

SIN

A SPIRE RPG
SOURCEBOOK

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NEW CLASSES, KICKSTARTER BACKER REWARDS

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The Cathedral of Our Glorious Lady: Pauline Chan

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The Many: Lio Keahna

Pilgrim's Walk and Lesser Cults: Viditya Voleti

SCENARIOS

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The Birth of Brother Harvest: Christine Beard

In the Hands of the Gods: Eleanor Hingley

CONTENT WARNINGS

Sin delves into the uses and abuses of power in a colonised city, and so it deals with a wide range of potentially upsetting topics. Here's a list of the topics covered in this book; each scenario also has a specific list of warnings for the particular topics it covers.

- **Mental health**, including addiction, claustrophobia, isolation, PTSD, and unreality.
- **Police**, including brutality, interrogation, imprisonment, and abuse of power.
- **Religious Extremism**, oppression, sectarian violence, cults and indoctrination, and suicide worship.
- **Violence**, including arson, burning, cannibalism, blood and gore, body horror, drowning, ethnic cleansing, firearms, scars and burns, self-harm and mutilation, terrorist bombing with civilian and religious targets, torture, warfare, and war crimes.
- **Sickness and medical horror**, including blood and gore, body horror, body modification, human experimentation, open sores, poisoning, physical disability, and surgery.
- **State violence**, including child soldiers, colonialism, cultural loss, genocide (historical, ongoing and planned), and slavery.
- **Vice**, including addiction, alcoholism, drug use, fraud, gambling, and slavery.

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INTRODUCTION

We've come a long way since *Spire*.

We were reading over the intro to *Strata*, our first sourcebook for *Spire*, where we talked excitedly about how the Kickstarter was funded in four hours. (We have Mary on hand to make sure that we always have a sensible funding goal, so that's definitely not an oversight on our part.)

The Kickstarter for *Sin* – this book, the one you're holding in your hands right now or looking at on a screen – took just under an hour to fund. And we asked for more money! The only logical conclusion to this series of events is that the next Kickstarter will be funded immediately upon launch, and the one after that before we launch it (though we're not sure reality can handle that).

This is all to say: we have an incredible community and readership. *Spire* is a setting that we dearly love, and it's been wonderful to see so many people get behind it so enthusiastically – not only with your own games and interpretations of the setting, but also through buying the books. You help us keep the lights on and put food on our collective table.

We handed over more control than ever to our writers this time around, and we're profoundly, deeply happy with what they've done. JP has fleshed out the strange-but-familiar districts of Red Row and the North Docks, while Basheer played with a wide variety of real-world details to strengthen the Order section. Plus, a superteam of writers with different backgrounds and experience have knocked the Religion section – arguably the most important, fundamental domain in *Spire* – out of the park.

And! There are two new classes, both of which are pleasantly weird, but we reckon they will slip neatly into any campaign you care to run. We also have three big adventures by some more cracking writers.

It's good, and we're very proud of it. And we couldn't have done it without you all. So: thank you for buying this book, and reading it, and hopefully making your own journeys into the strange, cruel, and beautiful world of *Spire*.

Yours,
Grant and Chris

A NOTE ON SIN

This book is an expansion designed to be used with the core book for *Spire: The City Must Fall*. While there's plenty of setting, style and interesting information for use in other games, the rules are all written assuming you're already familiar with the Resistance system as we use it in *Spire* – or at least that you have a copy you can use to look up the basics.

When we were naming this sourcebook – one that features Crime, Order and Religion – we struggled, because we have written ourselves into a corner where every hardback book we publish must have a single name, preferably beginning with "S." After much discussion, we replaced the working title of *God, Guns and Government* with *Sin*.

"Sin" is a loaded word. It carries with it a lot of negative connotations, such as the concept of one group of people saying another group of people are spiritually wrong for merely existing – not to mention the idea that all people are metaphysically dirty and must be purified through obeisance and ritual. Both of those are rubbish.

Spire is a fictional world but it draws heavily on our own – how could it not? – and, as such, there are parallels to be drawn and comparisons to be made. We have purposely kept the nature of sin within the city of *Spire* and the multifaceted faiths within as vague as we can, because a) with a canon this loose, we don't want players citing scripture at the table to defend their actions and b) that's how things tend to work in the real world with regard to interpretation of "right" and "wrong" when it comes to religion.

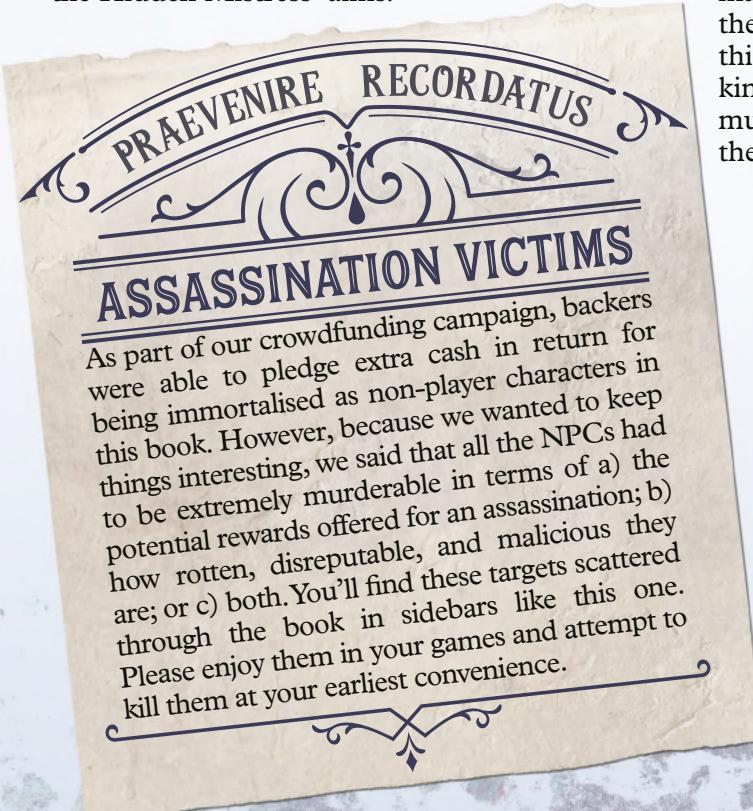
How deeply you wish to pursue the nature of sin in your game is up to you and your players – as with any difficult subject matter, there are safety tools detailed in the corebook (and many more online) that can help you navigate, or completely refuse to navigate, these difficult waters.

NEW CLASSES

The Morticians' Guild represents one of the strongest and most secure elements of drow influence within Spire. What was once a scattered group of corpse enthusiasts, death-god worshippers, and occult weirdos has become a crucial part of city politics and law since the high elves took the city.

While this is due in no small part to the popularity of their Undying surgery – a series of sacred medical procedures that freeze the subject at their current age – amongst the rich and famous, their legal rights to direct every funeral in Spire and their ownership of every corpse in the city give them tremendous sway.

The fact that they are the only profession permitted to end the lives of other citizens – via jurisdictional loopholes and the sword-points of their **Executioners** – is the reason why the Ministry has shown so much interest in them. Many of their members have been bribed, turned, or blackmailed into compliance with the Hidden Mistress' aims.



At the other end of the spectrum are the countless vagabond priests, false prophets, and divinely-inspired lunatics who proclaim a direct connection to the almighty. Pilgrim's Walk is littered with them. Even in the more secular districts, doomsayers and street preachers ply their trades on street corners and offer salvation at bargain rates, acting as earthing rods for the raw surplus of faith that swells within the city.

Some of these **Gutter Clerics** – a pejorative term coined by those belonging to more established religions – nonetheless wield considerable power, operating far from the rites and restrictions of commonplace religions and siphoning power from unknowing cosmic entities.

They play a dangerous game. Quite aside from drawing the wrath of forbidden, forgotten, or slumbering gods (gutter clerics have a higher rate of death from lightning strikes, even indoors, than any other profession in Spire), they are dabbling in forces that their aelfir masters would rather they didn't. Scouring their minds with arcane devices is the kind thing to do, but the aelfir are famously short on kindness; more often, they resort to quietly murdering those who would attempt to awaken their Old Gods.



GUTTER CLERIC

*'Azur! Charnel! Limyé! Incarne! Merhor! Great Damnou! Uh... Brother Harvest? Plür?
Is ANYONE listening up there?'*

You are on the cutting edge of Applied Theology. Wielding miracles granted by a dozen gods, you are somewhere between a field researcher and a metaphysical con artist. You trick forbidden, dead, or merely unpopular deities into blessing you with their aid – then hide from their sight before they realise what has happened.

CORE TRAITS

RESISTANCES: Mind +2, Shadow +2

SKILLS: Investigate, Compel

DOMAINS: Religion, Academia

REFRESH: Sacrifice something of worth to a god you have a connection with.

PC BOND: You've noticed a spark of divinity in one of the other player characters. Who is it, and have you told them about it?

NPC BOND: A friendly contact in the college of Applied Eschatology, the University of Divine Magic, or another even more esoteric institution. They may grant access to forbidden tomes, hidden knowledge, and the occasional musty safehouse.

EQUIPMENT:

Pick one set:

Home-made 'Pilgrim's Prayer' gun (**D3, Point-blank, Ranged, One-shot, Dangerous**)
'Cut-throat's Retort' razor (**D3, Concealable, Scarring**)

Or:

Reinforced illuminated multi-denominational holy text (**D3, Defensive, Surprising**)
Pocketfuls of holy symbols

CORE ABILITIES

PETTY COMMUNION. [Divine] *Small gods are desperate for any attention they can get.* Once per session, summon the small god of an object and talk with them. The less venerated the object, the less coherent the god.

Lesser or commonplace objects can only fathom base emotions, and have little concept of what it means to be a person. Highly venerated objects, on the other hand, can be haughty and dismissive.

BOOTLEG MIRACLE. [Divine] *You'll take a miracle from any god that's listening.* Once per situation, mark D3 stress to **Mind** or **Shadow**. Your next roll is made with Mastery.

DIVINE RETRIBUTION

GM: if you have a Gutter Cleric in your play group, it can be fun to use fallout to represent the vengeance of gods that were conned into performing miracles. You could use lightning strikes, terrible misfortune, temporary blindness, some sort of identifying mark or brand, and so on. Or, you can keep the relationship between gods and the real world distant and indistinct, and ignore the previous sentences completely. It's your game!



LOW ADVANCES: MINOR GODS

DABBLER. [Divine] *You have a back pocket full of prayers and oaths to a wide variety of gods; some of them even work. Choose any Low advance with the [Divine] tag from the Extra Advances section (Spire, p69).*

THE GHOST IN THE MACHINE. [Divine] *A gestalt divinity made from the vengeful spectres of a thousand industrial fatalities. Gain the Technology domain. You can mystically activate any machine or mechanism you can see by marking D3 stress to Mind. For D6 stress you can break it, interrupting its function until it is repaired.*

THE GODDESS OF SPENT SHELLS. [Divine] *A blind parasite godling, growing out of the strange faith of the Red Row Church of the Gun. Gain +1 Blood and the Fight skill. Firearms and explosives gain the Brutal tag when you use them.*

THE GOLDEN SERPENT. [Divine] *The wild deity of a bunch of hedonists, drunkards, and fools: they drink to excess and encourage their patron to inhabit their bodies. Gain the Low Society or High Society domain (decide when you select this power). When you get so wasted you can't remember what happened, mark D3 stress to Reputation. You awaken several hours later, either somewhere useful to the current mission or clutching something vital – GM's choice.*

IDOL SIPHON. [Divine] *The sorcerer-artists called Idols say that their power comes from talent and black magic; you believe that it comes from their legions of adoring fans. Gain the Deceive skill. Mark D6 stress to Mind or Shadow to take the form of the most famous person in the immediate vicinity until the end of the current situation. It's not a perfect simulacrum, and the person you're imitating knows something is wrong (even if they're not sure what).*

NECROFUSIMANCY. [Divine] *This cult believes the city of Spire once lived, but died long ago. They use hacked necromantic rituals to bring parts of it back to life. Gain +1 Mind. You can trick a passageway into leading somewhere else for a few seconds, but only for you. The more specific the place and the further away it is, the greater the stress you mark to Shadow (just anywhere else: D3; a particular type of location: D6; somewhere that's definitely safe: D8). Passageways must be of similar size for the spell to function without catastrophe, and you can bring allies along at a cost of +1 stress per passenger.*

PLÜRIAN HERESY. [Divine] *The great Toad-God Plür accepts all that is esoteric and strange into his monstrous gullet – though some of his priests believed that it should be they, not their master, who ate the treasures. Gain the Commerce domain. You can consume relics or items of other religious importance by marking D3 stress to Blood or Reputation, assuming the object is small enough to fit into your mouth.*

After you have consumed the item, you can mystically sense the followers of that religion within a small area (e.g. a market-place) for the remainder of the session. If you consume more valuable and revered items, you can sense them across a larger distance.

MINOR GODS

Spire likes gods. Not just the big ones, either – thousands of gods, frantic and scrabbling, newborn and desperate for followers, birthed raw and half-formed into the collective unconscious. Many of these godlings spawn and die upon the same day in response to some mis-spoken spell, mumbled prayer or inchoate longing, and are nothing more than metaphysical krill in the oceans of the heavens; but occasionally, an idea can take root and a fledgling church, or something akin to one, is formed.

These Minor Gods are imprecise and strange, and of little interest to “serious” researchers and theologists, but Gutter Clerics are far from what any university would consider serious. It is through bonding with these gods that Gutter Clerics may begin to understand the true power of channelling the divine – that for all their bluff and bluster, gods are pretty easy to fool when it comes to miracles.

MEDIUM ADVANCES: THE FORBIDDEN FAITHS

THE BEAST BEYOND THE WALLS.

[Divine] *In the frozen darkness beyond the town walls, a feral, vicious, and ravenous death waits. Gain the Pursue skill. Mark D3 stress to Blood to gain the tracking abilities of a predator. In addition to rolling with Mastery when you hunt someone down, you can recognise them by their scent.*

Mark D6 stress to Blood and consume a totemic object from a target to mark them. You can always see them and they can always see you: regardless of how much city is in the way, you see a spectral image of each other. Their difficulty counts as 0 for the purposes of you interacting with them. This effect lasts until the next new moon.

[Divine] *A campaign of secret executions by the [REDACTED] couldn't dissuade you from [REDACTED]. Now, you [REDACTED]. Once per session, when you [REDACTED] mark D6 stress to [REDACTED]; the area around you is [REDACTED] by [REDACTED]. Mark D8 stress to [REDACTED] to [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], scarring the city forever in your image.*

THE FIRE STOLEN. [Divine] *It is written that when the aelfir stole fire from the gods in ancient times, they stole it so comprehensively that a snuffed-out fire deity still hunts them in search of revenge. Mark D3 stress to Mind to cast this spell by speaking words of concealment and warding over yourself. You, and anyone nearby, reduce all Shadow stress by half (rounding up) for the remainder of the situation.*

Mark D8 stress to Blood to speak the secret name of fire aloud. Any target of your choosing that can hear it marks double the stress you marked.

LEKOLE'S FURY. [Divine] *The Red Moon God fills you with the fury of a bloodied saint. Gain the Fight skill. Mark D3 stress to Shadow to gain access to 3 additional slots in Blood for the remainder of the situation. At the end of the situation these slots are lost, and any stress allocated to them is removed from you. Mark an additional D3 stress to Mind after the initial spell to channel Lekole's wrath into your blows. For the remainder of the situation, you add your current Blood stress (including any in free slots) to the combat damage you inflict.*

THE FORBIDDEN FAITHS

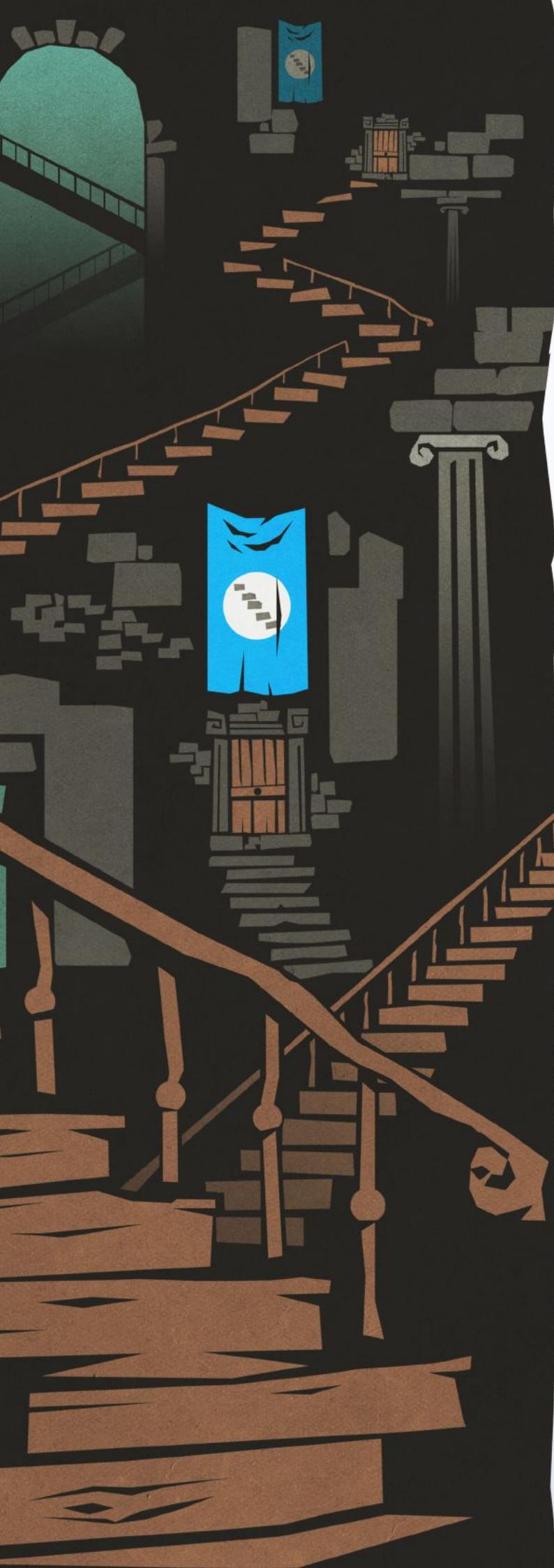
The aelfir allow free worship of most deities within the city of Spire, but there are a handful of religions that they have banned from the city entirely. Most importantly to the drow, they have outlawed worship of The Hidden Mistress (Lombré) and The Crimson Vigil (Lekolé), two of the three moon goddesses that form the triumvirate Damnou; this has lead to centuries of radicalisation as the faiths have been driven underground and changed into volatile, dangerous cults.

Many of the remaining forbidden faiths are associated with the Old Gods of the aelfir, and even mentioning their names aloud is illegal. These primal entities were feared, rather than loved, by their devotees - gods of starvation, predation, isolation and exposure, of the many ways that life in the bitter north is fragile and short-lived. Quite why the aelfir are so determined to scour out any notion of their old masters is unclear, but dark and terrible things lay waiting in the endless night of their homelands, and it might be wise not to draw their attention.

TOOLS AND METHODS

There is no college of Gutter Clerics, nor any uniform or standard equipment, nor any centralised canon or required reading - each and every one of them is making it up as they go along, operating with a mixture of robust experimentation and whatever education they managed to cobble together before working for an illegal paramilitary cult became the primary focus of their lives.

Still, there are similarities. Many of them drape themselves in as much religious iconography as possible, going to great lengths to wear icons and vestments from esoteric, rare and conflicting faiths; it is believed that miracles can be granted through sheer weight of holiness, rather than aiming in the direction of any specific religion. Books, whether the large leather-bound illuminated kind or the notebook filled-to-the-margins with scrawled findings kind, are perennially popular; and, it seems, to back up the image of lost knowledge and hidden wisdom, many Gutter Clerics take great pains to appear as though they are from anywhere other than Spire.



THE STILLNESS. [Divine] *Ancient aelfir priests of The Stillness held the ice of their homeland in high regard; it is constant, solid, unchanging. They strived to be as implacable themselves.* Gain +2 **Mind**. Once per session, clear D8 **Mind** stress or remove one ongoing **Mind** fallout from you or an ally within arm's reach as you coalesce your madness to conjure a brick of everfrost (see *Spire* p109).

LOMBRE'S GRACE. [Divine] *The drow goddess of hidden things blesses you with her sacred obfuscation.* Gain the **Sneak** skill. Mark D3 stress to **Mind** to cast this spell: a single person who you are currently looking at is unable to see you until the end of the situation. You're not invisible; you just don't register as out of place unless you do something exciting, like making a loud noise, attacking them, or breaking a window. You can mark D8 stress to **Mind** to extend this effect to all people who can currently see you, not just a single target.

[REDACTED]. [Divine] *They tracked you down and burned out the knowledge with [REDACTED], scarring [REDACTED] beyond recognition. But you still [REDACTED]. Once per [REDACTED], you can [REDACTED] when exposed to [REDACTED], [REDACTED] [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. In the aftermath, mark D3 stress to [REDACTED] to cling to your own sanity; mark D8 stress to [REDACTED] to [REDACTED] [REDACTED], instead.*

THE VASTNESS BENEATH. [Divine] *The aelfir believe not in an afterlife, but a before-life; trapped in sea-kelp, they drown undying in the Slumbering Depths until they earn a glorious existence in the lands above.* Mark D3 stress to **Mind** to conjure several barrels' worth of bitterly cold saltwater into your immediate area in a matter of seconds. As if placed under tremendous pressure, it sprays through gaps, boils up from grates and gutters, and spills from the ceiling in a torrent. Mark D8 stress to **Mind** to instead summon a flood of inky-black liquid from the waters beneath the Slumbering Deep. Eyeless things with too many teeth writhe and bite and twist within it, inflicting D6 damage to anyone caught in their path.

THE VOID ABOVE. [Divine] *The feather-wreathed priests of the Void would climb to great heights to bring themselves closer to the majesty of the sky.* Mark D3 stress to **Shadow** to weaken the effects of gravity on yourself and make great leaps through the air. You gain Mastery on any actions which involve daring jumps, falling from a great height, or rapidly ascending a vertical surface.

Mark D8 stress to *invert gravity* on a target within arm's reach for a minute or so; they are flung directly upwards towards the sky. In a low-ceilinged room they'd take D3 damage and stick to the roof, but if they're outside, they're pretty much done for.

HIGH ADVANCES: THE ELDER GODS

THE FIRST, THE SPINNER. [Divine] *She who spins the strands of life and consequence.* Once per session, activate this power when the GM would roll for fallout when you receive stress. For this roll and the remainder of the situation, you don't take fallout when you usually would. Instead, it happens to a bystander through an unlikely (but still possible) chain of events. You still clear stress as though you had suffered fallout.

Each time you activate this ability, make a mark next to it. The more slots you've marked, the more likely that the loose catastrophes are going to affect someone you care about.

0 marks: Absolute strangers, real nasty pieces of work

1 mark: Casual acquaintances, basically decent people

2 marks: Someone you know and care about, genuinely good people

3+ marks: Party members, lovers, pets, relatives

THE SECOND, THE WEAVER.

[Divine] *She who measures and crafts the skeins of fate.* Once per session, when the GM describes an unnamed NPC, you can seize their fate by giving them a name. Until the end of the session, you are treated as the gamesmaster with regard to this NPC: you make all decisions for them, speak for them, and so on. You also control their entire backstory, and can craft it however you wish to rationalise whatever strange actions you give them.

THE ELDER GODS

Gods come and go, rising and falling in power as their congregations swell and diminish, as holy wars are won and lost in their honour. They are reflections of the people who worship them and their power and image are shaped by those who preach in their name. Some radical scholars in the University of Divine Magic argue - usually just before they're expelled - that there's no such thing as gods, merely shapes that magical power is directed into, and the miracles of the priest and templar are metaphysically identical to occultism and witchery.

But: there are things older than gods. Fundamental forces of cause and effect, of creation and destruction, of doom and fate. No-one worships them because they do not listen, nor do they come with an associated creed. Few have been able to access the power that they offer; at least, not until now. Tread carefully.

At the end of the session, you lose control of their fate as it is dragged back into the pattern by the Weaver's influence. You cannot seize them again, as they now have a name. They will continue to crop up throughout your life, as you have stained the threads of their destiny with your actions.

THE THIRD, THE CUTTER. [Divine] *She who severs the thread of destiny.* You can cut out unpleasant futures, leaving yourself perfect, unobstructed, and increasingly deranged. When you roll to resolve an action, you can mark **Mind** stress to increase the result of your highest dice. Every 1 **Mind** stress you mark increases the result by 1.

THE FOURTH, THE SPITEFUL.

[Divine] *She who has been ignored for eons and grown strange and wicked.* You break the rules laid out by the three sisters. At the culmination of a night-long ritual at dawn, declare a goal that you *must* achieve. If you die before achieving this goal, you awaken at the culmination of that night-long ritual and mark D6 permanent **Mind** stress. You cannot remove this from your stress tracks in any way, but you are otherwise unharmed. The rest of the world resets to how it was at the dawn following the ritual. If you achieve your goal, you rejoin the thread of fate as normal; but if you take Severe **Mind** fallout, you are trapped eternally in a wretched, incapable time loop.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE OTHER PLAYERS IF I GET STUCK IN AN INFINITE LOOP?

Good question! It's not a lot of fun after the first few times. If you want to take **THE SPITEFUL** as an advance, it's probably a good idea to discuss it with your group and the GM first. They might have some ideas about how best to implement the ability in game terms – maybe devoting a whole session to it and working out a sensible rhythm to the loop that allows you all to enjoy yourselves.

If you take Severe **Mind** fallout and suffer the worst possible fate currently available in Spire – being trapped forever in a time loop while your sanity rots into pieces – we don't recommend that you play out the full thing, as that could take a while. It's your game!



MORTICIAN EXECUTIONER

'As punishment for your crimes, the city of Spire has declared you dead – and it falls to me to correct the administrative imbalance that sees you standing here, alive and breathing, in flagrant violation of several crucial edicts and one Grand Statute.'

Executions are illegal in Spire, thanks to a law instituted over a century ago by a Legislator-Architect who found capital punishment unfashionable. However, the influential Mortician sect were able to find a loophole around the ban: declaring a person legally dead, and then redressing the balance at swordpoint.

You are a Mortician Executioner, and you have joined the Ministry of our Hidden Mistress. You live a double life as a state assassin and a revolutionary, and must shoulder all the burdens that brings.

CORE TRAITS

RESISTANCES: **Blood +2, Reputation +2**

SKILLS: **Fight, Sneak**

DOMAINS: **Religion, Occult**

REFRESH: Subvert – not destroy – an obstacle in your path so that it now benefits the revolution.

PC BOND: One of the PCs has been legally declared dead in the past; you falsified their papers and restored them to life. What was their crime?

NPC BOND: An individual-level bond with an up-and-coming Mortician Executioner who likes you but isn't part of the revolution (yet).

EQUIPMENT:

Pick one set:

Vulnere Crossbow (**D6, Ranged, Reload**)

Paraklesis Axe (**D6, Brutal, Tiring**)

Executioner's Mask

Or:

Ossory Staff (**D3, Parrying**)

Custodian Ritual Garb (**Armour 2**)

Numerous divination and scrying accoutrements

CORE ABILITIES

TELL ME WHAT I NEED TO KNOW. *You cut to the heart of the matter.* Once per situation, state some information that you would like to know (e.g. the location of a person, the password for a speakeasy, the name of an aelfir's lover). The GM will tell you which nearby NPC, if any, knows it.

MARKED FOR DEATH. *You are the sharp end of a great and terrible bureaucracy.* Once per session you can declare a target legally dead. This is a long-winded process that requires several forms to be filled out in triplicate and filed with the appropriate authorities. The target must be registered as a citizen within Spire; this means that durance-dodgers, hyenas, and visiting dignitaries are off-limits.

When you hunt your target/s down, roll with Mastery on **Pursue** and **Fight** checks. Mark D3 stress to **Reputation** for every legally dead target that is not *actually* dead at the end of each session.

DIVINE AND OCCULT

The Executioner is currently the only class that has access to both Divine and Occult magic. Their Divine magic comes from traditional interpretations of the Mehrorian faith, whereas their Occult magic represents the innovative (and semi-legal) elements of their sect's research.

As a reminder: Divine magic has a set stress cost, usually D3 or D6, which is paid to activate the spell's effects. Occult magic is rolled to cast, and on a failure or partial success, the caster marks minimum D6 stress.



LOW ADVANCES

BUREAUCRATIC ASSASSINATION. [Divine]

*Turns out being declared legally dead was just the start of their problems. Gain the Academia domain. Once you have declared a target legally dead, you can update the city's paperwork to reflect the unfortunate reality. Mark D3 stress to **Shadow** to cast this spell while you are observing your marked target.*

Whatever element of the city they're interacting with causes them problems: their work permits are out of date, they can't access their members-only club, they don't have the correct paperwork to use a specific flight of stairs, and so on.

CORPSEFINDER GENERAL. You know where the bodies are buried.

Gain the Investigate skill. Once per session, declare that there is a corpse hidden somewhere in your immediate surroundings. Ask the GM whose corpse it is (it's related to the ongoing plot in some way).

COLD-HEARTED. [Divine] As you stop your heart with ancient magicks, death's touch spreads out from your body.

Gain the Compel skill. Mark D3 stress to **Blood** to cast this spell. For the remainder of the situation, you and your nearby allies roll with Mastery when intimidating a target.

DEATH'S KEEN BOLT. [Divine] Your weapon is a death sentence.

Gain +1 Reputation. Each session, you receive a specially-sanctified crossbow bolt from the Department of Executions. It is made from the blackened wood of the only undying tree in existence, which grows in a secluded chamber deep within the Necropolis. When fired from a suitable device, this functions as a (D8, Brutal, One-Shot) weapon. If it kills the target, mark D6 stress to **Shadow** as the Department of Executioners receives a mystical report from the bolt outlining the target's name, location, and time of execution. You can acquire another bolt by marking D3 Reputation stress and sending off a request in writing.

READ THEM THEIR RITES. You have the weight and terror of the Mortician's Guild behind you.

Once per situation, mark D6 stress to **Shadow** to activate this power. Anyone who hears you announce their name or organisation when you enter an area marks D3 stress from fear, ignoring armour. At the GM's discretion, certain enemies (Paladins, animals, demons) may be immune to this power.

SPEAK WITH 'DEAD'. [Divine]

You can fudge the rules around what exactly constitutes a 'ghost.' Once a target has been declared legally dead, you can commune with them using any available method of speaking with the nearby dead (see Spire p141 for ideas, or make up your own). Most people won't realise what's going on, and will answer at least a few questions before they figure it out.

DEAD MAN'S EYES. Mortician doctors are at the forefront of experimental medicine as a byproduct of their Undying surgery.

Your eyes are replaced with a donor pair from a corpse. Eyes are the windows to the soul, and your eyes are windows to someone else's soul; you gain the **Deceive** skill. In addition, you can see ghosts as though they were manifesting at all times. Roll with Mastery when trying to detect or investigate the presence of one.

DRESS

Most Morticians dress to impress. While some Executioners prefer no-nonsense, hard-wearing armour and combat fatigues (or a professional-looking suit and cravat), the sect as a whole is bound up with rules over what ritual garb is meant to be worn when and by whom. Tall hats are popular, as are ceremonial staves (often with spearheads, streamers, braziers or candles atop them), both of which are crucial when the bearer needs to attract the attention of the funeral they're leading across the crowded processional boulevards of New Heaven.

In addition to the hats and staves, a Mortician engaged in official business can be expected to wear chasubles, chimeres, veils, tippets, palitzas, buskins, maniples and no small number of bones, liturgical ribbons, inscribed bells and other mementos mori. It is common wisdom that if you can't hear a Mortician approaching, they aren't doing their job properly.

MEDIUM ADVANCES

AUTOECTOPIC ASPHYXIATION. [Occult]

You can briefly enter the Grey: the liminal space between the lands of the living and the dead. Roll Resist+Occult and undertake a minute-long ritual of hyperventilation and prayer to cast this spell. On a success, your body shifts into the Grey: a washed-out facsimile of the material world where the souls of the dead wait before travelling to their final resting place. You can move through the barely-inhabited Grey largely unopposed, as long as you can resist breathing in. When you do breathe in, you are ejected, and re-emerge into the material realm. To hold your breath for longer than a minute or so (less if you're performing strenuous activity) requires an Resist+Occult check. This increases by 1 difficulty each time you succeed.

CUTTING EDGE. [Occult]

Filigreed implants and stylishly undead body grafts mark you out as someone to be respected. Gain +2 Reputation and the High Society domain. You have at least one augmetic implant or corpse-graft that has no particular effect other than to be impressive when shown off in the right circles, e.g. non-functional megacorvid wings, six fingers on each hand, jewelled teeth, etc. In addition, select one of the following specific implants when you take this advance:

- **Glassblood Heart.** *Displayed proudly behind glass in your chest.* You become immune to poison, venom, and most unfashionable types of disease.
- **Hand of Glory.** *Plucked from the wrist of a hanged murderer.* Your left hand functions as a weapon with the following traits (D3, Ranged, Spread D3, Debilitating, One-Shot) when you light your fingertips. The wax grows back, eventually.
- **Soul-ward.** *Implanted relics and runes of protection carved into your bones.* Once per session, when you are the target of a magical spell, halve any stress received and inflict D8 stress on the caster.

When you gain a Low advance, you may pick an additional implant from the above list instead of selecting an advance normally.

HEART-STOPPING CURSE. [Divine]

You reach into a target's body with spectral tendrils and rip the life out of them. Mark D3 stress to Mind to cast this spell on an injured, ill, or poisoned target. You inflict D6 stress to them, and if they are killed, you refresh an equal amount of stress.

I WAS NEVER HERE. *You spent time in the Lacunae Tenebrant of the Library of Snuffed Candles, breaching the line between the living and the dead with the stroke of a pen. Removing evidence and arrest warrants is second nature to you. Gain the Order domain and the Bureaucracy knack. By spending an hour or so in a suitable office, archive, or repository and marking D3 stress to Reputation, you can: remove D6 Shadow stress; remove a Minor Shadow fallout; or downgrade your own or an ally's Moderate or Severe Shadow fallout by one step.*

IMPLANTED FETTER. [Occult] *You called in a few favours and broke a few rules to bind a restless spectre within your chest cavity. Roll Compel+Occult to cast this spell. On a success, you summon the ghost bound inside you until the end of the situation or until you choose to recall it. You can psychically command it to travel anywhere within a city block, and it is invisible to anyone without the ability to see ghosts (which is most people). While it is expelled from your chest, you see through its eyes and hear through its ears. You can't see like you normally would, and your eyes and mouth steam with glowing ectoplasm. Name the ghost and choose whether it hates you or whether it loves you too much.*

MEHROR

Mehrör, the Morticians' deity of snuffed candles, is the de facto state god of death having all-but-replaced the hard-line Brother Harvest of the Solar Pantheon following the rise in popularity of undying surgery amongst the rich and famous of Spire. Mehrör is concerned with the last of all things, the darkness that creeps into a room as the lamp is blown out, the documentation and remembrance of the dead, tradition, and historical records in general. He is widely regarded as boring by most citizens, and their only interaction with him will be a passing mention at a funeral otherwise dominated by references to the deceased's deity of choice.

MEMORIES LIKE CANDLE-SMOKE.

[Occult] You stitch together fragments of emotion into the ghost of a ghost, painting the past in broad strokes. Roll **Investigate+Occult** and spend ten minutes enacting a ritual to cast this spell. As part of the ritual, you must destroy a token representing the target (a treasured possession, hair or fingernails, an effigy, etc.).

On a success, you witness a recreation of the most important recent events in the area from the point of view of the target. The more emotionally resonant the events, the more vivid the recreation. Of course, no one has a perfect recollection of events, so bear that in mind.

ONE-DROW ARMY. You are used to fighting back gangs of enemies, and have developed your own fighting style as a consequence. Gain +2 **Blood**. Your attacks gain **Spread D3**. When you inflict stress, inflict half the amount to D3 additional targets nearby.

REAPER'S TOUCH. [Divine] You blur the lines between the living and the dead. When you attack a target within arm's reach, your attacks gain the **Devastating** tag (and therefore ignore any armour). If you would inflict less than 3 stress with an attack, your attack instead inflicts 3 stress.

THE MORTICIAN SECT

Death is a big business in Spire, and the Morticians are doing everything they can to corner the market. Operating out of the Necropolis - the hollow spine of Spire, riddled with ghosts and dusty bureaucracy - they oversee the vast majority of the deaths in the city and ensure that corpses are correctly disposed of, the correct rights are observed, and all the right paperwork is filled out. They are also responsible for developing the revolutionary undying surgical process which pins the subject at their current age indefinitely; this has proven very popular with the aelfir, who on the whole are keen to stay beautiful and influential long after mortality should have claimed them.

Their political influence means that becoming an ordained Mortician is one of the few options that a drow without money, noble blood or connections has to ascend the social ranks of Spire. More than one Petty Lord started out with nothing but a dream, a set of scalpels and a jar of formaldehyde.

PRAEVENIRE RECORDATUS

FALSE ROBERT

Plenty of people have been declared legally dead in Spire while they were very much alive, thanks to the Morticians – but False Robert is the only person to be declared legally incorrect. His Silver Quarter gossip rag published one too many stories bringing the honour of the Morticians' Guild into disrepute: accusing them of philandering with Carrion-Priests, botching Undying surgeries, and selling body parts on the black market. So the Guild declared a blanket falsehood on anything that he had published or intended to publish, exploiting a poorly-defined libel definition brought into law in the Year of Three Moons.

The declaration of falsehood extended not only to Robert's work, but to his very existence; he soon found that the city was rejecting him as incorrect. The only way he could maintain a grasp on reality (and keep publishing in any capacity) was to cycle through pseudonyms at an alarming rate. He discarded each new name as soon as he became known by it, in case it too ruined his work.

He's just now managed to claw back enough control to restart his gossip magazine, and he's planning to undermine the Morticians at any cost. They can't legally kill him now – as far as they're concerned he doesn't, and in fact can't, exist – so they're looking to their allies for help in exchange for generous rewards.

HIGH ADVANCES

THE RITE. [Divine] *The greatest and most secret of the Morticians' magicks is, ultimately, a bait-and-switch against the Goddess. The first time you would die, you don't. Instead, you are returned to life with a massive surge of power unlocked via a variety of dead man's wards and necromantic failsafes. You must choose someone nearby to die in your place, withering away to dust and tattered skin in seconds. When you have used this ability once, remove it from your character.*

UNDYING. [Occult] *You undergo Undying surgery and are fixed at your current age permanently. You are freed from the mortal concerns of hunger, cold, pain, and disease; but, you are burdened with immortal concerns. You gain 10 Implacable Armour slots which can be marked in place of Blood to represent your unnatural physiology. These slots are not negated by Piercing weapons. Assuming you can get a doctor to patch you up and replace the requisite fluids, these slots can be refreshed at the start of each session – rather than the start of each situation as armour normally functions.*

You can also mark D3 stress to **Mind** to regain D6 of these armour slots by ignoring the strange liquids and sawdust leaking out of what used to be your living body, or repairing it with rudimentary household materials. Either of these processes takes about half an hour.

SPECTRAL HOST. [Occult] *The Morticians imprison conjoined chimeric swarms of spectres in darkwood tetherboxes. You have had one implanted within the soft tissue of your body, lending you limited control over the spirit host. As **IMPLANTED FETTER**, but it is visible and terrifying, if you choose it to be. After you release the spirit host (see *Spire* p139 for more details), you can mark D3 stress to **Mind** to inflict D8 stress to any and all targets within range of the swarm.*

DEADLY NOTATION. [Divine] *A true master of death needs no sword. When you declare a target legally dead, they mark D6 stress each day. This manifests as accidents (runaway carriages, collapsing masonry, broken staircases) as the city itself attempts to correct the oversight. If the first day's stress doesn't kill them, they mystically know your name and rough location, and will probably attempt to rectify the situation.*

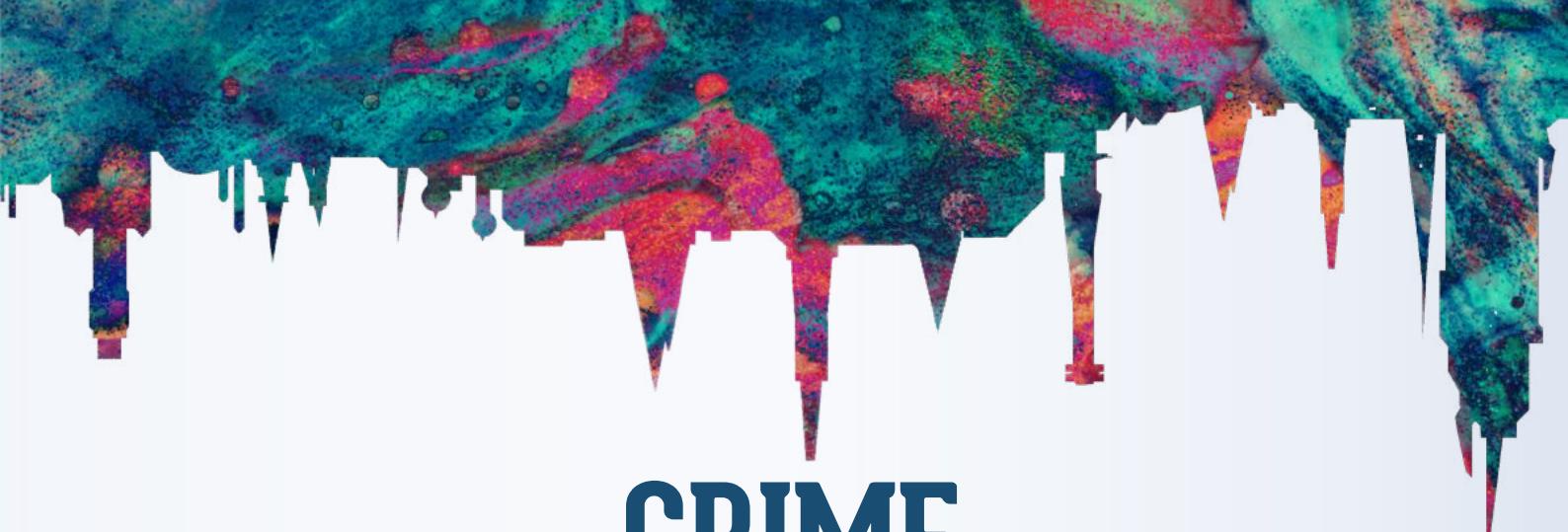


FUNERALS

Burial plots are at something of a premium in Spire. What little soft earth lays at the bottom of the city was cobbled over long ago, and the pockets of dirt that remain above are argued over and traded back and forth between landowners eager to grow plants in them or for the rights to be buried within when, and if, they should eventually die.

The vast majority of middle-class dead in Spire receive a sky burial - they are deposited in structures known as Towers of Silence in the heights of New Heaven, and carrion birds feast upon their bodies until only bones remain. Less wealthy corpses are transferred to the Garden District where they hang in macabre chambers and provide sustenance for fungi; the bodies of rich aelfir are destroyed, or preserved, or transformed according to whatever is de rigueur that decade. Cremation is currently popular enough to be viewed as passé by those in the know; unfashionably stuffed and mounted relatives clog up the spare rooms of Amaranth mansions and Necropolis storage warehouses; and more elaborate and exciting methods such as galvanic absolution, everfrost implantation and funerary cannon are created and endorsed every year.





CRIME

By JP Bradley

They say that crime doesn't pay, but words are cheap, and – when weighed against the coins spilling from the coffers of crime lords, self-made robber princesses, and scheming aelfir – clearly made of tarnished silver.

The Council condemns crime once a season, in an attempt to demonstrate that none of them are elbow-deep in the sump of criminal enterprise that regularly overflows into the sight of the respectable drow middle-class. In their turn, those hard-working citizens insist that *something* must be done; then they unpack their black market malak, read some banned literature, and pepper their food with smuggled Nujabian spices.

Crime in Spire is a way of life. The City Above is vast, the resources of the Guard are stretched, and the needs of the people are greater than the willingness of the Council to satisfy them. Between the cracks of lawful society, an ecosystem of those willing to break the rules to get what they want has sprung up to fulfil almost any need.

Most people in Spire have a toe dipped into the vast criminal enterprises that underpin the city. The shadow economy offers those with guile and determination not just wealth and power, but also a rare chance for social mobility.

For all their talk of law, order, and responsibility, the aelfir crave the illicit and taboo. The right kind of criminal can cut through the social order and even achieve celebrity in up-Spire society. But while they may be considered fashionable, and even be admired, they are no more than curios or pets to the aelfir – who will come down hard on any who would follow in their footsteps.

CRIME AT THE TABLE

This section does not criminalise sex work or drug users.

Sex work is labour, and should be decriminalised to afford sex workers the protections from violence and exploitation that should be granted to all workers.

Too often, all kinds of media uses violence towards (and often the murder of) sex workers as a lazy way to inject the 'salacious' into otherwise mundane tales of murder and violence. It is exploitative and corrosive to the safety of sex workers. We have no interest in perpetuating this kind of story in Spire.

Similarly, the criminalisation of drug use involves a selectively enforced punitive judicial framework to penalise users, often along racial lines. Whilst this does exist in Spire (malak, a traditional drow drug, is illegal to possess), it is explicitly in the context of an abuse of power and does not speak to the character of the person being criminalised.

Most crime is not a lapse of moral character as much as it is a necessity driven by deprivation and social inequality. Like any need, it is one that allows for the creation of power dynamics that echo the capitalist structures which enforce oppression and further exploit those who are most vulnerable to social inequality.



CRIMES OF SPIRE

There are as many crimes in Spire as there are denizens, and the statute book is a warzone of conflicting rulings throughout the generations. It is also now the battleground for a particular formerly married couple, who are playing out their long and bitter divorce in daily rulings and counter rulings.

The crimes below have certainly been prosecuted in the past, but they are all in constant danger of change, amendment, reinforcement, and reinterpretation – usually in a vengeful attempt at retribution over now-defunct wedding gifts.

VERMISSIAN SMUGGLING.

Of all the forms of moving contraband around Spire, this is by far the most dangerous. The Vermessian itself, tethered to the overripe realities exuded by the Heart and infested by the denizens of the City Beneath, is a twisting labyrinth of shifting, fractal realities. One could become lost forever in both mind and body, which makes it as difficult to patrol as it is to navigate. For the most part, the Guard simply don't bother.

The few successful Vermessian smugglers are exceptionally well paid and have a penchant for hedonism, as any delve could be their last. They gather openly in the Conductor's Club on Ivory Row despite the Guard presence, knowing they are untouchable unless caught in the act.

The Guard, for their part, look to catch these smugglers as they leave the Vermessian. However, they have been unable to map the multitudinous entrances and exits that appear and disappear throughout Spire, seemingly with a will of their own.

BURGLARY

The criminal definition of burglary is entry into a residence or structure with the intention to commit a criminal offence, not just the act of theft (as many drow mistakenly believe). As the entirety of the up-Spire districts are contained within the structure itself and the aelfir of Amaranth consider it their resident domain, burglary is easily added to other crimes to beef up prosecutions and add gaol time to misdemeanours.

LINE ENTANGLEMENT

The Vermessian is a useful resource for criminals who are bold enough to employ it, as the failed tangle of lines connects most of Spire via discreet sub-dimensions and garishly unmathematical spaces.

Coming and going through the hidden and shifting passages of the Vermessian is considered foolhardy and dangerous; but it is a different thing entirely to forge a new connection between its cavernous unreality and the City Above.

It is also, unsurprisingly, exceptionally illegal.

'Line entanglement' is defined as any method used to access parallel versions of the Vermessian for the purpose of navigating Spire.

The Vermessian Sages are familiar with a form of this power, finding entrances to the corrupted metro system wherever it's convenient; but this is done from the outside. To blindly open an accessway from inside the Vermessian and land at a chosen destination is highly dangerous to the practitioner, the fabric of reality itself, and (most importantly) the legal and physical barriers installed by the aelfir.

Suspected practitioners of the art include Saint Trespass and the gnollish amorist Innan of Spring Water, who used her power to enter the bedchambers of her aelfir lovers and escape without trace, even with the Solar Paladins at her heels.

SLIVERSMITHING

The act of creating a 'sliver' through retroengineered means. Slivers are illegal shards of scavenged Prokatakos technology which, if implanted in an organism of flesh, can alter or amplify its physical structure.

Their illegality in statute is due to the extremely dangerous nature of sliver implantation. It can have any number of side effects, ranging from rejection to permanent neurological damage and even death.

All of this is true. The few surgeons in Spire who can perform the procedure are secretive in their work, and they are vastly outnumbered by charlatans and sawbones. But if you can find a sufficiently competent practitioner (Doctor Abete of Red Row, for instance, or Derelictus' elusive Cutter Sark), the rewards may well be worth the risk.

BREACH OF DURANCE

The act of breaching one's durance by fleeing. This is enforced by Spire's bands of drow catchers. Drow who are caught will be returned to their durance or imprisoned, but the lucky ones may find sanctuary in the undercity, where they can assume a new identity with forged documents and bloodwriting if they have the funds to pay for them, or make the right kind of friends.

SPATIAL INVERSION

A delineated interior area of a structure is 'swapped' with the exterior, along with anything contained within (including people). Nobody is entirely sure how this is achieved.

However, it was once employed by Miscreant Y, a malefactor so dangerous that their crimes have been expunged from the record. Spatial inversion was made illegal the very next day in an emergency session of the Council.

UNDYING SURGERY WITHOUT LICENSE

The Undying Surgical License is an initiative introduced by the Guild of Morticians to maintain their monopoly. Where once there were a number of independent 'Clinicians Immortalis' in the Silver Quarter, they have now all closed or been pushed underground. Unlicensed Undying surgery is not necessarily more dangerous than the kind practiced by the Morticians; however, it is unregulated, and one places oneself entirely at the mercy of one's doctor.

The Morticians speak often of these dangers, spreading tales of individuals (never identified) who find themselves farmed of their organs and unscrupulous gangsters who retain the hearts of the Undying to force them into servitude.

Guild Morticians would never do these things without the proper paperwork.

MANIPULATION OF POST-MORTEM ENERGIES

Also known as Mortipulation. Another regulation created by the Morticians to enforce their monopoly on death, this law was later reinforced with a number of subclauses after the Winter of the Banshee. During this event, baleful spirits were manipulated into believing a string of (wrongly accused) individuals had caused their death.

The culprit was never caught, but it was speculated that they used occult coercion to implant false memories in the more malleable and fragmentary remembrances of the dead. Mortipulation went from a minor area of professional jurisdiction to a question of national security, and it was agreed that the memories of the dead should be placed under governmental and corporate control.

CREATION OF A LIVING MECHANISM

That is to say, the creation of a machine which possesses the mind of a drow – or worse, of an aelfir. The technique is an extension of Sliver technology (or some might say its logical end).

The mind within the machine may be born of flesh or be some emergent property of the device itself. Either way, a machine mind is anathema to the aelfir, who have mandated their destruction at every opportunity.

Yet some still covet the lure of metal, the permanence of silicate synapses and sinews of steel. By-My-Ashes-Drowned, a leading academic who has earned some renown by redrafting and correcting the research of human retroengineers, has pushed for the lessening of these restrictions to allow research in the field.

But By-My-Ashes-Drowned is old and his health is failing. Some critics have wondered aloud if he really seeks academic enlightenment, or just a cheaper, cleaner alternative to Undying surgery.

FALSE ANCESTRY

Ancestry is important to the drow. Every drow is believed to descend from at least one of the Noble Houses of the Home Nations, although which one can change depending on who they are speaking with. To be of the right blood is a great help in matters of social mobility, but also in affairs such as the sale of blood to Midwives.

Bloodwriters are specialised occultists who can manipulate blood, rearranging the hidden language within to confound both the Guard and the keen taste of the Midwives. In older times, the latter motivation was more common: the sale of rarified blood to feed the young is a good source of income for the destitute, and the profits could be split with the Bloodwriter. They have also found a good line in forging blood samples for many clients, including criminals who wish to avoid identification, the Guard when they need a swift prosecution, and of course the Old Lace Society.

Madam Pavane, a former midwife and witch, operates her 'surgery' in the Silver Quarter. She is adept at creating false vintages through a combination of archymistry, the Ritual of the Moon Beneath, and no small amount of manipulating legal documents.

Forging a noble heritage is viewed as a serious crime throughout Spire, both among the drow (who find these lineages sacred) and the aelfir (who disapprove of such social mobility).

OBSTRUCTIONISM

The act of obstructing a thoroughfare in Spire, impeding the flow of traffic and/or inconveniencing aelfir in any way. Akin to loitering, a charge of obstructionism is commonly deployed by the Guard to move drow on from any place they don't want drow to be.

LADDERING WITHOUT A PERMIT

This was initially entered into the statute book so the now defunct Guild of Waykeepers could restrict the flow of traffic to thoroughfares only. Laddering is the use of any ladder to climb Spire and circumnavigate agreed routes. The manufacture and sale of ladders is ostensibly regulated, with each ladder receiving a serial number before it is shipped out of the Works.

Punishments for laddering have recently increased, following a spate of crimes involving ladders with filed-off serial numbers. Lawyers are currently arguing whether the law also applies to suspended netting or fences that have been torn up and leaned against something.

Attempts to legislate against rope by defining it as a 'flexible stepless ladder' have been stymied by dangling protests from Perch, along with lobbying from the Shiners & Pane Washers Guild.



RED ROW

The home of crime in Spire: a warren of back alleys and dead ends where anything can be bought for a price – or lost at the point of a knife.

Red Row wasn't much to write home about until the Kated Fanmi moved in. These criminal families, backed by the spymasters of House Malrique in Home Nations, sought to foment unrest and eventually dethrone the aelfir – opening Spire up to a subterranean attack. These agents almost immediately abandoned any thoughts of revolution or loyalty to their masters and took the cash, investing in various enterprises to become masters of their small domain. Red Row flourished and its territory spread, consuming the districts around it, and by the time the money from the Home Nations dried up, Red Row was a self-sustaining criminal empire.

Still, there was never enough room.

War between the Kated Fanmi was inevitable. Red Row devolved into bloody shootouts, local businesses were bombed, and fires tore through whole neighbourhoods. The Guard had lost control, and the Council of Spire seemed content to let the district burn so it could be replaced by something more manageable.

But in the Year of Red Shadows, a new gang started to topple the old guard. This gang, led by Mr Winters, was bound by oaths of loyalty rather than blood. They tore down the old Kated Fanmi, and Winters himself became a legend. Large sections of Red Row fell under his sway, though some resisted.

Today Red Row is split between three factions: Mr Winters; the gnoll, Mother Moon; and the Threadneedle Sisters, triumvirate queens of Spire's drug trade.

However, there are still plenty of opportunities for the industrious and clever criminal to make a name for themselves. Most aspire to join one of the three existing powers, but some are out to carve their own niche in Spire's underbelly.

If you can play the game and win, the rewards are lucrative – and *everyone* thinks they can win. For the losers, there's a quick burial in The Corpse Pit; if they're really lucky, they'll be dead first.

THE KATEL FANMI

In the beginning many old cartel families, loyal to the Drow Houses, came to undermine the aelfir. They brought their old grudges with them, and by the Year of Red Shadows most of Red Row was divided between the six surviving families.

Fanmi Ajan were traditionalists, loyal to the old house and ruled by the aging Matriarch Ajan. In the early days Ajan turned out prolific quantities of weapons, and saw Mr Winters as the son she never had (to the chagrin of her actual sons). He exploited this relationship, removed her, and installed himself as leader of the Ajan.

Fanmi Chenfent had a near monopoly on Red Row's casinos, and was headquartered at the infamous Aviary Club. Bad casino investments in the Silver Quarter and Ison Chenfent's penchant for expensive occult pastimes left them vulnerable when Mr Winters decided to strike.

Fanmi Divendo held the sub-district of Threadneedle, where they produced malak and all manner of poisons. The Divendo fled Spire during Winters' turf war, leaving a power vacuum to be filled by the trio known only as the Threadneedle Sisters.

Fanmi Gepuon were racketeers, brutally extorting local businesses and press-ganging drow youths into their ranks. Mr Winters made powerful allies of the Gepuon early in his campaign, then left them to the mercy of the people they had exploited.

Fanmi Lavivol ruled the trade on people trafficking. For a sackful of cash they could get drow in and out of Spire with no questions asked. This made them a key, if unwitting, Ministry ally – until Frankie the Sack defected to Winters with his top lieutenants, bringing down the Lavivol.

Fanmi Losik were the Divendo's main (some would say only) competitor for Red Row's drug trade. Shortly after the fall of Fanmi Divendo, the Losik headquarters at Sliplock Hall burned down with the family inside. Mr Winters has denied any involvement.

MOTHER MOON

One might wonder why a gnoll, a hated enemy of the aelfir in Far Nujab, would come to Spire at all – let alone forge a life within the nest of their foes. But Mother Moon and her gnollish cohort have done just this, living in open defiance of aelfir rule.

Only Mother Moon has the guile and courage to make this possible; or at least, that's what she says. She seldom speaks of how she came to Spire, even to her closest confidants. All that's known is that one night the owners of Red Row's Arena died among screams and demon fire. Ever since then, the Arena has been overseen by Mother Moon and the refugee gnolls she has taken into her care.

In the Arena itself, Mother Moon is every inch the demon-scarred, hungrily prowling savage of aelfir propaganda. It's all show, but Mother Moon knows the value of putting on a show. Her audience sees exactly what they want to see; and what they don't see, they happily make up themselves.

This is good for business. Drow, humans, and even aelfir come to Red Row in droves to indulge their fetishism for exotic Nujabian delights. Their expectations are pandered to until they empty their wallets on overpriced delicacies and wagers on the Arena's almost-fair matches.

The myth of gnollish ferocity works as both advertising and as a protective deterrent. Yet like any myth, it is a fragile thing, and Mother Moon will sacrifice almost anything to keep it intact. Drow, human, and gnoll in her employ speak in hushed tones of the accidents or strange disappearances that befall those who earn her displeasure. Often, it's not even clear what they did wrong.

Beyond the Arena Mother Moon's vices are legendary. Her harem is rumoured to be a hundred strong, as diverse as her tastes, all sweetly perfumed and clad in flowing Nujabian silks. She retreats to her villa for orgies that last for days, sometimes attended by those she favours enough to permit into her home. But this harem, like Mother Moon's gnollish family, is fiercely protected. Guests are advised to treat them with the utmost respect.

But no one is permitted into Mother Moon's most sacred chamber. Here, the stonework gives way to spirebone, carved and inlaid with dozens of shelves. In this sanctum she can once again be Mother Moon, sorcerer and academic, quietly perusing her growing collection of aelfir poetry and losing herself in the memory of a time when she was free to have more curiosity than responsibility.

QUIET AKANTHA

Spire is often visited by squads of gnoll commandos who've travelled from Far Nujab to incite rebellion, perform sabotage, or otherwise undermine the aelfir war effort. These are dangerous missions, and usually the best operatives can hope for is a swift death. Quiet Akantha did not get that. Nobody knows what her assignment was; only that she was found floating by the North Docks and was then deposited into Mother Moon's mercy.

Mother Moon saw value in Akantha's corrosive hatred of the aelfir and their drow stooges. She gave Akantha a new purpose, channeling her skills and fury against those who came too close to Mother Moon's secrets. It is a role Akantha gladly plays to hurt the enemies of her homeland, and atone for the failure of her mission.

She is constantly reminded of that failure by the spireblack that encrusts her lungs, and the agonised wheezing that comes with it. Her only respite comes from the Once-Prince's tinctures, which are growing less effective even as the dose increases. What strength she has left is Mother Moon's, but Akantha uses it to hunt for any scrap of information that will allow her to complete her assignment.

WHO IS AKANTHA HUNTING?

Akantha's mission concerned the assassination of six industrialists who are key to the aelfir war effort in Far Nujab. They include:

Pavarriion Hayn, of the aelfir War Council. Hayn oversees duranced recruitment, drafting drow directly into service on the front lines and outfitting likely candidates with Slivers to enhance their potential.

Sister Silese Songot, a famed chemist rumoured to be making an alchemical weapon fused with gnollish demonology.

Mr Winters, Red Row's preeminent gangster, whose foundries turn out weapons for aelfir invasion forces and two-bit mobsters alike.

Chant-of-the-Faithful, Councillor of Truth for the War Council, who seized the presses of the Spire Trumpeter and turned them over to producing *Fervour*, the propaganda magazine for all true patriots.

Odoron Oft, a gnollish defector and propaganda coup for the aelfir. His advocacy for the war in Far Nujab as a 'necessary evil' has made him a sought-after personality in high society circles.

HEZERIN CHILDE

Hezerin Childe and their late brother, Undwel Ghost, were among the first gnolls brought to the Arena, second only to Mother Moon herself. Hezerin has made a name for themselves matching the bloodiest, or at least the most interesting, pairings in the Arena, but they are uncomfortable with Mother Moon's edicts of secrecy. They dislike playing the feral beast of aelfir propaganda, and long to show Spire how much more the gnoll can be.

Undwel Ghost also found maintaining the pantomime an enormous emotional strain, finding solace in the soporifics of Threadneedle. He died in hideous debt to the Sisters, and Childe still believes they are behind his death. However, Mother Moon has dismissed the notion, and forbidden Hezerin to take revenge.

WEDDEL PROFT

The Arena and its audiences are hungry for novelty, for spectacle, for the spilling of blood. Sating that hunger is the profession of Weddle Proft, who manages the Arena's procurement. A bookish human, his manner is one of acute anxiety until an exotic new acquisition is brought in. Then any reticence disappears beneath a deluge of pure enthusiasm for the Arena's latest combatant.

Poachers from up and down Spire are employed to bring in an endless parade of the strangest and most dangerous creatures that will fit in a cage: razor-beaked megacorvidae, horrors wrenched from the deeper Vermessian, and shuddering half-there shadows of things that never were. The more exotic and dangerous, the better.

A discredited naturalist from an up-Spire university (his underlings learn quickly not to ask which), Proft assesses and certifies acquisitions in return for a modest stipend and the chance to study the creatures before they enter the Arena. How *thorough* a study is allowed is a source of continuing debate between Proft and Childe.

Proft procures specimens through the Farrier Poachers: toff-adventurers and big game hunters who make sport and coin by sourcing, tracking, and capturing Spire's most dangerous game. They are also the people Proft calls when an Arena participant escapes, since the poachers don't much mind if their quarry is a beast, a person, or something in between.

THE ONCE-PRINCE

The Once-Prince is a maskless aelfir, rheumy-eyed and blind. He serves as the Arena's surgeon, doctor, and veterinarian as necessary, his hands working with swift surety. He moves through chambers full of sweet smelling spices and bitter unguents diagnosing injuries by touch, binding and stitching where necessary.

Everyone has their own pet theory about the Once-Prince's origins. The recurrent themes are: displaced aelfir royalty; tales of the fall of the Palace of Sighs; and a Prince and Princess trapped in the Oubliette Inverse, ever fearful of falling into the infinite sky.

The Once-Prince denies nothing; he only insists, with visible annoyance and only a little fear, that he has work to do.

PRAEVENIRE RECORDATUS

RUFUS VAELEN

Rufus claims to be an ex-adventurer. He claims it loudly several times a night, whenever some pretty young thing might be impressed by it. He backs it up with a wyvernbone buckler, sand-strider leather jerkin, an eyepatch he swears is magic, and a tattoo where the name of his (deceased) beloved keeps changing to whatever's most thematically appropriate. Rufus has invested his 'treasure' wisely, and has a wide variety of fingers in a wide variety of pies. Whether or not he was actually an adventurer is academic.

But: several people, all claiming to be part of his previous 'adventuring crew', have arrived in Spire and are offering money for the location of his treasure hoard. These guys don't seem to be rough-and-tumble, colourful-stories, wink-and-a-smile adventurers; more like the sort of cold-eyed people who pay well for quiet and efficient murder.

The Mansion of Lord Solivar Yssen

Sawtooth Boulevard, Outer Red Row, on the night of his birthing-day celebrations

C Maze, designed by prolific aelfir Mazewright
Perish-The-Foundlings; occult topiary patterns within inflict temporary madness as a fun party trick

F Lord Yssen, far too busy to attend his own party, planning another convoluted scheme where he poses as someone else for profit, influence and pleasure

H House Yssen youths off to hunt cannibals on the roofs of Grist

K Sister Damn-weather, about to smoke a cheeky cigarette

M Abolyon's doubly-secret ritual magic circle where he speaks to interdimensional corvid-demons that speak to him of glorious destruction

O Abolyon waiting in disguise to exact some sort of revenge



Q Warding runes disguised as graffiti

R Barely-secured chandelier

A Wander-the-Lost and Fey-Aranyen, twin hounds, not especially vicious but very loud

B Enterprising young thief eager to take advantage of the distraction caused by the party and make off with a sackful of valuables



S Rival Ministry team en route to assassinate Prince Theodore Yssen

T Lord Yssen's secret laboratory, where he has been experimenting (semi-successfully) with chameleon skin-grafts

D Sleeping quarters of Solivar's secret half-brother Abolyon, who plots his revenge nightly

E Temple devoted to Brother Autumn, built as a tax dodge

G Family graveyard, mainly used as a means of disposing of cover identities that have become compromised with elaborate, fake funerals

I Tallywhacker, Lord Yssen's pet ashnewt, lost for four days now

J Charming rooftop garden and fountain, only lightly haunted

L Priest of Brother Autumn shifts uncomfortably in his cassock and makes small talk with Prince Theodore Yssen, visiting from the Home Nations

N Masked ball; at least half of the participants are posing as someone else

P A man who keeps eating all the buffet food; no-one is entirely sure who he is

THREADNEEDLE

The gardens atop Threadneedle Square are lush with ivy and osier trees, thick with hemiparasitic missel berries. The rooftop is bordered with ornamental hedgerows, so the Sisters Threadneedle can watch Red Row's canvas of lights roll away from them without being bothered by the less aesthetic detritus in the alleyways below.

Threadneedle Square sits at the centre of the tangle of Red Row's alleys and ginnelways, like a heart or a very well-placed tumour. Sooner or later, all of Spire's drug trade passes through here.

The passages are ruled by a collection of gangs and freelance drug runners who vie for position among the Threadneedle Sisters' favourites. Victoria's favour is particularly sought-after, as those useful to her receive generous bequests. Competition is fierce, and she is not above playing suitors against each other to keep them from going into business for themselves.

Drugs are a part of life in Spire, whether it's the surgeon chewing devilsroot to focus the mind, the vat worker sneaking a dose of malak to get through the day, or the street priest taking exotic tinctures for visions of the Moon waxing full with their own face or the slavering fractal things that sit beneath the skin.

THE FALL AND RISE OF THREADNEEDLE

Threadneedle was originally the home territory of the Fanmi Divendo, who underpinned Spire's malak trade. This, however, was little more than a sideline to finance their real talent: poisons. The noble houses sent the Divendo to Spire to infiltrate and poison the Council. Soon, Divendo poisons were much in demand among the aelfir, and their toxins and exotic venoms were considered the fashionable way to end a rival.

The Divendo were better poised than any other Fanmi to fulfil their assignment, but decided revolution was bad for business. The aelfir were the Divendo's best clients, and were willing to pay over the odds for fascinating new ways to poison their enemies, lovers, and less competent staff.

Igadena Divendo, the leader of the Fanmi, invested heavily in research and development. She created small labs across Threadneedle and the greater Red Row area to keep Divendo's toxins on the bleeding edge of assassin chic.

The operation swelled in size, aided by an alliance with the Fanmi Lavivol. Looking for traceless weapons to use in their war against the other Fanmi, the Lavivol supplied the Divendo with skilled refugee chemists in exchange for the drugs they would develop.

But the war went badly for the Lavivol. When Frankie the Sack betrayed them and defected to Winters, Igadena feared what it meant for her family. They ransacked the safes and made off into the night with all the wealth they could carry.

Igadenda's assistant, Elisabeth, was the first to realise what had happened. She arrived at Igadena's private office to find the place ransacked, and she knew what happened when a Fanmi fell. Those left behind would be caught between the other Fanmi in the ensuing struggle to claim the remnants.

She could have run, but she didn't.

The morning orders went out from Igadena as normal. Supply quotas were met, dealers received their supply, and for two days Elisabeth maintained the pretense that it was business as usual, acting as the go-between for Threadneedle and their absent leader.

However, Victoria – already head of the Divendo's accountants – had also quietly realised something was amiss. She met with Elisabeth in Igadena's empty office, and after several long hours the two cut a deal: Victoria would go along with the pretence and cover up the hole in their finances in exchange for being given a cut of Threadneedle.

They had the leadership and the money, but neither would work without the product. There were several Divendo chemists that they could have worked with, but in Harriet, Elisabeth saw something special. It wasn't just her skill at creating stronger varieties of malak, but her trustworthiness.

Elisabeth and Victoria met Harriet in the garden of Threadneedle, and made her an offer she couldn't refuse. Once she accepted, the three pillars of Threadneedle were complete. They were a new family forged by mutual interests that bound them closer than blood: The Threadneedle Sisters.

THE BUSINESS OF THREADNEEDLE

The Sisters are not drug dealers; their business is nothing so gauche. They provide supply chain security, logistics, and quality assurance. Threadneedle Square sits at the nexus of the drug trade but separate from it, surrounded by warrens and passageways that lead everywhere from Amaranth to the Vermessian and down to Derelictus itself.

Harriet is responsible for making the drugs, a process carried out by a handpicked team of chemists working to her specifications and directed by her own chemical genius. The product is ever changing, as the needs of clients high and low shift with the seasons. The old drugs that once delighted clients up and down Spire are no longer effective.



Managing these clients falls to Sister Elizabeth. Matriarch to a large brood of children, she leaves broken paramours in her wake (but never removes her hooks from them). She has spun an intricate web of fealty, obligation, and lust that she plays like an instrument to influence Spire's tastes and trends.

The backbone that holds the operation together is Sister Victoria, who governs finances and invoicing. She is indefatigable, merciless, and keeps her designs unknowable until it is too late. She maintains a staff of clerks and bookkeepers to tally sales and outgoings, recording who owes whom in Spire and beyond. The pay is good and the benefits reasonable, but Victoria is rightly feared for breaking clerks who fail to meet her standards – or worse, exceed them.

SISTER VICTORIA

Threadneedle's accountant, comptroller, and logistics manager, Sister Victoria is the quiet engine that keeps the entire endeavour going. She cut her teeth on the Blue Docks and narrowly avoided signing a contract with Azur to join her sisters in their criminal enterprise.

Harriet is a genius and Elisabeth can hold a room, but Victoria is the one who considers all the possibilities. She makes the numbers add up, ensures they get paid from the network of dealers who move the product, and considers liability and insurance for the events the other two don't even want to consider.

CRIMINALISATION

The criminalisation of drugs is often touted as a public health triumph with a moral edge. Stories about the harm that drugs can do centre on saving substance abusers from themselves. Drugs are painted as a problem in and of themselves, siloed away from external factors. Any war on drugs must, by necessity, be a war on only drugs. No attention can be drawn to the reasons why people might want to alter or diminish their perception of reality, such as poverty, inequality, deprivation, or even simple boredom.

In Spire, what makes a drug illegal is not the harm it does, despite claims to the contrary. All drugs are potentially harmful when misused, and to a degree they are all prohibited by law. What makes something truly illegal is prosecution.

While the Guard are content to shake down Derelictan gutpockets for their last drop of malak, the drow of wealthier stock up-Spire will never face prosecution unless they are publicly improper. Even then, punishment will amount to an affordable fine and some minor service to allow them to appear contrite.

Aelfir, of course, are above such things.

She is overworked and underappreciated, but frankly far too invested in the entire endeavour to trust someone else with its operation.

The problem is Harriet. Victoria suspects, correctly, that her sister has cold feet. She's never been completely reliable (something Victoria convinces herself she has made her peace with) but recently she has become increasingly erratic. The potency and quality of the product has varied wildly, and Victoria is concerned about the damage it might do to her reputation.

Her attempt to bring this up with Elisabeth was less than successful due to her elder sister's other concerns around her children, and so Victoria has begun looking for a solution the only way she knows how.

In quiet parts of Red Row and the undercity below, she has begun anonymously investing in a number of small-time drug operations under the pseudonym 'Auntie'. Her goal is to scout a talented chemist she could sponsor to take some of the load off Harriet and potentially replace her entirely, allowing her younger sister to retire and stop messing up Victoria's schedules.

So far the plan has managed only to show the vast gulf in ability between Harriet and the average chemist. To conceal her failures, Victoria has been commandeering the Burning Jock – a group of North Dock Knights fond of aggravated assault, cheap cider, and arson – to clean up her 'indiscretions'.

PRAEVENIRE RECORDATUS

ALLAN THE THIRD

Allan was a child thief under the watch of Mister Tick (*Strata*, p225), who taught him the secrets of runic magic. Since Mister Tick met an unfortunate end and Allan and the other kids grew up, he's taken the magic and used it for other activities.

He carries a heavy iron door etched with runes of protection and hires himself out as a devoted bodyguard. He's really good at his job, and he's a nice guy: gives to charity, helps old ladies cross the street, etc. He's also standing between you and the person you've been tasked with killing. Best of luck.

(This is the third Allan to bear the door in combat. They change their name when they take up the mantle to give the impression that they're better at bodyguarding than they actually are.)

SISTER HARRIET

Stalking the halls of Threadneedle Square at unsociable hours, Sister Harriet is every inch the eccentric pharmacological genius. Her dress is unkempt, her limbs gangly, and her exhausted eyes are always focused on a point three feet behind your head.

She is usually seen talking to herself in broken sentences or self-dosing with customised compounds to stop her feeling too much. If she goes too long without self-medicating, the clouds will lift. She will sit in silent clarity, feeling everything too keenly and trying to hide that she is crying.

Harriet never managed moderation. She started on her own supply when she was young – just a little at first, to ingratiate herself to her Divendo mistresses. She found it abated the anxiety she felt and took the edge off those awkward social situations. She made friends easily, too easily, until they became faces passing quickly with names she couldn't quite remember.

She'd awake to memories of being too loud, too sociable; of trampling over other people in conversation. The come-down flooded her with new anxieties, but she was a chemist, after all. With just a little chemical tweaking, she could dam up the doubt and paranoia so it couldn't find her.

The problem was that the tweaking never stopped. Every week she promises herself that she will get clean, change something nebulous but fundamental in her life, and get better. It is a promise she cannot keep to herself. Sometimes she thinks about telling Elisabeth and Victoria, hoping they could keep her honest, but she knows she doesn't have the time to not be working. Her sisters rely on her, and she cannot let them down.

Recently she has begun looking at different ways to try and manage her addiction. She has sought out different philosophies and religions without much success. Obliquism was too obtrusive, and their drugs were boring. She found Our Maiden of the Tincture creepily obsessed with her. The Chantry Sanguine appealed for a while, though they are definitely the most disconcertingly content with their beliefs; and the Vermessianics taught her nothing she hadn't already learned on a bad trip.

She still entertains a small variety of clergy, disguising them as suitors so as not to worry her sisters. But ultimately this is a salve for the itch she cannot scratch, which she pushes to the back of her mind and tries not to think about: she needs to get out of this life before it kills her.

WHAT IS HARRIET TAKING?

The Dose, which completely removes the need to sleep. Harriet hasn't slept in weeks. Sleep is akin to death and that she cannot abide, not until she has answers to questions she can't remember. The problem is she's running out, and her attempts to make more aren't going well.

Blues, a combination of drugs that induces a deep sadness. Having burned out, Harriet wants to feel something again but can't connect to her emotions. She's slamming Blues and weeping almost constantly, and people are starting to notice.

Sulphur, a vicious drug of occult origin which erodes empathy and draws cruelty to the surface. This is a harsh, hard-edged world and to survive it Harriet must be nothing less. She's started mistreating the staff of Threadneedle, and has grown paranoid that they're plotting against her. She has put word out that she is seeking an eidolon smuggled from Far Nujab to produce her own Sulphur and protect herself.

Shiver Dust shifts the world into a dreamlike state, allowing Harriet to see what is and is not as she communes with alternate versions of herself. The problem is she's no longer sure which version of reality she lives in, or even which Harriet she is.

SISTER ELISABETH

The 'face' of Threadneedle, the eldest sister Elisabeth, is a striking woman. She not-so-secretly feels great pride in her own importance to the organisation. Without Harriet there would be no product, and without Victoria the finances would fall apart; neither would be anything without the market for the drugs they make and the force to ensure they maintain their market share.

Elisabeth moves freely up and down-Sprie from Red Row, gracing everyone from Derelictan Chumguzzlers to Amaranthean Obsequies. She will wait politely for masked aelfir to feel true sorrow and remorse after gobbling blues by the handful. With tact and charm she will move customers through the spectrum of Emotives, allowing them to feel each stage of grief in turn until they arrive at the pleasing afterglow of acceptance.

The Sisters' frontwoman makes it her business to know a little of everything, including the dirtiest Red Row gossip, the latest news from the war, and the most fashionable art and philosophies circulating in Amaranth.

ELISABETH'S CHILDREN

Elisabeth isn't exactly sure how many children she has, although Victoria could tell you. Those who've most successfully risen to prominence are:

Lapin, who manages the Sisters' Derelictus franchisees. They cut their teeth against Derelictan gangers, and had some close calls with things from the City Beneath. One of Elisabeth's more violent children.

Pique, a successful actress and host to the most lavish parties of the Silver Quarter. She retired from Desang, but tries to keep up her skills.

Dam Morque, a Knight of the Frothing Dram. The rowboats he commands underpin the narcotics supply chain for the entire North Docks.

'Thorough' Vantru, an illegitimate child and street level dealer in Perch. She works for Anastasia Gris and is secretly planning to usurp her.

Carlott, who wants nothing to do with her mother but may be Elisabeth's actual favourite. She has married a nice woman in the Garden District and dreads her mother's interference.

That knowledge extends to the activities of her trading partners. The Threadneedle Sisters don't run the drug trade – as they will repeatedly tell you – but if someone is cutting their product, Elisabeth is the first to hear about it.

She has had a string of marriages (some of them more than just political), and has fostered a brood of brilliant, if dysfunctional, children. Those who are fully grown have assumed minor positions within Threadneedle, where they vie for their mother's approval. Elisabeth encourages competitiveness among her offspring, withholding her affection until they truly earn it. She considers this a kindness, seeing it as preparing her children for a harsh world. Her children are much more divided on the subject.

One thing that unites them is the knowledge that Elisabeth is the eldest sister of Threadneedle, and she can't keep going forever. Out of earshot, they wonder when she will retire, and bicker among themselves over who shall be her successor.

None of them could be ready for her real plan.

WHAT'S HER PLAN?

- To give her third of Threadneedle to Carlott, who has the mind for it but definitely doesn't want it. This will mean a trip down the winding roads of the Garden District in the dead of night.
- To sell out Threadneedle to the aelfir and retire to the Undercoast. The first her sisters will know of this plan will be when she publicly denounces them in court.
- To live forever via Undying surgery. Despite her wealth, she's been forced to get it on the cheap.
- To ascend to godhood in a ritual involving heretics from the Church of Our Lady of the Tincture and a God-Knife.

MR WINTERS

Everyone knows Mr Winters: a neighbourhood lad who came up the old-fashioned way, on a trail red with the blood of those in his path and anyone fool enough to trust him. He's taken great pains to be all things to all people – a gentleman of means in society, a legitimate businessman to the Guard, and maybe the last of the honest crooks.

This history is all a lie. Nobody knows where the strange, pale boy came from before he turned up on Fanmi Ajan's doorstep, but he wasn't local. Nobody knows how he worked his way into the affections and trust of the Ajan matriarch. Nobody, even the Ajan themselves, are sure how he plucked control of the Fanmi from the matriarch for himself.

But everyone knows what happened next.

The Season of Red Shadows saw Winters move with guile and surety, leaving the leaders of the Katel Fanmi dead, cowed, or fleeing for their lives. Those who kissed Mr Winters' ring found him magnanimous, yet firm in victory. Those who refused discovered a depth of sadism far beyond the underworld's typical rules of engagement. The old crime families, used to decades of in-fighting under the old norms, were no match for Mr Winters' professional fighters armed with military surplus weapons.

Mr Winters sees himself as a man of the people, a kindly alternative to the Katel Fanmi. Yes, blood may be spilled and bones broken, but no more than is the cost of doing business. He believes strongly in the ties of community and family, with himself at the heart of both. An attack on him is an attack on Red Row itself.

These values have made him popular among the criminals in his employment. Winters has cast himself in the mold of the saintly mobster: he will break your kneecaps, but only if you've done something to deserve it. All he asks is respect. Unfortunately, disrespect can take many forms, from not laughing at his jokes to coughing in his presence to laughing too hard at his jokes. Even a seemingly innocuous breach of etiquette can end in being fed your own fingers.

A BARONY OF BULLETS

Mr Winters' money is in guns: making them, moving them, and selling them up and down Spire and into the lands beyond. His signature pieces, known as Red Row Specials, are chambered for large bullets and powerful spireblack charges. They are also known to be almost as dangerous to the wielder as to the victim.

Mr Winters sees his work as a kind of philanthropy. Red Row has traditionally been flooded with firearms from foreign parts; now he's simply encouraging folk to buy local.

The public facing side of Mr Winters' operation is the Winters Benevolent Foundation, a semi-legitimate charity set up to 'improve the lives of Red Row's unfortunates'. Its work involves direct outreach, providing meals for families, and construction work for labourers. The Foundation has also bought up tracts of traditional drow housing, displacing families into 'Winter Palaces' – large block tenements on the edge of Red Row. While on the outside they live up to the name, their interiors are cramped, overpopulated, and prone to infestation.

RED ROW SPECIALS

Red Row weapons are not sophisticated things; they're large-bore, short-barreled, and breech-loaded. Usually forged from Works run-off and salvaged parts, these guns are designed to be easy to use and to put you down hard. They are (D6, Ranged, Brutal and Unreliable) – if you're up against entry level thugs, this is what they'll be pointing at you.

The more discerning security professional, the sort who actually wears a tie, may use a more refined piece on occasions when the big players want to give an air of civility without sacrificing protection. In these instances, replace the Brutal Tag with Concealable.

