

GEIST

THE
SIN-EATERS
SECOND EDITION



KICKSTARTER MANUSCRIPT PREVIEW

Part 4

Chapter Five: Antagonists

It is a man's own mind, not his enemy or foe, that lures him to evil ways.

—Gautama Buddha

From the moment the Bargain is struck, Sin-Eaters face enemies from all sides. In the world of the living, necromancers and the eaters of the dead exploit and feast upon ghosts. In the world of the dead, Reapers and Kerberoi deceive and enslave them. Ideological differences between krewes spark bloody wars spread across both worlds. No matter their origin, they will all ensure that fighting for the dead is a perilous task.

Reapers

Some ghosts claim to be empowered by the Underworld, and that they serve its needs in return. Through the force of their Deathmasks (p. XX), Reapers travel into the world of the living to drag ghosts into the Great Below. They use their authority and prestige to defend the Underworld from those who would see it destroyed.

One simple truth drives a chill into the heart of a Sin-Eater: Underneath all their power and clout, Reapers are the very same dead they have sworn to protect.

A Ghost Like You

Any ghost can become a Reaper. Becoming one is as simple as finding a Deathmask buried in the soil or floating down one of the many tributaries of the Rivers of the Underworld. Donning the mask triggers a startling transformation.

Wearing a Deathmask is an exhilarating experience. A Reaper feels cold water running down his body, possibly the only sensation he's felt in years. In an instant, the Reaper's Corpus is infused with a monstrous visage. He is freed from the restraints of humanoid form and crackles with newfound death energy. After the initial rush of strength, his mind clears and he becomes focused on his true purpose: to capture ghosts above and drag them back to the Great Below.

Quite a few Reapers take on the role out of opportunity or simple curiosity, but most have a more elaborate origin. They describe experiencing psychedelic visions of beings known among Reapers as Chthonic Gods, whom they believe to rule the Underworld and write the Old Laws. Descriptions of these gods vary: gray stalks topped by blood-red lips, stone spirals spewing orange smoke, and blinking red eyes pressed together in a pyramid.

Without his Deathmask, a Reaper is indistinguishable from any other ghost. His thoughts, feelings, and opinions are still the same, though he may find himself adjusting them to better suit his new work. As long as a Reaper keeps his mask hidden, he can interact with others as if nothing ever happened.

The Dead Belong Below

Astute Sin-Eaters are quick to point out the obvious similarity between themselves and the Reapers they oppose. They claim to have accepted an offer to stave off their own personal oblivion at the cost of working with a powerful, enigmatic intelligence. In other words, both Sin-Eaters and Reapers have made a Bargain, with the difference lying in who the parties have bound themselves to. While Sin-Eaters enter a partnership with their little god of death and the human

underneath its terrifying form, Reapers are shackled to pure forces of entropy. Every action a Reaper takes is in hopes of serving the agenda of their Chthonic Gods, whatever that might be.

As Reapers come from all walks of death, they enter their position with a wide variety of opinions on the Underworld. Some have no problems with the current state of affairs, especially now that they have avoided the ultimate fate. Others may dislike or even despise the Underworld, even going so far as to try to use their powers to fix the system from within.

Ultimately, most Reapers come to agree on a single tenet: the Underworld's current state of affairs is necessary. Ghosts must be kept within the Great Below, for their own safety or the safety of the living. The wasting away of ghosts is a natural part of the world's ecology and must be encouraged.

Each Reaper develops their own reasons or rationalizations as to why this must be so. Perhaps it keeps the population healthy, or it feeds the power of their gods. Perhaps it is a grim reality of being dead, or perhaps a mystical placeholder for a true paradise to come.

With these philosophies in mind, Reapers view the Doctrines of Sin-Eater krewes with a range of emotions, from mild disdain to sheer ire. Sin-Eaters are outsiders, bound to amnesiac ghosts high on stolen power. Their claim that the system is broken has no validity. Even reformist Reapers reject their ideas. Sin-Eaters want too much change, too fast. Their ideals are understandable, even laudable, but invite chaos.

Faced with the potential destruction of the world they know, Reapers fight back by installing themselves into the Underworld's day-to-day life. Reapers serve as teachers, spiritual leaders, and even folk heroes. Some Reapers work as messengers, carrying important news while making sure their destinations are still holding the proper beliefs. Leaders and beloved pillars of riverside towns and graveyards may have a Deathmask hidden away, ready for use. Together, they present the idea of a world that works, and many Reapers take great pride in doing so.

Of course, no amount of public service can stave off the desire to reap.

The Chthonic Gods

They don't exist. You could map every tunnel, plumb every River, comb every book in every Dominion in the Lower Mysteries, and never find the way to Eljudnir or the palaces of the Lords of Xibalba. And what is the measure of a god's existence if not an actual, physical presence you can go and visit?

They do exist. The dead venerate them, pray to them and sacrifice to them and commit atrocities in their names. Even the living sometimes find their way to the Church of the Gods Below. And what is the measure of a god's existence if not the impact of its worshippers upon the world?

Harvesting Methods

All Reapers travel to the surface to capture ghosts. Their need to do so is just as strong and innate as any Sin-Eater's Burden. This drive can even take a physical form; Reapers who spend too much time shirking their task feel the sensation of dry, cracked skin all over their corpus, remedied only by catching a ghost.

While bearing their Deathmasks, Reapers have no difficulty leaving the Underworld and may stay in the world of the living as long as they like without suffering Essence bleed (p. XX). Many

Reapers take advantage of this, whether it's to visit missed families or to wreak terrible vengeance against their still-living enemies. No quota is required, but a Reaper who spends too much time on the surface without any ghosts in tow risks censure by his peers.

They rarely have to travel far to find their victims. Every graveyard in the world holds an Avernian Gate, and the ghosts that reside there cannot easily travel to their other Anchors (p. XX). A graveyard that has lost its guard can make for a bountiful harvest, but the wider world is just as rich. In the world of the Chronicles of Darkness, the dead are in eternal surplus.

Reapers often hunt alone; few ghosts can stand up to one. When a ghost is in their grasp, nothing short of a well-prepared krewe can save them. Every Reaper has their own method for capturing ghosts, based on the skills and techniques they had in life. One Reaper may stalk their quarry for hours, forcing them into dead ends. Another may create ephemeral traps and snares. Some Reapers use a riskier method: They remove their Deathmasks and present themselves as psychopomps, ready to guide the dead back to their place of rest. By the time their target realizes that something is wrong, the Reaper has already slipped his mask on.

Whatever form the chase takes, the end is as singular as it is horrific: The Reaper Engulfs (p. XX) his prey. The Reaper's Corpus twists and stretches, ribs unfolding and snapping like a bear trap, or jaws unhinging to swallow the ghost whole. Engulfed ghosts remember little about their time between capture and release in the Underworld. Recovered memories come in fragments: the muted sounds of distant noise, panicked feelings of claustrophobia, the scent of stale water. Reapers hunt down their victim's Anchors and destroy them to prevent the ghost from returning to the world of the living. Others prefer to leave Anchors unmolested, in hopes that an escaped ghost may flee to a more haunted area on the surface and serve as unknowing bait.

When a Reaper feels his task is finished, he returns to the Underworld and vomits up all the dead that he has Engulfed. Some Reapers take pity on these new arrivals and try to guide them towards River Cities or Dominions. Others abandon them entirely and seek out the next batch of ghosts to reap.

In cases where a ghost proves too difficult to consume, or when an Anchor is too large to quickly destroy, Reapers use a different tactic. They Descend (p. XX) the area around the ghost, condemning the land to tumble into the Underworld. Houses and buildings vanish in the blink of an eye. That the living can be caught in this process isn't a problem: Those who don't die in the initial collapse waste away in the Great Below. Other loose ends tie up on their own. The living rationalize the incident as a sinkhole or a freak accident. People with direct ties to the land quickly sicken and die. A sadistic Reaper may Descend an area just to reap the ghosts of people marked for death by the fallout.

Strength in Numbers

Threats to the Underworld can become too large for a single Reaper to handle. An unbound geist escapes in search of a body to hide in. A ghost has too many Anchors to Descend alone. When situations like these arise, it's time to round up a posse and put the problem down for good.

In cases where a ghost has several Anchors that cannot easily be destroyed, a posse will Descend them all at once, with one Reaper at each Anchor. With large enough groups, neighborhoods, city blocks, or even entire districts can be pulled beneath the earth, never to be seen again. The wave of illness and death that results from this can reach far and wide. A large enough number of Reapers could destroy an entire civilization this way, Descending cities and letting the aftereffect

do its work. Whether this has ever actually happened is hotly debated among Sin-Eater historians.

Mechanics

Reapers are ephemeral entities (p. XX). When they aren't wearing their masks, they are Rank 2 ghosts with no special powers or abilities. Putting on a Deathmask grants the Reaper the following:

- **Rank:** The Reaper's Rank increases to 3, 4, or 5. Attributes, Traits, and Maximum Essence increase accordingly.
- **Aspiration:** The Reaper gains "drag ghosts back to the Underworld" as an Aspiration.
- **Numina and Influences:** The Reaper has access to the Engulf and Descend Numina and may gain additional Influences and Numina befitting their new Rank limit.
- **Manifestations:** The Reaper has access to Manifestations according to their new Rank limit.
- **Ban and Bane:** Deathmasks that raise the Reaper to Rank 4 or 5 change his Ban and Bane to a form befitting their new Rank.
- **Essence Bleed:** The Reaper no longer suffers Essence bleed.
- **Donning and Removing:** Donning or removing a Deathmask is an instant action. A Reaper's Deathmask can only be forcibly removed in the presence of the Deathmask's Bane.

Faces of Death

Traits before the slash are the Reaper's Traits without the Deathmask. Traits after the slash are their Traits when wearing the mask. Influences, Numina, and Manifestations in italics are only accessible when the Reaper is wearing their Deathmask.

Desperate Spouse

"Don't worry. I know another place we can look for her."

Background: The happiest day of Andy Yang's life was when he married his high-school sweetheart, Olivia. It would also be his last. Not long after they left the reception, the newlyweds were caught in a head-on collision. Andy saw the other car sway into his lane but turned too late. The airbags failed and Andy slammed into his steering wheel. His last living memory was his wife's look of terror before the impact. The two died together, but Andy awoke in Holly Grove Cemetery alone.

Andy refused to believe that Olivia would move on without him and spent his early years among the dead looking for her. His search led him into the Underworld, to no avail. He became convinced that Olivia must still be on the surface and investigated means of escape. While contemplating drinking from one of the Rivers, he found the Pale Bloom washed up on its banks. Now he stalks both worlds until he can see his wife's smile once more.

Description: Andy is a lanky Chinese-American man in his late 20s, dressed in a well-tailored blue suit lightly spattered with fresh blood. His left eye is swollen shut and his nose is shattered. He always wears a sad smile.

When he dons the Pale Bloom, he becomes the Mourning Groom. His suit transforms into a classic tuxedo. His face is replaced by the blossom of a white rose with small, bright red veins running through each petal. When he Engulfs a ghost, his white-gloved hands burst into deep green vines lined with thorns that drag the ghost, screaming, into the ruined cage of his ribs.

Storytelling Hints: No matter what form he takes, Andy's search for his wife takes precedence. Among the dead, he serves as an information broker, selling rumors to anyone who will pay while sifting the data for any sign of Olivia. When he is reaping, he offers leniency to anyone who can take him to her. It is a lie: He follows up on whatever lead they may give him, but he takes them just the same.

If Olivia's ghost still exists and can be found, she could get him to give up the mask forever. It's also just as likely that she would inspire him to reap with renewed fervor, now that he has someone to provide for.

Virtue: Loyal

Vice: Obsessive

Aspirations: Reunite with Olivia

Rank: 2/3

Attributes: Power 2/5, Finesse 4/8, Resistance 3/7

Influence: Yang Wedding Rings 1, Regret 1, *Chance* 1

Corpus: 8/12

Willpower: 7/10

Size: 5

Speed: 11/18

Defense: 2/5

Initiative: 7/15

Numina: Pathfinder, Innocuous, Sign, Awe, Omen Trance, Speed, Telekinesis, *Engulf*, *Descend*

Manifestations: Twilight Form, Materialize, Avernian Gateway

Essence: 15/20

Ban: Andy dematerializes when he sees a car crash

Bane: Motor Oil

Ambitious Reformer

"I can't do this without you!"

Background: Agathe Richter wanted to change her country forever, and paid the ultimate price for it. The harsh economic climate of Germany after the Great War led her to the Social Democratic Party and later the Communist Party. She took part in what would later be known as the Spartacist Uprising and met her death at the hands of one of the *Freikorps*, voluntary military units ordered by the German chancellor to put down the revolt by force. She was beaten, shot in the stomach, and left to die in one of the buildings she helped seize.

Faced with the bleak oppression of the Great Below, Agathe resolved to transform the world before her into something better. With like-minded individuals, she helped build the small community of New Berlin. The community organized itself into workers' councils, united by a direct democratic system. They collectively farmed their stretch of the Cocytus for survival. A challenge soon arose: the city lost its inhabitants as fast as it gained them, lured away by the temptations of the capitalist River Cities. The merchants in these cities shunned New Berlin for standing against their way of life, and it became clear that spreading the city's political ideas would need some kind of backing force. The krewes Agathe joined either fell apart due to petty bickering or fell to Reapers. When she found the Whispering Shells, she saw an opportunity to subvert the system and bring about the changes she craved.

Now, New Berlin is a significant force in the Underworld. It is a common stop for many of the newly dead, especially those reaped by Agathe herself. Smaller communities using New Berlin's economic model have formed, but none seem to last as long. One day Agathe will reveal herself as a Reaper and begin a new revolution, but she fears that day may be a long time coming.

Description: Agathe is a broad and powerful German woman in her mid-40s. She has a stare that can unsettle even the hardest ghost. She makes no attempt to hide the gunshot wound that bloodies her simple dress, but will occasionally grasp at it, as if it still sends out twinges of pain.

When she drapes the Whispering Shells around her neck, she becomes Ocean's Last Whisper. She transforms into a shadowy humanoid figure with gleaming aquamarine eyes, her features hidden by an intense whirl of thick, blood-red mist peppered by sharp seashells. When she Engulfs a ghost, those seashells slam into its Corpus and fierce winds drag it into the mist.

Storytelling Hints: Agathe genuinely wants to make the Underworld better. Most of the time she doesn't even need to wear her Deathmask to reap: Her assurance that New Berlin is a better life is convincing enough for many ghosts. She couldn't be prouder of her community, but fears for its integrity. While the workers' councils are still important for day-to-day governance, Agathe is not afraid to be the final authority. If the dissent grows too great, Agathe uses her Deathmask to silence all argument.

Lately, Agathe has become frustrated that, after years of spreading the revolution, only New Berlin stands. She believes she has found a solution: She must gain enough power to transform the community into a Dominion. She hopes that increasing her reaping will convince the Chthonic Gods to grant her this boon, but the idea of drinking from one of the Rivers is tempting her. Whether this would transform her into the Kerberoi of her new domain or something more monstrous remains to be seen.

Virtue: Righteous

Vice: Controlling

Aspirations: Transform New Berlin into a Dominion

Rank: 2/4

Attributes: Power 6/12, Finesse 5/9, Resistance 3/9

Influences: Unpublished Essay 2, *Stillness* 2

Corpus: 8/14

Willpower: 8/10

Size: 5

Speed: 16/26

Defense: 5/9

Initiative: 8/18

Numina: Aggressive Meme, Emotional Aura, Seek, Awe, Blast, Implant Mission, Regenerate, Rapture, Left-Handed Spanner, *Engulf*, *Descend*

Manifestations: Twilight Form, Image, Avernian Gateway

Essence: 15/25

Ban: Agathe loses all Willpower when she hears the lullaby “Abendlied.” When she is Ocean’s Last Whisper, the song sends her fleeing back to the Underworld.

Bane: As Agathe, ground concrete dust. As Ocean’s Last Whisper, any object shot by a Gehwer 98 rifle.

Ruthless Judge

“It’s a settled matter. You’re coming with me.”

Background: Judge Bart Evans was the terror of Ripton County. His verdicts were cruel and rumored to be up to the highest bidder. Stories of him thrashing strangers with his cane for acts of perceived rudeness were common. Though he was unmarried, he adopted a daughter near the end of his life and showered her in uncharacteristic kindness.

One night, someone had enough. The culprit has been lost to history, but the county will never forget when Evans Manor went up in flames. The story that the tour guides tell is that Bart smelled the kerosene, ordered his maid to escort his daughter out of the building, and then sat in his study with a glass of brandy as the house burned around him.

Not long after, a rash of freak fires and building collapses plagued Ripton County. Superstitious locals called it “Evans’ Revenge.” They weren’t wrong: Soon after his death, he rose from the Underworld wearing the Raptor’s Milky Eyes. As a Reaper, Bart took to clearing up the areas he considered criminal and uncouth. Today, Bart wreaks havoc beyond Ripton County, sending the dead to the Great Below and subjecting the living to his new brand of judgement.

Description: Bart is a bald, rotund man with a strong nose and chin, which he often attributes to his noble British heritage. His flesh is horrifically burned, but his salt-and-pepper Shenandoah beard is still thick, strong, and the only hair on his body. He carries the ghost of his charred black cane.

The Raptor’s Milky Eyes is a pair of eyeglasses that transforms him into The Grasping Talon. He becomes a man-sized vulture with bloodshot humanoid eyes. When he opens his beak, a human mouth, crowded with rows of teeth, speaks. His wings are feathered with black obsidian. When he Engulfs a ghost, his flint claws spark as they stuff the shade whole into that terrible maw.

Storytelling Hints: Among the dead, Bart presents himself as an arbiter, someone who will resolve disputes between communities and even Dominions for a price. He is known for his wise counsel and fair compromises, a far cry from his living reputation. While he is satisfied reaping stray ghosts, his real passion lies in using his abilities on the living. On the surface, he becomes

obsessed with punishing crimes to the point where both the “guilty” and “innocent” parties find themselves trapped in the Underworld.

He has a special delight in menacing Sin-Eaters. These people are the worst criminals of all: trespassers of two worlds who refused to accept their station in life or death. Simply reacting to their transgressions isn’t enough for him, and he hopes to instill this attitude in a new generation of Reapers. When a posse comes for an unlucky soul, The Grasping Talon can usually be found leading the charge.

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Wrath

Aspirations: Find a respectable protégé

Rank: 2/5

Attributes: Power 2/10, Finesse 5/12, Resistance, 9/14

Influence: Evans Manor 2, *Pyre Flame* 2, *Grave Dirt* 2

Corpus: 10/19

Willpower: 10/10

Initiative: 14/26

Numina: Awe, Blast, Dement, Drain, Firestarter, *Emotional Aura*, *Hallucination*, *Host Jump*, *Telekinesis*, *Engulf*, *Descend*

Manifestations: Twilight Form, Avernian Gateway, Possess, *Materialize*

Essence: 15/50

Ban: Bart must obey a request if it is presented in a legally binding document. The Grasping Talon is only so bound by a document sealed with the original Seal of the County of Ripton.

Bane: As Bart, brandy. As The Grasping Talon, direct descendants of his daughter, Constance Evans. Constance changed her name and moved away after the fire, leaving few if any records behind.

Cannibal Geist

“You seek oblivion? Here I am.”

Background: Reapers share horror stories, just like anyone else. Poses swap cautionary tales of being trapped in the deeper parts of the Underworld or being bound by practitioners of esoteric arts to do their bidding. This story is not only true, it’s about one of them.

She calls herself Mass because that’s the only name that matters to her. She hates talking about who she was before she put on the Deathmask, and no one has ever seen her without it. Those close enough to Mass get pieces of her past. She was involved in an organization called The Theosophic Union, she was disturbingly familiar with the Great Below in life, and she obtained the Body Eternal almost immediately after her death.

Whatever her history, her present is clear: She hungers for her fellow geists, and her appetite is insatiable.

Description: Mass is a free-flowing accumulation of gray ectoplasm. Within her body, the broken Deathmasks of geists she has consumed are visible. Her Engulfing looks like an infection, her ephemeral form leaking into its Corpus and corrupting it. When she communicates with others, she pulls herself into a humanoid shape, combining the shattered masks into a makeshift skeleton. No one has seen Mass without the Body Eternal. She claims that she has never taken her Deathmask off. If she's lying, she could look like anyone.

Storytelling Hints: Mass is a living contradiction of the careful social constructs Reapers settle into. She provides no service to the Underworld, and all their philosophy means nothing to her. The only reason she hasn't eaten her compatriots is out of a need for companionship. That other Reapers know this and defend her anyways could be a severe blow to their greater narrative.

Mass still ventures to the surface to reap, but with two caveats. First, any geists she captures on the surface she does not bring back. She eats them on the spot and their Deathmask becomes part of her Corpus. Second, she only drops off half of her harvest. She keeps the rest inside herself until she arrives at a River. One by one, she forces the ghosts to drink from it, then consumes them after they become geists. A few Sin-Eaters have claimed that their geist was an escapee of Mass's procedure.

There are several possibilities as to who Mass is under the Body Eternal. She may have been an eater of the dead (p. XX) who wished to continue practicing her dark art. She may be the ghost of one of the more predatory creatures of the surface. She might even be a ghost of one of the Bound, hoping that the next geist she consumes will serve as a new Bargain.

Virtue: Patience

Vice: Gluttony

Aspirations: Find a true friend

Rank: 2/5

Attributes: Power 7/15, Finesse 3/15, Resistance 4/15

Influence: Chalices 1, Faith 1, *Disease 3*

Corpus: 9/20

Willpower: 10/10

Size: 5

Speed: 15/35

Defense: 4/15

Initiative: 7/30

Numina: Awe, Drain, Stalwart, *Blast, Dement, Essence Thief, Hallucination, Left-Handed Spanner, Pathfinder, Regenerate, Seek, Engulf, Descend*

Manifestations: Twilight Form, Image, Materialize, *Discorporate*

Essence: 15/50

Ban: Quoting a passage from one of the *Three Steles of Seth* in its original Greek will force Mass to take off her Deathmask. If her Deathmask is off, one only needs to quote a Bible verse, and she must pray.

Bane: Pages from the original print of *A Treatise on the Beyond Lands* by Dora Kensington. If her Deathmask is off, holy water.

Eaters of the Dead

Dig up the bones in Neanderthal ruins, and you'll see the butcher's trade plied by ones who count as mostly human: the cuts left by stone knives, the cracked hollows exposing rich marrow, the gnaw marks on the ribs. Look in the pits of their cousins, our ancestors, and you'll find the same thing. We've consumed the dead since before we called ourselves human. Look at the Donner Party, a crashed airliner, or a starving castle under siege. Say you wouldn't *consider* it in a desperate spot, and be named a liar. The taste for our own flesh lurks within our genes.

The taste of human remains sits within our souls, too, but knives, hands, or teeth cannot consume it. Sin-Eaters know this; they cannot process the Essence of death directly, instead rendering it into the liminal, physical substance of Plasm. The Bargain struck between geist and Bound facilitates this process. But the Bargain isn't the only way to eat the dead. Certain esoteric techniques — mystical, alchemical, technological — can allow an otherwise normal person to devour ghosts, shredding their Essence into slick, milky Plasm suitable for consumption. Once devoured, this Plasm fuels any number of Dread Powers, from staving off death to pursuing a warped sense of transcendence.

Like the Bargain, eating ghosts requires some sort of personalized technique, some ritual unique to the practitioner — and, perhaps, whomever they share their secrets with. Few ghost eaters possess more than one trick, for once you've become acclimated to a way of processing Plasm it's nearly impossible to develop another. But when you have a ready supply of the dead, one trick is all you need.

Ghosts and Shadows

Ghost eaters come from all walks of life; the only true commonality between them is an avaricious hunger and the ability to consume ghosts through some means. Ghosts may be echoes of the living, but they are echoes that think and feel, retaining personhood even in death — a ghost eater must be a person capable of repeated murder. Thus, ghost eaters don't stick together very long, for even among sociopaths, they're outcasts when they hunt openly. Most typically learn their trade from a mentor, who took their secrets from some other gustatory necromancer. Once the mentor's shared all they're willing to, mentor and protégé go their separate ways — they're competing for the same source of power, after all, and the longest lasting techniques prize secrecy and anonymity, preying upon the already unnoticed. Still, these relationships often form rough lineages stretching back centuries or more. No few ghost-eating lineages have come from long-standing krewes whose Bound members regularly practiced ectophagia. Some outlast the Sin-Eaters who inspired them, like the remnant krewes of Viking raiders whose wives drew the ghosts of the slain into beasts to be hunted and consumed once again, Plasm running thick alongside the animal's blood. The practice survives today in Sweden, where the elk is a popular animal to receive a human ghost as passenger on a hunt, driving the animal into irrational fits that render it easy to stalk and kill.

Most ghost eaters end up shedding mortal concerns such as jobs or families, focusing on their hunger as a full-time pursuit. It's rare that one manages to balance both their work and living concerns, although the longest-lived ghost eaters manage to do so in disproportionate numbers. Far too often, they make themselves a target for Sin-Eaters or any number of vengeful entities, including powerful ghosts. Successful ghost eaters study ghostly lore, accumulate weaponry and artifacts with efficacy against the dead, and find a way to temporally profit from their hunger.

Haute Cuisine

Every ghost eater has a *Cuisine*, taught to them by their mentor, that allows them to commit ectophagia (p. XX). Most often, a ghost eater's Cuisine is based on some odd occult principle, though since the 19th century there's been a number of Cuisines based primarily on pseudoscientific principles — treating ghosts as emanations of the ether or Plasmic echoes or self-sustaining psychic waveforms capable of materialization or some other quantum nonsense.

Most Cuisine require the ghost eater to trap ghosts in objects or food, though some allow ghost eaters to touch ghosts and revolve around more direct consumption. Not every Cuisine is equal, and not every Cuisine is inherently functional; if a Cuisine involves a specific location that later becomes inaccessible, the ghost eater will quickly degenerate. The Occult Skill is virtually ubiquitous among ghost eaters; almost all of them are able (and required) to perform exorcisms, abjurations, and bindings (p. XX) during feeding, physically trapping and subduing the ghosts they consume. Many also show cultivated talent in Investigation and Stealth, allowing them to gather information on the ghosts they devour.

Inevitably, ghost eaters turn to escaping their own mortality, and most Cuisines readily accommodate this —many of the oldest and most stable Cuisines began as life-extension techniques, and all Cuisines allow a ghost eater to arrest (and reverse) the aging process on a day-by-day basis. Ghost eaters often prep an Alternate Identity ahead of time to smooth the transition, though the practice is becoming increasingly difficult in the modern age.

