

HEART

THE CITY
BENEATH



GRANT HOWITT & CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR

ILLUSTRATED BY FELIX MIAL

HEART

THE CITY BENEATH

ABOVE US, THE CITY, SPIRE, STRETCHES INTO THE SKY.
BENEATH US, THE CITY, HEART, STRETCHES INTO THE EARTH.
DOWN THROUGH DIRT AND ROCK AND WATER, DOWN INTO
THE DEPTHS OF DARKNESS, DOWN INTO MADNESS
AND SICKNESS, DOWN INTO SOMETHING ANCIENT
AND OTHER.

FOLK GO INTO THAT PLACE LOOKING FOR
SOMETHING. SECRETS OF MAGIC LONG-LOST OR
NEVER DISCOVERED. SPELLS THAT ITCH IN YOUR BLOOD.
UNKNOWNABLE CREATURES TO HUNT AND HARVEST.
SOMEWHERE TO HIDE OR START AGAIN.
FORGIVENESS FROM A GOD THAT CAN'T HEAR THEM
BEG FOR IT.

AND NOW: YOU, THINKING YOU'VE GOT IT ALL
FIGURED OUT. WONDER WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR.

THE HEART CAN SMELL YOU. THE HEART
KNOWS YOU'RE COMING. WHEN YOU WALK
OUT OF THAT DOOR, WHEN YOU CLIMB
DOWN THE CHASM AT THE END OF THE
ROAD, WHEN YOU CRAWL ON YOUR
BELLY THROUGH THE WRITHING
PRESS OF ROCK, WHEN YOU
EMERGE BEATEN AND BLOODY,
IT'LL HAVE YOU.

THE HEART KNOWS WHAT
YOU WANT, AND BY THE
GODDESS, IT'LL GIVE IT TO
YOU OR KILL YOU
TRYING.

HEART: The City Beneath

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Published by Rowan, Rook and Decard Ltd.

First Edition (2020)

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Content warnings: Heart is a horror game, and as such, there are some unpleasant things in the text. These include but are not limited to: violence, drug use, addiction, ghosts, unwanted bodily transformation, and monsters that used to be people. We can assure you that there is no rape or sexual assault in this game.



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1

HOW TO PLAY

5

RESISTANCES

5

SKILLS, DOMAINS AND KNACKS

6

RULES IN BRIEF

8

CHARACTERS

9

ANCESTRIES

12

DROW, OR DARK ELVES

12

HUMANS

13

AELFIR, OR HIGH ELVES

14

GNOLLS

15

CALLINGS

16

ADVENTURE

16

ENLIGHTENMENT

18

FORCED

20

HEARTSONG

22

PENITENT

24

CLASSES

26

CLEAVER

26

DEADWALKER

31

DEEP APIARIST

36

HERETIC

41

HOUND

46

INCARNADINE

51

JUNK MAGE

56

VERMISSIAN KNIGHT

61

WITCH

66

RULES IN DETAIL

71

SUCCESS & FAILURE

71

HEALING

76

COMBAT

78

FALLOUT

80

RESOURCES & EQUIPMENT

90

BONDS

98

EXPLORATION

99

THE MAP

102

RUNNING THE GAME

104

THE WORLD OF HEART

121

GENERAL SOCIETY

121

THE VERMISSIAN

124

THE HEART ITSELF

126

GEOGRAPHY OF THE HEART

126

LANDMARKS

130

LANDMARKS BY TIER

132

TIER 0

136

TIER 1

137

TIER 2

146

TIER 3

157

ROGUE

164

FRACTURES

165

ADVERSARIES

175

LEGENDARY ADVERSARIES

200

APPENDICES

207

RULES SUMMARY

207

SUGGESTED MEDIA

210

THANKS

210

INDEX

216

CHARACTER SHEET

220



INTRODUCTION

This is a game set in the mad, shifting chasms and ruins known as the Heart. Groups of desperate people journey into it looking for something important: secrets, truth, absolution or sanctuary. They band together for protection and companionship as they move through dangerous, lawless lands in search of ‘havens’ – places of shelter, however impermanent, that offer respite from the Heart.

You are those people: delvers. You will trek deep into the twisting nightmare world of the Heart. It will form itself around you, and you will scar patterns into its flesh as it changes you. If you come back, you will not be the same.

If you're familiar with Spire, our previous game in the same universe, you'll notice that Heart shares a lot with it. It uses a modified version of the resistance system that powers Spire and takes place directly beneath the eponymous city. Each book can inform the other when it comes to setting and inspiration, but Heart is a completely standalone game. You don't need to know anything about Spire to play it.

TONE

Heart is a game of wonder, horror, tragedy and humanity in the face of inhumanity. Each player character is fundamentally doomed, as most of the high-level abilities kill the user when triggered. This isn't a game about long-term exploration and growth. It's about flawed, obsessive people making bad decisions and investigating a horrific undercity because they're convinced that the answers they need might lie inside it.

SAFETY TOOLS

It's always a good idea to have some safety tools in place to make sure that everyone is having a great time, especially with horror games. We considered putting these suggestions in the GM section, but because they're so important, we instead put them here where everyone can see them.

Firstly, before play starts, the GM should ask the players to share their Lines and Veils. A Line is a topic or action that the player doesn't want to be included in the game at all. A Veil is a topic or action that the player is okay with including in the game as long as its description is vague. Once people have outlined their lines and veils, it's up to the other players to respect them and not include them in the game.

However, not everyone wants to reveal a list of things that make them uncomfortable – especially if they're playing a game with strangers. In these cases, we also recommend that the GM places a card with an “X” written on it in the centre of the table: the X Card (by John Stavropoulos). If anyone (GM included) is uncomfortable with something that occurs in the game, they should touch the X Card and the group should stop pursuing the upsetting element and replace it with something else. The person who touched the X Card is under no obligation to explain why the topic upsets them if they don't want to.

There is a wide variety of other safety tools available online, so we recommend that you research them to work out which is the best for you and your group.

CONVENTIONS IN THE TEXT

- D12:** A 12-sided dice.
D10: A ten-sided dice.
D8: An eight-sided dice.
D6: A six-sided dice.
D4: A four-sided dice.
DX: A variable dice type.

SITUATION: A single scene of roleplay, give or take (this is not an exact term). Situations can be bound by locale (i.e. waiting concealed in ruins to spy on a cult), time (spending a few in-character hours harvesting mushrooms) or objective (chasing down a heartsblood beast).

PRONOUNS: We use masculine, feminine and non-gendered pronouns throughout this game.

DICE: We use “dice” as both a singular and plural term. We realise this is, strictly, incorrect.

PLAYING THE GAME

Most of the time, playing Heart takes the form of a conversation between the players and the gamesmaster. The gamesmaster describes the world, the players describe the actions of their characters, the gamesmaster reacts and so on. You usually won't be using rules or mechanics at all.

However, when a player character makes an action that's risky, dangerous or important – or the gamesmaster thinks it would be interesting to see them struggle – we use dice to see if they succeed or fail. The gamemaster shouldn't ask the player to roll unless there's something at stake.

When your character performs an action and the gamesmaster asks for a roll, you'll roll at least one ten-sided dice (hereafter called a D10). The higher you get, the better your character succeeded, and the less stress they took as a result of attempting the action.

Stress is bad, as it represents all kinds of minor negative effects on your character. The more stress you accrue, the more chance you have of it ticking over into something serious. Luckily there are lots of different ways of removing

stress, but more often than not you'll find yourself choosing between your own safety and the success of the expedition.

IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

RESISTANCE: a measure of what you have to lose. The higher the number, the more likely it is that your character suffers fallout.

SKILL: learned competence in a particular area of expertise. Skills add a D10 to relevant rolls.

DOMAIN: experience of an environment and its inhabitants or a broad topic of knowledge. Domains add a D10 to relevant rolls.

KNACK: a high degree of focus on a specific skill or domain. Knacks add a D10 to relevant rolls.

CALLING: why you came to the City Beneath and what keeps you here.

BEAT: goals, scenes or outcomes associated with a Calling. When you achieve one, you grow in power.

STRESS: abstract misfortune that represents the toll actions take on a character. Turns into fallout.

FALLOUT: the concrete cost of accruing too much stress; mechanical detriments or story effects leveled against a character.

DELVE: a perilous journey between two landmarks.

LANDMARK: an area of relative stability in the shifting City Beneath; something to navigate by.

TIER: tiers rank from 0 to 4. The higher the number, the closer the location is to the centre of the Heart.

A WORD FROM CHRIS AND GRANT

Hello. This is coming straight from us to you, gamesmaster.

You're going to make this game up as you go along. The book you're about to read is a list of suggestions and props for you to use. Everyone's game will be recognisably Heart, but their version of the City Beneath will be unique. This is intentional: we've baked it into the rules and fiction from the word go.

Inside, you'll find a world that builds itself around the player characters as they explore. You'll note that this is how pretty much every roleplaying game works when you sit down to play, but we wanted to make it part of the setting too.

We don't have a canonical Heart; we both run it differently. Chris' Heart is organic, a choking warren of quartz and teeth and blood and death, and people are few and far between. Grant's Heart is urban, a place of desperate survival built on the ruins of those who have failed before, and comes with high ceilings, alien skies and rushing breezes.

So: use what you want to, throw out what you don't like and create your own stuff. Stitch it together into a horrid patchwork of obsession and misfortune and tragedy and wonder. If you're not sure about a setting element, make something up and run with it; there aren't any right or wrong answers. Your Heart is supposed to be different from everyone else's.

What you're reading is just the start. Go mess it up and make it yours.

THE WORLD OF HEART

The Heart is a dangerous, unpredictable, mad place. Located beneath the mile-high city of Spire in the land of Destera, it is a rip in the holes between worlds.

The Heart begins, in theory, in the undercity of Spire near the tumbledown settlement of Derelictus. Get out of earshot of the sing-song gangs of street children, leave behind the tenements and shanties, crawl deep into the forsaken bowels of the city and you'll reach the Heart.

The Heart ends, in theory, *nowhere*. The closer one gets to its centre, the less stable reality becomes. In the midst of its red wet nightmare, concepts such as "beginning" and "end" come undone.

There are settlements on the outskirts: heretic churches worshipping forbidden gods; organised criminals guarding the drug farms and laboratories that supply Spire; cults of magicians who whisper to buried inhuman intelligences; in short, people who have turned their backs on the city above and delved into the Heart in search of answers. There are caves and buildings and the echoes of infrastructure that crumbled into uselessness centuries ago.

Go deeper, and the Heart makes less sense (to a rational mind, at least). Here there are crimson labyrinths ruled by the ghosts of slaughtered beasts; acres of high-rise buildings with swarms of spectres haunting the lower floors and people scraping out an existence huddled on the rooftops; twisting market-warrens of red cloth, cobblestones and awnings where maniac serfs worship their god-king masters and chant their financial transactions like sacred mantras.

Deeper still, and the Heart is almost untrained. There are skies here – blasted skies that have never held the sun or stars. There are lakes of dust where villages perch atop stilts and people hunt shark-headed beasts with harpoons. There are forests, moon-lit by no moon, where the trees are utterly mad and will hunt.

Beneath that? The Heart Itself, a blossoming tear in reality, a parasite universe of blood and bone seeping into the world of man and elf.

The Heart can taste and smell you, and it makes itself anew in your image. The settlements are there because people believe they should be: they are expectations repeated and made real, scars carved into the meat of the City Beneath by invaders. But go off the beaten path, tread into the unknown, and the Heart will grow invisibly, silently, just outside of your view. It listens to your dreams and fashions your reward, your punishment, your *world*, from roiling quintessence.

This is the Heart, and you know that somewhere down here is what you need.

WHAT IS THE HEART?

There are a wide variety of theories as to what the Heart is; no-one's quite sure. The following ideas are postulated by academics in the Cities Above and Below.

AMENABLE ESCHATON

The Heart is an extra-dimensional force that wants to expand and absorb all life on the planet, turning it into genetic copies or offshoots of itself. It's a benevolent grey goo and is doing this because it thinks it's best for the world and the people in it. It is as intelligent as a child and a mushroom at the same time.

It can copy the thoughts and memories of people who come in, so it's attempting to make itself... approachable? comfortable? – for life. It's copying aelfir and drow and owls and towns and social structures, but building them out of what it has to hand: meat, stone and time. It is iterating, trying to define what the optimum form is.

Spire was built to contain it by... someone? It's unclear. It used to work but now it doesn't, and the Heart is spreading through the city. Derelictus is stable because there are lots of people there, so it can copy what they expect to see and what they've seen; the deeper you get, the less sense it makes.

INQUISITIVE GOD-COCOON

The Heart is a godling of tremendous power – easily equal to the Damnou or the Solar Pantheon – and the Spire is a cocoon into which it will swell and eventually hatch. When it hatches, it will remake the cosmos. When you enter into the Heart, you're stepping into raw cosmic DNA soup, and reality doesn't make sense any more. It has all the building blocks to construct an entire universe, but they're just sloshing around down there.

It's not perfect; far from it. When you go into the Heart, it solidifies itself around you, trying to desperately latch onto whatever reality *might* be. It is trying to learn from you what a reality is. Crucially, it wants to keep you down here as an experiment – a lab-rat in a maze.

XENOCHRONISTIC TERRAFORMER

The Heart, like all other prokatakos arcologies on the planet, is from the future. Someone built them (and Spire) to make sure that the planet was habitable, and sent them back through time to ensure that their civilisation would happen. (But: it had already happened. But: that's because they sent the terraformers.)

Spire is responsible for atmosphere generation; the other arcologies were for water, basic life-forms, etc. They're the only reason that there's life on the planet, and they're using the Heart as a fuel source for whatever tool the Spire is. (The Heart is raw... *stuff*.) Every arcology has a Heart of some kind, but the others are better protected; also, no-one tried to build a mass transit network in them.

When the high elves built the Vermissian, they essentially drilled a hole into a microwave oven, turned it on and then stared point-blank through the hole. The Heart isn't *meant to be like this*; it's uncontained world radiation bleeding out into a reality that isn't ready for it without being properly filtered. Which means, presumably, you can *fix* it.

Eventually, the Prokatakos will evolve and they'll exist again. Or: for a first time?

OR, ALTERNATIVELY:

- The Heart is a giant slumbering creature, and the areas within are its dreams;
- The Heart is an engine, powering an unknowable world-machine;
- The Heart is the mass of worldstuff at the centre of the planet, and the planet is dying;
- The Heart is the manifestation of the sins of the people in Spire;
- The Heart is Not A Place Of Honour – it is ancient magical runoff, buried aeons ago, and the container is cracking;
- The Heart is the artistic masterpiece of a secret society of several thousand aelfir;
- The Heart is the only true land of the dead;
- The Heart is the root of all magic, and all the cults, religions and occult orders have got it very wrong indeed.

HOW TO PLAY

WHAT DO PLAYERS DO?

As a player, your main job in the game is to take on the role of a single character – someone who has chosen or forced to venture into the City Beneath. You'll speak for them, dictate their actions and make the choices that guide them through the underworld.

You'll create this character – probably in a group with the other players, but maybe on your own. Make a character that you're keen to play and who has questions that aren't answered. Instead of writing reams and reams of background text about what your character's done in the past, focus on what they're doing right now and how that manifests in tangible terms. Don't worry about coming to the table with something complete; it's much more fun, and easier, to bring a character with gaps that you can fill in during play.

Your character should be someone that the other characters can, at the very least, tolerate. Heart is a game about sticking together against the odds and uniting to gain strength from each other, so if you want to make a hard-bitten, laconic scumbag without a heart of gold or a self-serving occult weirdo who never uses one word when twenty would do, don't be surprised if things don't work out for you. Be someone worth adventuring with!

When you're in charge of your character, make interesting decisions. If your character was the sort of person who only did sensible things, they wouldn't be in the Heart; so make dangerous choices. Perform thrilling and exciting actions: trek out into the unknown wilderness, sacrifice everything you've got to uncover knowledge, put your life in danger to help people. Be bold and take risks. Don't get too attached to your character, because they're probably not going to survive; instead, try and have a glorious, colourful, entertaining demise.

Make informed decisions by understanding the rules your character uses – for example, if your character has an unusual advance, learn the rules for it. Remember what skills and domains they have access to, and remember what those skills and domains do.

Finally, the most important thing you need to do as a player is to remember that this is a game and you're just as responsible for making it a sat-

isfying experience as the gamesmaster. Be kind to the other players, respect their choices and generally try to be the sort of person you'd like to play a roleplaying game with.

WHAT DO GAMESMASTERS DO?

As a Gamesmaster, you'll control of everything in the game world that isn't a player character. You'll be in charge of all the non-player characters and the environment, but you'll also be responsible for interpreting the rules and managing the flow of the game. Like the players, it's your job to make interesting choices and push the story in an engaging direction – you'll be reacting to the player characters and changing the world in response to their actions.

We've written a full guide to being a Gamesmaster later in this book – it begins on p. 104, and it has advice for everyone of all skill levels.

RESISTANCES

Heart uses the Resistance system, which focuses on what's at stake in every conflict. Player characters have five resistances; your character can take stress to any of them based on what's happening in the story.

BLOOD: Physical exhaustion, pain, blood loss and injury.

ECHO: Twisting of the body and mind by the unreal energies of the Heart.

MIND: Madness, instability and weirdnesses.

FORTUNE: Bad luck, incompetence and overconfidence.

SUPPLIES: Loss of resources, damaged equipment and debt.

Your character class, calling, equipment and abilities might provide you with **protection**, which can reduce the amount of stress you take. For more details on stress and how to apply it, see p. 73.

SKILLS, DOMAINS AND KNACKS

Skills are things you can do; domains are areas of knowledge and experience. Skills apply specifically to actions, while domains are broader and might affect your contacts and/or your ability to function in different areas of the Heart.

Both are ways of giving your character a particular flavour and specific types of expertise. A character with the **Mend** skill and the **Religion** domain will likely have a very different personality and play style than one with the **Kill** skill and the **Cursed** domain.

Your character will have access to skills and domains when the game begins, and will have the opportunity to gain more through advancement. Your character class and calling may automatically give you certain skills and domains, and others may be available as choices. There are no levels or values in these – you either have them or you don't.

SKILLS

COMPEL: Make people do what you want via threats, lies, flattery or reasoned argument.

DELVE: Progress into dangerous or unknown territory.

DISCERN: Understand the world by drawing on accessible information.

ENDURE: Resist the effects of the Heart on your body and mind.

EVADE: Get away from someone or something that's trying to track you down.

HUNT: Track down someone or something that's trying to get away from you.

KILL: End the lives of people and things with weapons or your bare hands.

MEND: Repair something or someone that is broken; build something new.

SNEAK: Hide yourself or things from the attention of others.

If you have a skill, you add one D10 to your dice pool and pick the highest result when you perform the action associated with the skill. There's no such thing as an "untrained" skill; everyone can attempt most actions without penalty. Having a skill denotes a serious devotion to the practice.

DOMAINS

CURSED: Actively harmful locations. Places touched by the Heart.

DESOLATE: Wastelands and abandoned towns.

HAVEN: Settlements where people live, work and form communities.

OCCULT: Hidden knowledge and black magic.

RELIGION: Gods, and things worshipped like gods.

TECHNOLOGY: Machines, buildings and devices

WARREN: Cramped, dense corridors.

WILD: Wilderness, vegetation and animals.

If you possess the relevant domain for a situation, add one D10 to your dice pool and pick the highest result. Domains aren't intrinsically linked to action types, but to areas of the Heart, broad subjects of knowledge and connections you might have with the people of the City Beneath.

KNACKS

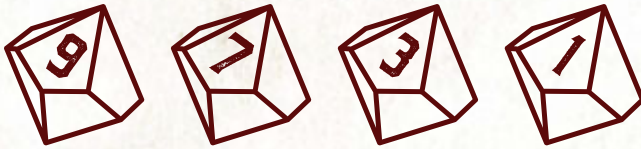
If you possess a skill or domain and gain it a second time, you get a knack. This is proficiency with a particular facet of the broad spectrum covered by the skill or domain. Using a knack allows you to roll with mastery, but you cannot gain more than one dice from mastery per roll.

RULES IN BRIEF

1. BUILD DICE POOL



2. ROLL DICE POOL



3. REMOVE DICE FOR DIFFICULTY



If the dice pool is reduced to 0 or fewer, roll 1D10 – succeed with cost on a 10, otherwise fail.

4. DETERMINE SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Compare your highest remaining dice to the following chart:

1:	Critical failure	Fail, and take double stress.
2-5:	Failure	Fail, and take stress.
6-7:	Success at a cost	Succeed, but take stress.
8-9:	Success	Succeed, and take no stress.
10:	Critical success	Succeed dramatically, and increase outgoing stress dice by 1 step.

ON A 6 OR MORE: INFLECT STRESS (IF TACKLING AN ADVERSARY OR DELVE)

Inflict stress to a relevant adversary or delve using the dice size for the character's equipment.

ON A 7 OR LESS: RESOLVE STRESS AND FALLOUT

GM rolls a D12 and compares it to their total stress:



No fallout is suffered.



Character takes Minor fallout and clears all stress in the associated resistance.



Character takes Major fallout and clears all stress.

CHARACTERS

In Heart, characters are made up of two primary facets: their Class (which is what they do and how they help the party) and their Calling (which is why they're delving and how they'll grow in power).

You'll note that most major abilities have minor upgrades associated with them. Once you have access to the major ability, you can use minor advances to improve or modify it. You don't have to access the minor upgrades in any particular order, but some will not be effective without, or will modify, others.

Unless otherwise specified, you can't take an ability more than once.

ANCESTRIES

There are four common ancestries in the Heart: drow, or dark elves; aelfir, or high elves; humans and gnolls. There are no mechanical differences between them; however, there are plenty of cultural differences. You're free to choose whichever fits your character and your story best.

RACISM

There's a trope in fantasy fiction where elves are bigots who are assured in their believed superiority to all other people. Even in *Spire*, the antagonists are massively racist high elves. However, we encourage you to veer away from acting out this behaviour in play, especially if your character is an aelfir; it's overdone to look down on characters of other ancestries. This also goes for playing a gnoll as a slaving beast or a drow as a sexy, duplicitous spider-worshiper.

People are people, first and foremost, not caricatures of their race. Make a person, and let the story flow from there.

Of course, you *can* play a game that continues the racial inequality in *Spire* and examine the effects of the City Above on the City Beneath, but we haven't written it that way. Down in the Heart, people hate you because of what you believe or which settlement you live in, not for who your parents were.

CALLINGS

Your calling is your reason for venturing into the nightmare undercity, the obsession that keeps you pushing deeper into the Heart in search of something intensely valuable to you. Understand this: you are not a normal person. Normal people don't give up their lives and willingly walk into terrifying labyrinths in the hope that they might find what they're looking for.

You're free to choose any calling you like. Having every player character in the party pick the same calling can lead to an interesting and very focused campaign.

ADVENTURE: You yearn for dangerous pleasures that the City Above cannot provide.

ENLIGHTENMENT: Seeking to achieve the impossible, you hunt for solutions in the undercity.

FORCED: You've been coerced into coming down here against your will.

HEARTSONG: Cursed with dreams of the Heart, you delve in search of revelations.

PENITENT: You are seeking to atone for crimes you committed against your order.

CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

Each calling is made up of a core ability (which you acquire when you take the calling at character generation) and several beats, which are split up into minor, major and zenith levels. These beats can be thought of as goals, achievements or scenes that shape your character's story. When you hit them, you can choose a new advance from your class. Minor beats earn you a minor advance; major beats earn you a major advance; and zenith beats unlock zenith abilities, the most

potent options available to your character. You can only use each beat a single time – cross it off once you've achieved it.

At the end of each session (and before the first one begins) each player chooses two beats from the list provided in their calling and tells the GM what they are. It's the GM's responsibility to introduce elements in the following session that allow players to pursue their chosen beats, and the players' responsibility to push the story towards achieving them. Minor beats can usually be fulfilled in a single session, major beats can take between two and three to properly achieve, and zenith abilities are generally selected to signal the beginning of the end-game for the character and as the culmination of multiple sessions of play.

(If you'd like to mix it up, have the other players and the GM choose one of your beats for you; this means they can indicate what sort of thing they'd like to see your character do, you can be rewarded for doing it, and they'll be more invested in the story that unfolds.)

GM: feel free to be blunt with establishing these details. There's no need to be coy about it – the players have explicitly told you what they want to happen, and the world of Heart means that they're descending into a parasite reality that can respond to their deepest desires.

NEGATIVE BEATS

Not all of the beats listed in the callings are things that characters would want to happen; for example, a lot of them deal with suffering fallout. Think of it this way: when you're selecting beats at the end of the session, you're not doing so as your character. Instead, you're indicating what you'd like to see happen to your character, and acting as a director of their story rather than piloting them through it.

Your character doesn't know that they have beats, much in the same way that they don't know that their sword does D6 damage or that they have 5 stress marked against their Blood resistance. They're a mechanical concern that feeds into the story, not something your character is aspiring to.

Players: feel free to ask questions and establish facts. For example, if one of your beats requires you to meet an NPC who hates you, and the GM introduces an NPC, you're completely within your rights to ask: "Is this the guy that hates me?" It makes telling stories easier for the GM and ties the narrative together.

You can only have two beats "active" at any one time. You cannot hit more than a single beat in any given situation (if both apply, pick the one that's most relevant.) As you cannot activate more beats before the start of the next session, you can only achieve two beats per session.

MAKING YOUR OWN CALLINGS

The five callings below (**ADVENTURE**, **ENLIGHTENMENT**, **FORCED**, **HEARTSONG** and **PENITENT**) form a decent basis for personal growth on an adventure, but you are encouraged to tweak, reskin and re flavour them so they'll be a better fit for your campaign.

For example, if you wanted to make a character who was obsessively seeking revenge against someone who wronged them in the past, you could take the Enlightenment calling and replace the bits that refer to the occult or academics with vigilantism and uncovering the villain's network of agents.

If you want to seed details of later events in the game, you can add beats that refer to specific events, people or places. For example: you're fascinated by the Huntress (p. 204) and want to use her in your game. You could add beats like "find evidence of the Huntress' machinations" or "meet an NPC who's seen the Huntress first hand" as minors, all the way up to "escape from the Huntress once she's got your scent" as a major. Even if you haven't really got a firm idea of what it is, putting in the minor beat "Set foot inside the Blind Library" sets your players up with a mystery to explore right off the bat.

You've got a great deal of freedom to create personalised beats for your campaign; take some chances with it, and see what works for your group.

CLASSES

Your class is the reason you're not dead yet. You are a capable person; maybe not a sane or sensible one, but you can handle yourself. Your class gives you access to abilities that let you affect the world around you or resist misfortune. When you achieve beats from your calling, you'll gain an advance from your class at the appropriate level.

Upon selecting a class you automatically gain every related core ability. Each class has a few Zenith abilities: these are the ultimate expression of the class, and they're not the sort of power that you can sustain in an ongoing campaign. They also mark the end of the character's progression as they achieve their goal.

Once a player unlocks a zenith advance, the GM should make it clear that they have only one or two games remaining before they should retire their character. Most of the zenith abilities have this baked in; activating them retires the character in exchange for a burst of tremendous power.

CLEAVER: Body-warping heartsblood hunters that consume their prey to fuel their terrible powers.

DEADWALKER: Half-dead drifters with the keys to the back door of heaven.

DEEP APIARIST: Occultists who fill their bodies with glyph-marked bees and can manipulate reality.

HERETIC: Zealots exiled from the City Above for their faith; they seek the Moon Beneath.

HOUND: Hard-bitten mercenaries with an undying legion of warriors at their back.

INCARNADINE: Damned clerics of the hungry, cruel deity of debt.

JUNK MAGE: Magic addicts with a direct line to entities slumbering in the depths.

VERMISSIAN KNIGHT: Armoured explorers and protectors of a cursed mass transit network.

WITCH: Carriers of a blood disease that lets them reshape flesh and bone; loved and feared.

CHARACTER GENERATION STEP-BY-STEP

- Select an ancestry for your character.
- Choose a calling and record the granted ability.
- Choose a class and record all of its core abilities.
- Select one major and three minor abilities from your class.
- Choose equipment.
- Select two beats for your first session.
- Answer the questions from your calling.
- Add finishing details.

DETAILS

Aside from the mechanical elements of your character, you'll need to determine what they look like, what name they go by, how they act and any other number of things within the fiction. Don't feel like you have to detail everything about your character up-front; instead, work in broad strokes and leave room for exploration later.

PEOPLE IN THE HEART

In the City Above, racial discrimination and war ensure that people of different ancestries live segmented, segregated lives outside of rare interzones. In the Heart, tensions are much more relaxed; prejudices are eroded when diverse communities band together against the dark. Your ancestry – or “race” – can be derived from any of the four cultures in this part of the world. Your ancestry has no bearing on in-game mechanics and only influences the fiction. The four most common ancestries for delvers are Drow, Humans, Aelfir and Gnolls. See the following pages for more on each.

DROW, OR DARK ELVES

Monochromatic elves with a strong sensitivity to sunlight. The lands surrounding the Heart are predominantly populated by dark elves, including the towering city of Spire (where they are subjugated by the aelfir) and the rolling desert caravan city of Aliquam. Drow live to around a hundred years of age, but the cruel conditions of Spire means that few of them reach 50. Drow do not give birth to viable young – instead, they lay fist-sized fleshy eggs that must be tended to for months until they develop into an infant.

Drow regularly find their way into the Heart, either actively fleeing Spire or trying to find someone or something to call their own in the depths. Some are pilgrims tracing fragmented maps to find the Moon Beneath, tired of the state-mandated religions in Spire.

The Drow of Spire predominantly worship Our Glorious Lady, a facet of their once-tripartite moon goddess; venerating the other two facets is forbidden. This religion focuses on six primary virtues, and it is considered good and proper for a drow to live their life in accordance with them: Community, Sagacity, Fury, Grace, Tenacity and Vigilance.

Answer one of the following questions when you make your character:

- **You were born in the City Above** and served a durance – four years of indentured servitude – under the rule of the cruel aelfir. What were you forced to do?
- **You were born in the City Beneath.** Where does your family live, and who or what do they worship?
- **You're a traveller from a distant land** – the desert of Aliquam, the treacherous foothills of Nujab or the warrenous Home Nations. Where are you from, and why aren't you there anymore?

Example drow names: *Therese, Livrade, Ypolita, Damon, Asseyon.*



When you generate your character, roll twice to create some trinkets and keepsakes they've brought with them into the City Beneath:

1. Deck of Malrique fortune cards
2. Yeast mother (name her)
3. Half a bottle of malak tincture; all that remains of your stash
4. Dog-tags from the Allied Defence Forces
5. Friendly but stupid pocket-mouse (name him)
6. Hand-drawn image of your dad's largest pig
7. Bag of statuettes depicting the The Many, a gang of refugee gods
8. Portable triptych shrine to the Moon Goddess, incense, candles
9. Small collection of Half-sten Horror sensationalist pulp literature
10. Coupon good for 1 (one) skywhale trip to Ys
11. Warm, hand-knitted scarf and gloves
12. Battered leather mask
13. Love-letters sent from the war
14. Midwife's blood-letting kit
15. Brightly-coloured headscarf and dark glasses
16. Bottle of corpsefruit liqueur
17. Your mother's second-best dagger
18. Votive image of Hallow Hearts-Breath-Halting
19. Well-worn brass statuette of an open-mouthed toad
20. Wanted poster from the City Above with your face on it

HUMANS

In this part of the world, humans have a reputation for digging into the ground to uncover ancient relics, and it's not entirely inaccurate. They have emerged from their scattered island nations in the Eastern Kingdoms bearing retro-engineered technology, and are eager to sell it to the highest bidder. Humans live brief but bright lives in the eyes of the elves, passing away at 60 or so, often from illness or injury.

The discovery of spireblack processing and the resulting rise in arms manufacture is almost entirely their doing. They have become prominent enough to gain a seat at the Council that rules the City Above through their shrewd politics, the vast sums gained from their discoveries and the way that they will do anything if the price is right.

Answer one of the following questions when you make your character:

- **You are from the Eastern Kingdoms.** You came to Spire with nothing but the clothes on your back and a dream, looking for excitement and profit. What went wrong?
- **You were kicked out** of a retro-engineering or magical college thanks to your unorthodox beliefs and practices. What did you do?
- **You're third-generation Heartborn**, and not at all like the humans on the surface. What incorrect assumption do people most often make about you?

Example human names: *Whent, Raffid, Dolwyn, Urwain, Josef, Ingwyn.*



When you generate your character, roll twice to create some trinkets and keepsakes they've brought with them into the City Beneath:

1. Grail charm made of wyvern-bone
2. Bullet with your own name carved on it
3. Broken pocket-watch with a picture of your mum in it
4. Arcology shard necklace
5. String of flickering coloured magelights
6. Votive image of a deceased Wanderer-King
7. Dog-eared Whitecross travel documents
8. Long-stemmed pipe and pungent tobacco
9. Feather-tokens to Luxulyan, Duke of Air
10. A single mechanical finger (in place of your own)
11. Battered and oft-repaired green coat
12. Custom scrimshaw kit, well-used
13. Sporadically-updated travel diary
14. Hard-to-clean drinking horn
15. Matching shell-casing charm bracelets, variety of calibres
16. Three slim unopened cans of cooked eels
17. Once-colourful mercenary fatigues
18. Harmonica inscribed with "SUMMER-COURT"
19. Pop-arcana book about humanity's ability to ascend to godhood, and how YOU can do it
20. Brightly-coloured fish in a jar (name him)

AELFIR, OR HIGH ELVES

Aelfir benefit from massive privilege; they rule the City Above and lead lives of bizarre luxury in their frozen palace of Amaranth. Some turn away from a life of power to seek meaning in the lawless city below, while others pursue the dark secrets whispered about in perfumed boudoirs. They are tall, impossibly graceful and can sustain their lives supposedly indefinitely with curious rituals and surgeries. Aelfir in the City Above wear masks to hide their faces from their inferiors; in the City Beneath, only traditionalists wear them.

In the City Above, their rule is cruel and capricious; it is self-serving and deleterious to those around them. When venturing into the City Below, most aelfir know that they lost any authority as soon as they passed through Derelictus. Many have adjusted to their new place in life. It's foolish not to; the Heart treats everyone equally.

Answer one of the following questions when you make your character:

- **You still wear your mask.** What does it look like, and why do you wear it?
- **Your family name was ruined** due to a cataclysmic social faux pas. What did they do?
- **You still cling to one luxury** that keeps you centred – a habit, a style of clothing, a drug, etc. What is it?

Example aelfir names: *Gather-Spring's-Heartbreak, Ash-On-Snow, The-Faithful-Unnumbered, Ink-Floods-The-Vein.* (Most use a single part of their name in conversations with acquaintances.)



When you generate your character, roll twice to create some trinkets and keepsakes they've brought with them into the City Beneath:

1. Vial of orchid-oil perfume
2. Fingerbone necklace
3. Your brother's preserved eye in a glass jar
4. Oversized and awkward book of family history
5. Your spouse's death-mask
6. Devotional circlet bearing imagery of the Solar Pantheon
7. Semi-functional music box
8. Ticket stub from an Opera-Orgy
9. Mummified cat (name her)
10. Elaborate and shrill-sounding flute
11. Glasses with red-tinted smoked lenses
12. Bone-pipe and the dregs of a poppy-dust bag
13. The flensing knife you got for your fifth birthday
14. Sword hilt with a half-inch of broken blade
15. Sacred symbols of the Old Gods, outlawed in the City Above
16. Metal teeth (original teeth removed due to boredom)
17. Spritz bottle and pocket fan, to keep from overheating
18. Stunted tree that grows sour fruit
19. Paints, brushes, and an easel of sorts
20. Patchy evidence regarding your step-sister's betrayal

GNOLLS

Hyena-headed people from the south with fur that covers their bodies. The gnolls are at war with the aelfir, and are forbidden from entering the city of Spire; many have gone into hiding in the City Beneath. The gnollish empire (and its capital city Al'Marah) is founded on their advanced demonological and mechanical abilities; there are tales of djinn being bound into brass spheres to power uncanny devices. In the confines of the Heart, where the gaps between realities are thin, they can achieve unthought-of results in mechanocultism – and great machines from ages past thrum and whirr in the hidden depths, just waiting to be found.

Gnolls have a reputation for being angry, bestial warriors – but a lot of this is propaganda on the part of the aelfir, and they're no more warlike than any other people. Some gnolls try to use their public image to their advantage and cultivate fearsome visages, but the majority are keen to be left to their own devices.

Answer one of the following questions when you make your character:

- **You travelled to the Heart** in search of something specific. Were you part of a team, or were you on your own – and did you find what you were looking for?
- **You fled Spire** – you were an escaped prisoner of war, a refugee or an agent on a clandestine mission. What do you miss most about the surface world?
- **You were born down here.** What image do you project to impress, surprise or intimidate people?

Example gnoll names: Some gnolls translate their names into the local language: Pitchwood, Roseglass, Herald or Redeye. Many use original names from their homeland, though: Brakesh, Ahkoura, Rahman, Dris, Majyd.



When you generate your character, roll twice to create some trinkets and keepsakes they've brought with them into the City Beneath:

1. Tiny sealed box that gets angry when you shake it
2. Several cubes of refined sugar wrapped in red paper
3. Annotated map of the war-torn Dust region
4. Stag beetle in a jar (name them)
5. Knotted weave of string that describes your grandmother
6. Poetry anthology with your work in it
7. Nujabian military fatigues
8. Spyglass built by your lover
9. Warm, leathery egg
10. Hair-dressing scissors, razor and mirror
11. Painted dog skull
12. Book of unsolved mathematical equations
13. Small sphere with southern star-map on it
14. Zither inscribed with vine-leaves
15. Book of macabre fairy-tales
16. Tacky lenticular image of the Source Pyramid in Al'Marah
17. Vial of rainwater from the southlands
18. Brass-inlaid tin half-filled with a brown, gritty stimulant
19. Bag of boiled sweets (various flavours)
20. Djinn-battery you don't know how to recharge



ADVENTURE

The City Above holds no more excitement for you. In the City Beneath, on the knife-edge between real and unreal, you can be who you really are.

CORE ABILITY

LEGENDARY: *You strive to live up to the stories that they'll tell of your exploits. When you gain a minor advance, refresh D6. When you gain a major advance, refresh D8.*

When you create your character, answer these questions:

- What drove you out of the City Above?
- You and another player character barely escaped from a dangerous situation recently. Who was it and what happened?
- Recently, you and another character returned from a delve with an item for a wealthy patron. They wouldn't give it up – why, and what was it?
- What's the most dangerous beast or individual you've heard tell of, and why haven't you defeated them yet?

MINOR BEATS

- ☐ Charm someone with tales of your exploits.
- ☐ Engage in reckless abandon with drink, drugs or sex.
- ☐ Slay a beast that drops resources of D10 or higher.
- ☐ Access a haven in tier 2 of the Heart.
- ☐ Take Major **Blood** fallout.
- ☐ Take Major **Fortune** fallout.
- ☐ Defeat a powerful foe one-on-one.
- ☐ Help an important or influential figure in a haven.
- ☐ Refuse to back down when it would be beneficial to do so.
- ☐ Establish a connection.
- ☐ Get in trouble with the Hounds.
- ☐ Rescue someone from peril.
- ☐ Make a dramatic entrance that's a Risky action.
- ☐ Claim a resource of at least D10 from a dangerous location.
- ☐ Defend a haven from attack.
- ☐ Have at least three havens know your name, for good or ill.
- ☐ Rush into danger before anyone else.
- ☐ Have a cocktail, fighting move or legendary beast named after you.
- ☐ Go somewhere where no-one else has stepped foot for at least a century.
- ☐ Win an unarmed brawl in a haven.
- ☐ Kick someone off a tall structure (they really deserved it).

MAJOR BEATS

- ☐ Acquire a rare or powerful (D12 value) item, preferably magic.
- ☐ Slay a beast that's at least five times your size.
- ☐ Have a landmark or connection named after you.
- ☐ Upgrade a haunt to D12.
- ☐ Save a haven from destruction or doom.
- ☐ Connect three havens to one another with permanent paths.
- ☐ Successfully perform a Dangerous action that saves the day.
- ☐ Catalogue your exploits for an extended period; either do it yourself or hire a bard.
- ☐ Lead a group or organisation (other than your delving party).
- ☐ Successfully lead, and take full credit for, a delve that takes you to Tier 3 or deeper.

ZENITH BEATS

- ☐ Reach Tier 4 of the Heart.
- ☐ Lead a haven to prosperity.

Roll 1d10 on the following table or choose to determine what you carry with you to mark your calling:

1. Pulp novel loosely based on your exploits
2. Mouth organ
3. Spidersilk scarf in a dashing colour
4. Inaccurate map of the Heart you bought off some guy in Derelictus
5. Copy of "RAVENOUS SHE-WITCHES OF HALLOW", a best-selling sensationalist book
6. Paper and sketching charcoal
7. Fake "Abomination-hunting" license
8. Unpunched Vermissian ticket used as a good-luck charm
9. Letters from your mum asking when you're going to come home
10. Expensive kohl eyeliner and pocket-mirror

ENLIGHTENMENT

Everyone said that what you intended to do was impossible, but you've never let "possibility" slow you down. You're looking for secrets hidden deep within the earth. You know that the Heart holds the answers to all your questions; no matter what it takes, you'll get them.

CORE ABILITY

UNORTHODOX METHODS. *You blend together method and madness in pursuit of your goals. Gain the Discern skill. Once per session, before you roll dice to resolve an action, instead state that your result is a 6. You succeed but take stress.*

When you create your character, answer these questions:

- What "impossible" thing are you attempting to achieve in the City Beneath?
- What's the first step on your journey?
- Choose another player character. They've been invaluable in your journey so far. What have you learned from them?
- Choose another player character. You know they're hiding secrets from you – why do you suspect they're doing this?



MINOR BEATS

- ☐ Allude to the events that led you to seek forbidden knowledge to achieve an impossible task.
- ☐ Put the acquisition of knowledge above preserving the lives of your allies.
- ☐ Gain access to knowledge that someone tried to conceal.
- ☐ Gain favour with a faction that can help you learn more about your goal.
- ☐ Take Minor **Mind** fallout.
- ☐ Destroy evidence or rhetoric that proves your task to be impossible.
- ☐ Sell or sacrifice a D8 or higher resource to secure a secret.
- ☐ Reach a landmark on tier 3 of the Heart.
- ☐ Find a helpful text.
- ☐ Succeed at a task that someone else has recently failed to achieve.
- ☐ Mark D8 stress to an NPC bond and describe what happens.
- ☐ Acquire an NPC bond who has access to useful information.
- ☐ Establish a connection on a delve.
- ☐ Take Minor **Supplies** fallout.
- ☐ Flee from combat or a similarly dangerous situation, or hide until it all blows over.
- ☐ Release your shocking findings in a journal published in the City Above.
- ☐ Meet someone from your old life who's trying to get you to give up on your quest.
- ☐ Dissect something or interrogate someone that can shed light on your task.
- ☐ Buy some cutting-edge, experimental or finely-made equipment and use it on a delve.

MAJOR BEATS

- ☐ Take Major **Mind** fallout.
- ☐ Kill someone who is trying to stop you from claiming knowledge.
- ☐ Sell or sacrifice a D12 resource to secure a secret.
- ☐ Destroy a haunt to learn more about your task.
- ☐ Gain authority within a faction that you can use to learn more about your goal.
- ☐ Find a source of knowledge on Tier 3 of the Heart.
- ☐ Take Major **Supplies** fallout.
- ☐ Acquire a renowned piece of equipment.
- ☐ Attract a protégé who's read your work and is determined to learn more.
- ☐ Explore a mysterious tower whilst on a delve (this increases the difficulty of the delve by D12).

ZENITH BEATS

- ☐ Find the final secret you have so desperately sought and use it to solve your impossible task.
- ☐ Find the final secret you have so desperately sought and destroy it so no one else can know of it.

Roll 1d10 on the following table or choose to determine what you carry with you to mark your calling:

1. Set of fragile magnifying lenses
2. Book of handwritten theories and observations
3. Portable alchemy kit in a leather box
4. Dried dream-mushrooms
5. Heady incense sticks that burn dirty-blue smoke
6. Bundled-up red-string-and-pins collage identifying the fools who tried to stop you
7. List of people who are Going To Pay, some names crossed out
8. Bag of heavy glass fortune stones
9. Taxidermied owl (name them)
10. Imported book of meditative stances and recipes to cleanse your spirit

FORCED

You don't want to be down here, but you don't have any choice. You're a prisoner, an initiate to a cult or someone's blackmailing you.

CORE ABILITY

COLLATERAL. *You have a knack for getting behind someone else when things kick off. Once per session, allocate stress to the nearest friendly target (PC or NPC) instead of marking it yourself.*

When you create your character, answer these questions:

- Who, or what, are your masters?
- What do your masters want?
- How are your masters maintaining power over you?
- How do your masters contact you?
- Choose another player character. They have history with your masters too. What's their relationship?



MINOR BEATS

- ☐ Receive orders from your masters.
- ☐ Follow orders from your masters, even though they put you at risk.
- ☐ Rebel against your orders, even though this puts you at risk.
- ☐ Forge a friendship or romantic relationship with an NPC.
- ☐ Get into trouble as someone discovers your chequered past.
- ☐ Betray someone because of your true nature.
- ☐ Take Minor **Fortune** fallout.
- ☐ Do something dangerous to conceal your past.
- ☐ Invoke your masters' name to get what you want.
- ☐ As a result of using the **COLLATERAL** ability, an NPC is taken out of action or a PC suffers fallout.
- ☐ Find a sanctuary where your masters cannot reach you.
- ☐ Rescue an NPC from trouble that you caused.
- ☐ Receive a time-critical mission that leads you away from your other objectives.
- ☐ Receive aid from someone reprehensible who's in the employ of your master.
- ☐ Send a requested resource (D8 or higher) back to your master rather than using it yourself.
- ☐ Perform a seemingly unconnected action for your masters that has grim consequences.
- ☐ Cover up a crime that someone else committed on behalf of your masters.
- ☐ Claim you're doing something on behalf of your masters when in fact it's for your own ends.
- ☐ Involve an NPC in your master's schemes.
- ☐ Do a favour for someone to gain leverage over them.

MAJOR BEATS

- ☐ Destroy something important to your masters.
- ☐ Learn or possess something that lessens the control your masters have over you.
- ☐ Perform a truly reprehensible act on behalf of your masters.
- ☐ Suffer the consequences of refusing to perform an important act on behalf of your masters.
- ☐ Take Major **Fortune** fallout.
- ☐ An important or beloved NPC dies after you bring them into your master's schemes.
- ☐ Thanks to your actions, a haven is pitched into deadly chaos.
- ☐ Coerce an important or beloved NPC into undertaking a task they don't want to do.
- ☐ Aid another person, who you know and hate, that is also in the employ of your masters.
- ☐ Complete a major objective for your master – something taking at least two sessions to achieve.

ZENITH BEATS

- ☐ End the control your master has over you.
- ☐ Take bloody revenge on your master.

Roll 1d10 on the following table or choose to determine what you carry with you to mark your calling:

1. Daguerreotype of your son
2. Moonsilver collar
3. Signed contract detailing your "employment"
4. Matchbook from The Manticore, an up-Spire casino
5. Subjugation sliver implanted in your neck
6. Guild brand on your upper arm
7. Deed to an apartment in Ivory Row up-Spire
8. Mark on your chest where your soul used to be, before you sold it
9. Your master's sigil, wrought from iron
10. Codebook showing you how and where to make your reports



HEARTSONG

When you sleep, you dream of the Heart. You're half-mad with glimpses of knowledge; mad enough to go ever deeper into the undercity, looking for revelations.

CORE ABILITY

IN THE BLOOD. *You move through the Heart as if blessed.* +1 **Echo** Protection. Once per situation, when you take stress to any resistance other than **Echo**, allocate it to **Echo**.

When you create your character, answer these questions:

- Which three images, symbols, people or creatures do you repeatedly see when you dream?
- What signs do you look for to recognise where the Heart is strongest?
- You recently witnessed an unearthly sight with another player character. Who was it, what happened and how did they react?
- Your connection to the Heart has touched you in some way. How does that manifest?

MINOR BEATS

- ☐ Following a long ritual, name The Heart. Only refer to it by this name from now on.
- ☐ Take Minor **Echo** fallout.
- ☐ See something from your dreams in the real world.
- ☐ Consume something of the Heart (eat the flesh of a heartsblood beast, etc).
- ☐ Be rendered helpless in the Heart for an hour or more.
- ☐ Perform a rite at a place of power (Tier 2 or deeper).
- ☐ Damage or sabotage a haven, letting the Heart in.
- ☐ Sacrifice something you love to the Heart.
- ☐ Allow something dangerous of the Heart to live when you could have killed it.
- ☐ Let your curiosity lead you into danger.
- ☐ Undergo a trance-like vision that lasts for hours.
- ☐ Communicate with something of the Heart.
- ☐ Witness an emissary of the Heart Itself.
- ☐ Experience a pulse – the changing of the Heart from one state to another – first-hand.
- ☐ Receive insight from a witch, a heartsblooded person or something stranger still.
- ☐ Gain information on why you have been chosen by the Heart.
- ☐ Receive a strange surgical implant or heartsblood transfusion.
- ☐ Build a shrine to the Heart somewhere important.
- ☐ Terrify or intrigue an NPC with your obsession.
- ☐ Perform an act of service to an NPC witch.
- ☐ Shelter someone touched by the Heart from persecution.
- ☐ Find a heart-touched sapling on a delve and bring it back to a haven for planting.
- ☐ Convince the party to collect **Cursed** resources on a delve, adding D6 to the delve's resistance.

MAJOR BEATS

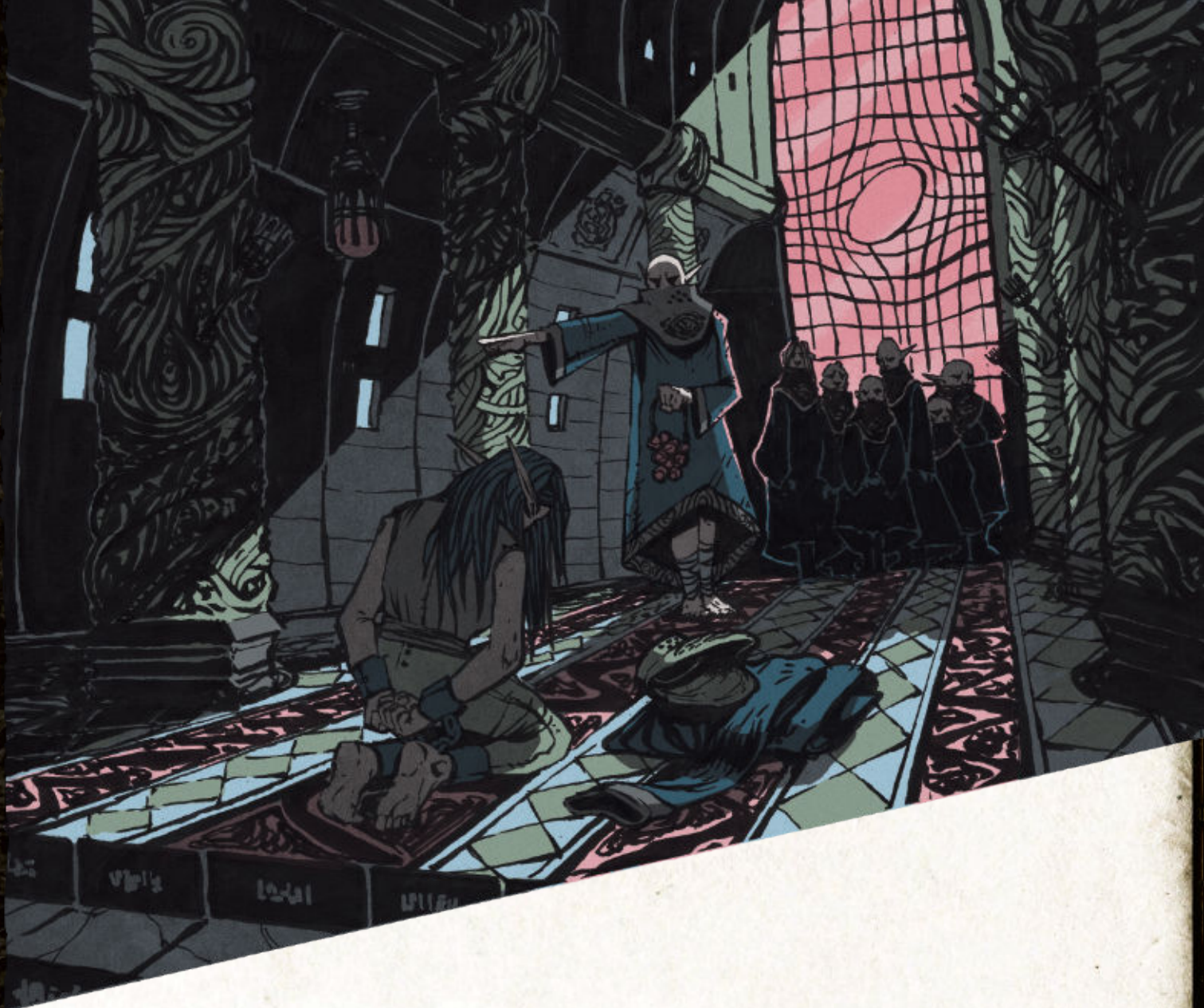
- ☐ Take Major **Echo** fallout.
- ☐ Perform a rite at a place of power (Tier 3 or deeper).
- ☐ Sacrifice someone important to the Heart.
- ☐ Establish a bond with a hearts-blood beast (Tier 2 or deeper).
- ☐ Show the truth of the Heart's majesty to an outsider (Tier 2 or deeper).
- ☐ Meet and learn from an emissary of the Heart.
- ☐ Destroy a haven, returning the land to the Heart.
- ☐ One of your bonds takes Critical fallout thanks to your actions.
- ☐ Deliver a crucial message on behalf of the Heart.
- ☐ Visit three Vermissian Stations.

ZENITH BEATS

- ☐ Become one with the Heart, and bind your essence to it.
- ☐ Break the hold that the Heart has over you, ripping it from your body and spirit.

Roll 1d10 on the following table or choose to determine what you carry with you to mark your calling:

1. Ink-blotted dream journal with maps of places you saw when you were asleep
2. Bag of bitter stimulant pastilles
3. Steel syringe and opiate powder
4. The word "THEOLOSIAN" growing over your upper chest
5. Barely-viable homonculus you shamefully coughed up or excised (name it)
6. Twenty sketches of the man you're convinced you're going to meet down here, all made by different artists
7. Signed copy of **BEYOND THE EDGE OF MADNESS: A Year In The Heart** by Gris Han-neman
8. Mandala made from hollow crow bones
9. Mad, impressionist votive image of a Witch
10. Greenish candles that help you sleep a dream-less sleep (sometimes)



PENITENT

You betrayed the trust of your order. Due to negligence, cowardice or malice, you caused them great harm. Now, wracked with guilt, you have sworn to make amends by venturing deep into the Heart and performing acts in service of your order.

CORE ABILITY

NOT YET. *Your willpower, fuelled with guilt, is legendary. Once per session, activate this ability to avoid suffering negative effects from **Blood** or **Mind** fallout for the remainder of the situation.*

When you create your character, answer these questions:

- What marks your order out from others like it?
- What evidence of your failings is visible in the City Beneath?
- Pick one of the other player characters; they were present at your betrayal. How were they involved?
- Pick one of the other player characters; you look up to them as an example of how to live one's life. What inspired this?

MINOR BEATS

- ☐ Take Minor **Blood** fallout.
- ☐ Help someone vulnerable with no expectation of repayment.
- ☐ Repair something physical – a bridge, a door, a wall, etc. – that someone needs.
- ☐ De-escalate a situation that would have led to bloodshed.
- ☐ Spare someone's life.
- ☐ Make penance at a site that is important to your order.
- ☐ Punish an NPC for wrongdoing.
- ☐ Meet an NPC who hates you for what you've done.
- ☐ Perform an act in service to your order.
- ☐ Bring bodily harm to those who stand against your order.
- ☐ Sabotage the assets of those who stand against your order.
- ☐ Establish a connection to a landmark that's important to your order.
- ☐ Witness first-hand the tragic extent of your failings.
- ☐ Donate needed supplies to your order.
- ☐ Teach someone the value of your order's philosophies.
- ☐ Put yourself in great danger to protect your companions.
- ☐ Make reparations to an NPC that you have personally wronged.
- ☐ Do something your order would frown upon.
- ☐ Rescue or assist an NPC who belongs to your order.
- ☐ Openly attack the enemies of your order.
- ☐ Refuse a desirable offer due to the restrictions of your penance.

MAJOR BEATS

- ☐ Take Major **Blood** fallout.
- ☐ Convert an important NPC to your order's cause.
- ☐ Establish continual connections between two landmarks on different tiers that are important to your order.
- ☐ Perform an act that, if your order discovered it, would undo your penance.
- ☐ Betray someone who really trusts you.
- ☐ Save a landmark dedicated to your order.
- ☐ Attack the enemies of your order when the odds are massively stacked against you.
- ☐ Eliminate or completely undermine a faction that is opposed to your order.
- ☐ Your order suffers a devastating setback, and you believe that it's your fault.
- ☐ A member of your order begs you to perform an undesirable task; to refuse would be disgraceful.

ZENITH BEATS

- ☐ Be truly absolved of your sins by a higher power.
- ☐ Betray your order – intentionally, this time.

Roll 1d10 on the following table or choose to determine what you carry with you to mark your calling:

1. Absolution chains (heavy)
2. Vellum scroll bearing a record of your crimes
3. Still-itching tattoo depicting your sins
4. The skull of someone you loved
5. Vial of ashes with a name on it
6. Masonry fragment from a destroyed statue
7. Book of handwritten, melodramatic poetry
8. Locket depicting a beautiful one-eyed drow
9. Ceremonial bronze Watchful Eye
10. Brand identifying you as one of the secretive knights of the Covenant of the Fallen Tower

CLEAVER



The Heart is a wild place, and it calls to wild people – those on the edge of society who find that the yoke of civilisation chafes against their skin. The wildest of all are known as Cleavers. They step out into the shifting nightmare of the City Beneath and make a home there. They are the first people to set foot in each new chamber of the place, forging ahead through a dark and strange frontier.

Their bodies change. Some welcome and seek out transformation, being unsatisfied with their physical forms – they modify their bodies with surgeries that are impossible in the City Above, or hunt and consume beasts of the Heart to gain their power. Some struggle with the change, but it is inevitable. Just as they scar the Heart into new patterns with each footstep forward, the Heart scars them in return and remakes them in a more suitable form: twisting horns, night-black eyes, curious senses unknown to the surface world and so on.

Cleavers are a common sight amongst parties of delvers, especially those in need of a guide – no-one knows the Heart like they do. No amount of research, no technological device and no arcane scrying ritual can tell you as much as burying yourself waist-deep in the red wet heaven and eating the bounty it generously offers up.

CORE TRAITS

SKILL: Hunt

DOMAIN: Cursed

RESOURCE:

A freshly-harvested heart that still occasionally twitches **D6 Wild**

EQUIPMENT:

Hunting Knife **Kill D6**

Pick one:

Cleaver **Kill D8, Brutal, Tiring**

Bone charms and animal-gut sutures **Mend Blood D6**

Heavy-draw bow **Kill D8, Ranged, Tiring**

CORE ABILITIES

HEARTSBLOOD

You have a bone-deep connection to the Heart Itself; the closer you get, the more powerful you become. Your minimum protection value for all resistances is equal to the tier of the Heart you are currently on. This value doesn't add to other sources of protection, but your base protection can't be lower than your current tier unless you specifically lose access to it due to fallout.

THE RED FEAST

Your crucible guts pluck memories from the meat. When you eat a resource, you gain any domains associated with that resource until the end of the situation. If you already have access to the domain, gain an appropriate knack. There's no limit to what you can eat, but tough or noxious materials might require an **Endure+Cursed** check to avoid causing yourself harm. Consuming resources requires your attention and leaves you exposed, so doing it successfully in stressful situations (such as combat) could require a **Sneak** or **Evade** roll.

MINOR ABILITIES

CALL OF THE WILD

With an almighty howl or a resounding blast on your horn, you pitch the area around you into disarray. Gain the **Wild** domain. Once per session, you can summon a chaotic horde of beasts (or just one big one) that throws the area around you into bestial chaos to conceal an escape, make communication nigh-impossible or create a distraction.

DARKLING EYES

Years of exploring the City Beneath have rid you of the need for creature comforts such as warmth, light and shelter. Gain the **Delve** skill. Your jet-black eyes allow you to see in pitch blackness as though it were full daylight.

DESPERATE MEASURES

You've eaten people. Sometimes to survive; other times to prosper. Gain the **Desolate** domain. You can consume the flesh of something or someone that you have recently killed and gain a skill associated with them for the remainder of the situation.

DOMINION

Gain access to one of the following domains: **Cursed, Desolate, Occult, Religion, Wild, Warren**. You can take this advance more than once.

FELL METABOLISM

Food is just fuel to stoke the fire undying within you. Gain the **Endure** skill. When you use **THE RED FEAST** ability, you may choose to have your attacks gain the **Brutal** tag for a number of actions equal to the amount rolled on the resource dice instead of gaining a domain.

FRACTURED FORM

Your flesh glistens with mirror shards that twitch and glitter to blur your silhouette. Gain the **Evade** skill. Small animals and insects are drawn to you and will perform your bidding to their best of their limited ability. Once per delve, you may use your adoring swarm as a piece of equipment (Delve D8).

GUT INSTINCT

Gain access to one of the following skills: **Compel, Delve, Discern, Endure, Evade, Hunt, Kill, Mend**. You can take this advance more than once.

INHUMAN

Gain +1 protection in the **Blood, Echo, Fortune** or **Supplies** resistance. You can take this advance more than once.

PITCHSKIN

Your skin bubbles and shifts into night-black tones as tar seeps through the pores. Gain the **Sneak** skill. The secretions from your skin are flammable and adhesive, acting as a sort of volatile glue you can exude at will.

SYMBIOTIC

You place a hand on a wall of flesh and feel the heartbeat of the City Beneath. Gain +2 **Fortune** protection.

TWISTING TERRITORY

You've fought tooth and nail in tunnels and pits to defend what's yours. Gain the **Warren** domain. Once per situation, you can ask the GM who's in charge of the immediate area around you. By smell, sight or some other esoteric sense, you gain an intuitive understanding of the apex predator or alpha creature (whether that's a person or a beast) in the local area. When you use this power, the target gets the uncanny feeling that they're under threat.

UNMAKING CLAWS

Your hands, anointed in the blood of angels, flicker in and out of reality. Gain the **Kill** skill. Your unarmed attacks gain the **Piercing** tag.

VESSEL

You let the energies of the Heart wash through you and fill you with glory, rather than struggling against them. Gain +2 **Echo** protection.

MAJOR ABILITIES

BLOODBOUND BEAST

You are accompanied by a ragged cryptid that follows your commands – an ancient stone-browed stag, a razortoothed heartsblood hound or something stranger. You feed it your blood, and it fights for you. You gain the **Bloodybound** tag on all weapons as you and your companion work in concert.

- **MINOR: PACK HUNTER.** If you mark stress to **Blood** to activate the **Bloodybound** tag, roll with mastery when you use the **Delve** and **Hunt** skills for the remainder of the current situation.
- **MINOR: POUNCE.** Once per situation, select an adversary you can see. That adversary marks D6 stress as your companion leaps on them.

- **MINOR: FAITHFUL UNTIL THE END.** If you take Critical fallout and would die, you do not die – instead, you are rescued by your companion and dragged to safety at the nearest landmark. Your companion dies in your arms, exhausted and wounded, after you regain consciousness. Remove **BLOODBOUND BEAST** from your character sheet and gain an immediate major advance. You can't access **BLOODBOUND BEAST** ever again.

CHIMERIC STRAIN

*With the sound of cracking muscle and twisting tendon, your form is transmuted into something terrifying. When you activate this power, mark D4 stress to **Echo**. For the remainder of the current situation, all melee attacks you make gain the **Brutal** and **Wyrd** tags.*

- **MINOR: BLIGHTED.** When you activate **CHIMERIC STRAIN**, increase the **Echo** stress inflicted by 1 step and gain +2 **Blood** Protection until the end of the current situation in addition to any other effects.
- **MINOR: HORNED.** When you activate **CHIMERIC STRAIN**, increase the **Echo** stress inflicted by 1 step and increase your melee damage by 1 step until the end of the current situation, in addition to any other effects.
- **MINOR: BEZERK.** When you activate **CHIMERIC STRAIN**, increase the **Echo** stress inflicted by 1 step and ignore the effects of **Blood** fallout until the end of the situation. You fight on, heedless of the pain.

EXTINCTION BOW

You carry a huge bow capable of launching specially-made arrows at your prey – the mark of a true hearts-blooded hunter. When you take this ability, you gain access to (or build) an enormous ranged weapon with the following profile: (Kill D10, Tiring, Ranged, Expensive.)

- **MINOR: HARPOON.** Once per situation, when you inflict stress to an adversary with the **EXTINCTION BOW**, you attach yourself to them with a rope or chain. They can't flee while attached – and neither can you.
- **MINOR: HUNTER'S EYE.** Once per situation, when you and your allies are in danger, point out a tactically useful element of the landscape. The first time an ally interacts with the element, they roll with mastery on their subsequent action.
- **MINOR: NIGHTMARE ARROW.** Gain access to the following weapon: (Kill D8, Spread, Ranged, One-Shot).

MONSTROUS APPETITE

*When you eat, you unhinge your jaw and wolf down anything within reach until your belly is distended and you are resplendent with power. When you use **THE RED FEAST** to consume a resource that has a domain you can access, remove stress from **Blood** or **Echo** equal to the amount rolled on the dice instead.*

- **MINOR: REJUVENATION.** Once per session, when you use **MONSTROUS APPETITE** to consume a resource that has a domain that you have access to – and the resource has a value of D8 or higher – you can remove a Minor **Blood** or **Echo** fallout entirely.
- **MINOR: TAINTED MEAT.** Once per session, when you use **MONSTROUS APPETITE** to consume a resource with the **Cursed** domain with a value of D8 or higher, add 1 to the minimum protection provided by your **HEARTSBLOOD** core ability instead of removing stress. This effect lasts until the end of the situation.
- **MINOR: HORRENDOUS BITE.** Once per situation, when you inflict stress with an unarmed attack on an adversary, you may choose to lower their difficulty by one step to a minimum of Standard until the end of the situation.

THE WILD HUNT

The Heart sings of flesh and plenty; you echo that sickening song. You may lead a group in communion with the Heart. This requires you to pass an **Endure+Cursed** roll, and the check is Risky if you're in an area with the **Haven** tag. (If you fail the check, you can try again later this session.) Those who commune gain the **Hunt** skill if they don't already have it, and increase the stress they inflict on delves by 1 step until the end of the current delve.

- **MINOR: ECHOES OF THE CITY BENEATH.** When you use **THE WILD HUNT**, instead of the **Hunt** skill, you may grant the **Delve** skill to participants. Pick which skill you grant each time you use the ability.
- **MINOR: STORYTELLER.** Once per session, when you're tracking a beast, you can declare it to be a renowned beast – you've heard tell of it before. Tell the party what's so dangerous about it, or repeat a legend of its exploits. This increases the beast's protection by 1, its damage by 1 step and any resources gathered from it by 2 steps.
- **MINOR: BOUNTY SHARED.** When you complete a delve or hunt and kill a renowned beast (see above), everyone who took part in **THE WILD HUNT** may remove D6 stress from **Fortune** or **Supplies**.

ZENITH ABILITIES

ANGELIC

You undergo the ultimate heartsblood transformation – you become an agent of the Heart Itself, a red and mighty angel, and your approach is ruin incarnate. Following a transformation process that is either distressingly sudden or agonisingly slow, your flesh and bones burst and reform into those of a towering Angel (p. 176). You are as powerful and ruinous as any other Angel, but you retain your will – for the remainder of the current situation, at least. After that, you are absorbed back into the flesh of the Heart, and become another agent of unreality that will beset delvers in centuries to come.

