

HEART

THE CITY
BENEATH



QUICKSTART EDITION

GRANT HOWITT & CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR

ILLUSTRATED BY FELIX MIAL



HEART

THE CITY BENEATH

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

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

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

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

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

Heart: The City Beneath - Quickstart Edition

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



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

5

WHAT IS HEART?

6

THE WORLD OF HEART

8

RULES

10

RESISTANCES

10

CLASSES AND CALLINGS

10

SKILLS AND DOMAINS

11

CALLINGS

12

SUCCESS AND FAILURE

12

HEALING

16

FALLOUT

18

EXPLORATION

24

LANDMARKS

24

COMBAT

26

TOOLS, WEAPONS AND RESOURCES

28

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS AND ADVERSARIES

34

RUNNING THE GAME

36

DROWNED

38

THE CHARACTERS

39

THE MAP

40

CHARACTER SHEETS:

QUIN MOREAU, PENITENT VERMISSIAN KNIGHT 47

LYND VASSAIL, HEARTSONG-CALLED WITCH 49

TENACITY MALRIQUE, ADVENTUROUS HERETIC 51

GETHIN BAYN, FORCED HOUND 53

YNNETH DANARIAN, ENLIGHTENED JUNK MAGE 55



INTRODUCTION

This quickstart pack is designed to get your first game of *Heart* up and running as straightforwardly as possible. It includes everything you need to play a short campaign – roughly three sessions of play, or about nine hours depending on your group – including the core rules of the game, five pregenerated characters to suit different types of play, locations and landmarks for your adventure, and lots of advice for the games-master too.

- If you'd like to find out more about the characters in *Drowned* and get started running or playing the adventure, turn to p. 38.
- If you want to get your head around the rules, start on p. 10.
- If you're keen to dive into the setting, start on p. 8.
- If you want to know more about how to run a great game of *Heart*, go to p. 36.
- And if you'd like to know it all, just read on from here.

WHAT ISN'T IN THIS QUICKSTART?

This book is intended to give you a taste of the *Heart* experience as well as teach you the rules, step-by-step. The core rulebook includes:

- Full rules for character creation and advancement, all the way to devastating Zenith abilities that inevitably doom your character.
- Rules for mapping and exploring the Heart, to make your own campaigns.
- A huge list of dangerous and pitiable adversaries to make your life in the City Beneath even more difficult.
- Details on the geography of the Heart, the landmarks and delves that populate it, and the people who have chosen for some reason to live there.
- An expanded list of Fallout results, allowing the GM to really personalise what happens when the player characters mess up.

CONVENTIONS IN THE TEXT

D12: A 12-sided dice.

D10: A ten-sided dice.

D8: An eight-sided dice.

D6: A six-sided dice.

D4: A four-sided dice.

These dice are arranged in size order, and in some situations certain conditions might mean you roll a larger or smaller dice than the basic one for the action. When a rule tells you to move up or down a “step” or a “dice size”, go up or down this list to find the new dice to roll. If you're already rolling a D4 you can't roll anything smaller; if you're already rolling a D12 you can't roll anything higher.

A single roll can include several dice. When we're talking about the number of dice rolled for a single action, we call it the “dice pool”.

SITUATION: A single scene of roleplay. A situation can be of variable length; some might be moments long, and others go on for hours of in-game time. A situation can best be described as “what's happening right now.” When the focus of the scene – the “thing that's happening” – changes, it's a new situation. You can cut back and forth between active situations to run multiple scenes concurrently, if you'd like, without ending any of them.

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

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

PLAYER: Someone who is playing the game; they take on the role of a character whose abilities are defined using the rules of the game. A player is in control of their character and their emotions and their actions, but should feel

free to suggest elements of the world around them if they feel inspired to.

GAMESMASTER (GM): The person in charge of the game – the final arbitrator on all decisions. The GM also plays every character that's not assigned to a player, is referee of the rules, is in charge of pacing and organisation, and is responsible for everyone's comfort and fun at the table.

PLAYER CHARACTER (PC): The character assigned to a player. These have more complex rules than non-player characters (see below) which allow for more drama, a finer understanding of their abilities, and a detailed examination of precisely how much trouble they're in at any one time.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTER (NPC): A character played by the GM. NPCs are more simple than PCs, having only a handful of rules devoted to them.

PARTY: A group of player characters.



WHAT IS HEART?

Heart is a game about damnation, redemption, survival and obsession, set in the Heart – the nightmare, unreal labyrinth that pulses and writhes beneath the city of Spire. It's also a game about body horror, walls made of breathing meat, and exploring a possibly-malevolent parasite dimension. It's also a game about dungeon-crawling, at the base of it: we wanted to take the classic story of descending into a dangerous underworld and see what twist we could put on it.

The Heart is a realm of infinite possibility that reforms itself anew with each generation that explore it, and it can contain most anything you can imagine. Your Heart, the one that you create with the rest of your gaming group, will be distinct from every other; there is no map to constrain you save the ones you make yourselves. As the delvers venture through the City Beneath, the gamesmaster forms it around them into something great, and terrifying, and personal.

You will not be playing normal people. Your characters are strange, broken people, obsessed with finding something – freedom, redemption, truth, impossible magicks, excitement – and have sheltered together for companionship. In the endless passageways of the Heart, they can find it – at the cost of their sanity, or their preconceived notions of reality, or their flesh and blood, or whatever they had left in them that made them a person, rather than a beast.

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Playing *Heart* takes the form of a conversation between the players and the gamesmaster – the gamesmaster describes the world, the players describe the actions of their characters, the gamesmaster reacts, and so on. For most of the game, you won't be using rules or mechanics at all.

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

When your character performs an action and the gamesmaster asks for a roll, you'll roll at least one ten-sided dice (a D10). The number of dice you roll depends on whether you have a skill you can apply to the action, or a domain that applies – essentially, whether your character has the background knowledge they would need to give them a boost. You can also add a dice if you have mastery over the action, skill, or domain – which means you're good at this specific thing. By default you always roll one dice, but in some situations you might be rolling as many as four.

The higher the result, the better your character succeeds, and the less stress they risk taking as a result of attempting the action.

Stress is bad, as it represents all kinds of minor negative effects on your character. The more stress you accrue, the more chance you have of it accumulating into something serious – in *Heart*, this is called Fallout. Luckily, there are lots of different ways of removing stress before that happens, but more often than not you'll find yourself choosing between your own safety and the success of the expedition.

WHAT KIND OF STORIES IS HEART BUILT FOR?

Heart is a horror game. It focuses on: body horror, which is the fear of your body being changed by foreign entities against your will; existential horror, which is the fear of your deeply-held convictions being proved false; monster horror, which features all kinds of horrible creatures; and violent horror, where there are gruesome consequences for engaging in combat.

It's not all horror; there's wonder too, as the City Beneath reveals strangenesses to the delvers as they make their way through it. There's camaraderie and togetherness; there's adventure, and excitement; there's the sense of establishing order over chaos. But, at the root of it, this is a game about upsetting things; of unstable people going into a malevolent parasite reality in search of answers they will probably not find. It is tragic, and ironic, and fun in a gallows humour sort of way.

Character death is not only a possibility, but a likelihood; as you amass injuries and misfortunes, the end will come for your character. It is your job as a player to make exciting choices, push your character into dangerous situations, and do your level best to have a good death.

Although the subject matter of *Heart* is often grim and gruesome, the game itself isn't and shouldn't be upsetting to play. People run and play horror games for all sorts of reasons – for fun, to explore subjects and experiences they wouldn't have in real life, to bond and to tell engaging stories about people. Running *Heart* is not about grossing people out or pushing them outside their comfort zone for no reason. It's about finding stories that meet those needs for your players, creating an environment that feels safe and supportive in which to explore the inhuman and horrifying themes, and pacing the game so that your players have fun.

LINES, VEILS AND THE X CARD

In every RPG, and perhaps especially in a horror game, it's important that you and your friends are comfortable when playing.

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

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

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

THE WORLD OF HEART

Underneath the mile-high crumbling city of Spire lies the Heart: an undercity, a cursed labyrinth, where reality comes unpinned at the seams and a parasite dimension encroaches on the surface world through meat, and stone, and teeth. It is a realm built and rebuilt on the ruins of civilisations that have attempted to tame it, or even understand it, and failed. Temples to dead gods rot in lightless caverns; city streets built by an unknown hand criss-cross settlements in nonsensical patterns; great rusted machines, the purpose of which is long forgotten, rumble and scrape in the darkness.

There is the Heart - the Greater Heart, the City Beneath - and the Heart Itself. The Heart Itself is the core of the place, and it coruscates with raw quintessence, unalloyed potential, with which it yearns to remake the world. It siphons dreams and fears from those who step into its domain and warps the City Beneath to better suit them. The closer one gets to the Heart Itself, the less sense anything makes. There are great forests beneath the earth, towering and creaking over the heads of cold-eyed hunters, that grow without ever seeing the sun. There are lakes of ash where fisherfolk sit on stilt-legged platforms and hunt with harpoons for the creatures that swim through the dust sea beneath them. There are alien skies, with uncanny constellations; gods and titans imprisoned in cursed caves; intelligences from the darkness between the stars; doorways to heaven, and hell, and any subsidiary dimension you care to imagine.

The city of Spire is the jewel in the crown of the aelfir (or high elf) empire; after a bloody siege two centuries prior, the dark elf (or drow) rulers of the city capitulated and handed over control to the invaders. Since then, the aelfir have used human mercenaries and indentured drow to fight

against the gnolls in the lands to the south and expanded their influence. (You can learn more about Spire, and the drow plot to overthrow the aelfir government, in the *Spire RPG*.)

The Heart is not an empty place; there are people here, many of whom are descended from those who lived in the undercity before the Vermissian Incident - when engineers pierced the Heart Itself in an attempt to power a city-wide transport network - made everything much less stable than it was before.

The settlement of Derelictus, also known as the City Between, functions as a staging post for delvers who gather here in the run-down bars and make plans. The Temple of the Moon Beneath stands as testament to the endurance of the drow of Spire who, when their state religion was outlawed by the aelfir, brought their most sacred site brick-by-brick to the Heart and rebuilt it away from prying eyes. The Hounds, a renegade military regiment, function as a sort of informal mercenary police. Illicit hallucinogenic fungus farms sit alongside sects devoted to black magic, demonology, forbidden gods, or weird philosophies.

But: it is dangerous, too. There are creatures and people that have been marked by the power of the place and changed, sometimes beyond recognition; foxes with seven legs of spindled bone, swarms of rats that whisper secrets from books they've eaten, men who've eaten flesh from the red, wet walls of the Heart and are now slavishly devoted to securing more meat for their blind, idiot masters.

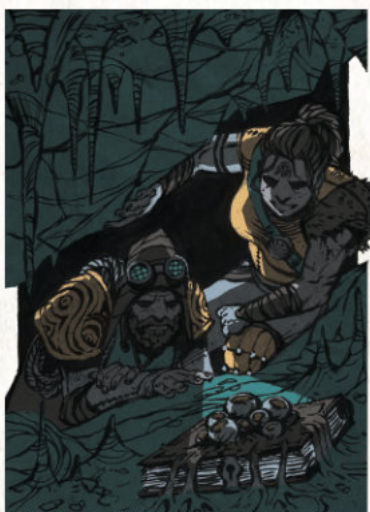
Be careful. Pack your supplies well. Practice your aim. Learn the strengths and weaknesses of your companions. Listen to the world around you and intuit the changing state of the City Beneath. But above all: remember why you chose to come down here, and let that obsession burn within you like a lantern to light your way.

THE PEOPLE OF HEART

Delvers are generally of one of four ancestries. Although the different people of the world are at one another's throats in the city of Spire, the Heart is a great leveller in social and racial terms, as it erodes many of the privileges of infrastructure and power that oppressors rely on to maintain control over the oppressed. It's not uncommon to see folk from different ancestries within the same adventuring party.



DROW: There are more drow than any other type of person in the City Beneath; Spire is predominantly made up of dark elves, and the undercity contains entrances to the tunnels to their lands in the west. They are largely monochrome, having black, white or grey skin and have a slight, tall build when compared to humans.



HUMAN: In the Heart, most humans you'll meet will come from the Eastern Kingdoms - a scattered series of principalities ruled over by a vagabond Wanderer-King. They have a reputation for unearthing ancient technology from the cursed arcologies on which their homelands are built and making their own copies - they managed to retroengineer the gun a few hundred years ago and warfare hasn't been the same since.



AELFIR: High elves, who augment their bodies with magic and implants to look more beautiful, more graceful, and more perfect. Aelfir in the city above - the ruling class - wear masks to hide their faces from their inferiors; in the City Beneath, only traditionalists wear them. Any aelfir in the Heart is probably exiled from polite society.



GNOLL: Hyena-headed people from the southlands who have a reliance on captured spirits and mechanical demonology to maintain control of their desert empire. As the aelfir are at war with them, they aren't permitted within the city limits of Spire; many gnolls in the area are driven into the undercity thanks to this ruling.

RULES

RESISTANCES

Heart uses the Resistance system, which focuses on what characters have to lose, and what's at stake in every conflict. In this game there are five resistances, and your character can take stress to any of them, based on what's happening in the story.

- **BLOOD:** Physical exhaustion, pain, blood loss and injury.
- **ECHO:** Twisting of the body and mind by the unreal energies of the Heart.
- **MIND:** Madness, instability, and weirdnesses.
- **FORTUNE:** Bad luck, incompetence, and overconfidence.
- **SUPPLIES:** Loss of resources, damaged equipment and debt.

Your character class, calling, equipment and abilities might provide you with **protection**, which can reduce the amount of stress you take. For more detail on stress and how to apply it, see p. 16.

CLASSES AND CALLINGS

Each player character in *Heart* is made up of a **class** and a **calling**.

Your **class** details your background, aptitudes and party role; it's the reason why you haven't died down here just yet. There are nine classes in the final game (though we only use five of them in this quickstart edition), which are:

- **CLEAVER:** A shapeshifting hunter who consumes the flesh of their prey - or anything they can get their hands on, really - to gain power.
- **DEEP APIARIST:** Occultists who have given their bodies up to the Hive, an otherworldly intelligence manifested as thousands of crystal bees. They see the Heart as anathema, and seek to keep it in check.

