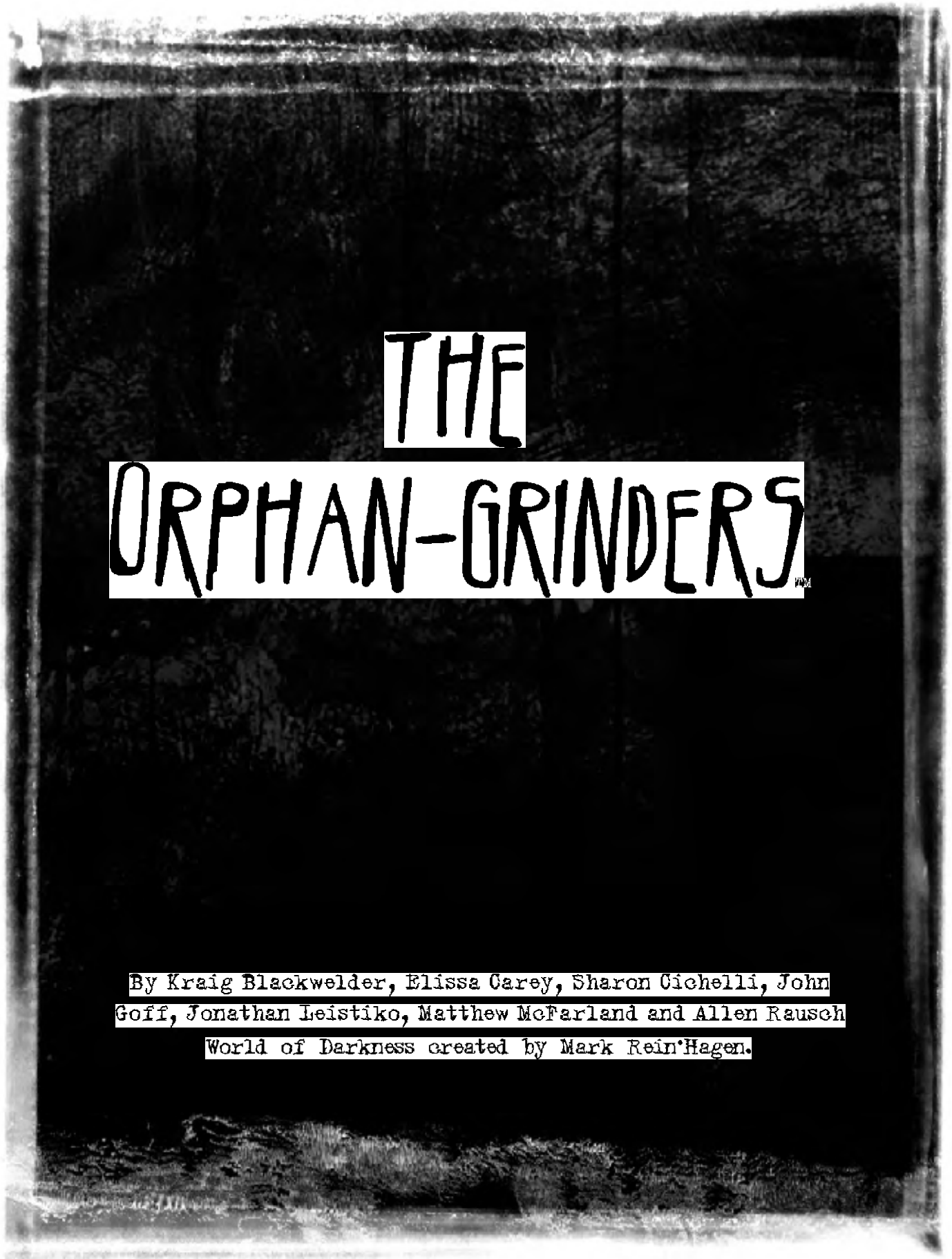
ORPHEUS™



THE ORPHAN-GRINDERS™

BOOK FIVE OF A SIX-BOOK SERIES



THE ORPHAN-GRINDERS™

By Kraig Blackwelder, Elissa Carey, Sharon Cichelli, John Goff, Jonathan Leistiko, Matthew McFarland and Allen Rausch

World of Darkness created by Mark Rein•Hagen.

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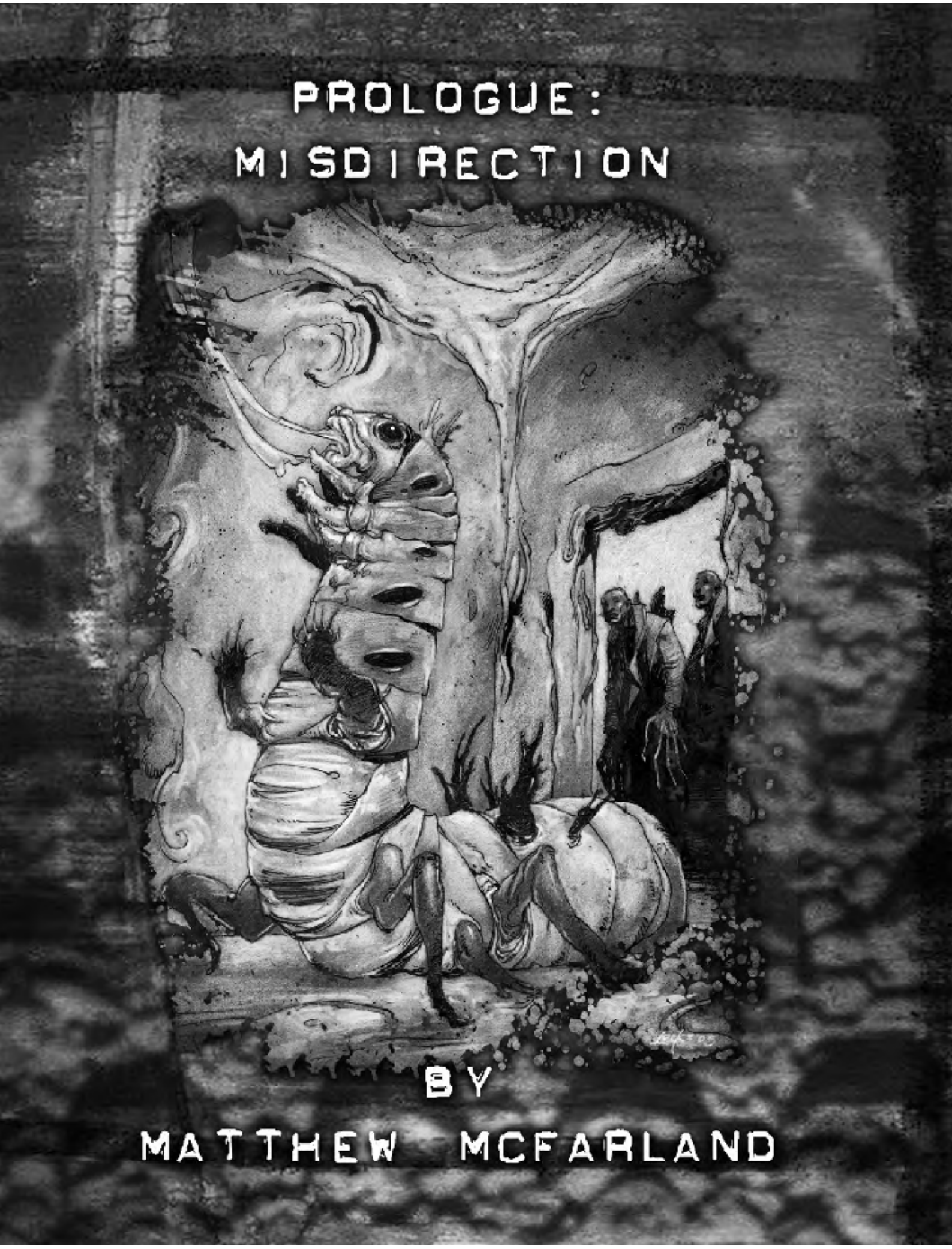
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PROLOGUE: MISDIRECTION



BY

MATTHEW MCFARLAND



Most people never have to fight for their lives.

I've been doing it for years, of course. Started when the doctor told me "John… it's cancer." Between one thing (the cancer) and another (Orpheus) I haven't had much time to smell the roses. I thought I was on the road to recovery there, for a while, and then, someone blew up Orpheus. Nothing like suddenly losing all medical benefits *and* your legal identity to boot.

I'm not dead yet. We jury-rigged a sleeper pod, and that's where my body is now. Nobody's disturbed the pod yet, but then, I don't go there much either. It sucks because the only reason I have to do the sleeper thing rather than just going zero when I need to is that my body's in such bad shape that it *needs* to be frozen.

Isn't that funny? That's where the whole thing started. Cryogenics, baby. When they find a cure for cancer, they can wake me up — or when the Spectres stop swarming the city, whichever comes first.

All of which means I've got to be dead until they find a cure. You'd think death would be peaceful or something? No, it's more like *Black Hawk Down* meets *Aliens* directed by Rob Zombie.

'Kay, pop culture references aside, let me explain. The mass pigment poisonings sent a lot of people howling into the afterlife. Things haven't gotten any better. And the drug culture, being composed of idiots, continues doing pigment, meaning there are tons of junkies out there who can see ghosts. Occasionally, I try doing shows for them, but I think they're too wasted to really get the gist. Of course, that's better than them sitting in the front row screaming about mirrors and spring-loaded cartridges up my sleeve. Please.

And then, there was this meteorite and ghost-quake thing that claimed one of our own. It shook up the living, but I promise you, we sure as hell felt it more over here. The invasion began not too long after that, and it's all been downhill from there. I've gotten separated from my allies — I could probably find Kate and the others, but I'm afraid of trying because that involves digging my little fingers into the spaces between, and I know the stuff that's lurking there now. I was with Lazarus Redux a couple of hours ago, but I got sidetracked. Misdirected, let's say. I'm a magician, I know *all* about misdirection. I was supposed to help Kate and the others and, instead, followed the guy who joined the other side, all because I thought he was trying to kill the girl in the yellow dress….

Maybe I'd better back up.

* * *

When the hives bloomed, we were still trying to figure out what to do next. Kate couldn't nail anything down. All she saw was us dying (and I mean that loosely) in new and interesting ways. She also said Tom somehow figured into all of this. Tom Hayes was one of us… one of the good guys. His body bit it when NextWorld attacked Orpheus, and then, he turned into a Spectre freakshow when his daughter died during the pigment poisonings. We captured him, but he escaped in a bit that would have made Houdini proud. I wasn't in any hurry to see him again.

So, there we all were… me, Kate, Ben, Hoyt and Annie — the rest were elsewhere, helping other ghosts and running damage control — holed up in my old magic shop, which was boarded up, locked and now official state property. We were there because Kate had a premonition that something bad was about to happen in the area and that it involved Tom.

The others were talking. Normally, I'm happy to listen to plans, but to be honest, I'm getting burned out. It's not that I think I deserve more breaks than other folks, but just a little respite would be nice. I mean, I wish I could go back to my body and take a vacation from all this crap, to someplace sunny, without hives or ghost meteorites.

Just keep smiling, man. The show's over soon.

I wish I could go back to my body and take a vacation from all this crap, to someplace sunny, without hives or ghost meteorites.

Just keep smiling, man. The show's over soon.

So, I let the others scheme, and I climbed up into the attic (through the ceiling, but hey) and looked out the window. There's a hive a few blocks away. Not a very big one, but that's like saying, "Oh, look, there's a nest of deadly killer bees — but not a very big nest." I thought it odd that I could see it from the window — it was bigger than I remembered, but there it was, this big, corpulent and fleshy mass bulging up from the building's superstructure.

And then, the hive *bloomed.*

It looked, for all the world, like a gigantic zit bursting. The fleshy pustule just exploded upward, filling the air with a huge plume of that damn ghost-quake dust again, and dozens — hundreds — of Spectres poured out. And then, from downstairs, I heard, "John! Where are you?" I wondered if one of them saw the bloom or if Kate just had a vision of the present.

You know what the stupid thing was? I'm standing in the attic of my shop — *my shop*, the place I built, stocked and ran for years before losing it to medical bills — and thinking, *Those fucking things had better not come in here and mess up my displays.* There haven't been displays in here for years. I'm definitely losing it.

The others were calling me, wanting (wisely) to get the hell back to Lazarus Redux, which we Spectre-proofed. The Spectres swarmed through buildings, and there were breeds of the things I'd never seen before. They'd grab ghosts and swoop up, back to the hive — and that was never good. I was all set to jump through the floor, back to my allies…

…And then, I saw Tom through the growing dust haze.

He looked about the same as last time I saw him, but Kate told me he could change his appearance, so I wasn't reassured. He walked among the Spectres like he was one of them — they completely ignored him. The worst thing, though, was the look on Tom's face. It was pure hate. I've seen Tom angry before, and I've seen him hateful. I wasn't there the night he lost his daughter, but I saw him afterward, and *man*, I'm glad I don't have any family that mean that much to me. The pain in his eyes was enough to give you sympathy aches. I tried talking to him about it, but all he said was "If you can conjure her up, do it. If not, you've got nothing to say to me."

What do you say to that?

I was all set to jump down there and tell the others, bit I heard the fight start. It's easy to tell when there's a fight involving Ben Cotton because he's neither subtle nor quiet. I heard wood splintering and gunshots (meaning he'd turned his hands into guns — I'd love to be able to do that, but all I can manage is flashlights), and then, all the lights on the block went out.

> It was bigger than I remembered, but there it was, this big, corpulent and fleshy mass bulging up from the building's superstructure.
>
> And then, the hive *bloomed.*

That meant one of two things. Either the Spectres cut the power somehow (and why bother?), or Hoyt was pissed. Whichever, I'm not much good in a fight, especially when Ben's throwing everything around, so I decided to keep an eye on Tom. He's probably how they found us, after all.

He stood outside the building, looking at the boarded-up windows like he could see through them. Hell… I could barely see through the dust cloud settling over everything. Tom had lost that look of hate, though — he just looked confused. Then, his head turned, whip quick, watching this little girl running up the street in the other direction. She was about 10 years old and definitely a ghost. She must have been a pretty special kid because she glowed like she was alive. Spectres don't notice the living most of the time, just like the dead don't notice each other. But Tom sure saw this girl, and he took off after her.

I'm not much of a humanitarian, I admit. I'm a fairly self-interested guy, but Tom was once very moral and driven — kind of a role model for me, I guess. No way was I going to let him hurt this girl. If it was just your average Spectre chasing her, I'm not sure I would have gone. But Tom? I couldn't let him fall any farther.

I dug my fingers into the spaces between and tugged. It worked. I appeared in an alleyway right as Tom ran by it, but something was wrong. It reminded me of the first time I cooked mussels. Did you know those things are still alive when you buy them? Before you cook them, you've got to tear off their "beards." It's a little flap of tissue poking out from the shell. When you do, though, you feel them move. That's what the jaunt felt like, like something was *in there* with me for the split second I wended myself across the street.

That, by the way, is why I'm squirrelly about doing it again.

Anyway, Tom went running by, and I wasn't in any position to jump him. So, I followed him, carefully, trying to pick out details through all the dust. The girl rounded the next corner, Tom followed and so did I. Maybe that little girl didn't know where she was going, but I sure did. If she

kept it up, she'd be near the hive that just bloomed. I wasn't about to let Tom chase her there.

She ducked into a shop, and Tom slowed to take the turn. That was my chance.

"Tom!"

Tom turned, and I held up my hands, showing him the light. He fought it, of course, but it's not that simple. The light *calls* to you. I've seen other folks use the same trick, and it's creepy how profoundly it affects someone… even me. You want that light, you want to see what's making it, to hold it, to own it, to fuck it—whatever, it's different for each person. Tom took two steps toward me and then stopped, lowering his eyes a little. I gritted my nonexistent teeth and tried harder. He took a few more steps. I backed up. It wasn't until we were a good 10 yards away from the door the girl had ducked through that I noticed that Tom was trying to talk.

"I went after her, Blink. But I lost. You can't find anyone down there. Not in the hive."

It takes a lot to render me speechless.

"Blink, I came back."

The Spectres howled from the dark skies. I could still hear the gunshots and the sounds of my cohorts fighting, and I wasn't about to chat with a buddy-turned-freakshow. But then, I saw his lips move and form a word I really couldn't ignore.

"Blink."

People call me that because I make things disappear. It's a nervous habit, like biting nails or twirling a pen — hand me a coin or a marble or something and it "blinks" while I'm talking. Only my friends use that nickname. I thought, at the time, that I was being a world-class idiot. I was drained, I was afraid to teleport, and I sure as hell wasn't going to dredge the Stormwall for a weapon to fight Spectres. But I dropped my hands, and Tom shook his head. I was ready to run, but he just stood there.

Finally, I spoke. I always seem to speak first. "What's going on, Tom?"

He opened his mouth but didn't seem to have any real idea of what to say. "Blink… I lost."

I started to back away. Kate said he was fatalistic as hell the last time she saw him, and I didn't feel like getting nailed to a wall. He kept talking, though. "I went after her, Blink. But I lost. You can't find anyone down there. Not in the hive."

It takes a lot to render me speechless.

"Blink, I came back."

But that did it.

"You what?"

He took a step but kept his hands limp at his sides. "I came back, Blink. I only fell to find Sarah. She's not there. I think they…." He stopped. He didn't want to think about it. Hell, I didn't blame him. She was his daughter, after all.

Against my better judgment, I stepped toward him. He didn't flip out and try to kill me. I took another step and looked him in the eye. I had one hand reaching for the Stormwall — scary or not, I wanted a quick exit. But he stood, looking sad, not moving an inch.

You know, at times like this, Annie would have a million questions about how he got back at all. Chet would have asked details about the hives, so we could blow them up or something. Kate would have sung quietly and tried to verify what he'd said.

Me, all I said was, "Nice trick."

Tom just smiled.

* * *

One thing about being a performer — you can usually smell a snow job. Tom wasn't lying to me. He really thought he'd become a Spectre and then returned, and I didn't have any reason to doubt him. We stood in front of the hive, and he muttered, "Remember, arm's reach from me, but no further" for about the hundredth time. For about as many times, I questioned my instincts.

Tom was never the most eloquent of guys, and his explanation of who the girl was — while we tried to follow her — wasn't easy to understand. Apparently she was a special kind of spirit, and honest to God, I thought I heard him say she was someone's grandmother. Or maybe she was someone's *granddaughter*. Damn storm was hindering conversation, but that made more sense. Anyway, I was running along behind him, catching about one word in seven of what he said, and thinking I should really get back to the others.

Misdirection, remember? I was a victim of it, for once. That's the way it works. Once you're distracted for a second by the gesture of the left hand, the right hand's already set up the trick. Tom's return from Spectrehood distracted me.

The right hand — the fact that I was about to follow an ex-Spectre into a hive after a little girl's ghost, while every Spectre in the universe swarmed the city — I never noticed it.

Tom told me he could make us invisible, even inside the hive. I'd never been in a hive before, but I'd heard stories from the others. Hives were like cancerous growths, places where the world was diseased. It's easy to see why they didn't want me along.

Tom reached out and touched me on the shoulder, and I felt a little buzz. It was like walking into a room with a TV on mute. You can hear that high-pitched whine but no other sound. The Spectres flowing out of the top of the hive didn't even look at us. Tom walked toward the office building's door. I followed, strangely relieved to be out of the storm.

"Arm's reach," he said.

Tom told me before we arrived that we couldn't talk or the Spectres would see us. If things went bad, I was supposed to get out of there, and never mind bringing him along. He could handle himself. I could reappear anywhere up to a half-mile away, which would be enough, ordinarily. Today, I wasn't so sure. I really wished Ben and Hoyt were with us, but this really wasn't their kind of fight.

This was a magic trick. Get in, make the girl disappear, get out. Someone's granddaughter. Was that why Tom was so insistent? Was this girl some surrogate Sarah? This is how misdirection works. You miss one detail, and then, you never see the whole picture. I don't think I would have followed him if I'd known the whole story.

We walked right through the abandoned building's doors. Ever see those termite mounds all encased in glass, so you can see the larva, the queen and everything else? And all those bugs crawling over one another? That's pretty much what it's like inside. The Spectres grew more inhuman-looking the deeper we went. They started off pretty normal... well, for Spectres, anyway—Fetches, skinned-dogs, the weird ones that look like pairs of hands attached to wings. Some wiseass called those "Clappers" once. Fucking laugh riot. But after we walked down the first hallway, they got weirder. We saw one that resembled a caterpillar smearing what looked like vomit on the walls. Didn't take a rocket scientist to figure that one out. It was building the place up. Reinforcing it and making it more like what it wanted.

Or more like what the queen wanted. I'm not much of a religious man, but I'm sure the thought *God, please don't show me the queen* passed through my head at least once.

We kept on walking, slowly. Once Tom jerked me out of the way of these disgusting tentacles that dropped down from the ceiling. I looked up and saw what looked like a patch of human hair growing from the corner. I kept my eyes in front of me after that. The Spectres slithered up and sniffed us, then went about their business. We saw the occasional Spectre dragging in another ghost, and I saw Tom's face. And that, actually, is what finally made me stop thinking he was just leading me to the slaughter.

Tom saw Sarah when those monsters dragged in other souls. He saw his daughter in their faces and her own fate in theirs. He wanted so badly to save those people, and the scariest and most heart-wrenching thing is that from the way he moved, the glint in his eyes, he *could* have.

Except I was with him. You can guess how that made me feel.

On we went.

* * *

We found the girl, and any possibility of me becoming remotely devout flew right out the window. I should have prayed to God to *show* me the queen because the fickle bastard probably would have steered me clear, then. Tom and I rounded a corner, and there we were, in a room that looked like we were standing on something's tongue.

Tom jerked me out of the way of these disgusting tentacles that dropped down from the ceiling. I looked up and saw what looked like a patch of human hair growing from the corner. I kept my eyes in front of me after that.

The ground bulged around us like one of those inflatable "moon-walk" things they have at county fairs, and I realized, it was *tasting* us. But whatever magic Tom was doing worked because it evidently decided we tasted like Spectres and went slack again.

The girl was in the corner, so still I almost didn't see her. She was still wearing the sundress. She was still glowing. Tom nodded to me, and we walked toward her.

You'd think she'd have looked at us like, "Wow, I'm glad to see normal people," but she barely acknowledged us. I tried to remember what Tom told me about her, but I couldn't hear him well before, like I said. I knew I was supposed to transport us — all three of us — out of there, but I can only jump about 100 feet. I hoped the outside of the hive was 100 feet away because if I miscalculated, we were all fucked.

We walked right up next to her, and Tom nodded again. I was still confused — this girl was standing there, in a hive, *way* too calm. *But hey*, I figured, *maybe she's like Tom.* Clawed her way out of Hell and running scared… right into a hive? Hey, it could happen.

I dug my fingers into the spaces between and wrapped them around the three of us. Right away, I knew something was wrong. She was struggling against it, and she was *very* strong. It was like trying to catch a live minnow with a pair of salad tongs. And worse yet, the second I tried, it was like alarm klaxons went off everywhere. Spectres swarmed into the room. Tom turned to face them, and I didn't see what he did. I was too busy trying to get hold of this girl.

She was slippery, like I said. She was also stronger than she had any right to be, and she was probably a Wisp because she knew enough about the Stormwall to resist me directly rather than do the unfocused flailing of most spooks. But I knew all about misdirection. I flashed my right hand just a little bit, and she watched. And that was all it took.

> The ground bulged around us like one of those inflatable "moon-walk" things they have at county fairs, and I realized, it was *tasting* us.

The three of us vanished and wound up in an alley about 50 feet away from the hive's outer wall, suddenly enveloped in the soupy haze. There were still Spectres nearby, but that didn't seem to concern Tom so much. He launched himself at that girl, and all of a sudden, he had *claws*.

Tom's always been psycho in a fight. Me, I'd rather do like Craig used to do and find a safe spot to shoot from, except I can't work a gun to save my life. I dug around in the Stormwall — fuck it, what's the worst that could happen? — and pulled out an old pirate's cutlass.

I'm no swordsman, but I'm quick, and I don't like to get hit. The Spectres jumped at me, and I slashed at a couple of them, but I was really just trying to approach Tom and the girl. Apparently, Tom'd gone crazy, and since I helped him attack this poor kid, I'd like to try to save her.

By the time I'd fought my way next to Tom, though, he'd gotten her gauze on his claws. She was gone, but he turned to me with these wide, berserk eyes and said "She's a Gemini."

And I was thinking, *And I'm an Aries. Big fucking deal.*

"A Spectre," he continued, backing away from the advancing freaks. "She's a Spectre." I wasn't sure I believed him, but the real Spectres sure didn't look like they were about to discriminate between the two of us, so maybe he wasn't lying. "Get out of here," he said. "Help Kate. Don't tell them you saw me."

And with that, he dived at one of the Spectres and *merged* with it. The other freaks didn't even seem to notice.

I was pretty wiped out, but I had enough energy to get the hell out of Dodge. I reappeared in front of a diner four blocks away. The diner was an old stomping ground of mine. I used to perform tricks for the counter girl.

I slipped through the door and sat down. The Spectres ran right by the diner, not noticing me. I settled into a booth and saw a waitress leading an old couple toward me. They got to within 10 feet and asked to be seated elsewhere. They said it was too cold. That happens around ghosts, you know.

***

I'm waiting, now, for Kate and the others. This is a meeting place for us before we head back to Lazarus Redux. They'll check it sooner or later. I could go out and look — I can stay ahead of the Spectres, at least for a while — but it's hard to get up and go back out into the storm. I'm just thinking about what Tom said, about not telling them.

He's *back*. Why wouldn't he want them to know? Is he ashamed? Afraid? Pissed off at us for not rescuing his daughter?

Or is he planning something else? Is this just another sleight of hand?

I listen to the Spectres howl and watch the chaos, and I wonder what it's all hiding. What's beyond the Stormwall, in the spaces between? What aren't we supposed to see?

I hear a wail from nearby — Kate. They'll be here soon. I decide to keep Tom's secret, for now.

I want to see the next trick. Next time, I'll watch *both* his hands.

INTRODUCTION



Megan: How do you think morale is holding up?
Cooper: Pretty well, all things considered, although high spirits are just no substitute for 800 rounds a minute.
— Dog Soldiers

Kate, do you feel that... that shit-in-your-pants pain in the pit of your stomach? Yeah, I was afraid of that.
I feel it, too.
— Chet Mason



Welcome to the eve of the metaplot's conclusion, the last book before **End Game** destroys everything you thought you knew about the afterlife. This is **The Orphan-Grinders**, book five out of six, and it's chock-full of deadly goodies. You know the face of your enemies, but you probably didn't realize the enormity of their machinations. Well, that's the bad news — the good news being the new tools and allies you have at your disposal to fight this massive development.

The Orphan-Grinders kicks off a high-combat, high-paced portion of the metaplot, and while events may seem more geared toward the action milieu than horror, it is still in keeping with certain horror genres. In fact, each book keeps with some aspect of suspense or horror, both as a means of presenting the widest field of genres for play and in keeping the cinematic experience promised throughout the various books.

As always, please note that the metaplot is sparse on specific current dates and locations. We encourage the readers to make what they will of this book, and one way to facilitate its offering to the creative spirits is to keep it unanchored. This way we offset the "but it's canon" syndrome, whereby we say it, therefore it is real. Well, perhaps it isn't canon yet. **Orpheus** is only as real to the World of Darkness as you want to make it.

Storytellers' Eyes Only – Then and Now: An Overview

If some readers are still playing through the events of the previous book, we recommend you abstain from reading this section until the Storyteller gives his assent on the matter.

Storytellers' Eyes Only – In the Before

The **Orpheus** core book introduced us to Orpheus Group, a corporate enterprise that offered the world its first and most serious foray into the hereafter. For a high fee, clients could contact the dead and ask those all important questions plaguing the bereaved: "Why did you kill yourself?" "Where did you hide our life savings?" "Where is the real will?" etc. Unfortunately, Orpheus Group was laden with the burdens of its past. Its skeletons lay in the closet, under the sofa, behind the chair and in a dozen different places that proved all too easy to uncover. And uncovered they were.

Crusade of Ashes opened a can of worms when test subjects from Orpheus Group's first secret batch of post-life agents, led by Uriah Bishop, hired a team of projecting mercenaries to eliminate and destroy the corporation. A two-pronged attack using mercs and allied Spectres obliterated Orpheus Group's compound, along with its infrastructure. With that, all Orpheus Group' secrets were laid bare, prompting a second pogrom by Orpheus Group's secret financiers… the NSA.

Ex-Orpheus personnel became fugitives, hunted by the FBI (which wanted projection technology brought under its mandate), the DEA (seeking answers to the proliferation of pigment), the NSA (secretly eliminating all links to its involvement with Orpheus Group) and sundry mercenaries and cult leaders operating from behind the scenes.

With Orpheus Group out of the way, alumni and alpha projector-turned-ghost Uriah Bishop was free to pursue his objectives without fear of reprisals. **Shades of Gray** saw the tainting of an entire pigment shipment with strychnine, resulting in the deaths of many partygoers at one rave. This was only the beginning, however, as the characters came to realize that pigment served as sacrificial drug to a mysterious entity known only as Grandmother. In fact, several pigment cults across the city worshiped this chthonic figure… and her accompanying flock of Spectres.

In **Shadow Games**, the opportunity to strike back at Uriah Bishop finally arrived. Uriah was the hub through which the world was introduced to pigment, and he headed a cult of his own making, called the Missionary Works of the Holy Ghost. Uriah understood the danger posed by Grandmother and allied himself with her in the hopes of forestalling a Spectre invasion of the hereafter. Given the events in this book, however, it's obvious that he failed. Still **Shadow Games** proved a vindication of sorts for characters, by allowing them to contend with Uriah and the pigment cults directly under his control, thereby avenging the destruction of Orpheus Group.

Storytellers' Eyes Only – In the Between

Unlike the downtime between previous supplements, where weeks and even months passed, **The Orphan-Grinders** is tightly linked to events in **Shadow Games**. The Storyteller can widen the gap between the two books by months or shorten it by days. Given the massive events of both supplements, however, we recommend the characters have some downtime to prepare for what's coming next because it's large and it's traumatic.

Following the events in **Shadow Games**, little has happened save for an increase in the number of hives. The ghost-quake seemingly signaled a proliferation of Spectre activity, and hive formation quickly outstrips any efforts to destroy them. Lazarus Redux remains at the forefront of organizing the resistance against the Spectres and is still the leading projector firm around. That said, the government now has its hands in the projecting enterprise with its newest Special Forces unit, Operation: Black Mercury.

Note: The caveat for Operation: Black Mercury is that it does not factor into or affect the metaplot timeline. It is strictly a chronicle option and source of inspiration for Storytellers looking to introduce new supporting characters. Operation: Black Mercury does exist in the **Orpheus** world, and characters may, in fact, encounter its teams. Storytellers, however, can do with them as they wish without fear of Black Mercury being ripped apart in the next and final supplement.

Regardless, there has been some drama in the intervening gap between books. Tom Hayes (if captured and held at Lazarus Redux) escapes from his cage, Kate Dennison's efforts to redeem him a failure. Or so it seems. Kate inadvertently opened a door within Tom's soul long enough for a major event to take place. Tom Hayes redeems himself, making him one of the few Spectres to recover from that condition. Tom Hayes is now an Orphan-Grinder, a new Shade discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

A new player also arrives in town, and his name is Mr. Jigsaw. His presence represents a huge shift in the perception of Spectres, because Mr. Jigsaw is the first Spectre who speaks to ghosts, interacts with them and is willing to barter secrets for services. In fact, the frighteningly calm and affable Mr. Jigsaw represents a group of Spectres who fight Grandmother, the first concrete indication that a schism exists among Spectres. His presence isn't widely known yet, but spooks are slowly learning about him.

Finally, on the mundane side of the fence, authorities investigating the proliferation of pigment cults have closed several down. If Uriah Bishop's Missionary Works is still around, then his cult weathers the storm better than most. In this case, it's the crucible's responsibility to bring down the cult. Elsewhere, efforts to reclaim and rebuild the blocks surrounding the ghost-quake's epicenter prove slowgoing, especially given the reports concerning freak accidents afflicting the construction crews.

Storytellers' Eyes Only - What I Can or Can't Do

Well, there's no such thing as can or can't in this situation because the chronicle is ultimately the product of the Storyteller, with help and inspiration from the players' actions. Still, much has occurred in the last four books, perhaps leading some Storytellers to wonder what is relevant and what is dispensable in the series.

• **Witch Hunt:** If this isn't over yet, the Storyteller should seriously consider wrapping up the fugitive storyline involving the FBI and the police (if she plans on introducing those elements mentioned in this book).

• **Pigment:** Unfortunately, pigment usage remains highly popular, thanks to well-placed Jasons acting as botanists and supplying manufacturers with the key ingredient. Ending the pigment threat isn't going to happen unless the Storyteller makes that the focus of the chronicle (in a Black Mercury style game — drug lords operating from beyond the grave and Fetches guarding seemingly empty plantation fields).

• **The Flatliners:** The Flatliners were never meant to serve as a threat beyond the fourth book given the final two supplements focus on the real menace: Grandmother. Still, that doesn't make the Flatliners any less dangerous, especially Uriah Bishop. If the Storyteller wishes, some Flatliners may actually work for the Spectres during the invasion to save their own asses. Or, better yet, perhaps a couple of them have a change of heart and switch sides to help fight the Spectre incursion. Both options are viable and certainly available for the Storyteller's considerations.

• **The Cults:** The cults are here to stay — but in what form depends on the characters. Most cults aren't aware of the dangers extant in this supplement, rendering them dangerous by virtue of their ignorance. Those that are aware of the Spectre pandemic are probably contributing to the problem, however. It isn't an issue to contend with those cults run by Flatliners or dealing in pigment. While some may continue operating during **The Orphan-Grinders**, they aren't the central concern anymore. Their story was only crucial to the preceding books.

• **The Hives and Spectres:** Keep reading. That's exactly what this book is about.

How to Use This Book

The Orphan-Grinders covers the state of the world and the changes awaiting the characters through its four main chapters. Each offers relevant tidbits of information, with a split between player-related material and Storyteller-pertinent data. The chapter breakdown below is more specific on which sections are for whom.

The Movie Model

Throughout the series, we've been quoting James Cameron's *Aliens*, and in no place is that movie more applicable than here in **The Orphan-Grinders**, given the situation. So, in keeping with tradition:

Hudson: Movement. Signal's clean. Range 20 meters.

Ripley: They found a way in. Something we missed.

Hicks: We didn't miss anything.

If the metaplot has accomplished one thing, by now, hopefully it's been cementing character cohesion under extraordinary circumstances. This is a very important step in the horror movie because the opponent invariably displays some superior quality that renders it unstoppable except to the correct combination of people and events. Here's where that cohesion pays off for the characters.

Unfortunately, if conflict is responsible for providing group cohesion, then this sourcebook has it in spades. Covered herein are events and situations meant to put the characters through the meat grinder. The previous books relied on various techniques to frighten or unnerve the characters, most of which were subtle or very humancentric. **The Orphan-Grinders** is all about the full-sprint horror, the can't-stop-or-I'll-die scenarios involved in fighting and escaping wave after wave of critters. *Aliens* and *Pitch Black* both played those scenarios beautifully, if only because the characters still had a fighting chance even when situations seemed at their worst.

The one thing to remember going into this book is that we chose the name "crucible" for a very specific reason. The situation is heating up, and the characters must come together to form a single and stronger whole because they won't be strong enough to survive this as separate elements.

This Movie Sucks

It's a given that only a few great storytellers and dreamsmiths can craft tales that seize everyone's fancy.

Orpheus isn't about crafting the next seminal classic or giving the reader pause to consider the philosophical realities of existence. **Orpheus** is about telling a (hopefully) fun story, one that will undoubtedly please some readers with the changes and leave others ambivalent. Nothing prevents Storyteller and troupe alike from ignoring the major changes suggested, however, and working their way around the events as though everything remained untouched. Throughout the series, the sourcebooks continually offer suggestions as to how one may incorporate certain events without them altering the very dynamic of the world (as written). In fact, **Orpheus** encourages this if only because it'll keep players guessing as to the game's course, including those who've already read the sourcebooks.

Chapter Breakdown

The Orphan-Grinders contains four main chapters, not including the fiction piece and the introduction. Players should avoid reading the Storyteller sections and chapters in order to enhance everyone's enjoyment of the product. Regardless, however, it's difficult to read some material without gaining immediate insight into how some events play. Therefore, players should ask Storytellers what they can and cannot read, and further, they shouldn't assume that, just because the mechanics incorporate a new set of rules or style of play, their characters are automatically privy to them.

Chapter One: Swarm Storm opens the supplement with a major story that shakes up the hereafter forever and sets the events of the final book in motion. Before Storytellers run this metaplot development, they should consult their players first to ensure the troupe wishes for their world to change radically and their chronicle to assume a different direction.

Chapter Two: All-Out War falls into two sections, the first for players and the second for Storytellers. The players' side of things deals with survival and what the players' characters would know that would help them to endure events, without relying on the Storyteller to spoon-feed them ideas. Additionally, we've included the next step in character cohesion — Crucible Horrors (Horrors that require two or more participants to fuel). The Storyteller's portion of the chapter deals with character survival and with a major new development — the ability to rescue Spectres from their state.

Chapter Three: The Unearthed Players Guide is as implied. It's for players and deals exclusively with a surprising new Shade called the Orphan-Grinders. This includes how to play them, how to create them and how their unique Horrors work given that Orphan-Grinders are redeemed Spectres returned as ghosts.

Chapter Four: Storytelling the Dead is strictly for the Storyteller and includes advice on playing **The Orphan-Grinders**, techniques to involve new characters based on recent chronicle events and several new allies in the form of the redeemed Spectres called the Hellboys. Also offered is greater disclosure on Spectre hierarchy and function, new Thorns and Horrors to use against the crucible and a brand new chronicle option using SOCOM's Operation: Black Mercury. This chapter wraps up with "Ghost Stories," ready made stories where the Storyteller can reveal new facets of the game.

Series Breakdown

Following the core book, the game's limited run progresses in much the same manner as would the action of a suspense film, with events building up with each successive revelation (supplement). These metaplot events reach their climax in the final book of the series, with the progression as follows:

Final Supplement — End Game: *<Static>Free Death. We're going through. Wish us luck<Static>*

Recommended Viewing

Following on the idea of **Orpheus** as a cinematic experience, here are some films to provide inspiration for **Orpheus** stories related to the events in **The Orphan-Grinders**. The common thread between these flicks is rather obvious:

Aliens: No DVD library would be complete without this classic. You know the plot. You know Hudson's lines. Even though it's over 12 years old, it still holds up amazingly well — far better than most mega-budget trilogies.

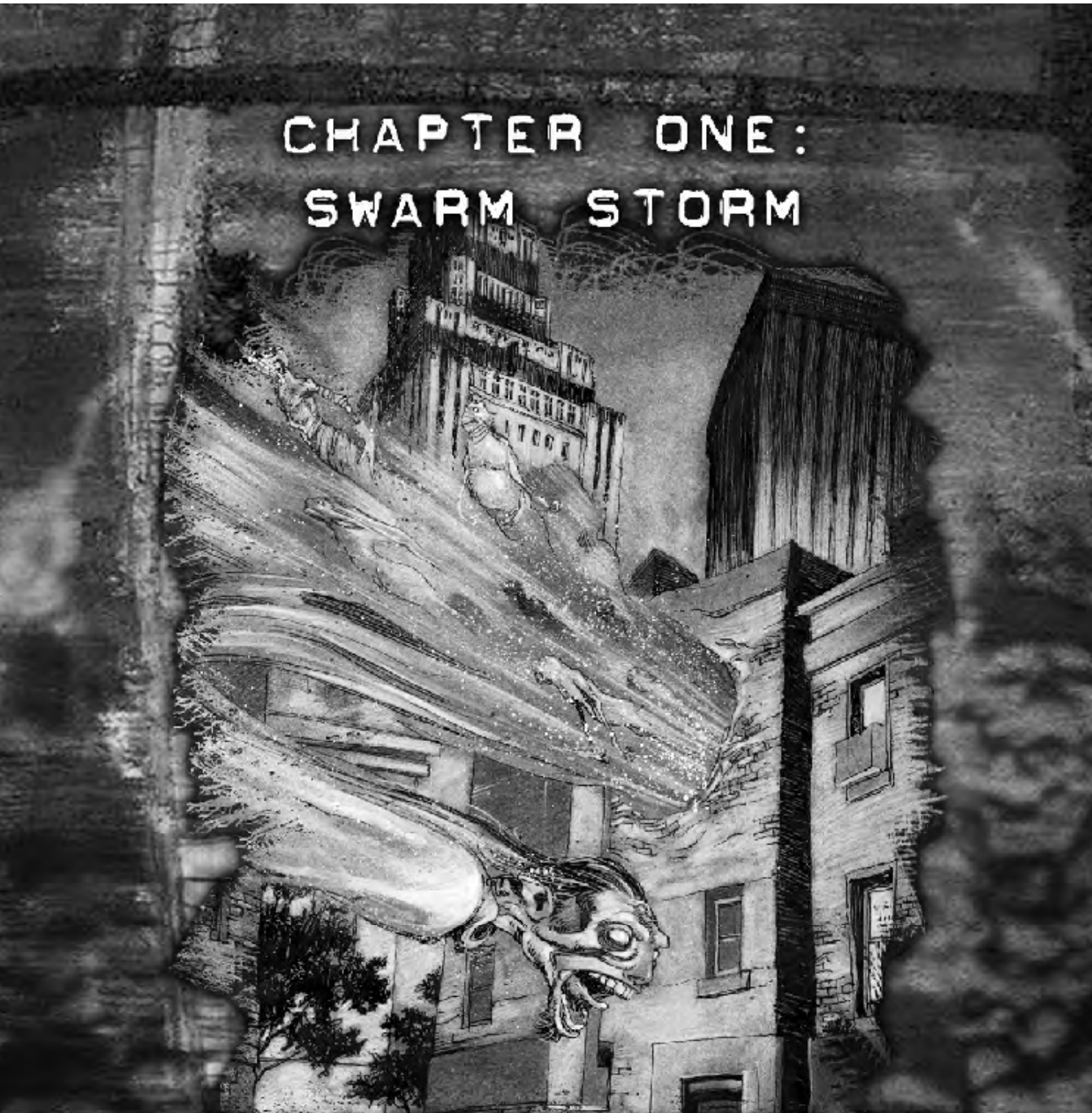
Dog Soldiers: Another infinitely quotable flick. British soldiers on a training exercise in the Scottish Highlands run afoul of really big and really belligerent werewolves. While light on the sheer number of opponents, the flick is great for that Alamo feeling: holed up and surrounded. The situation, not the opposition, is very apropos to events in **The Orphan-Grinders** and reminiscent of the situations in which the characters may find themselves.

Pitch Black: What can you say about Vin Diesel in his role as the ultimate cool antihero trying to survive an eclipse on a planet covered in hammerhead aliens? Good flick and surprisingly smart, with some international flavor thrown in as well. The situation is as nasty as *Aliens*, with mondo style points for Riddick's face-to-face tango with that one critter.

Starship Troopers: Bad, bad, bad. Someone should shoot Robert Heinlein just so he can roll over in his grave, but it's a great visual example of overwhelming opposition and desperate back-against-the-wall scenarios. Now, if only the actor's had kept their mouths shut....

28 Days Later: This fantastic and almost understated movie nearly defies categorization as a simple "zombie" flick. Still, the enemies are many and, more importantly to this movie's inclusion here, they *run*... really, really fast. The human-level desperation here is also worth noting and perhaps more apt to events in this book.

CHAPTER ONE: SWARM STORM



Wren: And the animals themselves are wondrous. They'll be invaluable once we've harnessed them.
Ripley: It's a cancer. You can't teach it tricks.
— Alien Resurrection

Oh, my god. Here they come. And they're solid!
— Eliza Rifkin, NSA (deceased)

If you are not the Storyteller, stop reading this chapter now. The contents of this section are exclusively the Storyteller's. If you're playing in an **Orpheus** chronicle, or even thinking about playing in one, then reading what follows will seriously reduce your enjoyment of the chronicle. Even if you're the kind of person who likes reading the spoilers to movies on the Internet, please, show some restraint for the sake of the other players. Movies are passive entertainment. You sit. You watch. You eat your overpriced popcorn. You go home. Roleplaying is completely different because it is interactive. Think about the last time you played in a chronicle that riled you up… blood pumping, sweat on your brow. Now, think about the last time a movie did that for you. A lot longer ago, right? Don't spoil it by reading any further, and don't rob the other players of their moment to shine. Why deprive yourself of the opportunity to feel that "gaming rush" again?

Turn to a different chapter, please.

Okay, now that that's out of the way, here's what you can expect. Every Spectre hive in the world is about unfold, blossoming like horrid anemones eager for sustenance. In the process, they disgorge countless Spectres from the hives. As it happened three to five years ago, but on a much larger scale now, this plague of Spectres sweeps across every city on the globe, gathering ghosts and herding them back to the hives.

This chapter gives you the necessary information to include this development in your chronicle and offers tools and scenes to drop directly into your chronicle. Why are the Spectres swarming? You'll learn all about the "whys" in the "Background" section. How do you work this blight into your chronicle? "Setting the Stage" offers tips for foreshadowing and a timeline of the events starting with the unfurling of the hives. How do the Spectres behave when they swarm? Like the crucible, the Spectres use "Tactics." How do you keep the initial onslaught from overwhelming the characters while still maintaining dramatic tension? "Enter the Crucible" and "Things to Do in Denver When You're Dead" have a collection of nasty complications for you to throw at the crucible without killing the characters outright. How will the crucible survive this protracted plague? If the crucible is struggling, you can drop some hints from "Run & Gun." Finally, "The Aftermath" discusses what the world is like after the Spectres purge the hereafter of its ghosts — or at least try to do so.

Change is afoot. As you reveal the new landscape to the characters, you bring them closer to understanding Grandmother and her existence. You bring them closer to their destiny.

BACKGROUND

A barrier in the hereafter prevents spooks from entering the realms of the dead. This barrier is called the Stormwall. Ghosts and projected entities hoping to explore the Underworld view the Stormwall as an obstacle to be breached or circumvented, but it's actually a crucial defense. An endless, baleful Maelstrom rages on the other side of this veil. Mighty structures fall before it and are tossed about like straw in a tornado. In **Shadow Games**, the force of this Maelstrom thrust a huge tower fragment through the Stormwall and into the hereafter.

Few creatures survive the desolating winds of the Maelstrom, but centered in its fury is a powerful creature, Grandmother. If the Spectres have gods, they are known as Malfeans, and Grandmother ranks first among their pantheon. When denizens beyond the Stormwall were plentiful, the Malfeans fed and encouraged the storm, thriving off the souls that spiraled into Oblivion. Now, the lands beyond the Stormwall are apparently devoid of souls, and Grandmother seeks sustenance elsewhere.

Grandmother is unique, however, in that she treats the Spectres as her children (and not her slaves, as other Malfeans might) and that the hives are actually *her corpus worming its way through the Stormwall and into the hereafter*. It's important to understand that not just some hives, but *every hive in the world* is part of Grandmother's flesh. Whether it's because Grandmother is world-spanningly huge as an entity or because some of her dimensions do not adhere to mass and volume as the living understand those principles remains unknown as of yet. Every hive the characters have seen, invaded or destroyed was a shelter composed of Grandmother's flesh that she thrust through the Stormwall to house her progeny. Meddling with her hives is often how the characters attract the attention of Grandmother's high-Spite Spectres.

That said, the characters cannot use the hives to pierce the Stormwall and visit the Underworld. The hive's conduit remains closed most of the time, and even when open, the various chambers act like floodgates to prevent the Maelstrom from flooding through as well. The minute the characters pierce the first in a series of reservoir chambers, Grandmother can open up the valves to create a Maelstrom wind tunnel (18 levels of lethal damage *per turn*). Otherwise, the Spectres attack the crucible, in unending numbers and waves (oh, and yeah, Storm-Wending from one chamber to the next won't work either if the valves are sealed).

Grandmother's interest in the hereafter is simple: She hungers, and the Underworld can no longer sustain her appetites. Scores of delectable blips, drones, echoes and ghosts inhabit the hereafter, and her followers harvest them for her as rapidly as possible. To form the hundreds of new hives popping up across the world, however, Grandmother must feed. Now that enough hives are prepared, they unfold and bloom like cyclopean anemone-flowers. Inside the hives, channels through

the Stormwall open, allowing wave after wave of Spectres to boil forth in packs and teams to cull souls for Grandmother to feast upon, just like in the harvest three to five years ago.

These Spectres sweep the globe, starting with the densely populated cities, then moving to the suburbs and rural areas. Thousands upon thousands of Spectres are united with one goal: Drag as many souls as they can find back to the hives and into Grandmother's maws. Safe places to hide quickly become scarce in the face of so many enemies. It is a time of crisis, and the ghost/projector community needs decisive leadership. The crucible is powerful, well trained and primed to step into a leadership or heroic role. It is the crucible's time to shine, and **The Orphan-Grinders** provides ample ammunition for the characters to accomplish their goals.

SETTING THE STAGE

The invasion starts with an increase both in the number of hives and in Spectre activity, accompanied by increased tensions among the living. The Spectres do their utmost to create depressed regions where people are likelier to die and souls are likelier to linger for the upcoming harvest. Once Grandmother unleashes her

HIVE PROLIFERATION

Many generations have defining moments: The assassination of JFK, the *Challenger* explosion, the 9-11 attack. Grandmother's Spectre swarm and soul harvest is a similar event for the spook community. When Grandmother is ready and her minions are in position, hives around the world will disgorge countless Spectres. These Spectres will infest the hereafter for weeks, and only the strongest, most quick-witted and luckiest ghosts will survive. To accomplish this feat, however, Grandmother first spawns dozens of new hives to unleash her progeny upon the hereafter. This increase in hives is not a sudden event. It happens gradually throughout **Orpheus**' course. In the previous books, you'll notice the hive threat lurking in the background, always growing larger and more sinister with each passing book. Now is when it all comes to a head. Grandmother is making one final push to increase the number of hives and to keep them open. Once enough hives are prepared, she opens them, allowing waves of Spectres to spew forth.

To ensure you don't catch the crucible flat-footed, mention the increase in hive density at least once during each session before the Spectre invasion. We've done our best to mention the increase in hives and the previous Spectre invasion throughout the previous two books… so, hopefully, few people find this turn of events a huge surprise. Be aware that some hives remained hidden due to their locations (such as at the bottom of a water refinery station or deep in the sewers), but many are visible and growing. The characters may decide to take direct action and attempt to eradicate the hives, but there are simply too many for them to handle alone. Going on a "fumigation crusade" may be cathartic for the characters, but make clear to them that there are still far too many hives, enough so that there is no way the crucible can destroy the majority of them before the invasion starts. At best, they can lessen the devastation in their own city.

Liberal foreshadowing will help to prepare the crucible. For those Storytellers who enjoy "the impending storm" scenario, they can use Forebode to offer their characters a glimpse of the future, thus allowing them several sessions to prepare defenses, to find safe havens and to warn allies of the coming storm. There's nothing like storytelling characters on the eve of battle. Conversely, you can mention the increase in hives, so the characters can arrive at their own conclusions. At least three sessions before you launch this Spectre assault, allow supporting characters to notice and mention the rise in Spectre activity in three separate neighborhoods. Subsequent investigations show that the Spectres are operating out of newly formed hives there. Whether the crucible goes out to destroy the hives or not, let them know at the end of the session that four more new hives have been spotted around the city.

Two sessions prior, ghosts working for Lazarus Redux return from scouting missions with reports about hives budding across the city. If the crucible attempts to organize efforts to eradicate these new hives, they can potentially clear a small area of the city (like five or 10 blocks), but there are far too many hives to purge the city of them.

One session before, the proliferation of hives tapers off. Gangs of Spectres flock to their hives, fortifying their defenses. Early in the session, Terrence Green can perhaps relate distressing news to the crucible: The proliferation of hives is not unique to this city. It's happening all over the world. Be kind to the crucible, and leave this session open for characters to react as they wish.

On the night of the invasion, you can follow the timeline with a clear conscience, confident that you gave the crucible ample warning of the impending events.

invasion, tensions among the living decrease momentarily, but all hell breaks loose in the hereafter. Existence is rough for nearly a month until the Spectres leave the cities to reap those souls in the rural areas. Afterward, the Spectres slowly withdraw, though existence doesn't return to normal. With the energy Grandmother expends in opening the hives, she isn't about to close them for the foreseeable future. The Spectres are here to stay.

In chronicling the events of an entire city, it's challenging to keep key developments in order. What follows is a timeline of those circumstances leading up to and following the Spectre invasion. Use this timeline to help keep the major events in your chronicle in order. The crucible need not be aware of every event on the timeline, but knowing what's transpiring in the background will help you to keep track of what's happening and why. The timeline also helps to frame your encounters within the context of the world at large. Just take one of the encounters from Chapter Four, set it among events at your point in the timeline, and you have that evening's adventure all ready.

Invasion Timeline

Four Weeks Out: Characters who are paying attention or who are engaged in missions notice that there are several new hives in the city (many aren't "functional" yet, but the Spectres are working hard to expand them). The rumor mill is thick with reports concerning Spectres attacking ghosts and plaguing people with increased frequency.

Three Weeks Out: The characters or their contacts notice that the number of hives increased again (the global number of hives increased by 50 percent over the past few weeks). Attacks and raids by Spectres are still on the rise. Sensitives and pigment users living in infested areas suffer from nightmares and mild headaches. The living feel slightly uneasy, though they attribute it to increasing social unrest across the globe.

Two Weeks Out: Despite potential actions by the characters and their allies, more hives are growing (the global number of hives is reputedly double that of the past few months, according to intel collated by Lazarus Redux). Intangible travel within the city is dangerous, even for large groups (four to six) of ghosts and projectors. The Spectres are active and aggressive. There's a hungry anticipation in the air, and Spectres are acting like caged tigers, pacing to and fro just before feeding time. A great event looms in the future, and the Spectres are eager for its arrival.

In the mundane world, the Spectres' influence is substantial and dangerous. There's a sharp rise in fatal and near-fatal accidents, especially freakish traffic accidents and home-related injuries. Inmates at mental facilities grow unsettled and rebellious, while already strained hospitals and clinics are pushed even further with an epidemic of heroin-, pigment- and other substance-abuse cases. Several flash mob gatherings turn mysteriously violent or destructive, and the general public inundates local police with reports of domestic violence and petty crime. Even relatively normal people in the city are on edge. The difficulty to all tests involving Social and Mental rolls and the living increases by one (people are more stubborn, more entrenched and definitely quicker to anger).

One Week Out: While no new hives appear, many inactive or nascent hives suddenly become active. Conversely, Spectre attacks dwindle rapidly. Spectres affiliated with various hives flock to their respective territories, entrenching themselves and leaving unaffiliated Spectres to claim their small domains. Any spooks traveling within a block of a hive are attacked viciously by its members and defenses. The Spectres obviously guard the hives against attack, and any attempts to assault or infiltrate a hive meet with extraordinary force and violence.

In mundane affairs, areas not infested with a hive regain their sense of normality. Crime and violence drop to more manageable levels in these areas, while life in those sections of the city sharing space with hives become nigh intolerable. Anyone in these neighborhoods (especially pigment users) suffers from ennui, depression, irritation and insomnia. Nausea, dizziness and migraines are common with the living, though projectors are immune to the effect, if only because they can see the Spectres disrupting people's lives. The media "suggests" the malaise may stem from any number of sources, from viral to mass global stress disorders. The previous symptoms of violence and aggression fade almost entirely, relieving considerable pressure from the police, but substance abuse rages unabated. Where applicable (wherever neighborhoods share space with hives), the difficulty to all tests involving Social and Mental rolls and the living increases by two.

T Minus Zero: Central hives (the single largest hive in a city), blossom around the world, opening like a monstrous orchid/flytrap hybrid. The budding of the hives takes about 10 minutes. Previously unseen flaps and seams along the hive's walls become unstuck with loud, wet, slurping and ripping sounds. Plate-sized flakes of husk pop from the surface as gigantic wall-petals twist and unfurl, exposing the fleshy gray-pink fascia of the hive's inner walls. Guardian-type Spectres race frantically about the hive, yowling in ecstatic rapture.

Once the central hive fully opens, it ejaculates a tremendous jet of Maelstrom effluvium over 300 feet into the air. This Maelstrom miasma is nearly identical to the dust storm that accompanied the arrival of the ghost-quake building in **Shadow Games**. It has the same quality to it, swirling about in clouds and eddies, settling around skyscrapers, pushing through the canyons of alleys and subways.

The strength of the Maelstrom pushes through the Stormwall, channeling an awesome blast. The force of the blast also launches spores that "energize" secondary hives in the city, serving as a catalyst for their opening. As the eruption continues, the effluvium, channeled detritus and spores rain down upon the buildings and streets for many blocks. This rain is intangible, and the average citizen has no idea this is happening.

Spores, borne on waves of Maelstrom effluvium, trigger the opening of the nearest hives. The small hives require three to five minutes to blossom and erupt, while the larger ones may require up to 10 minutes. The size of these secondary plumes depends on the size of the central hive erupting, but they range from 100 to 280 feet in height. These eruptions contain the same mixture of effluvium, detritus and spores as the first. As the force of the explosion carries the spores across the city, it triggers still more plumes throughout the city. These eruptions progress exponentially, until all the hives in the city blossom and clear their channels of debris, leaving the sky thick with Maelstrom filth. Increase the difficulty of all Perception rolls by one.

Terrence Green makes his first series of broadcasts for the day, detailing the relative size and location of the various eruptions and warning curiosity seekers to stay away from the eruption sites. He doesn't have any reports of attacks or hostile activities in the vicinity of the erupting hives, but he figures that whatever is happening can't be good.

Grandmother closes some of the channels between her hives and the Underworld where the Maelstrom rages. She acts as a canal with water-gates, moving Spectres through the hives one section at a time so the Maelstrom gusts don't blast the Spectres into the sky. This causes the effluvium plumes to cease, replacing them with a constant moaning wind that issues forth from the hives. The first wave of Spectres venture into the world, a mix of shock troops (Spectres with three Spite or less) and perimeter guards there to secure the hive's borders. The hordes swarm across the city, incapacitating ghosts and drones too slow or not self-aware enough to hide themselves from impending doom.

While Grandmother does direct the hordes, this invasion is not an orderly one. The Spectres are now in full competition to expand their particular hive's territory and to secure as many ghosts as necessary in bringing them the most glory. If this sometimes means stealing captured spooks from another hive, so be it. Certainly, many hives cooperate, but this invasion is a competitive one, sparking several Spectre turf wars and skirmishes that may help to save the characters in some instances. Still, everyone has a function, and Fetches and other perimeter guardians form a defensive line no farther than two blocks from the hive they serve. If a larger or stronger



force than themselves attacks, the guardians hold the line until reinforcements arrive. Further in, toward the hives, the first wave and resident Spectres attempt to delay their assailants until the second wave arrives to reinforce them. Seventy percent of the invading Spectres arrive in this first wave.

T Plus One Hour: Spectres with four to seven points of Spite comprise the bulk of the second wave. By now, the air is thick with ethereal filth, increasing the difficulty of all Perception-related rolls by two (for those who exist within or can see the hereafter). The second-wave Spectres gather in their natural groupings — Lost Boys gather in packs, for example, some waiting for a Friendly Angel to guide them. These units strike out and hunt down stronger victims than blips and drones (such as Echo-class spooks and lone characters). They use basic tactics and strategies (as outlined in "Tactics," below) but do not follow an overarching plan until the third-wave Spectres emerge to guide them. About 25 percent of the invading Spectre force is part of the second wave.

Terrence Green broadcasts a second series of reports on the many newly arrived Spectres and their general sweep-and-capture tactics. He makes note of the most densely infested areas of the city, repeating his warning to stay as far away from the hives and infested areas as possible.

T Plus Two Hours: The remaining five percent of the invasion emerges from the hives two hours after the first hive opens. The third wave consists of Spectres with eight or more Spite. Regardless how many third-wave Spectres emerge from a given hive, only about one to three remain in the hives. These Spectres act as "hive commanders," coordinating efforts of separate teams of less powerful Spectres and employing advanced strategies as outlined later in "Tactics." Hive commanders also assign teams of Spectres with specialized skills to specific areas of the city to deal with problem situations, to escort "soul trains" of enveloped captives and to accomplish specific tasks. Especially critical hives may even have additional Reapers or a Lawgiver assigned to them as hive commander during the third wave. Once the third-wave Spectres arrive, however, the bulk of the Spectres return back to their respective hives, offering an approximate two-hour window of reprieve for spooks, except in areas immediately surrounding the hives.

T Plus Four Hours: The Great Sweep. It requires the third-wave Spectres about two hours to organize the Spectres under their command, gathering their forces back to their respective birthing hives. Once everyone returns to the hives, the third-wave commanders employ "sweep and harvest" methods as outlined in "Tactics" in order to maximize the culling of souls while establishing the largest possible safe perimeter.

Terrence Green makes his third and final broadcast burst of the day. He reports that the Spectres have been retreating back to the hives in an uncharacteristically organized fashion, even breaking off pursuits to do so. Terrence persists in his advice that spooks should give the hives a wide berth and even recommends taking this lull in the violence as an opportunity to escape the city as quickly as possible. Terrence's last transmission ends in mid-sentence, however, cut off abruptly by panicked screams and shouting.

T Plus One Day: While the Spectres continue to hunt for souls, organized sweeps don't occur again until the morning. Once hunting for stragglers grows thin, however, squads of Spectres stop using rush tactics and begin stalking, baiting and laying traps for their more wily prey. Under the leadership of the hive commanders, they use the baiting and herding techniques outlined in "Tactics," below.

There are no Radio Free Death broadcasts throughout the entire day.

T Plus Three Days: An assault on Lazarus Redux. The folks at Lazarus Redux, being the considerate spooks that they are, have opened their facilities as a safe house for ghosts seeking shelter from the swarm. Lazarus Redux also acts as a base of operations for projectors to launch surgical strikes against Spectre squads and hives. These attacks attract the attention of third-wave Spectres, which, in turn, earns Grandmother's consideration. Remember that Lazarus Redux's walls are insulated by layers of hive material that Kate Dennison and her team cannibalized from the hive that existed in that same location.

Grandmother is enormous, and the loss of a hive here or there is of little consequence. But the process of rending and cauterizing one of her hives to create the intangible walls protecting Lazarus Redux sticks in Grandmother's craw. Grandmother remembers the destruction of her hive, and she remembers its location. Three days after the hives blossom, the Spectres launch an attack against Lazarus Redux. Within hours, squads of Spectres infiltrate the warehouse district to set up ambushes for stragglers outside of Lazarus Redux and Spooky Brews. Their goal is to nail projectors one and two at a time, gradually whittling Lazarus Redux's forces down to nothing. While the pickings are relatively slim, once the characters (or supporting characters) realize what's happening, the Spectres change tactics from ambushes to an all-out assault. Led by a trio of powerful Spectres (the Storyteller can use the Babd Spectres — Macha, Nemhain and Morrigan — from **Shadow Games** or simply two Reapers and a Lawgiver), the siege follows the siege techniques outlined in "Tactics" (for more information on the siege, see "Prolonged Assault: Lazarus Redux," pp. 22-23).

Radio Free Death resumes broadcasting, but sporadically and from different locations to prevent the Spectres from getting a lock on Terrence. For the remainder of the invasion, Terrence is a free agent,

Manifesting Spectres and the Media

During the Swarm Storm, it would be foolish to believe that Spectres never manifest and that people won't see the occasional flock of them dragging away a corporeal ghost trying to hide in the crowd. While the tabloids are rife with such tales, the serious papers won't even touch these stories, even with corroborating witnesses. In fact, it's the witnesses who pose the problem. As explained in the **Orpheus** core book (pp. 250-251), people can suffer from amnesia or derangements if confronted by the overt and hostile supernatural. And Spectres certainly qualify as hostile and frightening. Therefore, they don't make reliable witnesses for interviews or statements, except on various comedy news programs. Spectres are appearing, but reports of them remain limited to the Internet and independent or tabloid news. Still, the whole ordeal is enough to start a flurry of urban legends and conspiracy newsgroups.

appearing where the Storyteller needs him and helping who he can.

T Plus One Week: As prey grows thin, the competitive nature of the hunt becomes even more apparent. Grandmother treats the Spectres as her children, and like any group of children, the Spectres seek her approval and adoration. Grandmother is hungry, so the best Spectres are those who feed her the most souls. When souls were plentiful, there were more than enough for everyone to feel important. It's much harder to reap souls now, and scarcity breeds competition. Now that the third-wave Spectres realize souls are in short supply, they stop cooperating with neighboring hives and set out on their own. Competition leads to discord. Competing hives wage turf wars, skirmishing with other Spectres over prime hunting grounds and hijacking "soul trains," then ferrying the captured souls back to their own hives for processing. This dissension and infighting ultimately spreads to the Spectres participating in the assault against Lazarus Redux itself. Once the Spectres stop cooperating with each other, they are incapable of maintaining the lockdown on Lazarus Redux and the surrounding neighborhood. With the crucible's help, Lazarus Redux can break the siege fully.

T Plus Three Weeks: After three weeks, prey is sparse and infighting worsening. Many hive commanders gather the Spectres under their charge and leave the city for the rural communities. Unfortunately, Spectre activity doesn't return to "normal" levels. Several high-Spite Spectres remain in town along with their forces, nearly doubling the Spectres' pre-invasion population. The well-organized or large hives continue to employ the advanced tactics described in the "Tactics" section. For a full rundown on the post-invasion situation, flip to the "Aftermath" section at the end of this chapter.

Tactics

With Grandmother's active involvement in the invasion and the arrival of the hive commanders in the third wave, the Spectres employ abilities rarely used: Coordinated tactics. Aside from overwhelming numbers, the Spectres have the intelligence to place their troops where they'll be of most use. The following are suitable tactics for use in large-, medium- and small-scale skirmishes, as referred to in the previous section.

Defensive Tactics

If spooks or rival Spectres successfully attack a hive or group of Spectres, then the hive commander either reinforces the affected area/Spectres or pulls them back to reestablish a perimeter. If the attackers press forward, then the adjacent sectors of the perimeter not under attack swarm around behind to pinch off the enemy's escape. Upon surrounding their foes, the lead Spectre sends in a pack of first-wave Spectres to soften the prey, followed by a pack of Spectres with Envelop to incapacitate the adversaries. The Spectres goal is to capture their opponents and either convert them into high-ranking Spectres or feed them to Grandmother.

If, however, the Spectres fail to capture the enemy, then they launch a second wave of Spectres, including several that can attack at range. If the enemy perseveres still, then the hive stops trying to kill them. The Spectres' new goal is to harass the opponents until they realize that attacking the hive is more trouble than it's worth. The Spectres scatter and retreat to natural cover — dumpsters, parking lots, sewers, etc. — in hopes the enemy gives chase. Regardless of whether the attackers pursue fleeing Spectres or proceed on to the hive, the ignored Spectres rally behind the opposition, launching quick, sniping attacks and retreating to safety. Spectres too hurt to continue attacking retreat to the hive, while uninjured Spectres take their place.

The Spectres continue waging guerilla warfare, subtly herding the opposition from the hive perimeter. If no reinforcements are necessary or forthcoming, the hive's chief Spectre allows the enemy to escape — but only for as long as it takes to organize retaliatory expeditions against the offending adversaries. If the attackers proceed to the hive, knocking aside all opposition, the lead Spectre calls upon all remaining Spectres to its defense and (if the hive is important enough) uses hive-mind to summon high-Spite Spectres for help. If the situation is truly hopeless, then the hive leader gathers any important artifacts and flees with as many surviving Spectres

as possible. It assigns several Spectres to guard the rear and slow any pursuing enemy.

UNDER PRESSURE

Tactics and traps often work because they harry an already harrowed target into committing a tactical error or making a mistaken assumption. Unfortunately, regardless of the circumstances, the players won't experience the same pressure or fear tasking their characters. They have time to consider their circumstances and actions, making decisions with less prodded wits than their alter egos. The Storyteller, however, can impose whatever limitations are necessary to impress upon the players the gravity of the situation facing their characters. For example:

• **At Wit's End:** Decide quickly, or forfeit your character's actions. If the characters are racing to flee or arrive at a timely decision, the Storyteller can double the Wit's rating of each character and demand the player supply their action within that many seconds. Thus, if a character has three dots in Wits, his player has six seconds (three dots x 2) to decide and state his character's action. Otherwise, he forfeits that action to indecision and the pressure of the situation.

• **Shotgun Method:** Snapshot descriptions to impart the tension of a situation. When characters are running from the opposition or chasing someone, they may not have time to study the scenery around them. In essence, they only snatch glimpses of their surroundings. In this way, the Storyteller limits the visual input through his descriptions, or lack thereof, providing "snapshots" of the most pertinent information. For example: *You turn the corner. It's a hallway with two doors on each side. It ends at a t-intersection.*

Afterward, the Storyteller gives the player two or three seconds to provide his character's actions or intent — not so much to imply the timeliness of the situation, but to impart a sense of the time it takes the character to run down the corridor and go… wherever. If the player hesitates, so to does his character hesitate in that situation, wasting precious seconds. For those players whose characters have four or five dots in Perception, the Storyteller may also provide extra descriptions or allow them a crucial Perception roll that no one else earns. This may include mentioning that there's a security camera in the hallway or allowing for a Perception + Awareness roll to realize there may be Spectres hiding behind some of the walls.

BASIC TACTICS

Before the third-wave Spectres arrive, the first- and second-wave Spectres won't use more complex tactics than those outlined below, but they may act more intelligently than they have previously. This is because of the importance of the invasion.

At this stage, Spectres team up in complementary pairs: Lost Boys with Friendly Angels, Envelop-capable Spectres with those that have ranged attacks, etc. If the opposition outmatches a Spectre pack, then the Spectres retreat to safety, while unoccupied, nearby packs flock to the scene and provide assistance. If assistance doesn't arrive or cannot thwart the attack, then the perimeter guards (Fetches, Outflyers, etc.) of the affiliated hive distract the adversaries and cover the retreat.

• **Sweep and Harvest:** Once third-wave Spectres arrive, they recall most first- and second-wave Spectres to their hive but maintain the hive's defense perimeter. Once the first-wave Spectres return, the third-wave leaders send them on sweeps around the safe perimeter of the hive, like a line sweeping out from the center of a radar screen. The goal of these sweeps is a brisk but thorough shakedown of the area immediately surrounding each hive perimeter. If the Spectres discover a ghost on their sweep, they capture it or delay it long enough for the second-wave Spectres to trap the target and drag it to the hive. If no appropriate minions are available, then the chief Spectre sends out a swarm of first-wave Spectres to corral the target, run it down or prevent its escape until other Spectres arrive for collection.

This occurs in the two hours before the Spectres engage in the Great Sweep as outlined in the above timeline.

ADVANCED TACTICS

Spectres only employ the following advanced tactics once the chief Spectre gathers together the hive for the first time. After that initial meeting, the following tactics are fair game.

• **Herding:** The Spectres attack spooks but leave an obvious weak point to allow for the victims' escape. This retreat deliberately herds the target into a dead end. Spectres crawl over two of the walls, leaving the third unguarded…. Ah! There's the escape route. Ghosts and projectors can walk through walls. All the victims need to do is spend Vitality and run through the unguarded dead-end wall, and they're home free. The Spectres know this, too, however. That's why a cluster of Spectres with Envelop pounce on whomever comes through the other side of the "accidentally" unguarded wall. Surprise!

• **Baiting:** Baiting involves luring the target into your trap, then springing the trap when the target isn't expecting it. Two reliable variants of baiting are the Damsel in Distress and the Cry for Help. In the Damsel in Distress, one or two Spectres attack a victim where the location is relatively exposed. They toy with their prey until the characters or other spooks spot them. When the heroes sweep in to dispatch the two Spectres, they discover five (or more) Spectres concealed along the

perimeter that close in — surrounding and capturing the would-be rescuers. A variant of this is the Wolf in Sheep's Clothing, where the victim is also a Spectre. When the crucible attacks, the "damsel" runs to the safety of the party. As soon as the rescuers turn to deal with the pursuing Spectres, the "damsel" targets the most powerful rescuer and stabs him in the back.

The Cry for Help begins when the crucible hears sounds of combat and distressed cries emanating from a nearby location (alleyway, room, etc.). Upon entering the location to investigate, the crucible discovers that two or three Spectres were making the noise. There is no victim to be found. Before the characters can react, more Spectres surge through the walls to block off escape and close in on the crucible.

Overbearing: A big advantage Spectres have over spooks is numbers. There are more Spectres than there are crucible members. Many, *many* more. Overbearing works best if the Spectres trap their prey in a small, constrained area (like an alley) or surround them on all sides, but the prey is too dangerous to engage in combat. Instead of summoning a powerful Spectre (and thus risking a valuable hive resource), the chief Spectre sends in two or three swarms of first-wave Spectres. These wear down the targets through attrition and distract them from what's happening outside of the battle. While the swarm preoccupies the victims, the chief Spectre has time to send in Spectres with Envelop and Flit. Once the mob beats the targets down enough, these Spectres drop down from above to capture the targets and bring them to the hive.

Prolonged Assault: Lazarus Redux

The following section details some of the events during the siege of Lazarus Redux, though these are always assumed to include the characters. The crucible should be pivotal here and responsible for turning back the tide of Spectres.

When the Spectres encircle Lazarus Redux for the assault, their goal is to inflict as much damage as possible, ideally obliterating the building and reclaiming the hive. Their goal is to breach the defenses, to claim the souls within and to murder as many projectors as possible.

When the assault begins, hundreds of Spectres flock to Lazarus Redux, completely surrounding the building. The Spectres overwhelm any ghosts or projectors who attempt to enter or leave the facilities. Skimmers and sleepers whose bodies are on the premises, but whose souls are elsewhere, must use Puppetry, Broadband Ghost, Vector or Dream-Walker to enter through any means other than the front door. Small packs of Spectres sweep the surrounding neighborhood to harvest any spooks caught unawares by this sudden assault.

Packs of Fetches establish an outer perimeter, similar to the ones around the hives, to protect against outside forces coming to Lazarus Redux's rescue. Hordes of first-wave Spectres swarm over the exterior of Lazarus Redux, trying to find gaps or weak spots. They find none. At the same time, a mass of 200 first-wave Spectres, followed by 20 or 30 second-wave Spectres, attack the only opening at the front of the building (they don't know about the rear entrance, which remains locked down for the duration and, thus, inaccessible). The front is a double-door system with a relatively large hallway-alcove separating the two doors. If one door is open, the other automatically closes, operating much the same as a submarine's airlock.

Lazarus Redux responds by placing Banshees and Poltergeists in the alcove, thus limiting the Spectre's access to them by forcing them to enter in small numbers and from one direction. Dennison could keep both doors locked, but that won't discourage the Spectres. In fact, it'll provide them time to eventually break down the doors, for those smart enough to manifest. Dennison wants to give the Spectres a bloody nose and force them to retreat, and the alcove is the only defensible position where the spooks can fight without endangering the entire base. The Banshees use Wail to mow down hordes of Spectres, while the Poltergeists use Congeal's Benefit to increase Wail's damage. The Poltergeists also use Congeal to eliminate any Spectres that slip through. This spot is an excellent one in which to place combat-oriented characters, and in fact, if the characters don't participate, the Spectres might have an easier time overwhelming their opposition. Second-stage defenders who replace fallen spooks are fully charged Haunters with Witch's Nimbus active to full potential (to vaporize anything trying to scurry past them). Kate Dennison, however, makes a point of regularly swapping out people on guard duty in staggered intervals to ensure that no one gets too tired too quickly. She also ensures that any spook in the alcove has an ally in Lazarus Redux to provide his compatriot with steady Vitality. Regardless, if the alcove falls to the Spectres, Lazarus Redux can still keep the interior doors safely sealed, though they will have to mount an all out offensive to retake the alcove and protect against Spectres trying to swarm into the base.

The Spectres throw waves of their low-Spite brethren at the front door until they can muster some powerful ranged attackers. When the ranged attackers are ready, the hordes part to the sides, giving their "archers" a clear line of fire. This also gives characters with ranged-based Horrors a clear shot at their adversaries. After the ranged strikes, the hordes return to try breaking through. As the assault continues, these attacks become less frequent, with attrition wearing on the Spectres and causing some dissent in

the hive-mind. The longer the assault takes, the more resources are squandered. Eventually (Storyteller's choice after a suitable body count on both sides), the Spectres withdraw to a safer distance. They remain vigilant for any opportunity to break in, however.

If the hordes do manage to break or slip through, then a few packs of second-wave Spectres follow on their heels. Lazarus Redux must block/repair the breech and repel the invading Spectres while contending with those running rampant in the building. In this case, the characters can help in one of two ways. In the first, Kate Dennison and Hoyt Masterson already infused several solid plates of steel with hive material to seal potential breeches. These are in storage. They need someone to blast anything coming through the breech while they retrieve these plates and place them over any potential hole. Otherwise, the characters can retrieve the plates while dodging any nasties that entered the building.

