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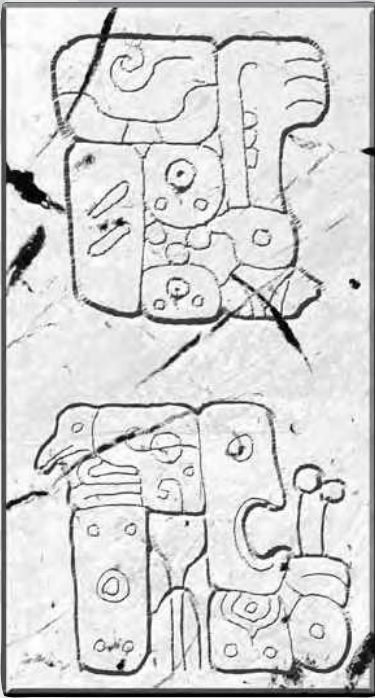
EXALTED
THE ABYSSALS

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THE
ABYSSALS™





Prince of Shadows came up out of the Well of the Void like a curse, climbing for what seemed like an eternity to reach the lowest of the nephwrack temples and for hours afterward to reach the edge of the Well. He did not recognize the place he emerged at, but sighting from the Calendar of Setesh, he could tell what part of Stygia he'd emerged into.

The Prince had never expected when he began his pilgrimage that the Malfeans would bring him back to Stygia, but he had had many days to plan while he climbed up from the porticos of the Malfean's temple-mausoleums. He made his way through the black and winding streets of the city to the District of Whispering Streets, where the nephwracks' armies had tread during the Contagion but taken no root. Today, the district's ruined symbol of office fled from hand to hand, and there was not an affirmation of authority that went by without violence along the parade route.

Abyssals were not wholly welcome, even among this district's mad and questionable inhabitants, and the inhabitants of the district shunned Prince of Shadows as he strode among them in his groaning black mail. Yet, despite this prejudice, it was in their district that Prince of Shadows kept his Manse, and it was to there he traveled.

Hidden behind wards against sorcerous observation, and behind the Manse's assembled staff of demon guardians as well, Prince of Shadows drained his Essence in an exchange of infallible messengers with his mistress.

She was, as always, frustratingly oblique, leaving him at loose ends. It frustrated him that the cherub's rote mimicry of her voice made him hungry for her arms even in these inappropriate circumstances. He was more angry that, once again, his mistress dropped hints of deep strategies, yet it seemed as if she spent most of her time tending to the needs of her loins and not of the masters. Sometimes, her hints and allusions of "greater plans" came true, but the Prince could not tell if she was actually telling him anything or simply manipulating the conversation with Essence to seem wiser and more formidable than she was.

Prince of Shadows had not slept in days. Now, sullen and breathless, the feeling of invincible epiphany from his commune with the masters gone, he was overcome with fatigue, and he slept where he knelt on the Manse's workroom floor, while the Manse's demon guardians whispered nervously beyond the door.



Sleeping, Prince of Shadows dreamt. He dreamed of the man he once was, or rather of the boy, dreamt of the night when he had shivered inside his soaked wool robes outside the tomb, dreamt of the night the Lover had first come to him in Sijan

It had been the very darkest hours of the night, and when he had gone out into the driving rain, the Prince had burned with a fever, but nothing could be permitted to halt the vigils of the order. Over the course of the hours, the fever of the young apprentice mortician cooled, and he felt more at ease in the night of storms. It was just before dawn, when the cold fingers of mist began to creep between the city's tottering mausoleums, that the boy who was to become Prince of Shadows first heard his mistress' voice.

It was a guiltless mad purr that mad his skin crawl and his cock rise. It came from behind one ear, and he attempted to arch away from it, shying away by reflex from the bite on the ear or the long-nailed hand he anticipated would slide under his robes. The soft laughter that followed was no farther away from his ear than the purr had been, and the Prince realized that his body would not move.

"You're a pretty one. A little slow, though." The woman finally spoke in a voice as enchanting as her purr and her laughter. "Want to know a secret little boy?"

The young man could give no answer, he was too cold and sick, and his body would not answer his demands.

"Yes. You're dying. Dead, actually. You died of the fever and the rain just a few minutes ago."

The boy sighed and with the realization came the feeling of distance from his body that he understood often accompanied death. Yet, he did not feel existence slipping away from him.

"Yes. I am holding you here. I have an offer to make. You have this."

There was a flashback to his life as third child to an impoverished family, the hard existence of a neglected and abused apprentice, a life of studying the funerary arts cut off young by a lonely death. He saw the ghosts who manipulated his living master and saw his place among them as a servant for centuries. The woman's voice was clear to him through the explosion of images. "There you are. Just another cog in the dreams of some people who don't even know you exist. They just expect you to keep functioning, even when they send you out into the rain to die."

The boy's mind jumped.

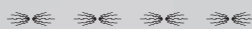
The woman's sensual laughter erupted again. "You didn't even think of that until I mentioned it, did you? That you might be something other than a playing piece in the games of those more important than you." His consciousness paled into shame, but her voice continued, "You would have, though, in 10 or 20 years. You had quite a bit of potential before your idiot masters sent you out into the storm to die as a sick young boy."

He saw himself as a master of the Observances both in life and death, as a successful designer of funeral rites, traveling the world and comforting queens and princes in despair. He saw himself forsaking Sijan and living as an independent savant, poor but wise and proud or growing rich and famous as a scavenger lord. "Unfortunately, you're dead. You're left with something more like this."

The boiling phantasm of success evaporated, and there was only a dawn none too distant from this moment, where the girl who would relieve him came out into the rainy morning and found him dead. He watched the girl shake her head and then duck behind the mausoleum to piss before hurrying back to report his death.

"And that's what the world gives you, boy. But you already knew that, or I wouldn't be here whispering in your ear. Take my hand, or go into the Underworld. Take my hand, or die here alone in the rain. Take my hand, and you will never die."

The boy accepted, knowing that the voice could only mean damnation. The offer, his acceptance, they had all taken place in the timeless instant when the young man's fluttering heart had finally ceased to beat. The pretty little tomb-guard barely had enough time to wonder what would happen next when the Black Exaltation was on him. It was a barbed rod of smoking black glass driven into his heart, it was the jaws of a great dark beast, it was the shadow of the final and ultimate eclipse falling across his name in the book of life and forever casting it into shadow.



Prince of Shadows awoke, as he always did, screaming at the moment of his Exaltation. The door of the room smashed open as the erymanthoi hurled themselves bodily at the portal and sent it flying from its hinges. The Prince smiled at the damage the demons caused. One of the flat-faced, red-furred monsters leaned down before him, stinking even here in the Underworld. "You are well, Master? You screamed. Are there any threats?"

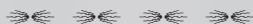


The Prince shook his head. "No. Your mistress sent me a dream of her presence. Bring me a basin of water, blood-ape, and fresh garb. I must clean myself."

The demon scurried off, and the Prince continued to smile admiringly at the wrecked and splintered door. Perhaps his mistress would learn more if there was a cost attached to her childish displays of power. Prince of Shadows stripped out of his filthy body suit, the same one that had held the points of his armor for so many months. Naked and careless of the Underworld's all-pervasive chill, the Exalt called for the blood-ape to return with a basin of water. When the beast shambled back into sight with the pan of chill water, Prince of Shadows took it from him impatiently and towed the seed from his naked loins.

"Beasts, dress me."

The demons wrapped him in a bodysuit of silk and linen and laced his weeping armor to it, tying down the points with their brutal strength until the metal of the plates cried out from tension. Then, he had the blood apes carry him in a palanquin to the edge of the city and used stormwind rider to depart, hurrying away to the East, across the Sunless Sea to where his mistress told him that the armies of the dead had begun to gather.



The darkness of living forests could not compare to the forests of the dead. Leathery black leaves and the grim dimness of the Underworld conspired to make the thickets places of darkness during the gray days and of impenetrable gloom during the long nights of the dead.

Prince of Shadows strode through the nighted forest surely, for the Malfeans had changed his eyes. They could penetrate the darkness of the Labyrinth — no lesser darkness would thwart them. This was an uncomfortable place for the Prince, far from his mistress and near the abodes of so many other lords, yet here he was, waiting in the darkness of the forest. His orders were to meet his contact, but his heart expected ambush or betrayal. His heart was not disappointed.

Prince of Shadows heard the calls of the hungry ghosts when they were more than a mile away, and it was not much longer until he heard the crashing and hurried footfalls of his contact. Then, there was a blue glimmer to the air. Prince of Shadows was far from a gifted hunter, but compared to the fleeing woman, he was a paragon of skill. If he were an inept woodsman, then she was the worst of rubes.

Princess Annuaski arrived dressed in a robe of white, with the hungry ghosts trailing close behind her. The beasts hesitated at the scent of the Abyssal, but their hunger drove them onward toward the fleeing ghost. The Exalt sighed. Her panic and her fear egged the beasts on. The faster she ran, the more sustenance they derived from the pursuit itself. Normally, Prince of Shadows would have watched bemused as this ironic scene played itself out, but the ghostly ruler was of use to his mistress.

Prince of Shadows bit his lip to hold back his chuckle, and Annuaski fled blindly past him, coming mere inches from the protector she could not see, one hand clutching a blue-glowing soulfire crystal, the other hand held out before her to protect her from collision with the forest giants. She was beautiful, in the manner of ghosts, her form simple and erotic, without wrinkles or lines or any sign of life. It was a beauty that had come from the fingers of an artisan, laid across a being whose frame knew no needs save locomotion.

Then, the hungry ghosts came, fierce and ragged and skeletal, their long claws glittering. First came two and then a third, who had stopped to bay at the dark moon hidden somewhere far above the canopy and clouds. It took a mere instant to slay them, and the Exalt's Essence did not stir, nor would he have loosed it even if hard-pressed. This was not the place to expend power.

The snarls alerted the Princess, and Prince of Shadows turned to find her standing behind him, her light held high. He raised his arm to shield his vision.



"Douse that, or do you want to invite the Mask of Winter's raitons to our little gathering? You would have been better served to meet us in Stygia. We have countless hidden places there."

She pulled the light close to her and extinguished it, and after a moment, Prince of Shadows spoke again. "Now, you asked my mistress to send an agent, ambitious princess. Now, I have come to you. Tell me of the betrayal that you plan, for otherwise, you would not have reached out to a faraway Deathlord for aid."

Annuaski nodded, her gesture graceful and devoid of any sentiment.

"Deathknight, I beg your favor and the favor of your mistress as well." Her voice was the singsong formalism of a professional courtier hitting her stride. "I beg your aid and beseech you to support me in my time of need—"

The Exalt cut her off, "Shut up. I know you grovel before me. You would never have called for us otherwise. Now tell me your proposal."

"The Mask of Winters even now rests in his corpse-fortress Juggernaut, planning his next conquest. Soon my nation of Hanau and Tyoka will be forced to take up arms against him."

Prince of Shadows nodded, "And what is it that you wish? We will not come to the field against another Deathlord."

"I did not expect you to, dark master. Soon, my nation will join with Sijan and the Empire of Aki to openly oppose the Mask of Winters. I think we shall shortly be vanquished and our people cast into slavery or destroyed. I will act as your spy, deathknight, reporting all that I can of the Empire of Aki and Sijan and what I can learn of the Mask of Winters, if you will shelter me from the storm that threatens the Underworld and return me to my throne as your puppet when your master rules the Underworld."

Princess Annuaski looked at the deathknight with eyes that held no more love or emotion than a glittering rock. She spoke without emotion, "Deathknight, there are only two things that matter in life or after it — power and survival. Why should I perish for my ideals when I can thrive and continue? Better to exist as a slave than pass into the Abyss a hero." Prince of Shadows wondered how long it would be until those eyes turned the depthless perfect black of the Disciples of the Abyss or if perhaps they had changed long ago, and the princess somehow concealed them.

Prince of Shadows smiled. "You are not yet in our service, yet you are already a fine slave. How do you know that my mistress is the proper master for your obedience, slip of a princess?"

Annuaski smiled cruelly, "Do you think I am blind? That I have not seen the full breadth of her schemes?"

Prince of Shadows looked wry, "Really? Prove yourself to me, then. Tell me, what is it my mistress plans?"

And so Prince of Shadows was told of his mistresses' dark plans from a ghostly princess in an abandoned wood hidden deep in the Underworld, and Prince of Shadows laughed within his black and loveless heart to hear them.



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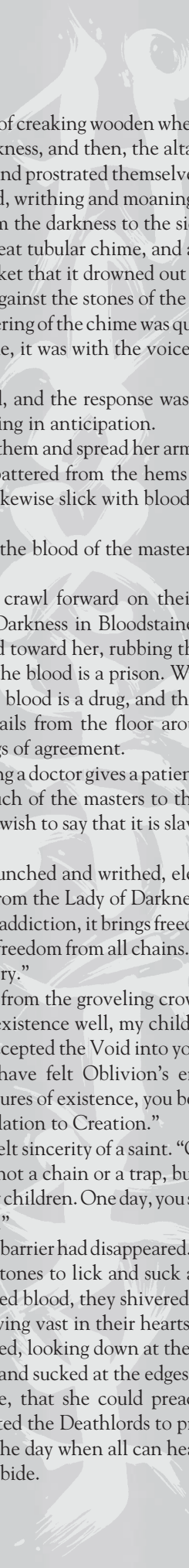
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The ceremony was a thing of creaking wooden wheels and crashing cymbals. It began as a growing discord in the darkness, and then, the altar area filled with flickering white light. The worshipers moaned and prostrated themselves as the light grew. They groveled before the fane of their dark god, writhing and moaning in the throes of ecstatic worship.

The priestess emerged from the darkness to the side of the altar with a smooth and graceful carriage. She bore a great tubular chime, and as she entered, she was striking it, producing such a dissonant racket that it drowned out for a moment the moaning of the wretches pressing themselves against the stones of the temple. The effect of her graceful walk and the discordant hammering of the chime was quite pronounced. When she ceased beating on the chime and spoke, it was with the voice of authority.

"Silence!"

The word was a command, and the response was immediate. The spectres pressed themselves to the floor, quivering in anticipation.

The priestess stood before them and spread her arms to give a benediction. Her robes were wet with blood, and it splattered from the hems onto the stones of the dais. The Abyssal's long black hair was likewise slick with blood, and streaks of red had run down her face.

"My children, I bring you the blood of the master. In a world of suffering, it brings peace."

The worshipers began to crawl forward on their bellies ever so slowly, inching gradually toward the Lady of Darkness in Bloodstained Robes. She smiled beatifically down on them as they slithered toward her, rubbing their faces against the floor.

"There are some who say the blood is a prison. We know they lie. The blood is the key to the prison. They say the blood is a drug, and they are right!"

There were shouts and wails from the floor around her, hoarse affirmatives and strangled, inarticulate mewlings of agreement.

"Because a drug is something a doctor gives a patient to treat an ailment, my children. They want to compare the touch of the masters to the devils of opium. They see your slavery to your cause, and they wish to say that it is slavery to the masters. But you know that is not so."

The figures on the floor hunched and writhed, electrified by the sermon, wriggling back and forth just a few feet from the Lady of Darkness.

"The Abyss does not bring addiction, it brings freedom from all addiction. The Abyss does not bring chains, it brings freedom from all chains. The Abyss does not bring slavery, it brings freedom from all slavery."

There was a gale of assent from the groveling crowd.

"You bear the burdens of existence well, my children. Each of you is a bodhissatva, each of you a saint. You have accepted the Void into your hearts. You have seen the gates of the nonexistent paradise, have felt Oblivion's embrace. And yet, you stay, you persevere. In the withering tortures of existence, you bear up under the fires and strive to bring the black balm of annihilation to Creation."

She smiled with the heartfelt sincerity of a saint. "Oh, my children, this is a drug, but you know as well as I that it is not a chain or a trap, but a glorious communion. Taste of the darkness that awaits you, my children. One day, you shall all be unmade, but until then, you can know how it shall feel."

And it was as if an invisible barrier had disappeared. The spectres began writhing their way forward across the rough stones to lick and suck at the wet red hems of the Lady's vestments. As they tasted the red blood, they shivered and convulsed with pleasure, the sweet feeling of emptiness growing vast in their hearts.

The Lady of Darkness sighed, looking down at the quivering, twitching ranks of her ghostly disciples as they licked and sucked at the edges of her gown. It saddened her that so few could hear her message, that she could preach only to the converted of the Labyrinth. Still, for now, it suited the Deathlords to preach the message of the ancestor cult and ghost-worship. Until the day when all can hear the truth, the Lady of Darkness in Bloodstained Robes would abide.



INTRODUCTION

*And we are always dreaming of the day when
all the fires of summer are defunct, when everyone
like a shriveled leaf sinks into the cooling ground of
a sunless earth, and when even the colors of autumn
have withered for the last time, dissolving into the
desolate whiteness of an eternal winter.*

—Thomas Ligotti, “Autumnal”

The Usurpation shattered the First Age. The Dragon-Blooded rose up against the Solars and slew them, first from ambush and then in a brutal years-long war with the sorcerous might of the few survivors. The Solar Deliberative and all it stood for vanished into an age of warring daimyos and struggles over the bureaucracy of the Shogunate.

But the First Age did not entirely die. Thirteen among the slain Solars bargained with the Malfeans for power. Thirteen bitter, twisted heroes turned their face from the light and swore allegiance to the gods that they had slain in the early days of history. In return, those dead gods gave them power. First, the Deathlords used that power to unleash the Contagion. Now, they have unleashed the next stroke in their plan for universal oblivion.

The Deathlords have obtained a third of the Solar Essences imprisoned by the Dragon-Blooded during the Usurpation. The Deathlords have twisted those Essences, and over the last five years, they have made bargains with those whose

life would otherwise have ended to accept the power of Oblivion and become the Exalted of the Abyss.

Unfortunately, it is the nature of the race that some men and women will assent to this. Now, they are armed and armored by the might of their dark masters. They are young in their power, but in time, that power can grow into a dark blasphemy of the Solar Exalted, making them peerless, nameless slaves to Darkness.

Some Abyssal Exalted consent to this role and serve their masters as loyal thralls. Others rail against their dark fate and seek to oppose the Deathlords or other menaces to Creation. Yet, at each turn, these renegades are dogged by the taint of their own power, which rises up to strike out at the world if they decline their duty. Thus, some are ruthless slaves to dark powers, others are grim and tragic figures, able to stand against lesser evils but ultimately serving the ends of Oblivion.

This is the subject of **Exalted: The Abyssal**; the struggles of these young deathknights as they seek to serve or oppose the

goals of the Deathlords in both the Underworld and the lands of the living. Regardless of how they seek to wield their might, the Abyssals may change the history of Creation as much as an equal number of Solars would, a disaster mitigated only by the reappearance of the other Solar Essences. Perhaps the Deathlords would have waited longer, but the disappearance of the Empress and the beginning of the Time of Tumult forced the Deathlord's bony hands. Of late, they have begun to send their Abyssal minions out on errands into the world — and to find which are loyal to their cause and which are not. This is the story of those early quests, conquests and rebellions.

THIS IS NOT A COMPLETE GAME

Despite its size, **Exalted: The Abyssals** is not a complete game. It is a supplement for White Wolf's **Exalted**, a game in which characters take the roles of Solar Exalted, heroes whose Essences were corrupted by the Deathlords to create the Abyssal Exalted. This book doesn't include descriptions of the core game's various Traits, rules on combat or a complete setting. It just has an in-depth treatment of ghosts, the Underworld, the Deathlords and existence as an Abyssal Exalted. You'll need to at least have access to a copy of **Exalted** to use this book.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Groups using this book will be able to play **Exalted** games with Abyssal Exalted characters or to portray ghosts, the shallow and passionate spirits who inhabit the Underworld. This book should also prove useful to Storytellers who want to present fully detailed Abyssal antagonists.

This book assumes without apology that the players may wish to portray loyal servants of the Deathlords as well as rebels against their power. Storytellers and players who don't like games where the characters are evil or serve wicked ends shouldn't participate in games they don't enjoy.

In structure, **Exalted: The Abyssals** is similar to the main **Exalted** rulebook, except that there are no Systems, Drama or Antagonists chapters. The contents are as follows:

Introduction:

The section you're reading now. It contains a statement of the book's overall character and a lexicon of important terms.

Chapter One: The Underworld

This chapter details the Underworld of **Exalted** and the fine points of existence as a ghost.

Chapter Two: Deathlords and Abyssals

This chapter details the ghostly Deathlords and their minions. Ten of the 13 Deathlords are described in detail, and the causes and condition of Abyssal Exaltation are also discussed.

Chapter Three: Character Creation

This chapter contains the rules for creating deathknight and ghost characters for use in an **Exalted** game. Though

they are mechanically compatible with the Solar Exalted, Abyssal characters may not necessarily get on well with their Solar counterparts, as they are impelled by their dark fates to work only evil.

Chapter Four: Traits

This chapter describes the specialized Traits used in Abyssal and ghost character creation. Traits detailed in the **Exalted** book are not discussed here. The chapter also contains a few mechanical systems unique to this book.

Chapter Five: Charms

This chapter details the dark and terrible Charms used by the Abyssal Exalted.

Chapter Six: The Arts of the Dead

This chapter discusses the artifacts that the dead make for their own use. It also covers the Arcanoi, the spirit Charms of the dead, for use by Moonshadow Caste Abyssals and ghost characters.

Chapter Seven: Storytelling

The final chapter of the book discusses the special needs of storytelling an Abyssals game.

LEXICON

Most of the terminology in this book was introduced in the **Exalted** main rulebook, and we have not reprinted those definitions here. The following entries are either words whose meaning is altered in the context of **Exalted: The Abyssals** or specialized vocabulary relevant to Abyssals, the Underworld or ghosts.

amphiskipolis: A settlement, temple or strong place in the Labyrinth built by the *nephuracks* and inhabited by *spectres*.

Abyssal Exalted: A Solar Essence captured by the *Deathlords* from the *Jade Prison* and corrupted in a *Monstrance of Celestial Portion*. The Deathlords use a necromantic ritual to offer this power to individuals worthy of Solar Exaltation who are about to die. The individual is given a chance of sacrificing her destiny and name to the Malfeans in exchange for dark power. Those who accept become Abyssal Exalted; those who decline perish as they otherwise would have.

Arcanos: The name ghosts give to one of the magical powers they can learn. The proper plural is Arcanoi. Most mortal savants simply call these ghostly powers "Charms," but the dead favor their own term.

Black Monarch, the: One of the *Dual Monarchs*, the ritual rulers of the *Underworld*. In his male aspect, the Black Monarch is called Setesh, and is the Monarch of Efficacious Prayers and master of the *Calendar of Setesh*. In her female aspect, she is called Nebthys and hears the secrets of the dying.

burial sacrifice: An animal or human sacrificed during the funeral process and buried with the corpse rises again in the *Underworld* as the slave of the individual they were buried with. Animals rise unfailingly and are unhesitatingly loyal to the deceased. Sacrificed humans may or may not rise and possess free will, though they are indelibly marked as another *ghost's* property.

burnt offering: Sacrifices made to the dead after their burial, which typically appear at the *Underworld* analog of



the altar as jade plaques with the recipient's name marked on them.

Calendar of Setesh, the: A great mechanical device built by Setesh, the male aspect of the *Black Monarch*, whose operation causes the passage of days in *the Underworld*.

dead, the: The collective label for all ghosts together as a group. This term is in common use in both Creation and *the Underworld*.

deathknight: A generic term for Abyssal Exalted. This term and many others are applied to these beings by the savants of the living, and many observers are currently not certain the Abyssals are Exalted at all.

Deathlord: One of the 13 Solars who sold their names and souls to the *Malfeans* after their murder during the Usurpation. The Deathlords are the *Malfeans*' primary pawns in their plans to destroy Creation.

Dual Monarchs: *The Black Monarch* and *the White Monarch* are two masked figures who serve as ritual kings of *the Underworld*. The Monarchs each have a male and a female aspect, appearing sometimes as one gender and sometimes as the other, depending on their whim and the demands of their extensive ritual schedule. Each aspect has its own personality and predilections, but the four aspects have always displayed a unity of purpose.

effigy: Effigies are specially prepared funerary statues of men or animals. The statues accompany an individual into *the Underworld* and, there, serve as her simple-minded guardians and servants. The city of *Stygia* also fields a great army of these effigies, which can be awakened and deployed in defense of the city in times of need.

ghost: The *hun* of an individual whose chooses not to enter *Lethe* and accept reincarnation, but to linger on in *the Underworld* instead. Some cultures worship the ghosts of their ancestors, while the Immaculate Philosophy decries the ghostly state as an offense against the natural order. Ghosts are spirits, but weak ones, and they are highly dependent on regular offerings to enhance their power. Though most non-Immaculates revere and sacrifice to their ancestors, only in those places where the Deathlords rule do *the dead* command the same degree of respect as gods and elementals.

grave goods: Objects buried with an individual that appear with him in *the Underworld*. These grave goods are always of the highest quality, even if the actual item use in the burial was cheap and shoddy — or even a paper-and-wood effigy.

hun: The higher soul of an individual, the seat of logic, reason and spiritual development. It passes out of the body with the final breath, as opposed to the *po*, which resides in the remains. If a *hun* chooses to linger in *the Underworld* rather than traveling on to its next incarnation, it becomes a *ghost*.

hungry ghost: A creature formed from the angered *po* of a deceased individual. It stalks the area around the body during the night and then descends into *the Underworld* during the day. Destruction of the corpse confines it to the *Underworld*, and proper burial or sunlight outside of a *shadowland* destroys one instantly.

Labyrinth: The dark tunnels that lie between the surface of *the Underworld* and the tombs of the *Malfeans*. The Labyrinth is the home of *spectres* as well as of many *hungry ghosts* who find their way to its dark corridors. The Labyrinth is a nightmare realm of manifest hallucination and solidified fear, where time and distance are sometimes as fluid as in the *Wyld*.

Lethe: A state of blissful repose *ghosts* enter as a prelude to accepting reincarnation. Over three days, the ghost grows increasingly lassitudinous and at peace, as her Passions and Fetters slip away one by one. At the end of the process, the ghost dissipates, and the being's higher soul is reborn into its next incarnation. This process cannot be stopped, but the Deathlords have chains that cast the wearer into Oblivion if he succumbs to Lethe while manacled.

Malfean: A dead Primordial, slain by the Solar Exalted. *The Underworld* was created with the first Primordial death, and those among the elder gods who were slain descended into the *Underworld*. The *Malfeans* lie now in state, dead yet wakeful in their vast dark tombs, wishing always to strangle out the living world, hurling all that is into *Oblivion*.

Monstrance of Celestial Portion: A cage in which a Solar Essence is corrupted with the Essence of the Abyss and transformed into Abyssal Essence. Each Abyssal Essence has a Monstrance it calls home, and it is to there that the Abyssal Essence flees if the Exalt who bears it is slain.

necromancy: A form of magic that uses the Essence of *the Underworld* to generate powerful black magic effects. Necromancy is practiced only by the Abyssals and the *Deathlords*. Like sorcery, necromancy has three levels of initiation: *Shadowlands*, *Labyrinth* and *Void Circle*. Necromancers can also practice sorcery, but advancement in one art inhibits development in the other.

necropolis: A city of *the dead*, where *ghosts* gather together for company and for protection against attacks by *spectres* and *hungry ghosts*. Necropoli are typically built in a location analogous to a city or burial place among the living, so that they can be near the altars to the dead.

nephwrack: *Spectres* who lead cults or live monastic existences in the service of *Oblivion*. They worship the *Malfeans* or *Oblivion* itself, and not the *Deathlords*. In general usage among *the dead*, a nephwrack is any spectre religious figure. The nephwracks' relationship with the *Deathlords* is strained, as the *Deathlords* see the nephwracks as lacking subtlety and power — which is generally true compared to even weak Exalted.

Neverborn: A term used among *the dead* to refer to the *Malfeans*, who were never born into Creation.

Oblivion: The force of true annihilation and total destruction, *Oblivion* came into existence when the Primordials died. Many are the savants who claim that it shall consume all life in the latter days of Creation, and the *Malfeans* and the *Deathlords* do their best to speed the coming of that day.

plasmic: A creature of *the Underworld* that is not a *ghost* nor created by one. Some of these creatures resemble simplified animals from the lands of the living. Others resemble no natural creature.

po: The po is the lower soul of an individual, full of his animal passions. It remains in the body at death, while the *hun* passed on to its next incarnation or descends into the *Underworld*. The po of an unburied corpse, murder victim or wicked individual will often rise as a *hungry ghost*.

shadowland: In the Second Age, the line between the *Underworld* and Creation is perilously thin. A shadowland is an area where constant ghostly activity or powerful negative geomancy have brought the two worlds together. Those who cross into the area in either world always arrive at the shadowland, but when they depart, they will always arrive in the lands of the living if they cross the region's borders during the day or in the *Underworld* if they depart at night. Shadowlands are dismal places, haunted both by *hungry ghosts* and the evil spirits of Creation, who thrive on the negative energy there.

spectre: A *ghost* whose heart has been consumed by *Oblivion* and who now seek universal annihilation as a servant of the *Malfeans*. The spectres are led by the *nephwracks*, who are their priests.

Stygia: The great dark capital city of the *dead*, where the *Dual Monarchy* rules. It is the location of the *Calendar of Setesh* and the *Well of the Void* as well as being the seat of the *Underworld's* ritual kings.

Underworld, the: The dark mirror of Creation that came into existence with the death of the *Malfeans*. The *Underworld* is a place of memory, ritual and dust, whose natural inhabitants are a few simple types of plants and animals. Those who die but do not wish to pass into *Lethe* linger in the *Underworld* as *ghosts*.

walking dead: A corpse or skeleton given mobility and a simple, slavish mentality through necromancy. The walking dead do not contain *ghosts*, but are instead animated by fragments of dark power, said by some to be the shattered souls of destroyed *spectres*.

Well of the Void, the: A great pit at the center of *Stygia* surrounded by the Manses of the *Deathlords* and the temples of the *dead*. The upper levels of the pit walls are decorated with the shrines and temples of the *Nephwracks*, and far below, in the darkness, are the porticos and fanes of the *Malfean* tombs.

White Monarch, the: One of the *Dual Monarchs*, the ritual rulers of the *Underworld*. In his male form, the White Monarch is called Usine, whose bright panoply gives the dead reason to continue their existences. In her female form, she is called Eset. Some say that in this form she is the incarnate voice of *Oblivion* and that she alone can calm the great storms that call the *spectres* from the *Labyrinth*.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Exalted: The Abyssals draws its inspiration from a variety of places: from modern gothic horror anime, ancient classics and ghost stories over a century old. The sources below proved some of the most influential to the game, but there are many others:

BOOKS

Wraith: The Oblivion. WWGS, Atlanta, GA. Now largely out of print, **Wraith: The Oblivion** was a little-appreciated game with a lot to offer. Much of **Exalted's** *Underworld* is drawn directly from the Deadlands of **Wraith**, particularly from the excellent **Dark Kingdom of Jade**, **Wraith: The Great War** and **Doomslayers: Into The Labyrinth**.

The Nightmare Factory. Thomas Ligotti. Carrol & Graf Publishers, Inc. NY, NY. ISBN 0-7867-0302-4. Thomas Ligotti's short horror fiction describes a strange world of industrial ruins, wicked puppets and terrible nihilistic gods. This book is an omnibus collection of Ligotti's earlier fiction. While the material is slow paced, the actual ideas are a very intelligent, creepy sort of horror. Maybe not everyone's cup of tea, but a major inspiration for **Exalted's** *Underworld*.

Enkidu in the Underworld. Author unknown. Possibly a shamanic narrative given epic trappings, this early story of descent into the *Underworld* involves Gilgamesh dropping his drumstick and drum into the land of the dead and Enkidu climbing down to fetch it.

The Odyssey. Homer. Included because of the ghost-summoning scene in Book XI, which contributed greatly to the rituals of summoning the dead in **Exalted** and to the character of ghosts as well.

VIDEO

Vampire Hunter D and **Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust.** The older one is slower and uglier, while the newer one is pretty and talks about spacefaring vampires. I'd suggest seeing the newer one and skipping the old one. There's a great example of the Great Curse in action when the vampire abducts his beloved and all the holy symbols in the city are ruined, all the mirrors break, etc.

Doomed Megalopolis. An OVA about a supernatural assault on 1890s Tokyo. A useful resource for **Exalted** and for *Abyssals* in particular due to its evil ghostly villain, its incredibly cool-looking magic and a plot that at one point involves giant shadow puppets pulling down the moon. Kato is the picture of a powerful *Abyssal*, and the plot of the movie could easily be transferred to any of **Exalted's** large cities.

Vampire Princess Miyu. The story of an young girl, touched by darkness and dedicated to forever tracking creatures of darkness called "the Shinma." The original four-episode OVA is incredible stuff, mostly focusing on the pain the character experiences from her ageless adolescence and cool sorcerous battles with demons. Definitely worth seeing for the demon-fighting stunts and the ghosts.

OTHER MEDIA

Castlevania: Symphony of the Night. Konami. PSX title, stock # SLUS 00067.

A superb sidescroller detailing the adventures of Dracula's renegade son, trudging through a predictable plot of revenge on dad, but it's got tons of atmosphere and cool power effects.



When confronted with a mystery, Inspector Chiu sought to ascertain the facts of a matter, for it was his nature to do so. His alacrity of perception had made him famous among the living as Port Calin's chief inspector. With the penetrating intellect necessary to unravel the most devious of schemes and the political aplomb to bring his justice at a moment of the criminal's political weakness, he had been a terror to that city's criminals and assassins. His lavish Sijanese funeral at public expense had placated the Inspector's outrage at his unsolved murder and tempted him away from Lethe, so now, he lingered in the Underworld and plied his trade.

At times, the prayers of his descendents called him out of his house in the Underworld and back to his altar. Sometimes, it was the offering of a young government censor seeking to root out graft. Those who called to Inspector Chiu Bao for aid in their inquiries, he aided as best as he was able, for it was in his nature to find that which was hidden, to punish those who did wrong and to protect his family, and there was little else that interested him.

Yet, tonight, Inspector Chui traveled at the behest of his dead king into the rural districts of Calin, to one of the small provincial necropoli where the dead of the city's agricultural hinterlands gathered together. The ghosts of the city's founders and heroes had enjoined him to go into the countryside and see why Two Rivers had not sent burnt offerings to the king of Calin's Underworld.

The Inspector did not travel alone, of course, but with a retinue. His hound and his horse accompanied him and silently behind him padded his two effigy defenders, more loyal by far than any bodyguard, living or dead. Both the Inspector and his effigy companions glittered and slicked from the shining grave-armor they wore. A dozen soldiers had come out from the necropolis of Calin as well, to escort the Inspector and provide official witness. It was a curse from one of the soldiers that first set the Inspector's hound to growling and put his effigy bodyguards to the alert.

In the growing night, the necropolis of Two Rivers was dark — in the gathering gloom, no blue soulfire crystals glowed in the city's lanes, nor did wisps of ghost-fire light the dark places. The party advanced cautiously toward the deserted city and the guards fanned out, their burial arms glittering in the Underworld night. With the Inspector in the lead, they advanced on the gates of the necropolis, which even now blew slightly in the Underworld breeze.

The Inspector looked over the clawed gate panels and the obvious signs of strife within. There were overturned carts, dropped items littered the ground, and here and there flickered the green glow of dormant pyre flame. Chiu Bao applied the excellent insight that had made him famous when living. "The primary attackers were hungry ghosts. I think it must have been a large pack, perhaps a dozen. Each of these was armored and equipped with steel-hard claws, so they were someone's soldiers. They could never have successfully breached the gates, so the defenses must have been compromised, by turncoats or spies."

The officer in charge of his escort had been standing by listening. He nodded, "Where do you think they came from?" Looking at the Inspector as he picked over the devastation, the soldier came to understand somewhat Chiu Bao's aloof demeanor. It couldn't be easy to do this sort of thing.

The Inspector walked cautiously into the courtyard, his effigies looming protectively to either side. "The Labyrinth, I suspect. I think it was some nephwrack cult looking for sacrifices or slaves —or possibly converts." Or perhaps agents of a Deathlord, looking for forge-fodder, thought Chiu Bao, but one did not speak of such things, ever, under any circumstances.

"What shall we do?"

"We shall search for survivors and enemies who might still linger, we shall send out scouts to see if the attackers can still be caught, and we shall prepare for the next time. I believe this is our first taste of the times to come. Let us learn."



CHAPTER ONE

THE UNDERWORLD

The Underworld was built to house that which remains when something leaves Creation but has not yet passed utterly beyond memory. Most savants who study such matters claim it was created at the death of the Primordials to accommodate their undying spirits. Other accounts differ on when it first came into being. Some say that it was built by the gods to hold the tombs of the Malfeans. Others hold that it was an integral part of the Primordial Creation.

The Underworld is a separate reality, like the Creation of the Primordials and yet lesser, and one tied inextricably to the land of the living. The Underworld is dank and chill, and a gray pall lies over everything, leaching colors into pale reflections of their glory; even bonfires cannot seem to chase the cold away or restore life to their surroundings. The dirt is black and grainy, where it is not the color of ash and soot. Sound travels strangely in the Underworld; laughter and singing fall away quickly into silence, while screams and sobs carry long distances. The sky of the Underworld is always overcast, covered in a thick haze of gray clouds through which the sun is never wholly visible, but enough light filters down through them to the ashen ground below to allow for something resembling normal visibility during the day.

THE STARS OF THE UNDERWORLD

Night in the Underworld is usually a time of impenetrable blackness, as the gray clouds of the day draw together and bind themselves in a midnight pall that even the sensitive eyes of the dead cannot pierce. At times, however, these clouds break, revealing the night sky above. Pitch black is that sky, and the moon that hangs in it casts no light, but scattered through the night sky are countless stars, eerie and strange in their glittering beauty. Those who cast auguries using these stars quickly find that they can foretell the fates of the dead, but cannot see the future of those who yet live (conversely, mortal seers using the stars of Creation cannot predict the future of or see the influence of the dead).

Characters traveling by night in the Underworld face great difficulty in just making their way; vision categories (see *Exalted*, p. 237) are always treated as one worse than normal (so *No Moon*, *Grass or Leafless Forest* would be treated as *No Moon*, *City or Forest*).

Divinations made in the Underworld regarding matters in Creation and the living will fail (no roll required). However, the stars of the Underworld can be used to foretell the fates of the dead. This is difficult for mortal seers (+2 difficulty to any divination cast against the dead), and few know the correct patterns and interpretations. Auguries cast against the Deathlords are still more

difficult (at least +3 difficulty, assuming the Deathlord has not taken additional steps to cloud his future). The fates of the Malfeans are unknown even to the stars of the Underworld and cannot be foretold in any fashion.

THE WATERS OF THE DEAD

The waters of the Underworld are dark and cold — even in a glass it has the appearance of liquid obsidian. The dead find water useful but not necessary — a ghost cannot die of dehydration, nor will crops fail utterly without rain, though it will be a sparse harvest. (Despite this, crops will not correspondingly grow in places they would not grow in Creation — the deserts of the Underworld's South, for example). The dead cannot drown, though they can become lost in the lightless depths of the oceans.

THE SEA OF SHADOWS

The Sea of Shadows stretches across the Underworld, a dark and turbulent ocean filled with strange and terrible beasts. Its waters taste like tears, and many say they are tears — all of the tears shed mourning the dead since the beginning of time. Storms on the Sea of Shadows are common and greatly feared. They carry not only the common dangers of a storm at sea, but the very real threat of airborne shades and beasts that ride the storms.

Despite these dangers, the Deathlords and the elder dead cross the Sea of Shadows, using ensorcelled boats made of reed with sails of papyrus. Little trade is conducted with these ships. They are primarily used as warships and as transports, to make the transit between the various islands of the West and the isle of Stygia, and, occasionally, for exploration. Those who would trade with their neighbors travel by land or stay close to the shorelines, as the Sea of Shadows is too dangerous for frequent deep-water ventures without good cause and powerful magics.

RIVERS OF THE UNDERWORLD

Five great rivers form the backbone of trade and travel in the Underworld, carrying ships laden with the spirits of the dead, their grave goods and the commerce of the Deathlords from necropoli to necropoli.

Styx: Leading from the Inland Sea of Shadows up to the gates of Stygia, the Styx is not the greatest of rivers in the Underworld, but it is almost certainly the most well known. Fleets of conquest, trade and exploration have traditionally started their journey in this mighty river, and more than a few have ended their existences here as well, sunk by the war-galleys and battle-barges of the Dual Monarchs.

Phlegethon: Traveling from the furthest Northeastern reaches, where it flows unimpeded by ice for only a handful of months out of the year, south past the great necropolis of Sijan and to the river Acheron, the river Phlegethon is sometimes named the River of Fire, for the



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HEAVENS BEYOND THE SEA OF SHADOWS

Not unlike among the living, who talk of a utopian paradise beyond the uttermost West, legends circulate throughout the Underworld of a final resting place beyond the West of the Sea of Shadows. Some claim it is a place beyond Deathlords and Exalts, gods and demons, a placid Far Shore where the fate of the dead is decided by the dead themselves. Others speak of a rocky prominence that rises out of the placid black waters, pinpointed by a single ray of sunlight that falls down seemingly from nowhere. At the peak of that mountain, it is said, sit three great gateways. One leads directly to Yu-Shan, and those who pass through it become honored servants of the gods. One leads to Lethe and a favorable reincarnation. Of the third gate, accounts differ. Some say that it leads to Malfeas. Some suggest it leads directly to Oblivion. Others have even wilder theories. What all of the legends do agree on, however, is that if there is a gateway to Heaven or some higher reward to be found in the Underworld, it lies in the farthest West.

lanterns that light the way of the ships that travel its dark waters through the oppressive forests. The forests that surround the Phlegethon travel right up to its banks, and the ancient trees that grow there soar high above the tallest mast, choking almost all light even during the day.

Cocytus: Considered by some dead to be the boundary between the East and the South, the River of Lamentation is sickly and diseased. Running deep into the depths of the dank swamps of the Southeast, Cocytus flows slowly and is nearly choked over with undergrowth in many places along its run. Its many offshoots branch into bewildering mazes of small streams, mires and bogs, and many ghosts who enter wander this watery maze until finally surrendering to Oblivion in despair.

Acheron: Analog of the Yellow and Yanaze rivers in the Scavenger Lands, the Acheron is a wide, fast-flowing beast that stretches from the depths of the dark forests of the East to the Inland Sea of Shadows. Despite its hazardous rapids and the creatures that frequent its waters, funeral barges of reed travel this river, and vessels carved of the pale white woods found in the East carry trade goods between the necropoli that line its shores.

Eridanus: Also named the River of Amber for the deposits of deep golden amber that are found in places close to its shores, the Eridanus flows from the Southeast up into the Acheron, joining it close to the outer edges of the territory claimed by Walker in Darkness. Eridanus is the shallowest of the Eastern rivers, and it runs swift, its waters seeming more like translucent obsidian than the black velvety color of most waters of the Underworld.

THE FIVE MAGICAL MATERIALS IN THE UNDERWORLD

Only one of the Five Magical Materials can be found naturally in the Underworld. Soulsteel is forged from human souls alloyed with the black stone of the Labyrinth. Unknown before the Contagion (except, perhaps, to the Primordials, since Autochthon created servants and weapons forged of this dark metal), soulsteel has become increasingly common throughout the Underworld, and many of the servants of the Deathlords carry weapons or implements made of it. Most Stygians would be disturbed to find out exactly how much soulsteel is in use in the Underworld and how much has been carried up to Creation through the shadowlands.

Jade's properties are well known to all in the Underworld, and it is highly sought after. Jade weapons, armor and tools are brought to the afterlife in caravans from the shadowlands or through its burial with dead princes and heroes. Jade and jade alloys are even stronger in the Underworld and as easy to work as soft gold when properly treated. Jade tools have a wet, opalescent appearance in the Underworld, and fluoresce in even the slightest light, retaining their brilliant colors even in the heart of the Labyrinth.

The "Celestial" Magical Materials are used in the devices and automata of the Underworld in small amounts, and there are a few weapons of all three types that were brought to the Underworld as grave goods, but these Materials are not nearly so common as jade and soulsteel. Though the power of these Magical Materials is unaltered in the Underworld, each exhibits strange traits in the dreary land of the dead. Moonsilver takes on a chill in the Underworld, but it is the healthy chill of a clear night under the full moon, not the dank cold that permeates the abode of the Restless Dead. The quicksilver metal quickly coats itself in a pattern of frost like snowflakes that cannot be wiped away or obliterated. Orichalcum carries the warmth of the sun in its touch and glows with a pale golden aura, as though it were surrounded by a crystal sphere full of sunlight. Starmetal turns silver beyond silver in the Underworld, and it reflects the rainbow and the stars of the living, diffracting into a riot of colors playing over its surface.

STORMS IN THE UNDERWORLD

Occasional gentle rains of tasteless, sterile water serve to water crops and forests in some fashion, but they are rare. More commonly, fearsome storms rip through the Underworld, massive howling affairs punctuated by blasts of arc-white or pitch-black and purple lightning that is perhaps the brightest natural source of

light in the Underworld. These downpours occasionally carry with them rains of blood, acid or other, less wholesome substances and hailstorms of shattered crockery, and other, far less pleasant, materials, but this detritus is quickly dissolved and washed away by the rains or fades to dust soon after the storm passes.

Most Underworld storms are largely harmless to an Exalt, but the most powerful are a source of environmental damage (see **Exalted**, p. 244). Typically, these would be the equivalent of a severe sandstorm, but the most potent can equal the lethality of a supernatural ice storm. Underworld storms of this magnitude rarely last longer than a few minutes at this intensity on land, but on the Sea of Shadows, storms of this ferocity have been known to last for days.

More dangerous than the effects of the storm itself are the beings often borne aloft by the storm. Hungry ghosts (see “The Servants of Oblivion”, p. 61) frequently wander in the path of powerful storms, and there are things that ride the storms’ winds that can challenge even Abyssals.

CREATURES OF THE UNDERWORLD

Although the Underworld’s selection of flora and fauna is quite limited when compared to Creation’s, there is still a wide variety of “life” wandering the shadows. There are massive aurochs and water buffalo, graceful white cranes and fearsome swooping hawks. Lions prowl the savannas of the East, and tigers wander its southern forests, preying on deer and mastodons that return to be hunted anew each dawn. The dead care for livestock (aurochs, water buffalo and sheep), and horses serve as their mounts. These creatures follow the same rules for materialization and regaining Essence as the dead themselves do. They can be affected by Charms and Arcanoi as if they were ghosts and, if somehow brought into Creation, are bodiless spirits unless Arcanoi or Charms are used to give them form.

Most of the fauna of the Underworld have analogs of a kind in Creation, but there are some things that exist only in the lands of the dead. Some of these are echoes of species or creations now extinct, while others are the last dreams of the Exalted or the slain soldiers-races of the Primordials.

UNDERWORLD FAUNA

Creature	Physical Att. Str/Dex/Sta	Willpower	Health Levels	Attack Spd/Acc/Dmg	Dodge/ Soak	Abilities
Aurochs	8/2/6	2	-0x2/-1x2/ -2x2/-4x3/I	Gore: 6/3/4L	4/2L/6B	Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 2
Barghest	4/3/3	3	0/-1x2/ -2x2/-4/I	Bite: 6/6/5L	4/2L/5B	Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 2 (Bite +1), Dodge 1, Presence 1 (Intimidation +2), Survival 3 (Tracking +3), Stealth 2 (Hide in Shadows +1)
Barghest, Greater	5/3/5	4	-0x2/-1x3/ -2/-4x2/I	Bite: 7/8/6L, Tackle: 6/7/ Clinch	5/3L/8B	Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 3 (Bite +2, Tackle +1), Dodge 2, Presence 2 (Intimidation +3), Stealth 3 (Hide in Shadows +2), Survival 4 (Tracking +3)
Ghost Tiger	9/4/8	5	-0x2/-1x3/ -2x2/-4x3/I	Bite: 6/9/9L, Claw: 8/10/7L	7/4L/8B	Athletics 4, Awareness 2, Brawl 4 (Bite +3), Dodge 3, Presence 4 (Intimidation +3), Stealth 3 (Hide in Shadows +3), Survival 3 (Tracking +2)

Horse, Common	4/2/4	2	-0/-1x2/ -2x3/-4/I	Bite: 5/3/1L, Kick: 2/2/6B	4/1L/4B	Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 1, Dodge 2
Horse, Noble	6/3/6	4	-0x2/-1x2/ -2x3/-4x2/I	Bite: 6/6/2L, Kick: 3/7/8B	6/3L/6B	Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 2 (Bite +1, Kick +1), Dodge 3
Jade Effigy	6/3/6	6	-0x3/-1x3/ -2x4/-4x2/I	Bow: 6/8/8L, Spear 8/8/9L, Sword: 8/9/10L	5/12L/18B	Archery 2 (Bow +2), Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 3 (Punch +1), Dodge 2, Melee 3 (Spear +1, Sword +2), Presence 2 (Intimidate +3), Stealth 1 (Motionless +2)
Pyre Hawk	2/4/3	3	0/-1x2/ -2/-4/I	Bite: 7/8/3L, Claw: 7/8/2L	7/2L/5B	Athletics 3 (Flying +3), Awareness 4, Brawl 3 (Bite +1, Claw +1), Dodge 3, Survival 2 (Tracking +1)
Savanna Lion	6/4/6	4	-0/-1x3/ -2x2/-4/I	Bite: 7/10/7L, Claw: 8/11/5L	4/3L/6B	Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 4 (Bite +2), Dodge 2, Presence 3 (Intimidation +3), Survival 4 (Tracking +3), Stealth 2
Tomb Golem	3/2/4	3	-0x2/-1x2/ -2/-4/I	Punch: 4/4/3B, 4/4L/4B Kick: 1/3/5B, Chopping Sword: 4/5/7L		Athletics 1, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Melee 2, Assorted Abilities as needed.

Note: Unless otherwise stated, assume animals possess Intelligence at 1 dot, Perception at 2 dots and Wits at 3 dots. For beasts, use the provided Acc value for both attacks and parries.

UNDERWORLD FAUNA

Aurochs: Standing as tall as a tall man, with horns that stretch nearly as far as a man can reach, the massive aurochs roam in herds across the Eastern Underworld. They are domesticated by some in the area and used much in the same ways cattle are used in Creation. Aurochs bulls are protective of the herd but will not normally attack unless provoked.

Barghest: Great fighting mastiffs bred by the Deathlords. How they are created is not known by most ghosts, and those who do know the secret will not speak of it. These beasts, with their coal-black fur and powerful build, are greatly feared by the denizens of the Underworld as much for their cunning and skill as for their ferocity — their eyes gleam with a terrible intelligence. Barghests have Perception ••• and Wits ••••.

Fortunately rare, the greater barghest rules over its lesser brethren in all ways. Standing nearly three feet tall at the shoulder, the greater barghests' powerful build and curious intellect makes them feared servants of the Deathlords and powerful allies of the Abyssals. The beasts are terrifically loyal to those they will call master, but they will savage anyone who claims that title without justification and approval. Typically, one member of a barghest pack will be a greater barghest, but there are hunting packs comprised exclusively of the larger beasts, usually operating in service of an Abyssal. Greater barghests have Intelligence ••, Perception ••• and Wits •••••, but they are still bestial in nature, interested in serving their masters, eating, fighting and little else.

Ghost Tiger: Where the lions of the Eastern plains are pack hunters, the ghost tiger normally hunts alone or in a mated pair. These striped or dappled black and

gray monsters are consummate trackers and fear nothing, though they may choose not to fight. Ghost tigers are rarely trainable (Control Rating of 5) and never fully domesticate, but they are not an unknown sight in the hunting camps of the deathknights — either as the Abyssals' hunting partners or as prey.

Horse: Most of the horses of the Underworld are stocky, sturdy beasts with shaggy black coats, that are meek and accepting of most duties but better suited to hauling wagons and carts or serving as the mounts of children or the elderly than to the din of the battlefield. The Deathlords and their servants make use of these animals but also have a number of nobler beasts. Tall and proud are these steeds, with ebony coats and haughty demeanor. A strange intellect lurks behind their eyes, which glint with fire in battle. Like the barghest, the provenance of these great mounts is unknown, but they are highly sought after by the Deathlords' servants and the hosts of the dead alike.

Jade Effigy: Weapons of the Dual Monarchy and of the more powerful nephwracks, these statues carved of solid jade are relics of the First Age and started their existences as the funerary army of some long-forgotten emperor. Thousands of years old, many have been worn smooth by the passage of time, featureless jade weapons carried in the hands of undetailed manikins. Others, more recently created, still resemble warriors of the First Age, bearing weapons and armor of curious design. Most effigies are controlled by the Dual Monarchy, but there are some that have been activated by others over the centuries, and the nephwracks manufacture their own in the Labyrinth. Storytellers may wish to allow players' characters to possess one or more jade effigy warriors. Artifact ••• will allow a character to possess a single fully functional warrior, while Artifact •••• will provide five intact warriors, and Artifact ••••• will provide 15.





Pyre Hawk: Pyre hawks are great ashen-gray predators with massive wingspans. The only color on them is in their eyes and on the undersides of their feathers, both of which are a fiery red — but rarely seen except in glimpses. The birds are consummate hunters, gliding just below the clouds to swoop and strike on small animals. They will attack ghosts that try to interfere in their hunting, threaten their nests or try to drive them off, but otherwise, pyre hawks have little to do with the populace of the Underworld. They are occasionally captured and trained to serve the dead (Control Rating 3).

Savanna Lion: Ashen-gray ghosts of the South-eastern plains of the Underworld, the savanna lions hunt in packs like their living cousins. A normal pride of these feline predators includes a single adult male, two to three adolescent males and anywhere from six to ten adult females. The great cats are unafraid of most other beings in the Underworld but are wary enough to retreat from an obvious threat.

Tomb Golem: Created when carved effigies or statuary are brought into the Underworld, these are faithful and hard-working servants, although unimaginative. Tomb golems can understand relatively complex series of instructions and duties but should not be left unattended for long periods — anything that does not fall within their instructions can bewilder them, causing problems. Tomb golems resemble whatever form they were carved into in Creation and, depending on this, may be equipped with weapons, armor or other tools. The Traits above are for a typical generic golem — soldier golems would have higher Physical Traits and better combat Abilities, while artisan golems would have a Craft Ability. Effigies cannot be repaired.

SHADOWLANDS

Shadowlands are places where the lands of the dead and the realms of the living are closer than they have any business being. The results of great battles, horrible plagues or terrible acts of depravity and murder in Creation, they are gateways between the two worlds, existing in both simultaneously.

Shadowlands share many of the features of the Underworld: The light of the sun shines less clearly in them, casting a pallor over everything even on those rare days when clouds don't blacken the sky. The air carries a noticeable chill, even at the height of summer. Little lives in most shadowlands; most animals will not willingly stay in a shadowland, and even battle-hardened and trained mounts will seek to escape them at their earliest opportunity. Most plants fare poorly in shadowlands. A few species of trees grow there — black ash, weeping willows, hemlock and yew

among them. A smaller number of undergrowth plants — oleander, nightshade, arrowgrass, nettles, aconite and poinsettias, among others — seem to do well. Various breeds of fungi, molds and mosses thrive, however. Common knowledge holds that to eat any plant in a shadowland is to invite death, and this is not far from the truth. Few plants that will grow in a shadowland are healthy to eat, and many are extremely toxic.

Storms howl through shadowlands, gaining intensity from the proximity of the Underworld. There are no gentle rains in shadowlands, only great smashing storms that fill the skies with thunder and actinic lightning or dreary, seemingly never-ending rainstorms that turn even the hardest of sun-baked soils into hip-deep mud. In the Northern reaches, these storms are often howling blizzards, with wind, hail and snow penetrating even the most carefully sewn garments and chilling to the bone. Other Northern storms are dreary snowfalls that never seem to end, covering the landscape in an impossibly deep coating of thick, wet snow. Some of the storms that beset the shadowlands sweep out of the Underworld (especially at night), and these are horrid affairs, raining down blood, ashen water and bits of bone or flesh on those unfortunate enough to be caught in them.

Most of the stones that can be easily mined from shadowlands are dark in color; black sandstone, obsidian, basalt, dark marbles and black granite. Metals mined here are also dark in color — even gold and silver take on a sullen, dark countenance when mined from shadowland deposits — and only dark gemstones are mined from shadowlands: blood rubies, garnets, amethysts and black opals predominate. The riches of the shadowlands are said to carry with them the taint of death and avarice. Many who take the gold of the shadowlands come to bad ends or become acquisitive beyond their means. Whether this is because of shadowland gold or merely the types of lives those who would deal with the agents of the Deathlords typically lead is a matter of debate among savants.

CITADELS

Many (although, by no means, all) large shadowlands have a citadel sitting at their heart or, in some cases, near the edge of the shadowland in the Underworld. Some of these citadels are inhabited by Deathlords, Abyssals or, in rare cases, nephwracks. One or two are the provinces of mortal rulers who have taken up residence. Others have been abandoned for one reason or another — some are cursed by their prior tenants, others have been prepared in advance for servants not yet ready to take up residence. Each is unique, but some things can be said about them as a group. Almost all citadels are formed from the same black stone that makes up the Labyrinth, and some say that they are actually extruded fragments of the Labyrinth itself.

Each reflects the personality of the Deathlord or Abyssal who resides, resided or will reside therein. Almost all have a doorway or portal that leads into the Labyrinth directly, and those that do not are always situated near some entry into the caverns of Oblivion.

CREATING A SHADOWLAND

Shadowlands are created through great suffering and death. Most shadowlands are the sites of horrible tragedies. Great battles, natural disasters, plagues and famines can all result in a shadowland, but they can also be created by smaller, more personal tragedies. There is a small shadowland in the basement of a tenement in the Nighthammer district in Nexus. Every other month for a span of two decades, a man brought a young woman into the basement; when he was done with them, their bones were used to panel its walls. Each death hammered the hidden chamber deeper toward the Underworld, until, finally, it broke through and became a shadowland, if a small one. What then happened to the man is not recorded, and this is perhaps a blessing.

Shadowlands can also be created when sufficient numbers of people are buried without the proper rites being performed or when a properly consecrated burial site is ritually desecrated in a particular fashion known to some of the dead, many Abyssals and a handful of mortal and Exalted sorcerers. These rituals require the sacrifice of both living and dead to work correctly.

A battlefield or plague-town does not normally instantly change into a shadowland. In most cases, the process is a gradual one that can, with effort, be stopped by employing much the same methods one would use to destroy an already existing one (see “Destroying a Shadowland,” below). Over the course of a year, animals vacate the nascent shadowland, refusing to return unless forced. Healthy plants begin to wither and die, despite the best efforts to save them, and are replaced by less wholesome vegetation. The skies gradually darken, and first the nights and then the days become progressively more chill. Hungry ghosts and other dark spirits grow increasingly more common, until, finally, ghosts are visible even during the day. Not long after that, the benighted region falls partway into the Underworld, and anyone traveling across its borders at night will wander into the Underworld, instead of farther into Creation.

DESTROYING A SHADOWLAND

There are a number of ways to sever the connection between the Underworld and Creation — and more still to prevent the dead from crossing into the lands of the living. Salt is a powerful weapon against the dead. Ghosts cannot cross a line of salt, and salting a shadowland will render it impossible for all but the most powerful of the dead to pass through into the lands of the living. It is still possible to

MATERIALIZATION IN THE UNDERWORLD

The Underworld is a spirit realm. There is nothing physical about it. Its facts and geography are those of magic and metaphysics, not of physical matters, and its inhabitants are nothing more than tight collections of passion, will and Essence. There is no dematerialization or materialization in the land of the dead. All spirits, ghosts, living individuals, Exalted and so on exist in the same phase of reality at all times. The only noticeable effect of this is that all dematerialized beings become material in shadowlands at night, as those places are at that time part of the Underworld. This materialization does not cost the spirit anything because it is not constructing a body from Essence, but rather, spirit and material existence have become indistinguishable. Some brave conspirators who wish to plan outside the view of Heaven take advantage of this fact, for in such places, the spies of the gods cannot lurk immaterially nearby.

Possession in the Underworld is problematic. It is possible to possess corpses in both the Underworld and the land of the living, but the possession of bodies with spirits in them is impossible in the Underworld. Any ghost possessing a living being is immediately ejected upon entering the Underworld — or at nightfall, if they are in a shadowland.

raise zombies and other undead from land that has been salted, but all Essence costs are doubled to do so. The faithful of the Immaculate Order know ways to sanctify or consecrate lands that may turn into a shadowland, preventing the links with the Underworld from growing strong enough, and can sometimes lessen the impact of the Underworld on a shadowland for a time. Permanent solutions normally require powerful sorcery such as the Benediction of Archgenesis (see **The Book of Three Circles**, p. 69) or gradual change through public works projects. By mingling the soil on the borders with that from fertile places, by holding festivals celebratory of life on the bordermarches and by replacing local vegetation with wholesome growth, the living can nibble at the edges of a shadowland. This normally causes the shadowland to recede slowly, about 10 yards per year. However, these efforts can push it back as far as a mile per year if the mortals are massively industrious or if sorcerers employ demons or elementals to do huge works.

EFFECTS OF SHADOWLANDS

Shadowlands leave their mark on any mortal that dares to remain within their borders for any length of time. Animals that are forced to stay in a shadowland



are rendered barren, and many species become sickly, eventually weakening and dying despite all efforts to keep them alive. Even the hardiest of animals will, given time, grow wan and unhealthy in the pale light of a shadowland. In places where mortals insist on residing in a shadowland, they often cluster farms and livestock herds on the outskirts of the shadowland — all too often, however, even these steps fail to keep the creatures alive. Especially in the North, many mortal shadowland inhabitants fall back on opportunistic cannibalism to supply some or most of their meat, which does little to endear them to their neighbors.

Mortals who dwell in a shadowland are almost as subject to its effects. Mortal pregnancies (what few there are in a shadowland) are even more fraught with peril than normal. In some shadowlands, less than one child in ten survives her first year, but it is more common that one in two or three pregnancies results in a live birth. Those who do survive often suffer greatly. Birth defects are not uncommon and include albinism, stricken constitutions, palsy, warped limbs and strangely cast eyes. Poor diet heightens the severity of these ailments, and many adults are pale, twisted creatures, little able to function. Most die before they reach 40, but few seem to mind.

SHADOWLAND MORTALS

There are no specific penalties for having been raised in a shadowland — not every child is born deformed, and not every shadowland community falls to rickets and cannibalism. But many of those who were born and raised in such places will have lowered Physical Attributes as a result of the incredibly harsh life they have lived. Shadowland mortal Storyteller characters should be created with a 5/3/3 Attribute spread for a heroic mortal and a 3/3/2 spread for an ordinary mortal. For genuinely backward and corrupted shadowlands, they might be built with fewer dots in Abilities (perhaps 18 to 20 for heroic mortals and 12 to 14 for ordinary mortals) and less bonus points as well, although less than 15 bonus points, combined with the restrictions above, will be very hampering. Storytellers should keep in mind that conditions vary greatly from shadowland to shadowland. The mortals of Onyx, for example, live fairly well, while those who live in the many scattered shadowlands of the North are far more likely to be wretched creatures.

None of these penalties should apply for Exalted (of any sort) who originally hail from a shadowland. Storytellers running a heroic mortals game centered around the denizens of a shadowland should consider waiving these restriction for the player's characters: Heroic mortals are at enough of a disadvantage in the harsh Second Age of Man without further hindering their chances of survival.



ESSENCE AND STATES OF BEING

The Essence of the Underworld is not like that of Creation. Permanently tinged with the power of death and ruin, it is of little use to those from Creation. In like fashion, the flows of Essence in Creation are difficult for the dead to manage. As a result, beings of Creation have problems recovering Essence while in the Underworld, and the reverse is true for the dead, who have problems regaining Essence while in Creation. In shadowlands, Essence is regained at different speeds depending on whether it is day or night.

A ghost wandering Creation is normally insubstantial, just like other disembodied spirits. He can observe the living and pass through solid objects, but he cannot directly interact with Creation without the use of Arcanoi or artifacts. If a ghost materializes in Creation, his Arcanoi, weapons and artifacts will work normally, until their stores of Essence run out. Ghosts in Creation typically seek to reinforce the sense of filial duty in their living relatives, so they can regain Essence from the prayers of their descendents (and, indeed, some are quite successful at this). Those unable (or unwilling) to seek out the rightful beneficence of their descendents are forced into a predatory existence, feeding on the blood and flesh of the living to regain Essence. Some seek out a shadowland to cross over to the Underworld or seek to create a shadowland of their own, but most such unquiet spirits are sought out by ghost-hunters or priests and destroyed. A ghost slain in Creation suffers the same penalties, etc. as one slain in the Underworld and reforms in the Underworld.

CALIBRATION

During the five days of Calibration, the barriers between Creation and the Underworld grow thin; ghosts find it easier to move between the two realms, and they draw strength from the Underworld. During Calibration, the costs for moving between the Underworld and Creation are halved. This applies to all Arcanoi, sorceries, Charms and Artifacts that have a cost in motes to pass from one realm to the other but not to spells whose rituals must specifically be performed on or around Calibration. Their position in the calendar year is already taken into account in their cost. Additionally, ghosts in Creation (and mortals in the Underworld) can regain Essence during Calibration, although at reduced rates. Calibration is normally a time of propitiation and sacrifice to the dead in most of the Threshold; even in nations where the Immaculate Order holds considerable sway, there are private sacrifices and muttered prayers to ward off the wrath of the dead during Calibration.

THE PATHS OF THE DEAD

At the gravesite, the pyre and the cairn, the paths of the living and the dead diverge. The dead begin their journey into the Underworld or reincarnation, and the living turn their backs on their mothers and fathers, their brothers, their princes and queens.

If you are
alive* in Creation
dead** in Creation

you regain Essence at
the normal rate
none (you don't regain Essence)

and you are
solid (you always are)
immaterial (without the use of
Arcanoi)

dead in Creation during Calibration
alive in a shadowland during the day
alive in a shadowland during Calibration
dead in a shadowland during the day
dead in a shadowland during Calibration
alive in a shadowland at night
dead in a shadowland at night
alive in the Underworld
alive in the Underworld during Calibration
dead in the Underworld

half the normal rate
half the normal rate
the normal rate
half the normal rate
the normal rate
half the normal rate
the normal rate
none
half the normal rate
the normal rate

immaterial (half cost to materialize)
solid
solid
immaterial
immaterial (half cost to materialize)
solid
solid
solid
solid
solid

* "Alive" in this case refers to any being whose primary domicile is Creation and who manipulates Essence in some fashion. This includes (but isn't necessarily limited to) Dragon-Blooded, Celestial and Alchemical Exalted, any First Age constructs that gather and store Essence, God-Blooded, the Fair Folk and almost all spirits and Wyld-touched.

** "Dead" refers to anything that normally makes its home in the Underworld or draws its power from the Underworld. This includes ghosts, shades, hungry ghosts and other dead, Abyssals and their Deathlord masters and hekatonkhire. It could also include things like certain corrupt spirits of death and ruin who draw their power more from the Underworld.



THE NATURE OF GHOSTS

It is well understood by most who study such things that the soul is composed of two parts. The higher, or enlightened, soul is the seat of memory, reason and the higher emotions, such as love, kindness and compassion. The lower, or animal, soul is the seat of rage, pride and ferocity. In life, both souls are vital to the health and well-being of a mortal, and an imbalance of one or the other is to be avoided. In death, the two souls are separated, for each has a different function. The higher soul (sometimes called the *hun* by those who make a study of such things) travels on; depending on its disposition, there are three possible destinations. A *hun* that is content with its life moves directly onto the wheel of reincarnation, to judged and born again into a new life. A higher soul that is unfulfilled — that has left tasks unfinished, died poorly or has great debts or duties left to expiate — remains in the Underworld, becoming a ghost. Finally, some small number of souls are torn from the wheel of reincarnation by Oblivion and are unmade, but it is believed that the number of such lost souls is quite small indeed.

Of those higher souls that linger, only those who have strong ties to the living or other reasons to remain stay in the Underworld for more than a few months. The dead may feel a duty to stay and provide comfort and advice for their family or friends, or they may have some task they need to finish. The reasons are as numerous as the ghosts that inhabit the Underworld. What binds them to the Underworld is a passion or desire to accomplish some task, fulfill some obligation or debt, clear a karmic burden or otherwise make right that which was left wrong or undone when they died.

The lower soul (also known as the *po*) normally remains with the decaying corpse, silently watching its surroundings unless enraged by those who would loot its tomb, defile the corpse or otherwise show disrespect to the dead. If burial rites are done incorrectly (or neglected completely), if the *po* is incapable of defending its grave from grave robbers or if other conditions such as negative astrological conjunctions greatly unsettle it, the *po* may become a hungry ghost (see below).

Normally, however, the animal soul of a corpse will slumber in the remains until the body decays. An enraged animal soul can sometimes rise from its grave to defend it — this is not exactly a hungry ghost, but its stats and powers are identical. The effect is not terribly common and only lasts for a single scene. About one in one hundred normal mortals will rise in such a fashion, or one in ten heroic mortals. The lower souls of most Exalted will rear up and attempt to defend their corpse, and such *pos* are often swollen grossly by the power of the Exaltation during life.

ECHOES OF THE DEAD

In some cases when a person dies, his higher soul passes on into its next incarnation, but some fragment of it remains behind. Haunts spring into existence when a particularly impressive death occurs. The sudden and usually shocking death of one or many people leaves a residue — built from the shattered souls of the victims — which forms an illusion where those last moments repeat over and over. Lacking volition or intellect, a haunt silently reenacts her death and the events that immediately lead up to it. Usually a short vignette or series of linked scenes, haunts can be found in most shadowlands, in many places in the Underworld and, occasionally, in the living world. Haunts come in a variety of forms, from the haunted inn where all the patrons are slaughtered by the mad innkeeper to the ghostly figure of a young queen who throws herself off the battlements of her fortress again and again in an eternally repeated moment of despair. In the Underworld, known haunts are marked with a pile of white stones at the border of the effect.

In the living world, haunts appear at night — usually every night, but some appear only on the anniversary of their death or on some other momentous day. All haunts have a tendency to appear during Calibration, and many older haunts become visible only during that time.

Haunts slowly lose their cohesion over a matter of decades — few survive more than a century or two, and almost none have survived from before the Contagion. Haunts are annoyances to most — they are unable to communicate and can usually only be dealt with through exorcism or ritual. Fortunately, the rituals required to disperse them are simple and are commonly known to those who make any study of exorcism and funeral rites. They are not so easily dispersed in the Underworld and form a regular part of the scenery there.

THE BROKEN WHEEL

The seasons move in cycles — through the five elements, reliably punctuated by Calibration. So, too, move the predictable rise and fall of kingdoms, the patterns of love and hate. Life moves in a grand cycle from life to death to life. Each life is a soul's chance to rise in the greatest cycle of all — reincarnation — from dumb beast, to human to, perhaps, Dragon-Blood and final union with the great Dragons themselves. The rise and fall of these cycles is the path of the natural world, but there is another world — a dusty dead end that lies in wait for the weak and foolish souls too proud to give up their past for their future.

Few, even the Dragon-Blooded, are completely ignorant of the Underworld and its seductive appeal. The chance to continue loving, to continue plotting, to hold fast to family, ambitions, hope — this is the seduction of the Underworld. The chance to whisper advice in the ears of sons and daughters, to be remembered and to know it. Those who feel they have failed in life are particularly vulnerable to becoming ghosts. No one wants to reincarnate as a roach or a slave. Some among the living claim that deeds done as ghosts count toward your karma in the next life — that one can make up for errors in life by honor in death. This is a heresy, popular among the outcaste, that the Immaculates vigorously suppress.

The painful truth — the first lesson a new ghost learns — is that the fall of a spirit to the Underworld throws that soul out of the cycle of life. Ghosts cannot change the karma they died with. No matter the honors gained after death, the kindness shown to strangers, the lessons learned and wisdom won, the soul's destiny is determined in life and only in life. On the other hand, the evils performed, the wickedness and the cruelties indulged as a ghost will not stain even the purest of souls. For those who have fought their darkest impulses all their lives — and earned a better life — the chance to finally indulge themselves can be a powerful attraction. Perhaps this is why so many ghosts return to the living world bent on a vengeance they dared not take when alive, now that they no longer need fear either the laws of the living or the laws of Heaven.

Ultimately, existence in the Underworld is static. Ghosts dwell in an echo of the living world, their kings and queens are born of the kingdoms above, and when a ghost finally sinks into Lethe, all that she did as a ghost is lost. The Underworld itself has no destiny separate from the world of the living. This is why the Deathlords must breach the barriers between the Underworld and the living one. They cannot rule the dark country of the dead without also ruling the brighter lands above. Even the landscape of the Underworld is a dark copy of the lands above.

If a living soul is ignorant of the ultimate futility of continuing as a ghost, the new ghost senses it immediately. It is this emptiness that fills the silences and dark corners in the Underworld. Even the Deathlords feel it and fill themselves with the hunger of Oblivion and the distant whispers of the Malfeans — promises of final fulfillment in an empty universe.

If a new ghost does not sink immediately into Lethe and rejoin the cycle of life or fall into Oblivion and cease to be, she must find something — anything — to fill the hollowness of her own existence. Most ghosts cling to the echoes of their past life as a reason to continue on — they follow their children's lives, they spy on their enemies, they hover around family shrines and listen greedily to their descendants tell stories and legends about their deeds.

LETHE AND OBLIVION

Lethe is the soft promise of renewal, and Oblivion is the dead, unbroken silence of utter and final annihilation.

When a ghost willingly embraces the end of her existence, she sinks under the gentle pull of Lethe. This process takes three days — three days while the ghost fades quietly, color leaving his skin and clothes until he is nothing more than a pearly, translucent glow. While under the influence of Lethe, the ghost is helpless. Once begun, this process cannot be halted, and no power above or below can harm the fading ghost. In the last few moments, a ghost fading into Lethe can send a final message to one person anywhere in the living world or the Underworld. This speech, of love or hate, will be whispered in the ear of the target as if the ghost were standing at her shoulder. It cannot be a spell. It is simply the ghost's final words. When his final words are done, the last faint glow flickers out. A ghost that enters Lethe returns to the cycle of reincarnation. His soul lives on, reborn to a new world and new challenges.

Oblivion is nothing like Lethe, and it was not until the arrival of the Neverborn that Oblivion existed at all. Where Lethe is a quiet letting go, Oblivion tears the ghost away from existence into complete and absolute annihilation. A ghost that succumbs to Oblivion is destroyed, his soul dissolves and he is forever gone. Oblivion exists in the touch of soulsteel — and in the whispers of spectres. Ghosts that fall into the Abyss fall also into Oblivion. The drag of Oblivion takes only moments, but they are moments of agony as the ghost feels his soul shredded and the touch of a sort of death that was never meant to exist.

In some day long past, a desperate ghost learned to do more. He found a way to be more than a passive witness to the lives of his family above. Perhaps it was out of love, perhaps hate, but someone found a way to communicate, to breach the barrier between life and death. Since then, even death will not necessarily end a mother's meddling in her child's life. From that first contact, ghosts learned how to cross into the living world, how to use their passion as a power and a weapon and, finally, how to create a physical presence in the living world. The living learned, as well, that they could not discount an ally or enemy just because he was dead and devised talismans and sorceries against ghosts.

Love and hate — powerful motivations in life, and they are equally powerful among the dead. Ghosts can be violently passionate — their affairs are intense, often bloody and all consuming. Ghosts bent on revenge burn bright with hate and determination, and it is these things — not food, not air, not drink — that keep ghosts anchored in the face



of Oblivion or Lethe. Though ghosts usually indulge their passions with one another, it is only those few fortunate enough to share their passion with a living partner who feel completely fulfilled. Living hate, living love, the stubborn beating of a living heart — these are the true food and drink of the dead.

FALLING

At the moment of death, the higher soul's connection to the physical world snaps, and the soul is cast adrift, usually bewildered and disoriented. The first sensation felt after death is the powerful pull of Lethe, and for the vast majority of the dead, this current carries them away to their new life.

A few spirits are strong enough, and determined enough, to resist that drag on their soul — sometimes only for hours or days, sometimes for centuries. But no matter how long a ghost's existence, no matter how powerful he becomes, he always feels that current drawing him back into the wheel of life. Some ghosts scorn it as a temptation and a weakness. Some see it as a promise of final rest. Eventually, however, nearly every ghost succumbs.

People that die of exposure, from poison or in their sleep may also slide ignorantly into the Underworld. A good many beggars and exiles have fallen asleep in a ditch to find themselves climbing out again in a world that is a dark echo of the one they've left behind. Such vagrant ghosts drift along the empty roads and dark cities, begging for prayers rather than bread, but their lot is little better than when they were alive. They have no family to pray for them and no property or grave to haunt. Most of these confused spirits either drift into Lethe or are taken into the thrall of a Deathlord. In a few cases, they find a way to change the pattern of their existence and become something more in death than they were in life.

Other spirits are well-prepared for their transition to the afterlife. They have created effigies and built finely crafted mausoleums and stocked them with grave goods. Carried into the Underworld by the prayers of their families, these ghosts are the wealthy of the Underworld.

When an individual's higher soul becomes a ghost, her soul creates a body for her out of the Essence of the Underworld, frequently called a corpus. This form resembles how they looked when they died, but any infirmity or injury is healed. The elderly can walk and move as they did when young, even though still hunched over and wrinkled with age, and those who died in some unwholesome fashion are whole, although they often bear some mark of their passing. Those who died in fire are sooty and ashen; victims of violence may bear scars or still-dripping wounds. Both the burnt and the bloody, however, leave little trace of their injury behind; the soot and blood quickly dry up into colorless dust and blow away. Plague victims are light green in color (the victims of the Conta-

gion are a darker green, making it a not-uncommon color in the Underworld), and those who drowned are a light purple. These forms are often temporary, however. The dead can reshape their forms (or have it done for them), and most choose to sculpt themselves to look as they did in their prime, whatever they perceive that to be. Servants of Oblivion and the mad often choose to sculpt themselves into horrifying monsters and bizarre apparitions, either out of some need to express their dark nature or from instinct.

REGAINING ESSENCE

Just as the living breathe, the dead likewise respire after a fashion, drawing in the ambient miasma of memories and reverence that suffuses the Underworld and exhaling the byproducts of their own Passion. In this fashion, ghosts in the Underworld regain Essence, though not at the same speed as creatures of the living world — the dead regain 2 motes per hour of rest and 3 per hour of massage, effective meditation or Slumber. For this reason, the dead are often reliant on Fetters, the Essence of grave-bound slaves, ancestor cults, the worship of other ghosts and soulfire crystals or Essence-containing gems to supplement their own Essence, for though they have a great deal of it, it returns to them only slowly.

DEATH IN THE UNDERWORLD

While gods are immortal, a ghost can be destroyed, at least for a time. When a ghost's corpus is destroyed, there are three possible outcomes: Lethe, Oblivion or dispersion and reformation.

Ghosts that are slain or exorcised by proper rites often enter Lethe. When a ghost loses its Incapacitated health level, roll Willpower, adding one die for every 2 dots of Fetters the ghost has remaining. If the ghost does not score at least three successes, he succumbs to Lethe. On a botch, the ghost is instead claimed by Oblivion. Otherwise, his corpus is dispersed and reforms sometime later (usually one day per point of Essence) at the Underworld analog of the location of their closest Fetter. The act of reforming a corpus is very draining, however, and the ghost loses one dot of permanent Essence each time it happens. Essence lost in this fashion can be bought back with experience as normal.

Falling into Oblivion is a very real possibility when facing the Deathlords, the nephwracks or their servants. Soulsteel weapons, the attacks of some monstrous entities and certain Charms can inflict this horrible fate on a ghost, as can being thrown into the Mouth of the Abyss. A ghost who falls into Oblivion is gone. No trace of his soul remains, no fragment of his memory or self is retained.

EXISTENCE IN THE UNDERWORLD

In the Underworld, nothing exists but for the will, prayers and hopes of the dead who inhabit it. In the earliest ages, there was neither land nor sky, nothing but a space beyond life where those that could not die were imprisoned. Each human spirit that arrived brought with it a fragment of dream, a memory of sky and sun. Over time, mountains and seas, cities and forests rose out of the shapeless dark. The movements of the Calendar of Setesh permits the existence of day and night, summer and winter in the Underworld. Prior to the Calendar, no sun rose, no stars shone. The Calendar marks the five directions and measures the seasons.

Ritual is the structure that stabilizes the existence of the dead, from the great cult of the Dual Monarchy — the largest cult in the Underworld — to the field prayers and harvest rituals performed by peasant-ghosts of the Contagion era. Every ruler in the Underworld is the focus of a cult of some sort. The Essence earned through worship gives the ghostly rulers the power to shape their kingdoms to their satisfaction.

The Dual Monarchs are worshiped by every ghost in the Underworld and gain huge amounts of power thereby. All the Deathlords have cults of various sizes, many of them growing rapidly, and even the meanest ghostly bandit king is worshiped by his band of ghostly followers.

MEMORIAM

Every prayer, every stick of joss, every flower or poem or dove sacrificed to the dead feeds the dead. Like grave goods and effigies, so, too, mausoleums, graveyards, sacred trees and crematoriums that exist in the living world have echoes in the Underworld. Properly buried ghosts awaken to the home that has been prepared for them, fed on incense, comforted by memoriam, sheltered by cold stone. Ghosts crowd around the Underworld shadow of every shrine and memorial. They huddle in graveyards and reside in mausoleums. They consume the scent of burning amber in the North, they listen eagerly to the incomprehensible prayers of the East, they drift in the smoke rising from the pyres of the South. They gain Essence from every act of remembrance, no matter how minor, that the living perform to honor the dead. Even the poor coins, rotten food and canvas shrouds of the Western traditions feed the dead in their way, and even the offerings of the poorest family are better than dying alone and unmourned in a ditch.

But better than all those rituals of remembrance, is a personal connection to a living soul. When a newborn is named after a dead aunt, that ghost gains a part of the child's Essence — and a welcome duty to that child. When a lover refuses to forget her dead beloved, her dreams and tears feed her ghostly lover. Such connections can be dangerous, a





powerful enough ghost can pull the living into death after them. There are many children who do not thrive and many lovers who pine to death for their lost loves.

Still, not all bonds between the living and the dead are so dangerous. The dead have knowledge and skills the living lack, and joined together, the living and the dead can advance the fortunes of a family or a kingdom. In the North, particularly, the living communicate regularly with the dead. It is common there for ghosts to enter the dreams of the living to offer advice, to give comfort or to pester their grandchildren for memoriam. There are as many rituals and prayers designed to keep nosy ghosts out of one's life as there are rites to allow contact between the two.

Shamans and diviners regularly communicate with the dead. They interpret the often-confusing dreams sent by the dead, read omens and pass on words of wisdom from the afterlife. The Deadspeakers of Sijan are the most skilled practitioners of divination and seances in the known world. They are able to call up the spirits of ghosts ages dead in order to gain knowledge long lost among the living. The city of Sijan benefits most obviously from the joined strengths of the living and the dead, but such alliances are present throughout the world and have been since the first ghost found his way back to the land of the living.

Many things attract the attention of the dead: incense, burnt offerings, prayers or even the whispered name of the ghost on the lips of the desperate or the beloved. Attentive and powerful ghosts can answer the weakest call, but to pull a ghost up from the Underworld with any certainty, the ritual requires blood.

EXPECTATIONS OF THE LIVING

The power of the dead is well known, and living family members occasionally entreat their dead relatives for favors or gifts from the Underworld. These may be simple things: a blessing upon a proposed union, advice or the recollection of some bit of forgotten knowledge. Other times, they are more complex. Some mortal families have grown skilled in consulting their ghostly members on matters of business, politics or war, although, in many cases, it is not altogether certain which family members are using which. Such requests are normally made with appropriate sacrifices. These can range from a few burnt offerings to expansions or improvements to family shrines to new burial chambers and other, more esoteric gifts. Although these requests for aid can be troublesome, even difficult or impossible to perform, the wise ghost at least listens and does not refuse his mortal kin too often. A ghost who ignores his descendents may find that his relatives assume that the dead relative has passed back on to the wheel of reincarnation or has turned his back on his family and is no longer to be honored. If he then returns seeking wrathful vengeance or a return to the old ways, he may find himself the target of exorcisms and ghost hunters or enslaved to a

necromancer granted the ghost's name by a family seeking to rid itself of his presence.

THE DISPLEASURE OF THE DEAD

The dead are not without recourse against the living. Failure to observe minor rituals or protocols can result in curses, in manifestations and hauntings or in broken crockery, while major transgressions can have much more serious results. True ghost hunters are rare, skilled exorcists are often busy, and both are expensive. As a result, they are usually reserved for the most egregious of cases, such as hungry ghosts. Few families are willing to sacrifice a child to the priesthood because Grandfather Wu is grumpy that his shrine is smaller than his brother's, when they can just spend a few days building up the shrine instead.

GRAVE GOODS

Not all dead become ghosts. Most don't. Their souls are immediately carried away to Lethe, and their grave goods never appear in the Underworld. However, if a soul pauses in the Underworld, even for a short time, any goods offered during her death rites become real in the Underworld and may be sold, given away or stolen.

All goods buried with the dead or offered during funeral rites become a part of the ghost's panoply. Mass-produced offerings of paper or cheap pine, such as those sold in every shop in Sijan, become goods of excellent quality, and offerings hand-made for a specific person are worthy of a prince's court. In the Underworld, the gold paint becomes real gold, the painted wooden coins become real jade, the miniature clothes or looms or chairs become real silk robes, real looms, real chairs. All offerings of weapons are exceptional, as per the guidelines in the **Exalted** main rulebook (p. 326). Offerings of food are eternally replenishing in the Underworld, the jug of fermented mares milk buried with a barbarian never runs dry, and the basket of bread is always full.

Memoriam and grave goods freely given away or sold are separated from their original owners, and any ritual ties between them are broken. Grave goods that are given away or sold retain all of their unusual qualities and, therefore, are quite expensive. This is not true for stolen goods. Grave goods may be stolen, and there is a large market for them, but there remains a tie between the true owner and the memoriam. This ritual tie can be used to track the item and as a conduit for harmful Arcanoi. In addition, stolen food offerings will not regenerate for the thief, damaged weapons or armor will not heal for them. The value of stolen grave goods thus lies partly in their tie to their true owners, but they are still goods of excellent quality.

EFFIGIES

Effigies of people or animals offered as part of a ghost's panoply become golems in the Underworld. They can follow relatively complex directions but do not function

ROBBING THE DEAD

Although grave goods travel with their owner to the Underworld, they also remain in the tomb where they were buried. Things of Creation must be carried into the Underworld through a shadowland to actually enter the land of the dead. The grave goods in the Underworld are shadows, memories or dreams of their existence in Creation. This is the reason for their idealized nature. This means, of course, that someone can go back to the tomb and unearth the buried goods. The dead naturally see this as incredibly offensive if done without copious sacrifices and their permission, and they will normally take action against those who attempt it.

As fragments of dreams, grave goods are quite real in the Underworld and in the shadowlands that adjoin it, but they quickly fade to dust if brought further into Creation. The only exceptions to this are at night and during Calibration. Grave goods brought into Creation during the night will last until struck by sunlight. Likewise, the borders between the Underworld and Creation are loose enough during Calibration that the goods of the dead will retain their potency until the end of that topsy-turvy season. Direct sunlight or the end of Calibration will cause them to fade into dust and mist in a matter of hours.

Artifacts and other devices buried as grave goods both remain in Creation and travel with their owner to the Underworld, just like other possessions do, and are subject to the same penalties if they leave the Underworld or a shadowland. There can, therefore, exist multiple copies of the same artifact. There is a tale that one daiklaive, usually called Thousand Suns Dawning, exists 23 times, having been stolen and buried and stolen again since the First Age. Items of the Five Magical Materials will pass into the Underworld as grave goods also of the Magical Materials, but they cannot be mock items — they must actually be made from the Five Magical Materials. Like all grave goods, such items cannot survive for long in the lands of the living.

As Essence-channelers, the dead can attune to weapons of the Five Magical Materials but gain no Materials bonus from them, ever, even if the ghost was an Exalt in life.

well without oversight or with a long absence of their owners. Effigies of animals or people also follow the dead into the Underworld. Effigies become golems, they live — after a fashion — but have no spirit. They are durable, obedient and unswervingly loyal. While not stupid, golems are not very independent of thought. Effigies designed in

imitation of an individual will look like that person but will not mimic her personality, skills or talents.

ANIMAL SACRIFICES

Animals sacrificed to the dead follow the ghost into the Underworld as part of his panoply. When a ghost awakens in the Underworld, his sacrificed animals are beside him, and these creatures will, unless imprisoned, remain with their masters for eternity. In their journey from the living world to the dead, the animals, like other offerings, transform into spectacular versions of themselves. Animals brought into the Underworld as grave goods gain 1 dot in each of their Physical Attributes, 2 Willpower and 1 Valor, and they add a -0, a -1 and a -2 health level. Their Control Rating is reduced by 1 for their owner and his grave-bound servants.

The animals are all of high quality, suitably trained and outfitted. The old war horse buried with the general is reborn as a stunning, vibrant and high-spirited beast in the prime of life. The loyalty of these sacrificed animals is absolute, sacrificed animals cannot be sold or given away. They will answer only to their master and his grave-bound servants. Animal sacrifices bear the mark of their master — be it a mon branded into the haunch of the horse, a golden ideograph on a dog's collar or tribal tattoos on the ears of barbarian caribou. The marks are faintly luminous and shine a pale blue. Animal sacrifices will not willingly leave their owner's service, and if trapped or imprisoned, they will fight viciously for freedom.

Sacrificed animals do not need to sleep, eat or drink. They will not die of old age or wounds. They cannot be destroyed — wounded unto death, an animal sacrifice reforms at its master's side the following sunset. When their owner succumbs to Lethe or Oblivion, the animals follow him. Sacrificial animals will not breed — they are a form of ghost, after all. While they are vigorous, healthy and clever, they do not have magical powers or human intelligence.

Animal sacrifices can follow their masters into the living world through a shadowland. If one is killed there, however, and its ghostly master cannot return to the Underworld before the next sunset, the animal is truly gone and will not return again to its master's side. Unlike human sacrifices, animals will not remain in the Underworld while their master travels to the world above and cannot be used by their masters to regain Essence. The value of animal sacrifices is in their loyalty and affection, not their utility as emissaries or fonts of magical power.

HUMAN SACRIFICE

In the South, concubines and catamites may end up on the pyre with their lovers, and in the West, unwanted young children and infants are sent into the dark sea with their dead mothers. Other folk may follow lovers or wives



into death through suicide, and on those terrible occasions when a person slaughters others and then themselves, the victims may become ghostly slaves — human sacrifices of the murderer to himself in the Underworld.

Human sacrifices feel the same attraction to Lethe at the moment of death and after it — and they are free to answer that call — but if they resist, they become ghostly servants in their owner's panoply. This is one reason why large funerals for wealthy princes often involve dozens or hundreds of such sacrifices — only a handful will actually materialize in the Underworld as ghosts.

As grave goods, human sacrifices are of the highest quality in the Underworld. Such ghosts gain an extra dot in one of their Attributes in each of the primary, secondary and tertiary categories and gain a point of permanent Essence. The drawback is that such sacrifices are mystically bound to their masters.

A sacrificed ghost appears in the Underworld in the clothes of her station — wives in the South wear their sheer trousers and tight vests, slaves have the chain collars of their servitude. The servant's garments and visage match the colors and style of the rest of the grave goods in a lordly panoply. The owner's markings and symbology always appear somewhere on the sacrifice's garments or person — a tattoo on the forehead, a mon embroidered on a silk kimono, a jade seal dangling from a slave's collar. In addition, unlike free ghosts, these sacrifices appear — like animals — as finer, more perfect

versions of themselves. The elderly but beloved catamite burned with his master is once again beautiful, slender and full of dark-eyed charm.

A tie is formed between sacrifice and master at the moment of death. The tie between master and servant acts as a Fetter (see "Passions and Fetters," p. 36) based on the love and respect they shared in life. A hostile servant thrown to his death so the living might be rid of him might be fettered to his master with a rating of only •, while a beloved courtesan might be bound to her mistress with a Fetter of •••••. Those who know the appropriate sorcery and Arcanoi can exploit this tie as if the sacrificed servant was a normal Fetter. However, only the master in such a relationship can draw Essence from his ties of Fetter — these Motes are immediately drained (without warning or consent) from the Essence pool of the servant. A master can choose to allow his servant to draw Essence from him if he desires, but he is not required to do so. This Fetter needs no representation — if the ghost is in the presence of the servant, he can draw up to twice the Fetter's rating in motes of Essence, if he is not, he can draw only the Fetter's rating in Essence. Sacrificed servants are not valid Fetters for the purposes of the master returning from Lethe, but the master's final dissolution is likely to draw his servants along (requires a roll to resist Lethe as if slain themselves when their master meets his final end).



Those tied in this manner know where their spouse or slave is, and each can always find the other. Of particular value: This tie endures even if one partner passes into the living world where ghosts normally cannot regain Essence. It is possible for a ghostly princess who has entered the living world to drain Essence from her servants who remain in the Underworld.

Servants cannot be sold, given away or stolen, only freed. Sacrificed ghosts have free will; one can abandon her master, but the ritual tie between them remains unless her master chooses to release her. The sacrifice cannot break the tie on her own. If a ghost freely breaks his tie to his slave, the owner's symbols on the ghost's person fade and become unreadable. They are still visible but cannot be identified. Even free, a sacrifice cannot escape her origin. Unfortunately for all, it is rare for a master to release their slaves or a wife to release her husband, even when the ghostly servants are openly hateful or rebellious.

In the Underworld, sacrifices are treated as part of their masters' panoply — as valuable property, not as fellow ghosts. Even when freed, these ghosts are viewed as lower in station or as straying property. Those wise lords and ladies who do not abuse their sacrifices may be rewarded with particularly loyal and talented servants, a status symbol that holds great weight in the Underworld and a source of strength when their own strength runs out.

Sacrificial servants can suffer dissolution without harm to their master, but if the master succumbs to Lethe, all servants must roll as if they themselves had suffered dissolution. Ghosts who fall into Oblivion invariably drag their sacrifices down with them in a final attempt to survive. It has been recently revealed that the Deathlords have a way to free a sacrifice against her owner's wishes, just another disruption they have brought to the Underworld.

BURNT OFFERINGS

Burnt offerings are sacrifices made to the dead after burial. They could be bribes to influence a ghost's decision or payment for services rendered. Burnt offerings are normally made in the form of replica goods — instead of

destroying actual objects, the supplicant destroys carefully crafted paper replicas of the goods she would sacrifice. Such sacrifices are not as effective as the real thing, but they are much less expensive.

Burnt offerings normally provide the dead with Essence and Willpower, although there are rituals that allow the living to sacrifice goods in such a way that they appear in the Underworld, just as if they had been buried with the deceased as grave goods. More commonly, the offerings appear as black jade tokens inscribed on one side with the name of the ghost for whom they are intended. They come into existence in the Underworld analog of the location in Creation where the sacrifice was made. To release the Essence or Willpower carried within, the ghost merely has to hold the token in her hand or touch it. Some ghosts have the tokens worked into their corpus as a decoration and a warning of their arsenal of power.

The ghost can choose what form the offering takes — Willpower or Essence — when it is touched. Any amount of Essence can be drawn from the token, but the token can only be drained once per turn. Any ghost can use an offering token, but those who are not the target cannot tap it for Willpower, and each mote drained draws 2 motes from the token. Like all such things, offering tokens only have power in the land of the dead. In the land of the living, they are merely black rocks, and if exposed to sunlight outside of the Underworld or shadowlands, they will crumble to dust.

Traditionally, ghosts pay taxes to their princes in burnt offerings. In recent years, several Deathlords have begun to impose taxes upon those dead within their sphere of influence as well. Resistance to these taxes is widespread, and enforcement is erratic.

OFFERINGS OF BLOOD

Blood is a potent offering for ghosts, especially those who have no family left to remember them or who have managed to get on themselves exorcised from their family shrines. The blood of animals, humans and especially family members is not only a powerful narcotic, it carries

Resources Cost of Sacrifice*	Benefits Imparted
X	1 Essence
•	3 Essence
••	5 Essence
•••	10 Essence/1 Willpower**
••••	20 Essence/2 Willpower**
•••••	30 Essence/3 Willpower**

* Replica goods typically cost less, or can be made by family members for little cost, but are less effective. Subtract • from the Resources worth of the real object, but the cost of the replicas is generally •• less.

** Each Willpower drains 10 Essence from the token



the Essence of the being it was drawn from. Creatures have a varying amount of Essence, based in part on their strength of spirit. These motes can be drained away from the sacrifice “victim” at a rate of about a mote per turn. Larger creatures may lose more motes per turn than smaller ones, but the minimum is 1 mote per turn.

Blood sacrifice does not need to involve pain or suffering (although some malevolent ghosts may desire that), and the “victim” does not need to be unwilling or killed in the process. However, the victim suffers one Health Level of unsoakable, unavoidable lethal damage for every mote offered in this fashion. Offered health levels can be healed magically.

Blood intended for use as an offering cannot be stored for very long before it is poured out — not more than an hour at most — and blood not offered as it runs from the vein is flat and foul-tasting. For the purposes of blood sacrifice to the dead and blood sacrifice to the dead only, assume that sacrificial offerings are not extras when determining how many health levels they have. Human blood is particularly succulent to the dead, giving them double the normal number of motes, and the delicious blood of family offers the dead three motes per health level offered.

Blood sprinkled on a fresh grave can give a new ghost the strength to resist Lethe. Blood bound into a shroud by a mortal necromancer can imprison a soul in her own rotting body. Nearly all rituals designed to call or communicate with the dead involve a blood offering. No more than a few drops are needed, just enough to feed the mute dead, to give them a voice and a brief connection to the land of the living. These small sacrifices are temporary but seductive. Ghosts can smell blood offerings for miles, and in shadowlands, such blood rites attract dozens of pale shades, eager to drink down this Essence of life. In those cases, the difficulty of the rite lies in identifying the ghost summoned among the crowd of dead with all of them clamoring for a taste of the offered blood.

Even the most foolish or weakest person with a bowl of blood and a half-learned chant can call up the dead. These simple rites are, for the most part, safe — this little magic only gives a ghost a temporary voice in the land of the living, and unless she has her own powers, that is all the ghost will get. However, in shadowlands and other places where the Underworld is close, even these rites can be dangerous. The scent of blood is potent, and such rites attract more than the ghost called for. Powerful spirits can pry wide the small opening in the barrier between the dead and the living and escape the Underworld. In the ages before the rise of the Deathlords — and the shadowlands — this way was the most common one for a ghost to enter the living world. Oddly, as the number and size of shadowlands increase, the small blood rites are becoming safer — it’s easier for a ghost to walk out of a shadowland than to fight to take over a blood rite.

SUMMONING GHOSTS

Anyone with 3 or more dots in Occult can attempt to summon spirits of the dead. The procedure is simple — the character must either go to the person’s grave, go to the location of her death or know the ghost’s full name, then make an offering of blood. To make this offering, the character draws mystic symbols in the ground in blood and chalk, chants various funereal incantations and then pours the offering on the ground. This process takes approximately 15 minutes, at the end of which time the ghost will appear if the player makes a successful Charisma + Occult roll.

The difficulty of this roll is 2 if performed in the mortal world and 1 if performed in a shadowland. The character gains one extra die to this roll if the blood used comes from a living creature that is sacrificed during the ritual (chickens and doves are the most common sacrifices). If fresh blood is used in the sacrifice, the character needs only have Occult • to perform the ceremony, which is reduced to difficulty 1. In a shadowland, a failed roll does not mean that there is no answer to the summoning but rather that additional ghosts besides the one called come for the blood. Every point of failure results in an additional five ghosts appearing, their temperament and interests up to the Storyteller.

RITUALS OF THE UNDERWORLD

There are hundreds of rituals in the Underworld, from the unbreakable demands of hospitality to the worship of the Dual Monarchy that turns the seasons of the dead. Rites range from day-long processions to muttered prayers and a few drops of blood spilled over a potter’s wheel.

Calibration Rite: The universal rite of the Underworld. The Calibration is sacrosanct, no warfare is permitted, no blood is shed, no work is performed. The prayers of every ghost are offered up to the Dual Monarchy — especially Setesh, master of the Calendar — and at the midnight hour, every flame and light is extinguished. The last hours of the dying year are spent in darkness until the new year is marked and measured by Setesh in his distant tower. Across the Underworld, the new year is born in a fragile flame, spontaneously igniting in the left hand of every ruler, princeling and lord in the Underworld. From this flame, candles are kindled, bonfires are started and the fires of ghostly civilization spread.

Sowing the Seed: The ritual varies slightly by crop, but all involve a blood sacrifice to feed the life in the seed and allow the plants to grow. The ruler of the household performs the sacrifice in the name of his shogun or lord. For

grain crops, the blood sacrifice is usually a heifer, cut in several arteries and driven across the freshly plowed fields. The crop is planted while the blood is fresh.

Harvest Rituals: One of the few that do not require blood sacrifice, this ritual simply demands that a portion of every harvest be left in the field, an offering to the land that provided the crop in the first place. A food offering is also made to the chain of authority, all the way up to the gilded cakes offered to the Dual Monarchs.

Feeding the Foundation: No building in the Underworld is complete without this rite being performed. A hollow foundation is created when the building is built, and a small animal — usually a puppy — is walled inside it. From this foundation of loyalty, strong walls and leak-proof roofs are born.

Processionals: Weddings, wars and worship all demand processionals. The yearly parade down the streets of Stygia is the greatest example of this ritual. The participants mark the boundaries of a land by the simple expedient of walking it. A figurehead or icon centering the rite (or, in the case of a wedding, the bride) is paraded around, while offerings of seeds, joss, grave goods and funeral money are thrown by the crowd. In warfare, the processional is the opening move of the battle — the two sides parade before each other, displaying their strength and praying for victory, while their enemies hurl curses instead of offerings.

Hospitality: Hospitality in the Underworld is rigidly bound by ritual and tradition. No free ghost may turn away an unarmed stranger seeking shelter. For three days, the guest must be well fed and treated courteously. In turn, the guest must behave in an honorable fashion — molesting the serving boys or the owner's wife voids any law of hospitality. If the household is attacked by enemies, guests are expected to help their hosts defend their homes. At sunset on the third day, hospitality laws end, ghostly guests can now be shown the door, and if they have angered their hosts, they can face attack. A significant percentage of the Restless Dead move from kingdom to kingdom, eternally taking advantage of the laws of hospitality. Serfs, slaves and sacrificed ghosts are exempt from protection under this law.

Rituals, courtesy and proper observance of status are important to the dead, they give their unchanging existence structure. Everyone displays courtesy and unfailing good manners. Status is rigidly enforced — it is very difficult to change the pattern of life in a town of the dead. The life lived, no matter how long ago, is the considered by most the only proper pattern of existence in the Underworld. Kingdoms or individuals who consistently violate proper form gain a negative reputation and — for those who are the focus of a cult — risk losing worshipers.





SLUMBER, HEALING AND WILLPOWER

The dead have no need for sleep, although many go through the motions of sleep out of living habit. Neither do their corpse-like bodies heal normally. Health levels suffered in ghostly combat remain until healed by Arcanoi or Charms or until the injured ghost drops into Slumber. Slumber is a form of somnolence where the ghost meditates in or with the representation of a Fetter and falls into a deep trance or sleeping state, to be awakened eight hours later by the Calendar of Setesh. When the ghost awakens, roll a Stamina check. Each success heals one level of lethal damage or two levels of bashing damage. Tens count as two successes on this roll, healing two lethal or four bashing levels of damage.

Players of ghosts do not get a Conviction roll for their characters to regain Willpower when they awaken from Slumber. Instead, their players roll the ghosts' Passion ratings whenever they activate a Passion in the pursuit of their goals, and the ghosts regain one point daily at the moment of their death. Ghosts also gain back their Willpower entirely when they accomplish a substantial life goal (i.e., finish a story) that furthers one of their Passions or protects one of their Fetters.

PASSIONS AND FETTERS

Each Passion represents something unfinished that ties the ghost to the Underworld. The more dots in the Passion, the stronger the ghost's commitment to it. There are things that keep a ghost attached to her former life — it could be the desire to continue experiencing some semblance of existence, parental duties to one's family and children, an oath sworn but not fulfilled. These are the things that hold the higher soul in the Underworld, instead of allowing it to pass directly back to the wheel of reincarnation. Once in the Underworld, many ghosts find reasons to go on with their existences. They develop duties and obligations in the Underworld, to their also-dead relatives or to friends and new acquaintances. These duties, obligations, oaths and desires are all known as Passions, and they are reflections of a ghost's Virtues. A ghost normally has one dot in a Passion for each dot she has in a Virtue, so a ghost with Compassion ••• would have three dots to allocate to Passions related to Compassion, such as devotion to a living or dead lover or to her family. They can all be in one Passion or multiple Passions, so long as the dots of Passions related to a particular Virtue add up the same rating as the Virtue itself. Characters will get the maximum benefit from having a few large Passions, but the fewer Passions the character has, the narrower a being she is.

Passions are what ghosts activate in the place of Virtues. They are identical in their effects, but narrower in scope, for the dead are not versatile or vibrant creatures. A ghost cannot activate a Passion that is not directly related to the current situation. Older ghosts have often turned their Passions away from the living world and focused them on the Underworld. See the Storytelling chapter for rules on changing Passions.

For Example: Mara Two-Feathers is a ghost who has as her Conviction Passion Protect My Living Family •••. If she were to see one of her family threatened, she would be able to respond by spending a Willpower and gaining three dice on some task to ensure their safety, but she could not activate her Passion merely to save herself when ambushed on the road to Stygia.

In addition, Passions are the source of Willpower for ghosts. Whenever a ghost activates a Passion for bonus dice, her player may roll the Passion's rating. Each success on this roll causes the character regain to regain a temporary Willpower point. Ghosts who accomplish substantial goals (i.e., completing any story that pursues a Passion or protects a Fetter) also gain back all their Willpower.

Fetters are places or things that tie the ghost to Creation in some fashion. It is easier to pass between the Underworld and Creation in the presence of a Fetter, and Fetters provide some sort of harbor or refuge to the ghost. Most ghosts have their place of burial as a Fetter, whether it is a grand mausoleum or a pitiful patch of sun-baked sand on a long-forgotten battleground. If a ghost's family remains and keeps its shrine or other holy places in good condition, then that is likely a Fetter as well, although usually not as important as the burial site. Other Fetters could include nearly anything the ghost found important — weapons, an unfinished manuscript, a favored hillside where the spirit watched the sunsets when living, a beloved toy or instrument, etc.

Fetters are rated like Passions; the more important the Fetter, the more dots. Fetters, even more so than Passions, directly tie a ghost to the Underworld. A ghost who has no Fetters remaining is adrift and must have a will of steel to survive any calamity that might befall him, or he will be drawn into Lethe. This is one reason why ghosts fiercely defend their burial chambers, since it is usually the strongest Fetter a ghost has.

Fetters always have a physical representation in the Underworld — a sword, a pen, a sheaf of papers or a toy. Trinkets, tokens and so forth represent large Fetters. A small plaque typically represents burial places, for example. Fetters are often part of the ghost's grave goods, and if they are, then the item provides the bonus of both the Fetter and the grave good — the ghost does not get two copies of the item. Fetters of items are always exceptional mortal items, but no better. Individuals who are Fetters cease being Fetters at the moment of their deaths.

In addition, Fetters and their representations provide material benefits to ghosts, similar to Manses and Hearthstones. While holding a Fetter's representation, the ghost may draw a number of motes of Essence per day equal to the Fetter's rating in dots, so, for example, a Fetter •• could be used to provide 2 motes of Essence per day. When a ghost is in the living world and inside of or in close proximity to the Fetter, he may draw twice the Fetter's rating in Essence per day. This is not in addition to the amount that can be drawn from the Fetter's representation, as that is tapping the ambient Essence in the Fetter. If the ghost draws motes through the representation, then that Essence will not be available at the actual Fetter. Essence recharges daily at the moment of the ghost's death. Unlike a Hearthstone, a ghost can gain the benefits of the representations of multiple Fetters at once. Other ghosts may not draw Essence from a Fetter through a stolen representation, but some ghosts will despoil the Fetters of others for use in magical rites against them or for the sheer joy of it.

DAMAGING AND STRENGTHENING FETTERS

The ties between a ghost and his Fetters can be damaged deliberately by those in the Underworld through the use of certain Arcanoi (what the dead call their Charms). Actions in Creation can also destroy a Fetter that has a concrete representation there, either reducing its value or destroying it altogether. For example, looting a ghost's tomb will typically reduce its value as a Fetter by 1 to 3 points, depending on how thorough the looting was and whether or not the tomb itself was damaged.

Representations that do not have a Fetter in Creation are gone forever if destroyed but are, of course, invulnerable to the tides of history among the living. Destroyed representations that have an actual Fetter in Creation will reform at the Fetter on the next anniversary of the ghost's death, immaterial and ready for retrieval, though of course the ghost must find a way to enter the world of the living and retrieve the representation.

The ties between a ghost and his Fetters are normally strengthened through contact and maintenance. For example, a ghost with a Fetter tying him to his living family can strengthen those ties by being a dutiful ancestor, hearing and responding to their prayers and requests and helping them when he can with advice and magical assistance. In addition, Fetters can be transferred, for example from a daughter to the family that daughter founds. See the Storytelling chapter for rules on transferring and strengthening Fetters.

THE AGES OF THE DEAD

The Underworld did not always exist. It came into being when the Primordials were betrayed and killed; the destruction of immortality not only created death itself, but a place for those unbelievably powerful dead. From the death of those vast beings, the Malfeans were born.

The Underworld was also born as a place to hold them. In those early, uncounted millennia, the Underworld was nearly deserted — a few stubborn murdered queens, exiled princes and confused beggars — wandering in an empty world of fog and shadows. The Abyss existed then, calling to the few ghosts in existence, and in that lost age, the first nephwracks were born.

The early ages of the Underworld are uncounted and uncountable, for time itself did not exist in the land of the dead. There were no seasons. In the North, the winter was unending, the summer unchanging in the South, and so on. The dim sun of the dead always hovered at the Eastern horizon, obscured by clouds, while the moon hung low in the sky to the West. Those rare times when the fogs and mists cleared enough for the stars to be seen, they remained fixed in place, changing neither by season nor by hour. It was not until the arrival of Setesh and his Calendar that the wheel of time began to turn in the land of the dead.

THE CALENDAR OF SETESH

The cycle of years turns by grace of the Monarch of Efficacious Prayers. Setesh is the keeper of the Calendar of the Dead — a gigantic construct of turning spires, brass tracks carrying variously sized spheres of ruby, crystal quartz, onyx and soulfire gems and silver lamps burning the offerings of thousands of worshipers. The delicately balanced gears and geocentric bearings are lubricated with the iridescent black oil of the Kraken and powered by the focused prayers of the dead. The massive Calendar wraps around the top third of the tallest tower of the Monarch's mausoleum — glittering in the pallid light of the Underworld — and time is measured in the rise and fall of its crystal spheres.

Before the Calendar, no time passed in the Underworld, and when the nephwracks invaded Stygia, the Calendar was abandoned, and time... stopped. The sun halted in the Underworld's dead sky, unmoving through all the battles between the nephwracks and the armies of the dead. When Setesh was reinstated, the Calendar was repaired, and the sun stirred again.

Setesh is capable of speeding, slowing or stopping the Calendar — which would halt the procession of years, the change of seasons, even the passage of day and night. He can also read the Calendar, predicting the future and reaching into the past.



The earliest ghosts were far outnumbered by shades and mortwights hungry for enough Essence to break into the living world and destroy all they came across. In those struggles to survive, the first alliances were born out of sheer desperation. Perhaps a loyal general followed a dying queen into the Underworld, and they brought their standards and panoplies with them. Perhaps those early ghosts raised a ruler from among beggars and hung thieves. Somehow, out of the darkness was born a civilization. The first pale marble mausoleums of Stygia were raised beside the Abyss that the ghosts feared so much.

As the Underworld became more civilized, the rivers charted, the Sea tentatively explored, ghosts also learned to contact their living descendents. With memoriam and the slow growth of ancestor worship, more and more ghosts fell into the Underworld rather than follow the natural course of things and remain on the wheel of reincarnation.

By the time the first stones of Sijan were laid on the ashy soils of the Eastern valleys, the Dual Monarchy had already risen to power and ruled a growing, vibrant city of the dead. Usine discovered the white-jade key to the black-jade effigies of a long-lost shogun and brought an army to serve the Monarchy.

Setesh built the Great Calendar of the Dead and invented the prayers and rites performed by the dead that allow the massive machine to function. For the first time, the sun moved from its place at the edge of the Eastern horizon, and human time began to move in the Underworld.

The Dual Monarchs and their armies of golems drove the nephwracks into the Labyrinth and sealed them away, along with their mortwright servants and hungry ghost hounds. For a very, very long time the Underworld was quiet, echoing the world above as it flourished in the Golden Age of the Celestials.

THE USURPATION

The tragedy and horror of the Usurpation was not limited to the living world. The slaughter and battles above brought a sudden influx of ghosts — warriors, generals, queens — into the Underworld. Entire cities collapsed into the Underworld, destroyed along with their Celestial masters. With the many new lords and ladies, the age of the great wars began. Dead rulers fought to control the various kingdoms of the Underworld.

The Dual Monarchy roused their golem armies to preserve Stygia and its control of the Abyss where priceless soulsteel and soulfire gems were mined — and to protect the rest of the Underworld from the nephwracks that had been imprisoned in the Labyrinth for so many centuries. Entire armies died in the fighting and woke to fight again in the Underworld.

In the chaos, Stygia itself was attacked. In their long sojourns in the Labyrinth, the nephwracks had grown in power and fearful knowledge. They had listened to the



whispers of the Abyss, fought wars among themselves and created vast armies of hungry ghosts and black-jade effigies. When they broke free, shades and mortwights — serving their nephwrack masters — flooded out of the Abyss and ravaged the glorious city of Stygia. Ancient mausoleums were destroyed, the Dual Monarchy itself was threatened. And the nephwracks, almost forgotten in the long age of peace, broke free.

The Monarchy fled, the only time they have ever left the city, and for a brief time, the only footsteps heard in Stygia were those of the nephwracks and their servants. Without the Monarchy as a ritual focus, thousands of ghosts lost their connections to the Essence provided by the capital city of the dead. The prayers and rites the dead performed for themselves became empty whispers. Time itself ceased to flow as the Great Calendar was thrown down and destroyed by the spectral armies. The voice of the Abyss grew overwhelming. Vast storms shook the Underworld, even bleeding into the world above, bringing shades and other hungry dead into the living world in unprecedented numbers. Many new ghosts who came into the Underworld were consumed immediately by Oblivion and utterly destroyed. The Underworld itself was threatened with destruction. As the bloody war of Dragon-Blooded betrayal raged in the living world, the dead kings and queens banded together to fight against the nephwracks and their terrible armies.

Many powerful ghosts of the First Age, clinging to existence in the Underworld, fell to Oblivion battling the nephwracks. Armies that had learned their skills in the wars of the living, fought for the land below. In the Underworld kingdoms, under a shadowed sun, the ghostly alliance slowly drove the nephwracks back into the Labyrinth. Finally, the Monarchy was restored, and order returned to the Underworld. The Calendar was restarted, and time began again in the Underworld.

The surviving queens and kings divided the Underworld amongst themselves, bowed their heads to the Dual Monarchy and learned to tolerate — even value — the peculiar advice of the surviving nephwracks. A certain contentment and peace returned to the land of the dead. The world above was of little interest, and the Underworld was once again predictable, controllable and secure.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE DEATHLORDS

Then, the Deathlords arrived, and they changed everything. At first, they seemed nothing more than particularly powerful ghosts. The connections they had to the Abyss were troubling, but over the centuries, the Underworld had been forced to come to terms with the nephwracks and their gospel of annihilation. The Deathlords seemed much the same. They ruled small kingdoms, paid respect to the Monarchy and seldom warred.

They brought with them powers terrifying in their strength and seduction, the cult of the ancestors and a bitter burning hunger for Oblivion. They mastered many of the shadowlands, created new cults — gaining Essence from their worshipers — and conquered or suborned several smaller kingdoms of the dead. But even their glittering seductions were not enough to truly overcome the rigid stability of the Underworld. Then, the Contagion came, and the Underworld suddenly became — crowded.

MANSES AND THE DEAD

Since the dawn of history, dead heroes who descended into the Underworld have raised up monuments and mausoleums to dwell in. Often, these were erected on geomantically significant spots and, thus, act as Manses for the Demesnes of the Underworld. Most such Manses are in the acropoli of the cities of the dead, and public temples and seats of government are often Manses. Outside the necropoli, the many Demesnes have all been capped by the Deathlords, who possess a dizzying abundance of Hearthstones as a result.

The dead can regain Essence from a Manse or Demesne they are attuned to at the regular rate. A ghost gains the benefits of any Hearthstone just as if he was an Exalt. This includes the magical powers of the Hearthstone, if the stone is set in an item of the Magical Materials that the ghost has attuned to himself.

The Hearthstones of Manses built in the Underworld have no power outside the Underworld and the shadowlands and are just worthless hunks of discolored glass or rock until they return to the land of the dead.

THE CONTAGION

As a result of the Contagion, millions of ghosts arrived, unprepared in the Underworld. Hundreds of thousands of them were without memoriam or grave goods. Hundreds were rulers, accustomed to holding lands, having servants, ruling kingdoms and fighting for what they wanted. The chaos of the Contagion threatened to bring about another great age of war in the Underworld.

The Deathlords generously offered their assistance. They advised the newly dead and supported the established kingdoms as the overloaded ghostly bureaucracy struggled to deal with the new influx of ghosts. They gave positions of respect and responsibility to ambitious soldiers and servants. They had jade and memoriam to sell, offerings to tempt dead appetites. Their advisors whispered in many ears, and the influence of the Deathlords grew quickly. The cult of the ancestor swelled large in the Underworld with adherents cut down by the Contagion



and fully certain they deserved the worship of the unfortunate survivors.

The Contagion ghosts far outnumber any other dead in the Underworld. They brought changes to the ancient cultures of the dead, new laws, new customs and new alliances. The burden of their numbers was a vast weight on the shoulders of the older kingdoms of the dead, coming as it did during such a time of crisis.

THE CONTAGION DEAD

The green-skinned Contagion dead, so abruptly torn from life, are particularly determined to preserve the status quo. They want nothing more than some kind of continuation of the life they lost. Thought to be hopelessly pedestrian by the older heroes of the First Age, the Contagion dead exist much as they did when they were alive.

Entire villages, young and old, are recreated in the Underworld. Farmers still farm, growing barley and rye. Wives and husbands indulge in empty copulation, children — eternally young — play in the shadowed streets. Governors and town elders meet to enforce rules and administer punishments. Their daimyos and shoguns, kings and queens, claim their due in grain, service and prayers. They repeat, endlessly the daily tasks they performed in life.

Freedom is possible, if a ghost is willing to leave his home and family; travel and exile may bring a ghost a different life than the one he has known for so long. It isn't easy, for most ghosts wear the mark of their station in their panoply and burial garments. The majority of ghosts that seek a new existence in another town or city usually find themselves once again in the same pattern, just serving a different master. A brisk trade in stolen clothes is supported by ghosts hoping to leave their old existence behind for a new one — sometimes any new one. The port cities of the Underworld see many Contagion dead, in ill-fitting clothes, hoping to travel to Sijan, Stygia or Chiaroscuro and throw themselves into a new life.

The ancient ghosts from the First Age of the world find the rigid, plebian existence of the Contagion ghosts extraordinarily dull. In a land where no one can starve, death is no longer a fear. Why remain bounded by the small ambitions of life? In addition, the older dead are empresses, warlords and heroes. They survived, when so many of their kindred were swept into Lethe and were victorious over the nephwracks. They served the demigods of the First Age and were betrayed to grand and tragic deaths. That the Contagion dead are content to remain small in spirit and limited in ambition is beyond the understanding of these ancient, stubborn ghosts.

However, there are uses for these farmers and carpenters. They do provide almost all of the basic goods found in the Underworld, from flat bread to lanterns to weapons. And those ghosts that flee their confined existence in their home make eager and obedient servants. Mainly, there are

SLAVERY IN THE UNDERWORLD

Until the coming of the Deathlords, slavery was virtually unknown in the Underworld, save for those poor souls sacrificed during burial rituals. When any slaves can voluntarily surrender to Lethe to avoid punishment or captivity or simply have themselves “killed” to escape, it is difficult, at best, to set up any kind of slave-holding culture. A scattered handful of artifacts were brought into the Underworld that allowed their wielders to enslave the dead, and some of the most powerful nephwracks had developed Arcanoi that could enslave a ghost. That was the extent of the matter, however — slaves were the provenance of those whose families had been wealthy enough to conduct human sacrifices during the funerary rites, and everyone else made do with golems and paid servants.

This is still largely the case, but the Deathlords and soulsteel have begun to change that. Soulsteel shackles can be made that prevent the dead from using Arcanoi without permission, and ghosts that die in the Underworld while bound in these soulsteel shackles are drawn into Oblivion without fail. There is still little slave trade in the Underworld (certainly nothing on the scale that occurs in Creation), but Deathlords and Abyssals are as likely to be serviced by slaves as by hired servants. Additionally, growing numbers of the rich dead have enslaved other ghosts, using soulsteel shackles purchased from the Deathlords and their servants.

just so many of them. Those armies that exist in the Underworld are made up of a great many Contagion dead — the Deathlords use them for cannon fodder, and the Sijanese use them to frighten the ignorant living who stray accidentally into the Underworld's Sijan. Relatively easy to exploit, the Contagion dead are found in every household and ministry as secretaries, mistresses, foot soldiers and the like.

The more recent dead, children of the chaotic modern era, are more like the First Age dead in spirit, if not in power. They are restless and often wealthier than the Contagion dead, and they possess living families to support them, unlike the ancient ghosts of the First Age.

THE NEW DEAD

If the Contagion dead harbor middle-class ambitions and desire to be seen as equals to the most ancient ghosts, the dead who've come after strive even more to emulate the ancient dead. Victims of a confusing and dull Age, the recently dead are not terribly welcome latecomers in the Underworld.

Unlike the Contagion dead, the newly dead often have memoriam and supportive families still living. As far as most of the Underworld is concerned, that's nearly all the new dead are good for. Relatively wealthy, the newly dead support a great deal of trade in the Underworld.

The new dead, however, are also a disruptive element. It's only that fact that there are relatively few of them compared to the Contagion dead that keeps them more-or-less out of trouble.

The new dead are much involved in the living world. Unlike both the Contagion dead and the ancient ghosts, the recently dead still have living families to care for and support. Sijan, in particular, is full of new dead, and they influence the city's politics. Recently arrived ghosts, still eager to reach the living world, are very responsive to the Deathlords' messages. They serve those dark masters in exchange for passage into Creation.

As news of the increasing chaos in the living world begins to filter to the dead, the ancient kings and lords are beginning to stir and become interested in the newly dead and the changes they might signal. Recently, rather than abandoning the new dead to their own paths, princes and shoguns have been collecting them up, assuring their obedience through oaths, then questioning them for any news of the world above they might have.

As the various factions of the Underworld stir, they begin to use the newly dead as messengers and spies in the living world. Ghosts appear more frequently of late (even a few in the Realm itself) not to satisfy personal interests, but in service of their dead masters. The Deathlords and the older rulers are still taking great care to avoid any sign of conflict as they move in the living world, but most know, it will not be long before loyalties must be declared. The dead are gathering allies and connections as quickly as they can, and the new dead find themselves caught up in thousand-year-old politics.

DEATH RITES

There are many funerary traditions in Creation, many ways to bid the dead farewell and usher them into a new existence. In each case, the funeral is not just the end of life, but for those ghosts who enter the Underworld, it is the beginning of a strange new existence.

CHILDREN OF THE DRAGONS

A Dragon-Blood funeral is a long affair, full of solemn ceremony. As any Dragon-Blooded will tell you — at length — these ceremonies are performed not to placate the spirits of the dead, but rather, for the edification of future generations and to bring the Dragon-Blooded Host together to remember the passing of a hero.

Dragon-Blooded bodies are disposed of in various ways; those who follow Hesiesh burn their dead, those who follow Pasiap bury them within beautifully designed gardens, those of Mela expose the bodies to the winged

scavengers in specially built, open-topped towers. In many cases, there is no body, the flesh having been lost on a battlefield or to the depredations of a Fair One or hunting an Anathema. Effigies of ivory and parchment are buried or burned instead. All Dragon-Blooded share some death rituals however, such as the naming scrolls and the ceremonial addition of a hero's plaque to the house shrine.

The names of the dead are preserved on scrolls in the family archives, and every Dragon-Blooded child is expected to memorize their bloodlines and ancestry along with their ancestors' notable acts and manner of death. These naming lists are precious to a family and are protected behind the strongest spells and cleverest locks a family can afford. It is within these lists, maintained by the matriarchs of the family, that true parentage is revealed and that who assassinated whom and who died peacefully in bed may be discovered.

Death plaques are usually made of one of the five colors of jade or — if the family cannot afford jade, dyed alabaster — and carved with the name of the dead on one side and the house seal on the other. Recently, poets and writers have begun to add memorial phrases onto their plaques, as have those with overweening egos. These clever sayings and poems on the jade plaques are borderline heresy, however, and more traditional families forswear everything but the name and seal — all titles and honors are lost when the spirit moves to its next life.

When a noble dies, his plaque is displayed in his household's entryway, and the entire household is in mourning for the next three months. Windows are draped, slaves are instructed to remain mute, and the family gathers to read the will and remember the dead one's deeds and fame. If possible, businesses are closed or left for servants to run as it's believed to be in poor taste to handle money when in mourning. If the head of a line dies, the entire family is summoned home to the family's central Manse — even the outcaste and exiled may return and petition the heir to be taken back into the family's good graces. The famous story of the Prodigal Soldier and her heroic return on the death of her scheming mother is a famous play dealing with the secrets and politicking common during a funeral. Like many Dragon-Blooded plays, most everyone in it dies in ironic commentary on the rituals that are present in the background of every scene.

Once the family is gathered together, the young adults recite the bloodline of the family, and the newly departed is ceremoniously added to the scroll. The plaque is carried from the household to the Great House's family shrine in a simple procession of the entire household. Incense and lucky paper coins are burned at the shrine, prayers to speed the spirits of the dead to their next life are recited, and surviving spouses are ceremonially relieved of their ties to the dead. The family gathers with its lawyers, the will is read, inheritance is divided, and any debts incurred by the dead are paid off, if possible.



The patrician class apes the traditions of the Dragon-Blooded, creating plaques and wills, draping their homes in black and hoping for the deceased to begin a new life as one of the honored Children of the Dragons.

For the slaves and lower classes within the Realm, funerals are much simpler. Many common funerals in the Realm echo traditions from other cultures in the world — the pyres of the South, the Sijanese burial customs of the East or the stone cairns of the North. The Realm does not copy the hard traditions of the West, however, and those who die in the western Realm are generally burned. The Immaculate Order keeps a close watch on such displays to ensure that the funerals do not lapse into heresy.

Official disposal of dead slaves is usually carried out by the most expedient method available. The bodies are usually burned in incinerators along with other forms of offensive garbage and the corpses of the disenfranchised and criminals. The ashes are sold to farmers to enrich their fields. As in life, slaves serve their masters in death.

THE EMPTY REALM

The Realm is the greatest kingdom in the living world. The center of the empire is the populous and wealthy Blessed Isle. In the Underworld, the corresponding land is nearly empty, the native population made up mostly of slaves and outcaste heretics. The Immaculate Philosophy is strong on the Blessed Isle, and most who dwell in the Realm live and die and live again. There is no room for ghosts among those who worship the Immaculates.

The most common inhabitants of the isle in the Underworld are immigrants. Ghosts from all over the world flock to Stygia and its glories. Some make their home in the city itself, while others spread out across the relatively fertile land to farm, raise animals, build the Monarchy's fleet of white-hulled ships or otherwise occupy their endless new existence.