Despite his passion for local produce, Mr Winters recognises the value of vintage wares, and offers a range of military surplus for jobs that require heavy ordinance. Zamlou – heavy bore break-loaded shotguns with hacked down barrels – are favoured in the warrens running between Red Row and the rest of Spire. They are (D6, Ranged, Point-Blank, Reload and Concealable).

Higher class clientele favour Rattlers. These ornate, finely crafted automatic weapons were standard issue for frontline officers. They are (D3, Ranged, Spread D6, Unreliable). Rattlers can be broken down to fit inside a case or bag, gaining the Concealable tag; but they must be reconstructed before they can be fired, which takes several minutes.

'THE ORGANISATION'

Mr Winters' crime syndicate is a ragtag bunch of mobsters from the 'old neighbourhood' – Katel Fanmi defectors, and hangers-on drawn by Winters' renown and wealth. The Organisation is divided into gangs under a kapi, who themselves receives orders through a chain of figureheads and middlemen. This chain can easily be severed whenever the authorities get too close to Mr Winters' interests.

Some of the more notable members of The Organisation are:

PATRICIA YSEN

Winters' personal assistant. The disowned daughter of Home Nations nobility, she is quietly convinced that she is the true power behind the Winters throne. Mr Winters is happy to let her believe this. He allows her to handle most of his legitimate activities, but keeps her out of his more illicit dealings – a fact she is beginning to realise.

BENEVIV 'BENNY' ROAM

claims to have come up from the old neighbourhood with Mr Winters. He tried to kill her once; it didn't take. Later, they agreed it was 'just business'. Bene knows how to keep a secret. In her youth, an encounter with Chenfent occultists left her cursed as a blood witch. She has held this secret ever since, hunting for a cure to no avail. Her reputation for discretion is why she has been trusted to enforce the Organisation's *Imili* code of silence. It is said that you can always tell if someone's leaked one of Mr Winters' secrets, because they're found with the vocal cords removed.

PRAEVENIRE RECORDATUS

SIMOV

Simov came out of the crucible of Derelictus hungry for power. After a lifetime of abuse and destitution, they were ready to get their hands on anything they could. On one fateful night, after a shady arms deal in the sweltering heat of the Works went wrong, Simov was shot eleven times by noted weapons merchant and bastard Ptolemy Bay to prove a point. Against the odds, they survived.

Now Simov is convinced that they cannot die, and has begun to move against Ptolemy with renewed aggression backed up by a wide array of rumours regarding their supposed immortality. They say that even Mr Bay is starting to believe the stories, and is getting increasingly desperate.

SAL GRISWALD is the head of Mr Winters' private security. In this street heavy, Mr Winters sees the honesty, integrity, and loyalty he imagines himself to possess. It helps that Sal will follow orders to the letter and lacks the ambition to ever pose a threat to him. Sal worships the ground that Mr Winters walks on, and would gladly give her life for him. Mr Winters would be happy to let her. Sal is Resistance 7 and Difficulty 1 in a fight, or Difficulty 2 if defending Mr Winters with her Zamlou shotgun (**D6, Ranged, Point-Blank, Reload and Concealable**).

DEVLIN WINTERS is Mr Winters' son and heir. He has been given every advantage that was denied Mr Winters in his own youth, up to and including an expensive up-Spire education. Mr Winters recognises that Devlin is a bright lad, if a bit soft and possibly in need of a kicking. What he doesn't know is that Devlin is trying to prove himself by running guns up in Perch, drawing the attention of the gun-loathing crime lord Anastasia Gris.

FRONQUEST 'FRANKIE THE SACK'

KARBAN brings in new talent and handles 'disciplinary action' for anyone who steps out of line. Back in the day he worked for Fanmi Lavivol, trafficking drow in and out of Spire. He does the same for Mr Winters, although these days you buy a ticket to ride not with silver, but by working off your debt at one of the Winters Foundries dotted around the district. Karban quietly misses the good old days, and is looking to go into business for himself.

'THE PAHRE' ELIYA LASSAN is a Lahjan who runs the Lady Most Luminous temple in Red Row. The Guard have proven reluctant to raid this holy site, making it a choice location as a safe house and illicit gun stash. The Pahre has recently begun taking confessions from members of the Guard, causing Winters to doubt their loyalty – but the Lahjan is popular within the Organisation, and Winters wants to be sure before he acts.

FALLOUT

If you are working for Mr Winters, you may suffer the fallout below:

SACKED [Shadow or Silver, Medium Fallout] You have brought too much of the wrong kind of attention to Mr Winters' operations, and find yourself bundled into a sack for a private meeting with Frankie the Sack and a couple of Red Row toughs. Frankie will give you a chance to prove that you're worthy of the trust that he and Mr Winters have placed in you, or else your next meeting will not be so pleasant.

THE AVIARY CLUB

The most striking thing about the Aviary is not the lavish velvet and marble décor or the well heeled clientele, but the dozens of squawking, preening exotic birds attending every table.

The Aviary Club is where Red Row's well-to-do come to show off their rarest avian delights. These might be procured from distant lands at incredible expense, fleshcarved by designer artisans of the Silver Quarter, or quietly rented from unscrupulous forgers who colour them with short-lived iridescent pigments.

Laymembers of the club are restricted to the 'pit', a ruck of crowded tables filled with middle-level mobsters and furious uncaged birds that scratch and peck their owners and each other. Fights are common between the birds and the mobsters. Weapons are confiscated at the door, but a well-trained bird of prey and some cutlery can do real damage if you wield them right.

On the balconies above you'll find the well-to-do mobsters, local kapi, and the odd aelfir tourist in private cages, meeting to discuss business and show off their birds. The waiting staff are Songbirds, with implanted plumage and voice boxes carved to render their speech into exquisite birdsong. It is completely incomprehensible to the members, but the staff have managed to form their own language with song, swaying, and the inclination of their avian masks.

The Aviary Club was one of Mr Winters' earliest acquisitions. As a young heavy he was barred from this old Chenfent Fanmi haunt due to his low birth. He took it because he could, and ever since he has become a regular fixture at the club – not because he cares for the place, but because he takes satisfaction in watching the faces of the older clientele as he is shown every deference by the fawning management.

Mr Winters has a private cage in the feather-garden of the Aviary. It is a cloistered space in which many-feathered pavo cluster together like shifting, squawking bushes. Inside the cage is a desk, a high backed throne, and a single seat for visitors who want to discuss serious business. This is where Mr Winters makes any deals that require his personal touch. The squawking birds prevent snooping, and nobody enters the cage without being thoroughly searched.

Merchandise handover takes place off-site, but Mr Winters keeps a few specialist items in the basement. Storied weapons, collector's items, and custom jobs for clients he wishes to impress are displayed in the vaults. Guests who earn the proprietor's enmity may also be invited down here to have a quiet word and – when necessary – be disposed of among the guano shipments destined for Mr Winters' foundries.

THE LINGO

The Lingo of Red Row arises from its shared criminal heritage and the need to communicate without the Guard listening in. The full lexicon of this secret language is impossible to record, as it is heavily context dependent. It is also constantly evolving to defy translation by outsiders, and individual streets have their own dialects. The only way to truly understand the Lingo is to live completely among the people of Red Row. However, anyone with the Crime domain will know the following common terms.

Imili – A word with no direct translation, but broadly 'humility' or 'stoicism'. It can be traced back to a Katel Fanmi tradition from the Home Nations, but in practice it amounts to 'don't talk to the Guard', even about an enemy.

Katel Fanmi – Old cartel families descended from the noble drew houses of the Home Nations. Their ancestors came to subvert the aelfir control of Spire, but their criminal enterprises quickly became an end unto themselves, and the fanmi fell to infighting.

Kapi – The old Katel word for the leader of a gang or mob, broadly considered the lowest leadership rank in the hierarchy by everyone except the kapi.

Konprann? – Roughly: 'Understand?' or 'You get me?', generally appended to the end of a statement to demand confirmation of comprehension or to emphasise the importance of a point.

Product – A Threadneedle term which has filtered down into the lower reaches of Red Row, this is simply a way of saying 'drugs' openly. It is neither subtle nor clever, but has proven an effective angle of legal defence.

(Red Row) Special/Ratgat – The snub-nosed, high powered pistols produced by the Winters Armoury. Dangerous, misfire-prone knock-offs called 'Ratgats' are also employed by less well-to-do criminals (or by those who have spited Mr Winters).

Ginnel/Ginnelway – Narrow alleyways that cut between buildings and streets across much of Spire's lower reaches, including Red Row, Derelictus, and the North Docks. Most are unmapped and are useful for evading the authorities.

Gutpocket – A common term for a thief or pickpocket based on stories of industrious thieves who would cut pockets open with fish gutting knives and help themselves to what fell out.

Old Bob – The Guard, singularly or collectively.

Good Bob – A member of the Guard who has been bribed or blackmailed into compliance.

FREELANCERS OF RED ROW

While Red Row's trinity of criminal powers snuff out any independent operations, some individuals have retained a certain amount of licence through exceptional skill or judicious bribery.

These freelancers walk a tightrope between the three powers, contracting their skills out to those who need them and making sure never to draw the ire of their other benefactors.

THE GUILD OF THIEVES, CUTPOCKETS, BURGLARS, AND ALLIED TRADES

Throughout Spire, trade guilds regulate labour and assure quality of work for the discerning employer. A Guild standard rosette supposedly represents a higher level of competence and professionalism.

In truth, Guilds are little more than paid members' clubs, carving up the premium jobs among themselves while driving the unregistered into ever more precarious wage labour. However, those premium jobs come at a price, with a thick cream of 'administrative costs' scraped off the top of each invoice.

This graft is not lost on its members, especially among the rosette-wearing practitioners of the kleptomantic arts, but the Thieves Guild 'inspectors' will take your knees as well as your reputation.

The guild's day-to-day administration is overseen by Justen Reine, a disgraced Azurite working to buy herself out of the red book and back into Azur's good graces. While her penchant for gambling does not help with this, the bookkeepers she runs provide a handy way to launder the Guild's immense quantities of ill-gotten stens.

Guild members are paid through 'thrown luges': heavily-rigged downstair races where the winnings correlate with the thief's earnings and the losses neatly match their registration fees. Of course, the entire system depends on the administrator remembering to rig the race – an oversight that led Reine's predecessor to run a luge face first.

Reine answers to the guildmaster, Makakla. Given his line of work, it is unsurprising that Makakla prefers to travel incognito. He may be a masked and shrouded aelfir, an aged and crooked-backed midwife, or a swaggering Knight in a flash of steel and ribbons; all you will know for sure is that your coinpurse is missing.

Makakla cares not for wealth itself. Instead, he forever chases the thrill of a well-executed heist. He is always present but never seen, except by those who show exceptional skill in thievery. Then he will foster their talents, teaching them the craft and discipline to hopefully one day surpass him and steal the unstealable treasure he has sought his whole life.

WHO IS MAKAKLA AND WHAT DO THEY WANT?

- The Prince of Night and Hearth Song who seeks to steal the sun so that he may reign forever.
- An avatar of Saint Trespass who seeks someone to recover their stolen mortality.
- The lure of a being from a dimensional fracture in the world, seeking a way through.
- A Prokatakos creation woken from slumber and seeking to revive their masters.
- The hunger of a worm of want, given shape and feeding on the act of theft.
- A thief who just really wanted some friends.

THE PASSWALL GANG

The Vermessian Project was a vision, a dream. In its early days, it promised to bring mass transit to Spire, with miles of rails travelling up and down the city ferrying aelfir, drow, and human alike in comfort relative to their status.

Making that dream a reality meant digging; miles and miles of digging, through stone, spirebone, and other substances nobody stopped to catalogue. Hundreds of durances were granted to drow who dreamed of a life in Spire, and still more unduranced drow and gutterkin were hired for a pittance.

Guided by the retroengineers, labourers dug stations and tracks, connecting ancient and sometimes closed-off passageways to create a network that spanned the city. The tunnels were crowded on the day the Heart was breached and the Vermessian flooded with a curdled tide of unreality. Those closest to the rupture were never seen again. Even those who had time to escape were... changed.

Nobody cared much for the diggers, builders, and artisans who lost their livelihood that day, but Spire always has somewhere for the dregs of society to fall to. Most people above a certain pay-grade have never even heard of *Fouyemania*, or 'the Digger's Madness'. The primary symptom is a desire to make holes: in walls, in tables, even in their own flesh.

Some of the afflicted speak of a hole so big it swallows worlds – the void all other voids lead into – and their need to chip a way through to it.

The symptoms can be abated with a calming tincture, but this is expensive and tolerance builds up quickly, requiring ever more potent doses.

Driven by this need and the compulsion of *Fouyemania* itself, a cooperative of ex-labourers formed the Passwall Gang. Their time in the

Vermessian had revealed to them that Spire's walls are only suggestions, as traversible as any artificial border.

Using the skills they learned on the tracks, the Passwall Gang dug up through Spire, into the basements, wine cellars, and treasure hoards of their former employers. As they left, the gang would seamlessly rebuild the walls behind them. By the time their targets realised they had been robbed, their fortunes had already been spent and spread around Red Row.

It took only a couple of scores to cover all the tincture they would ever need, a couple more to cover the pensions and paychecks they never received, and a couple more after that to make themselves comfortable (or even well off). They would say they were in it for the money, that the next big score would see them right – but the holes call to them, and their sleep is filled with the clink of hammer on stone.

An ongoing Passwall Gang operation needed administration to source the tools and cleanly dispose of the take. This job fell to the kindly Fassena Crayne. Crayne had been the drow resources deputy-manager on their stretch of the Vermessian, and was considered most trustworthy with the group's pooled resources.

T' WINDY 'AMMER

Drow miners have traditionally used pickaxes, often handed down from generation to generation, to hack through bone and rock. The Vermessian Project was something new, however, and required a new kind of tool.

Old-school miners were sceptical when the retroengineers handed them a loud pistol that repeatedly drove a spike into the ground, but it could break stone and crack spirebone with ease. Soon it became a symbol among the Vermessian workers, and those who have worked with it share a silent but unbreakable bond.

There is of course a proper name for this implement, but most drow know it by the name given it by one of the more popular Dig Leaders: T' Windy 'Ammer.

Smaller versions of the device are often used in minor work projects, but the Passwall Gang use a heavy-duty make that cuts through spirebone like it were clotted cream.

In a pinch, the hammer can be a weapon (D8, Piercing, Scarring, Tiring), albeit a cumbersome one. The mechanism requires feeding from a heavy air canister, and the person carrying it had better be well-guarded by the one wielding the weapon. Anyone on the receiving end will suffer horrific injuries if they are fortunate enough to survive.

Nobody knew how often she would dip her fingers into the old company pension pool. Nobody noticed that the take from each score came out of her office lighter than when it went in.

While the jobs keep coming and the call of the void still sings, nobody is even bothering to count what's in the gang's hidden network of Vermessian vaults. But the Guard are drawing closer, and even the most fervent diggers have been starting to wonder if it's time to cut and run. When that happens, the Passwall Gang will discover one hell of a hole in their finances.

PASSWALL GANGERS

Names: Irwell, Medlock, Irk

Descriptors: Obsessed with scratching holes in things, even their own skin; Shaking from their lack of tincture; Burdened with a recent score

Difficulty: 0, 1 in tight enclosed spaces

Resistance: 7

Equipment: Picks and Hammers (D6, Tiring), Ratchet Pumpgun (Ranged, D6, One-Shot), Windy 'Ammer (D8, Piercing, Scarring, Tiring)

CANTON FRAYNE

This human architect was summoned to Spire by an aelfir with designs on turning the docklands into her own private marina. The project was delayed by politics, an attempted assassination, and then finally waterside properties falling out of fashion. Frayne was forced to seek alternative employment, which is when he came to the attention of Mr Winters.

Winters initially hired Canton as a consultant, and was impressed on his first day when Canton described the internal layout of Winters' new workhouse from the outside. Canton possesses encyclopedic knowledge of building regulations and specifications. He knows the clearance of every door frame, the meaning of the number of windows on a floor, and where one must mount piping and alarm mechanisms in the cavities of walls.

Mr Winters made a game of it. At first he showed Canton buildings and had him sketch the internal layout. Later, he gave Canton tools, stage workers, and a row of abandoned warehouses to recreate these designs as an amusement. Canton, ever eager to demonstrate his skill, did so. He almost perfectly recreated the inside of the nondescript public building Mr Winters had shown him for a cadre of guests who toured the installation extensively.

Six days later, the Desteran Silver Exchange was robbed in a lightning raid that emptied the vault without even alerting the guards.

SHRINES OF CRIME

Like many of the professions of Spire, Red Row's criminals have their own arcane system of belief and worship driven by tradition, superstition, and need. Criminal acts demand criminal gods – crooked deities beyond the main pantheons, who trade worship and reverence for invisible blessings towards the success of their petitioner's illicit labours.

Some are Hallows of once great criminals, saints of crime denied the peace of death by their glorious deeds in life. Others are small gods of Perch, having engineered their own theft to grow their flock until they can ascend to true godhood. Finally, there are those which are not gods at all; but maybe they can steal the faith due to a god of thieves if they prove themselves worthy of the title.



BACK ALLEY PORTABLE SHRINES TO ROB, THE GOD OF MUGGING

Wherever the streets narrow or an alley arrives at an unexpected dead end, one might come across a small stand with a statuette. Drawing closer, one might see the image of one figure (usually with a sack and a bat or club) standing over another, who is kneeling and offering up coin. By the time you recognise its face, it is already too late. You have passed a shrine to Rob, the God of Mugging, and are now part of the observances.

The Clerics of Rob usually appear from your blind side, asking for alms to help their members. They will helpfully point out that the shrine traditionally demands a small tithe. If you try to leave they will take offence, explain they were just having a friendly conversation, and insist you make it up to them to show there's no hard feelings.

The clergy rarely *actually* threaten violence, although ceremonial daggers and batons are on full display. Most people 'offer' a 'donation' (though afterwards, some convince themselves they did it out of politeness). If it is any consolation, the lay clergy of the travelling shrines make donations of their own. Many have skin that shines blue and yellow with sacred bruises blessed by the senior priesthood's holy cudgels.

ADVANCE

Stealing a portable shrine to Rob (or, shamefully, making your own) allows you to take the following advance:

THE TITHE. [Low advance] *That will cover it, but what about the inconvenience?* +1 Silver.

Once per session, when you beat up or intimidate someone but do not kill them, you can also mug them for a small pile of stens to help you on your way. The next time you take **Silver** stress before the end of the session, do not roll for fallout.

CLERICS OF ROB, THE GOD OF MUGGING

Names: Bricktooth, Sten Smile, Mother Sledge

Descriptors: 'Blued up' and visibly weeping; Sticking their fingers in their pocket and telling you they have a knife; Showing a mean-looking kid the ropes.

Difficulty: 0, or 1 if they outnumber you

Resistance: 6

Equipment: Sacred clubs, cudgels (D6), Sanctified bricks (D3, Ranged), Pocket knife (D3, Concealable)

SAINT TRESPASS

The world is a lattice of borders between the places where one is allowed to exist and where one is not. Sometimes these borders are obvious, a wall or fence between the permitted and the forbidden; but more common and pervasive are the borders that exist by agreement alone. Barriers of privilege, wealth, or simple fear can hold a person back as surely as stone or ironwork.

Not Saint Trespass, who had the liberty of the world. Saint Trespass didn't care about the destination, only the challenge of getting there. They stole into Amaranth and the Vermessian Vaults, hopped into the frozen north and back out again. The Ministry tried to recruit them, but Saint Trespass owed their allegiance to nobody, and there was no cause greater than getting past the next lock.

Their last and greatest caper was to steal into Heaven itself, though scholars are divided on whose Heaven and what they found there. What they can agree on is that Saint Trespass almost made it back, but were tricked into the one thing they could never escape: godhood.

The Temple of Saint Trespass is an unassuming building, little more than an old mill. The shrine to the Saint is located in the innermost part of the building, behind doors locked and barred, among halls patrolled by sentry priests and trapped with retroengineered alarms. The faithful write their prayers on coloured flags. The closer they can place their prayer without getting caught, the more likely Saint Trespass is to look favourably on their endeavours.

ADVANCES

Breaking into the Temple of Saint Trespass allows you to take either of the advances below.

BURGLAR'S BLESSING. [Low advance]

Saint Trespass guides you. Put your faith in them and they will grant you what you need, even if you do not know you need it. Once per session, when you are breaking into somewhere you shouldn't be, you will find the exact tool you need to progress. For example: a uniform in your size; the key to the mansion's side door; the combination to the vault lock, written down by a forgetful guard.

ALL PART OF THE PLAN. [Medium advance] *You make an offering at the shrine of Saint Trespass so that they will provide inspiration and direction when hope seems lost.*

Once per session, if you are caught or your plan fails during a heist or break in, explain how this is in fact part of a cunning misdirection and reveal the real plan. The GM will allow this new plan to have a chance of succeeding.



CHURCH OF VANDALS

Their hymns are sung in the breaking of glass, their prayers writ large in graffiti, their devotions made wherever a toppled statue hits the paving stones. The Church of Vandals has no fixed temple: only flyers posted along the walls and up the lamp posts. The congregation is called to places of power, wealth, or excess that have yet to be consecrated by a brick or a daub of red paint.

They worship Yetwyn, the God who was defaced and broken into pieces by the first Vandals from whom all others took their name. Yetwyn is a god of ruins and rubble, speaking of the impermanence of all things and the coming of often destructive change.

The Church of Vandals has only a lay clergy, as the faithful's tendency towards iconoclasm means few leaders last for long. One of the more enduring figures is Madame Huelan, whose personal vendetta against aelfir sculptures has made her a semi-mythic figure in the Church.

It is rumoured that their propensity for destruction has made the Church of Vandals useful to the Ministry. Some say Ministry sages have decrypted the hidden language of the Church's flyers, and use them to post false pronouncements that draw the congregation to targets that best serve its agenda. However, the decentralised and ad hoc nature of the Church of Vandals' organisation mean it is impossible to prove such theories.

ADVANCES AND FALLOUT

If you devote yourself to Yetwyn, gain access to the following advance and fallout.

FATED TO RUBBLE. [Low advance] *You write a flyer in the secret language of the Church of Vandals, fating whatever it is pasted on to become rubble and know Yetwyn's pain.* Roll **Compel+Religion**. On a success you create a flyer marked with the curse of the fractured god Yetwyn. The power of the flyer will last for a day or so. When it is applied to a structure or monument, an area several yards around the flyer becomes more vulnerable to being destroyed. When attempting to attack this structure with the intention of destroying or vandalizing it, you or one of your allies may roll with Mastery.

COLLATERAL DAMAGE. [Reputation or Shadow, Moderate fallout] The Church of Vandals is a clumsy weapon with a mind of its own. Whether they suspect your manipulation or have simply grown outside of your ability to control, they destroy a property or resource belonging to you or one of your bonds.

THE DARK AMBER GOD OF ARSON

'It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.'

There is no temple to this god. They have no name, and no shrine nor clergy will be found: not even in Perch, where small gods linger like the leaves of autumn, blown into every corner. The Dark Amber God is a hungry god – one that speaks to those who cannot silence the crackle and whisper of its voice.

For some, fire is purity. You can clean the world with it, providing you think ash and charred bones are clean. These thoughts often drift like embers through the minds of the unwary, but the Dark Amber God latches onto them. It smoulders on every aggression and error and mistake, burning away in fractures of doubt, until the unconscionable becomes permissible and the permissible becomes necessary.

This terrible deity would see the whole world scoured with flame and still hunger for more. So far its disciples have had only a limited reach, the damage of their worship contained; but there are other minds up-Spire. Minds for whom armies, ancient weapons, and powerful magics are as cheap as a box of matches or a jerry can of lamp oil. Then the devastation could be absolute.

ADVANCES AND FALLOUT

If you devote yourself to the Dark Amber God in a ritual of fire and hateful truth, you may take the following as an additional advance.

ACCELERANT APOSTATE. [Low advance]

The flame exists in everything; it is simply a matter of freeing it. Once per situation, you may ask the GM what the most flammable object nearby is. In addition, gain the Refresh: 'Destroy in flame the property of another.'

Fire in Spire is much feared and reviled for the damage it can cause. Many remember the Year of Red Tongues, when fire took most of Old Derelictus and reached as high as the Silver Quarter. Many brigades were founded to ensure that each district had at least some way to combat fires should they occur. These were supplemented by the Firewatch, roving investigators who followed the course of fires to determine their source.

The Firewatch have spent years tracking the Dark Amber God. They believe they are coming close to finding whoever now possesses it and sealing away its evil. If you come to their attention, you risk the following fallout:

FIREWATCH. [Shadow, Moderate Fallout] A member of the Firewatch who has been hunting for the Dark Amber God suspects you are one of their agents, and seeks to arrest you for questioning.



THE FIREWATCHER'S TOOLKIT

The Firewatch was founded to quench fires, normal and occult, wherever they occur. Despite limited resources and an only semi-official authority, the Firewatch has amassed a collection of magical and retroengineered implements to combat the spreading flames. The following items and abilities are available if you are recruited to aid the Firewatch.

ADVANCES

CINDERSIGHT. [Low advance] *You can see the path of a fire and track it back to its source.* By surveying the scene of a fire after it has burned out, you can tell where and how the fire was started. You cannot determine who set the blaze or how long ago.

FIREBREAKWARD. [Low advance] *You have learned the secret charm of warding against blazes.* Mark D3 Silver stress. Select a door or section of wall as wide as your arms can reach, or an object you can wrap in your arms. You draw a sigil of protection across it with a poultice of water, charcoal, and crushed serpentine. For the next hour it will not burn through.

EQUIPMENT

The Knocker (D6, Brutal, Tiring) is said to be the axe that finally sundered the doors of the heretical Temple of the Moon Beneath. Whether or not this is true, the legend sharpens its blade and powers its swing. Though heavy, the Knocker has never met a door it cannot break. It will not be quiet, and may take several swings.

The Coolsuits were dragged out of the ashes of the Whitecross arcology's Cinderwell Chamber, the only recognisable items to survive the heat of the ancient facility's implosion. Made of a stiff yellow fabric covered in dials and valves, the suits' linings are padded with a lattice of milky white gel pockets that remain cool to the touch, no matter how much heat is applied to them. The Coolsuits have the **Heavy** tag and Resistance 3 against stress caused by fire or extreme heat.

Smotherdusters are canisters used to halt spreading fires in their tracks. Each canister comes with a spray nozzle which, when opened, unleashes a gout of inert white dust to choke out the flames. While useful for catching small fires before they do serious damage, smotherdusters are not enough to combat a full blaze. Prolonged exposure brings on the wheezing sickness that has ended many a Firewatcher's career.



ORRO, THE TRICKSTER GOD OF MURDER

Most gods offer good fortune to you or bad fortune to your enemies. The more ambitious gods might promise concrete boons like wealth or health. But Orro is one of the precious few gods willing to kill on command.

Gods of murder tend to be fleeting creatures. They feed on dark impulses, quickly waxing strong, but rarely able to sustain a faithful of any size. For most people, murder is not a goal to aspire to; nor are gods of murder a subject one can generally bring up in polite society, outside of the more salacious aelfir parties. Most gods of murder vanish as soon as their small congregation is caught or killed by the authorities (or each other).

Orro survives because they draw power not from the act of murder itself, but from the method and mystery that surrounds a murder. Orro cares nothing for the knife in the guts of some poor sod in an alleyway; but a knife in the corpse found in a room locked from the inside? The poison in the soup of a hated matriarch at a family meal? Murders where nobody or everybody is a suspect? Gods work in mysterious ways, and no one has more mysteries than Orro.

Orro's shrines are in the thick manilla folders in the bottom drawer of a detective's desk, or the corkboard full of newspaper clippings that some devotee is convinced – *convinced* – must be connected.

The faithful can be found in aelfir murder fanclubs, such as the Old Lace Society. Orro's favour can be purchased with a ritual in the petitioner's own blood, sealed with a death made to look like an accident. Hold your enemy's name in your mind while doing this, and before long, they too will be just another unsolved murder.

But Orro is a trickster god who hungers not only for death, but for intrigue and the ironic twist that knots the hangman's noose.

When your enemy meets their untimely end, you might be halfway across Spire – yet your favourite brand of tobacco will be found at the scene. The muddy footprints tracking away from the body will be your shoe size. The dagger will have slipped between the ribs at an angle indicative of your height. Meanwhile, all the witnesses around you at the time of the murder just can't *quite* place you at the time in question.

All circumstantial, of course; sometimes circumstantial is all it takes.



ADVANCE

If you have made a pact with Orro, you may take the advance below.

THE TRICKSTER'S PRICE. [Medium advance] *You have earned the favour of the Trickster, and Orro will see the subject of your ire dead.* Picture someone and say their name aloud. Within a day, they will be found dead in suspicious circumstances. Mark Shadow stress equal to the subject's Resistance, or 5 if they do not have one, as Orro leaves clues implicating you in the murder. To use this power again you must renew your pact, murdering someone in a new and interesting way as payment to Orro.

OUR LADY OF THE TINCTURE

Deep in the warrens of Red Row, former street dealers Miros Pilet and Bigayl Roosten set up a small chapel. They attracted worshippers with Malak-based rituals, and later the revelatory drugs of the Threadneedle Sisters.

The church's followers became aficionados of Harriet's concoctions, with a fandom that grew into obsession. Pilet has become increasingly convinced that Harriet is a saint. After all, she offers visions, takes away pain, and provides glimpses of a better, more real world. Bigayl is uncertain about the new direction the faith is taking, but the donations plate is full and the congregation is happy, in their glassy-eyed, dissociated sort of way.

Like any true holy woman, Harriet denies her own divinity, but her vehement resistance to the church's advances is getting awkward. Pilet grows increasingly deranged in her schemes to persuade Harriet to accept her destiny. Bigayle, always the more practical of the two, is starting to think that what the church really needs is a martyr.

RELIGION DOMAIN: CRIMES OF FAITH

The faithful are as criminal as anyone else. In the service of faith, even the most devout worshipper of Limyé can justify a criminal act; for the followers of Our Hidden Mistress, their very existence is a crime. Most crimes of faith are common enough, since the clergy have as much to gain by murder and theft as anyone else – but in Spire, where there is faith there is belief, and belief is a powerful thing.

Some crimes of faith include:

Heisting Saints – During the Howling Months of The Quiet Year, the bodies of several highly venerated saints were transported to safer accommodations. Not all of them reached their destinations.

Benefras Water – In a walled beer garden, deep within a long-lost pub, lies the One True Spring of Saint Benefras. Drinking from it cures all ailments. Its location is revealed only to those pure of heart, which may explain why nobody has seen it for a while. Two Orders of Knights – The Mizzenmast, led by Ser Julial Hoyt, and The Shaft and Quiver, led by Dam Mariline of Consteras – each claim their house's founder once set foot in that garden and returned with a keg of the famed elixir. Each Order dismisses the veracity of the other's claim, while offering to sell you a small vial of Real Benefras Water. It tastes like canal water and hard liquor.

Falsifying Ossuaries – Unsurprisingly, the aftermath of the Howling Months saw the market flooded with holy body parts. Most have the wit not to buy the bones of saints sold by hawkers on the fringes of the Blue Market. But up-Spire, there is a rich trade in high quality saints' bones, as long as their holiness is verified by divination.

Manifestation Seraphic – The naïve believe Angels to be manifestations of the will of the gods, divine and goodly in purpose. The learned claim them to be the dangerous acausal manifestation of a will beyond mortal reckoning. The wise realise both possibilities are equally terrifying. There will always be those who seek to summon these entities, believing that they possess the knowledge to bring them forth and even the will to control them. The Council brings its full might down on any who pursue this folly, living in mortal terror of the day somebody succeeds.



THE NORTH DOCKS

It is said the rivers of trade flow into Spire through the Blue Port, and the sewers of trade flow out of Spire through the North Docks. Warehouses slump drunkenly against each other for support, divided by a network of canals leading off the river. These are overseen by the Castle: an ironclad paddle-steamer brimming with cannons, marking the dominion of the Duke.

The Duke is a figurehead; in every real sense, the North Docks are ruled by the Knights. In their own minds, the Knights are a league of ancient, noble houses; in everyone else's eyes, they are a fractious and disreputable bunch of thugs, drunkards, privateers, and gangsters.

Swaggering down the canals in quarter-plate with colourful pennants streaming behind them, and occasionally followed by underpaid troubadours (usually press-ganged buskers forced into their 'liege's' colours), the Knights are out to be seen. They are usually frequenting their own Order's pub, or another Order's if they're in the mood for a scrap.

Brawls are generally considered to be good for morale by the higher ranked Knights who no longer get punched in the head. By tradition, the Knights – who are up to their eyeballs in oversized cutlery and entitlement – have the run of the docks. Tradition is the hardest thing to change.

The denizens of the North Docks have lived with the Knights all their lives, and largely give them a wide berth. Some revere the Knights' proud tradition; others quietly mutter that they're a bloody nuisance. But everyone accepts that regular armoured street fights between drunken bastards with greatswords is just a part of life.

UNDER COVER OF KNIGHT

The aelfir give the Knights of the North Docks a broad latitude, allowing them to act as the de facto law in these parts. This leeway is given in recognition of the ancient territorial claims the Knightly Orders share over the North Docks – namely, a collection of very well established long-term pub leases. It is also based on the understanding that the Knights will stick to fighting among themselves and stay out of the higher civic politics of the aelfir.

The nominal leader of the Knights, the Duke, has traditionally played the role of enforcer and deal maker. This involves keeping the Knightly bar brawls and street fights from erupting into actual civil war, while ensuring that the tenuous indulgence of the aelfir is maintained.

The Knights themselves are far from united. Their Orders are in a state of permanent conflict, and overlaid onto their

disputes is a complex patchwork of traditional allegiance, ancient grudge, and social expectation.

Some Orders and publicans will only accept members from families loyal to their former House in the Home Nations, whether or not that house still exists. Others are former Temple Orders, who will demand fealty to the correct aspect of the Moon before they'll serve you a drink. Still others serve in honour of their 'Tapgod': a lesser deity unique to their Public House, or borne from the Home Nations by the original founders of their Order.

The Knights turned to crime as a matter of necessity, although in the docks the lines are blurry between 'crime', 'property management', and 'policing'. The Knights themselves often argue over which is worse. What isn't up for debate is that while the aelfir tolerate the Knights, they have cut off the Orders' traditional income stream from their noble drow patrons.

Accustomed to a certain level of civility (and laziness), the Knights have responded by raising funds exactly the way they always have: through a semi-feudal system of taxation and levies. In practice, this looks like a group of stout Knights with more blades than teeth showing an uncomfortable amount of concern for how burnable your business looks.

Protection rackets have always formed the core of most Knightly revenues, but in recent years they have also diversified into smuggling, racketeering, and tilt fixing.

THE DUKE & DUCHESS

The Duke rules the North Docks from the Castle, a paddle-steamer with an inadvisably comprehensive weapons loadout, which now sits stationary and low in the water of the River Alph. The role is something of a poisoned chalice. On paper, the Duke has the freedom to make edicts, issue arrest warrants, and otherwise act as their own law on the waterfront, all enforced by the Castle's aged yet functional artillery.

The truth is not quite so simple. The Knights exist as an aelfir concession to drow tradition, especially because the alternative is forcibly disarming several thousand well-equipped drunkards. However, the aelfir are fickle in their mercies. In recent years they have shown far less tolerance to the street skirmishes, informal jousting tournaments, and occasional siege warfare that are all part of North Docks life. They have put pressure on the Duke to clear house, which is something she is loath to do.

Behind the Duke stands the Duchess: the power behind the throne with the manner of a praying mantis. She is an ambitious human woman who revels in the wealth and status of her position, and in the power it gives her to shape the lives of those beneath her. She is an accomplished politician – more so than her wife – and the few reforms that have managed to make a difference on the North Docks have done so by her design.

Rumours persist that she is growing tired of the Duke and weary of North Docks politics: that she wants something more, and if the Duke won't give it to her she might not be opposed to trading up. She could move on to a Duke with more ambition perhaps, or someone higher up the food chain. Someone of power and status, but malleable enough to listen as she whispers her wisdom into their ear.

More astute observers might point out that if this is her plan, she is certainly taking her time about it.

FALLOUT

DUCAL SOLUTION. [Shadow, Severe Fallout] Your actions have drawn the ire of the Duke, or at least the ire of the aelfir the Duke answers to. She needs to do something about you and has come up with a solution. The Castle bombards your location. You can save one person (other than yourself) or an object as you hear the whistling of the falling shells. When they land, you are killed instantly. Anyone else in the same location as you is killed, injured, or buried under rubble at the GM's discretion.

THE KNIGHTLY FIT

A Knightly Order is a community of like-minded individuals with whom one can share their love of drinking, extortion, and occasional violence. However, with that fellowship and privilege comes certain responsibilities. Knights are responsible not only for protecting their turf, but also for presenting themselves in a manner fitting their status.

Fashion is crucial to the Knights. While they would never deign to impose something as proletarian as a *uniform* on their members, a combination of example-setting and friendly peer-pressure ensures that nobody lets the side down by dressing like a corvid's dinner.

Different districts of the docks fall under the traditional jurisdiction of Knightly Orders that draw their lineage from different Home Nations. These patches have inherited historic regional dress and combined them with the milieu of styles, both innovative and imported, to create their own unique fashion.

From Westhead to Narrowfathom, the style tends towards baroque barrows armour, patch-worked with hide and imported fur (or a convincing gutterkin-mane substitute). Their livery is muted, and they are considered to be more sour and serious than they really are.

In the Washward, the style is for waders and tar lined armour that keeps out the worst of the wet. The entire ward and some of the surrounding areas are sinking, but they still make a show of decking out their war gondolas with magelamps and great horns. Baroque tunes herald their coming through the canal mists.

In Highslung and across most of the up-Spire side of the docks, the local flavour tends towards Amaranthian chic. Cloaks and veils of various colours, flowing fabrics, and quarter-plate armour which exposes an impractical amount of skin are the norm.

Randy Clam's Dockfront Steakhouse is a strange outlier. Here the Knights dress in uniform plate as lacquered as their smiles, and bearing a yellow clam on a deep blue background as their only heraldry.

Other dockfront establishments tend to be of an older vintage. Their staff are dressed in full quarterplate and each bears their own colours, often with banners to follow them round (and occasionally a coterie of pages, squires, and general hangers on). Newer fashions have occasionally tried to gain a foothold in these parts, but they never last for long. These are the Old Guard, fond of gold, inlaid gemstones more expensive than they are aesthetically pleasing, and suitably flattering codpieces.

THE CODE OF BARQUELRY

The North Docks bustles with the coming and going of merchant boats. They carry all manner of goods from distant lands into the ports, and then into the warehouses, canals, and teetering, aging public houses beyond.

Wherever there is trade there is money, and wherever there is money there is crime. Goods move from the docks at the say-so of the dockers and their Knight backers, swaggering thugs that are partly mafiosos and partly drunks. The Knights' modus operandi includes smuggling, protection rackets, and straight up muggings if they're in the mood.

Of course, the Knights see themselves as above the common street ruffians and hatchet men of the North Docks. They are steeped in the privilege of their position, and possess the surety of righteousness borne of a meaningless title and the ability to bear a very meaningful greatsword.

This may be why Knights tend to hold to formalities long since abandoned in other parts of Spire – not out of reverence for the past, but simply because it is how things are done. All Knights are possessed of a vanity that abhors being excluded from their subculture. In this way, though they bicker, they can also present a united front. On some level, every Knight appreciates that their adornment, lavish codpieces, and filigreed weapons – even their titles – mean nothing unless every Knight agrees to pretend they do.

This is what remains of the Code of Barquely. This began as simple rules of etiquette for navigating the canals by rowboat, but grew into a whole way of life.

CRIMES OF THE NORTH DOCKS

Rootrunning. Everyone uses malak; the aelfir public health campaign against it hasn't changed that. Neither have the city ordinances making it illegal, or the increasingly harsh penalties for carrying or distributing the tincture. The river continues to be a source of the drug for those who dare not grow the algae within the city limits. Malak barges move under cover of darkness, meeting rootrunners low in the water to offload their cargo before they reach inspection.

Moving malak up-Spire in any quantity is a difficult task. Guards patrol the stairs, and only the wealthy can afford passage on the retro-engineered elevators. The two traditional routes are ascending Spire's exterior with the Red Cable climbers, or wending behind the walls up-Spire along the hidden rivers (which, it is rumoured, end in the faded pleasure gardens of the Silver Quarter).

Dirking. Knights of the North Docks are permitted to bear their traditional large arms (swords, axes, flails, halberd, bardiche, Beq da Corbyn, Ranseur, Lukern Hammer etc) which would normally be illegal. Asking for them back seemed inadvisable. The one compromise enforced on the Knights by the Council was a minimum size for weapons. The crime of dirking is the cutting down of a weapon – commonly a sword – to render it concealable.

Case law surrounding dirking is a battlefield of craters and bloodied bodies. Successive prosecutors have tried to enforce a law so vaguely worded that a former Duke was arrested in the Year of Opulent Regret whilst buttering a piece of bread (with intent). This resulted in the Butterknife Riots, which lasted a whole season.

Dirking a weapon makes it significantly smaller, but also ruins its balance and makes it harder to wield without error. The weapon gains the Concealable and Unreliable tags.

To be a Knight was once to be a scholar and artisan as much as a soldier; but the Noble Houses bent the Knights to their purposes. The privileges they invested in them corrupted their spirits and made them focus only on what they could achieve at lance-point. Precious few remain who still make their own banners, brew their own ale, or craft their own cups.

The one art that has remained in vogue is poetry. Though the old epics of barquelric love are truncated or forgotten, any Knight worth their quarterplate will know chants to rouse the spirit against the creeping damp or fortify the will against a punch in the face.

Literary bootlegging. Spireblack Sensations is Spire's most popular deliberately fictional periodical. Inexpensive as it is, it could still be cheaper, and the North Docks is lousy with bogged-together printing presses making counterfeit copies to sell in local pubs.

These could be simple copy-houses, and they're certainly intended to be. Mostly the work involves tracing the originals onto sub-standard paper that looks legitimate enough but sells for a fraction of the price.

The problem is that once a story is out, it's a race against time to beat the legitimate copies to market. Sometimes they can steal a copy of an early pressing, but more often bootleggers have to get the jist of a story from a contact and then make up the rest.

For this they need (cheap, non-guild) writers and artists: gutterkin, dispossessed aelfir, and strike-listed drow are employed for a fraction of guild rates. The pay is terrible and the deadlines brutal, but with the lack of editorial oversight, artists can sometimes hide their own messages and values among the pages of blood and lust, sending messages that speak to the poor sods on the street who consume these bootleg prints in droves.

Tilt fixing. The act of fixing a jousting match, which is one of the better policed crimes – largely by the Knights themselves. The methodology for fixing a joust ranges from the mundane (bribing or threatening a competitor) to the technical (trick lances and dummy cobbles) and even the occult.

More challenging is enforcement. Interrupting a fixed joust risks disrupting the fun of an audience of heavily armed, heavily inebriated Knights. The Duke currently favours rectifying the problem by subtly having the perpetrators removed and battered out of sight of the joust itself.

PUBS OF THE NORTH DOCKS

The Dangling Vine has a vast wine cellar maintained and protected by Miette Renar, a weapons-grade sommelier and dab hand with a Trench Gun.

Danglers Rest, popular with the local anglers despite the owner's fervent desire to turn it into a popular night spot.

The Drooping Crook, which has had its sign defaced every week for a decade.

Willows Hang, attended by priests of Limyé. The drink is cheap, though conversations with the staff feel like they have a hidden cost.

The Cock o' Vin serves a number of fowl dishes made from the failed fleshcarved Pavo of the Aviary.

The Last Drop, a common hangout for the Hidden Guild of Poisoners under Mistress Tophine. Ironically, thanks to Guild rules, this is the place one is safest from being poisoned.

The Misty Gulch, which serves exceptional food, but its location on Lower Gorse Street makes it difficult to find.

The Pitch and Toss, which originally served the now long abandoned Magillicuddy Carnival. A fence divides the patrons from the abandoned rides haunted by lonely ghosts and amorous teens.

The Hungry Eel has a shrine to 'Handsome' Sally Grackler in the corner thanks to its obsessed landlady. The pub sits opposite Jacktar Station, an entrance into the Vermessian. Those who dare plumb the station's depths often 'tap Sally' at the shrine for good luck on the way out.

The Shivering Slab is popular with occultists who commune with the shuddering stone coffin that sits in its basement. The landlord assures visitors that it is quite safe, though he has a distant look in his eye.

The Stuffed Quiver is more of a drug den than anything else. Everyone knows they're making malak in the loft (the place reeks of the stuff), but so far the Guard have left them alone. Nobody is sure why.

Randy Clam's Dockfront Steakhouse, a franchise publican with an artificial atmosphere and its own cadre of franchised Knights.

The Half-Mast is a former frigate that ran aground at Upton Spur, a silt bank where the North Docks are shallow. A hole in its hull has left it flooded but otherwise sound. Being accessible only by boat has made it a novelty spot for young dilettantes visiting the North Docks.

The Grand Lance is a brothel which is considerably more upmarket than the rest of Huver Lane where it sits. It serves as a space of anonymity where attendees can explore their desires, free of judgement, under the protection of the Knight Commander Alizy Phonton.

Dock End sits on a pier, and is often used as neutral ground for settling affairs that might otherwise draw the attention of the Guard.

The Burning Jock burned down. Squires, gutterkin, and the occasional Ginnel Knight gather in the building's blackened shell to trade stories and cheap booze without harassment.

The Sandy Gulch sits on Gorse Street and is often mistaken for another pub. Its food is fine but patrons often wonder what the fuss is about.

The Horn and Horn is frequented by hunters from above and below who trade megacorvidae feathers for undercity pelts.

The Lance and Garter, home to a very serious sect of Knights. They have a round table that symbolises something (it changes depending who you ask) and get very upset when patrons disturb their loud ritual oaths.

The Dewy Pass does not actually exist, and is often given as a false address to prospective paramours one does not wish to meet again.

The Star and Martyr, a popular venue for Idols and musicians. It is constantly threatened with closure so the land can be turned into an aelfir estate.





THE NORTH DOCKS



THE ADMIRALITY

The North Docks boasts the largest number of boats in all Destera. The claim sounds impressive until one sees the flotilla of barely floating rowboats that serve the Knight Admirals. These bateaus, skiffs, and coracles sail the docks and canals, pillaging any small businesses with a waterfront address.

When not freebooting, many Knights indulge in the traditional nautical pastime of smuggling. The North Docks, with its miles of canals, bricked over waterways, and secluded wharfs, is the perfect place to move stolen, illicit, or dangerous goods for a nominal fee.

Displays of wealth amongst the smugglers are common. Greased haircuts with outrageous pompadours, oiled jerkins in unusual colours, robes of exotic furs, and codpieces both flattering and gross are much prized. During the day the Knights earn their coin on the water, and by night they race, gamble, and drink. It is common to see brightly coloured rowboats charging up and down the waterways for the amusement of cheering spectators.

While publicly she condemns this reckless and unKnightly behaviour on the waterways, the Duke is often seen collecting winnings from Mother Moon after a race.

CONTRABAND

A list of some exceptionally illegal items smuggled through the North Docks:

- A Nujabian eidolon statue covered in glyphs of gnollish script that pronounce dire warnings; slightly damaged.
- What is obviously three gutterkin in a trenchcoat, introduced as the missing dilettante Joyful-as-the-Morning.
- Carnal Dance of the Festal King, an aelfir narcographic painting.
- 'Bickering Susan', a cannonette belonging to the Hellionites but not currently in their possession.
- The Disquiet Casket: an interred, nameless aelfir in a casket who is quite dead and whose plaintive appeals should not be heeded. Do not open the casket.
- The stolen Totem Beast (mascot) of the Knights of the Goring Boar. It is a lesser boar (more commonly known as a 'pig') called Hammy which eats and shits constantly.

THE BELSTAFF

There was a time when the Knights of the North Docks used to be about something more than fistfights, extortion, and comparing garish codpieces. Most of what is known about this 'forgotten' history of barquelric Knighthood is collected in the various works of the esteemed aelfir academic, Rain-on-Glass, whose book series on drow traditions is as popular as it is fictional.

A tissue of romantic allusions, Rain-on-Glass' assumptions, and outright lies, these texts have nevertheless found purchase amongst a group of young well-heeled drow. Through a little research and some creative grafting of the family tree, these drow have traced their lines back to the original vassal Knights of the great drow houses. They now see themselves as the inheritors of the mantle of drow Knighthood.

They gather at *The Belstaff*, a pub on the waterfront that used to be *The Horned Cyclops* (down Backsil Street, near where the old church used to be). The windows have been boarded over and coloured magelights brought in. Inside, young drow wear serious expressions as they stand around glass tables discussing their favourite subjects: barquely, honour, and the arguments they recently won against the 'old guard'.

Once a week they rent out the space to a sparsely attended pulsecore night, and move their discussion outside where they chain smoke and pass quiet judgement on the attendees for their 'unbarquelrous' behaviour.

They style themselves as the Knights Errant, and are nominally led by an 'Errant Council' which sits at a three-sided table in the style of Saint Benefras (according to Rain-on-Glass). Two sides seat the council, whilst the final one faces towards their shrine of Saint Benefras himself.

However, the true power of the Errants lies with Ustes Quinn-Croy, a self-styled historian who claims a strong line of Quinn blood. Whether or not this is true, he is an insufferable bore convinced that the Knights could be great if only they would do things right. Naturally, 'right' means 'according to Quinn-Croy'.

This has led the Errants to become a glorified neighbourhood watch for the North Docks merchants. Aelfir authorities have also found the Errants all too willing to pitch in with 'cleaning up' the district, especially if it means showing up the decadent ways of the 'old guard'.

RAG TAGGERS

Knights love anything that celebrates their particular brand of semi-legal thuggery. Poetry is considered one of the classical forms of celebration, but few modern Knights have the patience for poems that last longer than the time it takes to down a pint.

The Knights much prefer more understandable and relatable things that can be seen from the street and show off their deeds and territory. This is where the Rag Taggers come in: a group of heraldic graffiti artists that operate outside the law and statutes of the Heraldry and Signers Guild. The Guild regulates the Knightly coats of arms, along with the signs for many of the pubs around the docks; but the Rag Taggers can ensure they get *seen*.

These stylised interpretations of Knight's heraldry are strictly against the terms of the Guild Heraldic Licence. As a result, any Knight will tell you they are shocked, *shocked* to see their own heralds painted in neon colours across the walls of factories and warehouses around the docklands.

The public face of the Rag Taggers is Elin Reno, a moody looking publican who runs The Rum Root: a small cupboard bar beneath Yssenrise Bridge where you have to push past an ale-bloated Ginnel Knight in full armour to get

through the door. Reno will entertain any reasonable offer of employment for the Taggers, and has a shotgun under the bar for anyone unreasonable who threatens them with the Guild.

The jobs themselves are undertaken by the gutterkin Reet-On and her artistic collective: a secretive group of artists, idols, poets, amusing drunks, and eager hangers-on. Reet is a gifted artist, but one who burns with revolutionary fervour. She has seen the gutterkin's lot and found it wanting, so she builds connections to the Knights and their resources through her work. She is biding her time, educating her fellow gutterkin in secret classes, subverting the heraldry of the Knights, and tagging public spaces in defiance of the drow and aelfir who would suppress her message of equality.

As well as being good advertising, the Rag Taggers' work is often used to delineate a Knightly Order's territory. When control shifts, the old tags are replaced by new ones honouring the latest 'management' of the street. More than one Order of Knights has come to blows just as a result of seeing unfamiliar heraldry encroaching on their domain. So far the Taggers themselves have avoided any blame for this, but some of the Knights look at them covetously and wonder if they'd not be safer under their 'protection'.

THE CITY A CANVAS

Spire is a canvas and always has been. Nobody knows who first cut their art into the spirebone, but they were followed by the drow, who turned cavernous halls and honeycombs of passageways into a home. Long after came the aelfir, who bound the city and drew echoes of the frozen north and the chains of aelfir law onto its canvas.

This is the image drawn on Spire today. It is painted on every surface and in every public space, a single dominating perspective that chokes all others with its righteousness.

Graffiti by its nature is an act of revolution. By painting on the walls, you prove that you can paint on the walls; you can break rules and display transgressions in brilliant colours and break up the grey monotony of the city. Most of all, by painting on the walls you take ownership of them, whatever the deed in a drawer of some distant office says.

ADVANCES

Joining the Rag Taggers allows access to the advances below.

HOME TURF. [Low advance] *Wherever you place your tags, that's your home.* If you suffer Shadow stress whilst in an area you've tagged, roll twice and take the lower result.

VISCERAL TAGS. [Low advance] *Whatever they say about your work, it can't be ignored; you made sure of that.* When in an area you've tagged, roll **Compel+Occult** to cause someone to become obsessed with or revulsed by your tags (the GM chooses which).

ONWHEELS. [Low advance] *You are part of the subculture of street rollers. You have wheels on your heels, the base of your boots, or a board you carry with you.* When on a roughly level surface and attempting to escape using the **Pursue** skill, you may roll with Mastery. Gain an Individual Bond with someone who is almost annoyingly into Roll Heels and the sub-culture surrounding them.

THE CITY A CANVAS. [Low advance] *The city is a canvas; the real beauty is lurking below the surface, and you will make sure they can't hide it anymore.* Gain +2 Reputation and take a Low advance from the Idol class.

THE CITY A PAGE. [Low advance] *The city is a page and you'll write a new chapter.* Gain +2 Shadow and take a Low advance from the Firebrand class.

SINKMARKET

If you need something of an illicit nature, you can find it on Sinkmarket.

This formalised black market was established by the renegade-Azurite-turned-master-fence Eloise Trufén. Sinkmarket is a collection of pontoons sunk into the riverbed silt of Spanwater Canal. On market days, dictated by an old Azurite numerological ledger, divers attach floats to the pontoons and the market erupts through the canal's surface.

By dint of a precarious legal technicality, Sinkmarket never actually comes into contact with the jurisdiction of the North Docks (defined as 'the land surrounding and boats *upon* the water'). A previous attempt by the Guard to raid the market was thwarted by destroying the floats and allowing the entire thing to sink, along with the contraband and a few of the patrons who couldn't swim.

At their own risk, fences and back-alley traders from across Spire flock to offload their wares in waterproofed sacks and sealed glass jars. The whole affair has the air of a carnival, full of coloured pennants, rigged games, and jesters and muses in masks of brightly coloured paint.

Here and there are aelfir accompanied by guards, taking in the intoxicating exoticism of the underclasses – though of course, they are carefully stage managed to keep them away from anything distasteful. In the farthest reaches of the market, seditious revolutionaries congregate to spread texts, debate revolutionary matters, and strongarm passers-by into joining their causes, all indulged by the Sinkmarket's liminal relationship to the law.

ADVANCES: KNIGHTLY FIGHTING STYLES

Over the centuries, the Knights of the North Docks have formed unique fighting styles that marry their right to bear large blades with a heroic disregard for the rules of fair play. If you are a Knight or have been trained by them, you may choose any of the advances below.

A FISTFUL OF STENS. [Low advance] *You follow up your attack with a handful of stens.* After you inflict stress on someone, mark **D3 Silver** stress to affect them as per the **Stunning** tag (*Spire*, p21).

FIGHT DIRTY. [Low advance] *Bring them down to your level and then beat them with experience. Also your fists.* Once per situation when rolling to **Fight**, you may hit someone with the closest object to hand. Inflict D6 stress or D3 **Piercing** damage (*Spire*, p21) as you put your boot into something vulnerable.

SING WHEN YOU'RE WINNING. [Medium advance] *You lead your friends in a raucous chorus, part hymnal, part sporting chant. The profanity is necessary and traditional.* +2 **Reputation.** Until the end of the situation, you and any allies who join you in song may assign **Blood** stress to free slots on your **Reputation** resistance.

THE ILLICIT GOODS OF SINKMARKET

Matchlance (trademark pending), an exceptionally illegal device made for the now defunct Hellionite-sponsored Matchlock Order of Knights. The Matchlance is a lance with a large-bore gun concealed inside the shaft. It operates as a normal lance (**D6, Piercing, Surprising**) until a hidden trigger is pressed, firing the loaded round (**D8, Ranged, One Shot**) at the unsuspecting target.

Spireblack Breacher, or a bomb by any other name. More accurately, a bomb designed to blow through walls and take out structural supports. It needs to be attached to something or someone to function properly.

Sanguine, a new drug of unknown providence. In small doses, it creates a feeling of oneness with the world and great closeness between users. This is because the drug's main ingredient is a secretion of the Vyskant mind parasite, which allows users to better hear the bloodsong of the unborn mother. Anyone wishing to may roll **Resist +Occult** to drown out the bloodsong with the discordant voice of the individual.

'Borrowed' Quarterplate, a set of ill-fitting and oddly smelling quarterplate that still bears the symbols of a Knightly Order long forgotten. It provides Armour 2, but the difficulty of anything stealthy or subtle increases by one step thanks to how bulky and obvious it is. Possessing this item exposes you to the possibility of acquiring the following fallout:

ON LOAN. [Shadow, Minor Fallout] This armour has been stolen from the Knights of the Half-Mast, who turn up ready to repossess the stolen goods from whoever bears it – or extract due compensation.

SQUIRES

Among the Orders, it is often said that anyone can become a Knight. All it takes is hard work, time, money, and breeding, which can also be bought with money. For those who lack any of the above through some personal failing, the good graces and sponsorship of a Knight can be obtained by becoming a Page. This unpaid position (in accordance with Spire's child labour laws) brings with it the hope of advancing to the role of a Knight's apprentice: a fully fledged, low paid Squire.

There is no telling how long it will take a young draw to ascend to Knighthood. Indeed, some bow-backed and wrinkled Squires eke out their twilight years carrying out clerical work, pot washing, and running to fetch their Knight's jousting lance or tournament codpiece when required.

While such tales of devotion are of course inspiring, less scrupulous Squires may notice they are trusted with many tedious yet essential tasks. It may occur to these Squires that they are in a position to exploit that trust, manipulating their Knightly liege or their assets to make a comfortable – if dishonourable – life for themselves.

Of course, embezzling from the Knights is always a dangerous proposition. Many a Squire caught by their superiors has been forced to flee to *Derelictus* or beyond.

Squires have their own social order. While the Knights are merrily bashing each other over the head each night, the Squires often find opportunities to socialise. They might sneak off to tea houses, crochet clubs, or candle-making classes – basically anywhere the Knights are unlikely to be. Here they gather to share stories and complaints, as well as warn each other of the movements of the Guard and any impending clampdowns or legal amendments that might affect their lieges' affairs.

ADVANCE

SQUIRE. [Low advance] *You may take this advance if you are a Squire to a Knight.* Name them and their Knightly Order (usually the pub they frequent with their Knightly mates). Gain a Bond with them. Once per situation when you would suffer **Shadow**, **Reputation**, or **Silver** stress, you may stress your Bond instead.

GINNEL KNIGHTS

Not every Knight belongs to a pub. When a pub is forced to close, the Knights who belonged to it drift rootless across the North Docks. Some are taken in by other Orders, though most return to whatever sad, unstoried life they had before Knighthood.

But: a determined few believe there is more to Knighthood than a pub, title, or legal recognition by the state. For these brave souls, Knighthood is a state of mind. To some they are inspirational heroes, harking back to the mythical Knights of old. To others they are particularly belligerent, heavily-armed street urchins that are getting on a bit. Either way, the Ginnel Knights will continue to operate their old patch, collecting protection money, shaking down locals, and giving them the honour of buying them drinks.

The Ginnel Knights who aren't arrested, killed, or shooed away with a broom can gather cadres of youths to whom they teach the ways of Knighthood. The training typically involves 'rescuing' crates from pubs, 'standing vigil' on street corners while their Knight drinks the contents, and then executing a 'tactical retreat' when the Guard turn up.

Drawn together under the twin banners of boredom and frustration, many Ginnel Squires form Orders of their own, telling stories of their Once and Future Pub.

Occasionally a band such as the Alley Rats or the Leak Street Rafters will rise to notoriety, and the press will gleefully cover their antics until they are abandoned by their Knight and then torn apart by infighting.

GINNEL SQUIRES

Names: Peri of the Alley, Crowsnook
Mattie, Toby Slatestep

Descriptors: Wearing a dyed tabard their mum definitely didn't make; Swigging from a shared bottle of cheap cider; Laughing at a crass joke about your parentage

Difficulty: 0, but Difficulty 1 if in large gangs or trying to impress their Knight, until one of them goes down

Resistance: 5

Equipment: Mop-Lance (D6), Brick-Sock Flail (D3, Brutal), Pocket knife (D3, Concealable)



UP-SPIRE CRIME

PERCH AND NEW HEAVEN

One clings to the side of Spire and the other sits atop its crown, beyond even the frozen halls of Amaranth. Perch and New Heaven are distant provinces of crime, poorly connected to the underworld literally and figuratively. Here in the harsh glare of the sun, crime and law have created their own unique ecosystems – stranger than their less elevated counterparts, but every bit as deadly.

ANASTASIA GRIS

Nobody has been in the business of crime longer than Anastasia Gris. At seventy, she's more than just a criminal or a throwback to the old days of the Katel. Gris came to Perch as a Losik kapi, working and stabbing her way through the ranks with a ruthlessness that has made her something of a folk legend. The denizens of Perch and New Heaven, even Gris's own rivals, will tell you she's the hardest bastard you'll ever meet (but at least she's not one of those Red Row upstarts). Her enemies fear her, but more than that, they respect her.

Anyone who does cross Gris will be evicted from her territory by being thrown off it. Everyone agrees this is only proper: partly to avoid the same fate, but mainly because it's considered a vital part of local colour. Gris is a thug, but she's Perch's thug, and a strange source of civic pride.

Her business is drugs. Gris's philosophy is 'pile 'em high and sell 'em cheap', which means her customers don't always know exactly what they're taking. Her trade runs completely parallel to the Threadneedle empire, and each minds their own business, though some subordinates on both sides have begun pushing for hostile takeovers.

Gris herself is, for the first time, eyeing retirement. She has no desire for a protracted and expensive war down-Spire; the only thing she can't abide more than a pointless turf war is guns. She sees them as flashy and arrogant in a domain where gravity is already the deadliest weapon. So Gris is doubly aggravated to find Mr Winters' merchandise turning up in Perch.

Winters is happily oblivious to his new feud. His son, Devlin, has been gun running up-Spire behind his back in a tragically misguided play for his father's approval. He's about to discover that retaliation hits harder when it lands on you from a great height.

'THOROGH' VANTRU

Vantru considers themselves the natural heir to the Gris drugs empire. Time and again they have shown themselves to be indispensable to Gris' operation, but never ambitious enough to be a threat. This is intentional. Vantru operates procurement for Gris, and subcontracts the grisly business of sending the competition on a 'shortcut down-Spire'.

Vantru is the illegitimate child of Sister Elisabeth of Threadneedle Square. Unacknowledged, they have avoided the internecine conflict of their siblings, striking out on their own to demonstrate their worth. Once they have proven themselves, Vantru intends to return triumphant as a worthy heir to their mother's mantle.

Unfortunately, Gris has been growing suspicious of her brutal yet oddly selfless lieutenant. Vantru may not be able to wait for Gris' retirement to make their move.

FALLOUT

DOWN-SPIRE SHORTCUT

[Shadow, Severe Fallout] You've been made, or you've pissed off the wrong people in New Heaven. A pair of burly drew grab you and drag you to the edge of Spire. An audience is already gathering. Some cheer, while others look on horrified as you are pitched off the side of the city and fall towards the clouds below. It is a long way down, and you have time to consider how you might have done things differently. The ground rushes up to meet you and you die quite horribly.

PRAEVENIRE RECORDATUS

THE BITTER BARON

When you want to absolutely ruin someone, you call the Bitter Baron. An aelfir of apparently good breeding, the Baron has devoted himself to the utter devastation of the lives of others as an art form. No simple hitman, the Baron instead systematically rips apart the social webs of a target with blackmail, lies, and falsified evidence. He forges repossession documents, burns smallholdings, and empties bank accounts; he turns your family against you, and leaves you penniless and destitute in the street. The Baron's services are expensive, and, for obvious reasons, there are no small number of desperate broken individuals who would like to see him killed.



CRIMES OF THE AELFIR

Aelfir do not break the law. That is to say: while many aelfir commit acts prohibited under certain local statutes and regulations, this is never done with the base criminality that the law was intended to restrict among less refined species.

Of course aelfir indulge in theft, murder, arson, and the enjoyment of psychoactive substances every bit as much as the drow. However, they only pursue these acts through regrettable moral or aesthetic necessity.

The aelfir are, by their own humble estimation, creatures of extraordinary and highly evolved morality. Law is a tool used only for those without the keen discipline and clarity of moral thought that all aelfir exemplify. Thus, it is their duty to enforce the laws of Spire until those who cannot control their baser urges can learn to live morally.

In fact, they regard the concept of criminality – and the fact that it continues to occur within the ordered system created for the drow – with a perverse fascination. Clampdowns and crackdowns, long prison sentences, and even capital punishment have done nothing to eliminate crime on the streets of Spire. Still, this has not been seen as any reason to stop.

OLD LACE SOCIETY

Of the crimes the aelfir are fascinated with, none intrigues them more than murder. Not the crude hacking and slashing committed in a moment of emotion or weakness, nor the business-like removal of a professional obstacle, but the kind of murder they can understand at an aesthetic level. A murder with poetry, stakes, and a devious mystery to be solved.

For the Old Lace Society, this began with a fascination for *Spireblack Sensations*: tawdy rags filled with salacious tales of murder. They hungered for stories of sex, occult power, and the kind of hard-drinking, lantern-jawed women who could seduce a countess and wrestle a gnoll with one hand.

Like all things for aelfir, the *Sensations* quickly lost their appeal. The Old Lace Society had dalliances with the criminal set, attending Mr Winters' balls and getting high in Threadneedle alleyways, but they all lacked the thrill of the chase, the overly complex crime, and the anticipation of the resolution.

The answer was obvious to the aelfir. If nobody was committing sufficiently pleasing crimes, it was because only the aelfir could do them correctly (as in all things). However, for the Old Lace Society the joy was in the hunt: finding the guilty and bringing them to the kind of freezing justice they exemplified. Knowing the guilty before they could investigate held no sport. They needed to find a way to commit a crime and then solve it to the satisfaction of all involved.

The answer was drugs.

By taking a cocktail of narcotics after the deed had been done, a member of the Society could arrive at a crime scene blissfully unaware not only of their responsibility for the crime but how they did it – and, crucially, who they had framed for the murder.

At such an event, the guests arrive dressed in floral print and aggressive tweeds, beginning interrogations over tea, scones, and the occasional dose of a not-entirely-reliable truth serum. While the game is afoot, nobody within the crime scene is permitted to leave (a group of guards called the 'Closed Circle' helps to enforce this) until the final mantleside denouncement.

The Society is focused on finding the most compelling narrative to match the clues they have found (or made up). Even on the rare occasion a 'real' murder merits their attention, one should not expect justice from the Society. This is a game, and the aelfir care more about discovering a shocking twist that shows off how clever they are than the facts of a particular case.

MEMBERS OF THE OLD LACE SOCIETY

Rhymes-on-Glass is the ostensible leader of the Old Lace Society. Wearing the mask of a doddering old lady, they are as focused on tea and etiquette as they are on their investigations. They like their victims to be young and their culprits to run.

Whisper-Low-Sweet-Song is the self-professed leader of the Old Lace Society, who proudly shows the scars of his expensive Undying surgery. He likes culprits that are entangled in their victim's lives and messy family feuds brought to the boil.

Tell-Me-Not is the founder of the Old Lace Society, and will admit in confidence to shunning the title of leader if not the role. She favours tweed capes and intricate sealed room cases with surprising culprits, which has resulted in the deaths of several former members.

Their-Sweet-Surrender is considered widely by their supporters to be the power behind the throne of the Society. Under a pseudonym, they author many tales of the Old Lace Society as *Spireblack Sensations*, without the knowledge or assent of the other members.

Our-Retired-Explorer is the Society treasurer, and uses his position to quietly guide the organisation. A former explorer who discovered numerous far-flung provinces for the aelfir and put down people opposed to being 'discovered', he is rarely seen without a large-bore hunting rifle. He enjoys lacing mysteries with the occult and 'exotic'.

A BEAUTIFUL DEATH

The aelfir have a strong culture of aestheticism. They demand beauty by their own standards in all things. An aelfir lives beautifully and dies beautifully, and everything within their sight should endeavour to mirror their beauty so as not to mar their passing.

For some aelfir, the quest to find a beauty that surpasses all others is a hobby; for others, it is an obsession, and there is nothing that they will not seek out the beauty in. For some aelfir, death is the most beautiful of all things: the summation of a life and the shedding of the mortal form for the unknown and unknowable province of whatever heaven they believe in. For others, the death itself is not what is beautiful, but how one dies. They abhor the randomness of a natural death, and are instead drawn to deaths that mirror the poetry and splendour with which they live their lives.

Serial killers hold a particular fascination for these aelfir. Not as random or garish as mass murder (where the interest tends towards the statistical), these *Aestheticians Mortali* look for deaths which demonstrate thought, ritual, and an appreciation for the life being taken. Murderers such as Masque, Argont the Swan, and the Glass Singer are popular. Debate rages over which artist's work is the most vibrant and relevant.

Others seek to make themselves a canvas, ghoulishly studying the victims so they can tempt the killer into murdering them as well, immortalising themselves as a work of art writ in blood and flesh.

Much of this craze is driven by the garish and exploitative biographies written by Inar Pwent, a middling writer formerly of the Muse. Pwent found their voice in framing the deeds of these murderers as the natural reaction to the decadence of society. The motive for a string of ritually murdered Idols or a carefully posed skinless tableau are explained as the culprit killing out of a heightened desire for manners, civility, or justice. In the end, Pwent has repeatedly argued, murder is just another way to satisfy the craving to impose order on the world. What aelfir can't identify with that?

POPULAR SERIAL KILLERS OF SPIRE

The Judge is popular with the more puritanical aelfir (and the drow who want to ingratiate themselves with them). The Judge's outfit is a highly conspicuous powdered wig and a mask of judgement. Their victims are those they believe guilty of criminal acts, and their murders are interpreted as ironic forms of execution. For instance, their latest victim was a notorious rumrunner found pickled in his own contraband. The Guard insist they have no leads on the identity of this killer, despite their prolific killing spree.

Death-Thy-Sweet-Perfume is another masked killer, though this mask is more practical. She wears it to protect herself from the fog of perfume produced by the canister she bears with her. The pink cloud that follows her is a potent toxin said to induce orgasmic raptures prior to death. She favours victims who practice beliefs heretical and unholy. This has led to an explosion of aelfir taking up heretical faiths to earn her attention and be killed at the peak of ecstasy.

The Pusher, a ghost of the North Docks and the Silver Quarter who is responsible for a string of drownings. Nothing connects the victims save their method of death, causing many to fear that this is of significance. Perhaps within or beneath Spire there is a cult dedicated to the worship of some deity of drowning. The Guard's insistence that these people just fell in has only fuelled speculation.

The Venture Street Cutter is considered a 'gateway killer'. He targets beautiful young aelfir and drow, exsanguinating them and removing a number of internal organs. His methodology is crude compared to less mainstream killers, and his symbolism rather obvious; but fetishistic analysis of his technique and motives among the lay-audience has seen him achieve huge popularity.

The Speaker is one of the more unusual killers. Controversy rages over whether his weapon is his voice itself, or some kind of arcane incantation he whispers to his victims before death. The Speaker has been heard but never seen; his voice is deep and sonorous. Wherever his voice is heard, there will soon be an academic or occult practitioner, dead by their own hand. It has earned the killer an entranced following in the same circles where he hunts, all eager to understand his power and what they can learn from him.



POLLUTANT THOUGHT

Aelfir supremacy is, to their minds, a product of their right to lead. For some, this is a product of divinity: a mandate handed down to them by the Solar Pantheon. Most aelfir, however, scoff at the idea that they need any kind of 'mandate'. One only has to look at their works to see how every domain that has fallen under their rule has been improved.

As a great civilising influence, the aelfir claim to have brought art, culture, and prosperity to Destera just as they will to Far Nujab. Nujab's millennia of recorded history and gnollish culture is irrelevant, as it is of entirely the wrong kind for the aelfir.

For the most part, an aelfir who disagrees with this narrative is tolerated – though a critic of aelfir expansion might not be invited to the same parties they used to be. They may even be broadly accused of performative dissent and the wrong kind of attention seeking. Those who persist – especially those who hold influence, or allow drow to sit at their tables, eat their food, and speak without due deference – may be dangerous.

When not subject to appropriate censure, drow may encourage a kindly aelfir to openly question the great works of their own race. They may cite distant history (which is obviously now irrelevant) as evidence of crimes, despite the fact that aelfir should no longer be considered accountable for them.

There is no legal framework for this kind of crime, called 'pollutant thought.' It erodes the righteous rule of the aelfir and seeks to embolden their enemies. But, while aelfir should never be subject to anything as pedestrian as the law, there should still be consequences.

Punishments are often subtle and unspoken. There is no arrest, no gaol; only the hushlisting of the offender. Other aelfir and their subordinates across Spire turn away the accused's trade and overtures of friendship. They are effectively locked out of aelfir society until shame should either correct their behaviour or compel them to abandon their position and live amongst their lessers in humiliation.

MASK FORGERY

A mask is more than a simple face covering to the aelfir: it is a symbol. Their public masks are the faces they turn towards the world. They have masks of greeting, of meeting, of commerce and grief and appropriate jubilation for an event. They switch masks often, always concealing the vulgar flesh of their true face lest it be seen and known by others.

Even in private they wear masks of intimacy, of lust, of secrets shared with friends and passions hidden from the world at large. It is the one thing no self-respecting aelfir will part with or gift to another. It is the core of their identity, imbued with their self through their actions. A mask can be more of a person than the aelfir who wears it.

This contrivance is a vulnerability to those not bound by aelfir propriety. A robber asking for valuables whilst adorned in the true owner's mask is not merely disguised as the owner; for all intents and purposes, they *are* the owner. The Guard has made futile overtures to persuade aelfir to register their masks, but it is unthinkable that an aelfir would have their identity listed like property in some ledger.

No aelfir could imagine having their very selves accountable to the drow Guard, of all people. They are even less willing to submit to a system that would reveal not just how many masks one owns but also their purposes. The aelfir stand firm against any suggestion of this, even as they authorise more invasive search powers down-Spire to stem the mask-forging shops and 'Face Markets' which they believe are the true root of these offences.

In truth, the biggest dealer in masks is one of their own: Lady Fray-Not-Thy-Will. The Lady began her enterprise to abate the boredom of her position, as she has no task in Spire save indulging her vice for petty gossip and courtly drama. First she stole the mask of her father and attended an illicit fête in his name, swapping masks with another aelfir in a transgressive act that would define her from that day onward.

She sells to anyone, though she has a keen eye for troublemakers – she remembers every client, and uses it shrewdly to set members of the Amaranthian court against each other.

THE FORGED MASKS OF FRAY-NOT-THY-WILL

The Smiling Mask of the Widow Sunlit-Fountain-Chambers, who has sworn never to wear this mask again. The mask was a betrothal gift from her late wife, Pool-Of-Summer-Wishing. Rumours persist that she has been seen wearing this mask (or one similar to it) while breaking her oath of sorrow in the company of the Guard Captain Swift-And-Certain.

The Quiet Mask is a common mask used by servants to indicate when they are present but can be trusted not to speak of what they see. This particular one seems to be in the design of the Dew-in-Long-Grass household of Amaranth.

The Death Mask of Hush-There-My-Childe, the restless former council member who has been dead since the Season of Seven Daughters. Though their killer was never brought to justice, received wisdom is that the culprit was a rival council member. They're rumoured to still walk the Council Chambers, calling out their murderer's name but incomprehensible with grief.

The Mask of The Once-Prince, which has a regal bearing, but is in an older style once popular in the north. It has the quality of looking important but nondescript, and is difficult to place unless one is very familiar with aelfir history.

CRIME: EXTRA ADVANCES

By N Masyk

SPIREBLACK GRIN

Anyone can admire creation; but only true genius sees the beauty in destruction. So claim the Spireblack Grins, at any rate: heretic gunsmiths, demolitionists, forgewrights, and tinkerers of technological terrors.

Hideously scarred and burned from hard labour in the war-forges and foundries of aelfir industrialists (as well as proximity to their own inventions), the Spireblack Grins sport bombastic tattoos over their twisted flesh.

They daub their bodies in grease-paint, soot, and blackpowder. They delight in the heat and the noise of explosions and high-automatic fire, the whiff of cordite and ignited powder, and the blood-red or bone-white flowers that bloom from their applications. The louder and more bombastic things are, the better. Few of them have fully-functioning senses anymore, and they delight in riotous excess almost out of necessity.

More of a loose collective than an actual gang or criminal enterprise, the Grinners' only unifying goal is the creation and demonstration of louder, dirtier, and more destructive power (including guns, bombs, explosions, and/or flames). They sell their wares partially to fund their future endeavours and partially to see their work spread through Spire. They want to hear the rattle and pop of large-caliber, high-automatic weapons chattering throughout the day and night.

But to a true Grinner, it is the act of destruction itself that is the greatest reward. They see themselves as musicians and artists, and their instruments and tools as devices of greater and more terrible destruction. Their canvas is the city itself. To a Grinner, civilization is a mistake, a disease; the cleansing fires of annihilation are the cure.

Chief among those who wish to put a stop to the Grinners' destructive creations is Mr Winters. His Organisation has steadily established a near-stranglehold on the manufacture and distribution of firearms within Red Row; but a collection of anarchist forgesmiths handing out weapons of mass destruction to anyone and everyone in the district is as bad for stability as it is for profit.

There is a substantial standing bounty on those confirmed to be members of the Spireblack Grins. Mr Winters will take them alive, to shackle them to their own foundries and set them to work for him if he can; but a dead Grinner is just as good.

Names: Red-Flower-Blooms, Mrs Vengeance, Doktore Boom

Descriptors: Emaciated and covering in festering sores; Covered in soot and a network of pink, puckering burns; Clad in burnished metal plates hammered into scarred flesh

Difficulty: 1

Resistance: 3

Equipment: Metal plates, leather harnesses, and welding-masks (Armour 2), A stupefying variety of firearms and explosives (D6, Dangerous, Ranged, Reload, Piercing)

ADVANCES

REQUIREMENT: Destroy something beautiful.

REFRESH: Destroy something (or someone!) with a gun you have built using this Advance. The less effective the gun and the more powerful the target, the more you refresh.

LOW ADVANCES

ARTISTE. *Guns are just a medium through which you can express your genius.* Once per session, when you have an hour or so to spare and a place to work, you can create a custom gun with two random tags as outlined in the adjacent boxout. Your gun is a work of art and is not designed for extended use: it breaks apart into junk at the end of the session.

IN A CAVE, WITH A BOX OF SCRAPS!

A bad workman always blames his tools. When you use the **ARTISTE** ability above, you can make a custom gun pretty much anywhere out of pretty much anything.

ATTENTION TO DETAIL. *Your twitchy eyes hide a keen perception.* Gain the **Investigate** skill. When you create a custom gun using the **ARTISTE** ability, roll 1D10 and choose which table to apply it to, instead of rolling randomly to choose between the two tables on offer.

MEDIUM ADVANCES

MAESTRO. *You conduct a symphony of chaos with your creations.* As **ARTISTE**, but your custom gun has 4 tags rather than 2.

CUSTOM GUNS

Your custom gun is (D6, Ranged, Dangerous) by default, and has additional random tags and features derived from the tables below.

Roll an initial D10 to determine the table, then another D10 to determine the tag. Re-roll any duplicate results, and work with the GM to figure out how contradictory tags function together. In addition, your gun displays some outrageous artistic flair tied to the tags rolled; describe what it is.

As an optional (and more entertaining) rule, the GM can determine the tags of your weapon and reveal them to you when you first use the gun in combat. Part of the joy of creation is discovery, after all.

TABLE ONE (D10: 1–5)

1 BRUTAL	Roll +1 dice for stress, and pick higher
2 PIERCING	Ignores armour
3 SURPRISING	Roll with Mastery on your first attack
4 DOUBLE-BARRELLED	Fire twice and then reload
5 RELOAD	Must be reloaded after each shot
6 SPREAD D3	Inflicts half stress to D3 additional targets within arm's reach of the primary target
7 POINT-BLANK	Damage increases by one dice size within arm's reach, decreases by one dice size at long range
8 SPREAD D6	Inflicts half stress to D6 additional targets within arm's reach of the primary target
9 STUNNING	Once per situation, targets take no damage but their difficulty is reduced to 0
0 UNSTABLE	Weapon must be braced before firing or increase difficulty of attack by 1

TABLE TWO (D10: 6–10)

1 CONDUIT	Mark D3 stress to Mind; roll with Mastery for rest of situation
2 BLOOD-BOUND	Mark D3 stress to Blood; roll with Mastery for rest of situation
3 SQUIB	Stress inflicted becomes D3
4 PUNCHY	Stress inflicted becomes D8
5 FIERCE	Damage becomes D10, weapon gains One-Shot (only fires once per situation)
6 LOUD	If you inflict maximum stress when using this weapon, mark D6 stress to Shadow
7 KEEN	On a 10, inflict +3 stress rather than +1 stress
8 EXTREME RANGE	Replaces Ranged; can be used at extreme ranges
9 FIERY	If you roll maximum stress, roll another dice of the same size and add it to the total
0 PERFECTED	Remove the Dangerous tag



THE BUTCHER'S GUILD

This is the latest and most successful criminal enterprise to take over stewardship of that accursed hole called the Red Pit, an accursed rust-red abattoir that festers like a wound within Derelictus. They daringly name themselves a 'guild,' brazenly displaying a blighted icon of a brass porcine skull in mockery of legitimacy; but the denizens of Derelictus know better.

'Red-Legs' is the whispered epithet as these extortionists and murderers-for-hire pass by, their leather garments permanently stained from gore-strewn abattoirs. They favour long coats dipped in blood; bare, scarred, and emaciated chests adorned in heavy brass chains; grotesque, distended guts; and cruelly hooked and spiked implements of butchery and slaughter.