Five Cuisines

No matter what their Cuisine is, a ghost eater ultimately draws a ghost within themselves and consumes that ghost's Corpus. It's an act of avarice that bends towards selfishness. Despite this commonality, Cuisines can be radically different:

One ghost eater surveys the changing land around Louisiana's cemeteries for a natural gas company, constantly uploading highly detailed digital files to the company's servers. They're detailed enough to defy the ancient principle that the map *isn't* the land—the code embedded in the map files contains some vital link to the Anchors of the ghosts in the cemeteries, allowing her to consume them remotely at broadband speeds.

Sugarcane is a hardy plant, and the remains of old sugar plantations dot Jamaica, a relic of colonialism. It's strong enough to grow in salinized land, albeit with some serious crop losses. This doesn't bother the ghost eater who keeps ghosts bound within her own special strain of the plant, however; the sugarcane absorbs them even as they're trapped in the salt, rendering the ghosts into Plasm-laden molasses. Despite the inferior crop, she makes a truly spectacular rum.

Many of Milwaukee's hotels show a notable Art Deco influence, with finely veined marble and granite walls. It's easy to miss the veins of salt, ground into the pillars and the support beams. So long as ghosts are caged and bound, the Eater's Cuisine allows him to grasp them and tear them

asunder with superhuman strength, stuffing his face with smoking Plasm that reeks like dirt and old moss. He stalks the hotel hallways, an eternal concierge in a prison of salt and old guilt.

Coney Island has a reputation for being haunted, but only rarely do the ghosts stick around. A ghost eater is responsible for the maintenance of the souvenir penny-press, where the oily, tarnished gears roll and elongate pennies to make cheap souvenirs. Small hollows in the blessed gears snag the Corpus of ghosts who flit by, ripping chunks of them off into the gears and lubricating the stained metal with Plasm. Every Sunday, he replaces the full gears with empty ones, retires to his workshop, and opens his chest to change out the gears in the little clockwork pump he uses for a heart.

A ghost eater works as a clinical therapist for the severely depressed. She has a high success rate, except when she doesn't. So far, no one has noticed that all the patients she fails to treat take their lives at the same bridge, and everyone who sees the strange, attenuating loading coils on the underside of the bridge thinks it's for some part of the city's electrical grid. They don't see her bathing in the radiance of the coils at night, ozone-tinged Plasm surging into her. They don't see the ghosts of the suicides forced to grip the coils by arcane magnetism, their Corpus constantly frying and sloughing off in Twilight until it's a fine mist of Plasm.

New Advantage: Rapacity

Rapacity represents a ghost eater's capacity for storing and manipulating the Plasm she's consumed. Occult or Science may represent the breadth of knowledge she's accumulated in her studies and ghost hunting, but Rapacity is the degree to which her thievery has distended and swollen her spirit.

Rapacity controls the number of Dread Powers the ghost eater can bring to bear and the amount of Plasm she can store in her body. Most don't grasp the mechanics of Rapacity, but as their hunger grows, they know it takes more and more ghosts to sate them.

Elder ghost eaters tend to burn out, or seek illimitable sources of the dead. Some ghost eaters develop unique physiological features, expressing Chthonian mutations. As an eater who must consume the skull and flesh of his prey's head to consume their ghost grows in Rapacity, he'll find his incisors and molars growing tougher and sharper, his jaw elongating to better cleave through bone, until he resembles the carnivorous beast he is.

Rapacity

- **Grande Cuisine:** Eaters of the Dead have a Rapacity trait (1-5) based on the total amount of Plasm they've consumed.
- **Plasm Pool:** Total Plasm pool is determined by Rank. Ghost eaters can spend up to their Rapacity in Plasm per turn.
- **Rapacious Immortality:** Ghost eaters must spend (Rapacity) Plasm per week to arrest the aging process. Failure to do so causes them to age rapidly to their actual, chronological age. Assuming that doesn't kill them, they may spend (Rapacity × 2) Plasm to reverse the process.

The Ghost of Marilyn Monroe

Ghosts oft-remembered gain Essence with greater rapidity than other ghosts. In-game, this can be abstracted as providing a point of Essence per week for every dot of Fame. Such popular ghosts tend to drop a dot of Fame for every decade they're

dead, but despite the surfeit of Essence they're no more powerful than any other ghost, and are thus a prime target for ghost eaters. Consuming a popular ghost grants the ghost eater the ghost's share of Essence in Plasm per week, making them even more attractive. A single celebrity can keep a ghost eater sated for decades.

Rapacity

[FORMAT AS A CHART]

Rank*	Plasm Stolen	Max Plasm/Turn	Dread Powers
1	10	10/1	4
2	70	12/2	8
3	400	14/3	12
4	1,000	17/4	16
5	10,000+	20/5	20

*Each rank acts as a Supernatural Tolerance trait.

Dread Powers

A ghost eater's Dread Powers are emanations of the Plasm they've stolen, and most relate to the nature of the Cuisine in some manner.

[PRODUCTION, FORMAT THESE AS BOXES LIKE THE DREAD POWERS IN THE COFD CORE]

Anchor Eater

What a ghost cared for in life remains long after they do. The ghost eater may identify a consumed ghost's Anchors on sight, and eat the Anchors for one point of Plasm per item Size. This does not give the ghost eater the ability to digest the Anchor, merely absorb Plasm — a prized bottle cap collection may be rich in Plasm, but quite painful on the other end.

Death Inurement

Requires: Rapacity 3. By devouring a ghost killed by anything other than natural causes, the ghost eater becomes inured to that ghost's particular cause of death — gunshots, car accidents, or drowning, for example. Often, a ghost eater preparing for violence will seek out a murder victim, while an eater seeking relief from disease will seek out a former patient in a hospital cemetery. This Dread Power costs (Rapacity) Plasm per week, and a ghost eater may only have one inurement at a time.

Abmortality

Requires: Death Inurement, Rapacity 5. The ghost eater has redoubled his efforts to escape death, and he's been *mostly* successful. He's not unkillable, not truly, but this is the closest he's capable of coming. The ghost eater gains a Bane related to their Cuisine — destroying their gear-heart, injecting them with a chemical that causes an electrical allergy so they can't use their Tesla Death Coils, etc. If they're killed by anything other than their Bane, they simply come back in a later scene, whole, hale and hearty.

Numen

The ghost eater permanently masters a single Numen as a ghost would. He pays all Essence costs in Plasm, while the activation roll is tied to a particular Attribute + Ability combination.

Regeneration (• to •••)

Plasm fills the rents and tears in the ghost eater's wounds. As a reflexive action once per turn, the ghost eater may spend 1 Plasm per dot in this power, provided it does not exceed their Plasm-per-turn limitation, healing one level of lethal or two levels of bashing damage per Plasm.

Know Vice

Ghost eating arises from avarice, and they know their own. By spending 1 point of Plasm, which boils out of a character's mouth, the Eater may identify a character's driving Vice or equivalent Morality Trait.

Learn Memories

The ghost eater devours the Memories of the ghost, taking them for their own (p. XX). The Eater may only hold one set of Memories at a time. These Memories can supplement a Skill roll, but once used, they fade. A ghost eater may suffer from Memory Bleed. Using this Dread Power reduces the Plasm gained from ectophagia by 2.

Supernatural Merit (• to ••••)

Ghost eaters often master abilities related to their Cuisine. They may purchase Supernatural Merits as Dread Powers, with each dot of the Merit counting as a Dread Power. A Science-based ghost eater who boils ghosts with electrical energy could easily develop Electrokinesis, for example. She pays any Willpower costs for using the Merit in Plasm instead.

The Dead Identity

Requires: Learn Memories. So long as they possess a remaining set of Memories, a ghost eater may adopt the mannerisms and superficial identity of the deceased. This doesn't change her physical appearance, but she may choose to use mundane disguise to supplement her now-perfect imitation. Using this Dread Power reduces the Plasm gained from ectophagia by 3.

Mr. Wong, Corpse-Untie-Immortal

Please don't touch that. It's very old and very valuable. Ah, but you're very young, aren't you?

Background: Mr. Wong runs a gardening shop in Manhattan's Chinatown, and he's been old for as long as anyone can remember. He's cranky toward the kids, sympathetic to the middle-aged, and deeply compassionate toward his fellow elderly, even if their age cannot possibly match his own. He's an 1,800-year-old *shijie xian*, a type of Taoist lich. While the kingdoms that would become China were riven by war, the man who would take the name Wong learned the trade of ghost eating from a hedge wizard in the hinterlands of Cáo Wèi. Having survived the wars, Wong indulged in Taoist fortune telling, which revealed his impending death by disease. Arrogantly, he aspired to join the ranks of the immortals to avoid such an ignominious fate. Wong consumed the venerable ghost of his own paternal grandfather, then left a Plasm-soaked shoe behind to die "of disease" in his place; he then took on another identity in a different province, a process that he has repeated for thousands of years. His techniques no longer restore his youth and vigor, but they do maintain his life. He's the spider in the vast Twilight web around Chinatown, plucking the dead at his leisure and consuming them with relish, digesting them with the strange, nodulated organs in his chest that he first noticed sometime during the

Crusades. Wong has seen Sin-Eaters come and go, and he has no reason to believe the current crop will last any longer than those in the past.

Appearance: Just a simple old Han Chinese man, with nothing truly remarkable about him. In public, Wong dresses in whatever clothing is unfashionably typical of the elderly. In private, he prefers silks or sweatpants made of wool or cotton, wearing them loosely. Under an X-ray, Wong is a horror — strange organs cluster around his vitals, and his bones have developed looping scrawls along them, like scrimshaw art on still-living bone. Wong worries these scrawls will spread to his teeth, but he figures he has a few more centuries before it becomes an issue.

Storytelling Hints: Be polite to the elderly — you know how they feel, and besides, it gives you a good lead on ghosts who can sate your hunger and sustain your abmortality. In fact, you're polite to everyone, since politeness costs nothing and impoliteness can cost a great deal. You're powerful and wise enough to know how fragile your hunger makes you, and you haven't lived this long by being stupid enough to stick your neck out and challenge the powers of the dead. You are proactive in identifying potential threats to your nature and skilled at suborning Sin-Eaters with morality issues. Nothing is worth the unlife of a corpse-untie-immortal, and if things get too hot you'll gladly bolt.

Virtue: Enduring

Vice: Arrogance

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 5, Wits 3, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 4, Composure 5

Mental Skills: Academics (Chinese History, Politics) 5, Investigation (Research) 5, Medicine (Chinese Alchemy) 5, Occult (Ghosts) 5, Politics 3, Science (Chemistry) 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Larceny 2, Stealth (Stalking) 3, Weaponry 4

Social Skills: Empathy 4, Expression 1, Persuasion 1, Socialize 1

Merits: Allies 2 (Fellow Abmortals), Fleet of Foot 2, Hoarder 5, Influence 3, Language (many), Sympathetic

Health: 7

Rapacity: 5

Plasm/Per Turn: 20/5

Dread Powers: Abmortality, Death Inurement, The Dead Identity, Anchor Eater, Learn Memories, any relevant Numen

Notes: Mr. Wong has had millennia to perfect his skills and establish contacts. He's not a combatant, though — he hasn't kept living this long by being a fantastic fighter, but by establishing caches and bolt-holes and knowing when to use them judiciously. He suffers from the Obsession (Immortality) Condition, and the tumors that would have originally killed him, and which require placating treatment with medicinal herbs. Wong's Cuisine allows him to trap ghosts in their own Anchors, which Wong then ritualistically buries to "consume" them, slurping up Plasm on his hands and knees as it seeps through the ground in a thick, chalky mist. Every 37 years (his mortal life span), Wong must consume the ghost of a paternal grandfather. Wong must

then cut ties with his old life and create a new one elsewhere; until he does so, he cannot consume Plasm.

Ghost Eaters as Antagonists

Ghost eaters are sneaky, subtle, and bent toward a goal that puts them at odds with any compassionate Bound. They're best used as Old Man Jenkins at the end of a haunting mystery, except that Old Man Jenkins has Plasm in his teeth. Despite their cockroach-like survivability and tenacity, ghost eaters are purely of the mortal world, and won't stand up to a krewe that's dedicated to figuring out why ghosts are disappearing before they should. They physically *can't* stand up to a krewe in open combat, which is why so many simply pack up and leave at the first sign of trouble rather than jeopardizing their abmortal lives.

Conversely, the longest-surviving ghost eaters may know things firsthand about the nature of death and the Underworld that are mere legend to Sin-Eaters. They represent a unique, if abhorrent, source of sympathy and alliance to a krewe willing to tolerate some degree of consuming the dead. These alliances can be cemented if the krewe mythology involves some element of judgment after death or a "might makes right" attitude towards devouring the defeated.

Necromancers

With the right tools, anyone can interact with the dead. Living people can use Ceremonies, Mementos, or even stranger magic to access the power of death. Sin-Eaters sometimes encourage this, especially among the living members of their krewes, as another way to assist the dead. A local priest who performs Pass On at every funeral becomes a blessing to ghosts who wish to move forward, and a woman who learns how to blindfold herself to speak to the dead can receive messages from her ancestors, even when her Sin-Eater teacher can't be around to mediate.

Necromancers, on the other hand, disrupt the balance between the living and the dead, stealing power from the grave with no intentions of giving anything back. Some of them just don't see ghosts as people, and so see enslaving or destroying them as a victimless crime. Others have a more nuanced understanding of death and the Underworld, but their ambitions are hardly inconvenienced by destroying anyone who opposes them, living or dead.

Even if a krewe can find a necromancer and stop him, figuring out what to do next is its own challenge. Killing a necromancer almost never helps: Deathly power gained in life translates into power after death. At best, the krewe finds itself facing the same enemy again, now with a grudge and powerful Numina on his side. At worst, necromancers find new bargains to strike, returning as Reapers, or Bound to geists of their own.

More than Human

The Bound are not the only supernatural beings in the Chronicles of Darkness who can affect the dead. Living mages, elder vampires, dark-dwelling changelings, and creatures stranger still have powers that can affect ghosts, the Underworld, and other forces under the purview of death. Sin-Eaters might call any such practitioner a necromancer, either mistaking them for a living human, or just lumping them in with everyone else who's messing around with ghosts for their own selfish ends.

Graverobbers

Despite Sin-Eaters' best efforts, living people stumble across Mementos all the time. Haunted objects are bought and sold in estate sales and pawn shops, or left to linger in attics or dusty dining-room shelves. Though the living have no easy way to tell a Memento from any other piece of slightly creepy bric-a-brac, sometimes someone stumbles upon the secret of a Memento's effect, and discovers how to use it to their advantage.

Most Mementos are harmless, if a little unnerving, but touching the supernatural doesn't tend to sit well with mortal minds. Memento collectors become jealous and possessive of their charms, or worse, they get greedy. Grave robbing is a common first step for necromancers looking to expand their collection, common enough that "graverobber" is a ubiquitous insult for any living person who owns a Memento. Many collectors are first brought to the attention of Sin-Eaters by frantic ghosts whose most cherished belongings they stole. Others lurk around funeral homes and estate sales, seeking the same trinkets through less illegal methods. The least successful, or the most insatiable, turn to finding more Mementos by ensuring there are fresh deaths around to create them.

To someone with a taste for haunted objects, a Sin-Eater with a Memento collection of her own is a tempting target. Living collectors don't have Plasm or Haunts to back up their hunt, so they make up for it with other forms of power: Money, connections, and training can bring more trouble to a krew than any amount of magic. A well-to-do necromancer might buy out a Sin-Eater's Cenote, hire thieves, or even start legal proceedings to try and reclaim "stolen property" that he wants to own. Graverobbers can also put the effects of their Mementos to good use, even if the greater power of their Keys remains out of their reach, especially when given time and space to prepare. A lamp that turns itself off in the presence of a ghost might simply act to warn the necromancer of an incoming Sin-Eater, but combined with electronic light sensors it could become the trigger for a dangerous trap.

Mortal Obsession

If a breaking point roll caused by a supernatural artifact like a Memento results in failure, a mortal character may gain the Obsession Condition (p. XX) instead of one of the usual options. A dramatic failure may produce a more serious, persistent version of the same Condition.

Dr. Jordan Thames

"There's no need for this to get ugly. Look, how much do you want for it?"

Background: Doctor Thames was already the head of a major pharmaceuticals company when he came across his first Memento: an ornate reliquary owned by an impoverished church. It was said to have the power to prevent decay, and when he tested this gift through experimentation, Thames was shocked to find that it actually worked. The wealthy businessman bribed the pastor into parting with the relic, and devoted his life to finding more objects like it. With enough samples to study, Thames thinks, he can figure out the secret to how they work, and harness their power over life and death.

Appearance: Thames is a lean, imposing man in his late 60s, with salt-and-pepper hair and perpetual frown. He prefers subtle quality over flashy displays of wealth, but is never seen wearing less than a three-piece suit.

Storytelling Hints: Dr. Thames is obsessed with discovering the secret of immortality, and thinks Mementos might hold the key, though seeing what a Sin-Eater can do to recover might motivate him will cause a shift in his priorities. He is a man of science, and considers himself above anyone who holds with “petty superstitions.” Money is his favorite tool for solving problems: first offering to buy someone out, then hiring someone to renegotiate if the offer is refused.

Virtue: Honor

Vice: Greed

Integrity: 6

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Strength 2, Presence 2

Physical Attributes: Wits 2, Dexterity 2, Manipulation 3

Social Attributes: Resolve 3, Stamina 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Computer 1, Investigation 3 (Finding Mementos), Medicine 1, Politics 2 (Big Business)

Physical Skills: Drive 1, Firearms 1, Larceny 2

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Intimidation 3 (Veiled Threats), Persuasion 2, Socialize 1, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Library (Occult) 1, Resources 4, Staff (hired muscle, Intimidation) 3, Untouchable

Willpower: 6

Health: 7

Speed: 9

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Attacks

Handheld Revolver (3 dice, 1 damage, range 20/40/80, clip 6)

Notes: Thames owns at least half a dozen Mementos, but rarely keeps more than one on his person at a time. The rest are scattered among bank boxes and private vaults. His personal favorite, the Ornate Reliquary, possesses the Key of Disease, and the effect of stopping all diseases and decay from advancing so long as it stays within a few yards of the sick person or rotting corpse.

Ritualists

Ceremonies are not innate to the Bound. Anyone who follows the right steps can make the ritual happen, regardless of whether they are alive or dead or even aware of what they’re doing. Most living people who stumble across one do so without context, and with no idea what, or whom, they’re learning to manipulate. More educated necromancers know exactly what they’re doing and, with research and practice, find out how to do it better and more often. Ceremonies take time and energy, but a dedicated necromancer can use them to threaten everything from a peaceful neighborhood up to the entire Underworld.

Even simple rites become dangerous in the wrong hands. A shopkeeper learns how to turn a drop of his own blood and a broken mirror into an irresistible lure for ghosts. He uses it to haunt his competition's business, trapping the dead and terrifying the living. A young man learns to speak with ghosts, coaxes them into telling him their troubles, then turns around and uses what he's learned to bilk their living, grieving relatives.

A different sort of danger comes from necromancers who use rituals by accident, or who don't understand exactly what they're really doing. A priest who thinks he's exorcising demons might actually be exorcising ghosts, forcing them into the Underworld with a rite passed down from generation to generation. A curious teenager decides to try out the creepy instructions she found on the internet, a half-accurate account of a real Ceremony that gets just enough right to open a door, but not enough to close it again. She'd already shared the link with all her friends, and news of her disappearance starts a grisly fad.

The most powerful ritualists find other people to make their sacrifices for them, either the living or the dead. A necromancer who wants to summon something terrible from the Underworld might start by binding several ghosts to her service, then use a second Ceremony to dissolve them into Plasm to fuel the working she really wants to perform. Through trial and error, careful study of the Underworld, or just dumb luck, some necromancers manage to modify a Ceremony to better suit their purposes, creating twisted new rites the likes of which Sin-Eaters would never even consider.

Erica Greenwood

"Stay the hell away, you have no idea what I can do to you now."

Background: Erica never fit in. Eighteen and friendless, she spent her evenings searching for anything strange and new, anything to set herself apart. She got into the occult as a hobby, until something she found on the internet actually worked. The first time she bound a ghost, trying out the instructions in an abandoned building, it was like something out of a horror movie: shaking walls, breaking glass, and horrible unearthly wailing. The second time she bound a ghost, it was in a classmate's backyard.

Unfortunately, Erica is performing the Ceremony she knows incorrectly. What's supposed to be a simple binding Ceremony (Black Cat's Crossing, p. XX) has been turned into an improvised form of torture. Ghosts trapped within her binding circle experience constant agony until they're able to escape, or until the binding ends. So far, the hauntings she's caused have only hurt the dead and terrified the living, but it's only a matter of time until she catches the wrong ghost, or pisses off the wrong people.

Appearance: Erica is a typical teen going through a halfhearted goth phase. She wears baggy black t-shirts and drugstore black eyeliner. Lately she's been favoring skull and ghost imagery, often hand-painted onto plain t-shirts, to silently claim credit for what she's been doing.

Storytelling Hints: Erica doesn't really know what she's doing, but this is the first time in her life she's had power over anything. Telling her that what she's doing is wrong could make her double down just as easily as it might make her stop. When scared, or approached by adults, she runs, looking for safety in either crowds or familiar environments.

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Anger

Integrity: 7

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Strength 2, Presence 1

Physical Attributes: Wits 3, Dexterity 3, Manipulation 3

Social Attributes: Resolve 3, Stamina 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Computer 2, Crafts 1, Investigation 1, Occult 1 (Ghosts)

Physical Skills: Athletics 2 (Running), Brawl 2, Larceny 2, Stealth 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Empathy 1, Expression 1, Persuasion 2, Socialize 1, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3 (Lying to Authority Figures)

Merits: Eye for the Strange, Fleet of Foot 2, Resources 1, Safe Place (booby-trapped abandoned building) 2, Ceremony (Shattered Bone Binding) 2

Willpower: 5

Health: 7

Speed: 12

Initiative: 5

Defense: 5

Attacks

Fists (4 dice, 0 damage)

Ceremony: Shattered Bone Binding (•••) (Manipulation + Subterfuge)

Subject: The nearest ghost within 30 yards.

Duration: Until the water in the bowl used in the ritual is gone (evaporated or spilled, for example).

Symbols: A circle of salt and crushed animal bones. A bowl of clear water. The fresh blood of a living human, willingly given.

Ritual: Fill the bowl of water, then place in the exact center of the circle. Cut into your own flesh, and speak the names of every dead person you can think of until something answers.

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Subterfuge vs. Resistance + Rank

Success: The subject is drawn into the circle, where they experience complete agony, as if every bone in their body were breaking at once. This does not damage their Corpus, but it reduces all actions to a chance die. The ghost's agony is reflected outside the circle: lowering the temperature, breaking glass, and otherwise mirroring their suffering in destructive, uncontrollable ways.

Necromantic Cults

One necromancer is dangerous. A whole group of them is a disaster. Working together, they share knowledge and resources, turning a few fragmentary Ceremonies and stolen Mementos into an organized system of belief and understanding. The oldest and most powerful have existed

uninterrupted for longer than the oldest krewe, since they've never needed to rely on the making of new Bargains to maintain their membership.

Necromantic cults work much like any other Mystery Cult (p. XX) that happens to be organized around matters of life and death. Some could be mistaken for a krewe that's missing its Sin-Eaters, as they seek to answer the same sorts of questions: What is death, how should it make us feel, and what do we do about it? But unlike a krewe, founded by people with one foot in the grave, necromantic cults are run by, and for, the living. Most consider ghosts to be either a danger to fight against or a source of power to harvest, sometimes both at once.

As with other cults, necromancers who work together share resources, amassing wealth, knowledge, and tools to serve the group. Established cults can have dozens of Ceremonies at their disposal, modified over the years to suit their purpose and doctrine. Some of them collect Mementos as well, either to study, use for their effects, or tear apart to fuel their rites. Cult members might gain Merits such as Resources, Contacts, or Allies just for joining, and be initiated into the cult's Ceremonies as they become more trusted. Some large cults keep their newer members in the dark about Ceremonies on purpose, using them to make the sacrifices needed for large rituals without ever teaching them how to perform them on their own.

The Church of Death's Shards

This necromantic cult was founded in the late 1960s, by a group of men who'd witnessed a krewe doing battle with an unusually vicious Reaper. The founders all had a clear view as a wounded Sin-Eater knit her flesh back together and pulled a horrific-looking mask off the ghost. In trying to make sense of what they'd seen, the founders came to one main conclusion: That woman had power over life and death, and they wanted some, too. Misunderstanding just what had occurred, they linked the mask she pulled off the ghost to the life she had restored.

Nowadays, the Church of Death's Shards consists of some three dozen members, spread out across several cities. They collect Mementos religiously, believing each to be a piece of death itself. With enough of them, they believe they can become death's masters.

The cult has believed since its inception that ghosts are evil, extrapolating from the terrible Reaper its founders once witnessed. Recently, the cult's last surviving founder has stumbled across something new: an old ritual that claims it can destroy any ghost. Having seen ghosts leave behind Mementos before, the church is preparing for a glorious new crusade: one that will rid the world of evil, and win them some new prizes at the same time.

The Church of Death's Shards

Initiation Benefits

- New recruits are taught everything the church knows about its ghostly foes. They gain an Occult specialty in Ghosts.
- Church members take care of one another. Established recruits gain one dot of Contacts or Resources.
- Having honed their perception through rigorous training, initiates gain the ability to recognize Mementos on sight, just like Sin-Eaters.
- Priests of the church are given access to the cult's Memento collection. Each is entrusted with one Memento of their own, and may borrow others for cult business.

••••• The inner circle of the church are researching a new Ceremony for their own purposes. They have access to a variation of the Ghost Trap Ceremony (p. XX) that allows them to harm the trapped ghost with physical weapons.

Enemy Bound

For some, the Bargain is a second chance, the opportunity to return and redo. For others, it is simply their due, a just and righteous universe delivering what is deserved. Maybe they were born into privilege and see the Bargain as just another part of that. Maybe, after a lifetime of struggle against bullies, the Bargain is karma's radioactive spider bite of reward. Whatever the interpretation, the bottom line is this: not all Bound are on board with the idea of helping the dead find peace. After all, what about *their* needs? Who's going to help *them*?

Good things come to those who help themselves. Or something.

And that's not even selfish. Something inspired every Bound to hang on, to cling fiercely to the world, to cry out for a second chance. It's easy to say that this is like calling to like, that it's some kind of merging, but maybe it's a cry for something else altogether. Maybe it's the simple will to power.

Bound who reject the idea of the Sin-Eater naturally come into conflict with krewes working to help the dead, and when that happens, the laws of nature favor the strong, the bold, the beautiful. Human law and ritual, after all, were created to elevate the undeserving. But it's a whole new ballgame now. This is the beyond, and here? We do not serve. The dead do.