Those ghosts "native" to the isle of Stygia are more likely to be slaves or peasants who have participated in illegal funerary rites despite Immaculate scrutiny. They arrive with whatever grave goods their families were able to secretly amass and little hope of reliable offerings from their living family.

Dragon-Bloods who are unfortunate enough to become ghosts arrive in the Underworld as paupers. Their families have offered them no grave goods or prayers, they have no death money, no loyal servants, no mausoleum. No ancestor worship by their children exists to support them. In death, the Dragon-Bloods, rulers of civilization, wander as beggars. This does not mean they remain in their low station — though they have none of the materiel goods so many other ghosts possess, they still retain the skills and force of will that made them lords and warriors in life. Many Dragon-Blooded ghosts find respect and reward in the service of the Deathlords.

Communication between the living and the dead of the Realm is nearly impossible. The Immaculate Order is quite aware of the knowledge hidden in the land of the dead, and it quickly suppresses any sign of reliable communication between the living and the Underworld that its monks come across. The only shadowland known on the Blessed Isle is in a remote area near the Imperial Mountain, and until her vanishment, it was under the exclusive control of the Empress. No ghost has yet found a way to pass that shadowland without assistance from the living world. For now, that passage between the living and the dead is closed.

SHADOWLANDS OF THE BLESSED ISLE

The shadowlands on the Blessed Isle have long since been thoroughly salted over, exorcised and completely landscaped by peasant levies and sorcery in an attempt to prevent any passage between the lands of the living and the realms of the dead. If any remain, they are extremely small and very well hidden. It is conceivable that agents of the dead could create new shadowlands, but it is unlikely that they would remain hidden for very long. Even in these troubled times, both the Immaculate Order and the All-Seeing Eye are ever-vigilant in their efforts to detect and destroy any threat to the Blessed Isle.

DUST AND ASHES

In most of the Southern provinces, the honored dead are purified by fire. Thieves and murderers, Anathema and aborted babies are thrown out for the jackals and the black-maned lions of the desert.

In the South, the funeral is the beginning of an existence of respect and reverence. Southern children are named after dead family members. They perform yearly cycles of rituals designed to attract the interest and blessing of their patron ancestors. In exchange for fruit, flowers, incense and an altar beside the fire, the living receive prophetic dreams, ghostly advice and as many lucky breaks as their dead namesakes can provide.

Southern funerals are noisy, wild affairs. Drums, flutes and wailing relatives make sure to drown out the cries of any unfortunate spouses or pets who accompany their masters into the Underworld. A lavish funeral celebration is important to any Southern family — three days is the rude minimum for a proper funeral, and the noble families have rites that can last for a month.

The corpse is prepared and burned quickly. The important parts of the celebration happen when the cool ashes are collected by the youngest child in the deceased's family. For many Southerners, the feel of warm ashes sticking to their fingers is one of their earliest memories.

The urn — and, therefore, the spirit of the dead — presides over the rest of the celebration, offered food and wine — particularly the sweet desert wines of the South-east and an ancient dish of maize and pigeon beans, the

MASKS AMONG THE DEAD

Many are those among the dead who were kings and princes in their mortal lives, and those individuals typically go about bare-faced and derive considerable reputation from their living deeds. But others among the dead were not so famous or led lives whose fame they would gladly abandon. These ghosts go about masked, and by this token, they signal that they have assumed a new identity in the Underworld and left their old life behind. They may still uphold the ancestor cult and fiercely protect their living descendants, but while ghosts who practice masking typically appear in their old faces and identities to their surviving mortal relatives, the liberties permitted the living are not acceptable among the dead, and it is considered a grave offense to call such ghosts by their now-abandoned living names.

Those among the dead who go masked typically wear very elaborate masks if their means allow it. These masks are as unique, distinctive and difficult to emulate as a natural human face, and individuals attempting to forge such masks must make the same rolls as if they were attempting to disguise themselves as a normal individual, except that they must have the materials to forge a mask available and the time required to compose the disguise is typically measured in days, not hours. In addition, many of the powerful among the dead strive for masks of unique material and singular appearance to thwart imposters, and it may be difficult to emulate such vizards without great effort or ingenuity. Many of the great dead's masks also bear powerful enchantments to protect and defend the wearer.

traditional food of the dead. Southern urns are works of art, as ornate as the family can afford and often commissioned by their owners years before their deaths. There is a brisk trade in stolen urns. The ashes of the proper owners are invariably tossed out by the thieves, so the crematoriums of the wealthy are usually cursed to deter theft.

Immaculate missionaries act in the greater cites of the South, and Southerners must at least pay lip service to Hesiesh when they light the funeral pyres.

DISTANT SMOKE

Outside of a thin band of land adjoining the Sea of Shadows, little grows in the Underworld's South, and even less thrives. A blasted land of sand and rock, the South is depressingly cold, despite the fierce sun burnt appearance of the landscape. There are rare volcanoes here, and many jagged mountains that claw endlessly at the rainless sky. The only rains here are great thunderstorms, but they bring





no respite for the thirsty, lasting only long enough to turn baked clay arroyos into channels for devastating flash floods that are gone nearly as soon as they arrive. Dusty winds mutter and moan through the harsh wind-torn landscape the rest of the time — some say they are the voices of spirits not quite forgotten, powerless and mad with age. Few of the dead make their home in the wastelands of the deep South — only the most desperate, stubborn or mad would willingly live in such a desolate place. The Southwest is the location of the Thousand and, west of that, a bitter tangle of dark-black vines and strange baobab trees, and while it cannot be called hot in this fetid jungle, nonetheless those who go there are drained of any semblance of energy or life as if boiling under the steamy heat of a true jungle. There are things here that are older than the First Age, and the Deathlords do not reside in the Southwest, and they encourage their Abyssal servants to avoid it as well. The Southeast is endless windswept savannas, stalked by ghostly lions and haunted by the ghosts of the cattle-herding nations that claim them.

Ghosts wake to celebration in the South. Living laughter and offerings hold the new ghosts in the Underworld, and the wealth they bring with them insures their place in their new world. They repay this loyalty with care and affection for their living families.

The Southern ghosts live mostly in the major cities along the Inland Sea of Shadows — the ancient nomad tribes of the desert are jealous of their empty lands, and few new ghosts who are lost there survive to tell the tale. The ghosts of the South are divided into great families, within which are dozens of smaller families, and so on — smaller and smaller — until even the beggar on the street can claim protection of a great house.

In turn, the great families can call on hundreds of members in their interfamily squabbles. Ghosts rise and fall in the South along with the fortunes of their patron families. The lords and ladies know the value of loyalty, and ambition in the newly arrived ghosts is carefully channeled into family politics.

Prestige in the South comes from the wealth and health of the living family a ghost is associated with. Any activity in the Underworld is measured against its use to a ghost's living relatives.

The custom of the South to name newborns after the recently dead gives Southern ghosts a strong tie to the living world. It's relatively easy for the ghosts to contact their namesakes, and any ghost with a living namesake has undeniable prestige in the Underworld. Much time is spent scheming to increase the fortunes of a living namesake. Ghosts spy among themselves to learn competitors' secrets and pass the news onto their namesakes. Magics to sicken a ghost and, hopefully, his living namesake are illegal but common in the South.

The strongest ghosts in the South strive to travel into Creation and become a sort of spiritual guardian (and advisor) to their living namesakes. Such alliances between ghost and descendent begin in childhood and can last throughout the decedent's life. This connection, usually affectionate, is often consummated by the death of the living namesake — the new ghost is welcomed into the Underworld by his lifelong companion and advisor. These relationships can become intense, and on occasion, the ghost — longing for closer contact with his namesake — will draw his descendent into death early. The strong association between the living and the dead in the civilized South also means that, occasionally, the living fall victim to politics originating in the Underworld. Assassins hired with burial gold know very well to avoid questions, do their job and leave the area.

SHADOWLANDS OF THE SOUTH

Firepeak Mountain: South and west of the city of the Lap, Firepeak Mountain marks the northernmost part of the Thousand, the mountain citadel of the First and Forsaken Lion. Buried deep in the mountains between Gem and the Lap, Firepeak is little known, even by explorers, and is thought by many who dwell outside the region to be legend.

Nightfall Island: A small island off the Southwestern shoreline. Far from anything that resembles civilization, the island has been largely missed by explorers both in the shadowland and in the Underworld up to this point. Its society has evolved naturally into a sort of mirror image of the society in the Skullstone Archipelago. On Nightfall Island, the living and the dead work together in, if not harmony, at least some semblance of reason. The dead lead, not because they are the dead, but because they are the most experienced and wisest of the island's inhabitants.

The Bayou of Endless Regret: Located off one of the small rivers that parallels the Cocytus, the Bayou of Endless Regret is dank and fetid even for the area. The massive mangroves and baobab trees choke nearly all of the light from the waters, and what ground exists is marshy and filled with patches of quicksand and other hazards. In Creation, the bayou is the ending of a minor river that parallels its Underworld namesake.

STONE HOUSES

For the living in the North, summer and fall are times of plenty when the grass grows high and trade is easy. For the dead, winter is their time of plenty, when gifts from living descendents are plentiful and their names are remembered in story and song.

There is a reason the Northern barbarians hate the stone cities of civilization. Stone houses are for the dead.

Winter is the burial season, and the barbarians build cairns for their fallen chieftains on their wintering grounds. The body is flayed by the old women of the tribe, dressed in his finest furs and richest jewels and sewn into a felt shroud along with his weapons, his hunting dogs and his hawks. Then, the cold stones are lain over the burial site. The elk and caribou riders also sacrifice totem animals during the burial of a high chieftain, to provide the dead with a herd in the afterlife. The mammoth riders bleed their mammoth instead, but for the same purpose. Slaves from the cities may also be sacrificed, but the tribes do not kill their own in service of the dead.

Among the barbarian tribes, there is no room for the sick, the weak or the old, and there is another way to earn the ceremonies due a chief. Those with the courage to do so outwalk — leave their tents and their families and walk into a snowstorm to die of exposure or starvation. Outwalkers are honored as chieftains are, no matter their living rank within the tribe. An effigy of wool is buried instead of the missing corpse.

In the civilized North, such as it is, the dead are similarly honored during winter with song, dance, offerings and animal sacrifice. In addition, the city-dwellers keep altars in their homes to their deceased ancestors, where they perform sacrifices to earn favors and divert bad luck. These altars are found near the hearth where food, drink, amber incense and — in the homes of the wealthy — flowers are offered to the dead. Small statuettes, made from the bones of the dead, preside over the household and are often carried to weddings and other important events by their descendents.

BEYOND THE VEIL

The Northern reaches of the Underworld are covered in a blanket of ashy snow and ice that persistently resist even the warmth of high summer (such as it is in the Underworld), lingering in the shade of the grim pine trees and brush that scatter the landscape. As in Creation, few reside here, and the North is a dark and quiet place even for the Underworld, traveled only by those on some sort of mission, those who cannot leave and those who have nowhere left to go. Many of the dead in the North are unsettled, a great number being hungry ghosts and spectres, and attacks on the living, in search of blood or merely vengeance, are all too common.

The Northeast is a land of dark frozen taiga and pine forests, a place where shadowy wolves hunt those who would venture into this land without the strength of numbers. To the Northwest are the frozen northernmost reaches of the Sea of Shadows, and here, even the Deathlords do not sail unless given compelling reason.

In the Northern traditions, barbarian ghosts wake in a felt tent, their loyal hounds and hawks by their sides, fine weapons to hand, with food and fermented milk to feed them. Chieftains and warlords also have a sacrificed herd to

give them immediate status. The barbarians burial customs allow ghosts to travel freely in the Underworld — their grave goods are portable, and they are not dependent on mausoleums or graves for connections to their descendents.

For new ghosts, the first few days are always the hardest. They must immediately find their tribe or risk being waylaid and robbed. Though the ghost tribes of the North are very protective of their dead and scouting parties look constantly for any dead tribesmen wandering the tundra, the icy plains are large, and those who die outside the burial fields are at risk of being permanently lost. The locations of the Northern burial fields is a closely guarded secret, both in the land of the living and in the Underworld, and there are always a few guides waiting there to bring new family home.

The guides waiting at the barbarian burial fields are usually paired — an old ghost, well experienced in the dangers of the Underworld, and a young ghost, hopefully someone who will be familiar to the newly arriving tribesman. Competition is fierce among the tribes for the honor, and summer contests of weaponscraft, riding, tracking, hunting and dream interpretation are held to select the best and bravest for the task. New guides are chosen every year, though a ghost may serve as often as she is able to command the honor.

The position of guide is a prestigious one. Northerners comfort their ancestors through the winter with stories, songs and gifts. Everyone leaves some offering: fermented milk, firestones, flutes, mittens or — from the children — toys. The loveliest maidens of the tribe remain with the cairn through the winter, providing companionship. Guides are able to take advantage of the wealth of offerings available at the burial sites, and more than a few living maidens have spent the winter with a ghostly lover to comfort their stay besides the eerie cairns.

In the North, there is usually plenty of warning that someone is going to die — ghost communicate regularly with their descendents and the local shamans or dream interpreters. It is the outwalkers who are most at risk. They wander from their tribe to die alone and in secret, and though effigies are buried in the tribes cairns, they will arrive wherever they die on the tundra instead of at one of the burial sites.

The ghost tribes welcome all their dead. They are wealthy enough to afford newcomers and strong enough to protect them. They are also preparing for a war not before seen for thousands of years in the Underworld and are eager to increase their numbers against the day when the Deathlords seek to rule them in more than name.

The Haslanti dead wake in a dark reflection of the home they lived — and died — in. Since the Haslanti city-states are some few hundred years old, those homes are crowded with generations of ghosts. New rooms and hallways are tacked onto the original structures as needed, never professionally built but cobbled together out of



whatever materials are to hand. Haslanti spirits crowd around the household shrines the way the living crowd around the central hearth — for warmth and comfort. They scorn the outer rooms as useful only to house the weak and foolish.

The grave goods a new ghost brings are critical in the cities, for those goods prove a ghost's station and, if necessary, can bribe or buy a position of safety in the house. Poor ghosts, neglected in death, are slowly edged out of the homes they belong to until they find themselves slowly driven from the cities entirely. Homeless ghosts are separated from their families' offerings and have only their irreplaceable burial goods. Over time, those precious goods are traded or sold as the increasingly desperate ghosts seek new homes among strangers.

There are many small shadowlands in the North, allowing ghosts easy travel between the land of the living and the land of the dead. Most living cities, however, have sigils and talismans to keep the dead beyond their boundaries. The easiest methods for ghosts to contact the living are through dreams and omens.

Advising living descendants is serious businesses, and both the barbarians and the urban dead discourage random contacts between the living and the dead, preferring to go through shamans and diviners instead.

There is little anyone in the Underworld can do about the constant, low-level traffic between the shadowlands but to remind the living to take care when they travel alone and at night. The dead are equally wary of strangers they come upon in the shadowy daylight of the Underworld, for there are travelers from the living world desperate enough or insane enough to seek out the shadowlands in order to follow wives, brothers or lovers into the darkness.

SHADOWLANDS OF THE NORTH

The North is dotted with many shadowlands. Some of the most notable are:

The Silent Meadow of Dust: Lying many days travel north and west of Gethamane, deep in frozen lands where neither mortal nor ghost willingly goes, this shadowland is home to the citadel of the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible, the strange underground fortress known as the Hidden Tabernacle.

The Vale of Mists and Shadows: Southeast of Crystal and shrouded constantly in a haze of mists and blizzards, the shadowland of Gradefes is home to the Fortress of Crimson Ice, citadel of the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears.

Marama's Fell: Located near the city of Whitewall, Marama's Fell has a larger proportion of hungry ghosts and other hostile dead than most other shadowlands, and attacks against living communities are even more common in the vicinity of the Fell than elsewhere.

THE FARE OF THE DEAD

The foods of the dead are mostly simple fare: coarse bread made of barley, maize or rice, stews of barley and mutton, roast venison and beef, squashes and some other vegetables (beans and peas foremost among them). Melons are the principle fruits of the dead, and they grow nearly anywhere there is water, but other fruits include apples, pears, pomegranates and grapes. Flavors are muted and subdued, and all manner of spices and peppers are popular requests for sacrifices. Famine is rarely a problem in the Underworld. The lands surrounding most necropoli are fertile and bountiful.

Food is the most common of sacrifices of the living, and with good reason. Dutiful families capable of attending to the needs of their dead with bountiful sacrifices of fine grains and produce and regular sacrifices of oxen and other livestock can guarantee that their ancestors need not eat the pale and nearly flavorless foods of the Underworld, for their larders are kept full with the offerings of their living relatives. Such families are usually looked upon favorably by their ancestors and can count on their help in hard times. Those incapable, or unwilling, to sacrifice for the continued sustenance of their ancestors are not always as blessed and may be subject to the ill-will of their honored dead, something always to be avoided.

ROOTS AND LEAVES

The waiting Forest dominates the imagination of the East, and it is to the Forest the dead return.

In the Eastern provinces, sacred groves are tended by funerary priests. Their trees — wide, strong and tall — are laden with the white-wrapped bodies of the dead, while, high above, the giant woodland vultures circle. Space on the sacred trees is scarce, and higher branches are purchased — sometimes years in advance — from the priests who tend the groves. Peasants too poor to afford any of the branches are buried among the roots, returning to the earth they spent their lives tending.

The funerals are professional affairs. Priests, mourners and processional organizers — all typically trained in Sijan — are hired by the deceased's family. The Sijanese Order is known all across the East and much of the rest of Creation for its funerary skills.

Eastern funerals takes place on the road, during the journey from the deceased's home to the sacred grove where he will be laid to rest. First, the body is partially mummified and wrapped in the heavily scented white linen and ropes that will be used to fasten it to the tree. Professional mourners chant the deceased's ancestry

constantly, to encourage the ghost to remain with the body through the trauma of mummification. The local diviner determines the best route to the sacred grove, and the family gathers at the funeral parlor, where the procession will start. At twilight, the caravan sets out.

White is the color of mourning in the East, and the entire party wears its funeral finery: white kimonos, white-powdered hair and faces, white-gloved hands. Even the guards hired to protect rich travelers wear white-washed armor and paint their swords white. The procession moves slowly but never stops — traveling day and night until it reaches the grove. Travel at night is illuminated by giant paper lanterns on long poles, and in the summer months, the luminous deathwatch moths are attracted to the soft light, and they trail the procession like the dim echoes of forgotten ghosts.

On arrival at the grove, the entire party fall silent and will remain silent the three final days of the funeral. The mourners, who have been wailing and chanting, fall into stylized, silent mimicry of grief, their contorted expressions enough to give young children nightmares.

Animals are sacrificed at the roots of the selected tree, to feed the dead and to attract the scavengers who will devour the body. The corpse is hoisted into the tree and bound to a sturdy branch. Then, the funeral party waits for the first of the vultures to arrive and begin tearing at the corpse. The vultures' white-barred wings will carry the ghost on the long journey to the Underworld, and everyone hopes for a strong young bird to be the first arrival.

FALLEN LEAVES

The Eastern Underworld is a land of dark forests and fell creatures. Here grow the trees of the dead, pale-barked with great black leaves that soak up the Underworld's sparse light, bearing strange fruits. As one travels farther East, the forests grow denser, and the underbrush thicker and harder to pass, until, eventually, travel becomes all but impossible even for the most dedicated. Many small city-states dot the East, many of them dating to the Contagion, and some even before, but they are typically small and poorly populated.

The Eastern dead wake in the endless, dark forests of sacred trees, the branches around them heavy with the pale fruit of their fellow dead. Above, the sacred vultures circle, waiting to carry messages between the living and the dead. For the rural Eastern ghosts, the sacred trees are the focus of their world. They scheme to protect their place or to rise to higher and higher branches until, someday perhaps, they will reside in the distant crowns, along with long-dead rulers.

The sacred trees provide much more than a place to perch while spitting on and mocking those lesser ghosts on the branches below. The trees bloom in the spring, and the Eastern ghosts gather the enormous pale blossoms to

create ghostflower, a drug that can be used to send dreams to the living world. In the trees' dark roots, luminous serpents live that possess a poison that can send a ghost into Lethe. Hunters seek those serpents and other rare plants and creatures to trade with the valley dead. Strangers are not welcome in the Eastern forests, for the ghosts there are notoriously jealous.

Travelers to the Eastern forests of the dead would be wise to get a guide, usually a ghost scheming to rise in station and location on her sacred tree. The ghosts of the East amuse themselves by whispering misdirection and by teasing travelers until they are lost in the dark corners of the forest where the deadly echoes of monsters dwell.

SHADOWLANDS OF THE EAST

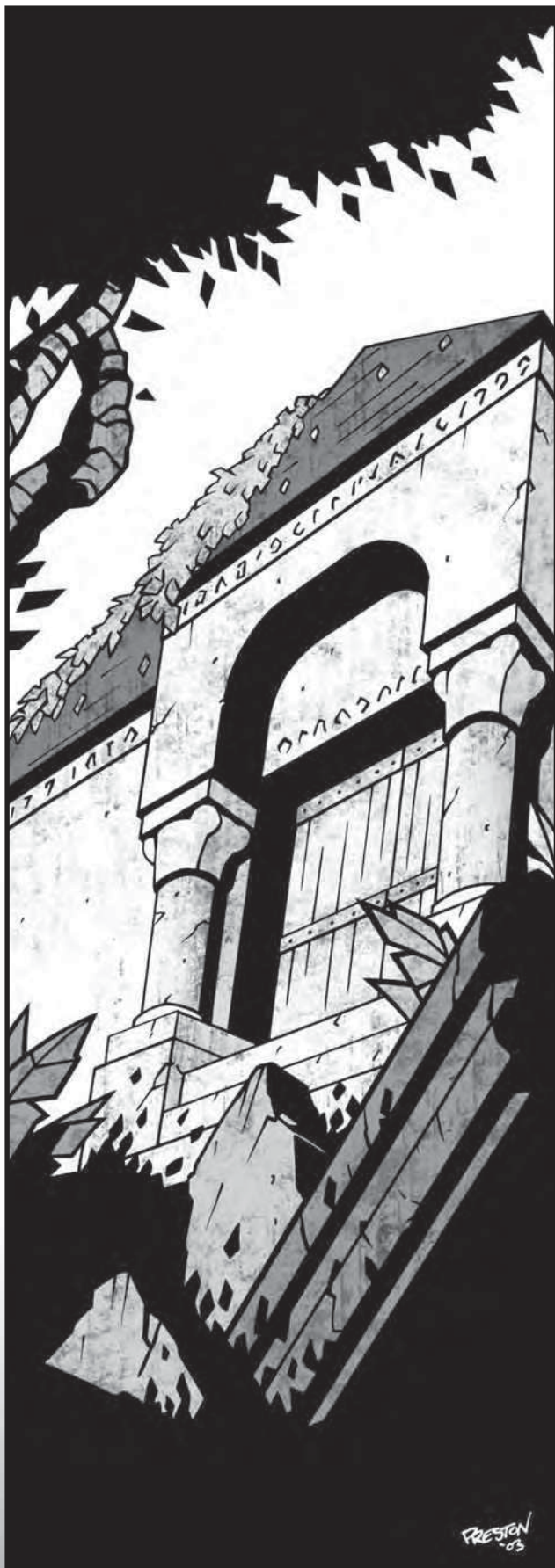
The Field of Woe: Site of one of the largest pitched battles between Haltan warriors and Linowan raiders, a disastrous slaughter that neither side counts as a victory. The Field of Woe is a nearly perfectly circular patch of grasslands, surrounded by black-barked pines on one side and black redwoods on the other. A single road splits the fields in half, ensuring that neither pines nor redwoods overwhelm the other.

Inari's Stand: Three days journey from Rubylak lies the shadowland that has been called Inari's Stand since the First Age, though nobody knows who Inari was or why she made a stand here. If any of the ghosts who wander this land of sloping hills and black oaks know the history to its name, they have not spoken of it yet.

The Crypt of the Windrider: Located north and east of Sijan, this small shadowland is unremarkable except for the huge temple-crypt located at its center. The crypt holds the remains of a Twilight sorcerer that set himself up as a demigod in the final days before the Usurpation, and his reign was one of bloody terror. He was buried in the temple he had raised up in his name, surrounded by the city he had raised in that name's honor and the corpses of his believers. The city has long since eroded into grass covered ruins and rubble, but the temple still stands at the center, protected by the spirits of his believers and the magical protections woven into the crypt by his assassins.

THE RIVER PROVINCE

Just as in Creation, the region surrounding the River Styx has always had great prominence in the Underworld. The great river Acheron and its tributaries allow for quick travel between the various necropoli of the East. Here, the black forests of the East have been cleared and, if not exactly civilized, tamed somewhat. Millions dwell in the necropoli that line the banks of the rivers here, and the region contains some of the most important kingdoms of the dead outside of Stygia itself.



The River Province is liberally studded with the remnants and ruins of cities, citadels, fortresses, temples and other structures. Some were built, used and abandoned by the dead at one point or another in the Underworld's long history. Others appear to be ruins of sites that once existed in Creation, echoes of famous structures or places now forgotten there but still existing in some fashion in the Underworld. And there are some that have no known origins. Some suggest they are remnants from before the First Age, possibly the summer palaces of the Primordials or the original residences of the gods.

The dead of Sijan arrive in a world as orderly as the neat rows of mausoleums they were interred in. Many ghosts buried in Sijan are strangers, sent to the city by their families to be prepared and properly mourned. There is safety in the city, for both the living and the dead. Sijanese ghosts can be assured that their panoply will remain safe and that they will wake with all their grave goods intact. However, once awake, the visitors find themselves at the mercy of the Byzantine Sijanese bureaucracy. There are mausoleum taxes and travel fees, a Sijanese guide is expensive, and no one in Sijan takes anything except grave goods in payment. A queen may be buried with a kingdom's worth of wealth, but by the time she reaches the gates out of the city, she's a pauper. Of course, the Sijanese are happy to provide work for the poor and a chance to rise in status in the second-greatest city in the Underworld.

The ghostly Observances of Sijan advise every kingdom in the Underworld of the complexities of living politics. They also control the living Sijan. Many centuries ago, the dead Observances took control of the living ones. Since that time, the black-robed Observances of the living city have been nothing more than apprentices to their ghostly masters. The dead Observances cultivate ambition carefully in their living students, who will, upon death, take their turn at true rulership. Because of this close connection, the living Observances have access to the goods and certain magic of the dead, as well as the clearest understanding of the Underworld and its politics of any living organization in the world.

SHADOWLANDS OF THE SCAVENGER LANDS

Although many small shadowlands are found throughout the Scavenger Lands, most of them are no larger than a graveyard or small battlefield. Many have been reclaimed by the living through civil works projects, or salted and exorcised by sorcerers, Immaculates and the Sijanese Orders over the centuries, rendering them useless to the dead. Some of the larger remaining shadowlands in the Scavenger Lands include:

The Mourning Field: Thoroughly salted and warded against intrusion, this blasted heath located less than a mile from the current walls of Lookshy, is host to the shattered souls of those killed when operatives of the 7th

Legion set off a weapon that destroyed their foes. No Abyssal or Deathlord claims this shadowland as their own; the keening and confused muttering of the dead who walk these fields, their minds and souls shattered beyond hope of Lethe, is enough to drive even their agents away.

Thorns: Newest of the shadowlands in the Scavenger Lands, the shadowland of Thorns is still growing sporadically, engulfing nearby shadowlands (most located on the site of nearby battlefields). Mask of Winter has claimed this shadowland as his own, and has moved his corpse-citadel Juggernaut to the very edge of the city.

Walker's Realm: This shadowland was formerly the possession of the Deathlord Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers. Walker's Realm is now claimed by Walker in Darkness, and he has raised his citadel, the Ebon Spires of Pyrron, in its center.

NIGHT TIDE

The Western provinces are poor and constantly battling the unforgiving Sea. There is little time to spare on the dead.

Western funerals are private affairs, usually just the deceased's close family and, sometimes, not even that. Fishermen and pirates who die far out at sea are sent to the afterlife by their shipmates. In the simplest ceremonies — used on slaves, orphans and criminals — the corpse is sewn into a canvas shroud, lashed to a spar or plank of wood and seen off on the evening tide with curses and blows.

For those with family, the ceremonies for the dead are only a little kinder. Bodies are prepared by the women of the towns — thumbs and big toes are tied together, a silver coin is placed in the mouth, and the body is then sewn into canvas. All buttons and ties are ripped off the deceased's clothes, and the dead go into the Sea barefoot. While the body is being prepared, family and friends gather at the deceased's home.

Traditionally, food, drink and comfort are brought to the surviving family members as the death of a fisherman or sailor can leave his surviving family in dire poverty. A wife who loses her husband is married off to her husband's brother or cousin as a second or third wife. For poor families, children under the age of one year are drowned if there is no one left to support them. Older children are sold into slavery or passed off to generous relatives, if there are any.

When the body is ready, the corpse is put in a tiny sealskin coracle and sent off on the outgoing tide. A broken compass is placed in the boat, along with impure water and fish bones to make sure the ghost cannot find its way home.

Westerners have a great fear of ghosts, zombies and haunts, and since the largest shadowland is located in the West, this fear is reasonable. Great care is taken to make sure the bodies and spirits of the dead cannot find their way back to their homes, families and enemies.

The coins given to the dead are a bribe to keep them away. The ritual defilement of a ghost's burial clothes make them torn and useless should the ghost arrive in the Underworld. Bad water and food are given as offerings to prove to the ghosts that their living relatives are too poor to bother with. Barefoot, hungry and confused by the spinning compass, Western ghosts wake to find themselves lost on a dark and endless sea. Many such coracles quickly become home to hungry ghosts, who often consume the only prey available — their ghostly higher soul.

DISTANT SHORES

The Sea of Shadows extends West as far as anyone has ever traveled, growing ever more still and silent as the sailor travels farther West. To the North, it eventually freezes over into a sheet of black ice that seems never-ending, and to the South, it merely extends further and further. While the Sea of Shadows is placid, it is far from harmless. Dark and twisted things wander its depths, and there is much less trade between the islands of the Underworld's West and the rest of the Underworld than there is in Creation. Only through great effort are a handful of trade routes kept open by the Deathlords and the kingdoms of the dead, and there is no tolerance for piracy or foolishness amongst the sailors who dare the Sea of Shadows.

The dead of the West wash in with the night tide. Few survive the pull of the water and the anger of their lower souls. As a result, the West is the emptiest land in the Underworld.

The Western ghosts are also the poorest. Burial customs don't leave the dead with much, and the hard life on the seas doesn't leave the living with any time to reminisce or pray. The dead of the West find their strength and pride in their very independence from the living world.

The black reavers of the Lintha Family sail the deadly seas, and they and the Deathlords' battleships are the only ships to move freely on the ocean. Unlike the rest of the West, the Lintha Family is closely connected with its dead relatives. The Underworld side of the Lintha Family seek out the vulnerable coracles with their terrified new dead staring across the endless water.

Most new ghosts drift into service with established lords. Many serve, in one fashion or the other, the Bodhissatva Anointed by Dark Water. They're grateful for the Deathlord and his kingdom for, unlike the Lintha, he does not base his acceptance of the dead on family ties. Anyone is welcome in Silver Prince's service.

The Deathlord pays well and provides homes, ships and materials to the newly dead. They repay him with loyalty and service. Western barques travel up the great rivers all around the world bearing the flag of the Skullstone Archipelago, manned by nemissaries, trading pearls and coral and carrying messages from the Deathlord to his many agents, commercial and otherwise.



Western dead struggle hard against the hungry sea, monsters of all sorts, from hungry ghosts and mortwights to the kraken and strange albino cachalot who swim the dark waters. Travel is difficult and experience is critical to survival. Though the rest of the Underworld has little respect for the Western ghosts and their poverty and stubborn pride, no one is foolish enough to ignore their advice when it comes to tide and weather on the seas of the dead.

SHADOWLANDS OF THE WEST

Darkmist Isle: The island of Darkmist, center of the Skullstone Archipelago, is an old shadowland, perhaps one of the first. For countless generations, the isle stood nearly uninhabited, populated only by the insane and the desperate until the coming of the Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water, who is also known as the Silver Prince.

The Isle of Shadows: A small island located 300 leagues west of the Blessed Isle, the Isle of Shadows is the domain of the nephwrack known only as the Speaker for the Sea. The Isle of Shadows has no native population, only a small handful of shipwrecked sailors and brigands who have not yet succumbed to the island's harsh climate and limited food supply. The island is unremarkable but for two features — it was once home to an important First Age shipyard, and it was the site of the final stand of a Circle of Solars during the Usurpation. The shipyard is nearly in ruins, but it could still produce a limited number of First Age ships if repaired. The tomb of the Solars who fell here is still inviolate, protected by curses, demons and First Age traps that have survived to the present day.

The Font of Mourning: Centered in the place where the Solar heroes Calan and Tomun fought their final battle against Thrice-Damned Gorol, the Font of Mourning is 100 square miles of twisted fens and dank swamp in the middle of the Southwest. Hungry ghosts and similar shades are common here, drawn by the benighted soul of Gorol, trapped here until Calan's curse is ended. The fates of Calan and Tomun are unknown to the dead, though rumors of all kinds persist even today.

THE LANDS OF THE DEAD

The kingdoms of the dead are small and numerous. There are hundreds of emperors, thousands of queens — all the eras of imperial ambition in the living world continue to exist as shadows in the land of the dead. Over the many centuries, the ghostly provinces and districts have come to an uneasy peace. In the crowded lands of the East, rulership is shared — season by season — among several rulers. In the South, ritual combat by champions ensures that large-scale warfare does not break out. The West is dominated by the twin powers of the Lintha Family and the Deathlords. The isle at the center of the Underworld is ruled directly by the Dual Monarchy.

STYGIA

Stygia is the dark jewel of the Underworld, and many claim it as the greatest city in both the Underworld and the land of the living. The city surrounds the hungry Mouth of the Void. The Abyss descends forever, while Stygia's silver and soulsteel spires rise up to pierce the living world.

The great city of Stygia has been the center of the world of the dead since long before the arrival of the Deathlords. Once nothing more, perhaps, than a great pit from which the wailing chants of the nephwracks rose, the city has spread across the dark island at the center of the Underworld like an endless field of gilded bones.

Stygia is a dim echo of the ancient capital of Meru, and while it far surpasses the modern Imperial City, it is still a tiny thing beside the ancient seat of the Solar Deliberative. The shadow-wrapped island around it is the mirror of the Blessed Isle above. As such, it has few native ghosts. Under the thumb of the Dragon-Blooded and their Immaculate priesthood, with its dogma of reincarnation, few who die in the Realm survive the pull of Lethe and their own beliefs to continue existence as a ghost. The city depends on the wealth and population of other kingdoms, kingdoms where ancestor worship is strong and communion with the living is possible. Few were born to Stygia, but many travel there, for it is in the center of the Underworld.

Stygia is the focus of the prayers of the dead, a powerful source of Essence and the axis of time in the Underworld. There is a constant drone of rituals and prayers echoing in the cold streets, spirit candles and sacrificial bonfires burn beneath the arches of every mausoleum, and processions — carrying the banners of long-forgotten kingdoms — channel the Essence produced within the city to the great rulers of the Underworld. The Great Calendar is located in the city, sprawling across the roof of Setesh's Tower, the tallest spire in Stygia.

The ghosts who inhabit Stygia exist in a world of unique bounty — they are bathed in the currents of Essence flowing from the thousands of mausoleums, they live at the center of a world's worship, and they are under the protection of some of the strongest ghosts in the Underworld. Both the Dual Monarchs and the Deathlords keep residences in Stygia. They build mausoleums of black marble, silvered iron and red glass, and much of the wealth of the Underworld finds its way to the twisting and shadowed streets of this city.

These ghosts also exist balanced precariously on the edge of destruction. The disturbing prophecies of the nephwracks and the blazing power of the Deathlords remind the ghosts of Stygia just how tenuous peace is in the land of the dead. The battles between the nephwracks over dogma are unpleasant reminders of the sack of Stygia by their grim spectres, and no ghost who dwells in the city is ignorant of the machinations of the Deathlords. Change is coming, and the citizens of Stygia will be at the heart of it.



THE COINS OF THE DEAD

The dead place little value in money, for they are ageless creatures with few needs. Yet, there is commerce between them. Some is barter — an exchange of goods for favors or services. Others trade in burnt offerings, for the offerings of the living are the breath of the dead. Yet, there are coins that circulate — the grave-good wealth of funeral hordes and coins of jade and silver brought from the land of the living by merchants trading in the shadowlands. These coins are used mostly in the cities of the dead, where there is much to buy and sell, and in places where grave goods and burnt offerings are scarce.

The Contagion dead also circulate among themselves replicas of the coins they used in life, buying and selling as if it were a matter of survival. Their relic coins of stone and wood are held to be of little value outside of their communities, but they favor them greatly.

THE CITY COUNCIL

A dozen and one ancient rulers balance the power of the Dual Monarchy. Each controls one of the 14 city districts (the Monarchs rule one directly), and most are also the rulers of a province or kingdom in the Under-

world. The Essence they gain by controlling a district in Stygia is channeled through their rituals to their lands, bringing them prosperity and great personal power.

The city council sits as an advisory body to the Dual Monarchy, the councilors playing politics, controlling access to the mausoleums that are a source of great Essence in the Underworld and manipulating lesser kingdoms to further their own ends. In the earlier ages of the city, the city council and the Dual Monarchy were often at odds, but the arrival of the Deathlords has forced the two powers into an uneasy partnership for their mutual survival.

The 13 rulers meet in a council — supposedly to advise the Monarchy, but often to buy and sell influence among themselves and sometimes to make their own deals with the nephwracks or the Deathlords. Wise ambassadors and spies skip the glitter and rush of the Monarchs' court and focus their attentions on the back rooms where the district families meet.

Politics within the old families of Stygia are as complicated as between them. Some of the greatest families are thousands of years old, with hundreds of members — large enough to be a private army.

THE DISTRICTS OF STYGIA

There have always been 14 districts in Stygia. They fluctuate in size and power, and the rulers may change, but



the districts themselves remain. Control of a district is based on ritual and possession of the boundary markers and the symbolic heart of the district. Every year, the rulers of every district must stage a great progress around their territory. They anoint the cracked and worn boundary stones with living blood and gold-flecked ambergris oil in order to retain control of the Essence produced in their districts. The symbol of the district accompanies the parade, taken from its hidden stronghold and displayed to the ghosts that gather along the route, to prove the ruler's right to rule.

These great parades are full of dark pageantry, the shrill ring of glass chimes and the heavy, sweet scent of amber announce the arrival of the parade long before the mass of soldiers and guardian golems can be seen. The yearly progress is always the most dangerous time for any district lord. Exposed to attack and the routes well known, it's usually during the progress that changes in rulership occur in the districts of Stygia. Rulers have been killed during these progresses, their bodyguards destroyed, the districts' symbols stolen. Disruption in this ritual affects the flow of Essence in the district and, therefore, the ruler's power. Because of this, the progress is always heavily guarded, the strength of the ruler gathered to ward off attack and allow the lord one more year of power and safety.

During the rest of the year, the rulers scheme to enlarge their districts through subtle manipulation of Essence flow and brute force. Moving or stealing boundary stones is a traditional way to expand territory in the city, and if it's backed up with enough soldiers and sufficient threats—or bribes—in the council, a ruler can keep claim to their newly acquired property.

Monarchs' Way is a major district (though not the largest) and is ruled directly by the Dual Monarchy. It is the only district immune to the struggle to retain ownership that all the other city rulers face. It surrounds the Mouth of Oblivion, controlling access to the dark heart of the Underworld. Even the Deathlords must make obeisance when they wish to journey through Monarch's Way and commune with the empty whispers of Oblivion. The white-jade key necessary to control the guardian golems of the city is the symbol of the district and resides in the custody of Usine. Monarchs' Way was completely destroyed when the nephwracks rose out of the Mouth to invade the Underworld. It has since been rebuilt, but fragments and foundations of the old buildings can still be seen incorporated into the architecture, like scars cut into the streets and onto the surfaces of the new construction.

Water Runs Red is the outermost district of Stygia and holds tenuous control over the city's wells and gates of entry. In the centuries of warfare and reconstruction after the defeat of the nephwracks, all of the boundary stones of this district disappeared. Without the boundary stones to control the waters, Stygia struggled for survival as horrific

beasts invaded from the vast wildness surrounding the city. Heroes of the war sought the boundary markers across the Underworld, while the monarchy fought to preserve Stygia. It was not until a ghost was summoned to the living world, to the great Imperial City itself, that any of the boundary stones were found. The Dragon-Blooded Empress held the boundary stones of Stygia's water hostage for knowledge, dark power and the whispered advice of the dead. Though a ghost sits on council for this district and holds the cauldron that is the symbolic heart of this district, the dead know that it is the Scarlet Empress who controls this district. With the disappearance of the Empress, the lords of Stygia are scheming to regain the boundary stones and control over their own city.

Other districts include:

Little Shoe

The largest district in the city and home to Stygia's plebian masses. The Hollow King has ruled here for thousands of years through clever politics, staged riots and ironclad control over the labor unions and crafts guilds. The symbol for this district is a heavy workman's maul, the head always gleaming with fresh blood.

The District of the Bone Lanterns

A serene district where the dead take their pleasures in funerary teas, the finest of ghostly courtesans and the sweet scent of living prayers. The Mistress with the White Hands rules from a great gaming house at the center of the district. The symbolic heart of the district is a branch from a cherry tree with its fragile blossoms eternally in bloom.

V'ijea

A district closely allied with Chiaroscuro until the new ruler Princess Annuaski gained control of it and its precious Essence flows. She has diverted most of the Essence to her distant kingdom in an Eastern valley and pays little attention to the activities within the district. The symbol that must be displayed in the yearly progress is a white-jade spear.

The District of Whispering Streets

Dark and twisted, this district suffered terribly under the invasion of the nephwracks and has yet to recover. No one lord had been able to hold this district for more than a few years. The very stones in the streets scheme to destroy all who walk upon them. Except for the unfortunates who live here, this district is empty. The symbol for this district is a bronze bell, the clapper long rotted away.

Twinborn's Death

Jointly ruled by twin ghosts murdered in an ancient bid for rule in the living world, this district has long been an ally of the Dual Monarchy. The rulers here have a kingdom in the South, each lives one year in Stygia then switches with her twin to rule in their distant kingdom. A small golden mirror is this district's symbol.

The Street of Swords

The constant ringing of hammers building weapons, clockwork toys and other amusements of the dead mark this district as well as the six soulsteel golems that mark its boundaries do. It is a valuable district, and its ruler, Lord Stalwart, is the most powerful of the council of Stygia. He is also a known puppet of the First and Forsaken Lion. Unsurprisingly, a great two-handed sword is this district's symbol.

Soul's Lost

Lacking in ambition, Queen Nefere has a history of becoming instead the puppet of whomever has the most flattering tongue. At this time, the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears whispers in her ear and gain a voice in the city council thereby. A small glass bottle, sealed with lead is the symbol for this district.

Icelord's Heart

Cold as the Northern lands that killed him, the Emperor Without Hope rules this district, having wrenched it from the hands of his own distant descendent last cycle. Still stabilizing his rule, both in Stygia and in the distant Snowfell Province, the Emperor has little time for city politics. The symbol for this district is a plain and serviceable shield, such as any mercenary or foot soldier carries.

The Wailing Wall

Even the dead grieve, and when they mourn, they come to the district bounded by the old inner wall of destroyed Stygia. Prayers and tears perfume the air here, and those ghosts who are not here to mourn tour the streets to breathe in the sweet scent of sorrow. The symbol for this district is a narrow bladed dagger of red jade. Mortician Aldis Nerin has ruled since his death fighting the Realm invasions of the Scavenger Lands.

The District Where Shadows Walk

Here, the nephwracks build their temples and fight amongst themselves with assassins and curses, each trying to prove the rightness of its dogma. Maru, the ruler of this district, is the only nephwrack to successfully hold a district beyond the first year. Here, the ruler must present a paper lantern, always casting a faint blue light and deep shadows.

Sunborn's Last Stand

The dead have heroes, and Sunborn was a hero in both the living world and the dead shadow beneath it. When the nephwracks rose, she stood in their path, allowing the innocent ghosts of the city time to flee. To this day, there are some that believe she did not fall to Oblivion, but waits, watching over the Underworld, for the day when she is needed again. The symbol for this district is a broken arrow, the fletching torn and bloody.

Coward's Way

This misnamed district has been held by Master Wun for centuries, and he remains a brave and courageous steward of his district and the small Western city he rules

through his wife and co-ruler Miyo One-Hand. A mailed glove is the symbol here.

THE GUARDIANS OF STYGIA

Standing at the silver gates of the city, marking the five corners of the central plaza and arrayed on the ashy plain surrounding Stygia, stand a vast army of thousands of jade effigies. Some are so old that the persistent wind of the Underworld has worn them to featureless pillars, others are freshly made by the smiths of Lord Stalwart's district. These are glittering, still brightly painted with symbols of luck and power. Regardless of age, they stand and wait.

The golem army belongs to the Dual Monarchy, and the jade key of their rulership is the talisman necessary to waken the army. They began as nothing more than part of a long-forgotten shogun's funerary army, but when the nephwracks rose, they became the last hope of victory. This army, never living and undying, is immune to the whispers of Oblivion. The effigies can be destroyed, but they cannot be suborned. When the Dual Monarchy retook Stygia from the nephwracks, it was at the head of this army that they marched. Since that time, the army has been expanded, some new golems built by Stygian smiths, while others were bought from ghosts foolish enough or desperate enough to be willing to part with such a useful part of a burial panoply. When the ghosts of Stygia hear the nephwrack's chants rise in the storms, when they watch the Deathlords' power fall like a shadow across the Underworld, they look to the golem armies in hope of safety.

THE SOUTH

Beyond the coastline of the Inland Sea of Shadows, the South swiftly becomes a great ashy desert. Nomadic tribes rule the trackless wastes, rich on the offerings of their ancestor-worshipping descendents. The Southern cities depend on ancient ritual combat to fend off the nomad tribes — combined with hefty bribes. There are few shadowlands in the South, but the First and Forsaken Lion rules there, and he is the mightiest of his kind, at least in battle. Word has spread that he will offer the black-robed nomads of the South the chance to cross through the shadowlands and pillage the living lands, while cults in the cities rise up against the traditional rulers.

The power in the Southern Underworld shifts between the great cities with control over the ocean trade routes, the nomads who rule the inland and the First and Forsaken Lion, who has the kingdoms of the Southern dead under his thrall.

CHIAROSCURO

In the destruction of the First Age, one of the greatest cities of that ancient civilization collapsed almost entirely into the Underworld amid fire and betrayal. The Chiaroscuro of the dead is located on a barren plain near the

THE DUAL MONARCHY

They are the ritual heart of the Underworld's ritual life, and their names are even whispered in forbidden rites among the living. The cult of the Dual Monarchy is the largest in the Underworld, and they gain Essence and power from the worship of millions of ghosts. For the dead, the existence of the Dual Monarchy is an eternal promise of stability and safety. They are chosen by lot among the ghosts fortunate to live in Stygia. Every so often, as determined by the mysterious Calendar of the Dead but always during the season of Calibration, the whole city takes part in a lottery. There are two white pebbles among a sea of black stones and two new ghosts to take the two crowns and four ritual masks of the Monarchy. None know what becomes of the old Monarchs, and none can say how the new ones are educated in their station in just a few short days. Though there are but two individuals serving the role, there are technically four Monarchs—each Monarch, White and Black, changes gender and personality as required to fulfil its role.

Usine, Male Aspect of the White Monarch

White-skinned, Usine is the stone fist of the Monarchy. He holds the key that controls the golem army of Stygia. In the past, he traveled outside Stygia, and his bright panoply gave the stagnant ghosts of the Underworld the strength to continue clinging to existence. Yet, recently, some fear moves in the mind of the Monarch, and he clings close to the city.

Eset, Female Aspect of the White Monarch

Eset is as likely to be found among the wailing worshipers of Oblivion as among her ghostly subjects. Eset is the strangest of the Dual Monarchs. Some believe that she was the first, that she

crawled from the Abyss and was taken up by a ghost, the senseless whispers of Oblivion given a mind and a voice. The Underworld depends on her to control the nephwracks and their servants. It is she that calms the great storms that, let loose, call the mortwights from the Labyrinth.

Setesh, Male Aspect of the Black Monarch

The smoke of funeral pyres rise from the robes of Setesh. He is the Monarch of Efficacious Prayers, and he oversees the propitiatory rituals and rites that insure the stability of the Underworld. His is the office that ghosts petition when they seek to place a mausoleum in Stygia, allowing them to gain Essence from the gathered prayers the dead offer to the dead. Setesh also maintains the Great Calendar of the Underworld, without which the cycle of rites would fall into catastrophic disarray. Mastery of the Calendar gives Setesh the talent of prophecy, at least as it bears on the future of the Underworld.

Nebthys, Female Aspect of the Black Monarch

Black-skinned Nebthys has always been the ruler most interested in the living world. She hears the last whispers of the dying, and many secrets have found their way into her dark mind. She has never been generous with her knowledge. She may whisper a single word into the proper ear or direct the Silver Observances to pass a quiet message into the living world, but she does not make proclamations or revelations. She has taken an Abyssal lover, and many fear what words she might whisper to him while wrapped in sheets scented with myrrh and attar of roses.



coast of the dark Inland Sea of Shadows. The great kingdom is much reduced. The Celestial Exalted that ruled these lands in the First Age did not enter the Underworld. Trapped by Dragon-Blooded treachery or eagerly seeking reincarnation, they abandoned the ghosts of their families and servants to the darkness of death.

The city is ruled by the old ministers, the ghostly servants of long forgotten Celestial masters. The ministries and their councils defend their right to rule through the names and positions of the Celestial Exalted that once ruled the living city. The most powerful of the ministers is Sworn-to-Fireblood, who served the long lost Celestial emperor, Fireblood.

No one knows, not even the dead, what position Sworn-to-Fireblood held in life, but he has successfully defended his right to represent the dead Celestials — and the most powerful ministry — for over a millennium. Sworn-to-Fireblood controls several ritually critical crematoriums. Popular in the living world, these crematoriums produce a constant stream of burnt offerings. In addition, living descendents pray near the urns of their dead namesakes in these areas. Any ghost who wants to advise or comfort her living descendents must pass by the minister's "wardens" on her way to her urn. Control of the wealth offered at crematoriums gives Sworn-to-Fireblood a stranglehold on the city's politics.

Chiaroscuro is infested with thousands of hungry ghosts, who pass back and forth between the land of the living and the dead with impunity. They hide their corpses in the collapsed glass buildings of the living Chiaroscuro and in the city's many pocket shadowlands. They shriek madly during the winter rains and hunt down any ghost foolish enough to leave the civilized neighborhoods of the city. Vast stretches of the city are walled off by precious salt imported from the living world, and banishing rites are enthusiastically performed by the various ministers to keep their neighborhoods safe. Even the most fervent prayers cannot always keep the hungry ghosts from invading other neighborhoods, and the ministers of the city are always seeking to hire brave and skilled ghosts to hunt down the mindless revenants. Every year, the guards and warriors of the entire city arrange a vast hunt where they sweep the streets clean of hungry ghosts, even passing temporarily into the living world to find the graves of the terrible creatures and destroy them.

THE VARANG

The horoscopes that control the lives of the living Varang do not end at their death. To the scandal of their imperial allies, the citizens of the Varang city-states also chart their afterlives. Most Varang are destined to reincarnate immediately on death, but some have more challenging horoscopes. They become ghosts.

The dead Varang live in a few small cities near the great grasslands, and they all have one purpose, one reason

THE CHAMPION OF CHIAROSCURO

When the nomads sweep in from the deep desert, arrayed in tattered black robes and riding red-eyed ghostly stallions, only the lone champion stands between their depredations and the greatest city in the South. Every year, the nomads arrive, and the ghostly champion must face down the raiding tribes. The champion must be a great warrior, crafty as well as powerful, and is usually chosen from the older ghosts of the First Age. Most importantly, the champion must be willing to lose. The duel between the champion of Chiaroscuro and the warrior chosen from among the tribe is nothing more than a pretty face on a bribe to keep the nomads from attacking the city. The city champion has never won a battle, in all the centuries of dueling, and no one wants to risk the nomads' anger by denying them their loot.

that destiny called them to the Underworld. The cities they inhabit are all ancient clockworks — vast machines, built during the First Age and lost to history. Powered by the Five Magical Materials, these machines must be tended, repaired and maintained for the prophesized day when war sweeps across the world above and the undead machines will wake.

The ghosts of the Varang are, therefore, usually mechanics and engineers destined to serve the city-machines they live in. They engage in necessary trade with other Underworld powers for supplies such as dream opal, silver and ruby-glass. They are fairly wealthy, well served by the living engineering and architectural castes of the Varang city-states who perform rituals and sacrifices to support their dead brethren. The ghosts of Varang have control over several mines in the Underworld's Gem and hire nomad mercenaries to oversee their interests there.

The Great Calendar of the Underworld was constructed by the ghosts of Varang, and the cult of Setesh is strong among these ghosts. Periodically, the Monarch of Efficacious Prayers summons Varang engineers to Stygia to tend to the Calendar.

GEM

Like Chiaroscuro, the inland city of Gem has a dark reflection. The jewels and minerals hidden in the black mountains tempt ghosts to risk the dangerous journey to the city. Those that survive the nomads of the desert face the harsh conditions of the small city nestled in the lifeless mountains of the South.

Gem has no true ruler, rather other interests such as Chiaroscuro or the Varang cities send overseers to administer the mines operated by the various cities. These overseers are usually captains or generals, with a large standing guard to protect the mines and insure that their



workers are neither lazy nor kidnaped by other mines and forced to work for a competitor. Several of the overseers were once servants of the Despot of Gem, now serving in a similar position as ghosts in the city's Underworld mirror.

There are many, tiny shadowlands in Gem. Deep in the lava tubes, where mining accidents have claimed generations of living miners, the barrier between the living and the dead is fractured. Ghostly miners lost in the depths occasionally wander into the living world, the source of ghost stories and miners' myths for the living citizens of Gem.

Most of the goods from Gem travel to Chiaroscuro — the city with the largest mines and strongest presence. Less powerful mine owners often pay a percentage of their goods to have them transported across the desert by Chiaroscuran caravans.

DARI OF THE MISTS

The echo of a grand First Age city, Dari lies in the crook of two Southern rivers. The unique climate of the area insures that the city is almost always buried deep in cool mists blowing from the waterways. The city is dominated by great shipping companies that have offices all over the Underworld, from Stygia all the way to the Skullstone shadowland. The shipping companies are known for their honesty and dedication to their contracts. All barge workers are bonded by their companies — magically geased to prevent them from stealing goods or selling secrets to competitors. In the living world, the city of Paragon is the closest city. Since the arrival of the Perfect of Paragon, no new ghosts have arrived in Dari of the Mists from the graveyards and crematoriums of that city.

Without new ghosts to replenish the city as the older citizens succumb to Lethe, Dari is becoming an empty city, and the great barges the city is famous for lie abandoned on the muddy shore. Some of the shipping companies have taken to the practice of using golems to man their barges or kidnaping young ghosts and magically binding them to a barge.

THE NOMADS

Many of the great tribes of the South may have settled out of their nomadic existences in the living world, but nomad armies rule the ashy deserts of the Underworld.

The greatest of the ghostly tribes is the D'hennish. The tribe was slaughtered, down to the newborn infants, by the treacherous Dragon-Blooded for its loyalty to the Solar Exalted. Succeeded by the Delzahn, they have no living descendents and are cut off from offerings and worship. Powerful loyalty and a burning desire for revenge keeps the ancient D'hennish from sliding into Lethe or Oblivion.

The tribe is a terror in the South. Completely dependent on raids for grave goods, the D'hennish have learned to "harvest" the smaller, less protected settlements in the black deserts. They are careful to never utterly destroy any town or city. Rather, they strip their victims of anything of

value, then leave — only to return months or years later when the ghosts have rebuilt their homes. Even the great cities are not entirely immune from quick raids by impetuous D'hennish ghosts on their black-maned stallions.

Only Chiaroscuro, with its ritual ties to the old Celestial Empire is immune to D'hennish attack. The D'hennish arrive, a terrifying army of black-veiled warriors, at the gates of the city on the longest day of the year. Their numbers cover the ashy plains, and their women wail and mock the settlers cowering behind their gates of obsidian and silver.

The Ministers City responds by sending forth its champion. Honor is answered with honor, and the D'hennish send their own red-veiled warrior. In a world where there is no death, the battle between two ancient warriors is over when one of the combatants yields. Every year, the champion of the city eventually surrenders and the ministers buy their warrior back with sacrifices of grave goods, ghostly stallions, enslaved ghosts and the captured prayers of the living.

THE NORTH

In the North, black ice and bitter cold rule the existence of the dead. The barbarian tribes are the most powerful single force in the North, rich, arrogant and numerous — no one can cross the tundra without encountering one of their raiding bands or tribal patrols. Most of the cites of the Northern Underworld cluster around the frozen seas, using the black ice as transportation and quickly falling under the influence of the Deathlords and their Abyssal servants.

The only barrier the dead barbarians have not yet found a way to overcome is the great scar of Whitewall. The living city Whitewall, ruled by the Syndics, built itself a great road of magic and common fieldstone. So mighty is this road that it cuts down into the Underworld itself, and the dead are no more able to set foot on it there than in the land of the living. It cuts the Northern plains nearly in half. Any ghostly travelers in the North must go far out of their way in order to avoid the scar, whatever direction they travel in.

TZATLI

The largest of the Northern cities is also, perhaps, the oldest city in the Underworld.

The fallen city of Tzatli — called Diamond Hearth by the living — lies in a deep, icy, valley guarded by sharp-toothed mountains. The sky above the city is always a deep, sapphire blue, and the stars are never visible. The cold in Tzatli is so intense that even the dead suffer from it. It penetrates the thickest furs, chills the warmest fires and stills the most passionate heart.

Once a jewel in the crown of the First Age, the city fell into the Underworld when the Dragon-Blooded attacked the Anathema. The magic and violence of that treachery

left the very spirit of the city shattered — its buildings are slightly off balance, as if they might collapse at any time, and the streets are a tangle of broken ice and mirrored glass. The city is populous but very quiet. The ghosts here, ancient survivors of the First Age, have had their passions frozen by the terrible cold of Tzatli. More powerful, perhaps, than any but the Deathlords, the ghosts here cling to existence more out of habit than any sense of purpose.

Few outsiders come to the city, for there is little of obvious value there, and the residents are a peaceful, spiritless lot. The most influential ghost in Tzatli is Shogun Widowmaker, a bitter and ancient creature who clings to dreams of revenge and long forgotten glory. The shogun's word is law, for few are willing to defy him, and he, so far, asks little of the city. Of late, though, the shogun has been seeking out the youngest and most passionate ghosts and sending them outside the city, carrying messages, sending them to explore the empty quarters of the city and sending them to seek alliances with the Deathlords.

While Tzatli would be mostly forgotten, even by the dead, recent events in the living world are bringing change to that still place. The cold sapphire sky is cracking. Living voices, long forgotten, are heard drifting from the icy blue sky above, and the passions of life are tainting the deathly silence that has held Tzatli in its grip since the fall of the First Age. The shogun has been active in the abandoned outer limits of the city, and rumors of living souls, captured by the shogun's soldiers, have spread among the residents of Tzatli. The barest hope of warming themselves beside such life has ghosts flocking to the shogun's banner.

THE FROZEN CITY-STATES

When the inhabitants of the Haslanti city-states die, they may live on as ghosts in the frozen cities of the North. The ghostly cities are much like the living ones but for the fact that the season never truly escapes winter and the rulers are ancestors whose names have been lost to myth in the living world.

Precious feathersteel and the truly fine steel needed to create iceships and air boats do not exist in the Underworld, so the city-states do not have the military advantages of their living counterparts. Occasionally, a Haslanti general or lord is buried with a model air boat or iceship as part of his panoply. These memoriam are priceless, and there are envoys from the Monarchy — and the Deathlords — seeking to employ or ally with those ghosts who have such devices as part of their grave goods.

The frozen city-states are closely allied with Dual Monarchy, for it was to the North that the Monarchs retreated when Stygia was overrun with nephwracks. The rulers of Stygia returned the hospitality by providing troops, military golems and advantageous trade agreements with the Northern cities.

THE HOLLOW MOUNTAIN

In the Northern Underworld, the ghostly echo of Gethamane is a deserted kingdom. The strange religion of the living city seems to prevent the creation of ghosts — and those few Gethamanese citizens that do rise as spirits do not survive to leave their city.

The monsters that infest the lower passages of Gethamane seem not to discriminate between the Underworld and the living one. They hunt the city in both worlds, consuming flesh in the world above and Essence in the world below. In the Underworld, Gethamane is the monsters' city, there is no patrol or army to drive them into the rough hewn deeper passages, and they hunt freely in the lightness tunnels. Rumors of treasure or a shadowland within the hollow mountain draw the occasional foolish ghost, and very few of them, no matter how well prepared, return.

THE ICEWALKERS

The barbarian ghosts of the North exist much as they did in life. They travel across the bitter taiga, following the herds of Underworld caribou and elk, pitching their felt tents in the lee of their mammoths and listening to the stories their living descendents tell around the tribal fires.

The fires of the barbarian tribes burn bright and hot, keeping the unnatural chill of the Underworld at bay. The ghosts feast on food offerings, wear the wonderfully decorated gifts of their descendents and ride bright-eyed, white-coated sacrifices of caribou, elk and mammoth. In the Underworld, the tribal worship of the dead makes the barbarians the wealthiest people in the Underworld save for the inhabitants of the capitol and the Eastern city of Sijan.

The ghost tribes are arrogant, rich and well content with their lot. Many generations of dead live within the same tribe, legendary chieftains sharing the fires of recently dead descendents. Warlike in life, the tribes continue their duels and blood feuds though the battles are ritual in nature, and at the days end, enemies return together to the fireside to drink and tell long stories.

The tribes control most of the North, and travelers know well that they must pay tribute to them. The tribes are strong enough to attack almost any city and keep to their living habit of demanding tribute in the form of grave goods, food offerings and anything else that catches their fancy. Such a dominant power has attracted the Deathlords, but they find the tribes openly resistant to their influence.

The mammoth tribes are the oldest in the Underworld, and they dominate the politics of the barbarians. The Mother of the Tribes, a woman of the mammoth tribe whose name has long been lost to legend, is worshiped as a god. Most believe that she was the first to ride a mammoth, the first to gather her family and travel with the herds.

Long, long years have given the Mother great wisdom. She watches the rise of the Deathlords with considerable



alarm and has begun to actively resist their dominance in the Underworld. Having seen the death of the First Age, knowing the secrets of the Deathlords, she is aware that their victory would mean the destruction of both the living and the ghost tribes that are her children.

THE EAST

The East is a huge power in the Underworld. Much more crowded in death than in life, the East is where the majority of the dead reside.

The countryside is a patchwork of thousands of minute kingdoms, hundreds of duchies, satrapies, shogunates, ancient administrative districts, bandit kingdoms and freeholds, all with their own necropoli and ghost-trees. Practically every ghost there claims a title of some sort. However, the dead rarely war, and the inevitable squabbles among the overpopulated nobility are as likely to be settled by diviners' rods as by swordplay.

Cult worship of all sorts flourish in the East, particularly among the younger ghosts who lived in died in the era of the loosely organized Scavenger Lands. The Dual Monarchy is still the largest cult, but several local rulers — such as Aki the Sword and the complex hierarchy of Sijanese worship — are extremely popular. The cult of the Mask of Winters is growing exponentially as ghosts see his increasing dominance in Eastern affairs as good reason to convert to the Deathlord's banner.

SIJAN

In the north of the chaotic Scavenger Lands, the necropolis of Sijan rises in terrifying glory. Sijan is a city where the living and the dead mingle, much as it is in the living world. In fact, there is little perceptible difference between the two.

The Observances rule the Sijan of the Underworld, as they do the living city. In fact, the living Observances are the lesser servants of their dead elders — careers in Observances do not truly begin until after death. Sijanese ghosts, through the Silver Observance, can contact their living associates, pass along messages, request offerings and interest themselves in living politics. The city of Sijan, both the living and the dead, is very aware of the threat the Deathlords are to the city's profitable status quo.

The Sijan of the Underworld is crowded for a city of the dead. Offerings are bought and sold, looted jade is bargained for, and desperate ghosts pay vast sums of funerary gold to have messages carried to the living Observances. In addition, Sijan contains a shadowland entirely free of Deathlord influence. The dark road winding through the Black Chase shadowland leads, in time, to the dim, uncertain streets of the Sijan of the living. Ghosts with enough courage and strength can pass into the living world though the Sijanese shadowland.

THE BEHEMOTH OF THE CHASE

The deep woods of the Black Chase are inhabited by the ghost of an ancient behemoth. The creature spends most of its time in a dull stupor, only stirring when it feels trespassers in its territory. Then, the behemoth's breath rattles the still branches of the black forest, and the creaking of its bones sounds much like the breaking of branches in the wind. Many ghosts who risk travel in the Chase are caught and devoured — their souls eaten away — before they even know the monster is upon them. Survivors are unable to describe the creature, having seen nothing more than the huge limbs rising taller than the ancient trees of the forest it dwells in.

Sijan has had its hand in the rise and fall of kingdoms both in the Underworld and in the living world. Its citizens have watched the rise of the Deathlords in the West and the East with concern, and they have begun, in the slow manner of the dead, to gather allies against them.

THE VALLEY PEOPLE

All along the river valleys lie the shattered ghosts of the great cities brought down into the Underworld by the Contagion. Several First Age administrative districts — long forgotten in the living world — still exist in the Underwood and are still ruled by their ancient kings and queens. Power among the rulers changes slowly in this part of the Underwood. The old ghosts, experienced and puissant, rule most of the Eastern lands.

These cities were the glory of the First Age, heavily populated and millions died when the Deathlords set their plans in motion. Over the centuries, the Eastern administrative districts have come to an uneasy balance of power, despite the strains of overpopulation. In some districts, there are generations of rulers living under the same roof. In order to maintain both peace and dignity, rulership is exchanged ritually among the rulers, and they each have a season where they are the masters of their kingdoms.

Seasons in the Underworld are not as they are in the living; summer follows winter by the will of the dead — prayers and rituals turn the grass green, ripen the barley in the fields and bring the birds winging from the South to the North. In the East, the rituals that turn the seasons also pass power from one ruler to the next.

HANAU AND TYOKA

Hanau and Tyoka is a dual kingdom with two rulers. Both kingdoms occupy the same land; relatively near the location of living Lookshy. Princess Annuaski and her great grandmother Queen Defiance-in-Shadow have managed to retain the strongest claim on their kingdom, and they each rule in their turn, in their own season.

Queen Defiance-in-Shadow rules Tyoka during the darkest months of the year when the land is barren and desolate. Comfort and shelter are always scarce in her kingdom, and she rules with an iron fist, choosing who will remain and who will be exiled in order to preserve the land. The queen's kingdom came to be during the latter years of the Contagion when famine killed thousands of those who had survived the plague. In her kingdom, the memory of hunger is strong. Many ghosts in her realm are thin and desperate, clinging to travelers and begging on the streets for crusts of bread or a bit of ritual incense.

Though harsh, her rule is just, and no one fears her soldiers or her court. Such cannot be said for Princess Annuaski.

The kingdom of Hanau seems warm and gentle, and the princess, with her wide green eyes and welcoming smile, is the jewel of the kingdom.

However, the warmth of Annuaski is false. Guest fires burn in every home, but the fires are cold — and drain Essence. Illusions of feasts and celebration warm the empty corridors of her great palace but cannot nourish even ghosts. The orchards of Hanau are heavy with fruit — and each bite is full of bitter gall and maggots. Beneath Annaski's fine silk robes is a ravaged body, tatters of flesh hanging onto twisted bones. Queen Defiance-in-Shadow's kingdom came into the Underworld during the Contagion, but Annaski's was born in the years afterward, when the fields lay fallow and the rats grew fat on human flesh in the silent cities.

Ambition has begun to poison the relations between Annuaski and Defiance-in-Shadow and are straining the balance of power between the two kingdoms. Summer is lingering long this season. Hanau's trees refuse to drop their leaves, and the few wild birds in the fields seem content to remain rather than fly South for the winter. A new diviner has gained Annuaski's favor, and the rites she performs are powerful, halting the turn of the seasons in the kingdom. Recently, Annuaski has taken open control of the V'ijea district in Stygia and is using the power gained from the city's mausoleums to prevent the change of seasons in her kingdom. Queen Defiance-in-Shadow must watch, from the borders of her own land, as the bright princess turns their dual kingdom into her private playground, bringing new amusements and strangers of unique power into the heart of the land.

The closest major city to Thorns and too small to defend themselves against the growing shadowland, Hanau and Tyoka must either ally with the Mask of Winters or commit themselves to one of the Eastern powers, such as the Empire of Aki or Sijan.

THE EMPIRE OF AKI

In the living world, there may be only one empire, but in the Underworld, there are hundreds, and the Empire of Aki is the largest. It stretches from the joining





of the rivers Acheron and Acherai all the way east to the beginning of the forest lands. The empire was once under the direct control of the hero Aki the Sword, and the Council of Royals still rules in her name.

Since the disappearance of the dictatrix 200 years ago, the empire has been ruled by the former Council of Royals, made up of representatives of the many smaller kingdoms, shogunates, duchies and so on within the empire. The council is far from a peaceful body, and without the dictatrix's iron control, violence — even on the floor of the council chamber itself — is increasingly common.

Less powerful rulers within the empire swear fealty and must perform ritual sacrifices to the imperial cult — part of the system of rule includes rites and oaths that insure mutual defense pacts among the kingdoms, which are proving increasingly important. War in the East is inevitable, and the various lords of the empire are mustering their troops while the smithies and weapon-masters are working day and night to arm the armies. Troops from all over the empire are gathering along the shores of the river Acheron, looking across the churning water to the deserted lands and marking time until war begins.

The Deathlord Mask of Winters has created a vast shadowland where the living city of Thorns once existed. Though his armies are currently concentrated in the living world, no ghost believes that will last forever.

THE WEST

The West is a nearly deserted expanse of black sea and tiny, isolated communities. The Western burial practices shatters the will of most dead — they either become hungry ghosts or are lost immediately to Lethe or Oblivion. Few have the strength to survive their journey to the Underworld, and those that do lack possessions once they arrive.

Western ghosts, if they do survive, are easy game for the Skullstone Archipelago's ghost hunters, and most end up as mindless drones supporting the massive civilization within that shadowland. Others wander the Sea of Shadows in their ramshackle coracles, unable to recognize land even if they stumble across it, ravenous and mad. They are a danger to both the living and the dead — they cross small shadowlands and wander into the living world, where they bring a terrifying death to the fishermen or sailors they stumble across.

There are a few exceptions. A few small towns have managed to survive on the islands around the Skullstone shadowland. The Deathlord's occasional demands of service or sacrifice is small price to pay for freedom from the hungry ghosts that wash in on the night tide. These dozen or so communities have become nothing more than puppet kingdoms for the Silver Prince's political scheming.

THE LINTHA

The Lintha Family remains as powerful in death as in life. Its oaths of loyalty do not end with its members lives, and the sargasso sea exists in the Underworld as well.

Though the ancient ships of the First Age do not float there, several ancient ghosts exist, and they rule the dead of the Lintha Family with a jade fist.

The Lintha ghosts hold to the same “family” ties as their descendents. Grandfathers and grandmothers — some born in the dawn of the First Age — rule over the more recently dead. The younger ghosts rise slowly in rank through displays of loyalty, of cleverness and of patience. The elders encourage a certain amount of competition within the Family, but everyone is expected to stand fast against any outside threat, dead or alive. Of all the Western powers, the Lintha are the only ones who sail the black seas seeking out their vulnerable newly dead. They never sell their young ghosts into servitude under the Deathlords.

The Bodhissatva Anointed with Dark Water has been courting the Lintha ghosts, and the thought of access to the Deathlord's shadowland is a tempting morsel. However, the oaths the Lintha swear prevent such outside alliances. For now, their family pact is protecting the Lintha from being absorbed into the Silver Prince's realm.

Part of the power the Lintha hold in the Western kingdoms has to do with the unique goods, poisons, strange creatures and weapons they sell. The Lintha ghosts hunt the deep-sea kraken using hungry ghosts as bait, and they pass some of the impervious scales to their living kin to sell. They hunt the albino whales, fanged sea dogs and luminous flying fish of the Underworld's black Sea and harvest the black pearls found only in its oysters. The Lintha family had — until the arrival of the Bodhissatva Anointed with Dark Water — a monopoly on all these things and used that monopoly to bribe the Realm.

The dead are also the living Lintha's secret weapon. Those few times that Western navies have tried to attack Bluehaven, the great undersea bells tolled and the black reavers of the Underworld rose out of the boiling water to join their descendents in defense of their mutual home. Using fear, their soulsteel blades and strangling ropes, the dead have made Bluehaven all but impregnable. The only weakness the Lintha Family faces is the Deathlord's increasing control over the Underworld in the West.

Competition with the Skullstone Archipelago is fought on two fronts, with both halves of the Lintha Family struggling for dominance in the face of the Deathlord's enormous power. In the Underworld, the Lintha Family is in a minority in its dislike of the Deathlord, for, in the West, the Bodhissatva is a welcome force of stability and safety.

WHALE BAY

Caught between the powerful Lintha Family and the terrible might of the Deathlord, few Western settlements avoid falling under one power or the other.

Whale Bay is one of them. A tiny town built atop an ancient shell midden, its location at the mouth of the River Woe gives it the power it needs to remain relatively independent.

Whale Bay is ruled by Miyo One-Hand, a ghost allied with Master Wun of the Coward's Way district in Stygia. Her single-minded devotion to the town of Whale Bay and the support of her husband Master Wun are the only things that have kept it free from the expansionistic Skullstone shadowland and the greedy Lintha.

Whale Bay serves at the gatekeeper between the Western Sea of Shadows and the safer inland kingdoms. Whale Bay fishermen hunt the fell beasts that swim in the dark Sea, keeping their bay safe for shipping. Hungry ghosts, brought in by the tide, are chased down, harpooned and anchored beneath the high tide until they are washed away into Oblivion. Patrols, bedecked in ragged canvas and gleaming soulsteel, keep peace in the crooked streets.

Tariff and freedom support Whale Bay. The secure docks in the bay cost jade, as do the laborers waiting on the wharves. Passage through the narrow mouth of the bay is guarded by massive iron chains and troops loyal to the mistress of the town. So long as jade crosses the right palms, no questions are asked, and everyone from servants of the Silver Prince to Lintha privateers to the stiff-necked servants of the Dual Monarchs are free to pursue their business in Whale Bay in anonymity and safety.

THE SERVANTS OF OBLIVION

Those ghosts who dwell on the surface of the Underworld seek to cling to life in some fashion, seeking memorial and influence over the lives of their mortal descendents. Those who dwell beneath it do not. They seek forever to bring about a greater darkness, a final emptiness wherein all existence has finally expired. They are the servants of Oblivion, and the dark corridors of the Labyrinth are their abode.

HUNGRY GHOSTS: VERMIN OF THE UNDERWORLD

Not only the higher soul can cling to life. If the body is not buried properly or the grave is looted, the lower soul may rise to terrorize both the living and the dead.

Unfortunately, hungry ghosts are common in the Underworld. When a person dies in terror or under great strain — when the living mind is shattered by a terrible trauma — the lower soul may cling to the body and become a hungry ghost. Hungry ghosts may also come into existence when burial rites are not properly followed or if the corpse is abandoned. Hungry ghosts are nearly mindless, ravaging monsters. Stripped of memory and personality, they are consumed by a single overwhelming drive. They hunger for what they have lost — a name, the trappings of a respectful death and the warmth of life itself. Hungry ghosts exist half in the living world and half in the land of the dead — haunting the night hours of the world above, they retreat to the Underworld during the day. A horror in the living world, they are viewed as dangerous vermin in

the land of the dead and are hunted there as well. Hungry ghosts wear shadows of their living forms, but their features are distorted by hate or fear. Their death wounds are unnaturally vivid.

Hungry ghosts are the lower, or animal, soul manifested after death. Typically, a hungry ghost rises from the grave if the person died a violent or hideous death. Murder and war, starvation and plague or suicide are all reasons why a hungry ghost might rise. Another reason is if there is a failure to observe the proper burial rites or if the rites were done in poor faith. Tied to its corpse, the lower soul seeks out the blood and breath of the living and vengeance against those who wronged it in life, if possible. A hungry ghost typically has only one Fetter — its decaying corpse. While one's corpse still exists, the hungry ghost is drawn into the lands of the living each night to stalk the area around the corpse. During the day, it slips into the corpse and hunts the Underworld, until night comes again. Then, it vanishes from the Underworld and rises from its corpse once more. Those enslaved by sorcerers do not enter the Underworld during the day, but lie bound and suffering within their rotting flesh.

Hungry ghosts are destroyed if they are struck by sunlight outside of a shadowland or if their corpses are properly buried. When one's corpse has faded to dust, or been destroyed, the hungry ghost is confined to the Underworld, to the delight of the living and the consternation of the dead. Hungry ghosts often gather in loose bands or packs. Packs still bound to the living world typically spring up because they are all rooted to the same atrocity or the same spot in the living world and, thus, constantly appear in the same area of the Underworld each time the sun of the living rises. In the case of ghosts no longer tied to the living world, they seem to be driven by some basic pack instinct. Individual ghosts and packs are sometimes tamed, after a fashion, by powerful ghosts, usually through the use of a combination of Arcanoi and brutal training. Other “free” hungry ghosts make their way down into the Labyrinth, where they are often subjugated by the powers of Oblivion. Called shades, these dark and twisted servants of the Abyss are feared even by the mortwights that normally act as their handlers.

A small handful of hungry ghosts remain tied to the spot of their deaths, passing between the Underworld and the living world even after their corpse has dissolved into dust. These are often the ghosts of the very powerful, the driven or the brutally slain, whose lower soul thirsts mindlessly for vengeance even after the corpse is buried or destroyed.

CREATING A HUNGRY GHOST

Hungry ghosts normally possess the stats given in **Exalted**, on pages 300-301, but exceptional examples do exist. The more impressive the mortal was in life, the more powerful the hungry ghost will be. If creating a hungry



ghost for a slain Storyteller character, you can use the following guidelines to determine how much more powerful it might be:

- For each point of the character's Physical or Mental Attributes above 4, raise the ghost's corresponding Attribute by 1 (so a character with Strength ••••• would have Strength ••••• as a hungry ghost). Intelligence cannot be raised by more than • in this fashion.

- God-Blooded and Wyld-touched characters may have some remnant of any powers they once had (a giant Wyld-touched would become a giant hungry ghost, for example). This is adjudicated on a case-by-case basis, but typically, any power or ability that is unconscious or a physical change in the character is available to the hungry ghost, while those that required focus, concentration or skill to use are not.

- Those of high status and power in society often become terrible hungry ghosts in death, even if not physically mighty. Princes and queens, merchant factors and religious figures all gain • on all Physical traits, and gain one -0, two -1 and two -2 health levels. Exalts should generally be considered of high status and power.

- Highly skilled characters result in skilled hungry ghosts, within reason. For every Ability of 4 or 5 dots, add one dot to one of the hungry ghost's Abilities (maximum of 5 dots in any Ability), but only if the hungry ghost template on pages 300-301 of the **Exalted** main book already possesses the Ability.

When an Exalt dies, her higher soul travels on to its appropriate reward, with only traces of its Exaltation left behind. The ghost of an Exalt has the same Traits and Abilities she had in life, and her corpus is enhanced by any Ox-Body Technique Charms she had.

The lower soul of an Exalt is far more powerful than her higher soul. Swollen large from its role as repository of the Exaltation, it gains size and power — and often some measure of cunning and intellect. Determine the Traits and Abilities of an Exalt's hungry ghost as normal, and then apply the following additional benefits:

- For every dot of Essence the Exalt had when he died, add • to the lower soul's Strength and Stamina (this cannot raise the lower soul's Strength or Stamina to more than 12), one -2 health level, +3L to its attack damage and 1L/1B soak.

- For every 2 full dots of Essence, add one dot to the lower soul's Dexterity and Wits (this cannot raise the lower soul's Dexterity or Wits to more than 7), and add one -1 health level.

- For every 3 full dots of Essence, add one dot to the lower soul's Intelligence and Essence (this cannot raise the lower soul's Intelligence or Essence to more than 4) and one -0 health level.

- Although not universal, the lower souls of Exalts who practiced sorcery — those who didn't end up trading their lower soul away for greater power or some

bit of knowledge — often have some knowledge of spirit Charms or Arcanoi.

For Example: Kai Zhen was a powerful Solar in life, and in death, his lower soul is an equally powerful hungry ghost that guards his corpse in the deepest South, where he died. His Essence of 7 in life means that he adds 7 to his Strength and Stamina, 3 to his Dexterity and Wits, 21L to his claw and bite damage, 2 to his Intelligence and Essence, and that he has a soak of 8L/9B and an additional 2 x -0/3 x -1/7 x -2 health levels, on top of whatever modifications were made for his physical prowess and skill in life. Such a powerful hungry ghost would be a threat even to well-prepared hunters.

THE LABYRINTH: ABODE OF DARKNESS

Ghosts whisper of it, every Abyssal passes through it, but it is the spectres who know its secrets.

The Labyrinth spreads like a cancer beneath the gleaming marble streets of Stygia. It surrounds the endless pit of Oblivion. The curses of long-forgotten spectres haunt the dark passages and mortwights hunt fragile newborn ghosts lost in echoing caverns and dead end halls.

The upper passages of the Labyrinth, at least those around Stygia, are made up of a warren of half-collapsed buildings, submerged city streets and broken mausoleums. These are the remnants of the original city of Stygia, multiplied a thousandfold into a Creation-wide maze of broken funerary plaques, forgotten talismans and the screams of trapped ghosts, unable to free themselves from some binding magic and yet unwilling to slip into Oblivion. Beneath all that, or far away from Stygia, the passages grow very rough and very strange. The walls seep blood, and the air moves as if some great, forgotten god breathes slowly in the depths. It is in these depths that the Abyssals find enlightenment, it is here that a ghost is transformed into a spectre, and it is here that the secret of annihilation is revealed.

The Labyrinth is heavy with intent. Spells and talismans are twisted here to the purpose of Oblivion. Ghosts that die in the Labyrinth cannot find Lethe and, instead, fall into the Abyss. The Deathlords power is strengthened here: Magic capable of twisting the Essence of the Exalted is possible here and nowhere else in the Underworld.

Nephwracks all journey into the Labyrinth, seeking the one whisper, the one moment of revelation. Once they have gained their fragment of wisdom and have lost all connection with the wheel of reincarnation and any hope of finding forgetfulness in Lethe, they return to the Underworld, eager to whisper their wisdom into the ears of foolish and frightened ghosts. Once a ghost has heard the voice of the Abyss, he is eternally tied to that moment, that whisper. It is that nihilistic inspiration that moves his existence from then on.

It is in the Labyrinth that the elements necessary to strengthen soulsteel are mined, and the ghostly miners of that precious metal take care not to stray from the warded

and guarded paths maintained by the Dual Monarchy. The Labyrinth is full of woe, and it will not wait long to find a ghost who looks for it.

There are many forgotten treasures in the Labyrinth, talismans and weapons of the First Age of Stygia, war machines, treasure and jewels, family plaques and histories were all abandoned when the nephwracks overcame the original defenders. Soulsteel is mined here, and soulfire gems. There are always foolhardy ghosts willing to risk the Labyrinth in hopes of gaining renown or riches. The price of failure is absolute annihilation.

Mortwights hunt the Labyrinth — their birthplace — and they sometimes gather in packs large enough to assault the Monarchy's mining parties. Hungry ghosts haunt the upper halls, where they take refuge from patrols. When the storms of the Underworld provide cover and distraction, they rise up to hunt in the darkness. New nephwracks wander the halls, seeking to trap and tame mortwights as their servants and hungry ghosts as their hunting packs. Occasionally, a Deathlord travels the deeper passages, cowing the mortwights and scattering even the mindless hungry ghosts with a touch of power.

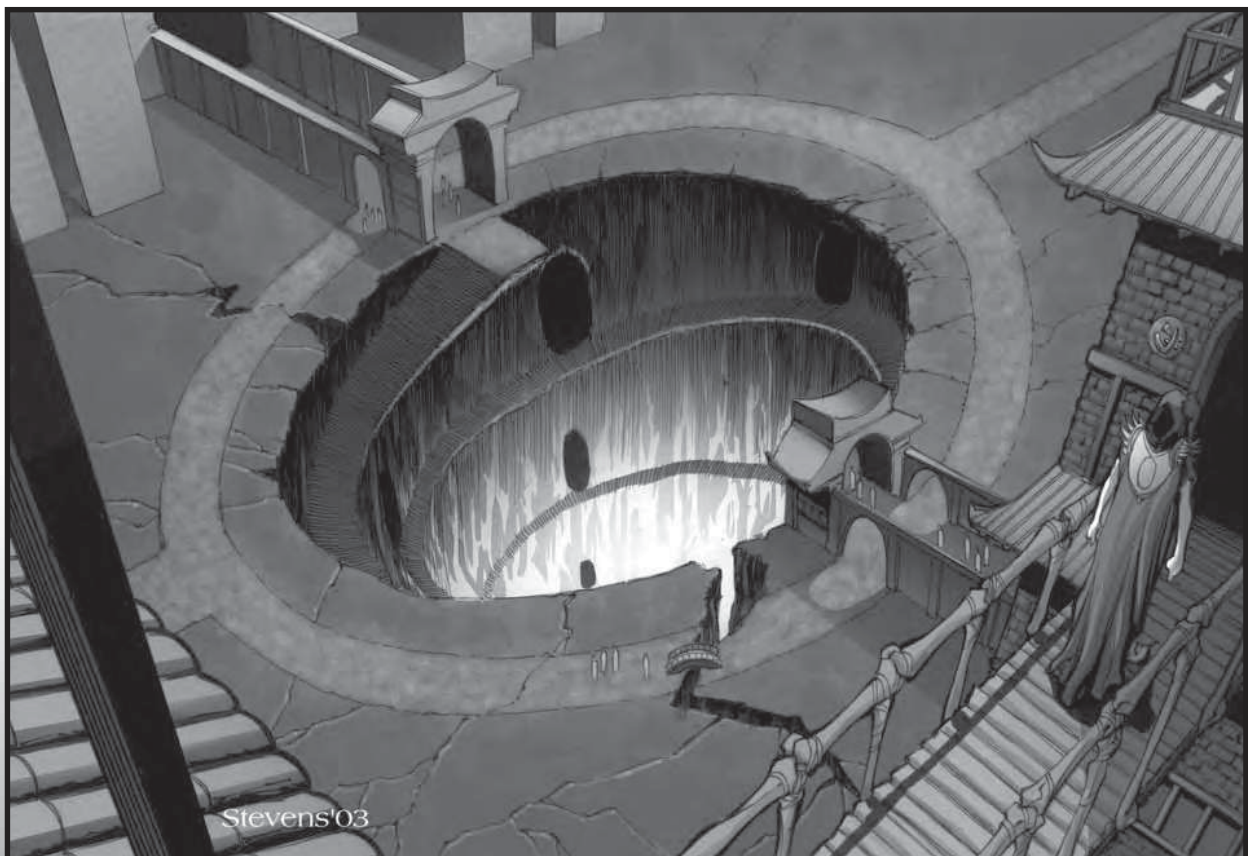
The structure of the Labyrinth is nearly as deadly as its inhabitants. There are traps and wards left from its endless conflicts that can destroy the unwary. The passages are unmapped — though there is a small market for forged maps, which are sold to ghosts who know no better. Power seeps from the Abyss, channeled through the Labyrinth to

whisper in travelers ears and taint their dreams. A split second of hesitation at the wrong moment, when the air of the Labyrinth moves the wrong way, can allow the call of Oblivion into the soul of a ghost... and then, he is lost. Many ghosts who seek wealth in the Labyrinth return instead as shades or are consumed by Oblivion.

The Labyrinth moves — passages that were once secure shift under the breath of Oblivion and become warped, changed and deadly. Spectres can influence the shape and shift of the Labyrinth, just they are also shaped by it. Battles are fought in the crumbling passages with blades and Arcanoi but also with the shifting of walls and floor. Strong spectres are able to hold and spread their influence in the Labyrinth, and the shape of their determination creates loyalty among the mortwights and lesser ghosts who dwell in the nephwracks' stronghold. This is how the nephwracks build loyalty and troops. Mortwights and other ghosts are captured and interred within a nephwrack's temple until their loyalty has been suborned by the spectre-priest's will.

THE WELL OF THE VOID

In the middle of the vast Necropolis of Stygia, there is a roughly circular chasm that leads down deep into the bowels of the Underworld. At the northernmost and southernmost points of this chasm are two stairways wide enough for a scale of cataphractoï to march abreast down them, with yet enough space for their officers to pass on the inside.





Its countless stairs are sometimes carved out of black granite, other times of pale marble, and still others are seemingly extruded out of the veins of soulfire crystal or soulsteel ore that striate the walls. Occasionally, there are landings, from whence tunnels burrow deep into the Labyrinth or lead quickly into palaces carved out of the chasm walls. No bridges span this gulf, and no construction hangs far out over it. Each of the Deathlords has a residence that overlooks its depth, and it dominates the landscape of the city in all ways. In the deepest parts of the Well are the tombs of the Malfeans — great porticos look out on the Well from their massive burial complexes, each connected to the stairwell in some fashion.

Miners from the surface dig deep into the walls at the higher levels in search of soulfire crystals, black steel and other, more esoteric minerals and substances. Sacrifices are common, by the servants of the Dual Monarchs as well as by those by the servants of the Abyss. Its appellations are many. It is called the Abyss, the Well of Souls, the Pit, That Damned Hole and by other, less flattering, names. But it is most commonly known as the Well of the Void, and at the bottom of the Well lies Oblivion.

ENTERING THE LABYRINTH

There are many ways of gaining access to the Labyrinth. In the Underworld, fissures exist in many places, and the mighty Citadels of the Deathlords all have at least one entrance to the Labyrinth. Almost any cave system in the Underworld eventually empties into some section of the Labyrinth if one follows it back and down far enough. Stygia is riddled with entrances into the Labyrinth — there are sections of the city long forgotten, buried and built on top of that have become permanent parts of the Labyrinth, their halls and chambers given over to the cults of Oblivion, and access from those sections of the city has been given over to the nephwracks to do with as they will. The Dual Monarchs would be displeased if they were to learn how many parts of the city are but a few hours of excavation from some of the most populated parts of the Labyrinth.

In Creation, finding a direct route into the Labyrinth is much more difficult — but not impossible. The first such opening was almost certainly the Well of Udr, which is believed to date to before the First Age, but several others have been found since then. All of these are in shadowlands, however.

THE MAKEUP OF THE LABYRINTH

The Labyrinth's tunnels extend throughout all of the Underworld and stretch in places up into the deepest caverns of Creation. Most tunnels are composed of the same featureless heavy black rock, a granite-like stone that seems almost to absorb light, but some are carved or grown out of basalt, obsidian or other stones. In some sections of the Labyrinth, the tunnels are not composed of stone at all: Ancient bone, petrified tree stumps, tanned human skins

OBLIVION

When the Deathlords say they fed their names to Oblivion at the behest of their Malfean masters, they do not wax metaphoric. Oblivion is a very real force, residing in the Well of the Void, often worshiped, occasionally loved and always, always feared.

Oblivion is entropy. It is decay that brings no life or hope with it and the void beyond which is nothingness. It became part of Creation when the Primordials were slain, and it will be the only thing left when Creation has fallen into it. It is that which the Malfeans desire above all other things, an end to their tormented existence. It is the power all Abyssals swear fealty to and promise their souls to, above even their Deathlord masters.

It might be that Oblivion came into existence because it became necessary due to the Malfeans' deaths or that it was finally able to enter Creation only after they were slain or exiled, or merely that Creation became broken when the Primordials that had built it left. What is known is that Oblivion is the ending of things. Anything that enters it disappears from Creation forever. Eventually, there will be nothing left of Creation. It will all have fallen into Oblivion and be gone.

The Malfeans seek to accelerate this process, to end their lingering existence — not death as mortals know it, and yet, not life as the Primordials knew it either. They seek the peace that comes with the outer void, the grace and majesty that is inherent in a final ending. The Deathlords are their tools in this, although their devotion is perhaps suspect. Oblivion, if it has any emotion or desire, does not seem to care. If it is aware in any sense, it knows the inevitability of its triumph.

and rusting steel have all been discovered, and a few sections seem to pulse with a life of their own, resembling arteries or other bodily organs. Some are dangerous: mile-long tunnels with walls made of razor-sharp blades that spin on hidden pivots at the slightest touch or chimneys whose walls are composed of human arms. Others are merely odd: weird phantasms of iridescent scales or gently waving palm fronds. The more esoteric, strange or outlandish a passageway is, the less likely it is, and the more likely that the ever-changing nature of the Labyrinth will replace it with something fatal. Most tunnels are wide and tall enough for a person to walk through upright, but this can vary incredibly. Some passageways are hundreds of yards across, and others are barely passable at all. In places, these catacombs open up into caverns, some of them little wider or taller than the tunnels they issued from, others vast caves miles long and high; some of the latter contain

huge palaces, tombs of the Malfeans or entire cities filled with the servants of Oblivion. Most tunnel walls are irregular, worn smooth by the infrequent but blinding storms that sometimes blast through sections of the Labyrinth or by floods of rank seawater, blood or other, less identifiable (or desirous) substances. Some passages show obvious signs of having been worked and mined out of the rock, and their walls are festooned with razor-sharp protrusions or their floors are littered with knife-like shards of the hard black stone. In places, outcroppings of some harder stone or alloy can cut a tunnel's width in half, and stalactites and stalagmites of the featureless black rock are common, especially in larger passageways and chambers.

Pools of water and other substances gather in low points in the Labyrinth. These may be of blood (sometimes bright and fresh, other times dank and congealed), of milky-white plasms that flow and stick like molasses and burn anything they touch as if it were fire or of luminescent slimes that stick to any surface, emitting a pale glow. There are lakes of acid and pools of dank curdled milk as well.

ILLUMINATION

For the most part, there is no light in the Labyrinth except that brought in from outside, and most of the inhabitants of the Labyrinth require no light to see by (if, indeed, they have functioning eyes at all). Occasionally, an explorer will come across veins of dully glowing red soulfire crystals, strange patches of passageway that glow with pale-white fire or a crevasse or sinkhole that lets the pale light of the Underworld surface filter down. There are places where the air itself seems to be made of light. Sometimes, these areas seem to move through the Labyrinth as if on some unknown mission. Other times, they merely reside in a single place. A small handful of the creatures that dwell in the Labyrinth either have developed, or were given, light sources to use as tools in hunting prey. And in some places, nephwracks have caused their dwellings to be lit, perhaps simply for effect, to show off some feature of their amphiskiopoi, or for other, more obscure reasons.

TIME, SPACE AND DISTANCE

Time can flow oddly in the Labyrinth. In most sections, time moves at the same rate as in the rest of the Underworld, but in other caverns and tunnels, time speeds up or slows down. Sometimes, this is only perceptual — hours seem like days, or days hours — but in many cases, the change is very real — ghosts have wandered out of the Labyrinth to find that decades, or even centuries, have passed since they first entered. Space is even more fluid than time in the Labyrinth. A creation of the sleeping Malfeans, it is a mirror held up to their vast dead dreams, shifting in shape and form by some unknowable whim. These changes are not generally frequent enough to be a direct hazard to travelers, but they are common enough that any but the roughest maps are useless. While major

landmarks typically remain in roughly the same location relative to other Underworld landmarks, the routes to and from them are erratic, and in some cases, they will relocate themselves completely, while maintaining the same relationships. More than one explorer has turned a corner to find themselves standing on the stairs of the Well of the Void, which they thought was a thousand leagues away, and the servants of Oblivion make frequent use of the way geometry folds in on itself in the Labyrinth, moving great distances in short periods of time. This process is not without risk, however. Many nephwracks jealously guard their domains, and there is always a chance of running into some shade or hekatonkhire that obeys no master.

SPECTRES: THE PRIESTS OF OBLIVION

If the mountain at the heart of the Realm is the axis around which the living world turns, the Mouth of the Void is the dark heart of the Underworld. Chief among the servants of the Abyss are the nephwracks, the high priests of Oblivion.

MORTWIGHTS

Mortwights are children of the Abyss. In the moment of death, when most souls either seek Lethe and reincarnation or cling to existence and become a ghost, they hear the call of Oblivion.

The mortwights are those who grew to hate Creation itself while still alive. Some are frustrated by a life spent to no purpose, others are blinded by their fears, and some blamed existence for their troubles. Most followed a life of destruction and rampage of one sort or another. Not all were killers while alive, although most were, but they all sought to tear down and destroy. They were usually quite mad before they left Creation, and the remainder became mad upon entering the Underworld. They all seek to continue to walk their road of hate, for at their moment of death, their soul was subsumed by the Abyss.

Many ghosts so trapped simply fall into the Abyss and are destroyed, but some stubborn spirits manage to halt their fall and, instead, become mortwights, rising to hunt the endless passages of the Labyrinth. Mortwights lose their names and memories to Oblivion, though they retain a fair amount of intelligence. The fire of Oblivion burns in their empty eyes and echoes in their faint, distant sounding shrieks. Mortwights usually spend their existence hunting the Labyrinth, tearing at each other and any other spirits unlucky enough to come across them. Occasionally, several mortwights gather together to hunt in packs, though these associations do not last long and usually end in a mutual blood bath as the mortwights turn on each other. Mortwights lose much of their living form and usually devolve into long-limbed, sharp-taloned, skeletal figures that look to be made of glossy black jade. Mortwights are often the most lucid of the Labyrinth's inhabitants and are frequently sent on missions into the Underworld, and even Creation, although extended operations are usually not feasible. These creatures



may be lucid, but they are rarely sane, and their appearance and attitudes make them poor diplomats.

THE DISCIPLES OF THE ABYSS

The Disciples of the Abyss are unique among the servants of Oblivion, for they were once normal ghosts.

Some ghosts become disillusioned of the color and vibrancy of Creation after they die. They may have been abandoned by their families or forgotten by their society, or they may simply be jealous of that which they once had and can never truly have again. They turn their backs on Creation and on the societies of the Underworld that seek to ape the conventions of a place they can never return to. Their eyes fill with the hard glittering blackness of obsidian.

Other ghosts travel into the Labyrinth, seeking fortune or respect. A few are even consciously seeking Oblivion as their ultimate goal. By choice or misfortune, somewhere in the twisted halls, they succumb to the soft call of Oblivion. That moment shapes the existence of the new spectre. They take the wisdom of annihilation they have learned and seek to pass it on to other ghosts. Unlike mortwights or hungry ghosts, Disciples of the Abyss retain much of their personality, memories and intelligence, just twisted to Oblivion's end.

Those Disciples who bother with individual identity often choose titles in a deliberate mockery of the Immaculate Order: Brother Decay, Sister Murder and Prior Dissipation are all examples. Others choose simple names that reflect their distaste for Creation: Daybreaker, Nightreaper, etc.

NEPHWRACK

Spectres are able to draw on the power of the Abyss, shaped and channeled by the Labyrinth, and some among them use this power to raise up temples. These spectre-priests are called nephwracks. The nephwracks are the priests and direct servants of Oblivion and claim that they can not only hear its call, but that they can understand it, after a fashion. The particular revelation a spectre receives varies between nephwracks, and they fight terrible and bitter battles among themselves in the Labyrinth over dogma, using packs of mortwights and hungry ghosts they have pressed into service. The nephwracks retain much of their original ghostly form, but a faint, dark haze seems to drift around them — the pollution of the Abyss — and their eyes are empty black pits.

Nephwracks are the evangelists of destruction, and the upper levels of the Labyrinth are made up of a warren of abandoned temples raised by long forgotten priests of the Abyss. In these temples, the nephwracks harvest and torment the mortwights and hungry ghosts that are drawn to the lure of their cults. From these tortured evil spirits, the nephwracks create their armies and servitors. The temples serve as Manses as well, channeling the dark Essence of the Abyss into the hearts of the priest.

HEKATONKHIRE

There are things that wander the Underworld, and especially the Labyrinth, which were old when the gods were created. In Creation, they were called behemoths, the first creations of the Primordials, and many of them were slain during the Primordial War. Like the Primordials themselves, however, the death of a behemoth is not like the death of a mortal. The souls of the slain behemoths came to reside in the Underworld like their makers, neither living nor dead. In the Underworld, they are called hekatonkhire, and like the Malfeans or hungry ghosts, their natures are often changed by their journey into the realms of the dead.

The number of hekatonkhire in the Underworld is unknown. Many still serve their Malfean masters, while others have struck out on their own. Some carve out their own empires in the endless darkness of the Labyrinth, while others merely cast about on the fringes of the Underworld, seeking only to be left alone, some surcease from their unending existence or another meal. A handful have been imprisoned or enslaved either by the kingdoms of the dead or by the Deathlords. Most are incredibly powerful, but many are only a shadow of what they once were.

Many nephwracks are very old indeed and have grown mighty over the centuries, skilled in the use of Arcanoi. Many are also twisted and warped by their extended exposure to the Malfeans and cannot pass as anything resembling mortal any longer. Most nephwracks dwell in their temple-citadels carved out of the deepest part of the Labyrinth, but a handful perform their devotions to entropy in citadels located in some shadowland that has ready access to the Labyrinth.

In their strongholds, the nephwracks gather armies composed of the other servants of Oblivion and reinforced with barghests and hekatonkhires. They use these armies against the societies of the Underworld and in holy wars against each other, usually for some perceived slight against their self-destructive dogmas. In the dark recesses of the Labyrinth, these nihilistic theocracies are the closest thing there are to kingdoms or organization, and their structure is loose indeed — it is a constantly shifting maze of alliances and holy crusades, where today's infidel is tomorrow's brother-in-faith and vice versa.

Like the Deathlords and the Abyssals, nephwracks give their names up to Oblivion to be devoured. They take titles as the Deathlords and the Abyssals do, although these names are usually much simpler and less grandiose: Falling Darkness, Night's Edge and Slave to Entropy are all known nephwrack names. Many take names based on their role or purpose: Speaker for Gorool, Mouth of the

NEPHWRACKS AND THE DEATHLORDS

The relationship between the nephwrack priests and the Deathlords is proof of the old saying that “the friend of my master is not my friend” and is strained at the best of times. Even between nephwracks and Deathlords who directly serve the same Malfean master, there is rarely peace and respect. While the Deathlords have occasionally made alliances or signed treaties with one or another of the nephwracks, they have just as often made war against the nephwracks when the spectres have grown too ambitious or aggressive. Fortunately, with significant exceptions, the nephwracks spend most of their time in the Labyrinth, pursuing their mad goals, reveling in the darkness of utter futility and engaging in endless rituals of appeasement for their dark gods.

The nephwracks know that they cannot hope to match the sheer power of the Deathlords, but they also know that their forces are not inconsequential. Some of the Deathlords could unilaterally hunt down and destroy every nephwrack if they wanted to (presuming that the Malfeans did not intervene), but doing so would stretch their forces impossibly thin, rendering them vulnerable to the machinations of the other Deathlords. In addition, the nephwracks *are* useful to the Deathlords. There may be tensions, but each group finds the other worthwhile enough to keep them in a state of uneasy and unfriendly truce.

Abyss and Voice of Oblivion, for example. Usually, these nephwracks are either very old and powerful or else presumptuous and ambitious.

KINGDOMS OF THE LABYRINTH

Much of the Labyrinth is unexplored and, thus, unclaimed by any lord or theocrat. Other sections are unclaimed for other reasons — there are sections of the Labyrinth that are simply too dangerous for even the servants of the Malfeans to stay in for any length of time. Yet, in the Labyrinth’s more stable regions, there are a number of long-standing polities. Several of the larger ones include:

The Cavern of the Ending: Ruled by the ancient nephwrack known as Servant of Oblivion, the Cavern of the Ending is an amphiskopolis situated in a massive cavern, normally located several hundred miles north of the Mouth of the Abyss. Most of the amphiskopolis is made up of buildings carved out of the cavern’s walls. The cavern floor itself is a rough and multi-layered affair, with deep trenches and high cliff faces throughout. In the center was located a temple to one of the more active Malfeans, but it was reportedly destroyed recently.

Oblivion’s Passage: One of the only kingdoms in the Labyrinth not ruled by a nephwrack, Oblivion’s Passage is a

complex of tunnels and small caves that nearly adjoins the Well of the Void. The mortwight known as Seven Murder’s Son currently rules the passage. A skilled tactician and a brilliant combatant, Seven Murder’s Son has gathered a relatively small, but extremely tight-knit and professional band of mortwights and Disciples, reinforced by hunting packs of large and fearsome hungry ghosts. His services are apparently for sale — he and his soldiers have been seen working in conjunction with the armies of several different nephwracks and Deathlords. There seems to be no question that his devotion to the cause of Oblivion is genuine — his shorter-term goals, however, remain unknown at present.

The Ocean of the Unending Night: Deep under the northeastern edges of the Isle of Stygia, there is a vast underground sea that stretches deep into what should be the Sea of Shadows. There are numerous small (and not-so-small) islands in this sea, ruled by the strange galleons of the nephwrack known as Never-Ending Silence. It is said that Never-Ending Silence knows ways of sailing his ships out into the Sea of Shadows from the Labyrinth — and even into the Western Ocean of Creation.

CITIES OF THE LABYRINTH

There are places where the tunnels of the Labyrinth open up into vast caverns miles wide and high. Some of these caves are empty voids, but others contain huge complexes of temples or massive city-fortresses, sometimes known as amphiskopoi. These cities are populated by the servants of Oblivion and are rarely spoken of in the Underworld. Few know of their existence, and few of those who know wish to contemplate the idea of entire cities of mortwights and shades awaiting the word of their nephwrack masters to strike.

SPECTRAL CREATURES

There are all manner of strange creatures and entities that wander through the Underworld, and especially the Labyrinth. Some are the remnants of species or creations long-since gone extinct, and the Underworld is the last place they can be found. Others are thought to be the demented dreams of the dead Malfeans, creatures torn out of the plasmic Essence of the Underworld, existing only so long as some part of a Malfean’s slumbering unconscious maintains some level of awareness of it. Many of these creatures are unique, or nearly so, separated from the hekatonkhire only by the fact that the hekatonkhire once lived and these plasmic entities have never existed in Creation (and, indeed, would be incapable of surviving in Creation for long, if at all).

Some plasmic entities have access to low-level Arcanoi or effects that are similar enough to spirit Charms that they can be used to represent the effects. Such beings typically have only a small Essence pool (8 to 14 motes per dot of Essence at most, and normally, no more than a permanent Essence of 3 or so).

Creature	Physical Att. Str/Dex/Sta	Willpower	Health Levels	Attack Spd/Acc/Dmg	Dodge/ Soak	Abilities
Consumption Cloud	2/4/4	3	-0/-1/-2x2/ -4x3/I	Envelop: 9/6/4L	8/4L/8B	Athletics 2 (Flying +1), Awareness 1, Brawl 2 (Envelop +2), Dodge 4, Stealth 4
Resplendent Burning Lotus	4/3/4	4	-0/-1/-2x2/ -4x2/I	Envelop: 7/6/2B	6/3L/6B	Athletics 2 (Swim +1), Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 4
River Wraith	10/2/12	4	-0x2/-1x4/ -2x4/-4x3/I	Bite: 5/7/11L	4/8L/14B	Athletics 3 (Swimming +1), Awareness 3, Brawl 3 (Bite +2), Dodge 2, Presence 3 (Intimidation +2), Stealth 2
Shadow	6/2/8	3	-0/-1x2/ -2x2/-4x4/I	Grab: 8/8/6B, Smash: 7/7/6L, Swallow: 4/4/10L	5/4L/8B	Athletics 4 (Swim +2), Awareness 2, Brawl 4 (Grab +2, Smash +1), Dodge 3, Presence 3 (Intimidation +2), Stealth 5
Steel Ant	1/2/1	2	-0x6/-1x4/ -2x4/-4x2/I	Swarm: 3/6/2L	2/1L/2B	Athletics 2, Awareness 1, Brawl 1(Swarm +3)
Steel Ant Queen	5/3/6	6	0/-1x2/ -2x2/-4x2/I	Bite: 4/6/4L, Stinger: 8/6/2L	5/10L/16B	Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 2 (Bite +1, Stinger +1), Dodge 2

Note: Unless otherwise stated, assume animals possess Intelligence at 1 dot, Perception at 2 dots and Wits at 3 dots. For beasts, use the provided Acc value for both attacks and parries.

Consumption Cloud: Pale-gray and mauve clouds that float against the wind, consumption clouds attack almost anything that moves. Even the slightest touch of the consumption cloud brings incredible pain, as the creature's form dissolves flesh and bone on contact. Metal armor provides no soak against this creature's touch, and armor made of leather or other organic material survives only a single turn before being ruined. Artifact armor protects normally in all instances and will not be destroyed by the touch of a consumption cloud. The player of anyone who takes damage from the consumption cloud must make a Valor check (difficulty 1) at the beginning of each turn for (10 - Stamina) turns. Characters whose players fail this roll suffer a -3 penalty on all task pools for that turn. Players of Exalted and other magical beings add 3 dice to this check. Though gaseous, consumption clouds are fortu-

nately easily disrupted. Unfortunately, they often attack from surprise and travel in small packs.

Resplendent Burning Lotus: Spreading perhaps as much as 15 to 20 feet in diameter if stretched out (a rare occurrence), the resplendent burning lotus is a rare splash of color as it drifts through the Seas of Shadows; depending on how recently it fed, it may range from a dusky rose to a brilliant crimson hue. The burning lotus (sometimes called the dreamstealer) feeds off the Essence of those foolish enough to come in contact with it. On a successful attack, the lotus has wrapped one of its pseudopods around its target. Treat the target as being in a clinch (see **Exalted**, p. 239), but the target suffers only two levels of bashing damage. Each turn he is within the lotus' grasp, the target *also* loses (6 - target's permanent Essence) motes of Essence, and his player must make a roll against Conviction (difficulty 1) or have his character be lost in the visions and

dreams that the lotus grants to those it touches. After the lotus has drained 30 Essence from its victims (possibly fewer, if it was already partly full), it will break off the attack, leaving its drained, dazed prey behind. The shades and other sea creatures that travel in the wake of the resplendent burning lotus often take advantage of such helpless victims. Those who survive the touch of the lotus are often called to experience its strange touch again and again (the player of each victim must make a successful Temperance check [difficulty 1] for his character, or the character feels the temptation to seek out the lotus to experience its touch again).

River Wraith: Although actually found fairly deep into the Sea of Shadows, the river wraith is still known mostly for its haunting the shorelines of the Underworld. Similar in shape and demeanor to the river dragon of Creation, the river wraith serves much the same purpose: eating anything foolish enough to stand still in its presence or not fast enough to outrun it. River wraiths are somewhat more amphibian than river dragons are and are as often seen on the beaches and nearby shorelines as in the water.

Shadow: Feared by all who dare the Sea of Shadows, these strange creatures appear as nothing so much as a patch of liquid shadow, hence their name. Growing as large as a ship in some cases and able to extend a dozen tarry pseudopods out to strike at targets even as far as 100 feet away, shadows can quickly strip a vessel of crew and cargo, apparently eating anything organic. Anything caught in a pseudopod grab attack is treated as being clinched (see *Exalted*, p. 239); anything subjected to a pseudopod smash takes the listed damage and is treated as having been thrown (see *Exalted*, p. 240). Anything that is engulfed in the creature's body will take 10L damage per turn until it is dragged free. Armor provides only half protection against this cold burning. Shadows take half damage from blunt attacks but double damage from fire.

Steel Ant: Half a foot long each, these strange creatures are scavengers and hunters, gathering bits of mundane metal and (recently) soulsteel to bring back to their massive hives. Attacking in swarms, they are capable of tearing any ghost they may find to pieces, looking for soulsteel, soulfire crystals or anything else they may find useful. The steel ant queens are rarely seen — this is probably fortunate, given their size (up to five feet long), their poisoned stingers and claws and their ability to use Arcanoi. Steel ant queens normally have an Essence of 2, 23 motes of Essence and four to six Arcanoi. Their Intelligence is 2, Perception 4 and Wits 4. Most shades avoid steel ants, for some unknown reason. The poison of a steel ant queen is typically equal to that of a coral snake (see *Exalted*, p. 243), and it affects the living and the dead alike.





LABYRINTH NAVIGATION

Making one's way through the Labyrinth is as much a matter of diplomacy as navigation, and interactions with those met along the way require a careful balancing between overwhelming displays of force and judicious exhibitions of respect and reverence. The servants who guard the ways of the Labyrinth are sometimes powerful, but more often, they have been placed there as punishment or simply because they are available. While they often have reinforcements that they can call upon, they must live long enough to sound an alarm. But in the realms of the dead, the servant killed today will speak with his master tomorrow after recovering from his demise, and the return trip may be much more problematic. Letters of passage secured ahead of time or negotiated for on the spot are sometimes needed. Bribery and extortion are not uncommon, though most shades and mortwrights know they can only push an Abyssal so far before he decides that the lackey he is dealing with needs to be taught a painful lesson in failure, regardless of the possible diplomatic repercussions. At other times, a statement of lineage and purpose is sufficient. Although relations between the nephwracks and the Deathlords are often strained, in the end, they do serve the same masters, and this is often enough to pave over differences.

Beyond the hazards of politics, theology and ideology, the Labyrinth is simply dangerous in its own right, even to a being as powerful as an Abyssal. There are things that wander there that serve nothing save Oblivion itself, and they rarely listen to impassioned pleas of common purpose or ideological purity. There are parts of the Labyrinth that can warp and mutate those who pass through them as thoroughly as the deepest parts of the Wyld could — and with almost as little reason. The walls of the Labyrinth themselves can turn hostile, and there are no maps, and little rhyme, to the way the Labyrinth shifts and changes in response to the dreams of the dead, mad Primordials.

Despite these dangers, natives of the Underworld make use of the Labyrinth as a means of quickly traveling from one part of the Underworld to another. The process can not only bypass defenses, it can cut many miles and days off even the longest journeys. Abyssals have the most need of such rapid transits, and they are quickly refining the art into as much of a science as they can. Nephwracks are still the masters of the art of Labyrinth navigation, however, and they long ago developed Arcanoi to aid them in their journeys. A handful of these have been uncovered by the learned scholars of Sijan and other necropoli, but they are rarely put to use. Even the ability to quickly find the right way does little good when the path leads straight through a nephwrack's heavily guarded temple complex.

Writs of safe passage, talismans that vouchsafe one's identity and allegiance and well-placed bribes can all speed the way through the Labyrinth. Charms and Arcanoi that aid the user in determining the best path to take can allow her to avoid the more difficult sections or to sidestep domains held by hostile nephwracks or Deathlords. The aid of a guide can help, but finding a trustworthy servant among the slaves to Oblivion can be difficult at the best of times.

ROLLING FOR LABYRINTH NAVIGATION

Navigating the Labyrinth is an extended test. The player rolls Wits + Survival against a difficulty based on how far the character needs to travel in the Underworld (See the Labyrinth Navigation Successes Required table, below). If several characters are traveling, only the player of the one who is leading the way rolls. Each roll in this extended task also has a basic difficulty based on how fast the character is trying to travel (see Travel Time Difficulty, below). The character's dice pool will usually be reduced by 1 die each time a roll is made. So, on the fifth roll, the player will generally be rolling with a -4 penalty. This represents the disorienting nature of the Labyrinth. A character who does not gather enough successes to reach her destination before her dice pool falls to 0 is lost somewhere in the Labyrinth. If the player botches, her character will have ended up in a very tight spot indeed.

Each individual die roll is checked against the Labyrinth Navigation Results table, below, in case of a failure. Storytellers are encouraged to add their own results as well. The characters could be trapped by the changing shape of the Labyrinth, be attacked by rogue shades or other creatures, have to backtrack because that section of the Underworld is now closed off to them or face other setbacks.

AIDS AND ASSISTANCE

A variety of different aids are available to Abyssals and others who attempt to pass through the Labyrinth:

Bona Fides: Vouchsafes of identity can be used to bypass sentient hazards — they contain various assurances and guarantees that the bearer is who he says he is. This might be useful if the characters can bully or bluff their way through, but it won't get them past resolute warders or guardians.

Bribes: Bribes can be used to bypass some obstacles or to get accurate information about the path ahead. Roll Manipulation + Larceny, adding one die for every dot of Resources offered above the first. The difficulty for this task is normally 3, but it can be modified up or down based on the rectitude of the guardians. Hostile sentinels will be less receptive to bribes, while friendly guards may become offended by an offer of money (but, usually, not *too* offended). Bribes must be in an appropriate form — food or

LABYRINTH NAVIGATION TABLES

TRAVEL TIME DIFFICULTY

Desired Length of Trip

Half the time it would normally take in the Underworld
One quarter as long as normal
One day (or less, if traveling a short distance)
One hour
Instant

Base Difficulty for Each Roll

2
3
4
5
6

LABYRINTH NAVIGATION RESULTS

Level of Success

Results

Succeed by 5 or more

The navigator has made a great breakthrough and is able to cut the trip's travel time further, shifting how long the journey ends up taking down by one level on the Travel Time Difficulty table. So, for example, if the journey was originally difficulty 3 (taking one-fourth as long as it normally would), it would now take only a day (as difficulty 4). Add three dice to the navigator's Wits + Survival dice pool for subsequent rolls in the extended test. Add extra successes to the total successes for the extended test.

Succeed by 4

The navigator has found his bearings, recognizing some near-permanent landmark, or the group has run across a group of warders or guardians that have set him on the right path. Add two dice to the navigator's Wits + Survival pool for subsequent rolls in the Labyrinth navigation test. Add extra successes on the Labyrinth navigation roll to total successes for the extended trip roll.

Succeed by 1-3

Reduce the character's Wits + Survival dice pool by 1 die for the next roll, add extra successes on this roll to total successes for the extended trip roll.

Fail by 1

The navigator has lost his bearings. Roll again immediately, but reduce next roll by an additional 1 (for a -2 total). This additional -1 penalty only applies to the next roll, not to subsequent rolls.

Fail by 2

The navigator and party stumble across some obstacle on their journey — a small band of guardians, a warder or some natural hazard. The problem can normally be bypassed with little problem.

Reduce the character's Wits + Survival dice pool by 1 die for next roll.

Fail by 3

As above, but the hazard is larger and more immediate — the guardians are hostile, the natural hazard is more dangerous, or the situation is otherwise complicated. Reduce the character's Wits + Survival dice pool by 1 die for next roll.

Fail by 4 or more

The navigator's party runs across some serious danger — a barely slumbering hekatonkhire or a massive war party. It could be a combat hazard, such as a pack of hungry ghosts, or a major natural hazard, such as the tunnel suddenly flooding with acid. This sort of hazard should normally be played out — if not, the Storyteller should substitute a fairly fearsome cost on the navigator and his party, in health levels, Essence, Willpower and Storyteller characters.

The next roll the navigator's player makes is treated as being two result categories worse when compared to this chart to determine what has happened. So if the player gets a "Fail by 1" result, it is treated as "Fail by 3." A "Succeed by 5" would be treated as a "Succeed by 1-3." Reduce the character's Wits + Survival dice pool by 2 dice for next roll.

Botch

The navigator and his band are hopelessly lost in the Labyrinth, facing some immediate and horrible doom — staring down an angry hekatonkhire, disrupting a major nephwrack's holiest of ceremonies, stumbling into a hostile amphiskopolis, etc. If the navigator and any companions manage to survive, all subsequent rolls are at +1 difficulty. In addition, the next two rolls are treated as being two result categories worse when compared to this chart to determine what has happened. Reduce the character's Wits + Survival dice pool by 3 dice for the next roll.

LABYRINTH NAVIGATION SUCCESSES REQUIRED

Distance to be Traveled	Travel Difficulty	Mapmaking Difficulty
Less than 100 miles	20	2
Less than 250 miles	25	3
Less than 500 miles	30	3
Less than 1,000 miles	35	4
Less than 2,000 miles	40	5
Less than 5,000 miles	45	6



edible slaves are more useful for bribing a pack of barghests than riches or artifacts, for example. If successful, the guards help the character on his way. A failure might indicate false information, a trap or a refusal to take a bribe. A botch will almost certainly result in guards taking forceful measures to attempt to restrain the character. All results leave the character without the bribe, although betrayed Abyssals will likely soon have their money back.

Writ of Safe Passage: Allows the navigator's player to roll Manipulation + Persuasion (difficulty 3) for his character to bypass a warder or guardian. On a failure, the obstacle refuses to accept the writ but is not immediately hostile. On a botch, the writ is not only invalid, it belongs to a nephwrack or Deathlord that the warder's masters are now hostile toward (even if they weren't when the writ was issued), and the warders are very poorly inclined toward the navigator. If the warders are servants of the being that issued the writ, there has been a religious schism or political power struggle, and they are now part of an opposing faction. Although a botch does not always result in an immediate attack, the warder or guardian will certainly attempt to harm the character and his party in some fashion. This harm could include combat, leading them into an ambush, sending them into some natural hazard or trap or otherwise inconveniencing or endangering the group in some way.

Pre-Planned Route: The player of the route mapper (who can be the person who subsequently uses the map) rolls Intelligence + Lore, against a difficulty equal to half the distance difficulty. Each extra success adds one die to the navigator's Wits + Survival roll. This kind of mapping normally requires access to a set of tools for black astrology and unholy geomancy that cost Resources ••••, that fill a small cart and that will attract unfavorable attention in almost any circumstance. Preparing the forecast takes one day (eight hours) of work for every point of the journey's Mapmaking Difficulty (so a trip of more than 1,000 miles but less than 2,000 miles would require four days to prepare for).

Guide: If the characters must recruit the guide, have the player of the talking character roll Charisma + Investigation against a difficulty of 3. If the roll is successful, the guide is (basically) trustworthy and will not betray the characters. If unsuccessful, the guide is working for some other group and will lead them into a trap of some kind or abandon them at an inopportune moment. If a botch, the guide is secretly working for the characters' enemies! A guide adds 1 success (or possibly more) to the Labyrinth navigation roll and any rolls for bribery, etc.

HAZARDS OF THE LABYRINTH

Just as there are many aids available to characters navigating the Labyrinth, there are also many hazards that even the most skilled navigator can encounter. In

general, which ones vex a particular group is left up to the Storyteller, but the list below should provide a good basic reference.

Guardians: Important locations in the Labyrinth — useful resources, gateways between domains, tunnels leading to important places — are often guarded. These guardians are usually subsidiary nephwracks, cunning shades or small bands of battle-hardened mortwights. Whatever their force composition, their purpose is to prevent unauthorized transit or to protect their leader's exclusive access to the resource. Some can be bribed, others intimidated, and several Abyssals can typically slay such beings without fear of immediate injury, although later political repercussions may be problematic. Bypassing a party of guardians typically requires a successful Manipulation + Presence roll, the difficulty ranging from 3 to 7, depending on the situation and relations between the warder's master and the navigator's.

Warders: Like guardians, warders are usually set to defend a particular part of the Labyrinth or to watch over some resource or feature that their master would like to see remain in his control. Warders are different than guardians in that they are typically inexperienced. It might be an acolyte nephwrack with a small pack of shades or barghests or a green unit of mortwright infantry.

Warders are usually easy to bribe or intimidate (+2 dice to all Bureaucracy, Larceny and Socialize pools). Many are desperate for some kind of conversation or news. Bypassing a warder is typically a Manipulation + Socialize roll, the difficulty ranging from 2 to 4, depending on relations between the warder's master and those of the navigator, recent events and other difficulties.

War Party: War parties are typically a mix of spectres and hungry ghosts, sometimes lead by a nephwrack. Unlike guardians or warders, war parties are almost invariably hostile. However, they are not mindless. They will usually take time to size up a potential opponent before attacking and may enter negotiation with an obviously superior foe. Bypassing a war party is typically a Manipulation + Presence roll, the difficulty ranging from 3 to 7, depending on relations between the war party's master and those of the navigator.

Wilding Pack: A wild pack of hungry ghosts or barghests on the hunt. Wilding packs can sometimes be bribed (typically through their stomachs) or intimidated. Difficulty for bypassing a wilding pack usually ranges from 3 to 7 or more, depending on the size and power of the pack, their chances elsewhere and their degree of hunger.

Nomadic Hekatonkhire: The traveler encounters a hekatonkhire or other major beast of the Labyrinth. This threat can be a serious one to even a prepared band of Abyssals and their war party. Fortunately, hekatonkhire are often sleeping, distracted or simply unwilling to



recognize the Abyssal's group as a threat. Some hekatonkhire can be bribed (the nature of the bribe varies wildly). Few can be meaningfully intimidated (difficulty 5 at the minimum).

Natural Hazards: The Labyrinth would be an amazingly dangerous place even without patrols and creatures. Steep crumbling crevasses, tunnels and chambers that abruptly narrow down too small for a person to move through, horrible flash floods of mucus, blood, water or acid and sudden geysers of pyre flame (see p. 256) are all possible natural hazards an Abyssal group could run into while trying to navigate the Labyrinth. Natural hazards can usually be bypassed with a Dexterity + Survival roll—difficulty ranges from 2 up, depending on the nature of

the hazard. Failure usually indicates eight to twelve health levels of lethal damage (this can be soaked normally), while a botch might double that damage or introduce some further complication (missing Storyteller characters, lost weapons, etc.).

Terrain Shift: Occupied parts of the Labyrinth are usually stable, but occasionally, they can undergo massive changes in structure and form without warning. Such shifts are rarely instantly lethal, but they can plunge those caught up in one into deep canyons, underground rivers, plains of magma or other terrain features. A terrain shift can be handled like natural hazards, above, but it is usually a Dexterity + Athletics roll, difficulty 4+, and may require additional rolls afterward, to handle the new terrain.



The Immaculate was resplendent in his glittering white-jade armor, the vanguard of the mercenary army that even now vexed her master's forces. He was wading through the press, his white warclub, now smeared with pus and maggots, cutting a clean arc through the ranks of the walking dead again and again. He and his men had held up her troops for weeks. The Maiden of the Mirthless Smile would have paid good jade to find out who had hired private soldiers, especially crack troops such as these, to man garrisons that were supposed to be long evacuated.

The hero appeared to be young, as all Dragon-Blooded did. By his face, he was a freckle-dusted soldier, no more than 20 years of age. His stance suggested otherwise, and the Abyssal estimated him at a little over a century. With his excellent gear, he wasn't some outcaste coming down from the hills to do his duty, he was a political exile, a religious zealot or an Seventh Legion soldier fighting under false colors as a "volunteer." His tetsubo was white-jade alloy like his armor, banded and studded with pure black-jade ornaments. The Maiden of the Mirthless Smile's eyes flicked across it. It was a grand goremaul, not a family heirloom, but still an ornate rarity — not unlike her own weapon.

But the weapon and the fighter's stance marked the Dragon-Blood as a Hill-Crushing Hero, a fighting style that the Maiden of the Mirthless Smile had heard of but never seen before now. Those Immaculates who styled themselves "Hill-Crushing Heroes" combined their Earth Dragon martial-arts techniques with secular Charms that enhanced their strength and ability to strike with jade weapons. It was said that, when the style was mastered, a blow from one of their jade maces could knock even a war god senseless, and properly used, the technique was almost invincible.

It hardly mattered — the Maiden of the Mirthless Smile was a master strategist. She was certain she could not stand up to one of his Hill-Crushing Blows. Her soulsteel body armor would crumple, and her bones would break. Thus, it was necessary that she employ a ruse. She urged her company forward into the press, and without hesitation, they threw their corpse-bodies into the path of his mace. She hung back, and a few moments later, when he had destroyed most of them, she calmly advanced forward, imitating the slumping gait of the walking dead and entered the press with the undead stragglers.

She watched as he artlessly demolished her troops. He fought predictably and with no thought of defense, not even seeing who he killed. She stepped forward and deflected his mighty hammer as it whipped casually for her head. As the tip of her grand daiklave left the ground for the block, she activated her special "Wolf Catching the Snake's Tail" technique, which many among the Exalted had come to fear.