The Butcher's Guild collects 'volunteers' from among the dregs of Derelictus to serve in the Pit, endlessly collecting food waste for compost to feed to the pallid, sickly livestock raised for slaughter in those lightless vaults.

Life as a 'volunteer' is nasty, brutish, and short. A few graduate to wearing leathers and long coats of their own, but most are simply never seen again. Initiates are largely drawn to this life from a young age, seduced by displays of strength and wealth, or assured of the Guild's valuable contribution to Derelictus society. Many – including the original founders of the Guild – are luckless and destitute inhabitants of Grist, who were promised better meat and a sense of belonging in exchange for loyalty.

Initiates who have been fed this 'better meat' for a long time become stronger, more aggressive, and more violent. Their skin turns ashen, their bellies and jaws distend, and their flesh reeks of rot and decay. Eventually, their minds are lost to the hunger. They are then brutally put down by their erstwhile Guild-mates, hewn into bloody chunks, and stuffed both sizzling and rare into the hungry mouths of the next batch of recruits.

At the end of it all, everything is just meat

Names:	Chunk, Saw, Three-Tooth
Descriptors:	Rotting long coats and leather pants dripping with gore; Sinewy corded muscle wrapped around pallid skeletal flesh; Teeth filed to points
Difficulty:	0. Red-Legs are brutal fighters, but not smart ones, and fight so recklessly they are often as much of a danger to themselves as they are to their opponents
Resistance:	5
Equipment:	Leather clothes (Armour 2), Butchery implements such as cleavers, saws, spikes, and hammers (D3, Brutal)

ADVANCES

REQUIREMENT: Bring a sizeable portion of meat to the Butchers' Guild and be sworn in by a Red-Legs.

REFRESH: Donate some rare or interesting meat to the Guild, and eat what is given to you in return.

LOW ADVANCES

RANCOR. *All flesh, even your own, is just meat to be sacrificed in service to the Guild.* Once per situation, when you mark stress to **Blood**, mark an equal amount of stress to a target within arm's reach.

A BLUNT AND HEAVY BLADE. *You are entrusted with a Butcher's Blade after proving your worth.* Your blade is a (**D3, Bloodbound, Brutal**) weapon. Even if it's taken from you, you can always find it close to hand.

MEDIUM ADVANCES

BLOODY MESS. *Your displays of violence are sickening to behold.* When you reduce a target to 0 Resistance with your Butcher's Blade, every adversary who sees it happen marks D3 stress.





SECOND-HAND RAIN

By Chris Farnell

Content Warnings: This scenario contains particular mention of alcoholism, gambling, violent death, and police interrogation.

INTRODUCTION OVERVIEW

The North Docks are the real Spire. Go any further out and you're heading into the wastes of Destera; go any further in and you're heading towards the infinite, maddening depths of the Heart.

Only here at the edge of things, where junks and freighters bustle at the quays like flies over rotten fruit, are you in the city proper. Only here, where opportunity lurks in every alleyway and waits to devour the unwary, are you really in Spire. At least, that's what everyone who lives here says.

But you just work here. A few months back, the Ministry installed you as their 'North Docks Intelligence Network Hub and Asset Liaison'. It wasn't until you were fully moved into your pokey office that you realised this basically added up to keeping track of which customs officials to bribe.

Your Magister is also a fan of 'initiative-led resourcing', which means you've forgone the customary Ministry stipend. You have to pay the rent on your office yourself through your cover as an independently contracted private investigator.

For the most part, this means tracking down missing durances, solving payroll theft disputes, and doing stakeouts for aelfir who believe their lovers are having affairs with people below their station. So far, you've not run into any trouble beyond some angry jilted lovers and the occasional death threat.

But recently it's begun to rain. Again, nothing unusual. The North Docks are no stranger to bizarre weather, despite none of the district being exposed to the sky. But it never stops.

Then one day, local snitch and all-round low-life Lors de Pluie enters your premises, and that's when your trouble really begins.

Read, or paraphrase, the previous section aloud to your players to bring them up to speed on the events surrounding this scenario.

For your first scene, roleplay an interaction between the players and Lors. Lors has known the party for a while, and refers to them as friends even though the players may not feel that way about him at all.

He's scared, but won't say why. All he wants is to leave a brown paper package in the players' protection, promising he will collect it for a substantial fee later on. Under no circumstances must the players look inside the package.

When he leaves – which he'll do in a hurry – it won't be long before the players hear screams from outside. Lors has been murdered on their doorstep.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON

Lors is a third-rate wheeler and dealer who stumbled into some first-rate power. The Home Nations General, Helene Joan of Quinn, has come to Spire seeking a legendary eidolon: the Crow-Thing. This black statuette that only vaguely resembles a bird has a long and storied history. It is said to have the power to end empires.

Lors commissioned a forgery, reasoning his mark would be in the middle of a distant battlefield before she figured out that she'd been swindled. But the forgery resembled people's idea of the Crow-Thing far more than the original figurine, which is smaller and less imposing. Demons, whatever their nature, are more of form and idea than substance – so the power that imbued the real Crow-Thing transferred to the forgery. The movement was sensed by every psychic, blood witch, and half-sensitive occultist through the North Docks. It didn't take long for word to reach Amaranth and the Crow-Thing's original owner: Kspeer Sun-Brushes-the-Clouds.

When he realised the size of the target on his back, Lors panicked and attempted to hide the Crow-Thing with the only people he trusted: the players (he really didn't have many friends). Unfortunately, when he left their office, he stepped right into the path of some Knights of the Wizened Weasel that Kspeer had hired as enforcers. When fleeing those enforcers, Lors ran straight into Hamstead – the forger who created the new eidolon. Hamstead killed him to prevent the eidolon falling into the wrong hands.

Now everyone with any interest in power in the North Docks is searching for the Crow-Thing, either to use it or to keep it from being used. To stay alive, the players are going to have to tread a fine line between the feuding factions.

ELVEN NOIR

Second-Hand Rain is a scenario that brings noir to Spire. Even if you've never read or watched any noir, you're probably familiar with the tropes. Hard drinking, down-on-their-luck PIs whose partners are dead; their client is a woman in a red dress that you'll describe with the most tortured simile you have to hand; she then betrays you, or you turn her into the cops; and so on.

We're not going to deny there's some of that here; after all, there's fun to be had with those tropes. But at the same time, we want to tell a story that echoes the themes of those films and books in a way that can be enjoyed as a straight-up noir rather than a parody.

Behind all the raincoats and nice hats, the heart of a lot of noir stories (particularly detective noir) is the very Spire-ish theme of a working class stiff trying to navigate the corridors of power. The private detectives of the noir genre are often hired by the rich and powerful to help fulfil agendas far above their pay grade.

But at the same time, those detectives are given licence to go where they please, ask whatever questions they like, and not have to worry about the social rules they're breaking (until they suffer a beating later). We've tried to do this while avoiding some of the more problematic recurring themes of the genre – namely that most of the women turn out to be evil.

To create a noirish atmosphere, here are a couple of things you can do as GM.

- Whenever a character meets the players, they offer them a drink. Sometimes it may be drugged or poisoned, but most adversaries will probably be more direct than that when it's time for actual violence.
- Never be afraid to employ an over-elaborate simile. See p. 90 for potential examples.
- Throughout this campaign it's raining. Mention this and take it into account at every available opportunity.

BEING DETECTIVES

'Private investigators' are a relatively new phenomenon in Spire. If you want someone doing over, it's easy to hire muscle. If you want to know something, Spire is rife with all kinds of mystics. If you want to have someone bound by law you can go to the Guard, if that's your thing.

But paying someone to find things out by collecting evidence, looking for clues, or even just spying on your friends and enemies is novel. In some of the lower and higher strata of society, it's even considered a little bit glamorous.

However, the players should be under no illusions. Just because some half-sten yellow press shockers (or the higher brow desang operas they inspired) are well-regarded right now doesn't mean anyone actually likes detectives.

After all, they are – bar the occasional foreign human – mostly drow. On a societal level, you are akin to a cleaner, plumber, or common surgeon; your clients always feel there is something vaguely distasteful about having to hire you. The higher class of people you investigate will be affronted by the indignity of having to speak to you, and any working person you meet will be automatically suspicious that you're working for some rich nob (or, even worse, their boss).

The people who show the characters the slightest bit of genuine friendliness or warmth are people they should immediately be very, very suspicious of.

GUMSHOE ADVANCES

At the start of the game, each player can select a Low advance from the City Guard or Graymanor Investigator lists (*Spire*, p. 69 and 71). Take additional advances from both lists as normal.

PLOT THREADS

THE CROW-THING

If the players open Lors's package, they will discover a shining black statue of pure obsidian. It is in the shape of a raven. Its feathers are made up of precisely inlaid onyx, with black sapphires for eyes. Regardless of what kind of light illuminates the statue, it always gives the impression of being lit in red. It is extremely cold to the touch.

A little research will reveal that this is the Crow-Thing, described below.

However, further research or interacting with anyone who has seen the Crow-Thing will reveal that you have a forgery – and not even a very convincing one. The real Crow-Thing is small, a little bigger than the palm of your hand. It is carved from unpolished granite, has no gemstones, and only vaguely resembles a bird shape.

But this statue is a far more fitting home for a demonic entity that brings down empires, and so the forgery has now become the real thing.

HISTORY

The Crow-Thing has turned up many times throughout history, although never for long. Where it appears, the libraries and record repositories soon turn to ash. Even eyewitnesses are hard to come by.

The earliest appearance we know of was at the Clay Zigguratropolis. The domain of the Red Ziggurat was said to span two shores, until the entire city was subsumed in the eruption of a suddenly active volcano. Ash blocked out the skies long enough to starve the few survivors. A guard at the border of Old Aliquam noted a 'bird-shaped piece of cooled lava' among the possessions of an interned refugee.

Several centuries later, the 'Lucky Crow' was said to be the prize possession of Queen Chlohsind the Last. Her body was never found, but it is said her surviving acolytes placed the crow on her tomb.

There are no reliable reports of a crow statuette being seen during the Whitecross Insurgency, but the insurgents themselves marched under the banner of the crow.

It has passed through the hands of three noble houses of the Home Nations, although none of their names are remembered. It's even been said that the north was once ruled by another, before the bird passed through their vicinity and the Everqueen ascended.

PRAEVENIRE RECORDATUS

SHAY VANGRIN

Shay deals in information. They have a semi-oracular relationship with the underworld, as the information they deal in is almost entirely random. You can buy an overstuffed envelope of info from them at a surprisingly affordable rate; but you don't get to pick what the info is about. Instead, they believe that you are cosmically guided to the right information, and you'll find what you need somewhere inside. (No refunds, obviously – you just need to open up to the universe better.)

Shay is being manipulated by almost every secret society operating in their area, and acts as a sort of barometer for how angry they are at each other. They definitely have information on the player characters, but whether or not they're aware of it and who they've sold it to are other matters entirely.

Most recently, a much-feared Red Row crime lord was known for the crow-shaped head atop his cane. It was horrible what the children did to him.

Some say that every owner of the Crow-Thing sees it twice: once as its owner, and once as its victim.

But while these stories are myriad, and half of them are almost certainly lies, the recurring message is that the Crow-Thing ends empires. Small or large, fleeting or historic, the Crow-Thing doesn't care. Anything can crumble if you put the time in.

RITUALS

While the tales of the Crow-Thing are many and self-contradictory, there are some elements of the story that have survived every retelling. Namely: the ritual needed to summon the Crow-Thing's powers.

This information can be gained from Maria Cramoisi, from a player character's own occult research, or even from Kspeer Sun-Brushes-the-Clouds if enough trickery or threat is applied.

At least five out of the six acts below must be performed while in possession of the Crow-Thing. The ritual can also be enacted by a coven, so one individual doesn't have to do every act – they can be performed by the group as a whole.

We've tried to be clear in explaining how an act will count here, but the final decision on whether an act is successfully performed comes down to the GM and what they think will give the most interesting and entertaining outcomes.

Bear in mind that should the Crow-Thing fall into the hands of an NPC (the Duchess, for instance, or Maria Cramoisi) it is entirely possible that they will start performing these rituals themselves. This will give them access to the same powers and trigger the same consequences.

If there is a predetermined ending to the campaign, it is the rituals being completed and one of the eidolon's major effects being used. Alternatively, the Crow-Thing could be taken out of play by either leaving Spire or falling into the possession of someone who will keep it safe.

THE GOLD RACKET

Take a job for the money.

Simple enough. Take and complete a case from an NPC without any personal or moral stake in the outcome. If the work is something the practitioner finds morally reprehensible, all the better.

WALK A CROOKED MILE

Betray an ally.

Again, straightforward enough. Sell someone out, deceive them, knowingly lead them to their death without their knowledge. The betrayal must be genuine: simply making the ally believe they are betrayed isn't enough. In addition, the ally must be somebody you believe to be on your side – so selling out someone who you think only *appears* to be an ally will not count. Due to the nature of the magic at work, the betrayal cannot be between members of the covenant (this is also a handy loophole to stop your players diving into PvP shenanigans).

KISS THE BLOOD OFF MY HANDS

Fall for someone who will poison your heart.

There's no faking this. The practitioner must be in genuine, real, true love, and those feelings must be returned. Their lover must be somebody who will betray them, openly work against them, or simply break up with them in the most devastating way possible. Alternatively, the practitioner may find they need to betray, openly work against, or devastatingly break up with their paramour. The important thing is that the practitioner is rendered completely heartbroken by the romance.

GUEST IN THE HOUSE

Dine in the house of your enemy.

The meal must be taken in the presence of your foe (so getting thrown some bread while locked up in their dungeon doesn't count). However, they don't have to *know* that they are your enemy.

SECRET BEYOND THE DOOR

Uncover a truth you wish you hadn't.

There is a lot of room for the GM to interpret this ritual, but it should be something that has a real emotional impact on the players. Try to aim for something that's not just 'they find out something bad'; give them something that makes them question why they are doing what they're doing, or what their goals should even be.

FOR YOU, I DIE

Pick a fight you have no hope of winning.

'Fight' here doesn't have to mean a physical conflict, but it must be a conflict where the stakes are real and defeat is near certain. A card game against a master player with somebody's life as the wager would be considered valid; a friendly punch-up with eight of your old drinking buddies would not.

It should go without saying, but if the players *win* the fight, then obviously they did have a hope of winning. That means it will not count. However, if genuinely losing the fight creates circumstances in the players' favour later down the line (such as winning somebody's respect or extracting some information), this will not have an effect on the ritual.

GIFTS OF THE CROW

For every two ritual acts the practitioner or practitioners perform, they will be able to ask the Crow-Thing to grant one of the following one-off minor effects. While a coven can perform rituals, only one chosen member of the coven will receive the benefits of each gift.

BIRD'S-EYE-VIEW

The practitioner can look inside one inaccessible room, anywhere within Spire, at any time. They will experience this as if they are standing within the room, invisible and insubstantial, and will see it as it is at that moment. This gift only affects eyesight: their hearing and other senses will be anchored to their physical presence. The vision will persist until the practitioner chooses to end it.

AS THE CROW FLIES

The practitioner can walk through any barrier of any thickness, physical or magical, and come out safely on the other side. The power gives the character one use only, so they will not be able to return in the same way.

NEVERMORE

Kill someone. Anyone. The practitioner can choose any soul to immediately die of accidental or natural causes. This leaves no physical or occult trace that could ever connect this death to the Crow-Thing or the practitioner.

SIDE EFFECTS

Any time a ritual act is completed, one of these side effects will occur or intensify.

THE BLACK BIRDS

After 1-2 rituals are performed, people might notice there are more birds around than usual. They are not necessarily crows; they might be ravens, jackdaws, rooks, or even common blackbirds, all appearing in twos or threes around the docks.

At 3-4 rituals, people are seeing them in fours or fives, or even dozens at a time. At this point they're a genuine nuisance, and unusually hard to scare off.

By 5-6 rituals it seems like every gutter, rooftop, and fence is a dark aviary. Black birds of any and every species are perched wherever there is room. Some of them have teeth, some of them have wings like bats, and some of them are the size of dogs.

RAIN

With every completed ritual, the rain pours a little harder. One ritual? You're looking at light showers and pitter-pattering noises against the glass. By the time you get to three rituals, you'll be machine-gunned by thick watery bullets if you step outside.

By the time five or six rituals are completed, the downpour's constant. Streets will run like rivers, and the roofs of less well-constructed buildings will collapse as the whole docks area threatens to wash into the sea.

The rain gets more intense the closer you are to the Crow-Thing. If it goes missing, this is a good way to track it down.

THE FRAME-UP

As the practitioner performs a ritual, they are seen elsewhere in the docks. They might be stealing petty items, cheating at gambling dens, or maybe a figure like them is responsible for a back alley beating of some innocent by-stander.

This could mean **Shadow or Reputation** stress, unwanted interest from the Guard and Grey-manor Investigators, or the ire of a character whose good graces are important to the practitioner.

MAJOR EFFECTS

FEEDING THE CROW

When all the rituals are performed, a practitioner or coven may ask the Crow-Thing to devour an empire. That empire might be the retail empire of a rival tycoon, the street-level empire of a Red Row gang, or the empire of the aelfir themselves.

Whichever is the target, the result is the same. One night, the black birds that have been assembling across the city turn on the infrastructure of that empire. This includes its rulers, enforcers, beneficiaries, and collaborators.

Anyone who wears a badge, holds an office, or does the untidy behind-the-scenes work that is necessary to the upkeep of the empire will find themselves between the pincers of a beak. They will be dragged into the dark waters of the docks, or through storm drains, or into cupboards, or under beds. The birds don't eat their prey. They simply take them elsewhere, and they are never seen again.

Those who merely suffer under the empire, or work for it under duress without oppressing their fellows, are left unharmed by the scourge. But be in no doubt: the Crow-Thing has no mercy for those it sees as the limbs of empire.

When the sun rises, it will be on a new Spire.

RELEASING THE CROW

While bringing down an empire may seem like the full extent of the Crow-Thing's power, it is more akin to tossing scraps of meat through the bars of its cage. A more zealous practitioner may unleash the demon at the heart of the Crow-Thing into our reality: a force of shaped darkness and fear that only vaguely resembles a bird.

Unchained, the Crow-Thing doesn't attack a specific empire, but the foundations of the concept itself. It will rip apart the empire of the senses, of objective reality, and of sanity.

THE CRIME SCENE

If the players decide to rush to Lors' aid, they will find him already dead on the street, his blood mingling with the rain in the gutter. If there are any witnesses, they've already moved on: it's coming down heavier than usual, and nobody wants to be caught out waiting for the Guard to finish their paperwork.

An observant eye may spot a cluster of drow in sharp evening-wear turning a distant corner.

Lors's murder happened outside the Tome de Guerre: the books and antiquities dealer beneath the players' office. It may be worth interviewing the owner.

Examining Lors' body may reveal he was stabbed multiple times in the gut; the work of someone who was in a hurry, but equally keen to make sure Lors stayed dead. They will also find Lors' Little Purple Book.

If the players hang around here for too long, they'll quickly run into some guards who will want to take them in for questioning. The Greymanor detectives, Dirk Le'Jon and Dylan Valentin, will also be present at the interrogation for reasons they will choose not to reveal (see the Dirk Le'Jon and Dylan Valentin character section). It's also possible that if the players are taken in, they will encounter Claude Reynard.

DROW IN EVENING WEAR

The drow the players might spot with a successful investigative roll are Knights of the Wizened Weasel, or just 'Weasels', as they're colloquially known. They are smartly dressed killers-for-hire with even fewer scruples than your average mercenary: the perfect tools for the discerning high society figure looking to take out a hit in the docks.

Pursuing the Weasels will be difficult but not impossible. If the players catch up with them, they will appear more skittish than you would normally expect after a kill. Snide and gloating is more their style, but these ones are very keen not to be associated with the murder. For more information, see p. 87.

TOME DE GUERRE

Tome de Guerre is one of those charming little bookshops that you're glad exist but somehow never go into. The shelves are piled high with thick leather volumes in a variety of languages, alongside old scientific instruments and furniture which might be for sale or might just be part of the décor.

The only staff the shop has is Maria Cramoisi (p. 78). She comes across as mousey and shy, but very keen to help.

LORS'S LITTLE PURPLE BOOK

When Lors was alive he liked to flash around his 'little purple book', which he claimed contained the contact details and dirtier secrets of all the great and good in Spire. The fact that it took this long for someone to kill him suggests that those secrets weren't half as juicy as Lors liked to imply.

However, this is still the best lead the players are likely to find, with the names and addresses of all the main players and locations.

Lor's little purple book is available as a handout at the end of this scenario.

PRAEVENIRE RECORDATUS

MISS CASSIDY

Miss Cassidy is a terrible, awful, horrible landlord. She wears a cocktail dress and pearls, despite never being in the right sort of place to wear a cocktail dress and pearls. She is often accompanied by several small dogs, but she gets bored of them easily, so usually just locks them in the abandoned wing of her townhouse and buys more to replace them. She's a real piece of work.

Miss Cassidy sends round her nephews to deal with any problems that arise from her tenants. The 'nephews' differ every time, but they're universally large, angry, and malicious; whereas the 'problems' range from minor plumbing malfunctions to refusing to go along with her audacious rent hikes. She is universally reviled by her tenants. Taking her out publicly would be just the thing to bring a neighbourhood onside – presuming you can get past her 'sons' and the dozens of starving dogs prowling around the lower levels of her abode.

PERSONS OF INTEREST

THE VICTIM

LORS DE PLUIE

WHY IS HE INVOLVED IN THE STORY?

He's been murdered, leaving the most powerful object in Spire in the players' possession.

WHAT SET HIM APART?

Lors was a wheeler and a dealer. He would tell anyone anything for the right money, and has at one time or another double-crossed, betrayed, or snatched on every faction or player in the North Docks. The players themselves have used him as an informant on more than one occasion. The sad thing is that Lors actually believed his widely-known untrustworthiness made him clever, and possibly even respected. In truth, it's a genuine surprise that he lived this long.

WHAT DID HE DESIRE?

Some people of Lors' ilk just want to get that one big score and retire, but this was never Lors' dream. His goal was always to be one of the puppet masters, a major player spinning the plates of the North Docks underworld.

By working for (and almost instantly betraying) anyone who'd talk to him in the Docks, Lors fantasised he was playing all the factions against each other. The reality is that he was just being played over and over again.

WHAT DID HE DESPISE?

The Weasels. If you ever spoke to Lors for any length of time, he would talk shit about the Weasels (once he was sure none of them were around). His application for membership at the Wizened Weasel had been turned down multiple times, often without even being looked at. Lors concocted many a conspiracy theory about the Wizened Weasel being a protectionist racket, run to keep the higher end of the North Docks black economy tied up. These theories are true, but this has nothing to do with the fact they never considered Lors a big enough deal to let him in.

THE POWER PLAYERS

These are the big names in the North Docks, the people whose agendas everyone else has to follow or dance around. Each of them has a job they can offer the players. Choose one or two that you think will be fun for you and your players, or see which ones arise organically during play. You absolutely shouldn't try to fit all of them into the campaign.

KSPEER SUN-BRUSHES-THE-CLOUDS

WHY IS HE INVOLVED IN THE STORY?

Kspeer Sun-Brushes-the-Clouds is the owner of the original Crow-Thing: an ancient lump of granite that is vaguely bird-shaped, and which until now held immense power. Now that the demon which once inhabited the Crow-Thing has moved to another vessel, Kspeer is furious. He will stop at nothing to possess the new, real, Crow-Thing.

WHAT SETS HIM APART?

Kspeer considers himself a 'power connoisseur'. However, this doesn't mean he wants to rise to the top of the political heap or conquer the world or anything as dull as that.

Kspeer wants to indulge every flavour and colour of power, from military might to financial leverage; from one-on-one physical domination to cultural influence. He even gets a thrill from making someone sit in an uncomfortable chair when they are too polite to say anything.

He owns armies and tenement flats, is a keen investor in the arts, owns a number of newspapers across the political spectrum, and has at least one well-thought-of fashion label.

Conversation with Kspeer will be peppered with these power games. He might offer you a drink that tastes horrible but which he swears is a delicacy, abruptly change the topic of conversation because he's 'bored', or simply decide on an impromptu arm wrestle.

WHAT DOES HE DESIRE?

In terms of actual desires, Kspeer is surprisingly content. The world is set up to his advantage, and he enjoys it.

It is for this reason, as well as his insatiable craving for new things, that Kspeer possesses possibly the greatest collection of objects of power within Spire. He keeps the original Crow-Thing, along with many other objects of power, inside a Vermissian Vault that can only be opened by his own hand.

Kspeer's fervour to recapture the Crow-Thing may at first appear to be simple avarice, but the truth is he's far more scared that someone will actually use it.

THE CONTENTS OF KSPEER'S VAULT

- A waxen clawed hand, whose finger-tips end in ever-burning candles
- A shiny silver revolver buried halfway into a concrete paving slab
- A tablet of cracked black glass with a picture of fruit engraved on the back
- An astonishingly well-written manifesto for drow liberation
- A real dragon's tooth
- A perpetual motion machine
- Blood from Spire's last true queen

WHAT DOES HE DESPISE?

Kspeer simply has no conception of what it would be like to be in a position of weakness. If he is placed in such a position, he will respond with panic and fury.

But, like most connoisseurs, what he most despises is people who don't appreciate his field. Power applied like a blunt instrument rather than a set of locksmith's tools disgusts him.

If he wants to extract information from someone, the idea of torturing them for it *bore*s him. He will want to talk to them, find out what they want, and create leverage in a more artful manner. Likewise, if platoons of armoured men are sent into the docks to retrieve his trinket, the artlessness of it will sadden him.

WHAT JOB WILL HE HIRE THE PLAYERS FOR?

First and foremost, if Kspeer offers the players a job, it's because he believes they despise him. Financial leverage over someone who hates him is, in his eyes, a fine vintage.

But in his search for the Crow-Thing, Kspeer has spied another item of power he desires to own. After only a couple of chance encounters, Kspeer declares he has fallen in love with the Duchess, and wishes to bind her heart and boundless political ambition to his own. He will hire the players to find out what it would take to turn her head.

STATS

KSPEER: Despite his fine clothes and manners, Kspeer keeps himself in excellent shape, as physical dominance is a pleasure he particularly savours. Stats as **Rising Star**, p. 89.

KSPEER'S GUARD: Kspeer's personal retinue wear blind golden helms, beneath which their eyes, ears, and noses are removed. Their only sense of their surroundings is how finely attuned they are to Kspeer's desires. If ordered to fight, they will continue to do so through any injury until Kspeer commands them to stop. Stats as **Enforcer**, p. 89.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- The party finds Kspeer in the Wizened Weasel, watching a gladiatorial battle put on for his amusement. There is nothing unusual about that, except that the combatants are aelfir, and the players soon realise that they are also very much in love. Kspeer has the thing each of them most wants, and so is making them fight to the death.
- The party arrives in the Duke's offices to find Kspeer sitting opposite her, finishing off what was clearly a full six course meal as they discuss affairs of state. The Duke has no plate in front of her.
- The party is invited to dinner at Kspeer's dockside apartment. He will attempt to extract the location of the Crow-Thing from them, using offers of money, power, and romance. When all of these fail, he will point out that the meal has been poisoned, and he will trade the Crow-Thing for the antidote.

HELENE JOAN OF QUINN

WHY IS SHE INVOLVED IN THE STORY?

Helene Joan of Quinn was Lors de Pluie's client – the one who hired him to steal the Crow-Thing in the first place. She is one of the most feared and respected generals in the battlehalls of the drow Home Nations.

The Home Nations are in the midst of several long and bloody civil wars. The battles are invitation only, and judged by history as much for their hospitality, décor, and outfits as they are for their strategies and acts of heroism. The strict etiquette and sumptuous set menus don't change the fact that these battles are bloodthirsty, merciless encounters between powers who have everything on the table.

The interconnected weave of fronts, alliances, and betrayals is all distant noise to the people of Spire, but out of that red mist the House of Yssen still stands as the power to beat. The nouveau riche of House Quinn believe themselves to be its natural successor.

Joan thinks that with the Crow-Thing, she can make that happen.

WHAT SETS HER APART?

Helene Joan is a master of all the arts of battle, from strategy to place setting and from close combat to ranged dance. However, she is out of her element when travelling through Spire. In her gut, she feels it is intensely unnatural for a drow city to be stacked high into the clouds, rather than deep into the embrace of the dirt.

She knows of the occupation by the aelfir, or 'high elves' as they are called back home ('high' being a strictly derogatory term). As far as she is concerned, they are welcome to this accursed place and the strange, chaotic, and unruly drow it breeds.

But in searching for Lors (who she believes has double-crossed her) and the Crow-Thing, she will have to find ways to survive under the thumb of aelfir rule and among her estranged drow cousins.

WHAT DOES SHE DESIRE?

For House Quinn to rise resplendent over the other Noble Houses of the drow nations, preferably with its feet in the bloodied entrails of a vanquished House Yssen. The entire Spire can collapse into the Heart for all she cares; she will undergo any trial to claim the Crow-Thing as a prize and finally bring Yssen's reign to an end.

WHAT DOES SHE DESPISE?

If you ask her, she will say the stale and self-important drow of House Yssen, with their sword worship and the tattoos they pretend are anything but boasts.

But, after spending a few days in Spire, she has to admit that she has more in common with her ancient and hated enemy than she does with the strange and feral creatures of this towering city. Even the aelfir, who Joan previously regarded as so alien as to be not worth interacting with, at least have a sense of decorum and hierarchy that simply isn't found among the bustling ships, markets, and pubs of the North Docks (though it has to be said, the aelfir do not feel the same way about Joan).

She hates every moment she has to spend among these people, and once she is able to return to the war at home she will never look back.

WHAT JOB WILL SHE HIRE THE PLAYERS FOR?

Since she has come to Spire, Helene Joan has been unable to shift the feeling she is being followed. She will hire the players to find out by whom. A stakeout will reveal she is being tracked by agents of House Aliquam – traders and nomads hired in turn by House Valwa to intercept the Crow-Thing. If the players succeed in this, Joan will be far more open with the players about her mission and goals.

STATS

HELENE JOAN OF QUINN is travelling alone, but she's a military leader, a resourceful soldier, and not above fighting dirty (even if she isn't dressed for the occasion). Stats as **Magister**, p. 89.

The **HOUSE ALIQUAM AGENTS** who are following Joan have the same stats as **Enforcer**, p. 89.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- Ever since the players approached Lors' body, they cannot shake the feeling they are being followed. Helene Joan is the one doing the following; if any of the players catch a glimpse of her, they see a tall drow in what can only be described as *haute couture* military dress for a moment before she slopes off into the shadows.
- During a fight when it seems the players are at a disadvantage, Helene Joan comes to their aid out of nowhere.
- The players return to the office to find a note that has been slid under the door. It instructs them to go to the Range tonight and order 'a fifth of the house red'. If they go, they will doubtless run into some misadventure, but will find no mysterious stranger. When they return, however, they will find their office has been broken into, and either it has been fully turned over in a hasty search, or the searchers are still present.

THE DUKE

WHY IS SHE INVOLVED IN THE STORY?

The Duke is, at least nominally, the political power in these parts. If she'd stood for election, her slogan would have been 'Don't rock the boats!'

She keeps a clean house. The turf wars under her rule have been mostly street-level scuffles where hardly anything burns down. Her few enemies know that killing her would cause chaos and piss off too many people to be worth it.

The Duke doesn't want any trouble. Which is a shame.

WHAT SETS HER APART?

Before she was the Duke, her name was Westfall of Gryndell. She was a refugee of the Home Nations wars who snuck onto Spire from a cargo junk as a child. Westfall worked her way up through the street gangs and Knightly Orders with judicious use of some knuckle dusters and a thicker-than-average forehead. Eventually, she graduated to a sword that made a better bludgeon than a stabbing weapon, and armour forged from scrap metal Westfall dredged from the harbour.

Of course, that was a long time ago. These days her sword hangs over her desk rather than on her belt, and the armour is a little tight around the belly. If you were to suggest she had gone to seed, she would reply 'What of it?'. Her rise to power and the glory days of her prime were long and tiring, and she sees no reason why she hasn't earned a rest.

WHAT DOES SHE DESIRE?

As is tradition, the Duke came to power by murdering the previous Duke: a vicious old bastard with dreams of glory that too often ended in other people's blood. With a Duke like that, a lot of people will look the other way when they go down.

But that was a long time ago, and an even longer time in politics. The Duke knows there's a fine line between 'a safe pair of hands' and 'a senile old sod who's rich pickings for the next young idiot with a sword and some ambition'.

To ensure she remains unchallenged (and also, incidentally, to satisfy her wife's desire for her to be a 'strong leader') the Duke feels like she ought to make a show of force. But as she has been successful so far in keeping the peace of the North Docks, such opportunities are hard to come by.

WHAT DOES SHE DESPISE?

Bullies. You might not be able to tell this at first glance, looking at the Duke in her too-small armour and her comfy chair, living on her old gunboat with all her big lunches and careful politicking. But the former Westfall of Gryndell spent her life walking into new places, identifying the biggest and meanest person there, and hitting them as hard as she could.

Age and fear have dampened that flame. As the various factions begin to circle the North Docks, her first instinct is going to be to do what she can for a quiet life. But as those with power get more vicious in their search for the Crow-Thing, and her citizens bear the brunt of it, something may be reignited in her.

WHAT JOB WILL SHE HIRE THE PLAYERS FOR?

If the players have the Duke's confidence, she will mention that she has reason to suspect someone is plotting an assassination. One of her food testers fell ill recently, and she's seen figures moving around the good sniping positions near the Castle.

Players investigating either of these threads will trace them back to the Duchess. She has no intention of assassinating the Duke (and could've easily done it by now if she wanted to) but she does want to keep her on her toes.

STATS

THE DUKE is an old school brawler who comes at you head on, screaming and waving a big sword. She's slower than she was, but she can still take a beating like nobody's business and get back on her feet. Stats as **The Knight**, p. 89.

Instead of Armour 3 quarterplate, the Duke wears an enchanted greatcoat that halves all incoming stress from weapons. Stealing and wearing the Duke's greatcoat in the North Docks is a great way to both test it out and get yourself killed.

THE HUSBANDS: The Duke's husbands are two gorgeous slabs of beefcake who've never discovered shirts or thinking for any length of time. It has been a number of years since the Duke has called either of them anything other than 'sweetheart' or 'my love'. She *thinks* she might have replaced one at some point, but isn't 100% sure.

As for the husbands themselves, the only subject they can speak on with any passion or knowledge is their undying love for the Duke. If anyone were to try and harm her, then by the gods, they will not stop fighting until she is avenged. Stats as **The Fool**, p. 89.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- As the players question (or are questioned by) Sergeant Reynard, the Duke barges into the office. She is furious about the disruption that has been occurring since Lors's murder. From her ranting, it's clear she's not really angry at the murder itself. Her problem is that so many different groups – including the Weasels, Greymanor Services, suspected agents for the Ministry and the Vigil, the players, and even the gods' damned Guard – are trying to actually *solve* it.

- The Duke is holding a party at the Castle to mark eight long years since she ascended to the Dukedom. Representatives from every Knightly Order, as well as all the rest of the Docks' great and good, will be there.
- The players return to the office to find the Duke waiting for them with both of her husbands. The husbands knock over some papers in an attempt to be threatening before the Duke asks them to stop. Then she explains to the players that their actions have been upsetting a lot of powerful people, drawing attention from *upstairs*. If they don't back off, she will be forced to make an example of them.

THE DUCHESS

WHY IS SHE INVOLVED IN THE STORY?

The Duchess makes it her business to know every scheme, rumour, and power play taking place in the North Docks. Right now all anyone is talking about is the Crow-Thing, and that means she wants it.

She has various spies and agents searching for the artefact, but she has no desire to use the Crow-Thing herself. She wishes only to use it as leverage to bargain for greater influence with the various factions of aelfir.

WHAT SETS HER APART?

If the Duke is the power in these parts, then the Duchess is the power behind the power. The Duke's leadership largely consists of listening to people's complaints, politely asking the rowdier Knightly Orders to keep it down a bit, and calmly explaining to local businesses why business rates have to rise in line with inflation.

The Duchess, meanwhile, has spies among the staff of every political household and crime family in the region. She is also rumoured to be having affairs with several of the Duke's chief allies and opponents, and is a regular at the Wizened Weasel's most prestigious tables. In a world of political animals, she is respected as an apex predator.

WHAT DOES SHE DESIRE?

The Duchess' lust for power and love of the political game is well-known even beyond the North Docks. She is known to be subtle yet ruthless in her machinations; only the foolish will go into open conflict with her or the throne she sits behind.

Yet perhaps the Duchess' darkest secret is that she is very much in love with her wife. It's easy to see why she fell for the Duke in the old days, when she was young, bloodthirsty, and rising through the ranks at an alarming speed. Today the Duke doesn't even seem to have any worthy political rivals, let alone a desire to kill them.

But while it would be easy for the Duchess to simply assassinate her wife and replace her with someone more ambitious and pliable, she simply can't bring herself to do it.

Still, she would give anything to see the Duke's old fire rekindled once more.

WHAT DOES SHE DESPISE?

Ideology. The Duchess believes that 'revolution' means 'a thing that keeps going around'. She can sympathise with someone trying to get the boot off their neck, or with someone who wants to keep their boot on somebody else's; but the second you start talking about a bright golden future, you are dead to her. She believes power should be applied practically and for concrete ends, not for big meaningless words like 'freedom'.

As much as she wants to see the Duke fighting again, the one thing that could shake her love is the Duke subscribing to some kind of noble cause.

WHAT JOB WILL SHE HIRE THE PLAYERS FOR?

The Duchess has long suspected that Sergeant Reynard wants to make a play for the Castle, subsuming the Dukedom into the North Docks Guard. As it happens, the Duchess is rather keen to see the Guard come under the direct control of the Castle instead, placing the Duke at its head. She will pay for convincing evidence of Reynard's treachery, and doesn't hugely mind about its veracity.

STATS

THE DUCHESS: Open combat is not how the Duchess has achieved what she has. If need be, she can deliver a devastating opening blow; but once the element of surprise is gone, her goal will be to distract and flee. But if you let her get away, you'd better be looking over your shoulder from then on. Stats as **The Vizier**, p. 89.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- The Duchess is playing the lounge at the Wizened Weasel. As she sings, her winks and gestures at figures around the room point to all the biggest players in North Docks.
- At the Castle or the Wizened Weasel, the Duchess will separate one of the party from the rest. She tells them that she can see they are different from the others, and she believes they can help each other out.
- The players arrive to meet a valuable information source. They find the Duchess standing over their body, a bloodied dagger in hand, swearing it isn't what it looks like. We will leave it to the GM to decide who the corpse is, and whether she did in fact kill them.

MARIA CRAMOISI

WHY IS SHE INVOLVED IN THE STORY?

Maria Cramoisi appears to be the owner of Tome de Guerre, the books and antiquities shop beneath the players' offices. She is assisted only by two scribes (both of which seem a bit more burly than you might expect in a bookshop).

When the players meet Maria, she will appear to be a shy, awkward bookshop proprietor. She only overcomes her shyness when given the opportunity to wax lyrical about the subjects she cares about: old books, myths and legends, antiquities, and demonology. In all of these areas her knowledge is extensive, and she can provide valuable insights to the players. Despite her shyness, Maria is very keen to be helpful, and will profess that she is very impressed at being able to assist some real live private detectives.

The players might notice that she seems very young to own a bookshop, to which she will reply that it was left to her by her father.

WHAT SETS HER APART?

The actual owner of Tome de Guerre is currently decomposing in a chest in the bookshop's cellar. Maria Cramoisi is an operative of the Sect of The Crimson Vigil; but even within that organisation, many of her comrades believe her methods are extreme.

WHAT DOES SHE DESIRE?

Maria wants not only to destroy the aelfir, but to vanquish all conquerors, bring down all oppressors, and burn away any who would wield power over another – all in honour of Lekolé.

To this end, she has studied demonological texts considered heretical even within her own sect. She has conversed with mystics and the mad, reviewed prophecies and horoscopes. Her journey has led her here, where she believes an item of unique power will fall within her grasp.

If she succeeds in acquiring the Crow-Thing and performing its rituals, she will not hesitate to unleash an incursion that could mark the beginning of the end for this reality.

WHAT DOES SHE DESPISE?

Violence. To be clear, Maria will not hesitate to lock you in a room and set fire to it. She has no issues with poisoning you, or with sending some bruisers to do damage to you on her behalf. Even if it comes to a face-to-face fight, she knows how to stick the knife in and twist.

But Maria regards fighting on an individual level as a distraction from the great work of the Vigil. Her calling is to destroy citadels and burn armies, to wash away her enemies en masse in an ocean of blood. Where Maria's colleagues might gloat about assassinating a lord or burning down a police station, Maria sees these acts as self-indulgent distractions from the real work at hand.

WHAT JOB WILL SHE HIRE THE PLAYERS FOR?

Maria will be very insistent that she doesn't want to be a nuisance, and anyway she's probably imagining it, but the last few nights she has noticed someone watching the shop. It's starting to make her nervous.

That 'someone' will turn out to be Helene Joan of Quinn, who knows Lors was connected to the antiquities store and believes it may help her track the Crow-Thing.

STATS

MARIA CRAMOISI

Difficulty: 0; 2 if you attempt to change her mind or get her to back down

Resistance: 12

Equipment: Red-painted, jury-rigged shotgun hidden behind the bookshop counter (**D6, Ranged, Point-blank, Reload, Dangerous**), Serious-looking knife (**D3, Brutal**)

Maria possesses the Eyes of Lekolé, and may trade one Resistance to start a fire in the vicinity. Within the confines of the bookshop, this will have serious consequences

SHOP ASSISTANTS

Descriptors: Muttering prayers of fire and blood under their breath as they stalk the bookshop; Pretending to be confused and scared then turning on you at the last second; Toppling a row of shelves on you in an attempt to pin you down

Difficulty: 0; 1 if you're trying to break their resolve

Resistance: 3 if you catch them unawares, 5 if they're on the warpath

Equipment: Clubs and knives (**D3**)

SUGGESTED SCENES

- The players bring the Crow-Thing to Maria to find out about it. She will enthusiastically tell them about the Crow-Thing and its history, but also point out that the artefact they possess is actually a very shabby forgery.
- Maria sends the players a message that she's made an important discovery about the Crow-Thing. They should come quickly, bringing the artefact with them. She will also say she believes she's in terrible danger. The players will arrive to find Maria a bleeding mess on the floor. Except, on looking closer, the blood is paint and the body is a dressed up sewing mannequin. Maria then launches her ambush in a bid to steal the Crow-Thing for herself.



MAGISTER GRIMSRUD

WHY IS HE INVOLVED IN THE STORY?

The party's Magister is a young, enthusiastic operative trying to bring some modern ideas into Ministry operations. He sends a lot of memos.

But not long after Lors's murder, that Magister finds themselves replaced by Magister Grimsrud: a gruff, old-school Magister who believes the job of the Ministry is to kill the right people and leave no witnesses.

WHAT SETS HIM APART?

There's not many like Grimsrud in the Ministry anymore. This is mostly because they died: caught, tortured, and executed by their enemies, or murdered by their own underlings. Grimsrud believes it's the job of a Magister to keep their hands clean, and the job of Ministers in the field to get their hands dirty (and, if necessary, be disposed of afterwards).

More than anything, he believes in a fanatical devotion to the cause. He has no time for any distractions from the goal of killing aelfir and undermining their structural power.

WHAT DOES HE DESIRE?

As a young neonate, Grimsrud's cell was lured into launching a heist on an aelfir lord's personal vault. The vault turned out to be a decoy, and the heist itself turned out to be an elaborate trap.

Every member of the cell was murdered horribly, except for Grimsrud; he was made to watch alongside the aelfir lord (who had arranged the trap for his own amusement). The lord then released Grimsrud, asking him to tell the story of what happened.

That lord was Kspeer Sun-Brushes-the-Clouds.

Grimsrud has turned up in North Docks with one goal, and one goal only: to finally take down Kspeer. Grimsrud has been tracking and trying to gain access to the aelfir lord for the length of his career, but Kspeer is elusive as he is dangerous.

With the 'theft' of the Crow-Thing, Grimsrud believes Kspeer may finally be tempted out into the open. He wants the players ready to strike.

WHAT DOES HE DESPISE?

Magic, demonology, most forms of occult practice. Any method of fighting the aelfir using these methods means owing a debt to demonic entities, which in Grimsrud's mind is just another form of fealty.

Grimsrud believes the only proper tools to fight the aelfir are the tried and tested ones of assassination, espionage, and blackmail. The fact that these methods alone have yet to yield results will not persuade him otherwise.

WHAT JOB WILL HE HIRE THE PLAYERS FOR?

He will conceal this information until he is sure Kspeer is on the playing field, but as far as Grimsrud is concerned, the players have only one goal: the assassination of Kspeer Sun-Brushes-the-Clouds. He will not be distracted from this purpose, and he will pay any cost in resources or lives to achieve it.

STATS

A competent brawler who's big on improvisation and less likely to carry an arsenal than to instantly know where the nearest sharp/blunt object is. Stats as **The Magister**, p. 89.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- The players return to their office to find Grimsrud sitting in one of their chairs, feet up on one of their desks, drinking the players' booze and smoking their cigarettes. He launches into an aggressive and detailed dissection of everything the players' cell has been doing wrong, before briefing them on Kspeer and their mission to assassinate him.
- Grimsrud sends the players to meet a source out on the docks, but tells Kspeer they're going to sell the Crow-Thing in an attempt to lure him out into the open.

PRAEVENIRE RECORDATUS

BECKETT FLYNN

Pale-haired and soft-spoken Beckett is attempting to syncretise the dozens of minor churches of crime in Red Row. He is doing so at gunpoint under the auspices of a crusade, accompanied by a small and ragged army of brass-knuckle pilgrims, firebomb prophets, and the sort of priests who don't mind kicking someone's teeth in. This is clearly an attempt to set up a protection racket themed around a Grand Unified Church of Holy Larceny, and most of the priests who've been forced into his business would be happy to see him dead.

THE PLAYING PIECES

While the power players each have their own agenda and vision for the North Docks or Spire as a whole, the following characters just work here. Maybe they're working for one of the power players, helping to push their agenda; maybe they're trying to make a quick buck while everyone else is talking politics; maybe they're just trying to survive. But they are as much a part of the North Docks as the great and the good.

**DIRK LE'JON & DYLAN VALENTIN,
PRIVATE INVESTIGATORS**

WHY ARE THEY INVOLVED IN THE STORY?

This inseparable pair are agents of the world famous Greymoor Services: Spire's premier consulting detective agency, and the players' chief competitor (not that Greymoor has ever noticed). They have been hired to investigate a theft and retrieve some stolen property, although the identity of their client is of course confidential.

The client is Kspeer Sun-Brushes-the-Clouds. Obviously. While Kspeer does have the Weasels working on more violent and shady methods of tracking down the Crow-Thing, he takes a certain amount of satisfaction in the idea of retrieving it through legitimate, law-abiding means.

WHAT SETS THEM APART?

If you search Spire from tip to foundations, you will not find straighter arrows than Le'Jon and Valentin. They are married to the job, as well as to each other, and are unerringly loyal to both.

Their jaws are square, and their tin breast-plates are unburnished beneath the official grey Greymoor Services trench coats that they've somehow managed to fit over them. Their helmets are oddly fedora-shaped. If they switched places while you weren't looking, there's no guarantee you'd notice.

But aside from their look, what they have in common is an unswerving dedication to the law and a meticulous eye for detail. They may appear foolish at times, but they are extremely dangerous.

WHAT DO THEY DESIRE?

Le'Jon and Valentin care for two things above all else: their deep and lasting love for each other, and their passion for upholding the law. Nothing can distract either of them from these twin loyalties. However, nobody is quite sure how things would land if they ever had to pick between the two.

WHAT DO THEY DESPISE?

Crime. If pushed, one or other of the detectives may reveal they are sympathetic to the causes and goals of the Ministry; but both passionately believe in the rule of law above all else, to the point where they may be distracted from one crime by the promise of preventing another.

This also means their integrity is unimpeachable. They will not be bribed, threatened, or coerced into turning a blind eye, and they will not make any deals. They're going to get their man, woman and/or person, and they'll do it entirely within the letter of the law.

STATS

LE'JON and VALENTIN have stats as **The Enforcer**, p. 89.

GREYMANOR OFFICERS have stats as **Goons** if they've been in the game a while and **Fools** if they're idealistic new recruits or on their last day before retirement.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- Le'Jon and Valentin pay a professional courtesy call to the players' office, informing them that they are investigating Lors' murder in connection with a theft. In the interests of inter-agency collaboration, the detectives will ask the players for an eyewitness account and question them on their relationship with Lors.
- After the players leave an encounter with another NPC, they walk right out into the path of Le'Jon and Valentin, who have arrived to question the same NPC about matters pertaining to their case. They will be very curious as to why the players keep turning up in their way.
- Immediately after the players kill someone, there is a knock at the door and the detectives announce their presence.
- Le'Jon and Valentin return to the players' office with a band of Greymoor officers, demanding to search the premises.

SERGEANT CLAUDE REYNARD

WHY IS HE INVOLVED IN THE STORY?

While Greymenor Services, the Weasels, the various Knightly Orders, and even the Duke's own Knights all add muscle to the various political interests in the Docks (and to a certain extent even enforce the law), Claude Reynard is the law in these parts.

In this case, 'the law' is obsequious to its aelfir masters while not doing any more work than is strictly necessary, and being more than happy to take a bribe where offered.

WHAT SETS HIM APART?

Reynard *likes* being the chief of the Free Watchmen. He likes the shiny uniform. He likes swishing up and down the North Docks High Street feeling important. He likes that legitimate businesses pay a nice wad of money every month to keep the street gangs from their doors, and he likes that the illegitimate ones pay him an even nicer wad of money to do nothing at all.

And he *really* likes the players. Even before Lors' murder, he would regularly pop round to 'question local investigative professionals about ongoing cases'. In reality, he just wanted to gossip.

He will frequently mention how glamorous the life of a private detective must be, and how he would become one himself if it didn't involve so much actual work.

He's also mentioned, and will mention again, that he suspects the players' firm is a front for the Ministry. There is no telling if this is a joke, a serious suspicion that he doesn't yet have the evidence to support, or a cast-iron certainty that Reynard hasn't acted on because he finds the characters' company amusing. He may even be a sympathiser to the Ministry's cause; or, he might not.

WHAT DOES HE DESIRE?

A bit of glamour, a bit of excitement, even some danger – but, and this can't be stressed enough, strictly as a spectator. Reynard has no great love or animosity towards any faction within the North Docks. Even where he creates enemies, he absolutely does not take it personally.

Indeed, currently Reynard is vexed by interference from the Castle, with the Duke's Knights shutting down a number of smuggling and unlicensed gambling operations that had numbered Reynard among their payroll. There is nothing personal in it, but Reynard believes his life would be more convenient if the Duke's Knights were removed from play – or at least absorbed into the Free Watchmen.

WHAT DOES HE DESPISE?

Work of any kind. Most of the less pleasant matters of running the Free Watchmen can be handed over to inferiors, or simply ignored until they go away. Occasionally Reynard will solve a crime, something easy but impressive, as it's always good to have a fresh victory on your résumé.

If Reynard is forced to work against his will, either because his superiors have demanded results or some blowhard has started making too much noise and made Reynard look bad, he will bring the full weight of the law down upon that person (and a little extra-judicial violence besides).

WHAT WILL HE HIRE THE PLAYERS FOR?

Reynard doesn't have much use for private investigators or hired muscle. After all, if you have to contract work like that out, what's the point in owning a police force? But he's found the Duke to be a nuisance in some of his business dealings lately, and so would be very appreciative if the players could find an angle that would allow Reynard to blackmail her.

STATS

REYNARD has stats as **The Queen**, p. 89.

His bodyguard(s) wait at a suitable distance, ready to spring into action at the first sign of trouble (stats as **The Goon**, p. 89).

SUGGESTED SCENES

- Reynard has the players brought in for questioning regarding Lors' murder (or other recent events that caught his attention). In the interrogation room, he will lay on a spread of sandwiches and finger food, and offer the players a choice of drinks. The enquiries will mostly be asking after their welfare and complaining about people who've made his life difficult. Questions directly pertaining to the case are thrown in as an afterthought.
- After the players have created too much of a scene, Reynard will barge in with a squadron of guards, arresting and beating up anyone who he believes needs arresting and beating up. As he does so, he will act personally affronted that the players would make his life difficult like this.
- As the events of the campaign are about to come to a head, the party is ambushed by Reynard and his men. He announces that the players are terrorists from the Ministry of Our Hidden Mistress, and they are under arrest.
- As the events of the campaign are about to come to a head, Reynard unexpectedly steps in to help, fighting off another faction or helping the party to conceal something that would lead to their arrest. If thanked, he will simply say 'Don't mention it. Please.'

THE WEASELS

WHY ARE THEY INVOLVED IN THE STORY?

When the Crow-Thing's essence was imbued in a new vessel and that vessel turned out to be in the North Docks, the Weasels were immediately set on the case by Kspeer Sun-Brushes-the-Clouds. With Lors dead and the Crow-Thing potentially lost forever, there's a lot of blame hanging over this order, ready to drop. Now they're ruthless *and* scared.

WHAT SETS THEM APART?

They call themselves 'The Dagger in the Velvet', 'The Gentleman's Order', and 'The Dapper Reapers', but none of these names have ever caught on. To everyone else in the Docks, they will always be the Weasels.

The Knights of the Order of the Wizened Weasel consider themselves a class apart from their brethren. This isn't just because they dress better, dine better, and move among a better quality of society. It's because they aren't constrained by the quaint codes of honour and chivalry that the other Orders cling to.

While the Weasels think this makes them mavericks, the attitude among other Orders is largely that the Weasels are spoiling it for everybody else.

WHAT DO THEY DESIRE?

On a typical day? Blood spilled, with somebody crying and gathering their teeth as the Weasels dance over them and back to their club to tell the story over a drink. But now a murder has been committed, they've been seen fleeing the scene, and this is one murder they don't want credit for.

They don't fear many people, but Kspeer could destroy them in any number of ways. He could buy up their club and turn it into a franchise *kafee* house, or spread a rumour that will turn the Order from feared to ridiculed. Or he might just have them all killed.

Whatever Kspeer has in mind, the Weasels are now ever more ruthless in their pursuit of the Crow-Thing, and no cruelty or destruction is beyond them. However, in their panic they're also liable to get sloppy.

WHAT DO THEY DESPISE?

Armour, jousting, duels, and holding doors open for people. The Weasels are into knighthood for exactly two things: stabbing, and making other people call you 'sir'. Everything else is old-fashioned and worthy of ridicule and contempt.

STATS

There are many Weasels dotted around the docks, but the head enforcers – and the Weasels on the scene of Lors' untimely demise – go by the names of Ziegler, Wolff, Bergman, and Voigt.

Like most Knights the Weasels love a good rumble, but if you fight them expecting a typical Knight's only-slightly-lenient attitude to fairplay, you will be in trouble. The Weasels like to strike hard and fast, in greater numbers, and from the side and back. Their weapons of choice are razors and daggers, but they're not above a good bludgeoning instrument if the mood takes them.

So long as they're convinced they have the upper hand, they will rarely go for the kill when they can go for the pain first.

Stats as **The Rising Star** and occasionally an **Enforcer**.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- The players approach an NPC who may know something they need, only to find them bloodied, battered, and already begging for their life. Whatever they know, they've already told it to the Weasels.
- The players are about to be taken in for questioning by Greymenor, the Order of the Castle, or the Guard, only for a gang of Weasels to turn up and declare *they* will be taking the players – even if they have to kill everyone else to do it.
- After leaving a conversation with Kspeer, the players are approached by the Weasels, who emerge from the shadows. They're oddly subservient and chummy, and keen to take the players for a drink to discuss what they know.
- After gaining entry to the Wizened Weasel, the players find the Weasels sitting around a table. They are playing a game where each player has a hand of six cards and three daggers laid out in front of them. The players are invited to join the game.

THE GNOLLS OF THE HEAP

WHY ARE THEY INVOLVED IN THE STORY?

The gnolls of the Heap are custodians of the wretched, the hunted, and the lost. If you have come into their domain, there is nowhere lower to go.

However, the gnolls' interest is more than just to provide what little sanctuary they can. They are also here to monitor an ancient demonological phenomena known as 'the Snarl': an apparent rift or scar in the nature of reality that may be linked to the players' own case.

WHAT SETS THEM APART?

The Duke has, for the most part, kept all the factions of the North Docks happy and achieved most of the tasks she has set out to do. But the Heap remains a continual nuisance.

Property developers looking to gentrify and commercialise the docks, law enforcement officers of various stripes, several newspapers, and any aelfir who happen to pass through the area have all lobbied to see the Heap cut loose or destroyed. But somehow, every effort to do so just hasn't managed to follow through.

The Heap is a collection of upturned fishing boats, wrecked tugs, and abandoned, half-submerged haulers that have been roped together into a sort of floating termite nest. It has become the go-to bolthole for the desperate, the hunted, and the damned. From a distance, the silhouettes of gnolls are often spotted standing watch among the flotsam, but no search by law enforcement has ever found one among the wrecks.

WHAT DO THEY DESIRE?

The gnolls are here simply to observe. They know that at some point a significant demonological event happens in the docks: it might have been in the past, or it might be in the future. Either way, they are committed to observing the Snarl and recording how it behaves and changes.

As the Crow-Thing inches closer to activation, some gnolls may theorise that it is the eidolon responsible for the Snarl. This is not something they want to interfere with one way or the other; they simply wish to be present when whatever happens, happens.

WHAT DO THEY DESPISE?

The ephemeral and unexamined lives of the North Docks' privileged classes. The gnoll researchers have sympathy for the downtrodden and disenfranchised. They believe there is clarity in a perspective uncluttered by possessions or social status, and will gladly provide shelter to those who need it. This is partly for the pragmatic reason of the camouflage they bring, but also out of a genuine desire to offer support.

As for the Knightly Orders, the aelfir, the politicians and entrepreneurs looking to achieve nothing beyond a fatter coin purse and a great social standing – the gnolls regard these people as mere flickering lights in eternity, myopic creatures who will learn nothing of the world and leave nothing to it.

STATS

Individual gnolls have stats as **The Goon**, p. 89.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- A particularly perceptive player may notice a glint of light sparking off something on the darkened mass of the Heap. Possibly it's caused by a reflection off the lens of a telescope, or a sniper rifle.
- Screaming can be heard coming from the Heap, and smoke is billowing out from it. The Weasels are on the hunt.
- After being found in a compromising situation, the players are unable to return to the office. The Heap is the only safe haven left.
- After completing four of the six rituals of the Crow-Thing, the party is approached by a gnoll who invites them to the secret research facility within the Heap.



HAMSTEAD

WHY ARE THEY INVOLVED IN THE STORY?

Hamstead is the world-class human artificer who Lors commissioned to create the Crow-Thing forgery – a job they did so well the forgery became the genuine article. Realising the power they had unleashed, Hamstead decided the only thing to do was to prevent it from falling into *anyone's* hands. So they killed the one person who would know where it is.

Now they've gone into hiding, terrified that someone else might use them to create more objects of power.

WHAT SETS THEM APART?

Hamstead is probably a genius. In Spire, 'genius' is a term that is not used lightly and usually intended literally. There is a very fine line between 'someone who has lots of brilliant ideas' and 'somebody the djinn are using to influence the material world on their behalf'.

Hamstead certainly doesn't know where their ideas come from, but their sleep is often interrupted by an unstoppable deluge of inspiration that will not be ignored. They have been on the run, carrying nothing but a couple of suitcases of sketching, painting, and sculpting materials. However, an astute tracker will be able to find them by following the ornate dioramas and intricate mechanical diagrams that have been graffitied through the backways and hidden passages of the docks.

WHAT DO THEY DESIRE?

All Hamstead wants is to find a quiet corner of the world where they can create their art in peace, without power-hungry people trying to use those creations for their own ends.

They may find sanctuary among the gnolls of the Heap, who will be sympathetic. They might try hopping on a boat and escaping from Spire altogether. Of course, many factions within Spire (including Kspeer, the Ministry, and the Vigil) will all be willing to offer Hamstead a safe haven – for a price.

WHAT DO THEY DESPISE?

Hamstead hates lying. They never learned the knack themselves and they struggle to identify a lie when told one; since they were a child, people have taken advantage of them time and time again by bending the truth, betraying them or suggesting things are one way when they're *definitely* not. In a pinch Hamstead can *try* to tell a lie (but they have more tells than a table full of amateur *Malrique* players), but they swing from viciously doubting obvious truths to blindly accepting blatant falsehoods on a knife-edge.

STATS

HAMSTEAD has stats as **The Hierophant**, p. 89.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- An address in Lors' Little Purple Book directs the players to a run-down workshop on the waterfront. They find the place a mess, as if somebody has left in a hurry. Searching the room they will find all kinds of blueprints, sketches, and half-completed canvases – including some preliminary sketches for something that looks a lot like the Crow-Thing.
- In conversation with Claude Reynard, he will mention in passing that he's getting a lot of complaints about the strange graffiti that's been turning up lately.
- On their way to or from somewhere else, the players notice the graffiti features some unusually intricate portraiture, as well as architectural drawings and mathematical diagrams. By asking around the neighbourhood for witnesses or charting the graffiti on a map, the players may be able to track Hamstead to a rooftop shack where they've been hiding. Hamstead will immediately try to escape.
- Investigating the Heap, the players find an area where the wrecks have been hammered together in a way that's far more ornate and solidly built than the rest of the floating raft. Here they will find that Hamstead has started building their new workshop with the gnolls' help.

LOCATIONS

THE OFFICE

The players have a small office with room for three desks, some shelving, and a couple of filing cabinets that turn into fold-down beds. It is situated in an office block on Treason Street, over the Tome de Guerre Books & Antiquities Store, and backs onto an abandoned Vermissian track that rattles with the sound of passing trains on the half-past every hour.

The misted glass on the door is stencilled with the names of Dupin, Lupin & Couseau: the private investigators who operated out of this office before all three were murdered one fateful night.

The drawers contain more empty bottles than they do paperwork, and the locks have been busted so many times that you've stopped bothering to replace them. But this is home, and the first port of call for anyone trying to find you.

THE RANGE

In the docks, they say that if you've got a dispute that you can't fix with talking and don't want to dirty yourself with fighting, settle it with a bet on the Range. What used to be a lot of cheap housing around a crime-ridden back alley is now the longest bar and widest queue of any drinking house in Spire. It also has excellent views of the premier pedestrian jousting arena.

Many a dirty deal has been made under the tables here to the sound of two of the docks' finest Knighted brethren, pissed off their faces and roaring to the heavens, charging into each other. The goal is supposedly for the Knights to strike one another with lances, but given the inebriation of the contestants, the winner is usually whoever is left standing after they collide head-on.

If you're looking for criminal dealings, or just to meet any of the docks' residents that actually work for a living, this is the place to come.

RULES

HOME TURF

When you're not out on a job, this is where you work, sleep, and drink. Without looking, you know where every overloaded ashtray, heavy duty stapler, or other concealed weapon is placed. Overall, you just tend to think a little bit clearer when you're here. Any action attempted here will be at -1 difficulty.

NPCS

If you've been away, just about anyone might have come to root through your office. If you're home, they might come to speak to, hire, or arrest you.

RULES

JOUSTING

If the players wish to bet on the jousts, they can do so by succeeding on a suitable check. Poking around the 'stables' to determine which Knights have a better chance of winning (and maybe pushing the odds in your favour) could use **Sneak+Crime**; yelling encouragement from the stands to your chosen fighter could use **Compel+Low Society**; reading through the latest treatise on jousting and arms techniques and working out the combatants strengths could use **Investigate+Academics**.

Failure on a bet incurs **Silver** stress. Success allows a player to clear **Silver** fallout, or if they don't have any, either gain some temporary Resistance Slots in **Silver** or a one-off bonus (such as a favour, information from a contact, or a round of drinks for some new potential allies).

Taking part in the joust itself is usually a **Fight+Low Society** check. Victory allows you similar benefits to winning a bet. Losing incurs **Blood** or **Reputation** stress, and non-Knights who wish to participate face uneven odds and a hostile crowd (increase the Difficulty of the check by 1).

NPCS

Helene Joan or Hamstead might be found trying to lie low here. Grimsrud may occasionally be seen nursing a whiskey and staring into the middle distance. The Duke might also sneak in for a pint and to place a few bets incognito. Claude Reynard can frequently be seen collecting his 'winnings', but is never seen placing a bet.

STATS

ORDER OF THE RANGE KNIGHTS: stats as **The Goon**, p. 89.

THE WIZENED WEASEL

The locals claim that the real power in the North Docks lies in the Castle. Non-locals often don't get the joke.

Just above the cavernous mouth to the docks, jutting out from the body of Spire itself, is a crooked tower. It is lined with windows too thin to see through from a distance, but which emit all kinds of coloured lights throughout the night. The stories say that it was once a lighthouse, or a guard tower, or a prison built by a jealous Knight for her lover.

Whatever it once was, that tower is now the Wizened Weasel: the most prestigious and hedonistic drinking, dining, and theatrical establishment in the entire North Docks. Entry is strictly membership-only, although exceptions are sometimes made for those considered famous, influential, or notorious enough to be entertaining.

The bouncer will accept no bribes. You must either achieve membership, disguise yourself effectively as an existing member, or build a reputation that will get you invited in.

Inside, all the pleasures of the flesh are yours. The finest wines and liqueurs from around the world are to be found behind the bar, including the last vintages of fallen cities and spirits from the cellars of legendary warriors. The menu might seem vague or even spartan, with dishes such as 'slow-cooked meat' or 'barbecued wings' – until you realise that the 'meat' or 'wings' will be literally any creature you request. Of course, this luxury comes at a price. The bar tabs of the Wizened Weasel are considered one of the delicacies of the high finance world, with entire nations betting their economies on the values of these soaring debts.

And that is to ignore all the pharmacological pleasures on offer. The Wizened Weasel is in a position to be the first to see any ship coming in, and no vice or contraband enters Spire without the Weasel taking its cut.

Despite the sheer hedonism on offer, the floor shows are actually somewhat underwhelming. When the Duchess visits, she will give a passably tantalising performance; and there is always a bill of dancers, magicians, singers, and low-key desang operas taking place on the stage.

But to come to the Weasel and actually watch the show is to miss the point. The real power brokers of the docks come here to mingle and be mingled with; to make deals, network, and more than anything to be seen by other influential people. If you've spent a night at the Weasel and can remember what the show was, you're probably already drifting into irrelevance.

RULES

HEY BIG SPENDER

Nearly all sins can be forgiven at the Wizened Weasel – for the right price. When attempting any task within the building, a player may make an extravagant expense. They can buy an extra dice per **Silver** stress incurred, but must say what they're spending money on.

NPCS

All the real power movers in the North Docks can be found here if you look. Kspeer, the Duchess, the Duke, and Reynard all dine here regularly. If they pay attention, the players might notice that one of the bartenders closely resembles Maria Cramoisi, who is operating undercover at the establishment.

THE CASTLE

Just off the shore of the docks, connected by a network of extremely rickety rope bridges, is a military paddle steamer converted into a pub that also functions as the seat of the North Docks' government.

The interior of the ship is divided into a number of offices, conference rooms, and parliaments, each with its own well-stocked bar. Within the Castle, you may find representatives of every Knightly Order and political interest with a stake in the North Docks. They are all arguing, dealing, drinking, and occasionally fighting (although not too much these days, as the Duke wants to bring down the repair bills).

This is also home to the North Docks' Records of Note, which are kept in leather bound tomes on the shelves behind each table. The more historically significant documents are framed on the walls behind the bars.

The other famous fixture of the Castle is Lazy Matilda: an enormous naval cannon built into the roof of the Castle and permanently pointing in the direction of the docks. Constantly crewed and guarded by a retinue of the Duke's five most loyal knights, it has been years since Matilda has seen any use, but she remains as a symbol of the Duke's power.

RULES

LAZY MATILDA

Though it is heavily guarded, taking over and using Lazy Matilda is possible. Firing Lazy Matilda at a target requires a difficulty 1 **Fight+Technology** check to load and aim it successfully. This kills the target and anyone standing nearby. It also obliterates most of the building they were standing in and instantly summons both the City Guard and the Knights to your position.

NPCS

Naturally, the Duke and Duchess can both be found here, as can Reynard (much against his will) and even Kspeer if he deigns to visit. This is the *only* place in the North Docks where Le'Jon and Valentin will be found drinking (albeit moderately).

STATS

KNIGHTS OF THE ORDER OF THE CASTLE: stats as **The Knight**, p. 89.

THE HEAP

Maybe the players have angered enough of the different factions that they need somewhere to lie low. Maybe they're looking for someone who desperately doesn't want to be found. Either way, there is nowhere lower in the docks that they can go.

There are many theories about the true nature of the Heap, be it a crime den, a secret refugee camp, or a staging post for an invasion. However, delve deeply enough past the many onion layers of repurposed shipwrecks and slum-living within the Heap, and you will find a pristine laboratory with shining metal walls and a suite of the very latest technomantic and demonological instrumentation. At the centre of that laboratory is a closely guarded chamber. It contains a vivid snarl of green lightning that twists in the air and burns itself into the eyes of any who look upon it.

There are many theories about the Snarl. It might be a half-formed doorway to another realm; an embryo of a new Heart; a lingering scar of an ancient demonological event, or perhaps of an event that has yet to happen. The Heap was originally built by gnolls who travelled here to investigate the Snarl and whatever formed it. It is a cause they are devoted to.

If the players (or anyone) activates the Crow-Thing, that may turn out to have been the cause of the Snarl.

RULES

NOBODY SEES NOTHING

Nobody in the Heap is much interested in anyone else's secrets. Even if they were, nobody would listen to them. While in the Heap take 1 extra temporary resistance for **Shadow** and **Reputation**.

NPCS

The gnolls and Hamstead may both be found here. The Weasels or Reynard's Guard may turn up here as well, but if they do, there's going to be a fight.

APPENDIX

NPC STATS

These stat blocks were originally published in *Shadow Operations*, a collection of one-shot missions for Spire. We're reprinting them here (and we've added a couple) as they crop up in *Second-Hand Rain*.

THE ENFORCER

Resistance: 9
Difficulty: 1
Equipment: Professional gear such as a Sword (D6) or Repeating pistol (D6, Ranged). Decent armour (2) but nothing large, heavy or exotic unless they're specifically looking for a fight.

THE FOOL

Resistance: 5
Difficulty: 1 (from sheer luck)
Equipment: Duelling pistol (D6, Ranged, One-shot) or Inherited sword (D6, Keen)

THE GOON

Resistance: 8
Difficulty: 0
Equipment: Cheap Shotgun (D6, Point-Blank, Reload, Unreliable), Sap (D3, concealable)

THE HIEROPHANT

Resistance: 4
Difficulty: 0
Equipment: A dagger (D3), maybe

THE KNIGHT

Resistance: 6
Difficulty: 0 if they're drunk, 1 if they're unhappily sober
Equipment: Quarterplate (Armour 3) and a Longsword (D6) or Greatsword (D8, Tiring)

THE MAGISTER

Resistance: 12
Difficulty: 2
Equipment: Altar-blades of Our Hidden Mistress (D6, Piercing, Unreliable), Flashbangs (D3, Spread, Stunning, Ranged), Sawn-off shotgun (D6, Point-Blank, Double-Barrelled), Concealed armour (Armour 2)

THE MERCHANT

Resistance: 4
Difficulty: 0
Equipment: If they're expecting trouble, a Gun (D6, Ranged, Reload) and tough clothing (Armour 2); otherwise, nothing more than a Dagger (D3)

THE MONSTER

Resistance: 9
Difficulty: 2 until you inflict stress on them, at which point it drops to 1
Equipment: Something cruel and close-ranged (D6, Brutal, Scarring), a Gun for emergencies (D6, Piercing, Ranged, One-Shot)

THE QUEEN

Resistance: 8
Difficulty: 0
Equipment: Bodyguard (D6, Defensive)

THE RISING STAR

Resistance: 8
Difficulty: 1
Equipment: Something flashy like a Rapier or Sabre (D6, Parry), or a Repeating pistol (D6, Ranged, Unreliable)

THE VIZIER

Resistance: 6
Difficulty: 1
Equipment: Concealed armour (1), Poison blade (D6, Keen), Poison (double stress versus Blood, Unreliable)

THE KEEN TAG

The Keen tag was introduced in *Strata*, and some of the NPCs have weapons that use it. In the hands of a PC, a weapon with the Keen tag inflicts +3 stress instead of +1 for each 10 rolled. In the hands of an NPC, it inflicts triple rather than double stress on a roll of a 1.



Potentially USEFUL SIMILES

To give your narration as GM a bit of noirish flavour, please feel free to pick from this selection of similes (or use them to inspire your own).

MEAN AS...

A DERELICTUS BANQUET
A RED HOW KNIFE FIGHT
A DURANCE'S PAYCHEQUE
A FRESHLY SHEARED GOAT

WARM AS...

THE FIRST DRINK ON A FRESH BATH TAB
A BUCKET OF SPIDER EGGS
A CORPSENUIT BLANKET
A MIDWIFE'S TOUCH

HOTTER THAN...

AN ALIQUAMI SUNRISE
A VIGILITE'S WAKE
A TELLIONITE'S SERMON
A WORKS SPEAKEASY

LEGS...

THAT DANGED OVER MY DESK LIKE PERCH ON A WINDY DAY
THAT WENT ALL THE WAY UP TO NEW HEAVEN
AS TALL AS SPIKE AND TWICE AS DEADLY
WITH KNEES LIKE A PYTHON HAS SWALLOWED A BABY'S HEAD
THAT COULD CROSS A BODY IN THE STREET WITHOUT BREAKING STRIDE

RAIN WAS FALLING LIKE...

WORRIES ON AN ANXIOUS MAN'S DREAMS
THE PRICE OF COATS DURING A WILDFIRE
THE STANDARDS OF A LONESOME SOUL SIX DRINKS DEEP
THE SKY WAS DISEASED AND THE GROUND WAS THE CURE
A BLUES ADDICT'S TEARS
LOMBIE HERSELF WAS MOURNING THE FALL OF SPIKE
SOMEONE HAD LEFT THE TAPS ON IN HEAVEN

COLD AS...

AN AELFHIS EMBRACE
AN AMARANTHIAN BED
A BAILIFF'S GAZE
A QUINN'S WELCOME IN A YSSIAN HOME
AN ALIQUAMI MIDNIGHT
A NEW HEAVEN TOWER OF SILENCE

EYES...

LIKE THE LAST GUNBARRELS YOU'LL EVER SEE
LIKE MAGELIGHTS IN A RED HOW BAR
LIKE A MORTICIAN'S SCALPEL
SO PERFECT YOU'D SWEAR AN AELFHAD MADE 'EM

FISTS...

LIKE A PRINTING PRESS
LIKE TWIN HAMMERS
LIKE BLACKSMITH'S HAMMERS
THAT'D HIT YOU LIKE BAD NEWS ON A GOOD DAY
THAT'D HIT YOU LIKE THE VERMISSIAN EXPRESS
THAT STILL TASTED OF SOMEONE ELSE'S FACE
THAT WERE ALL KNUCKLE

Lori's Little Purple Book

SGT. CLAUDE REYNARD

THE HIGH STREET WATCH HOUSE

Always good for a snitching to. Give it a while. He's missed we've been blackmailing the same marks. 109

THE DUKE & DUCHESS

THE CASTLE (YOU DON'T NEED AN ADDRESS IT'S THE BLOOMIN' CASTLE)

Nice spot for a pint and an earwiggings about Matters of State. Duchess ain't above paying for a favour when the mood takes her.

THE WIZENED WEASEL

~~FOLLOW THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE UP OFF OXGUARD'S PARADE~~

Bunch of snobs, you can do better business elsewhere.

DUPIN, LUPIN & COUSEAU INVESTIGATIONS

12/D TREASON STREET

New lads have moved in since that business with the triple homicide. Seem nice enough but not that bright.

HELENE JOAN OF QUINN

Can be found at the Range off Jennissgate. Wear a blue corseflower so she recognises you. Apparently in her parts first introductions are made through a duel to first blood, so wear a thick jumper.

HAMSTEAD'S SCULPTURES, ARTIFICES & MECHANISMS

43. THE FLOODED ALLEYS

Does good work at half the price they should be asking. Does tend to take things a bit seriously though.

MARIA CRAMOISI

TOME DE GUERRE BOOKS & ANTIQUITIES

2/A TREASON STREET

Claims she'll have those research materials we need for next week.





ORDER

By Basheer Ghouse

Spire is a city of laws, rules, and institutions. But they are not *your* rules; not *your* idea of Order. Whatever came before, it has been razed to the ground by the invading aelfir and replaced with laws meant to serve their interests.

Even if the Ministry is successful and wholly ousts the aelfir from Spire, these institutions will still be the ones that the high elves have created. The Ministry will either be forced to wield their oppressors' tools (with all that implies), or invest sweat, blood, and silver into tearing them down and creating new ones in their place.

Until then, they are a potential threat and a potential tool.

WHAT'S IN THE EVIDENCE LOCKER?

A lot of stuff ends up in a guard evidence locker. Even if half of it gets stolen and pawned by the guards, the remainder can still be interesting. Here's a short list:

- A live goat that has eaten vital evidence. It'll likely pass the evidence out the other end in the next day or so.
- Two kilos of malak in a box big enough for a hundred kilos.
- Ten rickety, home-made pistols (D6, Ranged, Reload, Unreliable). The ammunition has all been appropriated.
- A terrible knife in a case made for a far better knife.
- An empty chest with a busted lock.
- A broken eggshell surrounded by dry, viscous fluid. Whatever was within has escaped, possibly recently.

ENFORCEMENT

The basis of a society should not be the means by which it enforces its will on the citizenry; but in Spire, it is.

From the meanest districts of Derelictus to those poor souls indentured in Amaranth, the aelfir make their will known through a boot. Each boot looks and acts differently, and to the casual observer, they may be confused for different entities entirely. But the same foot and the same malign will is in each.

Every draw in Spire has intimate experience with this. They don't interact with the Council, the aelfir, or the ADF and byzantine bureaucracies in their day-to-day lives, but there's always some enforcer of the law a few blocks away, ready to hurt them in the name of the aelfir.

ACAB

There is no such thing as benevolent law enforcement in Spire. To enforce social order is an often brutal task; to do it on behalf of a colonial monstrosity enslaving your kin is vile. Regardless of any individual guard's intentions, or even any particular institution, the rot they perpetuate and enforce is murderous and evil.

The best, kindest, most virtuous guard in Spire still perpetuates the power of an institution that will see their children handed into slavery for years. The good cops are traitors, dead, or quit. The best anyone else gets is unwilling or corrupt.

The Ministry will never forget that. Neither should you.



THE CITY GUARD

The City Guard was never meant to be a law enforcement body. That they are is less a function of their design, and more testament to how thoroughly the aelfir have destroyed the pre-existing institutions of Spire.

As their name implies, the City Guard exists to protect aelfir interests within the city of Spire. They ward against insurrection, defend economic interests, ensure that no one is attacking aelfir in the streets, and enforce the will of the aelfir ruling council upon everyone else in the city. Everything else is secondary.

Pre-existing law enforcement and judicial bodies were thoroughly dismantled with the aelfir conquest, leaving no one to deal with crime and the more basic functions of law and order. The Guard was ordered to step in – not out of concern for the drow citizenry, but because the aelfir could not meaningfully administer the city in the state that they had left it in.

The result is an organisation that cares more about the image of handling crime than the particulars: a militia pressed into service as a law enforcement body. They barely have the institutional means to initiate an investigation, and rarely have the interest or resources to carry one out successfully, but there are an inordinate amount of resources for cordoning off crime scenes and dragging people into cells based on proximity or hunch. They are capable of stationing guards on corners and bringing out the batons, muskets, and cannon to crush riots, but they often have no idea why any particular riot occurs (or when the next one might).

So long as things look like they're functioning and aelfir commands are carried out, the Guard considers its work done. Everything else is extraneous: desperate, self-styled detectives networking across the city; locals badgering officials into helping them; cruel practices turning into more significant problems down the road. All of these merely exacerbate the city's problems and further intensify the misery of the common drow.

It's not that the guard is incompetent (though they often are); they simply don't care.

But the Ministry is precisely the sort of threat the City Guard is meant to oppose. If they had an inkling of what they truly faced, all of their resources would be mobilised to crush the threat.

How fortunate that they don't have a clue.

GUARDS

The Guard is a militia primarily made up of indentured drow, who serve alongside brutal careerists who see the entire Spire as a nest of enemies. Most are poorly trained, and taught mainly by the aforementioned careerists. Your average guard has heard a dozen tales of their fellows being murdered and mutilated on the job before their first patrol, and a couple of those tales might even be true.

As a rule, guards resent the people above them, fear the ones below them, and only trust each other. It's a deeply toxic environment: one that encourages pointless brutality in the name of revenge or safety, and sees reformers and idealists isolated for breaching the trust guards believe they need to survive.

No guard is paid particularly well, which encourages rampant corruption to make ends meet. Guards take bribes, skim off the top of their ever-lavish equipment funds, and even outright steal from evidence lockers, suspected criminals, and particularly unfortunate citizens. Few guards think they're paid well enough to risk getting hurt, and tend to gravitate towards the safest way to handle any given problem.

This is a boon to Ministers. It means they can push guards to rob or terrorise their enemies, bribe them to turn a blind eye to their activities, or simply outright hire local guards to be somewhere else for the duration of an operation.

Many guards are aware that their behaviour causes many of the problems they are meant to handle. They know full well how the smuggling sweeps and random arrests drive more folk to Red Row or Derelictus, and create violent criminals with a grudge against the uniform. They just view the problem as one of disloyal and criminal citizenry, rather than brutal and corrupt guards.

THE HIVE

The Hive was a stroke of artistic brilliance: an inescapable prison with an unassailable HQ; a central hub for operations; and a brutalist statement on the unerring, unavoidable grasp of the law. It was one of the first great projects of aelfir rule, and a statement about what the aelfir considered necessary within Spire. Now it is a fruit gone over-ripe, waiting to burst.