- **DEADWALKER:** A Deadwalker has stared into the face of death and come out triumphant, and they're accompanied by a spectre of their demise. They use their half-dead spirit to break into various afterlives using the thin reality of the City Beneath.
- **HERETIC:** A devotee of the Moon Beneath, a luminous and fecund goddess that grants them the ability to use strange miracles.
- **HOUND:** A mercenary police officer shackled by the cursed origins of their regiment.
- **INCARNADINE:** A cleric of the goddess of debt, at the end of their luck after a string of deals that saw their soul claimed by their mistress.
- **JUNK MAGE:** Hooked on unnatural power siphoned off from extradimensional entities, these wizards live precarious existences in search of the next hit.
- **VERMISSIAN KNIGHT:** An armoured traveller along the cursed train network, the Vermissian, with experimental technology and inside knowledge of the system's inner workings.
- **WITCH:** Carriers of a blood disease that grants them the ability to cast visceral magicks. Their sorcery hides their true forms - flickering, hungry zoetrope horrors.

Your **calling** is the reason why you chose to come to the Heart in the first place, and what keeps you down here when any sensible person would have fled long ago. The majority of a character's calling is made up of beats - events, challenges, goals or situations that, when the character experiences them, allow advancement and an increase in power. There are five callings available:

- **ADVENTURE:** Bored of a life on the surface, you seek a knife-edge life of danger and excitement where laws, both social and scientific, no longer apply.
- **HEARTSONG:** Years of mysterious dreams where a red wet heaven glistens beneath you have lead you to the cursed labyrinth of the City Beneath in search of greater truths.

- **ENLIGHTENMENT:** You want to achieve something impossible; you know that the Heart holds fragments of the knowledge you need to pull it off.
- **FORCED:** You don't want to be in the Heart, but your masters are blackmailing or coercing you into it. You follow their orders as best you're able.
- **PENITIENT:** You were part of an order; you let them down, and people paid the price for it. You try your best to make amends through self-sacrifice.

You can learn more about callings on p. 12.

SKILLS AND DOMAINS

Skills are things you can do, and domains are areas of knowledge and experience. Both are ways of giving your character a particular flavour and specific types of expertise – a character with the Mend skill and the Religion domain will likely have a very different personality and play style than one with the Kill skill and the Cursed domain. Skills apply specifically to actions that you might take, while domains are broader and might affect your contacts and your ability to function in different areas of the Heart.

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

SKILLS

- **COMPEL:** Make people do what you want via threats, lies, flattery or reasoned argument.
- **DELVE:** Progress into dangerous or unknown territory.
- **DISCERN:** Understand the world by drawing on accessible information.
- **ENDURE:** Resist the effects of the Heart on your body and mind.

- **EVADE:** Get away from someone or something that's trying to track you down.
- **HUNT:** Track down someone or something that's trying to get away from you.
- **KILL:** End the lives of people and things with weapons or your bare hands.
- **MEND:** Repair something or someone that is broken; build something new.
- **SNEAK:** Hide yourself or things from the attention of others.

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

DOMAINS

- **CURSED:** Actively harmful locations. Places touched by the Heart.
- **DESOLATE:** Wastelands and abandoned towns.
- **HAVEN:** Settlements where people live, work and form communities.
- **OCCULT:** Hidden knowledge and black magic.
- **RELIGION:** Gods, and things worshipped like gods.
- **TECHNOLOGY:** Machines, buildings and devices.
- **WARREN:** Cramped, dense corridors.
- **WILD:** Wilderness, vegetation and animals.

If you possess a **domain**, when you perform the action associated with the skill, you add one D10 to your dice pool and pick the highest result. Domains aren't intrinsically linked to action types, like skills are, but to areas of the Heart and contacts you might have.

KNACKS

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

CALLINGS

Your calling is your reason for venturing into the nightmare undercity; the obsession that keeps you pushing deeper into the Heart in search of something intensely valuable to you. In this Quickstart edition, each character comes with a calling already selected.

CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

Each calling is made up of a core ability, which you acquire when you take the calling at character generation, and several beats split up into minor, major and zenith levels. These beats can be thought of as goals, achievements, or scenes to play out that shape your character's story - and when you hit them, you can advance your character by choosing a new advance from your class. Minor beats earn you a minor advance; major beats earn you a major advance; and zenith beats unlock zenith abilities, the most potent options available to your character. The Quickstart edition includes a selection of minor and major beats and abilities for each character - there will be lots more available in the final core book.

At the start of each session (or at the end of each session if the GM would like more time to plan out the adventure) each player chooses any two beats from the list provided in their calling and tells the GM what they are. It's the GM's responsibility to introduce elements that allow players to pursue their chosen beats, and the players' responsibility to push the story towards achieving them.

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

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

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

SUCCESS AND FAILURE

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

1. First, establish the stakes for the roll. What do you have to lose, if anything?
2. Next work out if your character's skills and abilities apply to the action, and as a result establish how many dice you're rolling - the size of your dice pool.
3. Then roll your dice and, if it's a difficult action, remove dice according to the difficulty rules.
4. Work out whether you've succeeded (and what happens next as a result) by consulting the highest result rolled on your dice.
5. If necessary, mark stress and roll for fallout. If you've failed, or succeeded at a cost, there will be some negative effects for your character that the GM will help you to resolve.

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

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

RULES IN BRIEF

1. BUILD DICE POOL



Start with 1D10

+



Relevant Skill

+



Relevant Domain

+



Relevant Mastery

2. ROLL DICE POOL



3. REMOVE DICE FOR DIFFICULTY



RISKY:
Remove
highest dice



DANGEROUS:
Remove 2
highest dice



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

4. DETERMINE SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Compare your highest remaining dice to the following chart:

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

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

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

ON A 7 OR LESS: RESOLVE STRESS AND FALLOUT

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



> STRESS

No fallout is suffered.



≤ STRESS AND 6 OR LESS

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



≤ STRESS AND 7 OR MORE

Character takes Major fallout and clears all stress.

1. ESTABLISH THE STAKES

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

This is a conversation with your GM and perhaps with other players at your table. Sometimes the stakes will be obvious – for instance, if you're in the middle of a battle, and you're rolling to harm your opponent, you risk getting hurt yourself in return. Sometimes they'll be less obvious, and you'll need to think about what you're willing to risk on this roll. Look at your Resistances and work out what kind of stress you'll mark if you fail. Depending on what you're trying to do, it may make sense to target a resistance that is not immediately obvious. A rock falling on a character would by default cause Blood stress; alternatively, the rock might miss them by a fraction of an inch and cause the same amount of stress to Fortune instead.

At this point the GM will also need to work out how difficult the action is. There are four kinds of difficulty in *Heart*: Standard, Risky, Dangerous or Impossible, and they're explained in detail below (on p. 15). Standard difficulty won't affect your roll at all; Impossible, on the other hand, makes it pointless rolling, because there's no way to succeed. Risky and Dangerous actions will take one or two dice away from your roll, so it's important to know up front that these are higher stakes actions with a greater chance of failure.

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

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

2. CREATE YOUR DICE POOL

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

ADDING DICE

- If you have the skill you need, add one D10.
- If you have a domain that applies to your action, add one D10.
- If you have mastery over the action, skill or domain, add one D10. (Mastery doesn't stack – you can only use it once per action, no matter how many sources you get it from. You don't need a skill to benefit from mastery when using it, although often you'll have both.)
- For each character that assists you, if they have a relevant skill or domain, add one D10 to your dice pool – but they take stress the same way you would. (There is a limit to how many characters can aid you on any given action, determined by the GM.)

REMOVING DICE

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

If that means your dice pool would be reduced to zero, roll a single D10 instead, and use the Difficult Actions table instead of the Core Actions table in step 4. Effectively, this means the only way to succeed is if you roll a 10 on a single dice.

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

3. APPLY DIFFICULTY

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

- **Standard:** The default difficulty – there's something at stake but it's not especially hard. Don't make any changes to your dice results – go straight to the next step.
- **Risky:** The action is especially risky. Maybe the opposition is well-trained, the conditions are poor, or the character has a handicap of some sort. After you've rolled your dice, remove the highest result before working out whether or not you have succeeded.
- **Dangerous:** The action is very difficult and has a high chance of causing harm or misfortune to the character; any harder than this and it'd be impossible. After you've rolled your dice, remove the two highest results before working out whether you have succeeded.
- **Impossible:** The action cannot succeed, or the odds of success are so low as to make the action functionally impossible. Do not roll dice; the action fails, and the character incurs stress. Even if an action is impossible, players might still want to attempt it, in order to fulfil an objective, create a distraction or just because it makes for a better story.

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

4. WORK OUT WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

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

NORMAL ACTIONS

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

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

DIFFICULT ACTIONS

- 1-9:** Failure (take stress)
- 10:** Success at a cost (take stress)

If you're trying to do something that involves inflicting stress on someone or something else, you'll do so now. The size of dice you're inflicting is D4 as standard, but it can be modified by your abilities or equipment – see p. 28 for details.

PARTIAL STRESS AND PASSIVE ACTIONS

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

5. MARK STRESS AND RESOLVE FALLOUT

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

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

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

MIND: Madness, instability, and weirdnesses.

FORTUNE: Bad luck, incompetence, and overconfidence.

SUPPLIES: Loss of resources, damaged equipment and debt.

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

EXAMPLE CAUSES OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF STRESS

BLOOD: Getting stabbed, shot or mauled; walking for too long without rest; escaping a haven as it collapses into the Heart.

ECHO: Exploring corridors lined with teeth and eyes; casting uncanny magicks and rituals; getting caught between landmarks as the landscape shifts and changes; consuming plants or meat found in the Heart.

MIND: Casting mind-warping spells; witnessing strange wonders; killing another person; connecting your consciousness to vast, alien intelligences that slumber on the edge of reality.

FORTUNE: Making a loud noise that attracts attention; pushing your luck in general; upsetting powerful people; desecrating a shrine, or not paying the proper respects to a religious site.

SUPPLIES: Firing a gun; using a rope to climb out of somewhere; exploring in dark places using your spireblack lantern; healing another; being robbed or pickpocketed; repairing a bridge.

RESISTANCE PROTECTION

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

TAKING FALLOUT

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

1-6: Minor

7-12: Major

With the GM, work out what happens based on the type of stress that triggered the fallout; usually that's the resistance type that has the most stress marked against it. If there's a mix, or it's not clear, go with whatever sounds more interesting. You can choose a fallout from the list starting on p. 18, or make up your own.

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

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

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

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

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

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

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

HEALING

There are several different types of healing in *Heart*. Removing stress allows you to prevent things getting worse for your character – or, if you're removing stress due to taking fallout, it lets you crystallise your problems from the abstract to the concrete. Healing ongoing fallout lets you deal with the long-term effects of delving into the Heart without removing your character from play.

REMOVING STRESS

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

- Certain character abilities have the capacity to remove stress, at a cost.
- Resting at a landmark allows you to access their haunts and refresh. When you contribute a resource to a haunt, you can remove stress equal to the resource's dice size – roll it and subtract that amount. The dice size next to the haunt indicates the highest amount of stress they can remove, even if you have more valuable resources to trade.
- Suffering fallout removes stress from your character – although things definitely got worse for your character, their misfortune shifts from abstract (stress) to concrete (fallout). When you take minor fallout, remove all stress in the resistance associated with the fallout. When you take major or critical fallout, remove all stress from all resistances.
- Player characters can attempt to remove **Blood**, **Mind** or **Supplies** stress from each other using appropriate skills and equipment – see immediately below for more details.

DESCRIBING STRESS AND FALLOUT

The main difference between stress and fallout is that fallout has negative mechanical effects and stress doesn't. Fallout comes with its own description, but stress is slightly more nebulous because it's strictly a fictional concern. To that end, the GM and the player should work together to define what stress means to each character; when a stoic Vermissian Knight suffers Blood stress, the GM might describe it as hits to their armour and reverberation shuddering through their bones. When an unarmoured Junk Mage suffers Blood stress, the GM might describe it as near-misses, scrapes and exhaustion. A Witch, with dominion of blood, might get stabbed and simply not let herself bleed.

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

HEALING PLAYER CHARACTERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

REMOVING ONGOING FALLOUT

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

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

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

FALLOUT TYPES OF FALLOUT

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

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

Ongoing fallout "sticks" to the character until it's removed and make certain actions more likely to go wrong. These don't usually have an associated scene or event, and there's generally a way of mitigating the problem – a character with a broken leg, for example, could opt to cover the other characters with a rifle from a good vantage point so their lack of mobility won't be a problem. You can remove ongoing fallout from characters in a few different ways – there are more details on how to do this on p. 18.

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

MINOR FALLOUT

Minor fallouts are short-term, low-impact effects.

