

# GEIST

THE  
SIN-EATERS  
SECOND EDITION



KICKSTARTER MANUSCRIPT PREVIEW

Part 1

# A Brighter Morning — Prologue

Two women sat at the candlelit dining room table with their hands on the spirit board, unaware of the figure that hovered above them. Oliver knew them very well. Like all his tenants, Oliver had given them a “grace period,” a time to settle into the house before he made himself known. He took that time to learn all about them. He knew that the older woman in the ponytail and long white t-shirt was named Jade, and that the younger woman in the full pajama set who kept her hair long and untamed was named Trisha. They were the daughters of Hari Patel, who still slept in his room on the other side of the house, where Oliver’s parents slept when they were alive.

The Patels had fascinated Oliver from the moment they moved in. Hari was a single father who lived entirely within Oliver’s walls, running a business from the room that had previously been a nursery and worshipping at a household shrine tucked away in a small closet. Jade and Trish left the house far more often. On bad days, when Oliver felt compelled to wander the house and recreate his own death, he’d watch them leave for school instead. Jade went to a university downtown, Trisha to a high school a few miles away. The schools had names he couldn’t recognize and the subjects the women talked about sounded more like things that belonged in the pages of *Amazing Stories* than the world outside his window.

What excited Oliver most about the Patels was that Trisha could sense him. He was sure that he saw her looking at him from the corners of her eyes and that she shivered whenever he was near. He broke the grace period early, touching the bathroom mirror while she was brushing her teeth. She saw the imprint of vapor that his hand made. While it was disheartening to see her scream and bolt directly into the bathtub, the makeshift séance before him now was an encouraging sign. After years of reaching out and driving people away, someone was finally going to reach back.

Below him, the women talked.

“It’s here,” Trisha said. “I can feel it.”

Jade rolled her eyes. Trisha couldn’t see it through the dim light, but to Oliver it was clear as day.

Trisha laid her fingers on the planchette. “Let’s get started.”

Jade said, “Trisha, if this is some kind of prank...”

“It’s not a prank. You saw the picture.”

“The hand on the mirror? Anyone of us could have done that.”

Oliver hadn’t breathed in decades but his chest rose and fell as if he were hyperventilating. He grabbed at the planchette. Trisha lifted her hands from it, and Oliver’s fingers phased through the plastic.

“I saw it happen, right in front of me!” Trisha said. “And it’s not just that! Sometimes I can hear things.”

“Like now!” Oliver yelled. “Right now!”

She knitted her eyebrows and looked up at where he was. Jade leaned over the table. The creak of the floor boards caught Trisha’s attention. Oliver stiffened at the sound.

“Trish, it’s an old house. It’s going to make noises.”

Jade moved back into her chair, making a louder creak. Oliver squeezed his eyes shut. He kept saying “No” to himself, each repetition less steady.

“I know what an old house sounds like!” Trisha threw her arms up, gesturing to the whole house. “This isn’t it. You can’t hear it?”

“What am I supposed to be hearing?” Jade stomped a foot into the floor. “This?”

Oliver clasped his hands on his ears. “Not now!”

*Mid-day. August. School’s around the corner. The whole family goes out for a drive but he’s at home. Slept in. Oldest child but just can’t keep routine. Feels bad, wants to make it up, starts making lunch for everyone. Sees a car roll up, rushes out to greet them. Only it’s not the Packard like it should be, it’s the shiniest Rolls Royce he’s ever seen...*

Trisha put a finger to her lips. “‘Now.’ That’s what I heard, ‘now.’ Listen!”

Jade stood up. Another creak.

*Four well-dressed men come out of the car. He knows them now, recognizes the leader with the grin that’s far too wide. They’re not just here for Father’s money this time. Boy sees the shining glint of silver in the man’s hands, and tries to run...*

“It’s just the pipes, Trish.” Jade walked over to the sink with sure, steady strides. Creaks and groans rose from the floor with every step. She turned on the faucet.

“Dad told me about this. We just have to run the water for a bit and it’ll settle out.”

Trisha whispered. “I-i-it’s not the p-p-pipes.”

Jade turned and saw vapor rising from her sister’s mouth. It glowed in the candlelight. Goosebumps ran up her spine.

*They catch him. Beat him down and break all his limbs. They stamp every tender part of his body until he feels bruises forming down his torso, between his legs. The floorboards creak as they pull them up. They bring in a shovel, dig a hole right next to him.*

*“Your pa squealed about our little arrangement,” the man with the grin says. He’s still grinning, maybe even wider now. “So your kin’s dead. They’re gonna find them, but your pa loved you an awful lot. So I got something special.”*

*The boy sees the silver thing. A hacksaw...*

Jade took a step towards her sister. The dining room table flew into the air and fell over, slamming the spirit board into the wall. The kitchen cabinets all flew open at once and every dish flew towards her. One shattered on her head and she tumbled to the floor.

Every door in the house opened and slammed in a chaotic pattern. Hari ran out of the room, demanding to know what the girls had done. The circuit breaker behind him burst and he was silent. Jade rose from the floor to see her sister staring at a man standing before her, sliced into parts and held together by the thinnest viscera.

Trisha whispered prayers under her breath as Oliver shambled towards her.

“Help me,” he said. “It hurts.”

## Introduction

*The dead are all around us. They walk beside us on the streets, reach out to us with invisible hands, shout their needs with voices we don't hear. We turn away from the very thought of them, mumbling platitudes like "he's in a better place" or "she's at peace now."*

*He's not. She isn't. He's here, among us, trying desperately to make sure his children are looked after. She's trapped in an endless labyrinth of gray stone, slowly leeching away into nothingness while the man who stole her life's research goes unpunished. And so, when a grinning stranger with pale eyes and a broken-winged angel on his shoulder blows into town, they turn to him for help.*

*The dead are speaking. It's time to listen.*

## Themes

**Geist: The Sin-Eaters** is a game about people. Some of them are alive, some of them are dead, and some of them stand between the two, but they're all people.

**Geist** is about giving a voice to the voiceless, about standing up for the marginalized, about power and privilege and the responsibilities they carry with them.

**Geist** is a game about death.

**Geist** a game about hope.

## Empathy

Every ghost story is, at its core, a tragedy: Someone died with something unfinished, and now they linger on, in the world but ignored by it, trying with the often-limited tools at their disposal to make the living understand them. Sometimes, when that doesn't work, they lash out in frustration, just so that people notice *something* is going on, but no matter how frightening the apparition, how violent the manifestation, there's still a human being at the core of it.

Sin-Eaters are the ones who understand that. They live in two worlds: the world of the living and the world of the dead. As they struggle to understand their own identity and the cultural heritage of Sin-Eaters who came before, they act as intercessors and speakers for the dead, helping ghosts finish their unfinished business and laying tormented souls to rest. They come into a haunting and see not the monster making the walls bleed and lashing out at the living, but the frightened father who just wants his child back.

## Self vs. Service

Sin-Eaters have powerful motivators to pursue their own personal desires: Their Burdens drive them to resolve their unfinished business and their bond with their geist drives them to reach out to it and ease its suffering. On the other hand, they also have dramatic, firsthand evidence of how awful and oppressive the Underworld is. Resolving your own issues grants peace and passage beyond this vale of tears, but if you're gone, who will take up the fight? On the flip side, no one can live for the Cause alone.

## Hope and Joy

Yes, this is a game about death and the dead, and ghost stories all have a core of tragedy, but **Geist** is not an angsty, gloomy game. It's a celebration of the memories of people who have passed on, seizing the pleasure there is to be had in this life and the next, because whatever

comes after this world is a mystery. When you're dead, even the smallest indulgence reminds you of how sweet it is just to exist.

## Looking Back to Look Forward

Sin-Eaters aren't an ancient, monolithic culture; they've been around the mass graveyard of history, and there's old wisdom to be found there, but it's modern thinking, progressive morality, and the audacity to stand up and say "the system is broken, let's fix it" that's going to change the world.

Sin-Eaters consider "nothing changes" to be a fail state. They're agitators, radicals, and punks. There's a term for Bound who don't want to get out there and change things (even if not on a global/cosmic scale): that term is "Storyteller character."

## How to Use this Book

**Geist: The Sin-Eaters** is a storytelling game of second chances. It's a complete game, with everything you need to take a group of Sin-Eaters from character creation all the way to the end of the road. You can find extended rules in the **Chronicles of Darkness Rulebook**.

This book also contains the *Chronicle of the Dead*. The dead — a term which here usually means "ghosts," but also encompasses Sin-Eaters themselves and occasionally other, stranger beings — are a prominent part of the Sin-Eater's world, and the Chronicle of the Dead helps provide your game with a thematic focus and clear goals for play. The dead are trapped in a metaphysical system that seems designed to exploit and destroy them: Ghosts are trapped in the state of Twilight in the living world, bound to Anchors and able to communicate with the living only with great difficulty. Sinister shades called Reapers stalk them, and living necromancers and ghost-eaters see them as nothing more than expendable tools or even fuel. When their Anchors are destroyed, they are hurled screaming into the Underworld: a cold, subterranean otherworld that seems to feed on their very Essence.

A game of **Geist: The Sin-Eaters** focuses on a *krewe*, a mystery cult comprising Sin-Eaters, living mortals, and ghosts alike, and follows their battles against this system. It can be a small, intimate tale of keeping your own little patch of turf safe for the dead, a grand mythic epic that tears down the very Underworld itself, or even just a personal story of finding closure for the things that kept you from moving on.

Truth and Lies

### **Sin-Eaters are Possessed**

False. The Bargain creates a symbiotic link between a powerful ghost and a recently-deceased person, but the geist does not subsume or control the Sin-Eater's body.

### **Sin-Eaters Have Come Back From the Dead**

Not entirely true. Though the Bargain restores their bodies to biological "life" (i.e. they breathe, eat, have heartbeats, etc.), from a metaphysical standpoint, Sin-Eaters are counted among the dead. This means, among other things, that magic that specifically affects the living does not work on them, and that ghosts do not regain Essence when remembered by a Sin-Eater.

### **Sin-Eaters are Immortal**

False (though easily mistaken for true). While a Sin-Eater's geist can bring her back from fatal wounds, flesh-eating diseases, or terminal deprivation, eventually old age claims even the Bound. In addition, Sin-Eaters can be slain by attacks that echo their original death, or that incorporate the bane of their geists.

### **Sin-Eaters Speak With the Dead**

True, and more besides. To the Bound, ghosts are as visible and as solid as the living. Sin-Eaters also have an aura that allows ghosts to Manifest more easily around them.

### **Sin-Eaters Lead Death Cults**

True, though the phrase "death cult" has a pejorative element to it. Most Sin-Eaters organize *krewe*s, fellowships of living, dead, and those in between, to stand against the Underworld and accomplish their goals. Many krewe>s are religious in nature, ranging from wholly constructed faiths to fringe sects of more established religions.

### **Sin Eaters Can Change the World**

Absolutely true.

## Chapters

**Chapter One: The Quick and the Dead** describes the five *Burdens*, the reasons that Sin-Eaters cannot rest easy in their graves, but struck their Bargain to return to the world of flesh, Bound to a powerful ghost called a geist. It also reveals the five *archetypes* into which most Sin-Eater krewe>s fall.

**Chapter Two: The Road Back** covers Sin-Eaters themselves, their world, their society, and the friends and foes they're likely to encounter in the game.

**Chapter Three: The Quick and the Dead** tells you how to create a Sin-Eater character, and describes their strange powers and abilities.

**Chapter Four: Old Laws** details the rules of the Storytelling system, the mechanics that drive all of the **Chronicles of Darkness** games. It also covers systems unique to **Geist**, such as the rules that govern the Underworld and krewe actions.

**Chapter Five: Antagonists** delves into the principal antagonists of **Geist**, including the Reapers, Eaters of the Dead, mortal necromancers, Kerberoi, and even rival krewe>s.

**Chapter Six: The Quiet Places** provides sketches of potential settings for your chronicle in a variety of times and places throughout the world. It also describes several Deep Dominions, strange places within the Underworld where a ghost can gain a reprieve from its hunger... for a time, and at a price.

**Chapter Seven: Ghost Stories** contains advice for Storytellers on running **Geist**, as well as mechanics for the various endgame stories that can bring your chronicle to a dramatic end.

**Appendix One: The Absent** gives you all the information you need to create and play a ghost as a main character.

Finally, **Appendix Two: Conditions and Tilts** collects the various Conditions and Tilts used in **Geist** into a convenient, easy-to-reference location.

# Storytelling Games

If you're an old hand at tabletop roleplaying games, this section is old hat to you. Go ahead and skip down to the section on what players and Storytellers are responsible for.

If **Geist** is your first storytelling game, welcome! A storytelling game is a kind of improvisational, cooperative way of creating a story. A group of friends (we recommend between three and five, but you can play with as few as two or as many as you like) gets together around a table or an online conferencing tool or the like. Most of you will create and control a single character, one of the protagonists of the story. One of you, however, takes the role of *Storyteller*. The Storyteller controls everything else about the world of the story: antagonists, incidental characters, what happens outside of the players' characters' control, and how the world reacts to their actions.

A lot of the time, this is all done as a simple conversation. The players say what their characters do or say, the Storyteller says what happens in response, and so on. When the stakes are high and there's a possibility of failure or interesting complications, the game rules step in to help adjudicate whether characters succeed or fail. Do you successfully exorcise the Reaper, or does it escape your trap? Does the necromancer shoot you, or do you dive for cover in time? Like that. Usually you'll roll a number of 10-sided dice, determined by your character's *Traits* (ratings that describe how good your character is at various things, like computer hacking or raw physical strength): any die that rolls an 8, 9, or 10 is a *success*. Usually, even a single success is enough to succeed at what you're doing, and five or more successes means you did exceptionally well. There are a lot of permutations and specific rules for things like fighting, using magic, and so on, but you can almost always fall back on the basic rule of "roll dice, look for 8s, 9s, and 10s" if you're not sure what to do next.

While players other than the Storyteller will generally be advocates for their characters' success, planning ways in which they can succeed, a lot of drama and fun comes from when things don't go well for the protagonists. Think of a television series. The most interesting episodes are often the ones where everything goes wrong for the characters until they find a way to turn it around. That said, the Storyteller should make sure characters have a chance to bounce back rather than constantly dumping suffering on them.

## **The Storyteller is responsible for...**

- ...bringing the Chronicles of Darkness to life through description.
- ...deciding where scenes start and what's going on.
- ...portraying characters who don't belong to other players.
- ...involving each player and her character in the ongoing story.
- ...putting players' characters in tough spots, encouraging interesting decisions.
- ...facilitating the actions players' characters take, while making sure there are always complications.
- ...making sure that poor dice rolls affect but don't stop the story.

## **The players are responsible for...**

- ...creating their own individual characters as members of the cast.

...deciding what actions their characters take.

...making decisions that create drama and help keep the story moving.

...highlighting their characters' strengths and weaknesses.

...confronting the problems the Storyteller introduces.

...developing their characters' personalities and abilities over time, telling personal stories within the overall story of the game.

### **Everyone is responsible for...**

...giving other players chances to highlight their characters' abilities and personal stories, whether that's by showing them at their strongest or weakest.

...making suggestions about the story and action, while keeping in mind the authority of players over their characters and the responsibility of the Storyteller to occasionally make trouble.

## **Inspirational Media**

Here are some books and movies that capture the tone and feel of **Geist**.

### **Books**

Greg Palmer's *Death: The Trip of a Lifetime*. A somewhat humorous look at death rituals around the world: excellent inspiration for Sin-Eaters' and culture.

Any of M. R. James' work. James is hailed as one of the truly great authors of the ghost story.

Tim Powers' *Expiration Date*, although it treats most ghosts as barely-sapient recordings of psychic trauma, was a tremendous influence on the Eaters of the Dead and on the concept of Ceremonies.

Sean McGuire's *Sparrow Hill Road* follows a hitchhiking ghost through the invisible backroads of America and fairly oozes **Geist** flavor. As with *Expiration Date*, the principal antagonist of the book is fantastic inspiration for the Eaters of the Dead.

### **Movies & TV**

*Mama* (2013, dir. Andy Muschietti) is perhaps the most quintessentially **Geist** movie out there. The titular ghost is a perfect representation of a geist: recognizably human but distorted and warped, willing to lash out violently to protect her Bound charges, and ultimately granted peace only when she's reminded of the person she was. If you watch no other inspirational media, watch this film.

*ParaNorman* (2012, dir. Sam Fell & Chris Butler) is pitched at kids, but offers a good look at what it's like to be the only one in town who can see the dead. That the "monster" is defeated not by fighting or exorcising it, but by understanding and sympathizing with it, is also highly relevant.

*Coco* (2017, dir. Lee Unkrich) is also aimed at a younger audience, but its depiction of the afterlife is a perfect example of what Sin-Eaters might want to make of the Underworld. Watch for the brief scene where the characters visit a shantytown of forgotten spirits for a look at the River Cities of the Underworld as it exists now.

*The Lost Room* (2006, created by Christopher Leone & Laura Harkcom) isn't about ghosts at all, but its story about strange, indestructible Objects with bizarre powers and the obsessed people who will do anything to possess them is excellent fodder for Mementos and Memento cults.

## Glossary

**Abiding, the:** The **Burden** of those who died without leaving a legacy behind.

**Absent, the:** Ghosts who trade memories and hustle to survive.

**Archetype:** A broad classification of philosophy or religion into which most **krewe**s fall.

**Avernian Gate:** A portal from the world of the living to the **Underworld**, found in every cemetery in the world and also in places stained by death.

**Bargain, the:** The agreement between **geist** and **Bound** which ties them together and gives them power.

**Bereaved, the:** The **Burden** of those whom death separated from someone or something they love.

**Bonepickers:** A **krewe archetype** that exploits the dead for material gain.

**Bound, the:** Anyone who has made the **Bargain** with a **geist**.

**Burden:** The spiritual weight or unfinished business that prompted someone to make the **Bargain** rather than pass on.

**Ceremony:** A magical ritual, usually related to ghosts or the dead in some way. Anyone who learns a Ceremony can use it.

**Chthonian:** A “native” of the Underworld, never properly alive and of strange and alien mind. Their very touch is deadly to ghosts.

**Chthonic Gods:** The deities of the Underworld, worshipped by Reapers, some ghosts, and living cultists. They may or may not exist in a literal sense.

**Crisis point:** A moment that tests a **Sin-Eater's Synergy** and may result in her **geist** lashing out.

**Deathmask:** A particular type of **Memento** created when a **geist** is destroyed. Ghosts who wear a Deathmask inherit the destroyed **geist's** power.

**Deep Dominions:** Bizarre realms deep in the **Underworld** guarded by **Kerberoi**. Ghosts in Deep Dominions are safe from Essence drain so long as they obey the **Old Laws**.

**Eater of the Dead:** Living people who consume ghosts to gain power and immortality.

**Elysians:** A **krewe archetype** that sees immortality as their right and power as their privilege.

**Ferryman:** A being (sometimes a ghost, sometimes one of the **Bound**, sometimes something stranger) who conveys passengers down the **Rivers of the Underworld...** for a price.

**Gatekeepers:** A **krewe archetype** that seeks to keep the world of the living and the world of the dead strictly separate.

**Geist:** A powerful ghost whose human identity has been largely subsumed by the power of the **Underworld**. Most got that power by drinking from a **River of the Underworld**.

**Haunt:** The principal mystical powers wielded by the **Bound**, fueled by **Plasm** and **Synergy**.

**Hungry, the:** The **Burden** of those who refused to leave behind something from their living days.

**Kerberos:** The guardians of the **Deep Dominions** and enforcers of the **Old Laws**. Most appear as bizarre composite beings, and their origins are mysterious (pl. **Kerberoi**).

**Key:** A powerfully resonant form of death, which the **Bound** can tap into to fuel **Haunts** or gain **Plasm**.

**Kindly, the:** The **Burden** of those who seek to make amends for sins they committed in life.

**Krewe:** A mystery cult led by the **Bound**, with both living and dead celebrants.

**Liminal Aura:** The aura possessed by all **Bound** that makes it easier for ghosts to Manifest around them.

**Lower Mysteries:** The deepest parts of the **Underworld**, home to the **River Cities** and the **Deep Dominions**.

**Memento:** An object imbued with the resonance of death. A Memento has both a **Key** and a strange but often useful supernatural property.

**Mourners:** A **krewe archetype** that chronicles the stories of the forgotten dead and ensures that those stories are told.

**Necromancer:** A general term for any living magician who interacts with (and usually exploits) the dead regularly.

**Necropolitans:** A **krewe archetype** that focuses on making ghosts' afterlives into comfortable, affirming existences.

**Ocean of Fragments, the:** The ocean at the bottom of the **Underworld**. Those who plunge into its waters are stripped of their identities and ultimately dissolved.

**Old Laws:** The arcane rules of the **Deep Dominions**. Breaking them calls down the wrath of the **Kerberoi**.

**Pilgrims:** A **krewe archetype** that focuses on helping the dead resolve their own unfinished business.

**Plasm:** The semi-physical residue of ghostly Manifestations, which fuels the **Bound's** supernatural abilities.

**Reaper:** A ghost who worships the **Chthonic Gods** and, with the power of a **Deathmask**, seeks to drag the dead into the **Underworld**.

**River Cities:** Shantytowns in the **Underworld**, built by ghosts who dredge castoffs from the **River** for food.

**Rivers of the Underworld:** The innumerable waterways of the **Underworld**, whose tributaries begin at every **Avernian Gate** and which ultimately drain into the **Ocean of Fragments**.

**Sin-Eater:** A **Bound** who actively fights to protect the dead from the **Underworld**, **Reapers**, and similar forces.

**Synergy:** A measure of the strength of the bond between a **Bound** and their **geist**.

**Thanatologists:** A **krewe archetype** who see the dead as subjects for scientific study, nothing more.

**Undertakers:** A **krewe archetype** focused on preparing the living for death in the hopes of creating fewer ghosts to be trapped by the **Underworld**.

**Underworld:** The otherworld where ghosts go when they can no longer hold on in the living world. The Underworld leeches ghosts' Essence away until they are completely absorbed by the Underworld.

**Upper Reaches:** The "shallowest" parts of the **Underworld**, closest to the living world, home to small, desperate communities, strange ghost cults, and dead hermits.

**Vengeful, the:** The **Burden** of those who returned to see justice done for their own deaths.

# A Brighter Morning — Part I

Leah wiped the sweat from her eyes and saw the Abandoned One standing before her. Long ago, when the riptide pulled her under, his large gray eyes and waxy skin had been a terror to behold. Now he was only a painful sight, both a reminder of better times and of her greatest failure.

The Abandoned One pointed toward the door. Leah put down the screw gun. Of course someone had come to see her in the middle of fixing the air conditioner. She stood up and popped her back.

She felt the sensation of a hard shove against her shoulder, the Abandoned One's way of asking if he should send the visitor away.

Leah mopped her forehead with a handkerchief. "No. I'll talk to 'em. Stay close."