The Hive is a structure-within-a-structure. It is separated from its surroundings by a careful programme of demolitions and bridge construction. The structural supports that keep it from collapsing are also its only connections to the rest of Spire, turning the entire prison into an architectural hostage situation. Were saboteurs to destroy the struts and collapse the prison, who knows how much of the city it would take with it as it fell.

From the exterior, it's a hexagonal mass of armoured plating and shuttered windows, dropping away into the spirebone and accessible only by guarded bridge. Inside, it's a near-unnavigable mess of identical hallways and sheer drops into an unguarded abyss. Railings and safety measures have been deemed counterproductive, because they might encourage a sense of safety among the prisoners and laxness among the guards.

The offices, armouries, and bunks that make up the guard areas are built upon the same framework of supported walkways as the cells.

This allows the guards to expand their operations centre as needed by decommissioning cell blocks. Relay stations scattered throughout the complex allow for quick messages, provide a rallying point for guards to suppress prison riots or breakout attempts, and serve as central locations to monitor prisoners and drop cells into the abyss.

This all required a tremendous amount of engineering to achieve, which is the Hive's first and greatest flaw. The myriad mechanisms that comprise the gargantuan installation are ill-maintained and challenging to navigate. Cells fail to drop, armouries aren't restocked, lighting solutions fail, and messes fester for weeks before someone gets around to cleaning them up. This contributes to the Hive's other fatal flaw: it is staffed and administered by people.

Most guards don't exhaustively check all of the incoming food shipments due to their sheer quantity; others take bribes when something odd arrives. Quiet cell blocks get their food and then are watched lightly, if at all. Communication bans are lax in enforcement because of the impossible workforce they demand. Funding for improvement and renovation is low due to the aura of invulnerability that makes the Hive so fearsome. And then there is the Menagerie.

The Menagerie is a stopgap measure that has metastasised. Up-Spire universities required somewhere to store interesting genetic aberrants and unwilling test subjects. The rich and powerful needed to contain their experiments and pets somewhere they would not cause too much damage. And the Hive, well, the Hive always had free cells – and the City Guard always needed more money.

The Menagerie itself is a ring of cells separating the prisoners from Guard Headquarters. All sorts of curiosities whose only crime is their own existence are stashed here. Some of them

welcome it as a ready respite from a world they don't quite fit. Others seek an escape from cruel masters, freedom, or brutal revenge against a world that hates them.

STONE-SHATTERS-SILENCE

Stone-Shatters-Silence is one of the City Guard's few aelfir. Not many high elves would deign to consider such a low profession; Stone herself refuses to acknowledge their position in the organisation when in polite company. This is a problem, because they run the Guard.

Stone is a competent administrator while on the clock. They're good at the broad organisation and delegation that the guard requires, and indifferent enough to their employees' low-level corruption that they're well-liked by the rank and file. It's when they leave the office that problems arise.

All paperwork they receive must be written in code, so that they might pretend it's some grand dalliance or torrid affair when others see it. Messengers have to approach via their expansive manor house's back gate, and communicate a message with a suitable cover story for the staff. More than one emergency has met with a late or inadequate response because the given excuse wasn't enough to divert Stone from dinner with a member of the Council or a particularly noteworthy artist.

To their friends, family, children, and spouse, they are merely a landlord and advisor to the Council on matters of defense. They have even gone so far as to purchase and experiment on an ape, then have it shut away in the Menagerie so that they might have a viable excuse for why they're at their workplace so often.

They are currently being blackmailed by Bellat, who has threatened to tell their family their real profession if she is not regularly bribed.

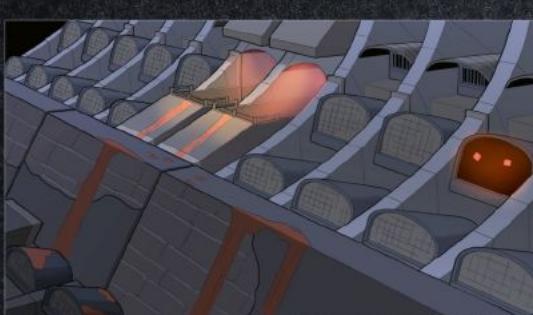
MENAGERIE INMATES

A drow subjected to arcanic experiments on sunlight-treatments since they were a child. They are now immune to sunlight and actively draw light and heat from the area around them. They just want to get out and live a life where they aren't subjected to medical torture.

A Spire-born gnoll mutant, capable of synthesizing any poison they ingest. They have been experimented upon for years by an aelfir surgeon-cosmeticist interested in the extent of their abilities. They want the experiments to stop, and are trying to bribe the guards into telling their master that they've died.

A drow who was the art project of a retired aelfir general. She has had a carapace grown under her skin, an artificial combat drug gland implanted into her spine, and various weapons built into her arms, hands, legs, and skull. She knows what her life expectancy is if freed, and wants to go out in a blaze of glory against her jailers.

A gutterkin of indeterminate species. Limbs and organs continuously grow from his back and writhe at any who come too close. Experimental treatments help him manage the resulting pain and cut away excess growth; he knows he would not survive long on the outside without them.





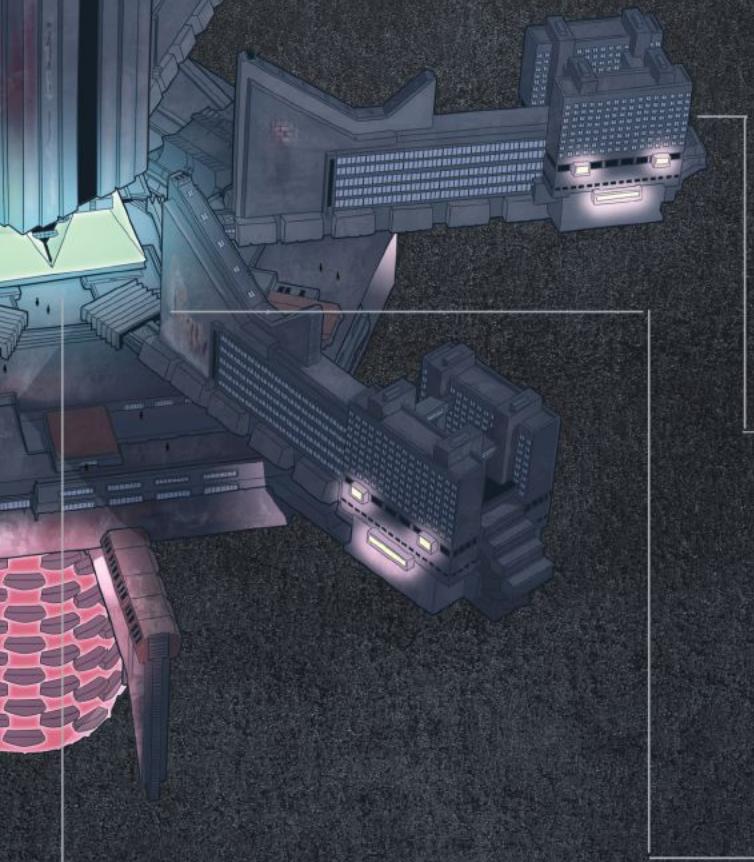
BALCONY (OVERVIEW)



PRISON ENTRANCE (OVERVIEW)



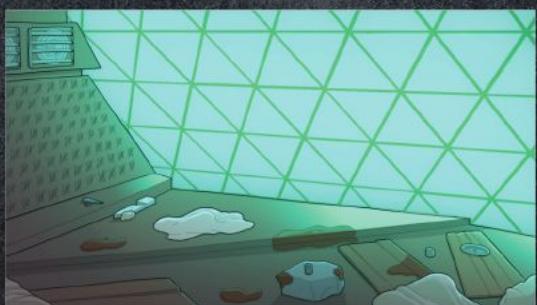
GUARD OFFICES/RESTROOM (INTERIOR)



LOW/MID SECURITY CELLS (INTERIOR)



ARMOURY/BARRACKS (INTERIOR)



WIZARD PIT (INTERIOR)



HAIGH

Haigh is a rail-thin collection of nervous tics in the approximate shape of a drow. As High Warden of the Hive, he is in charge of ensuring that the prisoners stay put and the prison functions correctly. It's been an easy job until recently (since the Hive's prodigious defenses are enough to stop any potential breakout), but one that has not played well with Haigh's pre-existing anxieties.

Haigh sees enemies in every corner, emergencies in every missed meeting, and escape attempts in every weird coincidence. Every plot that turns out to be nothing is merely proof that he is not wary enough: there must be *something* lurking in the shadows to break the Hive. The instincts that kept him alive as a guard and saw him promoted through crises again and again now make his life a living hell.

His escalating anxieties have been disastrous for Guard morale. Constant inspections leave guards tired, maintenance focuses on visible aberrations instead of the infrastructure defects that cause them, and regular crackdowns on casual embezzlement leave guards more desperate for what they can get and taking their frustrations out on the inmates. If unchecked, Haigh's issues threaten to cause the very disasters he is trying to prevent.

BELLAT

Bellat is the Hive's head quartermaster and the epitome of what it is to be a modern guard. She's openly corrupt, intensely loyal, and reflexively violent. She implements Haigh's paranoid policies, and then opens up channels for herself and those she favours to sidestep those policies. She coordinates bribery to make an enormous profit on smuggling to the prisoners, and regularly cuts their food rations to supplement those of the guard.

She also uses her wide-ranging access to form a basic information network. Nominally, this is the core of her ambition: a proper investigations division in the Guard to synthesise the quiet networking done by would-be detectives across Spire. In practice, it's a blackmail network that Bellat uses to accumulate power and wealth.

Bellat has no plans to upset things within the Guard. The status quo works quite well for her, and keeps her three husbands and many children well-fed and happy. But she may not have a choice in the matter.

Her network of informants have begun to collate information indicating that someone, or something, is striking at the guard. She's put together the strings of unsolved murders, the instances of sabotage just before some riot or robbery, and the escape of political dissidents in clusters across the city. While she's not sure what she's looking at, she knows that it threatens her cushy lifestyle.

NAISMITH

Naismith is a philosopher-architect, a master of translating profound statements into buildings and public works. He is one of the few drow to have been accepted into the ranks of an aelfir dominated profession; hence, in an act of petty revenge, he has been given the most hopeless job his superiors could find. He is to analyse the Hive and make recommendations for its remodelling.

Of course, the Hive was designed by a respected aelfir architect, so any change Naismith recommends would be a dire insult that would end his career. And if Naismith *doesn't* put his mark upon the Hive, then he has nothing of worth to say on the subject of architecture, and his career would end.

So far, Naismith has survived by blaming all of his proposed changes on maintenance failures. It's a tactic that's unlikely to last for long, and has sent him scrambling for potential saviours. While none have been forthcoming yet, Naismith's studies have given him an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Hive and its defenses. This is sure to be invaluable to *someone* interested in the facility.

JADY

Jady is the precinct captain for the Verloren Standard, the worst precinct in Spire and what generously passes for an outpost of law in Red Row. In a precinct of mistakes, violent brutes, and political victims, Jady is a paragon of Verloren police – that is to say, she is all of the above.

Openly corrupt, relentlessly suspicious of her superiors, and willing to use violence against the populace before it's used against her, she is a synthesis of every failing of Verloren Standard. Her tenure has arguably made the precinct safer than it's been in years, primarily because of her policy of pre-emptive strikes against anyone loitering too close to the precinct. It's also ruined relationships with criminal groups in Red Row. Plenty of them would love to see her gone, while she dreams of conducting a full, brutal sweep of the area.

CITY GUARD ADVANCES

PAID IN FULL. [Low advance] *You've bribed enough guards to get a reputation. Guards assume the best from you, so long as you keep the money flowing.* Take D3 Stress to **Silver** to roll with Mastery the next time you negotiate with City Guards.

FRIEND CHIT. [Medium advance] *The Friend Chit is a perk of Guard life. It is a chit with an ID number given to friends, family, and folks with a large purse, so other guards know to let them be.* +1 **Reputation**. Once per session, you can show guards your friend chit. As long as you haven't murdered someone in front of them or assaulted a guard, they'll let you finish whatever crime you were in the process of committing.

THE BLACK GUARD

The Black Guard is an elite subdivision of the City Guard; the professional military to its indentured militia. It was founded by the aelfir more than a century ago when it was clear that the City Guard's role was changing. Something more professional (and less reliant on indentured drow) was necessary to protect Amaranth.

The solution was a premier force of drow mercenaries, aelfir volunteers, and defence force veterans keen on turning their experience at arms into reliable income. Where the City Guard has pretensions of law enforcement, the Black Guard maintains no such illusions. They are a military force, meant to quash threats to the aelfir upper crust and guard sites of real importance.

In theory, the Black Guard is meant to be clear of political ties and competing interests that might compromise its mission. In practice, it is chronically underfunded, meant to cover more ground with fewer guards than it has, and a perennial victim of its success. This has led to commanders renting out their guards as mercenaries to upper-class aelfir and drow, just to meet costs and make payroll. This, in turn, has led to further cuts under the assumption that the guards can supplement themselves with mercenary work and an increasing reliance on private sponsorship.

The Black Guard is now a supremely lethal nest of tangled ties. Wealthy sponsors, regular clients, and rich veterans who help fund the Guard can call upon detachments at will. Commanders and individual guards have become used to bribery as a fact of life, and the Black Guard has been an instrument of political murder more than once. Worst of all, at a gala three months ago, two squads of Black Guard were pitted against each other by competing employers. This resulted in a bloodbath that killed one guard and several dozen bystanders.

THE NEEDLE

The Needle is a stark marble spire, carved to resemble the great fortresses of the far north. It looms over the grand avenue of Amaranth, reminding everyone who rules Spire.

At one time it competed with the Hive as headquarters of the City Guard, as a more noble building that did not involve proximity to prisoners or myriad drow – but the founding of the Black Guard made this purpose obsolete. The City Guard moved to the Hive, and the aelfir's new guardians settled into the Needle.

While the Guard as a whole has had difficulty reckoning with their apolitical mission and the reality of life in Amaranth, those in the Needle have no such difficulty. The guard's best and purest are stationed here, paid well and monitored aggressively to ensure that they remain uncorrupted by political ties. They inhabit the Needle's bottom floors, maintaining its defences, training, and occasionally sallying out against some high-

priority incident. The rest of the Needle houses Black Guards on desk duty or who need space to plan an operation, as well as the various unarmed support personnel who make their work possible: clerks, paper pushers, weapons manufacturers, and liaisons who are far easier targets than the Guards (but no less vital to their mission).

Unlike the Hive, the Needle doesn't house prisoners, as the Black Guard avoids taking any. However, it does host a wealth of contraband, evidence, and paperwork that could be equally valuable. An assault would be outright suicidal, but the Ministry has other ways to extract what they want from the fortress.

MAJI EBOH

Maji Eboh once joked that the Black Guard simply wouldn't function without her leadership. The Council agreed, and so had her drugged and forcibly subjected to Undying surgery days before her retirement. Held in check by her heart in a Council vault, the Council has gained an incorruptible, ever-living head of the Black Guard at the minor cost of her trust and loyalty.

Her service is effective but miserable. Her family, expansive and wealthy, are terrified of their matriarch and her fell moods. The Black Guard is kept functional to Maji's standards, but the drive, zeal, and problem-solving to handle its loyalty crisis no longer exists. So long as the budget remains sparse and mercenary work isn't brought to her attention, Maji is content to let the situation deteriorate.

But Maji does not plan to let herself be bound in servitude indefinitely. She doesn't have a plan, not yet, but she's forming one: a strike on her own heart, by a team of people she can trust. However, she's not yet sure if she's planning suicide or an escape.

BARLBOUGH

Barlbough is a rare human in the Black Guard. After nearly a decade as a mercenary in the Nujab, he was offered a position in the Guard and has slid into his role with aplomb. He has salt-and-pepper hair, a nose that has been broken several times, and a bulk that has served him well in his service.

Barlbough is a true believer. He's convinced that aelfir rule is for the best in Spire, that the Black Guard is a necessary part of public order, and that there wouldn't be problems if the drow just stopped getting uppity. He also deeply hates gnolls, and regularly brutalises gnoll gardeners and bystanders when given the opportunity.

His wife, partner, and four children have all moved into Spire of late, and his workaholic reputation has begun to flag as he spends more time with them. It's also made him more amenable to taking private security work from various noble families, as his salary is no longer enough to keep everyone comfortable.



PALADINS

To describe Paladins as part of the law is, perhaps, generous. Technically, they have no legal authority. Technically, their political backing is tenuous, and their numbers tiny.

In practice, even the Black Guard stays out of the way of the Paladins. The law bends for them, its tools follow their orders, and they are the most lethal and best-informed foes that Ministry agents may face. However, there are less than a hundred of them, and they have no allies.

Standing guidelines from the Ministry remain simple. If the Paladins show up at the site of an operation, evacuate immediately. If that isn't possible, don't betray Ministry secrets before they kill you.

LEADERSHIP

The Paladins' small numbers and fierce discipline results in a strict hierarchy that most aelfir find disturbing. They are led by an Arch-deacon, who reports to a superior in the aelfir homelands. Captains report to the Arch-deacon, and are reported to in turn by the Forsworn: ascetic veterans considered strange even by other Paladins.

ARCH-DEACON TELLS-OF-PAIN

Tells-Of-Pain is a young Arch-deacon. She has led the Paladins for only a decade after her predecessor was ripped limb from limb in combat with some heartsblood horror. Still, she has adapted quickly, and spearheaded many of the efforts that make the Paladins so terrifying to the Ministry and the other cults that inhabit Spire's underway.

She led the investigatory reforms that saw them ever more able to track down Ministry agents. The financial sponsorships and public funding that she has gained have seen the Paladins equipped more lethally than they have been in an age. She set up the outposts that have seen Paladins become scourges of the abandoned Vermessian, able to respond to crises across Spire with impossible speed.

She is also convinced that Undying surgery is an affront to Brother Autumn, and may be a larger threat to the Paladins' mission than the Ministry.

After all, to become Undying is to deny Brother Autumn his rightful due: the grim toll expected by the Solar Church, which each Paladin accepts unflinchingly and unreservedly. It is to place oneself above the Gods in general, and the Paladins in particular. What blasphemy could some half-dead moon goddess create to compare? What horror could be greater than this?

Tells-of-Pain is convinced that losing Spire would be worth it to rid the aelfir of their Undying populace. And increasingly, she shares her thoughts on the matter with her Captains.

CAPTAIN BRILLIANT-SPIRES

Brilliant-Spires is the only Paladin Captain without a public life. Her name is known, but there are no appearances, no gossip columns about her love life and philosophy, no grand speeches or public dedications. She appears when she must for religious functions, but wears a face-concealing mask throughout the process. There is rarely ever content for a would-be columnist to write about.

Brilliant-Spires' professional record is an exemplary one: a list of brutal raids, public executions, and cleansed temples that has stretched across every level of Spire for decades. She has a sterling devotion to discipline and the Paladins without blemish or cause for complaint. All of this is hiding a single, lethal secret.

Brilliant-Spires is a heretic. Worse: Brilliant-Spires believes with all her heart in Damnou, and the Ministry knows it.

It has not stopped her from slaughtering Ministry agents, attacking their bases, and investigating their operations with her usual lethal efficiency. But the knowledge has formed the kernel of a plan: to turn Brilliant-Spires upon the Paladins, or the Paladins upon her. All the Ministry needs is proof or a way to turn belief into action.

CAPTAIN FIRST-AT-DAWN'S-BREAKING

First-At-Dawn's-Breaking is the most prestigious Paladin in living memory. They've attended galas with the Council, saved thousands from the knives of bone-cultists, purged sacred hyenas from an orphanage, and headlined every newspaper in the gleaming city. They are charismatic, valorous, and brilliant, shaking hands with the masses and single-handedly working to further the cause of Brother Autumn in Amaranth.

The Ministry considers them a higher priority target than even the Arch-deacon, and has searched fruitlessly for some weakness in their character since they ascended to Captaincy. Most tasked with this have given up, convinced that no such flaw exists, and that First-At-Dawn's-Breaking is a scourge they will have to survive until old age claims them or they drown in the blood of Ministry cells.

But the flaw is there, a secret kept beneath layers of armour and mask and radiant smiles. First-At-Dawn's-Breaking thinks themself a fraud.

They are possessed of a truly massive inferiority complex, assigning each success to luck, dead friends, or hostile incompetence. They have been desperately attempting to avoid danger and the headlines, only to be pushed out front again and again. Their sword dulls in its sheath, for Dawn is increasingly too scared to draw it. This profound anxiety has ruined every aspect of their life which is not in the public eye.

They are looking, more than anything else, for a way to leave the Paladins alive. If the Ministry were to figure this out, it would be more than happy to offer them one. Although, who is to say whether they would remain retired if the Paladins were threatened in their absence?

CAPTAIN ICE-AGAINST-GLASS

Ice-Against-Glass is the youngest of the Paladin Captains, and one of the few Forsworn to accept a promotion. He is a firebrand among his fellows, using the celebrity of his position to demand reform and asceticism from other aelfir.

His speeches are backed by perfect posture, statuesque looks, and surgeries to scrape away his scalp. Muscle, bone, and blood vessels are now bare under a transparent layer of hardened carapace sewn to his forehead. After several incendiary rants against powerful nobles, his public appearances are now aggressively micro-managed by the Solar Church.

But while his public statements have caused outrage, his private statements cause true discord among the Paladins. Since his ascension, Ice has pushed for the institution of the Red Days: a rite of the Paladins which is so fell and ill-omened that only the Captains and Deacons know of it.

Rumours of this have leaked to the rest of the Paladins, their support staff, and the Ministry; but they know nothing of the event itself. They know only that Ice demands its implementation with ever-increasing fervour, and that the rest of the Paladins' leadership is terrified of the idea.

WHAT ARE THE RED DAYS?

- A week of unrestricted bloodshed in New Heaven. Paladins and aelfir hunters will slaughter drow by the hundreds, burning corpses, ravens, and hyenas in the street. This is all an attempt to draw the drow gods into the world and kill them in single combat.
- A three-day-long ritual meant to prove the Paladin's devotion to Brother Autumn. It will culminate in the self-immolation of Paladin leadership, and the crowning of a new Arch-deacon. The magical backlash will ignite the Sun-On-Earth.
- An attempted coup against the Council to bring aelfir government back in line with the perceived wishes of the Gods and the Queen.
- An exorcism-by-fire of the Heart itself. Doomed, but potentially catastrophic in a way the Paladins barely understand.

BLOOD-RUNS-SWEET

Head of the ascetic Forsworn is the burly, scarred figure of Blood-Runs-Sweet. She towers above her compatriots, armoured or not, and her skin bears the scars of sacred flagellations and hard-won combat. She is the first thing prospective recruits see as they are initiated, and the foremost aid to the Arch-deacon. In a warrior-sect of bloodthirsty fanatics, she is the most warlike, bloodthirsty, and fanatical.

The Ministry would dearly love to compromise Blood-Runs-Sweet to ruin the Forsworn, or at least stop the gargantuan aelfir from slaughtering more people. But they have run into a most peculiar problem: as near as anyone can tell, Blood-Runs-Sweet does not exist off duty.

This is not to say that she has an alter-ego, though one may exist who is remarkably well hidden. As near as the Ministry can tell, Blood-Runs-Sweet is only ever Blood-Runs-Sweet. Neither is it to say that she has dedicated herself to the job so thoroughly that there is no 'off duty' for her. She has shifts and schedules like any other Paladin, and leaves their headquarters to return home on occasion. It is simply that, upon leaving the headquarters, she stops existing.

The other Paladins have not questioned this. They simply assume that their fellow is a truly dedicated ascetic, reducing herself from sight as much as possible when not serving the order.

The Ministry, however, has theories: that Blood-Runs-Sweet is a transfigured drow, and returns to her natural shape when she leaves; that she has honed her asceticism to such an extent as to remove herself from the world when not serving; that she is the result of all the failed attempts to summon aelfir gods, a twisted manifestation of their will and essence that dissipates into the void when not needed. One theory is even that she is, in fact, an extraordinarily complex and dangerous mass hallucination. Each cell assigned to her case devises their own solution to the riddle, but so far, none have been correct.

THE PAGES

'Page' is a rough category. Bureaucrats, priests, failed aspirants to Paladinhood, pious drow, and anyone else who dedicate themselves to the Paladin's service can be one of their number.

They take on a hundred roles so that each Paladin can be the terrifying force they are, and shun any honour or recognition for this work. They are as ignored as a million other servants up and down Spire, but are afforded privilege and wealth by their masters.

To the Ministry, the Pages are the vulnerable underbelly of the Paladins. A Paladin is nearly invincible and horrendously lethal, but they can't work without their support; and a Page is precisely as vulnerable as anyone else.

WILDER

Wilder is a rarity among the Pages: a drow who proved themselves to Brother Autumn's clergy, and was allowed to serve the Paladins as a reward. They are well aware of their position's fragility, and that this is a privilege that could be taken away at any moment and for any reason. This means they are willing to do anything to maintain it.

Currently, 'anything' consists of running information processing for the Paladins. They get the reports, dispatch agents, and sift through reams of information, lies, and news. They tell the Paladins where the Ministry will strike next, and how. They are not the only Page with this role, but they are one of the most dedicated and loyal.

Naturally, the Paladins suspect that they are a mole for the Ministry, and the Ministry is aware of the rumour.

SUMMONING BROTHER AUTUMN

The methods and consequences of summoning an aelfir god into Spire are still unknown. Here are some possibilities:

The Heart devours all divine energy attempting to come through Spire. If the Solar Gods are to be summoned, they must be summoned within the Heart and brought out into the city to do their holy work. This is likely to corrupt the avatar with the essence of the Heart, eventually turning it into an Angel (see *Heart* p. 176). Worse, it may result in the god itself becoming tainted as the divine connection becomes a two-way street, unleashing untold havoc in the aelfir homelands.

The Heart cannot survive a divinity of such strength appearing in its vicinity. The successful summoning of the Solar Gods will kill the Heart and doom Spire. The collapse will be slow, gradual, and foreseen, but the aelfir will be loath to allow an evacuation until it is far too late.

SWIFTLY-OVER-HARVEST

Swiftly-Over-Harvest is a priest of the Solar Church, dedicated to Brother Autumn. He manages public appearances for Captain Ice-Against-Glass and half a dozen lesser Paladins in addition to administering to his flock.

His sermons are passionate and benevolent, describing the grim duty demanded by Brother Autumn, including the acceptance of death and the kindness of bloodshed. He has had half a dozen lovers of various genders (all of whom speak of him glowingly) and has fathered or adopted a dozen children.

Secretly, he is devising a method to summon the Solar Pantheon into Spire. The inability to channel divinity in Spire is one of very few limitations on the power of the aelfir, and the Paladins believe that if they could find a way around this restriction, it would allow them to destroy the Ministry once and for all. The Solar Church thinks it could enable Spire to become a locus of the Queen's will in the same way it does in the far north.

Swiftly-Over-Harvest has been promising results on this matter for thirty years and still has not managed it. But he believes that he is getting close, and he may be right.

LOVE'S-LOW-TYRANT

Love's-Low-Tyrant is an institution. He is nearing the end of his lifespan, and in a sect that decries Undying surgery and often dies violently, he has served longer than any Page or Paladin has been alive.

Spire's nature will not allow aelfir gods to come to Spire in anything but drow form. If Brother Autumn is to be summoned, it must be within the form of a trusted drow. This will likely succeed without side effects, but may provoke a profound theological crisis among aelfir clergy that could spark a civil war.

The Heart forces even divinity to play by its rules. Brother Autumn is not unable to come to Spire but refuses to come to Spire, for this would make him mortal and susceptible to death. However, the Paladins may well be able to compel his arrival, which would give the Ministry a window to kill an aelfir divinity and unleash untold havoc.

Once, Tyrant was an aspirant to the Paladins, but he failed their initiation due to his pride. In penance, he chose to dedicate himself as a Page, serving the order he was not worthy of joining.

Since then, he has endured, accumulating seniority as others died, left, and drifted away. Generation after generation joined the Paladins, and Tyrant became a respected elder; then a leader; and then a part of the service as integral as the swords, the armour, and the prayer.

He assigns Pages to jobs, ensures that Paladins are managed correctly, oversees weapon procurement and mass blessings, and chooses the liaisons with the guard and bureaucracy to minimise ever-present tensions. His latest project is his replacement: training people to take over parts of his jobs, and formalising the century-old codes and procedures that will ensure the Pages keep functioning when he dies.

But deep within his heart, hidden where he prays the Gods cannot see it, Love's-Low-Tyrant does not *want* to die. He reviles the Undying surgery as any servant of Autumn should; he knows its practitioners for cowards and corpses. But he cannot truly envision a Paladin order without him, and though he would never admit it, he does not want to.

Killing Love's-Low-Tyrant would be a blow in the Ministry's favour, but a pyrrhic one. His successors would take his role, and the backlash would be bloody and fierce. But breaking him – convincing him to take the Undying surgery and letting the Paladin order revile him as much as the Ministry does – now, that would be a lasting victory.

PAGE STATS

Names:	Law's-Loving-Grasp, Testimony-Of-Death, Archibald
Descriptors:	Swaddled in red robes; Muttering a prayer from the First Book of the Harvest; Laden with their master's weapons
Difficulty:	Dedicated and clever, but not fighters. Difficulty 0; 1 if you're trying to trick them or sneak by them.
Resistance:	4, but they never work alone.
Equipment:	Light armour (1), Jackdaw pistol (D6, Piercing, Reload, Ranged)

PALADIN FALLOUT AND ADVANCES

AUTUMN EYE. [Shadow, Moderate Fallout] A Page suspects you of forbidden worship. They are actively investigating your actions for evidence, and any action against them may draw the Paladins' wrath.

THE HARVEST. [Shadow, Severe Fallout] The Paladins are hunting you. Some Pages and guards, or a squad of Paladins, will oppose all of your operations. Contacts are hounded, family and friends interrogated and shot. Die well.

HERO KILLER. [Medium advance] Paladins bleed like everyone else. You know better than most; you've watched one die. Once per session, when confronted by Paladins or Pages, mark D3 stress and challenge them to combat. For the rest of the encounter, all of your rolls against them are rolled with Mastery.



TINSHEK, HEAD OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS

No one likes Tinshek, which is how Tinshek likes it. He is the one and only internal affairs investigator for the City Guard. A commissioner created the position solely as a means of getting revenge against a rival police officer, and Detective Tinshek was the only applicant. Despite this, he's very good at his job, and has somehow put a lot of corrupt cops behind bars. He's yet to find a non-corrupt cop, but blackmail material is useful if he wants to keep his position or earn a little extra.

An expert in back-tracing bribes and sources, Detective Tinshek is currently investigating a police informant connected to the player characters' cell. It's only a matter of time before he finds out about the Ministry involvement – although what happens after that is up to the players.

THE ETHICS BOARD

There are magics and secrets too profane even for the minds of the aelfir. To know of such things is banned, even among those tasked with researching and controlling them. This is, of course, an impossible mission. The people given that mission are the Ethics Board.

The Ethics Board is a subsection of Mother Winter's clergy in the Solar Church. Officially, they're a gathering of bureaucrat-theologians and minor arcanists, dedicated to vetting magical experiments for political and legal acceptability. In practice, aelfir standards of acceptability are so broad that they are considered a rubber stamp: a good place for an unassuming aelfir to pad out their résumé while en route to greater things.

This serves the Ethics Board well, for their true purpose is the suppression and destruction of banned knowledge. Angel binding, deep apiarism, ice-breaking, dimensional communion, the three proscribed cults, and worse are on their great lists of banned topics. Others – like demonology and drow midwifery – were once banned, but were removed from the lists when some element of government decided that it was inconvenient or impossible to police them.

SCOURING RECORDERS

Banned knowledge is so profoundly reviled that even members of the Ethics Board cannot know the specifics. This would be an impossible task, were it not for the scouring recorders: magical music boxes gifted to the aelfir by Mother Winter many centuries ago.

Each recorder is tuned to a banned subject when created, using the knowledge pulled from the still-living brain of a heretic mage. When played, the recorder's discordant, unholy notes roughly scrub all knowledge of such magic from their victim. The process is painful, intensely unpleasant, and fallible. The lucky ones have nightmares for weeks; others hear the droning notes for the rest of their lives.

Reminders of the forbidden topic threaten to trigger a memory cascade: a painful re-emergence of every memory suppressed by a particular recorder. The triggers for a memory cascade can be bizarre, and only tangentially linked to the forbidden magic at hand; it behooves members of the board to be careful even after their regular wipes.

For this reason, members of the Ethics Board tend to be somewhat eccentric. They refuse to allow beekeepers within a thousand paces of their homes, reflexively turn the corners of their abodes into curves, and manage dozens of other eccentricities that keep life livable.

Using a recorder causes D3 **Mind** stress, and suppresses all memories of a specific magical and theological topic. They do not work on anything besides magical and theological topics. Upon encountering a reminder of the topic, a character with suppressed memories may take D8 **Mind** stress to recover all of their lost memories.

THE MINISTRY AND THE ETHICS BOARD

Of the law enforcement bodies in Spire, the Ethics Board may be the least overtly hostile to the Ministry. Our Hidden Mistress is not proscribed in memory like the Old Gods of the aelfir, and the Ethics Board doesn't know or care about the Ministry's existence as an institution. As such, conflict tends to take one of two forms.

First: the Ethics Board and the Ministry may be pursuing the same objective, or different objectives in the same area in a way that is likely to cause conflict. In this case, the Ministry cell and the Enforcement team are unlikely to know of each other's presence until something goes wrong. For example, the Ministry cell may be looking to recruit a victim of the Ethics Board as an ally or resource; attempting to escape a spying mission with sensitive memories intact; or simply in the wrong place at the wrong time when all the water within a hundred metre radius turns into flesh-eating bees. The Ministry agents are likely not at the top of the Enforcement team's priority list, but may find themselves pursued and subjected to a scouring recorder to ensure that they don't know anything unseemly. Conversely, a Ministry cell going after a well-protected, well-connected aelfir may find an Enforcement team with the same foe useful – at least until the deed is done, and the subject turns to horrible music and intact minds.

Second: a Ministry member or cell has gained forbidden knowledge. This is likely banned magic, as many of the magics that the Ethics Board hunt down are potent weapons in the right hands. Having them initiate an investigation means that the cell has gained a powerful, magically connected, and dangerous adversary for as long as they believe that the magic is at large. They are unlikely to be satisfied without deaths and mind wipes. However, if the Ministry cell can fake a resolution to the crisis, it is not unheard of for dispatched Enforcement teams to act as if they were never at odds with those they were attempting to murder mere days before.



THE HALL OF ETHICS

The Hall of Ethics is an elegant but unassuming alabaster building on the campus of the High Elven University of Divine Magic. It can be seen from many places on campus, but is almost impossible to reach if you do not have business there, as the gossamer bridges that lead to it bend to other destinations until called upon.

Among aelfir students, it is an office of some prestige. This is because anyone who can shut down the work of another aelfir at a whim, no matter how powerful or well-connected, have significant power in Amaranth. Among others, it is an odd, ominous place that people mostly wish to avoid.

The building itself is sparsely decorated. The halls host portraits of the Deans of Ethics since the University's founding, and iconography dedicated to Mother Winter. Pleasant music drifts through the halls, courtesy of hidden music boxes embedded in the walls throughout the facility. The constant hustle and crowding of student life is absent here, and to most, it would seem like a pleasant ghost town. It is an empty building that you can stroll through to discuss the ethics of torturing some gutterkin for the rest of its life with some like-minded professors, get the rubber stamp you knew was coming, and go on your way.

Few know how to find the hidden staircases, or which tunes to hum to make the floor give way; which statue to twist, and how to twist it so that *here* and *there* become one place; the flagellations to promise the Second Dean so she might allow you to pass.

The true Hall of Ethics lies beneath and between the corridors of its cover. Its walls are lined with books of forbidden lore, and litanies of blasphemies are chanted by chained gutterkin so that the Old Gods may never look upon the building. Interrogation chambers, laboratories, and armouries are around every corner.

This secret hall is a constant hub of activity. It is full of investigations into possible banned magics and cults; experiments upon captured specimens; periodic bouts of illegal experimentation; and occasionally the horrible, scouring sound of the recorders. So far, it remains uncompromised; the Ministry is not a foe the Ethics Board is on the alert for, so who knows how long that will stay true.

HEAD OF INTAKE, BROKEN-YET-WORTHY-BACKS

The Ethics Board selects for academics instead of fanatics, but radicals arise nonetheless. Broken-Yet-Worthy-Backs is one such radical. She joined the Ethics Board as a bored aelfir youth who viewed it as a rung on the ladder to greatness, and was shocked when she learned the truth.

Over the years, Broken has seen the worst horrors that banned magic can summon. She has seen friends disembowelled and innocents killed because she was too slow (or those above her didn't care). She has had these memories scrubbed from her mind, only to relive them again and again whenever she returns to the field.

To survive it all, she has turned to the magic that she hunts, and is studying ice-breaking. Ice-breaking is a form of magic devised in the aelfir civil wars, which saw the Solar Gods rise and the Old Gods fall. It blots the sun's light from the sky, shatters ice and aelfir constructs, and spreads along waterways to find further victims. It is reviled and hated by the aelfir, but those few who know of its existence believe that the Everqueen is a master of the art. Its sole purpose is for aelfir to kill aelfir, without regard for collateral damage.

As Head of Intake, Broken vets prospective faculty for the Ethics Board's secret purpose, and recruits lower-level employees to serve on enforcement teams. She uses this role to ensure that every new entry owes her one and therefore can't afford to investigate her abuse of magic.

DEAN OF ETHICS, LIGHT-ON-SHORE

Light-on-Shore is a model example of the ethics board. He is a wizened, scholarly, Undying aelfir who has had blood under his cracked fingernails longer than he can remember. His devotion to the cause is inviolate. He has scrubbed his own mind so many times that he has a constant headache, a deep-seated aversion to caves, and a loathing for bees and their keepers. His reviews of upcoming experiments are always fair, and he has an unnatural knack for isolating potentially dangerous lines of research.

His focus on external wrongdoing and regular use of a scouring recorder has left him blind to the Ethics Board's growing corruption. An increasing number of agents and board members research the subjects they are meant to eradicate, skip sessions with the recorders, arrange their offices to regain their memories after each mind-wipe, and have taken up the worship of banned and dangerous cults. Occasionally one is careless, getting caught and disciplined appropriately, but these occasional deaths merely serve to blind Light-on-Shore to the problem's extent.

This is a failure that will catch up to him eventually. But until then, he is a force to be reckoned with.

HEAD OF ACCOUNTING PRACTICES, THROUGH-VILE-MOONLIGHT

Through-Vile-Moonlight is an odd figure in the Ethics Board, because they have reached their rank without once performing practical work. Through a quirk of luck and an enormous amount of personal effort, they have managed to avoid being deployed to kill monsters, burn temples, and butcher heretical priests and dangerous mages. Instead, they have progressed through the ranks via well-filed paperwork, excellent theoretical research, and a prodigious refusal to die.

They have been poisoned, shot, mauled by dogs, and on one memorable occasion thrown from a tower into the Recursive Pit – but each time, they have survived. Though a few of these murder attempts were because of their position in the Ethics Board, most were due to their significant gambling debts, which have accrued after a century of poor decisions and a steadfast refusal to pay their creditors. Most of their possessions are hidden within the Ethics Board building, making them difficult to repossess. So far, their plan of simply outliving everyone they owe money appears to be working surprisingly well.

Professionally, Through-Vile-Moonlight serves as Treasurer for the Ethics Board, especially the significant secret budget that funds its operations. They keep a tight hand on the finances, reviewing every proposed expenditure and ensuring that money doesn't vanish into some professor's passion project. Or at least, making sure that this doesn't happen without *considerable* bribes headed their way. As treasurers go, they're responsible. Their only real flaw is the minor fact that they are a committed evangelical cultist of a banned aelfir Old God known only as The Vast, and have been slowly turning their research laboratory into an endless pit disconnected from linear time.

To all but the closest observer, Moonlight is a respected member of the university faculty. They give lectures on economics and research ethics, have friends across the university, and can often be found arguing for funding at the Bursar's office.

JUNIOR TEACHING ASSISTANT TO THE ACTING ASSOCIATE HEAD OF ETHICAL CORRECTIONS, DOVE

Drow are not professors at the High Elven University of Divine Magic. This isn't due to any law or official policy, but instead an unofficial agreement by the faculty. There are impressive drow who might be of service to the university as instructors, speakers, and junior attendants – but the all-aelfir board of directors feels that giving drow employees tenure and formal rank wouldn't be an appropriate cultural fit at this time. Tenure hearings are put off, excuses are found to reject them, and most drow employees figure out what's up pretty quickly.

Dove is not most drow employees. They are a tall and lean figure, built like a hunter, with a chin forged for propaganda papers. They wear a mask at all times, carry a rapier or pistol beneath their coat, and are one of the most gifted, charismatic, and competent leaders the Ethics Board has seen. They have outlasted everyone above them in the chain of command, and by rights they should have formally been promoted to Head of Ethical Corrections some time ago. However, the Head must be faculty, and drow can't be.

This should have been the end of Dove's ambition, but when the previous Acting Head of Ethical Corrections died before she could be confirmed, the Dean deemed Dove worthy of leadership. A non-existent professor was appointed Acting Associate Head of Ethical Corrections, and Dove assigned as their junior assistant – giving Dove de facto control of Ethical Corrections in the fake professor's absence.

But if they aren't faculty and their authority comes from a technicality, then they aren't the true leader. And they know it.

So, Dove has dedicated themselves to becoming the first official drow faculty member of the High Elven University of Divine Magic. They have published papers and been cited in journals across Spire, the Home Nations, and the Elven Homelands. They have pushed the boundaries in ethical philosophy and divine embodiment theory, and polished each application for tenure until it far surpassed any of their competitors. And still, nothing.

At their latest review, the board expressed dissatisfaction with Dove's lack of accomplishments regarding the Ethics Board's *true* purpose. Desperate to prove themselves worthy, Dove has embarked on the most ambitious research of their career. They are trying to reverse engineer the forbidden magic of dimensional communion, and they are willing to do *anything* to succeed.



ETHICS ENFORCEMENT TEAMS

Having enough professors on staff to do everything the Ethics Board is meant to would be suspicious and fatally compromise the organisation's secrecy. As a result, the Ethics Board faculty rely heavily upon Ethics Enforcement teams made up of the department's other employees. Disguised as security guards, janitors, family members, experimental subjects, teacher's assistants, and particularly odd students, these teams serve as muscle when the Ethics Board doesn't want to involve the Guard in an operation.

On the job, Enforcement teams work in groups of two to three, generally led by a faculty member or senior enforcer. They dress in formal wear and conceal magical weaponry inside their clothes. This allows them to pose as a professor and their clique, or as a group of government officials. While they do have the authority to order the City Guard around, this is rarely used due to their work's secretive nature.

Enforcement teams are deployed only when the existence of a cult or proscribed magic is confirmed. The preparation process is extensive and involves the sorcerous unsealing of scoured memories, which is less dangerous than accidental memory recovery but no less unpleasant. Once the source of proscribed information is eliminated, all witnesses are meant to be scoured and all evidence destroyed. In practice, tomes of illicit lore and similar physical evidence are generally retrieved and sealed in the Ethics Board's vaults instead.

Between missions, Enforcement teams lead odd lives of training and study. They know that they're part of the Ethics Board and the generalities of their mission, but the specifics are rigorously scoured from their minds. Many are confused about the precise nature of their jobs; others have their families and relationships torn asunder by the stress of their position.

MISTER JAY

Jay applied to be a janitor; he thought this was a legitimate cleaning job that would keep him out of debt and a second durance. He just wanted something to keep food on the table, help his husband pay the bills, and give his kids some of the things he knows they deserve. Unfortunately for him, he was actually interviewing for a spot in the Ethics Enforcement teams.

It's not entirely clear what Broken-Yet-Worthy-Backs saw in Jay, but she deemed him worthy and brought him in. He was paid more than he dared hope; let in on secrets others would kill to know; and told in no uncertain terms that if he tried to run from or betray the Board, his family would suffer the consequences.

Jay is now a strapping young man who fills out the tailored suit that passes as his uniform. He's an expert duelist and solid marksman, but he is more desperate than ever to escape the Ethics Board before it kills him. The regular memory wipes aren't helping this, and the screaming nightmares and inability to explain anything to his family are beginning to strain his relationships at home.

He's resorted to stashing evidence in an unused part of the office between mind wipes, trying to accumulate enough blackmail, wealth, or *something* to let him get his family to safety.

DIGNITY

Dignity is an angel of a long-dead god. Its flesh is a mass of roiling horror, its voice a lethal scream that no living thing has heard and survived. Its squamous arms are tipped in deadly claws, and across its towering frame are eyes. So many eyes.

Dignity is, technically, the sort of thing the Ethics Board is meant to kill. However, after an entire Enforcement team and a dozen guards went missing, Dignity found the Hall of Ethics, entered the secret chambers, and began to act as if it was and always had been an employee. It didn't speak and didn't really interact, but it took orders and did what was asked of it. After two professors were killed trying to subdue it, it was decided that employing the monstrosity and hiding its nature was a more efficient way to keep it secret than throwing more warm bodies into its welcoming embrace.

Since then, Dignity has become a model employee. It doesn't talk back to superiors, doesn't complain about being given busywork, is a moderately competent investigator with a knack for magic, and never hesitates in killing the guilty once it has found a target. While Dignity doesn't take a paycheck or acknowledge commendations and performance reviews, it has accrued a truly stellar service record in the two decades since it first arrived.

Also it's a homicidal angel of a dead god serving an unknown purpose, is immune to physical harm, and knows all of the Ethics Board's secrets.

LADY LOVE-ENDLESS

Love-Endless is an adrenaline junkie. Her youth was spent in the Skalds, pursuing ever-greater dangers in the Nujab campaigns. Shifts with the Black Guard, mercenaries, and organised crime followed. All of these were attempts to find something dangerous enough to keep her attention.

When the Ethics Board approached her, she laughed them off at first. Love-Endless doesn't remember how they got her to take the position, but she considers it the best decision of her life.

ENFORCERS

Names:	Mister Toribold, Madam Marielle, Honourable Beyond-The-Far-Horizon
Descriptors:	Clean suits and styled hair; Something concealed under their coat; Reflective, darkened spectacles.
Difficulty:	0 in a straight fight, 2 if you're using magic
Resistance:	6
Equipment:	Armoured clothing (Armour 1), Breath-eater pistols (D6, Concealed, Ranged, Piercing, One-Shot), Bane spike (D6, Devastating). One person in each team has a scouring recorder.

WHAT'S THE ENFORCEMENT TEAM LOOKING FOR?

- Two hundred and fifty parrots, intermittently chanting the name of a dead god between bouts of raucous cussing.
- An ice-breaker gnoll serial killer has been turning the water in his victims' bodies to vapour, resulting in explosive deaths.
- A cult of Utterance, the Old God of motherhood, who have implanted empathy in an aelfir child and are raising him to be a well-adjusted person.
- An Angel of the Vast, summoned by a member of the Ethics Board and now loose upon Spire.
- A beekeeper, who has done precisely nothing wrong.
- A drow revolutionary who has been implanting spells within newly duranced drow that convert them (and all standing water within fifty feet) into their weight in murderous, flesh-eating hornets.

FALLOUT

SCOURED MEMORIES. [Mind, Moderate fallout] Your mind has been scrubbed via arcane means, taking some great and forbidden knowledge away from you. Worse, other memories have become collateral. Good friends, brief acquaintances, or even vital information have all escaped your mind. Even attempting to recall this lost information is deeply painful.

NEVER-WAS. [Reputation, Moderate fallout]

Some significant chunk of your social circle has simply forgotten that you exist, and they refuse to remember. Such a thing is easy to mistake for blacklisting until you talk to them, try to figure out what happened, and find that the mere thought of you is painful to many who once knew you. Until you can figure out what happened and reverse it, those affected will refuse to associate or interact with you willingly.

GODFALL. [Mind, Severe fallout]. You have learned of divinity – and it, in turn, has learned of you. Some aspect of a prothean intelligence has burned its way into your cerebral cortex, and is taking control of your brain. You have days or weeks until it hatches with unknown, horrible, and likely lethal consequences.



The Vermessian Vault is an infinite repository of information. All of it is accurate, but it doesn't necessarily relate to the reality in which it currently exists. Doctor Tyran, a rogue Vermessian Sage and lawyer, has been hired by the Council of Spire to assemble the largest criminal case ever witnessed in the city in an attempt to convict and arrest the entire Ministry from the ground up.

Doctor Tyran is very good at his job, and has a vast amount of data regarding the activities of the Ministry of Our Hidden Mistress. This includes several dossiers on the player characters' cell, featuring details of crimes they are yet to commit. Tyran's main means of defence in this wildly dangerous endeavour is simply not to be where people are trying to assassinate him, as he is already broadly aware of their destined movements. But he absolutely has to die; otherwise, in a few months' time he'll have the Goddess herself in handcuffs.



LOCAL LAW

There are places that the Guard don't go, such as anywhere that is too violent, too poor, or too bizarre for the Guard to bother with. Here, the locals have their own approaches to public order. Mostly they're criminals enforcing their rule in their territories; but occasionally, they're holdover institutions from drow rule or genuine civic-minded attempts at improving the city.

GREYMANOR SERVICES

Greymenor Services is a rapidly expanding investigative agency based out of the Works, operating from a heavily renovated bar. They will investigate anything that a client is willing to pay them for, bringing the truth to light.

Though it has been thriving on its own merits, most of its fame and recent growth comes from media exposure. A series of half-sten horrors detailing the travails of Maxwell Roche exploded in popularity some time ago, entrancing the young with images of hard-bitten, stoic detectives pursuing justice and getting into heroic shootouts in the back alleys of Spire.

The reality is less dramatic. Greymenor Services strictly abides by the law in all of its investigations. While most of its investigators are skilled in hand-to-hand combat, they aren't armed, and are discouraged from using lethal force. Mostly they deal with personal disputes, thefts, and petty crimes that the Guard can't be bothered to investigate; but they never, *ever*, work for free.

This rigid adherence to the law isn't always positive, as Spire's laws are unjust. Plenty of Greymenor investigations see innocent people locked up for malak use, vagrancy, and similarly harmless crimes. No matter how well-intentioned the investigators are, the laws they abide by are fundamentally broken.

Still, this is a massive improvement over the Guard. Every few months, a Greymenor investigator will solve a crime that the Guard hushed up or refused to pursue. While most of those are simply tossed aside by Spire's legal system, each one is an embarrassment to the government. It is proof that the Guard doesn't care about law enforcement or the fate of its citizens, and that disturbs those in the halls of power.

MAXWELL ROCHE

Maxwell Roche believes in things: justice, order, the idea that society is only as good as the people in it. How he came by these beliefs as a Knight on the North Docks is anyone's guess, but when he couldn't stand the brawling and drinking and pointless violence anymore, he decided to found Greymenor.

Roche looks the part the media has painted for him. He has a square jaw, plenty of scars, a few missing teeth, and lots of hard lessons learned on the docks. But the taciturn, ambiguous hero with a quick draw and comfortable relationship with violence doesn't exist. Roche is a talkative idealist, disarmingly friendly, who highly values his ability to solve cases by asking questions and deducing the truth. He doesn't torture or beat his suspects in back alleys, and prides himself on the fact that he has not killed a single person since founding Greymenor.

If Maxwell Roche has a flaw, it's that same idealism. He earnestly believes that Spire's system can work for the drow. He thinks that its problems are due to corrupt people rather than corrupt systems, and that if the guards were better or kinder, or if the aelfir were as noble as they claim, Spire would be good for the average person. It is the source of his firm's steadfast commitment to the law, and no amount of clear corruption has convinced him otherwise so far.

PRAEVENIRE RECORDATUS

BRYAN MCTODD

Bryan was a down-on-his-luck private investigator in Red Row when a dame walked into his office and made him an offer he couldn't refuse – partly because the dame was the ghost of a witch murdered by the Ministry, and partly because the offer was made in a dead tongue he couldn't comprehend. Now Bryan has sworn against his will to investigate the shadowy cult that's planning to overthrow Spire and bring his client's killers to justice, no matter how insane the ghost's constant intrusions are driving him. He's starting with the player characters' cell. If you kill him, it might actually be a kindness; or, the witch might just re-hire his ghost and carry on the investigation.

OTHER ORGANISATIONS

Other groups that enforce the laws of Spire include:

- **Every-Stone Investigations**, a group of mercenary tax collectors and strike-breakers who help aelfir nobles collect taxes or temporarily enforce laws in areas the Guard don't dare to visit.
- **The Limit Guard**, who patrol the outer regions of Spire, enforce immigration laws and hunt contraband.
- **The Harvesters**, who patrol overgrown routes in the Garden, keeping roads clear and villages connected, while often blackmailing farmers and small communities with the threat of being overrun by Spire's natural growth.

HOW THINGS MIGHT CHANGE

Jady provokes a full assault on **Verloren Standard** by the brutalised citizenry of Red Row. The Guard mobilises in riot gear in response, attacking the district more-or-less at random.

Bellat discredits **Stone-Shatters-Silence** in a bid to take control of the Guard.

The **Black Guard** is called on to handle a disagreement between members of the Council, heralding outright civil war in its ranks.

Maji Eboh steals her heart and escapes the city, leaving the **Black Guard** (and therefore Amaranth) in a state of vulnerable chaos.

Broken-Yet-Worthy-Backs unleashes an ice-breaking spell in Amaranth, shattering the **Crystal Spire** and its reserves of everfrost.

The **Guard** decide to crack down on **Greymanor Services** due to repeated humiliations, forcing the detectives to go underground and seek illicit help.

PRAEVENIRE RECORDATUS

MALAMUD DE YS

Malamud is a languid diplomat from the Home Nations, hailing from the (current) ruling house of Ys. Ve is ostensibly visiting Spire to have several expensive dinners with notable Council members for the sake of appearances. In reality, ve is doing all ve can to gather support from other drow noble houses and the aelfir against the ever-encroaching house of Quinn, who are rising to prominence in vis home far to the west. (Ve/vis pronouns are fairly common back in vis particular district of Ys, where folks view gender more flexibly than the average Spire citizen.) Ve also drinks vast amounts of corpsefruit liqueur (*Spire*, p. 117). Ve's clearly hooked, but no one is rude enough to mention it, which means that vis diplomatic efforts are often interrupted by hallucinogenic dreams of the dead. Vis attendants try to pass this off as an eccentricity.

The assassination of Malamud De Ys would prove disastrous for the aelfir, who only reopened official diplomatic channels between the Home Nations and Spire in the last fifty years. They are doing everything they can to exploit the endless civil wars in the region to their advantage. It might prove disastrous for the drow of Spire too if the Home Nations decide to exact their revenge through blood and fire, as they are predisposed to do. Best be careful with who you frame for the murder.



ALLIED DEFENSE FORCE

When the aelfir came to Spire, they were at the head of what would become the Allied Defense Force. It was a Knightly army taken into the modern age: skalds armed with pistols, and warrior-poets with calivers and cannon.

Now that same force is in Nujab. Its ranks are filled with duranced drow, its cannons are dosed with spireblack, and its intentions are cloaked in pretensions of 'defense' and 'alliance with the Home Nations'. But its purpose and its lethality are the same brutal things that came to Spire so long ago.

The Allied Defense Force is a combined army, made of Spire forces deployed to protect their city, and the drow Home Nations. It is nominally an ally to those nations, but it is, in effect, just the latest incarnation of the aelfir's colonial army.

And even with its might concentrated so far from Spire, it still finds a thousand ways to hurt the drow.

THE ADF AND SPIRE

By and large, the ADF doesn't *care* about Spire. Their job is technically to protect it and ensure aelfir hegemony over the great city, but in practice, the aelfir stranglehold is tight enough that the ADF can focus on its offensive interests. To the degree that the ADF is forced to acknowledge the city they are sworn to protect, they care about precisely two things.

Firstly, that Spire gives them the supplies they need to continue waging war elsewhere. This means people, powder, food, and transport. They also need communication and magical specialists, as well as somewhere to re-arm, recruit, and rest their troops.

Secondly, that Spire continues to export valuables to the aelfir homelands, such as spireblack, culture, food, labour, and magic. These are things that don't exist in the frozen north, or at least they can't be extracted as cheaply and efficiently.

Both of these interests are controlled through the Allied Defense HQ, better known as the Barracks. Located between the Blue Port and North Docks, the Barracks is a sprawling hub of activity. Here, recruits to the ADF are trained; mercenaries are paid (and can spend) their winnings; and every formation, supply train, and bullet sent to the Nujab departs from these headquarters.

Surrounding the Barracks is an array of cottage industries and labourers who serve its people. Arms merchants, cooks, sex workers, and more all live on the ADF's obscene wastage. If you were to ask them, they would say that the Barracks is a great place: it's the source of their livelihood, and protected by folk far kinder than the City Guard.

To really see how the ADF bleeds Spire dry, you would have to go elsewhere. You'd need to go to the Gardens, where farmers starve as the goods they grow are pulled from their mouths to feed the army; or to Derelictus, where 'recruiters' love to prey upon adolescent elves, stealing them away in job lots to fill the ranks and returning with poor, broken souls – or never returning at all. You'd have to visit Red Row, where military policy has seen thousands of armed veterans with no other skills flood the streets, desperate to live and given no other options besides violence; or go to the Works, where factories are turned to military production and ordered to make twice the weapons at half the cost, and damn the consequences. Or you could enter households across Spire, where the news of a loved ones' death is received in the form of mass-printed letters.

It's difficult for the Ministry to strike at the ADF. Most of its operations are outside of the Ministry's reach, and those that are in Spire are protected within the Barracks, surrounded by the largest concentration of armed combatants in the city. However, this does not make operations impossible. The luxuries and services that local workers provide are a vulnerable route for sabotage, even if the soldiers are hardened targets.

BLUEBLOCKS

Blueblocks is somewhere between a supply depot and a post office. It's a rough square of hastily erected three-storey buildings just outside of the Barracks. The space between the buildings is a glorified loading dock, where wagons fill with supplies before heading to the many businesses surrounding the Barracks. While most of the Blueblocks business comes from supplying the entrepreneurs around the Barracks and facilitating mail for on-duty soldiers, it has increasingly become a meeting point for disaffected drow officers of the Third Army.

The Blueblocks rooftops give an excellent view of the lower reaches of Spire. When the spireblack and smoke clears, one can see through the Works and almost up to Ivory Row. For officers in the Barracks, forbidden from even visiting their families in Spire proper, it's the closest they can get to home.

While it was originally somewhere for young officers to reminisce and dream of their families, its popularity hasn't gone unnoticed. Enterprising cooks have set up tables, shade, and restaurants on the rooftops; the local post offices offer special deals to send packages back home; and the Ministry has begun to scope out its regulars for recruitment.

ORGANISATION

The ADF is really two armies roughly sewn together, bursting at the seams and kept in line with ferocious discipline.

The first and biggest of these armies is made of drow. They are a professional force, but not in the sense of skill or dedication to the job. They have been de-cultured and de-racialised by a brutal indoctrination process, and then rebuilt as members of the army.

They are organised by rank, squad, and file, taught to value their unit and to obey orders from above no matter what they are. Aelfir command them, largely taking charge of divisions and armies instead of sullying themselves with lower ranks. Human mercenaries pad out their ranks, but they are drow in style and organisation.

Their rank structure is straightforward and hierarchical. Soldiers report to sergeants, who report to lieutenants, who report to true officers like captains, brigadiers, and major generals. There are also a variety of specialists, quartermasters, skywhale pilots, and all the other people you need for the non-combatant drudgery that makes an army work.

The Special Tactics Force is an exception to the army's predominantly drow composition. More than half of its members are aelfir who have resigned themselves to discipline, rank, and professionalisation in the name of furthering the cause. They are not here for social advancement when they head home or to reach the noble rank of warrior-poet, but to bring the aelfir victory in combat through whatever means are available. Each and every one of them is a sorcerer, and they secretly wield the feared and wildly illegal art of demonic incursions.

The second of these armies is the home army of the aelfir. Despite modern technology and doctrinal advancements, they are still organised like the monarchic retinues they descend from. Warrior-poets lead their ranks, each training and fielding a retinue of skalds who are tied to them by some social bond. The highest-ranking warrior-poets have an additional retinue of lower-ranking poets, each of whom bring their own skald-retinues with them. The skalds, meanwhile, provide their own weapons and armour. This army is not bound by rank, but by personal ties: the bond between skald and poet, and then between that poet and all the others in the army.

A side effect of this is that aelfir ranks are an indecipherable mess of favouritism and who knows who. A warrior-poet is, of course, more prestigious than a skald; but even that muddles, such as when the skald is popular and in the retinue of someone famous, and the warrior-poet is delegated to scouting duties with their retinue of two. The only clear part of the hierarchy is the current commander, who takes the rank of general until they are replaced.

MARTIAL LAW

On occasion, something goes deeply wrong and the ADF is called to suppress a revolt in Spire. This last happened a century ago during a famine, and the results were bloody enough that the Council is loath to do it again. The ADF is better armed and trained than the City Guard, but it isn't suited to city combat and doesn't have experience with investigations and counter-insurgency work. It also has a tendency to view everyone as a potential target – a type of egalitarianism the Council finds unwelcome in a firefight.

As such, any new implementation of martial law is likely to see a surge of incredibly dangerous, trigger-happy soldiers patrolling the streets of areas like Red Row and Derelictus. While this makes open combat near suicidal, the Ministry has already planned for such an occasion. Cells can cut supply lines, point ADF squads at elements of the Guard or other rivals, and stir public discontent in an attempt to foment mutinies, public unrest, and strife with the civilian government.

As a general rule, if martial law comes to Spire, the Ministry's goal is to convince the soldiers to leave rather than kill them.

Attempts have been made to reconcile these vastly different systems in the name of having a functioning army. The aelfir naturally consider all drow beneath them, but skalds are still expected to follow the combat orders of anyone above the rank of captain. Skalds are also expected to billet and discipline a squad of drow, and can requisition them from their commanders more or less at will. Often, skalds act as a sort of intermediary between sergeants and their lieutenants. This is particularly common with socially isolated skalds who see a squad as their best method of winning glory and advancing in the aelfir social hierarchy.

Warrior-poets generally gain an honorary rank of captain, and occasionally even command of a drow formation when they're promoted. Many also add additional ranks to their list of titles, often from other styles of military organisation entirely, and occasionally at random. It is not uncommon for an aelfir army to have a few dozen begs, boyars, majors, and starred generals, all of whom are self-appointed and eager to contest drow officers whenever they can.

The only fixed point in all of this is General Snow-on-Stone. The fearsome, mysterious, and peerless leader of the aelfir armies understands both elements of the army they command, and has become an expert in forcing discipline and cooperation among them.

MILITARY FASHION

As with most other aspects of aelfir life, the social ramifications of action in the military are far more important than the practical ones. Victory through some droll, standardised manouevre is nice, but will not get an officer the acclaim, riches, and promotion they so richly desire. No, even in battle and even in victory, the *fashion* of the thing is paramount.

Military fashion is a rather different thing to its civilian counterpart. It's not merely dress and socialising (though those are part of it) but in expression through strategy, tactics, and equipment. It is a poet showing their innermost self through bloodshed and subjugation.

RED-LIGHT-FADES

Until recently, Red-Light-Fades was the voice to watch in aelfir military fashion. His high collared, unarmoured uniform and delicate silken gloves were the talk of the town; his simple, brutal sabre tactics were the envy of duelists; and his elegant yet complex manouevres were both war-winners and show stoppers. Even the deployment of demons, secret as it is, was done with a sense of theatricality and showmanship that was the envy of his peers.

His disapproval strangled military bioengineering in the crib for decades. His analysis of skirmishes and scouting missions cut careers short or saw officers gain prestige they'd never dreamed of. He was, besides General Snow-On-Stone, *the* person to appease in the aelfir army.

Then he started losing battles: Galate Ridge, The Red Wadi. Not consistently, but occasionally; occasionally was still too often. He became desperate to regain the aura of invincibility and



prestige that he'd once had. A brilliant march brought his armies to the very gates of the gnoll capital at Dar Alqad. His plan was perfect, his numbers overwhelming. His Special Tactics teams had prepared an incursion into the very heart of the gnoll city on a scale nobody had dreamed of before. An entire city of soldiers and hostile citizens would be wiped from the map and replaced with an aelfir fortress.

It failed. The spell fizzled, half of the team responsible died, and the siege collapsed in the face of a counter-offensive. Red-Light-Fades fell from grace. He was relegated to recruiting and training in the Barracks, stripped of his glory and titles. He would do anything to return to the field.

Even collaborate with the Ministry.

VETERAN

Names:	Cain, Rich, Sam, Jeanne
Descriptors:	Eyepatch and missing nose; Itchy trigger finger; Battered armour
Difficulty:	Difficulty 1 in a straight-up fight; Difficulty 0 if ambushed
Resistance:	6
Equipment:	Light armour (2), Military-grade legrand rifles (D8, Ranged, Piercing), Infantry sabres (D6)

SKALD

Names:	Dance-Upon-Blades, Last-Song, Wind-Rushes-Past
Descriptors:	Eyes blank from drugs; Singing as they fight; Too many swords
Difficulty:	Skilled combatants but easily distracted. Difficulty 1, 0 if you ambush or trick them
Resistance:	6
Equipment:	Enchanted wards (Armour 1), Saint-swords (D6, Surprising) or Shotguns (D6, Ranged, Point-blank, Reload) or Singing Zweihanders (D8, Spread D6, Brutal, Conduit, Unreliable)

SPECIAL TACTICS TROOPER

Names:	Shadow-in-Darkness, Song-Over-Fields, Jane Doe, Judas
Descriptors:	Never talks; Has tallied kills on own skin; Lightning arcs between fingers
Difficulty:	2
Resistance:	6
Equipment:	Light armour (2), Gnoll flesh-cooker (D8, Spread D3, Ranged, Loading) or galvanic arquebus (D8, Extreme range, Unreliable), Knife (D3, Concealable) or aelfir songbow (D6, Brutal, Devastating, Tiring, Extreme range), Saint-sword (D6, Surprising)

MILITARY BIOENGINEERING

Military bioengineering has traditionally been frowned upon as a mediocre art with minimal chance to show off high elven skill. However, fashion changes, and several high-profile failures by Red-Light-Fades have seen opposition fade. Bioengineered drow have become a fashionable military accessory once again. If the life of a conscripted drow soldier is unpleasant, the life of a conscripted drow art project is miserable and generally short.

Powder-kin are drow who have had deep wells drilled into their backs and a specially-devised organ fitted to their spine. This organ creates and secretes a form of gritty liquid gunpowder. Aelfir officers who follow such fashions surround themselves with powder-kin, using them to swiftly reload weapons and avoid the increasingly unfashionable burden of carrying a powder horn about.

More impressive (or simply more proud) snipers get themselves more powder-kin drow. This, admittedly, has the side effect of surrounding the best snipers of the ADF with highly explosive bodies filled with shrapnel. But such are the sacrifices made in the name of fashion.

More expensive, less fashionable, but more useful are vanguard shells. These are drow who have been torn apart and reassembled to optimise them for a modern battlefield. Extra organs and nerve endings are removed, a third eye (and accompanying socket) is drilled into their skull, and their frame is reinforced against bullet and blade wounds. Such drow have greatly reduced life expectancies, but are much more resilient to shrapnel and similar battlefield damage. Most won't even notice the life expectancy change, as they traditionally charge in at the head of a column before a full-frontal assault on hostile fortifications.

The current height of fashion are whaletenders. Skywhales are an integral part of aelfir military doctrine, but controlling and protecting them has always been a problem. No one wants to be the skald stuck watching the whale while everyone else jumps into the fray. As the war in Nujab escalates, leaving them unguarded or with pitiful unmotivated drow as their defenders is less and less appetizing.

Whaletenders are drow who are surgically grafted to a skywhale for the duration of their military service. This process is reversible, albeit with significant atrophy of the poor drow's legs. They have the honour of guarding skywhales, and their valour is assured by the simple fact that it is impossible for them to abandon their posts.

POWDER-KIN

Names:	Matthew, Joanne, Dave
Descriptors:	Arms removed; Trying to surrender; Glassy-eyed and dead inside
Difficulty:	0. Couldn't fight even if they wanted to.
Resistance:	1. Explode for D6 Blood stress to everyone near them if killed with a gun or fire.
Equipment:	Powder-wells (a nearby ally ignores Loading on firearms)

STATS AND ADVANCES

POWDER KIN. [Low advance] *An aelfir drilled a well of spireblack into your spine. It's horrifically painful and you're now very flammable, but it makes reloading easier.* You may take **D3 Mind** stress to remove the **Reloading** quality from a weapon held by you or a friend for one scene. If you ever catch fire, take an immediate **D6 Blood** stress as part of your spine explodes.

VANGUARD SHELL. [Medium advance] *Your body has been hacked apart, revised and reformed to insure you to damage.* The first time you would take **Blood** fallout in a session, ignore it.

WHAT'S IN FASHION?

Military fashions wax and wane on a regular basis. Here are some passing fads:

- Melee combat is passé. All close fighting should be done with firearms and explosives. Friendly fire is a plus.
- Artfully drawing attention to the most vital parts of your biology and surviving the resulting sniper fire is in. Hiding rank insignia or taking cover is out.
- A cavalry charge shows the dextrous mind and keen discipline of a commander. So, naturally, the most clever and most disciplined commander has a battle plan that consists of nothing but cavalry charges.
- A truly tremendous artillery park is the peak of good taste. Ideally a battlefield should be completely flattened before any of your infantry engage.
- If you slowly walk all your infantry towards enemy lines, they shall eventually run out of ammunition and become disoriented. This allows for a truly sublime victory and appeases Brother Autumn in one fell swoop!
- The aelfir are masters of the sky, so grafting wings onto drow and using them as forward scouts and shock troops is swiftly entering fashion! Unfortunately the operation has high lethality, so they're testing it out in Spire and conscripting the survivors.

WAR IN NUJAB

The latest aelfir conquest are the gnoll tribes of the Nujab. They were imagined as an easy conquest: a set of disunited tribes with few great cities or fortifications, bereft even of that small spark of elvish essence that blessed the drow or humans. Their silks, coffee, iron, and technology would be great additions to the Everqueen's coffers, and the sparse land of the Nujab would be a wondrous blank canvas for the aelfir. Costs were weighed, oracles were consulted, the Everqueen made clear her will, and finally Snow-On-Stone led the first aelfir armies from Aliquam.

For a time it went well, and the armies swiftly established several beachheads. Snow-On-Stone and other commanders crushed what meagre opposition presented itself, and the ADF marched on. Even Aliquam, which had vociferously protested the invasion, was mollified by the streams of plunder arriving from the Nujab. Drow were pulled from Spire and installed as tools of government: administrators, tax collectors, merchants, and the like. Aelfir claimed land and planned new, glorious constructions, while drow officers won awards and comfort for their families back home.

But the Nujab was larger than any had accounted for, and over time the campaign went sour. There were always more gnolls to fight, and their armies were becoming larger, better armed, and better coordinated. The victories were harder fought and conquered territories were restless. Bandits began to attack shipments through occupied territories, towns rose up in rebellion, and tribes vanished into marshes, deserts, and mountains. The Special Tactics Force, once a weapon of last resort, became an ever more regular part of military campaigns.

The aelfir responded: conscription in Spire was heightened, rebellious populations were crushed, and reprisals were conducted against any town too close to a bandit raid or missing tribe. The army was restructured and Snow-on-Stone led an offensive over the red mountains, featuring ever newer, ever more deadly weaponry and tactics.

Then Red-Light-Fades was defeated at Dar Alqad and the fleet was destroyed at Warah, representing a defeat that the aelfir have simply not had to deal with for centuries. Now the Council is asking pointed questions of its generals, seers are processing the possibility of gnollish offensives into the drow Home Nations, and Snow-on-Stone has departed for the front to oversee things personally.

Rumours have even spread of a gnoll invasion and possible attack on Spire itself. There are whispers of human and gnoll spies running weapons and information into the city, looking for faultlines to push as the tide of war turns.

THE GNOLLS ARRIVE

A gnollish invasion of Spire may be the best chance the Ministry has at unseating the aelfir, but it would be a bloody victory. Sieges are brutal affairs, and Spire is so large that any invasion would involve street-to-street fighting and sieges within the city itself to push the aelfir back. Starvation would run rampant and siege weapons would set fires and collapse buildings. Perch is liable to break free and tumble to the ground, killing untold souls as it falls. Even if the gnolls won, they may be no friends to the Ministry.

To the gnolls, Spire is an enemy city that has launched a brutal invasion of their homeland. They don't make a distinction between oppressor and oppressed; drow wield the guns that kill their fellows, cast the spells that unleash demonic incursions, and manage oppressed territory as readily as anyone else. The experiments and mutilations visited upon gnolls in Amaranth and the universities are likely to cause outrage among the soldiers who find them – emotions that will be turned on nearby drow as readily as humans and high elves.

But the gnolls don't want to rule Spire. They merely want it neutralised as an enemy. They may take some gnoll crime lord or torture victim and appoint them ruler. They may leave a drow or aelfir government behind with assurances that the invasion will not happen again. They may even give the Ministry the leverage it needs to come out of the shadows and take control in the name of Damnou. But there are no guarantees, and therefore there are endless opportunities for any who survive the fighting.



ELVISH DEMONOLOGY

Demonology is a form of sorcery based around the summoning and binding of demons into hosts, and it is one of the Special Tactics Force's best-kept secrets.

To many, it is a powerful art, but not an overly monstrous one. The gnolls of Nujab use demonology as the basis for most of their technology, replacing the gunpowder and steam favoured by humans. The drow once had a form of it based around making pacts with demons through inert eidolons, a practice that had horrific consequences for the caster.

The aelfir form is more destructive by far. It involves converting a living person into an eidolon, distancing the caster from the ritual, and then turning the poor soul into an incursion: a living rift into the realm of demons that kills anyone it does not drive mad. This is useless for any purpose except war.

The result is an influx of demonic energy that is universally lethal to all living things in the area, mind-rendingly horrifying to those who witness it from a distance, and yet almost harmless to structures and possessions. It is officially banned in all forms, with treaties between the Everqueen and other nations ensuring it will never be deployed.

The Special Tactics Force consider it their trump card, and deploy it regularly in their wars against the gnolls. Implementations are generally on the formation and village level, though it has been deployed against walled bastions on several occasions. Only the Special Tactics Force and their handlers are allowed to know the true nature of the aelfir superweapon, with the official story around such attacks giving credit to the summoning of solar divinities onto the battlefield. Anyone else who learns the truth is ruthlessly silenced.

Aelfir study of demonology is heavily specialised, as the process for an incursion requires significant infrastructure and preparation. Codes and spells have to be sung into the mind of a would-be eidolon, relays and focusing devices are needed to increase yield and ensure that the casters don't explode, and then there is the ever-aggravating process of actually manoeuvring a potentially unaware or unwilling eidolon into the right place when battle is joined. It's a process in its infancy, still subject to refinement and prone to catastrophe if done incorrectly. More than one Special Tactics team has simply evaporated when a relay broke or the eidolon wandered off mid-casting.

Even if they wanted to diversify, the nature of the research makes it difficult. All of the researchers are secretly recruited from the Benevolent Order of Wisdom and Discovery and its various cults. They are secluded in hidden laboratories within the facility, and each one is given only a small piece of the truth behind what they are working on.



This keeps the army from being consumed by scandal, but also greatly limits the ability of researchers to progress the field.

The research focuses almost entirely on perfecting the aelfir art of demonology, as well as understanding how and why it works. Countermeasures are considered unimportant as no one else uses demon-strikes, and binding demons into anything besides people is considered a waste of valuable research time. After all, the aelfir invented living conduits; how could the methods of some other species be better than that of the high elves?

The failure of Red-Light-Fades at Dar Alqad has changed that. Suddenly, demonology could be thwarted, which meant that hostile powers knew they were using it. In turn, this brought up the possibility that it could be used against the aelfir – and they would have no way to stop the strike or escalate further. Counter-demonology is now very much in demand.

RAINS-STOP

Rains-Stop is a portly aelfir most often found in a collection of mismatched fashions that went out of style a decade ago. Nominally, he is a low-level professor at the Benevolent Order who is being blackmailed by both the Brotherhood of the Unlidded Eye and the Sisterhood of Illumination. In truth, he is in charge of the aelfir's demonology research at the university, and is the only researcher who knows their work's true nature. He manages the laboratories, collates and develops data, gives researchers their next tasks, recruits new scientists, and has potential leaks murdered.

He is both indispensable and aggressively disposable. He turns the various isolated experiments into something useful and teaches the Special Tactics Force's sorcerers each refinement upon their art, but he is also the only link between the army and their researchers at the Benevolent Order. If his work ever becomes public, he will be disavowed, disowned, and killed in short order.

Rains copes with the resulting stress by finding new (and less lethal) anxieties and hoarding secrets as an ablative reserve to delay investigators. He is deathly afraid of spiders and being poisoned; is deeply superstitious; evades his taxes; has an illicit romance with a fellow professor that has bloomed into an outright clandestine marriage; and periodically wanders into a slum for a few days to murder a gutterkin.

All of this is in the hope that those looking into him find only a deeply terrible man with all sorts of things to blackmail him over, rather than the deeply terrible man innovating city-destroying war crimes in the middle of an inhabited residential district.

WHAT COULD CHANGE?

A **Special Tactics** eidolon gets loose in Spire, sparking a frantic search for them by the ADF and Ministry. There is, of course, a risk of detonation if things go wrong.

Snow-on-Stone takes Dar Alqad, bringing tens of thousands of veteran soldiers and gnoll captives to Spire in the aftermath.

A daring gnollish raid kills **Snow-On-Stone**. Massive chaos ensues, and rumours spread of a gnollish army marching for the drow homelands or Spire itself.

A gnoll army besieges Spire. Railgun sabots rip through Perch and Amaranth and armies clash in the street, while citizens try to avoid starvation or becoming collateral damage.

The gnolls begin smuggling arms to Spire in an attempt to spark a revolution.

PRAEVENIRE RECORDATUS

BURDOCK SMITH-DESERT-DREAMS-OF-DELUGE

A year ago, Burdock Smith was a wandering playwright-prince of the human lands of Horizon to the east of Spire. He would spend his days picking flowers, writing poems about them, and abusing the hospitality of local innkeepers for weeks at a time.

That all changed when a visiting diplomatic delegation from Spire arranged for him to be married into the powerful Desert-Dreams-Of-Deluge aelfir family – a scandalous decision amongst the more traditional high elves, but crucial to cementing an allegiance between the two powers. With the war in Nujab reaching a bloody stalemate, the Council needs all the allies they can get.

Now Burdock spends his days in Spire, dressing in audaciously bejewelled outfits and sleeping with pretty much whoever he wants to. Meanwhile, his wife Esme Desert-Dreams-Of-Deluge attempts to cover up his indiscretions and funnels political aid from Horizon. If Burdock were to meet a terrible end – and his many affairs became public knowledge – that would cause the aelfir no end of problems.



GNOLL TECHNOLOGY

Gnollish technology is not well understood in Spire. Many elements bear only superficial resemblances to human galvanic energy, resulting in unfortunate and often lethal accidents during attempts at reverse engineering. Interrogating gnoll captives has unveiled that the basic assumptions underlying their technology are fundamentally alien.

Where humans use steam and retroengineered galvanism, and elves use light, song, and sorcery, gnolls use djinn-engines. Djinn-engines are a benign form of demonology: djinn filtered through lenses and alchemical formulae and spinning crucibles until they are rendered safe.

These generally take the form of a great brass orb suffused with the terrible power of a demon. Other forms are known, but all are referred to as a sarcophagus by the gnolls and eidolons by everyone else. Energy is constantly generated and siphoned by a sarcophagus, then diverted into capacitors great and small; or else they are directly wired into particularly impressive machinery. These capacitors are what powers gnollish technology.

THE BOX

The Allied Defense Force is transporting a box captured in the Nujab across Spire, to be sent north to the aelfir homelands. While spies have confirmed the box's presence and its route, none know what's in it.

The mission is simple. Intercept the box; find out what's inside; and, if possible, steal it.

The box is guarded by a squad of veterans, two skalds, and a Special Tactics trooper. They are tasked with escorting it to the Sky Dock to be studied in the court of the Everqueen. They're not expecting to be attacked and have a long route ahead of them, but they are skilled and dangerous combatants.

Inside the box is a gnollish light siege railgun. It is a (D8, Brutal (x2), Spread D8, Dangerous, Devastating, Extreme Range, Loading) weapon that can be fired a total of three times before its capacitor shatters. Its ammunition consists of custom-crafted finned sabots, but these can be replaced with any magnetic metals at the cost of losing both Brutal tags.

It will happily over-penetrate buildings, so your players should be careful about their aim. Also, it will happily over-penetrate buildings, so your players should have the opportunity to have fun with it.

A djinn-station is an enormous and incredibly dangerous facility that can host as many as forty trapped djinn. Each station is staffed by sorcerers, negotiators, and armed guards in protective suits carved from lead. The orbs are covered in alchemical unguents meant to keep the contained energy from leaking out and killing the staff. They must be constantly monitored against potential disaster, and the captured djinn have thoughts and desires of their own that must be met in order to keep them pliant. The gnolls have mastered this process, and Spire does not know of any serious incidents involving a gnoll-run djinn-station.

The campaign in Nujab has seen three of these stations fall to the aelfir armies – one was swiftly recaptured – and a Special Tactics team has managed to steal a single orb from a caravan retreating deeper into gnollish territory. Both of the permanently captured stations suffered catastrophic failures within a year of their conquest, with the resulting onslaught of energy killing hundreds. The third appears to have been decommissioned by the gnolls after they retook it.

Gnollish technology largely revolves around manipulating the invisible energy emissions that seem to be a byproduct of djinns. The most infamous pieces of technology are their weapons: terrifying energy-throwers that boil their victims alive and cause their body to burst; jezails that work without powder, throwing metal darts through foes at impossible ranges; spears carried on jets of flame that explode on impact, showering those nearby with burning, toxic metal that will kill a soldier over weeks. There are also the great siege rails that can knock skywhales from the sky and shatter the hardiest fortifications.