Archetypal Mirrors

Not all Bound — maybe not even a majority — ascribe to the krewe archetypes common among Sin-Eaters. Many find themselves on a different path, one that sets the living above the dead or sees Twilight as a resource to be tapped. Some are ignorant or misguided; others are as fiercely committed as any Sin-Eater, and work fervently to bring their visions of the Underworld to life.

Elysians

Death is for the little people.

Death may be the great equalizer, but with enough money and power, it's possible to keep it at bay and look great in the process. High-end skin creams, personal trainers, exotic vitamin regimens, and all the best medical care go a long way toward staving off the end, and if the worry gets to be too much? There's a pill for that. Whatever the problem, money provides the solution. How sweet it is.

Still, the end comes for us all eventually, though the drive to transcend the petty problems of mortals leaves the Elysians ripe for something more. For them, death is not the end, but simply *an* end, a stop along the road to something even greater. For the ancient Greeks, the Elysian Fields were the home of distinguished souls, the best and brightest, the cream rising naturally to the top of society, but they weren't the ultimate prize. Those souls who achieved entrance to the Elysian Fields could choose to be born again, in the hopes of attaining something even greater: eternity in the Isles of the Blessed. Though Elysians arise from various backgrounds, and have myriad religious beliefs (or none), they share this unique idea of an afterlife reserved just for them. It's no more than they deserve.

Elysians aren't much interested in cooperating; they may have accepted the Bargain, but they never agreed to a relationship on equal footing. They're at their best when controlling their geists, trading Synergy for Tyranny and ruling with an iron fist. The geist's reason for pulling the Elysian back from the brink doesn't matter, because it all comes back to the same thing: something more, something extra, was just the natural outcome. Expected. And it isn't that they don't know or understand their geists. It's that they just don't care. Maybe they'll get around to it eventually, once the rest of the business is handled. Just like those last-minute charitable donations at the end of the year.

Ceremonies: Ishtar's Perfume (•), Ghost Trap (••), Black Cat's Crossing (•••)

Mysteries

Dawn's Veil is a detached krewe dedicated to the pursuit of beauty and pleasure above all else. Most members of Dawn's Veil began their second lives as members of other krewes, but boredom with the plebeian concerns of the common Sin-Eater drove them out in search of something else. Muses of the Veil particularly appreciate haunts and block other krewes from coming into those spaces. "Haunting," says Madeleine Lapp, a Muse of the highest order, "is beautiful in its own way. The chaos. The pain. The struggle of mortals to understand sensory evidence the mind rejects. What could be more thrilling?"

The Seventh Empire is a small secret society who'd simply rather forget they're Bound at all. Marked by a strict, tyrannical control of their geists and a dedication to minimalist ceremonies, The Seventh Empire foresees a future collapse of the separation between the Underworld and the realms above, and they just aren't interested. Members work to maximize wealth and power for one purpose: to oppose those who would disrupt the delicate spiritual balance.

Old blood, though not as old as they pretend, **Les Niveaux Supérieurs** are a small krewe in the Eastern U.S. with ties to American political dynasties. They're great contacts if you need someone to cover an incident...if you can afford the cost.

Bonepickers

Death is a gold mine.

The upstarts and flashy entrepreneurs of the Underworld, Bonepickers wheel and deal, trafficking with necromancers and eaters of the dead. Nothing is off-limits if the profits are high enough. The lust for power does not exist in a vacuum, however. Like anyone else, the Bonepickers have hopes, desires, dreams — and crippling insecurities that keep them awake at night. When they win, it's because they deserve it. When they lose, it's because someone is out to get them, and they know how to hold a grudge.

But there is an emptiness that lurks under the drive. Ambition is a monstrous hunger never satisfied. Scratch the surface of hope and reveal a bottomless fear. Every desire springs from envy, the need not only to have, but to take. Every dream may turn on a dime, only to become a nightmare. For those on the fringe of the fringes, never quite fitting in anywhere else, this second life is one long, precarious gamble. Everything is on the line, and they know no one wins forever. They are dangerous, but predictable: They'll always go for broke, at any cost.

Ceremonies: Dead Man's Camera (•), Ghost Trap (••), Bloody Codex (•••)

Mysteries

Founded in the 1980s in New York, **The Metis Society** was founded by three real-estate developers who went down in the same small plane. If they have a religious base, it's the worship of accumulation; their krewe headquarters looks like Trump Tower on steroids, but what the Metis Society lacks in taste, they make up in skill. They work with Bound all over the world, helping to secure property, space, and security — for a small fee, of course. And that fee isn't always paid in cash.

The Golden Stair is a rising young krewe headquartered in Poland, capitalizing on political anxiety to make money and collect mementos. Collectors, known more for their determination than anything else, they will pursue what they want at all costs.

Thanatologists

“Faith? Why would I want to stop at not knowing?”

Death is a puzzle. Thanatologists are a recent phenomenon. Once simply “free agents” who didn't quite fit in anywhere, these separatists began coming together and forming loose krewes of their own. So what sets them apart? Among other things, their stoic refusal to participate in anything that resembles close community... even down to communing with their own geists.

After all, the Bargain doesn't guarantee any respect for the trappings of the world of the dead. Thanatologists aren't here to wash away sin for the sake of making the world a better place; Thanatologists are scientists, studying a new and strange field of academia. They traffic in information, leveraging technology, research, and their geists to amass data and to exploit the strange powers of the Underworld to their own advantage. Once they think they know everything about a situation, they might act... and they might simply observe. This, for them, is worship. These are their practices. They may call themselves skeptics, but self-reflection was never their strong point anyway.

A deep rift, a fundamental mistrusting angst, haunts the heart of Thanatologists. They never quite believed in an afterlife, in ghosts as echoes or leftovers or anything else, much less the actual spirits of real people. Even when they died, when they were saved, they were waiting for the other shoe to drop. For the bucket of pig's blood. For the ring of bullies to jump out of the shadows and yell “Gotcha!” In a way, they are still waiting. Their retreat from traditional krewes is just another part of that. If you never go to the party, the party can never turn on you.

They're not really villains, they're just trying to find a way to explain the unexplainable, and no information is off limits. Thanatologists maintain vast repositories of data, from credit-card numbers to random emails. They'll spend weeks searching out a century-old ghost haunting the old mill, learn what binds her to the living world, and then they'll file it away, another part of a carefully curated system. Every file is a badge earned. A potential weapon. A tool for the right situation. Some have compared this tendency to the Mourners, but Thanatologists aren't interested in helping the forgotten — or anyone else — without a good reason. And they're certainly not interested in debating the vagaries of preservation versus cultural appropriation.

Ceremonies: The Diviner's Jawbone (•), Skeleton Key (••), Bloody Codex (•••)

Mysteries

The Nameless operate on the fringes of the hacktivist collective Anonymous. While they avoid the pranks for pranks' sake, the Nameless are deeply involved in

the efforts of Anonymous to expose criminals, killers, and rapists, and often sell the information gained from their connections to Sin-Eaters struggling with unsettled spirits. Because the Nameless are rarely in physical proximity to one another, they have developed a number of solo Ceremonies, or Ceremonies strengthened by performance over video and audio chat.

The Society for the Preservation of Digital Artifacts is made up of collectors, and boasts a vast collection of information on Ceremonies, the Underworld, and Mementos. Members take an academic approach to study of the afterlife and Underworld, focusing on legendary krewes, the mechanics of Plasm, and maximizing the power of their geists. While they are often distracted and non-confrontational, they are rumored to be very powerful; only initiates able to leverage their geists in a controlled manner rise in the Society's ranks.

Gatekeepers

Death is as it should be.

Sometimes fascination turns to obsession. What starts as opinion settles into stone. So it is with the Gatekeepers. Deep exploration of the Underworld turned to a determination to preserve it, to the idea that all the light and darkness that ever was existed for a reason. As they changed, so too did their relationships with their geists. The Gatekeepers grew colder, less concerned with resolution than with simple persistence. What already is must remain. So mote it be.

For the Gatekeepers, life after life is simple, or it would be if so many others weren't standing in their way. The universe is a system, a machine, and for all the parts to function properly, well, they need to be allowed to *function*. True status quo warriors, they dedicate their time to encouraging everyone to leave well enough alone. Or they would, if allowed, but with everyone else sticking their noses where they don't belong, the Gatekeepers have learned they need to work to keep a balance by any means necessary.

At least, that's how the Gatekeepers see themselves. They're the good guys. Everyone else suffers from the disease of ego, but not them. They *see*.

Gatekeeper krewes can be dangerously unpredictable. Some are merely passively resistant; these krewes maintain synergy with their geists and aren't usually keen to start fights, but their calm detachment can't be trusted. They may seem laid back, but these krewes often specialize in disruptive Ceremonies meant to unsettle, to interfere, or to summon other enemies who'll do the work for them while the Gatekeepers kick back with their feet up.

Others are more militant. These Gatekeepers trade synergy for an iron-fisted control of their geists, with no thought for the inherent hypocrisy of subsuming their own Bargains. They're working in service to a greater good, and for them, that is enough.

Ceremonies: Death Watch (•), Ghost Trap (••), Crow Girl's Kiss (•••)

Mysteries

The Scales of the Heart is an Aztec-inspired krewe that believes in order to maintain the delicate balance between worlds, humans and ghosts must periodically be sacrificed. How better to achieve this than through other Bound? The Scales spend months purifying themselves and potential

sacrifices through ritual use of mild poisons, fasting, and extensive ceremony, and all members must be present at a sacrifice lest they become the next on the altar. The krewe's practices remained secret for well over a century until an escaped Sin-Eater revealed all they'd witnessed, and other krewes nearly wiped out the Scales in retaliation. Since the turn of the century, however, they've been slowly building membership back up, and the Scales have become a force again in West Texas, where they relocated in 2005.

After Lucas Lee woke up from a car crash, he discovered his strict Lutheran belief in the inerrancy of the Bible couldn't quite explain the new life he'd been given. He founded the **Evangelical Church of the Beyond**, a Missouri Synod-inspired krewe dedicated to fitting their experiences as Bound into the Bible through extensive explanatory notes and ritual. Their annotations become sacred texts, and they defend the order of things as they understand it through their militant arm, the Silver Knights of the Gate.

Kerberoi

Every Dead Dominion has a Kerberos to enforce the Old Laws. Nobody knows whether the Kerberoi wrote the Laws, or the Laws birthed the Kerberoi — they're the chicken and the egg, but that doesn't stop every Sin-Eater from having a theory. Most agree that Kerberoi must be a natural product of the Lower Mysteries, vital as they are to the functioning of the Dominions, but a few Sin-Eaters mutter of lost Bound corrupted by the Mysteries, trapped there as punishment or simply by bad luck, molded to the will of the Dominions they now serve.

Wherever they come from, Kerberoi are as old as the Dominions they guard, and just as varied. Each is a creature bound to its Dominion, and each is dedicated to enforcing its Old Laws, but that's where the similarities end. Every Dominion shapes its Kerberos into a fitting denizen, a symbol of justice and fear in keeping with the landscape it watches over, and Kerberoi range from the unsettlingly innocuous to the viscerally terrifying.

Though they're some of the most vicious denizens of the Underworld, Kerberoi are easy to avoid — if Laws aren't broken, the Kerberoi aren't interested. They have no motivation outside the pursuit and punishment of lawbreakers, and ignore any conflict or transgression that remains within the bounds of the Laws they enforce. Kerberoi are completely removed from the politics of their Dominions and the ghosts that reside in them, doling out punishment regardless of Rank and standing.

On the other side of that coin, Kerberoi are impossible to reason with. A Kerberos doesn't care if you broke its Old Laws for a good reason. It *especially* doesn't care if you didn't realize you were doing anything wrong. They have their atavistic drive to hunt down and punish, and anything outside of that is beyond their scope.

When they're not hunting, each Kerberos tends to have a favorite place to settle in its Dominion. It's often a place it can use its physical assets to augment its natural Dominion Sense — assuming it has any other way to survey the world around it. Groups of Bound can pass by a Kerberos at rest with no repercussions, as long as doing so is in accordance with Dominion Law, and they rarely seem bothered by the presence of Sin-Eaters, in particular. Peaceful Kerberoi are

not necessarily any more unsettling than the rest of the Underworld around them; frequent travelers often appreciate a Kerberos' predictability in the midst of chaos. A Kerberos' Laws might look nothing like the laws back home, but the principle is there, the familiarity of cause and effect to help ground visitors from topside.

Crime and Punishment

When a Kerberos comes into existence, it knows its Old Laws the way an animal knows how to breathe. It knows every intricacy of its Domain, always instinctually aware of the goings-on in its territory. If a Law is broken within the borders of its Dominion, it immediately knows which Law it was, who did it, and where they are.

Despite this local omnipotence, Kerberoi are still single creatures, and they're limited by their bodies. Once a Kerberos senses a lawbreaker, it still needs to physically hunt them down. It might be nearby, or, as is often the case with larger Dominions, it might be on the other end of its territory, dealing with another transgression. Some Dominions have multiple Kerberoi to help share the load, but even then, a lucky Sin-Eater might manage to escape the Dominion before they can be caught.

Once a lawbreaker has left a Kerberos' Dominion, it no longer has an exact lock on their location, only a general impression of how far they've gone, and in which direction. Kerberoi will follow their quarries outside their own borders, but they draw power from their home Dominions, and lose strength the longer they're away — not to mention the risk of other Laws being broken while they're away on a chase. A Kerberos gives up a hunt outside its borders if it grows too weak to keep pursuing, or if it senses another lawbreaker within the borders of its Dominion. That doesn't always mean the lawbreaker is home free, however; some Kerberoi have agents to help them pursue escapees, anything from Reapers to other Bound who hunt down lawbreakers as punishment for their own lawbreaking.

But for all that escape is possible, it's rare. Kerberoi are built to catch their prey. If they're not distracted by another trespass, they will track a lawbreaker to the edges of the Underworld. Though they can't leave the Underworld themselves, they'll send their agents topside to drag the lawbreaker back for their discipline. And an angry Kerberos is not open to negotiation.

Kerberoi don't kill as punishment if they can avoid it — after all, many of the creatures they punish are already dead. Instead, they assign a task or limitation, something that will repeatedly hinder the lawbreaker and force them to regret their crime. Kerberoi are in the business of teaching lessons, making examples, reminding every witness exactly how hard the hammer of justice falls in their Dominion. A dead Sin-Eater can't pass along their warnings.

When it comes to discipline, each Kerberos has its own internal logic, and to anyone else, the link between crime and punishment can seem tenuous at best. But once the punishment is assigned, the lawbreaker feels it like an itch. They're physically unable to resist following the Kerberos' demands. The task might not make sense, and it might not be something the lawbreaker would ever do of their own volition, but for as long as the Kerberos deems necessary, it's compulsory.

Because Kerberoi exist to serve their Dominions, their strengths and abilities are based entirely around the complexity of the Old Laws they uphold. A Kerberos with more Laws to enforce has a wider range of abilities by necessity. This doesn't mean a Kerberos with fewer Laws is less

dangerous — a Kerberos with only a handful of Laws to worry about can become a single-minded machine, relentless as it exacts the same perfected punishment over and over again.

Larger Dominions have more laws governing them, and more powerful Kerberoi protecting them. Sin-Eaters traveling through the Underworld won't encounter the most formidable Kerberoi right away; those live in the sprawling, shifting Dominions closest to the Ocean of Fragments, difficult to find and almost impossible to escape without breaking at least one Law.

Numina

All Kerberoi possess two Numina unique to their kind.

Dominion Sense

A Kerberos' Old Laws are engraved in its very being. It has complete knowledge of their every intricacy, and can out-loophole any Sin-Eater trying to break them. It also has omnipotent awareness of its Dominion, and is aware the instant any Law is broken. It is physically drawn to the trespasser, and will hunt them across the Dominion. Even after the lawbreaker has left the Dominion, the Kerberos knows how far they have traveled, and in which direction. If a Sin-Eater attempts to mask their presence in some way, the Kerberos may engage in a Clash of Wills (p. XX).

Enforcement

When a Kerberos catches a lawbreaker, it attempts to punish them without exception. The Kerberos spends a point of Essence and rolls Power + Finesse, contested by the lawbreaker's Resolve + Synergy. If the Kerberos succeeds, they impose the Lawbreaker Condition on their target.

The Moth

"It never stops moving, like a dog waiting for you to throw a ball. If you didn't know better, you'd think it was excited to see you. Who knows? Maybe it is."

Background: The Cavern of Flame is straightforward: Visitors must follow their course until its end, and they must guide others with the knowledge they gain. The two Laws might seem simple, but a Sin-Eater traveling through the Cavern must take care to obey them to the letter. A step into the dirt off their chosen trail is enough to catch the Moth's attention, and what might seem like a path's end to a casual observer might only be a bend in the road. Withholding any relevant information in response to a question is withholding knowledge, no matter how embarrassing it may be to tell the full truth. Perhaps because it has so few Laws to enforce, the Moth is notoriously picky, and if it understands bargaining, it doesn't give any indication.

Appearance: The Moth is impossibly large, with 12 thin legs and two pairs of wings. Its body is long and finely furred with no discernible head; three pairs of legs face toward one end, three toward the other, each triplet with its own corresponding set of wings. The Moth might seem like two creatures smashed together if its halves didn't cooperate so eerily well, scuttling back and forth in perfect synchronization.

Storytelling Hints: Despite its size, the Moth is unsettlingly playful in its chases, hovering above its quarry at dizzying heights before it descends. When it does catch a lawbreaker, it gives punishments that will bolster its Dominion — a Sin-Eater may have to spend a month lighting

every candle she sees, with each little fire appearing in the Cavern of Flame once it's burned out topside.

The Scribe

"You think everything in the Vault comes from volunteers? Even lawbreakers have knowledge to impart."

Background: The Vault's Old Laws are long and complex. Visitors must always leave a book exactly where they found it, they may not copy or otherwise document the texts they read, and they can't consult the same text twice during the same visit, just to name a few of the dozens of Laws that govern the Dominion. When a Sin-Eater inevitably tries to sneak a book out or pull a scroll back off the shelf to double-check their memorization, the Scribe appears, clicking impossibly fast down the aisle, a whirlwind of eyes and ink.

Appearance: Matron of the Vault, the Scribe is deceptively small. From a distance, it looks something like a spider, perhaps with a few extra legs, but closer inspection reveals that each of its dozen limbs is tipped with a fountain pen. It leaves delicate spots of ink behind as it walks among the endless shelves in the Vault, peering at the books in its care with its hundreds of dark eyes, covering its round body and pointing out in every direction. Bound who frequent the Vault insist that every time they visit, the Scribe has more eyes, nestled together and unblinking.

Storytelling Hints: For even the smallest infraction, the Scribe insists on an exhausting punishment: it demands that lawbreakers add to its collection. They might find themselves tasked with bringing every text on archery they can find back to the Vault, one at a time, over the course of a year. They might be forced to obsessively document their lives, with their journal added to the Vault when their period of punishment is over. The Scribe might insist the lawbreaker bring it some precious document from the material world, regardless of that document's value, or how well its owners protect it.

A Brighter Morning – Interlude II

The Patel house, which Mark had walked through only yesterday, was completely gone. In its place was a large hole shaped like a perfect circle, as if someone had taken a knife and carefully carved the property from existence. This was not too far from the truth.

Mark had seen the aftermath of Reaper attacks before, but he had never seen one leave such a dramatic mark so close to other homes in the neighborhood. Shattered glass and twisted metal spread around parts of the hole's circumference, the remnants of the cars that had parked around the house. A crowd was forming, talking and snapping pictures.

"Saint," Mark said, "We've got to split this crowd."

Mark patted his chest. The Open-Throated Saint pressed her hands on it and climbed into his body. Once she was fully inside him, Mark stepped out of his car. He violently coughed, expelling a thick cloud of mist around him. When the cloud dissipated, he was gone, at least in a physical sense. His body shifted into an invisible and intangible state, like the ghost he would have become if not for the Saint's intervention. He was one with her now, and his mind buzzed with her feelings. She couldn't get the image of the Tycoon's geist out of her mind and could barely contain the desire to make him pay.

“Easy, easy,” Mark said. He looked around. The lights from the phones of the crowd were harsher and wider spread. It illuminated the congregation, who were hiding in what remained of the backyard, underneath a partially uprooted tree. It would only be a matter of time until the crowd noticed them.

Mark moved into the crowd. “Let’s make a scene.”

Walking through people was more difficult than ghosts made it seem. Maintaining the integrity of a ghostly body as it moves through living flesh needs a strong sense of self and a keen focus on the task at hand. It took weeks of practice for Mark to master it.

For most of the crowd, having a ghostly being walk through them was enough. The sensation felt like being brushed by thin threads of viscous jelly, and the human mind was momentarily exposed to the tempest of heightened emotions that lay within its mind. Withstanding that kind of sensory overload needed a mental fortitude that the usual bystander couldn’t muster. For the rest, it was simply a matter of tossing the metal and glass around the hole into the air and then into the hole once people started running.

Once they dispersed, the Open-Throated Saint tore herself out of Mark’s chest. He gasped, taking in air for the first time since he became a ghost. He knelt down and grasped the dirt as he became solid again.

He looked up to see that the congregation was in bad shape. Some of them, like Yennifer and Walter, were badly cut. Scott, one of the newest members, made his robe into a makeshift sling to hold his broken arm. Kamala, heavily bruised herself, distributed medical supplies from a half-torn emergency bag.

The Golden Tycoon’s words swam in Mark’s mind: *Do you know how many medical bills you made us pay?*

He frowned. “What happened to the Patels? Where’s Leah?”

For a moment, the congregation said nothing. Then, Kamala spoke up. “They’re gone. The Reaper dragged them down. It took the ghost, too.”

Mark shut his eyes. “Oh.”

The Open-Throated Saint flew into a rage, swiping at empty air. In his mind’s eye, Mark saw a woman in a religious habit sobbing alone in a field. She tore her coif off her head and beat it against her breast.

He opened his eyes. The members of the congregation were pulling themselves up.

“I felt it coming,” Scott said as he adjusted his sling, “But before I could even say anything it attacked.”

“We weren’t ready,” Kamala’s voice hitched. “We tried to fight back but...”

“It’s okay,” Mark said. His geist calmed at his words. “You did what you could. You’re here, and that’s what matters.”

“But...” Kamala started to protest but Mark shook his head.

“Don’t beat yourselves up.” Mark pulled Yennifer to her feet. “It knew it wasn’t going to win a fair fight, so it had to hope for an ambush.”

Just like Fifth Street. That's what Mark wanted to say, even though he knew it wasn't true.

"Remember, when we put our own to rest, they think that we're spitting in their eyes. That's because we are. When we tell them that there's more to all this than just sadness and decay and fighting over little bits of trinkets, they say we're tearing their world apart. *That's because we are.*"

His speech was improvised but the words weren't exactly his. Leah had said something like that to him before he joined the church, back when he was just a vengeful young man trying to get back at the business partner who poisoned him.

"So, we're going to pull through this." He took a moment to look every member of the congregation in the eye. "And we're going to come back stronger than ever. Leah knows what she's doing. I've seen her pull through worse. She's going to save them, she's going to come back, and we're going to have our Brighter Morning."

His gut churned with doubt, but he didn't care. They believed him. For now, that was good enough.

"Come on," he said, "let's get back to the car. It's gonna be a tight squeeze, but I think it'll fit everyone. Scott, you ride shotgun with me. I don't want that arm getting any more messed up than it already is. Anyone need help walking?"

"I think we'll be fine," Kamala said. "Someone needs to tell Oumil."

"Once I'm sure you're all getting seen to, I'll let her know." Mark flashed his phone light into the hole, and saw a dirt bottom several feet deep. "Looks like it won't leave a Gate."

"Thank God for that," Scott said. "I don't want to see another one these for as long as I live."

In the distance, Mark heard the sound of sirens. "Aw, hell."

"So, what are we going to say to them?" Kamala asked. "We need an alibi, right?"

"It's not like we can blame it on ghosts." Scott chuckled.

"You sure about that?" Mark stretched his back.

Scott raised an eyebrow. "What?"

Mark waved the congregation away.

"Stand back," he said. "If I do this right, we're not going to need to say anything 'til we're at the hospital. Watch and learn."

He patted his chest. "Saint?"

Chapter Six: The Quiet Places

I, too sing America.

I am the darker brother.

They send me to eat in the kitchen

When company comes,

But I laugh

And eat well,

And grow strong.

Langston Hughes, “I, Too, Sing America”

No story happens in a vacuum, and doubly so the stories of the Bound, born as they are from strife and tragedy. Stories are born in specific places and specific times, and much like the Bound themselves, they’re born out of conflict, loss, and determination.

In the Room Where It Happens

Washington, D.C., USA 1968

1968 changed the world. Yes, it’s true of every year in every decade, but the impact of what happened during the 1960s is still felt today, full of tragedies and triumphs. The 60s are like that kid in the back of the class that slung one liners at teachers and left them stunned. The decade had the Rights Movements (Civil, Women, LGBT, Latino and Indian), the Vietnam War, *Loving v. Virginia*, *Star Trek* (with the first interracial kiss on television), and the tragic assassinations of great leaders fighting for change. The decade saw hippies, the March on Washington, riots that left communities reeling for decades, and the Space Race putting the first man on the moon. There can be no change without holding onto hope in the darkness that we can make the world a better place. The 1960s highlight that struggle against the impossible to bring progress.

History

Washington, D.C. is the embodiment of stunted transformation, corruption, revolution and power. It was a sleepy little backwoods pit stop that became the capital of the United States. The seat of power for a country dedicated to freedom, it is the only city whose citizens are denied a meaningful voice in the republic, as they still don’t have full voting representation in Congress. The leadership structure of the city has changed as, in 1967, it replaced its Board of Commissioners after 80 years, changing to a mayor-commissioner, currently Walter Washington.

After many compromises by the founding fathers in 1790, Washington was conceived as the new seat of power, moving the capital from Philadelphia in 1800. The north wanted Revolutionary War debts paid by the government, the south wanted slavery for their agricultural needs and lust for profit over human decency. Washington was between the two regions, created by taking land from Virginia and Maryland.

Washington remained a city of a few thousand souls who returned to their homes elsewhere in the summer until the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. The influx of soldiers and need for additional federal government caused a population boom, but the infrastructure couldn’t support the expanding needs. The city grew painfully over the ensuing decades, with new governmental agencies and urban renewal targeted at the underclass, shuffling them all to one section of town.

World War II changed Washington into what it is today, a seat of power on a global scale. The war boom increased population, jobs, and housing demands, with 200,000 people rushing to Washington for work. This migration, of sorts, forced minorities out of their jobs, out of their homes, and onto the streets. After the war, conditions did not improve substantially, and people of color were locked into the lower class.

Rocketing into the 60s, Washington is a hotbed of activism, from the injustices it placed on the backs of the underclass to the failing propaganda war over the Vietnam conflict. The city has one of the nation’s largest African-American populations due to blacks fleeing the south during the Great Migrations of the 1910s.