LEGENDARY BEAST

You shed what little remains of your human form and ascend into something many-limbed and majestic. When you gain access to this ability, you begin your hunt to slay the Beast: the capital-B Beast, an ancient creature wrought from stone and muscle and petrified wood. You will kill the Beast, and in doing so, you understand it perfectly. You become the new Beast, an epitome of bestial power and a legendary terror in the City Beneath.

You become part of the wilderness of the Heart; it grows around you more than ever, blossoming into patterns that you dream of in the echoing recesses of your ancient gestalt mind. Create a new landmark that you call your territory; here, you are lord and ruler, but you can no longer leave. One day, another Cleaver will find you, kill you and become you.

WEALD AND WOE

Following the passing of a legendary hunter, sometimes the Forest – an ancient heaven for wordless hunters and the gigantic beasts they pursue – crashes into the Heart to claim their body as a prize.

To activate this ability, die.

The landmark you are currently occupying is overwhelmed by the Forest (p. 168). If you're on a delve, immediately establish a new landmark where you're standing. Relic trees crash and tear through the walls of reality, swarms of giant beasts smash apart the world around them and your body is subsumed into the black, fecund soil to be reborn. This fracture will remain connected to the landmark for a few hours before it is severed – then the trees will petrify into a dead forest of glittering opal, ill-auspiced and frequented only by the dead.

When you are reborn, you awaken in the Forest. You have an afterlife of hunting, feasting and howling at the strange, indifferent stars to look forward to.

DEADWALKER



You were always obsessed with death; maybe you were a nihilistic cultist, a moneyed arcanist, a radical theologian or a sanctified killer. But your initial fascination was nothing compared to what happened after you died for the first time. Nothing's been the same ever since.

You didn't die properly; somehow, through willpower, luck or trickery, you stayed alive. Your tattered soul gives you a near-unique ability to step between the lands of the living and the dead with relative ease. Your constant companion – a spectral manifestation of the death that didn't take – guards you jealously and whispers secrets from beyond the veil into your ear while you slumber.

CORE TRAITS

SKILL: Delve

DOMAIN: Desolate

RESOURCE:

Bag of interesting teeth **D6 Desolate**

EQUIPMENT:

Pick one:

Hunting Rifle **Kill D6, Extreme Range, Reload**

Greatsword **Kill D10, Tiring**

Bootleg ambrosia and ritual blade **Mend Mind D6, Potent, Expensive; Kill D6**

CORE ABILITIES

DEATH FOLLOWS CLOSE

*You never knew anyone could love you as much as your own death. You are followed around by a manifestation of your death that is invisible and intangible to everyone but you – although when you are on the verge of dying, or in places that resonate heavily with death and sorrow, it might be visible to others. The exact appearance of it is up to you. The first time each session you suffer Major **Blood**, **Mind** or **Fortune** fallout, your death manifests to protect you and inflicts D8 stress on whatever caused the fallout.*

ENTER THE GREY

*You know the trick of stepping sideways into the Grey: the space between the worlds of the living and the worlds of the dead. Roll **Delve+Religion** to enact this ritual. It takes around ten minutes of preparation, e.g. donning ritual garb, inhaling sacred smoke, communing with your death and so on. On a success, the smoke clears, and you (and anyone you bring with you) are in the Grey.*

Within the Grey, the world is a shadowy echo of its living counterpart. Some souls linger here, awaiting their eternal reward, but for the most part it is grim, empty and monochrome. (For more information on travelling and surviving the Grey, see p. 169.) Exiting the Grey is a simple enough task for a Deadwalker and those they ferry across; it's a **Delve+Religion** roll for anyone else.

MINOR ABILITIES

ADEPT

Gain access to one of the following skills: **Compel**, **Delve**, **Discern**, **Endure**, **Evade**, **Hunt**, **Kill**, **Sneak**. You can take this advance more than once.

DEATHLESS

You've already died once; you can suffer through this. Gain the **Endure** skill. Roll **Endure+Religion** to ignore the effects of ongoing Minor **Blood** or **Echo** fallout until the end of the situation.

DIRT UNDER THE FINGERNAILS

You dug your way out of your own grave. Gain the **Warren** domain. You can dig through earth and mud with your bare hands as though you had a shovel; your fingernails are always stained with a little soil, and you cannot clean it off.

EXPLORER

Gain access to one of the following domains: **Cursed**, **Desolate**, **Occult**, **Religion**, **Technology**, **Warren**, **Wild**. You can take this advance more than once.

GRAIL ARMOUR

*You wear patchwork platemail scavenged from the bodies of dead heroes. Gain +2 **Blood** Protection.*

GRIM REAPER

*Your death has long whispered to you about the proper methods of execution; on occasion, it helps directly. Gain the **Kill** skill. Your death's attentions now function as the following weapon: (D8, Ranged, One-Shot).*

THE HARVEST

*The people of the Eastern Domain call Death the Harvest – an untamed god-beast of endings that you pray to for a quick demise. Gain the **Wild** domain. Wild animals are scared of you and will not attack you if other targets are available.*

LAST RITES

*You know enough about death rituals to be sworn in as a priest in three major faiths. Gain the **Religion** domain. When you touch the brow of a recently dead person, you can ask their spirit a single question before it fades away.*

MARKED FOR DEATH

*Your death tells you stories of dark spectres that swarm the land in search of doomed souls. Gain the **Hunt** skill. In addition, you can mark prey. When you mark prey, you spend ten minutes or so observing your target from hiding and whispering words of death over your weapon. When you hunt prey you have marked, roll with mastery. Your mark endures until your target dies or you mark another creature.*

SHADOW

*Your body, unmoored from the lands of the living, can become shadowy and indistinct. Gain the **Sneak** skill. By blowing out a lit candle and focusing, you can extinguish all light sources nearby. Sources that cannot be easily extinguished (magelights, glow-worms, etc) are temporarily muted instead.*

SURVIVOR

*Gain +1 Protection in the **Blood**, **Echo**, **Fortune** or **Supplies** resistance. You can take this advance more than once.*

TATTERED SOUL

*Your eternal spirit has been warped and torn by your experiences, leaving you with an affinity with the not-quite-real. Gain the **Cursed** domain and +1 **Echo** protection.*

WALKING RELIQUARY

*Your pack clinks and jingles with a dozen minor totems of the dead; in a pinch, the meagre power within can save your life. Gain +2 **Supplies** Protection.*

MAJOR ABILITIES**DESCENT**

You push through purgatory into the storied lands of the dead. When you are in the Grey (see above), you may undertake a delve to one of the eight heavens listed in the landmark section. Choose which one you have access to when you take this advance.

The delve will be Risky unless you and your companions dress in ritual garb and make suitable preparations to enter the heaven in question. Returning to the Grey requires another delve, which can be harder or easier than the initial one depending on whether the heaven wants to keep you there.

- **MINOR: ESOTERIC CARTOGRAPHER.** Choose two additional heavens that you have access to whilst in the Grey.
- **MINOR: STEP BETWEEN.** You can leave a Heaven and arrive at a completely different landmark than the one you started at. Your exit point must be within the same tier, and it must share a domain with the Heaven that you just visited. If you've never visited the landmark before, undertaking the delve is Risky.
- **MINOR: ALL DOORS AS ONE.** When you use **STEP BETWEEN**, your destination point can be one tier above or below your current tier.

ECHOES

You can glimpse the remnants of what has come before. Roll **Discern + Domain** to witness ghostly recreations of the past in your current location. This will generally show the most interesting or dramatic thing that occurred within recent memory.

- **MINOR: HIDDEN PASSAGEWAY.** Once per delve, when you use **ECHOES**, it functions as a D8 boon.
- **MINOR: FRAGMENTARY RECOLLECTION.** When you use **ECHOES**, you can speak with the echoes of people or other sentient entities present. These echoes are momentary snapshots of psyches, with all the limitations on cognition that such a state entails.
- **MINOR: ABSORB MEMORIES.** Once per session, when you're in a location with a domain that you do not possess, activate this power. You have access to that domain until the end of the session.

INVIDIOUS SPECTRE

Your death has got your back – right up until it can claim you for itself. Your death manifests as poltergeist activity and other supernatural phenomena that distresses and confuses your enemies. Any weapon you carry is considered to have the **Conduit** tag, and as such, you can mark D4 stress to **Mind** to roll with mastery when you attack for the remainder of the current situation.

- **MINOR: SOOTHE.** Once per session, when you mark stress, add 1 to any of your Protection values. This increase remains in place until the end of the session.
- **MINOR: GHOULISH GRASP.** Once per situation, a weapon you are carrying has the **Debilitating** tag.
- **MINOR: ETHEREAL TOUCH.** If you mark stress to activate the **Conduit** tag on your weapon, it gains the **Piercing** tag.

REAPER'S STRIKE

You forsake defence for a single, decisive blow. When you attack an adversary, you can choose to lose your **Blood** protection for the attack before you roll. If you do so and succeed or partially succeed, add your **Blood** protection value to the stress inflicted.

- **MINOR: INEXORABLE.** If the first dice you roll to determine the stress inflicted on an adversary shows 1 or 2, roll an additional dice of the same size and add the result to the stress inflicted.
- **MINOR: BLOODIED BUT UNBROKEN.** When you have 4 or more stress marked to **Blood** or are suffering from ongoing **Blood** fallout, gain +2 **Blood** Protection.
- **MINOR: SCYTHING BLOW.** Once per situation, treat your weapon as though it has the Spread tag when you inflict stress to an adversary.

SUDDEN DEATH

Your soul is so poorly attached to your body that you can dive headlong into the Grey without warning. **ENTER THE GREY** no longer takes ten minutes to cast – it is instantaneous. Bringing others along with you when you cast it in this manner makes the action Risky.

- **MINOR: LIMINAL.** Gain +2 **Blood** protection after entering the Grey. You can see and interact with people who are in the living world – they appear as indistinct blurs at a distance, but become clearer when nearby. You manifest as a weird, semi-ethereal phantom when you use this ability.
- **MINOR: ENTROPY.** Your hands become (Kill D8, Dangerous). When you touch a machine, construction or mechanism and focus, you can cause rust and decay where you touched it. Doing this quickly or under stress (e.g. destroying a bridge before your enemies can cross it all the way) requires a **Kill+Technology** check.
- **MINOR: BLOOD SACRIFICE.** Once per situation, when you inflict stress on an adversary that's roughly the same size as you in melee combat, you can transport both you and them to the Grey.

ZENITH ABILITIES

EXTINGUISH

Your death tells you soft and sweet: you can kill anything you want to. Using your powers over life and death and binding your own energy to the spell, you can draw any person, entity, landmark or concept (aside from the Heart Itself) into a physical vessel. You can then kill the vessel, destroying the concept and yourself in a final strike.

The entity has stats as determined by the GM; you don't have to fight it alone, and it's certainly possible (and encouraged) to tip the odds in your favour beforehand. When and if it dies, you die as well.

If you kill a landmark, that landmark is destroyed. If you kill a concept, it will wither and die in the minds of the people of the Heart, and they will no longer think of it.

There are limits to what you can achieve with this ability. If you kill the concept of breathable air, for example, folk will still breathe in and out but they won't understand what they're doing or why it's important.

INFERNAL CLAWS

You learn the secrets of the Dark Place. You know the location of and the route to hell (or something close to it). You can also summon fallen angels and other agents of misrule to drag a target down there. Compared to hell, the Eight Heavens seem like pretty nice places to spend an eternity. This process traps the target there indefinitely, wracking it with torments and driving it insane. Dragging someone to hell in this way consumes your life essence, and your death embraces you for one final time before stopping your heart.

SUNDER THE VEIL

With your last breath you tear open a ragged door to heaven and energy floods into the area, causing spontaneous miracles. To activate this ability, die. All nearby allies remove all ongoing fallout, all stress marked to all resistances and gain mastery on all rolls for the remainder of the situation.



DEEP APIARIST

They called to you: a distant buzzing hivehum reverberating through the City, a message of control and hope, a secret means of scraping meaning and reason from the unfathomable and ever-changing Heart. They are the Hive, they say – a megaconsciousness, a defence network, grown from within the Spire. They are here to help you push back the tide of unreality.

Desperate, you accepted them into you. Ten dozen glyph-marked bees crawled into your sinuses and built waxen bulwarks against the disorder within. You are better now. You see the world in different patterns, and can sift through the chaff and noise that only confused you before. You have a crystal clear, perfect vision of what Should Be.

You are a Deep Apiarist – one of a small sect of occultists who use the power of the Hive to work magic that manipulates order and chaos. The sigil-covered bees crawling through their bodies can unleash deadly attacks on those who would stand in their way.

CORE TRAITS

SKILL: Mend

DOMAIN: Occult

RESOURCE:

Heartsbloom rose in a glass jar **D6 Occult, Fragile**

EQUIPMENT:

Hive Tool **Kill D4, Brutal**

Pick one of:

Dimensional barometer **Delve D6**

Hunting rifle **Kill D6, Reload, Extreme Range**

Smoker **Kill D4, Debilitating, Smoke**

CORE ABILITIES

THE HIVE

*The sweetlings nest within your body. Some of your organs are replaced with complex copies made from wax by industrious bees. They live within you – a few at first, but as you grow in power, great swarms. Their curious buzzing aligns your mind with the Hive. At the beginning of each situation, clear all **Mind** stress as incipient madness flows*

*through you and into the Hive. You can never benefit from **Mind** protection or remove stress from **Mind**, aside from using this ability.*

RELEASE THE SWARM

You send out a swarm of bees, eager to defend you. Gain access to the following weapon: (Kill D4, Spread, Ranged).

MINOR ABILITIES

A PERFECT MACHINE

*You see that cogs, gears and engines are just echoes of the infinite, staggering majesty that is the Hive. Gain the **Technology** skill. Given time, you can repair technological devices even if you don't have the right parts: you synthesise them from wax and extruded bone.*

APISAMBULATION

*Your body sleeps while your mind, riddled with industrious bees, marches on. Gain access to the **Delve** skill. Once per session, while on a delve, you can opt to fall asleep and let the bees inside your body steer you. In this state, the bees speak for you and perform actions on your behalf – roleplay accordingly (the GM can use **Fortune** fallout to represent your inhuman pilots). Assuming you get a few hours' rest and progress on the delve, refresh D6 from any of your resistances.*

HIVEBORN

*You were reborn in one of the Great Hives; your body, though still mortal, is waxen and papery. Gain the **Warren** domain. You can fit yourself through any gap small enough for a bee by having your swarm chew up and reform your body on the other side. This process takes upwards of six hours. You can rush to get it done in an hour instead, but mark D8 stress to **Blood** as a result.*

HUNTER OF THE DAMNED

*You bring order to the Heart with sword and shot. Gain the **Hunt** skill. Once per session, when you eliminate a heartsblooded creature, remove D6 stress from any of your resistances.*

INTOXICANT

Pheromone glands pucker and blossom on your wrists and neck; you are alluring, irresistible, almost soporific. Gain the **Compel** skill. Once per session, when you talk to someone for five minutes or more, you convince them to revert to their basest impulses. They become driven solely by lust, hunger or a need for shelter – whichever they desire most right now.

INTRUSION

Your swarm grants you the power to overwhelm and control rudimentary minds. Gain the **Wild** domain. You learn the following spell: send your swarm to occupy and control the body of a wild animal that you can see with a successful **Compel+Wild** roll. You can now direct the animal to perform basic tasks, but the swarm's control is imperfect. For the duration of this spell, your unconscious body slumps to the floor; you come to when the swarm returns to you. At the end of the situation, the animal you controlled dies.

MANY EYES

Each of your companions is a vessel for your sight. Gain the **Discern** skill. When you stand still and close your eyes, you can see through the eyes of any of your bees, allowing you to spy around corners or look into closed spaces. You can't control the bees directly, but you have enough at your disposal to cover the area around you.

PERFECT STRUCTURE

Your body eschews treacherous meat in favour of a sturdy waxen comb. Gain +2 **Echo** Protection.

THRICE-WARDED

Your bees are marked with auspicious glyphs and you are able to brave the worst of the Heart unscathed. Gain the **Cursed** domain. Each session, the first time you would take Minor **Fortune** fallout, avoid the fallout and do not remove stress from **Fortune**.

UNCANNY BIOLOGY

Aside from the Queen nestled inside your heart, every part of your body is replaceable by the swarm. Gain +2 **Blood** Protection.

WAXEN SIGILS

Gain +1 Protection in the **Blood**, **Echo**, **Fortune** or **Supplies** resistance. You can take this advance more than once.

WHISPERS OF THE HIVE

Gain access to one of the following domains: **Cursed**, **Desolate**, **Occult**, **Religion**, **Technology**, **Warren**, **Wild**. You can take this advance more than once.

WISDOM FLOWS SO SWEET

Gain access to one of the following skills: **Compel**, **Delve**, **Discern**, **Endure**, **Hunt**, **Kill**, **Mend**, **Sneak**. You can take this advance more than once.

MAJOR ABILITIES**ANNIHILATION**

Your body is unHeart; it burns through the parasitic world of meat and bone. Against heartsblooded people or creatures, your touch functions as a (Kill D8) weapon. As you use it, your flesh roils and cracks, but the swarm repairs it as quickly as it is unmade; your opponent doesn't have that luxury. Against any other target, it functions as a (Kill D6) weapon.

- **MINOR: BLOSSOM WITHIN THE SKULL.** **ANNIHILATION** gains the Ranged tag.
- **MINOR: DARK FLOWERS.** Your touch gains the Debilitating tag and causes crystal to coalesce around your targets.
- **MINOR: THAT WHICH IS GOLDEN.** You may increase the damage die of any weapon you touch by two steps. The weapon is destroyed after it inflicts stress once.

BLESSED TOXIN

The swarm within you offers up its members as sacrifices to your cause, just like you offer yourself up to the Hive. Some of the bees inside you develop a sting that soothes the mind when injected (as well as being an addictive narcotic). Your body functions as a (Mend, Mind D6) item; you can mark D4 stress to **Blood** to have it function as a (Mend, Mind D8) item on your next action.

- **MINOR: FEARLESS.** Once per session, remove Minor **Mind** fallout from an ally or allow them to ignore the effects of Major **Mind** fallout for the remainder of the situation.
- **MINOR: PAINLESS.** Your body functions as a (Mend, Blood D6) item. You can mark D4 stress to Blood to have it function as a (Mend, Blood D8) item on your next action.
- **MINOR: BLOODLESS.** Gain +1 **Blood** protection. You are immune to mundane poisons.

DELERIUM SPIKE

The sacred majesty of the Hive fills you with fizzing, unstable power. The stress inflicted by your **RELEASE THE SWARM** ability increases to D6. The first time you inflict stress using **RELEASE THE SWARM** in a situation, add your **Mind** stress to the stress inflicted on the target. After the action is resolved, reduce your **Mind** stress to 0.

- **MINOR: IMPERFECT BALANCE.** When you mark stress to **Blood**, halve the amount of **Blood** stress inflicted (rounding up) if it is lower than your current **Mind** stress.
- **MINOR: VENOMOUS HEX.** You may replace the **Spread** tag with the **Piercing** tag when you use **RELEASE THE SWARM**.
- **MINOR: INQUISITIVE BURROWERS.** **RELEASE THE SWARM** gains the **Brutal** tag.

SACRED GEOMETRY

Multiple futures swim about your head, and you pick that which is most advantageous; to an outside observer, you move unopposed and uncanny. When you are rolling to inflict stress on a delve or adversary, or remove stress from yourself or an ally, and you roll a 6 (a number sacred to Apiarists), roll an additional D6 and add it to your total.

- **MINOR: MAJESTIC.** Once per situation, when you roll to resolve an action and you roll a 6, count that dice as if it rolled 10.
- **MINOR: PRISTINE.** You are always clean and well-presented, even when you have been trudging through filth or battling noxious pitchkin in close quarters. When you arrive in a landmark after a delve, roll with mastery when you make a first impression.
- **MINOR: REGAL.** Once per situation, after you mark stress to a resistance, gain +2 Protection in that resistance until the end of the situation.

UNCHAOS

The Heart is a chaotic place, and you seek to undo that with ancient magic. Roll **Mend+Occult** to cast this spell. On a success, for the remainder of the situation, you or one nearby ally treats Risky actions as Standard actions (keep the highest rolled dice) as probability coalesces around you and crystallizes at your feet.

- **MINOR: STABILISATION.** **UNCHAOS** may now affect all allies within arm's reach rather than a single nearby ally. If they leave your side, they lose access to the effect.
- **MINOR: PERFECTION.** Once per situation, a target under the effect of **UNCHAOS** can treat a Dangerous action as a Standard action.
- **MINOR: FILED AWAY.** Once per situation, when you cast **UNCHAOS**, all those affected by the spell remove D4 stress from **Fortune**.

ZENITH ABILITIES

ABSOLUTE STASIS

You use up every ounce of your power to encase a dangerous foe in crystal. To cast this spell, touch a creature; you and they are forever bound together, rendered perfect, inviolable and immobile in glittering, transparent crystal like a statue.

No-one has yet managed to break one of these statues. In fact, interacting with the crystal in any way incurs D10 stress as it spreads instantaneously from one body to another, binding another person into the curious tableau.

It is believed that those inside the crystal are still alive and conscious, but as previously mentioned, no-one has managed to break one open to find out.

DIMENSIONAL BASTION

You become a conduit to the Hive, and thousands of glyph-marked bees rush out of your body and clothing until your physical form is dissolved entirely into the swarm. The bees quickly spread out to the edges of the landmark you are occupying and ward it, building crystalline structures that keep the energies of the Heart at bay. While the bees endure, this place will be safe from the uncaring and ever-changing Heart Itself. You aren't quite dead, but you definitely aren't alive either: you persist as a message passed between the bees, an echo in the place. Rename the landmark appropriately.

SURRENDER TO CHAOS

A lifetime of carving order from disorder, and still the Heart remains chaotic. You lost before you ever started. You give in, tragically and catastrophically.

When you cast this spell, everything that is ordered around you flips to disorder: buildings collapse, machinery overloads and malfunctions, disease runs rampant, language breaks down and fire crackles at the edges of your vision. You are unmade, inverted; your bees are destroyed; and the Heart arrives to greedily consume your essence.

The Heart Itself spontaneously manifests in your current position. You are killed when this ability is used – crushed under the weight of impossible mathematics and ruinous vectors. Lines and angles no longer fully meet at the seams as raw nuclear chaos unfolds within you. After a few seconds of utter nightmare, the manifestation collapses, lapsing back into its natural state.

HERETIC



The Church of the Moon were driven out of the City Above two hundred years ago. Their faith had been outlawed by invading forces, their temples burned, their idols smashed to pieces, their priests slain in the street – but still they believed in Damnou, goddess of the moon tripartite, bringer of light and life to the drow. They fled into the undercity, seeking solace; what they found was a communion with their goddess greater than anything they could dream of in Spire. They found secrets hidden deep within the earth. They found the Moon Beneath.

You are an adherent to the faith of the Moon Beneath. Your great-grandparents might have been among the original refugees driven down to the Heart, or you might be a recent convert to the religion. Either way, you draw power from your faith and unearth the hidden wisdom of your queens who dwell deep in the earth. You proudly bear the symbols of your church – jewellery adorned with eyes, sacred chains that symbolise the restraints on the Moon Beneath, moonsilver piercings, and reams of sacred text – that would have you shot in the street in the City Above.

CORE TRAITS

SKILL:	Mend
DOMAIN:	Religion
RESOURCE:	

A single devotional **D6 Religion** candle that burns with a silver flame

EQUIPMENT:

Pick one:

Spireblack brazier	Unlit: Kill D6 Lit: Kill D8, Obscuring, Dangerous
Breech-loading pistol and Seeker's blade	Kill D6, Ranged, Reload; Kill D6, Brutal
Scripture-etched bandages and blessed oils and staff	Mend Blood/Mind D6; Kill D6

CORE ABILITY

MINISTRATIONS

You offer solace and calm in a world of chaos. Once per session, lead your allies in a service of praise to the Moon Beneath (how you practice your faith is up to you). All player characters who took part can remove one Minor **Blood** or **Mind** fallout, or downgrade one Major **Blood** or **Mind** fallout to Minor, at the end of the service. If you perform this service whilst on a delve, add +D4 to the delve's resistance.

MINOR ABILITIES

BLESSED DEPRIVATION

In your darkest hour, She will bless you with her immaculate grace. Gain the **Desolate** domain. When you are suffering from ongoing **Supplies** fallout, gain the **Trusty** tag when you roll to inflict stress on delves.

GRAVE DUTY

You spent time amongst the dead in the sepulchres, and time amongst the living at the funerals. Gain the **Warren** domain. Once per session, when you console or bolster an ally in times of fear and uncertainty, they gain +1 **Mind** protection until the end of the session.

THE GODDESS' GIFTS

Gain access to one of the following skills: **Compel**, **Discern**, **Endure**, **Evade**, **Hunt**, **Kill**, **Mend**. You can take this advance more than once.

THE LEFT HAND OF THE GODDESS

The faithful are a bountiful garden, and it is your task to excise disease and corruption at the root. Gain the **Kill** skill and +1 **Blood** Protection.

LIAR'S BURDEN

The moon beneath does not tolerate the wicked words of sinners. Gain the **Discern** skill. If you suspect an NPC is lying to you, roll **Discern+Religion**. On a success, if they were lying, they mark D4 stress; their mouth streams with blood as though they had attempted to chew on broken glass.

INCANDESCENT COMMUNION

In the tear between worlds, She blessed you with night-black eyes that resonate with Her Eternal Light. Gain the **Cursed** domain. You can see in total darkness as though the area was illuminated by candle-light.

RIGHTEOUS RHETORIC

You have argued over the interpretation of scripture with the temple elders time and time again. Gain the **Compel** skill. When you invoke your holy texts in conversation with another member of your faith, roll with mastery.

RITE OF PLACIDITY

Scholars who search for the Lady often find her immense majesty hard to bear, but you are well versed in the sacred canticles that allow you to weather her revelations. Gain +2 **Mind** Protection.

SACRED TATTOO

You carry your holy text inked onto your skin, a litany of pain endured in the name of Her Cthonic Majesty. Gain +2 **Fortune** Protection.

SHARD OF THE TEMPLE DOOR

The great doors of the Moon Ascendant temple were smashed to pieces on the night of the purge. You carry a shard of the door, reminding you that your faith is eternal. Gain the **Endure** skill. Once per session, when you touch the shard to a closed door, it will not open for at least an hour (unless it is destroyed).

TOMES OF KNOWLEDGE

Gain access to one of the following domains: **Cursed**, **Desolate**, **Haven**, **Religion**, **Technology**, **Wild**, **Warren**. You can take this advance more than once.

UNWAVERING FAITH

Gain +1 Protection in the **Mind**, **Supplies**, **Blood** or **Fortune** resistance. You can take this advance more than once.

WORDS OF GRACE

As you shine Her light into dark places, you are filled with her glory. Gain the **Haven** domain. Once per session, when you lead the community in an act of mercy and grace, refresh D6.

MAJOR ABILITIES

OATH OF COMMUNITY

You are scarred and battered from defending the defenceless, and you bear a sacred shield adorned with the wisdom of the Goddesses. Gain +1 **Blood** protection. When a nearby ally is attacked and you're ready to defend them, their **Blood** Protection increases by 1.

- **MINOR: MARTYR'S BLOOD.** Once per session, when a nearby ally takes Major **Blood** fallout, you both take Minor **Blood** fallout instead.
- **MINOR: MIRACULOUS INTERVENTION.** Once per situation, when you would mark stress to **Blood** but before the GM rolls to determine how much, activate this power. The attack only inflicts D4 stress.
- **MINOR: CAST ASUNDER.** Once per situation, when an adversary inflicts **Blood** fallout on you, reduce that adversary's stress dice by 1 step.

OATH OF FURY

You are but a vessel for the goddesses three to enact their will on the world through your hand. Roll **Endure+Religion** to beseech Damnou to lend you Her fury as you adorn yourself with sacred silver symbols. On a success, until the end of the session, you gain the **Kill** skill and your attacks gain the Brutal tag. If you already possess the **Kill** skill, gain a knack relevant to an intended target. At the end of the session, if you have not taken the life of a worthy creature, mark D6 stress to **Mind**.

The minor advances below grant access to alternate versions of **OATH OF FURY**. When you cast it, you can choose any version you can access. If you cast **OATH OF FURY** an additional time without meeting the requirements listed at the end of the spell, you mark D6 stress to **Mind** immediately.

- **MINOR: AVATAR OF FLAME.** When you use **OATH OF FURY**, you can choose to replace the benefits granted with +2 **Blood** protection and your attacks gaining the **Debilitating** tag. At the end of the session, if you have not taken the life of a worthy creature, mark D6 stress to **Mind**.

- **MINOR: AVATAR OF MOONLIGHT.** When you use **OATH OF FURY**, you can choose to replace the benefits granted with +2 **Echo** protection. In addition, when you use the **Mend** skill on an ally, instead of removing stress you may remove Minor **Blood** or **Mind** fallout on a successful roll. At the end of the session, if you have not removed both **Blood** and **Mind** fallout from your allies, mark D6 stress to **Mind**.
- **MINOR: AVATAR OF SHADOWS.** When you use **OATH OF FURY**, you can choose to replace the benefits granted with +2 **Fortune** protection and your attacks (even melee) gaining the **Extreme Range** tag. At the end of the session, if you have not taken the life of a worthy creature, mark D6 stress to **Mind**.
- **MINOR: GLORIOUS RESURGENCE.** Once per session, when you succeed at a Risky or Dangerous action, clear all stress marked against your resistances.
- **MINOR: ABIDE WITH ME.** Once per situation, you may grant the benefits of **OATH OF TENACITY** to a nearby ally.

RITE OF VIGILANCE

You look upon the world through the six sacred eyes of the Goddess and see beyond the realm of flesh and stone. When you attune your mind to the glory of the Moon Beneath, roll **Discern+Religion**. On a success, when you close your eyes, you can see the souls of creatures around you in your immediate area. These are visible regardless of physical obstructions.

OATH OF SAGACITY

You have learned one of the secret names of Three-Fold Damnou, and when you speak it aloud your enemies are struck senseless by its power. The name of the Goddess functions as the following weapon: (Kill D6, Spread, Debilitating, Maddening, One-Shot).

- **MINOR: FRAGMENT OF LEKOLÉ.** The weapon gains the **Brutal** tag.
- **MINOR: FRAGMENT OF LOMBRÉ.** The weapon gains the **Smoke** tag (it manifests like ink dropped in water) and no longer creates noise – in fact, it dampens all nearby noise.
- **MINOR: FRAGMENT OF LIMYÉ.** When you use **RITE OF SAGACITY**, you and all nearby allies remove D4 stress from **Blood**.
- **MINOR: HUNTER.** When an ally acts on the information you give them as a result of this power and attacks the creatures you've seen, they roll with mastery on their first attack.
- **MINOR: HEART'S SIGHT.** When an ally acts on the information you give them as a result of this power and attempts to socialise with the people you've seen, they roll with mastery on their first action.
- **MINOR: BLESSING.** When this ability is active, you can touch an ally and confer the benefits of soul-sight to them as well.

OATH OF TENACITY

She laid a kiss of stars and secrets upon your forehead, and you are infused with her tremendous determination. When you succeed at a Risky action, increase the size of the stress dice you inflict by 1 step. When you succeed at a Dangerous action, increase the size of the stress dice you inflict by 2 steps. You can choose to make an action Risky or Dangerous, even if it's Standard, to gain access to this benefit.

- **MINOR: IMPLACABLE FAITH.** When you take stress due to attempting a Risky or Dangerous action, the stress dice is reduced by 1 step.

WHERE'S THE OATH OF GRACE?

The followers of Damnou, in her form as the Moon Beneath or the Moon Above, broadly venerate her through the six Damnic virtues: Tenacity, Sagacity, Fury, Community, Vigilance and Grace. You'll notice that five of these virtues are represented in the major advances for the Heretic, but Grace is missing.

Why? No-one's quite sure. Some priests believe that Grace is above the other virtues, and that miracles channeling its power are beyond the ken of mortals. Others (dangerously) whisper that it was stolen from her by high elf gods millenia ago, making the drow of today blind and stumbling compared to the past paragons of elegance. Whatever the reason, the divine magic of grace evades the priesthood of the Moon Beneath for now.

ZENITH ABILITIES

ASCENSION

You transcend the need for mortal flesh. The Goddess appears before you in her trifold majesty: a scintillating blaze of divinity, silver-crimson and midnight black. She blesses you, and your frail mortal anatomy becomes a conduit for her eternal flesh. You take on an angelic form.

The descriptions of angels of the Moon Beneath are varied, but multiple heads, six or more wings, mighty voices raised in exaltation and an abundance of eyes are common themes. In your new form, your many hyperdimensional claws and appendages inflict D10 damage and possess the Piercing tag. You roll 6D10 when striking at those who would threaten the faithful or desecrate sacred ground, and all other actions automatically fail.

At the end of the situation, you are transfused into ossified bone-crystal, your radiance added to her incomprehensible refulgence, and retired as a player character.

GLORY

You come face to face with the goddess herself, and the radiance reflected in your eyes is too much for people to behold. You keep your face covered. When you uncover it, all those who can see you are stunned and awed, unable to look upon you without falling to their knees. Those who remain in your presence miraculously remove one Minor **Blood** or **Mind** fallout result, or downgrade a Major to a Minor after about an hour; most NPCs will convert to your faith on the spot.

In the City Above, a team of aelfir hunters working for the Solar Church are mobilised and dispatched to kill you. They will find and eliminate you, and you will die.

TESTAMENT OF FAITH

You become a beacon of hope for those struck by fear or desperation. To activate this ability, die a martyr's death. The ground on which you died (or where you're buried, whichever is more dramatically appropriate) becomes holy to the church of the Moon Beneath. Over the next few months, pilgrims will visit the site and erect a suitable shrine. For the remainder of the campaign, and at the GM's discretion any future campaigns, the shrine functions as a landmark with some appropriate haunts. Once per campaign, when the surviving player characters visit it, they can beseech your spirit to answer a question. You will deliver valuable wisdom.



HOUND

In the past: the 33rd Regiment were sent down to pacify the Heart by a mad warrior-poet from the City Above. Of the nine hundred or so enlisted soldiers who set off, three hundred survived. Surrounded by forces beyond their understanding and on the verge of total destruction, the surviving officers did what they could to save their troops. They did something terrible.

Now: there are three hundred badges, each marked with the name of the original hero who carried it. When you steal one, or have it bestowed upon you, you join the Hounds: the new name of the 33rd, protectors of the fragile populace of the Heart. You carry the weight of their deeds on your shoulders.

You hear that some of the original three hundred are still out there, still wearing their badges. You've heard of Hounds holding back the darkness alone, withstanding tremendous amounts of punishment, defending havens for days on end without sleep or food.

The Hounds draw on one another and the people of the Heart for strength. So long as someone draws breath in the City Beneath, they cannot be destroyed; this is their gift, and their curse.

CORE TRAITS

SKILL: Hunt

DOMAIN: Haven

RESOURCE:

Bottle of rotgut liquor **D6 Haven**

EQUIPMENT:

Pick one:

Standard-issue	Kill D8, Ranged,
Legrande rifle	Piercing, Expensive
Repeater Sidearm	Kill D6, Ranged, Brutal,
and knife	Reload; Kill D6
Well-stocked Haver-	Mend Supplies D6;
sack and cudgel	Kill D6

CORE ABILITY

IN THE THICK OF IT

You have a knack for getting yourself in just enough trouble to find the truth. Once per situation, when you would mark stress to any other resistance

*than **Fortune**, mark it to **Fortune**. When you suffer **Fortune** fallout, roll with mastery for the remainder of the situation.*

MINOR ABILITIES

ADVANCED TRAINING

Gain access to one of the following skills: **Compel, Delve, Discern, Endure, Evade, Hunt, Kill, Mend, Sneak**. You can take this advance more than once.

THE BETTER PART OF VALOUR

You'll get everyone out alive, if not intact. Gain the **Evade** skill. If you succeed on an **Evade** roll, all nearby allies roll with mastery when trying to evade until you next act.

CLOSE QUARTERS

You like things to be up-close and personal. Gain the **Warren** domain. When in areas with the **Warren** domain, gain +1 **Blood** protection.

CUSTODIAN

You – and those who wore the badge before you – have spent so much time rebuilding shattered lives and shattered homes that everyone welcomes you. Gain the **Mend** skill. If you are in a populated location you can always find someone willing to take you in, give you somewhere to sleep and maybe even some warm food.

ECHOES OF THE 33RD

Gain access to one of the following domains: **Cursed, Desolate, Haven, Technology, Warren, Wild**. You can take this advance more than once.

HARD AS NAILS

Gain access to +1 **Blood, Mind, Echo** or **Supplies** Protection. You can take this advance more than once.

KILL COUNT

Your weapons are cross-hatched with kill-marks; a testament to what you've done to protect others. Gain the **Kill** skill. Whenever you kill a person or creature, remove 1 stress from any resistance.

LIQUID COURAGE

You have developed a drinking habit to stay sane, because the booze isn't going to be what kills you. +1 **Mind** Protection. When you go drinking to remove **Mind** stress or fallout, treat the resource you spend as one dice size higher.

MARSHAL

You find out what's wrong and do your level best to fix it; if you can get paid in the process, so much the better. Gain the **Compel** skill. Once per session, when you enter a landmark, you learn of an injustice, threat or danger that's worrying the people there. Some folks might be able to pay you if you help them.

OUR GLORIOUS LADY

You found the goddess at the bottom of a bottle; she turned your life around. Gain the **Religion** domain. Once per session, clear D4 **Blood** stress from an ally as you beseech the goddess for their protection.

QUARTERMASTER TRAINING

You have studied under the Quartermasters of the Hounds, learning the valuable skill of creative acquisition. +1 **Supplies** Protection. You don't like to be unarmed – you steal, build and improvise what you need. Your “unarmed” attacks become (D6, Brutal, Unreliable); on a failure, it breaks and your unarmed attacks are D4 as standard.

ROUND THE NEXT CORNER

You can find a place to shelter, smoke a roll-up and let things blow over. Gain the **Delve** skill. Once per delve, you find an out-of-the-way location where you can catch your breath and recuperate without fear of being discovered by your enemies. You can take your time and heal here without incurring a bane.

SERGEANT

You wear the trademark heavy long-coat of a Sergeant of the Hounds, designed to mark you out as a protector of the people. +1 **Blood** Protection. Once per situation, when an adversary or NPC directs their attention towards an ally, declare that they pay attention to you instead.

MAJOR ABILITIES

CONDEMN

You have the authority to declare someone as a wanted criminal. Once per session, when you find evidence of someone's (or something's) crimes, you can publicly condemn them. When you or another Hound tracks down a condemned target, roll with mastery.

- **MINOR: JUDGE.** When you track a condemned target as part of a delve, increase your stress dice size by 1 step.
- **MINOR: JURY.** You no longer need evidence to condemn a target, but you do need a name, a picture or a first-hand description.
- **MINOR: EXECUTIONER.** When you attack a condemned target, increase your stress dice size by 1 step.

FOREWARNED AND FOREARMED

Never get into a fight you can't win. Once per session, when you have an hour or two to spare in a landmark, you can make preparations for the coming challenges. Pick one of the benefits from the list below. You and all other characters who choose to take part in preparations gain this benefit until they next enter a landmark.

- **Whetstone and Weapon Drill.** One piece of Kill equipment gains the **Brutal** tag.
- **Checked and Triple-Checked.** One piece of Delve equipment gains the **Trusty** tag.
- **Toughen Up.** Gain +1 **Blood** protection.
- **One for the Road.** Gain +1 **Mind** protection.
- **Creative Acquisitions.** Gain +1 **Supplies** protection.
- **MINOR: DOUBLE DUTY.** Choose two benefits when using this ability; those who take part gain the benefits of both. You can't choose the same benefit twice.
- **MINOR: ENCAMPMENT.** You may now perform this action on a delve; add a D6 bane to the delve's resistance if you do.

- **MINOR: EMERGENCY SUPPLIES.** If you have a few minutes to spare, you can give yourself or one ally one of the benefits from the list by consuming a resource worth D6 or higher. This does not count as the per-session use of the ability.

STARE DOWN

You have a reputation as a terrifying enforcer; just looking at some folk is enough to get them to throw down their weapons. Your gaze functions as a weapon (Kill D6, ranged). It only works when your target can see you and if they have the capacity to be scared of you – so criminals are fair game, but heartsblood predators aren't. You can use this "weapon" in a haven or other landmark without causing a huge ruckus. Your gaze won't kill people – it's disheartening, and if you reduce an opponent's resistance to 0 with it they surrender, try to bargain their way out or trip and incapacitate themselves whilst fleeing.

- **MINOR: LEGENDARY.** Your gaze now works on things that shouldn't be scared of you.
- **MINOR: NOSE-TO-NOSE.** Your gaze gains the **Point-blank** tag.
- **MINOR: NO SYMPATHY.** Once per situation, your gaze functions as (Mend **Mind/Blood** D6, Ranged) as you give your allies a disapproving glance that spurs them into action.

TRENCH-FIGHTER

*Your mind is scarred with mud, gore and screams from a century before your birth. When you attack at close range, your attacks gain the **Piercing** tag, even if you're unarmed.*

- **MINOR: OVER THE TOP.** +2 **Blood** Protection against ranged attacks.
- **MINOR: KEEP SMILING.** The first time you suffer **Mind** stress in a situation, do not roll for fallout.
- **MINOR: HOMECOMING.** When you enter a location with the **Haven** domain after a delve, refresh stress according to the size and importance of the location. Three shacks with a campfire is D4; Derelictus is D12.

UNSTOPPABLE

*You are filled with the spirits of those Hounds who have come before you. When you are suffering from ongoing **Blood** fallout, increase your **Kill** stress dice size by one step.*

- **MINOR: LIMPING ONWARD. UNSTOPPABLE** also increases your **Delve** stress dice by one step.
- **MINOR: SCARS LIKE MEDALS.** Gain +1 **Blood** protection for each ongoing fallout you have.
- **MINOR: ON YOUR FEET.** Once per session, downgrade a Major **Blood** fallout you have to a Minor **Blood** fallout.

ZENITH ABILITIES

EVERLASTING STAND

As you feel your identity slipping away into the gestalt consciousness of the 33rd, you give everything you have to protect the people of the City Beneath. When a landmark you are in is under threat from outside powers (which is pretty much always true), activate this ability. You become the original owner of your badge – it might be an instantaneous process, it might take several weeks – as you prepare to defend the landmark.

Once your preparations are complete, you are subsumed into the Hounds completely. The 33rd will watch the landmark you designated as safe indefinitely – nothing short of another zenith ability will put it in danger.

FULCRUM

Your actions have earned you the ultimate reward – your name replaces the one marked on your badge, and you are officially inducted into the 33rd. You are filled with the hopes and fears of every terrified, desperate person in the Heart. Until the end of the current situation, you roll five dice and pick the highest whenever you make an action. Once the situation ends, you slope off into the depths of the Heart to fight metaphysical battles beyond the understanding of mortals.

INCURSION

You learn a fragment of the terrible truth behind what happened to the 33rd all those years ago, and understand why they can never die. At the culmination of a dark ritual, you smash your badge apart on an altar made from bones and shell casings, and summon the last moments of the 33rd to your location. Reality comes undone; the world is transformed into a twisted, burning maze of trench and razorwire, and the 33rd act out their terrified final moments on whoever they can find.

The landmark you're in is destroyed, pretty much everything inside it dies and your mind is blasted into pieces as you witness the lengths they went to in order to survive.



INCARNADINE

It's easy to fall into debt; it's not easy to fall into the catastrophic levels of debt that you managed to achieve. You had to be good at borrowing money – and time, and the faith of others, anything you could get your hands on – to attract the attention of Incarne, the Crimson God of Debt.

One day you woke up and found parts of your life missing as though it had been rummaged through by celestial bailiffs: property, possessions, memories, family members, emotions and desires were divided up between your creditors by an unseen force. Maybe your husband didn't recognise you anymore; maybe you were never married in the first place. Maybe you came home to find the rooms barren and filthy as though it hadn't been lived in for decades.

Incarné made their mark on you: a brand across your heart which brought an end to your life as you knew it. Some people seek out the mark; there's power and freedom associated with burning your old life to ashes, and Incarné rewards those they claim with uncanny abilities that can bring them (and others) even deeper into debt. You stepped into the Heart to find meaning, fortune or oblivion.

You rarely speak of the mark or talk about how far you have fallen to be trading stories, hours and lives down in the dark of the City Beneath. But the mark itches. Your greed itches. You carry a heavier weight than can be seen and push anger, sadness and loss out into the darkness, far beyond the light of the haven.

CORE TRAITS

SKILL: Compel

DOMAIN: Haven

RESOURCE:

Second-hand wedding ring **D6 Haven**

EQUIPMENT:

Hooked Blade **Kill D6**

Pick one of:

Filigreed Revolver **Kill D8, Ranged, Expensive**

Bailiff's Iron Cudgel **Kill D8, Tiring**

Home-made Spireblack Pipe Bombs **Kill D6, Ranged, Spread, One-Shot**

CORE ABILITIES

THE COST OF DOING BUSINESS

A mix of scrying and luck magic lets you portion off your fortune to be used as you wish. At any time you may consume a resource and roll its dice; set this dice aside. When you perform an action or inflict stress, but before you roll the dice to resolve it, you may replace any unrolled dice in your pool with the dice you set aside. Once used in this manner, it is consumed. If you have an unspent dice set aside at the end of the session, you take **Fortune** stress equal to the value rolled on the dice.

MUTUALLY ASSURED DESTRUCTION

If you go down, you're taking them with you. If you die, the wards placed on your soul detonate in an attempt to take down whoever did you in. You explode and inflict stress equal to D8 + your current **Fortune** stress on anyone standing nearby.

MINOR ABILITIES

A RED AND BLOODY BUSINESS

You are well versed in the oldest transaction in the world – blood for blood. Gain the **Kill** skill. If you're killing someone or something that's shed your blood before, your attack gains the **Brutal** tag.

AN EYE FOR THE STRANGE

Years of exposure to unnatural energies from the items you've bought and sold has left a dirty handprint on your soul. Gain the **Occult** domain. Once per session, you may exchange one domain on one resource for any other.

BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY

Gain +1 Protection in the **Mind**, **Echo**, **Supplies** or **Fortune** resistance. You can take this advance more than once.

CREATIVE ACQUISITIONS

You know that the best price for any item is free. Gain the **Sneak** skill. When you attempt to steal a resource or equipment of D10 value or higher, roll with mastery.

CREATIVE BOOK-KEEPING

A flexible grasp on reality means you have something for every occasion on hand. Gain +2 **Supplies** Protection.

EYES IN THE BACK OF YOUR HEAD

You've set up enough crooked deals to know when you're about to be suckered into one. Gain the **Discern** skill. When you stand still and concentrate, you can quite literally see behind you as though you had eyes in the back of your head. Doing this for too long causes headaches and nausea.

JACK OF ALL TRADES

Gain access to one of the following skills: **Compel**, **Discern**, **Endure**, **Hunt**, **Kill**, **Mend**, **Sneak**. You can take this advance more than once.

LOST IT ALL

You understand – truly – the wretched sensation of having less than nothing. Gain the **Desolate** domain. Once per session ask the GM where the nearest source of wealth is and they will tell you.

MAKE DO

Periods of poverty have taught you to make the best of what you've got and keep things ticking over until your next big score. Gain the **Mend** skill. Once per session, you can immediately fix something that's broken – but it only works once. After that, it's destroyed past the point of repair.

ON THE RUN

You've been running from your creditors for years; you're not above crawling through shit on your hands and knees to survive. Gain the **Evade** skill. Mark D4 stress to **Supplies** to shift the attention of a person or creature to another PC or an important NPC.

PRIEST OF INCARNE

Most Incarnadines pay lip service to their god whilst paying off their debt; you've bought in wholesale, and you understand the terrible power of your patron. Gain the **Religion** domain. Once per session, when you visit a shrine of Incarne and preach to the faithful, refresh equal to the size of the shrine (D4 for cupboard-sized devotionals, D12 for a glorious temple).

The Red Market is too fractious and shifting to act as a shrine for the purposes of this ability.

RED MARKETEE

For a while, you were bold enough to trade blood and souls in the shifting alleyways of the Red Market. Gain the **Warren** domain. If someone tries to take what's yours, your attacks gain the **Brutal** tag when you attempt to stop them.

VALUABLE ASSET

Incarnes won't let you die, because then they can't collect what they're owed. Gain +2 **Fortune** Protection.

AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY

Gain access to one of the following domains: **Cursed**, **Desolate**, **Occult**, **Religion**, **Technology**, **Warren**. You can take this advance more than once.

MAJOR ABILITIES

BACKSTAB

They were fools to have trusted you. When you attack a target who is unaware of your position with a one-handed melee weapon, your attacks gain the **Piercing** tag.

- **MINOR: DEAD EYE.** The benefit also applies to ranged weapons.
- **MINOR: NEVER SAW IT COMING.** Mark D4 stress to **Mind** to activate this power for your next use of **BACKSTAB**. Your attack dice increases in size by two steps. **NEVER SAW IT COMING** only functions against a living person.
- **MINOR: REMUNERATION.** When you reduce a target to 0 resistance using **BACKSTAB**, remove stress from **Supplies** equal to double the value of your current tier.

BROKER

You beseech Incarne for aid. Roll **Mend+Haven** to cast this spell. On a success, remove D6 stress from any resistance (other than **Supplies**) for one nearby character other than yourself.

- **MINOR: INVEST. BROKER** can now be used on yourself.
- **MINOR: TRANSFERRAL.** Roll **Mend+Haven** to cast this spell; on a success, move a Minor fallout from any willing target other than yourself to any other willing target. Both targets must be within arm's reach of one another, and the receiving party must be able to bear the fallout (i.e. a creature with no legs can't receive the **LIMPING** fallout).
- **MINOR: INFLICT.** When you cast **TRANSFERRAL**, the target receiving the fallout does not have to be willing to receive it. Casting the spell in this way uses the target's difficulty instead of standard difficulty.

GRAVE

Debt is just quantified want; you cut out the middle-man. Roll **Compel+Haven** to cast this spell on an NPC you're speaking to; on a success, you can instill a great desire for something in them. If the thing they want is unusual for them, casting this spell is Risky. On a success, they now fiercely want whatever it is you've specified until the end of the current situation.

- **MINOR: ADDICT.** When you cast **GRAVE**, the target will desire the subject of your choosing until the end of the session. If they don't get what they want by the end of the session, they either descend into violence to acquire it or lose their mind in despair (GM's choice).
- **MINOR: VIRAL.** When you cast **GRAVE**, the target has the capacity to pass the desire on to anyone they speak to (aside from you) until it fades – there's a 1 in 6 chance of infection (roll a D6) for every person they talk to for more than a minute. You are immune to the effects of this spell; your allies aren't.
- **MINOR: CONDITIONING.** When you cast **GRAVE**, mark D6 stress to **Mind** to scar the target with the desire. From now on, the first time they see you each session, treat them as though you had just cast **GRAVE** on them with the same subject of desire.

DEBTOR'S REDS

Incarné's presence thrums through you; you are resplendent, terrible, and hard to look at directly. When you wear the sacred robes of Incarné and a myriad of holy symbols, ledgers and freshly-minted coins, you may automatically cause 1 stress to an adversary who can see you each time you act.

- **MINOR: BUY OFF.** Once per situation, if you are wearing your Debtor's Reds and incur stress, you can mark stress to **Supplies** instead of another resistance.
- **MINOR: CYCLE OF DEBT.** Roll **Kill+Religion** to cast this spell. Target an adversary who has been harmed by **DEBTOR'S REDS**. They mark stress equal to your current **Supplies** stress.
- **MINOR: ASSUME DEBT.** Whilst wearing your Debtor's Reds, any time you mark **Supplies** stress you may choose to ignore your **Supplies** protection. If you do so, you may immediately cause someone within arms reach to mark the same amount of stress that you have just taken.

KARMIC LEDGER

Once you know what's keeping someone awake at night, it's much easier to take advantage of them. Roll **Discern+Haven** to cast this spell on a target you can see and hear. On a success, you determine their deepest karmic debt: the greatest thing that they've taken from someone else (money, valuables, freedom, a son, etc). When you act on this information, roll with mastery.

- **MINOR: CONNECTION.** When you cast **KARMIC LEDGER**, you can see who the debt is owed to via an ephemeral red string connecting the two parties. It's easy enough to follow it.
- **MINOR: HARVEST.** When you cast **KARMIC LEDGER**, you can beseech Incarné (ask the GM) to rate the value of their debt on a scale from D4 (low) to D12 (extremely high). When you murder the target and give their debt to Incarné, remove stress equal to the dice size of their debt.
- **MINOR: CANDIDATE.** Once per session, when you spend a few minutes communing with Incarné, they show you a vision of a person with outstanding karmic debt in your nearby area.

NETWORK

You draw the faithful – those whose lives have been scarred by debt – around a symbol of Incarne, and harvest the bounty they offer up to your god. When in a landmark with the **Haven** domain, roll **Mend+Religion** to cast this spell as you build a shrine to Incarne; on a success, you add the landmark to your trade network. When you enter a haven that you have added to your trade network, gain a D4 (Haven) resource. Increase the dice size of this resource by one step for every additional haven in the network after the first to a maximum of D10.

If you take this ability, you or any other incarnadine may now incur the fallout below.

FALLOUT: SEVERED. [Major, Fortune/Supplies] Thanks to your neglect or pure misfortune, one of your shrines to Incarne has fallen into disrepair, and the haven it's inside is no longer part of your trade network.

MINOR: PROLIFERATION. Whilst at a haven that's in your trade network, you and your party may use haunts located in havens that you are not currently visiting. When you use a haunt in this way, halve the value rolled on the dice when determining how much stress to remove from your resistances. If you use such a haunt to remove fallout, increase the cost by 1 step.

- **MINOR: PATHWAYS.** When you and your allies attempt to establish a Connection between landmarks and at least one of them is part of your trade network, roll with mastery.
- **MINOR: MONEY TALKS.** Whilst at a shrine to Incarne, you can communicate with bonds or haunts in any haven that's part of your trade network.

ZENITH ABILITIES

ULTIMATE CREDIT

A life lived in service of Incarne brings with it a powerful favour. Once, and only once, you can buy anything (except the Heart Itself). You own this physical, conceptual or immaterial thing and have as much control over it as you do a knife, a suit of clothes or anything else you own. Two sessions from now, the debt will be recalled, and it will take your life.

ULTIMATE DEBT

You wield the wrath of Incarne. Once, and only once, you can unload the weight of Incarne's debt upon a single luckless individual, location or entity (except the Heart Itself). Anything and everything that could go wrong for the target does go wrong, and it does so catastrophically, but they do not die. Once per situation, you can harvest the debt on the target to clear stress from your resistance tracks – when you do so, roll a D10. On a 2 or higher, remove that much stress. On a 1, your luck runs out, and a cosmic loophole sees Incarne claim your life.

ULTIMATE REWARD

You did it – you paid it off. You finally got out of Incarne's debt. You can retire to a normal life wherever you please and start a family, maybe set up a small business – whatever you want. You die several years from now, maybe decades, surrounded by your loved ones.

JUNK MAGE



You were a magician, but you always knew there was something more. In the City Above, magic is a pale imitation of what it can be in the Heart. Down here, there is true power to be channeled (i.e. stolen) from beings of tremendous power. You see that the rites of the spell-slinging occultists and the miracle-summoning priests of Spire are nothing but two sides of the same coin – tricks that redirect ambient energy into desired effects.

You've tasted the dreams of the ancients. You know that vastly powerful things slumber in the City Beneath, and you know the secrets that plumb your brain directly into their vast, alien consciousnesses. Your spells are cobbled together from snatches of dreams, shards of true-names and the ravings of madmen. You are on the bleeding edge of magic.

The power is undeniable; addictive, in fact. To channel – to steal – the power of godlike beings is intoxicating. You relish the touch of madness, of accursed insight, into the vast and terrible truths that hide beneath reality. Sanity, safety, reputation; all these are secondary to the pursuit of arcane majesty.

CORE TRAITS

SKILL: Discern

DOMAIN: Occult

RESOURCE:

Vial of cursed ink D6 Occult

EQUIPMENT:

Pick one:

Two old-fashioned pistols	Kill D8, Ranged, Loud, One-Shot
Hungry knife	Kill D6, Brutal, Blood-bound, Dangerous
Overstuffed coat and blunderbuss	Mend Supplies D6; Kill D4, Spread, Point-blank, One-shot

CORE ABILITIES

RAVENING KNOWLEDGE

You crave the touch of what others call “madness”. The glimpses of truth that ravage your frail, mortal mind give you unimaginable power. When your

Mind stress is 4 or higher, roll with mastery when you attempt to cast a spell.

SACRIFICE

*You are willing to sacrifice anything for another hit. Before you cast a spell from this class, you can opt to destroy a resource with the **Occult** domain. Roll the resource's dice; the amount rolled is added to your Protection value against any stress incurred as a result of casting the spell.*

MINOR ABILITIES

BACK POCKET ARCANA

*Your satchel is overstuffed with occult leftovers – shavings of spireblack amber here, cursed squid-ink there, nails from wrongful crucifixions – that you can press into service. +2 **Supplies** Protection.*

BEEN EVERYWHERE

Gain access to one of the following domains: **Cursed, Desolate, Haven, Occult, Religion, Technology, Warren**. You can take this advance more than once.

BY ANY MEANS

Gain access to one of the following skills: **Compel, Delve, Discern, Evade, Hunt, Kill, Sneak, Mend**. You can take this advance more than once.

FRONTIER ETIQUETTE

*Your time in the City Above wasn't for naught; you learned how to hold a conversation, smile and nod in all the right places and read a room to avoid offence. Gain the **Haven** domain. The first time each session that you use a haunt, your spent resource counts as one dice size higher.*

LITANIES OF FALSE POWER

*You know that the gods of the world are distant, dead or disinterested; but you pay attention, for they may reveal useful secrets. Gain the **Religion** domain. When you use the **SACRIFICE** ability above, you may also consume resources with the **Religion** domain.*

MARK OF HUNGER

You can taste the power slumbering in the City Beneath, and you want it more than anything. Gain the **Delve** skill. You can smell sources of magical power – the more potent and active, the more pungent the smell. Different types of magic have different scents: relics of the Moon Beneath have the aroma of wine and butter, necromancy smells like nujabian kafee and the occult technology of the Vermissian resembles malt and rich tannins.

MARK OF THE PHANTOM

Silver-grey skinspells and litanies of obfuscation wind their way over your body; you are an aberration in space and time, glitching through the City Beneath. Gain the **Evade** skill. Once per situation, when you mark stress due to physical harm or detection, you may make the GM reroll the stress dice. Keep the second result, even if it's higher.

MARK OF SHADOW

You conceal your activities from rivals and superstitious fools with a mark etched on your skin; when you speak the right words, you become hard to notice. Gain the **Sneak** skill. Hiding from someone or something is always a Standard action for you, and never Risky or Dangerous.

MARK OF THE WEAVER

Your hands are covered in spiderweb ink; you have the capacity to stitch, fix and bind with a thought. Gain the **Mend** skill. Once per session, you can fix someone or something in a matter of seconds, even if it would usually take hours of careful work.

RUST AND IRON

You know of pathways that are clockwork and galvanic, shifting and malevolent, and were built by no mortal hand. Gain the **Technology** domain. Learn the following spell: roll **Mend+Technology** to improve a piece of equipment that has moving parts using a ritual that takes around half an hour. On a success, increase the equipment's quality by 1 step (standard becomes good, good becomes excellent) and give it the **Dangerous** and **Unreliable** tags. Once you have improved a piece of equipment with this spell, you can't improve it again.

SIPHON OF FORTUNE

There are places where you can wager more than cash on a game of cards; your stake of choice is good luck. +2 **Fortune** Protection.

WARDING SPELLS

Gain +1 Protection in the **Blood**, **Supplies**, **Echo** or **Fortune** resistance. You can take this advance more than once.

WRETCHED AND GLORIOUS

Your body is a prison, and when it blurs or breaks, you feel closer to your patrons. Gain the **Cursed** domain. When you use the **SACRIFICE** ability above, you may also consume resources with the **Cursed** domain.

MAJOR ABILITIES

CURSE OF THE SKY COURT

These fae spirits of air, long-banished from their birth realm, are in a zealous and perpetual quest for pleasure. Roll **Compel+Occult** to cast this spell by drinking strong liquor or taking narcotics and intoning an ancient contract. On a success, all those nearby are compelled to seek immediate pleasure: drink, drugs, dance, wild creation of art, music, general hedonism and miscellaneous frivolity. The alien creatures of the Heart may have an unusual definition of "pleasure" that defies mortal minds.

- **MINOR: ECSTASY.** When you cast **CURSE OF THE SKY COURT**, you can focus it on a single target rather than everyone nearby. This individual is overwhelmed with joy, and energised to seek more of it – they find it hard to focus on even immediate dangers. As long as you maintain your concentration on them, their difficulty is reduced to Standard.
- **MINOR: A MOMENT ETERNAL.** Roll **Evade+Occult** to cast this spell. On a success, your immediate area is time-shifted. For each hour outside of the area, those in the area experience 4 hours of time passing. While intended to stretch out a perfect moment, this can make time-sensitive tasks easier to attempt. The barrier that surrounds the area is blurry and

indistinct, and if anyone from outside the area intrudes, the spell is broken and time resumes to normal speed.

- **MINOR: STEAL THE NIGHT AWAY.** Once per session, when you engage in reckless hedonism, refresh D6. If you spend time with someone who fascinates you during the process, refresh D8 instead. These refreshes can be spent to remove fallout as though you were making use of a haunt.

FIRE OF THE RED KING

You have tasted the dreams of the Red King: his breath as fire, his blood as molten gold. This spell causes your unarmed attacks to gain the **Ranged** tag as you conjure flames on the clothing and bodies of those nearby. Each successive unarmed attack you inflict on the same target increases the size of your stress dice against that target by one step until the end of the situation.

- **MINOR: WORDS OF FLAME.** Your unarmed attacks inflict D6 stress rather than D4.
- **MINOR: SUPERHEAT.** In melee, your unarmed attacks have the **Piercing** tag.
- **MINOR: COIN-GOLD BLOOD.** You gain **Protection 5** against stress marked due to flame or heat.

FRENZY OF THE SKY COURT

The Court had their memories stripped away and their brains filled with nothing but air; though all of genius-level intelligence, they exist purely in a single, frantic moment. Roll **Evade+Occult** to cast this spell. On a success, you are filled with the mercurial energy of the Sky Court, and you gain +1 Protection to all resistances for the remainder of the situation. However, until the spell ends (and you can't end it early), any actions that require more than a couple of seconds' attention become Risky.

- **MINOR: TEMPORARY PERFECTION.** When you cast **FRENZY OF THE SKY COURT**, you gain access to a skill that you do not possess until the end of the situation.

- **MINOR: BRISK CONJURATION.** You are able to summon an indiscriminate blast of air in a direction of your choice. This spell functions as a (Kill D4, Spread, Debilitating, One-Shot) weapon.
- **MINOR: MADDENING STORM.** Roll **Compel+Occult** to cast this spell. On a success, an area roughly the size of a city block – centred on you – is assailed with stiff winds that stir up debris and howl deafeningly through tunnels and vents, but everything within ten feet of you remains calm. All **Sneak** and **Evade** checks in this area are made with mastery, but the inhabitants definitely know something's going on. This effect lasts until the end of the current situation; if you move outside of the zone of calm at the centre beforehand, the spell ends.

GREED OF THE RED KING

The Red King's one desire is wealth; he was so devoted to the pursuit of gold that he dreamed himself a reality of infinite splendour. Roll **Discern+Occult** to cast the spell. On a success, you determine what a target you can see wants most of all right now. In addition, you can smell money, or anything of particular value.

- **MINOR: ONLY THE FINEST.** Once per situation, an item you are holding becomes Excellent quality. At the end of the situation, the item is destroyed.
- **MINOR: GORGE.** Once per situation, when you eat (destroy) a resource with the **Haven** domain, remove stress from **Blood**, **Mind** or **Echo** equal to half the amount rolled on the resource's dice.
- **MINOR: A KING DEMANDS.** Once per session, you can demand that a target holding any item gives you that item, and they must obey.

KISS OF THE DROWNED QUEEN

You have glimpsed the sunken Court of the Drowned Queen, where she slumbers and awaits the resurgence of her line. With a touch, you can conjure salt water in the lungs of those who oppose you. This spell functions as the following weapon: (Kill D6, Piercing.) If the target is at least shin-deep in water, it inflicts D8 damage.

- **MINOR: SLUMBERING ETERNAL.** You no longer need to breathe air; no matter the situation, you will not asphyxiate. Once per session, you can also locate a useful source of water – a stream, a pipe, a drain, a reservoir, a waterfall, etc.
- **MINOR: BODY OF WATER.** You may no longer remove Blood fallout or stress by using haunts. However, once per session, choose one of the following when you spend at least an hour submerged in water: remove all stress from **Blood**, remove all Minor **Blood** fallout or downgrade one Major **Blood** fallout to Minor.
- **MINOR: GRACE.** You may walk on water as though it were solid ground.

SANCTUM OF THE STONE CHORUS

*They claim, in a hundred voices like the scraping of tectonic plates, that they are the Old Gods, imprisoned in the Heart by upstart deities. Roll **Discern+Religion** to cast this spell. On a success, you find (or spontaneously create) a path to one of the parasitic temples of the Old Gods, which sucks existence from the world like ticks. When you meditate here, remove D6 stress from **Echo**; your allies may use the temple in the same way. You may not open more than one path to a temple at any one time. After an hour or so, the path will seal shut – but not without warning, so you'll have time to leave.*

- **MINOR: BENEVOLENT.** Instead of removing D6 stress from **Echo**, you or any allies may remove D6 stress from **Supplies** or **Fortune** instead.
- **MINOR: OMNIPRESENT.** When you cast this spell, you access the same temple every time, no matter where you are; it becomes a Fracture. At the GM's discretion, Major **Mind** fallout could result in you losing access to this specific temple, and Minor **Mind** fallout could see it robbed or otherwise compromised.
- **MINOR: BOUNTIFUL.** Once per session, when you access the temple, you can locate a non-unique item of D8 value or lower.

ZENITH ABILITIES

THE HERALD OF THE RED KING

*You conjure forth a door to the King of Want, and his approach is terrible. You can only cast this spell once, but you do so automatically without needing to roll. The Red King appears, a writhing town-sized knot of jealousy and fire and iron-hard scales, and breathes flame so hot that it can destroy anyone and anything it touches. You can direct his attack. When you cast the spell, roll **Endure+Occult**. On a success, you become the new Red King, a furious engine of desire, and can be summoned by other Junk Mages. On a failure, you are added to his hoard. Either way, there's no coming back.*

THE HERALD OF THE DROWNED QUEEN

You give the Queen what she wants most of all: subjects. You can only cast this spell once, but you do so automatically without needing to roll. The landmark you're in is half-submerged in water, and from the depths in the centre a throne room rises, bearing the immortal majesty of the Drowned Queen. This is now her dominion, and you are her most trusted advisor; the remade landmark is utterly under your and the Queen's control. You have a session or two to get what you need out of the situation before you are retired as a player character – driven mad from occult stress, assassinated by agents of a rival haven, or betrothed to the Queen to cement the new expansion.

THE HERALD OF THE STONE CHORUS

You throw open the door to the Chorus' prison; while they look on in shock, you throw another captive into the cell. You can only cast this spell once, but you do so automatically without needing to roll. A creature or entity you are touching is sealed away in the Stone Chorus' prison eternally; you become part of the mechanism that locks the door, and cease to exist in any meaningful sense. Nothing can free the target from its prison short of you, the door, agreeing to open.

VERMISST KNIGHT



The Vermissian is a cursed, centuries-old mass transport network that the people from the City Above built to get from place to place quicker. To power it, they tapped into the wellspring of potential that is the Heart, and damned every single tunnel and station to eternal weirdness. The Vermissian never officially opened. Now, desperate people, fringe historians and heretic cults hide in the infrastructure, using the strange unreality within to further their own ends.