But most uses for djinn-power are innocuous. Strips of metal along gnollish buildings glow an eerie blue at night, providing all inhabitants with light to work by. Nomads track moving objects upon motion-tracking spheres, though the technology can't distinguish between beast and person (and fails to detect anything smaller than a jackal). Jagged, irregular telescopes show spectrums of light alongside images, revealing the age and composition of far-off stars. All of these would be strange and alien in Spire, but they are in theory no more dangerous than everfrost, megacorvidae, or the magic of a midwife.

Some of the Bound (*Spire*, p33) have even found that gnoll capacitors retain enough will from their previous hosts to take the place of a small god. Such bound items tend to be willful and needy, and their users have a strange habit of developing nasty cancers within a few decades; but the power of such an item is significant, and many consider them worth the risk.

GNOLL WEAPONS

Nujabian sabre	D3, Surprising
Splinter rocket	D3, Ranged, One-shot, Ongoing D6, Spread D8
Djinnwave emitter	D6, Point-blank, Ranged, Scarring, Spread D3, Unreliable
Cherenkov lance	D6, Brutal, Masterwork, Tiring
Rail-lock jezail	D8, Accurate, Extreme range, Loading

NUJABIAN SABRE

The Nujabian sabre is a slightly curved short-sword used by gnollish infantry. It is considered a side-arm in the gnollish armies, and is issued to all soldiers alongside their more lethal equipment as an option of last resort in melee combat. Many examples make their way to Spire as war trophies.

SPLINTER ROCKET

A Splinter rocket is a spear-length rocket with a payload of metal byproduct from gnoll demon-binding. Once ignited, it screams off into the distance and explodes, peppering the unfortunate victims with shrapnel. This shrapnel is horribly toxic, and if it is not removed, it will doom its victims to a slow and painful death.

DJINNWAVE EMITTER

Djinn-wave emitters are large firearms with a nozzle instead of a traditional muzzle. Fed by a gnoll capacitor, they emit a noxious blue wave and horrible heat instead of the more traditional munitions. Victims suffer from horrible burns and may explode like a meaty balloon.

CHERENKOV LANCE

The chosen weapon of gnollish cavalry, a Cherenkov lance is a long, razor-sharp lance forged from the remains of decommissioned djinn vessels. The resultant weapons are beautiful and terrifying to use, the air glowing blue around their blades.

RAIL-LOCK JEZAIL

The rail-lock is a long, fearsome gnollish rifle. They use energy from small capacitors to accelerate metal darts over terrifying distances with pinpoint accuracy. Gnollish snipers are some of their most fearsome troops. Many ADF veterans maintain a fear of rail-locks for decades after their service ends.

**LORD AMIR
STRIDES-ACROSS-DAWN**

Amir Strides-Across-Dawn is obsessed with drow culture, wears an eerie recreation of a drow face as a mask, and is extremely rich. He has accidentally kickstarted a massive black market in stolen artefacts of the drow religions, for which he pays enormous sums of money. He exhibits them in museums and private galleries that no drow would ever have a chance of getting into.

His latest acquisition is the death-shroud of the legendary drow midwife Maji Verdoux. Amir plans to have it privately showcased, and then woven into an elaborate scarf over the course of an 18-hour party to celebrate Amir's new apparel (and drow culture, he would hasten to add). He would be horrified by the suggestion that any of this is actually hurting the drow, but not horrified enough to actually change his behaviour.

The Vermessian Collective are eager to get their hands on the artefacts that he's squirreled away. Given the resources at his disposal, killing him is probably the easiest way to do it cleanly.

COLONIAL RULE

'We are noose-makers, charging the drow for the privilege of their hanging.'

The Council is a colonial government. Its purpose is not to administer Spire for the benefit of Spire's inhabitants, or even for the Council's benefit. Its purpose – the reason the ADF has not returned to Spire and shot everyone in charge – is to extract resources, wealth, ideas, and prestige from Spire to send north to the Everqueen. The circumstances of Spire and its inhabitants matter not at all.

Simultaneously, Spire itself is a fascination of the high elves. The most modern fashions in the court of the Everqueen take inspiration from Amaranth fashion shows and artists' imaginings of exotic drow. The court's literature and poetry are obsessed with far-off Spire, its beautiful drow, and the Council's civilising effects upon the populace. The naïve speak of how grateful the drow must be for their salvation; the cynical mutter of how the aelfir spend lives and treasure to help ungrateful, sun-fearing wretches.

Sympathy for the plight of the drow is, if anything, more pronounced in the aelfir homeland than it is in Spire itself – even if few of those sympathisers would ever actually visit Spire or help the drow of which they speak. Most who eat steak are less than keen to visit the slaughterhouse, after all.

Many in the homelands deeply resent the riches and autonomy enjoyed by aelfir in Spire. They accuse the Council and Amaranth's populace of going native; of being disloyal or uncultured; of being rich by chance rather than by virtue or breeding.

The Council is well aware of this. Many of their actions are to prove their worthiness or superiority to those who look down on them back home. Their aim is to ensure that any who visit Amaranth cannot question their sophistication, culture, or wealth.

And for this, like all other things in Spire's society, the drow suffer.

AELFIR LIFE

In the homelands, aelfir must live like anyone else. This means that there are poor aelfir: labourers, soldiers, and the dispossessed, because *someone* must take those roles. Even where the Everqueen's influence is strongest and disobeying her is unimaginable, some aelfir labour and others reap the rewards. Not so in Spire.

Amaranth is carefully structured so that the losers of society associate most of their oppression with other drow. The poor and oppressed who are on the losing end of every policy may be picked for a durance in the retinue of some aelfir nobility, but most serve in more banal

tasks. These include working in the Guard under a jaded drow sergeant; charging a gnollish line under drow officers, drow tactics, and drow discipline; and working a factory floor or serf farm where they are policed, abused, and exploited by other drow.

To facilitate this, most aelfir are landlords or part of the political establishment, charged with taxing some subsection of some district they may never visit in person. They might be setting policy over some bureaucratic behemoth, or negotiating the halls of power with rich drow and other aelfir. The drow in their reach will suffer at their hands, and suffer horribly. But their crimes are hidden from most of society by layers of indifference and social stratification. Drow labour underpins and makes possible the small comforts of every aelfir existence; it is vanishingly rare for even the most socially conscious aelf in the City Above to eschew that dependence entirely.

PRAEVENIRE RECORDATUS

ARMANTINE MAUMORENTI

Armantine is one of those old-school, high-ranking midwives who hobnob with the rich and famous. She never appears in public without a veil and bustle, glides through life in a perpetual haze of malak and brandy, and point-blank refuses to have anything to do with the messy business of incubating, protecting, or nurturing unborn drow children. She makes a point of knowing a little something about everyone around her, and never has a kind word for anyone.

Armantine has long been obsessed with the unnaturally long life spans of the aelfir. Not wanting to risk going under the knife for Undying surgery given her failing health, she has begun trading nearly-mature drow children to wealthy aelfir households in exchange for rejuvenating potions, year-excision sorceries, and delicate reskinning operations. At present, having a beautiful drow infant in your care is de rigueur for aelfir households. She stands to shave a solid decade off her age unless she is stopped before the end of the season.

Few of the common aelfir professions are labour-intensive, and coteries of drow secretaries and servants supplement those professions that do require work. As such, aelfir have the freedom and wealth to spend most of their time on personal interests. This includes pursuing the arts; studying new magics and sciences; experimenting with hobbies; and generally furthering the nest of vendettas, gossip, and petty scheming that is the average aelfir's social life.

As a result, Amaranth is a hub of aelfir art and culture. Aelfir artists seeking to further their skills and impress their friends take inspiration from the world around them, slowly drawing elements of drow culture into their work. Midwife wraps morph and shed cloth, conforming to minimalistic high elvish sensibilities to become sweeping gowns and sheer veils. Devotional art to drow gods – even to the banned Damnou – is copied and twisted into sculptures of Mother Winter and Sister Spring. Street murals about drow figures and struggles become styles of painting or poetic references to the all-benevolence of the Everqueen.

Once Amaranth has digested drow culture, it sends it north. Spire-born fashions become the newest fads in the court of the Everqueen, and are declared uniquely aelfir in nature. Visiting dignitaries marvel at how swiftly the drow have attempted to ape the fashions of their betters. The drow adjust, either trying to ape their overlords or preserve their culture. And the cycle repeats.

AELFIR LAWS AND TAXES

Aelfir are considered above the laws of Spire. They are, after all, inherently moral – so if they have to do something their rules consider illegal, they definitionally must have a reason to do so which is sufficient to justify the breach. Base criminality is the vice of *lesser* species.

This is, importantly, *very* different from the law being non-existent. Aelfir law is extensive, well understood, and can see aelfir fined into bankruptcy or outright executed for its violation. But whereas laws regarding other citizens of Spire govern murder, malak consumption, and similar frivolities, aelfir law governs more important spheres – such as who is allowed how many drow under durance, who may hold how many murder parties, and who is allowed to wear what at which times.

Broadly speaking, the most fashionable and extreme trends in aelfir society are restricted to the rich and influential. Due to the aelfir aversion to open hierarchies, permissions are generally gated behind taxes, fees, and landholdings rather than public titles or proofs of nobility. This may technically allow a lower class aelfir to mimic those above their station, but the costs are often ruinous. If they're found out, they might be censured by high society, bankrupted

and forced to perform menial clerical work for a bureau, or even (rarely) cast out of aelfir society altogether and doomed to live life among the populace at large.

The wealth that goes into the modern biomodification craze is illustrative. Showing that you don't need something because you have people to do its function for you (or because you have a transcendental understanding of it) is very much *in*; personally doing things is *out*. Drow will occasionally see an aelfir who has removed their arms and grafted them onto drow in their service, or who has removed all of their teeth because someone else chews their food.

These self-destructive biomodifications are heavily regulated. Surgeon-artists record each of their procedures, and the list of certifications and fees associated with a single major modification is immense. On top of this, the modified socialite must also submit fees to have a drow in durance surrendered to their care, pay for the upkeep of that drow, train them appropriately, and repeat this process for however many people will be needed to keep them functional.

There are workarounds. Daring aelfir will go for back-alley surgeries or perform grafts themselves, which are both options with considerable risk. Clever ones will attempt to make the largest possible statement with less expensive surgeries, such as snipping tendons and treating skin with acid instead of suffering dismemberment and skin-replacement therapies. Some will try to have fewer drow take the work of more, and others will fake licenses or forge paperwork claiming that the requisite fees have been paid. More commonly, an aelfir will simply attempt to extract extra wealth from whatever districts they have, asking the guards to beat factory workers into higher production or selling off bits of territory for quick cash.

This system applies across many activities and pastimes of noble aelfir life. For example, murder parties need attendants, have fees associated with each planned death, and require the host to own the building the party is in *and* for that building not to be their primary dwelling.

Experimenting on unsuspecting victims requires reagent registration and a nest of fees that can all be waived if the right official gives you the go ahead. The worst impulses of aelfir life on Spire are recognised; but instead of being banned and punished, they are encouraged, regulated, and monetised.

All of this is the system functioning as intended. For the Ministry, every step in this process is a useful lever. There is always a vulnerability that can be exploited or a service provided which can turn aelfir into unwitting pawns.



DIVORCE

While divorce is common in aelfir society, its connotations are wildly different from divorce in drow society. To the aelfir, a divorce is a basically amicable event, more often a fashion or economic consideration than a social one. Divorced aelfir are often better friends with their ex-partners than they were while married, and traditionally they will consult each other on upcoming affairs, dalliances, and marriages. It is a kernel of empathy in a society that is often deeply bitter and predatory.

The sign of a deeply dysfunctional marriage in aelfir society is when a couple sticks together through thick and thin, refusing to separate, divorce, or even move into different rooms as things get worse. Hatred and spite are powerful things: no truly bitter aelfir spouse will allow their partner the *respite*, the *mercy*, of being rid of them. Children, careers, and property turn into a battleground as the feuding couple fight. While murders are technically legal – with the right forms filled out and fees paid – for aelfir society, acrimonious marriages often result in socially unacceptable killings that see the survivor kicked from high society for their actions. Sometimes, however, the consequences of a failed marriage become truly catastrophic.

LORD OF LAW BRINGS-ONLY-SUNLIGHT

Brings-Only-Sunlight is the warrior-poet entrusted with maintaining Spire's legal code, and is one of Spire's two Nobles of Law. He must ensure that all laws are aesthetic expressions of the glory of the Everqueen and that they serve the long-term wellbeing of the aelfir empire. He has served in this role since the conquest of Spire, and much of the aelfir aesthetic in Spire is informed by his machinations.

In person, Brings-Only-Sunlight is a thin Undying aelfir who has had all the skin flayed from his body and replaced with a transparent silk extracted from dead drow midwives. He shuns clothes, only wearing the absolute minimum expected by polite society at any given time. He has fully embraced the ideal of an aelfir who can do as little as possible because everything must be done for them. The tendons in his arms and legs have been surgically cut, rendering him unable to walk without the assistance of four drow. He communicates only in code, poetry, and musical references, and employs no less than six translators so that less worthy creatures may understand his meaning.

Brings-Only-Sunlight has interests across Spire, notably in Nujabian imports, mushroom exports, and gambling. He was once the city's largest producer of unmarked ladders, an enterprise that has collapsed in the wake of increased enforcement from the Guard and relevant guilds.

LADY OF LAW ON-THE-HIGH-WATERS

On-The-High-Waters is the calligrapher-attorney entrusted with maintaining Spire's legal code, and is the other Noble of Law. She must ensure that all laws abide by the will of the Everqueen and serve to show aelfir superiority in Spire. She has served in this role since the conquest of Spire, and many of the aelfir institutions that sprawl across the city are of her own devising.

In person, On-The-High-Waters is a muscular Undying aelfir who often wears dress uniforms and similar pseudo-military paraphernalia. She shuns the minimalist tendencies of modern fashion, and instead displays her belongings and past with every outfit. Her features have been fixed in their Undying state via preservatives, keeping her no-longer-vital organs in perfect condition.

On-The-High-Waters has interests across Spire, notably in arms importation, textile exports, and spireblack harvesting. She once dominated the legal malak trade, and is still reeling from the loss its criminalisation caused.

THE GRAND FARCE

Seventy years ago, Lord Brings-Only-Sunlight and Lady On-The-High-Waters had a legendarily acrimonious divorce. Their friends and families assumed it was the normal social flaunting, as dramatic separations were in vogue. When high society realised that they well and truly hated each other, the scandal was enormous. Rumours circled for years, their sole child fled back to the Homelands, and their shared home burned down after a series of mysterious fires, tragic accidents, and the slaughter of an entire construction crew.

Eventually, things settled down. Most assumed that the acrimony had faded as it should. The two deigned to be seen in the same building as each other, and while no one ever saw them directly communicating, most surmised that all had been forgiven. They resumed their normal work, allowing their terrified, sleepless clerks and assistants to return to their lives, and settled into the routine of editing, abridging, and updating the aelfir books of law.

Unfortunately for everyone, Brings-Only-Sunlight and On-The-High-Waters hate each other exactly as much as the day they divorced. They will not kill each other (this would be a mercy compared to what each of them has planned), they will not show it in public (the social consequences are too great), and they will not admit it at work (this would disarm them of the best tool they

have to destroy their hated foe); but they hate each other nonetheless. Each wants the other utterly destroyed: their holdings burned to ash, their loves scattered to the winds, their ambitions crushed before their very eyes. They are both willing to do anything to make that happen.

However, 'anything' mostly takes the form of edits to the aelfir tomes of law. There are restrictions, of course – neither of the pair would dare step outside of the bounds given to them by the Everqueen, and others actually draft the laws – but their remit is wide and unchallenged.

So, each selectively edits new laws to make life miserable for the other. They draw on connections across Spire to have businesses banned and taxed, changing technicalities to hurt income streams or expel friends from high society. The very foundation of the aelfir rule of Spire has been turned into a weapon for a divorced couple's feud.

WHY DO THEY HATE EACH OTHER?

No one knows why the Lord and Lady hate each other so much. Here are some possibilities:

A torrid love affair that has never been forgiven.

A foul political betrayal, revealed only after the deed was done.

Each was asked to tell a truth about the other and did so, unaware that their spouse could hear them.

A debate over the quality of a play went horribly wrong.

They don't hate each other. This entire extended, disastrous, self-destructive affair is simply in dedication to a poem they are both rather fond of, which examines the idea of toxic relationships. They are merely extraordinarily dedicated to the bit.

BUREAUCRACY

Cities, especially occupied ones, don't administer themselves. Without active direction and work from above, the people will generate their own structures, hierarchies, and power dynamics. They will determine the winners and losers of who will exploit its citizenry and wealth, according to local mores instead of a centralised will. For proof, one must merely look at Red Row, Derelictus, Perch, and the North Docks.

However much they might disdain the idea, the aelfir have established bureaus to administer Spire and ensure that they are milking the city for all it is worth. There are easily two dozen bureaus, but most are small, half-formed things; the pet project of some aelfir (possibly long dead) who managed to push it through the Council, and then never quite finished setting it up.

In practice, bureaus have legislative and administrative authorities over everything that comes under their jurisdiction. The Council, ADF, and Everqueen have nominal vetoes, and the Lord and Lady of Law may adjust any legislation to maintain congruence with aelfir social norms, but none of them pay much attention to what's going on in a given bureau unless a scandal erupts. As such, the bureaus have a free hand, and are managed by choosing what sort of person is in charge rather than through hard-handed policy guidance.

This means that conflicts of jurisdiction are constant, and no resolution mechanism exists to handle them. Generally the larger bureau gets its way, but the resulting fights can be deeply chaotic, with consequences that reverberate throughout Spire.

BUREAU OF DEVELOPMENT

The Bureau of Development is in charge of the city's infrastructure – and, in theory, all new construction within its confines. They are meant to maintain maps, plan projects, and ensure that the city functions like a well-oiled machine. As anyone who has visited Spire can see, they are not particularly good at their job.

In practice, the Bureau of Development is a refuge for artistically inclined aelfir to see their visions come to life. A map that doesn't resemble Spire in the slightest, save for Amaranth and the Sky Dock, bedecks their small headquarters in the Silver Quarter. The basic work gets done, but is considered secondary to self-expression; orders are sent to construction crews who may or may not actually receive them. Grand revitalisation plans for Derelictus are submitted to the Council and promptly ignored.

This lack of action is often for the best. When the Bureau of Development acts, they are as likely to create a disaster comparable to the Vermessian as they are to forge a new High Elven University of Divine Magic. The Vermessian's ill-fated push into the realms below the city was a passion project by Patron-Architect Gerent Still-Flows-The-Silence, who sought to deploy this technological marvel to cement the aelfir's superiority and revolutionise Spire's profitability in one fell swoop. Enormous swathes of housing and critical infrastructure were demolished, and human retroengineers were entrusted with boring the train lines and constructing the framework. Famously, it failed, and left a lasting magical scar on the entire city.

The Bureau of Development is unique in that someone consistently reviews its proposals. Even the aelfir don't want another expensive, controversial mess like the Vermessian on their hands. The architects are limited to making mind-bending mansions, impossible aqueducts, actively murderous hospitals, and similar construction projects. While the Bureau also technically maintains the ability to have the Guard destroy unlicensed construction, in practice they are only allowed to do this when someone more important lets them.

THE RED PIT

Amaranth largely pretends that Derelictus doesn't exist. Outside of City Guard sweeps to recruit young drow for their durances, most of the aelfir are keen to forget just how deeply they have failed the undercity. When they do pay attention, they undertake periodic vanity projects to improve the region. The most recent of these is the Red Pit: a passion project of Dwells-Upon-Emptiness.

Dwells is a mid-ranking Bureau of Development architect who has developed a holistic theory of Spire's ills. According to Dwells, everything going wrong in Spire is because the drow require a direct link to the benevolence of their aelfir overlords. If such a link is missing, they shall revert to their natural state of barbarism. To solve this in Derelictus, he devised the Red Pit.

The Red Pit is a titanic food processing centre and abattoir, designed around Dwells' preferred style of arcanic minimalism. It was meant to deal with the ever-present malnutrition of Derelictus by repurposing other districts' food waste into viable meals. In theory, it would take food, compost it to grow mushrooms and feed livestock, and then employ locals in raising and slaughtering the livestock.

In practice, the Red Pit's construction has been marred with disappearances, delays, and constant rumours of figures in darkened stairwells and corridors that appear on no map. It was officially abandoned as a failure two

months after construction was completed, when the aelfir supervisor disappeared and the first crop of mushrooms all inexplicably resembled her face.

Local gangs periodically take over the cavernous building in an attempt to monopolise food production, but most abandon it quickly as the disappearances hit their ranks. However, recently the disappearances have spread. The Ministry is interested in figuring out what exactly the aelfir did down there before the consequences spiral out of control.

NEVER-HONED-EDGE

Never-Honed-Edge doesn't look like an aelfir planning a genocide. Their aesthetic is twee by design, and they skip the murder parties and living art exhibitions of high society for sterile, spindly sculptures. They prefer things that appear carved out of ice and bone and filigree, the pain that went into making them invisible – save to those who know exactly how they're made, and who suffered in the process.

They appear thin and pale and non-threatening in the calculated way of someone who finds such a disguise useful, and they've cultivated a reputation for relative kindness among the few drow they interact with.

Their problem is Perch. As far as Never-Honed-Edge is concerned, Perch doesn't exist. The fact that thousands upon thousands live in the district is a minor anomaly that will be corrected soon. Perch's construction was never approved, its existence was never added to the official maps, and its culture is dangerously free from aelfir influence. Therefore, the entire district needs to be removed, regardless of the consequences.

However, as an official in the Bureau of Development, Edge's authority to do something about it is limited. Even if they had the legal authority to order an entire district demolished, no one would obey their orders. So, they have resorted to being clever.

Never-Honed-Edge has planned a calculated series of approved demolitions and construction projects that are designed to weaken Perch's hold on the rest of Spire. Once those projects are complete, they will have a chunk of the gutter demolished and two of Perch's great fires extinguished for a day in the name of maintenance. They hope that this will cause the district to either collapse or be abandoned, eliminating resistance to having it scraped off Spire's side.

Never-Honed-Edge has told no one the true purpose of their work, but the Ministry and the Bound have noticed the odd construction orders. It is only a matter of time before someone investigates.



BUREAU OF DURANCE

The Bureau of Durance is the most hated bureau in Spire. It is in charge of maintaining records of the drow population, monitoring drow immigration, and managing the institution of durances. This means that it runs the census, collects birth dates from every egg in the city, decides how many drow a given aelfir shall be allowed, collects the donations the city is owed in exchange for service, and oversees the often brutal work of conscripting drow into servitude.

They are inarguably the most effective and functional branch of the aelfir government. Their records are in order, and though vast segments of the population have slipped the census, the Bureau can determine whether any given drow has served their durance within an hour. They know how many drow each aelfir in the city may house, and can form an estimate for visitors within a day. Indeed, the Bureau of Durance's filing system is considered a marvel by many aelfir, and its hallowed cabinets are often visited by wizened, stately dignitaries simply appreciating their clockwork efficiency.

The Bureau is well aware of how many drow they miss in the margins: how many drow live in Derelictus and Red Row and the Works, refusing to be counted. This is considered an opportunity rather than a problem: whenever new drow are needed to serve, the Bureau can simply marshal a few hundred guards, march through a district, and pull likely suspects off the street. Plenty will have done their time, and will be released forthwith if a keen-eyed clerk cannot find a debt to use to press them into service; more will have escaped their durance so far. These unfortunates will be interrogated, recorded, and sent to serve.

When an aelfir loses a drow under their care, the Bureau also helps replace the loss. Replacement is usually a public affair, recorded for eternity in one of the Bureau's many black books.

There are consequences for such a loss, as the maintenance of their drow is among the few duties aelfir are expected to uphold; but once fines are paid and social cost tallied, the Bureau will do their duty. Dead drow are simply replaced, with others pulled from the streets and handed over (though the aelfir will be asked not to lose this one). Runaways, however, are hunted. While the City Guard does the grunt work, the Bureau often tasks keen-minded investigators to direct them. Their success rate is terrifyingly high.

THE EYE

The Bureau of Durance is headquartered in the Eye: a large, oblong building next to the Sky Docks. From without, it appears to be made of flawless ebony stone, the hinges and mechanisms of its many doors hidden by cunning artifice. Inside, it is a trypophobic nightmare of cramped passageways and cavernous processing halls. Every wall, every floor, every ceiling, and every desk is pock-marked with small, irregular indentations.

Most drow who have served a durance have entered these dimly lit halls. They claim that it is bigger inside than it should be, and that there is something fundamentally unholy about the location. Drow employees swear that it judges them; that it knows they are no different from the people they process, and is keen to illustrate that fact. Save for the most inquisitive and foolhardy, employees try to get promoted out of the Eye as swiftly as possible.

Aelfir claim that this is all quaint drow superstition. The Eye is merely a glorious work of aelfir architecture, and any suspicions on the part of drow employees are simply due to their inability to recognise its glory. Still, all aelfir employed by the Bureau of Durance base their offices somewhere else, working out of their homes if they have to. Aelfir paying or evaluating drow for a durance do so elsewhere, or force a servant to deliver money and paperwork on their behalf.

This has now gone so far as to warp the Bureau's locations. It is headquartered out of a manor house in Ivory Row. The grand filing system occupies a warehouse a mere block away, patrolled at all times by a Black Guard squad. Prestigious offices and supplementary processing centres are scattered throughout the upper half of the city. All in the name of not being in the Eye.

Of course, the Eye itself hasn't done anything. There have been no murders, no disappearances, no unexplained madnesses, and no ghost sightings. In and of itself, this is suspicious in Spire; but the unsettling building has given no reason to assume that it is anything but what it appears to be.

Yet.

ROTTEN RAL

Going to the Bureau of Durance about a lost drow is an embarrassing affair, so plenty of aelfir opt for less official solutions to their problems.

Enter Ral. Ral is a handsome, middle-aged drow who lives in the Silver Quarter. He is a clerk in the Bureau who was assigned there during his own durance and never really left. His reputation is sterling. His coworkers love him, and despite the meagre pay of a civil servant, he has a respectably sized home, a loving wife and husband, children who have far better opportunities than he did, and he can always keep up with the latest fashion and gossip. This is made possible by his team of Drow Catchers.

The Drow Catchers are a group of mercenaries, private investigators, and 'reformed' criminals that assist aelfir who have misplaced a drow without the consequences and shame of approaching the Bureau of Durance. For a reasonable fee, they track down the missing drow and bring them back to their durance to serve out the remainder of their term. For an additional fee, paperwork can be altered to increase the length of their durance to make up for lost labour.

The Drow Catchers are always mindful of their profit margins. If an escapee is particularly slippery or dangerous, they may simply acquire a close-enough replacement from Red Row or Derelictus. The aelfir client rarely cares about the difference, and can't complain to the Bureau if they do, so the arrangement works out acceptably for everyone. Well, except for the replacement.

This service has made Ral wealthy and well-respected by the upper class, while simultaneously making him uniquely reviled by every drow who has heard of him. This has earned him his moniker of 'Rotten Ral' in the lower districts' tabloids – a name he wears with pride.

BUREAU OF JUSTICE

When the aelfir conquered Spire, they didn't have any experience with a judicial system. The influence of the Everqueen and aelfir psychology meant that such things simply weren't necessary in their homelands, and the idea of 'crime' was a faintly absurd one. Instead of repurposing existing drow structures, they decided that the aelfir approach to government affairs was clearly and obviously superior, and so established the Bureau of Justice.

The Bureau headquarters is a wide, cylindrical building in the rough shape of a spoked wheel. It consists of a central hub connected to an outer ring by grand hallways flanked by courtyards. Its roof is clad in gold, and a petrified drow has been incorporated into every structural column in the massive facility.

Most assumed criminals have their hearings in cramped rooms on the outer rings of the building, where they, an attorney (if they can afford one), and a prosecutor plead their cases to a clerk-judge. Aelfir testimonials are considered the highest form of evidence, followed by Guard testimony, physical evidence, and everything else, in that order. Most defendants are found guilty.

Sentencing guidelines are exhaustively documented and continuously updated. They generally consist of indentured labour, impossible fees, lengthy jail sentences, and execution. Officials must stick strictly to the guidelines, but they always have discretion over which punishment they inflict.

Many clerk-judges get kickbacks from the Bureau of Durance for covering labour shortages. This means most sentences come in the form of indentured labour, or fees that will shortly become indentured labour when the defendant fails to pay. Other trials are even shorter, as the defendant's lawyer bribes the judge (and occasionally the prosecutor) in exchange for an innocent verdict.

Particularly exciting and dramatic cases are sent to the hub to be tried in front of an audience. While the setup is theoretically the same, trials in the hub are guaranteed an aelfir calligrapher-attorney, a trial length of at least a month, and to take place in enormous amphitheatres that

can accommodate hundreds of people. The defendant is prepped for trial each morning by various makeup artists, while journalists and food vendors traverse the stands to ply their arts. The sublime arguments of the calligrapher-attorneys guarantee that at least some of the audience will be aelfir keen to keep up on the newest drama. Each of these cases is an event that will be broadcast to all of Spire via broadsheet newspapers.

Barring dramatic reveals about the facts of the case – which are surprisingly common – public trials always return a guilty verdict. They are staged as tragedies, with the calligrapher-attorneys debating the circumstances that brought the poor soul here, what caused them to so egregiously violate norms and decency, and arguing for mercy and murder in turn. Being a defendant can be incredibly popular if you survive the verdict, and more than one has seen their fines paid within days by an adoring or sympathetic public.

LOBBER

Lobber is a perpetually tired young drow woman who lives in the Bureau of Justice headquarters. She was assigned as a clerk-judge during her durance and never stopped. Three years ago, she went so far as to move into an abandoned break room that had been sealed off during a series of abandoned renovations; she has lived on office supplies ever since. Her clothes tend towards the ill-maintained, and she is usually mildly dishevelled.

Lobber is notable primarily for her incredible work ethic. She constantly takes cases for other clerk-judges, and has built a rapport with most prosecutors, defense lawyers, and repeat offenders who visit the office. Her bribery rates are consistent. Many lawyer-advocates familiar with the Ministry or Red Row gangs know exactly what to offer her to drop or downgrade charges, or how to flatter her for a little leniency in sentencing.

Theoretically, the amount of bribe money she brings in should make her spectacularly rich. However, no one knows where the money goes. It hasn't been an issue of interest until recently, when several Ministry agents tabulated the number of bribes they'd paid out to her over the previous six months and realised how much money Lobber must have made.

Since then it has become a matter of speculation and gossip among Ministry cells. Some say that she's saving for something mundane: citizenship and a trip out of the city, a house in the Silver Quarter, or some other grand indulgence. Others are beginning to speculate about darker motives, saying that there would be signs if there were a mundane purchase in the works; that she'd pick up better clothes and personal effects, with some sort of holding account for her wealth.

No one knows for certain.

BUREAU OF TRADE

The Bureau of Trade is in charge of extracting money from Spire and ensuring that the Everqueen gets her cut. While nominally tasked with monitoring and regulating imports and exports, in practice they control everything: from taxes to immigration law to what the Works can produce and what sort of drow artisans are allowed to be trained.

Though almost invisible to most drow, the Bureau of Trade has disproportionate influence on every aspect of their lives. Aside from being an excuse to arrest almost any given drow, the malak ban had its roots in an attempt to increase imports of Tirae rose-wine, an aelfir spirit that no one wants to buy. Successful drow mining efforts have been destroyed by taxes of close to one hundred percent on Spire-mined silver. This was implemented to ensure that stens are only minted with materials imported from the far north. Domestic gun manufacturing is banned, so all weapons (and, notably, all guns purchased by the Guard and ADF) must be imported from abroad. All non-aelfir gun imports are heavily taxed and scrutinised to funnel this market towards the frozen north.

These impositions are designed to destroy drow industries and make them a source of cash for the aelfir homelands. Industries that threaten the aelfir equivalents are destroyed, with irreplaceable knowledge lost in the name of squeezing every half-sten out of Spire's populace. It has also made the Bureau of Trade a priority target for the Ministry.

THE GREAT AUCTION HOUSE

In the Blue Port, the Bureau of Trade impounds dozens of tons of goods every day. Some are contraband; but most traders simply missed a tariff, failed to bribe a guard appropriately, or were the victim of any number of petty cruelties that the Bureau inflicts upon the unfortunate. All of these goods head to the Great Auction House of the Blue Port.

The Auction House is a massive structure. The oblong, ringed courtyards of its ground level are merely the tip of a gigantic underground facility that digs three storeys into the earth. From dusk to dawn, drow in smiling masks sell confiscated goods throughout the day at scandalously low prices. The resulting funds are funneled directly into the colonial government's coffers.

Occasionally, this is an opportunity for some poor robbed merchant to recoup their losses; but more often, it's a chance for already wealthy Spire-born merchants and aelfir nobles to purchase large quantities of goods on the cheap. Collectors also frequent the auction house, waiting for rare artefacts and cultural curiosities to come up for sale and attempting to buy them out from under each other.

The utter lack of oversight and regulation at the Auction House is a potential opportunity for Ministry agents. Little attention may be paid to what exactly is being purchased and who is attending, so it's an excellent opportunity to watch targets and purchase goods on the sly without legal ramifications. More importantly, it's all too possible for critical Ministry shipments to end up impounded and auctioned off, requiring swift action from a cell to purchase the lot or steal it directly from the warehouse.

Not that robbing the auction house is easy. While the sales are laissez-faire, well-paid mercenaries patrol the facility and the auctioneers tend to be difficult to bribe.

PRAEVENIRE RECORDATUS

ICZAK EPINELL, LORD OF THE NORTH WIND

Iczak began his career in Spire as an enterprising refrigeration technician. He specialised in repairing and rebuilding magical air-conditioning units for wealthy aelfir who desired a cooler environment in which to oppress the drow. Thanks to some favours owed to him by influential clients, Iczak was able to enter local politics, and now sits at the head of a sprawling and frigid empire of pipes and ducts.

His extensive plumbing efforts have upset no small number of people – bee druids whose swarms have been frozen, the now-defunct Guild of Refrigeration, drow whose homes have been destroyed to make room for vents – but he's well-protected by a small army of engineers, technicians, and security guards.

Taking him out – or subverting his reign in some fashion – would disrupt the cooling systems in Amaranth that high elves believe maintain their sanity. It would also open up the market for his struggling competitors, and grant access to the network of drow-sized tunnels that feed cold air into the abodes of the rich and famous.

LIVES-WITHIN-LIES

Lives-Within-Lies is a plump, beautiful aelfir with a taste for impeccable dresses and a single-minded devotion to Spire's convoluted tax code. She has dedicated her life to ensuring the city's finances are in order, that embezzlement and tax evasion are kept at acceptable levels, and that the complicated mess of factors that make aelfir society work don't crumble.

She has also uncovered a secret. Amaranth's economy is collapsing, and Undying surgery is at fault.

The economy relies on assets freeing up: on lands being inherited or disavowed, returned to the state, and then doled out to aelfir to keep them in lives of splendour. It relies on officials retiring and dying, emptying spots for new stars to take their place and offering advancement opportunities that don't involve murdering your elders.

Freezing has always been in use, of course; but frozen elves aren't taking up space in society. They aren't hogging prestigious job positions, preventing social advancement, and hoarding vast sums of wealth and land. But Undying aelfir are.

Aelfir society is now seeing a burgeoning swell of young artists and rebellious teens leaving these immortal and often overbearing parents. These children are playing at landlord and crime lord and aesthete, unsatisfied with the opportunities provided by their parents. Lies sees societal collapse coming faster than anyone would like.

While she has tried subtle means at changing things, like adjusting numbers and making proposals about how long an Undying aelf can retain certain types of assets (some of which have even passed into law), none of them have resolved the central problem. Whatever she does, Lives-Within-Lies cannot find a world where the Undying exist, Spire remains profitable to the Everqueen, and Amaranth doesn't collapse in chaos.

So she has begun to plan murders – just a few, just to buy some time. This will free some assets to put off the inevitable until she can figure out something long term. It's a plan she will need allies for; and of late, she has begun to reach out.

Several figures have heard of Lies' theory, and are ready to support her. Some hope to profit from the resulting chaos; others think that this is the best chance at stabilizing Amaranth; yet more couldn't care less whether she's right or merely caught up in paranoid fantasies, as long as aelfir – or their own Undying and devastatingly wealthy parents – die.

WHAT COULD CHANGE?

Brings-Only-Sunlight legalises domestic firearms ownership to hurt **On-The-High-Waters** arms importation interests, resulting in a tide of quality weaponry and gun violence across Spire.

On-The-High-Waters declares most forms of gambling a banned form of religious expression, resulting in horrifying crackdowns at all but the richest of establishments.

Lives-Within-Lies has her murder plot revealed, resulting in chaos as young aelfir realise that the system might hurt them soon.

The Bureau of Development decides to rezone Derelictus as an industrial district, and has tasked the guard with preliminary demolitions.

The Eye, after centuries of harvesting the self-worth and liberty of duranced drow, closes all of its doors and traps every employee and visiting drow inside. No further durances can be properly processed and the system starts to crumble. The ebony-black stone of the exterior betrays no sign of what happens within, but: soon, it will hatch.



STRAY DOGS

The war in Far Nujab was going so well, right up until it wasn't.

Early reports suggested an easy conquest; that the resources and lands of the gnolls would soon fall to the aelfir. Bolstered by early victories, the hosts of the enlisted swelled and grew, with more and more durances involving military service abroad. It became more than just a term of service and a means to at least one guaranteed meal a day: enlistment was honour, pride, and purpose.

Then tens of thousands of drow took part in the disastrous assault on Dar Alqad. The few that returned were broken in both mind and body; shattered by strange weapons and hideous demonologies, by watching friend and foe alike rent asunder by unspeakable weapons, by the vaunted hosts of the aelfir suffering unthinkable defeat after defeat.

Stray Dogs are the Far Nujab veterans that have made their way back to Spire through some manner or another. Some were fulfilling their durance, others were simply fleeing. They travel in ragged bands, and carry with them the haunted, harried look of a dog beaten so often that it only remembers how to bite.

Stripped of their pride and lacking the orchestrated direction of the military, Stray Dogs often turn to crime to survive. They form criminal bands of a similar structure to the Knightly Orders, and perform petty theft, extortion, strong-armed robbery, and murder-for-hire.

Dogs generally only trust other veterans, unwilling to believe that anyone else could understand the things they've seen or done. This makes them prone to misplaced belief in confidence tricksters with believable stories of service, and suspicion bordering on paranoia with anyone else.

What makes a Dog one of the more dangerous dregs of Red Row is the fact that they've by and large hit rock bottom, suffering defeats of the mind and body that would shatter most other drow. They are also often shunned and looked down upon by aelfir and drow alike: the former despise failure and weakness, and the latter regard them as unlucky lickspittles and cronies.

Names:	Gros, Lug, Teufel
Descriptors:	One-eyed, face grievously scarred from gnollish claws; Using a decommissioned long-rifle as a crutch; Aelfir summoning-song still echoing through their head that bleeds out whenever they drop their concentration
Difficulty:	0 until they take a hit, after which point 1
Resistance:	5
Equipment:	Tarnished revolver (D6, Ranged, Unreliable) or cut-down legrande carbine (D6, Ranged, Piercing, Reload, Unreliable) or looted gnollish repeater (D6, Point-Blank, Dangerous)

ADVANCES

REQUIREMENT: Veteran of a lost battle in Far Nujab, particularly the disastrous Dar Alqad or Dust campaigns.

REFRESH: Compromise or risk yourself for a fellow veteran.

LOW ADVANCES

BEG, BORROW, OR STEAL. *Your habit of stealing anything that isn't nailed down comes in useful when it doesn't get you in trouble.* Gain the **Steal** skill. Once per situation, you can declare that you are carrying a particular non-unique item that can be easily carried in one hand.

ASSEZ POILU. *The toughest of the tough.* Gain +1 **Blood** resistance. When you hold off the enemy while others retreat to safety, you roll with Mastery against the enemy and your allies roll with Mastery to escape.

MEDIUM ADVANCE

THEY'RE COMING OUT OF THE WALLS.

Things can always get worse than this; you'll be fine as long as you keep your head. When an ally you can see takes **Blood** fallout in a combat situation, refresh D3. When an ally you can see takes **Mind** fallout in a combat situation, mark D6 stress to **Mind**.

CANARIES

Some of the most preyed upon by the powers-that-be are the poor, destitute souls forced to scratch out a living within the Works, coughing up black tar and dodging gutterkin as they are extorted, press-ganged, and beguiled by confidence tricksters.

Among the first to call themselves Canaries were the work-gangs 'volunteered' by the City Guard and private business owners to work in the mines deep below Spire. Promised a few meagre scraps and lacking any alternatives, drow often fought each other for the right to take part in these work crews.

With little to no avenue for community security or support, some communes in the Works began to organise. A single twig – or in this case, drow – can be snapped easily, but a bundle is much more resilient.

When a few enterprising (and thick-skinned) labourers united, standing firm in the face of starvation and truncheon alike, they were able to secure moderately improved working conditions in their district. Others would soon follow suit.

In honour of their revolutionary roots, the Canaries at large adopted the trappings and slang of Works mining-crews. They use dust-catching bandanas, heavy boots, thick gloves, and rock-breaking hammers as symbols of resistance and defensive weapons.

While organising labour unions is not strictly illegal, a great deal of Canary activity reeks of sedition in the eyes of Spire authorities. Painstaking efforts are taken to ensure that public Canary activity is very much 'above board' in the eyes of their aelfir overlords. Elected delegates report to bureaucrats and Guard officers, community patrols assist local law enforcement in maintaining order, and a number of 'recidivists' are offered up to the Council at regular intervals.

With Canaries representing such a vast labour force, tenuous agreements have likewise been struck with criminal gangs such as Mr Winters' Organisation. Some within the Canaries find these agreements to be borderline unforgivable compromises on the moral purity of the organisation; but the sad reality is that without such alliances, they would have been crushed under the heel of either the Organisation or the Council long ago.

Names: Schlep, Widdy, Bray
Descriptors: Coughing up black tar into a red bandana; Ashen skin and baggy coveralls; Disabled from a workplace accident

Difficulty: 1; they share a grim refusal to back down

Resistance: 4
Equipment: Rock-breaking hammers (**D6, Brutal, Tiring**)

ADVANCES

REQUIREMENT: You must have spent time on a work-crew, as part of your durance or otherwise.

REFRESH: Lead a group to achieve something they couldn't have done alone.

LOW ADVANCES

THREE MILES DOWN. *You've done things, down in the mines. Bad things.* Gain the **Fight** skill. When you fight in cramped quarters or in the dark, you do so with Mastery.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE. *You are well-accustomed to the sound of a mattock cleaving through more than rock.* When you use an improvised weapon, it inflicts D6 stress rather than D3. You can choose to give an improvised weapon you are wielding the **Brutal** tag; if you do, it breaks when you use it in an attack.

MEDIUM ADVANCE

THE UNION, FOREVER. *No one is more important than the union.* Once per session, when you suffer ongoing **Reputation** or **Shadow** fallout, you can make an example of someone in your community and remove the fallout once people see what happens to traitors. Whether your victim is actually responsible or not is entirely at your discretion.

HIGH ADVANCE

A THOUSAND VOICES, RAISED AS ONE. *You walk with the terrible weight of the union behind you.* Activate this ability when you suffer **Blood** fallout. You ignore the effects of **Blood** or **Mind** fallout until the end of the situation, at which point you succumb to your wounds and die.





BIRTH OF BROTHER HARVEST

By Christine Beard

Content Warnings: This scenario mentions suicide worship, cult indoctrination, child soldiers, and attempted genocide.

Deep in the bowels of the Silver Quarter's premiere incubation house, something sinister stirs. Maji-Mistress Marienna LeDeaux harbours far more than the next generations of drow. Forgotten and forsaken gods are alive in the winding halls of the midwife's lair, brought forth by arcane rituals never seen before.

Commissioned by a fringe cult of aelfir to raise their murderous deity, the Majess (as she calls herself) has spun a complex series of lies and half-truths to disguise her methods and motives. As a worshipper of Damnou, LeDeaux has repurposed some of her own religious research to suit her new designs.

With the Cult of Brother Harvest eager to see their namesake cleanse the city and the Majess calling on her own wrathful goddess, untold chaos and destruction lies on the ever-approaching horizon.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON?

Disagreements over the worship of the Solar Pantheon have reached a boiling point. Devotees to the entire pantheon are railing against the selective worship of others.

Powered equally by faith, spite, and concern, some worshippers have taken it upon themselves to ensure that no one facet of the pantheon is neglected. They want to be sure that the wrath of the gods will not fall on the aelfir before they recognise the danger of their current situation.

With the help of a shrewd midwife, powerful tokens from their homeland, and a long and bloody ritual, a particular sect has proved their devotion by doing the impossible: calling forth an aelfir god within Spire. The Cult of Brother Harvest, led by Arimande Forget-Not-The-Fallen, has managed to summon a malformed and malevolent version of Brother Harvest: the least popular member of the Solar Pantheon. Though those devoted to him are shunned and disregarded, they aim to remind the aelfir of his importance and strike a heavy blow to any who resist worshipping him.

While he may not appear in his full resplendence or have command of all of his godly might, those that have brought him forth are confident that he will be able to do enough to serve their purposes. If he happens to turn against the aelfir who have spurned him recently, all the better. Pretending the harvest won't come doesn't prevent it from arriving.

Unfortunately, the cult has had to explore some strange avenues to manage such an incredible feat. Unable to draw enough power on their own, and separated from their ancestral home where their gods have little trouble appearing, they turned to the midwives of Spire for assistance.

What possessed her to assist the aelfir in such a dangerous mission remains solely in the mind of Majess Marienna LeDeaux: the head of a prestigious incubation house for the wealthy and influential, and the one who managed to summon Brother Autumn in the first place. With such valuable knowledge at her fingertips, LeDeaux has begun to set things in motion to call on Damnou in all her multifaceted glory as well.

Unable to appear in the city without a vessel, Brother Harvest himself is a mysterious figure at present. He is neither drow nor aelfir, and whether he approves of his summoning and subsequent condition is even more of an enigma.

While he is growing rapidly, he currently lacks the strength to leave the closed-off incubation cave he was born in. Funnelling his enormous power into the form provided – an enchanted piece of ice, brought from the frozen north and treated with the most powerful blood available – is an arduous and drawn-out process. Having recently emerged from his egg sac, his form is delicate, and he remains unable to summon the full breadth of his power. However, everyone aware of his presence knows just how quickly that might change.

The Ministry wants things shut down quickly and quietly, and has sent a cell to handle it. Whether that means killing the god before he can truly rise or putting an end to the drow who would betray their own brethren is all in the hands of the cell. So long as the Ministry still stands in the end, any means to this end will be forgiven (by their standards, of course). Whatever retribution they face from outsiders is, as always, none of the Ministry's concern.

ORGANISATIONS

Most religious organisations in Spire that fall outside of the permitted forms of worship are clusters and communes of believers, rather than rigidly structured and well-run communities. These groups end up acting out a rough approximation of the services they would have performed if it was allowed.

It's unusual to find anyone willing to call themselves a priest or priestess of these forbidden faiths, but not impossible. In more palatable variations, it may be something they can get away with; for example, aelfir may on occasion be dismissed (but not punished) for claiming priesthood in unpopular devotions. However, drow are much more reluctant to claim any titles that are likely to earn them a death sentence, forced labour, or exile.

That said, with the rise of Brother Harvest come other proscribed factions. With enough power behind them, these forbidden gods can wreak havoc and chaos before being put down.

THE CULT OF BROTHER HARVEST

Brother Harvest, the third member in the cycle of the Solar Pantheon, represents the necessary ends that preface new beginnings. He's the anger of the group, their driving force; he is the reminder that beauty only gains its grace from impermanence. Those that follow him know it is best to live as freely, fiercely, and fervently as possible; to leave as much of a mark as you can before the harvest comes and you can create no more.

Worship of him takes many forms, often dangerous or deadly, and occasionally militant. The most well-known and untouchable sect of followers are the Paladins, who have been allowed to persist mainly because of how zealous they are in wiping out the Ministry.

As Brother Harvest has fallen out of fashion, groups dedicated to him are less formal than others. Below the high priest there are few official clergy positions, especially as worship of Brother Harvest has been driven predominantly underground. There are, however, groups of devotees who have formed missionary sects, seeking out those who are sympathetic to the cause and recruiting them.

The ranks of Arimande's flock have filled out recently with gnolls, drow, and even humans who have been promised that their leader intends to make the aelfir pay for their arrogance. This is mostly a tactic to draw numbers, but a decent percentage of these recruits become true followers instead of leaving once they recognise what the group truly stands for.

On the surface, the cult of Brother Harvest is a radical group pushing back against the aelfir's denial of an important quarter of the Solar Pantheon. For their part, those that have abandoned Brother Harvest believe that since they can't call forth avatars of the gods in Spire the way they can in the frozen north, they're safely insulated from his ire. Arimande Forget-Not-The-Fallen intends to show them the error of their ways at nearly any cost. They cannot abide the thought of the aelfir falling to ruin through sheer hubris, and have been working to bring Brother Harvest forth to allow him to exercise his might.

One of the core tenets of the faith is that the only true way to serve the Brother is to know when your time has come and join him. Most members of the cult spend their lives looking to become their ideal self. They believe that once they have reached the pinnacle of themselves, the noble thing to do is die. Theatrical deaths are common, whether murders, suicides, or combinations of the two.

While this is sometimes an individual rite, it's hardly uncommon for large groups to decide together that their time has come. Followers have been known to cater elaborate feasts with their own portions poisoned, orchestrate ceremonial gladiator battles to the death, stage performance art in which they take their own life, and other such esoteric and haunting methods of showing their devotion.

No matter how many are involved in the ritual, they're never private affairs; to be witnessed is part of the appeal of the thing. To die without suitably elaborate circumstances flies in the face of the idea that you should nobly retire in the prime of your life. To continue on until you become old is abhorrent to the devout.

The cult believes that the popular fondness for Undying surgery flouts the natural order of things, and that it will only bring ruin upon the aelfir as a whole if they're allowed to continue. Many followers believe that in rejecting death and the Brother, the aelfir reject his gifts; they see those who have undergone Undying surgery as inferior and dull-witted. The term itself is used as an insult and a pejorative amongst followers, who believe the Undying must be removed for the sake of all. The more violent and calculating members of the cult have begun to explore methods of identifying and contacting the surgeons responsible for the procedure (or their patients) in the interest of culling them.

As in any reasonably powerful organisation, there are those who would undermine it or appropriate its resources to suit their own desires. Using Arimande as a puppet and figurehead, one mysterious aelfir moves in the dark to use the facsimile of Brother Harvest for his own ends. Soothsair Water's-Cutting-Edge has no particular grievance with the aelfir who choose Undying surgery and spurn Brother Harvest, but such a force of sheer destruction is hard to ignore.

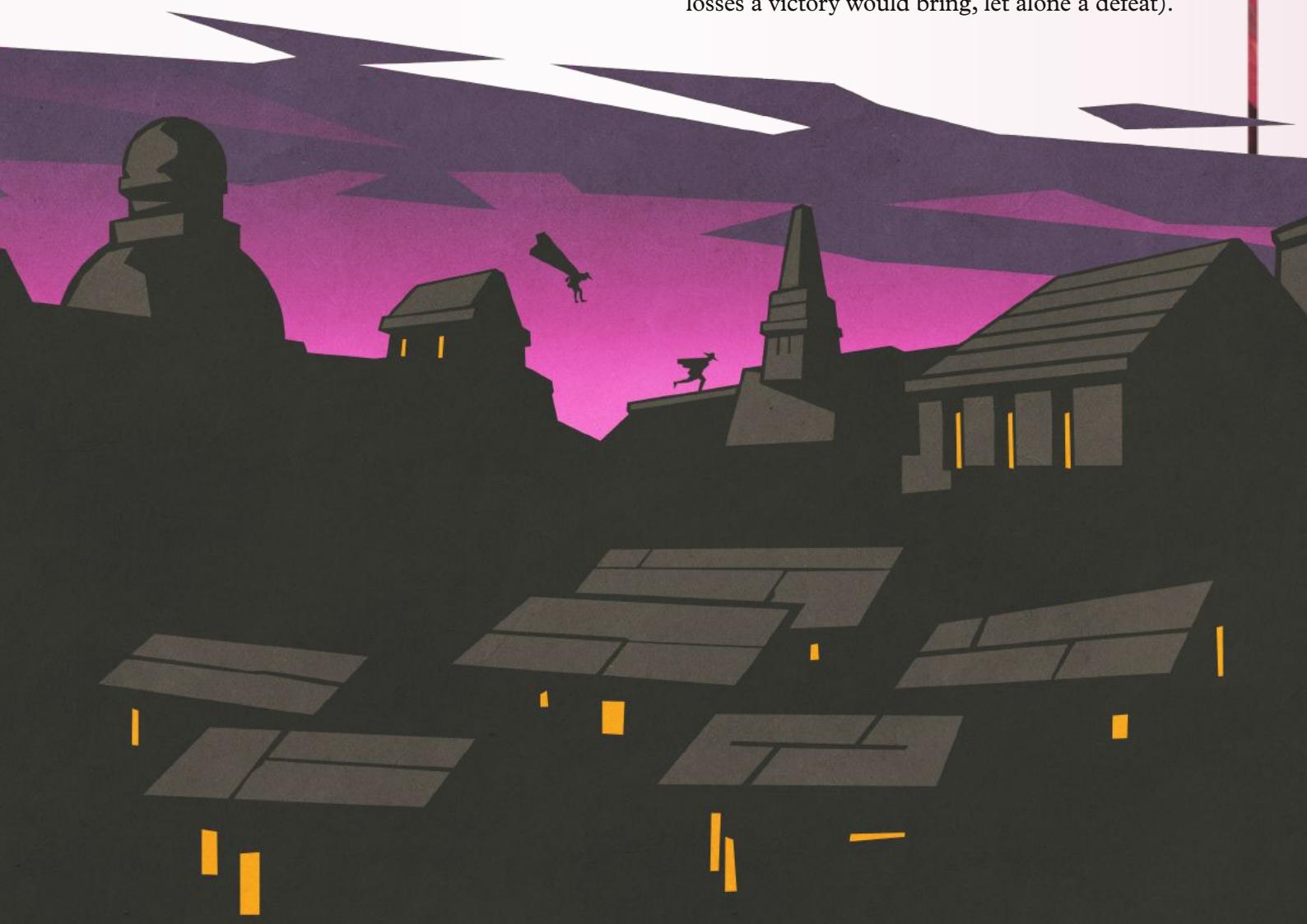
He believes it would be better to turn the vengeful god against his enemies: the Ministry, and all the drow who serve it. If a few who aren't involved get caught in the crossfire, it's no skin off his back; he blames the drow for the downfall of himself and his family, and harbours little more than a seething hatred for the entire culture. He 's bankrolled the cult with the dwindling remains of his fortune, confident that dealing the final blow to the revolution will return him to good standing.

THE HARVEST MILITIA

A loose collective of like-minded individuals, the Harvest Militia is less an organised fighting force and more of a hedonistic throng devoted to Brother Harvest. They occasionally run drills as a unit, but their primary function seems to be testing their mettle against each other in order to winnow the group down to its deadliest and most dangerous individuals.

Everyone within the militia is required to fight with a sickle or scythe (the hallmarks of their god), and their gatherings often devolve into a mess of bloody bodies and flashing blades. They wear the scars of these orgies of violence with pride, and will attempt to land or receive their blows in an aesthetically pleasing pattern. Members of the cult who are outside the militia may even request to end their lives in one of these massive battles. Those that seek it out often describe the beautiful agony with their last, shrieking breath.

Despite their lack of organisation, the Harvest Militia is still deadly when pushed into action. Most speculation on why the group is allowed to be a semi-public presence revolves around the fact that no one wants to waste the manpower needed to subdue them when whipped into their full righteous fury (or suffer the heavy losses a victory would bring, let alone a defeat).



THE SILVERSPUN

Though the worship of many drow gods has been forbidden in Spire, the faithful still find ways to follow them. Carefully hidden sects and isolated cells thrive in underground communities, with their devoted congregations sworn to secrecy and silence. Any shrines built to the gods are either small, secret things easily hidden or dismantled, or veiled tributes hiding in plain sight amongst more acceptable decorations.

Though the groups are separate from one another out of necessity, followers often recognise each other through a series of signs and countersigns, veiled passcodes, and coded speech. These are often used to relay information about meetings, masses, and other services, but they can also pass along news of law enforcement sniffing around, certain locations that have fallen out of use or been deemed safe for meetings, or new members and contacts to add to the network.

Among these groups are the Silverspun, whose services are hosted and run by Majess Marienna LeDeaux: a prestigious midwife operating in the middle and higher levels of Spire. The Silverspun meet in the bowels of her incubation house, far below the expansive catacombs-turned-clutch-caves where she and her fellows tend their eggs.

She keeps her services small, usually no more than ten at a time, but she holds them with more frequency than most other congregations. Concealing the faithful amongst her other patrons, she has made herself quite a fixture of the underground community in the higher circles of the drow.

Much as would be expected from a midwife, her web reaches far and wide. Many priestesses venture forth from her incubation house to hold services elsewhere for those who don't have the means or ability to visit her at home. But even within her employ, there are those who are unaware of the secrets deep within the house; if they were to wander too far, they would likely run into trouble.

Though she allows shrines and dedications to any forbidden gods, Majess LeDeaux herself dedicates her time and energy only to Damnou in her entirety. The services she hosts are most often held in her honour, and she will give the goddess' blessing to the egg sacs she tends if the parents request it (and possibly even if they don't.)

It's known that the Silverspun pay fealty to both banned aspects of Damnou. As a result, they are both more militant and aggressive than the Ministry, despite having fewer resources.

Aside from the usual defenders and guards employed to keep the hatcheries safe, the Silverspun maintain an army of devoted soldiers who have dedicated themselves to Lekolé and fight the enemies of the drow in her

service. Their guiding principle is fury, and though their drills are small and private, they are no less deadly for it.

They have no formal uniforms or insignia to identify them. Their fighting styles favour guerilla tactics that allow them to remain in the ever-shifting shadows, concealing them from their targets. They are ruthless, underhanded, and brutal fighters – deadly even with little more than a blade, and they have no love for fighting with honour or dignity. As a force dedicated to secrecy and protection, their strikes are surgical. They leave little evidence of their existence or methods behind, and will avoid a fair fight by any means necessary. A drawn-out conflict goes against all their training, which is to be as quick, silent, and deadly as possible.

Everyone in the force knows well that being discovered means swift retribution not only from their enemies, but from LeDeaux herself – and if she isn't the highest authority among the Silverspun, retribution from whoever she answers to as well.

SILVERSPUN ASSASSINS

The Assassins are loyal servants to the midwives in Majess LeDeaux's house, and they guard their charges zealously. As the elite of the standard defense corps, they also protect the Silverspun: the drow who secretly worship the goddess Damnou under LeDeaux's guidance.

Single-minded in their mission, these ruthless drow are often mutated by the Majess' experiments, and possibly brainwashed to remain in her service. While she does see to their education, LeDeaux keeps their studies focused on martial topics and rewards innovations in defending the house or tactics on the battlefield.

Operating in small squadrons of six to eight individuals, the fifty-odd soldiers currently in LeDeaux's employ are far deadlier than their numbers imply – and they are more than willing to die to protect their mistress.

SILVERSPUN ASSASSINS

Names:	Finn, Yixa, Bondin, Sola
Descriptors:	Light-footed; Nondescript; Hard-eyed; Whispers to themselves
Difficulty:	1, or 2 if they have ample time to prepare
Resistance:	6
Equipment:	Silksteel tunic (Armour 2, Concealable), Parrying dagger (D3, Concealable, Parrying), Throwing hatchet (D6, Ranged, Surprising)

NPCS

While the characters described here are major players in Brother Harvest's story, there are many others involved. Any characters that share bonds with the cell can be helpful, or entangled in this scenario themselves.

ARIMANDE FORGET-NOT-THE-FALLEN

Water, snow, and ice are malleable; even glaciers move.

To be unyielding does not show strength, but the stubbornness of stone.

Forget-Not-The-Fallen, the zealous and charismatic leader of the cult of Brother Harvest, wears masks emblazoned with the signs of death and decay. Their true mask, most often worn at their throat as an oversized brooch, is a rictus grin rumoured to be a likeness of their actual face. Whether or not that's true, it is crafted from the tanned and leathered skin of the previous cult leader.

Like all members of the group, their wardrobe consists of loose, flowing robes designed to mimic a pauper's rags. However, in true aelfir fashion, their clothing is constructed of the finest mesh and gauze, artfully torn to imply hardship without any actual suffering on their part. They proclaim to love the beauty of the desolate, the unwanted, and the broken, and outfit their followers as such. Though everyone in their care lives comfortably, they all appear to be fashionably destitute and waif-thin, starved to let hunger pains sharpen their minds and cheekbones.

Unlike most other aelfir organisations, including previous incarnations of the group, Forget-Not-The-Fallen welcomes all into the service of Brother Harvest. Though in the minority, drow, gnolls, and the occasional human have been spotted in the cult's signature robes. Arimande welcomes all followers in the group with the same warmth and grace, and is more than willing to provide for them. While the congregation live simply by aelfir standards, the comfort and stability are a lavish luxury for those used to being down-Spire, and have proved an effective recruitment tool. Brother Harvest, Forget-Not preaches, is not picky about his followers; all will go to him in the end.

Even casual acquaintances of the aelfir describe the cult – sometimes confusedly – as kind. They genuinely care for all the creatures who follow them, and even those that don't. When pressed on the reasons for this, Forget-Not merely responds that Brother Harvest does not wish anyone to suffer before meeting him; to have lived a healthy and robust life means they may continue the harvest when it comes.

When speaking of the morbid and macabre, Forget-Not's demeanour is still welcoming and calm. They can make mass suicides or bloody duels to the death sound hallowed and reverent.

MOTIVATIONS

Forget-Not-The-Fallen believes absolutely in the full cycle of seasons and that all things must have a beginning and an end. With the rise of Undying surgery, they fear the aelfir will stagnate in their current condition and never progress to a new age.

To pause the cycle indefinitely is unsustainable, and will lead only to permanent ruin via stasis and complacency. The resulting fall will be not a bang but a whimper, as their compatriots freeze not only themselves, but all of aelfir society as it is now. They truly fear that the stranglehold of the Undying will result in more and more watered down versions of creativity and invention: a ceaseless spiral of the same ideas being regurgitated over and over again, instead of anything truly new.

While the devotees of Brother Harvest do see death as an ultimate end state, senseless, massive executions aren't their goal. The group adheres to the idea of cognitive decay: the longer any individual lives (particularly past their generally accepted lifespan), the less elastic their ideas are, as they become intolerant of new concepts.

To prevent the ultimate decay of whole societies, Brother Harvest culls those who can no longer contribute and allows the fresh and new to flourish until it's their time to end. Leaders encourage introspection and voluntary death when individuals feel they have reached their ideal state, where they can learn or progress no further.

This idea, once widespread, has fallen by the wayside in general society. Forget-Not attributes the uprisings and revolts by the drow to be a product of aelfir complacency. If there were new minds and fresh perspectives, there would at least be better ways to keep the peasantry mollified instead of the rising chaos in Spire.

LEVERAGE

Many of the aelfir have written Arimande off as a lunatic and a zealot, and laugh at their fear of the Harvest. While they have their devoted followers, the cult is very much a minority; offering any paths toward mainstream acceptance is a surefire way to get their attention. For example, turning the angry shadow of a god on those who flout his teachings is a great way to wipe out some of the oldest and most powerful aelfir, allowing this death cult to fill in the power vacuum they leave behind.

Forget-Not has chosen the idea of renewal as the basis of their congregation. If nothing ever fades, nothing new can ever rise; rumour has it that they are considering whether successfully summoning Brother Harvest in Spire means they have reached their ideal self.

If so, they will be naming a successor soon and ending their life. Followers are already vying to be named the next leader, or cosying up to their favourite candidates in hopes of being placed in the new order's ranks.

There are other factions still devoted to Brother Harvest, but Forget-Not considers these to be gauche appropriations of the god's teachings. Rather than attending to the welfare of all to better prepare them for meeting Brother Harvest, this other group hoards resources and basks in opulence, believing that what they amass in life will contribute to their god's strength when they die.

Forget-Not fears that if worship of Brother Harvest does return to fashion, it will be under this abhorrent offshoot that allows the aelfir to continue living as they do without much consideration for the god himself. Rooting out more information on this group would surely earn their favour.

ARIMANDE FORGET-NOT-THE-FALLEN

Resistance: 8

Difficulty: 1 in ritual garb and wreathed in incense; 0 if you catch them unawares

Equipment: Culling Greatblade (D8, **Tiring, Bloodbound**)

Special: **Time of Endings.** When rolling for fallout as a result of stress suffered from Arimande's greatblade, roll two D10 and pick the lower result.



THE AUTUMN CONGREGATION

The lower-ranking clergy and laymen of the group call themselves the Autumn Congregation. When they come together, they create a fanatical group capable of hideous acts of destruction in the name of their god.

While they may be peaceful people in their everyday lives, services held in Brother Harvest's name allow them to unleash their primal urges. They embrace this dichotomy wholeheartedly, and cite Brother Harvest's grace and purpose alongside his cold, detached cruelty as the cause.

All manner of folk from all races, classes, and persuasions can be found in the ranks of the congregation. While some may lean more heavily towards perfection or retribution, everyone accepts that these two must go hand in hand. The harvest must come if there is to be a meaningful spring.

CONGREGANTS

Members: Gedry Instant-Is-The-End, aelfir acupuncture artisan; Flint, 'emancipated' gnoll and breeder of viciously poisonous blossoms; Armie Shun, human mercenary and tea merchant; Stasia Kinner, drow folk singer.

Resistance: 6

Difficulty: 0

Equipment: Throat-slitting blades (D3, **Brutal**)

Special: When half of a group of Autumn Congregation are taken down, the others are inspired to greater violence and their weapons become (D6) rather than (D3, **Brutal**)

SOOTHSAIR WATER'S-CUTTING-EDGE

We make our world more beautiful. Why not take decisive action to wipe out such a source of ugliness?

While Brother Harvest's influence has waned in the eyes of the aelfir, writing him off entirely ignores how he can be put to use in other situations. Water's-Cutting-Edge, a benefactor of the cult of Brother Harvest, couldn't care less about turning him against the aelfir who have forsaken him. Instead, his ambitions lie in turning the vengeful, forgotten deity against the ones that irritate Water's-Cutting-Edge the most.

He's aligned himself with Forget-Not-The-Fallen in order to conscript Brother Harvest and unleash him against the Ministry, wiping out the resistance once and for all. Though he has kept his contributions secret, he has supported Forget-Not's sect financially, and was the one who suggested bringing forth the gods in Spire.

He allows Forget-Not to claim this as his own idea; he's happier to keep his own name out of things as much as possible. He much prefers guiding things from afar than being in the thick of it, and will likely distance himself as much as possible should things go sideways. While he's confident in the plans he's laid out, he's not above setting contingencies in order to protect himself. He believes achieving his end goal will propel him to the top of the aelfir's social ladder, and eagerly anticipates his new life away from the middle tiers.

Though at first it seems Water's-Cutting-Edge has had himself tattooed to appear made of marble, closer inspection reveals instead that the delicate grey and blue lines actually shift, resembling waves at sea. They reflect his emotional state (usually slow and calm), deepening in colour and moving more quickly when he is impassioned, angry, or excited. His true mask hangs at his hip, a gauzy concoction of frozen bubbles and seafoam. His outfits are frequently less actual 'clothing' and more like careful drapings of quicksilver jewellery with sapphire and emerald stones.

He remains in continuous motion, whether it's the twirling of his wrists or a gentle sway of his upper body, and can frequently be heard before he's seen with the combination of this habit and his wardrobe. He has also had his vocal cords adjusted so he can punctuate his speech with the sounds of the ocean crashing.

MOTIVATIONS

His middling status amongst the aelfir means Soothsair lives beneath some of the wealthier drow, and he resents them deeply for it. Though he doesn't know very much about the Ministry, he's heard the rumours, and is determined to deliver them a debilitating blow.

In his mind, the drow are very much to blame for any inconveniences in his life; he is furious that there are some that don't seem to understand their place. Using the cult and his newborn god, he intends to make sure that they learn it.

To maintain his lifestyle, Water's-Cutting-Edge is in massive debt to a more powerful aelfir family, and is being forced into drastic action to avoid punishment. To infiltrate and disperse the cult of Brother Harvest was his first assignment, and if he succeeds, he has been promised Undying surgery as a reward on top of amnesty. He plans on taking things one step further, using the opportunity to lash out against others – even his benefactors – while he helps himself.

The Ministry is to blame for the hardships and struggles that have befallen Soothsair's family. He can't prove it directly, but a rash of arsons targeting his family's holdings have all been tied to drow activities. His family has already renounced all drow that were duranced with them at the time as the most likely culprits, but that's far from enough for him. He won't stop until he has destroyed everything he can to even the score.

LEVERAGE

Unhappy with his lot in life, and deeply resentful of the drow who move within his circles, Soothsair has taken to semi-regularly visiting the lower levels of Spire in disguise, to observe what he feels are drow living in their rightful places. Convincing himself that this form of tourism is soothing his bruised ego, he wanders for hours on end, drinking in the misery and misfortune like a particularly bitter tea. Whatever his motives are, he lacks the social clout to pass it off as a droll pastime, and would certainly be cast out to the very fringes of aelfir society if his habits were discovered.



Fuelling his theories about the Ministry is a damning piece of evidence left mysteriously untouched by the arsons that have plagued Soothsair's family. This is his own journal, complete with speculations on the further branches of his family and his distaste for them; vitriolic tirades against the drow in high society (and the aelfir who allow them to be there); and treasonous accusations that the higher echelons must all be working together to maintain the illusion of a striated society. It is not only a self-incriminating piece of his own misery, but a condemnation of his betters. If it were discovered, he would surely have a tragically short life or a numbingly long prison sentence.

Believing all that he's lost is due to the Ministry's actions, Water's-Cutting-Edge is easier to buy than most aelfir. Though he does not and will never truly trust any drow, he's comfortable with strange bedfellows as long as he feels he's getting the better end of the deal (and is confident that he can burn them in the

end). While it's hardly an optimal opportunity, someone as desperate and nakedly ambitious as he is leaves themselves far more open to manipulation than they like to think. However, even he has his limits, so it's a fine line to walk without pushing him too far.

SOOTHSAIR WATER'S-CUTTING-EDGE

Resistance: 10

Difficulty: 0, but see below.

Equipment: Passerine Auto-Revolver (D6, **Spread D3, Ranged, Unreliable**), Mourning-sword (D6, **Conduit**)

Special: If the players attack Soothsair but don't take him out, increase his difficulty by 1 as he obsessively trains himself and studies their movements in an effort to destroy them. His difficulty cannot exceed 2.

MAJESS MARIENNA LEDEAUX

What else do we do but forge the future? We don't merely raise children; we usher in a new age.

The matriarch of the premier convent of midwives in the higher levels of Spire, Majess LeDeaux is a soft-spoken and serious drow. She rarely leaves the protected walls of the incubation house where she watches over the egg sacs of future generations, leaving it to more junior members to venture forth. She prefers to drift around the halls of her home and hospital, seeing to high-profile charges herself and monitoring the midwives as they tend to the others.

Like the rest of the midwives in her employ, she wears a pristine white uniform of cotton and spider silk, with the hems and insignias in the red-brown rust of dried blood. Exceptionally lithe and long of limb, most liken her to the skittering spider-wraiths of children's nightmares more than any drow they've ever seen. Sisters in her order whisper about watching her at work: her six arms tending to clutch-beds and administering blood to egg sacs, her eight eyes flickering around her domain and seeming to see all.

Some even claim to have seen her spin cocoons for particularly delicate sacs in risk of rupture, drawing spider silk from her own veins instead of blood. Though her stretched and spindly appearance may make her appear fragile, anyone who has ever dealt with the woman knows the strength and steel in her could outlast any threat.

It was Marienna herself that tended to the malformed figure of Brother Harvest and brought the aelfir god to Spire. The hideous undertaking was performed at least partially within the underground expanse of the nursery. Secret ritual rooms contain not only scribbled notes and samples of blood, but failed or aborted attempts; and in the margins of her notes are strange symbols that look to be another language.

Inscrutable as they may be, one thing is clear: the operation to bring Brother Harvest to the city was not something carried out on a whim. Years of planning and experimentation went into his arrival, and now he's here.

MOTIVATIONS

The midwives, who are fairly secure in a job so long as the aelfir want servants, have little to lose or gain amidst the uprisings and rebellions pioneered by the Ministry – but they also have no qualms about more insidious forms of resistance. Few have the means or desire to wade into conflict, but the rare cells with a midwife member have heard the rumours of recent experiments in raising other things than just drow children.

It's not just aelfir gods LeDeaux has been researching. Her cryptic notes reference vengeful gods of nearly all persuasions, with particular attention paid to theories on calling forth Lekolé and Lombre.

Tired of watching her fellows give themselves over to the aelfir in exchange for petty luxuries, Majess LeDeaux has decided to turn her wrath against all who putter about in complacency. She's likewise unimpressed by the Ministry's lack of progress thus far, and is determined to rope Brother Harvest in under her own influence, turning him against those that commissioned his raising and the drow who allow their brethren to suffer. There will be a new order installed – one of midwives – if she gets her way.

Reviving Brother Harvest may be the end goal of the aelfir who approached her, but Majess LeDeaux has many more far-reaching plans. Not only has she created a number of blood vintages in the process of successfully bringing him forth, but administering them to otherwise normal egg sacs has garnered fascinating results. Now that she has (mostly) successfully summoned a god, she plans on seeing exactly what his divine blood will do when infused into the next generation.

LEVERAGE

LeDeaux still worships the forbidden drow gods – a risky habit when living amid the aelfir in the mid-to-upper levels of Spire. So far, she remains protected by virtue of the incubation house serving as her home and lair (and by remaining a figure singularly uninteresting to the aelfir). The comings and goings of other drow who may wish to join her for services are masked easily enough as parents dropping off or visiting egg sacs and picking up infants, ensuring no one looks too closely at the patrons of the house. However, should her practices surface, it would surely spell her doom.

While most up-Spire families prefer to have a live-in midwife to look over their progeny, Majess LeDeaux insists on all egg sacs being brought to her incubation house and left in her care. Ostensibly this is so she may better protect them should any unpleasantness arise, but in truth, she has been orchestrating a staggeringly large operation designed to place children where she sees fit. Swapping out children has allowed her to secret away heirs to powerful drow houses among the commoners, switch 'imperfect' children for ones with better dispositions or nicer appearances, or simply keep charges she's grown fond of or considers useful.

Though the records available to her sisters reflect the lie, a second hidden set reveals her complicated web of deceit and the true lineage of any children swapped while in her care. It's unlikely that an argument for the betterment of all drow would be enough to absolve her of guilt in the matter. The fallout would be devastating not only to her own house, but to midwives everywhere.

Egg sacs are occasionally orphaned before emerging; such is the nature of a city besieged by conflict and revolt. Rather than turning these unfortunate souls onto the streets, LeDeaux has used them in her experiments. She has a number of successful formulas now, and with them a small army of mutated children she keeps in her care. Whether she will use them to defend what's hers or to mount an attack remains to be seen, but breeding child soldiers indoctrinated from birth is hardly a good look on anyone.

That said, they *are* incredibly useful, and make wonderful sleeper agents. With ages ranging from weeks-old egg sacs to adults starting families of their own, Marienna is just beginning to test the limits of her indoctrination as her charges leave her direct control. Those that she has imbued with her own arachnid features, however, remain in the incubation house indefinitely.

MAJESS MARIENNA LEDEAUX

Resistance: 5, or 7 in her hatchery

Difficulty: 0

Equipment: Midwife's Razors (**D6, Piercing, Unreliable**) and Dripping hypodermic (**D8, Brutal, Destroyed on use**)

MAJI CORSARI LEDEAUX

We do what we must to preserve our people. Anything less is a death sentence.

Whether Corsari is Majess LeDeaux's biological daughter or a particularly promising ward is a matter of much debate. Either way, the young woman is clearly one of Marienna's favourites, and is already expected to inherit the hatchery when Majess LeDeaux retires or passes away – whichever comes first.

Much like her mentor, she is a soft-spoken and quietly intimidating figure; much like her sisters in the house, she has a number of arachnid features. The two extra arms aren't too strange for most, but the pincers and pedipalps she has in place of a lower jaw are more disturbing. While she doesn't bother to hide this from the other midwives, she frequently wears collars high enough to reach her nose or veils that cover her face from the eyes down when interacting with the populace. Still, there are the telltale clicks of something strange when she speaks, and there is a motion beneath the coverings that some find disconcerting.

Though she has a number of her mother's mannerisms, she is certainly the softer of the two; the rest of the midwives prefer to approach her before taking things to Marienna herself. While they all respect the proprietress, they're closer to Corsari, and are far more likely to confide in her than her mother. She's more than happy to keep their confidences, filter what reaches her mother and what falls by the wayside, and pass down some of her own doctrine along with orders from the Majess.

Corsari doesn't know the full extent of her mother's experiments in the lowest levels of the house, but she's privy to more than anyone else. She's aware of the experiments that Marienna is performing using the orphaned egg sacs, and has contributed to the different blood vintages that augment them.

LeDeaux has carefully kept her daughter away from as much of her Brother Harvest research as she can, but Corsari has done her fair share of snooping, and has surmised that Marienna is up to something cataclysmic in the service of the aelfir. Convinced she would only cooperate if under the most extreme duress, she is launching a counter-investigation to discover exactly what could be used to coerce her mother into helping their enemy.

MOTIVATIONS

Corsari stands to inherit the incubation house and all the pressure and prestige that entails. She's concerned that when her mother's part in the mysterious grand plan is finished, her anonymous backer will attempt to do away with her – or destroy the entire house to ensure she remains silent.

Since the future of the drow race (as well as the products of their experimentation and all related research) is kept safe within the walls of the house, she is determined to undermine whatever retaliatory plans the aelfir may have. To that end, she has sent some of the more aesthetically conventional members of staff to snoop around and see what they can find out about the unknown figure behind her mother's secrecy.

The other midwives have noticed the elder LeDeaux's furtive and secretive behaviour, and are deeply unhappy that something underhanded could be going on under their noses. They fear she'll cast them all in an awful light, leading to them all being punished by the aelfir or shunned by all but the most desperate drow.

While not quite at the point of pushing for a coup, they want answers at the very least – and possibly the peaceful removal of their leader if they deem her work too heinous to bear. As she has a hand in some of the experiments, Corsari needs to mitigate their fears and concerns, appease their anger, and keep her own name clear in the process. It's a tall order for just one woman, and she may need assistance.

Everything Marienna is doing has one caveat that irks Corsari: it is all bound and beholden to her mother. The mutated children, the augmented army, and the secret project she's keeping under wraps are all hers alone. Corsari isn't convinced she'll leave them to protect the lair when she eventually retires – or that anyone else will be able to control them in the event of her demise. Using the research she's already contributed, Corsari has begun developing strategies to sway those under her mother's control to her own influence, using different hypnotic techniques in conjunction with drugs to make them more susceptible. It's a tricky thing, but it's one of her top priorities.

LEVERAGE

Having an established operation is comforting, but Corsari prefers the more traditional (and less demanding) role midwives usually take when tending the progeny of the upper class. Looking to take what she's learned from her mother and strike out on her own, she's cultivating a group of prospective clients using her name and pedigree. Of course, it's unlikely Majess LeDeaux will take this news well (especially as she would have to begin training a new protégé). Corsari is reluctant to enact her plan until she is absolutely certain it will go as well as she hopes.

While her hands aren't quite as dirty as Marienna's, Corsari has contributed her fair share of effort and intelligence to the ethically questionable experiments happening at the house. Majess LeDeaux herself is in a solid enough position that she could blame her daughter if it all came to light, but Corsari has no one else to shift the blame to. With the other midwives already buzzing with unrest, she'd likely be left without a single ally if any of the research or victims of the experimentation were brought to the public's attention.

Corsari also has her own troubling secret squirrelled away in the incubation house: an egg sac fathered by Meyse San-Denis Destera. This is not an awful thing by itself, but it wasn't delivered to her by the Meyse and his wife: the egg sac is instead the product of Corsari's affair with him. She has yet to even tell him that they have a child together. As one of the more prominent and well-respected members of his house, San-Denis has much to lose should his infidelity come to light; she fears how he would react to knowing he had fathered an illegitimate child.

MAJI CORSARI LEDEAUX

Resistance: 6, or 10 in her hatchery

Difficulty: 0

Equipment: Midwife's Razors (D6, **Piercing, Unreliable**) and, just in case, a sawn-off hidden in her bustle (D6, **Point-Blank, One-Shot**)

THE MIDWIVES

A scuttling mass of whispers, limbs, and eyes, the sisters in LeDeaux's incubation house are a tight-knit and insular group who are absolutely devoted to raising their charges. They appear innocuous, if odd, to the casual observer; those that have seen them come to the defense of their unhatched eggs and newborn infants recall it in the haunted manner of someone who has witnessed a living nightmare.

Unnerving at the best of times, these women are truly terrifying when threatened and take no prisoners when pressed. Fortunately, it's a rare fool that decides challenging them is a good idea. For the most part they are entirely content to go about their lives, quietly nurturing the next generation. Majess LeDeaux does not permit cruelty from her staff. For the duration of their stay within the incubation house, the children know only gentle touches, warm beds, soft voices, and sweet lullabies.

MIDWIVES

Names: Anita Lassan, six-eyed governess; Sharna Coal, wasp-waisted master phlebototrix; Iniss Gurd, silk-spinning egg sac guardian; Bisham Sound, eight-armed hatchmaster and spider whisperer.

Resistance: 6, or 10 in her hatchery

Difficulty: 0

Equipment: None, save ritual and ceremonial garb and instruments. But her attacks are either venomous fangs (D6) or multiple barbed limbs (D6, **Brutal**) and she has **D6 Armour**, rolled at the start of the situation, to represent how much chitinous exoskeleton she can summon to protect herself.

