

THE MANUAL OF EXALTED POWER

ABYSSALS™



EXALTED
SECOND EDITION



BY ALAN ALEXANDER, CARL BOWEN, DANIEL DOVER,
MICHAEL GOODWIN AND DUSTIN SHAMPEL





SHE'S NOT
SLOWING DOWN,
SIR! AND NOW
THE ARMY'S
MOVING TOO!

THE WHOLE
ARMY...?

WHAT THE
HELL...?

I THOUGHT
WE...

I DON'T
BELIEVE IT!
WE'RE UNDER
ATTACK!

OPEN FIRE!

SHOOT, SHOOT!
DON'T LET HER
GET HERE!

SHIT!

I CAN'T
HIT HER!

OH GODS!
OH GODS!



SHE'S IN. SIGNAL THE OTHERS.

YES SIR.



ONE VOLLEY FOR RANGE.

YES SIR.



CREEEEAAAAAK



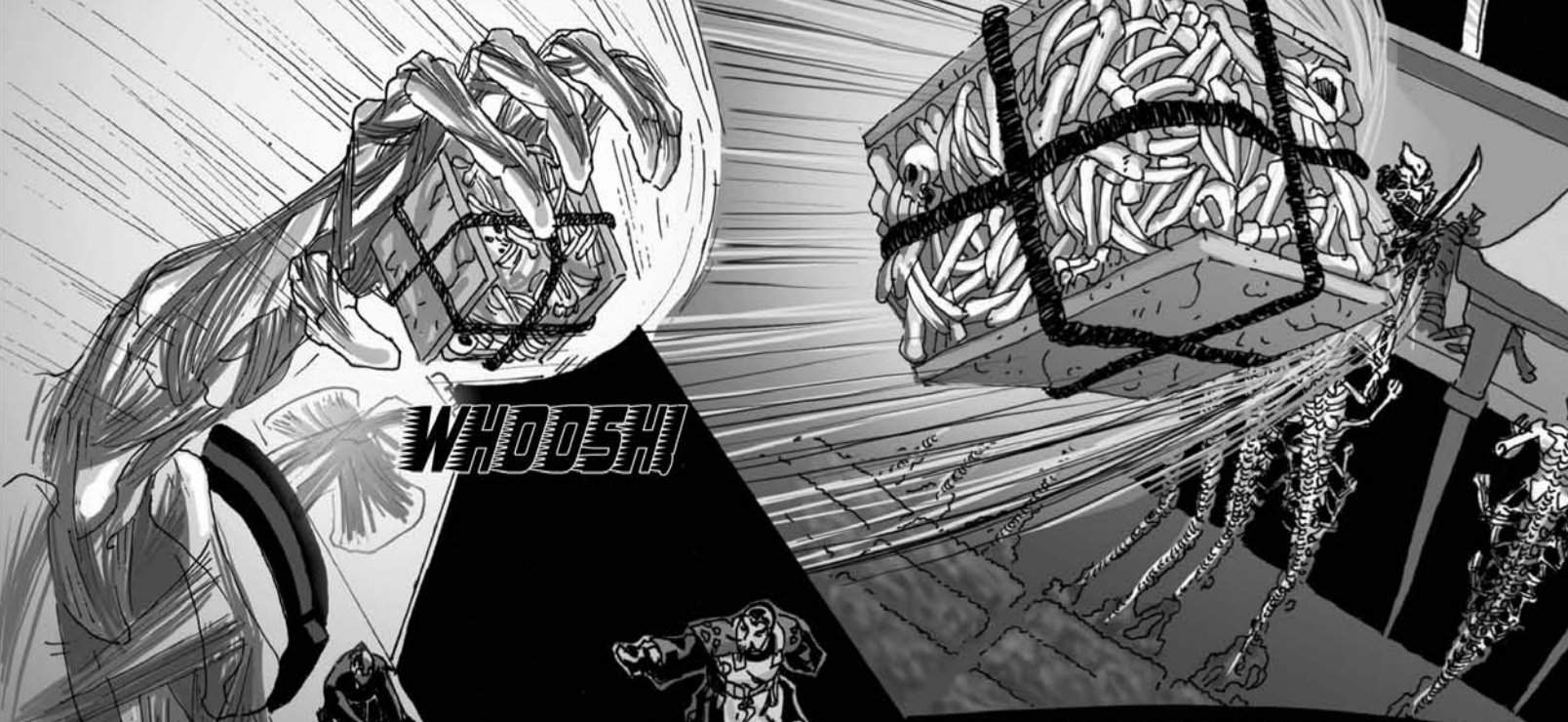
JUST ONE IN THE FIRST VOLLEY.

YES, SIR.

AND BE CAREFUL WITH IT.

CHAK!

READY... FIRE!









STOP THIS,
DEMON!



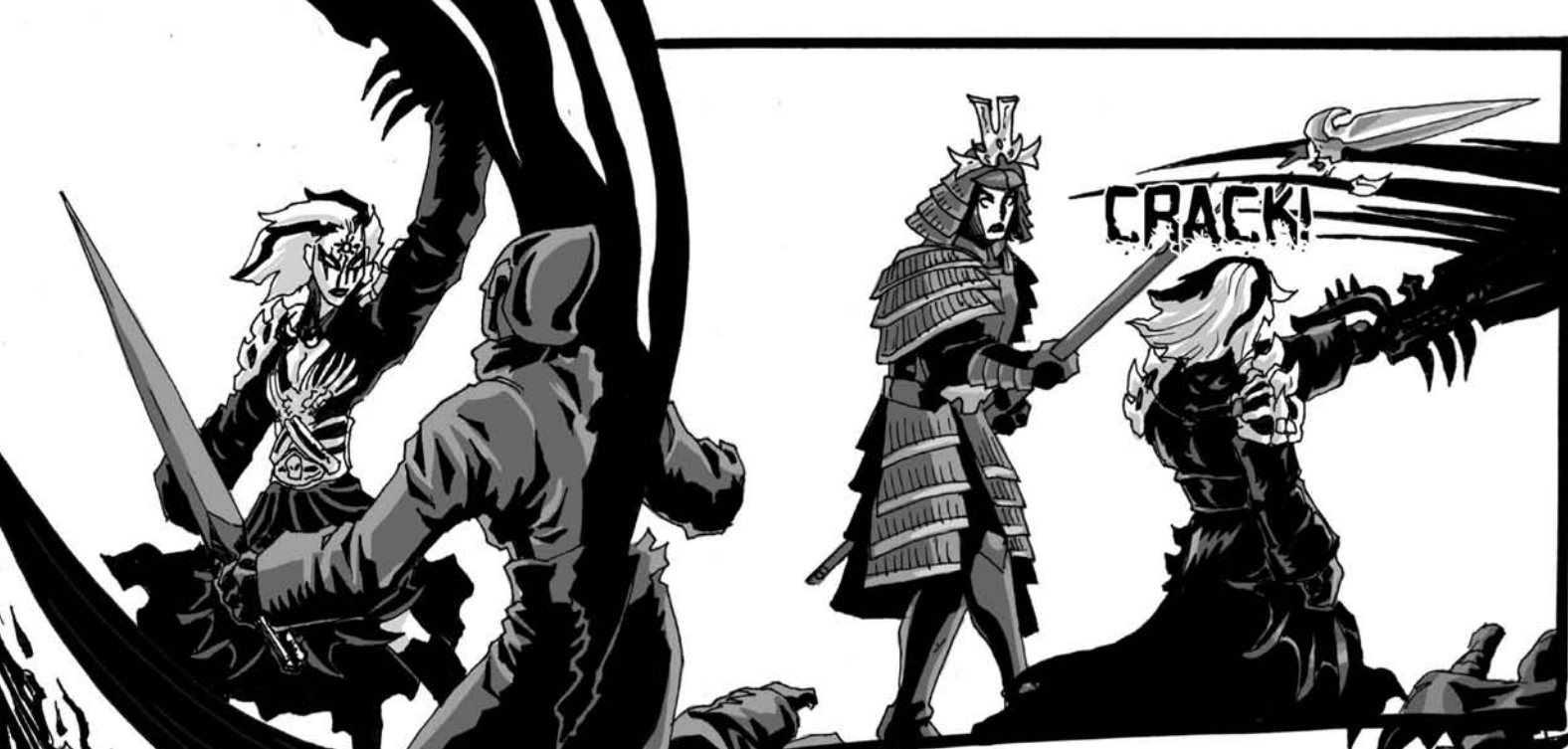
I'M NO DEMON.



DAMN!



KRIK!
KRIK!



WAIT, PLEASE!
WHY ARE YOU
DOING THIS?



WE SURRENDERED!
WE ALREADY
SURRENDERED!



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COMING NEXT:

THE COMPASS OF CELESTIAL DIRECTIONS, VOL. IV — THE UNDERWORLD

The fourth of five books dedicated to the supernatural locales of the **Exalted** setting, this supplement focuses on the Underworld, land of the dead. Created by the death of Primordials in their war with the Exalted, the Underworld is now home to billions of ghosts who have escaped the Cycle of Reincarnation. Will the returned Solars unite to destroy it as an affront to the proper function of Creation, or will they be seduced by its dark beauty and the power its dark art of necromancy offers, becoming like the corrupt Abyssal Exalted who call the place home?

COMING NEXT IN THIS SERIES:

GRACEFUL WICKED MASQUES — THE FAIR FOLK

Denizens of the Wyld that surrounds Creation, the raksha continue to wage war on shaped reality. Taking on physical form, becoming the very thing they despise, the so-called Fair Folk prey on the the fringes of Creation, biding their time until the next great crusade rides from the formless madness beyond the world's poles to finally end the blasphemy of shape. Will the Exalted again succeed in stemming the Fair Folk's tide of destruction, or will they be swept away by the Wyld onslaught, unable to unite against this common foe?



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HURRY! IT COULD BE SOMEONE WITH NEWS ABOUT THE BOYS!

I PRAY YOU'RE RIGHT.

JONAH, IS THAT YOU? HAS SOMEONE FOUND...

OH NO.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT YESTERDAY WAS?

IT WAS THE ANNIVERSARY OF YOUR FATHER'S DEATH.



WHY DIDN'T YOU VISIT HIS GRAVE AND MAKE YOUR OFFERINGS THERE?

YOU'VE DISAPPOINTED HIM TERRIBLY.

BUT, IT'S OUR SONS... THEY'VE DISAPPEARED IN THE MOUNTAINS.

WE'VE BEEN SEARCHING... I JUST FORGOT WHAT DAY IT WAS.



YOUR SONS ARE DEAD.



TWO DAYS AGO,
WANDERING LOST,
THEY FELL INTO A
SNOW LION'S DEN. IT
KILLED THEM.

THEIR SOULS HAVE
MOVED ON. YOUR
FATHER'S HASN'T.

WHAT?

NOOOO!
MY BABIES!

HE'S THE ONE YOU
SHOULD BE CONCERNED
ABOUT.

YOU HEARTLESS
MONSTER! HOW CAN
YOU SAY THAT?

I DON'T CARE ABOUT
MY DEAD FATHER! I
WANT MY SONS BACK!



AS YOU LIKE
IT, THEN.

BOYS...

MOOM-MEEE...

GET AWAY! GET
AWWWAAAAAY!!!





INTRODUCTION

*I am the spirit that denies,
And justly so: For all things from the void
Called forth, deserve to be destroyed.
T'were better, then, nought were created.
Thus, all which you as sin have rated—
Destruction—ought with evil blent—
That is my proper element.
—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust*

Creation first saw the Abyssal Exalted at the fall of the city of Thorns. Survivors who escaped told of mighty warriors and sorcerers who wielded terrible powers of death and destruction. And on their foreheads, like brands of outlawry, they bore the ancient, feared symbols of the Forsaken, the Blasphemous, the Unclean, the Wretched and the Deceivers. They bore the symbols of the Anathema blazing with dark power, streaming with blood!

In the few short years since, these knights of death have traveled throughout Creation, bringing terror and destruction wherever they go. The wise learned the names these dire Anathema give themselves: Abyssal Exalted, Chosen of the Void. They learned, too, that these Anathema had masters even mightier than themselves—the Deathlords, elder ghosts of incalculable power. And behind the Deathlords...? Here, the wise fall silent. The mystery of the deathknights has its roots in the Underworld, the grim realm of the dead, of

which even the greatest savants know little. They know, however, that the Underworld holds dreadful powers and principalities, of which the Deathlords might not be the greatest or most foul.

A few tales about the deathknights are different. Abyssal Exalted have defeated armies of the living and armies of the Fair Folk. They have killed beloved champions and hated warlords. They have often fought the Chosen of the Dragons, the Moon, the Sun and the Five Maidens. Yet Creation's Exalted heroes have also made alliances of convenience with Abyssals and sometimes found them courageous and honorable, in their fashion. Deathknights occasionally even seem kind or compassionate, though more so toward the restless dead than toward the living. They have also seen the black miracles of grief and destruction that erupt around Abyssals whenever these Chosen of the Void get too close to mortal folk. These witnesses conclude that there is more to the deathknights than first meets the eye.

WHO ARE THE ABYSSAL EXALTED?

The Abyssal Exalted are the Chosen of the Void. Each one began as a mortal man or woman with the potential for greatness who died before his or her time. At their moment of death, they were offered the chance to live again and receive great power. In exchange, they would pledge fealty to the Deathlords and serve the Deathlords' goal: the destruction of all life, plunging Creation itself into Oblivion. Those who became deathknights were the ones who accepted that offer.

At first glance, the Abyssal Exalted might seem like strange characters to place at the center of a storytelling game. Abyssals and their minions slaughter innocent mortals by the hundreds. They wear the forged souls of ancestors as armor and wield them as weapons. They spread disease, death and terror to Creation, and they have sworn ultimate loyalty to entities that wish to destroy everything, leaving nothing behind. Abyssals do not follow safe, conventional notions of heroism.

Then again, neither does anyone else in *Exalted*. The glorious Solar Exalted sometimes flip out and do terrible things too. Quite a few Lunars vow to destroy civilization for reasons that seem good to them, or they hunt and kill humans to take their forms. The Sidereals ruthlessly manipulate mortal lives and whole civilizations in the name of protecting reality. The Dragon-Blooded, who view themselves as guardians of civilization in a barbaric world, complacently reap the spoils of an oppressive world empire. All the Exalted make their compromises with expediency, use people for their own ends and battle those who disagree with them. They all believe they are doing something good, and that the final result will justify it all. Here are no stainless white hats or plaster saints.

Abyssals have just as many facets. One Abyssal might swear to destroy Creation because it sounds like deliciously selfish fun, but another might do so only because his Deathlord master threatens to slaughter his family if he refuses. The prospective deathknight might simply rather be enslaved to Oblivion than die. Even the darkest Abyssal can have a change of heart after he sees the full extent of his own depravity.

If you wouldn't accept one-dimensional Solar characters, don't accept simplistic Abyssal characters either. To be sure, some Abyssals are unrepentant monsters, but some are misunderstood (or misguided) protectors of the dead, or angst-ridden antiheroes seeking redemption. Black comes in many shades, and deathknights wear them all.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book tells all about the Abyssal Exalted, the champions given power by the chthonic entities of the Underworld. Whether you want to use Abyssals as villains and enemies in other Exalted games or run a series about the Abyssals themselves, here's everything you need.

THIS IS NOT A COMPLETE GAME!

Despite its size, *The Manual of Exalted Power—The Abyssals* is not a complete game. It is a supplement for White Wolf's *Exalted*, a game about near-divine heroes in a world of high fantasy. The core book describes the Solar Exalted, the Sun-blessed rightful rulers of Creation, reborn into a world that for centuries has hated them as the Solar Anathema, the demonic despots of the First Age. This supplement does not describe the game's various core traits, rules for conflict resolution or a complete setting. This supplement just gives in-depth information about the Abyssal Exalted, their society, their activities and the rules necessary to create and play Abyssal characters. You'll need to consult the *Exalted* core book for the basics.

Readers are also encouraged to look at *The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. IV—The Underworld*. The Abyssal Exalted spend a lot of time in the realm of the dead, and that *Exalted* supplement describes that eldritch shadow realm in detail.

Chapter One: The Chosen of the Void

This chapter tells how the Abyssal Exalted came to exist. It then reveals how the dread Deathlords recruit, empower, train and exploit their deathknights.

Chapter Two: The Deathlords

Every Abyssal receives her Exaltation from a Deathlord. This chapter describes these ancient ghosts, who dedicate themselves to dragging all the world into Oblivion. They are inconceivably powerful... and more than slightly mad.

Chapter Three: Character Creation

This chapter guides you step-by-step through the creation of Abyssal characters.

Chapter Four: Traits

Here, you can find the special Backgrounds that Abyssal Exalted can gain through service to their Deathlord masters. The chapter also describes the Dark Fate of the deathknights—the terrible force of Oblivion that builds within them to erupt in hideous black miracles. The dire magic that Exalts deathknights also receives its due.

Chapter Five: Charms

The cruel and destructive Charms of the Abyssal Exalted present a grim reflection of the Charms that the Solar Exalted wield. The heroes of Light and Darkness have more in common than either side would like to admit.

Chapter Six: Necrotech, the Science of Death

The Abyssals have more than Charms with which to ravage and appall Creation. They also wield a ghastly science of reanimation to build destructive undead horrors.

Chapter Seven: Abyssal Storytelling

The final chapter discusses the special factors one must consider for a game that centers on Abyssals. Such a series is not for the faint of heart.

LEXICON

The Abyssal Exalted have not existed long enough to develop much jargon of their own. Most of the terms with special importance for the deathknights are already defined in the **Exalted** core book. A few terms, however, are new or so important that they deserve repetition.

Arcanos, Arcanoi: The name ghosts sometimes use for their Charms. Each tree of Charms is always called an Arcanos; ghosts may call an individual Charm an Arcanos too. Ghosts who want to be clear call a Charm a Charm and reserve Arcanos (singular) and Arcanoi (plural) for mystic arts that include multiple Charms.

Dark Fate: A flaw the *Neverborn* engineered into the Abyssal Exaltation, replacing the Great Curse. It results in deathknights accumulating *Resonance* that erupts to harm the Abyssal and anything physically or emotionally close to her.

Deathlord: The ghosts of 13 Solar Exalted from the Old Realm, given vast powers by the *Neverborn*. In return, they pledge to destroy Creation. They select, empower and train the Abyssal Exalted.

Dual Monarchy: The ceremonial rulers of the *Underworld*. While the Dual Monarchy has an important place in the Underworld, the *Deathlords* all possess greater raw power.

fetter: Objects or places that hold great emotional value for ghosts. Fetters help ghosts resist the pull of *Lethe* and *Oblivion*.

hungry ghost: The animalistic “lower soul” of a person. It normally dissipates after death but could instead become a mindless predator.

Labyrinth: A network of tunnels and chambers that extends throughout the *Underworld*. It forms the dwelling place of spectres and other foul creatures.

Lethe: A state or condition of forgetfulness. The souls of the dead normally enter Lethe and forget their past identity before they reincarnate in a new person—provided some powerful emotion or connection to the living world does not make them persist as a ghost.

Liege: An Abyssal’s master, usually a *Deathlord*. Also, a special Background open to Abyssal characters.

Monstrance of Celestial Portion: The magical receptacle for an Abyssal Exaltation between mortal incarnations.

Mouth of the Void: An immense pit at the center of *Stygia* that descends through the *Labyrinth*, to the tombs of the *Neverborn*, and beyond them to *Oblivion* itself. Also called the Maw of Oblivion.

necromancy: The powerful magic of death. Abyssals and *Deathlords* are better at it than anyone else.

necrosurgeon: An artisan who creates *necrotech* creatures and devices.

necrotech: Tools and weapons created by reanimating cadavers and combining bits of them with mechanical parts in creative ways.

nemissary: A ghost that specializes in possessing and animating cadavers.

nephwrack: A powerful *spectre* priest of *Oblivion*.

Neverborn: The ghosts of the world’s Primordial creators, slain by the early Exalted. They created the *Underworld* and possibly *Oblivion* as well. They apparently want to complete the plunge into Oblivion they began when they died, but they cannot do so as long as Creation exists.

Oblivion: Also called the Void or the Abyss. Oblivion is an active force of annihilation and a place beneath the *Underworld* and the *Labyrinth*. The ultimate source of the Abyssal Exalted’s power.

Resonance: The force of necrotic Essence and the ire of the *Neverborn* that an Abyssal Exalt accumulates because of her *Dark Fate*.

risen: Reanimated. No force can truly raise the dead, but magic can give dead things a semblance of life. Most risen creatures feel a ghastly hunger for the blood and flesh of the living.

shadowland: A region where Creation interpenetrates with the *Underworld*, and ghosts and mortals can meet with ease.

spectre: Evil, insane ghosts that worship *Oblivion* but aren’t quite ready to go there. Most of them dwell in the *Labyrinth*.

Stygia: The capital of the *Dual Monarchy*, located at the center of the *Underworld* on an island continent that corresponds to the Blessed Isle.

Underworld: The realm of the dead, mostly separate from Creation. It is a whole world of its own. Its geography mirrors that of Creation.

Whispers: The dreaming thoughts of the *Neverborn* echo through the *Underworld*. Abyssals can develop the ability to sense and learn from this stream of cryptic thoughts and dream-images from the world’s dead creators. *Oblivion* itself emits a similar psychic whisper, but whereas tuning into the thoughts of the *Neverborn* brings both madness and wisdom, the Whispers of Oblivion bring only madness.



STOP RIGHT THERE!

GOOD GRACIOUS.
AM I BEING MUGGED?



DID YOU THINK
WE WOULDN'T
RECOGNIZE YOU?

I'D HOPED YOU
WOULDN'T, I SUPPOSE.
WHO ARE YOU?

DON'T CHANGE
THE SUBJECT!



DID YOU SUPPOSE WE'D
FORGOTTEN THE THOUSAND
FANG VIPER SOCIETY?

WE HAVEN'T! YOUR
DAYS OF RUNNING
FROM JUSTICE ARE
OVER, TRAITOR!

IF YOU WANT TO
LIVE, YOU'LL TAKE
US TO WHERE YOUR
MOTHER'S HIDING.



MY MOTHER?

WOW.



HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!!!!!

HAHAHA - WHOOOOF!

YOU THINK THIS
IS FUNNY!?



JUST KEEP
LAUGHING! YOU
THINK WE CAN'T FIND
YOUR MOTHER
WITHOUT YOU?

COUGH!



MADAM, MY MOTHER
DIED YEARS AGO. AT
THE FALL OF THORNS.

DEAD SOLDIERS
GUTTED HER IN
FRONT OF ME. RATS
ATE HER SKIN.

THAT MEMORY
KEEPS ME WARM
AT NIGHT.



YOU REMIND ME
OF HER.

GET OFF! GET
OFF ME!

skree! skree! skree! skree!



AAIIIEEEE!!!!

skree! skree! skree! skree!



LET'S REMINISCE
FURTHER!

CHAPTER ONE

THE CHOSEN OF THE VOID

Blasphemous villains. Tragic antiheroes. Profane exemplars of the power of Oblivion. Wretched victims forsaken by Creation and Yu-Shan. Proud lapdogs serving the Deathlords. Doomed penitents searching for the bleak, hidden road to redemption. These are the Abyssal Exalted. They are knights of the Underworld, spreading the power of death throughout Creation. The Abyssal Exalted sacrifice their names and their destinies to dead Primordials for stolen power and eternal life. Although the Deathlords are their immediate masters, the Abyssal Exalted ultimately serve the single, fatalistic desire of the Neverborn. Through them will Creation be unraveled and devoured and made no more. Whether they know it or not, whether they want it or not, the deathknights exist to destroy the world.

THE ORIGIN OF ABYSSAL EXALTATION

Viewed objectively, the road that led to the Black Exaltation was paved with failures, daunting setbacks and bitter disappointments. Yet each setback provided a new insight that made

possible some impressive breakthrough. The edges of the Abyss still grow wider a hair's breadth at a time, and the Neverborn masters of the Underworld crawl ever closer to their ultimate goal.

The dead Primordials' driving goal has not changed much since the beginning—though there is no true “beginning” as humanity defines the concept. Humanity can conceive of only this current cycle of ages. Those who dwell in Creation can neither imagine what came before it nor comprehend the minds of its creators. The Deathlords and nephwracks have overheard the thoughts of the Neverborn for centuries, while sorcerers question demons to gain ultimate knowledge. Yet the Neverborn dream, their acolytes are mad, and demons can lie despite any binding if their Yozi progenitors wish it so. The Maiden of Secrets herself does not presume to comprehend the entities that made her. (Or, if she does, she finds it prudent to say nothing.)

Nonetheless, at least 50 centuries of search suggest a plausible tale of Creation's origin. In the beginning, the Primordials wished to create something fixed and eternal that would defy and stand apart from the Wyld. To this end, they experimented with matter, energy and identity. They created forms in the



Wyld—discarding many at various stages of completion, keeping only the most successful aspects of each. From this long process of trial and error was Creation designed and built and calcified from the infinity of potential. Likewise was Yu-Shan built, where the Primordials dwelled and took their leisure at a remove from Creation, perfecting and tinkering with it and ever expanding the range of the Elemental Poles.

THE FLAW OF LIFE

If not for the addictive Games of Divinity, Creation might have eventually become the lasting monument the Primordials hoped to design. Distracted by the Games, however, the Primordials failed to notice and correct subtle flaws in Creation. Chief among those flaws, it turned out, was the stubborn persistence of life, though the tenacity of the survival instinct did not seem like a flaw at first. Indeed, it was necessary to shore up the material integrity of Creation against the continual erosion of the Wyld's unpredictable tides. But when living things grow, adapt and change unchecked, they diverge from their intended purposes. They overrun their boundaries and replace the careful balance of their creators' design with their own infinitely complicated interplay. They evolve beyond the roles intended for them and run out of control. This brings the potential for chaos, which leads back to the formless Wyld. Among all the forms of life in Creation, sentient life became the most dangerous. Not only could it evolve and exceed its design parameters, it could do so *on purpose*.

Building this evolutionary capacity and survival instinct into Creation's organisms was the Primordial designers' first major misstep. Ideally, the gods would regulate and maintain Creation according to their creators' design specifications. The gods had no other purpose but to ensure the proper function of Creation; they had no hope of advancement to any greater or loftier position. The gods proved to be too much like their masters, however, and they wanted more from existence. They coveted the Games of Divinity and the leisure the Primordials enjoyed in Yu-Shan. They neglected the minutia of their duties, allowing life to flourish and thrive in ways the Primordials never wanted.

Leaving the gods in charge of Creation, then, was the Primordials' second major mistake, and the gods capitalized upon it. Aided by the treachery of Gaia and Autochthon, they created the process of Exaltation and used it to empower humanity against the Primordials. Only when those first handfuls of Celestial Exalted, throngs of Terrestrial Exalted and hordes of lesser heroes marched did the Primordials realize the pervasive flaws in the design of their Creation. (Or perhaps, only then did the majority listen to and believe those few who had seen the danger all along.) Some of the Primordials pulled themselves away from the Games of Divinity and moved to strike down the wayward gods. Once the world's neglectful caretakers and their experimental champions were dealt with, the creators could begin the painstaking process of correcting their flawed Creation.

So they assumed, in any case. The Primordials did not move swiftly or forcefully enough to crush the insurrection. Unfortunately, most of the historical lore of the ensuing conflict has been lost in the chaos of war and the passage

of millennia. The Primordials themselves have blocked out some of the trauma of the worst battles in the war that ended their dominance. It can be presumed that the first Primordials (or more likely, their subordinate souls) who extricated themselves from the Games of Divinity underestimated their foes and were defeated with comparative ease.

This unlikely turn of events shocked the other Primordials and made clear to them the unpredictable strength of their new enemies. More powerful Primordials turned away from the Games of Divinity in larger numbers to face the growing threat. Their lesser souls did battle with the Exalted and were thrown down. Eventually the Primordials had to engage the Exalted in person, at which point the conflicts escalated to their most brutal and disastrous levels. Gods and Exalts and entire species by the score were destroyed, but the Primordials could not find victory. In fact, the unthinkable happened.

In great battles that all but tore Creation to pieces, Primordials died.

NEW HOPE IN DEATH

It is no longer known in Creation exactly how many of Primordials eventually died or which was the first to die. Gods and savants can only guess what effect those Primordials' death throes had on Creation and Yu-Shan in the places where they fell. Neither region was designed with the creators' deaths in mind. The Primordials knew the concept of death—they incorporated it into their grand design and set the Maiden of Endings to regulate it, after all—but they never expected it to apply to *themselves*. Yet for all the forgotten consequences lost to time, one undeniable consequence lingers to the present day. Where once Creation and Yu-Shan were the only two islands of stability set apart from the Wyld, the death of the fallen Primordials created a third: the Underworld. Many savants call the Underworld a dark mirror of Creation, but that comparison is slightly off the mark. The Underworld is more like the inside of a mask than a reflection in a mirror. It is Creation's opposite; its features seem similar only from a removed perspective.

The physical place that is the Underworld came from the same place as Creation: the minds of the Primordials. Only the Primordials themselves can truly understand exactly how the Underworld formed, but the Deathlords believe they have a loose conception. The Primordials existed by their own will, and when they died, their bodies collapsed and imploded into nothingness. At the moment of death, each slain Primordial conceived this possibility of *not existing*. Some cosmological savants believe that this moment of comprehension created the Abyss. Others counter that the Abyss always existed independently of the Primordials' understanding but the Primordials' recognition of the Void linked it to Creation and gave it power.

Regardless of metaphysical hairsplitting, as the Primordials died and plunged toward this Abyss of unbeing, their lives flashed before their minds' eyes, just as a dying human being's memories do at the moment of death. Most of the thoughts concerned Creation, which had occupied so much of the Primordials' attention. In see-

ing the fullness of their grand design laid out at once, the dying souls understood it better than they had ever done before, gaining insights into its brilliance and its flaws. From this understanding came the substance of the Underworld. In a sense, bringing forth substance is what a Primordial's understanding *does*. In their last instantaneous thoughts, the Primordials redesigned and re-created their world the way they should have done from the beginning, minus the living organisms that became such a destabilizing influence. This bleak, empty fantasy world materialized around the periphery of the Abyss, and the highest souls of the slain Primordials continued to implode and fall into the Abyss.

Until they stopped.

Indeed, even to this day, the dead Primordials come no closer to complete dissolution. They remain suspended deep within the substrata of the Underworld, unable to reach the tantalizingly close point of no return within the Abyss. Their vast, inconceivable, rotting bodies hang transformed into cyclopean tombs in the impenetrable depths. Their many souls have collapsed within those body-tombs into vague, dreaming consciousnesses. They commune with each other and with their defeated brethren who survived the war.

In their moribund contemplation, the Primordials gained enlightenment, recognizing at last how they could bring their original driving goal to fruition. The creation of the Underworld was a step in the right direction, but only the Underworld's black heart—the Abyss—could truly last forever in defiance of the Wyld. The Wyld encompasses all possibilities for change; the Abyss contains none. Already it stood apart, and the Primordials' contemplation of it made it ever more real and powerful. If the Abyss could draw the Primordials and all they had created into itself, it would become powerful enough to resist the chaos of the Wyld: End without world, amen.

THE CRUCIAL SETBACK

Unfortunately, while it was well and good to anticipate the eternal monument of the Abyss, those dreams couldn't change the fact that the dead Primordials' descent into it had ceased. They communed with one another and deliberated on the mystery of why that should be. The power of the Abyss already warped the surface of the Underworld, slowly pulling that realm into itself, but another force countered that gravity. The Underworld captured dead souls that broke off from Creation's cycle of reincarnation, but even those souls could resist the lure of Oblivion. They could not adapt and evolve as the living did. Indeed, these souls stayed in the Underworld in part because they did not want to change what they were. Ghosts could persist as long as they chose if they relied on this counterbalancing force that had halted the Primordials' descent.

The persistence of ghosts showed the Primordials why they too could not reach Oblivion. Bonds forged in life from the strong emotions of sentient beings acted like anchors or mooring lines leading back to Creation. The Primordials were not immune to these bonds. In fact, since they designed and built Creation, their fetters to it were the strongest of any beings'. As long as Creation remained whole, those bonds



would remain and they would never complete their slide into the Abyss. To free themselves and make Oblivion supreme, they needed to destroy Creation.

But how could they do this? The gods' Exalted champions showed they had the power to take Creation away from its authors. They certainly had the power to protect it.

A DIFFERENT TACK

This complete understanding of their situation occurred to the Primordials all at once, the same way complicated revelations come in dreams or moments of crisis. Only a single moment passed as the Primordials died, recognized the Abyss, saw its potential, conceived of the Underworld, predicted the phenomenon of ghosts, recognized their fetters to Creation and focused their hatred on the Exalted who slew them.

The Primordials then endured long, painful centuries of humiliation and obsession. They dreamed countless dreams of breaking Creation and their despised connection to it—all of which came to naught. Some ghosts felt the Primordials' hate-filled dreams and followed them down the Labyrinth to the Mouth of the Void. These spectres learned to worship the dead Primordials and serve them in their desire for Oblivion. All such ghosts were tortured and broken souls, however, whose hatred for life made them insane and unreliable. In the Labyrinth, the spectres acted out the dreams of the Primordials. The strongest nephwracks became the avatars of the Primordials' will, preaching to lesser spectres about the beautiful purity of dissolution within the Abyss. They gloried in the breaking of weak fetters as they cast other ghosts into the Void. They wracked their ravaged minds for ways to break the fetters of their masters. The nephwracks first called the slain Primordials the Neverborn, in recognition that their dead gods had not come from pre-existing creatures. They, and they alone, had experienced the mystery and revelation of death without the vile pollution of birth.

In time, the nephwracks left their Labyrinth to convert ghosts who resisted the purity of Oblivion. Their efforts were futile. No matter how many ghosts they brought to the Abyss, the Primordials' tether to Creation did not weaken. Souls entered the Underworld faster than the spectres could catch them. Too many ghosts relished their connections to Creation and jealously defended them. Every soul that fell into the Underworld destabilized the cycle of reincarnation—which was all to the good—but those willful souls banded together behind ever-stronger leaders to resist the spectres' depredations. They settled and spread throughout the Underworld, making it more like the Creation they remembered. Worse, when ghosts learned to contact the people they had left behind, they shored up and reinforced the fabric of Creation by affirming the efforts of the living.

This ugly trend culminated in a powerful regime led by a succession of schizophrenic dyads called the Dual Monarchy. These powerful entities built the fortress-city of Stygia around the mouth of the Abyss with the sole deluded purpose of keeping everything from falling into it. They even built a blasphemous pseudo-celestial calendar engine to impose a semblance of the passage of days and seasons

on the heretofore-perfect stasis of the realm. Seeing this in their dreams but unable to stop it, the Neverborn seethed and writhed in their tombs—but the geomantic barrier of Stygia prevented the Neverborn even from inflicting their storms of wrath on the Underworld. The Dual Monarchy organized armies of ghosts to drive the strongest spectres back to the Labyrinth and seal them inside.

Making matters worse, the hateful Exalted discovered ways to enter the Underworld without dying first. Venturing from their palaces under the searing sun, they found the wounds torn in the fabric of Creation by the deaths of the Primordials' lower souls and studied them. These wounds led into the Underworld and back out again, leaking the necrotic Essence of the Abyss into Creation. Using these suppurating gateways, the Exalted came to the Underworld to mock their defeated enemies or to steal the lingering secrets of those they had vanquished. They forced the Neverborn to submit to humiliating oaths and took from them tainted secrets of creation that they would develop in time into the black art of necromancy.

Even in these hard times, the Neverborn found some hope. They observed that the Exalted who came to them in the latter centuries after their defeat behaved quite differently than those they had faced in Creation. Those empowered by the Unconquered Sun especially were more sinister and cruel than the slayers who had cut them down. They were perverted, alien to the human beings they ruled. The other Exalted were differently yet equally broken, and even the passing of their empowered Essence from soul to soul could not fix them.