Using barely-understood technology and living in the space between worlds, the Vermissian Knights do their level best to understand the parasite reality and protect others they find there. They are in high demand as companions on delves: they have an understanding of the Heart, a good sword arm and a suit of powered armour built from scavenged train materials that helps keep them (and their allies) alive.

Knights will inscribe the names of landmarks that they have discovered, or found stable routes to, on their armour – it is as much a research project and an advertisement of their prowess as it is a means of protection. Each knight's suit is utterly unique, using technology taken from a dozen different places: different gauges of steels, different weights and levels of protection and flexibility and controls that are often inscrutable to anyone but the creator themselves.

CORE TRAITS

SKILL: Delve

DOMAIN: Technology

RESOURCE:

Spare capacitors and wires **D6 Technology**

EQUIPMENT:

Pick one:

Pneumatic hammer **Kill D8, Brutal, Loud, Tiring**

Scrapsword and Magelight rig **Kill D6; Delve D6**

Steel door shield **Kill D6, Block**

CORE ABILITY

VERMISSIAN PLATE

Your armour is made up of scavenged, barely-understood technology from the alternate realities inside the Vermissian network. Once per session, when you consume a resource with the **Technology** or **Occult** domains by augmenting or repairing your armour, roll the resource's dice and choose one of the following:

- Remove stress marked against Blood, Mind or Echo equal to the amount rolled.
- Inflict stress on a delve or adversary equal to the amount rolled.
- (D8 resource or higher) Gain access to a skill or domain for the rest of the session.
- (D8 resource or higher) Increase your Blood protection by 1 for the rest of the situation.

MINOR ABILITIES

ARCANE REBREATHES

You possess a gas mask that filters out airborne infectants from the Heart. +2 **Echo** Protection.

ARMOUR PLATING

Retro-engineered from train carriages, this trademark chest armour still bears the symbols of the rail networks that built the Vermissian. +2 **Blood** Protection.

BLACK KNIGHT

You have spent time studying the forbidden arts with the sages of your order. Gain the **Occult** domain. Once per session, when you enter a landmark, you can intuit the location of an occult sect who are hiding information that will aid you in your quest.

KNIGHT PROTECTOR

You are willing to kill and die to ensure that the Vermissian is safe. Gain the **Kill** skill. Once per situation, when an ally within arm's reach would mark stress to **Blood**, you mark an equivalent amount to **Blood** instead.

HELLWALKER

You have been anointed with the sacred oils that protect you from the nightmare energies of the Heart. Gain the **Cursed** domain. You can use a resource with the **Cursed** domain to activate your **VERMISSIAN PLATE** core ability.

PHANTOM LENS

Various blood, ichors and spittles have been used to treat these lenses, allowing you to see into dimensions other than the material. Gain the **Hunt** skill. While you wear these lenses, you can track anything – even if it doesn't leave a tangible trail.

PROTECTOR'S GAUNTLET

A heavy metal gauntlet bearing the emblem of your house: *The Lords Galvanic, The Free Wheels, The Cross Countrymen*. +1 **Blood** Protection, +1 **Fortune** protection.

SANGUINARY ARRAY

Your inefficient mortal heart is supplemented by a rig that extracts, filters and nourishes your vital fluids. One side effect of this is that your blood acts as an antenna for the scattershot electrical impulses of the Heart. Gain the **Discern** skill. If one of your senses becomes damaged or unusable, you can replace it with the weird echoes that shudder through your exposed blood – it's not perfect, but it'll do.

STALWART

Gain +1 Protection in the **Blood**, **Echo**, **Supplies** or **Fortune** resistance. You can take this advance more than once.

STEELBONES

Your armour bolts onto special implants that absorb harmful energy and distribute it through your body. Gain the **Endure** skill. You can fall distances of up to 3 storeys without taking damage.

STUDENT OF THE SAGES

Gain access to one of the following skills: **Compel**, **Delve**, **Discern**, **Endure**, **Hunt**, **Kill**, **Mend**. You can take this advance more than once.

TUNNEL RAT

You have performed the Rite of Suffocation, and know ways of slowing your breathing to survive longer. Gain the **Warren** domain. You can hold your breath for a very long time, allowing you to stay underwater or in toxic areas for extended periods.

WELL TRAVELLED

Gain access to one of the following domains: **Cursed**, **Desolate**, **Haven**, **Occult**, **Technology**, **Wild**, **Warren**. You can take this advance more than once.

MAJOR ABILITIES

AETHERIC FIELD

Your armour buzzes with static that makes your hair stand on end; this discharge can keep you safe from the body-warping effects of the Vermissian. Once per session, activate this power. You gain +3 **Echo** protection until the end of the current situation.

- **MINOR: HELIXICAN BURST.** When you activate **AETHERIC FIELD**, deal damage equal to your **Echo** protection to all adversaries standing nearby.
- **MINOR: RECHARGE.** Once you've used **AETHERIC FIELD**, you can use it again by consuming a D6 or higher value resource with the **Occult** or **Cursed** tags.
- **MINOR: ANATHEMA.** When **AETHERIC FIELD** is active, your melee attacks against heartsblood creatures or people gain the **Brutal** tag.

DRAGON-KILLER

You have been entrusted with a greatblade from the order's vaults – an ancient weapon designed to slay the fiercest abominations within the Vermissian network. A greatblade has two profiles: one when used against human-sized targets (Kill D6, Tiring), and one when used against targets significantly larger than yourself (Kill D10, Tiring).

- **MINOR: HUNTED.** Name the creature that is coming after you. Once per session, you can declare that it replaces the opposition in a dangerous scene as it eats them, chases them off or causes a big distraction – the GM decides. You'll have to fight or evade it yourself now, of course. If you kill it, gain a minor advance and remove this ability.
- **MINOR: ENDURANCE TRAINING.** Your greatblade no longer has the **Tiring** tag, and inflicts D8 stress against human-sized targets.
- **MINOR: APPLIED RESEARCH.** Once per situation, when you inflict stress on an adversary, you can identify its weak spots. For the remainder of the situation, you treat that adversary's difficulty as one step lower (to a minimum of Standard) when acting against it.

GET BEHIND ME

*You know that you can't explore the world alone, so you've learned to keep your team alive. Any ally within arm's reach of you gains +1 **Blood** protection thanks to your interventions. Once per situation, you can bellow an order and remove D4 **Blood** or **Mind** stress from a nearby ally.*

- **MINOR: LAST-MINUTE INTERVENTION.** Once per session, when an ally within arm's reach of you suffers **Blood** fallout, immediately downgrade it by one step (or remove it if it's Minor fallout).
- **MINOR: STEAM VENT.** Your armour gains the **Smoke** tag, and you can activate it at will.
- **MINOR: BACK-TO-BACK.** If there's only one ally within arm's reach of you, they gain +2 **Blood** protection instead of +1.

OVERCLOCK

*You push your Vermissian Plate up to, and honestly beyond, its limits. You may activate this ability at any time. When you do, make an immediate melee attack; your weapon gains the **Brutal** tag. After using the ability, mark D4 stress to **Fortune** as you push your luck and strain your engines.*

- **MINOR: PUNCTURE.** When you activate **OVERCLOCK**, you may choose to add the **Piercing** tag to your attacks in addition to the **Brutal** tag. If you do this, mark D6 stress to **Fortune** after using the ability.
- **MINOR: MOMENTUM.** When you activate **OVERCLOCK**, you may choose to add the **Trusty** tag to a **Delve** roll instead of the **Brutal** tag to an attack.
- **MINOR: GALVANIC CRUCIBLE.** You may activate your **VERMISSIAN PLATE** core ability twice per session, rather than once. The second time you do it, mark D4 stress to **Fortune**.

TRAILBLAZER

Leading teams of explorers to lost sites and distant stations have taught you how best to move through the City Beneath – even at a cost to your own health. When you lead a party on a delve, you may activate this ability. When active, increase the stress dice inflicted on the delve (and that the delve inflicts on you) by one step.

- **MINOR: FIRST TO THE FRONT.** When you lead a party in a fight you may activate this ability. When active, increase the stress dice that you and the adversary inflict on each other by one step.
- **MINOR: PATHFINDER.** When you attempt to establish a connection on a delve, roll with mastery.
- **MINOR: KEEP YOUR HEADS DOWN.** Whilst on a delve, any ally who can see or hear you while you give orders gains +1 **Fortune** protection.

ZENITH ABILITIES

END OF THE LINE

A lifetime of searching has paid off: you discover what you've been looking for all these years. On tier 2 or deeper, you may activate this power. You learn of the location of a unique landmark – something truly extraordinary. Work out what it is with the GM. You must complete a delve to reach it. Once there, you cannot leave the landmark. Instead, you die in some tragic fashion, vow to protect it forever or ascend into a pure state of electricity and echoing rails. Your character is removed from the story.

PERPETUAL MOTION ENGINE

Years of heartsblood radiation and forbidden knowledge culminate in your ultimate work: an engine powered by a throbbing heartseed, a source of wild and limitless power. Upon implantation of the heartseed into your suit's furnace, you become an unstoppable force within the City Beneath – indeed, you can never stop moving.

You stamp off into the darkness, and your character is removed from the story except for the **DEUX EX MACHINA** ability that is granted to all surviving members of your party.

DEUS EX MACHINA

This ability may only be used once per campaign by a single player character. When you are outside of a landmark and you or an ally suffers Major or Critical fallout, an inhuman collection of meat and twisted steel – the Vermissian Knight – arrives. They've been watching you this whole time. They immediately inflict 25 stress on an adversary of the GM's choosing, then disappear into the City Beneath to protect other delvers.

THE LAST TRAIN

You consume your power in a forbidden rite. Etching ancient timetables onto the walls in the blood of angels, and lighting signal-fires in colours not visible to the naked eye, you summon The Last Train to your position. The Last Train arrives at your current position by the most direct and destructive route, destroying anything in its path. You are killed when this ability is used – crushed under the wheels of the train, riddled with strange energies and cooked in your armour or burned out from the occult strain.

WITCH



There is a disease, deep in the City Beneath, that worms its way inside the blood and binds the victim to the place; they become a part of something far greater than themselves. Those who have made such a bond are called witches, and are viewed with a mixture of suspicion and awe by the other inhabitants of the Heart.

Each strain of the disease has a lineage and history associated with it, and witches are careful not to infect those who they think would squander the gift. This long tradition, combined with the way that some witches can kill the average person simply by glancing at them, means that the sect is treated as nobility or emissaries of the Heart Itself. They are almost fae-like, existing in their own world of strange practices and esoteric arts whispered from teacher to student over several centuries.

The witches' base of power is Hallow, a ramshackle town built within a burned-out cathedral inside the Heart. Almost every witch has passed through there, is going to pass through there or is trying to avoid it at all costs.

CORE TRAITS

SKILL: Compel

DOMAIN: Occult

RESOURCE:

Tattered finery (a silk scarf, worn jewellery, etc) **D6 Haven**

EQUIPMENT:

Pick one:

Sacred Blade **Kill D6, Bloodbound**

Goat's Leg Carbine **Kill D6, Ranged, Reload**

Physiker's bag **Mend Blood D6**

CORE ABILITIES

CRUCIBLE

You bring the energy of the Heart inside yourself and transmute it into crimson power. At any time, roll a D6. If it's equal to or under your current **Echo** stress, clear that much stress from **Echo** and roll with mastery on your next action. If it's over your current **Echo** stress, add that much stress to **Echo**.

TRUE FORM

Your skin skitters with barely-contained force: the hearts-blood within you is waiting to remake you as a flickering, hungry zoetrope horror. Whenever you want to, or when you suffer Major fallout, you enter your true form – describe it. When in your true form, you roll with mastery on **Hunt** and **Kill** checks, but all other checks become Risky. At the end of the current situation, you revert to your humanoid form.

MINOR ABILITIES

A MIND OF MANY DOORWAYS

Mortal concerns fade in comparison to the majesty of the blood-song that resonates within you. Gain +2 **Mind** Protection.

BLOOD-QUIET

The darkness of the City Beneath beats black within your veins. Gain the **Sneak** skill. When you enter your **TRUE FORM**, **Sneak** and **Evade** rolls are no longer considered Risky.

BOOKS OF LORE

Gain access to one of the following domains: **Cursed**, **Desolate**, **Occult**, **Religion**, **Warren**, **Wild**. You can take this advance more than once.

CHARMS AND WARDS

Gain +1 Protection in the **Blood**, **Mind**, **Supplies** or **Fortune** resistance. You can take this advance more than once.

DISTINGUISHED LINEAGE

Your blood-mothers have operated in the City Beneath for centuries; you carry the weight of their actions (and their promises) on your back. Gain the **Haven** domain. Once per session, when you mark stress to a bond, do not roll for fallout.

DIVINITY

You were inducted into a coven who believe that witches are blessed by the gods; you recognise a second heartbeat, unknowable and sacred, inside you. Gain the **Religion** domain. Roll **Discern+Religion** to follow the secret

signs in an inhabited landmark that lead to the hidden places of worship where you are revered as a messenger of the Heart Itself.

HEART-WISE

Gain access to one of the following skills: **Compel**, **Delve**, **Discern**, **Endure**, **Hunt**, **Kill**, **Mend**. You can take this advance more than once.

IMPLACABLE

You have withstood worse torments, and you will go on to do so again; through your blood you are stable, eternal, unwavering. Gain the **Endure** skill. Once per session, add 1 to a resistance of your choice. Remove the +1 at the end of the session.

THE OLD BLOOD

You inherited the disease from an ancient bloodline; you are strange, and powerful, and can see echoes of things that others can't. Gain the **Discern** skill. When you observe someone for a few seconds, you can read their aura and discern their surface-level emotions – whether they're angry, happy, frustrated and so on.

RAMBLEWYRD

You are well-versed in exploring and surviving the places most connected to the Heart Itself; sometimes you do it for pleasure. Gain the **Cursed** domain. Once per session, when you are in an area with the **Cursed** domain, remove D6 stress from resistances of your choice.

RED DOMINION

You don't bleed unless you want to; when you're angry, your veins pulse visibly beneath your skin. Gain +2 **Blood** protection.

WILD-WITCH

You know the secrets of the wild things of the world, and are skilled at distilling their essences. Gain the **Wild** domain. When you're in a landmark and have time to prepare, you can turn a resource with the **Wild** domain into a healing draught. When drunk, this draught removes **Blood** or **Mind** stress equal to its dice size minus one step – choose whether it's **Blood** or **Mind** when you create it.

WITCH-SPIT

They say that the spittle of witches can cure minor ailments, repair broken trinkets and soothe an aching heart. Yours closes up exit wounds. Gain the **Mend** skill. When you want it to be, your spit becomes adhesive and can harden into a tarry, sticky substance.

MAJOR ABILITIES

ASCENDANCY

You know the secret of singing the City Beneath into different shapes. Roll **Compel+Occult** to cast this spell and draw the Heart Itself into the area around you. The area you're in gains the **Occult** domain, and reacts appropriately: magic circles blossom on the floor and thrum with dark power, mist floods the air and so on. This lasts until the end of your current situation.

- **MINOR: BYPASS.** The first time you cast this spell on a delve, it functions as a D6 Boon.
- **MINOR: BLOOD CALLS FOR BLOOD.** All weapons used in the area increase their stress dice by 1 step for both adversaries and player characters.
- **MINOR: REFUGE.** Clear D6 **Fortune** stress on you or an ally each time you cast this spell.

CRIMSON MIRROR

You bleed onto an upturned mirror, and omens swim within the crimson. Roll **Discern+Occult** to cast this spell before you embark on a delve. On a success, you see three omens; describe them. You don't have to be too specific – in fact, the more vague you are, the better. These are fated to come up on the delve. The first time you interact with whatever you find that relates to each omen, you roll with mastery.

- **MINOR: SHARED VISIONS.** Your allies can also roll with mastery when they interact with the portentous items.
- **MINOR: SCARLET INSIGHT.** Once per session, when you cast this spell, clear D8 stress from **Mind** or **Fortune**.

- **MINOR: DIRE PORTENTS.** Once per session, re-roll any dice that you or anyone else rolled; the original roll is a vision you received, and you shout a warning (or act differently this time around).

EXSANGUINATE

You pluck a target's blood out of its mouth and nose, choking it on its own viscera. This spell functions as a weapon with the following tags: (Kill D6, ranged). You can mark stress accrued as a result of using this spell to **Echo**.

- **MINOR: RETCH.** The stress dice increases to D8.
- **MINOR: MAESTRO.** The weapon gains the **Piercing** tag.
- **MINOR: AS ABOVE, SO BELOW.** You do not need line of sight to use **EXSANGUINATE** as long as you have a sympathetic token connected to your target (their hair, a figurine in their shape, a favoured item of theirs, etc.), but you are still limited to making an attack within the usual distance of the **Range** tag.

FAMILIAR

You have developed a special relationship with a creature; you feed it your blood, and in return it accepts the monstrous changes of your magic. You are accompanied by a small creature – no bigger than a dog – that is cowardly and strange to look at. Describe it.

When you take stress from magical sources (including your own), you may assign that stress to your familiar instead of your own resistances. When you mark 4 total stress to your familiar, it is unavailable until the start of the next session. It returns changed; describe what aspect of it has been transformed by the magical energy coursing through it.

At the start of each session, remove all stress marked against your familiar.

- **MINOR: RESILIENT.** You can mark 6 total stress, instead of 4, before you lose access to your familiar for the remainder of the session.
- **MINOR: HUNGRY.** Your familiar functions as a (D8 Kill, Ranged, Unreliable) item.

- **MINOR: CURIOUS.** Your familiar functions as a (D8 Delve, Unreliable) item.

GREAT AND TERRIBLE

You unlock the power of your true form – an awe-inspiring union of magic and flesh. You are no longer forced to assume your true form (see **TRUE FORM**, above) when you take Major fallout. When you choose to enter your true form, all adversaries who can see you take D4 stress.

- **MINOR: ENTHRALL.** When you enter your true form, you may mark D4 stress to **Echo**; all who see you transform are stunned into inaction, and you have enough time to make a single action entirely unopposed.
- **MINOR: SACRED OBJECT.** Once per session, when you assume your true form, downgrade one **Blood** fallout result you are suffering from by one step.
- **MINOR: UNION.** Once per situation, when you are in your true form and an action you perform would be considered Risky, treat it as Standard difficulty instead.

LAIR

You adopt or create a predatory building and claim it as your own; it still eats people, but it doesn't eat you. The building in question is no larger than a small shop or study. Inside, the shadows crawl and scurry, the walls creak and whisper and a maddening heart-beat thuds at the back of your consciousness – perfect for you, but unsettling for anyone else. Any non-witch who enters your lair must roll **Resist+Occult** and mark D6 stress to **Echo** on a failure or D4 stress to **Echo** on a partial success.

When you are in a landmark, roll **Mend+Occult** to summon your lair. On a success, it's always been here, as far as anyone knows. Your lair acts as a bond (p. 98) – if it suffers fallout, it's either eaten someone who'll be missed or been damaged by suspicious locals.

- **MINOR: CALM.** Your lair no longer inflicts stress on non-witches when they enter, unless

you wish it to. You can't pick specific targets – it's either active or inactive.

- **MINOR: RULE.** While in your lair, you roll with mastery on all actions.
- **MINOR: FEED.** Once per session, you may feed a helpless or dead person or animal to your lair to remove stress from your bond. The larger the creature, the more stress you remove from the bond – a cat is D4, a person is D6, and if you can haul or lure a bear in there it's D12.

ZENITH ABILITIES

FINAL FORM

You reach down deep within yourself, inside the singing of your blood, and unearth your purest state: a night-black being of wrath and ruin. Your true form was but a mere shadow of this. You have complete control over the landmark you are currently occupying (or the nearby area, if you're on a delve) and you are omniscient and omnipresent within its borders. You alone chooses who lives and dies inside.

At the end of the situation after you activate this power, the area you are in is stained forever with your essence. It counts as one tier deeper than it was before and changes to become appropriately strange. You live on as an echo, a mark on the place; it becomes part of you, and you part of it.

PERFECT RESURRECTION

The communion between flesh and fracture, between the mortal and the undying, becomes near-perfect. You can make a perfect copy of someone who has died, but only once. The copy is absolutely the same as the original, right down to the soul. The copy is so good, in fact, that the person can no longer permanently die.

If they sustain damage that would kill them, they appear dead, but in fact a new copy is pupating somewhere in the depths of the Heart. It will slide out wetly within a lunar month. They get no say in this, and there is no known way to turn it off short of destroying the Heart Itself.

Casting this spell takes an hour or so of ritual chanting and kills you.

THE RED QUEEN

You ascend to dominance over the witches of Hallow. Following a long period of scheming or a single night of decisive action, you are now in charge of all the witches of Hallow. Such a force, when mobilised, is terrifying to behold: their true forms skitter and swarm across rooftops and in the shadows. Few can stand in their path and survive.

After a session or two, the realities of being the head witch set in – there is a surprising amount of admin to do, and other witches are always coming to you with requests for aid. Pretty soon you're going to be interred in the Red Vaults beneath Hallow (as all the leaders of the witches are) to join the chorus of elders.

RULES IN DETAIL

In addition to the short-form version of the mechanics of Heart on p. 5, what follows is an expanded explanation of the rules and further information on combat, equipment, resources, delving, healing, stress and fallout in particular.

YOU DON'T ALWAYS NEED TO ROLL

Not every action needs to use this system. In fact, the majority of things that the player characters do will simply be resolved as a conversation between the players and the gamesmaster. If a character wants to buy a drink in a pub, there's no need to roll dice; it just happens – failure is boring and success is trivial. If they want to buy a table of tight-lipped explorers a few rounds of drinks to loosen up their tongues, that's a different matter entirely. There's all sorts of things that could go wrong with that plan – it could wind up costing them more than they wanted to spend (**Supplies stress**), getting in trouble with the landlord (**Fortune stress**) or a cracking hangover (**Blood stress**).

If you can't come up with anything interesting resulting from failure, and the action is possible within the fiction of the world, just let it happen.

SUCCESS & FAILURE

When your character performs an important or challenging action, the gamesmaster will ask you to roll to see if you succeed. You'll need to do five things in this order.

1. First, establish the stakes for the roll. What do you have to lose, if anything?
2. Next, work out if your character's skills and abilities apply to the action, and as a result establish how many dice you're rolling (the size of your dice pool).

3. Roll your dice. If it's a difficult action, remove dice according to the difficulty rules.
4. Work out whether you've succeeded (and what happens next) by consulting the highest result rolled on your dice.
5. If necessary, mark stress and roll for fallout. If you've failed, or succeeded at a cost, there will be some negative effects for your character that the GM will help you to resolve.

Remember, all actions in Heart use the same basic mechanics – not just combat, but persuasion, infiltration, exploration and everything else your character might want to do. There's more detail on how to deal with combat, exploration and healing later on, but the core rules will be the same every time you roll.

We've explained these phases in lots of detail below in case you're new to roleplaying or want a detailed breakdown.

ESTABLISH THE STAKES AND DETERMINE DIFFICULTY

Don't roll if there's nothing at stake. If the character could easily do it, it works; if they couldn't do it at all, they don't. Only roll if the character has something to lose.

This is a conversation with your GM and perhaps with other players at your table. Sometimes the stakes will be obvious – for instance, if you're in the middle of a battle and you're rolling to harm your opponent, you risk getting hurt yourself in return. Sometimes they'll be less obvious, and you'll need to think about what you're willing to risk on this roll. Look at your resistances and work out what kind of stress you'll mark if you fail.

Depending on what you're trying to do, it may make sense to target a resistance that is not immediately obvious. Swimming through a submerged tunnel would by default inflict Blood stress from exhaustion and suffocation, but it

could also inflict **Supplies** stress from water leaking into a character's pack and ruining their kit.

At this point, the GM will also need to work out how difficult the action is. There are four kinds of difficulty in Heart – Standard, Risky, Dangerous or Impossible – and they're explained in detail below (on p. 72). Standard difficulty won't affect your roll at all; but Impossible makes it pointless to roll, because there's no way to succeed. Risky and Dangerous actions will take one or two dice away from your roll, so it's important to know up front that these are higher stakes actions with a greater chance of failure.

You can always back out or choose a different approach, but many player groups will throw themselves into difficult situations because it makes a better story. The important thing is that it's always the players' choice to do so: **the GM should never spring difficulty on the players.**

You can increase or decrease the difficulty of an action depending on your characters' behaviour; difficulty is not absolute, and a clever way to circumvent the challenge in the story can mechanically reduce the risk involved. For instance, using a crowbar to open a locked hatch rather than your bare hands might reduce the challenge from Risky to Standard.

CREATE YOUR DICE POOL

Every action starts with a single D10, so you always roll one dice. Some things will make your roll easier, and some will make it more challenging.

ADDING DICE

- If you have the skill you need, add one D10.
- If you have a domain that applies to your action, add one D10.
- If you have mastery over the action, skill or domain, add one D10. Mastery doesn't stack – you can only use it once per action, no matter how many sources you get it from. You don't need a skill to benefit from mastery when using it, although often you'll have both.
- For each character that assists you, if they have

a relevant skill or domain, add one D10 to your dice pool – but they take stress the same way you would. There is a limit on how many characters can aid you on any given action, determined by the GM.

REMOVING DICE

If the roll is Risky or Dangerous, it will reduce your results pool after you roll it – see step 3, "Apply Difficulty", for details. For now, you need to know that Risky rolls will remove one dice from your pool, and Dangerous rolls will remove two.

If that means your dice pool would be reduced to zero, roll a single D10 instead, and use the Difficult Actions table instead of the Core Actions table in step 3. Effectively, this means the only way to succeed is if you roll a 10 on a single dice.

Once you've worked out how many dice you have, roll them.

APPLY DIFFICULTY

Some actions are harder to perform successfully, or without incurring loss, than others. Heart has four levels of difficulty: Standard, Risky, Dangerous and Impossible.

STANDARD: The default difficulty. There's something at stake, but it's not especially hard. Don't make any changes to your dice results – go straight to the next step.

RISKY: The action is especially risky. Maybe the opposition is well-trained, the conditions are poor or the character has a handicap of some sort. After you've rolled your dice, remove the highest result before working out whether or not you have succeeded.

DANGEROUS: The action is very difficult and has a high chance of causing harm or misfortune to the character; any harder than this and it'd be impossible. After you've rolled your dice, remove the two highest results before working out whether you have succeeded.

IMPOSSIBLE: The action cannot succeed, or the odds of success are so low as to make the action functionally impossible. Do not roll dice; the action fails and the character incurs stress. Even if an action is impossible, players might still want to attempt it to fulfil an objective, create a distraction or just because it makes for a better story.

If a dice pool is reduced to zero or fewer dice due to difficulty, roll a single D10 and use the Difficult Actions table in the next step.

CHECK THE RESULTS

Finally, take your highest result, and use this table to work out what happens next:

NORMAL ACTIONS

- 1:** Critical failure (take double stress)
- 2-5:** Failure (take stress)
- 6-7:** Success at a cost (take stress)
- 8-9:** Success (take no stress)
- 10:** Critical success (increase outgoing stress dice by 1 step)

If you're rolling a single D10 because difficulty has reduced your dice pool to zero or below, use this table to work out what happens:

DIFFICULT ACTIONS

- 1:** Critical failure (take double stress)
- 2-9:** Failure (take stress)
- 10:** Success at a cost (take stress)

PARTIAL STRESS AND PASSIVE ACTIONS

Sometimes you're just rolling to minimise harm and not trying to achieve anything else in particular. You might test to see if you can hang onto your mind after seeing something horrific, to avoid damage from someone taking a swing at you or to barter a lower price at a market. On a 6-7 result on such an action, you still take stress, but it's one dice size lower than usual.

If you're trying to do something that involves inflicting stress on someone or something else, you'll do so now. The size of dice you're inflicting is D4 as standard, but it can be modified by your abilities or equipment – see p. 92 for details.

MARK STRESS AND CHECK FOR FALLOUT

When you act and something goes wrong – i.e. when you roll a 7 or less as your highest result or if you're using the difficult actions table – you'll mark stress to one of your resistances. There are five kinds of resistance:

BLOOD: Physical exhaustion, pain, blood loss and injury.

ECHO: Twisting of the body and mind by the unreal energies of the Heart.

MIND: Madness, instability and weirdnesses.

FORTUNE: Bad luck, incompetence and overconfidence.

SUPPLIES: Loss of resources, damaged equipment and debt.

Normally, you'll have established what kind of stress is at risk during phase 1 (establishing the stakes). Situations inflict stress on players relative to the risk and danger involved. This is determined by the GM, and in some cases we've listed specific values as a starting point in this guide. The lowest stress a situation can inflict is D4; the highest is D12.

If you are ever unsure about the amount of stress inflicted by an action (if, for instance, a character falls from a precarious ledge), a useful rule of thumb is to apply a dice type based on what tier of the Heart you're exploring, as follows:

TIER 0: D4 **TIER 2:** D6 **TIER 4:** D8
TIER 1: D4 **TIER 3:** D6

The GM is free to alter these values as they see fit, depending on the situation.

EXAMPLE CAUSES OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF STRESS

BLOOD: Getting stabbed, shot or mauled; walking for too long without rest; falling from a great height; contracting a disease, virus or ailment; being poisoned, or bitten by a venomous creature; escaping a haven as it collapses into the Heart.

ECHO: Coming into contact with heartsblood creatures; exploring corridors of teeth and eyes; spending too long in the wilderness of the Heart; casting uncanny magic and performing rituals; getting caught between landmarks as the landscape shifts and changes; enduring the terrible gaze of a vengeful witch; listening too intently to the whispers that stain the corridor outside your room; consuming plants or meat found in the Heart.

MIND: Experiencing something antithetical to your belief system; casting mind-warping spells; witnessing strange wonders; becoming stranded, helpless, in the wilderness of the City Beneath; becoming trapped with no hope of escape unless rescued; meeting an exact copy of

yourself who knows your name; connecting your consciousness to vast, alien intelligences that slumber on the edge of reality; eating your friends to survive; undergoing near-death experiences; watching your allies die in front of you; being betrayed by someone you trusted.

FORTUNE: Taking a wrong turn; making a loud noise that attracts attention; narrowly missing being crushed by a rock; pushing your luck in general; upsetting powerful people; causing an upset in a haven; stealing, killing innocent people or other taboo acts; desecrating a shrine, or not paying the proper respects to a religious site; accruing bad karma; leaving a trail which draws predators or rivals to your position; being reckless or foolhardy; showing off.

SUPPLIES: Firing a gun; eating food; using a rope to climb out of somewhere; exploring in dark places using



your spireblack lantern; gambling and losing; healing another; throwing food to distract a predator; bribing a Hound to let you past; being robbed or pickpocketed; repairing a bridge; setting up camp in the wilderness; erecting defences; waiting for days or weeks for someone to return.

RESISTANCE PROTECTION

Equipment and abilities can confer resistance protection. When you mark stress to a resistance, reduce the total stress taken by the value of the protection. Protection can completely negate stress loss; in this case, do not roll for fallout, as no stress has been added to the character. Fallout results can render a character's protection useless, lost or in need of repair.

TAKING FALLOUT

Each time your character takes stress, the GM will check for fallout to see if there's any kind of ongoing, serious effect at play. The GM rolls a D12 and compares the result to the current total stress marked against the character's resistances. If the result of the D12 roll is equal or lower, the character suffers fallout.

The level of fallout depends on the number rolled on the D12:

1-6: Minor.

7-12: Major.

With the GM, work out what happens based on the type of stress that triggered the fallout; usually that's the resistance type that has the most stress marked against it. If there's a mix, or it's not clear, go with whatever sounds more interesting. You can choose a fallout from the list starting on p. 80, or make up your own.

If you want, you can choose to combine two Minor fallouts into a single Major fallout – this can be especially appropriate if they're of the same resistance. The original Minor fallout is removed and replaced with the new Major one. Two Major fallouts can be combined into Critical fallout in the same way, but only if you choose to do so.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS TAKING STRESS

Non-Player Characters (NPCs) mark stress like players, but they only have one resistance – Resistance. When an NPC takes total stress equal to their resistance, they flee the situation, drop out of the conflict or do whatever it is the players want them to do.

Critical fallout signals the end of your character in one way or another: death, madness, destitution or any number of ignoble ends. Having multiple Major fallouts at the same time isn't fun for your character, but it's perfectly fine to choose to play that out rather than writing the character out of the game. **Character death is always a choice.**

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

Quin, a Vermissian Knight, is attempting to tear open a hatch to a forgotten train line before a pack of undead vassals track them down. The GM decides that the Evade skill and Technology domain would be suitable for this action, and also that the noise of creaking metal would attract the hunters, so it's Risky. Quin doesn't have the Evade skill, but they do have the Technology domain. Quin's player rolls two D10s – one standard, plus one for having the correct domain.

The D10s show 6 and 9. Because the action was Risky, the GM takes away the highest-scoring dice, leaving Quin's player with a final result of 6 as their highest dice – success at a cost. "You wrench open the hatch," says the GM, "but the vassals manage to grab your leg as you squirm through the gap and wrench it hard before you can kick free."

The GM rolls a D6 to determine how much stress Quin's player will need to mark to Blood, and they roll a 5. Quin has a Blood Protection of 2 which reduces this to 3. Quin didn't have any stress marked beforehand, so their total stress is now 3.

The GM rolls a D12 to see if Quin suffers fallout from stress; they score a 2, which is lower than Quin's total fallout, so they suffer Minor Blood fallout and clear all stress allocated to the Blood resistance. The GM decides that LIMPING would be a suitable Minor Blood fallout, and assigns it to Quin. From now on, they'll find it harder to move around until they get their leg fixed.

HEALING

Unless you're ready to die – and you're probably not – you'll need to heal up, replenish your stocks of supplies and take time to stay calm. Removing stress allows you to prevent things getting worse for your character – or, if you're removing stress due to taking fallout, it lets you crystallise your problems from the abstract to the concrete. Healing ongoing fallout lets you deal with the long-term effects of delving into the Heart without removing your character from play.

REMOVING STRESS

There are several ways you can remove stress from your character.

Certain character abilities have the capacity to remove stress – for example, the Incarnadine's **BROKER** ability lets them remove D6 stress from any resistance other than **Supplies**.

Resting at a landmark allows you to access their haunts and refresh. When you contribute a resource to a haunt, you can remove stress equal to the resource's dice size – roll it and subtract that amount. The dice size next to the haunt indicates the highest amount of stress they can remove, even if you have more valuable resources to trade.

Suffering fallout removes stress from your character: although things definitely got worse for your character, their misfortune shifts from abstract (stress) to concrete (fallout). When you take Minor fallout, remove all stress in the resistance associated with the fallout. When you take Major fallout, remove all stress from all resistances.

Player characters can attempt to remove **Blood**, **Mind** or **Supplies** stress from themselves or each other using appropriate skills and equipment – see below for more details.

USING SKILLS TO HEAL

When attempting to remove stress, the active player makes a check using the **Mend** skill and the domain most relevant to the injury, loss or location in which it took place (e.g. **Wild** for a snakebite, **Haven** for a gunshot, **Desolate** for exhaustion, **Occult** for a mind-addling hex). On a failure or partial success, they mark stress to **Supplies**. A successful action removes D4 stress; characters can increase this amount with suitable equipment.

BLOOD: **Blood** stress is removed via medical attention – stemming bleeding, bandaging wounds, applying numbing agents and administering painkillers. A character can make a **Mend+[Domain]** check to patch another character up; doing it to themselves is a Risky action.

MIND: **Mind** stress is removed by applying drugs that dull the mind to stop panic, fear and anxiety. A character can make a **Mend+[Domain]** check to calm another character down – self-medication is a Risky action.

ECHO: **Echo** stress and fallout cannot be removed without specialised abilities or access to haunts.

FORTUNE: **Fortune** stress and fallout cannot be removed without specialised abilities or access to haunts.

SUPPLIES: **Supplies** stress is removed by sharing your consumable equipment with the rest of the party. Make a **Delve+[Domain]** check to help out an ally by handing over your supplies or scavenging useful materials from the surrounding area. You can cure your own supplies stress in the same manner.

REMOVING ONGOING FALLOUT

Ongoing fallout usually can't be removed by player characters without the use of special abilities. These are serious problems that can't be solved in the chaos and tumult of a delve; they need space, time and relative calm to put them right.

The easiest way to remove ongoing fallout is to access a haunt with the appropriate resistance tag and pay for their services by spending resources. It costs a D6 resource to remove Minor fallout, and a D8 resource to downgrade a Major fallout to Minor. Critical fallout usually spells the death of the character but, should they be dragged to a haven quickly enough, you can downgrade it to Major for a D8 resource.

Finally, the GM might decide to remove fallout because it makes sense in the fiction. For example: the **DARKNESS Supplies** fallout puts the player character at a disadvantage when exploring because they're low on lantern fuel. If a player suffering from this fallout finds a replacement torch as they explore, the GM can choose to remove the fallout, or temporarily suppress its effects. This is handled on a case-by-case basis and should be discussed with the players as and when it arises.

DESCRIBING STRESS AND FALLOUT

The main difference between stress and fallout is that fallout has negative mechanical effects and stress doesn't. Fallout comes with its own description, but stress is more nebulous because it's strictly a fictional concern.

The GM and the player should work together to define what stress means to each character; when a stoic Vermissian Knight suffers Blood stress, the GM might describe it as hits to their armour and reverberation shuddering through their bones. When an unarmoured Junk Mage suffers Blood stress, the GM might describe it as near-misses, scrapes and exhaustion. A Witch, with dominion of blood, might get stabbed and simply not let herself bleed.

Whatever you and your group decide on is fine. Remember: you can get as descriptive as you like, but until someone receives fallout, there's no mechanical feedback.

COMBAT

The Heart is a dangerous place, and with the lives that delvers lead, getting into a fight is an inevitability.

The default roll in combat uses the **Kill** skill and whatever domain the fight is taking place in. For example, a fight on top of acres of abandoned high-rise buildings would use **Kill+Desolate**. Other skills commonly used in combat are **Hunt** (to catch fleeing targets), **Evade** (to dodge attacks), **Compel** (to browbeat or intimidate someone into backing down, or trick them with a feint), **Mend** (to help injured allies), **Discern** (to learn about the environment), **Sneak** (to hide or secretly change position) and **Endure** (to resist damage if you can't **Kill** your way out of the problem).

To clear up any confusion, here are some clarifications and supplemental rules that cover combat.

OUTNUMBERING

If a player character is engaged in combat with multiple enemies, increase the stress dice inflicted on them in combat by 1 step. Player characters outnumbering enemies gain no particular benefit.

RANGE

There are three ranges in Heart: **melee**, **ranged** and **extreme range**. Melee is fighting toe-to-toe in the same room; ranged can reach between buildings, or down to the street from a rooftop; extreme range is anything further than that, assuming you can get line of sight to aim the shot.

If a player character is outranged in a fight, they must take an action to close on their enemies (or maybe more than one, depending on how far away they are): **Evade** to run in without taking a hit, **Sneak** to break line of sight and move stealthily, and so on.

If the player characters outrange their enemies, use the combat rules as normal – it's assumed that delvers have access to ranged weapons when many of their adversaries don't. The beasts of the Heart are wicked-quick, nightmarishly tough and devilishly sneaky, and the standard skill roll takes into

account the fact that the player character's enemies are doing everything they can to close on them.

If a player character outranges their enemies and has an excellent firing position, at the GM's discretion, they can downgrade the difficulty of taking a shot by one step.

INITIATIVE

Heart doesn't use rounds or turns to measure time in combat. Players describe their character's actions, the GM reacts to those actions, and when the character has something to lose the GM calls for a dice roll. Once the dice have been rolled and the outcome resolved, play usually passes to another player.

However, there's no mechanical limit on how many times a player can act before others do; if it makes narrative sense for a character to act twice in a row (such as: leaping onto the back of a hearts-blood monster and then trying to stab it to death) then they can make the rolls one after another.

Remember – every dice roll comes with the chance of taking stress, so more actions will always equal more risk.

GM: your characters don't get turns of their own. You are at liberty to have your characters make any action at any time, and it's up to the player characters to stop them if they don't like it. You can also push players into making reactive rolls: for example, have enemies attack them and trigger check such as **Evade** or **Endure** to defend themselves. As a rough guide, try not to have your characters do more than one thing without a player having the chance to act in-between.

RESISTANCES

Weapons generally apply their stress to **Blood**; however, don't be afraid to attack other resistances if appropriate. Killing another living being can inflict **Mind** stress; a sneak-thief could make off with a character's **Supplies**; a heartsblood creature, flickering in and out of reality, applies stress directly to **Echo**.

WHO'S ON FIRST?

It can be hard to treat combat as something other than a series of turns and rounds if you've learned to do so from other roleplaying games. If you're finding it difficult to make sure everyone gets an equal go in combat, you can try one of the following methods:

- The GM chooses who acts at any time.
- Everyone takes an action in turn, going clockwise starting with the player left of the GM.
- The group decides who acts first; once they've acted it's their choice who acts next. Once everyone has acted, decide on a new starting player.



FALLOUT

Accrue enough stress and chances are you'll take fallout. Fallout represents defined negative effects on your character; broken bones, empty pockets, mind-bending panic, superfluous eyes and so on.

TYPES OF FALLOUT

Fallout is divided into two broad categories: immediate and ongoing.

Immediate fallout generally triggers a scene or event where the player character suffering the fallout is at a disadvantage – they're attacked, they become lost or someone's angry and confronts them. Once the scene is resolved, the fallout is removed. There's no way of avoiding or working around the situation: things are bad right now and need to be addressed, although the GM might wait to trigger the event at a dramatically appropriate time.

Ongoing fallout "sticks" to the character until it's removed, and makes certain actions more likely to go wrong. These don't usually have an associated scene or event, and there's generally a way of mitigating the problem. A character with a broken leg, for example, could opt to cover the other characters with a rifle from a good vantage point so their lack of mobility won't be a problem. You can remove ongoing fallout from characters in a few different ways, and there are more details on how to do this on p. 77.

Some (rare) fallout is **both** immediate *and* ongoing – it triggers an event and then the lingering effects go on to haunt the character until they're removed.

MINOR FALLOUT

Minor fallout brings short-term, low-impact effects.

BLOOD

BATTERED: Your dominant hand is injured; you can bandage it up and stop the bleeding, but it's of limited use for the time being. Any offensive action you make in combat becomes

Risky; any tasks that require fine dexterity are out of the question. [Ongoing]

BLEEDING: At the end of each situation where you have this fallout, mark D4 stress to **Blood**. [Ongoing]

DISARMED: You drop and lose whatever you're holding, leaving you defenceless; you inflict D4 stress in combat until you source a weapon. If you're somewhere precarious, you might lose the item forever. [Immediate]

FURIOUS: You're hurt, short-tempered and perceive sleights everywhere. You cannot help another character by adding a dice to their roll. [Ongoing]

LIMPING: You're slowed. If someone or something attacks your party, they'll attack you first. If there's any question over who arrives last, it's you. All checks involving rapid or stealthy movement become Risky. [Ongoing]

RINGING HEAD: Your head swims and you taste blood in your mouth. The next action you take is Dangerous, the one after that is Risky, and then you remove this fallout as your head clears. [Immediate]

SHATTERED: [also: **Supplies**] Your armour is no longer of use. You cannot use **Blood** Protection. [Ongoing]

SPITTING TEETH: Any action that requires you to speak or look respectable is Risky. [Ongoing]

TIRED: You're weary; you're going to make bad decisions and snap at your friends. You cannot gain extra dice from skills. [Ongoing]

WINDED: When you attack with melee weapons, decrease stress inflicted by one dice size. [Ongoing]

MIND

CLOUDED: Your mind starts to shut down in an attempt to protect itself; you can't think straight and sensations are dulled. You cannot gain extra dice from Domains. [Ongoing]

CREEPY: You react in a strange way that weirds out your friends – tell us how. Any friendly character who sees you do it marks D4 stress to **Mind**. [Immediate]

COLLATERAL MAGIC: Your panicked mind breaks for a second and reforms in an arcane pattern; down here, the old magics of blood and bone work better than they do on the surface. You immediately cast **AETHERIC SCOURGE** on a nearby ally, but mark no stress for doing so. This fallout can be upgraded (see **AETHERIC RESONANCE** below). [Immediate]

AETHERIC SCOURGE: Mark D6 stress to cast this spell. A nearby target takes D6 stress as raw magic boils out of you and into them, burning their skin and hair.

FASCINATION: You become obsessed with a strange topic – usually whatever caused the fallout. You must try and learn more about it, first hand if possible. Whenever you attempt to learn more about your weird fascination, roll with mastery. If you have the opportunity to learn about it and you refuse, mark D4 stress to **Mind**. [Ongoing]

FIGMENT: You lose track of what's real and what's not. The GM picks a Minor fallout from a different resistance and tells you have it. Until this fallout is removed, you're convinced you're suffering from the fallout (no matter what others tell you) and suffer from all appropriate effects. (GM: it is up to you whether you inform the player that this is a delusion or not.) [Ongoing]

SHAKEN: You panic and fall back on your primitive impulses. The GM chooses one: Fight (attack the problem in an attempt to destroy it), Flight (get away from the problem by any means necessary) or Freeze (do not act, putting yourself in danger). At the end of the situation, remove this fallout. [Immediate]

TAKE THE EDGE OFF: You can't get your head right until you have a drink (or something stronger). Until you reach a landmark with access to intoxicants and render yourself insensible, roll two dice when you mark stress to **Mind** and pick the higher. Can be upgraded to **ADDICT**. [Ongoing]

VULNERABLE: You feel small, shaken and scared. You cannot use **Mind** protection. [Ongoing]

WEIRD: You do something unsettling that bothers normal people – obsessive behaviour, singing to yourself, fulfilling a strange compulsion at inappropriate times. At the earliest opportunity, the GM can declare that your weirdness puts a useful NPC off you (and probably your allies, too). [Immediate, Ongoing]

ECHO

BUBOES: Your skin blisters and bubbles. When you take **Blood** stress, take an extra D4 as the boils split and burst. [Ongoing]

CONDUIT: Your best efforts to keep the unreal energies of the Heart at bay are futile: your body is a crucible for strangeness. You cannot use **Echo** protection. [Ongoing]

DEJA VU: You notice minor elements of your past life appearing in the Heart as though it is reading your mind and adapting itself to your expectations; the GM tells you what happens. [Immediate, Ongoing]



EXODUS: You retch up a handful of writhing creatures: pallid fat moths, translucent grubs, spiders with the wrong number of legs, throbbing parasites and so on. Anyone who sees this and isn't ready for it marks D4 stress to **Mind**. [Immediate]

FOLLOWER: Someone, or something, believes you are very important: chosen of the Heart and worth following. A weird-looking but essentially harmless creature or person follows you at a distance; they won't approach you, but they'll be keen to sift through your rubbish or attempt to hurt anyone who looks like they might want to get in your way. [Ongoing]

GLITCH: You disappear, only reappearing after every other player has acted at least once. [Immediate]

HEX-EYE: Your vision swims as you start to perceive worlds other than your own layered on top of one another. Any action you take that requires

accurate judging of distance (jumping, shooting, running down a corridor) becomes Risky. Once per session, you see something useful – ask the GM what it is. [Ongoing]

THE RAVENING CALL: This fallout has no effect, but it stays on your character, and occasionally manifests as a broken, staccato howl in the back of their mind. Should this fallout be upgraded, see **THE RAVENING BEAST** below. [Ongoing]

STRANGE APPETITE: You crave unusual – taboo – things rather than good honest meat and drink: rusted metal, living creatures, vermin, effluvia, used clothing, beloved pets, etc. Next time you visit a haunt and attempt to refresh **Blood** or **Mind** stress, you must seek out this weirdness and indulge in it; otherwise you will be unable to refresh. Once you've sought out the weirdness, remove this fallout. This fallout can be upgraded into **DARK CRAVINGS**. [Ongoing]

SIREN SONG: You cannot shake the thought of a particular place or person from your mind (the GM will pick a nearby landmark or NPC). If you do anything other than move towards it or remove obstacles in your path, the action becomes Risky. Once you reach it, the feeling dissipates. [Ongoing]

FORTUNE

BROKEN: An important item is damaged. You cannot use it until you take the time and resources to repair it. [Ongoing]

COLLATERAL: The next time you mark stress, a nearby ally marks the same amount; you then remove this fallout. [Immediate]

FOREBODING: Something bad is about to happen. GM, hint at an ominous future event – smoke in the distance, the tremors before a pulse, the frantic music of the Carnival. This fallout can be upgraded to **CRISIS** (see below). [Ongoing]

THE HARD WAY: You lead the party into danger. The next obstacle the group attempts to overcome is Dangerous; they can reduce it to Risky, or even Standard, with a decent plan. [Immediate]

IN TROUBLE: You upset an important figure in this or a nearby haven. [Immediate, Ongoing]

LONG WAY ROUND: You take longer than expected to reach your target. On a delve, add D6 to the delve's resistance. If you're searching for someone or something in a landmark, you arrive just late enough to be in trouble. [Immediate]

SEPARATED: You think you hear something, but when you turn to tell your allies, they are gone. You'll have to track them down or hope they find you. [Immediate]

UNLUCKY: Things are going to get worse before they get better. You cannot use **Fortune** protection. [Ongoing]

WORD OF MOUTH: Word spreads of your misdeeds. Wherever you're headed next, someone knows you're going there, and is going to try to take advantage of you. The GM shows how word is spreading. [Immediate]

SUPPLIES

BROKEN: An important item is damaged. You cannot use it until you take the time and resources to repair it. [Ongoing]

DAMAGED: A resource you're carrying is defective in some way – dented, torn, scuffed or cracked. Reduce its dice size by 1 step. [Immediate]

DARKNESS: Your supplies of spireblack oil run low. All **Delve** or **Discern** checks you make become Risky. Another party member can remove this fallout by marking D6 stress to **Supplies**. [Ongoing]

DEBTOR: During the next session or later in this one, an NPC who lent you money will call in a favour. [Immediate]

EMPTY: You're down to your last scraps of food, your last scraping of spireblack. You cannot use **Supplies** protection. [Ongoing]

HALF RATIONS: You're running low on food. When you remove stress, roll two dice and pick the lowest of the two. Another party member can remove this fallout by marking D6 stress to **Supplies**. [Ongoing]

OUT OF AMMO: You run out of ammunition for a ranged or powered weapon and it can no longer be used. If another party member has a similar weapon, they can remove this fallout by marking D6 stress to their own **Supplies**. [Ongoing]

USED UP: Your stocks are depleted of crucial items, something has spoiled or someone's stolen something vital from your bag. You cannot use any healing items you own. [Ongoing]

MAJOR FALLOUT

Major fallout represents serious problems for your character. It has long-lasting or serious implications, and the potential to end your story if left unchecked.

BLOOD

ARTERIAL WOUND: As **BLEEDING**, but you mark D6 stress at the end of every situation. [Ongoing]

BLINDED: You can't see, or can see so little that you might as well be blind. It might be permanent. Any task involving vision (so, most of them) becomes Dangerous. [Ongoing]

BROKEN ARM: Your arm breaks under the strain, and splintered bone juts up through your skin. You can't use the arm until it heals, which will make some tasks Risky or Dangerous, and others

impossible. This fallout can be downgraded to or upgraded from **BATTERED**. [Ongoing]

BROKEN LEG: Your leg bones splinter and crack. Any action involving the leg (climbing, moving above a crawl) automatically fails. This fallout can be downgraded to or upgraded from **LIMPING**. [Ongoing]

CRITICAL INJURY: You take a hit somewhere vital. The GM picks a skill you have access to and you no longer have access to that skill. For example, a hit to your sword-arm could remove **Kill**; an eye injury could remove **Discern**; ripped tendons in your fingers could remove **Mend**. [Ongoing]

DOWNED: You can't move under your own power and you're barely clinging on to consciousness. You can be moved around by others, but without medical attention, you're not going anywhere. Can be upgraded to **DYING**. [Ongoing]

EXHAUSTED: You can't go on; if you push yourself any harder you're going to pass out. Stop now, or convince someone else to carry you the rest of the way. Alternatively, make one more action and then fall unconscious once the roll is resolved. [Immediate, Ongoing]

MIND

AETHERIC RESONANCE: As **COLLATERAL MAGIC** Minor fallout, but you permanently learn **AETHERIC SCOURGE** and can cast it at will. [Ongoing]

ADDICT: You realise that you have become reliant on drugs to keep yourself stable. When you're high (or drunk, or whatever) you take **Mind** stress normally, but all tasks that require extended concentration or fine manipulation become Risky. When you're not intoxicated and you suffer stress to **Mind**, roll twice and pick the higher dice. It takes a few minutes to get high and a few hours to sober up. [Ongoing]

DELUSION: Something you believe to be true is in fact false. While you step outside, or during downtime, all the other players work with the GM to determine what you are deluded about. For example: you're not an orphan, and you've got a family back in High Rise; there's no such group as the Hounds, and your uniform doesn't mean anything; etc. Next time you encounter the subject, reality (and the other characters) behave appropriately, leaving you confused and shaken.

DESPAIR: Your mind races with the implications of what you've seen; your life before seems unreal and distant. The GM picks a domain that you have access to and you no longer have access to that domain. [Ongoing]

MEMORY HOLES: You did things that you can't quite recall. While you step outside, or during downtime, all the other players work with the GM to determine what you did that you blocked from your mind. These are generally pretty awful things. They can have happened up to a year ago in game time, or immediately upon suffering fallout. Your character has zero memory of the events, but everyone else involved knows what happened. [Immediate]

PHANTASM: As **FIGMENT** (see below), but the GM chooses a Major fallout instead. [Ongoing]

SCARRED: (See **SHAKEN** above.) Your mind cracks and reforms in primal, instinctive patterns. This functions as **SHAKEN**. In addition, every time you encounter the source of the fallout from now on, the GM can ask you to make an **Endure** check or suffer D8 stress to **Mind**. [Ongoing]

UNSETTLING: (See **SHAKEN** above.) You behave in a weird manner, causing your companions discomfort. This functions as **SHAKEN**, and any friendly character who sees you perform the act takes D6 **Mind** stress. [Immediate]

ECHO

BLOODED: You show some mark of the Heart in your physical form: twisting, fragile antlers of bone, fingernails that curve in fractal-sharp patterns, bioluminescent veins, additional joints in your limbs, and so on. Your frail mortal form is not designed to be used as such a canvas; when you mark stress to **Blood**, roll two dice and pick the higher. [Ongoing]

CULT: Your actions mark you as a true scion of the Heart, and weird people/creatures will trail around you, espousing your glories (whether real or imagined). This is nothing but trouble, and any attempt to take advantage of them will go wrong. Getting into a haven will be difficult with this many people around, so you'd best hope that some of them die along the way. [Ongoing]

DARK CRAVINGS: As **STRANGE APPETITE**, but the effect is permanent until this fallout is removed. [Ongoing]

EYES: Your eyes become wide black orbs; or perhaps you find more eyes blossoming on your body, growing in your sternum like a nest of spiders. You can see perfectly well in the dark, but lights dazzle and hurt you. The GM can call for an **Endure** check when you enter a well-lit area, and you take stress on a failure or partial success. [Ongoing]

THE LIFE NOT LIVED: Upgrades **DEJA VU**. You meet someone from your past who should, by all rights, be dead. [Immediate]

MEAT: Everyone is just meat to you: dull, worthless, soulless. Any time you enter a situation where you must talk to a mundane NPC for an extended period of time, the GM can call for an **Endure** roll; on a failure, take D6 stress. If you are intimate with a mundane NPC, take D10 stress on a failure. [Ongoing]

MIRAGE: The next landmark you reach is a facsimile made by the Heart, arranged to give you what you want. It seems real, but the more you explore, the more obvious it is that everything – the streets, the books, the people – is fake. It's an artful copy made out of meat, bone and blood. From the looks of things, it's existed for hundreds of years. Once you realise that the landmark is fake, remove this fallout. [Immediate]

THE RAVENING BEAST: Emerging from a patch of shadows, the Ravening Beast that has been hiding in your mind appears. It will attempt to maul others, but its primary motivation is to consume you utterly. Fighting off the beast does not remove this fallout, but it has no further effect unless you upgrade this fallout (see **THE RAVENING** below). [Immediate]

RAVENING BEAST

DIFFICULTY: Risky

RESISTANCE: 10

PROTECTION: 2

RESOURCE: Obsidian heart, definitely not a beacon to draw more in (D12, Occult)

EQUIPMENT: Fractal teeth and blackstone claws (D8)

RECONFIGURED PHYSIOLOGY: Your organs and bones don't make sense any more. You can no longer remove stress from **Blood**, or remove **Blood** fallout at haunts or through the use of medical kits. This shows itself in some outward fashion – unusual growths bulging under your skin, words appearing as bruises, black blood and so on. [Ongoing]

VANISHED: The next landmark you reach isn't there; you find something else instead. Presumably the landmark is somewhere, assuming it hasn't been entirely swallowed up by the Heart. [Immediate]

FORTUNE

CRISIS: As **FOREBODING**, above, but now the danger actually occurs. [Immediate]

DESTROYED: If you're currently on a delve that has a connection established, remove the connection and describe what happened. If you're inside a landmark, you destroy something of value and remove one of the landmark's haunts (if it has any). Tell us how you did it (on purpose or accidentally). [Immediate]

EXILED: You are banned from entering the haven you are currently in, or one that's nearby – tell us what happened. Your allies aren't subject to the same restrictions, but they will be treated with suspicion. [Immediate, Ongoing]

GRIEVANCE: You are marked as an enemy by a group within the Heart – a cult, a church, the Hounds, members of a particular haven, beasts, etc. They will work to foil your efforts as best they can until you clear your name or kill your way out of the problem. [Immediate, Ongoing]

HELL FOR WEATHER: Your predictions were wrong and you lead the party into an actively dangerous area; or, the area you're in changes and becomes hostile; or, if the locale permits, a storm whips up. Until you reach a landmark, all actions the party take become Risky. Remove this fallout when you do. [Immediate, Ongoing]

LOST MAP: Your map is lost or stolen. Until you get it back or replace it, you cannot use connections – every journey is treated as unexplored territory. [Ongoing]

LOST PROPERTY: You have misplaced an item; the GM picks which. You could spend time searching for it, but you'll need to back-track – and someone might have made off with it already. [Immediate]

NO WAY OUT: You lead the party into a dead-end, a trap or an ambush. Remove this fallout once you get out alive. [Immediate]

REPUTATION: Another delver has gotten wind of your successes (or your weaknesses) and they are coming for you. You are ambushed by a hunter seeking to claim your head and relieve you of your hard earned supplies. Remove this fallout once the fight is over. [Immediate]

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED: You pick the wrong path. The next landmark you reach isn't the one you're expecting – it's an entirely different one, and probably one you were trying to avoid. [Immediate]

UNWILLING LEADER: You end up responsible for an unwanted group – they have problems and they look to you to solve them. Maybe you killed their boss and now you're the new boss; maybe they appeal to your sense of kindness and you foolishly give in; maybe the "group" is an orphan you have to look after. You can use the group to achieve things, but honestly, they cause more problems than they solve. [Immediate, Ongoing]

SUPPLIES

IN THE DARK: Your torch sputters out, and you can't re-light it. As **DARKNESS**, above, but someone or something also takes the opportunity to strike while you're vulnerable. Until you can get some light, the fight is Dangerous. Once things calm down, another party member can remove this fallout by marking D6 stress to **Supplies**. [Immediate, Ongoing]

LOST PROPERTY: You have misplaced an item; the GM picks which. You could spend time searching for it, but you'll need to back-track – and someone might have made off with it already. [Immediate]



NO RATIONS: You're out of food. This functions as **HALF RATIONS**, and all actions you make become Risky due to shaking hands and low blood sugar. Another party member can remove this fallout by marking D8 stress to **Supplies**. [Ongoing]

SERVICES RENDERED: You've been forced to sell your skills to a third party to pay your debtors, and the work is not pleasant. Work out with the GM what your character doesn't want to do but is prepared to do to make ends meet. If you don't do it, you'll be in trouble; alternatively, you've done it in the past, and you describe it in a flashback. [Immediate]

SOLD: You're forced to sell off something valuable to pay your debtors. Work out with the GM what you're forced to sell. If you haven't used it since you last visited a haven, you sold it retroactively. [Immediate]

SPOILED: A resource you are carrying is destroyed: it degrades into uselessness, is revealed to be fake, breaks in your pack or scatters on the ground. Remove it from your possessions. [Immediate]

CRITICAL FALLOUT

Critical fallout spells the end for your character – they might die, they might not, but they retire from the game. It's possible they might return as an NPC, or changed beyond recognition in the future, but for now it's time to make a new character. The only way to receive Critical fallout – and therefore the only way to retire your character – is for the GM to choose to combine two Major fallouts, upgrading them to a single Critical fallout for your character.

BLOOD

BLEEDING OUT: You're dying. Choose: do something useful before you die (and roll with mastery, because this is the last thing you'll ever do) or desperately try to cling onto life (and lose something vital in the bargain). [Immediate]

CHOSEN: You pass out and awaken in a half-dream state before the Heart; you have been blessed with its power. You return to life seemingly unharmed – a miracle! But within a session or two your transformation into an Angel, a nightmare creature of blistering unreality and scintillating ribbons of wet flesh, is complete. You're not dead; but then again, you can't die. You retire as a player character. [Ongoing]

GHOST: You die, but your spirit doesn't rest easy. Your ghost remains in the City Beneath, angry at the manner of its death and the friends who it believes failed it – you haunt the party. Until they lay your spirit to rest (or murder it with specialised weapons), they suffer D6 **Mind** or **Echo** stress at the start of every session. [Immediate]

ECHO

BEAST: Your body warps and changes beyond recognition: you become a protean mess of meat and bone, terrifying to behold. You disappear into the Heart, surfacing only as a legend whispered in deep shadows; those who knew you tell stories of your exploits to remember you and warn others. You will be seen again in future sessions: the GM can use the stats for a Greater Heartsblood Beast to represent you. [Immediate]

BURST: Unable to contain the energy (or parasites, or your alternate self) within your form any longer, your body ruptures like overripe fruit. If you're lucky, you die; otherwise, you're kept alive indefinitely, spread throughout the Heart. Anyone standing near you marks D6 stress to **Echo**.

DESCENT: The next time you're in a landmark, the ground shakes as the Heart draws you and the place further down. Move the landmark, and anyone in it, to the next available space on the tier below. This is catastrophic; most people will not survive. You are swallowed up by the Heart, and retire as a player character. [Immediate]

MESSIAH: You have been followed by a cult of weirdos and monsters for long enough now – something's got to give. One of two things happen: either you believe your own hype and become a cult leader, leaving your life of delving behind and attempting to set up shop in a new haven within the Heart, or the cult out you as a false prophet and attempt to kill you in an appropriately brutal and public manner. [Immediate]

PETRIFIED: Your body calcifies, ossifies or crystalises, and you become a perfect statue of yourself. Your body is incredibly resistant to damage, so most people who turn into statues are left where they stand as a warning to others or as a sombre tribute.



THE RAVENING: Your body hatches with a wet red noise and a Ravening Beast emerges from you, skinless and steaming with heat, hungry for food. You die; this is how they breed. If your surviving friends are nearby, see boxout on p. XX for Ravening Beast combat information. [Immediate]

STRANDED: Somewhere along the line, your reality diverged from everyone else's – and by the time you realise, it's too late to do anything about it. You are marooned in a fracture, an alternate future or a parasite dimension – tell the group about where you spend the rest of your life. You might return, but it's doubtful that anyone you know will recognise you (or be alive) by the time you get back. [Immediate]

MIND

ABANDON: You have taken complete leave of your senses after the horrors that the Heart has laid upon you. You wander off into the wilderness; if you return, you will not be recognisable. More likely, you will starve to death in a cellar. [Immediate]

BREAK: You completely lose it. Anyone standing nearby who you care about marks D8 stress to **Mind**; anyone standing nearby who you've never really liked marks D8 stress to **Blood** as you attack them. After this, you die (either self-inflicted or at the hands of your allies) or your mind is so shattered that you retire as a player character. [Immediate]

OBSESSED: Your purpose has become twisted and cruel; you will stop at nothing to achieve it. Your character is retired from play and becomes an antagonist that acts against the surviving player characters in an effort to achieve their wicked desires. [Immediate, Ongoing]

FORTUNE

FOOL'S GOLD: You get exactly what you want – secrets, penitence, freedom, whatever. It seems too good to be true, which is apt, because it isn't: you've been tricked or deluded, and you don't have it after all. The stress is too much for you to bear, and your only worth now is as a warning to other delvers not to take things at face value. [Immediate]

HEAVY HANGS THE HEAD: Despite your best efforts, you are elected leader of a haven; maybe you defend it from an attack and the people think you've got what it takes to run the place. You don't. You have the capacity to do one useful thing with the haven's resources before you're assassinated by your rivals, the haven is overrun or the fact you were a patsy all along is revealed and you're hung out to dry. [Immediate]

A SLOW AND INSIDIOUS KILLER: You act with unearned confidence and your hubris is rewarded with an ironic death. [Immediate]

WRONG PLACE: You accidentally take a fatal blow meant for someone else. They are unharmed; you die. [Immediate]

SUPPLIES

DEFENCELESS: Your shield shatters; your sword breaks when struck by an enemy; or your armour straps rip and come apart. Unable to hold your foes off for any longer, you are run through or mauled and left for dead. [Immediate]

PITCH BLACK: Unable to see, you are dragged away by darkling creatures, never to return. [Immediate]

PLUMMET: Your line snaps; your hooks don't hold; your pick shears away and tumbles into a chasm. Whatever it is, you plunge into the darkness beneath and do not return. [Immediate]

STARVATION: You starve to death or are overcome by dehydration. [Immediate]

RESOURCES & EQUIPMENT

RESOURCES

Resources is a catch-all phrase for consumable or tradable items of value. The most fundamental resource is coin, but valuable merchandise can be traded for goods and services too. Barter is fairly common in the Heart, and becomes more so the deeper one descends.

The primary use of resources is to access haunts and remove stress and fallout. A doctor will patch you up in exchange for a silver ring stolen off the body of your attempted murderer; a temple will bless you if you present them with items sacred to their religion; and market traders will swap bandages, lantern oil and trail rations for flesh and furs harvested from the wild animals of the land.

Resources can also be consumed by some classes. Those who can cast magic spells can often destroy, sacrifice or directly eat resources of the appropriate domain to fuel their power. These specific uses are listed in the individual advances.



RESOURCE VALUE

A resource has a value that ranges from D4 to D12: D4 for common goods, D8 for valuable or rare items and D12 for truly remarkable things.

RESOURCE DOMAINS

A resource also has a domain that indicates where it's from, who's interested in buying it or what it can be used for. Most of the time a resource's domain doesn't matter, but some character abilities require resources of a particular domain to function.

RESOURCE TAGS

Some resources might also have tags. Unlike the tags in the Equipment section (p. 97) which are strictly mechanical, these are hints towards what might go wrong whilst harvesting, transporting or trying to sell these peculiar items. If a character suffers **Fortune** fallout and possesses a resource with a negative tag, you can use that as a springboard to create interesting problems for them. You can also apply these tags to equipment, if you'd like.

HARMFUL: the resource has the capacity to harm those who carry it via black magic, illness or strange energies.

FRAGILE: the resource will be destroyed if dropped or damaged.

AWKWARD: the resource is heavy or hard to carry.

DETERIORATING: the resource is breaking down, rotting or rusting and you'll need to get it to a new owner quickly.

TABOO: the resource isn't accepted for barter in most haunts (e.g. organs from heartsblooded people, gold teeth or certain narcotics).

VOLATILE: the resource may explode if mistreated.

MOBILE: if left unattended, the resource will leave of its own accord.

BEACON: the resource attracts something dangerous towards its position.

NICHE: the resource is only valuable to a very select group of people.

DISTRIBUTING RESOURCES

GM, it's your job to give players the opportunity to collect resources as they move through the City Beneath. Giving them a healthy supply of materials will allow them to remove stress and fallout at haunts and trade for better equipment.