BLOOD

BATTERED: Your dominant hand is injured; you can bandage it up and stop the bleeding but it's of limited use for the time being. Any offensive action you make in combat becomes Risky; any tasks that require fine dexterity are out of the question. [Ongoing]

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

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

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

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

ECHO

BUBOES: Your skin blisters and bubbles. When you mark stress to **Blood**, mark an extra d4 as the boils split and burst. [Ongoing]

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

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

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

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

FORTUNE

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

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

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

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

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

MIND

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

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

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

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

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

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

SUPPLIES

BROKEN: An important item is no longer of use. Until you take the time and resources to repair it, you cannot use it. [Ongoing]

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

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

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

OUT OF AMMO: You run out of ammunition for a ranged or powered weapon, and it can no longer be used. Another party member can remove this fallout by marking D6 stress to supplies if they have a similar weapon themselves. [Ongoing]

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

MAJOR FALLOUT

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

BLOOD

BROKEN ARM: Your arm breaks under the strain, and splintered bone juts up through your skin. You can't use the arm until it heals, which will make some tasks **Risky** or **Dangerous** and others impossible. This fallout can be downgraded to or upgraded from **BATTERED**. [Ongoing]

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

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

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

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

ECHO

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

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

EYES: Your eyes become wide black orbs; or perhaps you find more eyes blossoming on your body, under your clothes, growing in your sternum like a nest of spiders. You can see perfectly well in the dark, but lights dazzle and hurt you. The GM can call for an **Endure**

check when you enter a well-lit area, and you take stress on a failure or partial success. [Ongoing]

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

MIRAGE: The next landmark you reach is a facsimile made by the Heart, arranged in order to give you what you want. On first impression it seems real, but the more you explore, the more obvious it is that everything – the streets, the books, the people – isn't real. Instead, it's an artful copy made out of meat, bone and blood. From the looks of things, it's existed for hundreds of years. Once you realise that the landmark is fake, remove this fallout. [Immediate]

FORTUNE

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

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

LOST PROPERTY: You have misplaced an item; the GM picks which. You could spend time searching for it but it's going to involve backtracking; and someone might have made off with it already. [Immediate]

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

MIND

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

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

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

MEMORY HOLES: You did things that you can't quite recall. Every player aside from you, and the GM, works together to determine what you did that you blocked out from your mind while you step outside of the room, or during downtime. These are generally pretty awful things, and they can have happened up to a year ago in game time or immediately upon suffering fallout. Your character has zero memory of the events, but everyone else involved knows what happened. [Immediate]

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

SUPPLIES

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

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

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

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

CRITICAL FALLOUT

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

BLOOD

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

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

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

ECHO

BEAST: Your body warps and changes beyond recognition; you are a protean mess of meat and bone, and terrifying to behold. You disappear into the Heart, surfacing only as a legend whispered in deep shadows; those who knew you tell stories of your exploits to remember you, and to warn others. You will be seen again, in future sessions; the GM can use the stats for a **Greater Hearts-blood Beast** (p. 35) to represent you. [Immediate]

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

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

MIND

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

BREAK: You completely lose it. Anyone standing nearby who you care about marks D8 stress to

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

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

FORTUNE

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

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

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

SUPPLIES

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

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

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

EXPLORATION

HOW DOES THE HEART WORK?

The Heart is a rift between realities where centuries of black magic runoff from the undercity above have mixed with the roiling unnatural energies beneath and twisted and warped the space into an almost unrecognisable state. When you step into the Heart, it will reform itself around you – you will scar it into being, and the longer you stay in one place or retread the same routes, the more stable it will become.

TIERS

The Heart can be divided into tiers that correspond to the proximity of locations to the Heart Itself; that is, to the epicentre of unreality that roils beneath Spire.

TIER 0: The City Above, barely touched by the Heart; upper Derelictus, where the stairs and lifts go to the city above, Red Row where dandy-girl gangsters preen and murder their way through smoke-wreathed streets, and so on.

TIER 1: Running from the edge of Derelictus, the City Between, into the depths of the undercity. There are people here; some of them normal, most of them weird, but they're people. Havens are more commonplace than on the tiers beneath, and there are occasional pathways that can be used by anyone. Sects to forbidden gods and secret orders of occults hide themselves from the attentions of the surface world here.

TIER 2: The weirdness creeps in and changes things. There are still recognisable landmarks, but they shift and change location without warning. Monsters prowl the dark and empty spaces, and people are few and far between. There are havens, but they're unsettling and strange.

In the full book, there are full details on **TIER 3** and **4**, **ROGUE** landmarks that move of their own

accord, and **FRACTURES** – parasitic realities that use the metaphysical weirdness of the Heart to burst through into the world.

LANDMARKS

Some locations or areas are infamous enough to become landmarks; these are used for navigation through the Heart, in as much as one can navigate it. While the precise location of landmarks shifts, the nature of them stays the same. You can generally find them if you're on the same tier as them and you're a skilled tracker.

A journey through the Heart takes place between two landmarks. If the landmarks are connected with a road or path, see the Connections section on p. 26. If there's no established connection, however, the players will have to forge their own route through the unstable and shifting terrain of the Heart – see the Exploring section on p. 24. In the Drowned adventure attached to this quickstart, all journeys are considered to be exploration due to the unstable nature of the City Beneath after the events in Divesse (p. 40).

DELVES

Travelling on a route between two unconnected landmarks, or from one landmark into unknown territory, is a delve. Delves are dangerous and uncertain, and travellers must rely on their wits, bravery and equipment to survive – let alone get to where they're heading.

Each delve is broken down into several parts:

NAME: How the locals and delvers refer to the area. If it doesn't have a name, reference the two places that it connects, and encourage the players to name it if they turn it into a connection.

DESCRIPTION: A brief outline of the area.

DOMAINS: The domains most commonly encountered on the journey.

STRESS: The default dice size of stress inflicted on characters when they fail, or partially succeed, whilst on the journey – when they slip and fall, begin to drown, burn through sup-

plies, and so on. The larger the dice, the more dangerous the delve is.

RESISTANCE: The amount of stress the player characters must collectively inflict on the journey before it's completed. The higher this number is, the longer the delve will take.

EVENTS: Typical events, obstacles and curiosities that might occur on the journey. Remember that Fortune fallout will provide the GM with plenty of opportunities to push player characters into difficult situations.

CONNECTION: If the delve isn't a stable connection, what challenges await those who would seek to establish it as one. Usually described as a dangerous, optional adversary of some kind or an arduous task that adds dX value to the delve's resistance if attempted.

For examples of delves, see the **Drowned** adventure on p. 38.

COMPLETING A DELVE

As mentioned above, each delve has a Resistance. Resistance functions much like the equivalent statistic for an adversary; successful actions on the part of the player characters reduce it, and once it hits 0, the journey is complete. As with any situation, it's up to the GM to provide interesting options and react to player choices when they seek out solutions to problems.

When a character works towards completing a journey, they roll an appropriate combination of skill and domain as they would with any other action. On a success, or partial success, they inflict D4 stress (by default) on the delve. Equipment (see below) and abilities can increase this number, or change the way in which it is calculated.

A failure or partial success on this action inflicts stress on the character. This doesn't indicate that they're lost, stranded or in trouble – that's covered by the **Fortune** resistance. Instead, failure on a delve indicates that the party has consumed more supplies than they'd like, taken the long way round, or run the risk of attracting attention from adversaries.

***For example:** The party is delving through the Pulse Line, detailed on p. 41. The GM describes the perilous cliff face on which they stand and the pitch-black chasm that yawns open beneath them. The Heretic, who has the **Delve** skill, takes the lead by pressing on and inching their way across the cliff with their chest pressed tight against the rock.*

*The Heretic's player rolls 2D10 – their highest result is 7, so they succeed but mark stress. They roll a D4 – scoring 3 – and the GM removes 3 from the delve's resistance, reducing it to 7. The GM rolls a D6 – scoring 4 – and the Heretic's player marks that much stress. The GM decides it should be marked against **Fortune**.*

BOONS AND BANES

Aside from putting one foot in front of the other, characters might perform actions that make the journey easier whilst on a delve – or make things harder for themselves. For example, if a clutch of pitchkin have built a tarry, flammable nest in the only sensible path, the player characters might decide to take them on in a fight to clear a route through.

The fight isn't considered to be part of the delve itself; instead, if the pitchkin are defeated, it functions as a boon. If the players earn a boon, subtract D4 to D12 points from the delve's resistance – D4 for minor advantages and D12 for really clever gambits.

Similarly, if the party decides to rest for an extended period (usually to use healing abilities) or do something else that runs the risk of extending the delve, this functions as a bane. If the players incur a bane, add D4 to D12 points from the delve's resistance – D4 for quick rests or minor issues, all the way up to D12 for really serious problems.

EXTENDED CHALLENGES

You can, and indeed should, adapt the rules presented for delves and exploring to represent other challenges that can't be resolved with a single dice roll: the defence of a landmark against raiders, for example, or consecrating a shrine against dark powers. We've included an example of this at the end of the adventure that makes up the last part of this quickstart.

ABANDONING A DELVE

Sometimes things just don't work out. Should a party want to give up on a delve and return home, they'll need to get back to safety intact. This functions as an entirely new delve with a resistance equal to half the amount they'd already subtracted from the previous delve. Reducing the new delve's resistance to 0 means they've reached the place from which they started the journey.

CONNECTIONS

A stable link between one landmark and another is called a connection. A connection is a means of travelling between places through dangerous territory, and while you can't really rest on a connection for a long time, it's safe enough to pause and catch your breath.

Some landmarks, especially havens, already have connections marked between them if there's a reasonable amount of traffic going to and from each place. (That said, the unstable lands of the Heart cannot be relied upon, and connections often collapse or become unusable.) Others merely have the potential for a pathway to be established, and the players can choose to spend time, resources or effort on making it more stable for the next time they return. When you establish a connection on a delve, halve the resistance of the delve when you undertake it in future.

You can turn a delve into a connection by achieving the goal set out in the connection section of the delve description. This will usually take the form of an additional challenge – it could be as difficult as killing a Butcher in their cave of mewling flesh, or as straightforward as repairing a bridge that spans a chasm in the road. Establishing a connection will usually either increase the resistance of the delve by an amount specified in the description or bring the characters into direct conflict with a dangerous adversary.

COMBAT

As with the rest of the game, combat is handled as a conversation between players and the GM, and uses the normal rules for success and failure listed on p. 15. The players will describe their actions, whether they be movement, attacks, special abilities or fleeing in terror. The GM will then call for specific rolls; actions taken during combat are always considered Standard difficulty, and as such, are always rolled for.

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

INITIATIVE

Heart doesn't use rounds or turns to measure time in combat; like the rest of the game, players describe their character's actions, the GM reacts to those actions, and when something's at stake – the character has something to lose – the GM calls for a dice roll. Once the dice have been rolled and the outcome resolved, play usually passes to another player. However, there's no mechanical limit on how many times a player can act before others do; if it makes narrative sense for a character to act twice in a row (such as: leaping onto the back of a heartsblood monster and then trying to stab it to death) then they can make the rolls one after another.

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

GM: your characters don't get turns of their own. You can have your characters make any action at any time, and it's up to the player characters to stop them if they don't like it. You can

also push players into making reactive rolls, too: have enemies attack them and trigger a **Kill**, **Evade** or **Endure** check to defend themselves, for example. As a rough guide, try not to have your characters do more than one thing without a player having the chance to act in-between.

OUTNUMBERING

If a player character is engaged in combat with multiple enemies, increase the stress dice inflicted on them in combat by 1 step (see p. 16). Player characters outnumbering enemies gain no particular benefit.

RANGE

There are three ranges in *Heart*: melee, ranged, and extreme range. Melee is fighting toe-to-toe in the same room; ranged can reach between buildings, or down to the street from a rooftop; extreme range is anything further than that, assuming you can get line of sight to aim the shot. These are all narrative ranges, rather than strict rules ones, and as with everything in *Heart* we encourage you to go with what will make the most interesting story for your situation.

If a player character is outranged in a fight, they must take an action to close on their enemies (or maybe more than one, depending on how far away they are) – **Hunt** to run in, **Sneak** to break line of sight and move stealthily, or **Evade** to take advantage of available cover.

If the player characters outrange their enemies, use the combat rules as normal. The beasts of the Heart are wicked-quick, nightmarishly tough and devilishly sneaky, and the standard skill roll takes into account the fact that the player character's enemies are doing everything they can to close on them.

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

RESISTANCES AND STRESS

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

If you're fighting someone who's armed (or running away from them) and you take stress, you'll usually take stress equal to the amount that their weapon inflicts if they can reach you with it. If a character is outnumbered by their enemies, increase the stress dice inflicted on them by 1 step.

Players are encouraged to describe all sorts of desperate, exciting attacks whilst in combat. In general, however, players use the damage dice and tags of any weapon they are carrying regardless of the weapon used in the fiction of the game. The same is true for the GM as they inflict stress with adversaries and NPCs.

For example: *A Hound armed with a sword (D8 damage), caught up in a desperate brawl with an assassin in the depths of a flooded Vermissian station, tries to drown her opponent in the stagnant water that pools around their knees. She inflicts D8 stress with the attack, even though it would normally inflict D6 (as an attack with an improvised weapon) – it's more interesting to let her player vary their attack descriptions this way without penalising them.*

WHO'S ON FIRST?

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

- The GM chooses who acts at any time.
- Starting from the player to the left of the GM, everyone takes an action in turn, going clockwise around the table
- The group decides who acts first, and once that person has acted, it's their choice as to who acts next. Once everyone in the group has acted, decide on a new starting player
- Each player rolls a D6 and acts in number order. Once everyone has acted, roll again.

TOOLS, WEAPONS AND RESOURCES

EQUIPMENT

USING EQUIPMENT

Equipment enhances the abilities of a character and allows them access to different approaches when overcoming challenges. To use equipment as part of an action, describe your character doing so in the fiction; they lash a rope to an overhanging strut, open fire with a pistol, or patch up an ally with bandages from their medical bag after a brawl.

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

Using equipment in ways that it isn't designed for can, at the GM's discretion, reduce the size of the equipment's stress dice or make the action **Risky** – or it might be outright impossible.

Equipment has two functions within the rules of the game. Firstly, it allows characters to make actions that would be impossible without the equipment; a character couldn't cut a rope with their bare hands, but can use a knife to do it just fine. Secondly, it can enhance the effect that characters have on the world by increasing the dice size of stress inflicted or removed.

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

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

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

- **UNEQUIPPED:** D4
- **CIVILIAN:** D6
- **PROFESSIONAL:** D8
- **EXOTIC:** D10
- **LEGENDARY:** D12

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

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

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

BASIC EQUIPMENT

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

DELVE EQUIPMENT

Moving through the City Beneath isn't easy. Flooded train tunnels, unstable cliffs, marshes choked with scabbing blood, and crumbling, ancient masonry mean that a delver must rely on

the right equipment to survive. **Delve** equipment lets a character inflict stress on a delve, and therefore get closer to completing their journey, by succeeding on an appropriate roll. (You can find more details on how to undertake delves on p. 24.)

EXAMPLE DELVE EQUIPMENT:

- D6:** Compass with a fifth cardinal direction ("H"), Maidenhair rope, Bullseye spireblack lantern, Dowsing rod, Rudimentary spyglass, Signal flares, Pack ungulate, Hammer and chisel, Crowbar, Cookpot, Feather bedroll, Climbing kit.
- D8:** Logistical Barometer, Faithful hunting hound, Mining explosives, Portable magelight, Experimental air-tanks, Etheric spyglass, Grapple hook.