The second way characters can help is to join John Carruthers and others in scouring the facility for the intruding Spectres. Some Spectres target the power generators to "spoil the meat" (killing those in cryosleep). Other Spectres target the sleeper cradles directly. If the characters aren't specifically guarding those areas, then two spooks sound the alarm and barely manage to fend off the Spectres until reinforcements arrive. It's the Storyteller's choice whether the two supporting characters die in the valiant effort of protecting the cradles, but allowing the characters to witness the two spooks' sacrifice drives home the urgency of the situation. Regardless, the crucible must be careful not to damage the cryogenic tanks while fighting off the Spectres.

Throughout the attack, those Spectres not directly involved in combat prowl and cavort outside the building, yowling and howling all day and night. When they know they're being watched, the Spectres cart out a cluster of captive ghosts and torture them for hours, daring Lazarus Redux personnel to come to the rescue. In fact, Kate might allow for a rescue strike to save the ghosts, hoping to catch the Spectres by surprise. At the very least, someone with Storm-Wending can pop into the throng of Spectres and vanish with the victims. While it'll be difficult to return to Lazarus Redux, he can at least travel via Storm-Wending to other places of safety, forcing some Spectres to give chase.

Unbeknownst to anyone save the Spectres, this hive is still partially connected to the Underworld. While Grandmother can't open a hole large enough to allow a Spectre invasion into Lazarus Redux, she can create a tiny opening in the basement, sending in a small pack of Spite Rats (see "Run & Gun," below) to wreak havoc and find ways of opening the facility from the inside (this hive conduit should be small enough for cats and small dogs to slip through but nothing larger). If the characters aren't on the alert for attacks such as this one, then a Lazarus Redux employee spots the Spite Rats after they've explored the facility and perhaps found a weak point.

Once discovered, Spite Rats and other small Spectres swarm into the building from the small hive opening, forcing the characters to find and seal the opening (using the treated steel plates mentioned previously). Simultaneously, however, the chief Spectres launch a big attack at the main entrance. The invading Spectres cause damage and even destroy many spooks if the characters don't help. Until someone finds the hive conduit into Lazarus Redux, the Spectres coordinate their assaults in the hopes of preoccupying the characters on two fronts.

Prohibiting anyone from entering or leaving the compound, attacking the front entry, taunting the defenders and trying to send small Spectres through the hive conduit are the primary tactics that the Spectres employ during the assault. They persist morning, noon and night for about four days. At the end of the four days, some Spectres return to their hives and hunt down spooks, while the remainder fight over the tortured souls they captured. Skirmishes break out among the different hives, presenting Lazarus Redux with an opportunity to end the siege. Kate Dennison asks the characters to scatter the remaining Spectres. With a lot of hard work, the characters can potentially clear the area of Spectres, creating a safe zone around Lazarus Redux. That, however, requires many fights and the liberal use of Vitality. If the Storyteller wishes, he can use the "Vignettes of Horror" in Chapter Four (see p. 95) to provide some of the story seeds for this endeavor.

Enter the Crucible

The Spectre invasion is so huge that it is certain to affect the characters, either directly or indirectly. The characters cannot avoid the invasion, and they really can't stop it from happening. If you drop them into the hive bloom without warning, they will likely feel railroaded — and justifiably so. You must prepare the crucible for this event so the characters have a fighting chance to survive once Grandmother unleashes her plague. If you foreshadow it well enough, they might even take a proactive role, organizing a resistance and striking back at the Swarm Storm. Here are a few ways of involving the characters in events without giving too much away.

Precognitive Nightmares

Be careful with using dreams because they can be a hackneyed convention (in literature… not the **Orpheus** series). Dropping hints through precognitive nightmares

works best if you want to offer the crucible some advance warning or to provide the characters with an excuse to conduct some gratuitous, hands-on ghostbusting. If a character has Forebode, then you know through whom to channel your nightmares, though it also works with anyone possessing Sandman. A week before "the blooming" approaches, hit the aforementioned character with the following nightmare:

It's the house where you grew up. You're alone. The door is not locked. You need to make sure it's secure, but the door is ajar. This is urgent. You must shut the door. The latch is broken. It won't close. You must lock the door. There is disease and misery outside. Sickness shambles through the yard. You must shut it out. The backdoor is unlocked, too. Run to it... lock it. If the sickness reaches you, your skin will rot, your teeth will fall out, and you'll grow sick. You must shut all the doors. There are more doors than you remember. They're everywhere. As you run from one to another, shutting them, locking them, new ones open. Ones you locked, unlock. Keep running. It is cancer, it is contagious, and it scrabbles at the windows. Contagion pulls on the doors. You must shut them. You must shut it out. Run back to the front door. Watch the handle turn....

After suffering the nightmare, the unfortunate oracle sees intermittent flashes of shadow and darkness, visions of impending annihilation, surrounding any incorporeal spirit. These visions occur with increasing frequency as the invasion approaches, much more powerful when the character is closer to active hives (resourceful characters may try to use this to determine the location of concealed hives — let them, it's okay). These clues give the characters a fair shot at linking the hives and the nightmares to something large looming on the horizon.

If no one in the crucible has Forebode or Sandman, then choose someone else to have these nightmares and visions. A pigment user is ideal, or perhaps a supporting character can experience the nightmares instead. This distances the characters from the experience and adds the uncertainty of another person's perceptions coloring the report. Whether this is an advantage or disadvantage depends on how you want the crucible to react, but do bear in mind that the characters may not treat the nightmare as seriously if they hear about it instead of experiencing it.

THE GRAPEVINE

The characters likely exist in a big city with a significant community of projectors and ghosts. As a part of the community, the crucible will surely have some contacts they probe for information on a regular basis. Characters can obtain clues about upcoming events from several sources.

- **Tips from Orphan-Grinders:** Orphan-Grinders keep close tabs on Spectre movements and hive activity. They don't remember much from their time as Spectres, but they possess a unique comprehension of the workings of Spectre society. They notice the changes in behavior preceding the hive blossoms far sooner than anyone else would. They won't know what this means because they aren't linked to the hive-mind anymore, but they know that something big is about to happen. An allied Orphan-Grinder, such as Tom Hayes, can offer this information freely, or he can use it to reward the crucible for a favor (such as the rescue of his daughter, as outlined in Chapter Four). This is also a great excuse to set up an encounter with the Hellboys' crucible (also covered in Chapter Four).

- **Terrence Green:** When you want to inform the crucible about events, use the ever-popular mouthpiece, Terrence Green, to drop hints. During the sessions leading up to the invasion, Radio Free Death may broadcast warnings about strange Spectre activity or "dark dreams" concerning the upcoming weeks. Terrence may even visit the crucible directly to confer with them about potential events. Terrence is pretty certain that

EMERGENCY INGRESS

When the invasion begins, the folks at Lazarus Redux are smart enough to realize they need a standard way in and out of the facilities. They've known that for a while and surmised that their best option is Storm-Wending, with John Carruthers or another Wisp providing rapid transit.

Because spooks can't use Storm-Wending through Lazarus Redux's walls, however, Dennison and the others found a way to create a very brief window in their "battlements." They converted a room above the offices, one with an outside wall, into an airlock. The interior wall facing out has a sliding steel plate that can be moved aside or locked in place, and the only doorway in is a reinforced vault door. The room's interior and exterior walls, door, ceiling, floor and steel plate are treated with hive material, turning the chamber into a contained bubble. The steel plate itself covers one portion of outside wall where the hive treatment is weaker, allowing spooks and Spectres to slip through if the steel plate's not in place. Anyone touching that portion of the outside wall slips in partially, but is stopped by something he can't see. At predetermined times, Lazarus Redux slides the steel shutter open for precisely five seconds, allowing affiliated spooks to use Storm-Wending to enter or exit the room (and, thus, the facility). If a Spectre slips through, the Haunters or Banshees present blast it, but the Spectres rarely know this is happening since they can't see through the walls. Once the steel plate is back in place and the room is clear of Spectres, spooks monitoring the room through a Kirlian camera unlock the vault door.

the great purge of ghosts several years ago may happen again since there's nothing stopping the Spectres from repeating their success. He isn't shy about sharing his suspicions with the crucible, and he expects them to take it as seriously as he does.

OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

If you dropped hints about upcoming events and the crucible isn't picking up on them or if you want to keep the impending harvest of souls a surprise, then disregard the foreshadowing bits, and let the invasion catch the characters by surprise. If you choose this route, don't stick the crucible in the middle of the city when the hives bloom. It may be a spectacular view, but it isn't worth the crucible's destruction. Ensure the crucible's safety by placing it near a safe haven or by baiting it away from the city with an urgent mission. On the way back, when the crucible has a good view of the city without being in direct danger, that's when the invasion starts and the first plumes rise.

Let them watch the chain-reaction bursts of other plumes, building up to the emergence of the first-wave Spectres. While describing this event, impress its magnitude upon the characters. Seeing the dark flood of skittering Spectres erupt from the newly bloomed hives should be like watching an ant hill disgorge all its ants. Sure, you knew there were a lot, you just didn't know how many. Bearing witness to how the invasion unfolds from afar gives the characters fair knowledge of events and provides them time to register the entire affair. Seeing the sheer magnitude of the invasion makes it crystal clear that this isn't something that can be reversed. They are safe for now, but they must formulate a plan for the future if they want to survive: Do they hole up, plunge into the chaos or choose another fate?

THINGS TO DO IN DENVER WHEN YOU'RE DEAD

You unleashed the invasion on the characters, and they survived the initial onslaught of Spectres. In fact, perhaps they're doing a little too well. Where you wanted them to experience anxiety, they only expressed mild discomfort. Your insurmountable obstacles turned out to be minor annoyances. The problem is that they're in the middle of a great and horrible event and there's just no *tension*. What you need is a way to impede the crucible's escape. There are many ways to do this, but they boil down to obligation, obstruction and karma.

OBLIGATION

Remember Bruce Willis' character in *Pulp Fiction*? He could have left town scot-free, but he returned to his apartment for his father's gold watch and landed in serious trouble for it. For something composed of just words and feelings, an obligation can be quite potent. What kind of obligation drives a character to risk her life by staying in the midst of a horde of voracious Spectres? Let's look at a few classic responsibilities you can use to impede the characters' flight.

A central and crucial truth is that, while the Spectre invasion is in full swing and is a pivotal event, very few people actually realize what's happening. Life goes on. It doesn't stop. Thus, people still pursue their daily obligations, making it difficult for the characters to ignore their friends, their families and their jobs for an event nobody else sees or realizes exists.

A character may have a recurring commitment to her occupation or a volunteer job that conflicts with the Spectre invasion. This is especially potent when the well-being of other people is at stake. You can't choose to skip your shift on the emergency-response team just because it's inconvenient. If you work at a soup kitchen as penance for your sins, the swarm shouldn't stop you from doing your job — it's just a test of your faith and devotion.

The character may have an important role at a one-time event, such as a wedding, a funeral, a confirmation, etc. There's no excuse good enough to justify to your young daughter why you missed her birthday or confirmation. You can't skip out as best man — you have the groom's wedding ring! Consider not being present to recite the eulogy at your mother's funeral. Inconceivable!

In another vein, instead of appealing to the character's sense of honor, try appealing to his ego. Maybe the character needs to attend a special celebration such as an award ceremony, election or party in the character's honor. He can't blow off an engagement with 200 of the most influential people in his field. Beyond being rude, it would be career suicide.

You can also spring surprise complications on the crucible while it seeks shelter or is trying to help others. A character can receive a call from a friend, relative or contact, someone who urgently needs assistance. The caller might be terribly sick and needs the character to shuttle him to the hospital. The phone call may be from a black-market contact who needs money desperately to pay off a thug for gambling debts (before they break his legs and arms). It could be an old government contact who wants backup and is willing to blackmail the character into cooperating. It can even be a call from a Lazarus Redux operative, asking for help in repelling the swarm while they take in refugee ghosts. To fulfill this obligation, the crucible must make a detour or even return into the thick of the swarm. There's no way the crucible can survive this intact if it charges back with guns blazing, however. Discretion and stealth are the watchwords of the hour.

OBSTRUCTION

Easier than pulling the strings of obligation, but less subtle, is obstruction. Place things, people and events in the crucible's path, forcing the characters to choose a different road. If they are speeding out of town in a Porsche, a car accident, traffic jam or road construction slows them down handily. A worker's strike throws a convenient wrench in the escape plans of characters leaving by train or plane. Regardless of how they flee, you can have a swarm of first-wave Spectres overtake the crucible or catch it by surprise (if the critters have Manifest, so much the better for characters believing they are safe by virtue of remaining in their bodies), blocking the characters' escape and forcing them choose a different route.

You can also situate the crucible's destination within the perimeter of a nearby Spectre hive, thereby obstructing the characters with ghosts crying for help and spooks fighting for their very existence in last-ditch battles (tried and true classics).

KARMA

If you're a hero, there's one thing you can rely on: Fate *will* throw you a curve ball, especially if you're in a stressful situation, and fleeing a horde of soul-rending fiends certainly qualifies as stressful. As Storyteller, you are in control of events in the world around the characters, and you have an obligation to craft an exciting story for the players. If you must toss a little bad luck at them to keep the game interesting, that's fair.

The crucible is (ostensibly) a group of heroes. You can impede its flight to safety by placing innocent souls in jeopardy. While fleeing, the crucible can encounter a trio of ghosts beset by a swarm of first-wave Spectres. The crucible could leave them to perish, but that should weigh on the characters' consciences (the Storyteller may even penalize the characters with Spite points for particularly callous behavior). If that's not enough, the characters can run across a small train of Spectres using Envelop to transport a cluster of spooks back to their hive. The characters should know by now that the trapped spirits are doomed unless the crucible intervenes. Conversely, the crucible might witness a car crash on its way to safety. A ghost appears from among the newly killed. There aren't any Spectres there yet, but there will be, soon enough. The crucible's members can't just leave a total novice to perish, can they? If they bring the new ghost under their wing, then they must care for him until they can bring him to a place of safety, such as Lazarus Redux. Caring for a simple soul in the middle of an all-out invasion is a mission unto itself.

Over the course of their adventures, the characters have certainly made their share of enemies: Powerful Spectres, FBI operatives and the agents of other shadowy



government organizations, rivals in the spook community and Uriah Bishop and his cult, to name a few. Pick a surviving antagonist with a score to settle against one or more members of the crucible. The distracting anarchy created by the swarm provides an ideal time for the enemy to exact revenge. If the enemy wishes to settle a score with just one character, he might simply inform the other crucible members that they can leave unmolested. He only wants to fight his target. Unfortunately, no decent crucible-mate would leave a member behind, but it makes for a dramatic scene nonetheless.

If the crucible doesn't have any notable enemies or if you don't feel like running a combat, there're still plenty of complications available. Burglars vandalize a character's apartment, and the police arrive and need the character to file a report. The crucible discovers that its getaway car to flee the city was stolen, towed or had its tires slashed. A character with an addiction, a medical condition or a keepsake (remember that gold watch) discovers he forgot to bring the critical item he needs with him. He must return to his apartment and won't leave without it.

Run & Gun

Killing characters is deceptively easy, but it doesn't make for the most satisfying story. Still, the players must believe that you are capable of, and quite comfortable with, killing their characters. Make them sweat. Below are some ideas for keeping the pressure high without fatally overwhelming the crucible.

The Quick and the Dead

With thousands of Spectres running amok, it's inevitable that the crucible will encounter a Spectre patrol. The goal here isn't to kill the crucible members, but to scare them. It is also nice if you can make everyone feel useful. That's why the first wave consists of Spectres everyone has a chance of dispatching. First-wave Spectres are smaller and weaker than the ones to follow, but they are numerous and pervasive. If the crucible finishes the first encounter too easily, you can always throw another one at them later.

On a quick, related note, there is no specific number of active hives offered because the hives vary in size and number according to their host city. As a rule of thumb, for every one million people, there are about three small hives (with approximately 10 to 40 Spectres apiece) and one medium-sized hive (with 40 to 80 Spectres). At four or five million people, the city also hosts one large hive of massive proportions, with approximately 100 to 200 Spectres within. If the city has a high crime rate or a depressed economy (Detroit, Los Angeles, New York, etc.) the number of hives can double, in some instances.

Spite Rats

Spite Rats are typical first-wave Spectres. Spite Rats are the size of an overfed house cat, with oily fur, sharp incisors and a two-week-in-the-grave look to their decayed forms. Spite Rats swarm their target, though they should number (crucible members x 5). Storytellers can double that figure if the crucible possesses Wail and Witch's Nimbus. Essentially, the characters should be able to obliterate half of these critters before the Spite Rats close the gap and attack directly.



Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 3

Nature: Monster

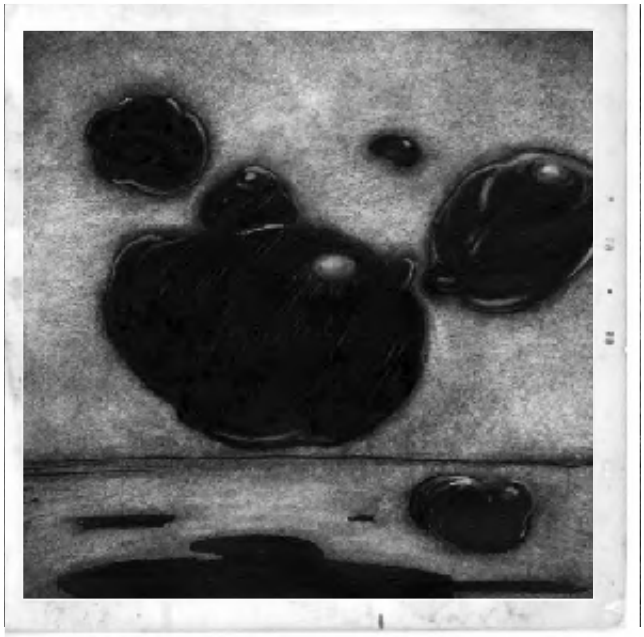
Willpower: 1

Spite: 3

Offensive Abilities: Claws, Flit, Maw

Swarm Globes

These Spectres are probably the least malevolent of the lot, but they are dangerous, nonetheless. They're also swarm-type creatures that resemble spheres of oil floating in air. They range from fist to toaster in size, and their function is to swarm and merge with one another to envelop a target, thus incapacitating their prey while another Spectre drags the victim to a hive. Swarm Globes always travel with other Spectres (usually those from the second wave) that direct them into action. Their favorite technique is to hover in the dark corners of rooms, using Chameleon to hide, and flood in once a target is too preoccupied to notice them or too deep inside the room to escape.



Attributes: Strength 1*, Dexterity 3, Stamina 1, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0, Perception 1, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 3

Nature: Monster

Willpower: 1

Spite: 4

Offensive Abilities: Chameleon (see p. 119), Envelop*, Flight (see p. 119)

*** Note:** This version of Envelop works differently than the rules stipulated in the **Orpheus** rulebook. The Swarm Globes gain Strength with each one that successfully contributes in the attack. Globes essentially attack three to five times in a turn (Storyteller's call), from multiple directions. Each successful strike means a major globule sticks to the character and acts with one dot of cumulative Strength. At the end of the turn, the Storyteller then rolls Envelop as per the rules stated in **Orpheus** (p. 267), with the Strength portion of the roll determined by the number of Swarm Globes that succeed in hitting the target. If the target beats the Swarm Globes in the grapple, he manages to knock one away for each additional success (though this counts as extra actions if he already acted that turn). When the next turn begins, the attack begins anew, but any Swarm Globes still affixed to the target from the previous turn still factor in to the cumulative Strength. Globes swarm a target until they hit 10 dots worth of Strength. By then, most prey is caught and held.

DOG-SPIDERS

This critter looks like a cross between a small dog and a spider: It has a skeletal dog head, with beady eyes and myriad teeth, and eight spider legs attached to its canine-like body. Dog-Spiders aren't swarm Spectres, but they are pack-minded. They travel in groups of 10 to 30, but they mostly use their numbers to surround a target and cut off avenues of escape. Dog-Spiders travel over most surfaces, like spiders, and often prefer to hide on ceilings—dropping on opponents immediately below them.

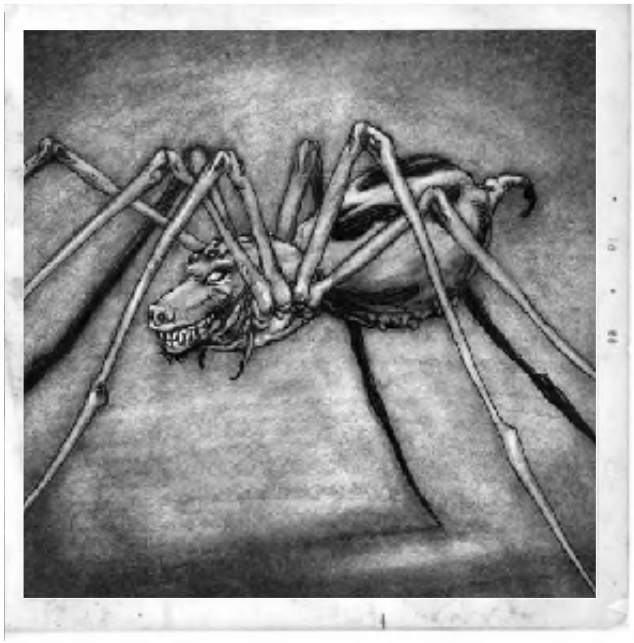
Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0, Perception 4, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 3

Nature: Monster

Willpower: 2 (5 for pack alpha)

Spite: 4 (6 for pack alpha)



Offensive Abilities: Claws, Flit, Maw, Storm-Wending* (only the pack alpha)

*** Note:** Dog-Spiders are particularly frightening because their alpha can use Storm-Wending to vanish with the pack, without appearing anywhere. They lie dormant in the between linking destinations. When someone uses Storm-Wending near them, they follow the spook through, arriving a turn later. During the Swarm Storm, there are plenty of packs just lying in wait for some unsuspecting spook to teleport by. Thankfully, spooks can sense the presence of "hidden" Dog-Spiders nearby with a Perception + Empathy roll (difficulty 6). Dog-Spiders sense travelers within four blocks of their exit point.

HUNKER DOWN AND HOLE UP

Do the characters have a safe haven, someplace easy to defend and tough for incorporeal entities to penetrate? If they do and they have enough supplies to weather the

swarm, they can sit tight and ride it out. More so, if there are only one or two points of access, then the crucible can hold out indefinitely. As in any military situation, whoever controls the choke points can hold out against superior numbers… as long as supplies last. If the crucible feels particularly bold, it can bait Spectres into attacking its sanctuary, forcing the swarm into a prolonged war of attrition. With large havens, the crucible can mount quick "search and recover" missions, rescuing lone ghosts from the swarm and ferrying them to its shelter. If the crucible is in contact with other safe houses, it may even act as an underground railroad, shuttling ghosts out of the city and away from the hives. For such selfless acts, the Storyteller may consider dropping the characters' Spite by a point or five at the end of the ordeal.

How about Lazarus Redux? Kate Dennison and her partners anticipated a variety of disasters, and they prepared accordingly. The Lazarus Redux facility is nearly Spectre-proof, thus allowing crucibles on exceptionally good terms with Lazarus Redux to hole up there. If they do, Dennison and the others expect the crucibles to pull their own weight by helping with guard duty, running rescue expeditions and tending to the refugees. It's tiring work, but Lazarus Redux is arguably the strongest and best-equipped safe house in the city. Unfortunately, the size of the facility and the high profiles of its founders and allies attracts the attention of more than one "sweep team" of Spectres. The compound must endure several harrowing days of siege before the Spectres go elsewhere or give up in favor of easier prey.

BURY YOUR HEAD IN THE SAND

Sometimes, the best way to survive a disaster is to be anywhere but where it's occurring. If the entire crucible consists of people who are still alive, then nothing prevents them from simply not projecting. All they have to do is wait. If some crucible members are dead, then this strategy becomes less viable. Unless the crucible leaves its dead members to fend for themselves, it must stick around to help them to survive.

As a Storyteller, this may be among the least satisfying solutions for the crucible to choose. After all, if everything happens in the hereafter and the crucible isn't going there, then it makes for a really dull game. Four ways to deal with this are:

• **Let them do it, but exact the consequences later:** The characters are certain to have friends and contacts among the dead. If the crucible's willing to leave them to an almost certain fate, then let it. When the crucible returns to the scene, make sure its members hear horrible stories about how Spectres dragged off their friends.

It's likely several people will ask the characters where they were when the shit hit the fan. It doesn't bode well for potential leaders when they run away and hide during a crisis, especially if they're a powerful and well trained group of professionals. As a result, characters may lose allies, contacts or the respect of others.

• **Make them squirm:** Let them pursue missions they can accomplish without projecting, but which are *much* harder if they choose not to do so. If the crucible wants to stay out of the hereafter, that's its members' prerogative. You can introduce new challenges when you run stories where characters can not access their powers. In this instance, the limitation is self-imposed, which makes the crucible's consternation more ironic.

Life goes on, regardless what the crucible does or does not do, and the characters must still make a living. If they once hired themselves out and used their special talents to achieve results, then keep the business flowing in. Breaking into a computer system, for example, is much harder if you can't walk through three layers of security and read the access codes beforehand. Use this self-imposed restriction to make the characters realize how heavily they rely on their extraordinary gifts.

Because characters have Dead-Eyes active constantly, they can still see what's happening in the hereafter. As needed, you can throw in grueling montages of Spectres ravaging defenseless souls. If you're feeling particularly malicious, make sure this happens at a rather inconvenient moment for the characters.

• **Railroad them into it:** The players may resent you for this, but if you must convince the crucible to project, you can force the issue. Ways to do so include: calling in a favor that the crucible owes, threatening a loved one with a supernatural threat, offering the crucible ridiculously appealing incentives or guilting the crucible into helping.

• **Death waits for no one:** Guess what? Among the myriad of Spectres appearing, a significant few can manifest. Thus, if the characters refuse to participate, it isn't an issue. The Spectres likely remember the crucible from several previous encounters, and they will send Spectres that can manifest to attack the characters.

ON THE RUN

If a crucible member possesses Storm-Wending and the crucible continues to funnel Vitality into that character, the characters may be able to operate mostly as they did before. The big difference is they'll be using Storm-Wending to make their getaways when matters get too heated (instead of merely running away).

Review the details of Storm-Wending so you'll be familiar with how it works when your Wisp decides to snatch the entire crucible from danger. Using Storm-Wending really isn't so much a long-term plan as it is a strategy the crucible will frequently rely on (or, at least, until it encounters Dog-Spiders). For this strategy to work well, however, the crucible still needs to have caches of supplies in safe houses scattered about the city. This way, the characters can regroup and recover their Vitality between encounters.



THE AFTERMATH

After the war, the landscape changes. In the short term, the crucible's daily existence becomes a matter of raw survival. Once they arrive, the Spectres stay in the city for several weeks, and while many depart to scour the countryside, a significant number remain behind. Day-to-day survival in the weeks following the invasion earns coverage in Chapter Two. Below, however, is a look at the significant long-term world changes after the storm.

The invasion utterly ravages the hereafter. In the wake of the invasion, the global spook population shrinks to no more than 10 percent of what it was before. If the characters have any significant ghostly contacts who they didn't protect specifically, then those contacts are likely gone forever (though the Storyteller shouldn't touch Background-related supporting characters since those already took heavy hits in **Crusade of Ashes** and **Shades of Gray**). This also creates problems for Terrence Green and other well-connected supporting characters. Without his network of informants, it takes Terrence Green longer to gather the latest information. He continues to air his Radio Free Death broadcasts and remains a great source for information, but the intel he provides is vaguer than it was previously.

More than a few projectors meet a sticky end at the claws of the Spectre horde. When a projected skimmer dies, her body remains open to possible possession by a Spectre, creating a Jason. It's a dangerous possibility that some projectors who die suffer this fate, creating a higher-than-average number of Jasons around the world. If the crucible is looking for a mindless hack-n-slash scenario, this situation provides a perfect opportunity to oblige them. If not, then throw in the occasional newspaper headline or news report about "ordinary people" snapping and going off on a murderous killing spree.

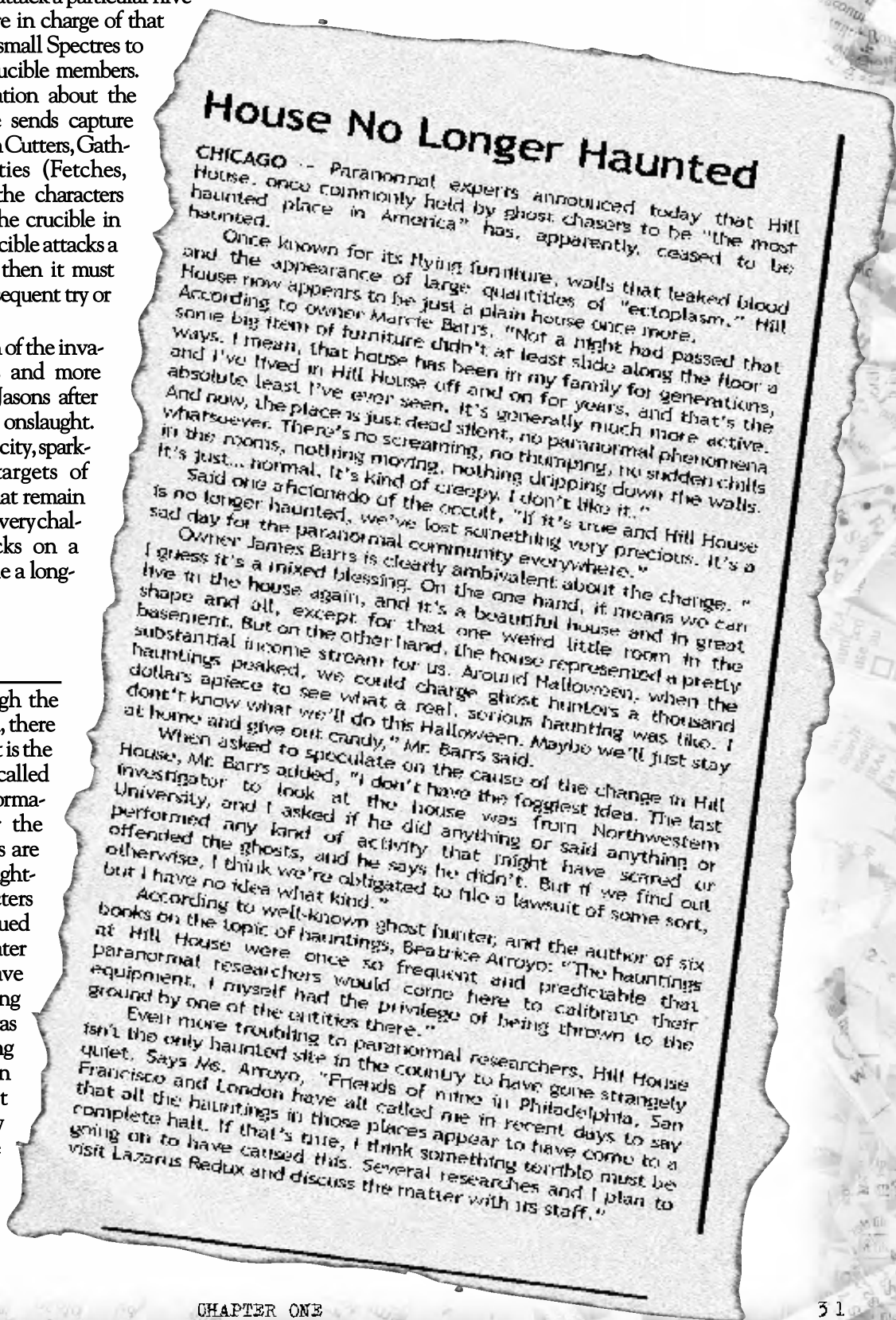
Meanwhile, the global population of Spectres is significantly higher than previously and is more widespread as well. This means Spectre encounters and hauntings are more common, even in less-inhabited areas. When the crucible returns to a location they cleaned out in the past, Spectres may have reinfested it. If the crucible has a safe house on the outskirts of town, set up a new Spectre hive a mile or so away.

To accomplish her goals, Grandmother forced many new hives through the Stormwall. These hives remain, even though most of them are small or relatively inactive. Characters are far likelier to encounter a hive while walking in the city, unless they're paying special attention to avoid them. Because of the scarcity of souls and the Spectre exodus from the cities, many hives have much less protection than normal after the initial weeks of the invasion. Unless the hive is of special importance, it is likelier to have only a few Spectres "squatting" in it, instead of a full complement. Unfortunately, this serves as an incentive for Spectres to launch more turf wars, as detailed in Chapter Four.

During the invasion, the third-wave Spectres act as hive leaders, if the hive doesn't possess one of strength already. These Spectres are more intelligent and more powerful than the average and are likelier to survive the invasion and any retaliatory measures meted out by the crucible and its allies. When the crucible encounters an important hive, it's almost certain that a third-wave or Spite 9+ Spectre is in charge of it. This allows less-intelligent Spectres in the hive to use strategies and tactics unavailable to them before the invasion. In this instance, it's a case where need necessitated adaptation.

Crucibles that repeatedly attack a particular hive earn the enmity of the Spectre in charge of that area. The chief Spectre sends small Spectres to find, follow and watch the crucible members. Once it has enough information about the characters, the chief Spectre sends capture parties (Swarm Globes, Ribbon Cutters, Gatherers, etc.) or ambush parties (Fetches, Frighteners, etc.) to attack the characters while they sleep or ambush the crucible in inconvenient places. If the crucible attacks a major hive more than once, then it must wipe it out on the third or subsequent try or suffer the consequences later.

To recap, in the aftermath of the invasion, there are fewer ghosts and more Spectres. There is a rash of Jasons after some projectors fall before the onslaught. Many extra hives remain in the city, sparking territorial feuds and targets of opportunity. The few hives that remain difficult in eradicating are very, very challenging, and repeated attacks on a principle hive earn the crucible a long-term enemy.



House No Longer Haunted

CHICAGO -- Paranormal experts announced today that Hill House, once commonly held by ghost chasers to be "the most haunted place in America" has, apparently, ceased to be haunted.

Once known for its flying furniture, walls that leaked blood and the appearance of large quantities of "ectoplasm," Hill House now appears to be just a plain house once more.

According to owner Marcie Barrs, "Not a night had passed that some big item of furniture didn't at least slide along the floor a ways. I mean, that house has been in my family for generations, and I've lived in Hill House off and on for years, and that's the absolute least I've ever seen. It's generally much more active. And now, the place is just dead silent, no paranormal phenomena whatsoever. There's no screaming, no thumping, no sudden chills in the rooms, nothing moving, nothing dripping down the walls. It's just... normal. It's kind of creepy. I don't like it."

Said one aficionado of the occult, "If it's true and Hill House is no longer haunted, we've lost something very precious. It's a sad day for the paranormal community everywhere."

Owner James Barrs is clearly ambivalent about the change. "I guess it's a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it means we can live in the house again, and it's a beautiful house and in great shape and all, except for that one weird little room in the basement. But on the other hand, the house represented a pretty substantial income stream for us. Around Halloween, when the hauntings peaked, we could charge ghost hunters a thousand dollars apiece to see what a real, serious haunting was like. I don't know what we'll do this Halloween. Maybe we'll just stay at home and give out candy," Mr. Barrs said.

When asked to speculate on the cause of the change in Hill House, Mr. Barrs added, "I don't have the foggiest idea. The last investigator to look at the house was from Northwestern University, and I asked if he did anything or said anything or performed any kind of activity that might have scared or offended the ghosts, and he says he didn't. But if we find out otherwise, I think we're obligated to file a lawsuit of some sort, but I have no idea what kind."

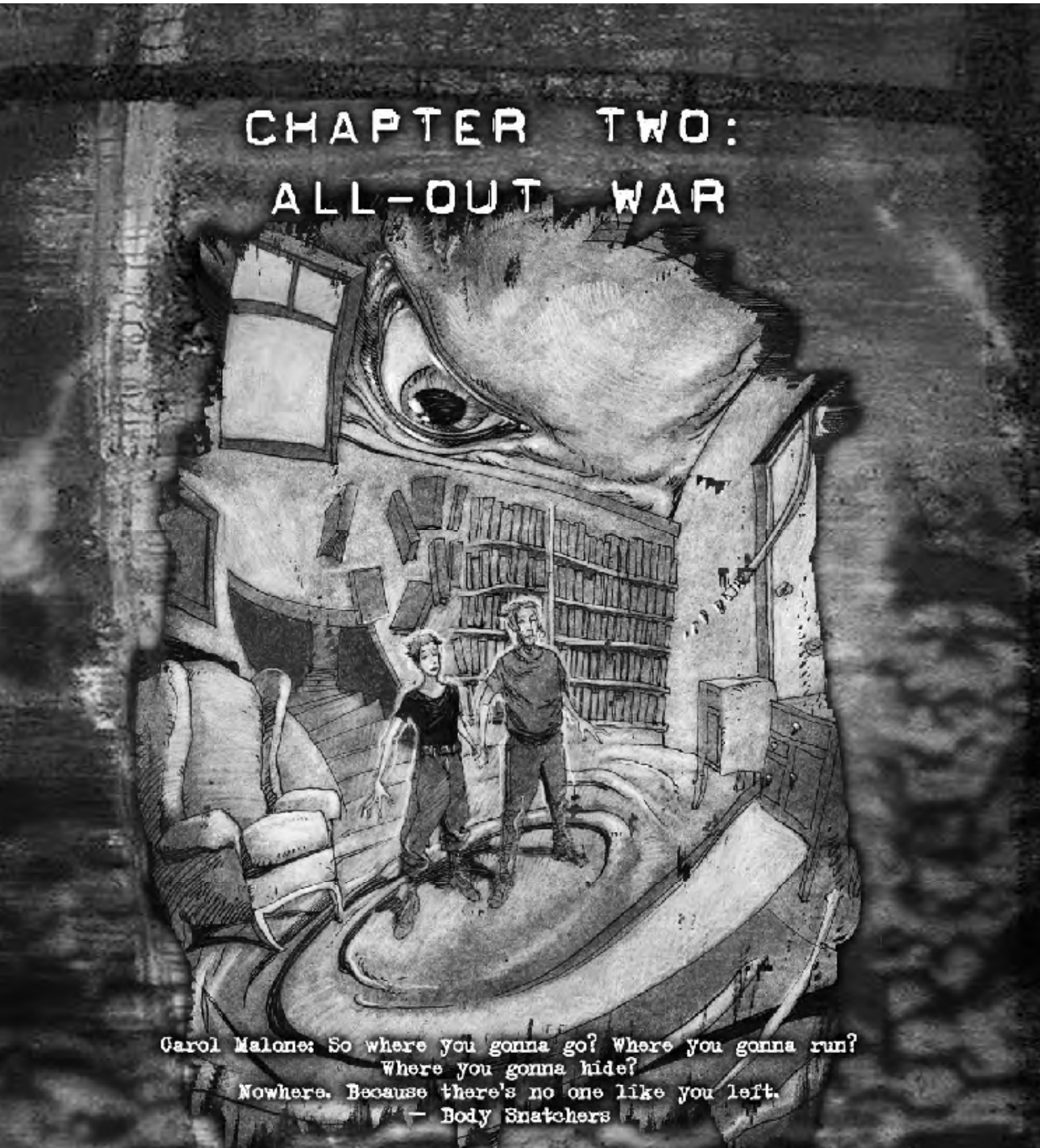
According to well-known ghost hunter, and the author of six books on the topic of hauntings, Beatrice Arroyo: "The hauntings at Hill House were once so frequent and predictable that paranormal researchers would come here to calibrate their equipment. I myself had the privilege of being thrown to the ground by one of the entities there."

Even more troubling to paranormal researchers, Hill House isn't the only haunted site in the country to have gone strangely quiet. Says Ms. Arroyo, "Friends of mine in Philadelphia, San Francisco and London have all called me in recent days to say that all the hauntings in those places appear to have come to a complete halt. If that's true, I think something terrible must be going on to have caused this. Several researches and I plan to visit Lazarus Redux and discuss the matter with its staff."

SILVER LINING

All that said, even though the characters seem overwhelmed, there are a few rays of hope. The first is the appearance of a rogue Spectre called Mr. Jigsaw. He possesses information and startling news for the characters — not all Spectres are with Grandmother. Some are fighting her. Secondly, the characters are unique in that their continued shared bond gives them greater abilities then they might have anticipated. Specifically, sharing Vitality and using Benefits was the first step in the road to using Crucible Horrors (as detailed in Chapter Two). Finally, the last silver lining in this particularly gloomy storm is the emergence of the Orphan-Grinders, reformed Spectres capable of fighting Grandmother's brood through their own gifts.

CHAPTER TWO: ALL-OUT WAR



Carol Malone: So where you gonna go? Where you gonna run?
Where you gonna hide?
Nowhere. Because there's no one like you left.
— Body Snatchers

So, like, I'm seeing all this shit drop. I mean, Spectres swarming everywhere like they're giving creation an enema. And I'm thinking, like... did God flush the toilet because we're just doused in shit right now, y'know?
— Anonymous

BRACE YOURSELF

Things are turning ugly — the events of this book and the next in the **Orpheus** line are harsh, some might even say cataclysmic. Fortunately, the contents of this chapter may help your character to survive the worst of it... maybe.

This chapter falls into two sections. The first contains information for all players. The second is exclusively the Storyteller's only. The Players Section contains a whole new type of power for your characters to wield. The Storytellers Section holds information about the Spectral assault in the hereafter. Can players buy this book and read all the Storyteller goodies? Well... we've said it enough times that you're probably sick of the lectures.

Key to this chapter (and all of **The Orphan-Grinders**, really) is attention to the characters' growing understanding of their nature, their capabilities and their adversaries. This chapter introduces some powerful new Horrors available to the characters, reflecting their greater understanding of their condition, as well as how to use them. Some changes may seem like they're boosting the characters' capabilities and capacities to rival any adversary they could possibly meet. In fact, they are. The characters will soon tangle with foes *far* more terrible than irate NSA agents or murderous Jasons. The powers herein — while seemingly excessive — are barely enough to even hint at survival.

PLAYERS SECTION

There are two ways to survive the events mentioned in this book. The first is to know what you're doing, in which case we have suggestions and recommendations for surviving the Spectre onslaught. The second method is to have plenty of firepower, enough to knock someone's front teeth in... which we've also supplied in adequate quantity. Have at it, and don't hold back because the opposition sure isn't planning on being gentle.

CRUCIBLE HORRORS

Spooks have long known they can share Vitality among their crucible-mates or provide allies with Benefits from their Horrors. Benefits were only a prelude to the power available with Crucible Horrors, which elevate the ability to empower another's Horror to a whole new level. Crucible Horrors result when two or more spooks combine their first-tier Horrors. By pooling their use of Horrors (and the Vitality fueling them), characters can achieve effects an order of magnitude greater than they could normally expect. They aren't just bigger or more powerful versions of the same thing — Benefits and some Merits already make that possible. Instead, they grant the allied characters fundamentally different powers entirely.

Characters can only combine first-tier Horrors, and only when using two of the same Horrors (Wail with Wail, Inhabit with Inhabit). You cannot, for example, combine Helter Skelter and Wail, though two spooks could certainly combine two Helter Skelters to create its Crucible Horror effect. Furthermore, Crucible Horrors are not as flexible as most Horrors. Spite cannot fuel them, they do not have Benefits, nor can they be the target of another's Benefit.

In theory, if all the characters know the same first-tier Horror, the entire crucible could channel Vitality into the Crucible Horror, resulting in truly incredible displays of power — power they'll need later on.

Movie fans can think of Crucible Horrors as the power behind the far-reaching and massive effects they've seen in movies about ghosts. The scene at the end of *Poltergeist*, where the entire house is sucked in upon itself, might be a good example of Inhabit's crucible effect. In *Evil Dead II*, when Ash's hair turns white from fear is a good example of Bedlam's increased effect.

The only difference between using a first-tier Horror alone and merging it for a Crucible Horror effect is that the characters pooling their powers must will themselves to join in the group effort. In game mechanic terms, that means the players must spend a point of temporary Willpower when their characters participate in a Crucible Horror. That's the only drawback, however, since Crucible Horror effects can be incredibly powerful.

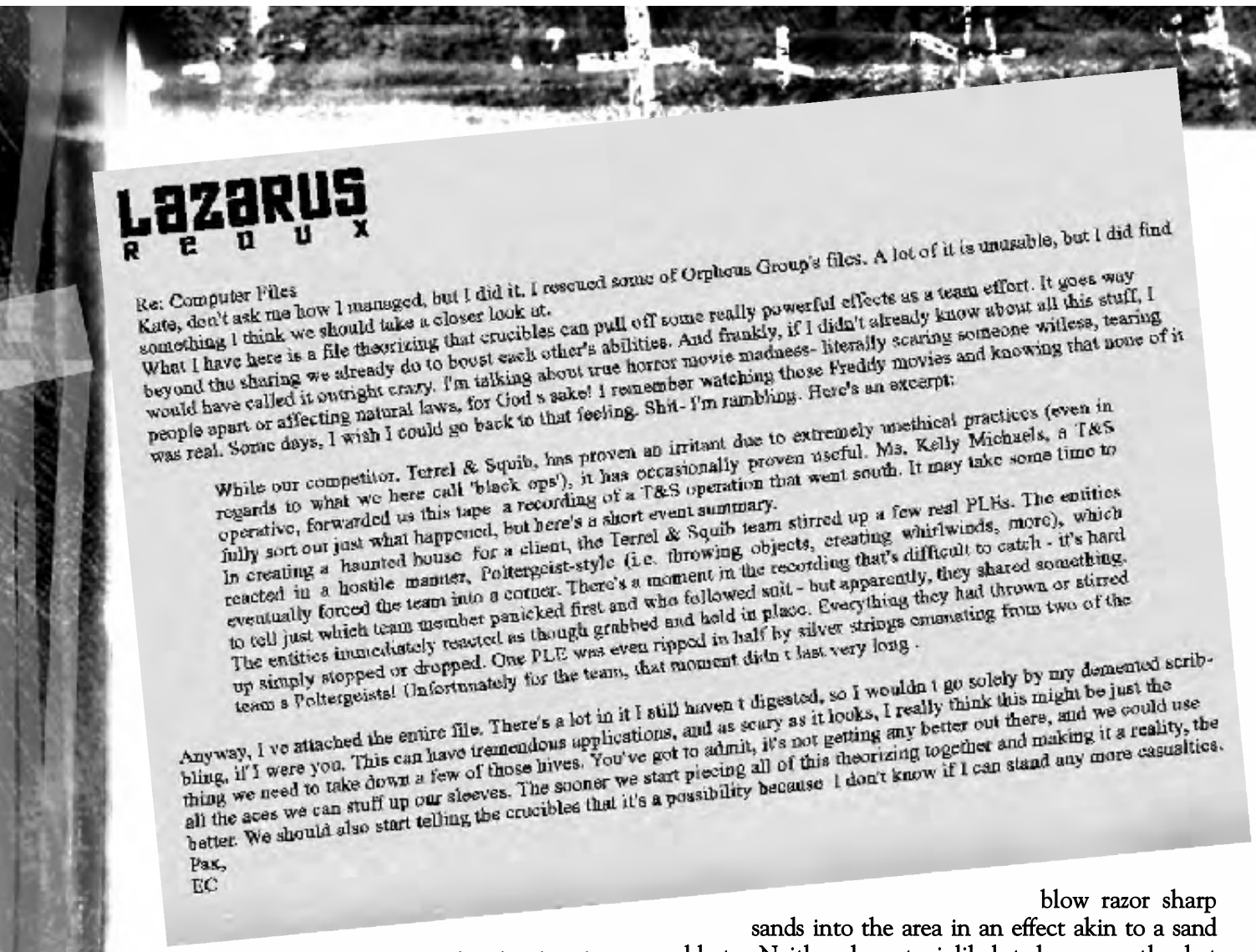
Much of the force behind Crucible Horrors comes from the massive influx of Vitality that the crucible can channel into the effect. Crucible Horrors have a minimum Vitality expenditure of five that the characters must meet before the effect kicks in. Thus, while some members of the crucible can't contribute their Horror to the shared effect, everyone's Vitality is always welcome. Players may want to consider just how effective they can be if their entire crucible becomes involved in fueling a Crucible Horror.

HOW DO THEY WORK?

Crucible Horrors are simple. The cooperating players state their use of a Crucible Horror. All participating players mark off a point of Willpower and declare how much Vitality they're channeling into the effect. The Storyteller determines the result based on the Vitality expenditure and, where appropriate, dice rolls.

EUREKA!

The complicated part of learning Crucible Horrors comes in the initial realization that a character can use his first-tier Horror like a Benefit to augment another character's power. Some characters may even stumble



upon the idea that they can combine Horrors, but if they try any combination of Horrors other than pooling the same Horrors together, they'll be disappointed.

The avenues to learning these effects are many and might include old standbys such as Terrence Green or Kate Dennison offering tutelage. Otherwise, the Storyteller likewise has a few supporting characters up his sleeve. Regardless, the players and the Storyteller should work together to determine how the characters stumble upon their new abilities. Do characters with access to the same first-tier Horror feel some kind of shared potential? More problematic, how do the characters realize they need to throw Willpower into the mix?

For crucibles going the route of self-discovery, characters may learn to use Crucible Horrors in a moment of panic. Two characters might be using the same Horror (Wail, for example) on an enemy, and perhaps try to create a more devastating effect by using their power side by side. Their Horror *would* combine, but instead of achieving a more powerful version of Wail, they'd wind up with the Crucible Horror Storm-Gloam, resulting in small tears in the Stormwall through which high winds blow razor sharp sands into the area in an effect akin to a sand blaster. Neither character is likely to know exactly what happened, but they may learn they can replicate the results, even though they find the experience mentally fatiguing (the expenditure of a Willpower point). If they then share their findings with the crucible, more characters may come to realize what happens when they pool their Horrors. Still, until the characters practice combining their Horrors or receive training, the process is slowgoing. It shouldn't be instantaneous. The Storyteller may impose penalties, such as the characters must spend double the Willpower to first elicit the effect or the players of everyone involved must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) for their characters to concentrate and coordinate properly. This is, after all, a process of trial and error.

Ultimately, the Storyteller should play out how the characters learn to use Crucible Horrors. Panic or tutelage are two ways of learning what they can accomplish, but a moment of clarity or sheer serendipity are equally likely to bring about the desired epiphany.

Crucible Horrors are listed below alphabetically by the Shade whose first-tier Horror combines to create that effect.

APPROVAL REQUIRED

Crucible Horrors are very powerful, and they might be too much for some games, depending on how quickly a Storyteller moves her stories. These powers are available now, however, given the nature of what's happening and what's to come. They are proactive adaptations. Without the Spectres present, there's less reason for these Horrors to exist. The greater the danger, however, the more these abilities become necessary. The Storyteller determines when the characters first learn about or use Crucible Horrors.

Storytellers should feel free to let characters employ Crucible Horrors when it suits their chronicle and no earlier. If a Storyteller enjoys taking her time moving the characters through the story arc and her players read this book (and decide they want to use Crucible Horrors on simple government agents), the Storyteller is well within her rights to refuse. She can say the necessary moment of understanding hasn't yet hit the characters, meaning they must wait.

Chapter One is a good point where characters first realize they can combine their first-tier Horrors, as is the Chapter Four story "Come Together" (see p. 155). By the events of **End Game**, the crucible had *better* have practiced a couple of different Crucible Horrors if it is going to be ready for the metaplot's denouement.

BANSHEE

WAIL: STORM-GLOAM

The three women held their ground despite the flood of Spectres emerging from the hive. When the black Spectral mass was within distance, the three wailed a Banshee's chorus of destruction, their voices rending holes in the very universe around them. The Spectres had been ready for anything… or so they thought. They'd seen attacks such as Wail before, but they weren't ready for what happened next. A howling black storm erupted in front of the Banshees and interwove itself into their terrible song. Winds raged and shrieked and gusted, accelerating black obsidian sand that tore through the Spectres. The scream shredded those in its path, a razor's torrent of song and howling wind. Those Spectres that dove back into the hive would likely survive to attack another day. Those whose malice pushed them forward were cut and sliced by particulate, their existence sheared away in fistfuls of Spectral strips.

The neighborhood was safe… for this one night.

Storm-Gloam uses the Banshees' voices to rip open tiny holes in the Storm Wall — the barrier separating this world from the Underworld — unleashing and propelling a terrible maelstrom of lacerating winds and sharp black sand.



Dark clouds of gauze-scouring particulate blow through the Stormwall, bringing darkness to the area, blinding anyone caught by the fierce storm and, if the winds are furious enough, potentially stripping the gauze from anyone caught in the gusts. It affects Spectres and spooks alike (except for those involved in generating the effect, who remain behind Storm-Gloam's rents). Even if *all members* of the crucible generating the effect are manifesting, the storm never appears to or affects the living.

System: The tiny black rents in reality that allow passage for the Maelstrom's winds, open a few feet in front of the characters using Storm-Gloam. The characters directing this Horror determine which way the wind blows from its origin point, while the amount of Vitality they invest determines the duration of the winds and the area affected, as well as the severity of the gusts.

The table below details the duration, the wind speeds and the degree of damage inflicted by this Horror. The "F" scale mentioned here is the Fujita scale, which meteorologists use to gauge the strength of tornados — a vivid indicator of the power unleashed by Storm-Gloam.

At the basic level of five Vitality, the winds are distracting but relatively tame, though the howling gusts and swirling darkness still impair perception. At this level, the winds blow along a relatively narrow course, in a "tube" about five feet in diameter. Each additional point of Vitality invested increases the diameter of the wind tunnel by one foot. A crucible investing 12 points of Vitality into Storm-Gloam, then, can create a powerful and blinding storm gust 12 feet in diameter — more than enough to eliminate an alley full of Spectres. Storm-Gloam's range, however, increases by five feet for every point of Vitality invested, meaning its base range is 25 feet.

All winds *above* an F2 rating can blow a target, forcefully, against the nearest hard surface or blast him to the ground for bashing damage in addition to the flaying damage inflicted by the biting sand crystals. Any target in the storm not wearing eye protection is blinded by its effects for one to ten turns (even at F0). The player of anyone foolish enough to look into the blasting winds of F1 or higher strength gusts must succeed on a Stamina roll (difficulty equal to the F rating: difficulty two at F2, three at F3, etc.) or his character is blinded for (10– Stamina) days by the sharp sands. Botching the Stamina Roll means the character suffers permanent blindness.

The damage from this Crucible Horror stems from two sources. The first is bashing damage inflicted by the buffeting winds and the targets impacting hard surfaces (if they lose their footing or grip). If a target is being thrown about, he suffers the bashing damage each turn. If the winds pin him to the floor or a wall, he suffers the bashing damage only once. To determine if this happens, the target's player must roll Dexterity/Stamina + Athletics (difficulty 5 + the storm's F rating). A failure means he hits the surface once and is possibly pinned (Strength roll to pull free, difficulty equal to the storm's F rating). A botch means the target is now airborne and is being slammed about, taking the storm's level of bashing damage each turn (though the target can grab on to something to anchor himself, taking damage only once more if successful: Dexterity + Athletic/Brawl, difficulty 5 + the storm's F rating). The second form of damage, lethal, comes from sharp sands ripping through gauze like shrapnel. The targets sustain the listed lethal damage *every turn they remain in the area of effect*, with the storm winds eroding their gauze. A target who cannot escape Storm-Gloam can easily have his skin flayed from his body if the winds are intense enough.

Seeking shelter in a vehicle or building protects a target from the force of Storm-Gloam until winds reach F2 or F3 severity, at which point the winds pass through the object. Such shelter decreases the storm's power by two F grades for each interceding object, meaning an F3 becomes F1 if a wall stands between the characters and their target. This also means Storytellers must modify the Wind Speed, Damage and Perception Roll Modifiers accordingly (see below, though the Duration remains the same). Two walls mean the storm is effectively neutralized past the second obstacle. Once the storm hits F4 or F5, however, each

Vitality	Duration	F Scale	Wind Speed (in mph)	Damage*	Perception Roll Modifier
5-7	5 turns	F0	40-72	1L	None
8-10	7 turns	F1	73-112	2L	+1 to difficulty
11-13	11 turns	F2	113-157	4L/2B	+2 to difficulty
14-16	17 turns	F3	158-206	6L/4B	+3 to difficulty
17-19	25 turns	F4	207-260	8L/6B	+4 to difficulty
20-22	35 turns	F5	261-318	10L, 8B	Difficulty 10
23+	Rest of scene	F6	319-379	12L, 10B	Difficulty 10

*** Note:** While the damage seems negligible for a power of this magnitude, its destructive capacity rests in its ability to affect large areas and many targets.

interceding object only decreases the storm's effectiveness by one F rating. This means there would have to be four walls along the length of the blast to bring an F4 down to F0. An F6, however, is a different beast, and its winds can ignore intervening obstacles along Storm-Gloam's path.

HAUNTER

INHABIT: ESCHER'S CORKSCREW

Some structures were just put together bad. This one started bad and got worse when the Spectres took over. Now, the four spooks, led by Hoyt, were doing something about it.

"I know it's too big to do alone," Hoyt said, "but if we all take possession of this mother at once, we can get some real results. You follow me?"

The other three nodded, uncertain but game nonetheless — they'd never tried anything of this magnitude before. With trepidation, the four spooks merged with the building, slipping and moving over one another like liquids with different viscosities — oil and water ghosts.

Inside the building, madness reigned. Spectres mounting stairs found themselves in an unending ascent that brought them nowhere. The very structure of the building turned against the Spectres and harmed them where it could. Those on the top floors were battered against the floor, walls and ceiling as gravity reversed direction several times.

The four spooks only racked up three Spectre kills that day, but they knew they'd completely disrupted anything those malicious bastards were planning.

And that was enough.

This incredibly powerful Crucible Horror allows ghosts to completely possess or inhabit a building or structure, controlling the very laws of physics within. The spooks can create blood, stretch space, reverse gravity or perform any number of other traditional haunting maneuvers. Those within the building are at the mercy of the controlling ghosts.

System: The characters' initial investment of five Vitality allows them to possess a building or large object (like a boat or 18-wheeler) for a scene and to know everything that's happening along the structure's every square foot. It's a limited omniscience hemmed in by the structure's interior walls and limited to the six senses (the sixth being Dead-Eyes). The characters eliciting this effect can also communicate with one another, creating whispers in the walls that people and spooks can hear but not understand. After that, characters can purchase additional special effects à la carte with more expenditures of Vitality.

The following effects are general examples of the characters' ability to control physics within the building's environs. These are, by no means, all the available tricks that characters can generate, but it provides players with ideas and Storytellers with Vitality-cost guidelines for other applications of this Crucible Horror.

Basic Animation: (one Vitality per five actions) One action allows spooks controlling the building to manipulate some portion of the interior, slamming doors, controlling elevators, shattering windows, turning on lights, turning off a furnace or performing other simple acts. The characters can cause selective blackouts with this power by controlling the building's electrical systems.

Structure Manipulation: (two Vitality per manipulation) The spooks can alter the basic layout of the building for the duration of a scene. The possessing ghosts can create or delete doors, rooms and whole floors, though not when someone is in the room or on the targeted floor. They can "create" new rooms in a building even if it seemingly violates the laws of physics, but the room always appears similar to those around it, like a mirror. By moving, adding and deleting walls, the characters can turn a regular office building into a terrifying, three-dimensional, shifting labyrinth.

Sound Manipulation: (one Vitality per 10 minutes) The spooks can warp sound to their liking. Effects the ghosts can generate include: causing sound to echo or sound hollow, turning all speech into whispers, causing loud sounds to be soft, causing soft sounds to be deafening or negating a specific noise entirely (characters can't nullify everyone's ability to speak, but they can prevent specific people from speaking).

Matter Creation: (one Vitality per 10 cubic feet of substance) Trails of ectoplasm, elevators full of blood, toilets spewing rotten viscera… these are all classic indicators of a haunting. The characters can use this power to create any of these substances, or worse, but the material must be organic in nature (blood, vomit, ectoplasm, semen, bones, viscera, snot, sewage, rotten meat, maggots, etc.). Additionally, the matter evaporates completely once the scene ends. Given the nature of the ability, the Vitality cost may not seem expensive, but it adds up quickly; filling an elevator half full with blood is 120 cubic feet of material, thus costing characters 12 Vitality. Characters cannot control the substance, unless they combine it with one of the listed effects (Gravity Redirection to cause blood to flow up walls, or Damage for the liquid to burn like acid).

Gravity Redirection: (two Vitality per gravity shift, for the scene's duration) Characters can make up down, causing victims to crash onto the ceiling, or sideways down, causing victims to smash against a wall or through a window. For the duration of this Horror, the characters determine gravity's pull within the confines of the building. They can even have gravity pull in different

directions in different rooms, if they so choose, making it particularly entertaining to chase a terrified victim from room to room. Suspending gravity to create a zero-g environment costs one Vitality per minute.

Temperature Manipulation: (one Vitality per three degrees change in room temperature, *or* one Vitality per 10 degrees shift in items smaller than a large computer monitor) The first application allows spooks to play with the temperature in any and all portions of the building, making rooms freezing cold or as hot as hell. The change in temperature is instantaneous and lasts the scene. The latter application lets the characters freeze or melt small objects, though trying to hurt antagonists in this fashion requires the Damage effect.

Spatial Manipulation: (one Vitality for every doubling/halving of space) This allows the characters to "expand" or "shrink" space, making short hallways seem miles long or large rooms contract enough to trigger claustrophobic attacks. The effect lasts for a minute.

Spatial Flexion: (two Vitality for every 90 degrees of curvature of one area) The characters can make space itself curve, causing bullets to veer off at strange angles or causing the world itself to appear twisted and contorted beyond belief. The structure's interior becomes its own funhouse mirror reflection, terrifying those inside (especially those who fear they're suffering flashbacks from that acid they dropped in college…). This does not damage people, however, but it can affect Perception or Dexterity related rolls (increasing the difficulty of related actions by one for every two Vitality points expended in a specific effect). The effect lasts a scene.

Temporal Manipulation: (two Vitality for every doubling/halving the normal flow of time) The spooks can speed up or slow down time for those inside a room, though this affects everyone in the room, except the characters. One moment the world moves at twice its normal rate, leaving targets in the dust, and the next moment, they're trapped in slow motion, moving like they were suspended in molasses. For time bursts, the targets' Wits and Perception suffer, increasing related difficulties by one for every two points of Vitality expended in the effect. For temporal lurches, the targets' Dexterity and Wits suffer equally. The effect lasts for a scene.

Solidification: (one Vitality per room for 10 minutes) A nasty effect, Solidification makes rooms, or entire buildings, "solid" to the intangible, meaning spooks and Spectres can't pass through walls and door as they once did. Everything within the affected area (furniture, etc.) is now also solid, meaning Helter Skelter can use real world objects to harm spooks and Spectres. This is a great way to create temporary havens for besieged characters seeking a respite from Spectres. Nobody can ripcord or use Storm-Wending to enter or exit the room during the effect's duration.

Damage: (one Vitality per 2B in damage, or two Vitality per 1L) This allows the characters to hurt an opponent using the effects above. Any number of the aforementioned abilities can hurt their targets, but only if they were capable of affecting the target in the first place. An incorporeal ghost will feel the effect of reversed gravity, but if he hits a wall, he'll likely fall through it. If the characters use Solidification to make the walls real, then the gravity reversal is capable of hurting the target (by slamming him into the ceiling with great force, for example). Otherwise, Sound Manipulation may produce painful noises, Matter Creation may create toxic substances, Temperature Manipulation may burn opponents, etc. The Storyteller is final arbiter in the damage capabilities of an effect. He can refuse to let a doorknob impale a target for 10L damage, for example, instead enabling the attack to do 4B.

PHANTASM

BEDLAM: TERRIBLE MADNESS

The killer thought he was clever in luring Grace and Thaddeus into the back room, not realizing they were merely manifesting. By that point, he'd locked the door and stuffed the key in his pants pocket. With that, out came the gun.

"I'm going to hurt you so good," he said, gloating and eager. He walked to a cabinet full of stained torture implements, his gun trained on the pair.

Eye contact between Grace and Thad was all they needed to coordinate their attack.

The killer's eyes widened suddenly, the room around him twisting into a nightmarish vista to beggar his own malevolent inclinations and fantasies. Judgment. Pain. Humiliation. The nightmare appeared all around him and closed in on him like a trap. His mind couldn't handle its immensity, the infinite fears of his own mind coming to devour him. He screamed and fell to his knees, vomiting. He lay there in his own puke, staring at the ceiling, not moving but to breathe.

Grace glanced at Thad, a look of distaste on her pretty face. "So, are you getting the key or am I?"

With Bedlam, a Phantasm can ensnare targets in a frightening illusion. Terrible Madness is similar in that it traps the foe in an illusion, but in this case, the illusion is one so powerful and terrifying that it causes debilitating psychological symptoms in the target. Not only does Terrible Madness seemingly shatter reality's laws, but it also draws on the target's memories, emotions, fears and insecurities to provide the illusion's devastating psychological impact. Sanity, even reality itself, breaks down

before the target's eyes, resulting in what amounts to massive psychological hemorrhaging.

While the effect is temporary, the target goes spectacularly insane in response to the visions that fuel his fears, going so far as to suffer physically as well. This effect is akin to those seen in horror films, where the victim sees something so horrific that his hair turns white from terror or he simply drops dead on the spot.

System: The target of Terrible Madness receives a contested Willpower roll against the combined Willpower scores of this Horror's active participants (difficulty 6 for everyone involved). If he wins one success, the target can resist Terrible Madness for two turns before the characters can try their attack again. If he succeeds by two successes, he can fight the effects for four turns, while three or more successes means he's immune to further attempts for the entire scene. If he loses, the Horror's effects kick in, and he goes horribly mad, in addition to suffering any number of physical complications (different rules apply for Spectres; see below for details).

One ghost, sickened by the visions swirling before her, may vomit forth Vitality, while another simply sits in a corner, trapped in a terrible malaise and losing one point of Willpower per turn. The symptoms of the target's madness depend on the nature and tone of the psychological onslaught (i.e., which of the target's stats the characters' players target). While the characters often know little or nothing about their opponent's psychological makeup, they do have an intent in mind. They may want to distract or slow down a fast opponent, not realizing that by attacking his Dexterity, they're encouraging his fears of having his legs amputated or forcing him to relive a particularly nasty leg break. The players know their intent, but the Storyteller decides on the target's emotional response. Conversely, given the **Orpheus** series' spirit is about "participating" instead of "watching," the Storyteller may allow the players some insight into the target's phobia and allow them to weave the nightmare. This tack is good for active participation, making the Horror more dynamic.

The severity and duration of the target's madness depend entirely on the crucible's Vitality expenditure. The first five points of Vitality trap the target in the insanity but have no lasting repercussions once the crucible ceases concentrating on the effect. In this case, the power acts like a five-point Vitality manifestation of Bedlam, affecting the target's six senses with highly personal fears and hallucinations. The minute someone breaks the characters' concentration or they engage in other actions, Terrible Madness' illusions end. Otherwise, once the base-form nightmare takes hold, the characters can *temporarily* decrease any of the Traits listed below, reducing them by one dot per two additional Vitality points channeled into the effect. Dots return to the target at a rate of one per hour, with the psychological scarring a shadow on their spirits for that time. If the crucible is feeling particularly malevolent, however, they can *permanently* remove dots from any given Trait by spending 10 Vitality points per dot to do so.

While the characters target their opponent's Traits, their adversary is trapped within the psychosis, experiencing everything with the vivid flourish of all six senses. That doesn't mean the target isn't aware of others around him. Until the targeted Trait hits zero, the victim can fight back, often lashing out with all his might at whatever rests beyond the illusion's periphery. This is usually considered blind fighting, as per the rules established in the core book (see **Orpheus**, p. 229). The following are a list of Traits that characters can target, as well as the effects of doing so.

Willpower: A gray depression of horizon-spanning proportions falls over the character, sapping his desire to do anything. At 0 Willpower, the target slips into an unresponsive catatonic state.

Dexterity: Tics and tremors overcome the target, or old injuries/illnesses/phobias resurface psychologically. If the target falls to 0 Dexterity, the ailment is so severe that he is in a constant state of suffering and can't even stand.

Charisma: The gibbering, freakish madness suffered by the target is distasteful to all those around her, impairing her ability to sway or charm others. At 0 Charisma, the target's behavior is so vile that others can't even stand to be in the same room with her.

Appearance: The horrors besetting the target lock her face into a grimace, a leer, a look of horror or any other distinctly unattractive expression. At 0 Appearance, the target's muscles actually constrict so much that the skin around the neck and face appears torn or so terribly strained that the target is truly horrible to look at.

Manipulation: The attack renders the target so mad that she can barely control her own actions, much less the actions of those around her. At 0 Manipulation, the target's speech is either so unintelligible or foul that she alienates anyone she tries swaying.

Perception: The target is so lost to his own insanity that he's insensible to external stimuli, losing some or even all of his ability to perceive the surrounding world. At 0 Perception, the target is utterly psychotic and cannot perceive the real world whatsoever through the thick walls of his delusions and hallucinations.

Intelligence: The target loses his mental capacity to function. At 0 Intelligence, the target is so shocked by the terrible things he witnesses that he often regresses

WHAT ABOUT SPECTRES?

Terrible Madness has a particularly interesting effect on Spectres, who are connected through the hive-mind. The hive-mind grants them degrees of (what passes for) stability — or at least a certain degree of psychological inertia — making them harder to affect with this Horror.

When the crucible uses this Horror against a Spectre, a contested Willpower roll is made — the crucible's combined Willpower against the target Spectre's. The crucible's difficulty is 8, however, while the target's is 6. If the crucible rolls more successes than the Spectre, Terrible Madness takes effect. If the Spectre ties the crucible or gains more successes, it means the hive-mind helped to stabilize the Spectre enough to ward off the madness. The same degrees of success enabling the target to fight Terrible Madness for two turns, four turns or an entire scene still apply here.

If a Spectre succumbs to this Horror and the crucible targets the Spectre's Spite till it reaches zero, the Spectre is overcome with terrible guilt for all the horrible things it committed during its time as a Spectre. It will, in all likelihood, become incapacitated by grief and, in whatever way it can, seek forgiveness from someone or something.

If the Spectre is alone, the crucible can use this opportunity to try and reach the Spectre, to rescue it from its condition. If the Spectre is *not* alone, its associates immediately attack the targeted Spectre to kill it and to prevent its guilt from potentially corrupting the hive-mind like a virus. For every turn the targeted Spectre continues to feel guilt, there's a one in ten chance (a one on a ten-sided die) that another nearby Spectre senses its cohort's overwhelming guilt and succumbs to it as well. The following turn, both Spectres have a one in ten chance of spreading their misery to others, affecting them as though struck down by the Spite-draining facet of this Horror. This costs the characters nothing, though the affected Spectres can only lose a maximum number of points equal to the first target's Spite. Thus, if a Spectre has three Spite, meaning it can't lose more than it has, a subsequently infected Reaper with 10 Spite can't lose more than three points.

into infancy or shuts down, losing all capacity for logic and reason.

Wits: The madness caused by this Horror renders the target delusional. Unable to distinguish reality from hallucinations, her Wits rating suffers, and she cannot think clearly. At 0 Wits, the target can't handle any situation more complex than a simple child's show without covering his eyes and ears and retreating from the emotional stress.

Vitality: A spook may feel she's burning up with Vitality and wants to rid herself of it — if only to sink into the cooler abyss. Or Vitality feels toxic and nauseating, causing the victim to disgorge it.

Spite: See the "What About Spectres?" sidebar.

POLTERGEIST

HELTER SHELTER: PUPPET STORM

The three spooks ran into the street, surprising the small group of Spectres arrayed against them. Ben Cotton took lead and yelled, "Now!"

The woman to his left and the man on his right didn't hesitate. They'd trained with Cotton long enough to know his every reaction and nuance. Silver tendrils flicked from their fingertips, multiple threads impaling each Spectre. The surprised Spectres tried running forward, to attack, but they were no longer touching the ground. Instead, the three spooks yanked them around by the silver tendrils like ugly marionettes.

"Torque 'em," Cotton shouted.

"With extreme prejudice," answered his colleagues. The threads yanked and pulled the Spectres, slamming them against walls, asphalt, cars and parking meters. The Spectres didn't expect to be forced into manifesting. Other threads pulled the Spectres' bodies in opposite directions, tearing their gauze and shredding their forms. The attack left no surface untouched by dark ichor or plasm, the Spectres smeared or battered lumps decaying at the ends of the tendrils.

The rules in **Orpheus** explicitly state that Helter Skelter's silver tendrils cannot affect gauze or flesh. When two or more spooks combine Helter Skelter into the Crucible Horror Puppet Storm, however, the power has no such limits. This terrible ability is destructive and nasty, allowing a crucible to throw a person, spook or Spectre around as easily as any Poltergeist manipulating books or a crescent wrench. More so, this Horror causes intangible targets to manifest physically, whether they possess the ability to do so or not. The crucible can batter targets against walls, spin them around so fast that blood sprays from their eyes from the centrifugal force or pull them in opposing directions to rip the targets apart.



That's not to say this Crucible Horror is singularly destructive. Characters can hang targets upside down 'til they talk, induce motion sickness like a wild ride or yank targets up in the air and drop them.

System: This Crucible Horror appears similar to Helter Skelter (see **Orpheus**, pp. 106-108), except it allows spooks to handle flesh and gauze as well. The initial expenditure of five Vitality creates more potent, silver strands for one turn, with subsequent turns requiring an additional point of Vitality (to reflect the power necessary to fuel such destructive forces). At minimum expenditure, only one strand appears, with one automatic dot in Strength and Dexterity.

A strand's starting range is 30 yards, but the weight each strand can lift and manipulate is now equal to one human-sized ghost/Spectre per dot of Strength or 100 pounds of living matter (ghosts and Spectres don't really have "weight," hence the discrepancy). Each strand equals one dot of Strength, meaning for two dots of Strength, the characters can either grab two separate targets or nail one adversary with two strands. This is important because the aforementioned "torque" effect provides that every two dots in Strength targeting one adversary delivers 1L damage, to simulate the strands working in opposition to one another. Bear in mind that the Strength value, in this case, is more an indication of potential damage being inflicted against opponents and not straight lifting capacity. Each point of Strength can deliver one level of bashing damage, while every two points of Strength targeting one adversary delivers one lethal (or two bashing).

To simplify all of this, the first five Vitality points create one tether with one dot in Dexterity and Strength. Each additional Vitality point expended on Strength creates a new strand. Each strand equals one dot of Strength and, thus, one level of bashing damage. Two strands equal two dots in Strength and can inflict one level of lethal damage (if the two strands are targeting one opponent). Strands can target one or multiple targets.

Dexterity, likewise, works differently in that each dot in Dexterity applies to *all* the strands simultaneously. Unfortunately, while the characters can handle an equal number of opponents without penalty, every additional target beyond that drops the effective Dexterity score of this Horror by one.

Each additional point of Vitality invested in this Crucible Horror can do one of the following:

- Force one target to manifest
- Add one dot to the Horror's Dexterity
- Add one tether, thereby adding one dot of Strength
- Extend the effect for one additional turn
- Increase the strands' range by five yards

This Horror can inflict either bashing or lethal damage, as mentioned previously. Bashing damage stems predominantly from the characters using the strands' dots in Strength to smash opponents into solid objects. To do so, however, they must channel Vitality into the strand, thus forcing intangible opponents to manifest. Otherwise, characters can only bash intangible opponents against the ground, so long as a sewer line, tunnel or floor isn't directly below (or they'll fall through, snapping the silver tether). At the Storyteller's discretion, the targets may take less damage (say, if the surface is padded) or more damage (if the surface is covered with pipes and debris).

Lethal damage works differently in that two or more strands work in tandem to pull or twist the target in opposite directions (effectively torquing the opponent). This causes internal stresses and injuries first, hence the lethal damage. To harm a target this way, the strands must operate in even numbers or pairs (two, four, six, eight strands, etc.) to provide an even distribution of pull and twist. Otherwise, the disparity in the application of Strength on opposing parts of the body creates a tug-of-war effect instead of a coordinated effort.

If the characters don't want to hurt the target excessively, they can simply swing the opponent around rapidly at the end of his tether, allowing centrifugal force do their work. Being swung around this way inflicts one level of bashing damage per strand per turn (if the characters wish) and requires the target's player to roll Stamina + Athletics (difficulty 5 + the number of strands involved). If the roll succeeds, the victim's fine for the moment. If the roll fails, he loses one dot in Stamina (affecting subsequent Stamina + Athletics rolls). Regardless, however, the target automatically loses a dot in Dexterity for every two turns he's inflicted with this torture. He regains these dots at a rate of one every two minutes once the ride ends.