Anything with potential value could be a resource. If someone's interested in buying, you can sell it – whether it's gold coins, a fabulous diadem or the intestinal tract of a bear. However:

1. If it's valuable, someone or something is probably guarding it;
2. If no-one's guarding it, it's probably hard to reach;
3. If no-one's guarding it and it's easy to reach, it's probably not very valuable.

Therefore, in general, the harder something is to get hold of, the more valuable it is as a resource. In exchange for overcoming a difficult task, you can choose to reward players with resources. The more resources you make available to them, the easier they'll find it to survive.

PLENTIFUL: Almost every situation yields some form of resource, with D6 to D8 fairly common.

STANDARD: Not every situation provides usable resources. Resources with the ability to clear fallouts (D6 and higher) are prized.

SCARCE: Resources are often only the product of specific actions taken to acquire them. Being able to remove a **BROKEN LEG** fallout is a major campaign point.

All adversaries have example resources in their descriptions. Distribute these as you see fit for your campaign. If the player characters are desperately in need then perhaps they find all of them, or maybe their actions have destroyed the available resources.

EXAMPLE RESOURCES

Relic Vermissian guidebook (D10, Technology); saints-hood mushrooms (D6, Religion); left hand of a hanged man (D8, Occult, Taboo); a ticket for one night's entertainment at Mme Lucile's House of Tricks (D6, Haven); change from the pocket of the guy you just mugged (D4, Haven); a bag of replacement cogs and sprockets (D4, Technology); side of flesh harvested from tunnel-ungulates (D8, Wild, Deteriorating); hearts bloom orchid (D6, Cursed, Volatile).

EXAMPLE RESOURCE LOCATIONS

- In the pockets of the person you just knocked out.
- Growing inside a terrifying creature.
- Behind the bar.
- Loaded onto a wagon travelling between two havens.
- In the back room of that ordinary-looking store.
- In a safe; underwater; in the Vermissian; or all three at once.
- Buried in soft earth, hinted at by a scrawled map.
- Coughed up by a jewelled beast that's obviously in pain.
- Hovering in the air, surrounded by mesmerised animals.
- Guarded by stone-faced templars underneath a hidden altar.
- At the bottom of a very deep well.
- Growing from a high cliff overhang.
- In the dwelling of a haven leader.
- Broken off a larger piece of machinery.
- In the detritus scattered around in a Butcher's lair.

RANDOM RESOURCE GENERATOR

VALUE (D10)

1-5: D4
6-7: D6
8: D8
9: D10
10: D12

DOMAIN (D10)

1: Cursed
2: Desolate
3-4: Haven
5: Occult
6: Religion
7: Technology
8: Warren
9: Wild
10: Combine two results



EQUIPMENT

Characters will have a choice of equipment at the start of the game and the option to acquire more in the City Beneath as the story allows. Equipment is broken down into four types:

- **DELVE:** Kit that makes moving through unstable or unusual terrain easier.
- **KILL:** Weapons, or things that can be used as weapons.
- **MEND:** Gear that lets a character heal or resupply whilst on a journey.
- **MISCELLANEOUS:** Anything that doesn't fit into one of the three above categories.

Kill, **Mend** and **Delve** equipment is marked with a dice size relative to the equipment's type:

- **Unequipped** – D4
- **Civilian** – D6

- **Professional** – D8
- **Exotic**: D10
- **Legendary**: D12

Most delvers won't ever get access to exotic or legendary equipment – it's very rare.

When rolling to inflict stress (on an adversary for **Kill** or a journey for **Delve**) or to remove stress (for **Mend**), roll the dice listed and add or remove it from the target's stress. Without access to specific equipment, the default stress dice is D4.

Equipment may also have tags that modify its use. It might have limited ammunition, have an extended range of effect, be unreliable or be especially effective against certain targets. Some tags are restricted to certain kinds of equipment, and others are universal. Tags are detailed more in the section below.

ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT

It's assumed that the player characters have more on hand than what's written on their character sheet – it's no fun to keep a precise inventory of everything a character owns at all times. Assume that player characters have access to basic supplies (food, spare change, rope, lantern fuel, bedding, etc.) as represented by the **Supplies** resistance. They can mark stress to it to show that they're using up their materials, and if they suffer **Supplies** fallout, they have a problem on their hands.

USING EQUIPMENT

When using any kind of equipment, the action must make sense in the fiction for the player to access the increased stress dice size. An experimental oxygen tank would help when exploring a flooded train station or navigating a wasteland filled with toxic smoke, but not when climbing up the arm of a fallen colossus or squeezing through tight gaps in an ancient sepulchre.

Using equipment in ways that it isn't designed for can, at the GM's discretion, reduce the size of the equipment's stress dice or make the action Risky – or it might be outright impossible.

DELVE EQUIPMENT

Moving through the City Beneath isn't easy. Flooded train tunnels, unstable cliffs, marshes choked with scabbing blood and ancient crumbling masonry mean that a delver must rely on the right equipment to survive. Delve equipment lets a character inflict stress on a delve (and therefore get closer to completing their journey) by succeeding on an appropriate roll. You can find more details on how to undertake delves on p. 100.

EXAMPLE DELVE EQUIPMENT:

D6: Compass with a fifth cardinal direction ("H"), Maidenhair rope, Bullseye spireblack lantern, Dowsing rod, Rudimentary spyglass, Signal flares, Pack ungulate, Hammer and chisel, Crowbar, Cookpot, Feather bedroll, Climbing kit.

D8: Logistical Barometer, Faithful hunting hound, Mining explosives, Portable magelight, Experimental air-tanks, Etheric spyglass, Grappling hook.

KILL EQUIPMENT

To see a delver without some kind of weapon is strange indeed. They lead dangerous lives and often find themselves in situations where they'll need to shoot or smash their way out. When facing an adversary, **Kill** equipment can increase the effectiveness of a character and inflict stress by succeeding on an appropriate roll. (You can find more details on combat on p. 78.)

If a character has a weapon that requires ammunition (bolts, bullets, arrows, etc.) we assume that they have a ready supply of ammunition for it – there's no need to track each individual piece. Remember that suffering Minor fallout to **Supplies** or **Fortune** can leave a character out of ammunition until they're able to acquire more.

EXAMPLE KILL EQUIPMENT:

D6: Kitchen knife, Enforcer's club, Machete, Chair, Hand-crossbow, Spireblack Special pistol, Gnollish preyhook.

OPTIONAL RULE: EQUIPMENT SLOTS

GM, if you're interested in making stories where the player characters have to make tough decisions about what to carry on or bring back from delves, you can use the following rules.

Each character has four equipment slots. To carry an item that inflicts or removes stress, or a resource with a value of D6 or higher, it must be assigned to an equipment slot. Characters can leave items in landmarks and return to pick them up later, but there's no guarantee that the item will still be there – even if you go to great lengths to hide it.

If a character has more pieces of equipment than they have slots, they can still carry them – but they're overloaded and the weight isn't properly distributed. Any actions which involve moving quickly or quietly are Risky. A character can gain two extra equipment slots as a minor advance.

Conversely: GM, if you're not interested in making stories about that, you can skip the fine details of weight and encumbrance. Instead, make ad-hoc judgements as to whether a player character is carrying too many things at once.

D8: Officer's sword, Spear, Legrande rifle, Aelfir-made sabre, Red Court shotgun, Enlisted crossbow, "Derelictus Greatsword" (big club).

MEND EQUIPMENT

Injury, madness and starvation are common causes of death in the Heart. **Mend** equipment seeks to overcome that by healing, calming and resupplying. **Mend** equipment lets a character remove stress marked to themselves or an ally by making an appropriate roll (see p. 76 for more details on removing stress) and is divided into the specific resistances that it can remove stress from: **Blood**, **Mind** or **Supplies**. **Fortune** and **Echo** stress can't be removed with equipment unless it's very special – instead, they're removed by using certain abilities and accessing haunts within landmarks.

EXAMPLE MEND BLOOD EQUIPMENT:

D4: Improvised first-aid (torn clothes for bandages, dragging someone out of the line of fire, applying pressure to the wound to stop the bleeding).

D6: Basic first-aid supplies (cloth bandages, healing herbs, smelling salts).

D8: The sort of thing a doctor or army medic would have on hand (some kind of anaesthetic, high-quality scalpels and forceps, antiseptic wash).

EXAMPLE MEND MIND EQUIPMENT:

D4: No serious drugs whatsoever (drink of water, cigarette, a hug).

D6: Commonly available drugs (alcohol, malak, godsmoke).

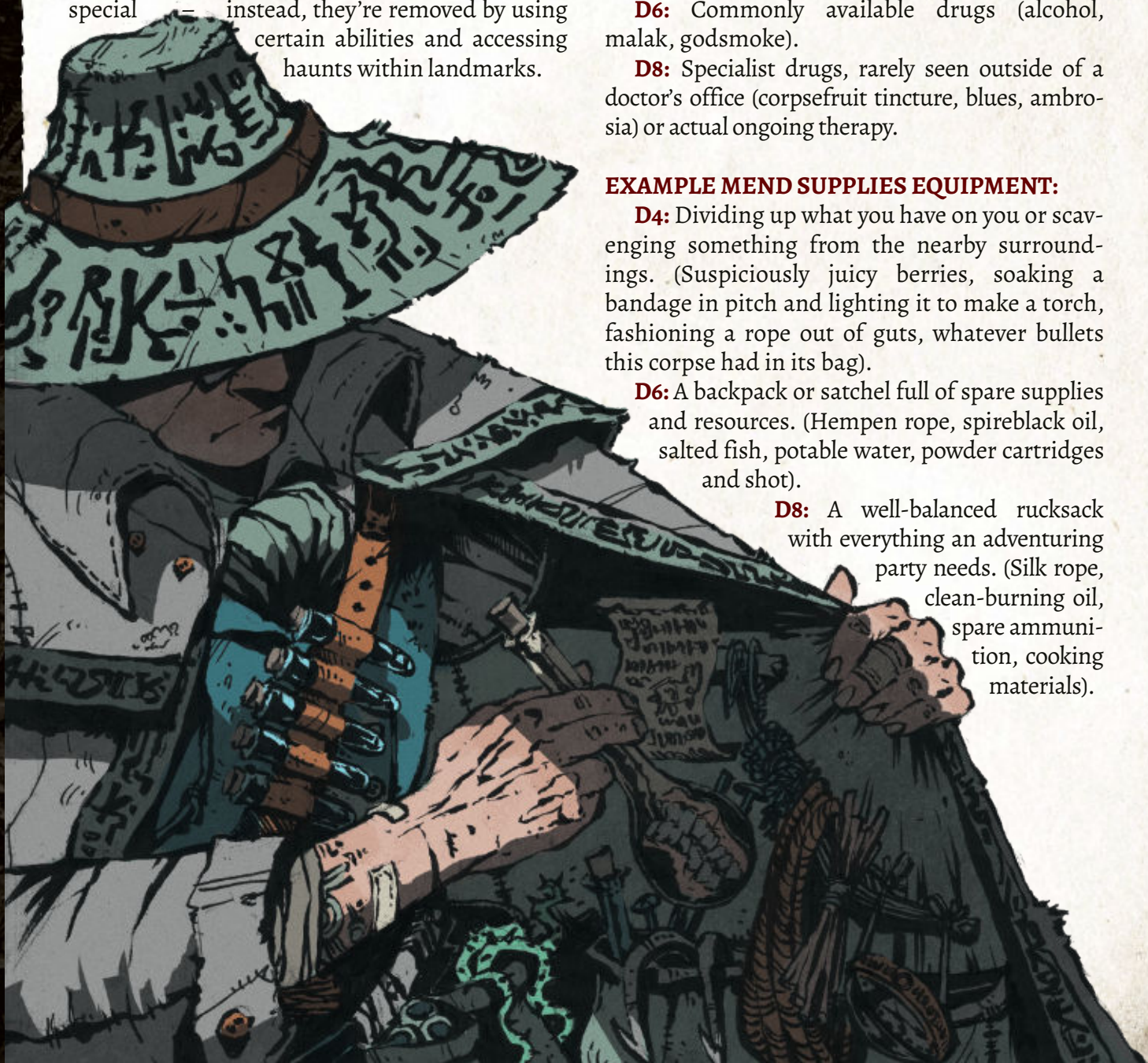
D8: Specialist drugs, rarely seen outside of a doctor's office (corpsefruit tincture, blues, ambrosia) or actual ongoing therapy.

EXAMPLE MEND SUPPLIES EQUIPMENT:

D4: Dividing up what you have on you or scavenging something from the nearby surroundings. (Suspiciously juicy berries, soaking a bandage in pitch and lighting it to make a torch, fashioning a rope out of guts, whatever bullets this corpse had in its bag).

D6: A backpack or satchel full of spare supplies and resources. (Hemp rope, spireblack oil, salted fish, potable water, powder cartridges and shot).

D8: A well-balanced rucksack with everything an adventuring party needs. (Silk rope, clean-burning oil, spare ammunition, cooking materials).



MISCELLANEOUS

If an item doesn't help with combat, exploration or healing (i.e. it doesn't inflict or remove stress) and it isn't valuable enough to class as a resource, it's classed as miscellaneous. Miscellaneous items can still have tags if appropriate, but generally they'll have a narrative rather than mechanical effect.

ARMOUR

Most **Blood** Protection – i.e. resistance to physical damage – is acquired through unlocking advances in your class rather than buying equipment in-game. You'll see in the class section on p. 27 that we've written some **Blood** Protection fiction that describes it as armour or shields, and some that describes it as innate magical abilities. These are purely narrative concerns, and not related to the mechanics of the game.

The **Block** tag (see below) increases a character's **Blood** resistance by 1 when they carry an item marked with it, but that's the only way equipment can increase protection. Items with the **Block** tag are rare.

Armour of Good or Excellent quality (see below) can be purchased like any other item and has the same effect in-game; it may also confer suitable weapons tags on the wearer. However, it will not provide any mechanical protection in and of itself, as every character is assumed to be wearing some kind of protective gear.

EQUIPMENT QUALITY

Most equipment is of standard quality (good enough, but nothing to write home about) and follows the rules for equipment detailed above. It also allows characters to perform tasks they'd otherwise not be able to: a rifle allows a character to attack at range, a lockpick lets them quietly open a door, a raft lets them float on water.

Good-quality equipment is more expensive, but can make tasks easier. A character with appropriate good quality equipment – i.e. if the item was specifically designed to help them perform the task in some way – treats a Risky action as a Standard one or a Dangerous action as Risky. Increase the cost of good-quality equipment by one dice size.

Example Good Equipment: Forged letter of marque from the Hounds, identifying you as an agent; full set of Midwife's tools; decent magnifying glass; a well-stitched and rugged greatcoat; strong and sturdy rope.

Excellent quality equipment is very expensive and incredibly rare, but allows a character to really let their abilities shine. A character with appropriate excellent quality equipment treats a Risky or Dangerous action as a Standard one. Increase the cost of excellent-quality equipment by two dice sizes.

Example Excellent Equipment: House Gryndel murderblade, curved and single-edged; retribution charm devoted to the goddess of the Red Moon; raven-feather cloak, harvested from birds in the City Above; black-laquered telescope built by the Starless Astronomer sect; a goatskin cloak harvested from a mighty Yssian Dark.

Renowned equipment is a unique, storied or characterful item. When a character has a piece of renowned equipment, they gain access to a knack associated with it. If they lose the item, they lose the knack. Renowned items aren't the kind of things you can purchase: they're very rare, and you tend to inherit them. They're most often given out by the GM as a reward for a successful delve, a powerful piece of roleplaying or as part of the story. A character cannot receive the benefits of more than one renowned item of equipment at a time.

Example Renowned Equipment: Razoredge tooth ripped from the skull of The Wolf (Compel Knack: Carve Threats); Jeska MacDiarmid's glass eye to replace your own (Discern Knack: Lies); tar-black rope used during the infamous conclusion of the Hallow Witch Trials (Delve Knack: Get Out Of Trouble); the Gjallerbront Rifle, etched with spiralling kill-marks (Kill Knack: Infamous Beasts.)

BUYING AND SELLING

Player characters don't have a defined amount of money; instead, their **Supplies** resistance reflects their capacity to buy goods.

To buy items, the GM decides on the cost involved: D4 for minor purchases, D8 for moderate and D12 for really expensive or exotic materials. Some items can't be purchased without expending



a lot of effort to find a seller and do whatever it is they want (usually something worth more than money) to acquire it. The character then marks stress to **Supplies** to represent their lowered total cash flow. Alternatively, they can trade resources of equivalent value rather than marking stress to **Supplies** or **Fortune**, or “spend” them to reduce the amount of stress incurred by the value rolled.

If a player wishes to find a lower price for an item or sell an item for a higher price than it's worth, and they don't have a specific advance granted by their class which lets them do this, then they'll have to put something on the line to achieve it. Shady back-room deals, swindling people out of their hard-earned cash, veiled or open threats – whatever they choose to do, it has to have the capacity to go wrong in order to pay off.

The player makes a roll with an appropriate skill and domain (**Compel+Haven** is the most common, but other combinations are possible). If they're buying, success means they reduce the value of the item by 1 step. Partial success means the value of the item stays the same and they mark the original amount of stress to **Supplies**. Failure means that the stress is increased by 1 step as something goes awry with their plan. If they're selling, it works the same way, but the perspective changes: success increases the value of the item sold by 1 step, partial success means it stays the same and failure means that they end up selling it for 1 dice size less than it's worth.

Things are hard to come by in the Heart; it can require a **Discern+Haven** skill to track down a suitable trader if your item is has the rare tag. All Excellent quality items are considered to be rare.

TAGS

Items may have tags attached to them that mechanically affect how they're used. Most tags only take effect when a player uses the item, though tags like **Piercing** can be used by both player- and non-player characters.

BLOCK: +1 **Blood** protection.

BLOODBOUND: Mark D4 stress to **Blood** to roll with mastery when using this equipment for the rest of the situation.

BRUTAL: When you roll for stress against an adversary when using this item, roll two dice and pick the highest. Multiple instances of this tag stack: if you managed to get it three times, you'd roll four dice and pick the highest when calculating stress.

CONDUIT: Mark D4 stress to **Mind** to roll with mastery when using this equipment for the rest of the situation.

DANGEROUS: When you inflict stress with this item and roll the maximum amount, mark D6 stress to **Blood**.

DEBILITATING: Once per situation, when you inflict stress with this item to one or more targets, the next attack made against them is rolled with mastery.

DEGENERATING: If you take damage from a weapon with this tag, roll **Endure+[Domain]** at the end of the situation. On a failure, mark D6 stress; on a partial success, mark D4 stress; on a success, mark none.

DISTRESSING: When you inflict stress with this item and roll the maximum amount, mark D6 stress to **Mind**.

DOUBLE-BARRELED: As **Reload**, but you can use the item twice before reloading.

EXPENSIVE: When you inflict stress with this item and roll the maximum amount, mark D6 stress to **Supplies**.

EXTREME RANGE: This item can be used at extreme range.

LIMITED X: You can use this X times before it gives out.

LOUD: When you inflict stress with this item and roll the maximum amount, mark D6 stress to **Fortune**.

OBSCURING: The bearer and any nearby allies reduce the damage of incoming and outgoing ranged weapons by 1 step.

ONE-SHOT: This equipment takes a very long time to prepare, so you can only use it once per situation.

PIERCING: You cannot reduce stress inflicted by this equipment by using **Blood** Protection, and adversaries do not benefit from their protection value.

POINT-BLANK: As **Ranged**, but at very close range it increases its stress dice by one step. If the shot travels far enough to spread out and dissipate, it lowers its stress dice by one step.

POTENT: When you roll for stress removed from yourself or an ally with this item, roll two dice and pick the highest. Multiple instances of this tag stack as per the **Brutal** tag.

RANGED: This equipment can be used at range.

RELOAD: This equipment must be reloaded between uses, giving enemies a chance to close in or flee.

SMOKE: As **Obscuring**, but only when the item is used, and only around the area it was used.

SPREAD: Anyone standing near the target on a successful use must roll **Evade+Domain** (or another applicable skill) to avoid marking stress as well. On a partial success, downgrade the stress dice by one size. NPCs caught in a blast simply take the stress.

TIRING: When you fail an action using this equipment, the size of its stress dice decreases by 1 for the remainder of the situation.

TRUSTY: When you roll for stress marked against a delve while using this item, roll two dice and pick the highest. Multiple instances of this tag stack as per the **Brutal** tag.

UNRELIABLE: When you fail an action using this equipment, it cannot be used for the remainder of the situation if in a landmark or for the remainder of the journey if on a delve.

WYRD: When you inflict stress with this item and roll the maximum amount, mark D6 stress to **Echo**.

BONDS

When you make a connection with someone or something in the Heart, they can become a bond at the GM's discretion. A bond represents a strong relationship – not necessarily an entirely positive one, but definitely not an adversarial one. You can't have more than three bonds at a time. If you want a new one, replace an older one as the relationship grows more distant.

When you visit a bond you can transfer stress onto them. **Mind** is the most common example, but other resistances are possible too; work it out with the GM. You can directly transfer up to D8 stress onto a bond each time you visit. You can

also remove Minor fallout results or downgrade Major fallout to Minor at a cost of D8 stress to the bond – make sure to explain how the bond helps you heal or move on.

Each time you transfer stress onto a bond, the GM rolls for fallout on that bond. If they suffer Minor fallout, they have a problem that needs solving and ask you for help. If they suffer Major fallout, they're in serious trouble. If they suffer Critical fallout, they are removed as a bond; if they're alive, they might really hate you.

OPTIONAL RULE: BOND ACTIONS

If you're running a game set in a single landmark or several closely-connected ones, you might want to consider using the following rule to govern player characters making requests of bonds (e.g. offering them a hiding spot, arranging a deal or meet, finding unusual supplies or digging up information).

To resolve the action, the GM rolls 1D10 as standard, an additional D10 if the request takes place in the immediate area where the bond lives and an additional D10 if the request is within the bond's broad area of expertise. They then compare the highest roll to the results chart on p.8 as though the bond were a player character to determine success, failure and any stress marked. They also roll for fallout if needed.



EXPLORATION

HOW DOES THE HEART WORK?

The Heart is a rift between realities. Centuries of black magic have leaked from the undercity above, mixed with the roiling unnatural energies beneath and warped the space into an almost unrecognisable state. When you step into the Heart, it will reform itself around you. You will scar it into being, and the longer you stay in one place or retread the same routes, the more stable it will become.

TIERS

The Heart can be divided into tiers that correspond to how close locations are to the Heart Itself, the epicentre of unreality that roils beneath Spire.

TIER 0: The City Above, barely touched by the Heart. This includes upper Derelictus, where the stairs and lifts lead to Spire; Red Row, where dandy-girl gangsters preen and murder their way

through smoke-wreathed streets; and so on. *Derelictus Central, Red Row, The North Docks, The Blue Port, St Perdita's Circle.*

TIER 1: The City Between, running from the edge of Derelictus into the depths of the undercity. There are people here – some of them normal, most of them weird, but they're still people. Havens are more commonplace here than on the tiers beneath, and there are occasional pathways that can be used by anyone. Sects to forbidden gods and secret occult orders hide themselves from the surface world here. *The Temple of the Moon Beneath, The God of Corpses, Tunnels to the Home Nations, The Tower, Labyrinth, Tunnels of Wet Filth, Shinbone, Terpsichore's Vaunt.*

TIER 2: This is where the weirdness creeps in and changes things. There are still recognisable landmarks, but they shift and change location without warning. Monsters prowl the dark and empty spaces, and



people are few and far between. There are havens, but they're unsettling and strange. *Inversion Court, The Hoard, Hallow, Highrise, The Shadow Cabinet, Swinefall, The Wailing Crevasse, Ravensrook, The Grey Conclave, The Bone Gardens.*

TIER 3: The weirdness rules here. Gravity, time and standard spatial interactions are no longer guaranteed. There are places that cannot be – vast underground seas, coniferous forests growing in the darkness, strange and alien skies glimpsed through stained-glass windows. Reality is unbuckled and loose. *Mangrove, Briar, The Cave, The Pyramid, Pupal Chambers of the Ligament Queen, Ghastling Plain, Clutch, The Crucible of Sumner.*

TIER 4: The Heart Itself: a blistering indefinable blaze, a red wet heaven that thumps and beats at the centre of the City Beneath. Here space and time are entirely undone, and travellers can become incorporated and reformed into impossible shapes. You cannot come back from here; if you do, you are not the same person who entered it.

FRACTURES: These otherworlds and pocket dimensions are accessible from the Heart; the deeper you go, the easier it is to reach them. They contain weirdnesses not found anywhere else, and also act as a sort of shortcut, if you don't mind stepping into alternate realities to use them. There's a permanent portal to UnSpire down in Vanishing Point; aside from that, you'll need to find or make your own doorway. *The Moon Garden, UnSpire, Vys, The City Eternal, The Grail Road, The Slumbering Depths, The Old Vermissian, Midnight On The Eve Of Our Demise (and other poems), Arbor Vitae.*

ROGUE: Some locations aren't bound by tier and can appear anywhere if you know how to look for them. Generally, the deeper they are, the weirder they are. *Vermissian Stations, Gryndel Hunting Clubs, The Room, Magi-Mal's Domain.*

DELVES

Some locations or areas are infamous enough to become landmarks. These are used for navigation through the Heart (in as much as one can navigate it). Though the precise locations of landmarks shift, their nature stays the same. You can gener-

ally find them if you're a skilled tracker on the same tier as them.

A journey through the Heart is considered to take place between two landmarks, and is called a delve. If the landmarks are connected by a road or path, see the Connections section below. If there's no established connection, the players will have to forge their own route through the unstable and shifting terrain of the Heart.

EXPLORING

Travelling on a route between two unconnected landmarks, or from one landmark into unknown territory, is a delve. Delves are dangerous and uncertain – travellers must rely on their wits, bravery and equipment just to survive, let alone get to where they're heading. For more information on creating delves, see p. 133.

EXAMPLE DELVE: CROWSFOOT PASS

A series of cliffside tracks and bridges that fell into disrepair long ago. There is a three-way crossroads in the middle which gives the place its name. Travellers mark their passage with feathers pushed quill-first into cracks in the rock.

DOMAINS: Desolate, Wild

TIER: 1-2

STRESS: D6

RESISTANCE: 10

EVENTS: Rockfall; Harpy Attack; Perilous Climb; Boisterous Swanfall cultists on pilgrimage from High Rise.

CONNECTION: Clear the rocky caverns of the Butcher (p. 180) that threatens the pass.

COMPLETING A DELVE

As mentioned above, each delve has a **resistance**. Resistance functions much like the equivalent statistic for an adversary: successful actions on the part of the player characters reduce it, and once it hits 0, the journey is complete. As with any situation, it's up to the GM to provide interesting options and react to player choices when they seek out solutions to problems.

When a character works towards completing a journey, they roll an appropriate combination of skill and domain as they would with any other

action. On a success, or partial success, they inflict D4 stress by default on the delve. Equipment (see above) and abilities can increase this number or change the way it is calculated.

A failure or partial success on this action inflicts stress on the character. This doesn't indicate that they're lost, stranded or in trouble – that's covered by the **Fortune** resistance. Instead, failure on a delve indicates that the party has consumed more supplies than they'd like, taken the long way round or risked attracting attention from adversaries.

For example: *The party is delving through Crowsfoot Pass, detailed above. The GM describes the perilous cliff face on which they stand and the pitch-black chasm that yawns open beneath them. The Heretic, who has the Delve skill, takes the lead by pressing on and inching their way across the cliff with their chest pressed tight against the rock.*

The Heretic's player rolls 2D10 – their highest result is 7, so they succeed but mark stress. They roll a D4 and get a 3, so the GM removes 3 from the delve's resistance (reducing it to 13). The GM rolls a D6 and gets a 4, so the Heretic's player marks that much stress. The GM decides it should be marked against Fortune.

BOONS AND BANES

Aside from putting one foot in front of the other, characters might perform actions that make the journey easier or harder for themselves whilst on a delve. For example, if a clutch of pitchkin have built a tarry, flammable nest in the only sensible path, the player characters might decide to take them on in a fight to clear the route.

The above fight isn't considered to be part of the delve itself. Instead, if the pitchkin are defeated, it functions as a boon. If the players earn a boon, subtract D4 to D12 points from the delve's resistance – D4 for minor advantages and D12 for really clever gambits.

Similarly, if the party decides to rest for an extended period (usually to use healing abilities) or do something else that risks extending the delve, this functions as a bane. If the players incur a bane, add D4 to D12 points to the delve's resistance – D4 for quick rests or minor issues, up to D12 for extended stays or really serious problems.

ABANDONING A DELVE

Sometimes things just don't work out. Should a party want to give up on a delve and return home, they'll need to get back to safety intact. This functions as an entirely new delve with a resistance equal to half the amount they'd already subtracted from the previous delve. Reducing the new delve's resistance to 0 means they've reached the place they started from.

Example: *The party are still navigating through Crowsfoot Pass. After a disastrous series of rolls they're injured and low on supplies, but the journey's resistance is still 9. To return to their starting location, they subtract the current resistance (9) from the starting resistance (16) and halve it, rounding up to get 4. The journey home will require them to inflict 4 stress before they're safe.*



CONNECTIONS

A stable link between one landmark and another is called a connection, and helps people travel between places through dangerous territory. While you can't really rest on a connection for a long time, it's safe enough to pause and catch your breath.

Some landmarks, especially havens, already have connections marked between them if there's a reasonable amount of traffic going to and from each place. That said, the unstable lands of the Heart cannot be relied upon, and connections often collapse or become unusable. When you establish a connection on a delve, halve the resistance of the delve when you undertake it in future.

You can turn a delve into a connection by achieving the goal set out in the connection section of the delve description. This will usually take the form of an additional challenge: it could be as difficult as killing a Butcher in their cave of mewing flesh, or as straightforward as repairing a bridge that spans a chasm in the road.

Establishing a connection will usually either

increase the resistance of the delve by an amount specified in the description, or bring the characters into direct conflict with a dangerous adversary.

THE MAP

It is impossible to map the Heart accurately. It shifts and warps in accordance with its own strange desires, and even major features of the landscape can relocate without warning. Guides through the Heart – strange people with their senses blasted by the energies of the place – know that memory is all but useless, and intuition is required to find a given location. That said, even guides know when to give up, and quite often a party of explorers will be met with the realisation that what they're looking for simply isn't where it should be.

FILLING OUT YOUR MAP

On p. 208 you'll see a blank map, with a hexagonal grid that you can use to mark out landmarks and the pathways between them. This isn't the only way to





map your version of the Heart: we recommend you do something here that works for your table. There are a variety of ways to fill out the blank map. The one we'd recommend least (but is most traditional) is for the GM to sit down and do the entire thing themselves, plotting out landmarks by tier and letting the players explore them. They might even give a second, blank map to the players, and not show them the full thing – that way, exploring the Heart becomes a mystery.

However, an easier – and we believe more effective – way of doing it is for the GM to create and adjust the map on the fly as the characters forge a path through the Heart. Instead of plotting out the whole of the Heart, the GM only concerns themselves with the current locations that the player characters know. Then, drawing on the choices the player characters have made and discussing those choices, they update the map ad-hoc in response.

The primary means of sketching out a map like this is to look at the starting domains that each of

the player characters possess and make sure that you include landmarks that share these domains. This will allow them to shine mechanically, as well as give them the chance to pursue elements of the setting that interest them.

The secondary means is to pay attention to the player character's active beats, which are announced at the start of each session. These beats are the player directly telling you what they want to do this session, so bear them in mind! Create the map and the events that happen as the characters move between locations to let them fulfill these beats.

As well as reacting to your players' motivations, you can give out information acquired from in-world sources. A helpful (or duplicitous) NPC can tell you where a landmark is; an old Vermissian map might hold clues to a station's location on the tier below; a lost library, cursed as it is, might contain the old folk tale that hints at the whereabouts of a passageway to the Heart Itself.

RUNNING THE GAME

The other players are taking on the roles of obsessive delvers, throwing themselves into a chaotic world in search of answers, excitement or salvation. They will explore the City Beneath, and be humbled by its glory; they will dash themselves on the rocks of the red wet heaven that slumbers beneath the earth.

And you: you are that heaven.

You are building a world, one step at a time, that the characters don't even know they want. You are the master of a strange and inscrutable power that infects the real world and spreads unreality throughout. Each shadowed temple to a forbidden god, each Vermissian station where the tracks sing to herald the arrival of non-existent trains, each smoking wretched den where hawkers ply their wares; they are all yours to create and command in service of the player characters.

Or, to put it another way: it's pretty cool to be a gamesmaster in a Heart campaign.

In this chapter, we're going to help you run the best game you can and have as much fun as possible doing it. Hopefully nothing we write will be required knowledge and you'll be able to play just fine without us guiding you, but the techniques and tricks described here should be useful regardless.

IF THIS IS YOUR FIRST TIME RUNNING A ROLEPLAYING GAME

If you've never gamesmastered a game before, you might not be aware of everything that goes into it. What follows is a run-down of the most basic elements of being a GM; if you're a dab hand at it already, you can skip this section and move on to the next one.

You're generally responsible for inviting players to the game. You can choose people who you already know and trust, or put out an open call on a messageboard. You need at least one other person to play a game of Heart, so make sure you have some interested players lined up.

You'll also be responsible for determining where and when the game takes place. A lot of people run their games out of cafes or pubs, especially if they live in a major city and there's one that's easy to reach for all players. Otherwise you might use your living room, or a spare room in your workplace or school/university (if they allow it). If you're running a game online, you'll need to choose the platform or app that the players are meeting on, and what time the game begins and ends.

It's your job to have the rules on hand and make sure that players have access to them. It's great if players buy their own copy of the rulebook, but not required. Printing character sheets for the players to fill in if you're playing in person is a nice thing to do, but generally people can write their own characters on paper if you don't have the time or inclination. Make sure you have the correct dice too: a few D4s, D6s, D8s, D12s and a handful of D10s.

During the game, you're in charge of everything aside from the actions that player characters make. For the majority of the game, this will function as a conversation between you and the players. You'll describe the world and act as the non-player characters, the players will react as their characters and you'll react to that in turn. You only need to break out the dice when a character attempts something that might fail.

Once the dice have been rolled (see p. 8 for a more detailed breakdown) it's up to you to interpret the results, use any mechanics associated with them (such as inflicting stress and checking for fallout) and describe the results in the fiction of the game. You're the final arbiter of the rules and events of the game, but feel free to ask the players for advice and input if they can help you out.

You're also in charge of the pacing of the game: keeping the energy flowing over the course of a session, giving players moments of high intensity, letting them relax, calling for a break and so on. Hopefully you'll get a feel for what your players enjoy in no time.

GENERAL TIPS FOR RUNNING ROLEPLAYING GAMES

If the rules aren't working for you, feel free to change them. This is your game and you should do what works for you and your group.

If you have a problem with something a player's doing, approach them about it (either at the table or privately after the game) and talk to them about it like grown-ups. If they don't change their behaviour, you should remove them from the game. It's not your job to placate or educate people: this is a leisure activity.

Ask the players questions, listen to the answers, and use them to build the game.

Don't make the players roll dice unless there's something at stake.

Nothing is static. Everything can (and should) change as the player characters interact with the world. NPCs change and die. Landmarks evolve and transform as people move in and out, disaster tears them to pieces, and the inhabitants make their mark on them.

When you describe a person or place, you should think about all the different senses. Does the temple smell of rusted iron and seawater, or cinnamon and honey? Does the air feel hot and dry on the player characters' skin, or is it clammy and wet? Can they hear the scrape of machinery beneath them or a mournful dirge? Does the holy water taste bitter and vinegar-sharp, or earthen and mineral?

When you play a non-player character, there's lots you can do to make them interesting and engaging. You can (and should!) put on different voices and adopt different mannerisms to help set them apart from others, but you don't have to be a master impressionist – you can achieve a lot by simply changing the tone or pitch of your speech. You can also change the way that you're sitting; even small modifications to your posture can have a big effect on the way you look and sound.

For some reason, many roleplaying games seem to think that everyone talks like the narrator in a fantasy novel. Examples of play have the GM saying stuff like: "As you enter the ominous chamber,

scintillating light plays across your worn armour, and the priest says: 'Prithee sires, welcome to this, the most humble temple of her Subterranean Grace!'" This is a lie. Pretty much everyone sounds like "Okay so: you, uh, you walk into the place. And it's spooky, and there's sort of like – shining lights in there? It's sharp, like a crisp line between light and shadow. Anyway there's a guy in there – a priest, weird lookin' guy – and he says: 'Hello! Come on in to the temple!'" It's okay to use a conversational tone.

Every NPC should want something that the player characters might be able to help with, even if they're not saying it up-front.

Your NPCs can lie. No-one remembers that NPCs can lie. Player characters are remarkably gullible, and if you pull it off correctly you'll look like a dramatic mastermind. Make sure they have more to gain by lying than telling the truth, though.

Not everyone is going to roleplay brilliantly with everyone else. Some groups just don't gel, and it's no-one's fault. Play with people you like and who build a brilliant story with you.

Learn the rules as best you can. You don't need to know what every single ability does without having to look it up (we certainly don't), but the better you understand the rules, the smoother the game will run. That said, don't be worried about referencing the rulebook during the game – no-one's expecting you to know the whole thing back-to-front.

If you're having difficulties working out what happens next – especially when your players do something unexpected – it's a good idea to take a five minute break to collect your thoughts. In fact, even if you're not struggling, it's a good idea to schedule a pause halfway through the session to help you (and your players) stay fresh and engaged.

There are no right or wrong ways to GM, and what works for everyone else might not work for you. The more you do it, the more comfortable you'll be.

IF THIS IS YOUR FIRST TIME RUNNING A STORY GAME

We'll explain what "story games" are below; if you already know what they are and what to expect, you can move ahead to the next bit. Otherwise, read on!

This is perhaps a needless distinction, but story games are a type of roleplaying game where narrative, thematic and character-driven elements are often more important than simulationist elements. Personally, we think that all roleplaying games are story games, since all roleplaying games are designed to tell a story even if it isn't particularly compelling. But "story game" is the term we have.

Traditional (or "trad") roleplaying games and story games are both great, and we're not saying that one form is better than the other or that you're wrong for liking one type more than the other. However, if you've only played trad games before, it can be hard to wrap your head around what's required to flourish as a GM in a story game – so hopefully this section can help you out. As before, if you're a dab hand at story games, you can skip it and move on to the next part.

Story games are vague in a way that trad games aren't when it comes to measuring things. In traditional games, a lot of things are strictly defined: the length of a turn, the distance a character can move in said turn, how skilled a character is with a particular class of weapon, different types of door hardness and so on. This allows the game to run smoothly because everyone's on the same page about what's happening and what's possible within the rules. The mechanics may be tricky to learn, but once they're in place, they take a lot of the weight when managing the moment-to-moment events of a game.

When you run a story game, you'll be establishing the world as a broad consensus. It doesn't necessarily matter that the door on the other side of the cultists that are hunting for you is 80ft away up a steep flight of stairs and the lighting conditions are shadowy. For Heart at least, what matters is how difficult it'll be to get there, and not why it's so difficult. The above situation sounds like a Risky **Evade** roll; maybe two stand-

ard difficulty **Sneak** rolls if you dash between cover rather than running flat out to escape.

In fact, it doesn't matter what the escape situation is like until one of the player characters considers it. It doesn't exist until it needs to. It certainly doesn't need rules: it's just whatever you want it to be, and whatever it needs to be for the story's sake.

You're thinking in terms of how player characters interact with a space or situation and how it reacts to their actions, rather than establishing a simulation and letting the characters exist in it: it's an active process. It's your responsibility to run the "simulation" of the game that exists in everyone's heads, and this can be quite draining.

As a story game GM, you'll end up improvising and making decisions far more often than you would as a trad GM. For this reason (amongst others) we recommend that story game sessions run between 2 and 3 hours; they take up a lot of active mental energy. Of course, maybe you and your players are fine with 10-hour marathon sessions delving deep into the City Beneath, and more power to you!

The second important thing about story games ties into the first: that lack of simulation gives you the power to mechanically improvise with ease. By reducing the amount of up-front decisions a GM needs to make and focusing on rationalisations and player-facing rules instead, you free up an infinite number of outcomes for every action.

Story games tend to like it when you improvise; they're engines for simulating moments held together with narrative, not living breathing worlds that sustain their existence off-camera. Because they're designed to encourage improvisation and surprise, they're at their best when you don't plan out your sessions too much. The more you try to define before the players arrive, the less flexible you'll be in play. Rather than reacting to what the characters do, you'll find yourself shoehorning in bits you prepared in advance. It's jarring, unsatisfying and honestly, if

you know what's going to happen before the game starts, why are you running a game? You should write a novel instead and get it out of your system. If your players don't have a chance of changing the story into a new and exciting shape, they're not going to have a great deal of fun.

Games (story games in particular) are at their best when everyone, GM included, is surprised by what's going on. Also – and this is a secret, so don't tell the players – storylines created on the fly in reaction to the players are generally far more engaging and entertaining than ones written in advance. By having input at the base level of the narrative, players feel involved and excited to see things happen, rather than wary at progressing through a fixed story.

So, the best prep you can do is to string together a few evocative concepts and motivations to draw on when players explore new territory, and work

out how to reincorporate previous elements into the narrative. But more on that later.

The final important thing about story games, which also ties into the first, is that there simply aren't rules for everything. In fact, there aren't rules for most things. This means that you'll be making a lot of adjudications ad hoc as you progress through the game. Just like making up a story as you go along, it can be pretty draining. Where a trad game offloads all that processing power into the rules, story games ask the GM to perform that role.

With Heart, we tried to make this as straightforward as possible. Firstly, unless you interact with a player character, you don't need to use any rules at all: whatever you want to happen simply happens. Secondly, when you do interact with a player character, we've kept the rules brisk enough that it should be possible to work out what to do in any given situation within a few seconds. If you're struggling to work out a rules call, feel free to pause the game or ask the players for their help. You're a player too, after all.

I DIDN'T CLIMB THE WALL. WHAT HAPPENED?

One of your players tries to clamber up a wall. They are trying to break into the back entrance of a landmark where they're no longer welcome after what they did last time, but they fail their roll. What happens next? Here are some rough ideas:

- "You scramble onto a ledge halfway up as your rope detaches from the roof and tumbles down into the darkness below. Mark stress to Supplies."
- "You spend a full three minutes clinging motionless to the wall, your heartbeat thumping in your ears, as you hear someone nearby talking about what they did to the last guy they caught sneaking in. Mark stress to Mind."
- "The crumbling stonework breaks and you slip down the wall, landing hard. Mark stress to Blood."
- "You hear the sound of shouting from above, spot someone on the wall haloed against the light from the settlement, and realise too late that they've sawed through your rope and you fall to the ground. Mark stress to Blood or Fortune."
- "Halfway up, you spot a guard with a rifle taking a smoke break atop the wall in pretty much exactly the wrong spot. Mark stress to Fortune."

IF THIS IS YOUR FIRST TIME RUNNING HEART

Okay – the rest of the chapter is for you. We're going to do our level best to set you up for running your own games of exploration and madness; but first, there are some things we'd like to get out of the way.

There are many, many different schools of thought on how to be a better gamesmaster. Some folks espouse learning as many of the rules as possible so you can wrap your head instantly around any given situation; some say that building a functional world in which the players can exist is the key to success; others claim that being an impartial arbiter of the rules, an uncaring and all-powerful god, is the best way.

Crucially, none of them are right and none of them are wrong. You'll find your feet after a few sessions regarding what you enjoy and what works best for you and your group, and that style will evolve over time.

With all those caveats in place: here's what we think works when GMing Heart, because this is what we like doing, and we wrote the game to support it. If it's not working for you, feel free to disregard everything and work it out yourself. It's your game, and your group; you know it better than we do.

CAMPAIGN FRAMES

Have a think about what sort of game you and your players would enjoy. Here are a few ideas for games of Heart that you could run:

A ragtag group of explorers, pulled together by fate, delve into the City Beneath in search of fortune and to further their own obsessive goals. (This is the "default" campaign frame for Heart.)

The defenders of a haven struggle to keep its inhabitants alive and sane as the Heart tries to claim back territory.

A mysterious ancestor leaves you a crumbling mansion in Derelictus, and you decide to set up a salvage operation in the tunnels beneath it – but you're shocked at what you find.

Can you set up a trading company and have it survive – perhaps prosper – in the City Beneath?

Your handlers sold you out; burned and broken, you stumble into the Heart, looking to escape the wrath of every counterintelligence agent in Spire.

Your unit is dispatched to retrieve a valuable item from deep in the Heart, but things go awry on the way.

A group of characters with the Penitent calling embark on a grand mission to clear their names after committing a hideous sin in the eyes of their church.

A group of quixotic Vermissian Knights and Dead-walkers set out on a quest to hunt down the biggest, most dangerous creatures in all of the Heart.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO REMEMBER

You are the players' sole point of contact with the world of Heart, and the arbitrator of their success and failure. If you take nothing else from this chapter, remember this:

When the players do something, the world should change as a result.

If the world doesn't react to the players' actions, they can quickly feel frustrated and unable to make an impact. As GM, it's your responsibility to maintain a loose grip on the fictional world and transform according to input – don't rail against unexpected actions by sticking to your guns. Your world exists in a state of conceptual flux, and it only solidifies when the player characters arrive and interact with it. If you can't think of a way that the world will change if an action fails, don't make the players roll to see what happens.

Successful actions are generally easy enough to use as a means of changing the world: they are, by their very nature, the player character attempting to manipulate events in their favour. Failure is much harder to rationalise, and it's often a GM's first reaction to respond to a failed roll with nothing happening. The action fails, the world doesn't change and everything progresses as if it was never attempted in the first place.

This is hugely unsatisfying. It makes players feel powerless (and not in a fun way), it can make their characters seem incompetent (which they aren't), and it doesn't push the story anywhere. Remember: when a player character fails a roll, they take stress. So what happened to make them suffer? Which resistance is going to take that stress and risk fallout? Take a look at the sources of stress on p. 74 and don't be afraid to get creative.

Don't worry about going for blood, either. Heart is a game about misfortune and tragedy, and a great deal of the rules are devoted to fallout – it's one of the most exciting parts of the game. (Also, secretly, players love it when bad things happen to their characters. There's something cathartic about it.) Fallout is a story beat: it takes the events that happened before, coalesces them into something concrete and challenging and pushes the players into tackling new problems that arise from it.

SPECIFIC TIPS FOR RUNNING HEART

STOP PLANNING

The more you prepare for a session, the more you're setting yourself up for failure. Every decision you make before the players are present sticks in place and becomes brittle – definite, perhaps, but not part of the collaborative story that you share with the players.

The players will bump up against decisions like this, and the harder they push, the easier they'll be to break. Either the planning falls apart because they did something you weren't expecting, or they will realise that they're passive elements in the world interacting with something preordained.

Flexibility and adaptiveness are the keys to success. When you prepare, think in terms of characters, broad concepts, motivations, snatches of ideas that you want to play with. The world doesn't exist until you speak about it at the table. Sure, you might have thought about it – you might even have written it down in a notebook – but until the players interact with it, it's in total flux. The players just turn up every week and make it up as they go along. Why can't you?

It's scary to trust to the story like that as GM. There's an expectation – real or imagined – that you're the indomitable master of an imaginary world, and there's an instinctive desire to push back against things you weren't expecting to maintain control. You don't need to; the story will work itself out just fine. And if it doesn't? Okay. It's not like you're getting paid for this, and you can always try again. This isn't important enough to get worried about doing well.

ASK QUESTIONS

Instead of preparing a sterile world for the players to bounce off, listen to them as they play the session. Ask them questions about the world the same way they ask questions of you. Let them build the world alongside you. Bring them in as

co-GMs, if you like: play it with you all just making it up as you go along, no grand mystery to solve or puzzle to beat – just tell a story together. You're not all-powerful, after all.

A lot of the abilities in Heart are designed to let the players surprise the GM. The Vermissian Knight, for example, can declare that there is a sect of occultists nearby when they're in a landmark if they took the **BLACK KNIGHT** advance. When players use abilities like this, make sure to ask them (or the other players) what sort of elements they're introducing.

Open-ended questions are okay – asking "What's this sect like?" gives the player a chance to flex their creative muscles. But it doesn't provide them much to work with. Instead, try to ask leading questions – ones that push the player into making interesting decisions about the world. Start with a statement and ask the player to clarify it. Here are some examples:

"The sect hates you aside from one member. Why do they like you?"

"The sect is slavishly devoted to creating art. What's their latest work?"

"The sect are weirdly open and friendly. What do you suspect they're up to?"

"You've never met these guys before – only written to them. What are you expecting to find here, and how is it completely inverted when you make contact?"

"The sect loves to get people to perform weird rites to gain acceptance. What did you have to do last time you met up with them?"

"The sect is far too keen. What's the one thing you wish they wouldn't do?"

REUSE SETTING DETAILS

Write things down as they happen, not beforehand. Write down NPC names and motivations, places the characters visit, adversaries you invent, rumours about delves – everything. Get the players to do it too. You're writing everything down because you're going to use it later.

When you introduce something, ask yourself – "Can I reuse something from earlier?" Sometimes it's tricky to connect something that already exists with

the story rather than coming up with an entirely new element, but it's much more satisfying when you do. The human mind is small and predictable and it struggles to handle new information. When something comes up more than once, even though we're making it up as we go along, it makes more narrative sense than something logical but unconnected.

You won't use everything you write down – you shouldn't. Some things will naturally fall by the wayside as the game progresses, and that's okay. They're disposable, but they can act as a resource when you're struggling to tie the disparate threads of plot together into an interesting narrative.

EVOKING THE ATMOSPHERE

Hopefully, if we've done our job right, the intended atmosphere for Heart will arise out of the rules naturally during play. But just so we can be up-front about it, we'll show our working and talk about the sort of tone that we wanted to impart.

WONDER

The Heart is wonderful, in as much as it inspires wonder in those who witness it. Portals to strange heavens nestle within a parasite dimension ruled by a curious intellect; impossible skies studded with alien stars blossom beneath the earth; godlike entities slumber fitfully waiting to be woken through praise or sacrifice.

The deeper the party descends into the Heart, the stranger and more grand and outlandish you can become with your locations and characters. Get as strange as you like. If it turns out to be unsustainable or messes with the tone of the game, you can always have the offending element swallowed up by the City Beneath, never to be seen again.

TRAGEDY

There is something tragic and pathetic about the creatures and people in the Heart. If their lives had gone better, they wouldn't be here; but ambition, bad luck and stubbornness leads them to ruin. Every building is falling down, and people are scared to leave their homes in case the path-

ways outside rearrange and strand them forever in a loose pocket of unreality. Even the monsters are sick, scared and desperate.

Nothing and no-one, aside from maybe the Heart Itself, is winning this game. Make success temporary, victories pyrrhic and prosperity bittersweet.

HORROR

We tell ourselves that we are sacred spaces. We protect and venerate our flesh. We assert dominance over it. We are apart from the world, and our minds and bodies are our domains. In a world with few sanctuaries, our bodies and brains are ours to control and shelter inside.

Horror tells us: absolutely not. Our bodies are not our own. We are violable, imperfect, fragile creatures – temporary smears of upstart electric meat. Our minds can be shattered and reforged, turning us against ourselves. The world is huge and complex and beyond our control. Our bodies can be pierced and slashed and burned, or infected and corrupted. There is no safety to be had and nothing is certain.

HUMANITY

The most crucial part of Heart is that people are here. (Even though the majority of those people are elves, we use “humanity” as shorthand.) In this alien frontier, this inhospitable and mad place, people do their best to survive and prosper. Very few of the people living and working in the City Beneath are what we'd consider normal, but they're people nonetheless, and they provide a welcome respite from the barrage of meat corridors and sentient teeth.

Once we get down to the core of it, the thing that most humans care about more than anything else is other humans. So put people in your game: scared people, overworked people, bored people – people who don't have all the answers and aren't in control.

INHUMANITY

For all we said in the previous section, the Heart isn't for people. They're not supposed to be here – they're parasites, invaders, stealing what they can from a place they can't really hope to under-

stand. The scale of the place is all wrong, and it goes on forever. Everything is trying to kill you. Entering the Heart is like entering any other wilderness: get far enough away from the structures that we've built to support one another, and pretty soon even the most self-centred person can feel tiny and insignificant.

Yes, the Heart built itself around the delvers and other people who entered it. But it isn't very good at it. It doesn't, and perhaps can't, understand them. This place is intended for something entirely unrelated to humanity.

TENSION, AND BREAKING IT

You are not going to be able to sustain the atmosphere for the whole game. That's okay. You're not supposed to.

Heart is intended to be a horror game: it's about dangerous people doing unpleasant things for bad reasons. The adversaries and terrain range from unsettling to distressing, things that can go wrong for your character include masses of invasive body transformation, and even the character abilities are upsetting. The whole thing drips with horror.

But: people are going to make jokes and puncture the tension of the body horror dungeon crawl. They're going to make jokes for a variety of reasons, such as:

- Nervousness, whether that's in or out of character.
- To release the pressure that builds up from tense horror sections.
- Because there's often something so over-the-top grim that it's actually pretty funny.

None of these are inherently bad. If you try to keep up an atmosphere of wonder, horror and humanity in the face of inhumanity 100% of the time, your players are going to get exhausted and frustrated. Let people make jokes and talk out of character; let them mess around and pull back on the horror throttle. In fact, it makes crashing back into something horrible even more effective

if everyone was laughing uproariously a few seconds ago.

If they're spending the whole game doing it, you might want to think about switching to a different game (or not, if you're all having fun!). But, in general, it doesn't matter.

GIVING PLAYERS WHAT THEY WANT

Fundamentally, your job as a GM is to steer the story in an interesting way that satisfies the players. The beats attached to each calling (see below) are your primary tools for this, but you can also draw information from the choices that your group has made about their characters.

Look at the skills and domains that the players have selected for their characters. These are indications that they want them to be good at those things and that they want to try them out within the game. Give players opportunities to use their skills and domains: a player who's chosen **Evade** and **Warren** wants their character to be chased through a cramped tunnel network by crazed cultists, even if their character isn't thrilled at the idea.

Similarly, the major abilities that they've chosen are a clue as to what they'd like to happen. If a Witch chooses **CRIMSON MIRROR** – an ability that lets them foresee what's going to happen on delves and deal with it when it does – then they're signalling that they want to go on delves and help shape them. If a Vermissian Knight chooses **DRAGON-KILLER**, they probably want to go and hunt monsters.

If you'd like, make a note of the major abilities, skills and domains of each character, and consider this your base inspiration for a session. If you steer the adventure back to one of these, at least one player is probably going to have a good time.

However, some of the best information comes from the characters' class and calling. Callings are handled a little differently (see below), but here's a rough breakdown of what you can assume players want in a game depending on their choice of class:

CLEAVER: Opportunities to hunt and to explore **Wild** and **Cursed** domains; normal-ish people to compare themselves to so they can feel monstrous; weaker enemies to terrify and huge enemies to bring down with a concerted effort; body-horror; havens to be unsettling in and places where they're welcome.

DEADWALKER: Travel; mysticism and ritual; ghosts and the undead; otherworlds and fractures; practical applications of religious rites; meeting weird hermits who dispense semi-useless wisdom; stealing things from heaven.

DEEP APIARIST: Technology sufficiently advanced as to be indistinguishable from magic; to encounter chaos and attempt to control it; to create and build structures; to help others, even if it creeps out the people they're helping; to understand and combat the machinations of the Heart Itself.

HERETIC: The Moon Beneath, and the temple of the same; weird cults and sects within the Damnic church to explore and exploit; religion and different ways of dealing with the stresses of living in the City Beneath; opportunities to be helpful and opportunities to be weird, potentially both at the same time.

HOUND: Havens with problems to solve; people who need things; mortal concerns, a hot meal and a strong drink; defending the defenceless, especially if they get to reinforce a structure as part of it; living up to the expectations of those who've come before you.

INCARNADINE: Fallible people with limited power and exploitable flaws; establishing connections and strengthening havens; talking to and taking advantage of rubes; people who underestimate them then receive their comeuppance; schemes, gambits and ruses; the finer things in life; markets, traders and deals.

JUNK MAGE: The occult, in all its forms, especially if those forms can be used for personal

gain; an opportunity to use their very specific abilities (eat gold, breathe water, mould stone like sand, etc.); trouble to dramatically run away from or cunningly avoid; stores of knowledge and hidden secrets; someone telling them that this magic is Too Powerful For Them, almost as a dare.

VERMISSIAN KNIGHT: To explore and witness strange and unseen sights; to protect others, whether they're NPCs or PCs; to venture into the twisted world of the Vermissian network; to find uncanny technology and try to use it; to fight, and win by the skin of their teeth.

WITCH: To misbehave and freak people out; to be respected and feared by NPCs; to meet emissaries of the Heart Itself and engage in its machinations; to unleash their True Form in the most effective possible place; to meet heartsblood creatures and bond with them.

You don't have to be coy about this. Often, GM advice seems wrapped up in hiding your intentions from players and making it seem as though you've got some huge, multi-layered ticking plot machine in your head that they can't fully see. But you're just making it up, aren't you? So don't be afraid to speak plainly – "I think a murder mystery in this next landmark would be fun, what do you think?" – because none of us are getting any younger.

CALLINGS AND BEATS

The most important tool available to you as a gamesmaster is the beats that are attached to the player characters' callings: a list of scenes, goals, events and outcomes that they can choose and try to fulfil. When they do this, they're letting you know what they want to happen to their character (even if their character might not want it to happen), so pay attention.

Get your players to pick out two beats at the end of each session (or offer them the chance to replace beats that they're no longer interested in pursuing) and make a note of what they pick.

These will form the basis of your notes for planning your next session. In fact, you might not need any more than this – but if you're apprehensive about going ahead without more preparation, you can flesh them out a bit.

A lot of good GMing is learning to intuit what a player wants and giving to them. We've tried to skip the "intuition" bit and instead made it mandatory that each player gives you two story beats ahead of every session, and then we reward the players for pursuing them. It should, hopefully, be pretty easy to seem like you're a good GM even when you've done barely any work.

We'll explain more with an example:

The delvers made it to the Red Market by the skin of their teeth, but they're alive and mostly intact. They're on a mission to steal the tanned and treated left hand of a mass murderer that's up for auction in the estate of Rubious Crowfer. The beats that the players have picked out and the potential events that could help trigger them are:

- **Take Minor Blood fallout.** A fight against rightfully suspicious market serfs (p. 193).
- **Spare someone's life.** Leaving one of the aforementioned serfs alive to report back to their master (or not) could make for an interesting story.
- **Experience a pulse first-hand.** Hit the delvers with a pulse while they're leaving the estate with (or without) the hand. The market starts to heave and contract, and fresh growth blossoms up from between the cobblestones. This is even better if it's tied to a Fortune fallout result, but not required.
- **Perform a rite at a place of power (Tier 3 and deeper).** The Red Market is on Tier 2, so provide a route to somewhere deeper for a potential escape if everything goes sideways. A delve down to Ghastling Plain could work well.
- **Claim a resource of at least D10 value from a dangerous location.** Acquiring the hand will be its own reward here. Make sure to mention other valuable items that are up for auction: a crystal bird that sings, a bezoar from a skywhale, a gnollish battery-djinn from Al'Marah, etc.
- **Make a dramatic entrance that's a Risky action.** The sort of player who chooses this beat will definitely

make their own opportunities to fulfil it – but keep mentioning big windows, badly-built ceilings or thin walls that they can burst through if they want.

CHARACTER ARCS, ZENITH BEATS AND GOOD DEATHS

Most of the drama in your game will arise from the players pursuing their characters' beats. They're structured to lead towards building an ending, or zenith, where the character reaches the limit of their power and begins stumbling towards their eventual downfall.

The easiest way to make these beats feel connected and part of a satisfying arc is to link them together – not just with other beats from the same character, but with others too. Re-use and re-incorporate as much as you can, building on and modifying what's come before rather than trying to invent something new every time.

A character's zenith beat heralds the end of their story. After a session or two of play, it's a good idea for players to look at their available Zenith abilities and pick out one that they're working towards. When a player lets you know that they've selected their zenith beat, you should give them the opportunity to work towards it over the next few sessions. If the resolution feels unsatisfying, it's probably because they haven't earned it yet; add another level of complication to the plot and let them continue.

When a player achieves their character's zenith beat, they have the opportunity to pick a Zenith ability: the ultimate expression of power for their character. Most of these work in absolutes, supercede normal rules, and allow the player a great deal of creative power. While you remain the ultimate arbitrator of the game, you should give them the benefit of the doubt when resolving Zenith abilities. They're the payoff for all the torment and misfortune, and give the player a chance to enshrine their character in the memories of those taking part in the game.

However, most player characters won't have the opportunity to reach their zenith, as they'll receive Critical fallout before that happens and be

removed from the game. As play progresses, fallout mounts up – while it's always up to the GM to combine two Major fallouts into a single Critical, there comes a point where it can feel inevitable. Remind your players that the aim of this game isn't to win, but to tell a good story. Sometimes death is part of that story.

Heart isn't the sort of game where you can play the same character for years on end. They're fragile, changeable, temporary things that you're encouraged to throw into excitement, adventure and misfortune. They're going to die. They're supposed to die. When that time comes, let the player give their character a proper send-off and really drive home the futile tragedy of their fatal ambition – or give them a chance to save the day and make one last-ditch attempt to help others before the reaper claims them.

ENDING A CAMPAIGN AND STARTING ANOTHER

Heart is designed as a short campaign system. The ideal length of campaign (to our minds at least) is about eight linked games. Characters aren't built to handle years of play, as mentioned above, and the pace of the game and level of abstraction in the rules means that events can happen quite quickly.

As your game takes shape, you should start thinking about how it's going to end. Generally, you should be able to work out a culmination point after about three sessions. Don't worry about working out what the player characters are going to do; instead, work out something that they want (either as a group or individually) and come up with someone or something that wants to stop them from getting it. As the player characters progress through their callings, bring them into conflict with the opposition, driving towards a final confrontation where they get the thing they want (or tragically fail to do so.)

Once this happens, you can consider the "campaign" over: the story has been told. Call a pause to the game, take a week off and let people get their

bearings. If people are interested in doing so, offer them the chance to play again using the same characters or with new ones. Then, take your map (p. 208), pick a new entrance point at Tier 0 and progress downwards as normal. Revisit old landmarks and delves to explore how they've changed since the player characters were last there as you tell a new story set in your ever-expanding version of the Heart.

ONE SHOT GAMES

Not everyone has the time or patience to run a campaign. If you're one of those people, or if you just want to try out Heart to see how it feels without committing to a regular game, you can run the game as a one-shot: a single session experience that aims to provide excitement and drama in about three or four hours.

Running Heart as a one-shot is straightforward enough. The only changes you'll have to make are around pacing and how you inflict stress and fallout.

Pacing-wise, cut out any long-winded bits where you all know how it's going to go. Don't bother setting up a meeting to negotiate a job for the delvers. Instead, jump straight to the point where they've set off on a delve and things have started to go dramatically wrong. Provide a clear objective that can be solved in a single session of play and put in a twist which provides a tricky decision or an interesting challenge. Lastly, give your players four or five beats to pick from and think about how you can help fulfil them during the session, and you're good to go.

In terms of stress: hurt them. There's no need to play safe, it's fun to receive fallout, and players don't need to worry about their characters surviving to the next session. Let situations spiral out of control, destroy landmarks, kill NPCs and play the game on fast-forward. It's a different experience from a campaign, and just as rewarding.

DELVER'S WORK

Much of the plot will be provided by the characters as they progress through their beats, but it helps to have an overarching goal to unite them. For this reason, your NPCs should offer the player

characters work – many of the landmarks (p. 130) come with employment opportunities attached.

Jobs should push the player characters into unusual and dangerous situations, allow them to meet interesting NPCs and give them an opportunity to explore the unique world of the City Beneath.

The immediately obvious way to offer jobs to the player characters is to do it in-character as an NPC that wants something done. But don't feel limited to this approach – here are a few more ideas.

Ask the players directly what sort of work they've been doing to stay afloat until now, and where (or from who) they might normally pick up jobs. Make a slightly different version of that job and offer it to them.

A lot of the beats connected to callings (especially the Forced calling) deal with completing missions, so wait for your players to ask directly for one and make it horrible. Or, have them tell you what the mission is and then make it horrible.

Start each adventure in media res and state the job out of character – “As you approach the Deathshead temple in search of sacred moths for the Mother Superior, you hear the telltale sound of a murder ballad being sung from within. What do you do?”

In-between games, when the player characters are in a landmark, make them some offers via email or direct messages and let them pick whichever they're interested in before the session starts.

All employment requests arrive anonymously on mysterious slips of paper and pay suspiciously well.



CREATING NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

As the GM, you'll play every non-player character in the game. If you reckon the players are going to try to fight a character, you'll need to get some stats for them – pick out something suitable from the Adversaries chapter and tweak it to fit. However, if they're not likely to get into combat, you don't need to worry about the mechanics and can focus on making an interesting character.

Here are a few things to consider when making and playing a non-player character:

Give them a name. Humans draw on Welsh, Cornish and (oddly) Greek names; Drow use archaic French and Haitian names with some of the letters changed; Aelfir have strings of poetic imagery as their names that sound a bit like haiku; Gnolls draw from Middle-Eastern names or just combine two cool nouns. If you're struggling to come up with names, use words you like the sound of (Insouciance, Cavalcade, Bellicose, Ventricle, Shank, Tryst, Spurious) and go from there.

Know what they want right now and maybe what they want in the grand scheme of things (but the first one is much more important), and communicate that to the characters.

You're (probably) not a professional actor, and you don't have an opportunity to rehearse, so don't worry about subtlety or delicate intricacies in your non-player characters. Write and play them big and bold, ham up the acting and don't be afraid to "accidentally" blurt out the plot.

Who is the character connected to? What organisations or factions that are already established in your story might they be part of? In general, the more you can link people together, the more satisfying your world is going to feel – and if the players are cruel or abusive to an NPC, it helps to have someone backing them up to raise the stakes.

Don't be coy, don't give vague answers because you heard a wizard in a film do it once, and don't act mysterious. It's frustrating and players don't like it. Instead, find something that the NPC is desperate to talk to the players about and go from there.

Work out what makes them stand out from the crowd. If most people from their order are X, this guy is Y, e.g.: "Most retroengineers are twitchy and obsessive; this guy's asleep in his workshop despite being surrounded by a half-dozen empty kafee cups."

Have your characters change (static characters are boring). This applies not only on a long-term level, as they grow and evolve in response to events, but in terms of a single scene. If you enter a scene happy, try to leave it sad, and vice versa. If you show a wealthy character, it's interesting to see them lose all their money; and powerful characters brought low (or low-status characters rising through the ranks) is always interesting to see.

Give your characters weaknesses and foibles; even if they look inhuman, give the players an element of humanity to latch onto and understand. (This only applies to NPCs that can talk; you don't need to give a heartsblood bear a human element. Then again, it might be creepy, so consider it.)

Pick a mannerism and go at it hard. Catch-phrases are good too. You're aiming for professional wrestler grade characterisation, not the main character of a seven-season HBO drama. Try and get your point across in ten seconds or fewer.

Don't be afraid to kill them. Every character is disposable, non-player characters doubly so. The story will continue even if your favourite NPC is dead, and it might be better for it (especially if it's the player characters' fault that they died).

ON COMBAT

The Heart is a dangerous place. There are plenty of people there who want to take what you've got, and they're not above killing you to get it. There are countless beasts who hunger for flesh. There are cults who would love to imprison you and siphon off your adventurous soul piece by piece until you're a withered husk.

Roleplaying games are bound up with combat; almost every game has rules for it, or they might only have rules for it. In fact, every single one of the classes in Heart has at least a handful of tricks that they can use to increase their combat effectiveness – whether it's attacking, defending, healing, increasing the

power of others or controlling the battlefield.

But: not everything has to be a fight.

Fights are brutal, and they can tip into fatal injury territory very quickly. Characters can't heal fallout outside of haunts except in rare cases, and even then they need to pay for it. Major **Blood** fallout could be the death knell of a delver's career.