She went to the door, the Abandoned One floating behind her. She looked over her shoulder and saw him smiling with his empty mouth. This was the first time they had spoken to each other for more than a moment in two weeks. She hadn't meant it to be that way, but the first week went by in a blur of crying fits and restless sleep, and in the second week she dived into fixing the house. Aidan's death seemed to have invited a myriad of problems into her home: The living room drywall cracked, the bed finally gave in, and now the air conditioner broke during the hottest part of the summer. The Abandoned One watched as she fixed these things, barely saying a word. Perhaps he was grieving in his own way, or feared that he would become his namesake if he left to take care of his own business.

Leah looked through the peephole. Mark wore his usual full business suit. The Open-Throated Saint stood beside him. He wasn't chatting over his phone's earpiece, which meant that this was serious.

She opened the door. Mark straightened his sweat-soaked tie. He smiled.

"Hot enough for you?" he said. The lacerations on the Saint's throat gurgled over, which was as close as she came to a greeting. Leah crossed her arms.

"Can we come in? Saint and I could really use some cool air."

"Air's broke," Leah said.

Mark's smile faded. He blinked the sweat out of his eyes. "Oh. Well. Do you want to talk about this in the car? It's probably boiling now, but after I start it up—"

The Abandoned One threw himself in front of Leah and loomed over Mark. The Open-Throated Saint growled and flexed her claws. He raised an arm to strike.

"That's enough!" Leah said to him. The Abandoned One looked at her, bewildered, and moved to the kitchen. The Saint glided forward. Leah glared at her, and she stopped.

"I'll just start over," Mark said. He raised his right hand, following traditional protocol. "As a High Priest of the Church of the Brighter Morning, I greet you, O High Priestess."

Leah sighed and raised her left hand. "I am honored to greet my follow traveler. What do you want, Mark?"

“We found someone. Old ghost, *real* old ghost. One of the parishioners knows someone who lives in his haunt. She got it to us before some con artist caught on. We need someone to help him pass on.”

Leah grimaced. “You could have just called.”

“You’d refuse if I did.”

She nodded, too exhausted from the heat to lie. “You should get someone else.”

“Leah, there isn’t anyone else. The recruits barely know how to perform an exorcism, Oumil’s taking a trip downstairs, I’m trying to make peace with Fifth Street, and Aiden’s...”

Leah looked away from him. The Abandoned One reappeared in the entrance hallway. Mark cleared his throat.

“You’re taking it better than any of us. You don’t think so, but you put him to rest so quickly. I couldn’t have done that.”

“I wasn’t going to let a Reaper take him,” Leah said. “I’d never let anyone be trapped down there. Never.”

“And that’s why we need you. The word has to have hit the street by now, about the ghost, about what Fifth Street did to us. It’s been so *quiet* lately, and the Saint’s been telling me it’s because no one’s made a move. Not yet. If we allow one display of weakness, it’s open season on everything we’ve worked for.”

Leah wrapped her arms around herself. “Who is he?”

Mark pulled out his phone. “Kamala said that the witnesses didn’t catch a name, but I did some research.”

He swiped through websites and spreadsheets. “A lot of low-key hauntings that end in a huge outburst. The house is in Silver Star’s old turf. They’d probably have taken care of it years ago, but no one’s seen them since the Reaper attack.”

He pinched out an obituary. “Here we are. The LaVoies all died in a car wreck, except for their oldest, Oliver. He went missing instead. Never found, foul play suspected but the case went cold. The old Krol family probably had a hand in it. Judging from the stories, I’d say he isn’t very happy about not being found.”

The Abandoned One rushed up, getting so close to the phone screen that his eyes took on a pale glow. The Open-Throated Saint inched forward but Mark motioned her to stay. The Abandoned One read the files with a wide grin.

“Kind of like you, huh?” Leah said to him.

The Abandoned One turned to her with expectant eyes. Leah’s body was filled with a sad, nervous energy, but she felt a rising exuberance through her bones. She had to fight off the urge to smile. The last time he had felt so strongly about something that the feeling leaked into her body, she had been invited to join the Church. Following her geist’s gut feelings was rarely a great idea, but what was there to gain out of denying him now?

“He wants to go, so I’ll go,” Leah said. “Any set time?”

“Tonight,” Mark said. “The sooner we act, the better. Get your things together; I’ll go make some calls.” He clicked his ear piece on and walked towards his car. “I’ve got to negotiate the price with the clients. They’ve got to know we don’t come cheap.”

“Wait,” Leah said.

Mark turned around, eyebrows raised.

“I need to pick up a new inverter. I’ll give you the directions.”

“Excuse me? Are you making me run your errand?”

Leah smiled. The Abandoned One took his place beside her, chest puffed up. “We don’t come cheap, either.”

## Chapter One: The Quick and the Dead

What makes a Sin-Eater? What compels a person on the cusp of death to agree to share their soul with a little corpse-god and claw her way, bloody-fingered and smeared with grave dirt, into the lands of the living? Dress the answer up however you like, it comes down to *Burden*. Each of the Bound died under the weight of something powerful. Responsibility. Greed. Loss. Regret. Rage. That weight draws a like-minded geist to her, inexorable as gravity, shapes her return from death, and drives her along her road.

The five Burdens are:

- **The Abiding:** Those who died with no legacy left behind. Abiding Sin-Eaters hold oblivion at bay until they can forge something that will last beyond them: their unfinished novel, a sweeping policy change, or the dissolution of the Underworld itself.
- **The Bereaved:** Those who lost someone dear to them — perhaps in the same incident that killed them, perhaps years before. The Bereaved scour the realms of the dead, seeking the fate of their lost loved ones.
- **The Hungry:** Those who left something behind they couldn’t bear to let go. They haunt the remnants of their lives and accomplishments, protecting what remains and hunting down that which was stolen.
- **The Kindly:** Those who, in death, recognize a great wrong they did in life and return to make amends. The Kindly redress personal wrongs and work to dismantle systems of exploitation they once benefitted from.
- **The Vengeful:** Those who blame another — rightly or wrongly — for their deaths and seek redress for the wrongs done to them.

Pulled in a thousand different directions by their Burdens, Sin-Eaters find common cause in methods more than motivations. Theirs is a mystical experience, and their brush with death leads them to find or found their own peculiar religions. Those faiths have been called many things: Mysteries, cults, churches, heresies — but since the early 20th century, spreading outward from Alabama and New Orleans to the rest of the world, the preferred term has been *krewe*.

There are very nearly as many krewes as there are Sin-Eaters, but they can be roughly divided by the broad strokes of their ethoi, if not the particulars of their faith. The five *krewe Archetypes* are:

- **Furies:** Krewes that focus on balancing the scales of justice. They hunt down murderers who got away with it, break the systems of oppression that grind marginalized people into the earth, and put right that which is wrong.
- **Mourners:** These Sin-Eaters remember the dead, especially those the living have forgotten. Archivists, storytellers, and publishers, they bring light into the darkness of the Underworld and return with wisdom to share.
- **Necropolitans:** Death is just another way of being, and to the Necropolitans, that means the dead have the same basic human rights as the living: freedom, comfort, sustenance, and safety. They care for the dead, protect them from the depredations of the Underworld, and reunite them with loved ones across the veil.
- **Pilgrims:** To Pilgrims, death is a step along a journey to something greater, one that cannot be moved past by clinging to what came before. They help the dead release their Anchors and come to terms with their demise.
- **Undertakers:** Undertakers help the living get their affairs in order before they become a ghost's unfinished business and delve into the works and faiths of Sin-Eaters who came before. By changing how people perceive death and by understanding its metaphysics, they can change the game altogether.

## The Abiding

*"The world is my epitaph."*

*You could have been someone. Maybe you never were, maybe you had it and lost it. That doesn't matter. What matters is that you could have been. If you'd had a little more time. If you'd had a little more opportunity. If you'd had a little more guts.*

*Most people, the only mark they leave on this world is a name and two dates on a little slab of stone. You won't be one of those people. Not again.*

The only real immortality is to create something greater than yourself: a skyscraper that will stand for decades, a political movement that shapes the culture of a nation, a criminal enterprise you can leave to your children. To be robbed of that is to be worse than merely forgotten; it's to be labeled *unimportant*.

The Abiding died wanting to change the world. They've bargained with death for the ultimate reward: a second chance to leave their mark.

## The Weight

The Abiding left the world too soon, before they could secure a legacy for themselves or their family. They never made enough money for their family to thrive, didn't leave the world better for having lived in it, or just never got their name on a monument like they always wanted. Maybe they just put it off, or maybe they never had the resources to bring it to fruition, but either way, important work was left undone, and that's intolerable. The Abiding leave the dying to those who have accomplished all they wanted.

In death, a person can do things they couldn't in life. A failed politician in New Jersey has the chance to lift his family name out of the mud by lifting his old neighborhood out of poverty. A

lonely writer never sold more than a handful of books before she died, but returns from the grave with a heart full of poetry.

Regardless of exactly how the Abiding die, it is always before their time, before they've been able to make a name for themselves, before they've left their mark on the world. One woman is crushed in a sudden sinkhole caused by a fuel line eruption beneath her on her way to the patent office. A social worker, trying to make an impact for the better, is stabbed by a drugged-out parent who didn't want to lose their daughter to the system. A mountain climber is trapped under collapsing rocks, left there to die of starvation and dehydration — all before he was able to set the record.

Others die with their legacy tarnished, maybe beyond repair. A professional athlete is accused of doping, but dies before she can disprove the accusations. A crooked prosecutor's illicit dealings come to light, putting the guilty as well as the wrongfully convicted back on the street. Going out as a disgrace is a huge motivator for many of the Abiding.

The ghosts drawn to an Abiding Sin-Eater are cut from the same cloth. They understand what it means to leave behind a lie or, worse, nothing at all. A man who choked during training for the national hotdog eating championships wants his record preserved for all time. The architect's shade wants her design for the Boreal Tower approved, not that hack Karnstein's.

## The Bargain

With the power she gains from the Bargain, the Abiding can finally take life by the reins and change course, leaving a trail for everyone to follow along behind her. Death is unforgiving for most, but these Sin-Eaters know they have greatness within in, something the world needs to know about or something they need to do to shape the world. This level of self-awareness draws a certain kind of geist.

Le Magistrat was once a powerful judge, appearing much like the Grim Reaper in long robes, and makes a great partner, giving the Sin-Eater a sounding board for the legal ramifications of their actions that will lead them to greatness. Likewise, the World Adventurer who speaks in multiple languages at once but never traveled the world like they truly wanted has equal interest in pursuing their own legacy, so joining with a Sin-Eater is a mutually beneficial partnership and can make for great stories to be told.

Other Abiding Sin-Eaters seem to draw geists with less ambition than themselves. The spirit is looking for a bandwagon to jump on, and the ambition the Sin-Eater oozes make them the obvious choice. This kind of geist is easy to push around and manipulate, content to let the Sin-Eater take the credit for their deeds. As a matter of fact, their successes may prove only to push the Bound further in their own goals. An overrated and disgraced movie critic calling themselves The Voice of Reason may be just the geist to make a Bargain with an aspiring director who never got to put her vision on film. All the tricks of the trade he's learned can help her avoid pitfalls, while simultaneously validating his own opinions.

## The Unquiet

The law offices of Espinosa and Bolton started small and humble, but Javier Espinosa had dreams of becoming a household name one day. Every day, he hoped for a national embezzlement scandal or celebrity murder to fall into his lap, but it never happened. Instead, he began investigating the local gangs in hopes of starting a class action. But bangers are

notoriously concerned with crusading attorneys, and Javier ended up hung upside down by the gang's enforcers, bleeding from his throat. Bangers aren't concerned at all with what they say around the dead, however, so he came back with plenty of evidence after making a deal with the Watchdog, a geist who guards the local cemetery. Who knew all he had to do was die to land the biggest case of his career? Now Javier has all the tools necessary to make a name for himself.

Giorgia's Bistro in Positano received several critics' choice awards, and its owner, Giorgia Esperanza, made a fine name for herself. Giorgia had focused on her work so much, her family was left in shambles when she choked on a link of sausage while working late in the kitchen. Through the darkness of death, she was greeted by a gaunt thing in ragged finery called the Epicurean, who offered her a second chance. When she returned, her children were already squabbling over their inheritances from the fortune she had acquired. It would take time, but she was determined to put her family back together, while also working on a number of new recipes.

Rachel Amado competed for Brazil in Rio and walked away with a silver in gymnastics. It was the most beautiful moment in her life, but her glory was smashed when she was caught sleeping with an athlete from another country, and her photos were spread all over the internet. At first it was nothing, but the constant news coverage and slut shaming was too much after a while and she decided to end it all. Her geist, known as The Gold, offered her power, a way to reclaim her glory and inspire others, the very thing Rachel wanted. She stepped back into the world with renewed eyes, and renewed spirit.

## The Faith

Necropolitans: The excitement of having a second chance, not to exact revenge or chase after lost loved ones, but to make the world better falls right in line with the Necropolitans. The Abiding also have a vested interest in throwing the best, most flamboyant parties so their reputation among the Bound also rises. It never hurts to have a worthy legacy in both sides of your life.

Furies: Some Abiding Furies take up the tradition to mete out some personal justice, targeting any and everyone who might have a stake in ruining their legacy. Your competition for the upcoming promotion? There's got to be something she has to pay for. Your daughter's unemployed, loser husband? What dirt could you find on him to make her leave?

Mourners: Not only are the Abiding interested in their own legacy, but they understand the importance of others' legacies being kept in pristine condition. They pay close attention to crossing every "t" and dotting every "i," leaving nothing out that would change the story being told. Every story is worthy of being recorded so no one is forgotten.

Pilgrims: Helping the less fortunate is a great way of building one's reputation. If your legacy is broken in the land of the living, why not see about raising your reputation amongst the dead? It may not have been your original plan, but the Abiding are nothing if not flexible.

Undertakers: Sitting back and hoping things fall into place is not really the path of an Abiding. They prefer to take the clay — ghosts — and mold them into a better self. Successful Abiding Undertakers have learned to counsel others so they can mold their own clay.

## The Epitaph

The Abiding's goal is to leave a lasting impression on whomever they interact with. This points to primary Social Attributes and Skills in most cases, usually with secondary Mental Attributes

for help with creating social and marketing strategies. Socialize, Subterfuge and Persuasion are easy picks for the Abiding's Skills, but don't forget other utility-type Skills like Streetwise or Stealth that can give them an edge on the streets. Most Abiding have a high rating in the Skill that reflects their legacy: Crafts, Computers, Medicine, or Science, for example.

The Library Merit gives the Abiding an edge on long-term projects related to their legacy, while Striking Looks is very helpful for getting them noticed even before they show off their talents. Encyclopedic Knowledge lets them impress others, Iron Stamina helps them go farther than others, and Social Merits like Fame or Inspiring show the impact their legacy already has.

The Caul Haunt allows the Abiding to push their physical form beyond what a normal person can accomplish, which is often the first step to greatness. The Memoria allows the Abiding to conjure memories and phantasms, ensuring that she's remembered as she wants to be. The Tomb takes the idea of rebuilding one's life and applies it outward, letting the Sin-Eater fix what's broken, mending or recreating greatness in their wake.

**Concepts:** Alluring dancer, once-incompetent dropout with something to prove to his parents, outstanding but underappreciated stage magician, excitable therapist, irritatingly curious reporter

**Haunts:** The Caul, The Memoria, The Tomb

The Others

The Bereaved: Focus on more than just one person, and you'll see a whole world that needs your influence.

The Hungry: I try not to stand upwind of these Sin-Eaters; they reek of greed and self-importance.

The Kindly: And what do you think wronging that person did to your legacy? You've got to think about these kind of things.

The Vengeful: Using anger as your primary tool only brings ruin to whatever you touch.

## The Bereaved

*"Have you seen this boy?"*

*When you die, you go into a warm, happy light where all your dead friends and relatives are waiting to greet you. That's what they say, right? Of course that's bullshit, and you found that out the hard way. There's only darkness and cold and the absence of them.*

*They might not be here, but they're out there somewhere, and not all the Rivers of the Underworld will keep you apart.*

Have you ever loved someone so much, you'd run to the edge of the Earth for them? The Bereaved has come back from the dead for just that, the promise of a reunion with someone who meant the world to them but is now dead. Even in their own death, they can't help but despair at their continued loss and want a way out of it for themselves, and for those they have lost before.

## The Weight

"Nothing makes a room feel emptier than wanting someone in it." Few people know what it means to truly lose. They might have lost a job, but they can just get another. Losing a family pet

is heartbreaking, but humanity has also become accustomed to simply replacing the animal with a younger, cuter model. The same replacement method overtakes the institution of marriage when couples that should have never been together decide it's too hard to continue. Every so often, however, a person enters your life whose loss leaves it barren and unfulfilled, making it impossible to truly move on in any meaningful way. Whether it was the slow deterioration of a loved one or the sudden loss of a child, the Bereaved have experienced this special kind of hardship, and it is the thing that motivates their every action, their every breath, their every thought. It is the kind of pain that sticks with a soul for years or decades; it never truly fades, it's never truly forgotten. Even if the Bereaved finds temporary moments of happiness, it comes crashing down when they realize the person they would want to share that moment with isn't there.

Upon their death — which might be at the same time as the person who filled the hole in their heart, or long after — the offer to get that person back is put on the table. Some believe they'll simply go on to the next life and instantly be with their loved ones, but one glance at the black Underworld and the chaos of the multitude of wandering ghosts is enough to focus their attention to the matter at hand... finally reuniting with their beloved so they can be together in this new version of the afterlife. The Bereaved don't have a single method for how to effectively do this, however. At times, one Sin-Eater may simply help anyone also looking for their loved one in hopes that finding them will put them closer to their own goal. Others create elaborate plans on entering the Underworld to retrieve their beloved, but this can only happen after extensive investigation into which realm of the abyss they might be located. Of course, some simply hope against hope that luck will bring them together and rebuked death just for the chance of doing that. It should be noted that not all love is romantic in nature. Blood brothers, family members, and even best friends can all qualify for becoming the Bereaved's focus. Then there are those who mourn a metaphorical ghost, such as seeing the "death" of their hometown or simply not having the courage to face someone, spurring the death of that relationship.

The Bereaved would argue that they died the day their beloved was taken from them. In some cases, this is literal: Her car skids on black ice, flips, tumbles, and the last thing she sees is her family crushed by crumpled metal. In others, it's metaphorical: After his husband of 50 years passes on, it's as though a spark inside was snuffed out. He's dead within a year, maybe two. Many Bereaved, after the loss of the most important person in their lives, take their own lives to speed along their reunion, not realizing the often even longer road ahead of them this creates.

Death itself is a state where pain and anguish dominate, and ghosts often look for like-minded beings to surround themselves with. A Sin-Eater fixated on their own personal loss is perfect for their purposes, often giving them the ability to see the pain of loss, the same pain they feel, in others. Every ghost is asked if they can help find the person the Bereaved misses, and most will help outright because they truly understand what it means to lose. When it comes to the Bereaved helping the ghost, however, it often becomes harder to do. If the search takes too long, they may not only lose hope for the ghost, but for their own journey. There is a delicate balance with hope and belief, and interacting with others sharing the same pain can often exacerbate it in one direction or another.

## The Bargain

Making the Bargain with a geist holds many secrets to the Underworld for the Bereaved. The geist has stuck around and become powerful enough through experience and survival instinct,

things that will undoubtedly become useful as they pursue their beloved. As much as they might want to, the Bereaved seldom draw geists who are as downtrodden or depressed as themselves. No, the geist usually has a spark of adventure, a self-confidence that the Sin-Eater may lack. They become two halves to a whole with time, developing the fortitude to overcome any hurdles that may present themselves. Promises made can be as simple as “I’ll help you get your son back,” or as complex as “I have a map of the Underworld and we could go there together for a price.” Different Sin-Eaters require varying levels of proof, but they are often desperate enough to take the geist at their word if there’s even a glimmer of hope — since hope is in such short supply for the Bereaved.

Of course, it’s important for every Sin-Eater to realize that no geist enters the Bargain without wanting something in return. A geist of a Manipulative Parent may just want to be able to hold an “I told you so” over someone already emotionally damaged. They are drawn to the Sin-Eater, seeing their emotional dependency and using it to prop themselves up as the guide. Another geist embodying the concept of Grief may offer the Bereaved the Bargain as a way to fulfill both their goals at the same time. They may even demand help with their own deep sadness before they’ll disclose a lead to the Sin-Eater’s beloved, or teach the Bound how to utilize their Haunts more effectively by practicing them on someone with whom he has a personal ax to grind. This kind of emotional blackmail is especially effective on the Bereaved. After all, they’d give almost anything to be reunited.

## The Unquiet

It was a hard road for Tamika Green, as her battle with cancer grew worse and worse by the year. At least she had years, though. Her cancer group support introduced her to Bethany, the brightest woman she’d ever known. The two became inseparable as they fought their cancer as a team. But teamwork is no match for squamous cell carcinoma, and the sickness claimed Bethany after just a few months. Tamika followed not long after, but she did not give in to death, making a bargain with the Goyet Man, a cannibal shade so ancient it might not even be an anatomically modern human. As a Sin-Eater, she is cancer-free but continues to attend survivor groups, which many ghosts who were not so lucky frequent. Maybe, one day, she and Bethany will meet again.

Xiao Hong cried herself to sleep almost every night after she was forced to give up her daughter. Her husband insisted it was her patriotic duty to have only one child, and they had yet to have a son to ensure their legacy. When she became pregnant again, it was too much to bear, and Hong killed herself to save the soul of the girl a soothsayer told her she was destined to birth. Together with the geist calling itself the Caregiver, Xiao Hong now scours the Underworld in hopes of finding the daughter she never met, if only to say how sorry she is. The Caregiver itself has amnesia, and often believes every child’s soul is her lost child, dragging Hong with her in an effort to save them all.

When he was eight, Miles’ mom left their family home and never returned. The police looked everywhere, and he and his father watched the news constantly, but she had just disappeared. This loss shaped the rest of the young boy’s life, prompting him to become a private investigator, so he could help people and secretly continue the search for his mother. Being shot by a client’s angry, cheating spouse didn’t deter his need for the closure he’d wanted since he was a kid. The way he sees it, now he just has more places to look. His geist, the Bookie, always has an ulterior motive behind his assistance. If making a quick buck is what it takes to find his mom, though, Miles is on board.

# The Faith

**Necropolitans:** Many of the events thrown by Bereaved Necropolitans are small, intimate gatherings, instead of debaucherous parties. The thought of their beloved is always in the back of their mind, making true enjoyment in the moment hard to accomplish most of the time. Those who can get over themselves may gather as many ghosts together as possible in hopes that one of them will be the person they are looking for.

**Furies:** A Bereaved's sense of justice is often muddled by their personal losses, but still they may attempt to follow the path of a Fury. They do become less bloodthirsty than other Burdens, knowing that the loss of life can be impactful, even if it a proposed "bad guy's" life. They often find the path of peace the best course of action.

**Mourners:** Becoming a Mourner is an easy choice for a Bereaved. They have already encapsulated and recorded every memory of their beloved, usually kept in some kind of journal or other memento. As a Mourner, they can assist others with recording their memories as well, something that is both therapeutic and powerful.