Everyone knows that something is on the wind. Every day, people leave their homes, pick up signs and protest on the National Mall. Walking down the Mall provides a front-row seat to Students for a Democratic Society providing teach-ins for all who will listen, protesting the war. In January, the government's propaganda machine collapses, with the Tet Offensive exposing the truth of the war: No end is in sight. Shocking the nation, more and more protesters take to the streets, including many Vietnam War veterans who arrive on crutches and in wheelchairs, throwing away their medals on television.

Being the seat of the government creates a lush middle class for those considered the average American. White unemployment hovers around 4%, although black unemployment is more than twice that. Even though the Civil Rights Act was signed four short years ago, segregation is the pervasive law of the land. Blacks are trapped in ghetto neighborhoods thanks to the oppressive housing laws established before '68, forcing them into the southern quarter of the city, largely into dilapidated homes. Few wish to sell to them, and even when they do, outrageous contracts, where a family can lose their home for missing a single payment, are enforced. This redlining limits the education opportunities that blacks can receive, as schools are built along neighborhood lines. With so-called "white flight," white parents placed their children in private schools. This practice escalated in the late 50s after schools were integrated, turning most of the public schools into black majorities. These schools do not receive any federal grant money.

The mounting frustration continues, as two-thirds of the population of the city is black but 80% of the police force is white. Police militarization is in full swing to oppress the civil rights and anti-war protesters. The boiling pot is near erupting. Washington explodes into riots for six days on April 4, 1968, after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King.

After the riots, the city slowly moves toward a new normal. President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (Fair Housing Act), on April 11, 1968, which prohibits discrimination for sale, rental, and financing of housing based on race, religion, national origin, or gender — a small step forward on a long road.

1968 spins on as Washington recovers from the riots, the National Guard units recede into painful memories, and activists go back out onto the street to continue the slow march of change. Looming on the horizon, Richard Nixon will become president, the first metro transportation system will open in few short years, and the Vietnam War will come to a messy end.

Washington, D.C. embodies what Sin-Eaters are struggling to find: the best way forward, one step at a time.

Geography

Washington D.C. is broken down into four unequal quadrants based on their direction from the compass set into the floor of the empty tomb of George Washington under the Capitol. It was rumored that the city's street system was made to confuse invaders and intimidate foreign nationals.

Northwest is the largest of the quadrants, making up roughly a third of the city and the most prosperous of the four. The lines of demarcation are apparent when one enters Northwest. A few of the main neighborhoods are DuPont Circle, Georgetown, Embassy Row and Cleveland Park.

Northeast contains parts of Capitol Hill, and the Atlas District and Fort Totten neighborhoods.

Southwest is the smallest of all the quadrants. Government renewal has led to the evictions of nearly all residents, many local businesses have been demolished.

Southeast is split by the Anacostia River snaking its way through the quadrant. Southeast houses many of the overlooked and oppressed, an area with spiking poverty and crime rates.

The heart of U Street began as a silent movie theater, Minnehaha, in 1910 and eventually transformed into **Ben's Chili Bowl** restaurant in 1958. In the midst of the riots of 1968 following Martin Luther King's assassination, Ben's is one of the few parts of the city to stay open, providing food, shelter and a safe haven for activists, firefighters, and soldiers alike. Ben's is a shimmering gem of hope in the void. It is a place for community. The Rattlers, a Fury krewa, have adopted the restaurant as a second home, and they will fight for it. They are frequently found there after 7 p.m. The National Guard has been receiving orders to keep the peace and they are harassing the Rattlers for some reason. They can't explain it, but the attention has been getting more and more heated. A misstep could lead to a deadly riot in the streets.

A popular hangout for the soldiers stationed in the D.C. metro area, **Crown Bar and Grill** on E Street boasts the cheapest booze and best pool tables in the city. Brawls are common in the three-story bar, though few are ever reported.

Hook: AWOL

Allen L. Adams joined the army in 1965 and served in both Kentucky and Korea before being stationed at Fort Myer, Virginia in '67. The young man, barely 20, is killed in a drunken bar battle by a Marine who hides the body.

The krewa encounters the ghost, who doesn't know where his body is. He doesn't want revenge, he just wants to be buried with honors so his mother knows he wasn't a deserter or a coward.

A stone's throw from the White House is the **House of the Temple of the Scottish Rite**. It's mostly a bog-standard Masonic lodge, but a dozen or so Brother Masons have been inducted into the Order of the Keystone Eternal, a Memento cult that believes Mementos are the dismembered viscera of God.

Howard University (Mecca, HU, or Howard) is a hub of African-American scholastic achievement. The school plays an important role in American history and the Civil Rights Movement, even inventing the "stool-sitting" technique during the early 40s, in which protesters peacefully fill available space at a local business to economically force change by costing them business. When the 1960s hit, students actively took part in the Movement, protesting against segregation in the Jim Crow south and beyond.

Hook: Freedom Ride

The krewa takes part in a Freedom Ride down south, to carry the message of peaceful equality. The journeys are fraught with dangers: local cops watching the roads for the buses, Klan mobs in their white costumes illuminated by burning crosses, and dark roads from which some travelers never return. The dead are all around them, as they have lost friends and families, and witnessed atrocities only humans could carry out.

Any Sin-Eater traveling near the **Octagon House** is overwhelmed by desperate pleas for help from the ghosts forever tied to it. The manor, one of the oldest buildings in the city, was designed in 1801 by William Thornton for the richest plantation owner and slaver in Richmond, Colonel John Tayloe III. Tayloe murdered both of his daughters in that house, the first in 1812 and the other in 1817. Their shades, and those of countless slaves, remain bound to the house, and even among the living it's known as one of the most haunted buildings in Washington.

The long-gone servants' bell can often be heard ringing in the distance, and apparitions range from the crumpled body of Rebecca Tayloe at the foot of the stairs to phantom footfalls and clanking sabers, to, if the stories can be believed, Dolley Madison hosting ghostly receptions in the parlor are frequent appearances. The grounds of the house have the Open Condition, and in the basement, directly below the last step of the stair, is an Avernian Gate.

Having seen better days decades ago, **Union Station** no longer serves crowds of 200,000 travelers by train and bus daily. The neoclassical-style building filled with granite and polished marble greets a few lonely commuters. The federal government is desperately funneling money to turn it into a lavish visitor center, to no avail. A once-thriving lifeline for the city is slowly fading away. Sin-Eaters riding the rail hear the pleas of long-dead travelers, just trying to make it to destinations that have moved on without them.

No Sin-Eater can pass unmolested through **Independence Avenue**, which include the remnants of the city's two largest and most notorious slave markets, The Yellow House and Williams Slave Pen. The slaves were chained in a windowless basement to await their torturous future. Even the living report hearing the screams of the dead and the constant clinking of chains. A line of hundreds of ghosts relives the worst moments of their lives: men and women being dragged from the basement to the auction block, a child taken from his parents, or husbands and wives separated and sold to different slavers.

Minister John Kinard and Secretary of the Smithsonian Institute S. Dillon Ripley opened the **Anacostia Community Museum** in 1967, reaching out to the African-American community in Anacostia. As director of the museum, Kinard is actively trying to increase attendance and solidify the museum for the community. After the initial exhibits of various arts and statues, the community requested exhibits that represented them.

Hook: Painting the Past

Kinard puts out flyers asking for local artists. Ana Green spent her life painting but died in a tenement fire, unknown and starving. She asks the krewe to have one of her pieces displayed in the museum. Only two have survived, one in the hands of an elite art dealer who refuses to part with it, and the other hanging on a vampire's wall. The vampire is willing to sell, but at what cost?

Arlington National Cemetery is well-protected by ghosts, Sin-Eaters, and living magicians alike. The cemetery itself is considered neutral ground by all. Anyone coming to honor the dead is welcomed. The Unknown Soldier, a very old and powerful geist who guards the cemetery, has repelled every Reaper that has dared to breach the Avernian Gate in his tomb. The Platoon krewe frequently visits the cemetery to talk to old friends.

Liberal, Conservative or Undecided

A newish krewe, the **First Church of Shepard, Psychopomp** came into existence as man looked to the stars and Yuri Gagarin touched the unknown. Joan Alder, one of the Abiding, founded the krewe after she wondered what would happen if someone died in space. Would their ghost be sucked back to Earth and into the Underworld? Would they ascend? Or are they trapped in limbo? The Shepards mostly work in the government, using their security clearance to acquire as much knowledge about NASA as possible, hoping to be aboard the first flight to the moon. Each of the group has spent a week at NASA and are expert pilots.

Washington's marble halls of power turn the world. Few know that as well as **The Children of the Republic**. They stroll through the corridors of power without resistance, using their geists to ferret out secrets better left unknown. They blackmail those who oppose their conservative views, ever to the right. One group is holding out against them, the **Winchells** (named for Walter Winchell), using the press as their weapon to quell the politicians. But each published story that kills a legislative bill through public opinion brings them one step closer to taking their fight into the streets.

Hook: Party Politics

The krewe is approached by the Children of the Republic to find dirt on the Winchells or to make them go away, without it all leading back to them. If the krewe refuses, the Children make sure the National Guard, local police, and others take an interest in the krewe.

Since long before the term krewe became a thing, the **Platoon** (though they don't call themselves that) have been a thing. They are soldiers who have fought, killed, and in most cases, died for their country. They have seen battles the way few can imagine. They have died on the field only to come back and keep fighting. But each time they are killed, some random Joe in their unit dies in their place, and they come back with the random Joe's blood on their soul. It happens over and over again until they're sent home. Soldiers can't just leave, they have orders and going AWOL in a warzone is a death sentence, but for whom? Most do whatever they can to get kicked out. Coming back home in shame, their families looking down on them, spouses leaving and children left asking why. Others are still in the stockade. The geists of Sin-Eaters never leave; they try to help the Bound resolve their Burdens and then move on to a new soldier dying on the battlefield. Each member is a fully trained soldier but prefers not to fight; they understand the cost of each life and the burden of living with that death.

The **Howard Knights** walk the halls of the University as a symbol that death does not stop the cause. Each returned to Washington as a Sin-Eater after a fatal trip into the deep Jim Crow south. They don't speak of it often, but are ready to protect their brothers and sisters, as the struggle continues.

Frenemies

The ghost of **Reverend Zen** lords over the **Washington National Cathedral** with kind words, a friendly smile, and an uplifting message about how it is time to move on. Once a ghost is hooked, the pastor escorts them down to the bowels of the cathedral to an Avernian Gate. If they resist, he reassures them the entire way that this is the order of things. Zen smiles and understands, and lets them go about their way if he can't convince them, but always tells them that they are welcome to come back. Once the ghost has departed, Zen dons a Deathmask to hunt down the ghost as the Reaper, Sacrament of the Consumption.

During riots, the **National Guard** and **Police** sweep into the streets, militarizing the city and doing whatever it takes to institute order. If the players find themselves on the streets during this time, they are likely targets of tear gas, assaults, beatings, and arrests.

Protesters weren't the only targets of the new militarization. Nixon once called Washington the "Crime Capital of the World." **Roland "The Pick" Mitchel** lived up to the moniker by stabbing rivals to death and sent his crew onto the streets to keep selling heroin. The Pick is one of the most established drug lords of Washington, D.C. Everyone seems to have heard stories about him killing eight cops with nothing but a pick, and surviving an attack where he was filled with hot lead. No one can account for it, but any room he enters holds its breath until he decides the occupants' fate. His right hand is **Julie West**, a deadly gun moll and getaway driver. The Pick himself is responsible for more deaths than the heroin he sells.

High Rollers

Jimmy "The Unofficial Mayor of 9th Street" Lake embodies what a Necropolitan should be, and that is why people (living and dead) flock to him. Always ready to drink, tell a joke and embrace life, he is on his way out of the city. He lost his haunted nightclub of 40 years, the Gayety, and moved his burlesque business to the Central Theater, but business is slow. He needs help. His spirits are low, but his jokes are top notch.

Hook: Brother, Can You Spare Some Plasm?

Jimmy needs a solid; he needs some help keeping his business open as he has become the target of audits. Seems like someone wants his building.

The **Demon Cat (D.C.)** stalks the bowels of the Capitol through the Crypt. Centuries ago, 100 cats were released into the crypt to quell a rat problem. Somewhere along the way, one of those cats died and became a barghest (p. XX), and somewhere else along the line, that barghest became a geist. Rumors that D.C. is Bound to a Sin-Eater Senator remain unconfirmed.

Disgruntled and in constant conflict with his geist, **Sergeant Charles Blake** haunts Washington with his very presence, helping ghosts resolve their burdens or banishing them. With a Synergy rating hovering between 0 and 1, the man is an open wound on the world, looking for a cause.

Hook: Never Leave a Sin-Eater Behind

The krewe stumbles over Sgt. Blake as he peacefully lays a ghost to rest, after hearing rumors of him devouring the dead. His internal conflict is apparent; if attacked, he fights back to escape. Looking into the man, the krewe discovers his family doesn't know why he goes from anger to happiness to depression. The krewe needs to either help the man find peace or stop him from killing more of the dead.

Predicting President Kennedy's death on May 13, 1956, seven years before it happened, propelled **Jeane Dixon (Lydia Emma Pinckert)** into the spotlight. She has quickly become a bestselling authority, journalist, and psychic. Rumors of the origins of her powers vary, she has issued an adamant claim that they are a gift from God. Lately her predictions have turned toward a great calamity that will drop half of Washington into a great pit, "from which none living will emerge."

In 1967, **John Richard Nichols** became one of the first Americans to openly talk about his homosexuality on national television, only to suffer countless death threats from his FBI-agent father. He co-runs the D.C. Mattachine Society branch, one of the first gay rights groups in the United States. He's also haunted: The ghost of his father's former FBI partner is Anchored to him, and blames Nichols' homosexuality for his father's loss of security clearance.

In January, **Jeannette Rankin Bridge** organized the largest women's march in Washington since Women's Suffrage in 1913. 5,000 women supporting the anti-war movement march from Union Station to the Capitol, as another group protests Arlington Cemetery to highlight the limited role women are forced to take as wives and mothers. Iris Jackson, one of Bridge's lieutenants in the march, went missing for a few weeks and came back different. She blacks out and awakens in unknown places. Iris doesn't remember making the Bargain when she was killed by "Pick," and her geist wants vengeance.

Need help, a friend to see if your spouse is cheating, or a drinking buddy? **Jackson Wright** is your man. A former lightweight boxer who was better at taking a hit than dishing them out, he had to retire from boxing, disappointing his father, a former middleweight boxer and 761st Black Panther veteran. Jackson is one of lucky ones who has a small apartment in Northeast D.C., which he uses as an office for his private eye business. What he lacked in boxing talent, he seems to have made up for with his Holmesian attention to detail, but he still can't get a steady gig. So, for a few bucks and a bottle of scotch, he'll take your case.

Southern Hospitality

Mobile, Alabama 1910

The skyline of 1910 Mobile is dotted with newly renovated factories, billowing clouds of grayish smoke being pushed skyward, and ever-taller buildings under construction. Everything leads back to the bay: Imports and exports are the city's lifeblood. The rising industrialization stands in contrast to the rich history of the city, peppered with rituals steeped in French culture and customs, including everyone's favorite party: Mardi Gras. The first Mardi Gras was held in Mobile in 1704, nearly two decades before New Orleans existed.

The city's wealth, like much of America's, was built on the backs and lives of minorities.

Jim Crow

Mobile, as most of the southern states, followed Jim Crow, a set of state and local laws that enforce racial segregation from 1890 through 1965 (the official end, but in reality, the same treatment continued). The laws dictated "separate but equal" treatment of blacks, when the reality was anything but. Jim Crow, and the high rate of lynchings, led to the Great Migrations of 1910 and 1970, where blacks moved north and westward.

Handling racism and Jim Crow can be tough, and it's a subject some people would rather sidestep, but that's not truthful to the setting or the spirit of the game. The first step is to establish what level of realism the players are comfortable with. Discuss it with the players and establish some rough guidelines and be prepared to use the Geist Card (p. XX).

Remember an important basic rule when playing a character of a race other than your own: don't try to be "black" or act like a racial stereotype, including putting

on an accent or voice. Storytellers, don't use vulgar language. The N word is never allowed. Instead, focus on how people interact with the characters: the way they are overlooked, the people that won't engage with them, and the assumption they are always wrong. Every encounter is starting from scratch. Use the description of actions.

The following examples of Jim Crow laws are just a sampling of what was on the books. Violating any of them can result in the offender being killed:

Black men can't extend hands to white men because it would imply social equality.

Displays of affection between black people are not allowed and are considered offensive.

Blacks are expected to step aside for whites and let them pass.

History

The Muscogee people lived peacefully in what would be named Mobile. The Spanish invasion ended that with death at sword point in 1540, and destroyed the fortified city of Maubila, that would become Mobile. The Spanish held the city until it fell into French hands in 1702 and became the capital of French Louisiana. An outbreak of yellow fever swept through the city in 1706, decimating the surrounding indigenous peoples and the slave population at the time, which led to a sizable Sin-Eater culture whose traditions still extend into the black and indigenous communities today.

Mobile fell into British hands in 1763, then back into Spanish hands in 1780, and eventually joined the United States in 1813 as part of the Mississippi Territory. It became part of the Alabama Territory a few years later, and joined Alabama when it became a state in 1819.

Mobile's main economic trades were slaves and cotton. Mobile was in an economic boom and began large-scale construction within the city, continuing its industrialization for decades. The Civil War forced Mobile to surrender to Union forces to avoid destruction, but the damage it sustained cost numerous lives and significant parts of the city.

Mobile prospered as the Port of Mobile rose to prominence. The increased wealth led to the city's population exploding, up to 51,000 in 1910. Social and racial tensions spiked with the passing of a new constitution in 1901 that stripped blacks and poor whites of the right to vote. A boycott was launched to protest the new constitution, but was quickly quelled.

Mobile in 1910 is a city on the rise: Money comes in and cotton goes out. Every day, a new wonder of the decade blooms into existence, be it a new hotel, electric trolley cars that traverse the length of the city, a new dance for next year's Mardi Gras, or a mint julep to die for on the veranda.

Daily Life in 1910

In 1910, over two-thirds of Americans live in small rural towns of 2,500 or less. The United States leads the world's production of iron and steel, while also producing half of the world's cotton, corn, and oil, and a third of the world's coal and gold.

In cities, most people work in factories and live in crowded, unsanitary tenements, but people also have more buying power than anyone in decades. Department

stores, mail-order catalogs, and an efficient postal service become staples of everyday life. More and more cities are moving away from gas lighting in favor of electric lighting for public use, though the trend is slower to catch on in private homes.

Middle- and upper-class white people have a spring in their step and hope in their hearts for a brighter tomorrow. They enjoy yearly vacations, weekend orchestral concerts, family picnics, and lawn games. A lucky few have phonographs in their home, but it's still not uncommon to see a young man courting a young woman on the veranda playing a banjo.

Cars have just begun production and are rolling out into towns. Speed limits are established in some places and not others because of the limited number of cars on the road.

Geography

Three miles north of downtown Mobile, **Africatown** was founded in 1860 in the aftermath of a failed plot to continue the outlawed slave trade practice. Timothy Meaher, a shipbuilder, along with his brother and several others, illegally brought 100 West African slaves into the Port of Mobile aboard the slave ship *Clotilde*. The scheme was discovered, the ship burned and scuttled, and the surviving slaves were left to fend for themselves. Thirty-two slaves, who were taken to Meaher's farm north of Mobile, built shelters, grew food, and learned to adapt. Over the years, Africatown became a self-governing society, preserving the language and traditions of their homeland. Charlie Poteet is their chief, and Jabez is their medicine man.

Every krewe in Mobile wants a piece of the **Magnolia Cemetery**. The sprawling cemetery houses over 60,000 burials. The massive cemetery contains the Old Hebrew Burial Ground, The Coal Handlers Union, Colored Benevolent Institution Number One, The Confederate Rest and other sub-cemetery plots. In 1883, a fence was erected around the cemetery, and by 1910 plans for a gatehouse with iron gates are in the works. The dead buried here are lively and passionate, and they have, collectively, vast knowledge of Mobile's history and its secret doings. Sin-Eaters willing to sit down for a long, meandering conversation about local politics or the hottest theater premieres of 1873 can learn a great deal. Plus, the cemetery's annual "Morti Gras" party is not to be missed.

By contrast, **Church Street Graveyard** is a nightmare. Founded outside the city in 1819, the four-acre cemetery has almost become the center of downtown as Mobile grows. Ever since the vanishing of the cemetery's guardian geist, the ghosts who dwell here seem to suffer from some unknown malady that accelerates their descent into madness.

The two-story brick **Richards-DAR House Museum** houses the history of antebellum Mobile. Many of the historical artifacts housed within are Anchors, and the museum has a reputation as one of the most haunted buildings in the city.

Opened in 1900, the **Bienville Hotel** is a ghost of its former, luxurious self. The hotel did fine business until the Cawthon and Battle Houses were constructed a few years later, built with Mardi Gras and their money in mind. Now the Bienville is a seedy flophouse, trading on its steadily declining glory, haunted by the memory of what it once was. Literally — parts of the old hotel linger on in Twilight, and local Necropolitans use it as a halfway house for recently risen ghosts.

Mobile Cotton Exchange (St. François and North Commerce Street) is vital in allowing cotton factors and merchants to control the sale, storage, and distribution of cotton from the Port of Mobile. By 1910 it was the third largest cotton exchange in the states.

Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception (2 South Claiborne Street) has been home of the Archbishops of Mobile since 1850. During the Civil War, a Union ammunition depot exploded, killing hundreds of people, burning most of Mobile to the ground, and blowing out the entire north wall of the cathedral and all of its windows. The wall was reconstructed and the windows replaced with beautiful stained-glass windows from Germany. The last window was added in 1910, under the watchful eye of the current Bishop, Edward Patrick Allen.

Hook: Reflections and Rewards

Otto Adler, a glassmaker for Franz Mayer & Co., traveled with the windows from Munich to oversee the installation. Always a strapping man, ever since installing the new window, his health and luck seem to be increasing dramatically. He is engaged to the mayor's daughter, a windfall of cash has come his way, and he just opened a new show. Otto's windows refract the light of the sunset just so, pinning any ghost who died in that long-ago ammo explosion like a butterfly and allowing Otto to devour them before the light fades. Three days ago, he tracked down and ate the last ghost from that fire. If he's going to continue to feed, he's going to need fresh ghosts killed in a massive fire.

Built in 1902, the value of the **Mobile Public Library** (Cont and Hamilton Street) quickly established itself to city leaders, and it received additional funding in 1910. The additional funding is used to construct additional buildings and add more collections to the library — collections that include journals, sermons, and other writings from many of Mobile's early Sin-Eaters. Segregation has left African-Americans without access to the library, and it will be decades before an additional building is constructed for Mobile's black community.

Union Station connects Mobile, Columbus, and Kentucky as part of the Mobile & Ohio (M&O) Company that transports cotton along its 260-mile line; it is the longest route in the world. Hundreds died building the rail, and many still haunt the track.

Mobile Bay is the city's lifeline. Built in 1885, the Middle Bay Lighthouse is a beacon to all ships coming and going. On warm summer nights, huge numbers of crab, shrimp, and fish swarm the shallow end of the bay, where they're easy prey for the locals. This "Jubilee" is rapidly becoming a favorite holiday for the living, but the dead see the correlation between the Jubilee and sightings of the ghost ship *Clotilde*, and are less charmed.

Mystic Societies

Mobile's history of secret societies dates to 1711, when the Boeuf Gras Society formed as part of the city's annual Carnival celebration. Officially, the mystic societies of Mobile are merely groups of like-minded folks who participate in Mardi Gras parades, but more than a few have occult ties and inner mysteries. Some are krewes, others are Memento cults, and others are stranger still with intentions incomprehensible to the living or the dead.

The **Order of Myths** was the oldest mystic society embracing Mardi Gras in Mobile. It was founded in 1867 and disbanded in 1901. The Geist of one of the original members has since made a new Bargain and re-founded the krewe in 1908, exploring the true meaning of the Bargain and

trying to understand the power between the two. A few of their numbers have supposedly Bound themselves to multiple geists, magnifying the Sin-Eaters' power.

Southern Crossers represents a long line of Southern pride, including the children of plantation owners looking to keep the status quo and themselves in power. With the power of their Bargains, family connections, and wealth, the small krewe of Bonepickers sees no reason the dead of Mobile should not serve their families, as they have always done.

Radically opposing Southern Crossers, the **Old Glory** is the largest Mystery in Mobile. It accepts members from all walks of life, but is principally made up of former slaves, children of slaves, and those crushed under the heel of segregation. Their chief goal is undermining Jim Crow through actions both political and occult, but some of their dead celebrants are beginning to grumble about the krewe's overt focus on living affairs.

Sipping 30-year-old brandy in the parlor of the Mobile Country Club, the **Visionaries** meet weekly to discuss the next phase of their grand plan. Unlike the others in the city, they are thinking big picture. That means money, and lots of it. The Visionaries fund krewes, occult researchers, and historical preservation societies all over the country. Throw enough money at the problem, they insist, and the whole, systemic problem comes crashing down.

Hook: Lost Tomorrows

The Visionaries never leave Mobile, their power base, but their money does. Unmarked cash shipments go out on the Mobile Line regularly — but a string of brazen train robberies has hit the last four trains carrying Visionary money.

Rabble Rousers

Taller and stouter than most, "**Billy**" does most of the heavy lifting on the dock and is well-paid for it. He never speaks out of turn, nods when addressed, and does what is asked of him. Random accidents seem to befall those around him, and have for a long period of time. He claims to have no knowledge of this strange coincidence, but the ghosts who follow him say otherwise.

Widow Ann Miller came into a tidy sum of money after her second husband Walter passed a few years back. She still dresses in black to mourn him. Now her stepson Francis and his wife, Anna, have passed as well, leaving her the family mill business and a tidier sum of money. The ghosts of Walter, Francis, and Anna still hover around her in Twilight, their ethereal hands reaching out, endlessly whispering a warning: "Don't drink it!"

Hook: The Merry Widow

The old mill has been plagued by apparitions and phantom noises since the latest death, and the three ghosts haunt the Widow Miller near constantly. A suspicious Sin-Eater might suspect the old "murder for the inheritance" scheme, but in truth, the family's drinking well contains lead, and the widow is also slowly dying. The ghosts are trying to warn her, but all three are Rank 1 and can't meaningfully communicate the danger.

Colonel Bartholomew Mullis died on the battlefield fighting the Union. Mullis was a vengeful piece of shit in life, and that has only magnified in death. His specter blames the defeat of the south on abolitionists, blacks, and moral degenerates. He is anchored to the anniversary of the

Battle of Mobile Bay, and every year on August 5th, he materializes and stalks the city. So far, he has killed nine people and injured 20.