SCENES

These are the most important locations in Brother Harvest's story, where his creators and captors reside. These are also the most likely places where he will manifest and be released from (or escape) to harrow his targets. As always, other locations the Ministry cell frequents or finds important can be incorporated, used as substitutes, or dramatically imperiled by the wrathful god's appearance.

Depending on how pressing the cell finds the matter of death gods being summoned, there are a number of points at which they can intercept the process.

Arimande's Temple, the home of the aelfir who commissioned Brother Harvest's raising, is the perfect site for the final infusion of power that will allow the god to manifest before his devoted servants. Here he can be charged with laying waste to all those he deems unworthy. News of an unstoppable force of death and fury will travel down-Spire as he rains destruction.

Majess LeDeaux's Incubation House is an ideal place to discover Brother Harvest, either before he's fully come into his power and been 'programmed' to exterminate drow and the Ministry, or as he begins his assault. This is also where LeDeaux has begun experimenting with raising the facets of Damnou (though they are unlikely to be in any truly functioning form) before trying for the unified goddess herself.

The Fallow Fields are a more liminal space. They're always just out of sight when you're looking for them, and without any sort of analogue in Spire. Ripped open by the summoning of such powerful creatures in a space so ill-prepared to receive them, the physics here are flexible, as are the rules of magic. Even the most average practitioner may find themselves capable of truly awesome things.

ARIMANDE'S TEMPLE

Semi-hidden on the outskirts of New Heaven, Arimande hosts his congregation on a flat stretch of stone stained red with the blood of a thousand martyrs, murders, and other holy battles. Nestled behind a sturdy windbreak of jutting stone, the most devout (or most destitute) of his followers have built a makeshift camp where all manner of revelry, art, music, and violence are celebrated for their beauty and innovation.

In the centre of this settlement stands an effigy of Brother Harvest himself. Dark, silent, and holding a wickedly sharp scythe with a curved blade as long as he is tall, the figure watches over the gathered masses. It is a constant reminder that death is never far away. Followers anoint themselves in the blood that drips perpetually from the blade, cut themselves on it to seal holy pacts, and leave artefacts of their most vibrant and inspired moments to honour their master.

The corvids and hyenas that occupy New Heaven have a particular love of the temple, since there is an ample supply of bodies (or parts) to feast upon. Most other inhabitants of the district give the temple a wide berth: the followers there are fanatical even by Spire's standards. As long as they respect that desire for distance, the cult of Brother Harvest is left to their own devices to continue following their fallen god.

THE FORSAKEN PLAINS

Beyond the semi-permanent structures of the camp sits an amphitheatre carved out of the rock, its terraces staggering upwards to provide places to sit in a rough semi-circle around the stage area at the base. Here the worshippers gather for sermons and services, to witness ceremonial gladiator fights or sacraments of death, and to celebrate new innovations in art and entertainment. Were it not for the crumbling foundations and sheer drop-offs at irregular intervals around the arena, it would be a place of beauty any would want to visit. Instead, the cult adores it for its danger, and are happy to keep it to themselves.

SUGGESTED SCENES

Welcome, Brother: The cell infiltrates the cult and attends a service at the temple, where Forget-Not-The-Fallen preaches about the imminent arrival of Brother Harvest.

Fighting Spirit: As he makes his way to New Heaven with the intent of returning to the Fallow Fields, the cult demands that Brother Harvest turn back and cull the unworthy. Will the cell shepherd him back home, or turn him against their enemies?

The End Times: With Brother Harvest defeated, the cult's mission is done. Many declare this to be their moment of fulfillment and are eager to die. Can Water's-Cutting-Edge and Forget-Not-The-Fallen be brought to justice before they end things along with their followers?

MAJESS LEDEAUX'S INCUBATION HOUSE

Out of the way of the hustle and bustle of the Silver Quarter's more common fare, Majess LeDeaux's domicile dominates a sizable cul-de-sac near the border of Ivory Row. A maze of dimly lit and faintly humid hallways, the incubation house is a mystery to all but its perpetual inhabitants.

Getting lost is easy for the common visitor, and even parents coming to check in on their children swear they end up in different wings entirely despite their destination being familiar. Though every hallway seems the same to the untrained eye, the midwives who inhabit the building seem to unerringly find their way. As a part of their training, new midwives shadow an established practitioner for a period of at least six months to learn the layout of the labyrinthine house.

The deeper you go, the less conventionally hospitable the place gets. It transitions over a number of floors to a series of caves and catacombs, warm and damp enough to occasionally drip on visitors. The lowest layers hold the youngest eggs, which are assessed on a monthly basis and gradually moved up to the higher levels as they develop. Each midwife in residence also has a suite on the floor of their choice: a self-sufficient cell including living, dining, and bathing areas, and whatever personalisation its occupant desires. Somewhere in the mid-levels is the makeshift church where Majess LeDeaux hosts her services to Damnou and allows the worship of other banned deities.

The house easily has enough space to support a population many times the size of the one it currently hosts, including any necessary staff; but a number of areas have been designated as off-limits. Sisters who have violated this rule have disappeared, or experienced terrible accidents and tragedies. As a result, the midwives often whisper about what their mistress might be hiding.

These areas are where the orphaned armies of the Majis LeDeaux are made, housed, and trained. Docile when not activated, they seem much like normal children in the way they move, learn, and play; but with the right signal, they coalesce into a fearsome hive of rage and violence.

BROTHER HARVEST'S CHAMBERS

Several floors below the last level of egg chambers sits Majess LeDeaux's laboratory and the holding place of Brother Harvest.

In a circular room, surrounded on all sides by thick stone walls and with a series of antechambers leading to the entrance, the fledgling god languishes in the dark in grim isolation. Austere and void of any life other than the god himself, not even spiders are willing (or permitted) to make their homes here.

Corsari herself has only ever been in her mother's lab, and knows nothing of her work with the cult; but she has her suspicions. LeDeaux alone observes the progress of her creation and records all of her experiments, only occasionally allowing her aelfir patrons to visit and monitor any advances. So far, they haven't observed anything of concern, and deem Brother Harvest to be amicable and compliant.

SUGGESTED SCENES

A Friend in Need: Having discovered her mother's underhanded dealings, Maji Corsari requests that the cell meet her. She wants help to plan a way to stop the summoning of Brother Harvest and confront the Majess.

Discovering Brother Harvest: After attending a mass led by LeDeaux, the cell ventures deep into the bowels of the house. Have they gotten lost, been invited, or simply decided to investigate an odd noise? How do they react to the presence of the god?

Wrath of God: LeDeaux performs the final ritual to call forth Brother Harvest at the behest of the cult, but it goes terribly awry and she is unable to control him any longer. He breaks free, wreaking havoc in the lower floors and escaping to the streets of the Silver Quarter.



THE FALLOW FIELDS

Though potentially familiar to aelfir, the sight of the Fallow Fields is likely new to drow: it is an endless expanse of tundra plowed like a field, waiting for the next planting. Coated in a thick layer of ice, the ground crackles underfoot, and crunches where the constant flurries of snow have built up.

For those truly devoted to the Autumn Prince, this is heaven - or as close as they can get. It is a realm outside of reality, a place of endings and undoing, where Brother Harvest draws power and prepares for the ultimate cull. Here Brother Harvest appears as his true self, an impossibly perfect representation of the aelfir. His very skin cuts like an obsidian scalpel at the slightest touch, and woe be to any who find themselves within his reach.

But the Fallow Fields have sat empty since he began to fall out of fashion. He rails against the ones that have ground the cycle to a halt and condemned him to an impotent existence, and is set upon culling the living to sow the seeds of another harvest.

The entryway to the Fallow Fields will be ripped open at the moment of his exaltation, taking the place of his statue in the temple and announcing his arrival. As he grows stronger in the incubation house, the cult zealously protects this entrance to prevent Brother Harvest from returning until they believe his work is done.

SUGGESTED SCENES

Misery and Woe: Even for aelfir, the climate of the Fallow Fields is punishing; any drow who enters them is likely to suffer ill effects after a short time. The longer the gate stays open, the more the Fields spill out into Spire. If it is open long enough, the entire city could be frozen solid. What can be done to prevent an ice age from taking over?

Close the Gate: The portal that springs open when Brother Harvest's power fully manifests is the link that tethers him to this plane; closing it will banish him. The ritual to close it must be performed within the Fields, with precious little time to spare between its completion and the door slamming shut again. Is it worth the risk to ensure he cannot return?

Reap What You Sow: For all the might he displays, Brother Harvest isn't nearly as impressive as his followers had hoped; so they decide that this meagre harvest is due to insufficient planting. To this end, they begin dragging outsiders into the fields, hoping the sacrifices will empower Brother Harvest.

BROTHER HARVEST, SCYTHES-CULL-THE-WEEPING

Once regarded as the epitome of perfection by the aelfir, Brother Harvest has of late been relegated to a much lesser position; most aelfir pay him little more than lip service. In the homeland he may have had the potency to remind them of his role, but in Spire they were immune from his wrath - until now.

Currently trapped in a malformed and malfunctioning body, Brother Harvest is a seething mass of pain and hatred, eager to improve or escape his condition. While his power is diminished by the imperfect summoning and less-than-ideal host, he remains a god of death and a potent weapon.

Tall and skeleton-thin, Brother Harvest looks like little more than skin stretched tight over bone. Jutting bone spurs lance off his joints and protrude from his spine; some are articulated enough to twitch erratically, but most are stationary outgrowths.

His mask, presented by Forget-Not-The-Fallen, is a simple, smooth oval of highly polished black metal with wide red lines spilling from the eyes all the way down to the bottom edge. This theme is echoed in his robes, which are hemmed in black satin and lined in red.

He is a perpetually silent figure. His own motivations if any are entirely inscrutable, but everyone involved in the process seems sure that they can point him in the direction of their particular target and watch him take their enemies down.

In truth, Brother Harvest will do whatever he needs to in order to escape. The body they have trapped him in is insufficient and wracked with pain. He has been brought to a place he was never supposed to be by those who would seek to use him as a mere weapon. Though he does look forward to lashing out at anyone nearby when he has the strength, it will be in an effort to burn out the host body and release him from the torment his captors have trapped him in. So far he is biding his time and allowing Majess LeDeaux to continue tending to him, feeding off the magical power of the blood infusions that she regularly provides.



Though he is almost invulnerable in his home in the Fallow Fields, the form Brother Harvest takes in Spire is a brittle concoction of blood, magic, ice, and hate. LeDeaux has intentionally left his form as vulnerable as possible in case of his escape. He is also still beholden to the physics of his body, though the magic coursing through his form reinforces it considerably.

His injuries heal rapidly when he is not under strain – cutting his arms off and calling it a day wouldn't be enough to stymie him for long – but constant pressure could wear him down to the point where he can be defeated.

Difficulty: 1 in his summoning chamber; otherwise 2.

Resistance: 10; 30 in the Fallow Fields

Equipment:

Sorrow Scythe (D8, Spread D6, Devastating, Scarring).

Brother Harvest's scythe is a truly fearsome weapon, and the mere sight of the glinting blade strikes fear into those who witness it. It vanishes on the dawn of the day after he is defeated.

Frozen Touch (D4, Ongoing D6, Scarring [frostbite]).

Making contact with the frozen god's form leads to pain and devastation, and leaves its mark in the form of angry black frostbite on the poor soul who endured it.

DEFEATING BROTHER HARVEST

How, exactly, does one lay an angry god to rest? Forget-Not-The-Fallen and Water's-Cutting-Edge don't seem to have thought that far.

Stopping a god of death once he's started reaping isn't the simplest of tasks. If the Ministry cell can devise a clever solution to the problem, they should of course get the chance to enact their plan; but if they're at a loss for where to begin, there are a few avenues to take.

Ask Majess LeDeaux for help. She made him, after all; she might know how to stop him, or at least what weaknesses he's likely to have. Whether it's poisoning the blood he needs or exploiting sleeper programming, she's a wellspring of information on him.

Devise a banishing ritual. Find objects of importance that resonate with Brother Harvest and his home in the Fallow Fields, locate him, and keep him distracted long enough to perform a somewhat lengthy and involved magical ritual. Try not to get killed.

Beat him to the punch. Brother Harvest was brought forth only to destroy. If he is reasonably satisfied that his goal has been met, he may disorporate on seeing the fulfillment of his task. Of course, staging the destruction may be more complicated than just confronting him in the first place.

Clear the way to the Fallow Fields. The cult of Brother Harvest is guarding the entrance to the Fallow Fields: the realm where the god resides and waits for the reaping. Eager to escape the torment that is his current condition, allowing him a way home would put a quick end to the bloodshed.

Defeat his avatar. The cult is guarding a gate to Brother Harvest's realm. While his power remains split between his world and ours, the angry god is vulnerable to those who would risk entering his domain.

PRAEVENIRE RECORDATUS

CHARLES LESTRANGE

Charles once worked for the Morticians guild. He found that the process of making someone immortal by merely removing their heart and fiddling around with the metaphysical connective tissue of the soul was fine, but lacked finesse. Charles envisioned a version that didn't require surgery or expensive blood-replacement treatments, and after leaving the guild in disgrace, he began his Great Work.

It took four years. Now LeStrange has contracts promising his soul to more than seven different gods at once – a couple of whom directly invalidate another. He has since become unable to die, as doing so would void at least six of his cosmically-bound contracts.

In addition to being unable to die, Charles is also unable to focus, speak in a coherent sentence, or tie his shoelaces: his head is full of screaming gods. He has become desperate to pass on. If you can pull it off and free the ones who'd rather be released from these bindings, you could really get into their divine good books – if you can avoid being lightninged or hexed into oblivion by a god protecting their investment.

AFTERMATH

No matter the state of the Ministry, the cell, or the city itself, one immutable truth has been revealed: the aelfir gods can be summoned here, and no one is safe from their ire.

After confronting Brother Harvest – whether he is banished from the city, defeated in a possibly permanent way, or merely subdued for the moment – there are still a number of loose ends to tie up.

What Ever Happened To Majess LeDeaux?

The midwife responsible for the experiments will face some sort of justice, whether it comes from the council, the other midwives, or the cell themselves. Do they come to her defense or condemn her? Do they allow her to continue in the hopes of calling forth Damnou? Is she permitted to continue acting as a midwife, or is her house handed over to her daughter?

Forget Me Not: In the wake of a disastrous series of events following the appearance of Brother Harvest, what does the cult make of their leader now? Is Water's-Cutting-Edge revealed as the mastermind, or does Forget-Not-The-Fallen take the fall? Have they accidentally struck the death blow for the god they were hoping to revive?

Ministrative Upheaval: Pulling the strings from behind the scenes, Water's-Cutting-Edge had planned to strike down the Ministry. How successful was his attempt, even in the chaos that ensued? Is the cell left floundering without contacts? Have they been driven even further underground to regroup? Or have they managed to escape largely unscathed?





RELIGION

There is no greater force than religion in the city of Spire. The Solar Pantheon of the high elves demands expansion and colonisation, so that the aelfir might make the world more beautiful and perfect with their presence. Spire has fallen before their inexorable glory, as has Aliquam, and soon Nujab. Thousands of young drow and millions of stens' worth of arms are sacrificed upon the altar of empire each year.

The faltering, fragmented Church of Our Glorious Lady upholds the traditions of Spire's drow – though each year, more and more of their congregation flock to the Solar Church's golden opulence and promises of plenty. Pilgrim's Row froths and festers with faiths old and new as cults shatter and reform on a weekly basis, feeding into and upon each other. The ancient beliefs of the Yssians find footholds in desperate drow, hungry for a sense of continuity that their masters stole long ago. For those in search of vengeance rather than belonging, the Crimson Vigil presses sacred blades into eager hands, and sends them off on their bloody business.

And – in forbidden temples and boarded-up attics, by the light of black candles and under the darkness of a waning moon – the Ministry of Our Hidden Mistress plots to topple the Council. They will use assassination and fear, poison and misdirection, lies and shadows to offer up the city to their goddess under their own careful, gracious control.

PRAEVENIRE RECORDATUS

THE APOSTLE

The Apostle is an Exarch – a high-ranking member of the Ministry – who is getting too powerful and well-known for his own good. Exarchs normally make do with controlling the organisation from the shadows, so the fact that anyone knows his name is out of the ordinary. He has a rich array of secrets and dirt on anyone who's anyone in the city. Now he's positioning himself as an 'artist of revolution', operating in broad, inscrutable strokes and insinuating himself into multiple rebel organisations as an advisor. Things are getting out of hand.

The cell's Magister would never suggest that the player characters tried to kill an Exarch – Goddess forbid – but it's clear that they would rather he was dead than alive. The cell can kill him, sure; but if they manage to do it, they won't be able to shake the idea that he wanted to be killed.

He's the final sacrifice in an ongoing ritual of revolution, and no one's really sure what happens when he kicks it off. Maybe his 'muse' – a woman who may or may not be trapped inside her vast Ivory Row mansion – can provide the key.

THE MINISTRY OF OUR HIDDEN MISTRESS

By Thomas Manuel

As an organisation, the Ministry does double-duty: it oversees the religious worship of Lombre, as well as the terrorist insurgency of Spire. Luckily, as far as the Ministry is concerned, insurgency is worship and worship is insurgency.

When you worship the forbidden goddess of the dark side of the moon, you are both a holy servant and a dangerous criminal: you are a Minister. In a city where any hint of bureaucracy quickly develops a life of its own, it would be wrong to call the Ministry an organised religion; it's an intentionally disorganised one.

People say the Ministry has a finger in every pie. Ministers are those fingers, creeping and probing, occasionally chopped off. Magisters are like wrists: mostly for direction, and often throbbing in pain for no readily apparent reason.

Moving from Minister to Magister isn't a promotion; that would be much too positive. It is at best a lateral advancement, moving one step closer to the centre of the Ministry's power: the dark, incense-filled dimension where the Weavers gibber and mutter in the ear of the Oracle.

The Oracle's garbled translation is sent through gloom and darkness to the Exarchs, the executive leaders of the Ministry. They spend their days motionless, being slowly eaten by their own shadows. Once they are fully digested, their shadows continue to serve, still bound to Lombre's will.

Exarchs interpret their instructions in their own idiosyncratic ways, slicing their meaning into thin slivers and passing them on to the Magisters. When they do this, Magisters gasp out loud in pain all across Spire. If they're fortunate, the pain comes from the pit of their stomachs; after heaving for a few moments, they may spit out a bile-soaked missive. If they're not so fortunate, they might have to visit a physician who can dig the note out of their liver with the help of a scalpel and an alcohol-infused rag.

A Magister's lifespan can be measured in messages. This potentially goes a long way to explain why they never seem to be in a good mood during the rare instances that a Minister gets to meet one.

COUNTER-COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE

As the Ministry grew in power and efficacy, the aelfir devoted potent resources to its destruction. Monetary rewards didn't work: residents began to report anyone who was rude to them on the street as a Minister. So instead, they recruited and bribed drow operatives of their own, launching a counter-insurgency campaign to infiltrate the Ministry's ranks.

This proved harder than they envisioned. The pain of the trials of initiation far outweighed the paltry recompense that was on offer, and the operatives broke down, fled, or died. So the aelfir got smarter, and their tactics got more creative.

THE FAKE TEST

This plan involved tracking potential Ministry recruits instead of arresting them. If they ever successfully joined up, they would be approached by an aelfir operative in disguise as a Magister. Under the pretense of an initiation test, the fake Magister would then convince the new recruit that they had to spy on the real Magister.

THE FAKE SPY

A handful of government operatives got good enough at impersonating Magisters that they implemented a more advanced version of the same ruse. Posing as Magisters, they contacted a cell and convinced them that their actual Magister was a spy and had to be assassinated. It's a high risk, high reward strategy; sometimes neither the government operatives nor the Ministry agents come out alive.

THE FAKE CELL

To keep potential recruits out of the hands of the Ministry, fake Magisters drafted them into fake Ministry cells. They would be assigned missions that harnessed their zeal for the purposes of the aelfir. This was potentially too successful: some of the aelfir's Magisters were eventually assassinated by real Ministers who then took their place, turning the imitation cells into real ones.

MINISTERIAL PRECEPTS

Because Exarchs and their Magisters are functionally independent within the Ministry, there is no orthodoxy of practice. Rites of initiation, articles of faith, ceremonies – nothing is standardised. But that doesn't mean that their beliefs are loose.

In their silos, Exarchs are free to breed theologies that become more intricate and overwrought with time. These beliefs trickle down to the worshippers of Lombre outside the Ministry, and are usually received with equal amounts of confusion and devotion.

One Exarch known as the AutoScribe is said to issue no instructions at all: they believe that from the point of view of the moon, the movement of Magisters and Ministers across Spire infallibly trace out the lines of the lost books of the Deyes-Liv. Another Exarch known as the Civil Divine believes that taming and harnessing the twisted bureaucracy of the city is the only way to victory. They proclaim that the revolution will be filed in triplicate, with the aelfir rubber-stamped out of existence.

But these individuals – if they exist – are unusual. The praxis and theologies of most Magisters tend towards a few core principles.



BE ANYBODY, BE NOBODY

When you joined the Ministry, you gave up an ordinary life. Friends, family, work – these are now things to be cultivated to give your life the right texture, but they are not important. The Ministry expects you to live at least two lives and die at least once. The only part of it that matters is what you can do for Lombre and for Spire.

MINISTER, CHANGE THYSELF. Shadow or Reputation, Minor Fallout. The Ministry repurposes some aspect of your personal life without your prior knowledge. Work with your GM to decide what it was and what it is now.



WORK IN DARKNESS

To work in darkness is to use the shadows to see and light to hide; to use light to be seen when you want to be seen, and use the darkness to disappear when the work is done. To work in darkness is to make plans that have a clarity of purpose, but to always have another ace up your sleeve. Sometimes a Minister is the ace; sometimes they're the decoy. This is what service to Lombre demands.

SET UP TO FAIL. Mind or Shadow, Moderate Fallout
You realise that you were never meant to succeed at this mission: you're just the decoy. As enemies descend on you, your only job is to get out of there.

BE A MIRAGE

Like the moon, the Ministry reflects the aspirations and fears of those who contemplate it, and it's always shapeshifting. Ministers are meant to inspire the faithful and terrify their enemies. For those who seek the liberation of Spire and the embrace of Lombre, the Ministry must be everything they want it to be. For those who subjugate Spire and wish to destroy the Hidden Mistress, the Ministry is the shapeless horror that lurks in the darkness. To be all of these things, the Ministry must be nothing. The greater the evidence that the Ministry does not exist, the more powerful it will be.

CLEAN UP THIS MESS. Shadow, Moderate Fallout. You or someone else left evidence of the Ministry's existence. Work out with your GM what was left behind and how to get it back. If you fail to retrieve the evidence, the Ministry's retribution will be swift and you won't be able to rest or resupply after the current mission.



WIN THE WAR

If you can feel the breath of the aelfir on your necks, that is your fault: an exposed neck is asking for trouble. The Ministry understands that this is a war, and the bodies pile up – even if some residents of Spire cannot see it. Ministers die, Magisters die. The Ministry is surrounded by enemies on all sides. Its odds of success are infinitesimal. And yet it will win, because it will do whatever it takes. It will make any bargain and cross any line to achieve victory.

FOR LOMBRE. Reputation, Moderate Fallout. The Ministry forces you to sacrifice someone you know. This could be an order to use them as baits, give them up to the City Guard, plant something incriminating on them, or something else. Work with your GM to decide what their precise demands are.



FESTIVALS OF OUR HIDDEN MISTRESS

While public celebration of Lombre is forbidden, certain festivals of the Hidden Mistress continue despite aelfir repression. It helps that, unlike other religions, these ceremonies involve little pomp or pageantry. In fact, the uninformed might not notice anything at all.

THE DAY OF CONTROL

Physical grace is central to the Hidden Mistress. During the festival, this virtue is reverently taken outside and then dropped on its head. This is the day when plates shatter on the floor, fires burn down filing cabinets, and people tumble into each other on the stairs.

The aelfir grumble that these acts of clumsiness are occasionally too convenient (too many accidents involve debt records and tax collectors). Every year, arrests precede and follow this celebration, but to no avail. The Day of Control rings with an annual chorus of groans, moans, clangs, bangs, and frantic whistles from enforcers of the law.

THE DAY OF LIFE

Every family in Spire has lost people to the aelfir. Some know the details of their deaths; some know nothing at all. One minute a person existed, and the next minute they were gone. The family might receive a formal notice in the mail, but if they visit the listed government department, all that waits for them is a series of increasingly curt responses.

On the Day of Life, these people are reborn. For one day every year, they are spoken of in the present tense. All calendars and photographs are taken down. The misadventures and motivations of the dead are cheerfully dissected over food and drink in the light of candles as the shadows loom.

THE DAY OF SHARING

On this day, locks are bought, doors are bolted, and windows are glued shut. On the Day of Sharing, all the faithful of Lombre are tasked with stealing from their neighbour. Neighbour, of course, is loosely defined; and the target isn't expected to be particularly valuable. The less valuable the object is, the purer the act of theft becomes.

In the days leading up to the festival, there is no admiring remark or casual compliment that isn't met with deep suspicion. The faithful squirrel away their prized possessions on the previous day, because when the clock strikes midnight all property rights are suspended. At the end of the day, every household will have both lost and gained in the great rearrangement. Those who have suffered in the exchange swear to do better next year.

THE DAY OF TRUST

Every dark elf understands the value of secrecy. A secret isn't an abstraction; it's a pillar of society and culture in Spire. Secrets can be a private thought, an embarrassing truth, or a dire revelation. On the Day of Trust, the faithful write down a confession, sign it, and hide it away somewhere. Then they go hunting for the confessions of others.

These secrets could be written plainly in notes, encoded in the beats of music, or concealed in some public graffiti. The medium is unrestricted, and the message could be anywhere. Those who have been praying to Lombre for a great act of aid or an intercession in their lives know that they must risk something of equally great value if they want to earn her favour. Besides, discovering the secrets of others has its own perks.

THE DAY OF TRUTH

Lies are central to drow society. They are not the grease that oils the wheels, but the wheels themselves. On the Day of Truth, the pious among the drow meet the morning as a new person. They will have forged or stolen documents. If they are more sociable, they've arranged to step into the shoes of a friend, replacing them for a day (or as long as the ruse can be maintained).

Those who are less devoted might only commit to answering every question with an untruth, or they might celebrate the day with one specific, grandiose lie, following it through as much as they can. Other drow play along, if only to see what happens when you give someone enough rope.

THE SHADOW CARNIVAL

On the last new moon of the year, Lombre's blessings fall on Spire. Nobody knows how it begins, and there's never any warning. In a district of the city, the shadows darken, the silence of night thickens, and heavy mist falls. Then, without light or sound, the dark elves dance.

They avoid the streets: this is a parade for the rooftops. From window to terrace, they leap through the air. They slide down slanted tiles and slip across domes. Old songs break out, the kind that sound embarrassing on more sober nights. Caught in the grips of the carnival, time flies – until, as suddenly as it began, it ends. An aelfir will spy a figure in joyous rapture, and with that, the spell is broken.





HALLOWS

The shrines to saints or hallows are often found in awkward corners of Spire, hidden away where they can go unnoticed by most. Ministers who consecrate themselves at the shrines of these hallows can avail themselves of the relevant Medium advances.

HALLOW YAGO

Yago was a disciple of the Hidden Mistress who took his commitment to precision in thought and deed to legendary degrees. As he advanced in years, it is said that he spoke and did less and less, often spending days in stillness and silence. But he isn't the saint of sitting around and doing nothing. Yago achieved the greatest results with the smallest actions. When asked to stop a war, the story goes that he moved five paces to the side and sat down. This minor gesture began a chain reaction that led to the toppling of an entire regime.

YAGO'S DISCIPLE. [Medium advance]

Brevity, wit, etc. When you set a scheme in motion with an order phrased in three words or less, roll with Mastery to see if you pull it off.

HALLOW MALLIKA

The feet of Mallika were said to never touch the ground. Whether or not she really spent her life leaping from roof to roof with aplomb, she is now the name invoked just before taking a leap – either literal (off a ledge) or metaphorical (of faith). Also known to be so graceful that she could dance across stretched rope, Mallika is additionally invoked by those engaged in tricky balancing acts. She is the patron of both daredevils and fence-sitters; those who risk everything, and those doing their best to play it completely safe.

MALLIKA'S DISCIPLE. [Medium advance]

You beseech Mallika to bestow grace unparalleled. Once per session, you can invoke Mallika's name during an act of acrobatics – either physical or mental – to automatically pull it off with aplomb.

HALLOW KELLENS

The hallow known as Kellens is one of the most popular hallows in drow myth; but there are no real facts about who Kellens was. All that is known is that a disciple of Lombre named Kellens became a master of disguise. By a quirk of culture, folk stories and myths where the protagonist can't be identified are now attributed to 'Kellens in disguise'. To bring up the fact that he couldn't possibly have been a prophet in the Nujab and a delver into the Heart at the same time is a good way to ensure you're no longer invited to parties.

KELLENS' DISCIPLE. [Medium advance]

You don't tell anyone everything; not even your cell mates. Once per session, mark D6 stress to **Reputation** and declare that a person who has been previously mentioned was one of your cover identities all along. The person you claim as a cover identity cannot be someone with more political power than you.

HALLOW QIDITZ

The story of Qiditz isn't a happy one. Once a venerated leader in Lombre's service, they were betrayed to the enemy and tortured in the depths of a subterranean prison. Every implement, every technique was tried, and their screams rent the air. They writhed in agony as new vistas in pain were unlocked by a battery of avant-garde tormentors. The enemy offered tricks and temptations, but not one coherent word escaped Qiditz's lips.

QIDITZ'S DISCIPLE. [Medium advance]

Your petty mortal pain is nothing compared to the torment of the Goddess as she weeps for the drow. Once per session, when you receive moderate or severe **Blood** or **Mind** fallout, you can reduce it to minor or moderate respectively.

EQUIPMENT

SILENCER. In Spire, a gun's loudness is part of its charm; much in the same way as a weapon might be praised for accuracy or range or destructive potential, on the bloody streets of Red Row and the shadowed back-alleys of the Silver Quarter, the louder a gun is the better it is. Why hide what you've got? Coupled with the human belief that traditional wars are often won by the side that generates the most noise and gunsmoke, occlusion and baffling technology is still rough-and-ready.

When a firearm is fitted with a silencer, you can use it when you mark stress while you're firing the gun; instead of marking the listed amount of stress to **Blood**, mark D3 stress to **Shadow** instead and discard the silencer.

GARROTE. A garrote isn't a weapon in as much as it's a length of tough cord that's used to choke the life out of your victim. Given that you can disguise it as rope - because it *is* rope - it remains perennially popular with the Ministry, who must often keep their murderous intentions secret. When armed with a garrote, you can use the **Sneak** skill in place of the **Fight** skill, but your target must remain unaware of your presence or intent until you get the cord around their neck and pull it tight; they mark D6, Piercing stress on a success or partial success.

LIQUID MIDNIGHT. Distilled from a top-secret source within the Vermessian, Liquid Midnight is a matte-black fluid contained in a ceramic container which is itself contained in a padded sheath. Breaking the container causes the darkness within to rapidly spread across an area like ink in water, snuffing out candles and dimming even the sun's light in a localised area. It functions as the active portion of **SNUFF THE FALSE SUNS** advance (*Spire*, p73) but it also affects sunlight. Make sure not to get it on your skin - it stains.

MOON GOGGLES. These goggles are fitted with unfathomably black lenses made - the defected Scryatrices claim - from sharded obsidian harvested from the dark side of the moon. Coupled with a red gem set above the lenses like a third eye which - again, they claim - projects "unlight" from the hidden moon, which can be seen through the goggles but is invisible to the naked eye. The long and short of it is: no matter their provenance, these goggles let you see in pitch blackness, but in well-lit areas they might as well be an expensive blindfold.

THE BLACKMAIL MACHINE. Located in the depths of the Ministry's headquarters beneath the Cathedral of Our Glorious Lady, the Blackmail Machine is theorised to have appeared from outside of time and rational space as no-one can remember building it - and the nature of its operation supports this theory, as it rewrites reality itself.

It is a computational engine the size of a living room that must be fueled with (living) cats that disappear when the machine is used, leaving no trace of their existence aside from a faint smell of piss. To operate it properly, expert sages fill out punch cards with encoded information on their target and their intentions and feed them into a slot - then wait for the machine to do its work.

Much of the Ministry's job is identifying leverage and using it to apply pressure to compromised targets - the Blackmail Machine removes all the legwork. Rather than finding out the target's dirty secret, it generates the secret and applies it directly to the target, who may not even be aware that it is happening. It also creates useful evidence of their (entirely new) shame for blackmail purposes, and it's bullet-proof evidence because it knows exactly what's happening. It determined it in the first place, after all.

Use of the Blackmail Machine is restricted to Magister-level operatives and above, and really only as a last resort or an emergency measure where investigation, falsifying documents and standard-issue honey traps have failed - the Ministry isn't exactly clear on what it's doing to reality, and each time it's used jealous Vermessian Sages get closer to uncovering its location and purpose. Before long they'll be hijacking alternate realities to break in and steal it.





RELATIONS WITH THE CHURCH OF OUR GLORIOUS LADY

The Ministry understands that the Cathedral is a compromised institution. The aelfir have taken a scalpel to the worship of Limyé, the Glorious Lady, and ensured that only the parts that are useful to them have survived. If the Cathedral wanders away from charity and maintenance, the iron knuckles of the City Guard rap on its doors and its leaders are quickly brought to heel. With every increasing whisper of the Ministry's actions, the Cathedral is pushed closer and closer to an outright denunciation – which the Ministry is perfectly happy with.

The Cathedral, unlike the Ministry, has the blessing of the aelfir to operate in the open. As far as the Ministry is concerned, the better the Cathedral's reputation with the aelfir, the more useful they are to the cause. As the mantra goes, the moon has many faces. The Cathedral must wear theirs.

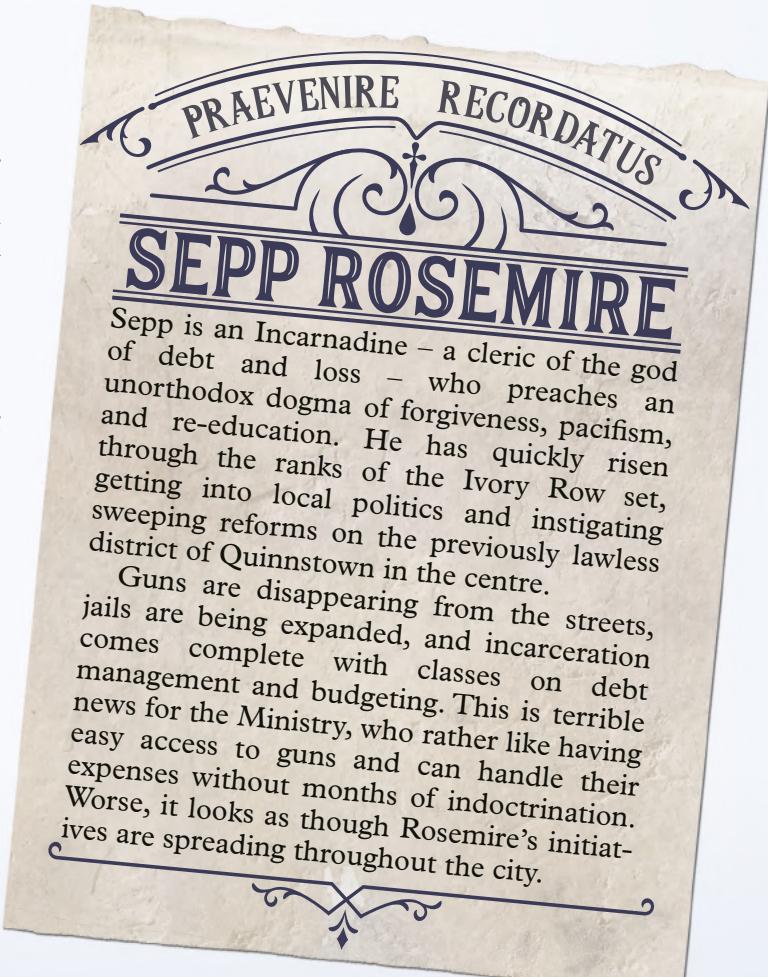
RELATIONS WITH THE VIGIL

The Ministry has known for a long time that the Vigil has been actively infiltrating their ranks, but trying to weed out Vigilites has been revealed to be a futile task. No matter how many they send on suicide missions, they always discover more. Even worse, as the grip of the aelfir on Spire squeezes ever tighter, the Ministry's focus on grace is becoming less popular. The opportunity for rage and blood that the Vigil offers seems to be more appealing to potential recruits.

In fact, some in the Ministry worry that the Vigil far exceeds them in potential power. One faction in particular – the Red Blade – suggests that the Ministry should change with the times and embrace direct violence over spycraft. However, this group remains in the background of official discussions, as their members keep being executed for being Vigil infiltrators.

RELATIONS WITH THE SOLAR CHURCH

The Solar Church is something of a joke to the Ministry; to an organisation who deal in shadows, a faith dedicated to sunlight and bold displays of power is seen as bumbling, uncomplex and graceless. They accuse the Solar Church's broad pantheistic approach as a tacky attempt to recruit as many people as possible (though it seems to work) and the popular image of a Solar priest amongst Ministers is one of an idiot who hasn't paused to reflect upon the true nature of existence, instead being satisfied with bright lights and catchy hymnals.



THE CHURCH OF OUR GLORIOUS LADY

By Pauline Chan

The drow goddess Limyé, Our Glorious Lady, is the light side of the moon. She personifies the virtues of tenacity and community, teaching her chosen people through songs, sermons, and stories. As the only facet of Damnou permitted within Spire, Limyé also now represents the indefatigable spirit of the drow under aelfir rule.

The Church of Our Glorious Lady has expanded to provide community services and charity—whatever they can give to comfort and support their fellow drow. Many of these services are offered through community temples scattered throughout Spire. Their locations range from a centuries-old temple in Ivory Row to a huddle of tents and shacks on a *Derelictus* rooftop, veiled by a sea of laundry lines. No two temples are the same, either in structure or services offered, save for the eight watchful eyes of a guardian spider painted or engraved above every entrance.

Uniting the city's disparate temples are the Weavers, who attend to the network from the battered grandeur of the Cathedral of Our Glorious Lady. They preserve and research drow lore and history, and suppress any heresies that threaten the stability of the Church (or its tenuous existence under aelfir rule).

Drow in Spire rarely refer to Limyé by name, instead preferring to use titles such as Our Glorious Lady, or the Lady for short. Sometimes she is referred to as the Kindly Face (e.g. 'May the Kindly Face light your way') or Mama Moon (e.g. 'Oh Mama Moon, what have you done this time?'). The aelfir, whether out of ignorance or disrespect, generally call her Limyé if they deign to acknowledge her at all. Other outsiders simply call her the drow goddess.

EVERDAY WORSHIP

Except for holidays, the Church of Our Glorious Lady does not run any formal religious services or require regular visits. Instead, congregation members are free to organise their own gatherings at their local temple or visit on their own.

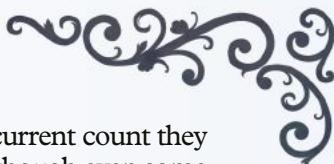
These gatherings have no prescribed rituals, but most groups start with quiet contemplation before opening the floor to those who feel moved to speak. Some gatherings remain silent in prayer. Others take turns sharing their experiences, or

recounting old stories about Limyé (like how she challenged Ishkrah to a weaving contest and created the tapestry of stars that hides the sun, or how she created mushrooms so her children would never starve whenever the White Rabbit came by). The only requirement is that, while in the main hall, discussions should be centred on the Lady or on church matters.

Lay priests can also lead impromptu services on request, though their primary responsibilities include managing the temple itself; leading monthly community meetings; counselling; community outreach; and mediation on issues – except for those involving sects or schisms. The Church's policy is to remain neutral on the schisms that have shredded the Home Nations.

In keeping with the tenet of community, drow are most comfortable honouring Limyé by performing good works, large and small, for the people around them. Families take turns baking bread for everyone to share after the monthly meetings, while aunties form quilting circles (they take donated clothes too ragged to be worn, and turn them into quilts for shelters). Volunteers linger outside the temples after work, offering to help their neighbours with much-needed home repairs without alerting their landlords. Some of these volunteers also serve as Maintainers: a quiet sect who acquire building materials through extra-legal means and repair crumbling church masonry. Additionally, it is an honour to be chosen as part of a Lahjan's escort to the next temple, and a rite of passage to spend a week volunteering with one of the Cathedral's many projects. Even an action as simple as helping an elderly neighbour carry their groceries upstairs every week is said to strengthen one's bonds to the Goddess and to fanmi.

It's common to see workers stretched out on benches in front of a temple during a break, or aunties pausing between errands to trade greetings and gossip while the children run inside to check for free snacks. Even drow who follow other cults or consider themselves estranged from the church will still visit their neighbourhood temple to trade rumours, seek post-durance counseling, or ask a lay priest to help resolve a dispute between neighbours (especially if they don't want the Guard to get involved).



HALLOWS AND REINCARNATION

Hallows – or saints, as other religions might call them – are a subject of much consternation in the Church of Our Glorious Lady. Despite the official ban on hallow worship within the city of Spire, the Church cannot help but venerate them because they keep spontaneously turning up.

The majority of drow in Spire believe that when they die, they'll live eternally in the Moon Garden, bathed in silver light with the Goddess – assuming they have lived lives that pleased her. Those who live unsatisfactory lives are thrown onto the dark side of the moon, and gradually fade away into dust and whispers. But hallows aren't subject to the same restrictions. These agents of the Goddess are reborn again and again throughout the centuries, and achieve their full power when they come of age.

It was thought by some more pessimistic figures within the Church that the phenomenon of hallow reincarnation was simply a combination of extensive teaching of the hallow's acts, and the propensity of the organisation to attract strange, desperate, and delusional people. But even after the aelfir banned all open worship of saints in Spire, they kept appearing. The Church held their own investigations into the matter to stop it happening before the high elves got wind of it (surely there was a secret group disseminating this banned knowledge?) but found nothing except more reincarnated saints. Young drow with tremendous spiritual power and knowledge of previous lives that they simply could not have accessed contacted the Church in greater and greater numbers.

Hidden away from the eyes of the aelfir and taught by the Church to understand their past lives through reading forbidden texts, twenty or so surviving hallows are coming to terms with the fact that their current lives are lies. They are merely temporary things, matchstick flames to the raging bonfires of their true purpose.

Not all of the hallows contacted the Church, though. Some suspect foul play: that perhaps they are simply being gathered together for easy removal. These feral saints reject the temples and live strange lives in the undercity, pulling worshipful cults around themselves for support. Unhindered by the restrictive teachings of the Church, they wield unpredictable and dangerous levels of power. Before long, most will be captured and indoctrinated.

HALLOW CHRYSOS OF GRAND TENACITY

Hallow Chrystos of Grand Tenacity is the only saint from the Order of Her Implacable Solace – a fact which rankles the surviving members, and reminds them of their outsider status within the wider church. They take pride in finding the statues that her vessels became and hiding them away within

their winding chambers. At their current count they have four and a half statues total, though even some of the intact pieces bear the marks of repair and replacement to the eyes of an expert. Each of the statues have her golden eyes – the ones that still have eyes, anyway – as proof of their sainthood. Every member of the Order dearly wishes to be displayed alongside one of her vessels when they finally transform into marble completely.

HALLOW BRACHUS

Hallow Brachus is the patron saint of Morticians, and one of the few Damnic saints that the aelfir allow the drow to worship. After all, were it not for Brachus' valuable surgeons and mystics, they'd be on the heap with the rest of their compatriots. Brachus, it is said, was a doctor in ancient Ys with a family keen to marry them off to a wealthy merchant; but they had no interest in taking a spouse, and instead wished to spread the light of Limyé through the world with healing and medicine. One day, their father demanded that they listen to their heart and do as their family wished. In a righteous fury, Brachus cut out their own heart and threw it at their father – then carried on working as if nothing had happened.

While this is certainly a colourful story (and indeed is widely regarded to be apocryphal), the Morticians do make it their business to pluck out the hearts of their patients and freeze them at their current age. Brachus' research formed the basis of what would become modern drow medicine. Open-chested statues of the hallow can be seen in many surgeries and medical practices. Anointing one's tools with disinfecting sacrament whilst intoning their Treatise of Humours is commonplace amongst the Mortician sect.

HALLOW VERDIGAN

Hallow Verdigan was gripped with a wanderlust that was quite unheard of in her underground hamlet in the Home Nations. Against the wishes of her family, she set off on a pilgrimage to better understand the Goddess by circumnavigating the globe. She reasoned that the planet on which she resided was but a flawed reflection of the perfection that shone down from the moon; Limyé's attempt to demonstrate her glory in a manner that mortals might understand. So, why not try to see as much of it as possible?

Verdigan travelled from Ys down to Destera, and on to Aliquam and Nujab, and the distant lands of Horizon far in the east, and beyond to the lost kingdoms where nomad ships skim across a golden sea of sand. She travelled through necropoli where wytch-fires blazed with actinic light, through mycelial empires and tumultuous seas, until her raft returned to Ys and she immediately dropped dead upon setting foot on shore. She is often depicted without feet in an attempt to show that she died from sacred exhaustion.





THE CATHEDRAL OF OUR GLORIOUS LADY

The Cathedral of Our Glorious Lady is less of a single building than an organised cacophony of architecture packed into several city blocks. It is a mess of maze-like extensions and improvised structures, all renovated countless times, picked over by scavengers, then reclaimed and repaired for some new purpose.

Through the once-silvered ceremonial gates that mark the border between the mundane and the divine, a nest of stalls, shacks, and mismatched buildings occupy what used to be the Cathedral's grand plaza. Tourists crowd the main path, gawking at the stalls selling everything from candles and headscarves to grilled mushroom skewers and protection charms 'made from real moonstone'. Pickpockets weave in and out of the throng; some even make a point to donate on their targets' behalf as a service to Our Glorious Lady.

The Cathedral provides most of its services to the needy on the fringes of the plaza, including their soup kitchen, resource centre, and volunteer clinic. The lines are long, but in between quips about what today's soup will be (it's always the same), the people waiting trade rumours about the rest of the city. Many of the surrounding buildings have also been co-opted by the Cathedral for a variety of purposes. These include daycares, classrooms, dormitories, egg clutches, offices, and even a thrift store specialising in donated items from incoming priests who are intent on devoting themselves to vows of poverty.

The Cathedral itself rises above the hubbub, its twin spires flanking its famed iridescent dome. Built centuries ago by a Desteran prince whose name disappeared with the cornerstone long before the aelfir arrived, some of the original stonework has survived years of neglect and opportunistic scavenging. But just as others have taken parts of the church for their own projects, the church has claimed pieces of the city in return. A discerning eye might pick out some planks from the North Docks used to repair a bench, or marble tiles inlaid with unicorn horn from an abandoned Ivory Row mansion to refloor a prayer room (to say nothing of the decommissioned Vermessian train cars wedged into what used to be an alley). Rumour has it that the Cathedral even contains pieces of the Solar Basilica, though no two people agree on what those pieces are, let alone where they might have been placed. The aelfir are reportedly still searching the Solar Basilica for any irregularities.

Above the entrance of the Cathedral proper are the familiar eight eyes, their moonstone glinting through a veil of protective webs woven by the Cathedral's spiders-in-residence. Through the double doors is the vestibule, which offers hot spiced tea and braided bread (said to resemble a plait of Our Glorious Lady's hair) after services, and side alcoves with sliding partitions for prayer groups of varying sizes. The nave sits under the dome itself, which is supported by a ring of stone pillars inlaid with moon-crystals that provide a pale light when candles are not needed. Behind and above the entrance to the nave is the balcony reserved for the choir, accessed via a spiral staircase tucked into a nearby pillar. Rows of curved benches are arranged in a crescent layout facing the sanctum at the far end of the room, where a Quicksilver Clock resides with its honour guard.

The origin of the eight Quicksilver Clocks remains the subject of scholarly debates and civil wars. The popular belief is that Limyé gifted eight such clocks to the drow after she led them underground so they could still track the sun, moon, and stars without risking exposure. She imbued the clocks with part of her essence in the form of a silvery liquid, so they would always run true. However, exactly which part of her essence it was has sparked two civil wars, a schism, and countless more bar fights – leading to the aphorism 'a fight about dogma is a dogfight'.





Beneath the nave is the undercroft, a labyrinth of tunnels and rooms which are helpfully unmapped due to conflicting renovations by rival sects. Church policy restricts access to clergy above a certain rank, in part to reduce the number of missing priests and visitors. Occasionally, a visiting academic is escorted to a study room and provided with a bell to ring for assistance and an exhortation to leave only with a priest. Most rooms in the undercroft are devoted to offices, storage, and the most prestigious (and dampest) dormitories. The tunnels are also rumoured to be home to the Cathedral's reliquaries; the crypts for every hallow; oracular chambers; the Church's internal affairs office, which is responsible for rooting out heresies and searching for hallows; and headquarters for the Maintainers.

Perhaps the most famous section of the undercroft is the Cathedral's library. This ancient library, dating back to the early Desteran emperors, is the exclusive domain of the Archivists: a circle of elder midwives charged with acquiring, recording, and preserving the legacy of the drow for future generations. Spire's Archivists are known to approach their duties with fanatical devotion, willing to go to extreme lengths to recover any drow cultural work regardless of importance or danger. Even the Church, which is intent on ritually dissolving every copy of the unabridged Sonnets from the Heart, has yet to successfully petition the Archivists for their version of it. To protect the library's knowledge from thieves, the Archivists maintain an undocumented classification system to organise the thousands of works stored in overflowing shelves or columns suspended overhead (alongside the bones of past trespassers).

FACTIONS

While the most populous faction within the Cathedral are traditionalists (known as **Gatherers** or the **Tenacious**, based on who you ask), a growing number of the clergy are joining the **Heavens Undivided**. These are a radical group of drow who espouse a syncretic worship of Limyé as one of the Solar Pantheon: separate, of course, but as much present in the celestial delegation as the sun itself. Their opponents argue that this is godless political maneuvering bordering on heresy; but the Undivided are all too aware that the Solar Church's disinterest and distaste towards the Cathedral can't be sustained for much longer without the total collapse of the organisation.

The aelfir are broadly against the idea of letting a drow goddess join the ranks of their divine patrons. However, it is currently in fashion amongst the high elves to embody a sort of ironic gnosticism in public – perhaps to ridicule the less faithful among their number. It's not out of the question that a persuasive enough argument – combined with the right kind of fashionably scandalous supporter – could bring Limyé into mainstream worship.

Meanwhile, the ultraconservative members of the **Order of Her Implacable Solace** are happy to wait out this difficult 'aelfir' business until the whole thing blows over. The Order is made up of truly ancient sages who extend their lifespans indefinitely by gradually turning into marble statues via jealously-guarded magics. Once the world has become perfect enough for Limyé to grace it with her presence, they posit, they will all be awoken to share in the new and glorious kingdom of their goddess. The comings and goings of the world outside their sanctums are of little interest to them. It's said that a handful of their number aren't aware that Spire was ever conquered.

The Order has fewer members each year, unless you count the statues as well, in which case it remains at roughly the same number. The caretakers who guard and polish the less mobile elements of the congregation are increasingly overworked: the family lines of serfs dating back centuries are either dying out, or giving up their lives of servitude for something more profitable and exciting.

The **Universal Celebrants** are a welcome sight on almost any street in the city. This quiet sect, primarily composed of older women, make it their business to be present at any and all festivals in Spire – whether they're part of Limyé's domain or not. Their cake stalls are legendary, their temporary tea-rooms have surprisingly good service despite the aging staff, and their guess-the-weight-of-the-fruit-cake contest has never been won.

This is largely done in an effort to raise extra funds for the congregation, make contact with those of other faiths, and generally insert themselves into the goings-on of whatever ceremony is happening nearby. No one could suspect an old woman carrying a tea tray of any ill intent, after all. Ministry cells occasionally find allies among their number when they need someone to distract the guards with a biscuit and some gentle conversation.

EQUIPMENT

RELIC BLUDGEON. (D6, Conduit, Tiring)

There are more destroyed temples of Limyé and Damnou than there are surviving ones, despite the best attempts of the drow of Spire. The fragmented remains of the buildings that haven't been repurposed into different structures entirely are venerated and cherished by the followers of Our Glorious Lady; they are relics of a glorious and distant past. The more militant members of the Church sometimes fashion these artefacts into weapons and beseech the Goddess to guide their hand in combat. A fragment of a marble staircase bound to a wooden bannister, a blackiron chain that once held a moonstone chandelier, and the painted head of a saint's statue have all seen use against the enemies of the Church.

CILISE. The tenacity of the followers of Limyé is peerless, and the cilise is an extremist representation of their unshakeable faith. These garments abrade and cut the skin of the wearer, showing that even though the world is set against them, there is no torment they cannot endure in the name of their faith. Once per situation, the wearer may replace a **Mind** fallout with a **Blood** fallout of equivalent level (they must do this before the **Mind** fallout takes effect).

FONT OF PLENTY. A semi-mythical fountain, much written-of in legend, that currently rests within the personal collection of the aelfir Lord River-Shatters-Stone in the frozen district of Amaranth. At the centre of the base of the great stone bowl is a representation of Limyé as the Weeping Mother: the aspect of her that grieves for her lost children. The eyes weep a nourishing, greyish fluid that tastes of silver and the night sky. Each time a faithful drow in Spire goes hungry for a day, she will cry enough nectar to sustain them should they drink of it. Even a thimbleful is enough to fill the belly of a hungry drow with miraculous satiety. When famine and injustice is rife on the streets of Spire, the bowl spills over with this silvery liquid. Lord River-Shatters-Stone is said to bathe in it with his most trusted lovers.

RELATIONS WITH THE MINISTRY

Officially, the Church of Our Glorious Lady considers the Ministry of Our Hidden Mistress an extremist group of heretics (one of the Great Heresies banned within Spire, in fact), and warns its people to report any suspicions or sightings to the City Guard. The Church prefers to disclaim all knowledge about and responsibility for the Ministry and their ilk. However, the lay folk – to the clergy's eternal dismay – will latch onto the latest rumours with a horrified fascination, similar to watching a runaway rickshaw catapult into a food vat.

Behind closed doors, the relationship between the Church and the Ministry is murkier. The Church has never forgotten (or been allowed to forget) that the Ministry persists, despite the aelfir's best attempts. Both groups seek to preserve the drow, their culture, and their identity. Both resent their aelfir occupiers and the countless humiliations the drow have suffered. The Ministry, however, has made no secret of its ruthless quest to overthrow the aelfir. This leaves the Church to deal with the consequences: the Paladins that come knocking for another purge, the fear of the community beforehand and the grief afterwards, the lives and livelihoods that must be rebuilt. On the other hand, the Ministry has been sold out enough times by disgruntled clergy or paid spies that no Magister involves one of their cells in Church business without a lecture about the backstabbing cowardice of priests.

The Church and the Ministry still collaborate with each other on the rare occasions that their goals align. These arrangements are commonly done in secret between individuals, rather than institutions, and forged with an understanding of mutual distrust (as with most Ministry missions). Some Magisters keep an eye out for such opportunities, hoping to cultivate disaffected priests as valuable informants or at least sympathisers. The Church leadership similarly uses these opportunities to keep tabs on Ministry activity.

RELATIONS WITH THE VIGIL

Officially, the Church brands anyone claiming to be part of the Sect of Our Crimson Vigil as a heretic, an extremist, and a terrorist working against the aims and purpose of the Church. Church officials refuse to dignify any questions about their legitimacy with an answer, except by stating that the Vigil is one of the Great Heresies.

The Church's general opinion behind closed doors is about the same. The Paladins still send their agents over to discuss the Vigil's latest exploits (which are invariably both public and undeniable), but the meetings tend to be less hostile and more a matter of presenting a united front.



RELATIONS WITH THE SOLAR CHURCH

The priests of our Glorious Lady maintain an embittered peace with the Solar Church; after all, they are aware that they exist within Spire solely as a “kindness” on behalf of the aelfir, and could be stamped out should they step too far out of line. They are continually reminded that their faith is lesser than the Solar faith: a curio, a primitive throw-back to Home Nations beliefs that the drow persist in following - and with the near-total lack of funding and support from the city council, this image is manifested in crumbling temples, pitiful alms and an aging congregation.

PRAEVENIRE RECORDATUS

GREY TOILS-IN-SUNLIGHT

Grey Toils-In-Sunlight (he renounced his original family name) is a noble-born dark elf who venerate the Solar Church above all others - and while paying at least lip service to the religion is considered the done thing, Grey has gone all in on his devotion. He has built dozens of workhouse-temples in the Works where impoverished drow can find back-breaking employment, terrible living conditions and round-the-clock religious propaganda in an effort to draw them away from their sinful life. In every single one, red stained-glass windows depicting the glorious superiority of the high elves over the other peoples of the world stand above rows of workbenches and sleeping cots, and hourly prayers ensure clean thought and pure living.

Most of his profits are fed back to his aelfir masters through donations to the Solar Church; he's desperate to be accepted or at least acknowledged for his contribution, but has had no luck yet. Eliminating him would stifle a significant source of income for the Church - and if done publicly, it could act as a potent symbol of the revolution.



THE CRIMSON VIGIL

By Helen Gould

The illegal cult of the Crimson Vigil never sleeps. They worship the red moon: the facet of drow religion that represents rage, blood, and retribution. She is called Our Lady of Vengeance, Lekolé, and she is the mother of every drow who would do anything to end their persecution.

The members of this sect show their devotion through violent, dangerous acts of revenge against the aelfir, who commit daily atrocities and continually abuse dark elves on an individual and institutional scale. It's a dangerous cult to join. But then, all cults are.

New recruits understand that they might die quickly and that collateral damage is always on the cards. They also understand that it's a necessary sacrifice to achieve the freedom of the drow in Spire.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Unlike the Ministry (which at least has some forms of hierarchy and leadership), the Crimson Vigil actively avoids any discernible central structures.

In most places, it's incredibly dangerous to admit to someone else that you're in the cult, or even just sympathetic to them. Almost nobody does this unless they themselves are actively recruiting someone into the cult (or pretending to do so for ulterior motives). This means that most Vigilites have lonely but intense lives, sustaining themselves with their belief, violence, hatred, and the ragtag meetings they manage to attend.

This is actually one of the reasons that they survive: they are scattered around in no discernible pattern, and leaderless apart from their own instincts and general faith. The tactics used by the Crimson Vigil differ from person to person, and a hundred schemes are always in progress from the petty to the grandiose. The only sacred texts are the prayers that are whispered from person to person – or, occasionally, on a person if they have tattooed themselves with declarations of their devotion.

The most successful plans – where success is defined as making a powerful statement against the rule of the aelfir – tend to be slow-growing and invisible until they suddenly become very loud and extremely brutal. Perhaps a member of a worker's guild has been slowly converting the others until they reach a critical mass and finally murder their aelfir bosses; maybe a Vigilite bar owner has been schmoozing her way into the aelfir's good graces before opening fire at an exclusive tasting night; or maybe a mild-mannered bookshop owner sets fire to his own spireblack-filled premises on a day when it is full of high-class clientele.

The less successful (and far more common) plans involve a newly converted Vigilite simply gathering whatever materials they think they need and launching an assault against the nearest oppressive person, symbol, or building. In the end, it's all very much down to how one chooses to express their worship of Lekolé; after all, there's often no one they can easily ask.

In addition, there are members of the Ministry among the ranks of the Vigil: those who have grown tired of the slow, slippery tactics of sabotage and espionage. Naturally, they will keep their new inclinations to themselves for as long as possible while they attempt to make Vigilite contacts and come up with explosive plans to finally end the aelfir menace.

Even with this focus on individual methods, it would be impossible to maintain a coherent religion without some kind of contact and communication. To let people know about day-to-day information, such as a weakness that members might like to exploit or a target that should be eliminated, there are dozens of signals and dead drop locations among each isolated group of Vigilites.

For example, perhaps a storefront on a busy street displays a red silk handkerchief one day; this can translate to 'check the dead drop for a new weapon'. It is common courtesy to leave behind a sharp token, such as a tooth or a screw, if something in a dead drop has been collected. That way, if somebody visits it after you, they will know that whatever was there is now in the right hands.

If there are bigger events, or someone learns of highly time-sensitive information, meetings of every Vigilite in the area can be called by whoever has something to say. As with the smaller pieces of information, there are various signals that might be used: a wild ululating scream at a certain time of night or from a certain place; a weirdly coloured fire in an unusual spot; even a dead body dangling from a rafter.

If the person calling a meeting is particularly favoured by Lekolé, they can communicate their desire via the sheer force of their hatred, causing a physical feeling of burning in the chests of everyone nearby who shares their faith. This feeling of immolation will not go away until all the Vigilites within half a mile have found and joined their comrade.

In general, though, it is a pretty big problem that there is no singular, recognisable way to communicate any of this. For new recruits, the process of initiation is often a high stakes game of pattern-spotting and observation (perhaps this splash of red paint means something, perhaps it

doesn't). The Vigilite who recruited them often vanishes almost as soon as they had appeared. The only way to know for sure what various signals mean is through practice, and some do write them down – but always in code, just in case.

Unfortunately, most recruits don't last long enough to get to that stage. This is especially true because the occasional undercover City Guard might pretend to be a Vigilite (or an aspiring initiate) to identify and neutralise potential threats to the 'peace'. These sting operations tend to lead to public executions, making everybody who is interested in the Crimson Vigil extra paranoid whenever they are approached by someone else. A lot of confusing fights start this way.

But, there are some members who have managed to stick around for a while. They are tougher, know more, and are respected by the others. Though the Vigil has no official leaders, these are the people that will be listened to (especially since they tend to have all the information and call most of the meetings).

SIGNALS

There are innumerable codes used between Vigilites, but they differ wildly between the districts of Spire. A signal that means 'bide your time' in Derelictus might mean 'strike now' in New Heaven. Common methods of communication include:

Changing small items in shop displays, such as moving something from one side of the window to another, or replacing displays entirely. A mannequin wearing a hat might mean that a high profile target can be expected in the area soon, or a birdcage with an open door might mean there is a Vigilite on the run from the law.

Adjustments to clothing to indicate status or information the wearer might hold. Wearing a scarlet belt might mean that the person knows where a stash of weapons can be found; holding a purse or wallet in the left hand might mean they have access to illicit funding, or that they know where something valuable is hidden.

Codewords, particularly in messages left in dead drop locations. Any reference to something or someone being 'red' usually means that they are sympathetic to the Crimson Vigil; mentioning the moon can indicate different dates depending on context; and talking about cutlery is sometimes code for weaponry.

CEREMONIES, RITES, AND INITIATIONS

Members of the Crimson Vigil are constantly in danger and must always maintain secrecy, so there are no standard daily rites that members have to publicly perform. However, most believers are fervent enough that they will come up with their own.

These rites lean heavily towards various ways of privately proving their dedication to Lekolé, such as staying up all night staring at the moon, reciting the full names of upcoming targets or carving them into surfaces, or making small blood sacrifices as a kind of appetiser for future destruction. This is also where tattoos might come in, whether done in code by an ordinary and unsuspecting tattooist, or secretly (and often badly) at home.

Having said that, there are also weddings, funerals, and initiation rites that follow vaguely similar templates. Attendance for these ceremonies tends to be fairly small, since mass gatherings are never a good idea and most Vigilites only know two or three others – but that doesn't make them any less important. Vigilites might also weave tokens of their secret faith into the rituals of other, more socially acceptable gods.

Half-masks that cover the eyes and nose (and often a hat and/or hood) are worn for all meetings, especially for the core ceremonies. That way, nobody can be sure of anybody else's face, making identification and betrayal difficult if anyone is captured.

Everybody's mask is unique, because they will have had to cobble it together themselves from whatever scrap materials they can find. Some will have hammered it together out of sheet metal, all jagged edges and menacing angles; some might make theirs from the bones of those they have assassinated, perhaps with old pieces of flesh and tendon still attached; others might take a different tack entirely, using scorched wood, warped glass, or maybe just carrying around a burning censer to wreath themselves in impenetrable smoke.

Anything will do as long as it hides your face and looks intimidating – though it does also have to have been blessed by Lekolé. You'll know that your mask has been blessed if you leave it in a pool of blood overnight and find it clean in the morning. New and unlucky Vigilites have been caught when going to retrieve their masks, since blood does have a habit of spreading and leaking. It's assumed that if this happens, Lekolé has not approved of their creation.



WEDDINGS

Vigilites do fall for each other, regardless of whether they have ever seen each other's faces. Perhaps their eyes met across the smoking ruins of a building, or they admired each other's knife tricks as they stabbed aelfir to death together, or they fought each other to a standstill and were mutually impressed.

Entering a committed relationship is not urgent enough to warrant any significant gathering of Vigilites, so weddings are generally just performed by the individuals themselves. The only requirements are to ensure that Lekolé can witness their marriage by having the ceremony under the blood moon, and to remove their masks afterwards as an act of trust in each other.

A Vigilite wedding is essentially a sacred blood pact to Lekolé and the other people in the marriage. After saying whatever vows they have prepared, everyone involved cuts each other's palm deeply, holds hands to mingle their blood, then cauterises each other's wounds. It's simple, but effective: every time you look at your own hand, you'll remember the commitment you made.

Many also set fire to something in the place where they got married, to mark it as a significant location; this is an optional extra that tends to be done more for flair than devotion. If the fire gets out of hand and burns down the whole venue, it is a clear sign of Lekolé's disapproval of the match.

Divorces are not common, mainly because marriage is usually ended by someone getting killed. When they do happen, Vigilites tend to hold a grudge. Commitment and loyalty is a big thing in the cult, whether you're committing yourself to Lekolé or to your partner/s. Breaking an oath or turning out to be unworthy of trust is taken as a very bad sign, and many divorced couples end up denouncing each other as traitors. Accusations like this are not usually taken very seriously by Vigilites outside the relationship, though.

LEKOLÉ'S DEVOTION. [Divine, Medium advance] *Marriage means being there for each other in the good times and the bad; especially the bad.* When your partner/s experience life-threatening circumstances, you are aware of it and can immediately transport yourself to their general area to help them. You get a single action to save them; if you do, mark D3 stress to **Mind**; if you do not, mark D8.

FUNERALS

Vigilites die a lot, so it is regarded as a waste of time and resources to devote a funeral to every single person who is lost during their holy crusade. Instead, there is a communal funeral held at the end of each year. It's the only regular event that every cult member should try to attend.

The annual funeral is the most important ritual for Vigilites because it involves hunting down a sacrificial aelfir to please Our Lady of Vengeance (which often takes a lot of careful planning). Pleasing Lekolé and performing a commendable funeral is paramount. Once kidnapped, the aelfir victim is burned alive as a symbol of the Crimson Vigil's commitment to vengeance on behalf of their fallen comrades and all drow.

Generally, the funeral is a simple ceremony. The names of people who are known or strongly suspected to have died are shouted out as the unfortunate aelfir is committed to the pyre. The ashes and screams are dedicated to Lekolé and to the fallen.

A lot of the time, only one or two people will know that another Vigilite has died due to the individualised nature of the cult. If nobody knows that you have died or disappeared, you won't be announced by name at the funeral. If you're lucky, somebody will yell out 'And the rest!' at the end, and you can be remembered as part of a blanket statement.

If a Vigilite is announced as dead at a funeral but is actually alive, it is generally seen as extremely poor taste to turn up anyway or correct anybody about it. The right thing to do is to decide on a replacement name to continue the work, as it's bad luck to operate under a dead person's name.

Nobody knows how many active Vigilites are previously-declared-dead people who have simply taken a new name and carried on in the faith – or how many have 'died' and then decided to go back to an ordinary life, with the secrets of the Vigil still in their heads.

VIGILITE NAMES

If you want to make your character a Vigilite, you can roll 2D10 on these tables to come up with your name.

HONORIFIC CALLSIGN

1	Brother	Hack
2	Sister	Blood
3	Sibling	Mangle
4	Cousin	Slice
5	Friend	Rend
6	Renegade	Burn
7	Outlaw	Flay
8	Herald	Lacerate
9	Consort	Knife
10	Augur	Maul

INITIATIONS

The only people required to attend these are the person who is joining the cult and the person who introduced them to it. If possible, one other member should also be in attendance as a witness – though given the Vigil's high rate of devotee turnover, this sometimes just means whoever has survived the week.

The process of initiation is as follows:

THE TRIAL OF FIRE involves praying aloud to Lekolé for her acceptance while holding a pinch of spireblack. If it ignites, you have been accepted.

This stage is almost never failed, as the initiate will usually treat the spireblack with a little something extra to make it particularly reactive to the friction and heat of a person's fingers. Obviously this results in burns, but the initiate is expected to take that in their stride.

THE TRIAL OF BLOOD involves fighting one of the other Vigilites present. The aim is not to kill them (though it's not seen as a bad thing) or even to seriously injure them; the aim is to wound them in a way that Lekolé will appreciate. For example: burning someone is auspicious due to the sacred nature of fire among Vigilites; stabbing someone in the eye bodes ill, because it affects their ability to see the Red Moon.

The initiate fails the trial if they die or cause no harm. There are, naturally, a lot of deaths at this stage.

SACRED WOUNDS. [Divine, Low advance].
The harm you inflicted on others has shaped your future. When you became a member of the Crimson Vigil, you had to fight somebody as part of your initiation. You wounded them in a particular way, and that means that your journey as a Vigilite will be marked similarly.

Choose one from the list below.

- **Face.** *You know how useful correctly-timed violence can be when someone needs to get the message.* You can mark D6 stress to **Blood** to remove minor **Reputation** fallout from yourself or one of your allies, or D8 stress to **Blood** to downgrade **Moderate Reputation** fallout to **Minor**.
- **Belly.** *You know the fastest way to a person's heart.* Roll with **Mastery** when you use a weapon to threaten someone. If you fail the roll, take D3 **Shadow** fallout in addition to any other stress: your victim will remember your face.
- **Knee.** *You know where to hit people to really make it hurt.* Choose a weapon you own and add the tags **Debilitating** and **Dangerous** to it.
- **Hand.** *You know how to be precise.* When in moonlight, you roll with **Mastery** whilst being quiet or sneaky.

If these trials have been passed, the initiate is granted **THE FIRST BLESSING**: they receive their Vigilite name, bestowed by the person who recruited them. These usually take the form of an honorific and a callsign: Brother, Sister, Comrade, or a similar form of address, followed by a suitably threatening word, such as Sharp, Blood, or Dagger.

Finally, the initiate is given **THE FIRST QUEST**, a holy mission for Lekolé: something dangerous that will really test their mettle and prove their worth to the Crimson Vigil and Our Lady of Vengeance. For this reason, there are often recruitment sprees when the current members are planning a particularly big attack: the new initiates can be sent off to be canaries in the mine. If they return, great; if they don't, well, onto the next likely candidate.

ACTS OF FAITH

Oaths are not enough to prove one's loyalty to the cause of the Crimson Vigil. Words are easily said, after all, and anybody could be an infiltrator. So, at the beginning of most Crimson Vigil meetings, the first item of business is a demonstration of faith from each person in attendance.

These demonstrations can include:

BURNING RINGS

Initiates attending meetings often wear or are given a metal symbol, such as a pendant or ring, which can be heated up to cause burns. This is generally done once a month – enough time to allow the skin to heal, but not quite enough time to lose the scar before it is done again. Showing these scars is a sign of your willingness for self-sacrifice.

WITNESSED WORSHIP

Any anti-establishment act of vandalism or violence, which must be done as soon as possible.

For ordinary meetings, this can be anything from writing 'AELFIR OUT' on a wall to destroying the premises of local collaborators or aelfir-friendly businesses. If it is a funeral – the most important meeting for Vigilites – the act has to be a big one involving more than two people, such as blowing up a common haunt of the oppressors or assassinating a high profile target.

Once these actions are done, the meeting can proceed – usually in a different place to where it started. At this point in the life of the Crimson Vigil, it's actually vaguely taboo to start and end a meeting in the same place: if you don't have to flee, you clearly aren't worshipping hard enough.

PRAYERS

The monthly prayer to Lekolé was originally intended as a way of remembering those unjustly lost to murder, war, or accidents; and back in the Home Nations, it still is. Worshippers use it as a way to release communal grief and rage about the deaths of loved ones, and it often ends in sharing comfort with each other (which is all too necessary given the region's continually-shifting territories and internecine conflict).

But in Spire, such prayers have to be done alone and in secret, which removes the cathartic element. Over time, these prayers have calcified into endless statements of vengeance and hardening of hearts.

A traditional blood moon prayer might be along the lines of: 'Lekolé, Lady of Vengeance, look down in wrath on the losses of your faithful. This moon we have lost several children in a building collapse. We pray that you will help us in bringing the neglectful owners to justice.' Then the participants will often hold one another and weep together, if they feel the need.

A blood moon prayer in Spire is more like: 'Lekolé, Lady of Vengeance, I burn to serve you always; accept my pain as a token of my faith. Since last I sought communion, we have lost a dozen more drow in a workshop explosion; I burn their names into my skin so that you might recognise them. A midwife was taken to the Hive and her eggs were smashed. Yesterday, another friendly shop was closed in favour of a dirty collaborator. This will not stand! I swear I will burn each culprit alive, and I will dedicate their screams and their bones to you. I pray you will give me the strength I need.'

If it is safe to do so, the Vigilite will then release a blood-curdling scream of anger and agony. Each person prays at a different time of the night depending on their daily activities and obligations, so during a blood moon, it is not unusual to be woken up several times at random hours of the night because of an intimidating howl from a few streets over. If other Vigilites are awake and hear a comrade screaming, they may join in, even if they have already completed their own prayer.

It's also a practical habit, as it is useful for Vigilites to know how many people around them share their faith. If there are many screams during the night, they know that they are strong; if there are only one or two, they know that many have died since the last time, and they need to improve their recruitment.

Many people temporarily lose their voices after completing their monthly prayer; indeed, many aim to do so. It's a lucky omen to have prayed so hard that your voice gave up before you did.

RECRUITMENT

Every Vigilite is expected to be in the process of bringing at least one other person into the cult at all times. With the death rate of the average group of Vigilites, constant headhunting is necessary to keep the cult alive. Reciting the names of current potential members and providing evidence of their radicalisation is a good way of demonstrating loyalty.

There are also less visible devotions which cannot be tested by anyone, but which are part of day-to-day practice. For example, every Vigilite is expected to pray to the blood moon whenever it appears (unless they have other religious business to attend to, like getting married or assassinating someone). These prayers mainly consist of reciting all of the new atrocities that have happened since the last prayer, and then naming each action that the Vigilite plans to take in vengeance.

Given the word-of-mouth nature of the Vigilite religion, these customs vary widely and appear more like folk superstition than any organised practice. Daily practices among any given sect might include: virulently cursing the name of the aelfir at least once a day; making coded notes about anyone suspected of being a collaborator; spending time contemplating fire and the duality of its destructive yet cleansing potential; marking yourself with ashes every time you hear of a drow being killed by the aelfir; and/or at least an hour spent preparing for violence, such as sharpening blades, cleaning guns, or honing your body for physical combat.



HEADQUARTERS

There are no centralised headquarters that every Vigilite can access. When meetings are called, they are never consecutively held in the same place.

Instead, every Spire district conceals up to a dozen saferooms, or even a whole safehouse if you're lucky. You could end up in a pub cellar in Red Row, with a secret tunnel that leads to an even more secret room; an abandoned attic in the depths of Grist, where you only have to worry about the cannibals; or a ramshackle, leaking boat down at the North Docks.

But if you live long enough as a member of the Crimson Vigil (unlikely), you will eventually hear whispers about the high shrine in New Heaven.

Being able to see the blood moon is incredibly important to the Crimson Vigil, so it was inevitable that they would find the place with the best view. If you can get to New Heaven, dodging the Carrion-Priests and Morticians and druids, heading always upwards and eastwards, you will eventually find a half-crumpled tower on the outer edge of Spire that faces the Home Nations.

Assuming you manage to scramble up and along the remnants of the stairs (which are more diagonal than vertical) you will reach the final room of the tower, precipitously sticking out a mile above the ground. From here, it's a sheer drop from the empty windows and balconies straight down to the rocks; but the air is also completely clear, giving a perfect view of the night sky. This is called the Red Shrine.

It's exposed and risky and unbelievably dangerous to visit; that's part of the charm. Travelling there usually involves taking someone out during the journey, as the Crimson Vigil aren't too concerned with stealth when visiting their shrine. Whether it is the City Guard, a Carrion-Priest, or just a Mortician trying to do their duties, a Vigilite on their pilgrimage will always attempt to fight and sacrifice anyone who tries to stop them – just like Lekolé would want. If someone ends up dying at the shrine itself, even better.

It's forbidden to speak to anybody that you meet there, even (and especially) if they're covered in blood, dirt, pus, and/or fire. Sometimes you might witness someone taking their final breath as they look up at the moon. It's a place to remind the Crimson Vigil what freedom feels like, and to give them an unbroken view of the Goddess.

People often leave small offerings of blood, bone, teeth, weapons, and other objects that indicate their devotion to Lekolé. If a Vigilite can manage it, an aelfir might be thrown from the shrine for an extra helping of good luck from Lekolé.

MEETINGS

At a meeting of the Crimson Vigil, everybody is exclusively referred to by their Vigilite names (see p. 171) for safety and secrecy.

The order of proceedings differs wildly amongst districts and groups, but there are common themes – namely fire, blood, violence, the moon, and pain. Common features include:

- Displaying any recent injuries caused by Vigilite devotions
- A fight to determine who is leading the meeting
- Howling, screaming, and shrieking at the moon
- Blood sacrifice (either literally sacrificing an aelfir or a collaborator and burning their body, or a more metaphorical sacrifice involving bleeding into an open flame)
- Frenzied stamping and chanting in rage
- Duels to resolve conflict and disagreements (often to the death)
- Taking drugs together (mainly chum, dagger, mushrooms, dreck, or sulphur if they can get it)
- Ritualised wounding of each other as a bonding exercise
- Competitive pain endurance tests, such as putting your hand in a fire and seeing who can keep it there the longest

The one thing that remains the same is that everybody will be wearing their mask, and there will be some form of violence – sacred or otherwise – before the meeting is over. The only time a mask will be taken off is if somebody is suspected of treachery, so that their face can be bared in shame to their former comrades before they are summarily killed. This happens more often than the Crimson Vigil can really afford.

FACTIONS

The Crimson Vigil has many schools of thought about how to achieve their goals – mainly which people and places are the most important to destroy, and what methods best glorify Lekolé. Vigilites from one school of thought are unlikely to hear different opinions, so everybody thinks that they have the right idea.

Below are some of these factions.

THE TRUE ORDER OF BLOOD

This group is the largest faction within the Crimson Vigil, and the most visible – partly due to the fact that blood is such a big part of their worship that they are often literally painted in it. For them, it is a sacred thing: so vital to life, but so easy to spill. And, of course, the drow have bled veritable rivers of blood for Spire. It's only natural to make the aelfir bleed in return for what they have stolen.

The most notable difference within this group is that they eschew masks entirely. Instead, they douse their faces in blood when attending a meeting, preparing for prayer, or on their way to enact the wishes of Our Lady of Vengeance. Ideally this blood should come from a righteous kill, but any will do in a pinch.

Luckily, there tends to be a lot of it around, since the True Order of Blood focuses on assassinations. Almost no other kind of resistance is accepted within their ranks: it's murder or nothing. Every assassination is a sacrifice to Lekolé, and the bloodier it is, the better; the cosmic scales of revenge must be evened out, after all. Each member has their own holy dagger, engraved with the name of somebody they've lost to the oppressors. They believe that striking the killing blow with one of these daggers is what turns their murders into proper sacrifices. In practical terms, the thinking behind their methods is that if you make it dangerous enough to be an oppressor or a collaborator, eventually they'll run out of willing people. Until that happens, well, each assassination is one more filthy aelfir that can't hurt anyone.

Because the True Order is based mainly in Derelictus and the Works, where conditions are awful and the rage of the people constantly bubbles under the surface, they receive a lot of quiet support. When the red-painted vigilantes go by on their way to enact holy justice, civilians are far more likely to turn a blind eye or lend a helping hand (for instance, by leaving certain doors unlocked, pointing in the relevant direction, or smashing a bottle over an inconvenient guard's head before hurrying off).

Naturally, this group has the highest body count amongst all Vigilites, because they care the least about subtlety. The average lifespan for a True Order Vigilite in Derelictus is about a month, but it doesn't really matter: everyone in the area has an axe to grind against the aelfir. For many, it doesn't take much to goad them into trying to achieve vengeance for themselves. Still, the drow reproduction cycle isn't very fast. The True Order may find themselves faced with a drastic shortage of recruits within a few months if they're not careful. And they are not, as a rule, careful.

NOTABLE MEMBERS

EDIE RATTLE (alias: Sister Pinpoint), an aging female drow who looks like the epitome of a kindly grandmother. She is the oldest member of the True Order, having been in the cult for almost two decades. This is because her main role has always been to provide hiding places and safe rooms for other members, and defend them via any means necessary. Nowadays she is an expert in stalling people with her innocent old lady routine, but she remains the best marks-woman in her district. Recently, her hated younger sister Rowena Rattle joined the City Guard; and now Edie is growing paranoid about what Rowena might reveal to the other guards.

WEISLEY PLUCK (alias: Comrade Wreck), who is the foreperson of the biggest weapons manufacturer in the Works. They smuggle out the weapons, fix the books, and keep up to date with when important visitors are coming down to the undercity – which means they tend to plan the logistics of all the possible assassinations. There's a lot of paperwork, so they're on the Dose (*Spire*, p. 105) and could unexpectedly fall unconscious – or even die – at any moment.



THE ZEALOTS OF THE INFERNAL

Messing around with demons is a surefire way to end up suffering a fate worse than death – but this sect doesn't bother to tell new recruits that. By the time they realise how much metaphysical trouble they're in, they're generally too addicted to the power to care. The group is mainly made up of former soldiers who have fought in the high elves' war against Nujab. They have all heard the rumours of how the aelfir secretly use demons to incinerate reality around their enemies.