**Pilgrims:** Wandering the earth to help resolve attachments and destroy Anchors that keep ghosts in this world is definitely a noble occupation. The Bereaved often gravitate to this krew to help thin the herd, and hopefully get a better view of their beloved once the crowd is gone. Every soul they aid is one more ghost out of their way.

**Undertakers:** Many Bereaved become Undertakers for one very real reason... they are crazy enough to make interacting with ghosts a normal part of their existence, even if they do it in their own way. They recognize their journey is both completely separate and yet parallel to ghosts who may need their help, giving them objectivity when assisting ghosts. Their hands-off approach makes it easier to focus on their primary mission, as well.

# The Epitaph

The Bereaved know what they want and have to be strategic about getting it. These characters overwhelmingly gravitate to Mental Attributes. Choosing either Physical or Social Attributes as their secondary Attributes is up to the individual, and helps to shape the methods they use. Skills like Academics, Computer, Survival, Empathy, Politics, and Persuasion will carry them a long way and make their job easier. They prefer to watch and learn before approaching if they can.

The Closed Book Merit succinctly describes how many of the Bereaved appear to others. Mental Merits like Trained Observer, Multilingual, or Indomitable make it hard to say no to them. The Bereaved also have a penchant for collecting Mementos, and it is not unheard of spend the majority of a character's dots on that Merit alone.

As far as Haunts go, the Bereaved have an interesting mix. The Curse is great for hexing fools, usually to show someone what they have and how quickly it can be taken from them. The Shroud cloaks and hides the Bereaved, allowing them to remove themselves from the world of the living and sink into their own despair. They should be careful how often they utilize this power. The Oracle comes from their connection to death, not just their own, but that of their beloved. It grants particular insight into destiny itself, helping them to lay out their strategies with time to spare.

**Concepts:** Lost child looking for a new family, betrayed cop, grumpy taxi driver, sympathetic gravedigger, inquisitive forensic pathologist

## **Haunts:** The Caul, The Oracle, The Shroud

The Others

The Abiding: What good is a legacy after you are gone? It's the people that you should care about.

The Hungry: Some of us can be so selfish.

The Kindly: I wish I could do good for the sake of it sometimes.

The Vengeful: Show me a man who knows what justice is, and I'll show you a man out for revenge.

## The Hungry

*"Turns out they were right: you can't take it with you.*

*Nobody said anything about coming back for it."*

*In the olden times, you would be buried with all your prized possessions. Your trusty sword, your favorite tools, maybe even your loyal hound. They knew, see, that you'd need them in the next life. You get that.*

*In the olden times, they also told stories about the unquiet dead, who would visit terrible curses upon those who stole from their grave mounds.*

*You get that, too.*

It's one thing to respect death and another to acknowledge that it will happen to you. Then it's an entirely different thing to simply deny death's right to your soul. The Hungry do just that, ignoring death and returning to the life they once had, attaching themselves to the things they left behind. They are almost fully encompassed in their attachments, seeing their possessions and experiences as the very thing to stave off death itself. Obtaining even more allows them to remain a Sin-Eater and fills their new lives with intrigue and adventure.

## The Weight

"You can't take it with you." It's a common saying those with a sense of pseudo-metaphysical enlightenment use to cheer people up when they've lost their home, car or other material possessions. For the Hungry, it is but a reminder of why they made their Bargain and chose to stay behind but split between worlds. To them, the idea of giving up what they've built is just too much to bear, enough that their possessions and experiences become a very real part of their being. Why would a world-traveling playboy want to leave their considerable wealth behind? Why would a genetic researcher leave before her world-changing vaccine was completed? What would you give for the chance to travel to Machu Picchu like you always wanted to, though you never found the time? The Hungry are attached to their old life, to the point of essentially disregarding death itself to return to what they have. The Hungry can't take it with them, but they sure as hell aren't going to leave it behind, either.

Few of the Hungry come back for the essentials like food, shelter, or other sensible things; they are instead obsessed with the things that probably took up the majority of their brainspace in life as well. Not only have they come back, but whatever it was that kept them here becomes the sole reason they exist, often rising to the level of destructive obsession. A Sin-Eater who stayed behind because she was never happy with the image she saw in the mirror may spend their time

under the knife to perfect a body that is now powered by death. Another Bound who stayed behind to experience every culinary masterpiece the world has to offer may experience quite the opposite, gaining more weight than their body can reasonably support as they eat their way out of the majority of their problems. Even the Sin-Eater who simply wanted to travel to one place to fulfill their dream won't be happy until they've flown around the world, each destination becoming more expensive and increasingly dangerous. Hell, if sufficiently preoccupied with a television show, the Bound may be compelled to stay behind to complete the season, only to be crushed when it gets cancelled, thus creating the secondary goal of getting it back on the air. While some can get caught in this obsessive lifestyle, some are able to calm their active brains and reach a moment of resolution at times.

In many cases, the Hungry feel like they've been robbed of their life... which is why they feel empowered to take it back. Few die due to self-inflicted wounds, and instead are killed by outside forces. They aren't the kind to seek revenge for their death itself, however; a Sin-Eater may simply be blinded by her cravings for wealth to even notice the murderer creeping up behind them. To him, she was the source of his misery, having stolen everything from him in her schemes to steal his promotion. To her, he was just jealous of the life she'd built for herself. Another timid Bound was thrown out of a party because he didn't fit the crowd, hitting his head on the way out and bleeding. His goal is not revenge, but to learn how to become more outgoing and expressive, a task many struggle with every day. Likewise, it could be that the Hungry died doing the thing he hoped for, such as dying during a plane crash on his way to his destination wedding. Sure he's saddened by the death of his wife, but it was the relaxing beaches of Hawaii that brought him back from the grave.

The Hungry attract the kinds of ghosts connected to what they've come back for, ranging from a ghost into the vintage cars the Sin-Eater has been restoring to a ghost haunted by the need to look young if the Bound returned to ensure they got the best picture taken of them for their gravestone. Sadly, whether the ghosts are helpful or harmful, they'll never truly register to one of the Hungry as they would to other Sin-Eaters. Ghosts are largely seen for how they can be used to get the Hungry more, and if they can't, they are summarily dismissed or helped as a way to get them to leave on a permanent basis. This is also a weak spot many Hungry have, as ghosts can sense their weakness and exploit it to manipulate the Sin-Eater into any number of different tasks. She may not want to break into a lab and steal a secret formula, but the ghost knows where to find the last limited-edition stamp that could finish her collection. The Bound is defined by what they want and their denial to give it up... and not always in a good way.

## The Bargain

The Hungry stare death in the face with the knowledge that everything they've worked to achieve, every goal they ever hoped to accomplish, everything that was important to them is about to be undone. It may be about wealth or materialism, but more often than not it's about a task left incomplete, dreams left unfulfilled. They rail against this and will often accept any bargain placed in front of them to not lose what they feel is theirs in their soul.

They hold on with everything they've got, and then they hear a voice tell them they can stay... for a price. At the moment of death, one can't be too picky. They'll accept the Robber Baron's Bargain, sealed with a puff on a smokestack cigar. The geist is equally happy to have found a profoundly willing host, to keep them from oblivion. From that time on, though, the Hungry are often more linked to their geist than other Sin-Eaters. They are partners in whatever endeavor

they undertake, neither ever wavering from the unified middle finger they have given to death itself. As long as the Hungry has been sated recently, they'll gladly give time to their geist to pursue whatever it is they want... especially if it is even more of the same. They can become a pair of intrepid adventurers, taking on anything from trawling the ruins of ancient Aztec cities to figuring out the intricacies of first-person shooting-game competitions to seeing how many sexual conquests they can rack up in record time. As long as they keep their souls aligned, there is little they can't accomplish together.

## The Unquiet

Daan De Vries died in the woods, crushed by a tree he felled himself to build his dream home. He was approached by the Lumberjack, a crude but persuasive geist, who offered another shot at his dream in exchange for defending the woods from trespassers. But when it was finally finished, that dream home felt hollow, empty. *Something* was missing, and Daan became obsessed with finding it. Over the years, he's built nearly a dozen cabins in his woods, but never captured that ephemeral something. Occasionally others try to occupy his cabins, but he returns to keep his pieces pristine — with the help of his trusty ax if necessary.

A decade of research and over a million dollars in funding, and Chetan Ghosh still hadn't cracked the secret to the HIV/AIDS vaccine. His team had come so close so many times, but the trials didn't go nearly as well as projected and getting grants wasn't becoming any easier. On his deathbed at 80 years old, Chetan felt he had failed his country by not completing his vaccine, but as the white lights came to him so did the voice of another scientifically minded geist, calling itself the Tattered Surgeon and offering to aid in finishing his work. He didn't hesitate one moment, and returned to his work in Pune a shriveled corpse of a man, in hopes of saving the world one day with the creeping voice of his geist whispering in his ear.

The glitz and glamour of Hollywood is often too much for anyone to resist. Once pulled into the limelight, like the movie industry's current darling Kristen Lopez was, even death is no escape, as the Tastemaker coaxed her from her white lights and back into the spotlight. Now, Kristen scours script after script looking for her next big role, not afraid to rip the heart out of any other starlet that stands in her way if her agent suggests it.

## The Faith

Necropolitans: What do the Hungry not have to celebrate? Choosing to become Necropolitan is an easy choice for most Sin-Eaters ecstatic with the fact that they escaped death and proud to share their happiness with anyone else. In their efforts to make their own lives better, there is a trickle-down effect that others benefit from as well.

Furies: Hungry Furies come off as corrupt cops, vigilant for justice but willing to bend the rules. They are more keenly aware of what is not only unfair, but wholly unjust and being as flexible as possible eventually leads to the best outcome. It often happens that their targets seem to have something they want, as well, as they mix their justice with their vice. Even if justice is blind, it often has deep green eyes.

Mourners: The Hungry make fine Mourners, especially those with a high sense of empathy. They acknowledge that their deep needs differ little from what the dead want. They are often quite interested in what the dead have to say, delving deep into their wealth of knowledge and sifting through it in hopes of finding a nugget they can use to their own advantage.

**Pilgrims:** Helping ghosts get rid of their attachments, usually for a price. Hungry Pilgrims certainly care for their charges, but their relationship often becomes a matter of “do as I say, not as I do.” This can cause some tension in their interaction, as the Sin-Eater plays with how they present themselves, but the end result is the same.

**Undertakers:** The Undertakers handle the dead in their charge much like a scared-straight program, showing them the horrors that come with obsessive personalities and helping them get over their own. They take a very hands-on approach, often not leaving the ghost’s side until they are certain the lesson has been learned.

## The Epitaph

While it sometimes takes muscle to keep what you have, seldom do the Hungry have an abundance of Physical Attribute dots. Instead, they usually have Mental and Social Attributes as their primary and secondary level respectively. As the Hungry are often less removed from the world of the living than other Sin-Eaters, they excel in Skills like Animal Ken, Computer, Drive, Medicine, and Socialize. These assets give them the tools to find what they need, get to it without too much trouble, and deal with many an obstacle when they get there.

Resources is likely an important Merit available to the Hungry, essentially gauging just how successful they’ll be in getting some of the things for which they are known for sticking around. Money opens a lot of doors. Not to mention those Hungry who are completely defined by their wealth. Other helpful Merits include Good Time Management, Fame, Striking Looks, Fast-Talking, Taste, and other things that reflect their inborn abilities.

The Marionette allows them to handle their business without lifting a finger, levitating weapons and items on a whim. The Caul allows them to manifest their primary focus outward with powerful transformations. A Hungry attached to his money may be able to cause razor-thin paper cuts to his enemy, while one obsessed with Aztec culture may turn into a jaguar warrior ready to carve their target’s heart from their chest. The Boneyard reflects the Sin-Eater’s connection to things outside of themselves, allowing them to haunt locations and create wicked horrors the likes of which have never been seen before.

**Concepts:** Tightfisted treasure-hunter, grandmother who never got to live the life she wanted, patient dancer, accountant-turned-bookie, the one and only amusing auto mechanic

**Haunts:** The Boneyard, The Marionette, The Curse

The Others

The Abiding: It’s hard enough to keep what you have already, but these guys want to build something new. Good luck with that.

The Bereaved: I totally get them. If I lost what was most important to me, I’d be upset, too.

The Kindly: I envy someone caring about others so much... No, no, honey, I said on the rocks. \*Sigh\* It’s just so hard sometimes.

The Vengeful: Letting someone get under your skin like that can’t be good for you.

## The Kindly

*“I’m not looking for your forgiveness. I do what I do so I can one day forgive myself.”*

*So here you are. Dead. Look back at your life — did you live the best one you probably could?*

*Probably not. Maybe you pretended not to have any spare change for that homeless person.*

*Maybe you only voted in the big national elections. But maybe you did something worse.*

*Something you devoted your life to making right, only to discover when you died that you hadn’t even come close to balancing the scales.*

*What would you do to have another chance to fix it?*

The Kindly did someone wrong in their past and were so overcome with regret that they’d make any kind of deal to make their wrongs right. They’ve accepted their death as part of a bigger design, but don’t want to go until their affairs are put in order. Of course, some affairs are easier to fix than others.

## The Weight

“Maybe all one can do is hope to end up with the right regrets.” But what happens when the end comes too soon? When the tides of fortune don’t go the way you want, or your fate is sealed before you get to say sorry. This is the karma the Kindly must deal with, faced with the knowledge that they’ve done something so incredibly terrible, so regrettable that they’ll never be able to make amends. Or will they? The Kindly have a mission they have stayed behind to fulfill, one very personal to their soul, and one that tells a story about their place in this world before and after their death.

How they go about making their amends depends on what wrong they’ve committed and the Bound’s disposition. A Sin-Eater who stays behind because he cheated on his wife and neglected his children becomes his family’s protector, defending them from harm. One who murdered an innocent with her car after having one too many stays behind to help others who suffer from alcoholism to make better choices.

Most of the Kindly die suddenly and usually accidentally. They seldom have time to rectify all they’ve done wrong in their lives or say long-overdue words to loved ones. One suddenly loses her balance and fall off the third story during a roof party. Another drowns during a fishing expedition, never having repaid the money she “borrowed” from the company pension. Other Sin-Eaters are directly targeted by those they have wronged, their victims. The mother who lost all her money in the Bound’s Ponzi scheme finally drums up the courage to pull the trigger on the one who ruined her family. The guy whose wife the Bound slept with gets his friends together to dole out some street justice. When the Kindly meets her death and her life flashes before her eyes, she continuously returns to this one niggling moment, her prime regret that she would give almost anything to alter.

This need to do good has a way of attracting ghosts of a similar vein. The ghost of a fire chief who wants to help families trapped in terrible situations leads the way to people in need. It becomes a time-management challenge for the Kindly, as they are constantly surrounded with people in need... but they know they ultimately cannot help them all. A sob story about the kid in danger the ghost left behind or a family who desperately needs the Sin-Eater to return a bag of money to them may just be enough to get the Bound to act on sentiment alone, but they can’t do both. Dealing with others’ problems too much can also lead to their own Aspirations falling to the wayside, so any Kindly Sin-Eater must be careful not to forget why they made their Bargain

in the first place. They already have their goals and the goals of their geist to worry about, after all.

## The Bargain

In their death, the Sin-Eater sends out the need to make amends for a Sin-Eater's crimes and misgivings like a beacon, a final plea to the universe to not let it end without making things right. Geists attracted to the Kindly also have their own wrongs to right, and seek a partner to help bring that mission to fruition... together. A Solemn Girl who feels guilty for the extreme cyber-bullying she committed on a girl who committed suicide may seek a Kindly to ally with, appearing as lines of code with just a saddened face, as might the Blank Badge, a police officer who shot an unarmed man in the heat of the moment, destroying his life and the life of his victim, appearing in his patrolman's uniform and with a featureless face.

The path to hell is paved with good intentions, however, and a Bound's hopefulness and positivity are tools a clever geist can exploit. One may be wretched soul of a chess player who sees their Sin-Eater as a pawn, playing on her Burdens every step of the way. Of course, he is well trained in subterfuge and would never let his Bound know the real truth of their unique relationship.

While rare, Kindly Sin-Eaters caught up in an accident of extreme emotional attachment at their moment of death may even take on their victim as a geist. So, a Bound who murders her husband and then turns the gun on herself in an elaborate murder-suicide may see the ghost of her lover instantly return to make the Bargain, without either of them ever truly knowing what this choice entails. A club-goer may share his recreational drugs with the prettiest girl at the party, only to find out his stash had been laced with something much deadlier. Even though she was the first to go, he was soon to follow, but not before her ghost returns and pleads with him to make peace with her family. They may not actually know the true identity of their geist for some time, as they work through the Remembrance, but it can stir the soul when it suddenly becomes apparent who their partner really is.

## The Unquiet

Dr. Jamal Gaines worked day and night and scoured every database, but couldn't find a replacement liver for his wife. In his eyes, her death was on his hands. He dove too deeply into his addictions, since no amount of good could alleviate his guilt. He just wished he could just do more as he slipped away into death from an overdose. On the other side, Jamal was greeted by the Empty Woman, who called to him to keep living. Now his days are spent finding suitable organ donors, willing or not, to make sure he never loses another patient to lack of availability.

The smiles of the children were enough to sustain Hanan Jouma in her hopes for spreading education to girls in her small village in Pakistan. It all went great until the Islamic State stepped in and shut down the school at gunpoint, threatening any teacher who dared come to work. Hanan watched her students' smiles turn to shame, and she knew she had let them down by not resisting. The soldiers killed her on the spot anyway. She joined forces with a geist called the Blessed Mind and now fights for women's rights in Pakistan, and protects her past students from harm whenever possible.

South Africa is rife with opportunities to make a political statement with a well-placed camera. Documentarian Annebe Finnis set out to do just that, even filming the beating and killing of

several black people by police officers during a protest. Fear of retaliation from the government and police made her second guess her decision to release the tape, and the years passed and life went on, until she was killed by a random mugger on her way home from the market. The only regret she ever had was the work never done, and that men who would never see justice. A geist called the Eyeless Watcher came to her and signed on for its own reasons it has yet to share. Now she watches the tape every night, looking for clues to find the murderers and bring them down. No longer will she sit on the sidelines out of fear while atrocities occur.

## The Faith

**Necropolitans:** Most believe the Necropolitans to be the perfect place for a Kindly, who goes out of their way to do good and bring joy. They help the living pay tribute to the dead, and look to save ghosts from themselves in many cases. Under the surface, however, is a being full of regret, just trying to forget it for a moment of peace, and that's the biggest thing the Necropolitans provide for the Kindly.

**Furies:** The Kindly look at themselves as the worst wrongdoers, and sometimes it takes one to know one. They make fine Furies, meting out justice when they see fit as a natural part of their existence. Becoming a Fury means they can do so with an air of authority other Kindly wouldn't be afforded.

**Mourners:** Those Kindly who become Mourners often take an introspective stance on their own crimes, hoping that finding and recording instances of the same wrongs can help another in the future. They often accumulate a wealth of knowledge on the law, both of the living and of the dead, which is helpful for any Sin-Eater.

**Pilgrims:** Often the best fit for the Kindly, Pilgrims offer the chance to help others day in and day out. Even though they are consumed with their own attachments and guilts, the Bound can release ghosts from this realm by direct involvement in their matters. They do have a track record of helping ghosts "for their own good," whether they want it or not

**Undertakers:** What could be more kind than helping another complete a task, but leaving the heavy lifting to them so they have a sense of achievement? Kindly Undertakers strive for being the perfect ear for ghosts to confide in, though they do become overzealous at times and need to remember that everyone's journey is different.

## The Epitaph

The first thing players should consider during character creation is how easy they want their atonement to be. Read: It shouldn't be an easy journey. Giving a Kindly who wants to protect their child from harm primary Physical Attributes and Skills may make him more "effective," but choosing Social Attributes and Skills means he has the ability to navigate bureaucracy and deal with social workers and the courts. Both are fair avenues to pursue, so the best approach is to spread Attributes as evenly as possible, with a focus on Skills like Empathy and Investigation. Stealth may be useful for those who want to make their amends anonymously, while Socialize and Persuasion are key for seeking forgiveness directly.

Choosing Merits like Patient, Reconciler, or Sympathetic fit well into the Kindly Sin-Eater's repertoire, but may be a little on the nose for some concepts. In most cases, Anonymity is a great Merit to keep the Bound hidden in plain sight, especially while in close proximity to their charge. The Kindly are known for taking their Burden on themselves, so Merits like Allies and Contacts

should be kept to a minimum. If anything, they'd put their trust in a single friend or supporter, so Retainer is the better choice.

The Shroud lets the Sin-Eater become more ghost-like. Even at low levels of ignoring the need for sustenance, it is a worthwhile Haunt to choose if the character is to be vigilant. Use of the Marionette reinforces the motif of the Kindly performing their works from afar, without having to directly engage and give themselves away. The Dirge, their ultimate tool, is key to manipulating the emotions of others, helpful for bringing forth or quelling the target's regrets.

**Concepts:** Helicopter parent from beyond the grave, peeping Tom who never got caught, irritatingly meticulous planner, groovy psychologist, debt collector for the dead

**Haunts:** The Dirge, The Marionette, The Shroud

The Others

The Abiding: You can't make deals with death... just put in the work for the sake of the work.

The Bereaved: I understand their loss; I lost myself a long time ago.

The Hungry: This level of attachment without the regret is commendable. Maybe one day I'll reach that level.

The Vengeful: So many of us give into their darker urges when they realize there is no glory in what we do. Ours is a hard road to walk.

## The Vengeful

*"I left the realm of rationality a long time ago. No, now's the time for good old-fashioned payback."*

*Yours is the oldest story: the wrathful shade wrongly slain, the victim unburied, the one they thought they got away with. Funeral customs were invented to keep you away. Shamans, magicians, and exorcists exist to propitiate you. You are the thing they fear.*

*Show them why.*

While on one's death bed, several emotions run through the Sin-Eater's mind... but none more than anger. Anger at the regrets left unsettled, anger at the people who led to your death, hell, anger at death itself. The Vengeful are these Sin-Eaters who look to take that anger out on those they think did them wrong.

## The Weight

"An eye for an eye leaves everyone blind," the saying goes, but the Vengeful don't rely on their eyes for what they crave. They access a deep, base desire for justice, for retribution, for blood, something that can fuel their rage long after they have been stricken blind, deaf, and mute. Their wrath still roars beneath their breast until anyone who wronged them in their old life has been dealt with. Vengeful Sin-Eaters eat, breathe, and shit the need to quench their thirst, in hopes they'll be able to feel anything besides hatred and anger one day. Some are chaotic rampagers, bloodying the streets in broad daylight and inviting retaliation. They create a revolving door of brutality, but also lose the element of surprise in many cases. Others find the one who hurt them,

grab the nearest weapon — a wrench, a sturdy desk lamp, a random piece of wood — and proceed to beat them to a pulp, regardless of the consequences.