Arthur Pendleton Bagby, the former Governor of Alabama, House of Representatives member, and United States Minister to Russia, was a born politician and has remained so in death. The shrewd ghost has turned Magnolia Cemetery into a thriving necropolis, rich with the Essence of living memory. He maintains relations with numerous mystic societies in Mobile, but his priority is always Magnolia — and the power it gives him.

Bettie Hunter, a former slave, earned her wealth through a carriage business. After the Civil War destroyed New Orleans' transportation market, Mobile became the major port city in the South. Bettie took advantage of this situation, which enabled her to buy a fine home rivaling successful white business owners. Operating through proxies, including a medium frequented by the carriage company's current owner, she still directs her empire today, with a healthy side business in relocating ghosts and their Anchors. The coming rise of the auto industry worries her, but so far even the most vigorous of séances hasn't convinced the man to diversify.

Everything a good person should be is embodied by **Bishop Edward Patrick Allen**. Immediately upon becoming the Bishop of Mobile in 1897, he got to work doubling the number of priests, more than tripling the number of Catholics in Mobile, and overseeing the construction of new churches, schools, orphanages, and hospitals. He reaches out to the African-American community by fostering an environment for education and the introduction of the Knights of Peter Claver (the largest and oldest Catholic African-American society).

Ezekiel Washington, born a slave and never knowing his true family, turned to the Word for relief. Now that he is free, he is beginning to lose his faith. He dreamed that freedom would wash away the racism, but has only encountered the harsh reality of the world.

Hook: One Man's Faith

Washington witnesses a Bargain and has no idea how to process it. He begins to preach about what he saw around town. If not stopped, the locals will go on a witch hunt, killing anyone they deem less than them.

Mae Watson has turned convention on its head, taking up journalism and publishing an independent paper about Mobile government. Much to the chagrin of the sheriff, Mae goes where the story is, and never minds petty things like segregation. Her latest story is an exposé on the Mystic Societies of Mobile and how deep their ties to local government run.

Mobile owes its drive toward modernization to one man, **Mayor Pat Lyon**. He stepped into the role in 1904, authorizing utility upgrades, paving streets and adding streetcar lines throughout the entire city. During his three terms as mayor, he also orders the construction of waterways to sanitize the drinking water. To date, six construction works have drowned under mysterious circumstances, and he needs more works, but people are too scared.

Edinesis

Edinburgh, Scotland

Beneath the warm gaze of the sun, Edinburgh is the crown that sits on Scotland's brow. Old architecture dots its skyline as the vertebrae on the back of a sleeping giant, warring endlessly with encroaching modernity on its many shapely hills. The Athens of the north is a city whose

dichotomies reveal themselves at every coiling causeway, whose streets resound both with the echoes of progress and the memories of its innumerable centuries. Its Old Town is studded with a mish-mash of brick buildings that compete with one another for equal footing, and entire streets overlap one another in a crazed patchwork of antiquated urban sprawl. Each cobblestone and every alley echo with the history of the place. No street looks entirely the same twice, for Old Town remembers itself anew minute to minute, day to day. It squats atop the decaying corpse of its labyrinthine underground streets, long left to fester in the dark. At its apex sits the prominent Edinburgh Castle atop a lushly greened basalt rock. Meanwhile, New Town unfurls itself: a resplendent, verdant-studded patchwork, filigreed with staid Georgian and looming Grecian Revival facades. Like Rome before it, Edinburgh is built on seven great hills, the foremost among them being Arthur's Seat, which lies at the direct heart of the metropolis.

Instabilities

Among the jewels of the city are the universities, which stand prominent among the thriving arts scene of Edinburgh. Enconced within those institutions, as well as in its Surgeons' Hall, the **Siege Perilous** is a krewe most notable for its high-brow eggheaded leanings. Theirs is a tradition marked by staid academia: The universities of the city have stood for centuries, and rumor holds that the Siege Perilous has existed for just as long. They constantly seek new treasures among the Bound's tatterdemalion refuse: objects of power or objects that *speak* to power are among their favorites.

Warring with them for nearly as long as they have existed is the krewe **Asterion's Vengeance**. Over the decades, Asterion's Vengeance has lost its stable footing on the underworld that snakes beneath the city. Where the dowdy airs of the Siege lean towards lofty, starry-eyed rites, Asterion's Vengeance delves into the ecstatic. It is this dichotomy: one pushing ever towards the light, and the other forever toward the primal dark, that causes such strife. It is for this very reason that they are hunting each other, and hunting *you*: Powerful rumors of deals made with the lords of the sundered Underworld have been flying across both krewes' various informational networks. And they are both looking to stop whoever might have struck such a devil's bargain.

Setpieces

One of the curators of the Surgeon's Hall has been ferrying specimens that have long fallen out of the catalogues to the black market. Jocasta, dying in her hospital bed, asks Asterion's Vengeance to purchase one of them: the haunted bones of a martyr with the power to cure any illness. She's willing to pay any price, but a changeling lord is looking for them as well.

The cold war between the krewes is growing hotter by the day. Alliances shift daily as unattached krewes close ranks, and choose their side of the chessboard.

Seventeen coffins with have been found — and lost. Asterion's Vengeance is threatening mayhem if they aren't collected and properly buried. With their discovery, grisly murders like those of Burke and Hare are beginning to crop up in the news.

Bald Agnes has been seen again in Holyrood Palace, stripped to the waist and bleeding. But this time, she promises any krewe that can ease her suffering the formulae for incredibly powerful rites — even the secret hiding place of Mementos that the Siege Perilous doesn't know of.

Axel, one of countless baristas in Edinburgh's café scene, says that he's been hearing the ghost of his grandfather every night coming up from the very ground. The Vaults have a long history

of suffering and death, but the turf war between the two major krewes refuses to budge. Fight or not, the voice from below is gaining power — over the dead and parts of the Underworld alike.

Run Away Home

Quilombo dos Palmares, Brazil 1654

Founded by survivors and free-born African slaves, Quilombo dos Palmares has defended itself tooth and nail from its very inception. It was said to be the biggest fugitive community in Brazil, and has warded off Portuguese invasion six times over. It will take an army to quell the community, which rules itself as a confederacy. They are mighty in their difference, a brotherhood among the palms.

Story Hooks

Palmares has constantly reimagined itself with each new conflict, internal or otherwise. The wars that it fights to merely to exist are punctuated by the decades it has remained. And the Portuguese are coming again to bring Palmares to heel, through might and other means.

Sin-Eaters of the region speak of capoeira fights in the dark between rival krewes. The ghosts here are beginning to take notice, and each new bit of violence is beginning to have a strange impact on the dead, who are gaining unimaginable power over the course of weeks. Is this a Ceremony? A Memento? The rash of possessions speaks to the former, yet no one knows just who these krewes might be, or just what they're doing to the ghosts...

A ghost has been seen stalking through the fields and jungles that surround Palmares. She begs for help: She was one of the many native captives originally taken as a bride for one of the men in the settlement. Now she wishes to find his spirit in the Underworld, for good or ill.

One of the many dead from the first conflicts Palmares faced has resurfaced. In exchange for a steady stream of offerings, he will help the kingdom against the encroaching soldiers. But his story isn't adding up, and a sudden rash of horrible murders has struck the community. The ghost isn't to blame, but something yet unknown from the Underworld might be.

Widows' Walk and Salt Spray

Winslow, Massachusetts

Winslow is a small coastal town about 50 miles southeast of Boston, whipped by chilly ocean winds and filled with an aura of faded glory.

The first inhabitants of the area that is now Winslow were the Wampanoag, who for thousands of years made their living by farming and fishing. A plague struck the Wampanoag people between 1616 and 1619, killing almost two-thirds of the entire nation. Devastated, traumatized, and greatly reduced in numbers, they were thus much more vulnerable to European colonization and subjugation when a group of English settlers from Boston, drawn by the area's natural harbor, founded a town there in 1643. Centuries of salt air have worn away the gravestones in the Old Burying Ground, but the locals still know which markers belong to which families.

In the mid-19th century, Winslow rose from a sleepy fishing village to stunning prosperity when its location and harbor made it an ideal site for the booming whaling trade. Everyone in Winslow made a fortune, and Ocean Street filled up with fine new houses funded by the profits from whaling expeditions. But when the New England whaling industry declined near the end of the

19th century, Winslow's fall was as swift as its rise. Those fine houses on Ocean Street fell into disrepair, paint peeling away in the sharp salt wind and shutters hanging askew because their owners could no longer afford to fix them.

Among Winslow's tragedies was the wreck of the *Ruby*: in 1866, the ship was lost just off the shore of Winslow in a violent storm, killing all on board. The wreck has become a collective Memento, holding onto the death energy of the dozens of sailors who perished. The wood does not decay; barnacles and sea creatures can find no purchase on the ship's keel.

Each successive depression and recession has hit Winslow harder, and each successive recovery has been fleeting. From time to time, mayors or entrepreneurs have tried to revive Winslow with some new scheme — funding the Harbor Museum as a way to honor (and profit from) Winslow's maritime past, bringing in a Haunted Walk company to give tours around Halloween — but nothing has worked so far. In the last decade, drug dealers from Boston expanded into Winslow, taking advantage of the economic desperation and numerous vacant buildings to get a foothold in the town. Today, Winslow is struggling and crumbling, constantly haunted by the shadows of its past.

At the Harbor Museum and Archives, curator Lizete Acosta keeps a collection of items too precious — or too strange — to put on display. One of these items is a scrimshaw necklace made from walrus-tusk ivory, carved with intricate patterns of interlocking circles and five-pointed stars. It's said that anyone who wears it will always return home from the sea. It's not said that they'll do so alive, or even human.

God Will Know His Own

Carcassonne, France, 1360

Carcassonne is a walled city in southern France. Rings of heavy stone walls fortify it; more than 50 tall towers protect it. Even the cathedral is fortified now. A few thousand residents — nobles and merchants, beggars and artisans, Christians and Jews — live here, resilient after plague and war, still seeking fulfillment through profit, bravery, art, and God.

Carcassonne is also one of the strongholds of Catharism, a Christian heresy that holds that all earthly things are sinful. Moderate Cathars simply live celibate and austere lives; more extreme ones go so far as to count the body itself as a corrupt and earthly creation and therefore reject it by starving themselves to death. Cathars also count both church and secular leaders as corrupt, adding political subversion to the religious heresy — and so the church moved against them. In August 1209, the city fell to a swift but brutal siege: The crusaders cut off the city's water supply in the height of summer, and hundreds died of thirst and disease.

Local legend says that during the misery of the siege, some of the Cathars managed to escape through secret tunnels that run beneath the city. Only those in direst need can enter. You always escape your peril here, but you always find something even more dangerous.

More misery and persecution followed. First, the conquering lords punished the Jews of Carcassonne for their resistance by instituting discriminatory restrictions, forbidding them from holding certain occupations or even eating with Christians. Then, the Inquisition came to root out the remaining Cathar heretics in the city and surrounding countryside.

Inquisition Tower, a round stone tower that rises high above the thick, fortified city walls, was claimed by the Inquisition to house their prisoners. The whole village of Verdun-en-Lauragais

was imprisoned here in 1305 before their execution. Several of the more devout Cathars starved to death during their imprisonment. Their misery opened an Avernian Gate in the tower, whose Key is a moan of profound hunger.

The Black Death arrived in January of 1348; by April, a quarter of the city was dead. The survivors, seeking to blame someone for their misfortune, accused the Jewish people of Carcassonne of poisoning the water: Several Jews were violently assaulted; others were dragged from their homes and burned to death. Now the plague has receded, and the city is beginning to recover — but the memory of pain and death is never too far away. Neither are the dead themselves.

In 1360, there are three active krewes in Carcassonne, each one locked in uneasy tension with the other two. They are:

The Caravites, Mourners, led by Solomon ben Joseph Caravita. Broken-hearted at the violence done to his people during the plague, he fears that the memory of Carcassonne's Jewish community will be lost. He is known to the rest of the city as the head of Carcassonne's Jewish burial society, a gentle soul who selflessly works to make sure that these lives will be remembered.

The Edict of Verdun, Furies, is led by the Cathar Pierre Bernier. In life, he was from the village of Verdun-en-Lauragais. The first time the Inquisition came for him he escaped; the second time, he was burned at the stake. He is fragile, horribly scarred, and fueled by an unyielding desire for revenge.

The Sisters of Lachesis, Pilgrims, led by Beatris Castanhier. She is a prosperous artisan and skilled weaver. Her husband died in the Black Death; she carried on the business in his absence. The same pragmatic and meticulous attitude that brought her success as a weaver has made her an effective leader for the Pilgrims. If you bring her the right materials, she can weave more than just cloth on her loom.

Solstice Spirals

Bru na Boinne, Ireland

For more than 5,000 years, people have lived at this bend in the River Boyne. Only a few have ever understood how close this area is to the Underworld.

Three massive earthwork domes dominate the landscape: Newgrange, Knowth, and Dowth, a few miles from each other. Each is more than 30 feet high and more than 200 feet across; all were built around 3200 BCE. Around each one is a ring of five-ton stones carved with abstract symbols: spirals, swirls, zigzags.

The entrances of these mounds align perfectly with sunrise on the winter solstice: on the darkest day of the year, a brave and tiny beam of light stretches deep into the interior to illuminate the black, into a chamber that once housed the ashes of the dead. With the correct application of power, these can be passages to the Underworld.

Only the mound at Newgrange is a functioning Avernian Gate. To open it, you must make a burnt offering in a bowl of carved stone at the moment that the light of the winter solstice sunrise strikes the inner chamber. If the Gates at Knowth and Dowth were to be reopened, the

earthworks would form an immensely powerful network; nobody has yet discovered how to open them, but krewes make the attempt every year on the winter solstice.

Over time, most people forgot the true meaning of the stones and the solstice chambers, but they continued to struggle over the land. Vikings raided and settled; Normans and English planted castles and the nearby town of Drogheda, then spent centuries tightening their grasp on this land and its people; Catholics and Protestants battle still over the true heart of Ireland. Thousands have died for deep-held causes over the centuries — in battle, in siege, in revolt, in protest — as well as in starvation and in the passing of long years.

The solstice mounds and their standing stones have seen it all, and they hold their power and remember.

Liam FitzGerald, part-time IT worker at the Bru na Boinne World Heritage Site, made a fortune in the Celtic Tiger tech boom, then lost it all again when the bubble burst. Unemployed and despairing, he fell into conspiracy theories, a tendency which only intensified when he got his part-time job at Bru na Boinne. He has plenty of ideas about what the standing stones and earthworks mean. Some of them might even be right, which is the trouble. Every so often, his internet rants stumble into things that are harmful to the local krewes. Until now, his boss, **Dr. Mairi O'Reilly**, has kept him in line. In addition to being a PhD in archaeology and the chief administrator of the Bru na Boinne World Heritage Site, she's a member of the **Three Lions**, the Undertaker krewe in nearby Drogheda. She's been feeding Liam false information to keep him from exposing what they're up to. Now alt.gothic.ghost has found Liam's blog, and they want to bring him into the fold — but the Three Lions are a powerful krewe.

Mega City 4

Beijing, China

Beijing is one of China's biggest cities, with a population of 21 million, although only 13 million have local hukou permits (meaning they're registered to be residents of Beijing). Over eight million, most coming from villages and towns to seek greater opportunities, are not able to access local government benefits and are vulnerable to being displaced in large numbers when the city finds it convenient. This vulnerability continues into the afterlife, as Reapers aggressively target ghosts who died without hukou permits. Even those who died with their permits in good order must pay regular fees of Essence to maintain their hukou status with the Reaper of Public Security.

Beijing is a university town, industry town, and seat of government. Its massive and diverse population mostly lives in close quarters in high-density apartment buildings. Like many major cities, extremes of wealth and poverty live side by side, painful reminders of people who came to the big smoke with big dreams and were broken instead. Beijing has numerous parks, temples, ancient buildings, and tourist attractions, attracting domestic and international tourism. If someone pauses to boggle at a foreign tourist and have their photo taken, it is probably because they too are tourists. Locals are more likely to shake their heads with embarrassment and move on.

Most people are not particularly religious, taking a practical, syncretic approach. Ensuring good luck is more important than any particular deity, and it makes sense to go with what works. Of those who identify as being seriously religious, 95% of those in Hebei and Henan, the provinces around Beijing, identify as Christian, and it is the fastest growing religion.

Ordinary ghosts are encouraged to fade away as fast as possible, through observances designed to appease, respect, and provide closure. Ghosts that linger beyond a few generations, that have demonic appetites or feel wronged, can manifest with creepy ingenuity and variety. Hungry ghost stories contain painful reminders about what happens when ghosts feel slighted.

The Reapers in Beijing are unusually bureaucratic and coordinated in their efforts. Some say it's because Beijing has been a major city with high population for so long that it has had to get organized or be overrun by hungry ghosts. Others blame Tiananmen Square, and for good reason.

Tiananmen, the Gate of Heavenly Peace, is one of the most famous Avernian Gates in the world. During the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, krewes from around China and beyond, inspired in part by the ghost of Hu Yaobang, came together to overthrow the old order of the Underworld. While tanks stopped for civilians in Tiananmen Square and up to a million gathered in the living world calling for change, the Underworld trembled on the brink of Catabasis. Reapers in charge of Beijing's administrative district were divided on how to manage the uprising. Eventually Reapers from outside the city bloodily put down the uprising. Many masks were destroyed that day, and even more in a cleanup afterwards, along with Sin-Eaters, ghosts, and humans.

Tiananmen Square is heavily monitored by Reapers and their agents. You can make a deal there, in the same way that airport security can guarantee a level of disarmament, but do not make sudden moves. Never show Ceremonial inclinations unless you have the correct papers and it is very clear to every watchdog that you have them. Many ghosts are drawn to the Mausoleum of Mao Zedong, swirling around his crystalline coffin, and those with hukuo status are not reaped into the Underworld unless they become a public nuisance.

Beijing is full of temples, ancient hutongs and public places of power, history, and culture. Turf wars between krewes over who gets what haunt are frequent and "renovations" are common as secret sigils are wiped away to make way to the new. Six-hundred-year-old temples whose entire structures have been rebuilt many times with fresh, artificially aged materials is just good upkeep, and creates ample opportunity for krewes to claim their haunts. The age of a building is about history, relationship, and culture, not the specific age of any component.

Instabilities

No one is more welcoming to tourist Sin-Eaters than the **Laowai Gentlemen's Club**. They lend a helping hand to everyone far from home, most guests serve as cover for the despicable acts of a smaller number of tourists and ex pats. **Boss Urchin**, one of Geist Nezha's many Sin-Eaters, has a mission to protect vulnerable children in the city. Boss Urchin is brave, impulsive, self-sacrificing, and he sees anyone associated with the Gentleman's Club as a predator that needs to be dealt with.

A swan-shaped paddleboat in Beihai Park is possessed, angry, and hissing. It never forgets a face and has a particular dislike for Sin-Eaters and men who wear hats.

The Reapers who watch over Tiananmen Square — **Enduring Struggle Against Counter-revolutionary Reactionaries** and **Harmonious Society and Vigilance** — are publicly unified in their desire for a peaceful Tiananmen Square. Enduring Struggle Against Counter-revolutionary Reactionaries feels like the Harmonious Society and Vigilance has gained too much power and his hold is too cloying and controlling. Enduring Struggle Against Counter-revolutionary Reactionaries has a very special dinner party planned with Harmonious Society and Vigilance as

the guest of honor, who will help her execute all eight courses? The favors she can extend include a map to Shangdu, an Underworld River City of legend.

Gong Laoshi was the cruelest teacher at Beijing #14C Experimental Junior High School, and saw no reason to stop when she died in 1983. She haunts the halls, savagely punishing the tardy, the left-handed, and anyone with poor penmanship.

Since the 1990s there have been rumors of an intricately hidden Dominion under Beijing called the **Garden of a Thousand Flowers**. If the rumors are true, it is a heavenly place of fearless philosophical inquiry, scientific pursuit, egalitarianism, and rich diversity. Evolving utopian ideals are pursued with curiosity and openness, shaped by communism but recognizing that no system has all the answers. One of the reasons its location continues to be such a secret may be that once you visit, why would you want to be anywhere else?

Setpieces

Burnt offerings fill the air during Ghost Month, but it is not enough, never enough, for hungry ghosts. Sin-Eaters smell so good, and they just want a taste, or a fuck, or to drown you a little bit. Staggering figures with distended bellies go through your garbage and try to eat anything you have touched, moaning as food turns to ash on their fiery tongues. Gossamer beauties float in the window, lure you to their watery grave and try to take more than you bargained for. You know it's July when a tumorous ghost leans against your leg while it feeds off pus from its own goiters.

The **CowboyPunks** ("Cowboy" is a local slang term for young people who take on a lot of western trappings, often highly fashionable stylings with some neckerchiefed cowboy swagger), a Necropolitan krewe, are about to launch the best nightclub ever. They just need a few bits and pieces; it's no big deal, pick up a few things from some obscure antique markets. They'd do it themselves, but they don't want to bother the **Lucky 8 Krewe** after that smart hutong incident.

The **Pink Lotus Alliance** is going to sneak into the Chinese Ethnic Culture Park and add a whole lot of queer figures into the displays. You can come distract the guards, and run interference with the mischievous ghosts up in the Banyan tree, if you can keep up.

Thousands were forcibly moved to build the Olympic Village in Beijing. Schools, shops, and apartments were bulldozed under, destroying countless Anchors and forgotten bones, stirring up the ancient, sleeping dead and creating a topsy-turvy jungle of ghosts and ghost structures from throughout Beijing's history. Eater of the dead **Wáng Huángsè's** ghost trap, nestled in the abandoned rowing park and oozing trails of corpus, is one of the many dangers within.

City of Spices

Calicut, India 1526

The Age of Exploration is an interesting lie. Explorers from Spain, Britain, Portugal, and more set out to discover worlds that had long since existed. The New World never was. The lost continents never were. The great discoveries were often rediscovered or revised from methods mastered by past peoples or even forgotten generations. The great voyages often paled before explorers rarely spoken of in the west: the learned Ibn Battuta, the wealthy Mansa Musa, or the massive fleets of Zheng He. The one truth of the explorers' age and the fantasy conjured around it is that the world would never be the same. A wind of want and war came along western sails, and death rode not so far behind.

Vasco de Gama of Portugal found not the first (land), the second (disputed Mediterranean routes), or even the third (the Arabian Peninsula) route to India. What he found instead was a long, arduous, but unclaimed road to a wealth in pepper, cinnamon, and more. With a clear route to the waters of the Indian Ocean trade empires, the Portuguese established a monopoly in the west... and a pirate empire in the east. The merchant princes of Africa, Asia, and Indonesia found themselves negotiating under cannonade, a state of affairs that held out for nearly a century of hostile peace or violent reprisals, only to be followed by the Dutch, the British, and a long, fractious road to eventual independence.

Great journeys and great spoils can all be measured in lives, and the ghosts of 100 peoples can be found in the ground and waters of Kozhikode.

Instabilities

Kozhikode, or Calicut, is a port dominated by Muslim traders under the rule of a Hindu dynasty under the polite, but well-armed thumb of Portugal. Wonders can be found, but costs can run as high as tensions.

Ghosts Do Not Exist

While Europeans have the power in the living world, the Twilight of Calicut is very much a Muslim city. Even the hustle of the dead for memories, Plasm, and a sense of resolution must pass through certain paths and those with no connection to that faith of old are often charged a *jizya*, or tax, to reside in relative peace. To some, this kind of tax is an affront. In a hard, dead world? It may well be more progressive than many other dead ports of call. Dealers in memories and Mementos visit often.

As the ummah of the dead work to reconcile their fate in a faith without ghosts, many in power style themselves as jinn, carving out little kingdoms of their own. Others claim to be qarin, sinful companions of souls long since departed. Geists and their Bound claim neither or both. There is no consensus, with conflicts between ghost cults and krewes being a constant worry. Finding your place among the dead is the first great struggle. Proving that place is the next. Some still reach out for living relatives who expect mere dreams or silence until the end of days. Calicut is an uncomfortable place to die. Most places are.

Due for the Dead

The dead of Calicut are often far from home when the edge of the world catches up to them. The ache to be remembered, to be honored in familiar ways, drives many ghosts to seek out Sin-Eaters of a similar origin. Dead ghettos emerge around the Portuguese fort, the Hindu court of the royal Zamorin, and the many little communities that folk far from home construct. Keeping rituals from home alive can be a turf war or a place of peace. For many who left home looking for answers their homelands denied them, finding meaning in the afterlives of other peoples is difficult, if not uncommon.

The Moura Encantada

A new Reaper has risen from the depths of Kerala, though no one knows how this European beauty came to live or die in Calicut. Her dark hair bound by a golden comb and her face masked above her full lips by a silver-inlaid skull, she walks the streets and harbors demanding “Pão por Deus” — bread for her god. This “bread” comes in the form of dead-white ghosts, drug to her by the enthralled. While feared as a servant of the Underworld, some whisper in the ears of her

many agents, eager to see her work complete. Then, surely, she will leave the rest of the dead in peace? Her preference for bribes and soft power conceal a powerful, relentless foe. If angered, her bare feet shake the ground and stir the sea. For now, she is satisfied being felt in all corners of Calicut.

Setpieces

Vasco de Gama and his armadas made their fortune via gunpowder diplomacy and through forcing ships to trade in their stead wherever they had no right to land. Many viewed them as little better than pirates, or perhaps far worse. In June of 1526, in response to the murder of an entire Muslim vessel and crew at sea, the local people of Calicut rioted and sought to burn down the fort and factory (sovereign trading outpost) of the Portuguese. The Zamorin took the opportunity to strike a blow, burning the fort to the ground. This would not be the end of Portugal's stake in Kerala, nor the end of the age of white imperialism in the region, but the upheaval among the living and the dead may stand as a point where many peoples unite. What shape this takes, and what follows, may well be up to the krewe that stands tallest in the chaos — or the last krewe standing.

Through it all, the Moura Encantada sings, beckoning for her due bread. She promised to take. She never promised to leave.

Dominion: The Nameless Bridges

They say the road to hell is paved with good intentions, but in truth, all roads to all places are paved by many hands. Every road, every passage, and every bridge above impassable rivers has a name. Every road, every passage, and especially every bridge we take and take for granted has been put together by the sweat and often the lives of those who built them. And not all bridges are made of wood, stone, or steel. Think of every dynasty, every movement, every innovation.

Every bridge has a name, and those who form its bones may well curse that name from below.

Utterly human architecture forms chains, hand to ankle, spine fused to spine, across a foggy void below. Many incorporate half-made wonders, shattered armor from a dozen eras, or ghastly bones so shy of skin that they will never be identified. Perhaps there's a River down there, with its own bounties or curses, down in the void between these tiny island plateaus of no real consequence or feature. The fog is rich, thick, and powerful all its own. Those who descend never rise again. The bridges are the only way, paths made of the many who go unremembered.