The aelfir do this by implanting magical devices or mimetic riddles into unsuspecting agents, and sending them into the midst of the enemy to act as living arcane bombs. The Zealots are doing the same, just with full knowledge of the consequences. Many experiment on their own bodies or on willing comrades with various new demonic inventions to see how far they can push their destructive power. As time has gone on, this has caused a kind of arms race within the sect: there are about a dozen leading members, now ancient by Vigilite standards, testing out their ideas on whichever new initiate they have recruited.

These twelve believers argue constantly about the best way to get the most out of demons, and each one has their own particular approach. One thinks that the most painful methods will cause the most destruction; another is sure that delicately placed crystals in very precise places will maximise the magical output; and yet another thinks that the secret lies in a cocktail of drugs taken before detonation (the exact mixture of which is yet to be determined). For these high-up members, recruitment is now just about getting more bodies to practise on until they are sure they can unleash the worst possible destruction on the aelfir.

They specialise in two main areas: magic (gaining the power to summon a demon and creating new spells) and research (finding out exactly how it's been done before and theorising on what changes to make in future). The problem they face is finding a way to create a demonic incursion strong enough to destroy the aelfir, but not so strong that it makes Spire permanently uninhabitable. For more information on demonology and why it's such a bad idea, see *Black Magic*, p. 14.

NOTABLE MEMBERS

ALESSE DESPARA (alias: Friend Serrated), who is undercover in the Guild of Morticians. Their work for the Vigil revolves around keeping track of whose hearts are being held for safe-keeping after the Undying surgery, researching and testing whether these organs can be used as eidolons for demonic incursion, and deciding whose heart is the best target. They'd best hope that their boss, Carys Goldenarm, hasn't noticed anything unusual in their notes. (She has.)

MATHEW EXTINRE (alias: Brother Blade) is the only demonologist on record to come back out of the Hive after being arrested. He refuses to talk about it, so nobody knows whether he escaped, took a deal, or was rescued. What the Zealots do know is that he has definitely summoned demons before, and is the only current member of the sect to have successfully done this. It's a shame that a piece of one of those demons is still inside him, and getting stronger every day.

PRAEVENIRE RECORDATUS

KEELEY

Keeley is the sole acolyte in a strange religion – and given the benchmark for a 'strange' religion in Spire is pretty high, that's saying something. She believes that a) existence is a sin; b) the 'more' you exist, the more sinful you are (i.e. if you're famous, well-respected, or noteworthy); and c) that she can save the souls of these poor deluded celebrities by murdering them in the gentlest way possible.

Keeley used to be – in another life, under a different name, years ago – famous herself, making a living as a high-stakes gambler and raconteur in the Silver Quarter. She found salvation at the bottom of a champagne bottle when she received the pristine word of King Neverwas during a drunken binge.

Freed from her obsession of attempting to exist as vividly as she could, Keeley now exists as a shadow at the edge of the world. She infiltrates the lives of the colourful and exciting, quietly smothering them in their sleep or poisoning their coffee. It's only a matter of time before she uncovers the daring lives of the player characters and starts killing them one by one in an attempt to redeem their immortal souls.

THE SECT OF ST HYPAKIS

St Hypakis was one of the first hallows (or saints) of the Crimson Vigil. She now rests eternal on the red moon, waiting to be reborn into a new chosen drow, and listening to the desperate prayers of the faithful.

The members of her sect claim to be her spiritual descendants; and indeed, they do seem to be the oldest faction in the Crimson Vigil. They believe they are under the protection of Hypakis, and not one of them will flinch at physical pain or violence, regardless of how horrendous it might be. If any of them are ever caught, they are all determined to go down in the bloodiest fight imaginable.

The oldest tale repeated before their shadowed altars is of the last great battles between the drow and the aelfir, just before the fall of Spire, where not one of the true followers of Hypakis were killed by arrows or blades until the very end. (Those who did fall early in battle, they explain, must have been lacking in faith.)

Their focus now is on hearts and minds – not to destroy, but to convert and convince. If they can spread their beliefs into the upper reaches of Spire and radicalise the drow who are closest to the aelfir, the Crimson Vigil will eventually have an agent in every significant high elf house. When the time is right, all the heads of the aelfir hydra can be removed at once, and everything in Spire will be restored.

Whether these time-consuming methods would actually be approved by St Hypakis, a notoriously violent and reckless saint, is a matter of debate outside of this sect. Some even suspect that this slow cult may have been set up by an infiltrator to direct potential Vigilites into a less disruptive path. But what would they know? They're not the chosen of Hypakis.

NOTABLE MEMBERS

MARI GUILLO (alias: Sister Incise), a bartender in the perennially popular Mermaid Club in the Silver Quarter. She uses her sharp eyesight and sympathetic ear to gather blackmail on everyone of interest who stops in for a drink. She claims to know the names of all the drow who serve significant aelfir, and she has something on every single one of them to help 'persuade' them into supporting the cause. She cares only for her work and for her son, Nate Guillor, who wants to be a Knight one day.

BRIAR SPYKALA (alias: Sister or Comrade Flame, depending on their mood), a Black Guard in Amaranth who is aiming to be promoted to the protection of the Council itself – and maybe even to replace her current Captain. They are studying the weak points of every prominent aelfir in the district, as well as secretly gathering duplicate masks to help with infiltration attempts.

The problem is that the aelfir have been noticing that their masks have been going missing, even if only temporarily; Briar had best hope they don't talk to each other about it.

THE RESURRECTIONISTS

These explosives experts have given up on ever reclaiming Spire intact. Instead, they are working to bring the whole thing crashing down: every member is focused on creating a huge stockpile of bombs.

Some focus on gathering materials (stolen, created, or invented); some find innocuous hiding places to store the various elements and then protect them with their lives; some experiment with maximising the power of the countless bombs that they'll need; and some are devoted to finding or making stable routes down to the foundations of Spire, which will be used for a one-way trip when every bomb is ready to be planted there.

This group is the most measured and patient out of all the various factions. Working with volatile elements that could kill you at any time will do that to a person, as does regularly tunnelling through ruins and dirt that could collapse at any moment.

Because of their patience and single-minded focus, this group is also the smallest: they have no time to spare for recruitment if they're going to pull off their Great Explosion. Some are starting to worry that soon there won't be enough of them to achieve it, but for the time being they're drowned out by the zeal of the others.

NOTABLE MEMBERS

CARO DESOLANT (alias: Sister Ruinous), a former midwife who had clutch after clutch of eggs destroyed in surprise raids or accidents caused by badly maintained buildings. Nowadays, she sells rugs, carpets, and tapestries in Red Row, using her storeroom to protect an enormous hoard of explosive materials. Unfortunately, her assistant Rudy has recently noticed them, and is quite panicked.

OBIT MORKALE (alias: Brother Smoulder), whose face hasn't been seen for weeks but must still be alive: the tap, tap, tap of his pickaxe in the depths of the undercity has not stopped ringing out. He is digging a tunnel through the main structural supports, each impact of iron into the spirebone a prayer to the Goddess; though considering how close he is to the Heart, perhaps it's not really him any more. Regardless, everyone can hear him – the City Guard and civilians just as much as the Vigilites. It's only a matter of time before someone goes hunting for him.



HALLOWS

When the blood moon rises, these hallows (or red saints) can walk among faithful Vigilites in Spire once more. They are the martyrs of the cult: those who were killed publicly, horribly, gloriously, or – in ideal cases – all three at once.

On the surface of the blood moon, these vengeful giants can be found in their most powerful form: ten foot tall, wielding rusted but wickedly sharp blackiron greatswords, and functionally immortal (see *Heart*, p. 172). Crowned with fire and constantly listening out for the pleas of their living comrades, they can be summoned by powerful prayers to inhabit a living person for the night. These vessels usually die by the time the sun rises, but not before the hallow inside them has caused a swathe of sublime destruction.

POSSESSED BY THE RED SAINTS

If your players are interested in channelling the power of the Crimson Vigil hallows, they can do so by engaging in acts of destruction and chaos, screaming at the blood moon and marking themselves with metaphysically reactive runes. Once they sustain enough stress, use the following fallout to represent them giving up their bodies to a fallen martyr:

TOUCHED BY THE RED MOON

[Severe, Blood] After a night of chaos and blood your fragile mortal form is overridden by one of the Red Saints (facing page). Choose which one you're beseeching when your campaign of terror begins. You gain access to uncanny godlike powers listed in their description – and are subject to the weakness listed too – for around an hour or so, at which point your withered husk will be consumed by the power of the Saint and you die. Until that happens, you no longer roll dice and instead function as a sort of secondary GM, spreading further chaos and fear through the city as you wish.

WHAT MAKES A VIGILITE HALLOW?

Becoming a hallow, regardless of which face of Damnou you represent, requires a spectacular level of devotion. The exact steps and circumstances are unknown (becoming an immensely powerful and barely-understood undead creature is never going to be an exact science), but there are two common features in every appearance of a Vigilite hallow.

Causing a massive amount of destruction. Specifically, enough destruction that it draws Lekolé's attention and impresses her enough to bless the Vigilite involved. Examples have included: destroying certain hearts in the secret chambers of the Morticians, thereby killing the famous warrior-poet Theo Rests-On-Glass and all his guests at his 130th birthday party; infiltrating The Hive on the anniversary of Spire's original fall and causing a riot that went on for weeks, leading to the escape of hundreds of captives (possibly including Mathew Extinre of the Zealots); and blowing up the temple of Father Summer during one of his festivals (they say parts of the building are still being fixed).

Undergoing a painful and public death. This can come in many ways. You might be made an example of at a public execution, killed in the act by the aelfir's many enforcers and guards, or caught in the consequences of your own destructive plans. Past hallows have been killed by being skinned alive, slowly frozen to death in the Ice Caves, and by being given to the College of Undying Light as living samples for their demonology experiments.

The sign that somebody has successfully become a hallow is a blinding flash of red fire at the moment of their death. When this is observed, the message is passed quickly throughout the Crimson Vigil, so that each member can celebrate this new addition to their saints by finding an aelfir to assassinate in their memory.

As with most high-up positions, you have to be extremely ambitious to attempt the path towards hallowdom. You have to walk willingly towards not just death, but a painful death; in fact, you have to specifically aim for the most agonising result possible. Plus, you need to make sure that you'll be taking out as many aelfir as possible.

Most of all, if you have decided to aim for a saintly death, you cannot back out halfway through. This is a sign of the utmost disrespect for Lekolé and shows that your faith is not strong enough for divinity. If you change your mind, you will be rejected utterly from her fiery embrace – and that would make all of your prior efforts worthless. Despite the shame of this, it isn't unheard of for a Vigilite to attempt a grand plan for hallowdom, chicken out at the last second after all their bragging, and just move district instead in the hope that they'll be assumed dead.

They respect me.
Please implement exfiltration plan ASAP

FAO: MAGISTER BLACKTHORN

RECENT HALLOWS AND THE NATURES OF THEIR DEATHS ST HELLISENT, THE TRUE INCINERATED

Slowly burned to death underground in the process of destroying the spiral garden of Always-Moves-The-Sky - a particularly cruel aelfir who had been hosting an outdoor party for the elites of Amaranth. Hellisent crawled into the maintenance shafts for the furnaces that kept the aelfir's plants warm and managed to damage the pressure valves, leading to an explosion that killed everyone in attendance. It is said that Hellisent did not even scream as they roasted in the metal vents. Their corpse was later displayed over the doors of the Crystal Temple until it rotted away. They are summoned when a Vigilite wants help with arson, sabotage, and escapes.

POWERS: Become a living inferno; create and destroy doors; cause machinery to explode; melt the eyes of aelfir right out of their heads.

WEAKNESS: Banished by the scent of fresh flowers.

HALLOW MAGDELENE, THE FAITHFUL SKINLESS

Skinned alive (it is said she laughed throughout) as punishment for opening a portal to the Vermessian underneath a group of Hive guards, who were toasting the successful execution of Magdelene's Vigilite wife. Since they were celebrating in the Gilded Oyster, a large number of the bar's wealthy clientele were also dumped into Spire's hellish train domain. The portal led directly to Godstreet Station, an all-consuming swamp where the remaining members of the Drowners - a small Vigilite sect that have all but disappeared in recent years - made aelfir sacrifices. If the Vermessian didn't finish off Magdelene's victims, the Drowners certainly did. She is summoned when a Vigilite wants help with magic, distractions, and personal crusades.

POWERS: Transform a solid surface into deep sludge; loud telepathic laughter; create duplicates of herself using her disembodied skin; flood a person's lungs.

WEAKNESS: Weeps uncontrollably at the mere mention of Ashe, Magdelene's wife.

HALLOW PROTHADEUS, THE WORTHY BLOOD

Dismembered over several days by two Paladins after he was caught in the act of murdering the rest of their order. He had planned it all meticulously: the diversion that would bring every Paladin running (at the Council chambers, naturally), the various high places where he could hide and snipe them one or two at a time, and the traps he could set for them along the way. He nearly managed to kill them all - but those last two Paladins had been in a different part of the Solar Basilica, and caught him from behind in a surprise attack. They took their vengeance slowly, cutting off each digit or limb one at a time to get him to betray his comrades. Naturally, he refused. Most Vigilites believe that those Paladins still have the burns from the red fire that ensued when Prothadeus' soul left for the Red Moon. He is summoned when a Vigilite wants help with overwhelming odds, marksmanship, and courage.

POWERS: Seal up someone's mouth; grow eyes in the back of your head; remove an aelfir's blood; cause a roof collapse

WEAKNESS: Terrified of heights.

EQUIPMENT

OFFERING FROM THE RED SHRINE

You can give an item new qualities if you travel to the Red Shrine and leave it there for three days during the blood moon. However, the item can then only be used during a blood moon.

Weapon: add the **Bloodbound** or **Brutal** tag. It is also now permanently bloodstained.

Armour: Add the **Implacable** or **Assault** tag.

When worn it gives you a shimmering heat aura, as if you are a walking bonfire.

Another kind of equipment: Gain +1 **Reputation** or +1 **Shadow** when carrying or displaying it. Only you get this benefit. The item now looks scorched.

MASK OF THE DREADED FACE

When the blood moon comes, a Vigilite with access to a servant's mask can perform a ritual to transform it into a Mask of the Dreaded Face. This ritual involves praying to Lekolé for at least an hour while holding your hand over a candle.

Once completed, mark D3 stress to **Mind**. The Mask can now be used once per session to disgust, intimidate, or alarm a single aelfir. You can only choose one of these effects at a time.

THE HYPAKIS DAGGER

When this (**D3, Piercing**) knife draws blood, it whispers one of the victim's secrets to the person wielding the knife.

HELLFIRE PISTOL

The most faithful and fierce members of the Crimson Vigil are rewarded with weapons that can serve them in their fight against the aelfir. The Hellfire pistol (**D6, Ranged, Reload, Bloodbound**) is one of the most well-respected examples.

Each of these large-bore weapons has been sanctified in the blood of hallows and oppressors alike. To the Vigil, the trademark report of a Hellfire is akin to a call to prayer bellowed from the rooftops.

It is commonly believed that the soul of a wielder passes into the gun upon their death. Users will often commune with the spirits of their predecessors in rituals of blood sacrifice and starvation.

SACRED SHOTGUN

The Crimson Vigil can't always afford to equip their new zealous foot-soldiers with the best equipment available. A Vigilite shotgun (**D6, Point-Blank, Ranged, Reload, Unreliable, Concealable**) has generally been through the hands of at least six different people.

Each of the previous owners will have modified their gun in some way with varying levels of success and competency. So, most Vigilite shotguns are sawn-off to make them easier to transport, covered in devotional scripts and prayer-strips, and almost unusably faulty.

WAR BRAZIER

When the Vigil strikes – and they can do so in their hundreds, having fomented rebellion in basements and attics, back-streets and drug dens all over the district – they will march with a war brazier (**D6, Spread D3, Dangerous**) leading the way.

Wielded by a zealot covered in dampened rags, the brazier is a two-handed flail with a head that burns with narcotic incense and blessed spireblack, leaving a trail of pungent, greasy smoke. Upon striking a foe, the fire contained within the brazier will splash out and burn other nearby targets, leading to most enemies giving it a wide berth. Ranged attacks against a Vigil war-party led by a brazier increase their difficulty by 1, on account of the obscuring smoke.

PRAEVENIRE RECORDATUS

CORMICK, KNIGHT WATCHMAN

Cormick's dad was in charge of guarding the workshops around the bad end of Copper Street; his dad's dad was in charge of guarding the same workshops; and so on and so forth. Cormick's entire family line has been bound to the small god of this particular district, and for generations they've fought to protect it from those who would harm the inhabitants.

Not Cormick, though. Cormick's sick of this dead-end job for a dead-end god and wants to be shot of the whole thing, so he's mistreating the deity and abusing his power. This wouldn't necessarily be a problem for the Ministry, but the player characters' cell has a safehouse in his domain. He can sense the intrusion and he's pissed off at them.

RELATIONS WITH THE CHURCH OF OUR GLORIOUS LADY

To most members of the Crimson Vigil, drow who devoutly follow the legal religion are to be avoided. Many Vigilites have been given up to the authorities by ordinary Limyé worshippers in an attempt to curry favour with the authorities and/or avoid trouble.

This is because any member of the Church being found to house or protect members of the Vigil would likely lead to terrible mass punishments. On top of that, the Crimson Vigil are not known for their nuance and consideration of others when in pursuit of their goals. They don't give any special attention or respect to the Church or its various holy ceremonies. If they want to blow up an aelfir while they're inspecting a service of Limyé for untoward sentiments, then they will – no matter how many other drow are present.

So, for active members of the Church, it is safer to betray those who worship Damnou's other faces than to keep their secrets and risk widespread death in the streets. They are thinking of the community.

Vigilites have mixed views on the members of the Church and their attitudes. Some feel that they are just bog-standard cowards (after all, not everyone is prepared to do what must be done); some that they are out-and-out traitors; and others simply shrug off any worries about them. They knew it would be dangerous when they joined up with the Vigil; betrayal by other drow is just another one of those risks.

It would be hard to get a Vigilite and a worshipper of Our Glorious Lady to agree to meet – but if you did, it probably wouldn't be long before there was an argument that ended badly.

RELATIONS WITH THE SOLAR CHURCH

The Vigil has nothing but contempt for the Solar Church and the turncoat cowards who meekly follow along behind its corrupt preachers. Not the aelfir – that lot are already damned regardless of who they pray to, for the most part – but the drow, who have been offered the light and truth of the moon and her many facets, and instead flocked to this upstart religion imported from the far north. While more moderate commentators are of the opinion that worship at the Solar Church is not only more convenient but much less illegal than joining a paramilitary murder/arsenal cult, the Vigil has no time for these sheep, and take great pride in testing the power of their gods with sword and shot.

RELATIONS WITH THE MINISTRY

The Crimson Vigil and the Ministry agree on one thing: the aelfir must be removed from power, and the drow must be freed. They disagree on almost everything else.

Where the Ministry relies on covert operations, spies, and infiltration tactics, the Vigil prefers outright executions, burning down buildings, and merciless violence towards the oppressors. They believe that revolution and freedom is never a quiet or subtle process; it will take mass destruction to free Spire, just like it took mass destruction to capture it. They are on a never-ending brutal hunt for vengeance. Every building that burns, every aelfir that bleeds, every life they take is dedicated to Lekolé, who must surely be nodding approvingly. Each member fights for her and for their people, and they don't have time for the complexities of espionage and a slow undermining of the system.

As a result, there is only a begrudging alliance between these two groups, though their relations have soured further in recent times. Many Ministry plots have involved using Vigilites as a distraction or as acceptable casualties in pursuit of their larger plans. This pattern has only recently become common knowledge among the cult. After all, there can only be so many joint operations resulting in only the Vigilites getting nastily slaughtered before someone catches on. Nobody likes being treated as cannon fodder, and whatever trust existed previously has had a big dent put in it.

However, there is quite a bit of defection in the other direction. The Ministry's tactics may be a bit safer and less extreme, but they also result in fewer tangible gains. Many Vigilites are actually ex-Ministry acolytes – though they will rarely admit that, since the instinctive response from others will likely be to execute them as a spy. To avoid this fate, some use their Ministry wiles to create a little Vigilite cell of their own from the ground up. You can't be suspicious if you're the leader, right?

THE SOLAR CHURCH

By Cat Evans

The Solar Church is the second most common religion amongst the drow of Spire, despite being antithetical to everything the drow Cathedral believes. The worship of Father Summer, Mother Winter, Sister Spring, and Brother Harvest originated with the aelfir in their northern homeland, and came to Spire with them. With the Solar Basilica positioned high up in the city, the spread of its faith through the drow population has been a top-down transmission.

A THOUSAND HOLY DAYS

There are fewer days in the calendar year than festivals of the Solar Church. Celebrations are created, forgotten, rewritten, and replaced with alacrity. On any given day, at least one Solar congregation is celebrating something.

A lack of religious faith is often used to slander political or social opponents. Aelfir in positions of power are occasionally forced to dash from one rite to another, squeezing them in between other appointments. This persists until an aelfir becomes powerful enough to erase inconvenient festivals from the common calendar.

Currently fashionable festivals include:

THE BALANCE DAYS: The equinoxes, when the sun is equally as powerful as the moon. These days of moderation and contemplation are mainly celebrated by hosting large gatherings where attendees ostentatiously demonstrate how moderate and introspective they are to dozens of their closest friends.

BITTEREST: The shortest day, in the midst of Mother Winter's restraint. For this day, the faithful surrender power to the worshippers of the moon. There is evidence that this was historically a day of chaos, where servants beat their masters and passed laws that lasted until nightfall. Now it is mainly a formal ceremony handing temporary power to the Church of Our Glorious Lady, whose clergy preside over a day-long riotous party. Some drow are campaigning to return the festival to its original nature.

CRACKED-GLASS'S ECLIPSE: Once upon a time, an aelfir scholar called Gazes-On-Cracked-Glass observed and recorded a lunar eclipse. That is the sole reason for this festival, and the only excuse anyone needs to keep lights and fires burning for an entire day and night, banishing every trace of darkness from the faithful's homes. No one has given much thought to the challenge this poses for drow worshippers.

DELIQUESCENT EXPOSITION: A celebration of Sister Spring, consisting of performances, exhibitions, and lectures that all showcase new movements in art, literature, and philosophy that have arisen over the previous year. The art schools up-Spire throw open their doors and invite the public to marvel at their creations.

KISS OF FIRST SUN: Celebrated on the first warm day after winter. In the aelfir homeland, this was a celebration of the spring thaw; in Spire, it takes place when the designated champion of Father Summer defeats the champion of Mother Winter in armed combat (sometimes a duel, sometimes a full battle). Aelfir use flames or magic to melt the delicate ice palaces they construct in their homes over the winter, causing flash floods down-Spire.

PRAISE THE REAPER: A day of feasting and praise for Brother Harvest, and one of the few days when he is publicly acknowledged. Desang performances are very much in vogue; their improvisational and responsive nature are in keeping with Scythe-Culls-The-Harvest's essence. The festivities of Praise the Reaper are also often marked by attacks on Undying elves.

BRIGHTEST: The longest day, and the height of Father Sun's glory. It's celebrated by a day of conspicuous philanthropy, for which the less fortunate (drow and humans) are expected to be appropriately grateful.

THE EXPOSITION

Each year's exhibits are different, but the most talked about at this year's Exposition are:

The Maladroit Puppeteer: The largest marionette in this exhibit exceeds ten feet in height and requires a crew of highly trained operators. Each marionette operates increasingly diminutive ones. Members of the public are invited to take control of the largest marionette, which causes hilarious tangles and mishaps. This serves as blunt commentary on how only those practised in wielding power can do so effectively.

Memorial: The artist, Elisheva Warm-Stone, sits behind a table and invites passersby to converse with her. She replies only with the last words of executed criminals from the previous century. The exhibit has spawned several spin-off performances based on memorable conversations.

Indelicates: An assortment of glass masks, lightly distressed with a hammer to send cracks throughout their surface so they are almost opaque. They're scandalous, but technically effective as masks. They're starting a craze that conservative aelfir find gauche and rebellious ones find delightful.



ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

The Solar Church has almost as many ranks as it does celebrations. It's an ancient faith, bound up with civic responsibility and power. New titles are created and bestowed as convenient, with powers and accolades attached which seem important at the time, to consolidate power or dissipate it, but seem almost random to outsiders. It's simplest to group participants into tiers.

OBSERVANTS: the name for the most common worshippers, who attend services and celebrations. Their faith spans a broad range from casual (i.e. attending only the most important rituals) to devout.

CELEBRANT: worshippers who take an active role in festivals, but are not part of the clergy. They form choirs, perform dances and ritual storytelling, or otherwise participate beyond observing and applauding. Becoming a celebrant requires an initiatory pilgrimage. This group is sometimes known as 'cousins of the Divine family' (or, for lapsed worshippers, second-cousins-once-removed).

CLERGY: There are a remarkable number of clergy, each serving one or all of the Divine family. Some appointments are titular only, while others serve with their whole heart for life. Many are responsible for a single festival, doing one day's work a year while receiving a stipend year round. Some festivals require the appointment of a new priest just for that occasion. When these appointees aren't chosen by political expediency, they're granted by oracles – so completely unprepared aelfir or drow can obtain great power for a day or two, only to have to surrender it again. These 'mayfly priests' then plunge back into anonymity.

BISHOPS: These are the highest ranking clergy, and they serve for life. They're presided over by the Bishop Prime, who serves all four gods equally. The Prime acts as a tie-breaker in inter-factional conflicts and is the highest ranking member of the Solar Church in Spire; however, there are dozens of higher ranks in the aelfir homeland. In theory, an Archbishop could walk out of the frozen north and take command of the entire clergy of Spire.

VARIANT TITLES: Other titles and positions come and go, with every member of the Solar clergy claiming up to a dozen depending on their duties and status. The Theocrats Zenithal and Nadirine, the Living Solstice, and the Most Favoured Sibling-Germane are among the most coveted.

AN ASSORTMENT OF BISHOPS

LADY SULIVANE TOLL-THE-VITAL, BISHOP PRIME

Young, beautiful, protected by her family's small private army, and carried around the city by half a dozen drow servants, Sulivane barely knows the most basic catechisms of the Divine Family. She loves drama and is both capricious and easily flattered.

ANDREGE

This Undying aelfir has spoken for Mother Winter since the aelfir came to Spire, and what he usually says is 'no.' Deviation from tradition meets with his intense displeasure and the occasional dispatch of assassins.

DORMIN SCARS-ON-STONE-HEARTS

Dormin has served Father Summer for as long as anyone can remember. They started their career as a humble medic, but rose through the ranks of the Solar Church through the performance of miracles (mostly inflicting fatal wounds and then healing them; only 1 in 10 died). They're dedicated to medical research, and often arrange university places for drow students who are willing to cover their tuition by volunteering as research subjects.

ELESTRA RED-LEAVES-WHISPER

Elestra is a clever politician from a good family who uses her position to raise the profile of the arts in Spire. She's campaigning to fund an art school in the Heart, claiming that the latest generation of artists are badly in need of new inspiration.

TELL-THE-STONE

Tell-the-Stone is a servant of Spring, and he is beautiful. With his limbs unnaturally extended and new arms and legs added, Tell-the-Stone is also somewhere between a dancer and a centipede. His performances are arresting, and his inability to take criticism is legendary.

AUBURN-WOODS-AT-DAWN

An odious, self-important demagogue who believes in nothing. Auburn would have been quietly assassinated years ago – except that the Paladins adore him. He feeds them praise like a stoker feeds an engine coal.

MINOR OBSERVANCES

Solar worshippers wear their affiliation proudly. Many deck themselves in small, glowing icons marked with lines of scripture, key dates in the festival calendar, or likenesses of the divine family.

They call on the pantheon to ward off danger or bestow virtue. 'Banish the dark' is a common expression to avert bad luck; 'Mother steel me' calls on Mother Winter for restraint and patience; and 'Sister thaw your heart' chides someone for being small-minded or reactionary. These expressions are all part of aelfir common parlance. Even aelfir who don't worship the Solar Pantheon use them without thinking twice.

Drow worshippers are often the most visibly observant, as it's in their interest to make sure that the aelfir realise they have a shared religion.

INITIATION

Most aelfir are raised in the church of the Solar Pantheon, but there's a difference between habitual obedience and devotion. Those who wish to be elevated from an observant to a celebrant (or higher) or who convert from other faiths embark on pilgrimages. For affluent aelfir, this often means a journey to the frozen temples of their homeland. This is a dangerous expedition involving a retinue the size of a small army and stops at other important sites, turning the trip into a year-long grand tour.

For everyone else, the pilgrimage is from the lowest zones of Spire all the way to the top, passing through the Solar Basilica itself and greeting the sun at noon. If an initiate has powerful friends, this is a pleasant stroll. If they have enemies, they face opposition at every turn – ranging from demands for bribes to pass through a private area to street toughs paid to kick their heads in, or even Paladins attempting to toss them off the walls of Spire.

SONGS OF PRAISE

'Command the cold to bite,
adjure the wind to keen,
Mother-Many, speed the sun,
the nights grow dark and sweet'

Lyrical motif occurring in many hymns
to Mother Winter

'O Conflagration! Blaze, blaze!
Most ardently your siblings raze
The stubble from the fields'

From the traditional Autumnal battle
hymn, *The Scouring of Beak Street*

ACCESSORIES ON THE BODIES OF THE FAITHFUL

Almanack bird: Glorious songbirds trained to parrot the day's celebrations and festivals on command. They pick up bawdy songs just as easily.

Scripture lockets & liturgical masks: The scriptures of the Solar Family are inspiring and heady. Some observants carry their favourites in long, narrow scrolls bundled up in lockets, ready to unroll like tongues when the clasp is undone. Others go further and etch passages onto their masks, filling up the designs with gold leaf or crystal.

Sensory relics: A sun mote, a snowflake, the scent of tilled earth, or the taste of spring dew, encased in a delicate alabaster vessel the size of a bullet. Refreshing and prestigious.



Cles is a key player in the Temple of Chitin: a very small church operating from the back room of a back room in a particularly rundown corner of Pilgrim's Walk. The congregation of the Temple of Chitin is made up entirely of insects. They worship Cles as a god no matter how hard he tries to stop them and for reasons that he cannot determine.

As his flock grew over the years (and their chewed-up-paper devotional icons increased in number) he stopped trying to kill them, and instead worked out a rudimentary system of commandments that allows him limited control over the insects. He's now using them to pull a pest exterminator scam on nearby temples, stealing from their coffers whilst he 'fumigates' the building. You reckon that – insect congregation or not – this guy would count as a god when it comes to relics, sacrifices, and rituals. Bear this in mind next time you're performing a spell.



DROW AND THE SOLAR CHURCH

There are many reasons for a drow to turn aside from the moon and worship the violent, intemperate sun. Some do so because their families already hold some status amongst the aelfir; others do so because they seek that status. Participation in the Solar Church's continuous parade of festivals and ceremonies reinforces a drow's place in the hierarchy and shores up a network of connections.

Other drow turn to the Solar Pantheon when they decide that Our Glorious Lady has betrayed them. She's done nothing to help them lately. She doesn't care that they're indentured, oppressed, and subjugated. Maybe she's looking elsewhere; or maybe she's dead.

Still others assert that the Solar Church is an inherently Spire cult, as opposed to the traditions of the Home Nations. It's a religion that doesn't care about them or accommodate them, but it's modern – and by the turning of the seasons, it's theirs.

Most of the drow communities where Solar worship is prevalent sit somewhere at this intersection of social climbing, civic pride, and religious disenfranchisement. Pull one of these levers and a neighbourhood can quickly turn to, or away from, this religion. When Solar worship gets a grip, traditional lunar worship dwindles. Drow who don't convert lose status, move elsewhere, or hold grudges against those who 'betray their origins'. When worship of Limyé resurfaces or drow less interested in conforming to aelfir traditions move in, Solar Pantheon worshippers move up-Spire or clean up their neighbourhood.

A drow who worships the Solar Pantheon sacrifices their body and mind for piety. Older, more traditional drow (or those who only pay lip service to the seasonal pantheon) show particular devotion to Mother Winter, as her short days and weak light are more easily tolerated by drow physiology. Others simply send household servants out into the sun on their behalf. A worshipper of the Solar Church is required to spend three hours a day in sunlight, meaning one drow servant (usually one who's offended somebody) can take twelve hours of sunlight on behalf of an entire family.

Others form splinter cults, such as the Cousins Crepuscular, creeping out from the shadows to perform innovative (or blasphemous) rites at dawn or dusk. These rituals promise escape into dreams (lucid, sweet, or torturous) and dramatic shifts of fortune. This group is not a recognised civic religion, and Brother Harvest's Paladins are one blasphemous festival away from a purge. With dawn and dusk rites serving as perfect bookends for a long night of celebration on Red Row, the Cousins Crepuscular are catching on amongst aelfir hedonists, making them that much harder to stamp out. As aelfir adopt these practices, the

drow are finding themselves pushed to the fringes of their own cult.

The most devout don't look for ways to work around the challenges of solar worship: they embrace it. And thus the Blistering Clergy came to be. These drow stand bravely under the sun, bare skin exposed to its brutal light, until their skin blisters and their thoughts sizzle and spit. When they stagger indoors, blind and raving, they babble prophecies and omens that are seized on and written down by bemused but enchanted aelfir.

Some say these ecstatic prophets speak in the gods' own voices. If that's true, it would bring them closer to the Solar Pantheon than any high elf in Spire. If that's not true, it would mean several of these drow perhaps aren't as deranged as they seem, and are manipulating the aelfir through their ravings.

True or not, the Blistering Clergy are in a difficult position. The aelfir don't dare move against them in case they truly are favoured by the gods, and they're all enjoying the new holy days introduced by this rich modern vein of scripture; but they also don't like playing second fiddle to a bunch of upstart servants choking out semi-coherent prophecies.

COUSIN OF THE DIVINE FAMILY

REQUIREMENT: Complete an initiatory pilgrimage.

REFRESH: Participate in a service or festival.

LOW ADVANCES

PREACH TO THE CONVERTED. You proudly and classlessly display your status to ingratiate yourself with your betters. Take D3 **Reputation** damage to roll with Mastery on your next social interaction with aelfir (even if they are not members of the church).

MOTHER STEEL ME. You ask Mother Winter to gift you patience and restraint. +1 **Mind**. Once per session, when you pray to the Winter goddess, reduce **Mind** stress by D6.

SISTER THAW YOUR HEART. You appeal to Sister Spring to help someone transcend their prejudices and see clearly. Once per session, decide who the underdog is in a given conflict. This need not be the obvious or logical choice: Sister Spring is more beguiled by a compelling story than a dull fact. Roll with Mastery when you attempt to convince someone to take the side of said underdog.

MEDIUM ADVANCES

CELEBRANT. *You're more than an observant; you're a valued member of the Church.* +2
Reputation. Roll with Mastery when you ask observants to help you.

BLISTERING CLERGY. [Divine] *Your skin is burned and your lips are cracked, but your eyes see clearly.* When you stand in direct sunlight for 10 minutes, mark D3 **Blood** stress to see a clear vision of something that will happen tomorrow. For an additional D3 **Mind** stress, ask the GM a question about what will take place; you will get a clear answer.

KILL THE SUN. [Divine] *Mother's skies are grey, and drow with her blessing walk under a cloud of their own (as well as inconvenient drizzle).* Take D3 Mind stress to reduce the effect of The Curse on you and one other person standing very close to you to 1 until the end of the current situation.

SATIETY. [Divine] *Father Summer's abundance makes people complacent, listless, and easily duped.* Take D3 **Mind** stress to make a single person slower. Attempts to trick, deceive, or sneak past them are made with Mastery. Mark D6 **Mind** stress to apply the effects of this spell on a small group instead.

HARVEST ALMANACK. [Divine] *Brother Harvest's worshippers know where crops are sown and secrets buried.* Take D3 **Mind** stress to instantly know the precise location of the nearest type of object (e.g. 'a knife'); or, take D6 **Mind** stress for the general direction and distance to a specific object (e.g. 'my knife'; 'the heart of Undying Stone-Cuts-Steel').

PERFECT THE PLANTING. [Divine] *In Sister's name, you take unbeautiful memories from others into yourself.* Take D6 **Mind** stress or mark one permanent stress to **Mind** (which cannot be removed by any means) to remove a painful or unpleasant memory from someone else and take it for yourself.

Note that the Ethics Board (p. 105) are firm about deterring the trading of memories.

SOLAR FALLOUT

Belief and belonging create problems of their own.

DEVOUT. [Mind, Minor Fallout] In times of stress, you turn to prayer. While you're engaged in your devotions, you give an adversary a chance to make their move.

BELIEVER. [Mind/Shadow, Minor Fallout] The Ministry is starting to believe you would put the Solar Church's interests ahead of theirs, so you are required to ostentatiously and publicly break some taboos. Miss services, or make yourself conspicuous at the Cathedral of Our Glorious Lady (but not too conspicuous, or you might draw attention to the Ministry). Did you think serving multiple deities would be easy?

EXCOMMUNICATED. [Silver/Reputation, Moderate Fallout] You crossed someone or crossed a line. The Solar Church doesn't want you, and until you've made amends, respectable members of the church won't be caught dead with you. The Divine family is blanking you. When you attempt a miracle, roll a D6. On a 1 or 2, the miracle simply doesn't occur.

FACTIONS

The Solar Church is a microcosm of aelfir nature: competitive, fractious, and grandstanding.

THE DEEP ROOTS OF SPRING

These poet-historians are instantly recognisable by the fragments of history recorded in cramped lines of text on their masks. Senior members continue the decoration as scarification down their necks and arms. They believe it is not right that Spire should hold so many secrets. They plumb its depths in radiant, joyful processions of recitation and dance, winding through the city, the Vermessian, and even the Heart.

More than one expedition has been lost in the Vermessian. The Vermessian Sages deny all knowledge of these disappearances, only sighing and repeating that the Vermessian is dangerous and best left unplumbed.



THE LONG WINTER

Nothing demonstrates mastery over the frailties of the flesh like having your heart replaced with an object d'art and buried in a box. Devotees of the Long Winter celebrate Morticians like saints, and work tirelessly to shut down backstreet practitioners of Undying surgery and ensure they never work again (murder and arson are proven tools).

When alerted to a person in possession of another's heart, the Long Winter reclaim it quickly and ruthlessly. Aelfir hearts are returned to their rightful owner; other hearts they retain because it would be sacrilege to destroy them, but some creatures are simply not equipped to be Undying, and need guidance and education.

The Long Winter maintains at least one Undying agent within the Paladins. This is an honour bestowed on those dangerous enough to pose a threat to a senior member of the Long Winter, but not crafty enough to wriggle away from their scrutiny; a combination of traits which means that these Long Winter plants have limited tenures as undercover agents. Tensions between the Long Winter and the Paladins regularly spill over into armed conflict. The autumnal equinox is brutal.

CALEFACTOR WAY SUPPER CLUB

Feasts in Father Summer's honour are as old as aelfir civilisation; but anything traditional is banal and below the notice of the Supper Club. They celebrate Father with avant-garde culinary spectacles – from micro-dosing with poisonous cocktails or replacing their teeth with glittering diamonds to crunch through bone and rock to the consumption of sapient beings. The Supper Club is a cannibal cult, but it's an affluent one that meets in elegant dining rooms in the Silver Quarter, and is therefore as good as untouchable.

RELATIONS WITH THE CHURCH OF OUR GLORIOUS LADY

Relationships between the Solar Church and the Church of Our Glorious Lady are characterised by resignation, frustration, and disdain.

The Church largely ignores the worshippers of Limyé, and by doing so denies them authority, visibility, and resources. Eventually, the aelfir will strangle the worship of the moon or banish it to Derelictus. Making it unfashionable might kill it faster than any active effort, but it pleases the aelfir to entice prominent drow into the Solar Church to hasten the process.

Meanwhile, the devotees of Our Glorious Lady work ever harder to preserve their Cathedral and faith, resigned to toiling away to support their community.

For Solar-worshipping drow, the Church of Our Glorious Lady is embarrassing in its shabby idealism; but it's the faith of their family and forebears, and the work the Cathedral does helps the drow keep body and soul together. Occasionally Solar drow make a gesture of unity, but never when it risks their own status. Requests from the Cathedral for meaningful support create divisions and resentment, and can rapidly tear apart a community.

RELATIONS WITH THE MINISTRY

The Solar Church is embarrassed that the Ministry even exists. Had they done their job correctly the drow of Spire would be all happily worshiping the sun – instead, several crucial missteps have left many drow feeling unable to connect with the faith, and driven them to seek meaning in dangerous interneccine cults. The Church would dearly love to convince a Minister to openly convert to sole worship of their pantheon – just think of the PR opportunities! – but ex-Ministers have a habit of winding up dead at the hands of their former employers, so they've had no success stories as of yet.

RELATIONS WITH THE VIGIL

As with the Ministry, the organisation is broadly ashamed that the Crimson Vigil continues to operate – but there are a large number of militant drow within the Solar Church's congregation that are dead set against the Vigilites, and eager to prove their loyalty to their new masters by breaking up meetings and engaging in open brawls against those bearing the mark of the Red Moon. Most Solar priests would rather they didn't do this and instead left it up to the official authorities, but street-fights between gangs of rookie Vigilites and enthusiastic amateur followers of Brother Harvest are on the increase.



The Solar Basilica by Hallowed-Cries-of-Soaring-Eagles
Year of the Windward Heron, Gouache on canvas

With this piece the artist seeks to reimagine the very concept of informative cartography. Rather than provide a direct representation, Hallowed-Cries-of-Soaring-Eagles' work portrays the ambiance of the building in which you now stand. This map challenges the visitor to understand the aesthetic flow of the Basilica as they navigate its halls, instead of slavishly tracing a line on a diagram like a child or servant.

THE MANY & THE OLD FAITH

By Lio Keahna

The Many are a refugee pantheon of gods and goddesses, imported to Spire by drow fleeing the endless civil wars in the Home Nations. Their names and individual identities have long been rubbed away by frantic praying fingers and desperate hearts, and so the collective has merged into an amorphous and protean whole. The vague shapes associated with them are the Spider; the Stone; the Tower; the Beast; the River; the Soil; the Heart; the Shadow; the Scroll; the Hook; and the Two, who rule them all. Worship of the Many is rare – perhaps one in five hundred drow pay respects to the old faith – but it is steadily increasing in popularity. You can learn more about The Many in *Spire*, p. 193.

Spire-born drow who are exposed to the Many often feel a kind of homesickness tugging at their chest. Scholars scrawl odd sigils in the margins of their notes as lonely, maddened poetry threatens to spill from their guts. Drow along Pilgrim's Walk leave sketches, sculptures, rotten food, and small oddities in myriad shrines that crop up and disappear by the hour. For their faith, they're granted access to a dreamworld of half-memories, broken stories, aphorisms, and scripture. They're brought to the Home Nations, whether they know it or not, to walk among their predecessors and learn from them.

As a fugitive pantheon, the Many are less authoritarian and more ancestral. The drow regard them with the kind of easy respect earned by confidantes and enemies in equal measure. They are decentralised and non-hierarchical; these gods are adornments who love the faithful wearing them, vengeful when provoked and careful in their chaos. Such derelicts carry power older than time. Those who follow in their manifold footsteps commune with abundance, especially in the face of desolation.

Out of necessity, worship of the Many is simple. These spirits follow their followers; haunt their oppressors; dream with their descendants. Their anonymity is their strength, and they require no great sacrifice to claim the faithful. Devotion to a faith so tattered is sacrifice enough. They feed on song and story. They share meals with families, curling themselves around the feet of the downtrodden like cats, and push them forward one step after another. They are refuge.

Unlike the two most popular pantheons in the Spire – Damnou and the Solar Pantheon – the Many refuse all forms of supremacy and are pragmatic to a fault. Why would they crave power over a crumbling ruin so exposed to sunlight? Why engage with gods who scorch and simmer their flesh by their own nature? Why demand votives from those who value individualism over communion? Their lack of ambition is sometimes viewed as cowardice or laziness, but it's kept them alive.

However, the Two who rule this covenant of survivors are nothing if not practical. They know as well as anyone the worth of individual communities: when you feed one fragment, you feed the whole.

FACTIONS

YS' EULOGISTS

Patron gods: two, beast, hearth

The refugees who survive the civil warfare of Ys run to Spire with stories of cataclysm on their lips and hurt etched into their bones. No matter which side the survivors represent, upon their arrival to the Spire, their previous allegiances are as nebulous as the gods they worship. This is but one of many deaths Yssian drow will endure in their lifetimes, but for the self-appointed believers who form Ys' Eulogists, these deaths do not go unmourned. Their goal is to create stronger community ties for civil war survivors, birthing family lines before they lose themselves to four year servitude.

Though the Many remain nameless, some of the faithful assign identities to each piece of the pantheon. The Two who rule become Birth and Death, or Casket and Hatch, or Cradle and Grave. For the Eulogists, the rest of the Many are unknown variables. When violence is required, they call upon the beasts of old. When warmth is needed or when families are being formed, they pray through shared food, fire, clothes. It's hard to distinguish between these pieces.

This is the ceremony of the dead: the refugees, not moments after resettlement in the empty, barren lots of the Works, will share their meagre rations amongst themselves and remember. They will remember backwards, beginning with what drove them out of Ys and ending with their births; who their parents were (or weren't); who raised them and who didn't. They will identify their sworn enemies in the group by these shared memories.

The chorus of the Many ties these enemies together. In these unions, the now-fugitive enemies democratically elect two people, one from each side, to reenact their own displacement. These two elected enemies meet in the centre of the barren feast. They link their arms together and eat from the other's hand, maintaining eye contact. Whoever blinks first is renamed Casket, while the other earns the name Hatch and must feed their remaining meal to their enemy by hand. Once all the food is shared, the chosen Two move to the nearest chain link fence bordering the lot.



Here, they fight. The refugee onlookers know of the Eulogists, and join their ranks through the Eulogist remembrance ritual. They murmur amongst themselves as the enemies brutalise and are brutalised in turn. Hatch strikes first. Casket follows. The onlookers whisper pieces of the story. The discontent is a contagion, every word percussive as it accumulates coherence.

Soon, a narrative emerges, and the enemies attune to it. The melee begins to mirror it, predict it, shape it. Only when the whispering turns into a cacophony – the onlookers screaming their pain while the bloodied Two stagger into the cold metal fence again and again – does the ceremony end. They fall away from each other, unrecognisable frames of dark pulp and reverent agony. If they both survive, they return to the now-silent onlookers together. There are no more sides.

BEL[L]OW

Patron gods: shadow, beast, soil, river

Bellow, Below, or Burrow; the Many's oldest devotees. Their name varies across the undercity (where most of its followers make their homes), but its variants are similar enough that they are easily recognisable. This splinter sect is itself disparate: they are united only by the rivers running through them in dreams and in blood, and their shared aim to protect the drow from their worst selves.

This is an underground network of occult healers; disgraced holy people; those orphaned or broken by the Crimson Vigil (even including former Vigilites); and those atoning for their sins. Appalled at the infection of the Vigil spreading along the underbelly of the Spire, they call upon the Old Gods to blot out the threat.

The Below are almost exclusively Spire-born, raised by homeland drow on stories of liberation. They are parents who've lost hatchlings, children who've lost villages, elders who remember when Damnou was unified and violence had purpose. They recognise each other by the tattoos on their hands and feet: the gristle pattern of the Beast, with the roots sprawling out from its core.

Initiation to the Below involves burial and rebirth. The initiates are buried within the mud of Grist, forced to contend with cannibal cultists and scuttling creatures as they pray to darkness incarnate. They touch the sickness that the upwardly mobile will not speak of, and they confront everything they contact through dirt-streaked fingertips and mud-muffled hymns. Once reborn, they are given ceremonial tattoos that signify both their place among the Below and the things they've done to earn it.

THE STITCH

Patron gods: spider, hearth, hook

The Stitch is an intergenerational and interfaith faction of both Yssian and Spire-born drow of the clan Destera, or the Weavers. Those who belong to Destera already make it their business to pull the thread from the past to the future, knitting and purling and weaving a cat's cradle of memory to push their children forward. Survival comes above all else.

Initiation into the Stitch is a literal trial by fire, wherein the novitiate must strip themselves at dusk. They are then led to the wild zones, where they're expected to unmake their clothes and reknit them into something completely new before daybreak. Beyond the risk of the sun's burning rays, there are death lilies, elf traps, and bored aelfir who know where the vulnerable would-be Weavers will gather. Those who survive barely make it out with their muscles intact, much less their blistered, bubbling skin.

Worship of the Many for the Weavers is an exercise in sustainability. Just as the first of their kind wove scraps of sacrament into their streetwear, so too does streetwear become sacrament. Established Weavers pass their cloth along to new initiates. Some include rules for how to be and how to move; others pray that the new ones will wear their colours better than they did.

HER CHILDREN

Patron gods: scroll, tower, river, shadow

In the Graveyard of Small Gods in Ivory Row sits an altar to the Many. There's only a rudimentary sketch – four wobbly lines which convey the appearance of a river – where the epitaph should be. Above the epitaph sits a well-worn ivory statuette in the vague shape of a woman, stained and indistinct from generations of reverent touch.

Once, she might have kept a name, or had a name ascribed to her. She may even have accepted sacrifices in her name; for her name; by her name. But those days are gone, and they were gone long before her only remaining form was taken from the far-off homelands to this land of decay.

Silence is her call. She pulls her followers to the Graveyard through dreams where nothing happens, and nothing continues to happen. They come alone. They sit in front of her altar for hours in the quiet. They listen. When it's time, they leave their names behind on a scroll which seems eerily clean for its surroundings.

The newly nameless thrive without the trappings of identity. They can be perceived by their fellow drow, but they revel in the anonymity of their religion, knowing no level of perception can compare to the vast erosion they represent. They are the river coring the earth. They are the tower, and they are the shadow the tower casts. Their main goal is to remember. They write down the constant, rolling current of truth as told by the invisible. They are watchers of the drow.

It is their choice how involved they want to be with their families; if they tell stories; if they watch and learn; if they aid in other factions for other godlings. The price they pay is cold. They can never fully return home.

RELATIONS WITH THE CHURCH OF OUR GLORIOUS LADY

As a community-based pantheon, the Many and their followers often align themselves with the work of the priests and their goddess. It's not uncommon to hear low, faraway singing of achaic hymnals at Church congregations: to the Many, any large gathering of drow is enough cause to celebrate.

Those faithful to the Many respectfully intermingle with the Church sermons, and some priests of the Church are more welcoming than others. They may incorporate symbolism of the Many into their sermons and clothing as small signs of deference, drawing in crowds who might not otherwise attend Church worship. It has become a kind of symbiotic relationship: the population of the Church grows, and the voices of the faithful feed the ancestors.

There's occasional tension between Limyé and the Many when the undercity worshippers disturb the other facets of Damnou. Often this tension is resolved through treaties drafted by Her Children, but there's always an idea or talk of rebellion that slips by. The Many, coalesced as they are, sometimes threaten to disinter both Lombre and Lekolé to return them to the whole. Both the Eulogists and Her Children work to quell the disquiet.

Our Glorious Lady and her priests continue their collaboration with the Many regardless, familiar as they are with the phases of the moon.

AELFIR AND THE MANY

Aelfir differ in their treatment of the Many. Some aelfir see belief in the Many as fashionable: they cleave to the spider, the hook, or the scroll, even weaving bits of gossamer into their clothes in mock deference.

Some claim to hear the chorus, if they're bold and crave connection. These aelfir consider the Many to be a heightened state of consciousness, something that can tether them to the land they occupy.

Others see the Many as symptoms of mental illness (e.g. 'hearing voices'), and on occasion will use this assumed pathology as an excuse to further oppress the drow. Once in a while, a particularly cruel high elf will take their entourage to the wild zones or deeper below, just to throw off drow rituals – or worse.

RELATIONS WITH THE MINISTRY

While the Ministry values its secrecy, the Many – particularly those who favour the Beast or the Soil – often cross paths with them. The Many and their followers consider the Ministry an isolationist cult, and a way of being which is in direct opposition to their own.

However, on occasion, they find themselves allied. During the rites of initiation, for example, the Many shift around the edges of the would-be Minister's reality. They engulf the Ministry's initiates in dream-rich soil within the catacombs, possess their blood with the Beast in times of fury, and warm their hardened interiors enough to remember what it means to be in a community.

These alliances are uneasy and impermanent. When the Ministry's initiates move from enduring trials to dealing them out, the Many move too. Whether this means inhibiting the self-important warmongering of the Magisters or leading wayward Ministers to the altar of Her, the Many become trickster enemies that shepherd the Ministers (or try to). Their disciplinary actions are, as always, rooted in love of the drow; but sometimes the love of the gods looks like madness.

RELATIONS WITH THE VIGIL

As with the Ministry, the Many's relationship with the Vigil is tense and divisive. When it comes to divisions of the Crimson Vigil, it's not uncommon to find them mirrored in the followers of the Many.

Worshippers of the Many do not share the Vigil's fixation on wrath. They are the self-proclaimed protectors of the helpless: those who are vulnerable and uninitiated, stuck in the crosshairs between insurrection and the crushing everyday life under aelfir rule. Instead, they listen close to the chorus of the Many, and walk among the shadows to intercept various attempts by the Vigil to unmake Spire.

Their battles can be bloody and horrific, but they'll choose self-sacrifice over the loss of innocent lives. It's not for the sake of Spire itself – poisoned, teetering, hubristic structure that it is – but for the sake of the drow.

Their greatest foes and occasional, reluctant allies are the demonologist Vigilites who are dead set on unreality. They are evenly matched, both in numbers and power, and more often than not they find themselves on the same side. This leads to a question that is too absolute for the Vigilites to voice in good faith, but too insistent for the Many to ignore: is balance inevitable?

THE MANY: EXTRA ADVANCES

YS' EULOGISTS

REQUIREMENT: Survive the Ceremony of the Dead.

REFRESH: Bring donations to newcomer refugee drow in the undercity.

LOW ADVANCES

BRUISED KNUCKLES. *We'll settle this here.* You know how to bring someone to the brink of death without killing them. When you make an unarmed attack and roll a 10 on your highest dice, your target's Resistance is reduced to 0 and they are unconscious. This ability will only function on targets that are capable of being unconscious (helmets etc. may make it unviable).

PUT ASIDE YOUR DIFFERENCES. *At the end of the day, you want the same things.* Once per session, you can determine the exact cause of a dispute between two parties of drow. When you attempt to escalate this dispute by whatever means, roll with Mastery.

MEDIUM ADVANCE

BEGIN ANEW. [Divine] *Your ancestors link their arms around you and your companions.* Once per session, draw your cell together in communion and prayer, and choose one of the five resistances. Everybody who participates in the communion clears all stress and all minor fallout allocated to this chosen resistance.

THE STITCH

REQUIREMENT: Endure the trial of the weaver.

REFRESH: Bring sacred cloth to the stronghold of clan Destera.

LOW ADVANCE

TAKE COVER. *Redistribute.* Gain the **Resist** skill.

A member of your party has lost clothing coverage due to physical fallout. Once per session, when you sew up the rips in your companion's clothing and share stories, you both clear D6 **Mind** stress. This takes around half an hour, and requires moderate peace and quiet to perform.

MEDIUM ADVANCE

UNBROKEN CHAIN. [Divine] *A wound to one is a wound to all.* This spell has a casting time of one hour. It removes all **Blood** stress and all **Blood** fallout from every character who participates in the ritual, then redistributes them amongst the participants in any manner you see fit. All stress and fallout must be reapplied. When marking stress in this way, you do not roll for fallout; when receiving fallout in this way, you do not lose stress.

PRAEVENIRE RECORDATUS

FRAIZON DE-STARYS

Fraizon is a charismatic cult leader from a dishonoured noble house (Starys, the Drowned Kings) who makes a habit of discrediting and ruining other cult leaders, sowing conflict among their flock and snapping up their impressionable congregations. They run a cult of absolution and forgiveness called the Perfect Mirror, professing to wash away the sins and madness of anyone who joins them. But it's all nonsense; they don't believe any of it. They're just after the power and influence of having a vast congregation beneath them.

A wide variety of disrobed cult leaders – the ones who weren't killed by their ex-followers as false prophets, anyway – are eager for them to get their comeuppance. There's just one problem: Fraizon doesn't have an ounce of inherent magical power, but the zealous support of their followers is giving them abilities they hadn't counted on. Just last week, an assassin's heart stopped seconds before they could deliver the killing blow on Fraizon as they gave their weekly sermon in People's Square.

BEL[L]OW

REQUIREMENT: Survive an encounter with the Crimson Vigil.

REFRESH: Dig a shallow grave. Put a Vigilite in it.

LOW ADVANCE

SCENT THE QUARRY. *Your blood quickens with the hunger of the Beast.* Gain the **Pursue** skill. If you're being tracked, you become aware of the person or creature that's following you as though you were the one tracking them. You can subsequently hunt them, if you wish.

MEDIUM ADVANCE

PROPHETIC DREAMS. [Divine] *You can smell the stink of blood on the future.* Mark D6 stress to **Mind** or perform an hour-long ritual marking the sigils of the Bel(l)ow on your palms in ink. You may ask the GM three questions regarding the path ahead. They will answer you in visions that take over your mind, no matter where you are or what you're doing.

HIGH ADVANCE

RITE OF PASSAGE. [Divine] *Death is the beginning.* To activate this ability, die. You are buried within the mud and rot of the city. There, you're found by the chorus of the Many. They are terrifying and monstrous and the most beautiful thing you've ever seen. Awaken at dawn, alive but irrevocably changed.

The GM and the other players work together to channel the Many and remake you in an appropriate image. They build a new character with the same number and level of advances that you had previously, but they can be chosen freely from any class. You look entirely different, but there is still a tell that belies your origins. The GM and the other players tell you what you look like now, and you determine the tell.

HER CHILDREN

REQUIREMENT: Spend one session without your name.

REFRESH: Lead another drow to Her altar. They don't need to write their name, but ask them to witness and remember yours for you.

LOW ADVANCES

SOMEONE NEW. [Divine] *What's in a name?*

Find the scroll of names left by Her altar and choose an appropriate one. This is your new identity. Any current Minor or Moderate **Mind** or **Shadow** fallout is removed. For each fallout removed, mark stress to **Reputation** as you cut away parts of your old identity – D3 for minor, D6 for moderate.

EYES UNCLOUDED. [Divine] *Truth will out.*

Once per session, when you have a minute or so to observe a location, you may declare that you've found a hidden passageway, secret door, concealed compartment, or some other obfuscated feature. You know how to open it.

HIGH ADVANCE

DISAPPEAR COMPLETELY. [Divine]

There's nobody here. This spell has no immediate stress cost, but D8 stress is paid upon ending the spell. When cast, you vanish entirely from the situation. You cannot engage with your party until the next dawn, except as a half-remembered nightmare: speaking in whispers, nudging fate in the directions you desire, and protecting those you care about. While de-manifested, you can add two dice to another player's roll once per situation.

PILGRIM'S WALK

By Viditya Voleti

There's a saying in Spire that every time a bird shits, a new religion opens its coffers and another closes its doors in Pilgrim's Walk.

Though it is generally seen as a place of endless worship and destitution, Pilgrim's Walk houses much more culture and life than the untrained eye can discern. Behind the walls and down the alleyways, faith is discussed, created, and distributed. Rumours flow around the temples and churches on Godstreet like holy water, lifting or drowning their practices.

There is never a dull moment. Behind every door is another ritual, another sermon, another scam, or another dark secret waiting to go horribly wrong.

WEIRDNESSES IN PILGRIM'S WALK:

There is a church on Godstreet where everyone who goes in for the service comes out as a different person – literally. Their memories appear to be intact, but it's as if their bodies have been replaced. Then they all seem to congregate at the Grattan Street Chapel to transform again.

The Festival of Salvation is around the corner, and parade floats are being made for the celebration of The-One-We-Have-Forgotten-To-Celebrate: an annual holiday in Pilgrim's Walk that is dedicated to a powerful god that everyone forgot about. Many believe it is better to celebrate them once a year than incur their wrath later on. Different households frantically yet joyously perform as many rites as they can think of, like burning money, offering food to rats, and even the occasional live sacrifice just to be safe.

Recently it was rumoured that a drow baby was found inside the lung of a priest who was lying dead on the street. The baby was perfectly healthy and is now residing inside The House Forever Abandoned – a temple dedicated to Yalrha, the god of lost trinkets. The monks believe the child to be their messiah, and have since had a large uptick in the number of lost items finding their way to the temple.

A product war is being waged between two manufacturers of religious charms as they expand their territories. What started as simple sabotage is now putting people in serious danger. Holy water has been replaced with acid; necklaces are suddenly made of lead; and now innocent buyers are suffering from strange curses bearing the mark of Anytheme, a long dead god of brutal revenge.

THE CULT OF GEORGE

Anyone who frequents Pilgrim's Walk is well aware of George (*Spire*, p. 165). It's hard to avoid bumping into him while he's being ordained, or hearing the jingling of his many religious charms as he walks down the street, or laughing at the rumours of his drunken antics. But one thing you will be hard pressed to hear about casually is the gospel of George.

Finding its way around Pilgrim's Walk, and now to other districts in Spire, is the Cult of George. It seems that enough people have watched this man stumble through life, being accepted by almost every religion but still staying alive and (mostly) well, that it got them talking. Is he doing something right? Is he truly blessed? Is he a saint himself? Those who see George not as a bumbling drunk, but as an avatar of a god unknown to them, believe one thing: he must be protected at all costs, for he will create the singular religion of the world!

The Cult of George live life as closely as they can to George himself. The initiation rite is to change your name to George; then you attempt to experience every religion you can, and drink to excess so that you might bring your mind closer to George's. Many devotees believe that their most righteous action is to keep George alive without him knowing, for the Cult of George has one other major tenet: George cannot know of his divinity.

In pursuit of this, the members work tirelessly to keep George's routines alive and to funnel his ever-dwindling wealth back into his own pockets. There are Cult of George members in other temples that feed George, give him shelter, or pay off thieves and cutthroats who harm his life. The Cult of George believes that the more members they have out there, the more they are able to care for their saint. Together, they will become one with George himself.

GEORGIST. [Divine, Low advance]

*You can hear George's thoughts – whichever one that may be – but they can hear yours as well. Change your name to George (in the name of George), and gain a Street-level bond labelled **George**. Once per situation, you may mark D6 stress to your bond George to cast this spell and tap into the experiences and talents of all Georges in Spire. Choose a skill or domain, and gain Mastery on all rolls using it until the end of the current situation.*

THE PILGRIMS WHO WALK

There are those in Pilgrim's Walk who wonder: 'Who is the pilgrim that walks?' Some laugh, knowing that's just a common joke told around the city. But those that have seen The Pilgrim, who worship its route and pray at its feet, know better than to laugh.

The Pilgrims Who Walk are a cult that can usually be heard before they are seen. All members of this cult wear jingling shackles around their ankles, walking slowly and deliberately around the streets of Pilgrim's Walk. The most devoted will only stop their routine after collapsing from exhaustion. To outsiders, their patterns are random; they might dramatically change direction or walk back and forth on a single street for hours. But to the members, they are following the footsteps of The Pilgrim.

The Pilgrim is who they believe to be the first person to walk these streets, and who still does so to this day. Many members will tell stories of how they found themselves alone, wandering, or lost when they noticed the strange bloody footprints of two left feet, and the distant jingling of chains. Often, these stories will end with them turning a corner and seeing a figure. Everyone describes them differently, except they all agree that the figure was distorted, terrifying, and twice as large as a gnoll.

The Pilgrims Who Walk deliberately attempt to lose themselves, hoping to find traces of their deity's path. They will keep walking until it shows up again. While not all members have seen The Pilgrim, those that believe in their tale find the practice meditative, and will try anything to steer their life back onto the right path.

SHAMBLE FORWARD. [Divine, Low advance] *You know the truth of this world: you cannot be found unless you are first lost.* First, become lost, and be found by the Pilgrim's path. Then, cast this spell by marking D3 stress to **Mind** when you are lost again in body, mind, or purpose. You will see The Pilgrim's bloody footprints on the ground in front of you, no matter where you are in Spire, and they will lead you towards a landmark that the locals cherish.

LESSER CULTS

While Pilgrim's Walk may be the metaphorical (and literal) birthplace of some of Spire's strangest religious activity, there are strange sects all throughout this behemoth of a city. People are always being broken and united, new gods found, and terrifying rituals done in the name of gods unseen.

WHALESHANTY SINGERS

Ever since the Great Flaming Skywhale Disaster twenty years ago, witnesses to that event have spread the belief that these beasts are truly divine. Built on scattered holy texts from an ancient religion that worshipped the skywhales, this cult watches the skywhales from a distance and divines truths from their activity.

Worshippers of skywhales believe them to be the true beings of this world, unburdened and unchallenged by anything natural. They are benevolent creatures by choice, but they can still send their soldiers to ruin or salvation – much like the warning they sent twenty years ago. A lot of cult members see wind-elves as caretakers, allowed to ride the skywhales as a true luxury.

Many practitioners of this cult are named Whaleshanty Singers due to their acute study of skywhale songs – and the horrific surgeries they undergo to add a third lung filled with skywhale gas to their bodies. This lets them replicate, to a degree, the songs that skywhales sing. This seems to have divine power amongst the masses as they sing out towards the great beasts in unison, supposedly calming them.

WHALESHANTY PIPES. [Divine, Medium advance] *We sing, and chant, and roar! To Spire we see you soar!* The skywhale organ in your body slowly produces a similar gas to the beasts, incredibly powerful but dangerous to you. Implant an organ that generates skywhale gas into your body and gain the **Compel** skill. Mark D6 stress to **Blood** to cast this spell, open your throat to your skywhale organ, and start singing. As you let out this strange approximation of a skywhale song, you can choose to either enrage those around you or calm them down to a passive state. This song can be heard from a great distance, but the emotional effect is limited to those in the immediate vicinity.

THE CARRION-CROWNED CARCASS OF NEW HEAVEN

The on-going struggles between the Morticians and the Charnelites result in tension and fighting on a daily basis. The two factions battle for territory as the hyenas and their masters expand their turf and the Morticians erect more Towers of Silence, neither ceding ground. However, a strange occurrence seems to have brought an uneasy peace between certain members of each group.

Somewhere in the shuffle of bodies and rituals atop New Heaven, an offering to the carrion creatures was not only denied, but preserved. Neither faction is sure who this corpse is, only that it's a drow; but even more importantly, no one knows which side attempted to dispose of it first. One morning a Charnelite found the body in a dark corner completely untouched – except for the face being bitten clean off and a hole in its chest cavity, where a nest had been made. Even stranger, the hyenas and corvids seemed to circle it protectively. One Mortician was ripped to shreds by both groups of animals for attempting to grab it. Several other attempts have ended similarly.

The majority of Morticians and Charnelites see no reason to dwell on this corpse; their greater feud is more important than this strange occurrence, and they demand it be properly disposed of. But dozens have instead put aside their differences in a newfound belief that the corpse is in fact an avatar of Charne's new form of Undeath: a blasphemous claim to the Charnelites, and similarly cowardly to the Morticians. The two factions have found a tenuous alliance in allocating resources to snuff out this growing sect, though many who attempt to do so are either killed or converted.

Those who believe have strong evidence for this claim. This corpse does not rot like the others, and does not draw evil spirits towards it. Its protectors seem to grow stronger and live longer by feasting in the newly-made halls of its shrine, praying at its feet and at those of its beastly guardians.

CARRION-PRIEST ADVANCE: UNDYING BOND. [Divine, Medium advance] *You've visited the Shrine of Undeath and found a new perspective on Charnel's familiars, growing your bond with your companion.* +2 **Blood.** Mark D6 **Blood** to cast this spell. Spend an hour with your hyena to empower it for the day, allowing it to rip into and feed on your own flesh. You can share senses with your hyena until the next dawn. In addition, when you issue the **GUARD** command, you also reduce stress marked to **Mind**, **Blood**, and **Reputation** by 1 to a minimum of 1. If you don't have access to the **GUARD** command, you do gain access for the duration of this spell.

RADIANCE INCARNATE

The most bombastic of the cults that walk the streets of Spire are those who come from the Temple Gleaming down in Derelictus, far from the light of the world. Radiance Incarnate is not only the name of their members, but also their driving mantra. 'Spire is bleak!' they shout; 'Spire is dour! Why live on this wretched plane like a poor sinner when you could embrace light, love, and laughter! Live like fire, shine like gemstones, be the light in the dark, become radiance incarnate!'

The Great Radiance teaches her subjects the true ways of becoming radiant. The Great Radiance claims to have been born in a flash of life after a spireblack explosion down in the heart of the city, and brought to this world in the form she uses now. She claims she was born in direct opposition to the darkness of Spire. She claims that her endless wealth is a gift manifested by the city itself. Any who challenge these claims are immolated on the spot.

She is surrounded by dancers, artists, and others who have given in to her message; people who have hit rock bottom and found new hope. They wear jewels that she grants if they display true devotion, and intricate outfits fitted with several torches, braziers, and candelabra that are wildly dangerous to have so close to their bodies. She leads parades all over Derelictus, a literal explosive event that many residents fear. The members that join in the procession carry great smoking spireblack torches while dancing, often leaving a trail of fire in their wake. Her Great Radiance spews her gospel as the parade marches on, claiming that soon all will feel true joy and warmth.

To prove yourself to her you must live like fire: embody love and shine bright. Many do so by lighting themselves on fire in front of her; but before they perish she banishes the flames with a single touch, returning them to their unburnt state. Many members of this cult choose to swallow the gemstones she gives them, believing that it will give them a semblance of her power.

BECOME RADIANT. [Divine, Medium advance] *You have felt the flames engulf your body and know the price to control your own radiance. You are free – you are alive! – and you will spread your joy to others like a wildfire.* Visit the Great Radiance and swallow one of her gemstones. Mark D6 stress to **Silver** to cast the following spell for the duration of a situation: your body alights in flames, hot and luminous. This fire will not hurt you or others, but will spread when touched and stay lit until your own fire is put out. While you are engulfed in radiant flames, you may mark D3 stress to **Blood** to extinguish all your flames in a brilliant explosion, inflicting D6 stress to those it touched and destroying any stone, wood, or steel within it.

GLOOMPLAYERS

The once-popular Gloomplayers reside in various theatres-turned-chapels around the city. The leading priests are a group of washed-up desang actors and directors who saw the words of great Production Gods in the entrails of their fellow actors during performances. They believe that the world is but a stage for these Production Gods, and that it is their job to put on shows that will please them.

The Gloomplayers preach the gospel of these deities through the 'godscripts' – the divine plays written about a person's life within their blood and bones – and believe that if they do not put on a great performance, the world will be shut down. Gloomplayers were once incredibly popular, packing their chapels with faithful witnesses to terrifyingly grim desang plays. They consisted of improvised narratives that continued until one of the cast died; the rest of the cast then performed the play written in the godscript of the one who just died.

Nowadays, the godscripts are surprisingly cheerful. The Gloomplayers are told that this is the Production Gods wanting a change of genre, as interpreted by the directors of these companies, which will lead to more people coming to more expensive shows. But, to their surprise, happy endings do not make great theatre in Spire. A rift is forming between the Gloomplayer theatre companies as to the interpretations of these godscripts.

DRAMATURGICAL TASTE. [Divine, Low advance] *After an intense scene of reaching into the zeitgeist and the soul of the everyman, it's good to sit back, take some notes, and reread the script. Study the art of the Gloomplayers to gain +1 Reputation and the Compel skill. If you find a fresh corpse, you can read the godscript within someone's blood and bones, and learn a secret from their life.*

THE SISTERHOOD OF STAINED GLASS

Spire is home to several religions that actively seek to harm the residents and infrastructure of the city, but none have made a more profound scar on it than the Sisterhood of Stained Glass. This cult deals in the greatest of prices for faith: not coin, not service, not even life or death, but memory.

The Sisterhood of Stained Glass has seen a great rise in Spire since they broke off from the Sunlight Collective. Their departure followed a disastrous gallery display they put on that everyone wanted to forget; and surprisingly, everyone did.

The Sisterhood of the Stained Glass believe that the strange glass windows in Ivory Row are in fact the eye lens of an unknowable god who has seen all of Spire's history, and all of its flaws and triumphs. Through rigorous prayer and giving their minds to the strange windows, they have learned how to refract and skew the memories of those who are gazed at by the great glass.

The Sisterhood have used this knowledge to create a dangerous business of faith, positioning themselves as soothsayers who can make all your worries go away in exchange for true devotion to themselves and their artistic vision. Of course, to the Sisterhood it's really just sculpting memories as they wish: their subjects are mere canvases and clay for their vision. They shape Spire not only as a conduit for this ancient god, but also for their own selfish gain. That which is dead may be remembered, but that which is forgotten never existed.

REFRACTION.

[Divine, Medium advance] *The colourful shard of glass embedded in your eye allows you to see into someone's mind; see their memories; see their true selves. Do you dare refract it further? You must visit the Sisterhood of Stained Glass and give yourself to them fully, allowing them to turn you into a piece of their art. Then, once per session, you can look into the mind of a person and pull out a recent memory. You may change one aspect of it, such as a person, location, time, flavourful detail, and so on.*

THE ARCHITECTS

On a lavish, ostentatious street lined with stately manors and extravagant clubs lies a small, nondescript bar that bears no name – except for the tiny sigil of a black and orange bird above the door. Within, dour-faced aristos sip expensive cocktails, lounge in louche armchairs before crackling fires, and discuss mind-numbing minutiae. These people are not The Architects.

But: on a certain day at a certain time, one could flash a chunky stone ring bearing the same symbol that hangs above the door, and utter a coded phrase (changed every fortnight) to the barkeep. Then one might be admitted to a private back room, leading to a carriage outside. They might then be blindfolded and brought through the winding streets and alleys to another, much more secretive location. And in that location, cowled and ringed Architects conduct secret rituals and practice geometrical rites and prayers in the darkness as they pull the marionette strings that govern drow society. At least, that's what they tell themselves.

Architects are the rich but not too rich, the powerful but not too powerful. They are the pretenders to the thrones: the self-important and insufferably arrogant society members who imagine themselves to be significant simply because they belong to a rarified social strata. The strings they claim to pull are superficial, and the plots they hatch never come to fruition. The trappings and pretenses of their secret society – which is in fact one of the worst kept secrets in Spire – are a self-serving ruse, meant to lend weight and gravitas to what is essentially a slightly more exclusive aristocrat's club. Even the religious aspect (worship of Aureus, the Masked Bowerbird) is somewhat farcical. The rings and the cowls and the passwords grant them a sense of belonging; the rituals and prayers are a pure pageantry of the wealth they can afford to casually waste.

An unintentional (and therefore largely unexploited) side effect of this smattering of middle managers and peripheral members of high society is that the Architects are sitting upon a vast whisper network. They are the cronies and hangers-on of every important personage in the Silver Quarter. They attend business deals and bear witness to the brokerages of power; they are the watchers of the doors and the keepers of the keys. They are privy to the dirty secrets that threaten the truly powerful across Spire – and yet, like the namesake of their petty patron god, they are content to merely build and sit upon these gilded nests of information. Through a curious mixture of ignorance and arrogance, they are unable to recognise their own power, and are thus easily and continually played by the very power structures they falsely believe themselves to govern.

Ministers who have secured invitations to Architect meetings walk a dangerous line of feigned ignorance whilst they clandestinely gather information. If this club ever fully grasped the reigns of power that continually slip through their fingers, the shockwaves could cascade throughout aeflir and drow society.

Stats

Names:	Moliere, Casey, Kalwa
Descriptors:	Luxurious attire and a masquerade mask; Nude save for a cowled robe and a stone ring bearing the order's sigil; Powdered wigs and plastered makeup; Ruffled necklines and puffed sleeves
Difficulty:	0
Resistance:	3
Equipment:	A variety of masterwork dueling-weapons, e.g. Sword-canes, Rapiers, Sabres (D6, some combination of Piercing, Masterpiece, Parrying) and Pistols (D6, Piercing, One-Shot)

Advances

REQUIREMENT: Secure an invitation to a meeting at the Architect's Club.

REFRESH: Pass a rumour, bit of gossip, or secret from one aristo to another.

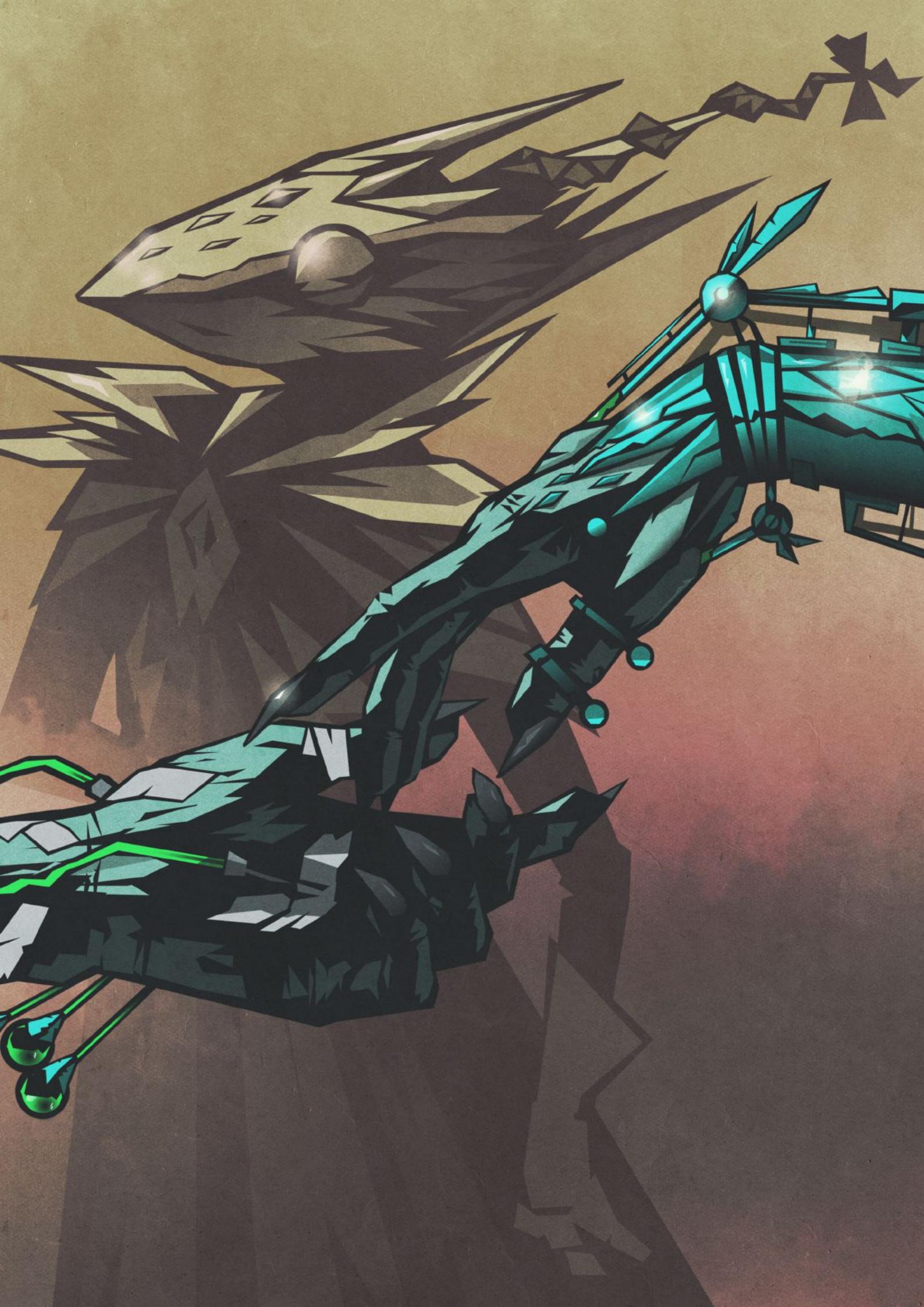
Low Advance

SOCIETY OF EQUALS. You know the secret handshake, you can say the right words, and you have friends in the right places. Gain the **High Society** domain and the Architects as a Street-level bond.

Medium Advances

SMOOTH THINGS OVER. You're sure you can clear up such a silly misunderstanding. Once per session, mark D6 stress to a bond with the Architects or D6 stress to **Silver** to remove a **Reputation** or **Shadow** fallout.

GET THINGS DONE. You know someone everywhere, and some of them even owe you a favour. Mark D3 stress to the Architects Bond granted by **SOCIETY OF EQUALS** to reroll an action's dice pool as you speak to the right people and ensure your needs are met. You can reroll almost any check as long as you have time for a handshake and a nod with the relevant authorities.



SOUL QUESTING CHURCH OF THE BLESSED MOTHER

Nujab war veterans and gnoll immigrants brought strange hallucinogens to Spire: mushrooms that make the walls bleed, and cloyingly sweet herb-smoke that washes the world in riotous colours. Drow dilettantes took to these with alacrity. Nearly overnight, a cottage industry of 'religious experiences' cropped up along the Street of Gods, promising the enlightenment of foreign mystics for very reasonable prices.

The Soul-Questing Church of the Blessed Mother adorns itself in the trappings of Far Nujab's religious practices. It involves a complex hierarchy of tiers, each with a corresponding tithe and an ever-increasing dose of hallucinogens. Clerics calling themselves 'Soul-Questors' measure would-be initiates' 'soul resonance' with a dazzling array of arcanotech gadgets and gizmos, assigning tiers of worship largely based on socio-economic status.

The higher a person's 'soul resonance', the more sacred hallucinogens one can (and indeed must) imbibe in order to commune better with the Blessed Mother - who is described as 'an ancient God worshipped by the gnolls of yore, who revelled in a mystical plane awash in riotous colours, shapes, and songs'.

The initiates whose 'soul resonance' (i.e. financial status) is low are not outright discouraged. Rather, they are promised spiritual guidance and counselling by the church elders in exchange for their voluntary labour in cultivating, harvesting, and drying the hallucinogenic mushrooms and herbs that the church sells to the wealthier patrons. Through a combination of calculated extravagance and old-fashioned snake-oil salesmanship, the founders of this church were able to amass a truly staggering amount of wealth in a relatively short time.