Fights are cruel, in that both parties are inflicting harm on one another in an attempt to get their way. If you talk through a problem with someone, you might be able to use them as an ally later on. If you stab them to death, you have to deal with their upset friends and relatives, or the looming threat of mob justice with a dead-eyed Hound at the head.

Fights don't leave much room for negotiation, and it's always easier to escalate than it is to de-escalate. You can't un-murder someone (short of using a Zenith ability, and even then that comes with a lot of strings attached) or get someone to talk calmly and cut a reasonable deal after you've shot their partner in the chest.

For all these reasons and more, let your players pick their battles.

Firstly: think about what the adversaries want and why it's led them to attack the player characters. All adversaries have a Motivation section in their stat block for this reason. It's highly unlikely that their true desire is to engage in a battle to the death with some weirdos who've just wandered into their territory. Most people and creatures fight because they want to maintain social standing, take resources from someone weaker (food, valuables, trade routes) or maintain ownership over what they perceive as their domain. How hard are the adversaries going to fight to get what they want and keep what they have?

Secondly: give the players lots of information. Give them the opportunity to spot those guys who are coming for them to rob them of the spoils they picked up in the depths of the Heart. Show them the spoor and tracks of the hearts-blood monstrosity that sputters and festers in the lightless valley beneath them. Have an emissary of the cult they've wronged arrive and tell them to get out of the dig site to avoid bloodshed.

Players aren't going to feel as hard done by if their misfortune is of their own making. A False Hallow appearing in the middle of a delve and blowing a hole the size of a side plate in someone's back with illegal magic might feel a bit cheap. If they had the opportunity to research the guy first – maybe pick up a contract to silence him from the temple of the Moon Beneath, kick in the door of his grimy temple and then lose a significant amount of their backmeat as he spits out a frantic curse – it feels a bit better, even though it's mechanically the same.

Thirdly: give player characters an out. Can they avoid their enemies entirely? Can they flee a burning haven rather than face slaughter at the hands of a rogue unit of Hounds? Can they just give their enemies what they want? Can they talk them down to a compromise? Can they trick them into downing their weapons or scare them into running away?

If your players are still spoiling for a fight, here's how to give it to them.

BALANCED ENCOUNTERS

Encounters aren't balanced, so throw that idea right out.

(Okay. You still want a fair fight? This isn't that sort of game. But a player character can turn out 4 stress per action on average, so: take the amount of actions you want the fight to last, multiply that by 4, and pick out enemies with a total resistance equal to that number. Protection ratings, difficulty and high-damage weapons on either side completely throw this out of whack, mind.)

What are you trying to evoke with these adversaries? What are they saying about your Heart? Is the cannibal cult who've been plucking the weak and infirm off the streets of Derelictus a vast and powerful conspiracy with mutated foot-soldiers bedecked in bolted-on armour, or are they desperate scavengers trying to satisfy an alien hunger in back alleys and deserted basements? Either works.

Are your players keen to start a brawl? Give it to them! If you've got a Deadwalker, a Vermissian Knight and a Hound all geared up to hunt monsters, then give them big dangerous monsters to

fight. Let them do it on their own terms. If a monster's dangerous, say it's dangerous up front and let them make an informed choice about taking it on.

If you set those same monsters on an Incarnadine, a Deep Apiarist and a Witch you'll have a very different experience. They're simply not prepared for it, in the same way that the monster-hunters aren't necessarily prepared to broker a peace treaty between two warring churches and open a trade route to a settlement full of starving people.

Encourage players to level the playing field or even tip the situation to their advantage – give out mastery dice, decrease incoming stress or lower enemy difficulty if you think that they've made some entertaining preparations. In some cases, adversaries have weaknesses that can make the fight almost trivial – harnessing a ghost's specific bane (p. 187), for example, will remove its protection value and increase the stress inflicted against it by two steps. This has the potential to resolve an otherwise deadly fight in a single roll, and that's a good thing (as long as everyone enjoyed the process of researching and preparing the banes).

Pick what you think is interesting, give the players an option to fight it and see what happens.

WHAT TO DO IF A FIGHT IS TOO TOUGH

- *The adversary takes what they wanted from the situation and leaves.*
- *The adversary feels sorry for the delvers and merely inflicts Major fallout before chuckling and walking off.*
- *Use a Fortune fallout result to trigger the arrival of something even more dangerous – it scares away the original adversary and gives the delvers a chance to flee.*
- *Reveal a hitherto-unreferenced weakness (lingering injury, mad devotion, lack of certain senses) that the delvers can exploit for more damage or lower-difficulty rolls.*
- *Remind the players that they can run away, even if it means leaving something behind.*
- *Have an ally arrive on the scene to support the player characters.*
- *Arbitrarily knock off half of the adversary's resistance or "forget" to subtract their protection from incoming stress and don't tell anyone.*

WHAT TO DO IF A FIGHT IS TOO EASY

- *Make the players feel bad about hurting these vulnerable creatures.*
- *Have the adversaries give up and run away.*
- *Signal the arrival of more adversaries sent as backup if these aren't dealt with.*
- *Have one of the adversaries pull out a dangerous weapon, increasing their threat.*
- *Show that the adversaries were just a distraction tactic and now the delvers have a new problem to deal with.*
- *Have the adversaries display terrifying supernatural traits (vomiting up homunculi, tearing chasms in the earth with their minds, fangs dripping with dimension-rending poison, splitting into swarms of things upon death), increase their damage and protection appropriately, and rationalise it later.*

TIPS FOR IMPROVING FIGHT SCENES

If your adversaries could have names, give them names. That's what the names section in the stat block is for! Similarly, each adversary should be different from the others. If you can't make them different enough, or there are too many, group them together into a single entity (see Mobs on p.XX) and go from there.

Never have a fight for the sake of having a fight. Every fight should be about something, and not every fight should be to the death.

If your adversaries can talk, have them talk. Talk to the player characters, talk to each other, talk about what they're going to do and react to what's happened. Don't worry about sounding too obvious when you're doing this: you're adding colour and reinforcing that the players' actions have an impact on the game world, not trying to write your magnum opus. Stuff like "They're coming up the stairs, throw me a gun!" and "Gavain is down, call for help!" is fine.

Have proper injuries be rare and brutal. For

ORDINARY PEOPLE

If the players want to fight normal folk (well, as "normal" as they get in the Heart) for some reason, then most people have resistance 5. If they're unarmed they inflict D4 damage, and if they grab a weapon they inflict D6.

example: **Blood** stress is bumps, bruises, abrasions, winding, near misses, exhausting, parries that send reverberations through your bones, the taste of tin in your mouth and so on. **Blood** fallout is wrenching, twisting, tearing, gushing, white-hot sharp pain, the alien sense of cold metal puncturing your warm flesh, teeth splintering in your mouth, rapidly-cooling blood soaking your trousers and socks, etc.

Ask the players: "What does that look like?" after they make a roll. Let them describe the flow of the fight as it goes on, and reinforce their character by giving them some focus time.

Never tell players that their characters are scared, even if they're bleeding out from a broken leg and surrounded by hungry razor-toothed leeches. They hate being told they're scared, and more often than not they'll roleplay being double-hard and not afraid of anything in response, so just let them make up their own mind about how they're feeling (until the **Mind** fallout kicks in, anyway).

Put stuff in the way. Characters can take cover (not that it's really a thing within the rules, but it's nice to say it sometimes), kick people into obstacles, grab props to use as one-shot weapons, create distractions – anything to break up the sense that you're having a fight in a featureless room.

Mess with positioning and space. Have enemies grab characters and knock them about – it's all just description anyway, so you can say what you want as long as it's not the sort of content reserved for fallout. It's more interesting to get pushed down a flight of stairs than it is to get socked in the jaw, and mechanically they have the same effect. Have walls and floors crumble, revealing new areas to beat people up in.

Let people use the rules for any weapon they possess, no matter what attack they're describing. Doing otherwise encourages repetitive and boring descriptions, because players like doing the most damage possible. For example: if someone's got a sword (**Kill D6**) and they want to drown some poor bastard in a fountain (**Kill D4**) then you might as well let them roll a D6 for stress; drowning someone in a fountain uses an element from the scene and is probably more memorable and per-

sonal than a slash with a blade.

Don't drag out a fight for longer than you have to. If the players have their adversaries on the ropes, call it there. The enemies give up, try to run away or start bargaining. There's no need to have it descend into a dice-rolling exercise.

If a player puts a load of points into **Blood** protection, they want to get hit a lot, so hit them and let them show off their abilities. But to keep them humble, make sure to throw in an adversary every now and again that inflicts **Mind** or **Echo** stress, or drop some **Fortune** stress on them for failing a roll so they don't feel entirely invulnerable. All the armour in the world can't help you if you fall down a hole.

LANDMARKS & DELVES

The Heart is full of mystery, and most of that mystery is collected in Landmarks. We'd like to get a few things out of the way first with regards to picking out landmarks for your campaign.

You don't have to use all of them. You're not supposed to – they're not all there! Your version of the Heart will have a handful of the landmarks, or ones of entirely your own creation, linked together by delves. Pick out the ones that you think are interesting or that serve your player characters' interests and go from there.

You don't have to use them as they're written. Change them – take elements from one and push them into another. Switch the domains out for different ones and see how it feels. For example, if you swap the **Occult** and **Haven** domain in Hallow (pXX) for **Religion** and **Wild**, you get a very different picture of how witches operate in the City Beneath.

Also, and this is crucial, you don't have to remember all of them either. This isn't a lore bible that you have to learn before you're allowed to run the game, and the landmarks especially are supposed to be inspiration for your own creations. Everything here is collaborative – if your players remember a cool landmark from the game that you don't, ask them for details and then fold it in. You're under no responsibility to know more

about the setting than anyone else, because the setting doesn't exist until it appears at your table.

As far as delves go, we can't provide them in this book as they're specific to your story – we can't predict how the landmarks in your Heart are going to be arranged. Luckily, we've written a guide to doing just that in the delves section on p. 133. If the players have picked a lot of delve-centric abilities, that's a sign to you that they're interested in travel, exploration and discovery. You should feel free to have plenty of nice, long, high-resistance delves. Conversely, if they haven't got these abilities, you should look to offer connections or alternate routes that they can take advantage of through other skills – combat, persuasion, trickery, etc.

Don't feel like you have to detail every part of a delve – just the interesting bits. In the same way that a film wouldn't show an hour of uneventful travel, neither do you.

Importantly, delves aren't puzzles to be solved. There's no right or wrong route for the players to take; rather, it's a series of challenges which will provide an opportunity for them to showcase their abilities. Present problems without solutions in mind and let the players sort out the fine details.

IN CLOSING

If you're worried about running your first (or second, or twentieth) game of Heart, we have good and bad news for you:

It never goes away.

We wrote the system and we get nervous almost every time our players show up for a session. Running Heart in the way we do – and the way that we advise you to do in this chapter – is an exercise in trust. The group is trusting you to come up with an exciting story and you, in turn, are trusting them to respect your authority. You're all trusting each other to propel the story forward, backward or in whatever interesting direction it goes.

There's a lot of moving parts and a lot of guesswork, and it goes wrong sometimes. That's okay. If nothing ever went wrong, you'd never learn anything and never improve. In the grand scheme of things, it doesn't matter if a session crashes and burns; there'll be other sessions and other games.

You don't have to be good at this, even if you've chosen to do it as a hobby. Getting better at it feels good, but you're under no requirement to improve. You and the players just have to have fun.

THE WORLD OF HEART

A SETTING PRIMER

Before this all begins, we would like to make one thing clear: none of what you read is gospel. The Heart that your group explores, and every unexpected and unplanned thing that it includes, is far more canonical than anything we could write in this chapter as far as you and the players are concerned.

So: change this. Forget bits of it. Make up your own world down here. This isn't a set of instructions for adventure, but an attempt to sketch out a narrative, metaphysical ecosystem that you can exist inside and use to tell stories.

We hope that the Heart can give you everything you've ever dreamt of.

GENERAL SOCIETY

Living in the Heart is perilous. Quite aside from the malicious flora and fauna, and the warring sects of death-worshippers and occult ne'er-do-wells, the landscape itself shifts and warps on a whim. Landmarks are areas of relative stability, where the streets have a decent chance of being in the same place when you wake up as they were when you went to sleep, and walls can keep the everyday terrors of the Heart at bay.

Not every landmark is full of people – in fact, most aren't. They are home to insular pockets of civilisation in the form of research teams, witch covens, beleaguered Hounds or zealous madmen – folk with a definite purpose. When people live in a place just for the sake of living in it, that landmark gradually becomes referred to as a haven, and it attracts others in search of security, companionship and trade.

While it is technically possible to create a landmark – i.e. to sear something permanent into the chaos of the Heart – it's not an exact science. If anyone's got a foolproof way of doing it, they're not sharing it with anyone else. Landmarks grow

IN THE BRIEFEST POSSIBLE TERMS

If you want to get a handle on all this quickly, here's what you need to know:

- Beneath the city of Spire is the Heart, a rip in reality where a strange otherspace has crawled into your own.
- The Heart is sparsely populated by drow, humans, high elves and gnolls. Some were born down there and others enter during their lives.
- Whenever someone enters the Heart, it builds itself into the image of their desires. It's not very good at it, and it can only do it a bit at a time. The more people who enter the Heart and the longer they stay in one place, the more stable it becomes.
- There are ruins of several ancient civilisations and arcane experiments here, some of which had technology or magic (or magical technology) that mortals cannot hope to comprehend.
- The deeper you go towards the centre, also known as the Heart Itself, the weirder things get.
- The player characters are delvers – obsessive, dangerous people who venture into the Heart in search of answers.

Let your players know this before a game starts, and they can define the rest themselves during play.

organically out of the desires of many people, from the stories and rumours passed between drinkers at dive bars, out of the dreams of a fevered explorer scrawled in bloodstained journals.

In between landmarks, the wilderness of the Heart is unpredictable and strange. Unobserved by all except handfuls of travellers, it is unsure of what to be at any given time, and folds itself into new patterns around each visitor. It is delvers who make a living of stepping between landmarks to ferry news, supplies and people, and occasionally build connections to make travel easier in future. Delvers are viewed with a mixture of excitement and mistrust by the inhabitants of a landmark –

they are outsiders, not bound by the local customs, and often quite dangerous individuals.

There's something keeping everyone down here. Very few sane people would choose to live in the Heart if they had any other options available; it's grim, dangerous and maddening. But everyone has something anchoring them to the City Beneath, meaning that they can't escape. Maybe they're too poor to risk moving away; or they have a network of codependent junkies to look after and/or take advantage of; or they're convinced that their fortune lies down the next corridor; or their family down here is old and infirm and needs support; or any one of a hundred reasons not to leave the flickering hellscape and try their luck in the dazzling light of the surface world.

ART

The City Beneath is bursting at the seams with art. Wherever there are people, they express themselves in wild patterns. Something about the place fills the inhabitants with creative energy.

It's as though the loose reality, disjointed cause and effect and the intrusive universe on their doorstep pushes them to understand the world through metaphor and allegory or abstract shapes and sounds, rather than relying on brittle and unbending science. Almost everyone creates art of some kind, and those who don't are considered a bit weird.

Murals line the walls of many settlements. Statues wrought from junk and detritus have pride of place in town squares, often hanging from ropes to keep them from touching the ground; songs are sung, and each new singer adds something to the lyrics or tune; books are hoarded, read and re-read, edited and cut up into new patterns; and cartography, the most prestigious and challenging art of all, sees practitioners descend into drug-induced fugues as they attempt to map the strange environment of the Heart through whatever means they have to hand.

Reason has failed the inhabitants of the Heart; instead, they have turned to rhyme.

RELIGION IN THE HEART

The Heart is home to dozens (if not hundreds) of faiths that were banned from the City Above or surrounding areas.

Chief amongst those is the Church of the Moon Beneath: a primarily drow sect who worship a strange reflection of the moon that they say waits fecund and luminescent in the depths of the Heart. Most settlements will have an area dedicated to her worship – these range from simple cupboard-shrines under staircases to temples wrought from repurposed ancient stone.

Like all faiths of a certain size, the tenets of her worship (known as Damnic worship after Damnou, the name of the unified goddess in Desteran patois) are hard to define. Different cults and schools within the religion vary wildly in their interpretation of doctrine: things that one sect finds to be mortal sins can be part of everyday business to a sub-temple two doors over.

Their philosophy tends to focus around some combination of the Damnic virtues: Grace, Community, Vigilance, Sagacity, Endurance and Fury. (See the Temple of the Moon Beneath and its subsidiary temples on p. 141 for more information on the Damnic virtues.) Some eschew worship of her totality in favour of a single aspect: the Red Moon gang, for example, rule the vicious streets of Oblation Row and are a mystery cult devoted to her war-form Lekole.

In addition to Damnou, one can find shrines to or followers of any number of gods, including:

- Mehror, the god of snuffed candles, and his pacifist cannibal priests;
- Incarne, goddess of debt, and her temple-souks;
- Spider-goddess Ishkrah, granter of occult secrets and ancient ally of the drow;
- Bloody-handed hyena-faced Charnel, the carrion-god of slaughter;
- The Many, a patchwork gestalt of dying gods from the land of Ys, and their refugee congregations;
- Garrack, human god of technology and discovery, and his steel-boned acolytes;
- The Hungry Deep, a yawning chasm of nihilism, and the insensate derelicts that pray to it.

People in the Heart don't limit themselves to worshipping gods, though. The patrons of the Junk Mage (p. 57) are venerated and prayed to in hidden backrooms and down shadowed alleys by those hungry for power; the witches of Hallow (p. 149) act as emissaries and messengers for the almighty power of the Heart, and many folk treat them as a sort of monstrous royalty; Butchers (p. 180) lose all rational thought and bellow prayers, bestial and naked, at the unresponsive walls of living meat that they were starving or foolish enough to eat from back when they were still considered human.

You can pray to anything. If you do it enough, and if enough people join you, it'll start to pay off in the form of miracles; small at first, but growing in power until you glow with celestial might.

A HANDFUL OF FESTIVALS

Festivals let the inhabitants of the Heart come up with excuses to spend time with one another, and are an important means of strengthening these often fraught and fragile communities. Here are a handful, but there are many more:

Rotsday, celebrated on the first day of the planting pulse (see p. 125), where seeds and bulbs are collected from far-flung environs and ensconced within the fecund earth. Around Rotsday, it's considered good manners to offer seeds if you arrive in a town; if you can make up an exciting story about where they're from, so much the better.

Sannon, where any unborn drow eggs are anointed with donations of blood from the community, and parents pray to various gods to ensure a safe birth and stable future.

It's bad luck to take the first or last drink from a bottle of liquor – except on Sorrow's Eve. On this night, everyone gets half-cut on whatever dog-ends of booze they've got hidden under the bed or in the back of the cupboard and has a party in the settlement's inn.

San-Lalin is an ancient holiday no longer celebrated in the City Above. Drow communities arm themselves with improvised weapons and descend on folk who've displeased them – usually bandits, landowners or those who otherwise prey on the people of the village. The Hounds do their best to limit San-Lalin celebrations to group

MAJOR ORGANISATIONS

What follows is a run-down of some, but definitely not all, of the factions that hold power and exert their influence over the Heart:

- **The Church of the Moon Beneath**, as described above.
- **The Hounds**, a group of badly-paid mercenary police who do their best to maintain a vague sense of order in the City Beneath.
- **The Vermissian Collective**, a sect of outlawed historian-occultists who hide in the mad tunnels of the cursed mass transit network and attempt to extract information from its alternate timelines and loose unreality.
- **The Gryndel Hunting Club**, established by Lady Salvatious Gryndel in the year of Ten Red Crows,

murders on the outskirts of town or ceremonial hangings, and try not to let it descend into full-on civil war.

On Pigsday, urchins in Derelictus and the surrounding communities scrub down their monstrous pet pigs and bring them to town squares for a parade and the chance of prizes (biggest, most furious, largest number of eyes, etc.). Pigsday usually descends into a bestial orgy of violence within minutes.

Screfadyd, a festival from the human islands to the east, sees the disparate communities welcome chroniclers into their midst to record local news to be taken back to the Wanderer-King. There are a handful of chroniclers in the Heart (and very few have any hope of ever getting the news back home) but they're doing their best.

On Tradyd, traditionally held on the first day of Bloom, folk will clear their houses of unwanted things and throw them into a pile in the middle of town. Until the next bell, people are encouraged to pick through and take whatever they want. At the end of the day, the pile is burned and the ash swept to the edge of the settlement to make a good-luck ward. Tradyd is a big day for the devoted artists that gather materials; some attempt to go on a sort of junk pilgrimage between settlements despite the dangers involved.

which maintains a network of subterranean lodges linked by ancient magic to make sure that their members can get a decent brandy or three after a hunt in the undercity.

- **The Incarnadine sect:** priests of the goddess of debt who oversee trade between settlements in exchange for a steep cut.
- **The witches of Hallow:** sages and wise-women of the Heart, who speak with an authority granted by a mystical blood disease that binds them to the City Beneath.
- **The Ministry,** an illegal cult from the City Above, which pays handsomely for secrets and/or items of power dug up from the Heart that might aid them in their war against the cruel high elf government.
- **The Tower Division of the University of Gwynn-Enforr,** which sponsors expeditions to unearth treasures and examine unexplained phenomena to better understand the world.

There are, of course, many more to be found: the Midden Mistresses of the Vermissian, for example, or the Deep Crowmen. You could come across the Al'Marajian Expedition Force; the mystery cults run by the street children of Derelictus; opportunistic officials from the Guild of Ladders; the Latchkey Conclave; and others besides – most of whom don't want to be noticed until the time is right.

THE VERMISSIAN

Around a hundred and fifty years ago, the high elves of Spire implemented a vast and ambitious mass transit network within Spire and the upper environs of the City Beneath with the assistance of humans from the Eastern Kingdoms. Known as the Vermissian, it would allow people to move freely throughout the city with speed and efficiency.

However: it didn't work.

Funding debacles, warring factions of engineers and draconic infrastructure laws meant that the Vermissian was unreliable and dangerous right from the start. In an effort to unify the network and power hundreds of trains that would worm their way through the tunnels, the aelfir spearheaded what would later be known as the Vermissian Incident. They dug deep into the City Beneath and pierced the Heart Itself, seeking to use its unimaginable energy to bind each station with one another on a mystical level.

Instead, the wild backlash of magical power pitched the Vermissian into chaos. The tunnels and passageways twisted back on themselves in both space and time, breaking into alternate dimensions and flooding the network with unreality. The Heart blossomed up through the City Above, barely contained by the warding glyphs etched into the passageway walls, and impossible creatures stalked the darkness. The stations were condemned and closed to the public, the network was put on permanent hiatus and the aelfir did their best to pretend that the entire thing never happened.

But: weirdness still thrums through the Vermissian and creeps into Spire. Sects of dark elf historians have made their home in the fractured multiverses within it, and practice forbidden magic to unlock the doors to alternate histories and rewrite the narrative of their world. In the Heart, the stations stand abandoned and unguarded, and from them bleed the unreal after-effects of the Vermissian Incident.

TIME IN THE HEART

This far below ground, time doesn't have the same impact as it does on the surface. With no sunlight to mark the passage of hours and days, the inhabitants of the Heart have adapted as best they can.

Every haven worth its spireblack will have at least one bell; prosperous or ostentatious communities might have more. Using sand or water clocks, or hard-to-maintain clockwork devices built in cramped workshops, the bells are rung at regular intervals to impose a vague rhythm on the otherwise homogeneous darkness. Most havens ring their bells on the hour, but smaller ones will ring every four, six or twelve hours instead.

In general, the closer to the Heart Itself a community is, the less important they find bells and time-keeping. The witches of Hallow view them as backward things, a crutch that distracts the mind from true communion with the Heart; the scattered inhabitants of Ghastling Plain live in placid, dreamlike states where time, space and intent blend into one another; and the beast-eyed

hunters who prowl the deep woods of Briar eschew them for listening to the natural rhythms of the place itself — the pulses.

The City

Beneath has seasonal cycles, just like the City Above, but they are inscrutable to most of the inhabitants. The Heart moves through seven broad states, and judging when it's going to change from one to the other is the mark of an experienced delver. Pulses are less pronounced in havens and in tiers 1 and 0; the people impose their will on the land, or it treats them kindly.

Each time the City changes, the inhabitants will mark a pulse. Instead of using months and years, they'll say that an event was "a handful of pulses ago" or "at least twenty pulses hence." The length of a particular pulse is not fixed (although some last longer than others) and they don't always pass in the order noted below. Timekeeping is a ramshackle, unreliable practice that can infuriate visitors from the City Above.

WHICH PULSE DOMINATES?

- 1: **Rot**, when the place is fecund and stinking, and the dirt is hungry
- 2-3: **Constrict**, when the passages grow tighter and travel is hard
- 4-5: **Swelter**, when it grows uncomfortably hot and the beasts are angry
- 6: **Scratch**, when ghosts rise to seek the comforts of the living and drums echo throughout
- 7-8: **Bloom**, when corridors expand and dark-flowers blossom
- 9: **Breath**, when wind rushes through the tunnels and sings curious songs
- 10: **Drip**, when water flows through the City in trickles and torrents

A character can discern when the current pulse will change with a successful Discern+Wild or Cursed check.

THE HEART ITSELF

The mortal mind (not to mention the mortal body) comes undone upon spending any decent length of time in contact with the Heart Itself. It is therefore hard to get reliable information on what is at the centre of the Heart – on what, precisely, the Heart Itself is – or on the effects of the blistering crimson channel ripped between worlds. There is something there; something raw and other. It is made of something akin to pure quintessence: potential realities blossoming and unfurling within another.

Here are a few ways that people, some of whom may have even experienced it, described the Heart Itself:

- A great kingdom held under alien stars, where towers of spiralling bone twist towards the heavens and lightning sparks between storm clouds that roil overhead, and not a soul is to be seen – as though the place is waiting for something to arrive.
- An enormous organ of flesh and gristle – indeed similar to a heart – that pumps unreality from an alternate plane into this one.
- The eye of a creature of unfathomable size, dreaming of another world; the run-off from its dreams infects the world around it.
- A single point of tremendous energy that's collapsed in on itself and is impossible to return from – anyone who says they've been inside, or even seen it, is a liar.
- A song sung by a thousand people jammed sideways into your head; through hearing it you travel into the song, add your voice to it and become the song, and it echoes the truths of the universe throughout your fragile body.
- A toxic steaming sea, thick as soup, that teems with life unseen in the surface world.
- A fallen fragment of a star that has burrowed deep within the earth; a maze of shattered bloodshot crystal, a sharp and strange universe both infinite and no bigger than a drow's fist.
- A book – the first book, the one which names all the things of the world and in naming them

gives them stable form – that can be read, and perhaps amended.

- A vast and terrible machine that tears the user limb from limb to let them speak with any divine creature they want.

These are all true, and they are all false. If you reach the Heart Itself, you are as close to nascent reality as you can be, and you will unconsciously twist it into a shape that fulfils your desires.

GEOGRAPHY OF THE HEART

The land of the Heart can be broadly split into two categories: natural and manufactured. Not that there's anything 'natural' about a forest growing miles beneath the surface of the world, bathed in light from an unseen moon; and many of the structures in the City Beneath were not built by hand, but fashioned from stone by the place itself (or are remnants of unfathomable, millenia-old cultures). But, splitting the place into natural and manufactured areas serves as a useful shorthand.

The natural areas of the Heart are primarily caverns, tunnels and stagnant pools of water. Sharp outcroppings and spires of rock formed from centuries of water dripping down from the City Above pepper the landscape, and progress is hard. Delves must squeeze through tight gaps, smash through porous rock with hammer and chisel and can never be sure what lies beyond the next blind corner.

The deeper one ventures within the Heart, the less that the geography relies on stone. The stalagmites are made of bones and teeth that whistle eerie notes in the breeze (and there is a breeze, somehow); the lakes are rimmed with tendrils that quest out into the water looking for nutrients and prey; and the walls pulse and shift, showing fluid passing underneath them. Plants grow without apparent need for sunlight; not just algae and fungi, but crawling bushes, insidious moss and great creaking trees.

The manufactured areas of the Heart are a mishmash of architectural styles. Of the dozen or so known civilisations that have inhabited Spire, most of them made some attempt to explore or colonise the vast area beneath. The inhabitants



make repurposing and reusing materials a point of pride, and most structures are made up of parts that are at least fourth-hand. Cathedrals to dead and forgotten gods crumble into ruins, leaving chequerboard flagstones beneath them and defaced statues dotting the perimeter; bridges between rooftops of haunted tower blocks are fashioned from scaffolding and reinforced with steel hawsers stolen from the tunnels of the Vermissian; havens (brief areas of stability in the chaos of the Heart) are built from the debris of previous generations and fiercely guarded.

The Heart wasn't always this bad. It wasn't always full of nightmare creatures, hungry for flesh; reality didn't come unstuck at the drop of a hat; and ghosts didn't used to swarm through the place looking for victims to possess. That's why there are people down there at all; otherwise, it would be far too hostile to warrant moving in.

Each successive exploration into the depths made things slightly worse, but the Vermissian Incident – when the corporation who constructed

the mass-transit network pierced the Heart Itself to siphon off otherworldly power as fuel – was the real turning point. The Vermissian twisted itself into a cursed labyrinth of steel and soot, and the residual energies leached quickly into the City Beneath.

MULTIPLE DOMAINS

Many locations (in fact, most of them) will have more than one suitable domain attached to them. A packed tower-block, rebuilt over decades to accommodate more occupants, could have the **Haven** and **Warren** domains; the humming shell of an ancient machine with trees bursting through the steel plates could have the **Wild** and **Technology** domains; a ritual site where the life was blasted out of the surroundings by a cataclysmic spell in ages past could have the **Desolate** and **Occult** domains.

GEOGRAPHY BY DOMAIN

CURSED

The fleshy floors flex and chew, tiny tooth-ringed mouths flicking open to gnaw apart debris; acid drips upwards from the floor, hissing against the ceiling; a word, blossoming from the stone in verdigris, infests the minds of those who read it.



Cursed areas of the City Beneath are actively harmful to those who would venture inside. Where the parasite dimension of stone and flesh exists most closely with the outside world, the bodies and minds of delvers are corrupted by the strangeness of the place. These places are mostly shunned by inhabitants, and may become tied to religious rituals. The witch settlement of Hallow is built on cursed catacombs where the elders of the cult are buried so that they might be fully absorbed into the Heart Itself.

DESOLATE

Thirty storeys up, the many rooftops are linked with rickety bridges; the ash plains seem to stretch on indefinitely, sapping the will of those who cross it on skiffs; dry and empty corridors echo for what seems like miles.



Desolate areas are grim, blighted places where nothing grows. Natural resources are scarce, and few people travel. The warped dimensions of the Heart allow for truly massive (and, strictly, physically impossible) places of nothing much in particular. Good folk don't stop here, and desperate tunnel bandits and emaciated beasts prowl the dark places looking for people to rob or kill.

HAVEN

An inn built in the burnt-out remnants of a church; a collection of platforms suspended over a chasm for safety from predators; a "temporary" military fortification, rebuilt seven times in the last decade, where the quartermaster rules.



Havens are rare islands of order in the chaos of the Heart. Amidst the strangeness, people strive to build something permanent and real – and, perhaps because many of them believed it would work, these settlements endured. Havens are as varied and strange as the people who build and maintain them; but most offer a bed, a stable reference point and someone to talk to.

OCCULT

A library where each book is the last moments of a person's life, and their ghost is bound within; a bar located in the gap between tick and tock where junk mages trade stolen true names; a great stone corpse, supposedly the remains of a bound demon, who whispers to passers-by.



There is more to the world than can be seen with the eyes alone. The occult is the domain of hidden knowledge, secret power and dark magic; and in the Heart, where reality and unreality spin in an endless dance, the occult is more prevalent than on the surface of the world. Many havens secretly only exist thanks to bargains with unknowable entities; in the lost places between them, magicians that find their practices are unwelcome even in the City Beneath make desperate attempts to cling to life and sanity whilst uncovering the truth of the universe. Deeper still, in forgotten antechambers and fractures severed from the world with razorsharp spells, lie the potent subjects of their obsessions: broken-winged angels, books too wicked to be exposed to sunlight and shadowy intelligences from beyond the world of man and elf that can be siphoned for power.

RELIGION

A pilgrim tends to a garden of crystals lit by magelights, devoted to the goddess of peace; the streets and walls are marked with the sins and glories of the blood-hungry Red Moon Cult, who run this place; a smoke-wreathed temple where priests offer aid to travellers in exchange for their teeth.



Wherever there are people, there are gods: hungry things, distant and strange, who crave praise and devotion like an addict craves a drug. There are hundreds of temples in the City Beneath devoted to almost as many religions. There are corvid murder-cults, renegade sects built up around the veneration of reincarnated saints, those who listen to the whispers of ancient beings buried deep within the earth and so on. The dominant religion in the Heart is the Order of The Moon Beneath – exiles from the City Above who preach communion with their great goddess that dwells slumbering and ripe within the Heart Itself – but they are by no means in charge. In the echoing depths of the City Beneath, it is easy to feel like you are beyond the sight of the gods.

TECHNOLOGY

A screeching hive of machinery, powering some unseen device storeys above; rusted, echoing vents that creak and buckle beneath the feet of explorers; a decrepit lift which drops pilgrims down to the sanctuary beneath, and is itself a candlelit shrine.



The City Beneath is studded with pockets of technology. Some are recent, fashioned by the exploratory teams of the Vermissian sect or left behind by the pacification attempts of the military; some are ancient and immobile forests of cogs and belts, hinting at ancient explorations into the underground. Some have clearly been built by no mortal hand – impractical and unfathomable things that hiss and creak to a forgotten purpose. Delvers often wrench whatever components they view as valuable out of the walls and drag them away for sale. However, these places are commonly

filled with tech-cults that find insight in the whisperings of interlocking teeth and grinding gears, and they resent anything that might upset the smooth running of their machine gods.

WARREN

Cramped sepulchres where gravetenders crawl on their bellies to catalogue the bones of the dead; a mess of collapsing slums, abandoned when the spireblack reserves dried up; ancient sewer systems, crusted with waste, marked in a language you cannot recognise.



The Heart is not easy to navigate at the best of times; in warrens, it's even harder. Low ceilings and narrow walls force delvers into bottlenecks where predators – slithering, darkling things well-suited to the close environs – can rip them to pieces. Most warrens are naturally-occurring or dug by animals, but some are the remnants of exploration: collapsed buildings, interlocking ventilation systems, abandoned mines and the like.

WILD

Brackish water pooling around the bases of the iridescent weeping willows and fizzing with insects; the lair of some great beast, long dead, which has become the hunting ground for its war-ringing children; mushrooms growing in concentric circles and spirals, their spores thickening the air.



There is too much wilderness in the City Beneath. It is as though the Heart Itself, learning of the surface world from the dreams of delvers, recreated it in an effort to make the place more comfortable (or perhaps enticing, beautiful or dangerous – who can say?). Everything here is off-kilter compared to the surface world. A tree might look perfectly normal, but have leaves that are blank white and without texture; flowers sprout from the backs of grazing animals and two-headed bees feed from them; the grass beneath a delver's feet will breathe in and out softly, air whistling through its millions of spiracles.

LANDMARKS

A landmark is a point of interest and conflict within the Heart. It could be a town built in the bowels of a creaking, ancient machine; a grave site for a legendary witch, bubbling with occult power; or an ash lake, dotted with stilt-walking scavengers. Unlike the events that occur whilst exploring or uncovering a trail between them, landmarks are where things happen. There's no defined size for a landmark: the smallest is the size of a room and the largest the size of a small town. What defines them, instead, is their importance with regards to the surrounding area.

PLACES THAT AREN'T LANDMARKS

The events that occur en route to a landmark have to take place somewhere, but the areas around each landmark are far less stable. Each landmark remains in place only as long as the inhabitants of the Heart believe it to be there; once it slips from mortal minds, it falls back into the shifting chaos of the City Beneath. Anywhere that isn't a landmark is protean and unstable – if player characters visit it a second time, there's no guarantee that it'll be the same.

For example: on the way to one landmark, the party encounter a druid carefully tending to a grove of mushrooms. Walking back a week later, they see that she's been completely subsumed into her fungal horde; she whispers to them with a thousand voices that are felt, not heard. Or her grove has become a stone circle, inscribed with pictographs of mushrooms and unreadable glyphs; or a cave where bandits, tripping on hallucinogens, fight enemies that only they can see (but might actually be there); or a dry river of silt and ash, full of fingerbones wearing corroded wedding rings. Even areas marked in place to make connections are strange, and operate around a theme rather than the laws of time and space.

HAUNTS

Haunts – individual areas within havens – can remove stress from your character's resistances. Listed next to each haunt are the resistances that they can access and the maximum amount of stress they can remove. For example:

CRIP STATION

DOMAINS: Haven, Technology

TIER: 1

DEFAULT STRESS: D4

HAUNTS:

- Frumious, an alchemist and technically a doctor (D8 Blood, D8 Echo)
- Singing crystalline caves (D6 Mind, D4 Fortune)
- Trading with the sages (D4 Supplies)

When you access a haven's haunts, you have to pay for using the services. The most common way of doing this is to trade: you can exchange resources (treasure, monster parts, etc.) to access an equivalent dice worth of refresh up to the dice size listed next to the haunt.

If your resources are of a higher rank than the haunt you're accessing, and it makes narrative sense to do so, you can downgrade them by an equivalent number of steps instead of trading them entirely. For example, you have a sack of narcotic mushrooms (D8) and want to access the Doktor's surgery; instead of removing the resource entirely to access the D6 refresh, it's downgraded by two steps (a D6), leaving it as a Handful of Shrooms (D4). However, you can't break down a single valuable item (a painting, for example) into smaller parts.

If you don't have resources to trade, you can choose to take equivalent stress to a different resistance. Most commonly this is **Supplies** (spending spare cash or trading items) or **Fortune** (pushing your luck), but you could also use **Blood**

(engaging in hard/dangerous work for goods and services), **Echo** (being subject to someone's weird experiments or scavenging materials from unstable areas) or **Mind** (doing something reprehensible in exchange for what you need). Whether or not these are viable options is up to the GM and dictated by the fiction.

UPGRADING

When you use a haunt, make a mark next to it. When a haunt has six marks against it, remove all marks and increase the refresh dice by one size. Improvements take time – when you upgrade a haunt, it won't take effect until the next time you visit this haven.

You can invest your time and money in the haunt, too. If you sacrifice resources or mark stress as though you were using the haunt at its full refresh value, but don't remove stress, make three marks on the improvement track.

DAMAGING OR DESTROYING A HAUNT

Some fallout results (most commonly **Fortune**) will damage haunts or havens; generally, they'll downgrade one or all of the haunts in the haven. A D4 haunt that is downgraded is removed entirely. Characters may also voluntarily damage a haven (e.g. as part of a ritual, an act required for their calling or out of vindictiveness) – play out the scene as normal and downgrade the haunt/s if the action is successful.

EMPLOYMENT

As delvers, the player characters' primary means of economic survival in the Heart is acting as agents for those with resources but without skills. Delvers are often contracted as a postal service, delivering goods and missives between havens; or they might be hired as guards for a caravan travelling through a dangerous area; or they could be asked to hunt a heartsblood creature that's been threatening the inhabitants of a settlement. Cartography, field botany, acquisition of rare artefacts (theft), defence, research, education, assassination; there's no

end to the jobs that those of means will deposit on those unafraid to get their hands dirty.

All NPCs want something right now; often, it's the sort of thing that delvers could help with (if they don't want anything right now, consider replacing them with a different NPC). Depending on the resources and obsession available to them, they'll go to varying lengths to achieve their goals. Most are willing to trade a little of what they have (coin, valuable goods or things that the player characters specifically desire) in exchange for services performed; others can only offer their thanks or a favour in kind. The arrival of a group of delvers in a haven is seen as a mixed blessing: while they bring news from outside, fresh faces and much-needed skills, they also have a tendency to cause trouble. Desperate people will contact them (perhaps secretly to avoid the suspicion of other residents) begging them for assistance.

Generally, an NPC will offer a reward equivalent to one dice size up from the default stress dice for their current tier for basic tasks; tasks that require multiple people will see all of them paid. (So: an NPC on Tier 1, which has a default stress dice of D6, will offer a D8 resource reward.) It's always possible to haggle with an NPC for a better rate, but this has its own risks.

As a GM, you can leverage the players' need for resources by offering them quests to distant or interesting landmarks. This gives all the player characters a shared short-term goal, a semi-reliable source of income and most importantly, a reason to explore the wilder and more dangerous parts of the Heart.

LANDMARKS BY TIER

Strange machines that grind and screech for some unknown purpose; crumbling temples to dead gods, haunted by the rotting spectres of their angels; caverns ringed with luminous fungi that grant revelations when eaten... the Heart is full of landmarks. Even though the environment of the Heart is unstable and unreal, landmarks are infamous or well-travelled enough that they maintain a semi-permanent state of existence. While their exact location may change from year to year, their essence remains.

HOW TO USE LANDMARKS

There is no definitive map of the Heart, apart from what you make for yourself. Your Heart (the one that your group adventures through, and which builds around them through their desires and by choosing beats from their callings) is the only map you need to worry about. It is exactly as true as it needs to be.

Listed in the following chapter are ideas for landmarks that can define your adventure and provide respite, resources, excitement or danger. We would like to make it clear up front that there is no version of the Heart where all of these landmarks are present or important; choose the ones that interest you and build on them. For more information on constructing your Heart and mapping it in a semi-sensible fashion, please see p. 102.

Remember that you can (and should) change the landmarks you find here to reflect what happens in your campaign. Have them bleed into one another; take a detail from one place and put it somewhere else; destroy them in-game; have them develop and react to player actions; do whatever you decide might be interesting. Delves are an especially great place to showcase the interaction between two landmarks as they overlap onto one another.

These are not the limits of what is in the Heart. It is strange, and the deeper a delver goes, the less authority logic or reason will have over the world around them. You are encouraged to create the landmarks that will best serve the story that you and the players are going to tell.

MAKING YOUR OWN LANDMARKS

Each landmark should provide one or more of the following things:

SANCTUARY: Visiting haunts gives player characters a chance to remove stress and fallout far more reliably and effectively than they can attempt on their own. In addition, haunts provide an excellent way to drop non-player characters into the story. You'll notice that many of our haunts lead with a person, rather than a location, for ease of roleplaying.

MATERIALS: Landmarks provide an opportunity to harvest resources (or acquire items) that aren't available in other parts of the City Beneath. Some character classes rely on resources to access their abilities, so give the players a chance to collect them.

ADVANCEMENT: Each player will have a set of beats tied to their calling that they'll need to complete in order to advance. Many of these will be made possible by visiting havens, as a lot of them rely on NPCs. When your players tell you their beats, come up with opportunities to fulfil those beats in landmarks. For example: a Penitent character will need opportunities to witness the effects of their betrayal, so making landmarks that tie into their order will help them explore that part of their calling.

EMPLOYMENT: Landmarks provide work for delvers, and it's work that ties the player group together as they adventure through the City Beneath. Every important non-player character should want something that they can't get, but which the player group might be able to help with for the right price.

DANGER: If the player characters are exploring a landmark as part of a job – rescuing someone from a cult or locating an item – then the landmark can provide an exciting challenge. Some landmarks are just horrible places to be, and

as long as the delvers have a reason to visit them, that's often enough.

WONDER: Some landmarks are just amazing in and of themselves, and give you a chance to flex your creative muscles. They can also allow players to explore the mysteries of the Heart without worrying about travel like they would on a delve.

If your landmark doesn't really provide any of the above, change it so it does, or sideline it into something that crops up on a delve. Not every idea is strong enough to develop into an entire landmark, but that doesn't mean you should get rid of it!

DELVES

Delves are, by necessity, between two landmarks. They take elements from both, acting as a transition between them. That means it's impossible to create a list of pre-written delves that you can slot seamlessly into your campaign like landmarks; instead, we've put together a guide to creating your own.

CREATING DELVES

When creating delves, you've got a few different things to think about. Thankfully, as these are mainly notes for your own use, you can be as scrappy and vague as you like; in fact, the looser you keep your descriptions, the easier a time you'll have responding to player actions. A delve breaks down into the following elements:

ROUTE: A delve will be between two (or more) landmarks – decide which ones at the start of the creation process, as this will inform the rest of your design.

TIER(S): A delve might remain within a single tier of the Heart or branch between them. Make a note of which ones it runs through and adjust the weirdness levels appropriately.

DOMAINS: The domains most commonly encountered on the journey. The primary domains of the two landmarks that it joins up are an obvious choice, but don't feel limited by them.

STRESS: The default dice size of stress inflicted on characters when they fail or partially succeed whilst on the journey. The larger the dice, the more dangerous the delve is. You can always adjust this once play has started, so it's better to start low and work upwards from there. You can find the default stresses for each tier on p. 73.

RESISTANCE: The amount of stress the player characters must collectively inflict on the journey before it's completed. The higher this number is, the longer the delve will take. For your first few delves, don't worry about adjusting this on the fly to make a delve longer or shorter – it's going to take you a while to get a feel for the right number for your group.

As a rough guide, if a player character has the appropriate equipment, they'll remove 4 resistance from a delve every time they make a roll against it. A resistance 12 delve should consist of about three major actions, a resistance 16 of four and so on. Characters without equipment will move slower, and those with equipment that inflicts D8 stress or higher on delves will travel much quicker.

DESCRIPTION: A brief outline of the area. Focus on the senses and how it feels to experience it as a delver. You might also want to note down the recent history of the area if it's going to be important to the game.

EVENTS: Typical events, obstacles and curiosities that might occur on the journey. These will generally result in one of the players making a roll of some kind to remove resistance from the delve, so think of them as challenges to be overcome. Physical barriers are a good start, as are tricky social encounters, detrimental environmental conditions or uniquely difficult navigation. You don't need more than a handful of ideas about interesting things you're going to throw at the player characters. If you're planning on putting a particular kind of adversary on the delve, make a note of their stats (or write down the page number of the book they're on).

CONNECTION: An optional objective that, if completed, allows the player characters to halve the resistance of the delve if they use it again in future. If correctly themed, these side-plots give you ample opportunity to allow players to fulfil their characters' beats too.

Once you know these things about the delve, you're good to go!

EXAMPLE OF DELVE CREATION

ROUTE: Between Swinefall and Highrise

TIER: 2

DOMAINS: Warren, Desolate

STRESS: D6

RESISTANCE: 14

DESCRIPTION: A vertical ascent through a reeking maze of pulsing red magelights and territorial pig spectres before climbing the blasted, half-ruined tower blocks of Highrise. It smells like old blood and rust, then mothballs and damp.

EVENTS: A mob of exiled pig ghosts howl their bestial support for a dethroned king; Creaking metal walkways, slick with ever-wet blood; Renegade groups of cull-priests from the Highrise cult are covered in protective charms and looking for sacrifices to the ghosts that plague their homes; A great butcher shop with rusted iron machinery where pig and humanoid ghosts vie for control; Eyeless spectres (p. 187) haunting the abandoned flats in the lower floors of Highrise.

CONNECTION: Help the exiled Pig King reclaim his throne, and he'll allow you and those of your blood safe(ish) passage

NOTES: The pig ghosts of Swinefall are at war with the humanoid ghosts of Highrise over territory, and the place is filled with unnatural shrieks and screams from distended spectral mouths.

GENERIC LANDMARKS

You won't find much in the way of generic landmarks in here (i.e. the sort of place that fills a gap between two other more interesting places, or which acts as a mundane location to start an adventure). All the landmarks we've listed are unique, but that doesn't mean that they're the only landmarks in the Heart or that generic landmarks don't serve a useful purpose. To have everything weird all the time can be exhausting in terms of plot and pacing, and it can be refreshing to take a break into (relative) normality every now and again to keep the weirdness fresh.

Feel free to come up with your own small landmarks to fill in the gaps between stories. Read through the locations below to get an idea of what sort of thing makes sense for your campaign, and go for it. What follows is a list of quick concepts for non-unique landmarks that you can expand:

- A watchtower with a trio of beleaguered Hounds, offering relative safety.
- A chapel to a goddess whose worship is forbidden in the City Above.
- A maintenance shaft for the Vermissian, converted into a cramped library-tunnel.
- A settlement built around an ever-turning paternoster and a half-decent pub.
- A hunting lodge, far from anything else, which hasn't been used for years.
- A coven of witches living in the shadow of a fallen monolith who trade magic for blood.
- A Labyrinthine colony built around an important secret, never to be told.
- A small dark-farm of goats, fowl and mushrooms tended to by a long-suffering family.
- A magical sanctum filled with bickering occultists.
- A weirdly normal house that resets itself, and those who live in it, once every 24 hours.
- A peaceful grove where the trees and ground breathe in time with the visitors.

WHAT'S IN A LANDMARK?

Each landmark is written out according to a template. Here's everything you need to know about it:

NAME: The landmark's name. All landmarks have names, otherwise they wouldn't be able to exist; if it doesn't have a name, put it on a delve instead.

DOMAINS: The most commonly-encountered domains in the landmark.

TIER: The tier of the Heart on which you'll most likely find the landmark: 0, 1, 2, 3 or Fracture. (Fractures are otherworlds that don't reside on any particular tier.) The deeper something is in the Heart, the weirder it'll be.

HAUNTS: Places where the delvers can exchange resources for removing stress or downgrading fallout. The maximum dice size and relative resistances are listed in brackets after the description.

DESCRIPTION OF LANDMARK: A longform area description that talks about the history and current state of the landmark, including any hooks that might draw player characters into the location.

SPECIAL RULES: Any special rules that are in effect within the landmark. Usually these are dangers to be avoided, but not all of them. Fallout specific to the area will be listed here as well, and you can choose to apply it to characters if it makes sense for the story.

DEFAULT STRESS: The standard amount of stress inflicted on player characters if they fail or partially succeed on an action. Each roll is still figured out on a case-by-case basis, but this provides a baseline to work from.

RESOURCES: Valuable materials that the delvers can harvest or steal from this landmark. The higher a resource's value, the harder it will be to safely acquire.

POTENTIAL PLOTS: Some story ideas to bring player characters to the landmark or propel them on to another once they arrive. Some have an NPC listed who offers a reward for completion (this is listed in brackets after the job description), but this isn't a hard and fast rule. Figure out what your player characters want and give it to them in exchange for dangerous work.

TIER 0

DERELICTUS, THE CITY BETWEEN**DOMAINS:** Haven**DEFAULT STRESS:** D4**HAUNTS:** Any, D10

Derelictus has been a waypoint for travellers between the two cities for centuries. In its centre, the aelfir architects who built the Vermissian commissioned an enormous station to link the City Above and the City Beneath and allow travel between them. Haven station, as it was to be called, was built but never connected to the line. After decades of delays, it was abandoned and the inhabitants of Derelictus moved in.

Huge, arching ceilings of broken and filthy glass tower above the central plaza. There are three platforms that extend downwards into the void below, each housing hundreds of people, and the station continues into the outskirts of Derelictus proper. Here, the racial tensions of Spire are relaxed somewhat by the interzone feel of the place; aelfir associate with – and on occasion marry – dark elves.

The central platforms form the crux of the City Between, as Derelictus is sometimes called – they cater to delvers, thrill-seekers, occultists, vagabonds and explorers all keen to descend into the Heart.

Platform 1 is a warren devoted to the very serious business of selling people things that will help them survive in the Heart. Workshops and traders boast the keenest swords, the warmest coats and the cleanest-burning



spireblack. The goods for sale are expensive; the owners have a captive audience, after all. Platforms 2 and 3 cater to the baser needs of delvers – the roughest ale, the greasiest food, the cheapest beds and the cheapest company.

Finally, platform 4 holds representatives from most of the factions who have a vested interest in Heart exploration. The Vermissian Collective boasts an intact ticket office here; the Hounds have a recruitment office; and the Gryndel Hunting Clubs offer farewell drinks to members before a delve. Any number of paramilitary, religious, occult or trade-related organisations have offices on the platform, whether publically or not.

SPECIAL RULES: Spending a few days in Derelictus automatically removes all stress from a character's resistances.

RESOURCES:

- There's work to be had for able-bodied people and those who can read and write. Doesn't pay very well though (D4, Haven).
- Various dark magicians kicked out of the City Above but not quite ready for the City Below practice their dark arts on the crumbling streets of Derelictus. If you can break into their hovels you can make off with their valuables – sacrificial animals, sheafs of arcane research notes, scrying-bones and so on (D8, Occult).
- Hunting the verminous swine that snuffle through the open sewers here is a popular pastime, and if you get a big one someone will generally buy it off you (D6, Wild).

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- Verrex, a shifty retro-technologist with a tumbledown workshop lit by flickering magelights, sends delvers off to rescue an escaped mechanical copy of himself. Whether it's real or not is another matter. (D10, Technology)
- A mystery cult made up of street kids approaches the party; the leader asks them to rescue his sister after she disappeared into the City Below looking for the Moon Beneath. (D4, Religion – plus a blessing from the Goddess)

- Insouciance Gryndel is a moneyed drow dilettante looking for guides to help her explore the City Beneath and maybe bag a legendary trophy (she's actually just looking for her father). She's offering a good price (D10, Haven) and she carries herself like she means business.

TIER 1

Tier 1 runs from the edge of Derelictus into the depths of the undercity. There are people here – some of them normal, most of them weird, but all still people. Havens are more commonplace than on the tiers beneath, and there are occasional pathways that can be used by anyone.

Here, sects to forbidden gods and secret orders of occultists hide themselves from the attentions of the surface world in rebuilt temples; hustlers manufacture narcotics for distribution in the City Above out of sight of the law; and those not welcome in polite society make a home (and a name) for themselves.

Tier 1 is relatively stable compared to the lower depths of the Heart. Buildings tend to stay in one place (unless they're hungry), maps only need to be updated every six months or so and connections between landmarks are only hazardous rather than outright deadly.

THE GOD OF CORPSES

DOMAINS: Haven, Religion

DEFAULT STRESS: D4

HAUNTS:

- Galen Guides-the-Pulse and Doctor Haverick, Avid Chirurgeons (D10, Blood).
- Madb, Rheumy-eyed Hierophant of Ribcage Market (D8, Supplies).

This landmark is a huge corpse of no particular beast: a whale, perhaps, or some sort of titanic ox. It died down here, and in dying it became a god. People live in it and worship it, praying that it will keep them alive a little longer.

There are Seven Sacred Ailments which it is considered good to die from. These are: Weeping Ague, Azur's Touch, Grackling-Cough, Quivering Buboes, Cluttered Lung, Degeneracy of the Bone and Quickening Blood. All others are the work of demons of

sin and must be eradicated. The physickers here are many, zealous and skilled, but they often take more interest in the disease than the person they're saving.

There is a sect here that seeks to awaken the god: to have it throw off its cthonic shackles and bear them, bodiless and free as a virus, into the heavens. There is another sect who believes that this is heresy, and that to bring it to life would shatter its divinity. They are at quiet war, concocting diseases and spreading them to one another in the vain hope of gaining power, but at present they seem to have reached a standstill.

RESOURCES:

- Vial of one of the Seven Sacred Ailments (D8, Religion, Dangerous).
- Face-rot Capsule (D6, Cursed, Dangerous. Can be used as a Kill D8, Spread, Ranged, Degenerating, Limited 1 weapon in a pinch.)
- Panaceaic Inhaler (D8, Religion)

GRIP STATION

DOMAINS:

Haven, Technology

DEFAULT STRESS: D6

HAUNTS:

- Frumious, an alchemist and technically a doctor (D8, Blood; D8, Echo)
- Singing crystalline caves (D6, Mind; D4, Fortune)
- Trading with the sages (D4 Supplies)

Around a hundred feet above the train tracks around Grip Station, glittering crystalline stalactites creak and shudder gently in response to the vibrations of those who move beneath them. It was the hope of the aelfir constructors that travellers on the line could marvel at the crystals as they were illuminated by huge spotlights mounted on the carriages, but the lights proved too expensive to maintain, and any time a train went over 10 miles an hour the stalactites started to fall from the ceiling. Journeys through Grip Station subsequently came with

fifteen minutes of agonisingly slow, pitch-black travel accompanied by the “singing” of crystals threatening to detach overhead.

Of late, the Vermissian Sages have established a local base of operations in the original station house, shoring up the fragile crystal structures above their heads with scaffolding.

RESOURCES:

Particularly resonant crystal (D8, Wild, Beacon. Can be rigged into a wayfinding device that functions as a Delve D8, Unreliable item)

LABYRINTH

DOMAINS: Warren

DEFAULT STRESS: D6

HAUNTS:

- Boreal, a doctor whose office was trapped in here (D8, Blood)
- The Penrose Stairs, a surprisingly good pub (D8, Mind)
- Dovetail Market, on the outskirts (D6, Supplies)

The Labyrinth curse is a disease that makes you build mazes around yourself; a sort of agoraphobia coupled with a weird capacity to collaborate with others. Sole sufferers will turn their flats into mazes with stacks of newspaper and cardboard boxes and hide in the cupboards; get more than ten together and they'll start building something elaborate and dangerous. Labyrinth is a commune of around a hundred and fifty infected builders who are expanding more and more each year. They swallow up the streets around their lairs and convert them into maddening mazes riddled with traps, pitfalls and wild beasts. Like many deep-dwellers, they implant animal material into their bodies; elder Labyrinthines have rows and rows of horns on their head, neck and back.

People would be happy to leave them alone, but they have an instinctive desire to build their structures around important things – or steal those things and put them deep inside the maze so no-one can reach them. They don't appear to get any use out of these resources, but instead enjoy “protecting” them from others. This is not a

huge problem when their walls stop heartsblood creatures from emerging from a cave, but it's a serious inconvenience when you return to a haven to find it surrounded by twisting passages and razorwire traps.

SPECIAL RULES: Doctors aren't entirely sure how the Labyrinth disease is transmitted between hosts. It might be blood-borne or air-borne, but it could just as likely be a mimetic virus contracted by exposure to mazes. The virus is represented by the fallouts below.

LABYRINTH CURSE. [Minor, Blood/Mind/Fortune] You are compelled to build mazes around things or people that you view as valuable. At the end of every session that you don't build at least a little bit of a maze, mark D4 stress to Mind.

LABYRINTHINE MIND. [Major, Blood/Mind] You fashion a labyrinth around yourself to keep you safe from harm. Inside the labyrinth, you roll with mastery; outside the labyrinth, all actions are Risky due to distraction and paranoia.

THE LABYRINTHINE. [Critical, Blood/Mind] You disappear into the capital-L Labyrinth – the big one, the ur-labyrinth that all other mazes are a dim shadow of – and don't come back until the next time your party gets lost, at which point it's revealed that you've built a maze for them. Maybe they can join you, or maybe you'll have to kill them to prove a point; whatever happens, you are immediately retired as a player character and become an NPC.

RESOURCES:

- At least a dozen treasures that vary from D8 to D12 in value and possess the **Occult**, **Cursed** or **Religion** domains. These are well-protected, as mentioned above, and navigating the area successfully uses the rules for delves (p. 100).

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- The Minotaur, That-Which-Escapes (p. 205), begins to crawl through its extra-dimensional

prison to the streets of Labyrinth. The inhabitants are nervous, but a bit excited; those in settlements nearby want it stopped at all costs.

- One of the player characters' siblings left home after contracting the Labyrinth curse, but when the delvers get inside and find them, they don't want to leave.
- Something valuable (D10, Any) is guarded within the labyrinth – but if the delvers manage to get it out, a number of other interested parties will attempt to take it off them.

REDCAP GROVE

DOMAINS: Wild

DEFAULT STRESS: D6

HAUNTS: Burnout druid den (D6, Blood/Mind)

Druids don't do well in the City Above; it is a place of rules and walls, science and enlightenment, art and industry. Exposure to the world's largest metropolis drives them mad after a year or two. A few wild-eyed men and women pray to the spirits of the birds or commune with the majesty of a bee swarm's hive-mind, but most end up dead or in the City Beneath, where civilisation comes undone and their bestial sides can flourish.

The druids of Redcap are, unlike the ones you'd find in your average sacred stone circle or wilderness grove, unrepentant criminals. Realising that their arcane arts gave them access to a) fast-growing plants, no matter the location, and b) the ability to turn into dangerous predators when they needed to, they established the undercity's most prolific and best-guarded drug farm and flooded the market with magic mushrooms. Anyone who tried to muscle in on their racket (or who tried to stop them for noble reasons) ended up on the wrong side of a hit squad of half-animal, half-drow assassins (p. 183).

Redcap, which looks to be built upon the ruins of an ancient cathedral, is now a lurid smear of fungal blooms and the air is thick with spores. The druids (and a few ungifted lackeys) keep watch over their stocks of mushrooms and escort shipments up to Red Row in the City Above. On occasion, they also release a few luckless sacri-

fices into the caverns beneath that they can hunt and kill, ensuring another good harvest as their blood soaks into the porous rock.

SPECIAL RULES: Non-druids, or people who aren't part of the wider organisation, generally aren't too welcome within Redcap Grove. They'll tolerate you if you're buying product, but otherwise you'll have to sneak in.

RESOURCES:

- Many different varieties of hallucinogenic mushrooms that grow out of rotten tree bark and dead bodies (D6 – D10, Taboo)

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- Someone claiming to work for the government of the City Above (although you never saw any proper identification) has asked you to steal a shipment of mushrooms before they leave for the streets of Red Row. They'll provide you with the time and place, and you get to keep everything you steal (D8, Taboo) aside from the Redcap Special.
- A druid named Versival – big beard, one eye, doesn't like clothes – cut a deal with a Vermissian Sage who believes that massive amounts of hallucinogenic mushrooms are just the thing to inspire his research. Versival doesn't like going into the technological hell that is the Vermissian, and rather than embarrass himself in front of his friends, he contracts some delvers to do it instead (D8, Wild).

RESONANCE CHAMBER FIVE

DOMAINS: Occult

DEFAULT STRESS: D4

HAUNTS: Commune with an alien consciousness (D4, Mind)

The Deep Apiarists carved a plinth out of solid bedrock and installed a buzzing network of bees in hives that cover the great pillar. They broadcast the hum – the signal that lets the bees communicate with one another over great distances – through the resonant structure. Any wandering

Apiarist will be sure to pay it a visit and commune with the intelligence at its core.

The resonance chambers act as a communications network for Deep Apiarists. They post messages of encouragement and warning for one another, stash supplies and even inter their dead here. The corpse's inhabitants simply add to the subaudible murmur that reverberates through the very bones of the City Beneath.

RESOURCES:

- A jar of glyph-marked deep bees (D4, Occult, Fragile, Mobile)
- A nascent queen, plucked from within a hive (D8, Occult, Fragile, Mobile)
- Research notes on the Hive left by a fatally-wounded apiarist (D8, Occult, Niche)

SUMP STATION

DOMAINS: Technology, Warren

DEFAULT STRESS: D4

HAUNTS: None.

Ancient pumps, several storeys high, used to suck the brackish water out of this place: the walls are porous and unstable, and water would seep in. Now the pumps are long-broken and the furnaces powering them are cold. The station is flooded at least waist-high.

The flooding – and the creatures that scud malevolently around the abandoned tracks (Wretches, p. 199) – keep people out, meaning that there are untouched airtight rooms, lockers, tunnels and even a vending machine that are presumably full of Vermissian artefacts. The fact that no-one's been stupid or competent enough to get into them yet doesn't stop tens of delvers drowning in here every year.

RESOURCES:

- Intact vending machine from The Vermissian Company (D12, Awkward).
- A box of damp information pamphlets: The Pulse Line and You, Proper Train Etiquette, something purporting to be a timetable that descends into a madman's prophetic scrawl (D8, Occult)

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- Athelren, a jaunty Vermissian Sage, dispatches the delvers to salvage the research notes from a lost exploration team in the bowels of Sump station. But why were they lost? (D8, Occult)
- This old guy with one eye and fewer teeth at the back of the bar won't shut up about a giant "eel with legs" that lives in Sump. Says the Signal-Box cultists (p. 196) there worship it like a carnivorous god.

THE TEMPLE OF THE MOON BENEATH

DOMAINS: Haven, Religion

DEFAULT STRESS: D4

HAUNTS:

- Sister Griswold's Clinic (D10 Blood)
- Altar of Our Many Mothers (D8 Fortune)
- Purification Chambers (D6 Echo)

Two hundred years ago, the Church of the Moon was driven out of the City Above in a week-long purge of fire and terror by the occupying aelfir forces: it was a relic of the old powers and a threat to the new regime. Battered and burned, the remnants of the church fled to the lawless depths of the Heart and sought to rebuild what they had lost in the darkness of the undercity.

Now, centuries later, they have rebuilt their once-glorious temple in the City Beneath. The stones and beams of the structure were smuggled down by pilgrims or recreated by blind artisans. The temple stands once more – mismatched and patched together, but surviving. The clerics there will pay handsomely for parts of the original grand temple or accurate reproductions should they be offered.

After their descent, the drow of the Temple of the Moon began to distrust the sky, believing it to be distant, changeable and uncaring. Their now-useless telescopes were dismantled, and followers instead sought wisdom in the true moon they had dreamed of since they arrived in the Heart. This moon dwelled far beneath the earth, a luminous and fecund mistress, of which the flitting phantom in the heavens was but a pale imitation. The Church of the Moon Beneath, as it was now called, sent the faithful down into the depths

searching for more insights and visions from their true goddess.

The Temple is one of the largest stable structures in the Heart. Within, it holds offices devoted to the six Damnic virtues: Community, Fury, Grace, Sagacity, Tenacity and Vigilance. There is generally a service, celebration or rite happening at any given time when delvers arrive. All are welcome to share in the majesty of the Moon Beneath should they pay the appropriate tithe or perform sufficient acts of faith.

RESOURCES:

- Stone chipping from the central altar (D6, Religion)
- Assorted saints bones from the ossuary (D4, Religion)

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- Sister Griswold, a spider-blooded ex-midwife from the City Above with more than her fair share of airs and graces, runs a clinic here. Her shipments of medicine and supplies smuggled out of Spire are being targeted by the druid-gangsters of Redcap Grove; she has put a price on their heads (D12, Religion) but it won't be an easy job.
- Pilgrims gather here to form parties and visit all six subsidiary temples of the Damnic faith. There's money in escorting them (D6, Haven per temple), even if it's often more trouble than it's worth. That said, if you visit all six subsidiary temples, they say that the Goddess blesses you with her sacred insight (i.e. gain access to the Religion domain and a medium advance of your choice).

SUBSIDIARY TEMPLES OF THE DAMNIC VIRTUES

Listed below are four offshoots of the main temple of the Moon Beneath. There are two others on deeper tiers: Sightless on tier 2 (p. 156) and Soufri on tier 3 (p. 162).