Her sword effortlessly flicked aside the head of his jade mace, and then, her grand daiklave Ironic Jest snapped forward as the Abyssal herself leapt back to give her terrible curved sabre room. The Maiden's counterstroke bit through the Immaculate's articulated plate armor and severed his right arm. He stared dumbfounded at the Abyssal who seemed to have suddenly materialized in his presence, crackling with live Essence, and she brought the sword around again and severed his other arm. The arms and the mace fell to the ground with a thud, and the Terrestrial stood there, staring stupidly at her, unable to imagine what could have just happened. She beheaded him without grace or dignity, deliberately leaving an ear, part of the chin and both the upper and lower teeth on one side attached to the neck.

No grace in life, no grace in death.



CHAPTER TWO

DEATHLORDS AND ABYSSALS

The Solar Exalted fell. Some call their downfall the result of treachery. Others claim it was a comeuppance long overdue. Those who were not slain immediately were hunted and dispatched after battles that shattered the heart of their glorious civilization, while a few died alone and miserable in hidden places throughout Creation. To prevent the Solars from passing into the cycle of reincarnation, certain Sidereal Exalted used Celestial Sorcery and destiny-manipulation to coerce the Essences of the slain Solars into the Jade Prison, an enormous structure that the Dragon-Blooded then sank to the bottom of the Inland Sea. They did this to lock away the Solar Exalted forever. The animal souls of the fallen Solar Exalted were placated with vast and elaborate tombs, while their higher souls haunted the Inland Sea in mute anger and frustration, gazing longingly at the weak apparition of the Jade Prison, forever out of their reach.

In time, certain Malfeans approached the mad and anguished ghosts of the defeated Solars and offered them a bargain. In exchange for their names and very destinies, they could enjoy immeasurable might as the all-powerful rulers of the Underworld and take their revenge on all of Creation. Most refused. Ten accepted immediately, with the ghost who would become the First and Forsaken Lion being the first. Three others agreed following their deaths centuries later. The Malfeans took them to the Labyrinth, where the dead

Primordials worked their black miracles, imbuing the ghosts of the Solars with their own tainted power.

Thus, the Deathlords were born.

THE DEATHLORDS

The Deathlords did not ride out of the Labyrinth like a storm, conquering the Underworld and imposing their imperial might upon the dead. They came, instead, quietly and individually, some rising out of ancient cracks in the broken land, others materializing out of thin air or the gray dusty rain. Over the course of a dozen years, all 10 of the original Deathlords had arrived, appearing to all eyes as unobtrusive, though noteworthy, scholar kings, seemingly more interested in knowledge than conquest, who soon melted into the background and were left alone to their studies.

During these first centuries, before the terror of the Great Contagion, the Deathlords had little contact with one another apart from the rare bargain for artifacts, slave sachets and discovered secrets. A diplomatic tradition developed among the Deathlords during these tense exchanges that brought some of them together as occasional allies, though none had any great love or sympathy for the others or their goals. Such alliances commonly ended quickly, though rarely with treachery. The Deathlords also agreed that the city of Stygia, the city at the center of the Underworld, and, likewise, the Mouth of Oblivion were to remain

neutral territory — places to worship and even gather for sacred rituals, not places befitting conquest. For centuries, time passed quietly, and the Deathlords' power grew.

THE GREAT CONTAGION

When mortals perish during events of great mortal consequence, the Underworld comes to Creation, tearing at the veil separating the living and the dead. Before the Great Contagion, few known shadowlands existed. These were usually the sites of momentous battles and were avoided by most out of either reverence for the fallen or for fear of what lie in wait for lone travelers in those dark and stagnant patches of the world.

The Deathlords watched these enigmatic places very carefully, testing their properties and investigating the possibilities of exploiting them. One shadowland stood out as more robust and stable than the rest, an ancient battle site far to the northeast of Greyfalls, now a quiet and defiled fen haunted by fallen warriors. The Deathlord known as the Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate in Unrent Veils entered this place and discovered its secrets. She quickly mastered the peculiar metaphysics of shadowlands and sold her findings to the other Deathlords, who set to work individually on plans to extend death's domain. As they did so, the Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate in Unrent Veils discovered an ancient buried temple in one of the only large shadowlands then extant, a place of ancient power predating the time of man. At the heart of this temple, she found the Well of Udr, a portal to the Labyrinth and a fountain of dark knowledge.

After more than a century of secret research, the Dowager called the others to congress in Stygia to berate her brothers and sisters and to present her plan. Their ambitions were too narrow, she scoffed, their appetites too small. Their petty campaigns would result only in dark spots in Creation that even the Dragon-Blooded could hem in and reduce. It would be better, she suggested, to think on a grander scale. A more effective plan would be to strike Creation once with a blow so powerful that all lands must descend into the shadows. She proposed the disaster that would become known as the Great Contagion, which, in its original conception, was to slay every living thing. The other Deathlords acquiesced eagerly, and a horrifying catastrophe set upon the world, a deadly sorcerous disease heaved up into Creation through the Well of Udr, which spread quickly and silently across the land and sea, massacring millions and sending the whole of the world into a age of darkness and misery.

Calamitous years passed, and the dead flooded the Underworld. The Deathlords welcomed the dead multitudes and cultivated their power in Creation in preparation for their victory. But progress seemed slower than some Deathlords expected. Growing impatient,





THE SEVEN DIVINE COUNSELORS

The Seven Divine Counselors served as prudent and learned sages and advisors to the rulers of Stygia. Alternately valued greatly and dismissed as useless throughout the history of the Underworld, they had the advantage of continuance on their side, as they had held their positions since the first kings rose to power in Stygia. Before Stygia was even a thought, the Seven were seekers into the mysteries of the land of the dead. Between them, it is said, they knew everything there was to know in the Underworld.

Using auguries and ancient devices, the Seven Divine Counselors immediately saw the Deathlords for what they were. While most other rulers of the Underworld viewed the Deathlords' arrival in the Underworld with a quiet, unconcerned nod, the Counselors knew what power the Deathlords possessed, for the cunning of the Seven could see into the Deathlords' souls and divine their dark destinies. Over the years that followed, most of the rulers of Stygia ignored the Counselors' warnings, unconvinced that any power could bring change into the seemingly immovable stagnancy of the Underworld. The First and Forsaken Lion's sudden arrival in Stygia changed everything.

The Seven Divine Counselors first advised that the gates be closed to the First and Forsaken Lion's army. When the invader forced his army into the city and demanded that homage be paid to him, the Counselors again advised the Dual Monarchs to refuse his request. Learning of their disobedience, and considering it to be the lowest of treachery, the First and Forsaken Lion struck them down and bound them in soulsteel chains, commanding them to worship him. Being proud, they again refused. Angered, the First and Forsaken Lion made a show of hurling the Counselors into Oblivion and commanding the rulers of Stygia to pay obeisance to him. Witnessing this spectacle, the Dual Monarchs bowed and swore to never transgress against him or any other Deathlord.

the First and Forsaken Lion and Eye and Seven Despairs took matters a step further. The two surreptitious Deathlords secretly sent emissaries to Fair Folk elders on the edges of the Creation, offering some dark deal, granting access, leave and perhaps assistance to the malign and bitter Fair Folk to do as they wished to the living. The Fair Folk took the bargain and set upon Creation during its hour of greatest desperation. The Fair Folk's invasion was not merely an opportunistic attack. They were invited to Creation's shores.

The Fair Folk were terrible. The fae host and its incomprehensible weapons washed across Creation and slew all that they encountered. As the mortal realms descended further into chaos and dissolution and despair, the dead poured into the Underworld, and the Deathlords reveled in their triumph. The shadowlands grew larger, with new patches of darkness emerging every day. All seemed lost for Creation, until the First Age defenses in the Imperial City were finally activated, the Fair Folk scattered and the holocaust suddenly brought to a halt.

A FRACTURED ALLIANCE

Citing the throngs of newly arrived ghosts in Stygia as a pretense, the First and Forsaken Lion invaded Stygia, claiming that his army would bring order to a city unable to contend with its own numbers. The Lion marched on the city from the East, but the army found the gates of Stygia closed to it. After demanding that the gates be thrown open and receiving only mocking silence in response, the First and Forsaken Lion himself tore the cold black barrier down with his hands. He later would reforge the gate and place it before his own citadel in Stygia. Another city gate was never erected.

Never before had such terror been brought to the Underworld's capital. The First and Forsaken Lion proscribed citizens and enslaved the defiant, transmuting them into winged incubi children subject to his every command. He pitched thousands of the dead into the Mouth of the Void as a demonstration of his power and what lie in wait for dissenters. The Stygian dead reacted with horror, their eyes suddenly opened to the true nature of the Deathlords.

The other Deathlords were furious. Some of them assembled armies of their own and set out to challenge the First and Forsaken Lion's position as Stygia's ruler. Others approached Stygia with but a small entourage. Six Deathlords in all came to Stygia, where they found the Forsaken Lion's army surrounding the city, accompanied by giant bone automata and several ensorcelled behemoths, so that none could pass. The First and Forsaken Lion's army outnumbered all of their forces combined. His Legion Sanguinary dispatched the enemy armies, leaving the other Deathlords alone on the field of battle, facing a numberless army and the sorcerous powers of a foe who knew their minds and had prepared for their arrival.

In the time that followed, the Deathlords discovered that Eye and Seven Despairs, for reasons unknown to any, had, in the night, entered the city and joined with First and Forsaken Lion. In a jealous rage, the remaining five Deathlords poured their collective might into a powerful spell. Nine enormous fists made of the twilight descended from the sky, tearing a swathe through the Forsaken Lion's army as thousands of black spirits rose out of the Void, scattering the remaining troops, allowing the Deathlords to enter the city and confront the traitors.

A political power struggle ensued. Its swiftly shifting alliances and dramatic betrayals proved to all the Deathlords that, having found nothing but defeat in Creation, each of them desired nothing more than to seize the throne of Stygia for him- or herself. None of them were interested in serious alliances, and none of their fellow Deathlords could be trusted. Out of apprehension, they decided to make their occupation of Stygia permanent, to rule as a congress, leaving the Dual Monarchs to stand as figureheads and the Deathlords' own instruments of rule. Each Deathlord erected a citadel, razing huge portions of the city in so doing. Ever since, Stygia has been an occupied city-state.

A SECOND ALLIANCE

Centuries passed, and among the Deathlords, a status quo of moribund complacency again held sway. Each pursued his own researches alone in his libraries and laboratories. A few quietly grew their power and influence in mortal lands. Most concentrated on cultivating their individual plans for conquest without yet occupying the shadowlands. Mortals barely took notice of the few dark powers that came into their midst. The Second Age was already a dark time — few took notice of any one shadow.

Not long ago, the Neverborn approached several of their living cousins, the Demon Princes, and negotiated a bargain. The Yozi agreed to teach the Deathlords to corrupt Exalted Essences so that minions might be fashioned to act as the Deathlords' intermediaries in Creation. For their effort, the Yozi Princes demanded a payment of 50 Solar Essences for themselves.

The Neverborn ordered a second congress of the Deathlords, the first since the initial occupation of Stygia, and the Deathlords decided upon a plan to retrieve the Solar Essences from the Jade Prison to satisfy their masters' bargain with the Yozi.

The Jade Prison held over 300 Solar Essences. After the Demon Princes were paid, the remainder would belong to the Deathlords to use in the creation of an army of deathknights who could overpower all opposition in Creation. No one — certainly not the tattered remnants of the Dragon-Blooded Host — would be able to withstand their might. The Deathlords would finally have their revenge, and the Malfeans would stand victorious over Creation.

Unable themselves to travel to where the Prison lay beneath the Inland Sea, the Deathlords combined their knowledge and sorcerous skill to construct a gigantic skeletal servitor, built from the combined bones of several behemoths and standing 300 feet in height. They dispatched their monstrosity into Creation, commanding it to journey to the bottom of the Inland Sea, to where the Jade Prison lay. Once there, it was to tear the cage open, catching the Solar Essences as they fled.

But the servitor was too slow. Perhaps it could not move so quickly underwater as the Deathlords had believed, or perhaps other forces moved to hinder its mission. Whatever

the reason, half of the Solar Essences escaped and fled into Creation, desperately seeking new hosts after their ages of imprisonment. The skeletal servitor returned, and when the Deathlords saw its failure, they took the Essences and bitterly discarded their servitor, casting it back into the sea, where it still haunts the wreckage of the Jade Prison.

The Deathlords paid their debt, relinquishing 50 Solar Essences to the Yozi Princes, unaware of what use they would soon make of them. A hundred Essences remained. These, they divided amongst themselves.

The Yozi Princes honored their bargain. They taught the Deathlords the metaphysics of Essence and how to taint and manipulate it. With their new knowledge, the Deathlords withdrew to their laboratories and perfected the arts of Abyssal Exaltation and Abyssal taint. Soon, the first Abyssal Exalted walked in Creation, with death riding in his wake.

A NOMINAL SUCCESS

The Deathlords remained unaware of the fate of those escaped Solar Essences. They knew that their prey had fled, but they remained unsure of whether or not the Solar Exalted would ever walk in Creation again. Even if they did, they surmised, the Solars would be too scattered and disorganized to be of any concern to the powerful front the deathknights would present. In any case, the deathknights have been assured victorious destinies by the Neverborn, while the gods have become hopelessly addicted to the Games of Divinity. The news of Solar Exalted emerging here and there in the Threshold brought amusement to some Deathlords, who began plotting the corruption of their peers. Other Deathlords took the news as the potentially serious threat it was and doubled their efforts to combat those who would resist them.

As they observed the return of the Solars, the Deathlords set about corrupting the Solar Essences they controlled and searching for mortals to corrupt and tempt with the dark powers they could offer. The Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears enjoyed the first success, who became a Midnight Caste she called the Martyr to the Last Rest, a ripe and young champion still holding high favor from his mistress. The other Deathlords followed suit, each wasting no time in using their new servants to further their own individual plans and schemes.

Three years ago, the Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water managed to imprison an itinerant Solar Exalted who had made his way to Skullstone. The Silver Prince rejoiced, considering the event some fortunate omen, and set about torturing and interrogating the Solar. The Solar did not cooperate. Angered, the Bodhisattva threw the Solar into a Monstrance of Celestial Portion, where his prisoner suffered and withered as the days turned into weeks and then months. Eventually, the Solar's will collapsed, and he consented to the service of the Malfeans and was taken to the Labyrinth and corrupted there. The new deathknight



was called Fallen Wolf of the Cutting Sea. He has since disappeared, being exiled from Skullstone for seven and ten years for disobedience to his master. Spies and rumor swiftly brought the news to the other Deathlords, who now keep their eyes open for wayward and unsuspecting Solar Exalted vulnerable to temptation.

WHAT ARE THE DEATHLORDS?

The Deathlords are hypostases of evil set upon Creation, the apotheoses of deliberate destruction. They are 13 dead Solar Exalted who, following their deaths during the Usurpation and afterward, accepted a bargain with the Neverborn. The bargain was thus: to serve Oblivion, to turn their backs on the Unconquered Sun in exchange for the power to exact their revenge on the living. This volume details eight of the active Deathlords, leaving the remaining five to the Storyteller's imagination.

The Deathlords as a whole might have been at first, somewhat similar in character. Each was a victim of treachery, each lived a life of unfathomable excess, and each was of such a character as to accept the Malfeans' bargain to begin with. However, through time and experience, they have grown into strikingly distinct entities. As the Malfeans have their individual quirks, with some being more devoted to the cause than others, so the Deathlords each have their own ways and perspectives on both their place in the world and the power granted them. Some have become lunatic in their pursuit of Creation's doom, while others have all but abandoned that cause in lieu of their own individual schemes. Some have met with wild success, while others seem cursed to eternal anguish and failure. The younger of the Deathlords still have a measure of enthusiasm for military conquest, while more experienced Deathlords have devised schemes that make conquest seem like a needless struggle.

The Deathlords each serve the Malfean cause in different ways, depending upon which lord or lords they serve and what tasks they are commanded to perform. When they were first created, some Deathlords swore loyalty and servitude to several Neverborn. A few — Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers, for instance — serve only one ultimate master. During the course of their dark existences, the Deathlords may pledge themselves to other Malfeans as well. Most Malfeans accept this practice, since they all, at least in theory, share the same goals.

But too many masters make for a poor servant. Some Deathlords have managed to swear themselves to three or more Malfeans, though none have exceeded this. The Malfeans have made it known that if their Deathlord servitors serve more than two other Neverborn, their displeasure will be made known.

Some Malfeans are more active in their campaigning than others. Many of them leave specific strategies to the Deathlords, though a few dictate their vassals' every step and demand that they follow every command to the letter.

Some Deathlords have not seen or heard from their Malfean masters for hundreds of years. Others are constantly being summoned back to the Labyrinth for parlays.

Ultimately, the ways and designs of the Neverborn are a mystery even to the Deathlords, who know only what their individual masters wish them to know. Each of the Deathlords have, in their own way, learned that the Malfeans are not of one mind, even when it comes to their main objectives. Malfeans often pit Deathlord against Deathlord in mad and pointless schemes or in response to some ancient vendetta.

However, the Neverborn sleep, and in their sleep, the Neverborn are always dreaming of the day when they will have their revenge on the gods. Their amusement is not the purpose of the Deathlords. The Malfeans created the Deathlords to be their agents and intermediaries in the Underworld, just as the Abyssal Exalted act as the agents of the Deathlords in Creation. This is the purpose of the Deathlords — to manipulate events and prepare Creation to join the Malfeans in the black embrace of Death, for only when no life exists can the Neverborn cease to be. When the time of their inevitable victory has come to pass, they shall lead the ghosts of Creation into the welcoming Mouth of the Void.

WHAT DEATHLORDS DO

Deathlords often sit in their towers of bone and stare off into the expanses of the Underworld, mutely contemplating the beauty of decay. They are, at times, perfectly willing to squander unreasonable amounts of effort and power in the pursuit of seemingly insignificant though troublesome foes. They even scowl in frustration and angst over loves lost, plans gone awry or devastating defeats.

But that is not all that they do. Such posturing is excellent for the morale of the troops and is effective propaganda for the Deathlord's power, but it's not the sum of a Deathlord's existence. There is real work to be done — and the death of all mortal things is no small task.

First and foremost, the Deathlords do their best to further the Malfean cause whenever possible. Each of the Deathlords has short-term campaigns to multiply the number and size of shadowlands in an effort to choke the living realms that lie between them. Individual Deathlords execute these plots differently. Some use charisma or trickery, while others just dispatch armies to outright slay the living. Regardless of method, the end result is much the same: fodder for the soulforges, husks for undead servants and the ghosts of the dead as minions and soldiers. Secondly, some Deathlords desire to rectify the error of allowing so many Solar Essences to escape their clutches by subverting and tainting the extant Solar Exalted whose Essences escaped.

Not all of the Deathlords, however, devote themselves so completely to the greater, long-term goal — that of bringing all that lives under the yoke of death so that the

Neverborn can draw the Underworld into the Mouth of the Void and bring blessed entropy to all existence. Some, such as the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible, pursue these goals quite fervently, while others, such as Eye and Seven Despairs, seem bent on ruling their own kingdoms of the dead.

Some Deathlords, such as the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears, pursue their goals in seeming idleness, trusting their deathknights and other servants to act in their stead. They enjoy what indulgences and wanton depravities they like and direct their minions as they see fit. Others pursue their long-term goal undaunted by distractions or frivolities — and, sometimes, even in the face of overwhelming disadvantages. For example, since his maiming, the First and Forsaken Lion always obeys the commands of the Neverborn unquestioningly. This latter group of Deathlords usually prefer to make all of the decisions, large and small, and often ride alongside their deathknights on missions or at the head of their armies in battle.

Despite their overarching goal of bringing death to all Creation, Deathlords very rarely venture into Creation itself. As ghosts, albeit very powerful ones, Deathlords do not regain Essence in the realm of the living and so can be left vulnerable, especially if stranded far from a shadowland. In addition, many of them rely largely on artifacts reforged from their own grave goods, and these wither if made to enter the land of the living.

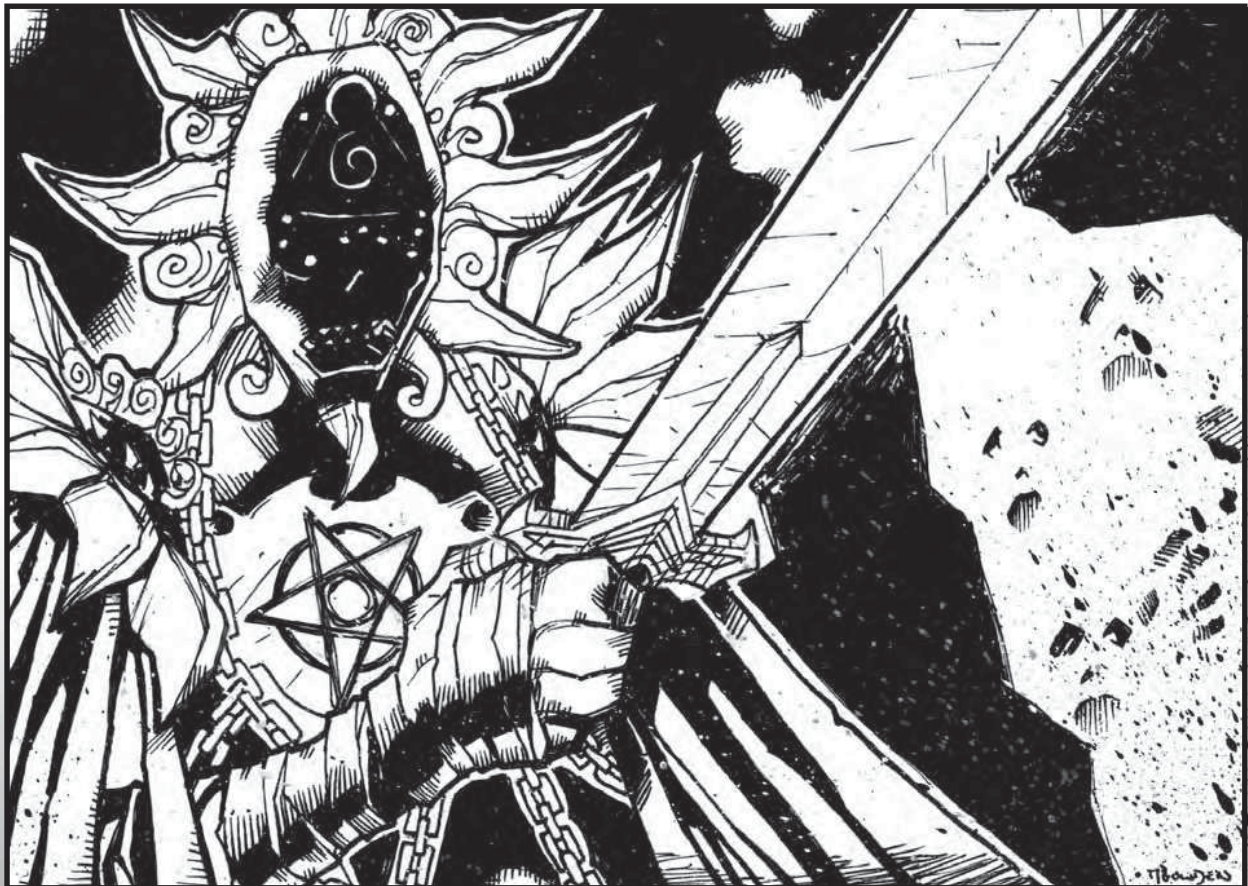
PAST LIVES

As a rule, the Deathlords possess only vague memories of their former lives as Solar Exalted. Though aware that they were Exalted and that they accepted their evil lot at least in part to take revenge on a world that murdered them, the details are hazy, becoming more so the further back into pre-Usurpation time the Deathlord tries to remember. Their names are gone, lost to the endless emptiness of Oblivion.

How much they remember depends on how attached the Deathlords were to their former lives, what regrets they have and what they left behind that still has power over them. The First and Forsaken Lion, for example, remembers nothing of his former life except that he was a great ruler of men and that he was beloved by his subjects. The Mask of Winters, on the other hand, remembers practically everything about his former life, as his very existence as a Deathlord is closely tied to events in that life.

THE USE OF SOULS

Deathlords derive their power from souls in a number of ways. Most of the dead that come into a Deathlord's grasp are useless, being unskilled in savantry, artifice, espionage or war. A Deathlord's artificers use these souls in forging soulsteel, a fate tantamount to eternal imprisonment. Deathlords typically employ dozens of artificers in





their soulforges, soulsteel being a material of enormous import and usefulness.

The dead who offer some skill or knowledge to a Deathlord have a fair chance of being used as war ghosts or in some other useful position, depending on what expertise the ghost possesses. When a need for labor exists, ghosts may be bound in soulsteel chains and consigned to slavery for the glory of their lord. Some Deathlords possess thousands of these slaves, who cannot escape their soulsteel bonds even by slipping into Lethe, the bitter and wrathful souls within their chains hurling them into the Oblivion instead.

A UNIFIED FRONT?

Long ago, the Deathlords were more unified and, in that respect, mightier than they are today. The various rifts, betrayals, wars and disagreements over the centuries have soured them on all but the most empty and politically motivated of alliances with one another. Once, the Deathlords might have been willing to plot, conspire and even ride into battle beside each other for the sake of their mutual cause. Now, they have each of them retired for the most part to their own shadowland citadels to carry out their private schemes, most entertaining the meaningless formalities of politics in Stygia when the situation requires, others not even bothering. These days, most of them abhor even the mention of another Deathlord's name or the sound of one another's voices.

Diplomacy among the Deathlords is accomplished at a congress in Stygia, though private negotiations certainly take place as well. As a rule, the Deathlords' formal diplomacy is a chilly affair. Certain few Deathlords, such as the Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water (also called the Silver Prince) mask their utter contempt for their kin in empty pleasantries. However, in general, the Deathlords resent one another bitterly and make no attempt to hide it. Their hatred often finds expression in vocal challenges, subtle antagonism and out-and-out hostility.

However, despite their hatred for one another, formal promises and oaths have significance even for Deathlords. While they have no difficulty in disregarding vows to mortals and spirits in Creation, Deathlords practically never renege on their agreements with each other, for fear of another schism akin to the one that followed in the wake of the First and Forsaken Lion's treachery. The last thing most of the Deathlords want is an open war involving all of their forces. Few of them have the power to launch a major military campaign, and they all know and fear the size of the First and Forsaken Lion's army and the dire and enigmatic powers their masters possess over their souls and the Underworld.

PROPAGANDA

While Deathlords might find cooperating with their brethren abhorrent or distasteful, they were all created with the express purpose of bringing about the end of

everything that lives. Since they cannot, as yet, simply march an army out of the shadowlands and overrun Creation, most Deathlords make use of various forms of propaganda. Their idea is that the minds of mortals can be won with lies and deception where military might cannot succeed. The goal of this propaganda is to convince mortals that death is the fated, and therefore holy and worthy, end of all existence.

In death, the Deathlords' servants preach, one finds wholeness and a complete lack of want. Never again must a mortal feel hunger or sickness or despair. After passing into the Underworld, that person lives forever among fallen loved ones and glorious heroes of past ages. And as long as the living continue to offer up prayers and sacrifices to the fallen, those ghosts will thrive and grow mighty.

Each Deathlord goes about spreading these notions in her own way, though some depend upon the wholesale acceptance of it more than others. When possible, especially vocal skeptics are put down quietly, though decisively. There aren't many cynics to be found, though. The afterlife is a foregone conclusion and open to doubt by none. Even among those who follow the Immaculate Philosophy, there are individuals for whom an unrighteous life makes reincarnation harbor horrific possibilities and others who would rather persist in their own identity and live out eternity with their families.

It aids the Deathlords that their portrayal of the Underworld is far from honest. None of the rhetoric mentions the dead being exploited as fodder for soulsteel. The possibility of slavery in the Deathlords' service is likewise omitted from their sermons. But the main difference between the Deathlords' rhetoric and the truth of their mission is that the Deathlords' mission is to drag Creation kicking and screaming into the Underworld to pave the way for the final end to all things. The death of all life is just the beginning of the journey to the true and final destination. Without the living to offer prayers and sacrifices to their loved ones, the Underworld will fade away into Oblivion. An elaborate religion based on ancestor-worship loses its appeal when the worshipers learn that the ultimate goal is to not only to deny the worshipers of everything promised them, but ultimately, to eradicate them from existence, and so, the Deathlords carefully conceal the truth from both the living and the dead.

WHAT THE DEATHLORDS KNOW ABOUT CREATION

Each Deathlord has his own motivations and peculiar habits. Yet, they share ultimate goals and origins, are subject to the same basic limitations and, hence, enjoy some common qualities with respect to their knowledge.

All of the Deathlords are the equivalent of First Age savants when it comes to knowledge of the metaphysics of death and the peculiarities of the Underworld, including its geography, customs and societies. Having spent so much time with their Malfean masters at the beginning of

their careers, they are also very knowledgeable of the rules and customs of the Labyrinth. This is not to say that all Deathlords fully understand all of the mysteries of the Underworld — they don't — but they have been there for centuries and have more power to penetrate the enigmas of that realm than anyone else.

Through sorcerous scrying and the reports from their own agents, each Deathlord has attained an uncanny familiarity with the shadowland in which his citadel is built. Any potential enemies of consequence are either quickly obliterated or watched very carefully. Mortal realms within a Deathlord's shadowland are made vassals to their baneful neighbor, the alternative being death, followed by horrible torture, ending, if the offenders are in luck, with their substance being forged into soulsteel for the Deathlord's Abyssal servants.

Other realms prove more problematic. Despite their spies, most Deathlords understand little of the current political realities in Creation, especially the Realm. Mortal princes, in general, hold no particular luster to any of the Deathlords and are valued only for their ability to lead subjects to their deaths. Paradoxically, for the Deathlord who has interacted with Creation the most, specific political knowledge was not a requirement. The Mask of Winters had no need of any particular savvy in his strike against Thorns. Some of the Deathlords, however, have realized that conquering the Realm may require some political machinations and have begun collecting as much information as possible.

Deathlords, for the most part, possess little knowledge of Fair Folk or their realms. Only the First and Forsaken Lion has made any progress in establishing links with them, and this may, perhaps, turn out to be a foolish ambition on his part. Generally, the Deathlords avoid the Fair Folk whenever possible, for the madness of the faerie is not compatible with the Deathlords' plans for universal oblivion. However, the Deathlords know that the Fair Folk fear the invincible certainty of death and keep their distance as well.

The Yozis have always been standoffish with the Deathlords. Although they have imparted certain of their secrets, many mysteries remain. This includes their ultimate goals, which seem inconsistent with the Deathlords' own program of wholesale extinction. Some Deathlords see them as a potential threat, for their goals will prove all the more difficult if the Demon Princes are successful at freeing themselves from their imprisonment. The Yozis' plans for the 50 Solar Essences are as yet unclear to the Deathlords and are cause for worry for some of them. The imprisoned Primordials certainly know how to make use of their prizes, and there is no reason to believe that the knowledge they imparted to the Malfeans is the full extent of their evil power. As a rule, Deathlords practice care in dealing with demons and do not let the children of the Yozis wander near their secret places.

NAMES

The Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible was obviously not known by this name in his previous life as a Solar Exalted. He and the other newly installed Deathlords traded their names away for power. Now, titles shroud the emptiness within their souls. Their former names were eaten and cast into the Void.

The titles the Deathlords have taken come from a many sources, though usually spring from their own ego-centric minds. Sometimes, they find favor in a title given them by a neighboring ruler or by some powerful spirit they wish to impress or otherwise remain in good favor with. The Neverborn provide titles as well and always refer to the Deathlords by the appellations they have allotted. Many Deathlords have taken several titles, and refer to themselves by each of them at their pleasure. The Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water goes by several titles, most notably the Silver Prince, which he is commonly named by foreigners. The First and Forsaken Lion once bore many titles but now goes by only one.

WEAPONS AND ARTIFACTS

Much like with their names, Deathlords did not spring into being possessed of potent weaponry and dread artifacts. Some of these prizes may have granted them by their Neverborn masters following their rebirth as a Deathlord, but by no means all. The First and Forsaken Lion holds the Seven Divine Counselors prisoner as his slaves not by means of any gift, but by his own craftiness and might. The Deathlords keep master artisans to assist in fashioning soulsteel weapons and armor, but the construction of these and other powerful items require the Deathlords' Void Circle Necromancy. Because they have had centuries to craft such things, each Deathlord will have any number of level 1 through 3 artifacts and a number of level 4 or 5 artifacts at his disposal.

CITADELS

The Deathlords are responsible for the construction of their own palaces and abodes. In some cases, they are ordered to build in a specific location for reasons known only to their commanding Neverborn, but the actual construction is up to the Deathlord. Deathlords typically build their citadels within or near to a shadowland, to allow easy access to Creation. Construction can last anywhere from days to decades, depending on the skill of the Deathlord and his mastery of the appropriate Void Circle Necromancy spells. Some citadels, such as the Thousand, are so massive and complex as to require myriad spells and an incredible amount of research.

As a matter of convenience, a Deathlord's citadel also functions as a Manse, so finding a Demesne within a shadowland is an important undertaking when deciding where to build. Deathlords typically *don't* build citadels close to the edge of a shadowland for the sake of defensibility and privacy.



A DEATHLORD'S INNATE POWERS

All Deathlords have the following powers.

MUTABLE FORM

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower

Deathlords can easily change their appearance into that of any creature, ranging in size from a dog to a large man. Larger creatures are possible, but require them to expend a great deal of Essence.

EYES OF OBLIVION

Cost: 2 motes

Ordinary mortals are no match for the Deathlords, who have the ability to slay any ordinary mortal in sight with the expenditure of 2 motes of Essence. If this power is used in a shadowland, the resulting ghost is beholden to the Deathlord for one thousand days. Outside of a shadowland, the mortal dies and passes into the Underworld as a free ghost.

COMMAND OF THE DEAD

Cost: None in a shadowland or the Underworld, 5 motes in Creation

Skeletons, zombies and similarly mindless walking dead cannot resist the command of the Deathlords, regardless of what masters they serve. This power requires no Essence expenditure when used within a

shadowland or the Underworld. Within Creation, the power costs 5 motes to command all the walking dead within sight for the rest of the scene.

FEED ON THE DEAD

Cost: None

When no other sources are available, the Deathlords may drain Essence from ghosts and other denizens of the Underworld. Success is automatic, with each use draining 1 dot of permanent Essence from the victim and adding 3 motes to the Deathlord's Essence pool. This is a dice action that requires no roll. A Deathlord cannot use this power on more than one ghost per turn.

VOID CIRCLE NECROMANCY

Essence Cost: Special

All Deathlords know necromancy of the Void Circle. Many also seem to demonstrate a mastery of sorcery up to at least the Celestial Circle. However, all their sorcerous effects are negative and tainted by Oblivion, so it could be that they use necromantic parodies of conventional spells. It is certain that the Deathlords can conjure demons of the Third Circle, though they do not do so with great frequency. They are also known to possess Charms, talismans or spells that protect them against sorcery of the Terrestrial or Celestial Circles.

One shadowland citadel is usually enough for a Deathlord, though nothing stands in their way should one of them decide to expand her influence by building another within a different shadowland. Such an enterprise lacks practicality, however, as the Deathlord would be forced to split her forces in order to defend additional holdings and deal with such new enemies and threats as might exist in the new locale.

DEATHKNIGHTS

Chosen mortals and corrupted Solar Exalted deemed worthy and valuable enough to champion the cause of Oblivion make up the Deathlords' elite minions. Exalted with Abyss-tainted Essence, deathknights serve the Deathlords as generals, spies, bodyguards and diplomats. Most Deathlords allow at least a few of their deathknights to wander throughout Creation to further the cause in their own way or dispatch them to posts throughout Creation and the Underworld, while requiring other deathknights (those either highly trusted or not trusted enough) to remain at their sides in continual unswerving servitude.

Whatever their particular approach toward their deathknights might be, all Deathlords know that their deathknights travel the same path as themselves, that they are, all of them, destined to bring Creation low in the end. To

defy this fate is foolhardy, for the Neverborn have already seized their names and chained their destinies to their service. Thus, the Deathlords are indulgent of willful deathknights, for, in the end, the willful as well as the subservient carry Oblivion's banner, whether they realize it or not.

Creating deathknights drains a Deathlord a great deal. Considering the painful expense of a deathknight's creation, along with the great advantage of having seasoned deathknights in their retinues, Deathlords typically do not throw them into dire situations needlessly or willfully slay them in punishment for transgressions.

CAN THE DEATHLORDS EVER BE DESTROYED?

The Deathlords are dead, so killing them in any traditional manner would undoubtedly prove ineffective. If defeated in battle, they merely rise again in the Underworld, and none of the methods of dealing with ordinary ghosts would have any effect. It might be that each has a secret weakness, but this might also be a lie created by the gods of Great Forks in the days after the Contagion in order to defeat the Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers. Throwing a Deathlord into the Mouth of Oblivion, if one could manage such a task, would almost certainly destroy that Deathlord forever, as it destroys all other things.

LEGENDS OF THE DEATHLORDS

While certainly not unheard of in Creation, the Deathlords have managed to keep their plans shrouded in mystery and their own public personas either nonexistent or inscrutable. In fact, it is not generally known that Deathlords have a common origin or any kind of solidarity of purpose. Most individuals have heard only one or two titles, and to the world at large, they are enigmatic, without a common thread connecting them apart from their fascination with death. Savants and the well-traveled have made some connections and developed the idea that the Deathlords are a group of some sort. Many Sidereal Exalted know exactly what the Deathlords are, but they keep the knowledge to themselves.

The 13 Deathlords — The wisest Sidereals know that there are 13 Deathlords and believe that this number is somehow astrologically significant to the success of the Malfean cause. This legend is, at least for now, partially true. There are 13 Deathlords, but this has not always been true. Up until very recently, 10 total Deathlords existed, and it is unknown if the Malfeans would or could create more if given an opportunity.

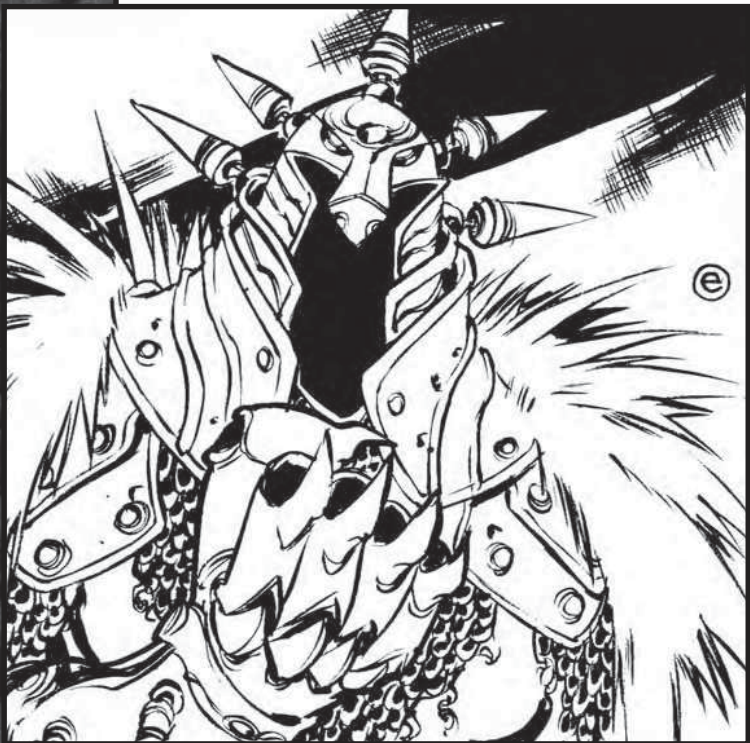
The 14th Deathlord — A few among the wise have read in omens and star charts that a lost Deathlord will one day rise again and conquer the others, ushering in an even darker age of death under one evil gauntlet before Creation's inevitable plunge into Oblivion.

The Deathlords' Secret Weaknesses — Some believe that the Deathlords each have a specific weakness, a hole in their immortal invulnerability that allows their permanent destruction. Such a story certainly offers hope to those few who oppose the Deathlords and their mission, but it is difficult to verify. It is tied in with the gods the Spinner of Glorious Tales and the Weaver of Dreams of Victory and their defeat of the Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers by divine magic (see *Scavenger Sons*, p. 79). It may be that they exploited a weakness they discovered, that their tale was a falsehood so convincing that the Princess Magnificent herself was deceived or that they created the weakness through their spreading of the tale. Even they may not know the truth, for it is often the nature of such magic to deceive the teller as well.

THE FIRST AND FORSAKEN LION

Description: Those daring to even glance at the featureless dark visage beneath the First and Forsaken Lion's helm go mad. An ill-phrased request or mere slip of the tongue earns his eternal enmity. Servants deranged enough to defy his commands can expect nothing less than Oblivion. A towering nine feet in height, faceless and draped in living soulsteel chains from which he drags his 40 incubi-child slaves, the First and Forsaken Lion is the very epitome of dark authority and fearsome power. Plates of notched and scorched armor cover his torso and limbs, and a smooth black helm conceals a contorted face of chaos and void, an amalgam of nothingness and a distorted window into an evil dark soul. From his waist hang seven shorter soulsteel chains, from which hang the skulls of the Seven Divine Counselors. The First and Forsaken Lion has no scruples about dirtying his dried and fractured hands in pursuit of the domination of the Underworld. He has personally led his forces across the Plain of Shards and brought millions of the dead under his imperial boot.

Cunning in conflict and a master of erudite knowledge, the First and Forsaken Lion is never at a loss for action, always dealing with threats quickly and decisively. When faced with an insult or defiance, he is more apt to deal a blow from his own blade, Varan's Ruin, than to command others to take his vengeance for him. When the offending party is not readily at hand, he dispatches one of his Abyssal Exalted to fetch the unfortunate blasphemer, who is drug in chains to the Thousand, where all manner of torment awaits.





VARAN'S RUIN

The First and Forsaken Lion wields Varan's Ruin, a massive grand daiklave over six feet in length, once the legendary blade of Varan Pen, an Exalted hero of the First Age who claimed descent from the gods. Varan fell heroically during the Usurpation, boldly taking the offensive against an army of Dragon-Blooded. He was buried secretly with his sword, which, if legend can be believed, opened the gates of the Underworld to Varan. For an age, he wandered the Underworld's barren wastes and became a champion once more, though there were, in those days, few to laud his great feats. When approached by the minions of the Malfeans and presented with their temptations to dark power, he steadfastly refused and slew the sleeping gods' servants.

In time, Varan met the First and Forsaken Lion, who was not pleased at the sight of the hero.

The Forsaken Lion hollowed out Varan's soul and alloyed it with Varan's blade into a massive daiklave that howls with an ancient pain and oddly gleeful depravity. Varan, now utterly corrupted by the base pleasure he receives when devouring Essence, cries out in mad hunger for his victims' souls.

When one gazes carefully at Varan's Ruin, one can see that hero's face, now mad with rage and hunger. Each blow dealt with Varan's Ruin drains 10 motes from the target's Essence pool. Five of these stolen motes go directly into the First and Forsaken Lion's Essence pool. Five are devoured by Varan. A killing blow from Varan's Ruin absorbs the victim's soul into the blade, where it is quickly consumed by Varan. Ghosts who merely touch the sword and whose players fail a single resistance roll (the ghost's Willpower versus Varan's Manipulation + Essence) are drawn in as well. The approach of any beings, living or dead, elicits yearning moans and tormented wails from the blade.

Soon after his first appearance in the Underworld, the First and Forsaken Lion shunned contact with the denizens of the land of the dead and the other Deathlords, taking up residence in a small castle off the coast far to the Southwest of Stygia. He was forced to abandon and destroy this citadel as a consequence of a deal with the Malfean He Who Holds in Thrall. At this Malfean's command, the Forsaken Lion set about building his current citadel, the fortress-realm known as the Thousand. In addition to this citadel, the First and Forsaken Lion has amassed the largest army in the Underworld, with which he has laid claim to most of the Underworld's South.

The First and Forsaken Lion has not always been so certain of his aggressive and malign role in the Underworld, however. Four hundred years ago, the First and Forsaken Lion rose up and asserted his independence from He Who Holds in Thrall, the Forsaken Lion's Neverborn lord. For his arrogance, the Malfean commanded the Forsaken Lion to march to the Southern mountains of the Underworld, a place devoid of cities and seemingly of little use to anyone. There, he was ordered to turn the mountain range into a fortress-realm. The First and Forsaken Lion questioned the wisdom of the enterprise and, for his defiance, was spirited deep inside the Malfean's tomb, where his tormenter subjected him to torture and curses the likes of which none can imagine and which cannot be described. As a constant reminder of his past insubordination, his master caused hundreds of soulsteel rivets to pierce the substance of his body. With sorcerous tools, the servant of his master attached the components of his soulsteel armor to his torso and limbs, a black carapace that has become his prison. This is his curse for defying his master: endless agony and the immutability of his ethereal body. He returned to the Underworld with an undaunted certainty that the orders of his master should be obeyed without question. The Thousand, the First and Forsaken Lion's palace in the South, was completed less than three years later.

The first of the Deathlords to assert his power in Stygia, the First and Forsaken Lion appeared in that city in a time of discord and commanded ritual observances to be paid to him. Such an affront had never been heard of before, as the Dual Monarch had always ruled without any serious challenge to their authority and, at least at the time, considered the Deathlords minor aristocratic scholars at best — certainly not a serious threat. Given the prevailing attitude, the Seven Divine Counselors instructed the Dual Monarchs to defy the Deathlords at all turns. The Forsaken Lion enslaved them for their defiance and made a show of casting simulacra of their forms into the Abyss. He bound the ethereal skulls of the real Divine Counselors with soulsteel chains. Since then, he has sought to take advantage of the lore the counselors provide, gaining strongholds in the Labyrinth and other key areas around the Underworld and locating scores of lost artifacts.

The First and Forsaken Lion does not spend all of his time conquering, however. He rides with his army during significant campaigns, but he leaves military operations largely to his generals. This Deathlord has been convinced that the key to true power is to delve deeper into the Underworld's own secrets, and he hopes to eventually understand even the enigmas of the dead Primordials. Perhaps he means to someday undo the curse that has been placed upon him, so that he will at last be free of his soulsteel cage. More likely, he has given up all such hope of being whole once more and yearns only for dominion over the living and dead alike.

However, despite his military mastery over the Underworld's South, the Forsaken Lion has not made much progress in Creation. In fact, because he has no ready access to Creation via a shadowland, very few mortals even know that he exists. Recently, however, with the other Deathlords quickly gaining strength through their interaction with the powers in Creation, the Forsaken Lion has admitted, at least to himself, that some effort must be made to secure holdings in the world of the living.

The Forsaken Lion's greatest advantage, apart from his mastery of six of the Seven Divine Counselors and the Legion Sanguinary, is his most valuable minion, the conquered Deathlord Princess Magnificent With Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers. He acquired her servitude by opportunistically pledging himself to the Malfean who had devoured her for her failures. The Forsaken Lion keeps his minion leashed with such potent sorceries that the Princess Magnificent dares not defy him, for fear of being stripped of what remains of the pitiable existence her master grants her. Though he will never admit the fact, the Forsaken Lion is in love with the Princess Magnificent and would protect her at all costs if she were seriously threatened. Outwardly, however, he is short and cruel in his commands to her and has become accustomed to her silent obedience.

THE LEGION SANGUINARY

The First and Forsaken Lion has 750,000 troops — not one of them mortal — at his command and stationed at various barracks in and around the confines of the Thousand, as well as in batteries throughout the South. When this army walks, it can be felt for leagues. Its war trumpets instill fear among the dead and word of its approach sends towns and villages scattering. Nearly the entire South of the Underworld has witnessed, or at least fears, the First and Forsaken Lion's Legion Sanguinary. The rest of the Underworld, with the exception of most of the Deathlords, fears the coming of this force and avoids even mentioning it. No one in Creation knows the true scale of the First and Forsaken Lion's power, assuming they have even heard of him or suspect his eventual campaign there.

This army lies in wait for the day when the Forsaken Lion will initiate his incursion into Creation. War ghosts make up most of the Legion Sanguinary, with a large number of nemissaries serving in his elite forces as reconnaissance and commando elements. The First and Forsaken Lion has also forged a number of warstriders of bone and soulsteel, which stand at the head of his army during battle. The very sight of these fearsome marvels frequently elicits swift surrenders and hasty retreats among enemy armies. The Forsaken Lion's General Diablerie, an Abyssal Exalted called Walking on Laughter, wears the largest and most terrible of these warstriders during significant battles.

The conquest of Creation is not the First and Forsaken Lion's primary concern. He plans to launch a military

campaign there but only in the service of swelling the Legion Sanguinary, which he will then march back into the Underworld, where his true passion for triumph lies.

THE THOUSAND

When not leading his armies or tending to administrative matters in Stygia, the Forsaken Lion dwells in the miles-wide, hollowed-out rocky crags known only as the Thousand. The size of an entire mountain range, the Thousand is more akin to a kingdom rather than a simple palace. Six entire armies — half of the Legion Sanguinary — dwell in this maze of treasure halls and puzzle rooms. Hundreds of slaves administer boundless libraries and stores of ancient artifacts and weapons for their lord. The spires of this magnificent realm are carved out of the mountain's own living rock and often reach such heights that they disappear from sight.

The caves and tunnels below the Thousand, most existing before the Forsaken Lion erected his citadel, contain all manner of roaming beasts unremembered even by the dead, strange treasures of unascertained uses and occasional cavities in the rock containing remarkable Hearthstones of immense size and power. The original inhabitants have long since departed, however, and answers as to the origins of such oddities are not forthcoming.

Deep in the heart of the Thousand sits the First and Forsaken Lion's throne room, a massive, cavernous affair, where echoes distort voices and indistinct shadows dance in the torchlight, with a high-backed and tremendous throne of soulsteel sitting in the center. The throne is encircled by a 30-foot-wide circular chasm of immeasurable depth bridged by steps of gigantic teeth that float in midair. Those who wish to parlay with the Forsaken Lion must cross this bridge without fear or be spilled into the black chasm.

THE FORSAKEN LION'S PLANS

Through his intermediary, Meticulous Owl, the First and Forsaken Lion has brokered a deal with a number of Fair Folk tribes on the borders of Creation. These Fair Folk have tentatively agreed to effect the destruction of the city of Gem in the Southern mountains. Such an attack, if ultimately successful, would likely cause the birth of a new shadowland, with the Thousand at its heart. Taking the initiative, the Forsaken Lion would then have the ability to ride his legions into Creation, in an area where he is sure to be nigh-on unopposed by mortal forces, and conquer the entire South.

Should the First and Forsaken Lion succeed in conquering Creation's South, he will then take his swelled army back to the Thousand and ride into the Underworld, heading first for Stygia, in an attempt to conquer the lands of the dead. His ultimate ambition lies in a final defeat of He Who Holds in Thrall. The First and Forsaken Lion has



STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE LEGION SANGUINARY

Twelve armies, each divided into 12 companies comprise the Forsaken Lion's forces. Half of this force has taken up various positions throughout the Underworld's South, while the other half remains stationed and in constant training at the site of the Thousand. Each army employs many kinds of troops, including infantry, shock troops, cavalry (who ride upon skeletal steeds), archers and divisions of troops trained in the use of siege engines. Troops are generally lightly armored, as the Lion relies on celeritous maneuver and wave tactics to eradicate his enemies. When at war, soldiers change their visage to that of the most horrific and fear-inducing creatures: twisted, massive demonic skeletal shapes, each more terrible than the next. Those conquered find themselves subsumed into the Forsaken Lion's forces or else suffer eternal slavery.

A general stands at the head of each army, each general answering ultimately to the General Diablerie. Each of the 12 armies acts semi-autonomously, as no opponents thus far have required more than one army to conquer, though it is not impossible that future campaigns, especially those in Creation, might demand a larger or more complex invasion force. Each general commands 12 lieutenants, who oversee companies of 5,000 troops.

Each army is designated by the name of its commanding general. Likewise, each company by its lieutenant. Each company is made up of factions, which are designated by function. Within these factions, number designates individuals, the highest number indicating the most senior.

For Example: A soldier might be referred to as Third Archer Roan Fox of Jun One-Eye's Company in General Decider Maya Blackburn's Army, Legion Sanguinary.

Order, not conquest, is the primary purpose of the Legion Sanguinary at present. The First and Forsaken Lion already controls the South and will not seek to extend his rule until he returns from Creation with 10 times his present number to overrun the entire Underworld. Training takes up most of the time of a typical soldier. In order to have the most effective training possible, entire mock-campaigns are constantly being staged in the vicinity of the Thousand. The winners of these operations briefly enjoy high kudos and honors before moving on to another competition.

The Legion Sanguinary is supported by thousands of soulsteel-bound ghost-slaves forced into a variety of roles designed to make conquest as efficient as possible. For the most part, these slaves answer to the detachments of engineers each company employs. They build siege engines, bridges, temporary quarters, walls and whatever else the Legion might require. They also build and repair armor, forge weapons and make arrows. These slaves have been extensively trained and can erect complex structures and machines much faster than their mortal counterparts, even experts. Fear is their primary motivator, but skill also plays a large part in their duties. Slaves who lack the discipline, skill or motivation to work in the engineering detachments make up either the fodder troops used as tactical diversion or the dregs. The dregs sate the passions of the war ghosts, clean troops' quarters and police their camps, make uniforms and act as training targets. Even among other slaves, the dregs are considered inferior beings. Crimes against them are only rarely reported and never investigated.

suffered continuous agony since his humiliating and cruel chastisement, and he now wishes more than anything to have his retribution. He pursues all of his other goals with this final objective in mind. Accepting that he will never again be free of pain and that Princess Magnificent is forever beyond his reach, he hopes that a millions-strong army of the dead will earn him his vengeance.

THE FIRST AND FORSAKEN LION'S SERVANTS

Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers is chief among the Forsaken Lion's servitors and commands the deathknights in his service. Having little to no contact with Creation has rendered the likelihood of finding other suitable deathknights unpromising at best. The Forsaken Lion has succeeded in recruiting only two Abyssal Exalted. Walking on Laughter is the

Dusk Caste Abyssal who commands his armies. A rather young deathknight — it has been less than one year since he entered the Forsaken Lion's service — Walking on Laughter seems to hold everyone and everything in contempt. Drunk with his own newfound power, he yearns to march his master's armies on any possible adversary to prove his might and worthiness. Meticulous Owl, who has been the First and Forsaken Lion's most trusted living servant for many years — gathers information from around the Underworld and the Labyrinth and acts as the Lion's agent in Creation. A Day Caste Abyssal, Meticulous Owl is a gruesome marvel to behold, seeming more like a thing to be pitied than a fierce deathknight of the Underworld. Beneath his black-jade deathmask, his right eye is gone, and the skin on the right side of his face appears melted and mangled. His left arm, infected with Oblivion's touch,

sways almost uselessly from his side as he shambles his hunchbacked body slowly on misshapen and brittle legs.

When it comes to the creation of deathknights, the First and Forsaken Lion prefers to fashion his servants out of whole cloth. He would sooner either Exalt one of his already-trusted servants (as he did with Meticulous Owl) than imbue a pliable-minded mortal with a tainted Essence, so that he can be certain of his deathknight's loyalties. The First and Forsaken Lion views the corruption of Solar Exalted as a fool's game. He thinks that it is better to destroy the servants of the light than to risk the setbacks or betrayals that might ensue if the converted soldiers were to somehow find their way to freedom.

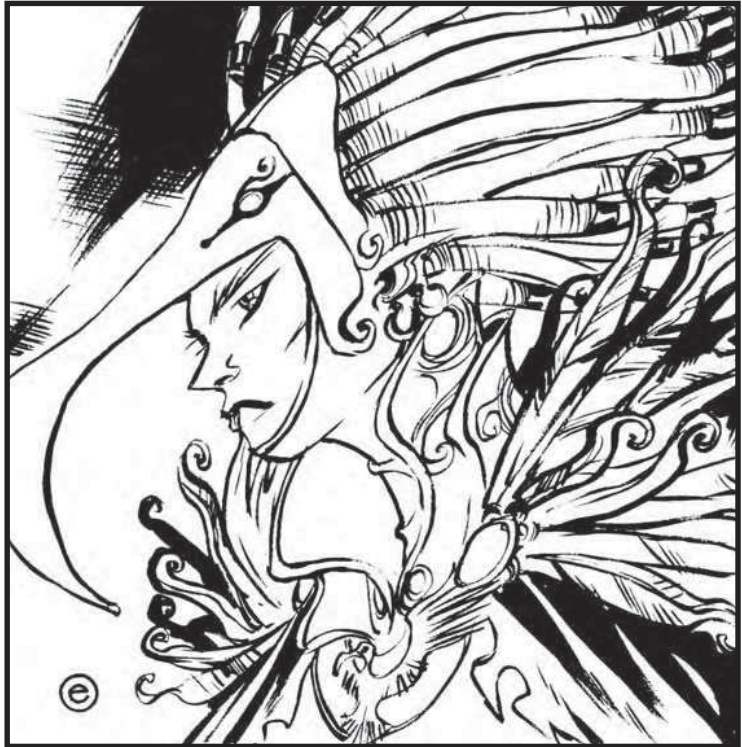
PRINCESS MAGNIFICENT WITH LIPS OF CORAL AND ROBES OF BLACK FEATHERS

Description: Also known as the Black Heron, this dark, unearthly beauty walks veiled in green and wears, as her name implies, a cloak of black feathers that can carry her aloft upon command. Some who have encountered her and lived have written songs and tales of her delicate charms: her petite, graceful body, her porcelain skin and her preternatural deep-green eyes filled with mystery. Her visage communicates only weakness and frailty, and she typically does little to correct this illusion. Upon closer inspection, if one dares approach her, details emerge that give hints to her unnatural state: a head that is larger and rounder than it should be, hands so small that her blade seems to wield itself and feet that do not touch the ground when she walks.

Such false impressions of doe-like innocence served her poorly in the course of her first and only foray into the world of the living. Instrumental in the spread of the Contagion, she quickly capitalized on the opportunities provided her and settled in the River Province. She built the House of Bitter Reflections in a wide, treeless and indefensible plain in the shadowland now known as Walkers' Realm as a show of confidence and boldness to any that would dare challenge her rule.

When three powerful gods arrive, guiding nations decimated by the Contagion, the Princess immediately began planning their downfall. She refused to recognize the powerful spirits, declined their initial entreaties and turned them away from her gates.

But the spirits were more powerful than she had anticipated, and they acted together to defend their mortal charges. These spirits hatched and successfully executed a



plan to rid their domain of the haughty Princess Magnificent (see *Scavenger Sons*, p. 79), and put her to flight from the lands that would become Great Forks under fear of her own undoing.

Princess Magnificent wandered the Threshold in search of a worthy site to restore her former short-lived successes. For years, she explored the region, indifferent to both the best locales and the very prospect of starting all over again. In time, she received an ominous message. She was expected in the grand audience chamber of her master, He Who Holds in Thrall, a Malfean lord who rules an entire realm within the Labyrinth. She did as she was bid, and many witnessed her return to the Underworld with bowed head and averted eyes. Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers walked the distance to Stygia, where she entered the Labyrinth through her own citadel. From that time on, few among the living or dead have seen or heard of her.

Princess Magnificent spent a year in He Who Holds in Thrall's presence, as the Malfean decided on proper punishment. Not a word was spoken during her detainment. Not a lash marred her skin, and no ingenious tortures were meted out on her flesh. She was not stripped of her power, nor dispatched to Oblivion, nor damned to suffer unspeakable agonies for an age. Her punishment, to her horror, was the utter humiliation of servitude to another Deathlord, the First and Forsaken Lion.

Princess Magnificent's servitude has prevented her from pursuing a comprehensive agenda of her own. The First and Forsaken Lion employs her mostly as a diplomat.



Her personal objective is her own freedom. Princess Magnificent is not permitted to enter the Labyrinth at all without the First and Forsaken Lion's accompaniment, nor can she enter Stygia. She has not been seen in Creation for centuries and is practically forgotten there.

THE UMBRELLA OF DISCORD

Princess Magnificent wields this deadly five-foot-tall, nine-foot-wide parasol made of the bones and skin of five fallen Solar Exalted, one from each caste, and hung with 13 tiny bells. The umbrella's point is of razor-sharp soulsteel and consigns the souls of the lives it takes immediately to the Void. The bells attached to the umbrella's 13 tines cause madness in mortals and ghosts alike — those hearing the eerie chimes turn on their compatriots and attack them until the bells cease ringing. The Umbrella of Discord can cause violent storms to erupt for one scene, even on clear days (though the effect is not instantaneous). Channeling 10 motes of Essence through the parasol darkens the sky into a starless, lightless tarp for one scene.

THE PRINCESS' SERVANTS

The First and Forsaken Lion does not permit the Princess any Exalted servants of her own. This edict has not stopped her. She herself appropriated one of the First and Forsaken Lion's Monstrances and Exalted a servant of her own, a Moonshadow Caste Abyssal called Son of Crows. Son of Crows has not been to the Labyrinth and has not been presented to the Malfeans. His Exaltation occurred mere months ago, and so far, the existence of this Abyssal Exalted has gone unnoticed, for the Princess has kept him hidden among the ghosts of a village leagues away from the Thousand. His Exaltation still formally incomplete, Son of Crows has been slowly losing his grip on both sanity and his great power.

THE BISHOP OF THE CHALCEDONY THURIBLE

Also called the Shining One and the Great Diaconate of Silent Vespers, among many other long-forgotten titles. The Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible, cloaked in fog and illusions, often wears a warm smile and effects a kind demeanor toward the loyal servants lucky enough to meet him. He never

bears weapons or armor. Instead, he presents himself as a gray-cloaked blind ascetic and bearer of great transcendental wisdom. To the eye, he looks like a rather ordinary, pale, beardless man of wizened age and average height. His disciples, those on the Shining Path, commonly mimic their master's appearance. Many have put out their own eyes to prove their worthiness.

If enraged, however, his true form emerges: The Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible has, in his self-absorbed madness, not only forgotten all memory of his former life, but has lost all sense of what it is to be mortal. He appears as an oily-black-skinned, bone-thin and rotting, fanged corpse. No clothing adorns him when in this state, and multiple unearthly sexual organs and protruding, purposeless bones emerge and recede continually from his body as he moves. His eyes are milky green and leak a stream of gray bile, which runs down the trenches in his long face.

In battle, the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible wields no melee weapons, for he is a master martial artist. He enters battle only if necessary, however, and never if his deathknights have been defeated. The jade crozier he carries is largely ceremonial, though has its sorcerous uses.

The Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible leads the race in proselytizing in the world of the living. While the Silver Prince may be more successful at driving the machine of soul collecting on a political level and few can hope to match the Lover's enticements, none of the other Deathlords can compete with the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible's mastery over the beliefs of his followers. He has achieved such fame and devotion



THE BISHOP'S CROZIER

A tall, black-jade crozier with a curved apex and several Hearthstone settings, this device has several uses. Firstly, it can sprout wings and assume the form of a gigantic ghostly bat, which the Bishop often uses for scrying purposes. The Bishop can see through the eyes of the creature and can control its movements, even outside of a shadowland, at a cost of 5 motes of Essence per hour. Secondly, by burning 10 motes of Essence and touching a mortal target with the crozier, the Bishop can cause his mortal victim to be “touched” with death, much like the Element Touch spirit Charm (see the **Exalted Storyteller's Companion**, p. 59). The target immediately takes on the aspect and qualities of a ghost for one day.

that several cities and even a few small nations compete for the honor of being named his place of origin. For hundreds of leagues around his citadel, cults erect temples and praise the Bishop and his good works. In some areas, entire villages devote themselves to living according to his teachings or to worshiping him directly, depending on their particular take on orthodoxy. Such mastery has, however, come at a price.

The Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible long ago devised the beginnings of a modest theology of death, which he wrote down in a book, *The Tome of Endless Night*, and taught to his scant followers, with instructions to seed it throughout Creation. In the intervening centuries, the mortal scholars pledging themselves to the study of the Bishop's initial writings have written speculations, elaborations, epistles, poems and quaestios in an attempt to better understand the oblique teachings of their master. Many of these writings run the gamut from the mildly misguided to the outright preposterous, with some proclaiming the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible to be the singular god of death himself.

Moreover, these mortal writings have quietly made their way back to the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible's citadel, where he spends most days entombed in a vast library vault filled with the books written by his honored disciples. These writings have so influenced the Deathlord over the centuries that he has become convinced of their veracity, considering even the most obscure, contradictory assertion to be self-evident truth and canon. At times, he even believes that he reigns over all of the dead. In fact, practically all of the Bishop's characteristics derive from some ancient manuscript alleging that he looks or acts in a certain way, that he possesses some authority or that he holds some things dear. The Bishop's very visage as a blind ascetic comes from one of the mad theodicies demonstrat-

ing his divinity. Even the title that he has taken was given him by one his devoted prophets.

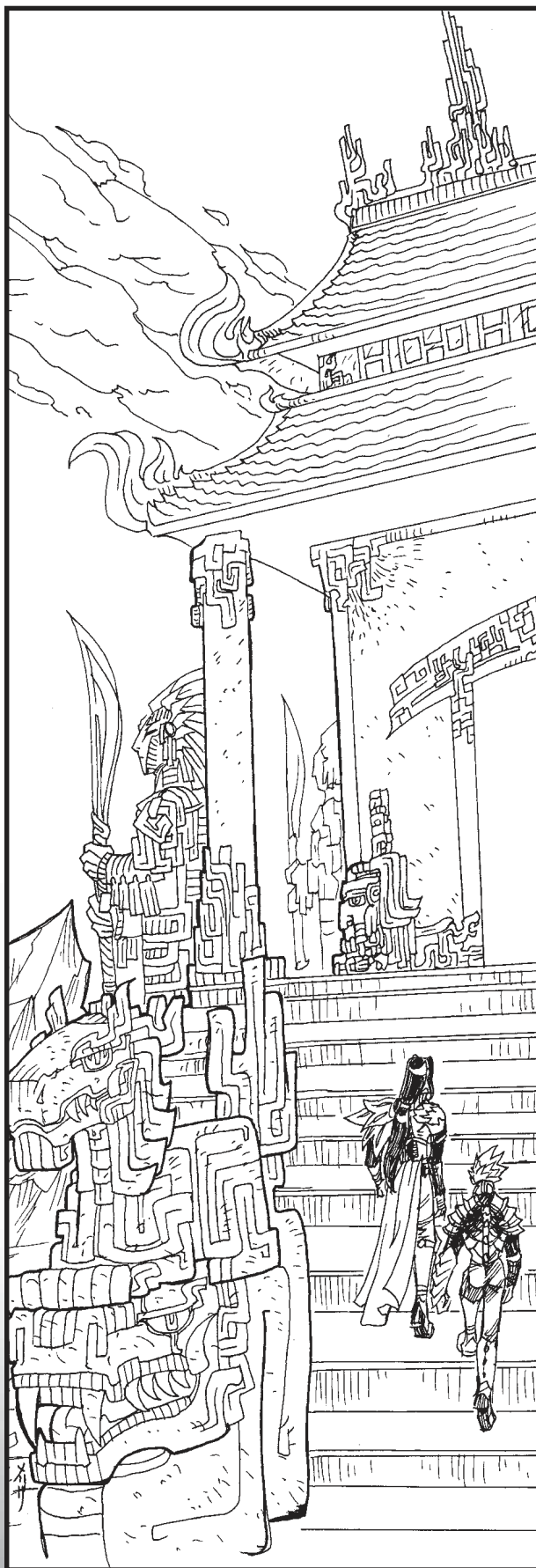
Over the centuries, the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible has become a master theologian and apologist for this crazed spiritual agenda and encourages, through his intermediaries, debate over the finer points of dogma, which usually finds expression in the wholesale slaughter of one faction or another. While different sects of his cult squabble over the veracity of one book or another by way of armed struggle, the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible is content to silently stand by and welcome them all into his fold after they slay each other. The Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible is mad, and he wants the world to die for him.

THE HIDDEN TABERNACLE

The Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible's cavernous tomb-citadel of blackened sepulchres is located in a shadowland hundreds of miles to the Northwest of White-wall known as the Silent Meadow of Dust. The citadel itself is almost entirely underground. One enters the citadel through an impressive golden mastaba situated at the center of a salt-strewn pillared garden of oddly carved boulders and bloody-streaked flagstones. On the outskirts of the site, large tenements housing the devoted sit in their faction's territory. The grounds surrounding the Hidden Tabernacle are treeless and blasted from constant battles between the factions of the Bishop's cult, the Shining Path.

Within, the Hidden Tabernacle is dark and unkempt, with red and copper mold on the ceilings and streams of yellowish water running across many passages. Only the most selfless and ascetic disciples are invited here, and rarely are they heard from again. They spend years in solitude and darkness, preparing for the moment when they will go off into the maze of narrow passageways in search of the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible himself, usually finding only shadows and death instead. Occasionally, one can also find those still living who have gone deep into the Hidden Tabernacle seeking their death, but could not find it. Driven mad by their failure, their only desire is to find their way to the surface and proclaim the bitter truth to the misguided souls above. Only rarely do they emerge alive. And the ghosts of those so disillusioned who do make it to the surface are quickly dealt with by the deathknights.

During the hours of darkness, many ghosts can be found in and around the Hidden Tabernacle. Mad and obsessed failed monastics who could not find the Bishop and died in the bowels of the Hidden Tabernacle and those who died during the many religious wars of the Shining Path make up most of the ghosts found here. These ghosts perform many obscure, hermetic and largely unnecessary rituals on the Tabernacle grounds. Otherwise, they pray, debate, fight, meditate, read and pontificate like their living counterparts. Mortals venturing near the Tabernacle, assuming they pass



by the various camps of Shining Path sects unaccosted, encounter the obsessed and tenacious ghosts seeking to convert mortals to their particular sect.

Mortal followers of the Shining Path are not welcomed in the Hidden Tabernacle unless they are ready to earnestly begin seeking their death. As few are ever seen to depart once they have entered, only a small number of idle worshipers seek to gain admittance. Walking corpses and ghostly temple stewards guard the low walls surrounding the citadel grounds to keep the curious, the overzealous and the mad at bay.

The Tabernacle's throne chamber is a large, high-ceilinged affair, with rows of columns, stagnant pools and the unendurable stench of decay. The Bishop rarely frequents this place, and it has been centuries since the chamber has seen any prolonged use. He is more likely found within the locked library vault behind the throne. Here, the Deathlord meditates and reads for years at a time, only briefly emerging to issue some dictate or to approve of some ingenious (or equally mad) writer of tracts. When he does emerge, feasts and holy celebrations are imminent.

THE BISHOP OF THE CHALCEDONY THURIBLE'S PHILOSOPHY AND PLANS

The Bishop is long since past planning to conquer Creation through a comprehensive worship of death. He is too mad and narcissistic for that now. Besides, it hardly seems necessary for him to play anything more than a ceremonial role in his followers' slow descent to Oblivion. He is blissfully indifferent to the idea of gaining many followers and possesses no bound slaves beyond the few zombies his deathknights created to guard the throne chamber. His thousands of disciples take care of indoctrinating new recruits nicely.

However, nothing would please the Bishop more than to abolish Creation and then to immediately destroy the Underworld. He hates all life and scorns even the dead as base and ignoble creatures who can never achieve the enlightenment he enjoys. Mortal things, he teaches, are tainted and evil by design and will all ultimately fall to the indefatigable arms of the Void.

Oblivion, nothingness and the silent warmth of the Void are the only true perfections. Death is the first step toward that perfection. Becoming one with Oblivion is the true goal. What happens in between is a tedious matter for the Bishop. He knows that the death of all things is unavoidable, so he tends to be patient. But the fact remains that to die is better than to live, and the faster everything ceases to be, the quicker he can transcend reality and become one with Oblivion himself. As such, his devotion to the Malfean cause is unswerving, though only by accident, as he frequently has no memory of his masters in the Labyrinth, believing himself the transcendent ruler of all.

THE BISHOP OF THE CHALCEDONY THURIBLE'S SERVANTS

The Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible has quite a few deathknights under his power, though two stand out as being the most devoted and effective in seeing to his interests. The Celebrant of Blood and Ten Thousand Virtues both dwell in the Hidden Tabernacle, only rarely embarking on missions that might take them away from their home. The Celebrant of Blood, a Daybreak Caste Abyssal, was once a prophet in the Bishop's service. A devoted acolyte, she descended into the catacombs seeking her own reconciliation. After three months, she finally collapsed at the feet of the Bishop, who touched her with Abyssal power. No mortal had made it to the Bishop's presence on her own, and none have since. She appears much as she did upon her death: skeletal and gaunt, her bones showing clearly through her translucent skin, though distinctly alive. Some suspect that Ten Thousand Virtues is a Deathlord, that the writings about the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible are little more than myths invented to perpetuate Ten Thousand Virtues' own mastery over a flock who would not respond so devotedly to a lord they encountered so often. In truth, he is not an Abyssal, but an ancient Sidereal Exalted who sided with the Malfean cause following the Usurpation. Ten Thousand Virtues wears a tall cylindrical hat and several layers of robes as his only raiment. He appears as a slightly pale man of middle years, with a long, white goatee and spherical, ice-blue eyes.

THE BODHISATTVA ANOINTED BY DARK WATER

The master of the Skullstone Archipelago, the fearsome center of an empire of the dead, the Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water, also called the Silver Prince, lords over his ghastly court and tends to the nightmarish administration that both justifies his rule and feeds his own dark power. He dresses in robes of razor-edged soulsteel shards that hide the pale, clearly dead flesh beneath. His hair is shoulder length and raven black and stands in sharp contrast to his chalk-white sunken face and toothless gums, which are typically covered with an ornately carved and delicately crafted opal deathmask. A soulsteel blade, Howler in the Darkness, hums constantly at his side.

The Bodhisattva has obtained wild success in fostering a successful campaign in the lands of the living, not through ritual or religious means, but through political persuasiveness and guile. His formula is elegant and simple.



Those who wish to hold a station of high importance in his realm must both adhere to that society's mores (which consist of all of the elements of adulation and devotion of the dead) and, more importantly, be, in fact, dead. Those seeking guarantees that their afterlife will be one of prominence and good fortune need look no further than Skullstone, where the living and the dead exist side by side.

The living who dwell in Skullstone may climb only so far up in the ranks of the realm's administrative body before any further advancement is denied pending death. Worthy servants are typically rewarded with some sort of advancement upon dying. Those particularly favored are granted positions of true authority. Needless to say, in Skullstone, suicides are common. Indeed, they are planned and celebrated rites of passage.

HOWLER IN DARKNESS

The Bodhisattva wields Howler in Darkness, a blade that appears as a plain straight sword. When drawn in battle, however, the blade expands in a flash of darkness to the size of a grand daiklave. Howler in Darkness hums monotonously, even when not wielded in combat, echoing the Silver Prince's voice with a metallic, otherworldly cadence. Howler in Darkness has also been heard to speak on its own occasionally. Players of foes struck with Howler in Darkness who do not die instantly must roll their characters' Willpower at difficulty 4 or be subject to the Silver Prince's commands for 100 days.



The Bodhisattva has a particular interest in welcoming many Exalted into his realm. Abyssal Exalted are, of course, given high honors and received with macabre parades and gifts if they are willing to pledge themselves to the Deathlord. Solar Exalted are not particularly welcome among the general populace, but the Silver Prince enjoys the challenge of tempting them into his service and usually invites them to remain for as long as they desire. Dragon-Blooded are not welcome at all in the necropolis of Onyx, Skullstone's political center. The guards at the Bone Gate turn them away immediately if they make their true nature known.

THE REALM OF SKULLSTONE

Centered on the island of Darkmist, the realm of Skullstone is unique in Creation, for the living denizens of this realm live and work side by side with the dead. While this is not a completely original state of affairs in itself, Skullstone sets itself apart by being the one place in Creation where this state is accepted, enjoyed and relied upon for its own continuance.

At the center of the island sits the necropolis of Onyx, the seat of power and the focus of nearly every aspect of life in Skullstone. The necropolis is surrounded by a 50-foot-high wall made from four massive, blackened bones once belonging to some ancient titanic beast. To enter Onyx by land, a visitor must pass beyond the Bone Gate, which is guarded by powerful ghosts and warriors such that it is nearly impossible for any but the craftiest to pass without leave — and certainly not undetected. Within, life — and unlives — is bustling. Masterfully preserved undead horses draw coaches made of bone down sooty torchlit streets sown with canopies of thick spider webs that block the sunlight. Massive family mausoleums, curiosity shops, firms and respectable storefronts are more and more the order the closer one gets to the citadel at the center of the necropolis. The citadel itself is a burnished black structure of massive dimensions, carved of volcanic glass into the shape of a ghoulish, crowned death mask. It is said that the great citadel's eyes keep silent vigil over the seas and ward away any who would wish to do harm to the Silver's Prince's realm. The hundreds of bone-white spires reaching skyward from the citadel's crown reach their apex in razor sharp points, from which the naked corpses of the realms' suicides are displayed to all.

The wealthy citizens of Skullstone revel in the trappings of the dead. Thick-walled mansions of marble blocks (often housing the tombs of the owners) line the wide road to the citadel. No less grand, most well to do commoners live in scaled-down varieties of the fashionable mansions of the wealthy. The poor and ignoble, as well as those who have been exiled, dwell outside the necropolis, where ramshackle wooden and stone shacks sit amidst the rotting stench of the public cemeteries. Masterless zombies roam ceaselessly. Mad ghosts torment the living, who resort to all manner of depravities in order to eke a living.

Primary colors, while not forbidden, are found but infrequently. Even the realm's flag, a small ivory circle surrounded by a sea of blackness, demonstrates this characteristic. The diet of the average living Skullstone denizen is peculiar in Creation as well. Dishes are commonly created using spiders (for which they have a developed a use for every part), worms, maggots, sheep's eyes, bat's wings and cave slime. As a popular spice — and also a powerful aphrodisiac — Skullstone's denizens regularly use the powdered remains of those heroes of the realm who have since passed into Lethe.

Little trade comes through Skullstone. Given its penchant for odd, unpalatable foodstuffs, not to mention the relative barrenness of the surrounding hinterland, Skullstone has little to offer the rest of Creation in trade. Which is good enough for them, as they neither want nor need much at all from the lands abroad. Furthermore, given Skullstone's dreadful skyline and the stench of decay one encounters upon approaching the island, it is little wonder that they receive few visitors. Only infrequently do traders brave the rough seas to come here. The few merchants bear reeds, with which the artisans of Skullstone have begun building its imperial skiffs. Such merchants never leave the docks and depart as soon as possible.

The majority of Skullstone's wealth comes from undead labor, for nowhere in Creation, save perhaps Sijan, can one find necrosurgeons with skills to match those of the necromancers in Skullstone. Treasures from sunken vessels and other riches located on the ocean floor make up a high percentage of Skullstone's trade goods, for which other realms pay handsomely. Zombies themselves fetch an excellent price as well.

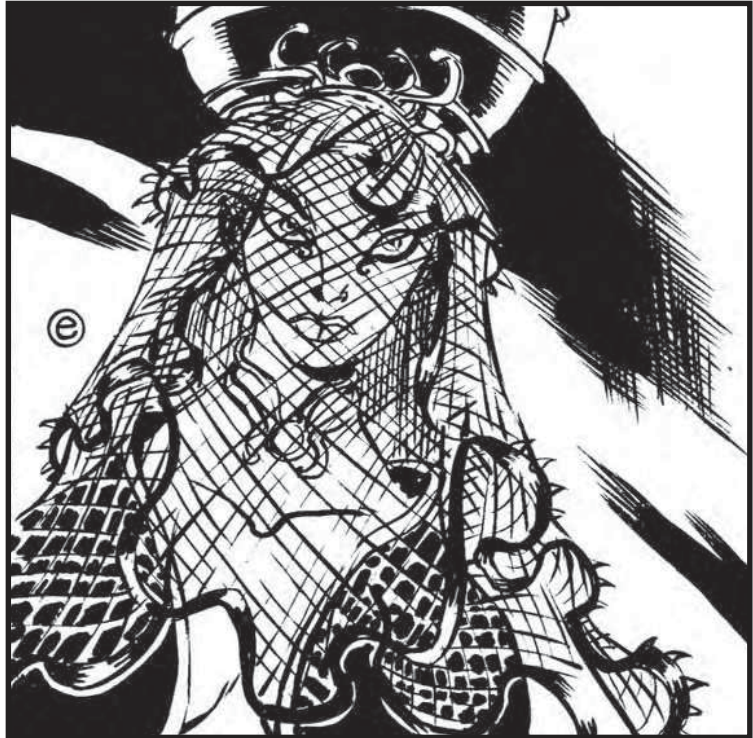
THE BODHISATTVA ANOINTED BY DARK WATER'S PLANS

The Silver Prince fears nothing and no one. He has no great army, but Skullstone's remote location offers protection enough from those not driven off by the stench and the aura of fright that surrounds his empire. The Silver Prince has found that a glib tongue and hoards of gold easily assuage the need for armed forces. Why conquer your foes with swords when buying their political convictions is much easier? Grease their mortal cunning with wealth. Show them the everlasting honors given to the loyal dead. Set them back upon Creation. The Silver Prince already has agents subverting nearby regimes. Once his ever-growing shadowland subsumes these places, the undermined empires will be his.

THE BODHISATTVA ANOINTED BY DARK WATER'S SERVANTS

The Silver Prince is a master manipulator. In addition to the many Abyssal, Sidereal and even Solar Exalted that he calls his own, he also secretly employs and aids powerful

personages who share his goals from behind the scenes, many times without their knowledge. He counts many Abyssal Exalted among his favorite servants, including Ebon Siaka and the Knight of Ghosts and Shadows. Ebon Siaka, a Dusk Caste Abyssal is admiral of the Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water's budding fleet and the individual in charge of the repair of that Deathlord's First Age ships. She always dresses in a soulsteel plate and chain breastplate swathed in the black and crimson sashes of Skullstone's navy and carries a gigantic stone maul of First Age origin, with which she can sink ships with a single blow. The Knight of Ghost and Shadows once served as personal guard to the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears. He lost his taste for the libertine company she kept and fled her service, living as a wanderer in the Threshold before coming to Skullstone. The trust and appreciation he receives in the Silver Prince's service makes the Knight of Ghost and Shadow one of the Deathlords' most contented servants. Lately, however, his appearance has begun to alter, his skin becoming grayer and slightly crinkled, his hair turning the drab ash of the locks of a corpse. What is more, he is losing the feeling in his hands. Could this be some form of curse from the Lover?



THE LOVER CLAD IN THE RAIMENT OF TEARS

Description: The Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears presents herself as a tall, wiry woman bereft of all but the most subtle curves, swathed in dark, transparent veils, tightly-fitting leather accoutrements, a brilliant orichalcum chest plate and the cascading tresses of her sable and cerulean ankle-length robing. Her expression is never far from sedate, but otherwise, the Lover is quite alive in appearance, with soft, creamy skin, fine-boned features and every appearance of vigor and health. Despite her warm and lively appearance, however, a cold chill aura surrounds her. At her side, she bears a long and thin blade of translucent soulsteel called Siren in Avern. At her other side floats the Mirror of Darkness and Lightning, an occult artifact attuned to the Lover's every movement, following wherever she leads.

The Lover Clad in Raiment of Tears relishes her pact with the Void and is utterly devoted to bringing Creation under the yoke of darkness and ruling as its queen. Her own personal foibles and desires, despite their prominence, have always been secondary to this greater cause. On the surface, the Lover seems like a shallow dilettante dabbling in the trapping of death and using her great power in service to nothing but her own base pleasures. Because of

this outward appearance, kings and even other Deathlords discount her as a minor threat at best. She has a sizable army, but the consensus among those aware of its existence is that she is too diverted by amusements to make use of it. The Lover promotes these misapprehensions about the seriousness of her devotion. When appearing publicly she puts on every appearance of idleness.

Several hundred concubines, male and female, living and dead, enjoy high honors and favor within the walls of her citadel, the Fortress of Crimson Ice. To be chosen for a particular night's pleasure is the chief goal of her devotees. For the living, it is a rite of passage, for one never returns alive from the Lover's bed. Death comes in the throes of ecstasy, as the victim's body is torn asunder. The Lover devours her partner's flesh and Essence during the ritual, emerging even more lifelike than before, an effect that causes her body to radiate a crimson luminescence and even slightly dampens the effect of her freezing aura for several days.

The Lover keeps her best, most impressive partners on after death as concubines and servants. The rest, she leaves to the Underworld, though some are still so enraptured with her in death that they hover around the Lover's citadel for centuries after their demise. A dark miasma of these paening souls shrouds the Fortress of Crimson Ice, obscuring its appearance from those approaching from a distance.

The Lover's has grown to desire a novel new sort of conquest, the Solar Exalted, whom she actively seeks to entice into her embrace. Her deathknights scour the Threshold in search of any and all newly erupted Solars. They are ordered to lure the Chosen of the Sun back to



their mistress' dark divan. Given the inherent and obvious difficulties and the vast distances involved, the Lover's success rate has been astonishing. Several Solars have made their way to her bed, and somewhat fewer have come away.

THE MIRROR OF DARKNESS AND LIGHTNING

A fool gazing uninvited into the mirror meets a terrible end. Eleven arms of jet black lightning seize the offender and pull her into the mirror forever, where her Essence joins that of the demon sorcerer within. The Lover may grant a particular favorite permission to face the mirror, but this is a rare honor. Those invited meet the fearsome eyes of bound rage and corruption. In that instant, their Essence pools are refilled and any temporary Willpower lost is regained. The effect is not without its drawbacks, however. One's player must roll Wits + Occult + Conviction at difficulty 4 or fall under the enchantment of the mirror, plunging into its depths. Once trapped in the mirror, escape is impossible without the explicit wish of the Lover, who has little tolerance for weakness in her chosen favorites.

THE FORTRESS OF CRIMSON ICE

The shadowland of Gradafes, shrouded in mist and frequent gray blizzards, is located many leagues to the southeast of Icehome. That country's citizens, though fearful of their new queen, is thankful at least for the pittance she provides them, for it is a poor land. The whole history of the country is, in fact, one gloomy record of internecine wars, barbaric deeds and unstable governments, of adventurers usurping thrones, only to be themselves unseated and of raids, rapine and pillagings.

The Lover built her Fortress of Crimson Ice in the center of this land. From afar, the Lover's citadel appears as a pale, reddish-purple miasma, gradually growing more and more distinct as one approaches, finally emerging as a brilliant castle of red ice that seems to have ascended like a crystalline hand from the depths below. Clouds of shapeless ghosts hover silently around the windows of the citadel, wailing and pleading for reentry. Several companies of soldiers have their stations at various points around the citadel's walls, rendering an undetected approach nearly impossible.

Within can be found all manner of debauchery, with entire halls dedicated to one subtle variation of one depravity or another. Servants here, both living and dead, have a dual role: total subservience to the wishes of the Lover and the constant continuance of decadence. The living servants all, of course, wish to someday be hand-picked to serve their mistress carnally, but in the meantime,

they are expected to hone their sexual proficiency to perfection with each other and the Lover's guests. To this end, mortal slaves, male and female, have taken to dressing as the Lover herself, and aping the bizarre rites said to take place in her bedchamber. Matters frequently get out of hand, however, and the death of mortal servants is not uncommon. Such deaths are handled with a variable amount of dissatisfaction among the deathknights and the Lover herself. Fierce punishments rarely ensue unless those slain were particular favorites. At times, such fortuitous slaughters result in rich rewards, if performed with admirable technique.

THE LOVER CLAD IN THE RAIMENT OF TEARS' GOALS

The Lover's agents scour the lands in search of mortals exemplifying beauty and strength, with both virtue to taint and honor to defile. Such mortals are difficult to find nowadays, however, and the Lover grows weary of waiting. Firstly, she has commanded the mortal servants of her citadel to produce as many children as possible. These children are raised according to the Lover's pleasure, and the best of their lot become a part of the Lover's teeming harem. Secondly, the Lover has commanded that her deathknights produce children as well, only with unwitting Solar Exalts and Exalted captives who have not yet given themselves to her.

The Lover's army is primarily for defensive purposes and for preventing the escape of powerful prisoners from her frozen dungeons. This army is certainly powerful and would likely emerge victorious over most challenges, but the Lover is not interested in military campaigning. She certainly has no desire to send her army abroad or to be without her favorite deathknights for the long stretch a martial attack on the Realm would require. She plans, instead, to take control of key members of the ruling houses of the Realm and incite a violent clash among their forces.

If battle is imminent, the Lover's agents will try to manipulate the situation such that it takes place as close to the capital of the Realm as possible and that as many as possible on all sides perish.

THE LOVER'S SERVANTS

The Lover enjoys the service of many Solar and Abyssal Exalted. Most of these, she allows to make their own way, and is quite forgiving of their lapses. One of her favorites is the Day Caste the Melkin Fool in Red, Ringmaster of the Circus Moribund, a touring phantasmagoria of physical artistry, lost beasts and all manner of rare and monstrous abortions of humanity transforming their own personal tragedies and pathos into fanfare. She is a deceptively frail woman of deathly ivory complexion, frequently wearing a disconcerting skull-shaped half-mask and dressing in black acrobat's tights covered with bright red and

yellow silk scarves and ties. Her striking bright-red hair stops at her shoulders, while her thick red lips form a perfect ironic pout. Quick with a prank and even quicker with a deft insult, the Melkin Fool can usually be found with the circus, though she often embarks on missions for her mistress across the Threshold and even in parts of the Realm, as her skills in the art of disguise are unmatched.

EYE AND SEVEN DESPAIRS

Description: When he appears in his natural shape, Eye and Seven Despairs is a bone-thin ancient horror of a corpse. His eyes are sunken so deep into his skull that they appear all but invisible. His mouth a tight, lipless slit situated beneath the two empty cavities where his nose once was. Only a few strands of long, ashen hair descend over his withered and mangled ears and onto his hunched shoulders. Long ago, one of his hands was completely and permanently stripped of its ghostly flesh, necessitating the use of a mechanical gauntlet known as the Fatal Arbalest of Quietus and Eclipses. He garbs himself in simple black robes that cascade around him and trail yards behind. This Deathlord rarely shows himself, however, not even to his closest servants. Not anymore.

It was treachery. In league with Eye and Seven Despairs' concubine, Star of Dirt and Doubt, the Deathlord's three closest Abyssal servants betrayed their master, seemingly casting him into the Mouth of the Void. Henceforth, the three have, through subtlety and sorcery, deceived both their former master's minions and foes alike, each in turn appearing, when necessary, in the form of the betrayed Deathlord. Each enjoys the servitude and favors of

Star of Dirt and Doubt, who is never far from one or another of her fellow conspirators, whispering counsels, sometimes contradictory, in their ears.

The plan to destroy Eye and Seven Despairs was not the triumph the conspiring Abyssals believe. Two years ago, Star of Dirt and Doubt was seduced by each of her master's three favorites in turn: Blood Scavenger, Chorus at Midnight and Scar of Uproar. The three quickly discovered Star of Dirt and Doubt's betrayal, and a great battle ensued between them, wherein all three Abyssals were nearly slain. As they lie in the dirt, dying, Star of Dirt and Doubt approached them and revealed their folly. She chided them for not realizing that even if one of them emerged victorious over the other two, she still truly only belonged to their master, and that nothing would ever change that fact. The three bowed their heads in shame and begged Star of Dirt and Doubt to slay them and let their blood spill, to feed their blood to their master in recompense for their own sad betrayal. But Star of Dirt and Doubt knew that none of them truly spoke in earnest, and so, she did not slay them, but left them upon the field of defeat. In the days that followed, after they all three of them beat their breasts in despair and tore their flesh and struck the ground with their fists, they gave each other such dire looks that, without a word, sealed them in a pact — a pact to destroy their master.

Not only love motivated the three to treachery. Eye and Seven Despairs held a relatively meek policy toward Creation in comparison with other Deathlords. Content with allowing his victims to come to him, he spent his days in apparent idleness. This is not to say that they saw their

master as weak, but they believed in their hearts that he was not sufficiently ambitious and that this lack of enterprise would taint their own destinies by association. But these poor servants were mistaken, for their master is perhaps the most active and determined of all the Deathlords. In fact, it appeared to Eye and Seven Despairs that his trusted servants were the ones lacking enthusiasm, too often quarreling among themselves and pursuing the affections of his consort rather than advancing their master's plans. He had come to desire to teach them a lesson and further his own schemes with one masterstroke.

TREACHERY

Their mistake was including Star of Dirt and Doubt in their scheme. Soon after the three Abyssals had come to an agreement about how Eye and Seven Despairs should be dispatched, they approached her, for they agreed that her participation was necessary, as she would surely see their hand in the betrayal. They told Star of Dirt and Doubt their plan,





and with a sad heart, she approached her master with the information, knowing with certainty what must follow.

Eye and Seven Despairs received the news with pleasure, congratulating himself for so thoroughly corrupting his once honorable and noble servants. The plan, he decided, was certainly a splendid one. It would be a shame to prevent such artful cunning from being played out to the end. After perhaps a century, when he finally allows his three upstarts to know the truth, they will have become very valuable servants indeed. And when they realize the fate of their lost love, their renegade spirits will be broken forever.

And so, when Blood Scavenger, Chorus at Midnight and Scar of Uproar came to his bed in the night, a sorcerous poison in hand, he watched from the shadows. When the traitors placed the poison root on their slumbering master's white tongue, he stifled a momentary regret. Indeed, Eye and Seven Despairs watched closely and dispassionately as his favorites, his *children*, bound him in heavy soulsteel chains and pulled a black cloth sack over his body. He followed them to the dungeons and then traveled with them during the short trip through the Labyrinth, emerging in his citadel in Stygia. The Abyssals then slunk through the streets of the city, secretly minding their traitorous cargo, until they came upon the heart of Stygia, where they found that dark oubliette opening into the Void. Even then, as his murderers stood on the threshold of the Void, he made no move to affect an escape. In fact, he smiled, quite widely, as the three Abyssals pitched their love into the darkness. And when he stepped out of the shadows, finally, Eye and Seven Despairs wore Star of Dirt and Dust's shape. He kissed each of the three upon the lips and swore eternal loyalty.

It has been one year since the betrayal, and no suspicions have yet been raised. Diplomatically, the new rulers have proven themselves naïve and impractical, but they have made good use of servants better suited to such things. This is the strategy for most aspects of their rule. They have developed a sufficiently daring overarching plan, but not so much as to raise suspicion. And Eye and Seven Despairs, in the guise of Star of Dirt and Doubt, is always on hand to guide them into either blunder or success.

Yes, it had been one year. One year without a hitch. One year of prosperity and leisure. Of lovemaking and sumptuous feasts. Of heartless abandon and the fruitless shedding of blood. One year out of a hundred to think on their deed and wait for inevitable consequence.

COLD HOUSE

A cold stone mansion high on a densely forested knoll far to the east of Kirighast, Cold House emanates an aura of disquiet and foreboding. Cold House sits near the center of the shadowland of Bonetree, where the trees are skeletal frauds dripping blood from pale crimson blossoms. All rolls involving Willpower are at -2 dice when characters are



THE FATAL ARBALEST OF QUIETUS AND ECLIPSES

Eye and Seven Despairs wears this massive mechanical gauntlet, an ancient, fearsome, clawed appendage that fits over his entire arm, fashioned of silver and jade and soulsteel and inlaid with numerous Hearthstones and dark gems. An uncut black soulfire crystal of uncanny size is set into the palm of the gauntlet. By burning 5 motes of Essence, Eye and Seven Despairs may release the Quietus Barb, a shaft of light that inflicts blindness and searing pain upon those struck for the remainder of the scene. Targets may attempt to dodge at difficulty 4. Those failing take 4L + a number of lethal wounds equal to the number of failures rolled on their dodge attempt. If the target is a Solar Exalt, she is blinded until the sun shines upon her once again outside of a shadowland. Wounds inflicted upon a Solar Exalt or other servant of the light with this weapon are aggravated damage.

within Bonetree and at -5 when inside Cold House itself. Within the house, the feeling of disquiet disappears, replaced by an odd sense of finality and peace, a feeling not unlike entering one's own grave. In fact, the sense of familiarity is so overwhelming that many of the living seek to remain as long as they can. A hidden threshold to the Labyrinth in the heart of the mansion has turned Cold House into a mysterious realm of endless, shifting corridors and surreal horror. In truth, those stepping into Cold House no longer walk in either Creation or the Underworld. They walk in an arm of the Labyrinth. Servants show guests to stately rooms, and upon spending a single evening in Cold House, guests never have the desire to leave, gradually losing interest in the outside world until they have but one goal, which can be met by finding some treasure, room or secret in the mansion. Few of these sought-after things exist, though some are items brought by other guests and lost long ago.

Guests will quickly realize that the interior of Cold House is larger than the exterior and that the mansion contains an infinite number of narrow, dusty hallways leading to abrupt dead ends, diagonal forks, dizzying spiral staircases and dimly lit halls. One's guest room is never far away, however: It is always easily found when one grows tired of exploring. Undead servants provide food daily — sumptuous feasts and parties seem to spring to life without warning and lurk around the most unexpected corners.

Many perish here in futile search for treasure or in pursuit of some higher meaning to the fascinating mysteries of the mansion's construction. As a result, hundreds — perhaps thousands — of ghosts still roam the halls pursuing

the objects of their obsessions. Most of them are mad, though, for the most part, not violently so. Many of these ghosts are commonly found gathered together, still pursuing the things they sought in life: answers, some legendary treasure or, least commonly, the Heart Room.

The present rulers of Cold House live in the upper levels, which can only be reached by means of sorcerous passwords and spells. These rooms have been dark and silent these past years. Eye and Seven Despairs brooked no mirth among his servants, and the quiet kept in these rooms stands as mute acknowledgment of his wishes, gone though he appears to be. The celebrations and orgies now held in Cold House are all conducted in the lower levels, which tends to cause a stir among some still-living guests, who often find themselves ghosts before the night is through.

THE HEART ROOM

The Heart Room is located deep under Cold House, and from there, a balcony looks out on the Mouth of the Void. It is the power that fuels the mansion's mysterious, beguiling nature, the voice that lures guests to remain at Cold House and the inspiration for their various quests. Ghosts who find the Heart Room can never bring themselves to leave its presence. The dead experience the discovery of the Heart Room as transcendence. Their minds have been twisted and shattered by the dark fingers of Oblivion stretching invisibly throughout Cold House and believe they have overcome an important moral or spiritual quest. They spend their remaining years in contemplation and prostration, finally succumbing to nothingness by hurling themselves into the Void.

The living cannot find the Heart Room, no matter how long they search. Living minds are not attuned to Oblivion's Voice, so they do not feel the same draw toward the Heart Room experienced by the dead. For the living, the Heart Room is one of the many legends and mysteries of Cold House, with no more or less truth than Cold House's other legends, like the Lucent Graal or the Ghost What Wears Diamond Slippers. The room may be searched for, and often is, but for the living, this quest is ultimately hopeless.

Eye and Seven Despairs visits the Heart Room often to feed upon souls and to observe his guests in their mute prostration before the Void as they worship the emptiness before them. Although they have lived in Cold House for decades, the Deathlord's traitorous servants are not aware of the Heart Room's existence, for, being still among the living, they have never heard Oblivion's call and have not thought to question the nature of Cold House.

EYE AND SEVEN DESPAIRS' SERVANTS

Eye and Seven Despairs knows that he cannot trust his betrayers. Yet, he allows them to live, issuing them veiled suggestions and commands disguised as Star of Dirt and Doubt. He has several wandering Abyssal servants under his command, however, whom he may recall

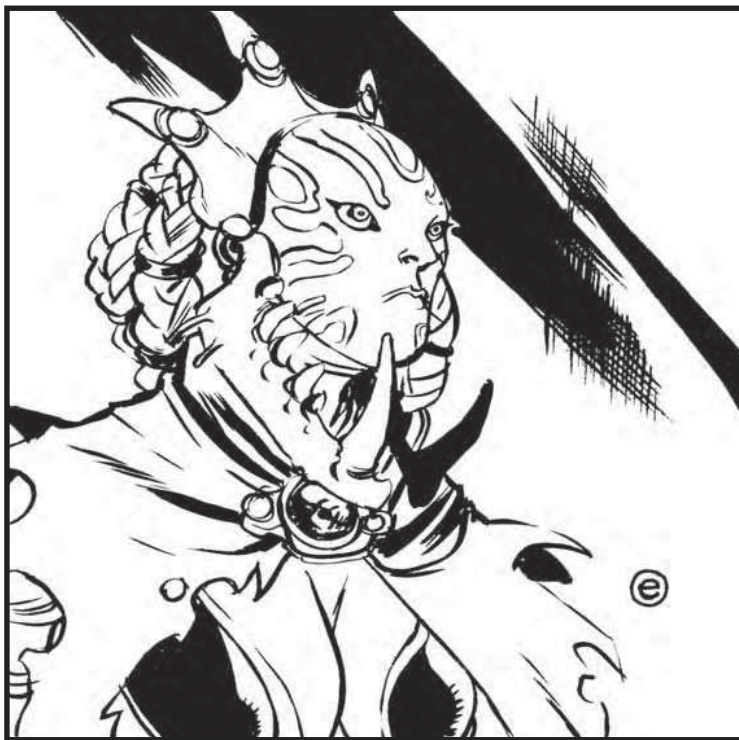


to Cold House if the situation gets too far out of hand. Scar of Uproar, a Dusk Caste Abyssal, is a bitter, illogical and reactionary individual, but there is no intrigue in him. His intentions and desires, which reveal a deeply emotional individual, all take the forefront in his behavior. He dresses in panther skins and black leather, with Lightning Torment Hatchets strapped to his massive arms and legs. Chorus at Midnight, a Day Caste Abyssal, is a skilled manipulator and the chief actor behind Eye and Seven Despairs' betrayal. Clever and convincing, she hopes to both eliminate her co-conspirators and take Star of Dirt and Doubt for herself. She was once a princess and still comports herself as one, appearing much the same as she did in life: austere though ingenuous, with large gray eyes and a noble nose, ankle-length raven hair and dry, anemic skin. Often curt and confident in conversation, her openness hides her corrupt, beguiling nature. She recently discovered the body of Blood Scavenger at the gates of Cold House, his body impaled a dozen times on sharp spears, his eyes burst and his entrails erupting from his mouth.

THE DOWAGER OF THE IRREVERENT VULGATE IN UNRENT VEILS

No one is safe in the Noss Fens — mortals passing through this dire marshland rarely see the sun again, and even gods keep their distance. The dead hunt the living nightly in great processions of hideous patchwork zombies: amalgamations of man and animal in every possible configuration. Throughout the Noss Fens, zombie animals scour the land for any scrap of carrion, conveying their finds to the massive burial mound in the center of this shadowland, the home of the Dowager, the Mound of Forsaken Seeds.

The Dowager herself, called Untamed Kethet of the Swarm by some, hunts when the stars are right, when her inner voice guides her to mortal blood, meat and soul fodder. She is a mighty sight to behold: a woman of great stature and build, dark-skinned with peculiar yellow eyes and long black snakes for fingers. Sometimes, she wears the red-and-black-streaked face of an uninviting mortal woman, donning the putrid and rotting skins of animals and a crown of ghostly azure-tinted jade. Upon her throne, she sits naked, her body striped with red and yellow ochre, long veils of purest black translucent silk draped over her skin. During the hunt, she appears with long-toothed feline traits, her body covered in sharp, bristly black fur and her legs bending backward. The Dowager always appears cloven-footed and bearing ram's horns on her head no matter what form she takes. Her rage



knows no bounds, and no sympathy can be seen in her empty black eyes. In battle, the Dowager uses only her massive soulsteel long powerbow, called Root of Scorn, and her many soulsteel shuriken, relying on her claws and wits when in hand-to-hand combat.

THE NOSS FENS AND THE HUNT

Traveling hundreds of leagues Northeast of Greyfalls, one discovers a great wooded swamp, with tremendous naked banyan trees casting heavy shadows over the land and a stagnant, putrid pungency that assails the nose long before the trees come into sight. Bloated animal corpses float stone-still in black waters disturbed only by the fell gasses occasionally rising out of their depths — but not for long. Those that live in Noss Fens are quick to scent the ripe dead meat and claim it. Those few villages existing on the very edges of the fens are built upon high stilts to prevent flooding, and the inhabitants speak guttural languages peculiar to their village. Many larger villages exist outside the fens, though they all speak some variation of Riverspeak. No large towns or cities are located nearby, and all the local inhabitants pay obeisance to the Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate in Unrent Veils.

When the Dowager so pleases, she sets her hunt upon a village. The hunt consists of hundreds of zombies, both conventional and not, typically led in shambling processions by either by the Deathlord's child-deathknight or one of her nephwracks. Upon arrival, the hunt gathers several families, cages them and returns to the Mound of Forsaken Seeds.

The hunt typically confines its operations to villages within the fens, not leaving the shadowland. Lately, however, Dowager has grown bolder, attacking villages outside the shadowland. What is more, she herself occasionally accompanies these hunting parties out of the shadowland, the only Deathlord daring to do so on a regular basis.

THE MOUND OF FORSAKEN SEEDS

The Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate in Unrent Veils' citadel appears as a massive, though unremarkable, burial mound. It is actually a gigantic ancient ziggurat covered eons past by earth and time. Once a place of worship for the Dragon Kings, the Mound of Forsaken Seeds is an ancient Manse built atop one of the most potent Demesnes in Creation.

The Noss Fens boasts very little wildlife. In the vicinity of the mound, though the stench of rot hangs in the air continually, no pests fly, and no scavengers are found. Fear is in the very air. Mortals with extraordinary Valor (4 or higher) may approach without penalty. Otherwise, their players must make a Valor + Essence roll at difficulty 4 or suffer -2 dice on all rolls while in the vicinity of the mound. Spirits suffer no penalties but suffer serious mental and emotional discomfort, so they do not frequent the area if they can help it. Fair Folk cannot be persuaded to approach the mound and will not even enter the Noss Fens without dire reason. When the Fair Folk marched through in the wake of the Contagion, they sensed some terrible ancient evil in these lands, and word quickly spread among their kind to avoid the Noss Fens at all costs.

Unbearable heat, dust, smoke and an array of both zombified animals and fearsome creatures unknown elsewhere lie silent and still in the winding halls and mysterious rooms of the Mound of Forsaken Seeds. Since making the Mound her home over a millennium ago, the Dowager has done little to alter the ancient design. Corridors twist into one another, sometimes banking downward or spiraling away into the depths, sometimes emptying into once-splendorous rooms filled with golden images of forgotten gods. The unlikely visitor, however, senses not merely the presence of twisted creatures and the piercing gaze of the dead upon her. If she listens carefully, a guest will hear the voices of children echoing distantly through the corridors.

In the center of the Mound, beyond a thick wall of spider webs (and spiders), one finds the Dowager's royal seat. And at the foot of the throne lies the Well of Udr.

THE WELL OF UDR

Mortals daring to enter this long, wide and pillared chamber experience thick, palpably hot air, fits of disorientation and vertigo and a cold unease that gradually becomes the worst terror man has endured. Without knowing quite why, mortals coming to this place helplessly crash to the floor, wail irrepressibly and tear out their eyes. As the wails of the long-dead and cursed victims of a

ROOT OF SCORN

A unique soulsteel long powerbow, Root of Scorn appears in the Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate in Unrent Veils' hand instantly with the expense of 1 mote of Essence. Arrows fired from this weapon transform into soulsteel harpoons: Upon striking a victim, the arrowheads clasp onto the victims bones like tiny clawed soulsteel hands and cannot be removed without cutting the soulsteel-weave cord attached to Root of Scorn (Strength + Valor at difficulty 4). Those slain in a shadowland while so attached to Root of Scorn's cord instantly become the Dowager's ghost slaves, as their bodies falls away and the soulsteel cord remains attached to their higher souls.

calamity never imagined wrack what sanity remains, victims cast themselves into the Well of Udr, into the unknown void opened eons past by a long-dead race, never understanding the reason behind their sudden madness, never knowing that it was here, long ago, that the Great Contagion was born.

Long before the Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate devised the plan to unleash the Contagion upon Creation, she mastered the secrets of the Well of Udr. Along with the massive tomes she found hidden within her new citadel, she spent centuries studying the Well and its properties, discovering it to be of an origin predating the creation of the gods and a vessel of unimaginable power.

THE LOWER HALLS

Deep into the earth, beneath the tombs of reptilian kings, queens and their armies, under temples to gods with long-forgotten names, sits chamber after chamber filled with the most marvelous and remarkable soulsteel articles. The walls themselves are lined with the substance and hung with soulsteel weave murals, soulsteel sconces and soulsteel weapons, while soulsteel furniture — beds, shelves, chairs — are arranged about each room. Certain rooms feature altars plated with dark soulsteel, while kitchens are stocked with soulsteel cutlery and china.

Behind soulsteel doors lie nurseries. Children play in the nurseries. They play with soulsteel toys. And when they are done playing, they pray at the soulsteel alter and eat with the soulsteel knives and sleep in their soulsteel beds. They take care of all of these things very well. And well they should, for even the smallest, most seemingly insignificant soulsteel bauble is someone's sister, someone's father. So they kiss their toys. They bow down to them and pray.

When the hunt returns from a raid, they lead their captives to the lower halls. The executioners there slay the adults, sparing no one, as their children observe.



When the ghosts emerge, Dowager permits them to spend a few hours with the children before the soulsmiths fashion them into objects. Very few try to escape. Those trying are made into horseshoes and troughs and are never seen again. The soulsmiths spare some ghosts, who become hunters themselves. The many bodies are fodder for the necromancers, who, at the Dowager's behest, tear corpses apart and merge human and animal components with truly disturbing, bizarre results.

Children are kept alive to worship their dead forbears, now forever cast in the form of objects. Prayers have a particularly strong potency within the Mound, and the Demesne strengthens more and more with every act of devotion. When children come of age, they typically suffer the same fate.

THE DOWAGER'S SCHEMES

The Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate in Unrent Veils has had enough of grand schemes aimed at ending all life in Creation, especially those requiring cooperation with other Deathlords, whom she despises with an unmatched hatred. For now, and forever as far as Dowager is concerned, she shall pursue her own modest schemes without bothering with her fatuous kin. She has all but ceased her affairs in Stygia, recalling all of her servants and practically closing her Stygian citadel. The other Deathlords believe that she may have quit her very destiny as a Deathlord altogether. They may be right.

Now, she cares only for increasing her own power via prayers and mastering the primeval sorcery she discovered ages ago. She has already learned of the existence of other universes, where she believes she might gain her freedom from the Malfeans and their taint, and she suspects that the Well of Udr, which disgorged the Contagion, must lead somewhere. Perhaps to her own salvation. She is certainly mistaken.

Threats and omens have appeared. Since their return, the Solar Exalted have, either through ignorance or wisdom, kept clear of the Dowager's lands, and no other hazards exist to offer any sort of challenge to her hunts. There are no cities to tempt the base natures of the Solars or those who would seek to conceal them from the Wyld Hunt. The few Solar Exalted to make their way here in the past met with ignoble ends. But news has reached the Dowager of powerful individuals who have come to her realm asking unwelcome questions and attacking her hunts. Whether these beings are Solar Exalted or not, she does not yet know. What is more, odd omens have appeared outside her citadel with an alarming frequency. A small, white, two-tailed pony with chrysanthemums in its mouth and hummingbirds buzzing around its head has been seen trotting around and atop the Mound in abject mockery of the dead, but when approached, it dashes off into the shadows, leaving no trace. The Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate herself has also seen a trio of damask-clad children holding hands and weeping at the

foot of the Mound. When they meet Dowager's gaze, their robes combust in green flames. The children stand there silently immolating, slowly fading away.

The Dowager has been collecting the dead in all their myriad forms for a long time and has amassed a sizable force. She commands several thousand master huntsmen and war ghosts as well as tens of thousands of zombies in an array of shapes and sizes, both mundane and strange. Anyone entering the fens is at risk. Those approaching the Mound cannot avoid an attack.

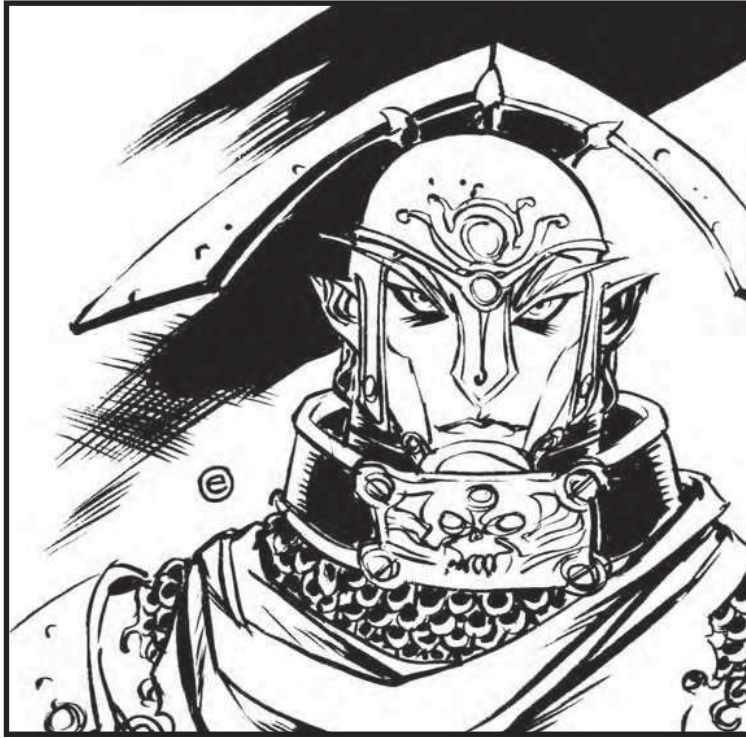
THE DOWAGER OF THE IRREVERENT VULGATE IN UNRENT VEILS' SERVANTS

The Dowager keeps but few Abyssal Exalted. Given the limited scope of her aims, few are required. When she does bring one forth, it is always a child and always takes the title Shoat of the Mire. She never taints the Essence of preexisting Exalted, preferring to slay all beings of such power on sight. The current Shoat of the Mire's is 10 years old. She watched the Procession of the Swine tear apart her mother, father and five brothers before being abducted and taken to Dowager's lower halls. Shy, insecure and unsure of both her power and her place, she is a difficult individual to deal with, for, in fear of her new master, she is prone to err on the side of surfeit in dealing with the unknown. A little over three feet tall, the Shoat of the Mire's torn gown ill-fits her extraordinarily small frame. The Shoat often has trouble muting her anima, appearing as a tiny radiant spirit of darkness seemingly at random. Hair black as midnight descends in chaotic rivulets to the small of her back, and her wee hands clutch a soulsteel dagger of inestimable elegance. This Shoat is an Abyssal of the Dusk Caste, and though her lack of experience fills some opponents with an abundance of confidence, she is no longer a stranger to combat and has learned many powerful Charms in her short tenure. Opponents take an additional -1 die penalty (in addition to the -2 penalty that may incur due to her caste) when attacking her as a result of her misleading appearance.

WALKER IN DARKNESS

Description: Also known as the Black Psychopomp, Promulgate of the Cromlech Cinerary, Walker in Darkness is a young and very opportunistic warrior-priest Deathlord who has recently become the only one to directly challenge the Mask of Winters' scheming. Having discovered the Mask's spies among his own servants, Walker in Darkness has determined to attempt to force the Mask of Winters into an alliance, else he will inform the other Deathlords that the Mask's spies hide among their ranks as well.

Walker in Darkness appears as a tall, bluish-skinned man with long ashen hair and severe orange eyes. When traveling, he often wears a light soulsteel cuirass over



crimson robes. Otherwise, he dresses in impressive crimson and black ceremonial garb. Walker in Darkness wields a soulsteel great axe called Arm of Shades Below in battle, though he is also a master archer with his soulsteel powerbow. A massive six-headed barghest, called Duke Lu, flanks him at war and lies beside his throne.

Walker in Darkness takes no chances. He performs sacrifices personally and dedicates each one to his Malfean lords, just in case one of them is observing. He keeps a close eye over his deathknights and does not tolerate waywardness as much as other Deathlords, for fear of treachery. An intellectual and a consummate planner, Walker in Darkness very rarely acts impulsively, though he is often quick to capitalize on a good opportunity when a sufficiently safe one presents itself. He is also one of the only Deathlords to commonly travel throughout the shadowlands — and beyond, if something is to be gained by it — alongside his deathknights on important missions.

Although he has few contacts there, Walker in Darkness is obsessed with the politics of the Realm, at times convinced that some great plot has been hatched by the powers there intent on his destruction. He is most interested in the workings of the Immaculate Order, though, being a newcomer in Creation, he has not gained any significant knowledge about any of its suspected schemes against him, if any exist.

As suspicious as he might seem, Walker in Darkness is not fearful of anything, and though he is somewhat quick to anger, he very rarely loses his composure.

A MILITARY MACHINE

Walker in Darkness operates his forces brilliantly, combining manipulation of enemy morale and perverse cruelty, usually resulting in victories before battles have a chance to begin. As a common practice, Walker's soldiers sever their enemies' hands and feet, then pile their helpless bodies in a heap to slowly bleed to death. Then, just before the first victims perish, the soldiers set the heap alight. This practice is cruel, but not wantonly so, as it is more politically motivated than deliberately extreme. The massacres are meant to deter future disobedience. They have never failed in this regard.

THE EBON SPIRES OF PYRRON

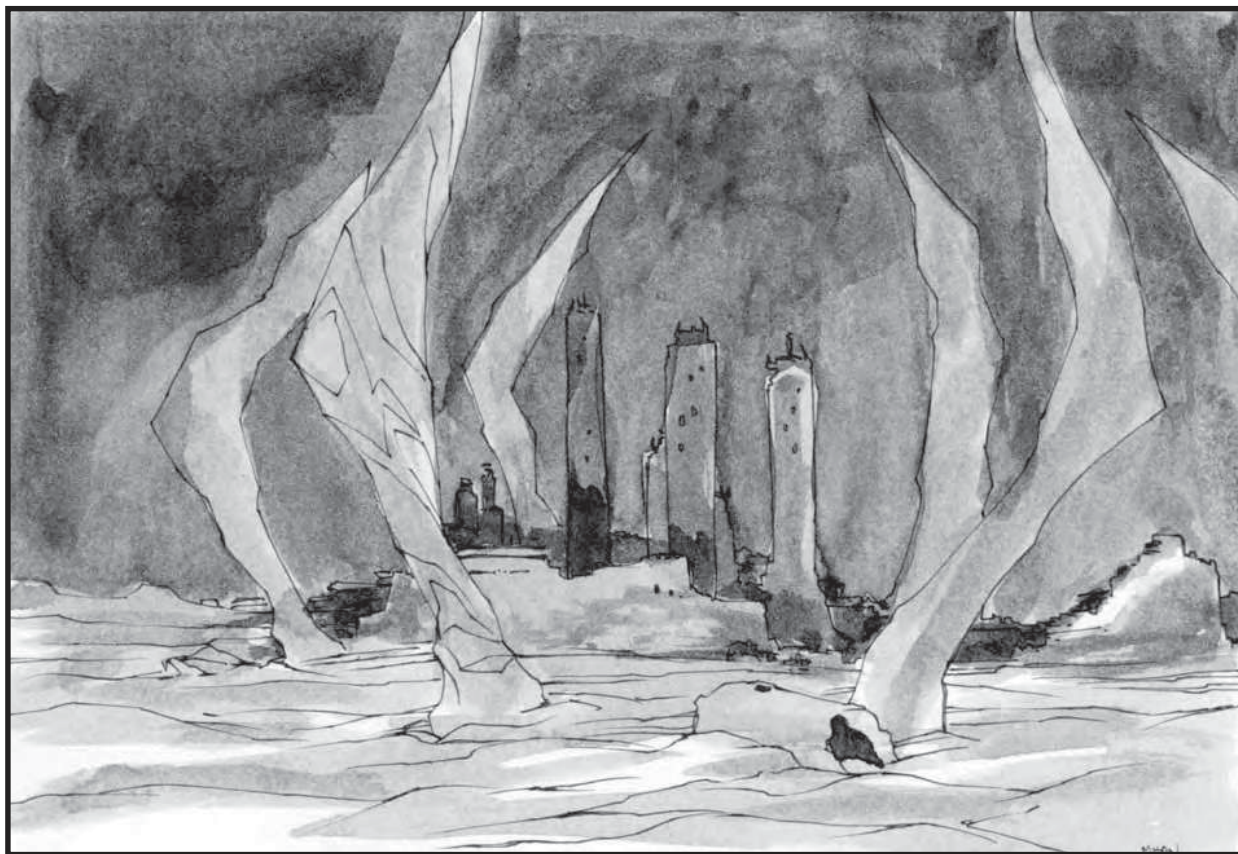
Polished crystal spires and black basalt walls rise above the barren plains of Walker's Realm. On this very spot, centuries ago, sat the House of Bitter Reflections, a citadel erected by the Princess Magnificent, and the remnants of that fallen palace still remain.

Toppled columns, lone staircases and crumbled towers litter the area, as if the former structure's pieces had been thrown up into the air by some great force, scattering vestiges of the Princess' rule far and wide. Part of the original foundation remains, however, from which the Ebon Spires of Pyrron emerge.

The Ebon Spires are protected by many powerful spells and illusions that mask its location, as well as impressive bestial automata set to destroy all invaders. An army of war ghosts rise out of the many encampments surrounding the Spires to meet invaders as well. If he is present and those attacking seem particularly formidable, Walker in Darkness will take up the defense of his citadel himself.

ARM OF SHADES BELOW

No mortal can lift Arm of Shades Below. Those trying are sapped of their Strength for the remainder of the scene (Strength = 1). Mortals struck with its blade are stricken with a rotting pox that slowly putrefies their bodies. One week after infection, no weapons can be wielded. If a victim finds no cure after one month, she finds herself little better than a walking corpse and completely under the control of Walker in Darkness. Only the strongest Solar sorcery can save the victim, but once a month has passed, even that is not enough, as the black destiny of the Deathlords will have completely poisoned the victim, tainting even her very name.



WALKER'S CURSE

Knowing that the local spirits would raze her citadel upon her departure, the Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers cursed the Demesne she built it upon, further tainting the Essence of her shadowland with death's touch. This curse consists of six Labyrinth Circle spells and one Solar Circle spell. Any attempt to dispel this curse must include at least three spells of the Labyrinth Circle.

Mortals approaching the Manse turn to dust and blow away on the wind, leaving their cold ghosts in its wake. The Manse itself is now extraordinarily tainted with death, such that the Essence drawn from it may only be used for Abyssal Charms and sorcery. The Manse's Hearthstones elicit severe ill effects on their bearers unless they are Abyssals or a Deathlord. Those who must breathe choke and die in the lifeless miasma within the Manse.

Because of the curse, Walker in Darkness cannot entertain living guests within his own citadel, Exalted or no, until he finds a way to remove the curse. This leaves the citadel itself and the lands surrounding it woefully undefended and ripe for conquest. Walker in Darkness has set up defensive military bastions of mortal conscripts throughout the area, but these precautions are hardly adequate should a sizable force attack.

The curse has made Walker in Darkness into a tireless, efficient and ultimately lonely Deathlord, who spends most his time on the battlefield and infrequently retreats to his citadel where only ghosts can attend to him.

THE GODS OF GREAT FORKS

The Spinner of Glorious Tales and the Weaver of Dreams of Victory have been watching Walker in Shadows very closely since his recent arrival, noting his tale and observing the results of the curse placed upon the land centuries past. They know that they are witness to a great tragedy, one they themselves planted the seeds of long ago. They also know that Walker in Darkness is doomed to fail and that Great Forks will never fall to the shadowlands. The curse that Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers left in her wake was a part of their story. Now, Walker in Darkness is as well.

The gods of Great Forks are as patient as they are interested. Walker in Darkness has made neither entreaty nor threat upon them or Great Forks. Should the Deathlord suddenly present arms against their chosen city, the gods of Great Forks will ensure his defeat. They have already told the tale of the triumph of Great Forks over all adversity, and Walker in Shadows cannot alter that tale as long as the curse upon his Manse remains. Should the curse be lifted, the story may unravel as well, and a confrontation between the gods of Great Forks and Walker in Darkness certain.

WALKER IN DARKNESS' SERVANTS

Walker in Darkness maintains several Abyssal Exalted as both spies and as military leaders, though they have never been to his citadel and do not know where to find it. He counts among his favorite servants Shards of Basalt to Her Army and the Green Lady. Shards of Basalt to Her Army, a Dusk Caste Abyssal, is a wise, though haughty military commander in Walker's army. His shimmering jet-black armor hides his strong, though ultimately deteriorating physique, a face horribly caved in on itself and dry, powdery skin the color of dust. When not engaged in military campaigning, Shards of Basalt resides in a mansion of black stone set down amongst the hills surrounding Walker's Realm, where he dwells with his wife. The Green Lady came to Walker in Darkness three years ago, revealing herself as a Sidereal Exalted and offered her services, claiming to see fortune and greatness in the stars for him. She set to work as counselor and soon became his chief agent when dealing with the sovereigns of Creation. Not long ago, she routed out a spy in the service of the Mask of Winters, who was found with documents bearing incriminating seals. Walker in Darkness executed the spy and has since relied on the Green Lady in matters of intelligence as well. It is her secret that there was no spy — she posed as a spymaster to recruit the agent and then “found” him to gain political capital.

THE MASK OF WINTERS

Much has been written about the Mask of Winters already — he is certainly the most well-known of all of the Deathlords in Creation. Information already presented about this Deathlord in other volumes will not be repeated.

The Mask of Winters is a liar, though he takes great pains to always appear honorable and courteous. He always comports himself immaculately, keeps his word and acts with the appearance of good faith at all times. But it's all a show. When he invaded Thorns, he did so with a smile. But smiles only hide treachery for so long. Eventually, they fade and the truth lays bare.

The youngest of the Deathlords, the Mask of Winters plays a dangerous game, attempting at once to dominate the mortal realm of Thorns and at the same time play the other Deathlords who might oppose his quick rise to power off of one another. Employing a combination of courtesy and audacity, the Mask of Winters wasted no time in establishing himself as a worthy power. Already, he commands an entire network of spies throughout the Threshold and several other areas, including the Realm itself. Very little occurs politically in the Threshold without the Mask of Winters hearing of it. He has also mastered military matters to such a fine

WALKER IN DARKNESS AND THE MASK OF WINTERS

Walker in Darkness and the Mask of Winters met before their rebirth as Deathlords. Walker in Darkness remembers very little. The Mask of Winters remembers everything.

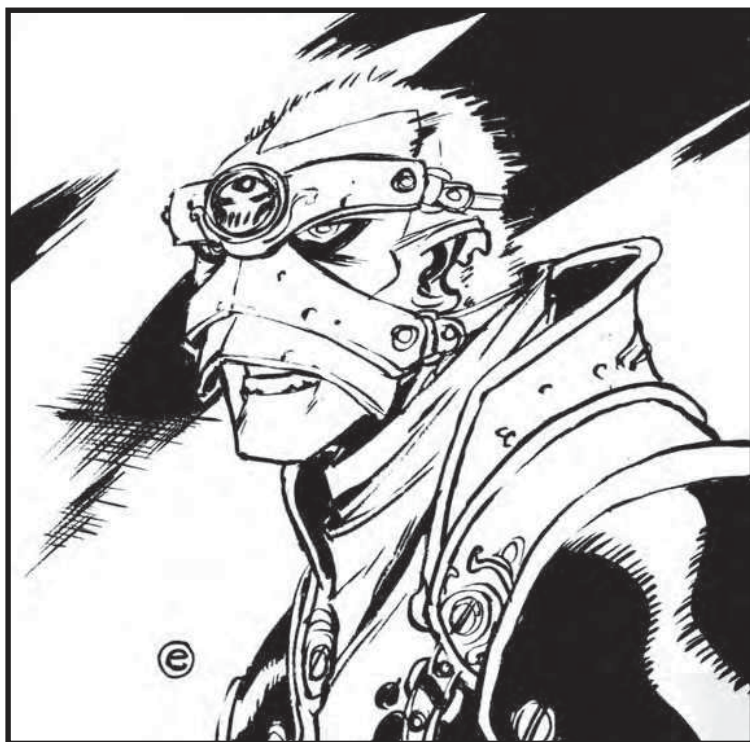
They met shortly after the Usurpation began, both having made their way to the Invisible Fortress (see **Time of Tumult**), where they hid from their executioners. At first, they were acquaintances, both finding the other Solar Exalted in the fortress distasteful — Walker in Darkness because of his introversion, the Mask of Winters because of his sense of absolute superiority, which, even in those days, he made no attempt to conceal. As the situation turned grimmer, and it became apparent that none of them would ever escape, the two grew to be friends for a number of years — and were even lovers, albeit briefly.