This Horror can affect living and intangible targets regardless of the crucible's current status. Unlike the strands created by Helter Skelter, there is no maximum Vitality the crucible can infuse into the tether, so long as the characters have enough to fuel the effect. Additionally, while the strands can force an opponent to manifest, he doesn't appear visibly. He is tangible, but invisible. That's right. This means characters can use this power to allow their own crucible-mates to fly or even to stay invisible while manifesting, rendering this a very useful ability.

Finally, just because a target is dangling on a string doesn't mean he can't retaliate. The victims of Puppet Storm can attack, though their relevant dice pools are decreased by one die for every dot in the Horror's Dexterity rating (final rating, not the total number of dots purchased to offset penalties).

SKINRIDER

PUPPETRY: MOB RULE

Chet, Terrance and two young Skinriders watched the street, spotting the lowlife drug peddlers and gangbangers who kept neighborhood children indoors and turned the area into a Spectre farm. It was time to change things around here. It was time to fight back.

The four concentrated, their eyes rolling into the backs of their heads, their minds ebbing out and touching those around them. All along the block, doors and windows opened, and frustrated citizens walked out of their homes and apartment blocks. Many carried guns or makeshift clubs. The street hoodlums took immediate notice.

"Leave. You're not wanted here anymore," the chorus of citizens said in unison, and they advanced on the startled thugs, none of whom had the chance to draw their guns. Those who didn't flee found themselves beaten to within an inch of their lives, but the message was clear — this wasn't their neighborhood, anymore.

"What d'you think?" Chet asked Terrance, after everyone had returned home, leaving an empty, but safer street.

"They'll be back... probably tonight. Probably bring some friends, too, for backup."

"Good. We'll be waiting for the pricks. They'll get the message eventually."

This Crucible Horror doesn't so much grant the ability to skinride multiple targets so much as it allows the crucible to exert a form of hive-mind control over them, linking the crucible and its mortal drones in such a way that they act in unison. While under the crucible's control, the mob exists with one thought and one goal: to follow the crucible's orders. The crucible, on the other hand, sees through the mortal drones' eyes, hears through their ears and speaks through their mouths.

The crucible uses each mortal drone as another body part. The mob, in essence, serves as limbs of the same body. What one sees, they all see. What one feels, they all feel. In this way, the crucible coordinates the actions of a large group.

System: For the characters to exert control over multiple targets, roll Charisma + Leadership or Manipulation + Subterfuge (difficulty 5; the average of Willpower) for each. A success means a character can exert his control over others, while a failure means he can't participate in the effort (there must be a minimum of two active participants for this Crucible Horror to work). The initial expenditure of five Vitality enables the crucible to control up to five human targets (this Crucible Horror has no effect on ghosts). Each additional mortal drone costs one Vitality.

The spooks can control any number of mortal drones equal to the sum of the Wits Attribute of the characters involved in the effort (so three spooks whose Wits are 3, 3 and 4 can control a maximum of 10 mortal drones). They must decide from the onset, however, how many people they plan to control and cannot increase that value without starting anew. Regardless of Wits scores, however, the characters can control a minimum of five people.

Once the characters establish control, they can see, hear, feel, etc. through the mortal drones' five senses (meaning no supernatural abilities such as Dead-Eyes) without suffering their injuries (unless they incapacitate a sense). The spooks can also manipulate their mortal drones in one of two ways. In the first, the characters can concentrate to control their mob, thus affording it a great degree of finesse and a wide range of actions. The drawback to this method is that the characters cannot move or engage in other actions, since it requires considerable effort to manipulate and coordinate a group of people. For every action or interruption suffered by the characters (they evade a blow, someone strikes a character, etc.), they lose control of one mortal drone. To regain control, the characters must begin the process from square one. Otherwise, they must continue with the number they have.

Additionally, the characters must spend Vitality to maintain active control over the mob. If the situation is noncombative, the characters must spend one Vitality every minute for every two mortal drones they control (round up, meaning three drones costs two Vitality every minute). If the mob is involved in combat, the characters must expend one Vitality per two mortal drones every turn (to reflect combat's frenetic nature). This method of control is obviously expensive, but the mob suffers no penalties to its actions.

The second method of control enables crucibles that don't want to baby-sit their mortal drones with the option of "programming" prearranged commands into the minds of their mob. The base expenditure of five Vitality enables a crucible to instill one command in the entire mob, such as: "follow that man," "act crazy" or "attack Robert Rice." In this case, characters can move around and engage in other actions, except they suffer penalties to their dice pools as though pursuing multiple actions. The reason is that the characters still hear and see through their puppets' eyes and ears, meaning they're more preoccupied. Each command programmed into the mob serves to eliminate one die from the characters' respective dice pools for all subsequent actions.

For an additional point of Vitality, the crucible can "program" the mob with an additional command. They can also give one mortal drone a specific command not shared by the others, but that too costs a point of Vitality.

Example: Chet Mason and two Skinrider allies use Mob Rule to take over the minds of five skate punks loitering on the corner (five Vitality expenditure). At this point, Chet and his accomplices sense everything the skate punks sense, and with the five arrayed down the length of Newbury Street, the spooks have great coverage for surveillance. Active coverage has a serious drawback, however: The three spooks would have to sit quietly and concentrate to maintain control over their drones, which they can't afford to do. Instead, the crucible's players decide to use the freebie command that comes with the base expenditure of five Vitality and give the five skaters the shared command "Keep watch over this street."

Still, having five kids loitering on the streets, watching everything intently might seem suspicious (and dangerous to the kids), so for an additional point of Vitality, the crucible tacks on the additional command "Keep out of sight." That's a total of six Vitality so far.

Chet and his buddies can later split the group and give each a separate assignment. Giving one drone the command "Watch this door" (+1 Vitality), two more drones the commands "Block this street" (+1 Vitality because it's shared) "and attack anyone with a gun" (another +1 Vitality shared) and commanding the last two drones to "Enter that building, go up to the roof and shine a flashlight down to the street" (+3 Vitality for three separate orders) requires a total Vitality expenditure of 12 Vitality (6+1+1+1+3).

While this form of Mob Rule is more Vitality effective, it does have its drawbacks. Specifically, the programmed drones act and move like automatons. They look out of place, and their actions suffer penalties to their dice pool based on the number of commands shared between two or more people. Each shared command robs the drones of one die from all dice pools. This variant of Mob Rule lasts a scene.

While the characters contributing to this Horror must remain within 10 feet of one another, the range for controlling drones is a radius of three blocks, with no eye contact necessary (the characters cannot use this as a form of radar to detect the number of people in the area or their locations). Drones who wander (or are taken) beyond that range experience (1d10) turns of disorientation, during which they're uncertain of their identity or actions.

When a drone is no longer influenced by Mob Rule, he has no memory of being commanded or controlled in any way. He remembers his own actions through a haze, but he hasn't the slightest idea why he was doing what he did. If his actions contradicted his normal inclinations, he'll be at a complete loss to explain his behavior.

Mob Rule Imperatives

Each of the following 20 simple phrases are examples of a single command that the crucible can offer mortal drones under its control. Storytellers and players can use these as guidelines or use them directly. They include:

Wait here
Rip him apart
Find this person
Guard this building
Run away
Hide in the shadows
Lift me up
Bring me that object
Barricade that door
Scream
Follow her
Dig in the basement
Light the fuse
Throw me that rope
Untie me
Stop traffic
Unlock the door
Turn off the computer
Climb over that fence
Pull the switch

Mob Rule can be extremely disorienting to those using it, and the more mortal drones the characters control, the more severe the disorientation. From the spooks' perspective, they've gone from one set of senses to five or more. This means the difficulty for all personal actions increases by one for every two mortal drones being controlled. The characters, however, can split the penalties among themselves to offset the confusion. Unlike Puppetry, the crucible using this Horror does not have access to their drones' memories or Abilities. Additionally, rather than stating out each drones' Traits, the Storyteller can template their basic Attributes atop that of the characters.

Finally, the potential for abuse here is great, so the Storyteller may allow drones to make contested Willpower rolls against one character to refuse engaging in some act they wouldn't normally do. The Storyteller can even demand the players roll for Spite points if their characters cause harm to a mortal drone (or give the characters a Spite rating if a drone dies).

Wisp

Unearthly Repose: Ecstatic Crusade

The Spectres closed in, preparing to deliver the two spooks back to the hive.

John Carruthers sensed Michael trembling. John, however, felt strangely calm, given the circumstances.

"You remember the plan, right?" John asked.

Michael nodded. He'd only been a projector for a few months, and this was all new to him. If he hadn't met John, he'd be dead by now.

Eyes closed and slight smiles on both their faces, they began Unearthly Repose, intertwining and braiding their energies together, creating something more in the sum of their contributions. John opened his eyes and stared at Michael, who now appeared exalted. Michael glowed with renewed and invigorated inner light, which he used as a spiritual beacon to reach out to the lost souls all around them. The Spectres shrunk from the glow.

Within moments, the light's clarion call beckoned to a small army of ghosts, and the cluster of fearful Spectres found themselves surrounded and in for the battle of their existences.

When a crucible uses Ecstatic Crusade, it targets one of its own members to serve as a medium, transforming her into a shining beacon of inspiration for local one to five Vitality ghosts. For this Horror's duration, the target character acts like a bright flare, drawing ghosts from their routine and offering them something upon which to focus beyond the haze afflicting them. The call of the Wisp offers low-ebb spirits a sense that they are somehow whole, part of something important and not weighed down by death. They can temporarily break free of their repetitive patterns and pursue actions on behalf of the Wisp (and friends) because Ecstatic Crusade serves as a new and more appealing focus. This Horror is comparable to cult hypnosis or religious fervor, where members focus on and devote their full energy to a singular purpose, working toward it with all their ability. More importantly, this Crucible Horror invigorates spirits with energy, granting them increased Vitality and the fervor to follow the medium character into battle if necessary. This Horror can either serve as a rallying cry in battle or as a lure to draw local ghosts to a safe area.

System: At the base expenditure of five Vitality, the crucible attracts nearby ghosts whose cumulative Vitality does not exceed 10 (i.e., 10 drones with a single point of Vitality each, five blips with two Vitality apiece, three blips with three points each, etc. or any mix thereof), and it raises their Willpower and Vitality scores by one. This Crucible Horror is dependent on the

number of low-ebb ghosts in the area, so trying this in the center of a recently built research park won't be as effective as attempting it in the middle of a cemetery or at the site of a terrible tragedy. Regardless, this Horror should always draw a minimum of two ghosts, meaning the Storyteller can always fiddle with their Vitalities to make the characters' expense in the matter worthwhile — this includes areas recently ravaged by hungry Spectres (there are *always* survivors).

The one to three Vitality spirits that appear are understandably weak but very enthusiastic about following the characters. In large part, it's their absence of self-identity that allows this Horror to summon drones and blips, and it's their new sense of purpose that gives them their intense desire to follow the characters. Those ghosts with Vitality ratings of four or five, however, have a strong identity and choose to appear. Some seek safety in numbers given the Spectre invasion, while others feel a sense of purpose emanating from the beacon (or feel strengthened by it). This doesn't mean they'll follow the characters blindly, however. They may not agree with certain choices or they may contest some decisions, but they are more willing to help, regardless.

Finally, the person acting as the beacon is almost equivalent to a living relic. The nimbus glow shining from him bothers Spectres and creatures of high Spite. Everyone whose Spite rating is greater than their Vitality rating has difficulty staying within proximity of the beacon, unless they are allies, friends or among the summoned. At Ecstatic Crusade's base expenditure of five Vitality, Spectres (or high-Spite antagonists) lose one die to all dice pools when trying to act within sight of the beacon.

Additional Vitality spent does one of the following:

• Attracts more ghosts by elevating the beacon's strength. Each additional point of Vitality invested in this Horror increases the Vitality total of the responding ghosts by two, granting the newcomers a boost of one Willpower and one Vitality as well. Channeling eight Vitality into this Horror, for example, nets a group of ghosts with a total of 16 Vitality (16 drones, eight blips with two Vitality each, etc.)

• Characters can temporarily heighten a single ghost's Vitality rating by an additional one, making him more vital and passionate about following the characters (only if he responds to the beacon). The crucible can invest up to two points of extra Vitality in a single ghost (on a point-per-point basis, beyond the initial investment), ignoring the normal proscription on exceeding the ghost's existing rating (a drone could never temporarily go beyond a rating of Vitality 1, previously). For this to take effect, however, the ghost must reach the beacon first. No ghost, however, can exceed a maximum Vitality cap of six.

• The characters can infuse the beacon with even more soul-searing light. Every two points of Vitality increases the discomfort felt by Spectres by eliminating an additional die from their respective dice pools.

• Echo-class ghosts do not gain the Willpower advantage available to blips and drones (mentioned in the paragraph below). The characters, however, can increase the Willpower of an Echo-class spirit by one for each point of Vitality spent. The Echo-class spirit must first go to the beacon voluntarily, however.

While Echo-class ghosts arrive and stay of their own volition, the drones and blips summoned by this Horror are inexorably drawn to the characters. They aren't just *willing* to follow the characters, they're aggressively *eager* to follow the crucible. They'll do anything the characters ask of them, including entering violent situations and fighting till their destruction. For purposes of following the characters' commands, these ghosts have an effective Willpower rating of 10.

While blips and drones are typically unable to use the high-Vitality manifestation forms or power Horrors at any but the most basic levels, bestowed Vitality now enables them to use their Vitality to their utmost to manifest or fuel Horrors, so long as they retain a single point to maintain their existence. During this power's duration, they may even regain their bestowed Vitality by spending Willpower (like the characters). Note that blips and drones can't spend from their effective "10" rating (as mentioned above), but they can spend the additional point of Willpower offered when Ecstatic Crusade first beckoned them (meaning they may spend up to their original Willpower ratings + 1).

This Horror's normal duration is one scene. If matters extend beyond one scene, the crucible can maintain it by investing 10 additional Vitality at the beginning of the next scene, for a maximum of three scenes. Once the duration of Ecstatic Crusade ends, any bestowed Vitality and Willpower fades, as does the temporary burst of enthusiasm. All of the blips and drones return to their previous habits or just mill around the area, most forgetting about events within the space of 24 hours. Echo-class ghosts, however, can remain of their own volition and might do so because the characters provide them with security and camaraderie.

As with the Poltergeist's Mob Rule, if the characters deliberately cause the ghosts' destruction or humiliation, the Storyteller can penalize the characters with Spite points or a rating. By the same token, the Storyteller should realize that there's a difference between leading these spooks into war, where casualties are a grim reality, and

DRONE AND BLIP ABILITIES

As mentioned in the **Orpheus** core book, low-ebb ghosts are far more limited in what they can accomplish than the characters. To their advantage, they rarely have Spite ratings over 1.

Drones possess a Vitality of 1 and can only use their Shade's zero-Vitality manifestation forms. They also have access to their Shade's basic Horror, which they can only use at the zero-Vitality expenditure.

Blips are moderately more useful since they have Vitality ratings of 2 or 3. They can therefore use their Shade's zero- and one-Vitality manifestation forms, and they can activate Horrors at the one-and two-Vitality levels.

While under the influence of Ecstatic Crusade, drones and blips regain Vitality at the normal rate up to the augmented maximum bestowed upon them by this Horror.

For more information on the abilities of drones and blips, see the **Orpheus** core book, pages 189 and 279.

directing them into a massacre. Additionally, if the characters continue to use the same spooks for Ecstatic Crusade, they gain bonuses for resolving their tethers and elevating them permanently. If the characters use the same ghost more than twice with this Horror and decide to elevate her, the Storyteller can reduce all difficulty penalties by two, when related to Misery Loves Company, Sense Lifeline and Sever the Strand.

SURVIVING UNDER THE GUN

Not even the power of Crucible Horrors are much use to your characters if they don't approach matters with their eyes open and their wits about them. The Swarm Storm is a Spectral assault of massive proportions. Roaming packs of Spectres, guided by snarling Fetches and other animal-type critters, surge through the city's streets and buildings. The characters — all spooks for that matter — are seriously outnumbered. The characters may have the advantage of power in one-on-one situations (or not), but the Spectres have two enormous advantages: sheer numbers and the hive-mind linking them all telepathically.

The mass of Spectres moving through the city is enough to give them a distinct advantage. They are everywhere: streets, alleys, hallways, basements… everywhere. Since they're intangible, doors don't shut them out (except in special circumstances detailed below), so the average spook has no chance of escape.

Even the characters, powerful as they are, must maintain low profiles and sharp eyes. Otherwise, they'll be swarmed and dragged off like any common drone or blip. After the events in **Crusade of Ashes**, the characters should be somewhat familiar with the fugitive lifestyle, even if this time it is happening on the other side of life. The crucible may need to dust off some skills it learned during its stint as an outlaw organization. The events unfolding in **The Orphan-Grinders**, however, are far more serious and difficult to survive. In this supplement, a powerful enemy thousands strong is actively hunting down the characters. Many of the tricks the characters adopted in **Crusade of Ashes** won't work or aren't applicable in their current predicament. Spectres, unlike government agencies, will likely have ways of neutralizing most, if not all, of the characters' advantages.

The easiest strategy available to projectors is to retreat to their meat and hide in their bodies, where the Spectral hordes will take no notice of them (hopefully). If they do that, however, the remaining crucible members must contend with surviving under combat conditions, outnumbered and severely weakened by the loss of their closest allies.

Worse yet, this Swarm Storm… this invasion of Spectres, doesn't occur in the space of a single day. It lasts for weeks (or even longer if it suits the Storyteller's purposes). The Spectres involved aren't interested in making a single quick lunge at the spooks they find and then leaving. On the contrary, the Spectres are intent on setting up house and occupying the hereafter where the characters dwell. The extended trauma of this situation can easily result in some interesting psychodynamics, and the characters must remain aware of what's happening with their crucible and in their own heads.

SIEGE MENTALITY

Foremost among the problems the characters face is the siege mentality. A siege mentality is a state of mind where those involved feel hemmed in on all sides. They're helpless to affect their surroundings. In light of the Spectre's shock troops and the brutal tactics they use on the spooks they find, the characters may feel that anything they do will likely backfire and end their existences. Consequently, they may be inclined to retreat into a purely defensive posture and remain there, paralyzed. Some spooks experiencing this state may want to run and hide from their enemies. Others may tolerate as much horror as they can and then make a move — *any* move, including the most dangerous or foolhardy — to reclaim some control over their own situation.



THE SITUATION

The characters are caught in terrifying and extremely fast-moving situations. They are outnumbered and, possibly, outgunned by the Spectres' Horrors and Thorns. The characters possess no indication of what's to come until the Spectres assume control of the streets, brutalizing, torturing and carting away spooks. There is no form of violence or cruelty the Spectres won't stoop to when rounding up victims. Spectres appear to be malice incarnate, and if their shock tactics cow the local spooks into docility, well then, so much the better.

The characters, who normally overcome most obstacles without too much difficulty, may, initially, find themselves in a state of shock. The invasion's first wave alone may devastate the crucible. This may offend the characters' sensibilities. They're heroes, after all. They're not used to watching innocent souls being degraded and dismembered *and not* being able to do anything about it. In this case, however, they must. The initial surge of Spectres is *thousands* strong. Between ubiquitous packs and the terrifyingly brief time it takes for Spectres to summon backup via the hive-mind, it's clear the characters may not be running around saving the day in the face of something of this magnitude.

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE FLESH...

While much easier, the lives of those spooks who seek shelter in their bodies isn't entirely without its own difficulties either. With the sudden influx of Spectres, the number of malevolent entities who know how to possess the living or "spiritually vacant" rises dramatically, leading to an upsurge in the number of Jasons. The murder rate, already rising around Spectre-heavy sites, sees a pronounced spike when joyriders commandeer the meat of various pigment addicts who happen to be exploring the trippy hereafter. Projectors of all types must be *very* judicious about projecting. Not only is the world plagued by violent monsters, but leaving one's body unattended becomes an invitation for a Spectre to take up residence.

THE DAILY GRIND

Once the Spectres establish themselves and claim their territory (and it won't take long), the days adopt a tedious pulse. One way or another, the characters will have to go into hiding if they're going to avoid becoming the

Spectres' next victims, or they'll have to fight them on a larger scale than what they've done before.

It's entirely likely that the characters will become exceedingly tense and, potentially, terse with one another. These are war conditions, and the characters aren't on the winning side for the time being. That's bound to take its toll, but rather than institute "wartime" rules, it's a matter for players to roleplay out (though Storytellers may rule that, for every number of days equal to their Wits ratings they're in this no-win situation, the characters lose a point of Willpower). Meanwhile, characters will likely have to bite their tongues on many occasions and work at being constructive instead of flying off the handle. The crucible already has a swarm of foes around it. The last thing the characters need to do is to make enemies of one another.

In the opening days of the invasion, screams born of torture and the sounds of combat and skittering Spectres become familiar. As weeks pass and the main hordes of Spectres go farther afield to find easy prey, the sounds drop off to nothing, and a horrible silence falls over the hereafter, broken only by the occasional sounds of clashing Spectre packs.

As Spectres claim territory, they leave behind a stable population of kin to search for holdouts. It isn't uncommon to find a Spectre in whichever building one enters, walking the halls and searching for refugees. Likewise, Spectres roam the streets, and one can always spot two or three Spectres in the span of a couple of hours. In depressed neighborhoods and near hives, that number is constant at every step.

Between the absence of normal ghosts and the lurking presence of clearly inhuman Spectres, the streets adopt an entirely new eeriness that only folks such as the characters can appreciate. The crucible, however, isn't likely to have time to study the view from the street, given the proliferation of Spectres. Existence in the hereafter belongs to them, and they won't leave room for any doubt in the matter.

All that said, the Spectral occupation brings on yet another danger for the characters, one that's almost immediately apparent:

Turf Wars

The Spectres' primary task in this invasion appears to be rounding up and harvesting ghosts. Spectres are predominantly driven by their baser emotions and, as such, are violently competitive. They will do anything to bolster their numbers, including stealing ghosts from other Spectres and poaching spooks from another hive.

This instigates wars.

While the characters may consider Spectre turf wars a blessing — anything resulting in more destroyed Spectres is a good thing, right? — in the long run, the territorial combats bring more critters into a given area, making it harder for the characters to move about unseen.

High-intensity moments in these conflicts usually last for no more than a few hours (though constant skirmishing for weeks isn't uncommon), but occasionally, a particular war turns excessively ugly. Then, Spectres from different hives overrun the area, and a several-square-block chunk of the hereafter becomes a violent, standing-room-only ichor bath. When that happens, the crucible's best option is to distance itself from the riot as much as possible.

If, for whatever reason, a character is inclined to *start* one of these enormous violent clashes, Wisps are particularly well suited for such sabotage. By using Ecstatic Crusade (and a whole bunch of spooks as lures) to draw Spectres into a rival hive's turf and then escaping with Storm Wending, the characters can all but ensure that a territorial skirmish ensues. To make this work, of course, the characters must possess some notion of where the hives' territorial boundaries lie and who belongs where. Reconnaissance is, thus, indispensable in making a strategy such as this work.

Staying Alive (Sort Of)

The Swarm Storm will likely provide a challenge unlike any the characters have seen before, and new challenges require new techniques to deal with them efficiently. Below are several tactics the characters can adopt to survive the Spectre invasion relatively intact.

Hiding

The platitudes acknowledging the clichéd wisdom of the occasional retreat are well known. "He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day," "Discretion is the better part of valor," and so on they go. The Swarm Storm is no time for the characters to engage in macho "No retreat!" attitudes. Unless, that is, they're comfortable with the notion of being dragged away, incapacitated, to meet an ugly end.

The fact is, staying hidden is among the few ways a spook will likely survive the invasion. The characters, fortunately, have a host of ways in which they can remain unseen:

Puppetry

Projectors generally have their own meat where they can hide if necessary, but ghosts with Puppetry can also seek refuge in anybody. Puppetry's advantage is that it allows the possessing spook to see other intangible entities (including Spectres) without them seeing him. A crucible requiring information about events transpir-

ing inside Spectre-controlled areas can send in a Skinrider in a mortal body.

Another strategy that allows more members of the crucible to enter Spectre turf is for a ghost to skinride a skimmer or active sleeper in his crucible. This enables two spooks to hide in the same flesh. The problem with this is that allowing another to ride you is an *extremely* intimate act. Even members of a crucible will likely give second thought to intimacy of this nature unless they're lovers or extraordinarily close friends with little to hide.

In Dreams

There are other, more unusual ways of hiding from Spectres as well. Phantasms, or others with the Sandman Horror, can also seek refuge in the dreams of others. So long as she's in a dream, the Phantasm character has no form the Spectres can attack (unless they too possess Sandman, which is possible). Being shunted from the dream (when the sleeper awakens, for example) is normally something a Phantasm tries to avoid, but a character looking for an excellent hiding spot for a day or two may find that the dreams of the living are the safest place when Spectres swarm through the streets. You can find the full write-up of Sandman on pages 95-97 of **Shades of Gray**.

Oblivion's Husk

No Horror is better suited to keeping characters safe from Spectre incursion than Oblivion's Husk (see "Oblivion's Husk," p. 82), especially for crucibles looking to avoid confrontation during the Swarm Storm. The Orphan-Grinder can bring his crucible into the very heart of Spectre territory, and so long as his companions do nothing to compromise their camouflage, they can remain unseen. This Horror's primary drawback is that it's remarkably draining on Vitality when used over extended periods of time. Remaining camouflaged in the heart of Spectre territory for more than a few hours, for example, would likely deplete most of the crucible's Vitality, and the crucible *really* doesn't want to encounter a pack of Spectres when its Vitality reserves are already tapped.

Another problem associated with Oblivion's Husk involves the crucible's capacity to confide in an ex-Spectre. Trusting an (ostensibly) redeemed Spectre enough to enter an area thick with his former comrades can be... difficult for more wary characters.

Storm-Gloam

The Banshee Crucible Horror creates small holes in the Stormwall, allowing exceedingly powerful winds through. But it does more than that. The Maelstrom's "sands" seemingly absorb light, creating a darkness that's difficult to penetrate visually (particularly when one takes into account the fact that the shards of sand are extremely sharp and dangerous to the eyes). A crucible using this Horror can position its origin point in such a way that it both blinds Spectres and blows them away, granting the crucible cover while hurting its enemies.

MOBILITY

Hiding is a sensible approach for characters when in an area occupied by Spectres, but it's not always possible for all crucible members to find a safe place to wait out the Spectral incursion. For those individuals (or crucibles), simply being more mobile than the Spectres themselves might be a better survival strategy. If the characters can outrun the Spectres, there's no need to hide from them.

Outmaneuvering Spectres might be a simple matter of using mundane transportation — a fast motorcycle will outrun Spectres, for instance. Characters with two or more dots in Streetwise, Security or Technology or four or more dots of Drive can hot-wire a car on a successful Intelligence + Ability roll (difficulty 7).

Conversely, however, the crucible can always make use of its supernatural resources.

Horrors

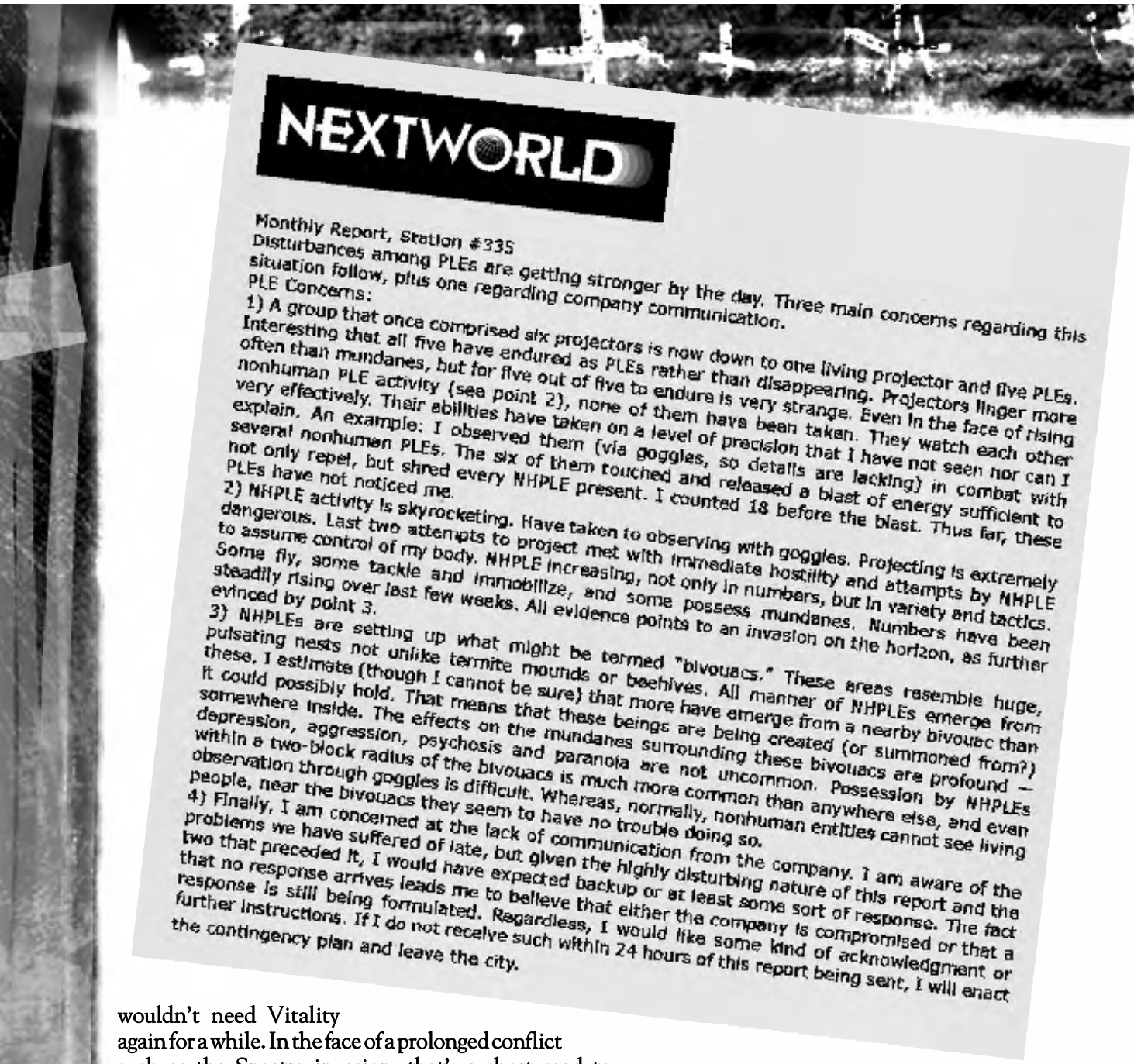
Spooks can utilize a wide range of Horrors that offer them a significant mobility advantage over the invading Spectres. Hot-wiring a car is unnecessary if one of the characters can Inhabit the vehicle or use the Orphan-Grinder Horror Hellion to summon a ride.

Storm-Wending is an excellent means of transportation, both for the Wisp and her crucible. If the Wisp travels alone, she can make successive uses of this power to cover a lot of territory, allowing her to perform reconnaissance duties for her crucible. If the Wisp uses Storm-Wending to transport her entire crucible, she'll need a healthy store of Vitality because transporting others is very draining.

With sufficient mastery of the Phantasm Horror Dream-Walker (and, of course, enough Vitality), a spook can transport her entire crucible long distances through the dreams of others. This Horror, obviously, is best used at night, but if the crucible is in dire straits during daylight hours, they won't balk at traveling through the dreams of bartenders, night watchmen and graveyard-shift workers.

VITALITY RATIONING

Many spooks, weaned on simple or relatively short-lived challenges, may discover they've developed a tendency to burn through Vitality quickly, either on the assumption that they can "borrow" more from compatriots or return to their meat to regenerate or that they



wouldn't need Vitality again for a while. In the face of a prolonged conflict such as the Spectre invasion, that's a short road to annihilation. In these circumstances, the crucible as a whole must conserve its Vitality. Running back to one's body isn't always practical (especially when trying to stay hidden from a legion of invading Spectres), and it's extremely unlikely the character can avoid spending Vitality for long unless he remains in hiding while regenerating. In a situation such as the Swarm Storm, characters may have to treat the axiom "don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes" quite seriously to maximize their efficiency. While this saves on Vitality and prevents the waste of limited resources, it also ratchets up the crucible's danger factor.

Just how much risk the crucible is willing to assume remains up to its members, but here are two Vitality expenditure-cutting methods.

Benefits

Some crucibles may make ample use of Horrors but rarely derive any mileage from Benefits. Benefits always provide a distinct advantage to the entire crucible, but that's doubly true when the crucible is trying to eke out Vitality for as long as possible.

Many Benefits augment distance, duration, damage or range of effect for another Horror. Helter Skelter's Benefit even boosts the Vitality strength of a recipient ability, making it a very worthwhile support mechanism. Characters making strategic use of Benefits will find that their Vitality stretches much further than if the crucible members insist on grandstanding and doing the rugged individualist shtick.

The Old Fashioned Way

It sometimes happens that characters are so used to their spook-borne abilities that they forget they used to have many similar tasks to perform when they *didn't* have access to Horrors — and they still got things done. They did survive multiple near-death traumas, after all. Characters engaged in Vitality rationing may need to step back from the immediacy of the moment and ask themselves what kinds of non-spectral, non-Horror-based methods they have at their disposal to deal with their current situation.

Characters often forget entirely about Abilities, in particular, once they become used to the flashier use of Horrors. A character running out of Vitality, for example, may want to forget about that flashy use of Helter Skelter and stick to good old-fashioned Brawl.

RECONNAISSANCE

Any crucible walking blindly or arrogantly into a Spectre-controlled area deserves any messy, unpleasant fate it suffers. By establishing some system for engaging in reconnaissance, the crucible can avoid that fatal degree of ignorance and keep its constituents from becoming Spectre fodder. By this point, the characters should realize they're in a war zone and should make no moves without first uncovering the enemy's activities. In this case, that's unusually difficult. The ebb and flow of Spectre activity is hardly orderly, but neither is it entirely chaotic. They comprise an army, and armies need a modicum of organization to function (though one problem in dealing with Spectres is that their access to the hive-mind grants them access to strategies and organizational systems that those outside it would be hard pressed to make any sense of).

For many reasons, it's in the crucible's best interest to maintain, at the very least, minimal levels of surveillance in relation to Spectre activity. First, maintaining watch over the rapacious invaders forces the characters to leave their safety zone, defusing the siege mentality that might otherwise paralyze them. Conducting forays into enemy territory may be dangerous and incredibly unpleasant (especially since the crucible can't help the ghosts in peril), but it does combat the feeling of helplessness that might otherwise overtake them.

Secondly, knowledge fights fear. Without some notion of the Spectres' activities, the characters may always assume the worst, which does nothing for morale. The more the crucible knows about the Spectres, their agendas and their tactics, the more manageable the threat seems and, therefore, becomes.

Lastly, and most importantly, reconnaissance provides the kind of information necessary to wage any kind of effective campaign against the Spectres. Thankfully, the characters have access to Horrors that greatly facilitate information gathering.

Puppetry

While the Spectres remain intent on ferreting out ghosts, they are largely ignorant of the world of the living. A character possessing a mortal body is free to walk the streets and gather information on Spectre troop movements without risk — or, at least, not too much risk. A mortal acting funny might still attract unwanted attention, and the Spectres *can* call on Jasons or any brethren with Manifest to be rid of troublemakers if necessary.

Storm-Wending

The ability to teleport into a locale, take stock of unfolding events and then pop back to safety is incredibly valuable. A character using this approach can appear, albeit briefly, in the very heart of enemy territory, note what's happening and pop back before the Spectres can even respond. Spooks capable of this Horror can easily wind up being the crucible's best reconnaissance agents.

Forebode

Any general in the world would give his right arm to predict the course of battle. Forebode is an incredibly powerful reconnaissance tool because, while it doesn't reveal the enemy's current position, it *can* suggest where the enemy *will be* in an hour, a day, a week or longer, depending on how much Vitality the spook expends. Conversely, by traveling to several locations just outside the boundary of a Spectre hive and using this Horror at each locale, the spook can discern in which direction the Spectres will head — either making themselves scarce or warning ghosts in harm's way (or both). This way, the crucible can create a kind of four-dimensional map of the Spectres' advance that, in addition to being useful in its own right, might give the crucible some notion of where the Spectres are headed (assuming they're going anywhere).

Another Forebode tactic useful to crucibles is in studying Spectre tactics. The crucible can discern Spectre tactics and methodology by visiting locales recently plagued by Spectres and using Forebode to study the past to see what the Spectres are doing and how they're accomplishing it. While this isn't guaranteed to be helpful, it might provide the characters with important information on Spectre tactics, numbers, leadership and other information key to combat situations.

Storytellers and players, however, should remember that Forebode does not offer crystal clear visions of the past and the future. Some images are figurative or

symbolic, which means the characters may have to divine the intent of the revelation. Additionally, glimpses of the future may be far more tenuous given the fluid nature of the invasion and its aftermath.

Inhabit

Like Puppetry, this Horror works for reconnaissance purposes if the character inhabits a vehicle but allows someone else to drive it (thus alleviating suspicion concerning a driverless car).

ALARMS

With some ingenuity, characters can rig Spectral alarms, or even traps, that alert them to the presence of incoming Spectres. If they have some items that detect Spectres (such as Kirlian cameras) or artifact materials that exist only in the hereafter (such as debris found at the ghost-quake site in **Shadow Games**), the characters may try to engineer a trap/alarm (Intelligence + Crafts/Security/Stealth/Survival or Technology, difficulty 7). These devices, however, should be limited-use items (usable a number of times equal to the successes in cobbling them together) and capable of killing no more than one or two Spectres at best. Still, traps could slow down the advancing Spectres enough to offer characters a significant head start.

If any member of the crucible can befriend, summon or command ghostly animals (see **Orpheus**, pp. 284-286), this would be a good time to use that ability. Any spectral guard could not only alert the crucible to the presence of Spectres, but potentially, soften up the enemy before it reaches the characters. A word to the softhearted, however: Creatures serving this function won't have a very good survival rate, so growing emotionally attached to them is unwise.

TIMING

Spectral sweeps of streets and buildings aren't entirely random, despite appearances to the contrary. Spectres don't think the same way as most people or spooks do, but they're still likely to follow a schedule of sorts. Recognizing that timing factor exists could make the difference between characters making a safe dash to a new hiding hole and getting caught in a violent exchange with Spectres.

Bear in mind that Spectres roost in most places in the city, like foreign forces occupying a nation. Many travel in packs that surge up and down streets and through buildings. This may be entirely random (or, thanks to the hive-mind, at least insufficiently orderly for others to comprehend), or there may be a pattern to these sweeps that the characters can capitalize on — once they determine the pattern. Ample reconnaissance will help the characters to determine whether or not Spectral activity takes place on a schedule of any kind (and it may not). Discovering that Spectres launch patrols in a given direction once every four hours, however, or noting that the worst surges transpire on odd-numbered days can save the characters enormous grief and wasted energy once they coordinate their forays to coincide with lulls in that Spectral activity.

FRIENDS

No ghost (and by extension, no crucible) should underestimate the power of friends. Good deeds the characters pursued for other spooks can return in big ways during these bad times. A character who made friends along the way isn't assured of having one of them tip him off if things look bad — especially since many of the character's friends might have fallen during the invasion's opening hours — but it never hurts to have them.

A slight variant on the "friendly" approach uses Unearthly Repose to calm a pack of Spectres that discovers the crucible. While this is a short-term fix, and the characters must move *quickly* to avoid more Spectres, it's an excellent way of protecting the crucible and providing it with a short-term distraction it might need.

SANCTUARY

For extended portions of the Swarm Storm, it may seem like Spectres are *everywhere*. That's not the case. While Spectres may well be in or near every building and street in a particular area, there are still places the characters can go to evade them — but it's up to the crucible to find these places.

Sewers

Can Spectres enter the sewers? Sure they can. Are they *likely* to enter the sewers? No, not unless a hive already exists there. What Spectres seek is not likely to be found in the sewers, particularly not several levels down (and any city with a population of over a million people will have many, many levels of sewers, some of which are likely to be more "habitable" than others).

In bigger cities, the most obvious example here being New York, there are entire populations of transients who live in the sewers and have done so for years. Some rarely ever venture to the surface. In such places, the ghostly population of the sewers is proportionately high (since the life span of most homeless people is significantly truncated). That said, the more populated the undercity, the likelier it is that Spectres will come looking for unclaimed ghosts that linger there.

Holy Ground

While relatively rare, some places are "holy ground" and abhorrent to Spectres, making them intensely uncomfortable. Even if the Spectres willingly endure the

discomfort, some of these consecrated places are so potently anathematic to Grandmother's brood that they cannot enter the space without taking damage. Given the number of churches and places that *ought* to be consecrated, it's astonishing how few have even the faintest hint of the sacred about them. Characters should consider seeking out churches and blessed places of all types and try to discern, through whatever means, if a place is sacrosanct or not. At the same time, they should be aware that it's dangerous to assume a place is consecrated without seeing how Spectres respond to it.

And sometimes, infrequently, holy ground has other problems associated with it. A place repels *all* spooks — including projectors — and while this definitely renders it Spectre-free, it does the crucible no good in any case.

Bear in mind that some places are sacred not because they bear any religious significance, but because they're places of great hope or well being. The home of a community activist who saved her neighborhood from crime or drugs is one such example.

Countryside

As mentioned earlier, Spectres hunt after ghosts. Ghosts tend to linger where they lived and died, and most people live and die in towns and cities. Ergo, the countryside is likely to be largely free of ghosts and, consequently, poor hunting for Spectres that are competing to bring back the most ghosts. While there are no guarantees that rural areas will remain Spectre-free, these places remain good bets for crucibles in need of downtime.

STORYTELLERS SECTION

The rest of this chapter is for Storyteller eyes only. While the contents of this section aren't likely to reveal too many big secrets to someone playing in an **Orpheus** chronicle, it may contain some ideas that could short-circuit your playing experience. Therefore, it's probably best you not risk ruining the excitement for yourself. Anyone reading this section who plans on playing in an **Orpheus** chronicle is strongly advised to flip to another section now.

Those of you remaining must be Storytellers. Congratulations, you're reaching one of **Orpheus**' most intense phases, and there's still more to come. By this point, the excitement at the gaming table should be peaking, and you and your players are hopefully having fun ("Fun? In a White Wolf game? Shouldn't we be sullen or angsty or something?").

This section offers suggestions on how to keep the game enjoyable while maintaining an intense experience for players. When the Spectres come through the hives in the Swarm Storm, looking for spooks to take back to their nest, the players will find themselves in an awkward and dangerous position. Those with bodies *could* retreat to their meat, leaving their remaining crucible-mates to their fates. Spirits and hues, however, have no such luxuries and little choice but to hide, flee or fight when the Spectres come looking for them.

Herein, you'll find suggestions on how to run this crucial phase of **Orpheus** and ensure it's both a dramatic and fun experience for your players.

RUNNING THE WAR

In Chapter One, we provided you with advice on how to warn characters about the dangers they face. In this chapter, we take a closer look at running a challenging and "realistic" (if that's the right word) game, while still allowing characters to survive the experience.

Read the Players Section encompassing the first half of this chapter for ideas on how characters might survive the invasion. The remainder of the chapter is for Storytellers' eyes only and contains several ways you can offer characters just enough survival options that they might outlast the invasion — *if* they're smart.

MOOD ENGINEERING

Just like the approach of a horror movie's climax, maintaining a mood of fear, dread and paranoia is key to the chronicle at this point. The more you heighten the roleplaying experience for players, the more fun they'll have. Following are some suggestions to help maintain an appropriate mood for this critical phase of your **Orpheus** chronicle:

Keep Distractions to a Minimum

You're putting considerable effort into generating mood. Don't let avoidable events undermine your hard work. Unless you're playing something that's enhancing the game's mood, turn the TV off. Don't suddenly break the tension of a situation to order pizza because it wastes the effort you invested *and* you know the pizza guy's going to interrupt you again in 45 minutes. Close doors to shut out unwanted noise or visitors from messing with your game.

Keep the Pace Moving

One of the best ways to maintain mood is to keep the game moving along at a fast clip, so there's no time for distractions to intrude and the characters must pay attention to keep up. Keep combat sequences as efficient as possible. Too many game mechanics and too much dice rolling can interfere with the ghost story you're trying to tell.

Discourage Out-of-Character Interaction

Do what you can to keep players in character and focused on the game. Depending on your troupe, this might be more easily said than done. While it's human nature to use humor to break a tense moment, you've worked hard to evoke that tension, and one dumb joke can blow the atmosphere you've spent hours establishing. Talk to your players beforehand, and ask them to remain serious. If that doesn't work, don't hesitate to impose experience-point penalties on players who ruin the mood too often.

Note: Some gamers play for the interactive experience of roleplaying. Others just play for fun and because it's a way to hang out with friends. If your troupe is just playing as a social experience and the mood isn't really important, don't implement penalties because you'll just come across as a control freak and alienate your friends.

Use Multimedia

Anything useable to maintain the dark mood you're trying to build at this juncture is fair game. Low lights, candles, background music, even loops of the better scenes from horror movies and video games can all contribute to an eerie atmosphere. This should heighten the impact of your chronicle and make for a more powerful roleplaying experience.

THE HORROR, THE HORROR

The Spectre attack is not a quick or occasional phenomenon. It isn't a pulsing swarm of monsters that retreat back to the hives after a few hours of mayhem. It's much more serious than that. For the days, weeks or even months of the Swarm Storm, Spectres roost *everywhere*, and they stalk through the city, searching for spooks to harvest.

The initial hours following the attack are likeliest the most violent and traumatic for the characters. Vicious Spectres swarm from the hives in packs, without warning for many spooks, and capture or destroy any ghost without enough sense to hide. Once the Spectres deplete the streets of ghosts, they move through buildings and homes, taking ghosts where they find them. Many spooks survive this initial surge only because the Spectres, partial to instant gratification, can pursue a surfeit of easy targets. Blips and drones comprise the largest portion of ghosts taken at this time since they aren't strong enough to fight properly or cognizant enough to realize they're about to be dragged to Hell (or some fate that's equally bad).

It's your task as Storyteller to evoke the full horror of the Spectre invasion. Without going overboard into prolixity, be detailed in your descriptions of the hundreds of horrible scenarios that the Spectres unleash on the city's ghosts. The events unfolding before the characters' eyes resemble something from a Hieronymus Bosch painting, and there's little or nothing the characters can do about it. The characters must realize that this is the end of the line for many local spooks. The Spectres claim ghostly contacts, friends, teachers, allies and adversaries alike, most of whom the characters never hear from again. Make sure the characters feel this. If there's a particular supporting character with whom the crucible has significant interaction, make sure they feel his absence with keen sharpness. Guide the characters, step-by-step, to the realization that the events playing out before their eyes are serious and that their experiences in the hereafter will never be the same again.

As the characters continue to defy fate and struggle against the Spectres, they should realize that it's only their extraordinary talents and their ability to work together as a team that keeps them from meeting the same fate befalling other spirits, hues and projectors. Before the crucible can arrive at that realization, however, it must survive the experience, and the only way it is going to survive is if you provide the means for clever players to save their characters from the Spectre sweeps.

In short, what resources or opportunities do you include to allow quick-witted and resourceful characters to hide or move safely about the city without getting dragged away to their destruction? We present some ideas below. If these don't work for your chronicle, however, feel free to develop your own methods.

SPECTRES HUNTING

When a cat successfully catches its prey, it sometimes takes it home as a "gift" to its owner as a sign, perhaps, of fealty. Imagine, now, a pack of big, deadly cats on the prowl for prey to drag back to their "mistress." That's the nature of the Swarm Storm in a nutshell. The Spectres compete to see which pack can deliver the most spooks to Grandmother. While such motivations make packs more aggressive than they might be otherwise, it also hinders their efforts to cooperate since they try undermining the efforts of rival packs and hives.

While it may take some time for the characters to realize it, the invading Spectres aren't fully coordinating or helping each other. They're competing to bring Grandmother the most souls and, thus, are less likely to use wide-scale tactics to target and swarm the city. While there's plenty of inter-pack coordination and cooperation, Spectre hives remain territorial, aiming, instead, to outmaneuver their rivals. It is currently the one major reason Spectres haven't overwhelmed the characters with sheer numbers and dragged them away (though, not for a lack of trying).

Once characters realize that Spectres are being territorial and that a given sector remains under the purview of a single hive and not a dozen, the crucible can potentially engage the Spectres in combat and weaken their hold over an area, if not liberate a block or two (though that risks initiating a Spectre turf war, where one Spectre hive tries to absorb the territory of another).

This might allow characters to create a home base, at least early on in the invasion, if only temporarily. At the very least, it might provide them with some respite from running, allowing them to plan something for the long term. On the other hand, the hive-mind might make such tactics impossible. And even if you deem that it *is* possible, the characters must remain vigilant against other Spectres infringing on their liberated territory and discovering it's open and waiting to be purged of ghosts.

The other thing the characters need to worry about is drawing attention to their ongoing destruction of area Spectres. Spectres, while malicious, are not stupid. They realize when someone is undermining their control of a neighborhood, and they'll compensate by sending in more powerful critters to handle the matter.

Be careful not to short-change the hive-mind ability *too* much. While Spectres are incredibly petty and competitive, they are soldiers. If the characters are

THE DILEMMA

Roleplaying is *all* about making decisions. A Storyteller who wants the crucible to face the kinds of hard decisions necessary in times of war might want to put the characters through hard ethical situations such as the following:

The characters are hard pressed by Spectres and doing everything they can to escape. They find a cubby hole and discover a cluster of terrified ghosts hiding there — so many, in fact, that there's no room for the crucible to fit. So, the characters must go back out into danger.

After leaving the building, however, the characters spot a large group of Spectres moving through the area, being meticulous in their sweep for spooks. The Spectres are bound to find the other ghosts. Now, the characters must choose between saving their own gauze by escaping, distracting the Spectres long enough for the ghosts to flee or returning to help the ghosts fight. The latter two options entail the characters falling to capture themselves.

Not only is this an opportunity for great roleplaying, but it's interesting to see just how heroic the characters can be when faced with tough decisions. If the characters choose to save themselves, it might be interesting if they encounter the ghosts later — but now as Spectres. And if the characters do make the truly heroic choice, it might just happen that their Spectres encounter a rival pack, beginning a fight and thereby allowing the characters and the ghosts to flee — but only at the last minute, just as the characters are about to be overwhelmed. After all, where's the fun in generating all that angst and dread if you resolve it too quickly *and* deny the characters the opportunity to prove their prowess by escaping on their own merits?

decimating their ilk, they're likely to forget about their petty competition long enough to contend with the crucible. Unless, that is, they decide that the characters are doing them a favor by weakening a strong rival tribe or culling a weak, ineffectual pack.

SAFE HAVENS

The Swarm Storm of Spectres is the last thing experienced by many, many ghosts. It is a spiritual holocaust of vast proportions. As Storyteller, it's up to you to convey the terror experienced by all spooks as the Spectres surge out from the hives, swarm through the city rounding up ghosts and vanish with their shrieking captives. At the same time (and this balance is where the artistry of Storytelling comes in), you need to give the characters options so they can avoid becoming victims themselves.

The most obvious safe haven, for those with bodies, is the flesh. Being embodied takes the spook right off most Spectres' radar. But that's not an option for everybody. Some projectors may want to stay disembodied so they can remain informed and involved with what's happening or so they can use their powers. And, of course, hues and spirits don't have any flesh of their own in which to seek shelter (unless they have Sandman or Puppetry…).

So, to assist you in providing save havens for disembodied characters, we offer the following potential sanctuaries. These, of course, do not include existing sanctuaries such as Lazarus Redux — which is available if overcrowded, given the present circumstances.

Sewers

They're cramped, they're filthy, and they stink, but sewers are among the safer places characters can hide at this point in the chronicle. It's not that Spectres *can't* wander into sewers, it's simply that they won't find as many souls wandering down there to bring back to Grandmother, and given the competitive nature of the invasion, it's not sufficiently rewarding for Spectres to waste their time stalking through mostly empty tunnels.

That's not to say there won't be *any* Spectres in the sewers. At the very beginning of the Swarm Storm, the sewers remain slightly less populated with Spectres than buildings. Once the Spectres discover where their prey is — and is not — located, the sewers are largely abandoned, at least until the easily culled ghosts are taken away, at which point, some Spectres may return to the sewers in search of the last remaining spooks.

The crucible may be inclined to turn the sewers into a refugee camps for ghosts — or at least a temporary shelter. If the sewers become a long-term base of operations for the characters, they may even want to help ghosts escape — permanently — by helping them resolve their issues with life. That, of course, wouldn't be particularly realistic, given that avoiding Spectres is hard enough without pursuing complicated missions for lost ghosts. The fact remains, however, that every ghost denied the Spectres is one less potential enemy to worry about later on (for more on this, see the "Saving Ghosts" section on p. 258 of **Orpheus**).

Turning the sewers into a refuge for ghosts is a noble sentiment, but tactically speaking, it's a terrible idea. Every additional ghost in this afterlife refugee camp is one more mouth that could betray the location, one more piece of gauze that can be followed back and one more potential hostage to force characters into turning themselves over to the Spectres. Characters having difficulty surviving, in particular, are better off claiming



the sewers as their own, guarding the area jealously and destroying any intruding Spectres. If refugees *do* wander into the sewers, and it's bound to happen sooner or later, the characters would be wise to stay as far from the new ghosts as possible.

That said, there may be some ghosts already indigenous to the sewers (construction workers who touched the wrong wire, homeless people who died of hypothermia or disease, kids eaten by alligators, etc.). If anyone can show the characters the best places to hide, those ghosts would certainly fit the bill. And from a Storyteller perspective, it's also handy to have a new face or two to replace some of the familiar Storyteller characters who've fallen to the Spectre packs.

The Stale and the Sterile

What goes for sewers also applies to other locales where Spectres are likely a rare sight due to the lack of spooks. New buildings where no one died yet (much less moved in) are relatively fruitless hunting grounds for Spectres, and they will be relatively light of Grandmother's minions.

Holy Ground

Some areas are consecrated (and remain so) by virtue of faith or by raw positive emotion, rendering any Spectres that wander too near such areas uncomfortable or causing actual pain to those critters that enter the consecrated area. Such places make excellent havens for characters and also provide a place where characters can shelter the ghosts they rescue. A crucible that makes its haven on holy ground is far safer than in the sewers. It's an odd kind of security, however. Spectres are likely to take note of all the consecrated ground in a city (information that Orphan-Grinders might be able to glean or remember) and put extra packs or patrols around them to prevent ghosts from escaping inside — or to grab any ghosts who wanders too far from the sanctified area.

The major advantage that holy ground holds is that spooks can use Storm-Wending, ripcording and any other method of transit to enter and leave the premises with no worries… unless the Storyteller decides otherwise. Unfortunately, there is no way to determine if a spot is actually sanctified unless the characters observe the actions of Spectres or their own high-Spite allies.

Below are two examples, one small and one large, of holy ground where the characters might take refuge. The Storyteller is encouraged to adapt these as she wishes or to use these as guidelines for creating her own.

• **The Metropolitan Community Church:** Relatively small for a church, the MCC sanctuary doesn't look like much from the outside, being a small storefront church.

Even on the inside, it seems quite humble. While it's clear that the congregation is either small or poor, the church contains the basic pews and lectern that one would likely find in any small Christian church—one vaguely recognizable as Episcopalian by its iconography.

While this may be a welcome sanctuary for the crucible, the MCC church is too small to serve as a serious refuge for large numbers of ghosts — and Spectres will lurk outside the church, waiting to nab any spook who slips out or tries to get in.

The pastor, Marguerite Oxford, is a kind old woman whose bright eyes are full of warmth and wit. She frequently works long hours in her office, preparing sermons and attending to church business. If embodied characters visit the church, she may ask them their business, since she knows her congregants by name and is a little wary of strangers.

Spectres setting foot inside the church are not harmed, but they are at -3 to all dice pools, while their Spite drops by one the moment they cross the threshold. The Spite thus lost returns at the normal rate.

• **Temple Vajrayana:** Tibetan Buddhism has a long history of naming demons and battling or transcending them as a means to enlightenment. Temple Vajrayana is a consecrated Buddhist temple located in a neighborhood that was once entirely Asian but has since diversified slowly for the last decade or so. Modest grounds surround the temple on the outside, while, on the inside, candles illuminate every dark corner. At the center of the temple is a 12-foot-tall golden Buddha sitting in the lotus position within a limpid pool atop which float hundreds of beeswax votive candles.

Rinpoche Gendun Trungpa is the teacher and resident cleric at Temple Vajrayana. He is a quiet and insightful man, and the characters may find themselves surprised to discover he can see ghosts as clearly as he sees the living.

Naturally, the temple is holy — and powerfully so. Spectres on the grounds outside the temple are at -1 to dice pools on all rolls. Spectres who push their way into the temple itself take 10 levels of lethal damage per turn (not surprising given that Tibetan monks have been combating demons for the last 1,400 years).

Other Sacred Space

Places can be sanctified by different kinds of rituals, not all of which are even performed consciously. Below are other types of potentially sanctified spaces that the Storyteller can elaborate upon and use in her chronicle as she sees fit.

• **The Wiccan Park:** A Wiccan coven frequents one park bordering a local university to practice its faith. The coven has consecrated the land to the goddess Diana and has taken extraordinary care of the park, picking up after others and attending to the plants and trees. The Wiccans' daily caretaking acts as a purifying force that prevents unclean spirits, such as Spectres, from trespassing in the area. Only certain parts of the park affect Spectres, turning it into a maze of safe zones and robbing the unwelcome of three dice in all dice pools.

• **The Nun's Home:** Sister Marie-Jeanne is a retired nun who now lives in a small home in a downtrodden neighborhood. At age 86, she still prays and helps others, just as she did at the convent. Her unflinching dedication to a kind and loving God renders

SPECTRES AND HOLY GROUND

Pure spiritual force channeled through kindness and love can consecrate a building so effectively that Spectres not only feel *intensely* uncomfortable upon entering the space, but they actually suffer damage as well. The Storyteller determines the strength of the consecration, with a weakly sanctified place doing no more than making Spectres uncomfortable and subjecting them to a -2 dice pool penalty. A truly sanctified holy space, however, can inflict up to 10 levels of bashing, or even lethal, damage *every turn* on Spectres or any spook whose Spite exceeds their Vitality. Mind you, that doesn't necessarily make consecrated grounds perfectly safe. One can't stash a body there, for example. And, characters who wander too close to the boundary of a consecrated area are still in danger of encountering Spectres that don't mind a little punishment. They may take some damage in doing so, but snatching a spook from holy ground is a feather in the cap of any Spectre who does so — and it also puts doubts in the minds of ghosts who might seek shelter in such refuges.

Any church/temple/mosque/etc. desecrated after its initial sanctification — either blatantly (by Satanists, for example) or subtly (where spiritual leaders preach hatred, intolerance and spiritual arrogance or where politics eclipse spirituality) — loses much of its sanctity and possesses little or no ability to repel Spectres. Characters may find themselves surprised and terrified to discover that the big fancy basilica on the square is so thoroughly corrupt that it actually *attracts* Spectres instead of repelling them. Likewise, they may be unexpectedly saved when they realize that the little storefront chapel tended by the dotty old parson remains inviolate.

her humble home anathema to Spectres, punishing them with four levels of lethal damage per turn.

• **The Dojo:** This dojo, or martial-arts studio, is owned by a wise instructor, who combines the rigors of martial-arts training with meditative focus. The sense of community developing among the pupils, combined with the daily study and practice of self-discipline and self-control, creates a sacred space with an unusually martial feel to it. This site robs Spectres of two Willpower and two Spite per turn.

Sanctuary

There are some locations that, for one reason or another, retain an echo in the hereafter. There are several possible reasons why. The location might be so old and notorious that its reflection is strong enough to endure as an emotional artifact of sorts. Or as in the example of Lazarus Redux, someone found a way of making the structure "tangible" to spooks and Spectres. Or the buffer separating the living and the dead is acutely strong in this location because of past brushes with the supernatural. The good news is that the building is quite solid to intangible entities, who cannot pass through its walls, floor, ceiling, doors or even windows (unless relevant to a Storyteller's plot). Spectres can certainly enter by manifesting and opening doors and windows physically, but the characters are relatively safe once they secure these entry points. It's certainly possible that the Spectres might devise ways of "dismantling" the structure by attacking it in the hereafter, but they're unlikely to damage it for one reason: As long as the physical structure remains intact, its spiritual reflection is extremely resistant to tampering. Even if the Spectres are somehow capable of damaging the real world structure, the spiritual one would remain solid for months, if not years or decades.

• **Sample Sanctuary — The Tik-Tok Roadhouse:** This establishment has been haunted since shortly after its completion in the 1920s, as a garage on the grounds of a wealthy man's estate. When the stock market imploded, the estate owner brought his whole family out to the garage and shot them, then himself, as a means of delivering his family from the penury of the crash.

The event, of course, proved a terrible scandal. The locals couldn't keep away from the grounds, so strong was their fascination with the event. The estate was placed on the market shortly thereafter, but it was eventually parceled after the neighborhood fell into decline and poverty. The estate's new owner split the spare garage from the main property and sold it separately. Since becoming a roadhouse, the Tik-Tok has drawn a rough clientele of bikers, truck drivers, prostitutes and gang members, all of whom have added to the locale's notoriety (and body count) over the decades.

While it has a large basement (for storing booze), the roadhouse's significance is its solid presence in the hereafter and the fact it only has two doors: one front and one back. The establishment has windows, but they're seven feet off the ground and too small for a normal sized person to slip through (small Spectres, however….).

The difficult part about using the Tik-Tok as shelter, however, is that a motley assortment of ghosts occupies the space. Bikers, whores and thugs who met various fates in the recent hereafter spend their afterlife in Tik-Tok. While most are drones and blips, those of Echo-class might not appreciate the characters barging in on their turf.

If the characters reach the Tik-Tok before the initial swarm of Spectres, they may be able to buy themselves some credibility by warning the ghosts. If the crucible is a little late, they may find the Tik-Tok's doors shut, with them on the wrong side. At that point, the characters can help fight one wave of Spectres, and hope it's enough to be allowed inside before the next wave of Spectres arrives.

Memorial

The Memorial Background represents those kind, warm feelings that we direct to the dead after they've died. More so, it represents how the dead inspire the living to excel or improve their lives and, as the name suggests, is often a location or physical embodiment of that inspiration.

Characters might be surprised to discover that they can capitalize on these feelings in other ways as well: If a character with this Background visits her memorial site, she'll discover she can gain a degree of protection from Spectres. The disadvantage of this approach, however, is that the character ceases to gain Vitality from this Background as long as she's using those positive emotions to fend off Spectres.

The most obvious affect on Spectres is the discomfort caused by their proximity to a spook's memorial. Spectres won't want to approach even a one-point memorial because of the warm feelings it accrues and channels. The stronger the memorial, the more discomfort it causes Spectres, until the feelings of love and warmth actually send the creatures into a slough of despondency (as reflected in the loss of Willpower).

If a character decides she really must have the Vitality made available through Memorial, the effects against Spectres stop entirely for that session (and the next one if the Storyteller deems insufficient time has passed), and the character can again access the extra Vitality.

Memorial	Effect
•	Spectres are very uncomfortable within 10 feet of the memorial and lose one die from all dice pools
••	Within 20 feet of the memorial, Spectres lose two of the following three: Two dice from all dice pools, two points of Willpower or two points of Spite.
•••	Any Spectre within 30 feet of the memorial loses two of the following three: Three dice from all pools, three Willpower or three Spite.
••••	Spectres within 40 feet of the memorial lose two of the following three: Four points of Spite, four dice from all dice pools or four points of Willpower.
•••••	Spectres closer than 50 feet lose two of the following three: Five dice from all dice pools, five points of Spite or five points of Willpower. Conversely, the Storyteller can rule instead that either dice pools, Willpower or Spite fall to one die/point.

See Ya, Daddy-O

While very little keeps Spectres from roaming far from their hives, they have a very clear agenda in bringing ghosts back. It doesn't make sense for them to go where there aren't spooks for them to harvest. While this pulls the crucible out of the action, at least in the short term, truly overwhelmed characters can simply put distance between themselves and the swarms. They can do so by grabbing a car and driving away into the countryside to someplace so empty that Spectres can't be bothered finding ghosts there for the time being. The middle of a national park won't likely have many Spectres, for example. Obviously, this derails the game a bit, but it also gives the players great opportunities to roleplay amongst themselves without entering combat every few minutes.

Another option in this vein is to use technology normally unavailable to Spectres as a means of escape. Hovering over the Swarm Storm in a helicopter or watching it from the deck of a boat while anchored a half-mile out grants the characters a degree of safety without pulling them from the action entirely. The number of Spectres that can reach them is limited, and characters with Storm-Wending can still ferry the crucible into the fray once they recover sufficiently. Situations such as these can also heighten the drama of your chronicle, with drained and struggling spooks evading rampaging Spectres through whatever means possible, desperately making their way to a relatively safe harbor.

RESCUING SPECTRES

You learned that ghosts overcome by their anger, consumed by their Spite, descend into depravity to do Grandmother's bidding as enslaved, sycophantic Spectres. But… what if this descent were reversible?

All is not lost. A Spectre still possessed of the vestiges of the tethers binding it to the living has a slim chance of clawing its way back to ghosthood and free will. With considerable effort, some can return as a new form of Shade, the Orphan-Grinder. Not all can make this journey without help, however. Would-be rescuers must show courage and tenacity, braving danger like the mouse that removed the thorn from the lion's paw, because the key to redeeming Spectres is to confront them with their former ties to humanity. Beyond that, redemption requires sacrifice, the gift of Vitality. Does the crucible have the drive and the courage? It's your job to provide the motivation.

This doesn't mean that all Orphan-Grinders require aid in order to abandon their Spectrehood, merely that the road is intensive and hard. The characters, however, can help accelerate the process and rescue those who might have been incapable of doing so themselves.

THE REALIZATION

Before addressing the benefits characters can achieve by saving Spectres, this section presents some methods for revealing to players the idea that Spectres are redeemable. Previous **Orpheus** books always hinted that Spectres were beyond redemption because the tools for hope are only now available. This is something with which the crucible can dirty its hands, to fight for, to believe in. However noble it is to redeem a blip or a drone, it's even more ennobling to uplift a Spectre back to humanity. That said, Chapter Four also includes a Spectre rescue story, featuring none other than signature character Tom Hayes, himself.

Below are some other ways to help the characters discover this possibility.

ARTIFACTS FROM THE GHOST-QUAKE

In **Shadow Games**, an ancient building from the Underworld impacted in the middle of the city. Aside from being a great place to set old-fashioned hack-and-slash, dungeon-style crawls, this building offers an excuse to introduce bits of forgotten supernatural lore as the spoils for those infiltrations. Now, if the characters already explored the tower, these might be artifacts taken *before* the characters arrived. Otherwise, the Wisp's Horror, Beckon Relic,

might prove equally intriguing as a vehicle. Possible plot devices, which are incorporeal, include:

• An antique steamer trunk, made from sea-worn cedar and adorned with brass hinges, bands and corner plates, contains a sheaf of parchment black with tight, meticulous handwriting. These scrolls chronicle an individual's attempts to rescue Spectres. Most of these attempts were failures, but there were a few successes. The dates span throughout the 1950s.

• A crumbling, leather-bound ledger that contains a variety of handwriting styles. It is a remnant from a musty bureaucracy extant in the Underworld, listing every uplifted Spectre from 1920 to 1940. Each entry cross references an entry in log books that are unavailable. Damage obliterates some pages in the ledger.

• A small book held shut by a leather thong. The frantic handwriting suggests that the author felt rushed to write down everything he wanted to say, that he was sure he would be interrupted at any moment. It's the diary of a redeemed Spectre, describing his often mundane days with a tone colored by awe. Some entries reflect on his time as a Spectre. Others describe his steps to redemption and what they felt like. In latter entries, he attempts to uplift a Spectre himself. The first entry says simply, "Today, I am fully awake."

OLD ORPHEUS GROUP INFORMATION

Orpheus Group had many branches and layers, enough so that no character could've known the true depth and breadth of its active research projects at the time NextWorld attacked the facilities. This option is also perfect for chronicles running Orpheus Group stories, with the information another revelation of the Byzantine nature of the operation. If you would like to include Orpheus' research into the rehabilitation of Spectres in your story, then how about the following plot devices:

• The crucible stumbles across a cache of Orpheus files and equipment, probably on the verge of being auctioned off by an ex-cop who was there at the aftermath of Orpheus Group's destruction. Buried among the expense reports and experimental Kirlian glasses, there's a locked high-security box containing top-security case dossiers. These files detail the successes and failures of Project Prometheus, an ultra-secret capture-and-rehabilitation program for Spectres. The reports meticulously outline Project Prometheus' attempts to "rehabilitate" four detained Spectres over a three-month period before Orpheus Group's destruction. Discovering Project Prometheus gives the crucible the basics it needs to uplift a Spectre back to humanity. Provide the crucible with as much or as little information (and misinformation) from this chapter as you see fit.

• While the crucible is hanging out in a local bar or coffeehouse (such as Spooky Brews), a reedy Iranian man in his late 40s approaches them. Brushing imagined dust from his tweed jacket, he introduces himself as Dr. Bijan Kehder and mentions that he's been trying to track down the crucible for a very long time. Dr. Kehder was second in command of Project Prometheus, a venture outsourced by Orpheus Group (and, thus, never present on the compound, thereby sparing it from NextWorld's attack). The briefcase he bears contains the documents detailed above. Dr. Kehder wants to offer the crucible an exchange of services: his secrets for help in rehabilitating a Spectre. Dr. Kehder captured the Spectre of his recently deceased wife using a Terrel & Squib labyrinth cage, and he needs the crucible to help in his wife's redemption.

GUIDANCE FROM SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

If you don't want to remind the crucible of the now-defunct Orpheus Group, you can introduce the information herein through a current contact. There are many people with a vested interest in spreading information about Spectre redemption. Any one of them could contact the crucible with hints and clues about the redemption process. Possible contacts from outside the group include:

• **Tom Hayes:** As mentioned earlier, Tom Hayes is featured in a story in Chapter Four, and given his nature as an Orphan-Grinder, he might be the perfect vehicle for the matter. Given his personal experiences, going from projector to Spectre to Orphan-Grinder, Tom Hayes has considerable practical and theoretical knowledge about Spectres. He knows how to redeem them, and he wants to help as many as possible. Given past events with Kate Dennison and his former allies at Lazarus Redux, Tom is too ashamed to show his face there. If the crucible maintains close ties with Lazarus Redux, Tom may leave the characters messages with tips and hints about rescuing Spectres. If the crucible is a little more independent, then he approaches them directly. Once the characters prove to his satisfaction that they're trustworthy, he tutors the crucible in redeeming Spectres. If the crucible does not have a Spectre it can or wants to save, then run the characters through the adventure involving the rescue of Sarah Hayes from Chapter Four.

• **Terrence Green:** Terrence Green knows a great deal about ghosts and the hereafter, but he doesn't know how to save a Spectre. He's so busy gathering

information, broadcasting Radio Free Death and helping in the anti-Spectre resistance that he doesn't have time to save the damned. Terrence Green is only recently aware that Spectres can be redeemed, though. He's heard stories about Spectres "waking up" on their own and becoming Orphan-Grinders, and he's met enough Orphan-Grinders to learn about their Horrors and about what it's like to return to the ranks of the free-willed. He's also seen a crucible reconnect a Spectre to one of its tethers (a crucial step in saving others) and minion bond it (see below for more information on turning a Spectre into a minion), so the crucible could transport the Spectre from one safe house to another. If the characters think to ask Terrence Green for advice, he has plenty, including information on who to see. Otherwise, you can work one of these factoids into one of Terrence's broadcasts. That should pique the crucible's interest.

• **The Hellboys:** Detailed in Chapter Four, the Hellboys are a crucible of Orphan-Grinders who specialize in rescuing Spectres. The Hellboys believe that if you haven't been a Spectre, then you can't understand what it's like. Because of this, they don't permit any other Shades into their crucible. The Hellboys' leader approaches the characters for assistance with a Spectre they're trying to uplift. This Spectre has an unusual Nature that none of the Hellboys match (or the Spectre has a tether relating to the characters). The Hellboys need someone to act as the Spectre's mentor to uplift it, and they need the crucible's assistance. If the crucible accepts, the characters can learn how to redeem a Spectre and earn the respect of the Hellboys.

• **Mr. Jigsaw:** Mr. Jigsaw is an extremely unique Spectre because he's not influenced by Grandmother in any way. In fact, he "represents" Spectres called Malfeans, which are fighting Grandmother. Mr. Jigsaw possesses extensive knowledge about Spectres and Grandmother. Full details about Mr. Jigsaw, and an introductory story, are in Chapter Four. His relationship with the crucible is enigmatic and frightening but generally benign — since he's a talent recruiter of sorts… and the characters are talented. He knows how characters can transform a Spectre into an Orphan-Grinder. The problem is that he isn't a charity worker. Mr. Jigsaw works for himself. The odds of him offering the information freely are slim, especially if the crucible has obvious assets. The crucible must haggle if it wants his assistance.

Anomalous Spectral Behavior

If the crucible is proactive, it may not want to be spoon-fed information concerning the rescue of Spectres. Establishing a situation where the characters can discover this information for themselves is difficult but infinitely possible. It all hinges on anomalous Spectre behavior.

Ninety-nine percent of Spectres are so locked into their condition that they would never conceive or imagine wanting to escape Grandmother's control. But that remaining one percent is special. They're like Tom Hayes, harboring enough surviving self-will and enough of a spark of love, compassion or integrity deep inside themselves that they can recover from their plunge into Spectrehood. Some can elevate themselves, as Tom Hayes did, but even the strongest and most noble spirit can use a helping hand.

It's hard fighting your malicious side made manifest. Sometimes, a Spectre who can't quite make that last push to freedom can exercise limited control over its behavior and inclinations. If the crucible pays attention, it may realize that a Spectre that's behaving oddly is actually calling out for help. Working with this Spectre, the characters may figure out how to redeem it on their own.

Here are some examples of Spectres acting oddly:

• **Help Me:** A pack of Spectres attacks the crucible, but given the current circumstances, that's hardly surprising. During the battle, one Spectre occasionally attacks its companions, before striking out at the crucible again. Just as a character is about to deal the killing blow, the Spectre's demeanor shifts. "Help me," it says in a fragile voice, holding its arms out, palms up, completely vulnerable. The Spectre can do little else, but it seemingly fights its odd personality shifts. Sometimes, it cries for help, but its arms and legs lash out at anything nearby. Other times, it curls into a fetal ball, rocking back and forth, while a vile stream of curses pours from its lips. If the characters decide to help, they must keep the Spectre somewhere secure. In the odd moments of clarity, the Spectre makes broken requests for its "ba-ba sheep." It wants to see the stuffed lamb it had as a child. The crucible should be able to figure it out from here, fumbling through its Default Abilities in a form of reverse engineering.

• **Protective Urges:** A widowed father, Miles Raeburn, contacts Lazarus Redux (or a crucible contact), which refers him to the crucible. He's very upset and distressed. He thinks his daughter Laura is possessed by a poltergeist (sure, it doesn't make any sense, but he doesn't understand the supernatural.) For the last two weeks, any time he comes within 20 feet of her, he feels a cold chill pass over his body and becomes nauseated. That's in addition to the barrage of objects that strike him when he chastises Laura for her behavior. When the crucible meets Laura, it's immediately apparent that the

young girl is not the source of the problem, nor is she possessed. A Spectre follows and plays gently with Laura... rolling a ball toward her or moving toys around. It attacks nearly anyone who approaches her, but it bears special enmity for Laura's father. If the characters attack the Spectre, it vanishes, returning later. Subsequent investigation shows that the Spectre only permits a few select friends and relatives to approach the young girl. In moments of lucidity and limited (but painful) speech, it reveals that the father was abusive to his wife and transferred his abuse to Laura after the wife died. The Spectre is the ghost of Laura's mother, who still wants to protect her daughter despite the Spectre urge to hurt. By shunting this urge to her husband, the Spectre retains some measure of control. This leaves the crucible to cope with a haunting by a Spectre instead of a drone. It's up to the crucible to make the mental leap and help resolve this Spectre's "tether" (by removing the daughter from her father's company and placing her with a trusted aunt or uncle).

CRUCIBLE MOTIVE

Spectres embody everything that's vile in the human spirit: They are evil beyond evil, wretched beyond wretched. At first glance, there seems to be little reason for the crucible to care about uplifting a Spectre. Admittedly, a crucible will seek opportunities to test their new-found understanding of Spectre salvation once you open the possibility, but some crucibles need a little motivation. You can provide the crucible with all the necessary information it needs to rescue Spectres, but all that effort is for naught if the characters don't want to do so. Using a friend or contact to ask the crucible for assistance is a perfectly serviceable way to push the crucible into saving its first Spectre, but there are other, more subtle ways.