The Neverborn hid their excitement from their Exalted inquisitors. The Exalted were powerful, yes, but they grew reckless, careless and destructive. More and more often, their powers enabled them to wreak terrible tragedy and widespread death, which would weaken the fabric of Creation and rot it away into the Underworld beneath. The borders the Exalted erected between themselves and the Fair Folk would keep the Wyld at bay while they tore Creation apart from within. The world would collapse into the Underworld first, the Neverborn would slide into the Abyss at last, and the Underworld would fall in behind them. The Primordials would finally achieve their glorious goal.

THE GREAT CURSE

Of course the Neverborn knew why the Solar Exalted turned evil and insane: Their dying moment of rage inflicted the Great Curse. Storytellers must decide for themselves whether anyone else knows about the Great Curse—in particular, the Deathlords. On one hand, the Deathlords have listened to their masters' dreams for more than a millennium, and they are also highly intelligent. On the other hand, the Neverborn have no particular reason to tell their servants about the Great Curse, and the Deathlords are more or less crazy. It is also possible that the Deathlords discovered the Great Curse but the Neverborn forbid them to reveal it.

THE BITTERSWEET USURPATION

Alas, once again the Neverborn tasted hope but swallowed frustration. The wisest Exalted elevated the weakest (but most numerous) and pitted them against the strongest in a desperate attempt to save their world. The Deathlords do not know (or perhaps refuse to recognize) if the Neverborn joyed in their dreams at the treacherous, painful defeat of their hated foes. Just as the Primordials never imagined being thrown down by their inferiors, the Solar Exalted found themselves unprepared for the possibility of their own defeat. Those who survived the initial betrayal raged against their treacherous underlings and plunged their world into a devastating war... but not devastating enough to destroy the world and free the Neverborn.

Many of the mortal victims caught in the middle of this conflict plunged into the Underworld full of fear, hate and rage, swelling the ranks of the Labyrinth's spectres. Those spectres boiled up out of the Labyrinth on hungry storm-winds, howling praises for their Neverborn masters. The Neverborn themselves did nothing. When the Exalted traitors constructed their Jade Prison to keep Solars from reappearing to menace Creation, the Neverborn accepted this further setback. The chronicles of Stygia record no great eruptions of Neverborn rage from the Mouth of the Void at the city's heart.

Had it been in their nature to do so, the Neverborn might have given up. (Had they done so, perhaps they would have slipped the chains that bound them to Creation and disappeared into the Abyss.) Without knowing it, however, the treacherous Sidereal and Terrestrial Exalted handed the Neverborn a new weapon against Creation.

While the individual Exaltations that gave the Solars their power were imprisoned, their actual souls remained free. True, the traitors placated the Solars' lower souls with grandiose tombs and excessive sacrifices, but many of the Lawgivers' higher souls clung to existence in the Underworld instead of accepting the cycle of reincarnation. The ghosts of the most powerful, driven and insane screamed in rage and wept in self-pity for their lost power.

Meanwhile, the Neverborn and the Demon Princes found the Jade Prison... interesting. It was, after all, designed to exist forever and to hold its contents forever, set apart from Creation. It was almost a crude approximation of the Abyss. What the Yozis saw in the Jade Prison, lesser creatures would learn only many centuries later.

The Neverborn also turned their attention to the spirits of their slain enemies. They shared much in common, the slain and their slaughtered murderers. Perhaps they could find a common interest. Not all the Primordials agreed, but five of them called out in their dreams to the ghosts of their fallen enemies.

Most of the dead Solars rebuffed the Neverborn's tentative contact. The youngest Exalts, as the ones least corrupted by centuries of absolute power, rejected temptation; or at least they remembered that the Neverborn were deadly, inhuman foes to ghosts and mortals alike. The oldest and proudest Exalts scoffed at the lingering souls of their enemies crawling to them like whipped curs hoping to placate their conquerors one last time. But some

ghosts listened. Having spent centuries, even millennia, as the most powerful beings in Creation, this new existence as pitiful ghosts did not suit them. It couldn't suit them. They would do anything, *anything*, to regain their power and rule once more.

The Neverborn still required the destruction of Creation, so they could subside into the Abyss at last. They did not, therefore, insult their new potential collaborators with an offer of power to rule Creation. The Neverborn did offer power, but only the power to destroy Creation and plunge its ruins into the Underworld—and eventually into the Abyss. The key to their bargain was the word “eventually.” If the empowered ghosts used their gifts to destroy and absorb Creation, they could rule whatever remained. The Neverborn would disappear immediately, but the Underworld would certainly follow more slowly. The Abyss would devour it in time, but for as long as it lasted, those who accepted the Neverborn's offer would become the lords of that dead world.

Ten dead Solars accepted the offer. Three more agreed later when the last of the First Age Solars finally died, but all the rest resisted. Through the twisting Labyrinth and the pit at Stygia's heart, the willing souls descended to the very edge of the Void. They entered the tomb-cadavers of five of the Neverborn and gave themselves utterly to the dead Primordials' power. In token of their submission, they renounced their names. The Neverborn fused the Solars' ghosts with broken pieces of their own lesser souls, which had long since ceased to function for them but could still confer power on simpler beings. Through these shards of themselves, the Neverborn could simulate the power of Exaltation, and more. They even supplemented their new vassals' understanding of necrotic and entropic principles to degrees that made these ghosts the foremost necromancers in existence. After a final period of rapid education in the customs and qualities of the dead, the Neverborn released their improved creations, their Deathlords, into the Underworld. And they waited to see what their mighty servants would do.

Surely *this* time...

MORE DEATHLORDS?

Could the Neverborn give their power to ghosts and create additional Deathlords? Maybe. Creating a Deathlord requires two things: a damaged subsidiary soul of a dead Primordial and a ghost that already possesses an Essence powerful enough to contain that more-than-divine shard. Although the ghosts of the Solars lost all their Charms, they still had the high Essence ratings they developed in life (not to mention the Attributes and Abilities developed through centuries of experience). Maybe the Neverborn still have a few soul-shards, but no Solar Exalted will attain sufficiently high Essence—and then die—for some centuries yet.

Then again, who says a Deathlord must be the ghost of a Solar? A number of Lunar and Sidereal elders possess the requisite force of Essence. The real question is whether any of them become ghosts, and are mad enough to betray all of Creation.



IMPERFECT VASSALS

From here on, the uncertainty of speculation is replaced by the disputation of different points of view. The Deathlords hold quite different opinions about what they did, why, and whose fault it is that Creation survived so long.

The Neverborn who empowered the Deathlords gave them neither a specific plan for ending Creation nor a timetable for victory. The Deathlords disguised themselves from those who had been their subjects in the living world and spread out into the Underworld. They had not yet mastered the powers placed at their disposal, and the hated Dragon-Blooded still commanded the weapons that were once the Solars' own, weapons that might slay even those beyond death.

Moreover, the Deathlords were proud and jealous. Each of them strove to establish herself as Oblivion's sole apostle, the one who would unmake all Creation. At first, the Deathlords spent far more time plotting against one another and building their power in the Underworld than in pursuing the goal of universal dissolution. Each of them selected a sphere of influence in the Underworld, choosing which portions they would prefer to rule when the time came.

Laboriously, ever so slowly, they insinuated themselves into the background of Underworld society, passing themselves off as scholars, wise ministers and monarchs of small kingdoms. Their political and military power grew at every turn, though they never pitted it against the might of the Dual Monarchy, and seldom against each other. They had, they knew, all of eternity to secure their positions. Of course they would destroy Creation and plunge it into the Underworld like their masters wanted. Eventually.

THE GREAT CONTAGION

Of the 13 Deathlords, only one owned up to what was expected of her. That one was known as the Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate in Unrent Veils. She communed deeply with her dreaming master through a hidden gateway to the Abyss called the Well of Udr. From its depths, she dredged up secrets her fellow Deathlords did not know, lore unknown even to the wisest sages of the Old Realm. Using the Well, she forged the power of Oblivion into a disease, the greatest pestilence the world had ever seen: the Great Contagion.

Eventually, the Dowager called her fellow Deathlords to a great conclave. She castigated them for dragging their feet. She revealed her discoveries and released her sickness into Creation.

The Void-spawned disease slew mortals by the millions. Four in 10 living beings in Creation died in the first few years. Then it was six in 10. Then nine. The disease spread in the air, in the water, in the toxins that burst from sun-swollen plague corpses. It seemed for a time that Creation's very Essence had been poisoned. The Exalted died alongside the mortals they ruled, and the sickness defied their most potent healing magics.

The gods locked the doors of Yu-Shan, stranding desperate colleagues in Creation with orders not to restore contact until the crisis ended. The dead rained into the Underworld, followed by their stranded hungry ghosts as their bodies were burned in mass graves. It seemed that the foundation of Creation itself would follow soon. Maybe within a year. Possibly next year. Surely before the decade ends. Considering the damage done, life in Creation had to end eventually... Right?

Somehow life and Creation obstinately persevered. The Dowager had done her job well—better than any of her fellow Deathlords—but had she missed something? Did some flaw in the design of her Contagion leave some percentage of the living immune to it? Impatient to destroy all Creation, two Deathlords enacted their own plan to finish the job (and usurp the credit when Creation finally fell to ruin).

THE FAIR FOLK INVASION

The elder of those opportunistic Deathlords was called the First and Forsaken Lion; the younger was called Eye and Seven Despairs. They sent a message from the Underworld into the Wyld that surrounds Creation. That message invited the armies of the Fair Folk—the ancient nemeses of the Primordials—to enter Creation and attack the weakened survivors of the Great Contagion. The Fair Folk did so, unmaking Creation itself as they passed.

And then, some Dragon-Blooded woman forced the Fair Folk back to a reasonably safe distance from the Elemental Pole of Earth. Creation was diminished, but what was left was good enough for the survivors. Life did not thrive as it once had, but it did continue.

The Dowager accuses her two rival Deathlords of an even greater miscalculation. Unmaking Creation might have freed the Neverborn to plunge at last into Oblivion... but the Fair Folk were creatures of the Wyld, a domain of pure creative potential diametrically opposed to the entropic energies of the Underworld—and the Contagion. The Dowager argues that as the Fair Folk spread across Creation, the two mystical forces interacted, engendering an immunity to the disease's effects among those who survived to that point. Had the two Deathlords not interfered, the Great Contagion would have extinguished the human race within another year or so and Creation would have fallen completely into shadow. Individuals might still die from the disease and in great numbers, but the Wyld zones that now spread across Creation kept the Great Contagion from bringing total extinction.

Of course, the First and Forsaken Lion and Eye and Seven Despairs reject the Dowager's argument. They insist that the flaw lay in their rival Deathlord's evocation of the Great Contagion. Other Deathlords agree with one side or the other depending on who they wish to annoy or cultivate for a temporary alliance.

CONQUEST OF STYGIA

Having failed at their best chance to destroy Creation, the First and Forsaken Lion and the Eye and Seven Despairs parted ways and sought to protect themselves from reprisals. The First and Forsaken Lion had already spent centuries amassing a mighty army. The sudden influx of dead souls from the Great Contagion and the Fair folk invasion cast all the societies of the Underworld into disarray. This disarray destabilized the regime of the Dual Monarchy. The First and Forsaken Lion mustered his army and marched it right to the black gates of Stygia, on the pretext that he needed to occupy the Underworld's capital to restore order. In no time, the First and Forsaken Lion made himself master of Stygia, with the Dual Monarchs as his captives.

Several other Deathlords moved against the First and Forsaken Lion. In so doing, they revealed their own power and wickedness to the rest of the Underworld. The other Deathlords found that the army occupying Stygia dwarfed all their forces combined—especially after Eye and Seven Despairs rejoined the First and Forsaken Lion's side. Eventually, the Deathlords reached a diplomatic agreement whereby they ruled Stygia as a congress with the Dual Monarchs remaining as figureheads. The First and Forsaken Lion kept some standing as "first among equals," pleased to escape censure for his failure during the Great Contagion. He was sorely mistaken.

The Deathlord's Neverborn patron, He Who Holds in Thrall, called the Deathlord to its tomb at the Mouth of Oblivion. The dead Primordial directed him to abandon his citadel in Stygia, to march his forces thousands of miles south to an isolated mountain range, and to devote himself to building a vast fortress there. When the Deathlord inquired why his master desired a great fortress so far from the center of Stygian power, all who listened to the Whispers of the Neverborn heard the Primordial's reply: *Because isolation is one penalty for failure. Another is pain.* Then the Lion screamed for weeks before emerging from his master's tomb a changed entity. Now permanently riveted into his armor and in constant agony, the First and Forsaken Lion swore total obedience to his master and immediately set forth on his journey. Since then, the Deathlord has maintained his place in Stygia only by dint of superior numbers and by playing the other Deathlords against each other. Exiled from Stygia except when his master gives him leave to enter, the First and Forsaken Lion has relied on loyal ghost seneschals to oversee his place in the city.

ONE LAST CHANCE

Several more centuries passed. Their Deathlords ruled Stygia and managed far-flung dominions in the Underworld, but they made little notable progress in the diminished Creation. One Deathlord, Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers, made early gains in the post-Contagion years but was tricked and brought low by a trio of clever gods. Her Neverborn master punished her by enslaving her to the First and Forsaken Lion. (Whether this was also a further punishment for the Lion is open to debate.)



Other Deathlords managed to tear small holes into Creation and seep the Underworld's necrotic Essence into the living world, but none of them came close to destroying the world.

Seven decades ago, the Deathlords' respective Neverborn masters commanded them to assemble for a special meeting. They learned that the long-silent Demon Princes had restored contact with their fallen Neverborn counterparts. From the study of the Jade Prison and experiments on a few Exalted who had fallen into their hands, the Yozis had figured out not only how to trap an Exaltation, but how to change its nature, structure and destiny without diminishing its potential for power.

Despite their power, the Yozis had little access to Creation. Granted, the Neverborn were equally cut off from Creation, but their powerful Deathlord servants were not. If those ghosts could somehow break the Jade Prison and capture the Solar Exaltations it held, the Demon Princes would teach the Neverborn how to alter and use them to empower mortal servants. The Yozis stipulated only that the Neverborn reserve and relinquish 50 Solar Essences to the Demon Princes. The rest would belong to the Neverborn. As a show of good faith, the Yozis even released preliminary designs for an apparatus that could temporarily catch and hold an individual Solar Exaltation.

The Neverborn commanded the Deathlords to open the Jade Prison and bring them the Solar Exaltations. *Quickly!* And the Deathlords set to work. For once, the Deathlords found the will of their dreaming masters expressed in utter clarity. Failure would mean their own destruction. If they succeeded, however, the Neverborn promised to grant them powerful vassals of their own.

ONE LAST STUMBLE

To breach the Jade Prison, the Deathlords began with the monstrous, semi-preserved carcass of a behemoth they dredged from the depths of the Western Ocean. They equipped it with tremendous claws, an armored tail and eyes that could not only see in the black depths but report what they saw in perfect detail. Between its jaws, like baleen in a whale's mouth, the Deathlords fixed hundreds of spiked chains built from the designs the Yozis had provided as a show of good faith. The Deathlords animated this hideous monstrosity with mighty necromancy and sent it toward its target. It scudded along the bottom of the ocean and into the Inland Sea, where it found the Jade Prison. As its masters directed, it scooped the prison up in one claw and lifted the other as high as it could. Like expert gem-cutters, the Deathlords had calculated the exact force and placement of the blow necessary to break the prison cleanly along one facet. The trapped Essences would be able to escape a few at a time, right into the beast's waiting chains. Just to be safe, the monster's other claw would hold the broken pieces together to regulate the flow of escapees.

That was the *plan*, but that wasn't what happened. Maybe, the beast's claw fell at the wrong angle or with too much force. Maybe the Jade Prison wasn't constructed quite the way the Deathlords thought. Whatever the reason, the Jade Prison didn't fracture. It shattered, blinding several of the beast's eyes

and destroying the claw that struck it. Exaltations fled in every direction as the beast tried to catch them in its grasping, flailing chains. When the chains could find no more Exaltations, they retracted into the beast's maw and extruded themselves down into the Labyrinth. Altogether, the creature had snagged only about half of the Essences the prison had contained. Disgusted, the Deathlords broke off contact with the beast and took their disappointing haul to their masters. The Neverborn gave the Yozi ambassadors their 50 Exaltations, and the Demon Princes proved as good as their word. They taught the Neverborn how to create the soul-corrupting mechanisms they had designed, then retreated back to their own prison with their new prizes.

THE GREAT CURSE, AGAIN

When the Neverborn received their stolen Exaltations from the Jade Prison, they made a fateful decision whose ramifications have yet to be realized: They revoked the Great Curse. This revocation applies only to the Exaltations they have in their possession, of course, but that still accounts for a third of all the Solar Exaltations ever created... a not insignificant number. In theory, removing the Curse makes their Abyssals more manageable in the long term, as Abyssal Exalted don't suffer the bouts of poor impulse control that afflict the Solar Exalted.

If the Neverborn find they were wrong, it's too late for them to change their minds. Only the unique circumstances of their unthinkable defeat by the Solars gave them the power to implement the Great Curse in the first place. They retain the authority to lift the Curse, but once they do, they have no power left to reapply it.

BIRTH OF THE ABYSSAL EXALTED

The Deathlords know that they disappointed their masters by offering them only 100 or so Exaltations instead of 250. Nevertheless, the Neverborn taught the Deathlords how to join an Exaltation to a mortal soul. The Neverborn also guided nephwrack slaves in the rites and procedures to create the receptacles that would contain and warp the Solar Exaltations: the Monstrances of Celestial Portion. After a period of rigorous testing with mortals stolen from convenient shadowlands, the first Abyssal Exalted were declared successes. Thereafter, the Neverborn divided the stolen Exaltations among the Deathlords, who imbued them into the Monstrances and set out to find suitable mortals to Exalt.

Thus were born the first of the Abyssal Exalted. In the five years since then, the Chosen of the Void have studied, trained and worked as the knights of the Deathlords, ultimately carrying out the will of the Neverborn. They are not as numerous as the Neverborn hoped, but then Creation is not as large as it once was. Perhaps 100 will suffice to kill the world and break the bonds that deny the Neverborn their rightful death. The Neverborn have every confidence that this is so.

This time they will not be denied.

THE ABYSSAL CONDITION

The Neverborn's and Deathlords' experiments with their captured bounty resulted in roughly 100 twisted, corrupted Solar Essences bound to Monstrances of Celestial Portion. To call a deathknight nothing more than a tainted Solar Exalt, however, is a vast understatement. Deathknights differ from the returning Lawgivers in the same way the Underworld differs from Creation. One is not simply a reflection of the other captured in polished obsidian, but a total inversion of the other set to diametrically opposing ends. Nearly everything about an Abyssal's experience—from the way he is selected for Exaltation to the ultimate goal of his existence—would seem alien or abhorrent to a Solar Exalt. While the two types of Exalt share some common ground, that ground is thin and cracked and uncomfortable for both.

UNNATURAL SELECTION

Celestial Exaltation takes place as a matter of destiny guided by divine craft. At the end of a Celestial Exalt's life, her Exaltation separates from her soul and returns to Yu-Shan. There it appears in a cabinet behind the desk of Lytek, the Right Hand of Power, god of Exaltation. He cleans away as much of the previous soul's excess baggage as possible, then releases the Exaltation to find a new mortal host. The Loom of Fate guides the Exaltation to someone who can achieve greatness but lacks the power to realize that potential. Various gods can mark mortals as preferred candidates for Exaltation, or search the Loom of Fate for mortals who seem likely to merit Exaltation, so few Celestial Exaltations come as a genuine surprise to Lytek or the Incarnae. Finally, with the approval of the appropriate celestial god—which usually amounts to the uninterested party stamping a form between rounds in the Games of Divinity—Lytek joins the tailored Essence to the candidate's soul. The candidate then truly respires the life energy of Creation for the first time, any message the Celestial god appended to the approval form plays in the candidate's mind, and a new Celestial Exalt comes to power. No force outside the bureaucratic loop can interfere with this process, and no power *at all* can bind a Celestial Exaltation to an unworthy mortal. Had it been otherwise, the Primordials would simply have commanded the rebellious Incarnae to send their Exaltations to pliable weaklings instead of heroes willing to challenge the masters of Creation.



Abyssal Exaltation, however, does not work that way. Each Abyssal Exaltation is bound to its own Monstrance of Celestial Portion. If an Abyssal champion dies, her Exaltation returns not to Lytek's cabinet, but to its Monstrance and a Deathlord's jealous grip. The Deathlord, then, controls how an Abyssal Exaltation finds a new soul. Deathknights appear only at their new overlords' will and pleasure, which causes something of a problem.

An Exaltation cannot bind to a ghost or to any creature of less than human intelligence. Only living, more-or-less human beings can Exalt. The Deathlords and their dead masters, however, have no Loom of Fate to reveal mortal destinies. It still behooves a Deathlord to empower a mortal who has a significant destiny, but without access to that information, what's a Deathlord to do?

Their easiest option is to look for mortals who live under the Deathlord's rule—most likely in a shadowland—who already show talent at combat, negotiation, arcane scholarship or whatever criterion the Deathlord needs filled. Most Deathlords have minions—ghosts, mortals, raitons and other spies—who can look for potential deathknights and assemble lists of candidates.



In lands farther removed from a Deathlord's rule, ancestral ghosts can supply further candidates. If a potential deathknight honors her ancestors' memories with prayers and offerings and glorifies their names by living a distinguished life, the candidate's ancestors will undoubtedly talk him up to other ghosts. If this praise spreads far enough, a Deathlord might hear it and look in on the mortal to see what all the fuss is about. If the praise seems justified, the Deathlord marks the mortal as a possible deathknight. After just a few short years, a sizeable percentage of the Underworld's denizens know about the existence and prominence of the Abyssal Exalted. Self-serving ghosts now lobby Deathlords with praise and petitions of support for their faithful descendants. Sometimes this grassroots campaigning impresses a Deathlord enough to consider the candidate for Exaltation. Sometimes it serves only to keep dynasties of ambitious ghosts occupied with promoting their descendants and sabotaging each others' efforts, rather than annoying their Deathlord with genuine schemes for power.

Experienced deathknights can also provide helpful insight into who might make good peers. They can perform physical reconnaissance when a Deathlord has no trustworthy mortal or ghost agents in an area. They can file reports on talented mortals they encountered in their missions. They can talk to a candidate, either obliquely or with all the formality of a job interview. If the mood strikes, a deathknight can put the candidate through a series of harsh tests. Based on his own experience as a mortal, he can then gauge how well the candidate will likely adapt to the constant skin-crawling sensation of Abyssal Essence or the prospect of servitude to the Neverborn. Just as importantly, if the experienced deathknight meets the candidate and just can't stand him, that's good for a Deathlord to know. A personality conflict alone won't change a Deathlord's mind, but if a candidate is only marginal in the Deathlord's estimation, a personality conflict might tip the scales from acceptance to rejection. Deathlords want their Abyssals to fight their enemies, not each other. Usually.

The Neverborn themselves perceive more than even the Deathlords can imagine. Events in Creation sometimes echo in the death-dreams of its murdered authors, and the Deathlords can listen to those dreams as they echo like half-heard whispers through the Underworld. When some Deathlords decide to anoint a new Abyssal, they meditate on their masters' dreams and look for clues to a likely candidate. It doesn't always work, but Deathlords have found candidates they never would have learned about any other way.

Or a Deathlord can take a chance and just release an Exaltation to seek a host on its own. The warped Exaltation retains its intrinsic power to find mortals marked by destiny with the potential to change the world—but a potential that mortal cannot realize due to her incipient death. The Deathlord sends out the Exaltation, waits (perhaps a long time), and then must make a spur-of-the-moment choice once the Exaltation finds a dying candidate. The candidate may well be quite a long way away, so retrieving the new Abyssal can present further problems. The Deathlord also has little

information about the personality of the potential deathknight, so this method truly does constitute a gamble.

COVERT INTELLIGENCE

Four Deathlords—the Mask of Winters, the Walker in Darkness, the Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water and the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible—can use the Loom of Fate to find potential deathknights. Each of them commands the Sidereal Exalt who is sometimes called the Green Lady. Granted, each Deathlord believes the Green Lady serves only him while the Green Lady believes she's probably playing all four Deathlords against each another for the sake of Creation, but that's beside the point.

The point is, the Green Lady still has covert access to Yu-Shan, the Loom of Fate and information about mortals otherwise destined for greatness. She then takes this information back to one or the other—sometimes all four—of her Deathlords.

GOOD CANDIDATES

The selection of deathknights relies so much on the individual Deathlords holding the Monstrances of Celestial Portion that the criteria for a prospective deathknight are best discussed in generalities. The Deathlords don't choose their deathknights whimsically, but they can afford to be picky and idiosyncratic as the mood strikes them. If an Abyssal doesn't work out, the Deathlord can always destroy him, reclaim his Essence and make a new Abyssal from a better-suited mortal.

Astrology cannot lead a Deathlord to a candidate, but it can confirm that a mortal has the potential for greatness. A destiny written in the stars of Creation says nothing about the potential for greatness in the Underworld—just as the stars of the Underworld tell nothing about the destinies of the living—but that incompatibility doesn't matter. The Lawgivers forge their own destinies once they Exalt, and the Abyssal Exalted do the same. Of course, it helps if a mortal already seems to be fulfilling that destiny, whether as a king or courtier, famous warrior or celebrated savant. Exalting people who already possess great skill and talent saves the Deathlord a lot of training time.

Deathlords look for the same qualities that any king would seek for his most important lieutenants. Mortals who excel in martial arts and battlefield tactics and who keep a cool head under pressure are attractive as potential war leaders. Mortals who are well read in history and classical literature and who blend deference and stubbornness in the right measure show potential as diplomats between dominions in the Underworld. Those who are well traveled, attractive, intimidating and unflappably confident could become envoys between the Underworld and Creation. Mortals who absorb information quickly and have strong constitutions might make good necromancers or necro-engineers.

This is not to suggest that every Deathlord relies on a fixed, rational checklist of qualifications when picking potential deathknights. The Deathlords are the insane ghosts of the debauched Solars of the First Age, further tainted by the power of the Neverborn. Because deathknights are disposable—costing a Deathlord nothing but the time spent replacing those who fail to live up to expectations—Deathlords do occasionally Exalt mortals for less than rational reasons. One Deathlord might Exalt a frustrated avenger who commits suicide in a moment of desperation, just to create in the deathknight a monument to that perfect moment of despair. Another Deathlord might Exalt someone just because she's the most beautiful girl he's ever seen. A Deathlord might create a circle of deathknights who look eerily similar to the mortal family he no longer consciously remembers. A Deathlord might Exalt a man with blue hair just to see if the man's hair turns black when the tainted Essence enlightens him. Since the choice is theirs, the Deathlords choose who they please for every reason under the Stygian sun.

The Deathlords' choices for deathknights do share one final generality: exposure to death in the candidates' lives. The candidate might grow up in a shadowland or (for whatever reason) settle there later in life. He might have been a battlefield surgeon. Perhaps he was the only sibling in his large family—or his whole village—to survive a horrific plague. Perhaps he, himself, was the only person in his entire city to catch a rare disease and his exposure to it changed him somehow. He might have been an ancestor cultist, a priest of an ancestor cult or a mortal Immaculate monk dedicated to wiping out such cults. Maybe he was a scavenger lord who specialized in haunted ruins or a Chiaroscuro salt warden or a Sijanese mortician. However the presence of death shapes or influences a candidate's outlook on life, the Deathlords often figure that more is better. They hope that so much exposure eases a mortal's transition into existence as a deathknight. (Not every Abyssal agrees on this point.) Objectively speaking, though, no amount of exposure to death or the dead makes any mortal any better suited for existence as an Abyssal Exalt.

THE BLACK EXALTATION

A few Deathlords and Abyssals poetically call it the Last Breath. The Black Exaltation of the Abyss differs starkly from a Solar's Exaltation. Most notably, it comes only at the moment of death as the heart sputters, the breath shortens and the great cold weight of inevitability presses down. Emptiness chokes off the mortal's vision. Then, in that last eternal instant before his soul rips in two, he hears the voice of a Deathlord in his mind. (Provided, of course, the Deathlord either is paying attention at that moment or has magically marked the person so that his death is made known to the Deathlord.) The Deathlord informs the dying mortal that one escape yet remains from his mortality. He offers the power of Abyssal Exaltation if the mortal will but choose to take it.

SOLAR CONVERSION

One potential field of deathknight recruitment (or impressment) available to the Deathlords is the pool of re-emerging Lawgivers. All a Deathlord need do is build a new Monstrance of Celestial Portion for the Lawgiver, throw him in and torture his body and mind until his Exaltation breaks and twists from Solar to Abyssal.

This recruitment tactic carries some risks. Capturing a Solar and holding on to him is no mean feat—especially if he already belongs to a Solar circle. Second, the more new Solar Exaltations a Deathlord captures, the more he upsets the balance of power between himself and his peers.

Then again, if he can convert enough Solars quickly enough before his rivals realize what he's up to, *who cares* about the balance of power?

That element of choice also distinguishes the Abyssal Exaltation from Solar Exaltation. The mortal cannot be forcibly Exalted against her will. A Deathlord can misrepresent the experience he offers or tell the mortal she has no choice, but if the mortal does not agree, the Last Breath passes from her. To those who express willingness, however, the Deathlord must explain the costs before the mortal makes her final choice.

First, deathknights must forgo their mortal names and answer only to the titles granted by the Deathlords or Neverborn. Most mortals find this cost easy to bear. No one who knew the mortals' old names forgets them or suffers ill effects from using them. The names that deathknights give up are just labels that no longer pertain to them.

Second, deathknights must give up their mortal destinies from the Loom of Fate. Most deathknights also make this sacrifice gladly, since whatever futures they might have attained mean nothing now at the point of death.

The final cost, however, is what gives one pause—and that explains the other two. That price is nothing less than the mortal's freedom. To receive the Black Exaltation, the mortal must vow to serve the goals of the dead yet undying Neverborn. That is, she must devote her newly given power to the cause of plunging Creation into the Underworld and the Underworld ultimately into the Abyss. In so doing, she removes herself from Creation and Creation's laws. The name she bore in Creation no longer applies to her *at all*: In the annals of Heaven, that person died.

If the mortal agrees to these terms, the deed is done and the flow of time resumes. Her chakras open and her body glows with the dark, necrotic Essence of the Underworld. Her new caste mark burns into her like a brand and weeps blood. Her strand in the Loom of Fate corrodes and snaps, occasionally causing damage to the threads around her that make up Creation. (Such damage can manifest as rivers running red with blood, noxious fumes rising from cracks in the earth, healthy females being struck barren and nearby animals losing themselves to the instinctive



need to flee. This event can even provide the final act that transforms a borderline area into a full-blown shadowland.) A character thus transformed is not properly a deathknight yet; the Deathlords bestow that title only after a period of training and indoctrination. She has become an Abyssal Exalt, however, as powerful and fearsome as any freshly Exalted Solar.

STATE OF BEING

When a dying mortal takes the Last Breath, his body, his mind and his heart all change irrevocably. In the moment when the Abyssal Exaltation grafts itself onto his soul, the deathly Essence of the Underworld surges through his body. This surge immediately restores the Abyssal's body to perfect functionality, despite whatever damage or defect brought the erstwhile mortal's body low in the first place. It also halts the entropy of aging, preserving the Abyssal's enviable good health forever more. The Abyssal can still be injured or even killed, but if he stays safely out of danger, his body will never grow old, never run down like a neglected machine and never die. Of course, the Exalted seldom stay out of danger...

This is not to say that the Abyssal becomes a paragon of health. Some Abyssals emerge from the transformation missing severed limbs. Some find themselves decorated with ragged scars over deep wounds or swaths of missing meat. Some retain disfiguring evidence of the circumstances that brought them to the threshold of death. Less fortunate Abyssals grow increasingly hideous as time goes by. Their skin withers like that of a mummy or shrivels like a corpse in a peat bog. Oozing pustules or lesions break out across others' bodies. Some retain the unhealing wounds and broken bones that killed them, rather than just the scars. Some sweat blood when they're nervous or cry maggots instead of tears. Some smell of open rot or musty tombs.

For every Abyssal whom Exaltation makes hideous, another gains unearthly beauty from the Last Breath. For them, any damage wrought by time and untimely death melts away, leaving only an idealized body. Flab evaporates; neglected muscles and ligaments firm and tighten. Unsightly blemishes vanish as skin either bleaches or darkens toward its closest natural extreme. Hair becomes fine and whole, often turning a glossy raven-black or an otherworldly silver-white. Eyes become clear and sharp. Even their teeth straighten and grow strong. This newfound beauty is cold, distant and irresistible.

The emotional transformation an Abyssal undergoes at the moment of Exaltation is no less significant. Upon taking the Last Breath, the taint of death poisons the Abyssal's hun, the higher half of his soul, devoted to rational thought and the higher emotions. Bleak humors, dour thoughts and unwholesome fantasies infect the Abyssal's mind. Dead bodies no longer revolt, and ghosts no longer inspire fear. Shadowlands no longer seem dreary or forbidding. The Underworld is no longer the bleak undiscovered country whence no traveler returns. Even death doesn't seem so bad now that the Abyssal has stopped short at its threshold. In that moment, most Abyssals finally realize just how much terror and anxiety ruled their mortal lives, and they release those burdens with tremendous relief.

Confidence flows into them, along with a sense of superiority over those mortals who still cling so fearfully to life.

What Abyssals gain in self-assurance, however, they lose in other areas. The simple pleasures they enjoyed in life now seem remote and juvenile. They can still eat and drink, but the lazy pleasure of a full stomach no longer holds much appeal. They take no joy in others' happiness as mortals do (however rarely). Burning hatred that gave them purpose in life now cools to aloof disdain. Attachments they held to spouses, children, siblings, parents and friends now seem pointless and distracting. Abyssal Exalts don't lose their capacity for emotional extremes, but the circumstances that bring them out can all change. An Abyssal might weep at the beauty of a sunrise, but he does so only because he knows it gives false hope to a rebel kingdom he's about to conquer. An Abyssal might applaud at the end of a theatrical performance well executed, but he does so only because he appreciates an irony in the story that the living will never understand. He might laugh at the last joke of a dying rival, but he does so only because he's so relieved his foe has finally let go of his fear of death. He might lash out in a rage at his subordinate ghosts, but he does so only to recoup the self-esteem his domineering Deathlord master stripped from him. The Abyssal's human emotions don't go away, they just emerge for different reasons.

VOICES OF THE NEVERBORN

Although it is not yet widely known among the Deathlords, another psychological change overcomes all Abyssal Exalted when they take the Last Breath. From their moment of choice until the end of days, the voices of the Neverborn whisper in their souls. Every Abyssal mind receives these signals, but not every one can translate them into meaningful information. Some deathknights experience these whispers as an incoherent river-rush they must dam up and release only under specific conditions, such as during meditation, in the throes of ecstatic climax or at the red peak of battlefield frenzy. To others, the whispers become an open connection to a single Neverborn lord. A lucky few deathknights hear the whispers only periodically, and only when their masters need something important done immediately.

These voices can aid a deathknight by providing insight into some mystery of the Underworld or by showing an Abyssal how to keep his Neverborn overlords best pleased. They can also become problematic. For instance, the Neverborn care nothing at all for the petty schemes of the Deathlords, so they have no qualms about ordering deathknights to perform tasks that oppose those schemes. They likewise care nothing for rivalries or enmities between Deathlords or their deathknights. Therefore, when they order several faithful deathknights to see a certain goal accomplished, it doesn't matter to them that the deathknights hate each other or have worked against each others' masters for years. If the opposing deathknights work together to achieve the goal, that's fine. If they sabotage each

ABYSSAL VIRTUES

The Four Virtues are woven into Creation as tightly as the Five Elements, and the Neverborn could not sever their Chosen from that subtle quaternion. Abyssal Exalted can channel Willpower through their Virtues just like any other Exalted can, and they can find their Virtues challenged or conflicting. Still, the Black Exaltation gives deathknights a somewhat different interpretation of these fundamental concepts.