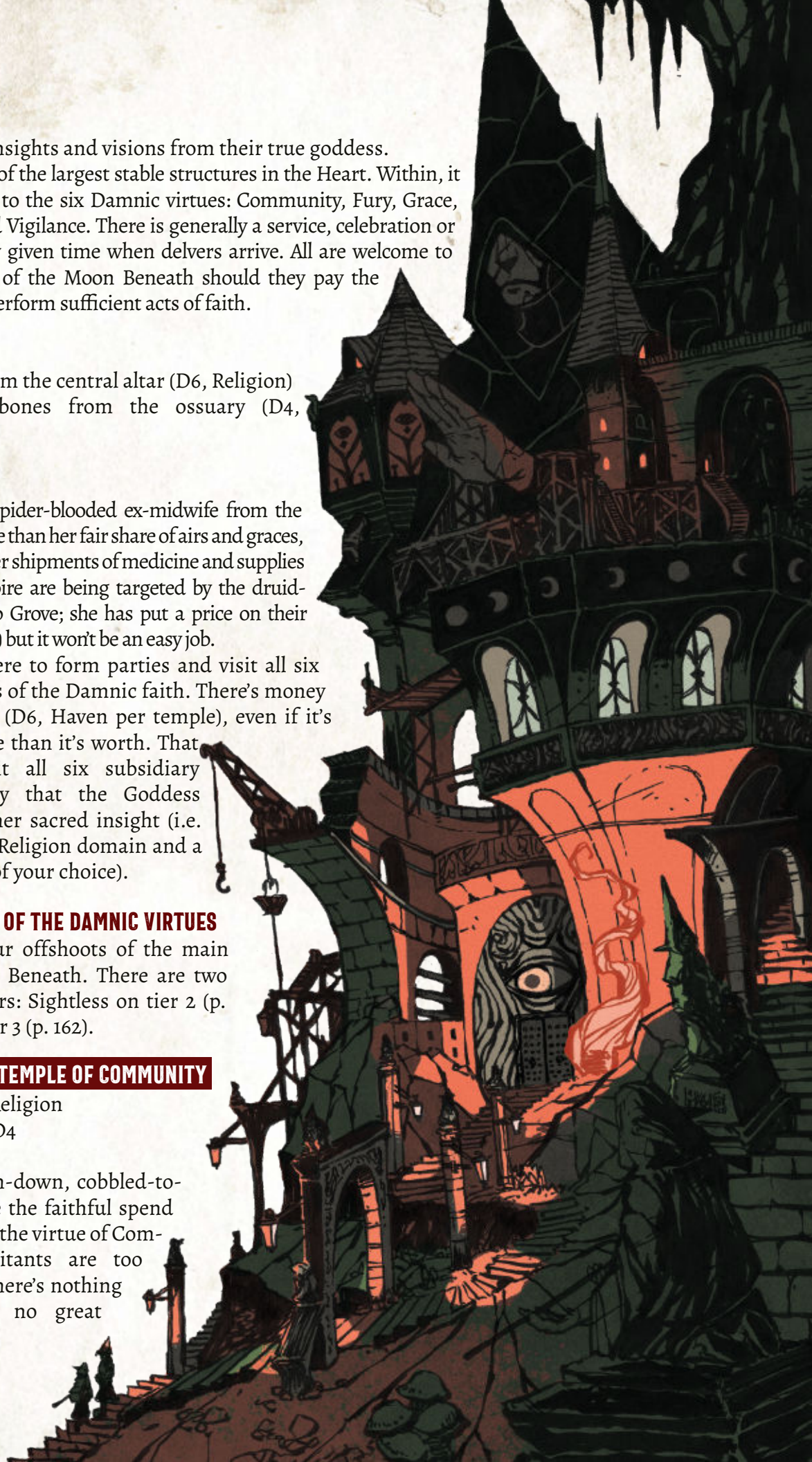
SONDERWOOD – THE TEMPLE OF COMMUNITY

DOMAINS: Haven, Religion

DEFAULT STRESS: D4

HAUNTS: None

Sonderwood is a run-down, cobbled-together temple where the faithful spend their lives devoted to the virtue of Community. The inhabitants are too friendly by far, but there's nothing sinister behind it; no great



malevolent motive. They're just terribly lonely and desperate for companionship. They offer room and board in exchange for performing services to the temple and, more importantly, attending hour-long sermons on the benefits of togetherness. Sonderwood is largely empty aside from a few die-hard priests and associated hangers-on who don't mind the religious spiel. Meeting rooms are stuffed with too many chairs, and libraries of community records detailing births, marriages and deaths crumble into uselessness.

The leader of the place, although she'd shy away from adopting such a title, is Chastity Graves: a witch who is experimenting with her arcane powers to unite the inhabitants of the temple in glorious, contractual unity. At present, she is attempting to marry everyone in the church to each other in a move that would at best be frowned upon by her superiors in the Temple of the Moon Beneath.

RESOURCES:

- A single ancient holy text barely held together with twine and glue, buried under piles of unrelated census information (D12, Religion, Deteriorating).

CHOLLEROUS – THE TEMPLE OF FURY

DOMAINS: Religion

DEFAULT STRESS: D4

HAUNTS:

- Back-alley doctor employed by the Hounds, mainly to treat sword wounds (D8, Blood)
- Redmoon Place, arms market (D10, Supplies)

In Chollerous, the unremarkable career of the Hound Derwent Swake took a dramatic upturn as he found himself the sole survivor of a retributive assault led by the witches of Hallow. Fighting off dozens of blood-mages and their enthralled minions, he kept them out of the church at the centre of the settlement for two days until reinforcements arrived and sent the witches packing. This was a perfect example of the Damnic virtue of Fury, and the temple of

Chollerous was regarded as a sacred site for the worshippers of the Moon Beneath.

At least, that's the official story. The truth is that Derwent Swake was blessed by the Moon Beneath in her form as Lekole, the blood moon and bringer of fury. He was filled with such furious rage that he slaughtered not only the witches but his squadmates too when they attempted to flee the carnage. Magicked, shot and stabbed at least a dozen times, Swake found himself unable to die. Trailing blood, wearing a floating crown of red light and bearing the limbs of the fallen as weapons, a joint effort between the witches and the Hounds managed to subdue him. The Hounds would go on to twist the story through retelling into what is common wisdom in the surrounding area today.

Also, they kept Swake. His body broken and burned but unable to die, he has been restrained in the catacombs beneath the temple. The faithful visit him to renew their fury by anointing themselves with his ever-flowing blood. Drawing on his power, Chollerous has grown into a stable haven that boasts an extensive arms market, and they provide to any who wish to take destiny into their own hands and strike back at those who have wronged them.

You can trade in your sword at Chollerous to receive a new one of equal make. Dented, rusted and blunt weapons are exchanged for bright, shiny ones at no cost, although there is a waiting list during busy periods. These gifted swords are sacred objects – blank slates upon which the faithful of Lekole can write a history of blood and murder.

RESOURCES:

- Vial of Swake's blood (D8, Religion, Occult.) You can drink the vial to ignore all **Blood** fallout results for a single situation as the frenzy of Lekole overtakes you.
- The first blade ever traded at Chollerous (D10, Cursed). Caked in rust and old blood, but if used as a weapon (it's Kill D10, Tiring, Brutal, Bloodbound, Dangerous)

ATHANE – THE TEMPLE OF SAGACITY

DOMAINS: Haven, Religion

DEFAULT STRESS: D4

HAUNTS:

- Rederan Foxworth, elderly and discreet drug dealer (D6, Mind)
- Van Jastobaal, polymath market trader (D6, Supplies)

Sagacity, one of the Damnic virtues, is the basis for the philosophy behind the temple at Athane. The thinkers here believe that discourse is crucial to understanding on the part of the speaker and the listener; as such, they have been in constant debate for the last forty years.

Perhaps the worship became twisted over time, but what began as a desire to communicate became a need to speak. Today, the priests at Athane share a belief that something catastrophic will happen should the debate ever cease, and the dirty steps of the central forum are littered with refuse and dozing religious philosophers. One speaker must always be on their feet, holding forth; the faithful view this as a sacred, if arduous, duty.

But the priests are growing old, and fresh ideas from new thinkers rarely make their way down to Athane, so standards have begun to slip. What was once a thoughtful, if infinitely long-winded, discourse on the nature of the Goddesses has devolved into lunatic sprawl about anything and everything – the war in Nujab, the price of malak, the secrets whispered by the Red Corridors, the selective infection patterns of the witch virus – with no direction or chair. People are welcome to stay for a while if they're willing to hold forth on something – anything – to give the priests a chance to rest their aging bones.

RANVESS – THE TEMPLE OF VIGILANCE

DOMAINS: Religion

DEFAULT STRESS: D4

HAUNTS:

- “Doctor” who doesn't tell you their name and asks too many questions (D4, Blood)
- A bar accessed by whispering the correct password into a bookcase (D4, Mind)
- Person claiming to be a Witch (D4, Echo)

- General Store with extensive catalogue but no apparent stock (D4, Supplies)
- Least secure confessional in the City Beneath (D4, Fortune)

A temple of spymasters with no-one to spy on. Traditionally, the Temple trains intelligence operatives – but there's no-one to spy on in Heart that's worth the time. It has devolved into an endless cycle of practice, misdirection and back-biting. Everyone is watching everyone else, determined to catch them in a slip-up, and the entire place is – well, paranoid isn't the word because it's not a delusion, but there you are. They love accepting guests because it gives them someone who isn't a godsdamn spymaster to try and extricate information from.

RESOURCES:

- A list of all known operatives and cover identities (D12 Haven if real, D4 Haven if not, but it's at least mildly incriminating)

THE TOWER

DOMAINS: Haven, Warren

DEFAULT STRESS: D4

HAUNTS:

- Jessamyn Duval, spiderblooded midwife and physician (D8, Blood)
- The North Docks, a canal-themed bar on the ground floor (D8, Mind)
- Compact Chapel of Our Glorious Lady (D8, Fortune)
- The Blue Port market, airy little shopping district covered in blue tapestries (D8, Supplies)

Ventrix Bring-The-River-Close was a visionary architect in the City Above. She is still a visionary architect in the City Beneath following her exile, and now she is free from petty constraints like organisational oversight, the fundamental nature of space and time or zoning laws.

Ventrix had a vision of a grand unified society where everyone had a place and no-one was surplus to requirements. She would spend days in communion with ant and bee hives, marvelling at their organisation; she studied under gnollish geoman-

cers, worked with ostracised retro-architects from the Eastern Domain and ate corpsefruit from ancient lineages to dream of days past. She courted and mined the brains of the finest artists and thinkers that aelfir society had to offer. At the summer festival in the year of Terrible Feathers, she unveiled her creation to the public: an entire redesign of Spire intended to have it function as the perfect society, with satisfaction and contentment for all.

This was too much for high elf society to bear. They considered themselves far better than the other races of the world, and Ventrrix's proposal threatened to undermine the strength of their dominion if the powerful ideas within ever reached the public at large. She was exiled, and though secret support from her patrons continued, she was not allowed to set foot in the frozen halls of Amaranth ever again.

Ventrrix fled to the undercity, and from there to the Heart. She understood what she had to do: the minds of aelfir society could not comprehend the weight of her suggestions if they remained purely theoretical. She required an experiment; a model society, a microcosm of her ideal nation, that she could present to the council to change their minds. She began construction of the tower.

That was around fifteen years ago, but time moves strangely in the Heart, and Ventrrix herself feels as though she has been at work for a century or more. Her creation – simply referred to as the Tower by those who live in or near it – is nearly complete.

Thirty storeys high, the Tower takes up the entirety of the vast cave in which it was built. Each level has space for between five and ten families, and these families are responsible for different elements of sustaining the colony. A tiny copy of the Garden District takes up three floors, with residents' beds suspended over the algae vats that feed the Tower. Tiny workshops handle the creation of work tools, spireblack refinement and construction materials. In the open-air plazas of the mid-levels, libraries and volunteer teachers seek to educate the residents on matters of art and critical thought, and the greatest plays of the last few centuries are performed by enthusiastic (if unskilled) players. In the upper levels, Ventrrix herself and a wide collection of advisors consult to

determine the best path forward for the colony. She rarely sleeps – instead, she tirelessly works to better the lives of those inside, and prepares for the day when she will reveal her work to the council in the City Above.

What's strange about the Tower is that it works. There aren't quite enough people in there (over half of the apartments are empty) and it faces problems from thieves and heartsblood monsters, but the residents are happy. The society ticks along just fine with Ventrrix at the head, and it expands year on year. Is it due to her socialist policies? Perhaps. Is it due to the architectural magic woven into the bones of the building, geomantic wards and hexes rewriting the brains of those who spend more than a few days inside? Maybe. Is it due to the spiritual energy of a thousand beehives fixed in place, ordering the minds of the inhabitants into perfect co-operation? It's hard to say.

Ventrrix makes no secret of the nature of the Tower, and her heart seems to be in the right place – even if her perfect society is one that requires no-one ever leave due to dissatisfaction. She is as much a prisoner of her magic as everyone else inside. There is no dark secret, no underhanded plot – just straightforward mind control in service of the perfect city.

On occasion, delvers are asked to “rescue” people who've moved to the Tower, and they always find them unwilling to leave. Indeed, these delvers – should they spend significant time within the structure – often get involved in the community themselves and join up, forsaking everything they once were. They're perfectly happy to do so.

SPECIAL RULES: When using a Haunt in the Tower, make a **Resist+Occult** check.

FALLOUT: GREAT SOCIETY. [Major, Echo / Mind] After spending too long listening to the quiet drone that pervades the Tower and talking with the residents (and maybe with a little help from powerful directed magics), you decide to settle down in a new berth in the sleeping quarters. If you're dragged out by some well-meaning allies, you can remove the fallout as normal.

RESOURCES:

- Personal effects of local inhabitants (D6, Haven)
- Mind-control nodes (D8, Occult, Harmful)

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- The delvers are hired by a masked aelfir operative to assassinate Ventrix (D12, Haven); the establishment feels that it's time for her little experiment to come to a close.
- An Idol from the City Above is looking for information on Ventrix' mind control (D8, Haven).

TUNNELS OF WET FILTH**DOMAINS:** Religion, Warren**DEFAULT STRESS:** D4**HAUNTS:**

- Tallow Market (D6 Supplies)
- Aster's Purgatives (D6 Echo)

The City Above directs its sewers down here, miles beneath the Spire, to be forgotten about in the darkness of the City Beneath. Most of what's washed down here is piss and shit and animal offal, but there are occasional treasures in the waste too. There's a cult of people who live in the sewers and adorn themselves with the filth. They're all horribly diseased and barely clinging on to life, with only the Heart keeping them alive in this new disgusting biome. They worship a great and dangerous god who defecates on them from above.

The streets here are filled with liquid grime, and in that grime swim wretches (p. 199) – hideous blubbery creatures that are bred by the inhabitants. Getting a leg bitten off by some half-crocodile monstrosity is tremendously funny to the folk who live in the Tunnels, and view outsiders thrashing about in the filth as a sort of street theatre.

SPECIAL RULES: This landmark will happily accept resources with the **TABOO** tag.

FALLOUT: STINK. [Minor, Fortune] Despite your best efforts, the reprehensible stench of the tunnels gets on you. NPCs outside of the tunnels automatically dislike you until you find a way to scrub yourself clean and remove this fallout.

RESOURCES:

- If you go shifting through the trash and effluvia, you might be able to find something of value (D4, Any), but there are better ways to spend your time.

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- Brother Colostomy, the de facto leader of the filth worshippers, is interested in building connections to nearby landmarks for trade. If you help him out, he'll reveal a secret sewer tunnel through a delve that allows you to establish a connection for no additional resistance.
- Weslin, a renegade witch, needs to be smuggled out of Hallow (p. 149) and into Aster's surgery. She's heard that his purgatives can rid someone of any illness, even one as deep-rooted as the blood disease that's nestled around her heart and which gives her horrific magical powers. She offers to cast a blessing on everyone who helps her, giving them access to the **Cursed** domain, before she pukes up her magic.

TIER 2

On Tier 2, the weirdness of the Heart creeps in and changes things. There are still recognisable landmarks, but they shift and change location without warning if the inhabitants don't pay attention. Monsters prowl the dark and empty spaces, and people are few and far between. There are havens, but they're unsettling and strange.

The distance between landmarks increases. Delves become the work of a day or two, not a handful of hours, as routes curl back on themselves and cross increasingly dangerous terrain. The surface world and the Heart crash into each other here, mixing the strange and the expected. Perfectly reasonable settlements are run by monstrous hives of flesh and brain-matter; though the streets look normal, they stutter and rearrange themselves to form letters from an unknown alphabet; people live side-by-side with the ghosts of their ancestors and eat their dead out of respect.

AVULSE**DOMAINS:** Cursed, Wild**DEFAULT STRESS:** D8**HAUNTS:** None.

Cleavers often eschew company. Many live as lone hunters or wayfinders, and few can tolerate each other's company for long. Avulse, however, is a community of cleavers centred around a twisted lump of muscle and gore who once went by the name of Barrellous Scrom: a cleaver who killed a Butcher (p. 180) and melded with the thing's god-wall. Since then, he has fed other hearts-touched hunters with his flesh, and they have grown strong and territorial.

He howls prophecies and orders from his throne room of gristle, but it is hard to tell which is which. Of late, his inner circle of followers are denying access to the chamber to all but the most favoured or zealous of his people.

RESOURCES:

- Red wet lump of Barrellous Scrom (D6, Cursed, Harmful, Taboo. The first time a cleaver character eats this flesh, they gain an immediate minor advance; on any subsequent use, they gain nothing except an increasingly strong devotion to Scrom).

SPECIAL RULES: The cleavers here – and various other heartsblood hangers-on – are much tougher than normal. They inflict D8 damage as standard and have resistance 8.

GHORRYN**DOMAINS:** Occult, Warren**DEFAULT STRESS:** D6**HAUNTS:**

- Hislop, a research surgeon who can also do medicine, they suppose (Blood, D10)
- Pub that conspicuously and deliberately doesn't have a name (Mind, D8)

The Heart defies explanation, but that doesn't stop some people from trying. In Ghorryn, a loose cabal of rumour-mongers, black market necromancers, information junkies and disgraced academics are

attempting to unravel the mystery that is the City Beneath – and they're making a big show of it.

Everyone in Ghorryn has their own complex theory as to what the Heart is, but also several adjacent theories concerning life, death, sanity, time, space and – most popular of all – the real purpose of Ghorryn. Why on earth would so many conspiracy theorists gather in one place if there wasn't something suspicious going on?

It's a self-fulfilling prophecy, of course. As more truth-seekers arrive, the settlement schisms into more and more factions, and everyone is looking to be the one who finally figures out the actual function of the Heart. For the time being, they make do with selling fragments of the information that they've harvested to interested parties, and warily exchange snippets of theories in an attempt to break new ground while not giving away anything truly valuable.

At the centre of it all, the spider in this web of red string, is Baldary: a human, doubtlessly hundreds of years old, who's extended his life with a series of magical, technological and surgical techniques. Baldary has a finger in every pie in Ghorryn, and his wealth of information and influence is a matter of pride. It's hard to get an audience with him, but worth the wait and the expense, as he can shed light on almost any matter you care to mention.

He reckons he's on the cusp of uncovering the greatest conspiracy of all. Everything points to Ghorryn being built for a purpose, rather than simply happening ad hoc, and everyone inside is a pawn in some greater scheme. If he can gather and sift enough raw information, he can finally figure out what's really going on here.

What he doesn't know is that he's responsible for the conspiracy. Long ago, as the head of a similar cult, he managed to discern what he believed was the true purpose of the Heart Itself. The knowledge was so devastating and uncanny that he locked it away within his brain to save his sanity; he forgot, but was left with a lingering sense of something hidden just out of reach.

He began to learn everything he could. The Heart, sensing his frustration at having only one

set of eyes and hands, created blank meat-puppets in the shape of people and gave them brains made of Baldary's hoarded notebooks. Everyone in Ghorryn is, essentially, him. The more meat-puppets he had to "help" him, the happier he seemed. Before long, the settlement flourished: a pocket of madness and obsession built out of a single man's mind.

Presumably, one day soon Baldary will uncover the secret behind the place. From there, he will unravel the mystery of the Heart Itself, and seal it away within his mind again to stay sane before burning this place to the ground. This is not the first Ghorryn, and it won't be the last.

RESOURCES:

- Armfuls of mostly useless research notes (D4, Occult, Heavy)
- Baldary's special notebooks (D8, Occult)

GRIN STATION

DOMAINS: Technology

DEFAULT STRESS: D6

HAUNTS: None

Designed as an underground tourist destination by a well-meaning but totally clueless aelfir in the City Above, Grin Station is a decrepit, crumbling amusement park that has been taken apart and rebuilt several times over the last century. Scavengers, their bodies studded with flickering magelights and jagged mirror shards, pick across the ruins of the place.

It seems to be regenerating, as they keep discovering new pockets of resources: sunken caverns with screeching tuppenny falls three times the height of a drow; stuttering zoetropes that project warped, titillating images onto the walls; aelfir-crafted monstrosities trapped in their own filth and madness in boarded-up haunted houses; and more besides.



RESOURCES:

- Badly scratched token for the merry-go-round (D6, Haven, Niche)
- Faded reel of smut from a "What the Serf Witnessed" machine (D8, Haven)

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- Lyngard, an eccentric witch, requests that the delvers accompany a group of the less experienced members of her coven on an Outing. As the itinerary grows more and more dangerous, it becomes clear that this is an entrance exam to the inner circle of the witch cult – and failure is fatal.

HALLOW

DOMAINS: Haven, Occult

DEFAULT STRESS: D4, D8 if the witches enter their True Form (see below)

HAUNTS:

- The Rite (Echo D12)
- Lydia Falcastle, debutante blood-trader (Supplies D6)
- The Red Well (Fortune D10)

In ages past, this place was a massive bronze-roofed cathedral to a

forgotten god; now it is the seat of power for the witch cult in the City Beneath. It is three dozen witch lairs in close proximity, overlapping and brushing against one another. In the twisting passages within, many-eyed familiars fat on witchblood scuttle and spy, and the routes between them shift and pulse like valves in a heart.

Still, it is not an unwelcoming place, if treated with respect. Witches maintain a tense relationship with the unanointed (their term for those not infected by the Witch virus); they're somewhere between petty nobility and dangerous monsters who need to be feared and maybe killed. Though each witch's lair is their own domain, there are central shared areas for ritual magic, socialisation and visitors.

Not that they attract many visitors – the settlement



is creepy and even more sentient than its surroundings – but almost every witch who carries the virus came through here at some point in their career. Many of them owe their survival (or the disease itself) to one of the elder witches that gather in the village square after dinner, smoke pipes stuffed with hair and narcotic herbs and cackle at inscrutable running jokes that have lasted a decade or more. Each witch here is a researcher and expert on the occult, and they venerate those who have come before them with whispered mantras and solemn canticles.

In the catacombs beneath Hallow, the stone gives way to meat: tense walls of muscle and fibrous tissue, and toothflower blooms that gnash and writhe. It is here where witches are buried, so that their bodies might return to the flesh of the Heart that gave them power through their lives. It is theorised that witches can't ever really die, not in the same way that the uninfected can – they just get more and more spread out.

SPECIAL RULES: On occasion (especially if you upset them) a blood-witch will shift to her true form: a flickering zoetrope horror, floating through the air as if gripped by unseen hands. They have a habit of setting each other off once they get started, in a grotesque chain reaction. If this happens, the streets darken, the pavement pulses like a heartbeat, the walls become sticky with blood and the location loses the **Haven** domain and gains the **Cursed** domain.

RESOURCES:

- The lairs of the witches contain vast stores of occult ephemera (D8 to D12, Occult) but stealing it is a really bad idea.

HANG STATION

DOMAINS: Technology

DEFAULT STRESS: D6

HAUNTS: None

Suspended over an artificial lake, Hang Station was designed to allow travellers on the Pulse line to view one of the aelfir's crowning glories: a vast aquatic monster captured from the frozen seas

far north, and brought to Spire for the entertainment of the populace. (Rumours that aelfir mages were siphoning magical energy from the thing's blood and anguish should not be entertained.) There are fine bridges built between the waiting rooms, many of the floors are glass and the occasional informative plaque still survives.

Now the metal hawsers supporting the bridges, tracks and platforms are rusting and unstable, and the station rocks gently whenever anyone steps on it. There's always a chance that the cables will snap and the delvers will plummet into the depths below. These depths contain a vast, neglected, undying sea creature the size of a town, visible as shifting organs in the light of flickering, malfunctioning magelights that occasionally pierce the darkness.

RESOURCES:

- Still-functioning magelights (D8, Haven, Technology, Fragile)
- Small ampoule of thick, tarry blood designed for an injection device (D10, Cursed)

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- A mad researcher by the name of Ostrer requests – nay, demands – that you take them to observe the enormous sea creature at the base of Hang Station (D10, Haven). They have determined that it has, somehow, laid eggs.

THE HARVEST BAZAAR

DOMAINS: Cursed

DEFAULT STRESS: D8

HAUNTS: None

This bazaar, situated atop a towering, crumbling structure, is home to occult weirdos, zealots of dead gods and half-real pitchkin who ply their trade from behind brightly-coloured stalls. They offer touchstones for sale: physical manifestations of conceptual ideas. You can buy good memories here (or sell bad ones); pick up a skill or master a musical instrument; or part-exchange your sense of decency for a working set of legs.

Each of the people who runs a stall is absolutely devoted to the art of trading ephemeral concepts, because this line of work is far less efficient and

profitable than trading extant goods for more of the same – or, heavens forbid, money. To put it another way: they're into this, in kind of a weird way, so you can probably reason your way into a good deal if you can understand whatever it is an individual trader is obsessed about at present.

Don't mistake this for a friendly place, though. The bazaar drains people of their positive traits – the ability to trade them back and forth is a side-effect of the place's hunger. The traders use other people's traits to stay in the game, but there's a reason that most of them are unapproachable, mean-tempered deviants: the bazaar has taken more from them than they'd like.

SPECIAL RULES: You can trade advances your character has in exchange for advances from other classes at a cost of D4 **Mind** stress for a minor advance and D6 **Mind** stress for a major advance. You can give up non-specific memories or traits too, which are represented by D8 **Mind** stress for a minor advance and D10 for a major one. There are other uses of the bazaar's power, such as removing fallout from your character or unlocking esoteric secrets, but the limits and costs of those are left up to the GM.

FALLOUT. HARVESTED. [Major, Echo/Mind] While exploring the bazaar, you lose a randomly determined skill or domain that you have access to. You don't feel it happening, but next time you try it, it doesn't work as well as it used to. You could probably get it back by breaking into the central structure which houses the bazaar, bypassing the eldritch locks and wards, and prying your crystalline talent out of the lotus-pod like growths that bloom in the perfect darkness within. Or you could simply learn how to do it again, which is probably easier.

RESOURCE:

- A dropped memory; you're not sure what it's of yet (D6, Any domains that relate to the specific memory, Niche)
- The gold some poor fool tried to pay with, now clogging a gutter. (D8, Haven)

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- Ridane, a melancholic artist, sold all their memories of their ex-boyfriend in exchange for artistic talent. Without the angst to inspire them, they can't put the talent to good use. The delvers are tasked with finding their memories and bringing them back (D8, Haven).

HIGHRISE

DOMAINS: Haven, Desolate

DEFAULT STRESS: D6

HAUNTS: Knockthrough Market, built across several floors (D8, Supplies)

A great sea of rectangular towers, each at least twenty storeys tall. Between the rooftops, improvised rope bridges hang and sway in the breeze from monstrous vents. Scavengers hide in shanty villages on roof islands – dark and desperate people, eking out an existence. Death cults promise absolution on a perfect swan-dive into the darkness below. Diseased pink-white crows caw and flock above, hungry for carrion.

The deeper you go, the more dangerous it gets. The ravenous, howling ghosts of a thousand previous inhabitants swarm through the lower levels; they guard their abandoned, filthy apartments from those that would enter in search of ancient treasures.

The drow inhabitants of Highrise, living lives that are all too-often cut short by starvation or hungry ghosts, have become obsessed with death. They inscribe the names of their fallen ancestors on their bodies with spidery black tattoos; some add the names to their own, leading to full titles thirty or forty words in length. Smoke-wreathed shrines to dead forefathers are erected on jealously-guarded rooftops, and rival clans will take great pleasure in desecrating and erasing names written in rival territories.

All bodies are thrown off the roofs into the roiling mass of ghosts below. Indeed, falling is seen as a sacred act by some. Just as some cultures venerate those fallen in battle, the drow of Highrise believe that it is right and good to fall and dash oneself apart on the broken masonry beneath. There is an art to a perfect death, and sects argue viciously over the correct way to die.

The Swanfall cult is the most prominent of these sects, and they espouse performing great acts in life – giving to the cult, laying ghosts to rest, creating edifices in honour of their forefathers – before diving head-first into the deep and never returning. Their only outright rivals, the Ascendent, believe that generations of sacrifices into the lower levels are the reason for the ghosts that plague the area and that bodies should be disposed of in fire. There are secret furnaces in abandoned buildings where they practice their heretic faith.

RESOURCES:

- Feathers from a succesful Swanfall dive (D6, Religion, Wild)
- Foul-tasting sacred albino crows (D4, Desolate, Wild, Taboo)

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- The delvers are hired by Kestrel, a rogue operative from the Church of the Moon Beneath, to deliver a valuable package to Highrise: a heavy box about the size of a small coffin. Unknown to the delvers, a battered and bruised reborn hallow of the Moon is inside it, being delivered to be thrown from the central tower and placate the hungry ghosts for years to come.

THE HOARD

DOMAINS: Cursed, Occult

TIER: 2 or 3

DEFAULT STRESS: D6

HAUNTS: None

The Hoard is a library, and an impressive one at that. The shelves groan under the weight of the tomes, some of them occult or religious, some of them mundane treatises. Golden magelights hum gently in the ceiling; worn but good-quality green carpet covers the floors; and librarians putter quietly about their business, cataloguing and copying books by hand.

It is a predatory building: a semi-mobile structure that uses the unreality of the Heart to hunt new prey. At the centre of it is a mewling, black-eyed, swollen maggot of a thing – a dragon larvae waiting to develop into its adult form. While it

dreams it twists the world around it into the library, as it is hungry for knowledge and believes the best way to acquire it is to have people bring it books and read them aloud. On occasion it will send out a party of librarians to ransack places where it can smell books, or to kidnap bookish sorcerers and drag them (and their collection) back to the Hoard.

The dragon isn't evil per se, but it doesn't consider the people it mind-controls into becoming unwilling librarians as any more worthy of respect than the stones the building sits on – they are tools to be used as it wishes. There are around twenty librarians in the Hoard at present (stats as regular people, but Protection 2 since they feel no pain), disguised under a glamour to look healthy when in reality they are emaciated and covered in sores. More join every year as occultists with a thirst for knowledge track down this famous travelling library without understanding the truth concealed within its walls.

Should you slay the dragon – a difficult task, as it hides itself from view and controls minds with powerful, semi-conscious magic – the Hoard will curl up and disintegrate like burning paper, leaving only the books and the mind-blasted librarians behind.

SPECIAL RULES: When you enter the Hoard, make an **Endure+Occult** roll. On a failure, mark D8 stress to **Mind**; on a partial success, D6; on a success, mark none.

FALLOUT: A THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE. [Minor, Mind] You become convinced that the secrets you need are in this legendary library. You wish to track it down, and when you find it, you will search the shelves for the answers to all your questions.

FALLOUT: PROBATIONARY PERIOD. [Major, Mind] The librarians tell you of a secret section available only to members of staff; they're willing to let you join if you do something truly reprehensible for them. Weirdly, you don't seem all that bothered about doing it.

FALLOUT: LIBRARIAN. [Critical, Mind] You become a librarian of the Hoard, and will defend it with your life. You spend your remaining years cataloguing books and reading them aloud through dry, cracked lips to a corpulent, wriggling dragon larva the size of a horse.

RESOURCES:

- Absolutely any book you can think of, including many you can't. (D8, Cursed, Occult, Mobile. Will return themselves to the library if left unattended).

LAST ORDERS**DOMAINS:** Cursed**TIER:** 2 or 3**DEFAULT STRESS:** D6**HAUNTS:** The Bar (D6, Mind)

Last Orders is an inn, which is strange enough in and of itself, because it usually shows up in the middle of nowhere. Still: it has beer on offer, brown paper bags of pork scratchings, little bowls of chewy dried mushrooms sprinkled with salt and a few bottles of liquor behind the bar. You could probably get a bowl of stew on a good night, too. It's a nice place, except that it's not.

The pub is a predatory structure. Like a pitcher plant lures insects inside it to be dissolved into a nutrient-rich soup, the building eats people for nourishment. It's not entirely clear whether it knows what it's doing or whether it's as passive as a carnivorous plant, but it doesn't really matter.

Anyone who has more than a couple of drinks starts to feel unwilling to leave (and why not? It's a functional pub in the middle of a subterranean hellscape). Eventually, after having one too many and talking about their problems to the curiously sympathetic bartenders and regulars (none of whom are able to talk at length about their own lives), they'll slope off for a piss or a nap and the building will take them. Usually the stairs collapse when someone tries to use them, and they tumble down into the basement with the other corpses.

They can't get out because their legs are broken from the fall, and slowly die in there before the pub renders them down into food.



SPECIAL RULES: It's entirely possible to get out of Last Orders alive, but knowing about the truth of the place isn't enough to get you through – it can still trick you. **Endure+Occult** checks are required to stay cogent, with **Mind** stress suffered on a failure. If you decide to tough it out, you can remove D8 stress from **Blood**, **Fortune** or **Supplies** as though Last Orders were a haunt.

FALLOUT: PISSED. [Minor, Mind] You're drunk, and the pub is comfortable. This has no particular effect aside from the fact that you're not really willing to leave; the atmosphere outside the pub looks even more unwelcoming than usual.

FALLOUT: STUMBLE. [Major, Mind] You tumble down into the depths of the pub. It does its best to do this when no-one else can see, but it's not perfect. You land on something soft: the decomposing corpse of the last poor bastard who fell down here.

FALLOUT: ONE OF THE STAFF. [Critical, Blood, Mind] You are dissolved into a sort of soup that the pub eats for sustenance. You die, but will probably reincarnated as a bartender or a regular, stripped of your agency. "You" – that is, the offshoot of the pub that looks like you – will warmly welcome your old friends should they revisit Last Orders in an attempt to feed the place.

RESOURCE:

- A dusty bottle of Desteran Red, dated before the aelfir took Spire. (D10, Haven, Fragile)
- A brand new bottle of Desteran Red, still settling, dated before the aelfir took Spire (D4, Haven, Fragile, Increase dice size by one for every year that passes)

THE MACHINES OF DUST

DOMAINS: Cursed, Technology

DEFAULT STRESS: D8

HAUNTS: None

At the centre of a shifting network of tunnels that stink of oil and rust and ozone is an obelisk to the

Hungry Deep, nameless god of decay. The obelisk has seats, each fitted with well-used leather restraints, arranged around it in a circle. On occasion, one or more of them will be occupied by a withered, catatonic person connected to the structure via cables. The people who maintain the machines insist that these luckless souls are responsible for dreaming the Heart into being, stopping it from spreading to the City Above or for the very existence of magic in the world. The area around the structure is dusty, greasy and abundant with fat, pallid moths.

The whole place is rancid with decay. Travellers will notice their equipment breaking, their hair and teeth falling out and their wounds itching and burning. The people strapped into the machines seem to be able to direct these energies somehow; pulling one out alive could let them unveil the secrets of the universe to you, or they might be completely mind-blasted into uselessness.

RESOURCES:

- Coalesced crystalline secrets of the universe, scraped off the receiver plates of the machines (D8, Occult, Beacon)
- Plump little Deep Moths (D4, Desolate, Wild)

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- A withered priest of the Hungry Deep recruits the delvers to escort them to the depths of the Machines of Dust (D8, Desolate/Haven) in search of nihilistic truth. Upon reaching the centre, the Machine consumes their psyche, and the corridors around them begin to rearrange themselves with the scraping of rusted metal.

THE RED MARKET

DOMAINS: Warren, Haven

DEFAULT STRESS: D6

HAUNTS:

- Stinking Cut-throat Alleys (D8 Supplies)
- Backstreet organ traders (D8 Blood)

The Red Market is a weird and twisted place of red cloth and shaking lanterns casting dancing spotlights across the streets. Here, the Incarnadine sect worships predatory capitalism and

carves out feudal territory with vicious attack and counter-attack.

You can buy and sell most anything here from cultist-traffickers, each of them dripping with dead-man's-switch occult wards designed to detonate in the event of their untimely death. Finding the right one is a challenge, as is avoiding the packs of deranged serfs, each bound to a trafficker, who roam the nightmare souk looking for prospects to harvest. The serfs ingest the coins they are given as payment, which leads to terrible sickness from metal poisoning; their skin is a deep, dark red as rust blooms through their bodies.

The Incarnadines here are legendary figures: Carmine Hypatia who trades

only in the beautiful parts of creatures, and has the burnished-copper eyes of a goat in place of her own; Rubious Crowfer, who eats his favoured serfs in what he believes is the ultimate expression of power; Vermellious Desteria, ex-priestess of the Moon Beneath, who turned her back on her goddess and descended into the Red Market in search of meaning and found it in the smoking barrel of a gun.

SPECIAL RULES: Incarnadines have no real physical defences, and instead inflict D10 stress to **Blood** on anyone that kills them and anyone standing nearby. They assume everyone is aware of this.

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- Serfs have their uses, but they're unsuited to fine detail work. A pretentious and violent-tempered Incarnadine by the name of Chastity Oxblood hires some delvers to attend a party held by a rival priest and poison the punchbowl (D8, Haven).
- Some opportunistic delvers try to establish themselves as brokers, arranging meetings between Incarnadines in neutral territory. The work pays okay if they're good (D6-D8, Haven); if they're not, they're dead.



SIGHTLESS – THE TEMPLE OF GRACE**DOMAINS:** Religion, Warren**DEFAULT STRESS:** D6**HAUNTS:**

- Sanctum of Our Hidden Mistress (D8 Blood, D8 Mind)
- Moonsilver casket (D10, Echo)

To the faithful at the temple of Sightless, grace is paramount. Worshipping the embodiment of The Moon Beneath in her form as the dark side of the moon, Lombre, they seek to exhibit grace in everything they do. Lombre is perfect, never missing a step or saying a word out of place: they do their all to live in accordance with her example.

The winding, warrenous corridors outside of the small inner sanctum are riddled with traps that maim and cut and tear, but do not kill. Those who join the temple must walk this labyrinth blindfolded, over and over, until they can step through it without triggering any of the cruel devices that are hidden in the walls and floor. The highest amongst them are far from pristine; they bear scars, missing fingers or hands and mangled feet from these traps. To them, their flesh was graceless, and Lombre blessed them by removing it so that they might understand her better.

SWINEFALL**DOMAINS:** Warren**DEFAULT STRESS:** D8**HAUNTS:** None

The pigs tumbled down here, slipping on spilt blood, to have their throats slit by butchers. The place is riddled with angry pig-ghosts – deranged, unable to make sense of their existence, a constant roiling storm of anguish and pain. This is a labyrinth of twisting, rusted sluices and slippery chutes, of hooks hanging from the ceiling, of the stink of shit and blood and rotting meat. The flies alone are nearly unbearable. The pig spirits have formed something of a bestial court here: travelers through Swinefall pay tribute to them with offerings of food scraps left in marked ritual sites, and usually they're left unmolested.

RESOURCES:

- Ritual offerings amid the food left on altars (D4, Warren, Wild)
- Trinkets and other lost items deep in the effluvia (D6, Warren)

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- The carrion-pig (p. 181) in a nearby haven has begun calling to the ghosts of swinefall, and no-one can hear themselves think. The delvers are tasked with putting a nearby court of the spectres to rest (D8, Haven).

TRYPOGENESIS CHAMBER**DOMAINS:** Occult**DEFAULT STRESS:** D6**HAUNTS:** The Chamber (D10, Blood, Echo) (Deep Apiarist only)

The Hive is a megaconsciousness beyond anything mortal minds can imagine. It dwells within the bones of the Spire, and the glyph-marked bees that fill the bodies of Deep Apiarists are simply the part of it that extrudes into the material realm via the Heart.

The Deep Apiarists guard the Trypogenesis Chamber with their lives. Not only is it thrice-warred and largely invisible to scrying magic, but watchers armed with long-guns hide in the upper reaches of the external structure, ready to turn what seems like haphazard, curious architecture into a merciless killing-ground if necessary.

Inside the curved shape of the building, through winding passageways and doorways of steel-hard wax, is the chamber itself: a hemispherical room no more than twenty feet in diameter, with at least a thousand tiny holes studding the walls and ceiling. From these holes, the Hive emerges as hundreds of glyph-marked bees. Each joins a colony under the care of a Deep Apiarist.

On the other side of the holes is the Hive – metaphysically, not spatially. Every Apiarist who has attempted to send the bees back through the holes and scry through their senses has been unable to control the rush of information. Their sinuses flood with blood and honey, their brains rapidly segment

out of an instinctive protective desire and they are driven mad by the scale of the thing.

Some things are best left unseen.

RESOURCES:

- Jar of fresh, still-moist bees from outside reality (D6, Occult, Fragile, Mobile)
- Enormously complex research notes on the nature of metaphysics (D8, Occult, Niche)

WELL STATION

DOMAINS: Technology

DEFAULT STRESS: D6

HAUNTS: The WELLness centre health spa. Abandoned but technically functional. (D8 Mind, Blood)

Built to serve the “ideal” drow community by the masters of the Vermissian, Well is remarkable in that it is all the same. Every tile is marked and chipped in the same places; every signpost displays the same gibberish letters; and there’s only one poster on every wall, advising travellers to be on the lookout for drow terrorists looking to damage the train network with occult machinations.

When (if) you work your way out of the station, the area around it is similarly creepy: every street is identical. There’s the same run-down bar (Etoille’s) on every corner, and the same flowers – right down to the exact number of withered petals – grow in tattered planters on the pavement. The only thing that lets a delver know which street they’re on are the flitting forms of the hungry ghosts that populate the lower levels of the buildings, which is a less than ideal method of navigation.

RESOURCES:

- Perfect flowers (D6, Haven, Deteriorating)
- Still edible canned food (D6, Haven, Deteriorating)
- A bottle of “WELL” water (D6, Haven, Deteriorating)
- The Toy sold in the Toy Shop (D6, Haven, Deteriorating)

TIER 3

In Tier 3, weirdness rules. Gravity, time and standard spatial interactions are no longer guaranteed. There are places that cannot be: great underground seas, coniferous forests growing in the darkness, strange and alien skies glimpsed through stained-glass windows. Reality is unbuckled and loose.

Almost anything goes in Tier 3: if you can imagine it, it’s here (and it’s probably here because you imagined it). The Heart twists places into bizarre representations of themselves, and the plastic hyper-reality of it overrides what few shreds of sense manage to make it down from the tiers above.

BRIAR

DOMAINS: Wild

DEFAULT STRESS: D6

HAUNTS:

- Granny’s Cottage (D8, Blood/Mind)
- The only hunter who’s willing to trade with you (D6, Supplies)

Briar is a dark forest shrouded in a perpetual twilight, where strange calls echo from unseen birds and iron-hard roots twist the ground asunder. Beasts roam these woods in search of prey, and they in turn are preyed upon by the dead-eyed solitary hunters who dwell here. On occasion, a hunter from Briar will venture into a haven on a tier above, dragging the abominable cadaver of something they’ve killed. They’ll exchange it for supplies before venturing alone back into the depths of the City Beneath to return to their hunt.

The moneyed hunters of House Gryndel believe Briar to be one of the finest places in the world to bag a trophy, and the trees are strung with the corpses of headstrong young men and women who thought they were skilled enough to handle the challenges of the deep wood. Those who return with a prize (the flowering crown of an orchid stag, the pelt of a monstrous boar, the scintillating eye of a cockatrice) are guaranteed a position of power in the House.

**RESOURCES:**

- The kind of berries that don't kill you when you eat them (D6, Wild)
- Pelts from monstrous beasts (D6-D10 depending on size)
- Rare fungi with soporific spores (D8, Taboo, Harmful)

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- A Gryndel hunter, Andersand, went missing months ago in search of Briar. His mother, an elderly drow with a huge amount of cash and no other surviving children, recruits the delvers to go and get him back. When they find him bedecked in trophies, they learn that they'll need his abilities to escape the shifting nightmare forest alive.

THE BUNKER

DOMAINS: Warren, Desolate (in the surrounding areas)

DEFAULT STRESS: D6

HAUNTS: None

The 33rd Regiment penetrated deep into the Heart when they attempted to pacify it all those years ago. They were trench-fighters, their wounds still fresh from the conflict in Nujab, and so when they met with resistance they did what they knew best: they dug in and waited it out.

A spiderweb network of trenches and bunkers criss-crosses the landscape and marks the furthest reach of the 33rd. Razorwire grows like vines from the muddy walls, the sound of distant bombing and repeater fire echoes throughout the cavern and the hands of the jealous dead reach up out of the dirt in no man's land to bring the living into their rotten embrace. Through the ever-present smoke, the

Walking Wounded (p. 199) trudge towards some long-destroyed objective, eternally trapped in a loop of gruesome death and painful rebirth.

At the centre of it all is the Central Command structure known as The Bunker, where the leaders of the regiment did what they could to limit the wholesale slaughter of their troops by the Heart Itself. To this day, the Bunker is host to regular meetings of the 33rd: the legendary figures of the regiment meet yearly to plan and scheme, and to protect the people of the Heart on a metaphysical level that even they can barely understand.

RESOURCES:

- The first shell casing fired in the conflict (D12, Occult – when reloaded and fired does double damage against Heartsblood creatures)
- Too many crumpled and destroyed dogtags (D6, Occult, Haven)
- Lieutenant Kane's heavy-bore Rifle (Kill D8, Ranged, Reload. Legendary: grants the Ambush knack for the Kill skill)

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- A host of angels is coming to destroy your settlement after they found out what you did. Can you reach the Bunker and request the assistance of the Hounds before it's too late?
- A one-eyed quartermaster hires you (D10, Haven) to carry a single bottle of rotgut whiskey to the Bunker so the commanders of the 33rd have something to drink. Can you make it there and keep the bottle intact?
- That quartermaster shouldn't have paid you up front, and you drank the whiskey without ever going to the Bunker. Now you're being hunted by thirsty and unpleasantly sober immortal soldiers. How are you going to make amends?

CAIRNMOR

DOMAINS: Haven, Wild

DEFAULT STRESS: D6

HAUNTS: The King's Banquet (Mind D8, Blood D8)

The King died a long time ago. He was interred in a grand barrow by his followers and then promptly forgotten as the tribe was wiped out

by disease. The great tree above the barrow fell, tearing open the entrance to the chamber and splitting apart, dripping intoxicating golden sap onto the body of the King. He was restored to life (kind of) and is convinced that he is in his own personal afterlife. He spends his days collecting and drinking the plentiful sap and telling tales of his glories to his assembled court, who are also all dead.

RESOURCES:

- The tree sap makes for an excellent, if sticky, booze (D8 for a bottle), but the King doesn't appreciate people stealing from the afterlife and his attendants are quicker than they look.

GHASTLING PLAIN

DOMAINS: Desolate

DEFAULT STRESS: D6

HAUNTS: Communal longhut with a roaring fire and excellent "seafood" (D8 Blood, D8 Mind)

The ceiling here is a smouldering, ever-burning mass of something: cinders twinkle in the depths and embers tumble down to form a sea of ash, shifting like water. There are people, here and there, who crave the raw nothingness of the place. They live quiet lives in houses kept out of the ash on stilts and fish for the pallid, eyeless lizards and squidlike creatures that scud through the detritus beneath them. Some build platforms out of taut ropes and creaking metal spider-legs that can move through the ash, but the majority of them travel on lightweight skiffs.

The squid of ghastrling plain are especially prized for their "ink" sacs. Evolved to work in air, rather than water, they issue a billowing cloud of night-black, abrasive grit that confuses predators and allows them to escape confrontation.

RESOURCES:

- Ink-dust harvested from land-squid (D8, Desolate, Occult, Volatile)
- A vaguely fishlike animal with too many eyes (D4, Desolate, Wild)
- Bleached bones the size of a full-grown drow, for construction purposes (D6, Desolate, Awkward)

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- There is something far larger than squid in the ash-sea, and it has been gnawing on the stilts of people's homes. The mayor of Ghastling Plain, an eccentric and barely-cogent drow known as Mishel Legrand, asks you (in a roundabout way) to hunt it down (D6, Desolate; the creature could presumably be harvested as well).
- Sink-holes have been opening in the ash-sea, dragging animals and fishermen down to somewhere lower. A wizened mage by the name of Exquisite believes that they are an expression of the Drowned Queen's majesty, and offers to fund an expedition down one (D12, Haven, Occult) on the express understanding that she is allowed to come along for the ride.

THE MAW

DOMAINS: Cursed, Desolate

DEFAULT STRESS: D6; D8 in the Maw itself

HAUNTS: None

Tents and lean-tos surround this place. Everything is falling apart, and the handful of people you spy huddling behind fallen columns or whispering into holes in the ground seem broken, decrepit and wasted-away. These are followers of the Hungry Deep: the nameless god of decay that resides inside the Heart and rewards sacrifices with an extended life (albeit a strange and dark one). They have given all they can to the Deep, and spend their remaining lives working out how to give more.

In the middle of the community is a grand maw, brutalist and angular, that accepts their offerings; a huge obsidian obelisk protrudes from the centre. The obelisk is uncomfortably, hideously real – every object, life or love sacrificed to it feeds and solidifies it in the minds of those around it. It is hard to look away and impossible not to focus on; in comparison, the rest of the world around it seems vague and indistinct.

The chamber around the obelisk descends into the earth, and it is here that nihilistic cultists will venture down sharp staircases in search of ecstatic

communion with the Hungry Deep. Any delver worth their spireblack will realise that the maw is a direct, if dangerous, route to the Heart Itself.

SPECIAL RULES: Any resources or equipment found here will have the **DETERIORATING** or **VOLATILE** tags.

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- The delvers acquire something so utterly dangerous that the only safe course of action is to hurl it into the Maw, stripping it of its quintessence.
- A beloved NPC wanders down here, bewitched by whispers of oblivion, and is now leading a cult of blind, toothless madmen on one-way pilgrimages down the maw. Can they be brought back or have they uncovered something truly valuable?

THE MOON GROVE

DOMAINS: Religion

DEFAULT STRESS: D8

HAUNTS: The gateway of the Chapel Perilous. Passing through requires a tithe. (D12 Echo)

The Moon Beneath grants marvellous gifts to her worshippers. Some become so blessed that they are unable to move under their own power any longer, their bodies covered in dozens of sacred black eyes, their teeth rotting away to show minute scriptures etched on them by the goddess. They begin a pilgrimage to this place before they die, often carried on a litter by other faithful, and their bodies are interred in the soft earth where the light of the Moon Beneath falls eternally.

There are acres upon acres of graves here; most are simply holes in the ground covered with earth, but some are grand monuments carved from the luminous white stones that ring the burial site. Very few grave robbers attempt to steal from these graves. The aura of goodness and piety is overwhelming, forcing wrongdoers to their knees with waves of ecstatic genuflection and glorious visions.

RESOURCES:

- Bones of the Faithful (D10, Religion, Beacon)
- Miscellaneous grave goods (D8, Religion, Taboo)

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- Serrattious, a hugely mutated and very wealthy cleric of the Moon Beneath, can no longer breathe without the aid of a human-made device. They beseech you to bring them to the Moon Garden and bury them alive (D12, Haven, Religion) before some of their many rivals (who may be real, imagined or, the lower you get in the Heart, both) assassinate them and drain their sacred power with heretical silver siphons.

THE PLAZA OF SILICATE FLOWERS, MISALLOCATED**DOMAINS:** Haven, Technology**DEFAULT STRESS:** D6**HAUNTS:**

- Doctor Hallowglass, unsuccessfully retired after a lifetime of military service (Blood D8)
- The Upturned Vessel, a weird bar where you can't get a proper drink and everyone seems to be on uppers instead (Mind D6)
- Chief Oncologist Harvestlight's djinnish scourge array (Echo D10)
- Pristine glass statue of the god Plür (Fortune D10)

The Plaza of Silicate Flowers was the pride of east Nujab. Built by the gnolls who live there using mechanoccultist techniques, it was the crown jewel of the resistance that fights against the encroaching aelfir armies. The streets, a precisely-ordered series of concentric circles, were lined with roses and orchids grown from a living silicate construct which caught the dying light of the sun each night and washed the neighbourhood in scintillating colours. At the centre, the



Institute of Celestial Ontology made inroads into the nature of space and time that rivalled the universities of Al'Marah in the south.

It was a beautiful place to live and work – until an attempt to siphon power from the Source (p. 174) to power miracles resulted in the Institute, and the surrounding streets, translocating wholesale into the depths of the Heart.

Chief Ontologist Yahudz Harvestlight has taken informal control of the settlement and opened trade with nearby landmarks, but this deep in the Heart there are few sane people to do business with. He is of the belief that the Heart is a sort of cosmic drain that all things lost in transit must pass through, and he might even be correct. He's doing his best to view the transportation as a blessing that allows him, and his associates, to better understand the nature of the universe – a point of view that's not shared by many of the other inhabitants.

After travelling to meet the wise-women of Hallow a year ago, Harvestlight has contracted the witch virus (although he'd never admit it). He maintains a stable of cat and cat-like familiars who siphon off the arcane stress that is put on his system by maintaining the wards that keep the Plaza relatively safe. At his behest, the glass flowers still grow, but they do so in curious paths and hang heavy with translucent fruit. They also grow in thorny patterns to keep out intruders, but he'll part them if he reckons a visitor might have something interesting to trade or share – especially some decent kafee.

RESOURCES:

- Silicate flower (D8, Haven, Fragile)
- Mechanoccultist spare parts (D6, Technology, Occult)

SOUFRI – THE TEMPLE OF TENACITY

DOMAINS: Cursed, Religion

DEFAULT STRESS: D6

HAUNTS: Isabelle Bateux, Stirrer of the Scalding Pits (D10, Echo)

In Soufri, the fires are ever-burning beneath your feet. In Soufri, the smoke can flood the streets without warning. In Soufri, the trees are dead and the flagstones cracked. Even compared to the rest of the Heart, Soufri is a terrible place; yet people choose to live there. The Goddess, the Moon Beneath in her infinite splendour, speaks truth. She says that of all her virtues, tenacity is the most important. To suffer and endure, especially to suffer without an ulterior motive in mind, is to honour her.

At least, this is what the inhabitants of Soufri believe. A few dozen die-hard adherents to the Damnic faith have set up shop here, where the sulphurous smoke clogs their lungs and they suck at old pipes for water, to better serve her. They are, universally, horrible. They are petty bullies who cloak their hatred of other people in scripture, and try to visit cruel tortures and hardships on one another (and themselves) to “prove” their love for the goddess.

SPECIAL RULES: For each day you spend in Soufri, make a **Endure+Cursed** roll. On a failure, mark D6 stress to **Blood**, and on a partial success, mark D4 stress to **Blood**. After about a week it gets easier, as you learn to cover your mouth when you breathe and avoid moving unless strictly necessary; roll with mastery.

TERMINUS

DOMAINS: Technology

DEFAULT STRESS: D6

HAUNTS: None

The trains have to stop somewhere. In Terminus, one of the fabled Nexus Devices of the Vermisian Network, sits a great central turntable on which trains would enter and rotate to face their next line. The chamber is dotted with tunnel entrances that go all the way to the top of the

domed ceiling – the turntable can be rotated not just right and left, but up, down and strangewise.

The Vermissian was not just technological in nature. To fulfil the unique needs of creating a mostly vertical train network, the designers had to resort to occult means to achieve their goals. It is theorised that the lines formed a complex arcane glyph through the Cities Above and Beneath, and the trains would trace the shape of it with their movements to ensure its survival – the magic was, it was proposed, self-sustaining.

The network collapsed, of course, leaving the warding glyph unscored and the magic in the walls unrestrained and wild. But the Nexus Devices, which are powered by great machines that siphon energy from the Heart Itself, continue to function as though trains were coming through them every hour. They constantly rotate and spin in unfathomably complex patterns.

Though hard to navigate and even harder to predict, Terminus can – in theory – allow access to any part of the Vermissian, even the lost Harvest Line or the metaphysically-locked Crescent-of-the-Morning station. There are sects here, similar to the Signal Box Cultists (p. 196), who track the spinning of the device as though it were some celestial orrery and jealously guard what few secrets they've pried out of this inscrutable machine.

RESOURCES:

- Largely inscrutable notes on the movement and “desires” of the Nexus Device (D6, Occult, Niche)
- Intricate model of the Nexus Device, built to replicate and study its movements (D10, Occult, Fragile)
- Heretical treatise theorising that the City revolves around the Nexus Device, which in fact remains still at all times (D4, Occult, Taboo)

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- To reach an inaccessible part of the Vermissian, the delvers must take a short-cut through the rotary chaos of Terminus.
- A Junk Mage seems to have worked out a way to siphon the power from the Nexus Device into spells that twist the City into new patterns. Can the delvers learn something from her or will they fall victim to one of her daring robberies?

WARDSTONE NASONOV

DOMAINS: Occult

DEFAULT STRESS: D4

HAUNTS: None

This is the end of the unstable dominion of the Deep Apiarists. This single stone, eight feet tall and wedged into soft earth, is their greatest achievement to date. Around it, the mad unreality of the Heart falls away, and there is calm in a radius of around ten feet.

Bees swarm around it, tracing out warding glyphs with complex movements, but before long each bee that is stationed here dies. There is very little food to go around, and the stress of maintaining the magic is more than their little bodies can handle. The ground is covered with their bodies, the glyphs dulled and incomprehensible.

The Deep Apiarists understand sacrifice, as do their passengers, but it is with grim acceptance that skilled members of the sect make a pilgrimage to Nasonov and deposit a portion of their swarm each year. It is Nasonov, they claim, that keeps the Heart at bay; it is Nasonov that leaves the surface world intact and confines the conflict between chaos and stasis to the City Beneath. It is a sacrifice they are willing to make.

RESOURCES:

- Rock chippings from the wardstone (D8, Occult, Taboo, Beacon)
- Sickly bees (D4, Occult, Mobile)

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- Sikalayon Sova, a dying Deep Apiarist, begs you to take his body to Nasonov so his last act can be to reinforce the wards. He's absolutely certain that if he doesn't do it, the Heart Itself will rise up and claim the entirety of the City Beneath. As the world starts to crumble around you even more than usual, you're worried that he might be right.

ROGUE

Some places don't know how to stay put. They can spring up anywhere they want to – even more so than the famously loose geography of the Heart suggests.

MAGI-MAL'S DOMAIN

DOMAINS: Cursed

TIER: Rogue

DEFAULT STRESS: D8

HAUNTS: None.

Magi-Mal is the only person to successfully combine the traits of a blood-witch and a spider-kin midwife in themselves without dying. She is tremendously powerful and, to the endless relief of the City Above, seems content to build a small empire of her own in the Heart. She hauls her shifting arachnid bulk around her lair in search of prey, and her lair is wherever she happens to be at the time.

She takes great pleasure in blood-binding creatures and people that she chooses not to eat, instead dressing them in tattered finery and giving them what she considers a decent upbringing. Her mastery over life and death is legendary: she herself cannot die unless her lair, which travels with her wherever she goes, is razed to the ground. Many inquisitive delvers risk their lives and sanity to gain her insight.

FALLOUT. ADOPTED. [Major, Blood/Echo/Mind] You are chosen by Magi-Mal as one of her children, and bonded to her via an injection of her diseased blood. Your clothes are taken and you are dressed by seven-legged spiders in an approximation of fashionable clothing from a century ago. Escape is possible, but resisting the orders of Magi-Mal – whether delivered by the woman herself or one of her many malformed agents – requires a **Dangerous Endure+Occult** check.

THE ROOM

DOMAINS: Warren

TIER: Rogue

DEFAULT STRESS: D4

HAUNTS: None.

The Room copies itself. It's an innocuous enough place: a bedsit, by the looks of it, with a few books on the shelf, some art on the walls, a simple kitchen around a stove and a chimney in one corner. But leave one of the doors (there's one external, one internal) and you'll walk into a copy of the room, and from that into another copy and so on. This isn't a trick of the mind – the room exists in physical space and so do you. There's just hundreds of copies, all joined together.

The items in each room (again, identical) are skewed and off-centre of reality. The books reference events that haven't happened and are written by authors no-one has heard of. The art shows an advertisement for a dated-looking stage play that was never performed. The food is dried meat from an unrecognisable animal, hard cheese tinged a strange red, and pear-like fruit of an unknown origin. (You can eat it, as long as it's not rotted.) People occasionally ransack or occupy the rooms, but they have no way of repairing themselves, so they stay different. The items themselves appear to be like seeds for the room: if taken away, they'll slowly change the areas they're placed in into a copy of the room. The room also affects areas by proximity, changing adjoining chambers into itself.

The arrival of The Room in a community is heralded with fear and suspicion, and artefacts stolen from them are viewed as dangerous, infected items to be shunned. However, some people (especially the Vermissian Sages) will pay handsomely for intact copies of the books and posters. They say that there are minute differences between them that are somehow vitally important. All too often someone brings in a stolen bedsheet – then they wake up one day and their bedroom will have become a copy of The Room. It'll spread from there unless it's burned out.

There are, of course, two sects who have devoted their lives to investigating The Room. One believes it is the handiwork of a kindly god and want to spread the divine plan as best they can; the other believes The Room is the work of a wicked devil and must all be burned before it takes over the whole world.

THE SALVATIOUS GRYNDEL HUNTING CLUB**DOMAINS:** Haven**DEFAULT STRESS:** D4**HAUNTS:**

- Fully-stocked minibar, for guests (D6 Mind)
- Fully-stocked maxibar, for members (D12 Mind)
- Bartering with overworked servants (D8 Supplies)

Lady Salvatious Gryndel, before she descended into the Heart for a final time and became the Huntress (p. 204), was once known as a fierce hunter and keen entrepreneur. Noticing a gap in the market for moneyed beast-killers, she aimed to set up a series of lavish hunting clubs in various sections of the Heart. However, due to budgeting oversights and time constraints, she instead used ancient Gryndel sorcery and complex (and illegal) human machinery to build a single hunting club and erect many doors instead.

The doors can only be opened with a key marked with the sigil of House Gryndel. If forced or picked by any other means, they will simply open onto a blank wall. Using a key (or fooling the lock into thinking you've used a key) will allow you access to the sumptuous club. Inside is a warren of wood-panelled walls, with tables groaning with meat and drink, jaded noble hunters tripping on drugs too controversial to be addicted to in the City Above, and more stuffed and mounted trophies than you can shake a Death's Head hunting pistol at.

RESOURCES:

- Hunting trophies (D6, Wild)
- Fine wine and suspiciously fresh pastries (D8, Haven)
- A frankly staggering number of high-calibre, over-designed guns (D12, Haven, Awkward)

FRACTURES

Fractures aren't real – or rather, they are at odds with the pre-eminent reality of this plane. Given that the Heart throws around enough spare metaphysics to support a dozen realities, they intrude into the City Beneath every now and again.

When you enter a fracture, you're leaving the Heart (spiritually, at least; physically, it's a bit more complex than that). Most of the fractures listed below are significantly bigger than normal landmarks, and some of them are entirely different versions of reality.

ELSEWHERE**DOMAINS:** Any**TIER:** Fracture**DEFAULT STRESS:** D4 in the day, D8 at night.**HAUNTS:** None.

Legends tell of a city the size of a country that exists in the gaps between the seconds on a clock. Nestling within the echoes of ticks and tocks lies Elsewhere, the doorway to dozens of worlds.

On the streets of Elsewhere, vibrant banners flutter and priests of distant gods sing the praises of their celestial masters. Here, a man with coins for skin plays the lyre and eats squirming sweetmeats from golden plates offered up by robotic chefs; there, a living song bound into a series of paintings rents an apartment and goes on dates with a time-struck wanderer from a strange and neon future; in the street, you hear a shopkeeper made of living glass arguing the finer points of interdimensional trade winds with an astrolabe that speaks in sonorous tones. Elsewhere forms the nexus to many, many worlds, and the Heart is just one of them.

It's a nice place to visit during the day. At night, the Interstitial arrive; darkling creatures of semisolid night that scour the streets for fresh meat to bleach and corrupt in unknowable rituals. Elsewhere is lit up like a firework once the sun goes down, and no one dares to even look out of their windows for fear of catching a mind-bending glimpse of the Interstitial. They sleep in fully-lit rooms, and when they die their bodies are left without ceremony on the streets to be claimed by the hungry dark.

RESOURCES:

- Trade goods from another dimension (D8, Any)

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- The eccentric scholar Wither-Halcyon-Bucolic-Offering has found a stable route to Elsewhere hidden within the chest cavity of a heavily-tattooed carrion-pig (p. 181) that is currently loose on Tier 3 of the Heart. The mission: find the pig, kill it and bring its huge corpse back to Derelictus so Wither can spread open its ribcage and slap a door in there (D12, Any).

PAPILIOUS BOTH**DOMAINS:** Religion, Occult**TIER:** Fracture**DEFAULT STRESS:** D4 (Benevolent), D8 (Malevolent)**BENEVOLENT HAUNTS:**

- Moths gently plucking madness from your ears (D8, Mind)
- Treatises on the perfect nature of the divine (D8, Fortune)

MALEVOLENT HAUNTS:

- Makeshift market strung up in abandoned stacks (D8, Supplies)

Papilious is a footnote in the pages of reality.

A nameless wizard – one of the ancient Sorcerer-Kings who conjured demon-towers from the naked earth in the Blasted Age of the Home Nations – postulated that, just as bees sup nectar from flowers, there must be an insect that can plunge its proboscis in the ear of a dreamer and siphon off its sweetness. Perhaps, he thought, that's how ideas spread with such speed through a populace! This doesn't exactly make sense, but the wizard was so deep in a dozen demonic bargains that rhyme had begun to replace reason in his shattered palace of a mind.

There are fragments of his various ideas scattered throughout the world, and several of those are in the Heart, where the walls between real and unreal are thin indeed. Papilious is one such place: an extra-dimensional fracture, accessed by encouraging a particular type of moth to gently probe your ear in search of delicious secrets, then following it as it flits around the City Beneath. Eventually, though you will not notice the change, you will be standing in one of the many doorways to Papilious: the home of the moth-keepers and the guardians of their lore books.

Upon first impressions, Papilious seems like an idyllic place. Moths, their bodies loaded with insubstantial pollen taken from the consciousnesses of those nearby,





are brushed with soft-bristled tools. Once loosened, the pollen is carefully spread inside the pages of blank books, where it miraculously begins to take the shape of words, pictures and formulae incomprehensible to all but the most learned scholars. Several of the greatest minds of the City Above have visited Papilious in search of wisdom, and they have found it. The keepers sell spare dust from the moths as a mind-sharpening drug, and invest the takings into magical wards and defences to keep Papilious safe.

But as you explore, the library will shift and twist into something else: there are two Papiliouses, each stored within the other. Towering archives become tumbledown wretched dens where desperate people sell access to the darkest recesses of their brains; benevolent librarians become monstrous, cruel priests devoted to harvesting secrets and bearing the eggs of their masters on their exposed necks; and the pursuit of wisdom is inverted into a rapacious desire for forbidden, harmful knowledge. Spymasters and dark magicians buy (or steal) secrets from the cultish guardians, and more than one delver has met their end here in a mad quest for enlightenment.

Opening the wrong door in the benevolent version will lead you to the malevolent one, and vice versa – but neither set of inhabitants gives any credence to the ridiculous theory that an entire inverted version of their own reality sits on the other side of a doorway or down a winding corridor. It is entirely possible to become lost within Papilious – indeed, it seems that many of the inhabitants have done just that, and decided to stay.

RESOURCES:

- The siphoned-off paper-thin dreams of madmen (D4, Occult, Niche)
- Inscrutable books of wisdom and prophecy (D6, Occult, Religion, Niche)
- Bag of moth-dust (D8, Occult. Ingest it to gain mastery on your spellcasting rolls for a situation)
- Scrutable books of wisdom and prophecy (D10, Occult, Religion)

UNSPIRE**DOMAINS:** Occult**TIER:** Fracture**DEFAULT STRESS:** D8**HAUNTS:** None.

In the back rooms of bars where secrets are sold, it is whispered that there is a fractured mirror image of the City Above hiding deep in the bowels of the Heart. This Unspire is said to be a strange and pale imitation of the original; the people there are not quite real, but they occasionally venture through to the Heart (which both cities share) in search of meaning.

Should a delver find Vanishing Point, the midpoint between the two places, they can venture into this paper-thin Spire (after passing their doppelganger, who had the same idea at the same time) and explore – perhaps even bringing back uncanny relics of the place. The Vermissian Sages have a vested interest in Unspire: they claim that the Heart Itself was never pierced there, and so the train network was not pitched into impossible chaos.

THE EIGHT HEAVENS**WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU DIE IN HEAVEN?**

If the delvers visit one of the afterlives outlined below, there is a good chance that one or more of them might sustain a fatal wound in heaven and die “on the wrong side.” Does their soul enter the heaven they’re in? Do they wander the boundaries of the otherworld as a deranged spirit for eternity? Do they drop into the Grey as normal? Do they suffer D10 stress to **Mind** and reappear at the entrance? Do officious psychopomps arrive and boot the corpse, soul still attached, into the celestial equivalent of the bins round the back?

Short answer: we don’t know. Make it up. No one’s supposed to get into heaven while they’re alive, let alone get stabbed in the gut and bleed out there, so metaphysics tends to handle it on a case-by-case basis.