Getting There

Few people reach the Nameless Bridges by complete accident, but instead may follow dead ends, lost leads, or hopeless quests for answers. Passing through other Dominions with only an inkling of purpose or a piece of the truth greatly increases the odds of happening across the Nameless Bridges. Rather than one place, it may be many similar connective tissues in the Underworld. Or, if one locale, it may remain unbound to something as secondary as geography. One needs only know half or less of a story to find themselves called to those who yearn to fill in all the blanks.

The hard part is finding the bridge one truly needs. Lifetimes have been lost in telling so many stories.

Old Laws

“One must become part of something greater to move forward.” Navigating the Nameless Bridges can be an expensive prospect without some mark of purpose or high station. The many arms and other hazards that form these living chains will pull, resist, or cast down those who try to cross without the blessing of high agency, destiny, or recognition of the struggles they faced.

A calling of note (represented by any Status of 4+, service to a Rank 4 or greater being, or representing a krewe or similarly powerful entity) allows a person and their immediate entourage to pass without resistance. The chains have no choice but to bow to their own purpose — serving as stepping stones to the truly great. While passage is easy, gaining insight into that particular bridge is impossible if this method is chosen. You are using them, not hearing them.

Those without such a calling, or who wish to respect the bridge, can seek the consensus of these many ghosts. This requires either a dedicated period of listening and aligning oneself to the cause the bridge represents, to remember it or perhaps to complete it again in some way. This comes in the form of promises, recounting of similar deeds by the travelers, or tithes of Essence and relevant memories. The most common promise is to carry a name — always one at a time — back to the world of the living as a seed of recollection, bringing a lost soul back to light.

Denizens

The **Bridges** are conglomerations of ghostly mass — people, innovations, relics, and more — that represent the context and time period of their shared sacrifices. While each is a chorus of desires and voices, treat a single bridge as a meta-entity of Rank 3 that draws on a single pool of Essence, a thematic set of Numina, and a singular lack of agency beyond their original purpose and an ache to be remembered. The faces in the masses are never recognizable. They are maimed. Destroyed. Faded. Fused into the mass of flesh or steel or stone. They are forgotten, but never silent. A blur of whispers, a chorus of shouts, sky-writing, even forms of sign language or code are possible.

The **Groomers** are Kerberoi who tend, maintain, and sometimes add new ghosts to the structure of the bridges. Many-faced in contrast to their faceless property, these skittering hulks insist upon a certain context and either destroy all individual faces they encounter or add them to their own exteriors in patches. If encountered, they will seek to assess the “fitness” of those who would rule over a bridge (for to cross a bridge is to rule it, in their countless eyes). Only the power of a high calling as listed above, or a sacrifice of Essence from the bridge beneath will stay their urge to add material to the greater stories they tend. They are ultimately gatekeepers of a certain history, demanding stories with singular leads. Anything too crude, unmannerly, or out of theme? It will have to be pared down to fit, just another link in the chain forward to progress.

The plateaus themselves are mostly bare juts of rock above the mist and silence, but a few still hold treasures of note. These **Milestones** may yet hold the culmination of a single or several bridges. Mementos, lost fetters to powerful ghosts, clues to old Remembrances, or other artifacts of power may sit here, otherwise unguarded. The Underworld has had many travelers. Few remain.

There’s an added boon to acquiring these milestones, if they still exist. So long as one holds such an object, they hold rulership over any bridge that leads to it. Bridges will gladly offer Essence, Plasm, Memories, or whatever meager gifts they might to see these items removed from their heights. They didn’t struggle to see their works sit on a pedestal. They want their work to be *felt*.

Dominion: The Nursery

An empty crib. A tiny casket. A painful and bewildered silence when someone asks “How many children do you have?” This is what gets left behind, after the unimaginable tragedy of a child’s death.

Never fear. The ghosts of children have somewhere to go. They are kept safe here in the Nursery, never aging, never growing. The Nursery gives these little ghosts what it thinks they want: unchanging safety, comforting brightness, consistent rules.

The boundaries of this Dominion appear as pastel walls lit by achingly bright lights and lined with rows of shelves and cubbies that are meant to hold toys. All the cubbies are empty, though — one wall holds a fireplace, and its blazing heat is constantly fed with the toys abandoned by the ghosts who live here, burned to extract the Essence that keeps the Nursery intact.

If you try to talk to the children in the Nursery, the newer ones cling to you, seeking the love and safety that their parents can no longer give them. The ones who have been here longer shun visitors, and instead return to their endless work at the fireplace, burning away toys and bathing in the Essence that emerges. Sometimes, as they work, they still sing nursery rhymes.

The Kerberos here is a protector of sorts: a massive teddy bear with its face loved off that thunders forth to defend the little ghosts of the Nursery.

Old Laws: Take turns. Share and share alike. Tell a story before the lights go out.

Getting There: Take one sip from the River Eresh-ki-gala, then sail down it until the water turns pink. Ask the dinosaur for directions, and do the second thing it tells you.

Story Hooks

- Your krewe has painstakingly gathered all the Keys that you need for the Avernian Gate in the ghost town of Atolia, CA. The last one is a wooden toy soldier with chipped red paint that was burned after its owner, 8-year-old Caleb Michaels, died in Atolia in the flu epidemic of 1918. You must find Caleb and the toy soldier here.
- You need Essence. No, you really *need* Essence. Without it, the boundaries of the Dominion of Salt will evaporate, creating an irreparable breach between it, the Autochthonous Jungle, and the River Acheron. The Nursery is the only place that you can get a sufficient supply — if you can convince the small ghosts here to give it to you.
- “...just tell us that she’s all right?” the young mother sobs. “Please?”

Dominion: The Cavern of Flame

The Ner Tamid at a synagogue; the Olympic torch; the fire at the tomb of an unknown soldier — all are supposed to be everlasting.

What happens when an eternal flame goes out?

Fire is an ever-changing thing. Its shape shifts, it climbs higher and sinks lower, it changes color in barely perceptible ways, and always, always, it consumes its fuel and burns out.

Then, it reappears here in the Cavern of Flame. This vast canyon of black stone has walls thousands of feet high, dotted with row after row of grottos in which burn tiny fires. Each flame can only light a small area, though, before the darkness swallows it up.

In the center, on a black stone floor, reside those who tended these flames in life, drawn here in death, too; constant souls whose faith keeps these flames alight. Aemilia, the Vestal Virgin who rekindled the sacred fire in Rome by casting a piece of her own garment onto the place where the flame once burned. Takhmurap, who commanded the Three Great Flames of ancient Persia to be brought to him, and who waits for them still.

Where other flames die, these endure. This is a place of purity and faithfulness, for all eternity.

Or at least, until this Dominion fades away, too.

The Kerberos here is The Moth (p. XX), an enormous creature with 12 legs and four wings. It flits in and out of the flickering light, hovering above the flames.

Old Laws: Be faithful: once you have chosen a course, remain on it until the path ends. Share your light: you must guide others with your knowledge.

Getting There: Find a candle made of pure beeswax and place it in a holder made of bone. Light it from an already-burning flame, and then blow it out. Continue walking in the darkness until you see what looks like stars.

Story Hooks

- The Flame of Hope in London, Ontario, Canada is one of the flames here; in the first year after it was lit, a vandal extinguished it. Gordon Davies, the last security guard on duty before the vandal struck, died two years later, still remorseful about what he felt was a failure on his part. That remorse has made his spirit unquiet. Guide him here so that he may be reunited with his flame.
- A member of your krewe thinks that fire from the Cavern of Flame can strengthen the ceremony of Persephone's Return. Bring back three flames: an echo of the fire at the Burning Mountain in Australia; the lost flame from the Helsinki memorial to sailors who perished at sea; and an ember from the Cherokee Nation's council fire. To find which flames are which, speak to the spirit of the Olympic torch-carrier Hermia Stephanides — if you can catch her.

Dominion: The Dead Forest

A dim forest of leafless trees, silent except for the dry clack of branches scraping against each other. But the air is still — so how do the branches move?

This is the Dead Forest. Even here in the Underworld, some souls want to forget who they were: those whose lives or deaths were so painful that they feel it is better to forget all life and all emotion than to hold onto anything of what has gone before. Their existence is still eternal, but it is an existence of oblivion, their minds gradually growing blank even as they take root in the timeless unchanging forest.

Some ghosts come here intentionally; others find themselves in the Dead Forest when they get lost — and then their minds begin to fade, so they cannot find their way out again.

If you touch a tree, it may recoil; if you speak to it, it may speak back. But if you break off a twig from one of the dry, leafless branches, it bleeds. Always.

The Kerberos here takes the form of a cluster of thorny twigs. It clatters over the forest floor, scattering dry leaves and stabbing pinprick holes in its wake.

Old Laws: Speak only of the past, so that you can keep your memories alive.

Getting There: In the valley below the Mountain of the Wolf, you will find a spiral path. Follow it outwards until you reach the banks of the River Phlegethon. Ford the river two by two. Then, you must become completely lost. Blindfold yourself; spin around until you lose your way; cloud your mind with magic — whatever it takes. When your mind and eyes clear once more, you will be in the Dead Forest.

Story Hooks

- A twig from one of the trees of the Dead Forest has somehow found its way into the hands of necromancer Philip Mackenzie, a member of the Church of Death's Shards. He is planning to use the spiritual resonance of the twig to create a link with the Underworld and send ghosts out of this realm and into oblivion. You must not only find a way to retrieve the twig from Philip, but also to return the twig to the Dead Forest so that it can be reunited with its original tree.
- The spirit of poet Chimuanya Okoro has been lost in the Dead Forest for seven years. Her sister, Kesandu, plagued by nightmares of Chimuanya's torment and oblivion, has asked you to help bring her sister peace. You must make your way to the Dead Forest, find a way to recall Chimuanya to herself enough so that she can be sent to a more peaceful place, and then return safely to tell Kesandu the tale.

Dominion: The Crossroads

The Crossroads is a place to make bargains and trades: A bargain made here is believed to be especially honest. Not all trades are tangible objects, though: you may trade away immaterial things such as abilities, emotions, and especially memories.

There is a marketplace here: a chaos of dim stalls and booths that flicker in and out, all crowded together in an effort to get as close to the Crossroads itself as possible. Running through the center are two roads made of neatly arranged bones crossed at perfect angles, stark white against the dull grayish-brown land.

The spirits who come here trade ghost objects rich in Essence; they trade secrets and services; they make oaths; they meet on what passes for neutral ground here in the Underworld.

At the center, where the roads cross, stands this Dominion's Kerberos, a massive creature that has grown into the shape of an arch. Four thick, stony legs carved into spiral columns curve up to meet at the top, above which rises a massive body and two curved faces so that it may watch all sides of the Crossroads at once.

One of these faces is the Oathkeeper: A bargain or promise made within the sight of its eyes is especially solemn and binding. Many believe that the Oathkeeper can exact punishment for breaking an oath made in its shadow; none know whether this is true, because none have yet dared to break one of these vows.

The other face is the Peacemaker: No harm may be done within its gaze. If anyone tries to do harm, the Kerberos either freezes them in place or crushes them with one massive foot.

Old Laws: All bargains made here must be honest. All trades made here must be equal. Break not a promise made in Oathkeeper's sight. Do no harm in Peacemaker's sight.

Getting There: To reach the Crossroads, simply begin along any straight path in the Underworld. With the first creature you see, make a bargain. To the second, swear an oath. The third will lead you to the Crossroads.

Story Hooks

- You never thought that your krewe would ever end your feud with Alecto's Fire, the Furies of Melbourne, Australia. It has gone on for years, bringing destruction to both sides. But now the leader, Meg Stuart, has reached out to try to make peace — and she insists upon finalizing the accord at the Crossroads, in order to follow tradition and protocol as much as possible. Which means that you trust her... right?
- Eva Brunelli traded away her Anchor, a silver filigree locket containing a hand-painted portrait of her grandfather. She swears that she thought it was a good idea at the time, and that she received something equally valuable in return — and yet she cannot produce the item that she received, and cannot even remember what it was. She does remember the ghost who traded with her, though: a small hunched man with wispy white hair and burning purple eyes. And she remembers that she made the trade at the Crossroads.

Chapter Six: The Quiet Places

*I, too sing America.
I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh
And eat well,
And grow strong.*

Langston Hughes, "I, Too, Sing America"

No story happens in a vacuum, and doubly so the stories of the Bound, born as they are from strife and tragedy. Stories are born in specific places and specific times, and much like the Bound themselves, they're born out of conflict, loss, and determination.

In the Room Where It Happens

Washington, D.C., USA 1968

1968 changed the world. Yes, it's true of every year in every decade, but the impact of what happened during the 1960s is still felt today, full of tragedies and triumphs. The 60s are like that kid in the back of the class that slung one liners at teachers and left them stunned. The decade had the Rights Movements (Civil, Women, LGBT, Latino and Indian), the Vietnam War, *Loving v. Virginia*, *Star Trek* (with the first interracial kiss on television), and the tragic assassinations of great leaders fighting for change. The decade saw hippies, the March on Washington, riots that left communities reeling for decades, and the Space Race putting the first man on the moon. There can be no change without holding onto hope in the darkness that we can make the world a better place. The 1960s highlight that struggle against the impossible to bring progress.

History

Washington, D.C. is the embodiment of stunted transformation, corruption, revolution and power. It was a sleepy little backwoods pit stop that became the capital of the United States. The seat of power for a country dedicated to freedom, it is the only city whose citizens are denied a meaningful voice in the republic, as they still don't have full voting representation in Congress. The leadership structure of the city has changed as, in 1967, it replaced its Board of Commissioners after 80 years, changing to a mayor-commissioner, currently Walter Washington.

After many compromises by the founding fathers in 1790, Washington was conceived as the new seat of power, moving the capital from Philadelphia in 1800. The north wanted Revolutionary War debts paid by the government, the south wanted slavery for their agricultural needs and lust for profit over human decency. Washington was between the two regions, created by taking land from Virginia and Maryland.

Washington remained a city of a few thousand souls who returned to their homes elsewhere in the summer until the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. The influx of soldiers and need for additional federal government caused a population boom, but the infrastructure couldn't support the expanding needs. The city grew painfully over the ensuing decades, with new governmental agencies and urban renewal targeted at the underclass, shuffling them all to one section of town.

World War II changed Washington into what it is today, a seat of power on a global scale. The war boom increased population, jobs, and housing demands, with 200,000 people rushing to Washington for work. This migration, of sorts, forced minorities out of their jobs, out of their homes, and onto the streets. After the war, conditions did not improve substantially, and people of color were locked into the lower class.

Rocketing into the 60s, Washington is a hotbed of activism, from the injustices it placed on the backs of the underclass to the failing propaganda war over the Vietnam conflict. The city has one of the nation's largest African-American populations due to blacks fleeing the south during the Great Migrations of the 1910s.

Everyone knows that something is on the wind. Every day, people leave their homes, pick up signs and protest on the National Mall. Walking down the Mall provides a front-row seat to Students for a Democratic Society providing teach-ins for all who will listen, protesting the war. In January, the government's propaganda machine collapses, with the Tet Offensive exposing the truth of the war: No end is in sight. Shocking the nation, more and more protesters take to the streets, including many Vietnam War veterans who arrive on crutches and in wheelchairs, throwing away their medals on television.

Being the seat of the government creates a lush middle class for those considered the average American. White unemployment hovers around 4%, although black unemployment is more than twice that. Even though the Civil Rights Act was signed four short years ago, segregation is the pervasive law of the land. Blacks are trapped in ghetto neighborhoods thanks to the oppressive housing laws established before '68, forcing them into the southern quarter of the city, largely into dilapidated homes. Few wish to sell to them, and even when they do, outrageous contracts, where a family can lose their home for missing a single payment, are enforced. This redlining limits the education opportunities that blacks can receive, as schools are built along neighborhood lines. With so-called "white flight," white parents placed their children in private schools. This practice escalated in the late 50s after schools were integrated, turning most of the public schools into black majorities. These schools do not receive any federal grant money.

The mounting frustration continues, as two-thirds of the population of the city is black but 80% of the police force is white. Police militarization is in full swing to oppress the civil rights and anti-war protesters. The boiling pot is near erupting. Washington explodes into riots for six days on April 4, 1968, after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King.

After the riots, the city slowly moves toward a new normal. President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (Fair Housing Act), on April 11, 1968, which prohibits discrimination for sale, rental, and financing of housing based on race, religion, national origin, or gender — a small step forward on a long road.

1968 spins on as Washington recovers from the riots, the National Guard units recede into painful memories, and activists go back out onto the street to continue the slow march of change. Looming on the horizon, Richard Nixon will become president, the first metro transportation system will open in few short years, and the Vietnam War will come to a messy end.

Washington, D.C. embodies what Sin-Eaters are struggling to find: the best way forward, one step at a time.

Geography

Washington D.C. is broken down into four unequal quadrants based on their direction from the compass set into the floor of the empty tomb of George Washington under the Capitol. It was rumored that the city's street system was made to confuse invaders and intimidate foreign nationals.

Northwest is the largest of the quadrants, making up roughly a third of the city and the most prosperous of the four. The lines of demarcation are apparent when one enters Northwest. A few of the main neighborhoods are DuPont Circle, Georgetown, Embassy Row and Cleveland Park.

Northeast contains parts of Capitol Hill, and the Atlas District and Fort Totten neighborhoods.

Southwest is the smallest of all the quadrants. Government renewal has led to the evictions of nearly all residents, many local businesses have been demolished.

Southeast is split by the Anacostia River snaking its way through the quadrant. Southeast houses many of the overlooked and oppressed, an area with spiking poverty and crime rates.

The heart of U Street began as a silent movie theater, Minnehaha, in 1910 and eventually transformed into **Ben's Chili Bowl** restaurant in 1958. In the midst of the riots of 1968 following Martin Luther King's assassination, Ben's is one of the few parts of the city to stay open, providing food, shelter and a safe haven for activists, firefighters, and soldiers alike. Ben's is a shimmering gem of hope in the void. It is a place for community. The Rattlers, a Fury krewa, have adopted the restaurant as a second home, and they will fight for it. They are frequently found there after 7 p.m. The National Guard has been receiving orders to keep the peace and they are harassing the Rattlers for some reason. They can't explain it, but the attention has been getting more and more heated. A misstep could lead to a deadly riot in the streets.

A popular hangout for the soldiers stationed in the D.C. metro area, **Crown Bar and Grill** on E Street boasts the cheapest booze and best pool tables in the city. Brawls are common in the three-story bar, though few are ever reported.

Hook: AWOL

Allen L. Adams joined the army in 1965 and served in both Kentucky and Korea before being stationed at Fort Myer, Virginia in '67. The young man, barely 20, is killed in a drunken bar battle by a Marine who hides the body.

The krewa encounters the ghost, who doesn't know where his body is. He doesn't want revenge, he just wants to be buried with honors so his mother knows he wasn't a deserter or a coward.

A stone's throw from the White House is the **House of the Temple of the Scottish Rite**. It's mostly a bog-standard Masonic lodge, but a dozen or so Brother Masons have been inducted into the Order of the Keystone Eternal, a Memento cult that believes Mementos are the dismembered viscera of God.

Howard University (Mecca, HU, or Howard) is a hub of African-American scholastic achievement. The school plays an important role in American history and the Civil Rights Movement, even inventing the "stool-sitting" technique during the early 40s, in which protesters peacefully fill available space at a local business to economically force change by costing them business. When the 1960s hit, students actively took part in the Movement, protesting against segregation in the Jim Crow south and beyond.

Hook: Freedom Ride

The krewe takes part in a Freedom Ride down south, to carry the message of peaceful equality. The journeys are fraught with dangers: local cops watching the roads for the buses, Klan mobs in their white costumes illuminated by burning crosses, and dark roads from which some travelers never return. The dead are all around them, as they have lost friends and families, and witnessed atrocities only humans could carry out.

Any Sin-Eater traveling near the **Octagon House** is overwhelmed by desperate pleas for help from the ghosts forever tied to it. The manor, one of the oldest buildings in the city, was designed in 1801 by William Thornton for the richest plantation owner and slaver in Richmond, Colonel John Tayloe III. Tayloe murdered both of his daughters in that house, the first in 1812 and the other in 1817. Their shades, and those of countless slaves, remain bound to the house, and even among the living it's known as one of the most haunted buildings in Washington.

The long-gone servants' bell can often be heard ringing in the distance, and apparitions range from the crumpled body of Rebecca Tayloe at the foot of the stairs to phantom footfalls and clanking sabers, to, if the stories can be believed, Dolley Madison hosting ghostly receptions in the parlor are frequent appearances. The grounds of the house have the Open Condition, and in the basement, directly below the last step of the stair, is an Avernian Gate.

Having seen better days decades ago, **Union Station** no longer serves crowds of 200,000 travelers by train and bus daily. The neoclassical-style building filled with granite and polished marble greets a few lonely commuters. The federal government is desperately funneling money to turn it into a lavish visitor center, to no avail. A once-thriving lifeline for the city is slowly fading away. Sin-Eaters riding the rail hear the pleas of long-dead travelers, just trying to make it to destinations that have moved on without them.

No Sin-Eater can pass unmolested through **Independence Avenue**, which include the remnants of the city's two largest and most notorious slave markets, The Yellow House and Williams Slave Pen. The slaves were chained in a windowless basement to await their torturous future. Even the living report hearing the screams of the dead and the constant clinking of chains. A line of hundreds of ghosts relives the worst moments of their lives: men and women being dragged from the basement to the auction block, a child taken from his parents, or husbands and wives separated and sold to different slavers.

Minister John Kinard and Secretary of the Smithsonian Institute S. Dillon Ripley opened the **Anacostia Community Museum** in 1967, reaching out to the African-American community in Anacostia. As director of the museum, Kinard is actively trying to increase attendance and solidify the museum for the community. After the initial exhibits of various arts and statues, the community requested exhibits that represented them.

Hook: Painting the Past

Kinard puts out flyers asking for local artists. Ana Green spent her life painting but died in a tenement fire, unknown and starving. She asks the krewe to have one of her pieces displayed in the museum. Only two have survived, one in the hands of an elite art dealer who refuses to part with it, and the other hanging on a vampire's wall. The vampire is willing to sell, but at what cost?

Arlington National Cemetery is well-protected by ghosts, Sin-Eaters, and living magicians alike. The cemetery itself is considered neutral ground by all. Anyone coming to honor the dead is welcomed. The Unknown Soldier, a very old and powerful geist who guards the cemetery, has repelled every Reaper that has dared to breach the Avernian Gate in his tomb. The Platoon krewe frequently visits the cemetery to talk to old friends.

Liberal, Conservative or Undecided

A newish krewe, the **First Church of Shepard, Psychopomp** came into existence as man looked to the stars and Yuri Gagarin touched the unknown. Joan Alder, one of the Abiding, founded the krewe after she wondered what would happen if someone died in space. Would their ghost be sucked back to Earth and into the Underworld? Would they ascend? Or are they trapped in limbo? The Shepards mostly work in the government, using their security clearance to acquire as much knowledge about NASA as possible, hoping to be aboard the first flight to the moon. Each of the group has spent a week at NASA and are expert pilots.

Washington's marble halls of power turn the world. Few know that as well as **The Children of the Republic**. They stroll through the corridors of power without resistance, using their geists to ferret out secrets better left unknown. They blackmail those who oppose their conservative views, ever to the right. One group is holding out against them, the **Winchells** (named for Walter Winchell), using the press as their weapon to quell the politicians. But each published story that kills a legislative bill through public opinion brings them one step closer to taking their fight into the streets.

Hook: Party Politics

The krewe is approached by the Children of the Republic to find dirt on the Winchells or to make them go away, without it all leading back to them. If the krewe refuses, the Children make sure the National Guard, local police, and others take an interest in the krewe.

Since long before the term krewe became a thing, the **Platoon** (though they don't call themselves that) have been a thing. They are soldiers who have fought, killed, and in most cases, died for their country. They have seen battles the way few can imagine. They have died on the field only to come back and keep fighting. But each time they are killed, some random Joe in their unit dies in their place, and they come back with the random Joe's blood on their soul. It happens over and over again until they're sent home. Soldiers can't just leave, they have orders and going AWOL in a warzone is a death sentence, but for whom? Most do whatever they can to get kicked out. Coming back home in shame, their families looking down on them, spouses leaving and children left asking why. Others are still in the stockade. The geists of Sin-Eaters never leave; they try to help the Bound resolve their Burdens and then move on to a new soldier dying on the battlefield. Each member is a fully trained soldier but prefers not to fight; they understand the cost of each life and the burden of living with that death.

The **Howard Knights** walk the halls of the University as a symbol that death does not stop the cause. Each returned to Washington as a Sin-Eater after a fatal trip into the deep Jim Crow south. They don't speak of it often, but are ready to protect their brothers and sisters, as the struggle continues.

Frenemies

The ghost of **Reverend Zen** lords over the **Washington National Cathedral** with kind words, a friendly smile, and an uplifting message about how it is time to move on. Once a ghost is hooked, the pastor escorts them down to the bowels of the cathedral to an Avernian Gate. If they resist, he reassures them the entire way that this is the order of things. Zen smiles and understands, and lets them go about their way if he can't convince them, but always tells them that they are welcome to come back. Once the ghost has departed, Zen dons a Deathmask to hunt down the ghost as the Reaper, Sacrament of the Consumption.

During riots, the **National Guard** and **Police** sweep into the streets, militarizing the city and doing whatever it takes to institute order. If the players find themselves on the streets during this time, they are likely targets of tear gas, assaults, beatings, and arrests.

Protesters weren't the only targets of the new militarization. Nixon once called Washington the "Crime Capital of the World." **Roland "The Pick" Mitchel** lived up to the moniker by stabbing rivals to death and sent his crew onto the streets to keep selling heroin. The Pick is one of the most established drug lords of Washington, D.C. Everyone seems to have heard stories about him killing eight cops with nothing but a pick, and surviving an attack where he was filled with hot lead. No one can account for it, but any room he enters holds its breath until he decides the occupants' fate. His right hand is **Julie West**, a deadly gun moll and getaway driver. The Pick himself is responsible for more deaths than the heroin he sells.

High Rollers

Jimmy "The Unofficial Mayor of 9th Street" Lake embodies what a Necropolitan should be, and that is why people (living and dead) flock to him. Always ready to drink, tell a joke and embrace life, he is on his way out of the city. He lost his haunted nightclub of 40 years, the Gayety, and moved his burlesque business to the Central Theater, but business is slow. He needs help. His spirits are low, but his jokes are top notch.

Hook: Brother, Can You Spare Some Plasm?

Jimmy needs a solid; he needs some help keeping his business open as he has become the target of audits. Seems like someone wants his building.