Compassion: Like other Exalted, deathknights use Compassion to understand the thoughts and emotions of other people—something the Black Exaltation can make difficult, especially when dealing with the living. Loyal deathknights need Compassion to get along with the people they manipulate, even if it's only to manage a pleasant smile while they ask for directions. Renegade Abyssals need Compassion to remind themselves that people matter and that they left the Deathlords' service for a reason. Loyalist or renegade, some Abyssals consider themselves highly compassionate people. They end suffering through the gift of death.

Conviction: The Abyssal Exalted need to believe in their cause, or some cause, anyway. Renegade or loyalist, it's how they live with being a monster. The Deathlords ask their minions to do terrible things; Conviction helps a deathknight carry out these commands. And yet the Deathlords do not want too much Conviction in their deathknights, lest their servants value Oblivion more than obedience. Renegade Abyssals might find some other mission or ideal with which to justify their existence, serving it with all the fervor that they can.

Temperance: Prudent self-control matters a lot for Abyssals. Like other Exalted, deathknights need to resist both temper and temptation. When your Deathlord sends you to find out what the scavenger saw in the tomb he explored, killing everyone in town in a fit of pique can make your mission harder than it needs to be. Renegades need to keep their cool too, when people they hoped to protect react with fear and anger... or to remind themselves that sometimes, the best way to care for mortals is to leave them, no matter how much you want to stay.

Valor: Most Abyssals find this the easiest Virtue to follow. Whether loyalist or renegade, the bitter ironies of their existence fade away in battle. Deathlords, however, would prefer that their minions not be so brave as to consider defiance...

other and compete viciously to achieve the goal, that's fine too. The Neverborn care only that their servants accomplish their goals.

ESSENCE

Abyssal Exalts are alive, but they do not respire the living energy of Creation. Their Exaltations absorb the Essence that moves in the Underworld, flowing inward from the far fringes to swirl and disappear into the Mouth of the Void. Abyssals' souls are attuned to the way that necrotic Essence moves and feels. In Creation, the Essence moves all wrong. It flows the wrong way, making the Exalt feel like a furry animal being petted in the wrong direction. It's effervescent and cloying at the same time, making an Abyssal's skin crawl. It's in every way antithetical to the pure, icy, sterile Essence of Oblivion.

If, therefore, an Abyssal tries to meditate and respire the Essence of Creation, he only manages to make himself feel edgy, distracted and slightly sick. Direct sunlight compounds this nauseating discomfort; too much sun can wrack some Abyssals with thundering headaches. Some deathknights even claim they can sense an ancient voice rebuking them just beneath the threshold of their perception. Less fortunate deathknights don't feel that sense of condemnation when exposed to direct sunlight, but instead feel lost and disconnected—as if they were wandering in a fog with only a faint voice trying in vain to direct them to an unknown destination.

To overcome these disorienting, debilitating effects, most deathknights adopt the trappings of the dead and the Underworld when they venture into Creation. They wear funeral shrouds and adorn themselves with skulls and bones, whether actual articles of bone or skeletal images in their clothing and jewelry. Abyssals often use expansive tombs or untended graveyards as their bases of operations in Creation. They decorate their mausoleum domiciles in dried flowers stolen from gravesites, or the fallen, dead leaves of autumn. They keep bats in silver cages (perhaps trained to carry messages), admire black vipers in stained terrariums, and occasionally carry large spiders with them on a shoulder or among their possessions. When they travel as heralds for their Deathlords, they hire a train of mourners to follow and wail their misery. They dress all in black or all in white. They sleep in coffins. They wear leather plague masks with cruel beaks and staring crystal eyes. They cool themselves with folding fans made of bone and human skin. Any affectation or adornment that would remind an onlooker of death, the grave, the Great Contagion or the Abyss itself suffices. Such dreadful trappings help an Abyssal to center himself and align his Essence in a more comfortable way. They do not allow him to respire Essence in Creation, but they do eliminate the annoying discomfort that being in Creation inflicts on him.

In shadowlands, as in the Underworld proper, these undermining sensations fade regardless of how the Abyssal adorns himself. Within such places' borders, Abyssals can finally relax, meditate and respire

Essence. That Essence is the Essence of Creation, but it is at least oriented properly as it flows down into the Underworld.

The only other way a deathknight can take in Essence in Creation is to steal it from a living person. To do so, the Abyssal must drink the person's blood, eat the victim's flesh or steal his breath. Taking Essence thus is an act of violence that converts the chaotic energy of living Essence into a form more suited to the deathknight's tastes.

TWICE PARIAHS

In Creation, Abyssals grow uncomfortable and sick. Creation weakens them on a fundamental level unless they swath themselves in paraphernalia of the grave. Doing so centers them, but it makes them more intimidating and unpleasant (to say the least) to the mortals around them.

Abyssals feel more at home in the Underworld, where they are praised as heroes and holy champions—but they do not really fit in there either. Despite appearances, Abyssals are very much alive, which makes them stand out from their bleak Underworld surroundings. The dead step lightly around them, as wary mortals do around wild animals. Deathknights' vitality makes them seem unpredictable and potentially dangerous to the staid, conservative, unchanging dead. (The authority figures the deathknights represent do not set ghosts' minds any more at ease either.) Abyssals fit in most in shadowlands, since they are caught between life and death in a manner similar to their surroundings. Yet the denizens of the realms on either side of a shadowland tend to look askance at their in-between neighbors, fearful of what influence the opposite realm might exert through the shared territory.

If the Neverborn did not plan this doubled sense of exiled desolation, it certainly serves their purpose. If a deathknight does not feel welcome or wanted in either Creation or the Underworld, she will have no qualms about seeing it all slip away into nothingness. Her true home is Oblivion.

POPULAR CONCEPTIONS

The creation of the first deathknights happened only a few years ago. Nevertheless, enough time has passed since their debut in Creation that opinions about them begin to circulate. Likewise, the deathknights hold their own opinions about those who inhabit Creation and its associated realms. Much of the deathknights' information on their opponents comes directly from the Deathlords, though, which flavors its authenticity.

THE DEATHLORDS AND NEVERBORN

The name the Deathlords chose for their new agents sums up their opinion of the Abyssal Exalted. The Abyssals are the Deathlords' knights, their champions, their subordinates. These heroes of Oblivion owe fealty to the Deathlords and could never possibly surpass them.

That's the optimistic view. The pessimistic view holds that the Abyssal Exalted could someday match the power the Deathlords wielded as living Solar Exalted in the First Age. When that happens, they could do away with the Deathlords at the behest of the Neverborn. For this reason, the Deathlords are careful either to sate their successful deathknights with effusive praise and rewards for jobs well done or to break their spirits with harsh punishment for even the smallest failures. (Whichever—or whatever mixture of both—suits the Deathlord's temperament.) Their paranoia also accounts for why the Deathlords always keep some of their tainted Abyssal Essences locked away in reserve in their Monstrances. They don't want to put too many potentially rebellious deathknights into play at once.

The Neverborn, however, have no fear of the Abyssals' promise of great power. They remember the great powers of the Solars that slew them and exiled their brethren. The Neverborn count on that power to end the world. The Abyssal Exalted are not yet anywhere near as powerful as the Deathlords, so the Deathlords remain the Neverborn's chief servants... for now. When the Abyssal Exalted come into their full power, the Deathlords will learn whether their own masters still think they are useful.

For now, a majority of deathknights don't understand enough about the Deathlords and Neverborn to have more than a simplistic opinion of them. The Deathlords are the unassailable sovereigns of the Underworld who rescued them from death and gave them power beyond imagining. The Neverborn are the remote horrors to whom even the powerful Deathlords must answer. Most deathknights don't know the true origin of their Exaltations or the Deathlords' history of power and madness. They know all they need to know, so that's enough for now. Only those rare few deathknights who have been sorely abused by insane Deathlords—or those fewer still who immediately regretted their choice as soon as they truly understood what they had become—care to examine their relationship to their masters in greater detail.

SOLARS

Most Solar Exalted don't know what to think about the Abyssals, because they've never met one or even heard of them. Hardly any of them know the greater goal of the Deathlords. Most Solars have Exalted only recently and are still learning what the hell's going on.

Solars who face Abyssals find themselves of roughly equal power levels one on one, though they may be

daunted by the resources the deathknights have available. Where Solars often act alone and live on the run, scrounging up what equipment they can, deathknights are given weapons and armor and even armies to command. Those Solars who aren't intimidated by the disparity of power might be forgiven if they swallow a pang of envy. Not that any of them want to be deathknights, but... it would be nice to have someone train you and arm you and give you an army.

What most troubles Solars, though, is that they don't understand the nuances of how they resemble deathknights and how they differ. They don't know if Abyssals are what dead Solars become. They don't know if a Solar can become a deathknight (or vice versa), or how easy the conversion process might be. Some might mistakenly believe that Abyssal Exaltation is just as natural as Solar Exaltation, only representing some opposing value.

As for the Abyssals, their Deathlords warn them not to underestimate any Solar Exalted who confront them. Solars are powerful and dangerous, most deathknights are told, and often too idealistic for their own good. Fortunately, most Solars are also young enough to still think like mortals and don't appreciate what power they truly possess. For this reason, many deathknights hold Solars in contempt or reserve a distant pity for them. Some of them also find that not all Solars are as idealistic as their masters fear. A rare few prove themselves amenable to cooperation and even fraternization. When deathknights find Solars like that, they keep an eye on them in the hope of one day converting them to the cause of Oblivion—or using them to break the curse of the Black Exaltation.

LUNARS

Deathknights represent a clear threat to the Thousand Streams River and everything else the Silver Pact holds dear. Where the Lunars want to make Creation stronger by any means necessary, the Abyssals want to tear it all down. As more Lunars face off against deathknights and survive to share their experience with their peers, though, the eldest see in the Abyssals' abilities similarities to what the Solar Exalted can do. Those similarities are superficial, true, but even that resemblance makes the Lunars uncomfortable. They know the Lawgivers have returned, but they also understand how mad and dangerous the Solars became when the Dragon-Blooded rose against them. The Lunars wonder if, perhaps, the Solars' madness and the centuries they spent elsewhere twisted their reincarnated souls into these new and terrible forms.

Most disturbing of all, a few Lunars felt... drawn... to a deathknight they met, the same way their elders say each Chosen of Luna once partnered with a single Chosen of the Sun. They *know* it's wrong—everything about the Abyssal Exalt repulses them—but they still

feel that connection, a horrible mixture of love and hate. And some Abyssals find themselves remembering other lives, when the savage trying to kill them was closer than their own heart.

Some of the Deathlords think that Lunars offer more of a threat to their deathknights than the Solars do. Lunars are better organized than Solars (which is to say, at all), and they take care of their own more than the returning Solars can. Deathlords who understand the Lunars' power counsel their deathknights accordingly and teach ways to undermine the societies the Lunars work so hard to create and defend, rather than attacking Lunar packs head on. Other Deathlords, however, still see Lunars as seconds-in-command like they were in the "good old days." Still others think of Lunars (especially Lunar elders) as nothing more than cowards and traitors who run and hide in the Wyld to fornicate with animals when things get too tough. These Deathlords instill their contempt in their deathknights or direct their deathknights to destroy anything a Lunar holds dear.

SIDEREALS

The Abyssal Exalted confound and confuse the Sidereals. They rarely know a deathknight is up to something until

the deathknight's plans unfold and damage the Tapestry of Creation. They can spot the similarities between Solar and Abyssal powers, but they have not yet completely worked out whence those similarities arise. (Of course, some Sidereals have already formed strong opinions on the subject.) They don't know what deathknights can do, how powerful they might become, or what damage they might yet wreak upon Creation. Nor can they predict how the existence of the Abyssal Exalted will affect the future. More so than the Fair Folk, whom the Sidereals have studied and fought for millennia, the unknown quantity the Abyssals represent unsettles the Chosen of the Maidens.

The Deathlords remember the Sidereals. Not all of them fully appreciate the Sidereals' role in the Usurpation, but they are paranoid enough that they don't trust the Sidereals anyway. More importantly, they know how much trouble the Sidereals have predicting what an Abyssal is going to do. The Deathlords rarely see the need to share with their deathknights what they remember about their erstwhile viziers unless they expect direct Sidereal interference. And of course, since the Deathlords have a distinct shortage of informants in Heaven, they know almost nothing about Sidereal plans. As a result, few deathknights learn anything at all about the Sidereals and their powers until after they survive a confrontation with one.



DRAGON-BLOODED

Most of the Dragon-Blooded see no difference between the deathknights and the Solars. Anathema are Anathema. They refer to the deathknight castes by the same epithets they apply to the Solar castes, which some deathknights now take as a badge of perverse pride. The Wyld Hunts give deathknights no more quarter than they give Solars. To the Scarlet Dynasty and Immaculate Order, the fact that a deathknight appears more powerful in a shadowland than in Creation—coupled with the fact that it seems better trained and better armed than most Solars—is only evidence that this particular Anathema has more experience in its evil. The result is the same: It has to die. Yet, just as some Dragon-Blooded leave their old lives behind to follow the Solar Exalted to glory, so too can depressed or desperate Dragon-Blooded be convinced to take up an Abyssal's cause. And some of the most ruthless or jaded Dynasts make deals with *anything* for the sake of power.

All Deathlords tell their deathknights that the Dragon-Blooded are dogs. Treacherous, weak, cowardly dogs who deserve to be scourged from Creation and driven howling into the Void. The fact that the Dragon-Blooded sit on Creation's largest stockpiles of Essence weaponry and First Age technology gives the deathknights pause (and infuriates their masters), but it doesn't fill them with fear. The Dragon-Blooded just have a temporary tactical advantage. Fortunately, it's one the Terrestrial Exalted barely understand how to use, and one that will make the deathknights that much more powerful when they take it for themselves.

If that weren't enough, many deathknights have reasons of their own to harbor no respect for the Dragon-Blooded. While Terrestrial Exalted are the most numerous and highly visible supernatural beings in Creation—the most powerful people most mortals know anything about—they received their power by chance, through an accident of birth. The deathknights *earned* their power. Something about them attracted the attention of a Deathlord from beyond the shroud of death, and when that power was offered to them, they chose to take it. Moreover, they worked hard to understand and develop that power, and they have progressed more in just a few short years than most Dragon-Bloods will in their whole lives. Self-aware deathknights understand this about the Dragon-Blooded, which inspires in them a cold hauteur. Anything a bitter, maniacal Deathlord might add after that is just validation of what the deathknight has already worked out for himself.

MORTALS AND GHOSTS

Considering how little chance the average mortal or ghost has ever to encounter a deathknight face-to-face, most of what the masses know about the Abyssals comes from propaganda. The Scarlet Dynasty, the Immaculate Order and other mortal authorities tell living people that Abyssals

are dangerous Anathema. The Deathlords tell their ghostly subjects that the Abyssals are champions of the ancestor cults and emissaries of respectful coexistence between Creation and the Underworld. And what the masses hear in the absence of contradictory evidence, so do they generally choose to believe.

Generally, that is. Some opinions do vary. Mortals who live in shadowlands claimed by Deathlords are more exposed to the Deathlords' propaganda, especially if a deathknight governs the shadowland. They see deathknights as baroque lords of both worlds, representing what the mortals themselves might become if they serve the Deathlords well. Ghosts who became ghosts recently at the hands of a deathknight's forces, however, might feel more inclined to believe in the opinions of the Dragon-Blooded. Older ghosts who feel that the Deathlords passed them over for advancement or otherwise cast them aside in favor of deathknights see the Abyssals as undeserving, hypocritical usurpers. (They committed the greatest sin of all by denying the finality of death at the moment of truth. Worse, the Deathlords *rewarded* them for it!) For the most part, though, unless mortals or ghosts see a deathknight in action firsthand, they tend to keep the opinion that's been fed to them.

The strident exception to the prevailing opinion in the Underworld is held by the nephwracks, the Oblivion-obsessed spectre-priests who devote themselves to the service of the Neverborn. Half of them believe that the Abyssals represent the perfection of the Neverborn desire for dissolution. These nephwracks worship Abyssal Exalted as saints of decay and avatars of the Neverborn's will. The other half of the nephwracks, however, see the Abyssals as misguided tools of the Deathlords living in denial of their true power and purpose. (This opinion is not much abused by the Deathlords' using deathknights to suppress uprisings of fanatical spectres in places where the Labyrinth touches their Underworld dominions.) Nephwracks can become valuable allies and ardent supporters of a deathknight's efforts, but they can also be treacherous, judgmental zealots who hold deathknights to impossible standards. Most frustrating of all, many nephwracks vacillate from one extreme to the other with no warning.

THE FINITE MISSION

When a dying mortal takes the Last Breath, he gives up his name and destiny in exchange for power and immortality. The excruciating ecstasy of the Black Exaltation is only the beginning of his transformation, though. He is not yet a deathknight. Before he can truly take on the finite mission to end Creation and the Underworld, he must undergo a period of indoctrination and training. Most of the time, this probationary period helps the Deathlords weed out those weak or wavering Abyssal Exalts who would become liabilities to the Neverborn's cause. It also helps them figure out which deathknights could threaten their own agendas or might one day try to cast the Deathlords from their thrones.

REMOTE ACTIVATION AND RECLAMATION

Before any indoctrination or training can begin, of course, a Deathlord must draw his newly Exalted Abyssal home. Ideal candidates for Abyssal Exaltation don't always stay conveniently in friendly shadowlands awaiting bleak destiny's call. In the years since the invention of Abyssal Exaltation, the Deathlords have devised several methods to reel in their recruits despite obstacles in both Creation and the Underworld. No method is perfect or foolproof, but fortunately neither is any counter-method devised against an imperfect technique.

Sometimes, a Deathlord can simply give a newly Exalted Abyssal directions to the nearest shadowland in his dominion. Watching from afar, the Deathlord can learn much about how the Exalt handles hardship during the uncomfortable trek through Creation. Such a wrenching solo journey can also help the new Abyssal work out the basics of his powers and accept that he no longer belongs in Creation.

Still, a Deathlord probably does not risk letting his new vassal twist in the wind for very long. If there's a shadowland within half a night's travel, the Deathlord might order the new Abyssal to wait while a squad of ghosts comes to escort him "home." When new Exalts are farther away than that, Deathlords prefer to send either nemissaries or other deathknights to retrieve them. Nemissaries suffice in most circumstances, but one or more deathknights might be needed to guide a new recruit through especially hostile territory. If time is short, a Deathlord might even pre-place a deathknight skilled in necromancy to hurry to the new Exalt's side, tear open a portal into the Labyrinth and return along that wicked path to the Deathlord's home in Stygia.

A Deathlord might even allow a trusted senior deathknight to bring the new recruit home through a rival's Underworld territory, if one of the rival's shadowlands provides the shortest route for the new Abyssal. Of course, commanding your deathknights to trespass through another Deathlord's dominion shows disrespect; letting another Deathlord get away with such trespass can cause a Deathlord to lose face among his peers. Deathlords might, however, grant each others' deathknights safe passage through their Underworld territories as symbols of recent alliances or as a show of willingness to build a new alliance.

BLASPHEMOUS INDOCTRINATION

Once a mortal accepts the Black Exaltation and makes his way to the Underworld, he is taken to Stygia, central city of the empire of the dead. The Deathlords might spend most of their time elsewhere in their far-flung Underworld dominions, but each comes to Stygia to welcome his new Exalts and impress them with the baroque grandeur of the world they rule. Many greet their shining black stars with opulent fetes and effusive adulation befitting the new heroes of the Abyss.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE ABYSS

Following that welcome comes a sermon on what the Deathlord in question expects from his deathknights and a primer on what the Neverborn believe and what they want—as the Deathlord sees it, anyway—and how to show them proper deference. While the Deathlords take different approaches to training their Exalts, they did work out a few basic principles that they all impart. The Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible and the Walker in Darkness—the Deathlords' leading theologians and theorists—codified the philosophy of the Abyss into five Understandings, each of which resonates with two of the Abyssal castes and corresponds to one of the cardinal directions of the Underworld. Each Understanding brings a student closer to true communion with the Neverborn. Memorizing the words of each Understanding and reciting them with full conviction is relatively easy; truly internalizing them can take many mortal lifetimes. Fortunately, most Deathlords believe that conviction is enough, and serving the Neverborn does not require true philosophical mastery.

ON UNDERWORLD CORRESPONDENCES

The correspondence of the five Underworld "elements" to the directions they represent, as discussed in the Understandings, is purely metaphorical. The Underworld has no Elemental Pole of Ash. In fact, it has no elemental poles, period (though death-tainted versions of Creation's elements dominate the Underworld's North, South, East, West and Center). The Deathlords linked the Understandings to five elements to help new Abyssals remember the philosophy... and because people who love systems and theories put everything into sets of five and devise correspondences between them.

THE UNDERSTANDING OF ASH

The Understanding of Ash corresponds to the North direction and the element of Air; it resonates with Day and Moonshadow Caste deathknights. It states: *The dead do not forget he who sacrifices for them.* Whether it be blood or material resources or time, any sacrifice a living person gives in the name of the dead empowers the dead. This principle sustains the ethereal economy of the Underworld and binds the living to the departed in chains of duty and responsibility. Such interdependence draws Creation closer to the Underworld and its own destruction; each burnt offering transfers a bit of Creation's Essence to the dead.

This Understanding resonates with deathknights of the Day Caste because, as emissaries into Creation, it is often their job to assure the living of its veracity. To them also falls the responsibility—either as missionaries or enforcers—to make sure that the living continue to sacrifice. The Understanding resonates with the Moonshadow Caste because it is often incumbent upon them to make sure that the dead uphold their end of this ancient bargain.

THE UNDERSTANDING OF BONE

The Understanding of Bone corresponds to the East direction and the element of Wood; it resonates with Dusk and Daybreak Caste deathknights. It states: *It is better to die than to live, better to be free of flesh than saddled with its imperfections.* Life is chaos constrained by brutal routines imposed by the dominance of the strong over the weak. The only fact on which the living can rely is that everything will change just as one grows old enough to appreciate the way things were. Then, whether the living adapt or cling to the old ways, the only thing they have to look forward to is merciless decline in health and power that ends the same way for everyone. Far better, then, to get one's death over with sooner rather than later, to don the purer shell of corpus, to become a citizen in a society that will not change significantly until the end of time. This Understanding resonates with the Dusk Caste because they bear the enviable power to grant the gift of sweet release from the imperfect mortal coil. It resonates with the Daybreak Caste because they know that the mind and the will are the true seats of the greatest power. Infirmities of the flesh only get in the way.

THE UNDERSTANDING OF PYRE FLAME

The Understanding of Pyre Flame corresponds to the South direction and the element of Fire; it resonates with Midnight and Dusk Caste deathknights. It states: *It is written in the stars of the dead that the living shall never triumph over the Neverborn.* The stars of the dead are wholly separate from those that shine over Creation, and never can one set of stars influence the other. Few can read the future in the stars above the Underworld, but their calculations all confirm this Understanding. Every deathknight must internalize and preach all five philosophical tenets, but this Understanding resonates most strongly with the Midnight Caste. It forms the foundation of their faith, assures them of inevitable triumph and proclaims the righteous superiority of their cause. It resonates with the Dusk Caste because in their martial prowess and strength is this Understanding's promise fulfilled.

THE UNDERSTANDING OF BLOOD

The Understanding of Blood corresponds to the West direction and the element of Water; it resonates with Daybreak and Day Caste deathknights. It states: *Mortals propel the downfall of Creation.* This Understanding is less a claim of superiority over the living and more a call to arms for the Abyssal Exalted. The downfall to which it refers is not the triumph of the Abyss, but the collapse of solid reality into formless Wyld. Sentient mortals, more than any other life form, inject chaos into the Primordials' Creation, and the Neverborn abhor that potential for chaos and the Wyld's return. Better, then, that mortals die and prevent that possibility. Daybreak Caste deathknights demonstrate a slightly skewed and literal interpretation of this Understanding, adapting the raw materials mortals leave behind at death

to empower the armies of the dead. Day Caste deathknights accept the Understanding's fundamental truth by observing the chaos of the living world firsthand as their masters' emissaries and spies.

THE UNDERSTANDING OF VOID

The Understanding of the Void corresponds to the Center direction and the element of Earth; it resonates with Moonshadow and Midnight Caste deathknights. It states: *There is no escape from the all-consuming mouth of the Void.* This Understanding forms the underpinnings of all the others. It is the first truth all Abyssals are taught and the one they must all honestly believe in order for the Neverborn to accept them—even if they secretly doubt all four other Understandings. This statement of inevitability is the ultimate truth, the only one that matters. It resonates with the Moonshadow Caste because it constitutes the one true absolute by which they swear and supplies the undeniable power that sanctifies their oaths. It resonates with the Midnight Caste because it, above all else, shores up their bruised and damaged faith when failure sets them back. They console themselves with the knowledge that no failure lasts forever. Any victory that defies the hunger of the Void only postpones the inevitable.

CATECHISM

The Deathlords vary widely in how they instill the foregoing philosophical tenets in their newly Exalted vassals (and they might leave the job to senior deathknights). One Deathlord might teach the Understanding of Void by cruelly casting prisoners into the Abyss. Another simply walks around the Mouth of the Void in the center of Stygia with the Abyssal in tow, pointing out all the places where the city unavoidably crumbles into the Abyss. Some Deathlords demonstrate the Understanding of Blood by opening necromantic scrying windows that show the chaos raging in war-ravaged kingdoms in the Threshold. Others might need only remind the Abyssal of horrible events in the recruit's mortal life and let those times of unpredictable danger speak for themselves.

The new Abyssal receives the lessons the Deathlord finds most effective as many times as it takes for the Understandings to sink in. In theory, the Deathlords can afford to wait for as long as it takes for the indoctrination to succeed, but their patience has limits. So does their masters'. If a new Abyssal is too thickheaded or willful to accept the basic catechism, it's more efficient just to get rid of him and Exalt someone else than to keep hammering away at his recalcitrance.

JUDGMENT

Each Deathlord (or deathknight adjutant) has his own style for teaching each of the Understandings, all modified to suit the temperaments and predispositions of the five Abyssal castes. They rarely spend much time on these initial lessons, though. It does not do to waste undue time rigorously training new Abyssals in the minutia of Underworld



etiquette or the expectations of necrofeudalism at this stage, because after the brief indoctrination period, the Deathlord must present his new Abyssal to his Neverborn master for judgment. This presentation occurs with as much or as little ceremony as the Deathlord pleases. The actual presentation is very simple, though.

When the Deathlord is satisfied that his new vassal comprehends the Understandings, he escorts the Exalt to the Mouth of the Void and down, down, down toward the darkness of the Abyss. At the precipice of nonexistence hang the tombs of the Neverborn. The Deathlord guides the Abyssal into the cracked tomb of one of his Primordial masters where the Abyssal is immersed in the Whispers of the Neverborn.

The Primordial oozes into the Exalt's mind and heart to test his comprehension of and belief in the Understandings of their cause. If the Primordial finds the Abyssal's devotion sufficiently pure, his soul is severed from the last of his destiny in Creation, which uncoils into the Abyss and disappears. As a token of the Abyssal's new fate as a creature of the Underworld, the Primordial gives the Abyssal a new name or title. (If the Abyssal is a Solar converted anew after the destruction of the Jade Prison, the Primordial incidentally lifts the Great Curse at this point as well.) If the Abyssal is

lucky, the Primordial then recedes like the tide, allowing him to leave. If not, the Neverborn horror enwraps the Abyssal in its unholy communion even longer, sharing fell secrets, imparting hideous wisdoms or granting oblique insights to which no once-mortal mind should ever be exposed.

At no point do the Neverborn question their Abyssals' *willingness* to accept their fatalistic mission. The Neverborn do not care whether an Abyssal wants to end Creation or plunge all of stable reality into the Abyss. Instead, they judge whether at her subtlest subconscious level—in her heart of hearts—an Abyssal believes that the Understandings are true. They assess the Abyssal's capacity to wreak tragedy and destruction using the power of a corrupted Solar Exaltation, and they gauge the strength of this new destiny to do just that. If the Abyssal's soul meets the Neverborn's standards for those criteria, the Neverborn accept him and release him to their Deathlords' management and care. The Exalt's free will doesn't enter into the equation because the Neverborn can't tamper with an Exalt's will. Independence is such a fundamental, intrinsic part of an empowering Exaltation that to remove that aspect would unravel the Exaltation into nothingness.

The last thing the Neverborn impart to an Abyssal is an understanding of exactly who his master is. The Deathlords

might give the orders, and the Abyssals owe them loyalty, but if ever a Deathlord's orders conflict with those of the Neverborn, the Neverborn take precedence. The Deathlords can certainly punish deathknights in creatively gruesome ways that redefine a soul's threshold of terror, but the worst thing they can do is cast a deathknight's Monstrance of Celestial Portion into the Abyss. Compared to what the Neverborn promise to do if the Abyssals ever defy *their* will, simple dissolution would be a blessing.

The Deathlords command the Abyssals. The Neverborn own them.

TRAINING

Once the Abyssal emerges from her awful communion with the Neverborn, she is released back to her Deathlord. As far as the Neverborn are concerned, the Abyssal is now ready to go out into Creation and begin the great work of destroying it. Like the Celestial Incarnae, the Neverborn leave the tedium of building peer communities and support networks up to the Exalted themselves. The Deathlords, however, have more productive ideas about how to prepare the Abyssal Exalted for their duties. Thus does the prospective deathknight's training begin.

Like the initial indoctrination, an Abyssal's training regimen varies by caste and by the tastes of his Deathlord. Each Deathlord has his own ideas about how best to inculcate and prepare his vassals—ideas derived from centuries spent ruling vast dominions in Creation and the Underworld. All Deathlords cover the same high points for all deathknights, though, in their own special ways. Basic training, however, often comes from experienced deathknights and trusted ghosts and nephwracks.

Basic training includes meditation techniques that enable Abyssals to channel and manipulate their Essence most efficiently. They also learn how to alleviate their discomfort in Creation and to attune themselves to artifacts, manses and hearthstones. Abyssals learn Excellencies in this period, as well as other basic Charms and occasionally the fundamentals of useful thaumaturgical practices. New Abyssals study basic Underworld etiquette and learn the ways the living and dead interact with and influence one another.

An Abyssal's trainers do not neglect any finishing or refining education the Abyssal might need. If the deathknight doesn't know how to read and is terrible at math, or if he has no style and grooms himself like a barbarian, his Deathlord supplies appropriate tutors. If a deathknight lacks experience at combat, he learns enough armed and unarmed combat that he can defend himself, if only long enough to flee.

Specialized training follows next, focusing on caste-based expectations. During this period, Abyssals intensively develop and hone those abilities in which members of their caste typically excel. Those who become generals in the Deathlords' armies learn the special advantages and limitations of fielding zombies, ghosts and necromantic war machines. Warriors and assassins learn specialized fighting

techniques and supernatural martial arts. Necro-engineers learn anatomy and study surgical techniques. Oblivion's priests read and meditate on the nephwracks' hideous illuminated scriptures, as well as the teachings of Creation's prominent ancestor cults. Future diplomats and spies study the politics and economics of the regions of Creation and the Underworld in which they will do most of their early work. Necromancers in training study either in their Deathlords' grim libraries or attend other academies of the Black Arts, and undergo the Trials of the Void.

The final stage of education involves cross-training in skills that support the expectations of the Abyssal's caste but are secondary to those expectations. A spy or diplomat might benefit from knowing supernatural martial arts techniques, for instance. A general could do with a basic understanding of the necro-engineering principles by which his war machines function.

During this phase, new Abyssals also learn how to work with the Deathlords' other deathknights as a functional Exalted circle. They figure out how each others' strengths can shore up their deficiencies. If time is short—for instance, a new Abyssal is needed immediately to replace the previous fallen carrier of the same Exaltation—a Deathlord might skip this final phase of training. Everything else, from how far their Deathlords' dominions and influence spreads to how to navigate the Labyrinth, is left to the Abyssal to learn on the job.

ELEVATION TO KNIGHTHOOD

When the Abyssal completes her training, she comes to the heart of her Deathlord master's primary citadel for a final vigil and elevation ceremony. The vigil takes place in the hearthstone chamber of the Deathlord's citadel manse. For 12 hours, the Abyssal meditates on her duty to the Deathlord and the Neverborn. At the end of the vigil, the Abyssal pledges his fealty to his Deathlord and formally accepts his sworn duty to see Creation fall into the Abyss. He then rises, at his Deathlord's command, for his elevation ceremony. The ceremony can include anything from a somber baptism in funerary oils to an elaborate grand guignol marking the end of the Abyssal's mortal sensibilities. When it ends, the Abyssal can finally call herself a deathknight. Her master bestows on her any weapons, armor or other resources deemed necessary and releases her at last to pursue her tainted destiny.

DUTIES

All deathknights have two duties, which as often come into conflict as coincide or supplement one another. Their first and most important duty is to plunge Creation wholly into the Underworld and see the Underworld itself sucked down into the Abyss. They owe this service to the Neverborn to whom they sold their names and destinies. They swear their second duty to their Deathlords. Technically, a deathknight's duty to the Neverborn trumps all others, but in practice, a deathknight spends more hours of every day fulfilling his



duty to his Deathlord. In many cases, the things a Deathlord commands his deathknights to do at least indirectly supports the Neverborn's overall goal. When the Deathlords put their dreams of conquest or their petty rivalries ahead of the true mission, however, their deathknights must decide which duty to uphold and which to neglect.

CASTE

Abyssal Exalted share the same division of labor with the Solar Exalted whence their Exaltations derived. Yet, whereas the Solar castes describe the various means by which the Solars improve, pacify and defend Creation, the Abyssal castes represent methods to destroy the world. Their duty makes the Abyssal Exalted anathema to Creation. As such, some deathknights accept the caste epithets coined by the Dragon-Blooded during their historical overthrow of their masters. Of course, not all Deathlords indulge in this fad or even deign to acknowledge its existence. Many Abyssals prefer to use the original names that invert the names of the Solar castes, or coin other poetic sobriquets that do not give credit (however ironically) to the Dragon-Blooded.

DUSK CASTE

The Forsaken, or deathknights of the Dusk Caste, are unsurpassed warriors and military commanders. The Neverborn expect their Children of Ash to lead the forces of the dead into Creation through the shadowlands and crush the armies of the living. They will kill the world. If the Deathlords fail in their own duties, the Forsaken will overthrow them and cast them into Oblivion. In the fullness of time, when only the Abyssal Exalted remain, the warriors of the Dusk Caste must carry out the harvest of their Exalted peers' souls, culminating in their own self-sacrifice as they cast themselves into the all-consuming Void.

In the meantime, the Children of Ash serve at the pleasure of the Deathlords. They lead the Deathlords' armies of conquest, striving not only to expand shadowland regions in Creation, but to strengthen and defend their masters' holdings in the Underworld. When a Deathlord's forces are besieged by a rival's ghost legions or a nephwrack's horde of insane zealots, it falls to the Dusk Caste to lead the defense. As lone warriors, these deathknights serve as their lords' champions and occasionally their bodyguards—especially when the Deathlords must go undisturbed in order to accomplish some tremendous feat of necromancy or when they have exhausted their reserves of Essence in doing so. Dusk Castes from the first wave of deathknights also protect those more recently Exalted and train them in the nuances of Underworld warfare.

MIDNIGHT CASTE

The Blasphemous, or deathknights of the Midnight Caste, are the holy spiritualists of the Abyss. The Neverborn expect their scions of Resplendent Darkness to prepare every sentient soul for its final dissolution in the Void. They preach the philosophy of the Abyss to the living and the dead, spreading its five Understandings far and wide. If the

Deathlords fall short of their obligations, the deathknights of the Midnight Caste must either remind them or strive to punish them for it. At the end of all, when none but the Abyssal Exalted remain and the warriors of the Dusk Caste raise their blades, the voices of the Midnight Caste must assure every heart that the impending sacrifice is the only righteous course. To prove this, they must become the first to offer themselves to the slaughter.