Other Vengeful hone their cravings through meticulous strategies to get the most out of their prey. The mouse is only eaten once the cat has finished with its fun, and so too do the Vengeful torment their targets before finally putting the final nail in their coffin. Irony is a common feature of their justice: If they died through gun violence, their victims are left riddled with bullets, while a Sin-Eater killed in a hit and run may drag their victims miles behind their car, laughing maniacally along the way. Others develop a serial killer's penchant of ritual, always needing to perform the same vengeful act again and again.

While being an instrument of death makes it easy to turn to killing as a final and only resort, Vengeful with a calmer temperament are sometimes quite happy with simply destroying their victims' lives and leaving them to survive the ruin. Perhaps the Sin-Eater was murdered in an effort to hide her former boss' many affairs, and she sets out to destroy his company, his livelihood, his marriage, and his family. Taking his life as well would only alleviate his pain, and that's not really the point, is it?

The Vengeful are born from a multitude of situations, since it is normal for humans to blame someone outside of themselves for their shortcomings (and death is the biggest shortcoming of all mortal creatures). One of the most simplistic forms is murder, regardless of the tools used to carry out the act, obviously engendering animosity from the victim. However, any slight can evoke a parallel reaction, depending on the individual. A man who deeply resents and blames his spouse for his death at the hand of the sex worker he was "forced" to hire is one example, but an embezzler who stole all of the Sin-Eater's money so they had none to give to the mugger who did them in is just as likely. The only qualifier is that the need to seek revenge is greater than their wish for peace. There is no peace for a Vengeful until their job is complete. Sadly, it is in their nature to blame again and again, creating a domino effect with almost no end. Vengeance only begets more vengeance, and the cycle only ends when the Sin-Eater has reached a new understanding about their existence.

Ghosts hell bent on revenge encircle the Vengeful, as if they sense a kindred spirit in the Sin-Eater. They can, at times, be called forth to vent their wrath on the Sin-Eater's enemies, but more often than not, these ghosts are just as selfish and angered as the Vengeful is, demanding help with their own personal crises before they'll depart. So many things stand in the way of the Vengeful's revenge, for one more to be added to the pile is just exhausting. It becomes a vicious cycle, with anger feeding anger feeding anger until something — an innocent bystander, a parked car, a whimpering puppy — is destroyed in a spontaneous and often misdirected violent outburst.

## The Bargain

Revenge is as basic to humans as the need for food, water, and shelter. It is no wonder that more Vengeful rise every day, sometimes coerced by a geist taking advantage of a human's lowest moment. The geist of a Door-to-Door Womanizing Salesman may entice a Sin-Eater with knowledge on how to pass the time when they aren't seeking vengeance. Rare instances create situations where a masochistic geist makes a bargain with a Vengeful, knowing that eventually their hostile nature will spill over to them as well. He'll go to great lengths to second guess his Sin-Eater, just hoping she'll snap and lay into him with all the fury of the Underworld. Some Sin-Eaters sincerely thank their geists for the opportunity, while others can feel trapped by the

cravings they had on their deathbed encompassing their every moment of existence so thoroughly. Yet another thing to enrage the Sin-Eater.

In other cases, the geist may simply be someone who knows the pain the Sin-Eater is going through. The ghost of a man killed by examples of “enhanced interrogation” methods may look fondly upon and make a Bargain with a Sin-Eater who was tortured by burglars. Especially if they held their own and didn’t give up anything to the creeps. He is the Justice Seeker and Sin-Eater is his tool, filling the geist with glee to see justice come to someone, even if they cannot experience it for themselves. Not only does the Bound benefit from the synergy they have with their geist, but they also now have access to all the memories of what their geist went through, knowing exactly how far to push the bamboo under the fingernails or just how hard to slam kneecaps with a sledgehammer without the victim going into shock. Now, he can fulfill vengeance for both of them in expert detail.

## The Unquiet

Lita Nunez is an ace driver in the San Juan underground circuit, and each win gets her one step closer to the top dogs who killed her and her brother. Lita is going to make sure they see her face again... right before she slits their throats. Until then, she gets off on the thrill of the chase and the horsepower of every race along her journey. Her geist, who calls himself the Speed Demon, latches on to her glory, loving the rush of excitement he always dreamed of when he was alive.

Despite working in the Wrigley Toys R&D department for over 40 years, Dennis Watkins was fired and his ideas stolen. His death was not the cleanest — a hit and run — but the driver was just one more person to screw him over. His geist, the Starving Child, recognized his rage at the injustices of his life as a mirror of her own. Returning for revenge on his former employer was an easy choice, and he builds a new toy every day, improving his skills for the day that he sends the perfect present to his old boss. One that he’s sure to get a blast out of.

Vengeance comes in all forms, but none is more fitting for retribution than the pain inflicted on one’s heart. Lucais knows this more than anyone, and so does anyone in Pays de la Loire and its surrounding regions. Lovers make their way to France every year, but so do the heartbroken... and many of them meet their end there as well. Lucais has become quite good at tracking down a ghost’s ex-lover and ruining their life, just short of killing them. Spreading rumors, ruining credit, and destroying their social circles and family relationships are just a few of his methods. He’s not in it for the blood... the pain is what he wants. Lucais’ geist, The Strangler, whispers sweet nothings into his ear just to chastise him for his reluctance to go for the kill. It has become a dance between the two.

## The Faith

Necropolitans: Vengeful Necropolitans may seem like an oxymoron — filled with hatred but exuding joy — but it happens more than one would think. It is a favorite to join for Vengeful who need some kind of anger management to keep them from going off the deep end, acting as a set of rules they can use to keep themselves in check. Those who cannot contain themselves turn their rage on the Underworld itself.

Furies: Fury krewes are an easy choice for many Vengeful, as they fall in with their existing objectives... hunt down wrongdoers and bring them to justice. Sometimes a Vengeful may take it

a bit far, but becoming a Fury gives them a lens with which to focus their rage and make a difference for others, not just themselves.

**Mourners:** Some might think a Vengeful Mourner to be an odd fit, but nothing could be further from the truth. Many ghosts are sticking around because they've been screwed over, and these Sin-Eaters are those who help them get a sense of closure, especially if the reason for the ghosts' deaths were covered up. Nothing stays buried forever, not if these Bound have a say.

**Pilgrims:** Vengeful Pilgrims are usually a work in process. They recognize they are holding on to many attachments, but using the lessons taught by the Pilgrims they can start checking names off their list and detaching themselves. In the process, they can help others understand and appreciate the journey they are on, creating a sense of camaraderie with fellow Sin-Eaters.

**Undertakers:** The Vengeful are usually act-first-think-later types, but subscribing to the Undertaker mentality gives them the ability to pause. In a way, it is easier to help a ghost deal with their own baggage, but their instinct is to jump in and destroy in most cases. It is a balancing act they struggle with, but not one that is insurmountable.

## The Epitaph

The Vengeful are known for their ability to take out their aggression on anyone they see as a target, meaning a focus on Physical Attributes is usually a good idea. Following that up with secondary Social Attributes means the character has the foundation to intimidate their way out of a fight they don't think they can win. Likewise, Physical Skills like Brawl and Firearms play into their archetype, but Skills like Larceny, Investigation, and Intimidation are important for finding the right target.

Merits like Retribution or Fleet of Foot are fine if players want to further focus on their physical output, but we encourage thinking outside of the box about the methods the Vengeful uses to exact their revenge. Allies and Contacts are always helpful to track people down and get tools to help one's cause, while Resources is a way to make a small-time revenge operation take on a great role in the story. Likewise, having the Safe Place Merit is wonderful for having a place to bring one's target back to for interrogation or death without prying eyes.

For Haunts, the Vengeful are set up as the perfect hunters. The Curse cripples their victims and is generally useful for making their lives miserable. The Memoria helps the Sin-Eater to understand their vengeance and allow their prey to understand (and experience) it, too. The Rage is what the Vengeful brings out when it is time to relieve the victim of their wretched existence.

**Concepts:** Torturer's favorite toy, ghost out for her own blood, ex-cop looking for justice, criminal mastermind with a new tool in his box, gangbanger with time on his hands

**Haunts:** The Curse, The Memoria, The Rage

### The Others

**The Abiding:** They attempt to build something lasting and beautiful. It'll take a few of their dreams tumbling down for them to get that it's all just a fantasy.

**The Bereaved:** We're all in search of something, whether it's something tangible like a loved one or something intangible like a fair shake. I tend to go for the easier of the two.

The Hungry: We all have unfinished business, but these guys take it way too seriously. And that's coming from me.

The Kindly: They seem like our opposite, but they make a lot of sense. That energy's gotta go somewhere, we just have different directions.

## Furies

*Justice is thine, sayeth the Bound.*

*"There's a feeling you get when you witness an injustice — for me it's this tingling pressure in my head, coming from right behind my eyes. Some ghosts are made of that feeling. It's all they are. It's not enough to care or to understand: We are the only ones who can do something about that feeling. The people who need our help most, no one else can help. No one believes them, no one cares about them... or if they do, they're afraid to do what needs to be done. Not me. Not us. If you join, not you."*

Injustice can take many forms, and it's usually a little more complicated than some motherfucker shooting you so he can steal your car. Actually, let's look at that case. You're driving down a dark street and a man walks up to you, points a pistol through the window glass, and orders you out. He shoots you, leaves you to bleed out in the street, and drives off in your car as your ghost looks on.

If all you cared about was revenge, you could track this guy down, tell him what he did wrong, and shoot him in the head. But Furies don't just care about revenge: They care about justice. A Fury would find this guy and ask him what happened in his life or his neighborhood to drive him to violence over a physical object. A Fury would organize their congregation to investigate the city planning and politics that led to that guy's neighborhood becoming a food desert or a crime haven. A Fury would investigate the corrupt, selfish politicians who underdeveloped that neighborhood, exposing them to voters before their reelection campaign.

And yes, sometimes, when it turns out someone did wrong by a ghost for completely selfish, personal reasons they won't recant, then sometimes the Furies shoot that someone right in the goddamn face. But the best retribution is to teach someone a lesson that changes them. It means nothing to kill someone for something they did wrong, only to make them a confused, unreachable ghost. The Furies want true justice: a wrongdoer taught a lesson, brought face to face with their transgressions, and made to understand why they and the Furies must now commit their energies to making it right.

## The Works

Furies must learn to decide, quickly and incisively, whether something they witness is just or unjust. Fury ceremonies often let celebrants practice these decisions. A senior ritualist leads the assembled like a lecture class or seminar, setting forth a case or problem and helping them come to a conclusion about it that makes sense to most of those present. To a Sin-Eater used to the rigid ceremonies of a different kind of krew, the Fury ritual might seem casual, purposeless — in fact, it might not even look like a ritual at all.

Elevated to the level of ritual, these discussions frequently resemble Platonic dialogues, Confucian analects, or philosophy symposia. Sometimes, though, it's a matter of art. The storytelling rituals that many Fury krewes engage in, sharing trickster stories and folktales about

vengeful and ill-behaved figures such as the Tortoise of Yorùbá myth, are more than just entertainment: They are parables. These stories underlie the Furies' most audacious and most famous exploits, orchestrating the haunting or the downfall of a villainous figure who has harmed many ghosts who deserved better.

Even a seemingly simple question may take time, as the krewe must function as judge, jury, and executioner in the case of many injustices. Since the job is so large and multifaceted, celebrants specialize early, apprenticing themselves to elders who focus on one part of this process. Some watch, gathering information and evidence and feeding it back to the krewe. Some collate that information to determine whether an injustice has occurred. Finally, some evaluate that injustice and measure out a punishment or response that both offers peace to a wronged ghost, and resolves the root cause of their suffering.

A significant minority of the cases that come to the Furies involve mutual wrongdoing. These are the most difficult to address, and often involve talking through the problem with both angry, sometimes violent, parties. These quarrels further cement the importance of the aforementioned discussion-based learning rituals. Through a combination of soft power, intimidation, and the secure knowledge that they'll be able to kick the problem's ass back to the Underworld if it gets out of hand, Furies can handle even the most confusing feuds. Hopefully.

Finally, battle is a ritual. Martial practice and strategy are meditation, but Furies ensure that moments of reverence are central: the kalaripayattu practitioner's salutation towards the altar, the Shingon mudras which focus the shugyosha, and the capoeira player's mandinga stance-step.

## The Faith

In a lot of ways, being a Fury is a lot like being a doctor. You know your job is essential. You perform it aggressively, secure in the knowledge you're helping others. But ultimately, you wish you lived in a world where you weren't needed.

For this reason, many Fury krewes' ceremonial obsession with law and order reflects a grander-scale desire for an accessible set of rules, a clear and easy system of moral imperatives, which ideally would obviate Furies. This is a tall order: Formulating such a set of rules is the work of millennia. Moreover, even when you hand them down on stone tablets, people still debate them endlessly, or perform actions you think are obviously wrong — crusades, terrorism, etc. — secure in the knowledge that your rules justify their actions. But when it comes to justice, prevention is much easier than cure, even when prevention is difficult and becomes a topic of widespread scholarly debate.

By the time someone has died, they've lost much of the agency that might allow them to avert injustice. But what if it weren't that way? What if death brought you face to face with the good or evil of your actions, judgment and justice, like entry into the Egyptian afterlife? Again, just assigning someone suffering because they've done wrong doesn't actually alleviate others' suffering, not unless the deterrent effect is stronger than most of us believe it is. A Fury-run afterworld confronts souls with not only the suffering they caused, but also the good they did in life, so they can best understand their impact on the world. Their afterlives would then let them make amends for, apologize for, or work against their transgressions. The final product might not look too different from the process Pilgrims send individual souls through, but automating it would be pretty great.

In the case of both these topics, everything works better as it gets better personalized to individual cases. A \$100 speeding ticket might be the result of the same transgression for a rich person and a poor person, but it's a far more severe punishment for the poor. Likewise, moral judgments work better when applied carefully and surgically to specific cases, and the same process of redress might have wildly different effects for two different people.

## The Heresy

The Furious path to heresy is in some ways the clearest. To many people, it turns out, doing harm feels good. Cathartic. Satisfying. The harm you're doing need not even have anything to do with violence. We live in a highly structured society, surrounded by strictures and norms that limit the range of choices we can make about how to deal with our problems to a few pre-selected options, most of which involve taking your problems to a higher temporal authority. Many Furies experience a rush such as they've never experienced before the first time they end and devour an intractable ghost, or fill up with effervescent glee when they see a villain suffer exposure or imprisonment. The feeling can become addictive quickly.

Even without that rush, it's still easy to go overboard with righting wrongs and ending injustices, harming individuals peripheral to the problem or hurting someone in ways that can't be undone. This kind of thing tends to leave a mess that's hard to clean up before normal folks notice.

Some Fury krewes have even taken it upon themselves to police not only other Bound, but also other Sin-Eaters, especially fledgling krewes without much guidance. This process is sometimes a helpful kind of oversight, but under other circumstances they'll punish krewes for honest mistakes, or their methods will drive a krewa into actual evil since they're being treated as evil anyway.

Like Necropolitans, Furies can sometimes be vulnerable to charismatic figures who take advantage of their power and zeal to target personal enemies. Furies who don't think through their orders may find their substantial powers and resources pointed at innocent enemies.

Moreover, Furies need to operate a pretty extensive intelligence and surveillance network in order to find their targets and dispose of them quickly and efficiently. The width of the net they cast requires them to find and retain information on others who are not actually guilty sometimes. A Fury krewa that becomes dominant in a city can turn that city's ghost world into a kind of surveillance state. For this reason, many other krewes are deeply wary when a Fury krewa rolls into town, unless of course their problems are so large and so violent that they can't deal with them themselves. If and when that threat disappears, the Furies might find their welcome withdrawn.

## The Mysteries

The **Bizango** shares a name with a coalition of Haitian vodou clergy who take it upon themselves to punish the wicked. The name could indicate that the two groups are formally aligned, that the krewa (which is almost certainly younger, if anything) has appropriated the name, or something in between — but they're secretive enough that they aren't clarifying. Its members quietly investigate and punish criminals against ghostly society, especially Bound with extreme antisocial tendencies. Subtle in the extreme, they operate through ghostly surveillance and judiciously applied (though rarely fatal) poison, and have a special hatred for religious intolerance.

**Le Quatrième Etat** is a renegade investigative journalism outfit. With contacts in krewes of many other archetypes (especially Mourners), le Quatrième Etat specializes in not only researching, but also exposing individuals who have wronged the dead. These exposés range from simple newspaper columns or blog posts to grand performative works of vengeance that echo through the living world and the dead one: tableaux of ghostly Plasm manipulated to reenact someone's crimes in a macabre puppet show, or giant mural versions of damning photos on the sides of office buildings. Journalists in le Quatrième Etat live dangerous lives, often incurring retribution from powerful living figures. Recently, the Quatrième Etat has sparked controversy by exposing the wrongdoing of one of its longtime contacts, a Necropolitan who used his social connections to cover up a side business in human trafficking. Everyone was happy to see their target go down, but at the same time, many krewes who used to cooperate with le Quatrième Etat are worried they might be investigated next.

The **Sodality of the Door** occupies a strange niche within Bound society: it neutralizes conflicts in the physical world that threaten violence against other krewes, even when those threats come from strange supernatural creatures. Usually this process involves talking people down from violence. They use the mysterious, confusing, and fearsome nature of Sin-Eaters' supernatural powers to defuse tensions and cut deals. If that doesn't work, well, there's ghost powers and baseball bats.

## The Congregation

Finesse is probably the most important Attribute for the Furies, followed closely by Power. You can't eliminate a threat if you can't find it, or if it sees you coming. Among Merits, Contacts are important for finding and keeping tabs on targets, Council of Faith provides due diligence and prevents misaimed retribution, and Anonymity allows you to strike unexpectedly and fade away without attracting retribution yourself.

**Ceremonies:** Ishtar's Perfume (•), Skeleton Key (••), Black Cat's Crossing (•••)

Stereotypes

**Mourners:** I understand what they're doing and why they're doing it, intellectually. But the idea of spending all my time doing it sounds about as satisfying as spending an afterlife haunting the DMV.

**Necropolitans:** I can't fault their aggressive attitude towards problem-solving. Between them and us, we probably have most of this business covered. Also, they always buy the first round.

**Pilgrims:** A lot of frustrated ex-Pilgrims wind up as Furies. A lot of frustrated ex-Furies wind up as Pilgrims. If one doesn't work for you, it's probably worth trying the other.

**Undertakers:** Slowly reshaping the deep mythic structure of human society is important, I'm sure, but for some problems, you need to open up a bottle of pills and pour all of them down someone else's throat.

## Mourners

*I've heard the last words of an idea. I never want to hear it again.*

*“Imma make this quick, because in fifteen minutes I gotta be in the River Cities with my boys. Homegirl inna picture frame propped against the wall, behind all them flowers and Hallmark cards? She was five blocks away from recording the illest mixtape of the decade before she had the misfortune to fit the description of someone who held up a bodega. Now I don’t know what you fucks with when it comes to poetry or music, but if you ever read, heard, played, or watched something that changed your life, I think you’ll unnerstand why we finna do what we finna do. Are you in or are you out?”*

Do you ever wonder what it might sound like to hear the poetry of Miyamoto Musashi, or to piece together broken shards of pottery to make Sappho’s verses whole again? To watch Aristophanes’ *Banqueters* or *Babylonians*, or Sophocles’ *Oedipus*, in their original form and before 1,000 reinterpretations? To build the devices detailed in Nikola Tesla’s notes, burnt in his laboratory on Fifth Avenue? To watch all the lost episodes of *Doctor Who*? To learn the secret techniques of the Koka ninja, which died with Fujita Seiko in 1966? Would you have learned the language of the Susquehannock, whom the Paxton Boys slaughtered in 1763? Do you wonder what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. or Mahatma Gandhi or el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz would have said on the day after they were assassinated?

The living come and go, as they have for billions of years. The body’s breakdown, the soul’s sublimation: These we cannot avert. But the things we create might live forever. If individual humans are the cells of the human race’s body, then poems, philosophies, songs, and stories are its immortal soul. So long as our ideas pass to the living before we pass on, we live, and humanity lives. But what if we die with our ideas unspoken and unshared? What if our deaths go unwitnessed, unremembered? Enter the Mourners. The living, when they die, cannot return. But an idea can be brought back from the dead, that it might live forever.

Mourners find the forgotten. They aid ghosts who died unknown and unremembered, carrying their stories forward to the next generation. Without Mourners, the things they save would never appear again.

## The Works

The Mourner approach to life, death, and work makes many of them traditionalists and conservatives in a fundamental sense: They’re interested in conserving endangered traditions, not necessarily because those traditions are superior, so much as because someone has to. This kind of excitement can range from cold, academic remove (transcribing passionate revels’ dance steps in Laban notation and filing them away) to overenthusiasm (adopting rituals from a dozen long-forgotten religions into your krewe’s ceremonies). Krewes in the latter vein, if they don’t tear themselves apart internally in debates over cultural appropriation, often pride themselves on their innovatively ancient cocktail of practices. In the same way that academics joust for dominance through name-dropping and intellectual acrobatics, Mourners often maintain a vigorous intellectual rivalry with nearby Mourner krewes, competing to find and display the most obscure and forgotten ceremonial relics.

Underneath, though, every Mourner krewe is dead serious about finding what’s lost. That quest begins with lost ghosts. Mourners reach out to living families who have lost someone and don’t know where they are, then send search parties through both the living world and the Underworld in order to find them. They can’t often bring them back, and they can’t always share how they’ve learned what they’ve learned, but to record the truth of someone’s last moments, the ending to their story, can satisfy as well as finding an unfinished novel’s unwritten last chapter — and any

Mourner will tell you it's just as important. They read, recite, and copy them over with all the reverence of monks illuminating manuscripts or transcribing sutras.

Mourner krewes also function as custodians for information. They operate Bound libraries, museums, and server farms. Many krewes from geographical regions with strong oral traditions, places like West Africa or Greece, train members as griots or rhapsodes. Even krewes with less rigorous traditions of intellectual retention expect their celebrants and leaders to reflect the things they learn in arts and letters, choreographing dance dramas or writing epic poems about the information they've found — and especially the stories they learn that haven't been recorded yet.

Mourners also take it upon themselves to become explorers, surveyors, and cartographers of the Great Below. Lost ghosts are found, and even if they can't be brought back to the vale of tears, perhaps their stories can be recorded. If not that, then perhaps the next Sin-Eaters to explore this part of the realm can have the benefit of a map and some documentation.

## The Faith

Necropolitans and Mourners find common ground in hopes for a world where the living and the dead maintain frequent, productive contact. Again, they look to tradition for a model: Ancestor worship in societies across the world provides a functional blueprint for what Mourners hope to establish. Imagine a world where no lost child is ever truly alone, where hope and answers and information are a prayer away.

Right now, humanity's means for storing data leave something to be desired. Clay pots shatter, and can't hold much data. Technological means seem permanent, but have short shelf lives. Twenty percent of the Viking 1 and 2 mission data died when NASA scrapped its magnetic tape readers. Servers degrade alarmingly quickly, and computers might not even read USB sticks anymore in five years. And we're all waiting for one ill-tempered AI to devour everything we keep in the cloud. Hell, if you die in an accident, everything you've ever password protected is gone. Mourners, however, research Underworldly means to store data, less expensive than laser-etching nickel tablets or coding it into tree DNA, and a few krewes have actually been compounding interest long enough that laser-etched nickel and digital vellum looks viable.