KILL EQUIPMENT

To see a delver without some kind of weapon is strange indeed; they lead dangerous lives, and often find themselves in the sort of situations that they'll need to shoot or smash their way out of. When facing an adversary, kill equipment can increase the effectiveness of a character and inflict stress by succeeding on an appropriate roll. (You can find more details on combat on p. 26.)

EXAMPLE KILL EQUIPMENT:

- D6:** Kitchen knife, Enforcer's club, Machete, Chair, Hand-crossbow, Spireblack Special pistol, Gnollish preyhook.
- D8:** Officer's sword, Spear, Legrande rifle, Aelfir-made warblade, Red Court shotgun, Enlisted crossbow, "Derelictus Greatsword" (big club).

AMMUNITION

If a character has a weapon that requires ammunition (bolts, bullets, arrows, etc) we assume that they have a ready supply of ammunition for it – there's no need to track each individual piece, as the main thing that affects the story is the moment when they run out. Remember that suffering Minor fallout to **Supplies** or **Fortune** can leave a character out of ammunition until they're able to acquire more.

MEND EQUIPMENT

Injury, madness and starvation are common causes of death in the Heart; **Mend** equipment seeks to overcome that by healing, calming and resupplying. **Mend** equipment lets a character remove stress marked to themselves or an ally by making an appropriate roll (see p. 17 for more details on removing stress), and is divided into the specific resistance from which it can remove stress: **Blood**, **Mind** or **Supplies**. **Fortune** and **Echo** stress can't be removed with equipment unless it's very special – instead, they're removed by using certain abilities and accessing haunts within havens.

EXAMPLE MEND BLOOD EQUIPMENT:

- D4:** Improvised first-aid.
- D6:** Basic first-aid supplies.
- D8:** The sort of thing a doctor or army medic would have on hand.

EXAMPLE MEND MIND EQUIPMENT:

- D4:** No serious drugs whatsoever.
- D6:** Commonly available drugs.
- D8:** Specialist drugs, rarely seen outside of a doctor's office.

EXAMPLE MEND SUPPLIES EQUIPMENT:

- D4:** Dividing up what you have on you, or scavenging something from the nearby surroundings.
- D6:** A backpack or satchel full of spare supplies and resources.
- D8:** A well-balanced rucksack with everything an adventuring party needs.

MISCELLANEOUS

If an item doesn't help with combat, exploration or healing – it doesn't inflict or remove stress – and it isn't valuable enough to class as a resource, it's classed as miscellaneous. Miscellaneous items can still have tags, if appropriate, but generally they'll have a narrative, rather than a mechanical effect.

ARMOUR

Most **Blood** Protection – that is, resistance to physical damage – is acquired through unlocking advances in your class rather than buying equipment in-game. Some Blood Protection is described as armour or shields, and some as innate magical abilities – these are purely narrative concerns, and not related to the mechanics of the game. The **BLOCK** tag (see below) increases a character's **Blood** resistance by 1 when they carry an item marked with it, but that's the only way that equipment can increase protection – and items with the **BLOCK** tag are rare.

Armour of Good or Excellent quality (see below) can be purchased like any other item, and it has the same effect in-game. It may also confer suitable weapons tags on the wearer. However, it will not provide any additional mechanical protection in and of itself, as every character is assumed to be wearing some kind of protective gear.

BUYING AND SELLING

Player characters don't have a defined amount of money to which they have access to; instead, their **Supplies** resistance models their capacity to buy goods.

To buy items, the GM decides on the cost involved: D4 for minor purchases, D8 for moderate, and D12 for really expensive or exotic materials. Some items just can't be purchased without expending a lot of effort to find a seller and do whatever it is they want (that's worth more than money) to acquire it. To pay, the character usually marks stress to **Supplies** to represent their lowered total cash flow; alternatively, they can trade resources of equivalent value, or "spend" them to reduce the amount of stress incurred by the value rolled.

If a player wishes to find a lower price for an item, or sell an item for a higher price than it's worth – and they don't have a specific advance granted by their class which lets them do this – then they'll have to take a risk and put something on the line to achieve it. Shady back-room deals, swindling people out of their hard-earned cash, veiled or open threats – whatever they choose to do, it has to have the capacity to go wrong in order to pay off. The player makes a roll with an

appropriate skill and domain (**Compel+Haven** is the most common, but other combinations are possible). If they're buying, success means they reduce the value of the item by 1 step. Partial success means the value of the item stays the same – they mark the original amount of stress to supplies. Failure means that the stress is increased by 1 step as something goes awry with their plan. (If they're selling, it works the same way, but the perspective changes: success increases the value of the item sold by 1 step, partial success means it stays the same, and failure means that they end up selling it for 1 dice size less than it's worth.)

Many things are hard to come by in the Heart; it can require a **Discern+Haven** skill to track down a suitable trader if your item has the **Rare** tag.

TAGS

Items may also have tags attached to them that mechanically affect the way they're used. Most tags will only take effect when a player uses the weapon; as a rough guide, if a tag refers to rolling dice, NPCs can't use it. (Tags such as **PIERCING**, though, can be used by both player- and non-player characters.)

BLOCK: Provides +1 **Blood** protection.

BLOODBLOOD: Mark D4 stress to **Blood** to roll with mastery when using this equipment for the rest of the situation.

BRUTAL: When you roll for stress marked against an adversary when using this item, roll two dice and pick the highest. Multiple instances of this tag stack: if you managed to get it three times, you'd roll four dice and pick the highest when calculating stress.

CONDUIT: Mark D4 stress to **Mind** to roll with mastery when using this equipment for the rest of the situation.

DANGEROUS: When you inflict stress with this item and roll the maximum amount, mark D6 stress to **Blood**.



DEBILITATING: Once per situation, when you inflict stress with this item to one or more targets, the next attack made against them is rolled with mastery.

DISTRESSING: When you inflict stress with this item and roll the maximum amount, mark D6 stress to **Mind**.

DOUBLE-BARRELED: As **RELOAD**, but you can use the item twice before reloading.

EXPENSIVE: When you inflict or remove stress with this item and roll the maximum amount, mark D6 stress to **Supplies**.

EXTREME RANGE: This item can be used at extreme range.

SMOKE: As **OBSCURING**, but only when the item is used, and only around the area it was used.

LIMITED X: You can use this equipment X times before it is completely used up.

LOUD: When you inflict stress with this item and roll the maximum amount, mark D6 stress to **Fortune**.

OBSCURING: The bearer and any nearby allies reduce the damage of incoming and outgoing ranged weapons by 1 step.

ONE-SHOT: You can only use this equipment once per situation – it takes a long time to prepare.

PIERCING: You cannot reduce stress inflicted by this equipment by using **Blood Protection**.

POINT-BLANK: As **RANGED**, but: at melee it increases its stress dice by one step. If the shot travels far enough to spread out and dissipate, it lowers its stress dice by one step.

POTENT: When you roll for stress removed from yourself or an ally with this time, roll two dice and pick the highest. Multiple instances of this tag stack as per the **BRUTAL** tag.

RANGED: This equipment can be used at range.

RELOAD: This equipment must be reloaded between uses, giving enemies a chance to close in or flee.

SPREAD: Anyone standing near the target on a successful use must roll **Evade+Domain** (or other applicable skill) to avoid marking stress as well; on a partial success, downgrade the stress dice by one size. NPCs caught in a blast simply take the stress.

TRUSTY: When you roll for stress marked against a delve when using this item, roll two dice and pick the highest. Multiple instances of this tag stack as per the **BRUTAL** tag.

TIRING: When you fail an action using this equipment, its stress dice decreases in size by 1 for the remainder of the situation.

UNRELIABLE: When you fail an action using this equipment, it cannot be used for the remainder of the situation if in a landmark or the remainder of the journey if on a delve.

WITCH: When you inflict or remove stress with this item and roll the maximum amount, mark D6 stress to **Echo**.

EXAMPLE EQUIPMENT

SUGGESTED COSTS

Brass knuckles: Kill D4, Brutal	D4
Explosive charge: Kill D6, Delve D8, Loud, Spread, Limited 1	D6
Barbed net: Kill D4, Debilitating, One-Shot	D6
“Lucky” Compass: Delve D4, Trusty, Unreliable	D6
Knife: Kill D6	D6
Godsmoke hookah: Mend Mind D6, Smoke	D6
Badly-made Cudgel: Kill D6, Unreliable	D4
Combat knife: Kill D6, Brutal	D6, Rare
Heavy thrown item: Kill D6, Ranged, One-Shot	Free, but it breaks when you throw it.
Shotgun: Kill D6, Point-Blank, Double-Barrelled	D8
Solid entrenching tool: Kill D6, Delve D6	D8
Saving Grace Hold-out Pistol: Kill D6, Ranged, Double-Barrelled	D8, Rare
Sword: Kill D8	D8
Soulbound pack ungulate: Delve D6, Conduit	D8
Aelfir-made rapier: Kill D8, Piercing	D8, Rare
Pistol: Kill D8, Ranged, Reload	D8
Heart-touched “bloodhound”: Delve D8, Kill D6, Dangerous	D8
Long-gun: Kill D8, Piercing, Ranged, Reload	D8, Rare
Heavy Blunderbuss: Kill D8, Point-Blank, Loud, Smoke, One-Shot	D8
Greatsword: Kill D8, Brutal, Tiring	D8, Rare
Calling-Bones: Mend Blood D6, Delve D6, Witch, Potent	D10
Velvet-lined aelfir relaxation kit: Mend Mind D8, Expensive	D10
Gnollish environment suit: Delve D8, Block	D12, Rare
Medical kit: Mend D6	D6

RESOURCES

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

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

Resources can also be consumed by some classes – those with a capacity to cast magic spells can often destroy, sacrifice or simply eat resources of the appropriate domain to fuel their power. These specific uses are listed in the individual advances for those classes.

RESOURCE VALUE

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

RESOURCE DOMAINS

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

RESOURCE TAGS

Some resources might also have tags. Unlike the tags in the Equipment section (p. 30) which are strictly mechanical, these are more hints as to things that might go wrong whilst harvesting, transporting or trying to sell these peculiar items. If a character suffers Fortune fallout whilst in the possession of a resource with a negative tag, you can use that as a springboard to create interesting problems for them.

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

TABOO: The resource isn't accepted for barter in most havens; things like organs from hearts-blooded people, gold teeth, or certain narcotics.

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

EXAMPLE RESOURCES

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

RANDOM RESOURCE GENERATOR

VALUE (D10)	DOMAIN (D10)
1-5: D4	1: Cursed
6-7: D6	2: Desolate
8: D8	3-4: Haven
9: D10	5: Occult
10: D12	6: Religion
	7: Technology
	8: Warren
	9: Wild
	10: Combine two results.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS AND ADVERSARIES

Any character not assigned to a player is by default a non-player character – one that’s played by the GM. Non-player characters have much simpler rules than player characters (or none at all!), because the game isn’t about them. In the adventure later in this document, specific non-player characters are outlined in each landmark, and their immediate actions and desires are noted. (GM: you can make up other NPCs. Don’t feel limited to what we’ve written.)

Adversaries are a kind of non-player character that are combative – there’s a good chance that the player characters will end up fighting them. Each adversary type has a block of information that explains their abilities and gives some prompts for roleplaying, like this:

VASSAL OF THE DROWNED QUEEN

NAMES: Sternoptyx, Bispinosus, Saccopharynx

DESCRIPTORS: Intricate coral structure growing out of their mouth and ears; Retching up gallons of seawater; Building an altar to the Drowned Queen

MOTIVATION: To make the world suitable for their Queen, which requires it to be submerged in sea water

DIFFICULTY: Standard. If they’re entirely submerged, fighting them directly is a Risky action.

RESISTANCE: 5

PROTECTION: 1

RESOURCE: Weirdly beautiful coral (D4, Wild, Occult)

EQUIPMENT: Sea-rusted blades (D6)

DOMAINS: Occult

- **NAMES** are some example names that the adversary might have: use them to lend weight to your descriptions as they call out to one another in combat.
- **DESCRIPTORS** give you some quick ways to differentiate adversaries from each other if you’re using multiple of the same type.
- **MOTIVATION** is broadly what the adversary wants; very few of them are just out to fight to the death for the hell of it. Everyone wants something.
- **DIFFICULTY** is the default difficulty of rolls made to interact with the adversary, but it’s not a requirement – let the fiction guide you as to whether an action is Standard, Risky or Dangerous. Sometimes this will list a specific approach to fighting them that’s harder or easier than normal.
- **RESISTANCE** is the adversary’s will to keep fighting. Stress marked against an NPC is subtracted from their Resistance, and once it reaches 0, they’re out of the fight – they’re dead, knocked out, down for the count, have surrendered or run away, or are otherwise at the mercy of the player characters.
- **PROTECTION** is subtracted from all incoming stress unless the player is using a weapon with the Piercing tag.
- **RESOURCE** is a suggestion of something valuable that the adversary is carrying, protecting or made up of.
- **EQUIPMENT** details what sort of weapons and other incidental kit the adversary has. Some of these can be taken and used by players (pistols, swords, etc) and some can’t (claws, teeth, etc).
- **DOMAINS** lets you know what domain/s the adversary is closely linked to for the purposes of determining dice pool sizes or working out where to place them in the Heart.

A FAIR FIGHT?

Sometimes, roleplaying games will have systems for working out what’s a “fair” fight for the player characters; Heart isn’t one of those games. GM: when your players get into a fight, use your best judgement to see what kinds of, and numbers of enemies work for your group. Characters can always flee a combat if it’s going against them and come back for another go later on.

Here's another adversary:

HEARTSBLOOD BEAST

These were animals once, but the energies of the Heart and generations of breeding have changed them into something protean and terrible. The smallest are the size of mice (they can shift their bodies into insubstantial shadowstuff, making them nearly impossible to hunt), but those that will pose a threat to delvers tend to be the size of stray dogs, feral pigs or scavenging foxes.

The Heart has no care for the original function of the creature's limbs and organs. It's common to see inverted creatures, their spines broken and bent, skittering crablike towards their prey. The limbs of others wither away, their ribcages blossoming out to form centipede-like legs that carry them forwards instead. A normal-looking deer might have, on closer inspection, no discernable mouth on its head; it's only when it squats over food and disgorges its entire stomach from a ragged maw on its underbelly that it becomes apparent that something's wrong.