Before that grim day arrives, the duties the Deathlords ask of the Midnight Caste take precedence. In the Underworld, the Midnight Caste bolster and spread the rightful authority of the Deathlords—whether to recalcitrant ghosts, doctrinally misguided nephwracks or other deathknights suffering crises of faith. As long as the Deathlords obey the will of the Neverborn, the Midnight Caste uphold their suzerainty.

Scions of Resplendent Darkness spread this brand of piety in Creation as well, though primarily to the citizens of shadowlands claimed by the Deathlord they serve. More importantly, though, deathknights of the Midnight Caste teach mortals the proper respect for and veneration of the dead—which ultimately empowers the Deathlords—and help the living to accept the simple fact that they too must die someday. And once the living finally come to accept that, they'll realize that there's no point putting off until tomorrow what could just as well come today. When new Abyssals are Exalted, the Deathlords often assign their Midnight Caste brothers and sisters to instill in them the five Understandings that guide their new existence.

DAYBREAK CASTE

The Unclean, or deathknights of the Daybreak Caste, are savants of the Underworld's forbidden secrets. The Neverborn expect these Shadows of the Abyss to devote their Essence-empowered intellect to finding new techniques of destruction. They must wreck the Calendar of Setesh that gives time and change to the Underworld. They must design weapons powerful enough to destroy even the Deathlords when their hour comes around at last. Come the end of days, when none but the Abyssal Exalted remain, the Daybreak Caste will convert the broken Games of Divinity into the mechanism that shatters the last of the Underworld and feeds it into the Abyss. Only when that last great work is done can they surrender to the might of the Dusk Caste.

In preparation for that day, the Deathlords put their Daybreak Castes' minds to good use. They train these deathknights in necromancy, sorcery and lore that Creation has long since lost. Daybreak Caste deathknights use what they learn to help design and supplement their masters' arcane defenses, and invent new necrotechnology beyond the imagination of the ultimately stagnant Deathlords. Newly Exalted Abyssals rely on their predecessors in the Daybreak Caste to round out their education after the Last Breath. The Shadows of the Abyss most often end up teaching their newest peers how Essence flows in Creation, in the

Underworld and between the two, as well as the unique physical and metaphysical properties of shadowlands, ghosts and the Labyrinth.

DAY CASTE

The Wretched, or deathknights of the Day Caste, are Oblivion's sappers and assassins. The Neverborn expect their Children of Blood to weaken and sicken Creation before the armies of the dead march, ensuring Oblivion's conquest before the first overt blow is struck. When the Midnight Caste cannot shout down the fools who spread false hope, the Day Caste must silence those optimistic voices. When the Celestial or Terrestrial Exalted stand up to unbalance the conflict between the living and the dead, the Day Caste level the playing field again. If necessary, the Day Caste must harry the complacent Deathlords from their places of power, severing the bonds that allow those ancient ghosts to cling to their existences. At the end of time, when only the Abyssal Exalted remain, their final duty will be to make sure that no deathknight defies Oblivion at the last minute. One must remain, hidden and vigilant, until even the last of the Dusk Caste gives himself to the Void. Then that one will follow, and all will be at peace.

Until that one is chosen, the Deathlords find plenty for the Day Caste to do. They use the Day Caste as spies, enforcers and saboteurs in the Underworld and abroad in Creation. No deathknight ever feels truly comfortable in Creation, but the Day Caste have the least trouble at hiding their presence while they work their masters' will. (Seeing how frequently these Abyssals must act in Creation, they consider the "Wretched" appellation particularly appropriate.)

The Children of Blood also find plenty of work in the Underworld. They are their Deathlords' secret police—the fearsome, mysterious enforcers of their masters' malignant will. These deathknights keep tabs on the activities of their masters' rivals. If a rival develops some unique advantage over the other Deathlords, Day Castes see that she either loses that advantage or finds it more trouble to maintain than it's worth. As regards new Abyssal Exalted, it falls to the Day Caste to retrieve them quickly and safely after their Last Breath—either from Creation or from a shadowland occupied by another Deathlord.

MOONSHADOW CASTE

The Deceivers, or deathknights of the Moonshadow Caste, are manipulators working the will of the Neverborn. The Neverborn expect their Children of Dust to bind all the dead together toward a single unity of purpose. Having done so, they make sure that when any one party thus bound commits himself to Oblivion, all parties find themselves obligated to do likewise. If the Deathlords truly break faith with the Neverborn, Moonshadow deathknights will expose them and call for the wayward ghosts' swift punishment. When nothing else is left but the Abyssal Exalted, the Moonshadows must make the Dusk Caste swear to raise

up arms against each other and take the final Day Caste's oath to submit to Oblivion when his vigil ends.

Believing that time is nowhere near, if it ever comes at all, the Deathlords set their Moonshadow Castes to more productive tasks. In shadowlands, the Moonshadows arbitrate when conflicts arise between the needs of the living and the dead. When the living can be convinced, coerced or tricked into serving the needs of the dead, the Moonshadows make all the necessary arrangements. When the Exalted among the living (especially Solars) find themselves at loggerheads with Abyssal Exalted, the Deceivers search for ways to defuse their conflicts—until the Abyssals are ready.

In the Underworld, Moonshadow deathknights serve many of the same purposes. They broker agreements between warring ghost factions or kingdoms, in the name of unifying the dead beneath the Deathlords. With them also lies the responsibility of resolving conflicts between Deathlords—even if all they actually do is observe the formalities and carry out the rituals of tradition while the Deathlords negotiate their grievances in person. When new Abyssals are created, Children of Dust educate the inexperienced Exalted in the social etiquette of the local ghosts as well as the ancient courtesies that must be observed between the living and the dead.

SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Living without regret as a deathknight requires utter devotion to the grand design of the Neverborn. The slain Primordials, however, grant no reward for a job well done except a harder job. Their dreaming minds pay more attention to the deathknight, expecting even greater success, and showing less tolerance for failure. The Neverborn whisper ever louder and ever more insistently in the minds of their most powerful Exalted, urging them on to the next conquest.

Unfortunately, where the Neverborn fall short in praise and appreciation, they more than make up for that deficiency in punishment for those who fail them. Caught in their death-dreams, the Neverborn *probably* don't notice small or scattered failures. Sooner or later, though, the Neverborn notice a deathknight who repeatedly fails to perform what's expected (*demand*ed) of him. The Abyssal's Neverborn lord then commands his presence. If the deathknight won't submit himself to judgment willingly, his Deathlord can probably make sure the Exalt answers the summons one way or another. Barring that, one of the deathknight's Exalted peers will almost certainly subdue and return with the wayward failure in order to curry favor or make up for a past failure of his own. If nothing else, eager hordes of nephwracks can swarm from the Labyrinth at the Neverborn's command to drag the recalcitrant deathknight to his rightful master's tomb.

Once the errant deathknight actually stands in the presence of one of the Neverborn, he is utterly at that

entity's... No, the Neverborn have no mercy. The tortures they inflict upon minions who displease them are unspeakable and lasting. There are no words to describe them.

NECROFEUDAL OBLIGATION

Aside from the constant demands of the Neverborn, a deathknight must also uphold her duties to her Deathlord. The punishment a Deathlord metes out for failure pales in comparison to what the Neverborn can do (or can make one do to oneself), but these ancient ghosts still can inflict appalling torments and cruelties.

In the Deathlord's favor, though, they understand how to vary the levels of punishment to fit the perpetrator's shortfall. The most egregious failures inspire hideous tortures that stop just short of sweet death, but lesser offenses might warrant only a callous roughing-up or a vicious humiliation, such as being whipped naked through the streets of Stygia. Small missteps might cost the deathknight nothing more than his pride as the Deathlord assigns him to some menial task (such as cleaning up his Ghost-Blooded necrosurgeons' teaching laboratory every day) until his master forgives him.

In the worst-case scenarios, however, a Deathlord can deliver a punishment whence there is no return and no hope of forgiveness. If a deathknight truly enrages his master, the Deathlord can hurl the doomed failure's Monstrance of Celestial Portion into the Abyss, destroying the deathknight utterly, Exaltation and all. Considering the limited supply of Monstrances, though, it is unlikely that the Neverborn entombed at the event horizon of the Void would let the Monstrance go past and not catch it. Whether that would be better or worse for the deathknight than Oblivion depends on why the Deathlord wanted so badly to be rid of him.

On the other hand, the Deathlords also know how to reward their servants for a job well done. The most generous Deathlords lavish priceless gifts on their most talented vassals and flatter them with praise. They can grant rare, powerful weapons, the likes of which Creation has not seen since the High First Age. They can reveal indescribably powerful spells of sorcery and necromancy to which no mortal has access. They can give a deathknight power, make him infamous, eradicate obstacles that are out of his league and show him pleasures that no one else in either world and a thousand years could ever make real. All they want is obedience and competent service... at destroying the world.

NOTORIOUS ABYSSAL EXALTED

The deathknight phenomenon, like the advent of the Solar Exalted, is still too new for legends about individuals to spread across Creation. Just as few desert nomads or Lintha pirates know anything about the Bull of the North, rare is the Haltan savant who ever heard of Walking on Laughter.

The most prominent among them have just begun to gain infamy in their separate corners of Creation. Unlike the Solars, however, the Abyssal Exalted also make names for themselves across the Underworld as the Deathlords' finest servants. The following deathknights stand out from their peers for a variety of reasons.

TYPHON, THE WINK OF THE STORM'S EYE

AMBASSADOR TO THE CONFEDERATION OF RIVERS

From a young age, the youth who would become the deathknight Typhon, Wink of the Storm's Eye, might have been destined for infamy and a life of treachery. His mother belonged to a secret society of dispossessed scions of Great Houses—patricians, mostly—called the "Thousand Fang Society," which sought to regain power on the Blessed Isle. The Society's great plan was to murder the Mouth of Peace and frame the Scarlet Empress for the deed. As the young patrician himself expected, counter-agents of the Realm's All-Seeing Eye quickly snuffed out this ludicrous nascent conspiracy, forcing the young man and his mother to flee for their lives. They ended up in Thorns with nothing but the clothes on their backs. In Thorns, the young exile persuaded his mother to let him perform the confidence schemes, unsavory favors and miscellaneous skullduggery that would restore their fortune. She acquiesced, and they made a reasonable home for themselves in the war-exhausted city. When the Empress disappeared, it seemed they could finally relax and stop living their lives in fear. The next year, the Mask of Winters conquered the city.

The young exile did not fear the dead, but his mother found them abhorrent. She had not, she insisted, defied the



Scarlet Empress and fled across the Inland Sea to become a peon in a dreary shadowland. Against her son's wishes and despite his arguments, she tried to organize a resistance movement against the Mask of Winters. She proved just as capable a revolutionary as she had been before. The Deathlord watched in amusement from afar as his soldiers slew her in her "secret" headquarters. Her son tried to defend her out of filial duty, but the Mask of Winters saw how half-heartedly he fought. The Deathlord called for a Monstrance and spoke in the mind of the young man who lay dying with a bone knife in his guts. Even at death's door, the young exile impressed the Deathlord with his clever wit and his keen grasp of certain uncomfortable political realities. The Deathlord offered this young man a place in his service, and the young man accepted.

As a deathknight of the Day Caste, the Wink of the Storm's Eye speaks for the Mask of Winters in the Scavenger Lands' Council of the Concordat. He calls himself "Typhon" because the locals find a name less ominous than his Neverborn-bestowed title. Typhon believes in Thorns and defends it passionately to those in the Council who speak out against it. He puts a brave face and a politic spin on the Mask of Winters' policies. When that fails to set his fellow Council members' minds at ease, he resorts to bribery, backroom deals or underhanded tricks.

Typhon looks like a fit man in his early twenties, with a shock of close-cropped black hair and a roguish smile. Defying early expectations, Typhon gained some popularity and influence in the Council through his skill at deal-making, favor-trading and influence-peddling, working out treaties and compromises that help both Thorns and the Confederation of Rivers. He even counts among his allies several Solar Exalts who respect the Mask of Winters' power and have made non-aggression agreements with the Deathlord. The Neverborn are less pleased with Typhon's immersion in mortal politics and high society, but so far the young deathknight manages to vent their necrotic ire in ways that leave his courtly reputation intact.

FALLEN WOLF OF THE CUTTING SEA

EXILE OF SKULLSTONE

The man now called Fallen Wolf of the Cutting Sea once had a hero's destiny laid out before him. In fact, he fulfilled that destiny by becoming one of the Solar Exalted. That fateful moment occurred during a diplomatic posting in Onyx, where the would-be hero was an aide to Abalone's ambassador and a low-ranking field observer for



the Wavecrest Archipelago's spy service. The young spy was meeting with a nemissary counterpart when the sun seemed to break through the perpetual cloud cover and a voice commanded him to accept no compromise with the unrighteous. He Exalted to the Zenith Caste, whereupon he destroyed the nemissary and sought to leave Onyx immediately. He fought his way to the port, wielding his newfound power awkwardly and drawing the notice of the Silver Prince's more powerful agents. Although he fought bravely, the novice Lawgiver was outmaneuvered and captured. His captors clapped him in Essence-stifling soulsteel manacles and dragged him before their master.

The Zenith Caste's bravery impressed and delighted the Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water, who vowed to make the Exalt his own. The Deathlord created a new Monstrance of Celestial Portion and imprisoned the unlucky Lawgiver within. Days passed, in which the Solar saw horrible visions of the Usurpation play out and felt the Unconquered Sun turning his back on Creation time and again. The Silver Prince spoke his gospel to his prisoner many times, wearing down the prisoner's resolve. He alternated this faux-religious browbeating with imaginative water tortures of every variety. In time, death seemed like the only escape, and the Solar almost took it. Only a dry, ancient voice that whispered from out of his dreams changed his mind. "Take the power," it urged. "In time, the Silver Prince too will fall." The Solar knew instinctively that this voice belonged to the Silver Prince's own Neverborn master, but he could resist no longer.

He surrendered to the Black Exaltation and gave his soul to the Abyss. It happened at the stroke of midnight in the middle of that year's Calibration.

After this transformation, the deathknight Fallen Wolf of the Cutting Sea proved an obstinate and infuriating servant. While the deathknight followed orders, he *willingly* followed only those that served the people of Skullstone and inflicted no outright harm on Skullstone's neighbors. He followed other commands only with much arguing; sometimes the Deathlord had to compel him using Charms or threaten his Monstrance to gain obedience. He likewise squabbled constantly with his fellow deathknights, all but coming to blows with the better-behaved Ebon Siaka. All that kept the Bodhisattva from destroying him outright was the fact that Fallen Wolf never incited the Skullfolk against their Silver Prince. In fact, Fallen Wolf worked hard (and very successfully) to reinforce the lies on which the Silver Prince built Skullstone society.

Eventually, however, the Silver Prince could take no more insubordination. He privately exiled Fallen Wolf, commanding him never to return to Skullstone without permission, lest he cast Fallen Wolf's Monstrance of Celestial Portion into the Abyss and have done with him. He then spread the word that Fallen Wolf had gone into the world to preach the good news about the Silver Prince and to strengthen ancestor cults in places that suppressed such righteous worship. This propaganda preserved the Deathlord's image at home while making sure that Fallen Wolf rarely receives a warm reception abroad.

Fallen Wolf now wanders the West, frustrated and ostracized, listening to the continuous Whispers of the Neverborn that chide and belittle him. He does good works where he can in spite of those whispers, suffering the inevitable black miracles and inflicting them on the land around him. He knows about the Silver Prince's secret Island Five—having learned about it from Ebon Siaka before his exile—but he feels powerless to do anything about it while the Silver Prince retains his Monstrance of Celestial Portion. If he can retrieve that horrid device (a wicked cruciform gibbet covered in soulsteel thorns and barbed chains) and spirit it away, that feeling will certainly change.

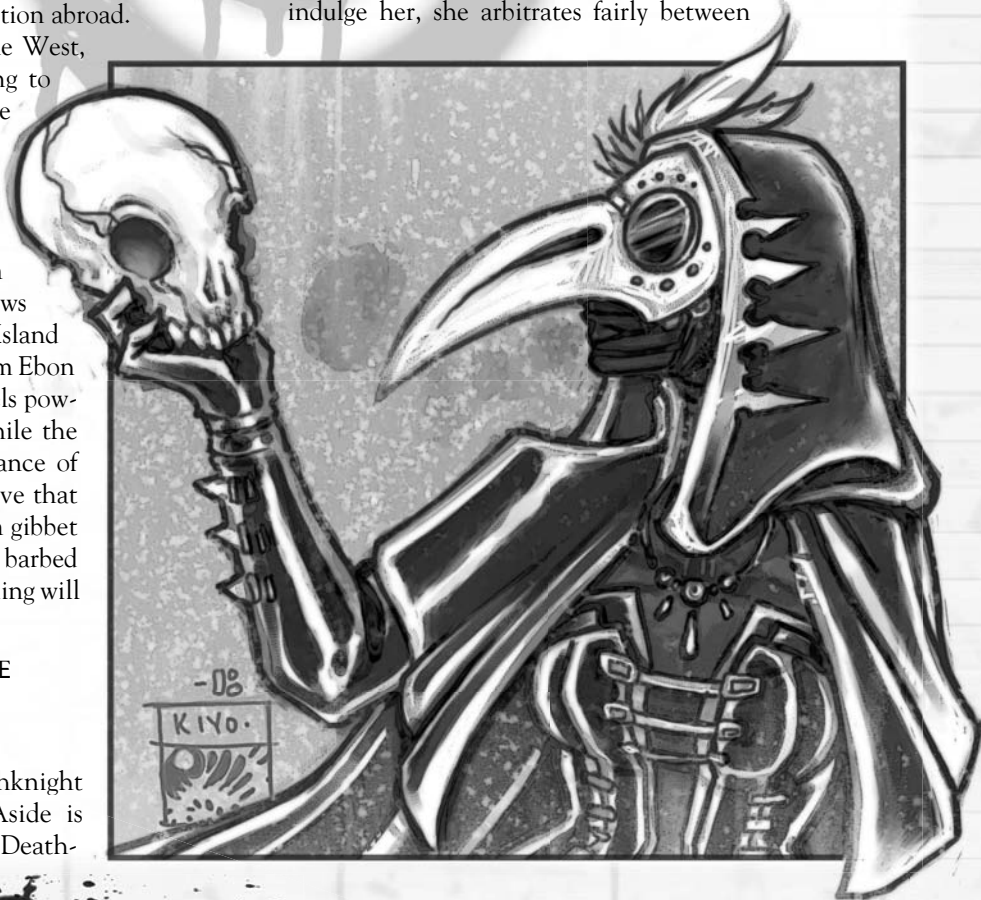
WEeping RAITON CAST ASIDE

ENIGMATIC ARBITER OF UNDERWORLD DISPUTES

The Moonshadow Caste deathknight called Weeping Raiton Cast Aside is either a liar working a cunning Death-

lord's obscure angle or a chilling reminder that even the Deathlords answer to a greater authority. Physically, she is an impressive, unsettling figure. She wears a Contagion-era corpse-collector's outfit, complete with red leather greatcoat and wading boots, a black leather cowl and an avian full-face mask with crystal lenses over the eyes and a firm beak on the front. (If it holds true to the historical standard, that mask is full of aromatic herbs to overpower the smell of the heaped dead.) The leather of her garments gleams with an oily coating that makes her invisible to plasmics and would repel insects in Creation. Her soulsteel mask covers her mouth but does not restrict her jaw or muffle her words. Beneath her mask, her face is a horrific collage of the ravages of Creation's worst sexually transmitted diseases. Her body is likewise terrible to behold, decorated in symmetrical patterns of running lesions and blisters that squirm as if tiny *things* writhed just beneath the surface.

Since her arrival in the Underworld, the deathknight has never returned to Creation. She spends her time making long trips through the Labyrinth from Stygia to each of the Deathlords' distant holdings. She always seems to arrive just when a Deathlord's deathknights are at each other's throats, when deathknights from different Deathlords come into conflict, or when two or more Deathlords clash over territory or other affairs of state. She presents herself as the voice of the Neverborn, representing the dead Primordials' interests in the conflict at hand. If the parties in dispute indulge her, she arbitrates fairly between



them, erring always on the side that inflicts the most damage on Creation. If one or both of the disputing parties politely refuse her intervention, she leaves.

If either party (or both) rebukes her or attempts to do her harm, however, Weeping Raiton levies a terrible punishment. She is a Void Circle necromancer and Celestial Circle sorcerer, as well as a master of Hungry Ghost Style and Snake Style martial arts. According to one Underworld legend, she stood her ground unarmed against a circle of the Mask of Winters' deathknights and destroyed two before the rest retreated to recover from their wounds. Another says that when the First and Forsaken Lion tried to expel her, she spoke a single word that made the rivets in his soulsteel armor tighten and burn, immobilizing him in excruciating pain for one whole day. Legends such as these have cropped up all over the Underworld for as long as Weeping Raiton has existed. Some falsely attribute the deeds of other deathknights to her, but most of the legends are unique and terrifying. Most of them can be neither verified nor disproved.

Weeping Raiton herself claims that she never swore fealty to a Deathlord and that the Neverborn themselves hold her Monstrance of Celestial Portion. Whether her Monstrance is one that a Deathlord cast into the Abyss to destroy it, or one that the Neverborn created for a Solar Essence they held in reserve from their servants, she does not say. Nor does she say which dead Primordial supposedly possesses her Monstrance. Her words give no indication of deceit... but that could just be because her hidden Deathlord master has successfully erased the knowledge of himself from her mind. Or it could be because she's telling the truth. None of the Deathlords admit to having Exalted her, and the only Deathlord who's supposedly suffered for mistreating her refuses to confirm or deny the alleged incident. (Just bringing it up in his presence enrages the First and Forsaken Lion beyond words.)

What truly disturbs people who investigate Weeping Raiton is that although the Neverborn do not verify her story, even in their ceaseless, whispered dreams, none of them has lashed out to punish her or to deny her claims. Therefore, the uncertainty that surrounds Weeping Raiton has protected her to date. If nothing else, it inspires denizens of the Underworld to at least act as if they take her claims at face value.

THE NEVERBORN THEMSELVES

Who can hope to comprehend the Neverborn? What can finite creatures understand about entities older than Time, whose souls lived outside their bodies and had souls

of their own, who created worlds simply by imagining their possibility? Who are dead, and dreaming, yet horribly aware of all things happening in Creation and the Underworld alike?

To find the Neverborn, one must descend the Mouth of the Void in the center of Stygia. That part is easy. The Twilight Castes of the First Age built two great stairways that spiral down the mighty shaft. One can also descend through the darkling layers of the Labyrinth. That is not so easy.

The tombs of the Neverborn, which are the Neverborn themselves, rest at the bottom of the Mouth, just short of Oblivion itself. Sometimes the tombs press close to the shaft, with only a few cramped passages between them. Sometimes they spread far apart so that miles of bare, flat stone separates each mountain-sized sepulcher. Other times, the tombs float freely, their bases infinitely diminished by the pull of Oblivion, forever falling but never moving an inch, constantly consumed yet never growing smaller. This nadir of the Labyrinth can change without warning. One minute you squeeze between mile-high walls of ebony stone, then you emerge on the balcony of a tomb floating in the Void, miles from its neighbors. The mausoleums of the Primordials themselves change shape, too. The vast stone masses shift with each new perspective, their endlessly piled arches, gables and porticoes appearing and disappearing as if the three dimensions of mortal experience were not enough to reveal their totality.

Like their servants, the Neverborn abandoned the names they carried in life. The annals of Heaven know the titles adopted by only three of the Neverborn: the Abhorrence of Life, the Perfected Principle of Consumption and He Who Holds in Thrall. Other names, such as Whose Whispers Chain, Queen of Suicides and the Speaker of the Final Silence might be alternative titles or separate entities. The subject is very difficult even for the wisest Sidereals to research.

Five of the tombs can be entered. The Black Nadir Concordat cracked the dreams of these Neverborn, forcing them to grant entrance to their bodies along with their thoughts. Those who enter the eldritch halls and chambers of a Neverborn's body experience the full power of the slain Primordials' will... and their hatred of their killers. The Deathlords and nephwracks do not know nearly as much about their dead masters as they imagine, but they know very well the hatred the Neverborn feel for the Exalted and the gods. That will and that hatred could destroy any creature who did not protect her mind with powerful magic.

CONFRONTING THE NEVERBORN

Each Abyssal meets a Primordial face to... well, architecture, at least once. Other Exalted might wish to encounter the Neverborn for reasons of their own.

Outside the calcified bodies of the Neverborn, characters stay relatively safe. Danger comes only from the spectres and stranger things that haunt the ultimate depths of the Labyrinth. Facing the Primordials themselves, however, anyone can hear their dreams with a successful (Perception + Occult) roll. A character needs the Whispers Background to make sense of it, though, unless the Primordial deliberately tries to make itself understood. They usually don't—they're asleep.

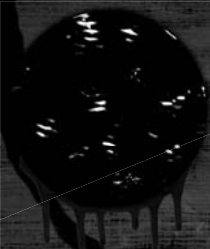
Return communication is possible using prayer (see **Exalted**, p. 132) or any Charm that enables communication directly to another person's mind. Characters can also combine the two methods. In this case, subtract the Essence minimum of the Charm from the difficulty of the prayer roll. Success means attracting the attention of the targeted Neverborn.

For the most part, the Neverborn transcend the trait system used in **Exalted**. Storytellers can use them to justify artifacts, events and powers that the game cannot easily define. The Neverborn have the power of Plot Device to set other events in motion. Nevertheless, the Exalted did kill the Primordials once, and have overcome them in other ways since then. Modern Exalted can attempt such feats as well. Storytellers should take the following as suggestions, rather than absolute rules: The Neverborn can do what you need them to do. Winning any direct confrontation, however, should be a tremendous challenge that tests the physical, mystical and moral strength of characters to the utmost—fully comparable to turning an Abyssal back into a Solar or persuading a Deathlord to turn against the Neverborn in full knowledge that the deed is suicide.

For purposes of social combat, treat the Neverborn as having values of 10 in every relevant trait: Abilities, Willpower, Essence, Virtues, figured static values, the works. They are unconditionally immune to unnatural mental influence, so characters who wish to force or trick boons from the Neverborn must obtain them through natural mental influence and social combat, forming or breaking Intimacies to the desired result. Of course, the Neverborn can use social combat right back, trying to crush or subvert the character's will.

Physically attacking the Neverborn is largely futile. Infused with Oblivion as they are, their soak is effectively infinite, though with a Hardness of only 20. At that, attacks deal only the minimum possible damage, whether through a character's Essence, the Overwhelming damage of a weapon, or fixed levels of damage such as from a Total Annihilation spell. At that, divide all damage by five (round down, to a minimum of 1). Most attacks just chip off a bit of stone to no purpose. A Neverborn has 100 -0 health levels, followed by a single Incapacitated level and 10 Dying levels. What happens then is up to the Storyteller.

Anyone who enters a Neverborn faces immensely greater danger if the Neverborn wakes up enough to notice him. The Neverborn cannot act physically, but they have nigh-limitless power over minds and Essence. They effortlessly crush the will of anyone who lacks the protection of a perfect defense against unnatural mental influence—and Deathlords cannot resist at all. As for what happens then, well, let the Storyteller exercise her ingenuity, from the perspective of a creature of infinite malice against Creation with an infinite power to reshape the victim's body and Essence. (Consider that what happened to the First and Forsaken Lion was merely a reprimand delivered to a slave the Neverborn still considered useful.) Such a character is effectively dead, barring interventions as incredible as defeating the Neverborn and forcing it to return the character's existence.



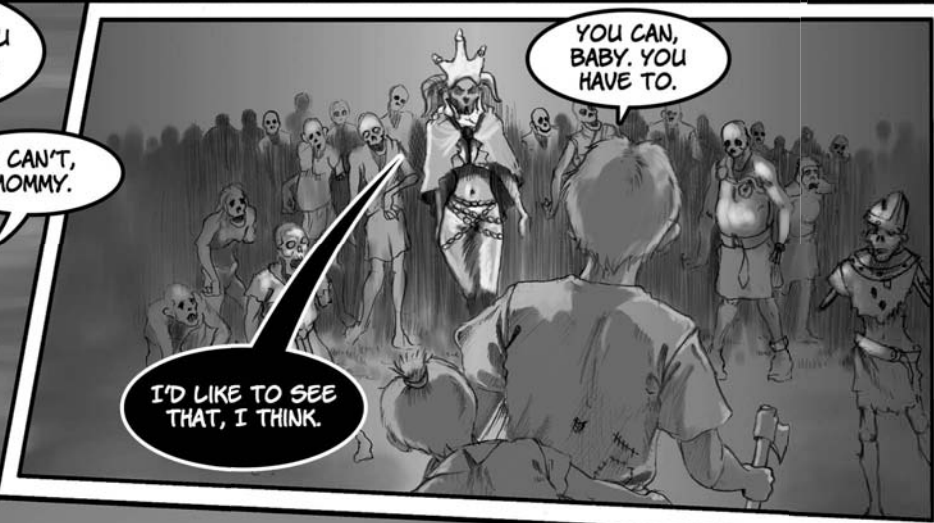


STAY BEHIND ME, HONEY.



LISTEN, IF ONE OF THEM GRABS ME, YOU CUT ITS HAND OFF. Y'HEAR?

I CAN'T, MOMMY.



YOU CAN, BABY. YOU HAVE TO.

I'D LIKE TO SEE THAT, I THINK.



NO... NO! YOU CAN'T DO THIS! YOU SAID WE WAS GOOD!

MOMMY...



YOU SAID IF WE WAS GOOD WE COULD LEAVE WHEN WE GREW UP!
WE WAS GOOD - YOU SAID SO! YOU SAID WE WAS FREE!

I TOLD YOU TO GO HOME AND REBUILD.
I DID NOT SAY YOU WERE FREE.





TELL ME, LITTLE GIRL, DO YOU WANT TO DIE?

DON'T LISTEN TO HER, BABY! DON'T LOOK AT HER!

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DIE IF YOU DON'T WANT TO.

IN FACT, IF YOU KILL THIS WOMAN, I'LL LET YOU LIVE.



SHUT UP! YOU SHUT UP!



DON'T YOU TALK TO—
AAAARRGH!

MOMMY?



YOU FILTHY... LITTLE... PIG!

WELL? YOU'RE NOT FINISHED YET.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DEATHLORDS

The Deathlords, masters of the Abyssal Exaltation, are the nightmares of Creation. Few outside the Underworld understood their true power until the Mask of Winters chose to reveal it at the city of Thorns. His dark Charms—which so resembled those of long-dead elder Solars—his puissant necromancy, and even the livery of his soldiers revealed the truth behind the Mask of Winters. He was the spectre of a long-dead Solar, now turned to the service of the Neverborn.

Or at least, so say those who know of such things, The Celestial Bureaucracy, the Five-Score Fellowship and the leaders of the Silver Pact all figured out that Deathlords are ghosts of First Age Solars, but Creation's mortals and the Dragon-Blooded haven't a clue. They know only enough about the Deathlords to fear them. Even the true number of Deathlords is a mystery. The Convention on Deathlords in Yu-Shan puts the number at 13 but does not even have names for them all. Perhaps

there more are hidden in the depths of the Labyrinth, obeying some bizarre edict of their masters, but only 13 are known to act in and upon Creation. Complicating matters, the various known Deathlords seem to delight in changing their names and even identities, using powerful shapeshifting abilities to conceal their agendas and confuse their enemies.

THE NATURE OF THE DEATHLORDS

Each Deathlord is a unique being, but all of them share certain common characteristics. In one sense, a Deathlord is simply a ghost of vast power. Saying that, however, is as much an oversimplification as saying that a Solar Exalt is simply a powerful mortal. The power at each Deathlord's disposal dwarfs that of any ghost not among their number.



TRAITS AND POWERS

All Deathlords have Essence ratings between 8 and 10. The formula for calculating a Deathlord's Personal Essence is $[(\text{Essence} \times 5)] + (\text{Willpower} \times 2) + (\text{highest Virtue} \times 2)]$. The formula for calculating a Deathlord's Peripheral Essence is $[(\text{Essence} \times 15) + (\text{Willpower} \times 3) + (\text{sum of all Virtues} \times 3)]$.

Deathlords usually have extremely high Attribute ratings. Every Attribute they consider important is rated 6 or better, while Physical Attributes can range as high as 15. They boast similarly high ratings in every Ability in which they hold an interest (up to 10, the highest definable rating, in the most prized Abilities).

ARCANOI

Each Deathlord has mastered most, if not all, ghostly Arcanoi. Some prodigies even invent new Arcanos Charms (or entire Arcanoi) that only they comprehend. This achievement alone would elevate a Deathlord far above a normal ghost, but these benefits represent only the *simplest* of their powers. Each Deathlord is also blessed with innate powers granted by their Neverborn masters. The following innate powers are common to all known Deathlords, unless otherwise specified:

Command of the Dead: The Deathlord can command any of the walking dead in her presence, overcoming the control of any rival necromancer. If two Deathlords try to control the same walking dead, the Storyteller rolls the Essence of each Deathlord, with the winner retaining control for the scene. The will of a Deathlord automatically seizes control of any walking dead commanded by any lesser necromancers. Using this power is a Speed 0 reflexive action. It costs five motes per activation in Creation but carries no cost in a shadowland or the Underworld.

Eyes of Oblivion: Mortals are no match whatsoever for Oblivion's favored servants. A Deathlord can instantly slay any single mortal in his line of sight with just the expenditure of two motes. A mortal hero with enlightened Essence (including Ghost-Blooded and God-Blooded mortals) can avoid this fate, sort of, through a successful Essence roll. The heroic mortal retains one Dying health level per success rolled for her. This power does not affect the Exalted.

A mortal slain thus always becomes a ghost. In the Underworld or a shadowland, the Deathlord's victim is bound to serve her slayer for 1,000 days. In Creation, she falls into the Underworld as a free ghost.

Feed on the Dead: As a reflexive, diceless action, the Deathlord can drain the Essence from any single ghost nearby. Each use of this power drains one point of permanent Essence from the ghost and grants the Deathlord three motes of temporary Essence.

Mutable Form: Each Deathlord can alter her physical form at will, taking the form of any human being or even any animal as small as a dog or as large as a large man. Changing shape in this manner normally costs 10 motes and one Willpower as a miscellaneous action. Some Deathlords have developed specialized versions of this power. Such variations are discussed under each Deathlord's individual entry beginning on page 53.

CHARMS

The Deathlords possess a dazzling array of Charms acquired over millennia of existence. Every Deathlord knows every Abyssal Charm in this book. They refined most of them. Any Deathlord probably takes the time (a day or so) to learn any new Charms invented by her Abyssal servants, if only for the satisfaction of knowing something her rival Deathlords don't.

Because of their pacts with the Neverborn, each Deathlord can use any Charms she knew during her life—*except* those that carry the Holy keyword (not that a Deathlord would ever willingly use such a Charm anyway). In most cases, the necrotic energy that now fuels the Deathlord perverts her Charms, causing them to manifest as their Abyssal equivalents, or at least gives any visible manifestation a deathly cast. This is not *always* so, however, especially in the case of Deathlords who were Eclipse Caste Solars in life and who had learned Charms associated with other Exalted types. Mercifully, only a few Deathlords appear to fit that category, and they appear to know only a few Lunar, Sidereal, divine or Dragon-Blooded Charms.

The Sidereals believe (or at least hope) that since the Deathlords reside outside fate, they cannot practice any Sidereal martial arts styles they remember from their former lives. Their hopes are in vain.

NECROMANCY AND SORCERY

All Deathlords have at least some skill with necromancy and sorcery. Most have mastered the Void Circle of Obsidian (the highest level of necromancy, available only to them and the Abyssal Exalted). None of them know *every* Void Circle spell, because each of them has invented a few that they never revealed to anyone else.