Mourners are all about redundant storage systems, though — and their favorite option is cultural exchange. Encouraging normal people's interest in the same topics Mourners research allows Mourners to "outsource" more mundane topics to living universities, art institutions, and record collectors. Better organized and interconnected mundane records help Mourners find what they're looking for.

They pursue new ceremonial technology in order to link these priorities. Access to a print library and a computer system isn't as good as a print library with information about computers as well as a computer system that can search the print library. Mourners develop ceremonies permitting their various information-storage methods to talk to one another. Imagine high-speed wireless Internet access from deep in the Underworld. Imagine viewing the depths of the Underworld on a remote camera from high in an office building. All information recorded and categorized. Free flow of information across the veil. This is where it's all headed.

## The Heresy

It's easy for Mourners to turn selfish and petty. When your krewe ethos is explicitly and enthusiastically competitive, sometimes a spiteful soul can take it too far: academic sabotage,

withholding of important information from people who need it but who may or may not credit you, and other ivory-tower shenanigans.

On more than one historical occasion, Mourner krewes have crossed the line into mercenary information brokering, or worse. Access to secrets no one else can reach opens one up to a spectacular new world of blackmail and manipulation. Corporations, politicians, and krewes with skeletons in their closets sometimes make use of greedy Mourner moonlighters to find and destroy information about them that they don't want revealed.

## The Mysteries

The **Musæum of Alexandria** claims an unbroken chain of membership dating back to ancient Egypt. They take the name seriously: Some of the krewe's elders refer to their geists without irony as Muses. Heirs of the great library that burned, the Musæum's goal is to catalogue all information. No more qualifiers. That's it. All. Information. The Musæum maintains a network of libraries, server banks, and other repositories and backups in the real world and the Underworld. Imagine Borges's Library of Babel modeled in the Underworld, books and scrolls that become infinite fractal libraries within themselves, using the Underworld's unreal geometry to fold impossible volumes of information into convenient (if unsettling) spaces, with creeping bookworms that read your intentions when they wriggle over your fingers and bring you the exact tome you need. They lead research into new technologies for the efficient and permanent preservation of human knowledge — living and otherwise. If some cataclysm erases all of humanity from the Earth, the Musæum wants to give our ghosts the benefit of everything they knew while living — or, at least, wants the Mourners among whatever beings come after us to keep our thoughts alive.

Another venerable krewe, the **Society for the Preservation of Endangered Martial Arts** is something of a niche interest, even for the Mourners. Yet over centuries of existence, they've never been able to accomplish their goal to completion: the retention of every fighting style and combat technique ever practiced by humans. They reason that, in a world increasingly dominated by apocalyptic superweapons, flying death robots, and cyberwarfare, one can expect the slow extinction of advanced methods for throwing spears at your enemies from horseback (although the Mourners did manage to snag the last copy of that book). But a great deal of historical and cultural information is coded into the way people fought during history, and many of the past's lessons on how to fight remain applicable to combat in the Underworld, especially with Reapers and Kerberoi. Given martial artists' dangerous lives during much of history, the Society has had its work cut out for it catching up to practitioners of rare styles before they die in some duel or other.

Originating in World War II's European theater, the **Unknown Soldier Cult** have taken their mission to war-torn areas around the world. With ceremonies and rituals that echo the ancient cult of Mithras, the cult preserves artworks, texts, and personal narratives from war zones. Soldiers usually work in pairs: one embedded on each side of a conflict, passing information back and forth via Ceremony to identify targets and extract as much high-value information as possible before it becomes collateral damage. The cult is well aware that members commit treason against their respective nations; it takes a particularly dispassionate temperament to know a missile is about to strike a location under your protection, and yet do nothing about it because you're not supposed to know.

# The Congregation

Resistance is important here: It takes serious dedication to do the kind of often-stultifying research that a Mourner krewe lives and breathes. The Merits Safe Place, Resources, and Exceptional Membership are crucial to that same mixture of long-term archiving and information-sifting. Also, if your Mourner krewe concept doesn't involve a Library, we're not sure what's going on with you.

**Ceremonies:** The Diviner's Jawbone (•), Gifts of Persephone (••), Bloody Codex (•••)

## Stereotypes

**Furies:** I appreciate the fact that they're willing to stand between our community and the threats no one else can handle. I really do. I still wish they'd listen to our advice about minimizing collateral damage to ideas as well as individuals.

**Necropolitans:** Goddamn party animals care more about your feelings than they do about saving something precious. Oh, and in half an hour I'm going to a board game night at their clubhouse if you want to come.

**Pilgrims:** They scare me, more than anyone else outside our outfit. The Pilgrims are the only ones who actually value destroying your attachments to what's gone before — hell, they even value destroying the things to which you might get attached. I wonder sometimes if anything we create matters — if they'd wipe it all out if they had the power.

**Undertakers:** If they didn't intercede with mortals for us, we'd probably have to do it ourselves. I'm grateful, because collecting and retelling mythology and making new mythology yourself aren't always overlapping skillsets.

# Necropolitans

*Welcome to the afterlife. Drinks to the left, snacks to the right, dance floor straight ahead. I'll hold on to your keys.*

*"Most of the time, when someone wants to know what we're about, they've heard we're the most fun. That's true! We're proud of it. We have fun, we make friends, we lighten the mood. But compassion motivates us. You may come for the fun, but you'll stay for the surety as you fall asleep that you saved a soul today."*

They'll tell you a lot of unkind things about Necropolitans. They'll tell you that Necropolitans make light of death and the dead. That they're social butterflies. That they're shallow. That they're selfish. Necropolitans laugh off all these labels, or jokingly assent to them — except for that last one. Necropolitans are the krewe of compassion.

Death scares us because it ends everything good and joyful about life: the feeling of sun on your skin, the satisfaction of sex, the confidence you'll get to learn how your favorite anime ends. But what if you needn't give up all these things? The idea has some positive history: We know heaven's temptation and hell's threat have legs. A Necropolitan brings love, joy, and hope to those who thought they had lost such things forever. In the process, the satisfaction of altruism brings them the same.

Necropolitans tend to be extroverted, open, and accepting. Argue all you like whether religion is a force for good or evil, or whether such and such a deity is real or what, but you can't deny the emotional and even financial rewards of a social safety net made of people who think like you. Loneliness plagues not only ghosts, but also the living driven away from others by their paranormal abilities. With no one to turn to, despair sets in. Enter the Necropolitans. No matter who you are, no matter how lost or scared, if you want to be known and have friends and engage with society, Necropolitans will be there for you.

## The Works

Ever been to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting? Or any meeting on the popular 12-step pattern they've set out? They're pretty affecting. The strict rules for speaking and sharing. The shocking honesty. The widespread belief in a higher power — often God, but not necessarily. But at the end of the meeting? Whether or not you felt at home, whether or not you want to come back, whether or not you believe this strange method will work, every single person at that meeting who doesn't have to dash off early gives you their contact information. It seems casual and friendly, but make no mistake: This is an important ritual. Each name, each number is a bulwark against suicide, self-harm, backsliding, and lost hope. One of them can't stave off all the darkness alone. But if not, perhaps the next one can, or the next after that, and so on. Necropolitan krewes follow the same principles.

The business of Necropolis begins with networks. Krewes function because they bring people together, divide and specialize responsibilities, and ensure support flows in every direction. Accordingly, Necropolitan rituals and norms emphasize trust, open communication, and forgiveness. A Necropolitan krewe might teach communications-based leadership methods associated with positivity-obsessed corporate cultures, pairing them with a Catholic confessional's guaranteed forgiveness. There are no mistakes, only opportunities, and any transgression can be forgiven as long as it's related honestly. The public space of these practices aligns many Necropolitan krewes with socially and politically focused religions from the Afro-Atlantic diaspora and China. It's rare that the rituals leave you alone with your faith. Someone else is always there with you.

As the neophyte in a Necropolitan krewe, expect senior members to assign a lot of homework, much of which involves tracking down other members of the krewe outside of rituals. You'll connect with the living over the internet or approach them during free moments at their workplaces. The process is often intimidating, as it makes you feel like you're inconveniencing them, but accustoming yourself to that feeling is part of your training, since you'll have to use those same social skills to reach out to ghosts who think they don't want or need to be helped.

Necropolitans also walk an odd line when it comes to those in need of social cachet, and those who have it. On the one hand, they want to help those in greatest need: introverts, ex-convicts, and others society has shunned or forgotten. On the other, they need the networking power wealthy, successful Sin-Eaters bring to the table, à la an American university's balance between the financial necessity of recruiting athletes and the moral imperative to help those who need and deserve it most.

The problem with this approach, from other krewes' perspectives, is that so much of it happens in public. You may not think anyone's listening to you talk about ghosts and the Underworld over drinks, but Reapers can be subtler than you hoped. Moreover, Necropolitans often frame themselves as the social mortar that unites disparate krewes. It's important to them to keep

talking to krewes outside their own viewpoint, and to keep information flowing between Sin-Eaters who otherwise wouldn't talk. But a lot of krewes would really prefer just to be left alone, no matter how friendly and charismatic you are.

Necropolitans like to borrow and combine rituals that point people at one another, especially when they involve physical action or contact. Even at their most staid, you're likely to see something like the Catholic kiss of peace, with members gently embracing or shaking hands in the middle of a service. The joined hands at the beginning of the séance are for the celebrants' benefit, not the ghost's. The sumo wrestlers crash together, miming grappling with the gods. And of course, there is music and dancing: Pentecostal-style sacred steel guitars, the dervishes' endless whirl, bhakti-yoga by way of northern Indian kathak, and — of course — New Orleans jazz funerals.

## The Faith

For most of human history, Sin-Eater society has been secret society: secret handshakes, pins with strange iconography, hidden doors leading to dark catacombs and windowless rooms. Necropolitans aren't down with that. They're evangelists. The wider-cast the net, the lower the barrier to entry, and the more successful they'll be. So where are they going with this?

Generally speaking, they want to create a society of the living and the dead where no one ever needs to be alone. This approach is crucial to safety as well as to satisfaction: Necropolitans envision a dense and multivalent network as a safety concern as well as a practical one. If a Reaper, ghost-eater, exorcist, or other threat comes for one of them, raising the hue and cry should — if nothing else — alert other friendly souls that something is wrong. So safety and friends are where it starts.

After that, Necropolitans have lofty aspirations. We all hope for a pleasant, positive, or at least peaceful afterlife. If the Underworld is more mutable than the real world — if it responds to what we want (or, at least, to what Sin-Eaters want) better than the real world, which continues to slouch towards Babylon — why can't we seize it and remake it into what we want? A paradise Underworld is within our grasp.

The loftiest goal, though, has nothing to do with remaking the Underworld. They're all about networks, right? You have to see this coming. Necropolitans want a world where the living reconcile with the dead, where ghosts' existence is no taboo. The fact that normal people don't acknowledge the existence of ghosts — a known quantity, a presence in every mythology, which everyone has the faculties to understand — is a tragedy for both living and dead. This very goal makes the Necropolitans most dangerous, most fearsome to secretive Sin-Eater society.

## The Heresy

A “missing stair” is an abusive member of a close-knit community whose peers make allowances for them instead of correcting their behavior. The most dangerous missing stairs tend to be shrewd and charismatic, ingratiating themselves easily with those surrounding them, making themselves seem socially and emotionally indispensable, and rendering others dependent on them.

Individual Necropolitan missing stairs can use this position of privilege to devour ghosts on the sly, pressure others for money, or lean on everyone nearby for emotional labor. While a Necropolitan who's physically or sexually abusive will probably run afoul of Furies or even

Reapers when they alienate enough others, Necropolitans who perpetrate low-level abuses, the kind of things that hurt other people but don't make big waves, may continue to perpetrate them for years. The emphasis on admittance of missteps and corresponding forgiveness within Necropolitan krewes sometimes works against this tendency and sometimes aggravates it. At best, the cycle of admittance and forgiveness allows Necropolitans to correct wrongdoing early and often, training new members in best practices and allowing them to learn efficiently from their mistakes. For this reason, confession and penance often become explicit elements of many Necropolitan ceremonies. But at worst, this tendency encourages celebrants who recognize wrongdoing in their leadership to continue to tolerate it, silently forgiving and absolving someone who needs more than just forgiveness.

Several prominent Necropolitan krewes have become — or come from — outright criminal organizations. The Chinese diaspora's Triads, for example, evolved from folk-religious secret societies whose clandestine rituals of ancestor worship attracted many Sin-Eaters. But fraternities like the Triads are far more reputable than the drug-dealing outfits which some krewes become to support their wild macabrics and indulgent habits. Liquor and LSD start out as means to a ceremonial end, but become mass addictions forced on new celebrants, or on the financially and socially vulnerable societies which support the krewe. From there, it's a short way to fall to get into gun running, money laundering, or other practices that start out as little side gigs to keep the krewe in the black and support Sin-Eaters' dangerous lifestyles. But then business gets really good (or really bad), and all of a sudden every krewe in the area is afraid of pissing off the heavily armed drug kingpins who have become the mortar between Bound society's bricks: a missing stair problem writ large. Of course, no one can go to the authorities even if they want to snitch, because that kind of heat is likely to threaten nearby krewes as well as the major offenders. Situations like these breed famous last words like "maybe we should ask the vampires to help with this problem, just this once."

## The Mysteries

**Le Krewe LaBas** of New Orleans popularized the term "krewe" in modern parlance. They formed in the aftermath of a 1920 rumble between two Mardi Gras Indian tribes, the Red Magnolias and the Burning Arrows, which turned lethal. During the melee, officers on both sides were slain — but they immediately returned as Bound, laughing and embracing to both krewes' confusion. Mardi Gras societies' organization, infrastructure, and secrecy founded a united krewe which forced white American Sin-Eater society to recognize black issues and black membership. They're still around today, mostly made up of elder statesmen, but still recruiting actively. They have business in the Underworld, but much of their contribution to the community is in organizing and supporting fledgling krewes with financial aid and mentorship. LaBas's relationship to other krewes in the Necropolitan matrix is a macrocosm of an individual Necropolitan's relationship with other Sin-Eaters, ghosts, and celebrants in their krewe.

Formed in the 1990s (of course) by some Bound with shared interests in adventurous sports, **X-Treme Uction** is generally accepted to have the worst name of any krewe in history, but its members are really enthusiastic about it. XTU is organized like a large sports club. It has a Bound manager, team captain, and trainer; the celebrants are its athletes. Their rituals involve intense and enthusiastic physical practice, driving themselves to the very edge of injury to become acquainted with the fear and sensation of oncoming death. XTU launches rescue

missions into the deadliest climates of the real world and the Underworld, contacting ghosts trapped on mountain peaks or sunk at the bottom of coral reefs.

**alt.gothic.ghost** started on Usenet a very long time ago, but now uses a proprietary social-networking program that has desktop and mobile clients designed to look like other programs if someone sees it over your shoulder. A lot of Sin-Eaters who've heard of alt.gothic.ghost wouldn't consider it a real krewe, which suits alt.gothic.ghost just fine. Many Sin-Eaters who belong to this internet-based group specialize in finding and contacting ghosts with technological affinities, who can speak only through electronic means or who are tied somehow to programs, servers, or even memes spreading through the internet. Many alt.gothic.ghost posters have mobility impairment issues from disability, age, or institutionalization — yet these same members, due to their proximity to the dead and dying, are invaluable to Sin-Eater society.

## The Congregation

When you build your krewe, remember Necropolitan philosophy's altruistic focus. The krewe you're building is as much for the individual members as it is for powerful Sin-Eaters. Given the emphasis on safety and support networks, Necropolitans tend to prioritize Resistance first, then Power and Finesse in equal measure. Given how wide-ranging Necropolitan networks get, Merits can go in many different directions, but you're more likely to wind up with a widespread network of low-level Allies and Contacts than one high-Status individual. Good Time Management and Anonymity, unsurprisingly, are rare.

**Ceremonies:** The Lovers' Telephone (•), Crow Girl Kiss (••), Dumb Supper (•••)

Stereotypes

**Furies:** Have they no one to talk to? Not the ghosts, the Furies.

**Mourners:** This is cool, but you gotta remember to tell people about it. The Mourners need us, and we need them.

**Pilgrims:** I wish I could tell you more about Pilgrims, but none of them have responded to my social media invites.

**Undertakers:** I love that they help our society relate to the living world. I hate that they think they know how to do it better than we do. Even if they're right.

## Pilgrims

*Come with me, and we will both become our perfect selves.*

*"To be frank, I'm not interested in pitching our krewe to you. If you're like most Bound, you won't give us a second thought, and you'll head off after one of your other options. One day, years from now, if you survive and so do I — and perhaps even if you don't — maybe I'll see you again. You'll have tried something else, perhaps a few something elses, and you'll be tired of not getting any results. You'll want something difficult, scary, but sure. Your heart will crave a beauty we can only find in the most fearsome dark. I can help you with that... and what's more, I can help you teach it to others."*

The world is a prison. The Underworld, more so. Indeed, they are prisons of our own making, the result of millennia of attachment, selfishness, and fear. We live, we die, we cling to our Anchors with desperate grasp, and we fail. Our essences bleed away into the Underworld's fabric, and we

are unmade. But we don't pass on, not necessarily — our suffering becomes the suffering of the world itself. The Underworld builds itself on our pain and failure, like a coral reef builds itself on its own corpse. Now it's huge, depressing, and dangerous. But what if ghosts and their Bound shepherds could find self-improvement, truth, or even beauty in the Underworld? What if their passage transformed from the deer's frightened flight into the monkey's journey west, fraught with devils and temptations but promising enlightenment?

Most Bound dislike what they find in the Underworld: this is gross, this is bad, this isn't as it should be. But a select few find the Underworld as it is fascinating, even educational. Maybe they have a researcher's mind, or an explorer's. Maybe they just have a morbid character. At any rate, they feel the motivation to explore, survey, and understand. These Pilgrims expertly guide the dead along the Underworld's pathways and watercourses, helping them understand their Anchors with an arduous way through the hellish marvels awaiting all of us when we pass on.

The fears of death, oblivion, and nothingness motivate every Sin-Eater, in some way. But Pilgrims charge the void like bulls. Why would it make sense, others wonder, to force ghosts to engage with everything hateful and wrong and harmful about the Underworld? What value is there in taking the rivers like a whitewater rafter, or picking through forests of bone and screams like a birdwatcher? This way lies madness, others think. And the Underworld is mad indeed — but the madness is part of its beauty. Just you wait. Just around one more corner, there's something that'll help you see....

## The Works

A plurality of Pilgrim krewes are explicitly and officially affiliated with the Buddhist sangha. Two millennia of practice, structure, and ritual aimed at exactly the end which interests the Pilgrims are hard to beat. Taken together, these krewes make up a negligible fraction of the world's Buddhist monks. No senior national or religious Buddhist leadership will probably ever recognize them — which is, of course, the way they like it — but they're there. These Pilgrims lead highly regimented lives, ritualizing basic practices such as sleeping, waking, cleaning, and eating. They spend much of the day in lecture, meditation, or chores. They often bury the dead and perform funeral services, a convenient opportunity to connect with ghosts who could use their help with passing on.

The emergence of Western psychoanalysis provided Pilgrims outside the sangha with exciting new structure. Judeo-Christian mystics, ascetics, and anchorites were important influences on the Pilgrims as well, but the importance of God, and love for God, in these traditions often conflicted with Pilgrims' goal of annihilating attachment. However, psychoanalysis and psychiatric therapy supplied a psychonautic framework and a way to explain the Underworld that jived with their philosophy.

Many Pilgrim rituals are all about exploration and celebration. The Underworld isn't a threat, it's a challenge, a lost horizon waiting to be delved and explored. Preparation for exploring the Underworld starts in the living world. Krewe elders lead neophytes on exploratory walks through parts of the real world selected for how "scary" they are: bad neighborhoods, dark woods, abandoned houses and buildings, nighttime graveyards. These practices train newcomers' instincts and confront their fear of the fearsome surroundings on the other side of the veil. The next step after that is leading others: for example, leading a blindfolded superior along a root-strewn trail or through a similar wilderness site.

Pilgrims also study the Underworld itself. They memorize lists of terms and discuss geography, physics, and other mechanics with their superiors in classrooms and on otherworldly field trips. The threats the dead face in the Underworld are an important topic here; while Pilgrims prefer not to fight their charges' battles for them, marauding Reapers and Kerberoi aren't any help in resolving Anchors. Pilgrims research their enemies' natures and habits in order best to avoid them. Stealth and speed are their first bulwark against Underworldly predators, but Pilgrims consider individual ghosts' journeys important enough that they will close ranks to fight off a Reaper or Kerberos if it's a choice between that or letting their charge get devoured.

Living necromancers with selfish agendas are another target. When a Pilgrim encounters a necromancer, in either the living world or the Underworld, they report back to their krewes, which then approaches the necromancer and asks politely whether the necromancer might prefer not to torment ghosts, and might prefer productive membership in their krewes or another. If this approach doesn't work, Pilgrims escalate to outright threats — and if that doesn't work, well, there's nothing for it. If a necromancer won't relent, sometimes there's only one way to keep them from harming others.

## The Faith

Pilgrims' vision of a peaceful future for the living and the dead begins with the end of Reaper activity. Reapers are both conceptually abhorrent and practically responsible for much of the Underworld's structural suffering and abuse. Given that the Pilgrim approach to ending ghosts' suffering often takes much more time than other krewes', their charges are particularly vulnerable to Reapers' depredations. Many Pilgrims consider the fate a soul suffers at a Reaper's claws the ultimate failure.

Pilgrims accept what's already present in the Underworld — or, at least, are more okay with it than members of many other types of krewes. Their training and ritual teaches them to appreciate the existing nature and mechanics of the Underworld. Some even view it with a sort of religious reverence: if it's there, then the dead are meant to interact with it. The difficulties and privations they encounter are there for a reason: to help them resolve their Anchors, to understand who they are and where they came from. So the structure of the Underworld doesn't necessarily need to change.

Others want to see the Underworld aid in the journey. What if the Underworld itself taught you what you needed to know to move on? What if the mechanics of Anchors and passing weren't a mystery to the ghosts they torment? What if the Underworld clearly informed ghosts they had to confront and resolve their Anchors?

If some Pilgrims seek to scour away attachments and expectations, while others seek to understand and accept them, the middle way is an Underworld that develops naturally and organically from the minds and souls of the living and the dead. This way, the path for the dead to take will remain arduous, but productively so, free of unnecessary fear or hardship born of hate and misunderstanding. The result will be an afterlife of journeys, gates, and meaning, a quest that validates the dead and brings them into productive contact with their own anchors.

Particularly visionary Pilgrims embrace the idea of having control over the shape the Underworld takes. These dreamers imagine painting the canvas of the Underworld with their will and imagination like a fiction author dreaming up a setting. Novels aren't quite the right model, though — it's really more participatory, since ghosts will actually be traveling through it in order

to learn things and overcome personal challenges. But imagine working together with other members of your krewes to plot out a journey for others that's just difficult enough for them to be able to learn, struggle through it, and enjoy a feeling of triumph at the end, before they pass out of it. That's the Pilgrim goal.