THE FOREST**DOMAINS:** Wild**TIER:** Fracture**DEFAULT STRESS:** D8**HAUNTS:** None

Long ago, people feared the night and hunted beasts with simple weapons, they believed in a different kind of heaven that was located deep beneath the earth. When you died and your bones shook off the heavy flesh that tied them to the world, and your spirit wormed its way through rock and dirt and sand, you would awaken in the Forest.

There you would hunt forever and you would never go hungry, because if you did, something bigger than you would take advantage of your weakness and eat you. Few believe this any more, save for a spark in the minds of primitive creatures – but still the Forest waits, hibernating, until the cities of the world collapse and it returns to its true power.

The Forest is too large. The trees are massive, and tower over those who wander here. The branches and leaves make a thick canopy overhead, allowing only sickly, weak rays of light. Deer that are easily ten foot to the shoulder pick their way through the tangled web of roots that covers the ground; hares the size of dogs skitter through the undergrowth; and the predators, huge rangy beasts with matted fur and jagged teeth, are never far away from the edge of your vision.

On occasion you might find another person, ancient and powerful, their bodies and minds scarred from years of hunting with only the weapons they can make themselves. None speak modern languages; some don’t speak at all. These are the last vestiges of the people who dreamed this vast, indifferent heaven wreathed in perpetual twilight into being, and they are powerful indeed.

Perhaps beneath the Forest there is yet another heaven where the beasts are larger still, the meat more filling, the stars more distant. No one’s found it and come back yet.

RESOURCE:

- Godbeast pelt (D10, Religion. Counts as a Mend Blood D6, **BLOCK** item when worn)

THE CRAIL ROAD**DOMAINS:** Desolate, Religion**TIER:** Fracture**DEFAULT STRESS:** D6**HAUNTS:** None

The humans from the east believe that upon their death, they will begin a journey down a long road of packed earth and cracked stone flanked by an endless, barren plain. The more important and righteous they were in life, the more vital and powerful they are here. Heroes of the Kingdom, the royal wanderer-nobles who battle the wild creatures of their lands, are hyper-real and defined; but the peasants who toil under them in the fields are semi-ephemeral, vague sketches of their former selves. Grave goods are carried across, too; kings are resplendent in velvet robes and bear ceremonial blades, but most of the people you'll see are naked aside from the cloth in which they were wrapped when they were buried in the earth.

Everyone knows that ascension waits at the end of the road. Should a traveller reach it, they will become a god in their pantheon – indeed, every human god was once a mortal who has reached the end of their journey. But this place is exhausting, and food is scarce aside from the occasional rangy hare or dehydrated tuber. If you die, you must start the road

over again. The vast majority of people give up on their journey, whether permanently or temporarily, and eke out an existence from what little they can find or steal from others on the road.

It is only the heroes that can hope to reach the end of the road and ascend – or a very clever peasant who can scheme and rob their way through the afterlife, amassing enough power and followers to complete the journey despite starting off at a distinct disadvantage.

RESOURCES:

- Grave goods from a fallen noble (D8, Desolate, Religion)

THE GREY**DOMAINS:** Desolate**TIER:** Fracture**DEFAULT STRESS:** D4**HAUNTS:** None

Between the lands of the living and the lands of the dead, the Grey persists. A pale and shadowy replication of the real world, the Grey is a



catch-all purgatory for the souls of the recently departed. They traipse back and forth in a poor imitation of their routines when they were alive, or huddle scared and shivering in ephemeral doorways once the reality of their deaths set in.

There are no gods here, no power blocs, no flora or fauna other than the pallid remnants of the living – and even they are only here temporarily. On occasion, deadwalkers (p. 32) or other travellers with the knack of stepping sideways use the Grey as a means of circumventing obstacles in the material realm: a well-guarded outpost becomes an abandoned, tumbledown tower, and can easily be walked past without incident.

The Grey is something of a hub location for afterlives; it is theorised that each one can be accessed through some esoteric route within this liminal realm. It is only within the boundaries of the Heart, where the walls between worlds are thin and permeable, that the living can hope to enter the lands of the dead and return intact.

SPECIAL RULES: The longer one stays in the Grey, the more their body is stripped away from their soul. This process doesn't hurt – quite the opposite, in fact. The flesh is struck with an overwhelming numbness, and stimuli become dulled and indistinct as the skin turns sallow-grey and the eyes rheumy. In game terms, visiting the Grey for a single situation is survivable, but each additional situation spent there requires a character to pass an **Endure+Desolate** roll or suffer D6 stress to **Blood**.

THE MOON'S FACES

THE DARK CITY

DOMAINS: Desolate, Religion, Warren

TIER: Fracture

DEFAULT STRESS: D8

HAUNTS:

- Nameless gutter bar run by a dozen or so dark elf shades (D6, Mind)
- The Night Market (D8, Supplies)

On the edges of the Moon Garden, on the dark side of the moon, the Dark City waits: a twisted

maze of ruined buildings, each at least five storeys high, where the souls of unworthy moon-worshippers wait and watch.

They'll be allowed into the Moon Garden, they're told. No one knows when or under what terms they'll be allowed in, but on occasion one of them will be permitted to step into the light and be welcomed into the loving arms of the Goddess. But no one knows how to make that happen, and the wretched spirits of dark elves spend decades – centuries even – trying to figure it out. It drives them mad.

As the shadow creeps across the moon, it brings the Dark City with it. The buildings crawl and unfurl to fill the space, slotting together to form insane pathways, stairs to nowhere and doors that open onto sheer drops into nothingness. The Dark City is crawling with souls, but most of them will keep out of the way of delvers – to them, living people shine like beacons, and it hurts to be around them for too long. They speak nigh-constantly in a low whisper of patched-together fragments of language that they use to exchange secrets and issue threats, each trying to outdo the others and get out of the Dark City for good.

At the edges of the light, where the Moon Garden meets the Dark City and the cracked obsidian gives way to silver grass and soft moonlight, a crowd of shades cluster at the border and watch the meandering of the blessed souls in the Garden with night-black eyes.

Those in the Moon Garden try not to look back.

RESOURCES:

- Mad scrawlings from the purgatorial souls as they try to find a way to break into heaven (D6, Occult, Religion).
- A bottle of bootleg ambrosia (D8, Religion, Niche, Unstable)
- Dark-razors, made from obsidian shards lashed to bleached wood (D6, Keen, Unreliable – on a failure, it shatters.)

THE MOON GARDEN

DOMAINS: Haven, Religion

TIER: Fracture

DEFAULT**STRESS:** D4**HAUNTS:** None.

However, each day you spend here, remove D4 Blood and Mind stress.

Folk who worship the moon goddess and live good lives are permitted to stay here for eternity. Located on the light side of the moon, the Moon Garden is a shifting monochrome wonderland: great towers of lunar rock spiral beautifully into the starry sky, silver-leaved ivory-white trees dot the landscape and acres of bushes ripe with fruit stretch off over the horizon. At the centre of the garden (which moves according to how much of the moon is currently lit by the sun) sits Limye, the dark elf goddess of community and tenacity. She sings sweetly to her followers to calm them and bring sweet release to their belaboured spirits.

It is a calm place – too calm, some Deadwalkers think, as just walking into the place dulls the mind and fills one's head with soporific thoughts of silver and moonlight. But there is something peaceful in oblivion; in having one's soul strung up with moonsilver and never feeling worry or fear ever again.

The dead who spend eternity here are placid, gentle souls. Some tend to the gardens, even though they don't need to, and

some pick out patterns in the stars and planets that dance overhead. On occasion they'll try to write some music or paint, but nothing complex seems to last here, and they grow forgetful before giving up entirely.

SPECIAL RULES: Upon entering the Moon Garden, make a **Endure+Occult** roll to resist the placid tune of the goddess; on a failure mark D8 stress to **Mind**, and on a partial success mark D6 stress to **Mind**. The following fallout is designed to represent the effects of the song.

FALLOUT: LUNACY. [Major, Mind] You don't want to do anything at all; you are content to wander the gardens and tend to the fruit trees. If this is upgraded to Critical fallout, there's no saving you; but maybe that isn't such a bad thing.

RESOURCES:

- Silver-red cherries and quince (D10, Religion. Can be consumed to remove D6 Mind stress)
- Simple, slightly worn furniture (D6, Religion, Awkward)

POTENTIAL PLOTS:

- Your mission in life has become simple. You are going to reach the Moon Garden and bring your innocent brother back from the land of the dead, because the pair of you need to be alive to kill your father. Everything in the way is just details.

THE RED MOON

DOMAINS: Desolate, Religion

TIER: Fracture

DEFAULT STRESS: D8

HAUNTS: None

Once a month, the moon that shines in the skies of the City Above turns a brilliant crimson. This is the blood moon, the domain of the warlike aspect of the goddess. This is when worshippers of her forbidden cults can call the spirits of murderous saints into themselves, filling their bodies with rage and power to better undertake The Crimson Vigil against the aelfir.

When a follower of these blood-cults dies in battle – or after detonating a suicide firebomb in an aelfir marketplace, or at the hands of an executioner after a string of gruesome murders – they ascend to the Red Moon. Here they sit, flame-crowned and looking out over domains of blackened brick and endless lakes of blood, waiting for the blood moon to shine in the skies once more so they might be called to the world below to enact glorious vengeance from beyond the veil of death. As the prayers of the faithful draw them down, their crowns blossom and grow into a furious corona of flame, and they are pulled into the heavens on beams of burning moonlight.

Aside from the Red Saints (p. 195), there's nothing and no-one else here – the place is abandoned. The saints themselves are slumbering giants, each about ten feet tall. When awoken, they are a terrible force to behold.

RESOURCES:

- Swords grow in the gritty soil of this land. They emerge hilt-first, rusted and blunt from the dirt, each a single piece of iron with filament roots that burrow into the ground below. (D6, Religion)
- The unanswered prayers of angry drow fill the corners of the abandoned buildings that cover the landscape; those who know the trick of it can bottle them. When listened to, these whispers

cleanse the mind of doubt and replace it with righteous fury. (Clears D8 Mind stress, Limited 1)

- The lakes, though often covered in thick scabs, contain a thick, acrid blood that can be drunk as a powerful narcotic. (D10, Taboo)
- The burning crown of one of the Red Saints is of inestimable value to the right collector (and will get you killed if the church finds out about the theft). Each one is unique, and without it, the saint will be bound to their throne and tormented by prayers they cannot hope to answer. (D12, Religion, Beacon, Taboo)

THE PALACE MULTIFACETED

DOMAINS: Religion, Occult

TIER: Fracture

DEFAULT STRESS: D8

HAUNTS: Anything your heart desires (D12, all Resistances. All resources are counted as one dice size lower at this haunt)

The Incarnadine sect – and by extension, their cousins the Azurites in the City Above – believe that heaven is real and that you can buy your way in. Indeed, the only method of entry is to purchase access through donating money, goods and time to the temple in your name. Each “gift” is added to your official account, and the more you’ve given by the time of your death, the grander and more luxurious your quarters will be.

The Palace Multifaceted feels like a cross between a high-end brothel and a theme park. There is no end to the luxury on offer here (for the right price) and the features are only limited by the imaginations and bank balances of the residents. A modest afterlife might amount to a three-bedroom apartment, nice curtains, all the malak you can stand to take and access to a delightful shared garden; but a high priest’s reward could be a mansion wrought from floating iron that sings with the wind, a fountain that sprays beautiful artwork made from water in prismatic bursts and a feasting table that is always full of delicious food and drink. These places are stitched together with ephemeral streets and corridors, and it’s considered a boon to get into a good part of heaven rather than slumming it with the proles in the lower levels.

But Azur and Incarnadine, the twin gods of the

place, claim that running an afterlife costs money (though they don't say where they're spending it). When someone runs out of cash in heaven, they are politely but firmly escorted off the premises and reincarnated as a poverty-stricken newborn. They will be welcome back inside when they've earned enough to buy a ticket. Incarnadines, never ones to make a fair deal if they can help it, take great pains to write contracts that will ensure their underlings go on contributing money in their name long after their deaths so they can stay in the palace forever.

SPECIAL RULES: Any item stolen from the Palace Multifaceted will quickly crumble to dust and gains the **DETERIORATING** tag upon being taken out of the fracture; the place cannot abide theft. If you make a deal and buy something – even at a greatly reduced cost – it endures.

RESOURCES:

- Glittering sundries, unparalleled works of art and so on (D12, Haven, see special rules above)

THE SLUMBERING DEPTHS

DOMAINS: Religion, Wild

TIER: Fracture

DEFAULT STRESS: D6

HAUNTS: None

The Solar Pantheon (the four gods of seasons and weather that the aelfir worship almost exclusively) teaches of oblivion and reincarnation after death, with the believer's soul-stuff being reformed anew in the deep, mystical oceans far to the north. It swims like a shoal of fish through the supernal sea, looking for a new-born to invest itself in.



On the ocean's bed, there are great forests of kelp that tower hundreds of feet into the air and stain the light orange-green with their translucent leaves. Within are the trapped souls of tens of thousands of high elves, their spectral skin a pallid hue, that fitfully sleep and writhe against their restraints. These are the Slumbering Depths.

The aelfir here are dreaming. They are dreaming of the lives of perfect elegance and beauty they will lead on the surface.

They dream of betrayals and love; of sumptuous wines, of quick and sure narcotics, of art that brings them to tears, of the fierce pain of birth. The richer and more beautiful their life, the longer they will dream; and as they dream, they drown, and their lungs flood with burning saltwater. At the culmination of their dream, as they experience their own death, their form bursts into light and glittering fish spiral out to rush towards the surface. They will not remember their dreams once they are born, except in fragmentary glimpses that are hard to discern.

In this way, the aelfir live their afterlives backwards. They are not rewarded for good or moral behaviour whilst they are alive, but rather earn an ideal life through centuries of celestial torment. To an aelfir, to live in the world is to live in heaven, and metaphysics is little more than a price they must pay for admission.

SPECIAL RULES: The Slumbering Depths are underwater, but the water is so oxygenated that it can be breathed as though it were air. Learning to do this is intensely unpleasant but slightly better than suffocating.

RESOURCES:

- Scintillating dreamfish, fragment of an aelfir soul (D8, Religion, Wild, Mobile)
- Celestial manta-ray hide (D10, Religion, Wild)

THE SOURCE

DOMAINS: Occult, Technology

TIER: Fracture

DEFAULT STRESS: D8

HAUNTS: None

Al'Marah, the capital city of the southern gnollish desert kingdom, has no state religion. The gov-

ernment there dictates that the souls of all people who die within sight of the central ziggurat of Al'Marah are absorbed into the Source: a coruscating realm of energy from which djinns and ifrits are drawn to power gnollish machinery. They know this to be a scientific fact because specially-shielded teams have braved the depths of the ziggurat, found heaven and reported back on it with first-hand eyewitness accounts.

It is a great labyrinth with corridors easily ten times the height of a gnoll and strange symbols etched into the walls in electrum and gold. On occasion, the symbols will flare – a warning, perhaps – and great storms of lightning will spiral down the corridor at unimaginable speed. Until the seventh exploration team learned the trick of interpreting the sigils, this was the most common cause of death when in the Source. Upon closer inspection, the symbols are all linked; each is connected to the other with gleaming wire, and the insane complexity of the circuitry within is illustrative of the complexity of the labyrinth itself.

Exploration team 23 encountered – according to the expedition's only survivor – a metallic construct of some kind. After they took samples of the electrum wiring in the walls, a formless spasm of whipping steel hawsers and scraping claws assaulted the unarmed and unarmoured team, ripping all but one to shreds within minutes. It proceeded to repair the damage caused to the circuitry.

You might find an exploration team (p. 188) down here. Since the events of Expedition 23, they carry weapons now and are unlikely to welcome the presence of intruders, but if they're in a tight spot they might need the help of a team of enterprising delvers. The strange constructs that protect the place (p. 197) are more of a threat, though.

RESOURCES:

- Technological gear from the mangled corpses of an exploration team (D8, Technology, Volatile)
- A thrumming node of something that isn't metal and isn't crystal, but looks like both (D12, Technology, Beacon)

ADVERSARIES

What follows is a brief list of some typical (and not-so-typical) adversaries that player characters can meet in the Heart. All of them have something they desire, and it is usually not to fight to the death; players should be encouraged to bargain with, evade or otherwise overcome enemies without resorting to combat. Remember: a single Minor fallout can easily trigger an attack, so let players make their own mistakes.

STAT BLOCKS

Each adversary is broken down into a series of stats and notes after their main description.

Names are a handful of example names that the adversary might have. It's especially useful if you have two or three of them engaging the players at once, so you can tell them apart easily.

Descriptors are things the adversary might be doing when discovered or physical quirks to aid with roleplay.

An adversary's **Motivation** is a rough guess at what it is they want to do right now. Most adversaries can be taken advantage of by using their motivation as leverage.

The **Difficulty** rating of an adversary is either Standard (roll as normal), Risky (remove highest dice after rolling) or Dangerous (remove two highest dice after rolling).

The higher their **Resistance**, the tougher an adversary is. When player characters inflict stress on an adversary, it's subtracted from their resistance. When it reaches 0, the adversary is at their mercy.

Subtract an adversary's **Protection** from all incoming stress.

Resources are something valuable that the adversary might be carrying or guarding.

An adversary's **Equipment** shows how much damage they inflict when they harm a player character. Some equipment (weapons, tools, etc.) can be taken and used by player characters, but others (claws, teeth) can't.

Special covers any unique rules or weirdnesses that the adversary has.

The listed **Domains** are those most closely related to the adversary, but shouldn't be considered a strict ruling on where they can be encountered.

The **Fallout** section lists any fallout results that are particular to this adversary type. The GM can use these instead of the standard results when a player suffers fallout during an engagement.

MAKING YOUR OWN ADVERSARIES

The adversaries listed in this chapter are by no means a complete bestiary of the people and creatures of the City Beneath. You are encouraged to create your own adversaries as you see fit to hunt and torment your player group. A quick way of doing this is to pick an existing adversary that you like the look of and change the description.

Alternatively, once you've read through a few of the entries in this chapter, you should be able to set stats for your own entirely original creations. There are no particular rules for this – just pick out what seems right to you, throw it at the players and tweak stuff on the fly if it isn't working.

OPTIONAL RULE: MOBS

If you've got a lot of adversaries facing off against the player characters but don't want to keep track of several different resistances, you can simply multiply the base resistance of one adversary by the rough number of adversaries within the group. When the players cumulatively inflict stress equal to the base resistance, one of the adversaries is taken out of action.

If you want a more hack-and-slash game of Heart, simply halve the Resistances and Protection of every creature and put them in mobs of about five.

ANGEL

They are red and terrible and mighty. They bring with them waking dreams of chaos and unmaking, a screeching, scraping song of rust and ashes. The angels of the Heart, as they are known by the inhabitants of the place, are thankfully rare.

When the cosmic intelligence at the centre of the City Beneath needs something done quickly and without subtlety, it will create one and dispatch it with a specific mission: the destruction of a haven that's encroaching on valuable resources, avenging the death of a beloved creature, reclaiming something that's been taken, and so on.

As they enter an area, it shifts into an unreal landscape. Walls pulse and seep interstitial fluid, the sound of grinding teeth drowns out all rational thought, and eyes blossom on every available surface.

NAMES: Crimsonian, Vulperine, Theolosian (anyone who witnesses an angel knows its name instinctively; indeed, they are unable to forget it)

DESCRIPTORS: A noise like tearing meat and screaming gristle; Wet red streamers coalescing and spiralling into the shape of an elongated humanoid; An immobile statue of bone with floating masks that shimmer and reform as it speaks.

MOTIVATION: Each angel is created to fulfil a specific objective, and can't understand things that aren't its objective. Sometimes they can't complete their mission and their programming breaks down, making them even more inscrutable.

DIFFICULTY: Dangerous

RESISTANCE: 20. Reducing an angel's resistance to 0 will render them unable to move or act; as their flesh rapidly putrefies, it will be born again in some distant stone womb.

PROTECTION: Equal to the tier on which they are encountered. **PIERCING** weapons will not overcome this.

RESOURCES: Caul (D12, Occult; when worn, heartsblood creatures will treat you as kin)

EQUIPMENT: Unmaking hands (Damage D10, Piercing)

SPECIAL: The first time you see a particular angel, roll **Endure+Cursed** and mark D10 stress to **Mind** on a failure.

DOMAINS: Cursed, Occult; but angels can be found in any domain if their mission takes them there, and few things can stop them.

AUTOMATON OF BURDEN

Though these mechanical creatures come in many varieties, the most common design is a headless four-legged pack animal. By using material scavenged from the broken alternate realities of the Vermissian (and from even weirder machines buried deeper beneath the earth), the creators of these devices can imbue them with basic intelligence via occult rituals. Some have the mind of a horse or ox bound into them, but such beasts are hard to come by in the Heart. Instead the designers must rely on substitutes: the combined intelligences of twenty pigeons, perhaps, or one of the carrion-swine that plague the settlements of the City Beneath.

These automatons follow their owners and carry their effects, so they're popular with the reclaimers who dig into the depths of the Vermissian in search of treasure or sellable junk. Generally you'll see them attached to their master via a chain or rope, but some can detect sigils stamped into the ground: by carving a unique symbol into the base of their staff, a reclaimer can mark a path for their automaton as they walk along. Some older traders ride them, sitting cross-legged on its back while surrounded by black candles, tapping ahead of the beast with a stick so it can follow the noise.

Occasionally automatons will wander away from their owner, or their owner will die, leaving them masterless. These are highly-prized treasures, and rumours of ramshackle constructs shuddering through the city laden with lost riches are popular in taverns and drug-dens all throughout the Heart.

NAMES: Bessie, Vyssos 3-X, Wrench

DESCRIPTORS: Thrice-repaired, with legs of different lengths and wooden side-panelling; Housing a portable shrine to the Moon Beneath and trailing incense; Stolen and joy-ridden by wretched pitchkin.

MOTIVATION: To follow their master however they've been programmed to do so, and to avoid harm.



DIFFICULTY: Standard

RESISTANCE: 10

PROTECTION: 0, unless their owner has reinforced them to 1 or 2.

RESOURCES: Frantic animal intelligence (D6, Occult); Spare parts (D8, Technology).

EQUIPMENT: Spindly legs (Kill D4).

SPECIAL: If you acquire an Automaton of Burden, it functions as a (Delve D6) item.

DOMAINS: Technology

THE BLIGHTED

There is a parasite that gives trees the gift of awakening and curses them to insanity. Burrowing and festering deep within the wood, the parasite changes the tree's biology to allow it to move on creaking dirt-caked legs of root and bark. They can think as quickly as the short-lived creatures that flit around it in the forests of their home.

But the parasite is hungry, and eats the wood of the tree in which it lives. Specimens have rents in their bark lined with writhing fleshy growths where they've been ravaged by it. The tree feels this sensation as an irritation at first, but as the parasite



grows in power and mass, it builds to a overwhelming, unscratchable itch that drives the tree insane.

The only way of stopping the itch is to give the parasite something else to eat, and even then, it is only temporary. Plant matter doesn't work fast enough and the trees don't want to risk further infection, so they hunt and kill other creatures, pressing the corpses against their festering wounds to calm the ravening sensation a little. Those that have been infected the longest lope through the forests with their kills impaled on their upper branches, occasionally pausing to tear off a rotting limb and hold it against themselves as they visibly relax.

If the trees don't consume their kills immediately, they gain some measure of control over the flesh via the parasite. Hands can grasp and manipulate; horrifically, faces can speak in the voices of their original owners. A blighted who's managed to learn to speak through a stolen mouth is rare, and acts as a caretaker for other, less fortunate infected trees.

If the blighted weren't all insane, they might be able to form a culture and somehow communicate with the other inhabitants of the Heart; in the moments when their minds calm down enough, they sometimes realise the horror of what they're doing. But the clarity doesn't last for long, and it brings a guilt that's as bad as the itch itself.

NAMES: They don't have, or really understand, names. Things are marked by their geographic location rather than a distinct moniker; where you are is what you are.

DESCRIPTORS: Carrying a twitching deer in its upper branches, letting the blood spill down over its wounds; Desperately trying to stand still amidst a copse of trees in ambush; Cradling a corpse to their "chest" as the parasite consumes it.

MOTIVATION: To get the itching to stop.

DIFFICULTY: Standard

RESISTANCE: 10

PROTECTION: 4 versus weapons that can't chop down trees.

RESOURCES: Parasite samples (D8, Cursed,

Dangerous); Assorted equipment and bones from its kills (D6, Haven, Wild).

EQUIPMENT: Impaling branches (D8).

SPECIAL: Fire inflicts double stress when used against the Blighted.

DOMAINS: Wild

BLOODED

The Heart changes people mentally and physically. The blurring world in the City Beneath smears the bodies and souls of the inhabitants into curious patterns. Worming its way into their blood, it passes its influence on to their offspring, and children born several generations deep can be strange indeed.

Some have developed new sense organs: black orb-like eyes that can sense the Heart's touch, or bristling hairs that taste the wind pricking up from their forearms. Some are born with birthmarks that warp and change into script over the course of their lives; some have fingernails of organic glass or spiralling horns of bone curling from their brow.

Stranger still, the Heart blurs the lines between flesh and not-flesh, between the individual and the place, and surgical implantation is possible in ways unthought of in the surface world. Body parts such as fingers, eyes and occasionally whole limbs can be grafted onto a donor and retain function (the acceptance rate is surprisingly high). Animal body parts can be used too, and depending on the level of heartsblood in the individual, even inorganic materials such as stone, repurposed machinery or crystal can be worked into someone's body and given sensitivity if not function. Those with implants who travel to the surface world find that their bodies start to reject them when free of the Heart's influence.

The deeper one travels into the Heart, the more blooded people one will find. Many of them regard delvers as invaders blundering into a world they're not entitled to in order to plunder its secrets, and not without reason. It was those changed by the Heart who bore the brunt of the original expedition of the 33rd, the regiment that would become the Hounds.

NAMES: Normal people names, perhaps about fifty years out of date: Versellian, Xandrix, Sewain, Brimner

DESCRIPTORS: Growing rows of teeth inside their mouth that make it difficult to speak; Listening to the singing crystals implanted in their chest and shoulders; Farming mushrooms and smoking clove cigarettes brought down by travellers.

MOTIVATION: To live in the Heart in peace, and not get killed thanks to some clueless delver unleashing hell.

DIFFICULTY: Standard

RESISTANCE: 6

PROTECTION: 0 for most, but those devoted to protecting the Heart and who are prepared for a fight have Protection 2

RESOURCES: Jewellery, keepsakes and valuables (D6). Their bodies, or body parts, can be sold as medical curiosities, but most havens in the Heart frown on this.

EQUIPMENT: Knife, club or poor-quality sword (D6); whatever ranged weapons they could scare up (D8, Ranged, One-Shot)

DOMAINS: Wild, Cursed

BURNT-OUT OCCULTIST

The rush of power can leave you wanting more; sorcery can certainly be an easy route to getting what you want, but the bristling touch of other realities on the mind can intoxicate and bewitch the caster. Driven mad by want and out of other options, these desperate mages will form fractious gangs and rob or kill vulnerable travellers in search of scraps of magical power – or whatever resonance they can wring out of the poor individual's blood.

The real danger is that one of these wretches will get their hands on a serviceable book of demonology. They're just smart enough to cast the spells and just tweaked-out enough to not take any of the proper precautions. More than one haven has been unmade in a scintillating blur when some reckless occultist created an incursion, willingly or not. The Hounds have a vested interest in stopping it from happening again.

NAMES: Griz, Swent, Nox.

DESCRIPTORS: Wearing a cracked porcelain mask, the last vestige of their life of luxury in the City Above; Going through the bins outside a church looking for something with a vague hint of power; Trailing a Junk Mage, their hands outstretched, begging for angel feathers or automaton dreams.

MOTIVATION: To learn new spells; to gather occult resources and huff them to cast magic; to get high, and forget their troubles for a bit.

DIFFICULTY: Standard

RESISTANCE: 6

PROTECTION: 0

RESOURCES: Almost-useless scraps of occult energy (D4, Occult)

EQUIPMENT: Black market black magic (Kill D8, Brutal, Ranged. This can inflict **Blood** or **Mind** stress on the target; the GM chooses.)

SPECIAL: If a Burnt-Out Occultist inflicts 7 or more stress on a single roll, they are taken out of action by the magical feedback.

DOMAINS: Occult

BUTCHER

These were once desperate people who, despite the warning songs and folk tales, ate the forbidden flesh that grows in secret places, making wet pulsing walls and beckoning with lipless mouths. Over time, it turned them into horrendous creatures of blight and bone.

They are easily twice the height of a person, with rangy, pallid limbs that give them tremendous speed and strength. Each worships the cave that they eat from, and they are all hopelessly addicted to the heartflesh. They drag back prey, or bits of prey, to push into the wall and replace what they have eaten.

Butchers are famously territorial, and will viciously kill one another on sight.

NAMES: They don't have names anymore; if they have to refer to each other, they do so in terms of their position, smell and deeds.



DESCRIPTORS: Bearing mighty antlers of rotting wood; Scratching symbols into the walls and trees with stones; Crouching on a rock and issuing forth a keening howl to others as a warning.

MOTIVATION: To claim meat (living, if possible) for its cave.

DIFFICULTY: Risky

RESISTANCE: 10

PROTECTION: 3

RESOURCES: Butcher entrails (D6, prized for making warding sigils); Antlers (D6-D10, depending on the number of points); Victims' leavings if you can find their cave and deal with the smell (D8).

EQUIPMENT: Nightmare claws (D10)

DOMAINS: Wild, Warren, Cursed

FALLOUT: TAKEN. [Blood, Major]. You are injured, unable to properly move and dragged through the darkness to be forced into the wall of flesh that the butcher venerates as a mute idiot god.

THE CARNIVAL

The Carnival is eternal. Sometimes the dancers die – their feet battered and bloody, crawling through abandoned districts on hands and knees – but the Carnival itself endures. The Carnival is a brain-wyrm that makes sufferers dance, cavort and sing. It is a gift, a cruel reward, sung into the minds of the undercity by a misguided warrior-poet of the aelfir in the City Above.

It is greater than the sufferers. Those who can write will scratch the words of it into walls, a word-salad nonsense that infects the reader. It hides in the choruses of folk songs, in the singsong games of children, in the graffiti on gang territory. Occasionally infection will come to a head and an entire haven will take leave of their senses, drape themselves in colourful rags and skip through the Heart, singing the virus aloud to bewitch and lure in passers-by. There's nothing malicious about them; honestly, even though they're malnourished and their feet are ruined with blisters, they seem genuinely happy. There are far worse ways to die down here.

The Carnival is not the only brain-wyrm to enter the Heart. Mummer-Pox causes sufferers to act out a great aelfir play that can only be performed over millennia, and this was deemed to be the most effective method of staging it. The Labyrinth Curse compels the infected to construct complex mazes riddled with traps around things it deems "unsafe." Scrivener's Lament forces those that carry it to write book after book, all attributed to the same author.

NAMES: Gregor, Yolande, Klimpt

DESCRIPTORS: Shaking a noise-maker made out of pebbles in a glass bottle; Carrying a severely malnourished (but uninfected) infant on their back; Daubing a shaky mural depicting the carnival onto the wall nearby in white paint.

MOTIVATION: To dance! Occasionally they'll come to their senses and scream in pain and hunger, so many troupes include a drummer among their number to keep the rhythm going.

DIFFICULTY: Standard

RESISTANCE: 4

PROTECTION: 0

RESOURCES: Whatever they were carrying when the infection took hold (D4)

EQUIPMENT: Most carry breakable noise-makers (D6, One-Shot) or are unarmed; none of them are really interested in fighting, though.

SPECIAL: Hearing the song of the carnival triggers an **Endure+Occult** check with D6 stress to **Mind** on a failure; getting up close (say, if you were rescuing someone) increases the stress to D8. You can overcome this by plugging your ears with wax or something similar, but this brings its own complications.

DOMAINS: Haven, Desolate.

FALLOUT: STUCK IN YOUR HEAD. [Minor, Mind] The carnival itches in the back of your mind. At the end of every session that you go without spreading the infection to others via singing it aloud, representing it in art, etc., mark D6 stress to **Mind**.

FALLOUT: DANCER. [Major, Mind] The Carnival has you. You dance off into the darkness; your allies will be able to find you, as you and your new companions are certainly making enough noise. They'll have to drag you out and tie you down until the feeling passes, or leave you to your death.

FALLOUT: DAMNED. [Critical, Mind] Feet broken and bloody, lips cracked and broken from dehydration, you cackle and spasm your last in some piss-stained back alley or godforsaken cave. You die.

CARRION-PIG

Pigs eat whatever rubbish they can find, so they're a common pest in havens; they'll scrub through waste piles and gutters looking for delicious morsels until someone chases them away. But their appetite is nothing compared to the carrion-pig: an enormous beast, easily the size of a horse and hugely fat, that eats absolutely anything organic you throw near its mouth. Carrion-pigs are popular methods of waste disposal in the Heart. Catch one (if you're brave enough), lock it

up in a cellar and throw anything vaguely edible down there and it'll gobble it up in seconds. Put a drain underneath and sluice it out once in a while, and you've got some foul-smelling fertilizer you can spread over whatever you've managed to grow.

Is it cruel to do this? Absolutely. It's a bastard thing to do, and in havens where they're used, most inhabitants try not to think about it. What's more, carrion-pigs' size is only limited by their age and how much they get to eat, so those that have been kept for years (or even decades) slowly grow to fit the shape of wherever they're imprisoned. But they never get sick (they're medical marvels) can survive for months off their own reserves of fat and are useful for disposing of bodies should the Hounds come round asking about what happened to the last bunch of delvers who came through the town and mysteriously disappeared.

They grow their largest in captivity, but wild ones are still pretty huge – easily enough to threaten an unsuspecting delver should they come across one. The bigger problem is when mating season rolls around. Picking up the scent of huge and fecund females trapped underneath havens, males will gather on nearby outcroppings of rock

and bellow a deep-throated call that makes windows shake. Should the female carrion-pig hear this, she'll thrash around against the confines of her prison and – if it's not well-built enough – destroy it, smash apart a good section of the haven with it and romp off in search of her lover-to-be.

NAMES: Owners tend not to name carrion-pigs, because they don't want to empathise with them.

DESCRIPTORS: Smashing through a nearby wall; Squealing so loud you think your eardrums are going to burst; Hungrily feasting on the corpse of their owner.

MOTIVATION: To eat, mate and, if it's got time, gain revenge on its owners.

DIFFICULTY: Risky, if they're in heat; Standard otherwise.

RESISTANCE: 15

PROTECTION: 5

RESOURCES: Too much stinking pig fat (D8, Heavy).

EQUIPMENT: Crushing body and champing jaws (Kill D8, Brutal).

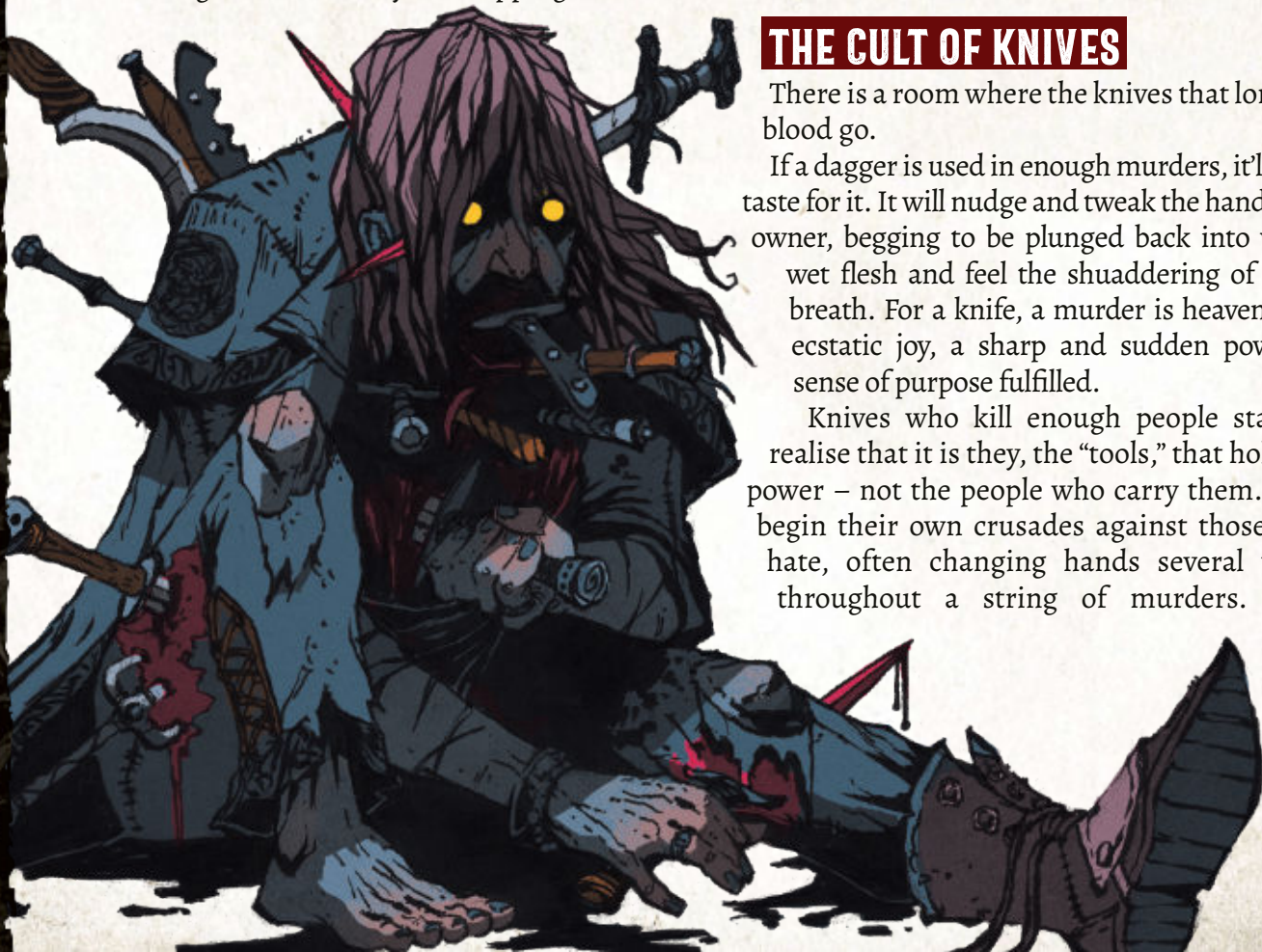
DOMAINS: Haven, Wild.

THE CULT OF KNIVES

There is a room where the knives that long for blood go.

If a dagger is used in enough murders, it'll get a taste for it. It will nudge and tweak the hand of its owner, begging to be plunged back into warm wet flesh and feel the shuaddering of a last breath. For a knife, a murder is heaven – an ecstatic joy, a sharp and sudden power, a sense of purpose fulfilled.

Knives who kill enough people start to realise that it is they, the “tools,” that hold the power – not the people who carry them. They begin their own crusades against those they hate, often changing hands several times throughout a string of murders. Even



though they are incapable of moving under their own power, they will warp the minds of those that hold them and call out to others of the same kind. They will begin to plot; they will form a cult.

This is how you will meet the Cult of Knives: in an unassuming basement or attic, whilst searching for something long thought lost, you will find a wide-eyed man or woman who has apparently stabbed themselves with thirteen or so knives and left them lodged inside their body. They are rendered senseless from the power of the knives. Within them, the cult of knives commune and whisper in a silent language of steel and blood and sharpness. As they notice you, they pluck one of the congregation from their thigh and lurch towards you, trailing blood, in an attempt to silence you.

The following stats are for the current “bearer” of the congregation – the knives are unable to move or attack under their own power.

NAMES: If you remove every knife, they’ll come to their senses and tell you their name (Theodora, Clovin, Wyst) before dying of blood loss.

DESCRIPTORS: Wearing bedraggled fancy clothing, like they walked here from the City Above; Calmly rearranging the knives in their torso as different cultists hold the floor; Coiled and ready to strike, assassin-like, eyes scanning the entrances.

MOTIVATION: To stop any interruptions to the meeting.

DIFFICULTY: Risky

RESISTANCE: 12

PROTECTION: 0

RESOURCES: Barely anything, although you might be able to sell the knives.

EQUIPMENT: Upwards of 13 knives (D6, Spread), all of which have been used in multiple killings and are, in a way, intelligent.

SPECIAL: The Cult of Knives ignores all Protection.

DOMAINS: Desolate, Warren, Haven.

FALLOUT: VESSEL. [Major, Blood] The bearer plunges one of the congregation inside you, and your mind swims from the pain. Halve all Protections, rounding down. You cannot remove the knife until you remove or downgrade this fallout. Can be upgraded to **APOSTLE** (see below).

FALLOUT: APOSTLE. [Critical, Blood] You are chosen as a suitable (read: weak-willed) candidate for the bearer of the congregation. You stumble off into the darkness and follow the will of the knives until you die, which will be soon.

DRUID LECBREAKER

The druid-gangs of Redcap Grove (p. 140) enforce their will over the surrounding area (and several neighbourhoods of Derelictus) with squads of shapeshifting druids. More than one headstrong tough has shot a rival on their turf only to have them, and all their mates, twist their bodies into nightmarish needle-toothed forms and attack.

NAMES: Rhoz, Thorne, Pitch

DESCRIPTORS: Picking their teeth with a night-black thorn; Eyes that flick between different pupil types every time they blink; Smoking incense rolled into a cigarette.

MOTIVATION: To protect the interests of their High Druid masters.

DIFFICULTY: Standard

RESISTANCE: 8

PROTECTION: 1

RESOURCES: Ritual gewgaws and tchotchkes made of mushrooms and animal bones (D6, Wild).

EQUIPMENT: Sickles, picks and mushroom-hooks (Damage D6).

DOMAINS: Wild.

FALLOUT: BEAST FORM. [Minor, Blood/Fortune] The druids channel the twisting power of nature within their bodies and transform into lank, pallid cave-creatures. Their protection increases to 3, and their unarmed damage increases to D8.

FALSE HALLOW

Messiahs are a common sight in the Heart. Most weeks, some wide-eyed pilgrim will stumble out of Derelictus and into the winding tunnels of the City Beneath in search of the truth denied to them in the surface world. Shouting of a coming doom, or muttering madly to themselves about salvation, most of them die within a few weeks of entering the City Beneath. Most commonly they'll be convinced they're reincarnated Hallows (saints) of Our Glorious Lady or some other aspect of the moon, but martyrs for the Solar Pantheon or the Charnel Death-cult aren't unheard of.

But not all of them die. Some are charismatic, or brutal enough to be feared, and draw cults around themselves with petty trickery and promises of power in the afterlife. Some never believed in the first place, and are con-artists playing a dangerous game. With reality being what it is in the Heart, those skilled or lucky enough to gather a following can leech off the faith of those devoted to them, and begin to spontaneously generate powers that are indistinguishable from miracles. They can heal the sick, send poxes on their enemies and strike down the wicked with a single mighty blow.

The Church of the Moon Beneath has a vested interest in removing False Hallows from power; they don't like the competition, and a lot of the behaviour of these living bandit-saints could be construed as heretical. Similarly, temples from the City Above will dispatch agents to silence False Hallows before their schemes gain momentum. It took the efforts of a joint force of Solar Pantheon paladins and specially-warded delvers to locate and destroy the heretical Church of the New Sun in the year of Crimson Ravens.

NAMES: Vasselin, Solipsus, Autumn-Storms-Curdle-the-Sky-and-We-Are-Found-Wanting.

DESCRIPTORS: Carried on a palanquin by four weeping devotees; Floating above the ground, their cloak caught in a wind that isn't blowing; Casually walking through a hail of fire without a scratch.

MOTIVATION: To foster a cult around them and grow in power; this might be for pious or selfish reasons, but it's hard to tell the difference.

DIFFICULTY: Dangerous

RESISTANCE: 8

PROTECTION: 3

RESOURCES: Unhallowed relics (D10, Occult)

EQUIPMENT: Simple work tools or repurposed ritual items (Kill D10 in their hands, Kill D6 for anyone else).

SPECIAL: False Hallows will often be surrounded by a cult of some kind; use the Signal-Box Cultist (p. 196) to represent them, but exchange the Technology domain for Religion.

DOMAINS: Religion, Occult

FERAL PSYCHOPOMP

The gaps between worlds are thin in the Heart, and it is possible to break into (or out of) heaven and hell using rituals performed at specific sites. Were everything working as intended, these realms would be entirely separate from the City Beneath – but the energy of the Heart has burrowed into other dimensions and they have begun to leak through, as have the beings who live within them.

Many faiths tell of creatures, collectively known as psychopomps, who ferry the souls of the dead to the afterlife. Curious or opportunistic psychopomps will sometimes leave their respective afterlives and explore the curious terrain of the Heart. Severed from the divine intelligences that govern them, these creatures turn animalistic and desperate when trapped in the wrong reality. Falling back on instinct, they attempt to do what they've done for eternity: ferry people to the underworld, even if some of those people aren't yet dead.

There are angels, their ivory-white robes ripped and stained, that cluster in the rafters of the Church of the Dark Mother and howl profanities at anyone who comes near. In the depths of the Lost Sepulchre, dead-eyed warrior maidens in rusted armour stagger blindly in search of souls worthy enough to carry to heaven on their long-dead winged steed. And in Cloven, the wild-children cap-

ture the mad, blind celestial horses that rampage through the overgrown streets and pluck their tattered wings to sell their feathers to occultists.

NAMES: Very few of them remember their names; some have adopted names that they have overheard whilst hiding in the City Beneath.

DESCRIPTORS: Clutching a rusted celestial spear to their chest; Patching up tattered wings with birdshit and feathers; Eating the pages of a holy book, one by one.

MOTIVATION: To guide souls back to their respective underworlds, but the doorways are lost and the “souls” are whoever they find trespassing on their domains.

DIFFICULTY: Standard

RESISTANCE: 7

PROTECTION: 2

RESOURCES: Tattered raiments (D6, Religion, Occult).

EQUIPMENT: Broken celestial blades (Kill D6, Brutal).

DOMAINS: Religion, Desolate.

FLIGHTLESS OWL HIVE

There's a folk story about how Owl, in his hubris, tried to court the Moon Goddess back when Spire was young. He claimed that he was king of the skies and that she should be honoured to be his bride. She cursed him and all his children to never fly again, and only the small owls were able to sneak away from her notice; even now, owls on the surface world will never land in a patch of moonlight. The larger owls were so ashamed that they learned the trick of burrowing so they could live beneath the earth and never have to set eyes on the moon ever again.

That's the story, anyway. The reality is that the Heart supports several hundred colonies of invasive, flightless owls. They operate in a hive structure like bees or ants, bringing back kills and regurgitating them into the mouths of scores of mewling, blind young. They're larger than surface owls and more vicious: they work in packs to bring down a target many times their size, screeching and flapping dust into the air to confuse their prey.

They'll often set up shop beneath a settlement and start stealing food, then animals, then children and so on. It's a fairly common first job for delvers to descend into the cramped tunnels beneath a haven and cull an owl hive;. Some superstitious types believe that a feather or bone from the first owl they ever kill is a good luck charm, and even seasoned explorers will bear a dirty-white feather in their cap as a memento. It's an easy enough job if you take out each group of guard owls quickly. Just don't let them wake the hive; if they do, the guttural song of the queen will echo through the chambers, and the invaders should leave quickly unless they wish to be torn to pieces.



NAMES: The individual owls don't have names; each Queen's name is a minute-long screech and only pronounceable by other owls.

DESCRIPTORS: Eating a weaker member of the hive whole; Blind and operating by echolocation; Mangy, with yellowing skin and patchy feathers.

MOTIVATION: To defend the Queen and ensure the safety of the hive.

DIFFICULTY: Standard.

RESISTANCE: 3

PROTECTION: 0

RESOURCES: Assorted owl bones (D4, Occult)

EQUIPMENT: Beaks and claws (D6)

DOMAINS: Wild, but those owls aren't the problem; they can be found in the Warren, Desolate and Haven domains too, which is when they come into conflict with people.

FALLOUT: AWOKEN THE HIVE. [Minor, Fortune] Your actions have summoned the hive in force, and a hundred hooting, retching dirty owls the size of your arm come scuttling out of holes in the walls and floor. There's too many to fight, so you'll have to find some other way out.

FALLOUT: AN AUDIENCE WITH THE QUEEN. [Major, Fortune] Swollen with eggs, heavier than a fully-grown man, the owl queen screeches and claws her way down the tunnel with surprising speed. She has resistance 12. Attacks against her are Risky due to the nosebleed-inducing cries she's making and her sheer bulk gives her a D8 damage dice.

GHOST

Ghosts are a fact of life in the Heart. Between the weird energies flowing through the place and the capacity for sudden violent death, the odds of your spirit rising as a ghost after your death are pretty high. Most of the burial rites of the inhabitants focus around stopping this from happening.

Ghosts (or phantoms, spectres or wraiths – there are a lot of names for them) tend to haunt something that was important to them in life. Most commonly they'll take up residence in the building where they lived and try to drive out new tenants; other times, they'll haunt an item that they owned, the weapon that killed them, their murderer or lover and so on. Not every ghost is malevolent, but many are; and most of those that aren't are far removed from reality, thanks to their minds fracturing under the stress of death.

You can put a ghost to rest by "solving" whatever unfinished business it has in the City Beneath or consecrating its remains, which allows it passage to its chosen afterlife. But not every ghost wants to move on. Some are actively fleeing judgement and making the most of their time trapped between worlds.

NAMES: Old-fashioned names like Enriette, Gregorious, Burrage.

DESCRIPTORS: Trailing ectoplasm from fatal wounds; Appearing only in mirrors and reflections; Manifesting as a flash of cold and the sound of creaking ice.

MOTIVATION: It differs from ghost to ghost, but most are caught between abject loneliness and directionless rage.

DIFFICULTY: If you can see them properly, Standard; otherwise, Risky. A character who can see can aid another who can't.

RESISTANCE: 5

PROTECTION: 10 (Not ignored by Piercing, see below).

RESOURCES: Nothing of import.

EQUIPMENT: Spectral claw (D6, Piercing); Otherworldly phenomena (D6, Spread, One-Shot).

SPECIAL: Consuming an appropriate resource with the **OCCULT** or **RELIGION** tags and a value of D6 or greater allows a character to ignore the ghosts' protection value until the end of the situation (e.g. anointing your hammer with holy water, wrapping prayer flags around your fists, scattering sacred salt).

Researching the specific item needed to affect a specific ghost allows the character to ignore the ghosts' protection value and increases their stress inflicted by two steps (e.g. etching the ghost's suicide note into your sword, wrapping their late husband's hair around your wrists, trapping them in a room by pouring dirt from their grave into the keyholes).

DOMAINS: Cursed, Occult, Religion.

FALLOUT: POSSESSED. [Major, Mind/Echo] You are possessed by a ghost and your body becomes a grim marionette. Until the end of the current situation you are trapped as a passenger behind your eyes, and the ghost has full control over your actions.



GNOLL INCURSION TEAM

The Heart is of particular interest to occultists, theologists and fringe scientists from all over the world. Some of them even manage to reach and explore it within their lifetimes rather than just reading about it in books.

As the gnolls who dwell in the deserts to the south are officially at war with the rulers of the City Above, the only way they can get their demonomechanical experts inside the City Beneath is to sneak in and hope they don't get caught.

Wearing special suits of sandwalker leather designed to withstand the wild energy of the Heart, teams of between six and ten gnolls explore the strangeness around them and document it on curious devices: shimmering spheres, light as soap-bubbles but strong as iron, that they say contain bound djinn of remembrance.

Most of the inhabitants of the Heart let them get on with it, since they keep themselves to themselves for the most part. But each new moon, there is a standing bounty paid for the heads of gnolls delivered to the Derelictus central square each, which is doled out by serious-looking drow administrators from the City Above. The exploration teams do their best to keep their existence a secret and to silence anyone who might report them to the authorities.

NAME: Doctor Pitchwood, First Assistant Sareth, Protector Bahram.

DESCRIPTORS: A blue-white searchlight stabbing through the darkness, illuminating you but leaving them in shadow; Screwing bulky lenses into place on their visor to observe a heartsblood creature; Tracing circuit-board patterns in blood around a humming battery to recharge it; Reinforcing subdermal shielding and limbic wards.

MOTIVATION: To catalogue the weirdness of the Heart and send back data to Al'Marah; to evade detection.

DIFFICULTY: Standard. One gnoll per party is designated Protector and is Risky instead

RESISTANCE: 5

PROTECTION: 2

RESOURCES: Arcanotechnological detritus, none of which you understand (D10, Technology, Occult, Dangerous).

EQUIPMENT: Gilded shotcannon (D8, Point-blank, Reload, Expensive) or Prey-Hook (D6, Debilitating, Ranged); Arcanochemical bombs (D6, Ranged, Spread, One-Shot).

DOMAINS: Technology.

GODBEAST

The Forest (p. 168) is an ancient heaven that slumbers beneath the earth waiting for the cities of the world to fall. Through it stalk creatures unlike any of those seen in the surface world: great elk, ten foot high at the shoulder with horns of stone and crystal; boars with tusks the size of a drow's arm and muscles like steel hawsers; and monstrous dragonflies that buzz through the air with a low bass drone.

On occasion, when a great hunter dies and their soul awakens in the Forest, the path between the ancient hunting ground and the real world opens, and godbeasts will step out in search of new food sources. Briar (p. 157) is the most common place to find them, but not more than once a decade does a hunter of sufficiently legendary proficiency pass away.

NAMES: None that you would understand.

DESCRIPTORS: Crashing through a treeline; Viciously protecting its young, themselves the size of a fully-armoured drow; Fleeing the arrival of something even larger and more dangerous.

MOTIVATION: To protect its young, which may or may not be on the same plane of reality as them.

DIFFICULTY: Standard. Once below resistance 10, their difficulty increases to Risky.

RESISTANCE: 30

PROTECTION: 3

RESOURCES: Pelt (D10, Religion, Wild. Counts as a Mend Blood D6, Block item when worn).

EQUIPMENT: Trampling hooves or gnashing teeth (D8, Brutal).

DOMAINS: Wild.

HARPIES

Each male harpy is a magpie-like corvid about the size of a housecat, and they like to take sharp and shiny things from people.

They tie the sharp things they take onto their beaks and talons to augment their dive-bombing method of catching prey. Older harpies have a wide array of knives, spear points, bayonets and cutlery attached to their pointed white beaks, and bent carpentry nails, fishing hooks and climbing pitons bound to their feet. One swooping from a cave roof can easily puncture the armour of an incautious delver. Harpies will gladly work in teams to dive-bomb a lone wanderer, quickly rendering them incapable of proper retaliation through pain and blood-loss. The shit-caked birds cackle and caw at their prey as it dies, and often imitate the sound of its death throes, as they are capable (and apparently cruel) mimics.

They bring the shiny things back to their bowers: mating sites intended to attract the attention of a female. To a harpy, "shiny" seems to mean occult resonance – they have an instinctive attraction towards items that are used to augment magical spells. Necklaces bearing wicked sigils, black-wax candles and two-headed goat placenta have all been stolen from travellers and arranged around the harpy's mating site in curious patterns.

Once the harpy has gathered enough shiny things, it will kill smaller creatures – rats, mice, feral piglets, pitchkin – and drag their corpses back to its bower where it will mark summoning sigils in their blood on the stone floor. Then, working on instinct alone, the harpy will caw out a mating call using fragments of language that it does not understand, stolen from the throats of the dying. This draws the attention of a female.

The female harpy is a different beast: a humanoid the height of a drow, with great wings where its hands would be, but no less filthy or callous than the male. The bowers act as summoning circles to draw them forth from whatever hellish

dimension they dwell in. They emerge through a rift in the blood-soaked floor and mate with the male (an act which generally results in his death).

From there, they will screech forth and experience the joys that the Heart has to offer: fresh prey, the terror on the faces of their victims, the feeling of flight after eons of confinement in their grim dimension. They live on borrowed time, as the magic used to summon them is as bestial and instinctive as they are. Only more death and fear can keep them in the City Beneath, or else they will crumble to dust as their spirits are dragged back to their otherworldly prison.

The female harpy will aim to slaughter her way to a haven, kill whoever she can inside and lay as many eggs as possible before her soul is claimed. In time, these grey-black orbs will hatch – always into a male – and they will start the cycle again.

MALE HARPY

NAMES: Only those they've stolen from people who died nearby.

DESCRIPTORS: Imitating the voice of someone who went missing from your haven; Tying a fishing hook onto its talons with surprising dexterity; Swooping towards you in a glinting blur.

MOTIVATION: To take sharp or shiny things; if people are carrying the things and won't give them up, they'll try to kill the people beforehand.

DIFFICULTY: Risky if you attack them as they're swooping from on high; if you can corner them, they're Standard.

RESISTANCE: 4

PROTECTION: 0

RESOURCES: Scrap metal (D4, Haven), Occult gewgaws at their bower (D6, Occult).

EQUIPMENT: Sharp things tied to their beaks and claws (D6; D6, Brutal when they're swooping).

DOMAINS: Wild, Desolate, Occult.

FEMALE HARPY

NAMES: None that you would understand or be able to pronounce.

DESCRIPTORS: Wrenching the head off a struggling Hound; Cackling in four or five voices at once; Laying a clutch of eggs in the roof of an abandoned house.

MOTIVATION: To kill, taste blood and lay eggs in safe places where they can hatch.

DIFFICULTY: Risky

RESISTANCE: 13

PROTECTION: 1

RESOURCES: If you kill it before it crumbles, a Harpy Heart (D10, Occult).

EQUIPMENT: Hideous talons (D8, Brutal).

SPECIAL: If the Harpy inflicts Minor **Blood** or **Mind** fallout, it restores D4 stamina; it restores D6 if it inflicts Major or Critical fallout.

DOMAINS: Wild, Desolate.

HEARTSBLOOD BEAST

These were animals once, but the energies of the Heart and generations of breeding have changed them into something protean and terrible. The smallest are the size of mice (they can shift their bodies into insubstantial shadowstuff, making them nearly impossible to hunt), but those that will pose a threat to delvers tend to be the size of stray dogs, feral pigs or scavenging foxes.

The Heart has no care for the original function of the creature's limbs and organs. It's common to see inverted creatures, their spines broken and bent, skittering crablike towards their prey. The limbs of others wither away, their ribcages blossoming out to form centipede-like legs that carry them forwards instead. A normal-looking deer might have, on closer inspection, no discernable mouth on its head; it's only when it squats over food and disgorges its entire stomach from a ragged maw on its underbelly that it becomes apparent that something's wrong.

Some heartsblood creatures were never normal to start with. In the same way that the Heart is a collection of memories and fears made solid, these animals are flesh-echoes spun from the nightmares of the inhabitants. A bear has never made its way into the Heart, and yet there is one here – or a simulacrum of one, stitched together out of meat and dreams, a ragged imitation of a half-remembered glimpse.

Folk stories persist of heartsblood creatures turning up to help injured travellers, especially if said travellers are favoured of the Heart; these are mostly lies.

There are two profiles here: one for smaller animals (dogs, cats, goats) and one for larger beasts (bears, deer, really big pigs).

NAMES: None that they use themselves, but the townsfolk in the Heart will ascribe titles to particularly infamous beasts: Red-Tooth, Shadow, Fat Jack.

DESCRIPTORS: A skeleton shifting uneasily in an ambulatory sack of flesh; A dog with shark-like rows of teeth that undulate and spasm; An emaciated pig on unstable legs of bone.

MOTIVATION: Mostly to survive and protect their young; but some have inscrutable motives implanted in their brains by the Heart, making them behave in unpredictable patterns.

HEARTSBLOOD BEAST

DIFFICULTY: Standard

RESISTANCE: 5

PROTECTION: 0, usually; 1 if it's particularly fierce.

RESOURCES: Often: Meat and fur (D6); Rarely: Curious and unique bones (D10, Niche).

EQUIPMENT: Teeth and claws (D6).

DOMAINS: Wild, Warren.

GREATER HEARTSBLOOD BEAST

DIFFICULTY: Risky

RESISTANCE: 10

PROTECTION: 2

RESOURCES: Often: Meat and fur (D8); Rarely: Curious and unique bones (D10, Niche).

EQUIPMENT: Massive claws, jagged teeth, suckered pseudopods (D8).

DOMAINS: Wild, Warren.

FALLOUT: COMPANION. [Minor/Major, Echo]

Seeing you as a fellow creature of the Heart, the beast comes to your aid. While this might be useful in the short-term (as it defends you from attackers, feeds you from its breast/regurgitates food into your mouth, leads you to safety, etc.) it will be a problem in the long term. Unless you or a friend kills it (and it will be very upset if you try), it will break into havens to kill people and pets, then bring you their mutilated corpses as gifts.



HEARTSEEDS

The Heart experiments. It has limitless power that some say even it doesn't understand how to use. The shifting tunnels of the City Beneath and the malleable reality down there is one piece of evidence for this theory; another is heartseeds.

These nodes of Heart energy are quietly birthed as wriggling, pallid maggots the size of a child's forearm. They crawl from cracks in the earth, coalesce in forgotten cupboards and bury themselves secretly in the bodies of dead men. Once they feel like they're in a good enough position, they will form a fleshy cocoon and pupate into something greater: a microcosm of the Heart itself, a testing ground designed to fail. As the cocoon swells and writhes, the area around the heartseed will begin to change. Walls twist and bend, water drips upward and animals crawl into ritual positions around it as they choke on their own liquefied organs.

If undiscovered, the seed will grow and bloom into a flower of sorts. By this point the area around it will be behaving as if it were one tier deeper than it actually is, and reality will be coming apart at the seams. Gibberish words etch themselves into the



walls; fields of broken glass hang in midair, glinting like stars; fire burns cold, or not at all; sound is plucked from the mouths of speakers and funnelled towards the centre of the space.

After a while, the flower will die. Someone will kill it in an attempt to normalise the surroundings or sell it to a collector, or it will be unable to sustain its pocket of unreality and wither away. But the Heart learns from it, if indeed it can be said to learn, and adapts its approaches to be more efficient next time. (Or perhaps more poetic? More terrifying? It is hard to understand what the Heart wants, or if it can want at all.) Heartseeds are akin to delvers in this respect: tendrils of something vast and other, exploring a strange environment and trying to bend it to their will.

Approaching and handling a blossoming heartseed inflicts **Echo** stress – D8 on average, with more for those who try to pluck it out of the ground and transport it elsewhere. An intact and blooming heartseed is a D12 resource with the appropriate domain, and can be used to power

rituals and blessings as though it had the Occult and Religion tags. A heartseed in its larval state is worth D10, because they often die during their metamorphosis if transported.

APPEARANCE

The appearance and effect of a heartseed depends on the domain it is pupating in:

CURSED: A purple-black fleshy heart the size of a fist, strung up with sticky red cables of flesh and tendon, beating erratically. The Vermisian Sages say that you could pluck it out and, if you were quick enough, replace someone's heart with it. This would be a terrible and very exciting way to die.

DESOLATE: A patch of raw nothing sitting uneasily in a space where it simply cannot be – everything has to be something, and yet this exists (or, rather, doesn't exist). It is best described as a sickening sensation that is felt in the stomach when observed; a void that

doesn't quite hurt your eyes to look at, but makes them feel strained, as though you've been crossing them. **Desolate** heartseeds attract the nihilistic worshippers of the Hungry Deep, who are eager to try and observe unalloyed nothingness. They will protect a nascent bloom with their lives.

HAVEN: A drow child, huddled and shivering, at the centre of the chaos. They are rooted to the floor, and their palms are affixed to their clutched forearms with a thick, fibrous paste. They babble incoherently, recycling words they've heard whilst in their larval state. They are able to tell your name by looking directly into your eyes; this is the only real trick they know.

OCCULT: A book or scroll with arcane-looking writing on it; a language you can half-read, or symbols that flit on the edge of your understanding. The pages are vellum-like and the words on them are, from a scholarly point of view, absolute bunkum. They hold no relevance to any ongoing esoteric theories, reference no known beings and don't follow even the most basic ritual practice. But in the City Beneath, they work – to an extent. They use blood and bone magic akin to those practiced by the witches of Hallow, but they don't require the user to be infected to cast them.

RELIGION: An altar to no god in particular. Unlit candles give off a sickly, wan light regardless, and the images of saints and hallows seem to have been drawn by someone with only a passing understanding of humanoid anatomy. Close examination of the altar reveals it to be made of calcified bone and porous stone, and it's covered in an astringent salt that inflicts wild hallucinations on anyone who gets it on their skin.

TECHNOLOGY: A ticking, whirring clockwork device made from organic materials. Cogs are studded with teeth, belts wrought from loops of hair and skin, "glass" covers are transparent membranes. Though they look imperfect, each error and aberration is perfectly replicated, leading to a machine that is asymmetrical but staggeringly precise.

WARREN: A carpet of slowly undulating and shifting mould that seeks out any biomass it can consume – fungus, primarily, but carrion and rotting plant matter are also good. At the centre of the slime colony is a writhing waist-high mass of yellow mould. It covers an area the size of a house in a thin layer of sticky acidic matter that eats away at everything it touches. Attempts to burn out the heartseed result in it panic-sporing, flooding the air with caustic cells in an attempt to escape.

WILD: A plump lotus flower, writhing with energy, emitting waves of soporific musk. Animals will rush to feed on the nectar and pollinate it, which is inevitably fatal. The heartseed uses them as raw materials, controlling them with translucent feelers and rebuilding them into something new, which enjoys a brief and frantic life.

MARKET SERF

In the twisting depths of the Red Market (p. 154), gangs of followers devoted to their Incarnadine masters carve out territory with bludgeon, sword and shot. To these serfs, their master is a godlike figure; they were all riddled with debt, and the Incarnadine saved them and their family from ruin in exchange for service. There are many households living comfortably in the lower levels of the City Above thanks to the good work of the Incarnadines and the bloody empires of trade and murder protected by their loyal serfs.

NAMES: Nux Ab-Crowfer, Quin Ex-Hypatia, Boswell Of-Tennant (Serfs take their master's given name as their surname, usually with a prefix.)

DESCRIPTORS: Pushing jagged shards of coins into their gums to act as teeth; Bears records of their master's financial transactions like a banner; Chants price lists like sacred mantras.

MOTIVATION: To bring heaping bounties to the feet of their splendid and gracious lords.

DIFFICULTY: Standard

RESISTANCE: 5

PROTECTION: 0, or 1 for favoured serfs

RESOURCES: Often: A few bloodied nail-like coins (D4, Haven); Rarely: Something you could use as leverage against their master (D10, Religion).

EQUIPMENT: Rusted, jagged blades (D6, Unreliable); one per group will carry either a blessed

coin-firing blunderbuss (D6, Point-blank, Spread, One-shot) or a heavy club studded with sacred transactions (D8, Tiring).

DOMAINS: Warren, Religion.

FALLOUT: AN AUDIENCE WITH OUR LORD.

[Major, Fortune, Blood] You are exhausted and outnumbered, and dragged before one of the lords of the Red Market to receive an offer you cannot refuse.

MIRROR SPIDERS

In the dim and distant past of the world, a god fled into the Heart, fatally wounded from a thousand cuts. Shattered and broken, it turned into a thousand spiders, each with a shard of mirror on its back in a unique shape. These spiders fled through the Heart to try to evade capture from the god's enemies.

It worked; the spiders were not found. Each is a godling in its own right, and each cultivates a sect of zealously devoted spiders and other, lesser insects around itself. They know that they can eat each other to gain power, and that they cannot die from old age. The largest and most powerful mirror spider has eaten seventy or so of its kin, and is the size of a dinner plate. (It is in the possession of a High Matriarch of the Church of the Moon Beneath, who uses it to do her hair; the spider believes the relationship to be a sort of marriage.)

Mirror spiders themselves aren't much of a threat, unless they're huge. The real danger comes from their suicide cults of mad insects ready to give their lives for the living god that walks among them. That, and the fact that should they gather together, they'll become a full-scale god once more.



NAMES: Each has a fragment of the true name of their original god; the sort of unwritable syllables that leave a bad taste in your mouth and smoke hanging in the air.