Most Deathlords also know sorcery spells from the Celestial Circle of Sapphire. Some of them seem to use sorcery from the Solar Circle of Adamant. In such cases, the spells might simply have been Void Circle spells that mimicked Solar Circle spells. Alternatively, that particular Deathlord might own some artifact that permits him to access the Adamant Circle.

OTHER

Every Deathlord knows a great deal about First Age technology—a great deal by the standards of the Age of Sorrows at least. Some of them know more than all of Creation's savants put together, and even more than the archives of Heaven. Some of them adapt their ancient lore into brand-new necrotech. They hold a near-monopoly on soulsteel, a magical material forged from the spiritual bodies of ghosts. The more souls each Deathlord sends to the Underworld, the greater her supply of that dire material grows.

Each Deathlord also dominates wide swaths of the Underworld. Some territories, they rule outright. Far larger areas pay them tribute in prayer-generated Essence, the Underworld's

iridescent jade, those artifacts the dead can make for themselves, and the ultimate commodity—ghostly slaves, ready to forge into soulsteel. If some Deathlords claim wider spheres of influence than others, it is only because they differ in their appetites for conquest and willingness to administer their territories.

DESTROYING A DEATHLORD

The most fearsome power of a Deathlord is simply his deathless nature. Ghosts, like other spirits, cannot die as living creatures do. When “slain,” a ghost usually reappears later at the site of her death, her burial or some other significant location. Ghosts can be destroyed permanently via the appropriate exorcism rituals, by necromantic attacks or by Charms such as Ghost-Eating Technique, but those techniques do not work against the Deathlords. Each Deathlord draws power from the limitless nothing of the Void. Throwing a Deathlord into the Mouth of the Void would probably kill him, but even that is uncertain (not to mention nigh-impossible to arrange). Anything less will cause the Deathlord to dematerialize and then re-form over the course of a year in his patron Neverborn's tomb.

So far, the only Deathlord to meet any kind of significant defeat in Creation has been Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers, and she was only brought low by metaphysical trickery rather than brute force. At the time, the Princess Magnificent used as her base of operations the shadowland now known as Walker's Realm near the city of Great Forks in the Scavenger Lands. The Deathlord sought to bring the people of Great Forks under her sway. In retaliation, two of the city's god-rulers, Spinner of Glorious Tales and Weaver of Dreams of Victory, fashioned a tale of her undoing. Part dream, part illusion and part reality, the tale told of a simple mortal who discovered the Princess's “secret weakness” and used it to destroy her. No one knows whether the gods' spell actually divined a true secret weakness (or even *created* it out of nothing) or simply persuaded the Princess that such a weakness existed. Regardless, the Deathlord fled her citadel in fear of her own destruction and has never again troubled the people of Great Forks.

Some savants who know the tale of Princess Magnificent believe that its lessons apply to more than just her own fate. They theorize that *all* of the seemingly invincible Deathlords have unique weaknesses, gaps in their armor that can destroy them. Of course, these savants lack any chance to test their theory. Discovering a Deathlord's bane (assuming it even exists) would be an epic task in and of itself. Perhaps the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears can only be slain by someone she truly loves. Perhaps the First and Forsaken Lion is fated to die only at the hands of a particular young child bearing a weapon of legend. Perhaps those who wish to defeat the Silver Prince him must show him how far he has strayed from the ideals he espoused in life, so that he chooses voluntarily to seek absolution in Lethe. Or maybe the Deathlords have no such banes, but spread tales to distract and delude their foes.

THEIR VIEW OF THEMSELVES

Deathlords share a few personality traits too. They are all extremely proud creatures—and why not? First, the Unconquered Sun chose them to rule Creation and gave them power to do so. Then, after the Unconquered Sun abandoned them and the Dragon-Blood betrayed them, the Neverborn invited them to join an even more exclusive caste and gave them even greater power. They have all but conquered the Underworld and expect to conquer Creation too—before they feed it to the Abyss.

The Deathlords also consider themselves the closest and most favored acolytes of the Neverborn. After all,

SO, ARE THEY ALL EVIL?

The short answer: Yes. The default assumption of **Exalted** is that each of the Deathlords is, by the standards of any sane and moral being, utterly evil. The ultimate goal of each Deathlord is the total annihilation of all life, no matter how prettily they describe the process to their Abyssal servants. Anyone who thinks they can appeal to the better nature of, say, the Lover, the Bodhisattva, the Bishop or the Lion will be sorely disappointed. Their malice is limited only by their desire to rule Creation or the Underworld before they destroy it. Any suggestion of forbearance, honor or even Realpolitik favor-trading is only a ploy. The Deathlords are nihilism incarnate.

But—and here's thing—they don't *have* to be. Each Deathlord was once a Solar Exalt, found worthy by the Unconquered Sun to smite the unholy and bring justice and peace to Creation. The Deathlords chose to reject that destiny and become unholy, but their original natures just might still be in there somewhere, buried deep inside a soul steeped in misery, revenge and despair. It's unlikely that anything could fan that tiny, guttering spark of humanity into a fire strong enough to awaken a Deathlord's long-forgotten self. If anyone could, though, it would be an Exalt—especially a Lawgiver who happened to carry within him the Exaltation once possessed by the Deathlord herself.

Such a redemption effort would be an extraordinary undertaking, every bit as difficult as figuring out the Deathlord's weakness in order to kill her. The Solar heroes would need the inner strength to meet the Deathlord's cruelty with compassion instead of a raised daiklave, as well as the wisdom and temperance to resist the Deathlord's attempts to corrupt or slay them. Even then, it might not work. In the hands of a good Storyteller, though, a redemption saga can give the heroes an epic story that lets them demonstrate the brightest and most noble attributes of the Chosen of the Unconquered Sun.

the Neverborn infused them with part of themselves. The Deathlords almost destroyed Creation once already, failing only because of a fluke. The Abyssals have the potential for great power but will never get a chance to realize that potential in full. Let the Neverborn whisper flattery to the deathknights. (It must be flattery, it cannot possibly be the truth...) The Abyssals are disposable servants whom the Deathlords intend to dispose of at the end of time, along with everything else, before taking their own plunge to Oblivion.

Now armed with potent agents capable of acting freely in Creation, each of the Deathlords pursues his or her own agenda for how best to bring about Creation's undoing. The Mask of Winters and the First and Forsaken Lion plot destructive military campaigns. The Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible seeks to turn all humanity toward the worship of death. The Dowager pursues annihilation through occult means with her mastery of the Well of Udr. The Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water quite literally seeks to trick the human race into embracing death as an alternative lifestyle.

Whatever their means or motives, each Deathlord has the same ultimate goal—to be the last thing in existence, to be the one who blows out the candle and closes the door behind him as all Creation ceases to be. For the Deathlords sincerely believe in the mission assigned them by the Neverborn. Some of them are slow in their plans, or do not even *have* a plan, but they genuinely intend to see Creation end. They just want to fulfill their most demented dreams of power first.

THE NINE DEATHLORDS

Described hereafter are nine of the 13 Deathlords known to be active in Creation. The remaining four are left for the imagination of individual Storytellers.

Like their Abyssal servants, Deathlords suffer the effects of Resonance (see p. 112) if they cling too closely to the vestiges of their prior lives, and that includes their names. (An integral part of swearing allegiance to the Neverborn is the abandonment of one's mortal name and identity.) Instead, they use descriptive epithets and titles, often of obscure derivation and enigmatic meaning.

Some Deathlords employ multiple names, as do their Abyssal servants. They might adopt pseudonyms so the hated Sidereal Exalted have greater difficulty tracking their activities. Other Deathlords change their names for idiosyncratic reasons. In defiance of their masters and their own natures, some Deathlords forged... inappropriate connections with the world of the living and were commanded to redefine themselves as punishment. Others simply change identities as part of some mad whim. Most notably, Eye and Seven Despairs maintains a completely separate identity as the Prioress of Bloody Sands, a fact unknown even to the majority of his deathknights.

SAMPLE SERVANTS

The descriptions that follow also describe the typical “servants” of each Deathlord. These servants include Abyssal Exalted. The descriptions typically list only a few of the Abyssals in each Deathlord’s employ, though. The remaining servants are presumed to be the players’ Abyssal characters. The description of each Deathlord’s typical servant is meant only to provide suggestions about how to create an Abyssal circle that fits in with a particular Deathlord’s milieu. Yet, as long as the Storyteller approves, nothing prohibits a player from creating an Abyssal character who defies the stereotype associated with each Deathlord’s servants. A brutish thug could serve the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears; a pampered dilettante could somehow end up in the hardened military ranks of the Legion Sanguinary.

Also, four Deathlords are left as nameless blank slates. If the players and Storyteller prefer, their Abyssal characters could serve a Deathlord created by the Storyteller, with these nine Deathlords as their master’s rivals.

THE BISHOP OF THE CHALCEDONY THURIBLE

Other Names: The Shining One; The Great Diacolate of Silent Vespers; Lord of the Hidden Tabernacle; High Priest of Oblivion

The Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible is one of the more devoted servants of the Neverborn. Unfortunately, his devotion often impedes his effectiveness. The Deathlord doesn’t just promote ancestor cults and death worship over the rest of Creation’s religions, he genuinely believes he can destroy Creation through pure theological argument. The Bishop hopes to persuade all of Creation’s mortals to march into the Void in order to experience the joy of nothingness. Other efforts to gain power—war, magic, political subversion, and so on—come second to this religious effort.

At the core of the Bishop’s peculiar theology lie his own views on Oblivion, a philosophy called the Shining Path. He seeks to encapsulate his doctrine into a set of scriptures called the *Tome of Endless Night*. According to these scriptures, the history of life consists of four ages. In the First Age (as the Bishop recognizes it), there was random chaos within the untempered Wyld. In the Second Age, the Primordials forged Creation and fashioned life. Their constructs were flawed beings, however, who lived out lives of pain and suffering before dying, only to reincarnate into new beings who lived lives equally full of pain and suffering. In the Third Age, some of the more compassionate and enlightened Primordials sacrificed themselves to the Exalted to create the Underworld

and open the door to the Mouth of the Void. The foolish Solars arrogantly believed that they could slay the creators of all things, but those Primordials who became the Neverborn actually allowed themselves to be slain in order to give Creation the chance to free itself from the cruel burden of life.

Soon, Creation will enter its fourth and final age as all life enters the Void, willingly or not. The comforting embrace of Oblivion will erase all pain, end all unhappiness, scourge all regret. Sins will no longer exist, for there will be none alive to commit them. The rich man and the poor man will be as brothers, for there will be no wealth to hoard or covet. All will be at perfect, infinite peace. All will be one with Oblivion. All will be good.

Unfortunately, for all the Bishop’s devotion, his actual progress is slow. The Deathlord has spent centuries refining and recording his philosophies. Today, the *Tome of Endless Night* extends to hundreds of volumes. Some of the Bishop’s writings are so elegiac and moving that they became the doctrinal foundation for ancestor cults across Creation. Many more are gibberish consigned to the Bishop’s personal library. A few describe Oblivion so intimately and seductively that they drive readers insane. The Bishop reserves those for anyone who stands between him and his apotheosis.

Regardless of the eloquence of his writing, the Bishop’s Neverborn masters grow impatient with his theoretical approach to his mission. They goad his Abyssal servants to take more direct action. The Bishop himself, perhaps aware of his own faults, allows his deathknights wide latitude in pursuing both his agenda and that of the Neverborn. He does, however, give all of his Abyssal servants a firm spiritual grounding and inculcate them in the Understandings before he allows them to run free. Accordingly, most of his Abyssals take a somewhat religious approach to service, often acting as mendicant priests and holy warriors. All of the Bishop’s servants either believe fervently in his nihilistic religious views or are smart enough to fake such devotion. While the Deathlord allows his servants a relatively long leash, he also punishes any deviation from the Shining Path. While few of his servants know all the Bishop’s arcane theology, virtually all adhere to its basic precepts: Life is a cruel cycle of pain and suffering; Death is immortality and freedom from Life’s chains; and Oblivion is the path to ultimate enlightenment and peace.

The Bishop prefers to take the form of a wizened old man with a warm smile, swathed in the robes of a traveling sage or priest. Though blind, he exudes wisdom and tranquility. Many of his followers deliberately blind themselves to emulate their master. The Bishop discourages his Abyssal servants from doing so. When they insist, he provides them with the means to see without eyes, whether through First Age technology, necrotech or other means.



When the Bishop goes to battle, however, a very different face appears. The Bishop's war form appears barely human: a rotting corpse with oily, black skin and a jutting canine jaw rimmed with razor-sharp fangs. Jagged bone spurs erupt from his skin as he moves, and grotesque sexual organs protrude from his body and undulate madly. The Bishop never wears clothing in battle, for the toxic oil that covers his skin automatically inflicts three levels of aggravated damage with the slightest touch. His eyes turn milky green and leak a putrescent green bile that is equally dangerous.

THE BISHOP'S DOMAIN

The Bishop secludes himself in the bowels of the Hidden Tabernacle, an underground manse found in the shadowland known as the Silent Meadow of Dust. True to its name, the Hidden Tabernacle is hard to find. Through powerful magic, the Bishop shaped five geomantically identical locations in the shadowland, enabling his manse to manifest in any of them. The Silent Meadow of Dust itself is part of the Kunlun region, an extensive area of cold, arid steppe in Creation's Northwest. Over the centuries, the Bishop succeeded in turning other small shadowlands into geomantic duplicates of the Silent Meadow of Dust, enabling the Hidden Tabernacle to appear further and further abroad in the North.

The Bishop's temple-manse looks quite small—a basaltic structure coated in peeling gold paint, no more than 50 feet wide and 50 feet high. Most of the Hidden Tabernacle is underground, a great labyrinth of basalt and soulsteel leading ever deeper into the cold, dead earth. Mortal worshipers of the Shining Path are occasionally invited here to commune with the Bishop. More often, armies of his followers battle for the Bishop's favor, fighting holy wars before the Tabernacle's doors over doctrinal disputes so arcane as to be incomprehensible to anyone who's not on the Shining Path. The survivors find only shadows, misery and death in the dark tunnels of the Tabernacle. Their ghosts wander, lost and bereft, until despair leads them to Oblivion and the truth behind the Bishop's teaching—or until the Bishop's deathknights find them. While the Bishop busies himself with his tomes and scriptures, his deathknights have more practical needs, and they can always do with more soulsteel. As a result, far fewer ghosts haunt the Tabernacle than have died there. Most of the ghosts in residence are nephwracks who attend to the Bishop's needs like the adoring monks of a beloved abbot.

(For further details on the Hidden Tabernacle, see p. 84 of **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex.**)

The Bishop claims complete theological authority over a number of village-states and tribes in the Kunlun region, such as the towns of Ikh Bayan, Naruu and Tharn. He also corresponds with mortal death cultists across Creation (though rarely with his fellow Deathlords), and could exert considerable influence among such groups if he chose to do so. He is not nearly as expansionist as most of his peers, but the Bishop shows a strong interest in the city of Whitewall, as well as the vast shadowland known as Marama's Fell beyond

it. Seizing control of Marama's Fell is problematic given its nature and inhabitants. The Bishop also ponders how best to thwart the ongoing efforts of the Syndics of Whitewall to shrink the shadowland.

Furthermore, the Bishop has designs on Whitewall itself. In the First Age, Whitewall was the holy city of Ondar Shambal, geomantically designed to focus and amplify prayer. If Whitewall could be brought into a shadowland and its walls were suitably altered, the city could focus the prayers of ancestor cultists instead. (Not to mention prayers to the Bishop, whom his followers worship as a de facto death-god himself.) A shadowland stretching from Marama's Fell to the nearer Silent Meadow of Dust and encompassing Whitewall would be an achievement dwarfing those of all the other Deathlords. Most of the Bishop's overt machinations are directed toward that end.

THE BISHOP'S PANOPLY

Unlike most of his peers, the Bishop uses little necrotech or other artifacts. Instead, he relies on his powerful martial arts skills. This reliance frustrates his deathknights, especially those who lack the patience and meditative focus to pursue martial arts studies. Some of his Abyssals perform services for rival Deathlords solely to acquire soulsteel weapons and armor. The Bishop permits such freelancing but always thoroughly debriefs the Abyssal afterward, looking for any signs of temptation away from the Shining Path. Thus far he has executed only one deathknight—for the "crime" of remarking favorably on the appearance of the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears—but other deathknights have spent time on a short leash out of concerns for their loyalty.

The Deathlord's most notable artifact is the Bishop's Crosier, a tall black-jade shepherd's staff with a curved hook at the top. The hook circles back into itself, and contains several hearthstone sockets. It has many curious powers, which work only for the Bishop himself.

- **Weapon:** The Crosier can function as a melee weapon, essentially an artifact staff of exceptional power. It has the following traits: Speed 4, Accuracy +5, Damage +5B, Defense +4, Rate 2.

- **Bat Form:** The Bishop can transform the Crosier into a black-jade automaton in the shape of a clockwork bat. He can see through the bat's eyes and direct its actions at a cost of five motes per hour. In a shadowland or the Underworld, the bat can easily fly through walls and other solid objects.

Destroying the Crosier, whether in its bat-form or its normal form, required determined effort. In its bat form, the Crosier has Strength 3, Dexterity 3 and Stamina 4. It possesses all of the Bishop's Mental Attributes, as it is merely an extension of his will. It has 15 -0 health levels, 10A/20L/20B soak and a Hardness of 10A/20L/20B. If it is not totally destroyed, it repairs itself of all damage within a single day. It attacks with two raking talons (Speed 5, Accuracy 10, Damage +5L, Rate 2), and has a Dodge DV of 8. The bat can fly at up to 30 miles per hour and never tires.

- **Transubstantiation:** For 10 motes, the Bishop can use the Crosier to transform a living mortal into a ghost for one day. Transformed mortals are considered to be "touched" with death. Effectively, this power mimics the spirit Charm Elemental Touch, except that it treats "death" as an element. While the effect lasts, the mortal has all the innate properties of a ghost but possesses no Arcanoi or other Charms. Normal mortals also fall under the complete mental command of the Bishop. Heroic mortals can attempt to resist the Bishop's commands, but they can rely on only their Parry MDV. This power cannot affect the Exalted.

- **Hearthstones:** The Bishop has access to a number of hearthstones, but he invariably stocks the Crosier with Abyssal equivalents of the monkey stone or the seven leaping dragon stone (see *Exalted*, p. 383 and p. 384).

THE BISHOP'S TACTICS

The Bishop prefers not to engage his foes in physical combat. He favors such Charms as Dread Lord's Demeanor and Bitter Sweetness of Betrayal to crush his enemy's will and bend them to his own agenda. If he's forced to fight, he calls upon his formidable Martial Arts Charms. The Bishop has fully mastered Dark Messiah Style, Hungry Ghost Style and Mantis Style. He also knows the Charcoal March of Spiders Style at least up to that style's Form-type Charm. He currently works at developing a new Celestial martial art that he calls Gentle Embrace Style. Despite its disarming name, Gentle Embrace Style invokes the power of Oblivion itself. Once codified, it could become one of the deadliest martial arts styles ever invented.

SERVANTS OF THE BISHOP

The Bishop's servants must long for Oblivion. The Deathlord chooses his closest followers (whether ghost or Abyssal) from the despairing and the suicidal, and usually from those who already adhere to his religious views. He does not offer Exaltation to anyone who does not already follow the Shining Path, though a few of his choices have shown weak faith. More than one of his deathknights is an apostate, mouthing the words of the *Tome of Endless Night* but not really believing them. The Bishop cares not, for he knows that the Neverborn will never allow such spiritual frauds to betray his greater mission. In the end, all will believe as he does. All will embrace Oblivion.

Dusk Caste Abyssals who serve the Bishop fight in the name of Oblivion itself, the only thing worth dying for. Midnight Caste Abyssals spread the Bishop's gospel across Creation. Daybreak Abyssals perhaps find themselves the least favored of the Bishop's servants, as he seems to distrust the scholarly deathknights for their intrinsically secular nature. Still, someone has to forge all that soulsteel and show Oblivion's grandeur through necromancy. Day Caste Abyssals typically serve as the Bishop's inquisitors, watching for any hints of apostasy from their fellows. Far from stamping out heresy, however, the Bishop's inquisitors spread contradictory interpretations of scripture among rival territories in hopes of triggering religious warfare. Finally, the Moonshadow Abyssals become the Deathlord's missionaries and diplomats, wandering across the North and even farther afield, spreading the Bishop's good news.



The Bishop's most devoted servant is the Celebrant of Blood, a Daybreak Caste Abyssal who was once a mortal priestess of the Shining Path. To prove her devotion, she dared the Hidden Tabernacle and sought out the Bishop himself to beg him to end her life personally. To date, she is the only mortal to enter the Tabernacle and return alive... so to speak. Impressed with her devotion, the Bishop granted her the Black Exaltation and placed her at his right hand. In so doing, he broke her heart. The Celebrant, a true believer, hoped for death and instead received immortality. She remains loyal to her master, but his "gift" still rankles her, as does his decision to keep her close at hand within the Tabernacle. She schemes through her subordinate deathknights to provoke a war between the Bishop and some outside party such as the Realm or the Bull of the North. Perhaps then her master will send her into battle where she might find a death she deems worthy.

The Moonshadow Caste called the Harbinger of the Ghost-Cold Wind, or the White Walker of the North, most recently traveled through the territory of the Haslanti League. The Bishop's missionary to the frozen North is perhaps a poor choice for the job. In his mortal life, the White Walker was a shaman who served the death gods worshiped by the Haslanti. He accepted Exaltation from the Bishop rather than die at the hands of Immaculate missionaries. The White Walker never fully integrated his prior belief system with the Shining Path, though. He spends much of his time away from the Silent Meadow of Dust, ignoring his master's plans in favor of bolstering ancestor worship in the Haslanti territories. The Bishop tolerates this disobedience because he hopes the young missionary will forge an alliance between the Haslanti death gods and the Bishop's followers, granting the Deathlord inroads into the burgeoning Haslanti League itself. More information on the White Walker appears in *Exalted*, p. 341.

The Bishop's most unusual servant is his most secret, an elderly man of enormous mystical power and martial arts prowess called Ten Thousand Virtues. A few conspiracy theorists among the Shining Path wonder if perhaps Ten Thousand Virtues is actually the Deathlord while the Bishop is a false front. The Bishop encourages this view. Let those who would plot against him blunt their swords on a mighty but ultimately expendable warrior. Only the bishop's most loyal servants know the truth: Ten Thousand Virtues is an ancient Sidereal Exalt converted to the Bishop's vision after reading from the *Tome of Endless Night*.

Even that "truth" conceals a lie, however, for Ten Thousand Virtues is only one of the ancient Sidereal's names. As the Green Lady, the Sidereal infiltrates the councils of three of the Bishop's most hated rivals: the Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water, Mask of Winters and the Walker in Darkness. None of them realize that the beautiful lover they share is actually a man, let alone one spying on all three of them. Ten Thousand Virtues also kept his true loyalties hidden from the Five-Score Fellowship for centuries. He spreads disinformation about the Bishop's activities among the Sidereals so that none of them realize the common belief system that unites death cults across Creation.

SERIES IDEAS

In an Abyssal series centered on the Bishop, the characters most likely have strong religious views about death and the afterlife. The basic premise of the Bishop's philosophy is that falling into the Void brings perfect bliss and enlightenment, but only if everything else falls into the Void as well. True believers become fervent supporters of the Neverborn, but only as avatars or hypostases of Oblivion itself. Those who turn from the Bishop's service must go far from his territory or risk death at the hands of fellow deathknights, regardless of what the Bishop himself might wish.

Story seeds involving the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible might include:

Marama's Fell: The Bishop vies constantly with the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears over who will rule Marama's Fell, one of the largest shadowlands in Creation and one many times larger than the Silent Meadow of Dust. As a complication, Marama's Fell has a large population of very powerful ghosts who have no intention of bowing to any Deathlord. Some of these ghosts are actually the spirits of powerful artificial life forms created by the ancient Solars and exterminated by the Dragon-Blooded, and their powers exceed those of conventional ghosts.

The Wyld Hunt: The Wyld Hunt keeps a prominent base at the Pinnacle of the Hunt near Cherak. The Spire's chief Immaculate monk is the war-mongering zealot Peleps Deled. War between the Shining Path and the Immaculate Order seems inevitable—it would be a shame not to take the first shot when it became available.

Diplomacy Among the Living and the Dead: Closer to home, the city-states around the Silent Meadow of Dust all nominally follow the Bishop, but the fractious communities are prone to internecine conflict. The Bishop might want his deathknights to mediate and resolve these conflicts... or he might want them stirred up into a holy war, the better to speed the growth of shadowlands in the North.

THE BODHISATTVA ANOINTED BY DARK WATER

Other Names: The Silver Prince, innumerable false identities in Skullstone's bureaucracy

(Note: More information about the Bodhisattva, his plans and his servants can be found in *The Compass of Terrestrial Directions, Vol. II—The West*. See *The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. IV—The Underworld* for a complete write-up of the Deathlord, the Green Lady, Ebon Siaka and Moray Darktide.)

The Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water is perhaps the most dangerous of all the Deathlords, mainly because so few realize how dangerous he is. This pragmatic and patient Deathlord has pursued his personal schemes for annihilation almost since the Contagion's failure became apparent. In contrast to the hurried plans of his rivals, the Bodhisattva estimated that destroying Creation would take him just under 1,200 years. His



Neverborn patron, the Perfected Principle of Consumption, raged at this delay, but the Deathlord persuaded it that only patience and cunning could succeed where brutality had failed. To the Bodhisattva's great surprise and pleasure, the Scarlet Empress recently disappeared, shaving half a millennium off his timetable. The Bodhisattva now believes he can conquer all of Creation within a decade, depending on how the Realm Civil War plays out and whether his incompetent rivals get in his way. And then, he can destroy it in another 10 years.

Like the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible, the Bodhisattva relies heavily on religion in pursuing Oblivion's goals. Unlike the Bishop, however, the Bodhisattva lacks any true religious feeling. His state religion, the New Order philosophy, is a complete fabrication. It is calculated to win the loyalty of the people of the Skullstone Archipelago, to lull the people of the surrounding territories into a false sense of security, and to hide his secret plans to build a huge fleet of necrotech ships that can conquer the West and drag the whole region into the Underworld.

The New Order philosophy postulates that all who die within the Skullstone shadowland return as ghosts. Due to the Bodhisattva's munificence, the vast majority of Skullstone souls proceed directly into reincarnation. Only a few "righteous dead" voluntarily stay behind as ghosts to help maintain their society's continuity. Skullstone society venerates these righteous dead, who form the backbone of the nation's extensive (and pervasive) bureaucracy. Modern

Skullstone also incorporates necromancy and zombie labor into nearly every aspect of its culture and industry.

In truth, *none* of Skullstone's deceased *ever* reincarnate. Except for a fraction of ghosts (about one in eight) whom the Bodhisattva deems indispensable, all of Skullstone's ghosts are magically dragged to a secret island base hidden within a nearby metaphysical anomaly. Here, they become soulsteel to meet the Bodhisattva's ever-burgeoning needs.

The Bodhisattva makes great use of his natural shapeshifting powers. Indeed, most of his subjects know their Deathlord only as the Silver Prince and do not even realize that he is literally the same person as the semi-mythical Bodhisattva who founded the Skullstone nation 680 years ago. As the Bodhisattva, the Deathlord appeared as a traveling mendicant in simple robes, aged but still full of fire and passion. In that form, he predicted his own future return as "a prince clad in silver." Today, the Silver Prince is a towering figure in robes of silver cloth layered in razor-edged soulsteel shards, each of which whimpers softly with his every motion. His pale dead face remains handsome by the standards of Skullfolk, most of whom appreciate the beauty of a well-preserved corpse. He usually wears an ornate opal death-mask on ceremonial occasions. During the long interregnum between the Bodhisattva's 150-year reign and the coming of the Silver Prince, the Deathlord wore the faces of countless influential Skullfolk whose lives he stole in the process of molding his society from the shadows.

THE BODHISATTVA'S DOMAIN

The Bodhisattva's principle base of operations is Ebon Skull, an enormous manse and palace carved into the side of Mount Vashti, an extinct volcano on the archipelago's largest island. After the Skullfolk carved Ebon Skull by hard labor, the Deathlord then used the Inauspicious Citadel spell to imbue it with greater power. Onyx, Skullstone's capital, grew up around Ebon Skull. The Bodhisattva also directed the construction of manses across Skullstone. Today, most of his territory's demesnes are capped, their manses either turned to the Deathlord's purposes or loaned out to his deathknights and other servants.

Skullstone consists of five islands. The largest island, Darkmist, forms the political and cultural center of the nation, with Ebon Skull and Onyx as the capital. The people of Darkmist are born, raised and die in a society in which the living and the dead interact at least nominally as equals and where zombies and skeletons perform most unskilled manual labor. Other islands include Greyshores, Seagate and Cormorant, all of them inhabited and loyal to the Silver Prince's authority but not completely engulfed by the local shadowland. Most Skullfolk are nationalistic, relatively well educated and completely loyal to the New Order. The Silver Prince oversees every aspect of their daily routine—from education to employment to entertainment—and surrounds them with magical loyalty-inspiring propaganda.

The last island in the archipelago has no name except Island Five. The result of a spatial anomaly produced in the near-collapse of Creation during the Fair Folk Invasion, Island Five technically should not even exist. The Sidereal Exalted would have erased it had it not landed in the periphery of the Skullstone shadowland. No one dwells on Island Five except nephwracks and a few ghost slaves bent utterly to the Deathlord's will. These ghosts and their zombie slaves toil to craft the Silver Prince's modernized fleet of artifact ships with which he plans to conquer the entire West. They build the fleet out of soulsteel forged from the souls of nearly 90% of Skullstone's population, a fact the Deathlord rigorously conceals from his people and most of his Abyssal servants.

THE BODHISATTVA'S PANOPLY

As Lord of Skullstone, the Silver Prince commands a substantial portion of Creation's necromancers and necrosurgeons. The zombies at his disposal number in the hundreds of thousands. His secret base on Island Five provides him with inexhaustible supplies of soulsteel. When his Black Fleet becomes fully operational (in about two years, by his estimation), he will have the equivalent of 100 First Age light warships armed with necrotic Essence weapons.

Personally, the Bodhisattva's robes grant the defenses of soulsteel superheavy plate but with Mobility and Fatigue

penalties of -0. His grand daiklave, Howler in Darkness, has the unusual property of appearing as a ceremonial short sword while sheathed, then expanding to its full size when drawn. Howler in Darkness has the traits of a standard grand daiklave except as follows: Accuracy +4, Damage +15L/5, Defense +1. If Howler in Darkness strikes a character without slaying her instantly but the damage inflicted exceeds the character's Dodge MDV, she must obey any commands given by the Silver Prince for the next 100 days.

THE BODHISATTVA'S COMBAT TACTICS

The Bodhisattva chiefly relies on social prowess to defeat his enemies. Most notably, he has a high-Essence version of the Charm Irresistible Succubus Style, which he activates at will for no Essence cost. He can also perfectly defend against all mental and social attacks (save those made by a Neverborn) at a cost of three motes, and he has an improved version of the Poisoning the Will Charm, which costs only five motes to activate and renders the target's Dodge MDV inapplicable.

If forced to fight, the Bodhisattva reveals himself as a skilled swordsman. He has mastered the Violet Bier of Sorrows Style of martial arts—and his silver-and-soulsteel robes do not count as armor when he uses the style's Charms.

He also possesses a number of melee-based Combos and high-Essence Charms. By spending three motes and one Willpower, for instance, the Silver Prince can thereafter perfectly parry any attack for the rest of the scene. Each parry costs three motes and does not count as Charm usage for that action.

Finally, while the Bodhisattva is not the most puissant sorcerer among the Deathlords, he is a Void Circle necromancer and a Celestial Circle sorcerer. He avoids using spells openly, however, to preserve his image as a benignly strict administrator instead of a supernatural tyrant.

SERVANTS OF THE BODHISATTVA

Above all else, the Bodhisattva demands loyalty. All of the Bodhisattva's plans hinge on the society he built in Skullstone, the mighty anchor destined to drag all Creation down into the Void. He cannot and will not jeopardize that asset by granting Exaltation to someone from outside Skullstone or even a citizen of less-than-perfect devotion to her nation. That is, he will never do so again. One of his first deathknights was actually a Solar Exalt whom he captured and thrust into a Monstrance of Celestial Portion. His mind broken and his soul raped into submission, the former Solar swore loyalty to the Neverborn and emerged as the Fallen Wolf of the Cutting Sea. The Bodhisattva soon realized, however, that Fallen Wolf was not as broken as he could have been and banished his unruly servant. Fallen Wolf now wanders the West, tormented by a guilty conscience as much as his Abyssal Resonance and the damnable Whispers of the Neverborn.

The Silver Prince typically places Dusk Caste Abyssals in the Skullstone Navy. The ruthless Ebon Siaka became the Deathlord's most trusted lieutenant and the Admiral of the Black Fleet. The Bodhisattva has little use for the Midnight Caste, as he fears their natural fervor might lead them to see through the deception behind the New Order philosophy. Any Midnights who did serve would most likely function as missionaries on the outer islands and diplomats to foreign territories. The Bodhisattva prizes his Daybreak Abyssals, however, since the entire economy of his nation depends on necromancy, necrosurgery and other occult disciplines. Day Caste Abyssals have a part to play as well, as Skullstone's invasive government includes a very active secret police. Moonshadow Abyssals serve the Bodhisattva as trade emissaries, diplomats and naval officers. Recently, an Abyssal circle loyal to Skullstone and led by a Moonshadow successfully bound a storm mother against attacking Skullstone ships, and the Bodhisattva seems eager to put the power of Moonshadow oath-binding to further use.

Tales say that Ebon Siaka was a Tya before her Exaltation. Today she invariably dresses in soulsteel plate adorned with the colors of Skullstone. She also carries a gigantic stone hammer with the traits of a grand goremaul. She uses it to destroy entire ships with one blow.

The Knight of Ghosts and Shadows did not begin as one of the Bodhisattva's servants. Instead, the Silver Prince recruited him away from a rival. The Day Caste Abyssal arrived in Onyx about six months ago as a refugee from the court of the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears. As he explained to the Silver Prince, the Knight had grown disgusted by his mistress's licentiousness and abandoned her court. After years of wandering, tales of the Prince's audacity and charisma led him to Skullstone. Since then, the Knight has served the Bodhisattva faithfully. Lately, however, the Knight worries about strange alterations to his body: crinkling skin, graying hair, a growing numbness in his hands. Concerned that his condition comes from some curse from the Lover, he has petitioned the Bodhisattva for advanced training in necromancy in hopes of combating whatever ails him.

The Bodhisattva does not rely exclusively on his Abyssal servants. He recently (and tentatively) forced into his service a young Sidereal Exalt who defected from the Five-Score Fellowship. This Sidereal converted to the Neverborn cause after the Bodhisattva forced her to stare into the Mouth of Oblivion. She now calls herself Unfolding Corpse-White Lotus, though she continues to use her former identity as the Green Lady when she spies on the Bodhisattva's rival Deathlords, Mask of Winters and Walker in Darkness. She has a third identity as well, posing as the elderly male Sidereal Ten Thousand Virtues, servant and supplicant of the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible. It amuses the Silver Prince endlessly to hear

her tales of how she pits the Mask of Winters and the Walker against each other, not to mention the fatuous Bishop's inability even to detect the true gender of the spy in his councils.

Captain Moray Darktide is a Dawn Caste Solar Exalt. For some baffling reason, the Unconquered Sun chose to Exalt a Skullstone privateer locked in combat with a group of Lintha pirates. Moray Darktide now finds himself uneasily caught between his newfound status as a Lawgiver and his lifelong patriotism and belief in the New Order philosophy. The Bodhisattva keeps Darktide far away from Skullstone much of the time, lest the Solar discover Island Five and turn irrevocably against the Deathlord. The Bodhisattva does not realize that by sending Darktide so far away from home so often, he has allowed his pet Solar to be discovered by Fallen Wolf of the Cutting Sea.