## The Heresy

Pilgrims who forget that enlightenment must go hand in hand with compassion risk treating ghosts with cruelty. It is normal and common for ghosts to have little to no understanding of the mechanics of resolving Anchors or passing on; their own existence, to say nothing of the Underworld, baffle them. Yet a Pilgrim who is too strict with their erstwhile student, ignoring the most efficacious route in favor of the most spiritually rigorous and orthodox, risks that ghost's safety and peace of mind, especially with Reapers abroad.

Fascination with the Underworld, a most tempting attachment for the unattached, is not a widely appreciated viewpoint. Both Mourners and Pilgrims value exploring and mapping the Underworld, but many Mourners still find Pilgrims' fascination with what the Underworld is, rather than what it should be, morbid and unsettling. Necropolitans and Furies don't understand the utility of waiting for someone to make themselves happy when you could just get involved and do it for them with far less work.

Moreover, the Underworld doesn't just change in response to us: it also changes us. When we gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes also. Some Pilgrims' fascination with the mechanics of the Underworld extends to a fascination with Kerberoi, necromancers, and even Reapers.

It's technically impossible for one of the Bound to become a Reaper. Reapers are ghosts, not humans. But some krewes still share horror stories, usually second- or third-hand, of the Pilgrim who became too much like a Reaper in order to embed themselves among the Reapers, and who never made it back. One day, their krewes-mates looked from Reaper to Pilgrim, Pilgrim to Reaper, and could not tell the difference.

## The Mysteries

The **First Church of Persephone, Architect** are Sin-Eaters interested in building and urban planning, who explore the Underworld's urban areas. Traditionally, Pilgrims set courses through the Underworld's "natural" areas, which are not densely populated and which bring a ghost into little contact with other ghosts. But the structures other ghosts build fascinate these Pilgrims. Drawing on Gothic literary theories such as the house as metaphor for the mind, they plot their charges' journeys through river cities and cemetery towns. These are often a good choice for more extroverted shades, who would descend into paralyzed loneliness in an actual wilderness with no one but themselves and a creepy Pilgrim around. In the process, the Architects do some of the archival work which normally falls to Mourners, mapping fallen Underworld cities and sharing notes on architectural features.

The **Convivial Society of St. Christopher Souterrain** specialize in exploring and traveling the Underworld's waterways. A Sin-Eater may work as a Ferryman, taking ghosts and others down these rivers in exchange for a fare. But the Society has greater and deeper aspirations. They ply the waters of the Underworld in ritual-built vessels which travel not only on the surface, but underneath it, seeking the mysteries, answers, and possible educational routes which might lie below. Their goal is to render the depths of the Underworld as viable as the surface for travel, as

well as to explore the fluid dynamics of these strange waters. This practice also takes them to underwater locations in the living world where ghosts may be trapped: shipwrecks at the bottom of oceans, underwater rivers, and the like.

The **Temple of Dogcatchers** got their name from their deadly fascination with Kerberoi and other fearsome denizens of the Underworld. Dogcatchers specialize in stealthy exploration and observation of the most dangerous parts of the Underworld, the gateways to the Deep Dominions and the doings of the Chthonic Gods and their servants. Dogcatcher exploits have led to some of our most useful information about the Reapers' and Kerberoi's nature, strengths, and weaknesses, but it's about as dangerous as you expect. Dogcatchers have also developed some interesting methods and rituals of camouflage and stealth.

## The Congregation

Krewes on a more traditional Buddhist model tend to emphasize Power and Resistance: the conduct of ceremonies with large numbers of celebrants in attendance, and strict adherence to the rules and strictures of membership and the sangha. Emplaced monasteries need a Safe Place, enough Resources to support a large number of monks or nuns, and almost certainly a Council of Faith. Libraries prove invaluable to the active part of the Pilgrims' mission: information about the Underworld's layout and secrets always helps.

**Ceremonies:** Dead Man's Camera (•), Gifts of Persephone (••), Bloody Codex (•••)

### Stereotypes

**Furies:** I feel like I've spent a lifetime and a half learning why this method of solving problems doesn't actually solve any problems. You can't fault Furies' enthusiasm, but I have to wonder whether they're really listening to the people they say they'll help.

**Mourners:** Our closest kindred spirits. They recognize the value of a good map, and the things they do (if not the things they think) work well with the way we appreciate the Below.

**Necropolitans:** There's so much more joy and beauty, if you just look a little further past the names and the voices....

**Undertakers:** Do they really hope to chart all humanity's course, where every religion has failed? It's challenging enough to guide the dead.

## Undertakers

*I'm dying right now. So are you. We all are. Death is all around us, always. It's time we stopped being afraid.*

*"Hey, are you Geraldine? I'm Doctor Nzimande. I heard you have an imaginary friend, and I was wondering if I could talk to you about them. No, I know the other kids give you a hard time about it, but I believe you, I promise. It's basically my job. So I want to hear all about the... Ribbon Princess, is it? Tell me how you met, tell me how you contact her, tell me how she contacts you. It sounds like she's lonely and needs friends. It's hard when there's only one person who will listen to you. With your help, maybe we can change that."*

The Underworld is too strong to confront head-on. The innumerable failed revolutions of Sin-Eaters past prove that. That's why the Undertakers want to win the chess game against death before the pieces hit the board. They study Sin-Eater history, from the Chinese cults of the Three Kingdoms Era to the New Zealand Railway Battalion of the 1950s. They explore the Deep Dominions to try to understand what birthed them, relating to the living what went wrong. They confront the fear of death, the threat of Anchoring, and the lore surrounding ghosts and the Bound in living hearts and minds, guiding humans towards peaceful passing to thin the ranks of ghosts feeding the Underworld. When the quick slip through the cracks and fall into the Underworld, Undertakers are there to bring them back. All these efforts point towards a more perfect legend written on the line between life and death. Let the living look toward death with equanimity and confidence. Let death be not proud, but kind.

An Undertaker's job is part therapy, part public relations, part community organizing. They head off ghost problems before the ghost comes into being in the first place by easing the day's journey into night. Like Necropolitans, Undertakers create structures and establishments to support the living and the dead; but the Undertakers' interest extends into the realm of myth itself. What stories and mythologies do ghosts and Sin-Eaters create? How do the living react to those mythologies? Do they make the world an easier place to be dead? Are the Chthonic Gods' servants involved? And when the mythologies of the Bound cross over with the mythologies of other supernatural beings, what is to be done?

## The Works

Even the most skeptical living recognize Undertakers' rituals. All the accoutrements of funerals, meant to comfort and soothe the living, are Undertaker business. In Tibet, monks carry cadavers into the mountains for exposure to vultures in sky burial. In Ghana, event planners order beer kegs and pore over playlists of the deceased's favorite songs for a wake. In Uruguay, doctors meet with families whose elders have just entered hospice care. None of these things are hidden, but all of them are relevant to Sin-Eating.

More esoteric Undertaker rituals familiarize individuals with death's nature and trappings in an environment where they aren't ugly surprises. They also spend time among the dead and those close to death in senior centers, war zones, and dangerous neighborhoods. Handling parts of corpses or the possessions of the dead shows up in many rituals: a ritual leader describes a disease's progress, the moment of passing, and then the ghost's installation in the Underworld in a low-lit room as ritual participants pass around human bones or left-behind jewelry. The process involves a lot of crying, fear, and sadness.

The next major aspect of Undertakers' work is curating and sharing stories. Wherever supernatural mythology breeds, the Undertakers go to work. They've been interested in speculative-fiction publication for a long time, but the decline of the print industry has turned their attention to fanfiction collectives, neo-pagan circles, and especially new religions that spawn outside of krewes.

As part of the myth-manipulation process, Undertakers take charge of damage control when Sin-Eater business leaks to the outside world in a way that absolutely needs to be locked down. Sometimes these phenomena are useful, true, but other times it just needs to stop: everything from personal information about vulnerable Bound to media sightings of ghost activity can do more harm than good. Undertakers take it upon themselves to destroy information or, under extreme circumstances, even intimidate witnesses into keeping what they've discovered to

themselves. It's not pretty, and many Sin-Eaters — even many Undertakers — don't like or agree with this part of the work, but fear of backlash or exploitation encourages them to work on a smaller, more secretive scale.

But the Undertakers reap their most important crop from the Deep Dominions. Here, amidst the remains of Sin-Eaters' past struggles, they discover which myths failed and fell, and which had potential. From these scraps and strands they weave new possibilities, syncretizing concepts and figures into new, promising gestalts and bearing them back into the light. Where Mourners are content to record and observe, Undertakers refine and redistribute, like scavengers on the forest floor.

## The Faith

Lofty and high-concept as their mission may be, Undertakers are practical, even cynical when it comes to long-term goals. Their quests into the Deep Dominions to find their predecessors' mistakes and lessons keep their process grounded in empiricism and evidence. They're crafting something better, yes, but they pattern it on what they know has yielded results in the past. Some Undertakers claim the invention (or at least popularization) of eulogies, grave goods, and even funerals is the fruit of ancient Undertaker labor.

Other krewes tend to see the integration of human and Bound society as a consummation devoutly to be desired, but consigned to the distant future. Conversely, Undertakers plan like it could happen tomorrow. One loose cannon is all it takes to blow the lid off supernatural phenomena in the public eye and bring a literal crusade down on Sin-Eaters and the celebrants who support them. If and when it happens, Undertakers won't be caught off guard because they imagined humanity would never figure them out.

Undertakers' backup plan grows more viable if the Underworld becomes a normal, expected part of human life and afterlife. Its gates are open to the living, carefully guarded to ensure that monsters on one side — on either side — don't wind up where they shouldn't be. It wouldn't even have to be that different. It would just have to be reachable. With Sin-Eaters as guides, humans could cross the veil and confront the thing they fear most. Death wouldn't be the final frontier anymore. Something would lie beyond it, something that was its own kind of alive, something not Hell or oblivion or the kingdom of an irrational deity. The living could plan not only for retirement, but also afterlife, preparing places for others who would come after them. In life, they could study the mechanics of passing on, so that they would have a trajectory, a plan. Those who use death as a threat or a tool — the executioners, warmongers, and murderers — would lose much power, as the true effects of what they do became clear and present. For once, humanity might agree on a direction.

Undertakers' hopes will lead to salvation for the living and the dead both. They will transform mainstream society and banish the fear of death forever.

## The Heresy

Much of other krewes' fear about Undertakers originates from their belief that while stories are important, some stories should be told and others just shouldn't. Like Furies, Undertakers sometimes take it upon themselves to dictate policy to other krewes; but where errant Furies mandate or punish transgressions against law or morality, overstepping Undertakers instead

demand that other krewes shape their interactions with the living according to a party line which supports their chosen mythology.

Greedy sometimes claims Undertakers who liaise with other supernatural beings in the living world. It starts out innocuously: you want to maintain good relations with the local vampires, so you hire yourself out to do track down information in the Underworld or interview a ghost. But Sin-Eaters' mobility through the Underworld and their powers of stealth, observation, and fear can be turned to less innocent aims — and those are the ones that pay better.

Undertakers' predominance over interactions with mortals can also position a greedy Undertaker to control normal humans via fear and misinformation. With a wide-ranging information network and some carefully chosen factoids and evidence, the Undertakers are capable of gaslighting and manipulating ordinary people who have no other contact with the world of ghosts. These Undertakers's human victims find themselves enlisted as foot soldiers in conflicts with other Bound, or ushered into post-mortem power structures which favor the unscrupulous Undertaker when they meet their own ends.

Finally, spending so much time in the Deep Dominions can be hazardous to your health. Undertaker krewes saturated in their predecessors' psychological and practical failures sometimes take on the negativity that surrounds them. Their treatment of one another and the world around them begins to reflect the pride, hatred, or selfishness which crashed the Catabasis and created the Dominion. The worst-hit begin to spend more and more time in the Deep, less and less in the real world, coiling on the dead riches they find there like dragons. They grow greedy and territorial, lashing out at wayward ghosts or Sin-Eaters who venture too close to their hoards.

## The Mysteries

Based in northeastern Luxembourg City's Kierchbiert district, **Schultheiss and Company** is an internationally successful public relations firm which happens to specialize in ghosts which haunt organizations, from the classic theater ghost to those occupying fiber-optic networks or somehow attached to concepts such as "Freemasonry" or "the World Taekwondo Federation." They have special needs ordinary ghosts may not share — as do the hapless, bewildered organizations they bother. Since it needs to groom Bound talent early and often, Schultheiss's agents often reach out to Sin-Eaters who accepted the Bargain in childhood. Even the most skeptical parents are often too starstruck by the prospect of a venerable and munificent corporation underwriting their child's academic development to notice that the Schultheiss-selected "tutors" are teaching the kid ghost powers. Also, they can probably buy their parents a house after their first annual bonus.

The **Romsa Ludographical Institute** is a nascent academic department at the world's northernmost university, Norway's University of Tromsø. The Institute's several Sin-Eater faculty (rather idealistically) see Nordic-style live-action role-playing as the perfect means to seize control of the mythological narrative surrounding the Bound. Their short-form, minimalist games evoke real-life experience with death, dying, and grief, often (and controversially) incorporate in-game versions of indigenous Sami as well as Norwegian Lutheran funerary customs. Well-known for their tendency to draw players' out-of-character emotion into in-character experience, these games disperse Undertaker-style ritual and the process of willingly grappling with death during life through the next generation of gamers. Recognizing that their favorite mode of play is kind of a niche interest, the Institute now reaches out to recruit new

blood through academic and gaming-theory channels across the globe, inculcating an increasingly diverse set of analog and digital gamers with Undertaker ideas.

***Dispatches from Beyond the Veil*** got its start as a conspiracy theory zine in the late 1980s. Out of love of tradition, they still publish a black-and-white printed and mailed version of their publication, but they've also grown into a distributed network of believers in the world of ghosts and the Bound. As a zine no one of import is likely ever to take seriously, *Dispatches* has the luxury of being able to talk honestly and openly about certain aspects of the Underworld, though they haven't gone into detail about what distinguishes a Sin-Eater from other individuals with ghosts following them around. When a story about the Bound leaks into the ghost-hunting community, *Dispatches* sends Sin-Eaters to perform a "follow-up report." They find out what's actually going on, attend to the ghost's needs, and set up defenses against Reapers or Kerberoi whom the activity might attract. Then they figure out the angle on the story that will cast Sin-Eaters in the best light — and the Chthonic Gods' servants in the worst.

## The Congregation

Talking about serious mythology with non-serious living folks requires a great deal of Finesse: subtle influence, a few words here, a repeated and edited story there, that kind of thing. Power is next most important, but the krewe members' close ties to the mortal world mean that Resistance is sometimes difficult for an Undertaker krewe to come by; the members have other priorities which are just as important. Merits tend to focus on information gathering: Exceptional Membership for talented psychics and mediums, Resources, and especially wide networks of Contacts.

**Ceremonies:** Go With Love (•), Crow Girl Kiss (••), Death Watch (•••)

Stereotypes

**Furies:** I think they call this "broken window policing" in America, yes?

**Mourners:** As much time as we spend rooting around in the Deep Dominions together, I have to say, sometimes it's easier to create something new and useful instead of digging it out of the Temple of Doom or whatever. Some stories straight-up shouldn't be told.

**Necropolitans:** Our closest allies, but the incessant positivity can get a little grating. Hanging with them all the time would be like working at Disney World.

**Pilgrims:** How's this for philosophy: You can't get where you're going without understanding where you've come from.

## Chapter Two: The Road Back

*No, I don't feel death coming.  
I feel death going,  
having thrown up his hands,  
for the moment.*

James Baldwin, "Amen"

You're not born expecting death. You can't even grasp the concept until you're a few years in, and it's even longer before you think to apply it to yourself. Understanding your own death means understanding you're vulnerable, that all the worst rules of the world apply not just to some faceless other, but to you. It means accepting that everything you spend your life building has an expiration date. Someday, whether or not you're ready, it ends.

The big reveal, the one not everybody lucks out enough to get, is that stopping for death isn't your only option.

### The Living

Death waits behind every veil humans hang to hide it. No matter how well we block it out, we never forget it's there. We know what's at the end of the road, and at our best, we live rich, defiant lives in spite of it. At our most desperate, we hunt for detours, bridges, anything to tell us that the chasm we're heading toward isn't as finite as it looks.

Read sacred texts, classic epics, folklore, and you'll find death. Next to death, you'll find ghosts, immortals, and an infinite variety of people going to the ends of the Earth to dodge the natural order of living. The stories change, depending on who tells them, but common threads cross the world. The pious receive eternal life as a reward for good behavior, while trickster heroes steal theirs from unwitting gods. Lone divine warriors slaughter armies. Ageless hermits emerge from their hidden places to teach, or to warn. Immortality belongs to the remarkable and the worthy, and if you're lucky, you might brush shoulders with one of the blessed.

Some of these stories made their way into the modern era as myths, others as religions. People enjoy the former and live by the latter, but most agree that, if eternal life exists, it has nothing to do with the material world. Immortals don't walk among humans — if eternal life exists, it comes after death, and it plays out in a world far from this one.

People think they know what that world looks like, or what they'll look like in that world. They do what they believe they must to guarantee a place in that world for themselves, and try to teach others to do the same. Some don't expect a world after this one, and find other ways to occupy their time. People leave one another alone about it, or they don't.

But no matter what specifics people believe, they're not likely to imagine cheating mortality the way their ancestors did. If they believe in anything other than the finality of death, they believe that it comes to us the same way death does, in a crawling marquee. They don't outsmart or defeat death. They meet it as it comes, and prepare for whatever they believe comes next.

For Sin-Eaters, reality falls somewhere in the middle. There are ways to claim immortality without dying first, but the Bound don't concern themselves with those. Death is inevitable. However, death is not a freefall into the dark, and it's certainly not the passive reception of an eternal gift. For the Bound, death comes with a choice.

## The Sin-Eater

Before Sin-Eaters were Sin-Eaters, they were human beings, too. They went to sleep too late and woke up groggy. They laughed at their own jokes. They got irritated with the people they loved, and tried to forgive them. They thought about their own mortality, or tried not to. And, like all of the living, they died.

If the way a person thought about the end of their life stayed constant from birth, they'd never actually become aware of it — their thoughts on the meaning of death come from a string of influences and experiences throughout their lives that are entirely unique to them. Experiences after death matter just as much. Every moment of revelation tempers the mind, whether or not the body is along for the ride.

This is the same way people shape their thoughts on the meaning of life.

The Bound must blend these two understandings together in a way they likely never have before. Death ceases to be a static event — it can evolve, just as life can, and it bends to choice. The nascent Bound view this new development through the lens of their beliefs, their memories, and their convictions. Some accept the change and move forward. Others reject it and hold fast to their human ideas. No one lived experience marks a Sin-Eater, and no one manner of death guarantees someone will choose to Bargain their way back to life.

If anything unites Sin-Eaters, it's the deep-seated feeling that something is *wrong*.

A Sin-Eater looks at the state of their worlds, that of the living and that of the dead, and wants change. They see a ghost wreaking havoc and want to *understand* it, want to make contact with the vestiges of a person in pain and help settle their score. They feel the weight of their Burden and seek to lift it through action.

The Catholic priest views the ghosts he interacts with as confirmation of his dogma, and embraces his new role as a guide for lost souls. The trauma surgeon sees caring for the dead as an extension of her history caring for the living. The victim of a hate crime sees his own pain reflected in the pain of the dead, their suffering unseen by the world around them, and finds his own peace in bringing peace to others.

Not all of the Bound become Sin-Eaters, after all; the former is a state of being, but the latter is a way of thinking. Sin-Eaters want to solve problems, heal pain, end suffering. Someone who spent their life aware of the flaws of the world carries that awareness into the next phase of their existence — they are uniquely attuned to imbalance, injustice, and unfinished business.

In myths and scripture, humans brush death and rejoin the living as changed beings. They find the weak points in inevitability and use their wisdom to reshape the mortal world. Not every ancient hero came to their understandings the same way, and not all Sin-Eaters begin their new lives with the same motives. But Sin-Eaters share one conviction: If human will can turn back death, it can accomplish anything.

## The Dead

Life never lasts.

Death hovers just out of earshot and in the backs of our minds. It fills our stories, our poetry, our simplest language, but we still avoid eye contact with the end. When we force ourselves to see it, the picture isn't often pretty. So, throughout life, people build up a relationship with death —

avoidant, ambivalent, even romantic toward the many endings around them. It builds toward an idea of our own end, but few resolve that feeling. Fewer can maintain it when their own death comes into focus. When death comes, questions arise. Doubts remain. Fear shatters the uncertain, and what's left lingers. In short?

Dying very often sucks.

## On Loss and Having

Life is a promise to death. It's the foregone conclusion of living, except for the rarest and oddest of the world's denizens. When you were born, you were guaranteed to die. As part of that promise, death has lain in wait for you to meet it. Given any opportunity, it reaches out to take its due — every slip, every sickness, every accident. You feel it tugging at your heartstrings. You thrill in dodging death, in close calls, in little horrors and fantastical violence. Meanwhile, you're careful. You eat healthy. You take care of yourself. You pray.

But like any constant, from stable, frozen stillness to all of our creations, life fails. Death is as certain as physics — our return to equilibrium.

Every imperfect death is its own mystery, a puzzle for many kinds of coroner to solve. Did the deceased have a love letter saved on a flash drive somewhere, unsent and unanswered? Did he have a wedding band in his back pocket and a condom in his wallet, both now lost in the evidence room of a city too overwhelmed to sort out one little bar fight? Did the newly dead owe somebody money? Did she cheat on her taxes? Did the shock of death strike her with the full fury of its absurdity? To the surprise of the newly dead, few of us die clean.

No matter the reason, those who face death often find it wanting. They reach out to avoid the sudden lurch of that loss. They grab tight for fading sensations, but something in them *tears*. Something wrenches. Something breaks loose. Life falls away in a deluge of heartbeats, failing chemistry, body heat, and the dragging weight of meat and bones. Hanging on halts that freefall, denies the gravity of death. But without gravity, the dead are left to hang, out of reach of solid ground.

Needful things keep unliving ephemera bound to this world of heavy matter. These needs become the chains that bind them. Anchored to this world, but ephemeral, they lurk in Twilight. The sad truth is that, of all the things to do wrong, dying might just be the easiest. Cities strain with unseen citizens. Would *you* be ready?

Death is not the end, but that doesn't make it any less inconvenient.

## Out of Sight, Out of Mind

The world teems with ghosts. Anyone with doubts, hidden sins, or unfinished business might find themselves bound to the bones of the earth, tethered to Anchors. Some take ephemeral form right away. Others form around their most familiar Anchors over days or weeks. It's not uncommon to see the dead try to continue their lives, unaware and ineffectual. They haven't felt the difference yet. And why not? Being dead is like being alive, only out of touch.