The **Demon Cat (D.C.)** stalks the bowels of the Capitol through the Crypt. Centuries ago, 100 cats were released into the crypt to quell a rat problem. Somewhere along the way, one of those cats died and became a barghest (p. XX), and somewhere else along the line, that barghest became a geist. Rumors that D.C. is Bound to a Sin-Eater Senator remain unconfirmed.

Disgruntled and in constant conflict with his geist, **Sergeant Charles Blake** haunts Washington with his very presence, helping ghosts resolve their burdens or banishing them. With a Synergy rating hovering between 0 and 1, the man is an open wound on the world, looking for a cause.

Hook: Never Leave a Sin-Eater Behind

The krewe stumbles over Sgt. Blake as he peacefully lays a ghost to rest, after hearing rumors of him devouring the dead. His internal conflict is apparent; if attacked, he fights back to escape. Looking into the man, the krewe discovers his family doesn't know why he goes from anger to happiness to depression. The krewe needs to either help the man find peace or stop him from killing more of the dead.

Predicting President Kennedy's death on May 13, 1956, seven years before it happened, propelled **Jeane Dixon (Lydia Emma Pinckert)** into the spotlight. She has quickly become a bestselling authority, journalist, and psychic. Rumors of the origins of her powers vary, she has issued an adamant claim that they are a gift from God. Lately her predictions have turned toward a great calamity that will drop half of Washington into a great pit, "from which none living will emerge."

In 1967, **John Richard Nichols** became one of the first Americans to openly talk about his homosexuality on national television, only to suffer countless death threats from his FBI-agent father. He co-runs the D.C. Mattachine Society branch, one of the first gay rights groups in the United States. He's also haunted: The ghost of his father's former FBI partner is Anchored to him, and blames Nichols' homosexuality for his father's loss of security clearance.

In January, **Jeannette Rankin Bridge** organized the largest women's march in Washington since Women's Suffrage in 1913. 5,000 women supporting the anti-war movement march from Union Station to the Capitol, as another group protests Arlington Cemetery to highlight the limited role women are forced to take as wives and mothers. Iris Jackson, one of Bridge's lieutenants in the march, went missing for a few weeks and came back different. She blacks out and awakens in unknown places. Iris doesn't remember making the Bargain when she was killed by "Pick," and her geist wants vengeance.

Need help, a friend to see if your spouse is cheating, or a drinking buddy? **Jackson Wright** is your man. A former lightweight boxer who was better at taking a hit than dishing them out, he had to retire from boxing, disappointing his father, a former middleweight boxer and 761st Black Panther veteran. Jackson is one of lucky ones who has a small apartment in Northeast D.C., which he uses as an office for his private eye business. What he lacked in boxing talent, he seems to have made up for with his Holmesian attention to detail, but he still can't get a steady gig. So, for a few bucks and a bottle of scotch, he'll take your case.

Southern Hospitality

Mobile, Alabama 1910

The skyline of 1910 Mobile is dotted with newly renovated factories, billowing clouds of grayish smoke being pushed skyward, and ever-taller buildings under construction. Everything leads back to the bay: Imports and exports are the city's lifeblood. The rising industrialization stands in contrast to the rich history of the city, peppered with rituals steeped in French culture and customs, including everyone's favorite party: Mardi Gras. The first Mardi Gras was held in Mobile in 1704, nearly two decades before New Orleans existed.

The city's wealth, like much of America's, was built on the backs and lives of minorities.

Jim Crow

Mobile, as most of the southern states, followed Jim Crow, a set of state and local laws that enforce racial segregation from 1890 through 1965 (the official end, but in reality, the same treatment continued). The laws dictated "separate but equal" treatment of blacks, when the reality was anything but. Jim Crow, and the high rate of lynchings, led to the Great Migrations of 1910 and 1970, where blacks moved north and westward.

Handling racism and Jim Crow can be tough, and it's a subject some people would rather sidestep, but that's not truthful to the setting or the spirit of the game. The first step is to establish what level of realism the players are comfortable with. Discuss it with the players and establish some rough guidelines and be prepared to use the Geist Card (p. XX).

Remember an important basic rule when playing a character of a race other than your own: don't try to be "black" or act like a racial stereotype, including putting on an accent or voice. Storytellers, don't use vulgar language. The N word is never allowed. Instead, focus on how people interact with the characters: the way they are overlooked, the people that won't engage with them, and the assumption they are always wrong. Every encounter is starting from scratch. Use the description of actions.

The following examples of Jim Crow laws are just a sampling of what was on the books. Violating any of them can result in the offender being killed:

Black men can't extend hands to white men because it would imply social equality.

Displays of affection between black people are not allowed and are considered offensive.

Blacks are expected to step aside for whites and let them pass.

History

The Muscogee people lived peacefully in what would be named Mobile. The Spanish invasion ended that with death at sword point in 1540, and destroyed the fortified city of Maubila, that would become Mobile. The Spanish held the city until it fell into French hands in 1702 and became the capital of French Louisiana. An outbreak of yellow fever swept through the city in 1706, decimating the surrounding indigenous peoples and the slave population at the time, which led to a sizable Sin-Eater culture whose traditions still extend into the black and indigenous communities today.

Mobile fell into British hands in 1763, then back into Spanish hands in 1780, and eventually joined the United States in 1813 as part of the Mississippi Territory. It became part of the Alabama Territory a few years later, and joined Alabama when it became a state in 1819.

Mobile's main economic trades were slaves and cotton. Mobile was in an economic boom and began large-scale construction within the city, continuing its industrialization for decades. The Civil War forced Mobile to surrender to Union forces to avoid destruction, but the damage it sustained cost numerous lives and significant parts of the city.

Mobile prospered as the Port of Mobile rose to prominence. The increased wealth led to the city's population exploding, up to 51,000 in 1910. Social and racial tensions spiked with the passing of a new constitution in 1901 that stripped blacks and poor whites of the right to vote. A boycott was launched to protest the new constitution, but was quickly quelled.

Mobile in 1910 is a city on the rise: Money comes in and cotton goes out. Every day, a new wonder of the decade blooms into existence, be it a new hotel, electric trolley cars that traverse the length of the city, a new dance for next year's Mardi Gras, or a mint julep to die for on the veranda.

Daily Life in 1910

In 1910, over two-thirds of Americans live in small rural towns of 2,500 or less. The United States leads the world's production of iron and steel, while also producing half of the world's cotton, corn, and oil, and a third of the world's coal and gold.

In cities, most people work in factories and live in crowded, unsanitary tenements, but people also have more buying power than anyone in decades. Department stores, mail-order catalogs, and an efficient postal service become staples of everyday life. More and more cities are moving away from gas lighting in favor of electric lighting for public use, though the trend is slower to catch on in private homes.

Middle- and upper-class white people have a spring in their step and hope in their hearts for a brighter tomorrow. They enjoy yearly vacations, weekend orchestral concerts, family picnics, and lawn games. A lucky few have phonographs in their home, but it's still not uncommon to see a young man courting a young woman on the veranda playing a banjo.

Cars have just begun production and are rolling out into towns. Speed limits are established in some places and not others because of the limited number of cars on the road.

Geography

Three miles north of downtown Mobile, **Africatown** was founded in 1860 in the aftermath of a failed plot to continue the outlawed slave trade practice. Timothy Meaher, a shipbuilder, along with his brother and several others, illegally brought 100 West African slaves into the Port of Mobile aboard the slave ship *Clotilde*. The scheme was discovered, the ship burned and scuttled, and the surviving slaves were left to fend for themselves. Thirty-two slaves, who were taken to Meaher's farm north of Mobile, built shelters, grew food, and learned to adapt. Over the years, Africatown became a self-governing society, preserving the language and traditions of their homeland. Charlie Poteet is their chief, and Jabez is their medicine man.

Every krewe in Mobile wants a piece of the **Magnolia Cemetery**. The sprawling cemetery houses over 60,000 burials. The massive cemetery contains the Old Hebrew Burial Ground, The Coal Handlers Union, Colored Benevolent Institution Number One, The Confederate Rest and other sub-cemetery plots. In 1883, a fence was erected around the cemetery, and by 1910 plans for a gatehouse with iron gates are in the works. The dead buried here are lively and passionate, and they have, collectively, vast knowledge of Mobile's history and its secret doings. Sin-Eaters willing to sit down for a long, meandering conversation about local politics or the hottest theater premieres of 1873 can learn a great deal. Plus, the cemetery's annual "Morti Gras" party is not to be missed.

By contrast, **Church Street Graveyard** is a nightmare. Founded outside the city in 1819, the four-acre cemetery has almost become the center of downtown as Mobile grows. Ever since the vanishing of the cemetery's guardian geist, the ghosts who dwell here seem to suffer from some unknown malady that accelerates their descent into madness.

The two-story brick **Richards-DAR House Museum** houses the history of antebellum Mobile. Many of the historical artifacts housed within are Anchors, and the museum has a reputation as one of the most haunted buildings in the city.

Opened in 1900, the **Bienville Hotel** is a ghost of its former, luxurious self. The hotel did fine business until the Cawthon and Battle Houses were constructed a few years later, built with Mardi Gras and their money in mind. Now the Bienville is a seedy flophouse, trading on its steadily declining glory, haunted by the memory of what it once was. Literally — parts of the old hotel linger on in Twilight, and local Necropolitans use it as a halfway house for recently risen ghosts.

Mobile Cotton Exchange (St. François and North Commerce Street) is vital in allowing cotton factors and merchants to control the sale, storage, and distribution of cotton from the Port of Mobile. By 1910 it was the third largest cotton exchange in the states.

Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception (2 South Claiborne Street) has been home of the Archbishops of Mobile since 1850. During the Civil War, a Union ammunition depot exploded, killing hundreds of people, burning most of Mobile to the ground, and blowing out the entire north wall of the cathedral and all of its windows. The wall was reconstructed and the windows replaced with beautiful stained-glass windows from Germany. The last window was added in 1910, under the watchful eye of the current Bishop, Edward Patrick Allen.

Hook: Reflections and Rewards

Otto Adler, a glassmaker for Franz Mayer & Co., traveled with the windows from Munich to oversee the installation. Always a strapping man, ever since installing the new window, his health and luck seem to be increasing dramatically. He is engaged to the mayor's daughter, a windfall of cash has come his way, and he just opened a new show. Otto's windows refract the light of the sunset just so, pinning any ghost who died in that long-ago ammo explosion like a butterfly and allowing Otto to devour them before the light fades. Three days ago, he tracked down and ate the last ghost from that fire. If he's going to continue to feed, he's going to need fresh ghosts killed in a massive fire.

Built in 1902, the value of the **Mobile Public Library** (Cont and Hamilton Street) quickly established itself to city leaders, and it received additional funding in 1910. The additional funding is used to construct additional buildings and add more collections to the library — collections that include journals, sermons, and other writings from many of Mobile's early Sin-Eaters. Segregation has left African-Americans without access to the library, and it will be decades before an additional building is constructed for Mobile's black community.

Union Station connects Mobile, Columbus, and Kentucky as part of the Mobile & Ohio (M&O) Company that transports cotton along its 260-mile line; it is the longest route in the world. Hundreds died building the rail, and many still haunt the track.

Mobile Bay is the city's lifeline. Built in 1885, the Middle Bay Lighthouse is a beacon to all ships coming and going. On warm summer nights, huge numbers of crab, shrimp, and fish swarm the shallow end of the bay, where they're easy prey for the locals. This "Jubilee" is rapidly becoming a favorite holiday for the living, but the dead see the correlation between the Jubilee and sightings of the ghost ship *Clotilde*, and are less charmed.

Mystic Societies

Mobile's history of secret societies dates to 1711, when the Boeuf Gras Society formed as part of the city's annual Carnival celebration. Officially, the mystic societies of Mobile are merely groups of like-minded folks who participate in Mardi Gras parades, but more than a few have occult ties and inner mysteries. Some are krewes, others are Memento cults, and others are stranger still with intentions incomprehensible to the living or the dead.

The **Order of Myths** was the oldest mystic society embracing Mardi Gras in Mobile. It was founded in 1867 and disbanded in 1901. The geist of one of the original members has since made a new Bargain and re-founded the krewe in 1908, exploring the true meaning of the Bargain and trying to understand the power between the two. A few of their numbers have supposedly Bound themselves to multiple geists, magnifying the Sin-Eaters' power.

Southern Crossers represents a long line of Southern pride, including the children of plantation owners looking to keep the status quo and themselves in power. With the power of their Bargains, family connections, and wealth, the small krewe of Bonepickers sees no reason the dead of Mobile should not serve their families, as they have always done.

Radically opposing Southern Crossers, the **Old Glory** is the largest Mystery in Mobile. It accepts members from all walks of life, but is principally made up of former slaves, children of slaves, and those crushed under the heel of segregation. Their chief goal is undermining Jim Crow through actions both political and occult, but some of their dead celebrants are beginning to grumble about the krewe's overt focus on living affairs.

Sipping 30-year-old brandy in the parlor of the Mobile Country Club, the **Visionaries** meet weekly to discuss the next phase of their grand plan. Unlike the others in the city, they are thinking big picture. That means money, and lots of it. The Visionaries fund krewes, occult researchers, and historical preservation societies all over the country. Throw enough money at the problem, they insist, and the whole, systemic problem comes crashing down.

Hook: Lost Tomorrows

The Visionaries never leave Mobile, their power base, but their money does. Unmarked cash shipments go out on the Mobile Line regularly — but a string of brazen train robberies has hit the last four trains carrying Visionary money.

Rabble Rousers

Taller and stouter than most, "**Billy**" does most of the heavy lifting on the dock and is well-paid for it. He never speaks out of turn, nods when addressed, and does what is asked of him. Random accidents seem to befall those around him, and have for a long period of time. He claims to have no knowledge of this strange coincidence, but the ghosts who follow him say otherwise.

Widow Ann Miller came into a tidy sum of money after her second husband Walter passed a few years back. She still dresses in black to mourn him. Now her stepson Francis and his wife, Anna, have passed as well, leaving her the family mill business and a tidier sum of money. The ghosts of Walter, Francis, and Anna still hover around her in Twilight, their ethereal hands reaching out, endlessly whispering a warning: "Don't drink it!"

Hook: The Merry Widow

The old mill has been plagued by apparitions and phantom noises since the latest death, and the three ghosts haunt the Widow Miller near constantly. A suspicious Sin-Eater might suspect the old “murder for the inheritance” scheme, but in truth, the family’s drinking well contains lead, and the widow is also slowly dying. The ghosts are trying to warn her, but all three are Rank 1 and can’t meaningfully communicate the danger.

Colonel Bartholomew Mullis died on the battlefield fighting the Union. Mullis was a vengeful piece of shit in life, and that has only magnified in death. His specter blames the defeat of the south on abolitionists, blacks, and moral degenerates. He is anchored to the anniversary of the Battle of Mobile Bay, and every year on August 5th, he materializes and stalks the city. So far, he has killed nine people and injured 20.

Arthur Pendleton Bagby, the former Governor of Alabama, House of Representatives member, and United States Minister to Russia, was a born politician and has remained so in death. The shrewd ghost has turned Magnolia Cemetery into a thriving necropolis, rich with the Essence of living memory. He maintains relations with numerous mystic societies in Mobile, but his priority is always Magnolia — and the power it gives him.

Bettie Hunter, a former slave, earned her wealth through a carriage business. After the Civil War destroyed New Orleans’ transportation market, Mobile became the major port city in the South. Bettie took advantage of this situation, which enabled her to buy a fine home rivaling successful white business owners. Operating through proxies, including a medium frequented by the carriage company’s current owner, she still directs her empire today, with a healthy side business in relocating ghosts and their Anchors. The coming rise of the auto industry worries her, but so far even the most vigorous of séances hasn’t convinced the man to diversify.

Everything a good person should be is embodied by **Bishop Edward Patrick Allen**. Immediately upon becoming the Bishop of Mobile in 1897, he got to work doubling the number of priests, more than tripling the number of Catholics in Mobile, and overseeing the construction of new churches, schools, orphanages, and hospitals. He reaches out to the African-American community by fostering an environment for education and the introduction of the Knights of Peter Claver (the largest and oldest Catholic African-American society).

Ezekiel Washington, born a slave and never knowing his true family, turned to the Word for relief. Now that he is free, he is beginning to lose his faith. He dreamed that freedom would wash away the racism, but has only encountered the harsh reality of the world.

Hook: One Man’s Faith

Washington witnesses a Bargain and has no idea how to process it. He begins to preach about what he saw around town. If not stopped, the locals will go on a witch hunt, killing anyone they deem less than them.

Mae Watson has turned convention on its head, taking up journalism and publishing an independent paper about Mobile government. Much to the chagrin of the sheriff, Mae goes where the story is, and never minds petty things like segregation. Her latest story is an exposé on the Mystic Societies of Mobile and how deep their ties to local government run.

Mobile owes its drive toward modernization to one man, **Mayor Pat Lyon**. He stepped into the role in 1904, authorizing utility upgrades, paving streets and adding streetcar lines throughout the entire city. During his three terms as mayor, he also orders the construction of waterways to sanitize the drinking water. To date, six construction works have drowned under mysterious circumstances, and he needs more works, but people are too scared.

Edinesis

Edinburgh, Scotland

Beneath the warm gaze of the sun, Edinburgh is the crown that sits on Scotland's brow. Old architecture dots its skyline as the vertebrae on the back of a sleeping giant, warring endlessly with encroaching modernity on its many shapely hills. The Athens of the north is a city whose dichotomies reveal themselves at every coiling causeway, whose streets resound both with the echoes of progress and the memories of its innumerable centuries. Its Old Town is studded with a mish-mash of brick buildings that compete with one another for equal footing, and entire streets overlap one another in a crazed patchwork of antiquated urban sprawl. Each cobblestone and every alley echo with the history of the place. No street looks entirely the same twice, for Old Town remembers itself anew minute to minute, day to day. It squats atop the decaying corpse of its labyrinthine underground streets, long left to fester in the dark. At its apex sits the prominent Edinburgh Castle atop a lushly greened basalt rock. Meanwhile, New Town unfurls itself: a resplendent, verdant-studded patchwork, filigreed with staid Georgian and looming Grecian Revival facades. Like Rome before it, Edinburgh is built on seven great hills, the foremost among them being Arthur's Seat, which lies at the direct heart of the metropolis.

Instabilities

Among the jewels of the city are the universities, which stand prominent among the thriving arts scene of Edinburgh. Enconced within those institutions, as well as in its Surgeons' Hall, the **Siege Perilous** is a krewe most notable for its high-brow eggheaded leanings. Theirs is a tradition marked by staid academia: The universities of the city have stood for centuries, and rumor holds that the Siege Perilous has existed for just as long. They constantly seek new treasures among the Bound's tatterdemalion refuse: objects of power or objects that *speak* to power are among their favorites.

Warring with them for nearly as long as they have existed is the krewe **Asterion's Vengeance**. Over the decades, Asterion's Vengeance has lost its stable footing on the underworld that snakes beneath the city. Where the dowdy airs of the Siege lean towards lofty, starry-eyed rites, Asterion's Vengeance delves into the ecstatic. It is this dichotomy: one pushing ever towards the light, and the other forever toward the primal dark, that causes such strife. It is for this very reason that they are hunting each other, and hunting *you*: Powerful rumors of deals made with the lords of the sundered Underworld have been flying across both krewes' various informational networks. And they are both looking to stop whoever might have struck such a devil's bargain.

Setpieces

One of the curators of the Surgeon's Hall has been ferrying specimens that have long fallen out of the catalogues to the black market. Jocasta, dying in her hospital bed, asks Asterion's Vengeance to purchase one of them: the haunted bones of a martyr with the power to cure any illness. She's willing to pay any price, but a changeling lord is looking for them as well.

The cold war between the krewes is growing hotter by the day. Alliances shift daily as unattached krewes close ranks, and choose their side of the chessboard.

Seventeen coffins with have been found — and lost. Asterion's Vengeance is threatening mayhem if they aren't collected and properly buried. With their discovery, grisly murders like those of Burke and Hare are beginning to crop up in the news.

Bald Agnes has been seen again in Holyrood Palace, stripped to the waist and bleeding. But this time, she promises any krewe that can ease her suffering the formulae for incredibly powerful rites — even the secret hiding place of Mementos that the Siege Perilous doesn't know of.

Axel, one of countless baristas in Edinburgh's café scene, says that he's been hearing the ghost of his grandfather every night coming up from the very ground. The Vaults have a long history of suffering and death, but the turf war between the two major krewes refuses to budge. Fight or not, the voice from below is gaining power — over the dead and parts of the Underworld alike.

Run Away Home

Quilombo dos Palmares, Brazil 1654

Founded by survivors and free-born African slaves, Quilombo dos Palmares has defended itself tooth and nail from its very inception. It was said to be the biggest fugitive community in Brazil, and has warded off Portuguese invasion six times over. It will take an army to quell the community, which rules itself as a confederacy. They are mighty in their difference, a brotherhood among the palms.

Story Hooks

Palmares has constantly reimagined itself with each new conflict, internal or otherwise. The wars that it fights to merely to exist are punctuated by the decades it has remained. And the Portuguese are coming again to bring Palmares to heel, through might and other means.

Sin-Eaters of the region speak of capoeira fights in the dark between rival krewes. The ghosts here are beginning to take notice, and each new bit of violence is beginning to have a strange impact on the dead, who are gaining unimaginable power over the course of weeks. Is this a Ceremony? A Memento? The rash of possessions speaks to the former, yet no one knows just who these krewes might be, or just what they're doing to the ghosts...

A ghost has been seen stalking through the fields and jungles that surround Palmares. She begs for help: She was one of the many native captives originally taken as a bride for one of the men in the settlement. Now she wishes to find his spirit in the Underworld, for good or ill.

One of the many dead from the first conflicts Palmares faced has resurfaced. In exchange for a steady stream of offerings, he will help the kingdom against the encroaching soldiers. But his story isn't adding up, and a sudden rash of horrible murders has struck the community. The ghost isn't to blame, but something yet unknown from the Underworld might be.

Widows' Walk and Salt Spray

Winslow, Massachusetts

Winslow is a small coastal town about 50 miles southeast of Boston, whipped by chilly ocean winds and filled with an aura of faded glory.

The first inhabitants of the area that is now Winslow were the Wampanoag, who for thousands of years made their living by farming and fishing. A plague struck the Wampanoag people between 1616 and 1619, killing almost two-thirds of the entire nation. Devastated, traumatized, and greatly reduced in numbers, they were thus much more vulnerable to European colonization and subjugation when a group of English settlers from Boston, drawn by the area's natural harbor, founded a town there in 1643. Centuries of salt air have worn away the gravestones in the Old Burying Ground, but the locals still know which markers belong to which families.

In the mid-19th century, Winslow rose from a sleepy fishing village to stunning prosperity when its location and harbor made it an ideal site for the booming whaling trade. Everyone in Winslow made a fortune, and Ocean Street filled up with fine new houses funded by the profits from whaling expeditions. But when the New England whaling industry declined near the end of the 19th century, Winslow's fall was as swift as its rise. Those fine houses on Ocean Street fell into disrepair, paint peeling away in the sharp salt wind and shutters hanging askew because their owners could no longer afford to fix them.

Among Winslow's tragedies was the wreck of the *Ruby*: in 1866, the ship was lost just off the shore of Winslow in a violent storm, killing all on board. The wreck has become a collective Memento, holding onto the death energy of the dozens of sailors who perished. The wood does not decay; barnacles and sea creatures can find no purchase on the ship's keel.

Each successive depression and recession has hit Winslow harder, and each successive recovery has been fleeting. From time to time, mayors or entrepreneurs have tried to revive Winslow with some new scheme — funding the Harbor Museum as a way to honor (and profit from) Winslow's maritime past, bringing in a Haunted Walk company to give tours around Halloween — but nothing has worked so far. In the last decade, drug dealers from Boston expanded into Winslow, taking advantage of the economic desperation and numerous vacant buildings to get a foothold in the town. Today, Winslow is struggling and crumbling, constantly haunted by the shadows of its past.

At the Harbor Museum and Archives, curator Lizete Acosta keeps a collection of items too precious — or too strange — to put on display. One of these items is a scrimshaw necklace made from walrus-tusk ivory, carved with intricate patterns of interlocking circles and five-pointed stars. It's said that anyone who wears it will always return home from the sea. It's not said that they'll do so alive, or even human.

God Will Know His Own

Carcassonne, France, 1360

Carcassonne is a walled city in southern France. Rings of heavy stone walls fortify it; more than 50 tall towers protect it. Even the cathedral is fortified now. A few thousand residents — nobles and merchants, beggars and artisans, Christians and Jews — live here, resilient after plague and war, still seeking fulfillment through profit, bravery, art, and God.

Carcassonne is also one of the strongholds of Catharism, a Christian heresy that holds that all earthly things are sinful. Moderate Cathars simply live celibate and austere lives; more extreme ones go so far as to count the body itself as a corrupt and earthly creation and therefore reject it by starving themselves to death. Cathars also count both church and secular leaders as corrupt, adding political subversion to the religious heresy — and so the church moved against them. In

August 1209, the city fell to a swift but brutal siege: The crusaders cut off the city's water supply in the height of summer, and hundreds died of thirst and disease.

Local legend says that during the misery of the siege, some of the Cathars managed to escape through secret tunnels that run beneath the city. Only those in direst need can enter. You always escape your peril here, but you always find something even more dangerous.

More misery and persecution followed. First, the conquering lords punished the Jews of Carcassonne for their resistance by instituting discriminatory restrictions, forbidding them from holding certain occupations or even eating with Christians. Then, the Inquisition came to root out the remaining Cathar heretics in the city and surrounding countryside.

Inquisition Tower, a round stone tower that rises high above the thick, fortified city walls, was claimed by the Inquisition to house their prisoners. The whole village of Verdun-en-Lauragais was imprisoned here in 1305 before their execution. Several of the more devout Cathars starved to death during their imprisonment. Their misery opened an Avernian Gate in the tower, whose Key is a moan of profound hunger.

The Black Death arrived in January of 1348; by April, a quarter of the city was dead. The survivors, seeking to blame someone for their misfortune, accused the Jewish people of Carcassonne of poisoning the water: Several Jews were violently assaulted; others were dragged from their homes and burned to death. Now the plague has receded, and the city is beginning to recover — but the memory of pain and death is never too far away. Neither are the dead themselves.

In 1360, there are three active krewes in Carcassonne, each one locked in uneasy tension with the other two. They are:

The Caravites, Mourners, led by Solomon ben Joseph Caravita. Broken-hearted at the violence done to his people during the plague, he fears that the memory of Carcassonne's Jewish community will be lost. He is known to the rest of the city as the head of Carcassonne's Jewish burial society, a gentle soul who selflessly works to make sure that these lives will be remembered.

The Edict of Verdun, Furies, is led by the Cathar Pierre Bernier. In life, he was from the village of Verdun-en-Lauragais. The first time the Inquisition came for him he escaped; the second time, he was burned at the stake. He is fragile, horribly scarred, and fueled by an unyielding desire for revenge.