Some heartsblood creatures were never normal to start with. In the same way that the Heart is a collection of memories and fears made solid, these animals are flesh-echoes spun from the nightmares of the inhabitants. A bear has never made its way into the Heart, and yet there is one here - or a simulacrum of one, stitched together out of meat and dreams, a ragged imitation of a half-remembered glimpse.

Folk stories persist of heartsblood creatures turning up to help injured travellers, especially if said travellers are favoured of the Heart; these are mostly lies.

There are two profiles here: one for smaller animals (dogs, cats, goats) and one for larger beasts (bears, deer, really big pigs).

NAMES: None that they use themselves, but the townsfolk in the Heart will ascribe titles to particularly infamous beasts: Red-Tooth, Shadow, Fat Jack

DESCRIPTORS: A skeleton shifting uneasily in an ambulatory sack of flesh; A dog with shark-like rows of teeth that undulate and spasm; An emaciated pig on unstable legs of bone

MOTIVATION: Mostly to survive and protect their young; but some have inscrutable motives implanted in their brains by the Heart, making them behave in unpredictable patterns.



HEARTSBLOOD BEAST

DIFFICULTY: Standard

RESISTANCE: 5

PROTECTION: 0, usually; 1 if it's particularly fierce

RESOURCES: Often: Meat and fur (D6); Rarely: Curious and unique bones (D10, Niche)

EQUIPMENT: Teeth and claws (D6)

DOMAINS: Wild, Warren

GREATER HEARTSBLOOD BEAST

DIFFICULTY: Risky

RESISTANCE: 10

PROTECTION: 2

RESOURCES: Often: Meat and fur (D8); Rarely: Curious and unique bones (D10, Niche)

EQUIPMENT: Massive claws, jagged teeth, suckered pseudopods (D8)

DOMAINS: Wild, Warren

FALLOUT: COMPANION. [Minor/Major, Echo] Seeing you as a fellow creature of the Heart, the beast comes to your aid. While this might be useful in the short-term (as it defends you from attackers, feeds you from its breast/regurgitates food into your mouth, leads you to safety, etc.) it will be a problem in the long term. Unless you or a friend kills it (and it will be very upset if you try), it will break into havens to kill people and pets, then bring you their mutilated corpses as gifts.

RUNNING THE GAME

We're assuming, given that you're reading this part of book, that you'll be the gamesmaster.

It's your job to run the game – to describe the City Beneath, to voice every non-player character, to bring challenge to the delvers and to be in charge of the flow of the session. The adventure later on in this book is designed to ease you into all of these roles and provide a structure to rely on as you take your first steps into the world of *Heart*.

(An “adventure” is a scenario, a set of challenges written ahead of time rather than improvised on the spot for the player characters to interact with. It provides a skeleton for the plot of the game to hang around, but most of what happens around the table will be invented by you and your players.)

Thankfully, running *Heart* (and, really, all role-playing games) is easy. Once you've got an understanding of the basic rules, all that's required is an active imagination and the willingness to make up stories with your friends. What follows below is some general advice on running your first, and indeed subsequent, games of *Heart*.

TAKE CARE OF EVERYONE AT THE TABLE

Your most important job as GM is to make sure that the whole group is having a good time and isn't uncomfortable or upset with what's happening in the game. Take a look at the Lines, Veils and the X Card on p. 7 and run through it with your group at the start of the session.

MAKE IT UP

Your group's version of the Heart is going to be different from every other group's – that's intentional, and we left deliberate gaps in the world for you and your players to fill in. As the Heart exists in a fluctuating state of reality, so does your game. Which is to say: there are no wrong answers, and whatever world you end up with is just as valid as anyone else's, even ours.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO CHANGE THINGS

Drowned, the adventure in this quickstart, is fairly “on-rails” – which means that it follows a predetermined path that the delvers are required to follow. But if your players are pushing in a different direction, and you feel confident enough to do it, you should absolutely change anything you want. Don't worry about contradicting other things in the adventure: go with what's in front of you at the table, and rationalise it later.

YOUR PLAYERS WILL TELL YOU WHAT THEY WANT

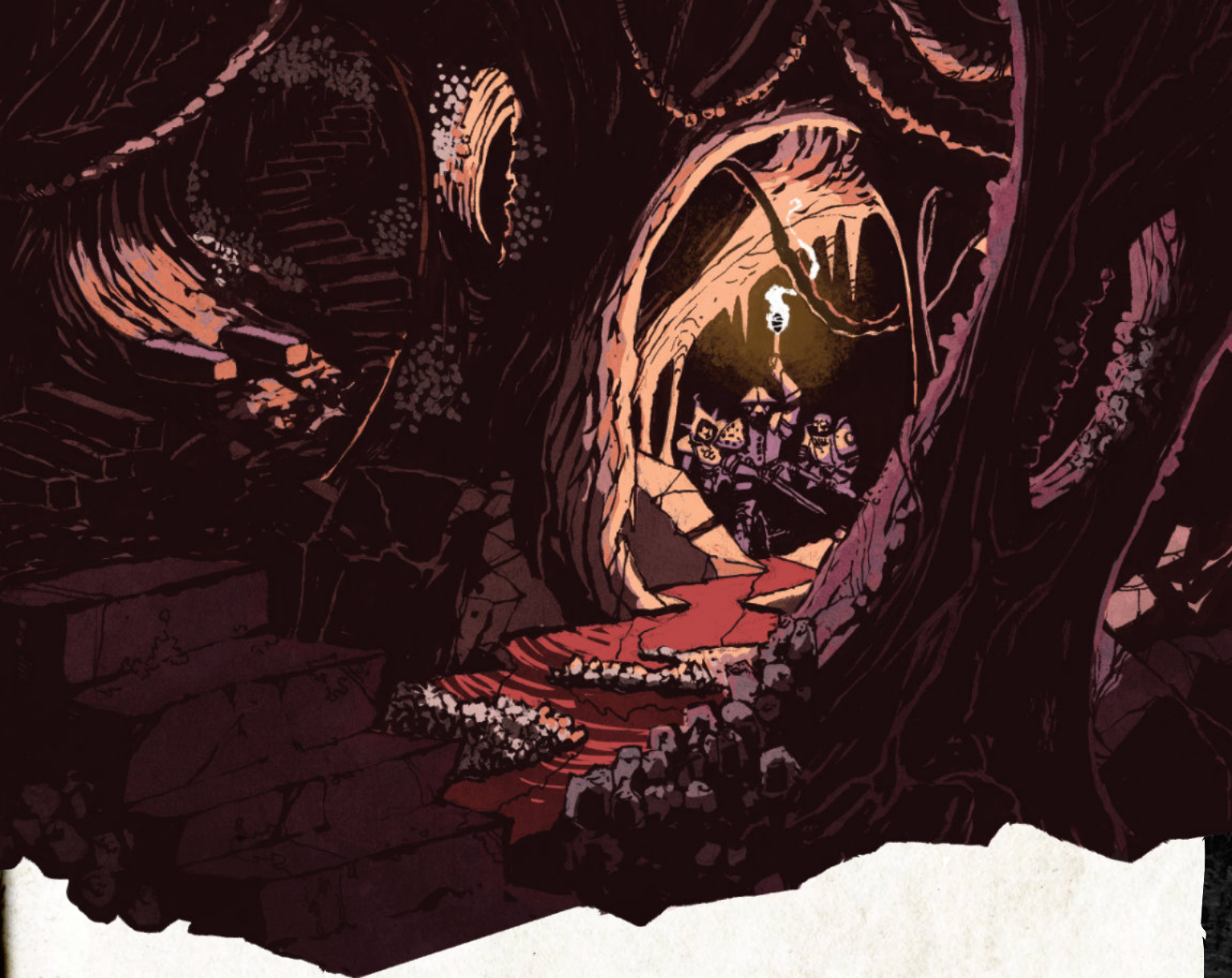
At the start of each session (or the end if you want more time to plan), ask your players to tell you which two beats from their calling they're following during the game. You don't have to hand these to them without a challenge – it's up to the players to pursue them as well – but they can easily flesh out the adventure. If you're stumped as to what to come up with next, the beats form a list of ready-to-go scenes and opportunities that you know your players will be enthusiastic about.

EVERY NPC WANTS SOMETHING

When you introduce a non-player character into the game, think – above all else – what it is they want right now. You don't need to work out what they want in the long term, nor do you need to figure out how the delvers could help them get what they want. Your NPCs should wear their hearts on their sleeves, and you don't need to be coy about signalling what they want; you can be as blunt as you like if it gets the story moving.

PEOPLE ARE GOING TO MAKE JOKES, AND THAT'S OKAY

Heart is a horror game, and horror is a hard tone to sustain – especially when you're working in a relaxed roleplaying environment. You'll find that, no matter how terrifying and/or disgusting you make things, your players will crack jokes to relieve the tension. It might get frustrating, but: let them.



We're all human, and the audacious grimness of *Heart* can be ludicrous and upsetting at the same time. The great thing about body horror as a central motif is that it's quick and easy to re-establish, even when folks are laughing at it.

BODY HORROR 101

Some simple ways to put body horror in your game:

- Enemies grab a PC's face and put their fingers in their mouth/ears/eyes.
- Bones jut through the skin after they break.
- When the Heart changes the body of a delver, the skin around the new eye/bone spine/implant is red-raw, itchy and seeping.
- Even friendly NPCs are upsetting in some way:

they have mottled bronze spheres in place of their eyes, their rashes form sigils over their face and neck, their fingernails have changed into brittle, spiralling helixes.

- Characters are smashed around like rag dolls, trapped under debris, pinned against walls, held in uncomfortable positions and generally made to feel like they aren't in control of their bodies.
- Meat, sinew and bone turns up where it shouldn't; structures are made out of it, interstitial fluid seeps from the pommel of a character's sword; mechanisms are ossified growths rather than handmade.

DROWNED

As haven after haven is consumed by a mysterious curse that leaves them flooded with saltwater, a group of delvers must venture through unfriendly territory and down into the depths of the Heart to reclaim what is needed to protect the inhabitants of the Temple of the Moon Beneath.

HOW TO USE THIS ADVENTURE

GM: Drowned is an adventure, or scenario, written to help you and your players learn the rules of *Heart* as you play. It's broken up into landmarks and delves. Landmarks are areas of stability where, by living in one place or through unusual will, the inhabitants have managed to fix the City Beneath into a coherent shape. Delves are treacherous routes between landmarks during which the party must work together to forge a path ahead.

This is to allow you more flexibility in telling the story. Think of landmarks as rooms in an immense dungeon; they are large areas where major events take place. Delves, then, are the connecting corridors, providing challenges and a selection of smaller bitesize vignettes as the characters travel. You are invited to use some, all, or none of them. This way you can expand or contract the adventure as you see fit to either squeeze it into a single session or to stretch it out into a longer game.

It's assumed that the players will take on the mission offered to them by Arielle in the temple and descend to Stepwell to get what she needs, and the structure of this adventure reflects that – it focuses on events that occur between the two places, and little else. The players will still have a lot of choice on how to approach individual situations, and you'll have a lot of freedom to describe landmarks and delves however you like.

That said: if you, or the players, go off the beaten path and start exploring outside of the

areas of the adventure – that's fine! Make up your own story, and let your player characters die their own glorious deaths in the madness of the City Beneath.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON?

The Drowned Queen, an extradimensional entity from whom junk mages can siphon power, has been summoned into the Heart. She is keen to make the environment suitable for her visit, so she is sending vassals – reanimated corpses of drowned victims – to flood landmarks with saltwater. So far she's managed to drown two havens, and she had a really good go at flooding Grip Station before the Vermissian sages and knights beat her back. The inhabitants of the Heart haven't quite figured out why their settlements are disappearing underwater, but they're not happy.

The Queen is in Stepwell: once the home of a sect of rat-worshipping occultists, now a waterlogged chamber where damp pages covered in incantations float alongside the rotting bodies of the dead.

BEGINNING THE GAME

GM: have each player choose a pregenerated character from the list below. The party has been hired to protect, or otherwise support, the people of Divesse after mysterious attacks have destroyed two havens – take a look at it in the landmarks below, and describe it to the players. Ask them to describe their characters to one another, and to tell you what they're doing to help the people of the settlement.

Let them get a handle on what the world looks and feels like, and then leap right into the action as Divesse begins to fill up with seawater.

THE CHARACTERS

QUIN MOREAU, VERMISSIAN KNIGHT (PENITENT)

You were a Vermissian Sage until a few months ago – one of the scholars who use the unreality of the cursed train network to research alternate histories. But your wards faltered, and you let Them in, and a lot of people died. You took up the shield and became a Knight, and now you wander the tunnels of the Vermissian seeking to atone for what went wrong.

Play Quin if you want to:

- Withstand physical damage and curious energies.
- Guide travellers through the iron maze of the Vermissian.
- Deal with a great tragedy in your past.

LYND VASSAIL, WITCH (HEARTSONG).

You were a sickly child; your parents never thought you'd survive until your twelfth birthday. But, after a visit from a mysterious doctor, you grew stronger – and plagued with dreams of the red wet heaven that dwells in the City Beneath. You know this new infection is from the Heart, and since your family exiled you, your visions have lead you down here in search of its origin.

Play Lynd if you want to:

- Cast weird blood magic spells.
- Cope with a nightmarish True Form roiling beneath your skin.
- Have a unique bond with City Beneath.

TENACITY MALRIQUE, HERETIC (ADVENTURE)

You have seen the glory of the Moon Beneath, she who slumbers fecund and luminous beneath the earth, and seek to live your life in her service. Convinced you are blessed by her glory, you have descended to the depths of the Heart looking for challenges befitting of an agent of the Goddess.

Play Tenacity if you want to:

- Praise the Moon Beneath.
- Speak the secret name of the goddess and watch your enemies crumble.
- Seek glory and excitement.

GETHIN BAYN, HOUND (FORCED)

You borrowed money from the wrong person – Felix Bechard, a vicious crime lord and occultist. Deep in debt, you were forced into the undercity to protect Bechard's interests to earn your freedom. A few weeks in you found the corpse of a Hound – the mercenary police who keep order in the Heart – and you stole their badge, uniform, and identity. Everyone treats you as though you're one of the Hounds, and you like it that way.