To Twilight eyes, the dead resemble the life they left behind. Some bear marks of their deaths — open wounds, lingering sickness, trails of meaty smoke. But they're still *people*. Just dead people. They're a mosaic of memories, culture, class, and milestones, just like the rest of us. Ghosts capture both a moment and a lifetime, and are captured by them in turn.

The body is a familiar place and a common seat for their bad choices or old traumas. From that vantage, they feel the call of other Anchors, but cannot travel freely from one to the next. To step away from an Anchor is to slowly come undone, bleeding out Essence with every step. To get to another Anchor, another answer, another chance, might not be worth the risk. Most shades stay near the Anchors they can reach to stave off bleeding away what little's left. Graveyards form hubs of souls tied to little but their own corpses, waiting for the last flakes of bone to fall apart. With a bit of luck, they can watch the world walk right through them.

Weaker ghosts can't even process their own deaths. They exist in echoes, repeating the events of their deaths or unresolved desires like a one-track playlist. No one else knows why they're dancing, crying, screaming...or still. Even if they reach their Anchors, there's little chance they could make a difference. They'll move from Anchor to Anchor, scene to scene, a story that someone else has to read and resolve. Often, no one's even looking.

Those strong enough to maintain lucidity look through a foggy window at a life they can barely touch. It isn't a whole existence — gaps linger around a life and death that left them incomplete. Lost memories haunt the dead with truths they need to know but still fear knowing. They walk Twilit streets, rushing like the rain is coming down — washing them out, draining their Essence, their sense of self and memory — chasing Anchors and a little hope. When the hope runs out, they turn to melancholy. When melancholy's not enough...well, there's always rage.

Some ghosts find comfort in the persistence of the living. Life goes on without them. It always does. Others find their vigil bittersweet at best. They wouldn't have stayed if things were fine, after all. Death might trap the dead, but it's hell on the survivors, too. Murders go unavenged and even punishment isn't closure. Loved ones face loneliness and stacks of unpaid medical bills. It's no surprise that more ghosts lurk in ghettos than at garden parties, more unmourned stories are found among the ignored and overlooked. That much hasn't changed at all. The Twilight mists are diverse, reflecting the biases of life expectancies by cruel demographics. The wealthy dead face a different problem — often a first (or second) taste of true powerlessness.

A ghost is a silent witness to its own loss, but just watching isn't enough. How could it ever be? Sorrow, fury, need, or outrage stir up the ephemeral essence of a ghost. When the indifference of the heavy world becomes too much to bear, the ghost Manifests its unfelt weight. The first few times, it's violent. Dramatic. Unplanned. Uncontrolled. It's an outburst, like a sob or bare knuckles into brick. With practice, it becomes a conscious tool. A ghost's power is a scream into the void that finally, sweetly resonates. Essence shivers and congeals into thick, raw Plasm.

Plasm is fingerprints on the walls and footsteps on the creaking stairs. Plasm is fresh blood leaking from a cabinet full of lies. Plasm is what lifts the knife. Plasm is what throws it. Nails that dig warnings into glass with the screech of sharp claws. Steam, brackish water, or unidentifiable sludge that congeals out of Twilight. Plasm gives the ghost what it thought it needed — a sight to be seen, hands that can reach, power to affect the world. People finally *react*. And when they do? They react in horror, denial, or worse: They react with hurried flight from a ghost's cry for help.

To most, it's easier to sleep and wait for a reason to stir. Too bad the dead can't rest so easily.

## It Gets Worse

The dead don't grow. Sure, they interact with each other, and you can force changes upon them, but the bonds that kept them here were the last vestiges of an identity that's uniquely theirs. To go beyond that conscious vestige of their past lives requires desperate measures.

Old ghosts hoard what Essence, secrets, tricks, and friends they can to stave off being unmoored. The haunts of the comfortably dead might be endless parties, philosophical salons, or celebrations of the lives and deaths around them. Some watch knife fights like the Super Bowl. Some just host watch parties of shows they can appreciate, dropping the temperature in some poor stranger's house. Some grow powerful, trading lost lore with mediums or stranger things. A ghost may not become a new, different person, but benefits from better circumstances. Do the living really change that much, if we're being honest? Is how we change really all that different?

The dead wander in a state of Twilight, without matter but full of need. Death is a mist, a maze, a blurry haze of weak connections imposed on them by the weight of hidden things. Being mourned — or even just remembered — helps keep them moored to the Earth. It keeps them strong and sensate. Without an outside force to act on them, the dead won't see another sunrise, even if they hang around another 100 years. They won't find any new horizons, no matter how hard they look. As their Anchors and surviving remnants face the living world, they find themselves comforted, resolved, confused, or further lost. As those Anchors die or crumble, they feel another call, another gravity. Death is not the end, but you can see it from there.

The dead may not grow, but another way can open up beneath them — puckered, dark, and ever hungry. Gates lead to a place meant only for the dead. For those with nowhere else to go?

The Underworld awaits. But that doesn't mean that it lies dormant or patient.

Sometimes, it *takes*.

## Hitting Bottom

Avernian Gates hide like riptides in Twilight — unseen by those above the surface, but keenly felt by the people fighting to stay afloat. When a Gate opens, it *calls*. But the Underworld isn't always content to take only the curious or the desperate. Sometimes, ghosts come back out. A few have their own business, but the ones that linger in the memory of even the most fractured ghost are the men, women, and others in monstrous masks. They come with hooks and chains. They come with dark Numina and inexplicable power. They come back to the living world, but not to live. They come to take the dead back down with them.

Those called Reapers may be ghosts, but they're not the friendly kind.

Down strange roads into stranger depths, the dead find a world all their own. Some wander in, looking for something, anything, better than a Twilight existence or a slow second death bereft of Essence. Others are taken. The caves offer shelter from the loss of Essence, countless lost treasures, and maybe answers that the living world can no longer provide. A shame it's a trap.

Below, weakened, forgotten masses fight with a frantic need for every shred of discarded hope or memory, thirsty for fresh Essence that the world above once provided. Those cruel enough to sustain their strength or those rare few still remembered after leaving the sunlit world can carve out a place of power. Ruling a tiny slice of twisted death, reigning over prisoners and the half-aware, doesn't appeal to nice people, but few nice people make it to the top of the huddling heap.

There are strange fruits down below, and stranger rivers. If a ghost drinks deep, he can grow, but not as he is or was. The Underworld itself grows inside him, changing who and what he was into

something older, something darker, something further lost. A ghost might become something distinctly other, freed from those last worries, but if he does? He'll lose as much as he gains, if not more. No one will recognize him, but they'll fear him all the same. These "lucky" few become geists, and in doing so, surrender something that they'll long for as long as they persist.

Stranger things even than geists lurk down in the depths, more than willing to give gifts. Those who accept become enforcers of a broken purgatory, empowered to leave it as they will. Fall hard and deep enough, and you become a hunter of the dead, a tool of darker powers.

## What About the Light?

The idea of "moving on" is complicated and remains perhaps the last great mystery. It seems to have little to do with unfinished business — ghosts who find peace with their Anchors often linger well past their epiphanies. The rare ghost can close their eyes and fade into a puff of contentment, but most require the aid of the sympathetic living, or the next best thing. Letting go is antithetical to the dead. It's a struggle to persist, built upon a refusal to dissolve.

So what's on the other side? Where are they going? Could anyone return? Answers vary along lines of faith, conjecture, and propaganda. Some think they skip the mire of the Underworld and go on to the afterlife they're due. Some think that the void can't be dodged forever. No matter the result, moving on is a one-way door, even for the dead who once came back again.

Some doors don't re-open.

### Sidebar: What's Spot Doing Here?

As any anyone who's looked along Twilight roads or down the depths of the Underworld can tell you, death is neither clean nor anthropocentric. Twilight is littered with the ghosts of structures and objects, half-gleaming or pointedly ruined. Not all once-living ghosts are human, either, maybe not even most considering how prolifically rats live and die. The circumstances may differ — how emotionally unfulfilled is a heart-shot deer? — but the result is the same. Sudden deaths, deprivation, or horrid conditions create ephemeral imprints in flesh, stone, or steel. Proximity to an Avernian Gate will do it, too. Sometimes you don't even have to fully die to leave a ghost in Twilight.

The Underworld is full of pale beasts and swarms of vermin. Dead crows feed on their own eyes. Loyal pets may follow their masters farther than they ever should. Purged predators still stalk their territories, using simple Manifestations to wreak havoc on hunters and trespassers alike. Rumors of bestial geists or prized hunting hounds of gods below are older than the ghosts who tell them. And of course, nothing kills a cockroach, not even death. What keeps them crunching underfoot?

It might be better not to know. What would it say about you?

## The Bargain

If death is being bound to Anchors in a formless, weightless world, dying is a moment of severance. Weight. Warmth. The sense of connection between people and points in time. It all starts to fall away. What if, in that moment, in the desperate, reflexive reaching out for Anchors, something *else* reached back through your skin? What if you felt that other pull you closer?

Would you hold on?

## A Short Drop

The immaterial exclusion of Twilight and the depths beyond Avernian Gates are never truly far, but getting there is no guarantee. Many, but not most, of the dead just die. Quick or slow, in sudden gasps or shallow rattles, they pass on and they recognize that end. They accept it. Maybe they saw it coming. Maybe on some level they felt they deserved to die or were owed some kind of rest. Some of us have the grace to leave the world behind. Either they're at peace, or they soon will be. Survivors often say that their lives flash before their eyes, a visual calculus of how they arrived at the end. For some people, the math adds up. It might not be fair. It might not be convenient. It just... *is*.

Not so for the rest of us, destined for the land of the dead. The flesh is resolved, but passions aren't. There's always more to do, always more to say, a few more crimes to answer for or to commit. Everyone leaves someone behind — even if it's just a version of themselves they'd rather not see. If the moment of death is the calculation of a life, then for the unquiet dead, the end doesn't add up. The end's an anticlimax or an ironic cruelty. For deep or petty reasons, the dead can't handle it. Most of the time, that means clawing their way back from the brink as a ghost.

Sometimes, though, that dissatisfaction draws attention. That rejection of a foregone conclusion echoes to those all too familiar with the raw deal of unresolved death. That rejection, that human response to the final “no,” resonates with those who've been there. The Bound are lucky.

When they shout against the void, something unexpected answers.

## And a Sudden Stop

While they may walk down dead roads and empty avenues, the Bound are not dead. Or if they are, they're dead without most of the drawbacks of dying. Lamenting their death to a ghost isn't going to garner much sympathy. They aren't out of touch. At the cusp, they didn't die alone.

Perhaps the tone and texture of their lingering Burdens drew attention. Perhaps they died lucky, the way people are born lucky every day. Perhaps we're never really alone in a world with a Twilight haze just beyond our fingertips. That's not what matters. What does matter is the geist. A bleak angel lingered over you as you start to slip across that final, one-way threshold. You died.

And for reasons of its own, it reached out and took hold. It grasped your sinking shade. You *lived*.

Imagine that moment. Were you lying in a cooling pool of blood? Were you in a soft, sweat-sticky bed? A moving car? When time went wan and still, were you alone? Some get a sense of premonition or have had brushes with Twilight realms before — mediums, the haunted, and the like. These people tend to have a sense for when death is done waiting. For others, this is their first glimpse of death. The world loses color, texture, its essential gravity. Feeling fades.

In its place, the geist looms before you or hovers overhead, a proximal horror, a nightmare in the corner of the eye. Their unknowable will or alien curiosity holds you in your own skin. They do not belong in the scene of your end, nor do they seem to care. One tracks your blood across a floor no living eye will ever see. Another takes a careful inventory of your mourning loved ones — their clothes, their tears, the contents of their pockets. Geists are ghosts, but more than ghosts:

They're strange shapes and elemental fury, leaking wounds and brilliant light. They are invaders in your most private, intimate moment, and yet, they mean you're not alone.

This is the first echo of your geist's Remembrance, a sense that even through the impossibility of its form and presence, it is not unfamiliar. It is not your enemy. The same grip that keeps you in the moment reminds you that you're being held. The bite of clove smoke spills from its gaps and down your hungry throat. You feel its eyes in every reflective surface, keeping you in clear focus. This is the first taste of a bond between the geist and the dying, and that first taste is an *offer*.

Beyond that hold is a vast unknowability. You cannot see what lies ahead, but its edges are not comforting. You aren't yet gone from what you had, but you already feel how far away it is. Few people die alone, and the geist is just the beginning. How many people have died right where you lay? How many ghosts linger around you at the moment of your death? The geist holds you in place, but it does not hide you from Twilight or Twilight from you.

Some of the Bound are given a chance and refuse. Does the Underworld catch the scent of their longevity and steal away these dead? Do they just fade away? Are they consumed by a rejected geist, a mere pause on their long, dark road? Whatever happens, they're not around to tell anyone the price of saying no. No Bargain begins in a place of fairness, but that's not what matters yet.

What matters in the moment *is* the moment. Time strains at your edges. The geist's grip is there, but thin. The sense of something needful and not whole fills the space widening in your flesh. To some, it's instant. To others, it's the grueling climb of gangrene or frostbite. To a rare few, it's gentle arms, a welcoming back home. If you are a Sin-Eater, you've accepted or been accepted.

You may have been saved, but you haven't exactly survived.

## Hanging Around

Time passes. You walk familiar streets through an unfamiliar filter. The roads are more or less the same, but the change is palpable and ever-present. It's not the world that's changed — it's your perception of it. You breathe, but you notice flavors in the air you'd always missed before. You walk and you tire, but there's a certain vividness to the energy and to the exhaustion and to so many doors you've never opened, never walked through, never even considered. You eat. You sleep. You drink. Maybe you spend time with a lover or take care of your cat. You can do anything you did before, but it's never quite the same. In many ways, it's better. It's all *intentional* now. You may not be dead, but you've died and now you live the difference. Sensations are more present and valuable, but one new feeling is certain: You're never doing anything alone. You are *Bound*.

Bound to your geist, yes, but you're also bound to the living world. To your new awareness of the many dead, who have little or none of what you have. You're strapped into your own skin and to a world half in Twilight, and you are not allowed to forget it.

Your geist isn't always present (which in itself can be unnerving), but it often observes your life. Dormant and resting. Active and impatient. Curious and inquisitive. It looms over aspects that call out to its mood or memory. It may not offer color commentary, but you'll get an idea of its interests. When the force keeping you alive wants something, you have no choice but to feel it. And sometimes, the geist pulls. It aches to act through you. When you rein it in, you feel echoes

of the old offer. You feel time inch down again. You feel your bones get distant. But when you let it go, when you tune in to its thirst or its fury, you get to feel two kinds of alive.

The results are often horrifying. It's funny how feeling alive brings death closer to the surface.

The geist isn't the only tie that binds the Bound. More than ever before, connections come to the fore. With eyes open to a world of the lonely dead, alive with a sense of the sheer depths beneath your feet, you learn to treasure the links that keep you from sinking further. Is it the fetter-call of a ghost inhabiting the flesh, or is it a psychological response to the trauma of death? Is it some mystical awareness given to those who've crossed a threshold or a simple ache to understand — yourself, your place, your geist, your role in the bigger picture? Again, it doesn't matter. What matters is that each Sin-Eater finds herself bound to this liminal experience. Who? What? Why? First and last, what can you do for your bonds to justify your existence? How do you own it?

Drink a toast for the dead. Dig up a grave or two for a grim, forgotten ghost, delve into the Underworld and maybe even right some of the wrongs that accumulate in the bleak depths. But you mustn't forget to live. That would defeat the point of it all. Don't waste your Bargain.

Not everybody gets a second chance.

## In Good Company

Perhaps the greatest privilege of a Sin-Eater is that while they might get lonely, they'll never be alone. The pull of the Burden may ache or inconvenience, but it's a vivid reminder of the joys of life and the distance that can come with death. You walk the world, but a call to the unfamiliar familiar still haunts you. It's the same world out there that it ever was, but now you can see it.

The dead themselves are affected by a Sin-Eater's awareness. Imagine for a moment, screaming for hours, for days, unheard and unanswered. Imagine trading memories with huddled masses, making the most of not much at all. Imagine, then, that someone looked right at you — someone unexpected or irritating, an open hand or a shakedown. Even at its worst? It's *new*. To walk among the dead is to walk in a position of power, standing as a fulcrum for a ghost's limited leverage. Place and purpose linger at every Sin-Eater's fingertips, but also haunt their nights.

How many hard luck stories will you pass by on your way to your morning coffee?

Of course, not everyone who sees your situation is desperate. Cunning ghosts with decades or more of experience working their hustle will not be impressed. Necromancers, rival krewes, con-artist mediums, and others seek to exploit you and the dead with equal gusto. Twisted eaters of the dead might see your geist or your friends as dinner. Things born below might not even understand or care that you know pain, so long as you satisfy their visceral urges.

The Bound are never alone, but that doesn't make you safe.

## Killing Time

Many who die never make it home. Some answer the pleas of one ghost and find themselves stuck on an endless path of savior stories, a boulder just as sure and heavy as Sisyphus'. More find themselves knee-deep in the business of a krewes, raising old gods and exploring older tunnels. Others follow their geists' needs and urges, seeking to know the strange shade that shares their skull. The Bound have many reasons they tell themselves, but the honest reason is that digging into the land of the dead is often easier than going home.

If your death was expected or inevitable, how do you explain your miraculous survival? The vagaries of the Bargain might leave a Sin-Eater confirmed dead and gone before a surprising recovery. Worse, what if your end wasn't an accident? Do you tell your rivals that you're alive again? Do you come home to the place that might have killed you? If you got lucky, will your enemies move on? Will they pick somebody more vulnerable? And perhaps saddest: Some Sin-Eaters don't die alone. The Bargain doesn't seem so sweet if it means coming back to an empty home. Or worse, another haunting. Are those the ghosts you'd want to face? Changing towns, finding a krewes, and hunting down a geist's story are all ways to embrace life. Most Sin-Eaters know exactly where their Burden is. Not everyone's in a hurry to face it.

You've got a living world, a Twilight shadow, and an Underworld to contend with. Even those who've lived, died, and lived again can believe that they've got *time* to put the big things off.

Sometimes, they're even right.

## The Carnival

Community defines humanity. Even our initial moments of existence are awash in community, be it mother and child, a midwife assisting during childbirth, or a partner holding the newborn as they arrive into this world. Birth involves a community of people supporting each other. Humans, living or dead, strive to be part of something: It is natural, innate, primal.

Science says the urge to form groups derives from two needs: survival and acceptance. Prehistoric humans needed to form groups for food, sharing daily duties, and to protect themselves against larger creatures. The unspoken need was for acceptance in some form, either visible or intangible, creating a level of belonging. The yearning for community makes us human. Sin-Eaters understand that drive more than most; each Sin-Eater represents a mini-community unto themselves.

### The Twilight Network

How does one Sin-Eater find another? Do they lurk around the graveyard, ask a passing ghost, or place a wanted ad on Craigslist: "Dead Alive, seeking same?" In the distant past, Sin-Eaters could go for years without meeting another of their kind unless they ventured into the Underworld or just got lucky. Symbols and messages visible only in Twilight were left for fellow Sin-Eaters, used to mark territory, to warn against dangers in the region, or just to say "Sin-Eater here." Those old forms still see use, but over the centuries, transportation (and communication) has modernized, making contact between cities, states, and continents commonplace. Online chat rooms, blogs, and websites globally connect krewes from Auburn, Alabama to Ahmedabad, India.

The internet empowers krewes to found multiple branches around the world, connecting through Skype, sharing gigs of encrypted occult files in a Dropbox, and using remote-control-over-IP drones to investigate areas previously unreachable. This freedom of information has its own risks, but it has enabled new Sin-Eaters to easily find answers and connect with others of their kind.

## Born In Death

The Bargain requires death. Not merely the death of the Bound, though of course that's part of it — but in order to haul a human being back from the pit, a geist needs a significant source of power, more even than the Essence they feed on. The Bargain draws on *resonance*, a sort of background radiation created by death. It needn't be large in scale, but it must be intense. A fatal, three-car pileup could birth a krewe's worth of Sin-Eaters. A serial killer's ritual kill room might poison the world for blocks around, enough that a geist can seize hold of it and merge with the old man dying of cancer around the corner. The larger the event, the more powerful the resonance, and Sin-Eaters explode into the world in massive numbers. But where that resonance doesn't exist, the Bargain can't be struck. The history of the Bound, then, is one of tragedy, but also of discontinuity. Their societies are born in plagues, in wars, in terrible fires and floods. But even the once-dead aren't immortal, and so as the plague dies off, as the peace treaties are signed and mother nature's fury quelled, they flicker and fade, leaving behind cryptic writings and half-remembered myths and legends.

### Pebbles and Avalanches

For as long as Sin-Eaters have recorded their own history, their societies have followed the same pattern. Arise in the wake of a massive uptick in deaths, then fade as the tragedy that birthed them does. Some lasted mere decades, others a century or more. Most of these societies were geographically isolated, though that had more to do with fewer travel opportunities for ancient peoples than anything mystical.

Sin-Eater society got its first taste of globalism with the age of colonialism, when Europeans brought disease and slaughter to the rest of the planet, but it wasn't until World War I and the influenza epidemic that followed it that the Bound really began to see themselves as a worldwide phenomenon. Easy transoceanic communication and travel allowed for Sin-Eaters from New Orleans to New Zealand to exchange ideas and share practices — and just when that wave of Bound might have started to die off, World War II kicked off and started the whole cycle again.

Since World War II, Mourner krewes have noticed a curious thing: That old limit on the Bargain no longer seems to apply. Optimists say that the sheer weight of human population has reached the point that even the normal daily mortality rate across the globe creates enough death resonance to fulfill the Bargain. Pessimists say the Underworld is gaining power and will soon swallow the world of the living just like it swallows the dead. And the cynics just point to the near-constant brushfire wars, police brutality, and hate crimes the world over with a “what did you expect?” shrug.

Without a contiguous society before them, the Bound bring their own life experiences and those of their unusual, unsilent partners to the search for answers. Out of the ashes of history and whatever remnants of their own faith survived the sudden shock of death, out of the fever dreams of their geists and the mysteries of the Underworld, they forge meaning out of their second lives. They scrape together bits of everything that fits, discard what doesn't, and build a doctrine out of the end of their world.

## Finding Religion

A Sin-Eater's traditions and lore are drawn from their life experiences, beliefs before the first death and faint whispers from the Underworld. They can never go back to the life they had. A pale imitation? Yes, but never the old life. Their understanding has expanded and can't easily be sealed away again. Customs are whispered from dead to dead, each slightly altering the tale. They're personal and individual, but when you get enough people with similar traditions together (or one person persuasive enough to bring others around to their way of thinking), you get a religion — or, in Sin-Eater parlance, a krewe.

Krewes form for all of the reasons that humans group together: for survival, acceptance, knowledge, the acquisition of power, whatever. In the past, most krewes were secret societies, gentlemen's clubs, and ladies' leagues, shrouded in secrecy for fear of retaliation for their beliefs or to protect the living from the dead (or vice versa). In modern times, the same holds true to some extent, but the internet, 24-hour surveillance and Big Brother have made that secrecy a commodity that gets harder to retain with every passing day. There is power in the shadows and being unseen.