After centuries of living in close quarters with one another, however, conflict was bound to occur. Their common plight kept them from destroying each other long before, but slowly, madness and paranoia crept in. Soon, the inhabitants of the Invisible Fortress all turned on one another. Without warning, the Mask of Winters struck Walker in Darkness down.

A century later, the Mask of Winters perished, still convinced that destiny had more in store for him. Soon afterward, his destiny came to him. Walker in Darkness, though he did not remember his murderer, appeared to the Mask of Winters' ghost as the agent of the Neverborn and escorted him into the Labyrinth.

Walker in Darkness now has a vague recollection of the Mask of Winters. He is aware that he knew the Mask of Winters in his former life but does not remember that the Mask of Winters killed him. The Mask of Winters remembers practically everything about his life, though the knowledge has done him little good — the world has completely changed since the Usurpation. Walker in Darkness has little interest in learning the truth of his former life. If he ever discovered the Mask of Winters' treachery, however, war between them would be inevitable, despite any clever words from his adversary.





degree that he usually predicts where an enemy will strike next before he himself knows and takes initiatives to prevent such an attack from even occurring.

The Mask of Winters has agents in the courts of many other Deathlords. He has had the most success infiltrating the convoluted bureaucracies of the Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water, with several spies entering Skullstone society while still living, rising through the ranks, and now holding prominent, though largely insignificant, positions. One of his chief spies, the Green Lady, has infiltrated Walker in Darkness' realm so successfully that she has that Deathlord's ear. Recently, she set events in motion that will bring Walker in Darkness under the Mask of Winter's power. Walker in Darkness is surely to be the first to fall in the Mask of Winters' mighty conquest, but it is doubtful whether he will be the last.

WHENCE COMES THIS AUDACITY?

Many Deathlords have taken notice of their younger brother's seemingly inexhaustible supply of nerve. Even when attending congress in Stygia he demonstrates a puzzling bravado that, it is generally agreed, he has not earned. He seems fanatically devoted to the cause, but his actions indicate a heedless ambition, which has given rise to a sober, parental tolerance in other Deathlords, who often consider age and experience the only true measure of superiority. The Mask of Winters obviously has other ideas. Vision and destiny hold the higher value in his mind.

Long ago, before the Usurpation, the Mask of Winters was a Solar Exalted prince named Larquen Quen. Indulgent in all manner of perversion, as many of the Exalted were in those days, Quen kept loose and varied company, rubbing

shoulders with the highest-placed spirits in Creation as well as the most infamous villains. During one of his spectacular galas, a captivating woman in green approached and offered herself to him for the evening. In the aftermath of their blissful, strangely satisfying tryst, the Green Lady turned to Quen.

"I have seen your destiny," she whispered. "And that destiny is great. You will one day rule all of Creation."

Larquen Quen smiled. "Many of your kind have claimed as much to me, but they all want something. Why have *you* come to me this night?"

The Green Lady stood without looking at him, dressed and walked slowly to the bedroom door, saying as she departed, "Patience, my lord. You have nothing of true value. Destiny has not yet found you."

Such honesty and lack of desire for gratification touched the Mask of Winters' heart and plucked his ego. The Green Lady's words remained with him, and he himself soon believed that a great destiny awaited him, that he would one day hold Creation in his hands.

GOALS

Solidifying his rule of Thorns is certainly a goal, but it only serves as a rung in the ladder of the Mask of Winters' ultimate ambition: to bring the other Deathlords under his yoke, to utterly humiliate them all and, then, to cast them all into the Void. The centuries of shame and madness spent in the Invisible Fortress certainly damaged his sanity, but they also wounded his irrepressible pride, for he had fled instead of facing an honorable death in battle.

His sanity fell into ruin upon his death, wherein he found himself gifted with power instead of punished for his incredibly immoderate life and ignoble end. Placed in a rank with both Walker in Darkness, whom he murdered, and the vengeful shades of Solar warriors who did not flee their ultimate peril, but stood their ground and died honorably, drove the Mask of Winters to madness.

On the surface, all of the Mask of Winters' schemes serve the Malfean cause, but they also serve his greater design, which is to utterly destroy the other Deathlords. Alliances with other Deathlords all bear ulterior motives, usually to either keep close watch over them or to give some placation to the suspicious. When he does finally strike, the operation will be tightly organized and intricately planned, with every possibility for error removed.

THE MASK OF WINTERS' SERVANTS

Most of the Mask of Winters' Exalted servants serve as spies or heralds, with very few used for purely military matters. Whatever their use, however, each of his servants

faces several tests of loyalty before being trusted with important missions. The Mask of Winters is not above staging elaborate trials for servants to overcome to ensure their trustworthiness. The only exception is Apostate in Tatters. Once a mad eschatological poet and prophet, Apostate in Tatters has not ceased his mad ramblings even as an Abyssal Exalted. A Midnight Caste Abyssal, he frequents Lookshy and Nexus, plaguing the populace of both cities with such insane demonstrations and displays of power (which he openly presents as miracles from the Neverborn) that the Wyld Hunt has caught his trail. A wrinkled, miasmatic and frightfully faced man with a white beard and one eye, Apostate in Tatters was, perhaps, a mistake — but a somewhat useful one at least, as he can be sent out to draw unlimited attention to himself.

THE ABYSSAL EXALTED

The Deathlords scheme, intrigue and battle endlessly in the service of the Malfean agenda, but their own fingers only stretch so far. Not even the Contagion could bring about an end to all Creation. Now, with nations in chaos and political realities changing every day, an effective assault on Creation is unlikely, so long as the dead alone serve as the agents of darkness.

Approximately five years ago, the first Exalted champion of darkness erupted under a pale, starless black sky. In the years that followed, dozens more put themselves under the yoke of Oblivion. These are the Abyssal Exalted: passionate, immortal, noble poet-sorcerers touched by destiny's infected fingers and charged by the Deathlords to bring about the death of all things and bound by destinies chained to Oblivion's road. In a moment of weakness, each chose to sell her name and destiny to the Malfeans in exchange for life anew and an Exalted Essence tainted by the power of the dead Primordials. This power, though at a deathknight's command, ultimately serves the Void.

Most embrace their dark gifts. Others resist their tainted destinies to the last. Some simply go mad. Whatever their choice, the power within persists. It will keep them alive forever, cheating death as they serve it, until the end of Creation, when they and their kindred are all that remain of the living. Battle or misfortune might claim them, but age and disease have no hold over their existences.

And in return, the power of the Void worms its way into the Great Curse and takes its grip on their souls. It speaks through them and influences everything they do. When the time comes, despite whatever sympathy they might have for the living or whatever hatred they might harbor for the Deathlords or the Malfeans, they will surely stand with the forces of darkness and pull all of Creation down into the Void. Such is their destiny and their inescapable fate. They may try to resist this destiny, but in so doing, they will only travel further down the road toward the apocalypse. They have made their bargain and

drunk of Oblivion's black power, and now, it is in them, and it fills them.

Exalted in fear and educated in the Labyrinth, Abyssal Exalted are the Deathlords' courtiers, ambassadors, generals, warriors and intermediaries in the realms of both the Underworld and Creation, tasks that mirror natures balanced between life and death. They dress in black, draping their pale, chalky skin in funerary linens, and they accent their outfits with deathly accoutrements. An Abyssal Exalted possesses remarkable skill in battle and potent sorcery equal to the greatest magic of the Celestial Circle.

Deathknights are rarely Exalted in Creation. The sorceries used by the Deathlords have little reach into the lands of the living, and so, it is in shadowlands and on their borders that Abyssal Exalted most commonly appear. Only those in the utmost fear and extremity can reach out to the Deathlords from deep within the living lands.

THE FACE OF EVIL

Deathknights manifest great variation in appearance, ranging from taut, supple skin, to deteriorating and putrefying flesh, to naked bone, with faces and figures exquisite, repulsive or dreadful and everything in between. All have an aura of death. Unlike the Deathlords and the Neverborn they serve, however, deathknights still live and breathe.

Some deathknights acquire an odd vitality following their Exaltation. Some of these Abyssals develop soft, unblemished skin that fades to pale chalk-white, while others retain the healthy pallor of the living. Thin hair either drains of all color or darkens to effulgent raven. Fingers grow longer, and eyes become wider and rounder.

In other cases, the Abyss-tainted Essence corrupts and consumes the flesh of the bearer, leaving behind a husk in various states of decomposition. Their eyes sink deeper into their skulls, and their skin cracks and oozes a thin, white ichor. For some, the procession of age and rot ends with their faces resembling that of a mummified corpse, their skin a peeling, powdery vellum of decay. These carry with them always the musty effluvium of ancient crypts. Others never lose the stench and visage of rot: Flesh and blood and bile drip from them endlessly, while worms nest in their brains and burrow into their still-living hearts.

What is true is that the greater an Abyssal's command over Essence, the greater the beauty or the starker the decay. Some may go untouched at first, but as the power within them grows, the Abyssal's appearance becomes unmistakable.

CANDIDATES FOR EXALTATION

Each Deathlord has different ideas about proper deathknight candidates. What links all deathknights is that, unlike other Exalted, whose Exaltations were thrust upon them by the will of Celestial forces beyond their comprehension, Abyssal Exalted in all cases have chosen to align





themselves with the Void. Some may regret that choice as one made without true understanding of the consequences or as a decision made in haste under the influence of rage or despair, but the decision stands, and there can be no renegotiations. The Malfians have consumed their names, and their fates are now rewritten. The only choice left for remorseful deathknights is whether or not to obey.

NEWLY EXALTED DEATHKNIGHTS

Cautious Deathlords such as the First and Forsaken Lion and the Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate in Unrent Veils prefer to avoid associating with Solar Exalted at all, creating their minions from the ground up by Exalting ordinary mortals with tainted Essences. In addition to the heroic stature of their original destinies, newly Chosen deathknights usually harbor some previous experience or fascination with death, be it the result of the passing of a lover, a bout of disease or a profound interest in the slain and the trappings of the crypt. Deathlords see such mortals as potential servants and use astrological means to closely watch those in the shadowlands. Suicidal mortals are especially prized; either profoundly moved by a Deathlord's arguments and entreaties or tragically misled and exploited by their new masters, such deathknights make for some of the most dedicated and unswerving servants of Oblivion.

The Deathlords use Void Circle Necromancy to send out their eyes, watching over their shadowlands, alert for death's hand as it approaches a hero about to meet her end.

The Deathlord is given a vision of the mortal and may choose to initiate a psychic link with the soon-to-die, appearing to her in this moment of vulnerability. The Deathlord speaks in a quiet and convincing voice in the doomed mortal's mind to give her a choice. She can accept her death and pass on, powerless, into the Underworld, her enemies triumphant, leaving behind a corrupt and transitory world of fools, charlatans and villains. Or she can accept that death must inevitably come to all things, that in death all things arrive at last at their holy, predestined, final peace. If the mortal accepts the latter, the Deathlord offers her the opportunity to help purify the world, to deliver the living to their final ends and to foment the worship of death in all Creation. In exchange for her name and ultimate destiny, the Deathlord will not only save her life, he will Exalt her with an Essence tainted with darkness and death. The moment she accepts the Deathlord's bargain, she is lost to Creation.

Mortals who accept the Deathlords' bargain do so for reasons personal, tragic or trite. They may agree with their new master's philosophy and wish to spread death and the adulation of it throughout Creation and the Underworld. They may desire the power to destroy or enslave their enemies or to avenge injustices. Or their decision may come rashly in a mad craving for life with no thought given to the cost. It matters not — the newly Exalted Abyssal's name has been consumed by the Void, her ultimate destiny sold to the Neverborn and the corrupted Essence

already ensconced within her soul. All that remains is to fetch the new Exalt and deliver her into the Labyrinth.

Once a Deathlord has seduced his prey into accepting a tainted Exaltation, the new deathknight must be found and delivered to the Neverborn so that she may formally give up her name to them. Ghostly trackers and other deathknights pursue the itinerant Abyssal. Time is of the Essence, for if the new Exalt regrets her choice and escapes the shadowland before she can be retrieved, she will not be easily located. If the minions of another Deathlord find her first, she will serve another.

For this reason, only the most retiring Deathlords or those who create Exalts far from the borders of the Underworld abandon their infant servants to chance, allowing the Abyssal's powers to save her or not as fate dictates. If the Deathlord is at all militant, he more typically chooses to directly intervene and spirits himself to the new Exalt's side through some sorcerous conceit. His form might unfold before her out of a sudden flurry of freezing gusts, thorns, bats or nests of unblinking eyes. He might rise out of the earth in an abrupt pillar of green flame or spirit her away from her foes with ethereal fingers. Whatever the Deathlord's choice of guise, the Abyssal's survival is assured.

FORMER SOLAR EXALTED

Some Deathlords, such as the Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water and the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears, enjoy the rare pleasure of tainting the Essences of Solar Exalted. These Deathlords see the act of tainting Solar Essences as their right and duty, as those Essences should have been theirs when their automaton ravaged the Jade Prison. Turning the agents of the Unconquered Sun away from the bright path gives these tormentors a dark thrill and immeasurable pleasure. The more righteous and life-affirming the Solar had been before his fall, the sweeter the triumph. In addition, former Solars make for formidable, ready-trained warriors more easily instructed in the sorcery and philosophy peculiar to the servants of Oblivion.

Solar Exalted have many potential reasons for forsaking the Unconquered Sun, the most common being weakness of will. Unable to deny the inevitability of the death of all things or the transience of flesh, a Solar falling to a Deathlord's temptations admits in her heart, if only for a moment, that death is greater than life. Solar Exalted especially loyal to the Unconquered Sun typically only fall to the Deathlords' temptations after months or years caged in one of their dungeons.

Less idealistic Solar Exalted who have through battle been brought near to death may accept a Deathlord's bargain for fear of losing their lives. Others may not wish to relinquish their great power. Perhaps they believe at first that the Abyssal taint will not corrupt them as the Deathlords believe, that their will is stronger than the taint. Or perhaps they are just as corrupt and evil as the

Deathlords themselves and gleefully accept the opportunity to cheat death.

EXPERIENCING ABYSSAL EXALTATION

No thunderous explosions or astronomical anomalies accompany Abyssal Exaltation. While no two Abyssal Exaltations are alike, all express themselves gradually and quietly, usually by the new Exalt influencing the world around or her perception of it. It is true that a deathknight's body will undergo outward change, but this process is a slow one. The immediate effects are psychological, as the new deathknight experiences the world apparently changing around her.

At first, a slow, painfully chill wind endlessly penetrates the skin and freezes the bones of the newly Exalted Abyssal. What follows is different for every deathknight, as it is dependent on her own fears and psychological states. Details might include:

- A creeping putrefaction of the flesh, followed by dire visions of shadowy arms emerging from fiery pits that open in the earth, desperately clawing at her tainted soul.
- Glimpses of damnation seen in mirrors, the eyes of friends and other reflective surfaces.
- Horrifying nightmares of citadels encrusted in flesh and bodiless mouths whispering in unknown tongues in the recesses of the mind.
- Silent visions of thousands of eyes opening in thin air and weeping blood.
- Trees screaming in terror as blood trickles from their leaves.
- Raitons who follow the character constantly, spying and cackling.
- Dark clouds and hideous black birds appear to follow wherever she may go.
- Loathsome dark insects and long-toothed bats throng like a dread haze in the character's wake.
- Mad wayfarers call the character by name and prophesy her doom.
- The dead rise out of the earth to greet the character or to bar her way.

Some may experience their Exaltation with the perception that something momentous and macabre has happened to them. Others, usually those who experience their Exaltation while in a near-death dream state, might feel no change in themselves at all initially, interpreting the outward effects, and even the memory of their agreement with their new master, as signs of their own madness. This will last no longer than the time till the Abyssal's arrival in the Labyrinth to formally give up her name — the Malfeans do not permit their servants any self-deception about the truth of their state.

Deathknights feel their Exaltation more keenly and personally than other sorts of Exalted. Inwardly, Abyssal Exaltation feels like nothing more than a cold privation and a quiet calm of the soul akin to a dark



epiphany: a vague sense of having lost something small and wholesome in exchange for something great and dark and mighty. A newly Exalted Abyssal realizes at once that her destiny has been joined to a greater power and purpose. Some accept this revelation with ease and take the roads to which their destinies guide them. Others resist their destinies and regret the moment of weakness in which they sold their destinies to Oblivion.

TRAINING AND PREPARATION IN THE LABYRINTH

Slain by their treacherous progeny and denied all that lies outside of death, the Neverborn silently dream of Creation's ruin. They contrive their vengeance amidst the stillness and decay of the tombs encompassing them. They whisper in the minds of their servants: *There is no escape from the all-consuming Mouth of the Void.*

Nothing occupies the Malfeans' twisted minds more than their own lust for revenge. The deathknights are the fingers that shall deliver this vengeance to them. But the Deathlord's new servants must be properly instructed. There are doctrines to master and new sorcery to study, as well as the cryptic formalities of obeisance to the Neverborn.

Then, the Deathlord escorts her newly Exalted minion to her Malfean lord's tomb deep within the Labyrinth, where the Neverborn look into her, judge her and accept her fealty. It is at this point that the character's name is actually consumed.

Training and preparing a newly Exalted deathknight can take a long time. The young heroes have no experience with sorcery or Charms and must spend months, sometimes years, just learning the rudiments. The philosophy of the Void is foreign to most and can take some time to master. There are newly Exalted deathknights who lionized the dead and made use of their trappings even before Abyssal Exaltation. These more readily learn and accept the Neverborn's teachings.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE VOID

It is better to die than to live, better to be free of flesh than saddled with its imperfections. The deathknights shall bring the message to Creation as harbingers of the approaching inevitable doom. The dead eclipse the living in greatness. Their bodies are incorruptible, and their existence is without want, as there is no hunger or need in death. He who understands and accept this truth is blessed; he who denies it, lost.

The dead do not forget he who libates for them. The dead who enjoy prayers and sacrifices from their living descendants shall pave their way to the Underworld and prepare seats of greatness so that all the dead shall revere the faithful at their passing through the gates of the Underworld. The dead deserve such adulation, for they are infinitely superior to the living, who are bound to their ancestors and owe their existence to them. Yet, the dead must give back to the

living, sharing their wisdom and their power. If a ghost does not care for his descendents, others will outshine the neglectful spirit and enjoy higher honors.

Mortals are the fuel that propels the downfall of Creation. Mortals are a deathknight's rightful prey. The flesh is weak, unworthy and infinitely inferior to the perfect immutability of the dead. The living will ultimately join us in Oblivion. Their prayers give power to the dead. In drinking mortal blood, in eating mortal flesh, deathknights suckle at the founts of Essence to better bring Creation low. With each mortal that dies, the power of the dead grows, and Creation is simultaneously weakened. To usher mortals along the road is no trespass, and to use the living as pawns is eminently proper.

It is written in the stars of the dead that the living shall never triumph over the Neverborn. The lords of Oblivion cannot fail. Woe to the mortal man who seeks to deny the righteous lords of darkness their just due. The stars decree that all things shall be drawn into the quiet peace of death. Woe to him who challenges destiny, for he too shall enter the darkness and find his lords unkind. Woe to him who turns his back on the darkness and challenges the lords of Oblivion, for the stars shall burn him and darkness take his eyes. Oblivion's ultimate triumph is manifest through Celestial Authority, and none may challenge it.

JUDGMENT

Following her training, the deathknight prostrates herself before the Malfean, who judges the fitness and worthiness of the Abyssal. Unworthiness merits instant destruction and a staunch reprimand for the Deathlord responsible for delivering the botched minion. If deemed satisfactory, the new deathknight is given over to her Deathlord or his delegate, who escorts her to the Deathlord's citadel. There begins her tutelage in the lands and ways of the dead.

AN UNDERWORLD SOJOURN

Following her period of instruction in the Labyrinth, one final stroke is all that remains to bind the deathknight's destiny to her new master. The Black Pact begins with the deathknight willingly placing herself within the Monstrance of Celestial Portion and chanting blasphemies and maledictions upon Creation for six days. During this ritual, the deathknight's Essence becomes attuned to the Monstrance. On the sixth day, the Deathlord renames the deathknight, choosing a sobriquet fitting to the use the Deathlord intends for the new deathknight. This designation may change at the Deathlord's pleasure. On the seventh day, the ritual ends, and the deathknight is set free.

Most Deathlords command new deathknights to undertake a trek throughout the Underworld as part of their education, so that they may see and know the realities and proprieties of the dead. For deathknights intended for evangelical details both in Creation and the Underworld,

this journey is especially significant, for the more they learn about the thoughts and cares of the dead, the better they may convince both the living and the dead of the superiority and worthiness of the Underworld's denizens. At least one Deathlord, the Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate in Unrent Veils, has forsaken this part of a deathknight's education. Her single current servant is kept close to her, and it is likely that any future servants would be held equally close.

For the rest of her existence, her master's citadel becomes the deathknight's true home. Though she may rule far away realms or dwell at the very edge of Creation, her Deathlord's citadel is her true haven and most sacred Manse. The Void-tainted Essence flowing through the cold stones and soulsteel gates resonates with her anima like no other energies in Creation or the Underworld. While within her master's citadel, she regains Essence at twice the normal rate. Should a deathknight switch loyalties to another Deathlord, the citadel's gates are forever closed to her; she loses all benefit and becomes subject to her former master's vengeance, as the deathknight's destiny is still linked to her original Deathlord.

MISSIONS

Deathknights serve as their masters' hands in Creation, carrying out deeds impossible or inconvenient for the Deathlords themselves. They are frequently placed in command of the Deathlords' invading armies, championing the cause of Oblivion through conquest of arms. The deathknights lead their lord's forces throughout the shadowlands, and sometimes beyond, in conquest of mortal kingdoms, to establish strategic positions, to patrol borders and preserve order in their master's domain and to oppose the machinations of rival Deathlords. Deathknights rarely lead their armies into Creation, and even then, the enterprise is usually undertaken with extreme caution. The hazards are too great. Deathknights are helpless in Creation when their Essence is exhausted and there are no living to feed upon. Defeated kingdoms are too difficult to keep, and the rising sun makes retreat from battle impossible. Battling mortal legions is a rare joy for many deathknight commanders, however, for the bodies of the fallen swell their ranks. The terror and shock in mortal opponents' eyes as the broken husks of their fallen compatriots rise and turn on them is one with few equals. Deathknights victorious in Creation often return to the shadowlands with their forces two or three times their original size, commanding respect and loyalty from their charges and winning glory from their master.

Very rarely, a Deathlord will place one of his deathknights in command of his navies with orders to set sail into Creation. The navies of the dead are notorious among the living for their silent ambushes and cruel acts of murder and piracy, though few ever survive such encounters. More often than not, navies patrol in or near the shadowlands, eluding enemy ships by slipping into the mists and leaving pursuers to perish on the bone-reefs or to fall victim to beasts drifting like sodden carcasses in the dark waters.

In the Underworld, the Deathlords' armies are free to roam where they will, but they are usually kept concealed. Even the First and Forsaken Lion's Legion Sanguinary fights few battles. The Deathlords have used their forces at many key moments in the history of the Underworld, but open campaigns are rare and largely unnecessary except where the armies of the Deathlords engage one another. Even then, these wars are affairs most commonly fought by ambush, sorcery and summoned demons, not by massed armies.

Both the most and least trusted deathknights serve the Deathlord's person. Bodyguards, heralds, bailiffs, bodyservants and other posts of variable distinction wait on their master's pleasure. These Abyssals typically stay near to their lord, dwelling in the Deathlord's citadel for as long as the assignment lasts. Bodyguards rarely leave their lord's side, while heralds and bailiffs serve in a more formal capacity, administering their master's concerns and acting in the Deathlord's interests when he is absent. Bodyservants usually hold that post as a result of some failure or crime, and the Deathlords typically spare no opportunity to abuse and dishonor them.

The Deathlords have been watching for a long time. They have spies and informers in the Threshold, the Realm and even the courts of rival Deathlords. Some of these spies are deathknights, who use their dark powers to gather intelligence and to corrupt powerful individuals in foreign regimes. The Mask of Winters commands a frighteningly far-reaching web of agents, though others, such as the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears, also finesse and incite events with a few well-placed spies. Whoever their master, deathknight spies learn all they can of the lands, troops, spirits, rulers and beliefs of a particular kingdom or region. Recently, the All-Seeing Eye discovered a double-agent in its midst. Compromised by a lone Sidereal who discovered the ruse and revealed the infiltrator's true nature, the deathknight calling herself Lamb's Wolf escaped to a galley of bone and flesh that disappeared into the blackness of the night.

Spies and informers are less secret in the Underworld, for there is no longer any reason to hide. The dead have either come to believe the Deathlords' rhetoric or have come to realize the vast scope of the Deathlords' plans and know that they are hopeless in their clutches. The villages and towns of the Underworld crawl with stoolies and squealers who prove their loyalty by exposing or betraying their peers. More sophisticated spies lead these rings. In Stygia or near a Deathlord's citadel, the operation may be overseen by a deathknight. Deathknights infiltrating another Deathlord's realm must maintain absolute secrecy, for the Deathlords have eyes everywhere.

Deathknight ambassadors and heralds ride out of the darkness to parlay with rivals and kings, to issue challenge, to mediate disputes among neighboring realms and to broker deals and treaties with those whom they would manipulate. Every Deathlord will have his own particular strategies and goals, but deathknights given these kinds of tasks often have



MONSTRANCE OF CELESTIAL PORTION

Built from a design given to the Deathlords by the Yozi Princes, a Monstrance of Celestial Portion is a five-foot-square cage of soulsteel, bleached bones and black jade, carefully etched with eldritch runes and wards. Deathlords use Monstrances of Celestial Portions to trap Exalted Essences and as an essential component in the sorcery used to taint those Essences. Each tainted Essence is uniquely linked through sorcery to a single Monstrance. Deathlords use this connection to spy on and communicate with their deathknights. Should a deathknight perish, her Essence flees back to its prison. A cold, black aura emanates from the cage, causing mortals within 10 feet to flee in terror. Only mortals with Valor 5 are able to approach a Monstrance.

Solar Exalted cannot bear the sight of these blasphemous creations and will avert their eyes from the malignant runes etched upon the cages. Solars also cannot consciously approach or even touch a Monstrance of Celestial Portion without the greatest strain to their Willpower and Valor (-1 penalty to dice pools involving these Traits when in or around the Monstrance). The Deathlords use torment in these cages to torture captured Solars into accepting the Black Exaltation of the Malfeans. The mechanical effects of such imprisonment are up to the Storyteller, but it is certain the bars drain Essence and that they are immune to Charms of escape and both Terrestrial and Celestial Circle Sorcery.



similar directives: Meet threats and insults with smiles, divide the enemy, and never compromise your master.

Ambassadors in the Underworld need not be so silver-tongued as those in Creation. Dead kings and their ceremonial armies pose no threat to the plans of the Deathlords. Only in the realms of other Deathlords must extreme caution be taken. Deathknights assigned to such rivals must be carefully trained in the formalities of approaching and dealing with the Deathlord whose court they enter — often an entire mission in itself.

Deathlords often send their deathknights into Creation and the Underworld to spread the creed of death and darkness. The living need not be reminded that souls rise in the Underworld after death, but the dead need prayers and offerings to be of use to the Deathlords. Deathknights serve

as the chief proselytizers for the worship and adulation of the dead. They travel throughout the shadowlands instructing the faithful, preaching to skeptics and presiding over the liturgy of the ancestor cult. With glib tongues, they enlighten the living, spinning parables and sermons highlighting the beauty and magnificence of the Underworld and its honored denizens, who have the power to usher the living into the Underworld. The living, they preach, will have abundant riches and power in death if they worship the dead and pay them tribute. Specific dogma will differ, as none of the Deathlords pursue the same goals and each has her own individual approach with respect to the dogma they spread among the living. Yet, always, the deathknights gather worshipers together in the shadowlands and perform prayer-rites and sacrifices to give power and

praise to the dead, rituals that feed the power of the Deathlords as well.

Preaching to the dead is another matter — and takes little convincing. The dead are certain of their significance and need not be reminded that the living depend on them for their great wisdom. The Deathlords and deathknights add to this sense of superiority, teaching that death is the sacred culmination of all existence, that prayers and sacrifices from the living will make the dead mighty.

When the Deathlords desire something, when an artifact or intriguing mortal catches their attention and their craving for it will not abate, they charge their minions, frequently deathknights, with the recovery of these things. Sometimes, the mission takes mere days and but a few short leagues' travel, while, other times, the quest may last years, bringing the deathknights to unfamiliar, faraway lands fraught with foreign perils. Deathknights set upon long quests usually return to their lord's citadel only infrequently, as Deathlords with whims tolerate no dalliance. Some of these missions of discovery and recovery may bring one deathknight to the Underworld and others to the land of the living. The perils tend to be of a different sort, and the deathknight certainly feels more comfortable among the dead.

Deathlords might also install their deathknights as regents in conquered kingdoms. These Abyssal chieftains and kings commonly use their authority to institute some sort of domain-wide worship of the dead. Seemingly innocuous at first, the deathknight's kingdom might slowly take on the attributes of a dark theocracy, with all aspects of life eventually being touched by the new religion. The very worship of gods might be outlawed and condemned, setting up an eventual conflict between the Deathlord and local deities and forcing the local Immaculate clergy into slavery or exile. Deathknight rulers may also attract unwanted attention from powerful neighboring kingdoms, potent spirits, a curious Wyld Hunt, Immaculates, Solar Exalted or even the forces of the Realm.

The Deathlords do not regularly inhabit their Stygian townhouses. Matters in the shadowlands and Creation divert their attention away from the tedious administration of a city home. Depending on the Deathlord, highly favored and trusted minions or disgraced, incompetent ones may be chosen for the duty of keeping their master's Stygian house in his absence. The Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water might send an honored, though somewhat disposable champion for a year-long tenure as regent, while Eye and Seven Despairs might send along a token, likely corrupt deathknight. The task itself is largely a sinecure position, though if a Deathlord would suddenly choose to visit Stygia, he will expect that all of his business there will be in perfect order when he arrives. A deathknight regent finds herself maintaining inventories and overseeing servants for the most part, but emergencies give her the opportunity to shine, as she holds sway in her master's absence.

At times, deathknights are set loose upon Creation and left to their own devices. This may be the result of their master's severe displeasure, evidence of extraordinary trust or undertaken at the behest of a Malfean lord who has seen what the stars have in store for the deathknight. Circumstances will dictate the precise expectations and conditions of the exile or open-ended mission, but Deathlords demand, as always, that their servants, favored or not, always act in the interests of their lords.

Whatever the mission, tests follow tests follow tests, and there is rarely indication if the action has been performed satisfactorily or if the Abyssal's reactions to one test are not, in fact, part of another, larger test. For the Abyssal Exalted, the trials never end, and scrutiny never ceases. Their masters are forever judging them.

SERVING THE VOID

When an Abyssal sells her name to the Neverborn, she sells her ultimate destiny to them as well. The dark power she accepts in return inevitably turns itself toward their service. Even if she denies her destiny and takes up the mantle of a champion of light, in the end, she must find that she has been serving the darkness all along. Such is her foreordained, inescapable fate.

Some Abyssals react to this by surrounding themselves with the trappings of the dead to announce their absolute allegiance to Oblivion. Some throw themselves into life-affirming debaucheries, indulging in the most depraved luxuries and pleasures of the flesh, knowing that, one day, they must stand with the legions of darkness and destroy all that they revel in. Others withdraw from mortal contact to grimly contemplate their role in Creation's dire fate. These are taciturn sentinels of the Void, denying themselves the simplest of pleasures and shunning any lasting contact with the living.

While deathknights may have the freedom and the power to accept or reject their destinies in their hearts, to be Oblivion's lapdogs or cankers on its heel, their destinies demand that their *actions* express complicity with and devotion to the philosophy of the Void. The Abyssal who, through hubris, opposes her appointed destiny is doomed to inevitable ruin. Deathknights openly abandoning their roles as soldiers of the Abyss earn the displeasure of their masters, who rain black miracles upon their wayward servants.

Black miracles manifest around the deathknight attempting to cheat her destiny, sometimes effecting her alone, other times bleeding into the lives of the world around her. The seed of death exists within the soul of every deathknight, which reacts and lashes out at its host when the deathknight's actions are in disharmony with her ordained destiny. Wine becomes vinegar in her presence, and nearby livestock begin to bear stillborn young. Local women become barren, and seeds stored near her fail to sprout. Meat spoils at her touch, and milk curdles when the deathknight passes by. Her friends all suffer ruin or come to painful ends.



Unless the Abyssal changes her ways, the stain on her destiny invokes ever worse consequences. Monstrosities from the Underworld appear to plague her, killing companions and destroying her holdings and possessions. Healers trying to help those she loves bring only plagues and infirmity. Local magistrates condemn the innocent and indulge the crimes of the wicked. And all those who love her find themselves struck down by disease and misfortune.

CHEATING DESTINY

The Deathlords are not omniscient, however. It is possible for a deathknight to secretly work against her destiny or, at least, to harbor inimical loyalties, while outwardly presenting herself precisely as her lord expects and even enjoying the highest favor. As long as she keeps up this ruse, her devotion might never be questioned and her destiny remains satisfied. Obviously defying the Deathlords without even presenting the seeming of fealty brings black miracles and worse punishments upon a deathknight. Only by assuming at least the appearance of acquiescence to her destiny can an Abyssal avoid disaster and her master's displeasure. Obeying her master unquestioningly, donning and surrounding herself with the trappings of the dead and spreading the worship of death satisfies her destiny. So long as she plays the part fate demands of her, performs dark and terrible deeds and never pits her strength directly against the Neverborn, she will satisfy her destiny even as she strives against it. Her Deathlord may see through her treacherous

intentions and punish her, but so long as the results of her actions are in line with her tainted destiny, she will not be scourged by the power that is within her.

REWARDS

The Deathlords reward excellence and loyalty with luxuries, tools and honors to heighten their minions' infamy and to increase their power so that the Abyssals may serve their lords even more capably. Some Deathlords appreciate grace and extraordinary polish, rewarding deathknights who perform their deeds with imagination and awarding poets high distinctions. Other Deathlords have no care for taste and reward only pragmatism and efficiency.

Deathlords commonly bestow soulsteel weapons and armor upon loyal deathknights early in their careers. Daiklaves, powerbows and soulsteel armor make appropriate boons to untested deathknights. Those who show valor, imagination or great skill in service to their master may be granted more impressive arms, and those not martially inclined can expect equivalent rewards. Lost secrets and potent sorcery are the rewards for patient minions who have shown unyielding devotion and unquestionable fidelity. Extraordinary acts of devotion are often rewarded with rare artifacts from the Deathlord's private collection as a show of appreciation. Most Deathlords hide impressive vaults of lore from all but their favorite deathknights, who will, at times, be granted the

key to her master's libraries for a day. Such gifts also serve as incentive for other deathknights to be as loyal and heroic, for such rewards could be theirs as well.

Deathlords expect their deathknights to study the rudiments of Terrestrial Circle Sorcery or Shadowlands Circle Necromancy, and the sorcerer kings provide their minions whatever vital instruction they might need when they first return from the Labyrinth. The Deathlords tend to be circumspect with more powerful sorcery, however — at least until the deathknight proves her loyalty and competence. The most formidable magics — Void and Celestial Circles — are only rarely taught, as the Deathlords incline toward keeping some secrets to themselves for the sake of their own security.

Most Deathlords do not rank their deathknights as they would soldiers in an army. The Abyssals are too few and too specialized for one to be placed especially above another. Special opportunities may periodically arise, however, requiring a loyal, capable minion, and Deathlords consider their favorites first. Notable duties might include anything from serving as a herald to the Realm to ruling a conquered kingdom as the Deathlord's agent. At times, apart from the high honor of being chosen, the assignments have no reward save fresh burdens. At other times, they are quite lucrative, in the good attentions of the Abyssals' master, if nothing else.

FAILURE

Abyssal Exaltation is a young art, and some Deathlords have been rather liberal in choosing just who makes a promising canvas. Not all deathknights make for effective servants. Even those deathknights claiming unconditional loyalty to the Deathlords may be too mad, too individualistic or too self-important to be of any use. Others do not have the necessary audacity, recoiling from challenges and opportunities out of fear or excessive compassion.

Deathlords do not throw their servants away lightly, however. The expense of creating them guarantees them more than one chance to fall in line. Punishments, trials and imprisonment are all made use of before the troublesome deathknight is finally done away with.

Deathknights who have time and time again proven their opposition to the cause of Oblivion, despite black miracles and other punishments, earn nothing less than death. Her Deathlord master hurls her Monstrance of Celestial Portion into the Mouth of the Void, destroying the deathknight forever. Regardless of where the deathknight is at the time, her body erupts in brilliant green flame. All that remains is coaldust and ashes.

EXISTENCE AS A DEATHKNIGHT

There is no society of Abyssal Exalted. Unlike the Dragon-Blooded, they do not live together or gather formally or socially except at the pleasure of their lords. They have no customs or traditions or history. Like Solars, everything the Abyssals do, they do individually.

Despite appearances, deathknights are technically alive. They were once mortal and, unlike the Deathlords, remember what life was like before they took up lives of cursed, dark power. Sometimes, a deathknight goes through a period of regret and remembrance, indulging in the food she once enjoyed, haunting her former home and dressing in the fashions she once wore. But, though destiny may tolerate such waywardness for a while, the pleasures at the deathknight's fingertips invariably bring about suffering, both to herself and those around her. More often than not, she will seek solace in the Underworld. The dead themselves stroke their passions and memories and relive the experiences felt in life in order to bring themselves power, but deathknights receive no power or pleasure from plunging into the experiences of their past apart from brief shards and shadows of anamnesis. In the end, the search for bliss becomes more important than the experience of it, as the orgies and feasts the deathknights pursue never equal the intensity they had before they accepted their grim destiny. Some deny this and endlessly chase extravagant riches, luxuries and sensual pleasures. Others accept it and retreat into themselves or the society of the dead, where at least they might witness others achieve satisfaction from their memories of the past.

ABYSSALS IN CREATION

Though they may be mortal, Abyssal Exalted are alien to Creation. Their tainted Essences conflict with Creation's very principles, such that deathknights experience a feeling that varies between a slight discomfort and a terrible, vertiginous anguish when they walk in the living world. Direct sunlight makes matters worse, weakening and blinding them. The further they wander from the shadowlands, the worse their uneasiness. When in Creation, Abyssals do not respire normally, and while their intake of air is as normal, they cannot draw Essence from their environment through rest and meditation.

Only certain facets of Creation — those celebrating, representing or otherwise referring to death — resonate with an Abyssal's dark anima. Surrounding themselves with such trappings of the dead elicits a sense of peace in Abyssals and counteracts the ill feelings effects their presence in Creation engenders in them.

THE TRAPPINGS OF THE DEAD

Deathknights surround themselves with paraphernalia that protects them from the ill effects of Creation and remind the living who view them of the death and decay all around them. To all eyes, the Abyssals revel in morbid extremes and take pleasure in donning the trappings of the dead. Some genuinely enjoy presenting dark spectacles, while others who may not wish to call so much attention to themselves disdain surrounding themselves with such things.

Most deathknights dress in black funerary linens, cerecloth and silk winding sheets, accompanied by accents of silver jewelry, veils, lace, corsetry bearing motifs of





EFFECTS OF CREATION

- Deathknights in Creation who are unprotected by the trappings of the dead have a dice-pool penalty of -2 dice on any Athletics rolls and to their level of success in feats of Strength.
- A deathknight may fend off this penalty by burning 5 motes of Essence per day. This Essence is spent at the moment of sunrise.
- Characters who surround themselves with the trappings of the dead negate all penalties with no expenditure of Essence. Only the use of death's trappings removes the emotional discomfort caused by their presence in Creation.
- Deathknights in Creation may only regain Essence by feeding off the Essence of the living or by drawing Essence from the Hearthstones of Manses located in Creation or the shadowlands.

skulls, bats, spiders and other details associated with darkness. Embalming ointments, unguents and perfumes made from exotic spices and rare oils are particularly prized. In Creation, deathknights make their homes in crypts and mausoleums and surround themselves with candles, desiccated roses, nightshade, black ivy and ruined statues representing the dead. To be of use to a deathknight in fending off Creation's effects, these items must have some particular association with death. Linens and clothing must be taken from tombs; candles and flowers must have seen some use in funerals.

ABYSSALS IN THE UNDERWORLD

Deathknights suffer no hindrances in the Underworld. The fatigue and weariness felt in Creation disappears, and the glacial, caliginous energies there replenish their Essence and evoke vitality and strength. Because of this, most deathknights prefer the serenity of the Underworld to Creation's inhospitable malaise.

Many deathknights grow to appreciate and even love the quiet melancholy of the realms and people throughout the lands of the dead. Some Abyssals interact frequently with the dead, at turns fascinated and revolted with their solemn, passionless existences, taking them as slaves or servants or lovers. Yet, there is always a gulf between the Abyssal and the dead, and it is not just one of power. The life that lingers in the Abyssal Exalted sets them starkly apart from the inhabitants of the Underworld, just as the death energies within them set them apart from the living inhabitants of Creation. The deathknights live. They have not experienced death's cold hand, nor shall they ever.

Very rarely, one finds a deathknight intent on avoiding contact with the dead, appalled by the their silent agapes and feasts, their prayer rituals, their self-worship and their absolute predictability. Such deathknights ac-

cept that they are aliens among the dead, despite their sworn service to the lords of the Void. When they must deal with the dead, most such deathknights do so cruelly or indifferently, thinking of the dead as no more worthy than the living. The Deathlords keep the excesses of these individuals in line, however. The dead are the Deathlords' allies in the ancestor cult — the callous nature of the Deathlords' servants cannot be allowed to change that.

DEATH

A deathknight's tainted Essence keeps her alive forever, such that age and disease cannot touch her. If she does not fall in battle, she will live until Creation at last falters and winks out. If she is killed in battle, her fate is terrible. Her higher soul does not join the Underworld as a ghost and does not enter into the cycle of reincarnation, but falls into the Mouth of the Void. Her lower soul will certainly rise again as a powerful hungry ghost, and her Abyssally Exalted Essence flees back to its Monstrance of Celestial Portion in the citadel of the Deathlord who controlled the Abyssal.

The souls of former deathknights have many uses: slavery or similar servitude as a ghost, fodder for soulsteel — or if they served their masters loyally and died heroically, they may find themselves honored in death and enjoy fame and renown for the rest of their existences.

WHERE DOES THE ESSENCE GO?

When an Abyssal Exalted dies, her Essence cannot enter the cycle of reincarnation in the same way a Solar Exalted Essence does. Her Essence has been tainted and twisted by the Deathlords and contaminated by death and, therefore, cannot endure Creation's principles, which are opposed to death. A death in Creation scars an Abyssal Essence. The Essence flees, hiding in dead things while the sun (whose rays further injure the Essence) shines and hastening toward a shadowland at night, drawn toward it's Monstrance of Celestial Portion. Because of the rarity and power of Exalted Essences, the Deathlords always spare no expense in retrieving or stealing them, taking them back to their laboratories, where they prepare the Essences for use in creating a new deathknight. Once the scarred Essence is secure in either its original or a new Monstrance, it begins to heal, a process lasting until the full moon appears. Stolen Essences are those tricked through sorcery into taking another Monstrance as their own.

REDEMPTION

Everything a deathknight experiences reinforces the notion that their dark fates are sealed, that he no longer has any choice but to bring Creation down, and that nothing he can do will ever bring him back into the light.

To oppose the Neverborn spells certain doom, the deathknights are told, for it is written in the stars that the dead will ultimately triumph over the living.

This is a lie born of Malfean tongues, hiding a terrible secret of which even the Deathlords are unaware. The hidden truth is that turning their back on the Deathlords is not a fool's crusade. In fact, if an Abyssal has enough sincerity and passion for life, if he will fearlessly stand against Oblivion *despite* the Abyssal Curse and if he will finally admit to himself that it would have been better to have died rather than accept the self-defeating and hypocritical task of bringing Creation low whilst enjoying immortality, it may be possible for him to subvert the Malfean's curse and cure the taint infecting his Exaltation.

Redemption isn't easy, though. The most difficult part of the quest is learning that the possibility for redemption exists at all. Then, the Abyssal must either learn what must be done on his own or be guided along the path by a Celestial Incarna, an ancient Sidereal or some other plot-device character. The process of removing the taint from an Abyssal Essence requires a Zenith Caste Solar to act as holy exorcist and a Solar Circle sorcerer to bind and expel the Abyssal taint. If the participants perform the rituals precisely and if the stars — the last participant necessary for redemption — are favorable, the Unconquered Sun turns his compassionate gaze to the Abyssal and grants the forgiven a new name. The character becomes a Solar of considerably reduced power. Should the ritual fail and the Unconquered Sun not appear, the Abyssal dies, and her soul falls into the Mouth of the Void, while her Exaltation flees back to her Deathlord's clutches.

A powerful event such as this should be central to a particular ongoing story. No other specific criteria exist, but it is recommended that the Storyteller devise absorbing and emotionally satisfying means for redemption to occur. Redemption is not commonplace, and it has not yet canonically happened in the setting outside of the Storyteller's series.

REDEMPTION

A redeemed deathknight loses 2 dots of permanent Essence and must convert half of her Charms in each Ability (rounded down) into Solar Charms for that Ability, which, in this case, can have an Minimum Essence rating above the character's current Essence, but not exceeding her former Essence as an Abyssal. Known spells remain, but the character automatically and forever loses all access to necromancy (though she may retain knowledge of the spells).





The ghost wept disconsolately, her wracking sobs filling the bedchamber and spilling into the study where Falling Tears Poet sat contemplating his calligraphy collection. His twisted and withered hands deftly riffled through the leaves of paper and sheets of silk. The infallible messenger's arrival was inopportune but not unanticipated. It was the triumph of Ping Yin's art.

"I will not be long," he said.

The sobbing continued, and he sighed. Ghosts were impossible creatures. This was her reward from the relationship, this weeping at his departure. He listened to her endless self-inflicted heartache and wondered again how mortals could worship these creatures at all. Then, the voice in the back of his mind began.

Because you tell them to, and you speak with the voice of Essence. Because they are without magic in a world of gods, and an ancestor's ghost is better than nothing.

It was the voice of his conscience, a voice he had long thought silent. He had thought the cancer and the broken heart killed it or the black horror of the Labyrinth and the silent booming voices of the Malfeans pressing down on him. He was certain that somewhere in that black procession of events, his moral compass had become unhinged.

But no, there it was.

"You can weep until the living world is dead, Ping Yin. I will not stay here for you."

More sobbing, yet she would spurn him if he did not rebuff her thusly. Falling Tears Poet, who was also sometimes called Wisdom's Cracked Vase or the Sorrowful Calligrapher, reflected often on this matter as he composed his verses.

The Abyssal strode out onto the porch of his study, to where a gap in the railings without steps or ladder marked the Manse as a sorcerer's abode. He looked up at the Underworld's leaden sky and glanced out at the black-leafed forest that covered the grounds, then he sighed. He tried not to care about the ghosts, but they were all expert at provoking a response, at providing themselves with the emotional context they needed to satisfy their desires.

In truth, he did not know if he would be away long, nor did he care if Ping Yin lingered in the demon-haunted halls of his Manse or departed. He was sick of ghostly antics, of the passionate love and the staged betrayals. It was shallow, tawdry and fake. Ghosts were nothing beside the true face of the Abyss. The nephwracks were mere caricatures of catechism-spewing Immaculate revival preachers, and the Deathlords were little different, pretending to serve Oblivion, when, in fact, they sought to provide themselves with kingdoms and Manses so like those they had in life. Even the Malfeans were shams, mere ghosts themselves, petulantly tearing at a Creation they could never again possess.

They were all as snowflakes in a great blaze whose dark power they chose not to acknowledge.

Falling Tears Poet spread his arms wide and recited the seven secret words of the spell. He brought his palms together, and threads of Essence kindled between them, growing into a thread, then a rope and then larger, revealing that the twisting rope was not a rope at all, but a vortex. The winds expanded between his hands until they were a rolling coil of power held in check only by the sheets of protective Essence that coated the Poet's hands. In the tongue of the Old Realm, the Abyssal shouted, "Stormwind Rider!" and released the spell.

The winds enveloped him, enwrapped him and plucked his gnarled form from the balcony and out into the dusty gray grounds of the Manse. He was but a bandy-legged shadow in their weightless embrace, and he curled up like a child would and then loosed the full speed of the winds. He disappeared from the Manse in a matter of moments, racing across the wind-blown lawns, curving effortlessly around the great dark trees and then leaping the wall with effortless grace. Here, he was free of the pain of walking and standing upright, free to think and free to resent that he served paper cutout villains propped up before a darkness so vast it beggared comprehension. The voice of conscience, once heard, was not so easy to quiet.



CHAPTER THREE

CHARACTER CREATION

Beneath the lands of the living lies the Underworld, where the dead dwell in darkness. The world of the dead is a world without flesh, driven entirely by passion. And so, it is passion that draws the Deathlords to their chosen mortal champions. Now, you are one of those servants. Within your heart burns the passion to become a romantic legend. Love and hate drive you to a destiny of greatness, a destiny cloaked in darkness and pain. You are a deathknight. A living champion of death.

This chapter provides the rules needed to create Abyssal characters. The process for creating one of the Abyssal Exalted follows the same guidelines presented for Solars in **Exalted**. However, there are areas in which the deathknights differ from their Solar reflections. The following material details these differences and is meant to supplement and expand the rules in **Exalted**.

STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPT

This is the single most important step in creating your character. Without it, your traits are nothing but random dots on a sheet of paper. The stronger your concept is, the stronger your final character will be and the easier it will be to flesh him out. For the Abyssal Exalted, there are a number of factors which must be taken into account when deciding upon a character concept.

THE STORYTELLER

During character creation, it is important for the Storyteller to work with her players, and vice versa. Ultimately, gaming is a team effort, and the closer everyone works together, the more fun everyone will have. This is especially vital for the Abyssals, whose passions can easily drive them in radically different directions. Storytellers should discuss with their players the type of series they want to run, and players should work to create character concepts that fit that type of series. Players should also work at making their characters fully developed personalities with histories, goals and passions. The more raw material a Storyteller has to work with, the more story hooks she can provide for that character.

DEATHLORD

Who does your character serve? There are 13 Deathlords who create and command the Abyssal Exalted, and each has her own motivations, goals and plans. Each selects her champions for different reasons and sets them to different tasks. Which Deathlord an Abyssal serves will impact why he was chosen as a deathknight and what his duties may be. Even an Abyssal who seeks

to rebel against death continues to feel the shadow of his Deathlord across his life. Be sure to talk to your Storyteller and fellow players about what Deathlord your character serves — it's unlikely the game will work well if you each pick a different one.

CASTE

Like the Solar Exalted, the deathknights are divided into castes based upon aspects of leadership (although distorted to fit the way the Deathlords and their Malfean masters interpret each aspect). When a Deathlord Exalts one of her new champions, she selects the caste most suitable for that individual. Those individuals selected for Exaltation are almost always chosen because they compliment the Exalted soul shards already in the Deathlord's possession. However, a Deathlord may decide, be it out of need, a perverse sense of humor or because she sees something in the character that even he is unaware of, to Exalt a deathknight into a caste he does not appear suitable for. An example might be a poet exalted into the Dusk Caste because his Deathlord believes that the character's artistry in bringing death will exceed his artistry with words.

When selecting your character's caste, consider why his Deathlord chose him to be a member of that caste. Understanding why he was chosen will help give you an idea of what his Deathlord expects from him in the future, as well as which Attributes, Abilities and other Traits your character might favor.

NATURE

Nature functions identically for Abyssal Exalted as it does for Solars. While some Natures are common among certain Castes, they are by no means the only ones present. Your character may have any Nature you wish.

STEP TWO: CHOOSING ATTRIBUTES

Like all characters, Abyssal Exalted begin with each Attribute at one dot. And like all Exalted, the deathknights are far more powerful than mundane mortals or the spirits of the dead.

An Abyssal character has eight (8) dots to divide among his primary Attributes, six (6) dots to divide among his secondary Attributes, and four (4) dots to divide among his tertiary Attributes. Characters are not limited in how many dots they may assign to each Attribute. Attributes may not be raised above five dots. Abyssals may opt to forgo the free dot of Appearance and begin the game with Appearance 0 but do not gain a bonus Attribute dot for doing so.

PARAGONS OF DEATH

Though it may seem strange to think of deathknights as lofty and noble champions, the Abyssals are no strangers to the Paragon Nature. The fact that the cause they champion strikes most mortals with terror and dread does not in any way diminish a deathknight Paragon's sense of duty and devotion to that which he holds dear: death. To the Paragon of Death, life is a menagerie of pain and ugliness ended only by the peace of the grave. In death, there is the endless beauty of pure spirit unshackled from the bonds of crude, temporary flesh. So great is the Abyssal Paragon's devotion that he has forsaken that which he loves most, all so that he may bring the gift he is denied to all of Creation.

STEP THREE: CHOOSING ABILITIES

Abilities begin with a rating of zero and are divided according to which caste each Ability is attuned to.

- **Dusk Abilities** are those related to bringing death through physical combat. They are Archery, Brawl, Martial Arts, Melee and Thrown.

- **Midnight Abilities** are those that relate to spreading the faith of death, regardless of what obstacles one must face. They are Endurance, Performance, Presence, Resistance and Survival.

- **Daybreak Abilities** are those devoted to understanding and harnessing the power of death. They are Craft, Investigation, Lore, Medicine and Occult.

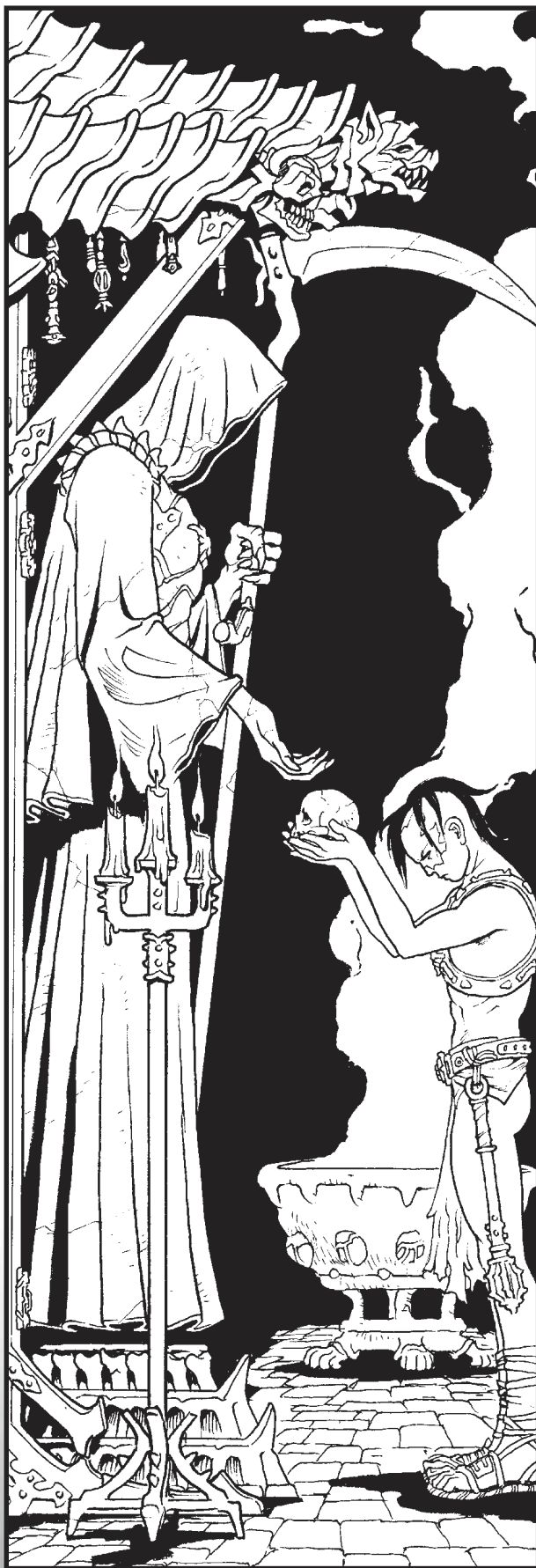
- **Day Abilities** are those that involve walking unseen among the living. They are Athletics, Awareness, Dodge, Larceny and Stealth.

- **Moonshadow Abilities** are those devoted to casting death's subtle shadow across the courts of both the living and the dead. They are Bureaucracy, Linguistics, Ride, Sail and Socialize.

Every deathknight has a natural affinity with his caste's Abilities. This affinity is represented by the easier time a character has in raising her *Caste Abilities* through both bonus and experience points. See the table on page 125 for the point costs.

Each Abyssal also has a natural affinity with certain Abilities outside of his Caste Abilities. A character selects five Abilities to be his *Favored Abilities*. These Abilities receive the same bonus and experience point discounts as his Caste Abilities. You may not "double up" and increase your discount by choosing Caste Abilities as Favored Abilities.

You may not assign more than three dots to any Ability, but you can increase Abilities to four or five dots



with bonus points. Bonus points may also be used to purchase Ability specialties in the same manner detailed in **Exalted**.

STEP FOUR: ADVANTAGES

Unlike their Solar reflections, Abyssal Exalted have access to their master's resources and favor. Those who are in their masters favor get thirteen (13) points of Backgrounds. Those who are on the run receive only five (5). Storytellers should treat badly any players who want to make "loyal" characters who immediately turn coat in order to gain the extra Backgrounds. Backgrounds may not be raised above three (3) without the use of bonus points. Because of their patronage from the Deathlords, certain Backgrounds work differently for deathknights. In addition to the Backgrounds presented in **Exalted**, Abyssal Exalted also have access to several new Backgrounds. See Chapter Four: Traits for details on these new Traits.

Deathknights, like all Exalted, have access to the mystic powers and abilities known as Charms. Select ten (10) Charms for your character. At least five (5) of these Charms must be selected from the character's Caste or Favored Abilities.

Like all sentient beings, living or dead, within the world of Exalted, Abyssals are driven by desire and emotion. Your character has five (5) dots to divide among the four Virtues — Compassion, Conviction, Temperance and Valor. Virtues may not be raised higher than 3 without spending bonus points.

In addition, deathknights — like all Exalted — are tainted by the Great Curse. The Malfeans have twisted and warped the Curse as it relates to their champions, so that the Curse intertwines the Abyssals' destiny with that of their Deathlord and her Malfean masters. Rules for the Abyssal Curse may be found in Chapter Four: Traits.

STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES

An Abyssal character calculates his Willpower by adding together his two highest Virtues. Abyssal Exalted begin with an Essence of two (2). Each of these Traits may be raised using bonus points (although Willpower may not exceed a rating of 8 unless the character has ratings of 4 or higher in his two highest Virtues).

As with all Exalted, deathknights channel their Essence into both Personal and Peripheral Essence. Effects created using Personal Essence are subtle, while effects generated using Peripheral Essence are terror-inducing demonstrations of the character's dark might, causing his anima banner to flare.

Personal Essence pool is calculated by multiplying your character's Essence Trait by three and then adding his Willpower ($[\text{Essence} \times 3] + \text{Willpower}$).

Peripheral Essence pool is calculated by multiplying your character's Essence Trait by seven and then adding the sum of his Willpower and his Virtues ([Essence x 7] + Willpower + [the sum of Virtues]).

Abyssal characters possess the normal mortal seven (7) health levels — a -0 health level, two -1 health levels, two -2 health levels, a -4 health level and an Incapacitated health level — plus any additional health levels gained from the Abyssal Ox Body Technique charm.

Abyssal characters have 15 bonus points that may be spend at any time during character creation. See the chart on page 125 for the point cost of raising each Trait.

THE SPARK OF DEATH

Now come the finishing touches. Answer the same questions for your Abyssal character that you would for any other Exalt: What does he look like? What are his habits and quirks? Who is he close to? Who are his enemies and rivals? What was his childhood like? When did he first manifest? What motivates him to do the things he does?

In addition, there are other questions to answer:

- **Death:** How did you first encounter death? What was it that granted you the understanding of death you now hold? How would you have died had you not bound your destiny to that of your Deathlord?

- **Your Deathlord:** How did you come to the attention of your Deathlord? What made her want to elevate you to one of her champions? Were you already in her service as a mortal, or were you recruited by her other servants? How loyal are you to her, and what makes you so loyal or disloyal? How far are you willing to go to advance her goals? Do you love or hate her?

- **Your Circle:** How did you meet the other Abyssals you associate with? Do they serve the same Deathlord as you, or do you work together because your various Deathlords are currently allied with each other? Have they earned your respect and trust? Your love or hate?

- **The Dead:** How do you feel about the dead? Do you prefer their company to that of the living? Are they just tools to use in advancing your Deathlord's goals? Is one of them your lover or spouse?

- **The Living:** How do you feel about the living? Do you pity them? Do you view them with contempt? Do you dare to love one of the living?

- **Memories of the Past:** Do you remember anything of the First Age? A former lover, lost to betrayal? The abuses committed by yourself and other Solars driven mad? The treachery of the other Exalted? Do you remember anything of the time your soul spent imprisoned? The time

it was warped and twisted by the Malfeans? How do these memories (assuming you have any) color your perceptions of the modern day?

THE HEROIC DEAD

The average ghost in **Exalted** is little different from the average mortal. And just as there are those heroic mortals who stand head and shoulders above their fellow men, there are heroic ghosts whose power and passions set them above their fellow dead. Many of the heroic dead were heroic mortals in life, although others were men and women of no reputation when living who have found in death a second chance for greatness.

STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPT

As with any character, the key to creating an interesting ghost is to start with an interesting concept. Ghost characters select a Nature as normal but do not select a caste. Also decide where the character's loyalty lies. The politics of the dead are as complex as the politics of the living, if not more so. Does the ghost serve one of the countless kingdoms of the dead, her still living family, one of the Deathlords or only herself?

STEP TWO: CHOOSING ATTRIBUTES

Heroic ghosts prioritize their Attributes just as Exalted do but do not receive as many points to spend. A heroic ghost character receives only six (6) points to spend on her primary Attributes, four (4) dots for her secondary Attributes and three (3) dots for her tertiary Attributes.

STEP THREE: CHOOSING ABILITIES

Heroic ghosts have twenty-two (22) dots to spend on Abilities. You may not assign more than three dots to any Ability, but you can increase Abilities to four or five dots with bonus points. Bonus points may also be used to purchase Ability specialties as normal.

- **Optional Rule:** If the Storyteller agrees to it, a heroic ghost character may have one Ability to serve as her Favored Ability, complete with the discount available to Exalted. This ability is the one at which the ghost excels in above all others and is, in fact, a key focus of her very existence. The character may never have any other Ability rated higher than her Favored Ability. The Favored Ability must be equal to or greater than every other Ability she possesses.

CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

CHARACTER CREATION PROCESS

• STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPT

Choose concept, caste and Nature.
Note caste's anima powers.

• STEP TWO: SELECT ATTRIBUTES

Note that all Attributes except Appearance start with one dot before you add any. Abyssals may choose to start the game with Appearance 0 to reflect an extensively rotted visage.

Prioritize the three categories: Physical, Social, Mental (8/6/4)

Choose Physical Traits: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina

Choose Social Traits: Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance

Choose Mental Traits: Perception, Intelligence, Wits

• STEP THREE: SELECT ABILITIES

Note Caste Abilities.

Select Favored Abilities (5; may not be the same as Caste Abilities).

Choose Abilities (25 — at least 10 must be from Caste or Favored Abilities; at least one must be in each Favored Ability; none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points).

• STEP FOUR: SELECT ADVANTAGES

Choose Backgrounds (13 for loyal deathknights, 5 for fugitives. In either case, none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points), Charms (10 — at least 5 must be from Caste of Favored Abilities), Virtues (5 — none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points) and Virtue Flaw.

• STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES

Record Essence (2), Willpower (add the total of two highest Virtues — may not start at higher than 8 unless at least two Virtues are 4 or higher), Personal Essence pool ([Essence x 3] + Willpower), Peripheral Essence pool ([Essence x 7] + Willpower + [the sum of your Virtues]) and health levels (7, plus any gained from Charms).

• BONUS POINTS

Bonus points (15) may be spent at any time during character creation.

SAMPLE CONCEPTS

- **Craftsman** — carpenter, swordsmith, cobbler
- **Criminal** — bandit lord, pirate, con artist
- **Drifter** — nomadic tribesman, scavenger, gambler

- **Entertainer** — professional courtesan, musician, gladiator
- **Merchant** — caravan owner, slave trader, money lender
- **Politician** — barbarian prince, town magistrate, vizier
- **Priest** — shaman, initiate of the Order of the Immaculate Dragons, monk
- **Scholar** — royal historian, healer, engineer
- **Soldier** — city guardsmen, mercenary, barbarian warrior
- **Worker** — farmer, manservant, dock worker

CASTES

• **Dusk:**

Masters of bringing death through war, the Peacebringers are the leaders and champions of the Underworld's armies. The Deathlords choose the Dusk Caste from those with a talent for the arts of combat and weaponry.

Caste Abilities: Archery, Brawl, Martial Arts, Melee and Thrown.

Anima Powers: May use their anima to appear dark and terrifying for a scene.

• **Midnight:**

The Echoes of the Abyss are high priests and evangelists of death. The Deathlords choose the Midnight Caste from those who crave the end of all life and wish to awaken that craving in others.

Caste Abilities: Endurance, Performance, Presence, Resistance and Survival

Anima Powers: May use their anima to animate the bodies of the dead and to do aggravated damage to the living.

• **Daybreak:**

Necromancers and craftsmen of the Abyssal Exalted, the Children of Bone are dark and morbid artisans. The Deathlords choose the Daybreak Caste from those who seek the darkest forms of knowledge and apply it to create horrifying results.

Caste Abilities: Craft, Investigation, Lore, Medicine and Occult

Anima Powers: May use their anima as a defensive shield.

• **Day:**

Lords of stealth and trickery, the Daywalkers walk unseen among the living. The Deathlords choose the Day Caste from those who excel in entering places where they

CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

are not wanted or in finding unconventional ways of bringing death.

Caste Abilities: Athletics, Awareness, Dodge, Larceny and Stealth

Anima Powers: May use their anima as a cloak against detection, and may mute their anima's display when using Essence.

- **Moonshadow:**

Diplomats and bureaucrats, the Hollow Darkness is the force that keeps the empires of the dead running smoothly. The Deathlords chose the Moonshadow Caste from those who master the arts of negotiation, travel and treachery.

Caste Abilities: Bureaucracy, Linguistics, Ride, Sail and Socialize

Anima Powers: May use their anima to sanctify oaths and contracts.

NATURE

- **Architect** — You want to leave a lasting legacy.
- **Bravo** — Might makes Right.
- **Bureaucrat** — Rules keep the world from collapsing into chaos.
- **Caregiver** — You are a wellspring of compassion
- **Conniver** — Brains over Brawn.
- **Critic** — Pointing out flaws makes it possible to correct them.
- **Explorer** — Existence is a never ending adventure.
- **Follower** — You look for someone else to take charge.
- **Gallant** — You seek to be the center of attention.
- **Hedonist** — Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you will die.
- **Jester** — Laughter can heal (or hurt) and teach.
- **Judge** — Balance, truth and justice are your quest.
- **Leader** — You are the one others turn to in times of crisis.
- **Martyr** — You are ready to give everything for what you believe.
- **Paragon** — You strive to be the noble ideal of a hero.
- **Rebel** — You constantly seek to challenge authority.
- **Sage** — Any problem can be solved with logic and deduction.
- **Survivor** — You withstand anything that the universe throws at you.
- **Thrillseeker** — You walk the razor's edge between life and death (or death and oblivion)

- **Visionary** — You see the world for what it could be, rather than what it is.

VIRTUES

- **Compassion** — Empathy and forgiveness.
- **Conviction** — Emotional endurance.
- **Temperance** — Self-control and clear-headedness.
- **Valor** — Courage and bravery.

BACKGROUNDS

- **Abyssal Command** — Your leadership of your master's troops.
- **Allies** — Aides and friends who help in tasks.
- **Artifact** — Wondrous devices of the First Age, or the relics of the dead.
- **Contacts** — Information sources and friends in useful places.
- **Familiar** — An animal companion.
- **Followers** — Ghosts or mortals who look to you for leadership.
- **Influence** — Your pull in the world around you.
- **Liege** — Your relationship with your Deathlord.
- **Manse** — A place of power and Essence.
- **Necromancy** — Your training in the unique magics of the Abyssals.
- **Resources** — Material goods and money.
- **Spies** — Your ability to call on your master's espionage capabilities.
- **Underworld Manse** — Your access to places of power in the Underworld.
- **Whispers** — Your personal attunement to the Malfeans.

BONUS POINTS

TRAIT	COST
Attribute	4
Ability	2 (1 if a Favored or Caste Ability)
Background	1 (2 if the Background is being raised above 3)
Specialty	1 (2 per 1 if in Favored or Caste Abilities)
Virtue	3
Willpower	2
Essence	7
Charms	5 (4 if in a Favored or Caste Ability)



STEP FOUR: ADVANTAGES

Ghosts select Virtues as normal but do not suffer from the Great Curse (which was specifically laid upon the Exalted). Ghosts from areas that uphold the Immaculate Philosophy have five (5) dots to spend on Backgrounds, while those from areas with active ancestor worship have eight (8) dots. These Backgrounds including certain unique Backgrounds detailed in Chapter Four: Traits. Backgrounds may not be raised above 3 without spending bonus points, and ghosts from Immaculate dominated areas cannot buy Ancestor Cult or Grave Goods above •.

Heroic ghost characters select six (6) Arcanoi from among the Charms in Chapter Six: The Arts of the Dead. Ghosts may not learn Exalted Charms.

STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES

Ghosts calculate Willpower as normal (the sum of their two highest Virtues) and have a starting Essence of 2.

Ghosts do not have separate Personal and Peripheral Essence pools, instead having a single Essence pool that serves all of the character's needs. A ghost's Essence pool is calculated by multiplying the character's Essence Trait by ten and then adding her Willpower multiplied by three and the sum of her Virtues multiplied by two ($[\text{Essence} \times 10] + [\text{Willpower} \times 3] + [(\text{the sum of Virtues}) \times 2]$).

Choose a number of dots of Passions for each Virtue equal to the number of dots the character has in that Virtue.

All players' ghosts start with 5 dots worth of Fetters. No Fetter can be higher than 3 without the expenditure of bonus points.

Ghosts have the same health levels as Exalted characters (7 health levels, plus any gained through Charms).

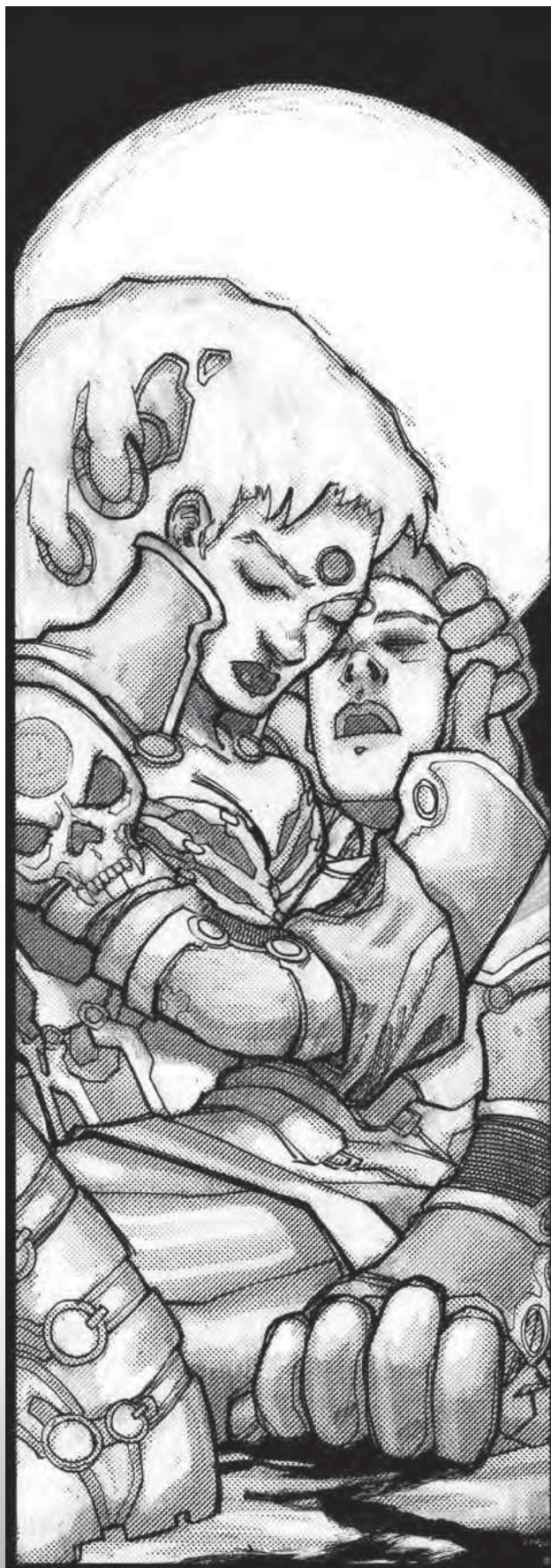
Heroic ghost characters have 21 bonus points. These points may be used to raise a character's Essence or to purchase new Arcanoi, as well as to raise other Traits.

THE SPARK OF DEATH

As with any character, answer the following questions: What does she look like? What are her habits and quirks? Who is she close to? Who are her enemies and rivals? What was her life like? How did she die? What motivates her to do the things she does?

THE MUNDANE DEAD

Not every ghost possesses the destiny and passion to be heroic. Mundane ghosts only have four dots to spend in one Attribute category, three dots in each of the other two categories, 16 dots in Abilities, two Arcanoi and 15 bonus points. Virtues, Willpower, Essence and Essence pool are identical to those of heroic ghosts.



CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

CHARACTER CREATION PROCESS

• STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPT

Choose concept and Nature

• STEP TWO: SELECT ATTRIBUTES

Note that all Attributes start with one dot before you add any.

Prioritize the three categories: Physical, Social, Mental (6/4/3)

Choose Physical Traits: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina

Choose Social Traits: Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance

Choose Mental Traits: Perception, Intelligence, Wits

• STEP THREE: SELECT ABILITIES

Choose Abilities (22, none may be raised higher than 3 without spending bonus points)

• STEP FOUR: SELECT ADVANTAGES

Choose Arcanoi (6), Backgrounds (5 for those from areas that worship the Immaculate Philosophy, 8 for those who come from areas that permit veneration of the dead — none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points, and ghosts from Immaculate regions cannot buy Ancestor Cult or Grave Goods above •) and Virtues (5 — none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points).

• STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES

Record Essence (2), Willpower (add the total of two highest Virtues — may not start at higher than 8 unless at least two Virtues are 4 or higher), Essence Pool ([Essence x 10] + [Willpower x 3] + [(the sum of Virtues) x 2]) and health levels (7, plus any gained through Arcanoi). Choose Fetters (5) and Passions (total dots equal to Virtue ratings). A ghost can never have more dots of Fetters than his Willpower + Essence.

• BONUS POINTS

Bonus points (21) may be spent at any time during character creation.

TRAIT	COST
Attribute	4
Ability	2 (1 if the Favored Ability)
Background	1 (2 if the Background is being raised above 3)
Specialty	1 (2 per 1 if in the Favored Ability)
Virtue	5
Willpower	3
Essence	12
Arcanos	6
Fetter	3

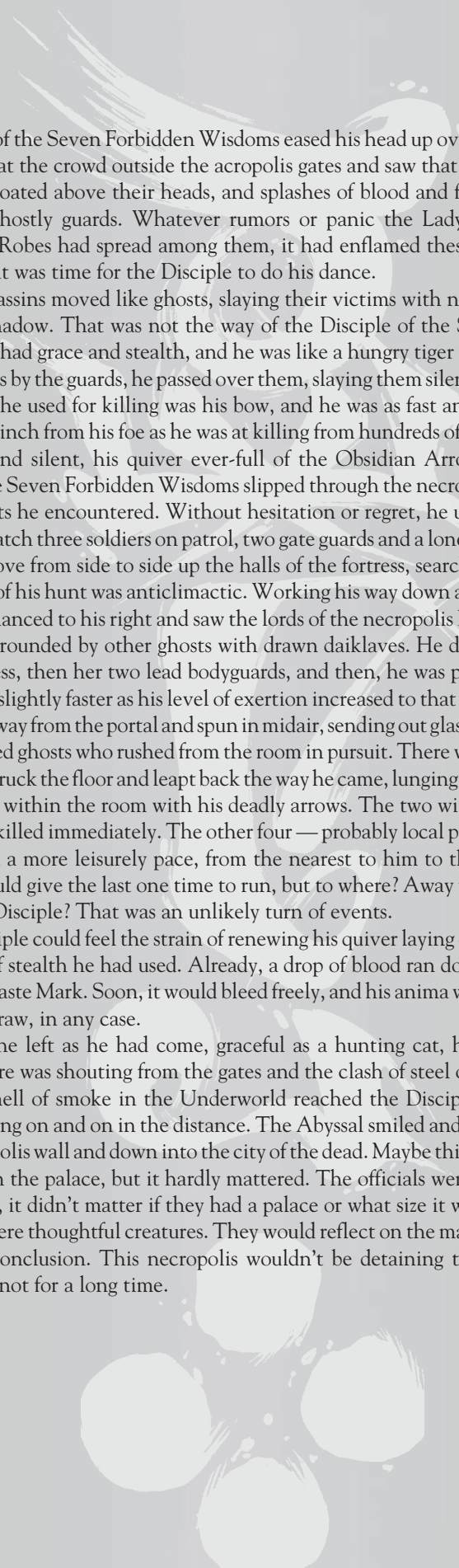
NATURE AND VIRTUES

See chart on page 125.

BACKGROUNDS

- **Ancestor Cult** — Mortal worshipers who provide you with burnt offerings.
- **Artifact** — The wonders of the dead.
- **Allies** — Aides and friends who help in tasks.
- **Backing** — Standing and rank in an organization of power and influence.
- **Contacts** — Information sources and friends in useful places.
- **Followers** — Ghosts who look to you for leadership.
- **Grave Goods** — The value of your burial panoply.
- **Influence** — Your pull in the world around you.
- **Mentor** — A teacher and instructor.
- **Resources** — Material goods and money.
- **Underworld Cult** — The veneration of your fellow ghosts.





Disciple of the Seven Forbidden Wisdoms eased his head up over the edge of the wall, glanced at the crowd outside the acropolis gates and saw that they were angry. Corpse fires floated above their heads, and splashes of blood and floods of maggots sprayed the ghostly guards. Whatever rumors or panic the Lady of Darkness in Bloodstained Robes had spread among them, it had enflamed these Contagion-era ghosts. Now, it was time for the Disciple to do his dance.

Some assassins moved like ghosts, slaying their victims with no more sign than a flickering shadow. That was not the way of the Disciple of the Seven Forbidden Wisdoms. He had grace and stealth, and he was like a hungry tiger when he hunted. He did not pass by the guards, he passed over them, slaying them silently and savagely.

The tool he used for killing was his bow, and he was as fast and as apt at firing arrows a mere inch from his foe as he was at killing from hundreds of yards away. And so, barefoot and silent, his quiver ever-full of the Obsidian Arrows of Woe, the Disciple of the Seven Forbidden Wisdoms slipped through the necropolis, destroying all those ghosts he encountered. Without hesitation or regret, he used his icy black arrows to dispatch three soldiers on patrol, two gate guards and a lone messenger. Like a snake, he wove from side to side up the halls of the fortress, searching for his prey.

The end of his hunt was anticlimactic. Working his way down an upper hallway, the Disciple glanced to his right and saw the lords of the necropolis huddled together in a room, surrounded by other ghosts with drawn daiklaves. He destroyed first the ghostly princess, then her two lead bodyguards, and then, he was past the door. His heart skipped slightly faster as his level of exertion increased to that of a man jogging, and he leapt away from the portal and spun in midair, sending out glass arrows to pierce the three armed ghosts who rushed from the room in pursuit. There was shouting, and the Disciple struck the floor and leapt back the way he came, lunging through the door to spray those within the room with his deadly arrows. The two with daiklaves who remained, he killed immediately. The other four — probably local political figures — he silenced at a more leisurely pace, from the nearest to him to the farthest away. Perhaps it would give the last one time to run, but to where? Away from the glorious dance of the Disciple? That was an unlikely turn of events.

The Disciple could feel the strain of renewing his quiver laying on him, on top of the Charms of stealth he had used. Already, a drop of blood ran down his face from his weeping Caste Mark. Soon, it would bleed freely, and his anima would flare. It was time to withdraw, in any case.

And so, he left as he had come, graceful as a hunting cat, his eyes on every doorway. There was shouting from the gates and the clash of steel of steel. The thin and empty smell of smoke in the Underworld reached the Disciple, and someone began screaming on and on in the distance. The Abyssal smiled and leapt effortlessly over the acropolis wall and down into the city of the dead. Maybe this petty riot would grow and burn the palace, but it hardly mattered. The officials were gone now, and without them, it didn't matter if they had a palace or what size it was.

Ghosts were thoughtful creatures. They would reflect on the matter and come to the obvious conclusion. This necropolis wouldn't be detaining the agents of the master again, not for a long time.



CHAPTER FOUR

TRAITS

Most of the Traits used in **Exalted: The Abyssals** are identical to the ones used in **Exalted**. Virtues, Abilities, Attributes, Willpower, Essence and the like are all handled identically or nearly so. For the rules governing these Traits, see the Traits chapter, beginning on page 112 of **Exalted**.

This chapter covers those Traits that are unique to the spirits of the Underworld.

USEFUL CRAFTS

Both the dead and the deathknights have a number of Craft Abilities practiced exclusively in the Underworld or among the Abyssal Exalted. These Abilities are listed here for the reference of players creating characters. The crafts of the dead are further explained on pages 232-234 of Chapter Six: The Arts of the Dead.

Craft (Necrosurgery): *Used by Abyssals.* The art of shaping dead flesh. Used to construct undead war machines with the necromancy spell Walking War Machine and to prepare prosthetics of bone with the Medicine Charm Bone Graft Technique.

Craft (Jadecrafting): *Used by Abyssals and the dead.* The art of shaping jade in the Underworld, where it has very different physical properties than among the living.

Craft (Soulforging): *Used by Abyssals and the dead.* The art of hammering ghosts into soulsteel.

Craft (Moliation): *Used by the dead.* The art of reshaping ghostly flesh.

Craft (Pandemonium): *Used by the dead.* The art of creating horrifying illusions and dangerous manifestations in the land of the living.

EXPANDED BACKGROUNDS

The Underworld possesses a rich and distinct cultural heritage, one that is, in some ways, alien to that of the living. As a result of this unique culture, several Backgrounds work differently for Abyssal characters than they do for Solars and other champions of the living. In addition, there are several new Backgrounds exclusive to Abyssal characters.

ALTERED BACKGROUNDS

As stated, the nature of Abyssal society requires the redefinition of certain Background Traits. While some require only notes on how they apply specifically to the culture of the deathknights, others work entirely differently. Unless mentioned below, existing Backgrounds work just as they do in **Exalted**.

ARTIFACT

The Deathlords rule vast kingdoms within the Underworld, and their favored servants, the Abyssal Exalted, are able to take full advantage of the resources at their

THE TITLE

Abyssals sacrifice their name to the Malfeans at their moment of Exaltation. This is not a figurative act. The character can no longer call herself by the name she lost. She may only call herself by titles or by obvious aliases.

This does not destroy the Abyssal's name or disassociate her from her personal history. Her old identity still exists. Savants and detectives can investigate her history, and those who knew her prior to her Exaltation will still recognize her, assuming she is not decayed or beautified beyond recognition.

Abyssals who cling to their now-lost names suffer severely from the Abyssal Curse. See page 147 of this chapter for details of the specific effects.

liege's command. As a result of this, deathknights have a much easier time acquiring artifacts than most other Exalted. Only the Dragon-Blooded can match the Abyssals on this front, and although the kingdoms of the dead cannot equal the Realm in size and resources, there are many more Dragon-Blooded than there are Abyssals — the resources the Realm holds must be spread far thinner.

All a deathknight's artifacts are forged from soulsteel unless the Storyteller gives specific permission otherwise. The raw materials necessary for this Magical Material's creation are found only within the Underworld, and the Deathlords set their ghostly servants to work harvesting both the black stone of the Labyrinth and the souls of the dead so that Abyssal and ghostly Artificers might forge them into objects of dread wonder.

These artifacts are frequently disturbing blends of grotesque beauty and fascinating horror. The faces of the dead are reflected in their surfaces, and the screams and moans of the dead issue forth softly now and then. This display is especially severe with more powerful artifacts, which often make use of older, more powerful souls in their creation.

Jade, usually taken from grave goods or purchased from those Guild caravans that dare trade with the shadowlands, is the second most common Magical Material used in the creation of Abyssal artifacts. Jade's incredible liquid intensity of color in the Underworld brings a sometimes-unsettling splash of splendor to Exalted cloaked in the dark colors of death.

Very rarely, the other Magical Materials will find their way into the Underworld. orichalcum glows with a soft pale light in the lands of the dead, and some Abyssals find themselves uncomfortable in the Material's presence. Items made of moonsilver are always covered with an icy frost and frequently leave a chill in their wake. Starmetal gleams, distorting any light which strikes it like a glass prism.

In addition, Abyssal characters have access to the artifacts of the dead. See Chapter Six for details on these unique tools of the Underworld. Such relics can be purchased for their normal Artifact value, but players should be aware that they are of no use outside the Underworld. For more on artifacts, see Chapter Nine: Wonders and Equipment in **Exalted** and Chapter Six of this book.

This alteration of the Artifacts Background only applies to those Abyssals who continue to faithfully serve their Deathlords. Renegade Abyssals use the Artifact Background found in Chapter Four: Traits of the main **Exalted** rulebook.

x None: Who are you, that your Deathlord has given you no trinkets of power?

• Trinkets: Artifacts with a combined Artifact rating no higher than 3.

•• Sound Gear: Artifacts with a combined Artifact rating no higher than 5. None can individually be above Artifact 3 without Storyteller permission.

••• Well-Equipped: Artifacts with a combined Artifact rating no higher than 7. None can individually be above Artifact 4 without Storyteller permission.

•••• Supremely Appointed: Artifacts with a combined Artifact rating no higher than 10. There is no limit on individual Artifact level, other than it cannot be N/A.

••••• Divine Regalia: Artifacts with a combined Artifact rating no higher than 13. There is no limit on individual Artifact level, other than it cannot be N/A.

BACKING AND MENTOR

Deathknights owe no allegiance to anyone save their Deathlord and the Malfeans. Because of this, no Abyssal in service to a Deathlord may begin play with the Backing or Mentor Background. Such characters use the Liege Background below instead. Characters who have attempted to forsake their liege may, at the Storyteller's discretion, begin with some degree of Backing or Mentor.

FAMILIAR

Abyssal familiars are almost exclusively those beasts found within the Underworld. The most common are the monstrous barghest-hounds bred by the Deathlords and the black or occasionally pale horses that frequently serve as the deathknight's steeds. However, almost any animal, living or dead, can end up as an Abyssal familiar (though most will be creatures associated with death or the Underworld). Ghostly familiars remain the same sort of creatures they were in life. Ghost animals must use Charms to materialize in the living world. Living familiars will eventually take on the cast of death if kept too long in the Underworld.

FOLLOWERS

Abyssal Exalted attract followers from among both the living and the dead. The former are most often drawn from



among those humans who dwell within the shadowlands or from among the numerous death cults found throughout Creation. The latter typically hail from the ranks of the Deathlords armies and subjects. These include zombies, war ghosts and nemissaries. Although many mortal followers will be simple Militia, some Deathlords and deathknights may train living subjects as Infantry or even Elite Troops. Members of death cults are typically Heretics, although some murder cults produce Criminals specializing in assassination. Traits for these followers can be found on pages 277-278 and 298-301 of **Exalted**.

CULT AND THE ABYSSALS

The supplements **Exalted: The Lunars** and **Games of Divinity** introduced the Cult Background, which represents the Essence and Willpower the character gains from individuals who worship her as a god. The dead, including the Deathlords, enjoy much worship in the form of ancestor cults and Underworld cults, but Abyssals generally have no cult at all. The Abyssal is a nameless servant of her master. Any devotions she is offered should go, instead, to her Malfean or Deathlord master. The only way that an Abyssal is likely to start with a cult or an underworld cult is if she is a renegade who leads a temple of spectres or death cultists.

MANSE

The Deathlords have claimed few places of power in the lands of the living. Most of those they do control are Abyssal-aspected Manses located in various shadowlands. Abyssals who wish to have access to the Manses of the living must purchase the Manse Background normally, receiving one Manse with a rating equal to the number of dots in this Background.

NEW BACKGROUNDS

In addition to the standard Backgrounds presented in **Exalted**, the deathknights have several additional Backgrounds from which to choose.

ABYSSAL COMMAND

The character has been placed at the head of one of his Deathlord's military formations. The troops are typically battle-trained and moliated ghosts, ancestor cultist zealots or death-cult fanatics. Characters may trade two living soldiers for one ghost, and one living soldier for three skeletons or walking corpses. These troopers are the character's personal retinue and don't have anything to do other than take the character's orders, though the deathknight may second them to the regular military when he is not using them. When the character loses his

soldiers, they will be replaced as quickly as the Deathlord is willing and able. Characters who waste their soldiers are unlikely to get replacements very soon.

The loyalty of these soldiers is variable. Depending on the Deathlord and the abilities of the character's fellow Abyssals, the troops may have been subjected to conditioning techniques and supernatural training. Unconditioned troops will fight loyally if they are well-treated and given reason to believe they fight for a strong cause. If subjected to diseased conditions, thrown away as cannon fodder or given reason to believe that the Deathlords actually seek to annihilate the entire universe, their morale will generally be low. Characters will have to act appropriately in front of religiously motivated troops or risk poor morale or outright rebellion.

Not all Deathlords have large formations of troops. Storytellers are perfectly within their rights to put the brakes on characters with military ambitions whose masters have nary a soul in arms.

Troops that come from this Background use the Elite Troops template found on page 278 of **Exalted**. Walking dead are as described on page 299 of **Exalted**. War ghosts are described on page 301 of **Exalted**. Walking dead will have higher quality undead handlers to drive them at a rate of about one per ten regular shamblers. All troops are extras.

- x None. Not even a bodyguard?
- A small bodyguard of two ghosts, five soldiers or 15 common zombies. They also do basic domestic chores.
- A large bodyguard of 13 ghosts, 25 soldiers or 75 zombies and other walking dead commanders. Perhaps you fear ambush?
- An armed company of 50 ghosts, 100 men or 300 common zombies and assorted other animated dead. The character might command a unit of commando raiders, a monastic fighting order, a violent criminal syndicate or a very large personal bodyguard.
- A heavy company of 250 ghosts, 500 men or 1,500 shamblers. Perhaps the character commands the palace guard or his lord's heavy cavalry. The character's force may contain undead war machines, at the Storyteller's discretion.
- A double dragon, 500 war ghosts, 1,000 soldiers or 3,000 common zombies and an additional 250 more intelligent walking dead to manage them. The force can only be the vanguard of your master's forces or the Deathlord's personal bodyguard.

LIEGE

An Abyssal's Deathlord may serve any number of roles for her deathknights. Patron, teacher and confessor are only the most common. As a result of the close relationship between a Deathlord and her Abyssal champions, every Abyssal character is considered to have her Deathlord as both a mentor and a backer. Abyssals use the Liege Background to represent the Deathlord's level of interest in the character's existence and activities. Keep in mind that, no matter how close a relationship an Abyssal may have with her liege, the relationship is and always will be one of servitude. The higher a character's Liege rating, the more closely her will and her destiny are bound to that of her Deathlord.

The Liege Background grants beginning Abyssal characters additional bonus points representing the amount of additional time and effort a Deathlord has taken to train his favored servants. A character with the Liege Background has an additional number of bonus points that may be spent on the Backgrounds of Abyssal Command, Artifact, Followers, Influence, Manse, Necromancy, Resources, Underworld Manse and Whispers, as well as on any of the character's Caste or Favored Abilities and on Charms.

Renegade deathknights on the run from their Deathlord masters may not buy the Liege Background. If the game is to hinge on the characters rebelling against their Deathlord masters, then the players should discuss if this Background is appropriate and to what degree.

- x You no longer have any contact with your Deathlord, either because you have turned your back upon him or because he has turned his back upon you.
- You and your Deathlord are distant, and he takes only the minimal interest in your doings. The character possesses 2 additional bonus points to be spent on those Traits detailed in the Liege Background description.
- Your Deathlord takes an infrequent interest in your activities, perhaps a half-dozen times a year, and gives you a small number of underlings and other resources to use in the course of your duties. The character receives 4 additional bonus points.
- Your Deathlord calls you into his presence occasionally, perhaps once a month, and grants you a moderate amount of resources to use as you see fit. The character receives 6 additional bonus points.
- You see your Deathlord often, reporting to him almost weekly and are entrusted with a large number of his empire's

resources. The character receives 9 additional bonus points.

•••••

You are your Deathlord's most favored servant, acting as his trusted agent and receiving his full support in all things. The character receives 12 additional bonus points.

NECROMANCY

The Deathlords have had millennia to gather their power and to uncover the secrets of the Underworld. The greatest secrets of necromancy are at their fingertips, and these same secrets are made available to their deathknight servants. A character who possesses the Necromancy Background has put forth the time and effort to master the dread magics of the Underworld. Most learn at the feet of their Deathlords. Some undertake independent instruction or seek out the ghosts of First Age loremasters. A few mad souls descend deep into the Underworld in order to learn the dark arts from the Malfeans themselves.

The Necromancy Background enables a character to begin the game with the knowledge of a certain number of necromancy spells without having to swap out Charms for spells. All of the spells learned from this Background must be Necromantic in nature. It may not be used to learn Terrestrial or Celestial sorcery.

- x You have little to no training in the arts of necromancy.
- You have received basic instruction in the necromantic arts. Your character starts with the knowledge of one necromancy spell of the Shadowlands Circle.
- You have a strong understanding of the core principles of the magic of the Underworld. Your character starts with the knowledge of two necromancy spells of the Shadowlands Circle.
- You have received extensive training in the arts of necromancy. Your character starts with the knowledge of three necromancy spells of the Shadowlands Circle.
- You have an advanced understanding of the power death can wield over Creation. Your character starts with the knowledge of five necromancy spells of the Shadowlands or Labyrinth Circle.
- A prodigy in the study of the dread arts. Your character starts with the knowledge of seven necromancy spells of the Shadowlands or Labyrinth Circles.



SPIES

The Deathlords have spies everywhere. They have had hundreds of years to establish their networks, and they can use a potent combination of demons, spies and sorcerous communication to manage their intelligence apparatus. Characters with this Background have some portion of the Deathlord's intelligence machinery at their command. Perhaps they manage it, or perhaps they have been given it as a status item or plaything. Whatever the case, a character can use the network to spy on his foes.

Characters with this Background do not have discretionary access to the organization's budget, but so long as they keep their Deathlord happy, they can take advantage of its facilities and resources for their personal protection and to fulfill their agenda.

- x No agents serve you.
- You have control of the security forces in the area around a major Manse or perhaps run a small secret police force. You have five spies under your control.
- You control a bureau of 25 spies, perhaps enforcing your master's demesne over one or more shadowlands.
- You control a bureau of perhaps 100 spies, monitoring a single kingdom in the Underworld or perhaps all of your masters affairs in the mortal world. Your organization probably has several hundred part-time informants and ties with local death cults who can provide muscle among the living and the dead.
- You control a large network of several hundred full-time operators and several hundred additional casuals. You have achieved varying degrees of penetration over an entire Direction, either in the land of the living or the land of the dead.
- Your organization spans an entire Direction in both the lands of the living and the dead. You have eyes every where: thousands of casual agents, hundreds of full time agents and a commando force of 100 elite troops.

UNDERWORLD MANSE

Though the Deathlords lay claim to few Manses among the living, they claim most such places in land of the dead, having been that kingdom's sole sorcerers for many long centuries. With demon and ghost laborers, they have made these places into countless strongpoints and hidden retreats. They keep most of their vast gem-hoard for themselves, and a Deathlord who so chooses can go about adorned with the Empress' ransom in Hearthstones

of the most exquisite power. Some of these secret places and magical talismans the Deathlords share with their Abyssal servants.

But although it is abundant, the power of the Underworld is fragile. The effects of the Hearthstones of Abyssal Manses stop at the edge of the shadowlands. Beyond the borders of the kingdom of death and the lands it holds in sway, the stones provide no Essence, and the Hearthstone's magical powers also vanish. It is simply an inert rock, albeit a very hard one. Deathlords with a military agenda typically put securing Manses in Creation at the top of their list of priorities.

Access to a Manse's Hearthstone generally implies the character also has use of the Manse's facilities as a fortress, place of habitation, magical library or whatever other functions it might serve. If the deathknight is forbidden the use of the Manses, the Storyteller should consider compensating the character in some other fashion. Underworld Manses are not the sole property of the deathknight, however, and can be stripped away or reassigned at the Abyssal's master's whim.

Renegade Abyssals may purchase Underworld Manse, but it represents only places they have found on their own or stolen cleanly from their former master. **Renegades buying Underworld Manse receive only the benefits listed for Manse on page 145 of the Exalted rulebook.**

- x Why is it that the master has not opened any of the Underworld's Manses to you?
- The character is permitted use of and attuned to several level 1 and level 2 Manses in the Underworld. She may have one Hearthstone of level 1 or 2.
- The character is allowed to enter and has been attuned to several weak Underworld Manses. She has level 1 or level 2 Hearthstones, no more than three levels total.
- The character is permitted entrance to and has been attuned to some fairly powerful Underworld Manses. She has a level 3 Hearthstone and several level 1 and level 2 stones (no more than six levels, total, including the large stone).
- The character has access to and is attuned to some of the Deathlord's most powerful mansions in the Underworld. She has a level 4 Hearthstone and several of level 1 or level 2 and possibly even one of level 3 (no more than eight levels, total, including the large stone).
- The character has been taken into the bosom of her master's powers and been allowed to enter and attune herself to the Deathlord's most powerful

Underworld Manses. She has even been entrusted with the Hearthstone of one of these temples of the infinite void. She has a level 5 Hearthstone and several others of levels 1-3 (no more than 10 levels, total, including the large stone).

WHISPERS

In creating their Abyssal champions, the Deathlords called upon the power of their dead gods, the Malfeans. The dark influence of the long dead Primordials stains the souls of every deathknight. While members of the Midnight Caste have the most direct contact with the Malfeans upon their Exaltation, every Abyssal Exalted feels the touch of the Neverborn upon their minds. Some Abyssals learn to listen to the darkness in their hearts, minds and souls, seeking unholy communion with their gods of death. There are secrets to be learned by listening to the darkness.

A character with the Whispers Background may use it to tap into the wealth of lore lost in the darkness of the Underworld. Once per night (one night being from dusk until dawn the following day), by her player rolling Perception + Whispers, an Abyssal character may perform one of the following actions.

By listening to the whispering voices that flow through her mind, a character may uncover a secret lost into the void of the Underworld. The exact nature of this secret is left to the Storyteller's discretion, but the greater the level of success, the more important the secret. A single success might only reveal a story of death or tragedy involving a living person the character is or will soon be dealing with (clever characters will take advantage of this knowledge to engage in blackmail, psychological torture or even to convert the individual to the worship of death). This knowledge fades from the Abyssal's mind after one night.

A character may use the whispers of the Underworld as a guide, following them intuitively until she reaches a place the Malfeans believe her action may benefit them the most. The greater the number of successes rolled, the stronger the character is drawn in the direction she must go. Often, these are locations where a single death might have monumental consequences (be it politically or simply on the emotional psyche of an entire town or village), where the population is ripe for recruitment into death cults or where hope threatens the growth of a shadowland. Some renegade Abyssals try to use this ability to find where they might do the most damage against the works of the Malfeans, walking the razor's edge of the AbyssalCurse.

A character may attempt to use the knowledge whispered in her mind as a substitute for one Ability. After focusing on the whispered voices (a successful





Perception + Whispers roll), her player may substitute the deathknight's Whispers rating for a single Ability rating in a single roll. The commonness of the task determines the difficulty of the Whispers roll. Using Whispers in place of Archery to make a shot would require only a basic success, while using it in place of Lore to operate a complex First Age engineering marvel might require a legendary success. The character must spend 1 temporary Willpower to activate the Whispers Background.

- x You either have not made an effort to listen to the whispers of the Underworld or you have successfully ignored them.
- You have learned to hear the voices in your soul but still have difficulty understanding the wisdom they impart.
- You have a strong insight into the will of the Malfeans.
- The music of death sings in your soul.
- The quiet voices of your dead gods are your constant companion.
- You are one with the Malfeans, and your eyes shine with the light of divine insight.

CASTES

Just as the Solar Exalted are divided into castes based upon the predispositions of their spiritual essence, so to are the Abyssal Exalted. Where their Solar reflections are naturally divided along aspects of leadership, the castes of the deathknights are at once aspects of leadership and of servitude. While the Abyssals are first among the Deathlords' champions and sit at the head of mighty armies and empires, they are still servants to their lieges.

ANIMA EFFECT

All castes of Abyssal Exalted can channel Essence directly through their animas to generate magical effects. While this is inefficient compared to the refined magic of Charms, it is reflexive, and every deathknight can utilize her caste's anima power without special training.

In addition to those abilities unique to their caste, all Abyssal Exalted can spend a single mote of essence to:

- Cause her Caste Mark to split open and glow bright scarlet or to crackle with black energy for a scene (as if the

character has spent 4 - 7 motes of Peripheral Essence). Doing so will cause the Caste Mark to bleed around the edges as well.

- Cause her anima to glow brightly enough to read by for a scene (as if the character has spent 8-10 motes of Peripheral Essence).

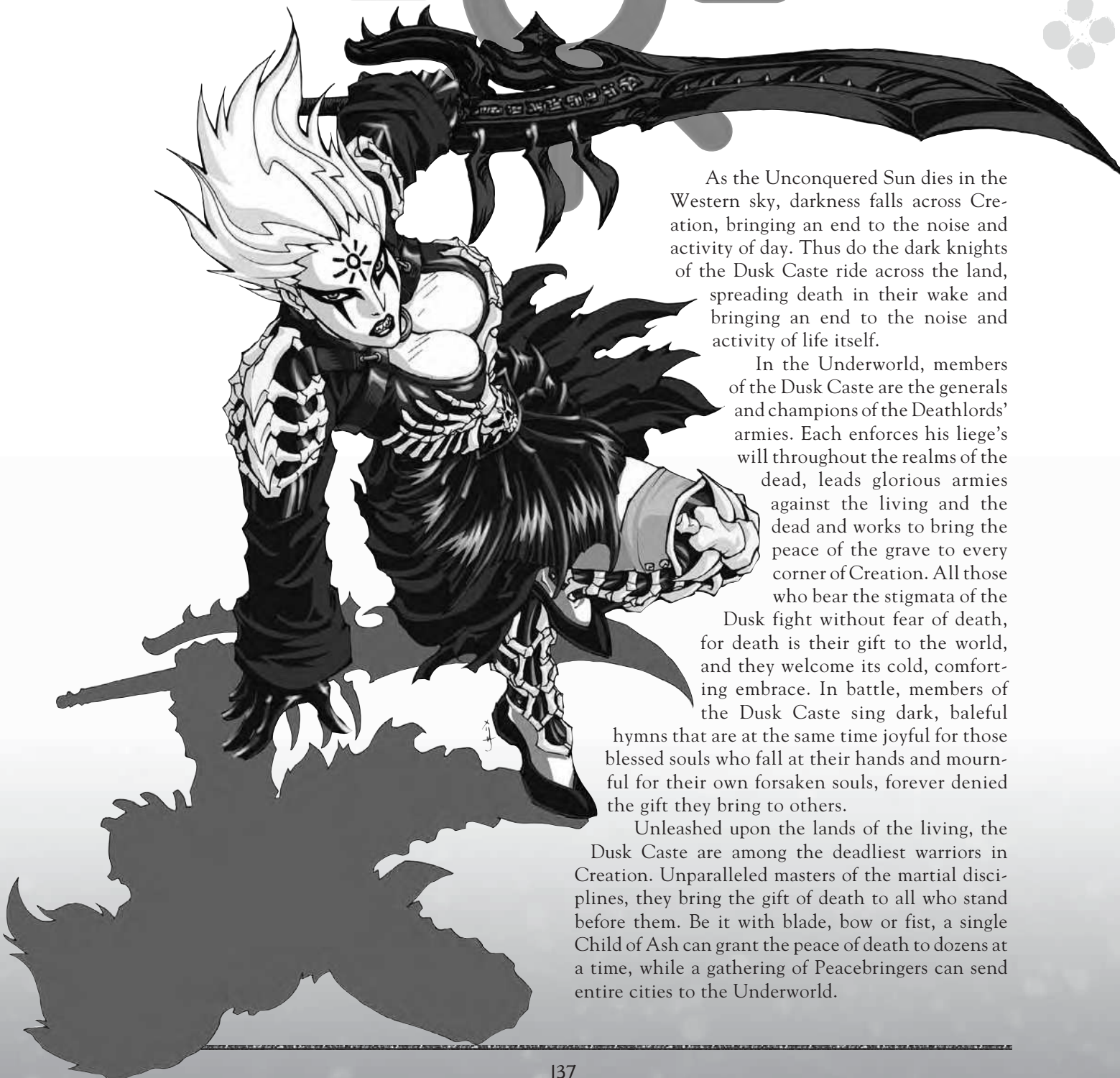
- Attune her anima to the emanations of the Underworld, enabling her to sense nearby shadowlands, as well as ghosts and the walking dead. At a distance of (the character's permanent Essence x 100) yards, an Abyssal will recognize the presence of shadowlands, ghosts and creatures of the Underworld. This does not reveal the location of the Underworld emanations to the deathknight, only their general presence. The sense lasts until the end of the scene.

- Though Abyssals cannot regain Essence in the land of the living through rest and respiration, they have an option that other Exalted do not. By spending 3 motes of Essence and a simple action, an Abyssal may grow a set of fangs. The fangs are Spd -3, Acc +0, Dmg +0L and Def -2 if the character bites with them. Their primary use, however, is for feeding.

If the Abyssal manages to place an opponent in a clinch while the fangs are deployed, in subsequent turns, rather than doing normal damage for the clinch, the Abyssal can instead choose to feed on the victim. This feeding does one automatic level of unsoakable lethal damage if the Abyssal's bite would cause even a single die of damage to the victim (so sorcerers who have used Invulnerable Skin of Bronze may be immune to the Abyssal's bite). This replenishes 1 mote of the Abyssal's Essence stores. Feeding does not necessarily represent draining blood. Particularly vicious Abyssals may eat their victims alive instead. The mechanical effects of eating or draining blood are identical. A victim may attempt to escape the deathknight's clinch as normal, and the deathknight's player uses the normal roll for the Abyssal to maintain the clinch.

Abyssals cannot eat corpses for nourishment — they must drain not just the blood but the life-Essence of living foes to replenish their own stores. A target cannot have been dead for more than one minute for the Abyssal to feed successfully. As usual, an Abyssal cannot drain more motes from a victim than the victim's remaining health levels + 3. Extras never provide more than 3 motes.

Dusk Caste



As the Unconquered Sun dies in the Western sky, darkness falls across Creation, bringing an end to the noise and activity of day. Thus do the dark knights of the Dusk Caste ride across the land, spreading death in their wake and bringing an end to the noise and activity of life itself.

In the Underworld, members of the Dusk Caste are the generals and champions of the Deathlords' armies. Each enforces his liege's will throughout the realms of the dead, leads glorious armies against the living and the dead and works to bring the peace of the grave to every corner of Creation. All those who bear the stigmata of the

Dusk fight without fear of death, for death is their gift to the world, and they welcome its cold, comforting embrace. In battle, members of the Dusk Caste sing dark, baleful hymns that are at the same time joyful for those blessed souls who fall at their hands and mournful for their own forsaken souls, forever denied the gift they bring to others.

Unleashed upon the lands of the living, the Dusk Caste are among the deadliest warriors in Creation. Unparalleled masters of the martial disciplines, they bring the gift of death to all who stand before them. Be it with blade, bow or fist, a single Child of Ash can grant the peace of death to dozens at a time, while a gathering of Peacebringers can send entire cities to the Underworld.



Members of the Dusk Caste are chosen from among those who have mastered the arts of bringing death through war and combat. Murderous duelists and merciless warlords are only a fraction of the Peacebringers' numbers. Heartless pitfighters who bring death to all who face them, warrior-poets who compose dark odes to the glory of mortal battle, aging veterans who are unwilling to give up the thrill of bringing death, highwaymen who relish the taking of life as well as jade, steel-eyed youths with the resolve to murder for what they hold dear — all these and more are found among the Children of Ash.

Dusk Caste Abyssals are the martial arm of a Circle, becoming the ones a group looks to for expertise in killing all that stands before them. They are the Circle's primary means of offence and use their mastery of combat to bring death wherever and whenever it may be needed.

Anima Banner: Dusk Caste Abyssals are marked by blackened circle surrounded by black lines branded on the center of their brow. During large expenditures of Peripheral Essence, this brand will bleed along the edges. Their animas tend to be pitch black with an edging of gray, sometimes tinged with dark purple.

Anima Effects: By spending 10 motes of Essence, the character can appear dark and terrible for the remainder of the scene (or until he chooses to let the effect dissipate). Players of mortal creatures attempting to face the Abyssal must make a Valor check or be unable to look directly at the character or strongly oppose him, subtracting 2 dice from all attempts to attack the character. Characters whose players botch their Valor rolls (and most natural animals) will flee in terror of the spectre that confronts them.

Caste Abilities: Members of the Dusk Caste excel in bringing death through all forms of combat, armed or otherwise. They have a natural affinity for the Abilities of Archery, Brawl, Martial Arts, Melee and Thrown.

Associations: The season of spring, the colors white and purple, the eastern direction, the element of ghost flame, the full moon

Sobriquets: They Who Sing Forsaken Hymns, Peacebringers, Children of Ash, Ascending Darkness

Concepts: amoral general, brooding swordsman, mercenary assassin, mercy killer, murder cultist, Deathlord's living weapon, La Belle Dame Sans Merci

My life was stolen from me. I
did no wrong, and yet, I was
struck down by cruel fate. Now,
I am a butcher of the innocent.
Why should I possess mercy
when Heaven gave me none?

Midnight Caste

In the resplendent darkness of the midnight hour, when the Unconquered Sun lies dead until his morning resurrection, there is only the glory of the night and the quiet echoes within the shadows. And so do the Midnight Caste evangelize the glory of death and give voice to the echoing whispers of the Abyss, spreading the gospel of the Malfeans and revealing their wisdom and power — the unfettered power of death itself — to all who will listen.

In the Underworld, the Midnight Castes serve as the high priests of the Deathlords. They preach the power and the glory of death and inspire both the living and the dead to follow the will of the Deathlords and, through them, the Malfeans.

Servants of the Deathlords often look to members of the Midnight Caste for spiritual leadership, seeking the wisdom and the dark blessings of their dead gods. Faith sustains the Children of Silence through all hardship, even the anguish of never knowing the glory of true death. So great is the faith of the Midnight Castes that they have taken upon themselves the burden of eternal life so that they may further teach of the power and glory of Oblivion.

When sent among the lands of the living, the Midnight Caste works to reveal the glory of death to those who have yet to feel its embrace. Some seek spectacular demonstrations of





death's ultimate might, murdering entire cities and turning entire regions into blighted wastelands. Others are more subtle, establishing hidden death cults so that they may instruct mortals in the worship of the Deathlords and the Malfeans. These cults grow like carefully nurtured cancer in the living world, offering a source of spies, assassins and even Essence to those Abyssals whose dark work takes them outside of the Underworld.

Abyssals of the Midnight Caste are chosen from among those who truly believe in the inevitable triumph of death and who desire to spread this understanding to others by any means necessary. Every member of the Midnight Caste hears the whispers of the Malfeans upon their Exaltation. The dark and forbidden secrets granted to the newborn Children of Silence place within them a cold resolve, acting as an impenetrable icy core of faith at the center of their being.

Within a Circle, members of the Midnight Caste become a bulwark of faith and confidence for their compatriots. Their tireless devotion to the will of the Deathlords and the Malfeans enables the Children of Silence to withstand tests that would break the wills of the less zealous, and their dark charisma allows them to inspire others to new heights of loyalty and fanaticism.

Anima Banner: Midnight Caste Abyssals bear a large, black circular Caste Mark branded upon their brow. During large expenditures of Peripheral Essence, this circle will bleed along the edges. Their animas are a black so deep that it seem like nothing less than a hole in the Tapestry.

Anima Effects: The Midnight Caste is empowered with the unholy might of the Deathlords' dark gods. With but a touch, these Exalted can cause the bodies of the fallen to rise as zombies. A character spends 5 motes of Essence and touches a body, and it awakens and rises by the end of the scene. Such zombies are of permanent duration and are always extras. Use the Common Zombie statistics on page 299 of *Exalted*.

An Abyssal may also strike down mortals with an icy glance. As her action for a turn, the Exalted may channel 5 motes of Essence through her anima and indicate a normal mortal within 10 yards. She then does her Essence as dice of unsoakable aggravated damage against the target. This power has no effect on Fair Folk, Exalted or other magical beings.

Caste Abilities: Members of the Midnight Caste hold a unique understanding of death that enables them to survive that which would destroy the less-enlightened, as well as to spread their faith to others. They have a natural affinity for the Abilities of Endurance, Performance, Presence, Resistance and Survival.

Associations: The season of summer, the colors yellow and cobalt, the southern direction, the ghost-element of jade and the half moon

Sobriquets: They Who Speak Blasphemous Truths, Echoes of the Abyss, Children of Silence, Resplendent Darkness

Concepts: Death-cult leader, physician, Deathlord's strong right hand, voice of the Malfeans, deranged hermit, dark herald, spiritual advisor

Come to me and drink the
blood of my robes. It is
the chalice of Oblivion
and sweet milk to the
parched lips of those
who suffer. Drink, oh
sufferer, and know peace.

Daybreak Caste

As the Unconquered Sun is slowly reborn after its nightly death, the darkness of night is forced to retreat before the light of day. The dark shadows stand as the last line of defense against the sun, sheltering the creatures of darkness and death and hiding the night's secrets from the living. And so, the Daybreak Caste offers refuge to the dark and morbid secrets of the Underworld, taking forbidden knowledge and using it as a weapon against the crude ignorance of life.

In the Underworld, the Children of Bone are the creators of the Deathlords' arsenals. From their minds and hands come the mighty engines of destruction, legions of armed and armored dead warriors and powerful necromantic magics that form the cornerstone of their masters' armies. Daybreak Abyssals travel to the deepest depths of the Underworld in search of the endless scraps of lore, weapons and magical power that have passed into the realms of the dead. As the most learned beings within the Underworld, they seek knowledge from any source available, be it the ghosts of long dead scholars or from the Malfears themselves.

When unleashed upon Creation, these Abyssals seek to test the magical and material arts of the dead against those of the living, leaving dead armies and blighted landscapes in their wake. The Daybreak Castes also continue their endless quest for dark knowledge and mystical power, scouring the tombs of long-dead Exalted and searching for those treasure





troves of artifacts hidden from the Dragon-Blooded in the wake of the Great Betrayal.

Members of the Daybreak Caste are chosen from among those who are unafraid to seek out even the most forbidden and blasphemous learning and lore and those who seek to apply that knowledge to dark and morbid effect. Few are content to remain mere bookkeepers, no matter how enticing the idea of spending centuries pouring over the libraries of the dead may be. The way of They Who Work Unclean Arts is that of the grave robber, the poisoner, the soul-forger, the demonologist, the vivisectionist, the necromancer and the crafter of mighty undead siege engines. Each possesses not just an obsession for knowledge, but a grim need to see it applied in the name of death.

As members of a Circle, Bone Children are called upon for their command of the darkest of dark arts. When magic and learning are needed, the Daybreak Caste is the one others look to for answers.

Anima Banner: The Caste Mark of the Daybreak Caste Abyssals is a dark circle branded on their brow, the top half filled in with black and the bottom half being only an empty border. During large expenditures of Peripheral Essence, this circle will bleed along the edges. Their animas tend toward the more spectacular colors of the Underworld, displaying the whole range of grays with some purples and even dark greens.

Anima Effects: Abyssals of the Daybreak Caste may channel Essence through their animas, filling them with the swirling power of the Underworld. If, after an enemy's player has rolled damage, the Exalted would take health levels of damage, then he may spend 5 motes of Essence to strengthen his anima in an attempt to stop the attack. Roll the character's Essence, and for each success, he can subtract one health level from the damage the enemy would have done. This effect can turn an otherwise deadly blow or reduce a weak attack to harmlessness.

Caste Abilities: Members of the Daybreak Caste excel at seeking a further understanding of death and in the applications of that knowledge. They have a natural affinity for the Abilities of Craft, Investigation, Lore, Medicine and Occult.

Associations: The season of autumn, the colors of orange and black, the western direction, the corpse-element of bone and the crescent moon

Sobriquets: They Who Work Unclean Arts, Shadows of the Abyss, Children of Bone, Descending Darkness

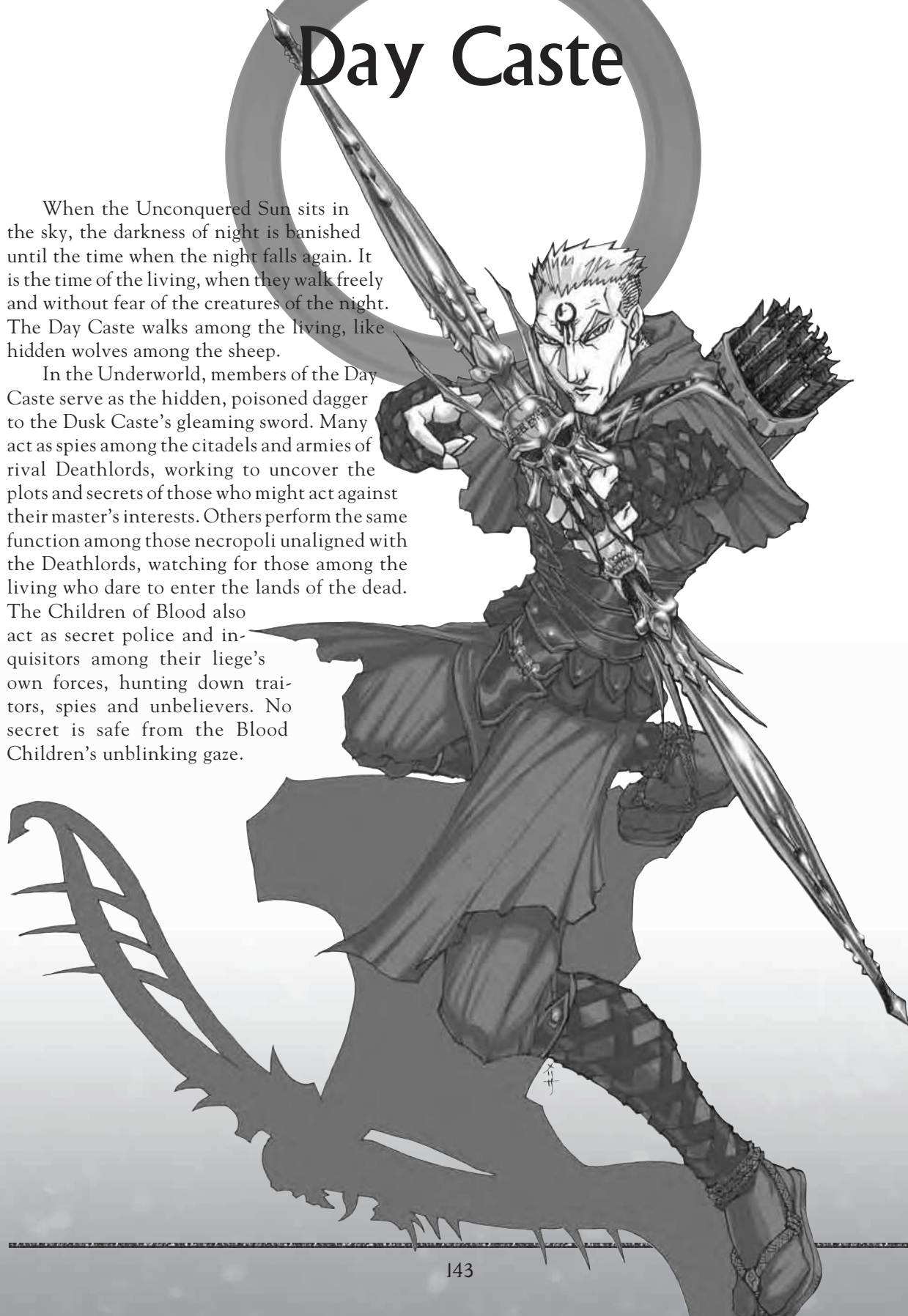
Concepts: Fallen shaman, artificer, obsessed scholar, death witch, military engineer, Deathlord's interrogator, plague bringer

DO YOU SEE THIS PICTURE? THAT IS
WHAT YOU WILL LOOK LIKE WHEN I
HAVE FINISHED OPERATING. DO NOT
WORRY, YOU WILL ALSO BE DEAD.

Day Caste

When the Unconquered Sun sits in the sky, the darkness of night is banished until the time when the night falls again. It is the time of the living, when they walk freely and without fear of the creatures of the night. The Day Caste walks among the living, like hidden wolves among the sheep.

In the Underworld, members of the Day Caste serve as the hidden, poisoned dagger to the Dusk Caste's gleaming sword. Many act as spies among the citadels and armies of rival Deathlords, working to uncover the plots and secrets of those who might act against their master's interests. Others perform the same function among those necropoli unaligned with the Deathlords, watching for those among the living who dare to enter the lands of the dead. The Children of Blood also act as secret police and inquisitors among their liege's own forces, hunting down traitors, spies and unbelievers. No secret is safe from the Blood Children's unblinking gaze.





Beyond the lands of the dead, the Day Castes are sent among the cities and towns of Creation. Here, they walk among the living, hiding their Abyssal natures and bringing death to those places where armies of undead and powerful necromancy cannot. Posing as merchants, refugees, monks and other faces within the sea of humanity, they carry out acts of surveillance, sabotage, theft and assassination in the name of their Deathlords. When brute force will not further a Deathlord's aims, the Daywalkers succeed through stealth and treachery.

Members of the Day Caste are chosen from those most able to walk unnoticed among the living and the dead, as well as those able to bring death in subtle, quiet and unconventional ways. Spies and assassins are chosen but also relentless hunters, children whose innocent faces hide cold hearts, murderous concubines, accomplished liars and merciless revolutionaries. Any who favor the use of cunning, wit and skill to bring about death may become one of the Day Caste.

Daywalkers frequently serve as the eyes and ears of their Circle, going to gather information where others cannot. When death requires unconventional and underhanded methods, it is the Day Caste others look to for solutions.

Anima Banner: Day Caste Abyssals have only an empty black ring branded on their brow. During large expenditures of Peripheral Essence, this ring will bleed along the edges. Their animas are a phantasmal black and gray, tinged with a sickly green.

Anima Effects: Exalted of the Day Caste have more control over their animas than the average Abyssal. They may mute their animas, allowing them to exert their powers without the display of an anima

banner. When the Day Caste Abyssal expends Peripheral Essence, she may double the number of motes spent in order to prevent the expenditure from adding to her anima banner. This ability does not allow the character to mute the Essence displays caused by the use of sorcery.

The character may also extend her muted anima like a choking cloak around her. This extended anima last for an entire scene and costs 5 motes of Essence to evoke. The anima mutes the senses of those attempting to perceive the Abyssal and the evidence the Exalted leaves behind for those who would follow her trail. Shadows are darker, sounds muffled, and the character's scent and footprints are both much lighter than normal. In game terms, increase the difficulty of all rolls to detect or track the Exalted by 1, so long as the muted anima is in effect.

Caste Abilities: Members of the Day Caste excel at moving unnoticed among others and gathering hidden information. They have a natural affinity for the Abilities of Athletics, Awareness, Dodge, Larceny and Stealth.

Associations: The season of winter, the colors indigo and gray, the northern direction, the corpse-element of blood and the new moon

Sobriquets: They Who Dwell Among The Wretched, Daywalkers, Children of Blood, Hidden Darkness

Concepts: Deathlord's quisling, prostitute turned assassin, spy master, heretical cult leader, master inquisitor, power behind a corrupt throne, nihilistic revolutionary

I have never known the fetid
oppression of existence among
the living. Your breath takes me
there, but I shall only suffer for
a little while.

Moonshadow Caste

When Luna's face is hidden by shadow, all Creation is engulfed in darkness. In every corner of the world, there is no light save that of the pale and distant stars. The Unconquered Sun is dead, and the Silver Lady is shrouded in mourning. In this moment, all who exist are granted a brief glimpse of the darkness that awaits at the end of all things. And so, the Moonshadow Caste works to spread the shroud of death across all lands. Death touches all things, crossing all boundaries and uniting all within its cold embrace.

In the Underworld, members of the Moonshadow Caste serve as the diplomats of the Deathlords. They endlessly travel from one court to the next, negotiating treaties and striking dark bargains.





Through their efforts, cities of the dead are slowly but surely brought under the Deathlords' influence, dread legions are ensured the resources they need for war, and dark kingdoms are kept running smoothly. Dust Children endlessly create, alter and discard alliances, treating individuals, groups and cities like pieces on a Gateway board.

Among the lands of the living, Moonshadow Abyssals perform similar functions. They work to sow discord within and between towns and cities, leaving chaos and mistrust in their wake. By doing so, the kingdoms of the living are less able to resist the armies of the dead. Some are even willing to ally with the Deathlords if it will mean the defeat of their hated enemies, and the members of the Moonshadow Caste are there to negotiate and sanctify treaties whose creation is likely the end result of months or even years of lies and manipulations (and will undoubtedly be worded in such a way that allows the Abyssal and his Deathlord several loopholes). To the Dust Children, it does not matter if one city is spared the gift of death in order to better bring that gift to a second city. Death comes for all things in time.

Members of the Moonshadow Caste are chosen from among those who excel at social manipulation. Unlike the Midnight Caste, who speak truths others do not wish to acknowledge, the Hollow Darkness uses treachery. The Moonshadows are ruthless diplomats, wicked courtesans and heartless confidence men who patiently spin webs of lies and deception throughout back alleys, market places and royal courts. They are the true masters of guile and plotting.

Children of Dust are frequently the voice of their Circle. As natural manipulators, they turn potential foes into allies of convenience and use their abilities to plan and organize to help devise and set in motion grand plots.

Anima Banner: Moonshadow Abyssals have a black disc within a circle branded upon their brow as a Caste Mark. During large expenditures of Peripheral Essence, this disc and circle will bleed along the edges. Their animas are translucent grays and blacks, often with faint pale purple and green sparkles.

Anima Effects: When a Moonshadow Caste is party or witness to an oath, he may use his anima to sanctify it. The character must touch hands to seal the agreement or touch the hands of those who are party to it. His anima burns brightly, swirling with the words and runes by which the Malfeans give him the right to sanctify matters by their unspeakable names. Those who break such an oath (including the Exalt himself) suffer a terrible curse.

The Exalted spends 10 motes of Essence and a point of Willpower to sanctify the oath. Those who break it will suffer terrible luck from their oathbreaking. A number of times equal to the Exalted's Essence at the time he witnesses or agrees to the oath, the oathbreaker's player will horribly botch a critical roll. When this happens is up to the Storyteller, but it is always at the worst possible moment. The Exalted need not be alive when the curse takes effect — he sanctifies the oath, but the Abyssal's dark gods enforce it.