Play Gethin if you want to:

- Be a competent fighter.
- Lie, cheat and steal.
- Have a shadowy past.

YNNETH DANARIAN, JUNK MAGE (ENLIGHTENMENT).

You're an occultist – and you used to be one of the best, but you burned out years back after trying to channel powers beyond your understanding. Desperate, you went looking in dark places for power, and you found it. You delve ever deeper into the undercity looking for information on the Drowned Queen – the otherworldly being from which you siphon power.

Play Ynneth if you want to:

- Seek power in dark places.
- Siphon elemental power from a mysterious entity.
- Take the lead in occult situations.

Full character sheets can be found at the end of this book.

THE MAP

TIER 1

DIVESSE

PULSE LINE

TEMPLE OF THE
MOON BENEATH

TEMPLE TO GRIP

GRIP STATION

TIER 2

DESCENT INTO
STEPWELL

STEPWELL

DIVESSE, DOOMED FROM THE START

DOMAINS: Haven, Warren

Divesse was once an aqueduct, funnelling water down into the City Beneath from the rivers on the surface; now, it is a quiet market settlement where around thirty families make their homes.

The player characters have been hired to keep guard over, or otherwise support, the inhabitants of Divesse. There's talk around town of settlements disappearing, of whole communities vanishing overnight, and folk are scared.

From the central structure, the inhabitants construct walkways, ladders and staircases that twist and twirl up into old maintenance tunnels, natural caverns and constructed platforms. It's a matter of pride to have the tallest, the most complex, or the most intricate struts leading to your home, and above the market stalls, lanterns twinkle and glimmer through wrought-iron metalwork and brightly-coloured glass.

This week is festival time, and the traders have gone to great lengths to make their stalls as attractive as possible to travellers. Streamers of red and orange flutter in the slight breeze that blows through the tunnel, sacred incense burns with the smell of cloves and resin, and – as is tradition – all the rats in town are caught and have bells stuck to them for reasons that are lost to history. Despite the fear in the air there's a sense of hope for a good festival and, therefore, a good year to come.

Which is all for naught, as Divesse is about to be submerged beneath several million gallons of saltwater.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS:

- **Vent**, a moth-trader, who builds cages out of gauze to contain their most precious specimens; as the settlement floods, they rush back to their storeroom to rescue their stock.
- **Devlin**, a washed-up Hound who's overseeing the hiring of the player characters. He tries to stop the drowning of Divesse as best he can, but he's soon surrounded by Vassals bearing rusted blades.
- **Sorrow-Gathers-Stormlike**, an ancient and infirm high elf who teaches reading, writing and minor magicks to the children of Divesse (of which there are around 4 at any one time). She's trapped in her lodgings, and her students rush in to tell the party.

SCENES IN DIVESSE:

AS THE GAME BEGINS: The market is in full swing: selling treasures pulled from the depths beneath, bushels of mushrooms and salted lizard-meat, and devotional clay tablets on which the faithful write prayers to those lost in the City Beneath in the hopes that their spirits will hear them. Ask your players what they're doing to keep an eye on the people of Divesse, and whether they're engaging in the fun and games themselves.

SOON AFTER: A traveller in a long hooded cloak stands immobile in the centre of town; water starts to pool around their feet, and if – when – someone confronts them, it's revealed that they're Vassals (p. 45) – emissaries of the Drowned Queen, a powerful otherworldly force. All around, the party spot more travellers dressed in a similar fashion and before long saltwater pours from the struts above the market and collects on the floor. It seems like the market is full of them.

Unfortunately, the drowning of Divesse is inevitable; there are too many Vassals in place for the party to stop them. All they can hope to do is slow the tide of water by killing some of the Vassals, escorting people out of the settlement, fashioning boats from whatever materials they can find or, through whatever means they can envisage, rescuing as many inhabitants as possible.

ACTIONS

There's a guide to resolving actions on p. 12. Remember: players always roll 1D10, and can add more if they have the relevant skill or domain for the tasks they're performing. Here are some suggested combinations, but don't feel limited by them:

- *Tracking down a Vassal by their trail of seawater:* Hunt+Occult
- *Attacking a Vassal:* Kill+Occult
- *Gathering panicked townsfolk:* Compel+Haven
- *Building a raft out of an old cupboard:* Mend+Technology
- *Swimming into a waterlogged tunnel to rescue someone:* Endure+Warren
- *Finding the safest route out:* Discern+Warren
- *Leading the party to the outskirts of town:* Delve+Warren

THE PULSE LINE, SUBMERGED – THE FIRST DELVE

DOMAINS: Warren, Technology

STRESS: D4

RESISTANCE: 10

Construction of the Pulse line was intended to join the underground Vermissian train network to the above-ground portion – and also power the entire system by tapping into the Heart Itself. It went dreadfully wrong, and unleashed the monstrous energies of the City Beneath through the Vermissian, warping it permanently and rendering it unusable at best and malevolently dangerous at worst.

Now, part of it forms a stable connection between Divesse and the Temple of the Moon Beneath – or it did, at least, until it flooded waist-deep with seawater an hour ago. Flickering magelights illuminate tunnels filled with filthy salt water, and beasts that slumbered in ancient mud awaiting rains that would never come have awoken, ravenous.

EVENTS: Twisting, nonsensical paths through rusted tunnels; Part of the route is submerged; A bulkhead gives way and releases a huge rush of water, washing you down the corridor; Vassals of the Queen reach up with rotting hands to drag you under.

CONNECTION: Swim down into the old Vermissian tunnels and open a hatch, allowing the water to drain (+D6)

RESOURCES: Waterlogged but working Magelight (D6, technology), Coral speared vassal limbs (D4, Occult)

DELVING ACTIONS

As with the escape from Divesse, here are some example combinations of skills and domains that can be used to undertake the delve. Remember: even if a character doesn't have the requisite skill or domain, they can still attempt the action – they just don't add extra D10s to their pool.

- *Hold your breath as you swim through a pitch-black, submerged tunnel in search of an air pocket:* Endure+Warren
- *Clamber along the side of the tunnel, keeping out of the water:* Delve+Warren
- *Decipher the Vermissian maintenance codes on the walls to work out where you are:* Discern+Technology
- *Keep away from the clutching hands of the submerged dead:* Evade+Occult
- *Track down and kill the wide-mawed slugfish after it snatches one of the refugees from Divesse:* Hunt+Wild

THE TEMPLE OF THE MOON BENEATH – TESTAMENT TO HER GLORY

DOMAINS: Religion, Haven

HAUNTS:

- Sister Griswold's Clinic (Blood, D10)
- Sergeant Borealis' Bar, Technically Just A Barracks (Mind D6)
- Purification Chambers (Echo, D6)
- Altar of Our Many Mothers (Fortune, D8)
- Gibbous St Market (D6)

Two hundred years ago, the Church of the Moon was driven out of the City Above and into the Heart in a week-long purge of fire and terror by the occupying aelfir forces. Since then, they have rebuilt their once-glorious temple in the City Beneath. The stones and beams of the structure were smuggled down by pilgrims, or recreated by skilled artisans, and the temple stands once more – mismatched, and patched together, but surviving.

After their descent the drow of the Temple of the Moon began to distrust the sky, believing it to be distant, changeable, and uncaring. Their now-useless telescopes were dismantled, and followers instead sought wisdom in the true moon of which they had dreamed since they arrived in the Heart – that which dwelled far beneath the earth, a luminous and fecund mistress, of which the flitting phantom in the heavens was but a pale imitation. The Church of the Moon Beneath, as it was now called, sent the faithful down into the depths searching for more insights and visions from their true goddess.

HAUNTS

You'll notice that some of the landmarks in this adventure have haunts – these are places that player characters can trade resources to heal their wounds. When you contribute a resource to a haunt, you can remove stress equal to the resource's dice size – roll it and subtract that amount. The dice size next to the haunt indicates the highest amount of stress they can remove, even if you have more valuable resources to trade.

You can also use haunts to remove or downgrade ongoing fallout – D6 resource to remove minor fallout, and D8 resource to downgrade major fallout to minor. See p. 33 for more on haunts.

Of late, the mercenary Hounds have been drafted in to protect the temple against attacks from saboteurs looking to submerge the temple in the same way as Divesse was lost. The streets surrounding the temple are tense as both groups attempt to be the one that's in charge of the situation.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

- **Sister Arielle**, the lorekeeper of the Temple, who used to be the church's chief executioner but infirmity and age confine her to the building itself. She swears like a docker, carries a revolver, and refuses to use a wheelchair, instead pulling herself forward on two canes. She wants to get the Hounds out of the Temple, and realises that the only way to do this is to get warding runes from the rat-monks of Stepwell on the tier below and use them to protect the area. She offers the delvers D10 (**Religion**) resource each (in the form of pouches of moon-stamped pieces of silver) to bring her the runes from Stepwell.
- **Whispers-The-Wyrm**, captain of this temporary allegiance of Hounds from multiple regiments – posh, basically decent, and very far out of their depth. They want to keep the people of the temple, and their soldiers, as safe as possible. The recent arrival of Deathshard cultists in the pathways towards Grip Station has made their job even harder.

SCENES IN THE TEMPLE OF THE MOON BENEATH

- **AS THE DELVERS ARRIVE:** Arielle blusters through a Hound checkpoint on both walking sticks, and no-one raises a hand to stop her as she carries on into the Temple itself. Whispers-The-Wyrm looks on, exasperated.
- A Hound accosts an impoverished pilgrim, suspecting them of sabotage. Things start to get heated, and soon a crowd of angry people surround the guards.
- A Hound, dressed in grey sack-cloth to disguise themselves, returns from hunting on the outskirts of town. They drag in a waterlogged corpse, coral growing from within its body – a vassal. They claim they found it wandering outside of the settlement.

TEMPLE TO GRIP, THE SECOND DELVE**DOMAINS:** Desolate, Religion**STRESS:** D4**RESISTANCE:** 14

Arielle lays out the quickest route to Stepwell: from the temple, head to Grip station; from there, descend deeper into the Heart to find Stepwell.

The route to Grip Station used to be fairly safe until the Deathshead cult moved in. It winds through the ruins of an old mining settlement; it used to have a name when people lived here, but now it's just a few empty shacks huddled around a mineshaft where the cultists have set up a temple to avarice.

The players might want to take down the Deathsheads, especially if they've been offered a reward for doing so by Whispers-The-Wyrm. You can learn more about combat in p. 26.

EVENTS: Leaving the Temple through the sepulchres where the dead whisper sweet mysteries; Navigating the disorientating passageways of an abandoned mining settlement; Evading the attentions of the Deathsheads; Finding an entrance to the Vermissian network.

RESOURCES: Curious Ore (D10, Cursed, Dangerous), Leaden cult fetishes, (D4, Religion)

CONNECTION: Eliminate the Deathsheads, a cult of murderers and thieves who believe that the pilgrims who walk through their turf are a gift from the Moon Beneath, and rob/kill them appropriately (or try to induct them into the cult if they're strong enough).

DEATHSHEAD CULTIST**NAME:** Ygritte, Vincenzo, Shew

DESCRIPTION: Surrounded by skull-marked moths, clearly blessed by their mistress; Flashing a mouthful of gold teeth stolen from pilgrims; Praying for a good hunt and making the sign of the moon

MOTIVATION: Hunt the glorious bounty placed before them – pilgrims and travellers – for their possessions and, on occasion, meat.

DIFFICULTY: Standard**RESISTANCE:** 5**PROTECTION:** 1

RESOURCE: Wedding rings, gold teeth, family heirlooms, silk scarves (D8, Haven, Taboo)

EQUIPMENT: Heavy-bore archaic pistol (D8, Ranged, Loud, One-Shot), Wicked-looking knives (D6, Brutal)

SPECIAL: There are around 9 Deathsheads in total, but only ever 3 or so together at one time. If you can take out their leader, a charismatic drow named Bishop Juin who carries dozens of mismatched knives, they'll crumble.

GRIP STATION, A CRYSTALLINE DEATHTRAP**DOMAINS:** Technology**HAUNTS:**

- Frumious, alchemist and technically a doctor (Blood D8, Echo D8)
- Singing crystalline caves (D6 Mind, D4 Fortune)
- Trading with the sages (D4 Supplies)

Around a hundred feet above the train tracks around Grip Station, glittering crystalline stalactites creak and shudder gently in response to the vibrations of those who move beneath them. It was the hope of the aelfir constructors that travellers on the line could marvel at the crystals as they were illuminated by huge spotlights mounted on the carriages; but the lights proved too expensive to maintain, and any time a train went over 10 miles an hour the stalactites started to fall from the ceiling. (Journeys through Grip station subsequently came with a fifteen-minute portion of agonisingly slow, pitch-black travel accompanied by the "singing" of crystals threatening to detach overhead.)

Oflate, the Vermissian Sages have established a local base of operations in the original station house, shoring up the fragile crystal structures above their heads with scaffolding. What would have been a perfectly serviceable regional office has been ruined by the arrival of the Vassals; the station was flooded six months ago after Quin, the Vermissian Knight who travels with the party, failed in their duties. They've only recently finished drying out the tunnels, salvaging what books they can, and they're still mourning the dead.

The Sages are unwilling to let anyone in without good reason.

Were the dead not rising and flooding the undercity, this might be considered paranoid. The killzone outside of the main gates has the corpses of at least seven vassals in various states of decomposition, each of them riddled with rifle shot.

Aside from tense trade negotiations outside the main entrance, no-one's going in and no-one's coming out. Two on-edge sages armed with rifles stand on either side of the door behind recently-erected gates. They tell the party to get lost, unless they've got something to sell, in which case they can maybe exchange it for coin and then get lost. It's possible through use of abilities or clever tactics to get inside – but it's not easy.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

- **Magos Grisholm**, highest-ranking survivor of the Vermissian Sages, is an increasingly paranoid and desperate drow. They want to keep what remains of their research safe, even if that means barring entry to the needy; they have a responsibility to take revenge against the Drowned Queen by stopping her and her Vassals entirely, and that requires far more study.