• **This Time, It's Personal:** A Spectre takes an unusual interest in a crucible member, spying on her from the shadows and leaping out to harass her at odd moments, but not actually attacking. During confrontations with the Spectre, it manifests particular mannerisms and uses actual turns of phrase (Spectres don't normally speak to characters). These clues slowly reveal to the targeted character that the Spectre is someone she once cared deeply about. This could be a relative or loved one who fell in with Uriah Bishop's cult and was never seen again or a ghostly contact caught up in the swarming hordes who had enough Spite to deliberately become a Spectre to avoid being munched. Tying the Spectre's history to that of the crucible gives the crucible a reason to experiment with this strange new process. Instead of performing the equivalent of a supernatural mercy killing, they have the opportunity to bring back a cherished soul from the brink of damnation.

• **Block the Path:** If you can't weave a Spectre into a character's background, then weave the Spectre into the plot of a story. During the course of a story, introduce a plot twist requiring the crucible to obtain an item or some information from Samantha White, a supporting character. When the crucible tries to locate Samantha White, it is unable to find her at her usual haunts. Talking to ghosts who associate with Samantha reveals that she only recently became a Spectre and was last seen haunting the old electrical plant on the west side of town. To complete its mission, the crucible must track down Samantha and convert her back into a ghost to acquire the information or item from her.

• **Introducing a New Character:** If a player wants to retire her character or if a new player is joining the troupe, find out if she wants to play an Orphan-Grinder. If so, then work with the player to craft the Spectre that the Orphan-Grinder begins as, fleshing out the Spectre's current powers, the tethers of the ghost trapped inside the Spectre and the history of the ghost that eventually caused her fall. After fully detailing the Spectre, you can introduce it through any of the methods outlined above. As the crucible rehabilitates the Spectre, turn control of the Spectre over to the player who created it. When the Spectre becomes an Orphan-Grinder, then the player assumes complete control.

• **Survival of the Fittest:** Ilona Darewell, a former Orpheus trainer, contacts a crucible member (if she survived Orpheus' collapse and subsequent events). She wants to meet tomorrow to "talk about the freelance projector business and catch up on old times." At the meeting the following day, it's obvious she's close to the edge — her Spite and Vitality are nearly even with each other. She's edgy and quick to snap at imagined slights, and she looks in desperate need of rest. With a little probing, Ilona tells the characters she's being stalked by a group of Spectres and doesn't dare project. The Spectres have harassed her for over two months, and Ilona is at her wit's end, looking for advice on what to do. Unless the crucible chooses to guard her that night, the next time the characters see her, it is as one of the Spectres in an ambush a few weeks later. In fact, all the Spectres of that pack are former Orpheus projectors who've now set their sights on the crucible. It's convert or be converted.

REDEMPTION

Once the crucible learns how to redeem a Spectre and selects a suitable subject for its rescue mission, the characters will want to give it a try. Bringing a Spectre back to the ranks of humanity is a very similar process to sending a blip or a drone to its final reward.

The goal of redeeming a Spectre is to strengthen the ghost trapped inside until it's strong enough to quash its more violent inclinations and resume control of its gauze once more. This is accomplished by reacquainting the Spectre with those things and goals it feels most passionately about as a ghost: its tethers. It's the reverse of rescuing blips and drones where the characters resolve the tethers, thereby freeing the ghosts from them. Here, the characters strengthen them. When the ghost is strong enough, the crucible gives it one last push, and the Spectre is reborn as an Orphan-Grinder.

Before beginning this process, however, the characters must choose a Spectre that was once a ghost. They cannot rescue a Spectre who was never connected to the living. Therefore, it's possible to rescue Lost Boys and Frighteners and impossible to convert Reapers and Friendly Angels, for example.

The process of redeeming a Spectre follows three basic steps: choosing a mentor, capturing the Spectre and rehabilitation.

CHOOSING A MENTOR

The first step is to choose a character to guide the Spectre on its journey back, someone whose outlook is similar to the Spectre's. The crucible must select one character who shares the target Spectre's Nature (Addict, Barbarian, Deviant, Grotesque, Monster or Wretch, though some Spectres may also possess Director or other Natures not normally associated with Spectres). An appropriate Nature within a Nature group also works, however. If no one in the crucible shares a Nature or Nature group with the Spectre, then the characters must recruit someone from outside the crucible to assist them. This is an excellent opportunity to partner the crucible with an Orphan-Grinder. Mechanics-wise, the Orphan-Grinder Shade has the only set of Natures shared by most Spectres. Matching Natures or Nature groups is important because, like rescuing blips and drones, the mentor must be able to use Misery Loves Company, Sense Lifeline and Sever the Strand for this to work.

CAPTURING THE SPECTRE

Selecting a mentor is easy. Capturing a Spectre is significantly harder. Most Spectres won't sit passively and allow themselves to be saved. Thus, the crucible must capture and incapacitate the Spectre before commencing rehabilitation. The crucible may worry that other Spectres will flock to its target's aid, but the characters shouldn't be too concerned. While the Spectre still has access to the hive-mind, it's unlikely other Spectres will commit the resources necessary to rescue a solitary entity (unless there's plenty of weak characters present and the



Spectre can convince its associates that there are many souls to be had). Otherwise, perhaps an Orphan-Grinder can help the crucible through the Song of the Hive, a unique Horror available only to a select few (see Chapter Four). This Horror can "excise" a Spectre from the hive-mind temporarily, isolating it and preventing reinforcements from arriving to help the beleaguered Spectre.

Rehabilitating a Spectre is a lengthy process, which can require several weeks. The crucible needs a place where it can secure the Spectre for extended stays. Places to keep a Spectre during rehabilitation include:

• **Lazarus Redux:** Lazarus Redux is insulated with hive material that's been patched together and fused to the facility's outer wall, effectively ghost-proofing the entire structure. Its resident spooks also fused hive material to the walls of two gigantic brewing tanks. Kate Dennison and gang prepared the tanks specifically for the purpose of holding unwilling ghosts or Spectres. The crucible should consult with Kate Dennison or John Carruthers at Lazarus Redux to see if it can use one of the tanks as a holding cell. Even if the crucible isn't on Kate's or John's good side, they'll probably let the crucible use it, if only to learn the process themselves.

• **Better Living Through Technology:** The Freedom Fighters section of **Shadow Games** outlines a crucible of high-tech scavengers called the Hyenas. In addition to their cutting-edge sleeper gear, they're perfecting a powerful electromagnetic field capable of blocking gauze from passing through it, which is similar in principle to the buffer separating real-world objects from the hereafter. The Hyenas aren't remotely altruistic and won't give up their secrets readily. If the crucible has interesting toys or data with which it is willing to barter, it can probably strike a deal with the geeks to rig a detention field to hold its Spectre. Even if they reach an agreement, the Hyenas won't give the prison to the crucible. They want to keep the prison in their hideout. They're afraid the crucible (or its allies) will dismantle the device and reverse-engineer the technology. If the crucible wants to keep the prison in its own space, it'll have to steal the technology.

• **They Don't Build 'Em Like They Used To:** If the crucible locates a really old building with a rich and unusual history, then it doesn't have to worry about scrounging up and welding together old hive matter or negotiating with evil-genius wannabes. A rare few old buildings resonate strongly in the hereafter, creating an intangible reflection that's real and palpable to ghosts and Spectres. All the crucible needs to do is pay the rent (if the building or rooms are available), set up a few cots, buy a coffee maker and an alarm clock and soundproof a few walls just in case, and it's in business.

REHABILITATION

Now that the crucible captured a Spectre, the long, arduous process of rehabilitating it begins. This process is similar to that for untethering blips and drones, with a few marked differences.

Misery Loves Company

Misery Loves Company operates almost exactly as it does for blips and drones, and it only works if the character using this ability shares the Nature or Nature group of the target. If the crucible does its homework and selects a proper mentor, then this won't be a problem. Unlike using this Default Ability on a low-ebb ghost, however, the mentor doesn't need to engage the Spectre in conversation. He merely needs to spend time in its presence and talk to it. Depending on how disagreeable and riled up the Spectre is, this could be more difficult than it sounds. Think of it as trying to mollify a panicked, rabid dog or attempting to talk a lunatic down from a bad acid trip.

As usual, the mentor's player must spend one point of Vitality and succeed at a resisted Willpower roll. A successful roll forms a bond between the Spectre and the mentor, giving the mentor's player two additional dice on all Social rolls directed at the Spectre. If the two share the same Nature, the bonus rises to four additional dice. This ability helps the character to link his essence to the Spectre's, enabling them to empathize with each other. This melding of essences leaks through to the behavior of the participants. The Spectre becomes calmer and adopts some of the mentor's small mannerisms, while the mentor becomes more agitated and shows hints of the Spectre's personality traits. The effects of Misery Loves Company last for the remainder of the scene. Once the effects expire, the mentor must restart the communication process with the Spectre at the start of the next session before he can pursue the subsequent step.

Sense Lifeline

This can only occur during a scene when the Spectre and the character are in tune. Like the process of reading the ties that bind a ghost to the afterlife, the mentor must delve into the Spectre's mind and find the items, events and people that most closely link the Spectre to whatever human scraps survived their long submersion in darkness.

By spending a Vitality point, the mentor gains insight as to what sustains the Spectre's faint shred of humanity, but he can only do so *once* per scene. This insight takes the form of a clairvoyant flash: For a few seconds, the mentor sees images, hears voices and feels emotions relating to the Spectre's tethers. If the mentor's player succeeds in a Perception + Empathy roll (difficulty equal to the Spectre's Spite), then the mentor

receives a particularly clear guiding impulse directly from the submerged personality of the ghost inside the Spectre. He has a name or location where the crucible can start its investigations. Otherwise, the character must start the process again in a subsequent scene and hope for more information, unless he already knows the Spectre's mortal identity.

The revealed tethers stem entirely from the Spectre's former mortal life, and Sense Lifeline only provides a vague understanding of the nature or location of those anchors. Additional investigation into the Spectre's previous existence is usually necessary to discover the exact tethers and their significance.

In some instances, it's possible that the mentor successfully used Sense Lifeline but did not uncover any tethers. This happens when the Spectre was never human to begin with. Animal ghosts turned into Spectres can be saved through the process described in this section, but those who were never anything but Spectres are what they are. In these instances, a quick and painless dissolution is the best answer.

Once the crucible uncovers a Spectre's tether and the characters feel they've adequately researched it, the mentor can test the tether's validity or strength by confronting the Spectre with it while Sense Lifeline is in effect. Where mentioning a tether to a blip jars it out of its routine, mentioning a tether to a Spectre evokes a sudden and extreme reaction. Possible responses range from sudden rapt attention, to uncharacteristic timidity, to babbling outbursts of incoherent half-memories or to raging tantrums. When presenting a possible tether to a Spectre, it's a good idea to have backup ready in case the situation spirals out of control. A history of passive responses to tethers is no guarantee that future responses will be similar. Regardless of how the reaction manifests, however, it usually reflects a facet of the Spectre's former personality and is notably different from the Spectre's expected behavior.

A redeemable Spectre has several tethers equal to its Spite rating. See the **Orpheus** core book, p. 260, for suggested tethers, and use them as inspiration when designing your own. When selecting tethers for Spectres, ensure there's at least one or two on the Difficult or Dangerous tables so the crucible can minion bond the Spectre (described later in this chapter) if necessary.

Sever the Strand

Once the crucible unearths and fully understands one or more of the Spectre's tethers, the characters are ready to reconnect the Spectre with its human past. The mentor must thus infuse the Spectre with Vitality to reestablish the link. This serves to drop the Spectre's Spite rating by one and has the same rewards as saving a ghost would. Unlike the process of resolving a ghost's tethers, where the crucible guides the ghost through a kind of supernatural psychoanalysis to overcome unresolved emotional ties, the process of reverting a Spectre into a ghost involves reaffirming its tethers and strengthening its ties to those bonds. For example, if, before becoming a Spectre, the ghost had wanted to see his gravesite, the characters would visit the gravesite and then remind the Spectre that it still hasn't visited the cemetery where it's located. If the tether involves a loved one, the crucible reminds the loved one that she did care and miss the dearly departed, so he isn't forgotten (before sharing that personal experience with the Spectre). That's key. The characters must somehow interact directly with the tether or its intent, acting as the Spectre's proxy in the matter. The ghost inside the Spectre may desire revenge on a backstabbing co-worker, requiring the crucible to confront the co-worker (now executive vice-president) in his corner office. If the tether is an object, such as a prized trophy, the crucible must retrieve the object so the Spectre can see it again. The process of exposing the Spectre to these emotionally charged situations agitates and empowers the submerged human side of the Spectre, enabling it to slowly regain dominance over its Spite once again. By providing the Spectre with anchors, memories of what it loved in its mortal life and, hopefully, regret at its condition, the mentor guides the Spectre along the long, slow path to recovery.

To strengthen a Spectre's ties to its tethers, thereby uplifting its suppressed human side and reducing its Spite, the mentor's player must win a resisted Willpower roll and spend 10 Vitality points (after the investigation, at the point of communion). If successful, the active tether decreases the Spectre's Spite rating by one, to a minimum of zero. If the roll isn't successful, the Vitality is expended on an obstinate Spectre, and the mentor must accrue another 10 Vitality to try again. Strengthening a Spectre's tethers also benefits the mentor. This triumph of humanity over malice revitalizes the mentor by reminding him of what it really means to be human. The mentor's Vitality rises to 10 points (as with rescuing ghosts, even if a hue). The Storyteller may also deduct up to five Spite points from the mentor, depending on the altruism of the character's motives and on the difficulty of resolving a particular tether. Snatching the Spectre of your daughter from the brink of oblivion should net the full award, while raising a Spectre so you can eventually torture and interrogate the ghost submerged within for information or revenge should certainly not.

Earlier, it was mentioned that a redeemable Spectre has a number of tethers equal to its Spite rating. Maybe, though, one tether proved too difficult to resolve or impossible to determine and solve. Maybe the crucible absolutely, positively needs this Spectre reborn. Or perhaps the characters did resolve all the tethers, but something about the Spectre's past makes it all the more difficult to save. In this case, there are several solutions and alternate complications available to you.

• **Potent Tethers:** Some tethers, especially ones near and dear to the Spectre's inner ghost, are more powerful than others. When the crucible reattaches such a potent tether to a Spectre, the Storyteller can remove two Spite ratings from it instead of just one. These tethers do not increase the benefits the mentor or the crucible receives from redeeming the Spectre.

• **Pushing It:** When the crucible reattaches a Spectre's tether, let the characters know it's ready to be reborn (Storyteller's option since this occurs rarely), even though its Spite isn't at zero yet and some tethers remain outstanding (the remaining tethers must be minor, and the Spite must be no higher than one or two). If the crucible proceeds at this point, every 10 Vitality the characters contribute beyond what's required erases one excess point of Spite from the Spectre, *carrying* any remaining excess Spite over to the new Orphan-Grinder. The danger in this is that for each excess Spite rating, the Orphan-Grinder manifests one of its Stains. Until the Orphan-Grinder drops those excess Spite ratings, the Stains remain constantly active.

• **Therapy:** The characters reaffirm the Spectre's last tether but discover it can't become an Orphan-Grinder yet. It has half-tethers that can't be sensed or solved — possibly it has issues with its conduct as Spectre, or maybe it's afraid of freedom and being isolated from the hive-mind or the community of which it partook. The mentor must essentially act as the Spectre's psychotherapist, helping it to overcome the last few hurdles before it's ready to reintegrate with ghostly society. To initiate a counseling session, the mentor must use Misery Loves Company on the Spectre, then spend a point of Willpower. The mentor and the Spectre enter an intense psychic rapport. The mentor sees and experiences the razor-thin, dreamlike buffer between the ghost's and the Spectre's personalities. In this place, the mentor and the Spectre can explore the Spectre's fears and anxieties in much the same way the Horror Sandman operates. The mentor guides the Spectre to confront one specific problem, the one he sensed when using Misery Loves Company. Through the Spectre's subconscious mind, a scene depicting that unresolved problem appears and plays out (whether the mentor and Spectre are only observers or can interact with the scene is up to you,



though someone with Sandman can certainly participate in the exchange as well).

If the mentor doesn't provide guidance and help the Spectre to resolve its dilemma, the Spectre's self-sabotaging nature causes the scenario to promptly turn sour. The mentor must help the Spectre to confront these quandaries and to overcome them. Other members of the crucible can participate as voices inside the mentor's mind (if players make a successful Perception +Meditation/Empathy roll, difficulty 6) or if using Sandman. The final outcome of the session is left to Storyteller discretion, but a good session should have the same benefits as strengthening a tether normally would, while a bad session could give the mentor temporary Spite points or even increase the Spectre's Spite rating. A quick and dirty way to resolve the session is for the mentor's player to roll Manipulation + Empathy/Subterfuge/Science (Psychology) against difficulty 8 in an extended action. The player must roll successes equal to or greater than the Spectre's *initial* Spite rating (before all this rescuing and uplifting hooey began). And the mentor has only three turns to accomplish this before being forced to begin the psychoanalysis anew. After that, the connection between Spectre and mentor falters. If successful, the Spectre is ready to cross over. No successes mean the mentor made no progress during the session. A botch means the session went horribly awry and the mentor must choose to either gain temporary Spite points equal to the Spectre's *initial* Spite rating or allow the Spectre to gain a Spite rating (and pushing it further from salvation).

• **Oops:** The crucible chose poorly, and the Spectre is unredeemable. Perhaps he was a serial rapist in life or a pedophile or someone with such low self-esteem that he always sabotaged his own success at the last moment. Now, the characters have an ethical dilemma on their hands. They probably spent weeks, even months, trying to redeem this wretch. They've seen it come as close to human as it has been in ages. The mentor *bonded his soul* to this creature, and now, the crucible discovers it was all for nothing. The characters can set the Spectre free, but it'll revert to its old ways and sow misery. They can keep it imprisoned indefinitely, but that's hardly reasonable — and it places a significant burden on the crucible. They could destroy it, but the trauma of separation may cause the mentor to gain a Spite rating. This remains the Storyteller's purview, but well-played scenes of grief and hard decisions while the crucible decides who'll commit the deed might deserve their own reward (such as the mentor not gaining Spite, but *losing* a Spite rating because the Spectre commits all that was good about itself to the mentor). Conversely, callous behavior and indifference toward the Spectre (which had hope and did love the characters in its own way near the end) deserves a Spite rating be given to the mentor or the character responsible for destroying the critter or engineering its demise.

REBIRTHING

When the crucible manages to reconnect the Spectre to its tethers or to drop the Spectre's Spite rating to zero, the characters can bring it back from Spectrehood. All that remains is for the mentor to serve as the crucible's conduit. The crucible must channel 40 Vitality through the mentor and into the target. The mentor simultaneously burns one Willpower rating (which can be purchased back through experience, but at current rating to reflect the altruistic nature of saving a Spectre, an enemy). Suffusing the target with a jolt of Vitality and Willpower, like Dr. Frankenstein hitting his monster with electricity, alters the Spectre's metaphysical state. The Spectre instantly transforms into an Orphan-Grinder, emerging from his Spectre cocoon in a torrent of emotional outpouring. Shock, rage, grief... all play out as the revitalized human portion contends with its time in the dark hole of Spectrehood. The Orphan-Grinder is now free from Grandmother's influence and can make his own decisions, though he'll likely need a little time to adjust. The Orphan-Grinder will be well-disposed to the crucible, but there is no guarantee that he'll ally with it. He's only bound to the crucible by gratitude, nothing more.

If the crucible successfully redeems a Spectre, it gains greater rewards still. One character — the one who, in the Storyteller's opinion, did the most to help the Spectre — loses one Spite rating. Usually, the mentor enjoys this boon, but in exceptional circumstances, it may be another crucible member.

MINIONS

The process of turning a Spectre into an Orphan-Grinder takes time and commitment, and the Spectre will resist the mentor and the crucible the entire time. Until a Spectre is fully reborn, its malicious side is dominant. Most Spectres take any opportunity to sabotage the characters and their attempts to help it. This makes certain tasks, such as transporting the Spectre from one place to another, very challenging. Fortunately, it's possible for the mentor to suppress the Spectre's overtly aggressive side, turning the Spectre into a minion of sorts.

Through a process of bonding, empathy and nonaggression, the mentor can temporarily bond a Spectre to himself as a brief ally, helping it to override its hive-

Tellus
North America

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TELLUS UNVEILS KOJINA'S LATEST MASTERPIECE, *SPECTER: THE REBIRTH*

In a surprise announcement at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, Tellus (NASDAQ: TLS) CEO Abraham Reigel revealed the latest masterpiece by legendary game designer Heiliki Kojima, a third-person action game for the Tellus Typhoon called *Specter: The Rebirth*.

"Several years ago, a tragic car accident nearly cost the Tellus family one of its most talented members," Reigel said. "Fortunately, someone realized that the producer of such classic titles as *Deathspot*, *Nightmare Warriors*, *Dracula's Castle* and, of course, *Bloodhunger* and *Bloodhunger 2* had more work to do! Now, after three years of secret work at Tellus of Japan, we are finally ready to unveil *Specter: The Rebirth*."

Specter: The Rebirth takes place in a world much like our own, but here, a hideous demon from beyond space and time is invading our reality. This "Mother of Fear" sends her legions of undead to build hideous warrens in the city, populated with all kinds of living-dead monsters that devour human life energy. Players must destroy these zombies before the warrens can suck up enough energy to open the gate between dimensions and bring the demon world into the human one. The twist is that the characters the players use are also undead. Players can choose to play as a vampire, ghost, ghoul or mummy N each with its own arsenal of incredible powers to call upon.

"I believe that *Specter: The Rebirth* will be my greatest game ever," Kojima said. "Based on the characters they play, gamers will earn four completely different experiences that ultimately lead to the same ending." In addition to revolutionary gameplay, *Specter: The Rebirth* will include two hours of FMV footage, motion-captured graphics using Hollywood stuntmen, a soundtrack written exclusively for the title by leading-edge metal band Skullfunk'd and brilliant, stunning, next-generation graphics.

Specter: The Rebirth will be released for the Tellus Typhoon in September. PC, PlaySaturn 2 and Vector-Box versions are planned for a Christmas release.

Please contact Michael Pacheco, Media Relations, with any questions. Please note that due to his continuing health problems, Mr. Kojima will be unavailable for interviews. Mr. Reigel is available by appointment.

At right: A "poltergeist" and a "skinrider" use their own unique powers in a cooperative-mode online game.



mind imperatives. A few ways for the crucible to learn the process for turning a Spectre into a minion are:

• Let the crucible discover how to minion bond on its own (this method is probably the most fun and rewarding for the crucible). Immediately after the mentor successfully bonds the Spectre to a significant tether, drop hints such as: "The ghost's suppressed personality is very close to the surface right now, pounding on the Spectre's emotional barriers like a child trapped under the surface of a frozen lake. Its muffled voice echoes faintly in your soul, calling out for help." If you allude to the submerged ghost's needs for a little more "emotional strength" (read: Willpower) for every significant tether, the mentor should eventually get the hint.

• If an Orphan-Grinder is assisting with the deprogramming, then she can offer the information as a useful tool. After all, she probably experienced it when she was saved and uses minion bonding when she rescues Spectres. If the crucible consults with the Hellboys for guidance, they share this secret, but if the Hellboys discover the crucible is treating a minion-bound Spectre poorly, they will try to rescue it.

• Mr. Jigsaw knows Spectres and how they behave. If he's to tell the crucible how to minion bond, it's best he appear after the characters endure a difficult episode with a Spectre in their care, a situation where knowing how to minion bond is incredibly useful. Of course, in such explanations lies a price, something Mr. Jigsaw is completely candid about. Regardless of the exchange of services, Mr. Jigsaw is polite and civil, never making the characters feel out of place or stupid for not knowing how to accomplish certain matters.

The Minion-Bonding Process

To turn a Spectre into a minion, the mentor must successfully use Sever the Strand to reacquaint the Spectre with a major tether (a Difficult or Dangerous one, using the Random Ghost Tether generator in the **Orpheus** core book, p. 260, as a guide). Upon successful completion, the mentor spends a Willpower point to "adopt" the Spectre as his minion for one day, spending an additional Willpower point per day to keep the Spectre relatively mollified. Turning the Spectre into a minion disconnects it from Grandmother's hive-mind and strengthens the empathic bond between the mentor and the Spectre. During this time, the Spectre views the mentor as kin, with an odd mixture of respect, trust and fear. It has no strong opinions, positive or negative, concerning the other crucible members or strangers, and it waits for the mentor to act appropriately. This won't be a "lick-my-hand" kind of pet, but neither will it go rottweiler on people.

While connected to its mentor, the Spectre tends to follow that character's commands and requests, obeying orders such as "Stay there" or "Follow me" without question. Whether it follows more complex instructions that go against the Spectre's basic nature depends on the Spectre's current Spite rating. If the mentor gives the Spectre an order that requires it to harm other Spectres or if the command places the Spectre in jeopardy, then the mentor's player must make a Willpower roll (difficulty equal to the minion's current Spite rating + 5). If the roll is successful, then the Spectre carries out the command. The Spectre will not obey the command if the roll fails, choosing to express its fear or displeasure with a whimper or growl. If the player botches the roll, then the minion bond breaks, and the Spectre is free to attack its mentor until the character spends an additional Willpower point to carry his control through for the *remaining* day (not another full 24 hours).

A mentor can also ask the Spectre for information, and it will answer questions simply and truthfully, but there's an important limitation to what the Spectre knows. Being disconnected from the hive-mind is



disorienting for the Spectre, and its perceptions are blurred and distorted. Its recollection of anything that happened while in the hive-mind is foggy and distant. Because of this confusion, the Spectre has an effective Willpower rating of two and one dot in each Mental Attribute for the duration of the minion bond. Even though the Spectre is eager to answer any questions put forth by its mentor, it has no information beyond personal facts. Everything else about the hives, the Malfeans, Grandmother, etc. is like a distant dream, full of haze and fog.

The bond between Spectre and mentor lasts for one day. The mentor can sense when the bond is about to expire, starting about an hour before its termination. It begins as a tugging at the pit of the mentor's stomach, as if something is becoming unstuck from the inside. This tugging grows stronger until the bond severs. During this last hour, the mentor's player can spend a point of Willpower to renew the minion bond for another day. If the bond expires, the Spectre reverts to its normal self. Hopefully, the crucible has the Spectre back in containment when this happens.

A minion bond doesn't always last the day. It's possible for the bond to end earlier. If the Spectre suffers injuries as a result of the crucible's direct actions (they send it into combat, for example — minions aren't supposed to be used as pit bulls) or if a crucible member abuses it, the Spectre reverts back to its normal state at the beginning of the next turn. When the bond is broken in this fashion, the Spectre loses its connection to the tether used to minion bond it. The Spectre regains that one Spite rating, and the characters must reacquaint it with that tether all over again.

WHAT NEXT?

The odds are that the first Spectre the crucible rescues will be someone important to it or an ally, someone it is well motivated to rescue from Spectrehood. After rescuing one Spectre, it's not too likely the characters will go off and rescue every other Spectre they meet. The process of redeeming Spectres is involved and dangerous. Despite the significant rewards, it's not an option the crucible should choose lightly. It takes a truly unusual or exceptional Spectre to grab the crucible's attention and motivate the characters to consider that Spectre a candidate worthy of rehabilitation. Ways to direct the crucible's attention to one particular Spectre over others include:

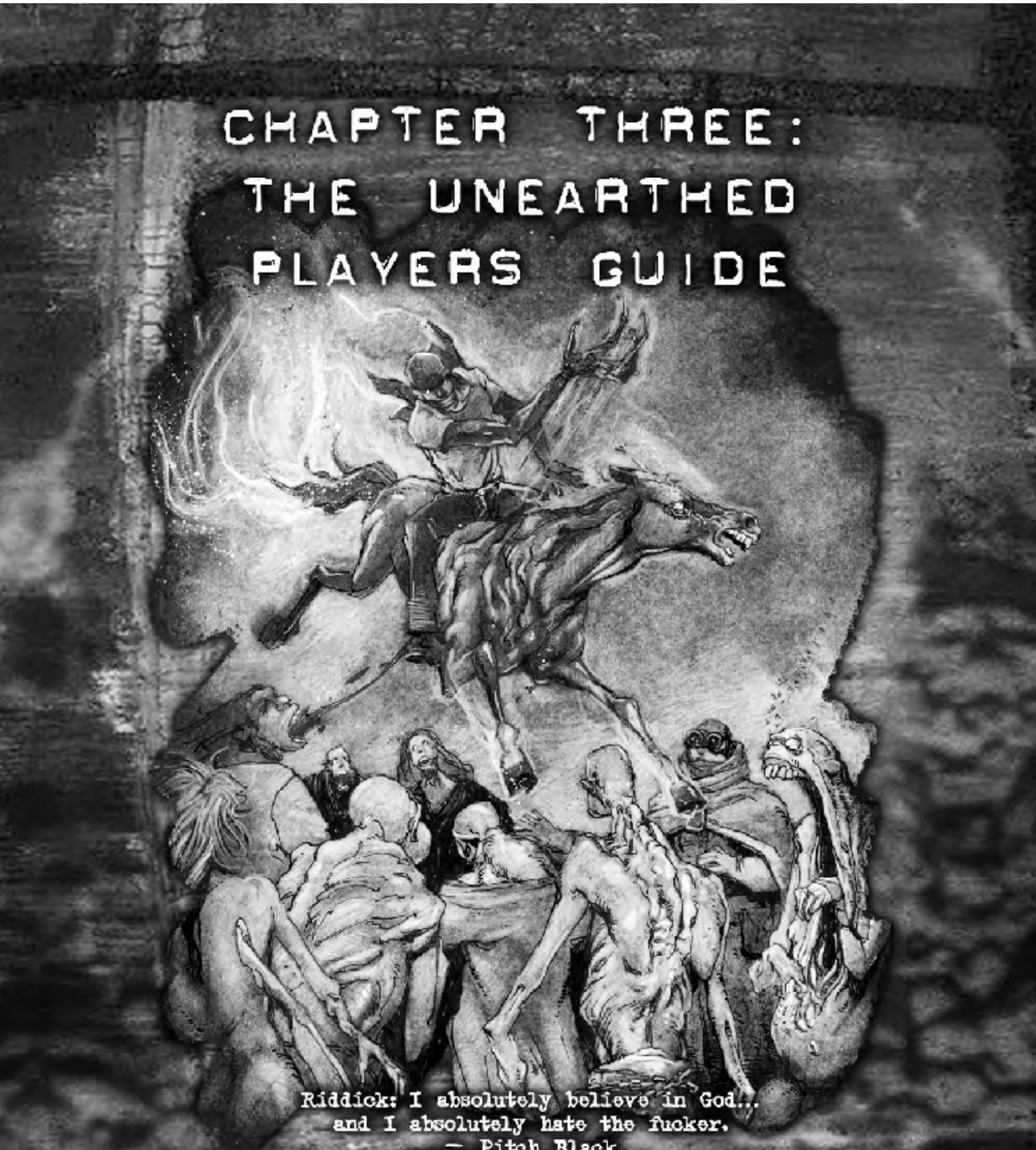
• **Converting the Enemy:** High-Spite Spectres are the crucible's most potent foes. Instead of destroying one, a powerful crucible can capture it and attempt to convert it back into a ghost. Converting strong Spectres such as Frighteners kills two birds with one stone — first, it removes a powerful enemy, and second, it creates a potential ally. A high-Spite Spectre that likely attracts the crucible's attention is probably one who has harassed and tormented the crucible for a while. You've spent much time developing the personality of this creature. The crucible's efforts to unearth and expose the agent's tethers give you an opportunity for character-driven roleplaying.

Once the characters fully rehabilitate the Spectre, consider what kind of knowledge he might possess. Most recovered Spectres remember little of events when they were in the hive-mind, but for Storytellers capable of running the events in **End Game**, this new Orphan-Grinder might serve as the perfect guide for events to come. Storytellers familiar with events preceding this miniseries and the old world of ghosts can use this character to bridge the Underworld prior with the living now. Conversely, Storytellers uninterested in that angle can simple nail the crucible with a nasty ploy — the Orphan-Grinder in question wanted to become a Spectre in the first place, just like he wants to become a Lawgiver (an Orphan-Grinder who returns to Spectrehood, see p. 81) now. He allowed himself to be converted, so he could lure the characters into an ambush and become more powerful than before (Lawgivers are on par with, if not more powerful than, Reapers).

• **Reclaiming the Fallen:** The Swarm Storm's aftermath provides another reason for the crucible to seek out redeemable Spectres. During the Swarm Storm, many allied ghosts and projectors fell to the onslaught and were converted into Spectres. With some investigation, the crucible can locate and recover allies. It should be easier to research the tethers of Spectres the crucible knew well when they were ghosts. Another advantage is that the crucible has a better idea of how such a Spectre will react to them once it's reborn as an Orphan-Grinder. The crucible may also want to recover the Spectre if the ghost within has important information vital to the characters.

• **Oblivion's Husk:** Now that they're aware of them, the crucible should try or may want to incorporate an Orphan-Grinder. Orphan-Grinders maintain a twilight existence, halfway between the worlds of Spectres and ghosts. This connection gives them a special empathic understanding of Spectres, which manifests as powers such as Oblivion's Husk and Song of the Hive. Both powers confer the ability to spy upon the hive-mind and impart in some way the ability to eavesdrop on Spectral plans, to alter Spectres' minor agendas, to influence Spectres and even to locate specific Spectres. An Orphan-Grinder could prove instrumental in fighting the Spectres — or in saving a few of the truly worthy....

CHAPTER THREE: THE UNEARTHED PLAYERS GUIDE



Riddick: I absolutely believe in God...
and I absolutely hate the fucker.
— Pitch Black

I fought my way through life, death and Hell itself.
Don't talk to me about redemption.
— Tom Hayes

This chapter presents some new options for players and their characters. The first and, in many ways, most important option is the introduction of the Orphan-Grinder Shade. Orphan-Grinders are spooks who previously fell to Spite and became Spectres, only to return from the darkest parts of the hereafter after regaining some portion of their humanity.

Naturally (or perhaps unnaturally), these former Spectres do not return unchanged. If nothing else, their capabilities are greatly altered. Fortunately, this chapter includes details on the Orphan-Grinders' starting, second-tier and third-tier Horrors. These Horrors allow the Orphan-Grinders to call upon help from Spectral forces or even to rejoin with the hive-mind for a brief time.

Unlike new Horrors introduced in previous supplements (such as Bedlam and Sandman in **Shades of Gray**), the Orphan-Grinders' Horrors — Oblivion's Husk, Hellion and Vector — are banned Horrors for *every* Shade except the Orphan-Grinders. Conversely, Orphan-Grinders, their former Shades wiped away along with much of their old personas by dint of becoming Spectres, have no restrictions on the Horrors they can learn. Orphan-Grinders have the potential to become very powerful ghosts indeed — but then, they reclaimed a measure of their souls while trapped in a kind of Hell. Perhaps they deserve the power they have. Perhaps some higher authority feels they've earned it.

Perhaps that higher authority is even benevolent.

Playing the Orphan-Grinders

Each of the other Shades available for play in **Orpheus** represents an archetypal facet of the ghost story — the violent poltergeist, the mysterious ghost who appears in dreams, the beguiling shimmer of light leading onlookers into peril, etc. The Orphan-Grinder, however, while occasionally branching into legendry (see the Hellion Horror, p. 84), is, for the most part, rooted not in mythology, but in the game setting. That doesn't mean Orphan-Grinders aren't compelling or interesting characters — quite the opposite. Orphan-Grinders can be extremely challenging to play. It does, however, mean that some additional attention to their mindsets, their origins and their natures is in order.

The Road Back from Hell

Orphan-Grinders learned, the hard way, what fate awaits those who allow their Spite to rule them. Every Orphan-Grinder knows, even briefly, what it's like to be a Spectre. Mercifully, most don't remember that horror (see p. 77 for what little they *do* remember), but all of them recall the way back, whatever allowed them to crawl through the hives, through the Spite, past Grandmother's minions and back toward being a ghost.

There is no one true way of recovering from being a Spectre. In fact, given the rarity of Orphan-Grinders, it's fair to say that every member of the Shade finds her own way back. That said, a few possibilities exist here for your consideration.

Love Conquers All

It may seem clichéd, but it's not — it's archetypal. Love can indeed pull a Spectre back from the brink. In some cases, it's what turned the ghost into a Spectre in the first place (Tom Hayes, the signature character for the Orphan-Grinder Shade, became a Spectre hoping he'd find his daughter and recovered his sanity in large part due to memories of the girl she was). Love for a sibling, a spouse, a friend or even King and Country (see "A Matter of Principle," below) can lurk within a Spectre's mind, shunting off some of the hive-mind's voices until the situation finally reaches critical mass. Perhaps the hive-mind asks a devoted husband to reap the soul of someone who looks like his wife or, for extra tragedy, the soul of his wife herself. Perhaps a devoted father finds himself possessing a body (i.e., becoming a Jason) and stalking toward an elementary school with an ax in his hand. Spite and Vitality are forms of energy, from a ghostly perspective, and energy can't ever truly disappear. If love is strong enough to endure death, there's no reason it can't endure the monstrous transition to Spectrehood — and provide a way free from it.

A Matter of Principle

Sometimes, a moral or ethical code is enough to liberate a Spectre from servitude, though the moral code doesn't necessarily have to be "good" — a neo-Nazi who truly believes his rhetoric might theoretically pull free of the Spite that made him a Spectre by clinging to that idiom. Soldiers, policemen, the clergy and journalists, to name a few, commonly define themselves, at least partially, by their principles. Naturally, those principles are of no use to Grandmother, unless the hive-mind can shunt them into "belief in Grandmother's agenda," but she really prefers drones to fervent believers. In most people, the hive-mind completely drowns out any voice of reason or morality. Some folks, especially those who died in the line of duty or as a result of adhering to their morals, can tear themselves free of the hive-mind when asked to grossly violate their most treasured ethics.

ORPHAN-GRINDER

Smile. It gets a whole lot worse than this. Believe me, I know.

Everyone who interacts with the dead on a direct level, either as a projector or as a departed ghost, must cope with Spite. Accumulating too much negative emotion is detrimental to more than just a spook's mental health — it can spell the end of her very existence. Only by helping other ghosts to their eternal reward (see **Orpheus**, p. 193) — by "putting things right" in a very direct way — can spooks rid themselves of Spite.

But far too many spooks don't understand that, to protect themselves from the eventuality of falling to Spite, they must help others. Other ghosts allow their anger, hate and fear to sit and fester until the feelings consume them. And of course, a ghost occasionally draws on Spite willingly, either from a desire for revenge or even a far nobler goal (see the Tom Hayes signature character write-up in this chapter). These unfortunates become Spectres, their very natures subsumed by whatever unholy agenda the Spectre hive-mind has in store for them. They retain what they knew as ghosts (meaning that Orpheus agents who become Spectres are *extremely* dangerous to their former crucible-mates, as perhaps the characters have already discovered), but they replace everything that was decent and ethical about themselves with an unswerving desire to serve their mistress.



Yet, something of the persons they were still remains, for it's possible, if unlikely, for a Spectre to throw off her chains, disconnect from the hive-mind and rise again as a true ghost. These "redeemed Spectres" are called Orphan-Grinders. Orphaned now from their hideous mother and orphaned from their former existence, they are caught between states. Still others claim their name stems from something far more sinister… that unlike the Spectres, which are remorseless by nature, the Orphan-Grinders are more harsh and brutal because they understand the quality of mercy and yet ignore it as a failing.

Unlike the other Shades, which stem from a character's personality in life, very few generalities can be made about the Orphan-Grinders as a group. This is due, in part, to their rarity — since few souls have the tenacity or opportunity to become Orphan-Grinders — but is mostly because the defining trait of an Orphan-Grinder has nothing to do with her mortal life. The defining trait is that somehow, the character returned from Spectrehood.

Orphan-Grinders are often highly principled people. While anyone can become a Spectre, those who become Orphan-Grinders typically fell from grace without noticing how closely they ventured to the brink. This can either happen because of one monumental accumulation of Spite, perhaps upon seeing a friend or loved one perish or suffer, or it can happen slowly, the ghost garnering Spite gradually without ever truly noticing how angry and bitter she'd become. Through all this, however, the character remains very true to herself — she knows who she is and what she's doing.

Orphan-Grinders very rarely feel as though events spiraled beyond their control, even when they have, and it is precisely this sense of control over their own minds and souls that allows them to return from what is, essentially, damnation.

This overwhelming sense of self and strength of will isn't always so nebulous, however. All ghosts have tethers keeping them bound to life in some way. Often, an Orphan-Grinder's tethers are so strong that these connections remain with her even during her "tenure" as a Spectre. These tethers are dormant but still present, and they still represent a large part of who the character is. If such a strong tether can be "tapped" somehow, the effect on the Spectre's latent human soul is much the same as the effect on a spider when something strums its web. The soul awakens, even for an instant, but if the soul is sufficiently strong, that instant is enough.

Orphan-Grinders retain their memories and goals from before their fall from grace, but their personalities cannot help but change. The characteristics of their former Shades become muted. A former Wisp no longer has the same desire to interact with others, and a former Phantasm no longer possesses the same artistic spark. Grandmother's caress strips away the essential facets of the Orphan-Grinder's personality. What remains is typically a frightening sense of purpose along with a hatred and fear of Spectres that puts that of even the most dogged of other spooks to shame. Orphan-Grinders know what will happen to the world if Grandmother has her way. All other concerns, including (ironically) the tethers that allowed the Orphan-Grinder to return, become secondary considerations at best.

All Orphan-Grinders have the spirit Lament. Their disadvantage — the Spectre counterpart — changes to Ascension's Call (see p. 81), but all other facets of the Lament remain true.

Horrors: *Oblivion's Husk*, Hellion, Vector

Manifestation Forms: At **zero Vitality** points, the Orphan-Grinder appears as a cloud of black smoke or grayish, roiling mist. Anyone looking very carefully might see the character's face appear in the wisps of smoke for a few seconds at a time, though focusing on the face or its features is near impossible. In this form, the character can speak with a raspy whisper (no more than a few words a time) but cannot touch or manipulate any solid objects.

With **one Vitality** point, the smoke coalesces into a thick, oily puddle that can move and assume a humanoid form. This liquid is cold to the touch, and any person touching it with his bare skin or gauze finds it stings briefly, like putting bare flesh on freezing metal. The character can speak in this form, but the words are slurred, and the voice is thick and sibilant. Unlike many other Shades, Orphan-Grinders with high Spite ratings are completely indistinguishable from others of their ilk.

At **two Vitality** points, the character manifests fully, appearing as a normal human being, indistinguishable from her living form. Fully manifested Orphan-Grinders often grow withdrawn and sad. They know what they've lost and, on some subconscious level, understand the world's likely fate. Many of them are also strangely afraid of shadows and superstitiously avoid crossing them while manifested.

Base Vitality: 5

Base Spite: 3

Base Willpower: 6

Recommended Natures: Addict, Barbarian, Deviant, Grotesque, Monster, Wretch

TOM HAYES

Tom Hayes could have surrendered at any time. When his brother molested his young daughter, he did what he could to cope and to help her through it. When he discovered he had an inoperable cancer, he persevered. When his wife committed suicide, he latched on to his love for his daughter. When Orpheus approached him, he accepted its offer.

And still, the misfortunes continued, and still, Tom Hayes fought. When Orpheus fell, Tom Hayes' body was in a sleeper pod that NextWorld destroyed. Tom Hayes died. And still, he didn't give up. When Spectres took his daughter Sarah to "Hell," however, that was the closest Tom Hayes ever came to surrendering. He'd read Orpheus' reports on Spectres and knew there was no way to find someone who had become one. Still, Tom was persistent, and he thought of a way — he'd follow the Spectres, and get his daughter back.

But Spectres don't have that kind of freedom. They do what the hive-mind demands of them, as Tom discovered. Some part of him, the part that remained the tenacious, loving man he was in life, watched in horror as a creature using his rage, anguish and voice hunted down his former co-workers and friends. After the "ghost-quake" rocked the Spectre's hive-mind, Lazarus Redux found Tom and imprisoned him in an attempt to "save" him.

Kate Dennison's unflinching friendship provided Tom with a window into salvation, a way around all the Spite he'd accepted, even if she didn't realize her hand in the matter. Tom dove for that window and fought his way back, escaping from Grandmother's hold and from Lazarus Redux. Tom still had a mission to complete, and Kate would only detain him further.

In his first few days as an Orphan-Grinder, Tom searched relentlessly for his daughter, using his new Horrors to scour the hive-mind. In the process, Tom discovered there is no mercy. He can't locate his daughter, yet, or find any answers. All he managed to do was hurt his friends and give the hive-mind a little more information about the survivors of Orpheus. He remains alone, desperately wanting to share what he knows but afraid of hurting Kate and the others' again with his agendas.

Loss

Memories are tricky things. Sometimes, a sensation or emotion we believe lost forever is only waiting for the right stimulus to return in full force to our minds. As much as Grandmother might believe that her Spectral minions have no memories remaining from their human days, it isn't always true. A Spectre might occasionally see something that was important to it during its life — where it proposed to its spouse, where its child was born or even something less obviously significant, such as the bakery where it bought muffins on the way to work. Seeing something that was important or, better yet, defining to the human being the Spectre was can sometimes throw that humanity into sharp relief. That notion of loss can, at times, create enough of a gap in the hive-mind that the human in the monster reemerges.

Salvation

Spite (as **Orpheus** uses the term) stems from anger, hatred and bitterness, but it also stems from self-loathing and grief. Sometimes, ghosts descend into Spectrehood not because they allow their rage to get the better of them or because they wish to strike back at the world, but because they simply don't see themselves as anything but worthless. This kind of person makes for the rarest of the already-rare Orphan-Grinders. To achieve salvation, such beings must convince themselves *as Spectres* that their human lives and souls were worthwhile and did fulfill some purpose. How they accomplish this monumental feat depends entirely on the ghost in question, but it probably involves some expression of humanity toward the Spectre by a living person (or by someone the Spectre believes is a living person, i.e., a ghost with a high Vitality score — Tom Hayes also owes his salvation to this as well, given Kate Dennison refused to give up on him). That moment of humanity *might* be enough to make the human inside the Spectre realize that something in him was worth caring about and allow that human being to push his way past the hive-mind to become an Orphan-Grinder. As might be expected, this happens so infrequently that even ghosts who know of the Orphan-Grinders confidently state that it's impossible.

Interestingly, examples of this class of Orphan-Grinder are the ones most likely to find redemption and become true ghosts again (see p. 79).

Spontaneity

Very few Spectres are actually redeemable. After all, not all of them were even human, and the ones that were seldom possess the inner strength to rise from their Spite-driven imprisonment. We already discussed the most common "triggers" for becoming an Orphan-Grinder, but it bears noting that, occasionally, a Spectre becomes this Shade… and has no idea whatsoever how it happened. Certainly these spirits remember their mortal lives and have tethers that are relatively strong, but nothing on the nigh-fanatical level of other Orphan-Grinders. Pious-minded spooks suspect that God elevates these Spectres and grants them their humanity back for some greater purpose. Cynics, of course, murmur that there is another, darker possibility to these Manchurian candidates and Spectres in sheep's clothing.

The Orphan-Grinder Mindset

The Shade write-up at the beginning of this chapter offers some insight into Orphan-Grinder behavior, as well as members of this Shade's general (and potential) goals, but the subject merits more discussion. Orphan-Grinders, as former Spectres, combine the experiences of POWs and brainwashed cultists. While Spectres, they were aware, on some level, of what was happening and what the were doing, but at the same time, they were completely enthralled by the hive-mind. This can establish a number of possible attitudes upon such a character's return from his plummet, and a player should consider how the character reacts given his time spent with the enemy (or more accurately, *as* the enemy) and what that does to his in-chronicle behavior and attitudes.

The Hive-Mind

Imagine a group of people comprised of the members of your family who always understood and nurtured you, the friends who supported you, the lover who fulfilled you and the teachers who guided you. Now, imagine those people inside your head, helping you to fulfill your life's purpose.

It's easy to see why some Orphan-Grinders secretly *miss* the hive-mind.

The hive-mind guides all Spectres, linking them together like soldier ants. It's the single most dangerous factor in fighting Spectres. Even if a crucible manages to surprise and destroy a solitary Spectre, experience assures them that its last act before destruction was to summon help. Even the most powerful Spectres — Reapers, Frighteners, etc. — remain connected to the hive-mind in some capacity. This means that help is almost always nearby, that information spreads hellishly quickly among Spectres and that Spectres are nearly impossible to surprise.

Leaving that kind of information and support network and braving the cold, lonely expanse of freedom is hard on many Orphan-Grinders. Naturally, they wouldn't return to the hive-mind (slavery is slavery, no matter how comforting), but sometimes, an Orphan-Grinder's eyes gloss over while

she reaches out for the hive-mind, for the knowledge that her brothers and sisters are there... and they aren't. Even the Horror, Oblivion's Husk (see p. 82), is a poor substitute. Though it allows the Orphan-Grinder to touch upon the hive-mind, it doesn't allow a connection with it (which is probably a good thing).

Other Orphan-Grinders are only too pleased to be free of the claustrophobia of the hive-mind. Characters with a strong sense of individuality and principles, especially, often loathe the intrusive hive-mind, which helps greatly in breaking them from Spectrehood as Orphan-Grinders. These characters often remain aloof, even from other ghosts, and despise using Oblivion's Husk to mask themselves from Spectres. Any reminder of their loss of self, as associated with the hive-mind, is too much for them to bear.

Atrocities in Grandmother's Name

Upon discovering the existence of Orphan-Grinders, ghosts often excitedly assume that since a former Spectre was connected to the hive-mind, she knows the *truth* about Spectres and any number of other questions plaguing the dead. The facts are disappointing, as usual: The hive-mind is analogous to an immense library wherein a Spectre can learn virtually anything — but the minute he steps out of the library (i.e., becomes an Orphan-Grinder) he loses that knowledge. Entering the library again requires reconnecting with the hive-mind, thus becoming a Spectre once more. Thus, Orphan-Grinders remember what the hive-mind *feels* like but not any of the information it conveys. They may recall a few details, the mission of a local Spectre group or the location of a nascent hive (in other words, whatever the Storyteller requires them to remember to further the chronicle), but they know nothing in terms of spiritual truths.

What they do remember in detail, however, is what they did while in the thrall of the hive-mind. Whatever evils and atrocities they committed while a Spectre become part of their personal memories, subsumed into their Spite. Some Orphan-Grinders react to these memories by fanatically hunting after and destroying Spectres, while others try to redeem Spectres into Orphan-Grinders (see Chapter Two). Others still suffer from horrible guilt over their actions, regardless of how many times their compatriots remind them that they served the hive-mind as victims and were not in control of their actions or faculties. These Orphan-Grinders believe in their guilt by dint that they allowed themselves to fall to Spite in the first place and, in that, they are correct.

Some Orphan-Grinders profess they feel little responsibility for their prior conduct. It wasn't as though they had a choice, but the fact that they remember what they did, along with remembering the satisfaction of a job well done they felt after carrying out mayhem and murder, means that the experience must have some effect. Players with Orphan-Grinder characters should consider what their characters remember of their tenure as Spectres and how they feel about it. Are there ghosts a character hurt (or created) while he was a Spectre? Could the Orphan-Grinder find and help these spirits as an apology or as penance?

Violence

Orphan-Grinders are no strangers to violence, and that means they often frighten other ghosts with their intensity and brutality in combat. The fact is, though, Orphan-Grinders have seen the worst depths to which a

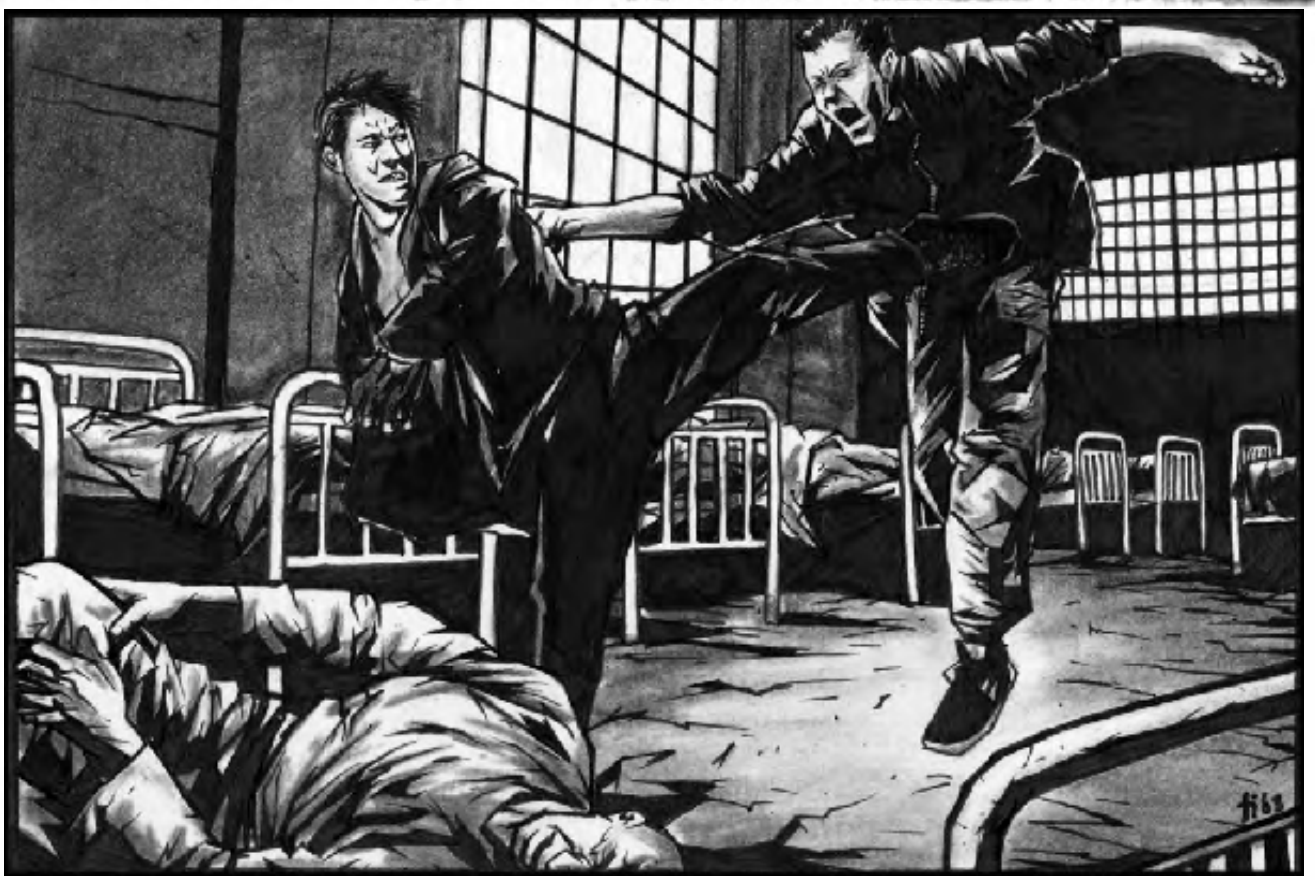
Clamoring to Know

It's inevitable that, with the prospect of playing redeemed Spectres, the players will have many questions regarding the Orphan-Grinders. Questions such as:

• **My old character became a Spectre. Can I reclaim him as an Orphan-Grinder?** Technically, yes, though that always remains the purview of the Storyteller. If the character outlived his usefulness or became a Spectre because of constant, irresponsible behavior, then the Storyteller may dictate his fate sealed. If the Storyteller wishes to provide a link with previous ghost chronicles, however, then this option is certainly viable — even more so if the Storyteller chooses to resurrect old supporting characters from editions gone by....

• **Don't the Orphan-Grinders have Spite-tempered applications for their Horrors or even Crucible Horrors?** The Orphan-Grinders' Horrors are already bringing them close to their former states, and using Spite is sort of like adding fuel to the fire. They can't wield Spite to power their Horrors because, for each Spite they tap to do so, they automatically gain an equivalent Spite point. Secondly, Crucible Horrors remain beyond Orphan-Grinders because their nature prevents them from interacting well with others. Besides, given that their Horror's lack that first integral step in cooperation (Benefits), they can't reach the next step (Crucible Horrors).

• **Why are Orphan-Grinders appearing now?** Perhaps the dynamics of the universe are shifting to counterbalance the onslaught and glut of Spectres. Perhaps the process always existed, but such cases were so rare that few ever heard about them (until someone made the information more widespread). Or perhaps a schism among Spectres is causing some brethren to slip between the cracks.



soul can sink, and that engenders desperation (and probably anger, fear and any number of other intense emotions including love of freedom and existence). Orphan-Grinder characters, as evidenced by their Horrors, can very easily become combat monsters, and there's nothing at all wrong with that. Each player, however, should strive to determine what her character is feeling during these moments of violence. Guilt for her actions as a Spectre? Righteousness for mercifully destroying other Spectres? Fear that, if she doesn't win the fight, she will once again be shackled by the hive-mind?

GRANDMOTHER'S SONG

Once an Orphan-Grinder escapes Spectrehood, she isn't truly free until she finds redemption (see below). Her Spite, what was once her own negativity, her personal reservoir of anger and hatred, has mixed with and been tainted by Grandmother's agenda. Therefore, while the siren call of the hive-mind is gone and the Orphan-Grinder is no longer bound to Grandmother's will, she faces problems and complications with which no other Shade must contend.

Note to Storytellers: The hive-mind is *not* everpresent in an Orphan-Grinder. These ghosts are severed from the hive-mind, and though some residual "taint" lingers on in the Spite of an Orphan-Grinder, no Orphan-Grinder need be concerned with inadvertently connecting to the hive-mind and betraying her compatriots. The Orphan-Grinder can *choose*, at any time, to fall once again into Spectrehood (see Lawgivers, p. 81), but she does not have a ravenous or insidious other presence in her head urging her to do so. Spite is frightening because it does *not* have an agenda or a will — it is emotional poison, though the ghost's own shortcomings might encourage her through Spite. When Spite reaches a certain level, the ghost's will and agenda change (rather than being subsumed, see the difference?). The circumstances listed below all grant opportunities for Orphan-Grinders to accrue Spite or to otherwise come closer to becoming Spectres again.

THE EVIL TWIN

Spirit characters who become Spectres merge with their "evil twins" (see "Lament: Spirit," p. 97 of **Orpheus**) — the act cannibalizes the evil twin to create the connection between a human mind and the inhuman hive-mind possible. When a Spectre becomes an Orphan-Grinder, however, the evil twin reappears. The time spent as the Spectre's connection to the hive-mind strips the twin of everything unique it once held. It is now no longer a reflection of the Orphan-Grinder — it doesn't even have that much humanity left. The twin becomes a special kind of Spectre called a Gemini. Worse yet, it shines with the Vitality rating of the

Orphan-Grinder, misleading some into believing it's an actual ghost.

A Gemini begins with Traits equal to the Orphan-Grinder from which it sprang, but it develops independently thereafter. Gemini are capable of using any non-Orphan-Grinder Horrors that their former selves knew but can only learn Spectre powers thereafter. They retain none of their human memories or agendas. Whereas a spirit's Spectre doppelganger exists to harm its counterpart and her loved ones, a Gemini couldn't care less about the living. All Gemini care about is tracking down and recapturing Orphan-Grinders... any Orphan-Grinders. They can perceive Orphan-Grinders in the same way spirits sense their Spectre counterparts (though Orphan-Grinders cannot sense their Gemini without using Oblivion's Husk), and Gemini are not limited to sensing the characters whom they once partially comprised. Once a Gemini finds an Orphan-Grinder, it immediately uses its Lockstep Horror on the unfortunate ghost (see sidebar). Gemini are capable of acting with all the creativity and malice of any Spectre and are happy to arrange ambushes and other traps for Orphan-Grinders.

Unique Spectre Horror - Lockstep

This Horror, available only to Gemini Spectres, overwhelms Orphan-Grinders with mental pain. The hive-mind is magnified to unearthly levels and broadcast directly into an Orphan-Grinder's thoughts. This often has the effect of forcing the unfortunate ghost to march, lockstep, into whatever unpleasantness the Gemini has waiting for her.

Using Lockstep requires the tapping of a Spite point and a Charisma + Expression roll, opposed by the Orphan-Grinder's player who must make a Willpower roll (both rolls are difficulty 6). The rolls continue each turn until the Horror stops because the Gemini takes damage or is distracted or because the Orphan-Grinder escapes or succumbs. While the Gemini is using the power, the Orphan-Grinder is considered Crippled (-5 dice to all actions and walks at a fourth of her normal movement rate). The Gemini cannot move or take other actions while using Lockstep.

Each turn, compare the number of successes rolled by both parties. If the Orphan-Grinder wins, there is no effect. If the Gemini wins, the Orphan-Grinder loses one Willpower point. If the Orphan-Grinder falls to zero Willpower, she sinks into a stupor, and the Gemini can carry her soul back to a hive to make her a Lawgiver.

Destroying a Gemini is difficult. Like a spirit's counterpart, the Gemini simply disappears for a short time. Unlike the spirit's twin, however, the Gemini spends much less time beyond the Stormwall. Because the connection between a Gemini and its counterpart is so weak, the Gemini must rest for a short while to recover its strength, after which it returns to hunting Orphan-Grinders. The Storyteller should roll the Gemini's Spite rating when it is destroyed and subtract the number of successes from 10. This is the number of *days* the Gemini remains banished.

Thievery

Orphan-Grinders are capable of using this power just like any other spook, but the repercussions are much more damning for them. When an Orphan-Grinder character steals Vitality from another ghost, the difficulty of the Spite roll to determine if she accrues Spite is 4 not 6 (see "Thievery," p. 151 of **Orpheus**). If the Orphan-Grinder turns another ghost into a Spectre through Thievery, she not only gains a Spite rating, but alerts all Spectres within a mile radius of her location. In essence, creating a new Spectre sends up a massive Spite flare.

Vector

Using the Vector Horror to possess Spectres (see p. 85) can result in an Orphan-Grinder gaining additional Spite.

Entering Hives

Orphan-Grinders are the best qualified of any ghosts to enter and emerge from hives unscathed, but even the most careful Orphan-Grinder using Oblivion's Husk can never truly be safe. Aside from the possibility that a Spectre might somehow penetrate the Orphan-Grinder's disguise and bring down all the hive's defense upon her head, one of a hive's protective measures can reveal Orphan-Grinders quite easily.

As described in Chapter Four of **Shades of Gray**, all hives host fine, toothy tendrils that siphon Vitality from ghosts. Those tendrils also caress and even nibble on Spectres but can easily distinguish through the "flavor" of the energies found therein that someone is not suitable prey. The tendrils are not sentient and are not part of the hive-mind. When they "taste" Orphan-Grinders, however, even those concealed by Oblivion's Husk, they still drain Vitality. Since the tendrils are not part of the hive-mind, they cannot alert the other Spectres of the hive, but they can weaken an Orphan-Grinder, either forcing her to flee or to reveal herself.

Redemption

Orphan-Grinders, though not Spectres and no longer connected to the hive-mind, are not entirely free. While they may not know this for the time being, no Orphan-Grinder can pass on to her final reward without ridding

herself of the abundance of tainted Spite festering in her soul. To ultimately "pass on," an Orphan-Grinder must divest the last remaining traces of the hive-mind from herself and become a member of her former (or perhaps even a different) Shade once again. Afterward, she can transcend or remain if she so wishes.

This requires considerable effort and change from the character, both in game mechanic terms and, mostly, in story terms. The details of both receive proper explanation below.

Mechanics

The mechanics of redemption are actually simple: The character must reduce her Spite rating to one. Lowering Spite rating is described on page 193 of **Orpheus** and is the only method by which Orphan-Grinders can achieve redemption.

Naturally, Orphan-Grinders don't have any way knowing that by helping other ghosts pass on, they can themselves find their eternal peace. As a result, most Orphan-Grinders focus more on destroying Spectres than on helping other spooks resolve their tethers. But the first time an Orphan-Grinder drops by one Spite rating, she immediately feels her soul grow lighter and realizes she's taken a step along a path that feels, for want of a better word, *right*.

Unfortunately, this Spite rating loss weakens the Gemini counterpart of that particular Orphan-Grinder, causing it to lose a Spite rating as well. It immediately sends out a distress call to the hive-mind, resulting in all Spectres redoubling their efforts to find the Orphan-Grinder. Even Spectres have a sense of self-preservation, and if an Orphan-Grinder succeeds in becoming a true ghost, her Gemini "counterpart" immediately dissolves.

The Path to Redemption

In mechanical terms, redemption may only require saving a few ghosts, but from the character's perspective, it's more involved than that.

As previously mentioned, when a Spectre becomes an Orphan-Grinder, important parts of the personality fall away, while, in their place, emerge the mottled essence of the new, ghost/Spectre hybrid that is the Orphan-Grinder Shade. Redemption is, for the Orphan-Grinder, a process of removing the still-Spectral parts of the soul. Nature and supernature, however, abhor a vacuum, and so, the character must replace the tainted, sickly Spite she excises from her soul with something. Defining that "something" is a major part of an Orphan-Grinder's redemption, for it helps the player determine what Shade the character will adopt should she ever manage to achieve salvation.

Whenever an Orphan-Grinder participates in helping another soul ascend, she feels more like the person she once was, and more of the spiritual taint left by hive-mind

Example of Redemption: Jimmy Patterson

Jimmy was a rich kid who died of an accidental heroin overdose. Heroin wasn't his only poison of choice, however, and his usage of pigment ensured he became a hue upon death. He struggled with existence as a ghost, while his ability to fit into any situation and his predilection for computers made him a Haunter. He didn't remain so for long, however. The guilt over the pain he caused his family, who never knew of his drug habits, and his anger at how the family failed to attend his funeral or to give him an obituary sent his Spite skyrocketing. Within six months of his death, Jimmy was a Spectre.

Jimmy, however, was always possessed of a singular will and refused to live his life on anyone else's terms. He could blend in with any crowd, true, but he did so without compromising his own unique persona. Becoming a Spectre, therefore, just one of countless identical drones, was the worst torture possible. What remained of his conscious mind struggled constantly, looking for that window to throw the hive-mind through and reassert himself. One day, while the Spectre Jimmy prepared to pounce on a young woman who had OD'd moments before on pigment, Jimmy's personality roared to the fore, and he became an Orphan-Grinder.

Jimmy was never much for trouble, drugs notwithstanding, so rather than battle Spectres, he concentrated on helping drones and blips toward sentience. Nothing troubled him more than seeing people unable to make choices, locked into their routines so tightly they didn't even know they were dead. As he helped them, he discovered that his indignation and energy, which helped him escape Spectrehood, were becoming important facets of his personality. A few months later, after helping a composer's ghost finish his masterpiece and ascend, Jimmy felt the last vestiges of the hive-mind wrench themselves free of his thoughts. He was no longer an Orphan-Grinder, but he had changed too much to be a Haunter. He was proactive and angry now, ready to shake things up as much as necessary to achieve results. He had become a Poltergeist.

In game system terms, Jimmy's Lament is spirit, though his new Lament drawback is Ascension's Call. He loses Oblivion's Husk and Hellion (the two Orphan-Grinder Horrors he'd developed), but he immediately gains Helter Skelter and Juggernaut. If he had learned Unearthly Repose during his time as an Orphan-Grinder, or even before as a Haunter, he'd lose that Horror immediately upon become a Poltergeist — since it is a banned Horror for that Shade. The Storyteller might allow Jimmy's player to choose another Horror to compensate or perhaps just remind the player that Jimmy is fortunate to be extant in any condition.

exposure sloughs off. Whether the character knows it or not, her Gemini grows closer to dissolution. This means that, as the character approaches redemption, Spectres of all stripes, Gemini and Lawgivers included, hunt her with greater fervency.

Throughout all this, however, the character is capable of backsliding. She must lose any gains in Spite rating before redemption is possible, even though she accrued this Spite rating as an Orphan-Grinder rather than as a Spectre. Any time the character gains a Spite rating, whether by tapping Spite, Thievery or any other method, her Gemini also becomes stronger (this is one of the few noticeable connections between an Orphan-Grinder and "her" Gemini).

When the Orphan-Grinder finally reduces her Spite rating to one, she feels the weight of the hive-mind finally lift completely from her soul. She immediately changes Shades once again, either reclaiming her old Shade or adopting a new one in keeping with her personality as it changed from her time as an Orphan-Grinder. The character's Nature might change, as well.

Upon redemption, the character promptly loses all Orphan-Grinder Horrors she knew, as well as any Horrors considered banned by her new Shade. Her Lament is still that of spirit, but her Gemini completely dissolves, meaning she does not suffer from the depredations of an "evil twin" the way most spirits do. She does, however, gain a new drawback coined Ascension's Call and must also be wary — if she ever becomes a Spectre again, she becomes a Lawgiver (see p. 81), and there are no second chances for these creatures.

New Spirit Drawback: Ascension's Call

While a reborn spirit's advantage (five additional freebie points, available if the character was never played as a spirit but started the chronicle as an Orphan-Grinder) is still in effect, the disadvantage of a malignant counterpart is not. Instead, the spirit is beset by Ascension's Call, a sense that heaven is just around the corner and that nothing else matters.

Redeemed Orphan-Grinders no longer possess their malevolent counterpart, which serves to "elevate" their souls. They are unburdened by their baser emotions, in some ways, and less tethered to this realm. The desire to rid themselves of their remaining Spite and transcend the living entirely is nearly overwhelming… suffocating. Every action they pursue seems paltry and insignificant when compared to the promise of Ascension's Call — so much so that redeemed Orphan-Grinders must spend one Willpower point every day to continue pursuing the day-to-day activities of their crucibles. If an Orphan-Grinder cannot spend that Willpower point, for whatever reason (whether due to a deliberate decision or inability), the character suffers -2 dice to all dice pools from distraction during that day. To his friends, he seems lost and in a dreamlike state.

Of course, redeemed spirits don't consider this a drawback. They do feel connected to this state of euphoria and hope, and if they remain behind, it's to help others and protect their friends. Once a spirit hits one Spite rating for whatever reason, he'll do everything in his power to rid himself of his last Spite and finally move on to the promise of heaven.

The Lawgivers

Orphan-Grinders can succumb to Spite just like any other ghosts, regardless of whether they redeemed themselves or are still Orphan-Grinders at the time. When a former Spectre fails to Spite, however, she falls hard indeed. When an Orphan-Grinder accumulates enough Spite to become a Spectre, several things happen at once.

First, the Orphan-Grinder and her Gemini seek each other out. The Gemini then dissolves into a mass of writhing chains. These chains envelope the character and dig deeply into her gauze. One chain then pierces the Stormwall and acts as a direct conduit to Grandmother.

Second, the character's human memories are completely wiped away. Grandmother takes no chances with those ghosts who've already fought their way free of her service once. Former Orphan-Grinders do not earn a second chance at redemption. Everything human in them is completely and permanently subsumed by the hive-mind. Not even enough remains to hate the things that once tethered the ghost to the world of the living. Unlike some once-human Spectres, Lawgivers do not have tethers.

Finally, the creature's gauze changes into a black, leathery substance, all except for the face, which remains human and recognizable, but deathly pale. The wounds opened by the chains remain exposed and weep at all times, while the chains whip around the Lawgiver like tentacles.

Lawgivers are extensions of Grandmother's will and are almost empty shells programmed as her automatons. Their usual role is in settling disputes between high-ranking Spectres such as Reapers or in helping to establish powerful new hives. Each Lawgiver has at least one Gemini in its service, and while the Lawgivers don't care about Orphan-Grinders any more than any other ghost, they're more than happy to participate in bringing this lot under their collective thumb.

Game statistics and more information on Lawgivers are offered Chapter Four.

Orphan-Grinder Horrors

The following three Horrors are unique to Orphan-Grinders, and no other Shade may learn them. These three

Horrors require a level of familiarity with Grandmother and Spectres in general, combined with the humanity and sense of self that only Orphan-Grinders possess.

Orphan-Grinders' Horrors are unique in that they don't have Benefits. The principles upon which they work are so alien that no other spooks besides the Orphan-Grinders can benefit from them. More so, the very thing that allows an Orphan-Grinder to liberate himself from the hive-mind is the same that shies away from such intimate connections as Vitality sharing.

OBLIVION'S HUSK

The three ghosts were hues. Tom guessed that they had died during the recent pigment massacres and hadn't quite found their feet yet. He couldn't blame them. He'd been playing at being a ghost for months before he actually died, and it still took him time to adjust. Of course, the Spectres approaching the area wouldn't give them that kind of time.

Tom had heard the Spectres coming, but he hoped they wouldn't notice the kids. He thought about attacking, but he was badly outnumbered and already exhausted. Dredging up his last reserves of Vitality, he called up the grimy, buzzing whispers of the hive-mind, rendering himself invisible to its remote perceptions. Tom jumped from his perch down among the kids.

"Hey, what's—" one of them began.

"Shut up," hissed Tom. "They can't see us right now. Just stand absolutely still… 'cause here they come."

The nature of Spectres is a matter of some debate among the more scholarly of projectors. Some people feel that while some Spectres are (or rather, were) ghosts, others are simply creatures from another existence… perhaps demons, perhaps something stranger still. Whatever the truth, Orphan-Grinders can attest that something of a "Spectral condition" exists, which includes the hive-mind, the inability to distinguish high-Vitality ghosts from the living and, of course, the grotesque "physical" features distorting a Spectre's appearance. With this Horror, an Orphan-Grinder can recall that Spectral condition and reap a number of benefits from it. She can locate Spectres or make herself invisible to them or even manifest the claws and armor typical of the more martial of these creatures.

As useful a Horror as Oblivion's Husk is, Orphan-Grinders are loath to use it often. The sensation is, as might be expected, reminiscent of actually being a Spectre. It includes a light buzzing in the back of the character's head and phantom sensations of being touched and probed while the power is in effect. Only when the character draws on the most overt manifestations of the power — the physical changes — do these feelings fade.



System: Oblivion's Husk has three main functions: Masking the character's presence from Spectres, locating and determining information about Spectres and manifesting the claws, teeth and carapace common to some breeds. Because the first two uses of this Horror have no application on living targets, the character can't employ them when manifested. The character can use the third application, however, to alter the Orphan-Grinder's manifested form.

Camouflaging oneself or others from Spectres is a simple matter of spending Vitality. The Orphan-Grinder creates a sensory bubble in the hive-mind, forcing Spectres to ignore anything within that bubble. It's akin to creating an overwhelming suggestion that says "We're not here." While this allows the Orphan-Grinder considerable leeway as a spy if alone, anyone else included inside the field can compromise it easily. Speech, sudden movement or additional expenditures of Vitality up to two points enable a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 6) for Spectres in the immediate area to detect the disturbance contrary to what the hive-mind says. Aggressive Spectres might attack immediately, while sentries or spies simply follow the group wherever it goes. Use of any Horror or any Vitality expenditure beyond two points on the part of anyone except the Orphan-Grinder automatically disrupts the static and allows any Spectres within line of sight to see the entire group (though the Orphan-Grinder's player may immediately spend Vitality to activate this Horror on the Orphan-Grinder alone).

The Vitality expenditures and effects/limitations for this facet of Oblivion's Husk are as follows:

Zero Vitality: The Orphan-Grinder is invisible to Spectres for as long as he remains still and does not spend Vitality or speak. After 10 minutes, Spectres with Perception + Awareness pools of seven dice or more sense something is amiss and either attack or sit and watch the Orphan-Grinder until he moves.

One Vitality: The Orphan-Grinder is invisible to Spectres and can move about freely. He cannot use Horrors, speak or pursue offensive action against another Spectre without deactivating this Horror. The character also becomes "visible" if he enters a hive.

Two Vitality: As with a one-Vitality expenditure, except the character can now speak without becoming visible.

Three Vitality: As the two-Vitality expenditure, except the character may use non-offensive Horrors without becoming visible. Conversely, the character may extend the field to include himself and anyone within five feet, subject to the aforementioned mentioned limitations.

Four Vitality: As per the three-Vitality expenditure, except the character may enter hives and still remain invisible, but he may not use Horrors or attack Spectres while within. Conversely, the character can extend the field to anyone within 10 feet, subject to those limitations mentioned previously.

Five Vitality: The character may now use offensive Horrors and attack Spectres while remaining invisible. Spectres usually flee if attacked by an invisible opponent. Conversely, the field is now strong enough for anyone within 10 feet of the Orphan-Grinder to enter a hive, subject to the aforementioned limitations.

The camouflage aspect of Oblivion's Husk lasts for one scene, after which the player must spend more Vitality for the Horror to continue working.

The second facet of Oblivion's Husk allows the Orphan-Grinder to detect and glean information about Spectres. This ability is an extension of the camouflage power. The character just taps a little more deeply into the hive-mind and connects mentally with nearby Spectres.

Zero Vitality: The character simply knows if any Spectres are within (Perception x 5) yards.

One Vitality: The character is aware of Spectre-related movements within 30 yards of his location and adds two to his initiative rating against Spectres.

Two Vitality: The character can detect Spectres within a quarter-mile radius and adds four to his initiative rating against Spectres. Conversely, the character may focus on one Spectre within his line of sight and determine its immediate agenda. This is usually summed up in one or two words: "hunt," "find (something specific)," etc.