SERIES IDEAS

In an Abyssal series centered on the Bodhisattva, the characters are most likely citizens of Skullstone with varying degrees of patriotism. If the characters discover Island Five, they may be appalled (if they somehow retained their basic humanity) or they may be delighted (if they listen to the whispers of the Perfected Principle of Consumption). Story seeds involving the Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water might include:

Political Intrigue: The Bodhisattva's foreign policy focuses mainly on persuading the other Western nations that Skullstone presents no danger, while setting them all against one another instead. Diplomacy and espionage go hand in hand for Abyssals who represent the Deathlord in foreign courts.

War on the High Seas: The Bodhisattva holds a special hatred for the Lintha pirates and would love to see them exterminated utterly. Moray Darktide already pursues this goal, but a circle of Abyssals might be just the help he needs to finish the job. In other news, military conflict against the Realm, the local elemental courts or even the Silver Pact in the West seems inevitable. The Realm outposts in Wavecrest are openly hostile toward Skullstone, and the local storm mothers hate Skullstone for the recent humiliation of one of their number by an Abyssal circle. Also, the ancient Lunar Leviathan is not oblivious to the Bodhisattva's ambitions, and he makes tentative steps toward assembling a pack to infiltrate and spy upon the Deathlord's government, gathering the intelligence this First Age Admiral needs to plan a devastating assault.

Spies: The Sidereals of the West recognize the Silver Prince's threat, although even they know nothing of Island Five. Convention Chairman Righteous Tsunami constantly schemes to insert Sidereal spies into Skullstone. Abyssals might be needed for counter-espionage against the Sidereals of the Convention of Water.

THE DOWAGER OF THE IRREVERENT VULGATE IN UNRENT VEILS

Other Names: Untamed Kethet of the Swarm

She would be the most notorious murderer in Creation's history, if only Creation knew who she was. As chief architect of the Great Contagion, the Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate in Unrent Veils killed more people than anyone in the history of Creation ever has, and she remains bitter that she didn't get them all. Her anger only burns hotter when she contemplates how the Contagion's failure resulted from betrayal by her own peers. She has no proof, but the Dowager knows the hunted, furtive looks of foolish boys who think themselves men. All her instincts tell her that the Contagion failed because the First and Forsaken Lion and his lapdog, Eye and Seven Despairs, tried to steal her glory. But the Dowager also knows patience. Her master, the Neverborn known as the Abhorrence of Life, promises her that she will be the last thing in existence to enter the Mouth of Oblivion, and that before she does so, the First and Forsaken Lion will be hers to torment until doing so ceases to amuse her.

The other Deathlords think that the Contagion's failure broke the Dowager. She no longer attends to the intrigues of Stygia. Indeed, she seldom leaves her citadel, the Mound of Forsaken Seeds—which lurks within a misbegotten swamp called the Noss Fens at the Eastern edge of Creation. The other Deathlords think her seclusion means that she has nothing left to offer Oblivion's cause. In its ghastly tomb, the Abhorrence of Life thinks differently.

Since the Contagion's end, the Dowager has spent centuries studying the Well of Udr whence she summoned that dire plague. She once believed that the Well led directly to the Mouth of Oblivion. Now, she thinks that it is much more. The Well leads beyond Creation, beyond the Underworld, beyond the Wyld, beyond... everything. It is the singular point of intersection between all worlds, all states, all possibilities. This realization haunts the Dowager as she wonders what could possibly exist beyond the utter nothingness of Oblivion. At times, she wonders whether she might find other universes within the depths of the Well, perhaps even one where she could be free of the Neverborn and their taint. But then, the soft whisper rises up from the Labyrinth: *No, my sweet. You've danced your dance. Now, you must pay the piper.* The Dowager knows her master speaks the truth, and she knows what she must do.

Within the infinite depths of the Well, other universes do indeed lie. Given an infinite number of such universes, it follows that one universe must be the perfect antithesis of Creation. And so, the Dowager sits, staring into the depths of the Well of Udr, searching for the Anti-Creation. When she finds it, Creation will join with its equal and its opposite, and nothing will be left in the wake of that joining.

The Dowager knows that the other Deathlords have learned her plan through their spies, and they consider her mad. Well, of *course* she is mad. The Dowager accepted that from the moment she made her pact with the Abhorrence of Life. But that doesn't make her wrong.



The Dowager's appearance varies with her moods if not more frequently. She had a Lunar mate once whom she loved dearly. While she no longer remembers his name, much less the warmth of his caress, she often takes the form of animals or beastmen in her hunts. As much beast as woman, the Dowager delights in stalking and slaughtering the mortals whose bodies and souls she repurposes for her own use. Some of her fellow Deathlords marvel at her naked savagery and wonder if she could possibly have been a Lunar Exalt instead of a Solar. Those with clearer memories of the First Age simply shake their heads. The Lunars epitomized the brutality of nature, but their Solar mates often ran with them and just as often grew to love the hunt even more than those born to it. The Dowager is what she is.

On the hunt for flesh, blood and souls, the Dowager typically wears the form of a tall and powerful naked woman with dark skin, eyes of burning yellow and writhing black snakes for fingers. When she encounters challenging prey, her face becomes that of a lioness, while her body covers itself with bristly black fur that glistens with ichor. When she sits upon her throne contemplating the Well of Udr, she rests naked save for flowing veils of translucent black silk and body-paint of red and yellow ochre. In all these forms, the Dowager appears cloven-footed, and ram's horns adorn her head. Yet she has one other form, quite unlike her others.

Sometimes the Dowager leads her army of zombies against a poor, doomed village. The mortals captured in these hunts, young and old, are caged and transported back to the Mound of Forsaken Seeds. Everyone over the age of nine is brutally slain. Their ghosts receive a brief opportunity to say goodbye to their children before the Dowager's servants forge the ghosts into soulsteel. The children, who observe this entire process, then live within the Mound with the Dowager until they come of age, at which point she sends them out to repopulate deserted villages and the whole cycle begins again. In the meantime, the Dowager wears a human form without horns or hooves when she interacts with her adopted children, and her face becomes a mask of compassion and motherly concern. It is a lie, and the children know it, but they also know enough to pretend otherwise. The Dowager is not their mother and does not pretend to be. She is a mad, sadistic governess whose charges were orphaned by her hand. She is the icy headmistress in an academy of shadows and tears, where whispers from below sing her children to sleep each night.

THE DOWAGER'S DOMAIN

The Noss Fens is a large and inhospitable swamp stretching about 250 miles across, located in the far East near the Bordermarches of the Wyld. Despite its proximity to Creation's rim, the swamp never becomes the target of any Fair Folk incursion. The Noss Fens do not seem to have resulted from some massive loss of Creation-born life. Not only were there no battles in that region, there were virtually no human settlements at all. Rather, the

Noss Fens seems to have erupted spontaneously out of the Well itself for some unfathomable reason not long after the Usurpation. The fens stayed unpopulated throughout the First Age, and the few Solars who knew of the strange pre-human ruins within the swamp found the place too unwholesome to remain. After learning the shadowland's history, the Dowager felt intrigued enough to erect her citadel in the Noss Fens.

Parts of the citadel predate the Usurpation and possibly even the First Age. At first glance, the Mound of Forsaken Seeds looks like a large but otherwise unremarkable burial mound standing about 100 feet at its highest point, with a small structure at the top. In fact, the mound is a later attempt to bury an ancient ziggurat that some long-forgotten race used as a place of worship. During her initial excavation of the Mound, the Dowager assumed that early Dragon Kings built the temple-manse. Now she suspects that it might be the work of some even older species incompletely erased even from prehistory. She also suspects that the Abhorrence of Life knows who really built the ziggurat and for what purpose but keeps this knowledge from her.

The Noss Fens terrify all animals, and they will not enter the shadowland without being caged or magically compelled. The native animals all seem dead and more than slightly decayed... but such is the fertilizing power of the nearby Elemental Pole of Wood that even dead things can mate and give birth to equally dead-seeming offspring. It's even worse near the Mound. Only the bravest mortals—even Exalted—can approach the Mound itself without constantly trembling at the edge of panic. Spirits are immune to this effect but suffer severe mental disturbances while within the Fens. Fair Folk do not enter the Noss Fens for any reason. They strive to resist any magical compulsion to do so.

The Mound itself is full of twisting corridors that look almost as if some great worm gnawed them into the earth. The tunnels lead to chambers lit by soulsteel lamps and appointed with the finest soulsteel furniture: chairs, beds and even eating utensils. Here dwell the children captured on the Dowager's latest hunt. Condemned to reside in the Mound until they come of age, these children play with soulsteel toys, eat with soulsteel forks, sleep on soulsteel beds and pray before soulsteel altars. They pray for their dead mothers and fathers, now condemned to an eternity as a toy, a fork, a bed or an altar. They pray that they do not, someday, share that same fate.

At the heart of the Mound, at the base and center of the buried ziggurat, lies a great open chamber whose walls bear the symbols of long-forgotten gods who were ancient when humanity was new. This vault holds the Dowager's great throne, at the foot of which lies the Well of Udr. Mortals who enter this fetid chamber are doomed, and even the mightiest Exalt risks death or madness at this ultimate nexus of the unthinkable and the impossible.

THE TERROR OF THE MOUND

When any mortal with a Valor rating less than 4 approaches the Mound, her player must roll (Valor + Essence) at difficulty 4. If this roll fails, all subsequent rolls for the character's actions suffer a -2 penalty on all rolls as long as the character stays within one mile of the Mound. The Exalted—including Abyssals—are not immune to this force of terror. The children who dwell in the Mound are used to it.

The Well itself inflicts a potent mental attack on any living being that comes near. The attack automatically scores (10 – target's Dodge MDV) successes every 10 ticks, with each success causing the target to lose one *permanent* point of Willpower. Anyone whose Willpower drops to 0 commits suicide in response to the sheer existential horror that the Well invokes. Most mortals respond by ripping their own eyes out to escape the visions that the Well inflicts. Doing so does not save them. Exalted have some defense. Treat an Exalt's Dodge MDV as being three higher than it really is. Abyssal Exalted are completely immune to this effect, as are the dead. Anyone who survives long enough (and is foolish enough) to look *into* the Well is slain instantly unless he is protected by powerful Charms (such as perfect defenses against unnatural mental influence) or an oath of loyalty to the Abhorrence of Life.

THE DOWAGER'S PANOPLY

The Dowager's principle weapon is her soulsteel long powerbow, Root of Scorn. As an innate power, anyone attuned to Root of Scorn can send it Elsewhere or retrieve it at a cost of one mote. This act does not count as Charm use. Arrows fired from Root of Scorn transform in midair into soulsteel harpoons. Upon striking a victim, the arrowheads clasp onto the victim's bones and cannot be removed without first severing the magical cord attaching the harpoon to Root of Scorn (requiring a [Strength + Valor] roll at difficulty 4). Those slain within a shadowland while so attached to the powerbow's cord instantly become ghost-slaves to the bow's owner. Root of Scorn's full traits are Speed 6, Accuracy +5, Damage +4L, Rate 3 and Range 350, and it costs 6 motes to attune.

These traits do not include the magical material bonuses an Abyssal (or the Dowager herself) would gain from using Root of Scorn against a living target.

Even her fellow Deathlords consider the Dowager to be the best necromancer in all Creation. Her libraries include almost every text on necromancy ever written, including many she wrote herself during her living days. As a necrosurgeon, she specializes in combining body parts

from different species. The zombie armies who attend her number in the thousands, most of them grotesque amalgamations that make conventional zombies seem almost quaint in comparison.

THE DOWAGER'S COMBAT TACTICS

The Dowager considers virtually everyone in Creation to be beneath her notice, a character flaw that might yet bring about her undoing. Assuming an attacker can get through her army of patchwork zombies, assuming he can defeat her Dusk Caste deathknight champion, assuming he can resist the baleful power of the Well of Udr—then and only then does the Dowager resort to personal combat. The Deathlord relies on Root of Scorn as long as ranged attacks seem practical. In close-quarter combat, she adopts her leonine war form. In this shape, the Dowager's Strength, Dexterity and Stamina increase to 15. She sprouts spiny black fur that inflicts five dice of lethal damage on anyone who touches her. This fur also grants a soak bonus of +6A/10L/10B. The Dowager also grows eight-inch talons that inflict +5L damage in hand-to-hand combat. Charged as they are with necrotic energy, these talons inflict piercing damage. The Dowager has mastered both Tiger Style and Lunar Hero Style martial arts, and her talons are compatible with those styles.

SERVANTS OF THE DOWAGER

While many of the Dowager's mannerisms perturb her fellow Deathlords, none do so more than her strange refusal to make wider use of her Monstrances of Celestial Portion. The Deathlord owns several of the devices, yet she never empowers more than a single Abyssal servant. At any given time, the Dowager has one, and only one, deathknight—invariably a young girl, usually no more than 10 years old at the time of Exaltation—whom she always names the Shoat of the Mire. This practice baffles the other Deathlords, who cannot imagine why the Dowager would waste Exaltation on a mere child.

The Dowager cares nothing for either her peers' curiosity or their scorn. Indeed, she considers them fools for granting Exaltation with only the most cursory thought to what their servants would do with such a gift. To the Dowager, each Shoat of the Mire is an experiment and nothing more. She chooses each of them from among the children who reside in the bowels of the Mound of Forsaken Seeds. Indeed, the Mound takes its name from these children, these tiny seeds who, when watered by the love of Oblivion and nurtured by the Dowager's own boundless hate, can grow into mighty trees indeed. Everything the Dowager does, both for and to her children, she has calculated to teach them the pointlessness of existence and hatred for the cruelty of life. Her experiments in child-rearing approach their end. Having applied all that she has learned, she intends to expand her stable of Abyssal Exalts to create a full circle, one whose members call her "Mother" and the Abhorrence of Life "Father."

The Dowager knows all about the attempts by the Bodhisattva and the Lover to convert Solar Exalts to the service of Oblivion, and she laughs at their failures. If a Solar Exalt comes to the Noss Fens, she will slay him or die in the attempt. The former is far more likely than the latter.

SERIES IDEAS

Any series set in the court of the Dowager will be an unusual and challenging roleplaying experience. The members of a circle of Abyssals who are Exalted by the Dowager will probably be somewhere between the ages of eight and 13. They have lived most of their lives in a dark and gloomy crypt in the Mound of Forsaken Seeds, their only companions being each other and an assortment of toys forged from someone's dead parent, which whimper in misery when they play with them. As victims of Stockholm syndrome combined with nearly unimaginable psychological torments, such Abyssals almost certainly must be child sociopaths. Then again, they might not be. Perhaps these Forsaken Seeds retain enough innocence that once they get a taste of actual life in Creation (or even existence in the Underworld), they reject the Whispers of the Neverborn and flee the Noss Fens to seek their own destiny elsewhere... with an army of zombie abominations and one angry "Mother" hot on their trail.

EYE AND SEVEN DESPAIRS

Other Names: Star of Dirt and Doubt (false identity); Prioreess of Bloody Sands

In life, Eye and Seven Despairs was a prodigy who died before his time. In death, he is feckless and capricious. Now and then, he produces startling innovations in necromancy and necrosurgery. He may, indeed, be the most intelligent of the Deathlords... when he puts his mind to something. Now, however, he squanders his gifts in a futile pursuit of vengeance over 15 centuries in the making against perceived enemies who are oblivious to the source of his ire.

The Solar Exalted who would become Eye and Seven Despairs actually died *before* the Usurpation. Exalting at an unusually young age, the future Deathlord found himself thrust into a circle of much older, *much* more jaded, and far more powerful Solars who found the newly Exalted Twilight Caste a poor replacement for the 3,000-year-old peer of the Deliberative whom he had replaced. Bored with his naïveté and annoyed at his immaturity and inexperience, his circle-mates cruelly used potent mind-altering Charms to toy with and humiliate him. Seven times they reduced the young Solar to suicidal despair, the last when they gave him a present: his mortal father's left eye in a jeweled case, plucked right out of the old man's head. This torment was the last. The young Solar, no more than 10 years past Exaltation, took his own life rather than spend centuries with the debased monsters whom fate had appointed as his

"boon companions." Ironically, the Usurpation came less than six months later, and the other Solars followed their victim into the Underworld. Even more ironically, those Solars, freed from the Great Curse post-mortem, repented of their sins and quickly entered Lethe. Deprived of even the chance for revenge, his bitterness over the circumstances of his demise blossomed into a psychotic hatred of all life. The ghost of the young Solar became one of the first to swear allegiance to the Neverborn. (Indeed, Eye and Seven Despairs sometimes claims he was *the* first, that he sought out the slain Primordial called Abhorrence of Life, and that he gave the Neverborn the idea to anoint other Solar ghosts as Deathlords.)

Eye and Seven Despairs became a stalwart supporter of the Neverborn goal, although a somewhat ineffective one. He had the same potential for raw power as the others, and amazing natural talent at medicine and sorcery, but he lacked their centuries of experience. Eye and Seven Despairs twice allied himself with the First and Forsaken Lion, although he looked to the other Deathlords less like an ally and more like a toadying sycophant. When the Neverborn provided the Deathlords with the capacity to steal and corrupt Solar Essences, the effectiveness of Eye and Seven Despairs ended almost completely. While the other Deathlords set themselves (with varying degrees of success) to determining how best to integrate Abyssal Exalted into their forces, Eye and Seven Despairs obsessed over one and only one thing: how to acquire the Exaltations of his former circlemates and torment them for all eternity.

As it happened, only three of the Deathlord's four targets came into his hand. He gave those Exaltations to three Abyssals: Blood Scavenger, Chorus at Midnight and Scar of Uproar, all of whom he chose primarily for how much they resembled their predecessors both physically and in temperament. The fourth member of Eye and Seven Despairs' former circle eludes him, which infuriates the Deathlord immeasurably. Concentrating his ire on the three Abyssals in his service, Eye and Seven Despairs set in motion a complex plan for revenge. He enslaved one of the most beautiful courtesans in the South, whom he renamed Star of Dirt and Doubt, and set her to seduce each of his three Abyssals in turn. In time, they all turned on one another in jealousy before forging a pact to slay their Deathlord master and seize Star of Dirt and Doubt for themselves.

The pact was actually the Deathlord's own idea. Eye and Seven Despairs switched places with Star of Dirt and Doubt, with the end result that his three Abyssals unwittingly murdered the object of their joint affections by hurling her into the Mouth of the Void. Ever since, the Deathlord has enjoyed the sexual favors of each of his deathknights while wearing Star of Dirt and Doubt's form. And in that form, "she" whispers both encouragements and doubts to the deathknights, turning them against



one another and driving them to acts of self-destruction. Eventually, Blood Scavenger deduced the truth of the Deathlord's deception and confronted Star of Dirt and Doubt. He was later found dead at the gates of the Deathlord's fortress, impaled with dozens of spears, his eyes burst and his entrails hanging lewdly from his mouth. Star of Dirt and Doubt led Scar of Uproar and Chorus at Midnight each to believe that the other is responsible. Blood Scavenger's Black Exaltation soon returned to its Monstrance, but Eye and Seven Despairs has not yet found a mortal host who resembles its First Age possessor enough to bestow it on another victim.

Needless to say, those Deathlords who know of Eye and Seven Despairs' conduct consider him an utter fool. The Deathlords have only 100 Abyssal Exaltations between them. Perpetually tormenting three of them out of revenge for some centuries-old slight is not only an absurd waste of resources but also suggests a connection to one's past life that is completely unbefitting a Deathlord. The Neverborn seem to agree. Eye and Seven Despairs receives dreams and whispered threats to bestow his Monstrances on some other Deathlord—perhaps the Mask of Winters. The other Deathlords also hear these dream-sendings.

In response, Eye and Seven Despairs has grudgingly begun other activities, though halfheartedly in comparison to his peers. In addition to Cold House, his manse within the Bonetree shadowland to the east of Harborhead, the Deathlord opened up a "second front" in the Field of Bloodied Bulls shadowland 200 miles south of Kirighast. He also created another false identity for himself as the Prioress of Bloody Sands. This strange insistence on creating elaborate fake identities (and female ones at that) does not reassure the other Deathlords as to Eye and Seven Despairs' fitness to serve among their number, particularly since his efforts in Harborhead thus far look unfocused and ineffectual. Red Famine, the Deathlord's fourth deathknight (and the only one who stays busy subverting communities, conducting massacres and otherwise extending his master's power), frequently considers defecting to join the Mask of Winters. At least Mask of Winters is doing *something*.

Eye and Seven Despairs' distraction had another side effect. He forgot about his latest necro-medical experiment and allowed it to be stolen before he could test, perfect and deploy it against Creation. See p. 220 for the Deathlord dilettante's invention.

Eye and Seven Despairs' "true" form is that of a desiccated corpse with sunken eyes and a cavity where his nose once was. He lost an arm at some point during his sojourn in the Underworld and replaced it with a necrotech gauntlet somewhat pretentiously called the Fatal Arbalest of Quiet and Eclipses. In the form of Star of Dirt and Dust, he appears as a pale woman of exceptional beauty, usually draped in the flowing veils of a concubine. As the Prioress

of Bloody Sands, he takes the shape of an emaciated old woman, bald-headed and wearing the bloodstained robes of an itinerant monk.

EYE AND SEVEN DESPAIRS' DOMAIN

Eye and Seven Despairs maintains two separate territories, although one is much smaller than the other—more of an outpost than a citadel. The tiny shadowland called the Field of Bloodied Bulls formed in R.Y. 422 on the site of the last battle in the Realm's conquest of Harborhead. In this battle, the Dragon-Blooded slew Blood on the Horn, a God-Blooded rebel and daughter of the god Ahlat. The Deathlord enjoys some success in persuading superstitious locals that his Prioress identity is actually the ghost of that national hero. Unfortunately, his shadowland has no nearby manses. His facilities there consist of a single military bunker commanded by Red Famine. Also, every night spent in the Field of Bloodied Bulls is a night the Deathlord denies himself the pleasure of tormenting Scar of Uproar and Chorus at Midnight.

The Deathlord's true home consists of the great fortress of Cold House in Bonetree. The shadowland is so named for its horticulture. Its forests of Bonetree are moliated skeletons that perpetually weep blood from pale, red blossoms. Bonetree itself is barely five miles across.

Less than 100 miles away, however, stretches the Bayou of Endless Regret. At over 100,000 square miles, the Bayou is one of Creation's largest shadowlands. Its plants and animals also produce hundreds of eldritch drugs and poisons. Eye and Seven Despairs claims both shadowlands as his own, which would come as news to the elusive ghosts of the Bayou. What's more, the Mask of Winters regularly and brazenly sends expeditionary forces into the Bayou's northeastern quadrant. Eye and Seven Despairs does little to consolidate his hold over the Bayou's great expanse. Then again, his rival Deathlord sees little greater success in subjugating the Bayou. The Neverborn forbid the Deathlords to make open war on each other, so if the two Deathlords wish to escalate the conflict, they must do so by proxies.

Cold House looks like a great stone manor house, three stories tall and occupying just over an acre. As its name implies, the manse radiates cold, as well as a palpable sense of unease. Once a visitor enters Cold House, however, his disquiet is replaced by an odd sense of finality and peace, as if all of life's sorrows were at an end. Spectral valets show guests to lushly, if gloomily, appointed bedchambers. After spending a single night in Cold House, most guests lose all desire to depart.

Explorers find Cold House a maddening experience, for they find the house even bigger on the inside than it appears from the outside. Its dank corridors abruptly dead end or even circle back on themselves in impossible ways. Explorers often spend hours searching for an exit from Cold House, only to find that they have been going in circles



the whole time. The visitor's own room is never far away, though, no matter how long she searches. If the visitor feels hungry or thirsty, she can easily find a sumptuous feast or ribald party around the next corner, complete with festive party-goers in lewd masques—echoes of happier times long ago extinguished.

The secret of Cold House shows just how deeply its master wastes his talents. Cold House does not actually exist in either Creation or the Underworld. Through a trick of Eye and Seven Despairs' manse-building artifice and Neverborn metaphysics, its interior is really part of the Labyrinth. Anyone who wants to find anything in Cold House—beyond what Eye and Seven Despairs permits—must use the same techniques that ghosts or mortals use to navigate the ever-changing Labyrinth (as described in **Chapter Seven of *The Compass of Celestial Directions*, Vol. IV—The Underworld**).

Thousands of ghosts prowl the halls of Cold House, endlessly searching for some lost item or hidden treasure, or simply for a way out that remains forever out of reach. If lost treasures exist here, they most probably lie in the upper levels of the manse, which hold the chambers of the two surviving deathknights and their beloved concubine (as well as the private suite of Eye and Seven Despairs himself). Chorus at Midnight and Scar of Uproar sealed the Deathlord's chambers at the quiet insistence of Star of Dirt and Doubt. Only she enters them, though her lovers do not know it. The entire top floor of Cold House cannot be

reached from the lower levels save by magical means. Even those methods do not grant entrance to the Deathlord's personal chambers unless Star of Dirt and Doubt so wishes. Other than the Deathlord's Monstrances, the Abyssals have no idea what treasures wait in their former master's rooms, nor do they care to find out.

Anyone who searches Cold House not for exit or treasure is most likely looking for the Heart Room instead, whether they realize it or not. The spiritual core of the manse is a large chamber in the lowest sub-basement of the manse. Those who find this Heart Room (not hearthroom—that's elsewhere) are met with an ornate balcony of basalt and soulsteel overlooking the very Mouth of the Void itself. The supernatural qualities of Cold House, including its quiet insistence that its visitors never depart, all derive from this room. The dead who find this place are ensnared by it. Once they see the Mouth of the Void, such ghosts are irrevocably broken. Thereafter, they do nothing but sit in silent contemplation of the majesty of nothingness—for days, for years, for centuries—until finally, all doubts silenced and all questions answered, they hurl themselves into the Void.

The living cannot ever find the Heart Room. Only the dead are so attuned to the urgent Whispers of Oblivion that they can trace it to this place. Eye and Seven Despairs visits the Heart Room regularly, both to feed on the ghosts who linger in prostrate submission to Oblivion and to prostrate himself.

CHILLS

When characters come within sight of Cold House, any Willpower rolls made for them suffer a -2 internal penalty. Once a character enters Cold House, she suffers a powerful lethargy that inflicts a -5 internal penalty on all Willpower rolls. Also, characters within Cold House need a successful Willpower roll (applying the -5 penalty) in order to voluntarily leave.

EYE AND SEVEN DESPAIRS' PANOPLY

Eye and Seven Despairs' subject territories, magical arsenal, mundane wealth and supply of minions surpass most mortal nations but remain inferior to those of most other Deathlords. His peculiar obsessions also prevented him from wisely allocating the resources he does possess.

The Deathlord's chief personal weapon is his mechanical gauntlet, the Fatal Arbalest of Quietus and Eclipses. The Arbalest actually replaces his right arm, which he lost at some point long ago in his Underworld travails. The "hand" of the Arbalest consists of a series of claws that move on a sophisticated pulley system. The claws have Speed 5, Accuracy +1, Damage +8L, Defense +2 and Rate 3. The Arbalest counts as a natural weapon, and the damage it deals is piercing. The gauntlet grants the Deathlord an effective Strength of 10 for purposes of lifting and throwing, though not for slashing with its claws. True to its name, the Arbalest also functions as a magical crossbow that fires up to three Essence bolts per attack at a cost of one mote per bolt. These bolts are Speed 4, Accuracy +3, Damage 5L, Rate 200 and have a Range of 200.

While the other Deathlords occasionally gift their weapons to their favored deathknights for special battles, Eye and Seven Despair's gauntlet is permanently attached to his body. He could never loan it out, even in the unlikely event he wanted to do so. Eye and Seven Despairs can use the Arbalest as a crossbow only in his primary form, but he gains the improved Strength and the ability to inflict piercing, lethal damage in any human form he takes.

EYE AND SEVEN DESPAIRS' COMBAT TACTICS

Eye and Seven Despairs overestimates his own power and durability, (though in his defense, it is true that he cannot be killed through any conventional means). He also does not know much about personal combat, so his tactics seldom show much cunning.

In any case, the Deathlord's main combat strategy is simply to stay out of combat. Few beings other than his fellow Deathlords (and any Abyssals who serve him in his Prioress identity) even know that he still exists. As Star of Dirt and

Doubt, however, he excels at misdirection, obfuscation and appeals to the chivalry of any high-Compassion heroes who threaten his schemes.

If he must engage in direct combat, Eye and Seven Despairs relies almost exclusively on the Fatal Arbalest of Quietus and Eclipses and his preternatural skill at dodging. Eye and Seven Despairs possesses a high-level custom Dodge Charm. At a cost of four motes and one Willpower, he can perfectly dodge any attack in a scene with the expenditure of four motes per attack dodged. Evasion in this manner does not count as use of a Charm, so Eye and Seven Despairs can perfectly dodge attacks and use other Charms without the need for a Combo.

SERVANTS OF EYE AND SEVEN DESPAIRS

The first two Abyssals who received Exaltation from Eye and Seven Despairs are the Day Caste Chorus at Midnight and the Dusk Caste Scar of Uproar. Both feel an obsessive love for their joint concubine, Star of Dirt and Doubt, a love subtly augmented by the Deathlord's powerful mind-altering Charms. Each Abyssal is paranoid and suspicious of the other, and each of them believes that the other one murdered their co-conspirator, Blood Scavenger. Despite their mutual hostility, they continue to work together in the misguided belief that they can prove themselves to the Neverborn as better and more loyal servants of Oblivion than their former master was. They have no idea that their "former master" oversees every aspect of their plans, improving or undermining them according to his insane whims.

Chorus at Midnight follows a long-term plan to establish a ghostly spy network across the Southeast, stretching from Kirighast to Thorns. She knows about a new Deathlord called the Prioress of Bloody Sands and seeks more information about this new rival. Flush with her success in destroying Eye and Seven Despairs, Chorus at Midnight wants to feel the forbidden thrill of hurling another Deathlord into the Void. They don't seem so tough!

Scar of Uproar's plans are more direct, almost comically so. He wants to march his forces into Harborhead's capital, kill everyone he can find, and then take over once a new shadowland forms there. Oblivious to just how powerful the Realm remains even in its current disarray, Scar of Uproar believes that he can simply sack Kirighast just as the Mask of Winters did with Thorns. Unfortunately for him, he has a fraction of the Mask's forces and none of his necromantic skill or tactical genius.

Red Famine is actually Eye and Seven Despairs' most important deathknight. The Prioress of Bloody Sands bound him into service, but Red Famine quickly realized that his mistress and the supposedly deceased lord of Cold House were one and the same. Eye and Seven Despairs then bound him to keep silent about his secondary identity. After just a few short years, Red Famine now brims with contempt toward his master/mistress, who leaves him virtually unattended while shuttling

between Cold House and the Field of Bloodied Bulls.

The deathknight now enacts his own plan to destroy Kirighast. For the last year, he has used bribery and blackmail to recruit mortal spies among both the satrap's administration and the Brides of Ahlat. He doesn't seek tactical information but simply identifies those persons who seem most likely to favor diplomacy and negotiation over militancy. Those individuals then meet with fatal accidents or illnesses. As a result, the Realm forces grow increasingly reactionary while the dominant resistance group becomes ever more violent. Red Famine anticipates that open warfare will erupt either in Kirighast itself or near the jade mines at Bent Creek. Either site would make an attractive shadowland. Privately, Red Famine hopes that he can somehow supplant Eye and Seven Despairs and trade his newly created shadowland to either Mask of Winters or the First and Forsaken Lion for a suitably high position in their organizations.

SERIES IDEAS

If Eye and Seven Despairs chose to Exalt new deathknights, he would most likely do so just to placate his Neverborn masters. He would give little thought to what sort of individual he would Exalt or what roles Abyssals of different castes would play in his organization. In fact, he would most likely delegate such decisions to Red Famine, who would probably seek out individuals who could aid in his own plans for Harborhead. Abyssals in such a series would find themselves in the unusual position of answering to a deathknight only a few years older than themselves rather than an ancient Deathlord with millennia of experience.

Alternatively, Eye and Seven Despairs might choose to Exalt more Abyssals at Cold House as part of his continuing revenge melodrama. Such newly Exalted deathknights might swear total loyalty to Eye and Seven Despairs, only to be subjected to the same surreal mind games as their predecessors. (In this scenario, Eye and Seven Despairs' has probably destroyed all three of his former minion-victims.) The soul-corrupting nature of Cold House supplies a further complication, as the manse's link to the Labyrinth inflicts madness and despair on all who reside within it. Or perhaps these new Abyssals were created by the command of Scar of Uproar and/or Chorus at Midnight, either or both of whom might have acted under the influence of Star of Dirt and Doubt. How will new Abyssal servants, forced to obey the edicts of obviously incompetent masters, fit into the hidden Deathlord's schemes?

THE FIRST AND FORSAKEN LION

Other Names: Oblivion's General

The being who became known as the First and Forsaken Lion believes he was the first Solar ghost to accept the Neverborn's offer of power. Perhaps because of his eagerness, he quickly proved himself as the most powerful of the Deathlords as well. In life, the Lion received Solar Exaltation not long after the end of the Primordial War, making him one of the oldest sentient beings in all Creation. For all his power, though, the Lion made mistakes that earned him the ire of

his Neverborn patron, He Who Holds in Thrall. During the Great Contagion, the Lion's impatience and eagerness for personal glory led him to open the gates of Creation to the Fair Folk, an impetuous action that, ironically, might have saved Creation from extinction by the Dowager's fell disease.

For that mistake and others, He Who Holds in Thrall laid two punishments on his errant servant. First, the Neverborn agonizingly and permanently riveted the Deathlord's soulsteel armor to his body. Second, the Lion's master banished him from Stygia and commanded him to build a great fortress-in-exile, the Thousand, far from any useful shadowlands and even farther from the Underworld kingdom the Deathlord sought to rule.

When the Lion was fused into his armor, he lost the power to change his own shape. Accordingly, he always manifests in the same form, a nine-foot-tall tower of a man covered from head to toe in soulsteel superheavy plate armor. His helmet conceals his face, and his armor conceals every inch of his body. The severed heads of six of the Seven Divine Counselors of Stygia hang from his belt, ready to lend their wisdom whenever he commands.

LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP

Some of the Lion's fellow Deathlords think that He Who Holds in Thrall levied a third punishment by assigning the disgraced Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers—also called the Black Heron—to serve him. The theory goes that He Who Holds in Thrall secretly placed a geas on the Lion to feel an obsessive lust for Princess Magnificent. At the same time, the slain Primordial imbued Princess Magnificent with a burning contempt for the First and Forsaken Lion. No poison burns as much as unrequited love, and in time, that poison would burn its way into the Lion's soul, leaving behind only a hatred for any world in which love could flourish.

No one who knows the two can doubt that the Black Heron loathes the First and Forsaken Lion, but wounded pride could account for that. The speculation about the Lion's feelings rest on observations of the way he treats her, or sometimes mistreats her. The Deathlords, ghosts and Abyssals who hold this theory say that sometimes, the Lion seems to be trying to impress the Black Heron, or he lets her get away with behavior that would result in torture or death for any other perpetrator. Other times, the Lion grows angry and insulting with her for reasons the observers can't understand.

Of course, the First and Forsaken Lion does not talk about his feelings. People who know the Lion think he would probably behead or disembowel anyone who asked. The truth is known only by the Lion, the Neverborn... and the Storyteller.



THE LION'S DOMAIN

For all his power and authority, the First and Forsaken Lion has little territory to show for it—by Deathlord standards. His army, the Legion Sanguinary, is the largest military force in the Underworld, if not in all existence, numbering more than 750,000 troops. Except for his deathknights, all his soldiers are dead. Half the Legion followed the Lion into exile to the Thousand, a vast complex of hollowed-out caves and soulsteel ramparts. This immense citadel takes up most of a small mountain range in the Underworld located not far from where Gem stands in Creation. Another 200,000 remain in Stygia. It is the largest single military force in the city, and a not-inconsiderable fraction of the population. While the Lion may not return to Stygia until his Neverborn master permits it, his Abyssal lieutenants ably oversee his interests in the capital. The rest of the Legion Sanguinary is scattered across the Underworld in garrisons conveniently placed to intimidate the Lion's rivals without actually provoking them.