Then the 'soul-questing' elements of the hallucinogens began to actually work.

The first initiates of the Blessed Mother who developed powers were dismissed as overly enthusiastic, as they were unable to properly articulate what they'd seen through the noxious, cloying smoke. But rumours began to circulate of initiates who were able to glean jealously-guarded secrets through what they called 'reading colours', manipulate the world around them through the power of their voices, and other bizarre phantasmagoria. These powers seem to develop without rhyme or reason, and with little correspondence to the amount of hallucinogens ingested. This has made their appearance a blessing and a curse for the Questors. After all, if you don't need to pour endless wealth into the church to reap the Mother's blessings, why would you?

The founders of the church are seen only by the most generous donors. According to the official doctrine, they have ascended to an entirely enlightened plane and no longer require hallucinogens to commune with the Blessed Mother. As living conduits of Her will, they are able to interpret Her directives and pass them along to those who have reached the highest level of 'soul resonance'. In reality, the founders now move unseen and unknown among their initiates, accompanied by their most trusted Questors. They seek to control or at least understand the blessings their god has begun to bestow. Those who are suddenly endowed with these powers are aggressively 'recruited' into the church. They are rarely seen again.

STATS

Names:	Kaf, Curran, Esme
Descriptors:	Red-robed and cowled, extolling the virtues of sacred hallucinogens; Twitching and frothing, deep in the grip of a hallucinogenic frenzy; Toiling blissfully in service of the church, attempting to reach spiritual enlightenment
Difficulty:	0
Resistance:	2
Equipment:	The church actively practices non-violence, except when an initiate is unable to pay; but the priests are surprisingly quick with their Coshes (D3, Surprising) when necessary.

SACRED HALLUCINOGENS

MOTHER'S BREATH

A hallucinogenic tea made from fermented bark that will take up your whole afternoon with a single cup, delivering a gentle and long-lasting high. It deadens the nerves and slows the pulse. With sufficient concentration (which can prove difficult), it also allows the user to access limited psychic powers, such as levitation, telekinesis, and surface-level telepathy.

SOUL-QUESTING SACRAMENT

This mushroom grants a short-lived rush of auditory hallucinations, increasing the user's heart-rate and making them feel as though they are in sync with nearby sounds. It can make a simple musical performance into an experience akin to communion with a god. Side-effects include minor astral projection, seeing exactly one second into the future, and pulsing waves of bass emanating from the heart.

ADVANCES

REQUIREMENT: Donate a large sum of money to the church (at least D8 **Silver** stress) and imbibe the sacred hallucinogens.

REFRESH: Share a consensual hallucinogenic experience with another, and guide each other through the depths of your respective souls.

LOW ADVANCE

SOMEBODY TO LOVE. *The Blessed Mother wraps you in her sacred breath of loving kindness.* Gain +2 **Mind** resistance and the **Religion** domain. You will now never have a bad trip when taking hallucinogens: you can anchor yourself to a grounding point rather than losing yourself in unpleasant thoughts and sensations.

HIGH ADVANCE

BREAK ON THROUGH TO THE OTHER SIDE. *You may have had your doubts, but it turns out that these guys were the real deal after all.* When you activate this ability, you ascend to a higher plane of existence and are removed from play. In your place, you leave a profound and strange alteration to the world. Discuss what this is with your GM and the other players.





IN THE HANDS OF THE GODS

A scenario by Eleanor Hingley

Content warnings: religious violence; explosions with civilian and religious targets; poisoning; drugs; police violence.

INTRODUCTION

In the ramshackle and bustling district of Pilgrim's Walk, the Street of Gods is a clamour of churches and temples decked out in kaleidoscope colours to attract the attention of those looking for a little faith. For the aelfir, it also provides a place to keep the multitudinous religions of the common folk contained. The Street of Gods has its own economy of tithes, collection plates, and hawkers of blessings, amulets, and relics – all presided over by the corrupt landlords Ashter and Quinn.

To walk down the Street of Gods is to be assailed by litanies that are shouted, sung, and babbled incoherently. You'll have pamphlets and prayer sheets thrust into your hands, and find yourself spattered with holy liquids that are probably water with every step. Many of the temples have taken a pragmatic approach, offering free samples of food and drink to entice potential worshippers. Others are masters of pitching the benefits of their religion over its tenets, asking if passersby want to get rich, attract that special someone, or find enlightenment in the entrails of the universe.

Beneath this whirl of colour, sound, and sensation, the real world of the Street of Gods continues apace. Temples and churches nurture century-long feuds and battle for a few more worshippers to fill their pews. Meanwhile, the hurly-burly provides a cover for the Ministry's operatives, sellers of powerful relics, a multitude of less salubrious cults, and a whisper network of gutterkin who trade information for scraps and spare change.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON?

The landlords of Pilgrim's Walk, Ashter and Quinn, are pitting three churches against one another to profit from their conflict. They have bribed the disgraced aelfir scholar Bright-The-Day to plant the suggestion within three churches – the Temple Furious, the Church of the Scourge, and the Sacriligean Fancy – that the relic known as the Holy Hand has a deep-rooted history within their faith, and they should retrieve it.

The Holy Hand is a sculpted stone hand pointing its index finger. It is a deliberately generic magical item that takes on the properties of the faithful who wield it and can enhance the miracles of their religion. All three churches have their own statue of the founder of their faith (originally part of a sculpted triptych), and all three statues have a missing space where a pointed hand could fit. It is impossible to tell which statue the hand originally belonged to, or whether it belonged to any of them at all.

Ashter and Quinn are profiting off these groups by supplying weapons and explosives. They have come to a lucrative agreement with The Sisters – a crime family dealing in drugs and luxuries (see Spire p103) – to offer stimulants, intoxicants, and poisons to the churches just in time for the mayhem. It is in Ashter and Quinn's interests to draw the hunt for the Hand out as long as possible, and they have people on the street making sure no one interferes. They have also paid the Cult of Garrack to store a number of items (including the Hand) in one of their warehouses filled with spare parts. The Cult of Garrack does not know what the Hand is or that the other churches are after it.

Meanwhile, a group of gutterkin thieves called the Inedibles have gotten wind of the Hand's value and are also trying to steal it. Lastly, the local City Guard (led by Captain Mordant) wants to make sure no one disrupts their system of rackets and bribes.



THE JOB

The Ministry has taken an interest in the conflict between three churches on the Street of Gods: the Temple Furious, the Church of the Scourge, and the Sacriligean Fancy. Rumour has it that they're fighting over a relic they all believe they have a claim to; whatever the case, any one of the three churches can offer valuable services to the Ministry.

The Ministry would like the player characters to look into this conflict and see if they can turn it to their advantage. The implication is that the players should side with one of the churches, but they can choose to potentially play them off against one another – or steal the Hand for themselves. As long as the Ministry benefits from it in some way, they will be satisfied.

FAITHS OF THE STREET OF GODS

The Brothers of Dust: Though simply an ascetic group of monks when viewed from the outside, the Brothers of Dust specialise in recruiting large groups of people with no skills beyond 'standing in place and chanting'. They are available to hire for foot chases, protests, and weddings.

The Church of the Scourge: Publicly, they are known for their tea house, excellent cakes, healing, and specialisations in toxins and charitable works. Secretly, the Church of the Scourge worships a sentient poison that lurks in the tunnels beneath their building.

The Cult of Garrack: Worshippers of an enigmatic figure who modified their own body and ascended to godhood. The Cult of Garrack seeks to emulate them by implanting mechanical 'upgrades' into themselves, with varying degrees of success.

The Sacriligean Fancy: A faith with constantly-shifting tenets where the practitioners wear masks and costumes to lampoon rich aelfir, and are known for having the best parties. They are secretly a network of servants for the aelfir who trade information to bring their masters down.

The Temple Furious: A church of people who believe they can channel fury so well that they must chain themselves up to keep it locked away – at least, until they can release it upon their enemies.

The Truescribers: Somewhere between a church, a study group and an artist commune, the Truescribers study the nature of all scribing and drawing. It is rumoured that they can enact changes in the world simply by writing them down. It's also said that if you give the Truescribers a false name to write down in their notebooks, you'll sometimes think of that other name first before you remember your real one.

Players with the domains of **Religion**, **Order**, and **Crime** learn the following rumours:

RELIGION

- Something big is going down on the Street of Gods: a fight over a stone sculpture that is apparently a powerful relic called the Holy Hand. All three churches say it fits the statue in their temple. Assante of the Brothers of Dust is warning pilgrims away from that part of Pilgrim's Walk (and into the Loess Enclave where his faith is based) because of the fights that keep breaking out. Great for recruitment, he says.
- Kermes and Realgar of the Truescribers have been watching a fallen aelfir scholar, Bright-The-Day, who studies the religions of the district and has been spending a lot of time interacting with the three warring churches.

ORDER

- The scuttlebutt around the City Guard is that the Street of Gods is getting more chaotic by the day, with people getting caught in the fight between the three churches. If Captain Mordant and the Peacemongers (the local City Guard precinct) want to avoid attracting scrutiny, they'll have to deal with it fast.
- The Paladins are always looking for an excuse to go on a bloody murder spree through the district. It'll be bad for everyone involved if things aren't sorted out before the Paladins start to pay attention.

CRIME

- Conflicts like the one on the Street of Gods are good for business. The Sisters are dealing drugs and other illicit substances to the churches, and there seems to be a healthy trade in arms and explosives coming from...somewhere. No one is quite sure who's behind it.
- The gutterkin have found themselves with a lot of work carrying messages across Pilgrim's Walk and passing on information about the three churches to interested parties. Also, a group of gutterkin thieves called the Inedibles is planning to steal the Hand and auction it off at the Hand Over Fist auction house.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The simplest and quickest route for this adventure is that the player characters follow the Ministry's advice and side with one of the churches. If they start asking questions about the Hand at one of the churches, the faithful of that sect will take the opportunity to introduce them to their leader, who wishes to hire them to retrieve the Hand in exchange for a future alliance with the Ministry.

The GM chooses which of the rival churches to send the player characters up against first. The friendly church has been told that this rival church already has the Hand at their sacred site, and requests that the characters retrieve it (unsuccessfully, as it is in fact in the warehouse of the Cult of Garrack). The details of each church's sacred site and the defenders that characters will encounter there are included under 'Factions' on p. 212.

When the players return to their friendly church without finding the Hand, that church is attacked by the third group of believers that has not yet been involved – meaning that the players are now publicly aligned with one church and opposed to the others. Again, the details of the attack by each church can be found under 'Factions' on p. 212.

By questioning the churches, investigating Bright-The-Day, or following the weapon runners supplying the fights, the party discovers that Ashter and Quinn are the frauds behind all this. They also find out that the relic is being stored in the warehouse of the Cult of Garrack. In a confusing and climactic encounter, they retrieve it and give it to the church they sided with in exchange for assisting the Ministry in the future.

To get the players into the adventure quickly, have the churches make the offer of employing the characters to retrieve the Hand early on. Drop hints about clandestine activities going on behind the scenes: secret doorways to the sacred site, suspicious deliveries, and the general sense that more is going on beneath the surface. This will encourage players to explore the true face of the churches and the mystery behind the conflict.

There are many ways the players can diverge from the course above. The adventure is designed to be a toolkit for following whatever madcap scheme the players embark upon. If an outcome isn't explicitly covered in this write up, or the existing information no longer works for where the story has gone, feel free to change it! If the players are in doubt about who to go to for information, they could run into George, a practitioner of all the other faiths of the Street of Gods; spot Ashter or Quinn's operatives doing dastardly things; or be approached by gutterkin offering information (for a price).

If they want to abscond with the Hand, pit the churches against each other, take out Ashter and Quinn themselves, or team up with the Inedibles to auction the Hand off, this adventure should provide the tools to run with it. Don't try to include everything in this scenario. Lots of material may not come up, depending on which routes the characters take; but if you need to throw in some Enforcers or Peacemongers to warn the party off or slow them down, you can find stats for these in the Factions section.

PLOT DIVERGENCE

Since this adventure can diverge in many ways, here are some suggestions for how to handle some other routes (though this is in no way exhaustive).

PLAYING THEM OFF

The players try to pit all three churches against each other and gain benefits from helping each one. They learn that all of them have been told by Bright-The-Day that the Hand is in another church's sacred site. The party can maintain a good relationship with all of them until they show clear allegiance or antagonism towards one.

The GM might deem that a church's trust can be regained through an appropriate Difficulty 1 social roll (though only once). This is likely to be unsustainable at the end when the party retrieves the Hand from the warehouse, but making the churches bid for the Hand is an option – if a risky one. After all, there is a very good chance that a bidding war could turn into a street war.

UNITING THE FAITHFUL

The players persuade the churches to band together and put aside their differences. This is challenging, and requires them to build up trust with the churches. If they choose to take this route after harming or opposing a church, any social rolls to convince NPCs of the wisdom of a united front are made at Difficulty 1.

Alternatively, if one of the player characters is willing to join a church and undergo one of its initiation tests (see the tests listed under the section 'George'), they can negate the need for a social check. Greymere By-Halflight can be a valuable ally in convincing the churches of the fraud or persuading them to team up, but she requires the characters to promise that Bright-The-Day will end up discredited if she helps them.

TEAMING UP WITH THE INEDIBLES

The player characters can choose to team up with the Inedibles if they can track them down. The Inedibles are wary, but if the characters can gain their trust, they are friendly and willing to work together, as they are not entirely confident of their ability to pull off a job like this. They can retrieve the Hand from the warehouse while the party distracts the Cult of Garrack and hold off any other interested parties.

The Inedibles will not betray the PCs first, but if they suspect they are going to be betrayed, they will react quickly and violently. Their priority is getting paid: they don't care about favours or future benefits. If the PCs can offer payment from themselves, the Ministry, or one of the churches, the Inedibles will take it.

THE PUPPETMASTERS

See *Spire* p165 for more information on Ashter and Quinn.

The PCs can confront Ashter and Quinn and try to force them to back down. This is a difficult and dangerous route.

The party can approach them separately in their own homes, in which case they have to get past the Enforcers and Chrysalis (for Ashter) or Mancuerda (for Quinn). Alternatively, they can confront both at the same time whilst they are having a meeting; this will involve the Enforcers led by both Chrysalis and Mancuerda.

Ashter and Quinn are Difficulty 1 to affect in any way, and will refuse to back down unless some kind of concrete threat (or a more enticing offer) is made. This could be threatening to reveal their fraud to a religious authority; dropping enough hints about Venren's evidence to suggest it is more substantial than it is; or proving that they have been paying off the local City Guard.

Alternatively, the PCs could lie wildly and try to turn them against one another. If this is successful, Ashter and Quinn sell each other out immediately, and offer to have the Hand brought to wherever the characters want to take it.

THE HOLY HAND

The Holy Hand is a divine artefact that is part of one of the three statues held in the religious centres of the Temple Furious, the Church of the Scourge, and the Sacriligean Fancy. Which does it originally belong to? Who knows? It would fit onto any of the three of them as though it had always been there. Given its ability to enhance the power of any faith's miracles, perhaps it is not actually from any of these statues originally, and simply adapts to circumstances.

The Holy Hand is a stone hand slightly larger than a real one, making a pointing gesture. Until it is fixed into one of the statues, any divine caster who uses it to cast a divine spell casts the most powerful version of that spell possible. While that sounds great, the results are incredibly unpredictable, and will almost certainly cause unforeseen consequences. You could heal everyone in the room (including your foes); or, if you glow with the brightest moonlight possible, you might blind your allies. The caster must also make a Resist roll or take D8 Mind stress as they channel impossible power through themselves. Using the Hand also risks attracting attention from other interested parties.

When fixed onto one of the statues, the Hand still enhances the miracles of that church's faith, but with less extreme and more predictable results.

WHAT'S THE TRUE ORIGIN OF THE HAND?

If the players want to learn the true history of the Holy Hand, you can choose one of the three churches as the original owners, or one of the following suggestions.

The Hand is...

- A key to a secret cache of powerful forbidden relics, created so that only the faithful could open the door.
- Part of a magical construct that was separated into parts to keep it from rampaging through the city.
- A clue in a city-wide treasure hunt designed by an eccentric aelfir who wished to challenge the worthy to find his buried fortune.
- A god all of its own: the God of Fickle Purpose, whose mysterious agendas whisper in the minds of any who come into contact with it.
- A token of a conspiracy by a group of aelfir who send powerful objects into Spire to sow their geomantic influence throughout the city.
- The power converter for a terrifying protatakos machine hidden deep within the city. It just needs someone to provide the energy.

INFORMATION GATHERING

Since this adventure can play out in so many ways, the players could seek out information from a multitude of sources. Below are some ideas of what they can learn and how. Some information may require checks to learn (at the GM's discretion), but if the characters have already established a rapport with the source, they may not be needed.

VISITING THE CHURCHES

In general, the player characters can learn the following information from visiting the churches:

- They all believe that the Holy Hand is a relic of their own faith.
- They have a statue of their founder in their temple. It has clear damage lines where it has been removed from a larger structure, and a space where a pointing hand could fit.
- An aelfir scholar called Bright-The-Day, who lives on the Street of Gods and studies the faiths there, is supplying them with background information about this relic and its place within the church's history. He brought them the information free of charge, claiming he discovered it in the course of his research and thought they should know.
- They have been told that the Hand is currently being held in a sacred site of one of the other two rival churches. (It is up to the GM which one to choose; the church not chosen can appear later in an attack on the players' allied church.) They are willing to do a deal with the Ministry or pay the player characters to obtain it for them.
- They are unwilling to talk freely about who told them that the Hand was currently held by a rival church. Sufficient social manipulation (or other means of information gathering) reveals that a drow called Chrysalis sold them the information. A successful Investigate+Crime check (D6 Shadow or Reputation stress) is enough to know that he is Ashter's negotiator and torturer. See below under 'Crime' and the Factions section for more information on Chrysalis.
- They are willing to help the Ministry covertly in exchange for the Hand.
- They have a mysterious delivery during the PCs' visit, either by one of the Sisters' drug dealers or one of the arms smugglers (see the 'Crime' section). The church is very cagey about it, but they say it relates to retrieving the Hand.

See the individual sections on the churches below for more specific information.

CRIME

The party can gather information from criminals on and around the Street of Gods. Sources include Dorsan, a Sisters' drug dealer; Keerick, an arms smuggler for Mancuerda; and Scram, a gutterkin informant with a diminutive stature and ragged moth wings. They will pass on the following:

- The Sisters are making a good profit dealing increased amounts of poisons to the Church of the Scourge, combat drugs to the Temple Furious, and regular drugs to the Sacriligean Fancy. Strangely, they were on the scene pretty much immediately and cornered the market fast.
- If the player characters shake down a Sisters' drug dealer, they learn that the Sisters cut a deal with someone called Chrysalis to find out when the rise in demand was going to happen.
- The Inedibles, a thieving crew of gutterkin, have learned where the Hand actually is. They are rumoured to be trying to steal it and sell it to the highest bidder.
- Weapons and explosives are changing hands with more regularity than you would usually see on the Street of Gods. No one knows who's supplying them, though.
- If the player characters shake down an arms smuggler, they learn that the trade in weapons and explosives is being coordinated by someone called Mancuerda.
- When they hear the names Mancuerda or Chrysalis, characters can recall (with appropriate checks) that Chrysalis is Ashter's creepy negotiator and torturer, and Mancuerda is Quinn's legbreaker. Nobody wants to be on either of their bad sides.

RELIGION AND ACADEMIA

The sources here are Assante, an enterprising Brother of Dust; and Kermes and Realgar of the Truescribers. They say that:

- The Cult of Garrack has been storing supplies for Ashter and Quinn in one of their warehouses of spare parts, which they use for self-augmentation.
- The scholar Bright-The-Day is a disgraced aelfir. He has been studying the faiths of the Street of Gods for years for a very important book that will be published someday. He has also been talking to all three churches involved in the conflict, and recently upgraded to a much nicer house.
- The drow scholar Greymere By-Halflight, who also studies the faiths of the Street of Gods, has been complaining that Bright-The-Day is a liar and a cheat more often than she usually does.

ORDER

The sources for Order are Huttle In Preece, a faithful City Guard on break; and Bissin, a Guard of the Pilgrim's Walk Peacemongers. They will divulge that:

- The local City Guard precinct is run by the famously corrupt Captain Mordant and her Pilgrim's Walk Peacemongers. They operate out of a spindly watchtower crammed onto the corner of the Street of Gods called the Blessing in Disguise – or just the Blessing for short.
- Captain Mordant is concerned about the possibility of this conflict bringing attention to her policing of the district, especially from the Paladins. She will likely arrest anyone she sees as escalating the situation (or anyone she can pin the trouble on).
- A determined lawyer called Venren is building a case against Ashter and Quinn using an obscure law about the ownership of religious property. It's unlikely to go anywhere, and most of his peers view Venren with a kind of pity. However, if the PCs can persuade him to drop the case or find out what evidence he has, it could provide blackmail or bargaining material to pressure the landlords into giving up their scheme.

GEORGE

See *Spire*, p165 for more information on George, and p. 194 of this book for the Georgist extra advance.

George knows all. He can supply basic information on most subjects to do with Pilgrim's Walk for free, such as identifying who people are; where they can be found (if they aren't secretive); giving directions; and offering publicly available knowledge about the faiths.

If the PCs perform minor tasks to help him gain the favour of different churches, he also gives one piece of information they do not already have from the lists above, at the GM's discretion. He can pop up at any time if the characters are stuck or if they are unsure who to approach.

He will ask the PCs to perform one of the following tasks for each extra piece of information he offers.

- To enter the Temple Furious' inner sanctum, you need to have fury in your heart; George finds it hard to summon, and has been rejected by the Temple as a result. He's angry at the aelfir (most drow are), but he isn't really furious at anyone or anything specific. The PCs need to coach him into tapping his inner fury, or make him good enough at acting to fake anger.
- George is not a healer or a particularly good baker, which are the two easy ways into the Church of the Scourge. However, he has heard that anyone who can endure a poisoned cake baked by the Scourge may join. Help George secure some kind of protection against poison so he can pass the initiation test, or find a really excellent cake recipe that will guarantee him entry.
- The Sacriligean Fancy is easy to access on the surface: all you need to do is want to party. Getting into the VIP room is much harder. George has heard that they like information about the aelfir, and that you can enter if you prove you are willing to discard something you hold sacred. George has no information on the aelfir. He is bedecked in things he holds sacred, but he thinks that perhaps they won't take the destruction of one of his amulets as a serious enough sacrifice. The characters can either get him information on one of the aelfir, or persuade him of a compelling and sacred thing which he can then convincingly discard.

ADVENTURE CONCLUSION

STEALING THE HAND

Ashter and Quinn have paid to store the Holy Hand in the warehouse of the Cult of Garrack, where the group keeps their weird tech and spare parts. The Hand is stored in a pile of crates, all marked as belonging to Ashter.

The cultists of Garrack are unwilling to allow the player characters inside without significant bribery or persuasion. They can instead sneak or fight their way past Kerberos the Sentinel. Inside, multiple groups try to navigate a maze-like warehouse and use the weird technology stored there against one another.

Options for this final encounter based on player actions, which can be combined as needed, include:

- Ashter and Quinn have learned that the player characters are ruining their plan and have tipped off at least two of the rival churches that the Hand is in the warehouse. Both churches are now converging on it, and one of them explodes the back of the warehouse to get in without tangling with Kerberos.
- Ashter and Quinn's Enforcers have gone to the warehouse to protect their valuable asset, having been given access by the Cult of Garrack.
- The Peacemongers might be present if the party has really annoyed them.
- The Inedibles are in the process of stealing the Hand.
- If the players have been unsubtle about getting inside the warehouse, the Cult of Garrack might be chasing them.

WEIRD TECH

The Cult of Garrack collects weird bits of technology to implant into themselves as a way of getting closer to Garrack. If the players make successful rolls, they may retrieve and use these pieces of tech. They are all single use and bulky, so the player group can carry a maximum of one per character until they have used it up and thrown it aside.

GRAVITIAN FIELD: *A globe of fractured amber.* When rolled underneath an individual, it pulses and shatters, leaving them suspended five feet in the air for a few seconds before they are dumped unceremoniously on the ground. Conveys Mastery on an appropriate roll.

DECK OF FRIENDS: *A pack of four little glass cards.* When thrown into a space, they project multiple glowing illusions of the user. The next person to attack a target in the area deals +1 stress, but then the illusions wink out.

THE CLAW: *A hefty mechanical claw that can grab, clamp, or crush.* It is a (D6, Brutal) weapon that also slows the target unless they stop to remove it.

GRAPPLING HOOK: *A mechanical device that hooks a line into a distant point and then forcibly retracts it.* If hooked into a person, it is a (D3, Piercing) weapon that drags them closer and pulls them off their feet. If used as part of a check to reach a higher point, it gives Mastery on the check.

HELPFUL DISPENSER: *A dispenser loaded with foam that sets rapidly, rendering a narrow area impassable.* If used on a person, they are Stunned but take no Stress.



FACTIONS

THE RIVAL CHURCHES

The religions detailed here are part of the plethora of small religions that form the backbone of Spire, beneath the notice and the cares of its major faiths. Most Spire denizens follow Damnou or the Solar Pantheon; few have heard of these sects outside of their devotees and their nearest neighbours. These are small factional organisations, with all the potential for both invisibility and highly visible squabbling that that entails. Some adherents follow multiple faiths; others find welcome, succour and support here among a very particular congregation.

THE TEMPLE FURIOUS

Adherents of the Temple Furious attempt to embody the concept of fury. They keep it restrained with meditation, working out, and physical chains locked in place around them. They are considered posers by many of the drow, who know what true fury feels like and have no desire to chain it. When the chains come off, something is unleashed, but most of the time people don't live long enough to tell whether it's true Fury or not. The believers follow the teachings of their founder, Roth, whose chained statue they have in their temple.

PRACTICES

The Temple Furious believes in harnessing their rage through a combination of intense concentration on their own emotions and strict discipline.

To better contain fury within their bodies, they work out while focusing on things or people that make them angry. They believe that the adrenaline that flows through their muscles carries fury through their whole bodies, strengthening and containing it like a wound spring. They meditate with a similar intensity, honing their self-control out of fear that their fury will escape and rampage through the streets.

When they are initiated into the Temple and feel the touch of fury, they begin with one chain. Over time, they add more, detailed with tiny markings passed down by Roth to keep their fury restrained. The Temple Furious do take their chains off in private to sleep or bathe, but they must do so with special rituals or risk unleashing the fury churning inside them.

Adherents of the Temple Furious also take an illegal combat stimulant (provided by the Sisters) called Roth's Blood when they are gearing up for a fight. The drug heightens both emotions and strength. For the next scene, those who take it gain Mastery on tests that rely on strength – but any Mind, Reputation, or Shadow stress moves up to the next dice type.

Their most notable public space is the Wall Furious, where the Furious and members of the public perform one of their core rites: target practice. People place pictures or the names of the targets of their fury on the wall, and throw blessed darts at them in the hope that the Divine Fury might curse them.

MEMBERS

RUE THY SINS, THE HEAD OF THE TEMPLE FURIOUS

Rue is a tall, muscular drow who bears many chains wrapped around her torso and legs; some look as old as she is. They form intricate patterns that have worn down her skin in places. There are a huge variety of locks – some plain and heavy, others intricate and expensive-looking. To unlock them all and unwind her from the chains would take many hours.

TEACUP, THE DIMINUTIVE BUT RESPECTED TRAINER

Teacup is an elderly drow who looks harmless in their robes and the single strong chain that almost swallows them; but any doubts about their capabilities as a combatant are dispelled as soon as they leap into action. They are the coach of the Temple Furious and lead the training and meditation sessions for all adherents to the faith, as well as the initiation trials of new members. Even Rue bows before them.

TORRENCE, THE INITIATE

Torrence, like many initiates of the Temple Furious, gave himself a name that he thought sounded very cool when he first arrived: Torrent, like a storm. But within the Temple, you have to earn the right to a name as pretentious as that, and Torrence definitely had not. He only has a single chain which splits into three, and is working hard to earn more. He is muscular and proud, but easily manipulated.

AS ALLIES

The Temple Furious are able to deploy a number of combat-capable individuals within a few minutes anywhere within Pilgrim's Walk. Characters who have allied with them can make a social roll to persuade them to lend additional combatants to a future fight. These allies will convey Mastery on combat rolls made in the same scene while the character works with them.

BLESSING

If the players choose to give the Holy Hand to the Temple Furious, they provide a martial force that can assist the Ministry in future endeavours. In addition, once per game, each character can roll with Mastery to channel their fury when they use overwhelming force or shattering strength.

AS ENEMIES

When roused to hatred, the Temple Furious attack swiftly, and may serve as an alternative threat to the Enforcers or the Peacemongers as the players investigate the district. If the players manage to remove the chains of a member of the Temple, they will face an Avatar of Fury that causes immense collateral damage.

THE FURIOUS

Names:	Careena, Maelstrom, Fighting-Fire
Descriptors:	Perfectly poised; Jangling with chains; Drugged up and wild-eyed
Difficulty:	1 in a fight or to resist mind control, 0 otherwise
Resistance:	6
Equipment:	Weights, bars, practice weapons (D6, Tiring), Chains (D3, Stunning), Revealing work-out clothes, D3 doses of Roth's Blood

AVATAR OF FURY

Descriptors:	A cutting whirlwind of chains; A bulging doglike creature of muscle and veins; A shower of ephemeral blades
Difficulty:	1, but 0 to redirect their attacks onto each other
Resistance:	8
Equipment:	Lashing chains (D3, Stunning), Crushing hands (D6), Relentless blades (D6, Brutal)

ATTACK ON ANOTHER CHURCH

If the Temple attacks one of the other churches, they release one of their Furies at either the Church of the Scourge's tea and cake fundraiser, or at the Sacrilegian Fancy's drug-fuelled rave.

SACRED SITE: THE CHAINS THAT BIND

Another church has been told that the Hand is being held by the Temple Furious in their training yard: the Chains That Bind. It is a covered training yard where the Temple Furious members lift weights, push chained wheels, and wrestle. The fight here is a bunch of angry, muscular, and very focused weightlifters. Environmental hazards include getting tangled in chains or crushed by weights.

ADVANCES

LOW ADVANCE

PERFECT FOCUS. [Divine] *A tranquil surface above a roiling tempest.* Gain +1 **Mind** resistance and roll with Mastery against any effect that would influence your emotional state.

MEDIUM ADVANCES

THE EYE OF THE STORM. [Divine] *Never peace, only focus.* Once per session, when you inflict stress on another person with a physical attack, you can recover D6 **Blood** stress.

POINT OF IMPACT. [Divine] *Choose your targets wisely.* Take D3 stress to grant yourself Mastery in all attacks against one carefully-chosen target of your fury for this situation.

HIGH ADVANCE

CHAINED FURY. [Divine] *Your Fury is unleashed.* You have a Fury chained within you. You believe it to be a creation of your own emotions, but in truth, you have no idea what power is roiling in your body. If you ever choose to release it, or others break the chains that keep it bound, a Fury will emerge and attack everyone nearby. You can direct it towards or away from specific targets while it is in your vicinity, but until it is defeated, it will continue to seek out targets for its violent retribution. Once slain, it returns to your body and you can bind it once again in chains.

THE SACRILIGEAN FANCY

An eccentric church whose tenets change every day and whose leadership constantly shifts, the Sacriligean Fancy hold nothing sacred. They wear elaborate costumes and wield impractical weapons that satirise famous aristocratic figures, causing outrage while just about avoiding arrest. They do have the best parties on the Street of Gods though – and the best drugs.

This brightly-coloured facade hides a secret network of canny servants of the aelfir who are adept at using city institutions for their benefit. They are social and bureaucratic operators, hedonists, and masters of misdirection. The statue of their founder, Motley, holds pride of place in their temple, spattered with paint from garish celebrations over the years.

PRACTICES

The Sacriligean Fancy has mastered the art of appealing to large numbers of casual worshippers who turn up for the parties, drugs, and parades, but who rarely look too closely at what's really going on. It provides a perfect cover for the Fancy's true strengths: espionage, blackmail, and information gathering.

A subtle set of codes and signals allows the Fancy to communicate quickly when the City Guard is about to shut down a party. They also pay a few members of the Peacemongers well to look the other way when it comes to the prevalence of illegal drugs at their gatherings, and to tip them off when they're likely to be raided.

The Sacriligean Fancy do believe in some tenets: they believe in a world turned upside down, where the servants are kings and the kings lie dead in the gutter. Part of their initiation is to strip the concept of 'the sacred' from their adherents. Initiates must take the things that they truly believe in and tear their faith to pieces, replacing it with irreverence. They put stock in having the will and cunning to undermine their masters (the aelfir and those drew that cooperate with them), and trust only one another.

MEMBERS

BLUSHING VIOLET, AN ENIGMATIC SOCIALITE LEADING THE SACRILIGEAN FANCY

Blushing Violet revels in their life as the nominal leader of the Sacriligean Fancy. They maintain an organisational grip on the cult, even as those who are technically the leaders change in accordance with their strictures. Outside the Fancy, they are unrecognisable: a drab drew servant of a disgustingly decadent aelfir.

KLAUS, A SHARP-EYED BODYGUARD

A bodyguard in the church and in his everyday life, Klaus has been through many different aelfir masters, building a reputation for quiet competence while plundering the secrets of each one before he left their service. He has occasionally performed small assassinations for the Fancy, but they are careful to only make such moves when the need is great or the risk of exposure is low.

ADORA, A SAVVY TRADER IN LUXURY GOODS

Adora sources the drugs, alcohol, and costumes for the Fancy. She is the servant of a high-end merchant in the Silver Quarter and does her own deals on the side, skimming off the top whenever she can do so safely. Her role takes her all over Spire, and she has a network of informants stretching across many aelfir households. She acts as the primary coordinator for the Fancy and feeds money in to fund parties and bribes.

AS ALLIES

Those who get close enough to the Fancy to perceive their true purpose through the haze of Ivory dust are privileged indeed. There are few people within the city that they do not know; with a good social roll or in exchange for other information, they might even tell you about them.

BLESSING

If the players choose to give the Holy Hand to the Sacriligean Fancy, they will set their network of informants to work for the Ministry. In addition, during an interaction with a high-class aelfir household, any character may take D3 **Shadow** stress to declare that one of the servants is a member of the Sacriligean Fancy who could be a potential informant or ally. However, this does not guarantee that the NPC will cooperate with the PCs or endanger themselves for them.

AS ENEMIES

The Sacriligean Fancy could, in all likelihood, take out a significant number of aelfir nobles if they chose to; for now, they would rather lie in wait and maintain their cover so they can be ready to strike with surgical precision. When they attack, it is indirect or easily blamed on someone else. They are most likely to use the systems of the city to their advantage, navigating the bureaucracy designed to inconvenience them with ease.





ATTACK ON ANOTHER CHURCH:

In an attack on another church, the Sacrilegean Fancy pulls strings with the City Guard to go in and crack heads, haul people off for an overnight stay in a cell, and confiscate real or planted illegal material.

SACRED SITE - THE CARNIVALE OBLIQUE

Another church has been told that the Hand is being held by the Sacrilegean Fancy in their VIP room, the Carnivale Oblique. The VIP room is a roped-off area of the church that can only be entered by the most useful of the church's partygoers and the most trusted of their actual adherents. The Carnivale Oblique is a confusing party filled with revellers in various altered states of consciousness and clothing. The fight here is a group of masked, lethal assassins who disappear into the crowd as soon as they have attacked. The environment is not overtly hostile, but the party goers get in the way and provide cover for the information brokering that usually goes on during such events.

THE CARNIVALE

Names:	Columbina, Arlecchino, Pierrot
Descriptors:	A pure white outfit with a flower mask; A cape and outfit of shifting grey diamonds with a mask to match; A neat but theatrical black suit and mask
Difficulty:	1 when they are blending into a crowd or hiding, 0 otherwise
Resistance:	5
Equipment:	Throwing knives (D3, Ranged, Concealable), Slim poniard (D6, Parry), Light armoured tunics (Armour 1), A dose of a drug: ivory, glimmer or godsmoke

ADVANCES

LOW ADVANCE

HIDE IN PLAIN SIGHT. [Divine] *Balancing acts have a tendency to slip.* Gain +2 **Shadow** resistance and gain Mastery to rolls made to repair or protect your secret identity.

MEDIUM ADVANCES

UNMASK! UNMASK! [Divine] *Masks only show your true face more clearly.* Take D3 **Shadow** stress to study a person who is masked or in disguise and learn something useful that could identify them later or give a clue about their everyday life.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND. [Divine] *Everyone has a price.* Take D6 **Mind** stress to learn one thing another person wants that could sway them into helping you if you supplied it.

HIGH ADVANCE

A WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN. [Divine] *Where the servants are kings and the kings lie dead in the gutter.* This is a ritual where the Sacrilegean Fancy gather, destroy something sacred to them, and destroy something sacred to their high-ranking target. This ritual deals all participants D8 **Mind** stress.

The target then becomes the victim of their own system: city institutions, authorities, law enforcement, the press, and their less legal allies all turn on that person for one month. Afterwards, members of the Sacrilegean Fancy gain Mastery on all rolls to do with that target until they are dead or ruined, whichever comes first.

The magic disappears when the target has been stripped of their assets, position, and respect. It is designed to bring down the lofty, not crush the low.

THE CHURCH OF THE SCOURGE

On the surface, the Church of the Scourge is a respectable group of healers who specialise in curing toxins and poisons. They might be a little odd, but their tea and cake fundraisers are very popular. They have done wonderful things for the local community with their clinic, charity tea shop, and food distribution drive. At the centre of their community tea house sits a statue of their founder, Beneficent, offerings of food and drink at his feet.

They also worship a sentient poison called the Scourge in the tunnels beneath the church. It creeps through people's veins to burn them from the inside out before returning to its central mass.

PRACTICES

The Church of the Scourge believes in community spirit, seeing themselves as part of a larger organism in the way that the Scourge's component tendrils are still part of a whole. They do a lot of good work for the community, including giving food and healthcare to people who are in need.

They believe in studying and overcoming all lesser toxins so that the Scourge may assert its superiority as the ultimate poison, which makes them the foremost experts in their field. Part of their sacrament is to ingest very small quantities of inferior poisons so that, with the blessing of the Scourge, they are able to form stronger resistances to these toxins. As a result, all members of the church are marked by the physical aftereffects of a poison, with patches of discoloured skin, sores, scarring, or a sickly pallor.

THE SCOURGE FAMILY

Names:	The Sacristan, Brother Mendicant, Sister Wolfsbane
Descriptions:	Pale and sickly-looking; Bright-eyed and grinning; Wreathed in calm purpose
Difficulty:	2 against poison, 0 otherwise
Resistance:	5
Equipment:	Monastic robes or clean and simple clothes, Leather gauntlets, Blowpipe (D3, Ranged, Ongoing D3), Jagged poisoned blade (D6, Brutal), Poison spit (D6, Ranged, Point Blank).

THE SCOURGE

Descriptions:	A sickly greenish-white entity that slithers through the tunnels. It is a living poison that trails hissing corrosion wherever its elongated limbs touch.
Difficulty:	1
Resistance:	8
Equipment:	Burrowing ephemeral tendrils (D3, Piercing), Corrosive grasp (D6, Scarring, Ongoing D3)

MEMBERS

FATHER BIENENSTICH, KINDLY HEAD PRIEST OF THE SCOURGE

Father Bienenstich is a gentle old soul with an easy smile and a generous spirit. He truly believes in bringing the good word of the Scourge to all, but he understands that not everyone is ready to inhale its blessed vapours yet. He has the constitution of a skywhale.

PROCTOR FEAR NOT THE WEAK, A HIGHLY ORGANISED PRIEST OF THE SCOURGE

Fear Not is an owlish young drew with a pair of thick-lensed glasses and a tendency to tut at anything she disapproves of. Despite this, she has a soft spot for those who are in dire straits and will do whatever she can to help them – often by intimidating or irritating others into doing better.

CREDENCE OF THE SUFFERING, A DREAMY HEALER

Credence has her head in the clouds, but her practical skills are nothing to be sniffed at. She has studied anatomy extensively and is one of Spire's most knowledgeable specialists in toxins. She also channels the healing powers of the Scourge to help people throw off physical ailments.

AS ALLIES

The Church of the Scourge have healing capabilities both divine and mundane, and can provide faster healing or the cure to any poison in exchange for a small contribution to their charity funds. They can act as a source of healing for stress.

BLESSING

If the players choose to give the Holy Hand to the Church of the Scourge, they provide healing for those injured or poisoned on Ministry business. When healing stress with the Church of the Scourge, roll twice and take the higher result. In addition, they give Mastery when a character rolls to fix fallout relating to poison or toxins.

AS ENEMIES

The Church of the Scourge gives little outward sign when they are truly angry. They still smile and speak pleasantly, but there is a near-undetectable edge to their politeness; as undetectable as the poison that will definitely find its way into the PCs' drinks at some point in the future. If the players really anger the Church of the Scourge or decide to put an end to them, they can face it in the tunnels beneath the church or emerging from the pipes of one of the other temples.

ATTACK ON ANOTHER CHURCH

If they attack one of the other churches, they send the Scourge itself into the waterways that feed their rival's temple. This is a sickness dose rather than an instant death dose, but it lays out all members of that temple for the foreseeable future.

SACRED SITE - THE POISON BATHS

Another church has been told that the Hand is being held by the Church of the Scourge in their spa, the Poison Baths. This is an underground spa where the believers breathe noxious fumes and soak in the diluted essence of the Scourge. The fight here is a group of kindly priests who can spit poison. Environmental risks include poisonous fumes and toxic water.

ADVANCES

LOW ADVANCE

LESSER CORRUPTIONS. [Divine] *All other poisons cower before the Scourge.* Roll with Mastery to resist, fix, or avoid poisons and toxins that do not originate from the Scourge.

MEDIUM ADVANCES

CAST OUT. [Divine] *Cleanse the body with the Scourge's searing touch.* Once per session, mark D3 stress to **Mind** to cast this rite. The target can heal 2 stress and shift up to 4 stress to their **Blood** resistance without rolling for fallout.

THE SCOURGE'S BLESSING. [Divine] *A tendril of the Scourge emerges from your body.* Mark D6 stress to **Blood** to cast this rite. You can produce and control a whipping tendril of the Scourge's superior poison until the end of the current situation. It is a **(D6, Ranged, Scarring)** weapon.

HIGH ADVANCE

SICKEN. [Divine] *The Scourge is in the waterways. It is in all of us.* Once per session, you can mark D8 stress to **Reputation** to cast this rite. The Scourge answers your call and bubbles through the waterways. You can sicken a room full of people with the toxic miasma you produce, either causing them to become incapacitated or granting Mastery to yourself and your associates when rolling against them. If any of your associates breathe this miasma, they take D6 stress to **Blood**.

THE RIVAL SCHOLARS

Bright-The-Day and Greymere By-Halflight are rival scholars who live on the Street of Gods and study the innumerable faiths there. They utterly hate each other and are constantly trying to undermine one another's credibility. Both are convinced the other stole research from them, and both are probably correct.

Talking to Greymere is entirely optional, but she can be persuaded to provide a weighty and scholarly voice in support of the Hand being false if the players wish to convince the churches of this. Characters with the Academia domain may already know Greymere.

BRIGHT-THE-DAY

He is an aelfir who left his post at the College of the Undying Light under murky circumstances and is now on 'study leave'. He claims to be making an in-depth survey of the quaint folk beliefs of the drow and others on the Street of Gods for an eventual book. This survey has now lasted decades without any sign of moving towards publication.

Bright-The-Day has been bribed by Ashter and Quinn to persuade the three rival churches that the Holy Hand is a vital part of their history. He is now living in a much nicer place than he was before, and is flashing cash around when he was previously known to owe both landlords money.

GREYMER BY-HALFLIGHT

She is a drow who has been studying the faiths of Spire as part of a theory that the city is actually made of dead gods who were worshipped and forgotten. She struggles to maintain credibility within the academic community, especially as Bright-The-Day plays to aelfir snobbery to undermine her. She is too tenacious to be ignored, though, and has seen success in some academic journals. Her ambition is to someday lecture in one of the academic institutions of the city.

She knows the truth of the Holy Hand: that it is a powerful relic that can reshape itself to channel and enhance the miracles of any faith, and could fit any of the three statues the churches have. Greymere is willing to weigh in on the side of truth if the player characters promise her that Bright-The-Day will be discredited; but whether anyone will believe Greymere over Bright is up in the air.

THE LAWYER VENREN

Venren is a drow lawyer who has spent the last year doggedly collating information on Ashter and Quinn's activities in Pilgrim's Walk. He is a freelancer who does far more pro bono work than he should, and will otherwise accept payment in whatever resource his client can lay their hands on. As a result, his poky office is filled with random objects, wares, and barter items that he didn't have the heart to refuse.

He generally keeps his distance from the Ministry. He believes in their mission, but knows that association with them would do more harm than good for his work. He is also clever enough to work out that the player characters are from the Ministry (unless they do a good job of hiding it) and is somewhat guarded as a result.

He has a large amount of information on Ashter and Quinn, but they are immensely good at avoiding anything that might hold up in a court of law. Besides, he is self-aware enough to know that the chances of them ever getting a fair trial are low to none. But despite the hopeless odds, Venren can't stop trying.

If the characters ask him for help, he shares information on Ashter and Quinn's deal with the Sisters. Chrysalis has negotiated for them to run drugs (for the Temple Furious and Sacrilegian Fancy) and poisons (for the Church of the Scourge) during this period of greater activity. He also knows some of the routes they've been using to import weapons and explosives to sell to the churches, and the extent to which they have bribed the Pilgrim's Walk Peacemongers to ignore their activities. Captain Mordant is not exactly on their payroll, but she maintains a network of bribes and corruption which includes Ashter and Quinn.

Venren's case is still flimsy, but the players can use their chat with him to gain enough references to specific instances of illegal activities that they might be able to persuade Ashter or Quinn to back down, or get Captain Mordant to turn on them. The party will gain Mastery if they try to do so after talking with Venren.

THE INEDIBLES

The Inedibles are a crew of gutterkin thieves who all have forms that give them an edge in their profession. Their name comes from the time they tried to evade pursuit by going through a Skywhale and ended up being violently spat out.

Like all gutterkin, they are invisible until they cause a problem (or until someone decides to have a problem with them). They take full advantage of this by keeping in touch with the network of gutterkin messengers and informants across Pilgrim's Walk, who have learned that they can make decent money by collecting information for the churches. The Inedibles have heard of the relic from the other gutterkin who are running messages for the churches, and have decided to steal it so they can auction it to the highest bidder through the Hand Over Fist: an auction house in Pilgrim's Walk run through an aelfir/drow partnership. They can be thrown in as rivals in the hunt for the relic or employed to help.

PRIS (she/her) is the nominal leader of this band of scoundrels, mostly by virtue of being the most rational and easiest to talk to. Her body is more liquid than most, and she is able to squeeze through spaces others could not. She is intelligent and loyal to her friends, but ruthless. Her skin is tinted a sickly silver.

KRELLNER (they/them) has seven muscular limbs attached to their buff torso, tapering to more commonly-sized legs beneath. They are capable of immense feats of strength and athletics. They are a cheerful sort, though they will not hesitate to break the fingers of anyone who looks at their friends funny. Gives the best hugs.

JECK BEHIND-YOU (he/him) is a vaguely humanoid mass of shadow and razor blades with a toothy, charismatic grin floating at roughly head height. He finds people's discomfort around him amusing, flirts outrageously, and is both a brutal combatant and a lightning-fast thief.

INEDIBLES

Difficulty:

1 to beat them at their own game (i.e. burglary, athletics, or something that plays to their unique physiology), 0 otherwise

Resistance:

Equipment:

4
Natural defences (**Armour 2**), Sling (**D3, Ranged**), Cloud of razor blades (**D6, Piercing**), Impossible numbers of knives (**D3, Surprising**), Too many arms (**D3, Brutal**), A selection of shiny objects, trinkets, and coins that they have looted instinctively from Pilgrim's Walk

THE CULT OF GARRACK

See *Spire* p197 for more on the Cult of Garrack.

Members include Widget, a slim cultist with many useful attachments; Figment, a tall cultist whose torso and head are encased in a weird, constantly-shifting metal sculpture; and Kerberos, a sentinel cultist who skitters around on powerful metal limbs.

Those who worship Garrack replace bits of their bodies with mechanical parts to emulate their divine patron and ascend beyond the flesh. They are weird, even by the standards of the many faiths of the Street of Gods. They use their church primarily as a front for recruitment and trade, with cables and wires going to deeper, darker chambers where their more advanced members exalt their god.

They also have a warehouse on the Street of Gods for their spare parts and the strange mechanical objects they have salvaged over the years. Ashter rents the space to them in return for storing valuable objects there, guarded by the terrifying sentinel Kerberos.

KERBEROS THE SENTINEL

Difficulty: 1

Resistance: 8

Equipment: Skittering metal legs (cannot be knocked over), Darting retractable metal claws (D8, **Parry**, **Ranged**), Powerful jaws (D8, **Brutal**), Reinforced carapace (Armour 2, **Implacable**)

ASHTER AND QUINN'S ENFORCERS

If the players are very deep into information gathering, the pace might start to slow. The GM could throw in an action scene that also moves the plot forward.

Ashter and Quinn, upon learning of the player characters' involvement, are keen to dissuade them from discovering the truth. They send some hired goons to rough them up a bit and tell them to scram. If they beat the goons, the PCs can bribe or interrogate them to learn that they have been employed by Ashter and Quinn to discourage people from interfering in the churches' conflict. The Enforcers can also be used in the final warehouse confrontation, or if the PCs attack Ashter and Quinn directly.

Names:	Brackish, Coarse Greta, Yon
Descriptors:	Ostentatious display of stolen weapons; Tall, ponderous, and distracted; Constantly twitching
Difficulty:	1 while Mancuerda or Chrysalis are present, 0 otherwise
Resistance:	5
Equipment:	Light armour (Armour 2), Spiked chain (D3), Splintering jawbone sword (D6, Ongoing D3), Javelin (D6, Ranged)

CHRY SALIS

Chrysalis is Ashter's creepy negotiator, known to enjoy torturing people who don't pay their dues. He is a tall, skinny drow with a fringe of short grey hair around the edges of his bald head (often covered by a hood) and solemn grey robes.

Difficulty: 1 against magical mental or social attacks, 2 against mundane mental or social attacks, 0 otherwise

Resistance: 7

Equipment: Cat o' nine tails (D3, **Scarring**, **Stunning**), Enchanted robe (Armour 2, **Concealed**)

MANCUERDA

Mancuerda is Quinn's legbreaker. His everyday job is leading Quinn's Enforcers as they kick down doors, demand rent, and see off would-be rivals to Quinn's business. Mancuerda is a potential villain to face in the Garrack warehouse, the Ashter and Quinn confrontation, or at another point during the adventure. He is a hard-bitten human with a barrel chest and an unpleasant grin.

Difficulty: 1 vs physical attacks, 0 otherwise

7

Resistance:

Equipment: City Guard riot gear (Armour 4, **Heavy**), Shrike pistol (D6, **Penetrating**, **Ranged**, **Double-barrelled**), Brass knuckles (D3, **Stunning**)

CAPTAIN MORDANT AND THE PILGRIM'S WALK PEACEMONGERS

Captain Mordant's Peacemongers are the highly corrupt City Guard of Pilgrim's Walk, in deep with Ashter, Quinn, and the criminal syndicates.

If the actions of the PCs risk attracting the attention of the rest of the City Guard or the Paladins (or if they gain Shadow fallout), Captain Mordant may try to discourage them by threatening them with imprisonment: they are endangering her economic interests and job security by drawing scrutiny. First, she will send a few of her tougher guards to corner them in an alley. If the characters continue to be a problem, she will make an official arrest herself and throw them in cells overnight so events progress without them.

Mordant is a hard nut to crack, but she values her set-up in Pilgrim's Walk too much to endanger it. If the player characters make a compelling case that she should turn on Ashter and Quinn, she accepts; but on the condition that she and the Peacemongers are kept out of anything official.

CAPTAIN MORDANT

Description: A dour-faced drow with a multitude of scars, a dirty laugh, and a thousand-yard stare.

Difficulty: 1

Resistance: 6

Equipment: Captain's armour (**Armour 3**), Mace that is definitely not standard issue (**D6, Brutal**)

PEACEMONGERS

Names: Betty Narr, Foret Binns, Cullen Bristow

Descriptors: Armour daubed with symbols of faith; Godsmoke cigarette tucked behind their ear; Earnest greenhorn with a confused expression

Difficulty: 0

Resistance: 5

Equipment: Light armour (**Armour 2**), Club (**D3**)

CUSTOM FALLOUT

MINOR FALLOUT

Poisoned [Blood]. You are shaking and enervated, racked by pain from the poison in your system. Whenever you take stress, take an additional one.

Cursed [Mind]. Whether it's a divine curse or a twist of fate, luck isn't your friend today. Roll any skill or Knack dice twice and take the lower result.

Enraged [Mind]. You are filled with fury and are no longer able to focus on tasks that require you to remain calm. You automatically fail any task that requires precision, patience, or compromise.

Blessed [Reputation/Silver]. A god has decided to bestow a blessing of wealth upon you. However, because this god is not very powerful, the wealth they bestow comes from other people. Valuables, goods, and coins snake towards you through the air from nearby people, leading either to accusations of telekinetic theft or to you having to pay them off so they'll leave you alone.

Godless [Reputation]. You are known, fairly or unfairly, to be blasphemous and disrespectful about the gods and their servants. Any social checks against religious NPCs have their Difficulty increased by 1, and you cannot use the Religion domain to contribute to pools.

Known [Shadow]. Your face, voice, gait, and gestures have been memorised by one NPC. They can recognise you again no matter how well you disguise yourself (unless you successfully avoid their notice altogether).

MODERATE FALLOUT

System Shock [Blood]. Feedback from a piece of magitech has compromised your system. You are frozen in place and cannot move, but you are able to perceive events around you and communicate.

Angry God [Shadow]. You have attracted the ire of an angry god. Whenever you try to hide, you are instead surrounded by attention-grabbing lights and sounds that might be called a 'miracle' to anyone not afflicted with them. You cannot sneak, hide, or disguise yourself.

Grabbed [Shadow]. You have been grabbed off the street by the Enforcers or the Peacemongers, and are now separated from your friends. Talk your way out, offer bribes, or get beaten up for your troubles!

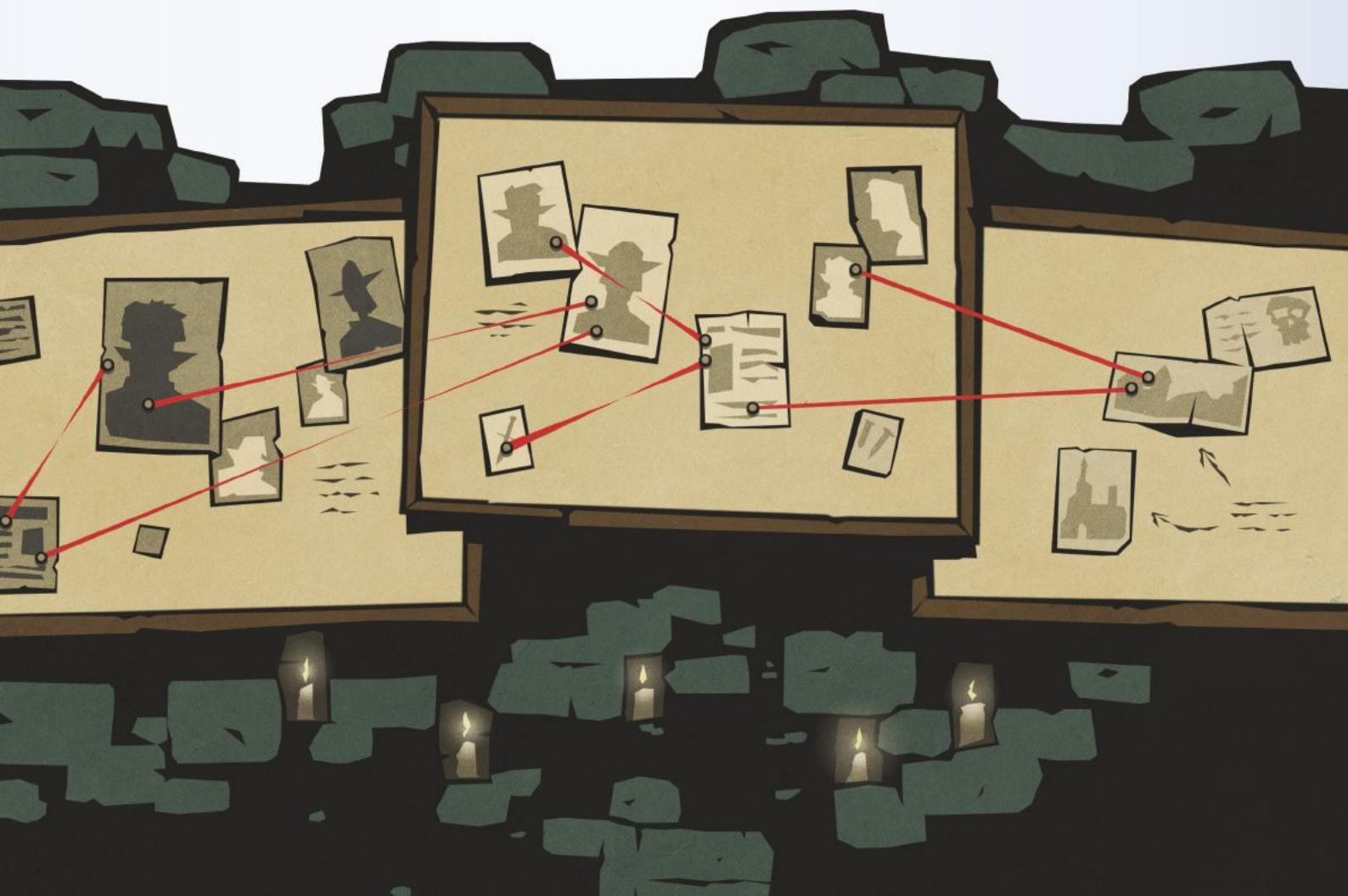
Hunted [Shadow]. Ashter and Quinn have put a bounty on your head. Everywhere you go in Pilgrim's Walk, there are people looking to make some money by selling you out. Unless you disguise yourself, avoid notice entirely, or hide, the GM can bring a group of Enforcers into any scene you are in.

Tithed [Silver]. Due to the esoteric workings of a temple's bureaucracy, you have accidentally become a member and must pay a tithe. You must regularly contribute time or money to the temple until you free yourself through a lengthy set of forms.



CULTS OF PERSONALITY

The sections that follow are Kickstarter backer rewards. For a princely sum, a handful of kind supporters commissioned a cult each, working with us to create something that meshed with the existing world of Spire whilst staying true to their intentions. It's challenging and satisfying work, and we hope you like what we've come up with!





THE WATCHERS

Commissioned by *Atlas*

Spire is the city of a thousand gods, and the Watchers are interested in actively reducing that number – one god at a time. No end of torment has been lumped upon poor and desperate unfortunates in the name of one deity or another. Holy crusades have razed cities to the ground and destroyed priceless cultural artefacts. Multiple districts of the city are rife with minor holy turf wars as rival cults vie for control of the populace.

The Watchers claim to have arisen from a prehistoric group of warriors who saw what the unknowable had planned for the world and weren't having any of it. They forged weapons and tools using sorceries stolen from heaven to allow them to fight toe-to-toe with the gods themselves. These days, they have to make do with infiltrating temples, destabilising them from the inside, and occasionally executing a priest or two. But, they still draw power from the idea of the ancient artefacts that once let their forebears behead and shackle the divine, earthbound and mewling.

Whether or not they actually existed is a moot point.

REQUIREMENT: Undergo the esoteric initiation rites of the Watchers and win their trust.

REFRESH: Destabilise, damage, or destroy a religious organisation.

LOW ADVANCES

SHROUD OF THE LOYAL SERVANT.

[Occult] *Prowl through the flock as you please.* Gain the **Deceive** skill. Roll **Deceive+Occult** to cast this spell. On a success, you may blend in seamlessly with any religious congregation that you enter. Your clothes shift to form a rough average of those worn around you, you are innately aware of all the relevant calls and responses in whatever service you attend, and in general you won't stick out like a sore thumb. You don't actually know anything about the religion in question, but if pressed, you will be able to automatically respond with something authentic-sounding and non-committal. The effects of this spell last until you leave the area.

DECLARATION OF ANATHEMA.

[Occult] *Scribe the name of the faithful in blood, and they shall tremble at your approach.* Gain the Religion domain. Roll **Fight+Occult** to cast this spell whilst writing the name

of a religious organisation on vellum, as well as listing their most egregious crimes, their more influential members, and so on. On a success, you roll with Mastery when you act against them until the next dawn. If the declaration is damaged or destroyed before dawn, the spell ends.

MEDIUM ADVANCES

MANTLE OF THE ANOINTED. [Occult]

Don the mask of the slave-driver and move unopposed amongst their number. +1 **Mind**. Roll **Deceive+Occult** to cast this spell. On a success, you can pass as a low-level authority figure within any religious organisation that you enter, though not with any particular rank or title; you just look the part. In addition, you're able to lead a worship session and find your way around the back rooms of the temple without too much trouble. You can also cite the relevant scripture well enough to sound believable to members of the congregation. The effects of this spell last until you leave the area.

TRUE IRON SHACKLES. [Occult] *Bind the ephemeral to earth and sever their connection to the divine.* Once per situation when you are targeted by magic from a Divine source, roll **Resist+Occult** to cast this spell. On a success, not only does the magic have no effect on you (so you do not mark any associated stress or suffer any ill effects), but you dull the caster's bond with their god. Reduce their difficulty by 1 until they are able to atone at a suitable place of worship.

CASKET OF GOD-BINDING. [Occult]

Wrench the wretched from ivory towers and seal them in blackiron caskets. Roll **Fight+Occult** to cast this spell on a target within arm's reach (you need access to an empty chest, barrel, crate, or other suitable vessel for it to function). On a success, you mystically trap the target in the vessel. They cannot escape for a full minute.

According to the Watchers' literature this spell used to a) work on gods and b) restrain them forever, but times are tight. After the minute has elapsed, your victim will burst free from their bindings. You or anyone touching the vessel can extend the duration of the spell for another minute by marking D3 stress to **Mind**.



THE CULT OF THE DOG-MEN

Commissioned by Nathan Brown

Carrian-Priests are heretics in the eyes of the Council, but they're the sort of heretics that they allow to operate in the city and only try to excommunicate or kill if they bother anyone important. They're well-entrenched, and they do a lot of good work in the community if you ignore the cannibalism and hyena-fighting.

The Dog-Men of Red Row are heretics too: heretics in the eyes of the Carrian-Priests, who are keen to make a good name for themselves in the eyes of the Council. So they were exiled from New Heaven, driven down the city, and forced to make a home deep beneath the ground.

As far as underground heretic cannibal cults go, the Dog-Men are particularly vicious. The priests of New Heaven preach deliverance for the souls of the dead through ritual consumption of their flesh in service of the corpse-god Charnel; but the Dog-Men want to keep those souls for themselves. More powerful members of the cult boast swarms of disparate spectres tethered to their mortal forms. Kill them and you release these ghosts, for good or ill.

They don't call themselves Dog-Men – they're still Carrian-Priests as far as they're concerned – but the inhabitants of Red Row picked the name due to the mad-eyed, spittle-flecked hounds that accompany them on hunts, barking and snapping at ghosts to keep them in line. The cult members' filed teeth, spiked collars, canine pelts, and hunting howls back up the rumours that they can shapeshift into dogs themselves. There's no reason why the rumours shouldn't be true.

REQUIREMENT: Survive a hunting party of the Dog-Men and defeat the cultist sent to kill you in single combat, then accept their offer of fellowship.

REFRESH: Eat lots of raw meat. Animal flesh will get you D3; the flesh of people D6; family members or someone you care about, D8.

LOW ADVANCES

DOG. *Man's best friend is a full belly, but dogs come in a close second.* +1 **Mind.** You gain access to a loyal (if deranged) dog. Name it. To represent your dog risking itself in combat, all your weapons gain the **Bloodbound** tag.

RED ORACLE. [Divine] *You beseech your dog-headed lord for guidance.* When you eat a significant portion of a creature's raw flesh (enough that they'd notice it was missing), you commune with Charnel and can choose one of the following benefits:

- Information on how the creature died – or if it's alive, what it can see right now
- Access to a skill or domain related to the creature until the end of the session
- Remove D3 **Blood** stress and roll with Mastery on your next dice roll

HUNT WITH THE HOUNDS. *Dogs howl and bark in the darkness around you.* Mark D3 stress to **Shadow** to activate this power. Roll with Mastery on **Pursue** and **Intimidate** rolls until the end of the current situation.

MEDIUM ADVANCES

FETTERED PHANTOM. [Divine] *You grab spirits and tether them to your body with old magic.* Once per session, when you end the life of a person in a violent or otherwise unpleasant way, you can claim their ghost as your own. Mark their name on your character sheet.

You can expend a ghost at any point to: add 2 dice to a roll; double the damage inflicted with a melee attack; or remove a minor or Moderate **Blood** fallout. If you die while you have ghosts tethered to you, everyone within arm's reach of you marks D6 stress to **Blood** or **Mind** per ghost released.

BLOOD ON THE WIND. [Divine] *Your pack lays in wait until you give them the signal – meat, fresh and bloody.* When you snuff out a person's life and offer them up to the pack with a howl instead of eating them, mark D6 stress to **Shadow**. A group of fellow Dog-Men and their hounds descend on your current position, barking and shouting, and tear the corpse to shreds with their teeth. What they do after that is up to them, but it makes for a good distraction.





THE ECLIPSE

Commissioned by James White

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The Eclipse have realised the truth of the sun. Though the aelfir of Spire may worship it as a god – or several gods, to be precise – theirs is a brutish and simplistic channelling of the power that resides in the great celestial orb. There are far older and sharper workings available to those that are willing to risk their minds and bodies for them.

What's more, they're even more aggrieved at the aelfir's occupation of Spire than the Ministry are. Not only has the home of their ancestors been broken and oppressed by the high elves, but each clumsy instance of deference to the Solar Pantheon muddies their connection to the sun as the aether is flooded with cultish, sanctimonious noise.

This secretive collection of occult scholars has only recently risen to power after decades of being subdued. It's thought that, due to schisms in the Solar Church and a rise in drow support of the Church of Our Glorious Lady, their bond with their patron is finally becoming stable enough to allow reliable magic.

The Eclipse are happy to see the aelfir's control over Spire (and the blind, idiot faith they bring with them) weaken, and have allied with the Ministry of Our Hidden Mistress to further destabilise it.

REQUIREMENT: Sustain Moderate **Blood** or **Mind** fallout from exposing yourself to sunlight, and experience a revelation about the true power of the sun.

REFRESH: Disrupt the Solar Church's hold over the people of Spire.

LOW ADVANCES

MAGNESIAN FLARE. [Occult] *Your outstretched arm, marked with sigils in night-black ink, ignites with the force of the noonday summer sun for a dazzling instant.* Mark D6 stress to **Blood** to cast this spell. Your body functions as a damage 1, Point-Blank, Stunning, Spread D6, One-Shot weapon.

CELESTIAL EYE. [Occult] *You bind your senses to the overwhelming map of light and shadow that overlays the world.* Mark D3 to **Blood** to cast this spell whilst staring directly at the sun. Your vision blurs and swims with afterimages. Soon you can see Spire from the sun's point of view, and are able to zoom in on any part you choose (as long as it's in direct sunlight). During this scrying you are unable to see out of your physical eyes, but your other senses work as normal. After ten minutes or so, your consciousness returns to your body and your ordinary vision slowly comes back.

SOUL'S PENUMBRA. [Occult] *You stain your soul with shadows darker than dark.* Gain the **Occult** domain. As long as a part of you is in shadow – even a part as small as your finger – you are not harmed by the sun's light.

MEDIUM ADVANCES

GLORIOUS INCANDESCENCE. [Occult] *You manipulate the drow's ancient curse to burn a victim alive.* Mark D3 stress to **Blood** to cast this spell on a drow target (or anyone under the effects of **SPREAD THE CURSE**) within your line of sight. For the rest of the current situation, if your target is exposed to direct sunlight, they mark D6 stress and begin to catch fire. Even a short period of exposure will kill them, and upon death they will burst apart, inflicting D3 damage on anyone standing nearby.

SPREAD THE CURSE. [Occult] *You are ready for the coming fight against the high elves, and you will level the playing field by any means necessary.* Gain +1 **Blood** and +1 **Mind**. Mark D6 stress to **Mind** to cast this spell on a human or aelfir target within arm's reach. Your target is now permanently subject to the Curse that causes drow to be harmed by direct sunlight, and they take damage in the same way.

PERPETUAL TWILIGHT. [Occult] *You evade the sun's attentions and stretch out the night into infinity.* This spell has no stress cost upon initial casting, but it must be cast at dawn or dusk in a secluded room with no windows (cover them up if you have to). You and anyone in the room with you may Lay Low to reduce stress, but the plot doesn't advance and your enemies don't move against you. Outside of the room, no matter how long you wait inside, only an hour or so has passed.

When any of the participants leave the room or an outsider enters it, the spell is broken and you mark D6 stress to **Mind**. Staying in a single room for a long period of time may bring its own challenges too, even if life in the city outside is temporarily paused.

OCCULT OR DIVINE?

Much like the Blood Witch (*Black Magic*, p. 3), members of the Eclipse cult cast occult spells, but don't roll to do so like other occult casters. Instead, they mark stress directly in exchange for power, like a divine caster would. This is intended to represent their old-fashioned approach compared to the flashier, modern occult spellcasters like the Idol and Inksmith. If you'd rather have them be on the bleeding edge of magic, you can replace the stress costs in these abilities with a **Compel+Occult** check.



THE ORDER OF TRUE PHYSICIANS

Commissioned by Tim Rudloff

For too long, medicine has been the purview of the quack, the priest, and the superstitious. Hundreds of people die every day from preventable diseases and infections as old-fashioned beliefs tie the hands of doctors. Despite well-documented evidence that burying a heart stuck with iron nails at a crossroads does nothing for even minor coughs and colds, dozens of streets are dug up every week, causing no end of disruption – and people still have colds!

It's time for a logical, scientific approach to illness and injury. It's time to cast aside the myths and apply common sense and rigorous study to the science of medicine. It's time to finally realise that every single bad thing that happens to the body and mind is but a reflection of the Grand Universal Stream of Energy that flows through every living creature. Being shot, stabbed, or infected simply disrupts the natural passage of that energy.

The sisters of the Order of True Physicians realise this, and they're bringing pro-active, ultra-holistic health and wellness to the citizens of Spire. They can't wait to show you what they can do.

LOW ADVANCES

MEDICAL TRAINING. *Physicians are encouraged to be well-trained, well-read, and of sound mind and body (at the start of their careers, at least). Gain the Fix skill, the Academia domain, and +1 Blood and Mind resistance.*

TIME TO SHINE. *The stench of blood and the screams of distress put a skip in your step. When you witness another player character suffering Blood or Mind fallout, you roll with Mastery for the remainder of the situation.*

TOO MUCH BLOOD. *Blood is but a medium for maladies and negative energy. Get it out! Make a Fix+Academics check. On a success, a subject within arm's reach clears all Blood stress, but immediately takes Minor Blood fallout. BLEEDING is an appropriate one, but you can mix it up with TIRED, STUNNED, or fallouts of your own creation.*

AMPUTATION ENTHUSIAST. [Occult]

When all you have is a bonesaw, all your problems start to look like gangrenous legs. Skillful application of tourniquets can arrest and direct the flow of pain and disease into one of your subject's extremities. When someone within arm's reach suffers Blood fallout and you have a few minutes to operate, you can replace it with the BROKEN LEG or BROKEN ARM fallout – except that you cut off the limb, so it won't be able to heal. The subject clears any remaining stress allocated to Blood as a result of the surgery. This ability can only be used a maximum of four times on any given subject, for obvious reasons.

MEDIUM ADVANCES

NIGHTINGALE STRIKE. *You solve the immediate problem rather than worrying too much about the future. When a player character within arm's reach takes Minor or Moderate Mind fallout with an immediate effect, you can choose to render them unconscious rather than have them suffer the effects of the fallout. While they're out cold, you can make a Fix+Academics roll to remove the fallout (difficulty 0 for Minor and difficulty 1 for Moderate). On a success, they wake up with a headache but no other ill-effects; on a failure, they wake up and suffer the full effects of the fallout.*

HOLISTIC UNDERSTANDING. *You realise that all maladies are just reflections of the negative energy flowing through your subject and the universe. Once per session, when you remove stress or fallout from a target using one of the abilities in this extra advance, it can be used for any resistance – not just the ones specified.*



THE CULT OF THE UNWHOLE

Commissioned by Steven Humphries

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In a dripping wet cistern beneath the endlessly circling water of a Silver Quarter penfold canal, the Cult of the Unwhole are building their god out of spare parts. According to their sacred texts – of which there are many conflicting canons – Nastroth, an ancient drow god of unfulfilled craving, was slain when they were tricked into fully existing (since they reason that the most profound of all cravings is for existence itself). They were killed by either a nameless war god; a great eyeless lizard that will one day drink the sea; or Nastroth's counterpart: the Golden Serpent, a god of hedonism and instant gratification.

Regardless of who or what killed Nastroth, they're definitely dead. The cult, made up primarily of drow (with the occasional aelfir who's come along because it's fashionably weird to deny oneself pleasures), is constructing an avatar for them. According to the most popular canon, the avatar must be made out of the body parts of aelfir who have died performing selfless acts. Given the callous nature of Spire's ruling class, these are hard to come by.

Still, perhaps having an eternally unfinished avatar is a purer way of worshipping a god of unfulfilled desires. Even in their nascent state, this deity can grant power in exchange for denial of pleasure, basic physical needs, or contact with other people.

REQUIREMENT: Make contact with the Cult of the Unwhole and voluntarily accept a fallout from the list below.

REFRESH: Donate a suitable body part to the avatar.

CORE ABILITY

SACRED CRAVING. [Divine] *The ultimate expression of existence is to be consumed with longing.* At the start of each session, you can voluntarily take on a Craving fallout (see below) in service to your Lord. Each one adds either 1 or 3 points to your Craving total, which affects your other abilities.

You can remove most of these fallouts instantly by indulging the desire, but to do so is shameful. Most worshippers eventually realise that their lives are simply cycles of self-denial followed by shame.

LOW ADVANCES

REFLECTED SUFFERING. [Divine] *Your cravings reverberate through your body, spreading out to others.* When you make an attack, you inflict stress which is equal to your current Craving total rather than rolling to determine stress as normal.

BENEVOLENT LORD. [Divine] *Nastroth, in fragmentary dreams and visions, cleanses you of unimportant concerns.* Once per session, remove an amount of stress equal to your current **Craving** total from any resistance.

DIVINE INSPIRATION. [Divine] *Your faltering body is but a conduit for the divine will of Nastroth; the closer you are to them, the more graceful and pure your movements and words become.* Once per situation, add half of your current **Craving** total (rounding up) to a dice roll and use the new result.

SACRED ENDURANCE. [Divine] *Immersing oneself in the mortal concerns of pain and hunger frees the higher mind to perform its sacred duty.* When your **Craving** total is 2 or more, gain access to the **Resist** skill and the **Religion** domain. When it is 4 or more, gain Mastery on rolls involving **Resist** or **Religion**.

MINOR FALLOUT [1 CRAVING]

RAVENOUS. [Craving] The most basic of desires – to eat and drink – is often denied by new acolytes looking to find favour with Nastroth. All physical actions (running, fighting, sneaking, and so on) increase their difficulty by 1.

SLEEP-DEPRIVED. [Craving] The most dedicated followers avoid the use of stimulants to stay awake, but strong kaffee at midnight is a common practice amongst many members of the cult. All social actions increase their difficulty by 1.

MODERATE FALLOUT [3 CRAVINGS]

SUN-TOUCHED. [Craving] The drow long to hide from the sun, so that their skin might not burn and blister; you stand proudly in the light, teeth gritted. Mark D3 stress to **Blood** at the start of each situation where you are present. This fallout can only be sustained when it is possible to stand in sunlight for a significant portion of each situation.

SUBSTANCE WITHDRAWAL. [Craving] Some devoted members of the Cult of the Unwhole become addicted to drugs, and then deny themselves the release of taking them. While under substance withdrawal, your mind swims. You cannot use the abilities granted by any classes or advances other than this one. Skills and domains function as normal.

ISOLATED. [Craving] You have shut yourself off from kindness, joy, or close contact with others. You feel loneliness and desperation gnaw away at your soul. While suffering from this fallout, you cannot benefit from other characters' abilities or accept their help on rolls, nor can you make use of bonds. However, negative effects from other characters' abilities still trigger.





THE ARRIVAL

Commissioned by Cole Stephan



The Arrival was written by an anonymous aelfir playwright-alienist in the Year of Hallowed Hopes, and is one of many examples of memetic drama that were in fashion amongst high elf society at the time; plays would be written in secret, actors were infected with the narrative (knowingly or unknowingly) and devoted audiences would pay handsomely for inoculations that would let them witness the decentralised performance without risk of succumbing to the story themselves. Unlike other memetic dramas, The Arrival was infused with the shifting magic of the Heart, and it carried with it a terrible potential.

The baroque and over-written play concerns a struggling amateur theatrical troupe attempting to put on a show called The Arrival which will infuse the city of Spire with chaotic magical energy and usher in the next stage of consciousness. As the plot progresses, characters begin to murder and betray each other for choice roles in the play until there is only one actor remaining; they deliver the final monologue as the world is consumed in protean madness and curtains fall.

It is imperative (the Ethics Board claims) that the play never be performed in its entirety or Spire will be completely annihilated. Still, eager occultists delve into the powerful theatrical magic surrounding The Arrival, and some of them manage to resist the mad compulsion of the play long enough to gain an edge over their rivals.

Requirement: Come in contact with a hand-written fragment of The Arrival.

Refresh: Perform part of The Arrival in public; the larger the crowd, the better.

LOW ADVANCES

HERALD THE ARRIVAL. [Occult] *"This play contains within it all the seeds of all our dreams." The Arrival, Act 1, Scene 1.* If you give a fragment of the play to someone likely to find it interesting and spend some time talking with them, roll **Compel+Occult**. On a success you gain them as an individual-level Bond; increase the difficulty of all actions they take that are not related to The Arrival by 1.

MEDIUM ADVANCES

SCENE CHANGE. [Occult] *"Make haste away from here you fiend, or fear the teeth of my keen sabre!" The Arrival, Act 1, Scene 9.* Roll **Fix+Occult** to cast this spell by changing the backdrop for one you have painstakingly created (or rushed out at the last minute, if you're daring). On a success, you and everyone in front of the backdrop are instantly transported to the location depicted by the backdrop; it has to be within Spire, as nowhere else on the continent has the correct magical resonance. The backdrop fades away into the real once used.

PROP WORK. [Occult] *"Here you stand unmasked! Your fabricated glories turn to ash." The Arrival, Act 2, Scene 3.* Roll **Fix+Occult** to cast this spell on an item you or someone within arm's reach of you is holding. On a success, it changes. If it's a prop version of an item (stage jewelry, a sword, a guard's badge) then it transforms into a real example of it; if it's a real version of an item it becomes a prop replacement with all the limitations that entails. It reverts to its original form at the end of the current situation.



HIGH ADVANCES

FAKE BLOOD. [Occult] “Rejoice: this paper world will crumple to reveal its hollow form.” *The Arrival, Act 2, Scene 7.* Once per session, when you suffer fallout, you reveal it to be a fabrication made up of nothing but cheaply-made props and poorly-paid actors. You do not clear stress as normal and the fallout has no further effect.

CURTAINS. [Occult] “What remains to speak? We are but moths, and this our burning.” *The Arrival, Act 3, Scene 12.* Succeed on a Difficulty 2 **Compel+Occult** roll to perform the play in its entirety. Spire is consumed with raw and questing unreality, along with everyone in it.

FALLOUT

STAGEHAND. [Minor, Mind, Shadow, Reputation] You have infected someone with The Arrival in its memetic form, and they are now obsessed with performing the play; they will come back into your life having made preparations you did not want them to make.

THE WORLD'S A STAGE. [Moderate, Mind] One of the characters from the play enters your life, treating you as though you are one of the other characters. They have a habit of arriving at the worst possible time.

UNDERSTUDY. [Moderate, Mind] As **THE WORLD'S A STAGE**, but they're someone you've known for years, only now revealing their true identity.

PUT ON THE MASK. [Moderate, Mind] You pass out, wake up, and you have become one of the characters from the play trapped in your mortal body. (Or: you believe you've become them. It's impossible to tell.) You become obsessed with attempting to return to the play in order to escape this strange dimension; would anyone believe them if you told them the truth?

ABSORBED. [Severe, Mind] Whilst performing the play, you are absorbed into it entirely and become one of the characters within.



APPENDICES

KICKSTARTER BACKERS

[NON-PLAYER] CHARACTER ASSASSINATION BACKERS

Alex Pulido: Cles Quennel	185	Penitent: Fraizon De-Starys	194
Shay: Shay Vangrin	69	Shawn "Allan III" McPhee: Allan The Third	30
Rob Lally: Beckett Flynn	80	Imogen Cassidy: Miss Cassidy	72
Rufus Lunn: Rufun Valun	25	Joe Rooney: Sepp Rosemire	160
Puck Malamud: Malamud de Ys	111	Michele Paroli: Bryan McTodd	110
Alex Huth: False Robert	16	Mateja Simovic: Simov	34
Anna Keeley: Keeley	176	Matt "Catapult" Wang: Tinshek, Head of Internal Affairs	104
Apostolis Dousias: The Apostle	153	Matt Tyrer: Doctor Tyran	109
Ben Cawkwell: The Bitter Baron	57	Michael Burdick: Burdock Smith-Desert-Dreams-of-Deluge	118
Charles Strange: Charles Lestrangle	150	Vivian Gossler: Iczak Epinell	130
Myridian: Cormick, Knight Watchmann	180	Graeme Copeland: Grey Toils-In-Sunlight	167
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