Three Vitality: The character can sense Spectres within a mile of his location and adds six to his initiative rating against them. Conversely, the character may focus on any one Spectre within unhindered sight and learn if it was once human.

Four Vitality: The character detects all Spectre-related movement and activity within three miles of his location and automatically wins initiative against Spectres. Conversely, the character can focus on any Spectres within unhindered sight and eavesdrop on their conversation with the hive-mind, intercepting communications and instructions.

Five Vitality: The character detects all Spectre-related movement and activity within five miles of himself and not only wins initiative, but gains two extra dice in all combat related-actions against Spectres. Conversely, the character may focus on any one Spectre within line of sight and determine if it was once human and, if so, one surviving tether holding it.

All uses of this facet of Oblivion's Husk last for one scene.

Finally, the most direct and disturbing use of this Horror allows the Spectre to grow hideous claws, a maw full of fangs or an armored carapace. This facet of Oblivion's Husk is the only one usable while the character manifests. Additionally, while its effects appear

somewhat similar to Spite-empowered manifestations, this Horror does not increase a character's Spite (if he uses Vitality). Vitality expenditure only affects one of the three changes, but a character can split his points among the three. So, if someone spends three Vitality to power this effect, he can put all three points into claws (for example) or split the effect to one Vitality point for claws, one Vitality for teeth and one Vitality for armor.

The claws, teeth and armor inflict and soak damage based on the Vitality expended, as follows:

Zero Vitality: Claws inflict Strength + 1 lethal damage, teeth inflict Strength lethal damage, carapace adds one die to soak. At this stage, the character can only create one zero Vitality effect and not all three.

One Vitality: Claws inflict Strength + 2 lethal damage, teeth inflict Strength +1 lethal damage, carapace adds two dice to soak.

Two Vitality: Claws inflict Strength + 3 lethal damage, teeth inflict Strength + 2 lethal damage, carapace adds three dice to soak.

Three Vitality: Claws inflict Strength + 4 lethal damage, teeth inflict Strength + 3 lethal damage, carapace adds four dice to soak.

Four Vitality: Claws inflict Strength + 5 lethal damage, teeth inflict Strength + 4 lethal damage, carapace adds five dice to soak.

Five Vitality: Claws inflict Strength + 6 lethal damage, teeth inflict Strength + 5 lethal damage, carapace adds six dice to soak.

This facet of Oblivion's Husk lasts for one scene.

HELLION

Leonard took a hit of pigment and waited. He was getting better at astral travel now — he could even become solid if his black H was pure enough. And when you could steer people's cars through guardrails, unlock people's doors from the inside and "distract" cashiers long enough to open their registers, buying pure stuff wasn't a big issue.

Leonard rose up from his body and walked through the wall of his apartment. He considered what to do tonight. Money wasn't a big issue — last night's activities had seen to that — and he had more... visceral things in mind for the evening. The blonde in the next building over, for instance. Maybe he could convince her he was an angel or something?

Leonard was standing in front of her apartment building, deciding what to do about her boyfriend when he heard the sound of hooves. He turned and gasped. Barreling toward him was a man riding a glowing, white horse. The fucking thing had fangs... huge, sharp fangs that dripped with ghostly ichor.

"Jesus...Christ..." Leonard stammered.

"No, Tom Hayes," the rider said, but by that time, the horse's fangs had severed Leonard's head.

Not all Spectres were once human. The creatures that Orphan-Grinders refer to as "Hellions" fall into this category. These Spectral horses serve as steeds for powerful Spectres, including Reapers and Lawgivers. Orphan-Grinders, whether or not they ever used a Hellion mount during their service to Grandmother, can learn to summon them.

To draw forth a Hellion, the Orphan-Grinder emits a shrill, ululating whistle. The horse then rises up from the ground in a spray of black bile or descends from the sky in a nimbus of blue-white fire. An Orphan-Grinder summoning a Hellion connects with the forces of his former mistress for one brief second. As a result, any spook hearing the whistle feels a brief but powerful sense of dread, like something malevolent just noticed them.

System: Hellions cannot manifest to the living, and if an Orphan-Grinder manifests while a Hellion he summoned is present, the mount immediately vanishes. Hellions are near-mindless automatons, completely under the control of their riders. As such, they cannot be possessed or affected by mental powers such as Unearthly Repose. Once summoned, a Hellion remains for one hour. The character may extend this duration by spending Willpower (one Willpower point equates to an additional hour of service).

Hellions obey their riders' mental commands but do not pursue any instinctive actions on their masters' behalf unless ordered to do so or possessed of the Loyalty power (see below). They are not intelligent and can only understand very simple commands such as "attack," "run," "jump," etc. If the Orphan-Grinder can no longer see his mount, the Hellion wanders off until the duration expires, and then, it returns to the hereafter from whence it sprang (though the Orphan-Grinder can recall a wayward steed for one Vitality).

Tied to the Orphan-Grinder who summoned it, a Hellion acts on its master's initiative and can carry its rider plus one additional passenger. If the Orphan-Grinder is destroyed, the Hellion immediately vanishes. Using this Horror requires a full turn, during which time the Orphan-Grinder can take no other action. Afterward, the rider can use Horrors while on the beast — including Storm-Wending to drop in on foes by surprise (the mount is considered an extra "passenger" in this case).

Hellions possess the following Traits:

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 3, Awareness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2

Nature: Bravo

Willpower: As summoner

Spite: 5

Offensive Abilities: Trample or kick for Strength + 2 dice of bashing damage

By expending Vitality, the Orphan-Grinder can either increase the horse's Physical Attributes or grant the Hellion special powers. The Orphan-Grinder can expend a maximum of 10 Vitality "building" the mount (actually, the Vitality expended is more a "sacrifice" to summon the beast from Grandmother's legions). Spending more than five Vitality requires at least two turns to summon the beast. Attributes can be increased to a maximum rating of 6.

Zero Vitality: The Hellion summoned has the statistics given above.

One Vitality: Add one dot to any Physical Attribute. Add 1 to Spite.

Two Vitality: Add two dots to Physical Attributes.

Three Vitality: Add three dots to Physical Attributes. Add 2 to Spite.

Four Vitality: Add four dots to Physical Attributes.

Five Vitality: Add five dots to Physical Attributes. Add 3 to Spite.

Special powers can be added to mounts in addition to, or instead of, Attribute increases. The following are examples of the sorts of powers that some Hellions exhibit. The player is encouraged to create additional ones, subject to Storyteller approval.

• **Fanged Maw (One Vitality):** The Hellion sports a mouthful of fangs and can bite for Strength + 2 lethal damage.

• **Hooves of Flame (One Vitality):** The mount inflicts lethal damage with its hooves.

• **Loyalty (Two Vitality):** The mount works to protect the character. If the Orphan-Grinder suffers a grievous injury or is dazed (see p. 233 of **Orpheus**), the Hellion removes him from battle. Also, the mount places itself in harm's way to protect its master.

• **Rider's Unity (Two Vitality):** The steed and the Orphan-Grinder act as one. Roll initiative separately for both the character and the Hellion. Both act on the highest result.

• **Cunning Mount (Three Vitality):** The beast has Perception 4, Intelligence 2 and Wits 5. It is capable of understanding more complex commands and acting out of sight of its master for a number of turns equal to the Orphan-Grinder's Intelligence rating.

• **Nightmare (Four Vitality):** The Hellion strikes fear into all who see it. Roll Willpower (difficulty 8) for everyone who views the mount. If the roll fails, the witness suffers a -3 dice pool penalty to all offensive actions toward the Hellion and its rider. If the roll botches, the witness is frozen in fear and can only watch as the Orphan-Grinder rides her down. Make this roll for allies of the Orphan-Grinder as well, but treat botches as simple failures.

• **Spectral Steed (Five Vitality):** Rider and mount can ignore gravity, running up walls or along ceilings as though traversing normal ground. The mount can fly at 25 mph for a number of turns equal to its Stamina, after which it must remain on the ground for two full turns.

VECTOR

Kate wasn't sure how she and the others had been separated, but she knew she was in trouble. The Spectres poured out of the hive like hornets from a nest. She raced across a street and hid in an alleyway, hoping to wait out the storm and find John.

Kate looked up and saw a Spectre screech in delight and dive from the sky. It swooped past her gaze, then flew up with a ghost in its talons. Kate readied herself to scream — she couldn't just let that poor man suffer whatever fate awaited him in the hive — but the man glowed. Kate had never seen that effect before.

The ghost's gauze rippled like pond water in a rainstorm, his features running together and changing. An instant later, the Spectre was holding someone who looked like…

…Tom.

The Spectre screeched in surprise as Tom's hands grew into wicked claws and slashed at the beast.

Not even the most accomplished Skinrider can possess another spook. Possessing a body is one thing — it's a matter of taking control of the flesh and shutting down the mind. But with a ghost, the mind is all that matters, and it resists such intrusion.

Powerful Orphan-Grinders, however, can overtake the gauze of any spook they can see or of any spook with whom they share an empathic link, even over great distances. An Orphan-Grinder can possess the spook's gauze, masquerading as another ghost (though this ruse is difficult to maintain for any length of time) or simply "infecting" the target, reshaping the ghost's gauze to match his own and using it as a shield. This insidious power even works on Spectres (though not without risk).

Spooks subjected to this power feel a momentary burst of searing pain, followed by complete loss of awareness. The Orphan-Grinder himself feels the target's gauze slide over him like donning a silk suit — and, if masquerading as another ghost, feels slightly "crowded" throughout the experience.

System: The Orphan-Grinder can use Vector on any spook it sees or, if the character has previously established a link with Misery Loves Company (see **Orpheus**, pp. 149-150), at a distance based on the amount of Vitality spent. In either case, the Orphan-Grinder may choose to masquerade as the possessed ghost or to infect the spook. Vector provides a way for

the Orphan-Grinder to travel quickly (provided the character established links to a large number of spooks in different places) and to protect himself in combat by using other ghosts' gauze as shields.

Possessing a ghost within the Orphan-Grinder's line of sight requires the player to roll Charisma + Leadership (difficulty of the target's Willpower). Unlike Puppetry, where the number of successes determines the duration of the possession, the number of successes for Vector determines the duration that the Orphan-Grinder can masquerade as the target. If the Orphan-Grinder does not wish to hide in the target's gauze, only one success is necessary.

One success: The Orphan-Grinder can only maintain the masquerade for a number of turns equal to his Wits rating, after which he must either leave the spook's gauze or infect it.

Two successes: The character can maintain the masquerade for one scene.

Three successes: The Orphan-Grinder can maintain the masquerade for one hour.

Four successes: The character can maintain the masquerade for six hours.

Five+ successes: The character can maintain the masquerade for 12 hours.

The number of Vitality points expended determines the type of ghost the Orphan-Grinder can possess.

Zero Vitality: May possess a drone.

One Vitality: May possess a blip.

Two Vitality: May possess a ghost with a maximum Vitality of four or five.

Three Vitality: May possess a ghost with a maximum Vitality of 10.

Four Vitality: May possess a projected entity.

Five Vitality: May possess a Spectre, though this carries additional risks.

Possessing projectors, even sleepers, is more difficult because their gauze remains linked to a living body at some level. Possessing Spectres is a supreme effort and requires an immediate Spite rating roll (difficulty 8). Every success gives the Orphan-Grinder a point of Spite. Possessing any spook with a maximum Vitality greater than three allows the host to try to break free periodically. After a number of hours equal to the Orphan-Grinder's Willpower have passed, the Storyteller should make a Willpower roll for the host (difficulty 8) once an hour thereafter. Every time the host's gauze suffers damage equal to or greater than her Willpower rating, the Storyteller makes the same roll. When the host accumulates a number of successes equal to the Orphan-Grinder's Willpower, the host can expel the Orphan-Grinder from her gauze (the character can maintain control by spending a Willpower point — this



"resets" the number of successes the host needs to expel the character).

Orphan-Grinders cannot use the Horrors of the ghosts they possess, though those brave (or desperate) enough to possess Spectres *can* use their hosts' Spectre Horrors and Thorns, substituting their own Vitality for any required Spite expenditure. They retain their own Attributes or Abilities as well. If the Orphan-Grinder's host has any manifested Stains, they are available to the Orphan-Grinder as well.

Infecting a ghost's gauze requires the Vitality expenditure and the same roll, but as stated, only one success is required. The Orphan-Grinder then subconsciously reshapes the host's gauze to resemble his own (this also happens when the masquerade duration expires, unless the Orphan-Grinder simply wants to release his victim — see the table above). The character then has a shield. Any attackers must destroy the host's gauze before they can hurt the Orphan-Grinder beneath. The Orphan-Grinder can spend the host's Willpower to replenish the host's Vitality, but he cannot use the host's Willpower or Vitality for any other purpose.

If the host is a Spectre, sleeper, spirit or hue, the Orphan-Grinder can "ride" her gauze until it is completely destroyed unless the host manages to expunge the character (see above). If the host is a projector, her spirit snaps back to her body upon losing the last of its Vitality.

Should a spook perish because the character used her as cannon fodder, the Orphan-Grinder gains an immediate Spite rating to reflect that this runs contrary to the Orphan-Grinder's attempts to leave its Spectre nature behind. Finally, whether the host expels the unwanted rider, the Orphan-Grinder leaves or the host is destroyed, the Orphan-Grinder appears right next to the host, even if the host served as the character's conduit.

They miss you in the clubhouse, Tom. The tales of your outrageous deeds as a Spectre are still making the rounds of the hive-mind. When I told my employers I'd be seeing you, they said to say hi. They wanted me to tell you that you're welcome to join their camp anytime. They'll welcome you with open arms.

And just to clarify matters, I want you to know that I wouldn't let this nascent friendship of ours interfere with my destroying you if you were ever to succumb to Grandmother again. You'd make an excellent Lawgiver, too good. I'm afraid. I hope you don't mind my saying that. I just want you to have the peace of mind of knowing I'd spare you that humiliation. It's important to me.

I must tell you, I keep wondering what it must be like to have surrendered all that you did - that intimate connection with a swarm of your peers, the heady sense of power borne of pure malice, dispensing with that troublesome conscience. And yet, here you gave it up for nothing more than this. I find it remarkable and very curious. Then again, I never had to worry about a Psyche.

How would you compare the two states of being, Tom? Is it just a little dimmer? Is it lonely without the hive to keep you company? Is it like comparing apples and oranges? Or is it more like comparing apples and, say, spent uranium rounds? Was it like being your own evil twin, or was it more than that? Do you miss it? Do you ever long for the tender caress of Oblivion? If you do, resist, Tom. I find you infinitely more interesting in this state. Oh, do keep me abreast of your progress. I am so very curious.

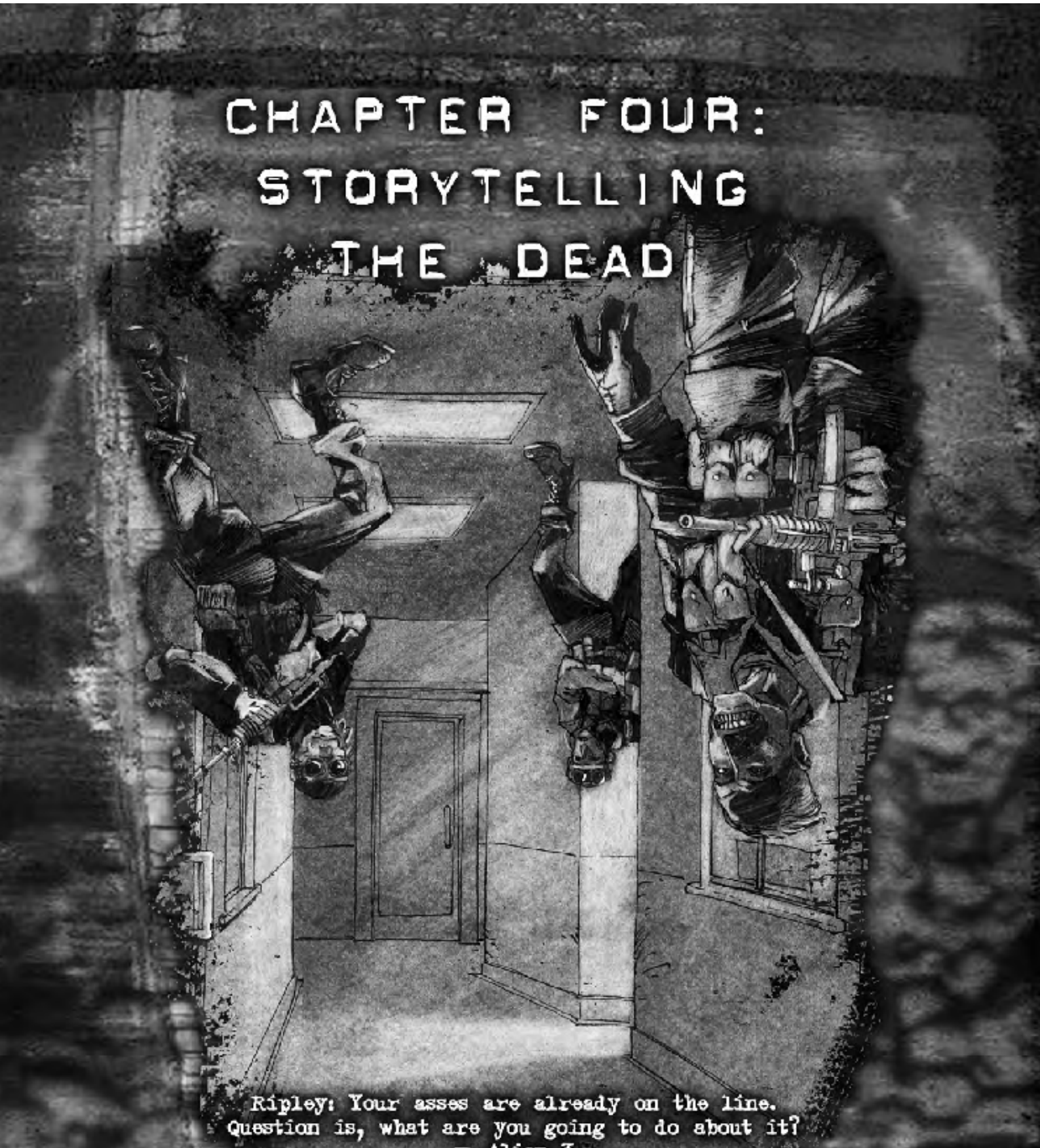
I don't know if you know this, Tom, but something's changed in the way ghosts feel their dark side. There was a time - and not all that long ago, either - when ghosts such as you were on much closer terms with their malicious inclinations. You shared your body with your twin, and the ongoing conversation - the closeness made things so much more interesting and intimate. Nowadays, everybody seems to insist on having his own gauze, like spoiled children who must have their own room. That's what Doppelgangers are, did you know that? For every one of you happy go lucky spooks flitting about out there, there's also a Doppelganger lying in wait. Just be glad you were never a host. Poor bastards are so weak, they don't even feel their connection to their Spectre half and vice-verse, of course.

I wondered what changed, though. Why aren't you connected at the hip, so to speak, like projectors some sort of virus, infecting ghosts to rid themselves of their alter egos? Did the Maelstrom cause the spiritual schism? One of my employers, his name isn't important right now, believes that Grandmother might have separated ghosts from their evil Siamese twins herself. Something about your presence creating a dissonant voice in the hive-mind. Or did he say you gave your twins too much free will, too much for her to control? I can't remember, now, but it isn't important.

Toodles.

Mr. Jigsaw

CHAPTER FOUR: STORYTELLING THE DEAD



Ripley: Your asses are already on the line.
Question is, what are you going to do about it?
— Alien 3

Hello. I'm a Spectre, but please, don't hold that against me.
I'm really quite friendly.
— Mr. Jigsaw

There comes a moment in every book and movie where the characters, with whom you're probably relating to, stop reacting and start becoming proactive. They're no longer being dragged along for the ride while everything happens around them. Instead, they jump right into the mix of things and make their mark: Ripley rescues Newt in *Aliens*; Neo goes after Morpheus in *The Matrix*; Nelson flatlines to seek forgiveness from Billy Mahoney in *Flatliners*; and Nancy stalks Freddy in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. The characters enter the belly of the beast to seize their destiny, and while they are stronger than before, greater danger impedes the way to their greatest challenge and victory. Storytelling with **The Orphan-Grinders** is all about that moment, granting characters more power to enable them to take an active role in fighting the nightmare unfolding around them.

IT'S A WHOLE NEW WORLD

While there is a general mood, theme and direction that **Orpheus** sets out, each book in the series also lends itself to different styles of play and chronicle options. In the core book, the focus was on the characters working for Orpheus Group as they learned the ropes and uncovered dark hints about their employer, its rivals and the larger haunted world. It, and the supplements immediately following it, centered upon telling the same sort of ghost stories you might have shared with friends while sitting around a campfire. In **The Orphan-Grinders**, the focus is on the characters using the knowledge they've gained, sometimes painfully, to fight a monstrous Spectral war not of their choosing, with no promise of success. It's a much darker and potentially grislier tale that doesn't end when the mysterious hitchhiker vanishes, the poltergeist is exorcised or a departed family member finds peace. The characters are experiencing a selective hell on earth, surrounded by Spectres that have the run of the place. Whether the tale in this book plays out as part of the ongoing **Orpheus** saga or a setting or chronicle unto itself is entirely the Storyteller's choice. In either case, there are a few matters important to relating an effective story that need to be kept in mind.

WHO ARE THE CHARACTERS NOW?

Just as people change over time as a natural outgrowth of their learning experiences, so do characters change over the course of a given chronicle. Who the characters are now, compared with who they were at the outset of the chronicle, depends largely on what they've learned and, more importantly, how this affected them.

When Orpheus Group employed the characters, they had a safety net. For projectors, this literally meant someplace to return to when their ghostly duties ended or danger threatened their very existences. For true ghosts, Orpheus Group represented a haven of sorts and a chance to see lingering mortal affairs put in order. The destruction of Orpheus Group flipped everything upside down and turned the characters into fugitives from Uriah Bishop (and company), Spectres, Grandmother-fearing cultists, NSA agents and more. How has each turn of events leading to now affected the characters? Have they become fearful, belligerent, stoic, traumatized, determined? For projectors with families, how has this changed their lives? Have skimmers with families broken their silence concerning Orpheus or fallen deeper into nondisclosure, further straining relationships and creating additional stress for the skimmers? Sleepers must worry about who or what is caring for their bodies while they're out, if the other members of their crucible don't have custody.

The steady revelation of things in the hereafter bigger than Orpheus Group is also enough to make anyone sit up all night in a cold sweat. For the characters, it seems like it can't get much worse. Worst of all, the hives now spawn hundreds of Spectres, all intent on capturing ghosts to feed Grandmother's ravenous hunger. How do the characters react when survival is measured by minutes and hours rather than day by day? Think on various war films you've seen. Even the most mentally stable protagonists must develop coping mechanisms to keep body and soul together.

Then, along comes Lazarus Redux, asking for the characters' help against Grandmother. Is the crucible grateful to have another group helping to share the burden of fighting or resentful and suspicious that its new ally may use the characters as stalking horses? Whether or not the characters are, or become, freedom fighters plays a role in character development as well. Each character will have different reasons for joining the cause, from a simple desire to survive without someone higher up manipulating them — such as Orpheus Group or Terrel & Squib — to truly believing in the need to fight back — not just for themselves, but for the greater good. Consider how the crucible works with others. A borderline-hostile, marriage-of-convenience relationship makes for a tense state of affairs, fraught with flare-ups, suspicion and the real possibility of betrayal. On the other hand, a good working relationship with a free flow of information and resources may buoy "spirits" and give hope in an otherwise desperate situation. How you choose to portray the supporting characters

here influences which of the two are the likeliest outcomes and, thus, the mood of your chronicle.

For those chronicles not dependent on Orpheus Group (because it's gone or because it never existed), how does the current situation come to pass? As Storyteller, you must decide upon a set of events leading to the hive blossoms and the sudden plague of Spectres. What effect does each event have upon the crucible? Do the characters begin the story as a crucible, or does chance throw them together? Are they all projectors, sucked into the war through some bizarre accident, or maybe ghosts simply defending their haunts against the invasion? Are they all members of a government organization, a corporation, a university's faculty or even a family? Are they all strangers, with circumstance forcing them to work together for survival or coming together only after discovering they'd been working parallel to uncover the same plot? Each variable is a different avenue for character change and growth that Storytellers can use to tailor a chronicle set entirely in the Spectre war.

WHAT DO THE CHARACTERS DO?

So, here the characters are, in the middle of this war where hordes of Spectres hunt after ghosts and drag them off to a fate worse than death — literally. What do they do? Can they survive the pogrom and even dare to retaliate? How and why the crucible fights is just as, if not more, important than any tactics and strategies the characters might employ.

The crucible's abilities, or Crucible Horrors, are a formidable force with which to reckon. Benefits are good boosts for the Horrors individual characters wield, but it's the ability to pool Vitality and kick off a potent Crucible Horror that can sometimes make all the difference. Consider the tier-one Horror for Poltergeists, Helter Skelter. It's a useful ability, but it's only good with inanimate objects. Since the Crucible Horror version can affect Spectres, a veritable whirlwind of spectral chaos makes for a powerful weapon against their numbers. Crucible Horrors open the door for increased crucible cooperation, adding a dimension to the strategies employed in the battle for continued existence.

Although this particular stage of the chronicle is deliberately bleak, there are a few additional rays of hope. One of the biggest reasons for optimism stems from the Orphan-Grinders themselves. Once Spectres, these ghosts managed to claw their way up from a spiritual darkness for a chance at redemption, thus fighting the entity threatening the hereafter. Due to their nature, they have a unique understanding of the situation, which may offer them an advantage when combating Spectres.





What makes Orphan-Grinders truly important, however, is in what they represent — a way free of one's personal hell, giving Grandmother one less slave to hunt food for her and one less enemy to fight. In the crucible's hands, this realization is a mighty weapon. Although Grandmother is extremely powerful, with hundreds of Spectres at her beck and call, each Spectre redeemed is one freed from her grasp. This, in turn, disturbs her — not quite like a note out of tune, but like a tooth missing from a great gear-filled machine. The machine may still work, but the forces of entropy will eventually wear it down to the point where enough missing teeth can potentially bring everything crashing to a halt.

The characters must pick their salvations wisely, however, because of the considerable risk each venture entails. They stand a better chance of rescuing ghosts on the verge of becoming Spectres or those Spectres they once knew (ones with strong emotional ties to crucible) than they do Spectres with whom they know little about. Each, Spite-filled ghost and Spectre, must possess something worth fighting for, something that'll make them less likely to resist the crucible's attempts to help them rise from their nearly or completely inhuman state. It's a matter of reacquainting them with the reasons why they haven't succumbed and passed on completely. The characters can do far less with a relative stranger, though it's still possible. Unfortunately, failure to rescue a Spectre might push him further into remorselessness and cruelty.

What this means for characters is that every effort counts when rescuing a Spectre from itself. It also provides them with a good reason to do so. Before, the characters helped ghosts and fumigated Spectres because someone paid them handsomely to do so. Even the generous hearted might have had difficulty voluntarily accepting those duties without calling it a job and needing recompense — it's hazardous work. Now, however, the crucible should know that it needs help, allies and information to ensure its survival in the long run, here or in the hereafter. And, frankly, it's the right thing to do. Unlike the other supernatural denizens in the World of Darkness at large, the characters are very human and, thus, are able to be swayed by concerns of right or wrong. Even with the potential to sink into depravity, humanity is often called to rise above and make redress — a central tenet of what it is to be an Orphan-Grinder, as well.

WHY DO THE CHARACTERS STAY TOGETHER?

For those chronicles following the events that began in the core book and continued through **Shadow Games**, it's easy to see why the crucible sticks together. It begins when Orpheus Group assigns the crucible its members: It's a job, and Orpheus expects everyone to behave professionally. Over time, however, as the members work together more, bonds of friendship, trust or even love develop. Naturally, Orpheus Group's destruction tested and strengthened these bonds. With the likes of Uriah Bishop hunting the characters, even the most fractious crucible would be hard-pressed to deny the need to stick together for survival. As more of the underlying plot unfolded and the dangers increased, the characters may have clung together for support because no one else knew them as well. They learned to work together as a team and even act like a second family.

In this stage of the chronicle, however, even surrogate families can be torn apart by the increasing stress. Reinforcing the need, coupled with incentives, to stick together can be crucial. But what about supporting characters, Storyteller personae who might fill the same roles that the technicians and co-workers did in Orpheus Group? It can be nearly as tough accepting help from a relative stranger as it might be to allow an entirely new member into the crucible. The reasons why the crucible might accept help or new members, however, remain largely similar. A few suggestions follow.

"Strength in numbers" is a truism with concrete applications in **Orpheus**. It's not just an abstract thought in which to take comfort. Sharing Vitality and strength through Benefits helps to reinforce the crucible's bonds in potent ways, but with odds as overwhelming as the Spectre invasion, the characters need more. This is where Crucible Horrors come into play as well, something the whole crucible — and not just one member with one other lending support — can potentially do. The more members who can add to the effect, the greater the chance the Horror can produce a devastating result. This not only improves the odds for survival, but also for fighting back and winning.

Staying together also increases the odds of being able to help other ghosts and "rescue" Spectres. Since it's through common Natures that a character connects with a fellow spook, it only makes sense to have as many characters in the crucible as possible. Where different Natures can be a source of intra-crucible strife and, possibly, have been in the past, they can now serve as a source of strength instead. The more experiences and dissimilar personalities that crucibles can bring to the table, the better. Individuality can be an asset. Each character has something unique to offer to the group as a whole.

When it comes to accepting supporting characters into a group, one of the easiest induction methods is by

using a former Orpheus worker who somehow survived the attack and subsequent pogrom. While this improves the odds that the characters accept the supporting character, it doesn't preclude them from having become ultra-paranoid — thus refusing to let the supporting character approach closer than arm's length. After all, it is suspicious that this person survived when the crucible had such a difficult time of it. How did he manage? Conversely, the less the crucible knows about the person in question, the greater the chance of suspicion and doubt. Treachery, however, can still come at the hands of someone the characters trust, if that is your aim. Perhaps Grandmother and her ilk subverted him, or perhaps he simply chose to back the winning team.

Conversely, how about someone who managed to worm free of a cult's influence? How trustworthy is she? She's likely to provide a bit of valuable information concerning Grandmother or perhaps pigment, if the latter avenue remains untouched. Is all of her information true? How the crucible handles this, and what happens when it uses this data, dictates just how far the characters trust the ex-cultist. It may even be a longer and slower process than with any other characters approaching the group, but the potential reward is at least as great, if not more so.

If the crucible works for or with another organization such as Radio Free Death, Lazarus Redux or even Operation: Black Mercury (see p. 131), the characters must (at the very least) cooperate with its various members. Encouraging cooperation can be as simple as giving the players' characters a greater say in their participation than they might otherwise have. Perhaps they are the ones to approach one of the aforementioned agencies or know that these groups need the crucible as badly as it needs help. In contrast, the characters may distrust the organization with whom they partner, with the exception of someone they befriend because of shared experience. You can then groom the supporting character to be nearly indispensable to the crucible, such that he's trusted almost as implicitly as any crucible member (or, perhaps, even accepted as a member of the group). Naturally, this may be exactly what the organization in question wants....

SAME OLD, SAME OLD

To some Storytellers, the destruction of Orpheus Group presents problems for those wishing to follow canon even though it interferes with their chronicle as they have it planned. Or, maybe it's not the missing Orpheus Group that's the problem, but the government hunting for the characters. Regardless the difficulty, however, you do have options for modifying the details of the bigger picture so that it fits in your chronicle without sacrificing the entire plot.

So, what if Orpheus Group survived events up to this point? It weathered NextWorld's assault and helped investigate the pigment poisonings. It may have even helped with the recent ghost-quake. **The Orphan-Grinders** is an entirely different ball game. The events described throughout aren't matters of subtle investigation or unearthing the truth. This is out and out survival. This is war... but Orpheus Group would be prepared. Previous experience has taught it the need for vigilance. Between the Spectre invasion at least four years prior, the increase in hives and the influx of Spectres during the ghost-quake, it doesn't take a genius to realize another Spectre invasion is likely imminent. In this case, Orpheus Group offices are likely protected against Spectral intrusion in the same way that Lazarus Redux protected its offices (see **Shadow Games**). In fact, given the amount of knowledge that Orpheus Group possesses concerning the hereafter, it may have several methods of rapid transport across the city, including in-house Wisps who possess Storm-Wending.

Orpheus Group may be providing Operation: Black Mercury with assistance as a civilian contractor or may even be mounting rescue parties to help various ghosts stranded or taken by Spectres. The current infestation of Spectres allows Orpheus Group to play the hero and spook community leader following a series of events that haven't illuminated it under the best light. It's important to remember that Orpheus Group was never really the bad guy in the EVIL™ sort of way, even though it often operated in the gray areas. Like all things human, the groups members had their stellar moments and their failings. This is a chance for Orpheus to enjoy the former despite the extenuating circumstances.

Orpheus Group, in **The Orphan-Grinders**, is a glimmer of hope in the mad sequence of events, possessing more collective firepower and investigative assistance than the characters could hope to gather on their own. Admittedly, the resulting chronicle may be less gritty and desperate, but Storytellers can rectify this by intensifying the threat, if they so wish. Perhaps the Spectres are a little smarter or are besieging the Orpheus compound through sheer numbers.

Maybe the attack on Orpheus Group succeeded and, instead, the crucible is still fleeing government agents. As the chronicle progresses, just how much does the government learn about what's happening? Are the FBI and the NSA aware of Uriah Bishop's connections with the Missionary Works and Grandmother? How much do they know about Grandmother and the source of the Spectre invasion? Here, Operation: Black Mer-

cury may play a pivotal role, probably liaising with NSA and FBI agents in the field and back in the offices while pulling double duty on fighting the Spectre hordes while hunting after the characters. If it isn't fully in possession of the facts just yet, one matter to consider is that the government may consider spooks such as the crucible to be partially at fault for the current situation. How do the characters present evidence to the contrary, assuming they could find someone in the government who believes them? Perhaps the crucible manages to convince its government hunters that the cults, Bishop and Grandmother present a greater threat than it does. Do they work together? While the characters may not be "deputized," so to speak, they may share crucial pieces of information with government agents or work together with those agents to destroy hives. The matter of the Orphan-Grinders and the rescue of Spectres may be problematic, given that various agencies may not see those issues as vital as fumigating the twisted spooks. It may take significant evidence to sway them to agree to explore that avenue. Handled well, however, it can make for a rewarding scenario.

Perhaps your chronicle hinges more on the events in **Shades of Gray**, those beyond the massive deaths caused from cyanide-laced pigment. Pigment itself is a powerful drug that could kill, and has killed, without the addition of a deadly poison. Does the Missionary Works of the Holy Ghost try to hook more people on pigment instead? Or does it find another avenue for mass creating ghosts to feed Grandmother later? Assuming it does neither, what happens to the Missionary Works when the Spectres arrive? The easiest answer is that it is just as vulnerable to harvesting as anyone else, or perhaps, it is in no danger from the harvest, thanks to its technique of using others as bait. It's even possible that some cults or cultists actually try to join the Spectres in the harvesting process. How does this affect what the characters learn? Do they learn about Grandmother more easily, should they manage to capture a cultist desperate to feed her? Does this simplify matters or make it even more difficult to discover the other secrets?

A NEW BEGINNING

What happens when new characters appear, whether because new players join the group or because an existing player changes characters? Most crucibles, at this point, are understandably paranoid about newcomers, given all they've been through. The characters must somehow ingratiate themselves into the crucibles' graces. Will they forge their own bonds of trust, or will joining be an act of pure necessity? Joining under false pretenses or even a temporary crucible membership are also entirely possible, though Storytellers must be careful with allowing betrayers within a crucible. The characters have enough crap being thrown at them without having to question one another's loyalty.

With a tight-knit crucible, it can be difficult to add new characters should your group gain new players. Under the best circumstances, a crucible that understands the benefits of a diverse membership may be more accepting of new recruits. Further, the crucible may even go out of its way to enlist others, drawing in new Shades only recently emerged (such as the Orphan-Grinders and Phantasms). While a good idea, characters may need to balance this against the necessity of forming close relationships. Too many new faces may allow for the possibility of treachery from within. The group may even approach this from a different angle, joining a large organization such as the Black Mercuries or another freedom fighter consortium to add (relative) "safety" to strength in numbers. For example: The characters run into a spook while looking for entry into a hive. The spook is in similar straits as the crucible, the differences being she's working solo and the hive in question is in a neighborhood or building that she knows inside and out. Comparing notes reveals that she's not only trustworthy, but has as much incentive for fighting as do the characters — perhaps the Spectres captured a close friend or relative of hers or turned him into a Spectre, and she needs help freeing him. Her path and the crucible's path intersect and merge at the hive.

Chronicles beginning with this book's events may produce crucibles thrown together out of coincidence and obligation more than any familial sense. Additionally, a preexisting crucible may also accept new members or help because circumstances promise failure otherwise. This can happen when the characters hail from backgrounds not involving Orpheus Group or similar organizations and hook up with characters who do owe their experiences to a group. It might also happen with a crucible of new ghosts — such as hues who somehow escaped the massive harvesting in the previous books — banding together to figure out what's transpiring. For example: The characters are a mixed group, whether ex-Orpheus Group operatives, government agents, Orphan-Grinders, ex-Terrel & Squib projectors and any other possibility in between. Each is at ground zero for different reasons when the hives blossom and must now coordinate efforts to survive. Players may find this option difficult since it doesn't provide much reason why their characters remain together afterward. Storytellers should encourage players to discover commonalties between their characters. This way, they forge superficial bonds that may strengthen over the chronicle's



course. Be careful in how you pursue this option, however, or you may annoy players. No one likes being forced into decisions they may otherwise avoid.

Temporary or provisional membership in the crucible is another possibility. This option is one best used for a new character not present for the entire chronicle because the player is only sitting in on a handful of game sessions. Storytellers can also use this as an introduction to characters who will eventually join the crucible but, for whatever reason right now, can not or will not. A character who can provide the group with a safe haven, who can help to rescue a spook or who holds the key to an important piece of information are all examples Storytellers should consider. There are a few drawbacks to this option, the biggest serving as a warning not to place too much emphasis on a potentially unreliable character. There's always a chance he or she may not appear at the next session, leaving you to retool matters and irritating the players at the delays and potential waste of time. One scenario for you and the players to consider: The characters, while discovering and experimenting with how Crucible Horrors work, rescue an ex-Orpheus ghost from a pack of Spectres. The Spectres decimated his crucible, but not before it discovered a few things about Crucible Horrors that the ghost can share with the characters. The situation is advantageous to both parties: The new character gains relative safety by joining the crucible, and the characters gain a few insights into the functioning of Crucible Horrors.

Deceit, while not the best of options, shouldn't be entirely discounted either. Storytellers can use any pretext to gain the crucible's trust, such as the instances given above. The intentions may be good or bad. The character could be a surviving Terrel & Squib agent, out to gather information on why the crucible attacked his former employer. Or she may represent a freedom fighter crucible that hopes to work with the characters but isn't sure about their effectiveness. This works best when carefully tied into the chronicle's plot. The last thing you want to do is make it obvious, in or out of the game, that the character was a last minute addition. Additionally, ensuring the players are okay with this avenue of play is also a good idea. Some may enjoy the resulting intrigue, while others may only grow irritated at the additional troubles piled on to an already miserable situation. One option to consider: The characters, having heard rumors that an organization possesses weapons and a fortified base from which to operate, fish for concrete information. In turn, the organization in question hears about the characters' efforts, both in fighting Spectres and in their search for it, and wants to be sure they can be trusted. The organization sends an undercover operative to gain the characters' trust, in order to see if including them in its operations is a good or a bad idea. The agent's cover story may either mollify the characters or set off alarm bells, so the Storyteller must make careful decisions as to what role the infiltrator plays. Again, however, Storytellers should carefully consider the ramifications of pursuing this option.

Anatomy of Adventure, or How to Run a Chronicle

Throughout the previous **Orpheus** books, it required some effort to uncover the nature of events and to base stories around that. Here, uncovering matters is perhaps more difficult, since Spectre-related incidents occur under the veil of an alien and near-unfathomable mindset. How, then, does the Storyteller involve characters more directly without handing them everything on a silver platter? The more information they possess, the better chance the characters have at succeeding in their goals. Unfortunately, such data is often best delivered through circumstance and the situations in which the characters find themselves.

One source of story hooks or information is through Terrence Green or Lazarus Redux. Whether either party coerces the characters or the crucible voluntarily works with them, both Green and Lazarus Redux possess information that they can share. The characters may discover that the Spectres are fighting amongst themselves or that they can save some Spectres from their fate. After fighting Spectres for a while, it'd be difficult not to notice that not all Spectres act with a single mind or a unified purpose.

As one such Spectre, Mr. Jigsaw (see p. 104) represents another way the characters may uncover a significant piece of the larger puzzle. In fact, he has several tidbits to impart to the crucible, though he will never reveal what he doesn't want to reveal. He may appear to the characters in several potential situations: in the midst of a fight against Spectres before the characters discover how to employ Crucible Horrors; after a fight against a horde of Spectres; while the characters puzzling out inconsistencies in Spectre behavior; or not long after the characters find their own safe haven. While Mr. Jigsaw appears to be a deus ex machina, with careful maneuvering, Storytellers can make him appear less so. Perhaps he doesn't lay out all his cards at once, but delivers bits of information shortly before the crucible needs it. Maybe he simply confirms what the characters already suspected. The fact that he's

a *cooperative* Spectre should arouse enough suspicion concerning his motives that the crucible will likely question the veracity of his information and not believe him without a separate investigation.

Conversely, an allied Orphan-Grinder, such as Tom Hayes or one of the Hellboys (see p. 125), could relate information to the crucible through his own experiences in returning from Spectrehood, thereby providing clues as to the differences between Grandmother's minions and the Spectre dissenters. Tom Hayes is likeliest to appear to any ex-Orpheus characters, particularly if they find themselves in dire straits. Other Orphan-Grinders may appear in any number of ways, maybe while the crucible is rescuing a Spectre or is in the depths of a hive, liberating other ghosts.

There's also a chance the characters haven't yet uncovered Terrence Green's identity or his link to Project: Flatline. Green knows a great deal about what's happening, although perhaps without as much depth as Mr. Jigsaw. In this fashion, Green can fill in gaps in the characters' knowledge, as well as impart any information that remains outstanding from previous supplements. He knows a considerable amount about Uriah Bishop and his connection to cults such as the Missionary Works of the Holy Ghost. Green also realizes Grandmother is a powerful being, but he may not be fully aware of the extent or nature of her power. Bear in mind, however, that Green may not have known much in the early installments of the limited series. Like the characters, he's learning things along the way and, thus, may serve as a slow but steady trickle of valuable data.

The crucible may even earn a surprise visit from a "Deep Throat"-type government agent, be he a former hunter of the crucible, an operative within Operation: Black Mercury or something else altogether. The government was at least peripherally involved in Orpheus Group since its earliest incarnations. Therefore, it's entirely possible that this individual uncovered more than he realized in the process. Like any good government informant, he feels remorse for his part in matters or feels the characters deserve to know what's transpiring, believing that the fight itself is too important to keep vital information hidden. He doesn't want to get caught, and so, he'll never directly help or approach the characters. He can offer them clues along the way, however.

If none of these options work for the chronicle, it's still feasible for the members of the crucible to gather all the pertinent information themselves. Their investigations almost always lead toward action. For example, studying the hives increases the likelihood of encountering Spectres or other past (surviving) opposition. It's also a good idea to start characters in places with the most overt activity, since they'll more likely bear clues of the sort the characters can use. From there, you can introduce actions or elements to the scene that may entice them into investigating further. For example, if you describe a street at night as having several stores with their lights still on while the rest of the stores are dark, there's a good chance the characters will investigate the lit stores. Conversely, if it's earlier in the day and you describe them as being dark, or even abandoned, you may earn a similar response. The trick is to slip in seemingly innocuous details that may grab their interest but otherwise leave the situation in their hands.

Proactive groups may also find tidbits in this book that they consider of interest and present you with one or more of them as possibilities to investigate. Or, they may recall a throwaway detail or loose thread from a previous session, bring that to your attention and take the initiative on determining how it fits in with the big picture. Capturing a Spectre and bringing it back to Lazarus Redux for interrogation is one among many viable methods that the characters might pursue. You may even goad them a little. What would the crucible do if it found a suicide note or the remains of a cultist's journal? Set the characters center stage where someone abducted a crucible member or where an Orphan-Grinder first appeared, and you have the beginnings of a story.

VIGNETTES OF HORROR

It is well known that a conflict of some type is integral to any good story. Whereas the previous books focused upon interpersonal dynamics, outside antagonists or locations as conflict instigators, here it is entirely dependent on the situations the characters may find themselves in or their encounters while trying to survive and fight back. The following are eight vignettes the Storyteller can drop directly into her game or use for inspiration as she pleases. The protagonist in the fiction is normally the person in dire straits. The Storyteller may employ these vignettes during the Spectre invasion to amp up the excitement, though they can certainly unfold in the following weeks, as tales of existence while under the invasion.

GOOD INTENTIONS

"All my sins revisited," Sister Grace whispered as she faced the advancing gang of Lost Boys.

Each child was marked differently. Weeping bedsores covered one, while another was a mass of welts, like a topographic map. The third wore tattered clown pancake and motley. A fourth, had wrapped the lower half of its face in duct tape, while the upper half appeared purple and bloated.

Mud and filth caked the last one from the waist down, its nightgown ripped down the front. All five possessed very long, ragged talons.

The lead child regarded Sister Grace solemnly. "Now I lay you down to sleep, I pray to Grandmother your soul to reap..."

"Leave," Sister Grace pleaded quietly, and she crossed herself as she swung the censer on its chain.

St. Joseph's, a Catholic grade school and orphanage, is an island of calm in Spectre-infested waters, and the reason for that calm is Sister Grace McClure. She died of a heart attack while teaching and has been remembered fondly ever since. Someone always lights a candle for Sister Grace, which has led to St. Joseph's chapel to become her Memorial.

As a young nun, however, Sister Grace was the stuff of Catholic grade-school horror stories. She believed her punishments were for the children's own good — until one of them died while directly under her care. Several others also perished at the hands of abusive adoptive parents. That was Sister Grace's wake-up call. She changed for the better and has been trying to make amends ever since, caring for the children of the orphanage even after her death. When the hives appeared, her task grew that much more difficult.

THE CONFLICT

Surrounded by hives and several Spectre packs, the characters discover St. Joseph's chapel might, with Sister Grace's blessing, serve as a temporary safe haven. Her close affinity with St. Joseph's allows her to keep other incorporeals out of the chapel, though the characters can move her to pity. The refuge is only temporary, however, and the characters must eventually move on. Their continued presence at the school will attract attention.

Specifically, the foes to fear are Max and the Wild Things. This Spectre pack hopes to take Sister Grace or the characters to the hives. Cunning and malicious, the Spectres will endanger the lives of the orphans or nuns to force Sister Grace to leave the protected chapel and deal with them. She knows this and will see it as her chance for real atonement. She'll also suspect that she may not survive the encounter and plans on sacrificing herself so the characters can escape. The crucible may or may not fight at her side, but there are additional Spectres in the area that'll join the fracas should the characters involve themselves.

MAX AND THE WILD THINGS

The pack of Lost Boys are children Sister Grace wronged, who now operate under Grandmother's control. Max, the group's leader, is covered in bedsores;



Sister Grace strapped him to his bed as punishment for habitual bedwetting. Inadequate nutrition overtaxed his system, and he eventually caught pneumonia and died. The other four children suffered under abusive adoptive parents; Grace mistook their authoritarian natures as merely strict but loving, like herself. These Spectres blame her for their fate, too.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4



Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Intimidation 2, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 1, Survival 1

Nature: Grotesque

Willpower: 5

Spite: 6

Offensive Abilities: Claws, Hive-Mind, Manifest, Maw

DEATH BECOMES YOU

Taking a shortcut wasn't the smartest idea. The alley, littered with trash fires and drug addicts, was prime hunting ground for Spectres. It was a Spectre farm.

As though summoned, two Spectres emerged through an adjoining alley wall. One, a Reaper, led a feral Spectre on a chain to rest near a strung-out female. The junkie had just finished injecting a black substance into the crook of her elbow. As the drug took effect, the Reaper pulled the other Spectre back to remove his collar.

The girl, sensing something amiss, looked up. Her eyes widened. "Holy shit."

The Reaper unleashed the Spectre, its dead black eyes absorbing the girl's reflection as it stalked closer.

The alley cuts through a bad neighborhood, with at least one hive near by. The alley itself is broad and open. One could hide behind piles of trash or in doorways, but it otherwise affords little cover. The alley also houses a variety of unfortunate souls, some of whom are mindlessly territorial. Most drug users there take pigment and are in various, latter stages of addiction. Among the discarded examples of humanity is Jessica Singer, a pigment addict on the cusp of becoming a viable host for a Jason. She is among any one of the local addicts who might spot the characters before the Spectres do.

The alley is far from being a safe haven, given the pigment addicts, the misery and the high mortality rates that frequently draw in Spectres. The alley is part of a warren of derelict row homes, punctuated with the occasional liquor store, check-cashing front or fast-food eatery. Reinforcements or help is unlikely.

THE CONFLICT

Jessica Singer is a 16 year-old runaway and, as evinced by the track marks on her arms and legs, a frequent pigment user. Her latest injection may be her last, however. Not only is she mainlining a particularly strong dosage to addle her wits, but Shiv, a would-be Jason, literally wants her body. Shiv's master is a Reaper called the Pusher. The Pusher is one of several potent Spectres in this particular Spectre farm. The pair target and reap pigment users and cultivate some to serve as vessels for Jasons.

The characters may or may not wish to become involved given circumstances such as the hives blooming. Chances are good that Jessica notices the characters, however. Once she does, her pleas for help will either draw the Spectres' attentions to the crucible or the characters to the girl's plight. The crucible may have no alternative but to fight the Jason to survive or to help Jessica. The Pusher only involves itself if the crucible is besting Shiv. It will otherwise busy itself with harvesting the girl and alerting any backup.

THE PUSHER

The Pusher is like many of its kin. Its death-like robes are a patchwork of gauze, and its cowl is a dark abyss reflecting nothing but two fearful red embers. Coiled across its chest are barbed chains, which it uses with deadly proficiency. The Pusher is one of several shepherds at the Spectre farm. It ensures the mortals under its watch remain broken and easily subjugated until it either reaps their souls at death or allows a Jason to ride the broken husk of humanity.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 4



Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Intimidation 5, Investigation 2, Leadership 3, Melee 5, Occult 2, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 2

Nature: Monster

Willpower: 10

Spite: 10

Offensive Abilities: Carapace (+5B/5L soak), Chill, Hive-Mind, Manifest, Rend,

Tentacles (barbed; chains) x 2

SHIV

In life, Shiv was on death row for the murder of several teens. A borderline psychotic, he was damn near a monster before the state executed him for his crimes. His fall toward Spectrehood was a short jaunt, though Shiv quickly earned note as a capable Jason. Still, the Pusher felt Shiv's murderous sprees needed direction. The Reaper stepped in and took control of Shiv, improving the former convict's deadly skills.



Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Intimidation 3, Melee 3, Security 2, Streetwise 2

Nature: Monster

Willpower: 4

Spite: 7

Offensive Abilities: Claws, Flicker, Hive-Mind (being embodied doesn't cut the Spectre inside Shiv off from its brethren), Ignore Wound Penalties (wound penalties do not apply to Shiv's host), Preternatural Strength (the Spectre's own Physical Traits augment that of its host's, adding 4 dots to Strength, 3 to Dexterity and 3 to Stamina), Regeneration (Shiv may tap Spite to heal physical damage it's sustained; it heals lethal damage on a one-for-one basis, while the expenditure of a single point of Spite heals all its bashing damage).

THE BAD SEED

It's been tough finding ghosts with more awareness than blips and tougher still convincing them to venture to Lazarus Redux, where they'll be safe from the swarms. Sometimes, getting ghosts to safety also means working with the occasional drone or blips to help them through their problems... like rehab for spooks.

Torey, whimpering in a corner as usual, was a little girl who died in a fire last week. She constantly cries for her parents, who died quickly and quietly from asphyxiation.

This time, she looks up, and her features blur and change into something inhuman. Whatever it is leering back, it isn't Torey. "How pleasant," it rasps. "Do stay. Company will be here shortly."

Torey's burned ruin of a house rests in the middle of a quiet suburban neighborhood. It might have remained quiet had a ghostly fragment not punched through the Stormwall and into the house with enough force to set off a gas explosion. The home has been a beacon ever since, attracting spooks and Spectre alike. Sensitives in the area also sense the inherent negative energies suffusing the site.

Regardless, Fetches and other animal-type Spectres flock to the burned home like flies to carrion. Some Virus-capable Spectres also hang around the structure, teaming up when strong prey — such as the characters — arrive. The rest of the time, they're prone to squabbles

and turf wars. A recent destructive fracas drove many away, but they're slowly returning.

THE CONFLICT

The crucible, while shepherding ghosts to shelters, encounter Torey's house and Torey. She is a blip, reenacting her last moments before death and looking for her parents (who have passed on) like a broken record. She survives the Spectres because one Spectre named Garza uses her as its vessel.

While the characters attempt to rescue Torey, Garza uses the little girl's ghost to attack the crucible. The Spectre tries to keep the characters there until more of its compatriots arrive. It also taunts crucible members with the possibility of saving Torey by using her own voice. Fetches or Spectre Hounds are the most likely to arrive first, in a pack of three to five.

GARZA

In life, Garza was a failed actor. He liked the idea of becoming any personality to which he set his mind. Hollywood was brutal, however. He auditioned for part after part and was turned down for each one. He took to drugs, particularly pigment, to achieve the same high he derived from being in the spotlight. Pigment eventually killed him, and he slid from ghost to Spectre very quickly afterward, reveling in the horror and the attention his new nature garnered.



Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics 1, Alertness 1, Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Enigmas 2, Expression 2, Performance 2

Nature: Deviant

Willpower: 5

Spite: 5

Offensive Abilities: Chill, Envelop, Hive-Mind, Virus

DEAD SOULS

Hives, *you think to yourself*, what an appropriate name. *Walking through this dank, almost fleshy organic cave system makes you feel like an intruder in a deformed wasp's nest.* Nothing several sticks of dynamite couldn't fix, *you muse, except it wouldn't work against spectral matter and would probably kill more people than it would save ghosts.*

"Help... please...," a weak voice pleads. You spin around. It's coming from a spook embedded in the walls, her gauze stretched like wallpaper beneath a coating of shellac. More voices join in, more souls embedded in the walls as far as your vision permits, all begging for release....

Now, the Spectres know someone's in the hive.

There's a network of hives situated in the subbasements of several buildings in the downtown business district. This particular hive rests at the root of the largest building and extends upward like a cancerous growth, encompassing at least half the structure. Anyone trying to eradicate this hive may well end up destroying the building since the hive seems to have penetrated the support beams themselves. Destroying the hive through anything but surgical precision will cause untold collateral damage. And that doesn't even take into account the potential loss of life, which would only serve to strengthen and feed the hive.

Aside from the sheer number of souls trapped here, the biggest problem is in freeing them. They're sunk in and ensnared, requiring rescuers to dig them out one at a time. This may alert resident Spectres, particularly some Ribbon Cutters that act as part of the defenses.

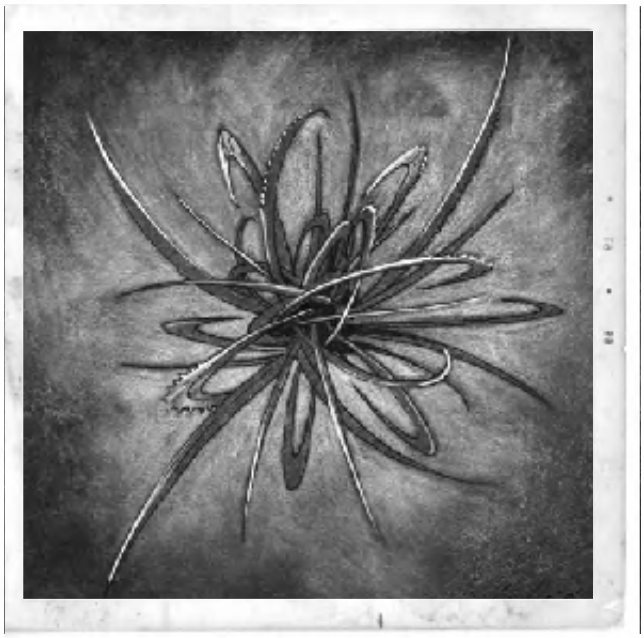
THE CONFLICT

The characters may be trying to escape the hive, to rescue someone or to investigate how to destroy it. Regardless, on their journey through the hive, they'll encounter at least one chamber filled with ghosts stashed away in the walls like stored meals in a spider's web. It's possible to free a few with great effort, but it's nearly impossible to free them all without concerted efforts from other crucibles such as the Freedom Fighters. Even the act of liberating the few can attract all sorts of the wrong attention, which may be even more disastrous depending on the crucible's reasons for being in the hive in the first place. With the trapped spooks all calling for help, however, earning the wrong sort of attention is inevitable. What then do the characters do? Do they try to pull some ghosts free and leave the rest as they are? Many ghosts would prefer destruction to this state — an

altogether different sort of release than the characters intended. Can they honor those requests, before or after any opposition arrives? Can the characters leave and return with more help?

RIBBON CUTTERS

These Ribbon Cutters are variants of those presented in **Shadow Games**, though they appear much the same: balls of blades, all pointing outward and constantly twirling and spinning about. When the Ribbon Cutters attack, the blades lance outward, striking targets. When the Spectres try to sever a silver cord, they move until the cord is situated center mass within themselves before spinning about quickly. The blades essentially implode inward, consuming the Ribbon Cutter and destroying the silver cord. Ribbon Cutters rarely sever silver cords, however, unless accompanied by a Gatherer. Instead, they rest along the cord like a booby trap. When a skimmer tries to ripcord back to his body, he moves through the Ribbon Cutter, which shreds the projector's gauze.



Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Charisma 0, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0, Perception 4, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 4, Intimidation 5, Melee 4, Stealth 1

Nature: Martyr

Willpower: 4

Spite: 8

Offensive Abilities: Blades (each blade inflicts Strength + 2 lethal damage; the Ribbon Cutter can also spin in combat, inflicting Strength + 5 lethal damage; anyone engaged in hand-to-hand combat suffers two dice of lethal damage every time she hits the sphere with her body; anyone ripcording through a Ribbon Cutter suffers 10 lethal, which skimmers can convert to bashing), Flit

ROLLING THE BONES

"It should be just up ahead," Raymond says. He takes point as the group mounts the hill to the cemetery. His remains are buried there in a communal grave. He wants them moved to his wife's grave, but he needs help. He hasn't been able to return there since the Spectres arrived en masse. Once at the summit, and the cemetery gates, nothing obstructs the group's view. In fact, it's quite easy to see the small army of Spectres in residence at the graveyard.

"My grave's over there," Raymond whispers, gesturing to one end of the cemetery. "What now? I can't go—"

A wail pierces the air — the Spectres are holding a struggling ghost, tormenting her.

"Leona" Raymond cries, and then, he rushes to help his wife....

Originally attracted to the cemetery because of all the lingering ghosts they could harvest, the numerous Spectres here (including a Reaper, a handful of Lost Boys, a Friendly Angel and several other indeterminate types) stay because it serves as a central gathering area within easy reach of a Spectre farm, at least one hive and a hospital. The area contains more low-Vitality spooks than the crucible can feasibly rescue, so an all-out assault is not an option.

The cemetery is also a wide-open space with little cover, rendering a sneaky approach difficult. Anyone mounting a rescue would have to use high Vitality or a skinridden host to approach the Spectres relatively unnoticed, and even that may prove difficult to do effectively.

THE CONFLICT

Raymond's ready to move on, but he needs one last tether resolved: Relocating his remains to be interred with his wife Leona's. Leona died a year ago when a car full of drunken teens collided with hers at high speed. Raymond died six months ago in another collision, a victim of the Frighteners produced from the accident that killed his wife. He crashed into a bus hard enough to render positive identification impossible, so bits of Raymond were accidentally buried with the other victims.

The problem is that the Frighteners are holding Leona. She'd been hoping to move on as well once Raymond's and her remains were reunited, but the Spectres captured her and have been torturing Leona, hoping she'd become a Spectre.

It's suicide to try to rescue Leona, much less to recover Raymond's bones at this time, but he's not about to listen to reason now. It's up to the characters to decide how they help him, if at all.

CAR ACCIDENT FRIGHTENERS

These three Frighteners were once teen boys out celebrating the last week of school before graduation. Unfortunately, swimming up to the eyeballs in beer doesn't make for a good condition in which to be driving. One moment of horsing around with the wheel translated into a violent death that deprived them and Leona of their remaining lives.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 2



Abilities: Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Computer 2, Drive 1, Expression 1, Intimidation 1, Melee 2, Technology 2

Nature: Deviant

Willpower: 4

Spite: 5

Offensive Abilities: Carapace, Flit, Immolate, Rend

MONSTER I AM

It was a little unnerving to see a spook appear seemingly out of nowhere. Even more unnerving when he said his name was Gary and that he used to be a Spectre. Maybe you shouldn't be surprised, considering how he's now trying to subdue and capture the Spectre you found in this old ironworks foundry.

"Hold still, you little shit," Gary hisses. The Orphan-Grinder has the Spectre, a Frightener who looks vaguely like a badly mangled 11-year-old boy, pinned to the floor with the help of some sharp and cruel-looking claws extending from his fingers. The more the Spectre struggles, the more gouges appear in his gauze. Makes you wonder if maybe... this isn't such a good idea, after all.



The ironworks foundry has suffered a run of bad luck lately, with accident after accident ending in several near-misses, a few disfiguring mishaps and even a couple of deaths. If matters don't change, the foundry's owners will close it for good instead of temporarily. Its biggest problem is a Frightener, specifically the former ghost of a young boy killed while investigating a piece of heavy machinery during a school field trip.

The foundry is situated in a large industrial park with factories, a few companies and a private airfield not far off. Ghosts and Spectres alike can access plenty of heavy machinery and cause significant havoc here and in nearby businesses. The location also means there are plenty of hiding spots from which Spectres can launch an ambush. No hives are obvious, but all that means is that, if any are nearby, they're hidden from view.

THE CONFLICT

The crucible, perhaps on a mission for Lazarus Redux or maybe looking for safe havens, arrive at the foundry to investigate it and to rid it of any Spectres. Not long after, the little Frightener appears and attacks the characters. Gary then steps out of nowhere to assist in subduing it. The characters aren't in much danger. They should be able to drive the Spectre off with few scratches to their gauze. It should be clear, however, that Gary's tactics are overkill and a bit disturbing. If one character knew the boy when he was alive, it might make the Spectre even more sympathetic — even if the characters can't agree on rescuing it, the Storyteller can portray it as worthy of consideration.

The crucible may confront and/or rebuke Gary. Friends or allies such as him make it difficult to determine just who the good guys are and who are the bad. Depending on how the characters approach Gary, he may reluctantly release the Spectre, or he may instead fight with one or more members of the crucible.

GARY OSBORNE

Gary is an Orphan-Grinder working with Mr. Jigsaw (see p. 104). In fact, it was thanks to Mr. Jigsaw's help that Gary knew to appear in the foundry when he did. Gary is having trouble holding on to those things that make him human, however, and reaccumulating Spite. At this rate, without intervention from the characters, he'll plummet rapidly back into Spectrehood and never return from that state again.

In life, Gary was a security guard, gunning for the chance to become a cop. After tasting the sort of power he could wield in even a quasi-law-enforcement profession, he'd wanted more. He died after trying to intervene in a bank robbery. After becoming a Spectre, his thirst for personal power and glory allowed him to pull away from the hive-mind.



Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 2, Computer 1, Intimidation 3, Investigation 2, Law 1, Linguistics 1, Melee 1, Security 2, Subterfuge 1

Shade: Orphan-Grinder

Lament: Spirit

Nature: Bravo

Willpower: 7

Vitality: 7

Spite: 7

Offensive Abilities: Congeal, Hellion, Oblivion's Husk, Storm-Wending

MONSTER I BECOME

She wasn't part of the crucible, but she'd been a close friend, probably pulling the crucible members' asses out of the fire on numerous occasions. Maybe she grew a little scary over time, but you really didn't notice it until the hives opened. Now, each desperate situation provokes increasingly harsher and more stringent defensive and offensive measures from her. She, and everyone else, knows she's sliding further toward Spectrehood, though she's trying to fight it.

Tonight, though, she fails. Tonight's the night she makes the switch, and she's wearing her inner war on her sleeve for all to see.

"You have to destroy me," she says. "It's the only way." But she looks like she's not about to make it easy, however....

"She," in this instance, is whichever allied supporting character the Storyteller can dispense with or has the patience to introduce and play out. In the latter case, we'll call the supporting character "Violet." Regardless, this vignette occurs wherever and whenever it is least convenient for it to unfold. The characters, along with Violet, are hiding out. Perhaps this story unfolds deep in Spectre territory or during a turf war or maybe while waiting for a patrol to pass before moving on to another location. The most notable feature, essentially, is that the area be knee-deep in Spectres, making it impossible for Violet to resist sinking down to their level. It's a particularly stressful situation all around, made worse with Violet's obvious trouble. If on their way back to the haven, the characters face the possibility of having to leave her behind if she succumbs. If the characters left their haven recently, perhaps on their way to a mission, they face the possibility of having to abort their efforts. Their friend will, unfortunately, call attention to the crucible's actions or destination, and no one wants to leave a friend behind if it's at all possible not to.

The Conflict

Regardless of the "bigger picture," Violet is about to monkey wrench the entire situation. She knows she can't hold out against her cruel urges much longer, and the last thing she ever wants to become is one of the monsters she's fought with such tenacity thus far. She prefers to be destroyed, but the main problem is her sense of self-preservation. The Spectre she's about to become wants very much to remain in existence and will do anything to ensure that. This ultimately means calling the attention of all nearby Spectres, betraying Violet's friends. Violet is almost too far gone for any rehabilitation, so unfortunately, the characters can't knock her out and drag her back home for a heart-to-heart intervention. Saving her is akin to rescuing a full-blown Spectre, meaning expending much time and effort in strengthening her ties to her tethers.

Violet

Violet is one of those people who just can't seem to catch a break. Born into impoverished circumstances, Violet's family always suffered some setback any time they were just about to get ahead — hospitalization, taxes, thieves, house fire. Later in life, Violet discovered shortly before graduating high school that she was pregnant. She finally told her boyfriend, who immediately dumped her and claimed she'd been sleeping around. Within a week, stricken by despair, she committed suicide. Since then, she's done her best to be the strong mother figure she felt she should have been.



Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 1, Athletics 1, Awareness 1, Brawl 2, Computer 1, Empathy 3, Firearms 1, Intuition 2, Investigation 1, Linguistics 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise 2

Shade: Banshee

Lament: Spirit

Nature: Penitent (fast becoming Bravo)

Willpower: 6

Vitality: 9

Spite: 9

Offensive Abilities: Bedlam, Forebode, Pandemonium, Wail

My Brother's Keeper

The message read "Come to Plato's Ideal, 8 PM." Plato's Ideal is an upscale club in the heart of the downtown entertainment district. While it's doubtful any Spectres would send invitations these days, it still pays to be cautious. Nothing good generally comes from anonymous notes.

Thankfully, the scene in the club is happening on the spook side of things, else several flavors of chaos would have broken out. An unknown, angry and scared ghost struggles against two very imposing-looking Spectres that seem intent on dragging her away like beat cops hauling in a recalcitrant suspect.

"I. Am. NOT. Going. Back!" she screams while they struggle. Then, her eyes lock on yours, and you can hear her cry for help before she even utters it.

Plato's Ideal is an upscale club for young professionals, and it's frequently crowded. The club's far from most Spectre farms and hives, but it's not quite no man's land, either. Patrols are sparse but regular. Last week, the Spectres patrolling the area "disappeared." None took their place, but it was only a matter of time before the Spectres returned to uncover the problem.

THE CONFLICT

Noelle is a recent Orphan-Grinder and was part of the Spectre patrol that vanished. She doesn't remember much about the incident, but she does recall coming back out of love for her family. Wanting to help fight the Spectres, she contacted the crucible (whether through a mutual ally or because she's been spying on the characters) in hopes it could point her in the right direction. She didn't count on Spectres called Shepherds appearing to force her back into "slavery," however.

SHEPHERDS

Shepherds are often mistaken for Reapers, if only because they appear physically similar. Shepherds are robed figures with masks of ghostly, patchwork iron for faces floating within their cowls. If a cowl's pulled back, the mask remains, floating with no head that's visible. These Spectres carry a shepherd crook's in their desiccated hands and often hold a chained leash for one of the Fetches accompanying them. Sometimes, when the robes of the Shepherd flutter open, witnesses can see several eyes staring back at them. The Shepherds can summon up to eight Fetches, which appear from their robes, or they can stuff a target into the depth of their robes as per Envelop.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 0, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 2



Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Intuition 2, Investigation 2, Melee 1, Stealth 3

Nature: Judge

Willpower: 7

Spite: 8

Offensive Abilities: Envelop, Hive-Mind, Rend, Summon (up to eight Fetches instantly; each requires the Shepherd tap one Spite; they remain for the duration of the scene)

MR. JIGSAW: MALFEAN EMISSARY

He looked almost human... at least at first. He wore what appeared to be a spotless white, double-breasted suit, a white shirt and a black tie. He also sported a white fedora with a black felt band above the brim, but it was his face that betrayed his nature. His face... or rather, the lack of one. There was nothing beneath that fedora but black gel in human proportions.

"Hello, Mr. Hayes." When he spoke, human features pushed their way through the oily black substance filling his suit. When he stopped speaking, his skin became featureless again.

"I've heard of you." Tom replied, casting furtive glances around the empty room for potential escape routes. "They call you Mr. Jigsaw. They say you're a Spectre who fights Spectres."

The corpse-like features emerged again, completely different from the last time he spoke, drowning just below a thin miasma of dark gauze. He was smiling. "Not exactly true, Mr. Hayes. What you call Spectres are, in fact, abominations my... employers seek to eradicate."

"And they're doing 'cause they're nice folk, right?" Tom could feel the hostility and malevolence leaking from this creature. It filled the run-down room with pulsing waves of malign intent. Despite this, though, Tom did not feel afraid.

A completely different face pushed through the oily skin, one whose laugh was utterly devoid of humor. "Nice folk? No, certainly not." Mr. Jigsaw paused a moment, almost forcing his features to submerge. "Call it an alliance of convenience," he said at last. "Are you familiar with history at all, Mr. Hayes?"

Tom shrugged his shoulders. "A little. My dad was a history professor, though my field's architecture."

"Indeed, I would have enjoyed... meeting your father."

Mr. Jigsaw's odd pauses made Tom uncomfortable.

"History is one of my passions," the Spectre said, continuing. "You might say I have a... hunger... for information. Do you know what Winston Churchill said when asked about the wisdom of allying himself with a monster such as Stalin?"

Tom quickly glanced out the window. The street was empty. Mr. Jigsaw had promised him safe passage in and out of the area if Tom listened to his offer. This particular Spectre's

word was supposed to be good — at least according to those who hadn't presumably vanished after dealing with him.

"I don't see how that's relevant," Tom replied. The empty street worried him, especially this close to the Argent Castle Spectre farm. Outflyers were almost certainly floating around the area.

Mr. Jigsaw chuckled again. "Then you haven't been paying attention to current events. Churchill's reply to the question was 'To defeat Hitler I would ally with Satan himself. With Satan you at least understand his motivations.'"

That grabbed Tom's attention, "Are you comparing yourself to Satan, Mr. Jigsaw?"

Jigsaw sighed, "Orpheus ghosts — far too literal and simply no historical perspective. Of course, that's not entirely your fault. For you, history only began within the last five years. But, to answer your question... no. I am not comparing myself or my employers to Satan. My point is that, in the past, my superiors haven't been, shall we say, on the best of terms with the dead communities. When they were in their ascendance, though, the world of the living and that of its Underworld had a sense of order, a hierarchy if you will. These new Spectres, the hives, the sweeps for ghostly fodder... all this is only the beginning. If we allow them to complete their work — her work — everything we know will be swept away. What replaces it will be...," Mr. Jigsaw said, trailing off.

"What?" Tom asked, his brows furrowed.

The face emerging from the oily skin looked... worried? It was difficult to be sure. "I'm trying to find the words, but there's nothing in your human vocabulary to properly convey the coming horrors, Mr. Hayes. What lies behind the Stormwall is literally beyond human reckoning. And to merely call Spectres evil is to do them a great disservice. What they are trying to do...." Mr. Jigsaw trailed off again.

"Oh, for the love of GOD! What!?" Tom said, exasperated by the roundabout conversation.

"I don't think you're ready to know all the answers yet." Jigsaw replied.

"Don't give me that shit!" Tom yelled, "If anyone is ready, it's me. In case you haven't noticed, we're in the middle of a war, and I'm back on the losing side! If you have information that can help us, tell me. Otherwise, get the fuck out of my face, 'cause I have better things to do."

Mr. Jigsaw smiled, a predatory grin that made Tom step back. "Very well, then, Mr. Hayes, we have a deal. Why don't you have a seat." Mr. Jigsaw gestured to a decrepit wooden chair. "I have much to tell you and very little time."

Tom sat down. "You're going to tell me how to fight them."

Mr. Jigsaw waggled a finger at him. "First mistake, Mr. Hayes. Spectres are not a 'Them.' Spectres are an 'It'."

"I don't understand."

The grin returned. "You will, Mr. Hayes. That's why I'm here."

A SPECTRE WHO FIGHTS SPECTRES

Spectres lurk on the cornices over every street corner. Turf wars, for all their intra-Spectre violence, only strengthen the hives. Elsewhere in the city, spooks, whether former Orpheus operatives or independent agents, fight a desperate rearguard action against an almost overwhelming force. Yet, when matters appear at their worst, rumors surface concerning a new player in the hereafter's greatest game. Someone is circulating information on fighting the Spectres, and several crucibles on the verge of destruction find themselves saved by a mysterious critter calling himself "Mr. Jigsaw."

Unfortunately, the World of Darkness isn't a four-color comic book. Mr. Jigsaw isn't a superhero trying to save the day. He is, in fact, another Spectre, a stone-cold killer implementing the agenda of his mysterious backers... beings he calls "Malfeans." His purpose remains unknown, as are the reasons why he and his masters fighting the Spectres. For desperate crucibles struggling to keep their heads above water, though, Mr. Jigsaw's help and information may seem like a Godsend. Not caring about Mr. Jigsaw's motives is a mistake, however, because Mr. Jigsaw may, in the end, prove that the cure is worse than the disease.

APPEARANCE

Mr. Jigsaw's appearance is bizarre, to say the least. When first approached, he appears almost human. He stands at 6'7" and wears an impeccably neat, white double-breasted suit with a black tie. He also wears a white fedora with a black band. The suit, however, contains something distinctly inhuman. Inside the clothes is an oily black ooze that churns and roils, seemingly held together only by the clothing and some alien will. The substance is only visible as two blobs sticking out from the sleeves and a head-like mass of ooze wearing the fedora.

Mr. Jigsaw's "hands" sprout as many or as few "fingers" as required to manipulate objects, though he usually tries limiting his digits at five to help people feel more comfortable around him. More horrifying is the manner in which he speaks. When Mr. Jigsaw communicates, human features on the generous side of cadaver push their way through the oily skin of his "head" to deliver his message. The features change every time, as does his voice. He never sits.

Mr. Jigsaw's tie isn't what it appears to be. A closer inspection indicates that the tie is made of scaly black leather. In fact, it's a 15-foot tentacle that Mr. Jigsaw can, when necessary, use to attack foes or lift and throw heavy objects. His tentacle can also



grip stationary objects and pull Mr. Jigsaw around at double his normal movement.

All this, however, belies Mr. Jigsaw's true appearance. If Mr. Jigsaw bows and removes his fedora, it's not a sign of respect. Rather, he's about to show his real colors. Upon removing his hat, Mr. Jigsaw's entire body splits down its sides, down to the waist. The two halves then open up like a bird's beak, revealing an enormous, tooth-lined maw with a large glistening black tongue and a gullet that seems to go down forever. The 15-foot tentacle is the tongue, which snares and drags food — usually other Spectres, but the occasional spook as well — into the maw, where Mr. Jigsaw chews and swallows them. Jigsaw doesn't do this often, but this form is usually the last thing anyone sees.

There are some intelligent Spectres who believe that anyone Mr. Jigsaw consumes in this fashion becomes a part of him, their personality and knowledge subsumed into his black oily body. If true, it would certainly account for Mr. Jigsaw's shifting appearance and why his actions are "invisible" to the hive-mind (meaning that he can hide his motives behind any personality or, even, that he exists within a contained hive-mind).