No major shadowlands lie within 1,000 miles of the Thousand—certainly none large enough and convenient enough to accommodate hundreds of thousands of troops with thousands of necromantic war machines. Accordingly, if the Lion is to gain a foothold in Creation, he must create his own pathway. To that end, the Lion schemes to destroy Gem, whether through plague, civil war, famine, engineering a Fair Folk incursion or some other means. By the Lion's calculations, exterminating one of the South's most populous cities should generate a shadowland slightly smaller than the Font of Mourning—a 100-square-mile shadowland swamp in the Southwest. That should be more than big enough for the Lion's needs. Although he previously judged the Fair Folk as the most efficient weapon to use against Gem, his trusted deathknight Meticulous Owl recently brought to his attention an intriguing new possibility. It seems that a small army of strange intruders from regions unknown is active in the Font of Mourning. Perhaps these "locust-men" can provide the massacre the First and Forsaken Lion needs.

THE LION'S PANOPLY

The Lion's resources dwarf those of most of his peers. The Legion Sanguinary is several times larger than the army of the Mask of Winters—the only other Deathlord who could seriously challenge the Lion in direct military combat—and even Juggernaut might be no match for an army 750,000 strong. The Lion himself sees the Bodhisattva as his sole rival in terms of military strength, and even that is only because the Lion has no navy and no prospects for getting one soon. Although the Lion thinks himself invincible, he is also a realist. The Legion Sanguinary's maintenance and upkeep requirements are prodigious, and the Lion knows that unless he can somehow exert his forces in Creation, he will soon suffer a shortage of soulsteel and other resources.

Indeed, that shortage has already made itself felt. One of the Lion's most prized possessions is his royal warstrider, the Insidious Ebon Xoanon, which has only minimal soulsteel components. Its fuselage is actually made of ebony overlaid with human skin

and bones, all of which have been magically reinforced to possess durability comparable to the magical materials.

The Lion's personal weapon is his soulsteel grand daiklave, Varan's Ruin. The soulsteel of this mighty blade did not come from the souls of common ghosts, but from a quality source such as few weaponsmiths would ever see. Varan Pen was a Solar hero of the First Age. Noble and steadfast, Varan resisted the madness and decadence that claimed his Solar peers. (Or at least he resisted them more than most.) When the Usurpation claimed him, he became a great hero of the Underworld, resisting the temptations of the Neverborn and helping many ghosts find peace and Lethe. Then, the Lion found him, captured him, and melted his ghostly flesh into steel without taking the customary step of beating his sentence into submission. The agony broke Varan's mind and consumed it with hate and malice. Varan's Ruin hungers for blood and souls, and it revels in carnage. The weapon has the traits of a grand daiklave but can confer the Accuracy, Defense and Rate benefits of orichalcum *or* soulsteel, whether the wielder is Solar or Abyssal Exalted (or, of course, the Lion himself). Each blow struck with Varan's Ruin drains 10 motes from the target's Essence pool. Five go to the wielder; Varan's hungry soul consumes the rest. The blade utterly consumes the souls of any living beings it slays, and ghosts who merely touch Varan's Ruin are drawn in as well if their players fail Willpower rolls at difficulty 6.

The Lion's greatest and most terrifying weapon, however, is still under construction. More than a century ago, the First and forsaken Lion ordered the construction of a flying battle cruiser he dubbed the *Final Maelstrom*. It is more than a quarter-mile wide and still five to 10 years from completion. This mighty war machine of obsidian, black jade and soulsteel operates by long forgotten First Age principles. The *Final Maelstrom* will draw upon the raw power of Oblivion even while fully manifested in Creation under the full light of the Unconquered Sun. The most devastating necrotic Essence weapons in existence will make the *Final Maelstrom* a force on par with the Five-Metal Shrike and the Thousand-Forged Dragons... far surpassing any of the pitiful airships of Lookshy and the Realm.

THE LION'S COMBAT TACTICS

The combat Charms at the Lion's disposal include every Archery, Melee and Thrown Charm known to Abyssals or Solars. The First and Forsaken Lion has mastered Earth Dragon Style and Violet Bier of Sorrows Style and knows the Scarlet-Patterned Battlefield style up to its Form-type Charm. He prefers Violet Bier of Sorrows Style since it greatly enhances his use of Varan's Ruin.

The Lion knows a host of defensive and offensive high-Essence Charms.

- For 10 motes, he can generate a scene-length Presence-based aura that instantly slays any non-magical being who touches him.
- He has a supplemental Melee Charm, costing five motes, that enables his attacks to automatically bypass any non-perfect defense.

- A supplemental Melee Charm that costs six motes kills every extra within 10 yards when he successfully strikes any enemy target.

- For five motes, the Lion can render himself perfectly immune to any non-magical source of damage.

- In mass combat, he uses a War Charm costing five motes that doubles the difficulty of any opposing force to resist rout for the rest of the scene.

SERVANTS OF THE FIRST AND FORSAKEN LION

The Lion runs his forces as a strict military body, complete with ranks, promotions and command structure. Quite possibly, he cannot conceive of how to maintain any other sort of administration. Accordingly, the Lion strongly favors persons with a military background in choosing his Abyssals.

The Lion intuitively favors Dusk Caste Abyssals over any other type. This preference could lead him astray, since he might appoint any Dusk Caste within an Abyssal circle to the leadership role whether she is the best person or not. The Dusk Caste Walking on Laughter, for example, now commands the Legion Sanguinary despite his inexperience. The Lion respects Midnights for their charisma, their devotion and their boundless stamina, but he has little time for theological concerns.

The Lion prizes Daybreak Abyssals for their necromantic skills and for their mastery of artifact construction. Although he knows more about First Age military artifact design principles than anyone but another Deathlord, the Lion understands that applying such principles is best left to technicians with a natural flair for it. He usually favors Daybreak craftsmen over sorcerers.

Day Caste Abyssals are valued for their cunning at infiltration and intelligence gathering. The Day Caste Meticulous Owl became the Lion's most trusted servant despite Walking on Laughter's technically superior rank. A truly hideous specimen even by the standards of Abyssal Exalted, Meticulous Owl is crippled, deformed, blind in one eye—this was *before* his Exaltation—and one of the most cunning manipulators and spymasters in all Creation. Since his Exaltation, only the Lion has seen the face Meticulous Owl hides behind a black jade mask.

The Lion slightly distrusts Moonshadow Exalts, possibly because naval combat is the only field of war in which the Lion knows he is not the undisputed master. It leaves him uncertain whether he can properly evaluate a Moonshadow's proposals for sea-based conflict. The only Moonshadow currently in his service, Shatterer of the Way, monitors the City of Dead Flowers in An-Teng, the closest shadowland that could possibly serve as a staging ground for the Legion Sanguinary.

In addition to his deathknights, the Lion has one other servant, albeit an unruly one: his fellow Deathlord, the disgraced Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers. The Princess is discussed more fully starting on p. 75.

SERIES IDEAS

Regardless of their personality or background, characters who serve the First and Forsaken Lion are expected to comport themselves as high-ranking officers in a well-disciplined, if ghoulish, military company. Story hooks involving the Lion's Abyssals might include any of the following:

Gem Must Die!: The time has come for the Lion and the Legion Sanguinary to make themselves known in Creation. To achieve this, the Lion needs a large, conveniently located shadowland. Accordingly, he assigns the characters to infiltrate the city of Gem and figure out how to destroy it utterly while maximizing mortal casualties.

War in An-Teng: Northwest of the Thousand lies the once-great nation of An-Teng, now reduced to a pitiful land of peasants sorely abused by the Dragon-Blooded. But the Lion's spies in the area scent the possibility of impending revolution, as the long-suffering peasants seek to rise up against the Scarlet Empire. They cannot succeed, of course, but with the subtle manipulations of an Abyssal circle, perhaps the uprising could lead to new and larger shadowlands in An-Teng, making it a viable staging area for the Legion Sanguinary.

Stygian Intrigue: The Lion's forced exile to the Thousand sorely tests his Deathlord status of first-among-equals. To maintain his dominance in Stygia, the Lion sends a group of loyal deathknights to oversee his garrison there and prevent the other Deathlords from undermining his authority.

THE LOVER CLAD IN THE RAIMENT OF TEARS

Other Names: She Who Must Be Obeyed

Most Deathlords view the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears as a whore and a dilettante, though one not *quite* as incompetent as Eye and Seven Despairs. Only the Bodhisattva does not share that view, for he remembers the Lover from their living days. Remembers her and *fears* her. For the Lover, when she bore a different name and served the Unconquered Sun, ventured into the Labyrinth before any of the other future Deathlords even knew what it was. She knew secret spells and words of power and how to make a man die for her love. She knew the price of every man's soul, and the Bodhisattva fears that she knows these things still. The Bodhisattva keeps his own counsel, however, and hopes a distance of 8,000 miles suffices to keep him out of her web, while suspecting that she already has agents within his court.

The Lover carefully crafts her illusion of inconsequentiality. In her citadel, the Fortress of Crimson Ice, her subjects while away their time in carnal delights. The most skilled lovers (living or dead) earn the supreme reward of pleasuring their mistress. While her lovers in-

clude the living and the dead, only the dead ever leave her chambers, for the Deathlord is an... exuberant love-maker. Now and then, she trifles at destroying a petty kingdom or a legion on the march. Her critics wonder whether she will ever do anything *important* to further the Neverborn's goals.

Those critics are fools. When she lived, the Lover pursued every form of pleasure the decadent Solar Exalted could devise. Eventually, she realized that pleasure bore diminishing returns. Every pleasure palls in time, and the hedonist becomes so jaded that the continued pursuit of pleasure becomes pointless. With this epiphany, the Solar realized the futility of her own millennia-long existence. She contemplated suicide before the Dragon-Blooded did her the favor of ending her life for her.

Among all the Deathlords, only the Lover does not seek revenge on Creation for her betrayal and murder. Quite the contrary, she feels grateful that the Dragon-Blooded ended her banal excuse for a life, and she hopes to honor their heroism by returning the favor. Convinced of the utter pointlessness of human existence, the Lover spreads ultimate pleasure among her followers because she knows from bitter experience that when pleasure ends, nothing of any value remains. A surfeit of pleasure leads inevitably to despair, and the only answer to despair is Oblivion. The sheer absurdity of suggestions that joy can be found in duty, helping others or other sacrifices of self drives her into a killing rage.

In nearly all her forms, the Lover is a woman of sensual beauty. She has developed an improved version of the Mutable Form power intrinsic to all Deathlords. At a cost of seven motes and one Willpower, the Lover can intuitively assume a form that represents a particular onlooker's ideal sexual partner. For 10 motes and one Willpower, she can use the aforementioned ability in the presence of multiple people, with each onlooker seeing her in an ideal form. In either case, the Lover gains a +5 bonus to all social actions against affected onlookers.

THE LOVER'S DOMAIN

The Lover resides in a small shadowland called the Vale of Dust and Shadows, located in the Kingdom of Gradafes about 600 miles southeast of Crystal. This small Northeastern nation covers less than 1,000 square miles. The farmers and goat-herders of Gradafes provide meat and other foodstuffs to the Lover's court (for the benefit of her living visitors) in exchange for protection from barbarians and other outside enemies. The most prominent of such enemies are the region's Tear Eater barbarian tribes. The Tear Eaters posed a perennial threat to Gradafes until the Lover met with their tribal leaders and won them to her cause. These tribes now worship their ancestors, many of whom continue on as the freeze-dried Greater Dead who oversee Tear Eaters society. They, in turn, worship the Deathlord who taught them how to rule beyond death.

With an area of less than thirty square miles, the Vale of Dust and Shadows is one of the smallest shadowlands to serve as a Deathlord's primary domain, but it suits the Lover's tastes. Up until the Contagion, the area held an isolated monastery dedicated to a Shogunate-era precursor to the Immaculate Order. These monks practiced rigorous celibacy as well as other ascetic disciplines. Their remarkable faith and piety somehow gave the monks and the people of the tiny nation an exceptional immunity to the Great Contagion, much to the Deathlords' surprise. Finding this unacceptable, the Lover personally traveled to the monastery in the guise of a beautiful (and seemingly virginal) young refugee seeking shelter for the night. Once inside, she seduced every monk in the monastery, male and female. As the sun rose over the monastery's walls, the first symptoms of the Great Contagion appeared among the fallen monks and the people they protected. The Lover remained even after the monks had all died. After amusing herself by stirring all their ghosts into a frenzy of magically induced sexual excitement, she severed each of their arms at the shoulder and watched their fumbling attempts to couple.

After the debacle of the Contagion and the Fair Folk Invasion, the Lover returned to the Vale. She built her citadel, the Fortress of Crimson Ice, on the ruins of the old monastery. Over time, the living Gradafesi returned as well, rebuilding the towns near the fortress and swearing allegiance to the Lover. The Kingdom of Gradafes consists of cold steppes, but the strange, unwholesome animals and plants indigenous to the Underworld flourished in the Lover's domain. In the Contagion's aftermath, even such unappealing fare was better than starvation. Besides, while the Lover's domain was cold and frightening, the Deathlord herself had a beauty that haunted the souls of the living. The Lover soon subjugated the entire nation without a single armed conflict.

From a distance, the Fortress of Crimson Ice appears as a pale miasma of red and purple, growing more distinct as the visitor approaches. Eventually, it coalesces into a series of red-crystal parapets and fortifications around a turreted central tower. Translucent ghosts float around the fortress as if begging entrance. As one finally grows near, the sounds of never-ending festivals and orgies seep from the fortress. Thousands of servants, living and dead, reside within the Fortress of Crimson Ice. The Lover binds them to two commandments. First, they must obey the Lover in all things; second, when she has no orders for them, they must engage in any and every form of hedonistic decadence they can imagine.

Most of these servants are broken things, burnt out by decades or even centuries of sex, gluttony, drugs and perversion. No longer able to experience any true pleasure, they perform orgiastic rites by rote, hoping for some new instruction from their mistress to break the monotony. Failing that, they pray for Oblivion. Those

servants who have not yet experienced such transcendent ecstasy alternate between mindless gibbering at the sensations they endure and growing dread at the possibility of becoming like their jaded fellows. A few of the fortress's denizens have gone utterly mad from their existence. Some now emulate their mistress (even dressing like her, regardless of gender), while others find that they can still experience the pleasure of a brutal kill well executed.

Some of the armless ghost-monks still remain. They continue their orgy as best they can. Sometimes they beg visitors to help them. Over the centuries, the Lover has added other ghosts she trapped in perpetual lust and then maimed in various ways, producing a pathetically pornographic freak show as an adjunct to her court.

THE LOVER'S PANOPLY

The Lover carries a soulsteel blade called the Siren in Avern—not even a daiklave, but a thin, translucent rapier—but it is only superficially a combat weapon. The Siren in Avern has the traits of a reaper daiklave except as follows: Damage (special), Defense +5. On a successful hit, the blade inflicts no damage. Instead, roll (extra successes + the wielder's Charisma + wielder's permanent Essence) against the target's Dodge MDV. Each threshold success causes the target to lose one point of temporary Willpower. Furthermore, anytime the wielder successfully parries an attack with the Siren in Avern, the attacker's player must roll Compassion and score no successes. With even one success, the attacker must break off the fight and cannot initiate any further attacks against the wielder for the rest of the scene. Overcoming this Compulsion effect costs five Willpower points. It ends automatically if the wielder of the blade attacks the character again. If the Compassion roll produces five or more successes, the character instantly falls in love with the wielder for a year and a day. He cannot attack her and cannot apply Dodge MDV to her social attacks. Solars can break this bond before the time limit ends but only after expending 10 Willpower points.

The Lover also possesses the Mirror of Darkness and Lightning, a one-foot-wide, 11-sided mirror of polished obsidian and soulsteel that floats obediently at the Lover's side. A demon sorcerer forged the Mirror long ago but was overcome by his own creation and trapped within for all eternity. Those who look into the Mirror without the Lover's permission suffer the same fate. Eleven arms of black lightning snatch them up and pull them in, and the ever-hungry demon devours them within seconds. Only perfect defenses can protect against these lightning arms. Those whom the Lover permits to look into the Mirror can resist being imprisoned and devoured if their players successfully roll (Wits + Occult + Conviction), at a difficulty of 4. Characters whose players succeed on this roll completely replenish their Essence pools and regain any spent Willpower.



The Lover also owns many other artifacts and devices. Her flirtatious and vapid exterior conceals a superb command of magic and arcane science. She is second only to the Dowager in necromancy, and she follows close behind the Walker in Darkness and the First and Forsaken Lion in her application of magitech and necrotech. Even in those areas, however, the Lover favors misdirection. She has produced only one warstrider so far, a soulsteel noble warstrider known as the Hateful Devourer of Love. Her rivals laughed to learn that a clumsy deathknight allowed Lookshy to capture it. Yet the Lover allowed the prize to fall into Lookshy's hand, for it carries the doom of that nation within its coils and pulleys.

THE LOVER'S COMBAT TACTICS

The Lover utterly eschews combat, believing that only one who can resist her charms deserves the honor of killing her. Thus far, however, she has never met anyone strong-willed enough to even draw a sword against her. Even when she does enter combat, she does so only for the purpose of using the Siren in Avern to make her attackers fall in love with her. Already, a number of Solar Exalted have shared her bed and sworn their devotion to her. Some of them she even allows to live, withholding the final bliss she grants to so many others.

Misdirection and obfuscation are the Lover's true weapons. Already, she has laid the foundation of Lookshy's destruction without anyone else knowing about it. Her deathknights move silently among the Tear Eaters, reinforcing the barbarians' loyalty to her. They use Hardened Killer Training Style to transform them into ruthless killing machines that will soon become a match for the Bull of the North and his pitiful Icewalkers.

The Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears is far from helpless in a fight, though. During her living days, she mastered the Snake Style and Ebon Shadow Style of supernatural martial arts. She oversaw the creation of Laughing Wounds Style as well, which enables its practitioner to draw strength from both the pain he receives and the pain he inflicts.

SERVANTS OF THE LOVER

The Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears has many Abyssal followers. Indeed, she was the first Deathlord to Exalt an Abyssal. Exalted into the Midnight Caste, the Martyr to the Last Rest (sometimes known as the Shadow of the Ash Arrow) remains high among her favorites and serves as her chief emissary to the Tear Eaters tribes. The cunning Day Caste Exquisite Pain, having successfully placed a viper near the heart of Lookshy, now turns his attention to the Linowan Nation and its great shadowland, the Fields of Woe. The Lover's most beloved servant is the mysterious Melkin Fool in Red who oversees the Circus Moribund, a macabre traveling carnival that wanders the Northeast introducing innocent villagers to the wonders of forbidden pleasure and the majesty of death.

The Lover's reach extends far from the Northeast, though. Some of her deathknights infiltrate the Scarlet Empire, where they fan the flames of discontent among the Great Houses and push them toward civil war. She even has a spy in the court of the Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water. The pious and chaste Knight of Ghosts and Shadows who so recently swore allegiance to the Bodhisattva is a deception, a false personality inserted into one of her most loyal servants. Without knowing his own reasons for acting, the Knight now seeks instruction from the Bodhisattva into the deeper mysteries of necromancy, while regularly reporting his discoveries in his dreams. Another deathknight, the Prince of Shadows dwells in Kirighast, disguised as a humble mortal savant. From that perch, he spies on the Lover's enemies even as he seduces Solar Exalted and others to his mistress's cause.

Unlike many of her peers, the Lover does not favor one caste over another or even have preferred roles for the different castes. An individualist herself, the Lover looks for strong-willed and passionate individuals and lets the Black Exaltation simply augment what is already there. In addition to her deathknights, the Lover is also served by several Solar and Dragon-Blooded Exalted who have fallen before her beauty and libido. She has not yet tamed a Lunar or seduced a Sidereal, but she remains game for anything.

SERIES IDEAS

More than any other Deathlord, the Lover seeks a political means to destroy Creation—guiding humanity to exterminate itself. Her deathknights all love her to an obsessive degree. Each believes that he can win her favor if only he can devise a sufficiently elegant way to kill large numbers of people. For example, Exquisite Pain himself came up with the idea of creating a powerful but cursed artifact for the sole purpose of allowing a rival nation to capture it and destroy themselves. Although the Lover regularly sends out entire circles, whether as diplomatic envoys or as subversives and saboteurs, she finds that Abyssal circles often stymie themselves with infighting, as each Exalt wants to claim all the glory... and her love. Accordingly, the Lover uses the Sworn Brothers' Oath spell to bind groups of Abyssals into temporary loyalty to one another. She also dispels this artificial oathbond immediately before debriefing the circle so that they will be more forthright and honest about each other's failures.

Story hooks for Abyssals in the service of the Lover include the following:

Guiding the Tear Eaters: The Lunar Exalted in the Northeast grow concerned about the Lover's close ties to the Tear Eaters. Some of them consider a move into Tear Eater territory. To defend against a Lunar assault, the Abyssals must obtain reliable intelligence on Lunar activity and then figure out how to thwart it. An added bonus might be bringing a young Lunar back to the Fortress of Crimson Ice for the Lover's amusement. Alternatively, perhaps the Tear Eaters grow strong enough to challenge the Bull of the North. They only need Abyssal generals to lead them into battle.

The Circus Moribund: Abyssals assigned to the Circus Moribund act as undercover operatives under the leadership of the Melkin Fool in Red. (Or, perhaps, they fill in for her while the Melkin Fool is busy with some other assignment.) Their travels with the strange carnival mask their efforts to spy on Northeastern cities and spread the absurdity of life and the love of death among the people they encounter. But the Circus starts to get a reputation, and even the Wyld Hunt might show up to take in a show.

The Death of Lookshy: The Lover decides it's time to give her contemptuous rival Deathlords a shock by conquering one of the great nations in Creation. Although she finds military conflict tedious and unimaginative, she will suffer through the boredom of a military campaign rather than tolerate further insults. Accordingly, the Lover activates the doom concealed within the Hateful Devourer of Lover. A large shadowland soon covers Lookshy, leaving its sizable First Age infrastructure ripe for conquest. Now, all she needs to do is mop up any resistance from the remnants of Lookshy's military, pacify its ghosts and consolidate her control before the Mask of Winters can move in. The characters are just the deathknights for the job. See **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. 1—Wonders of the First Age**, p. 158, for more information about the Hateful Devourer of Love.

THE MASK OF WINTERS

Other Names: Larquen Quen

The Mask of Winters left the other Deathlords slack-jawed when he brazenly attacked and subjugated the Realm satrapy of Thorns, and incidentally made himself the most (in)famous Deathlord in all Creation. For centuries, the Deathlords held a tacit agreement that they would move subtly against Creation, lest they suffer as the Black Heron does or give the living an enemy against whom to unite. Such subtlety became impossible once the Mask seized Thorns. Since then, other Deathlords have scrambled to match his accomplishment—some more capably than others.

Flush with success, the Mask of Winters shows little interest in expansion. Instead, he consolidates his hold over Thorns and stamps out all resistance. He also seems to enjoy worming his way into the politics and diplomacy of the Confederation of Rivers, forcing the heads of other states to accept him as a power with whom they must negotiate.

The Mask's other great interest is destroying his fellow Deathlords. At any given time, nearly half of his substantial number of deathknights operates abroad in elaborate machinations to undermine his rivals. As usual for the Neverborn, the Deathlord's masters take their time in registering an opinion. Perhaps they tolerate his perfidy because they think the Mask cannot destroy all of his rivals without fatally wounding Creation in the process. Perhaps they're giving him rope with which to hang himself. Perhaps their dreaming minds have not noticed. The Mask of Winters believes their silence constitutes an endorsement of his pursuit of his great destiny.



The Mask of Winters was once a Twilight Caste named Larquen Quen who survived the Usurpation and did not actually die until centuries after the first 10 Deathlords forged their pacts with the Neverborn. Larquen fled the Usurpation at its onset along with a group of other Solars led by the ancient and illustrious Kal Bax. Master Bax had constructed an ingeniously hidden manse—an Invisible Fortress that even the Loom of Fate could not find. He and his protégés fled there to wait out the Usurpation. Their wait became long indeed. In time, each of the Solars died of old age, suicide... or murder by one of their fellows. When Larquen Quen died and fell into the Underworld, the Neverborn sent an emissary to meet him, the Walker in Darkness. To Larquen's astonishment, that Deathlord was actually one of his former compatriots from Bax's Invisible Fortress. The Walker, however, remembered nothing of his mortal life—which was good since Larquen Quen had murdered him. Larquen concealed his recognition of the Neverborn's emissary, followed the Walker into the Labyrinth and sold his name to the Abyss for the power of a Deathlord.

The Mask of Winters typically appears as a towering figure standing more than seven feet tall and wrapped in undulating black funeral robes. Beneath the robes, he wears soulsteel superheavy plate that whimpers in pain when struck with the voices of newborn children. The Deathlord wears a helm with two mask-like faces, one on the front and one on the back. One is a face of sublime beauty, while the other is so horrific that it causes mortals to flee in terror. The Mask of Winters has learned to use of these visages to disturbing effect. He can see out of both masks, so no one can surprise him from behind. If attacked from behind, he uses his Mutable Form to reverse his joints and turn his entire body back to front and vice versa at a cost of one mote. Alternatively, if he wishes to discomfit others, he can turn his neck 180 degrees to look at them with his other face.

More information on the Mask of Winters appears in *Exalted*, pp. 320-322.

THE MASK'S DOMAIN

The Mask of Winters chose the site of his first foray into Creation well. When the Deathlord arrived in R.Y. 758, Thorns had decimated its military forces in a disastrous campaign against the Confederation of Rivers. Its hereditary autocrat retained his throne solely due to the support of his Dragon-Blooded handlers. The war created a number of small shadowlands around Thorns. The Mask of Winters marched several legions of undead troops out of those shadowlands. The Dynasts in residence rallied Thorns' own forces and might have held the city against the ghosts and zombies, had not the Deathlord sent in his Abyssal Exalted. The deathknights' efforts caused two small shadowlands to merge into a single one big enough for Juggernaut to crawl through. The deathknights and the corpse-behemoth made short work of the city's Dragon-Blooded defenders. Within a few days, shadowlands covered most of Thorns.

Thorns remains an occupied city, its people terrified, unable to leave and barely able to survive on the city's dwindling food supplies. Squads of shambling dead commanded by nemissary captains patrol the streets, looking for any signs of dissent or resistance. There is a resistance movement in Thorns, but its members are so desperate that they even parlay with Solar and Lunar Anathema. For his part, having seized a beachhead in Creation, the Mask of Winters now makes a show of consolidating his holdings, even as his spies across Creation monitor the other Deathlords and look for ways to undermine their dark schemes.

For more information about Thorns, see Chapter Five of *The Compass of Terrestrial Directions, Vol. I—The Scavenger Lands*.

THE MASK OF WINTERS' PANOPLY

See *Exalted*, p. 321 for descriptions of the Mask of Winters' principle weapons and armor. The Deathlord's most powerful weapon, however, is undoubtedly the great behemoth called Juggernaut. The great undead monstrosity would be one mile tall if it stood upright. Currently, it crawls about ponderously on its hands and knees. Its master placed towers of basalt and ebony on its back to serve as a command center. More information on Juggernaut appears in *The Compass of Terrestrial Directions, Vol. I—The Scavenger Lands*, p. 154.

In addition, the Deathlord's two-faced mask gives him four bonus successes on all Presence-based rolls when the beautiful face shows or four bonus successes on all intimidation attempts when the hideous face shows.

THE MASK OF WINTERS' COMBAT TACTICS

The Mask of Winters relies heavily on his sorcerous and necromantic powers in combat. What's more, it is a canny enemy indeed who can engage the Deathlord without also battling scores of zombies, nemissaries and even more macabre minions. If he's forced to defend himself through conventional means, the Mask knows several high-Essence Charms:

- For three motes and one Willpower, he can perfectly parry any attack for the rest of the scene at a cost of three motes per attack. Such parries do not count as Charm usage.
- For two motes, he can slay with a single successful hit anyone who has a permanent Essence less than 5.
- For five motes, the Mask of Winters can make a single Melee attack against *everyone* within a 10-yard radius as a single action. This does not count as an extra-action Charm: The Mask's sword itself multiplies and strikes out at every applicable target, making one attack against them all.

SERVANTS OF THE MASK OF WINTERS

It is possible that the Mask of Winters has the most Abyssal servants of any Deathlord. It is equally possible that he merely pretends to do so, directing his deathknights to change their names and identities in order to confound

his enemies. The Mask seems not to care about the caste of his Abyssals, but he uses all of them efficiently and inventively. He seems unwilling to integrate his Abyssals into his command structure, however—not even his Dusk Caste servants into his military officer core. He prefers instead to keep administrative authority in the hands of war ghosts whose loyalties he can secure through necromancy.

The Midnight Caste Apostate in Tatters was the Mask's first Abyssal servant, and something of a disappointment. Mad before Exaltation, the Apostate wanders the streets of Nexus, Lookshy and other Scavenger Lands cities, effortlessly evading the local guards to preach his frightening and apocalyptic sermons to a terrified populace.

The Day Caste called Typhon serves the Mask throughout the Scavenger Lands as his emissary to the Confederation of Rivers and, sometimes, his assassin. See pp. 42-43 for Typhon's background.

The Dusk Caste alternately known as the Prince Resplendent in the Ruin of Ages or simply as Crumbling Pillar is the Mask's chief warrior. The Deathlord dispatches him to confront those who are too powerful to assassinate and too cunning to fall before treachery.

In addition to his many Abyssal servants, the Mask of Winters has one exceptionally rare prize in his arsenal. Long before the Usurpation, Larquen Quen made the acquaintance of a beautiful and mysterious Sidereal Exalt called the Green Lady. After a night of passionate lovemaking, she first told Larquen of the destiny of greatness he would achieve when the time was right. The Green Lady so impressed the Twilight Caste that even his own death in the Invisible Fortress did not shake his confidence. When the Mask of Winters first made his presence felt in Creation, the Bureau of Destiny sent the Green Lady to learn his secrets. The Sidereals did not know of the prior relationship between the two, and they do not know today that the Green Lady is a loyal servant—and, once more, the lover—of the Mask of Winters. When the Sidereal does not haunt the Mask's bedchambers, she feeds disinformation to the Sidereal Exalted or spies on the Mask's rival Deathlords under false identities. At the Mask's direction, she seduced his colleague (and former victim), the Walker in Darkness and prepares to deliver him to her lover.

SERIES IDEAS

An Abyssal circle that serves the Mask of Winters might perform diverse missions across Creation. The Mask of Winters has spies in the courts of many of his Deathlord rivals. At any time, new developments might require him to dispatch a circle to prevent another Deathlord from achieving some objective. Possible story hooks include the following:

In Defense of Thorns: The occupation of a Realm tributary by a Deathlord has finally become intolerable. The Great Houses prepare for a full-scale assault on Thorns. Even worse, the Deliberative makes serious motions toward alliance with Lookshy and the Confederation of Rivers. The Realm offers to acknowledge their independence and grant valuable trade agreements in exchange for aid in destroying the Mask of Winters. While the Deathlord's position is still strong, he has no particular interest in seeing enemies on three sides ally against him. The circle must somehow wreck the peace conference or, failing that, prepare to wage war on three fronts.

Into the Bayou of Endless Regret: The Mask's rival to the southwest, Eye and Seven Despairs, asserts dominion over the vast Bayou of Endless Regret shadowland, a claim Eye and Seven Despairs cannot enforce. The Mask wearies of his rival's posturing. He sends a circle to seize control of the Bayou, as well as Eye and Seven Despairs' manse at Cold House. But can the circle even reach Cold House through the deadly and noxious Bayou? And even if his deathknights take Cold House, can they hold it, given that manse's strange properties?

PRINCESS MAGNIFICENT WITH LIPS OF CORAL AND ROBES OF BLACK FEATHERS

Other Names: The Black Heron

Experts on the Deathlords rate Princess Magnificent as the second-weakest of the Deathlords, after Eye and Seven Despairs. Like him, she is an object of scorn to her rivals. The Black Heron, however, is far more capable than her current status suggests. Only a single miscalculation brought her low.

When the Deathlords first entered Creation, they moved slowly and cautiously, aware that they could not yet resist the awesome powers that the Scarlet Empress had claimed for herself. Princess Magnificent occupied a shadowland near the present-day city of Great Forks. There, she constructed her citadel, the House of Bitter Reflections. Against the edicts of her Neverborn patron, He Who Holds in Thrall, the Black Heron moved beyond the limits of her shadowland into Creation, where she sought to enslave three nearby tribes of refugees. Unfortunately for the Deathlord, three powerful deities protected those refugees. These gods defeated Princess Magnificent and drove her away. (See *The Compass of Terrestrial Directions, Vol. I—The Scavenger Lands*, p. 82, for a fuller version of the story.)

After this humiliating failure, He Who Holds in Thrall called the Princess Magnificent into the Labyrinth. As Princess Magnificent remembers the event, He Who Holds in Thrall forgave her defeat; she could not have anticipated the intervention of such powerful deities. He could not forgive her presumption in entering Creation in defiance of his commands, and thereby making the existence of the Deathlords known to mortals, gods and,



worst of all, the Sidereals. Indeed, as a result of her foolish actions, the Sidereals established a new special convention just to study the Deathlords. The proud Black Heron suffered neither agony nor Oblivion. Instead, He Who Holds in Thrall bound her to serve the First and Forsaken Lion, whom she has despised ever since. As a result of her hatred for the Lion, the Princess Magnificent will do anything, *anything*, to free herself from his control. She would destroy Creation just to persuade He Who Holds in Thrall to release her. Then again, she might betray the Neverborn cause if she thought she could gain her freedom in so doing.

The Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers is far more beautiful than a Deathlord has a right to be. While she is no voluptuous temptress like the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears, the Princess Magnificent typically appears as a lissome beauty garbed in a cloak of black feathers, with haunting green eyes and skin like black porcelain. She also wears green silk robes and a headdress that resembles the head of a great bird. Upon closer inspection, the observer might note that her head looks slightly too large and rounded for her body, that her eyes are too large for her head, and that her dainty feet never seem to touch the ground. These details give her a human touch of imperfection that actually heightens her attractiveness.

The Black Heron has no domain. When she fled the House of Bitter Reflections, she paused long enough to curse the grounds so that no other Deathlord could make use of it. Today, she remains with the First and Forsaken Lion in the Thousand, where she constantly schemes to undo her superior and seize his assets for herself.

THE BLACK HERON'S PANOPLY

The Princess Magnificent's feathered cloak allows her to fly at will (and at no Essence cost) at speeds of up to 50 miles per hour out of combat. In combat, she can move 15 yards per tick and Dash at twice that speed. The cloak also serves as armor, granting a soak bonus of +8A/12L/12B. Her principle weapon is the Umbrella of Discord. When opened, this enchanted parasol stands five feet tall and nine feet wide. It was constructed from the bones and skin of five dead Solars, one from each caste. It is a testament to the Princess's inherent ruthlessness that she actually forged this hideous weapon in the First Age *before* the Usurpation. Its point ends in razor-sharp soulsteel. As a simple weapon, the Umbrella of Discord has Speed 4, Accuracy +0, Damage +5L, Defense +6 and Rate 2. The damage the Umbrella deals is piercing, and it costs 6 motes to attune.

The Umbrella of Discord is one of the most powerful necromantic devices of the First Age. Anyone it slays is automatically sucked directly into the Void. What's

more, the bells attached to the umbrella's 13 rib tips cause violent dissention among those nearby. As long as the bells continue to jingle, everyone within 100 yards, both living and ghostly, is compelled to attack any nearby allies. Characters with a Dodge MDV of 8 or higher can spend one Willpower to ignore this Compulsion effect for a scene. Characters with a Dodge MDV of less than 8 can spend three Willpower every action to ignore the effect. For 10 motes, the bearer of the umbrella can generate a violent thunderstorm that lasts for one scene. Alternatively, the bearer can spend 10 motes simply to darken the sky into utter blackness for one scene.