The Sisters of Lachesis, Pilgrims, led by Beatris Castanhier. She is a prosperous artisan and skilled weaver. Her husband died in the Black Death; she carried on the business in his absence. The same pragmatic and meticulous attitude that brought her success as a weaver has made her an effective leader for the Pilgrims. If you bring her the right materials, she can weave more than just cloth on her loom.

Solstice Spirals

Bru na Boinne, Ireland

For more than 5,000 years, people have lived at this bend in the River Boyne. Only a few have ever understood how close this area is to the Underworld.

Three massive earthwork domes dominate the landscape: Newgrange, Knowth, and Dowth, a few miles from each other. Each is more than 30 feet high and more than 200 feet across; all were built around 3200 BCE. Around each one is a ring of five-ton stones carved with abstract symbols: spirals, swirls, zigzags.

The entrances of these mounds align perfectly with sunrise on the winter solstice: on the darkest day of the year, a brave and tiny beam of light stretches deep into the interior to illuminate the black, into a chamber that once housed the ashes of the dead. With the correct application of power, these can be passages to the Underworld.

Only the mound at Newgrange is a functioning Avernian Gate. To open it, you must make a burnt offering in a bowl of carved stone at the moment that the light of the winter solstice sunrise strikes the inner chamber. If the Gates at Knowth and Dowth were to be reopened, the earthworks would form an immensely powerful network; nobody has yet discovered how to open them, but krewes make the attempt every year on the winter solstice.

Over time, most people forgot the true meaning of the stones and the solstice chambers, but they continued to struggle over the land. Vikings raided and settled; Normans and English planted castles and the nearby town of Drogheda, then spent centuries tightening their grasp on this land and its people; Catholics and Protestants battle still over the true heart of Ireland. Thousands have died for deep-held causes over the centuries — in battle, in siege, in revolt, in protest — as well as in starvation and in the passing of long years.

The solstice mounds and their standing stones have seen it all, and they hold their power and remember.

Liam FitzGerald, part-time IT worker at the Bru na Boinne World Heritage Site, made a fortune in the Celtic Tiger tech boom, then lost it all again when the bubble burst. Unemployed and despairing, he fell into conspiracy theories, a tendency which only intensified when he got his part-time job at Bru na Boinne. He has plenty of ideas about what the standing stones and earthworks mean. Some of them might even be right, which is the trouble. Every so often, his internet rants stumble into things that are harmful to the local krewes. Until now, his boss, **Dr. Mairi O'Reilly**, has kept him in line. In addition to being a PhD in archaeology and the chief administrator of the Bru na Boinne World Heritage Site, she's a member of the **Three Lions**, the Undertaker krewe in nearby Drogheda. She's been feeding Liam false information to keep him from exposing what they're up to. Now alt.gothic.ghost has found Liam's blog, and they want to bring him into the fold — but the Three Lions are a powerful krewe.

Mega City 4

Beijing, China

Beijing is one of China's biggest cities, with a population of 21 million, although only 13 million have local hukou permits (meaning they're registered to be residents of Beijing). Over eight million, most coming from villages and towns to seek greater opportunities, are not able to access local government benefits and are vulnerable to being displaced in large numbers when the city finds it convenient. This vulnerability continues into the afterlife, as Reapers aggressively target ghosts who died without hukou permits. Even those who died with their permits in good order must pay regular fees of Essence to maintain their hukou status with the Reaper of Public Security.

Beijing is a university town, industry town, and seat of government. Its massive and diverse population mostly lives in close quarters in high-density apartment buildings. Like many major cities, extremes of wealth and poverty live side by side, painful reminders of people who came to the big smoke with big dreams and were broken instead. Beijing has numerous parks, temples, ancient buildings, and tourist attractions, attracting domestic and international tourism. If someone pauses to boggle at a foreign tourist and have their photo taken, it is probably because they too are tourists. Locals are more likely to shake their heads with embarrassment and move on.

Most people are not particularly religious, taking a practical, syncretic approach. Ensuring good luck is more important than any particular deity, and it makes sense to go with what works. Of those who identify as being seriously religious, 95% of those in Hebei and Henan, the provinces around Beijing, identify as Christian, and it is the fastest growing religion.

Ordinary ghosts are encouraged to fade away as fast as possible, through observances designed to appease, respect, and provide closure. Ghosts that linger beyond a few generations, that have demonic appetites or feel wronged, can manifest with creepy ingenuity and variety. Hungry ghost stories contain painful reminders about what happens when ghosts feel slighted.

The Reapers in Beijing are unusually bureaucratic and coordinated in their efforts. Some say it's because Beijing has been a major city with high population for so long that it has had to get organized or be overrun by hungry ghosts. Others blame Tiananmen Square, and for good reason.

Tiananmen, the Gate of Heavenly Peace, is one of the most famous Avernian Gates in the world. During the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, krewes from around China and beyond, inspired in part by the ghost of Hu Yaobang, came together to overthrow the old order of the Underworld. While tanks stopped for civilians in Tiananmen Square and up to a million gathered in the living world calling for change, the Underworld trembled on the brink of Catabasis. Reapers in charge of Beijing's administrative district were divided on how to manage the uprising. Eventually Reapers from outside the city bloodily put down the uprising. Many masks were destroyed that day, and even more in a cleanup afterwards, along with Sin-Eaters, ghosts, and humans.

Tiananmen Square is heavily monitored by Reapers and their agents. You can make a deal there, in the same way that airport security can guarantee a level of disarmament, but do not make sudden moves. Never show Ceremonial inclinations unless you have the correct papers and it is very clear to every watchdog that you have them. Many ghosts are drawn to the Mausoleum of Mao Zedong, swirling around his crystalline coffin, and those with hukuo status are not reaped into the Underworld unless they become a public nuisance.

Beijing is full of temples, ancient hutongs and public places of power, history, and culture. Turf wars between krewes over who gets what haunt are frequent and "renovations" are common as secret sigils are wiped away to make way to the new. Six-hundred-year-old temples whose entire structures have been rebuilt many times with fresh, artificially aged materials is just good upkeep, and creates ample opportunity for krewes to claim their haunts. The age of a building is about history, relationship, and culture, not the specific age of any component.

Instabilities

No one is more welcoming to tourist Sin-Eaters than the **Laowai Gentlemen's Club**. They lend a helping hand to everyone far from home, most guests serve as cover for the despicable acts of a

smaller number of tourists and ex pats. **Boss Urchin**, one of Geist Nezha's many Sin-Eaters, has a mission to protect vulnerable children in the city. Boss Urchin is brave, impulsive, self-sacrificing, and he sees anyone associated with the Gentleman's Club as a predator that needs to be dealt with.

A swan-shaped paddleboat in Beihai Park is possessed, angry, and hissing. It never forgets a face and has a particular dislike for Sin-Eaters and men who wear hats.

The Reapers who watch over Tiananmen Square — **Enduring Struggle Against Counter-revolutionary Reactionaries** and **Harmonious Society and Vigilance** — are publicly unified in their desire for a peaceful Tiananmen Square. Enduring Struggle Against Counter-revolutionary Reactionaries feels like the Harmonious Society and Vigilance has gained too much power and his hold is too cloying and controlling. Enduring Struggle Against Counter-revolutionary Reactionaries has a very special dinner party planned with Harmonious Society and Vigilance as the guest of honor, who will help her execute all eight courses? The favors she can extend include a map to Shangdu, an Underworld River City of legend.

Gong Laoshi was the cruelest teacher at Beijing #14C Experimental Junior High School, and saw no reason to stop when she died in 1983. She haunts the halls, savagely punishing the tardy, the left-handed, and anyone with poor penmanship.

Since the 1990s there have been rumors of an intricately hidden Dominion under Beijing called the **Garden of a Thousand Flowers**. If the rumors are true, it is a heavenly place of fearless philosophical inquiry, scientific pursuit, egalitarianism, and rich diversity. Evolving utopian ideals are pursued with curiosity and openness, shaped by communism but recognizing that no system has all the answers. One of the reasons its location continues to be such a secret may be that once you visit, why would you want to be anywhere else?

Setpieces

Burnt offerings fill the air during Ghost Month, but it is not enough, never enough, for hungry ghosts. Sin-Eaters smell so good, and they just want a taste, or a fuck, or to drown you a little bit. Staggering figures with distended bellies go through your garbage and try to eat anything you have touched, moaning as food turns to ash on their fiery tongues. Gossamer beauties float in the window, lure you to their watery grave and try to take more than you bargained for. You know it's July when a tumorous ghost leans against your leg while it feeds off pus from its own goiters.

The **CowboyPunks** ("Cowboy" is a local slang term for young people who take on a lot of western trappings, often highly fashionable stylings with some neckerchiefed cowboy swagger), a Necropolitan krewe, are about to launch the best nightclub ever. They just need a few bits and pieces; it's no big deal, pick up a few things from some obscure antique markets. They'd do it themselves, but they don't want to bother the **Lucky 8 Krewe** after that smart hutong incident.

The **Pink Lotus Alliance** is going to sneak into the Chinese Ethnic Culture Park and add a whole lot of queer figures into the displays. You can come distract the guards, and run interference with the mischievous ghosts up in the Banyan tree, if you can keep up.

Thousands were forcibly moved to build the Olympic Village in Beijing. Schools, shops, and apartments were bulldozed under, destroying countless Anchors and forgotten bones, stirring up the ancient, sleeping dead and creating a topsy-turvy jungle of ghosts and ghost structures from

throughout Beijing's history. Eater of the dead **Wáng Huángsè's** ghost trap, nestled in the abandoned rowing park and oozing trails of corpus, is one of the many dangers within.

City of Spices

Calicut, India 1526

The Age of Exploration is an interesting lie. Explorers from Spain, Britain, Portugal, and more set out to discover worlds that had long since existed. The New World never was. The lost continents never were. The great discoveries were often rediscovered or revised from methods mastered by past peoples or even forgotten generations. The great voyages often paled before explorers rarely spoken of in the west: the learned Ibn Battuta, the wealthy Mansa Musa, or the massive fleets of Zheng He. The one truth of the explorers' age and the fantasy conjured around it is that the world would never be the same. A wind of want and war came along western sails, and death rode not so far behind.

Vasco de Gama of Portugal found not the first (land), the second (disputed Mediterranean routes), or even the third (the Arabian Peninsula) route to India. What he found instead was a long, arduous, but unclaimed road to a wealth in pepper, cinnamon, and more. With a clear route to the waters of the Indian Ocean trade empires, the Portuguese established a monopoly in the west... and a pirate empire in the east. The merchant princes of Africa, Asia, and Indonesia found themselves negotiating under cannonade, a state of affairs that held out for nearly a century of hostile peace or violent reprisals, only to be followed by the Dutch, the British, and a long, fractious road to eventual independence.

Great journeys and great spoils can all be measured in lives, and the ghosts of 100 peoples can be found in the ground and waters of Kozhikode.

Instabilities

Kozhikode, or Calicut, is a port dominated by Muslim traders under the rule of a Hindu dynasty under the polite, but well-armed thumb of Portugal. Wonders can be found, but costs can run as high as tensions.

Ghosts Do Not Exist

While Europeans have the power in the living world, the Twilight of Calicut is very much a Muslim city. Even the hustle of the dead for memories, Plasm, and a sense of resolution must pass through certain paths and those with no connection to that faith of old are often charged a *jizya*, or tax, to reside in relative peace. To some, this kind of tax is an affront. In a hard, dead world? It may well be more progressive than many other dead ports of call. Dealers in memories and Mementos visit often.

As the ummah of the dead work to reconcile their fate in a faith without ghosts, many in power style themselves as jinn, carving out little kingdoms of their own. Others claim to be qarin, sinful companions of souls long since departed. Geists and their Bound claim neither or both. There is no consensus, with conflicts between ghost cults and krewes being a constant worry. Finding your place among the dead is the first great struggle. Proving that place is the next. Some still reach out for living relatives who expect mere dreams or silence until the end of days. Calicut is an uncomfortable place to die. Most places are.

Due for the Dead

The dead of Calicut are often far from home when the edge of the world catches up to them. The ache to be remembered, to be honored in familiar ways, drives many ghosts to seek out Sin-Eaters of a similar origin. Dead ghettos emerge around the Portuguese fort, the Hindu court of the royal Zamorin, and the many little communities that folk far from home construct. Keeping rituals from home alive can be a turf war or a place of peace. For many who left home looking for answers their homelands denied them, finding meaning in the afterlives of other peoples is difficult, if not uncommon.

The Moura Encantada

A new Reaper has risen from the depths of Kerala, though no one knows how this European beauty came to live or die in Calicut. Her dark hair bound by a golden comb and her face masked above her full lips by a silver-inlaid skull, she walks the streets and harbors demanding “Pão por Deus” — bread for her god. This “bread” comes in the form of dead-white ghosts, drug to her by the enthralled. While feared as a servant of the Underworld, some whisper in the ears of her many agents, eager to see her work complete. Then, surely, she will leave the rest of the dead in peace? Her preference for bribes and soft power conceal a powerful, relentless foe. If angered, her bare feet shake the ground and stir the sea. For now, she is satisfied being felt in all corners of Calicut.

Setpieces

Vasco de Gama and his armadas made their fortune via gunpowder diplomacy and through forcing ships to trade in their stead wherever they had no right to land. Many viewed them as little better than pirates, or perhaps far worse. In June of 1526, in response to the murder of an entire Muslim vessel and crew at sea, the local people of Calicut rioted and sought to burn down the fort and factory (sovereign trading outpost) of the Portuguese. The Zamorin took the opportunity to strike a blow, burning the fort to the ground. This would not be the end of Portugal’s stake in Kerala, nor the end of the age of white imperialism in the region, but the upheaval among the living and the dead may stand as a point where many peoples unite. What shape this takes, and what follows, may well be up to the krewe that stands tallest in the chaos — or the last krewe standing.

Through it all, the Moura Encantada sings, beckoning for her due bread. She promised to take. She never promised to leave.

Dominion: The Nameless Bridges

They say the road to hell is paved with good intentions, but in truth, all roads to all places are paved by many hands. Every road, every passage, and every bridge above impassable rivers has a name. Every road, every passage, and especially every bridge we take and take for granted has been put together by the sweat and often the lives of those who built them. And not all bridges are made of wood, stone, or steel. Think of every dynasty, every movement, every innovation.

Every bridge has a name, and those who form its bones may well curse that name from below.

Utterly human architecture forms chains, hand to ankle, spine fused to spine, across a foggy void below. Many incorporate half-made wonders, shattered armor from a dozen eras, or ghastly bones so shy of skin that they will never be identified. Perhaps there’s a River down there, with its own bounties or curses, down in the void between these tiny island plateaus of no real

consequence or feature. The fog is rich, thick, and powerful all its own. Those who descend never rise again. The bridges are the only way, paths made of the many who go unremembered.

Getting There

Few people reach the Nameless Bridges by complete accident, but instead may follow dead ends, lost leads, or hopeless quests for answers. Passing through other Dominions with only an inkling of purpose or a piece of the truth greatly increases the odds of happening across the Nameless Bridges. Rather than one place, it may be many similar connective tissues in the Underworld. Or, if one locale, it may remain unbound to something as secondary as geography. One needs only know half or less of a story to find themselves called to those who yearn to fill in all the blanks.

The hard part is finding the bridge one truly needs. Lifetimes have been lost in telling so many stories.

Old Laws

“One must become part of something greater to move forward.” Navigating the Nameless Bridges can be an expensive prospect without some mark of purpose or high station. The many arms and other hazards that form these living chains will pull, resist, or cast down those who try to cross without the blessing of high agency, destiny, or recognition of the struggles they faced.

A calling of note (represented by any Status of 4+, service to a Rank 4 or greater being, or representing a krewe or similarly powerful entity) allows a person and their immediate entourage to pass without resistance. The chains have no choice but to bow to their own purpose — serving as stepping stones to the truly great. While passage is easy, gaining insight into that particular bridge is impossible if this method is chosen. You are using them, not hearing them.

Those without such a calling, or who wish to respect the bridge, can seek the consensus of these many ghosts. This requires either a dedicated period of listening and aligning oneself to the cause the bridge represents, to remember it or perhaps to complete it again in some way. This comes in the form of promises, recounting of similar deeds by the travelers, or tithes of Essence and relevant memories. The most common promise is to carry a name — always one at a time — back to the world of the living as a seed of recollection, bringing a lost soul back to light.

Denizens

The **Bridges** are conglomerations of ghostly mass — people, innovations, relics, and more — that represent the context and time period of their shared sacrifices. While each is a chorus of desires and voices, treat a single bridge as a meta-entity of Rank 3 that draws on a single pool of Essence, a thematic set of Numina, and a singular lack of agency beyond their original purpose and an ache to be remembered. The faces in the masses are never recognizable. They are maimed. Destroyed. Faded. Fused into the mass of flesh or steel or stone. They are forgotten, but never silent. A blur of whispers, a chorus of shouts, sky-writing, even forms of sign language or code are possible.

The **Groomers** are Kerberoi who tend, maintain, and sometimes add new ghosts to the structure of the bridges. Many-faced in contrast to their faceless property, these skittering hulks insist upon a certain context and either destroy all individual faces they encounter or add them to their own exteriors in patches. If encountered, they will seek to assess the “fitness” of those who would rule over a bridge (for to cross a bridge is to rule it, in their countless eyes). Only the power of a high calling as listed above, or a sacrifice of Essence from the bridge beneath will

stay their urge to add material to the greater stories they tend. They are ultimately gatekeepers of a certain history, demanding stories with singular leads. Anything too crude, unmannerly, or out of theme? It will have to be pared down to fit, just another link in the chain forward to progress.

The plateaus themselves are mostly bare juts of rock above the mist and silence, but a few still hold treasures of note. These **Milestones** may yet hold the culmination of a single or several bridges. Mementos, lost fetters to powerful ghosts, clues to old Remembrances, or other artifacts of power may sit here, otherwise unguarded. The Underworld has had many travelers. Few remain.

There's an added boon to acquiring these milestones, if they still exist. So long as one holds such an object, they hold rulership over any bridge that leads to it. Bridges will gladly offer Essence, Plasm, Memories, or whatever meager gifts they might to see these items removed from their heights. They didn't struggle to see their works sit on a pedestal. They want their work to be *felt*.

Dominion: The Nursery

An empty crib. A tiny casket. A painful and bewildered silence when someone asks "How many children do you have?" This is what gets left behind, after the unimaginable tragedy of a child's death.

Never fear. The ghosts of children have somewhere to go. They are kept safe here in the Nursery, never aging, never growing. The Nursery gives these little ghosts what it thinks they want: unchanging safety, comforting brightness, consistent rules.

The boundaries of this Dominion appear as pastel walls lit by achingly bright lights and lined with rows of shelves and cubbies that are meant to hold toys. All the cubbies are empty, though — one wall holds a fireplace, and its blazing heat is constantly fed with the toys abandoned by the ghosts who live here, burned to extract the Essence that keeps the Nursery intact.

If you try to talk to the children in the Nursery, the newer ones cling to you, seeking the love and safety that their parents can no longer give them. The ones who have been here longer shun visitors, and instead return to their endless work at the fireplace, burning away toys and bathing in the Essence that emerges. Sometimes, as they work, they still sing nursery rhymes.

The Kerberos here is a protector of sorts: a massive teddy bear with its face loved off that thunders forth to defend the little ghosts of the Nursery.

Old Laws: Take turns. Share and share alike. Tell a story before the lights go out.

Getting There: Take one sip from the River Eresh-ki-gala, then sail down it until the water turns pink. Ask the dinosaur for directions, and do the second thing it tells you.

Story Hooks

- Your krewe has painstakingly gathered all the Keys that you need for the Avernian Gate in the ghost town of Atolia, CA. The last one is a wooden toy soldier with chipped red paint that was burned after its owner, 8-year-old Caleb Michaels, died in Atolia in the flu epidemic of 1918. You must find Caleb and the toy soldier here.
- You need Essence. No, you really *need* Essence. Without it, the boundaries of the Dominion of Salt will evaporate, creating an irreparable breach between it, the Autochthonous Jungle, and the River Acheron. The Nursery is the only place that you can get a sufficient supply — if you can convince the small ghosts here to give it to you.

- “...just tell us that she’s all right?” the young mother sobs. “Please?”

Dominion: The Cavern of Flame

The Ner Tamid at a synagogue; the Olympic torch; the fire at the tomb of an unknown soldier — all are supposed to be everlasting.

What happens when an eternal flame goes out?

Fire is an ever-changing thing. Its shape shifts, it climbs higher and sinks lower, it changes color in barely perceptible ways, and always, always, it consumes its fuel and burns out.

Then, it reappears here in the Cavern of Flame. This vast canyon of black stone has walls thousands of feet high, dotted with row after row of grottos in which burn tiny fires. Each flame can only light a small area, though, before the darkness swallows it up.

In the center, on a black stone floor, reside those who tended these flames in life, drawn here in death, too; constant souls whose faith keeps these flames alight. Aemilia, the Vestal Virgin who rekindled the sacred fire in Rome by casting a piece of her own garment onto the place where the flame once burned. Takhmurap, who commanded the Three Great Flames of ancient Persia to be brought to him, and who waits for them still.

Where other flames die, these endure. This is a place of purity and faithfulness, for all eternity.

Or at least, until this Dominion fades away, too.

The Kerberos here is The Moth (p. XX), an enormous creature with 12 legs and four wings. It flits in and out of the flickering light, hovering above the flames.

Old Laws: Be faithful: once you have chosen a course, remain on it until the path ends. Share your light: you must guide others with your knowledge.

Getting There: Find a candle made of pure beeswax and place it in a holder made of bone. Light it from an already-burning flame, and then blow it out. Continue walking in the darkness until you see what looks like stars.

Story Hooks

- The Flame of Hope in London, Ontario, Canada is one of the flames here; in the first year after it was lit, a vandal extinguished it. Gordon Davies, the last security guard on duty before the vandal struck, died two years later, still remorseful about what he felt was a failure on his part. That remorse has made his spirit unquiet. Guide him here so that he may be reunited with his flame.
- A member of your krewa thinks that fire from the Cavern of Flame can strengthen the ceremony of Persephone’s Return. Bring back three flames: an echo of the fire at the Burning Mountain in Australia; the lost flame from the Helsinki memorial to sailors who perished at sea; and an ember from the Cherokee Nation’s council fire. To find which flames are which, speak to the spirit of the Olympic torch-carrier Hermia Stephanides — if you can catch her.

Dominion: The Dead Forest

A dim forest of leafless trees, silent except for the dry clack of branches scraping against each other. But the air is still — so how do the branches move?

This is the Dead Forest. Even here in the Underworld, some souls want to forget who they were: those whose lives or deaths were so painful that they feel it is better to forget all life and all emotion than to hold onto anything of what has gone before. Their existence is still eternal, but it is an existence of oblivion, their minds gradually growing blank even as they take root in the timeless unchanging forest.

Some ghosts come here intentionally; others find themselves in the Dead Forest when they get lost — and then their minds begin to fade, so they cannot find their way out again.

If you touch a tree, it may recoil; if you speak to it, it may speak back. But if you break off a twig from one of the dry, leafless branches, it bleeds. Always.

The Kerberos here takes the form of a cluster of thorny twigs. It clatters over the forest floor, scattering dry leaves and stabbing pinprick holes in its wake.

Old Laws: Speak only of the past, so that you can keep your memories alive.

Getting There: In the valley below the Mountain of the Wolf, you will find a spiral path. Follow it outwards until you reach the banks of the River Phlegethon. Ford the river two by two. Then, you must become completely lost. Blindfold yourself; spin around until you lose your way; cloud your mind with magic — whatever it takes. When your mind and eyes clear once more, you will be in the Dead Forest.

Story Hooks

- A twig from one of the trees of the Dead Forest has somehow found its way into the hands of necromancer Philip Mackenzie, a member of the Church of Death's Shards. He is planning to use the spiritual resonance of the twig to create a link with the Underworld and send ghosts out of this realm and into oblivion. You must not only find a way to retrieve the twig from Philip, but also to return the twig to the Dead Forest so that it can be reunited with its original tree.
- The spirit of poet Chimuanya Okoro has been lost in the Dead Forest for seven years. Her sister, Kesandu, plagued by nightmares of Chimuanya's torment and oblivion, has asked you to help bring her sister peace. You must make your way to the Dead Forest, find a way to recall Chimuanya to herself enough so that she can be sent to a more peaceful place, and then return safely to tell Kesandu the tale.

Dominion: The Crossroads

The Crossroads is a place to make bargains and trades: A bargain made here is believed to be especially honest. Not all trades are tangible objects, though: you may trade away immaterial things such as abilities, emotions, and especially memories.

There is a marketplace here: a chaos of dim stalls and booths that flicker in and out, all crowded together in an effort to get as close to the Crossroads itself as possible. Running through the center are two roads made of neatly arranged bones crossed at perfect angles, stark white against the dull grayish-brown land.

The spirits who come here trade ghost objects rich in Essence; they trade secrets and services; they make oaths; they meet on what passes for neutral ground here in the Underworld.

At the center, where the roads cross, stands this Dominion's Kerberos, a massive creature that has grown into the shape of an arch. Four thick, stony legs carved into spiral columns curve up to

meet at the top, above which rises a massive body and two curved faces so that it may watch all sides of the Crossroads at once.

One of these faces is the Oathkeeper: A bargain or promise made within the sight of its eyes is especially solemn and binding. Many believe that the Oathkeeper can exact punishment for breaking an oath made in its shadow; none know whether this is true, because none have yet dared to break one of these vows.

The other face is the Peacemaker: No harm may be done within its gaze. If anyone tries to do harm, the Kerberos either freezes them in place or crushes them with one massive foot.

Old Laws: All bargains made here must be honest. All trades made here must be equal. Break not a promise made in Oathkeeper's sight. Do no harm in Peacemaker's sight.

Getting There: To reach the Crossroads, simply begin along any straight path in the Underworld. With the first creature you see, make a bargain. To the second, swear an oath. The third will lead you to the Crossroads.

Story Hooks

- You never thought that your krewe would ever end your feud with Alecto's Fire, the Furies of Melbourne, Australia. It has gone on for years, bringing destruction to both sides. But now the leader, Meg Stuart, has reached out to try to make peace — and she insists upon finalizing the accord at the Crossroads, in order to follow tradition and protocol as much as possible. Which means that you trust her... right?
- Eva Brunelli traded away her Anchor, a silver filigree locket containing a hand-painted portrait of her grandfather. She swears that she thought it was a good idea at the time, and that she received something equally valuable in return — and yet she cannot produce the item that she received, and cannot even remember what it was. She does remember the ghost who traded with her, though: a small hunched man with wispy white hair and burning purple eyes. And she remembers that she made the trade at the Crossroads.