Personality

Mr. Jigsaw is unfailingly polite. While his Spectral nature is obvious, especially in the way he radiates malevolence, Mr. Jigsaw never grows upset or angry or outraged. When speaking to characters, he acts calm and patient, never raising his voice and always talking in measured, reasoned (but condescending) tones... much like an Ivy League college professor speaking with a group of below-average students.

Mr. Jigsaw presents this demeanor regardless of his circumstances. He may shock characters by performing horrific tortures on Spectres or spooks while conversing as though at a casual faculty luncheon. This also means Mr. Jigsaw is utterly impossible to read and is, additionally, immune to any kind of emotional manipulation or control (from Intimidation and Manipulation to Unearthly Repose and Vector). Mr. Jigsaw never offers any indication he's upset or losing his patience before launching into a bout of blinding violence. After it's over, he'll calmly dust himself off and continue about his business.

If Mr. Jigsaw has a weakness, it's his hunger for information. In most cases, this hunger is metaphorical. In addition to disseminating vital intel and tactics in the war against the Spectres (information included further down), he's also an insatiable news junkie. After he's done speaking with someone, Mr. Jigsaw is known for grilling people about what they've seen, often eliciting details and reaching conclusions no one else can. Characters, in fact, can lure him into dangerous situations using some new piece of data. If the rumors about Mr. Jigsaw are accurate, however, eating someone will allow him to immediately absorb all the information and knowledge she possesses.

Mr. Jigsaw's Agenda

Mr. Jigsaw's ultimate purpose remains a mystery to everyone save himself and his "employers." He seems quite sincere in his desire to beat back the Spectres and dedicates everything he does toward that goal. His exact identity, however — as well as those of the "Malfeans" employing him and their fight against the Spectres — remains a mystery. At the moment, he seems interested in three matters:

- The current disposition of the Spectres' forces in the city. Mr. Jigsaw spies on many different hives, though nobody's ever sees him entering one. In such situations, he merely observes the comings and going of a hive's occupants, occasionally following a particular Spectre for a while before returning to the hive. He also studies Spectre turf wars first hand, watching and noting how the Spectres fight and what powers they use.
- The current deployment of forces fighting the Spectres. Mr. Jigsaw frequently inquires about the whereabouts of the spook community's leading figures — mostly signature characters, though he maintains close tabs on the characters as well, after he engages in any verbal exchange with them. It's not unusual for characters to discover that he's been asking about the crucible's activities and their specific actions even though they haven't seen him for a couple of weeks.
- Disseminating information about the nature of Spectres and the best ways to fight them. Note, however, that Mr. Jigsaw doesn't provide this free of charge — he frequently requires some sort of service in exchange. Neither does he blurt out everything he knows to just anyone he meets. Rather, he parcels out information piecemeal to those he believes can forward his agenda.

Mr. Jigsaw's Information

Mr. Jigsaw possesses much information of which Orpheus Group had remained ignorant. He can also shed new light on events that transpired since Orpheus Group's destruction, including information that the Storyteller has yet to reveal. Storytellers should parcel this information out carefully and in small doses, in return for the characters completing missions for Mr. Jigsaw. Also note that, as much as Mr. Jigsaw knows, he isn't omnipotent, nor does he possess all the secrets of the hereafter. Even Mr. Jigsaw receives only as much

information as he needs from his Malfean employers, and while this is substantially more than the characters know, it still isn't everything. Nor is there any guarantee that what he tells the crucible remains unclouded by the Malfeans' agendas. Thus, the following information is only as accurate as Mr. Jigsaw chooses it to be.

Grandmother and the Malfeans

In the years prior to Orpheus Group and projecting science, there was an order to the hereafter. The Underworld was a realm where the past lay trapped, built on the sinking ruins and ashes of a previous empire. Sheltered among the broken ruins of this unquiet land of howling winds and detritus existed the restless dead who could not surrender the passions and hungers driving them in life. Instead, they built empires on the shifting foundations. The demise of these empires came with the appearance of a vast, shredding storm called the Maelstrom. Beneath it all, however, there were always the Malfeans. They were gods among the Spectres... objects of fear for entities whose natures left them incapable of fearing much.

Matters continued in this fashion for a while, but the Underworld was never meant to contain these empires and, thus, could not remain stable. In time, a schism developed among the Malfeans. Most were content to feed from those spirits who came to them through the natural process of death and transit through the Stormwall. One among them, however, lusted after more. The Malfean called Grandmother saw the bright human world, filled with enough mortal luminance to assuage even her hunger and decided she wanted it. The remaining Malfeans, fearing the disorder to the Underworld and their own nourishment that would arise should one of their number try to breach the Stormwall, fought her.

They lost.

Grandmother was powerful, and though not the cause of the Maelstrom, she helped to whip it into an even greater frenzy than it might have been. The other Malfeans, once dancers in the razor winds, instead became its victims, tossed about helplessly while the storm scoured the temporary empires of mortal spirits into the ground. Grandmother herself became the center of the storm, a vast cosmic funnel down which poured the denizens of dead aristocracies and vast numbers of other entities. Grandmother's Spectres, the only ones who seemed still able to ride the winds, helped the Maelstrom do its work, harvesting virtually every ghost in the Underworld. Those Spectres who Grandmother did not mentally override through her growing powers, she slew or drove deep underground.

The Malfeans, still storm-tossed and bereft of their innumerable servitors, were vastly weakened. It took them considerable time alone to reach a point where they could stabilize themselves, to say nothing of launching a counterattack against Grandmother. When they were finally ready, however, they found few who could implement their will — Mr. Jigsaw among them. Nobody knows quite who or what Mr. Jigsaw is save the Malfeans. Some claim he's the first Spectre and that, long before the Maelstrom, he was utterly free-willed. Others claim Mr. Jigsaw is neither Spectre nor spook, but something indigenous to the hereafter. Regardless, if Mr. Jigsaw ever had a master, it was long before current events. He's almost always had employers, however, and he's built his clandestine reputation on never failing a commission.

Mr. Jigsaw never reveals the names of past clients or of the Malfeans he serves simply because: "They wouldn't mean anything to you anyway. Besides, if you can trust me to betray the confidence of my employers, well then, you can't trust me for much, can you?"

Orpheus

Once upon a time, there were funny little apelike creatures who dared to believe they could tame nature, reach the moon and even conquer the secrets of death. They managed the first two, but the third one eluded them until a Spectre introduced them to a drug called pigment. That was a mistake. While pigment helped to facilitate projection, it was, in fact, designed to pin a user's soul to the hereafter (essentially acting like a harvest drug). However, the little apelike creatures then displayed the reason why they survive... tenacity and adaptability.

Projection was never a matter of a drug simply taking effect or of some outside influence charting mortal development. It's a matter of humanity's ability to adapt, excel and soar beyond any imposed limitations, a lesson oft forgotten in this World of Darkness. Projection is more about will and the enduring nature of the human spirit. The drug pigment, and all of its derivatives, certainly launched the catalyst, but they eventually became a crutch and then, finally, a placebo. Certainly, many people are addicted to pigment, but the Spectres never figured hues could rise to become ghosts or that mortals could become projectors. Admittedly, the numbers remain few enough that pigment manufacturing continues, but the resulting emergence of projectors often tempers that so-called success.

Regardless, a whole host of people discovered how to project through firms such as Orpheus Group and Terrel & Squib, and in them, the Malfeans saw the beginnings of an army.



GRANDMOTHER CULTS AND THE HIVES

The Spectres weren't blind, however, and, along with Uriah Bishop, realized that projectors proved a threat to their power base. The destruction of Orpheus was a seemingly decisive attempt to eliminate that threat, but it only served to scatter projectors into all walks of life, much like blowing dandelion spores across the open plains. Groups of Orpheus survivors and independent projectors not only managed to avoid capture and destruction, they continued interfering in Grandmother's affairs.

Regardless, the presence of projectors could not forestall the hives from opening and unleashing a barrage of Spectres to cull more souls. This event is only a prelude, however, to their piercing the Stormwall and allowing Grandmother to plunge the world into a kind of Hell where even death provides no escape. The world under Spectre domination is an ecosystem of misery where only Grandmother's brood wanders free. Any who survive the coming purge are doomed to spend the remainder of existence as miserable hunted animals. Even Bishop realized this possibility and worked toward preventing it — or at least toward staying as close to the top of the Spectral food chain as possible.

Now is the time for the Malfeans to act, which is where Mr. Jigsaw comes in. Mr. Jigsaw reveals that projectors and certain ghosts (such as the characters) are, in fact, far stronger than the ghosts of old. The reasons are uncertain, but some theories include:

• High-Vitality spooks may actually be the hereafter's self-defense mechanism against Grandmother's growing presence.

• Old ghosts suffered from a condition whereby a portion of themselves actively encouraged them to seek death and violence. Call it a realization and embodiment of their negative aspects, but it was a Spectre seed that remained extant in everyone. New ghosts and projectors are no longer hindered by this dual identity for whatever reason, possibly increasing their potential to become more vibrant.

Those spooks who survived Orpheus' destruction, their subsequent status as fugitives, the Spectres and the resultant purges are tougher, stronger and more powerful than anyone could ever have imagined. Even better, a new class of spook, the Orphan-Grinder, emerges into existence with an understanding of Grandmother and her brood. The Malfeans sent Mr. Jigsaw to "rally the troops," as it were, and to help fight Grandmother. Even without Mr. Jigsaw's assistance, the truth remains that the world's dead must pull together and figure out a way to fight the Spectres.

LAST, BUT NOT LEAST

Mr. Jigsaw may or may not reveal these facts depending on his relationship with the group. We leave this decision to Storyteller discretion. The first tidbit he may reveal is that the Malfeans can occasionally "override" Grandmother's control over some Spectres, turning them against their kin. It's for this reason the characters may sometimes encounter Spectres who willingly assist them, albeit temporarily. In Chapter One of **Shadow Games**, one of these overridden Spectres attacked Uriah Bishop's right-hand man, Ethan Torrance, when he visited the wreckage of the ghost tower.

The reason the Malfeans are helping the characters in this fashion is that they're merely looking out for their "investment" (meaning, the characters), even though they have little to do with the characters' state or success. In Malfean logic, the fact that they haven't targeted or tried to kill the characters marks them as an investment. Secondly, the characters have likely proven themselves capable in handily surviving recent events. This marks them as valuable allies in the fight against Grandmother.

The second big secret that Mr. Jigsaw holds, the one he won't share unless the characters prove "unreasonably" intractable over an extended period of time, is that the Malfeans are responsible for shanghaiing the characters' bodies (if the Storyteller played this mysterious event). The Malfeans used turned Gatherers and Ribbon Cutters to kidnap projectors' bodies to insure their future complicity, should the need arise. Somewhere beyond the Stormwall, protected in Gatherer sacs, the characters bodies remain under the care of the Malfeans, who won't be denied their victory over Grandmother. Obviously, this bit of information is trump news, so Mr. Jigsaw will only use it as a last-ditch, desperation move.

Naturally, Mr. Jigsaw is a wealth of information — information he relates in snippets, each in exchange for service. Mr. Jigsaw only reveals these when he thinks the characters are most desperate for them:

• **Memorials are anathema to Spectres:** Fairly straightforward given we've already discussed this previously.

• **Song of the Hive:** Mr. Jigsaw is willing to teach any Orphan-Grinder willing to help him with "a few unpleasantries...".

• **Rescuing Spectres:** Not only can Mr. Jigsaw teach characters how to rescue Spectres and turn them into minions, he's responsible for why that information has become so widespread (and, thus, why Orphan-Grinders seem like they're coming out of the woodwork). In fact, to ingratiate himself to the crucible, he might

even surprise them by rescuing one of their allies turned Spectre, giving it over to the Hellboys for conversion.

USING MR. JIGSAW

Obviously, Mr. Jigsaw is an extraordinary ally for the characters. While his motives are obscure and his malicious nature is obvious, if he is a threat, it's a distant one for now. Grandmother's Spectres pound at the door right now, and someone needs to deal with them. Thus, the Storyteller should encourage the characters to partially trust the nattily dressed Spectre without misleading them — simply because Mr. Jigsaw is relatively straightforward and unabashed about his nature.

To cement some lines of communication, Mr. Jigsaw could help a crucible in dire straits or provide a piece of vital information with no strings attached ("first one's free, the next one carries a cost"). Mr. Jigsaw also never lies and always keeps his word (though he may shade or not reveal bits of intel — he's *very* careful about the promises he makes)

One thing about Mr. Jigsaw, however, is that he's not a deus ex machina. While Mr. Jigsaw fights if the situation merits it and does go to great lengths to protect his assets, he will not save the characters from their own stupidity, nor will he fight their battles for them. Mr. Jigsaw does nothing out of altruism. He's looking for soldiers in the war against Grandmother, and if a crucible can't handle itself, it's not his place to save the characters' bacon.

This means the Storyteller should use Mr. Jigsaw judiciously. You can use him to steer the game in the direction where you want it to go, but at no time should players feel like Mr. Jigsaw's appearance robs them of their free will. He can fill in gaps in the character's information, but he shouldn't do all the legwork for them. In fact, Mr. Jigsaw can send them on missions to uncover intelligence he already knows. It's a way of "strengthening" the crucible and ensuring that the characters are as sharp as he needs them to be for upcoming challenges.

The types of missions Mr. Jigsaw may send them on include:

• **Information Gathering:** Mr. Jigsaw may need characters to observe and gather information on Spectre movements. He may ask them to watch a turf war in progress and judge which hive is gaining the upper hand, or perhaps he requires some obscure piece of lore that he believes can help in the fight. For example, while Mr. Jigsaw can teach the characters about the Song of the Hive Horror, he may feel it's more effective — and furthers his own plans — if the crucible contacts and learns about the Horror from one of the Hellboys or another Orphan-Grinder. The worst of these missions may demand the crucible venture into a hive.

• **Capture:** Mr. Jigsaw may require the crucible capture a specific Spectre. This definitely entails use of Song of the Hive since these missions frequently follow with Mr. Jigsaw ingesting the Spectre to learn the hive's current plans (another indication Mr. Jigsaw may exist within a separate hive-mind of his own making).

• **Contact:** Mr. Jigsaw may ask characters to relay messages from one crucible to another, informing them they're about to be attacked or telling them where to strike and truly hurt the Spectres. He may also ask the characters to bring other crucibles to meet with him, to let them know about the Malfean forces or to hook two groups of spooks up together so that they might combine forces.

• **Combat:** These missions are all too frequent. Mr. Jigsaw sends the characters to support another crucible defending its hideout, to assassinate a particular Spectre, to assault or destroy one of the pigment cults or, in the worst-case scenario, to execute a spook or crucible member who's about to betray the cause.

MR. JIGSAW

Nobody knows much about Mr. Jigsaw. His appearance and the malevolence he radiates mark him as Spectre, yet, unlike the rest of his brethren, Mr. Jigsaw is relatively independent. Indeed, he's the only Spectre who seems to enjoy speaking with spooks. He possesses no hive affiliation and fights Grandmother and her hordes for personal reasons. He plays his cards close to his vest, revealing only as much as his chess pieces need to know.





Among Mr. Jigsaw's extraordinary features is complete immunity to any kind of intimidation, charm or manipulation, whether through an Ability or Horror. Any powers designed to affect his mind or to sway his reaction automatically fail. This, perhaps, is the reason he never succumbed to Grandmother's influence and even that of the Malfeans. As powerful as the latter are, they've been reduced to hiring him, rather than pressing him into service.

Mr. Jigsaw prefers talking over fighting and using charm and guile rather than threats or intimidation to convince people to implement his plans. Should it come down to it, though, Mr. Jigsaw is perfectly capable of inflicting shocking amounts of violence on anyone who interferes with his plans. Indeed, when forced to violence, he seems to enjoy inflicting as much pain and agony as possible on his foes, perhaps sending a message to anyone else who might try to interfere with his plans or perhaps to satisfy some dark Spectral need.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

Abilities: Athletics 4, Brawl 5, Empathy 5, Intuition 4, Leadership 4, Occult 4, Streetwise 5, Survival 5

Nature: Manipulator

Willpower: 10

Spite: 10

Offensive Abilities: Black Hands, Chill, Claws, Flit, Lullaby, Manifest, Maw, Rend, Song of the Hive, Tentacles, Vertigo

SPECTRES

Your first mistake was in treating Spectres as individual entities... like you could classify them the same way you would, say, species of gazelles. No, Mr. Hayes, Spectres are not animals, nor are they ghosts. Spectres are a disease. Ebola with legs... cancer with a smile.

— Mr. Jigsaw to Tom Hayes

The great philosopher Sun Tzu said that to defeat your enemies, you must first understand them. This is one of the many reasons why Orpheus Group fell. It never discerned the full motives and agendas of its business rivals or of the government operatives using it as a tool. Orpheus played with forces it barely understood and never properly catalogued the intricate rules governing human ghosts. When it came to Spectres... forget it. Orpheus Group was content to check them off in neat little boxes marked "Unknown," to tell agents to avoid or exterminate them and to hope that these walking conundrums would eventually go away. Between Terrell & Squib, pigment, Uriah Bishop, NextWorld, the FBI, the NSA, the Death Merchants and a host of other more mundane threats, Orpheus had more pressing concerns.

Unfortunately, Orpheus Group was wrong in discounting the cunning of and the threat posed by the Spectres. All of Orpheus' problems and its eventual destruction could, in the end, be traced back to the Spectres and their mysterious mistress, Grandmother. Now, of course, all former enmities are almost meaningless with the Spectres' invasion in full swing. As it was less than four to five years ago, the Spectres are everywhere, sweeping the world clean of ghosts. The difference is, this time, they're coming in force, and they're not leaving. Without solid information on the nature of Spectres and how they operate, they can't be stopped.

THERE ARE NO "SPECTRES"

In the past, it was difficult finding a good metaphor for how Spectres and their society worked. Much of the reason for that was because the information, to that point, had been contradictory. Some Spectres, such as Frighteners, Jasons and Lost Boys, are recognizable as formerly human. Others, such as Fetches, Hawgs, Chitters and Chupacabras seem more animal-like, often single-minded engines of destruction. Then, there are those creatures, such as the frighteningly intelligent Friendly Angels and Reapers, who are utterly alien save that they manifest as the worst aspects of human fears. Some Spectres seem to garner respect from each other. Others are cannon fodder. While Spectres will work together in highly coordinated programs of destruction, rival Spectres sometimes (while still serving Grandmother) tear each other to pieces. Some ghosts have even seen allied hives go to war against one another.

The mysterious motivations of Spectres make more sense upon applying the metaphor of a disease. Spectres are a plague, a sickness in the hereafter. In a human, a bacteria or virus sometimes infects a healthy body and grows wild, starving or consuming healthy cells while adding to its own mass of diseased tissue. From a human's perspective, such organisms are life gone awry — their health means the host's death.

From a spook's perspective, Spectres are exactly the same. Spectres pollute the psychic landscape of the hereafter, and where they thrive, there is no light, no hope, no positive emotion of any kind. There is no chance for redemption, for the liberation from tethers or for souls to move on. Being a Spectre is nothing but an endless sinkhole of rage, violence and despair. Where Spectres hold sway is literally Hell on Earth, and if nobody stops them, it's the end of everything.

SPECTRE FUNCTIONS

Using the metaphor of a disease, the motivations and operations of the Spectres become clear. A disease progresses in three stages: infection, metastasis and anti-immunization. That essentially describes the process of a Spectre invasion and provides a handy way to separate Spectres by their function. When spooks wish to gauge the spiritual health of a particular area and where they can best coordinate their attacks, this guide can help.

INFECTION

Infection-Type Spectres: Chupacabras, E-Demons, Fetches, Friendly Angels, Frighteners, Jasons, Lost Boys, Spectre Hounds

The term "infectors" covers those Spectres whose job it is to influence areas in order to turn "healthy zones" into Spectre farms (see p. 116). Note that the term "healthy zone" is relative, since Spectres are naturally attracted to places where negative emotions run rampant. Even the worst inner-city ghetto contains recognizable human emotions. Such places may be troubled, but hope hasn't entirely fled. That all changes once infectors arrives.

All infectors, whether spawned across the Stormwall or created from fallen ghosts, are those Spectres that interact the most with spooks and humans. As such, they have the most recognizable "motives" and operating styles. Many manifest as humanity's worst nightmares, thus spawning new types of infectors daily — based on information culled from previous generations of infectors.

Infectors (and all Spectres, for that matter) come in two types. Most are "freelance." After their creation, they wander and try settling areas with minimal Spectre activity, causing as much mayhem as necessary to convert the emotional atmosphere to one more conducive to the growth of a new hive. The drawback to freelance infectors is that there's no guarantee they can attract other Spectres, call for immediate assistance or foster the growth of a hive, leaving them vulnerable to a crucible counterattack. Freelance infectors are also the most distant from the song of the hive-mind. They're connected, naturally, but only in a general sense, and without allegiance to a particular hive. They remain vulnerable to the depredations of more territorial Spectres and may act *too* independently — viewing a Spectre farm as "theirs" and fighting off metastasis Spectres (see the next section, "Metastasis"). When that happens, other Spectres dispatch a Reaper or a Lawgiver to contend with them.

The biggest threat posed by freelance infectors (beyond the obvious) is that, since many remain independent of one another, eliminating them may do nothing to slow hive growth or hold back the Spectre invasion. One of the biggest dangers facing spooks is that infectors are merely decoys, sent out to attract all the attention while the second- and third-stage Spectres establish the proper beachheads.

Far less common, but more dangerous are "affiliated" infectors. These are infectors created by a mature hive and owing allegiance only to that hive. Affiliated infectors prepare virgin territory for their hive's expansion (creating neighboring farms) and receive their assignments by the Reaper in charge. Affiliated infectors can and will defend their farms from all manner of foe, be they meddling spooks, freelance infectors or Spectres affiliated with rival hives. Affiliated infectors bear a significant advantage in being able to count on support from the parent hive. Their biggest weakness, however, is that they're vulnerable to attack by other Spectres — hives aren't shy about stealing feeding grounds from one another (see p. 115 for "Turf Wars" and how a crucible can turn this phenomenon to their advantage).

One tactic that crucibles can use to slow the Spectre invasion is to target infectors. Merely destroying a Friendly Angel and its Lost Boy pack, however, or wiping out Jasons at random is a guaranteed waste of time, energy and resources. This is where information on Spectre movements comes in handy. While there are dozens of hives in the city, many are immature and not yet ready to expand, and others are sickly and on the verge of being absorbed into other hives. These nascent or underdeveloped hives expend significant resources in creating Chitters, Hawgs and other defenses.

There are only up to a dozen hives in the city large and healthy enough to expend resources on creating affiliated infectors and aggressively pursuing new territory. Should a crucible try to prevent these hives from expanding, it's those affiliated infectors that they must target, be they a specific Leech nest or Lost Boy pack's stomping grounds. This information is available either directly from Mr. Jigsaw or through a new Horror employed by the Hellboys called Song of the Hive (see p. 121).

METASTASIS

Metastasis Spectres: Carpet Crawlers, Hawgs, Outflyers, Spreaders

Metastasis is that point in a disease's progress when it destroys the afflicted region's healthy cells, replacing it with diseased tissue. This tissue slowly establishes its own system of nutrition and reproduction, often creating new blood vessels and stealing nutrients from the surrounding tissues to grow more of its own. The parallel with Spectres is obvious. Metastasis is the point where an area is so psychically damaged and corrupted that the

Stormwall weakens and the first tendril of hive gauze creeps through from the Underworld. That's correct, while Spectres can manufacture hives on one side of the Stormwall, it's only when the hive breaches the Stormwall and creates a conduit into the Underworld that it becomes a proper hive. This allows Spectres to travel between the two worlds, a trick currently unavailable to most spooks.

Note that hives do not *require* the presence of Spectres to grow. So long as the Stormwall is sufficiently weakened and the area possesses the requisite level of despair, fear and horror, a hive will continue to spread, albeit quite slowly. Spectres merely speed the process along, both by generating more emotions that keep the Stormwall weakened and by using the gauze of spooks and Spectres alike to build more layers to the hive on this side of the Stormwall. They also defend the area from spooks capable of attacking the hive on a spiritual level and (to a lesser extent) from well-meaning mortals who may try to destroy a decrepit, crack house that roots a hive through misery.

To that end, hives spawn metastasis Spectres whose sole purpose is to repair, extend and spread the hive's influence. These Spectres *always* answer to a specific hive and rarely travel outside of it (in the case of Outflyers and Carpet Crawlers, they mark the perimeter of a hive's claimed territory). They're also the closest any Spectre comes to being "benign." That doesn't mean harmless, however. It means combat isn't the primary purpose of metastasis Spectres. Thus, if a crucible was to reconnoiter a hive, odds are that Carpet Crawlers, Spreaders and Hawgs would continue doing their jobs and not attack on sight. All these creatures are still Spectres, however, and will attack if someone invades the hive or if ordered to do so by the hive-mind.

Metastasis Spectres are mostly mindless and fulfill much the same functions as worker ants in an ant colony. As such, destroying them won't inflict tremendous damage to a hive. They're identical, interchangeable and, ultimately, replaceable.

ANTI-IMMUNIZERS

Anti-Immunization Spectres: Chitters, Lawgivers, Reapers, Ribbon Cutters, Syrenes

Naturally, a healthy body fights the destructive presence inside it. Bodies have defenses, immunization agents that attack the disease and try to eliminate it. When this happens, the malignancy develops its own anti-immunization agents designed specifically to overcome the body's defenses. The Spectral disease is no different. The most terrifying and alien Spectres are that way because they're not designed to understand humans or to spread the hive's influence. Anti-immunization



Spectres are warrior creatures, each designed to counter and kill anything hindering the growth of the hive.

As a group, the "anti-immunization" Spectres are the most diverse in power, intelligence, ability and status within Spectral society. That's because each of them not only bears a specific purpose, but defends the hive against a specific threat. Reapers are the earliest versions of these creatures and serve in two capacities: as general planners/strategists and as all-purpose warriors. Ribbon Cutters appeared after Spectres encountered projectors. Now that some Spectres are clawing their way back from the hive-mind's embrace, the Spectres responded through the creation of Syrenes, Spectres specifically designed to hunt Orphan-Grinders.

Because it is created for a specific purpose, an anti-immunizer may be either freelance or affiliated. Chitters, for example, act as a hive's defense force and are, thus, always affiliated. Lawgivers, however, who primarily police and destroy renegade Spectres, are almost always freelance.

Storyteller Note

One of the most effective ways a Storyteller can generate fear and terror among characters during the Spectre invasion is by having them realize that Spectre attacks never happen in a vacuum. Although individual Spectres may be more or less intelligent than a crucible, the hive-mind as a whole learns from every encounter. Since some Spectres have only a minimal concept of self-preservation, they're perfectly willing to sacrifice dozens of their number in successive attacks designed to gather information about foes.

Spectres may also possess varying power and Trait levels, even within the same species, thus offering a very effective way of generating both a "siege mentality" and a sense of time sensitivity within characters. Admittedly, some changes may require weeks or months before a hive receives a new batch of Spectres from across the Stormwall that's capable of contending with a specific set of circumstances. Start with a wave of generic Spectres that you know the crucible can handle. A month or two after it defeats the first group, send a second wave that uses Horrors and Thorns designed specifically to defeat whatever method the crucible used in handling the last one. Among the Spectres' most effective weapons is the knowledge that not only do new Spectres always replace the ones that fall, but they also learn from their brethren's experiences, becoming tougher and deadlier than in previous generations.

If they do associate with a hive, it's because they need the hive's resources to destroy a strong opponent.

Spectre Society

Spectres have one overriding goal shaping their actions, and that's to provide for Grandmother across the Stormwall, whatever her agenda may be. Because of that and the fact that all Spectres share that commonality through their hive-mind, it's too easy to treat Spectres as simple-minded automatons, cancerous cells overcoming all obstacles through sheer number. Nothing could be further from the truth. Spectres are capable of fighting, and do fight, each other, even working at cross purposes at the expense of their shared goals when their agendas conflict. Spectres have a society as rich and complex as that of humans or spooks based on two major principles: abuse and Darwinian competition.

Abuse, or the "I Love You, But..." Syndrome

It may seem odd to proclaim that Spectre society is filled with love, but it's true. Indeed, among the few things Orphan-Grinders agree on concerning their experiences as Spectres is that a sense of love suffused the hive-mind. Imagine all the different varieties of closeness, warmth and support you experience with family, friends, sexual partners, teammates and co-workers. Then, imagine that voices in your head offer you all those different kinds of love in one package. That's the experience of living in the hive-mind, and many Orphan-Grinders secretly miss it. Unfortunately, since these are Spectres we're talking about, all this comes with a caveat. The love that fills the hive is not of the healthy sort. It is, rather, the conditional, twisted love commonly associated with abuse.

The type of emotional abuse inherent in Spectre society can be summed up in one phrase: "I love you, but...." Unlike a true declaration of love, the phrase "I love you, but..." is conditional. Rather than being tender and affectionate, it is, in fact, a method of control that uses love as both a lure and a whip. It allows the speaker to remain distant and in control, while inviting the subject of the remark to compromise himself, pushing himself to greater lengths to counteract the "but...." Obviously, Spectres don't go around speaking to one another, but the emotional effect is the same — love is the currency paid out to all Spectres, and it's one handed out sparingly and removed quickly.

This emotional economy is both vertical and horizontal. Love travels up and down the Spectre line vertically, beginning with Grandmother's love for species such as Reapers — among her most important servitors — and descends through mid-level infectors,



all the way down to Chitters and Carpet Crawlers on the lowest rungs of Spectre society. Each Spectre in the hive's hierarchy constantly works to win the love, respect and approval of those higher on the chain.

This emotional economy also works horizontally. Effective hives may have a Reaper and its Frightener lieutenants who band together because they work well as a unit. They not only push forward the overall Spectre agenda, but they help each other to prosper. This forms bonds of something akin to the "friendship" and "respect" of human society.

The most extreme example of this is the Friendly Angel/Lost Boy bond. Lost Boys are the fallen ghosts of abandoned and abused children. The very essence of a Lost Boy is an emotional black hole yearning for love. Friendly Angels fill that role as literal love transmitters. Through their illusions, they promise living children love and family but, inevitably, lead them to horrible deaths. The irony, of course, is that Friendly Angels keep their promises. Lost Boys do earn love and family, albeit the worst, most abusive family imaginable. Yet, much as human children defend an abusive parent because having a bad parent is better than having no parent at all, so, too, do Lost Boys defend Friendly Angels. Such a creature is probably the closest thing to family most Lost Boys have ever known.

Ironically, the same bonds of love that keep Spectres cemented may also be their greatest weakness. Spectral emotional bonds are entirely utilitarian in nature. There's little tolerance for failure or even marginal success in Spectre society. Relationships between Spectres are very fluid and constantly moving. A Spectre may terminate a long-standing partnership if it believes it's in its interest to do so. Indeed, whole hives may rise or fall depending on how Grandmother shifts her affections. As mentioned previously, real love, generous and open, with no strings attached, can conquer the abusive affection of Spectres, potentially rescuing those once human and transforming them into minions or even Orphan-Grinders.

DARWINIAN COMPETITION

Given the abusive nature of Spectre love and approval, it only makes sense that this aspect of Spectral society would give rise to brutal competition. Spectres are the ultimate example of a Darwinian social order. The strong survive and prosper, culling the weak for the good of the race. More so, much like cats sometimes offer their owners dead mice or birds as a "gifts," Spectres also compete to please or impress Grandmother (as discussed under "Turf Wars," p. 115).

Grandmother encourages this competition at every level of Spectre society. It's a rare moment indeed inside a hive when a couple of Chitters aren't ripping each other to shreds. Hawgs who bump while hauling their loads of gauze may attempt to gore one another, leaving the badly injured to be torn apart by Spreaders and added to the walls. Moving up to more intelligent Spectres, rivalries become less violent and more subtle, and the plots of Friendly Angels, Frighteners and Reapers are often Byzantine in their complexity (though it's rare any spook or mortal will ever see this side of the equation). When they're ready to act, though, high-echelon Spectres can be just as violent as their less-intelligent brethren and are often far more creative.

This level of competition stretches far beyond inter-Spectre rivalries. Every Spectre possesses four levels of loyalty. Their lowest level of loyalty is to their own existence. As mentioned previously, Spectres have a survival instinct, though that can be overridden when the Spectre's destruction serves the good of the hive. This is rare and difficult to enforce, however. Should the hive-mind or a Spectre's immediate superior decide to destroy a particular Spectre, that Spectre will often fight that sacrifice even though it's for the advancement of the species. Every Spectre is aware it has a purpose and will fight ferociously to preserve itself so long as that purpose remains unfulfilled.

A Spectre's second level of loyalty is to its pack or its hive-mates. As mentioned previously, Spectres develop emotional bonds with one another. While completely cynical and self-serving, in mortal respects, Spectres often defend one of their own against a rival Spectre or may choose to rescue one Spectre while leaving another to the tender ministrations of spooks. Spectres make these evaluations using the cold logic that they protect something that's an asset to them. In low-tier and less-intelligent Spectres, this may be as simple as a group of Chitters uniting to bring down an intruding Chupacabra. As always, matters become more complicated the higher up the hierarchy one goes. It's not unheard of for a Reaper to allow word of an infestation to leak out to spooks just to bring down a Friendly Angel who's grown a little too independent.

A Spectre's highest loyalty is to Grandmother, though even Mr. Jigsaw is uncertainty if fealty to Grandmother is born from free will or a matter of her overriding influence. Regardless, while the Spectres tolerate some infighting and independence, anything threatening Grandmother's overall agenda earns swift and harsh retribution. Additionally, should Grandmother enforce her will, she will overcome all hive differences and force her Spectres to work together... though this is rarely necessary.

Somewhere between their loyalty to Grandmother and their loyalty to their own pack-mates is where

matters become interesting. This gray area is where a Spectre's loyalty to the hive lays. While all Spectres share the same hive-mind, facilitating communication and the reinforcement of Grandmother's general imperatives, Grandmother leaves the actual details of that agenda to her Spectres, to implement in whatever manner they see fit.

In other words, the hive-mind is the psychic chorus of the entire Spectre species. Grandmother's voice is obviously strongest and provides the bass line, the unifying musical bed in the Spectre's alien symphony, but as more Spectres' voices join the harmony, the tune changes. Different Spectres add their own melodies and influences based on what they feel is the best method for completing Grandmother's plans.

This means that the song of the hive-mind differs slightly based on the current activities of each individual hive and the plans of its governing Reaper (or other top-tier Spectre). It's this different hive-mind "accent" that Spectres use to identify themselves as members of a particular hive, while also using it to identify members of other hives or freelance Spectres. In cases where two hives are in conflict with one another, the Reapers in charge may deliberately play up the differences between accents to keep the other hive from "eavesdropping" through their shared connection. In many cases, the Spectre's left hemisphere literally doesn't know what its right hemisphere is doing, though this only works when the number of Spectres engaged in the activity is small. When the battle involves many Spectres, the voices and intent are too loud to ignore or mask. The Spectres, however, may soon discover a way around that dilemma.

This is also why freelance and infector Spectres go "rogue" more often than affiliated ones. Freelance Spectres are connected to the hive-mind, but only on the most basic level. Their very nature means their thinking must remain independent, meaning they lack many elements of the supportive "groupthink" that come with hive affiliation. Without it, a Spectre may feel only it is truly loyal to Grandmother, since it believes it has a choice in the matter, or its natural competitiveness may override or suppress its much weaker hive-mind connection in favor of individual pursuit for power and control. Should any Spectre's connection to the hive-mind grow weak enough, the Spectres declare it a "rogue" and send a Lawgiver or Reaper (for powerful Spectres) or a pack of Fetches (for less-powerful Spectres) after it — even though rogues are always somehow loyal to Grandmother.

TURF WARS

In much the same way that individual Spectres compete with one another for the love and approval of their superiors, so, too, do hives compete with one another for the love and favor of Grandmother. Spectres judge hives in a variety of ways: amount of territory covered, number of souls collected and sacrificed, ability to overcome difficult problems or generate new ways to speed hive growth or to defend against spooks. Grandmother's mind is too vast for anyone to truly understand how she thinks at any given moment, but all Spectres instinctively know which of them stands in her good graces and which of them do not.

This gives rise to the phenomena of turf wars. Turf wars occur when two or more hives hope to exploit the same resource or to win Grandmother's favor by eliminating the same enemy. The flash point may be a Spectre farm (see p. 116) they hope to control, a spook with an interesting power who they wish to convert or perhaps an Orphan-Grinder who's eludes capture thus far. Other turf wars might occur because one hive hopes to test a new Horror or Spectre-type in real-world conditions, while the other hive wants that advantage itself.

In such cases, combat between hives is wild and violent. Spectres from the two hives collide and clash whether appropriate or not, be it in small skirmishes or with both hives unleashing a flood of Spectres to duke it out with hundreds of participants. The winner emerges only after one hive realizes it cannot afford the conflict any longer and withdraws for the other to claim the resource. Spectres know when they are about to fight, and they know when the other hive capitulates — such is the advantage of the hive-mind. There are also constant border conflicts where the territories of different hives meet. Outflyers and affiliated Spectres test one another's defenses often, looking for a weakness they can exploit.

Turf wars may also erupt when one hive judges another to be weak and unable to defend its territory. When one hive utters such accusations, a ripple passes throughout the hive-mind, announcing the declaration of the war. Such avowals are akin to one hive pronouncing another unfit to serve Grandmother. For such transgressions, there are only two possible outcomes: the total annihilation of the offending hive's population or the destruction of the accusers for daring such utterances. Once one hive falls, the victorious hive's Spectres colonize the hive structure, populating it with their own members and directing its growth toward merging with the parent hive.

Full-blown wars between hives are as brutal as they are rare. Only two rules govern such conflicts. The first is that there are no allies in a hive war. For a second hive to ally with another against a stronger hive would be to



admit that it is too weak to defend itself and, therefore, should be purged for the good of the race.

Hives may, however, arrange a "truce" with non-adversarial Spectres — even an agreement to ignore each other or to allow the besieged right of passage through another hive's territory can be enormously beneficial for a hive under attack. If a strong hive attacks a weaker one, the weaker may try to convince a third hive that the war has opened a hole in its enemy's defenses. This applies to spooks as well. While a safe house may temporarily exist in the "shadow" of a hive (see "Spooks, Turf Wars and Hive Shadows," below), there should never be any understanding or alliance between Spectres and spooks. That's what makes Mr. Jigsaw so unique and valuable.

The second rule of turf wars is that no conflict can imperil the Spectres' overall agendas or plans. Should Grandmother or other hives decide that a war is taking too long, wasting too many resources or allowing spooks to gain the upper hand, the hive-mind declares the war over. Such commands immediately override any local agenda, even if in mid-battle, and both hives will cooperating with each other until the threat passes. The hives involved may then decide whether to resume hostilities.

Spooks, Turf Wars and Hive Shadows

As dangerous as turf wars are, they also represent an incredible opportunity to inflict serious damage against Spectres and (curiously enough) a way to create temporary havens to hide spooks from the general Spectre onslaught. This requires crucibles to gather as much intelligence as possible concerning the current status of the city's hives, their current activity levels and their potential enemies.

Hives currently defending their territory against a rival or that are involved in a significant turf war create an odd effect called a "hive shadow." Hive shadows form in any contested zone where a turf war is in progress. With a hive's resources geared toward defending itself and defeating a rival, most hives will temporarily cease harvesting and expansion activities. Spectres not involved in the war avoid the disputed area to keep from dragging their hives into the conflict. This means that, paradoxically, an area involved in a turf war is, in fact, one of the safest for local spooks.

In game terms, Spectres of a hive involved in the war will generally ignore any ghost with a Vitality of 4 or greater (ghosts with Vitality 3 or less are still easy prey). This doesn't mean that Spectres and spooks reach an understanding — trouble the Spectres, and they will try ripping you to shreds. If a crucible keeps a low profile, however, it's quite possible to create cubby holes and safe houses in turf war zones. In some cases, a crucible can extend a safe house's duration by helping the weaker hive in the conflict defend its territory. Unfortunately, this might also mean stopping other crucibles from destroying the local hive. The moral implications of making such choices remain to the imagination of the Storyteller and players.

Spooks may also significantly damage the ambitions of Spectres by attacking or "assisting" members of certain hives. If a crucible can prolong a turf war by attacking both sides, thus maintaining a parity of forces, the Spectres may weaken themselves through attrition. In the most extreme cases, crucibles have managed to help two hives whittle each other down and used powers such as Song of the Hive and Oblivion's Husk to encourage other hives to annihilate them.

Unfortunately, using turf wars to fight Spectres is only a delaying tactic. Even while fighting, Spectres grow stronger through evolutionary selection, and as mentioned earlier, the Spectres themselves do not allow turf wars to endanger their cause.

Spectre Farms

"Spectre farm" is the catch-all term for an area corrupted by the presence of infectors or other Spectres, but has not yet been so emotionally devastated that a hive's formed or is operational. These areas are typically similar to those zones that attract hives: slums, ghettos, drug alleys and economically depressed neighborhoods. Essentially, wherever violence is common, life is cheap, happiness is fleeting and fear and despair are ever-present. Unlike places where the hives have blossomed, though, Spectre farms still possess some life and hope. Community projects haven't failed, and projects such as "homes for the homeless" are still running.

To illustrate the differences, examine two areas plagued by drug usage. A shooting gallery in an abandoned warehouse district is prime real estate for a hive. The only living people in the area are those users who either lie in a stupor on filthy mattresses or wander zombie-like looking for their next fix. A low-income area where kids *deal* in drugs, however, is a good location for a Spectre farm. While the neighborhood certainly has its fill of violence, anger and despair, there're still community outreach programs, concerned Church groups and hard-working parents making better lives for their children. All this is enough to hold off the formation of a hive.

An area may become a Spectre farm in several ways. Maybe it's a depressed neighborhood that attracts freelance infectors looking to start a new hive. It may be host to affiliated infectors on a mission to expand their

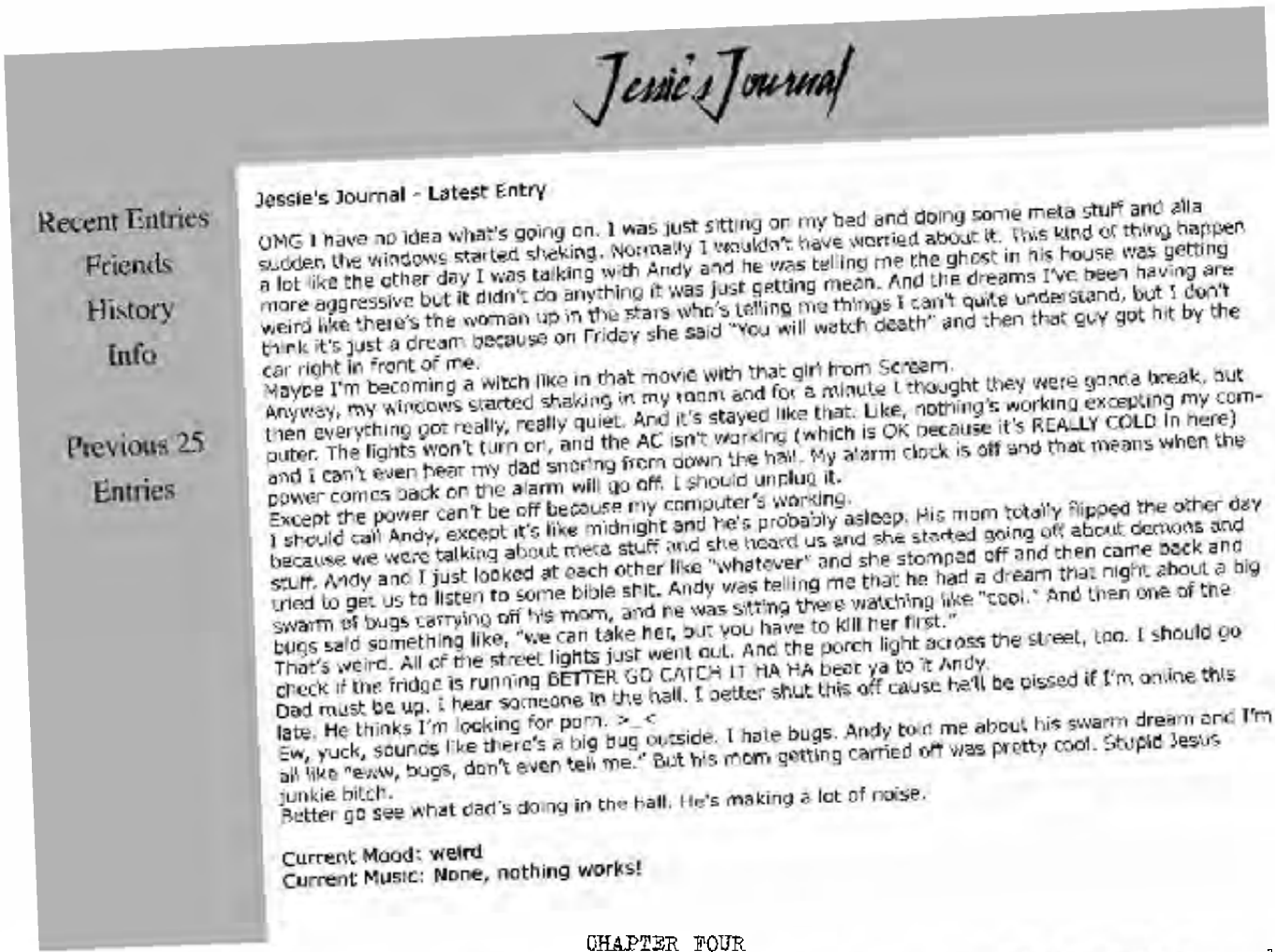
hive's territory. Most of the time, however, the Spectres declare the farm off limits to hive growth because it is more useful as a steady supply of fresh spooks. In rarer cases, a Spectre farm may be neutral territory, a buffer zone between rival hives. In such cases, the area is host to an array of Spectres passing through and causing random mayhem.

Spectre farms are incredibly dangerous places for spooks to frequent, second only to actual hives. Spectres have a variety of uses for farms, which is why they're the focus of constant attention. First, as mentioned earlier, farms can serve as neutral territory between hives. More so, the neighborhood's constant state of emotional turmoil and despair, coupled with an unnaturally high rate of murders and suicides, make it a rich vein of new souls to tap as Spectres, fodder or building material. Spectres also use many farms as test beds, assessing new types of Spectres, new Spectre Thorns and even new hosts for potential Jasons. Some Spectre farms even specialize in turning spooks into unique Spectres as a template for a new species. Storytellers can introduce one-shot creatures in Spectre farms, allowing the characters to destroy a potentially nasty breed before it increases in number.

For Storytellers, Spectre farms offer a rich source of potential adventures. For example:

• **Information Gathering:** Unlike hive sectors where both humans and spooks are rare and Spectre defenses are strongest, the situation in a Spectre farm is more fluid. Several operations are usually unfolding here at the same time, and its neutral character makes it a crossroads for Spectres from across the city. Both humans and ghosts are more common in the area. Stealth and Horror usage can provide a crucible with considerable information concerning the current state of Spectre-related affairs. If the crucible plays its cards right, it can even capture and examine a specific Spectre.

• **Alliances:** Given the economic and social misery of some neighborhoods, random death, whether by murder or suicide, is an unfortunate fact of life among local residents. The presence of so many Spectres naturally aggravates the situation. As such, there's a constant stream of new spooks in the area, some of whom may be strong enough to make good allies. Crucibles can rescue others, resolving their tethers and helping them to transcend (if only to decrease the characters' Spite rating). Characters may even find human allies to help,


Jessie's Journal

Recent Entries
Friends
History
Info

Previous 25 Entries

Jessie's Journal - Latest Entry

OMG I have no idea what's going on. I was just sitting on my bed and doing some meta stuff and alla sudden the windows started shaking. Normally I wouldn't have worried about it. This kind of thing happen a lot like the other day I was talking with Andy and he was telling me the ghost in his house was getting more aggressive but it didn't do anything it was just getting mean. And the dreams I've been having are weird like there's the woman up in the stars who's telling me things I can't quite understand, but I don't think it's just a dream because on Friday she said "You will watch death" and then that guy got hit by the car right in front of me.
Maybe I'm becoming a witch like in that movie with that girl from Scream.
Anyway, my windows started shaking in my room and for a minute I thought they were gonna break, but then everything got really, really quiet. And it's stayed like that. Like, nothing's working excepting my computer. The lights won't turn on, and the AC isn't working (which is OK because it's REALLY COLD in here) and I can't even hear my dad snoring from down the hall. My alarm clock is off and that means when the power comes back on the alarm will go off. I should unplug it.
Except the power can't be off because my computer's working.
I should call Andy, except it's like midnight and he's probably asleep. His mom totally flipped the other day because we were talking about meta stuff and she heard us and she started going off about demons and stuff. Andy and I just looked at each other like "whatever" and she stomped off and then came back and tried to get us to listen to some bible shit. Andy was telling me that he had a dream that night about a big swarm of bugs carrying off his mom, and he was sitting there watching like "cool." And then one of the bugs said something like, "we can take her, but you have to kill her first."
That's weird. All of the street lights just went out. And the porch light across the street, too. I should go check if the fridge is running BETTER GO CATCH IT HA HA beat ya to it Andy.
Dad must be up. I hear someone in the hall. I better shut this off cause he'll be pissed if I'm online this late. He thinks I'm looking for porn. >_<
Ew, yuck, sounds like there's a big bug outside. I hate bugs. Andy told me about his swarm dream and I'm all like "eww, bugs, don't even tell me." But his mom getting carried off was pretty cool. Stupid Jesus junkie bitch.
Better go see what dad's doing in the hall. He's making a lot of noise.

Current Mood: weird
Current Music: None, nothing works!

unwittingly, push back the Spectral plague. Alliances with civic reformers, policemen and community activists can help to improve conditions in a Spectre farm, restoring hope to and enforcing positive human emotions in the area (see "An Orphan-Grinder Crucible: The Hellboys" on p. 125).

CAPTURE

The phrase "fate worse than death" ordinarily doesn't have much meaning for characters who might have already died and tasted several flavors of Hell in the process. Unfortunately, nothing in a spook's experience prepares him for capture by Spectres. Ghosts with Vitality 3 or less suffer the quickest fate — Spreaders slice them up and use their gauze to pad the hive's walls. Spectres commonly incarcerate spooks with Vitality ratings of 4 or 5, detaining them in inaccessible areas of the hive that are guarded by Fetches. Once the Spectres cobble together a collection of ghosts equaling 50 Vitality points or more, they sacrifice these souls to Grandmother. Spooks with a Vitality of 6 or higher (including players' characters) are in real trouble. Recognizing that such spirits are rare and may possess valuable skills, Horrors or information, the Spectres try turning these spooks into creatures like themselves.

Spooks receiving such an "honor" are in for a protracted regimen of torture and brainwashing designed to lower a spook's Vitality and raise his Spite levels. Most often, Friendly Angels pursue this task, using their illusion abilities to harrow a target. Spectres use suitably modified versions of classic brainwashing techniques including sensory deprivation followed by sensory overload. Friendly Angels alternate forms to represent both close confidants and the subject's worst nightmares. Smart Spectres arrange pseudo-escapes, then reveal them to be illusions. They may reveal tethers and either reinforce or shift the tethers to serve the hive's cause. The subject must battle other Spectres without rest, utilizing his Horrors, burning Willpower and tapping into his most primal instincts and Spite to survive. Finally, the torture victim eventually breaks mentally, thus exposing himself to the voice of the hive-mind, which promises nothing but rest and love. Eventually, everyone succumbs.

System: Any character captured by Spectres can resist their conversion efforts for a number of hours equal to the total of his Strength, Stamina and Willpower. After that, the player must roll his character's current Willpower (difficulty 8) once every two game hours. Failure means the loss of a Willpower point or a Vitality point and the gain of one Spite point. A botched roll means the character loses both Willpower and Vitality,



as well as gaining one Spite rating for every one rolled that isn't canceled out by a success. Should Willpower hit zero before Spite hits 10, the Spectres allow the spook an hour of rest before continuing. When Spite hits 10, the character becomes a Spectre, his breed determined by the Storyteller.

Note: Storytellers may find that Spectres capturing a character is a difficult situation to handle among players. While the player's character isn't destroyed, rescuing him or her from a hive (while not impossible) is incredibly difficult. Storytellers have two choices in this matter. While it's possible to decree that any character captured by the Spectres is lost, that eliminates any chance of a unique roleplaying opportunity. Storytellers may likewise choose to run a character's torture as a separate one-on-one session that explores the character's nastier side in between episodes of attempted rescues. The crucible may also fail to rescue the character in time, in which case, it'll have to resort to bringing him back as an Orphan-Grinder. This method may, in fact, be an excellent way to introduce the new Shade to the crucible.

New Thorns and Horrors

The following Thorns and horrors are among the many displayed by Spectres and are, again, but guidelines for the ones that Storytellers can invent themselves.

Black Hands (Horror): An unusual ability frequently displayed by Lawgivers, this Horror allows the Spectre to catch and hold victims. By tapping one Spite, the Spectre creates two dozen shadow arms that appear from adjoining floors and walls to grab and immobilize a target. Each Spite tapped enables the Spectre to create more arms and to seize one additional target. Regardless, the effect lasts for a scene. The hands inflict no damage, but a character's player must make an opposed Strength roll against the Spectre to break free.

Blink (Horror): By tapping two Spite, a Spectre can vanish and reappear anywhere within 50 yards of its original location, so long as it's within line of sight. A Spectre may not Blink through walls or any other visually obstructing barriers. Once active, the power lasts for the duration of a scene.

Burrow (Horror): This name is a relative misnomer since the Spectre isn't actually burrowing into the earth. Instead, the Spectre can travel through thick materials normally too well-buffered for spooks to pass through, such as the very earth itself. By tapping one Spite, a Spectre can "burrow" through material at half its normal movement. For an additional Spite point, the Spectre may move at normal speed. This Horror lasts for one scene, after which the Spectre must surface.

Chameleon (Thorn): The Spectre has natural camouflage and can blend into the background with frightening ease. If nobody is aware a Chameleon-using Spectre is in vicinity and it isn't moving, players must roll Perception + Awareness (difficulty 10) for their characters to spot it. If the creature moves or the characters are actively searching for it, then the difficulty drops by two. The minute the creature is within hand-to-hand range, its Chameleon advantage vanishes… so to speak.

Creeping Divider (Horror): By tapping three Spite, a Spectre causes its entire form to literally collapse into a swarm of ghostly, insect-like creatures for one scene. Only Horrors or weapons affecting entire areas can hurt the swarm, which possesses (as a whole) the same number of Spite (and, thus, health levels) and Traits as the Spectre.

Flight (Thorn): Unlike Flit, which allows a Spectre to fly despite shape or form (often in blatant contravention of physics), Flight enables a Spectre to become airborne through wings or glider membranes. In this case, movement falls into four categories, which are hovering, gliding, flying and diving. There are no rules for hovering since the Spectre is exerting just enough force to stay in place and remain aloft. If gliding, the Spectre moves at (Dexterity + 12) yards per turn. If flying, movement is ([Dexterity x 3] + 20) yards per turn. If dive-bombing (thus using gravity and wings to provide acceleration), movement is ([Dexterity x 5] + 40) yards per turn, but the Spectre loses two dots in Dexterity (which does not affect the movement calculations) in relation to anything other than aiming at and buzzing a target. If calculating damage for blows delivered while moving, the creature delivers one die of bashing damage for every three yards of movement the Spectre is currently pursuing.

Hemorrhagic Ichor (Thorn): The Spectre oozes a substance from its body that weakens and discorporates a ghost's gauze. The Spectre delivers the ichor through physical damage, regardless of whether by claw or tentacle or weapon. Any spook struck by Hemorrhagic Ichor sustains one additional level of lethal damage.

Impaling Tentacle (Thorn): A Spectre with this Thorn has a five-foot-long tentacle with a sharp, bony point. The Impaling Tentacle is similar to the Tentacles Thorn offered in **Orpheus**, except a strike from this appendage may also cause three levels of lethal damage. A Spectre with Hemorrhagic Ichor may also use the tentacle to inject the poison directly into a spook.

Lullaby (Horror): Lullaby allows a Spectre to croon a soft chant that renders a spook or another Spectre more docile and subservient for a scene. Any spook with Vitality of 3 or less will not move unless prompted to do



so by someone else, while for spooks with higher Vitality levels, roll against their starting Willpower (difficulty 6) for them to do so. Additionally, because the Spectre can increase this Horror's effect by tapping more Spite (up to five), the spook's player must roll a number of successes equal to the Spite tapped. Failure means that all rolls made for the victim during that scene suffer a difficulty penalty equal to the number of Spite tapped that weren't canceled out by successes.

Example: Brenda's character, Alex, faces a Spectre using Lullaby against her. Because the Spectre taps three Spite to fuel the effect, Brenda must roll three successes on Alex's Willpower Trait against difficulty 6. Alex's starting Willpower is five, but Brenda rolls a 3, 4, 4, 5 and 6, only one success. One success negates one Spite tapped, meaning Lullaby is equal to two tapped Spite instead of three. Thus, all of Alex's actions for the scene now suffer a penalty of two to their difficulty instead of three.

A botched roll means the character falls unconscious, though her player may make a Willpower roll (difficulty 5) for the spook to awaken if she suffers any damage.

Psychic Hum (Horror): This Thorn produces a psychic resonance that emanates from the body of the Spectre. Similar to how a subsonic hum can enrage living creatures, the Psychic Hum can disrupt a spook's thoughts and emotions. All ghosts with a starting Vitality of 3 or less feel enraged, and many will, at the Storyteller's discretion, attack the nearest spook. Players of ghosts with Vitality of 4 or higher may roll their characters' Intelligence + Perception, difficulty 6. Failure means they too attack the nearest spook so long as the hum continues. Psychic Hum affects any number of people around the Spectre, so long as they are within (starting Willpower) yards. Psychic Hum costs one Spite to activate and lasts for one scene. Once active, the hum only stops when the Spectre wills it or falls unconscious.

Quicksand (Horror): Like Burrow, this power affects not physical terrain itself, but the resonance buffer giving real-world objects mass and presence to incorporeal entities. By tapping one Spite, the Spectre can disrupt the buffer beneath a spook's feet, causing him to pass through an object involuntarily, with no control over descent. The player of a targeted spook may make a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 6) for his character to notice the disruption and attempt to leap out of the way (using Athletic + Dodge, difficulty 7). For each turn he's caught in the effect, the character sinks by two feet, though the Spectre need not concentrate on the "quicksand" for it to continue working. Pulling free requires a Strength + Athletics roll (difficulty 6), though the difficulty increases by one for every turn beyond the first that the character remains trapped. All combat during this turn accrues a difficulty penalty of two, while movement is impossible until the character is freed. The Spectre can leave the character trapped in an object this way, can force him to drop through several floors or can submerge him until someone destroys the Spectre or digs the character out. The power's effect lasts for one scene.

Quills (Thorns): This Thorn causes one-foot-long spikes to sprout from the Spectre's body. The Spectre can either keep the quills flat against its body, in which case they serve as armor rating 3. Otherwise, the bristling quills inflict two dice of lethal damage, whether an opponent strikes the Spectre or vice versa. Some Spectres use a Horror-variant of this Thorn. By tapping two Spite points, the Spectre can hurl one quill from its body per turn for the duration of the scene to a range of 20 feet, inflicting two dice of lethal damage on a successful attack.

Shadow Rampart (Horror): By tapping two Spite, the Spectre summons up a Shadow rampart that springs up between it and its enemy. The rampart is approximately three feet thick, up to six feet in height and five feet in length. Spooks can't pass through it, but going over or around it isn't an issue. The Shadow Rampart has the equivalent of 10 health levels to resist damage. More damage than that shatters it.

Shriek (Horror): While not as versatile as a Banshee's Wail, a Spectre Shriek does mirror the more devastating effects of that particular Horror. For each Spite tapped, the Spectre's Shriek inflicts one die of lethal damage to anyone within a 10-yard radius. More Spite increases the damage, but not the range. Obviously, the effect is nondiscriminatory, except it doesn't hurt the Spectre using Shriek.

Track (Thorn): To use this Thorn, a Spectre must physically touch its target, though it can do so in the course of combat (when delivering damage). The Spectre injects or leaves a negligible trace of its gauze in the foe, not enough to have any adverse effect or even for the spook to notice. A target so marked also sloughs off the tainted gauze in about 12 hours. During this time, however, the Spectre in question, or any member of its hive, can track the gauze wherever it goes.

Vertigo (Horror): By tapping two Spite, for the duration of the scene the Spectre can cause targets within a 25-foot radius to suffer extreme dizziness and vertigo. This power affects both the living and the dead, essentially halving their movement, inhibiting their Dexterity by one dot and increasing the difficulty of all actions by two.

NEW HORROR

This Horror is not available to all Orphan-Grinders, only to those who enter into an agreement with Malfean-

aligned emissaries such as Mr. Jigsaw. The reason is that this Horror reopens an ability closer to the Spectral nature of an Orphan-Grinder rather than the redeemed portion of the soul that clawed its way back from its condition.

SONG OF THE HIVE

Park Slope was probably a good neighborhood 20 years ago. In the intervening decades, rough economic times, demographic shifts and decreasing property values took their toll. It wasn't a slum, not yet, but window-bars, multiple locks on doors and nocturnal drug dealers conducting brisk business in its back alleys proclaimed it was well on its way.

Perfect farm country, *Clem Wallace thought. He'd spent the last three days investigating missing children reports. While he found a couple of Friendly Angels in the early stages of infesting neighborhoods, they were all freelancers.*

"Come on... be here you little fuckers," Clem whispered, watching the street from his rooftop vantage. Finally, he saw his quarry. A small, childlike figure crept out from a dark alleyway. He couldn't see the face clearly from this distance, but its naked body and bloated belly told him what he wanted to know. It was a Lost Boy.

The Mayfair Green hive was ready to make a move. It was the biggest hive in the area, and if it claimed any more territory, there was no way the Montgomery Housing Project's hive could hold out — to say nothing of the safe house hiding in its shadow. Clem opened his mind to the Song of the Hive and felt an oily filter slip over his eyes, turning the world amber save for the pattern of glowing blue dots limning the tiny Spectre and identifying his affiliation.

Clem smiled, "Hello, Mayfair Green! Sorry Ty, this neighborhood is off limits."

Some Orphan-Grinders refer to the Spectral hive-mind as "the Song" or "the Voices," which is as close as explanation as they can impart as to what it's like to share your thoughts with Spectres. One valuable piece of information that some Orphan-Grinders understand is that Spectres experience the Song differently. Subtle variations in the thought processes of different sections of the hive-mind give rise to "accents," which Spectres use to identify themselves as members of a particular hive.

Like Oblivion's Husk, Song of the Hive allows Orphan-Grinders to briefly tap the Spectre hive-mind, although its effects are different beyond that. Song of the Hive allows a spook to identify a Spectre's hive affiliation on sight. High-Vitality expenditures allow a spook to tap even further into that particular hive's mind, pinpointing other Spectres and earning insight into the hive's current plans.

Unfortunately, Song of the Hive is incredibly dangerous to use. It requires a spook to attune his or her mind to the Spectres, literally thinking the way Spectres would. As a result, using the power at high levels can potentially incur Spite penalties.

System: When an Orphan-Grinder uses Song of the Hive, it alters his perceptions and his mental processes, allowing him to tap into the hive-mind. While in effect, an amber film covers the Orphan-Grinder's eyes, and he hears a buzzing in his head that sounds like thousands of voices whispering in the next room. Any Spectres the character sees glows with a distinct identifier revealing their hive affiliation. The marker looks like a geometric pattern of lights embedded in the flesh of the Spectre being seen. Every member of a particular hive has the same pattern, while unaffiliated Spectres possess a white glow.

Orphan-Grinders expending two or less Vitality on Song of the Hive can only move at a walking speed and cannot use any Horrors or engage in any complicated actions or conversation. Higher-Vitality expenditures expose the spirit to more of the twisted thoughts traveling through the hive-mind. As a result, the character cannot move or speak until he exits the Song. This Horror only works when a minimum of one Spectre is in visual range, though it continues to operate should the Spectre move beyond the character's line of sight.

Vitality and Spite requirements and effects/limitations for Song of the Hive are as follows (though, please note that Spite listed is tapped and not spent, as per normal rules; additionally, each effect lasts a scene, during which time, the character can access the various abilities associated with the Vitality expended/Spite tapped):

Zero Vitality: The character can identify the hive markings of any Spectre within unhindered sight. After five minutes, a Spectre with high Perception can "feel" the intruding character if the Storyteller successfully rolls its Perception + Awareness (difficulty 7). It can then pinpoint the character to within 100 yards and will investigate.

One Vitality: The character can identify the hive markings of any Spectre within unhindered sight, as well as detect the presence of other Spectres *who are members of the same hive* within 100 yards of the target. The targeted Spectre detects this mental intrusion as noted above, save the difficulty is now 8.

Two Vitality: As above, except the character detects affiliated hive Spectres out to a quarter-mile range. The character also senses the overall directives of all hive members in the vicinity, though these are usually simple objectives such as "expand territory," "hunt enemies" or "defend buildings." Unlike the Horror Oblivion's Husk, Song of the Hive relates the current objective of the hive rather than the individual Spectre — except when the target is unaffiliated.

Three Vitality + One Spite: The ability to detect affiliated Spectres now has a range of one mile, and the intrusion remains undetectable by the targeted Spectre. With a successful Manipulation + Leadership roll (difficulty 9), the Orphan-Grinder can change one word of a hive directive in the target Spectre. Instead of "hunt



X," the character may change the order to "find X" or "follow X." This only works once per scene on a particular Spectre, though the character can target multiple Spectres individually within that scene (so long as they're within unhindered sight).

Four Vitality + Two Spite: As above, except the detection radius extends to five miles and the character has a general sense of the entire hive's current situation (its status in a turf war, the general numbers of its Spectres, its assets, its current enemies, etc.). He can also glean specific information on the current plans of any affiliated Spectres within unhindered sight (if the hive assigns them to a specific mission) if his player successfully rolls Perception + Awareness (difficulty 7). Storytellers may rule that each success relates one particular piece of information. Finally, the character can alter up to three words in one or more objectives (thus changing the verbs in three different commands or rewording one objective more extensively). Again, the power affects one Spectre at a time, though the Orphan-Grinder can target multiple Spectres over the scene's duration.

Five Vitality, + Three Spite: This is the most dangerous use of Song of the Hive, but the character cannot employ both its effects simultaneously. Once the player expends the Vitality and taps the Spite, he must choose between one of the two effects. The first application of this Horror allows an Orphan-Grinder to briefly connect with the mind with the Reaper or Lawgiver in charge of the hive, regardless of the intervening distance. In that moment, the character earns a complete sense of the hive's current activities, its plans for the next month and the location of every member of the hive, regardless of location. This does not allow the Orphan-Grinder to touch upon the very identity or directives of Grandmother, merely the immediate Spectre goals. To do otherwise is to plunge the character back into the bosom of Grandmother herself and turn the character into a Spectre forever. Regardless, the Reaper or Lawgiver may detect the intruding presence if the Storyteller successfully rolls its Perception + Awareness against the character's Manipulation + Subterfuge (difficulty 6). One success more than the character indicates the Spectre can expend a Willpower point to shut the intruder from its thoughts. Two successes more mean the Spectre knows the identity of the intruding presence, while three successes more allows the Spectre to pinpoint the intruder to within 100 yards of his present location. How the hive's leader chooses to handle the situation remains the Storyteller's prerogative.

The second application of this Horror allows the character to alter one word (or aspect) of an entire hive's directive for one full minute, committing the hive to that one action for 60 seconds. So, if the hive directive is "Fight the enemy hive," the character can alter that to "Surrender to the enemy hive," "Don't fight the enemy hive," "Fight the allied hive" and "Fight your hive." In all examples, the change is to one word, one verb (fight) or one subject (enemy hive). The Storyteller remains the final arbiter of this power's effect, but when the minute ends, the Spectres automatically return to their original course. More so, the Spectre in charge of the hive can use the methods mentioned above to potentially track down the culprit for the brief moment of that connection.

Song of the Hive also carries a unique and valuable ability... the power to "jam" and isolate one Spectre from the hive-mind, preventing it from contacting its kin for help. Once within 10 feet of the Spectre and in direct line-of-sight, the Orphan-Grinder must spend three Vitality and his player succeed in a contested Willpower roll against the Spectre. If successful, the Orphan-Grinder uses mental white noise to block the Spectre's access to the hive-mind, rendering it unable to speak to its brethren and preventing other Spectres from tracking down their distressed brethren. This effect lasts for one scene and requires the Orphan-Grinder to invest his complete concentration (meaning he can take no subsequent actions without his concentration slipping and the block failing). After that one scene, the Orphan-Grinder can maintain the jamming trick against the Spectre by spending a Willpower point per day, with minimal concentration required (the Orphan-Grinder suffers -1 die to all dice pools for that time).

Benefit: Some Orphan-Grinders are unsure as to whether this ability is an actual Benefit or some separate application of Song of the Hive. Regardless, Orphan-Grinders may spend 20 Vitality points and use Song of the Hive to create a primitive hive-mind between the crucible's members that lasts for one week. This connection allows characters to emotionally support one another and to help each other bear the weight of negative passions. Essentially, this means the crucible's members may distribute incoming Spite points to one another. The crucible shares the burden, allowing a member with a low Spite rating to take a Spite point hit for a member with a high Spite rating. This only works on incoming Spite points and cannot reduce existing Spite. The method of distribution is entirely voluntary, meaning the Orphan-Grinder cannot force it upon low-ebb spirits.

NEW SPECTRES

When the hives bloom and Grandmother's invasion begins, the handful of Spectres offered here are but a meager selection of the types that emerge. **Orpheus** tries to keep Spectres an evolving surprise if only to prevent characters from becoming too comfortable and familiar with (and thus unafraid of) Grandmother's legions. Let uncertainty be your tool in manipulating player fear.

CARPET CRAWLERS

As hives grow, their rate of expansion increases rapidly. The major reason for this is Carpet Crawlers.

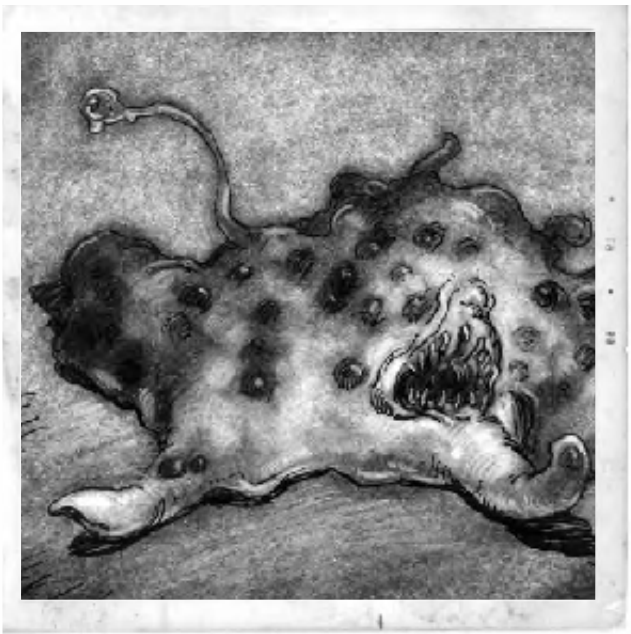
Carpet Crawlers look like shapeless mounds that slowly slither along, extending pseudopods from themselves before flowing along the tentacles' length. Closer examination reveals that Crawlers are a gelatinous mass through which float dozens of eyes. Occasionally, an eye (or two) drifts to the surface and extends outward on a dripping tentacle for a few moments, before sinking back into the mass. Hideous tooth-filled mouths also open at random on the Crawler's diseased-looking gauze, each emitting a random stream of nonsense syllables before it closes again.

Despite their vile appearance, Carpet Crawlers are not actually dangerous. They will defend themselves with their pseudopods and mouths, but their primary function fits their name. By crawling through the streets and buildings surrounding the hive, they extend the hive's territory. Everywhere a Carpet Crawler moves, it leaves behind a slimy trail that quickly hardens into a thin layer of moist gauze. Crawlers can also cling to any surface. If they encounter a wall, they simply continue crawling vertically or even upside down. Eventually, a group of them can completely cover whatever structure they crawl over, encasing it in a thin layer of gauze. For this reason, Spreaders (see **Shades of Gray**) often accompany Carpet Crawlers, molding or adding to the gauze as per the hive's needs. The rate by which Carpet Crawlers cover a location remains the Storyteller's prerogative.

The Spectral slime that Carpet Crawlers leave behind fills several functions:

• A hive covered by Crawler slime grows at twice the speed of an ordinary hive.

• Upon contact with a spook, the Crawler alerts the hive-mind instantly as to the presence and location of the intruder — if the Crawler can detect the intruder's presence.



• When completely covered in Crawler slime, a building generates a low-ebb sense of despair or forlornness. The difficulties of all Willpower-related rolls made on the characters' behalf are increased by one.

• Any human "inadvertently" covered by Crawler slime (which remains intangible by the living) slowly loses hope over the next few years, months or, sometimes, even weeks. The person may attempt suicide, though helpful spooks can assist him by cleaning the Spectral gunk from the victim, thus restoring his Willpower and good humor.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 0, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0, Perception 1, Intelligence 1, Wits 1

Abilities: Brawl 2

Nature: Monster

Willpower: 2

Spite: 2

Offensive Abilities: Maw, Tentacle

LAWGIVERS

Becoming an Orphan-Grinder is a rare thing. Becoming a ghost again, even rarer. Spurring on all Orphan-Grinders, however, is the fear of enduring the fate of those who fail — being shackled to Grandmother forever as a Lawgiver. Lawgivers are avatars of Grandmother's will and completely subservient to her wishes, acting as her hands in the world. Lawgivers have one purpose alone — to rectify situations, which implies a whole lot of brutality. Most act against rogue Spectres or failing hives, destroying small hives or temporarily assuming command of larger ones when necessary (replacing its Reaper if required). Lawgivers also hunt Orphan-Grinders when they can, at first attempting to lure them back into the fold, then destroying them if that fails. A spook who earns the attention of a Lawgiver is rare indeed — as well as in incredible danger.

Lawgivers resemble humans with skintight leather clothing around which are wrapped long lengths of chains that the Spectres can mentally manipulate as appendages or weapons. Their faces are chalk-white but, otherwise, appear the same as they did when they were spirits. Their bodies usually sport hideous wounds resembling the remnants of some torture (chests split open, hooks sticking though arms, spikes in ears).

One small length of floating chain always trails behind them and disappears into the Stormwall. This umbilical cord is the Lawgiver's direct connection to Grandmother, and severing it is the only way to permanently destroy the creature. Spotting the trailing chain requires a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 7), and it requires a Dexterity + [Brawl, Firearms or Melee] roll (difficulty 9) to strike the chain. The chain itself has the equivalent of 15 health levels that are affected only



by lethal damage; the chain's damage must be tallied separately from any punishment inflicted against the Lawgiver's body. Damage sufficient to destroy a Lawgiver's body (without destroying the chain) causes both to dissolve back through the Stormwall and reform in 24 hours at any given location.

Finally, because Lawgivers are failed Orphan-Grinders, many possess Orphan-Grinder Horrors as well, except for Oblivion's Husk, which, as Spectres, they don't require.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 0, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 5

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Awareness 4, Brawl 3, Empathy 4, Intimidation 4, Investigation 5, Leadership 5, Melee 5, Subterfuge 3

Nature: Monster

Willpower: 10

Spite: 10

Offensive Abilities: Black Hands, Burrow, Claws, Hellion, Hemorrhagic Ichor, Hive-Mind, Impaling Tentacle (in the form of a chain, though its length can extend up to 15 feet), Lullaby, Quicksand, Vector

OUTFLYERS

What demands the creation of Outflyers remains a mystery. It's possible Outflyers appeared the first time a hive's territory overlapped with that of another hive, necessitating the creation of a Spectre to secure a hive's perimeter. Perhaps Outflyers exist to defend the hive against incursions and to act as an early warning system for the hive's Reaper. A final option is that Outflyers are the active eyes and ears of the hive-mind, documenting hive battles to better inform Grandmother. Regardless, the fact is Outflyers currently serve all these purposes.

Outflyers are floating, spiked balls covered with quills — they vaguely resemble sea urchins. The creatures sport one enormous red eye set over an enormous maw that they use in vicious biting attacks, but their primary weapons are their aforementioned quills. In combat, an Outflyer attempts to slam into opponents, impaling them on its spikes. It can fire its quills as well, though it avoids doing so except in dire circumstances — since it takes 24 hours to grow new ones. An Outflyer's quills can also inject Hemorrhagic Ichor, at its discretion.

Outflyers, while belligerent, are not normally aggressive. They usually float a patrol route on the edge of their hive's territory and routinely ignore spooks with fewer than four starting Vitality. They also frequently fight other Outflyers from rival hives. So long as they remain on the respective sides of their unspoken territory markers, hostility between Outflyers remains limited to aggressive movements and snarls. Outflyers do violate each other's territory with some regularity, however, resulting in some spectacular battles. In fact, Outflyers are the primary combatants in the jockeying for territory that occurs among hives.