Also, Abyssals of the Moonshadow Caste are talented generalists. Provided they have willing tutors, they may learn the Charms of other types of Exalted and even of spirits (including ghosts). Such Charms cost double the normal experience to learn (usually 20 points) and use. Moonshadow Caste characters may not start the game knowing the Charms of other such beings without the Storyteller's permission.

Caste Abilities: Members of the Moonshadow Caste excel in all forms of manipulation, organization and travel. They have a natural affinity for the Abilities of Bureaucracy, Linguistics, Ride, Sail and Socialize.

Associations: The period of Calibration, the color silver, the center direction, the corpse-element of prayer and the gibbous moon

Sobriquets: They Who Walk Within Webs of Deception, Winds of the Abyss, Children of Dust, Hollow Darkness

Concepts: Merchant prince, scheming socialite, actor turned Deathlord agent, political troubleshooter, self-serving seneschal, honey-tongued courtesan, sower of discord

You speak for the living, I speak
for the dead. Let our meeting be
hallowed by the ancient courtesies
of such business.

THE ABYSSAL CURSE

The Exalted of Creation suffer the Great Curse laid on them by the dying Primordials who would become the Malfeans. As the champions of the Malfeans, however, the Abyssals are not subject to the Curse, but the imprint of that curse has been used to tie their destinies irrevocably to the Deathlords and the Malfeans themselves. Should an Abyssal turn against his destiny and defy his mandate of darkness, his tainted power turns against the world around him, leaving the touch of the Abyss where he will not.

THE VIRTUES OF DEATH

Unlike the Great Curse, the Abyssal Curse does not attach itself to a particular Virtue. Rather, the Curse distorts and ultimately perverts all Virtues to its own end. Even those who rebel against their nature find their perspectives and morals altered by their dark Exaltation.

COMPASSION

The virtue of Compassion serves as a measure of one's empathy toward others. For those who serve the Malfeans, this empathy manifests as a desire to end the suffering of the living and bring them the release of death. Among renegade Abyssals, this Virtue serves as an overall understanding of the living and a desire to live life to the fullest. Regardless of their loyalties, compassionate Abyssals seek to relieve the suffering of others — one way or another.

CONVICTION

For the Abyssal Exalted, Conviction represents emotional endurance. Among faithful deathknights, it gauges their loyalty and the lengths they will go to serve their lieges. For renegades, this Virtue measures their willingness to rebel against their former masters. The higher a renegade's Conviction rating, the greater his will to stand and forge his own destiny. No matter which side he stands on, an Abyssal with high Conviction does whatever he feels is necessary for his beliefs.

TEMPERANCE

A character's self-control is measured by her Temperance. For deathknights, the Virtue measures their ability to contain their destructive impulses when the situation demands. Raw force and annihilation are not always the best means to advance a Deathlord's will, and Temperance allows loyal Abyssals to keep their fervor in check in such situations. Renegades use Temperance to maintain self-control, just as normal Exalts do. Whatever their allegiance, temperate Abyssals act with icy calculated prudence.

VALOR

Quite simply, Valor is courage. Loyal Abyssals use Valor to remain steadfast against the enemies of their lieges, be it into the heart of the Realm or against the

champions of a rival Deathlord. For renegades, Valor measures their willingness to stand against any and all threats to their own person or the people and places they care about. Whether he fights for the side of life or death, a valorous Abyssal's overwhelming passion drives him forward against all odds.

RESONANCE

Unlike other Exalted, Abyssals do not have a Limit Trait. Instead, their corrupted destiny manifests in an aura of unease known as Resonance. This Trait has a rating from 1 to 10 and measures the character's accumulated death taint. As Resonance increases, an Abyssal's spectral nature seeps to the surface and discomfits those around her. Living beings sense this aura as unnatural and unclean, while the dead and other Abyssals feel the palpable doom of the Malfeans' displeasure. For every point of Resonance the character has above her lowest Virtue rating, she loses one die from all Social rolls. This penalty cannot reduce a character's dice pool below her lowest Virtue and does not affect rolls to intimidate the living. Even if the character does not actively interact with others, her aura makes those around her subtly uncomfortable. More dire still, the atavistic taint of Resonance opposes Virtues. The difficulty of all Virtue rolls increases by one for every four points of Resonance an Abyssal has (or fraction thereof for characters with a Resonance of 9 or 10).

GAINING RESONANCE

Abyssal Exalted gain Resonance by acting in opposition to their nature or against the will of Malfeans. As such, faithful deathknights gain considerably less Resonance than renegades, although they too risk taint for failing in their duties. If an Abyssal gains enough Resonance to bring her Resonance total over 10, the extra Resonance immediately bleeds into a spectral manifestation with a value equal to the excess. The Abyssal's player chooses this effect, which manifests for the rest of the scene in addition to any other effects the character evokes. See "Resonance Manipulation" below for more information and examples of such manifestations.

LITANY OF SINS

Whenever an Abyssal commits any of the following actions, she automatically gains Resonance as described in the transgression. This list is by no means exhaustive. Storytellers should feel free to develop other sins as appropriate, using the listed offenses as a guideline for severity. Abyssal Exalted can deliberately transgress against the will of the Malfeans to scourge the land around them with black miracles, but daring the wrath of the Malfeans is a dangerous thing, and characters who do commit transgressions at the direct behest of their



Deathlord suffer for it, not their master. However, an otherwise loyal deathknight who sins without orders to do so gains Resonance normally.

- Dwelling within a Solar Manse or Demesne. Add one point of Resonance for each night the deathknight remains in the place of power. Add an additional point per night if the character is attuned to a Solar Manse or Demesne, regardless of whether he actually dwells there.

- Living among mortals as if you were one of them. Add one point of Resonance for each night spent dwelling in the same house as one of the living.

- Clinging to your forsaken name. Add one point of Resonance whenever you acknowledge or introduce yourself by your former name, to a maximum of three points per night.

- Taking a willing lover from among the living. Each night of intimacy adds one point of Resonance.

- Siring or bearing a child with a living lover. Add four points of Resonance when the child is born.

- Saving the life of any mortal. Gain one point of Resonance per life saved, to a maximum of three points for a single event.

- Fighting against the forces of death on behalf of the living. Gain four points of Resonance at the conclusion of the battle, in addition to any Resonance gained from actually saving mortal lives.

- Disobeying one's liege. The Deathlord can inflict up to one Resonance per day on the character as a reflexive action at any distance and at any time.

LOSING RESONANCE

Unlike the Limit Trait of other Exalted, Resonance does not "break" and reset to zero when it reaches its maximum value. Instead, Abyssals must bleed off their taint gradually via one of the following methods.

Castigation: The Abyssal engages in acts of contrition and self-mortification to atone for his sins against the Malfeans. A penitent deathknight seeks out an Abyssal of the Midnight Caste or his Deathlord and spends a scene confessing his sins and performing self-flagellation or other torturous rituals to purge his weakness.

Midnight Caste Abyssals can pray directly for absolution from the Malfeans, but their players must succeed in a Charisma + Performance roll at difficulty 3 to pray successfully. Abyssals of other castes praying for themselves roll at difficulty 5. At the conclusion of the scene, the deathknight loses a number of points of Resonance equal the number of health levels of lethal damage suffered during the torture session. An Abyssal cannot use this method of Resonance bleeding more than once per night. It is not possible to fake contrition in order to exchange health levels for Resonance loss.

Communion: Another method used exclusively by loyal deathknights is direct communion with the Malfeans. A character engages in deep meditation, attempting to

commune directly with his dead gods. Others do so in the form of journeys (sometimes referred to as Harrowings) that take them deep into the heart of the Labyrinth and prove their dedication to the slumbering Malfeans. By spending a full night and day in deep meditation, a character may bleed off as many points of Resonance as he has permanent Essence. By questing deep into the Underworld where the Malfeans dwell, a deathknight may bleed off all his Resonance — provided his actions during the Harrowing please his dark gods. Storytellers are encouraged to run a Harrowing as either a single episode solo adventure for a character or as a group adventure for an entire Circle seeking communion.

The Trappings of Death: By acting as one who is dead, an Abyssal may allay the Malfeans' wrath. The character can dress in funerary garb, sleep in a crypt, avoid the sun, subsist on blood, sing ethereal funeral hymns, etc. For each full night and day spent engaging in such acts, the Abyssal loses one point of Resonance.

Resonance Manipulation: By tapping into his tainted Essence, an Abyssal may bleed energy into the world around him to evoke unnatural or outright horrifying effects. The character's player rolls the character's Essence. If the player rolls no successes, the Abyssal *gains* one point of Resonance and manifests an effect with a cost equal to his permanent Essence (selected by the Storyteller). Each success on the roll bleeds one point of Resonance, up to the character's Essence rating. The total number of points discharged determines the intensity of the manifestation. Characters may only attempt this feat once per scene but may use this method to burn off Resonance as they receive it. Although the Abyssal's player selects the actual effect, the character does not consciously choose how his tainted destiny manifests.

ABYSSAL ANIMA BANNERS

The anima banners of the Abyssal don't just give away the Abyssal's identity through the incandescent display of Essence. When his anima banner is fully ablaze, the Abyssal is a figure of incredible dread. The deathknights' animas are the cold touch of Oblivion unleashed upon Creation, and all living creatures who see them instinctively know that they bring only death in their wake.

THE DEAD

Ghost characters use the same Traits as Exalted characters. However, certain Backgrounds are different, and ghosts are not subject to the effects of the Great Curse or the influence of the Malfeans.

POWERS OF THE DEAD

The following powers are shared by all ghosts.

Acute Sense: The dead have remarkable visual acuity, particular pertaining to sickness and disease. They have a +1 automatic success to all rolls involving visual

RESONANCE MANIPULATION EFFECTS

An Abyssal may channel Resonance to create one of the unnatural effects listed below at the appropriate level. Each manifestation lasts for an entire scene. Storytellers are free to develop additional effects as they see fit.

Resonance Lost	Effects
1	The character's eyes glint or shine with cold radiance; the character's skin grows slightly pale and ashen, as though from sickness or frostbite; the character's shadow distends to include monstrous features such as claws and spines; the character's bones creak and grind audibly as he moves; the character's voice takes on an otherworldly timbre; the character's hair coils and writhes as though windswept, even in still air; the character smells faintly of decay or overturned soil.
2	The character's reflection becomes warped and twisted (either appearing unrecognizable or as a creature of death, such as a skeleton); the temperature noticeably chills when the character enters a room or area; shadows lengthen and grow darker in the character's presence; symbols of the Unconquered Sun or the Immaculate Dragons grow dark and tarnished when the character enters the room; birds of ill omen follow in the character's wake; winds follow in the character's wake, sounding like the lamentations of the Restless Dead; stigmata form on the character's body.
3	The character casts no reflection for the next day; the grass dies wherever the character walks upon it; all symbols of the Unconquered Sun or the Immaculate Dragons within the area of a village or a small town grow dark and tarnished; the character reeks of the oils and perfumes used in the preparation of corpses; non-magical animals are frightened of the character and will flee from his presence; all food within the area of a village or small town spoils; the character's body becomes ice cold and pale, like that of a corpse; temple bells spontaneously ring whenever the character comes within a mile of a temple; all fires smaller than a bonfire within the character's line of sight die out.
4	Symbols of the Unconquered Sun or the Immaculate Dragons within the area of a large town or a small city grow bent and twisted by the character's presence; the sky grows dark and overcast, and black lightning crackles from earth to sky; all unborn children and animals currently gestating in an area the size of a large town, large farmstead or small city will be born dead; All mirrors that catch the character's reflection crack or shatter; the sounds of life become noticeably muffled and muted in 100-yard radius around the character; all crops within the character's line of sight die; the surf within 100 yards of the character grows still and silent; all shadows in the character's presence scream or sing haunting paeans to the Abyss.
5	The character's shadow animates itself and takes on a dark life of its own for the scene (the shadow cannot harm any living creature); powerful storms lash the area around the character; phantasmal images of the dead drift about the character; all livestock within the character's line of sight take ill and die over the next few days; all plants smaller than a full-grown tree within one mile of the character wither and rot; all symbols of the Unconquered Sun or the Immaculate Dragons shatter, melt or burst into unholy flame within one mile of the character.
6	The character's eyes become blackened portals to the tombs of the Malfeans, showing maddening images of death and oblivion to all who look within; the character's searing shadow leaves the ground desiccated and barren; all mortals who look upon the character bleed from the eyes.
7	The character's flesh melts and dematerializes into wisps of shadow, briefly transforming her into a living skeleton; the character's anima flares to its full iconic splendor and remains so-displayed for a scene.
8	For the next week, the character's shadow comes to life as a malevolent undead creature in the service of the Malfeans (use the character's Traits); every intact corpse in the character's presence rises as a common zombie and rampages until the next sunrise.
9	The earth trembles as the character passes and expels bones or noxious vapors from its crevasses; glowing quicksilver or chips of bone and ash rain from the tempest-torn sky for miles.
10	A shadowland, one mile in radius, forms around the character over the course of the scene. This shadowland persists for a number of years equal to the character's permanent Essence.



ABYSSAL ANIMA BANNERS

Motes of
Peripheral
Essence

Effect

1-3	The character's Caste Mark becomes prominent, appearing as a black brand upon her forehead. Anyone seeing the Exalt may make a Perception + Awareness roll at standard difficulty to notice the Caste Mark.
4-7	The character's Caste Mark splits open and begins to bleed. The blood will soak through anything placed over it.
8-10	The character is surrounded by a dark aura bright enough to read by, and his Caste Mark is bleeding wound on his forehead. Stealth is impossible.
11-15	The character is engulfed in a chilling bonfire of Essence, which radiates from her feet to at least a foot above the character's head. Objects that come in contact with the aura may be left cold and decayed, as if they had been left to rot for days or even months. The character is visible for miles. The light is bright and steady enough to read by out to a spearcast's distance. The character's Caste Mark bleeds and burns with a blue, white, black or red radiance.
16+	The character is surmounted or surrounded by a coldly glowing image totemic to his person — a Moonshadow diplomat might be surrounded by a great spider made of ice, a Midnight Caste necromancer by a giant glowing skull or a seemingly endless void, and so on. Blood pours from the character's Caste Mark. This effect fades during any turn the character does not spend Essence, but leaps back into existence if the character again burns Peripheral Essence. The character's Caste Mark appears as a portal to the ultimate Void during these turns, and may cause derangements in normal mortals who see it.

perception and all Awareness or Medicine rolls to spot or diagnose illness. Unfortunately, this eye for decay is something the dead cannot escape, and to them, even the living world is a dreary place.

Naturally Immaterial: The dead are naturally immaterial when they are in the land of the living. They are thus invulnerable to most attacks, able to pass through solid objects, invisible and so forth. It requires a special Charm — Weighted With the Anchor of Flesh — for them to materialize in the living world.

Vulnerable to Wards: The dead are spirit beings and, thus, vulnerable to ritual placation and wards. Hungry ghosts are blocked by a line of salt or germinated grain. Normal ghosts must make a Willpower roll to cross such an unbroken ward, no matter how inept the ward's builder. Failure means they cannot dare the ward while it stands.

Occultists can erect wards that are foolproof against ghosts. A ghost will be blocked by wards erected by an occultist with Occult Trait equal to the ghost's permanent Essence, but he may be able to slip by during Calibration and the latest hours of the night. A ghost will be completely thwarted by the wards of magicians with an Occult higher than the ghost's permanent Essence. The materials for such wards cost Resources • for a small room or Resources •• for a house up to the size of a small mansion. If a mortal sorceress performs the service, she will charge Resources • to •• to ward a room and Resources •• to ••• to ward a building.

In addition, there are tokens and talismans that have power over the ancestors. These are warding charms, as described on page 337 of the **Exalted** rule book. One such token wards off the walking dead, while another protects against ghosts and hungry ghosts. Any rolls involving characters carrying such a token are made at -1 die to the ghost's pools. These talismans cost only Resources •• and can be made by even mediocre occultists, so in areas troubled by the dead, more mortals will carry them than not.

A ghost can be expelled from a body he is possessing by a mortal magician whose player rolls a number of successes on a Charisma + Occult roll equal to the Essence of the ghost. There is nothing in the 30 minute ritual that keeps the ghost from physically assaulting the magician, and it is entirely possible the sorcerer is unprepared to deal with the angered ghost. Then again, mortal ghost hunters and exorcists are familiar with the ways of the dead and never fail to carry talismans and good luck charms on their person. The ritual of exorcism's components include herbs and incense worth Resources ••. Exorcisms usually cost Resources ••• but may cost Resources •••• if the exorcism involves a famous ghost hunter and his attendants.

NEW AND ALTERED BACKGROUNDS

Ghost characters cannot possess the Backgrounds of Familiar, Liege or Manse. If a ghost has control of a



Manse, it is as a plot device. Ghosts lack the ability to bond with animals the way Exalted are able to. Liege represents an Abyssal's personal relationship with his Deathlord and does not apply to ghosts (ghosts who serve Deathlords use the Backing Background instead).

Ghosts who worship the Malfeans may, at the Storyteller's discretion, possess the Whispers Background — but at twice the cost. The first 3 dots cost 2 Background or bonus points each, while each dot above 3 costs 4 bonus points each.

Allies, Backing, Followers, Influence, Mentor and Resources work the same for ghosts as they do for mortals and Exalted. Backing almost always comes from one of the kingdoms of the Underworld or one of the shadowland kingdoms of the living world. Followers are almost always other ghosts. Mentors are typically older, more powerful ghosts, although spirits, Deathlords, Exalted and other beings may also be mentors to the dead. Resources consist of the currency and trade goods of the Underworld.

In addition, the following new Backgrounds are available for ghost characters.

ANCESTOR CULT

A number of mortals pay homage and respect to you after your death, burning valuables and effigies of valuables in your memory. This may be your large extended family and their descendants or citizens of a nation or an ethnic group who consider your deeds in life worthy of remem-

brance. These prayers and offerings to you give you Essence in death. The larger your memoriam, the more Essence it gives you. Of course, this easy Essence does come at a price. The living expect guidance or aid from their honored ancestors. In addition, your cult may come under attack from outside forces such as local gods, the Immaculate Order or a rival ancestor's cult.

Characters can lose access to their own burnt offerings if they are no longer able to haunt the Underworld analog of the altar. In places where the altars of the dead are operated in public, the local tax authorities supervise the altars in the Underworld to make sure the local Underworld prince receives his portion.

At the Storyteller's discretion, once per story, a player may roll her character's Cult Background. Success allows the character to exploit the cult to effectively increase her Followers or Resources by one for a single action with the Background.

- x You have no one to make offerings in your name. Why?
- A wife or perhaps a few children remember you and make offerings. You receive Resources • tributes every few days and the occasional Resources •• tribute. This is the maximum Ancestor Cult any ghost on the Blessed Isle can expect to have without Immaculate persecution.



- You are held up as an honored ancestor by a family line or a small extended family. You receive daily Resources • tributes, Resources •• tributes at least once a week and a Resources ••• tribute (almost certainly a Resources ••••• effigy) on the major holidays.
- A large family venerates you as a revered ancestor and tells stories of your deeds, or perhaps you are the founder of a small town or the hero of a small nation. Your daily offerings amount to Resources ••, and there are several (at least three) Resources ••• offerings on the major holidays or anniversaries important to the character. There are doubtless a number of children who bear your name, and much is done in your memory. Occasionally (no more than once a year), a mortal occultist may send the character a new grave good with a mortal Resources cost no higher than •••.
- You are one of the prime ancestors of a powerful and influential clan, or perhaps founder of a small nation or a city. There is an altar set up for you, and you have at least one part-time priest. You receive Resources ••• total burnt offerings daily and Resources •••• offerings on the major holidays or when individuals seek your special favor. In addition, the constant invocation and veneration of the character strengthens her will. Every day at the moment of the ghost's death, the ghost regains 1 Willpower.
- You were the founder of a great nation or the hero of a people. Children are named after you, and there is a full temple with full-time priests devoted to your memory. You receive Resources ••• in burnt offerings daily, with Resources ••••• offerings on all the major holidays. Every few weeks, a follower will make a Resources •••• offering seeking your special favor. In addition, the ghost regains one temporary Willpower daily on the moment of her death, and the prayers and offerings of her worshipers give her an additional 2 motes of Essence per hour. The character is becoming quite the god and will have to begin contending with other local little gods for serious worship.

CULT AND THE DEAD

The dead can, in theory, gain the Cult Background from mortal worshipers if they have enough veneration and sacrifice. Ancestor Cult already reflects this — the effects of Cult • are integrated into Ancestor Cult ••••, and Cult •• is likewise integrated in Ancestor Cult •••••. Characters who increase their cult beyond this level keep Ancestor Cult level ••••• of burnt offerings, but lose the effects of Cult •• and gain the effects of Cult ••• instead. This is extremely uncommon. In order to keep such an active cult, the ghost must effectively live as a god, dwelling in the land of the living in a very strong Fetter, a Manse or a Demesne. Ghosts living such a life are weaker than the gods they compete with and prominent targets for wandering Immaculates eager to lead the blasphemous spirit onto the virtuous path of reincarnation. Cults among the dead are the subject of Underworld Cult, below.

ARTIFACT

Ghosts possess far fewer wonders than the average Abyssal. They use the Artifact Background as printed on page 142 of the **Exalted** rulebook, receiving one point of Artifact for every dot of the Background they purchase. As noted in Chapter Six: The Arts of The Dead, the dead receive no materials bonus when using items of the Five Magical Materials. Any artifacts possessed by the dead will always be the wonders of the dead or simple artifacts such as daiklaves and magical armor. These artifacts can never be rated above Artifact ••• without special Storyteller permission.

GRAVE GOODS

This Background measures the general value of the character's funeral spread. Characters with high Grave Goods were buried with both panoply and retinue, while those with low ratings were buried poor and alone. Grave Good are not Resources, because they do not replenish themselves. They are the character's outfit in the Underworld, and once they are gone, the character is naked and alone. Characters with high Resources may have many exceptional weapons and gear, but they will be someone else's grave goods bought at a necropolis and will wear out. Characters with high Resources cannot use that to justify grave-bound servants or sacrificed animals.

- x You have no grave goods. Perhaps you were a pauper or a follower of the Immaculate Philosophy, or perhaps you died in a plague or war and were buried in haste.
- You have basic grave goods — a fine suit of clothing, a weapon and some tasty food.

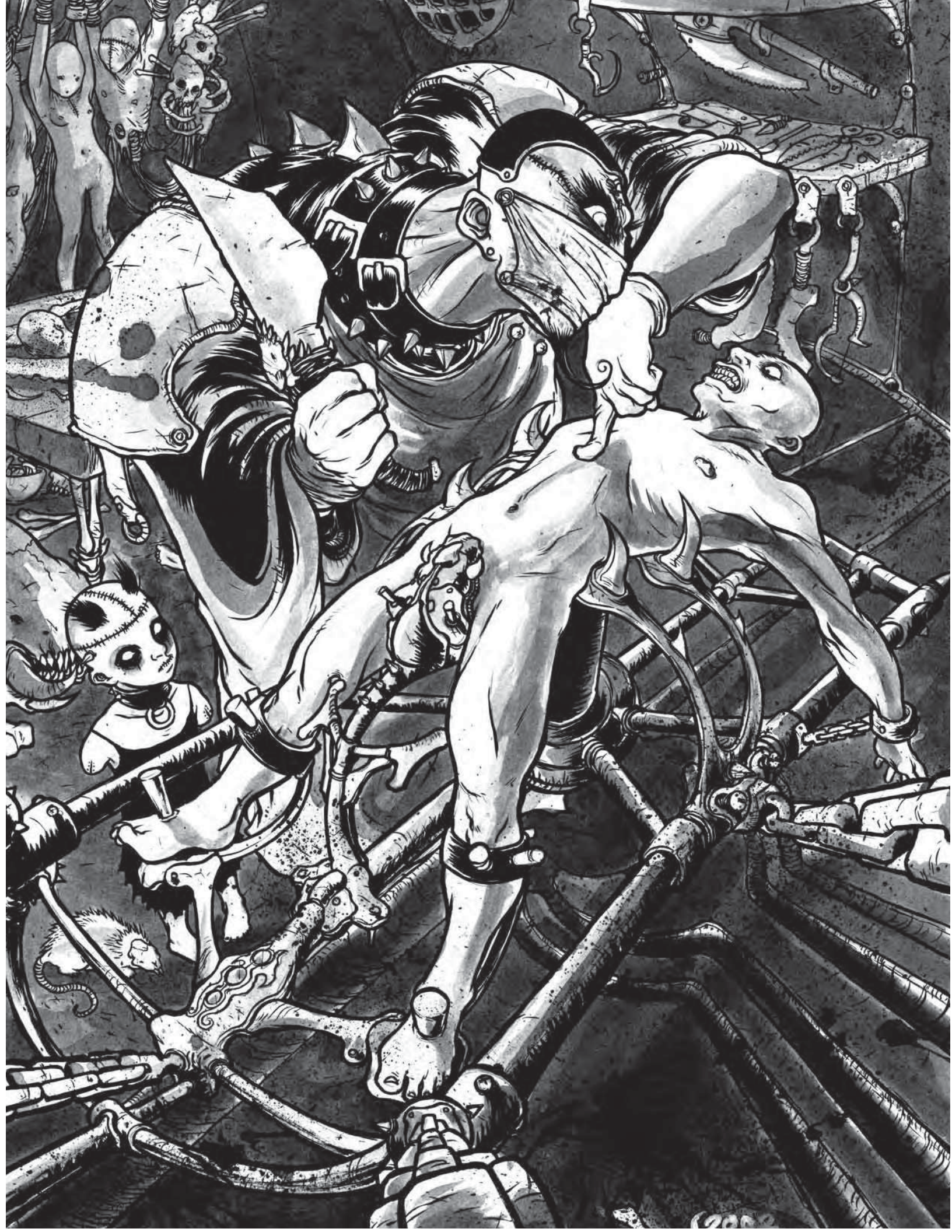
- You have elaborate grave goods — a suit of armor, several suits of clothing, much jewelry, miscellaneous personal goods such as books and games and several weapons.
- You had a princely panoply. Perhaps you were a mortal prince, or perhaps you were simply an ancestor cultist who knew how to prepare for the Underworld. This is the appropriate level of grave goods for someone who received a first-rate Sijanese burial or who was buried among the icewalkers or other ancestor-worshipping tribes. The character has many suits of fine clothing and glittering finery, a dozen exceptional weapons, a larder full of delicacies and 100 Essence/10 Willpower in burnt offerings. You may have one to three sacrificed animals, one to three funeral effigies and a favorite wife or servant as your sacrificial slave.
- You were given a funeral fit for a queen of means. You have a large tomb that probably entered the Underworld with you that can serve as a residence. You have all the weapons, trappings, armor and food you could ever want, and your entire household never wants for the food of the living. You have a hound and a hawk and a horse — and sheep and cattle as well. You will have a ship if from a nautical culture. You can have up to 100 effigies and a dozen total sacrificed wives, aides and bodyguards or slaves. You have 150 Essence/15 Willpower in burnt offerings.
- Your burial was a national effort by a country of considerable resources or one of the best funerals that Sijan has seen in decades. You are fabulously rich in trappings and have yachts with effigy crews and a stable of horses. You possess herds of sheep and cattle, complete with effigy herdsmen. You have 1,000 warrior effigies, and your ghostly servants include a dozen personal servants and close retainers, a brawny gang of workers and a harem of beautiful sex partners (who may also be the workers, under appropriate circumstances). Your vast tomb has assuredly entered the Underworld with you to serve as your palace among the dead. You have 250 Essence/25 Willpower in burnt offerings.

UNDERWORLD CULT

Many ghosts receive extensive worship from their fellow ghosts. Ghostly peasants venerate their ritual kings, spectres venerate the nephwracks, citizens of Stygia venerate the ruler of their district, and all venerate the Dual Monarchy and the cities of Stygia and Sijan. These many rituals help bind ghosts to their existences. Underworld Cult provides no Willpower, but ghosts who are worshiped by other ghosts can gain considerable Essence from it.

- x None worship you, but by your worship of others, you help perpetuate the system of memory and veneration that allows the dead to respire and the great Calendar of the Underworld to turn.
- Your peers and household make obsecence to you. You gain 1 Essence per hour from their devotions. Long-time inhabitants of Sijan often gain this level of Underworld Cult by feeding on ambient reverence.
- There are perhaps a hundred who call you their spirit patron and kneel down regularly in your honor, calling out your name and hiding their faces. Perhaps you are the founder of an extensive family or the ritual ruler of a small town. You gain 2 Essence per hour from the worship. Long-term residents of Stygia can gain this level of Underworld Cult just from feeding on the many prayers offered to the city itself.
- There are several hundred who treat the character as spirit lord. This is the appropriate level of Underworld Cult for the average nephwrack temple, the founder of a major clan or the ritual ruler of a city-state of the dead. You gain 3 Essence per hour from the prostrations and veneration of your ghostly underlings.
- You have several thousand ghostly worshipers, perhaps a larger kingdom of the dead or leadership of a great family in the Underworld. This is also the level of Underworld Cult possessed by the ghosts of ancient heroes from ambient reverence. The character gains 4 motes per hour from her cult's activities.
- You sport a cult similar in size to that of a successful spectral religion, a Deathlord or the devotions of an empire as great as that of Aki's or of a Stygian district. You gain 5 Essence per hour from your tens of thousands of ghostly worshipers.





At first, the patient saw only the doctor's one leather-gauntleted hand. It was early in the ceremony, and he groggily attempted to struggle free of the sacrificial frame. The Abyssal pushed him back down one-handed and clipped him down in the frame. It was then that the peasant saw the Exalt's blood-smeared gauntlet and realized what was in store for him.

Unfortunately for the victim, by the time the sedatives completely ceased their effects, he was quite securely fastened to the frame. Bound and gagged, the unfortunate was unable even to turn his head to search for ways to escape his fate. Yet, he did not need to look from side to side for his hopes to fade. The room was an abattoir, the floor covered in blood grooves and the walls decorated with bones and the many-bladed instruments of necrosurgery.

There were rattlings from behind the rack and the Exalt walked forward into the victim's field of view and turned to face his patient. The Abyssal was dressed in a white cotton shirt, loose-fitting pants and a black leather apron, and he wore the blood-smeared black leather gauntlets the victim has seen earlier. The deathknight was slim and handsome, with a long moustache and a small goatee, and he had a look of disdain the peasant had come to associate with the worst parts of privilege.

The Abyssal crossed his hands and spoke, saying in Old Realm, "Can you understand me?" The man stared at him, and so, the Exalt tried Low Realm and then Riverspeak. Riverspeak elicited a response, and the physician sighed. Mongrels. Continuing in the tongue of the River Province, the Exalt said, "I am the Seven Degreed Physician of Black Maladies. You are my patient."

The victim shook the frame.

The Abyssal smiled his merciless smile and stroked his chin. The jade beads on the tips of his moustache quivered with his barely suppressed laughter.

"You wonder what will become of you? I will tell you. My master makes use of certain necromantic devices, among them spine chains? You have perhaps seen them, they look like centipedes made from the torsos of men, that run on the arms? Yes, you will be one of the segments."

The doctor smiled.

"You wonder why I tell you this? You think it is perhaps because I am a sadistic madman who enjoys this?" The Exalt leaned close to the victim, his minty breath puffing against the peasant's face.

"That is not so. My torment of you serves a purpose."

The Exalt reached above the prisoner's head and manipulated some sort of switch. He spun the sacrificial frame 180 degrees to face the other 18 members of his village who also hung in similar frames, naked and gagged. Above him, the victim heard a latch click, relocking the frame.

"It serves to strengthen the magic. It is a traumatic event linked to your death that you all share, so it will be easier for me to bind you all together. You will be the first link, so I tell you of the trauma while they all watch. Thus, the link between you is already of the sort I desire."

The thin Exalt walked over to a table and picked up a leather-and-adamant face shield and a long thick-bladed knife, his leather apron and silk pantaloons swishing. The Seven Degreed Surgeon smiled apologetically.

"I apologize profusely for the lack of intimacy. Please do not think that it is because you are a creature of low station. I do not hold that against you. It is that... when I split the ribs, there is always a great splash, and I do not wish to get your blood in my moustache or hair."

He continued smiling, knife in hand, as he walked toward the victim.



CHAPTER FIVE CHARMS

Closely paralleling the magic of the Solar Exalted in raw power, the Charms and necromancy of the Abyssal Exalted are terrible things. Yet, the deathknights must guard and ration their Essence in the living world, since they have no means beyond cannibalism and Hearthstones of restoring their power. In the shadowlands or the Underworld, however, their strength is almost without bounds. As both the Wyld Hunt and the returning Solar Exalted have discovered, the warrior-slaves of the Deathlords are as dangerous as they are terrifying.

DICE POOLS

As corrupted Solars, Abyssal Exalted follow the same rules as the Solars regarding dice pools. A deathknight cannot more than double an Attribute + Ability pool with Charms, unless the text of the Charm specifically states otherwise. However, many Abyssals know Charms that reduce an enemy's dice pool. Where applicable, these Charms can be combined in Combos with "dice adders" for added effect, since enemy dice pool reductions do not count against the deathknight's own dice-pool limit.

ABYSSAL VERSUS SOLAR MAGIC

Abyssal Exalted can do most of the same things as Solar Exalted, albeit with a dark twist. In general, Abyssal magic is slightly less efficient in terms of Essence cost and notably more adept at killing and inflicting suffering. As previously noted, many Abyssal Charms reverse or negate Solar effects—subtracting dice from an opponent's pool instead of adding them to one's own, etc. Abyssal Exalted also have difficulty with teamwork, as many of their greatest Charms have detrimental effects on bystanders. They have limited shape-changing magic, most of which revolves around unnaturally augmenting or shaping blood and bone to their whim—a far cry from the natural transformations of the Lunar Exalted. Deathknights similarly practice minor divinations and curses, but nothing to compare with the astrology of the Sidereals. The primary purpose of the Abyssal Exalted is to kill Creation itself, and that is a task they are well-suited to.

PRESENTATION FORMAT

The Charms listed below use the same format as in *Exalted*. Cost, Duration, Type, Minimum Ability, Minimum Essence and Prerequisite Charms are presented and function identically to Solar Exalted Charms.

DUSK CASTE

ARCHERY

BLOODTHIRSTY ARROW

Cost: 1 mote per die
Duration: Instant
Type: Supplemental
Minimum Archery: 2
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: None

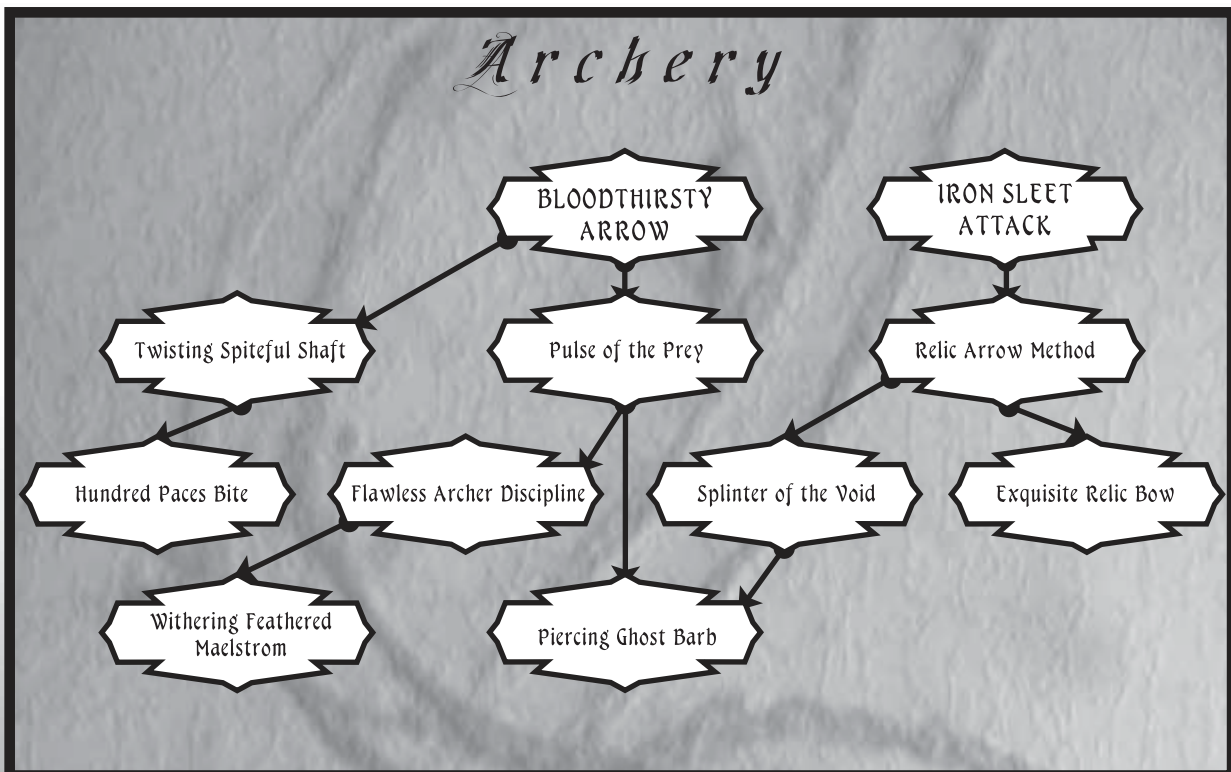
The character extends a wisp of Oblivion through his bow, filling his arrow with a thirst for blood and death. The shaft eagerly adjusts its course to compensate for any evasive action. For every mote of Essence the Abyssal spends, he may either reduce the dice pool of his target's first defensive action by one die or add one die to the damage of an attack against a living target. This Charm cannot reduce a character's dice pool lower than her Essence score, nor can it add more damage than the activating Abyssal's permanent Essence. The Exalt can use both effects of this Charm at the same time, provided he can afford the Essence expenditure.

TWISTING SPITEFUL SHAFT

Cost: 3 motes
Duration: Instant
Type: Supplemental
Minimum Archery: 3
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Bloodthirsty Arrow

Empowered with rage and seething Essence, the Abyssal's arrow twists cruelly within its target to inflict horrible rending wounds. Even after impact, it continues to bore deeper into the flesh until forcibly removed. Arrows enchanted with this Charm add the character's permanent Essence to their base damage. In addition, if the arrow inflicts damage, the head continues boring into the target, inflicting its normal damage modifier at the beginning of each subsequent turn until pulled free, for a maximum number of turns equal to the firing character's permanent Essence.

This damage cannot be lower than one die. Thus, a standard broadhead arrow inflicts 2L each turn, a frog crotch 4L and a target arrow 1L. Damage inflicted by a boring arrow can only be soaked with Stamina and other natural soak. Removing an arrow requires a successful Strength + Athletics roll against a difficulty equal to the permanent Essence of the firing character. This difficulty can never rise above 5. Once a victim dies or the arrow has been pulled free, its magic immediately fades. Only arrows that naturally inflict lethal damage can be enchanted with this Charm.





ESSENCE AND EXTRAS

In addition to regaining Essence through consumption of blood and flesh, many Abyssal Exalted know Charms that permit them to steal motes of Essence by inflicting damage or by other esoteric means. Regardless of the feeding method employed, a deathknight can only drain as many motes as her victim has health levels remaining plus three. Extras do *not* yield this bonus Essence, so a healthy extra provides 3 motes at best.

HUNDRED PACES BITE

Cost: 1 mote

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Archery: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Twisting Spiteful Shaft

With this Charm, an Abyssal's arrow becomes a conduit for his life-draining anima. The Exalt regains one mote of Essence for every health level of damage his arrow inflicts on a living target. If this Charm is placed in a Combo with Twisting Spiteful Shaft, the Essence cost increases to 3 motes, but the arrow continues to absorb Essence as long as it burrows.

PULSE OF THE PREY

Cost: 3 motes + special

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Archery: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Bloodthirsty Arrow

The character's eyes glint with power as he attunes his gaze to the glow of Essence in his victim. For 3 motes, the Exalt may make a single Archery attack without penalty for visual conditions, although other environmental factors may interfere with his accuracy. For every additional mote spent, the character may also add one die to his Archery attack roll, although he cannot add more dice than his target's Essence score. This Charm does not aid in targeting inanimate objects.

FLAWLESS ARCHER DISCIPLINE

Cost: 2 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Archery: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Pulse of the Prey

Guided by the grim certainty of death, the Abyssal blocks out all distractions. From the time he draws his arrow to the moment of release, the deathknight perceives and knows nothing but his target and his cold desire to end its existence. The player still rolls an attack as normal, but successes only matter for purposes of damage. Even in the case of a botch, he still hits the target, inflicting the arrow's base damage. Although this Charm permits feats of impossible accuracy, such as cutting ropes or picking off objects at the maximum range of the bow, it does *not* allow called shots to bypass armor.

WITHERING FEATHERED MAELSTROM

Cost: 8 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Extra Action

Minimum Archery: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Flawless Archer Discipline

Her arms and fingers a flickering blur of motion, an Abyssal with this Charm may empty her entire quiver before her opponents have time to register surprise. So long as the character hits her intended target, she may make another attack at her full Archery dice pool. The character must concentrate all her attacks on one target. This Charm ends when the character exhausts her ammunition or when she has done damage a number of times equal to her Archery score.

IRON SLEET ATTACK

Cost: 4 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Archery: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

Infused with the chill of the Void, the character's arrow freezes in flight and trails wisps of glowing frost. This supernatural cold adds the character's Essence score to the arrow's damage, as well as inflicting debilitating frostbite. Victims of Iron Sleet Attack lose one dot of Dexterity every time the Iron Sleet Attack successfully does damage to them. Characters reduced to zero Dexterity can only huddle in misery, assuming they can move at all. Frostbitten characters regain lost Dexterity at the rate of one dot per hour. This Charm has no effect on the undead or on other beings immune to extreme cold.

RELIC ARROW METHOD

Cost: 1 mote per arrow

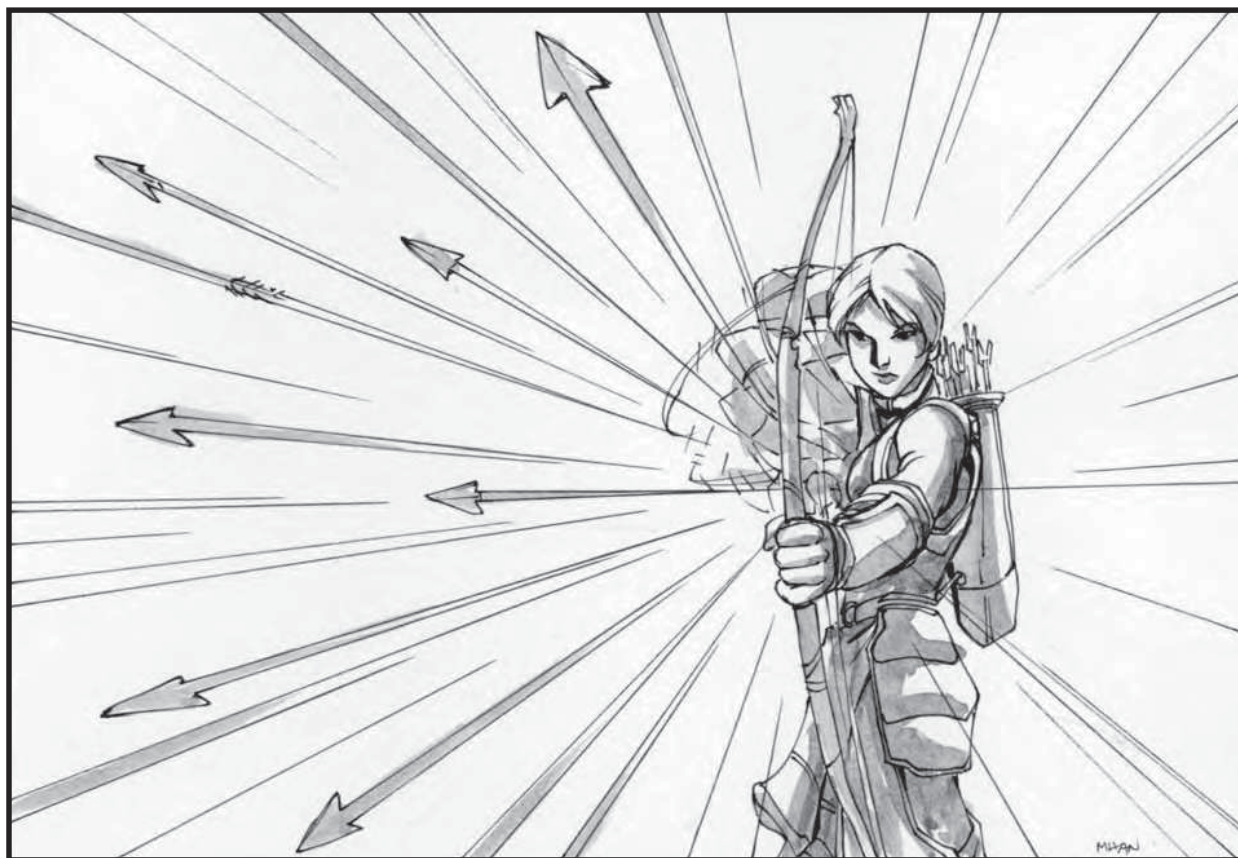
Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Archery: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Iron Sleet Attack



The character draws his bow, and a savagely barbed shaft materializes under his touch. Arrows created with this Charm have normal statistics for their type of ammunition but shimmer like spun glass and evaporate moments after impact.

SPLINTER OF THE VOID

Cost: 1 mote per 2L

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Archery: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Relic Arrow Method

The Abyssal draws a bolt of crackling Oblivion across his bow. This bolt is fired as a normal arrow, but inflicts a base damage of 2L for every mote of Essence spent. The character's bow does not add to this total. Against Fair Folk, mutants and other creatures of the Wyld, the necrotic energy inflicts aggravated damage. Characters killed by this Charm disintegrate in a shrieking flash of barrow-flame and leave no ghosts. Oblivion bolts do not suffer penalties for distance or wind, and have a maximum range of (the archer's permanent Essence x 100) yards. Characters cannot spend more Essence powering this Charm than their Archery score. Splinter of the Void is incompatible with arrow-enhancing Charms.

EXQUISITE RELIC BOW

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Archery: 4

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Relic Arrow Method

Sculpting his anima with a thought, the Abyssal summons a bow of calcified Essence and memory into her hands. This bow has an Accuracy equal to the character's Essence but otherwise has the same statistics as a composite bow fitted to its creator's Strength. Despite their common Traits, each Abyssal's bow is a unique expression of her soul — no two are exactly alike. Exquisite Relic Bow does not manifest with ammunition, so characters without arrows must employ Relic Arrow Method.

PIERCING GHOST BARB

Cost: 6 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Archery: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Pulse of the Prey, Splinter of the Void



As with Relic Arrow Method, the Exalt summons a shaft of pure Essence. This translucent arrow glows softly and moans as it flies. The shaft is fired like a normal arrow, but dematerializes as it leaves the bow. The arrow remains visible but incorporeal, capable of passing through solid matter without a trace. The arrow only rematerializes if it intersects a living being in its path. Since the bolt bypasses walls and armor, victims can only soak the attack with their Stamina and other natural soak. Trees and other living barriers provide cover normally, as does armor that is somehow alive, such as a perronele (see **Games of Divinity**, p. 119-120). This Charm also allows the character to hit dematerialized spirits, although it does not kill them permanently. Any incorporeal spirit struck by a Piercing Ghost Barb manifests to all onlookers for the rest of the scene as a luminous but intangible apparition.

BRAWL

DEAD MAN'S GRASP

Cost: 1 mote per turn
Duration: Until released
Type: Reflexive
Minimum Brawl: 2
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: None

The Abyssal seizes his opponent and crushes her with the unnatural strength of the risen dead. The character makes a clinch attack as normal (see **Exalted** p. 239), but he inflicts lethal damage with his initial grab. So long as the Exalt continues to reflexively activate the Charm at the beginning of the turn, his clinch inflicts lethal damage rather than bashing. In addition, the deathknight's damage pool increases by +1L for every full turn the Charm is maintained. This bonus is cumulative over successive turns, but resets to zero if the Abyssal stops spending Essence or relaxes his grip for even a moment.

RAPACIOUS LAMPREY TECHNIQUE

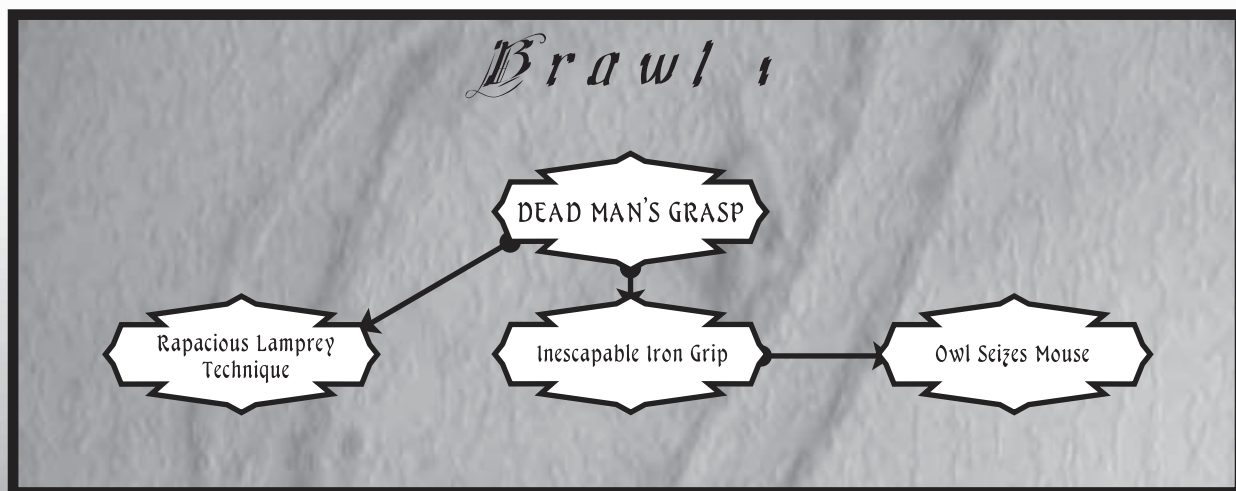
Cost: 2 motes
Duration: One turn
Type: Reflexive
Minimum Brawl: 3
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Dead Man's Grasp

Fueling his hunger with Essence, an Abyssal with this Charm can drain blood far more quickly. The Exalt can drink up to his Essence x 3 health levels in a turn, rather than the usual one. Blood loss afflicts the target normally. This Charm does not accelerate the rate at which the Abyssal can devour flesh.

INESCAPABLE IRON GRIP

Cost: 5 motes
Duration: Until released
Type: Supplemental
Minimum Brawl: 3
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Dead Man's Grasp

With this Charm, an Abyssal can grab a victim and choke him to death without making a sound. The player rolls for a standard hold attempt (see **Exalted**, p. 240), adding her character's Essence score in automatic successes to the initial roll to grab. As usual, this attack inflicts no damage. If the Exalt succeeds, she tightly—and silently—seizes her victim by the throat. He cannot breathe at all, either to inhale or to scream a warning, although he may still try to escape on his next action. However, the victim cumulatively loses one die from his Strength + Brawl/Martial Arts dice pool for every successive turn the hold is maintained. Once a victim has no dice remaining, he can no longer struggle. Incapacitated characters caught in an Inescapable Iron Grip suffocate as though drowning (see **Exalted**, p. 243). Players of victims may roll Stamina + Resistance against a difficulty of the Abyssal's permanent Essence to hold their breath longer. Victims begin breathing immediately if released before death.



OWL SEIZES MOUSE

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Brawl: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Inescapable Iron Grip

The character surges forward in a burst of speed, allowing him to grab and pin an enemy before she can respond. The Exalt makes a normal clinch or hold attack, but his target cannot parry or dodge. Clinches enhanced by this Charm do no damage, but in the case of both clinches and holds, the characters immediately have a reflexive contest to maintain the clinch or hold as though it was a subsequent round. If the defender wins, she retains her action for the round, but the actual clinch attack cannot be parried or dodged. As an added benefit, the character may move up to his normal sprinting distance without penalty on the turn he uses this Charm, to allow the character to clinch opponents ordinarily beyond his reach. The character need not make this extended action.

RAVAGING STRIKE

Cost: 1 mote

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Brawl: 1

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

The Abyssal channels wrath and Essence through his hands to deliver terrible blows. The character makes his attack normally but counts extra successes twice for the purposes of determining damage. This Charm can be activated after the attack roll.

SCOURING EROSION METHOD

Cost: 1 mote per 1 or 2 soak reduction

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Brawl: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Ravaging Strike

The Abyssal concentrates his anima into a roiling corona of Oblivion. His attack inflicts normal damage, but its withering aura of entropy reduces the target's soak by 1 point for every mote spent, or 2 points per mote in the case of inanimate objects. This reduction only applies for resisting the character's one attack. Animate targets cannot have their soak reduced below their permanent Essence.

LASHING TEMPEST ATTACK

Cost: 1 mote per 2 yards

Duration: Instant

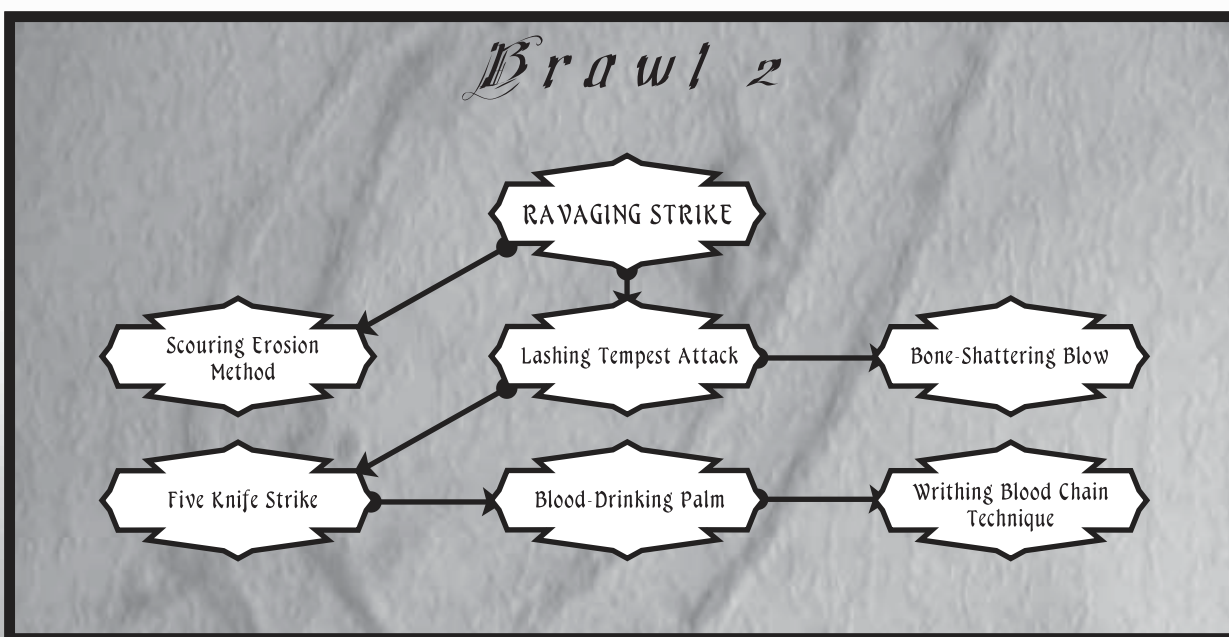
Type: Supplemental

Minimum Brawl: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Ravaging Strike

With this Charm, the character envelops her hand in a cyclone of howling shadows. With a normal strike or even a gentle touch, the Abyssal blasts her opponent back two yards for every mote spent. If the victim strikes a solid object, he suffers one bashing health level of damage for every yard he would have otherwise continued to fly. This damage is bashing unless the target collides with spikes or other lethal obstructions. Characters cannot spend more motes powering this Charm than their Strength.





BONE-SHATTERING BLOW

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplementary

Minimum Brawl: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Lashing Tempest Attack

The character strikes with horrible crushing force, inflicting lethal wounds with her assault. If she inflicts at least one level of damage with her attack, her victim doubles all wound penalties until he fully heals. If this Charm is used on a target more than once, each subsequent attack increases the victim's total wound penalty by one die. Once a character completely heals, his wound penalties reset to normal. UnExalted victims of this Charm do not lose their additional penalties until they receive medical treatment to set their broken bones.

FIVE KNIFE STRIKE

Cost: 4 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Brawl: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Lashing Tempest Attack

The character sprouts wicked bone claws from his fingers, allowing him to inflict Strength + 1 lethal damage with all hand-to-hand attacks. In addition, the character can safely parry weapons and other lethal blows.

BLOOD-DRINKING PALM

Cost: 2 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplementary

Minimum Brawl: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Five Knife Strike

The Abyssal delivers a vicious open-handed blow to an enemy. In addition to inflicting lethal damage, her attack forcibly siphons blood through the target's skin. The Abyssal regains 1 mote of Essence per point of raw damage inflicted before applying the target's soak. This Charm is an exception to the usual rule that Abyssal Exalted can only regain Essence for actual damage inflicted. However, the Abyssal cannot absorb more motes from a single attack than the victim's Stamina + Essence. Blood-Drinking Palm only works against living beings and Fair Folk and, then, only if the Exalt strikes bare or cloth-covered skin. Storytellers should require a well-described stunt for an Abyssal to successfully use this Charm against an armored opponent.

WRITHING BLOOD CHAIN TECHNIQUE

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower, 1 health level

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Brawl: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Blood-Drinking Palm

With a painful surge of Essence, the Abyssal transforms her blood into deadly weapons. At the end of the turn, chains of iron-hard congealed blood erupt from her back or arms. The character grows a number of chains equal to her permanent Essence, and each is tipped with a razor-sharp claw. For the rest of the scene, the character gains a number of extra actions each turn equal to the number of chains grown. These actions can only be used to attack or parry. If a character uses any chains to attack, he cannot split his dice pool that turn, and vice versa. Blood chains have a length in yards and a Speed, Accuracy and Defense rating equal to their creator's Essence and inflict a base lethal damage of the character's Strength + Essence. They are wielded using the Brawl Ability. Once this Charm expires, the chains revert to fluid blood and disintegrate in a splash of gore. A character using Writhing Blood Chain Technique cannot use Extra Action-type Charms or take advantage of extra actions granted by other magic while this Charm remains active.

MARTIAL ARTS

ESSENCE DISCERNING GLANCE

Cost: 6 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Martial Arts: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

This Charm allows the character to attune his vision to the flow of energy through living creatures, spirits and other entities with a permanent Essence rating. Such beings appear overlaid with a fine tracing of red veins that glow in direct proportion to the strength of their life force. While under the effects of this Charm, the character can perceive incorporeal spirits as though they had manifested, although they remain invisible to others. Additionally, the character may scrutinize a target's aura as a simple action by spending 1 mote and his player rolling Perception + Martial Arts. Each success on this roll gauges one of the target's following Traits as decided by the observer's player: health levels remaining, permanent Essence rating or total current Essence pool. This Charm cannot discern the nature of a magical being, only its overall power. Thus, characters cannot determine the type or caste of an Exalted or differentiate between Personal and Peripheral Essence without other magic.

SHROUDED CLAW ATTACK

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Martial Arts: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Essence Discerning Glance

The character suffuses her hands with the spectral Essence of the Underworld, causing them to flicker like the corpus of a ghost. As a result, players of characters attempting to dodge or parry blows enhanced with this Charm roll only half the character's normal dice pool, rounded down. In addition, such attacks make no noise, even from impact. The Essence to power this Charm must be spent prior to making the attack roll. This Charm is not compatible with the use of weapons.

HUNGRY GHOST FORM

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Martial Arts: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Shrouded Claw Attack

The Exalted takes on the visage and attitude of a ravening shade, his pallid flesh growing cold and faintly translucent as he coils to lunge. For the rest of the scene, the character inflicts lethal damage with all hand-to-hand attacks. Additionally, he regains 1 mote of Essence for every health level of damage inflicted against animate targets (living creatures, spirits, undead, etc.). Lastly, the character may reflexively spend 3 motes per attack to strike dematerialized spirits, although this Charm provides no ability to perceive such beings. Spirits slain by this Charm eventually regenerate unless other magic is employed, but this process takes time and is extremely painful. Characters cannot use more than one Martial Arts Form-type Charm at a time. This Charm is incompatible with the use of armor.

POWER REAPING PRANA

Cost: 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Martial Arts: 4

Minimum Essence: 3

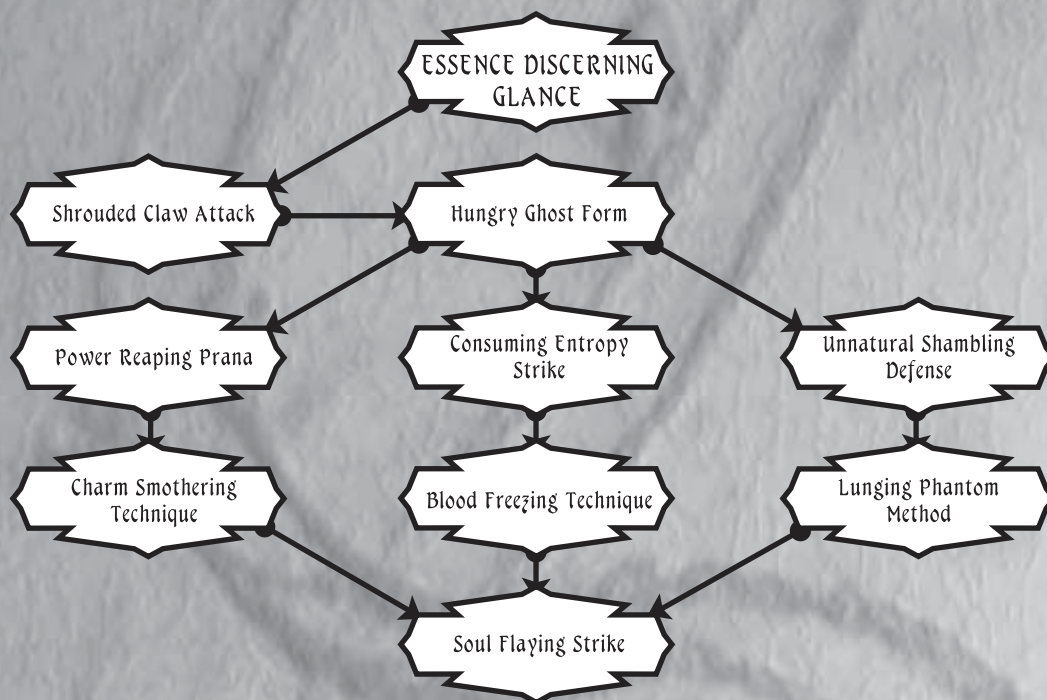
Prerequisite Charms: Hungry Ghost Form

Executing a series of quick slashes in the air, the Exalt reaches forth her anima to siphon up expended Essence as it flows from her enemies. In order to use this Charm, the character must already have Essence Discerning Glance active and her target must be within 10 yards when





Martial Arts



spending Essence to power an effect. For the purposes of this Charm, the total Essence cost of all Charms in a Combo is considered one effect. The character's player rolls Perception + Martial Arts; each success allows the Exalt to regain 2 motes of Essence. The character may not gain more Essence from a single effect than the total motes spent powering it, so a character that achieves three successes draining a Charm costing 4 motes only gains 4 motes rather than 6. Use of this Charm does not in any way disrupt the effect being drained. At the end of the turn, all remaining motes acquired via this Charm in excess of the character's permanent Essence dissipate. This limit applies regardless of how many times this Charm is activated in a turn. Power Reaping Prana is explicitly permitted to be part of a Combo with Charms of other Abilities.

CHARM SMOTHERING TECHNIQUE

Cost: 1+ motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Martial Arts: 5

Minimum Essence: 4

Prerequisite Charms: Power Reaping Prana

Lashing out with a soul-numbing tendril of power, the Exalt stifles her enemy's magic before it even takes form. Charms aborted in this fashion manifest as a burst of dimly glowing sparks that do not contribute to the victim's anima

banner. Abyssal characters must have Essence Discerning Glance active in order to perceive the use of Charms before they take effect, although the deathknights do not know which Charms are being used unless their players make a successful reflexive Intelligence + Occult roll (difficulty 2).

Similarly, Charm Smothering Technique can only counter Charms activated within 10 yards of the Exalt. Targets of this Charm may immediately spend a number of additional motes equal to the Essence invested by the Abyssal. If they cannot or do not pay this surcharge, their Charms fail, and all costs spent on the stillborn magic are lost. If the target pays the surcharge, the Charm takes effect normally. Charm Smothering Technique can only counter singular Charms — Combos, spells, Fair Folk glamour and other forms of magic cannot be smothered. Characters cannot spend more motes on this Charm than their Wits + Martial Arts, nor can they use Power Reaping Prana to draw energy from smothered Charms.

CONSUMING ENTROPY STRIKE

Cost: 1 mote per 2L

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplementary

Minimum Martial Arts: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Hungry Ghost Form

The character brings to bear the ravaging power of Oblivion in a crackling nimbus around her hand. In addition to inflicting lethal damage, the character's attack reduces the victim's soak by 2L per mote spent. A target's soak cannot be reduced below zero. This reduced soak only applies to resisting the this single attack and returns to normal immediately thereafter. Weakening non-magical armor with this Charm leaves a fine layer of rust or rot at the point of impact, although this decay is too minor to actually damage the armor.

BLOOD FREEZING TECHNIQUE

Cost: 6 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplementary

Minimum Martial Arts: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Consuming Entropy Strike

The character's fingers tighten in rigid claws, and his skin becomes numbingly cold to the touch. In addition to inflicting lethal damage, his attack drains warmth on impact. If the attack inflicts damage, the target loses one dot of Dexterity. Recalculate the victim's initiative accordingly and apply this new rating immediately. Characters who have not yet acted on the turn in which they are numbed have their actions delayed until their new initiative total. Lost Dexterity returns at the end of the scene (or in 10 to 15 minutes in the case of long scenes). Characters reduced to zero Dexterity are paralyzed and can take no physical action, although they may still think clearly to the degree allowed by their wound penalties and employ Charms that do not require movement. Blood Freezing Technique has no effect on beings immune to cold, including most undead and automata.

UNNATURAL SHAMBLING DEFTNESS

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Extra Action

Minimum Martial Arts: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Hungry Ghost Form

The character's motions take on the unsettling jerkiness of the walking dead as she wavers between impossible bursts of speed and total stillness. The character may take a total number of extra actions equal to her permanent Essence. These actions can be used for any combat-related tasks, subject to Storyteller approval. The character cannot split her dice pool on the same turn she employs this Charm. This Charm is incompatible with the use of armor.

LUNGING PHANTOM METHOD

Cost: 4 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Martial Arts: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Unnatural Shambling Deftness

The Abyssal rushes forward, twisting and dematerializing as he pounces so that he passes through his enemy and rematerializes behind her. The subsequent attack does no more damage than usual, but it gains all of the benefits of attacking from behind (see **Exalted**, p. 238). This Charm is incompatible with the use of armor.

SOUL-FLAYING STRIKE

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower, 1 health level

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Martial Arts: 5

Minimum Essence: 4

Prerequisite Charms: Charm Smothering Technique, Blood Freezing Technique, Lunging Phantom Method

The deathknight delivers a powerful open-handed blow, Essence crackling around his clawed fingers in moaning arcs. The character makes the attack as normal. If the strike hits, roll the Abyssal's permanent Essence against the permanent Essence of the victim. If the Exalt wins, the victim suffers unsoakable aggravated damage equal to the deathknight's Martial Arts score (damage dice are rolled normally). This damage is in addition to any damage inflicted by the actual blow. Victims slain by this Charm arise as hungry ghosts upon the next sunset. Such ghosts have the usual statistics for their kind (see p. 127) but are never extras, and they obey the Abyssal to the best of their limited intelligence. Spirits and Fair Folk slain with this Charm are annihilated utterly and evaporate on the spot. This Charm is incompatible with the use of armor.

MELEE

FURIOUS BLADE

Cost: 1 mote per die

Duration: Instant

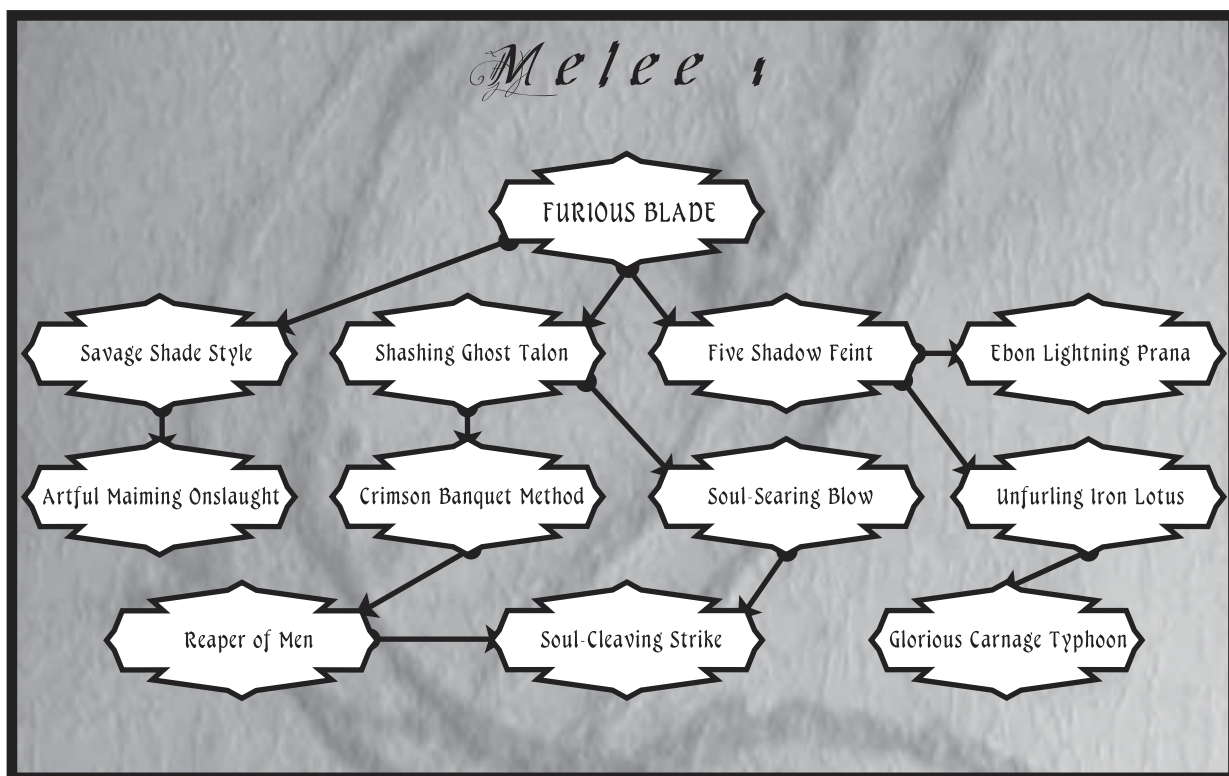
Type: Supplemental

Minimum Melee: 1

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

Enveloped in a corona of roiling darkness, the Abyssal's weapon moves with predatory zeal to cut down enemies. The character may add one die to a single attack for every mote spent but cannot more than double his Dexterity + Melee dice pool.



SAVAGE SHADE STYLE

Cost: 1 mote

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Melee: 2

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: Furious Blade

With this Charm, the Abyssal focuses fury and Essence through his weapon to strike horrible rending blows. The character makes his attack as normal, but successes count twice for the purposes of determining damage. This Charm must be invoked before making the attack roll.

ARTFUL MAIMING ONSLAUGHT

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Melee: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Savage Shade Style

Striking with cruel precision, an Abyssal with this Charm aims his blow to sever limbs and mutilate his opponent. Add the Abyssal's Dexterity to the damage of his attack, but this attack has a difficulty of at least 3. Severing an arm or leg (or tentacle or similarly sized appendage) is difficulty 3 and requires the Exalt to inflict at least two health levels of damage after soak.

Severing a hand or putting out an eye increases the attack difficulty to 4 but only requires a single level of damage. Regardless of the actual damage rolled, the Abyssal's strike only inflicts the minimum levels necessary for the maiming. Thus, a character who rolls five health levels of damage after the target's soak only inflicts two levels on an attempt to sever an arm. Victims still must contend with bleeding and shock, however. Consider the amputee's wound penalty to be twice its usual value until her bleeding is stanchied (however, Exalted make their normal difficulty 1 roll).

Additionally, victims' players must make a successful reflexive Stamina + Resistance roll for their characters to take any action on the turn they lose a limb. The Storyteller should assign other penalties or restrict actions as appropriate for maimed victims (see *Exalted*, p. 234).

SLASHING GHOST TALON

Cost: 1 mote

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Melee: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Furious Blade

The character's blade shrieks and moans as it becomes a conduit for her insatiable hunger. The deathknight makes her attack as normal but regains 1 mote of Essence for every health level of damage inflicted. If the Abyssal uses a soulsteel weapon to strike a

being with an Essence pool, she also absorbs the motes stolen by her weapon. This latter bonus only applies if the character is attuned to her weapon.

CRIMSON BANQUET METHOD

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Melee: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Slashing Ghost Talon

With this Charm, the character harvests power from every blow that draws blood. Crimson Banquet Method duplicates the effects of Slashing Ghost Talon, but the bonus applies to every attack made during the scene. This Charm cannot be stacked with itself to gain multiple motes per health level inflicted, nor may the Abyssal use Slashing Ghost Talon while employing this Charm. A character cannot gain more Essence in a single turn from the use of this Charm than the character's Essence + Lore.

REAPER OF MEN

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Melee: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Crimson Banquet Method

The deathknight suffuses her body and weapon with necrotic Essence, wreathing herself in a nimbus of cold baleful energy. Any living being who touches her or strikes her with a hand-to-hand attack suffers lethal damage equal to the Abyssal's Essence score. The character's hand-to-hand attacks also inflict lethal damage and add her Essence to the damage of the attack. Mindless ghosts and walking dead fear characters using this Charm and will not attack them unless mystically compelled.

SOUL-SEARING BLOW

Cost: 2+ motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Melee: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Slashing Ghost Talon

Projecting the spiritual cold of Oblivion through his weapon, the Abyssal can assault the very soul and will of a foe. If the character's attack hits (it need not inflict damage), the victim loses 1 point of temporary Willpower for every 2 motes spent. Exalted and other beings with control over their Essence pools may choose to lose 2 motes of Essence for every Willpower point they would have otherwise lost. If this Charm reduces a character's temporary Willpower below zero, she suffers

lethal damage equal to the difference. Thus, a victim with 3 Willpower remaining who loses 5 points suffers 2L damage. This damage is soaked only with the character's permanent Essence score and nothing else. The Abyssal cannot spend more motes powering this Charm than twice her Conviction.

SOUL-CLEAVING STRIKE

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower, 1 health level

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Melee: 5

Minimum Essence: 4

Prerequisite Charms: Reaper of Men, Soul-Searing Blow

The greatest swordsmen of the deathknights can slice through souls as easily as others carve flesh. Upon invoking this Charm, the Abyssal's weapon flares with cold fire and shrieks loud enough to be heard up to a mile away. The character makes one attack at his full dice pool, which is fully effective against both material beings and incorporeal spirits and does normal damage in addition to this Charm's effects. If the blow hits, the victim's player must immediately roll permanent Essence at standard difficulty.

If this roll succeeds, the victim suffers unsoakable dice of lethal damage equal to the Abyssal's own Essence rating. If the roll fails, the victim loses one dot of permanent Essence. A botch inflicts permanent Essence loss *and* damage. If a character's permanent Essence drops to zero, her life force is instantly snuffed out, and her maimed soul falls screaming into Oblivion.

Spirits and Fair Folk slain in this manner are likewise destroyed. Damage inflicted by Spirit-Cleaving Strike is purely spiritual and cannot be soaked or prevented with magic that solely defends against physical assault. All effects of this Charm are applied before resolving the strike's normal damage. This Charm does not work on automata, the walking dead or other beings without souls.

FIVE SHADOW FEINT

Cost: 1 mote per die

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Melee: 2

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: Furious Blade

The Abyssal's arm and weapon flickers, blossoming into a confusing spray of shadows and afterimages. The character makes his attack normally, but the target loses one die from her first defensive dice pool for every mote spent. The Abyssal may not reduce a character's dice pool below her Essence rating. If Five Shadow Feint is placed in a Combo with Furious Blade, the Essence cost of both Charms increases to 2 motes per die.



EBON LIGHTNING PRANA

Cost: 4 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Melee: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Five Shadow Feint

Drawing his blade and lunging in a single fluid motion, an Abyssal with this Charm may strike faster than mortal eyes can follow. The character suffers no penalty for drawing a sheathed weapon and strikes whenever he wishes without regard for initiative. Although the character's first action must be a Melee attack, he can still split his dice pool normally to take other actions later in the turn. However, the character cannot take any dice actions after the first attack until his regular initiative. If the character faces an opponent with similar magic, normal initiative determines who acts first. A character can only use Ebon Lightning Prana once per turn, and in order to use it, his weapon must be sheathed. For the purposes of this Charm, sheathing a sword as part of a split action is a dice action that requires no roll, but is counted as one of the character's actions for the turn.

UNFURLING IRON LOTUS

Cost: 3 motes per attack

Duration: Instant

Type: Extra Action

Minimum Melee: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Five Shadow Feint

The Abyssal spins and thrusts in a rapid cascade of blows. The Charm takes its name from the wispy contrails left by each strike, which, taken together, resemble the petals of a blooming flower. The character may make one additional attack at his full dice pool for every 3 motes spent, although he may not purchase more extra attacks than his Essence score. Characters must activate

this Charm before taking their first action and may not split their dice pool on the same turn they employ Unfurling Iron Lotus. Defenders must dodge or parry each attack separately.

GLORIOUS CARNAGE TYPHOON

Cost: 8 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Extra Action

Minimum Melee: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Unfurling Iron Lotus

Blade flashing in a spiral of blood and pain and death, the Abyssal scythes through her opponents like a tornado. So long as the character hits her intended target and inflicts damage, she may immediately make another attack at her full dice pool. Each attack must be leveled at a different victim, and the Exalt cannot move more yards than her Melee score between each target. This Charm ends when the character misses or strikes every possible victim within reach of her blade.

BLADE-SUMMONING GESTURE

Cost: 1 mote

Duration: Instant

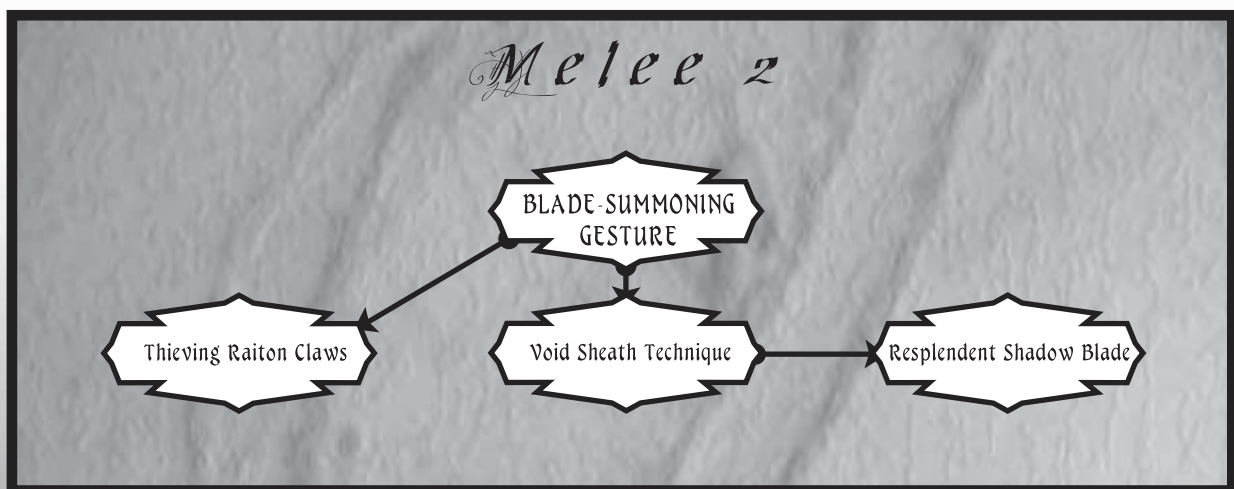
Type: Simple

Minimum Melee: 2

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

Extending his will and anima in a grasping tendril, the Abyssal calls his weapon to his hand. Summoned weapons can overcome friction and gravity — even pull free from bodies — but cannot defeat walls, chains or similar obstacles. The character must be able to see his weapon and have a hand free to receive it. Furthermore, this Charm can only call weapons the Exalt has previously wielded.



THIEVING RAITON CLAWS

Cost: 3 motes**Duration:** Instant**Type:** Simple**Minimum Melee:** 3**Minimum Essence:** 2**Prerequisite Charms:** Blade-Summoning Gesture

Instead of retrieving her own weapon, an Abyssal with Thieving Raiton Claws may attempt to steal the weapon of a foe. The Exalt reaches out an empty hand, and her player rolls Dexterity + Melee at difficulty 3. This effect cannot be parried or dodged. If this roll is successful, the effect is resolved as a normal disarming attempt (see *Exalted*, p. 238). If the disarming succeeds, the targeted weapon is torn from the enemy's grasp and flies to the Abyssal's own. This Charm can steal any weapon in the character's line of sight, although it cannot seize magical weapons attuned to their wielders or weapons made entirely of Essence. Otherwise, this Charm duplicates the effects and limitations of Blade-Summoning Gesture.

VOID SHEATH TECHNIQUE

Cost: 1 mote**Duration:** Indefinite**Type:** Simple**Minimum Melee:** 3**Minimum Essence:** 2**Prerequisite Charms:** Blade-Summoning Gesture

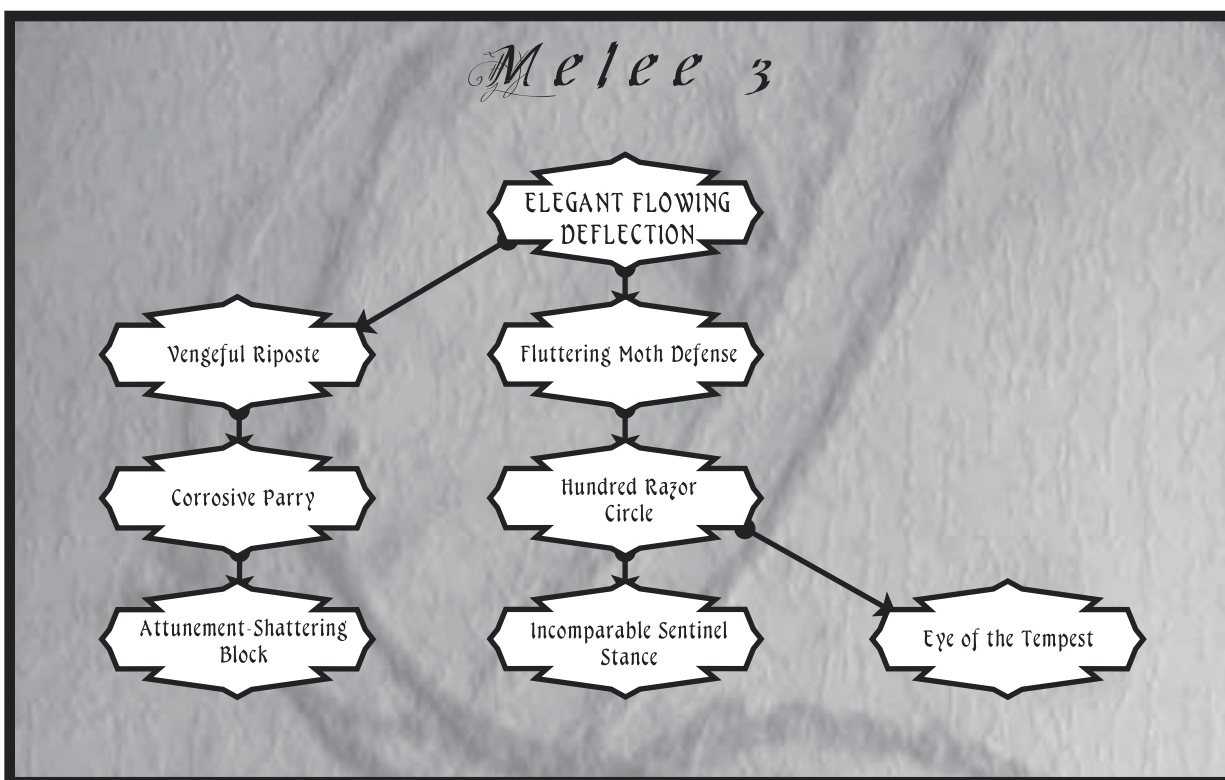
With a moment's concentration, an Abyssal who knows this Charm may banish a weapon from his grasp and the world. The weapon shimmers and vanishes Elsewhere, remaining hidden and inaccessible until the character reflexively ends the Charm and draws his weapon forth. This Charm can only banish a single weapon at a time, one the Abyssal is intimately familiar with — typically his most prized implement of battle.

RESPLENDENT SHADOW BLADE

Cost: 6 motes, 1 Willpower**Duration:** One Scene**Type:** Simple**Minimum Melee:** 4**Minimum Essence:** 2**Prerequisite Charms:** Void Sheath

Technique





Raising her hand imperiously, a character with this Charm freezes raw Essence into her ideal weapon. This weapon appears sculpted of black crystal and glitters with power and malice. Although most deathknights prefer variations of slashing swords, this Charm can create any bladed weapon from ornate scythes to jagged tiger claws. When Resplendent Shadow Blade is purchased, the Abyssal's player must decide the form of the weapon. He then divides a number of points equal to twice the character's Melee score between the weapon's Speed, Damage, Accuracy and Defense. As usual, the damage bonus of the weapon is added to the character's Strength to determine its base lethal damage.

Once selected, this Charm always summons the same weapon. The blade's statistics remain constant unless the character raises his Melee score, permitting him to divide two more points to its characteristics. The Abyssal must purchase this Charm again to conjure a different form of blade. Weapons created with this Charm have the tensile strength of soulsteel — and likewise drain motes equal to their owner's permanent Essence on any hit that inflicts actual damage.

ELEGANT FLOWING DEFLECTION

Cost: 1 mote per 2 dice
Duration: Instant
Type: Reflexive
Minimum Melee: 1
Minimum Essence: 1
Prerequisite Charms: None

The Exalt moves with preternatural grace, shifting his weapon without breaking form or stride to parry any hand-to-hand attack he is aware of. The character's player rolls two dice for every mote spent but cannot purchase more dice than his normal defensive pool for the weapon. This total includes applicable specialties and weapon bonuses in addition to the character's Dexterity + Melee. If the character has an odd number of dice in his pool, the fractional mote remaining after buying the last die is lost.

VENGEFUL RIPOSTE

Cost: 1 mote
Duration: Instant
Type: Reflexive
Minimum Melee: 2
Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: Elegant Flowing Deflection

Shifting quickly from defense to offense, the character parries one incoming strike with a swift blow to the attacker's weapon hand or limb. If the deathknight's player rolls more successes than the attacker, any left-over successes are treated as a Melee attack against the aggressor. Thus, a parry that rolls five successes to deflect an attack with three successes becomes a two-success attack. This counterstrike cannot be blocked or dodged without magic. A character may not use Vengeful Riposte in response to other counterattack Charms. Note that this Charm does *not* grant the character a free parry or extra parry dice.

CORROSIVE PARRY**Cost:** Weapon damage + 1 motes**Duration:** Instant**Type:** Reflexive**Minimum Melee:** 3**Minimum Essence:** 2**Prerequisite Charms:** Vengeful Riposte

Filling his blade with necrotic Essence as he parries, the Abyssal rots or rusts his opponent's weapon to dust as it strikes his block. The Abyssal character's player rolls Dexterity + Melee in response to any close-range attack. If even one success is achieved, the attacker's weapon shatters to milled splinters and rust without injuring the defender. The deathknight must spend motes equal to the weapon's base damage modifier plus one, so it costs 3 motes to disintegrate a short sword, 8 for a great axe, etc. The character can only disintegrate actual weapons — so no rotting off an aggressor's fist or claws. Also, this Charm cannot damage weapons made of Essence or the Five Magical Materials.

ATTUNEMENT-SHATTERING BLOCK**Cost:** 3 motes, 1 Willpower**Duration:** Instant**Type:** Reflexive**Minimum Melee:** 4**Minimum Essence:** 3**Prerequisite Charms:** Corrosive Parry

With this Charm, an Abyssal can dissipate the Essence empowering a magical weapon, rendering it temporarily useless. Attunement-Shattering Block may be activated whenever the deathknight parries a magical weapon. Her parry need not deflect the attack entirely, but the Abyssal character's player must roll at least one success on the block attempt. This Charm costs 3 motes and 1 temporary Willpower.

The defending character's player then makes a reflexive Essence + Melee roll, with a difficulty equal to the target's permanent Essence. If it succeeds, the weapon becomes an inert hunk of steel and Magical Materials, although it may be reattuned normally by its owner. Of course, this reattunement takes between 15 and 30 minutes. The victim can avert deattunement by immediately spending a number of motes equal to the attunement cost of the weapon.

FLUTTERING MOTH DEFENSE**Cost:** 2 motes**Duration:** Instant**Type:** Reflexive**Minimum Melee:** 3**Minimum Essence:** 2**Prerequisite Charms:** Elegant Flowing Deflection

With growing mastery, the Abyssal's weapon dances to intercept attacks as a moth spiraling a torch. The

deathknight's player may roll her character's full Dexterity + Melee dice pool to parry any one close-range attack the Abyssal is aware of.

HUNDRED RAZOR CIRCLE**Cost:** 5 motes**Duration:** One turn**Type:** Reflexive**Minimum Melee:** 4**Minimum Essence:** 2**Prerequisite Charms:** Fluttering Moth Defense

Sometimes, the best defense is a good offense. Building on this principle, the Abyssal stands motionless and traces a lightning-fast pattern of strikes and slices around him. Anyone entering this warded circle risks terrible injury. The Exalt cannot actively attack, dodge or move faster than one yard per turn without breaking the Charm, but his player automatically rolls a full Dexterity + Melee attack against everyone who is currently within or who subsequently approaches within three yards of the character.

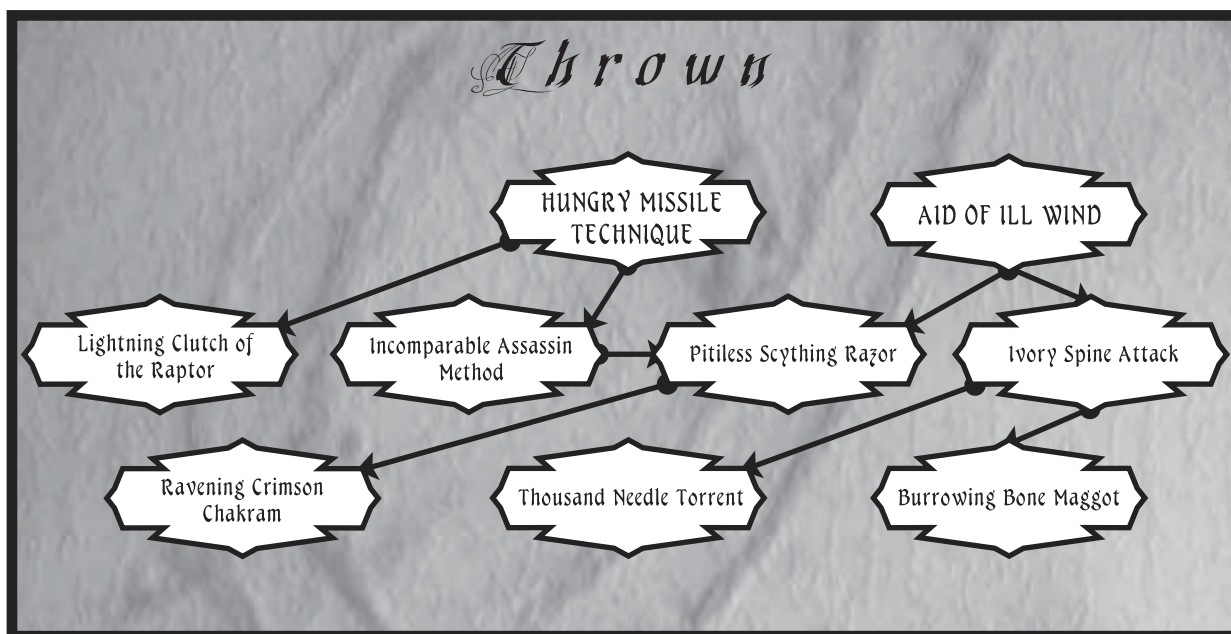
The character may also reflexively attack incoming projectiles of which he is aware. This is a difficulty 4 Dexterity + Melee roll and adds the weapon's Parry modifier as well. Success destroys or swats aside the offending missile. Note that this Charm does *not* distinguish between friend and foe — the Exalt must attack everyone in range.

INCOMPARABLE SENTINEL STANCE**Cost:** 3 motes, 1 Willpower**Duration:** Instant**Type:** Reflexive**Minimum Melee:** 3**Minimum Essence:** 2**Prerequisite Charms:** Hundred Razor Circle

The Abyssal may effortlessly deflect any attack she is aware of without her player making a roll. This Charm can turn aside assaults normally impossible to parry, such as goutts of caustic slime or the falling boulders of a landslide. The character can even parry the attacks of greater spirits and demon lords, although such onslaughts invariably shatter any non-magical weapon in the process. This is a perfect defense.

EYE OF THE TEMPEST**Cost:** 5 motes, 1 Willpower**Duration:** One scene**Type:** Reflexive**Minimum Melee:** 5**Minimum Essence:** 3**Prerequisite Charms:** Hundred Razor Circle

With this Charm, the Abyssal becomes a point of serene calm in a vortex of steel and howling shadows. The deathknight's player may use his character's full Dexterity + Melee dice pool to parry all physical attacks of which the Abyssal is aware.



THROWN

HUNGRY MISSILE TECHNIQUE

Cost: 1 mote per die
Duration: Instant
Type: Reflexive
Minimum Thrown: 2
Minimum Essence: 1
Prerequisite Charms: None

Suffused with malevolent hunger, the character's weapon leaps from her hand and turns in flight to pursue its prey. After the target declares any defense, the Abyssal may activate this Charm to subtract one die per mote spent from the target's player's defense roll against a single Thrown attack the Abyssal makes. The Abyssal cannot spend more motes powering this Charm than are required to reduce a victim's dice pool to his permanent Essence rating. If the target has Charms or other effects that allow multiple forms of defense, Hungry Missile Technique applies only to the first defense.

LIGHTNING CLUTCH OF THE RAPTOR

Cost: 1 mote (4 motes against area attacks)
Duration: Instant
Type: Reflexive
Minimum Thrown: 4
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Hungry Missile Technique

A character with this Charm moves with impossible speed, plucking arrows and other missile weapons from the air before they can hit her. The Abyssal may reflexively parry any ranged attack she is aware of with her full Dexterity + Thrown. If this roll leaves the attacker with no successes, the Exalt has successfully caught the projectile

and may subsequently do with it whatever she wishes. Even if the defender fails to score more successes than her attacker, she still reduces the damage of the attack as normal, so the Charm is not an all-or-nothing proposition.

The speed at which the character grabs incoming missiles is sufficient to douse most fires, including flames set by the Solar Charm Fiery Arrow Attack. The character cannot parry bolts of Essence or other purely mystical projectiles unless she has a permanent Essence of 3 or higher. If an Abyssal fully parries an intangible missile, it disperses harmlessly against her palm.

Lightning Clutch of the Raptor may also be used to defend against ranged area-of-effect attacks such as the Death of Obsidian Butterflies. This use costs 4 motes instead of 1, and the character only deflects missiles threatening her. Otherwise, parrying an area assault follows the same rules as any other application of this Charm.

INCOMPARABLE ASSASSIN METHOD

Cost: 2 motes
Duration: Instant
Type: Supplemental
Minimum Thrown: 3
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Hungry Missile Technique

An Abyssal with this Charm instinctively knows where and how to throw his weapon to deliver a fatal blow. The player makes an attack roll as normal, but the damage is doubled after it is rolled. However, if this not enough to kill the target outright, the strike only inflicts one automatic unsoakable health level of damage. As an ancillary benefit, the character's attack inflicts lethal damage (at least 1L) if it didn't already, so this attack can be used to throw tiny or unconventional weapons such as dominos with Range 10, Accuracy +0, Rate 3.

AID OF ILL WIND

Cost: 2+ motes
Duration: Instant
Type: Supplemental
Minimum Thrown: 3
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: None

The Abyssal lightens her weapon as she launches it, buoying its flight with a spectral gust summoned from the Underworld. The weapon's range increases by one factor for every 2 motes spent. Thus, a character that spends 2 motes doubles her attack's range, while one who spends 4 motes triples it, etc. Characters cannot spend more 2-mote increments activating this Charm than they have points of permanent Essence.

IVORY SPINE ATTACK

Cost: 1 mote per needle
Duration: Instant
Type: Reflexive
Minimum Thrown: 4
Minimum Medicine: 1
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Aid of Ill Wind

With a subtle flick of her wrist, an Abyssal who knows this Charm may extrude a slender bone needle from her palm or fingertip. The needle itself is quite small — no more than the length of a child's finger — but its paralytic venom coating helps make up for its size. Needles created with this Charm have a base lethal damage and Accuracy equal to the character's Essence rating and a Range in yards of five times this value. Without other magic, a character cannot throw more than three needles per turn. Note that needles do *not* add Strength for determining damage, although attack successes contribute normally. Needles remain envenomed for one hour after creation. Players of unarmored characters struck by a poisoned needle must reflexively roll Stamina + Resistance against a difficulty of the Abyssal's Medicine score. Exalted victims whose players fail this roll suffer levels of unsoakable lethal damage equal to the deathknight's Essence. UnExalted victims whose players fail die painfully after one day unless treated with curative magic. The Abyssal Exalt is naturally immune to her own poison.

THOUSAND NEEDLE TORRENT

Cost: 12 motes, 1 Willpower, 1 health level
Duration: Instant
Type: Simple
Minimum Thrown: 5
Minimum Essence: 3
Prerequisite Charms: Ivory Spine Attack

The character channels Essence through her entire skeleton, growing hundreds of Essence-laden bone needles similar to those produced with Ivory Spine Attack. Within seconds, the needles tear through her skin at high velocity, saturating the immediate area with razor-sharp spikes. Everyone within five yards of the Exalt suffers lethal damage (soaked normally) equal to the Abyssal's Stamina + Thrown + Essence.

This damage is reduced by one die for every yard further out, so victims six yards away suffer (Stamina + Thrown + Essence - 1)L, etc. This damage cannot be dodged or blocked without a stunt or Charm. Successes on dodge or block attempts reduce the damage by 1L per success. Needles created with this Charm disintegrate seconds after their explosive flight. Armored characters may not use this Charm, as their armor blunts the explosion.

BURROWING BONE MAGGOT

Cost: 8 motes, 1 Willpower
Duration: Varies
Type: Simple
Minimum Thrown: 5
Minimum Essence: 3
Prerequisite Charms: Ivory Spine Attack

With this Charm, an Abyssal may fling a burrowing splinter of gleaming bone at his target. Upon striking a living victim, the spine rapidly burrows into her body and begins its painful journey to her heart. The needle has the same statistics as one created with Ivory Spine Attack, although it is not poisonous. Rather, if it successfully hits a victim, it begins inflicting one die of unsoakable lethal damage each minute. This damage continues until the victim dies or the Abyssal wills the needle to temporarily stop. The Abyssal can later will the needle to resume its path at any time. The spine itself remains in existence as long as the Abyssal leaves Essence committed to it or until its victim dies. Skilled doctors can sometimes remove a Burrowing Bone Maggot, but the Dexterity + Medicine roll for such surgery has a minimum difficulty of 4 and requires a sharp knife and the surgeon's undivided dice action for 10 turns (half a minute).

PITILESS SCYTHING RAZOR

Cost: 7 motes
Duration: Instant
Type: Extra Action
Minimum Thrown: 5
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Incomparable Assassin Method, Aid of Ill Wind

A thrown weapon enchanted with this Charm becomes an extension of its owner's malice, arcing and ricocheting from one target to the next like a swooping



bird of prey. The weapon makes a number of separate attacks equal to the character's Thrown score. Each attack is made at the Abyssal's full dice pool, with no subtractions for multiple actions. If an attack misses, the weapon simply moves on to its next target. However, if any roll botches, the weapon strikes an unintended victim and falls to the ground. Otherwise, the weapon faithfully returns to its master's hand at the end of the turn. All targets of Pitiless Scything Razor must be in range when the character first throws the weapon, and no target may be hit more than once with a given weapon during a single use of this Charm.

RAVENING CRIMSON CHAKRAM

Cost: 6 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Extra Action

Minimum Thrown: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Pitiless Scything Razor

Imbued with a measure of its master's bloodlust, a weapon enchanted with this Charm leaps from its master's hand to slake itself on the life energy of its prey. Ravening Crimson Chakram duplicates the effects of Pitiless Scything Razor with two key differences: First, the thrown weapon can attack the same target more than once. Second, the weapon actually *feeds* when it hits, absorbing 1 mote of Essence for every health level of damage inflicted after soak. If the Abyssal's player does not botch any attack rolls, the deathknight gains all harvested motes when he recovers his weapon at the end of the turn. Soulsteel throwing weapons also drain motes as normal for each attack.

MIDNIGHT CASTE

ENDURANCE

OX-BODY TECHNIQUE

Cost: None

Duration: Permanent

Type: Special

Minimum Endurance: Varies

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

As befitting the champions of the Underworld, Abyssal Exalted are far more resilient than mere mortals and may purchase extra health levels as if they were a Charm. This Charm can be taken as many times as a character has dots of Endurance. Each Ox-Body Technique purchased provides one of the following, decided by the player at the time of purchase:

- One -0 health level
- Two -1 health levels
- One -1 health level and two -2 health levels

GHOST ARMOR PRANA

Cost: 3 motes per point

Duration: One hour

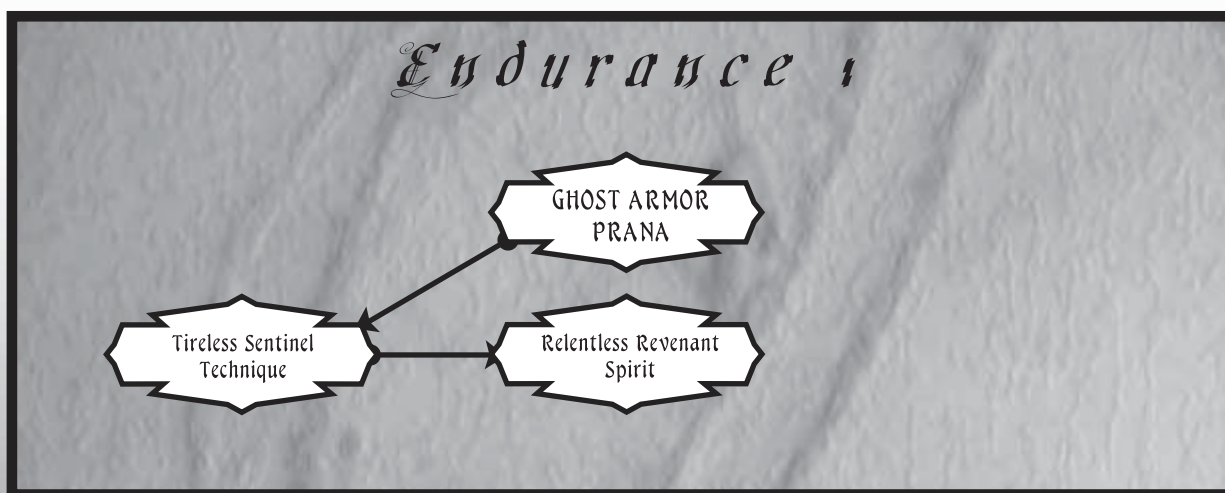
Type: Simple

Minimum Endurance: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

The Abyssal enfolds his anima about his armor, granting it surreal lightness for an hour. For every 3 motes spent, the character reduces the fatigue value and mobility penalty of his armor by one point, to a maximum possible reduction equal to his permanent Essence. A fatigue value of zero indicates the character need never roll to see if he becomes fatigued from wearing his armor. This Charm cannot reduce a character's mobility penalty or fatigue value below zero.



TIRELESS SENTINEL TECHNIQUE

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Endurance: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Ghost Armor Prana

An Abyssal with this Charm may revivify himself with Essence, allowing him to act at full strength without penalties for sleep loss or exhaustion. There is no limit to how many days this Charm can be used in a row, but animating death Essence is a poor substitute for natural rest. After a number of days equal to the character's Stamina + Endurance, the Exalt begins to suffer one unsoakable level of bashing damage each time the Charm is used. This damage does not heal until the character stops using the Charm. Once a character ends use of Tireless Sentinel Technique, he cannot safely reactivate it until all damage from the Charm has been healed. Doing otherwise only continues the process of decay.

RELENTLESS REVENANT SPIRIT

Cost: None

Duration: Permanent

Type: Special

Minimum Endurance: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Tireless Sentinel Technique

Once an Abyssal learns this Charm, death itself cannot stop him. If slain, his spirit rises again as a ghost. He loses his Exaltation and its commiserate powers, but he gains the full advantages of unlife, retains the ability to use any supernatural martial-arts forms he may know up to and including the Form (but not more advanced techniques) and gains twice as many Arcanoi as a starting ghost. The Storyteller has final say on what Traits the character keeps and how many ghost Charms he can purchase, etc.

PAIN-EATING FOCUS

Cost: 1 mote

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Endurance: 1

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

More than any of the other Chosen, the Abyssal Exalted understand the power of suffering and hate. A character with this Charm may invoke it whenever she is struck in combat. For every die of pre-soak damage the attack inflicts, her player may roll one die. Each success on this roll restores 1 mote of Essence, up to the character's usual limit. A character cannot harvest more Essence from a single attack than her Essence rating.

INSENSIBLE CORPSE TECHNIQUE

Cost: None/1 mote per -1

Duration: Permanent/one scene

Type: Special/Reflexive

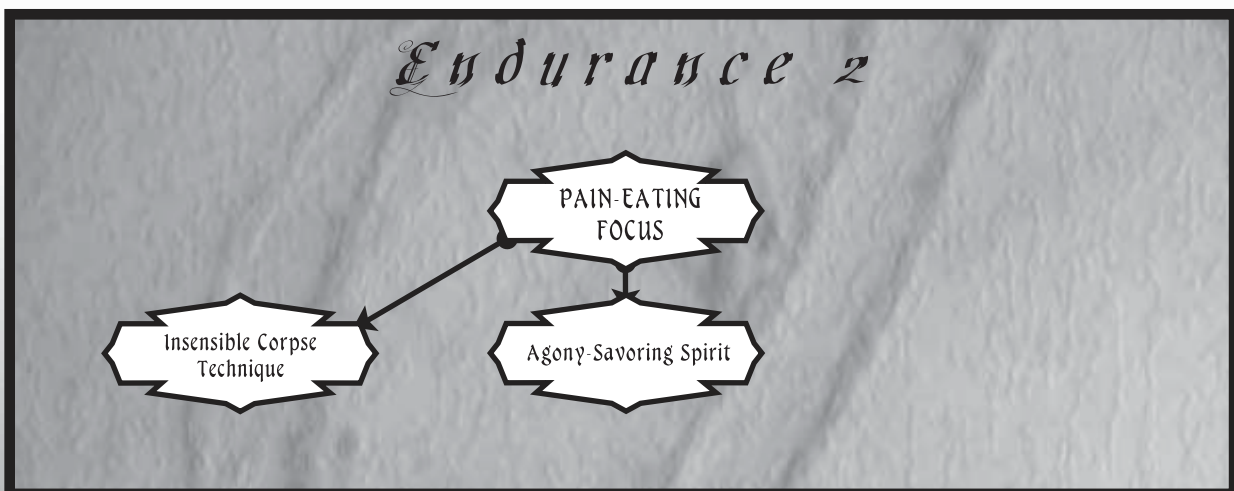
Minimum Endurance: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Pain-Eating Focus

Many Abyssal Exalted show disturbing indifference to suffering. When this Charm is purchased, the player must decide whether to permanently inure the Exalt against the worst of his pain or cultivate a more powerful numbing for short-term use. In the former case, the Exalt permanently subtracts 2 from all wound penalties. Such anesthetizing does not accelerate healing, so a -2 level reduced to -0 still regenerates as a -2. However, this penalty reduction is cumulative, so characters buying this Charm twice subtract 4 from their wound penalties. Once this Charm is purchased three times, the Exalt is thereafter immune to all but the most unimaginably terrible agony.

In its configuration as a temporary anesthetic, this Charm allows characters to dampen pain with Essence. For every mote spent, the Exalt can ignore one die of





wound penalties. This Charm can be used multiple times in a scene, with cumulative effect. Characters can even negate more dice of wound penalties than they currently suffer from in preparation for future injury. Exalted who know the temporary *and* permanent form of this Charm combine both effects when determining their final wound penalty reduction.

AGONY-SAVORING SPIRIT

Cost: 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Endurance: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Pain-Eating Focus

Where an Abyssal with Pain-Eating Focus draws power from her own torment, a character with this Charm may feed on the suffering of others. A character can use this Charm whenever she slays an individual single-handedly. The Abyssal's player rolls Conviction. Each success restores one point of Willpower.

PERFORMANCE

HAUNTING INFLECTION TRICK

Cost: 1 mote per 2 dice

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Performance: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

As the Exalt speaks, her voice takes on an otherworldly tone. Whether shattered into multiple discordant pitches or augmented to mellifluous grace, her augmented tone adds emotional weight to everything she says. The character can add 2 dice to a Performance or Presence dice pool for every mote spent, although she may not more than double her pool. The character must be employing her voice to invoke this Charm, whether for singing, teaching or oration.

WITHERING DIRGE

Cost: 2 motes per 1L damage

Duration: Instant

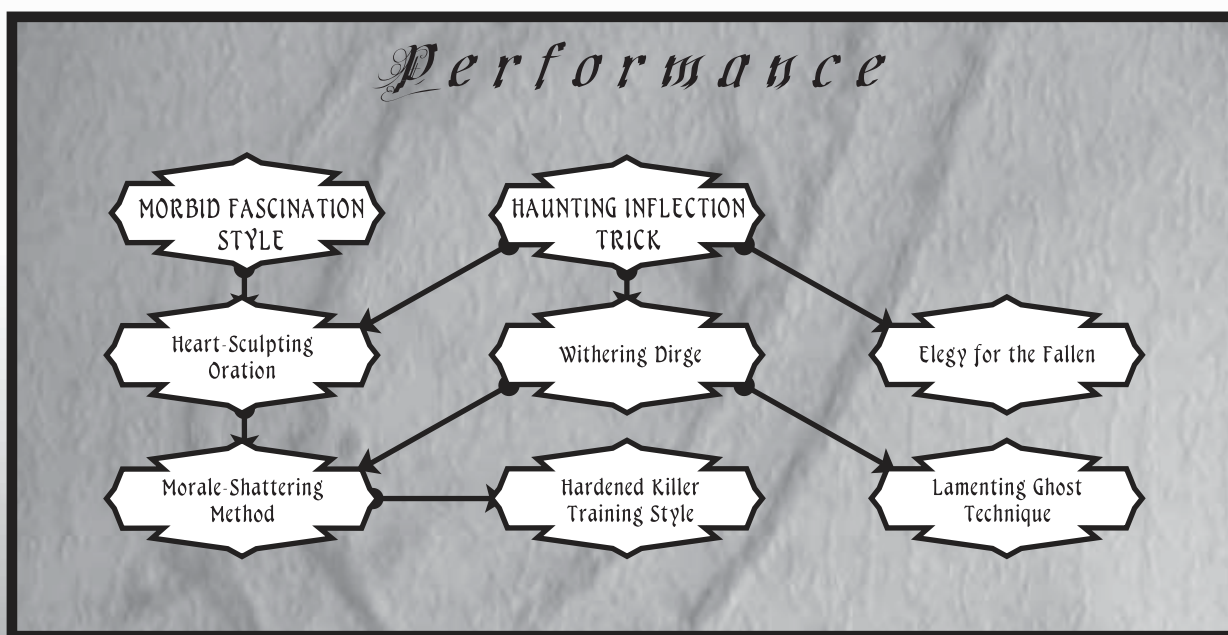
Type: Reflexive

Minimum Performance: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Haunting Inflection Trick

A deathknight can channel Essence into a mournful song so that members of his audience, willing or otherwise, start to die as they listen to it. Their bodies weaken as their life Essence is sucked away into the Underworld. Each listener suffers 1L for every 2 motes spent on the Charm, up to a maximum damage equal to the deathknight's permanent Essence. This damage leaves no physical mark and may only be soaked with Stamina or soak-boosting Charms. Characters can only use this Charm once per turn, although they may activate it on subsequent turns to continue their song unabated. The exact nature of a Withering Dirge depends on the Abyssal, but there is no mechanical difference between an aching beautiful requiem and a piercing scream of anguish. Nonliving beings and the deaf are immune to this Charm.



LAMENTING GHOST TECHNIQUE

Cost: 1 mote per 1L damage

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Performance: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Withering Dirge

An Abyssal with this Charm can transform her voice into a terrible weapon. The character opens her mouth wide and screams, pouring Essence into a devastating sonic blast. The character's player rolls Manipulation + Performance to hit a single target, inflicting a base damage of 1L for every mote of Essence spent. Extra successes add as normal. This attack cannot be parried, only dodged, and may be soaked only with Stamina and other natural soak enhancers. Lamenting Ghost Technique has a range of (the character's Performance x 10) yards. An Abyssal may not spend more motes powering this Charm than her Stamina + Essence.

ELEGY FOR THE FALLEN

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: Special

Type: Simple

Minimum Performance: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Haunting Inflection Trick

Preaching the veneration of death and the dead is seen as a sacred obligation by many deathknights. Such adulation serves two purposes: strengthening the power of the Underworld and garnering useful allies among the dead. To these ends, Abyssal Exalted with this Charm may channel the prayers of a living congregation to empower the dead. A memorial service can be directed at a single ghost or the dead in general, as decided by the Exalt, but such worship can only be carried out at night.

If targeting a single ghost, the Abyssal spends one or more hours leading his assembled congregation in prayers to the honored deceased. Such prayers can take the form of a high ritual, a mournful song or dance — even a lighthearted wake. After each hour, the character's player rolls dice equal to the number of active participants. The total number of dice cannot be greater than twice the deathknight's Charisma + Performance. A ghost who is subject of such a celebration regains 1 mote of Essence for every success rolled — or half that number if she is not physically present at the memorial.

If used to facilitate general worship of death, this Charm uses the same system. However, the total Essence generated is divided evenly among all ghosts through the mausoleums of Stygia.

MORBID FASCINATION STYLE

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Performance: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

With this Charm, an Abyssal may instantly command fear and respect from an assembled crowd. Audience members may not like her performance or believe her words, but they recognize the implicit malice she embodies and treat her accordingly. In short, they may not like her, but they know better than to heckle or depart before the end of the show. A few disturbed souls may actually find the Abyssal more alluring as a result of her dangerous edge, but these are the exception, not the rule. This Charm only works on non-magical beings.

HEART-SCULPTING ORATION

Cost: 6 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Performance: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Haunting Inflection Trick, Morbid Fascination Style

An Abyssal with this Charm can inflame or harden the passions of the living and the dead alike. The character speaks with smoldering fervor or cold certainty, lending supernatural conviction to her words and mannerisms. The Abyssal's player selects an emotion and rolls Manipulation + Performance at difficulty 2. If the desired emotion is innately negative — such as hate, fear or sorrow — this roll is made at standard difficulty.

Targets whose Willpower score is less than the number of successes rolled are completely overwhelmed by the emotional onslaught and act accordingly. A crowd suffused with rage is apt to riot, while a celibate monk overcome with lust seeks to indulge his previously repressed desire. Targets with a Willpower less than twice the number of successes rolled may make a Willpower roll (difficulty 1) to resist the emotion. Individuals whose Willpower exceeds twice the successes rolled are completely unaffected. The emotional tampering caused by this Charm only lasts for one scene, although low Temperance characters may continue to indulge themselves for some time afterward, at Storyteller discretion.

This Charm can also induce apathy, rather than passion. This requires the same roll, but affected characters find themselves emotionally numbed. Everything feels crushingly bleak and hollow. This effect can be used to quell riots, as apathetic mobs quickly lose inertia and disperse.



MORALE-SHATTERING METHOD

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Performance: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Withering Dirge, Heart-Sculpting Oration

An Abyssal Exalt who knows this Charm can radiate a nimbus of cold dread that saps the morale of enemies. All enemy troops within a radius of (the character's Conviction x 100) yards feel terror seize their hearts. Soldiers ensorcelled with this Charm lose 1 die from all combat dice pools and their players suffer a +1 difficulty on all Valor rolls. The effect of this Charm on the overall outcome of a battle rests within the Storyteller's discretion, but its influence should be considerable.

HARDENED KILLER TRAINING STYLE

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One week

Type: Simple

Minimum Performance: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Morale-Shattering Method

Although many deathknight generals prefer mute legions of zombies to unpredictable mortal troops, a few recognize the power of the human spirit — and the beauty in crushing that spirit to serve the will of the Deathlords. Abyssals who know this Charm can transform a motley crew of peaceful farmers and children into competent merciless killers with disturbing ease.

Characters may supervise a maximum of (their Essence rating x 100) soldiers in a given week. Soldiers trained for a month or longer are considered elite troops. They are quite disciplined, with relevant combat Abilities rated at 3 or higher and usually a specialty or two in a favored weapon.

More importantly, this brutal training regimen gradually wears away humanity and replaces it with psychotic malice. For every two weeks that a soldier undergoes this instruction, she loses one dot of Compassion and gains a dot of either Valor or Conviction. By the time they graduate, the new soldiers typically have Compassion 1 and five or more dots divided between Conviction and Valor. Continued use of this Charm only further increases the combat prowess of the Abyssal's troops.



PRESENCE

ELEGANT TYRANT'S MAJESTY

Cost: 6 motes

Duration: One hour

Type: Simple

Minimum Presence: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

An Abyssal using this Charm radiates terrible allure. His words resound with unholy power and conviction, while his every gesture bespeaks grace and nobility. The Exalt's player adds a number of dice equal to his character's permanent Essence to all Presence, Socialize and Bureaucracy rolls involving one-on-one interaction. This bonus also applies to all intimidation attempts, regardless of the number of onlookers present. Note that this Charm engenders respect and fear — it does not win friends or make the Exalt more likeable.

COMMAND THE DEAD

Cost: 5/10 motes, 1 Willpower + 1/3 motes per additional target

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Presence: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Elegant Tyrant's Majesty

An Abyssal using this Charm may issue orders to the dead and demand their obedience. If targeting mindless undead or hungry ghosts, the cost of the Charm is 5 motes, plus 1 mote for every additional target beyond the first. Actual ghosts require 10 motes, plus 3 motes per additional target, and the Exalt must have a permanent Essence of 3 or higher to control such beings.

The Exalt's player rolls Manipulation + Presence against a difficulty of the target's permanent Essence. If targeting multiple beings, use the highest Essence rating in the group. The amount of control the character has depends on the number of successes rolled. One success is sufficient to bark simple harmless commands that do not violate the target's Nature ("Back off!" for example). With three successes, the target must completely obey the Exalt, although sentient targets may ignore commands that would cause them physical harm. With five successes, the target does *anything* the Exalt commands for the duration of the Charm.

Keep in mind that the walking dead aren't the brightest creatures and have difficulty comprehending anything more complicated than a simple sentence. While more intelligent, ghosts are similarly limited by language. The dead cannot obey instructions they do not understand, regardless of their degree of obedience. Ensorcelled targets never attack their master, however — at least, not until they regain their own free will.

An Abyssal may also use Command the Dead to usurp control of walking dead and ghosts from other necromancers. This follows the same rules, except that the difficulty is the Essence rating of the targets' current master. Characters cannot usurp control from necromancers with a higher permanent Essence than their own.

SKELETON SUMMONING GESTURE

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower

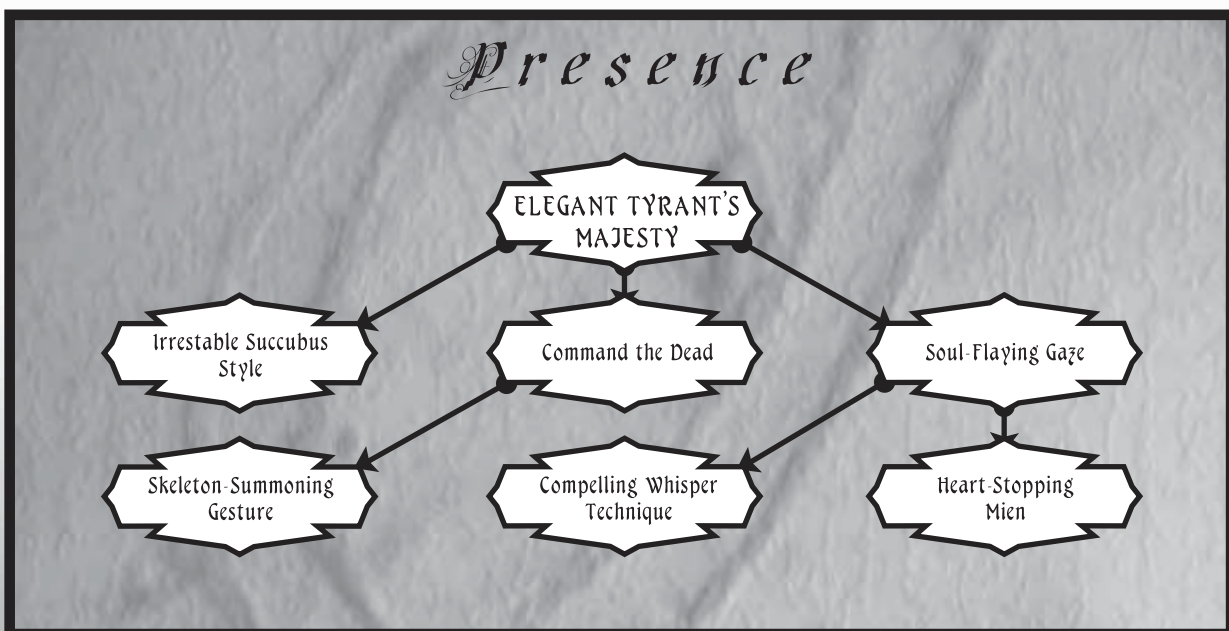
Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Presence: 3

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Command the Dead





The Abyssal channels a burst of Essence into the ground beneath her feet. If a largely whole skeleton is in the vicinity, it claws its way out of the ground and emerges at the beginning of the next turn. Skeletons raised with this Charm obey their maker to the best of their limited intelligence and have the same statistics as common zombies (see **Exalted**, p. 298). These monsters are always extras.

IRRESISTIBLE SUCCUBUS STYLE

Cost: 8 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Presence: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Elegant Tyrant's Majesty

Irresistible Succubus Style heightens an Abyssal's cold beauty, transforming her visage to match her idealized form. Deathknights using this Charm are alabaster angels or onyx goddesses, achingly beautiful apparitions with flawless skin and ruby lips. A character adds her permanent Essence to her Appearance rating as long as she remains enchanted. This metamorphosis is no illusion, however, but an ideal brought to life with Essence. As such, the character's altered beauty cannot be pierced by magic that detects glamour or illusions.

In addition to augmenting her beauty, this Charm also causes the Abyssal to exude an aura of seduction. Players of characters who behold the Exalt or interact with her must make a successful Temperance roll. If the roll fails, the characters find the Abyssal overwhelmingly desirable regardless of their normal sexual preference. They will not harm the Exalt and are likely to behave irrationally in an attempt to impress her. If the Exalt actually wishes to seduce a smitten character, she may do so without a roll.

This aura has no effect on beings with an Essence rating higher than the Exalt invoking the Charm, nor does it affect the Fair Folk. Similarly, this aura has no effect on characters engaged in combat or who otherwise believe the Abyssal means them harm. Overtly hostile acts on the part of the Exalt may render a particular subject immune but do not prevent this Charm from enthralling others.

SOUL-FLAYING GAZE

Cost: 8 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One turn

Type: Simple

Minimum Presence: 4

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Elegant Tyrant's Majesty

By staring intently at a target, an Abyssal with this Charm can sap that victim's will and subjugate her spirit. The target must be within five yards and must be able to see

the Exalt when Soul-Flaying Gaze is invoked. If these conditions are met, the target finds her vision drawn to the deathknight's own eyes.

As their gazes connect, the Abyssal's player rolls Manipulation + Presence in a resisted roll against the target's Willpower. If the Exalt wins, the target is immediately entranced and can take no further actions that turn. Additionally, the victim loses a number of points of Willpower equal to the Abyssal's permanent Essence.

If the target wins, the Charm has no effect. A character who loses all Willpower from this Charm become highly suggestible to the Abyssal. Although she cannot be ordered to do anything to harm herself or others (unless naturally predisposed to do so), such a hapless individual otherwise obeys the Exalt for the rest of the scene. This control shatters immediately if the victim suffers actual damage, although she must regain lost Willpower normally.

COMPELLING WHISPER TECHNIQUE

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Special

Type: Simple

Minimum Presence: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Soul-Flaying Gaze

Layering his speech with a haunting chorus of voices, the Abyssal may implant hidden commands in a target's psyche. Roll the character's Manipulation + Presence in a resisted contest against the target's Willpower. If the target wins, she immediately knows what the Exalt attempted to do and the precise conditions of the suggestion. If the Exalt wins, however, he may issue one order.

This instruction can be as simple or complicated as desired, but the intended task cannot take longer than the Abyssal's Essence rating in turns. The suggestion remains until its conditions are met or a number of days equal to the Manipulation of the Exalt have passed. During this time, the target has no conscious recollection of her orders. Even after the target carries out her instructions, she does not recall the act unless specified to do so. Even if she remembers her actions, she does not connect them with a hypnotic suggestion unless she has other reason to believe such tampering occurred. This Charm cannot make characters hurt themselves or others unless they are already strongly predisposed to do so.

HEART-STOPPING MIEN

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Presence: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Soul-Flaying Gaze

An Abyssal with this Charm blazes with unholy power and radiates unimaginable soul-chilling horror, causing his anima to flare as if he had spent 15 motes of Peripheral Essence. While Heart-Stopping Mien is in effect, a successful reflexive Valor roll is required each turn to attack the character or to voluntarily approach within two yards of him. If an aggressor fails, she suffers unsoakable lethal damage equal to the Abyssal's Essence rating. Characters that suffer more damage in this fashion than their Stamina spend the rest of the turn writhing in agony and lose their action.

Injuries inflicted by this Charm typically manifest as heart attacks or strokes, although more exotic torments are not unheard of. Magical beings (including other Exalts) do not suffer this damage but, instead, cannot attack the deathknight on a turn that their players fail a Valor roll. Those who can attack the Abyssal do so at a die penalty equal to the deathknight's permanent Essence. This Charm is not compatible with the Dusk Caste anima power.