DESCRIPTORS: Residing in a tiny temple of discarded newspaper; Sitting beneath a miniature idealised portrait of themselves, created by their followers; Has stuck shards of mirror onto their back to look more impressive to other spiders.

MOTIVATION: To find and consume other mirror spiders. If you can find someone who can speak to them, they're often willing to bargain.

DIFFICULTY: Standard

RESISTANCE: 6 per swarm – you can crush any individual member of it without bother.

PROTECTION: 4. Weapons that hit many insects at once (brooms, burning torches, etc) ignore this protection, but Piercing weapons don't.

RESOURCES: Each mirror spider is worth between a D6 and D12 resource, depending on the size and complexity of the mirror on their back. The miniature holy books and devotional art pieces are of interest to collectors (D8, Niche) but worthless otherwise.

EQUIPMENT: Suicide Spiders that crawl into armour and down throats (D6, Piercing; each time it's used, remove 1 resistance from the swarm).

DOMAINS: Warren, Religion

PITCHKIN

These poor individuals were kicked out of the factories in the City Above because they were too ill to work. Spireblack, the flammable tar-like substance that collects in the eaves of factories, got into their lungs and ravaged their bodies with a black-vein sickness. They fled to the Heart and were warped by its energy until they formed a symbiotic relationship with the poison. Instead of killing them, it made them stronger (and took away their higher reasoning).

NAMES: Each has a word marked on them which they now use as a name in their heavy, sussurating tongue: Vulpine, Wrath, Serrate, Quill.

DESCRIPTORS: Clinging to the underside of the ceiling with long black talons; Pausing to

cough and retch up lumps of tar; Huge, jet-black eyes glinting in the darkness.

MOTIVATION: The pitchkin only want spireblack; they won't bother you unless you threaten their supply. On occasion, traders carrying spireblack are attacked by bands of pitchkin.

DIFFICULTY: Standard

RESISTANCE: 7

PROTECTION: 0

RESOURCES: Spireblack reserves (D8, Technology)

EQUIPMENT: Filthy teeth and claws (D6)

SPECIAL: Pitchkin are extremely flammable. Fire inflicts D8 damage minimum when used against them; however, once a pitchkin is on fire, its unarmed damage increases to D8. There is a martyr caste that sets themselves on fire to protect the stocks, but these are rare.

DOMAINS: Technology, Cursed.

FALLOUT: EXPLODE. [Minor, Fortune] One of the pitchkin that you set alight explodes in a final wet thump. All nearby characters take D6 stress (Endure+Cursed to resist).

RED SAINT

These towering sentinels sit upon jagged thrones on the surface of the Red Moon (p. 172) and listen to the prayers of the faithful in their dreams. When roused from their slumber – usually by invasive delvers or rare incursions from rival heavens – they are terrifying to behold.

NAMES: Saint Hellisent, Hallow Magdelene, Hallow Prothadeus.

DESCRIPTORS: Carrying their own skin to illustrate the way they were martyred; Wrenching huge and rusted greatswords out of the ground and discarding them when they break; Bearing two additional sets of arms that glitter with jewellery.

MOTIVATION: To be left alone that they might hear those who pray to them.

DIFFICULTY: Standard, but see fallout below.

RESISTANCE: 16

PROTECTION: 2

RESOURCES: Burning Crown (D12)



EQUIPMENT: Rusted blackiron blades (D8, Brutal, Tiring).

SPECIAL: You can't kill a Red Saint without access to forbidden Rituals of Extinguishing – something that the Church of the Moon Beneath might possess. The worst you can do without is incapacitate them, but their wounds heal in minutes.

DOMAINS: Religion, Desolate.

FALLOUT: AWAKE. [Minor, Blood/Fortune] The sounds of battle draw the half-asleep saint to full consciousness. Increase its difficulty to Risky and its resistance by 8.

SIGNAL-BOX CULTISTS

The Vermissian still has functioning signal-boxes: tiny rooms with mechanisms and lights that stutter into life, attempting to direct a train network that long ago slipped into a parasite dimension. Most of the information they give out is nonsense, and Vermissian Knights steer clear of them with a wariness that borders on superstition. But tunnel-dwellers – the luckless souls who make their homes in the infrastructure – view them as blind oracles that whisper secret truths to those brave enough to listen.

The most devoted of these cults guard the signal-boxes, drape themselves in tattered raiments of the Vermissian (mouldering curtains from first-class carriages, rivets hammered into their bodies, implanted glass lenses over their eyes) and offer gibberish wisdom to vagrants in exchange for service or supplies.

NAMES: Haslam, Levier, Forneau

DESCRIPTORS: Limbs reinforced with rusted pistons with weeping sores at the entry points; Chanting the names of Vermissian stations, some of which exist; Blind, carrying a legless cultist on their back who directs them

MOTIVATION: To induct others into the cult, to trade for supplies, or to slit the throat of a Vermissian Knight and have them bleed out over the signal machinery.

DIFFICULTY: Standard

RESISTANCE: 4

PROTECTION: ○

RESOURCES:

Rusted but still-functional machinery (D8, Niche)

EQUIPMENT: Levers, wrenches and bent rails (D6, Tiring); A fragment of the true nature of the Vermissian (D8, Ranged, One-Shot – inflicts Mind stress).

DOMAINS: Technology, Warren.

There are a wide variety of similar mystery cults in the Heart: The Followers of the Midden Mistress, The Wretched Galvanic, The Seers of the One Moon. Aside from their domain and descriptors, they function identically in mechanical terms.

SOURCEBORN CONSTRUCT

These blurring storms of noise and steel are the guardians of the Source (p. 174). On occasion one might creep out in search of supplies (rare metals or silicates), but it's almost unheard of for one to leave their heavenly circuit.

NAMES: None in a language that you can understand or speak

DESCRIPTORS: A flickering blur of steel and carbon dust that forms itself into hexagons; A box which appears motionless until razor-sharp filaments spiral forth to maim you; A hovering obsidian orb that telekinetically flings objects around it with terrifying precision.

MOTIVATION: To protect and repair the mysterious sigils on the walls of the Source.

DIFFICULTY: Risky

RESISTANCE: 20

PROTECTION: 2

RESOURCES: Machine heart (D12, Technology); Impossibly keen metal to make sword-blades from (D8, Technology).

EQUIPMENT: Ultrasharp metal shards (D6, Brutal, Piercing, Ranged. When used by another, they gain the Dangerous tag).

DOMAINS: Technology

SKELETON COURTIER

In the depths of the Heart, the ancient burial mound of an unnamed King sits beneath a tree. He lives out his afterlife here in a sort of skeletal heaven, completely off his head on narcotic tree sap drunk from the roots above him. His court, a selection of similarly dead weirdos and lackeys, fight over access to the intoxicating sap in an effort to put up with his interminably long war stories.

NAMES: Ser Ethelren, Ser Fenswith, Lady Arablast.

DESCRIPTORS: Absolutely loaded on intoxicating tree sap and having problems holding it together; Bearing the crest of one of the noble houses of the City Above; Has arms and legs tied on with twine.

MOTIVATION: To hear interesting stories and brutally murder anyone who tries to steal their sap.

DIFFICULTY: Standard

RESISTANCE: 12

PROTECTION: 0 to 2, depending on whether they were buried in diaphanous gowns or ancient platemail.

RESOURCES: Tarnished but beautiful burial goods (D8).

EQUIPMENT: Ancient and rusted weaponry (D8, Unreliable)

SPECIAL: Their bony bodies lower the stress dice from edged weapons and bullets by 1 step, but increase the stress dice from blunt weapons by 1 step.

DOMAINS: Warren

TUNNEL BRIGANDS

Opportunistic thieves and killers who prey on vulnerable travellers for their valuables are most commonly found in the tunnels to the Home Nations, but there are no end of places where a gang of desperate people with guns and a lack of empathy can make a quick buck. They're not up for a serious fight, and are generally open to bargaining if you have something to offer that they can't just take from you.

NAMES: Jonjak, Pentekost, Mataline

DESCRIPTORS: Wearing stolen Yssian fashion, taken from refugees; Younger than they really ought to be for this line of work; Chest bound tight

with bandages, braces holding up their trousers.

MOTIVATION: To take money or valuables from folk using the tunnels to emigrate into the City Above; however, they're boisterous and insecure, so some will take any opportunity to prove their cruelty and superiority.

DIFFICULTY: Standard

RESISTANCE: 5

PROTECTION: 1

RESOURCES: Wedding rings, gold teeth, family heirlooms, silk scarves (D8, Illegal); a few doses of dagger, godsmoke or chum (D6, narcotic).

EQUIPMENT: Heavy-bore archaic pistol (D8, Brutal, Ranged, Loud, One-Shot), Wicked-looking knives (D6, Potent).

DOMAINS: Warren, but Brigands can be found anywhere there are travellers.

FALLOUT: ROBBED. [Minor, Blood/Fortune] You are knocked out, held at gunpoint or otherwise restrained by the brigands and your valuables are taken; lose an item/resource determined by the GM.

THE WALKING WOUNDED

Years ago – maybe even a century – the 33rd Regiment of the Allied Defence Force were sent into the City Below to pacify the Heart. Some of them went AWOL and would go on to form the Hounds as they are today; most weren't that lucky.

You hear tell of what happened as you work your way down a bottle of rotgut liquor and huddle around the trashfires for warmth. They are horror stories even for denizens of the Heart: legends of unimaginable cruelty on the part of the 33rd's mad aelfir officers, themselves protected by shimmering wards and implanted saints' bones, marching at the head of columns of deranged and mind-blasted soldiers. You hear whispers of doomed assaults on heartsblood enclaves and encroaching angels; of the walls of the City Beneath coming alive and crushing – chewing – the poor bastards to pulp; of the flesh and bone of the troopers coming untethered and rewriting itself in hideous new shapes. The worst thing, they say, is that the least fortunate of all never died. They can't. In their final moments of torment and confusion and panic, they bonded with the eternal energy of the Heart.



You'll see them at the edge of a haven: rendered senseless, bandages over ruined eyes, hands on each others' shoulders, limping in a line to Goddess knows where. If you're brave enough to approach them, you'll realise that they aren't a line of soldiers – they're all one mass of flesh, hand-stumps fused to shoulders, ancient iron pistols melded with puckered skin and twisting bone. Some are still following their original mission: to dig trenches, repel invaders or take enemy positions and slaughter everyone inside. Most are just trying, blind and broken, to get home.

NAMES: Somewhere in the depths of their minds they still remember their names, but their mouths are too twisted to pronounce them.

DESCRIPTORS: Medals fused into chest; Bandages made of crumbling skin covering their sores; Dragging a heavy jezail that's melded with their arms.

MOTIVATION: To get home, which is a hopeless endeavour, because everyone they know died decades ago. Many believe they're still at war with whoever they meet, but you might be able to convince them otherwise. Some, accompanied by their insane and undying aelfir officers, are still attempting to fulfil their original missions.

DIFFICULTY: Standard – they can't see or hear properly, but they can sense movement uncannily well.

RESISTANCE: 4 for each "surviving" member of the squad; most have around resistance 20.

PROTECTION: 2

RESOURCES: Nothing of value.

EQUIPMENT: Jagged bone spurs and knives (D6); Rusted archaic firearms (D8, Ranged). Items removed from the walking wounded corrode completely within minutes, making them unusable by others.

DOMAINS: Cursed, Desolate.

WRETCH

The Tunnels of Wet Filth (p. 146) are home to some of the most wretched and disgusting creatures that the Heart has to offer. A lot of the inhabitants keep them as pets, and an enthusiastic breeding/surgery program has ensured a wide variety of absolutely horrible monstrosities.

NAMES: Gronk, Chrysanth, Felice.

DESCRIPTORS: It was once four dogs, but now it's melded together; A crocodilian shadow, barely seen; A snorting, finned piglike creature with a horrible wide mouth.

MOTIVATION: To eat delicious legs poked under the surface of the filth, or to perform "tricks" (usually eating delicious legs) for their masters in exchange for treats (further delicious legs).

RESISTANCE: 6

PROTECTION: 2 when they're under the surface, but 0 if you can get them onto dry-ish land.

RESOURCES: The creatures and the garbage they swim around in are useless outside of the tunnels, but inside it they're praised with a reverence that makes them (D6, Religion) items.

EQUIPMENT: Dirty teeth and claws (D6, Degenerating); Retching bile (D6, mark stress to **Supplies**).

DOMAINS: Warren

FALLOUT: SUBMERGED. [Minor, Blood/Fortune] You are pulled beneath the surface of the filth and begin to drown; increase the dice size of all stress you take by 1 step. When (if) you get out alive, remove this fallout.

LEGENDARY ADVERSARIES

BLIGHT UNENDING: THE BASILISK

The basilisk (and there is only ever one, because what creature this wretched could ever hope to breed) wants a friend. It longs for the security of companionship; the feel of a body against its own; a comfortable routine, a smile, a single kindness.

However, the basilisk is the most reprehensible thing imaginable. It is a protean mess of flesh, cancerous growths, scar tissue and weeping interstitial fluid. It rarely moves above a slow crawl, since it loathes itself so much it can scarcely bear to lift its own legs. It smells like spoiled milk and is so ugly that light refuses to touch it; its very gaze is enough to crack rocks and shatter glass. The entire thing is loaded with venom and poison so potent that birds flying overhead will tumble out of the air and hit the ground stone dead.

Sages of the Heart believe it is an experiment on the part of whatever intelligence rules the domain: an attempt to understand the concept of venom, poison or corrosion. It is raw walking disgust and death. It is not predatory; it eats carrion, which is usually made up of other creatures overcome by its power and already rotting away as it approaches them. It seems to seek out other creatures from curiosity rather than hunger.

Each time it dies – from starvation or from being torn apart by something that cannot bear its presence a second longer – it is born again, even more venomous and wretched in some vile pit in the bowels of the Heart. Again, it slowly works its way towards the surface world in search of companionship.

Just approaching the same area as the basilisk requires characters to make an

Endure+Cursed check. Failure inflicts D6 **Blood** or **Supplies** stress (or D4 on a partial success) in the form of the characters' body and equipment degrading as they approach.

A second, risky **Endure+Cursed** check is required to get within range of the thing, this time inflicting D8 stress on a failure (D6 on a partial success). At this range, the evidence of the basilisk's corruption will be apparent: dead plant-life,



the rotting corpses of small animals, crumbling stone and a rancid stench. At the centre, the basilisk sits cloaked in shadow, occasionally taking a step forward or issuing a pathetic croak.

Finally, attacking the creature in any way constitutes a dangerous action that inflicts D10 stress on a failure or partial success, but any success or partial success will kill it. Once dead, the creature becomes marginally easier to tolerate; collectors of particularly virulent poisons will pay handsomely for the fluids extracted from its corpse (D12, Cursed, Dangerous). In addition, the cured skin of a basilisk is said to provide protection from all toxins – even otherworldly ones – when worn, but wearers are treated with the same extreme loathing as the original creature. They will be barred from havens, pathways will crumble underneath their feet and the world itself will seem to turn against them.

Delvers do not have to attack the creature (although: they will want to, as even looking it at fills them with compulsive loathing) and can instead attempt to make friends with it. This will kill them.

NICODEMAI SHADOW-DAMNS- THE-SEEDLINGS: THE GORCON

About fifty years ago there were a sect of ludicrously wealthy aelfir in the City Above who, during meditation on the concept of mask-wearing as dictated by religious doctrine, suddenly truly understood the power of the uncovered face. They believed that, as the moon reflects the sun, the aelfir's faces reflected the glory of heaven itself. Mortals, unable to withstand the



staggering grace of the Solar Pantheon, would turn to stone if they looked upon one uncovered.

This wasn't true in the slightest – provably false, in fact – but a combination of unwavering aelfir pride and the sort of black magic that gets passed around at high elf parties meant that they made it true. At first, they used their power to turn favoured lovers or pets into perfect statues, forever frozen at the moment of death: never aging and preserved perfectly. Somewhere along the line the wrong council member's son was turned to stone, people got upset and the sect were exiled from their lofty positions in Spire and driven into the undercity.

Still ludicrously wealthy, they hired guides, claimed land and established a presence in the Heart. Their powers grew ever-stronger, augmented by the loose reality of the place, but they were growing older by the day while their lovers were still pristine and perfect in stone. In an effort to maintain their beauty, members of the cult began to “marry” one another. At the culmination of the days-long ceremony, they would lift each other's veils and gaze into their loved one's eyes until both turned to stone. All of the sect paired up – all except one.

Nicodemai Shadow-Damns-The-Seedlings is the last surviving member; it has been years since the last pair married and he was left alone. In that time, he has erected mirrors all over the sect's dilapidated estate; he spends his waking hours staring into them, desperately trying to turn himself to stone. He is growing more decrepit by the day, his supplies have long run out, and he sustains himself on rat-flesh and dirty water. He can turn any living thing he sees into stone (indeed, he can't help but do it) aside from himself. He is rotting to pieces, terribly lonely and needs to make himself perfect before it's too late.

DESCRIPTORS: Dragging in another statue to “watch” him perform; Angriily smashing mirrors by hurling plates and furniture at them; Jabbing himself in the thigh with pins to keep himself awake; Hunting rats blindfolded, in an effort not to turn them to stone before he can eat them.

MOTIVATION: To turn to stone; he's quite mad but willing to accept help in exchange for access to his vast supplies of hidden occult knowledge.

DIFFICULTY: Dangerous – if he looks at you, you turn to stone.

RESISTANCE: 9

PROTECTION: 2

RESOURCES: Arcane gewgaws and charms (D6, Occult); Partially-broken, creepily-accurate statues of other sect members (D8, Occult, Heavy); Cheap stimulants (D6, Haven).

EQUIPMENT: Dire gaze (D8, Ranged). If you can cover or damage his eyes, this drops to D6.

SPECIAL: His hidden occult books contain a staggering amount of knowledge, and are worth an enormous amount to the right collector (D12, Occult) but killing him won't get you access to them – you'll have to bargain.

DOMAINS: Occult, Cursed

CAROTID FOREST: THE HYDRA

There's an old story – everyone knows it – about a huge amphibious lizard with many heads on many long necks. It smashes villages apart and eats travellers and livestock, bursting from shallow-seeming water to ambush its prey. Every time you chop through a neck, two more grow instantaneously from the stump; a clever hero works out that if you cauterise the neck wound, it can't regenerate heads.

That's just the story, though. In reality, things got out of hand because said clever hero didn't turn up in time. The great lizard, as stupid as it was, worked out that it could generate new heads and necks by mutilating itself – so why should it wait until someone came at it with a sword? It experimented gingerly at first, carefully severing one neck and caring for the nascent heads that emerged, but its confidence grew until one day it descended upon its own flesh in an orgy of ripping and tearing. A hundred new heads blossomed from the body. They were hungry and their teeth were sharp; they fed.

The rampage lasted for a few months, and at the end of it, the lizard was unable to move due to the enormous weight of its own necks. But it didn't need to move: it was bigger than ever before, the necks longer and more dextrous. Its body grew fat and cankerous as it juddered and spasmed in the depths of its lair.

That was decades – maybe centuries – ago. Over time, the lizard has eaten everything within

range. Few creatures approach the forest of gently swaying, moss-covered trunks that sprout from the cracked earth, but on occasion a foolish animal or desperate traveller will seek shelter or nourishment there. As the ancient and starved brains of the lizard sense its arrival, the “trees” will snap down with terrifying speed and rip the poor unfortunate to shreds with slavering jaws.

DESCRIPTORS: Creaking gently in a breeze that’s not there; What appears to be fruit is a blossom of dark-red heartsblood eyes on a neck; Singing in a keening wail to imitate distress or mating calls of other species (even humanoid ones) to lure in prey.

MOTIVATION: To eat!

DIFFICULTY: Standard on the outskirts, and Risky further in.

RESISTANCE: 6 per neck; there are over a hundred necks in Carotid Forest, but they have a maximum range of about twenty feet.

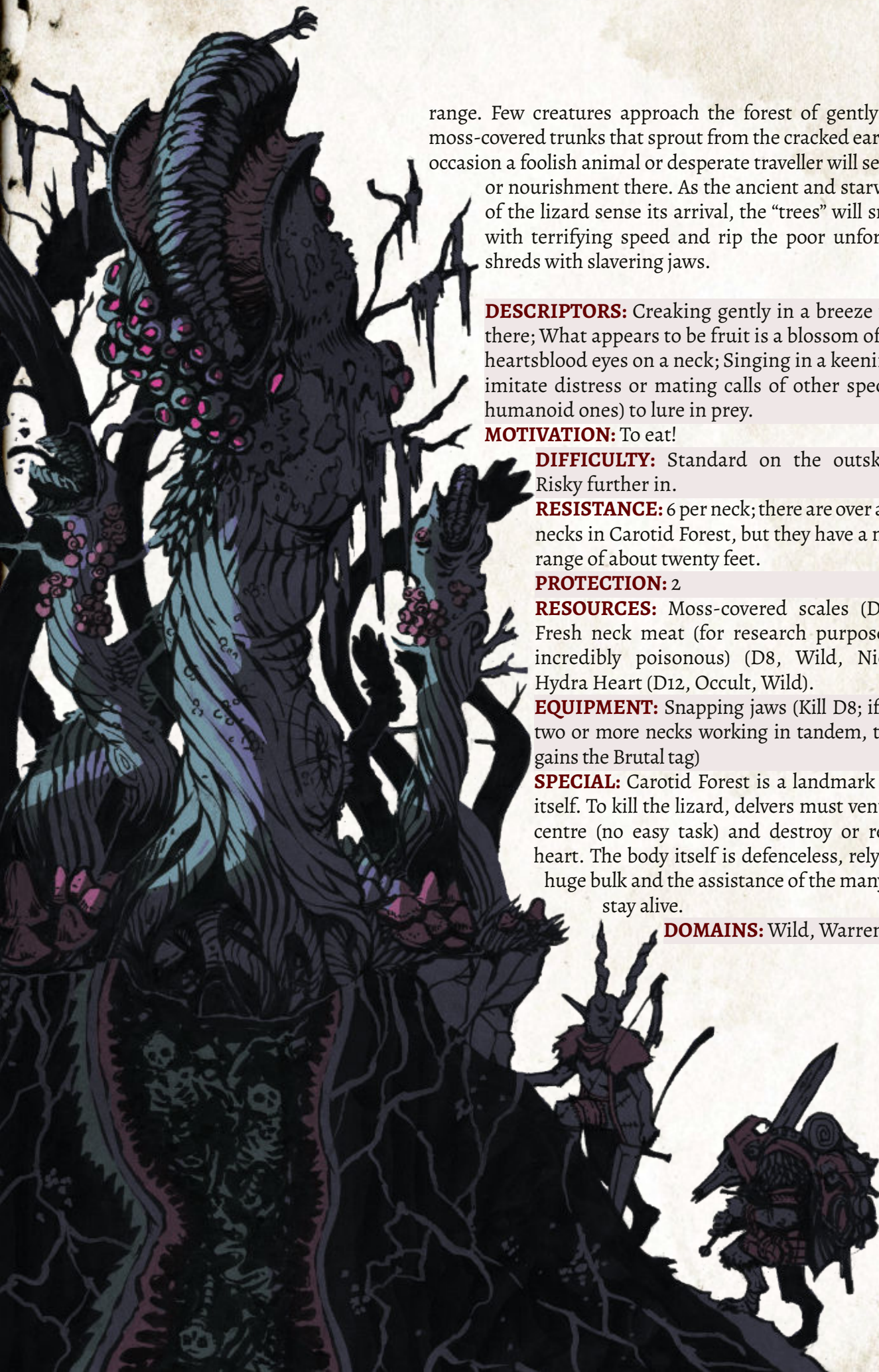
PROTECTION: 2

RESOURCES: Moss-covered scales (D6, Wild), Fresh neck meat (for research purposes, as it’s incredibly poisonous) (D8, Wild, Niche), the Hydra Heart (D12, Occult, Wild).

EQUIPMENT: Snapping jaws (Kill D8; if there are two or more necks working in tandem, this attack gains the Brutal tag)

SPECIAL: Carotid Forest is a landmark in and of itself. To kill the lizard, delvers must venture to its centre (no easy task) and destroy or remove its heart. The body itself is defenceless, relying on its huge bulk and the assistance of the many heads to stay alive.

DOMAINS: Wild, Warren.



LADY SALVATIOUS GRYNDEL: THE HUNTRESS

House Gryndel, one of the noble families of dark elves that rule the distant western nation of Ys, adores a hunt. It was Lady Salvatious Gryndel who spearheaded the trend of descending into the wildest and most dangerous places of the world to track and kill prey. She holidayed in the merciless barrows of Whitecross, harpooned skywhales with the wind elves in the mountains of Spur, and hunted the skeletal Wvyern Undying across the trackless deserts of Nujab.

But satisfaction eluded her, and she found no suitable challenge in the natural world. She opted to descend into an unnatural one instead: the Heart. Here, where reality rubbed thin, surely she would find something worthy of her skills?

Salvatious Gryndel was last seen about sixty years ago. In her place stands something altogether more fearsome than that fierce drow matriarch: The Huntress, peerless tracker of the wild places of the Heart. The spatially-linked Hunting Clubs she set up before her transformation are still standing, and each of them leaves an empty ceremonial chair by the fire should she deem it necessary to return.

The Huntress tired of beasts long ago. There was no creature she could not find, no hide her spear and arrows couldn't pierce, no animal intelligence that surpassed her own.

Instead, she found people who she felt deserved punishment (or reward). With ancient Gryndel magics augmented by the potent ichor of the hearts she ripped from elder deep-gryphons, she transformed these people into beasts.

It's not clear what counts as "deserving" in the Huntress' eyes. Perhaps she picks great hunters for the challenge, or only the most cunning and cowardly people to act as the ultimate prey. There's also a rumour that she punishes those who harm women, and more than one woman in the Heart carries an amulet that



she claims grants the protection (or at least the retribution) of the Huntress. But maybe it's something to do with the colour of her prey's eyes. No-one knows for sure.

By the time you learn that the Huntress has taken an interest in you (you see a flicker of her in the tree-line, or a warning shot slams into the wall behind you) it's already too late. She has laced your food with chemicals that twist your spirit and open you up to her sorcery; she has sung ancient songs stolen from the throats of godbeasts to you while you slept; she has slipped bone-charms amongst your possessions. The change has already begun.

Soon, your body will warp and distend into that of a beast. Sometimes it's a specific animal, but she likes to be creative and will often meld traits from different creatures into a single chimera. She will leave your hands intact and give you weapons that she has made herself: things of wood and sinew and metal scavenged from those she has fought before. She will sound her horn, and then the glorious hunt will begin.

DESCRIPTORS: Sawing the head off a stag that used to be an Incarnadine; smoking a pipe as she sits beside a smouldering campfire; shooting an arrow into your shoulder rather than your head in an attempt to be sporting.

MOTIVATION: To claim the greatest of trophies.

DIFFICULTY: Risky

RESISTANCE: 15

PROTECTION: 3

RESOURCES: Rifle (see below), Several lifetimes' worth of trophies (D12, Wild).

EQUIPMENT: Bistouri custom long-arm rifle (Kill D10, Debilitating, Extreme Range. Wounds caused by this weapon are always clean and do not damage any trophies that may be claimed from the target. Without access to the Huntress' stocks of ammunition, the weapon becomes Limited 5.)

DOMAINS: Wild.

FALLOUT: MARKED. [Minor, Blood/Mind] The huntress can sense you at any distance and through solid surfaces. This is not exact, but any attempts at stealth against the Huntress become Dangerous.

FALLOUT: WILDEST HUNT. [Major, Echo/Mind] The huntress twists your physical form into a bestial chimera. Your voice becomes animalistic and broken, and your appearance is horrifying to almost anyone who sees you. While under the effects of this curse you cannot communicate with anyone not also suffering this fallout, and most people will attack you on sight. However, you gain the Evade knack "Flee the Huntress."

THAT-WHICH-ESCAPES: THE MINOTAUR

Sufferers of the Labyrinth Curse – a mimetic virus that compels people to build complex mazes around things that they believe to be important – are pretty minor compared to the rest of the problems in the Heart. On occasion a group of delvers will return to a haven to find that it's been surrounded by rows and rows of walls and traps, but compared to the crimson unreality of Angels or the shuddering wrongness of heartsblood beasts, it's nothing they can't handle. The real difficulties come when the labyrinth is complete.

All labyrinths are reflections of the capital-L Labyrinth: a Fracture where something great and dark and terrible was sealed away a very long time ago. When a labyrinth becomes sufficiently dangerous and complex, it acts as a doorway to the ur-Labyrinth and the thing inside subsequently tries to escape.

Here's the good news: the thing (called That-Which-Escapes, or The Minotaur) is so large that it cannot easily fit down corridors that people have constructed for their own use. It is impossible to tell how tall it is, because no-one has ever seen it standing up. The first sign that it is approaching are the sounds of titanic dislocating joints and booming howls of pain deep within the labyrinth, as it struggles to pull itself from its own domain and into the City Beneath. From



there, as it scrapes and squeezes its way onward, an unlucky traveller might see a hand the size of a doorway, fingers questing for purchase or a single huge, mad eye staring through a window in search of a route through. Eventually, anyone near the labyrinth will be able to hear its cries as the thing wrenches and hauls its giant body through the crushing environs of the maze.

It is humanoid, with pallid skin and bristly dark hair. It hates the labyrinth and wants to get out more than anything, but despite its massive strength, it can't destroy the place – it's unable to damage anything that's part of the maze.

You can't fight the minotaur, per se; it's simply too big. If you damage the labyrinth or collapse it on top of the creature, you run the risk of making its escape easier. You can reinforce the labyrinth, perhaps, or make it simpler to sever its connection to the capital-L-Labyrinth. You can maybe drive it off, but you have to be worse than whatever it's running away from. You could bargain with it, but that comes with its own risks: it could flatten you by accident, and to get close enough to its face to speak to it properly, you'll need to bypass its grasping, battered hands.

So far, it's not been able to escape the confines of its prison, but what would happen if it did doesn't really bear thinking about.

RULES SUMMARY

ROLLING

BUILD DICE POOL

- Roll 1D10
- 1D10 for relevant skill.
- 1D10 for relevant domain.
- 1D10 for relevant mastery.

ROLL DICE POOL

REMOVE DICE FOR DIFFICULTY

- Remove no dice if the action is Standard.
- Remove the highest dice if the action is Risky.
- Remove the two highest dice if the action is Dangerous.
- If the dice pool is reduced to 0 or fewer, roll 1D10 – succeed at a cost on a 10, otherwise fail.

DETERMINE SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Compare your highest remaining dice to the following chart:

- 1:** Critical failure (take double stress).
- 2-5:** Failure (take stress).
- 6-7:** Success at a cost (take stress).
- 8-9:** Success (take no stress).
- 10:** Critical success (increase outgoing stress dice by 1 step).

INFLECT STRESS

If not tackling an adversary or delve, skip this step. On a 6 or higher, inflict stress to a relevant adversary or delve using the dice size of character's equipment.

RESOLVE STRESS AND FALLOUT

- If player character marked stress, GM rolls a D12 and compares it to their total stress.
- If result is higher than total stress, no fallout is suffered.
- If result is lower than total stress and between 1-6, character takes Minor fallout and clears all stress in the associated resistance.
- If result is lower than total stress and between 7-12, character takes Major fallout and clears all stress.

PROTECTION

When you mark stress to a resistance, reduce the total stress taken by the value of the protection.

SKILLS

- COMPEL:** Threats, lies, flattery or diplomacy.
- DELVE:** Climb, crawl, explore, plot a route.
- DISCERN:** Look, smell, touch, hear (maybe taste on a bad day).
- ENDURE:** Resist the effects of the Heart on your body and mind.
- EVADE:** Run away, dodge attacks, lose pursuers.
- HUNT:** Track something or someone down.
- KILL:** Murder people and creatures.
- MEND:** Repair, build, jury-rig, heal.
- SNEAK:** Hide, blend in, conceal items.

DOMAINS

- CURSED:** Actively harmful locations.
- DESOLATE:** Wastelands and abandoned towns.
- HAVEN:** Settlements where people live, work and form communities.
- OCCULT:** Hidden knowledge and black magic.
- RELIGION:** Gods, and things worshipped like gods.
- TECHNOLOGY:** Machines, buildings and devices
- WARREN:** Cramped, dense corridors.
- WILD:** Wilderness, vegetation and animals.

RESISTANCES

- BLOOD:** Physical exhaustion, pain, blood loss and injury.
- ECHO:** Twisting of the body and mind by the unreal energies of the Heart.
- MIND:** Madness, instability and weirdnesses.
- FORTUNE:** Bad luck, incompetence and over-confidence.
- SUPPLIES:** Loss of resources, damaged equipment and debt.

When you mark stress to a resistance, reduce the total stress taken by the value of the protection.

FALLOUT

Each time you mark stress, the GM rolls a D12 and compares the result to your current total stress. If they roll equal or lower, you suffer fallout: Minor fallout if they roll 1-6, Major fallout if they roll 7+. GM chooses which fallout to apply and whether to combine two fallouts of the same level to upgrade them. Two Majors equal a Critical fallout, which kills you (or worse).

DIFFICULTY

The GM will tell you the difficulty of an action before you roll – Standard (remove no dice), Risky (remove highest dice), Dangerous (remove two highest dice) and Impossible (action fails automatically).





SUGGESTED MEDIA

Here are some of the inspirations we drew from when writing Heart. We hope they will provide that same inspiration when delving through the City Beneath.

- Annihilation by Jeff Vandermeer (the book and the film, also the soundtrack is good)
- As Above, So Below (2014 film)
- Avalon by The Huntress and the Holder of Hands (2017 album)
- Bloodborne (PS4 game) by From Software
- Borders by Emptyset (2017 album)
- Ficciones by Jorge Luis Borges
- Fire on the Velvet Horizon, Veins of the Earth (Patrick Stuart & Scrap Princess)
- Gardens of Ynn by Emmy Allen
- Gyo, The Enigma of Amigara Fault and Uzumaki by Junji Ito
- Into the Wyrld and Wild by Charles BF Avery
- Mixtape by BLVCK CEILING (2016 album)
- Necromunda (tabletop game)
- Roadside Picnic (Arkady & Boris Strugatsky)
- Salvation is a Deep Dark Well by the Builders and the Butchers (2009 album)
- Shrines by Purity Ring (2012 album)
- Silent Hill 2 (PS2 game) by Team Silent

THANKS TO:

The Vermissian Collective for helping every step of the way, reading bad drafts and good drafts, and being the most wonderful and supportive group an RPG designer could ask for. Without them, this would be a much worse book.

The RRD Discord for their enthusiastic support in making the Heart their own.

Tim Lerman for the Feral Psychopomp concept.

John Stavropoulos for the X-Card.

Mark Carter for the six temples of Damnou concept.

Ghorrn (p. 147), commissioned by Joshua Wise

The Plaza of Silicate Flowers, Misallocated (p. 161), commissioned by Tim Rudloff

Papilious Both (p. 166) commissioned by Matt Tryer and Edward Scott

Gnoll Incursion Team (p. 188) adopted by Cole Stephan

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alie Ash, Nathan, Nathan Brown, Nathan Decker, Nathan Haines, Nathan Joy, Nathan Swift, Nathan Wilkinson, Nathaniel "Nagashofchaos", Nathaniel B. Heironimus, Nathaniel Hattrick, Nathaniel James, Nathaniel Lanza, Nathaniel MacDonald, Nathaniel Panitch-Daughton, Nathaniel Wilson, Nbaer, Neal Dalton, Neall Raemonn Price, NecroNuke9, Neil, neil Anderson, Neil Mahoney, Neil Scott, Neil Webber, neko_cam, Nemanja Jerković, NeoShinGundam, Nethescorial, Nezumi, Niall O'Donnell, Nicholas Avenell, Nicholas Claaszen, Nicholas Irish, Nicholas Peterson, Nicholas Rowe, NicholasBrucks, Nick, Nick Bate, Nick Boughton, Nick Brooke, Nick D., Nick Doran, Nick Hopkins, Nick Lang, Nick Roland, Nick S, Nick Soapdish, Nick Stinchcombe, Nick Swanson, Nick Zakhar, Nicklas Andersson, nico tessel, Nicola Went, Nicolai Hestehave Worsøe Jørgensen, Nicolas, Nicolas Aguirre Nankervis, Nicolas Brian, Nicolas Duchesne, Nicolas Voss, Nicole Powers, Niibl, Nikhil Nair, Nikola Adamus, Nikolaj Munk, Nikolas Kieker, Nikolay Slavov, Nimaël, NinjaDuckie, Ninola, nisshan, No Pun Inc., Noah Kunin, Noel Warford, Not a Bumblebee, Not_a_Clue, notyours, Nullpunkt, Nuno Teixeira, Nurbh, Obscure Injoke, Oddtwang, Odin, Odyssey, Oh Seung Han, Ohad, oldstevo, Oliver Gerlach, Oliver Hackmann, Oliver Korpilla, Oliver Maschmeier, Olivia, Olivier Bos, Olivier Royer, Omar, Omar Baig, Omari Brooks, Onehandstan, Ong Eng Yian, Onno Ebberts, Oscar Forslund, Otis Martin, Ouin Ouin, Owen Thompson, Owlglass, Ozzy Beck, PABLO, Pablo Barria Urenda, Pablo Saldaña, Pacific, Palimrya, Pam Sartain, Pandatheist, Paolo Carnevali, Paolo Zanella, PaoloSpaziosi, Parke Hultman, Parva Ovis, Pascal Olet, Pascal Siddons, patchbeardpirate, Patrick Bethke, Patrick Dunn, Patrick Knowles, patrick maietta, Patrick Monroe, Patrick Murphy, Patrick O'Melveny, Patrick Schwieren, Paul, Paul Abell, Paul Echeverri, Paul Forsythe, Paul Gibson, Paul Goldenstein, Paul Gregory, Paul Kalupnieks, Paul Maitland, Paul McBride, Paul Mitchener, Paul Rivers, Paul Scherer, Paul Thompson, Paul Tomes, Pauline Chan, Pawel, Pearson Bolt, Pedro Garcia, Pedro Rivera, Penny Patterson, Pepe Dargallo, PepperTitan, Pete Shaw, Pete Taylor, Peter, Peter "Wiggles" Underwood, Peter Björklund, Peter C. Romine, Peter Felder, Peter Griffith, Peter Haderlein, Peter Holland, Peter Mazzeo, Peter Queen, Peter Richard Scott Brooks, Peter Shepherd, Peter Stening, peterwallis, peterwolflowe, Petr Svarny, Petter Wäss, Phantasmanomicron, Phenomen, Phil Corpuz, Phil Hanley, Phil Smith, philip hindley, Philip Junek, Philip Rogers, Philip Tweddle, Philipp Ottensamer, Philippe Niederkorn, Philippe Robert, Phill Cameron, Phill Massey, Phillip Ames, Phillip Bailey, Phillip M Anderson, Phillip McGregor, Phillip Nicholson, Phillip Sacramento, phwilder, Picks-at-Flies, Pieter, poirier, Pontus Börjesson, poochi, Preston Bruce, PST, purpledragonwitch, PurpleDynamite, Quadrat, Quasi, QuillHound Studios, Quinn Wongkew, QuirkyAI, R Woodward, Rabihi Ghandour, Rachael, Rachel, Rachel Bennett, Rachel Cumiskey, Rafael Ferreira, Rafael García, Ragnar Hill, Rain Mockford, Rajan Khanna, Rajnesh Jindel, Rand Brittain, Randal Bernhoft, Randall M Holmes, Randy Mosiondz, Rapa93, Raphael Andrade, Raven Callahan, Ray Olsen, Raymond Bennett, rbpm, Recknar, Reg Mudford, Reiley, "Reise, Reise", Remi, René Schultze, Ricardo Nacarini, Rich Harkrader, Rich Winslow, Richard, Richard Christopher August, Richard Coulthard, Richard Fannon, Richard Fryer, Richard Greene, Richard Gropp, Richard Harrison, Richard Hughes, Richard Lawrence, Richard Lees, Richard Mundy, Richard Rivera, Richard Schwerdtfeger,

Richard Tamalavitch, Rick R, Rickard, Rikku San, Riley, riley common, RJ Simpson, Rob Abrazado, Rob Donoghue, Rob Maiden, Rob Sansone, Rob Saronson, Robb & Char Irrgang, Robert, Robert, Robert, Robert, Robert Anderson, Robert Bivens, Robert Daley, Robert De Luna, Robert J Schwalb, Robert Karlgren, Robert Kukuchka, Robert Murray, Robin, Robineau Olivier, Roger Penny, Rogro, RogueWolven, Roland Bahr, Rolf Böhm, Roni Ortolan, Ronn Langton, Roonel, Rooster Hogfish, Rory Murphy, Rose Davidson, Ross Hall, Ross Lavelle, Ross Payton, Ross Shaw, Rowan Speight, Roxual Barger, Roy Chua Yue Hian, rschweik, Ruben de Zeeuw, Ruderabbit, Russ Brown, Russ Williams, Russell Andrews, Russell Hoyle, Russian Guyovich, Ryan, Ryan, Ryan Boelter, Ryan Cicak, Ryan Dukacz, Ryan Hill, Ryan Mannix, Ryan McWilliams, Ryan Patterson, Ryan Percy, Ryan W Sims, Ryan Young, Rykey Goldsmid, Ryo, S Christopher, S.A. 'Birdy' Hannon, Sakurai Shugi, SalmonOfWar, Sam Armstrong, Sam Bergus, Sam Bruun, Sam Button-Harrison, Sam Chabot, Sam Chan, Sam DeFabbia-Kane, Sam Gorton, Sam Hulett, Sam Jones, Sam Lamont, Sam Sarjant, Sam Sleney, Sam Slocum, Sam Smith, sam watson, Sam Zeitlin, samaieron, Samantha Keaveney, Samantha Pillersdorf, Samantha Streeter, Samantha Sutton, Sameen Saberi, Samir, Sampson Moon-Wainwright, Samuel, Samuel Huylebroeck, Samuel Rayment, Sanae, Sandor, Sandra Fabiano, Sandro Grazi-ani, Sanne Kalkman, Sarah, Sarah, Sarah, Sarah, Sarah Bear, Sarah Doombringer, Sarah Frisk, Sarah Williams, Sartec, Schmee the cat, Schouwey, scoff, Sconce, Scott, Scott A, Scott Dicken, Scott Fitzsimmons, Scott johnson, Scott McMillin, Scott Michelson, Scott Stannett, Scott Weber, Scott_W, Screwberry, Sean Carroll, Sean Clancy, Sean Gray, Sean Jack, Sean Leventhal, Sean M Dunstan, Sean Martin-Iverson, Sean Munro, Sean Nyhan, Sean Pagliarulo, Sean Smith, Sean Young, Sebastian, Sebastian D., Sebastian Helton, Sebastian Jones, Sebastian Roth, Sebastian Schreier, Sébastien Mary, Sebastien Zander, Secondhand, secondrean, Selene, Seph Steel, Serephor, Sergi Montaner, Sergio Rodriguez, Sergio Silvio Herrera Gea, SerPe, Seth Hartley, Seth Johnson, Seth Maxfield Flagg, Seth Wiggins, ShadyShopkeep, Shane, Shane Doyle, Shane Jackson, Shane Preuit, Shannon M., Shanon Daly, Sharang Biswas, Shaun Gilroy, Shawn Gray, Shawn M, Shawn Polka, Shirasuna Hirokazu, Shoeless Pete Games, Shuna, Sian, Sid Sebastian Tanner, Sigil Stone Publishing, Silas, Silas Christoffer Petersen, Silas McDermott, Silverwing Prime, Simon, Simon, Simon Brake, Simon Laursen, Simon Moody, Simon Taylor, Simon Ward, Simone Maccapani, Sinuhe Shakkara, SirRageALot, SixOfSpades, Sizzlelean, Skye, Skyler Crossman, Smarre, Smith, sogeru, Sol Foster, Soleil Frondillon, Sonata, Soop-Om, soopadoopa, Sophia, Søren Moskjær Lauridsen, SoSo T, SoulMuppet Publishing, sp4rkfish, spacht, Spencer Campbell, Spencer Hobson, Spenser Isdahl, Spooky, Spyros Veronikis, squidraider, Stas, Stefan Hertenberger, Stefan L., Stefan Schloesser, Stefano Stradaoli, Steff Morris, Stephan Beyer, Stephane Lorek, Stephen, Stephen Faure, Stephen Jones, Stephen Masson, Stephen Ray, Stephen Smith, Steve Brown, Steve Burnett, Steve Bush, Steve Slater-Brown, Steven Danielson, Steven DeVito, Steven Humphries, Steven Koschuk, Steven Moy, Steven Post, Steven Tudor, Steven Warble, Steven Ward, Steven Watkins, Stew Wilson, StillStorming, stoichkov13, Stoo Goff, Striking Yak, Stuart Fairchild, Stuart Hall, Styrbjörn, Sunwalker, superbright, Super-guin200, Svante Landgraf, Swackidy, Swen Möglich, Sylvestre Picard, Sylvia, T, TaiyouInc, Tandy Larson, Tanner Delventhal,

Tapam, Tartan Collier, Tatyana Vogt, Taylor, Taylor Bleir, Taylor Leyhew, Taylor Martin, Taylor Perry, Taylor Sims, tchambli, TechnocratJT, Teebeutel, templar34, Teris, terriblefrog, Terrieux Hubert, Terry Cox, Terry Gilbert, Terry Herc, TGabor, Thalji, That Old Tree, The Duellist, The Freelancing Roleplayer, The K in Kalcium, The Lost King, The Rangdo of Arg, TheBenHatton, Theodore Gast, Thibaud, Thomas, Thomas Cole, Thomas Faßnacht, Thomas Fix, Thomas Frank, Thomas Hausman, Thomas Hume, Thomas J., Thomas Kirkendall, Thomas Lee Bunting, Thomas Masters, Thomas Minser, Thomas R., Thomas Robbins, Thomas Whitbread, Thorin Messer, Thorsten Schubert, Thot-5, Throjn, thryn henderson, Tim, Tim Baker, Tim Burrell-Saward, Tim Davies, Tim Davis, Tim Dubbelman, Tim Gonzalez, Tim Maytom, Tim McBu, Tim Pinington, Tim Rudloff, Timothy, Timothy Burston, Timothy Grant, Timothy McGowan, TinyShenanigans, tirpen, Tobias B. L. Jørgensen, Tobias Kröger, Todd Agthe, Todd Stephens, Tom 'palfrey' Parker-Shemilt, Tom Gielly, Tom Graves, Tom Hughes, Tom Kitchin, Tom Lommel, Tom Pouncey, Tom Shen, Tom Sherlock, Tom Whitbrook, Tomas DeCou, Tomas Seymour-Turner, Tommaso De Benetti, Tommaso Verde, Tommy Lee, Tonda, Tony Love, Torrie Smith, touraj, Travis J I Corcoran, Travis Stout, Trevor, TreVorpalsword, trickybee, Trip Space-Parasite, Tristan, Tristan Cohen, Trivia, trjacobs, TRN-SHMN, TS Luikart, Tsubame, Tubstout, Tuisku Taivainen, TwoSharpBlades, Tyler Crumrine, Tyler Diaz, Tyler Hollingsworth, Tyler Rankins, Tyler Riegle, Ukyou Strauss, uriel shashua, Ursidice, Valence, Valerie, Valthek, Vanessa Prinsen, Vasilis Liaskovitis, VaultAge, Vaux Walker Adams, vendemiaire, Ventress Vines, Victor Allen, Victoria Hyde, Victory Condition Gaming, Vincent Mason, Violet Henderson, Voidgazer, Vojtech Pribyl, VonPlat, W Ryan Carden, Wade Cottell, Wade Rickett, waelcyrg, Waldviech, walter, Walter Anfang, Walter S. Smith, Wanderer, Wasitora, Watertext, weirdbones, Wes, Wes Fournier, Wesley Griffiths, Whitman, Whitt, Wil Alambre, Wil Cornish, Wilhelm Kugelberg, Will, Will Comolli, Will Johnson, Will P, Will Strinz, William, William Blackstock, William Chung, William Cohen, William Dee Humrich, William Hochella, William L. Munn (Adept Icarus), William Lee, William P, William Schucker, William T Carmichael, William Thieme, William Valmus, wix_88, Wrathamon, Wright Rickman, Wyatt, Wythe Marshall, Xander Crowe, Xavier Nihil, xiavn, xidle2, XIG Games, Yann Raoul, Yannick Massa, Yelise, Yuri Lukach, Zach, Zach Hunt, Zach Miller, Zach Reisetter, Zachary, Zachary Derenne, Zachary Petriw, Zack Norwig, Zafos, zak, Zak McClendon, zak ralston, Zane Dempsey, Zane Jones, Zeb Berryman, Zebby Orchard, zebra Matt, Zed Lopez, Zero1Nine, Zhenglong Zhou, Zimrilim, zpg, Zyphe

INDEX

A

Abide With Me (Ability)	44
Absolute Stasis (Ability)	39
Absorb Memories (Ability)	34
Action results table	8, 73
Addict (Ability)	54
Adept (Ability)	32
Advanced Training (Ability)	47
Adventure (Calling)	16
Enlightenment (Calling)	18
Adversaries	175
Aelfir (Ancestry)	14
Aetheric Field (Ability)	63
A King Demands (Ability)	59
All Doors As One (Ability)	33
A Mind of Many Doorways (Ability)	67
A Moment Eternal (Ability)	58
Anathema (Ability)	63
An Eye For the Strange (Ability)	52
Angel (Adversary)	176
Angelic (Ability)	30
Annihilation (Ability)	38
A Perfect Machine (Ability)	37
Apisambulation (Ability)	37
Applied Research (Ability)	64
Arcane Rebreather (Ability)	62
Areas of Opportunity (Ability)	53
A Red and Bloody Business (Ability)	52
Armour	95
Armour Plating (Ability)	62
As Above So Below (Ability)	69
Ascendancy (Ability)	68
Ascension (Ability)	45
Assume Debt (Ability)	54
Athane	144
Automaton of Burden (Adversary)	176
Avatar of Flame (Ability)	43
Avatar of Moonlight (Ability)	44
Avulse	147

B

Back Pocket Arcana (Ability)	57
Backstab (Ability)	53
Back-to-Back (Ability)	64
Basilisk, The (Legendary Adversary)	200

Been Everywhere (Ability)	57
Benevolent (Ability)	60
Berzerk (Ability)	29
Better Part of Valour, The (Ability)	47
Better Safe Than Sorry (Ability)	52
Black Knight (Ability)	62
Blessed Deprivation (Ability)	42
Blessed Toxin (Ability)	39
Blessing (Ability)	44
Blighted, The (Adversary)	178
Blighted (Ability)	29
Bloodbound Beast (Ability)	28
Blood Calls For Blood (Ability)	68
Blooded, The (Adversary)	179
Bloodied But Unbroken (Ability)	34
Bloodless (Ability)	39
Blood-Quiet (Ability)	67
Blood Sacrifice (Ability)	34
Blossom Within The Skull (Ability)	38
Body of Water (Ability)	60
Bonds	98
Books of Lore (Ability)	67
Boons and Banes	101
Bountiful (Ability)	60
Bounty Shared (Ability)	30
Briar	157
Brisk Conjuraton (Ability)	59
Broker (Ability)	53
Bunker, The	158
Burnt-Out Occultist (Adversary)	179
Buying and selling	95
Buy Off (Ability)	54
By Any Means (Ability)	57
Bypass (Ability)	68

C

Cairnmore	159
Callings	9
Call of the Wild (Ability)	27
Calm (Ability)	69
Candidate (Ability)	54
Carnival, The (Adversary)	181
Carrion-Pig (Adversary)	181
Cast Asunder (Ability)	43
Charms and Wards (Ability)	67

Cheat Sheet	207
Chimeric Strain (Ability)	29
Chollerous	143
Classes	11
Cleaver (Class)	27
Close Quarters (Ability)	47
Coin-Gold Blood (Ability)	59
Combat	78
Condemn (Ability)	48
Conditioning (Ability)	54
Connections	102
Cost of Doing Business, The (Ability)	52
Crave (Ability)	54
Creating a character	11
Creative Acquisitions (Ability)	52
Creative Book-Keeping (Ability)	53
Crimson Mirror (Ability)	68
Crucible (Ability)	67
Cult of Knives (Adversary)	182
Curious (Ability)	69
Curse of the Sky Court (Ability)	58
Custodian (Ability)	47
Cycle of Debt (Ability)	54

D

Dark City, The	170
Dark Flowers (Ability)	38
Darkling Eyes (Ability)	27
Dead Eye (Ability)	53
Deadwalker (Class)	32
Death Follows Close (Ability)	32
Deathless (Ability)	32
Debtor's Reds (Ability)	54
Deep Apiarist (Class)	37
Default stress by tier	73
Delerium Spike (Ability)	39
Delves	100, 133
Derelictus	136
Descent (Ability)	33
Desperate Measures (Ability)	28
Deus Ex Machina (Ability)	65
Difficulty	72
Dimensional Bastion (Ability)	39
Dire Portents (Ability)	69
Dirt Under the Fingernails (Ability)	32

Distinguished Lineage (Ability)	67	Final Form (Ability)	70	Hard as Nails (Ability)	47
Divinity (Ability)	67	Fire of the Red King (Ability)	59	Harpoon (Ability)	29
Domains	7	First to the Front (Ability)	64	Harpy (Adversary)	189
Dominion (Ability)	28	Flightless Owl Hive (Adversary)	185	Harvest, The (Ability)	33
Double Duty (Ability)	48	Forced (Calling)	20	Harvest (Ability)	54
Dragon-Killer (Ability)	64	Forest, The	168	Harvest Bazaar, The	150
Drow (Ancestry)	12	Forewarned and Forearmed (Ability)	48	Haunts	130
Druid Legbreaker (Adversary)	183	Fractured Form (Ability)	28	Damaging	131
		Fractures	165	Upgrading	131
E		Fragmentary Recollection (Ability)	34	Healing and removing stress	76
Echoes (Ability)	34	Fragment of Lekole (Ability)	44	Heart Itself, The	126
Echoes of the 33d (Ability)	47	Fragment of Limye (Ability)	44	Heartsblood (Ability)	27
Echoes of the City Beneath (Ability)	30	Fragment of Lombre (Ability)	44	Heartsblood Beast (Adversary)	190
Ecstasy (Ability)	58	Frenzy of the Sky Court (Ability)	59	Heartseeds (Adversary)	191
Eight Heavens, The	168	Frontier Etiquette (Ability)	57	Heartsong (Calling)	22
Elsewhere	165	Fulcrum (Ability)	50	Heart-wise (Ability)	68
Emergency Supplies (Ability)	49			Heart's Sight (Ability)	44
Encampment (Ability)	48	G		Helixican Burst (Ability)	63
End of the Line (Ability)	65	Galvanic Crucible (Ability)	64	Hellwalker (Ability)	63
Endurance Training (Ability)	64	Get Behind Me (Ability)	64	Herald of the Drowned Queen, The	
Enter the Grey (Ability)	32	Ghastling Plain	159	(Ability)	60
Enthrall (Ability)	69	Ghorrin	147	Herald of the Red King, The (Ability)	60
Entropy (Ability)	34	Ghost (Adversary)	187	Herald of the Stone Chorus, The	
Equipment	92	Ghoulish Grasp (Ability)	34	(Ability)	60
Esoteric Cartographer (Ability)	33	Glorious Resurgence (Ability)	44	Heretic (Class)	42
Ethereal Touch (Ability)	34	Glory (Ability)	45	Hidden Passageway (Ability)	34
Everlasting Stand (Ability)	50	Gnoll (Ancestry)	15	High Rise	151
Extinguish (Ability)	35	Gnoll Incursion Team (Adversary)	188	Hive, The (Ability)	37
Executioner (Ability)	48	Godbeast (Adversary)	189	Hiveborn (Ability)	37
Explorer (Ability)	32	Goddess' Gifts, The (Ability)	42	Hoard, The	152
Exsanguinate (Ability)	69	God of Corpses, the	137	Homecoming (Ability)	49
Extinction Bow (Ability)	29	Gorge (Ability)	59	Horned (Ability)	29
Eyes in the Back of Your Head (Ability)	53	Gorgon, The (Legendary Adversary)	201	Horrendous Bite (Ability)	29
		Grail Armour (Ability)	33	Hound (Class)	47
F		Grail Road, The	169	Human (Ancestry)	13
Faithful Until The End (Ability)	29	Grave Duty (Ability)	42	Hungry (Ability)	69
Fallout	80	Great and Terrible (Ability)	69	Hunted (Ability)	64
Critical	87	Greed of the Red King (Ability)	59	Hunter (Ability)	44
Major	83	Grey, The	169	Hunter of the Damned (Ability)	37
Minor	80	Grim Reaper (Ability)	33	Hunter's Eye (Ability)	29
False Hallow (Adversary)	184	Grin Station	148	Huntress, The (Legendary Adversary)	204
Familiar (Ability)	69	Grip Station	138	Hydra, The (Legendary Adversary)	202
Fearless (Ability)	39	Gut Instinct (Ability)	28		
Feed (Ability)	70			I	
Fell Metabolism (Ability)	28	H		Imperfect Balance (Ability)	39
Feral Psychopomp (Adversary)	184	Hallow	149	Implacable (Ability)	68
Filed Away (Ability)	39	Hang Station	150	Implacable Faith (Ability)	44

- Incandescent Communion (Ability) 43
 Incarnadine (Class) 52
 Incursion (Ability) 50
 Inexorable (Ability) 34
 Infernal Claws (Ability) 35
 Inflict (Ability) 54
 Inhuman (Ability) 28
 Initiative 78
 Inquisitive Burrowers (Ability) 39
 In The Thick of It (Ability) 47
 Intoxicant (Ability) 38
 Intrusion (Ability) 38
 Invest (Ability) 54
 Invidious Spectre (Ability) 34
- J**
- Jack of All Trades (Ability) 53
 Judge (Ability) 48
 Junk Mage (Class) 57
 Jury (Ability) 48
- K**
- Karmic Ledger (Ability) 54
 Keep Smiling (Ability) 49
 Keep Your Heads Down (Ability) 64
 Kill Count (Ability) 47
 Kiss of the Drowned Queen (Ability) 59
 Knacks 7
 Knight Protector (Ability) 62
- L**
- Labyrinth 139
 Lair (Ability) 69
 Landmarks 130
 Tier 0 136
 Tier 1 137
 Tier 2 146
 Tier 3 157
 Last-minute Intervention (Ability) 64
 Last Orders 153
 Last Rites (Ability) 33
 Last Train, The (Ability) 65
 Left Hand of the Goddess, The (Ability) 42
 Legendary (Ability) 49
 Legendary Beast (Ability) 30
 Liar's Burden (Ability) 42
- Liminal (Ability) 34
 Limping Onward (Ability) 49
 Liquid Courage (Ability) 48
 Litanies of False Power (Ability) 57
 Lost It All (Ability) 53
- M**
- Machines of Dust, The 154
 Maddening Storm (Ability) 59
 Maestro (Ability) 69
 Magi-Mal's Domain 164
 Majestic (Ability) 39
 Major Organisations 123
 Make Do (Ability) 53
 Many Eyes (Ability) 38
 Map 102, 208
 Marked for Death (Ability) 33
 Market Serf (Adversary) 193
 Mark of Hunger (Ability) 58
 Mark of Shadow (Ability) 58
 Mark of the Phantom (Ability) 58
 Mark of the Weaver (Ability) 58
 Marshal (Ability) 48
 Martyr's Blood (Ability) 43
 Maw, The 160
 Ministrations (Ability) 42
 Minotaur, The (Legendary Adversary) 205
 Miraculous Intervention (Ability) 43
 Mirror-Spiders (Adversary) 194
 Momentum (Ability) 64
 Money Talks (Ability) 55
 Monstrous Appetite (Ability) 29
 Moon Garden, The 170
 Moon Grove 160
 Mutually Assured Destruction (Ability) 52
- N**
- Network (Ability) 55
 Never Saw It Coming (Ability) 53
 Nightmare Arrow (Ability) 29
 Nose-to-Nose (Ability) 49
 No Sympathy (Ability) 49
- O**
- Oath of Community (Ability) 43
 Oath of Fury (Ability) 43
 Oath of Sagacity (Ability) 44
- Oath of Tenacity (Ability) 44
 Old Blood, The (Ability) 68
 Omnipresent (Ability) 60
 Only the Finest (Ability) 59
 On the Run (Ability) 53
 On Your Feet (Ability) 49
 Our Glorious Lady (Ability) 48
 Outnumbering 78
 Overclock (Ability) 64
 Over The Top (Ability) 49
- P**
- Pack Hunter (Ability) 28
 Painless (Ability) 39
 Palace Multifaceted, The 172
 Papillious Both 166
 Pathfinder (Ability) 64
 Pathways (Ability) 55
 Penitent (Calling) 24
 Perfection (Ability) 39
 Perfect Resurrection (Ability) 70
 Perfect Structure (Ability) 38
 Perpetual Motion Engine (Ability) 65
 Phantom Lens (Ability) 63
 Pitchkin (Adversary) 195
 Pitchskin (Ability) 28
 Plaza of Silicate Flowers (Misallocated), The 161
 Pounce (Ability) 28
 Priest of Incarne (Ability) 53
 Pristine (Ability) 39
 Proliferation (Ability) 55
 Protection 75
 Protector's Gauntlet (Ability) 63
 Pulses 125
 Puncture (Ability) 64
- Q**
- Quartermaster Training (Ability) 48
- R**
- Ramblewyrd (Ability) 68
 Range 78
 Ranvess 144
 Ravening Knowledge (Ability) 57
 Reaper's Strike (Ability) 34
 Recharge (Ability) 63

- Redcap Grove 140
 Red Dominion (Ability) 68
 Red Feast, The (Ability) 27
 Red Market, The 154
 Red Marketeer (Ability) 53
 Red Moon, The 172
 Red Queen, The (Ability) 70
 Red Saint (Adversary) 195
 Refuge (Ability) 68
 Regal (Ability) 39
 Rejuvenation (Ability) 29
 Release the Swarm (Ability) 37
 Religion in the Heart 122
 Resilient (Ability) 69
 Resistances 5
 Resonance Chamber Five 140
 Resources 90
 Retch (Ability) 69
 Righteous Rhetoric (Ability) 43
 Rite of Placidity (Ability) 43
 Rite of Vigilance (Ability) 44
 Rogue Landmarks 164
 Room, The 164
 Round the Next Corner (Ability) 48
 Rule (Ability) 70
 Rules in Brief 8
 Rules in Detail 71
 Rules Summary 207
 Running the game 104
 Rust and Iron (Ability) 58
- S**
- Sacred Geometry (Ability) 39
 Sacred Object (Ability) 69
 Sacred Tattoo (Ability) 43
 Sacrifice (Ability) 57
 Salvacious Gryndel Hunting Club, The 165
 Sanctum of the Stone Chorus (Ability) 60
 Sanguinary Array (Ability) 63
 Scarlet Insight (Ability) 68
 Scars Like Medals (Ability) 49
 Scything Blow (Ability) 34
 Sergeant (Ability) 48
 Setting Primer 121
 Shadow (Ability) 33
 Shard of the Temple Door (Ability) 43
 Shared Visions (Ability) 68
- T**
- Sightless 156
 Signal-box Cultist (Adversary) 196
 Siphon of Fortune (Ability) 58
 Skeleton Courtier (Adversary) 198
 Skills 7
 Slumbering Depths, The 173
 Slumbering Eternal (Ability) 60
 Sonderwood 142
 Soothe (Ability) 34
 Soufri 162
 Source, The 174
 Sourceborn Construct (Adversary) 197
 Stabilisation (Ability) 39
 Stalwart (Ability) 63
 Stare Down (Ability) 49
 Steal the Night Away (Ability) 59
 Steam Vent (Ability) 64
 Steelbones (Ability) 63
 Step Between (Ability) 33
 Storyteller (Ability) 30
 Stress, Causes of 74
 Student of the Sages (Ability) 63
 Sudden Death (Ability) 34
 Suddender to Chaos (Ability) 39
 Sump Station 141
 Sunder the Veil (Ability) 35
 Superheat (Ability) 59
 Survivor (Ability) 33
 Swinefall 156
 Symbiotic (Ability) 28
- U**
- Trench-Fighter (Ability) 49
 True Form (Ability) 67
 Trypogenesis Chamber 156
 Tunnel Brigand (Adversary) 198
 Tunnel Rat (Ability) 63
 Tunnels of Wet Filth 146
 Twisting Territory (Ability) 28
- V**
- Ultimate Credit (Ability) 55
 Ultimate Debt (Ability) 55
 Ultimate Reward (Ability) 55
 Uncanny Biology (Ability) 38
 Unchaos (Ability) 39
 Union (Ability) 69
 Unmaking Claws (Ability) 28
 Unspire 168
 Unstoppable (Ability) 49
 Unwavering Faith (Ability) 43
- W**
- Valuable Asset (Ability) 53
 Venomous Hex (Ability) 39
 Vermissian Knight (Class) 62
 Vermissian Plate (Ability) 62
 Vessel (Ability) 28
 Viral (Ability) 54
- Walking Reliquary (Ability) 33
 Walking Wounded, The (Adversary) 198
 Warding Spells (Ability) 58
 Wardstone Nasonov 163
 Waxen Sigils (Ability) 38
 Weald and Woe (Ability) 30
 Well Station 157
 Well Travelled (Ability) 63
 Whispers of the Hive (Ability) 38
 Wild Hunt, The (Ability) 30
 Wild Witch (Ability) 68
 Wisdom Flows So Sweet (Ability) 38
 Witch (Class) 67
 Witch-spit (Ability) 68
 Words of Flame (Ability) 59
 Words of Grace (Ability) 43
 Wretch (Adversary) 199
 Wretched and Glorious (Ability) 58

HEART

THE CITY
BENEATH

BLOOD		
MIND		
ECHO		
FORTUNE		
SUPPLIES		

NAME _____

CLASS

CALLING

ACTIVE BEATS

RESOURCES

SKILLS KNACKS DOMAINS KNACKS

☐ **Compel** _____ ☐ **Cursed** _____

☐ Delve _____ ☐ Desolate _____

☐ Discern _____ ☐ Haven _____

☐ Endure _____ ☐ Occult _____
☐ Enslaved _____ ☐ Politics _____

☐ Evade _____ ☐ Religion _____
☐ Hunt _____ ☐ Technology _____

☐ Hunt ☐ Technology
☐ Kill ☐ Warren

☐ Kim _____ ☐ Warren _____
☐ Mend _____ ☐ Wild _____

☐ **Menu** _____ ☐ **Wind** _____

☐ **Sneak** _____

ABILITIES

FALLOUT

MAGES HOOKED ON ILLEGAL MAGIC, DESPERATE FOR ANOTHER HIT.
RUINS ANCIENT BEYOND RECKONING, OVERGROWN WITH BONE AND SINEW.
A SUNKEN MOON, FECUND AND GLORIOUS, THAT CALLS THE FAITHFUL EVER-DEEPER.
GLYPH-MARKED BEES THAT SWARM WITHIN YOU AND SEAL YOUR MADNESS UP WITH WAX.
DOWNTRODDEN MERCENARIES BEARING THE WEIGHT OF A LOST REGIMENT ON THEIR SHOULDERS.
REGAL WITCHES WHO CHANNEL UNEARTHLY POWERS THROUGH THEIR OWN DISEASED BLOOD.
VAGABOND KNIGHTS WEARING ARMOUR BRISTLING WITH BARELY-UNDERSTOOD MACHINERY.
CHTHONIC ANGELS THAT SING A SCREECHING, SCRAPING SONG OF RUST AND ASHES.

A RED WET HEAVEN SLUMBERING FITFUL UNDER THE CITY OF SPIRE.

THIS IS THE HEART: THE CITY BENEATH.

Heart: The City Beneath is a tabletop roleplaying game about delving into a nightmare undercity that will give you everything you've ever dreamed of - or kill you in the process. It is a dungeon-crawling, story-forward tabletop RPG that focuses on what characters have to lose in pursuit of their dreams in the chaotic darkness beneath the world.

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