SCENES IN GRIP STATION

- **AS THE DELVERS APPROACH:** A trio of pilgrims en route to the Temple of the Moon Beneath pass them walking in the opposite direction – they've just been turned away from Grip Station, and one of their number is wounded and needs rest. They're angry at the sages but have no means of getting inside.

- As the player characters wait at the main gate, the singing of the rock formations overhead intensifies and razor-sharp shards start to fall to the ground and shatter. Unless the party finds cover soon – say, inside Grip Station – they're going to be caught in the storm of crystals.
- Inside the station, a player character notices that seawater is quietly filling up a storage room; one of the vassals from the initial assault is still here, and is semi-dormant.

GRIP TO STEPWELL, THE THIRD DELVE

DOMAINS: Occult

STRESS: D6

RESISTANCE: 10

Grip Station stands before a great shaft, ringed with crumbling stairs, that descends into the depths of the Heart. This delve will take the party down to Tier 2 of the City Beneath, where things start to get even weirder than before.

EVENTS: Walk down, down, far deeper than you can really fathom, until your legs are jelly; Ignore the shimmering patterns of light-reflected-from-water that flit across the stone and warp the mind; Look up and realise you've been walking for an hour but are still only thirty feet from the entrance

RESOURCES: Crumbling piece of filigreed balustrade (D6, Haven), Scrapings of twitching mould from the runes on the walls (D6, Occult).

CONNECTION: Decipher the runes on the walls (+D10 Resistance)

THE COURT OF THE DROWNED QUEEN, ONCE STEPWELL

DOMAINS: Occult

Stepwell was built, appropriately, in a stepwell – a huge structure designed to hold water with stairways that lead to multiple levels within. It used to be a bit creepy; there were a sect of rat-worshipping occultists who lived here, and would let the sacred animals crawl and scratch all over their bodies as they writhed in divine ecstasy. They're all dead now.

The Drowned Queen, a spiteful and petty extradimensional entity of tremendous power, has set up shop here. Someone summoned her – maybe it was one of the rat-cultists after they learned a spell from the Holy Swarm – and she's made the place her own. The well is full to the brim, and occasional islands of worked stone jut up from the surface. She's had her vassals construct bridges between them in preparation for the arrival of outsiders but they're not very good at it. Coral grows up from beneath the surface of the water in beautiful colours – cold white, vibrant yellow, and glittering silver. Beneath it, shoals of fish flit back and forth, and the waterlogged bodies of vassals trudge up and down submerged steps carrying treasures stolen from drowned havens.

The Queen is looking for a consort: someone to marry and cement the connection between this world of stone and blood and the deep darkness from whence she came. She looks like a dark elf whose body glints with bioluminescence, and she sits on a throne of coral and stone.

The rat-cult had a wide variety of different spells that they'd collected over the years; some traded from other settlements, some stolen, but most of them whispered to them by a carpet of rats imbued with divine power. Most of their libraries have been lost, submerged beneath the flood, but one – on the opposite side of the Queen's chamber to the one that the party enters through – has survived. Lucky for them, it's the one with the warding runes that Arielle needs.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

The Drowned Queen: You cannot fight the Drowned Queen. Or, more accurately: you can try to fight the Drowned Queen, maybe even successfully harm the body on the throne which is an anglerfish-style lure, and her monstrous True Form will arise from the depths – a titanic eel with terrible snapping jaws and more eyes than you can count. Assume that she inflicts D10 stress as standard in this form, and she can only be distracted or upset, not killed. She's not a monster to be defeated: she runs this place, now, and demands respect.

You can talk to her; she's eager for conversation, as her Vassals are all made from her own intelligence and therefore can't hope to surprise or entertain her. She speaks slowly but deliberately, as though she is arranging her thoughts and sending them up from some cosmic abyss, which she is.

VASSAL

The Drowned Queen makes Vassals of those who drown in her domains; she fills them with seawater, turns their bones to coral, makes their eyes black and glistening, and sharpens their teeth into ripping, shark-like rows. They have a limited intellect – a sliver of her power laid in their waterlogged brains like an egg – and it is slavishly devoted to their mistress.

Vassals can fill an area the size of a haven with seawater in a matter of hours; they either summon it from beneath their feet or vomit it out of their mouths.

NAMES: Sternoptyx, Bispinosus, Saccopharynx

DESCRIPTORS: Intricate coral structure growing out of their mouth and ears; Retching up gallons of seawater; Building an altar to the Drowned Queen

MOTIVATION: To make the world suitable for their Queen, which requires it to be submerged in sea water

DIFFICULTY: Standard. If they're entirely submerged, fighting them directly is a Risky action.

RESISTANCE: 5

PROTECTION: 1

RESOURCE: Weirdly beautiful coral (D4, Wild, Occult)

EQUIPMENT: Sea-rusted blades (D6)

DOMAINS: Occult

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

Assuming the party steals, barter for or manages to con the Drowned Queen out of the warding runes, they have to get them back up to the Temple of the Moon Beneath. There are three ways you can handle this:

- Play through the ascent in full, the same way you came down but in reverse; this will be a lot easier if the players have established connections whilst on the delves.
- Run the ascent as a single, massive delve – Resistance 25 or so – drawing details from the landmarks and delves they've visited on their way down.
- Narrate the ascent with a series of scenes discussing how things have changed (if at all) since the party first came through. Ask the players what challenges their characters face, and how they overcome them.

Whichever option you choose, once the party arrives back in the Temple, things are more tense than ever. The Hounds are struggling to maintain control, and the temple elders are pleading with the folk who live and worship there to stay calm. What's worse, the streets around the temple can start to flood with seawater right as the characters arrive – they need to act quickly to get the runes to Arielle in time. Play through the climactic scene in the manner of a delve using the info below.

ENACT THE WARDING RITUAL

DOMAINS: Occult, Religion

STRESS: D6

RESISTANCE: 9

EVENTS (and suggested stress inflicted against the scene): Help Arielle chant the canticles of warding (D6); Beseech the goddess for aid (D4); Hold the door shut as vassals try to knock it down (D4); Get the imperiled faithful to higher ground (D4); Drag sandbags in place to stop the inner sanctum flooding (D6); Lead the Vassals away from the sanctum (D8)

RESOURCES: Payment from Arielle (D10, Religion)

SPECIAL: There's a chance that the Temple Beneath could flood if the party don't pull this off. You can use the Critical Fortune fallout below to represent this:

DROWNED. Arielle stumbles and drops the runes; there's a flash of magic as the spell misfires, and then all hope is lost. The Temple of the Moon Beneath is submerged beneath seawater over the next few hours and dozens of people die.

CONTINUING THE STORY

If the players are eager to keep playing, you can continue the story from here. They might want to drive out the Drowned Queen entirely (how would they even go about doing that?); they may want to help secure more Vermissian stations, or help the people of the Temple rebuild, or strike out in a random direction in search of adventure.

The core rulebook for *Heart* contains full details for all nine classes, and a whole underworld (and additional dimensions) packed with nightmares to explore. You can learn more about *Heart* - and buy a copy - at rowanrookanddecad.com

HEART

THE CITY
BENEATH

NAME Quin Moreau

CLASS Vermisian Knight

CALLING Penitent

ACTIVE BEATS

EQUIPMENT

Pneumatic Hammer (Kill D8, Brutal, Loud, Tiring)

RESOURCES

Bag of mysterious coins (D6, Haven)

Inch-long train screws (D4, Technology)

SKILLS	KNACKS	DOMAINS	KNACKS
☐ Compel	<u> </u>	☐ Cursed	<u> </u>
☒ Delve	<u> </u>	☐ Desolate	<u> </u>
☐ Discern	<u> </u>	☐ Haven	<u> </u>
☐ Endure	<u> </u>	☒ Occult	<u> </u>
☐ Evade	<u> </u>	☐ Religion	<u> </u>
☐ Hunt	<u> </u>	☒ Technology	<u> </u>
☐ Kill	<u> </u>	☐ Warren	<u> </u>
☐ Mend	<u> </u>	☐ Wild	<u> </u>
☐ Sneak	<u> </u>		

		PROTECTIONS
BLOOD	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☒ ☒ ☐ ☐
MIND	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
ECHO	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
FORTUNE	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
SUPPLIES	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ABILITIES

VERMISSIAN PLATE: 1/session, consume a resource with the **Technology** or **Occult** domain, roll its dice and choose one:

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

NOT YET: 1/session, activate this to avoid suffering the effects of **Blood** or **Mind** fallout for the rest of this situation.

BLACK KNIGHT: 1/session, when you enter a landmark you can intuit the location of an occult sect whose hidden lore can aid you in your quest.

AETHERIC FIELD: 1/session, activate this field to gain +3 **Echo** protection for the rest of the situation and deal damage equal to your new Echo protection to all adversaries nearby.

FALLOUT

QUIN MOREAU, PENITENT VERMISSIAN KNIGHT

CALLING: PENITENT

When you create your character, answer these four questions:

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

MINOR BEATS:

- ☐ Meet an NPC who hates you for what you've done.
- ☐ Witness first-hand the tragic extent of your failings.
- ☐ Take minor **Blood** fallout.
- ☐ Make penance at a site that is important to your order.
- ☐ Repair something physical - a bridge, a door, a wall, etc. - that someone needs.

MAJOR BEATS:

- ☐ Your order suffers a devastating setback, and you believe that it's your fault.
- ☐ Betray someone who really trusts you.

UNLOCKABLE ABILITIES

MINOR

- **WELL TRAVELLED.** Gain access to one of the following domains: **Cursed**, **Desolate**, **Haven**, **Occult**, **Technology**, **Wild**, **Warren**. You can take this advance more than once.
- **STALWART.** Gain +1 Protection in the **Blood**, **Echo**, **Supplies** or **Fortune** resistance. You can take this advance more than once.
- **STUDENT OF THE SAGES.** Gain access to one of the following skills: **Compel**, **Delve**, **Discern**, **Endure**, **Hunt**, **Kill**, **Mend**. You can take this advance more than once.
- **TUNNEL RAT.** You have performed the Rite of Suffocation, and know ways of slowing your breathing to survive longer. Gain the **Warren** domain. You can hold your breath for a very long time, allowing you to stay underwater or in toxic areas for extended periods.
- **HELLWALKER.** You have been anointed with the sacred oils that protect you from the nightmare energies of the Heart. Gain the **Cursed** domain. In addition, you can use a resource with the **Cursed** domain to activate your **VERMISSIAN PLATE** core ability.

MAJOR

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

STARTING ABILITIES IN FULL

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

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

NOT YET. Your willpower, fuelled with guilt, is legendary. Once per session, when you activate this ability, you do not suffer negative effects from **Blood** or **Mind** fallout for the remainder of the situation.

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

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

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

HELIXICAN BURST. Your armour surges to life with a blast of shimmering power. When you activate **AETHERIC FIELD**, deal damage equal to your increased **Echo** protection to all adversaries standing nearby.

BONDS

NOTES

HEART

THE CITY BENEATH

NAME Lynd Vassail

CLASS Witch

CALLING Heartsong

ACTIVE BEATS

EQUIPMENT

Sacred Athame (Kill D6, Bloodbound)

Heartward dowsing rod (Delve D6)

RESOURCES

Family jewelry (D8, Haven)

SKILLS

☒ Compel
☐ Delve
☐ Discern
☐ Endure
☐ Evade
☐ Hunt
☐ Kill
☒ Mend
☐ Sneak

KNACKS

DOMAINS

☐ Cursed
☐ Desolate
☐ Haven
☒ Occult
☐ Religion
☐ Technology
☐ Warren
☐ Wild

KNACKS

BLOOD ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
MIND ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
ECHO ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☒
FORTUNE ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
SUPPLIES ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

PROTECTIONS

☐☐☐☐☐
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☐☐☐☐☐
☐☐☐☐☐

ABILITIES

IN THE BLOOD: 1/situation, when you take stress to any resistance other than **Echo**, allocate it to **Echo**.

CRUCIBLE: At any time, roll a D6. If it's equal to or under your current **Echo** stress, clear that much stress from **Echo** and roll with mastery on your next action. If it's over your current **Echo** stress, add that much stress to **Echo**.

TRUE FORM: You may enter your true form when you want, inflicting D4 stress on all adversaries who can see you. While in it, you roll with mastery on **Hunt** and **Kill** checks but all others become **Risky**. You revert back to humanoid at the end of the situation.

- 1/situation, when an action you perform in your true form would be **Risky**, treat it as **Standard** instead.
- 1/session, when you assume your true form, downgrade a **Blood** fallout result you're suffering from by one step.

FALLOUT

LYND VASSAIL, HEARTSONG-CALLED WITCH

CALLING: HEARTSONG

When you create your character, answer these four questions:

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

MINOR BEATS:

- ☐ Let your curiosity lead you into danger.
- ☐ Witness an emissary of the Heart Itself.
- ☐ Convince the party to collect **Cursed** resources on a delve, adding D6 to the delve's resistance.
- ☐ Perform a rite at a place of power (Tier 2 or deeper).
- ☐ Take minor **Echo** fallout.

MAJOR BEATS:

- ☐ Take major **Echo** fallout.
- ☐ Meet an emissary of the Heart and learn from them.

UNLOCKABLE ABILITIES

MINOR

- **HEART-WISE:** Gain access to one of the following skills: **Compel**, **Delve**, **Discern**, **Endure**, **Hunt**, **Kill**, **Mend**. You can take this advance more than once.
- **BOOKS OF LORE:** Gain access to one of the following domains: **Cursed**, **Desolate**, **Occult**, **Religion**, **Warren**, **Wild**. You can take this advance more than once.
- **CHARMS AND WARDS:** Gain +1 Protection in the **Blood**, **Mind**, **Supplies** or **Fortune** resistance. You can take this advance more than once.
- **RED DOMINION.** *You don't bleed unless you want to; when you're angry, your veins pulse visibly beneath your skin.* Gain +2 **Blood** protection.
- **A MIND OF MANY DOORWAYS.** *Mortal concerns fade in comparison to the majesty of the blood-song that resonates within you.* Gain +2 **Mind** Protection.