RESISTANCE

SPIRIT-HARDENED FRAME

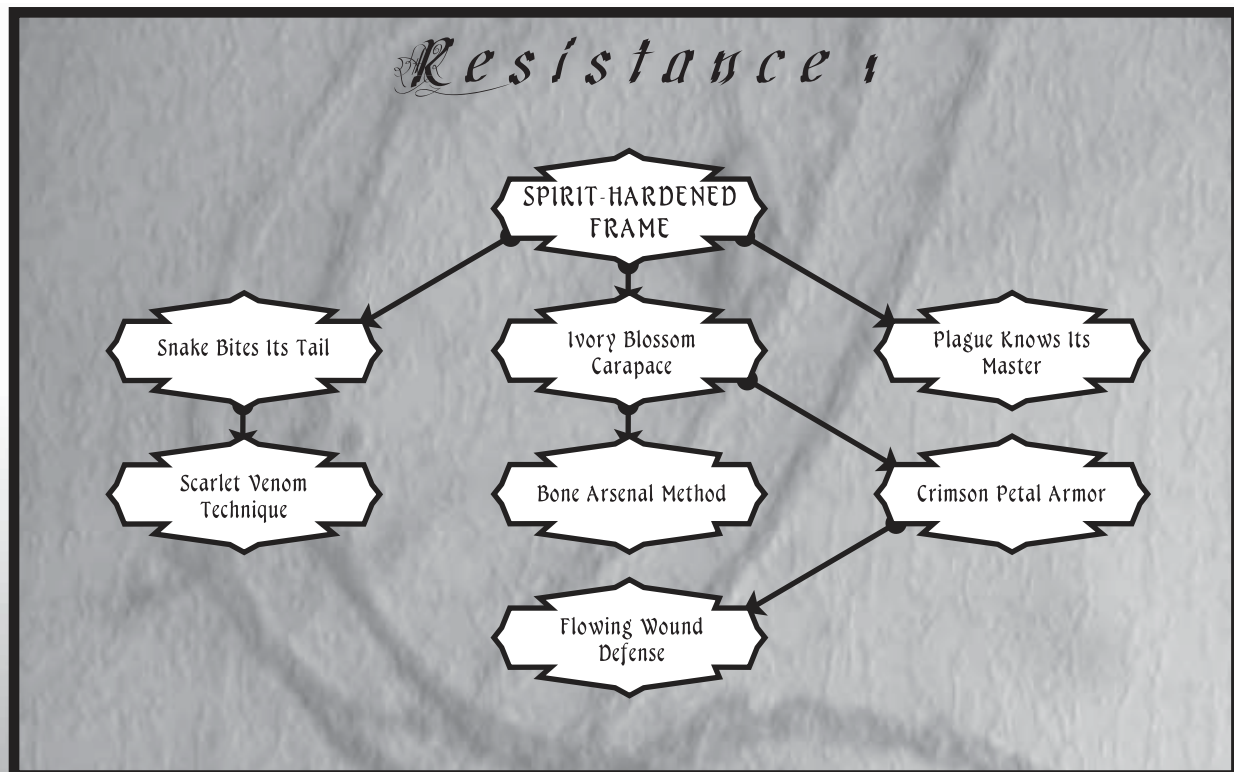
Cost: 2+ motes
Duration: One scene
Type: Simple
Minimum Resistance: 2
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: None

The Exalted channels calcifying death Essence through his body, granting his flesh the resilience of leathery, wind-dried tissue. For every 2 motes of Essence spent, the character may add one point to his bashing soak. Additionally, the character can add half this bonus to his lethal soak (rounded down). Although this Charm can be activated multiple times in a scene to stack protection, the total bashing soak cannot exceed a character's Stamina + Resistance (or half that value for lethal soak). Spirit-Hardened Frame is compatible with armor.

IVORY BLOSSOM CARAPACE

Cost: 1 mote per 1B/1L, plus one lethal health level
Duration: One scene
Type: Simple
Minimum Resistance: 4
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Spirit-Hardened Frame

The Abyssal seeps Essence into her skeleton, forcing hundreds of bony spines through her skin to blossom into armored plates over her entire body. At the end of the scene, the plates fold back into quills and retract. Exoskeletons grown with this Charm have one point of bashing and lethal soak for every mote spent in their creation, as well as a mobility penalty equal to half their soak rating (rounded down). Characters cannot spend more motes building an Ivory Blossom Carapace than their Stamina + Resistance, no matter how many times they use this Charm in a scene to add additional plating. Characters wearing armor cannot use this Charm. The health level





cost of this Charm only applies the first time it is used during a given scene.

BONE ARSENAL METHOD

Cost: Varies

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Brawl: 2

Minimum Resistance: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Ivory Blossom Carapace

This multipurpose Charm allows characters to extrude spikes and razor spines over their entire body or to grow weapons from their limbs. If used to grow spines, the Charm costs 8 motes, 1 Willpower and one lethal health level. The lattice of blades provides an additional soak of 2B/2L that stacks with soak bonuses from other Charms. Additionally, characters encased in blades can inflict lethal damage with all “unarmed” hand-to-hand attacks, including wrestling maneuvers such as clinches and tackles. Finally, anyone who grapples a character with spines or strikes her barehanded must immediately soak a number of dice of lethal damage equal to his own Strength.

Growing melee weapons with Bone Arsenal Method costs one lethal health level, as well as 1 mote for every +1 invested in Speed, Accuracy, Defense or lethal damage (all of which begin at a rating of 0). Characters cannot raise any of these Traits higher than their permanent Essence. Although weapons created with this Charm can take virtually any form, they remain obvious extensions of their creator’s skeleton and cannot be dropped or taken away unless severed.

Characters with Ivory Blossom Carapace activated do not have to spend health levels to use any aspect of this Charm, though other costs remain unchanged. All protrusions and weapons created by Bone Arsenal Method retract into their owner’s skeleton when the Charm expires.

CRIMSON PETAL ARMOR

Cost: 1 mote per 1B/1L, 1 Willpower, one lethal health level

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Resistance: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Ivory Blossom Carapace

Upon activation of this Charm, blood gushes from every pore of the character’s skin and shapes itself into a suit of enchanted armor. This liquid armor flows and shifts with its wearer’s every motion, yet hardens to turn aside blows as if it were made of the finest steel. When this Charm expires, the glistening armor flows back into its creator’s body through his mouth.

Apart from its appearance, Crimson Petal Armor follows the same rules as Ivory Blossom Carapace, except that its liquid armor is virtually weightless and has no mobility penalty. Characters cannot activate this Charm while using Ivory Blossom Carapace (or vice versa), just as with any other armor. Characters only need to spend Willpower the first time they activate this Charm during a scene.

FLOWING WOUND DEFENSE

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower, one lethal health level

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Resistance: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Crimson Petal Armor

Building on the principle of Crimson Petal Armor, this Charm allows an Abyssal to momentarily liquefy her body and possessions to shrug off any blow or assault. Upon impact, she seamlessly melts into gore and then re-solidifies, allowing the attack to pass harmlessly through her without resistance. This process is particularly gruesome when defending against falls and other full-body trauma, as the character splatters into a mass of congealed blood and immediately reforms without injury. Characters using this Charm take no damage from a single attack but must contend with secondary effects normally. This momentary invulnerability duplicates the protection granted by the Solar Charm Adamant Skin Technique (see **Exalted**, p. 177) and is a form of perfect defense. A character must invoke Flowing Wound Defense after his opponent spends any motes to activate Charms but before the foe makes her actual attack roll.

PLAGUE KNOWS ITS MASTER

Cost: None

Duration: Permanent

Type: Special

Minimum Resistance: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Spirit-Hardened Frame

Some Abyssal Exalted become highly resistant to disease as a result of their consecration to the Malfians. As with Ox Body Technique, this blessing can be purchased as if it were a Charm. Players of characters with Plague Knows Its Master subtract their characters’ permanent Essence from the difficulty of all Stamina + Resistance and Stamina + Endurance rolls to resist or throw off infection and disease. In the case of avoiding infected wounds, this reduction is cumulative with the -2 modifier all Exalted share. If the final difficulty of any modified roll is reduced below 1, the character automatically avoids contracting the illness or successfully purges it from his system (as appropriate to the roll in question).

SNAKE BITES ITS TAIL

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Resistance: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Spirit-Hardened Frame

The character amplifies her metabolism with Essence, strengthening her body's resistance to poison. For the rest of the scene, the Exalt nullifies any poison she is exposed to that has a resistance difficulty lower than her permanent Essence. Against stronger poisons, the Exalt's player may add her character's Essence in automatic successes to her Stamina + Resistance roll. Characters need not evoke this Charm before exposure to toxins, as long as they activate it before rolling to resist. Incidental toxins such as spoiled food are generally considered difficulty 1 or 2 for the purposes of this Charm. Characters protected by this Charm may safely consume an additional number of alcoholic drinks equal to their Resistance without penalty.

SCARLET VENOM TECHNIQUE

Cost: None

Duration: Permanent

Type: Special

Minimum Resistance: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Snake Bites Its Tail

Corrupted in body and spirit by the power of the Malfeans, some Abyssal Exalted find their very blood tainted with vile poison. Once a character purchases this Charm, venom suffuses every fluid in her body. This poison has the same statistics as arrow frog venom (see *Exalted*, p. 243). Players of living beings consuming or otherwise internalizing these tainted fluids (such as through kissing or more intimate contact) must succeed at a Stamina + Resistance roll or have their characters suffer the full

deleterious effects of the poison. This Charm cannot be turned off or suppressed — the corruption is irreversible.

ARMOR-CALLING KATA

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: One turn

Type: Simple

Minimum Resistance: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

With this Charm, an Abyssal can dramatically speed the process of donning his armor. He need only gesture to it, and his anima flows out to enfold the armor in a liquid shroud of darkness. By the end of the turn, the anima slithers back and fastens the armor perfectly in place. The character must have the armor readily available and at hand to use this Charm and may not grab his armor from further away than his Essence in yards.

VOID-BANISHED MAIL

Cost: 3 motes to summon or banish

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Resistance: 4

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Armor-Calling Kata

An Abyssal who knows this Charm can store his armor Elsewhere, recalling it only as needed for battle. The character must be wearing his armor with all its straps and fastenings fitted properly to banish it. If these conditions are met, the armor vanishes in a flash of ghostly light. At any time, the character may concentrate and summon his armor from Elsewhere, causing it to reappear on his person with a scream of torn air. A character can only have one suit of armor stored Elsewhere at a time and may not recall it unless she is unarmored to receive it. Void-Banished Mail cannot banish armor substantially larger than the Exalt, so it is impossible to hide warstriders with this Charm.





INAUSPICIOUS SHADOW PLATE

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Resistance: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Void-Banished Mail

The Abyssal's anima hardens, encasing her in a suit of obsidian-black plate mail. This armor is an expression of the character's soul, and thus, it reflects her personality and temperament. It may be ornate and decorated with weeping faces and skulls or elegant in its simplicity — it is the character's ideal armor. Inauspicious Shadow Plate provides 10L/10B soak, with only a -1 mobility penalty. For an additional 2 motes, the deathknight can also grow a sweeping black cape that moves and flows of its own accord to entangle and snag incoming blows. This cloak acts like a shield, increasing the difficulty of all attacks against the Exalt by +1.

SURVIVAL

ESSENCE ENGORGEMENT TECHNIQUE

Cost: None

Duration: Permanent

Type: Special

Minimum Survival: 1

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

Lacking ready sources of Essence apart from cannibalism, Abyssal Exalted must often conserve their power in Creation. Deathknights with this Charm can offset this weakness somewhat by bloating their animas with stolen power. For each time this Charm is taken, the Abyssal adds an additional 10 motes to his Peripheral Essence pool. However, the Exalt can only fill this extra capacity by consuming flesh or blood or by using Essence-draining magic. The character cannot recharge this bonus pool

with Hearthstones, respiration or any other passive means. Characters cannot take this Charm more times than their permanent Essence rating.

BLOOD-FEASTING TECHNIQUE

Cost: None

Duration: Permanent

Type: Special

Minimum Survival: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Essence Engorgement Technique

Once an Abyssal masters this Charm, he can subsist entirely on a diet of human blood. The character must drink a number of health levels per day equal to his permanent Essence if he wishes to replace his body's need for regular food. While subsisting on blood, characters suffer no dietary deficiencies. Many deathknights who learn this Charm find their palettes prefer the sweet taste of life to blander solid food. Note that blood consumed specifically as sustenance for this Charm does not provide Essence.

SUPERIOR PREDATOR STYLE

Cost: 10 motes

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Survival: 1

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

With this Charm, an Abyssal can intensify his aura of menace to ward off animals. Herbivores and domesticated beasts avoid the character completely and panic if directly confronted. Most non-magical predators keep their distance, fighting only as a last resort if cornered. This Charm has less effect on magical beasts and super-predators such as tyrant lizards and siaka. Such beings can overcome the aversion with a successful Willpower roll, although they still suffer a +1 difficulty to attack the Exalt.

Survival 1

ESSENCE
ENGORGEMENT
TECHNIQUE

Blood-Feasting
Technique



FETTER THE BEAST

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower, 1 experience point

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Survival: 3

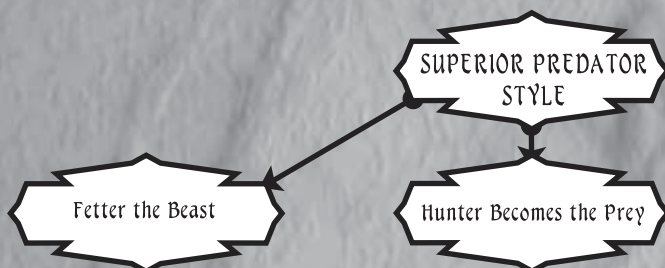
Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Superior Predator Style

By beating an animal into submission or otherwise abusing it to establish dominance, an Abyssal with this Charm can mystically chain a beast to her will. The

character gains one dot of the Familiar Background each time she uses this Charm, although she can only have one Familiar at a time. Thus, it would take three applications of this Charm to enslave a wild omen dog and another two to gain communication and sharing of senses. Although dangerous animals make superior slaves, it takes considerably more work to tame them. Beating an angry bear until it cowers in obedience can be problematic at best, to say nothing of subduing a full-grown tyrant lizard. Characters should prepare for appropriately epic combat unless they plan on raising such monsters from birth.

Survival 2





HUNTER BECOMES THE PREY

Cost: None

Duration: Permanent

Type: Special

Minimum Survival: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Superior Predator Style

While most deathknights can only absorb Essence from the blood and flesh of other sentient beings, a few have learned to draw power from lesser creatures. Once a character purchases this Charm, he can devour animals to regain Essence. Such prey must be consumed within minutes of death and cannot be cooked or otherwise prepared. Additionally, the animal must be a predator or scavenger. If these conditions are met, the Exalt regains 1 mote for every two health levels eaten. Otherwise, the meal affords only physical sustenance.

ENDURING HUNTSMAN METHOD

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Survival: 3

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

With this Charm, a character gains unnatural resilience to hostile environments, regardless of attire or preparation. She can withstand brutal extremes of temperature without ill effect and need never fear hypothermia, frostbite, parasites, sand blindness or any other hazard of the wilderness. This resistance applies to virtually any condition a human body could actually survive, however briefly. Thus, a character could trudge naked through a blizzard without discomfort but would not have an easier time breathing underwater or

surviving a raging bonfire. Ultimately, the limits of this Charm are left to Storyteller discretion.

SHELTERING INTERMENT PRANA

Cost: 3 motes per hour, plus 1 Willpower

Duration: Until released

Type: Simple

Minimum Survival: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Enduring Huntsman Method

Pulling his arms and legs together like a corpse ready for burial, an Abyssal with this Charm can mystically sink into the earth. This process buries the character a full yard underground, leaving no trace of excavation on the surface. The character slips into a state of suspended animation for the duration of the Charm and does not breathe, although he still hungers normally. Sheltering Interment Prana lasts one hour for every 3 motes spent, unless the torpid character is injured or uncovered by digging. Once the Charm ends for whatever reason, the character arises to the surface in a shower of dirt and immediately regains consciousness. Characters may regain Essence while interred (assuming they are in a location that permits it), although motes used to power the Charm remain committed during its duration.

UNDERWORLD FORAGING TECHNIQUE

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: One hour

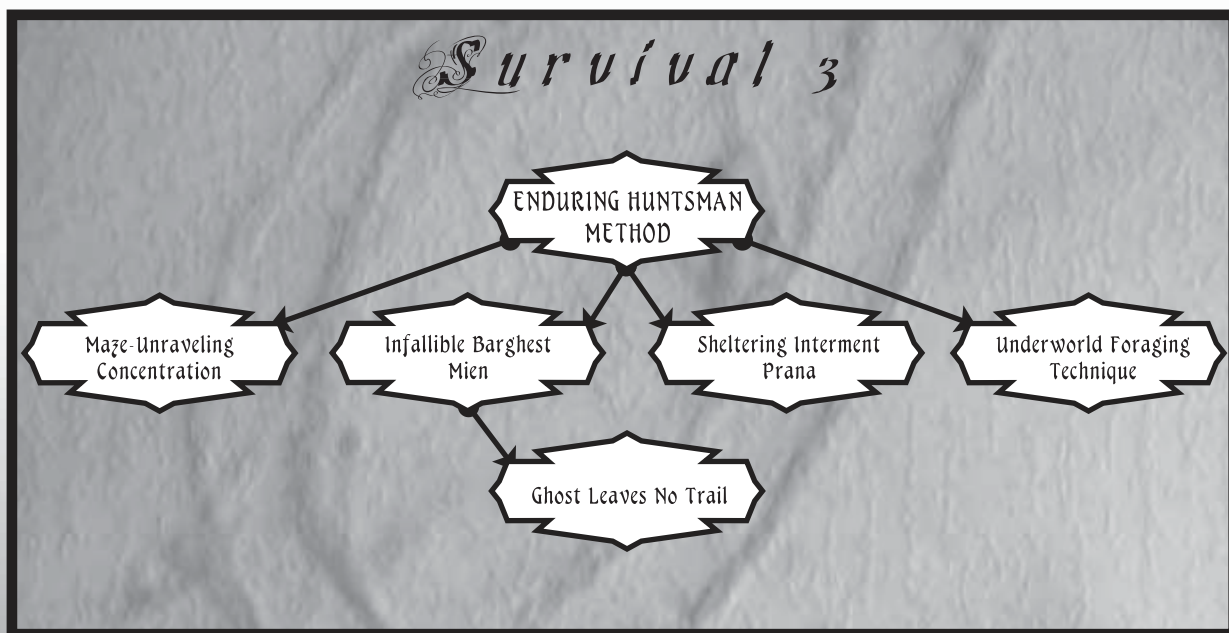
Type: Simple

Minimum Survival: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Enduring Huntsman Method

By definition, few environments are as inhospitable and lifeless as the dim recesses of the Underworld. The food of ghosts is a poor substitute for the fruits of Creation,



and the strange beasts that lurk in the realm of the dead afford little in the way of palatable meat. With this Charm, however, an Abyssal may readily consume spectral food and derive full nourishment from her meal.

MAZE-UNRAVELING CONCENTRATION

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Survival: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Enduring Huntsman Method

With this Charm, an Abyssal can mentally unlock the twisting paths of a labyrinth to find a desired course or egress. The character may add his permanent Essence in automatic successes to a single attempt to navigate a maze or similarly convoluted network of passages. This Charm also aids in navigating the Labyrinth beneath the Underworld, although to a lesser degree. The Ebon Maze defies sane comprehension, both for its size and alien geometry. Characters can only unravel short stretches at a time, and this Charm only applies to a single navigation roll.

INFALLIBLE BARGHEST MIEN

Cost: 1 mote per die, plus 1 Willpower

Duration: Until released

Type: Simple

Minimum Survival: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Enduring Huntsman Method

With this Charm, an Abyssal can pursue a quarry with supernatural prowess and determination. The player can add one die per mote to any roll to track a single target individual. This target must be decided when the Charm is invoked and cannot later be changed. Bonus dice gained from this Charm apply to all tracking attempts until the character finds his quarry or gives up his hunt, although this Charm cannot more than double a character's dice pool. Infallible Barghest Mien aids in tracking regardless of environment; the character can stalk his quarry through the twisting streets of a necropolis as readily as any wilderness. Characters may only benefit from one application of this Charm at a time. Characters using this Charm are considered supernatural trackers.

GHOST LEAVES NO TRAIL

Cost: 5+ motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Survival: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Infallible Barghest Mien

For the duration of this Charm, the character passes as unobtrusively as a phantom. She leaves no footprints or scent or any sign of her passing that can be detected by

conventional means. The character can also extend this protection to a maximum number of companions equal to her permanent Essence rating at a cost of 5 motes each. Only characters with supernatural tracking abilities can hope to follow an Exalt shrouded by this Charm, and such attempts are resolved through a normal tracking contest.

DAYBREAK CASTE

CRAFT

FAULT-FINDING SCRUTINY

Cost: 4 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Craft: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

By attuning her gaze to the seeds of entropy in all things, an Abyssal using this Charm can perceive the weak points of any inanimate object. Fracture lines and hidden cracks appear stained oily black, while even the slightest traces of rot or rust glow hideous shades of brown and red. With this knowledge, characters may exploit or repair the flaws they find with greater facility.

Characters attempting to repair faults identified with this Charm may double any Craft-related dice pool to do so. However, such repairs require the same effort, time and tools as normal. Similarly, characters attacking a scrutinized object's weak points count extra successes twice for the purpose of determining damage with their first strike. Subsequent attacks do not receive this bonus unless the character uses Fault-Finding Scrutiny to reevaluate the object's weaknesses.

(MATERIAL) WITHERING METHOD

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: Instant

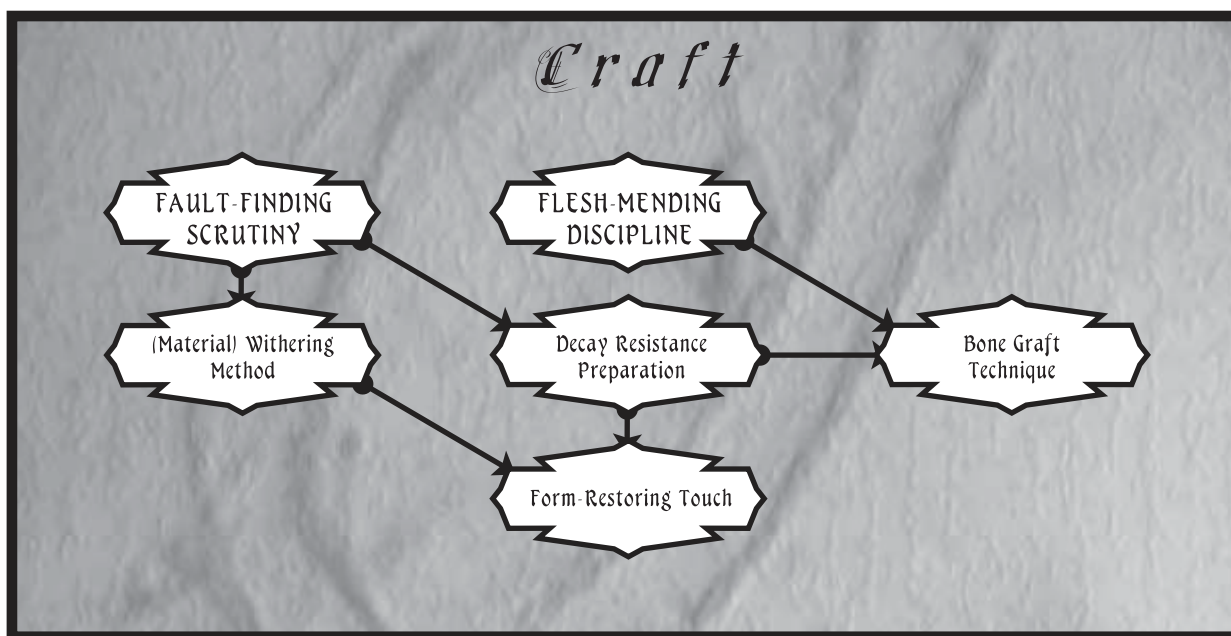
Type: Reflexive

Minimum Craft: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Fault-Finding Scrutiny

The Exalt channels corrosive Essence directly into an object, triggering rapid decay. (Material) Withering Method is actually three separate Charms, each encompassing a different substance: wood, metal and stone. Although the three versions decay their respective material differently — rotting, rusting or crumbling as appropriate — the final result is the same: The object disintegrates to nothing within seconds. This Charm can only be used on objects the size of a large weapon or a single suit of armor. (Material) Withering Method has no effect on enchanted items, including those made from or reinforced by the Five Magical Materials. All versions of this



Charm have a range of (the Abyssal's permanent Essence x 10) yards and may only be used once per turn.

DECAY RESISTANCE PREPARATION

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Craft: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Fault-Finding Scrutiny

This Charm makes an object highly resistant to natural and unnatural forms of decay, including corrosion, rust, rot and even simple weathering. For ordinary wear and tear, treated objects endure at least 10 times as long as untreated counterparts. Against more aggressive causes of decay, such as acid baths or bolts of raw entropy, treated objects have double the usual soak or resistance dice pool. Although this enhancement is permanent, it only protects against decay. Treated objects have no additional resilience against other sources of damage and may be cut, burnt or otherwise broken as easily as normal. This Charm does not work on living beings.

BONE GRAFT TECHNIQUE

Cost: 10 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Craft: 4

Minimum Medicine: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Decay Resistance Preparation, Flesh-Mending Discipline

With this Charm, an Abyssal can fashion prosthetics of iron and carved bone and affix them to living flesh as

replacements for missing limbs. The Exalt must first build the actual prosthesis, which requires a number of creation rolls as outlined on pages 245 and 246 of *Exalted*, usually using Craft (Necrosurgery). If successful, the character can use this Charm to join the implant with its host. The recipient must commit Essence (or Willpower, in the case of mortals) to attune the device to her life force. Generally, a hand requires 3 motes or 1 point of Willpower, while a full arm requires 5 motes or 2 Willpower. Entire legs can take as many as 8 motes or 3 Willpower. So long as the cost remains attuned, the prosthesis behaves entirely as its organic counterpart. Owing to their sturdy construction, prosthetics designed with this Charm have a +2L/2B soak against damage of any sort.

FORM-RESTORING TOUCH

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower, one lethal health level

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Craft: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: All three (Material) Withering Method Charms, Decay Resistance Preparation

This Charm allows a character to repair any broken object, so long as some fragment remains. The character must spend a number of hours working on the object equal to (10 - her permanent Essence), while she painstakingly joins shards and binds them with wisps of memory dredged from the winds of the Underworld. This Charm cannot remake intangible items (such as broken promises) or restore objects more yards in radius than the character's permanent Essence. Form-Restoring Touch can repair items of First Age manufacture but can do nothing to mend those whose magic has fled or been exhausted.

INVESTIGATION

EXCELLENT INQUISITOR ATTITUDE

Cost: 1 mote per die
Duration: Until relaxed
Type: Supplementary
Minimum Investigation: 1
Minimum Essence: 1
Prerequisite Charms: None

The character grows cold and detached, studying the world with heartless scrutiny. For each mote of Essence spent, the player may add 1 die to an Investigation roll, but the number of bonus dice cannot more than double the character's base Attribute + Ability pool. This bonus may be maintained for extended investigations, research or interrogation sessions. However, the bonus only applies to a single specific task that can last no longer than a scene. This Charm can only enhance one task at a time.

For Example: Prince of Shadows has a prisoner brought before him. He uses Excellent Inquisitor Attitude for the purpose of interrogating her, spending 4 motes to gain four bonus dice. Since he plans to spend the full scene torturing his captive, this bonus applies to all related Investigation rolls for the scene. However, he receives no bonus to search the prisoner's belongings or to notice clues evident in her dress or accent, since these tasks are unrelated to interrogation.

DECEPTION-PIERCING STARE

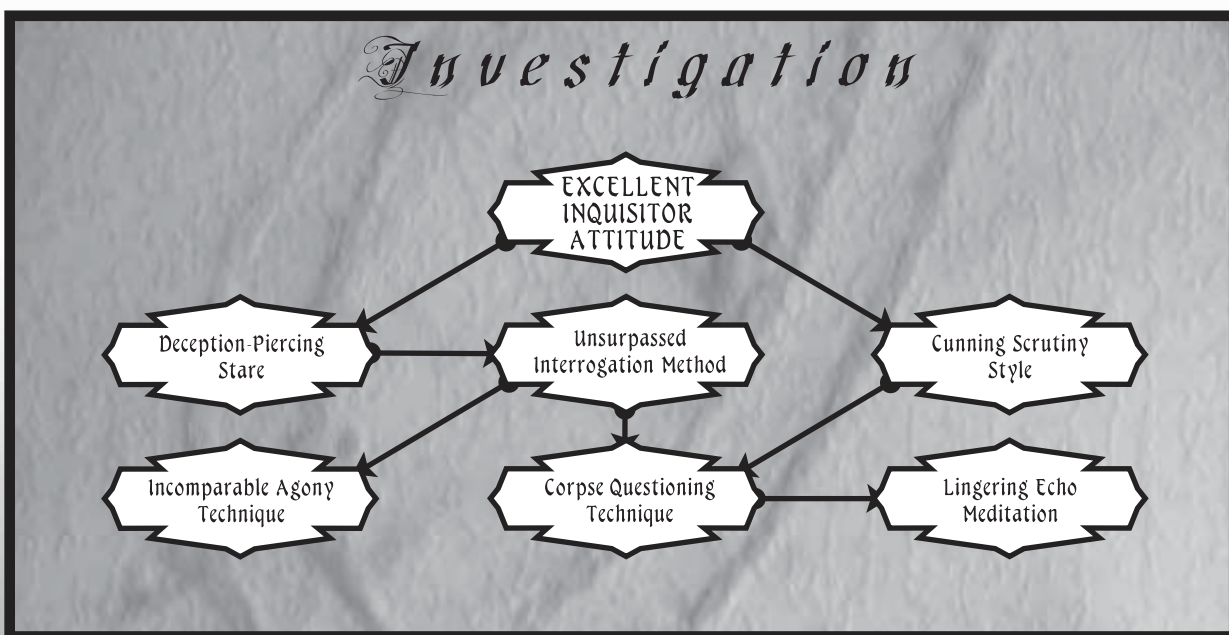
Cost: 6 motes
Duration: One scene
Type: Reflexive
Minimum Investigation: 2
Minimum Essence: 1
Prerequisite Charms: Excellent Inquisitor Attitude

This Charm allows a character to look at an individual and perceive the slight taint of unrighteousness left by deliberate lies. This Charm is infallible within its limits, but only detects deliberate falsehoods. Characters who sincerely believe a falsehood do not register as having lied, nor do characters who answer in an unclear manner or withhold information (including those who refuse to answer at all). Deception-Piercing Stare cannot compel or discern truth.

UNSURPASSED INTERROGATION METHOD

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower
Duration: One scene
Type: Simple
Minimum Investigation: 4
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Deception-Piercing Stare

With this Charm, an Abyssal inflicts terrible pain on anyone who disrespectfully answers her questions with lies or silence. This Charm only applies to the extended interrogation of one individual whose Willpower + Essence is less than the Exalt's Manipulation + Investigation. The player of an affected character must reflexively roll Willpower against a difficulty of the Exalt's permanent Essence whenever he attempts to lie or withhold relevant information. If the roll succeeds, the character can answer or remain silent as he wishes, although the Exalt can repeat the question on the following turn if she is dissatisfied with the response. If the roll fails, the victim suffers one unsoakable level of bashing damage and spends the rest of the turn in agony. The Abyssal may not control or lessen this damage after invoking Unsurpassed Interrogation Method except by prematurely ending the Charm. It is possible for victims to kill themselves with repeated lies,





although they are not punished for speaking falsehoods they sincerely believe. The Abyssal can normally ask one question per turn, though complicated questions may require additional turns to phrase or answer. This Charm can only be used on a given target once per week.

INCOMPARABLE AGONY TECHNIQUE

Cost: 6 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Investigation: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Unsurpassed Interrogation Method

Building on the principle of Unsurpassed Interrogation Method, this Charm allows a character to torture victims with the force of her preternatural will. The Exalt's player must make a Conviction + Essence roll, resisted by the victim's Willpower + Essence. For every success rolled beyond the victim's, the Abyssal can psychically inflict one level of unsoakable bashing or lethal damage or remove one point of temporary Willpower from the victim's pool. If so desired, the Abyssal's player can apply fewer successes than he actually rolled. Characters reduced below zero temporary Willpower with this Charm gain a derangement chosen by the Storyteller and fall catatonic for the remainder of the scene. Wounds inflicted by this Charm take whatever form the Abyssal desires, although stigmata and artistically broken bones are common motifs. The Charm only affects a single restrained or willingly motionless victim within 5 yards of the Exalt, severely limiting its combat application. Additionally, the Charm has no effect on characters with a higher permanent Essence than the Abyssal.

CUNNING SCRUTINY STYLE

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Investigation: 3

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: Excellent Inquisitor Attitude

Through careful examination of undisturbed physical evidence at a scene, the character can mentally reconstruct the process that led to that evidence. For example, characters finding a dead body may analyze its wounds to determine the angle of attack, the type of weapon used, etc. Although primarily employed for forensic purposes, this Charm may just as easily reconstruct the evidence left by liaisons or the details of an abandoned campsite.

This Charm functions automatically only so long as there is abundant physical evidence. Where evidence is lacking—or has been disturbed—the player must instead roll Perception + Investigation at a difficulty determined

by the amount of tampering. Success allows the character to reconstruct events normally.

CORPSE QUESTIONING TECHNIQUE

Cost: 6 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Investigation: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Unsurpassed Interrogation Method, Cunning Scrutiny Style

Potent memories linger in the flesh, even after death. This Charm allows an Abyssal to extract those memories, partially animating a corpse or disembodied head to answer her questions. Cadavers ensorcelled by this Charm open their mouths and speak in whispering monotones but have no personality of their own. Although corpses cannot lie, either directly or by significant omission, their memories rot along with their flesh. For every full week a body has been dead, its Intelligence is reduced by one dot, to a minimum rating of 1. Corpses can only understand and speak languages known in life and remain silent if asked questions they do not understand. Unearthed skulls can barely whisper “yes” or “no” to the simplest queries, while freshly slain cadavers may answer virtually any question put to them. Magic that forestalls physical rot also preserves the Intelligence of a corpse.

LINGERING ECHO MEDITATION

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Investigation: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Corpse Questioning Technique

Important or emotionally charged events leave a psychic imprint on the location and objects involved. Such imprints can last for years or even centuries, depending on their potency. By touching such a marked place or object and attuning his mind to its passion, an Abyssal with this Charm may induce a vivid flashback of the events leading to the imprint. If the scrutinized object has multiple associations, the strongest passion usually prevails—but not always. Visions triggered by this Charm affect all senses—in effect, the character is mentally transported to the time and place of the imprinted passion. Though flashbacks only last a few seconds in reality, they can appear to take minutes or even hours depending on their content and intensity. Visions are always colored by their dominant passion. A violent murder scene may have a slight red tint or a frenetic jerkiness. Similarly, a couple shown at their wedding might appear softer and more beautiful—almost ethereal. In no case can a character take any action in a vision or even choose his vantage point.

As an optional rule, a Storyteller can trigger this Charm reflexively whenever a character touches an object sufficiently charged with emotional energy. In such cases, the Essence cost remains the same, but the Willpower requirement is waived since the resulting vision is not an act of will. Such flashbacks should enhance mood and move a plot forward. They should never be used frivolously or as an excuse to drain a character's Essence.

LORE

CRYPT BOLT

Cost: 1 mote per 2L damage

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Lore: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

The character reaches out his hand, and a bolt of crackling darkness leaps from his outstretched palm. Damage inflicted by this Charm manifests as sudden decay: Metal corrodes or rusts, while wood and flesh wither away as though blighted by disease and aging. The character's player rolls Dexterity + Athletics or Thrown (whichever he prefers) to hit, applying an Accuracy bonus equal to his permanent Essence. This attack has a range of (the character's permanent Essence x 10) yards and does a base

damage of 2L for each mote of Essence spent. Against Fair Folk and creatures of the Wyld, Crypt Bolt inflicts aggravated damage. A character cannot spend more motes on this Charm than his Stamina + Lore.

ESSENCE-SCATTERING BLAST

Cost: 1+ mote, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

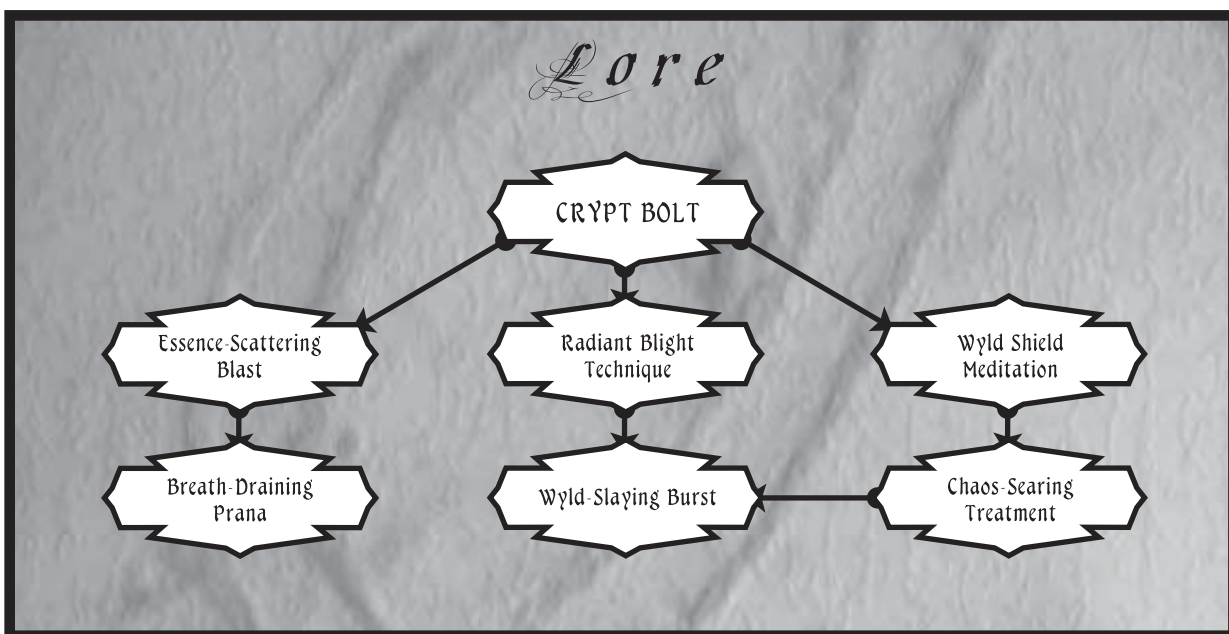
Minimum Lore: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Crypt Bolt

The character extends his arm, and a bolt of coruscating energy flies from his fingertips. If this bolt strikes a being with an Essence pool, it envelops her in ribbons of black lightning and drains her energy. Although it inflicts no damage, Essence-Scattering Blast otherwise follows the same rules as Crypt Bolt with regards to its Range, Accuracy and roll to hit. Victims struck by this attack lose 1 mote of Essence for every mote spent activating this Charm, plus a number of additional motes equal to the Exalt's permanent Essence. If applicable, victims always lose Peripheral Essence before Personal Essence. This Charm dissipates harmlessly if it hits anything besides a magical being, including unExalted mortals. A character cannot spend more motes on this Charm than his Stamina + Lore.





BREATH-DRAINING PRANA

Cost: 1 mote

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Lore: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Essence-Scattering Blast

With this Charm, an Abyssal may feed on a target's life force directly without even touching her. The player rolls Willpower. Each success inflicts one die of lethal damage that can only be soaked with Stamina. For every level of damage actually inflicted, the Abyssal regains 1 mote of Essence. This Charm can also target the Essence pool of a magical being, with successes draining motes directly on a one-for-one basis. So long as the Exalt drains fewer motes than a target's Stamina, she may not even notice the loss — attributing the sudden weakness to some other cause. However, Essence drained from another magical being's pool glimmers in the air as it flows out of the victim's mouth and into the Abyssal's own. This Charm can target any being in the deathknight's line of sight.

RADIANT BLIGHT TECHNIQUE

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Lore: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Crypt Bolt

By forcing death Essence into the land around her, the deathknight can destroy all the plant life in the vicinity and seriously damage the creatures that live there. The Abyssal's player rolls Charisma + Lore. All plants within a circular area with radius equal to the number of successes rolled in yards wither and die. All animals and people within that radius, including other Exalted, suffer dice of lethal damage equal to the character's permanent Essence. The damage from this Charm is soaked only with the character's natural soak.

WYLD SHIELD MEDITATION

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Special

Type: Simple

Minimum Lore: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Crypt Bolt

Whereas the Wyld embodies growth and untamed possibility, the Underworld represents death and ultimate stagnation. As such, Abyssal Exalted with this Charm can channel their death-tainted Essence to shield them from the warping effects of Wyld energies. With this Charm invoked, the character and her possessions (an amount that can equal a fully laden horse if mounted) can venture in the most chaotic regions of the Wyld without suffering any change of form. Additionally, the character can add her permanent Essence to her soak (and other applicable rolls) to resist greater Fair Folk magic. Wyld Shield Meditation lasts as long as the Exalt desires, although each hour that the user maintains it inflicts one level of unsoakable bashing damage to her.

CHAOS-SEARING TREATMENT

Cost: 5 motes**Duration:** One scene**Type:** Simple**Minimum Lore:** 3**Minimum Essence:** 2**Prerequisite Charms:** Wyld Shield Meditation

With this Charm, an Abyssal may channel soul-numbing death Essence into a weapon. For the rest of the scene, the weapon inflicts aggravated damage on Fair Folk and Wyld beasts as though it was made of cold iron.

WYLD-SLAYING BURST

Cost: 30 motes, 1 Willpower, one lethal health level, 3 experience points

Duration: Instant**Type:** Simple**Minimum Lore:** 5**Minimum Essence:** 3

Prerequisite Charms: Radiant Blight Technique, Chaos-Searing Treatment

With this Charm, an Abyssal may unleash the full force of the Underworld against the twin enemies of life and Wyld. This blast erupts as a spherical shockwave from the deathknight, withering trees and eroding rocks even as it sucks color and life from the landscape. The Abyssal's player rolls Intelligence + Lore + Essence. All Fair Folk and Wyld-spawned mutants in the area of effect suffer levels of unsoakable aggravated damage equal to the number of successes rolled. Fae slain by this Charm disintegrate outright, the glamour of their bodies evaporating under the onslaught of necrotic energy. Living beings inside the blast zone suffer dice of lethal damage equal to the Abyssal's Lore rating. This burst extends to a radius of (the character's permanent Essence x 10) yards. Once this Charm has been used on an area, nothing will grow within the barren circle for months—or even years.

MEDICINE

INFALLIBLE AILMENT SENSE

Cost: 1 mote**Duration:** Five minutes**Type:** Simple**Minimum Medicine:** 2**Minimum Essence:** 2**Prerequisite Charms:** None

By examining a patient and noting his symptoms, a character with this Charm can unerringly diagnose any physical illness with which she is familiar. Characters can also attempt to diagnose mental illness with this Charm, but this requires 30 minutes of examination and a successful Perception + Medicine roll. This Charm does not improve a character's actual medical knowledge, only her ability to recognize and correctly discern known ailments. If a character has never encountered or heard of a disease, she can only diagnose its general type and ascertain whether it is magical or not. Characters can diagnose their own physical diseases with this Charm, although they cannot objectively evaluate their own mental health.

CONTAMINATION OF (FORM)

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower**Duration:** Instant**Type:** Simple**Minimum Medicine:** 3**Minimum Essence:** 2**Prerequisite Charms:** Infallible Ailment Sense

Disease is one of the doors to the Underworld. This Charm allows an Abyssal to open that door somewhat, temporarily infecting the target with a malady. When he purchases this Charm, a character must choose the type of illness he can inflict. Characters may purchase this Charm more than once in order to spread different forms of disease. In all forms, the character must be within three yards of his intended victim in order to infect her.

*Medicine*INFALLIBLE
AILMENT SENSE

Contamination of (Form)



The effects of each permutation are detailed below:

Body: The Abyssal's player chooses one of the plagues listed in the **Exalted** rulebook (pp. 319-321) and makes an Intelligence + Medicine roll with a difficulty equal to (the disease's Virulence - 1, minimum 1). If the roll is successful, the target must succeed on a Stamina + Resistance roll to resist infection, just as if exposed to the disease in question. The illness is noncommunicable.

Mind: The Abyssal's player chooses one of the derangements listed in the **Exalted** rulebook (p. 281) and makes a Manipulation + Medicine roll (difficulty 3). If this roll is successful, the target succumbs to the chosen form of madness unless her player makes a successful Willpower roll against a difficulty of the Abyssal's permanent Essence. Derangements induced by this Charm last a number of days equal to the Exalt's Manipulation rating. The actual game effects of madness are left to Storytellers to decide.

Spirit: The Abyssal's player makes a Conviction + Medicine roll, resisted by his intended victim's Valor + Essence. If the Exalt wins, the target immediately falls prey to soul-numbing despair. Afflicted characters cannot regain lost Willpower and suffer a -2 penalty to all dice pools. This depression is not a derangement, but a form of soul rot. As such, the infection cannot be cured through mundane means or magical remedies that target mental illness. Once per day, players of infected characters can roll Willpower against a difficulty of the Abyssal's permanent Essence. If successful, the character's soul recovers, and her despair lifts. Ordinary mortals infected with despair for more days than their Valor rating commit suicide. Characters cannot learn Contamination of Spirit until they have mastered the other two forms of this Charm.

RAMPANT PESTILENCE METHOD

Cost: 20 motes, 1 Willpower, 3 experience points

Duration: Indefinite

Type: Simple

Minimum Medicine: 4

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Contamination of Body

This Charm duplicates the effects of Contamination of Body with two notable exceptions. First, plagues created with this Charm are more deadly and resistant to medication, adding +1 to the difficulty of any Endurance, Resistance or Medicine-related roll to fight off or treat the disease. In addition, such plagues are just that — plagues — and may be spread to other victims by all the usual vectors for the disease. The effects persist until the Abyssal removes the Essence committed to the Charm. After that point, the disease ceases to be contagious. Although Abyssals are immune to diseases they personally create, their fellows and allies are not, so they must be careful in the use of this Charm: Plague does not distinguish between friend and foe.

TAINT EXTRACTION TECHNIQUE

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower, one lethal health level

Duration: Instant

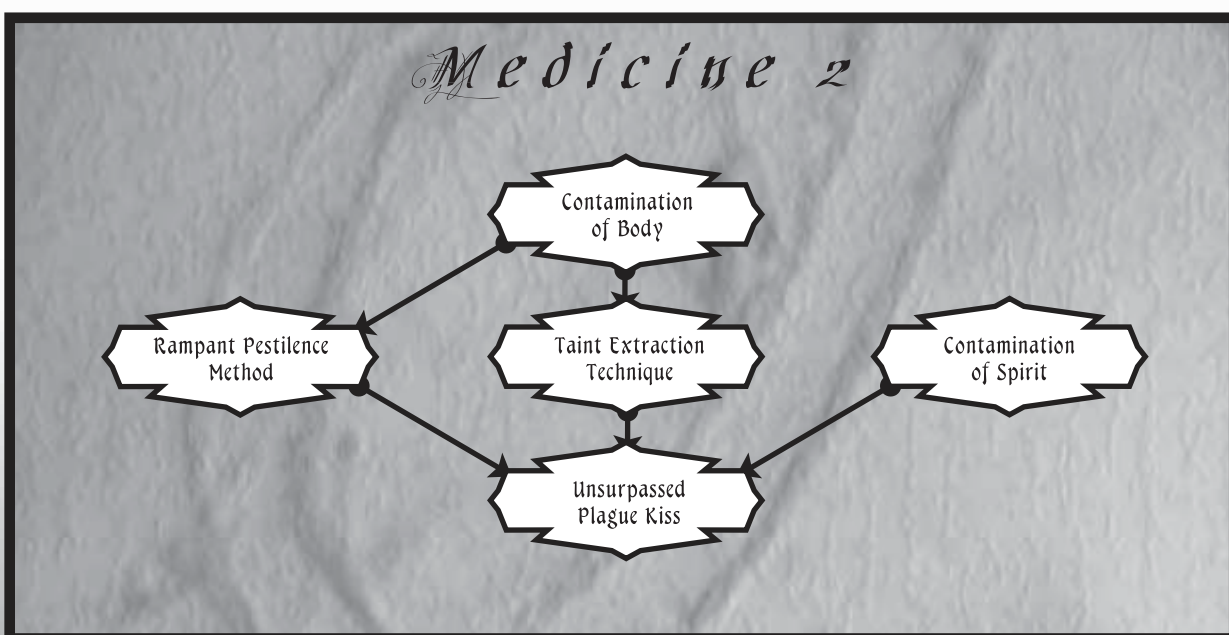
Type: Simple

Minimum Medicine: 4

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Contamination of Body

With this Charm, an Abyssal can expunge the corruption of disease from his flesh or the flesh of another. All it takes is a moment of concentration and a touch, and the excised taint bursts from the patient's body as a viscous



sludge. The subject is immediately cured of all infected wounds, as well as all diseases whose Difficulty to Treat is less than or equal to the Exalt's Medicine rating. This Charm can even cure the Great Contagion. Unfortunately, the violent expulsion of taint is quite traumatic — cured characters suffer a number of levels of lethal damage equal to the Untreated Morbidity of their worst disease. This damage can only be soaked with Stamina, assuming the patient can soak lethal damage at all.

UNSURPASSED PLAGUE KISS

Cost: 15 motes, 1 aggravated health level

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Medicine: 5

Minimum Essence: 4

Prerequisite Charms: Contamination of Spirit, Rampant Pestilence Method, Taint Extraction Technique

When the Great Contagion swept across Creation, only one in ten survived. Unsurpassed Plague Kiss allows an Abyssal to unleash this greatest of weapons with a simple touch — albeit a weaker, noncommunicable strain. In order to avoid contracting the Contagion, the victim's player must make a reflexive Stamina + Resistance roll at difficulty 5. If this roll fails, the player must then roll one die to see if his character is blessed with natural immunity. If the number rolled is less than or equal to the victim's permanent Essence, she survives with only minor fever. Otherwise, the character dies painfully after a number of days equal to her Stamina. Characters that survive infection are thereafter immune to all strains of the Great Contagion.

FLESH-MENDING DISCIPLINE

Cost: 10 motes

Duration: One day

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Medicine: 1

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

This Charm allows an Abyssal to force the undesired taint of injury from his body, repairing broken bones and torn flesh with equal facility. While Flesh-Mending Discipline is active, the character heals bashing and lethal damage at 10 times the normal rate. This Charm does not allow the regeneration of amputated or destroyed tissue, nor may it accelerate the healing of anyone other than the Exalt. Characters may activate this Charm at any time, even while unconscious.

TOUCH OF GENTLE REPOSE

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: Instant

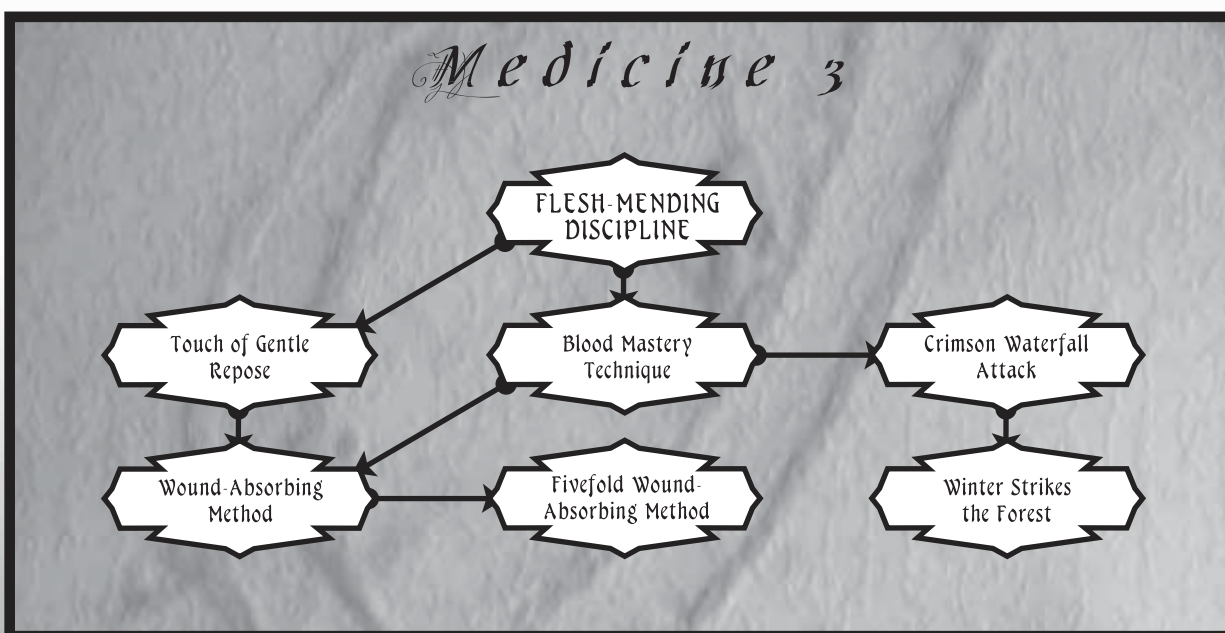
Type: Simple

Minimum Medicine: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Flesh-Mending Discipline

Death is often a welcome release from suffering. With this Charm, an Abyssal can grant that release to a willing individual. The Exalt need only lay his hands on the subject and whisper a prayer of dedication to the Malfians. If the patient truly wishes to die, she may spend a point of Willpower to painlessly end her own life. This decision cannot be coerced in any way, or the Charm fails. Subjects of this Charm never rise as hungry ghosts, although they are no more or less likely to linger as actual ghosts. Characters cannot use this Charm to facilitate their own suicide.





BLOOD MASTERY TECHNIQUE

Cost: None

Duration: Permanent

Type: Special

Minimum Medicine: 1

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Flesh-Mending Discipline

Though Exalted seldom have to worry about bleeding to death, the Chosen can still be overcome by blood loss. Once she masters this Charm, however, an Abyssal transcends this limitation. She can reflexively stanch her wounds without a roll, even while unconscious. Flesh contracts and pulls tight, hungrily reabsorbing any blood spilled by the original trauma. Within instants, the injury seals completely. Blood Mastery Technique does not speed healing — it only prevents additional damage from bleeding. This Charm cannot mitigate Abyssal Caste Mark stigmata.

CRIMSON WATERFALL ATTACK

Cost: 2 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplementary

Minimum Medicine: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Blood Mastery Technique

With her knowledge of anatomy, an Abyssal with this Charm can aim her blows at an enemy's arteries. In addition to inflicting normal damage, lethal attacks augmented with Crimson Waterfall Attack bleed profusely. All rolls to stanch the victim's bleeding have their difficulty increased by (the Abyssal's permanent Essence rating - the target's permanent Essence rating). Victims of this Charm also bleed more quickly, suffering one health level of unsoakable lethal damage every minute. Characters with Blood Mastery Technique or similar magic are immune to this Charm. Crimson Waterfall Attack is explicitly permitted to be part of a Combo with Charms of other Abilities.

WINTER STRIKES THE FOREST

Cost: 10 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplementary

Minimum Medicine: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Crimson Waterfall Attack

This Charm allows an Abyssal to infuse a target with corrosive entropy. For a full day, the target heals all injuries at one-tenth her normal rate. If the target has magic increasing her healing speed, apply the reduction to her new rating. For example, Solar Exalted employing Body-Mending Meditation recover at their normal rate if cursed with this Charm — their 10x bonus canceled by the one-tenth penalty. This Charm does not inhibit magic that

directly restores health levels. Once this Charm's duration expires, the target begins to heal any remaining wounds normally with no lingering ill effects. Only one application of this Charm can affect a given target at a time. Winter Strikes the Forest can augment a hand-to-hand attack or be delivered through any other form of touch. However, characters can only use this Charm once per turn. This Charm is explicitly permitted to be part of a Combo with Charms of other Abilities.

WOUND-ABSORBING METHOD

Cost: 2 motes per health level, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Medicine: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Touch of Gentle Repose, Blood Mastery Technique

With this Charm, an Abyssal can channel Essence into his wounds, drawing them closed with force of will. Use of this Charm leaves discolored bruises in place of deep gashes, audibly sets broken bones in place and otherwise transforms serious injury into minor inconvenience. For every 2 motes spent, the character can convert one level of lethal damage into a bashing wound level. Characters with a permanent Essence of 3 or higher can also use this Charm to heal others, although such healing is invariably quite painful. UnExalted characters treated by this Charm lose a number of Willpower points equal to the number of lethal levels converted unless they are unconscious or anesthetized.

FIVEFOLD WOUND-ABSORBING METHOD

Cost: 4 motes and 1 Willpower per health level

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

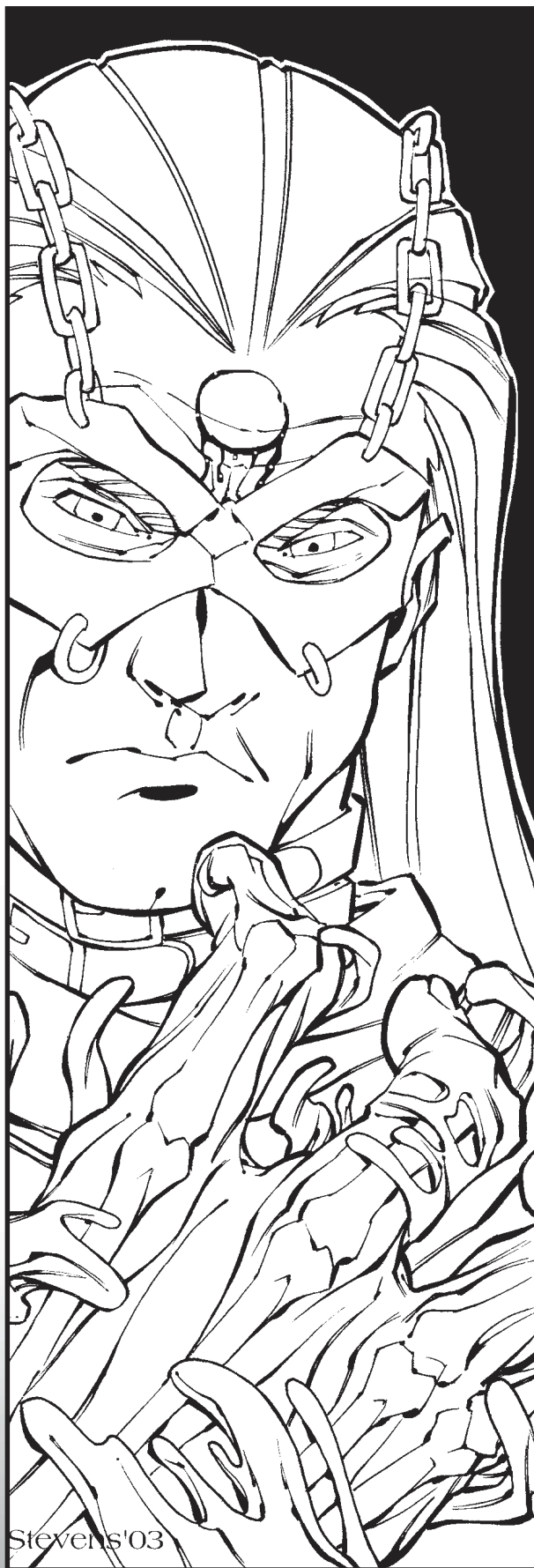
Minimum Medicine: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Wound-Absorbing Method

This Charm allows the Abyssal to direct a surge of eldritch power through his flesh, turning his most grievous wounds into lesser cuts and breaks. For every 5 motes spent, the character can instantly convert one level of aggravated damage into a lethal wound level. Converted wounds heal normally unless treated with further magic (such as Wound-Absorbing Method).

Alternately, this Charm can be used to regenerate destroyed tissue, amputated limbs, lost eyes, etc. Eyes, tongues, hands, feet, mouths full of smashed teeth and other lesser maimings are each the equivalent of one health level. Lost limbs are the equivalent of two health levels. Although regeneration fueled by this Charm is continuous and requires no particular effort or rest on the part of the Abyssal, such healing is not instantaneous. Destroyed tissue takes one hour per health level to regrow.



OCCULT

TERRESTRIAL CIRCLE SORCERY

Cost: 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Occult: 3

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: None

Least of all sorcery and still worlds beyond the power of the most talented mortal wizards, magic of the First Circle sees much use among the deathknights.

Note that invoking this Charm only enables the character to cast a single Terrestrial Circle Sorcery spell. The actual spell itself has an Essence cost, often very high, that the character must pay to actualize it. This cost is listed in the spell's description. Terrestrial Circle Sorcery can never be part of a Combo.

CELESTIAL CIRCLE SORCERY

Cost: 2 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Occult: 4

Minimum Essence: 4

Prerequisite Charms: Terrestrial Circle Sorcery

Easily outstripping the most potent spells of the Dragon-Blooded, the magic of the Second Circle is well known in the Underworld as a weapon of the Deathlords and their Day-break Caste servants. Other Abyssal Exalted must often coax or barter with these entities for power, though the sorcerer-kings of the dead are notably reticent to share their secrets. Celestial Circle Sorcery can never be part of a Combo.

SHADOWLANDS CIRCLE NECROMANCY

Cost: 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Occult: 3

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: None

Where sorcery manipulates and channels the Essence of Creation, its sister art of necromancy binds the dark energies of the Underworld. The Essence of death is potent but limited in scope. What it lacks in flexibility, however, it makes up for in might. Those who delve into the mystical lore of the Malfeans to master this Charm can hone will and spirit to perform necromancy of the First Circle. Note that, as with sorcery, the cost of this Charm only enables the character to cast a single Shadowlands Circle spell. The actual spell itself has an Essence cost, often very high, that the character must pay to actualize it. This cost is listed in the spell's description. Shadowlands Circle Necromancy can never be part of a Combo.



Occult 1

TERRESTRIAL
CIRCLE SORCERY

Celestial Circle Sorcery

LABYRINTH CIRCLE NECROMANCY

Cost: 2 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Occult: 4

Minimum Essence: 4

Prerequisite Charms: Shadowlands Circle Necromancy

Above — or perhaps below — the necromancy of the First Circle, Labyrinth Circle magic is the stuff of nightmares and dreams best left to dead gods. Still, for those who would master its secrets, this circle offers great and terrible power. Labyrinth Circle Necromancy can never be part of a Combo.

VOID CIRCLE NECROMANCY

Cost: 3 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Occult: 5

Minimum Essence: 5

Prerequisite Charms: Labyrinth Circle Necromancy

In true poetic irony, the very death taint that denies the Abyssal Exalted access to Solar Circle Sorcery also

grants them comparable power over the Oblivion they serve. Masters of Void Circle Necromancy are thankfully rare, but theirs is the power of unmaking, the power that would devour all Creation in its hunger — and the Underworld as well. Few spells of this potency exist outside the personal libraries of the Deathlords; the sorcerer-kings of the Underworld zealously hoard such mighty lore as they hoard little else. Void Circle Necromancy can never be part of a Combo.

SPIRIT SENSING TECHNIQUE

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Occult: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

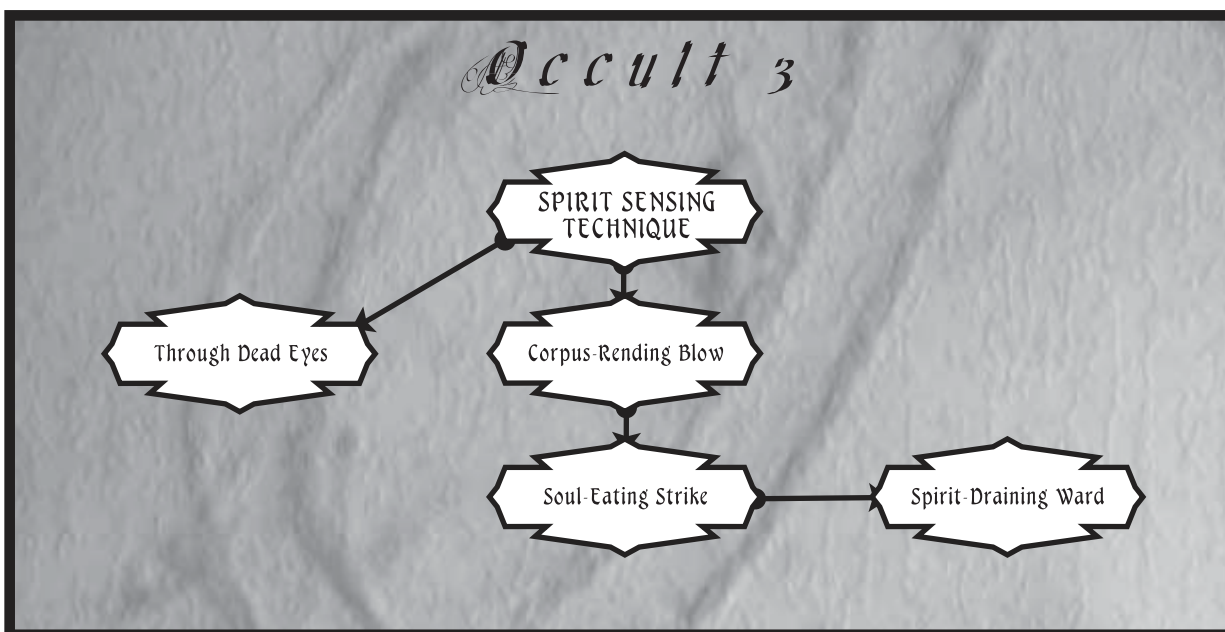
This Charm allows the character to perceive dematerialized spirits in her vicinity. Such beings appear as translucent specters of their materialized form, although ghosts appear more “solid” to the Abyssal than other types of spirits. Every 5 motes spent above the Charm’s base cost allow the character to project one additional sense into the

Occult 2

SHADOWLANDS
CIRCLE NECROMANCY

Labyrinth Circle
Necromancy

Void Circle Necromancy



spirit realm. However, even if a character can *feel* the touch of a dematerialized spirit, she cannot actually touch it without employing other magic.

THROUGH DEAD EYES

Cost: 6 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Occult: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Spirit Sensing Technique

Even in the most verdant forests, the necrotic Essence of the Underworld leaks through into Creation in wisps and trails. With this potent Charm, an Abyssal can perceive these energies directly. Beings and places suffused with death glow with their own baleful radiance, while objects imbued with living Essence appear shadowed or empty. In addition to perceiving dematerialized ghosts, the character can identify other Abyssal Exalted with a glance and precisely determine the boundaries of any shadowland. Deathknights employing this Charm can also spot the seething ripples and whorls of Charms and sorcery, allowing them to notice most magic without a roll. With a successful Intelligence + Occult roll, a character can even identify magic (although the difficulty increases by 1 if the scrutinized magic does not involve death energy).

CORPUS-RENDING BLOW

Cost: 2 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Occult: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Spirit Sensing Technique

Charging his hand or weapon with spectral energy, the character can make one strike against an immaterial spirit. The character's player must still roll to hit the creature normally, although the deathknight may elect to attack the spirit's Essence in lieu of inflicting damage. This decision must be made when activating the Charm, before rolling the attack. If the Abyssal chooses to drain Essence, roll her Conviction + Occult in place of damage, using the spirit's Valor as its soak total. Each level of "damage" inflicted in this fashion drains 2 motes of Essence from the spirit's pool and adds it to the character's own. Drained motes that would take a character above her normal maximum are still drained but dissipate without benefit to the Exalt. If the character uses this Charm to cause actual injury, the attack is resolved normally. This Charm confers no ability to perceive incorporeal spirits, so characters attacking without other magic (such as Spirit Sensing Technique) suffer the usual penalty for blind fighting. This Charm has no effect on materialized spirits. Corpus-Rending Blow is explicitly permitted to be part of a Combo with Charms of other Abilities.

SOUL-EATING STRIKE

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Occult: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Corpus-Rending Blow

This Charm allows an Abyssal to infuse a single attack with the chill of the Void. The character's blow can strike incorporeal spirits. A successful hit inflicts aggravated damage *and* drains Essence as Corpus-Rending Blow (roll separately for each form of damage). Spirits slain by such



attacks are irrevocably destroyed. Against materialized spirits, this Charm allows the Abyssal to drain Essence as above, but the attack does not inflict aggravated damage. Materialized spirits killed via Soul-Eating Strike eventually regenerate. This Charm is explicitly permitted to be part of a Combo with Charms of other Abilities. Spirits can sense Exalted who know this Charm and fear and loathe them.

SPIRIT-DRAINING WARD

Cost: 10 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Occult: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Soul-Eating Strike

Opening himself as a conduit to the Void, the Abyssal spreads his arms, and a maelstrom of flickering shadows billows out to fill a radius equaling his permanent Essence in yards. This effect remains centered on the character for the remainder of the scene. While visible in the material world, the unnatural storm barely raises a light breeze. However, immaterial spirits within the area of effect suffer battering cold equivalent to an arctic gale. Against such creatures, this Charm inflicts a number of levels of aggravated damage equal to the Abyssal's permanent Essence minus the spirit's permanent Essence. This damage is not rolled. It is simply applied each turn unless the spirit has a means of soaking aggravated damage. The character regains 2 motes of Essence for every level of damage inflicted by the ward, up to his usual maximum. Spirits killed by this Charm are sucked into the Void and permanently destroyed. Although this Charm cannot injure spirits whose Essence rating matches or exceeds the character, the ward still discomfits them (adding +1 to the difficulty of all actions inside its area of effect). Materialized

spirits are immune to this Charm. Spirits can sense Exalts who know this Charm and hate them for it.

DAY CASTE

ATHLETICS

RAITON'S NIMBLE PERCH

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Athletics: 1

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

With this Charm, an Abyssal becomes preternaturally deft and light. She can balance on objects ordinarily too weak or delicate to support her without risk of falling or breaking the object. The deathknight's player need never make an Athletics roll for the Abyssal to move gracefully or keep her footing, except in the most challenging and improbable circumstances.

SPIDER POUNCE TECHNIQUE

Cost: 1 mote

Duration: Instant

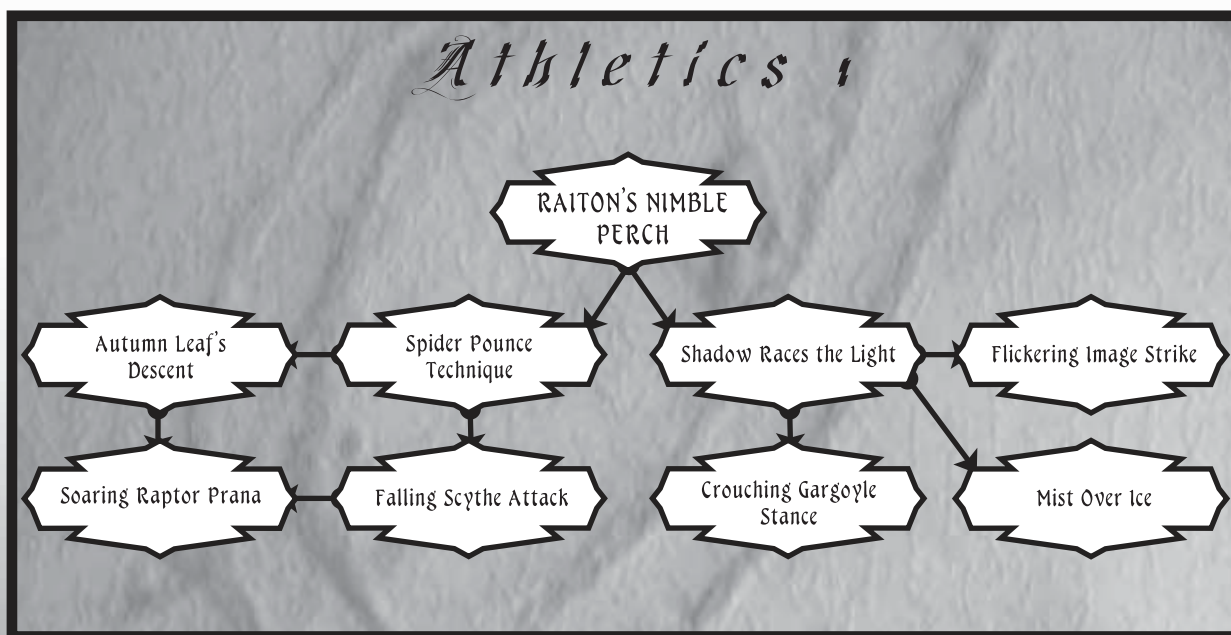
Type: Reflexive

Minimum Athletics: 1

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: Raiton's Nimble Perch

Muscles strengthened beyond human limits, the Abyssal lunges impossibly far and fast in the blink of an eye. The character can move (Strength x 3) yards vertically or twice that distance horizontally in place of a normal movement action. For leaps that are somewhere in between, the



Storyteller determines the character's jumping distance. Characters may attack on the same turn that they employ this Charm but receive no particular bonus for doing so (except, possibly, the element of surprise). This Charm can only be used once per turn.

AUTUMN LEAF'S DESCENT

Cost: 2 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Athletics: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Spider Pounce Technique

Further buoying her body with Essence, the character falls softly and quietly as a feather. The character can fall noiselessly from any height up to a mile without suffering any damage, so long as he invokes this Charm before he actually lands. Once the character touches the ground, the protection expires. Characters under the influence of this Charm are virtually weightless and can crudely glide — but not fly — on thermals and updrafts with a successful Dexterity + Athletics roll at difficulty 2 but must continue to activate the Charm from turn to turn, making it an expensive means of extended flight. No roll is required if the character wishes to fall straight down without such maneuvers.

FALLING SCYTHER ATTACK

Cost: 3 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Athletics: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Spider Pounce Technique

The Abyssal springs into the air, adding deadly momentum to her blow as she descends. Her attack is eerily quiet and trails shadowy afterimages of the weapon or limb used. The character makes her attack normally, but the damage is doubled after it is rolled. Characters cannot move in the same turn that they invoke Falling Scythe Attack, which precludes it from being placed in a Combo with Charms that involve or require movement, such as Flickering Image Strike. This Charm *can* be placed in a Combo with Spider Pounce Technique in order to extend the range of the character's jumping attack, but this does not further increase the strike's damage. This Charm is explicitly permitted to be part of a Combo with Charms of other Abilities.

SOARING RAPTOR PRANA

Cost: 3 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Special

Type: Simple

Minimum Athletics: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Autumn Leaf's Descent, Falling Scythe Attack





Where he could only glide with Autumn Leaf's Descent, an Abyssal with this Charm can truly — if briefly — fly. The character must spend a full turn in concentration as he floods his being with Essence. At the end of the turn, he is borne aloft on spectral winds and may subsequently fly wherever he wishes. These winds cause capes and cloaks to billow and flutter, giving the illusion of wings if the character is so attired. Characters may keep this Charm active as long as they continue to spend 2 motes of Essence each turn, but they fall normally once they stop paying this reflexive upkeep. All Essence spent on Soaring Raptor Prana remains committed until the character ceases flying. While propelled by this Charm, Exalts move (Dexterity x 9) yards per turn and may attack other aerial combatants normally or assault targets on the ground using ranged weapons. Alternately, they can swoop and strike as they pass.

Unless they are swooping, flying characters can only be attacked with ranged weapons, by other flying/leaping characters or on the initiative count when they strike a ground based target in close combat. As usual, characters rolling higher than the Abyssal can delay their initiative to strike at the necessary moment. Due to the Exalt's speed, individuals other than his target strike him at a -3 dice penalty unless wielding a long weapon, such a spear. In such cases, the penalty drops to -1. The Exalt's target may attack him normally without penalty so long as she times her strike accordingly.

SHADOW RACES THE LIGHT

Cost: 2+ motes

Duration: One turn

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Athletics: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Raiton's Nimble Perch

With this Charm, a character may dramatically increase her speed for short dashes. Upon activation, the Exalt surges ahead as a muted blur of motion, her features obscured in trailing wisps of shadow. She may increase her sprinting speed by one factor for every 2 motes spent, up to a maximum multiplier of her permanent Essence. For example, a character with an Essence rating of 3 can spend 4 motes to triple her normal sprinting distance for the turn. As an additional benefit, characters employing this Charm can run without fear of getting winded or weary.

FLICKERING IMAGE STRIKE

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplementary

Minimum Athletics: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Shadow Races the Light

With this Charm, an Exalt delivers a single devastating blow as he rushes past an opponent. While executing

this attack, the character is a flickering blur of violence and shadow — his motions appear broken as if viewed by the light of a pulsing strobe. The character makes his attack normally, but the damage he inflicts is doubled after it is rolled.

The Exalt can move up to his normal sprinting distance without penalty on the same turn he activates this Charm, although he is not required to do so. He must have relative freedom of motion, however, so restrained characters cannot use this Charm. Flickering Image Strike is explicitly permitted to be part of Combos with Charm of other Abilities.

CROUCHING GARGOYLE STANCE

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: Special

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Athletics: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Shadow Races the Light

The character hunches over and stretches at inhuman angles, gaining unnatural flexibility and balance for as long as he maintains this Charm. The Exalt can scuttle or dash along any surface without regard to gravity, allowing him to scale sheer walls or dance on a ceiling with equal facility. Alternately, the character may stand motionless at odd angles or cling to an impossible perch. Storytellers should assign bonuses as appropriate. While useful, the character's distended limbs and joints reduce his Appearance by 1, to a minimum rating of zero.

The Exalt must pay 1 mote each turn he maintains this Charm; this expenditure is reflexive and requires no concentration. If the character does not pay this upkeep, his body returns to its normal configuration, and he once again becomes subject to gravity and inertia. All Essence spent on Crouching Gargoyle Stance remains committed until the Charm expires.

MIST OVER ICE

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: Special

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Athletics: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Shadow Races the Light

Stepping with the weightless poise of a ghost, a character with this Charm can tread on water and other fluid surfaces as easily as solid ground. Her silent footfalls leave no ripples or wake, no sign to mark her passage as a corporeal being. Although the character can walk on dangerous liquids such as corrosive slime and magma without sinking, such landscapes inflict normal injury to the soles of her feet or shoes.

Characters must spend 2 motes each turn that they maintain Mist Over Ice. This upkeep is reflexive and does

Athletics 2

ENHANCED (Attribute) DISCIPLINE

not require significant effort, but the overall concentration necessary to maintain this Charm adds +1 to the difficulty of all complex tasks (as decided by the Storyteller). If a character fails to pay this upkeep, she sinks normally. All Essence spent on this Charm remains committed until the Exalt stops using Mist Over Ice.

ENHANCED (ATTRIBUTE) DISCIPLINE

Cost: 3/5 motes per dot

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Athletics: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

Suffusing his flesh and bones with Essence, the Abyssal briefly elevates his physical prowess to superhuman levels. When he purchases this Charm, the character must choose whether to heighten agility or power. This choice determines whether the character increases his Strength or Dexterity. This Charm cannot be purchased again, so the character must decide if he wishes to focus on Strength or Dexterity.

For every 3 motes spent, the character raises his Strength by one dot. For every 5 motes spent, the character increases his Dexterity by one dot. The character cannot increase an Attribute by more than his permanent Essence rating.

INFIRMITY INFLECTING GESTURE

Cost: 3 motes per dot, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Athletics: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Enhanced Strength Discipline

With this Charm, an Abyssal can sap an enemy's vigor and leave him briefly enfeebled. The character gestures to any living target within five yards, and a wave of smothering Essence leaps from her fingers. Her player makes a Willpower roll against a difficulty equal to the target's permanent Essence. If the roll is successful, the victim loses 1 dot of Strength for every 3 motes spent.

Exalted targets (and other beings capable of channeling Essence) cannot have their Strength reduced below their permanent Essence with this Charm. Additionally, magical victims can cancel their weakness by spending 5 motes per dot, although such resistance requires concentration and counts as a dice action. This Charm has no effect on targets whose permanent Essence is higher than the Abyssal's.

Non-magical targets are not so lucky, however. If their Strength is reduced to zero, they remain at Strength 1 for the rest of the scene, but they also lose a permanent dot of Strength that can only be recovered with experience. This Charm cannot permanently reduce a victim's Strength below 1.

Athletics 3

ENHANCED STRENGTH DISCIPLINE

Infirmary Inflicting
Gesture

Strength Stealing
Technique



STRENGTH STEALING TECHNIQUE

Cost: 4 motes per dot, plus 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Athletics: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Infirmity Inflicting Gesture

With this Charm, an Abyssal can rob a living victim of her potency and add it to his own might. The character must successfully strike his target in hand-to-hand combat. Regardless of whether the attack inflicts damage, the Abyssal's player makes a Willpower roll against the target's permanent Essence. If the Abyssal's player wins, the victim loses 1 dot of Strength for every 4 motes the Abyssal spent (according to the same rules as Infirmity Inflicting Gesture). In addition, the character gains 1 dot of Strength for every 2 dots temporarily taken. This bonus lasts for the rest of the scene.

The Exalt gains no Strength for reducing a mortal's rating and cannot more than double his unmodified Strength with this Charm. Victims regain all lost Strength at the end of the scene unless their rating has been permanently reduced. This Charm is explicitly permitted to be part of a Combo with Charms of other Abilities. As with Infirmity Inflicting Gesture, mortal crippled by the Charm cannot recover except by spending experience.

AWARENESS

FIVEFOLD SENSORY EXERCISE

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Awareness: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

Guiding and expanding his perception with a rush of Essence, a character with this Charm experiences every sensation magnified fivefold. Colors are deeper and richer, sounds more melodic or discordant, and scents somehow fuller and yet subtler at once. The world is achingly beautiful to the Abyssal, a painful realization indeed for those chosen to extinguish that beauty and drown it in the Void. In addition to adding his Essence to all Awareness rolls, the character employing this Charm can differentiate sensations far more readily than any mortal. It is incumbent upon the Storyteller to relay information accordingly. Characters using this Charm are no more susceptible to sensory overload than normal.

SENSE-ERODING GESTURE

Cost: 2 motes per turn

Duration: One scene

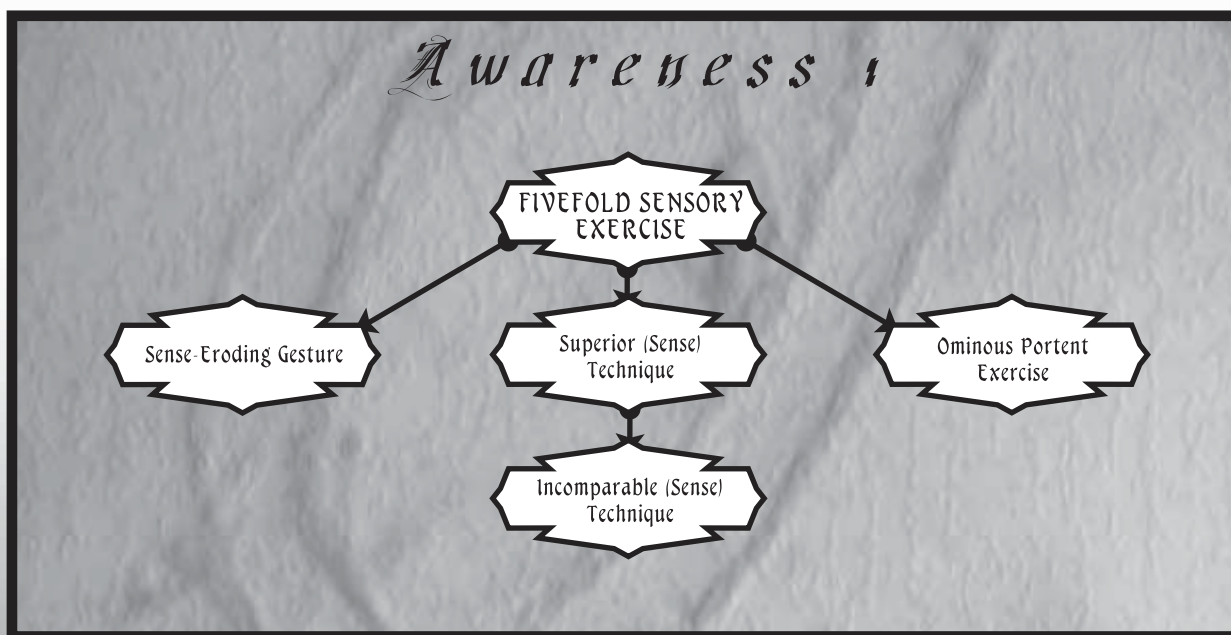
Type: Simple

Minimum Awareness: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Fivefold Sensory Exercise

With a savage clawing motion, a character who knows this Charm may indicate an enemy in her line of sight and dull his awareness. The Abyssal's player rolls Manipulation + Awareness against a difficulty of the target's permanent Essence. Each success allows the Abyssal to reduce all the target's Awareness dice pools by one die for the duration of the Charm. This Charm cannot reduce a victim's dice pool lower than his Essence score. At the Storyteller's discretion, this penalty may also apply to other tasks requiring precise sensory acuity, such as Archery attacks. The Essence cost of this Charm must be paid prior to the activation roll.



Awareness 2

Superior Sight
Technique

Owl Eyes Treatment

OMINOUS PORTENT METHOD

Cost: None

Duration: Permanent

Type: Special

Minimum Awareness: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Fivefold Sensory Exercise

The character gains a “sixth sense” that warns her whenever immediate danger threatens. Such premonitions require no roll, but the accompanying wave of horror drains 1 mote from the Abyssal. Experiencing a premonition does *not* count as a Charm use, allowing the character to freely invoke other Charms on the same turn he receives a warning, but Ominous Portent Method cannot be placed in a Combo. The character’s prescience warns her of any physical threat, from a concealed pit of spikes to an assassin’s knife, but the Charm is not infallible and does nothing to warn of purely spiritual or mental danger.

SUPERIOR (SENSE) FOCUS

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Awareness: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Fivefold Sensory Exercise

This Charm precisely duplicates the effects of the Solar Charm Keen (Sense) Technique (see **Exalted**, p. 196). Characters may not use Superior (Sense) Focus in conjunction with Fivefold Sensory Exercise.

OWL EYES TREATMENT

Cost: Special

Duration: Permanent

Type: Special

Minimum Awareness: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Superior Sight Focus

Once an Abyssal purchases this Charm, he can thereafter see in darkness without penalty. His enhanced vision pierces all shades of gloom, from moonlit night to the utter blackness of the Labyrinth. However, this modification also makes the character sensitive to bright light. Under lighting comparable to the noonday sun or within close proximity to a torch, the Abyssal suffers the penalty for murky vision. The Exalt can suppress or reactivate his night vision at will to avoid this problem, but each change takes one full turn and costs 1 mote. This change counts as a Charm, cannot be placed in a Combo and leaves the character totally blind (-4 dice to attacks) during the turn it happens. This Charm does not allow the character to see more easily through fog or smoke, nor does it help him perceive invisible objects or people.

INCOMPARABLE (SENSE) TECHNIQUE

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Awareness: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Superior (Sense) Focus

This Charm precisely duplicates the effects of the Solar Charm Unsurpassed (Sense) Discipline (see **Exalted**, p. 196). Characters may only learn permutations of this Charm to enhance senses they have already purchased with Superior (Sense) Focus. This Charm is incompatible with Superior (Sense) Focus and Fivefold Sensory Exercise.

DODGE

FLITTING SHADOW FORM

Cost: 1 mote per 2 dice

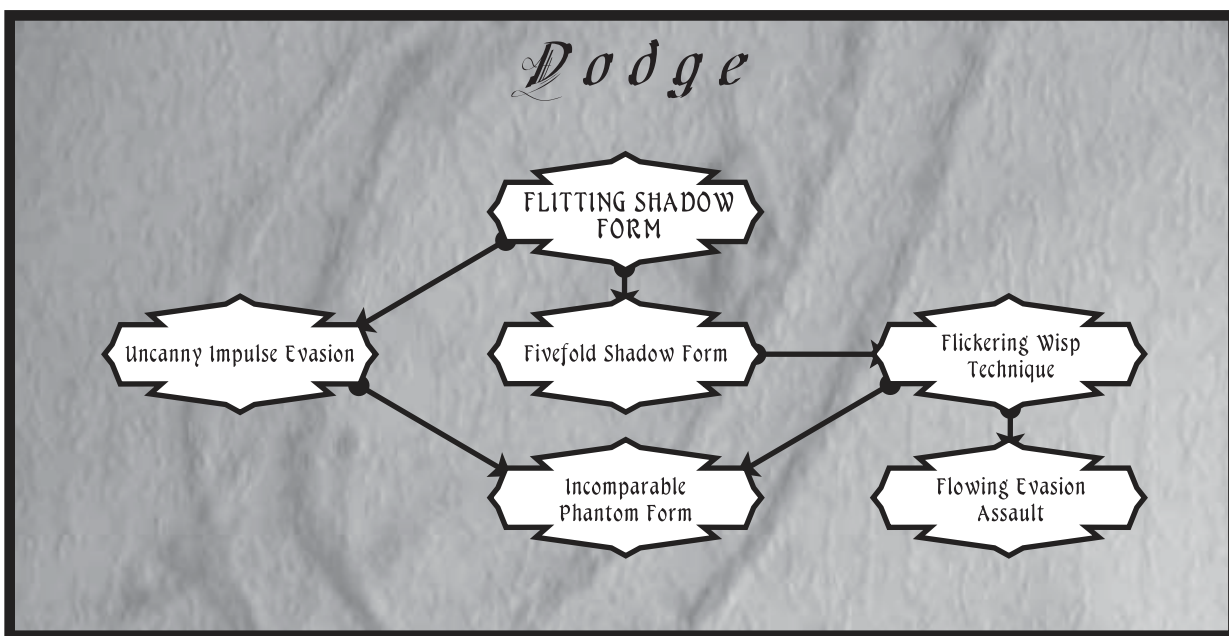
Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Dodge: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None



The Exalted channels Essence through his body and movements, making him extremely difficult to strike. For every mote spent, the Abyssal reduces the dice pool of a single attack by two dice. This Charm can only target attacks aimed specifically at the Exalt and may reduce a dice pool to zero (ensuring that the attack misses). Characters may activate this Charm any time after an attack is declared but before dice are rolled. Flitting Shadow Form can only target attacks the Exalt is aware of.

UNCANNY IMPULSE EVASION

Cost: 2 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Dodge: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Flitting Shadow Form

Whenever a character with this Charm is attacked, she feels a sense of impending dread and may attempt to sidestep an unseen blow on impulse alone. The character's dice pool for such a dodge equals her unmodified Dexterity. This Charm cannot be placed in a Combo with other Dodge Charms. If a deathknight's player does not choose to activate this Charm in response to an unseen attack, the Exalt does not sense the blow until it lands. This Charm must be activated prior to the attack roll.

FIVEFOLD SHADOW FORM

Cost: 2 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Dodge: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Flitting Shadow Form

Moving faster than the shadows cast by a guttering candle, the Abyssal may evade blows with supernatural prowess. The attacker loses a number of dice from a single attack roll equal to the deathknight's Dodge + Essence. If this reduces an attack dice pool to zero, the blow automatically misses. This Charm must be activated prior to the attack roll.

FLICKERING WISP TECHNIQUE

Cost: 6 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Dodge: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Fivefold Shadow Form

The Abyssal ripples and vanishes like smoke in a stiff breeze, coalescing a split second later a short distance away. This Charm allows the Abyssal to perfectly dodge any one attack that he can perceive without a roll, including those with an area effect. The character still cannot dodge magical effects that explicitly prohibit dodging, however. The character may not move more yards with this technique than his permanent Essence rating and cannot use the Charm to teleport through solid barriers. Flickering Wisp Technique must be activated prior to the attack roll.

FLOWING EVASION ASSAULT

Cost: 6 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Dodge: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Flickering Wisp Technique

In addition to teleporting out of harm's way, an Abyssal with this Charm can ensure that she materializes behind her opponent. Flowing Evasion Assault follows the same rules as Flickering Wisp Technique with two exceptions. First, the Exalt may reappear as far away as her Dodge in yards. Secondly, if the attacker is within this range, the Abyssal may automatically reappear behind her opponent. If the Abyssal has any actions remaining to launch an attack of her own, she gains the full benefits of attacking from behind (see **Exalted**, p. 238).

INCOMPARABLE PHANTOM FORM

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Dodge: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Uncanny Impulse Evasion, Flickering Wisp Technique

Suffusing his body with spectral Essence, the Abyssal becomes translucent and partially dematerialized. In addition to unnerving opponents, this transformation allows the Exalt to dodge all incoming attacks, perceived or otherwise, with his full Dexterity + Dodge pool.

LARCENY

THEFT OF FACE

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: One hour

Type: Simple

Minimum Larceny: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

By stealing a victim's Essence, a character with this Charm can also steal her visage. The player of the Abyssal makes an Intelligence + Larceny roll after her character consumes 1 or more motes of Essence from her target by

means of blood drinking or magic. The difficulty is 6 minus the total number of motes taken. If a character drains a victim entirely of blood or consumes all her flesh, the difficulty is automatically 1. Successes on this roll count as a mundane impersonation attempt (see **Exalted**, p. 255), except that the Abyssal's features actually shift to resemble the victim's. Players of characters attempting to pierce the ruse may roll Perception + Awareness against a difficulty of the deathknight's successes. Note that the Exalt only takes on the appearance of his target — the Charm does not bestow knowledge of mannerisms. Characters who know the target personally can quickly recognize the Exalt as an imposter simply by interacting with him. This Charm can only be used to impersonate humans.

THEFT OF MIEN

Cost: 6 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One hour

Type: Simple

Minimum Larceny: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Theft of Face

This Charm duplicates the effects of Theft of Face with one exception: The Exalt also steals intuitive knowledge of her victim's mannerisms and habits. Consequently, the ruse is much more effective and can easily fool casual associates of the target. Close family members can still recognize that something is wrong, however, regardless of whether they actually suspect an imposter or attribute the odd behavior to illness.

FLAWLESS DOPPELGANGER DISGUISE

Cost: 15 motes, 1 Willpower, 1 experience point

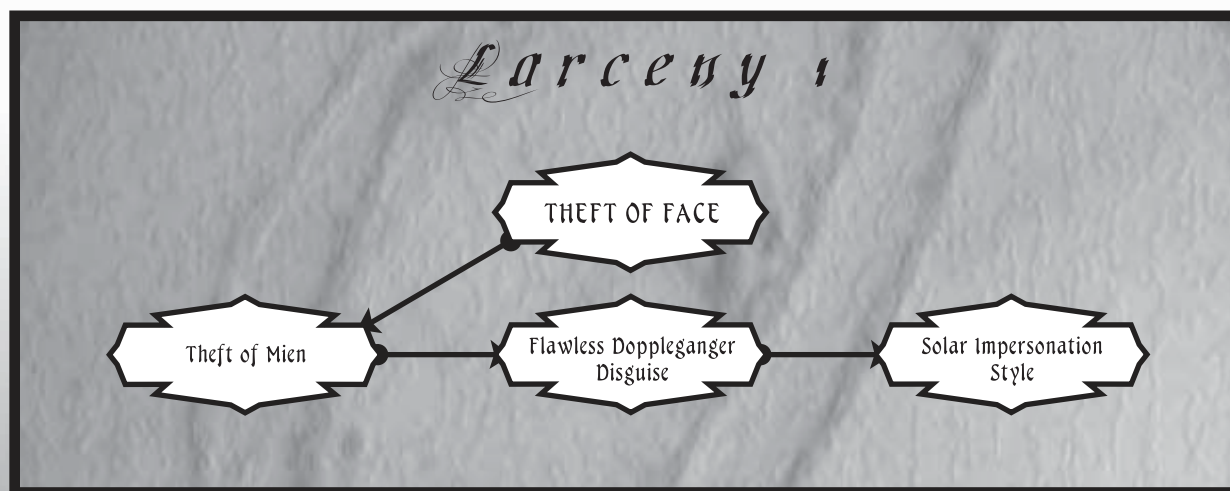
Duration: Until released

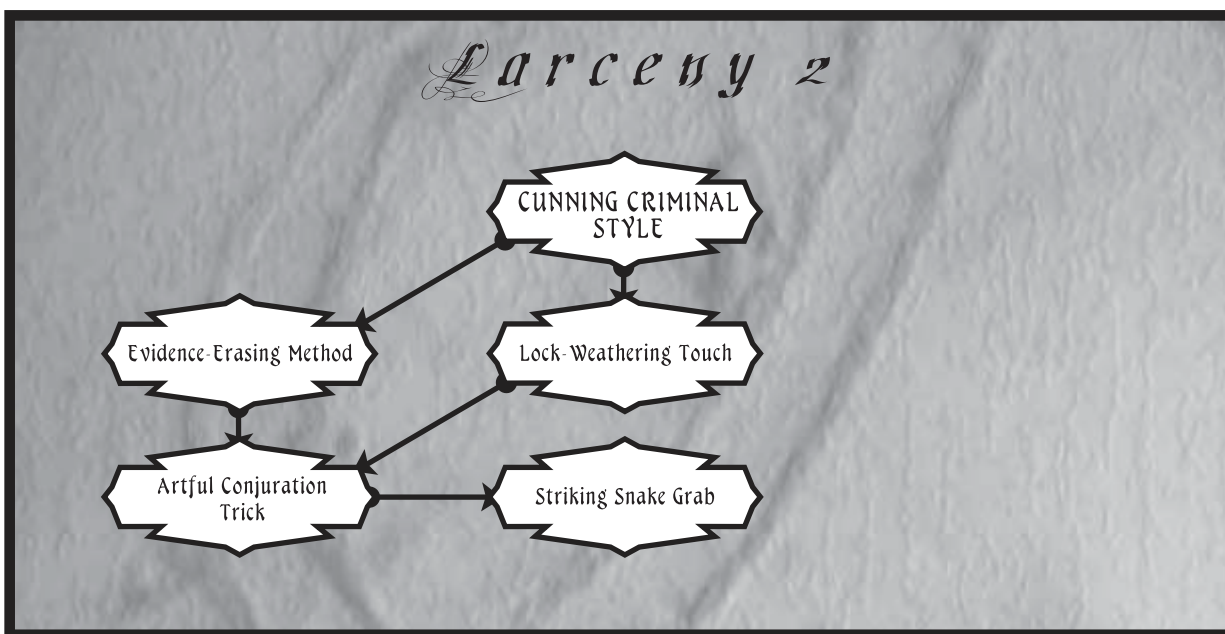
Type: Simple

Minimum Larceny: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Theft of Mien





With this Charm, an Abyssal may consume the flesh and spirit of a victim to steal her very identity. The character must completely drain her victim of blood and spend one hour digesting and studying the stolen Essence. At the conclusion of her meditation, the Exalt shifts into the perfect likeness of her victim. This is not an illusion, however, but a startling transformation. Every mark and scar is duplicated, every tic and mannerism compensated for.

If questioned, the Exalt can even draw on the stolen memories of her prey with an Intelligence + Larceny roll at a difficulty assigned by the Storyteller. No amount of physical scrutiny can discern that the Abyssal is not whom she pretends to be, although any display of an Abyssal anima banner may spoil the effect. This Charm only permits impersonation of human victims who are the same gender as the Exalt. Although she may disguise herself as an Exalted victim and even duplicate elemental aspect markings or Lunar scarring, the character cannot emulate the powers or anima of her stolen visage. Once the character voluntarily ends this Charm, she loses all memories and shifts back to her true form. Death also ends the ruse. Characters can only assume a given guise once before the memories are digested.

SOLAR IMPERSONATION STYLE

Cost: 15 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Larceny: 5

Minimum Essence: 4

Prerequisite Charms: Flawless Doppelganger Disguise

By channeling the nascent spark of Solar Essence trapped within her, an Abyssal with this Charm can shift

her anima to resemble that of a Chosen of the Unconquered Sun. While this Charm is in effect, the deathknight's anima banner and Caste Mark manifests exactly as a Solar of the appropriate type (Dusk become Dawn, Midnight becomes Zenith, etc.). This Charm only affects the anima *banner*, however. The Exalt retains the anima *power* appropriate to his true Caste. Any Zenith Caste Solar with a Permanent Essence higher than the Abyssal's can see through the disguise. Only Abyssal Exalted can learn this Charm, although it is rumored that some Solars of the Night Caste may have developed a similar technique for impersonating deathknights.

CUNNING CRIMINAL STYLE

Cost: 10 motes

Duration: One day

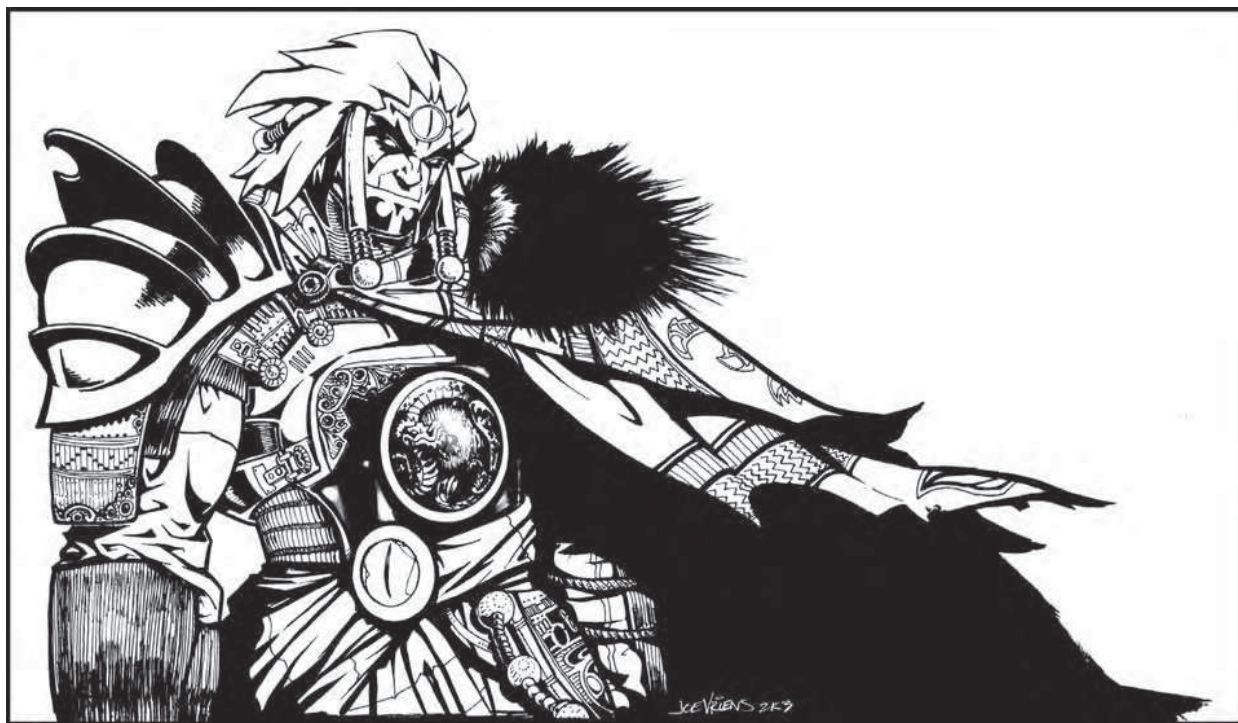
Type: Simple

Minimum Larceny: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

Many criminals live short bloody lives and die just as bleakly. Accordingly, an Abyssal who taps into the web of shared regrets and suffering of the criminal dead has a wealth of information at his disposal. He can intuitively pick out criminal establishments from honest businesses and discern those who actively desire to sell or buy illegal merchandise. Just as easily, the Abyssal can spot the lines of power in the local crime scene and track them back to the true crime-lords of the area. While this Charm remains active, the character is at home in any criminal subculture. Cunning Criminal Style cannot discern informers or undercover agents from ordinary criminals unless there are sufficient clues present to draw such a conclusion.



EVIDENCE-ERASING METHOD

Cost: 1 mote

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Larceny: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Cunning Criminal Style

With this Charm active, an Abyssal leaves no more evidence of her passing than a ghost. She can be spotted just as easily as before, but she does not drop unintentional clues or leave physical evidence such as footprints, hair, etc. Obviously, if an Abyssal wants to leave clues, she may do so, since the Charm only protects against unintentional evidence. Only supernatural tracking can find a character shrouded with this Charm.

LOCK-WEATHERING TOUCH

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Larceny: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Cunning Criminal Style

With this Charm, an Exalt can instantly bypass any mundane lock with a gentle touch. The lock rusts away inside with a wisp of acrid smoke, causing the mechanism to fall open. This Charm must be used separately on each lock and may affect locked manacles as easily as the bolts of doors and safes.

ARTFUL CONJURATION TRICK

Cost: 2 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Larceny: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Evidence-Erasing Method, Lock-Weathering Touch

Through the use of this Charm, an Abyssal becomes preternaturally deft at sleight of hand and may perform amazing feats of conjuration and legerdemain without requiring a roll. For outright impossible stunts, such as actually summoning a coin from a belt pouch without reaching for it, the Storyteller may require a Dexterity + Larceny roll. This Charm is intended for trickery and bedazzlement, not combat. Instantly palming a handful of shuriken is permissible, but the character cannot actually create something from nothing, nor steal possessions from an opponent. The Storyteller retains final say on what can and cannot be done with this Charm.

STRIKING SNAKE GRAB

Cost: 4 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Larceny: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Artful Conjuration Trick



The Abyssal extends his hand in a lightning-fast clutching gesture, reaching out with his Essence to steal an object in his direct line of sight. The targeted object flickers and vanishes, rematerializing from Elsewhere in the character's grasp. This Charm can only grab objects small enough to comfortably hold with one hand and may not take possessions out of a sentient being's grasp. Possessions on a person's body can be swiped but not if they are securely fastened. A money pouch could be grabbed but not the belt it was affixed to, for example. Ultimately, the Storyteller retains final say on what can or cannot be taken with this Charm.

STEALTH

CONCEALING DISTRACTION DISCIPLINE

Cost: 4 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Stealth: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

Briefly eroding the attention span of onlookers with a gentle rush of Essence, an Abyssal with this Charm becomes far more difficult to notice. Until the end of the scene, all attempts to spot the Exalt increase their difficulty by his permanent Essence. This increase applies only so long as the Abyssal does not draw undue attention to himself and remains unnoticed. Once he is spotted by anyone, the Charm immediately ends and cannot be reactivated until the Exalt moves entirely out of sight.

ENCOUNTER-BANISHING GESTURE

Cost: 3 motes per target

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Stealth: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Concealing Distraction Discipline

Despite their prowess, even the most stealthy and nimble Day Castes get caught from time to time. With this Charm, a character can rip the memory of an encounter from a target's mind so that he forgets he ever saw the Exalt. The Abyssal's player rolls Manipulation + Stealth against a difficulty of the target's Essence (or highest Essence in the case of a group). For every success rolled, the target forgets the events of one turn. Thus, four successes erase the past four turns of a target's memory. As an added benefit, a befuddled target will not notice the Abyssal again for a like number of turns unless she draws attention to herself. This gives the Exalt a few seconds to escape and conceal herself more thoroughly. This Charm has no effect on beings with a higher permanent Essence than the Abyssal or against beings who are physically agitated (for example, those in combat).

SPLINTER IN THE MIND'S EYE

Cost: 8 motes, 1 Willpower

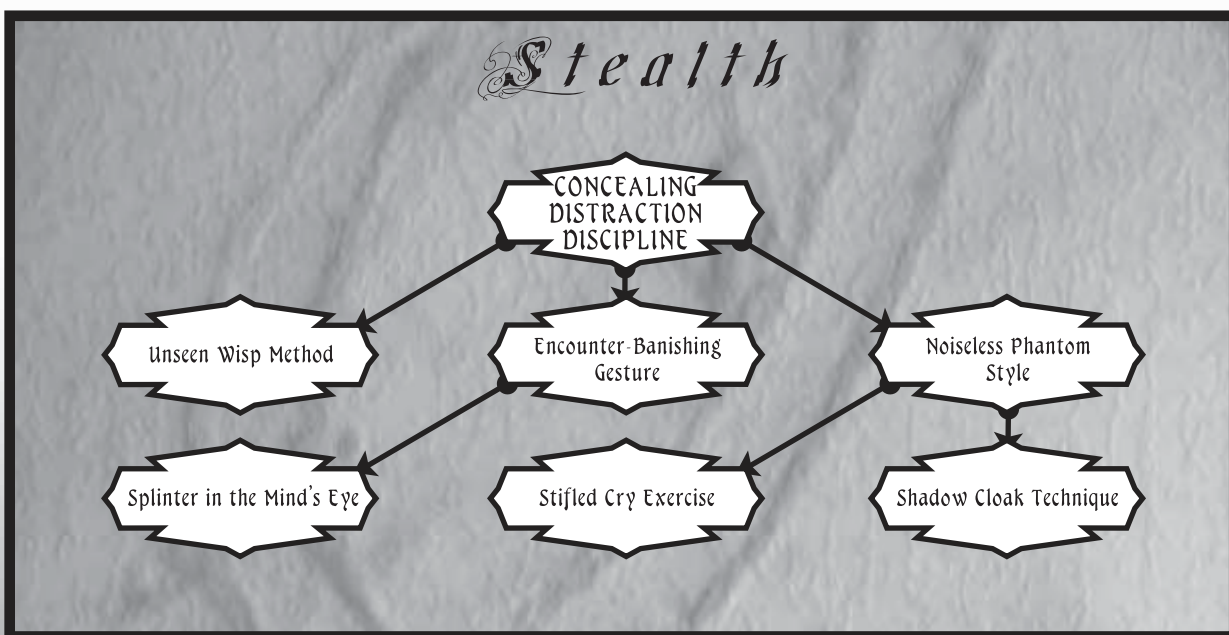
Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Stealth: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Encounter-Banishing Gesture



This Charm duplicates the effects and rules of Encounter-Banishing Gesture, except that its effects extend to a number of witnesses equal to the Abyssal's Essence rating x 10 without requiring motes for each observer.

NOISELESS PHANTOM STYLE

Cost: 4 motes

Duration: Stealth in minutes

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Stealth: 4

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Concealing Distraction Discipline

Enveloped in the stillness of the grave, an Abyssal with this Charm active makes no noise whatsoever. Her footsteps do not echo or splash — she can jump or stomp or shout in perfect eerie silence. Conversely, she cannot speak or employ any magic that relies on sound. This Charm only wards against sounds made by the character, however. Her blade might slide soundlessly through a victim's ribs, but the effect would not muffle the victim's scream of pain or rasping death rattle.

STIFLED CRY EXERCISE

Cost: 1 mote

Duration: One turn

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Stealth: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Noiseless Phantom Style

The Abyssal focuses on a single victim within line of sight and smothers his voice with Essence. Until the end of the turn, the target cannot speak or make any other vocalized noise. Day Caste assassins often employ this Charm to prevent their victims from screaming. This Charm has no effect on beings with a higher permanent Essence than the Exalt.

SHADOW CLOAK TECHNIQUE

Cost: 2 motes per die

Duration: Stealth in turns

Type: Simple

Minimum Stealth: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Noiseless Phantom Style

The Abyssal cocoons himself in pure darkness, taking on the wraithlike appearance of a solidified shadow. So long as he remains in darkness or among other shadows, he adds 1 die per 2 motes spent to all Stealth rolls. The Exalt cannot purchase more dice with this Charm than equal to twice his Essence rating. If a bright light is shined on the hidden Exalt, his cloak dissolves immediately, and the Charm ends.

UNSEEN WISP METHOD

Cost: 2 motes per turn

Duration: Varies

Type: Simple

Minimum Stealth: 5

Minimum Essence: 4

Prerequisite Charms: Concealing Distraction Discipline

The Abyssal vanishes wholly from sight, dissolving in a ripple of scattering shadows. For a number of turns equal to half the number of motes invested, the Exalt is visible as nothing more than a wavering in the air. Ranged attacks against her are all but impossible without magical aid or well-described stunts, while close-range attacks suffer a difficulty penalty of the deathknight's permanent Essence.

MOONSHADOW CASTE

BUREAUCRACY

AUTHORITY-ERODING TECHNIQUE

Cost: 1 mote per die

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Bureaucracy: 1

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

Through this Charm, an Abyssal can momentarily confuse a target and weaken her effectiveness in a critical moment. For every mote spent, the target loses one die from a single Bureaucracy roll. This Charm cannot reduce a victim's dice pool lower than her Essence, however. Authority-Eroding Technique may be invoked any time after an appropriate action is declared but before dice are rolled. The Abyssal can even set up the targeted roll, such as by asking a pointed question in a meeting.

ARGUMENT-SLAYING REMARK

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: Instant

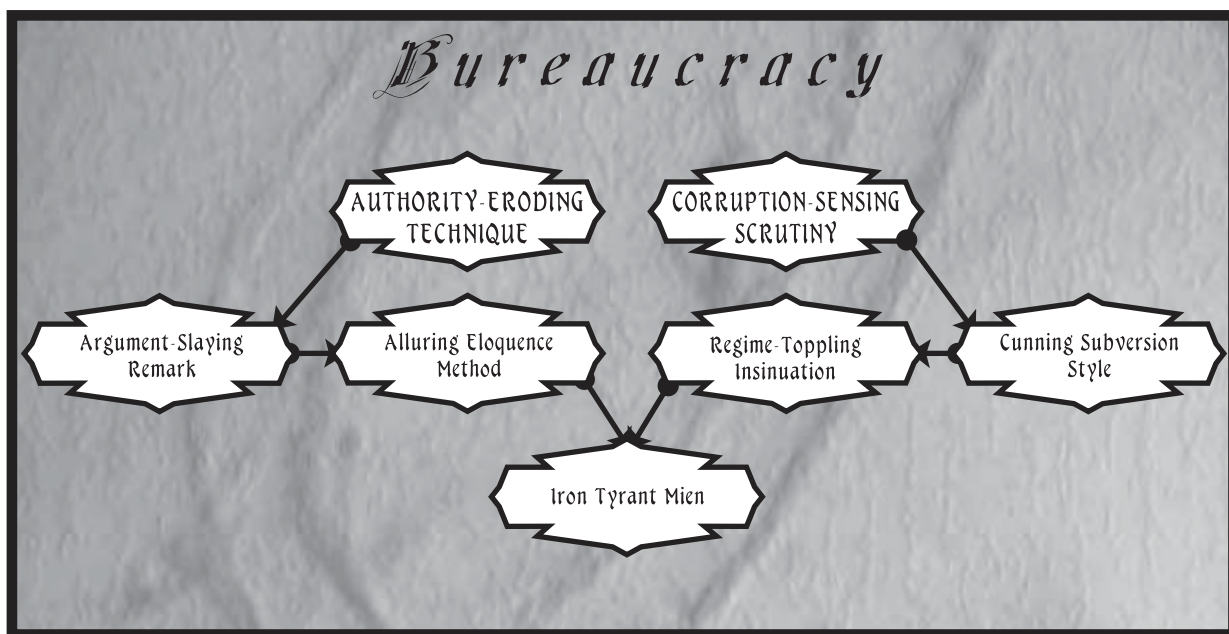
Type: Reflexive

Minimum Bureaucracy: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Authority-Eroding Technique

By speaking brusquely and projecting an aura of menace, an Abyssal with this Charm can cut through the drawn-out process of debate. The targeted argument ends within moments with the best resolution that the Exalt could have achieved with continued discussion. For example, a character could use this Charm to derive the best price from a merchant, saving minutes or perhaps even hours of haggling. Note that Argument-Slaying Remark isn't a perfect "final word" Charm—if an answer would be no regardless of what the Abyssal might say or argue, then



the answer remains no. This Charm simply brings the matter to a conclusion instantly.

ALLURING ELOQUENCE METHOD

Cost: 4 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplementary

Minimum Bureaucracy: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Argument-Slaying Remark

This Charm allows an Exalt to vocalize a course of action or point of view with such eloquence and grace that opponents find it difficult or even impossible to argue. The Abyssal's player makes the Bureaucracy or Performance roll as normal, but all rivals add the deathknight's Essence rating to the difficulty of their counterarguments.

CORRUPTION-SENSING SCRUTINY

Cost: 2 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Bureaucracy: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

With this Charm, an Abyssal can perceive corrupt officials and bureaucrats by a distinctive oily stain on their aura. Alternately, she can intuitively gauge a "clean" official's susceptibility to corruption. Her player rolls Perception + Bureaucracy against a difficulty of the target's Essence score. The amount of information gleaned depends on the number of successes rolled.

Simple success allows the Abyssal to sense whether the target has ever engaged in corruption or not (i.e., accepted a bribe, doctored a report, etc.). With three

successes, the character can measure the depth of a target's corruption or her overall vulnerability to such. Thus, she can distinguish the minor blotches of a plagiarizing poet from the inky coils of a politician who secretly assassinated his rivals. With five successes, the Abyssal gains a vague sense of the target's offenses, though not the context or specifics. This hunch enables the deathknight to take advantage of an official's hidden weakness or vice — or simply to know whom best to bribe.

CUNNING SUBVERSION STYLE

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One week

Type: Simple

Minimum Bureaucracy: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Corruption-Sensing Scrutiny

With a few artfully placed rumors and whispers, an Abyssal with this Charm can sow the seeds of discord and mistrust within a particular bureau or organization. Tempers flare, growing mistrust leads to outright hostility and factionalism; the bureau steadily grinds to a halt and implodes under the weight of indolence and excess. This Charm can fully affect a department whose total membership is no greater than (the deathknight's Essence rating x 20). If the character wishes to affect a larger organization, he must use this Charm multiple times or settle for a slower, lesser effect as the magic strikes randomly. Regardless, it takes time for infighting and paranoia to build to an extent that it actually impedes efficiency. While this is left to Storytellers to adjudicate, the overall corruption and rivalry or lack thereof plays a significant role, as does the quality and strength of leadership within the organization. Generally, this Charm

is beyond the scope of rules and has little tangible effect. Its intangible effects can be quite dramatic, however. Few organizations of mortals can withstand more than a month of this Charm without utterly disintegrating.

REGIME-TOPPLING INSINUATION

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One week

Type: Simple

Minimum Bureaucracy: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Cunning Subversion Style

This Charm closely parallels Cunning Subversion Style. Rather than targeting an organization, however, the Abyssal may focus the havoc against a specific leader. Even if there is no actual coup or assassination attempt — though there might well be — the concomitant treachery and distrust makes all but the most tyrannical despot utterly ineffective. The victim's orders are twisted or disregarded by subordinates, while overall morale drops to an all-time low. Each application of this Charm may affect a number of people equal to the character's Essence rating x 20. As with Cunning Subversion Style, this Charm is primarily a matter of roleplaying rather than rules. Still, it is unlikely that any mortal leader can last more than a month with a hierarchy that hates and mistrusts him. Whether he is pushed out of office or stabbed to death in an alley depends very much on the character and nature of the victim's subordinates and the type of organization. Ironically, true tyrants have little to fear from this Charm, as they already know how to retain authority in the face of negative popular opinion.

IRON TYRANT MIEN

Cost: 12 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One week

Type: Simple

Minimum Bureaucracy: 5

Minimum Essence: 4

Prerequisite Charms: Alluring Eloquence Method, Regime-Toppling Insinuation

Exuding menace and prowess in equal measure, an Abyssal can enchant his very authority to sow fear and discourage rebellion. The character must have some recognized leadership position in order to use this Charm, although the type and scope of leadership doesn't matter. A caravan master can surpass a king in brutal tyranny. While this Charm is active, no one with a Willpower score lower than the character's Essence can bring herself to consider disobedience, let alone participate in outright rebellion.

Individuals with a Willpower rating equal to the character's Willpower may act against the despot, but their players suffer a difficulty increase of the deathknight's

permanent Essence on all Social rolls to rally others to the cause. Characters whose Willpower exceeds the Abyssal's are immune to this Charm, as are all magical beings. Also, this Charm only affects members of the hierarchy over which the Exalt presides. A great monarch could order any subject about but would have no authority over a foreign citizen. Storyteller discretion is particularly important in preventing abuse of this Charm. Of course, a large sphere of influence carries its own risks. Besides the increased likelihood that a strong-willed champion will organize a coup, infamous dictators may attract jealous rivals who wish to usurp their power.

LINGUISTICS

LANGUAGE ABSORBING METHOD

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One week

Type: Simple

Minimum Linguistics: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

With this Charm, an Abyssal may absorb a victim's knowledge of language even as he devours her Essence. The character must have consumed at least 1 mote from the target sometime during the scene — whether through blood drinking, Charms, etc. His player then rolls Wits + Linguistics, with a difficulty of (5 - the total number of motes taken). If this lowers the difficulty below one, no roll is needed. If the roll succeeds, the Abyssal instantly learns one language of his choice known to the target. This knowledge is absolute — the deathknight speaks with perfect fluency and no trace of accent and may read and write in the tongue so long as the target knew how to do so. If the character consumes more than 5 motes, he may also spend double the requisite experience point cost to digest the stolen knowledge and permanently increase his Linguistics rating on the spot. Otherwise, languages absorbed with this Charm fade completely when the Charm expires.

PEERLESS FLUENCY STYLE

Cost: 1 mote per die

Duration: One scene

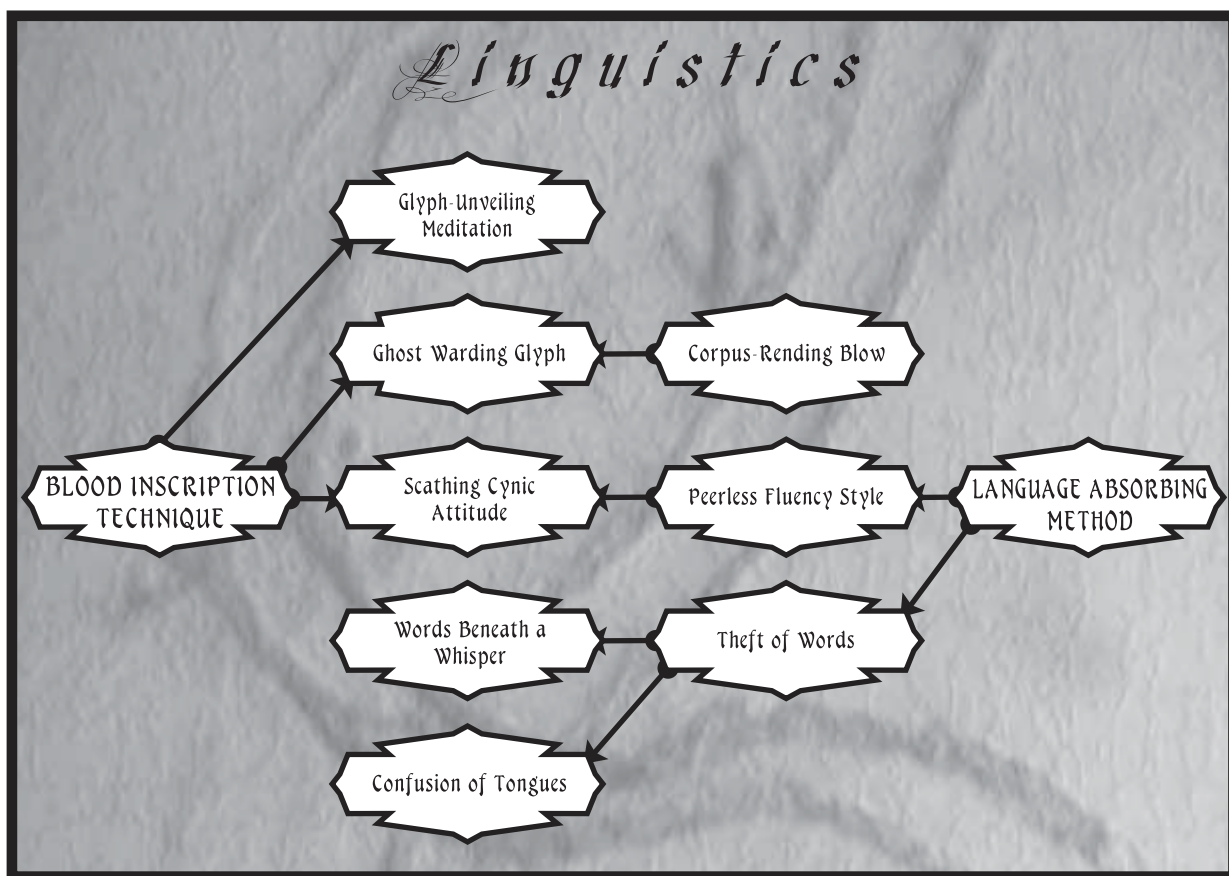
Type: Reflexive

Minimum Linguistics: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Language Absorbing Method

As the warrior-poets of the Underworld, many Abyssal Exalted speak and write with haunting skill and eloquence. For every mote spent on this Charm, the character may add one die to all Linguistics rolls for a specific known language. These dice are mechanically identical to a Linguistics specialty (see *Exalted*, p. 140) and may similarly add to other communication-related



rolls, at Storyteller discretion. The character cannot purchase more bonus dice for any language than her Intelligence score. Note that characters with four or more dice of fluency convey superhuman grace, as is immediately evident to any listener or reader. Indeed, slow-witted mortals may have trouble following the cadence and intricate vocabulary of such characters.

THEFT OF WORDS

Cost: 2 motes + 4 motes per language

Duration: One hour

Type: Simple

Minimum Linguistics: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Language Absorbing Method

With this Charm, an Abyssal can temporarily excise a victim's comprehension of a particular language. The Exalt whispers softly in the maddening dialect of the Malfeans and indicates a target within line of sight. His player then rolls Manipulation + Linguistics against a difficulty of the target's permanent Essence. For every success rolled, the character may spend 5 motes to remove a random language or pick a language known the Abyssal and suppress it. The latter is a gamble, however, unless the Exalt is certain his target knows the language in question. Individuals deprived of all languages cannot speak or write

at all, although they may attempt to grunt and crudely pantomime their intentions. Once the duration ends, the target regains full memory of all her forgotten languages. This Charm has no effect on beings with a higher permanent Essence than the Exalt.

CONFUSION OF TONGUES

Cost: 8 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Linguistics: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Theft of Words

Cursing sharply in the lost tongue of the Malfeans, the Abyssal distorts all communication in a zone around her person. No one inside this area of effect can understand written or spoken language. Familiar letters run together into baffling glyphs, while every spoken phrase twists into complete gibberish. Clever characters may communicate simple concepts with pantomime or crude drawings, but formal or established hand signs convey no more meaning than any spoken tongue. The character makes a Manipulation + Linguistics roll against the targets, with a difficulty equal to the targets' highest permanent Essence. This Charm has no effect on characters whose permanent

Essence matches or exceeds the Abyssal's. However, while such beings hear and see languages as they truly are, their own words remain twisted to affected beings. The zone of distortion extends to a radius of (the character's permanent Essence x 3) yards.

WORDS BENEATH A WHISPER

Cost: 3 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Until released

Type: Simple

Minimum Linguistics: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Theft of Words

An Abyssal with this Charm may bypass language entirely and communicate telepathically. The character must be able to directly sense her target to invoke this Charm. If at any time the Exalt cannot perceive her target, the connection instantly breaks, and the Charm ends. While the link remains, however, the Abyssal can project her thoughts at will as a reflexive action, enabling her to speak with someone she does not share a language with. The target knows the thoughts come from outside his mind, although he cannot pinpoint their source without other magic unless the Exalt identifies herself. Similarly, the target may project his own thoughts and replies along the

link. As with vocalized speech, neither party projects information they do not intend to convey — this Charm does *not* allow deeper mind reading or memory probing, nor does it preclude deception.