Modern krewes take all those forms and more. A mahjong group that meets weekly. A cell of DEA agents in a bust that went sideways. A fantasy football league. An after-work jazz band that always seems to meet but has never played a venue. These days, krewes can even be scattered around the world and connected with technology. Some even practice their faith openly, either as a fringe sect of a larger church, a "revival" of an old religion, or an entirely new doctrine. Even in countries where religious freedom is nominally the law of the land, though, faiths outside the mainstream (or worse, that seem "foreign" to the people in power) are often targeted for harassment, so openly religious krewes have to tread carefully.

## Finite Eternity

Sin-Eaters are practically immortal for a short time. Death does not come for them, but the drives of two beings motivate them to come to terms with Remembrances and make peace with Burdens. Duties to one's krewe must be upheld. It's a constant struggle for balance between forces, plagued by the dead for help and the constant pull of the Underworld that longs to break their souls. But though the struggle seems endless, there is light at the end of the tunnel.

The Bound are held to this world by chains of need. Their own Burden calls to them, dragging them back from the grave with every breath. Their geists, too, are prisoners of their own fragmented memories. Together, they can break those chains, lay down their Burdens and piece together their shattered identities. Sin-Eaters call this **Catharsis**, and consider it a victory, at least of a personal sort. It allows the Bound and her geist to move on, to take that final step beyond this vale of tears that she's guided so many ghosts to.

For some, the small scale, the personal, isn't enough. If one of us is unfree, none of us is free, as the saying goes. These Sin-Eaters throw themselves into the mysteries of death, exploring the Underworld through the lens of their own mythology until they understand what's broken. Undergoing their own **Catabasis**, a sacred journey into the Underworld, they confront the Chthonic Gods in a ritualistic challenge and change the very nature of the Great Below forever. The fact that the Underworld has remained unchanged as far back as the Bound have records, and that the corpses of failed Catabases litter the Lower Mysteries, speaks to the difficulty of this task.

Finally, for some, the path out is that of power. Though it's a road few Sin-Eaters walk, some of the Bound seek not synergy, but dominance. Force-feeding their geists from the Rivers of the Underworld like foie gras geese, they bloat themselves with unwholesome power and become one with the Underworld itself. Some say this **Cabeiros** transforms them into Chthonic Gods, while others insist that this is just one more trap the Underworld lays to snare the unwary.

## The Underworld

Necromancers blessed with dry wit deride ghosts as psychic echoes, mere shells thrown off by the trauma of life and death. Those necromancers are insulated by the warmth of biochemistry, divorced from the fate that awaits them by electricity sparking around lumps of fat grown proud and arrogant by evolution. But the separation from their final destination is temporary. A ghost thinks and feels, and someday a ghost will be all that's left of the necromancer.

All that's left of anyone.

And they all go to the same place, eventually.

## The Lands of the Dead

Scholarly Bound and academically inclined necromancers have catalogued the Underworld for as long as human society has explored it. While deep cultural variations and subtle elemental distinctions exist depending on the author, most divide the Underworld into several distinct areas:

- The *low places* or *cenotes*, areas of Twilight that contain an Avernian Gate and are keenly attuned to the energies of death. On the other side of the Gates lies...
- ...the *Upper Reaches*, or the liminal stage between the living world and the...
- ...*Rivers of the Dead*, a vast series of waterways that contain small gatherings of ghosts plagued by Reapers, and that cut through the Lower Mysteries, which contain...
- ...the *Dead Dominions*, or dry areas of the Underworld subject to peculiar Old Laws that grow more numerous the deeper you go, enforced by and subject to the rule of their Kerberoi, lords of their dead realms. Yet all Rivers lead to...
- ...the *Ocean of Fragments*.

On the dead side, Avernian Gates shine with a dim and coruscating light, scattering rays across forgotten tunnels like beams of sunlight broken by the ocean's surface. Brackish water seeps and flows from cracks in the Gates, even if they lead to the hottest parts of Death Valley or Gilf Kebir. This same water flows out of an opened Gate in a torrent strong enough to knock the unwary off their feet, heralding a new ghost's arrival. The dead are not sucked into Gates, but blown through, pushed to equalize the pressure of existence. They fall to the floor of the Depths sodden, another piece of detritus amidst a vast field of dead debris.

## The Upper Reaches

The Upper Reaches resemble whatever is underground relative to the location of the Gate. When the Gate of a cemetery opens, as so many do, the Depths resemble catacombs; if the dead enter the Depths through a city, they are subway tunnels; wilderness Gates lead to deep caverns, and deaths at sea lead to sandy dunes without a sky or cramped, rusted submarine quarters. No mourners ever descend to pay their respects, no trains ever come, and no submariners man the

vessel — the Reaches resemble an out-of-the-way portion of their locale, such as maintenance sections of the subway or a cavern walkway far separated from the lighted, well-trodden path. At times, the dead feel subway cars slamming down on tracks just beyond the walls, sending bare lightbulbs swaying and flickering, or glimpse the shadows of children laughing in a cavern walkway far above, but no matter how loudly they cry, the living never hear them, and no amount of frantic excavation breaks through to anyone alive. Every tunnel slopes down — some have a sheer vertical drop requiring aid to safely traverse, while others boast a polished and grand flight of stairs. The thin streams of water moving through always let the travelers know they're heading deeper, though.

The Reaches run the gamut of cold, though sweat comes unbidden at times. Often they are so chill that breath can be seen. Condensation beads the walls and soaks into the ground, giving surfaces a reflective sheen to toss back the glow of yellowed service lights or iridescent lichen or the alien constellations in the cavern ceiling overhead. Dampness swells humid and heavy within the spectral lungs of those who walk the tunnels. The steady seep of water from the Gates (and the ceiling, so strong at times that it seems to be raining) gathers itself into streams, which themselves collect into the stagnant pools where the dead find their first meal.

The living are not the only things that die. Valued knick-knacks, treasured possessions, even real estate prized by a community: They all burn, decay, and are lost. They persist in Twilight for a time, but without Anchors, these sad castoffs are blown into any nearby Gate whenever it opens. Detritus floats ever downstream, breaking into fragments and moving through the Upper Reaches at a glacial pace. Yet they are still charged with Essence, and ghosts, deprived of Anchors themselves, cannot help but be reminded of how much they've lost with the first bite of a rotten teddy bear or the crunch of a soiled wedding photo on ephemeral teeth.

While the Upper Reaches aren't the Underworld — that title properly belongs to the lands touched by the Rivers, not mere tributary streams — they do share certain traits with the Underworld proper.

It's not uncommon to encounter groups of ghosts in the Depths, banding together for protection or more efficient victimization of weaker ghosts. In time, all of them eventually move on, if only for the simple reason that the geography of the tunnels changes, slowly but surely. Unwatched debris moves rapidly in the flow of water, eventually merging into streams and brooks. The tunnels slowly widen and take on aspects of one another the further one descends, subway maintenance corridors giving way to vast caverns still ringed with lambent safety lights. Hulks and structures litter these areas, mute testaments to remembered shipwrecks and well-loved buildings that fell through a Gate and became lodged. Visitors can find shelter but no succor within, since most are long-stripped of items containing Essence. Pirate ships covered in strange runic symbols, weathered gravestones three stories high, even small parts of cities like Pripyat remain within the Depths, drifting down year by year. Strange coral stretches from the tunnel floors, as if left there by some ancient flood.

## The River Cities

Eventually, sojourners and psychopomps alike come to the Rivers.

Massive waterways cut deep into the heart of the Underworld, fed by the myriad Gate-streams and condensation running through the tunnels. Signs of culture and community mark the areas around the Rivers, the dead from 1,000 societies blending together in confused and harrowed

shantytowns. Most are built from the detritus that slides down into the Rivers, giving them a patchwork appearance. A rare few have residents that possessed some degree of supernatural might capable of reshaping the Underworld, and are built up like favelas or banlieus. Most can be seen from the Upper Reaches — cliffs in the tunnels give glimpses of these communities, lighted by thousands of scavenged lanterns that never go out and reflect off the glittering Rivers in the never-ending night.

## Ashes and Temples

The strong rule in these places, brutalizing the weak while forming into gangs and cults. Resources are scarce, consisting of castoffs sifted out of the streams that feed the Rivers. Some of these are cracked apart and cooked, flavored with weird mushrooms that grow in the Underworld to provide some semblance of a meal; the meaty smell of seared fungi hangs about the river hamlets like funerary incense. Some ghosts inevitably establish an economy, and soon the strong dominate the weak, just like in the living world. The only law here is that of the Reapers and the merchant kings, the former sweeping through and devastating communities when the latter grow too strong. Yet here a ghost may stay and rest, even attempt some sense of normalcy.

Many ghosts cling to their old religions, sectarian difficulties breaking down and blending in the face of an Underworld that doesn't conform to anyone's expectations. Some adopt a faith and culture they never held in life, believing this to be the darkest foxhole you can get, while the most militant atheists rage at the lack of cessation or material rebirth. But slowly, the word spreads: you must find new gods, in a place like this.

The Reapers who wash over these towns, worse than any flood, serve gods. They believe the Chthonic Gods to be nameless and formless, a pantheistic folk belief that holds the Gods as inseparable from the Underworld itself, commingling with the living world with the Upper Reaches as a liminal state. The Gods are the Underworld, connected to but separate from the living world, as two lovers kissing are intimately joined but disparate. The longer a ghost spends in the Underworld, the harder it is to deny an omnipresent feeling of maliciousness. One by one, curious altars made of rotting ofrendas spring up in dark corners of these river cities, meaningless runes carved on their surfaces and babbling prayers made of 1,000 patchwork faiths uttered over them.

Eventually, all of the prayers are answered, one way or another.

## Washed Away

Some communities find a guardian or champion: the rare necromancer (sometimes even a vampire), ghost of a mage, or Sin-Eater on an extended solo sojourn. One of the oldest of these communities, Dead Man's Hand, is inhabited mostly by western North American ghosts and has been guarded by the Death Valley Krewe since the days of the Transcontinental Railroad. The Death Valley Krewe is as close to elder statesmen as Sin-Eaters get, and the krewe has a certain legacy to it. Whenever a krewe member dies, their ghost takes up residence in the casinos and taverns of Dead Man's Hand, while another joins the krewe to take their place; so far, not even concerted Reaper attacks have been able to break the krewe's hold. Dead Man's Hand, and the few ancient communities like it, are as permanent as any structures in the Underworld come.

## The Rivers of Death

The Rivers are the heart of the Underworld, and they touch every point. Bridges cross over the Rivers all the time, but they only ever lead to other tunnels within the Upper Reaches or various River cities. To truly go anywhere in the Underworld, one must sail the Rivers.

Some of the Rivers' banks are fetid and greasy charred flesh, others pristine dark sand, still others are bleached bone. If their riverbanks are strange, the Rivers themselves are stranger: some are composed of insects floating amid the brackish waters, others are clogged with bone dust, and some have sap or gold coins floating within. Drinking from the Rivers can confer great power, but eating or drinking the stuff of the Underworld is perilous in nearly every culture's mythology.

Like Charon of myth, boatmen pole craft about the waters, willing to accept payment for crossing. Their appearances vary — many conform to the stereotype of the old man with a barnacle-encysted poleboat and lantern, but others are winged demons dragging shells on fiery chains, while others are “travel agents” for the dead, all smiles and crisp white suits. They ferry passengers down the Rivers...and back up, for a price. Few of these boatmen have much of a personality, though the reasons why don't become clear until a traveler reaches the Ocean of Fragments.

Boatmen accept ofrendas or material offerings in the form of coins —two is traditional — but in lieu of that, they ask for solidified Plasm, a pint of blood poured into the River, secrets, or some utilitarian piece of far greater value. The Bound are capable of acting as boatmen, too; some aspect of the Bargain makes this possible, and so long as they procure a craft hardy enough to withstand the rigors of River travel, the Underworld proper beckons. Even a krew forged by friendship and fraternity is not immune to the boatman's requirements, however. Krewemates must pay the Sin-Eater in full, but so long as they do (and do not loan that payment), the boat keeps its inhabitants safe from attack and the dangers of the River, rendering even the most powerful and aggressive of the Underworld's denizens harmless. Sin-Eaters who sail the Rivers without having the proper offerings come back missing an eye, a finger, or worse.

That's the price coming back, not sailing down. Once the boatman accepts a traveler onto their craft, the Underworld proper opens.

### The Names of the Rivers

The Underworld's Rivers demarcate boundaries and borders and provide passage into the Lower Mysteries and accompanying Dead Dominions. The following is an incomplete list; Storytellers are encouraged to create their own, with according strange waters and stranger effects.

**Acheron, the River of Woe:** Drinking from this river aids in remembering painful memories.

**Anahita, the River of Life:** These waters heal wounds, but the waters are limited, and powerful Reapers constantly guard it.

**Eresh-ki-gala, the River of Dead Seed:** This swampy river brims with strange floating seeds; consuming them cures infertility and ensures perfect conception the next time the eater attempts a reproductive or generative act.

**Id-Kura, the River of Consumption:** Drinking from the river creates sympathy for the traveler among ghosts at the cost of unquenchable thirst.

**Kohan-II, the River of Pus:** The soupy, warm, pus-filled waters of this river repel ghosts (and Reapers), but leech health from the drinker.

**Lethe, the River of Memory:** By drinking from this river, the drinker can answer every question put to him, even without knowing the answer, but he forgets a detail about his life with every answer.

**Urdabrunnr, the River of Fate:** Urdabrunnr's waters show two possible futures, successful and failed, for every action the drinker takes.

## The Lower Mysteries

Pole away from the shantytowns and the Riverbanks don't look dramatically different, just emptier. Occasionally, travelers see ghosts reenacting grim tableaux from 1,000 different Underworld myths: Sisyphus and his rock, Head-Apu I's head in the tree, Baldr playing dead with mistletoe in his eye. Those who travel down the Rivers hold these reenactors to be in the thrall of the Chthonic Gods. These strange tableaux are all travelers along the Rivers see until they come to the Dead Dominions.

## The Dead Dominions

The Lower Mysteries below the Rivers are 1,000 broken kingdoms, ruled by ancient ghosts, feudal overlords to those forced here in exile from the Depths. Their borders are often unclear and undefined, but each is watched over by a Kerberos, a being empowered to enforce the strange and Byzantine laws that suffuse these realms and keep them whole.

Each Dominion has a gate, seemingly ancient — specifically, Sumerian, if you know your myths. Each gate has a Guardian, a ghost who greets travelers and informs them of the Old Laws by which each Domain is ruled. The farther along the Rivers one sails, the longer and stranger the Laws become. "You must eat and drink what is offered to you" seems simple enough, but soon it becomes "Do not speak to a shade unless commanded to" and "Let no slight pass unchallenged with blood and steel." Stepping into the Dead Dominions, into a place where the Essence bleed of the Underworld is staunch, means placing yourself in subject to those Laws. Break them, and you face the wrath of the Kerberoi.

Dominions come and go with the passage of time. Some are impossibly ancient, inhabited by ghosts who claim to remember the mammoth. Others are decidedly modern, gleaming obsidian skyscrapers with no bottom to them and skyways connecting the gaps. They have appeared with each past upwelling of Sin-Eaters, dozens blooming in the dark caverns like flowers to a midnight sun. When Tenochtitlan fell to Cortés, Mictlan greeted the Sin-Eaters who came with the war dead. When the Great Famine, the Black Death, and the Hundred Years' War ravaged Europe, the Christian dead found their way to the Sainted Kingdom of Prester John, under the earth rather than to the east.

Dominions are born in the lulls between generations of Sin-Eaters, a great upswelling of Essence and life within death. Even they cannot hold against the tides for eternity, however. The Sainted Kingdom fell after 500 years of grace, cracking and falling and slamming into the Ocean of Fragments over a single bad year. The Rivers were impassable that year, choked and swelled as they were with Christian ghosts lamenting their sins.

## Kerberoi

You will know a Kerberos on sight, though their forms are mutable and as fluid as the Rivers. Some are the three-headed hellhounds of Greek legend, others spit fire that wreathes their six arms wielding wicked blades, and yet others are a visage of death that defies acculturation. A Kerberos rules their Dead Dominion, instantly knowing when an Old Law has been broken and compelled to punish the transgressor according to ancient and alien rules. If the Kerberoi were ever human, mercy has been stripped from them. Even fleeing the Dominion cannot keep a krewe safe; Kerberoi have been known to command Reapers to pursue those who have fled outside their jurisdiction.

### Whispered Dominions

Potentially thousands of Dead Dominions exist, and many more existed before they fell into the Ocean. The following are but a few.

**An-Shot-Ka:** Potentially the oldest Dominion, it is an ancient place of cracked and faded architecture, having lost a great deal of territory to the Ocean... yet it has not fallen yet. The ancient Kerberos who guards it, the Triptych, claims to hold the secrets of geists long fallen.

**Lowgate Prison:** Overseen by the Kerberos called the Faceless Warden, the impregnable and inescapable Lowgate serves as jail for those who broke Old Laws in other Dominions. They're kept until they are suitably punished and spiritually divorced of their Vice.

**Gehenna:** After the fall of the Saintly Kingdom, this Dominion arose to take its place for Christians who maintain their faith against all odds — yet in Gehenna they are punished for the sins they feel they deserve.

**The Forge of Orcus:** The eponymous Kerberos oversees this Dominion, where souls are forged into goods which are sold to denizens and visitors alike. Sin-Eaters often negotiate with boatmen to drop them off here so they can acquire payment.

**The Vault:** A gigantic library, this Dominion houses all forgotten and destroyed knowledge in books along thousands of shelves (and one titanic scroll, guarded by strange beasts). It can be visited freely, but finding the lost information you seek will cost you dearly.

## The Ocean of Fragments

All Rivers stream to the Ocean, yet the Ocean is never full. Many cultures hold that the world began with an endless ocean. Very few know that is how it ends.

The Ocean of Fragments has all the hallmarks of a Dominion — a Kerberos, Old Laws — yet it is more ancient by far than any other, appearing in the oldest, most hallowed texts of the Bound. In the repeated loss and fragmentation of Sin-Eater culture, the prominence of the Ocean has been somewhat obscured, though the earliest Sin-Eaters seemed far more preoccupied with it than their modern inheritors. Sail the Rivers long enough, though, and you'll hear the lapping of ebony waves upon the Black Beach, see the lonely fire of the Hermit who lives on the sands. The brackish water of the Rivers gives way to salt and sadness, for the Ocean is, by all accounts, made of tears. Do not sail beyond the shallows, for the depths of the Ocean belong to the Freightier and the Leviathan.

No structures sit upon the Black Beach; no dead warlords lay claim to it. Only the forlorn sit upon those shores, and only for as long as it takes them to screw up their courage and wade into the Ocean. Nothing survives within those waters, though breath comes easy. Instead of bubbles trickling up to a surface, identifiers of the individual break off like tiny pearls and pieces of driftwood to spiral into the endless sea. Small things at first, like “I am the Third Grade Spelling Bee Champion of Elderbrook Elementary” or “I am a lover of cheesy television shows meant for children.” Then other things break off — “I am an accountant,” “I am a writer,” “I am a Muslim,” “I am a mother” — until the only thing left is “I am.”

When that is sundered, existence ends. *Sic transit mundus.*

Travelers approach the Ocean in two ways: sailing the winding Riverways through the Dominions, or plummeting through one of the miles-high shafts in the Ocean’s cavernous ceiling after falling from a higher part of the Underworld. In the former case, sailors should heave to the Freighter and beach their ships, for only the Freighter and her Admiral may sail the Ocean’s waters. In the latter case, travelers should enjoy the swim to shore while they still possess some self-identity. People venture to the Ocean for a myriad of reasons — to see where the waters go, to retrieve some valuable cargo from the Freighter, to rid themselves of a troublesome identifier like “I am a vampire” or “I am a murderer.” The Ocean can take these things, leaving them mortal and innocent yet again, if need be. But it will probably take much more than that, and it cannot return one to life.

There is nothing beyond the waters of the Ocean, no bottom, no deeper Underworld. The identifiers caught in the currents spiral down into entropic eternity.

## The Freighter

The ship that sails the dark waters has been described as a barque, a Viking longship, a superfreighter built to carry tons of oil. At the dawn of modern Sin-Eater society in the 1920s, it was RMS *Titanic*.

Her crew only holds on to a few ragged identifiers, foundational things that keep them going and were important, once. They are castaways and loners, those who lost the reason they waded into the Ocean in the first place. Her captain, the Admiral, wears a string of identifiers around his neck, gilded trophies made of foreign egos. Rumors abound that he numbers the boatmen among his fleet, and his necklace is their self-identity held hostage for leal service.

The Freighter’s cargo is identifiers, rare and treasured bits of identity belonging to millions of forgotten ghosts. Her nets are silver silk, dipping easily into the Ocean and catching interesting elements within. The Admiral sifts through to choose the finest while consigning the rest to the deep. He is a collector of these things, and when struck by a mood of magnanimity will allow visitors to search through his holds for choice identifiers, some of which give access to troves of information and knowledge at the cost of altering one’s identity with another’s. Perhaps this is why the Admiral sometimes goes for a swim, coming back up with his primary identifier of “I am the Admiral, and the captain of the Freighter.”

## The Leviathan

The Kerberos of the Ocean of Fragments is a titanic beast that swims beneath the waters. It cannot be placated or dealt with, precisely, though it intervenes to enforce the Old Laws with tentacles as vast as a skyscraper. It has been known to pluck castaways from the deeps and return them to shore, but whether the beast is driven by compassion or disdain none can say.

## The Hermit and the Black Beach

Besides the Admiral and the crew of the Freighter, only one ghost is a long-term resident of the Ocean, and he can be found sifting through the surf for tiny identifiers that he uses as tinder and kindling. The Hermit is an old man of indistinct ethnicity, but friendly nonetheless, and conversant in all languages. He's reluctant to tell of himself, but he will recount the excitement of when a Dominion eventually cracks loose and plunges into the Ocean, taking all of its inhabitants with it. The bonfires he builds from their lightest identifiers are spectacular.

## Beyond the Beyond

Anything is possible. Hope springs eternal. Don't let the bastards grind you down. Desperation is the mother of invention. The grass is always greener on the other side. Whenever God closes a door, He opens a window. Some people just won't take no for an answer.

The Ocean of Fragments is the end of all things. This is accepted as fact by one and all, an axiom of death itself, so all-encompassing it reaches the status of the proverbial. No one has ever sailed the Ocean and found something else, and no one has ever plumbed its depths and returned whole. In its waters lies the dissolution of self and identity, the death of memory. Here lies the true Undiscovered Country — and perhaps the Undiscoverable Country.

Or maybe everyone else just isn't trying hard enough. If no one's done it, that doesn't mean it can't be done, just that no one's done it yet. Perhaps a krewe believes that the Ocean of Fragments is just another Dominion, if the largest and deadliest; or perhaps that other, distant shores lie at the remotest reaches of its waves. Maybe they can sail off the edge into something else, to a better Underworld, one that doesn't thrive on oppression and exploitation.

Is escape enough?