MAJOR

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

STARTING ABILITIES IN FULL

IN THE BLOOD. *You move through the Heart as if blessed.* +1 **Echo** Protection (Included above). In addition, once per situation, when you take stress to any resistance other than **Echo**, allocate it to **Echo**.

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

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

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

GREAT AND TERRIBLE. *You unlock the power of your true form - an awe-inspiring union of magic and flesh.* When you choose to enter your true form, all adversaries who can see you take D4 stress.

SACRED OBJECT. Once per session, when you assume your true form, downgrade one **Blood** fallout result you are suffering from by one step.

UNION. Once per situation, when you are in your true form and an action you perform would be considered **Risky**, treat it as **Standard** difficulty instead.

BONDS

NOTES

HEART

THE CITY
BENEATH

NAME Tenacity Malrique

CLASS Heretic

CALLING Adventure

ACTIVE BEATS

EQUIPMENT

Breech-loading pistol (Kill D6, Ranged, Reload)

Seeker's blade (Kill D6, Brutal)

Bandages used by a saint (Mend Blood D6, Expensive)

RESOURCES

Silver moon amulet (D8, Religion)

SKILLS	KNACKS	DOMAINS	KNACKS
☐ Compel	<u> </u>	☐ Cursed	<u> </u>
☐ Delve	<u> </u>	☐ Desolate	<u> </u>
☐ Discern	<u> </u>	☐ Haven	<u> </u>
☐ Endure	<u> </u>	☐ Occult	<u> </u>
☐ Evade	<u> </u>	☒ Religion	<u> </u>
☐ Hunt	<u> </u>	☐ Technology	<u> </u>
☒ Kill	<u> </u>	☒ Warren	<u> </u>
☒ Mend	<u> </u>	☐ Wild	<u> </u>
☐ Sneak	<u> </u>		

		PROTECTIONS
BLOOD	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
MIND	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
ECHO	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
FORTUNE	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
SUPPLIES	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ABILITIES

MINISTRATIONS: 1/session, lead your allies in a service of praise. All PCs who took part downgrade one Blood or Mind fallout one step at the end. If you performed this on a delve, add +1D4 to the delve's resistance.

LEGENDARY: When you gain a minor advance, remove D6 stress. When you gain a major advance, remove D8 stress.

GRAVE DUTY 1/session, console or bolster an ally to give them +1 **Mind** protection for the rest of the session.

OATH OF SAGACITY: You can speak the secret name of the goddess as a weapon that dampens all noise (Kill D6, Spread, Debilitating, Maddening, One-Shot, Smoke).

FALLOUT

TENACITY MALRIQUE, ADVENTUROUS HERETIC

CALLING: ADVENTURE

When you create your character, answer these four questions:

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

MINOR BEATS:

- ☐ Help an important or influential figure in a haven.
- ☐ Rescue someone from peril.
- ☐ Make a dramatic entrance that's a **Risky** action.
- ☐ Take Major **Fortune** Fallout.
- ☐ Rush into danger before anyone else.
- ☐ Establish a connection.

MAJOR BEATS:

- ☐ Successfully perform an action of **Dangerous** difficulty that saves the day.
- ☐ Save a haven from destruction or doom.

UNLOCKABLE ABILITIES

MINOR

- **TOMES OF KNOWLEDGE.** Gain access to one of the following domains: **Cursed**, **Desolate**, **Haven**, **Religion**, **Technology**, **Wild**, **Warren**. You can take this advance more than once.
- **UNWAVERING FAITH.** Gain +1 Protection in the **Mind**, **Supplies**, **Blood** or **Fortune** resistance. You can take this advance more than once.
- **THE GODDESS' GIFTS.** Gain access to one of the following skills: **Compel**, **Discern**, **Endure**, **Evade**, **Hunt**, **Kill**, **Mend**. You can take this advance more than once.
- **SHARD OF THE TEMPLE DOOR.** *The great doors of the Moon Ascendant temple were smashed to pieces on the night of the purge. You carry a shard of the door, reminding you that your faith is eternal.* Gain the **Endure** skill. Once per session, when you touch the shard to a closed door, it will not open for at least an hour (unless it is destroyed).
- **RIGHTEOUS RHETORIC.** *You have argued over the interpretation of scripture with the temple elders time and time again.* Gain the **Compel** skill. When you invoke your holy texts in conversation with another member of your faith, roll with mastery.

MAJOR

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

STARTING ABILITIES IN FULL

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

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

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

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

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

FRAGMENT OF LOMBRÉ. The weapon gains the Smoke tag (it manifests like ink dropped in water) and no longer creates noise - in fact, it dampens all nearby noise.

BONDS

NOTES

HEART

THE CITY
BENEATH

NAME Gethin Bayn

CLASS Hound

CALLING Forced

ACTIVE BEATS

EQUIPMENT

Legrande rifle (Kill D8, ranged, piercing, expensive)

Heavy Rucksack full of maybe-stolen goods
(Mend Supplies D6, Potent)

RESOURCES

Bottle of rotgut liquor (D6, Haven)

		PROTECTIONS
BLOOD	□□□□□□□□□□	□□□□□
MIND	□□□□□□□□□□	■□□□□
ECHO	□□□□□□□□□□	□□□□□
FORTUNE	□□□□□□□□□□	□□□□□
SUPPLIES	□□□□□□□□□□	□□□□□

ABILITIES

COLLATERAL: 1/session, allocate stress to the nearest friendly target instead of marking it yourself.

IN THE THICK OF IT: 1/situation, when you would mark stress to any resistance other than **Fallout**, mark it to **Fallout**. When you suffer **Fortune** fallout, roll with mastery for the remainder of the situation.

LIQUID COURAGE: When you go drinking to relieve **Mind** stress, treat the resource you spent it as one dice size higher.

KILL COUNT: Whenever you kill a person or creature, remove 1 stress from any resistance.

STARE DOWN: Your gaze is a weapon (Kill D6, Ranged, Point-Blank). It only works when your target can see you and if they have the capacity to be scared of you. Your gaze won't kill people - it's disheartening, and if you reduce an opponent's Resistance to 0 with it they surrender, try to bargain their way out, or trip and incapacitate themselves whilst fleeing.

SKILLS	KNACKS	DOMAINS	KNACKS
☐ Compel	<u> </u>	☐ Cursed	<u> </u>
☐ Delve	<u> </u>	☐ Desolate	<u> </u>
☐ Discern	<u> </u>	■ Haven	<u> </u>
☐ Endure	<u> </u>	☐ Occult	<u> </u>
☐ Evade	<u> </u>	☐ Religion	<u> </u>
■ Hunt	<u> </u>	☐ Technology	<u> </u>
■ Kill	<u> </u>	☐ Warren	<u> </u>
☐ Mend	<u> </u>	☐ Wild	<u> </u>
☐ Sneak	<u> </u>		

FALLOUT

GETHIN BAYN, FORCED HOUND

CALLING: FORCED

When you create your character, answer these questions:

- How are your masters maintaining power over you?
- How do your masters contact you to deliver orders?
- Choose another player character. They have history with your masters, too. What's their relationship with them?

MINOR BEATS:

- ☐ Do something dangerous to conceal your past.
- ☐ Invoke your masters' name to get what you want.
- ☐ Receive orders from your masters.
- ☐ Follow orders from your masters, even though they put you at risk.
- ☐ Take minor **Fortune** fallout.

MAJOR BEATS:

- ☐ Suffer the consequences of refusing to perform an important act on behalf of your masters.
- ☐ Take major **Fortune** fallout.

UNLOCKABLE ABILITIES

MINOR

- **ADVANCED TRAINING:** Gain access to one of the following skills: **Compel**, **Delve**, **Discern**, **Endure**, **Evade**, **Hunt**, **Kill**, **Mend**, **Sneak**. You can take this advance more than once.
- **ECHOES OF THE 33RD:** Gain access to one of the following domains: **Cursed**, **Desolate**, **Haven**, **Technology**, **Warren**, **Wild**. You can take this advance more than once.
- **HARD AS NAILS:** Gain access to +1 **Blood**, **Mind**, **Echo** or **Supplies** Protection. You can take this advance more than once.
- **ROUND THE NEXT CORNER.** *You can find a place to shelter, smoke a roll-up, and let things blow over.* Gain the **Delve** skill. Once per delve, you find an out-of-the-way location where you can catch your breath and recuperate without fear of being discovered by your enemies. You can take your time and heal here without adding to the delve's resistance.
- **SERGEANT:** *You wear the trademark heavy long-coat of a Sergeant of the Hounds, designed to mark you out as a protector of the people.* +1 **Blood** Protection. Once per situation, when an adversary or NPC directs their attention towards an ally, declare that they pay attention to you instead.

MAJOR

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

STARTING ABILITIES IN FULL

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

IN THE THICK OF IT. *You have a knack for getting yourself in just enough trouble to find the truth.* Once per situation, when you would mark stress to any other resistance than **Fortune**, mark it to **Fortune**. When you suffer **Fortune** fallout, roll with mastery for the remainder of the situation.

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

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

STARE DOWN. Your gaze functions as a weapon (Kill D6, ranged). It only works when your target can see you and if they have the capacity to be scared of you (so: criminals are fair game, but heartsblood beasts aren't). You can use this "weapon" in a haven or other landmark without causing a huge ruckus. Your gaze won't kill people - it's disheartening, and if you reduce an opponent's Resistance to 0 with it they surrender, try to bargain their way out, or trip and incapacitate themselves whilst fleeing.

NOSE-TO-NOSE. Your gaze gains the **point-blank** tag.

BONDS

NOTES

HEART

THE CITY
BENEATH

NAME Ynneth Danarian

CLASS Junk Mage

CALLING Enlightenment

ACTIVE BEATS

EQUIPMENT

Two old-fashioned pistols (D8, Ranged, Loud, One-Shot)

Scrappy wolfhound (Delve D6)

RESOURCES

Dead men's fingers (D6, Occult)

Waxen simulacra (D4, Occult)

SKILLS

☐ Compel
☐ Delve
☒ Discern Books
☐ Endure
☐ Evade
☐ Hunt
☐ Kill
☐ Mend
☐ Sneak

KNACKS

DOMAINS

☐ Cursed
☐ Desolate
☐ Haven
☒ Occult
☒ Religion
☐ Technology
☐ Warren
☐ Wild

KNACKS

FALLOUT

BLOOD ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
MIND ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
ECHO ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
FORTUNE ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☒☒☐☐
SUPPLIES ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

PROTECTIONS

☐☐☐☐☐
☐☐☐☐☐
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☐☐☐☐☐

ABILITIES

RAVENING KNOWLEDGE: Roll with mastery when casting spells if your **Mind** stress is 4 or higher.

SACRIFICE: Before you cast a spell, you can sacrifice a resource with the **Occult** or Religion **domains**. Roll its dice, and add the result to your protection against stress incurred from casting the spell.

UNORTHODOX METHODS: 1/session, before rolling, instead state your result is a 6 - you succeed but take stress.

KISS OF THE DROWNED QUEEN: With a touch, you can conjure salt water in the lungs of those who oppose you. This spell functions as the following weapon: (Kill D6, Piercing.) If the target is at least shin-deep in water, it inflicts D8 damage.

SLUMBERING ETERNAL: You no longer need to breathe air; no matter the situation, you will not asphyxiate. 1/session, you can locate a useful source of water - a stream, a pipe, a drain, a reservoir, a waterfall, etc.

YNNETH DANARIAN, ENLIGHTENED JUNK MAGE

CALLING: ENLIGHTENMENT

When you create your character, answer these four questions:

- What “impossible” thing are you attempting in the Heart?
- What’s the first step on your journey?
- Choose another player character. They’ve been invaluable in your journey so far: what have you learned from them?
- Choose another player character. You know they’re hiding secrets from you - why do you suspect they’re doing this?

MINOR BEATS:

- ☐ Take Minor **Mind** fallout.
- ☐ Dissect something or interrogate someone that can shed light on your task.
- ☐ Establish a connection on a delve.
- ☐ Find a helpful text.
- ☐ Gain favour with a faction that can help you learn more about your goal.

MAJOR BEATS:

- ☐ Take Major **Supplies** fallout.
- ☐ Kill someone who is trying to stop you from claiming knowledge.

UNLOCKABLE ABILITIES

MINOR

- **BY ANY MEANS.** Gain access to one of the following skills: **Compel**, **Delve**, **Discern**, **Evade**, **Hunt**, **Kill**, **Sneak**, **Mend**. You can take this advance more than once.
- **BEEN EVERYWHERE.** Gain access to one of the following domains: **Cursed**, **Desolate**, **Haven**, **Occult**, **Religion**, **Technology**, **Warren**. You can take this advance more than once.
- **WARDING SPELLS.** Gain +1 Protection in the **Blood**, **Supplies**, **Echo** or **Fortune** resistance. You can take this advance more than once.
- **MARK OF THE PHANTOM.** *Silver-grey skinspells and litanies of obfuscation wind their way over your body; you are an aberration in space and time, glitching through the City Beneath.* Gain the **Evade** skill. Once per situation, when you mark stress due to physical harm or detection, you may make the GM reroll the stress dice. Keep the second result, even if it’s higher.
- **MARK OF THE WEAVER.** *Your hands are covered in spiderweb ink; you have the capacity to stitch, fix and bind with a thought.* Gain the **Mend** skill. Once per session, you can fix someone or something in a matter of seconds, even if it would usually take hours of careful work.

MAJOR

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

STARTING ABILITIES IN FULL

RAVENING KNOWLEDGE. *You crave the touch of what others call “madness”. The glimpses of truth that ravage your frail, mortal mind give you unimaginable power.* When your **Mind** stress is 4 or higher, roll with mastery when you attempt to cast a spell.

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

UNORTHODOX METHODS. Gain the **Discern** skill. Once per session, before you roll dice to resolve an action, instead state that your result is a 6. You succeed but take stress.

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

GOOD LUCK CHARMS. *Thousands of people carry lucky charms; yours (fetishes of wax and wood, crows’ teeth and mummified organs) actually work.* +2 **Fortune** Protection.

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

SLUMBERING ETERNAL. *You no longer need to breathe air; no matter the situation, you will not asphyxiate.* Once per session, you can also locate a useful source of water - a stream, a pipe, a drain, a reservoir, a waterfall, etc.

BONDS

NOTES