BLOOD INSCRIPTION TECHNIQUE

Cost: 4 motes

Duration: One scene

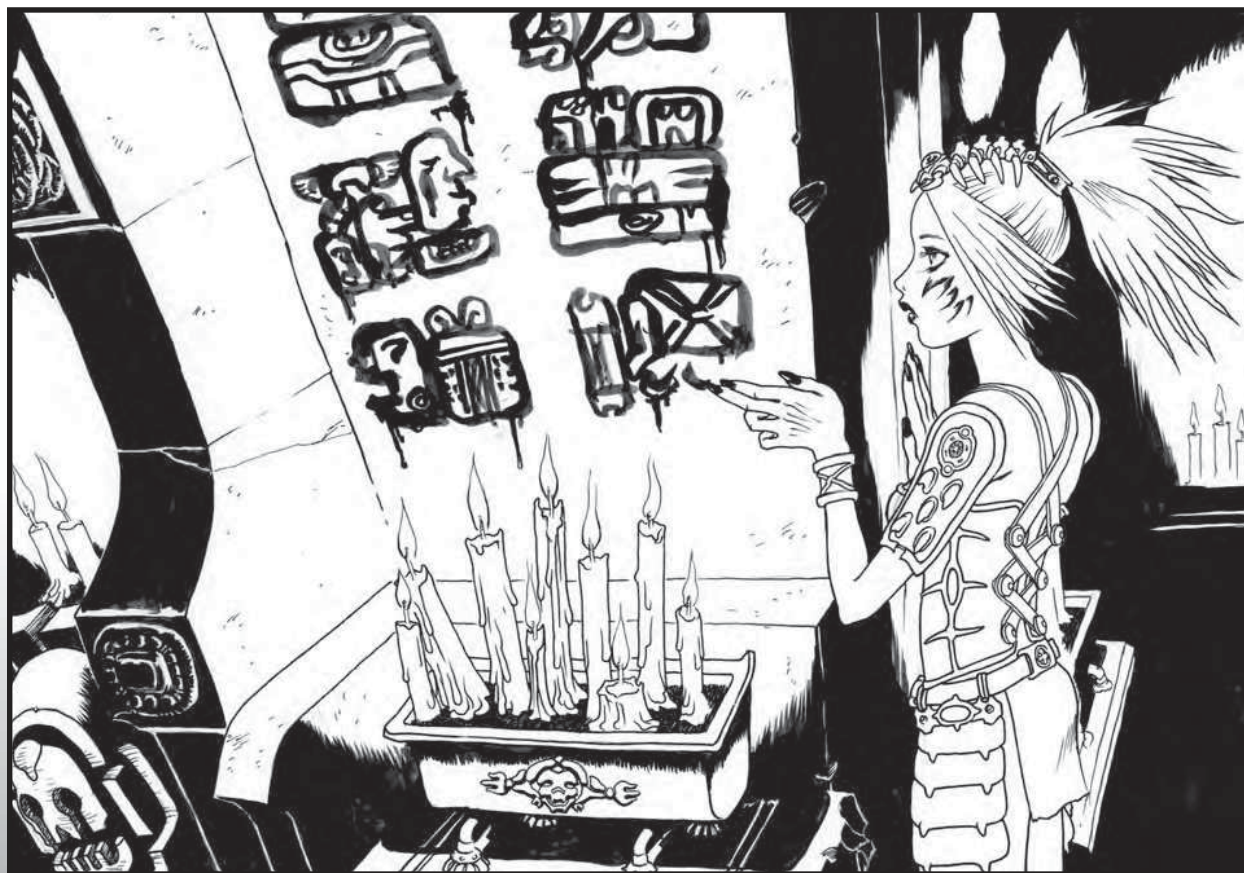
Type: Simple

Minimum Linguistics: 1

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

By channeling Essence-laden blood through his fingertips, an Exalt who knows this Charm always has a means of writing. As the Abyssal traces glyphs with his fingers, his touch leaves runes of indelible crimson. Marks etched with this Charm are virtually indistinguishable from ink stains and can be cleaned or removed as such if the writing surface permits. It is far easier to scrub stone than paper, after all. If used to mark living beings, the glyphs resemble tattoos, but gradually fade over a period of days or weeks like any applied dye. Characters using this Charm write with uncanny precision, easily matching the graceful calligraphy of even a very fine stylus or brush.





GHOST-WARDING GLYPH

Cost: 8 motes

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Linguistics: 2

Minimum Occult: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Corpus-Rending Blow, Blood

Inscription Technique

By tracing a mystical blood rune on a target's forehead, an Abyssal with this Charm may protect an individual from hungry ghosts and walking dead. The mark cannot be washed off and retains a slick appearance even after it dries. For the duration of the Charm, no zombie or bestial ghost will attack the target unless compelled to do so by a necromancer, an Abyssal, a ghost using Arcanoi or some other supernatural compulsion. Sentient ghosts generally leave the character alone out of fear of the Deathlords but are not compelled to do so. This Charm can enchant any human, including Exalted, but any display of an anima banner or Caste Mark burns away the rune and revokes the protection. The Abyssal may use the Ghost-Warding Glyph on himself.

GLYPH-UNVEILING MEDITATION

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One reading

Type: Simple

Minimum Linguistics: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Blood Inscription Technique

By touching a sample of writing, an Abyssal with this Charm can attune his mind to the lingering wisps of memory left by the author. The Exalt can read the targeted work with perfect fluency, but loses attunement and comprehension as soon as he stops reading or reaches the end of the document. Note that it is not necessary to read in a linear manner: He may skim passages, jump ahead and reread sections as many times as desired. However, once the Abyssal halts to pursue another task, the Charm ends. Although an Exalt cannot quote specific passages or recall exact wording after the Charm ends, he still remembers what he read and what it meant.

This Charm does not work against artificial languages, codes and other such methods of deliberately obscuring the content of a work, as the author's intent is devious and the traces left behind are opaque.

SCATHING CYNIC ATTITUDE

Cost: 6 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Linguistics: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Peerless Fluency Style, Blood Inscription Technique

A character using this Charm becomes preternaturally resistant to all forms of persuasion, from simple argument to outright mind control. For the duration of the Charm, the character's Nature changes to Critic. Any time the deathknight is subjected to words or magic that would alter his point of view or perceptions, his player may reflexively roll Willpower against a difficulty of the offending character's Essence. Success allows the Abyssal to scornfully shrug off the suggestion. Characters using this Charm are notably brusque and bitter, which adds +1 to the difficulty of all Charisma rolls. Scathing Cynic Attitude cannot defend against persuasion by beings with a higher permanent Essence than the character's Willpower.

RIDE

SOUL REINS

Cost: 1 mote per point

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Ride: 2

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

A character with this Charm can subdue a mount with his supernatural will. For every mote spent, the targeted animal has its Control Rating reduced by one point. If this reduces the steed's Control Rating to zero, it obeys unhesitatingly and will jump to its death if so directed. Mounts tamed with this Charm only obey the Exalt. All other characters must contend with the beast's normal Control Rating. Soul Reins only affects animals trained for riding — characters cannot jump on the back of a wild tyrant lizard and expect compliance.

MOUNT-BREAKING METHOD

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

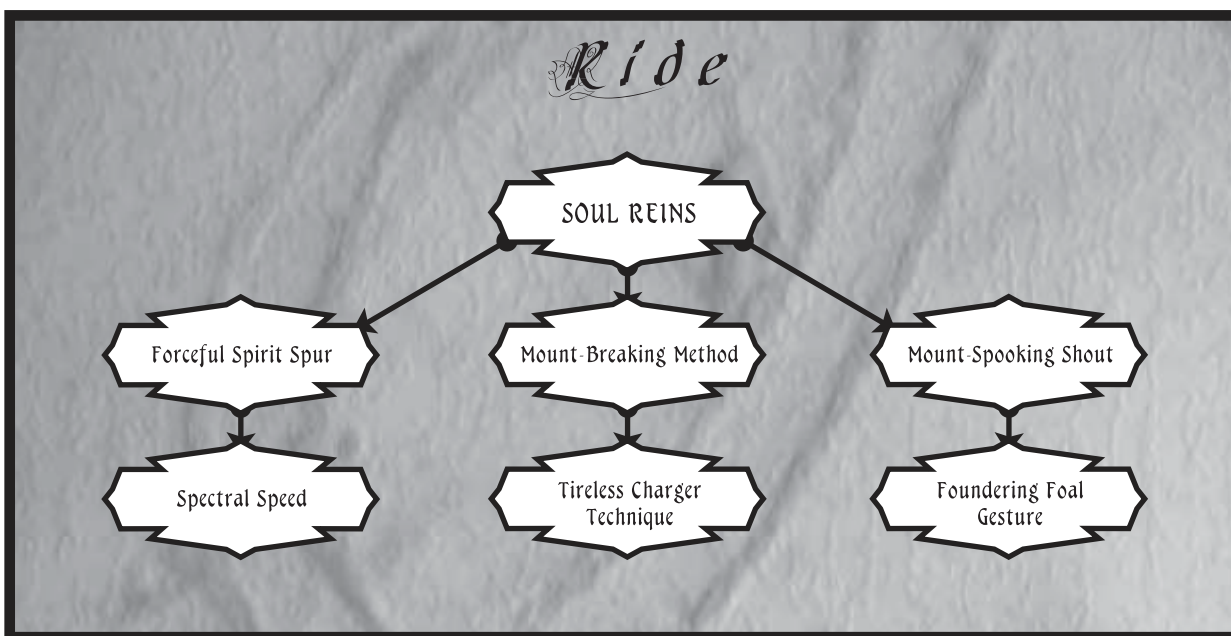
Type: Simple

Minimum Ride: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Soul Reins

Similar to Soul Reins, this Charm allows a deathknight to dominate a steed and subsume its will to her own. Unlike the lesser Charm, however, the effects of Mount-Breaking Method are permanent. The character's player rolls Strength + Ride against a difficulty of the animal's Control Rating. Each success permanently reduces the mount's Control Rating by one point, to a minimum score of one. If the Abyssal's player actually rolls enough successes to reduce a Control Rating to zero, the beast gains immunity to terror when ridden by the Exalt. Although the final outcome is a foregone conclusion based on the results of the roll, the character must still spend the rest of the scene aggressively



taming her steed. Unless this roll is botched, the Exalt will not suffer injury during the training session. This Charm actually weakens the spirit of the beast rather than simply compelling obedience, so the mount's new Control Rating applies to all riders. Mount-Breaking Method may affect any animal that can possibly be trained to accept a rider, even dangerous beasts such as hybroc and bear. The character must have a permanent Essence of 3 or higher to train exotic or deadly animals, however.

TIRELESS CHARGER TECHNIQUE

Cost: 6 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Varies

Type: Simple

Minimum Ride: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Mount-Breaking Method

With this Charm, a mounted character can briefly sustain and push his horse with raw Essence. Tireless Charger Technique lasts until the Abyssal dismounts or a number of hours have passed equal to the deathknight's Ride score. Enchanted steeds have boundless energy and never need to stop for food or water. However, the necrotic Essence powering this Charm also eats at the animal's life force. For every hour or fraction thereof that the Charm is maintained, the horse suffers one level of unsoakable lethal damage. This damage is deferred until the Charm ends. After a horse suffers injury from this Charm, it cannot be safely re-enchanted with this Charm until it fully heals its wounds. Doing otherwise allows the horse to act at full strength again, but immediately kills the mount when the forced march ends.

FORCEFUL SPIRIT SPUR

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Ride: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Soul Reins

An Abyssal with this Charm can silently summon her mount from great distances. The steed feels the bite of phantom spurs digging harshly into its flanks unless it moves at best possible speed toward the Exalt. This Charm has a range of (the character's permanent Essence x 10) miles. The Abyssal must have clearly exerted dominance over the summoned animal at least once before it will answer a summons. Such dominance can have been achieved through physical (such as through beating or rough use of actual spurs) or mystical (as in the case of Soul Reins) means. While animals under the influence of this Charm never get distracted or become lost, they cannot circumvent complex obstacles any better than normal. The compulsion and pain inflicted by this Charm remain in force until the animal reaches its master or moves beyond range.

SPECTRAL STEED

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Ride: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Forceful Spirit Spur

With this Charm, a character may summon a ghost horse from the Essence of the Underworld. Materializing



out of dusky smoke, the beast has the appearance of a pure black stallion with eyes like smoldering coals and sharp teeth no horse alive should have. It has the same statistics as a war horse of excellent quality (see **Exalted**, p. 316), but it is utterly tireless, fearless and inflicts 4L with a successful bite. Spectral steeds do not need food or drink, but enjoy the taste of human flesh and blood. If a character uses this Charm again before its duration expires, a new horse appears, and the old one dissolves with a screaming whinny.

MOUNT-SPOOKING SHOUT

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Ride: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Soul Reins

The Abyssal pours Essence into his voice, unleashing an unholy shriek that terrifies most steeds. All living mounts within earshot of the character rear and bolt unless the players of their riders or team drivers makes a successful Charisma + Ride roll against a difficulty of the shouting Abyssal's Essence. Even if this roll succeeds, affected mounts remain skittish and add one to their Control Rating for the rest of the scene. This increase is cumulative if the Abyssal emits more than one such scream in a scene. Mount-Spooking Shout does not terrify the Abyssal's own steed, nor does the Charm have any effect on beasts other than pack animals or actual mounts.

FOUNDERING FOAL GESTURE

Cost: 4 motes per animal, plus 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Ride: 4

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Mount-Spooking Shout

Gesturing sharply at a mount in her line of sight, the Abyssal curses her target with weakness and pain. The steed cannot move any faster than a walk unless pushed for short agonizing bursts by its rider. Foundering Foal Gesture can affect multiple animals at a cost of 4 motes each. As with Mount-Spooking Shout, this Charm only affects pack animals and steeds, although magical beasts and those strengthened with magic are also immune.

SAIL

MASTER SAILOR'S MEMORY

Cost: 1 mote per dot

Duration: One scene

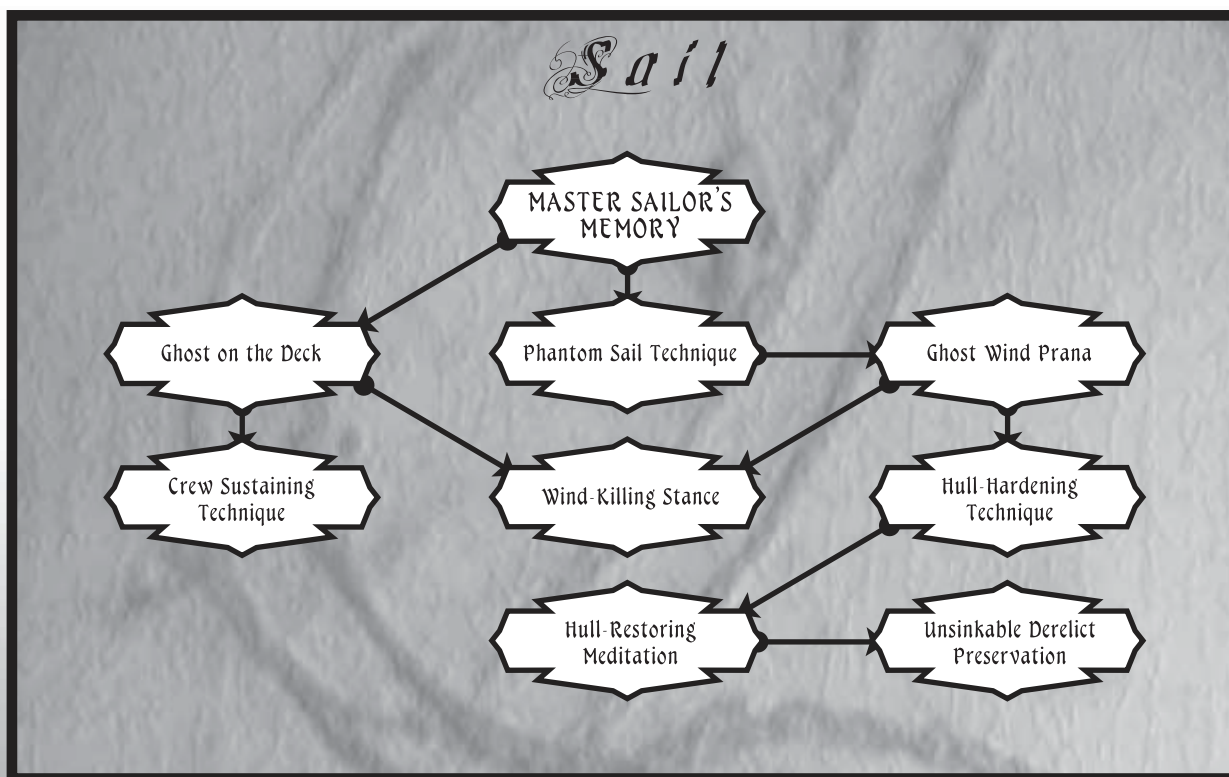
Type: Reflexive

Minimum Sail: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

The character momentarily closes his eyes and dredges memories from the drowned dead of the Underworld. When he opens his eyes, he intuitively understands the craft of sailing as though from decades of experience at sea.



The Exalt adds one dot to his Sail rating for every mote spent, although this Charm cannot raise a character's Sail above 5. In addition, Exalted using this Charm never botch a roll to keep their balance in tumultuous seas, although they can still fall normally.

GHOST ON THE DECK

Cost: 3 motes
Duration: One day
Type: Reflexive
Minimum Sail: 3
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Master Sailor's Memory

The character digs deeper into the memories of sailors long dead, allowing the stolen expertise to guide his every movement. While this Charm is in effect, the Exalt has perfect balance and may effortlessly stride about the deck or scurry up rigging without requiring a roll, even in the middle of a howling typhoon or on impact with a submerged reef. The rest of the crew may fly overboard from the impact or lashing winds, but the Exalt stands eerily unruffled. Characters using this Charm are also completely immune to seasickness.

CREW SUSTAINING TECHNIQUE

Cost: Varies
Duration: One day
Type: Simple
Minimum Sail: 5
Minimum Essence: 3
Prerequisite Charms: Ghost on the Deck

Channeling the Essence of the Underworld and his own life force, the character may reduce a crew's need for food and rest. The character must spend one point of Willpower, plus 1 mote for every four crewmembers or fraction thereof that he wishes to enchant. If there are rats or other vermin aboard, their life energy is absorbed into powering the Charm, reducing the cost to 1 mote per six crewmen. This side effect steadily kills off all pests, including the inevitable weevils in the ship's biscuits, which most sailors regard as a bad omen. Unless a ship is very large or very infested, it takes only two or three applications of this Charm to completely eradicate all vermin aboard.

A sailor ensorcelled with Crew Sustaining Technique needs only a quarter of the food, water and rest that she normally does. She does not suffer from scurvy or other dietary deficiencies from substandard rations and feels unusually enervated. Long-term exposure is dangerous, however. If this Charm is used on a character for more days than her Stamina, each successive day reduces her Stamina by one dot. Characters reduced to zero Stamina die. Lost Stamina returns at the rate of one point per day. Only after a character has fully recovered her Stamina can she be safely enchanted again. This Charm has no effect on

Exalted or other magical beings and cannot be used except to sustain the crew and passengers of a ship.

PHANTOM SAIL TECHNIQUE

Cost: 6 motes
Duration: One day
Type: Reflexive
Minimum Sail: 3
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Master Sailor's Memory

With this Charm, a character channels Essence to patch the rips and tears of a damaged sail and rigging. The character concentrates and raises his hand, summoning a morass of shadows to spread over the targeted sail. For the next 24 hours, the sail behaves as if undamaged and provides appropriate propulsion. If a ship has multiple sails, the Exalt may have to use this Charm more than once. While Phantom Sail Technique can restore clinging tatters to full function, it cannot create a sail from nothing. At least some identifiable vestiges must remain.

GHOST WIND PRANA

Cost: 10 motes
Duration: One scene
Type: Simple
Minimum Sail: 5
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Phantom Sail Technique

The Abyssal stands on deck, arms upraised and crackling with Essence as she summons a cold wind from the Underworld. This wind only exists to propel her vessel and displaces all natural breezes for that purpose, but otherwise, it does not disturb the water or the wind for other ships (though they may hear its eerie howling). Ships so enchanted move as though the wind were full in their sails, regardless of the prevailing wind's direction or the course set by the helmsman. The spectral wind has the same intensity as the winds around it, however, so ships sailing in a hurricane must still contend with the dangers of such a gale.

WIND-KILLING STANCE

Cost: 20 motes, 1 Willpower
Duration: One scene
Type: Simple
Minimum Sail: 5
Minimum Essence: 3
Prerequisite Charms: Ghost on the Deck, Ghost Wind Prana

With this Charm, an Abyssal can extend a zone of stillness from him, displacing even the fiercest gales within its periphery. The Exalt stands on deck and concentrates, tracing a horizontal arc with his arms. At the conclusion of the gesture, a spherical wave of Essence flashes out from the arc to a radius of (the character's



permanent Essence x 15) yards. This wave vanishes almost immediately, but its magic kills all breezes inside its boundary. This artificial stillness moves with the Exalt and lasts for one scene or until its creator dies or moves more than a yard from his original location on deck. The character can still speak and gesture normally while maintaining this Charm, however. Wind-Killing Stance cannot stop magical breezes or breezes called by magical beings unless their creator is substantially less powerful than the Abyssal (Storyteller's discretion). This Charm is primarily used to weather storms and to prevent enemy sailing vessels from escaping.

HULL-HARDENING TECHNIQUE

Cost: 1 mote per 1L of soak, plus 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Sail: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Ghost Wind Prana

By laying hands against a ship and willing Essence to flow through its timbers, an Abyssal with this Charm can mystically reinforce her vessel. The ship gains 1L soak per mote spent, although the deathknight cannot purchase more points of soak than his Stamina + Sail. This limit applies to all applications of the Charm in a scene. Hull-Hardening Technique does not require Willpower if used to strengthen a ship while another application the Charm remains active. Hulls regularly treated with this Charm look bleached and weathered before their time, although they retain the durability of their true age.

HULL-RESTORING MEDITATION

Cost: Varies, plus 1 Willpower

Duration: Special

Type: Simple

Minimum Sail: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Hull-Hardening Technique

The Abyssal extends his anima in a myriad of tendrils through the hull, caulking and patching breaches and split seams with raw Essence. Within moments, this energy calcifies into a durable material with the consistency and appearance of bleached bone. Repairing combat damage requires the Abyssal to spend motes equal to the ship's damaged or destroyed rating, as appropriate to the severity of damage. For non-combat repairs and general caulking, the Storyteller should assign an Essence cost based on the severity of damage and the ship's size. Sealing a leaky warship requires considerably more Essence than a river yacht.

While this Charm can stave off certain destruction by sealing massive breaches, it does not remove handling penalties for water trapped in the hull. Such penalties remain until the water is pumped or bailed out normally.

This Charm requires something resembling an intact hull to work. It cannot regenerate entire missing segments, let alone restore a ruined hulk. Ships repeatedly treated with this Charm look far more like floating skeletons of behemoths than vessels fashioned by human hands. This Charm cannot repair ships of First Age design. This Charm lasts for a number of hours equal to the Abyssal's Essence in Creation, but if the ship is in or enters a shadowland or the Underworld while the hull is so patched, the patches will endure so long as it does not leave that shadowland or the Underworld.

UNSINKABLE DERELICT PRESERVATION

Cost: 10 motes, 2 Willpower

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Sail: 5

Minimum Essence: 4

Prerequisite Charms: Hull-Restoring Meditation

Although it is possible to strengthen and repair vessels with lesser Charms, an Abyssal with Unsinkable Derelict Preservation can enchant a ship to ignore damage entirely. The Exalt channels Essence through the ship's hull, temporarily sealing all breaks and gashes with translucent wisps of relic from the Underworld. Ships ensorcelled with this Charm act entirely as if whole, keeping out water and moving with their normal maneuverability and speed. Further damage is also similarly ignored for the Charm's duration. Once the Charm's protection ends, severely damaged vessels take on water and sink normally. This Charm can even restore a rotting hulk to full operation, so long as enough of the hull remains to identify the ship. Vessels that have broken asunder cannot be enchanted, as they lack the material foundation to accept relic grafts. Ultimately, the Storyteller is the final arbiter of whether or not a ship retains enough substance to preserve. This Charm can affect First Age ships.

SOCIALIZE

EXQUISITE ETIQUETTE STYLE

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: One scene

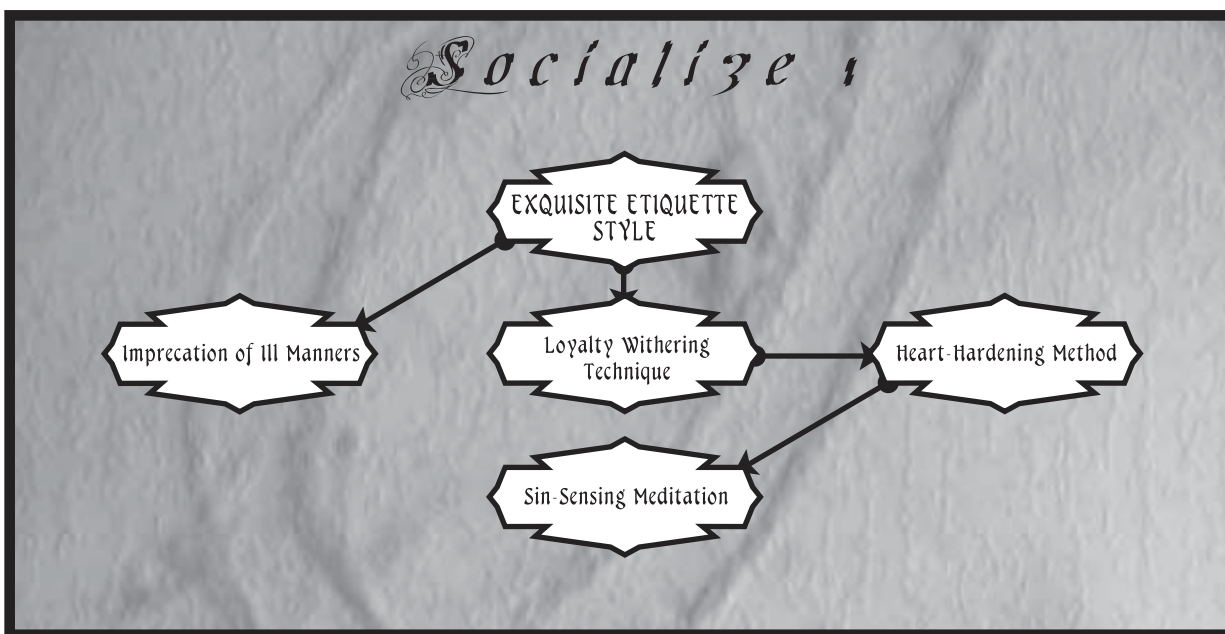
Type: Reflexive

Minimum Socialize: 2

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

The Abyssal attunes his mind to the communal memories of the dead to act with due propriety and decorum. Characters under the effects of this Charm become faultlessly — but not officiously — polite. They instinctively know the appropriate greeting customs or table manners for their situation and never run the risk of making an unintentional faux pas. This Charm is of paramount importance when dealing with ancient ghosts whose cultures and customs have long since fallen to the passing of Ages.



IMPRECATION OF ILL MANNERS

Cost: 1 mote per 1 die

Duration: One turn

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Socialize: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Exquisite Etiquette Style

The Abyssal concentrates on a victim in his line of sight, silently projecting a surge of visceral anger into her subconscious. For the rest of the turn, the target loses one die from all Socialize dice pools for every mote spent. This reduction manifests as poor manners, Freudian slips and other, similar gaffes. It is impossible to determine that the Charm's target is acting under the influence of a curse without magical means, although astute observers (Perception + Awareness 4+) may suspect that *something* is amiss (Perception + Presence, difficulty equal to the Abyssal's Essence). Abyssal Exalted normally employ Imprecation of Ill Manners to sabotage negotiations at a critical juncture or to discredit rivals.

LOYALTY WITHERING TECHNIQUE

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: Varies

Type: Simple

Minimum Socialize: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Exquisite Etiquette Style

Caressing a victim's mind with the corrupting taint of the Void, an Abyssal with this Charm can plant seeds of doubt in the faithful and erode trust in favor of treachery. The character need only spend a few minutes talking with her target; her player then rolls Manipulation + Socialize

against a difficulty chosen by the Storyteller. This difficulty reflects the overall devotion of the target to the selected individual or cause. If she rolls enough successes, the target becomes suspicious and hostile toward whom-ever or whatever the Abyssal desires. This treacherous dislike lasts a number of hours equal to the deathknight's permanent Essence. If the Exalt receives more successes than necessary, this duration is measured in days rather than hours. This Charm has no effect on beings with a higher Essence rating than the Abyssal.

HEART-HARDENING METHOD

Cost: 6 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Socialize: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Loyalty Withering Technique

By infecting a target's very soul with festering Essence, the Abyssal can scour a heart of honor and righteousness. The Exalt must spend several minutes talking to the target, casting doubt on the importance of a particular Virtue. Her player then rolls Manipulation + Socialize, with a difficulty equal to the targeted Virtue. The victim temporarily loses one dot of the appropriate Virtue for every success in excess of its rating. If the number of successes exceeds the target's Willpower score, the target also loses a permanent dot of the Virtue. Whether temporary or permanent, this Charm cannot reduce a Virtue below a rating of one. Virtues that are temporarily diminished return at the rate of one dot per hour. The Abyssal can even use this Charm on herself, with appropriate successes detracting from the targeted Virtue as normal. While this rationalization process has its uses — particularly in situations when scruples



Socialize 2

PASSION-UNVEILING
GLANCE

Intimations of Mortality

are a liability — the Abyssal risks permanent Virtue loss if she rationalizes too well.

Although a victim ensorcelled by this Charm retains his Nature, his behavior reflects his new Virtue rating. A Thrillseeker deprived of his once-considerable Valor will be torn by desires and a curiosity he can no longer bring himself to express. Likewise, a Survivor dropped to Compassion 1 will do practically anything to anyone in order to preserve his existence.

SIN-SENSING MEDITATION

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Socialize: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Heart-Hardening Method

As cynical as they are pragmatic, characters with this Charm recognize that *everyone* can be bought. Their price might not be in jade or jewels — perhaps in a guiltier pleasure, a secret vice instead — but regardless, there is always something a person cannot resist or refuse. To have the object of her desire, an individual will betray her closest friends or worse. Upon activating this Charm, an Abyssal knows precisely what that object is for his target. He may not have the means of satisfying the desire in question, particularly if it is nigh impossible to acquire, but at least, he knows. The Storyteller should decide the nature of a target's weakness, keeping in mind her Nature and Temperance score. Low Temperance characters are less disciplined and, thus, have easier wants to satisfy. High Temperance characters are invariably more difficult and complicated to satiate. It is always possible that some beatific saint exists on whom this Charm would have no effect, but no deathknight has ever met such a person in the decadent Age of Sorrows.

PASSION-UNVEILING GLANCE

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Socialize: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

With this Charm, an Abyssal perceives the flickering aura of emotion and passion overlaying her target. The Abyssal's player rolls Perception + Socialize. This roll is made at standard difficulty if the target is not trying to conceal or misrepresent his feelings. Otherwise, the target's player reflexively rolls Manipulation + Performance to resist. The amount of information the Abyssal gleans depends on the number of successes rolled beyond any the target may have garnered. Simple success reveals the target's most dominant surface emotion. With three successes, the Abyssal can sense all of a target's surface feelings and gauge their rough proportion to one another (i.e., strong admiration with a touch of jealousy). Five or more successes allow the Abyssal to sense all emotions her target currently feels, as well as giving her a rough sense of the target's permanent Willpower and Virtue allocation (weak, unremarkable, strong, overpowering, etc.). Regardless of the successes rolled, this Charm does not provide context. Even if a deathknight notices coiling tendrils of hatred in a target's aura, she doesn't automatically know who he hates or why he hates them.

INTIMATIONS OF MORTALITY

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Socialize: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Passion-Unveiling Glance

Some Abyssal Exalted are particularly adept at seeding the minds of mortals with such doubts about the true



nature of life and death that they come to be obsessed with their own mortality. A deathknight must speak with a target at least briefly (the exchange need be only a few sentences), and the Abyssal's player then makes a Manipulation + Socialize roll with a difficulty of the target's permanent Essence. If successful, the target becomes depressed and withdrawn, suffering a +2 difficulty to all Social rolls for the next 24 hours. If this Charm is used continuously on an unExalted target for more days than her Conviction rating, her depression blossoms into an actual derangement. Targets thus afflicted continue to suffer Social penalties even after the Charm wears off.

NECROMANCY

Although many Abyssal Exalted delve into studies of sorcery, their own dark art of necromancy remains their greatest and least-understood asset. Just as the Abyssal Exalted are death-tainted mirrors of their Solar cousins, necromancy is a death-tainted mirror of sorcery itself — yet a fundamentally distinct form of magic. Sorcery involves the willful channeling of living Essence to reshape Creation. Necromancy similarly reshapes the Underworld with its own Essence or draws it inexorably closer to the realm of the living. Many sorcerers consider the very idea of necromancy a blasphemous abomination, yet it was the Twilight Caste that first explored the art in the First Age. The Deathlords are perhaps the only relics of that study remaining in the Age of Sorrows.

In order to understand what necromancy is, it is necessary to understand what it is not. It is not sorcery. Sorcery is as flexible as it is powerful, capable of influencing or outright directing virtually any aspect of Creation. Necromancy, on the other hand, sacrifices much of this flexibility for raw power and specialization — which is why First Circle necromancers can sometimes work magic comparable to Celestial Circle Sorcery. Unfortunately for its practitioners, necromancy really is limited. It does the job marvelously for killing large numbers of people, raising undead and enchanting the souls of the living or dead alike. It does less well manipulating shadows, leveling curses and dealing with other aspects associated with death or the Void. Yet, there is precious little else that necromancy can do. Certainly there are necromancers who find unconventional ways of employing their art — raising morbid palaces of bone and marble, for example. But then, there are sorcerers who animate bone lions and wield blood lashes. Crossover between the two disciplines happens; it's just that each has an area of expertise.

RULES

Much like sorcery, necromancy is divided into three circles of power, with separate spells at each level. Instead of ascending from earth to Heaven in the progression of Terrestrial, Celestial and Solar, the three circles of necromancy descend in growing power from Shadowlands to Labyrinth and, finally, to Void. Characters using necromancy must possess the appropriate Charm to do so and



NO, IT'S NOT EVIL SORCERY

Necromancy channels the dead Essence of the Underworld. Sorcery channels the living Essence of Creation. However, this distinction does not make necromancy inherently evil, any more than sorcery is inherently good. Sorcerers can cure plagues and reverse droughts and create beautiful palaces out of thin air, but they also traffic with demons, summon monsoons of poisonous acid rain and lay curses so foul they can flay a soul. Necromancers, on the other hand, create undead and bind ghosts to their service, but they can also protect the living from the dead and consult with revered heroes and ancestors. Any attempt to classify one school of magic as “evil” and the other as “good” is doomed to failure — necromancy and sorcery have no innate morality. As always, it is the intention and action of each magician that matters.

must invoke both spell and Charm concurrently to work an effect. Minimum casting times for each circle also parallel sorcery, as does the time and effort required to learn or invent new spells. One notable difference is the danger of miscast necromancy versus sorcery. Necromancy channels the very energy of Oblivion. As such, Essence burns from a botched spell inflict aggravated damage. Precious few necromancers survive their first serious mistake.

GUIDELINES AND COMPARISONS

Death: No sorcerer or necromancer can restore true life to the dead. In the world of **Exalted**, death is a passage that offers no return.

Raising Undead: Celestial Circle Sorcery can animate a zombie, while Solar Circle Sorcery can raise a slightly stronger or more intelligent zombie. No circle of sorcery can create complicated or greater undead, such as skull-rams and spine chains. Conversely, Shadowlands Circle Necromancy can easily create multiple zombies simultaneously or raise an exceptional creature for a specific task. Labyrinth Circle Necromancy can call entire armies of shambling corpses to unlife, while masters of the Void Circle may raise the bloated corpses and skeletons of behemoths to serve at their behest. The Mask of Winters raised Juggernaut with such magic.

Summoning Ghosts: Celestial Circle sorcerers can summon ghosts, albeit with greater difficulty than other spirits. The Solar Circle permits a lengthier or more difficult summoning, such as calling a nephwrack from the heart of the Labyrinth. Shadowlands Circle necromancers can bind ghosts with ease, while their counterparts among the Labyrinth Circle can lay intricate compulsions on the dead. Malfeans stir in their sleep when Void Circle necromancers call their names.

NECROMANCY AND OTHER EXALTED

Although the Abyssals are the undisputed masters of necromancy, they are not the only Exalted to practice death magic. Though Terrestrial Exalted lack the power to see beyond their living elemental nature, any Celestial Exalted can learn Shadowlands Circle Necromancy (substituting Intelligence for Occult in the Lunar variation). Solar Exalted can learn as deep as the Labyrinth Circle. Despite this innate capability, the only non-Abyssal necromancers in the Age of Sorrows are a tiny handful of the Favored of Saturn. Still, the Twilight Caste were the original necromancers of the First Age. It will not be long before the Descending Suns unearth the twisted secrets of death once more.

THE SHADOWLANDS CIRCLE

The Shadowlands Circle is the weakest circle of death magic, named for the spiritual blights that emerge where Creation and the Underworld bleed into one another. Most Abyssal Exalted eventually learn this circle as their natural birthright, though, of course, it is most common among the Daybreak Caste.

HUNGRY CREEPING SHADOW

Cost: 15 motes

The necromancer opens her mouth as if to scream, and a viscous black ooze pours forth, gathering into a horrible amorphous creature of liquid shadow that pursues any one target in its creator's line of sight. The beast has Physical Attributes and a Brawl Ability equal to its creator's permanent Essence and a number of health levels equal to its creator's Stamina + Essence. It is immune to all purely kinetic damage, such as from swords or fists, but has no soak against fire or magical damage. Like the undead, it lacks Virtues but never fails Valor checks. The Hungry Creeping Shadow can flow up walls and through narrow pipes or under most doors and unerringly follows its quarry. If it catches its victim, the beast attempts to clinch and slowly crush the life from her. The creature only exists for one hour. Upon its demise, it boils away to a slimy residue.

IRON COUNTERMAGIC

Cost: 10 or 20 motes

With this spell, the Exalted can absorb and smother the energy of hostile necromancy. If the character spends 10 motes, she may slash at the air, tearing ribbons of black power to swirl and bleed around her person. This shield negates all hostile spells of the Shadowlands Circle directed at her until the end of the next turn, but its cold also seeps into her joints and bones, inflicting a -2 penalty to all Physical actions for as long as it persists. Alternately, for 20

motes, the caster can extinguish a single Shadowlands Circle spell within a number of feet equaling her permanent Essence x 50. Extant spells are disintegrated, while spells in the process of being cast are torn asunder.

This spell is extremely fast and takes effect as soon as the character spends Willpower. Countermagic cannot banish summoned ghosts, although it can break bonds of servitude wrought by necromancy. Also, spells countered with Iron Countermagic shatter into freezing Abyssal Essence, possibly injuring bystanders or withering plant life as the magic unravels. The necromancer using the countermagic is entirely safe, however.

More powerful versions of this spell exist at higher circles: Onyx for Labyrinth and Obsidian for Void. Each protects against spells of their own circle or below. If used to counter a spell of a lower circle, the countermagic annihilates the spell utterly without any side effects or collateral damage. Countered Void Circle spells slay mortal bystanders and ravage the earth, although in most cases, the backlash will pale compared to the intended effects of the spell.

Necromantic countermagic can also oppose sorcery if it is one circle higher, and vice versa. Thus, Sapphire Countermagic (see *Exalted*, p. 221) may counter Shadowlands Circle spells, while Obsidian Countermagic may block Celestial Circle Sorcery, etc. The personal shield/direct extinguishing costs for Onyx and Obsidian Countermagic are 15 motes/20 motes and 20 motes/25 motes respectively.

PIERCING THE SHROUD

Cost: 10 motes

The necromancer concentrates and murmurs a discordant incantation that shakes the earth in the immediate vicinity and unnerves all natural animals who hear it. This chant takes 10 minutes minus the caster's Occult score to finish, to a minimum duration of one minute. At the conclusion of the chant, the Exalt reaches out with a blade and cuts a vertical slash in the air. As the blade passes, it tears the fabric of Creation itself and opens a shimmering rift to the Labyrinth. The rift persists for a number of turns equal to its creator's permanent Essence before closing with a horrible sucking sound. This spell only permits a necromancer to enter the Labyrinth — the character must find her own way out.

RAISE THE SKELETAL HORDE

Cost: Varies

As she prepares this spell, a ball of crackling Essence grows and envelops the necromancer's clenched hand. This sphere glows darkly and pulsates like a beating heart, finally erupting at the conclusion of the spell in a cascade of jagged lightning that arcs and forks to strike the nearest intact human carcasses or skeletons within 100 yards. Corpses struck by this obscene energy spend the rest of the turn getting to their feet or clawing their way from the earth as appropriate to their location. Skeletons and zombies raised with this Charm have the same statistics as common zombies (see

Exalted p. 299), though they are always extras. Once raised, such creatures obey their creator to the best of their limited Intelligence. This spell creates one zombie for every 5 motes spent. Alternately, the necromancer may opt to spend only 3 motes per zombie, but such creatures lose all animation at the end of the scene. Characters may not create both permanent and temporary minions in the same casting.

There are also two Labyrinth Circle versions of this spell. Arisen Legion duplicates the effect of Raise the Skeletal Horde but reduces the Essence cost to 3 motes per permanent zombie or 1 mote per temporary zombie. The second variation, Call the Greater Servitor, costs 6 motes for each minion, but the caster cannot create temporary zombies or raise more corpses in a single casting than his Occult score. Zombies raised with Call the Greater Servitor are never extras and have an Intelligence and Melee of 2, allowing them to use weapons, to wear armor and to obey more complicated instructions.

RUNE OF SWEET PASSING

Cost: 15 motes

The necromancer spends an hour painting an elaborate pattern of glyphs on a naked mortal's skin. The Exalt must use paint made from human blood mixed with soil taken from a grave. At the conclusion of the ritual, the runes flare with red light and soak into the target's skin. Once a mortal has been treated with this spell, she is assured of becoming a ghost upon death. The necromancer also knows immediately when the target dies, although he does not know the circumstances or location of her passing. This spell only creates ghosts; it does not compel their service or loyalty. Targets of this spell need not be willing, although unwilling targets must generally be restrained. This spell has no effect on the Exalted or other magical beings.

SHADE PRISON AMULET

Cost: 10 motes

This spell can enchant any piece of bone jewelry to become a vessel for hungry ghosts. The necromancer etches runes into the object's surface and invests it with Essence. If the amulet touches a hungry ghost, it sucks the soul into itself in a swirl of wind. Each amulet can store only one ghost, and the imprisonment lasts only so long as the talisman remains intact. Once the prison breaks, the ghost escapes to wreak havoc, although it will not attack the person that freed it. Breaking a prison by daylight destroys the trapped spirit.

A Labyrinth Circle version of this spell, Bauble of the Captive Soul, follows the same rules but can capture any ghost it touches. This spell costs 15 motes.

SOUL BRAND

Cost: 15 motes

By pressing her palm against an unExalted mortal's flesh and whispering a benediction to the Malfeans, a necromancer with this spell can mystically tattoo him with a rune of power.



This rune confers the same protection as a Ghost-Warding Glyph (see page 216), but the effects are permanent unless the necromancer withdraws the protection. If the glyph is ever removed, whether through countermagic or the whim of its creator, it inflicts the necromancer's permanent Essence as dice of lethal damage as it burns away. Should a branded mortal ever become Exalted, his rune vanishes without causing injury in a flash of pain and light. This spell is often used to brand the foreheads or palms of favored servants.

SUMMON GHOST

Cost: 15+ motes

This spell calls one of the Restless Dead and binds her to the service of the necromancer. This spell can only be cast at night or in the Underworld itself, and it involves an hour-long ritual requiring an unbroken circle of blood or bone-dust. The character must also know the name of the ghost he wishes to summon or have a piece of her corpse in his possession. The actual spell itself costs 10 motes to tear a portal to the Underworld and call forth the target.

Once a ghost is summoned, the necromancer must overpower her soul with an opposed Willpower + Essence test. For every 5 additional motes the Exalt spends during casting, the ghost's pool decreases by one die. This struggle continues with rolls made each turn, until one character accumulates three more successes than the other. If the ghost wins, she immediately escapes through the portal and cannot be recalled by the necromancer for a full year. If the Exalt wins, the ghost must obey him for one year or fulfill a single task that can have infinite duration. This binding only forces the ghost to obey the letter of the necromancer's commands, rather than their intent, but most ghosts will fully comply rather than risk the wrath of an Exalted. Once the ghost fulfills its obligation, it vanishes back to its original location in the Underworld.

Although ghosts make excellent servants, their usefulness in the living world is limited by their difficulty in regaining Essence. Necromancers employing such vassals must be sure to feed them motes of Essence, either their own or from libations of human blood. Though they resent servitude, few ghosts will plot revenge when their terms of service end, if only out of fear. On the other hand, summoning a courtier or honored servant of a Deathlord can have dire repercussions indeed.

The sorcery version of this spell belongs to the Celestial Circle and follows the same rules, save that the ritual takes three hours and summoned ghosts cannot be bound for longer than a lunar month. Astrology cannot not benefit summoners of the dead.

WALKING WAR MACHINE

Cost: Varies

Few weapons sow as much terror among living armies as the undead siege engines employed by the Deathlords. With this spell, a necromancer can use Essence to animate such devices. The Exalt must first build or oversee the building of

the monstrosity with his player making an extended Intelligence + Craft (Necrosurgery) roll to represent this. Bodies must be cut and stitched together and any grafts of metal inserted where appropriate. The Storyteller decides the difficulty based on the size and complexity of the weapon. For example, a spine chain needs one success for every two segments. Once the creature is complete, the necromancer simply touches it and invests 5 motes for every success needed to assemble it. Monsters created with this Charm serve their master to the best of their limited Intelligence. Statistics for spine chains can be found on page 300 of *Exalted*. Other devices are left to players' imagination and Storyteller approval but should be of a similar power level.

THE LABYRINTH CIRCLE

The Labyrinth sits beneath the skin of Creation, the great incomprehensible maze at the heart of the Underworld. Just as the Labyrinth sits closer to the ultimate source of death than the shadowlands do, so too does magic of the Labyrinth Circle delve closer to the source of necromancy. In the First Age, a few corrupt Solar Exalted of the Twilight Caste knew necromancy of this circle, but the current Age finds the Deathlords and their Daybreak servants its undisputed masters.

EXQUISITE UNDEAD AIDE

Cost: 20 motes

Instead of raising a mindless shambling horde, a necromancer with this spell can create a single powerful servant to act as a lieutenant or majordomo. The creature begins with the same statistics as a common zombie (see *Exalted*, p. 299), with the following modifications: All Attributes save for Appearance have a minimum rating of 2. The creature gains a number of Ability dots equal to its creator's Intelligence + Occult, which may be allocated to any Abilities the caster knows. No Ability can exceed the necromancer's own rating, however. The zombie never decays any further, although it exudes a distinctive musty reek that clearly marks it as one of the undead. The creature may speak in clipped rasping phrases, although it only speaks in response to questions from its master or in fulfillment of her orders. It is not considered an extra and has a full complement of health levels.

Zombies created with this spell typically serve one specific function: housekeeper, bodyguard, porter, etc. Powerful necromancers are even known to create meticulous undead laboratory assistants to assist them in the creation of more monsters.

HUNDRED SHADE BREATH

Cost: Varies

The necromancer inhales and concentrates, building the spell inside her lungs. When the magic is ready, she opens her mouth wide and a glowing blue fog rushes out in dozens of curling tendrils as she exhales. Over the next turn, these wisps coalesce into hungry ghosts — one for every 2 motes of Essence spent. These ghosts have normal statistics (see *Exalted*, p. 300) and are all extras. Obviously, this spell is of no use during the day, as sunlight

would instantly burn the assembled horde to ash. At the end of the scene in which they were summoned, any “surviving” ghosts dissolve to mist and flow back into the necromancer’s mouth. Motes spent on this spell remain committed only so long as the ghosts exist. Every ghost that perishes frees 2 motes from the committed total.

IVORY RAZOR FOREST

Cost: 25 motes

The necromancer gestures in the direction of his enemies, and a shockwave of Essence skims the earth toward them. The wave is invisible except as a rippling distortion in the air and causes no injury. However, in its wake, dozens or even hundreds of great spines of gleaming bone tear up through the earth at great speed, to a maximum height of the caster’s permanent Essence in yards. The razor-edged blades cut through everything in their path, inflicting 8L damage that cannot be blocked, only dodged. The spell affects a total area of (the necromancer’s Charisma + Occult x 10) square yards, although this area can be divided into any shape or configuration as the caster sees fit. Some prefer to break apart troop formations with long narrow swaths, while others grow the bones into impassable fences or ramparts. The spikes shatter into dust after a number of days equal to their creator’s Essence, but have the durability of a brick wall until that time (see *Exalted*, p. 239). The blades are densely packed enough that nothing larger than a rabbit can slip through the cracks, and being thrown against them also inflicts 8L.

REAPING THE FALLEN

Cost: 25 motes

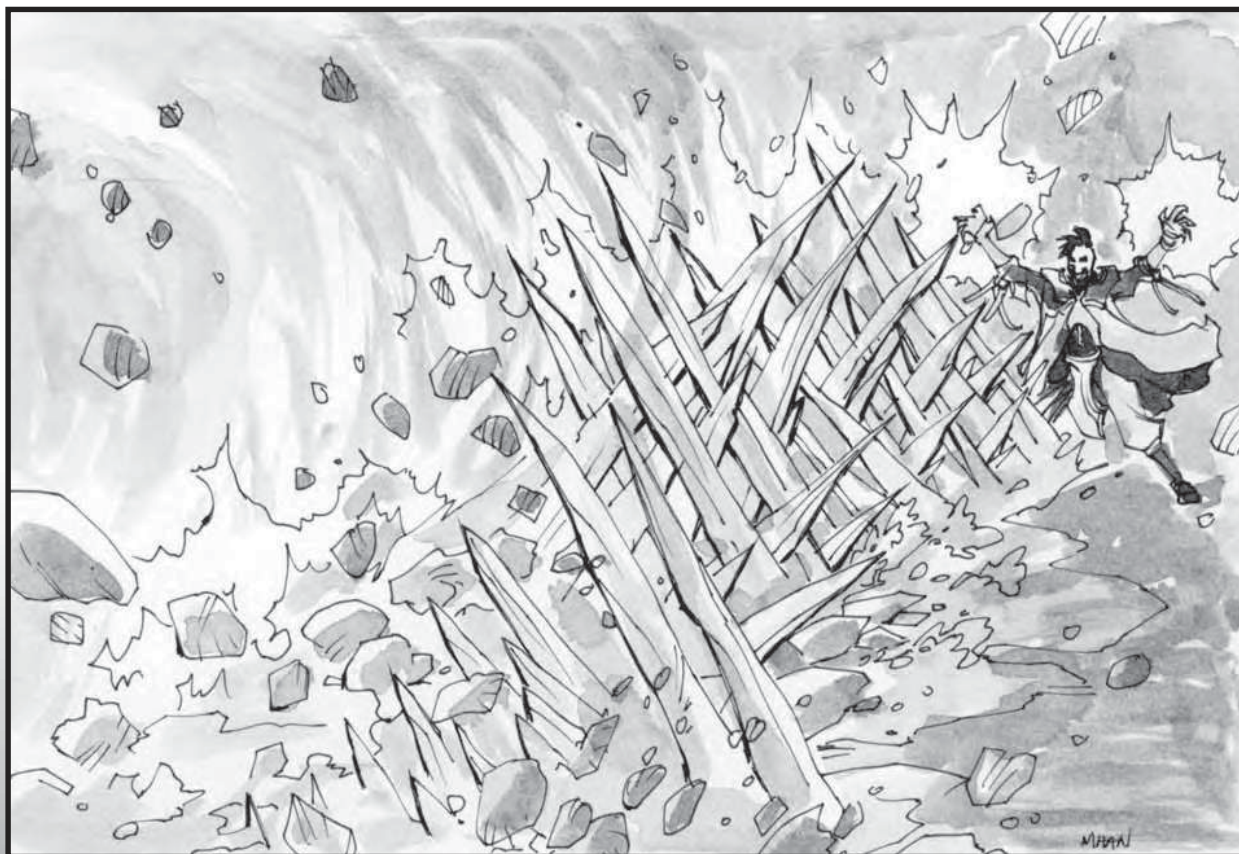
With this spell, a necromancer opens her soul to draw power from death. Her anima erupts to its full iconic glory regardless of whether she spent Personal or Peripheral Essence, while her face contorts into a mask of inhuman rage and hunger. For the rest of the scene, the character gains 1 mote for every sentient living being that dies within a league of her, up to her usual maximum. Obviously, this spell is only useful in the presence of mass carnage, such as a massacre or a military battle. In such settings, the Storyteller should assign how many motes the character gains each turn instead of awarding Essence on a per death basis.

A Void Circle version of this spell, *Blood from the Slaughter*, instead allows the necromancer to supplant his own life force with the energy released by carnage. At the end of each turn, the character regenerates one level of bashing or lethal damage for every living sentient killed within one league, but the character cannot regenerate more levels per turn than his permanent Essence. *Blood from the Slaughter* costs 35 motes to invoke.

SPITEFUL PASSING

Cost: Special

Faced with the bitterness of his own demise, a necromancer with this spell may unleash his hate in a final blast of power. Although he must still spend a turn concentrating,





the character need only speak one word to cast this spell. He may scream in defiance or weakly cough his last syllables from blood-flecked lips, but the effects remain the same. His body arches in pain and expires as searing light erupts from its opened mouth, eyes and wounds. All living beings and Fair Folk within a number of yards equal to the necromancer's Stamina suffer his permanent Essence in dice of lethal damage, plus one additional die for every mote remaining in his pool. This damage bypasses armor. It is soaked only with the victim's own natural soak, and it inflicts no physical trauma—victims killed by the spell simply drop where they stand, while survivors feel a terrible cold grip them. All plants within range wither and die. The necromancer's corpse rots to dust within moments of the blast.

STEALING THE GATHERED BREATH

Cost: 15 motes

The necromancer opens his mouth and inhales, drawing energy from every sentient living being within (the character's permanent Essence x 5) yards. All victims within range suffer one die of lethal damage that can only be soaked with Stamina. Each level of damage actually inflicted by this spell restores 1 mote of Essence to the necromancer. Energy harvested with this spell can be seen by all onlookers as streams of pale light rushing from its victims to the necromancer's maw.

STRIKING SPECTRE LASH

Cost: 15 motes + 2 motes per attack

Upon casting this spell, a long tendril of solidified darkness grows from the necromancer's wrist or palm. This serpentine appendage undulates and coils of its own volition, striking more like a darting snake or an octopoid tentacle than any mundane whip. The lash has a Speed, Accuracy and Defense rating equal to its master's Essence score and a length in yards of four times this value. Its base damage equals its creator's Strength + Essence. In addition to inflicting normal damage and permitting grappling attacks at range, the whip can kill ordinary mortals and animals outright. If the necromancer reflexively spends 2 motes before making his attack roll and successfully hits, the victim's player must make a reflexive Essence roll. If this roll fails, the victim falls dead with a look of horror frozen in her face. Exalts, spirits, Fair Folk, and other magical beings are immune to this effect. Non-magical creatures that are notably larger than humans are immune to this effect so long as their Stamina exceeds the necromancer's Essence rating.

THE VOID CIRCLE

Though it is generally believed by savants that no Exalted can practice the discipline of necromancy apart from the Abyssals, such is not the case. Solar Exalted once probed the powers of the Labyrinth Circle and could do so again with the proper tutelage. Still, none save the deathknights and their Deathlord masters can invoke magic of the Void itself. Indeed, no scholar of the First Age

ever suspected such terrible magic was possible. Yet, it is with magic of this circle that the Deathlords created and unleashed the Great Contagion, and it is with this circle that the sorcerer-kings of the Malfeans now seduce and corrupt nascent Solar Exalted to the service of Oblivion.

ABYSSAL AEGIS

Cost: 20 motes

Until the next sunrise, the necromancer gains extra bashing and lethal soak equal to his permanent Essence. In addition, the character is completely immune to all magic specifically designed to cause extra damage or trauma to Abyssal Exalted, Deathlords or denizens of the Underworld. This protection does not make the Exalt immune to an attack augmented with such an effect, although the effect itself is negated. Thus, blasts from the Zenith Caste anima power vanish in a swirl of shadow before they touch the necromancer, but a Blazing Solar Bolt still hits, albeit for lethal damage only.

ANGUISHED SHADE HARVEST

Cost: 60 motes

This potent spell consecrates a stretch of land to the Underworld so that all who suffer violent death within its borders arise as hungry ghosts. The necromancer must begin this spell as the sun dips beneath the horizon and spend the required Essence. He then journeys as quickly as possible, physically pacing the intended boundary of the effect. He cannot fly or transport himself magically, although he may use a mount to aid his travel. If he keeps moving without recrossing his path and arrives at his original location before midnight, the spell takes effect. Malignant black clouds grow in the sky to cover the entire area, casting the earth into murky gloom even after daybreak. Any mortal who suffers a violent or painful demise in the afflicted area before dusk thereafter arises as a hungry ghost when the last rays of sunlight leave the sky. These ghosts will not attack the necromancer, but they are not under his control in any way. Hungry ghosts created with this spell have normal statistics (see *Exalted*, p. 301) but are always considered extras.

BLOOD MONSOON

Cost: 50 motes (committed) + one lethal health level

The necromancer cuts his palm and flings a spray of blood into the air. These droplets never fall to the earth. Instead, they rise and multiply until a column of beaded crimson ascends in an obscene geyser into the sky. When this pillar reaches a height of one mile, it blossoms outward, growing into a disk-shaped cloud that eventually covers a radius in miles equal to its creator's permanent Essence. This entire process takes one hour. Although the necromancer can take other actions during this time, the Essence powering the spell remains committed until it completely runs its course. After the cloud reaches its full size, a torrential downpour of blood drenches the earth below in gore for a number of hours equal to the necromancer's Stamina. Ghosts and other creatures of the Underworld can

glut themselves on this rain, although they gain no Essence from it. Blood summoned with this spell rapidly mixes with dirt and clots into a stinking, sticky morass of polluted gore, wreaking havoc on the local environment. Most plants and smaller animals in the area of effect die outright, while humans and other larger creatures must succeed in an hourly Stamina + Endurance check to avoid becoming violently ill and suffering a 1 die penalty to all actions. This spell — and its commiserate scent of death — also attracts hungry ghosts and other malevolent creatures for dozens of miles.

DIMMING OF THE LIGHT

Cost: 80 motes

With this terrible spell, a necromancer can taint the divine Essence of a willing Solar, transforming her into one of the Abyssal Exalted. This spell requires a ritual lasting from sunset to midnight and may only be cast within a shadowland or the Underworld. The Solar must physically enter a Monstrance of Celestial Portion willingly, renounce her god and defile her Caste Mark by painting it with the blood of a murdered innocent. She then renounces her powers one by one, cursing and forsaking each Charm she knows. Lastly, she renounces her very name.

Powerless, nameless and empty, the broken Solar kneels and pledges her life and soul to the Malfeans and the Void. The necromancer stands by through this litany, silently praying for the dead Primordials to hear and affirm each renouncement in turn. At the final moment, on the stroke of midnight, the necromancer lays one hand on the forehead of the kneeling Solar and spends the required Essence. The animas of both characters immediately burst into full iconic splendor, shadow and light pressing fiercely against one another. Then, the Solar's anima begins to darken like a guttering candle, at last dying as shadows swallow it for all time. When the necromancer withdraws his hand, his palm is slick with blood from the new Abyssal's Caste Mark.

A Solar Exalted transformed in this manner gains a number of Abyssal Charms equal to the number of Solar Charms she knew before the change. She remembers all her spells, if any, though she can never again call on the magic of the Solar Circle. All magical items attuned to her lose their attunement, but they may be subsequently reattuned. Her new caste follows her original caste — Dawn to Dusk, Zenith to Midnight, etc. Her Virtue Flaw vanishes, replaced with the Abyssal Curse. She is thereafter in all ways a deathknight and must contend with the advantages and disadvantages of her state.

INAUSPICIOUS CITADEL

Cost: 60 motes

Through this spell, a necromancer can raise a fortress of gleaming obsidian and black basalt from the earth. Prior to casting the spell, the Exalt must oversee the excavation of a deep pit in the heart of a shadowland. This pit must be as wide as a man can reach with both arms outstretch and deep enough that a man holding a torch could not see the

bottom if he peered into its depths. The Exalt must then sacrifice at least 100 mortals, either one by one or in a great massacre. Great care must be taken so that not even a single drop of blood falls anywhere but in the pit. After all the corpses have been thrown into the lightless shaft, the necromancer leans over the rim, spends the required Essence and cuts his hand. After one full health level has dripped into the dark, the ground shakes as the earth beneath the pit falls away to the depths of the Labyrinth and the dead gods reach slowly upward for the sacrifice. The necromancer and any bystanders have only a few minutes to flee the area before a castle of stone grinds up from beneath the pit. Although each citadel is unique, all emerge hollowed and defensible, with polished towers like jutting fingers of black stone inlaid with the meaningless mazy marks of the Labyrinth. At the bottommost room of every citadel, lower than all its dungeons, a gleaming sanctuary of jet serves as a chapel to the Malfeans. In its center of its floor yawns an open shaft that extends down to the ultimate darkness and the whispering, dreaming gods that dwell there.

LORD OF THE DEAD

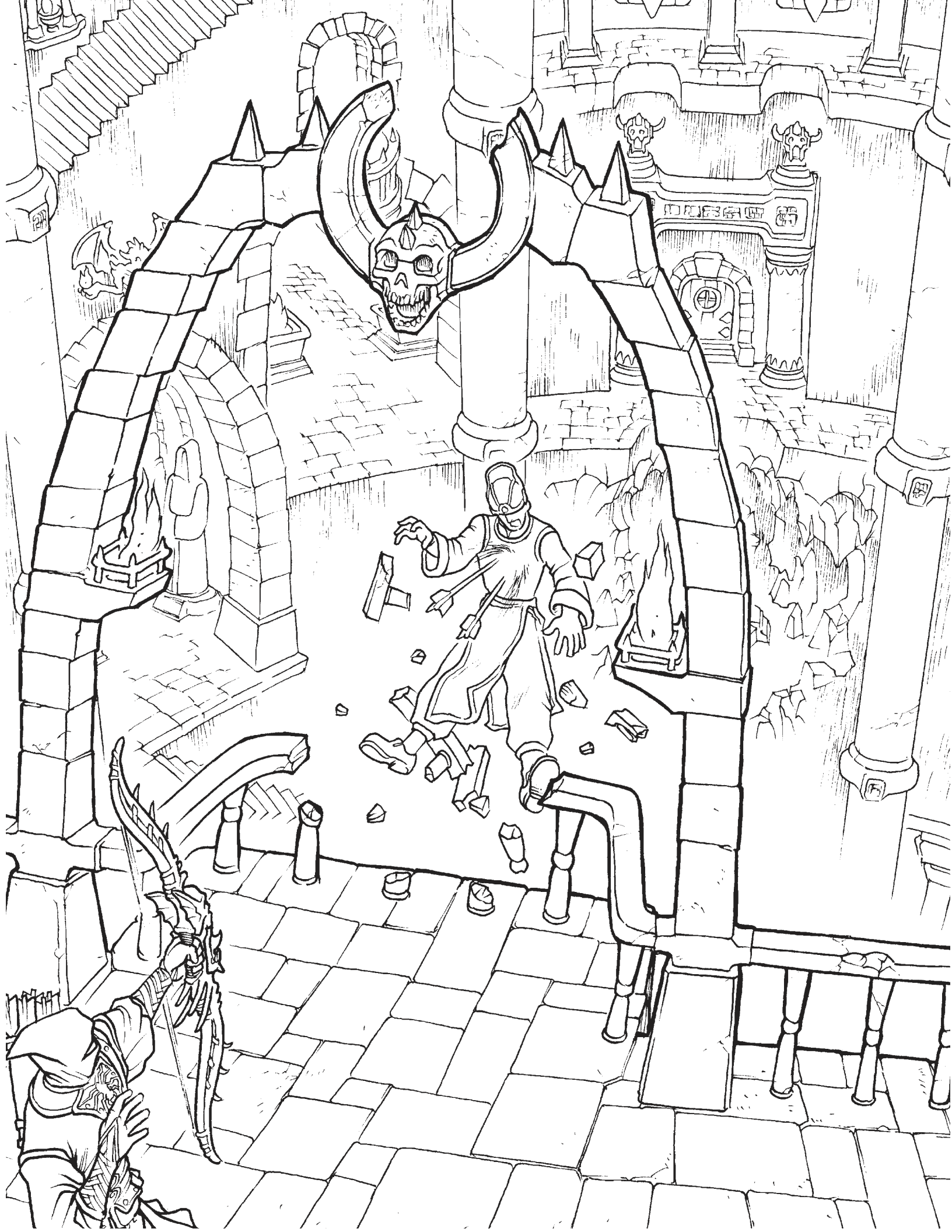
Cost: 25 motes

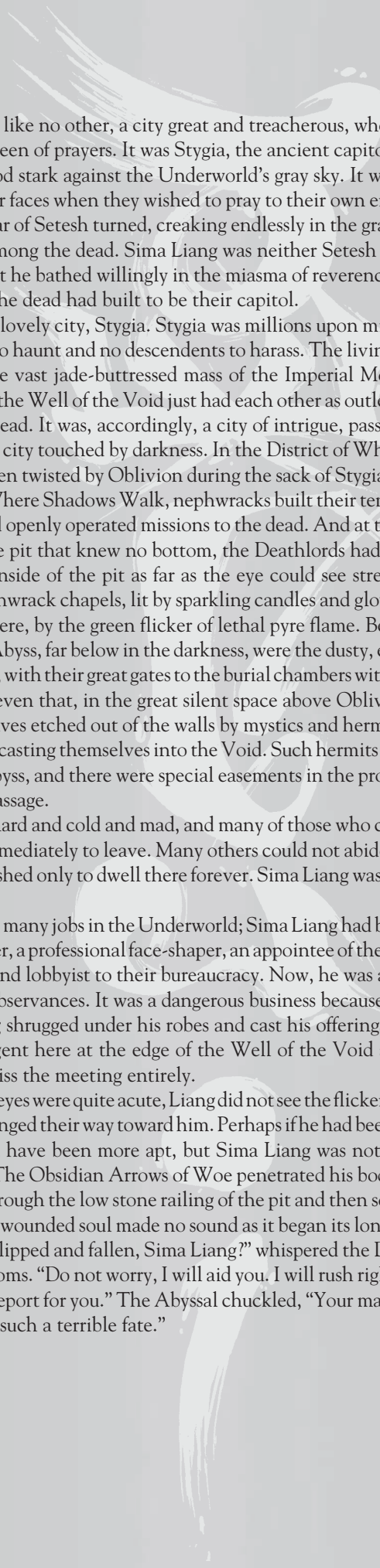
Upon casting this spell, the necromancer's Caste Mark emerges and glows a baleful vivid red for the next full day. While this light persists, the character may command any ghost, walking dead or other creature of death that has a lower permanent Essence than her own, and affected creatures must obey to the best of their abilities and intelligence. Commands can be as simple or complicated as desired, although zombies have difficulty comprehending anything more involved than a simple sentence. As a final benefit, no creature of death can attack the Exalt. This spell cannot command or protect against Abyssal Exalted or Deathlords.

POISONING THE WELL

Cost: 50 motes (committed)

Through this spell, a necromancer can vastly speed the rate at which a Demesne changes its aspect to Abyssal. The Exalt must remain at the heart of the Demesne, fasting and praying to the Malfeans for a number of days equal to its rating. The Essence powering this spell must be spent at the beginning of this period and remains committed for the full duration. A Demesne polluted with this spell loses one point from its rating each month as the Underworld consumes its Essence. When the Demesne reaches a rating of zero, it shifts to an Abyssal aspect and begins to regain lost points every month until it returns to its original strength. A sorcerer who knows the spell Adamant Countermagic may arrest this decay by spending double the usual number of motes, but barring sorcerous or necromantic countermagic, no power short of an Incarna can halt the process. Should the corrosion be averted before it runs its course, lost points of strength return at the rate of one each year.





It was a city like no other, a city great and treacherous, whose every stone wept an opalescent sheen of prayers. It was Stygia, the ancient capitol of the dead, whose mausoleums stood stark against the Underworld's gray sky. It was to Stygia that the dead turned their faces when they wished to pray to their own eminence. It was here that the Calendar of Setesh turned, creaking endlessly in the gray darkness, marking time's passage among the dead. Sima Liang was neither Setesh nor one of the other ancient dead, but he bathed willingly in the miasma of reverence offered up to them and to the city the dead had built to be their capitol.

It was not a lovely city, Stygia. Stygia was millions upon millions of ghosts with no living world to haunt and no descendents to harass. The living world's equivalent to Stygia was the vast jade-buttressed mass of the Imperial Mountain. Those who chose to exist at the Well of the Void just had each other as outlets for the unflagging passions of the dead. It was, accordingly, a city of intrigue, passion and deceit.

It was also a city touched by darkness. In the District of Whispering Streets, the buildings had been twisted by Oblivion during the sack of Stygia and never repaired. In the District Where Shadows Walk, nephwracks built their temples to the ultimate annihilation and openly operated missions to the dead. And at the center of the city, on the rim of the pit that knew no bottom, the Deathlords had their many Manses.

Down the inside of the pit as far as the eye could see stretched the fanes and balconies of nephwrack chapels, lit by sparkling candles and glowing soulfire crystals and, here and there, by the green flicker of lethal pyre flame. Below the fanes of the Temples of the Abyss, far below in the darkness, were the dusty, empty porticos of the Malfeans' tombs, with their great gates to the burial chambers within them. And it was said that below even that, in the great silent space above Oblivion, that there were countless tiny caves etched out of the walls by mystics and hermits, who dwelt there for a time before casting themselves into the Void. Such hermits clustered around the Mouth of the Abyss, and there were special easements in the property around the pit to allow them passage.

Stygia was hard and cold and mad, and many of those who came could not abide it and wished immediately to leave. Many others could not abide an absence from its precincts and wished only to dwell there forever. Sima Liang was one of the latter sort of ghost.

He had held many jobs in the Underworld; Sima Liang had been a thug, a soldier, a military armorer, a professional face-shaper, an appointee of the Dual Monarchy and then a courtier and lobbyist to their bureaucracy. Now, he was a spymaster, running agents for the Observances. It was a dangerous business because the Deathlords had long arms. Liang shrugged under his robes and cast his offerings into the Abyss. He waited for his agent here at the edge of the Well of the Void and wondered if the courier would miss the meeting entirely.

Though his eyes were quite acute, Liang did not see the flicker of the deathknight's arrows as they winged their way toward him. Perhaps if he had been one of the Exalted, his senses would have been more apt, but Sima Liang was not one of the Chosen, merely a ghost. The Obsidian Arrows of Woe penetrated his body in five places, and he was hurled through the low stone railing of the pit and then some 10 yards beyond that. The fatally wounded soul made no sound as it began its long fall into the Abyss.

"Have you slipped and fallen, Sima Liang?" whispered the Disciple of the Seven Forbidden Wisdoms. "Do not worry, I will aid you. I will rush right back to your study and finish your report for you." The Abyssal chuckled, "Your masters will never even suspect you met such a terrible fate."



CHAPTER SIX

THE ARTS OF THE DEAD

Existence among the dead is extremely different from life even in the most desolate shadowland. The dead have their own rhythms, needs and desires, very unlike those of the living. Fortunately, they also have the tools and talents required to deal with the demands of their unique existence. The Restless Dead have their crafts and even their own workers of Essence.

The materials of the Underworld — soul-stuff and transformed jade — cannot be manipulated through mortal smithing techniques. The tools and weapons of the dead have no parallels among the living, something for which the living should be thankful. And then there are the methods that ghosts have for bending the Essence of the Underworld to their will.

The powers that have been given to the Restless Dead are a form of spirit Charm, which the dead call an Arcanos. They are of limited effectiveness on the living. While some of their abilities reach across the border between the living and the dead, most of their power in Creation relies on terror, illusion and suggestion.

THE CRAFTS OF THE DEAD

The dead work their magic with materials alien to the living — soulsteel, raw illusion or ghostly ectoplasm. Out of necessity, then, the residents of the Underworld have developed their own curious arts for shaping these materials. Four distinct schools of craft have developed among the dead.

CRAFT (MOLIATION)

By developing this Ability, the ghost learns the subtle techniques of working the wraithly corpus. This knowledge allows the ghost to shape, mold and modify the stuff that makes up his form — and that of his fellow ghosts. The natural laws of living Creation have no sway in the Underworld, and the substance of a ghost can take any form a skilled master of Molation wishes it to, from gossamer-delicate feathers to gleaming armor.

Molation does not grant the ability to reshape ghostly ectoplasm. Rather, it provides the knowledge that a ghost with these powers needs to use them to good effect. Ghosts who are familiar with Molation can detect its use on others, and they can guide others in its use (-1 difficulty on rolls involving Molation for ghosts being advised by another with a higher level of the Ability). Molation does not grant knowledge of soul-forging.

Specialties: Masks, Monstrous Forms, Weaponry, Armor, Disguise

Standard: Detect the use of Molation on others, add or remove a feature crudely, create a lifelike mask

Challenging: Create a mask that inspires fear, create useful weaponry, craft a ghost into a new shape

Legendary: Reshape a ghost into an armored killing machine. Create masks so lifelike that none may recognize the ghost's true appearance.

CRAFT (PANDEMONIUM)

Pandemonium is the art of crafting horrors, illusions and nightmares. It is also the art of making dreams and fantasies, rendering it one of the most versatile of the ghostly crafts. Improving one's knowledge of Pandemonium improves one's ability to craft illusions of all sorts, from the magnificent to the soul-rending. The best exemplars of the craft, of course, are able to do both, but most of its practitioners have their own specialties.

Pandemonium does not grant the ability to shape dreams, illusions and so forth. Instead, it is merely the knowledge of how to do so. A ghost with innate talent but no knowledge of Pandemonium can still summon forth horrors, but a master of Craft (Pandemonium) with no innate Arcanoi is left commenting on the works of others.

Specialties: Insects, Ichors, Scuttling Things, Shapeless Horrors, Fantasies, Phantom Epics

Standard: Detect another's use of Pandemonium, create a simple illusion, affect the living world

Challenging: Create a complex illusion involving more than one sense, manifest a horror of some sort, engage in strenuous poltergeist activity

Legendary: A flood of devouring beetles and locusts, reaching into the Mouth of Oblivion

CRAFT (SOULFORGING)

Soulforging is the art of hammering the ghostly flesh of the dead into the useful implements of the Underworld. It also is the art that allows the creation of soulsteel, the unearthly metal that combines ectoplasm with the ores of the Labyrinth. While superficially soulforging resembles mortal smithing, it has demands and requirements that living blacksmiths never dreamed of. For one thing, the material of the mortal smith does not to scream while it is under the hammer. For another, the dangers of working with flames of pure Essence are far, far greater than any perils a mere mortal forge can pose.

Without the proper equipment, soulforging is mostly useless. While it does grant any ghost who possesses it the analytical eye to identify soulforged work and an understanding of the process by which souls are transformed into commodities, it is primarily an active skill. Full usage of Craft (Soulforging) requires a smith's setup — an anvil, a hammer, an Essence forge and, most importantly, a supply of souls. Soulforgers prefer equipment made of soulsteel or jade when they can get it — the relentless heat and pounding tends to reduce lesser equipment to rubble in short order. However, in a pinch they'll take whatever they can get, so long as they have the raw materials they need.

Specialties: Objets D'art, Weaponry, Armor, Construction





Standard: Identify soulforged objects, render a soul into raw materials, make a basic sword or other simple item, create sturdy items for use in construction in the Underworld

Challenging: Create a unique weapon, build a device with multiple moving parts out of soulforged elements, create a flexible chain, create a soulforged item that can use Essence

Legendary: Construct a soulforged automaton, make a unique weapon, do soulforged filigree work, create and work with soulsteel

SOULFORGING AND JADECRAFTING

Both soulforging and jadcraftering are technical arts. Though they are in a sense magical, it is natural magic and requires no Charms. Instead, the use of soulsteel and jade allows the dead to forge artifacts, as if they were normal mortal sorcerers. The dead are natural artificers, but their hands do not lend themselves to works of great power. Normal ghosts cannot forge items of greater than Artifact •••, and items of greater power are invariably creations of some Deathlord or ghostly hero of legend. Ghosts can only make simple weapons and armor (their greatest feats are grand daiklaves and reinforced breastplates, not implosion bows and warstriders) and their own baroque and ghostly artifice, unsuitable for use in the land of the living. The process is exactly as outlined on pages 88-89 of *The Book of Three Circles*, save that the dead use Dexterity + Craft (Soulforging) or Craft (Jadcraftering) rather than Intelligence + Occult when making the rolls for Step Three: Creation. Forging artifacts still requires exotic ingredients, which are invariably some sort of mad Underworld substance, frequently found only within the Labyrinth.

CRAFT (JADECRAFTING)

The last of the materials the artisans of the dead work with is jade. Potent in the lands of the living, it becomes even more special in the lands of the dead. Too fragile to be soulforged, too tough to be Moliated, jade is nevertheless extraordinarily valuable to the Restless Dead, and those who can work it are highly regarded.

Specialties: Grave Goods, Jewelry, Ornamental Weaponry, Magical Artifacts

Standard: Take a grave good and render it useful in the Underworld, carve raw jade into a useful shape, evaluate the worth of a jade item

Challenging: Create useful jade implements, devices and chains, incorporate jade into a device created in the Underworld

Legendary: Craft jewelry pleasing to one of the Deathlords, infuse a jade item with Essence

ARCANOI

Most Arcanoi are of limited duration. Often a ghost will want to extend the effect without re-spending the initial cost or rerolling the effect. Certain Charms can have their duration extended by the injection of additional motes of Essence. The costs are noted in each instance. They are paid when the Charm is extended and add to the Essence committed to the effect. The Essence itself is stored in the Charm and returns to the ghost when the Charm's effect ends. There is no limit to how long a ghost can sustain an Arcanos' effect in this fashion so long as she has motes to feed it.

COMBOS AND THE DEAD

As spirit beings, the dead are natural Essence-channelers, but there are limits to their expertise and power, and their power does not lend itself naturally to combat. The dead may never learn Combos and so may never use more than one Charm per turn. Many ghostly Charms replicate the effects of a Combo by giving weak, long-duration bonuses to the effects of other Charms.

SHIFTING GHOST-CLAY PATH

The dead are of malleable substance, and it often suits their needs and desires to reshape themselves. Some ghosts assume forms of the utmost beauty, others the most direly horrifying shapes. It is with the Shifting Ghost-Clay Path that all such ghostly miracles are accomplished.

WAXEN GHOSTLY FLESH

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Compassion: 2

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

With Waxen Ghostly Flesh, a ghost can adjust his form. Features can be lengthened or eradicated, appearances changed, height and girth added or decreased, and skin or hair color altered. Ghosts can assume improbable colors and shapes through the use of this Arcanos, and those whose appearance has been altered through the use of this Charm may be iridescent, inwardly glowing or painted with flawless funeral makeup. The ghost using the Charm spends Essence and then, molding his flesh as a

potter would mold clay, adjusts the aspects of his appearance that he wishes to change.

A Dexterity + Craft (Moliation) roll indicates the success level of the attempt, with the amount of change the ghost is attempting to render determining the difficulty. Note that using this power restricts the ghost to a roughly human form of mass roughly equivalent to the ghost's own, and it does not grant useful armor, fangs or claws (though it can create the appearance of such). The ghost is simply reshaping himself, not drawing new ghostly matter from elsewhere.

After a scene, the ghost's flesh begins to melt back toward its customary form. The process is visible to anyone observing the ghost closely (Perception + Awareness roll) and is a useful and time-honored method of flushing out ghostly impostors. A ghost thus reshaped can spend a Willpower point to arrest the slide back to his usual form for an hour, at which point the process picks up where it left off. This process can be repeated as long as the ghost has the Willpower to spend.

Feature Changed	Difficulty
Skin, hair or eye color	1
Facial feature	2
Body shape	3
Adding non-human feature	4

NINE TERRORS VISAGE

Cost: 6 motes

Duration: One hour

Type: Simple

Minimum Compassion: 3

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: Waxed Ghostly Flesh

With Nine Terrors Visage, a ghost can instantly assume another face without so much as moving a muscle. The ghost's image simply shifts and changes. The mask remains in place for an hour, at which point it melts and shifts back to the ghost's original appearance. The change in visage can be maintained for an additional day by the expenditure of a Willpower point.

Many ghosts have a series of visages they use on a regular basis, ranging from the horrifying to the alluring. Creating a visage requires a day's effort, a successful Dexterity + Craft (Moliation) roll to plan and a Dexterity + Compassion (difficulty 2 for normal visages) roll to create. If the rolls are successful, the visage is now available for the ghost to use whenever she pleases.

Some visages may be so horrifying and/or alluring that they may have an additional affect beyond simply changing the ghost's appearance. These Visages are +2 difficulty on the roll to create (planning difficulty as normal). Some visage effects include:

Fear: The players of all who see the ghost's face must make a successful Valor roll (difficulty 1) or have their characters flee in terror for the duration of a scene. They will not be able to fight except in self-defense, and then, all rolls will still be at +2 difficulty.

Entrancement: Those who see the ghost's face are so smitten with its otherworldly beauty that their players must succeed on a Temperance roll (difficulty 1) or have their characters become enraptured with the spirit. Such smitten souls are prone to follow the ghost's suggestions or to do whatever they think will please the ghost of their own initiative.

Disgust: The ghost's visage is so repulsive that the player of any observer must succeed on a Willpower roll (difficulty 1), or his character is caught in the throes of a brief bout of nausea. Players of those thus afflicted are at +1 difficulty on their rolls for any physical activity. This effect persists for the remainder of the scene, but the character can only suffer from it once at a given time.

Once a character has successfully overcome the effects of a Nine Terrors Visage, she is immune to the ghost using that particular visage on her ever thereafter. However, those mortals who fail to resist are at +1 difficulty to resist it the next time. Four consecutive failures means that the character will never be able to resist the effects of that visage without a dramatic change in her mental makeup. This limitation does not apply to the Exalted, who are too mighty for such ghostly tricks.

YIELDING SPIRIT FORM

Cost: 4 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Compassion: 2

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: Waxed Ghostly Flesh

The ghost's spirit form becomes soft and pliable upon impact, rendering her more resistant to damage. The impact of a blow (or slash or stab) is still felt, but the ghost's body simply distends, adjusting to the effects of the strike. The player of a ghost who activates this Charm may roll her character's full Dexterity + Craft (Moliation) pool against any attack the ghost is aware of. Every success subtracts one from the damage of a single lethal or bashing attack. This roll is made after the attack is resolved but before soak is applied.

Even if the blow does no damage, the ghost will usually be deformed by it in some way. A strike to the head will crush the shape of the ghost's skull; a slash to the arm may deform it beyond recognition. The effects are merely cosmetic, however, and the deformation quickly heals itself. For every level of damage sopped up by the Yielding Spirit Form, it takes one turn for the ghost's unliving tissue to restore itself to its original form.



This process is constant, but additional damage absorbed during this time adds to the duration of the recovery.

STEELING THE SPIRIT

Cost: 7 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One day/success

Type: Simple

Minimum Compassion: 2

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Yielding Spirit Form

Steeling the Spirit lets a ghost fix in place his altered features or form. A Willpower roll determines how many days the steeled flesh remains. The effect is extended for one day for each success. This power, however, can only be used by the ghost on himself.

In addition, when used in conjunction with Ghost-Devil Form to harden protrusions such as fangs, claws and the like, such accouterments are treated as if they are exceptional weapons and gain the same number of bonus points.

GHOST-DEVIL FORM

Cost: 10 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Compassion: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Nine Terrors Visage, Steeling the Spirit

Ghost-Devil Form allows the ghost to adopt not just a new face, but rather, a new form entirely. This form can be human or otherwise and can sport working claws, talons, fangs and the like. A Ghost-Devil Form can be up to twice the ghost's normal size and can feature such extras as additional working limbs, armor and so forth. It does not need to be human in the slightest, and the change from regular form to Ghost-Devil Form is effectively instantaneous.

Like Nine Terrors Visage, a Ghost-Devil Form must be conceptualized beforehand. Crafting a Ghost-Devil Form takes longer than making a Nine Terrors Visage, however, and is more difficult. Building a form requires an Intelligence + Craft (Moliation) roll to design and then a Dexterity + Compassion roll (Difficulty 3) to execute. Each damage-dealing or similar aspect of the form (claws, fangs, extra arms) requires an additional day of design work and an additional Craft (Moliation) roll at difficulty 2 to build. Ghost-Devil Form is also similar to Nine Terrors Visage in its duration and effects on observers. This Arcanos almost always has its effect extended through the use of Steeling the Spirit or some other, more powerful Charm of permanency. Only ghosts and ghostly beings can be reshaped with the power of this Charm.



MANIFESTATIONS OF GHOST-DEVIL FORM

Various protrusions can be made by a ghost using Ghost-Devil Form.

Shapechange	Effect
Claws	Spd +3, Acc +1, Dam +3L, Def -1
Fangs	Spd +0, Acc +1, Dam +4L, Def -1
Armored Skin	+2L/2B levels of soak, compatible with armor
Additional Eyes	All Perception rolls against visible enemies are at -2 difficulty
Extra Arms	-1 to the extra actions penalty for each additional set of arms, to a maximum of -3

WEIGHTED WITH THE ANCHOR OF FLESH

Cost: 20 motes, 2 Willpower (no Willpower in the shadowlands)

Duration: One hour

Type: Simple

Minimum Compassion: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Ghost-Devil Form

When Weighted With the Anchor of Flesh, a ghost obtains the ability to materialize in the lands of the living. If he does so when in Ghost-Devil Form, then all of the weaponry available to him in that shape retains its potency. In short, the ghost materializes and can affect the living world normally, for good or for ill, until the Anchor lifts and he fades back to insubstantiality.

While held by the Anchor of Flesh, the ghost can be wounded by material weapons and is otherwise normal and material. If wounded, he will bleed (though the blood will fade as he does), and if struck down, he will fall before dissipating back into the Underworld.

The Anchor's duration is one hour. However, the ghost can extend this by expending another point of Willpower for each additional hour he wishes to remain. Ghosts who have materialized thus are still vulnerable to banishment and to effects that specifically target materialized spirits.

STOLEN WAX DISCIPLINE

Cost: 5 motes, one lethal health level

Duration: One hour per permanent Essence

Type: Simple

Minimum Compassion: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Waxen Ghostly Flesh

Stolen Wax Discipline allows a ghost to reshape the unliving tissues of another ghost. It only works on willing subjects but is useful for disguising friends, theatrical performances and the like.

Using Stolen Wax Discipline requires the laying of hands upon the target, as well as a successful Dexterity + Compassion roll. The difficulty of the roll depends on the degree of change being attempted (see Waxen Ghostly Flesh for a guideline to appropriate difficulties). The effects of the Arcanos last one hour per point of the shaping ghost's permanent Essence and cannot be extended through the use of Willpower. To extend its effects, either the ghost doing the shaping must use Prison of the New Form, or the ghost receiving the changes must use Steeling the Spirit.

BROKEN MOLD STRIKE

Cost: 7 motes

Duration: Instant or one hour

Type: Supplementary

Minimum Compassion: 3

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Stolen Wax Discipline

Unlike Stolen Wax Discipline, Broken Mold Strike allows a ghost to inflict the horrors of reshaped flesh on an unwilling target. Using Broken Mold Strike requires a successful Brawl attack, which need do no damage, followed by a reflexive Strength + Compassion roll.

A ghost attacking with Broken Mold Strike shreds and boils off the target's ectoplasm doing a base lethal damage equal to the ghost's Willpower + (successes on the Strength + Compassion roll) + any extra successes on the attack. This attack works only against other ghosts or against creatures that partake of ghostly nature and can be subjected to the Shifting Ghost-Clay Path. This does not include deathknights, whose physical substance shields them from this attack.

SHAPING THE OBEDIENT SERVANT

Cost: 9 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One day

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Compassion: 3

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Ghost-Devil Form, Stolen Wax Discipline

Shaping the Obedient Servant is the means by which a ghost can use the powers associated with Ghost-Devil Form on another. Frequently used by servants of the Deathlords to create monstrous ghostly warriors for battles among the dead, this power is also a favorite of artisans, costumers and others among the dead who depend on disguise as part of their livelihood.

Shaping the Obedient Servant requires the expenditure of the Arcanos cost, followed by the regular difficulty 3 Dexterity + Compassion roll for Ghost-Devil Form. Obedient Servant shapes must be planned ahead of time, just like Ghost-Devil Form, but if all the results are going to look the same, only one roll needs to be made to plan the change.



Often, the Deathlords and their more powerful senses wish to make the effects of Shaping the Obedient Servant permanent. This can be accomplished through a successful Willpower roll and the expenditure of experience points on the part of the character being reshaped. The more experience points expended, the longer the effect lasts. A single experience point freezes it for a month, 2 points for a year, and 3 points extend the effect indefinitely. Essence is no longer committed to the effect once experience points are spent to extend it. This Arcanos works only on the dead.

PRISON OF THE NEW FORM

Cost: 12 motes, 1 Willpower
Duration: One week per success
Type: Supplemental
Minimum Compassion: 4
Minimum Essence: 3
Prerequisite Charms: Broken Mold Strike

Prison of the New Form enables a ghost to seal her target into his current form, willing or no. The character must touch the target or make a successful unarmed Brawl or Martial Arts attack that need not do damage. A successful contested roll of the attacking ghost's Stamina + Compassion against the target's Conviction enables the ghost to lock down the victim's form for one week per extra success. During this time, he cannot be affected by any other spirit-flesh crafting power that alters his form, but he remains vulnerable to damage from powers such as Broken Mold Strike. Prison of the New Form is often used to keep prisoners in an eyeless, mouthless or limbless state. Obviously, this Arcanos works only against ghosts or ghostly creatures.

TERROR-SPREADING ART

Ghosts must often influence the living. Through portents and hauntings, they make their will known. The Terror-Spreading Art covers all aspects of this, from the horror used for vengeance against the living to other forms of interaction as well.

CORPSE-FED RADIANCE

Cost: 2 motes
Duration: One scene
Type: Simple
Minimum Conviction: 1
Minimum Essence: 1
Prerequisite Charms: None

Ghosts are most comfortable in the dark of night, but that does not mean they always wish to go unseen in the darkness. Some ghosts wish to be seen, either to terrify the mortals who behold them or to illuminate the steps of those foolish enough to trust the dead as guides. By releasing 2 motes of Essence, a ghost can cause herself to

glow with radiance as bright as the setting sun. Two or more ghosts acting in unison can combine their radiance, and when seven act in concert, the effect is as bright as the noonday sun in the Far Southern deserts. A ghost may choose to display any color, from the hideous green of grave mold to the warm gold of afternoon sunshine. When performed in the living world, the Corpse-Fed Radiance is visible even if the ghost is dematerialized.

BLACK BREATH OF THE ABYSS

Cost: 8 motes
Duration: One scene
Type: Simple
Minimum Conviction: 1
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Corpse-Fed Radiance

Darkness is more potent than light. Every dead man knows this. Thus does Black Breath of the Abyss surpass Corpse-Fed Radiance in the hierarchy of ghostly skills.

When summoned, the Black Breath of the Abyss is more than just a cloud of darkness. It is an utter absence of light that boils out of the ghost's mouth, ears, nose and eyes. Devouring any normal source of light, the cloud extends for 10 feet around the ghost. If the ghost expends a Willpower point, the cloud will move in any direction of his choosing. Those caught in the cloud are utterly blinded — except ghosts, who can see through the darkness clearly. No light can penetrate its inky depths, and those trapped within subtract two successes from all attack rolls. The boundary for the Arcanos' effect is as insubstantial as air and can be crossed simply by moving out of the area of effect, but the disorienting effect of the total darkness makes this difficult.

The Black Breath of the Abyss cannot be dispelled by normal light, though it will fade away in due time. The manifestation of a Solar anima banner within the cloud of darkness will also dispel it.

PAINTING THE SUNSET PICTURE

Cost: 4 motes
Duration: One scene
Type: Simple
Minimum Conviction: 2
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Black Breath of the Abyss

Mere light is not always enough to work a ghost's will. Storytellers among the dead use illusions to illustrate their tales, and artisans of terror regard well-crafted images as the most basic tools of their trade.

The illusions the dead craft by Painting the Sunset Picture are simple ones — a single image in three dimensions, with a basic color palette, immobile and faintly transparent. They can be as large as the ghost creating them wishes, though most of the Restless Dead prefer to

keep their creations man-sized or smaller. Often, the images flicker or blur, revealing their artificial origins.

Painting the Sunset Picture requires a successful Wits + Craft (Pandemonium) roll against a difficulty of 1. More complicated illusions, such as the image of a tree individual leaves or a detailed reconstruction of the Palace Sublime are more difficult, and may reach as high as difficulty 3. The illusion's appearance may move as fast or as slow as the ghostly creator wishes.

A ghost can sustain a Sunset Picture for an hour if she wishes by feeding it a point of Willpower. She can also create multiple illusions simultaneously, each with their own cost in Essence. Sunset Pictures that have run their course slowly fade away into transparency. The illusions of Painting the Sunset Picture are visible even when created in the lands of the living. The ghost need not materialize to make the illusions visible.

MIDNIGHT CANVAS UNFURLED

Cost: 5 motes + 1 Willpower; 5 motes/additional sense

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Conviction: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Painting the Sunset Picture

Any ghost with a modicum of training can create a simple illusion. It is far more difficult to create a complex one, one that moves, speaks and gives the appearance of life.

Midnight Canvas Unfurled is the tool of choice for these masters of illusion, and it serves them well. By utilizing this Arcanos, a ghost may craft an illusion that exists in three dimensions and is capable of movement. With a successful Wits + Craft (Pandemonium) roll by his player, the ghost summons the fleshed out illusion. The difficulty of this Charm is the same as that of Painting the Sunset Picture; the larger and more complex the illusion is, the higher the difficulty. By spending 5 additional motes of Essence, the master of the illusion can cause the illusion to affect a sense beside sight. Sound is most often used, but true craftsmen among the dead take delight in creating illusions so complex that they fool the living. These phantasms will even obey their creator's wishes to move or speak, so long as the wishes are simple. The image lasts a single scene, unless sustained with an investment of Willpower. A single point of Willpower will extend the illusion's lifespan to an hour.

Only the past masters among the dead have ever created a Midnight Canvas larger than a behemoth, though the Deathlords do so with some regularity and disdain. However, the artisans of the dead have compensated by learning how to add other touches of realism to their creations.

The illusions of Midnight Canvas Unfurled, like those of Painting the Sunset Picture, are visible even when created in the lands of the living. The ghost need not materialize to make the illusions visible. They can be seen, even if he cannot.

THE ICHOR CAULDRON

Cost: 6 motes

Duration: One hour

Type: Simple

Minimum Conviction: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Midnight Canvas Unfurled

This Charm gives the user the ability to summon large quantities of any sort of foul, harmless fluid out of thin air, and it can be employed to terrify, disgust or disturb with equal ease. Those using it can summon up to (their Conviction rating x 10) gallons of any harmless fluid they choose — blood and squirming but harmless maggots are acceptable, acids and flammable oils are not. This liquid manifests on the walls, floors, ceilings and other surfaces nearby, at the ghost's discretion.

The uses of this power can be as benign as filling a pot with water or as malicious as making blood drip out of walls. The fluid will remain in place until it dries up or drains away, but in that time, it will have no visible source, and its flow cannot be stemmed. While the ichor that is created cannot be directly harmful, it can have dangerous secondary effects, such as rendering a steep staircase slippery or smearing the ink on a precious document.

MESSENGER OF THE GRAVE

Cost: 4 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One hour

Type: Simple

Minimum Conviction: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: The Ichor Cauldron

This Charm creates vermin and gives them brief life. The Messenger takes the form of a deathwatch beetle, rat or other small creature. Instantly responsive to the will of its creator, the creature scuttles forth to work his will. At the end of an hour, the Messenger will shrivel and die, but its life can be extended another hour by the expenditure of another point of Willpower by the ghost who summoned it. Messengers can be killed as per normal creatures of their type; a simple sword thrust or even a well-placed boot heel will do for most.

Creating a Messenger requires a Wits + Pandemonium roll. The difficulty is 2 for an insect or similarly small creature, difficulty 3 for anything else up to the size of a large rat. Nothing larger can be created through the use of this Charm. The Messenger appears at the ghost's feet and goes forth into the world to do his bidding. While the



Messenger has enough rudimentary intelligence to obey the ghost's mental commands, it is not a familiar and still cannot be pushed beyond its innate capabilities. For example, a summoned rat may be able to climb walls, but it's still not going to be able to transcribe a document or make complex judgments about humans.

Messengers may have fangs or claws, but even those created in the image of a poisonous creature such as a spider do not have venom. A ghost need not be materialized in order to use this Charm. Her odious minion will appear in the world of the living unless this Charm is used in the Underworld or in a shadowland at night.

SIX PLAGUE SUMMONS

Cost: 20 motes, 2 Willpower

Duration: One hour

Type: Simple

Minimum Conviction: 3

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Messenger of the Grave

One rat. One spider. One serpent. A single example of any of these species can be overlooked, swatted or stepped on. A flood of them, however, is not so easy to dismiss. Six Plague Summons lets a ghost create and send forth an entire horde of vermin, which will happily swarm over, devour or trample anything before it. All that is required is the investment of Essence and Willpower and a successful Wits + Pandemonium roll (difficulty 2 for anything up to a mouse in size, 3 for anything up to a rat).

A Six Plague Summons can include anywhere from a half-dozen to thousands of creatures, depending on the success of the initial roll. The more successes scored, the more creatures, with the number going up by a factor of five for each success.

Number of Successes	Approximate Number of Creatures Summoned
0	1-10
1	50
2	250
3	1250
4	6250

Successes beyond four produce what is, for all intents and purposes, a numberless swarm.

The downside is that a plague thus summoned is extremely difficult to control. The ghost who brings it forth can give it some rough direction ("Go east!" or "Chase him!") but not much more than that. Vermin brought forth through this Charm are also ravenously hungry, making them even more difficult to control. Fortunately, the plague lasts one hour and one hour only and cannot be extended beyond that. A ghost need not be

materialized in order to use this Charm. In fact, her festering swarm always appears in the world of the living, unless she invokes this Charm in the Underworld or at night in a shadowland.

HAND OF THE WIND

Cost: 3 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Conviction: 1

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: Corpse-Fed Radiance

Not all of the dead are content to paint pictures in the air. Some wish to affect the lands of the living in a more tangible way. Hand of the Wind lets these ghosts reach out with more-than-ghostly force.

By exercising this Arcanos, the ghost fortifies his being with his will for an instant. During that time, he is capable of one action that affects the world of flesh as if he were a part of it. Whether that consists of striking a blow, stealing a trinket or pushing an archer lining up a shot is entirely up to the ghost. Any action the ghost takes is subject to an appropriate roll (The player of a ghost trying to snatch a First Age relic out of an enemy's hand would have to roll Dexterity + Larceny, for example, while the player of one seeking to pick up an abandoned dagger and hurl it would roll Dexterity + Thrown). The ghost himself cannot be struck by mortal weapons during this time, as he is not actually materialized.

Note that Hand of the Wind can be used for only one action at a time, though with a loose definition of "one action." Picking something up and throwing it is considered one action; holding a pen and writing a several thousand line epic poem is not. In general, there is not enough time for characters to split their dice pool. Hand of the Wind cannot be used in the Underworld. Its uses are limited to the living world and during the day in the shadowlands.

STRIKE OF DEAD HANDS

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Conviction: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Hand of the Wind

What Strike of Dead Hands gives a ghost is physical power, pure and simple. By adding brute force to a blow enabled by Hand of the Wind, the ghost suddenly makes his interactions with the world of the living that much more devastating.

Strike of Dead Hands lasts, like its antecedent, for just one attack, but it is far more potent. Any attacks or Strength-based actions undertaken with this Arcanos

have one additional automatic success, and any blow struck has additional lethal damage dice equal to the ghost's Strength rating, meaning that the ghost's Strength effectively doubles for the purposes of damage on the blow. Ghosts can use this Charm to strike blows with weapons, and a ghost armed with a daiklave can be a menace to an Exalt who cannot attack spirits. The ghost has no fine control of Strike of Dead Hands and, thus, cannot temper a blow or pull a punch when using it.

FLYING TIME TECHNIQUE

Cost: 8 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Extra Action

Minimum Conviction: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Strike of Dead Hands

By exploiting their ghostly nature, the dead can cause the distortions of time, space and speed peculiar to nightmares to become manifest reality. The ghost possessing this Charm can move with incredible speed, cover impossible distances and strike many times as time for her victim slows to a dreamy crawl.

Though the special effects of this Charm are of nightmare sensory distortion, the mechanical effect is one of extra actions. The player of the ghost invoking the Arcanos rolls Intelligence + Craft (Pandemonium). For every success, the ghost gains an extra action that turn, but the number of extra actions cannot exceed the ghost's permanent Essence. These extra actions cannot be saved from turn to turn. Other than its unusual special effects, Flying Time Technique is a normal Extra Action Charm and subject to the usual restrictions.

EBON GRASP OF OBLIVION

Cost: 16 motes, 3 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Conviction: 3

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Black Breath of the Abyss, Strike of Dead Hands

One of the ultimate powers of the dead, Ebon Grasp of Oblivion strikes mercilessly and takes its victims back with it into the depths of the Abyss. Emerging from the ghosts facial orifices like the Black Breath, the Ebon Grasp mauls those it strikes, savaging their flesh and spirits. Those who are struck down by the Ebon Grasp are seized by it and taken, screaming, into the depths of the Underworld.

All who are within a five-yard radius of the ghost's mouth and eyes (other than the ghost activating the Arcanos) are subject to the Ebon Grasp's hideous effects. Each turn the Ebon Grasp touches a target gives the cloud a reflexive Strength + Brawl attack against the victim,





using the summoning ghost's statistics. A successful attack does Strength + 2 lethal damage. If the target is reduced to Incapacitated or below, the next turn the cloud picks him up and begins dragging him into the Abyss. This process takes two turns to complete, during which time he can be rescued by a contested Strength roll against the cloud. Victims who are not rescued are drawn into the Abyss through the physical form of the summoning ghost, a disturbing and obscene process. The Ebon Grasp can be fought like any other physical threat. It does not dodge, has a soak of 6L/12B, has eight health levels and takes no wound penalties. It uses the characters Traits and acts on initiative 10. The Ebon Grasp of Oblivion ignores all attacks that do less than its soak, and weapons not made from the Five Magical Materials, subjected to Elemental Enchantment or otherwise enhanced do only bashing damage to the Ebon Grasp.

SAVAGE GHOST TAMER ARTS

The dead are plagued by all the hungry ghosts who fall away from the land of their living when the body rots or who cunningly drag their mummified corpses into the shelter of a shadowland. Many among the dead hunt and destroy these monstrous pests, but not all. Some among the dead tame hungry ghosts and use them as servants.

TASTE THE DEMON WIND

Cost: 2 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Valor: 1

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

One of the most common hazards of ghostly existence are roving packs of hungry ghosts. Mindless and driven by inhuman appetites, they roam the across the worlds, constantly searching for prey, living or otherwise. As such, it behooves a clever ghost to be aware of these potential hazards, and Taste the Demon Wind allows a ghost to do exactly that.

When a ghost uses this power, a successful roll of Perception + Presence renders her aware of the number, direction and location of any hungry ghosts in the vicinity. The more successes rolled, the further out hungry ghosts can be detected.

Number of Successes	Range
1	100 yards
2	250 yards
3	500 meters
4	1 mile
5	5 miles

Taste the Demon Wind must be used consciously. The ghost must be actively listening for hungry ghosts, or else, this Arcanos is useless. The way in which the power manifests varies from spirit to spirit. Some detect hungry ghosts as a foul odor or a sudden chill, while others claim to be able to suddenly hear their howling, even from great distances.

Once a ghost has detected a hungry ghost, she is then aware of its location at all times until it leaves her range. Hungry ghosts are not aware they've been found out, nor are they usually clever enough to lope outside of range and then return, undetected.

CALL THE RAVENING HOUND

Cost: 8 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Valor: 2

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: Taste the Demon Wind

Summoning a hungry ghost — or a pack of them — is not the brightest thing a ghost can do. However, there are times when it makes sense to do so. The arrival of a pack of hungry ghosts can provide excellent cover for an escape, and some of the more advanced Arcanoi also provide uses for hungry ghosts that arrive.

The use of Call the Ravening Hound requires a successful Manipulation + Presence roll. The more successes scored, the further away the hungry ghosts may be that are summoned (and the more who are likely to heed the call). Bear in mind, however, that if one hungry ghost suddenly bolts in response to a summons, the rest of his pack may follow of its own volition.

Number of Successes	Range	Maximum Number of Hungry Ghosts Called
1	100 yards	1
2	250 yards	2
3	500 yards	4
4	1 mile	8
5	5 miles	20

When a ghost uses this power successfully, a cold, unearthly shrieking rises up from where he is standing. This radiates outward to the limits of the Arcanos' effective range. Any hungry ghosts within the range will howl in response, and the nearest to the summoning ghost will respond. This initial call is very distinctive, and those who are familiar with the use of the Arcanos will be able to recognize it for what it is. This practice is highly illegal in civilized portions of the Underworld. Those caught using Call the Ravening Hound face enslavement or worse as punishment for deliberately attracting the scourge of hungry ghosts.

RELENTLESS HUNTER'S MARK**Cost:** 10 motes, 1 Willpower**Duration:** One hour**Type:** Simple**Minimum Valor:** 4**Minimum Essence:** 3**Prerequisite Charms:** Call the Ravening Hound

Hungry ghosts are relentless, savage hunters. This is why many ghosts find it useful to unleash them on their enemies. Placing the Relentless Hunter's Mark on a victim immediately makes that individual the center of attention for any hungry ghost in the vicinity, as well as any he stumbles across while the Mark endures. A pale white handprint outlined in angry red, the Mark calls hungry ghosts to itself like raw meat calls hungry dogs, and it whips those hungry ghosts into a frenzy of anger against the Mark's bearer.

The Mark can be placed on an individual or on an item such as a breastplate or weapon. To place the Relentless Hunter's Mark, a ghost's player must make a successful Dexterity + Brawl roll for his character to touch the target, then succeed on a Manipulation + Presence roll (difficulty 2). The Mark then remains in place on the target for an hour, highly visible to all. Hungry ghosts will react to the Mark immediately and will pursue the victim relentlessly until either they or their target is brought down. Once the Mark fades, hungry ghosts will no longer be unnaturally drawn to the character, but if they're already hunting her, they won't suddenly stop.

While the basic Mark fades after an hour, some ghosts are skilled at prolonging its effects. The expenditure of a single experience point when placing the Relentless Hunter's Mark on a target seals it in place for a year and a day. Spending 2 makes it permanent.

DIVERSION OF THE SAVAGE HUNGER**Cost:** 12 motes**Duration:** One scene**Type:** Simple**Minimum Valor:** 2**Minimum Essence:** 1**Prerequisite Charms:** Call the Ravening Hound

The flip side of detecting the location of a nearby hungry ghost is preventing it from detecting you. While ghosts of power can deal with even a pack of hungry ghosts with minimal risk of destruction, not every restless spirit is so capable. Even those who can put down a hungry ghost should the situation require it often prefer to avoid any confrontation on general principle.

With that in mind, many ghosts become skilled in the exercise of Diversion of the Savage Hunger. The successful use of this Arcanos effectively removes a ghost from the perception of any nearby hungry ghosts. A successful Perception + Presence roll is required (difficulty 2), but once success is achieved, the hungry ghost or ghosts are no

longer a problem — a single successful use hides a ghost from all hungry ghosts until the end of the scene. Any attack on the hungry ghosts or otherwise ostentatious display of the hiding ghost's presence negates the effect of Diversion of the Savage Hunger and leaves the ghost vulnerable to attack once again.

TAME THE WICKED APPETITE**Cost:** 8 motes**Duration:** One scene**Type:** Simple**Minimum Valor:** 2**Minimum Essence:** 2**Prerequisite Charms:** Diversion of the Savage Hunger

Tame the Wicked Appetite does exactly what its name suggests: It soothes the driving passion of hungry ghosts, rendering them passive and calm. Hungry ghosts that are affected will simply lay down in their tracks or wander around dazed. If attacked, they will return to their customary savagery, but if not attacked, they will be dull and passive until the Arcanos' power wears off. They will not even resist attempts to chain or muzzle them, though once they feel their bonds they may become more violent.

Using Tame the Wicked Appetite requires a roll of Charisma + Presence. The more successes obtained, the more hungry ghosts that can be dealt with. Any hungry ghost struck by the usage of Tame the Wicked Appetite will fall prey to it immediately, whether it is wandering the shadowlands or in mid-pounce. This Charm has a maximum range of (the ghost's Valor x 10) yards.

Number of Successes	Number of Hungry Ghosts Tamed
1	1
2	3
3	5
4	10
5	20

The hungry ghosts' hunger remains sated for the duration of a single scene, though for the cost of another mote of Essence, the ghost using the Arcanos can extend the effect for an hour. Furthermore, by spending an experience point, the ghost can make the effect permanent, rendering the affected hungry ghosts permanently deprived of their appetites. This expenditure releases any Essence committed to the Charm.

COMMAND THE HUNGRY DEVIL**Cost:** 8 motes, 1 Willpower**Duration:** Instant**Type:** Simple**Minimum Valor:** 3**Minimum Essence:** 2**Prerequisite Charms:** Call the Ravening Hound



There are times when it is not enough to divert a hungry ghost. Occasionally, it is useful to harness the ravening power of a hungry ghost to one's own ends. Thus was developed the ability to Command the Hungry Devil. This Arcanos allows a ghost to issue a single, irresistible command to a hungry ghost. The command itself must be obeyed to the letter and to the best of the hungry ghost's ability, even if it leads to swift destruction.

To Command the Hungry Devil requires a successful Manipulation + Presence roll, difficulty 2. The more successes achieved, the more hungry ghosts can be commanded.

Number of Successes	Number of Hungry Ghosts Commanded
1	1
2	3
3	5
4	10
5	20

The command need not be a single word, as a relatively simple sentence can be understood by a hungry ghost. "Stop" is a perfectly acceptable use of Command the Hungry Devil, with the understanding that the hungry ghost is free to start again a moment later. More effective are commands such as "Attack him!" or "Go back to the corpse that spawned you!" On the other hand, any ghost who issues a complex command such as "Invade the Prince of Shadows' citadel and bring me his left-handed gauntlet" is going to be disappointed. If the order given is too complex, the target ghost will remain motionless for a turn and then resume its former attitude. Hungry ghosts will, however, attempt to fulfill impossible commands, so long as they are simple enough to be understood.

DUST COMMANDS LITANY

Cost: 12 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Valor: 2

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Command the Hungry Devil

Dust Commands Litany is an extension of the power of Command the Hungry Devil. Rather than a single command, however, it grants mastery over the hungry ghost for an entire scene. Furthermore, it can be extended for an additional scene by an additional mote's expenditure. Dust Commands Litany is useful for ghosts who keep penned herds of hungry ghosts or who employ the beasts as watchdogs and the like.

GHOSTLY HARNESS EXERCISE

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One month

Type: Simple

Minimum Valor: 3

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Tame the Wicked Appetite, Command the Hungry Devil

There are some among the dead who devote their existence to dealing with the scourge of hungry ghosts in a most unusual fashion — by taming them. These spirits are masters of Ghostly Harness Exercise, which allows them to soothe hungry ghosts' savage nature for extended periods of time. While hungry ghosts marked by this power maintain their capacity for savagery, they are no longer constantly ravenous and can be trained. They even form a bond of sorts with the ghost who tames them, and so long as they are tamed, they will not attack him under any circumstances. This includes while under the influence of Command the Hungry Devil. Of course, the hungry ghost trainer must keep his end of the bargain, taking care of his charges, spending time with them and feeding them appropriately.

Hungry ghosts tamed with this power can be used as watchdogs or bodyguards. Some ghosts use them as fighting animals in tournaments and underground betting pits, but most feel that this is an unnecessary expense. Without the effects of Ghostly Harness Exercise, the task of training a hungry ghost is utterly impossible. Even with the Charm, training is a time-consuming process and requires a month of intense work with harness, whip and fist. However, once the hungry ghost has been trained, it is trained forever.

Tamed hungry ghosts function in much the same way trained hounds do for mortals, obeying simple commands, leaping to their owners' defense and eagerly awaiting the chance to hunt.

SPIRIT-HANDLING LEASH

Cost: 5 motes, 2 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Valor: 3

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Ghostly Harness Exercise

Spirit-Handling Leash is not nearly so powerful as its prerequisite. It does, however, have one virtue that Ghostly Harness Exercise lacks: versatility. It allows a trainer to transfer a tamed hungry ghost's loyalty to a new owner, quickly, easily and permanently. The trainer is still regarded with some, for lack of a better term, affection, but it is to its new owner that the hungry ghost now shows its utter devotion. The Spirit-Handling Leash will remain in place permanently, and the hungry ghost whose affections have been transferred will regard its owner with the same

affection it once gave its trainer. The hungry ghost will hunt, guard or attack at its owner's command and will never attack the holder of the Spirit-Handling Leash. It is not uncommon to see servants of wealthy and noble ghosts walking the streets of the necropoli with leashed packs of hungry ghosts snuffling out ahead of them, a plain symbol of their power for all to see.

ESSENCE-MEASURING THIEF ARTS

The dead treasure Essence, for there is little of it in their dusty realm. Many of their arts focus around moving, storing and stealing Essence. These are called the Essence-Measuring Thief Arts, though all those who practice them are not thieves, the dead are suspicious of them nevertheless, for they can suck the prayers from a fellow spirit with but a touch.

AURA-READING TECHNIQUE

Cost: 2 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Temperance: 1

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

Aura-Reading Technique allows a ghost to see how much Essence another being — be it a ghost, another spirit or an Exalted — contains within her. Use of Aura-Reading Technique requires a successful Perception + Larceny roll. If the roll is successful, the ghost can perceive the aura of anything he looks at for a single scene. This allows the ghost to literally see the Essence bubbling within the target. The ghost cannot do anything about this, nor can he share his vision with another. However, this technique does allow him to assess those he comes in contact with quickly.

To a ghost using Aura-Reading Technique, the color of the target's aura correlates to the amount of Essence she contains. The "aura" the Arcanos displays is not a true aura. Rather, it is a colorful display that, to the ghost's eyes, appears to overlay the target's silhouette. It is visible regardless of ambient light, but the ghost must be aware of the target's presence before he can use Aura-Reading Technique. In other words, it this Charm cannot be used for detection, only assessment.

Color	Number of Motes
Black	Zero
Indigo	1-5
Green	5-10
Yellow	10-20
Orange	20-40
Red	40+

There is no way for the target of an Aura-Reading Technique to know that she has been spied upon in this manner. The Technique has an effective range equal to the ghost's sight range, and as such, ghosts skilled in its usage are often used as lookouts by the Deathlords.

DELICIOUS ESSENCE SCENT

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Temperance: 1

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: Aura-Reading Technique

Delicious Essence Scent does not allow a ghost to determine how much Essence someone contains. Rather, it enables the ghost to sniff out living sources of Essence.

To use Delicious Essence Scent, the ghost spends a mote of Essence, and his player makes a Perception + Dexterity roll (difficulty 2). A success immediately fills the ghost's nostrils with the scent of Essence, which the ghost can follow to its source. The stronger the source, the more potent the trail, and the easier it is for the ghost to follow. The ghost's player makes a Perception + Temperance roll, with a difficulty equal to (4 - the permanent Essence of the target [minimum 1]). If the roll is successful, the ghost is aware of the character's location and permanent Essence. The power has a range of 100 yards.

As the ghost is detecting pure Essence, Delicious Essence Scent pierces illusions, veils and disguises that do not also cloak the character's magical nature. If anything living is within range, Delicious Essence Scent can find it.

ESSENCE-DEVOURING GHOST TOUCH

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Temperance: 1

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Delicious Essence Scent

Essence-Devouring Ghost Touch lets a ghost absorb another ghost's Essence through the brush of a fingertip. Any touch is sufficient to let the ghost drain the target's energies, though it must, in fact, be a touch. Mere proximity is not enough for Essence-Devouring Ghost Touch to work. To use Essence-Devouring Ghost Touch, the ghost must succeed on an unarmed Brawl or Martial Arts attack, which need do no damage.

When the power activates, the player of the ghost makes a difficulty 2 Manipulation + Larceny roll. Each success on the roll strips away 2 motes of Essence from the victim. This Essence does not flow to the ghost. Rather, it dissipates and can be used by no one. When Essence-Devouring Ghost Touch is used by several ghosts in conjunction, it is a deadly tactic. In particular, it is a



favorite tool of hungry ghosts, who use it to swarm victims under when hunting. This Charm only works on ghosts and beings of a ghostly nature.

FEEDING THE LAMPREY'S APPETITE

Cost: 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Temperance: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Essence-Devouring Ghost Touch

Feeding the Lamprey's Appetite makes use of the delicious Essence wasted by Essence-Devouring Ghost Touch. After this Arcanos is invoked, at any point later in the turn, the ghost may make a Temperance roll (difficulty 1). A success lets her absorb a number of motes equal to half the number stripped from the target. These motes are then available for her use, if necessary allowing her to re-trigger Essence-Devouring Ghost Touch.

RAVENING LIFE-FORCE HUNGER

Cost: 4 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Temperance: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Essence-Devouring Ghost Touch

Ravens Life-Force Hunger removes the protection the living have against the scourge of Essence-Devouring Ghost Touch. Not only does Ravens Life-Force Hunger affect ghosts, it also affects other spirits, Exalted and any other beings unfortunate enough to encounter it. The ghost must be materialized for the power to work, however.

The technique for using Ravens Life-Force Hunger is precisely identical to that for Essence-Devouring Ghost Touch. Each success on the Manipulation + Larceny roll dissipates 2 motes of Essence for each success. The Essence dissipates and cannot be used by anyone. Non-Essence-channelers who are affected by this Charm have their breath disrupted. Those whose players succeed at a Stamina + Endurance roll (difficulty 3) will survive, those whose players fail will be incapacitated by chills and mad hallucinations by the time the sun next crosses the horizon. They will die in (their Stamina) days unless they are tended by a character with Medicine 3 or higher who can correct their disrupted life rhythms.

BLOOD-DRINKING THIRST

Cost: 1 Willpower + 1 Willpower per activation

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Temperance: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Ravens Life-Force Hunger

Blood-Drinking Thirst does not literally drain blood or, indeed, any fluid from the victim, but it does allow the ghost to steal the strength of a being besides another ghost. It makes available for the ghost's use the Essence drained by Ravening Life-Force Hunger. When this Arcanos is active, whenever the ghost uses Ravening Life-Force Hunger or Essence-Devouring Ghost Touch, she can spend a Willpower for her player to make a reflexive Temperance roll (difficulty 1). Success lets her absorb a number of motes equal to the number stripped from the target, which are instantly available for her use. Her Essence cannot be increased beyond its maximum through the use of this Charm.

BLENDING THE STREAMS OF ESSENCE

Cost: 6 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Temperance: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Essence-Devouring Ghost Touch

Blending the Streams of Essence reverses the flow of energy from Essence-Devouring Ghost Touch. Instead of draining Essence from the victim, Blending the Streams of Essence allows a ghost to give some of her own energy to another ghost, which he can then use for whatever purpose he desires. This energy can be used instantly by the recipient.

Using Blending the Streams of Essence requires a physical touch. If the target resists, it must be delivered as part of a successful unarmed Brawl or Martial Arts attack, which need do no damage. Once physical contact is made, the donor ghost's player must succeed on a Temperance roll (difficulty 1). If it succeeds, she may transfer a number of motes equal to her Willpower rating to the intended recipient. He can, if he chooses, refuse the infusion, in which case the Essence is lost. The Essence given comes from the ghost's own pool, and the ghost can never reduce her temporary Essence pool below 1 with his Charm.

Blending the Streams of Essence can only be used on one ghost per scene. It is only effective on ghosts, and any attempt to use it on a living being wastes the ghost's energies.

FEEDING LIFE'S FOUNTAIN

Cost: 7 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Temperance: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Blending the Streams of Essence

Feeding Life's Fountain allows a ghost to transfer his Essence to a living recipient. All of the rules and restric-

tions of Blending the Streams of Essence apply. If used on non-Essence-channelers, the effect is one of extreme good health and lasts for (the Essence of the ghost activating the Arcanos x the number of motes spent) days. The victim will have one automatic success on all Stamina + Resistance or Stamina + Endurance rolls to resist illness or poisoning and will not become ill from fatigue even if they eat badly or live under bad conditions. Living recipients are also very fertile, and it is through this Charm that ancestors answer their descendants' fertility problems. This Charm cannot cure actual sterility, only reproductive difficulties. Giving birth to the child is often difficult for or fatal to the mother if she had difficulty bearing live children or carrying them to term.

FILLING THE PRECIOUS VIAL

Cost: 7 motes + 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Temperance: 3

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Blending the Streams of Essence

Masters of this technique create the gems and crystals laden with Essence that fuel the Underworld's society. Filling the Precious Vial is nothing less than the ability to take one's own Essence and pour it into an inanimate container for anyone to use.

Putting this power to use requires both the preparation of a suitable container, such as an Essence-containing gem or soulfire crystal and a Perception + Larceny roll (difficulty 2). Before the roll, the ghost's player must announce the number of motes to be invested in the object. If the roll is a success, the motes are expended and the Essence is sealed in the container. Containers used for holding Essence are rare and delicate things. Soulfire crystals (see p. 254) are the most popular, followed by Essence-containing gems (see p. 255), though there are other options such as small carvings and mirrors that enjoy a certain amount of popularity. An Essence container that is cracked, however, is liable to go up in a massive explosion, doing one level of lethal damage per mote stored inside to anyone within 10 feet of the blast.

If the Willpower point is not spent activating this Charm, the Vial is still filled, but it will leak a mote a day. The expenditure of the Willpower seals the Vial and traps the Essence inside.

THE STRINGLESS PUPPETEER ART

Possession is one of the hallmark powers of the dead, and it is through the use of the Stringless Puppeteer Art that the dead exercise this dark influence over the living.



SPIRIT-CATCHING EYE TECHNIQUE

Cost: 2 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Compassion: 1

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

Death sharpens a ghost's perceptions. Ghosts can see better than mortals, can spot flaws more easily and can pick out the living from the dead at great distances. Some ghosts, however, have acquired even better methods of perception, and Spirit-Catching Eye Technique is one of them. This power lets a ghost see other ghosts who might normally be hidden from the eye. Ghosts who possess mortals or travel inside the bodies of other ghosts may be able to hide from normal observers, but Spirit-Catching Eye Technique reveals them.

When invoked, any ghosts or other spirits within view suddenly seem to glow with a pale white light. If the ghost is possessing a mortal, the ghost's face overlays the host's. If ghosts are traveling in another ghost's body, each is distinctly illuminated through the host's ectoplasmic flesh, which becomes transparent. The power lasts only an instant, and the ghost may or may not (reflexive Perception + Awareness roll, difficulty 2) be able to recognize the ghostly faces she sees hiding in mortal or unliving flesh.

Those spotted by use of this power are not aware they've been noticed, unless the ghost doing the spotting gives the game away through a reaction of some sort.

SOUL-WHISPERING EMPATHY DISCIPLINE

Cost: 3 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Compassion: 1

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: Spirit-Catching Eye Technique

This technique allows a ghost to sense a target's surface thoughts and feelings, picking up the rough gist of what the target is thinking about, as well as any strong emotions he might be experiencing. While this power does not allow the ghost to go rummaging through a victim's subconscious, it does allow her to go "along for the ride," as it were, and pick up knowledge pertaining to what the victim is doing at the moment. If the victim is reciting a password to pass an enchanted guardian, the ghost will hear it, but if the victim is trying on various pairs of shoes, it's highly unlikely the password will come to the surface of his mind.

The use of Soul-Whispering Empathy Discipline first requires the acquisition of a target. The victim must be within sight of the ghost, though no physical contact is required. (Once psychic contact is made, the ghost no longer needs to maintain proximity.) After a target has

been identified, the next step is a Manipulation + Awareness roll (difficulty equal to the target's Essence). Success on this roll allows the ghost to make contact. While contact is established, the ghost "hears" the target's thoughts. She does not see through his eyes or hear through his ears. However, the victim's thoughts are easily distinguishable from the ghost's own.

Contact lasts for a single scene, though the ghost can extend it for another scene by spending a Willpower point. The ghost can continue to do this until she runs out of Willpower, if she so chooses. The victim does not know that his thoughts are being eavesdropped on, although Exalted and anyone with a Compassion of 3 or above may (Perception + Awareness, difficulty 1) have the distinct feeling he's being watched.

Contact with the target is broken at the end of the scene, if the target is killed or rendered unconscious or if the ghost doing the eavesdropping is wounded or otherwise distracted (including any expenditure of Willpower for any other reason than to extend this Charm). This Arcanos works on ghosts as well as mortals.

SKIN-RIDING PRANA

Cost: 6 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Compassion: 1

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Soul-Whispering Empathy Discipline

Skin-Riding Prana builds upon the base established by Soul-Whispering Empathy Discipline. However, in addition to allowing a ghost to simply skim the surface of the target's mind, he can now make full use of the target's senses. He can see through the victim's eyes, hear through her ears and even catch the scent of whatever the target sniffs.

While Skin-Riding Prana is active, the input from the target overlays what the ghost himself sees and hears in a distant, transparent fashion. If the ghost concentrates, he can easily make out what the target is seeing and hearing. If there are distractions around the character, paying attention to both sensory inputs requires a Willpower roll, difficulty 1. Many practitioners of this power prefer to retreat to specially prepared chambers or tents if they can once contact has been established, the better to protect themselves from any outside input.

Other than the obvious, Skin-Riding Prana functions in the same way as does Soul-Whispering Empathy Discipline. The victim must be within sight of the ghost, though no touch is required. After a target has been identified, the next step is a Manipulation + Awareness roll (difficulty equal to the target's Essence). Success on this roll allows the ghost to make contact, and once psychic contact is

made, the ghost no longer needs to maintain proximity. This Arcanos works on ghosts as well as mortals.

SIX DEMON BAG

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower to create; 3 motes to eject

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Compassion: 2

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: Spirit-Catching Eye Technique, Skin-Riding Prana

A Six Demon Bag is a boon to ghostly smugglers, assassins and couriers of all persuasions. It is equally the bane of border patrols, bodyguards and customs agents. This power allows a ghost to create a hollow within herself in which she can store small items without a hint of evidence.

When using a Six Demon Bag, the ghost tears open a gap in her flesh and inserts the item to be carried there — be it cash, a dagger, a scroll or anything else inert and up to one cubic foot in area — into the hollow thus created. The ghost's flesh is then sealed up around it, and the item rests more or less comfortably within the ghost herself. Experienced couriers know to sheathe weapons and the like, lest a smuggled knife cut its way out during a particularly energetic moment.

The mechanical effect of this Charm is to add +4 difficulty to a searching character's player's Perception + Awareness roll when contesting the Wits + Larceny roll the smuggler's player makes to conceal an object. Removing the object from the Six Demon Bag costs an additional 3 motes of Essence. The ghost can eject the item from her body at any time, or she can wait for the Arcanos to expire, at which point the item pops out on its own. The item can be cut out of the ghost in question as well. This doesn't cost the additional 3 motes, but it does inflict damage on the ghost — three health levels of unsoakable lethal damage. Items carried in a Six Demon Bag do show up when the ghost is viewed with Spirit-Catching Eye Technique. This negates the Charm's bonus, but the ghost's player can still make a Wits + Larceny roll for the ghost to shield the compartment.

MORTAL-SHADOWING TECHNIQUE

Cost: 7 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One hour

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Compassion: 2

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: Soul-Whispering Empathy Discipline

Mortal-Shadowing Technique is the next step on the road to possession. A ghost using Mortal-Shadowing Technique can literally meld into a mortal's body, journeying

with him and experiencing all that he experiences. This includes everything from ecstasy to death, though the latter forces the ghost out of the host's body.

Activation of this power requires, first of all, finding a target. Once the ghost has a target, she has merely to touch him or make an unarmed Brawl or Martial Arts attack that need do no damage. Her player then makes a Dexterity + Awareness roll, with a difficulty equal to the target's permanent Essence. If the roll is successful, the ghost sinks into the flesh of her host and will journey with him wherever he goes and whatever he does.

The host is unaware of the ghost unless she breaks her silence or otherwise gives herself away, but once he is aware, he can spend a Willpower point for his player to make a contested Willpower roll against the ghost. If the ghost loses, she is ejected from the body. If not, she remains.

If the host is killed, the ghost is immediately forced out of the body. Note that while using Mortal-Shadowing Technique, the ghost cannot control or otherwise affect the body that she is "possessing." She is merely a passenger, albeit an awake and aware one. Interestingly enough, any damage done to the host body manifests as bashing damage on the ghost.