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 1

Abilities: Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Intimidation 4, Melee 3

Nature: Monster

Willpower: 4

Spite: 4

Offensive Abilities: Flight, Hemorrhagic Ichor, Hive-Mind, Maw, Quills, Track



Syrenes

Syrenes terrify spooks because of what they represent. The first Syrenes appeared less than a month after the first Orphan-Grinders, demonstrating that, no matter how deadly Spectres become, they can become deadlier over time through adaptation. Also known as "Butterflies," they're one of several Spectre breeds tasked with hunting down and capturing high-ebb ghosts such as the characters.

Syrenes vaguely resemble humans from a distance, though this similarity fades upon closer examination. Syrenes stand seven feet tall and are painfully thin. Their arms and legs bend at two different joints instead of one and their oval-shaped heads sit squarely on their thin frames. A Syrene's face is almost featureless, save for a round mouth (that uses Shriek and Lullaby) and two enormous blue eyes. The creature's most shocking feature, however, is its enormous multicolored wings. A Syrene's wings resemble those of an insect, but they are not necessary for flight. Rather, the wings are its primary attack method. The Syrene claps them together to Envelop a target before returning with its captive to the hive.

Syrenes are usually tasked with finding specific targets, which they track relentlessly. More rarely, a Reaper or Lawgiver may use them to capture a Spectre from a rival hive. Syrenes thus possess a special connection to both Reapers and Lawgivers through the hive-mind, and the two breeds will answer a Syrene's calls for help with overwhelming force.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Charisma 4, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Empathy 4, Intimidation 3, Intuition 4, Stealth 2



Nature: Fanatic

Willpower: 8

Spite: 8

Offensive Abilities: Blink, Envelop, Flicker, Flight, Hive-Mind, Lullaby, Shriek, Track

An Orphan-Grinder Crucible: The Hellboys

One of the best ways to introduce the concept and abilities of Orphan-Grinders to players is to show the former Spectres in action. That's where the Hellboys come in. The Hellboys are a crucible of five Orphan-Grinders currently waging a semi-successful holding action against the Spectres. Led by Clement Wallace, the only spook ever to become a Reaper (and the only one to claw his way back out again), the Hellboys have taken as their territory 12 square blocks of the city. They are currently fighting a daily battle to protect the Park Slope district from the depredations of Mayfair Green and to redeem as many Montgomery hive Spectres as they can.

Storyteller Note: Although the Hellboys number five, only three are detailed here. The remaining two are for the Storyteller to develop. Additionally, Storytellers should feel free to adjust the names of neighborhoods and districts to better fit their chronicle.

The Park Slope District

Over 60 years ago, Park Slope was one of the nicest sections of the city to live if you were a member of the emerging black middle class. Although not as prosperous as other sections of town, an active business association, an effective neighborhood watch program and other community initiatives were on the verge of igniting a regional renaissance. Then, a racist gerrymandering scheme split the Park Slope voting bloc, and the area lost its representation on the city council. Punishing taxes and well-meant "social improvement" projects killed off businesses in the area, while the creation of the first two housing projects in the city — Dunreade and Montgomery — on opposite ends of the district finished the job. By the mid-50s, the district was a sinkhole of crime and desperation.

Then, in 1971, Clem Wallace returned to his childhood neighborhood, determined to save it. The destruction of the Dunreade Housing Project was Wallace Construction's first job. Clem followed this with the construction of the Dunreade Apartments, a low-income apartment complex administered for profit by one



of Wallace's companies. It was a spectacular success and helped to reverse the area's depreciation. Unfortunately, Wallace was less successful in implementing his plans for Park Slope. Despite the growth of businesses around Dunreade, corruption and kickbacks on the city council prevented Wallace from enacting certain zoning changes or obtaining the clearances he needed to pull the Montgomery Project from the gutters. Eventually, Wallace moved on to other crusades, but he returned to Park Slope again and again over the last 30 years to renovate the Montgomery Project and to help preserve Dunreade.

Currently, the competing influences of the Dunreade Apartments (and the Tubman Theater) on one side and the Montgomery Project to the east and Mayfair Green to the west make the Dunreade section of Park Slope an island of semi-prosperity and hope in a sea of urban despair. Unfortunately, Dunreade is only prosperous in comparison to its surroundings. Violent crimes and domestic violence rates are still disturbingly high, and the battle against drug dealers and prostitutes is almost constant.

Even before the Spectres turned the Montgomery Project into a hive, the block around the building was among the most dangerous, violent and drug-infested in the city. Heading west toward Dunreade, however, the area improves. About five blocks west of Montgomery, however, a hiccup in the city's zoning laws turns one entire block into a long chain of low-rent strip clubs, sex shops and cheap bars—locally, it's called Hooker Alley. This street marks the DMZ in the constant struggle of Dunreade to stave off Montgomery's influence. The next several blocks mark Dunreade, centered on the Dunreade Apartments. Continuing west, the Tubman Theater marks the end of the Park Slope district and the beginning of Mayfair Green.

THE DUNREADE SPECTRE FARM

Such an island seems easy pickings once the Spectre invasion starts, and, but for the vagaries of Spectre turf wars, the battle should have already been lost. It certainly seemed headed that way when a hive erupted in the Montgomery housing project. As with every hive, the Montgomery Spectres quickly cleared the place of spooks and tried to spread their pernicious influence, in this case toward Dunreade. Then, something happened. Mayfair Green, one of the city's large hives, declared war on Montgomery, quickly turning Dunreade into a no man's land between them. In short, Dunreade became a Spectre farm.

Spectre presence in Dunreade is almost constant, even though these Spectres almost entirely ignore the area's spooks. Rather, they maintain a constant watch for rivals, and it's a rare day that unfolds where a major confrontation between Mayfair and Montgomery Spectres doesn't unfold. While this certainly doesn't help the living residents of the area, the Spectres concentrating on each other and the Hellboy's influence keep Dunreade from slipping over the edge.

THE TUBMAN THEATER

Like Harlem's Apollo Theater, the Tubman Theater is among the centerpieces of African-American culture in the United States. Built in 1926, the Tubman is a spectacular example of Art Deco design and, over the years, has been favorably compared with architectural contemporaries such as the Empire State Building lobby and Radio City Music Hall. These days, however, the Tubman Theater is something more. It's a point of pride among the city's black residents, a bulwark against encroaching urban decay and (perhaps more importantly) the headquarters for the Hellboys' crusade.

In its history, the Tubman has seen hundreds of African-American luminaries perform in its hall. The most famous include Louis Armstrong, Eartha Kitt, Lena Horne, Sammy Davis Jr., Whitney Houston and the Jackson 5. While the theater suffered through tough economic times, its status as a cultural landmark and national treasure helps it to pull through. Most recently, it sold the rights to broadcast its weekly amateur night to HBO for a cool nine million dollars, enough to keep it operating for the next year.

Whether because of the theater's historical significance or because it serves as inspiration for so many, the building is a safe haven in the hereafter, making it the perfect headquarters for the Hellboys. Spectres cannot pass through its walls, and should Dunreade succumb to either the Montgomery or the Mayfair Green hive, the Tubman would be the last place to go.

Unfortunately, not everything is rosy at the Tubman. The Hellboys' presence, along with that of their Spectral minions, affects the theater. First, the presence of Spectres inside the theater affects patrons, many of whom report feeling unsafe inside. The Hellboys' constant battle to keep Spectres out of the theater results in "strange and unexplainable supernatural phenomena," making people in the neighborhood increasingly leery about watching shows at the Tubman. Recently, an amateur night competition loser took his own life in the theater's basement.

THE HELLBOYS

When Clem Wallace saved himself from being Mayfair Green's Reaper, Dunreade was his primary tether. Initially after becoming an Orphan-Grinder, the sight of Dunreade infested by Spectres sent Wallace on an indiscriminate crusade to destroy every Spectre he could. Meeting Beth Savitch, however, changed his perspective. He realized it might be possible to save Spectres the way both he and Beth had been saved. Over



the next several weeks, they watched the Montgomery hive in the hopes of determining how to rescue others like themselves. During that time, they rehabilitated three more Spectres into Orphan-Grinders, including Dr. Ronald Connors (see p. 130).

Eventually, the so-called Hellboys realized that Wallace's twin goals — saving Dunreade and rescuing Spectres — might be one and the same. Given the Montgomery hive was small and weak (especially in comparison to Mayfair Green), the Hellboys adopted a "hands off" policy toward Montgomery Spectres, covertly helping them in their war against Mayfair Green. This frequently puts them in the morally ugly position of defending local Spectres against other crucibles trying to eradicate the seemingly vulnerable Montgomery hive. While the Hellboys hate defending the weak hive, and they know they're condemning Dunreade's residents to far more misery than normal, they realize that life on a Spectre farm is still better and preferable to Mayfair Green overrunning the area.

Currently, all the Hellboys (save for Clem Wallace) have Spectral minions from Montgomery, whom they're in the process of trying to save. They also have a loose alliance with Tom Hayes and with Mr. Jigsaw. While Hayes doesn't necessarily agree with their methods, he does approve of their goals. Both sides do call on one other for help occasionally, and Clem is hopeful that Tom will join the Hellboys at some future point. They need all the help they can get. Despite the Hellboys' best efforts, Mayfair Green is slowly destroying Montgomery, and it's only a matter of time before the hive overruns Dunreade.

USING THE HELLBOYS

The Hellboys can be an extraordinary addition to any chronicle, be it as friends, neutrals or even enemies. It's important Storytellers realize that the Hellboys are isolated from the rest of the war both by their peculiar circumstances and by choice. Unlike other spooks, the Hellboys aren't particularly interested in fighting the general war against the Spectres. Rather, their twin objectives are to preserve Dunreade while rescuing the Montgomery Spectres.

As a result, they're incredibly proprietary when it comes to their 12 blocks and react harshly to anyone who interferes with their agenda. While they have no objection to collaborations and alliances, any such interactions are on the Hellboys' terms. That means, when in Dunreade, you march to the Hellboys' tune and follow their orders. Otherwise, get out or face the consequences. While in Dunreade, you do not attack Spectres without permission, and you do not run independent operations with the human population. The Hellboys, as a crucible of Orphan-Grinders, believe they have better insight into solving the Spectre problem. They aren't interested in becoming in-



Community Mourns Real-Estate Developer and Activist.

By Christopher McPhee, staff reporter

Hundreds of mourners gathered today for the funeral of Clement C. Wallace, noted writer, Vietnam veteran and real-estate magnate. Wallace, author of Tombs for the Living: How Public Housing is Destroying Black America, was brutally murdered by unknown assailants in his home last Friday. Services were held at Our Lady of Perpetual Hope in Mission Hills, where police estimate that 6,000 people lined the processional route and stood outside the church during the service.

Wallace grew up in the Dunreade Housing Project before joining the US Marine Corps at 17 in 1967. He served three tours of duty in Vietnam as a member of the infamous "Tunnel Rats" who flushed out Viet Cong soldiers from underground passages. He also earned a Silver Star, two Purple Hearts and a citation for gallantry in combat. Returning to the States in 1970, he spent a brief period as an instructor at Parris Island before leaving the Marines to start his own construction business.

In subsequent years, Wallace Construction made its mark and fortune financing projects in some of the city's most run-down neighborhoods. Initially controversial, many of Wallace's projects, including the Lincoln Terrace Galleria, the Huntington Mall and the Dunreade Apartments are now credited for restoring economic life and prosperity to those districts. Wallace was also the spokesman for the Black Banking Network, a group that helped to secure financing for minority-owned small businesses.

Just prior to his murder, Wallace was involved in bidding for a municipal contract to tear down the infamous Mayfair Green Housing Project.

In a press conference after the funeral, Wallace's sister Shondra, responded to this reporter, "Clem never spoke about his experiences in the military, but (referring to his refusal to be buried in Arlington National Cemetery) I believe he merely viewed his time in the Marines as a training ground for the fight against mankind's true enemies: poverty, hopelessness and despair. Let that be his legacy to the human race."

Wallace leaves behind a wife, Anna (52), and two daughters, Elissa (30) and Halima (26).

volved with another crucible's plans or being part of someone else's "bigger picture."

That being said, crucibles can learn much from the Hellboys. The Hellboys understand and can teach other Orphan-Grinders Song of the Hive (thanks to Mr. Jigsaw). They also possess an incredible insight into the mindset, strategies and tactics of Spectres, garnered primarily from close observations of Montgomery and interactions with their pet projects. Running with the Hellboys for a few weeks can teach a crucible all manner of effective new combat strategies to help it in the war against Spectres. The Hellboys can also provide aid should their goals somehow coincide with the crucible's. This mostly happens if the characters collide with Mayfair Green — the Hellboys would be thrilled to offer any assistance necessary to hurt or destroy that hive.

Conversely, it's quite easy for the Hellboys and the characters to come to blows. Dunreade offers an incredibly attractive location for a crucible to set up shop. The Hellboys' efforts and the war between Mayfair Green and Montgomery have actually turned Dunreade into one of the safest and most stable locations in the city in which to hide. Characters, however, may not realize the knife's edge upon which Dunreade's stability rests. Attacking or destroying a Montgomery Spectre, weakening the Montgomery hive or interfering in the lives of the locals may be the catalyst necessary to ensure Mayfair Green's dominance. The Hellboys deal harshly with such matters.

The Hellboys may also be neutral to the characters. In such a case, the crucible may come to some arrangement with the Hellboys, using the area as a safe house or headquarters for operations outside of the Dunreade area. If this potential exists, the Hellboys implement draconian restrictions on "outsiders," such as not manifesting to locals, disallowing the use of Horrors and a proscription against fighting in the area unless in self-defense.

CLEM WALLACE – HELLBOY LEADER

Clement Wallace was born in 1949, in the Dunreade Housing Project. Dunreade, the first "experimental" public housing project for the city, quickly established the pattern for all local public housing that followed. Although politicians built the projects with the loftiest of goals in mind, Dunreade quickly became a haven for pimps, prostitutes and drug dealers. Clement, however, managed to escape and make a better life for himself thanks to his loving parents. He joined the US Marine Corps as a combat engineer in 1967. Serving three tours in Vietnam, he earned a Silver Star, two Purple Hearts and a citation for gallantry in combat. Returning to the States in 1970, he spent a brief period as an instructor at Parris Island before finding his true passion… construction.

Wallace Construction was Clem's way of dealing with the trauma of his youth. Having seen what public housing did to his neighbors and friends, he was determined to demolish the buildings and bring economic life back to those neighborhoods. His company made millions financing projects in run-down districts that were credited for restoring local prosperity. Unfortunately, his last project, the destruction and renovation of the infamous Mayfair Green Project, took his life. It took four Jasons from Mayfair



Green three hours to kill him and the same number of weeks for his spirit to become a Spectre.

Then, something strange occurred. Rather than becoming a Frightener like the Spectres expected, Clem's ferocious will, intelligence and towering rage turned him into a Reaper, potentially the only Reaper who was ever human. A brief power struggle ensued in which Clem destroyed the Reaper that ordered his torture and murder. Clem assumed control of the Mayfair Green hive, but not long after, some shred of humanity within him realized that his new state meant creating the kinds of slums he spent his whole life trying to destroy, slums like Mayfair Green. It was his lifelong passion that brought him back.

Clem now fights with the same intensity when trying to reform the slums as he did when he was alive. He started the Hellboys for the same reasons he launched the Black Banking Network — because Orphan-Grinders alone truly understand what's needed to destroy the Spectres the same way that only black business owners can truly save their communities.

Clem is quite comfortable in his role as the leader of a guerilla band since it fits both his military background and his reformist zeal. He isn't trying to save a Spectre minion (the Hellboys are work enough for him), but he does wield the same scythe and wear the same dark cloak he used as a Reaper — something that may initially frighten anyone trying to approach Clem in a friendly fashion.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 4, Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Academics 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 4, Computer 2, Finance 2, Firearms 3, Law 3, Leadership 5, Melee 3, Politics 4, Science 3, Streetwise 4, Survival 3

Shade: Orphan-Grinder

Lament: Spirit

Nature: Crusader

Willpower: 10

Vitality: 8

Spite: 5

Offensive Abilities: Hellion, Inhabit, Oblivion's Husk, Song of the Hive, Vector, Witch's Nimbus

Equipment: Reaper Scythe (Speed -2, Accuracy +1, Damage 9L, Defense +0)

Beth Savitch - Hellboy

Beth's sister Eileen was always the family favorite: straight-A student, valedictorian, married with a perfect family, athletic, beautiful, etc. Beth, however, was always the wild child: high-school dropout, smoked, drank, ran with a motorcycle gang until she was 22 and became a jewelry designer. Despite distancing herself from her parents, though, Beth remained close to Eileen. When Eileen lost her baby to a car accident and, later, her husband to suicide, Beth was there. When Eileen joined Orpheus, Beth supported her. And when Eileen died on a botched mission to Mexico, Beth wished for nothing more than revenge on both the Chupacabra that killed her and on Orpheus, which had sent her sister to Guadalajara.

The Chupacabra got Beth first. A possessed pack of street mongrels tore her to shreds and transported her ghost to a Spectre hive. Afterward, she spent significant time as a Spectre, committing numerous atrocities and helping in the expansion of many hives across North America. Finally, one day, Beth heard her sister's voice inside the hive-mind. It lasted a brief moment, but it was enough to



reawaken what little humanity remained inside her. She clawed her way free of the hive and is now determined to track down and save her sister, even if it means working her way through every Spectre in the world.

Beth's current project is Maria, a Lost Boy she believes was created by the same Chupacabra that killed her sister. Beth's managed to reawaken the tiniest fragment of humanity in the Lost Boy, enough to transfer her love from the Friendly Angel she stole her from and to uncover her real name. The same Friendly Angel has attacked the Hellboys twice so far.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Crafts 3, Drive 4, Empathy 3, Firearms 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 2, Survival 4

Shade: Orphan-Grinder

Lament: Spirit

Nature: Rebel

Willpower: 7

Vitality: 7

Spite: 4

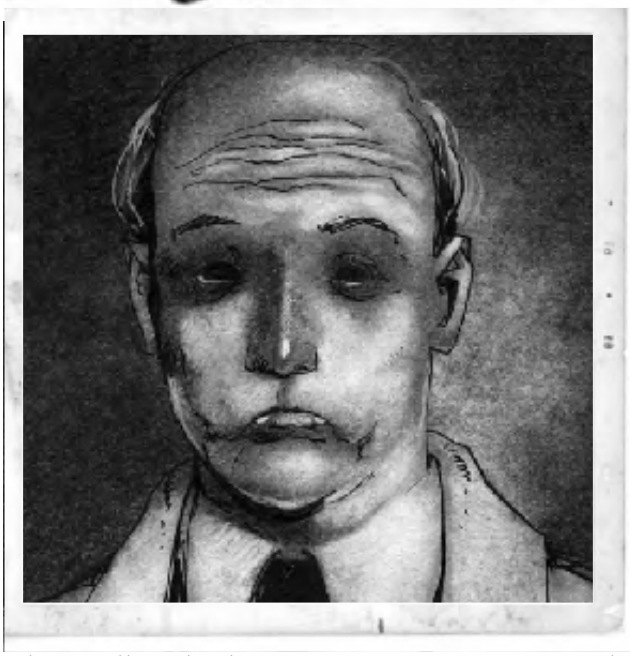
Offensive Abilities: Congeal, Hellion (which manifests as a motorcycle in her case), Helter Skelter, Oblivion's Husk, Song of the Hive

DR. RONALD CONNORS - HELLBOY

Anyone who ever brought a sick animal to Ron Connors' veterinary clinic loved the compassion and devotion he offered to those the creatures in his care. They also never understood how someone who loved animals so passionately could be so clinical and distant with the people around him. Despite Dr. Connor's affection for animals, he never grew close to anyone, not even his colleagues.

Dr. Connors hated humanity. A strict vegan and member of the Animal Liberation Organization, Dr. Connor's clinic doubled as a bomb factory whose explosives demolished three animal testing centers and a fast-food restaurant. These activities eventually cost Dr. Connors his life when a mishap resulted in an explosion that destroyed his clinic. His hatred for humanity worsened after Spectres found his spirit in the ruins of his clinic and turned him into one of them. Dr. Connors eventually became a Jason, enabling him to hunt those people he so despised.

Dr. Connors might have remained a Jason had he not encountered a Chupacabra. Unlike other Spectre breeds, Chupacabras seemed specifically designed to damage and torture animals. While his hatred for humanity hadn't slackened, Dr. Connors fought the hive-mind and tried reclaiming his identity. Mr. Jigsaw noticed the struggling Spectre and recommended to



Clem Wallace that he try to save Dr. Connors. Upon his triumphant return as an Orphan-Grinder, Dr. Connors joined the Hellboys, partially out of gratitude and mostly because unless someone stops the Spectres, they'll continue to create more Chupacabras.

Dr. Connors always urges more aggressive raids on Spectres and frequently goes off alone to rescue animal ghosts and to hunt Chupacabras. He also has a Fetch minion, which he's trying to domesticate. The other Hellboys watch Dr. Connors carefully, however, since he seems the closest to Spectrehood, and Connors as a Lawgiver is a frightening thought.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Animal Ken 5, Brawl 2, Crafts 3, Firearms 3, Intuition 3, Medicine 4, Science 3, Survival 2

Shade: Orphan-Grinder

Lament: Spirit

Nature: Crusader

Willpower: 8

Vitality: 8

Spite: 7

Offensive Abilities: Hellion, Oblivion's Husk, Song of the Hive

Operation: Black Mercury

Jesus. Looks like the cash is all there. All right, you held up to your part of the bargain... guess it's my turn. I'll tell you everything you want to know. You want my mother's maiden name, my PIN, anything.

Just kidding, guys.

I've been underpaid for this shit for too long. They beat that Code of Conduct crap into you for long enough, you start buying into it. Well, I can thank that bit of propaganda for a missing little finger, a chest full of cracked ribs and nightmares to last me two lifetimes. A couple of years ago, I wouldn't have talked… not even with all this cash. Back then, I thought dying was just like a big afternoon nap that you never got up from.

Now, I know different. I know what's over there, and I want to enjoy this side for as long as I can.

You know, I can't figure out who you guys are, though. You're definitely not Sudanese, and the accent's all wrong for Eastern Europe. The only thing I can think of is… nah, fuck it, right? Besides, in the end, it doesn't really matter. I'm here, and you came to hear a story.

So, where should I start? I guess it ain't important. Go ahead. Push record, 'cause here goes….

History

I guess you're familiar with some of Orpheus' background. NextWorld and other similar entrepreneurial endeavors into the afterlife, too? If none of that rings a bell, maybe you'd better spend some more time researching. I'm not going to waste time rehashing stuff you can find with a Google search. You guys have access to the 'Net, right? Anyway, I'm betting you're looking for the behind-the-scenes crap, so I'll start with the NSA.

The National Security Agency

Way I understand it, the NSA actually looked into using spooks back when Orpheus was first getting rolling. They pulled together a group of skimmers and trained them in covert operations — off the official books, of course, but these guys were Orpheus' first graduates after that Flatliner fiasco. Now, it doesn't take James Bond to figure out how handy it is for a group focusing on information security to have a team of intangible and virtually undetectable agents at its beck and call. Unfortunately, during the first Spectre invasion, almost every one of their operatives was killed. It was nasty, from what I heard, and several NSA non-spook operatives went nuts from the shit they saw. Nobody needs to see someone's soul being ripped in half.

After that debacle, the NSA subcontracted its work to Orpheus. Let someone else's operatives get fucked in the head. Being nuts means being a security risk, but you can't be a security risk if you don't know shit. That's where Orpheus came in. Now, normally, that sort of project isn't something an agency is supposed to farm out to third parties. It reeks too much of the early 60s CIA — and we all know how badly that freelancer botched that bit down in Dallas. Let's just say the appropriate oversight committees frown on that sort of thing…

…or would have if the NSA had sought clearance for the action.

Knowing it would be denied, the agency pulled an end run around the bureaucrats and funded the project by siphoning money off of other black budgets. Every-

BLACK MERCURY JARGON

AO: Area of Operations.

civvies: Civilian attire, clothes.

deadheads: Sleepers.

Delta: 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta. Delta Force. The Army's counterterrorist unit.

hippies: Skimmers. Refers to the use of meditative techniques necessary for skimming.

IntSum: Intelligence Summary Report. A regular update of current intelligence on the present situation.

KIA: Killed In Action.

LZ: Landing Zone. A site where helicopters land.

MIA: Missing In Action.

MOS: Military Occupational Specialty. In plain English, the specific job a soldier is trained to perform represented by an alphanumeric code, such as 11B (Infantryman) or 97E (Interrogator). For SFOD-O, all MOS codes ending in "O" indicate a projector-based specialty.

operator: A general term for any field special-operations soldier.

NCO: Noncommissioned Officer; ranks corporal through sergeant major.

OPORD: Operations Order. A detailed breakdown of the mission and how it will be accomplished. Command uses this to brief a team prior to mission.

PSYOPS: Psychological Operations. Any operation designed to influence the target's morale or psychological well-being.

SEAL: Sea-Air-Land. Acronym for Navy special-ops unit.

sheet: A ghost.

SitRep: Situation Report. Brief update on the current situation; more commonly used in Hollywood than in the military. Used by non-career recruits in SFOD-O.

SF: Special Forces. Technically speaking, this term refers specifically to the Army's Green Berets only.

SOP: Standard Operating Procedure.

thing worked fine for a while. Orpheus carried most of the overhead but was still paid nicely for the few ops it conducted for the NSA (and you can never underestimate the importance of friends in high places). For its part, the NSA compartmentalized whatever hand dealt with Orpheus, which in itself was covered via a double-blind against exposure should an op go south. Only a few in Orpheus Group knew about of the agency's involvement, and vice versa.

Then, somebody in the Department of Justice got a hard-on for Orpheus, and everything came crashing down.

Operation: Black Mercury

The Justice Department, or maybe I should say the FBI, pretty much pulled Orpheus apart like a mean little neighbor kid does a fly. After looking at the remains for a while, Washington decided maybe the public was better served if the government was in control of any particularly well-trained and well-financed group of spooks.

At first, the NSA and the FBI led the pack for supervisory control, and the directors were all hot under the collar to get their hands on legitimate funding for it. Unfortunately, after the FBI dug around in Orpheus' files and ledgers, it found a well-hidden paper trail leading a circuitous route back to the NSA. A little more poking uncovered evidence of the first team's disastrous failure. Worse yet, there was some indications that NSA operatives may have had tertiary involvement with some pigment-distribution operations, drawing the DEA into the brawl.

The Justice Department decided that, since the NSA was caught with its hand in the cookie jar, and not just once, it simply couldn't trust the Puzzle Palace to handle the project responsibly. Actually, if you ask me, it was sour grapes on the FBI's part for not co-opting Orpheus first. Anyway, after all the jockeying for power, favor trading and bluster wound down, the military ended up with the reigns for the project. If you think about it, it does make a kind of twisted sense. Think of all the billions of dollars the military spends trying to keep its soldiers alive, when, all along, it could just beat the enemy to the punch and kill them first. It codenamed the project Operation: Black Mercury and turned it over to the US Special Operations Command, or SOCOM if you're into acronyms. And you don't get much more "special" than Black Mercury.

There was a hell of a lot of infighting between the different branches of the military over who got ultimate control. Unlike most other military commands, SOCOM is a combined force. Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines special ops all fall under its mandate. Operation: Black Mercury had all the makings of a big-budget item, so everybody vied for the reins.

When the dust settled, the Army came up smiling. I'm not sure why, but I suspect it's because the Army is kind of the "catch-all" branch. The Air Force, Navy and Marines all have a targeted mission. The Army's always been the bastard child, kind of. It claims more ships than the Navy, more aircraft than the Air Force and more amphibious landings than the Marines. Now, those claims are more than a little spurious — probably 90 percent of what the Army calls "a ship" the Navy wouldn't waste time sinking, and the same applies for aircraft and the Air Force — but the fact remains, the Army has a track record of diversity.

That, and the head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was an Army general at the time.

Organization

Operation: Black Mercury involves more than just spook troops. There is a sizeable support structure behind the front-line soldiers. The Defense Advanced Research Products Agency designs — or in many cases, rips off Orpheus and NextWorld — equipment, and the US Army Materiel Command is responsible for the actual production. Civilian and military specialists in a variety of fields, such as cryogenic medicine and electromagnetic physics, provide expertise in areas outside the scope of SOCOM's current internal assets.

However, as always, in the end, soldiers perform the grunt work.

SFOD-O

The Army refers to the field units of Operation: Black Mercury as the 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Omega, or SFOD-O, or just the Black Mercuries. The designation sparked something of a joke among the operators, who call it DO… as in DOA. They claim there's no "A" because their bodies haven't got there yet. Yeah, it's weak, but at least nobody calls it Omega Force. Sounds a little too much like some bad 80s Japanese cartoon.

SFOD-O falls under the direct command of SOCOM, which controls all US special-operations forces, from the ubiquitous Navy Seals to Air Force Pararescue to the Green Berets. SOCOM answers to

the Joint Chiefs of Staff, making it something of an anomaly in the US military. The Joint Chiefs are really advisors to the President on military matters, but SOCOM is their exclusive toy. You see, because of the interdisciplinary nature of SOCOM, there was no way all branches of the military were going to agree to which of them got to hog all the special-ops units. So, while SFOD-O is technically an Army unit, the regular Army doesn't really have control of it.

The General

Brigadier General Anton E. Zerba was tapped to build the unit from the ground up. General Zerba has been around for a while. I heard he signed up back in the last days of Vietnam, in the early 70s. Now, keep in mind that, at that time, Special Forces was still a risky venture career-wise. The top brass wasn't convinced it was anything more than a harebrained idea fostered by sycophants in the late Kennedy administration.

Regardless, Zerba jumped in headfirst and never came up for air. He had his hand in virtually every significant mission involving special ops over the next 25 years. Over the years, he built quite a record for himself, but because he chose special ops over a more conventional career field such as infantry or artillery, he pretty much topped out at brigadier general. Word in the ranks is that Zerba always knew that he'd be lucky to get even one star. He's a naturalized citizen, originally from Greece or Yugoslavia or one of those Adriatic nations. I can't keep them straight anymore.

The Joint Chiefs chose Zerba to head Black Mercury because they didn't really have anywhere else to put him. In addition to his background, he hasn't got much political savvy. But he's hell on wheels when it comes to unorthodox tactics. He pulled the few strings he had in hand — hard enough to break some from what I heard — and ended up the top brass on Black Mercury. He made many promises about what he would accomplish with the operation to land the command.

Now, the rest of us are jumping through hoops to make those promises real.

Basic Structure

Right now, SFOD-O consists of three battalions and one headquarters company. The headquarters company (OCOM) is made up of non-spooks primarily and is responsible for administering the activities of all three battalions. It not only provides command and control of all Black Mercury missions, but also oversees all support and training operations. There're about 500 personnel, military and civilian, attached to the SFOD-O headquarters company. OCOM is based at MacDill Air Force Base in Florida.

Each of the three battalions has three companies and a support/headquarters company known as Operational Detachment Charlie, or C Detachment. The C Detachment is responsible for command, planning and supervision of the three companies beneath it. The C Detachment also coordinates all support and transport needs for its subordinate units. The brass assigns no spooks to C Detachment. These guys are mostly paper pushers or ink dabbers. The commanding officer for a C Detachment is either a full bird colonel or a light colonel.

Each battalion is based within reach of its area of operation, which is the particular part of the world within which it's tasked to operate. The 1st Battalion is based at MacDill Air Force Base and is responsible for the Western Hemisphere. The 2nd Battalion is based in Seoul, Korea, and is tasked with the Pacific Rim and Southeast Asia. The 3rd Battalion is based at RAF Lancashire in Great Britain and operates in



Europe and the Middle East. Lancashire's where I was based: 4th ODA, 2nd Company, 3rd SFOD-O Battalion, that's me.

Within the battalions, each company has 10 A Detachments (ODAs) and one Operational Detachment B, or B Detachment. The B Detachment acts as command and control of the ODAs in the field. It's responsible for establishing what's called an Advanced Operations Base, or AOB. It maintains the "safe house" in the field and handles upkeep and monitoring of deadhead coffins. A major commands B Detachment, which operates with approximately 20 personnel. Ten of those are specially trained cryogenic medics tasked with maintaining coffins. The rest are mostly administrative personnel, such as supply NBC and operations sergeants.

Operational Detachment Alpha (A-Team)

The ODA, occasionally referred to as "A-Team," is the sharp edge of the Black Mercury blade. ODAs are the field soldiers who accomplish missions tasked by headquarters. They are also exclusively comprised of projectors. On paper, each ODA has 14 members broken down as follows:

Detachment Commander: One detachment commander, usually a captain, is responsible for maintaining operational readiness. He also serves as the field commander. While the detachment commander must follow those commanders above him, be it the B Detachment commander or the SFOD-O commanding general, he usually has considerable leeway in accomplishing the mission put to his team once they're in the field. Although this position is an "untyped" slot — that is, it doesn't require a specific Shade — many det commanders tend toward Skinriders or Poltergeists by nature of their personalities. All detachment commanders are skimmers.

Detachment Technician: One detachment technician, who is usually a warrant or chief warrant officer, serves as the XO, or the detachment's executive officer. His team usually refers to him as the det tech, or, more often, "the chief" because of his rank. The chief commands in absence of the commander, but he's also in charge of any PSYOPS and cultural or linguistic activities. Like the det commander, the det tech is untyped, but experience says they tend toward the same Shades as commanders,

US Army Ranks

There are three types of rank in the US Army: enlisted, warrant officer and commissioned officer. The majority of the Army is made up of the enlisted ranks, the privates and sergeants who do the dirty work. Warrant officers hold a position higher than that of the enlisted but lower than that of officers — in general, warrant officers hold their rank as subject matter experts. All pilots in the Army are warrant officers. Commissioned officers hold command positions.

Rank is a funny thing in the military. Even though the lowest officer, a second lieutenant, technically outranks the highest enlisted or warrant rank, good officers recognize that high-ranking enlisted soldiers and warrants hold years or even decades of experience. The officers may, thus, defer to their judgment, even though rank does not require them to do so.

Enlisted
E-1 Private
E-2 Private
E-3 Private First Class
E-4 Specialist/Corporal
E-5 Sergeant
E-6 Staff Sergeant
E-7 Sergeant First Class
E-8 Master Sergeant/First Sergeant
E-9 Sergeant Major/Command Sergeant Major

Warrant Officer
WO-1 Warrant Officer
CW-2 Chief Warrant Officer 2
CW-3 Chief Warrant Officer 3
CW-4 Chief Warrant Officer 4
CW-5 Chief Warrant Officer 5

Commissioned Officer
O-1 Second Lieutenant
O-2 First Lieutenant
O-3 Captain
O-4 Major
O-5 Lieutenant Colonel ("Light Colonel")
O-6 Colonel ("Full Bird Colonel")
O-7 Brigadier General
O-8 Major General
O-9 Lieutenant General
O-10 General

either Skinriders or Poltergeists. This slot is one of the two slots in an ODA where the rare Wisp is employed in SFOD-O. Few Wisps make it past the screening tests, something about the average personality of a Wisp not being "special-operations mentality." The det tech position is usually tasked to a skimmer, but occasionally, a sleeper can fill the slot if he meets the other requirements.

Special Forces Operations Sergeant, MOS 18ZO: Next in line is the operations sergeant, usually a master sergeant. The operations sergeant is the senior enlisted soldier on the team and, often, the person who actually runs the unit. Although the det commander has final say, the ops sergeant almost always handles day-to-day operations. He's frequently called the "team daddy" as a result. The ops sergeant slot is untyped, filled by experience and rank rather than Shade type. Still, thanks to the personality types drawn to this sort of work, most ops sergeants are Poltergeists. Ops sergeants are almost exclusively skimmers, as there's too much pencil pushing and other admin work for a deadhead to accomplish.

Assistant Operations Sergeant, MOS 18FO: The job of the assistant ops sergeant is — you guessed it — to assist the operations sergeant. A sergeant first class almost always fills this position. The assistant is also the team's intelligence officer. He directs any intel gathering operations and is responsible for on-the-scene analysis, production and dissemination of field intelligence. He's further trained in interrogation and prisoner handling. While no Shade is designated for this position, the assistant ops sergeant is often a Banshee, if for no other reason than their verbal powers. Occasionally, though, you'll see a Wisp or a Skinrider here. Both offer considerable advantages to an intelligence officer. This position is often filled by a sleeper, but it's not a requirement.

Special Forces Medical Sergeant (2), MOS 18DO: Two medical sergeants provide medical support to the team. The medical sergeants are highly trained in their field and far more than just medics. They oversee and maintain the team's mobile coffins as well as handle any battlefield injuries. They're capable of managing nearly any trauma and are authorized to prescribe and issue controlled medications such as antibiotics and narcotics. The medical sergeant slots are untyped, filled by expertise and experience rather than Shade type. For obvious reasons, medical sergeants are all skimmers.

Now… the rest of the team is made up of one sleeper and one skimmer matched in skills. The Army usually goes to some length to match personality types as well, since the team has to rely on each other exclusively, often for extended periods.

Special Forces Weapons Sergeant (4), MOS 18BO: First on the list are four weapons sergeants, or two sets of two if the math gives you problems. Poltergeists or Banshees most often fill these slots. The weapons sergeant is familiar with virtually every small arm in common issue around the world. He's also capable of operating most crew-served weapons, such as machine guns, mortars and the like. This knowledge, combined with the Poltergeist's manipulative abilities, allow weapons sergeants to turn virtually any opposing force weapons against the enemy.

Special Forces Engineer Sergeant (2), MOS 18CO: There are two engineer sergeants in each A-Team. Engineer sergeants are almost always Haunters or Poltergeists. They're extensively trained in demolitions and know how to bring down virtually any structure, from a tool shed to a suspension bridge. Haunter abilities expand on this, particularly with those spooks skilled enough to manipulate electrical fields, enabling them to either control or destroy virtually any structure they encounter. Engineer sergeants also double as anti-vehicle or anti-armor, whether through Shade abilities or more mundane methods such as high explosives.

Special Forces Communications Sergeant (2), MOS 18EO: Finally, two communications sergeants round out the A-Team. They're also generally Banshees or Haunters. The communications sergeants are responsible for establishing and maintaining all communications necessary to operate the team, whether internally among the members or externally with a higher command. The army trains them in all manner of radios from multichannel, frequency-hopping radios to satellite phones to tin cans with strings between them. Life gets really complicated for these guys when the team goes ghost and nobody can carry a radio.

The Real World

Okay, that's how it looks on paper, all nice and orderly with everything in its place. What I described is the perfect-world scenario for the unit. The truth is Operation: Black Mercury is a fairly new project. It's a long way from completion, and as such, none of the battalions are at full strength. On top of that is the complicating factor of finding enough projectors to fill out the A-Teams, much less the right types for each position. As it stands now, SFOD-O is making

due with what it can find. That means some weapons sergeants are Banshees or Phantasms and some teams are exclusively manned by skimmers while others are almost entirely sleepers.

I estimate that Black Mercury has a 60 percent fill rate. No battalion has a full complement of ODAs, and many are operating with fewer than the 14 members dictated by mandate. Given the time it takes to prep a skilled operator, my guess is, it'll be years before the project is fully up to strength. Until then, SFOD-O has to make due with less troops than it wants and not always the perfect match it has planned.

Mission

Black Mercury is, first and foremost, a military operation. There are currently still some civilians attached, primarily in technical or medical fields where the military has yet to catch up. Unlike Orpheus or NextWorld, Black Mercury couldn't give a damn about haunted houses or that *Crossing Over* crap. Black Mercury is concerned with winning wars and insuring peace. SOCOM pulled the mission and task list for Black Mercury straight from its textbooks on special ops. I have heard stories about operators getting pulled into a traditional haunting, usually if it involves a locale of military or political significance — can't have some Senator's wife boinking a security risk — but those are the exception rather than the norm.

Special operations generally receives five types of missions: foreign internal defense, unconventional warfare, special reconnaissance, direct action and counterterrorism. Regular Special Forces troops engage in all five missions. Due to the rather unique nature of Black Mercury units, they receive assignments in only three of the five. The two types SOCOM doesn't task SFOD-O to perform are foreign internal defense and unconventional warfare.

Foreign internal defense missions usually involve assisting friendly nations to develop their own military and police forces, as well as aid with humanitarian and civic projects. For obvious reasons, a force of highly trained projectors is probably better employed in other tasks. The second type of mission Black Mercury doesn't undertake, unconventional warfare, might at first seem well-suited to the unit's capabilities. Unconventional warfare covers a broad spectrum of military operations conducted in enemy-held or sensitive areas. While, in fact, some of the missions tasked to SFOD-O do border on unconventional warfare, in general, these missions are longer term than the unit can sustain. Skimmers might be suited for this sort of mission, but transport and storage problems for sleepers' coffins exclude them from all but the briefest excursions of this type. And, as I'll talk about a little later, the skimmers and sleepers train to operate together and to maximize each other's strengths, making the total greater than the sum of their parts. Eliminating half the team more than halves its effectiveness.

Enough about what Black Mercury doesn't do. Let's talk about the missions it *does* undertake. On paper — or doctrinally, if you want to sound like a training officer — those missions are special reconnaissance, direct action and counterterrorism. Unofficially, operators do get tagged to perform other, more unconventional missions, but the Army doesn't have a name for those just yet, so in true bureaucratic fashion, it pretends they don't exist.

Special Reconnaissance

Special-reconnaissance missions generally involve the unit infiltrating deep behind enemy lines. SFOD-O units are perfectly suited to this task — unmanifested projectors are invisible to standard detection measures. Standard goals for this sort of intel gathering include determining enemy strengths and capabilities in a target area, locating hidden factories and production facilities, acquiring secured information and mapping troop and vehicle movement. Often, major conventional operations require extensive special reconnaissance to properly plan and execute.

Special reconnaissance missions are usually relatively short term, seldom lasting more than a few days duration and often accomplished in hours. For longer-duration recons, the skimmers' ability to quickly recover Vitality is essential to sleeper members of the team.

There are several ways an A-Team can infiltrate, depending on the timeframe. An A-Team seldom deploys coffins during special reconnaissance, due to the sensitive nature of the infiltration. Sleepers simply accompany the skimmers on whatever transport is utilized.

The most common infiltration method is for UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters to deploy the unit to landing zones near the target. Pickup is either prearranged or coordinated through secure communications, depending on the mission plan. Ground infiltration, either by foot or vehicle, is also possible for areas in which air insertion isn't an option, either due to terrain or for security purposes. The teams rarely use this sort of insertion for several reasons. It exposes skimmer members

of the team to a greater risk of detection during the infiltration, it limits the team's options for extraction from the area, and it is generally more time-consuming than airborne operations.

Tactically, Black Mercury operators are all trained in true airborne operations since disembodied projectors can use material parachutes when manifested — though falls are just as deadly to spooks as everybody else.

Direct Action

Direct-action missions are combat-engagement oriented. They involve either overt or covert tactical action against an enemy target. These aren't limited to simple shoot-'em-ups, but actually cover a fairly wide range of activities. Direct-action missions differ from unconventional warfare primarily in their duration. Few direct actions take more than a few hours to accomplish, and those that do seldom take more than a day.

Some sample direct-action missions include ambushes to interdict supply lines or reinforcements, capturing enemy personnel for interrogation, rescuing friendly personnel from behind the lines and any number of sabotage-related activities. A direct-action mission may require the A-Team to place mines behind enemy lines or to "paint" targets with laser designators for smart bombs to home in on. That's a side of the war you'll never hear about in the media. Desert Storm made smart bombs celebrities, but no one ever mentioned the special-ops team on the ground that actually marked the target while the pilots flew thousands of feet overhead.

Direct action can also serve as a diversion for an attack elsewhere. In this case, the team's goal is to make the most noise and to cause the biggest explosions in order to draw the enemy's attention to the wrong place, setting it up for a sucker punch.

Infiltration for direct action relies almost exclusively on air transport. Only in the instances where mine emplacement, mine clearing or sabotage is the focus of the mission is ground infiltration considered — and then only if time allows. Most direct-action missions require the team to move fast, hit hard and get the hell out.

Counterterrorism

A relatively recent addition to the task list for special-operations units is counterterrorism. Projector A-Teams are particularly well suited to these sorts of mission, since it's highly unlikely a terrorist organization will have access to the sort of sophisticated detection devices necessary to counter spooks. I remember, a couple of years ago, a single Orpheus employee foiled a hostage situation down in Florida. If a relatively untrained civilian can take down a few armed



STANDARD MILITARY ORGANIZATION

The military units operating under Operation: Black Mercury fall along nontraditional lines in a fashion similar to the Army's Special Forces, with some modifications due to their rather unique circumstances. Traditional military units follow a different organizational structure. Since Black Mercury operators will likely find themselves facing line units on occasion, a passing familiarity with unit structure might help both Storytellers and players.

- **Squad:** The baseline unit for most combat arms units is the squad. It consists of approximately 10 soldiers under the command of a staff sergeant or someone of equivalent rank.
- **Platoon:** A platoon consists of three to four squads, or approximately 30 to 40 soldiers. A first or second lieutenant commands the unit and is assisted by his platoon sergeant, usually a sergeant first class.
- **Company:** A company usually contains three platoons and a small, squad-sized headquarters element. A captain is the commanding officer, while a first sergeant assists him.
- **Battalion:** Most often, three companies and a headquarters-and-support company compose a battalion. A lieutenant colonel usually commands the battalion, but depending on circumstances, a major or even a colonel may command one. Several officers of ranks from second lieutenant through major and sergeant major assist a battalion commander. The battalion headquarters element often includes one or more platoons of support personnel such as mechanics, cooks and communications specialists.
- **Brigade:** A brigade consists of at least three battalions and several support companies. A full colonel or, possibly, even a brigadier general may command a brigade, and he has a full staff of lower-ranking officers assisting in various staff positions. Brigades often have extensive support units attached, such as an artillery battery or a transportation company.
- **Division:** A division consists of two or three brigades and many support units. Divisions usually fall under the aegis of major generals, though a lieutenant general may hold the position in some cases. Divisions are often self-sufficient, with their own internal assets in aviation, armor, artillery and every aspect of support, such as transportation, medical units and quartermasters.
- **Others:** Higher-level units such as armies and corps are built from divisions, independent brigades and regiments and other smaller units. At this level, the structure is widely varied and often task-specific.

fanatics, imagine what a well-trained military unit can do.

Until recently, most counterterrorist ops were primarily responsive in nature. That is, the team got the call after the terrorists had already made their move. In that situation, the team's goal is to contain the hostiles and to limit collateral damage as much as possible. That's what the military calls civilian casualties, by the way: collateral damage. That trend is changing, though, and many counterterrorism actions are now preemptive in nature, hoping to cut off the snake's head before it strikes, so to speak. Intelligence isn't always as reliable as one would like, so, occasionally, a team takes out the wrong target, but hey, that's why the Army sanitized its language with phrases such as "collateral damage." Sounds much better than gutting innocent bystanders.

Deployment for counterterrorism missions is easier for an A-Team than either special reconnaissance or direct action, since most terrorist attacks occur on friendly soil. Mobile coffins are usually nearby, and virtually any piece of equipment desired is available in short order. Since terrorist cells usually hide inside the very society they target, transport is easy to arrange even for preemptive raids.

Strictly speaking, the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 forbids the use of the military to enforce civilian laws. However, the current public attitude toward terrorism is aggressive, and phrases such as "the War on Terrorism" blur what was once a well-defined line. Now, the government paints terrorists as foreign adversaries and thus legitimate targets for the military to engage… even on US soil. Since the legality of this assumption hasn't been tested in court yet, SFOD-O teams are under standing orders to maintain low profiles when operating in-country. The government issues "sanitized" black uniforms — that is, uniforms with no identifying patches of any sort — for counterterrorist ops in the US.

Interestingly enough, there is no proscription against US soldiers being used to enforce the civilian laws of other countries, so, on foreign soil, SFOD-O operates with a much freer hand. Not all that long ago, the Big Boys tasked a team to perform a preemptive strike in a Pacific Rim country with whom, let's just say, we don't do a lot of importing and exporting. A standard counterterrorist team would have been hard pressed to get close to the terrorist cell's headquarters, which was operating under quiet, but very real, government sanction. The team of projectors, however, managed to set up a rally point approximately three miles from the target where the skimmers stowed their bodies, left a small security force to guard the position and infiltrated the otherwise airtight security with ease.

Not only did they succeed in eliminating the cell and its infrastructure, the action left no evidence or witnesses to tie the op directly to the US.

That's one of the biggest benefits command currently sees to SFOD-O as a counterterrorism weapon — plausible deniability. The troops are as well trained as other counterterrorist units, but their ability to operate under the radar gives them greater latitude to operate in locales where a meat team's presence might spark an international incident.

Other Missions

Okay, so those are the doctrinal missions the Army came up with for Black Mercury operators. But, as anyone who's had a specific job description can tell you, there's always a little disclaimer at the end saying "Other duties as assigned." You can bet the military and its boss, the US government, has little trouble coming up with "other duties."

Counter-Drug: Everybody's favorite, "the War on Drugs" is a popular source of black-ops missions for SFOD-O teams. It's a poorly kept secret that several branches of the military are actively involved in interdicting the drug trade either at the borders or in foreign countries. It's not unheard of for military-intelligence units to set up ground sensors or radar along the border to detect border crossers and then to provide law enforcement with the intel. However, it's accepted practice for the Department of Defense to draw the line of its involvement at the US border to avoid any possible Posse Comitatus Act violations. A few kilos of coke for the FBI to use in a media campaign just isn't worth the hassle.

Outside the States, however, the military has always employed a fairly free hand when it comes to the drug trade. The Coast Guard and the Navy are both involved in intercepting ships in waters off US shores, and warplanes have, on more than one occasion, forced suspect civilian aircraft to land. Lesser-known operations target the home territory of South American drug cartels and require soldiers to get up close and personal with the private militias of the drug lords. These types of clandestine missions are often detailed to SFOD-O operators, not so much because of the suitability for the unit's skill set, but rather, to get the relatively new teams needed combat experience before throwing them to the wolves in actual warfare.

Typically, one or more A-Teams, complete with a B Detachment for support, are infiltrated into an urban area such as Bogotá or Medellín. The teams move in undercover as either tourist groups or contractors and set up a support base from which they fan out into the surrounding countryside. Once the op gets rolling, most of the secondary missions are almost textbook special reconnaissance or direct action. Currently, the Colombian government is cooperating with — or at least turning a blind eye to — the military's activities, going so far as to allow limited air support for some operations. This cooperation is no doubt heavily dependent on continued American foreign aid, and should Congress cut back funding, I wouldn't be surprised to see the teams working completely undercover and unsupported (or maybe even prohibited from operating in that country).

Colombia isn't the only country where such missions occur, but it is the one where they are most common. Other countries where they occur include Panama, Guatemala and Argentina. Operations in these areas, however, are far more restrained given that they lack local government support.

Psychological Operations: The Army's PSYOPS planners are currently having a field day with the possibilities posed by projectors. Currently, such operations are limited in scope and focus on some of the more obvious applications.

To date, Black Mercury has had its greatest successes in third-world countries. The average member of the populace in those areas has a lower level of education and a wider susceptibility to superstition. A guerrilla force may find its support base fading when it becomes clear some supernatural entity frowns upon its actions. Desertions increase, morale drops, and the local inhabitants provide less assistance. SFOD-O operators might achieve all those ends through carefully crafted manifestations.

Superstition-based techniques aren't nearly as effective among more advanced nations, but PSYOPS has made some advances in hitting industrialized military forces where it hurts through targeted sabotage. Luxury items, such as alcohol, are relatively easy to contaminate. It's also easy to compromise fuel supplies and even to deny sleep to enemy troops without ever exposing the operators to any real physical risk. While such missions have limited tactical advantage in a directly quantifiable way, the impact on morale can be tremendous.

Wetwork: I mean, please, if you were the world's most powerful nation and you had undetectable, untraceable, highly trained and well-equipped killers on

your payroll, wouldn't you use them? Why waste months on political maneuvering when a few seconds can solve the problem just as easily?

Maybe it's not the most ethical of practices, but SFOD-O teams occasionally embark on assassination missions. Actually, I'm surprised SFOD-O doesn't conduct them more frequently when you consider how easy it is for an operator to take down a target. No fuss, no muss, no evidence. I guess it says something for our government that Castro and Qaddafi are still around. Or maybe nobody's suggested it just yet.

Wetwork missions are always off the books, and the pencil pushers account for the expenditures as training missions. Seldom is an entire team directly involved, since it's simpler to let sleepers handle the task without ever jeopardizing their bodies. The units handle infiltrations just like special reconnaissance or direct action, with the added bonus that, since only sleepers deploy, even transport pilots or drivers don't know an op is underway. I have to admit, I wonder what they think when they're ordered to stop briefly at secluded drop zone and no one (that they can see) gets out.

Internal Paranormal Defense: This type of mission didn't have a name before Black Mercury. The Defense Department is real antsy about possible compromises of the US government by supernatural entities, and SFOD-O represents pretty much the only real defense against that threat. I hear the NSA managed to squirrel away a few projectors and maybe a genuine sheet or two that it keeps off the books for its own use, but even if it's true, there aren't enough of them to make a difference, and they aren't properly trained.

Operation: Black Mercury is drafting operating procedures to detect and prevent compromises of government assets by paranormal threats. It's also prepping contingency plans to contain any damage should prevention fail. This scenario has the potential to get really ugly if the wrong weapons fall into the wrong hands at the wrong time. I'm not sure what sort of goals a Spectre might have, but who knows what one — or a hive — might do with a truckload of sarin gas… or launch codes?

For that reason, you can bet any IPD missions have top priority in SFOD-O planning. After all, Black Mercury is the only internal organization with any real chance of resolving the situation with a favorable outcome.

Bug Hunts: Since the creation of Operation: Black Mercury, certain elements in SFOD-O headquarters have been tasked with monitoring the behavior of entities commonly referred to as Spectres. Word's trickled down to the teams that these entities are becoming increasingly active and aggressive. That info didn't really come as a surprise to the majority of operators, since we've been fending those things off on at least every other mission for the past few months.

At least one A-Team suffered serious casualties from a Spectre ambush while on an op in Lebanon recently. The team wasn't up to snuff going into the op — few are right now — and though the original mission went off without a hitch, the team got waylaid while preparing to exfiltrate the area. Most of the team was running low on Vitality when the Spectres hit, having expended it on the target. Reports of exactly what happened are muddied, but apparently, the things swarmed over the team like a black wave. A couple of hippies managed to ripcord back to their meat bodies, but not a single deadhead made it out. Since then, the top brass has gotten serious about how to handle Spectres.

Right now, Black Mercury is working with unsupported theories and educated guesses. A few of us with experience from our Orpheus and NextWorld days were tapped to put in our two cents, but no tactical doctrine has emerged as of yet. If the numbers of Spectres continues to increase along the current lines, it's obvious this could hamper the viability of SFOD-O. With that in mind, one of the primary missions of Black Mercury is control and/or extermination of any and all Spectres.

A-Teams in every SFOD-O battalion are specifically tasked as anti-Spectre units. Those teams provide overwatch support for other teams on mundane missions, covering their backs during evacuations when they're low on firepower and high on fatigue. The Spectres seem able to sense when we're weak — like predators culling the stragglers from a herd. The anti-Spectre teams also occasionally launch direct assaults on Spectre "hives," but so far, those operations have met with limited success tactically simply because of the sheer numbers of Spectres in a hive.

House Cleaning: I said SFOD-O has little to do with traditional ghostbusting, but that's not a hard and fast rule. If a haunting is high enough profile politically (or for someone of sufficient influence within the Department of Defense), the SFOD-O may task operators to handle a bothersome Blip- or Drone-class entity. Unlike the techniques employed by Orpheus or Lazarus Redux employees, SFOD-O operators seldom give a flying crap

about the well-being of some poor spook. In other words, just because something's dead doesn't mean you shouldn't kill it again. Unless absolutely necessary, A-Teams don't waste time trying to find a peaceful way of resolving the issue — they shoot it until it ceases to be a problem. When I say "shoot," I'm speaking figuratively, of course, but you get the idea.

If you've got any experience with sheets, you're well aware that the simplest solution — superior firepower — won't always solve the problem. That's where those of us with outside experience come into our own. Since the military has little experience with investigations of true paranormal phenomenon, former Orpheus and NextWorld employees must sometimes clear especially difficult hauntings. In these cases, we're usually given reasonable support and resources to handle the situation, at least after the initial guns-a-blazing method fails.

Scavenging: Sounds weird, but SFOD-O figured out real quick that some pieces of equipment sometimes ghost following their destruction. Sure, most don't last long, but artifact equipment is worth a mint, and the SFOD-O sometimes sends teams into hotspots to scavenge any artifacts they can find. The brass tried destroying stocks of new equipment a few months back to see if any ghosted but eventually realized the artifacts had to have "blood, sweat and tears" spilled over them. Now, they just opt for scavenging convenient hot zones.

Recruitment and Selection

As you might imagine, finding suitable recruits for Black Mercury positions isn't the easiest task. There are two routes SOCOM is currently pursuing: Selecting likely candidates from active-duty military personnel and recruiting qualified individuals from the private sector. Given a choice, SOCOM would limit its recruitment program to active duty personnel for many reasons, but since there are a large number of vacancies in the organization, it can't ignore any possible source at this time.

There's one exception to that: Under no circumstances does Black Mercury use sheets as operators. The brass believes they're too much of a wild card. After all, when the chips are down, there's really no way to ensure the ghost's loyalty. I hear dying has a way of reordering one's priorities.

In-Service

When dealing with active-duty personnel, Black Mercury has several advantages. Because the project is technically a Defense Department operation, it's not limited to Army personnel only. This widens the pool of possible recruits tremendously, opening it up to the Marines, the Navy, the Air Force and even the Coast Guard for potential recruitment efforts. Whether it's because of active-duty snobbery or an unstated valid reason, Black Mercury doesn't hold Reserve and National Guard members in the same category as active-duty personnel. Instead, it treats them like the private sector, which means they're subject to greater scrutiny.

Screening

Recruiters have complete access to all military medical records. This allows them to screen potential candidates for previous near-death experiences. Or at least, it would, if the military was in step with computerization. As it stands, a fair number of medical records exist only in paper format. The military maintains copies of the records at the individual soldier's current duty station. If he's been active for more than a single tour, though, there's a good chance that a copy of his partial file is on record at a central facility in St. Louis. That's where SFOD-O in-service screeners currently spend much of their time, skimming files for any red flags in a soldier's medical history.

Not surprisingly, many service personnel have at least one, if not several, near-death experiences — particularly special-ops troops — which suits Black Mercury just fine. Right behind special ops are combat veterans. Because of the rather consistent, if low-level, involvement in armed conflicts the US military has had over the last decade, there're a lot of combat veterans. After them come personnel with either parachute or dive training. This clustering effect of near-death experiences helps to narrow down the page-turning when screeners are trying to find suitable candidate. The brass does encourage screeners to search for potential recruits outside those high-incidence groups, though, to better diversify the unit.

A second benefit to in-service recruitment is that many active-duty personnel already have some level of security clearance. Members of SFOD-O must be eligible for and receive a Top Secret (Sensitive Compartmentalized Information) clearance. The fact the military has a unit that effectively kills half its membership for every mission isn't something SOCOM wants to become common knowledge. The recruiters immediately subject anyone whose clearance isn't high enough (or who doesn't have any clearance) to a precontact security screening. If the individual appears unlikely to qualify for the necessary level of clearance, the screeners

abort the process before a recruiter ever even approaches him.

Contact and Initial Briefing

Should the potential candidate meet the initial screening requirements, then a recruiter contacts him. Initially, he's told only that his profile meets that of a new, highly secret special-ops unit. The recruiter discloses nothing about the true mission or even existence of SFOD-O during the first stages of contact. Instead, the recruiter mentions that, due to the stress of the assignment, he must subject the candidate to rigorous physical, mental and psychological tests to determine if he is up to the task.

During this process, the recruit undergoes several personality and problem-solving tests, most of which are based on those used by Orpheus. After the personality testing, the recruit faces a battery of intensive physical trails and medical exams. Hidden in the middle of these exams is a preliminary cryogenic test where doctors temporarily flatline the recruit. Black Mercury researchers found that certain alpha-wave responses seem common to sleepers and skimmers, indicating a predisposition to projecting. If they observe those patterns in the recruit, he moves to the next stage in the screening process.

While the testing phase is underway, Black Mercury initiates a background check on the recruit. The check goes back 10 years at a minimum and considers factors such as criminal history, foreign travel and/or relationships, financial position, drinking habits, drug use and general moral fiber. Investigators interview neighbors, friends, relatives and former co-workers. All records are open to the background investigators, including juvenile court documents, expunged charges and civilian medical records.

The screeners miss nothing. They even consider the candidate's social network. Any close family ties or romantic involvements immediately eliminate a candidate from consideration. Long absences strain relationships and may cause an operator to choose between duty and the heart. Also, I imagine family-oriented operators might think twice about flatlining, no matter how safe the Army says it is.

The process pretty much lays the candidate's soul bare and goes over it with a magnifying glass. Depending on how well-traveled the candidate was or how often he moved, the process takes anywhere from six months to a year. The recruiters place the recruitment process on hold until investigators complete the background checks and the candidate receives the required security clearance.

Since civilian candidates face the same scrutiny and checks, you can see why Black Mercury prefers targeting military personnel, particularly those with existing clearances. Fortunately for them, most special-ops troops, one of the highest near-death correspondence groups, already possess Top Secret clearances.

Civilian Recruits

As much as the boys in green prefer recruiting from their own, there's one little hitch: Until now, transcendental meditation wasn't on the Army's list of training priorities. There are a few career military personnel, like me, who've picked up yoga or other meditative techniques, usually on tours in Japan or other Pacific Rim assignments, but we're a definite minority. So, to get skimmers — or "hippies" as some of the Good Old Boys call us — they've had to widen their recruitment efforts into the private sector.

It's not as easy for Black Mercury screeners to get their hands on private medical records, at least not in the bulk they need to perform an adequate sampling. Instead of trying to locate individuals likely to have projector talents, they reverse the process for civilians. Black Mercury has extensive documentation on former Orpheus, NextWorld and Terrel & Squib employees thanks to the FBI's efforts and the proliferation of ex-military types on these former projecting firms' payrolls. The recruiters review the information on already-trained skimmers from those organizations, as well as the few identified in government service elsewhere, and sift through test results to find likely candidates for military service.

FEMALE CANDIDATES

While current US military doctrine doesn't allow for women in most combat MOSs, Black Mercury operates under slightly different rules. Black Mercury is in serious need of projectors. Given that the ranks are far under strength and that General Zerba has written many checks that his unit might not be able to cash, he's given recruiters orders to not discriminate by sex. Delta Force is rumored to have sponsored several female operators into its program for use as infiltrators in hostage situations, so there's even a precedent for the practice.

Will female SFOD-O candidates face discrimination in a former boys-only club? Sure, it's possible, maybe even probable. But the fact is Black Mercury isn't in a position to discount anyone who's qualified.

The recruiters then subject their flagged matches to background screening — without their knowledge or consent — to determine suitability. As with active military recruits, this process takes anywhere from six months to a year. Normally, these sorts of checks require release forms, but Black Mercury has enough juice behind it to circumvent any annoying privacy laws. If a candidate checks out, both in skills and background, Uncle Sam extends an offer.

I should mention that Black Mercury prefers to enlist skimmers from the private sector. They've got about a million prospective sleepers already on the rolls, and unless the civilian prospect has unique experiences, unique skill sets or access to unique Horrors, he often isn't worth the time.

Initial Briefing and In-Processing

Once investigators identify a group of 20 to 30 recruits as qualified candidates, Black Mercury recruiters schedule a group briefing on SFOD-O's bare essentials and its mission. The organization does not indoctrinate or train smaller groups or individuals at this point. They train candidates as a part of a team from the program's start up until they receive their battalion assignments.

This briefing pretty much marks the point of no return for any recruit, and it's why the organization requires all candidates to have the necessary security clearance prior to the briefing. Any attendee must sign a waiver acknowledging criminal responsibility should he disclose the nature of the organization to any outside source. In fact, I believe the exact word used is "treason," which has the distinction of being the only crime actually defined in the Constitution. They're pretty serious about maintaining operational integrity, and they let you know it. Since I'm talking to you, it's probably obvious that signature didn't carry as much weight with me as the one on the bottom of that check you gave me. Or should I say cash you gave....

Although the recruiters don't reveal the exact nature of Black Mercury at this briefing, they disseminate enough information for a reasonably intelligent person to put two and two together. Since the screeners also select candidates for intelligence, it's reasonable to assume that some of them can come up with "four." This is especially true of civilian candidates, who probably have a damn good idea why they've been contacted in the first place. Recruits can opt out of the selection process at any time, even once training is under way, but they remain bound by the criminal waiver.

After they complete briefing, those remaining in the program are given a training start date, usually within a week. Black Mercury gives a candidate just enough time to tie up any loose ends but not enough to seriously reconsider his choice.

Pay

Let me tell ya. Nobody joins the military for the pay, or if they do, they're probably underqualified for pizza delivery. The average member of a Black Mercury ODA is a staff sergeant with about six years of active duty. That means his base salary is about $2,400 a month. On top of that, the Army is "generous" enough to authorize a bonus of $150 hazardous duty pay and special-skill incentive pay of $100. That means the average Black Mercury operator bags about $31,800 a year. Since they keep the team under pretty tight wraps and only accept single candidates, all members live on base and dine for free on wonderful Army food. Which really means any chance of an allotment for food and housing is out of the question.

It's better for officers, but not by much, with the average ODA commander grossing right around $50,000. That brings an officer's salary within sight of what we were making back in the heyday of Orpheus, but the work's a lot harder, and the accommodations pretty much suck.

On the other hand, Black Mercury does have pretty good medical and dental.

Training

Once Black Mercury wraps up the recruitment process, the remaining candidates begin training at a secured and compartmentalized portion of Fort Pickett, Virginia. As I said earlier, Black Mercury practices what is known in Army circles as One Station Unit Training, or OSUT. This process originated with combat line units, particularly infantry. The idea is to bring the trainees through the course from in-processing to assignment as one group, so unit cohesion is already there by the time the Army places the new recruits in their assigned unit. Ideally, it builds morale and peer bonds. On the flipside, it also means you get a unit filled with green recruits and no real field experience.

With Black Mercury A-Teams, the OSUT process is more important than just generating a "touchy-feely" camaraderie between soldiers. A central part of ODA tactics involves voluntarily sharing essence among the projectors, and that's only possible after the team members establish a level of intimacy. The Army designed the training regimen specifically to create those bonds.

While SOCOM prefers staffing the training program with all military personnel, it just doesn't have

THE ARMY PHONETIC ALPHABET

To ensure clear communication, personnel never use individual letters in radio or spoken messages. Instead, they substitute a specific word for the letter as noted below.

A = Alpha	B = Bravo	C = Charlie	D = Delta	E = Echo	F = Foxtrot
G = Golf	H = Hotel	I = India	J = Juliet	K = Kilo	L = Lima
M = Mike	N = November	O = Oscar	P = Papa	Q = Quebec	R = Romeo
S = Sierra	T = Tango	U = Uniform	V = Victor	W = Whiskey	X = X-ray
Y = Yankee	Z = Zulu				

the pool of experience from which to draw right now. Instead, it must employ a few civilian contractors to train recruits in some of the finer points of projecting. It's mostly through this outsourcing that soldiers learn any meditative techniques whatsoever. In time, I'm guessing they'll come around, but for now, the main obstacle is that most old-school military men can't get past the whole 60s thing when it comes to meditation as standard training practice.

The Program

The Black Mercury training program takes approximately one year to complete. It's broken into four distinct phases, each focusing on a different aspect of the job while building on previous training.

Phase I is the only portion of the training program where the candidates spend extended periods apart. During this initial stage, sleeper recruits learn the basics of projecting and are exposed to the wonders of the cryogenic coffin. While the sleepers — mostly active military personnel — learn what death feels like, the civilian skimmers are acquainted with military life. The civilians undergo the equivalent of infantry basic training, learning the, well, basics of Army life, from rank structure to basic drill to how to strip and reassemble an M-4 assault weapon blindfolded. The few active military skimmers spend their time honing their projecting or assisting the others with basic skills. Phase I lasts approximately six weeks from start to finish.

Most attrition occurs during Phase I, with approximately one-third of the initial candidates dropping out voluntarily or getting booted from the program. Among the sleepers, many simply can't handle the concept of flatlining or just don't have the talent to project, and a slightly smaller number of civilian skimmers just aren't cut out for the military.

During Phase II, researchers test and screen the candidates for occupational and Shade aptitudes, since SFOD-O slots specific Shades to some of the ODA positions. Due to extensive psychological testing, Black Mercury already has a good idea at this point as to what Shade a candidate will manifest, but every now and then, there's a surprise. All Black Mercury occupational training is standardized to 32 weeks. During this time, the process houses candidates together and requires that all non-training time is spent together.

Phase III borrows elements from SEAL, Delta Force and Ranger combat courses and combines and condenses them into an eight-week-long intensive training program on small-unit engagements. It covers everything from patrolling techniques to room entry to hostage scenarios. While Black Mercuries receive extensive training in mundane combat tactics, in a toe-to-toe firefight, it's likely they would fall short of SEAL or Delta standards. Face it, those organizations focus solely on material-world tactics and techniques. Where the Black Mercuries get their edge is during Phase IV.

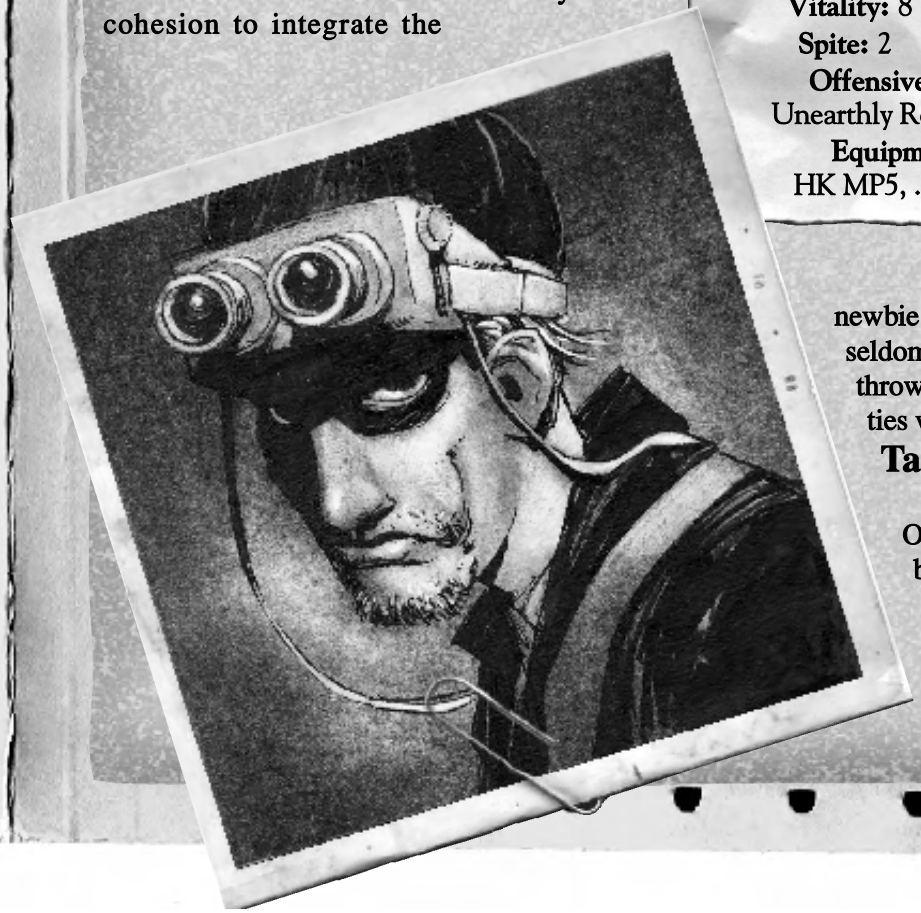
The final stage, Phase IV, builds on the previous three stages to forge the unit into a cohesive force capable of coordinating both meat-bound and projected operators into a double-edged blade. This is where the possibilities offered by projecting are tied to physical missions. The team learns the mechanics of sharing essence and how the individual skills of each position tie together with the capabilities of skimmers and sleepers, as well as the innate abilities of the various Shades, to form force multipliers. The final stage lasts six weeks, building from simple exercises in projector reconnaissance all the way to coordinating assaults with simultaneous Poltergeist and Haunter attacks.

At the end of Phase IV, the team graduates from the training process and receives its assignment as an ODA to one of the three battalions in SFOD-O.

Replacements

The problem with the OSUT training philosophy is that it doesn't account for the necessity of providing replacement soldiers for understrength ODAs. Vacancies arise in a unit through various reasons. Not all classes graduate a full-strength team. Combat losses or natural attrition may reduce a complete ODA to less than doctrinal numbers. And while the screening process ensures the proper Shade fills in for team positions, some ODAs have weapons sergeants who are Wisps, communications sergeants who are Phantasms and so on. While those Shades can contribute to the team, their abilities don't always match the tactics the ODA is trained to employ.

So far, the only solution SFOD-O has found for this problem is to route any "excess" graduates to understrength ODAs. That is, if a class graduates more than 14 recruits, the SFOD-O farm out any above that magic number to understaffed ODAs. This causes some complications, particularly when it comes to the essence sharing on which many team tactics rely. Ideally, ODAs with new recruits should remain offline for about a month to build the minimum necessary cohesion to integrate the newbie, but with SFOD-O so undermanned, this seldom occurs. Often, the poor former trainee is thrown right into the fire without the necessary ties with his teammates.



Master Sergeant Brent Radford

A small-town boy and consummate womanizer, Radford often surprises people with his anything-but-rural attitudes and interests. He's courteous, well educated and well read, and he seems far too laid back for the likes of SOCOM. It's probably one reason why many of Black Mercury's civilian recruits prefer speaking and dealing with Radford over the other unit members. Still, while Radford spends considerable time filling out reports and evaluations, his firearms expertise is topnotch, rivaling that of his units' weapons sergeants.

Master Sergeant Radford is often saddled with helping civilian recruits, not for any like or dislike, but because he's patient enough to show them ropes. Unfortunately, it means he's often held back from various operations because he's in the process of bringing civvies up to speed with SOCOM's performance demands.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Bureaucracy 2, Drive 3, Empathy 2, Firearms 5, Intimidation 2, Intuition 3, Leadership 4, Melee 3, Politics 1, Security 2, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 1, Survival 2

Shade: Wisp

Lament: Skimmer

Nature: Bon Vivant

Willpower: 6

Vitality: 8

Spite: 2

Offensive Abilities: Inhabit, Storm-Wending, Unearthly Repose, Witch's Nimbus

Equipment: KD armor, AN/KVS-9B goggles, HK MP5, .50 AE Desert Eagle

Tactics

As far as combat engagements go, the ODA's built on basic squad-level tactics used by everybody from Rangers to SEALs to line-infantry units. I'm not going to waste time going over room-clearing techniques or breaching methods or even patrol formations. They're probably exactly the same

tactics you guys use. What I'm going to tell you is what Black Mercury teaches its ODAs to do with projectors.

Sleepers

Black Mercury sleepers generally spend a significant time frozen. The average "tour" in a coffin for an operator is four to six months. They do get downtime with their meat bodies to recover whenever possible, but the deadheads spend a lot of time on their feet — in a spiritual sense. That means they likely enter and leave the area of operations "dead."

Sleepers generally rely on the same transportation as skimmers do to reach an AO. The one hitch is that nobody's come up with a working parachute for projectors, so anytime a genuine airborne drop is necessary, the deadheads have to manifest to jump, potentially robbing them of necessary Vitality. For that reason, helicopter or air-assault missions are preferred by the ODAs. Sleepers can fast-rope down just as easily as a meat body. Or if the ODA is one of the few with a Wisp of sufficient power and experience, he can transport them directly to the ground.

Once at the AO, the sleepers come into their own. Their initial employment is as eyes-on reconnaissance of the target. Sleepers are usually selected for recon activities since skimmers usually project once in the field (otherwise, why bring them along?). Skimmers also suffer physically from extended projection, and Black Mercury recons are nothing if not thorough. Haunter Shades are particularly useful for high-tech recons. In most cases, projecting operators can perform an in-depth walk-through of a target and closely observe any security measures and personnel without risk of compromise.

Sleepers are also the preferred focal point for manifesting or utilizing any Horrors the ODA may require for the mission, using skimmers as batteries to recharge as necessary. In combat, Poltergeists may provide pinpoint accuracy for a grenade by carrying it to a target or may manifest on the enemy's flank and Congeal a firearm. Banshees can disrupt massed opponents or even serve as anti-vehicular weapons if sufficiently bolstered by skimmers. Haunters can disable virtually any automated security system or vehicle, deny use of any complex weapon or even build up sufficient static electricity to become weapons themselves. Skinriders are perfect for circumventing human guards without raising an alarm.

Conversely, sleepers may, instead, bleed off vital essence to a skimmer to reduce their own signatures. This tactic lessens the likelihood of detection as well as reduces the chance of drawing the attention of nearby ghosts at an inopportune moment.

Skimmers

Hippie operators, like me, are sort of the jack-of-all-trades in the ODA. We can project and function in the same way as deadheads for limited periods, but we also have our meat around for those times when a physical presence is necessary. That means we're carrying most of the equipment too, though a manifest sleeper is good for long-haul transport without becoming fatigued.

After the deadheads recon, we usually perform any actions on the target, supported by sleeper manifestations and Horrors if necessary. Sure, a sleeper operator can take out a terrorist while projecting, but it's easier and less costly to just shoot them most of the time. The deadheads work as bird dogs, locating any unseen targets and calling fire in on them.

One skimmer is usually tasked to secure the ODA's rally point and guard it during the mission. That way, if the team has to fall back, there's a known safe point where it can regroup. Also, if any skimmers need to project, the rally point is where they leave their meat, and the rear guard is responsible for protecting them as well.

In general, skimmers avoid projecting unless it's mission essential. Any abuse we suffer tends to have more lasting consequences. As I mentioned before, the preferred option is for skimmers to serve as filling stations for the deadheads. Since our essence recovers far more quickly in the field than theirs, we can recharge them and then recover on our own. It's sort of like cross-loading ammo when supplies get low if you think about it. Additionally, we're the ones who often make the kills or set the demolitions, since we can carry gear in the first place.

Equipment

Like I said earlier, Black Mercury has all the makings of a big-budget project. With any big budget comes a lot of fancy and expensive toys — and a laundry list of contractors looking for their cut. The Army Materiel Command is having a field day with all the new line items it gets to add thanks to SFOD-O, while the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency comes up with something new every day to spend money on.

Personal Gear

In addition to more standard military equipment such as grenades, M-4 carbines, flash-bangs, and the like, Black Mercury ODAs have access to a few special issue items designed specifically for their missions.

AN/GRS-45 Gauze Reactive Strobe: A low-cost

alternative to KVGs (see below) designed by the Raytheon Company, this device emits rapid bursts of charged particles that are photoreactive when in contact with gauze. The end effect is that any projector, sheet or Spectre within 20 feet of an active strobe becomes visible to the human eye. The pulsing strobe displays the gauze in a flickering, stop-motion-like effect and can be unsettling to the unprepared, particularly when observing a Spectre exhibiting Thorns. The strobe does not, in any way, make the gauze it illuminates more susceptible to physical attacks.

AN/KVS-9B: Virtually identical to the Kirlian goggles employed by Terrel & Squib, the primary Army difference, thanks to ITT Industries, is that the AN/KVS-9B incorporates Generation 3 night-vision capabilities. The goggles are also hardened to withstand electromagnetic bursts and use standard Army batteries available through the supply system. The SFOD-O issues these devices to the ODAs because standard night-vision devices don't register sheets and other incorporeals, but they give them mostly to non-projector personnel who can't see spooks automatically the way I can.

AN/BPR-131 Radar System: Developed by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency and manufactured by Raytheon, this radar system uses a variation of the theory behind Kirlian cameras. It generates a pulse similar to conventional radar that detects any gauze-based entity within a 90° arc extending approximately 100 yards from the emitter. The system is bulky, weighing in at approximately 120 pounds, and nonmobile. It is primarily employed for base security at Black Mercury installations.

Kinetic Dispersal Armor, Ground Troop (KDAGT): Approximately the same size and weight of current Kevlar-based body armor, KDAGT (or just KD armor) is designed to work in conjunction with embodied skimmers. Don't ask me how they managed it, but the armor not only protects the user from blunt trauma and bullet penetration as per Kevlar, it enables the skimmer to use certain low-ebb Horror effects when in his own body. From what I understand, the armor's design uses some material the Russians developed when they were researching psychic abilities back in the 60s and 70s. Any skimmer with Helter Skelter or Witch's Nimbus can use his powers at minimum effect.

M71 Fragmentation Grenade: Using fragments of unknown materials removed from the walls of a Spectre hive, the Army Materiel Command crafted a fragmentation grenade that's equally

RUNNING A BLACK MERCURY CHRONICLE

For many, there's something inherently cool about playing a military chronicle. Maybe it's the tactical aspect or the planning of a surgical strike or using all the lingo in-character. Or maybe it's just playing with all the big guns and neat toys without having to worry about boot polish and six-mile, 5 AM runs. For the Storyteller, an Operation: Black Mercury chronicle offers a potentially endless source of ideas, some possibly drawn from the nightly news.

Regardless of the draw, remember that one of the key elements to a Black Mercury chronicle is finding a way to maintain the horror aspect of the game. That can be tough when the characters are tough-as-nails operators with all the latest gear, the best training and large-caliber firearms.

How do you do it? Well, watch a few films that throw military-style units into a horror plot. *Aliens*, *Resident Evil*, *Dog Soldiers* and *Predator* are a few examples. A recurring theme is that all that fancy equipment isn't as effective as promised. That doesn't mean it has to be completely ineffective, it's just not a magic pill that solves all the problems. For example, rarely are ODAs equipped to deal with Spectres or truly powerful ghosts. On a normal mission, they're in the same boat as an Orpheus operative when faced with the paranormal. Or imagine a team suddenly facing a Spectre horde with no backup and nowhere to run. Even fully equipped, the characters are likely to be in a bad way.

Another trick is to get them to forget they're playing a horror game for a little while — let them drop their guard. They're one of the most effective military units around, especially when a mundane mission goes according to plan. After a couple of successes, the players may think their characters are damn-near invincible.

And that's when you hit them with a blossoming hive.

effective against gauze and human flesh. Because of the uniqueness of the material used to create the grenades and the difficulty in obtaining further samples, supplies of M71 grenades are limited and issued only in circumstances where a team will likely encounter gauze-based resistance.

M198 Modified Ball Ammunition: Based on technical specifications "acquired" from Terrel & Squib, this 5.56mm cartridge is sized for the M-16 and its smaller cousin, the M-4 carbine. Its effect is the same as that of the original T&S ghostshot ammo, causing normal damage to both flesh and gauze. Due to the composite material in the bullet, it fairs slightly worse against armor. Similar rounds are available for 9mm and .45 caliber pistols. Because of its lessened penetration, M198 rounds are issued only for ODAs expecting to encounter Spectres, sheets or other projectors. For standard missions, ODAs use regular military ball ammunition.

AN/TTD-6: This is a large, cylindrical scope that mounts on a variety of submachine guns, assault weapons and sniper rifles produced jointly by ITT Industries and General Dynamics. When mounted, the firearm can use no other scope or vision-enhancing equipment. Like the KD Armor, the scope allows skimmers with Forebode to use their base Horror's effect through the scope. When a sniper targets through this device while he uses Forebode on it, he actually views a millisecond or two into the future, enabling him to better anticipate a target's position at the time the shot reaches that target.

Vehicles

Black Mercury uses both standard-issue and modified versions of current US Army vehicles for transport, depending on mission requirements.

M997F Ambulance, Basic Armor: The M997F is a modified standard Army HMMWV, or Humvee, ambulance. The Army retrofitted it to carry two cryogenic coffins in the passenger compartments instead of the usual four stretchers. It's armored with the basic HMMWV armor, which is good for most small-caliber weapons but doesn't even slow the bigger rounds down. The coffins' power supply is dependent on the vehicle's diesel engine, so extended missions require frequent refueling. The M997F isn't intended as a combat vehicle. It's merely a way to mobilize the otherwise unwieldy "sleeping" accommodations of deadheads for short periods.

M920 Medium Transport Tractor/Trailer: When faced with a longer or more static deployment, Black Mercury deploys sleeper coffins in specially constructed semitrailers. Each trailer contains a built-in



generator and a fuel capacity capable of servicing the coffins for up to three days without refueling. The M920 is also frequently deployed in controlled urban environments, such as the sites of contained hostage scenarios, to allow the deadheads to "recharge" with greater frequency.

UH-60, Black Hawk: SFOD-O makes use of a variety of models of the Army's ubiquitous Black Hawk — not so affectionately known as "Crash Hawks" by many field troops. The Crash Hawks are used primarily for insertion and extraction operations and require no special equipment. Black Mercury does not currently have any dedicated air assets. Instead, elements of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR), the "Night Stalkers," are tasked as needed for support.

Base Security

While each base layout of the three battalions differs greatly according to available structures and local protocols, all operate under the same general security systems. The primary focus of Black Mercury security at battalion staging areas is against possible Spectre or hostile projector infiltration.

Each has a designated "safe room" — which may actually consist of several interconnected interior rooms — of at least 1,000 square feet. The walls of the safe room are constructed of a composite similar to that used in Terrell & Squib's labyrinth cages and are accessible only by ingress through a "gauze lock" composed of the same material. A coded key pad with fingerprint recognition hardware controls access from the outside. The designers realized, after a particularly unfortunate incident, the necessity of allowing access to incorporeal ODA members too low on spiritual essence to physically manifest. The gauze locks are now fitted with Kirlian cameras monitored constantly from a security station inside the safe room. Incorporeal ODA members must give a prearranged hand signal, changed on a regular basis, to gain access.

AN/BPR-131 radar units monitor the perimeter of the station, and any positive hits automatically elevate the security level until identified. ODAs rotate through guard duty approximately every month, providing the base with projector coverage 24/7. All security on SFOD-O sites is in addition to standard procedures already in effect at the parent base, which can be safely assumed to suffice as a counter to any casual physical threats.

QUICK SYSTEM MATERIAL

Kinetic Dispersal Armor, Ground Troop (KDAGT): KD armor functions exactly like Kevlar: Armor Rating 3, Penalty 1.

M198 Modified Ball Ammunition: The reduced penalty to armor effectively means that armor has an additional 1 to its rating against this ammunition type.

AN/TTD-6: The TTD scope requires the spook spend one Vitality to properly activate it and removes two from the difficulty of any shot fired while using the scope — in addition to any bonus dice granted from the maneuver. If the sniper does not use the aiming combat maneuver, the scope grants no bonus.

Last Words

That's all I can do from memory. You don't seem shocked by anything I've said, so I'm betting you knew at least something of the story before now — which also means you know I've told you the truth and earned that cash.

Thank you gents, it's been a pleasure. Before I leave, though, there's one last thing. With the hives blossoming and all the bad shit happening, Operation: Black Mercury is accelerating research into ways of hurting spooks and Spectres. Their focus seems to be oriented toward finding artifact weapons since we've been hearing rumors that someone's already detonated a ghost nuke in the afterlife. Given the Army's approach to matters, I wouldn't be surprised if they tried fishing up one or two nukes just to clear an entire city of its spooks and Spectres. After all, who'll know they did anything....

GHOST STORIES

The following ghost stories deal with events and revelations discussed in this and preceding chapters. Because **Orpheus** focuses on characters as lynchpins to events or their aftermath, the following stories all allow the Storyteller to involve players'

characters at every step. These stories are all rough overviews and are intended as potential encounters, however, because they can not anticipate every chronicle contingency. Storytellers should introduce events and involve the characters as she believes best suits her chronicle.

SOUL ASYLUM

BACKGROUND

Regardless of whether the crucible joins with Lazarus Redux or not, the characters will probably want their own safe house. The problem, however, is how to go about getting it? The Spectre invasion means very few places are safe to investigate. Of those potential islands of refuge, few seem inhabitable even by dead standards. The rest are hard to find or taken but surely worth investigating. The crucible needs a semipermanent place to rest and regroup without fear of someone spying on or attacking it.

Recognizing this need, the crucible must likely scouts around for suitable locations. Since there are no real-estate brokers catering to these sites, the characters must actually visit these potential havens themselves. Through the course of their investigations, many will likely prove unsuitable or unavailable for one reason or another, the biggest being infestations of Grandmother's brood. Eventually, however, one place rises above the rest: Vanders State Hospital. Despite — or because of — its reputation as haunted, it is a relatively secure and abandoned location that curiously echoes as quite solid to spooks. This last detail, above all, makes it desirable. The ability to keep Grandmother's Spectres at bay in any capacity is what the characters need most. Naturally, some ghosts already inhabit Vanders State Hospital, but most are blips and drones that require rescuing, whether by turning them into allies or by sending them on, their tethers resolved. The strongest ghost present is Cameron Jason, however, who acts as a focal point for the other spirits.

VANDERS STATE HOSPITAL

Vanders State Hospital, or Vanders Sanitarium as it was once known, is situated on a hill bordering the edges of the city limits. Years ago, it and the land it occupies were part of the original town from where the city sprang. Over the years, however, people avoided Vanders as unsettling for a variety of reasons. Local lore held the sanitarium sat on old Indian burial grounds (at best, a dubious, if not sensationalist, claim) that hid the remains of unwanted inmates as well. More likely, its single crime was that it housed the criminally insane.

For years, Vanders operated on a shoestring budget, its facilities in constant need of repair. Its management hired less than qualified staff, and the inmates received no better treatment than that of animals. In fact, Vanders Sanitarium had one of the highest patient mortality rates of all state-run institutions across the country. Even a belated attempt by the state to revamp it into a true hospital didn't rescue or erase its horrible reputation. Between the fusion of its crumbling gothic façade and its sterile institutional interior, no one drove past the hospital without feeling a shiver shoot down his spine. Many nearby residents refused treatment at Vanders, even in emergencies. To that extent, Vanders only received the truly life-threatening cases, thus artificially keeping the patient mortality rate high.

The state finally closed down Vanders in the late 1990s. The Historical Society cares for it now, but since it has other sites that draw more tourist attention, it leaves the hospital alone except for the occasional television crew filming for this supernatural series or that. Vanders enjoyed brief notoriety as a haunted site during the recent ghost-craze, with a short tour of the grounds and a brochure detailing its sordid history. This resurgence, however, remained short-lived.

HOOKS

The simple need for a haven won't be enough to lead the crucible to Vanders. "Any port in a storm" might work for the characters, so long as they continue moving. That can be tiring, however, especially considering the invasion unfolding around them. As Lazarus Redux is likely to be as homelike or private as your typical military base, a place the characters can safely call home and truly relax is likely a high priority. Lazarus Redux is also becoming too crowded with ghost refugees. Characters may have difficulty rehabilitating Spectres or tending to their private concerns.

That said, uncovering information about Vanders is a simple matter. As it stands currently, there are many sources capable of pointing out the location, from Terrence Green to Mr. Jigsaw to any of the Freedom Fighter groups detailed in **Shadow Games**. Talking to the right spooks may also reveal that Vanders is an unusual location, given it registers as "solid." The only reason other spooks haven't tried retreating there for safety is because they can't reach it safely. Anyone with a history in institutionalized health care — whether as a professional or a patient — might have relevant stories or legends relating to the state hospital.

Finally, the characters might stumble across Vanders accidentally, while investigating a case or

VANDERS STATE HOSPITAL: A GLIMPSE INTO HISTORY

By Laura Reingold

Say "sanitarium," and one conjures up images of filthy, wild-eyed patients in straight jackets. Say "state hospital," and the mental picture adjusts radically to sterile facilities and helpful doctors and nurses. Reconciling the two images would normally be a difficult task for anyone, but for those people familiar with Vanders State Hospital, it's simply a part of our city's cultural landscape.

Sadly, there are quite a few people who remain unaware of the decommissioned hospital's history. Before Vanders Sanitarium became Vanders State Hospital, it cared for people who, for one reason or another, could no longer care for themselves. Over the decades, however, its population grew to include patients with different mental illnesses, ranging from the mild to the homicidal. In some areas of the hospital, in fact, one can still find recessed alcoves with iron links set into the walls or a stashed-away bed with thick leather straps. Though the main facilities were remodeled in the early 1950s, one can still see bits and pieces of its original gothic architecture in the sealed-off auxiliary buildings set further back on the grounds. Reforms in the care for the mentally ill forced the state to convert the sanitarium into a hospital and to build entirely new housing further upstate.

Unfortunately, the stigma of the sanitarium remained following its conversion. Many people refused treatment at Vanders for myriad reasons. Some were concerned about the quality of care extant in the crumbling facilities. Others worried more about the quality of the staff hired to work there. No matter who one spoke to about the old hospital, however, it was not concerns about the outdated facilities that rested foremost in their thoughts — or even its reputation for mismanagement and high patient mortality. Ask anyone about Vanders, and talk inevitably turns to ghost stories.

"Oh, yes," says Annette Hawker, Vice President of the Historical Society. "There've been many stories about Vanders and its ghosts, ever since the 1700s. It started out as an almshouse, built on land supposedly belonging to the local Native American tribes. It's said they used it as a burial ground, but so far, we've found no corroborating evidence. No one's seen any ghosts for at least several years now, so the stories are likely fabrications. Still, we've compiled the best stories into a book to fund the building's restoration."

The book, and a walking tour of the grounds, will be made available in early September in time for the beginning of the school year.

For more information, call the Historical Society at 555-9669. It promises that a good time can be had by all, and all ages are welcome.

searching for someone. The fact Vanders registers as "solid" to spooks will not go unnoticed, especially given the size of the location.

INTEL

The characters' combined efforts can unearth significant information about Vanders State Hospital. Enough research (consulting several resources) and interviewing spooks and the living alike garner the most information, outside of a personal inspection of the locale.

Library and Historical Society research reveals that Vanders began as an almshouse, built in its current location in the late 1700s. Unsubstantiated, and often sensationalist, reports include mention of hauntings from restless Indian souls, given the original owners reputedly built the poorhouse atop of burial site. Later, an entrepreneur purchased the almshouse from the Church, converting it into a convalescence home. In the early 1900s, the state acquired the almshouse and converted it into a sanitarium that was to have a dubious record for patient care.

Checking with the state's Building Codes Division directly or through an appropriate contact may yield the old hospital's blueprints from its last major renovation in the early 1950s. This shows that contractors did only enough work to bring the building up to code. They left the auxiliary structures untouched, ostensibly locked up to prevent accidents or misuse.

Interviewing caretakers or former staff and residents reveals that the place has been haunted for some time. Activity died down or quit several years ago — coinciding with the last Spectre invasion — but only for less than a year's time.

Many of the spooks inhabiting Vanders are definitely of the low-ebb variety, though one or two may be cognizant enough to relate information. They are protected by Cameron Jason, who acts as a shepherd and father figure. He helps them fight the occasional Spectre patrol that manages to find its way to Vanders, since the former hospital is relatively isolated. Resident spooks aren't sure if the building's "presence" is a result of its history or if it has something to do with the hospital grounds itself.

To use the hospital as a base of operations, the crucible must first convince its chief resident, Cameron, that sharing Vanders is a good idea. Depending on how the crucible

pursues the matter, this can either be difficult or easy. Or the characters can simply defeat Cameron and destroy him or drive him off, though this isn't recommended — he can make a decent ally. The main problem with Cameron is that he isn't aware of what's happening in the outside world, so convincing him of certain events will be difficult. It's also possible that one or two other Echo-class, or even Mirage-class, ghosts occupy some of Vanders' auxiliary buildings. They won't likely bother Cameron or the characters, however, unless someone uncovers their hiding places. Unlike Cameron, they are aware of outside events and would prefer remaining hidden. If asked to leave... well, they won't do so easily or without a fight.

Additionally, there is at least one unaffiliated Spectre nearby that keeps watch, hoping to snag the occasional wayward spook. When the number of ghosts at Vanders increases, it will call upon a pack or more of its brethren to reap the place. If the characters don't find and dispose of it, the Spectre (Storyteller's choice as to the foe) will compromise the site, though it already exposes itself by occasionally preying on Cameron's flock.

CAMERON JASON

Vanders' spook-in-residence is a shy young Haunter who died of leukemia at the age of 21. Doctors discovered his condition when he was 17, not long after he'd come out of the closet. Finding himself isolated by both circumstances and with few friends, he turned to his love of architecture for comfort. He wandered the city, admiring various structures, but his favorites were anything with a rumored hint of the supernatural about them. In his spare time, he constructed models of these places or dreamt up his own designs, looking forward to the day when he could enroll in college and become an architect.



Cameron died after his cancer outpaced his chemotherapy treatments. As a ghost, however, he can now be at one with his favorite haunt. He would prefer to have the place to himself, which is why many frequently misinterpret his territoriality as hostility. In all, though, Cameron never really had friends to begin with, so the thought of sharing his privacy with relative "equals" is frightening. He is a good guy, however.

Cameron has only a vague idea of what's transpiring outside of Vanders and may not believe the characters' stories about Grandmother, Uriah Bishop or Spectre redemption. What he does know is that Spectres have been more active lately and a bit more single-minded than usual. He'll admit that some occasionally try to breach Vanders, but given his ability to inhabit the structure and its solidity to spooks, he's been able to protect himself and the resident blips and drones. Without the crucible's help, however, if the Spectres ever decide to attack Vanders en masse, he may not be able to withstand the assault.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics 2, Awareness 1, Brawl 1, Computer 2, Crafts 3, Intimidation 1, Investigation 1, Medicine 1, Meditation 3, Occult 1, Stealth 3, Technology 2

Shade: Haunter
Lament: Spirit
Nature: Loner
Willpower: 8
Vitality: 8
Spite: 4

HELTER SKELTER, INHABIT AND GHOST BUILDINGS

While some buildings still register as "solid" to spooks, a few still remain susceptible to Horrors. The technique Lazarus Redux used (fusing hive material into the walls) as well as that employed by Operation: Black Mercury renders their structures immune to these tricks. Those places solid in the hereafter like Vanders, however, function as though all the physics and laws placed upon the living remain in effect. Spooks must open doors to get through them, and if a door's locked, they need a key or must break down the obstruction. That means using Inhabit on these buildings or using Helter Skelter on the shattered remains of a broken door work as per normal, except that the effects have the advantage of affecting and hurting unmanifested Spectres within the building.



Offensive Abilities: Helter Skelter, Inhabit, Witch's Nimbus

The Brass Ring

If the characters are completely successful, they earn not only a safe haven, but an ally or two as well. And who knows: Vanders may harbor more secrets than the ability to keep out Grandmother's Spectres. These can range from a ghost who's been in existence for a very long time — who's been lying low and waiting for the right spooks on whom to impart some piece of lore — to an artifact or two that can shackle Spectres.

Meeting Mr. Jigsaw and the Hellboys

Background

If the players haven't already heard about Dunreade, they should. It's the only section of town where the Spectres are even close to being held at bay. This is due to a bizarre set of circumstances that make the Dunreade Spectre farm a no man's land between the large Mayfair Green hive and the small Montgomery hive. The resultant turf war and the influence of a small group of Orphan-Grinders called the Hellboys (see p. 125) have forestalled massive Spectre sweeps of the area.

Recently, the Hellboys' headquarters, the Tubman Theater, witnessed a tragedy. Demond Lewis, a 13-year-old singer, entered the Tubman Theater's weekly amateur night. A bright kid whose greatest ambition was to rap like many of his Def Jam idols, Demond was truly happy and hopeful the day he stepped out onto the stage. Unfortunately, he wasn't nearly as good as he thought he was, and both the poor crowd reception and being hooked off stage crushed his dream. The following day, he snuck into the theater, went downstairs into the boiler room and hung himself.

This being **Orpheus**, however, that wasn't the end of the story. Demond is currently haunting the theater. The Hellboys naturally try to help him, but Demond hides from every ghost haunting the building — especially the Hellboys, who frequently have their Spectre minions in tow.

Unfortunately for the Hellboys, Demond has become a victim a second time. Unbeknownst to the crucible, a Montgomery Friendly Angel (masquerading as the ghost of BZ Trump, a famous murdered rap impresario) managed to sneak into the boiler room. It hides its presence by communicating only with Demond. Eventually, it hopes to torture Demond into becoming a Lost Boy and to steal one of the Hellboy's minions at the same time (Beth Savitch's Maria — see p. 129). Maria, a Montgomery Lost Boy that Beth is trying to save, is being held back from recovering its ghost status by the Friendly Angel.

Location

The Tubman Theater is a beautiful example of Art Deco architecture in the predominantly African American Park Slope section of the city. A point of pride for the local community, the Tubman is compared favorably to such classic Art Deco masterpieces as Rockefeller Center and the Empire State Building lobby. In terms of the caliber of performers, only the Apollo Theater boasts more African-American and Latino superstars in its performance history.

The actual theater features 700 seats in 25 rows and is carpeted in red with red and brushed gold wallpaper. A second tier of seats in a balcony above the main auditorium holds another 200 patrons. A huge fresco of Apollo presides over the proscenium arch overlooking the stage, while the wallpaper at stage right has a large patch that's been rubbed down to the underlying wood. It's a Tubman tradition to rub that part of the wall for luck when taking the stage.

The remainder of the theater contains three men's and three women's restrooms, a backstage area that includes storage for props and wardrobes, dressing rooms that can accommodate a cast of 40 and catwalks for lighting that allow access to any portion of the theater's electrical system. The front lobby contains two concession stands, a ticket window and several glass-enclosed exhibits detailing the theater's history (with costumes and props from many of its productions).

The theater basement is especially labyrinthine, between the boiler room, the set storage bays and the workshops for building props, painting scenery and cobbling together wardrobes. This creates plenty of hiding holes, shadowy nooks and crannies and forgotten doors hidden behind dismantled sets from plays past.

Note: One of the displays contains a wooden cane used in the first performance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1926. Harriet Tubman herself supposedly used the cane near the end of her life, and a relative of hers donated it to the theater at its grand opening. Nobody knows whether the story is true, but generations of people's affections have imbued the cane, making it an artifact of sorts. It exists in the hereafter as well, a fact the Hellboys don't yet know. It only activates for an African-American spirit who picks it up, allowing her to distribute three dots in Intelligence, Perception and Wits.

Hooks

How the characters first meet Mr. Jigsaw is entirely up to the Storyteller. He may save them from a dire situation or contact them through an intermediary like



Tom Hayes. Regardless of how the characters encounter him, Mr. Jigsaw must first elicit their trust.

Many characters who are used to running battles with Spectres may decide to attack another Spectre on sight. The fact that Mr. Jigsaw can speak, however, and do so eloquently should probably give them pause. If it doesn't, Mr. Jigsaw will use whatever means necessary to immobilize the characters to present his offer (probably using Black Hands). Characters are, of course, perfectly free to refuse his offer, but he should make clear to the characters that, without his help, they are almost assuredly doomed.

Mr. Jigsaw approached the characters because he needs their help (not entirely true, but he figures this would be a good way to introduce himself and foster a rapport — after all, Mr. Jigsaw already knows the Hellboys). He "just" noticed the unusual situation in Dunreade and is looking for a crucible to investigate the area — particularly the strange events happening at the Tubman. He wants a neutral party to report to him on the different players in the area. Note that this story can easily play out over several sessions as the crucible returns again and again to investigate matters.

Regardless of how the investigation proceeds, however, Mr. Jigsaw eventually wants the crucible to capture a Spectre from both hives for his consumption, which he doesn't mention initially (this is a good time for the Storyteller to introduce the concept of hive markings and the Song of the Hive Horror). Capturing a Mayfair Green Spectre is actually the easy part of the mission. Trying to capture a Montgomery Spectre, however, most certainly brings the crucible into conflict with the Hellboys, who take a dim view of anybody messing with Montgomery Spectres (as they are trying to maintain the balance of power in the area and keep Dunreade clear of hives).

Amusingly, this is exactly what Mr. Jigsaw was hoping would happen. While he needs to devour the Spectres for their knowledge, he also wants to see how the crucible and the Hellboys react to one another. He's curious to see just how far each is willing to go, thereby estimating their future worth to him.

INTEL

Eventually, assuming the crucible doesn't violently collide with the Hellboys, the characters should end up at the Tubman Theater. The Hellboys will, of course, resist the prospect of surrendering one of their Montgomery Spectres. That hive needs every resource it's got to hold off Mayfair Green, but the Hellboys also understand the value of maintaining an alliance with Mr. Jigsaw.

During this visit, however, Beth's Lost Boy, Maria, should go Spectre-crazy, attempting to kill one of the characters. If the crucible manages to defend itself without destroying Maria, it not only gains Beth Savitch's gratitude, it can also find out about BZ Trump. A back-in-control and remorseful Maria mentions her "secret friend," the Montgomery Friendly Angel who's befriended her and Demond. The solution to everyone's problem suddenly presents itself. They can save Demond and Maria by capturing BZ Trump and delivering it to Mr. Jigsaw.

Of course, capturing the Friendly Angel isn't as easy as it sounds. Between its ability to impersonate others and its frightening illusions, BZ Trump is skilled at hiding and dodging pursuers, especially in so large a space as the theater. In a pinch, Trump will use Demond as its shield, ordering him to perform hit-and-run attacks on the crucible, knowing the characters will be reluctant to unleash their full fury against an innocent spirit.

THE OPPOSITION

The opposition actually depends on how the crucible proceeds. Attack Montgomery Spectres, and the Hellboys are the likely opponents. Help Maria, and BZ Trump is the villain.

• **BZ Trump:** This Friendly Angel manifests as the ghost of a murdered rap impresario, a natural magnet for a spirit who murdered himself when his own dream of rap stardom was cut short. Use Mr. Fox in **Crusade of Ashes** (p. 134) as the template for this Friendly Angel, except Trump also has Vector.

• **The Hellboys:** See p. 125 for information on the Hellboys.

• **Maria, Lost Boy:** Maria is a Montgomery Spectre that's been turned into a minion by Beth Savitch, in hopes of eventually redeeming her. Beth has made considerable progress, though that progress slowed recently when BZ Trump found a way into the Tubman Theater. Use Hunger in the **Orpheus** core book (pp. 269-270) as the template for this Lost Boy (except Maria's Spite is currently at one).

DEMOND LEWIS

Demond Lewis was like plenty of black kids growing up on the tough streets of Dunreade. His father left him before he was born, and his mother worked two jobs to provide for them. Unlike many kids, however, Demond had a dream that kept him on the straight and narrow (while many of his classmates turned to drugs or crime). Demond was going to perform. In fact, Demond has an extraordinary singing voice. He performed in several school musicals and was selected for Kids 4 Kids produc-



tions, a statewide theater troupe whose performances are by children, for children.

Then, he met the ghost of BZ Trump. The Friendly Angel convinced him that singing wasn't his true calling, rap was. Demond switched from the Motown and R&B records his mother played for him to the new craft of Ice-T and Snoop Dogg. Unfortunately, Demond didn't have the same talent for rap that he did as a singer. In fact, he was terrible at it. The Friendly Angel encouraged Demond to enter the Tubman Theater's amateur night, knowing he would end up being booed off stage. When that happened, the Friendly Angel plagued him with visions of his shattered life, and rather than picking himself up and returning to his true talents, Demond hung himself in the boiler room of the Tubman Theater. His return as a ghost is what allowed BZ Trump to enter into the theater via Vector.

Demond has only one tether: He must sing at the Tubman Theater in front of an audience (including his mother, Vonetta) and receive a standing ovation. Should the crucible figure out his tether and set him free, it's worth a Spite rating reduction. Freeing Demond is also the key to freeing Maria — should she hear him sing and be released from his torment, she'll remember what it is to be human and be ready to take that last step to become an Orphan-Grinder (yes, her Spite won't be at zero, yet, but that doesn't matter in this instance). The Hellboys may even invite the crucible to participate in helping Maria cross over.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Athletics 1, Empathy 3, Performance 4
Shade: Banshee
Lament: Spirit
Nature: Bon Vivant
Vitality: 7
Willpower: 4
Spite: 2
Offensive Abilities: Wail

THE BRASS RING

There are several possible rewards should the characters manage to negotiate their way through this scenario:

- **Alliance — The Hellboys:** Should the characters deal well with the Hellboys, it's possible that the crucible will have gained powerful allies in this troop of Orphan-Grinders.
- **Alliance — Mr. Jigsaw:** Working their way through such a tough situation and providing two captured Spectres deeply impresses Mr. Jigsaw. He can thus help them with information or teach them how to rescue Spectres. In the future, he will take considerable more interest in the crucible's affairs and may consider it for very special missions.
- **Spite Reduction:** Saving Demond and Maria from BZ Trump's influence is worthy of a moderate reduction in Spite points (say two or three points).
- **New Horror Acquisition:** If the characters have an Orphan-Grinder among them, Mr. Jigsaw or the Hellboys may volunteer to show him how to use Song of the Hive, as well as what the Spectre marks mean.
- **Artifact Acquisition:** Although it's not necessary for the completion of the mission, it's possible the crucible may discover that the cane in the lobby is an artifact.
- **Safe House Acquisition:** Capturing BZ Trump and clearing him out makes the Tubman considerably safer, at least in the short run. So long as they obey the rules that the Hellboys laid down for operating in Dunreade (see "Using the Hellboys" on p. 127), the characters can share the Tubman when in need.

COME TOGETHER

BACKGROUND

One potential teacher to impart knowledge about Crucible Horrors is signature character Annie Harper, though the Storyteller can use whomever he believes is more germane to the characters. It's important for the story, however, that the character not be a skimmer, simply because he could escape from the situation by ripcording. For the sake of clarity here, however, we mention Annie Harper to avoid confusion. After beginning her lessons in using Crucible Horrors, Annie invites the characters to meet her at the Bradford Hotel. She

intends to cover the basics again before taking them to a spook-infested area, someplace she deems a big enough threat to warrant that sort of power but not big enough to put the characters at significant risk. What makes the hotel an ideal location for meeting is the relative absence of Spectres there.

Well, tonight it seems the Spectres rectified their oversight. The hotel is in the middle of a Spectre turf war, and Annie is trapped inside. There's no way of knowing if she's evaded the Spectres or if she's been captured and needs to be rescued. Worse yet, while there's some hope the characters can avoid notice, they may need to battle large numbers of Spectres that, just moments before, were ripping each other's gauze to shreds. The situation is perfect for the crucible to try using what it's learned, difficult though that may prove.

THE BRADFORD HOTEL

The Bradford Hotel lies downtown, just a block away from the business district, convention center and various attractions. It's a typical structure: tall and imposing glass, concrete and steel with a posh interior and adjoining parking garage. There's a steady flow of people coming and going during the day, with fewer folks wandering in and out at night. It's also a modern structure, with very little history, only a warehouse that stood in its place a decade ago. What little ghostly inhabitants exist are quiet and unobtrusive as a whole. Guests blame the cold spots on thermostat changes and shuffled items on housekeeping services.

Adjoining and nearby lots, however, are significantly different. Regardless of whether they have spooks, most of these buildings have colorful histories, even the newest structures. This is largely why Spectres haven't bothered with the hotel until now: They've been preoccupied with more alluring sites elsewhere. Now, two small hives are expanding their territory, and the hotel falls squarely in the center of the disputed region. It's just a matter of bad timing that they've chosen to fight it out now.

HOOKS

The biggest draw, here, is helping out fellow spook Annie Harper. Even if the characters feel confident enough in their ability to wield Crucible Horrors, it's Annie who taught them, and now, she needs their help in return. As in war and survival movies, this scenario draws upon the heroic "leave no soldier behind" ideal. If the characters need further incentive, then supporting characters such as Chet Mason make it abundantly clear that the crucible's welcome at Lazarus Redux is contingent on its willingness to help Annie.

Conversely, the characters may be on their way to the hotel when the fighting begins. Or if the crucible isn't involved with Lazarus Redux, then it might be



investigating local matters independently when the skirmish erupts. Regardless, this is an opportunity to throw an epic, ghostly battle with all the glory and risk for disaster it entails. This is the crucible's first chance to use its Crucible Horrors. If the characters learned a little about Crucible Horrors prior to this point, the feeling they derive when the process works — and works potently — should be cause for jubilation.

INTEL

There isn't much to learn ahead of time, except potentially through a fortuitous use of Forebode. Characters already familiar with the area or with local spooks may learn, with a successful Manipulation + Streetwise roll (difficulty 6), that a turf war is in the making with Spectres from the two hives skirmishing more frequently. More than three successes may even yield the name of the two respective Spectre leaders, the warring pair some spooks have nicknamed Frick and Frack because they appear nearly identical. Otherwise, the turf war comes as a complete surprise, leaving the characters with few options save to use their newly discovered Crucible Horrors to survive the fight.

Even without forewarning, once the turf war erupts, it doesn't take much time to realize that there is an unusually large Spectre presence in the area and that they're fighting. A successful Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 6), however, reveals that there are at least two different groups fighting each other. From there, it shouldn't be difficult to surmise a turf war is unfolding. Most of it remains confined to the hereafter, in the streets surrounding the hotel, in its lobby and in its corridors. Occasionally, however, some effects bleed through. Even the most marginally sensitive person can tell that something of a preternatural nature is happening but not the specifics.

Among the biggest problems the characters face is in how they approach the situation. While they may not expect a turf war, once they do notice the Spectres, their reactions may determine how quickly they may be plunged into a fight. Finding cover quickly should offer the characters a chance to hash out a plan, whether it's to slip inside the hotel to find their ally or to take on the Spectres. Delaying, or somehow attracting the Spectres' attention, means immediate pitched battles, something the crucible may be ill-prepared to handle. The characters are probably used to handling between two and five Spectres together as a team but (likely) not twice to four times that amount. This is why using Crucible Horrors is crucial.

The upside to the situation is that, should the crucible find and destroy Frick and Frack, there's a good chance that their affiliated Spectres may be confused just long enough to give the characters a head start on escaping or hiding. Soon after, however, a Spectre on either side will assume control of its hive. This may mean the turf war continues or that both groups coalesce under one Spectre's command or that they disperse to regroup (Storyteller's choice). In the last case, they'll likely hunt after the characters in hopes of capturing them, so the crucible may still need to fight or evade Spectres until it returns to home base, with or without Annie Harper.

In the story, it's up to the Storyteller to determine whether Annie is hiding or if the Spectres captured her. The situation is dangerous, either way. Using Storm-Wending to reach her, for example, might expend enough Vitality to attract the Spectres' immediate attention. That's even if the characters know where Annie is located — or even if she's in the hotel at all. It's also possible the Spectres are hiding, intending to wait Annie out. If so, the crucible must fight them off before it can guarantee any sort of safe passage out of the hotel.

FRICK & FRACK

The leaders of their respective Spectre groups, Frick and Frack were once twin brothers. While they were close and shared many qualities, they grew to regard one another as reflections of their own insecurities. Each one went out of his way to distinguish himself from his twin but, invariably, competed in the same matters to spite one another. This dislike grew into active enmity, and eventually, both brothers arranged for the murder of his twin. The fact they did so concurrently was proof positive that the universe had a sense of humor.

The afterlife only sharpened the two brothers' hatred for one another.





Frick and Frack each command a minimum of 10 to 20 Spectres of varying types, with the ability to summon more if necessary. Their little civil war remains a stalemate until the characters arrive. While they won't aid each other, they might suspend direct aggression against one another long enough to deal with the characters — but still getting in each other's way, whether deliberately or accidentally. Or one group may attack the other when the crucible distracts it, taking advantage of the temporary vulnerability.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Leadership 4, Melee 3, Stealth 2

Nature: Competitor

Willpower: 8

Spite: 8

Offensive Abilities: Flit, Hive-Mind, Maw, Psychic Hum, Quicksand, Tentacles, Vertigo

The Brass Ring

The actual main prize is for the characters to learn and apply the Crucible Horrors. With these, the characters can more effectively fight Grandmother's Spectres. There are many ways you can introduce Crucible Horrors to the crucible. This particular story merely provides one example that can be used as is or as the basis from which to create your own scenario. Any one of the vignettes provided earlier can also introduce the Crucible Horrors, though the Storyteller may need to crank up the threat level to necessitate the introduction or use of Crucible Horrors — showing them to be the powerful (and scary) weapons that they are.

Secondly, though no less important from a purely human perspective, is Annie Harper's rescue. While she may have taught the characters all she knows, she's still a friend and fellow spook. Every able body is vital in the fight against Grandmother and her hives, and what Annie might do further down the line may be of more help to the characters than they realize — especially since Annie herself feels as though she's on the cusp of discovering her real identity as a ghost.

Lastly, the characters have the chance to gain important intel on the area adjacent to the hotel. If played well, the crucible can potentially capture a Spectre to discover all it knows. With luck and great effort, they may even try rehabilitating the Spectre and, thus, in the long run, add another Orphan-Grinder to the war effort. With fighting erupting everywhere, it's all too easy for the characters to lose sight of redemption and hope. This scenario can be a good opportunity to remind them that hope appears in more than one form.

Reunion

Background

Tom Hayes has recovered from being a Spectre, inspired by his love for his daughter, Sarah, but unable to save her as of yet. Sarah died horribly, after indulging in spiked pigment at a rave where hundreds died (see **Shades of Gray**). The Spectres sealed many ghosts' fates that evening, including Sarah's. Tom deliberately became a Spectre in order to save her, somehow. He failed, but Kate Dennison provided him with an avenue of escape from his condition, enabling him to claw his way back to the surface and turning him into an Orphan-Grinder.

Now that he's back in control, Tom must find his daughter and rescue her from her personal hell. He isn't comfortable asking the signature characters in Lazarus Redux for help because he's ashamed of his conduct. He betrayed his friends regardless of the circumstances. Tom probably knows the crucible from previous encounters and will likely have little emotional baggage associated with it (or at least, far less than he would with other spooks such as Kate Dennison and Chet Mason), so he'll ask the crucible for assistance. He needs someone to locate his daughter while he draws a pursuing Lawgiver away. The Lawgiver is trying to find Tom through his daughter, so the moment Tom appears, the Lawgiver will come after him.

When he was a Spectre, Tom could sense Sarah's general location. Now that he's an Orphan-Grinder, he senses her occasionally and only fleetingly. He believes his daughter haunts the city park, but he's not sure exactly where within the park. If the crucible agrees to help him track down his daughter and capture her, Tom will teach the characters how to redeem Spectres, and they'll have his undying gratitude.

The Pet Cemetery and The Rehabilitation Sanctuary

There are two key locations in this adventure: the city park where Sarah stalks and the location where the crucible holds Sarah while helping to redeem her.

The Pet Cemetery: Before she died, Sarah wanted to be a veterinarian. With her mother dead and her father fighting cancer, she felt a need to offer her compassion, and focus, *somewhere*. So, she took care of injured park animals and sick strays with tenderness and sympathy. When they died, she took them to the large city park just behind her house on 49th and Hill Streets.

Deep in the wooded section of the park, where few adults ever went, Sarah created a private pet cemetery for her deceased friends. Later, after neighborhood children found the cemetery, many took to burying their pets there as well.

The "cemetery" is in a shaded glen about 15 feet by 30 feet. At its center is a plastic milk-crate altar decorated with weather-worn collars, rusted I.D. tags and candle stubs. A small hand trowel that Sarah and the other children use to dig the graves waits under the milk crate. All around the glen are little monuments (tiny cairns, wooden slats, pictures in tiny cracked frames) to the animals buried there, each with the name Sarah or someone else gave the animal and its date of death.

On a final note, Tom Hayes does not know about the pet cemetery because it was his daughter's private retreat. He knows only that his daughter spent a lot of time at the park.

The Sanctuary: The best location for the crucible to contain Sarah Hayes is in one of two holding tanks at Lazarus Redux, but Tom Hayes is resistant to this idea. If the crucible manages to convince Tom to hold Sarah at Lazarus Redux, she'll remain in the brewing room in a heavily modified copper brewing tank about 30 feet in diameter. For more details on Lazarus Redux's facility, please refer to Chapter Four of **Shadow Games**.

If Tom convinces the characters otherwise, then he'll keep Sarah in a burnt-out fraternity house just a few blocks away from a nearby university campus. The Tau Delta Xi fraternity house is the second-oldest building on or around the campus (the dean's house is the oldest), and it's a historic landmark in the city. The Tau Delta Xi house is a large, three-story Georgian with a saltbox-style attachment at the rear for an expanded kitchen, pantry and washroom. The house sits on a stone-and-mortar basement that dates back to the founding of the city.

Seventeen years ago, a natural gas leak turned the interior into a raging inferno that killed 43 students during a party. The university boarded up the house and slated it for demolition the following year. Budget cuts, combined with public outcry for renovation, deflected the initial push to destroy the house. Year after year of promises has left the building abandoned and largely forgotten by everyone except its immediate neighbors. Tall, reedy weeds and grasses grow thick on its lawn. Unkempt trees and shrubs practically hide the front and sides of the house from the street, while a high wood fence surrounds it in the rear. Inside, the walls are scarred and the ceiling's stained from the fire two decades ago. No furniture and very little debris remains inside, the legacy of an abortive attempt at renovation 13 years ago.

The most remarkable trait of Tau Delta Xi house is its basement. The basement walls, floor and ceiling are solid to spooks and Spectres. Tom uses this feature to his advantage and prepared a room in the cellar to hold his daughter. It is relatively easy to complete Sarah's recovery there undisturbed.

If the crucible is cautious and discreet, it can stay in the house for weeks without interference from the neighbors or the authorities. Posing as renovators is another way of gaining access, or the crucible can just buy the lot outright. A local realtor lists it at $375,000, but he'll sell for as low as $195,000. It's a fixer-upper, but it is in a valuable location.

HOOKS

There are two avenues for meeting Tom Hayes, the first of which is Tom Hayes himself approaching the group. Otherwise, if Tom doesn't know the group well enough, or vice versa, he'll likely seek help from Terrance Green who, in turn, asks the characters for their help. The crucible should accept any opportunity to work with Tom Hayes, though nobody is twisting the characters' arms. He's a useful ally, and refusing his request makes him less likely to offer his help in the future. Also, folks at Lazarus Redux are concerned about Tom Hayes. Patching up matters between Tom and Lazarus Redux makes the crucible look good and helps to strengthen Lazarus Redux considerably. Additionally, Tom's offer to guide the crucible through the esoteric and delicate process of turning a Spectre into an Orphan-Grinder provides the crucible with very valuable information. There are plenty of reasons for the crucible to pursue this mission.

INTEL

Before the crucible can deprogram Sarah, it must find her. In all likelihood, she's haunting the area around the city park, but the park covers over 10 acres. The characters need to conduct an investigation to determine where she is.

Most of the following tests assume that the characters are in or near the forest that dominates the west side of the city park. If the characters are elsewhere, then increase the difficulty by two.

Animal Ken (difficulty 7): The park's animals appear agitated. Many of their patterns seem disrupted, and they're giving the deeply forested west side of the park a wide berth. This behavior is odd, given the forested west side is lush and ripe for gathering nuts and berries.

Awareness (difficulty 6): The characters spot a small Spectre… the remains of a stray terrier's ghost. Sarah has been tormenting ("healing") it for the past

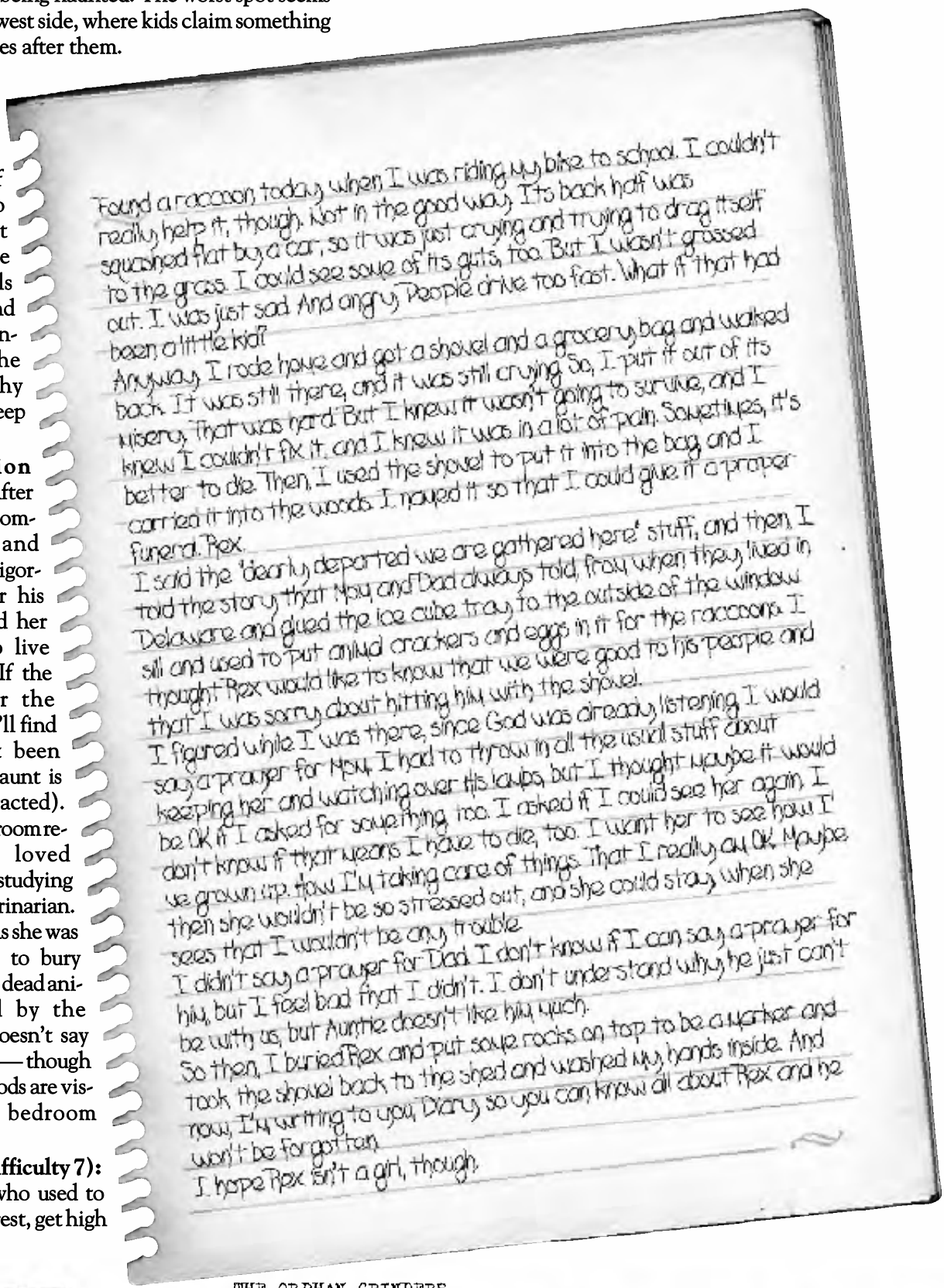
two weeks since she found it. As the characters approach the cemetery, they'll discover more animal Spectres.

Enigmas/Occult (difficulty 8): The park is fast developing a reputation among locals in the adjoining neighborhoods of being haunted. The worst spot seems to be the forested west side, where kids claim something in the woods chases after them.

Intimidation or Subterfuge (difficulty 5): It's easy to bully or convince any of the park winos into disclosing that they've seen the ghosts of animals wandering around or heard eerie keening noises in the forest. That's why none of them sleep there any more.

Investigation (difficulty 6): After Sarah's mother committed suicide and Tom underwent rigorous treatment for his cancer, Sarah and her brothers went to live with their aunt. If the characters enter the aunt's home, they'll find her room hasn't been touched (Sarah's aunt is distant and distracted). Searching Sarah's room reveals that she loved animals and was studying to become a veterinarian. Her diary mentions she was going somewhere to bury her pets, strays and dead animals she found by the roadside, but it doesn't say where specifically — though the park's west woods are visible from her bedroom window.

Streetwise (difficulty 7): A group of kids who used to hang out in the forest, get high and shoot squirrels ran out of the park scared shitless a month ago. They haven't returned. Tracking the kids down reveals that after facing a scary-ass manifested Sarah, several of them suffered bad accidents.


Found a raccoon today when I was riding my bike to school. I couldn't really help it, though. Not in the good way. It's back half was squashed flat by a car, so it was just crying and trying to drag itself to the grass. I could see some of its guts, too. But I wasn't grossed out. I was just sad. And angry. People drive too fast. What if that had been a little kid?

Anyway, I rode home and got a shovel and a grocery bag and walked back. It was still there, and it was still crying. So, I put it out of its misery. That was hard. But I knew it wasn't going to survive, and I knew I couldn't fix it, and I knew it was in a lot of pain. Sometimes, it's better to die. Then, I used the shovel to put it into the bag, and I carried it into the woods. I buried it so that I could give it a proper funeral. Rex.

I said the 'dearly departed we are gathered here' stuff, and then I told the story that Mom and Dad always told, from when they lived in Delaware and glued the ice cube tray to the outside of the window sill and used to put animal crackers and eggs in it for the raccoons. I thought Rex would like to know that we were good to his people and that I was sorry about hitting him with the shovel.

I figured while I was there, since God was already listening, I would say a prayer for Mom. I had to throw in all the usual stuff about keeping her and watching over this house, but I thought maybe it would be OK if I asked for something nice. I asked if I could see her again. I don't know if that means I have to die, too. I want her to see how I've grown up. How I'm taking care of things. That I really am OK. Maybe then she wouldn't be so stressed out, and she could stay when she sees that I wouldn't be any trouble.

I didn't say a prayer for Dad. I don't know if I can say a prayer for him, but I feel bad that I didn't. I don't understand why he just can't be with us, but Auntie doesn't like him much.

So then, I buried Rex and put some rocks on top to be a marker and took the shovel back to the shed and washed my hands inside. And now, I'm writing to you, Diary, so you can know all about Rex and he won't be forgotten.

I hope Rex isn't a girl, though.

Upon finding Sarah, the characters need Tom Hayes to distract the Lawgiver that hides nearby. Otherwise, trying to snag Sarah means fighting the Lawgiver and whatever reinforcements it calls in for help.

SARAH HAYES

Sarah was a sweet kid, but when her dad's life fell to pieces, hers followed suit shortly after. When her mother committed suicide, Sarah turned to pets for affection because, at least in that role, she could be a nurturing figure. Unlike adults, pets rely on you, are always there for you and love you unconditionally. As her father's health declined, the state forced Sarah and her two brothers to live with Thea Anheier, her mother's sister.

Sarah spent the next few years helping strays. While she still made friends and earned good grades in school, she felt disconnected from the world around her. Her attention and focus remained on the animals she adopted. To commemorate those animals that died, Sarah found the park glen and built a cemetery.

Sarah's death came during the lull between the twin storms called high school and university. Her friends convinced her to attend a rave, and she indulged in some pigment, not realizing someone had laced the drug with strychnine. Sarah died horribly: muscles contracting and contorted and hammered by bone-snapping spasms. Death brought no white tunnel either. Pigment was designed to pin the butterfly soul to the hereafter's display board, and Sarah died in time for Spectres to grab her. She succumbed to Spite shortly thereafter and has since been part of a hive.

Currently, a Lawgiver has borrowed Sarah from the hive to lure her father, Tom Hayes, into a trap. Sarah, in turn, wandered back to the park where she feels the greatest sense of peace. If she can, Sarah will try to flee from the characters while her animal Spectre friends provide a diversion (use animal ghosts such as the Spectral Hound from **Orpheus** or the Spectre Hounds from **Shadow Games**). If cornered, she will fight.



For Storytellers playing out Sarah's rehabilitation, her tethers are: bring my father back to me; apologize to my aunt for letting her down; donate $1,000 to the local SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) chapter; leave flowers on my mother's grave; give a stray animal a loving home.

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 1, Animal Ken 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Empathy 3, Enigmas 1, Intimidation 1, Intuition 2, Medicine 2 (Veterinary), Stealth 1

Nature: Caregiver

Willpower: 7

Spite: 5

Offensive Abilities: Claws, Envelop, Flight, Lullaby

THE BRASS RING

Through this story, the crucible discovers how to rehabilitate some Spectres, reaps the benefits of redeeming a Spectre and earns Tom Hayes' (and hopefully his daughter's) eternal gratitude. If they're clever, the characters might even reunite Tom Hayes with Lazarus Redux (earning even more brownie points with Kate Dennison and the gang). An ambitious crucible may also cleanse the pet cemetery in the park and lay those animal spirits to rest by resolving simple animal tethers such as: "let me sleep," "return me home" or "love me." For Storytellers with a soft heart, putting all the animals to rest may net the crucible the removal of five Spite points, if not a full Spite rating, from those who actively participated. If the crucible seeks a material reward, Tom Hayes can prove a valuable contact and ally, while Lazarus Redux can provide money and a wide range of materials or services. If the crucible purchases the Tau Delta Xi house and skillfully renovates it, the characters can sell it for $450,000 or more.

SERVED COLD

BACKGROUND

Janette Fieldman is a recent addition to Lazarus Redux and has an issue that needs to be resolved. A fellow named Cyrus J. Randall kidnaped her and held her captive for a month before strangling her to death. She's not sure, but she thinks he put her body in a large freezer that he keeps in his basement apartment dwelling. She has a vague memory of that.



Whether it's Janette, Kate Dennison or some other mutual acquaintance who asks, someone needs the crucible's assistance to: 1) recover Janette's body to give it a proper burial (and provide her family with closure), and 2) ensure that Cyrus "sees justice." Janette believes she can lead the characters to the serial killer's home, but her problem is more difficult than that. Cyrus's apartment is part of a very small hive and Janette barely escaped the last time (she vaguely remember the clawing, black forms trying to pull her down, but in the moments after a traumatic death, everything is normally blurry). Cyrus is also recently dead. Either through his own carelessness or the Spectre's machinations, he slipped and fell just after turning off his shower, breaking his neck. He now lies rotting in the stall, a few days away from attracting attention through the bad smell. Cyrus is now a Spectre. He took to his new state quite easily and happily continues his work in the hereafter, snatching ghosts to feed the hive.

CYRUS'S APARTMENT

Located in the basement of a three-story abandoned tenement, Cyrus's apartment has the look of a slovenly bachelor dump. Refuse in the form of clothing and take-out-food containers litters the floor, while dust forms a hard shell over everything. The exceptions are a large deep freezer sitting next to a small refrigerator and a butcher's block next to a utility sink. Inside the freezer, as expected, are several dismembered bodies. One is Janette's. The rest the characters can identify with some research.

In the hereafter, however, the building borders on a Spectre farm, with the occasional squatters and drug addicts drifting in and out for refuge. Not as obvious is the presence of a small hive, found on the building's top floor. Maneuvering through the partially boarded front door reveals the entrance to the hive, which extends down into the basement and the serial killer's home. No more than three or four Spectres are active at any time, though up to 20 can appear if the hive is sufficiently threatened.

HOOKS

Janette's case, for former Orpheus Group employees, is not unlike the kinds of cases the characters used to undertake. The difference here is that they aren't doing it for the pay (there is no financial reward), but for the good of it. One option to bring the characters into the story would be for them to befriend Janette first before eventually discovering her "situation." This approach allows some players to offer help rather than being forced into yet another errand of mercy.

Then, for those characters with a sense of fair play, there's Cyrus himself... a serial killer who hasn't been caught yet. While ideas may differ on the precepts of justice and on its implementation, characters with strong consciences will want to see justice delivered. Once they discover Cyrus's fate, however, will the characters be more or less inclined toward seeking justice? As a Spectre, is Cyrus worthy of redemption, or is his state punishment enough. Lacking a supernatural body of justice or centralized code of conduct, then, most may agree that Cyrus must be destroyed. This way, he is of no more use to the hive and, by extension, Grandmother.

INTEL

Characters can check old news stories on the Internet or go to a library and investigate either recent or microfiched newspapers. A successful Intelligence + Computer or Wits + Investigation roll (difficulty 6) turns up articles on Janette, as well as other stories on missing women (some relating to Cyrus' activities, most not). Each article states that the authorities continue their investigations, but the women's families are hoping for phone calls or letters asking for ransoms.

Speaking with Janette reveals the general area where Cyrus lives (within five city blocks) and a general description as well. Understandably, she doesn't remember much beyond that. She was terrified, and anything she unwittingly saw about the hive's presence could be attributed to her fear of the situation and the killer.

Once in the apartment, the characters find a whole pile of news clippings and some more glued to the wall. Each is a missing-persons story, complete with pictures of the victim, quotes from her family and so forth. The most recent clipping concerns Janette, with adjacent articles concerning the bodies in Cyrus's freezer. There are several more articles, going back as far as six years ago. What happened to those bodies is unknown, until or unless the crucible finds a notebook hidden in the apartment. Within it are detailed accounts of how Cyrus stalked and kidnaped his victims and where he buried them afterward (outside the city, in a wooded area).

Once the characters encounter Cyrus and the hive's Spectres, they have a fight on their hands unless they "hide." The Spectres themselves are a small but potent and very malicious bunch, comprised of several Fetches, a small pack of Lost Boys, a Frightener or two and several others.

Even before the crucible arrives at the killer's building, there's a chance Spectres may see the characters and engage them in a fight. The hive in the building itself almost guarantees Spectre interference unless the characters take precautions to approach stealthily. If the crucible has an Orphan-Grinder in its midst (such as Tom Hayes), he may be able to determine this ahead of time. Otherwise, the threat of the hive may not become apparent until the crucible approaches its destination.

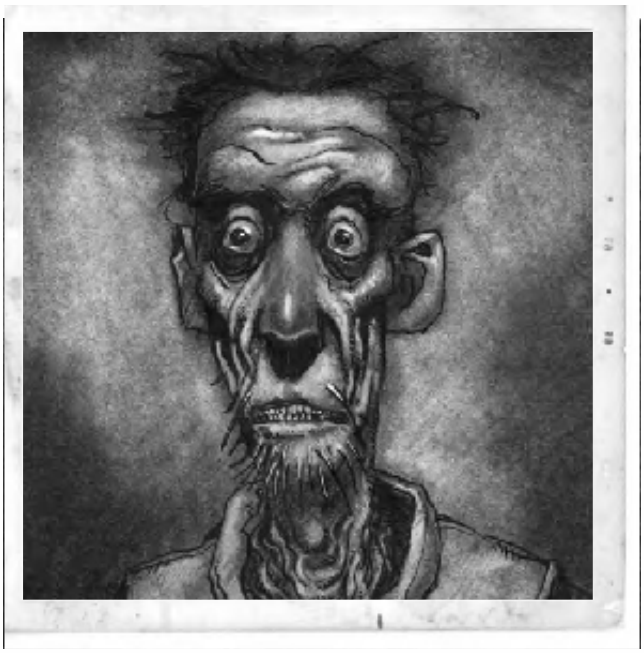
It's also possible to draw the attention of particularly powerful Spectres stalking the area. This is particularly likely if a besieged Spectre uses Hive-Mind to call for reinforcements.

Should any crucible member think to reconnoiter the area while walking around in his own skin, he'll find an equally dangerous neighborhood filled with abandoned or rundown tenements and row houses. It's a burgeoning Spectre farm. Drug addiction (to both pigment and other, more traditional, recreational drugs) is rampant, as are taciturn or even hostile residents, gangbangers and drug pushers. It's the kind of neighborhood where you'd best mind your own business lest you draw unwanted gunfire.

Cyrus J. Randall

Cyrus hailed from a completely normal background, with two loving parents who are still married. His siblings (one sister, two brothers) went on to successful lives, with families of their own in two cases. Cyrus went through school without incident and completed several years of technical training in computer repair before joining the military as an infantryman. His military career went well — until Uncle Sam sent him to the front lines in Operation: Desert Storm.

Something happened to Cyrus in Kuwait. Whether it was posttraumatic stress disorder or something more sinister remains a mystery. A bullet wound left him with a minor disability but one still severe enough to warrant his discharge from the Army on medical grounds. He drew a veteran's disability check (sent to a PO Box), supplementing what income he scored from his old computer training or any other odd jobs he landed. He still had much time on his hands, and his mind soon traveled down avenues best left unexplored. Maybe he might have gone that way on his own, or perhaps, the Spectres had something to do with it. Regardless, when he discovered he relished what he was doing, there was no turning back… even after death.



Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 1, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 3, Computer 3, Drive 1, Firearms 3, Melee 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2, Survival 1

Nature: Monster

Willpower: 8

Spite: 5

Offensive Abilities: Chill, Claws, Envelop, Manifest

The Brass Ring

Even if all the crucible does is recover Janette's body, the crucible will enjoy the satisfaction of having helped a fellow spook (in other words, netting some Vitality for themselves). This, in turn, strengthens Janette with more Vitality given that one of her tethers is resolved, making her a better asset and ally for the crucible and for Lazarus Redux. She is a Banshee with access to Forebode, Wail and Puppetry and is happy to help when she can.

With luck, determination and more than some personal risk, it's also possible that the characters can destroy Cyrus J. Randall, if not the hive as well. It potentially requires the use of some Crucible Horrors to carry this out, so the Storyteller should keep that in mind if the characters opt to destroy the hive.

Shell Game: Part I

Background

The following two stories are interlinked. The Storyteller can lead into the first story over the course of a few sessions or even months. In life, Agent Murphy headed one of several teams of government agents that doggedly pursued the crucible after Orpheus Group spectacularly exploded. A few months ago, rumors surfaced that he'd died. He hadn't been seen since then, until recently, when he surfaced as a spirit. Agent Murphy is just as dogged in death as a ghost, but the experience seems to have unhinged his mind. A Skinrider, he initially drops in on characters through host people or objects, dropping cryptic rhyming riddles, caustic comments and random statements but not much else. In short, he's been nothing more than a nuisance to the crucible.

Today, however, a close friend of the crucible's contacts the characters. His teenaged daughter, Ellen, left home and joined a cult called The Proverbial Light. He's extremely concerned about her confusing behavior and suspects she's been brainwashed. Before she vanished, she spoke of the supernatural and other disturbing matters, putting her father in mind of the crucible. He hopes they can find his daughter and bring her home safely.

The cult is a pigment cult, one that Agent Murphy has hinted at knowing about through his cryptic remarks (stuff like: "They led me into the proverbial light, but it wasn't real..."). He claims the cult killed him. The problem is finding Agent Murphy and questioning him without waiting for him to appear. And the clock is ticking.

OLD IS NEW ANTIQUES

Agent Murphy's only surviving family is his wife, Evelyn. She owns a little antique shop in the kitschier section of town. Agent Murphy often frequents the store, watching over his wife and sometimes possessing her in a strange show of affection. What nobody realizes is that Agent Murphy's old team is actually keeping tabs on Evelyn's shop as well. Agent Murphy has already appeared to his former teammates, and they know he's a ghost. They've been sent to recruit him and to debrief him on his murder, but they are still using surveillance to gather intel before approaching their old partner.

Inside the shop are all manner of slightly dusty but well-kept antiques, from settees to grandfather clocks and from costume jewelry to children's toys. There's a ventriloquist's dummy sitting on a chaise longue-style carriage. Agent Murphy either uses Inhabit on it to speak to the characters or uses Puppetry on Evelyn, his widow, to communicate.

HOOKS

Close friends and past associations are the key, here. If the characters' friends don't have teenaged daughters, then a son, sibling or spouse will do instead. Preferably, this person should be someone the characters know or respect, though an old enemy seeking help in exchange for surrender or a cessation to hostilities might also make for a unique roleplaying opportunity. As always, if none of these avenues work, there's always Lazarus Redux or Terrence Green, who might contract this assignment out to the crucible.

In addition, there's the chance to finally get Agent Murphy (and any other lingering government agents with a grudge) off the crucible's back. If the characters trap Agent Murphy or contend with the Proverbial Light cult, they'll earn brownie points with the government team... brownie points they can use in their favor.



INTEL

Agent Murphy's appearances are random, necessitating the group to investigate his background or to wait for him to appear again. Either works, though the latter option will take far longer than the former. A simple Intelligence + Investigation or Computer roll (for Internet searches, difficulty 5) yields the quickest results — Murphy's widow Evelyn.

Attempting to find the cult's whereabouts without Murphy's help (Wits + Streetwise/Occult/Enigmas, difficulty 8/9/9 respectively), may yield, at best, a general neighborhood. The cult is discussed in Part II of the adventure. The cult itself is relatively unimportant to this phase of the story.

Aside from any dangers Agent Murphy himself presents, the biggest problem is his old team. It's interested in retrieving Murphy, and if its agents recognize the crucible, that'll only aggravate the situation. If the characters miss the Old Is New Antiques lead, the Storyteller can post the agents on surveillance duty outside of the Proverbial Light's base of operations. Priority-wise, gathering evidence against the pigment cult is principle, but the agents are likewise interested in the characters' involvement in matters. Regardless, they'll appear at the most inopportune moment, raiding the cult while the crucible is infiltrating it or after the characters speak a few words with Murphy. Should a fight break out between the crucible and the agents, Murphy sides with his former compatriots, aggravating matters if he hasn't yet divulged the information the crucible seeks.

It's also possible that the cult, worried about Ellen's nosy father, bugged his house. If he phones the characters or they visit him, the cult will know he intends to rescue his daughter. Cult members may pay him, or the crucible, a not-so-friendly visit to warn them off. If that doesn't work, they launch an attack using handguns, Molotov cocktails and some Horrors.

Regardless, Agent Murphy is an Echo-class spirit and not much of a threat to the characters.

AGENT MURPHY'S TEAM

NSA? FBI? Pick your favorite government agency, and these four are your men. They've dealt with spooks before, both literal and figurative ones, and will continue doing so until some group such as Black Mercury slaps them down. While the hunt for the crucible is over (one would assume by this point — otherwise, they operate with official sanction to hunt the characters), these agents may bear the characters a grudge for the way events unfolded.



Murphy's team knew he'd tangled with a pigment cult but didn't know which one. His teammates did encounter Murphy as a ghost and were subsequently instructed to "recruit him." Whether this requires bugging the antiques store or raiding the cult (Murphy, in this instance, provided a clue as to his murderers) depends on the story's circumstances. In the former case, the agents will want the cult's location in order to destroy it after a thorough raid. While they may agree to assist in Ellen's rescue, they're far more likely to consider her an acceptable loss in bringing down this murderous pigment cult.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 2, Drive 1, Firearms 3, Intrigue 2, Investigation 1, Law 1, Security 2, Subterfuge 1

Willpower: 7

Equipment: Glock 17 pistol w/ ghostshot ammo (see **Orpheus**, p. 277), Kevlar vest (see **Orpheus**, p. 234), wireless headset, Kirlian goggles (see **Orpheus**, p. 277)

THE BRASS RING

The primary goal is to uncover the location of the pigment cult in order to rescue Ellen. With Agent Murphy being the easiest track to the cult, several additional potential rewards remain within the characters' grasp. The characters can broker a deal: In exchange for the cult's location and ending their conflict, Murphy may want the shelter of a safe haven or help to become

a more powerful spirit so that he can manifest to his wife. He may also ask for retribution against his killers, though he prefers his old team take care of the matter. This could help him to remove a tether tying him to his current existence and to move on.

For characters with interests in "material gains," Agent Murphy can offer one of several artifacts given his wife's shop has some unusual items. Storyteller's decision in the matter as to Agent Murphy's potential contribution.

SHELL GAME: PART II

BACKGROUND

Picking up where Shell Game: Part I left off, the crucible now knows the location of the pigment cult that Ellen "joined." It's up to the characters — and any allies they bring along — to smuggle her out.

The Proverbial Light cult "recruited" Ellen because they believed she was sensitive to the presence of ghosts. In truth, she and her friend Katherine were pigment addicts who hoped to draw their supply straight from the source, believing cult membership included freebies. By the time Ellen accidentally discovered pigment's true purpose, it was too late. She had been inducted into the cult and was too afraid to escape. She's tried kicking her drug habit, but the cult's ceremonies demand she take it now and then. Her friend Katherine, however, didn't stop and overdosed.

Ellen strives to please the cultists out of fear, and she is very afraid of their capabilities now that she can project through pigment and knows what lies in the hereafter. She is a skimmer and a Phantasm while high, able to craft illusions and to walk into others' dreams. She understands the connection between her pigment use and her skimming and knows she's still doomed. She takes "naps" when she can, using her time to craft dreams of others, dreams mostly revolving around *Alice in Wonderland* motifs. Sometimes, a "Cheshire Cat" accompanies her in these dreams, but it's actually a Fetch the cult uses to monitor Ellen. In fact, Ellen is engaged in one such dream when the crucible arrives, thus rendering her rescue that much more difficult.

NINTH STREET MISSION

The Proverbial Light is a minor pigment cult with tenuous links to the Missionary Works of the Holy Ghost. If the Missionary Works is defunct, the Proverbial Light escaped notice only because it's relative small fry. Still, several Spectres have allied themselves with the Proverbial Light if only because the cult is helping to turn the neighborhood into a Spectre farm. The cultists, however, mistakenly believe they have a certain control over the Spectres, a situation the latter tolerate until it no longer suits their purposes.

Ellen's captors suborned a chapel and soup kitchen for their drug lab and housing, as well as a gathering spot for meetings. It's situated in a poor neighborhood, though far from true urban blight. The locals consist mostly of blue- and pink-collar workers, as well as college students and starving artists, but it's nowhere near middle class either. Garish and bright chalk murals cover the exterior of the building, attempting (and failing) to emulate the style of Maxfield Parrish.

There aren't many Spectres around the building, though the neighborhood itself does have its harvesting share. They patrol this area and keep most other Spectres at bay. If anyone destroys these Spectres, then it opens the environs to competing packs looking to expand their territory. The Spectres maintaining this farm remain unlisted to allow the Storyteller to tailor the threat to the crucible's abilities. It isn't unreasonable, however, to include a Fetch (to watch over Ellen) and a Frightener or two to serve as the area's heavy guns.

HOOKS

Many of the reasons for carrying out the mission in the previous story still apply here. In addition, the characters may now have allies or additional tools or simply more confidence in their ability to raid the cult. If the crucible manages to evade Murphy's team, then it must act quickly to retrieve the girl before the agents crash the party. Otherwise, the presence of government agents will complicate matters (which given that the crucible must deal with the cultists and possible Spectres, is complicated enough).

INTEL

Any successful rolls the Storyteller deems necessary (Academics, Investigation, Occult, Streetwise, generally difficulty 6) confirm that the address Murphy gave for the cult's location is correct. It also fits into the general neighborhood determined earlier. Scouting out the location on foot seals the deal. A successful Perception + Alertness/Awareness roll (difficulty 7) reveals that the majority of people coming and leaving the location fit the bill as cultists, while a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 7) also betrays the fact that the local Spectres generally avoid the cult.

Even with speaking to any of Ellen's old friends or acquaintances, it's tough understanding why and how she joined the cult. That she became hooked on pigment is even more of a surprise, as is the fact that she's now a skimmer. The crucible may, in fact, be completely unprepared for what they uncover — that Ellen is off skimming in a cultist's dreams and not in her body. The

characters must be especially careful so she doesn't die in the fighting, or she might go straight from skimmer to hue and leave a very upset and bereaved father.

An Orphan-Grinder using Oblivion's Husk can determine if any Spectres are nearby and, if so, how many. He can also shield the crucible's presence from the Spectres in order for the characters to sneak inside and make a grab for Ellen, thereby avoiding the potential skirmishes more likely in a straight assault. Conversely, a Wisp with Storm-Wending may be able to bring the characters inside with some effort. If the characters encounter Ellen's body, though, a successful Intelligence + Awareness/Medicine/Meditation roll (difficulty 6) indicate she's still alive and, in all likelihood, skimming. If the characters try to find Ellen, it may require another Phantasm or someone with the Dream-Walker or Sandman powers to enter her thoughts to locate her (Wits + Empathy, difficulty 7, to sense her proximity and location). Otherwise, they'll have to wait for her to return to her body when she's done.

Danger can come from any quarter in this scenario, from the cultists to pet Spectres to government agents and even to a panicky Ellen herself. While she isn't violent and won't fight the characters, she may resist them. If matters are particularly unlucky for the crucible, all of these things could happen at once. It's far likelier the characters will face the cultists, with a Spectre or three backing them up. Or the characters could tangle with the Spectres, with cultists as backup.

Regardless, Ellen remains without stats and undetailed to allow the Storyteller more leeway in determining her identity in relation to her father, the crucible's ally. This is also a good place to introduce a new character to the crucible, especially if "Ellen" is a natural projector and not a pigment-induced skimmer as presented here.

CULTISTS

You love them, you hate them, you've seen them before. Their whole agenda is to survive the Spectre infestation and make a couple of bucks on the side. Sure, some are fanatics, but some are also addicts or, sadly, lost souls looking for their place in the world.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2



Abilities: Academics 1, Alertness 1, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Computer 1, Crafts 2, Enigmas 2, Intimidation 1, Medicine 1, Meditation 2, Occult 2, Subterfuge 1

Willpower: 5

Equipment: Clubs, knives, chairs, pistols, anything handy

Note: A couple, including the head of the cult, may also possess the following abilities:

Shade: Haunter or Poltergeist

Lament: Skimmer

Vitality: 7

Spite: 4

Offensive Abilities: Inhabit and Witch's Nimbus, or Congeal and Helter Skelter

THE BRASS RING

After all this trouble, the characters can hopefully return Ellen to her father. If everything goes particularly well, then they also disperse some cultists, damage or destroy their drug lab and reverse the neighborhood's downward spiral. This alone can eliminate one to three Spite points, if the Storyteller so wishes.

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