Spending an additional Willpower point extends the effect for a day. More than one ghost at a time can use Mortal-Shadowing Technique, but if one extends control to the level of Puppeteer's Masterful Hand, the rest are ejected instantly, with the host none the wiser.

PUPPETEER'S MASTERFUL HAND

Cost: 7 motes, 2 Willpower

Duration: One hour

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Compassion: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Mortal-Shadowing Technique

Unlike Mortal Shadowing Technique, this Arcanos allows for true possession. Once in command of the mortal body, the ghost truly controls it. She can use any of the body's Attributes and Abilities, but she is not privy to the host's secrets or knowledge. If the victim is Exalted, she can use all his attunements and automatic effects, and any reflexive effects the Exalt activates to preserve his frame, but the ghost has no access to the Exalt's Charms. The ghost can also use her Arcanoi, including those involving effects to the ghost's body such as Ghost-Devil Form. Any transformation and reshaping lapses the instant the ghost departs the victim's frame. The puppeteer uses her own Essence and not the host's to power any Arcanoi she activates.

Puppeteer's Masterful Hand requires a Dexterity + Compassion roll with a difficulty equal to twice the target's permanent Essence. The possessing ghost may extend the effects of this Charm for an additional hour by expending



1 Willpower per hour, but her player must succeed at the possession roll again each time the duration is extended. During the possession, the body's native intelligence is removed from authority and has no awareness of what his body does while it is possessed unless the ghost wants to let him watch. Needless to say, this can produce some awkward situations, as the ghost is under no obligation to leave the host in better shape than she found him.

If so possessed, the reflexive Charms of one of the Exalted continue to defend his body. The Exalt's player should decide intelligently what reflexives activate when, but the consciousness of the Exalt is not making the decisions, the player is just portraying the character's supernatural combat training.

NEMISSARY'S RIDE

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower (+ 1 experience point)

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Compassion: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Mortal-Shadowing Technique

This Arcanos allows a ghost to acquire a host more pliable and convenient than a living human. Instead of a living host, he possesses a corpse and manipulates its dead flesh as a ghost using Puppeteer's Masterful Hand manipulates the living. Because there is no resistance, the

character's player need only succeed in a difficulty 1 Strength + Compassion roll for the ghost to inhabit the corpse. The only limitation is that the magic animating the body isn't strong enough to hold disarticulated bones together, so there must be enough flesh remaining to actually move the corpse.

A ghost using this Charm may extend the duration by paying the activation cost again. His player may spend an experience point to make the possession permanent. This locks the ghost in the body, free of charge, until he chooses to leave. When he abandons it, it can never be inhabited again. As a corpse will decay to the point of uselessness in just a few weeks, most nemissaries are very hard on permanently possessed bodies. Ghosts who know this Arcanos and have access to their own corpse can possess it permanently without the cost of an experience point.

DEAD FUR CLOAK METHOD

Cost: 6 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Indefinite

Type: Simple

Minimum Compassion: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Nemissary's Ride

The possession of the human form is easiest for the dead, as they were themselves once human. Yet, with



refinement of their skills, the dead can also possess animals as well. This Arcanos allows a ghost to possess the corpse of any beast no larger than a wolf. It is most typically used on raitons, because they mummify naturally and can be made to fly even when long dead. The Deathlords use veritable legions of such spies. When in possession of an animal's body, the ghost has all of its Physical Attributes but otherwise uses his own Traits. As with Nemissary's Ride, the character's player need only make a difficulty 1 Strength + Compassion roll to effect the possession.

DEATH OF A HOST

While the death (or destruction) of a host doesn't mean the death of the rider, it can have unpleasant consequences for the ghost in command. The ghost is forcibly ejected from the host's body and stunned and unable to act for a number of turns equal to the host's Willpower.

TANGLED WEB ARTS

Destiny and Passion tie a ghost to his Fetters. Many Arcanoi revolve around monitoring and protecting these attachments.

WORLD-BRIDGING MEDITATION

Cost: 4 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Temperance: 1

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

Ghosts maintain links to the world they left behind, willingly or no. World-Bridging Meditation enables a ghost to check in on those things that still matter. While it does not provide tremendous detail, it does give enough information to allow the ghost to know the basics of what's going on with his Fetters. For many of the dead, that's enough.

To employ World-Bridging Meditation, the ghost requires a moment of peace and quiet in which to meditate. If the circumstances are noisy or disruptive, a Willpower roll is required. Once the ghost is calm enough to continue, the player announces what Fetter the ghost is attempting to sense. It must be a Fetter — otherwise, the connection won't be strong enough to allow the ghost to peer through the veil of death. At that point, a Wits + Temperance roll is made. If it is successful, the ghost gets a sense of the current state of the object or person. What the ghost gets is nothing more than a general assessment — health, condition and not much more. If the person is dead (or the object has been destroyed) the ghost is instantly aware of it and feels a cold, hollow absence.

DEATH-AVOIDING MONITOR

Cost: 4 motes, 1 Willpower/+1 or 2 experience

Duration: One week/instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Temperance: 1

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: World-Bridging Meditation

Sometimes, a momentary glimpse isn't enough. In these cases, the ghost wishes to establish a more permanent link. In that case, Death-Avoiding Monitor is a useful technique for letting the ghost remain constantly aware of the condition of an object. The Death-Avoiding Monitor lets the ghost know when the object — or person's — condition changes. Such changes include — but are not limited to — injury, illness, death, falling in love and pregnancy, in the case of a person, or structural damage or destruction, in the case of an object. The sense of the object stays in the background and only intrudes when the ghost concentrates or when the monitored condition changes. The object does not need to be one of the ghost's Fetters.

Establishing the Death-Avoiding Monitor requires a Perception + Temperance roll, difficulty 1. If the ghost wishes to extend the effect of the Death-Avoiding Monitor, his player can do so by extending an experience point. This allows the effect to carry over for a year and a day. Adding a second experience point makes the effect permanent.

EXTENSION OF THE FRIENDLY GAZE

Cost: 6 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Temperance: 2

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: World-Bridging Meditation

Extension of the Friendly Gaze allows a ghost to peer in on another ghost's Fetters. By laying a hand on her fellow shade, the ghost can peer across the barrier between worlds to see how the Fetter is faring. This information is not magically shared with the target, which allows the ghost gathering it to use the power in a potentially unscrupulous manner.

The first step in the Extension of the Friendly Gaze is simple physical contact between the ghost and her peer. If the other ghost is willing, this is automatic. If not, it requires a successful Dexterity + Brawl or Martial Arts attack, which need do no damage. Once physical contact, be it ever so brief, has been established, the player of the ghost attempting to use this Arcanos makes a reflexive Wits + Mediation roll at a difficulty of (5 - the Fetter rating of the object). If successful, the ghost gets the same sort of information about one of the target's Fetters that she would have gotten from using World-Bridging Meditation for herself. If the target is not consenting, the Storyteller chooses the object or individual the ghost learns about.



TURNABOUT IS FAIR PLAY

There is no way for a ghost to know if her counterpart also has the ability to perform Extension of the Friendly Gaze. If a ghost uses the power on a ghost who also possesses it, that ghost may, in turn, use it, reflexively and simultaneously, on his assailant.

VEIL-PIERCING BINDING

Cost: 5 motes, 2 Willpower + 1 or 2 experience

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Temperance: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Extension of the Friendly Gaze
With Veil-Piercing Binding, a ghost can do for others

what Death-Avoiding Monitor allows him to do for himself. This Arcanos binds an object or person in the lands of the living to the consciousness of a ghost, allowing her to perform a check on its status whenever she wants.

Veil-Piercing Binding must be invoked the turn after Extension of the Friendly Gaze. The ghost's player makes an Endurance + Meditation roll (difficulty 2). If it succeeds, the Fetter the ghost saw with Extension of the Friendly Gaze is bound to the target. As with Death-Avoiding Monitor, the target must spend a point of Essence each time she wishes to check in on her bound Fetter. Veil-Piercing Binding can only bind one object or person at a time, but it can be used more than once on an individual ghost.

The duration of Veil-Piercing Binding can be extended by the expenditure of experience points. One experience point prolongs the effect for a year; two makes it permanent.

MARK OF THE RELENTLESS HUNTER

Cost: 6 motes, 1 Willpower + 1 or 2 experience

Duration: One week

Type: Simple

Minimum Temperance: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Death-Avoiding Monitor

The Mark of the Relentless Hunter allows a ghost to not only know the rough condition of a Fetter, but also to sense its location and direction. While Mark of the Relentless Hunter is in effect, the ghost can effortlessly sense the Fetter and, thus, can track it even across the worlds. The connection, once forged, is unbreakable by any natural means, and the ghost's sense of his Fetter is unshakable. Only the end of the Arcanos' duration or the destruction of the item will serve to break the connection naturally.

The Mark of the Relentless Hunter can also be set on an item or person bound to a ghost through either Death-

Avoiding Monitor or Veil-Piercing Binding. The object must be specified before the Essence and Willpower is spent, at which point the player of the ghost activating the Arcanos makes a Perception + Meditation roll (difficulty 2 if it's being performed on another ghost, difficulty 1 if the ghost is performing it on herself). If the roll is successful, the ghost now has a fix on the item and can summon up its condition and direction without expenditure of Essence.

Expending 1 experience point can extend the Mark out to a year. A second experience point makes the sign permanent. Characters who have this Charm's effects binding them to an object can develop Fetters relating to it more easily and cheaply. See Chapter Seven: Storytelling for details. If another ghost is the beneficiary of this Arcanos, his player must spend the experience points. Essence committed to the Charm is released when it is made permanent with experience.

THE ETERNAL HUNT

Once the Mark of the Relentless Hunter has been made permanent, even death cannot exert power over it. A ghost can find a loved one or a hated enemy who passes into the Underworld by virtue of a Mark placed during life.

SENSING THE DELICATE STRANDS

Cost: 6 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Temperance: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Aura-Reading Technique, Extension of the Friendly Gaze

Sensing the Delicate Strands allows a ghost to get a mental image of the things that are important to another ghost. It is also a key step in performing Chain-Shattering Discipline, illuminating a target who would otherwise be unknowable.

Using the Arcanos does not require physical contact. Instead, the ghost must only be within sight of her target. Once the object of her attentions has been picked out, the ghost's player makes a Perception + Occult roll (difficulty 3). A success gives the ghost basic knowledge of one of the target's Fetters. The character knows the distance to, the direction of, the appearance of and the general nature of the subject's attachment to the Fetter. At no additional cost, the ghost's player can keep rolling until she fails. Each success reveals another secret.

If an attempt at Sensing the Delicate Strands fails, 24 hours must elapse before the ghost can make another attempt on the same target. A ghost whose mind has been read thus is not aware that Sensing the Delicate Strands

has been used on him, regardless of whether the attempt succeeds or fails.

CHAIN-SHATTERING DISCIPLINE

Cost: 6 motes, 3 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Temperance: 3

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Mark of the Relentless Hunter

Chain-Shattering Discipline is the inverse of powers such as Veil-Piercing Binding. Instead of binding a ghost to a Fetter, this Arcanoi instead shatters that bond. Once the ghost has identified a target, she can choose to break the ghost's connection to it. Once the connection is broken, the Fetter is gone. It and its representation no longer provide any benefits, nor can the ghost nor any other ghosts spy on it with Arcanoi for sensing or locating Fetters. The connection is lost, irretrievably and irrevocably.

The use of Chain-Shattering Discipline requires either visual contact with the target and a successful use of Sensing the Delicate Strands or possession of something belonging to the target, which is broken when the Charm is activated. A Strength + Temperance roll with difficulty equal to the target's permanent Essence plus the strength of the Fetter is required to actually break the link.

The target is instantly aware of the breaking of the link, even if there was no active connection between the two at the time. The victim's player must also succeed on a Willpower roll, or his character goes mad for a number of days equal to the attacker's Temperance rating.

WEAVER GUARDS THE LOOM

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: One day

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Temperance: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Sensing the Delicate Strands

Any ghost who can touch another's Fetters is painfully aware that someone may be doing the same thing to them. This knowledge made the development of Weaver Guards the Loom — the most basic defense against this sort of aggression — a necessity. By exercising Weaver Guards the Loom, the ghost gathers the threads of his Fetters, so as to know when another hand is touching them.

Activating Weaver Guards the Loom requires an Intelligence + Meditation roll (difficulty 1). If successful, the ghost is now automatically protected against Fetter-related intrusion. He need not think about it and can reflexively renew the protection when its duration lapses.

While Weaver Guards the Loom is in effect, the ghost's player gets a reflexive Perception + Temperance roll (difficulty 1) in the instance of any attempt to use any

Fetter monitoring or detection Charm against the ghost. If the action is detected, the ghost's player can make a reflexive Perception + Occult roll (difficulty 3) to see if his character has an idea where the intrusion comes from. Success on this roll reveals the identity of the interloper. Weaver Guards the Loom does not prevent the intrusion. It merely reports the fact to the ghost whose Fetters are being violated. There is no way for the intruding ghost to know she has been detected.

FARMER DEFENDS THE UNHARVESTED FIELD

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Temperance: 3

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Weaver Guards the Loom

Weaver Guards the Loom provides awareness of intrusion. Farmer Defends the Unharvested Field allows the ghost to strike back. A supplement to its predecessor, Farmer Defends the Unharvested Field is generally invoked whenever Weaver Guards the Loom detects tampering with the character's Fetters. As soon as the latter Charm detects an unwelcome intrusion of this sort, the ghost's power strikes back invisibly. On a successful Wits + Mediation (difficulty 1) roll by the player of the ghost using this Charm, the offending party suddenly suffers sharp pain, akin to being struck with a glass-studded whip. This does 5L damage, soaked only with natural soak. The intruding ghost loses her concentration, the attempt she made automatically fails, and her identity is immediately known to her target. While the blow is strictly psychic, it does have a physical manifestation — the affected ghost bleeds from her sensory organs for several minutes.

While Farmer Defends the Unharvested Field is reflexive, a ghost can choose not to unleash it. The cost of the Arcanoi is paid each time it is used, but there is no cost if the ghost refrains from using it. Farmer Defends the Unharvested Field can specifically preempt Chain-Shattering Discipline.

THE WONDERS OF THE DEAD

The ghostly technologies of the Underworld are very different than the automata and daiklaves of the living. Unhindered by natural laws, these items display a bewildering variety of macabre powers and function only in the Underworld. If not in the Underworld or the shadowlands, they are worthless junk. If kept too long within the lands of the living, they will crumble to dust. In the lands of the dead, however, these artifacts wield an impressive array of powers.

Exalted traveling in the Underworld can make use of artifacts, though at a higher cost than the dead themselves do. Ghostly creations are designed specifically for ghosts, after all. Any attunement and activation costs are doubled



for the Exalted, spirits and other beings not of the Underworld. This penalty does not apply to Abyssals, who are themselves full of death energies and can attune to these artifacts for normal cost but cannot use them outside the Underworld any more than a ghost could. One of the reasons the Deathlords stay always to the shadowlands and the Underworld is that many of their most powerful artifacts are constructed in this fashion and are powerless outside the lands of the dead.

GHOSTS AND THE FIVE MAGICAL MATERIALS

Ghosts can channel Essence well enough to attune to occult objects of the living made from the Five Magical Materials, though not to the same effect as the Exalted. They may attune to items that contain nothing but jade and soulsteel for the normal attunement cost but receive no Magical Material benefit for it. If the items contain any Magical Materials other than jade and soulsteel, their activation and attunement costs are doubled for the dead, who still receive no Magical Material bonus. Obviously, these penalties apply only to items made for the living. The dead can attune to their own artifacts for the normal cost.

SOULFIRE CRYSTAL (RESOURCES VARIES)

Soulfire crystal is a mineral that occurs only in the Underworld and is most commonly found in the Labyrinth. Ambitious ghosts lead or fund expeditions into the Labyrinth to mine veins of the extremely hard, blue-white crystals out of the walls of the Labyrinth. These miners are heavily guarded by well-paid mercenaries and experts in combat Arcanoi. Despite the defenses, the hazards of the Labyrinth claim mining expeditions every year, and news of a deposit of soulfire crystals discovered on the Underworld's surface inevitably brings hordes of fortune-seeking wraiths.

The passion evoked by these crystals, and the lengths to which the dead will go to secure them, is easily understood. Soulfire crystals are one of only a handful of ways known to store Essence. The amount of Essence a soulfire crystal can store is based on its size and clarity. A crystal the size of a man's thumb might store only a single mote, while a sphere the span of a man's outstretched arms can store as much as 25 motes. Crystals of such huge size are incredibly rare, and in general, a soulfire crystal contains a number of motes of Essence equal to (the stone's Resources cost x 2).

Soulfire crystals can be used by any Essence-channeler. Any amount of Essence can be drawn from a crystal at once, but Essence can be drawn from them only once per turn. Essence from a crystal can be used immediately to power a spell or Charm or to replenish the user's own



depleted Essence stores. Soulfire crystals store Death-aspected Essence; if an Exalted other than an Abyssal recharges one, they will find it quickly perverts any other kind of Essence into Death-aspected Essence (at the rate of 1 mote of Essence per minute). This Essence cannot be used for creation, defense or healing. The exact effects of this vary. Typically, tasks that run counter to the goals of Oblivion will be at +2 difficulty, and if the task would have succeeded, if not for the extra difficulty, it might work, but it will be in some monkey's paw fashion. Charms of healing or regeneration will always twist in some fashion; a Charm to regrow an arm, for example, might result in a perfectly functional, but obviously dead limb.

Soulfire crystals are inactive in Creation — their power exists, but it is quiescent until returned to the Underworld or a shadowland. While in Creation the soulfire crystals are also quite vulnerable. Direct sunlight or the anima flare of a Solar (especially a Zenith) can damage or destroy a soulfire crystal. Each exposure to direct sunlight or Solar anima flare in Creation reduces the Crystal one level (from Artifact 3 to Artifact 2, for example), and deliberate use of a Zenith's Anima Effect on a crystal the Zenith can touch without interruption shatters the crystal instantly. Solar anima flares have no effect on these crystals in the Underworld.

ESSENCE-CONTAINING GEM (ARTIFACT VARIES)

For centuries, the best craftsmen in the Underworld have been searching for a way to convert and store pure Essence better than the soulfire crystal. While as of yet they have not succeeded, they have come up with some exceedingly clever approaches that accomplish roughly the same thing.

One of the most widespread is the use of Essence-containing gems, gemstones left as grave goods that have crossed the barrier between worlds. Through the use of jade and soulsteel conductors, they have been rendered able to store Essence. Essence-containing gems are always a dark, smoky gray in color, and the smallest of them is the size of a man's thumbnail. No matter how many facets a gem might have, it does not sparkle in the weak light of the Underworld. Rather, each gem glows from within, a thick, red gleam that pulses irregularly so long as the gem contains some Essence.

Essence-containing gems are rated from • to •••••. The rating correlates roughly to the gem's size and quality and dictates how many motes of Essence the gem can hold. Smaller gems that are of superior quality can, unsurprisingly, hold more Essence than larger, flawed ones. While there is a certain minimum size for Essence-containing gems — anything smaller than a man's thumbnail won't hold Essence — there is no maximum.

Essence-containing gems are fueled by ghosts using Filling the Precious Vial (see page 247). Gems do not have to be filled to maximum capacity.

Gem Rating	Capacity
•	3 motes
••	7 motes
•••	15 motes
••••	35 motes
•••••	75 motes

Once a gem is charged, the Essence then remains within the stone for a year and a day, at which point it dissipates. Gems can be recharged an infinite number of times, though any attempt to over-fill a gem burns part of it out and reduces its rating by one. Excess Essence in the gem at this time is considered lost. Essence-containing gems can also be deliberately broken, in the same fashion as a Hearthstone. If the stone is empty, its destruction is harmless. If the stone is charged, however, the act of smashing it causes an explosion of pure Essence, laced with shrapnel from the stone itself. Such explosions do a number of levels of lethal damage equal to the number of motes remaining in the stone to individuals within a number of yards equal to the gem's Artifact rating.

The gems have many uses in the Underworld. The most common is that ghosts use them for Essence, draining the gem rather than their own innate stores. Often, these gems are mounted in ornate jewelry, armor or masks,

SOULED DEVICES

Numerous artifacts require Essence to operate. Many such items used among the dead contain a mounting on them, capable of holding a soulfire crystal or Essence-containing gem. Those with these mountings can drain power from the Essence-containing gem or soulfire crystal in them instead of from the ghost wielding them. An item cannot be attuned with motes from a gem. Each mount increases the difficulty of the artifact creation by the same amount as a Hearthstone setting, and a universal mount that can hold either increases the difficulty by twice as much. Exalted may draw on the power of these items if they are attuned to the device that carries the stone.

Such storage devices are useless in the land of the living, for there, these wondrous Essence batteries are little more than discolored stones. Items made by the Deathlords (that is, almost all artifacts possessed by deathknights) should be assumed to use universal stone mounts, not Hearthstone mounts. No items yet forged by the living have such a universal mount, but they could if the artificer was familiar with the principles of their construction.



though the baleful glow of Essence-fire from within indicates that these are not merely decorations. Less common, but more potent, are gems that are incorporated into artifacts to serve as power sources. Such items have special housings for mounting gems of various sizes and drain Essence directly from the stones when used.

Note that gems of greater than a ●●● rating are exceedingly rare and are generally found only in the possession of the Deathlords and the greatest of the Underworld's kings and queens. Such gems are often set into the Deathlords' thrones or used to power their massive war engines.

VESSEL OF THE PYRE (ARTIFACT VARIES)

Vessels of the pyre are the only known method of transporting pyre flame, and the best method of using it as a weapon. Each pyre vessel is an earthenware jug with a thick, heavy stopper, unadorned and unlovely. Most are small enough to fit in the hand, though some are as tall as a man and as wide as a doorway. Each can be filled with pyre flame, as workers using special soulsteel funnels and other implements can shovel the stuff into the vessel without much risk of harm. Once the pyre flame is inside the vessel and the stopper is sealed, it can be transported safely.

A vessel can also be used as a deadly projectile weapon. Whether flung by hand or hurled by a war engine, a jug full of pyre flame splits open on contact, spreading its contents all around the immediate vicinity and on any bystanders therein. The dead are careful in its use in siege warfare, however, as a citadel that has been brought down by vessels of the pyre is likely to be worthless as a possession of the victor. Its main use, rather, is as a weapon of terror.

The size of the vessel determines how much pyre flame it can hold and how much damage the flame does on impact. Full vessels can be stored for untold centuries without any harm to their contents, though in such cases their keepers tend to seal them with wax to prevent spillage.

CHIME OF PERFECT SUMMONING (ARTIFACT ●)

A chime of perfect summoning appears as a small bronze bell, complete with hammer and stand. It is no more than a foot high and is always coated in a layer of verdigris that makes it appear less valuable than it is. A

PYRE FLAME

Combining the worst elements of water, fire and acid, pyre flame is a greenish flame that is alternately feared and coveted throughout the Underworld. Found in vast pits and geysers throughout the lands of the dead, it casts an unearthly glow that makes all within its range look diseased and wan. It burns as hotly as real fire does in the lands of the living, clings to any surface it strikes and eats through almost anything in the Underworld except for earth, stone, jade and soulsteel. Any other material is burned through at a rate of an inch per scene, save spectacularly flammable items, which burn faster. Pyre flame never goes out, but it never expands, either — once it has burned up its fuel, it simply sits there, its pile of embers smoldering patiently. It can also burn stray Essence, and patches of it often burn merrily atop bare stone in shadowlands, cemeteries and the sites of hauntings.

The touch of pyre flame does two health levels of lethal damage per turn, and it must be scraped off or it will continue to do that damage every turn until it has devoured the ghostly flesh it rests on. Any instrument used to scrape it off will also be covered in pyre flame, but as pyre flame transmits no heat, there's no risk to its wielder. Pyre flame cannot be smothered, doused or stamped out. Shoveling earth over it will dampen it temporarily, but when the site is uncovered, the flames burst into new prominence.

ghost can, if she so chooses, invest a number of motes of Essence in the chime up to her Essence rating. When the chime is struck with the hammer, a mote is expended, and the ghost, no matter where she might be in any of the worlds, hears the summons. More than one ghost can invest Essence in the chime, to a limit of 13 ghosts, each able to put in as many motes as they have points of permanent Essence.

When a ghost hears the chime, she is not compelled to return immediately, nor can the chime be struck for just one ghost's benefit. Once all of the Essence a ghost has

VESSEL OF THE PYRE SIZE AND DAMAGE

Size	Rating	Splash Radius	Damage on Impact
Small (Handheld)	●	Two feet	3A
Medium (Two-handed)	●●	Five feet	7A
Large (Three-feet high)	●●●	10 feet	15A
Massive (Six-feet high)	●●●●	20 feet	30A

stored in the chime has been exhausted, she no longer hears its summons, but she can recharge it simply by touching it and spending Essence.

The sound of the chime is surprisingly deep, and the tone sustains for a single minute. It cannot be mistaken for anything else. Anyone who hears it knows exactly what it is. However, no ghost who has not invested Essence in the chime can hear it at all, even if he stands right next to it when it is struck.

GRAVE-PRISON CHAINS (ARTIFACT •• TO •••)

The dead are notoriously difficult to keep as prisoners, a fact which drove the Deathlords to the creation of a method to control such unruly captives. The result were the grave-prison chains, a dreadful set of shackles and chains whose appearance hints at the power they contain.

Grave-prison chains normally consist of five shackles — one each for the ankles, wrists and neck of the prisoner — but sets have been modified to fit prisoners of inhuman form. Each shackle is connected by chains to two other shackles, as well as to a ring designed for attachment to leads and staples. The manacles and chains are a uniform dull gray marked with mottled patches of rust and other stains, and there is small black stone set into each shackle. Every set of grave-prison chains has its own unique key, and no key will open more than one set.

Prisoners held by the chains lose more than freedom of motion, though the shackles certainly restrict that as well. What is more damning is that any ghost bound with the chains is no longer able to spend Essence and, thus, cannot use any of his Arcanoi. Any attempt still extracts the Essence cost (along with any associated Willpower or other costs), but no effect is achieved. Careful observers may see the stones on the shackles flare with dark light at these times, but there is no other effect, visible or otherwise. A few rare sets (Artifact •••) will allow the prisoner contained within to use Essence at the chains' owner's discretion. These sets of chains are marked by having red, rather than black, stones on the manacles.

Unless a prisoner is released, there is only one method of escape from grave-prison chains: Oblivion. Ghosts who are destroyed while in grave-prison chains descend directly to Oblivion, with no chance to accept Lethe. For this reason, they are the preferred tools of the Deathlords. After the chains have been worn for one scene, they extract a 5 mote attunement cost from their victim. Their powers are effective even before they attune themselves, however.

MORNING STAR GUIDE (ARTIFACT ••)

One of the rarest and most invaluable things one can find in the lands of the dead is an truly reliable guide. Wracked by monstrous storms, largely uninhabited and tied to the ever-changing Labyrinth, the Underworld is a

very easy place to get lost in. This, then, is why morning star guides are so highly prized among the dead and why those who bear them are among the most sought-after guides in the Underworld.

In appearance, a morning star guide is unremarkable — simply a wrought-iron lantern with an oddly shaped crystal inside. The lantern is strangely light, however, and always feels warm to the touch. But these are but minor properties of a greater wonder. The true power of the artifact comes from the crystal, which grows only in the deepest pits of the Labyrinth. Many are mined by the Deathlords or the nephwracks and shaped by skilled ghosts enthralled into their service.

A morning star guide costs 7 motes of committed Essence to attune to. To use it, the character must hold it up and spend a single mote of Essence. Once it is activated, the owner merely concentrates on his destination. Once he's firmly fixed it in his mind, the morning star guide will shine brightest when held in the direction of that goal and grow steadily dimmer if turned away from it. Once a destination is locked in, its sense of direction is infallible, and it takes another mote to reset it to a new one. The morning star guide always illuminates the shortest path, not necessarily the safest. It may point across pits, bogs, pyre flame eruptions or other hazards, unconcerned for the safety of the one using it.

Note that morning star guides cannot be dimmed, but they can be hooded. However, the searing brightness they produce carries for a long way in the gloam of the Underworld and can serve as beacons for brigands, hungry ghosts and worse. Most morning star guides can't be used for navigation to anything other than a fixed location, but a very rare few (Artifact ••••) can find individuals and objects.

SOULFIRE MASK (ARTIFACT ••)

This is the most common type of defensive mask worn by the dead, and it can be found in many different shapes and versions all across the Underworld. Weaker and stronger versions exist, and masks of similar concept can be found ranging from Artifact • to N/A. Regardless of its appearance, this example has two universal stone mounts on it. If the character does not have any better stones for them, the mask comes equipped with two six-point soulfire crystals set in it.

By expending 3 motes of the mask's Essence, the character may conjure up a crackling nimbus of energy that reflexively increases his soak by 4L/6B against a single attack. This may be done more than once for a given attack. By spending 4 motes, he can unleash the same blue-white arc against targets up to 20 yards away. The attack uses Dexterity + the Throw or the Athletics Ability, whichever the wielder prefers. It has +2 Accuracy, a Rate of 1 and does 7L plus extra successes on the attack.



WONDERS AMONG THE DEAD

The dead are fond of their funereal magic, and those who have the resources often seek to obtain artifacts to enhance their status and personal power, paying for them in favors, grave goods and the coins of the dead. The cost of such items is similar to the price of wonders among the Dragon-Blooded; the purchase of such an item has a Resources cost of (the Artifact level of the item + 2). While new examples are available, there is a constant demand. Most such items are custom-made and the waiting lists of the great artifact-makers are long even by the standards of the ageless dead. Items above Artifact 3 are exceedingly rare and beyond price, for only Deathlords and ancient heroes can forge them.

Weaker wonders are typically available only in the metropoli of the dead, and the rural dead travel to the great cities to procure such artifacts or make do with grave goods. Storytellers may decide whether any given item is or is not available, and in no case should characters be allowed to begin the game with a high Resources and immediately go on a shopping spree to obtain large numbers of artifacts.

A ghost must commit 7 motes to attune to a soulfire mask. The mask has no inherent energy capacity, it must be set with soulfire or Essence-containing gems in order to function.

VISAGE-DISTORTING MASK (ARTIFACT ••)

Some ghosts are able to change their appearance at will. The rest use a visage-distorting mask. Appearing as a simple clay mask crudely painted with a set of facial features, the mask looks to be nothing more than the work of a child. Once placed on a ghost's face, however, the mask goes to work, melding with its wearer's features and rendering him unrecognizable. Even players of ghosts who know the mask-bearer well must make a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 2) for their characters to recognize the ghost once they see her, while others stand no chance at all.

The mask's effects last so long as the ghost wears the device. Generally, it can be worn for up to a week at a time, during which time the ghost can speak and otherwise act normally. Once the mask's time span is up — or the ghost wishes to be rid of it — it simply pops off, looking a little the worse for wear. Each visage-distorting mask has between three and thirteen uses, no more, and can never be recharged. Once a mask has exhausted all of its uses, it shatters, and the broken shards rapidly crumble to dust. No two masks can bear the same set of features. Each is unique, and attempts to replicate older visage-distorting masks have always ended in twisted, monstrous disaster.

Attuning a visage-distorting mask requires simply lifting it to one's face for an instant. That, and 3 motes of Essence, are all that is required.

DEMON-EMBRACING ROBES (ARTIFACT •••)

Proper dress is important to functionaries in the courts of the Deathlords, but only a very few are blessed with demon-embracing robes. These garments are, at first glance, indistinguishable from the normal clothing one expects of a functionary in the bureaucracy of the dead. They demonstrate fine workmanship, excellent embroidery and superb taste, but nothing more. That, at least, is how they appear.

When activated, however, the sleeves of a set of demon-embracing robes stretch forward, acting as arms and striking with devastating force. Each sleeve is capable of an independent attack and attacks with Speed 7, Acc +7, Damage 7B + extra successes. In addition, the robes serve as armor (Soak 6L/4B, Mobility Penalty 0, Fatigue 0).

Demon-embracing robes respond only to their owners. Should another ghost attempt to wear them, the sleeves will immediately begin attacking the usurper and will not stop doing so until he has struggled out of the garment or been pummeled into Lethe. Escaping the robes requires a successful Dexterity + Athletics roll, difficulty 2, as the robes twist and turn to hold the character.

Attuning to the garment requires 5 motes of Essence. Spending 3 experience points and committing 3 additional motes seals the bargain and renders the robes constantly active, otherwise they will become "ownerless" if they go unattuned and may be stolen. In no case will the robes ever cooperate with someone who slew a previous owner. There is no way to tell if a set of robes are in fact demon-embracing until one puts them on, at which point the garment's true nature manifests itself.

GHOST-STRENGTHENING LINKS (ARTIFACT •••)

Often mistaken for grave-prison chains, ghost-strengthening links do not weaken the spirit who wears them. Rather, they empower their bearer, making him stronger, more resistant to damage and more potent in battle.

Ghost-strengthening links consist of a central ring and chains that lead to manacles for the ankles and wrists of their wearer. The ring itself is almost a foot across, and when activated with 5 motes of Essence, sinks into the wraith who triggered the links, anchoring itself just above the base of the spine. The implantation of the ring does a level of aggravated damage that does not heal until the item is removed. The ring cannot be removed except by physically destroying the ghost or by the character who wears it spending 3 motes to cause it to eject.

Once implanted, the links require the expenditure of 3 motes of Essence to activate. They remain active until the end of the scene and can be activated as a reflexive action that requires no roll. The chains normally come with a single

mount for a soulfire crystal. If the character has nothing better to mount in it, it contains a four point soulfire crystal.

If active, the links can strike targets up to 10 feet away with a crushing Brawl attack (Speed +3, Accuracy +0, Damage +9B, Defense +4). They can also clinch enemies. This is a normal clinch, and making the attack requires an action, but the chains hold the victim and the character may act normally while still maintaining the clinch. Normally, all of the chains attack a single enemy, but the ghost can split his dice pool and attack multiple targets.

The links also serve as armor on the arms, legs and back of the ghost wearing them, and they provide an additional +3B/+3L soak to the wearer and act as a shield that increases the difficulty of hand-to-hand attacks against the character by +1. They are compatible with the use of armor but not the use of a normal shield.

THE TONGUE OF THE ELEVEN DEMON HOWL (ARTIFACT ●●●)

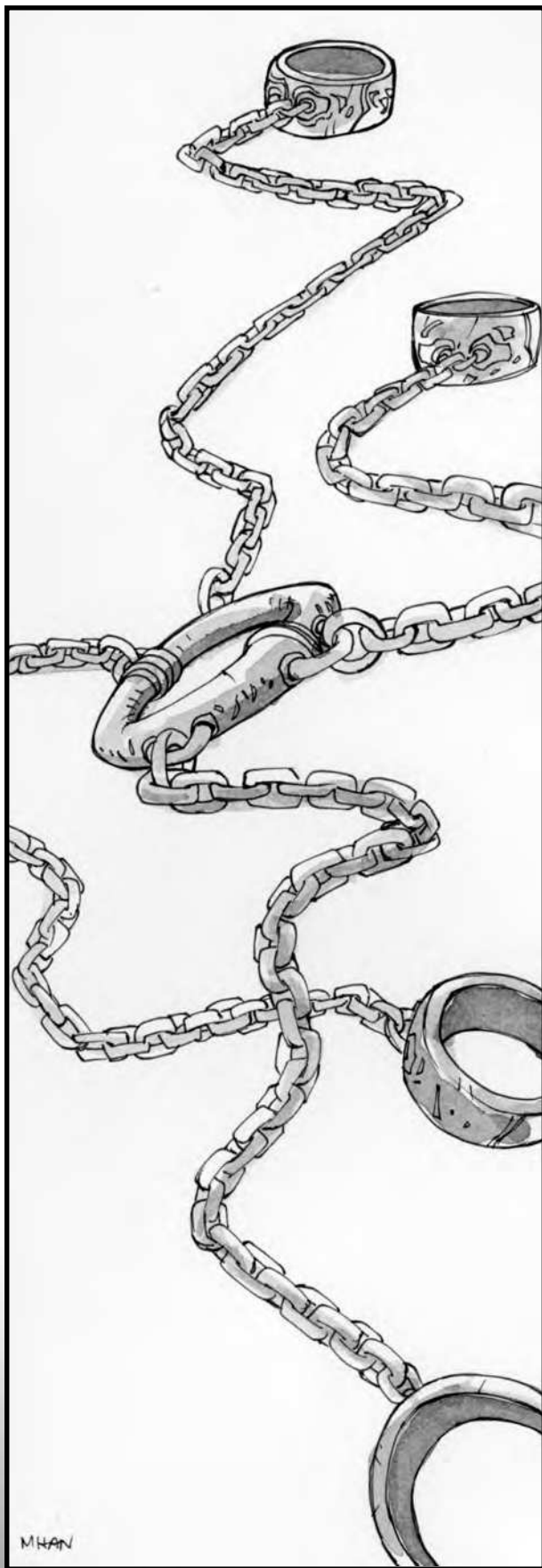
Cut from the mouths of a creature that dwell deep within the Labyrinth and bound with slivers of forged souls, the tongue of the eleven demon howl is something that is more often forced upon a ghost than accepted voluntarily. This is because even though the tongue brings power, it also brings permanent agony. Once the tongue of the eleven demon howl is inserted into its bearer's mouth, it proceeds to devour the ghost's real tongue and then graft itself in the devastated organ's place. This serves as the attunement process, one that also requires 5 motes of Essence, which are effectively lost forever.

Once it is in place, the tongue changes the ghost permanently. Her voice becomes deep and guttural, her speech filled with obscenities and blasphemies. On the other hand, there are benefits to possessing the device. Most prominent among them is the ability to use, without any training, the Arcanos Call the Ravening Hound (see p. 242) three times per day. The ghost is also now capable of bellowing loud enough to be heard for a mile in any direction, deafening any within 100 yards whose players do not succeed on a Stamina + Endurance roll (difficulty 2). It is a dice action that requires no roll to bellow in this fashion.

REPEATING MAGGOT-CASTER (ARTIFACT ●●●)

Loathsome even by ghostly standards, the repeating maggot-caster is used only by the most depraved, sadistic and vicious ghosts. Its use is outlawed in the cities of the dead, and only spectres and the servants of the Deathlords use such weapons. Those who use them and are not above the law are hauled off for the most imaginative tortures the dead can devise. That being said, there are rather a lot of them in circulation, and more come to light every day.

The repeating maggot-caster is a frame with a grip on one end and a barrel projecting from the other. It is crafted from soulsteel and marked with any number of hideous crests





and spines. At the center of a repeating maggot-caster is a rotating cylinder with multiple chambers bored into it. Each chamber is home to a large, squirming, chittering maggot. When the trigger on the cylinder is pulled, it fires one of the maggots to a range of up to 50 yards. Repeating maggot-casters have a mount for a soulfire crystal, and if the character has no better crystal or gem to mount in it, it contains a six-point soulfire crystal. Each shot drains 1 mote from this crystal, as well as firing one of the weapon's six maggots.

Accuracy	Damage	Range	Rate
+2	Special	50 yards (max)	2/turn

If the projectile strikes its target, it does no immediate damage. If the maggot strikes armor, it will scurry over the target seeking flesh. Once it finds bare skin (at initiative 10 the next turn if the target is wearing armor, immediately if the target is unarmored), the hungry maggot burrows into its target, disappearing into the ghost's unliving flesh. It will remain there, worming its way through the ghost's form and devouring everything in its path, for as long as there is ghost-flesh for it to feed upon. The maggot bullet does one level of aggravated damage for every scene it remains in the target. Multiple maggots deliver multiple levels of damage.

A character with Medicine 2 or higher can cut them out, but she must succeed at a difficulty 3 Dexterity + Medicine roll for each maggot removed, or do 3 automatic unsoakable levels of lethal damage to the patient while removing the maggot.

Caster-maggots are grown by mortwights in colonies on specially reshaped hungry ghosts. Obtaining replacement ammunition for a maggot-casting cylinder is extremely difficult unless one has contacts with the nephwracks or the Deathlords.

VIRTUE-ENHANCING FLASK (ARTIFACT •••)

Virtue-enhancing flasks are among the rarest commodities in the Underworld. Each appears as a small iron flask, often decorated with inlaid symbolic patterns. They hold but a single draught and, yet, are curiously heavy when full.

Attuning a Virtue-enhancing flask requires its owner to wear it on her person for a day. Once that has happened, the attunement lasts until it is worn by another individual for that length of time, in which case the attunement swaps over. An unattuned flask produces no Virtue and, thus, can easily be overlooked as a common drinking vessel. Maintaining a functioning flask requires the commitment of 5 motes of Essence, plus the expenditure of 2 more every time the flask needs to be refilled.

The liquid a Virtue-enhancing flask contains is clear and warm and, depending on which Virtue it enhances, has a unique scent. This scent is only apparent once the flask has been unstoppered, but once it has been, the odor quickly fills the immediate vicinity.

In addition to possessing a strong scent, the flask's contents also have the ability to raise the appropriate Virtue score of the drinker by one point, to a maximum of 5. This allows the ghost to learn Arcanoi she might otherwise not be able to but does not add to Passions. Should the ghost be lucky enough to possess more than one flask, he can drink in series, achieving a greater temporary boost. However, the increase in Virtue lasts for only one scene.

Each Flask contains only enough liquid for one drink at a time and requires a day to regenerate its contents. Anyone attempting to take a second draught from an empty flask will find themselves with a mouthful of dust instead.

Ghosts using a flask to assist in learning Arcanoi above and beyond their normal capabilities must take a drink from the flask before any instruction begins and cannot receive any useful instruction in the Arcanos once the drink's effect has waned. As such, such training necessarily takes a long time, as the student is only able to learn for a short while each day. However, once the appropriate knowledge has been passed on, a ghost doesn't lose it even if her actual Virtue rating is below the minimum threshold for that particular Charm. It is still available to her if she drinks from an appropriate flask.

Virtue	Scent
Compassion	Orchids
Temperance	Green tea
Conviction	Hot iron in the forge
Valor	Fresh blood

HOVERING IRON SPIRIT (ARTIFACT ••••)

A faithful, indefatigable guardian for the ghost lucky enough to possess one, a hovering iron spirit is a small figure forged out of soulsteel into the shape of a protector. Most appear as birds of prey, though, in truth, their appearance does not matter. It is their function that makes them so valuable.

Attunement of a hovering iron spirit takes a week, during which time the item must be constantly in the attuning ghost's presence. A single instant of separation is enough to wreck the process and necessitate that it start all over again. Attunement costs 9 motes of Essence and an experience point.

Once a hovering iron spirit has been attuned to a master, it will hover behind him, never staying still and never straying more than a yard from its post. It will attempt to circumnavigate any attempts to separate it from its master, potentially causing harm to anyone trying to separate the two. Many hovering iron spirits have been crafted with sharp edges for just this reason. Should there be any threat, however, the iron spirit will place itself between its owner and the danger and wait there.

Once combat starts, the hovering iron spirit will automatically move to catch any projectiles fired at its master. It can catch a number per turn equal to the ghost's Valor rating and will do so without prompting from its master, freeing him for other tasks. Each hovering iron spirit can absorb 50 levels of damage before being destroyed. Damage against it is rolled, not applied automatically. It has a soak of 12B/6L.

Repairing one requires access to soulsteel and a talented soulforger, but unless completely destroyed, a hovering iron spirit can be made as good as new within the space of a week. Repairing the hovering iron spirit requires Craft (Soulforging) •••• and Occult ••. It costs Resources •••• to repair one, as soulsteel is extremely difficult to obtain.

Should the iron spirit's master be sent to Oblivion, it falls to the ground, inert, and can be picked up — and attuned — by anyone. On the other hand, a wraith of insufficient power who attaches a hovering iron spirit to herself is liable to draw some very unpleasant attention and to be stripped of her possession by the surest method possible. A ghost can never have more than one hovering iron spirit attuned to her. Should she attempt to attune a second one, the two will immediately destroy each other.

SHROUD OF THE UNQUIET DEAD (ARTIFACT ••••)

Stitched together from faces and limbs torn from other ghosts, a shroud of the unquiet dead is nothing more or less than a full-body skin suit for a ghost. However, the shroud is not intended as a disguise. Rather, with its patchwork of faces, eyes, ears, hands and other, less identifiable appendages, it is a gruesome mockery of even the most twisted ghost-form. It must also be fed. One ghost of some sort or other must be fed to the shroud each month, or it turns on itself and will devour itself from hunger. As shrouds are difficult to find and more difficult to create, any ghosts who owns one takes care to avoid this circumstance.

The process of attuning a shroud of the unquiet dead is gruesome, another factor in their scarcity. The ghost wishing to attune the item must feed it, piecemeal, another ghost, as well as part of his own body. A finger will suffice for this purpose, and the mark cannot be healed until such time as the owner relinquishes the suit. Wearing the shroud also requires the investment of 7 motes of Essence, which are returned to the wearer when he doffs the suit.

Generally worn only by spectres, the shroud of the unquiet dead emits an incessant wailing, shrieking and moaning from all of its mismatched mouths. Its eyes look in all directions, making the shroud's wearer almost impossible to sneak up on. Subtract 3 successes from all Stealth rolls attempting to sneak up on the wearer of the shroud, and the wearer is immune to surprise attack from enemies who are not invisible. If the shroud's eyes see someone approaching, the mouths will shout out a warning in chorus. Anyone touching the shroud or making an un-

armed attack on the wearer is liable to suffer a nasty bite; up to six mouths can attack independently and will do so if given the opportunity. Each makes a reflexive 4 dice unarmed attack and does (1L plus successes) damage if they connect. This damage can be soaked. The attacks are made by the artifact and not by the ghost wearing it, who can still act normally.

But the shroud of the unquiet dead is more than simply an early warning system. By spending a mote of Essence (and with a successful Willpower roll), the owner of the shroud can summon up the memories of any of the dismembered ghosts whose bits make up the shroud. The greater the number of successes, the more detailed the memories are and the more that can be recalled. For an additional mote, the wearer of the shroud can then speak in that ghost's voice.

WHIP OF DEVOURING SERPENTS (ARTIFACT •••••)

The whip of devouring serpents is much prized by slavers among the dead, as it is a most effective tool for keeping their chattel in line. Rarely used but often threatened, it can turn the most ferocious prisoner into a docile thrall with a single well-placed blow.

Consisting of an iron handle holding seven leathery strands, the whip is thick, grim and ugly. Each of the seven strands is capped with a forged soulsteel serpent head, and each of these is adorned with prominent and jagged fangs. Unsurprisingly, the entire apparatus twists and twines as though it were alive, though the serpent heads will not strike the weapon's wielder except under exceptional circumstances.

When used, the whip of devouring serpents (Speed +5, Accuracy +1, Damage +2L, Defense -2) has a devastating effect. On a successful attack that does damage, each head rolls a single die to see if the fangs sink into the target. On a success, they do, and the head drains a point of Willpower from the target. Tens count as double, but no more than seven points can be drained by one strike. The target cannot be reduced below zero temporary Willpower.

The whip of devouring serpents can only be used on a single target per attack, and the character cannot make multiple attacks with this weapon by means of splitting his dice pool (Charms still work).

Attuning a whip takes an hour, and the owner must allow the whip to feed on him. It requires 9 committed motes of Essence, and each head must drink a point of Willpower. The Willpower returns normally, but must be paid every time the weapon is attuned.

In addition, the whip must be fed. Each point of Willpower it drains sustains it for a week. However, once the reservoir is empty, the whip will drain 1 Willpower per day from the character attuned to it (normally lost just after the character makes her Conviction roll to regain Willpower).



The Mask of Winters raised his arm, and black lightning and motes of blackness leapt from the soil of the shadowland of Thorns, swelling and growing along the area's corrupted dragon lines. This was the only sign of the gathering dark power. Thorns was already blasted, its Essence corrupted and its Manses darkened with Abyssal power. There were no more holy texts or holy men or mirrors or good luck charms left within its precincts; all had perished from the effects of some black sorcery or another. Now, only the lightning-bright radiance of the power remained.

The violet and black coruscance abated, and there was a vast bass groan from the bones of Juggernaut as the rotting behemoth shifted in its unquiet repose. Below, hundreds of specially trained nemissaries slaved to animate the gargantuan muscles and drag the behemoth's great dead body into motion.

The Mask of Winters stood there motionless as the fortress creaked and shifted and moved — through the bone-penetrating crashes as Juggernaut's arms came to rest in a new position and through the wall-tumbling vibration as the vast animated corpse pulled itself forward hundreds of yards. An outside observer would have detected the Mask of Winters was lost in sensation and perception. He had honed his every sense supernally and extended them to their utmost degree. He felt every creak of the behemoth's great dead bones, heard every nauseating gurgle of Juggernaut's great gut full of maggots. He listened, and it was not until a full 10 hours later, after Juggernaut had finished its creaking arm-over-arm crawl forward, that the Deathlord allowed his attention to lapse.

When Juggernaut ceased to crawl, the precise location where it ceased and the times of its motion were subject to minute analysis by the Deathlord's own servants and also by the spies he knew lurked within his holdings. Indeed, it was primarily for their benefit that Juggernaut moved at all. A mobile fortress was useless if that mobility was not exploited, and so, once every week or 10 days, the Mask of Winters moved Juggernaut several miles in order to ruin any assault plans or ritual sorceries. Each time Juggernaut moved, the Mask of Winters assumed his position in the fortress' throne room. Many took this as a sign of weakness, that the corpse or the enchantments were not strong enough.

They could not have been more wrong. The Mask of Winters was not worried that his fortress would fall to pieces or that his magic would fail. He was a faultless sorcerer, and it had been fated that Juggernaut would die if certain conditions were met, not that it would perish from existence. The behemoth's corpse would lie and rot until destiny itself unwove. Lie and rot and hate, for like its Primordial creators, Juggernaut's death had not snuffed out its awareness, only its ability to act.

The consciousness that lingered in its great worm-eaten brain longed as it always had to rise up and batter Creation with its invulnerable fists, to trample cities beneath the soles of its vast feet and feel the warm tickle of flames as burning cities licked its soles. This did not suit the Mask of Winters' plan, at least not yet, but the combination of necromancy and Arcanoi used to move the behemoth was perilously close to animating him as well. This was why the Juggernaut only crawled. His black equations had indicated to the Deathlord that any more necromantic energy would allow the great beast to rise again and move of its own volition.

And thus, whenever his corpse-fortress moved, the Mask of Winters would perch atop the behemoth's back, rehearsing the gestures of Obsidian Countermagic, ready always to begin the necromancy should Juggernaut lurch up from its wounded crouch. The Maker of Rubble would not walk again until the Mask of Winters wished it to. Then and only then would Creation once again know the inexorable tread of the Slayer of Nations.



CHAPTER SEVEN

Storytelling

This chapter is explicitly aimed at the Storyteller of an Abyssals series. Players are welcome to read onward and see what kinds of things the Storyteller might be up to, but the following advice and suggestions will address the Storyteller directly. This chapter contains a discussion of fitting Deathlords into your series, followed by description of the two basic kinds of Abyssals series, sample series and stories for both kinds of series. The chapter concludes with a look at the ways that Abyssals can fit into other **Exalted** games and how other Exalted can fit into Abyssal series.

One of the key pieces of understanding in running an Abyssals game is that while the Underworld is a classical ghost-world setting, underlying the Realm and the rest of Creation and full of ghosts and the never-ending craving for veneration by one's descendants, Abyssal Exalted aren't in that genre. They are powerful and romantic characters. They are busy saving or dooming Creation, exercising powers and abilities that make those around them gape in awe. They have a grand and dark fate those not similarly cursed cannot share or understand. They are romantic in the old sense of the word — they rarely have minor problems in love, battle or daily life. No, their problems are great — they become star-crossed lovers for the ages, fight duels that will be sung of for decades and stop rebellions single-handedly.

THE DEATHLORDS

The Deathlords are incredibly powerful and ancient beings most of whom have worn their current forms since the time of the Usurpation. They desire nothing more than to plunge the world into eternal night, to bring about Oblivion and destroy all life.

Any story you want to tell about Abyssal Exalted features the Deathlords, even if only as a brooding background presence. These are the beings that approached the troupe's characters with a dark bargain and managed to seduce them with an offer of immortality and power. They are owed more complexity than a caricature as monsters. Eight of them are detailed elsewhere in this book (see pp. 76-107), but others are deliberately left undetailed so that you can create your own if you desire. Developing the Deathlords' personalities and motivations will help you tell better stories with your troupe, as you will be better able to describe the Deathlords' reactions to events that you did not anticipate as Storyteller.

After the Usurpation, the Malfeans approached scores of ghosts of Solar Exalted, offering them vast power and the opportunity to take vengeance against the Realm that had betrayed and murdered them. Many Solars refused the Malfeans' offer. They saw the offer as giving them the choice of enslavement to replace their bleak half-existence, and they wanted no part of it. Ten ghosts did take the

THESE ARE HORRIBLE, HORRIBLE PEOPLE

Keep in mind as you read this chapter and run an Abyssals series that the players' characters are individuals who, on the verge of death, freely chose to serve the forces of universal destruction rather than face dissolution themselves. This is one of the most selfish choices that a human being could possibly make — advocating and aiding in the deaths of thousands if not millions of innocents rather than facing one's own demise.

As a result, do not assume that the Abyssal Exalted in your series will always be haunted, Byronic heroes, tormented by the choices they have made and working as hard as they can to harm no innocent. The deathknights simply *cannot* do this: The Abyssal Curse always works against them. Even those Abyssals who are moral creatures torn by regret must do a little bit of harm to the forces of life every day, lest the karmic poison of righteousness build up in their systems and destroy them. But most Abyssals will revel in the destruction that they create; they are full of contempt for the living and enthusiastically support the Deathlords' plans to extinguish the light of the world.

An Abyssal series will contain powerful, dark imagery. Players' characters will be forced into situations where they must bring about the deaths of many innocents. Discuss this with your players *ahead of time*. If certain players are made uncomfortable by this prospect, you should consider running a different flavor of Exalted.

Issues to discuss with your players include:

- The casual deaths of the innocent
- The deliberate deaths of the innocent
- Atrocities
- What they find scary versus what they find cheesy

offer, though — and three other Solar Exalted accepted the Malfeasans' bargain later. These 13 saw the Malfeasans' offer as a chance to lash out at the world that had betrayed them, and they became the Deathlords.

If you intend to feature individual Deathlords in your series, then you have detail work to get out of the way for each one. The simplest way to do this is answer some basic questions about the Deathlord, in order to shine a light onto the character's background and motivations. Regardless of the Deathlord's intended role, you should determine some general information about any Deathlord that is to play a part in your series.

WHAT ROLE WILL THE DEATHLORD PLAY

Mentor: The Deathlord will provide the characters' initial Resources, Artifacts and so on; he may even be responsible for teaching the troupe's characters their initial Charms. This is because the Deathlords have far greater levels of Resources, Artifacts and Charms than the troupe begins with. Assume that any Deathlord has a Resources level of 6-9 and a vast supply of Artifacts forged during the long centuries of their Underworld exile. Select his personal equipment accordingly.

If the mentor is responsible for having taught the Circle its Charms, then either he knows all the Charms that the Circle starts with, or he has other servants who do. Given the range of Abilities that a typical Circle starts off with this will provide you with a very versatile Deathlord. If the Deathlord serves as mentor to several characters in the Circle, expect that the group will approach him for further study. If nothing else, he knows every Solar Charm listed in **Exalted** and every Abyssal Charm in this book — he might have taught the characters everything *they* know, but he certainly didn't teach them everything *he* knows. Give Deathlords plenty of unique Charms that they cannot or will not easily teach to the troupe's characters. Inverted, death-oriented versions of existing Solar Charms that aren't already present in the Abyssal Charms list are particularly good for this, but there's no reason to stop there. Work with your players to determine what sorts of Essence 6+ Charms and superior Combos the Deathlord is likely to have. Some of these might be powerfully advanced versions of the same abilities the Circle uses, but again, the Deathlord is sure to have some abilities that the characters can't replicate.

Pursuer: If the characters are fleeing the influence and power of this Deathlord, they won't be interacting with him face-to-face much, if at all, until a final confrontation takes place. He can influence and affect them, however. If they are within his domain, his sorceries can surely alter the landscape and their perceptions to match his plans — characters might find themselves caught in a sudden thunderstorm or confronted with a maze of hedges that hadn't existed previously. He can also send them messages at a distance, whether through dreams, animal or demon servants or whispers on the wind.

The Deathlord is immortal but not indestructible, and he will not risk his existence lightly. Therefore, you need to determine the amount of resources that the Deathlord will put into the pursuit. That depends on three issues: The reason the Deathlord is pursuing the Circle, the resources that the Deathlord has available generally and the general needs of your series.

The reason the Deathlord is pursuing the characters is the first decision you must make. Either he is their former master, or he is another Deathlord that the characters





offended in some way. If the Circle is fleeing its former master, see “Former Master,” below.

If, instead, they’ve made an enemy of another Deathlord, the level of pursuit that the Deathlord sends after them will be commensurate with the sort of crime the Circle committed against him. What kind of plot led to this pursuit? Surely, some kind of storyline led the characters into conflict with the Deathlord. If the group was acting on orders of their own master — possibly stirring up trouble as part of a larger plot — they ought to have a plan for escape. If they were acting independently — by choice or because they are estranged from their own masters — then run the pursuit so as to keep the players trying to plot out their next move even as they flee. Give the characters an occasional chance to relax — keeping a high level of paranoia and intensity is both difficult and tiring for players and Storytellers — but for the most part keep the group moving.

Simple trespass on a shadowland deserves little more than a violent warning in the form of ghostly or demonic pursuit. Robbery, banditry or stirring up a revolt will be met by the Deathlord’s more powerful servants, including his own Abyssals. A Deathlord with a personally aggressive streak may venture into the field himself to track down Exalted who violate his laws, but more conservative Deathlords direct events from afar or entrust such matters to their lieutenants. For egregious crimes, such as stirring up active dissent against the Deathlord’s cult of worship, the deaths of other Abyssal servants or the theft of supremely powerful artifacts (those of rating 5 and above), the Deathlord will have the Circle pursued to the poles of Creation.

What resources does the Deathlord have available? If the troupe’s Circle slew his elite group of deathknights and has now fled his presence, he probably won’t have any servants capable of challenging the Circle immediately. He might set some of his weaker servants to the task of keeping track of the Abyssals while he builds up his own strength. If he feels that he has to bring them back or destroy them at once but lacks the resources to do so, he might have to rely on summoned demons, favors from an ally, mercenaries or even another Deathlord. A desperate Deathlord could venture into the field himself, but doing so puts him at enormous risk from his rivals, so he will not do so lightly.

Former Master: This is mostly the mentor Deathlord, as described above, but the foe also pursues the characters.

Most important to the former master Deathlord’s current disposition is the question of why the Circle and the Deathlord are no longer allied. It may be that the entire Circle once served this Deathlord and has left his service, or it may be that this particular Deathlord was only master to some members of the Circle. This question needs to be answered with input from the troupe because it affects the

structure of the entire series. A single Deathlord gives the characters a common thread, and at the same time, the members of the group can distinguish themselves by their relationship to that Deathlord — perhaps one was the favored “child,” while another was the overlooked plodder, and so on. A single Deathlord would also be a good excuse for balance among the characters’ roles. One Deathlord would presumably try to build a Circle that had complementary talents.

On the other hand, having the characters be the former servants of multiple Deathlords can help build some conflict into the game right from the start, as the characters naturally divide into two (or more) groups. If you and your players want that kind of intragroup tension, this is definitely the right choice. It’s also a good choice if players have designed characters that play too much into one another’s niches and they want a way to differentiate themselves. If two warriors are both lightly armored showboats with similar histories, coming from different Deathlords’ retinues is a great way to separate the two.

Consider what the Circle’s departure did to the Deathlord’s attitude and resources. How great was the value of the material the Abyssals took with them when they left their Deathlord’s service? Most of the Artifacts in any character’s possession came from her former patron Deathlord; does the Circle have anything so valuable that its absence might genuinely weaken him?

The Circle’s flight might have changed the Deathlord’s attitude toward his own servants, as well. He might have changed his method of command in light of the group’s departure, trying to keep his other servants from similar rebellion. Whether this is reflected in a tightening up of security and discipline among the other troops or by a relaxation of such standards will vary from Deathlord to Deathlord and probably ought to be fit to your series. If you want to show the characters that their foe has become implacable and cold, choose the former; if you want them to see rampages and wildness, the latter is more appropriate.

Even the most embittered Deathlord can take some comfort in the fact that a rebellious Circle of Abyssals is cursed to eternally serve the Malfeans in some fashion.

Foil: This Deathlord is one whose interests are orthogonal to the Circle and its Deathlord master. His interests overlap with the Circle’s on one or two important issues, and his servants are likely to be recurring characters in the series. The Storyteller needs to figure out what overlapping interests the foil has with the Circle, and what the foil’s interests are exactly. If you want the foil and his servants to remain as real foils rather than antagonists, provide them with interests that aren’t directly opposed to the Circle’s interests. If the characters are plundering a tomb to retrieve a powerful artifact, set the foil’s interests such that his servants want to investigate the tomb itself and the history it represents,

for instance. Conflict — and not necessarily violent conflict — emerges naturally from such a competition. And this kind of conflict gives your players choices. Do the characters want to find a solution to their conflict that satisfies both parties? Would they rather seek out their own goals at the expense of the others? Or do they find the foil's interests so compelling that they abandon their original pursuit in order to go after the foil's target?

The foil's servants might continue to intersect in this way with the Circle and their activities over the course of a series. If you keep the two groups at cross purposes, rather than opposite sides of an issue, you can keep every encounter from degenerating into bloodshed and provide the troupe with interesting recurring characters.

Figure out, then, what this Deathlord wants and in what ways his interests will intersect with the Circle's. The Deathlord's relationship with your group's Deathlord is a useful thing to develop as well; if the Deathlords are enemies, how will they respond to seeing two Circles of their servants negotiating a solution to a mutual problem without coming to blows? Alternately, if they are allies, how will they respond to bloodshed among their servants?

Master's Enemy/Enemy's Master: These are sure to be challenging foes in any Abyssal series. This Deathlord is the enemy of the Circle's Deathlord master or the master of a Circle of Abyssals that the troupe's Circle holds enmity toward. There doesn't necessarily have to be one of these in every series. This is especially true if your series doesn't focus on the Deathlords themselves. If there are Deathlord antagonists, decide why the characters' master and each enemy Deathlord are at odds. It might simply be the result of a series of minor insults, trespasses and lapses of etiquette, or there may be genuine conflicts over resources, plans or theological matters. When determining the motives of a Deathlord, it's important to avoid underplaying their genius. The Deathlords are brilliant and perceptive entities, and they rarely do anything by accident. While their natural wickedness might set them to squabbling, most of their rivalries will be rooted in real and important differences.

Determine what the Deathlords did in life as Solars. Most of the Deathlords were murdered by the Dragon-Blooded. Was the Deathlord in question one of the heinously deserving Solars (as most of them were) or was he the rare Solar Exalt to have a few redeeming qualities remaining?

The Solars of the old Realm, before the Usurpation, were wicked and undeserving of their vast power and status. However, few of them actually trafficked with the Malfeans or the Yozis. It stands to reason that the Malfeans would first have approached the ghosts of those Solars that they had been familiar with in life to offer them the power of a Deathlord. Did the Deathlord that you are detailing have any relationship with the Malfeans or the Yozis in life? Perhaps he had no relationship at all, and

PLAYING AN IMMORTAL GENIUS

How do you pull off running a 1,500-year-old character with fantastic abilities, supergenius intelligence and centuries' worth of planning? You cheat. We've already established above that the Deathlords can be assumed to have all of the Charms in this book and probably all of the Solar Charms in the *Exalted* rules as well. Should you be expected to come up with all of the Essence 6-9 Charms, artifacts and devastating Combos the Deathlord has? No. Assume the Deathlord has whatever he needs to accomplish his goals. He would have made sure he had sufficient mystical abilities before he got this far.

The same goes for his plans. The Deathlord would have thought of contingencies that you, as a Storyteller, might never have expected. You can either pull *deus ex machina* counterplans out of your hat while the game runs, or you can quite legitimately say to your players, "I'm going to need 15 minutes to figure out an appropriate response to this, even though Lord Bonegrinder certainly responds immediately because he is much smarter than I am."

SWERVING BLACK PATHS

The Deathlords are unique beings. As Storyteller, you're well within your rights to offer up alternate versions of their origins for your series. This origin might affect the origin of the Abyssals themselves, but it doesn't have to; the Deathlords might simply be entirely different beings from the Abyssal Exalted, rather than being overpowered and primordial versions of the Abyssals themselves.

- The Deathlords might be components of the Malfeans the way that demons are a component of a Yozi. Perhaps they exist on their own, or perhaps the power has been blended in with a mortal or ghost.

- The Sidereals had to sacrifice 13 innocent souls to perform the ritual that allowed the Solars to be slain in the Usurpation; these 13 souls have returned to the world with the Malfeans' help as the Deathlords.

- The Deathlords are simply very powerful and ancient ghosts who date back to the First Age; they use the Abyssals as pawns because they have become so distant from the land of the living that they can no longer affect it directly.

- The Deathlords are the vanguard of an invading force from another reality (much like the Alchemical Exalted of *Time of Tumult*), and they intend to enslave the lands of the dead and turn them into homes for their own people. This option is an ambitious one, but *Exalted* is designed for epic tales.



the Solars' betrayal and murder filled him with hatred and a need for revenge.

While you are working out the details of the Deathlord's life before the Usurpation, give some thought to his relationship with other Exalted while alive. Most of the Solar Essences that were trapped for so long during the height of the Scarlet Empire are free again in some form: Some are in the hands of the Yozis, some were captured by the Deathlords themselves and became Abyssals, and many became Solars. Most Solars had relationships with other types of Exalts as well: Sidereals as advisors, Lunars as lovers and Dragon-Bloods as lieutenants. The Deathlord's former life is still out there, in shards. Of course, this isn't true reincarnation — it's the Exalted Essence that's reincarnated, not the Exalt's soul. Some Deathlords might see this as effective reincarnation and see the bearers of that old power as their former lovers or foes reborn, but that's obsessive madness and not a reflection of reality. A Deathlord who has turned entirely toward his new unlfe will seek to erase or ignore those vestiges of his former existence, while one who remembers his life fondly may attempt to coax elements of his old existence back into his life. A Circle full of Abyssal Exalted is the perfect tool for that kind of work. Lastly, the matter of greatest complexity: this Deathlord's current motivations and plans. There's nothing wrong with a little cliché, if you want to go that

route: Certainly the Deathlord wants to destroy all life and eventually Creation itself. Beyond that, he might crave vengeance upon his foes and rivals from his life as a Solar. He likely wants to turn the entire mortal world into a shadowland, the reflection of the Underworld below. Or he might crave something relatively simple: quiet and peace, which he can no longer get, or excitement and adventure to fill the long nights.

THEME

Exalted: the Abyssals features several themes, and they are fodder for a good series singly or together.

DUTY VERSUS PERSONAL DESIRES

Abyssals in service to a Deathlord make few decisions for themselves. Their instructions come from above, and they are expected to fulfill their master's desires with precision and skill. The Abyssals' very nature favors this kind of existence. Their Exaltation and Abyssal Curse tie them inextricably to the Deathlords and the forces of darkness.

Choosing to live out from under the thumb of a Deathlord is a hard decision to make, and the choice has more negative repercussions to it than positive ones. The Abyssal will be hunted, will lose a powerful patron who protects him from his other enemies and must rely on his own meager resources to survive in lands that do not



welcome him. For some Abyssals, however, the call of freedom is too hard to ignore.

In your games, you can illustrate this theme by providing Abyssals on the other side of the fence from the Circle. If your players' characters are servants of a Deathlord, provide a Circle of free Abyssals who they must destroy or bring back to the fold; if the players' characters are free, be sure to detail the Circle that has been charged with destroying them or returning them to service. Make sure the opposite Abyssals aren't merely used as bludgeons — give them personalities and reasons for living as they do. Give the players' Circle a reason to wonder whether the other side might actually be right. You can use this theme more subtly as well, by mentioning Storyteller characters who are content in their duty to a higher lord — household servants satisfied with a job well done, city guards and so on — or characters such as Threshold farmholders or barbarians who are free to act as they wish and revel in that freedom.

Lastly, remember that true liberty is only available to Abyssal Exalted through Redemption (see "Redemption," p. 116). The Abyssal Curse makes every deathknight a slave to destruction in the end. The characters might benefit from the freedom to live where they like, without taking direct orders from a Deathlord that they must call master, but the truth is that the Malfeans own them, and that's not true freedom.

LIFE VERSUS DEATH

The Deathlords' cults (see below) put forth the philosophy that death is superior to life. The Abyssal Exalted walk a line between those two states: They are living beings who are imbued with the power of death and who bring death with them. Every culture has complex rituals around the passage from life into death. These are usually intended to reassure the living that their existence does not come to an end when they die. The presence of ghosts and the Underworld helps immensely in reassuring the living, and funerals and the rituals associated with death have changed as the population of the Underworld has swelled to previously unseen levels.

The dead need the living. They gain energy through the devotion of the living to lost ancestors, and their numbers only swell in a delayed echo of the swelling population of the living world. The sample story "The Hungry Ghosts," below, is an illustration of this point and how it can fit into your series.

The Underworld is not a place of creativity. Most of the material there is stuff that came from the living world, and it is ultimately only passing through on its way to Oblivion. The paradox of the ghostly craftsman might be a useful illustration of this point: He might turn a patch of plasm into a shovel or build a wall with eroded stones from Creation, but he can't *make* anything *real* of his own anymore. Creation, as an act, is inherently part of life and

the living. Remember that the entire living world was almost once taken into the Underworld already: At the time of the Great Contagion around 90 percent of the living world died, and most of the dead entered the Underworld rather than passing directly on to reincarnation or Oblivion. The Underworld was nearly empty when the Contagion began, and the artifacts and edifices that now dot its landscape had to be built out of the castoffs of the living. Very old ghosts who oppose the Deathlords are sure to spread this truth in an attempt to undermine them. Abyssals loyal to the Deathlords may be called upon to destroy such heretics, while rebel Abyssals might well try and help them spread their heterodoxy.

DEATH VERSUS CORRUPTION

It is often said of those living with horrible disease or in truly terrible circumstances that death is a mercy. The Abyssals are the angels of that mercy. The religions of the Deathlords hold that suicide is honorable, that euthanasia of the aged is a form of respect and that a peaceful death is superior to a pain-wracked life. True, the living have a duty to support the dead through their works and sacrifice, but life itself is not held in particular esteem.

Among the supernatural beings of the **Exalted** setting, the servants of the Yozis are those that relish pain and deceit, while the Abyssals serve destruction and death. While it might be thought that those two things go hand in hand, the truth is that they are often at cross purposes. Each sees the other as a means to its own end. The relationship between the servants of each of those forces mirrors this. An Infernal and an Abyssal might work together, but each one would seek to master the situation.

Stories that use this theme don't have to be quite so heavy-handed as that, however. For instance, characters might encounter an older mortal, fighting leprosy or cancer in an attempt to finish his life's work (fighting off death and corruption together) or coping with the funeral and will-reading of a political gadfly and inveterate liar (a character who lost battles with both death and deceit).

More subtly, Characters might also get wrapped up in the potential suicide of an unusually naïve Dynast from the hinterlands as she comes to the center of the Empire and realizes how corrupt and incestuous her ruling society really is or witness a character's parent's slow degeneration into senility as the Abyssal himself remains immortal and unaging. These characters represent the ascendance of one half of this conflict over the other.

FAITH VERSUS FAITH

The religion of death that the Deathlords have created for their subjects is a powerful one with simple logical underpinnings: Death is superior to life, for in death there is no pain, there is no hunger, there is no loss, and there is no chaos. Ghosts and living adherents to this



religion have faith that the Deathlords are the gatekeepers of the path to true wisdom and holders of the key to eternal existence as a ghost.

The religion that the Scarlet Empire has created for its subjects has a more complex basis, but its adherents believe it no less strongly. They have faith that a moral and obedient life in line with the Immaculate Philosophy will lead them to reincarnate as a superior being, eventually joining the ranks of the Exalted.

Both of these religions are cynical and built on a basis of falsehood and slavery. The truth is that the Deathlords want obedient living servants who become obedient ghosts and help them to expand the Underworld into the land of the living. The Dragon-Blooded want obedient living servants who help them expand the power of the Scarlet Empire and keep the Dragon-Blooded in their accustomed seats of authority, comfort and influence.

There are a number of ways you can bring elements of this theme into your series. For instance, as each Deathlord typically positions himself at the highest point of the hierarchy of his own death cult, he is sure to have an older and respected ghost serve him in the post of high priest. You should decide whether this high priest really finds the Deathlord to be worthy of veneration or whether he uses the hierarchy underneath him just as the Deathlord does. Either decision poses good roleplaying opportunities for the Circle. Additionally, you will want to decide as the series begins how the Circle's master's death cult defines its role. Are the Abyssal characters the black angels of the Deathlord? Are they hidden away behind the scenes where neither ghosts nor living worshipers should see them?

More subtly, many ghosts will persist in their faith in the Deathlord's cult even when presented with unequivocal truth that the Deathlord intends only to manipulate them to his own ends through that cult. How will the Circle deal with a ghost or group of ghosts that retains faith even in the light of such apparent betrayal? Or you could run a story involving the monks of the Immaculate Order, who are devoted followers of their faith and often trek into the Threshold in search of lost knowledge of the First Age; this might bring them into the domain of the players' Circle.

LOVE

Love is not generally forbidden to the Abyssal Exalted, but it complicates their lives greatly. Love is impossible to predict, and it's nearly impossible to create it or put a stop to it for practical reasons. Characters fall in love for reasons neither can control, and those who try to escape invariably make things worse.

There are essentially six types of individuals that an Abyssal might become romantically entangled with: The living, the dead, the Exalted and the Deathlords. Each of these poses its own problems and can easily contribute continuing subplots to an Abyssals game.

THE LIVING

An Abyssal Exalted might still have a living lover from before his near-death and Exaltation. This might even be a spouse — the character will have to decide whether the lifelong vows of fidelity and love that he made supercede the eternal vows of duty and pledges to serve destruction and death he made to the Malfeans when he turned over his name to them. The Abyssals are still living beings, in any case, and although they spend their days surrounded by the dead and the trappings of death, they may still crave the touch of the living. Abyssals are still capable of the creative impulse, despite their deathlike visages and shrouds, and some wish to sire or bear children, a wish that can only be satisfied by a mortal lover. The child of a mortal and an Abyssal will be an ordinary mortal, but one with the touch of Death in his makeup. An obsession with funerals, white hair — these sorts of things will be obvious to any character whose player succeeds at a Lore check after her character meets the child. These things will be more severe — even leading to real power in the offspring — based on the total Essence of the child's parents, per the following table.

GOD-BLOODED OFFSPRING TABLE

Total Essence 4 or less:	Normal mortal with a minor touch of Death
Total Essence 5 or more:	Minor God-Blood
Total Essence 7 or more:	Moderately Powerful God-Blood
Total Essence 11 or more:	Very Powerful God-Blood

THE DEAD

The Abyssals spend plenty of time in the Underworld and the shadowlands, and ghosts tend to haunt the deathknights' Manses, as well, drawn as they are to the funereal atmosphere. But romance between the dead and the Abyssals is doomed. For one, the Abyssal is, in fact, a living being, not one of the dead; while the dead still remember love and can go through the motions, the emotions they feel are nearly always those gleaned from another for sustenance, rather than genuine deep feelings. However, the dead are incredible lovers, given the infinite promise of having malleable plasm for a body.

Ghosts have different perspectives than Abyssals — Abyssals are the living with a strong touch of death about them, while ghosts once died but chose to continue to exist. Ghosts look to Abyssals to remind them of that spark of life, while still being close enough in nature that the two might be able to love. The dead have difficult existences

before them, and an Abyssal lover might provide the brightest spark in that existence. Aside from their deathknight lovers, ghosts must tend to their anchors in the world of the living and make sure with near-maniacal certainty that their descendants are properly venerating them and sending appropriate sacrifices. Most of the dead are, at their core, selfish, empty people: If they were fulfilled and whole, they would have no qualms about entering Lethe to be reincarnated in the land of the living. The love of a deathknight provides many ghosts with just enough purpose and light to pull them away from this self-obsessive nature and remind them of the beauty of life.

THE EXALTED

Exalts who end up in love, whether they are both Abyssals or not, are often drawn together because those who wielded their powers were lovers in previous incarnations before the Usurpation. And while the characters might have slowly and gracefully fallen in love in their old lives, now they must deal with the existence of that love almost against their will. They did not choose it, but there is a haunting attraction between them that they cannot wholly ignore. The opposite might occur as well. Two Exalts may fall in love, only to find the enmity of their former incarnations driving a wedge between them.

Two Exalts might also fall in love in the modern day, with no preexisting relationship from their former days. Storytellers can benefit from setting up romances between Exalted characters who might otherwise be at cross purposes. If a player's character falls in love with another Abyssal, perhaps that Abyssal will turn to serve a different Deathlord. Personal subplots such as these gain their strength by forcing the character to make hard decisions about his priorities. Does his duty to his Deathlord supercede all things, or will the character fight his allies and risk destruction by the Abyssal Curse to save the life of his Lunar lover?

DEATHLORDS

Love for the Deathlords is almost always unrequited love. The Deathlords are distant and monstrous beings who eventually wish only for the destruction of all life. This kind of love will almost always be unidirectional, the infatuation of a servant with her master. Intelligent and cruel, a Deathlord will take full advantage of a servant who displays such feelings, playing on the Abyssal's emotions as he makes demands of the character and occasionally rewards her with his apparent love and attention. However, an Abyssal who feels as though she is being toyed with might eventually grow disenchanted or even rebellious, so the wise Deathlord does not toy unnecessarily with his servants. Consider also the possibility of a Deathlord who is infatuated with one of his servants who does not, in turn, feel the same way. That sort of lecherous attention mimics many damaged relationships in the modern world



Exalted



and, as such, may prove interesting to play up. Only in the very rarest case will the Deathlord truly reciprocate the Abyssal's love, and even if he does, he may be unable to express the true depths of his feelings.

REDEMPTION

As described in "Redemption" (p. 116), Abyssals can become Solars again. This is extremely difficult. They must reclaim their Solar Essences from out of the hands of the Malfeans and receive the personal blessing of the Unconquered Sun. This sort of thing is not a simple task. There aren't stories of Abyssals getting redeemed casually told in bars. It should be difficult for the players' Circle to even discover that such a thing is possible, and any player Abyssal who is actually redeemed will likely be the first Abyssal to have succeeded. The forces of Oblivion will surely rise up to stop such a thing, attempting to kill the Abyssal who seeks to become a Solar so that his Essence returns to the Deathlords rather than being converted into a servant of the enemy. The redemption of a Solar should come as the culmination of a long and dramatic plot arc, as the character realizes that his choice to live and serve the forces of darkness was objectively *wrong* and that he should have died.

A character may find himself unwilling or unable to go through redemption but still be unwilling to continue to exist as an Abyssal. For such a character, suicide is the only option. Once one has accepted Exaltation, the Exalted Essence becomes wrapped around one's life energy. As with redemption as described above, this sort of action should only come at the end of a character's plot arc, as the Abyssal realizes the terrible mistake he made in becoming a Deathlord's servant.

ABYSSAL SERIES

All Abyssal Exalted are servants of evil. The Malfeans have eaten their names, and the Deathlords are the source of their power. Two basic sorts of series can stem from this truth: one where the Circle works independently of any Deathlord and one where the Circle acts as the servant of one or more Deathlords.

DARKER EVILS THAN DEATH

In the first sort of game, the characters are independent of the Deathlords. However, they cannot escape their dark destinies. They are doomed to live with the trappings of death, at least maintaining the appearance of a warrior dedicated to undertaking dark deeds and the end of all life.

Either the characters' Deathlord has been destroyed, or he has loosed his Abyssals on Creation or the Underworld for his own purposes. In this sort of series, the most important thing to remember as a Storyteller is that the characters are still bound by their promise to the Malfeans: They will continue to carry the trappings of death and will serve destruction whether they choose to or not. If the characters ignore their duties to Oblivion, then even the most casual acts they undertake will have disastrous consequences for those around them. As a result, most independent Circles will ferret out enemies and further Oblivion's cause by destroying them. Moral Abyssals — those who feel some guilt at the terrible acts they must undertake and who might regret the choice they made — will try to make enemies of those beings that would bring the greatest harm to innocents. This would include the Fair Folk, the Infernal Exalted, the Lunar Exalted and their barbarian warlords and, in many cases, the Dragon-Blooded.

If the Circle fled the Deathlord's service, you should decide what kind of pursuit its former master intends to send after the deathknights. If your game isn't really about the Deathlords, it may suffice for ghostly servants or Abyssals to show up once every several sessions to remind the characters that they came from *somewhere*.

On the other hand, you might prefer to run every story predicated on the idea that the characters have to keep moving, staying one step ahead of the Deathlord. This sort of game can be exhausting for players as well as characters, as the players must roleplay continuing paranoia for session after session. It can be very intense, but it is hard to maintain that sort of intensity for more than a handful of sessions. Try to throw a less-hectic story into the midst of the pursuit every once in a while. Perhaps a group of pursuers is comically incompetent, letting the Circle defeat or escape them for a short while and relax for a week or so.

EXAMPLE STORIES AND SERIES

Below is a list of sample story ideas for a series involving independent characters. These are not the only stories that a Storyteller can use in an Abyssal series, but they are the more common ones.

THE HUNGRY GHOSTS

In this story, ghosts that the Circle has grown friendly with — they may be allies or simply friendly Storyteller characters — come to the group for help. The tribute they have perennially received from their families has been cut down to a trickle, and they have lost status in the community of the dead and begun to starve. Ordinarily, they would just lay a curse down on their contrary descendants, but they cannot learn why their family members have ceased to pay tribute, and they ask the Abyssals to investigate for them.

THE END OF A DEATHLORD

Deathlords can be destroyed. However, in the default **Exalted** setting, the Abyssal Exalted have only been around for a few years, and no one is quite sure what happens to them when their patron Deathlord is destroyed. The Abyssals in that Deathlord's service remain Abyssal Exalted, subject to the Abyssal Curse. After all, their Exalted Essences are tainted by Oblivion itself, not the Deathlord, who is merely a broker for the transaction. However, this has never occurred, nor is it likely to appear in published material any time soon, so Storytellers should feel free to make their own decisions. It could be that the destruction of a Deathlord might result in the destruction of Abyssal servants that don't take special precautions. The characters might even be reborn as Solar Exalted as the taint leaves their Essences. This would lead to a radical change in your game, as the characters go from serving darkness to become blazing vanguards of the light, but there's no reason not to do that if it will make for a fun series.

Even if the Abyssals do survive unchanged, there remains the social question of what happens to Abyssal characters who no longer have a Deathlord master. They might choose to go independent. While this challenging for the young, for more experienced Abyssals it can actually be more difficult. Young Abyssals without much experience can fade into the background, hiding like the Solars. Older deathknights will have enemies among the other Deathlords and in Creation and cannot go unchallenged so easily. Older Abyssals must have powerbases, either built up on their own or stolen from their now-destroyed masters, to stand a chance of survival. Thus, the period after a Deathlord's final destruction will be marked by a scramble for resources, as Abyssals and other servants attempt to absorb their late master's estate, powers and authority within the land of the dead.

There are a few reasons why this sort of thing might be happening: If the ghosts reside within the influence of the Scarlet Empire, it may be that imperial forces have clamped down on heretical ancestor-worship. Alternately, an eddy of the Wyld may have swirled in to eclipse the ghosts' families' home — the family might still be alive but insane or trapped. Or the ghosts' families might have been killed themselves, and a few might wander the lands of the dead, lost and beset on all sides, while their ungrateful ancestors worry only about receiving their tribute.

Whatever the cause, the Circle must ameliorate the ghosts' problem. It must find a way for the ghosts' families to return to providing the ghosts with tribute or, at least, must escort the newly dead descendants to join the rest of the family.

SANCTUARY

The Circle hears word that one of the despotic kings of the South (or whichever part of Creation they make their home) has caused to be built a town dedicated entirely to service the dead, similar to Sijan in the East. The truth, as the characters discover when they investigate, is that the king is attempting to curry the favor of one of the local Deathlords. He is capturing refugees from a nearby kingdom or prisoners from a conquered territory, housing them in this town and then ritually murdering a number of them every day. The Deathlord, of course, is intrigued by this offering, but the characters will learn that he is not alone: Servants of a powerful Yozi are attracted to the deceitful murder of these foreigners, and they begin to draw Essence from the rituals just as the Deathlord's servants might. Complicating things further, the ghosts of those ritually slain are growing in number in the Underworld near the town, and they are angry at their living families' treatment.

SAMPLE SERIES

The sample below demonstrates the possibilities of a series wherein the characters serve no Deathlord, having just become free of their previous master. This is not the only way to run such a series and is intended simply as a mine for ideas for your own game.

SAMPLE SERIES: LIBERATION

This series begins just after the Abyssals' escape from the service of their Deathlord master and assumes that all of the Abyssal Exalted in the Circle have a core of morality, certain things they will refuse to do, and it also assumes that they do not wish to see the entirety of Creation consumed by the darkness of Oblivion. As Storyteller, you should sit down with each player and run a short prelude, highlighting the character's moral boundaries and learning what tendencies toward good and evil lie within the character's makeup.

The Abyssals begin the series free but on the run. They must purchase the normal Manse and Artifact Backgrounds from the main **Exalted** book. The Circle does not immediately realize the dangers of denying its dark fate — in early stories, the Abyssals will encounter mortals who need the deathknights' direct assistance and servants of their old Deathlord who must be dispatched. Subsequently, the Abyssals will learn to their regret that they cannot just openly take up arms against the Deathlords, as every step they take to support the forces



of life and light exacerbates their Curse and brings further ruination to everyone around them.

As word of the Curse spreads, another Deathlord sends his own servants —Abyssal or otherwise — to contact the Circle and offer it a way out: If the renegade Abyssals come to serve him, they will accept their fate and true nature as servants of destruction and, in so doing, eliminate the Curse that haunts them. That Deathlord's home is distant, and the Circle will face challenges to get there and discuss the proposition further. And, of course, that invitation is more trap than offer; the Circle cannot refuse the Deathlord's proposal once within his domain, or it will face a great battle.

The series can go one of two ways from this point: Either the characters return to servitude, or they manage to remain free from the clutches of a second Deathlord. Abyssals who enter the service of this new master find that his designs on the world are no more palatable than their previous master's and must again free themselves. Those that remain free now find themselves in a struggle against the forces of two separate Deathlords.

SAMPLE SERIES: SERVANTS OF THE DARKEST LORDS

In the second broad type of Abyssals series, the Circle is a group of devoted and loyal servants to one or more Deathlords. In this case, the characters are actively furthering the cause of death every night (or almost every night), and so, the Abyssal Curse crops up less frequently, as they aren't denying their eternal purposes at all.

NIGHTLY EXISTENCE IN SERVITUDE

Part of the success of the early parts of this kind of series depends on your choice of stories. There are only so many different kinds of tasks that a Deathlord can assign to an elite squad of deathknights, and the players' interest in the game depends in large part on what those tasks are. As a general rule, a Deathlord will assign his Abyssal servants the kind of tasks that ghosts can't be trusted with or can't perform, for which mortal servants would be inappropriate and which are too dangerous, tedious, time-consuming or menial for the Deathlord himself to attend to. Here are some suggestions.

- **Courier Duty:** The characters must carry an item or message from one place to another. Usually, the places through which the Circle is expected to move are dangerous, or else, the object it carries is of extreme value. Courier duty of a pointless message through extremely dangerous territory is a good way for a Deathlord to rid himself of a particularly troublesome group of servants.

- **Assassination:** Neither ghosts nor ordinary mortals can challenge a Deathlord in an open fight, but if a

ghost or mortal is giving the characters' master a difficult time politically, he may designate her as a target for destruction. Depending on the Deathlord's style, this may be done flagrantly, as the Circle sweeps in like a flock of ravens, announces "This woman has broken the laws of the Deathlord" and summarily kills her. Less showy Deathlords may act more subtly, perhaps framing another for the target's death.

- **Ambassadorial Duty:** The Deathlord wishes to set up a bastion of his own power within a territory whose control he does not wish to challenge. He sends one character to act as his ambassador to that foreign land and the rest of the Circle to act as the ambassador's aides and staff. The ambassador might be a player's character, particularly if one of them is a Moonshadow. A Deathlord is not likely to send an ambassador to a ruler that he does not respect in some fashion, unless the diplomatic corps is really there to cover for a second, secret mission. But characters sent to act as real ambassadors — say, to the stronghold of another Deathlord or to the barbaric citadel of a mighty Lunar Exalted warlord — will find themselves exercising their political skills to the utmost.

- **Treasure Hunt:** Hundreds of caches of First Age lore and artifacts dot the landscape of the Threshold. No doubt some Deathlords remember a few caches personally. By now, however, any caches that were easy to find and plunder have been discovered and looted for everything they were worth by scavenger lords or the forces of the Scarlet Empire. Therefore, the only ones that remain potentially useful are those caches that rest deep in the Wyld or are defended by powerful autonomous First Age weapons so insanely dangerous that even the Dragon-Blooded of the Realm and the Seventh Legion cannot survive looting the sites. Abyssal Exalted are, of course, the perfect tools for raiding such sites, and they can expect to face the same kinds of challenges that any other Exalt might.

- **General Lieutenancy:** Someone needs to manage the regular operations of a Deathlord's empire. This includes purely logistical issues — taxing merchants and ordinary citizens (both living and dead), making sure new ghosts are added to the government rolls, making sure that ghosts that have surrendered to Oblivion or Lethe are removed from the rolls and so on. It also involves commanding and training the Deathlord's armies. See "Two-Fisted Tales of Middle Management," below.

TWO-FISTED TALES OF MIDDLE MANAGEMENT

The most expedient way for an Abyssal to solve his problems is with the edge of a daiklave. However, in many cases, the daiklave brings with it more problems than it solves — and a Deathlord will be incensed if his thoughtless Abyssal servant dealt with a personnel conflict by

destroying another valued servant. The Abyssal Exalted may be among the most treasured members of a Deathlord's retinue, but they are not the Deathlord's only servants, for the Deathlords must rely on the service of many ghosts and mortals beneath them. Abyssal Exalted are probably near the top of their Deathlord's hierarchy, as well, which means that, in addition to relying on the bureaucracy, they will probably have responsibility over some part of it.

Storytellers who do not wish to have their series dwell too heavily on the structure of a large organization such as a Deathlord's nation should position the players' characters outside of the Deathlord's main ruling party — either they are special operatives or they are renegades. On the other hand, if you do wish to have your series involve the Deathlord's greater organization, the following are some story ideas and topics to consider.

LIFE AT THE TOP

Most Deathlords run their nighted kingdoms just as a living king would rule over his people. Despite a Deathlord's brilliance, power and immortality, he cannot rule single-handedly. The Deathlord needs a body of servants, each one invested with sufficient latitude to act independently and handle tasks that the Deathlord himself cannot be bothered to attend to. The Deathlord might give these servants unique titles, or he might name them all "Duke" or "Commander" or something similar. He may divide them up geographically, giving each duke authority over a few hundred square miles. Alternately, he could divide them up by sphere of influence — one might control the Deathlord's cult, another taxation, a third the armies of the dead, and so on.

Each member of this top tier will probably have an apparatus of her own, with the hierarchy continuing downward until, after a few layers, it reaches those who do work — laborers, soldiers, craftsmen or sorcerers.

The Abyssal Exalted will likely fit in near the top of this hierarchy. Remember that there are only 100 deathknights in Creation and 13 Deathlords. The average Deathlord will have just seven or eight Abyssals to call his own, and they cost him dearly to acquire. He will not squander their talents on jobs that are easily handled by other members of his immediate staff. Regardless of whether the deathknights are given freelance troubleshooting sorts of roles or specific positions in the Deathlord's hierarchy, they will work where their unique talents can be brought to bear to best serve the Deathlord.

THE PERILS OF MANAGEMENT

But management isn't easy, and being a dark lord requires the administrative burden of rulership. Abyssals will frequently be called upon to perform administrative tasks, and that's something that the Storyteller may not be





sure how to present. The section that follows details some of the most common bureaucratic challenges.

COMMAND AND CONTROL

Military organizations split up the main problems of leading warriors into two broad strokes: *command*, or “Getting people to do what you want them to do,” and *control*, or “Keeping people from doing what you don’t want them to do.” Groups suffer from inertia — it takes work to prod a group into action and work to get them to stop doing things.

A classic command story involves getting a reluctant army to fight a battle on behalf of its master. Armies follow a nice hierarchy, so there may seem to the Circle to be straightforward solutions to this problem. Every unit needs to be properly inspired by its leader, the leaders need to be appropriately inspired by their higher officers, and the deathknights themselves should inspire loyalty and fear in the higher officers. Different things motivate different soldiers and units. Some might only need to see the deathknights out in the field, while others might need to be inspired by the officers immediately superior to them.

A classic control story would revolve around the characters’ discovery that the Deathlord’s tax collectors were taxing his subjects so heavily that they could not feed themselves or their families. Even from a Deathlord’s purely utilitarian view, this is unproductive, as a home-*stead* full of the impoverished and malnourished is less valuable than one with higher productivity. You would want to develop personalities, typical activities, levels of graft and abilities for a number of different tax collectors. Most tax collectors work alone, so the Circle would have to figure out how to get individual tax collectors to stop overtaxing the people. Perhaps they could be paid higher wages in order to stop graft; perhaps a group of inspectors might be created to oversee the tax collectors; or perhaps overzealous tax collectors should receive some form of poetic justice, being forced to live as peasants for a year to learn the folly of their ways.

THE INFORMATION CHAIN

Particularly in a Deathlord’s nation, truth is a tool rather than a fact of life. Superiors lie to their underlings. Dukes and deathknights lie to lesser servants, who, in turn, lie to the peasantry. All involved do this for what seem like perfectly good reasons. For instance, sharing detailed plans with an underling is inappropriate if the plans aren’t fully fleshed out because that underling may make plans of his own contingent on your incomplete planning, or a superior might not trust an underling’s discretion enough to share critical plans. Less defensible reasons include withholding information from a disliked subordinate in order to see him fail or basic incompetencies such as passing information down the chain that was correct at one point but not passing down corrections as they occur.

Underlings lie to their superiors, as well, out of fear, malice or incompetence. Fearful servants tell their masters what they think the masters want to hear rather than the truth; malicious ones feed their masters information that they think will poison their masters’ future activities; and incompetent ones simply don’t have the correct answers to give.

What this means, in effect, is that, without work to keep channels of communication open in both directions, a Deathlord’s apparatus risks becoming a headless, handless beast. Directives from the top are obfuscated and ignored and based on incorrect information passed upward anyway. Deathknights can improve the quality of the information chain through the use of Charms — they can tell when someone’s telling the truth, for instance — and they can do so because they are relatively free agents. Most Abyssals act purely at the behest of their Deathlords, and although they surely have designs of their own, the deathknights are assumed to be acting in their lords’ best interests. As a result, an Abyssal can go anywhere within a Deathlord’s nation and investigate what’s really going on in order to report back to the Deathlord and his dukes. Your stories can take Abyssal servants to any corner of a Deathlord’s domain in order to ferret out corruption, infiltration, deception, heresy and other crimes against the state.

DEALING WITH PEERS

Abyssal Exalted are near the top of a Deathlord’s power hierarchy. Few servants, if any, will be of a higher rank than they are, but they are likely to have several peers. After all, the Abyssals have hardly been around for any time at all, despite their power and obvious loyalty to the cause. Most of their peers are, by contrast, long-term servants of the Deathlord. Some are ghosts, some are mortals, and a few might be other things (free spirits or independent Exalted of another type). The Abyssals’ peers probably have an advantage in experience, expressed as raw knowledge of the Deathlord’s apparatus, and, possibly, in political skill, but unless they are powerfully magically active, they can’t hope to compete with the Abyssals’ Charms and the obvious favor of the Deathlord.

Accordingly, the Abyssals will come to dominate the higher echelons of politics in the Deathlords’ camp. They might be the subjects of a figurative tug of war, as different factions attempt to pull the characters to their way of thinking, or they might become mini-Deathlords as far as the rest of a Deathlord’s court is concerned such that other servitors might all attempt to curry the characters’ favor.

Some peers may become disgruntled at these new arrivals’ ascension to apparently unearned power, and they could launch political or physical attacks against the Circle in order to discredit or destroy it. More interesting from a story perspective is a peer who disagrees with the characters’ ascension to power and political stance but who doesn’t try to take them out of the picture, as he is loyal to his Deathlord and sees the Circle’s value to his

master. This character will pose problems for the characters, as he will oppose their plans and activities, but he clearly has the Deathlord's best interests at heart and will move to support the Circle in dire situations.

MANAGING YOUR DEATHLORD FROM BELOW

As described above, under "The Perils of Management," Abyssals will find themselves managing their Deathlord at least as much as he directs them. Obviously the characters won't direct their Deathlord to take particular actions, but through the information they feed to him, they can sway his attitudes and influence his plans.

As Storyteller, one of the most important things you can do as a favor to your players is to make your characters manipulable in ways that characters can learn about. Deathlords would be included in this. It is likely that novice Abyssals won't be aware of the ways that their Deathlord can be swayed, but once you've detailed the Deathlord's history and motivations (as described elsewhere), you will have a good idea of what characters can do to change his attitudes. If, for instance, the Deathlord was betrayed by his Lunar lover near the end of the First Age, he might have a blindingly irrational hatred of Lunar Exalted, particularly those who wear his old lover's favored shapes. You can show this to your players by having the Deathlord react unexpectedly strongly to a discussion involving Lunars. Characters will learn from the encounter that they can use, "the Lunars issue" to push or pull their lord along certain courses of action.

Characters shouldn't be allowed to do this too predictably or too skillfully. The Deathlords are amazingly self-aware entities — they really have to be because, if they can't see their own blind spots and weak points, their enemies will pick them apart — and they won't let their deathknights manipulate and abuse them. But if characters judiciously use their master's "buttons," reward them. It gets players thinking of your characters as real individuals, and that makes the game more real for everyone.

TACTICS, STRATEGY, LOGISTICS

Three scales of activity dominate the tasks of any large group: the tactical, the strategic and the logistical. Tactical activity is centered around getting actual tasks done immediately. Strategic activity is the planning and the coordination of large-scale tasks. Logistical activity allows for supplies and support to come into place to allow tactical activity to succeed.

TACTICS

Tactical activity doesn't necessarily mean squad-level battlefield activity. This simply means getting actual tasks done. Tactical activity can be anything from building a bridge to taxing a village to fighting a group of barbarians.

The key to success in tactical activity is to have the right group of people in the right place at the right time. Abyssals who oversee this kind of work will want to make sure they assess their underlings' skill levels and put each Storyteller character where he best fits to get a given task accomplished. Abyssals have to be careful here. As Exalted, they are extremely capable and powerful individuals, and they could easily dig a ditch in a day or defeat a small horde of Fair Folk on their own. They have to make sure to place themselves where they can do the most good.

As Storyteller, don't make this decision easy. Say that the characters choose to help a small group of the Deathlord's soldiers defend a town from the encroachment of barbarians. Some characters need to go scout out the barbarians' activities; others need to build fortifications; others need to prepare weapons; and still others need to guide and lead the soldiers. The Circle may not have enough members to adequately cover all of these tasks, and you should force the players to make hard choices here. Can the Abyssals trust the old local blacksmith who swears he can get a few swords repaired by the time the barbarians arrive, or should one of the Abyssals do it herself and risk the fortifications not getting done in time?

STRATEGY

Strategic work means painting a large number of tactical tasks in broad strokes, without paying too much attention to the specific details (trusting instead that those responsible for the details will handle them).

A Deathlord may take an active hand in strategic planning, or he may hand down broad directives and expect his Abyssals and other high-level underlings to tend to the strategic details.

Tune strategic planning in your game to the needs of your group. If your players really enjoy planning in-game — whether of war, of massive construction projects or of rituals intended to defile the land of the living — then, by all means, put plenty of this sort of thing into their hands, and let them spend a session or two defining their Deathlord's plan. You may wish to take an in-character role, either as the Deathlord himself or as another of his trusted advisors. In this fashion, you can provide information to players while they plan in-character without having to drop character to do so.

Doing strategic planning can lead characters to write their own stories for you, very easily. "The Deathlord would like to expand his shadowland into this jungle, but we don't know who or what lives in there right now, so we'd better go find out before we just assume it'll take six months to subjugate and convert it." Sure, you then have to decide what's there, but the players choose their own direction.

On the other hand, strategic planning might simply not be the sort of thing that your players enjoy. In that case, it's easy to excise — unless the characters object, simply assume that they are not the strategic planners of the organization,



but rather, the active, tactical arm of the Deathlord's apparatus. Storyteller characters who are involved with high-level planning can just pass orders or suggestions down to the Abyssals, who can tend to the details.

LOGISTICS

Logistics is all about making sure the right supplies and support end up where they are supposed to. And it's not just as simple as making sure that the wagons of food get from point A to point B in time to feed the army that's arriving there. It can go all the way back to the mining of ore to smelt into tools and weapons, scheduling the planting of fields and so on, and logistical work can be disrupted by almost anything.

Logistics is half about planning and half about execution. Abyssal characters can use Bureaucracy Charms to influence the planning, and they can attend to particulars in person — making sure that workers are properly motivated, that bandits are appropriately suppressed and so on.

STORIES AND SERIES

The following list of story seeds should by no means be considered comprehensive, but it is here to provide inspiration for other stories and series.

The Hidden Cancer

Portents, Exalted sorcery or simple political skill has led the Circle to believe that there is a traitor to their master among his Abyssal Exalted servants. It is up to the characters to root that traitor out. As Storyteller, you should figure out who the traitor is, why and how he intends to betray his master and any other important details. The traitor might simply serve another Deathlord or one of the powerful kings of the dead, or he might even have sold out to some faction among the living for his own reasons.

Presumably, the troupe's Circle does not make up the entirety of the Deathlord's Abyssal servants — there are 100 Abyssals and 13 Deathlords, leading to an average of seven or eight Abyssal servants for each Deathlord — so detail several others, including some red herrings, to make a worthwhile mystery out of discovering the traitor's identity. Remember that Charms such as Excellent Inquisitor Method and Cunning Scrutiny Style will help the Circle, but the traitor knows those Charms exist and must have taken precautions against them. Remember also that no Abyssal has more than a few years' experience at this point in time, and so, none of the other deathknights in the master's service is going to be able to stand up to the entire Circle without backup once his identity is discovered. On the other hand, a one-turn combat as the climax to such a subplot is anticlimactic. Give the traitor some backup or at least an escape route that leads to an exciting chase sequence.

Rebellion of the Ancient

A ghost that has existed in the Underworld since before the Usurpation and now lives as a king of one of the many kingdoms of the dead has gotten his hands on a great source of power. He may have tapped some First Age artifact that fell into the lands of the dead, or he might have figured out a way to tap into Essence through the ghosts of mortal sorcerers or something else not directly involving the Malfeans or the Yozis. His great age and legendary status has given him a great deal of political power in the local area, as his name is known to all the ghosts of the region, and all of them venerate him for his great knowledge and wisdom.

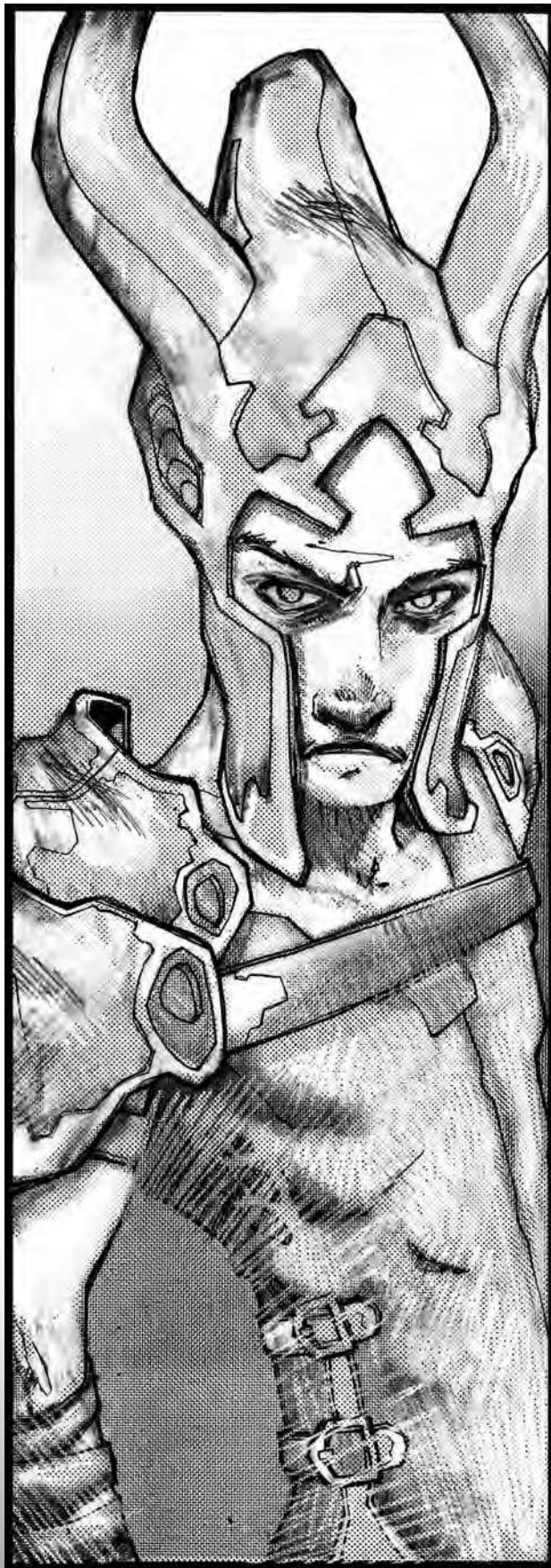
The ghost-king's power now rivals that of the local Deathlord, the Circle's master. And the ghost-king's sheer knowledge of the realm of the dead outstrips that of the Circle's master. The troupe's Circle must either destroy this king of the ghosts without turning him into a martyr or, better yet, co-opt him into the Deathlord's service.

The Lord of the Helm

At the time of the Usurpation, the Circle's Deathlord was a powerful Solar, the general of the Realm's most powerful armies. His name and visage were feared throughout the world, and he wore a horned helm enchanted to strike fear into any enemy that could see it. That general was invited to the great feast where the majority of the Solars were murdered and died there with his peers. The Helm of Torment fell into the hands of a Dragon-Blooded officer, and it was passed from him to one of his descendants upon his demise in the Contagion. Eventually, the Helm was lost in a naval battle in the West. It was assumed to have been destroyed or lost forever.

However, recently, reports have come out of the West that the Helm of Torment or something very much like it has been seen in the possession of a young aquatic Lunar Exalted, who has been using it to terrorize the navy of the Coral Archipelago.

The Circle's master commands his servants to return the Helm of Torment to him. This is a relatively simple search-destroy-and-retrieve mission, but even it has some complications — Lunar Exalted are hard to find when they know they're being hunted, and by the time the characters find out that the Lunar is out there, he's already being hunted by Coral's forces. Additionally, while Abyssal Exalted are at no more of a disadvantage than any other human when in or near the water, they're at a vast disadvantage when compared to most of the inhabitants of the West. Given all this, you could complicate the situation further by adding rival Lunar Exalted or a rival Circle of Abyssals — perhaps even a Circle that also serves the characters' master, rather than being the obvious foes that a Circle in the service of another Deathlord would be.



SAMPLE SERIES

A sample series that focuses on a group of Abyssals who loyally serve their Deathlord master is described below. As with the previous series, this isn't intended as a prescription so much as a pool of ideas to inspire your own games.

RIGHTEOUS FISTS OF THE UNDERWORLD

In this series, the Circle moves from being untrusted tertiary servants of a Deathlord to being his innermost Circle of advisors and generals as the Deathlord wages war on Creation itself.

As starting Abyssals, the Circle is given a variety of relatively menial tasks — the deathknights act as couriers and bullyboys throughout the Underworld and on the outskirts of various shadowlands. The characters' tasks are carefully chosen. They must convey messages back and forth between their own Deathlord and the other lords of the dead as their master attempts to find out who would act as an ally and who as a foe if he were to launch a full-scale attack on the Scarlet Empire. They must ruthlessly destroy ghost and mortal spies who learn of the Deathlord's plans and wish to pass those plans on. As the Circle continues to perform its duties loyally and skillfully, its members receive favors and greater trust from the Deathlord.

Throughout this period, of course, the Circle is also dealing with more ordinary Exalted storylines and subplots: ramifications of their Exaltation on their families and friends, unrequited love, battle with Wyld creatures and Dragon-Blooded, the recovery of First Age Artifacts and so on. However, one important theme that develops during the series is an ongoing secret conflict with a particular Deathlord over matters the characters' master will not speak of. This enemy Deathlord is eventually destroyed after great risk and effort by the players' characters.

The ebb and flow of the Deathlords' war will depend on the success of the Abyssals in battle and leadership. In the end, however, the Circle will learn that the reason this Deathlord was the target of their master's attack was that he was opposed to the particulars of their master's plan to drag all of Creation into the Underworld and, thence, into the maw of Oblivion. It becomes clear that the Circle's master has held back the majority of his armies to prepare a march across the lands of the living, slaughtering and destroying everything in their path.

Now, the Abyssals must choose between supporting their master (and sentencing the world to destruction) and rebellion (perhaps saving the world while sentencing themselves to destruction). This is the time when the Abyssals can redeem themselves, possibly even saving Creation, or perhaps they can go down in a blaze of glory, dying to destroy their master — or they might even choose



loyalty over the fate of the world and help their master extinguish every light in Creation.

THE HUNDRED MOTES

The Abyssals do not inhabit a world of their own. There are other Exalted and myriad supernatural beings throughout Creation. Some of them would fit quite nicely into an Abyssals series, just as Abyssals might fit quite well into series about other sorts of Exalted.

SOLAR EXALTED

Solars and Abyssals are moderately compatible in a mixed Circle. An evenly mixed Circle would be tricky, as the group would be pulled in two different directions (most Solars have motivations having nothing to do with the Deathlords or the Malfians, while those beings dominate an Abyssal's existence), but if a sufficiently strong mutual motivation was provided, the group could probably work together. Marauding Fair Folk or oppressive imperials are always good choices in that regard, and a joint Circle working together against a particularly nasty Deathlord while indirectly serving the Abyssals' master (a different Deathlord) is also quite plausible.

A lone Abyssal in a Circle of Solars would probably be an escapee from his Deathlord master's service and have to rely on his friends for support and defense. At the same time, he would have to maintain the minimum trappings of death and destruction, lest the Abyssal Curse come down upon him. A lone Solar in a Circle of Abyssals might well be something of an extended guest or an ambassador from the realm of the living within the shadowlands. If the Circle still serves a Deathlord, that Solar might have fallen into the Deathlord's service as well, or he might be the bearer of the power that Exalted an associate of the Abyssals (or the Deathlord) in a previous incarnation. Free Abyssals might rely on Solar allies to perform tasks that they can't do themselves for fear of triggering the Abyssal Curse.

From the standpoint of Storyteller characters, Abyssals and Solars make excellent foils for one another, given that their abilities and natures are roughly the inverse of each others'. An Abyssal can serve as a contact or even a mentor for a Solar, and the two sorts of characters might never come into conflict. But given the potential for antipathy and the aforementioned opposition between the characters' natures, Solars and Abyssals make excellent long-term foes, and there's no reason to be afraid to use them that way.

TERRESTRIAL EXALTED

The Dragon-Blooded are prone to see Abyssal Exalted as pawns in their struggle for power over the Realm. If a Circle of Abyssals is generally hostile to the Empire itself (and many are, either due to the influence of their Deathlord masters or their own anger at the corruption

and oppression of the Scarlet Empire), clever Dragon-Blooded will try to aim those deathknights at the political enemies of their Great Houses.

A mixed Terrestrial-Abyssal Circle is not easy to justify. The easiest way to do so, as with most such groups, is to pose a common enemy. A group of young Dragon-Blooded might well see an advantage in allying with a Deathlord whose rival is endangering their house's interests.

For the most part, the Dragon-Bloods do not understand the Abyssal Exalted. The Abyssals' true nature is largely secret, and the Dragon-Blooded would likely be terrified if they found out the true origins of the Deathlords and the Abyssals.

LUNAR EXALTED

There isn't a lot of natural overlap between the stories of the Lunar Exalted and the Abyssal Exalted. Abyssals begin their supernatural existences as slaves to otherworldly forces of destruction and death, while Lunars gain the Exaltation by vigorously choosing life and its trappings in the face of failure or abject hardship. These are not particularly compatible, although some barbarians might follow a darker code and, like any wise animal, choose existence over death. An Abyssal-Lunar crossover series will require a very strong premise and should not be a traditional open-ended game. Abyssals and Lunars might work together toward a specific end, such as the destruction of an extremely powerful common enemy, but they are not likely to remain close after their victory. Because of this lack of a strong overlap in theme, a strong series premise might allow for a single player's Lunar character to work as part of an Abyssal series, or vice versa, but a more even crossover probably won't work as well.

A lone character of one of these two types might crop up in a series focusing on the other if there is a lot of attention paid to reincarnation and the past lives of the Exalted. Since the Abyssals are created from corrupted Solar Essences, it is certain that a given Abyssal is the reincarnation of a particular Solar. Since Solars and Lunars were one another's spouses in the days before the Usurpation, there may well be a Lunar Exalt out there that is this character's onetime lover. That Lunar might himself be a reincarnation of a previous Lunar Exalted, or he might be truly ancient and remember the Abyssal's life as a Solar. Such characters might encounter one another repeatedly, when they least expect to, as if the fates were drawing them closer together. Perhaps, eventually, a character with a flair for old legendry might come upon a sonnet or old epic in which characters very similar to the two in the current series love one another. Players must then decide what paths the characters want to walk. Do they wish to follow the same steps their predecessors did, even knowing the dark fate their predecessors succumbed to? Or should they separate in the hopes of avoiding that final darkness?

THE MALFEANS

The Malfeans represent the heart of the Deathlords' power. The dead Primordials have existed in some fashion since the beginning of time. When a Malfean is roused to intense emotion, there is thunder in the Underworld; when a Malfean acts, Creation shudders. Remember that it is the Malfeans, not the Deathlords, that really hold the key to the Abyssal characters' Exalted Essences.

The Malfeans are responsible for the Abyssal Great Curse, and each Abyssal Exalt has looked upon a Malfean as he surrendered his name to it. The image of that being surely haunts the Abyssal's dreams, always reminding him that the final fate of the world is to spiral into Oblivion.

Abyssal Exalted cannot hope to directly challenge a Malfean. If nothing else, the very act of challenge would violate the oath the Abyssal took when he was Exalted, and he would lose the Exalted Essence that keeps him alive eternally and provides him with power. However, a sufficiently epic Abyssals series might well reach the stage that the Circle overthrows its Deathlord master and wishes to go beyond, to free their Solar Essences from the grasp of the Malfeans. Another game might see the Malfeans themselves emerge onto the face of Creation as the Deathlords bring about eternal night and slaughter the universe — noble Abyssals would surely turn on their masters to save all Creation.

How, then, can Abyssals possibly challenge a Malfean? There are no hard and fast rules for this in **Exalted** — the Neverborn are incredibly powerful creatures. But consider: The Malfeans must be bound by some sort of control over their behavior. By default, they're dead, which has a certain restrictive effect on them, but what if that weren't the case? They lurk down around Oblivion, at the very heart of the Underworld. If they truly desired to destroy the universe right away, they certainly have the raw power to slaughter everyone for a hundred miles from a given spot and rip the Scarlet Empire from its moorings. What stops them from doing so in your series? Here are some suggestions.

- Perhaps the Malfeans are imprisoned by Oblivion because they are fueled by Oblivion. They cannot escape beyond a certain distance from this end of all things, lest their power fade and they turn into ordinary ghosts or even corpses.

- The Malfeans might require a particular series of events or an astrological conjunction before they can burst forth into the Underworld proper — or even the lands of the living. Savvy Abyssals will research with magic and in repositories of First Age lore to find out what conditions in particular a given Malfean is waiting for. Clever Abyssals can indirectly rig those conditions such that they never take place or speed the inevitable victory of their dark masters. Malfeans that are waiting for a virgin birth, for instance, can be thwarted by encouraging barbarian tribes

to wage war on the locals, leading to women anywhere near childbearing age to lose their virginity or by the periodic slaughter or plague infestation of pregnant women until the crisis passes.

- And remember that many parts of the constellations in the sky are incarnate beings of some flavor. An enterprising and powerful Abyssal Circle might be able to persuade the Maiden of Endings to avoid her usual dalliance with the Moon if that conjunction would lead to a horrible consequence for the world. This would necessitate a change in the canon that states that mortal astrology cannot foresee the actions of the Deathlords or the Malfeans, but if you've come this far you may as well make further changes. Be aware, though, that by allowing astrology to foresee the Malfeans' and Deathlords' actions you're spreading some power of prophecy out into places it doesn't extend to as the game currently exists. The best solution to that is to ensure that astrology is somewhat unpredictable, even by those skilled in reading the skies: Give astrologers competing predictions.

THE YOZIS

The Yozis are generally the enemies of the Abyssals, just as they are the enemies of the Deathlords. Admittedly, the Yozis and the Malfeans have cooperated, as they did to arrange the creation of the Deathlords, but the Yozis have different plans for reality than the Malfeans do, and the two sets of plans do not intersect. The Yozis are creatures of deceit, corruption and wickedness, while the Malfeans crave only Oblivion. At least Oblivion is honest.

The Yozis, including their servants the Infernal Exalted, make great antagonists for your Abyssals series. They can unquestionably serve as the antagonists of your series, even as the Abyssals themselves live the role of Servant of Ultimate Evil. The Infernal Exalted can be used to lend an air of unreality to your game, as well: Nothing will confuse a Circle of Abyssals as much as acting openly as heroes and saving a village full of mortals from the forces of the Yozis. The Yozis' evil can make the quest for the purity of Oblivion seem downright heroic by comparison. Death is pure, brings an end to pain and is final, even as it is corrupted by the Malfeans. The Yozis bring deceit and pain, where Oblivion brings release.

The servants of the Yozis could ally with the Abyssals. Generally, this happens when a particular Circle of Exalts meddles in the affairs both of the Circle's Deathlord and a powerful Yozi or when the throne of a minor kingdom proves itself abnormally resistant to ordinary sorts of Exalted persuasion and begins to hinder the activities of both the Infernals and the Abyssals within its borders. A lengthy political series might revolve around a Circle of Abyssals working with a group of Yozi-worshippers trying to destroy the Scarlet Empire at the same time that the Yozis work to prepare the Realm for

the return of the Scarlet Empress in her hellish regalia. Sprinkle in some player-run Dragon-Blooded, and your game sessions will never be boring.

OTHERS

Storms of the Wyld do occasionally sweep across shadowlands on the face of Creation, though they do not reach the Underworld itself. The Underworld fights storms of its own, and within the shadowlands, the Abyssals generally have the edge. The Abyssals are the subject of intense Sidereal scrutiny. The leaders of both the Gold and Bronze factions have an excellent idea where the Abyssals came from. Learning more about the deathknights occupies the spare time of both the Cult of the Illuminated and the Siderials who lurk behind the Immaculate Order, but for now, the Star-Born are cautious. They are few in number and the weakest among the Celestial Exalted in direct confrontation. They know that, in war, you must think first, before you move.

ABYSSAL EXPERIENCE

Experience point costs for Abyssals are as normal for Solar Exalted. The only difference is that training times for all Abyssal Traits are doubled outside the shadowlands or the Underworld. In such conditions, Abyssals must train normally to increase even Favored Abilities. Nec-

romancy spells are treated exactly as normal spells for purposes of training time and learning.

ABYSSAL APPEARANCE AND ESSENCE

Abyssals may appear as normal humans at first, but it is unavoidable that the black power within them leaves its mark on their mortal flesh. This is reflected by an alteration of the character's Appearance. **Abyssals at or below Essence 3 may have any Appearance they wish. Those at Essence 4 can no longer be average in their appearance — they must have an Appearance below 2 or above 2. Those at Essence 5 have begun down the road to an inhuman existence; they must either have Appearance 0 or 4+.** Abyssals above Essence 5, when they emerge, will be inhumanly terrifying or preternaturally beautiful.

Abyssals do not have a choice about changing their Appearance. Those who will become more beautiful must buy their Appearance up as a prerequisite to increasing their Essence. This costs the normal number of experience points. Abyssals who wish to lower their Appearance may do so for free. Abyssals who change their Appearance when they increase their Essence above 3 do not need to train normally for the Attribute change; the training time is assumed to take place concurrently with the training for their Essence increase.



GHOSTLY EXPERIENCE

The dead are capable of growth and change, although they do it slowly. Below follow the training times, experience costs and guidelines for the increase of ghostly Traits.

GHOSTLY EXPERIENCE COSTS

Trait Increase	Cost
Attribute	current rating x 8
Favored Ability	(current rating x 4) - 1
Ability	current rating x 4
Essence	current rating x 12
Virtue	current rating x 6
Willpower	current rating x 5
Fetter	current rating x 3
New Trait	Cost
Ability	12
Arcanos	14
Invent New Arcanos	20
New Fetter	20
New Fetter (Relentless Hunter)	15
Special	Cost
Shift Passion	20
Shift Fetter	10

TRAINING TIMES

Trait	Time Required
Increase Attribute	current rating x 3 x months
New Ability	12 weeks
Increase Ability	current rating x 2 weeks
Arcanos	8 weeks
Invent New Arcanos	32 weeks
Essence	current rating x 2 months*
Virtue	current rating x 10 weeks
Willpower	current rating x 6 weeks
New Fetter	1 year**
New Fetter (Relentless Hunter)	6 months**
Increase Fetter	6 months**
Special	Time Required
Shift Passion	6 months/dot
Shift Fetter	1 year/dot**

* Training required to advance to Essence 3 or higher. Cannot exceed Essence 5.

** Total dots of Fetters cannot exceed Willpower + Essence.

GENERAL TRAINING

The dead are not incredibly flexible creatures, and their training times are very long as a result. This might cause some problem in regular play, and Storytellers are free to shorten training times. However, Storytellers should also consider that it might be more appropriate to instead not hand out experience points or otherwise allow advancement during a ghost game of short in-game duration, as the ghosts would never seek to change themselves to meet the situation. The Storyteller should instead give starting characters bonus Traits or more bonus points at creation to make sure they're equal to the upcoming series.

PASSIONS

Ghosts increase their Passions when they increase their Virtues. There is no other way for these Traits to increase. However, the dead can, over time, transfer the focus of their Passions. This is a very unpleasant and dangerous time for ghosts, and the process is not one they undertake lightly. Some ghosts do it deliberately through techniques involving meditation and structured thinking. Others find themselves genuinely involved in new activities, and their Passions drift naturally. Many do neither and perish from weakness of will after the expiration of the objects of their Passion.

Ghosts can spend experience points to shift the focus of their Passions. This decreases a Passion by one dot. In turn, it increases an existing Passion by one dot or creates a new one-dot Passion. The training time for shifting the focus of the character's Passion does not have to be spent exclusively in meditation and structured thinking. The character can, instead, count hours of passionate involvement in the matter, but each hour of involvement only counts for one half hour of training. However, if the character is truly passionate about the matter, that should be little burden.

Each dot of a Passions must be shifted separately — the training time cannot be lumped together. Thus, there will be a dangerous time when the ghost does not passionately believe in anything at all, which can be troublesome if the ghost is following her soul's desires and not deliberately finding new means of attaching herself to existence. Most Passions that ghosts develop in the Underworld relate to the society of the dead or to advancing their legacy or memory among the living. The elder ghosts among the society of the dead are as emotionally involved in their undead existences or their cults as a murder victim is with his widowed wife.



THE WHISPER OF OBLIVION

Ghostly characters may be so unfortunate as to encounter the Whisper of Oblivion while in the Labyrinth. This encounter is a cruel one indeed, for the player of the ghost who hears the Whisper much make a Willpower + Essence roll, difficulty 5. If the roll succeeds, the Whisper merely caresses the ghost, and she loses a point of temporary Willpower. If the character fails, the Whisper has entered her, and she will hear it forever as a voice softly harping on the sham of her existence. Eventually, she will succumb.

One dot of the character's highest Passion immediately becomes tainted. Whenever the character's player botches on a roll involving the Virtue associated with that Passion or on a roll for which the character activated the Passion, another dot of the Passion is tainted. When all the dots of the Passion have been tainted, the ghost's heart is forever soured to that Passion, and she will seek to destroy it to the degree she once sought to preserve it. If the Passion is at three dots or above, the character's player will have to fail a Passion roll for the ghost not to strike out at the thing she loved when given the opportunity. One dot of the character's next highest Passion then becomes tainted. This means that characters with only one-dot Passions immediately succumb to the Abyss.

When all of a character's Passions have been tainted, the character's heart is consumed by Oblivion, and she becomes a Disciple of the Abyss.

If a character with tainted Passions is destroyed or voluntarily enters Lethe, her player must make a Willpower roll with a difficulty equal to the number of dots of tainted Passions she possesses. If the roll fails, she succumbs to the call of the Abyss and falls into Oblivion instead. This roll is made separately from and before the roll to survive and emerge from Lethe that a ghost's player must make when that ghost suffers dissolution.

Only ghosts can succumb to this terrible fate. There is no cure, and Storytellers should deploy it with care against players' characters.

FETTERS

Ghosts can join themselves to new Fetters and, thus, anchor themselves more firmly to their ghostly existence. The matters of the dead are not compelling enough to serve as true Fetters, only things in the living world will do. The ghost can more easily attune to a Fetter she's been joined to by the Mark of the Relentless Hunter Arcanoi, and ghosts seeking to deliberately develop Fetters often connect themselves to their future Fetters with that Charm. This reduces the training time and experience cost, as noted in the tables.

A ghost cannot just fetter herself to the most enduring object around. Her Fetters must pertain to the ghost's Passions or the veneration of the ghost. Like training for Passions, the ghost does not need to spend the time entirely in meditation. Time spent in or in proximity to the Fetter counts as one half hour of training time per hour spent haunting the new Fetter.

Ghosts can shift Fetters in a fashion similar to how they shift Passions. The new Fetter must be in contact with the current fetter. For example, a ghost might transfer his Fetter from his tomb to the unfortunate tomb-robber that defiles it or from a prized locket to the mansion of the beloved who still carries it. The ghost must spend the training time in meditation in the presence of the two Fetters are together. Existence near Fetters in proximity counts for half training time. If the ghost used Mark of the Relentless Hunter, the Mark does not follow the dots of the Fetter but stays with the object so marked. A ghost can never have more Fetters than her permanent Willpower + Essence.

ARCANOI

All ghosts can learn Arcanoi without a tutor simply by doubling the training time required and can invent new Arcanoi by quadrupling the training time. The dead have invented countless variant and specialized Arcanoi, and the practice of ghostly arts can vary wildly from practitioner to practitioner. The masters of these arts guard their techniques with a fervor normally reserved only for supernatural martial-arts techniques.

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0 MILES 1000 2000 3000

CITY

MAJOR CITY



DEATHLORD CITADEL
SHADOWLAND

TZATLI

FORTRESS OF
RED ICE

ONYX

SKULLSTONE
ARCHIPELAGO

SEA OF
SHADOWS

ISLE OF
SHADOWS

THE HIDDEN
TABERNACLE

WHITEWALL

THE HOLLOW
MOUNTAIN

ICEHOME

MARAMA'S FELL

RIVER PHELETHON

FIELDS OF WOE

CRYPT OF THE WINDRIDER

THE BLACK CHASE

HANAU
& TYOKA

SIJAN

EMPIRE OF AKI

RIVER ACHERON

STYGIA

ISLE OF STYGIA

SPIRES
OF PYRRON

MOUND OF
FORSAKEN
SEEDS

MOURNING
FIELD

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