The First and Forsaken Lion built a soulsteel warstrider for the Princess's use. Named Joy in the Suffering of Others, this royal warstrider is nearly the equal of the Lion's own Insidious Ebon Xoanon. Upon presenting it to her, the Lion said that it could be hers if only she would ask him for it. Her response was to spit on its fuselage and walk away.

THE PRINCESS'S COMBAT TACTICS

Despite her weakness compared to other Deathlords, the Princess Magnificent is an able combatant. She prefers to open the Umbrella of Discord and use it as a melee weapon. While its bells jingle, most of her enemies turn on each other and ignore her, even as she slashes at them with the umbrella's deadly blade. The Princess Magnificent mastered the Dreaming Pearl Courtesan Style of martial arts, and the Umbrella of Discord is specially designed to count as a "prop" for appropriate Charms from that style. Her feathered cloak can also function as a prop for Dreaming Pearl Courtesan Style. Because of her nature as a Deathlord, however, the Princess Magnificent cannot use the final Charm in the Dreaming Pearl Courtesan Style, called Invoking the Chimera's Coils. She once sparred with the Mask of Winters' Sidereal minion, the Green Lady, who also knows the style. Onlookers thought it was the most beautiful dance they had ever seen.

The Princess Magnificent also wields a number of high-Essence Charms:

- An Athletics Charm allows her to perfectly parry incoming attacks with the hem of her cloak for just two motes.
- She has Presence Charms specially devised to complement her umbrella's properties. For two motes and one Willpower, she can lend part of her power to anyone ensnared by the Umbrella of Discord. For the rest of the scene, she can spend another two motes and allow the player of an affected character to re-roll a failed attack roll. Spending two motes in this way does not count as Charm usage for either the Black Heron or the affected character.
- For 10 motes and one Willpower, the Princess Magnificent can activate a Charm that negates any and all penalties to her Parry DV for the rest of the scene.

SERVANTS OF THE PRINCESS MAGNIFICENT

The First and Forsaken Lion forbids Princess Magnificent from creating Abyssal Exalted of her own. Therefore, she has done exactly that. By stealing one of the Lion's Monstrances, the Princess Exalted a Moonshadow Caste she named Son of Crows. Currently, she hides him among the ghosts of a small village far from the Thousand. She visits him in dreams to tutor him in the ways of Exaltation. Despite her best efforts, it appears that Son of Crows' Exaltation was flawed, for his insanity grows daily.

SERIES IDEAS

Given that the Princess Magnificent is forbidden to create Abyssal servants, it would be difficult to build a series around her. More plausibly, she functions as a supporting character or possibly even an antagonist in a series set around the First and Forsaken Lion. Still, that shouldn't stop a clever Storyteller. The Black Heron could somehow have freed herself from the Lion's yoke. Perhaps she has found some way to Exalt a circle of Abyssals and guide them down the Labyrinth for confirmation by He Who Holds in Thrall. Presumably, the Neverborn believes the characters will serve their cause despite their unorthodox empowerment. In such a series, the characters might not even know the Deathlord's identity—only that some mysterious patron gives them missions and guides their training.

THE WALKER IN DARKNESS

Other Names: The Black Psychopomp; the Promulgator of the Cromlech Cinerary

Like the Mask of Winters, the man who became the Walker in Darkness survived the Usurpation by fleeing to the Invisible Fortress, only to die even more ignobly centuries later as he and his fellow refugees turned on each other. The Walker remembers none of this, though. Larquen Quen murdered him using a powerful artifact that slew the memories of its victims as well as their bodies. The Walker emerged in the Underworld as a virtual amnesiac. Nephwracks found him and led him to the Labyrinth, where the Neverborn easily seduced him to their cause. Perhaps out of malicious humor, the Neverborn later sent the Walker in Darkness to recruit Larquen Quen after the latter's demise. Thus did the Walker unwittingly help to transform his own murderer into one of his peers.

Although the Walker in Darkness does not remember Larquen Quen, he soon developed a palpable dislike of the Mask of Winters, which the conquest of Thorns has only enhanced. The Walker tells anyone who will listen that the subjugation of a Realm satrapy did little to advance the goals of the Neverborn and much to thwart them. Before Thorns, the great powers of Creation paid little attention to the Deathlords. Now, the Deathlords are watched constantly, their every move scrutinized for preludes to the next Thorns. The Mask of Winters achieved little except to inflate his already oversized ego.

The Walker in Darkness sees himself as a true Neverborn loyalist. He has several well-conceived and energetic plans for the annihilation of life—not on the same scale as the Great Contagion, but he’s trying. Thus far, he pursues them with admirable skill. If he has a fault, it’s a tendency to spread his efforts too widely and abandon one plot at the first setback in favor of his latest dire inspiration.

The Walker suspects that he was a Zenith Caste in life. While he cannot match the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible as a theologian, he approaches his existence as a warrior-priest of his Neverborn masters. In fact, he and the Bishop have corresponded for centuries. No two Deathlords actually trust one another, but the relationship between these two is undoubtedly the most cordial. The Walker also stands out for joining his servants in the field. He has personally destroyed several kingdoms in the East by posing as a prophet, a sorcerer-savant or a monarch’s vizier.

The Walker’s most recognizable visage is that of a tall, muscular male with bluish skin and shoulder-length, grayish-white hair. His glowing orange eyes seem to peer into the very souls of those caught in his gaze, as if he knew his subjects’ most secret sins. In combat, the Walker wears a soulsteel breastplate over scarlet robes. More commonly, he wears ceremonial robes of crimson and black. Many of the peasants who reside near the Walker’s shadowland realm worship the Deathlord as a death-god called the Black Psychopomp. In that guise, he usually wears flowing black robes and shows the face of a flayed skull.

THE WALKER’S DOMAIN

The Walker built his citadel on the ruins of the House of Bitter Reflections, formerly the home of Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers. His principal shadowland, now called Walker’s Realm by all who dwell nearby, is reasonably close to Great Forks. His citadel, the Ebon Spires of Pyrron, is one of the larger Deathlord citadels (though the Thousand dwarfs it). The citadel takes its name from the First Age city of Pyrron, whose total destruction during the Usurpation created the shadowland.

The Ebon Spires consist of nine minarets of basalt and obsidian topped with black jade cupolas. Each minaret stands over 300 feet tall. The nine towers form a crude circle of profoundly inauspicious geomancy, linked by a thick defensive wall of gigantic planks of ebony and teak. The Walker’s magic gives the wood the resilience of granite. The area inside the walls can hold a small village. Several thousand ghosts reside in Pyrron where they serve the Deathlord as soldiers and other sorts of minions.

Unfortunately for the Walker in Darkness, his domain bears a curse. When the Princess Magnificent

fled this territory, she resolved that if she couldn’t own this shadowland, no other Deathlord would either. Her curse instantly slays any mortals who enter the shadowland, casting their souls immediately into the Void. Only the Exalted enjoy some immunity. (They die more slowly.) Even Abyssal Exalted are affected by this curse, which means that the Walker’s servants cannot remain in his manse for any significant length of time. As a result, the Walker is the Deathlord most likely to have Abyssals roaming about Creation relatively unsupervised.

THE KILLING CURSE

Within the Walker’s Realm, an Exalt suffers a number of aggravated damage dice every five hours equal to (10 – the character’s Dodge MDV). If the Exalt’s Dodge MDV equals or exceeds 10, through Charms or some other means, the Exalt still takes one die of aggravated damage every 24 hours.

EXPANSIVE AMBITIONS

The nearest major city to the Walker’s Realm is Great Forks. The Walker has designs on that city, but he also knows what happened to the Black Heron and has no wish to test his mettle against the city’s gods. At the moment, he finds greater interest in nearby Denandsor, an intact First Age city brimming with powerful artifacts. While he lost his personal memories of the First Age, the Deathlord remembers the fabled city and its vast treasure-trove of automata and other artifacts. In fact, the Walker knows so much about Denandsor that he thinks he might have ruled the city during the First Age. What’s more, Denandsor might hold clues to his identity and past. Unfortunately, while the Walker knows exactly how to deactivate the city’s supernatural defenses (including the fear-inducing effect that keeps out most interlopers), he also knows that they can be deactivated only from within the city itself.

Reaching further afield, the Walker makes diplomatic overtures to Sijan. He is one of the few Deathlords to maintain an embassy there, although its existence remains a secret known only to a few within the Sijanese government who think he makes a more tolerable ally than the Realm or Lookshy. Some of the Walker’s servants even wonder if he goes too far in wooing the great necropolis. Rumors fly among the Deathlord’s servants that he gave Sijan its own Monstrance of Celestial Portion—perhaps even more than one. Those who repeat these rumors wonder if he exceeded his authority from the Neverborn by placing Abyssals at the discretion of someone other than a Deathlord, and if so, what penalty such a reckless action might bring.

In any case, the Walker dares not extend his forces to Great Forks or Denandsor—let alone Sijan—until he resolves the problems of his own court. In addition to the curse on his shadowland, the Walker also knows that the Mask of Winters sends spies into his forces. He has already executed some of them. He feigns ignorance of the others to feed disinformation to his rival. The Walker in Darkness intends to trick the other Deathlord into a trap that will bring him under the Walker's sway—perhaps by exposing the Mask's folly in some way the Neverborn cannot ignore.

THE WALKER'S PANOPLY

The Deathlord's principal weapon is a soulsteel grand grimcleaver called Arm of Shades Below. No non-magical creature can lift this weapon. Anyone who tries is rendered helpless, as the weapon reduces her Strength to 1 for the rest of the scene. Anyone hit by Arm of Shades Below also suffers a rotting pox that instantly reduces her Strength to 1 and causes her to lose one dot of Stamina and Willpower every day. If the victim is not cured within one month, she dies and becomes a zombie under the Walker's control. Infection is automatic for mortals, but Exalted and magical beings resist this disease as if its Virulence were 5. The disease's Treated and Untreated Morbidity difficulties are 5 and 6, respectively. The disease cannot be treated without magic, and its Magical Treatment difficulty is 5. Arm of Shades Below otherwise has all the traits of a soulsteel grand grimcleaver.

THE WALKER'S COMBAT TACTICS

The Walker in Darkness is an extremely capable fighter who can match any Deathlord except the First and forsaken Lion at melee combat, especially when wielding Arm of Shades Below. A permanent high-Essence Charm allows him to treat Arm of Shades Below as an in-style weapon for any martial arts style. He has mastered Mantis Style and Solar Hero Style, including several Charms that build upon Solar Hero Style (all those that appear in *Scroll of the Monk*, pp. 83–85). More frighteningly, he knows Citrine Poxes of Contagion Style up to the Form-type Charm.

The Walker also knows several other customized high-Essence Charms:

- By spending three motes and one Willpower, the Walker in Darkness can thereafter perfectly parry any attack for the duration of the scene for three motes per attack. Such parries do not count as Charm usage.
- By spending five motes and one Willpower, the Walker can infuse his weapon with necrotic energy, causing it to inflict aggravated damage for the scene.
- By spending six motes, the Walker can cause the blood shed by his enemies to poison his weapon. For every level of lethal or aggravated damage he inflicts on

a target, he gains a +1 damage bonus on all successful attacks against *any* target for the rest of the scene. The effects of this Charm are cumulative, so the more damage the Walker inflicts in a battle, the more damage he can inflict in the future.

The Walker also owns a soulsteel long powerbow, though he rarely uses it. It is the weapon he is most likely to loan out to favored deathknights. Known as Raiton to the Heart, the powerbow has all the traits of a normal weapon of its type except that its range is doubled. Also, anyone who fires this bow (including non-Abyssals and even Essence-wielding mortals) can use the Charm *Twisting Spiteful Shaft* (see p. 122) with it even if the character doesn't know that Charm. Doing so does not count as a Charm use.

SERVANTS OF THE WALKER IN DARKNESS

The Walker gives no preference to any one caste, but he does believe (perhaps too strongly) that caste is highly important. The Walker tends to assume that because a deathknight belongs to a particular caste, she *ought* to perform the role associated with that caste and none other. It simply does not occur to him that a particular Moonshadow might be a better tactician than a particular Dusk Caste, or that a Midnight might develop a better aptitude for magic than a Daybreak. In this, his amnesia about First Age life as a Solar blinds him to just how fluid Solar castes were (and Abyssal castes are). As far as the Walker is concerned, Dusks command armies, Midnights rouse worshipers, Daybreaks research lore and magic, Days infiltrate and spy, and Moonshadows negotiate. That this policy places a deranged Dusk Caste in charge of his armies and an incompetent ambassador in charge of his most delicate diplomatic venture does not deter him.

The ranking Abyssal in the Walker's military forces is his Dusk Caste general Shards of Basalt (sometimes called Shards of Basalt to Her Army because of a mistranslation by a Lookshy intelligence officer). This individual (troubled even by Abyssal standards) suffered from multiple personalities before Exaltation, a result of a lifetime of abuse. Although born female, Shards of Basalt often responded to stress or danger by adopting the persona of an adult male. When s/he accepted the Black Exaltation, both personalities surrendered their names and both assumed the identity of Shards of Basalt. Depending on the circumstances, the deathknight acts as a pious and bloodthirsty warrior-nun or an arrogant but cunning military strategist. As a further complication, the male personality considers the female personality "his" wife, while the female personality does not know of the other self's existence. Those who follow Shards of Basalt cannot actually determine his/her gender, for regardless of which personality is in control, the deathknight's body appears



to be an emaciated and mummified corpse stuffed into a jet-black suit of soulsteel armor.

White Bone Sinner was a gladiator in Nexus, who died before he could become famous. After his death in a private bout, he was Exalted as a Moonshadow and trained to act as the Walker's envoy to Sijan. Due to the interference of a Solar Exalt, though, the deathknight earned his master's ire for losing a beautiful ghost the Deathlord had purchased from Sijan as a concubine. (In fact, the Solar was Exalted in the midst of a foolhardy attempt to "rescue" the ghost.) The Deathlord punished White Bone Sinner with a six-month imprisonment in a nightmarish chamber of distorted reflections that rip at the minds of any who gaze upon them. Now calling himself the Visitor in the Hall of Obsidian Mirrors, this deathknight is desperate either to return the lovely ghost to the Ebon Spires or else to gain revenge on the Solar who set her free. In his free time, he fantasized about taking revenge on the Nexus gladiator who ended his life.

The Walker in Darkness also commands a great many nemissaries, nephwracks and other powerful and talented ghosts. Many of them remain important figures in his organization—not least because they can stay near him in the Ebon Spires, where even his mightiest deathknights can make only brief visits. Even if she finds favor with the Deathlord, a deathknight very probably receives orders and reports back to a ghost, rather than the Walker himself.

The Walker's most cherished servant, however, is neither a ghost nor an Abyssal, but rather the corrupted Sidereal known as the Green Lady. The Mask of Winters sent the Green Lady to seduce the Walker in Darkness, but she found her honeyed words no match for the Walker's perspicacity. He discovered her deception and used his natural charisma and powerful mind-altering Charms to seduce the seductress and turn her against the Mask. Now utterly loyal to the Walker, the Green Lady feeds disinformation to the Mask of Winters, as well as the other three Deathlords whose courts she infiltrated at the Walker's command. Pleased with how his plans advance, the Walker views his Sidereal triple-agent as a pet. He even went to the trouble of "marrying" her in a macabre ceremony officiated by a gibbering nephwrack priest and consummated at the very Mouth of the Void. When

the Green Lady stopped crying three days later, she complimented her "husband" for how thoughtful and romantic the service was.

SERIES IDEAS

The Walker in Darkness sends his deathknights on varied missions. The Deathlord is ambitious but relatively unfocused (at least compared to more directed Deathlords such as the Bishop and the Lion), and he vacillates between cunning diplomacy and overt military action. As a result, he hasn't gotten very far with either. Sample story hooks for a series involving the Walker in Darkness include:

Mission to Sijan: Abyssals assigned to the Walker's secret embassy in Sijan find themselves involved in subtle, "cloak-and-dagger" espionage with both ghostly and mortal inhabitants. Few know that the Walker negotiates with factions of the Sijanese government for an alliance, and the Walker plans to keep it that way. For extra fun, the Visitor in the Hall of Obsidian Mirrors holds authority over any Abyssals assigned to Sijan. Driven and obsessed with his own personal issues, the former White Bone Sinner constantly risks exposing the mission.

Assault on Denandsor: Abyssals assigned to the Walker's "Denandsor Project" receive the thankless job of trying to infiltrate a First Age city that doesn't like intruders and is very good at defending itself. The reward for mastering Denandsor's secrets is one of the largest First Age artifact caches in Creation... provided one can get it out past the legions of Lookshy who wish to claim the city for themselves.

The Curse of Walker's Realm: The Walker *really* wants to remove the curse on his shadowland and considers some rather extreme measures to do so. One possibility is cutting some kind of deal with the spirits of Great Forks. Such a deal would require some tricky diplomacy against some very cagey spirits. Another option might involve an expedition in search of rare and obscure sorcerous knowledge, perhaps even to long lost Sperimin, the City of Magic. Still another possibility (if you don't mind a suicide mission) is to get the answer straight from the Black Heron's mouth... by infiltrating the Thousand and kidnapping the Princess Magnificent right from under the First and Forsaken Lion's nose.

THE GREEN LADY

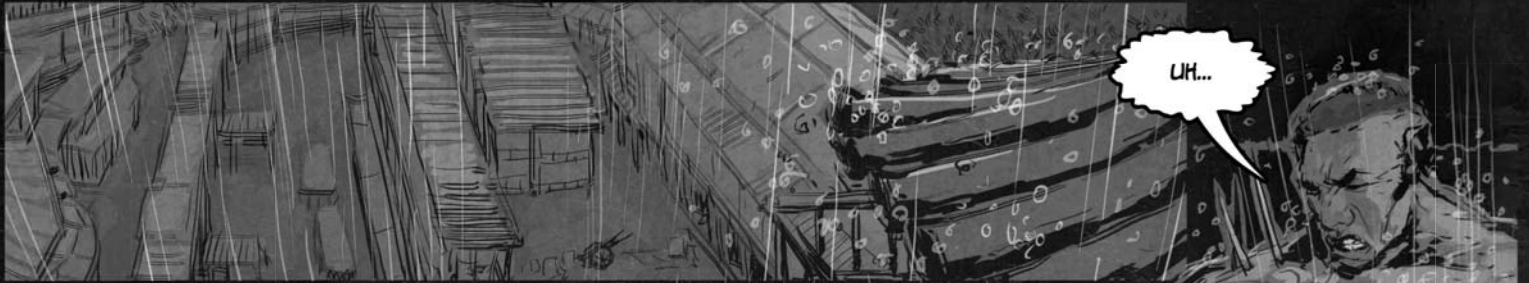
So to whom, if anyone, does the Green Lady truly give her loyalty? The Mask of Winters? Her "husband," the Walker in Darkness? To the Bodhisattva, whom she serves as Unfolding Corpse-White Lotus? Or is it possible that all this time, the Green Lady is actually a *man* named Ten Thousand Virtues and only the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible has the wit to see it?

The truth is... all of the above. Centuries ago, the Sideral most commonly identified as the Green Lady ventured into the Underworld all the way to the Labyrinth itself to find the secrets of the Deathlords. She quickly realized, however, that even one of her age and experience could not long endure that unholy place. As the Whispers of Oblivion dug into her mind, she used her peerless skills of misdirection to deceive not only the Neverborn but herself as well.

Today, the Green Lady serves four Deathlords, the Bureau of Destiny, the Bronze Faction, the Neverborn—and not even the gods know who else. She is loyal to all of them. She has betrayed all of them. She knows any one of them will slay her if they ever doubt her loyalty. The Green Lady herself does not know who she truly serves, nor does she know what she does during the increasingly long gaps in her memory. When wearing the shape of Ten Thousand Virtues (through the power of a hearthstone that permits her to change sex at will), she genuinely believes she is a man. Most importantly of all, she does not know that deep inside the hall of mirrors that is her mind, her true self still resides, watching and waiting for the right moment. One day, she will learn what she needs to learn—how to destroy the Deathlords utterly. On that day, her confusion will end, her true self will re-emerge, and her true loyalty will stand revealed.

Unless she destroys Creation first.





UH...

YOU'RE WEAKER
THAN I EXPECTED,
PANTHER.

OF COURSE, MY
POISON NEEDLES
ARE PROBABLY
RESPONSIBLE FOR
THAT.

GET UP. I WANT
YOU TO DIE LIKE
I DID.



WHO THE...?



Kra-Koom!

YOU'D BETTER
NOT HAVE
FORGOTTEN ME!



THE LAST TIME YOU SAW ME ALIVE WAS
AT KERREK DESET'S PLACE IN BASTION.

HE SAID HE'D SPONSOR WHOEVER WON
HIS PRIVATE EXHIBITION. REMEMBER?



P-PANTHER...

IT WASN'T SUPPOSED TO
BE A FIGHT TO THE DEATH.

BUT SO WHAT? ALL YOU
CARED ABOUT WAS BEING
A STAR IN THE ARENA!



YOU GOT YOUR SPONSOR. I GOT
DUMPED IN THE NEAREST CANAL.

BUT SOMETHING HAPPENED IN THE
WATER. A VOICE SPOKE TO ME.



IT OFFERED ME VENGEANCE, RESPECT,
POWER. IT OFFERED ME A PURPOSE.



NOW BEG ME FOR
YOUR LIFE, YOU
BASTARD!

FRANKLY, VENGEANCE WAS ENOUGH.



CHAPTER THREE

CHARACTER CREATION

The Abyssal Exalted are the destroyers of Creation. The Deathlords created the Abyssals for this sole purpose and have bound them into this role with oaths to the Neverborn. A deathknight either lives as a slave (however powerful and well rewarded), or he exists in hiding, trying to find some measure of freedom while evading the wrath of his creator. Regardless of how closely they hew to the words of their master, all Abyssals kill. They do so by their nature, unable to help themselves. All of their Charms and abilities inflict harm rather than protect and create. Those who refrain from inflicting harm—or even fight against the forces of death and Oblivion—find themselves building Resonance until they unleash black miracles that do their killing for them. An Abyssal can never escape what he is: murderer of the world and champion of death.

Abyssals are young. While the plot to create them began long ago, success came only recently. Abyssals first

appeared shortly after the Scarlet Empress vanished, on the heels of the returning Solar Exalted. As warriors of the Mask of Winters, these terrible new Anathema struck a blow that shocked Creation, conquering the city of Thorns and dragging it into the Underworld.

Despite their terrifyingly successful debut in Creation, these young deathknights have since discovered the hardships of their situation. The Deathlords present no unified front against Creation. They spend much of their time squabbling over who rules which scrap of the Underworld. Isolated from their past, often mistreated by their masters, many deathknights seethed bitterly. The steely leashes the Deathlords imposed upon their new disciples began to fray almost immediately, and before long, the first Abyssal escaped the control of his master. Others soon followed.

As one of the factors that triggered this new Time of Tumult, the Abyssals stand on the cusp of something

great—and terrible. Some struggle to come to grips with their past as once-glorious Solar heroes; others explore their unique new powers over death. Still others heed the plight of the dead and defend the followers of the ancestor cults. While the rest of Creation trembles in their presence and seeks a way to destroy them, these young Exalted survey the world and its bleak shadow, pondering their next move.

STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPT

An Abyssal doesn't begin as a block of death-dealing traits, ready to maim and torment other shrieking, innocent blocks of text. Each deathknight was once a living person, with fears and loves, ambitions and resentments. Knowing the person you want to create makes assigning game traits much easier—and helps you create a character you'll enjoy playing.

You can draw inspiration from a variety of sources. Abyssal Exalted embody the themes of horror and tragedy, and concepts such as "Embittered Ex-Lover" or "Repentant Monster" work very well. At its core, **Exalted** is a game of epic fantasy, and concepts native to such settings, such as "Priest of Darkness" or "Vicious Swordsman" are suitable, provided you find a proper Abyssal twist. Finally, the setting of **Exalted** itself can provide ample inspiration, giving rise to concepts such as "Vengeful Former Dynast", "Airship Captain turned Dreaded Pirate" or "Obsessed Hunter of the Fair Folk."

A concept should begin as a few words, something that sums up the core of the character. Start simple, and let the details of your character grow from this seed of inspiration.

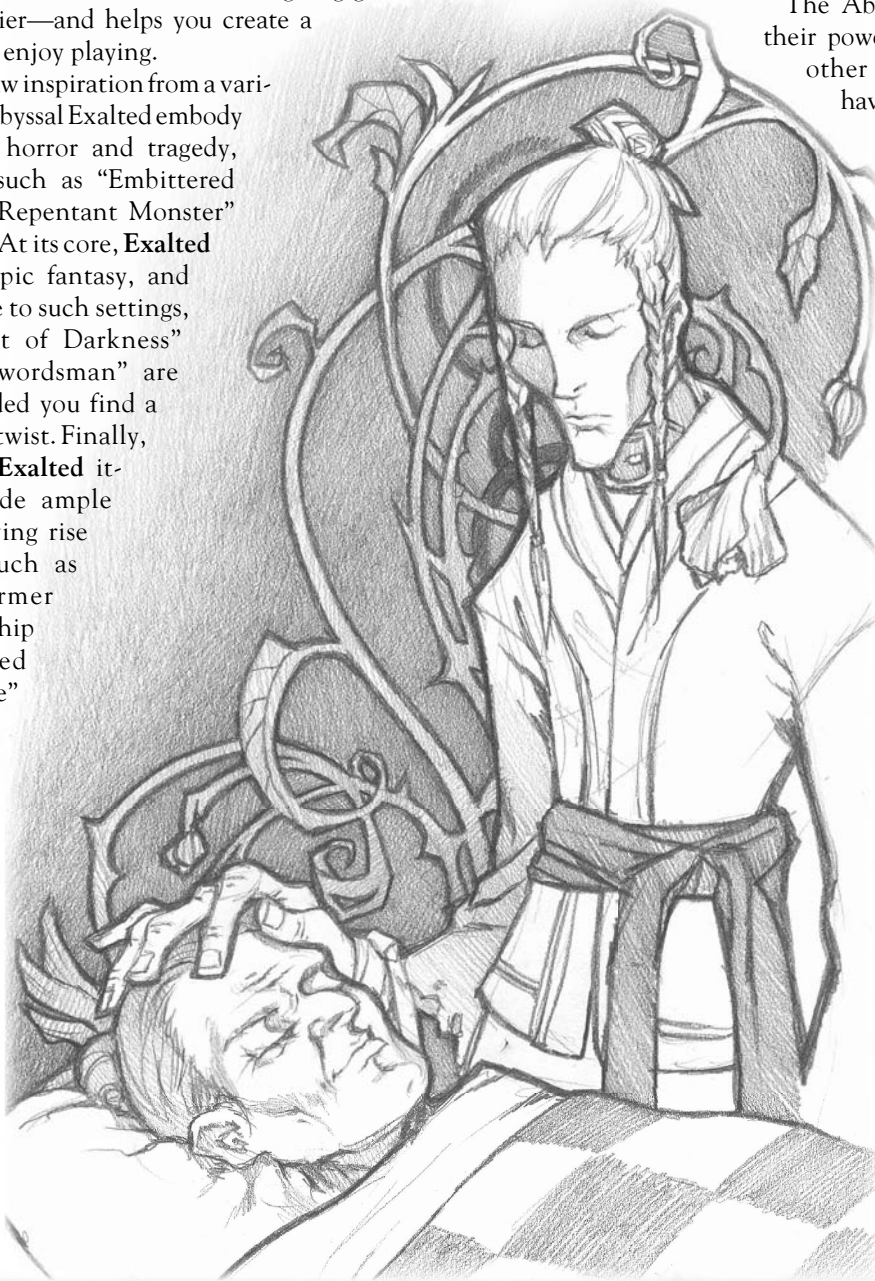
TEAM EFFORT

While deathknights are often unpleasant people, keep your fellow players in mind. When creating your Abyssal, work with your Storyteller and the rest of your gaming group so that, while your Abyssals might ruthlessly slaughter the rest of the world, they won't ruthlessly slaughter each other. Back-stabbing and treachery can be great fun, but only if all the players at the table know what they're getting into.

THE BLACK EXALTATION

The Abyssals don't receive their power in the same way other Exalted do. They have no sudden moment of enlightenment or a rush of religious ecstasy that leaves them free to do as they wish afterward. Instead, power comes at the moment of death, whether a scholar chokes slowly on his own bile after reading a passage of forbidden lore, a warrior struggles to stand after a hail of arrows impales his body, or a forgotten beggar boy gasps for his final breath in a ditch. A Deathlord visits her chosen victim and offers him a new life in service to the Abyss. By agreeing to sacrifice the world, a new Abyssal rises to meet his dark destiny.

This means your Abyssal is unlikely to be a





self-sacrificing martyr or some saint who resents his conversion to the side of Oblivion. At the very least, every Abyssal suffers a moment of weakness when he agrees to his slavery to darkness. Many, however, understood the deal they're making and don't regret it. A deathknight needn't be a terrible person, though. Deathlords long ago mastered the arts of persuasion. They might exploit a warrior's obsession with a hated enemy or threaten the life of a beloved family member if the prospective deathknight refuses.

Nonetheless, all Abyssals have a *reason* they accepted the Black Exaltation. Even if that reason is merely a love of slaughter or a deep, abiding ambition for power, determining that reason can define much of a new Abyssal's personality.

THE DARK MASTER

Whereas other Exalted receive their power from an impersonal, distant god, Abyssals must contend with their creator on a daily basis. The Deathlords acquired and tainted the power of Solar Exaltation at great cost. They want a return on their investment. Deathlords research prospective Abyssals as best they can and strive to ensure their new minions' long and faithful service.

The relationship between Deathlord and deathknight is a two-way street. The Deathlord has her expectations, desires and peculiarities. She grants her deathknight his initial position, and most of his soldiers, artifacts and worldly power comes directly from her hand. Some Deathlords see their disciples as lovers, children or precocious students. Others see them as tools to use, break and throw away.

The Abyssal cannot help but harbor strong feelings about his Deathlord... one way or another. Some Abyssals worship their Deathlords as saviors who drew them from the brink of death and gave them power. Others resent their servitude and see their masters as cruel tyrants bent on destroying a world the Abyssal once loved. A Deathlord can also treat each of her Abyssals differently: When she showers one with praise and another with derision, the disparity can create interesting tensions between deathknights.

SLAVE OR FUGITIVE

When you create your Abyssal, be sure to decide whether she still serves her Deathlord or not. Loyal Abyssals gain access to powerful Backgrounds such as Liege and Abyssal Command (see Chapter Four). In return, they must obey a master. A renegade Abyssal gains her freedom and may do as she wishes (to an extent), but in addition to losing access to Abyssal Backgrounds of greater power, she finds herself a fugitive from the forces of a wrathful former master.

CASTE

The Abyssal castes mirror those of their Solar counterparts, both mimicking them and twisting them in subtle ways. Just as Solar castes define much of a Solar's capability, so too does an Abyssal find his duties to his Deathlord defined by

his caste. When choosing your deathknight's caste, keep your concept in mind. Some concepts naturally suggest certain castes, while others can fit any. A "Vicious Swordsman" would most likely be a member of the Dusk Caste, but an "Embittered Ex-Lover" could belong to any caste.

Like Solars, an Abyssal's personality and talents naturally define which caste suits him. A pacifist poet probably won't be made a Dusk Caste but might find himself a member of the Moonshadow Caste. Since a Deathlord picks and chooses whom she Exalts, however, she can grant a caste based on her needs rather than the prospective Abyssal's desires. For instance, a Deathlord who plans imminent conquests might need a Dusk Caste to command her army. If she can't find any talented but dying generals, she might offer the Black Exaltation to someone else whom she can groom for command, such as a merchant who knows how to move men and materiel on a large scale, or a courtier with a gift for rousing rhetoric.

MOTIVATION

Like all Exalted, Abyssals are larger than life, as are the passions that drive them. They need suitably epic Motivations. Yet the Black Exaltation subtly twists their personalities. Whereas Solars try to build, change and rule, Abyssals seek to destroy. An Abyssal's Motivation must always be defined in terms of what he seeks to eliminate from the world. Such Motivations don't need to be inherently cruel or malicious, though. A devoted Abyssal might seek to destroy innocence, while a heroic Abyssal might seek to destroy injustice... but oh, what terrible weapons the Black Exaltation forces him to use!

Create a motivation for your character that is suitably epic in scope, that is suitably destructive in nature and that fits the character's concept. For more information about choosing, playing or changing a character's Motivation, see p. 88 of *Exalted*.

STEP TWO: ATTRIBUTES

Deathlords seek out the finest specimens when they choose new minions to Exalt. Once the Black Exaltation takes root, its energies lift the bearer's body, mind and soul to even greater heights of prowess. This elevation sometimes shows a dramatic effect as new muscle writhes beneath the deathknight's skin or his flesh withers like a mummy's to become an image of death.

As with all characters, Abyssals start with one dot in each of their Attributes before you assign further dots. If you want to play a hideous monster, scarred and rotted by his Exaltation, you can forfeit your Abyssal's free dot of Appearance so he begins with an Appearance of 0. (Doing so doesn't grant you a replacement dot to spend somewhere else.)

Decide how to prioritize Attribute dots among the Physical, Social and Mental categories, based on your character concept. Choose one Attribute set as primary, one as secondary and one as tertiary.

Physical: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina

Social: Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance
Mental: Perception, Intelligence, Wits
(For a full explanation of Attributes, see **Exalted**, p. 101).

Distribute eight dots among your character's primary Attributes, six dots among her secondary Attributes and four dots among her tertiary Attributes. You may not raise any Attribute above five dots.

STEP THREE: ABILITIES

When an Abyssal Exalts, his Caste grants him a particular affinity for certain Abilities, representing the focus the Deathlord chose for him in his new existence as Oblivion's champion. As dark mirrors to the Solar Exalted, these affinities match those of their sunlit counterparts.

- **Dusk Abilities:** Archery, Martial Arts, Melee, Thrown, War
- **Midnight Abilities:** Integrity, Performance, Presence, Resistance, Survival
- **Daybreak Abilities:** Craft, Investigation, Lore, Medicine, Occult
- **Day Abilities:** Athletics, Awareness, Dodge, Larceny, Stealth
- **Moonshadow Abilities:** Bureaucracy, Linguistics, Ride, Sail, Socialize

On your Abyssal's character sheet, mark the squares next to each of her five Caste Abilities.

Beyond these traits, the Chosen of the Void express their own talents and peculiarities through their own unique affinities. Select five of the remaining 20 Abilities as "Favored" for your Abyssal, marking the box beside these chosen Abilities.

Just as with Solars, you have 10 dots to distribute among Caste and Favored Abilities. Because Favored Abilities represent areas of talent and skill for the Abyssal, you must allocate at least one dot to each Favored Ability. You then receive 18 more dots to distribute among whatever Abilities you want. At this stage, you may not raise an Ability higher than three dots. You can do so later, using bonus points. You can also buy specialties for your deathknight's Abilities.

STEP FOUR: ADVANTAGES

Abyssals have more at their disposal than just their talents and training. They lead armies of the dead, wield necromantic powers and suffer strange imbalances and empowering insanities.

BACKGROUNDS

Backgrounds represent an Abyssal's worldly resources, his standing in the Underworld and powerful treasures he has collected. See Chapter Four for explanations of these Backgrounds.

Like Solars, Abyssals begin with seven dots you can distribute among Backgrounds as you see fit. As always, the character's concept should guide your choices. You can't

raise any Background above three dots without using bonus points. Buying the fourth and fifth dot of a Background costs more bonus points than buying the first three. See the "Bonus Points" table, p. 91.

Abyssals loyal to their Deathlord receive considerably more resources than Abyssals on the run from them do. While both sorts of characters receive seven dots for Backgrounds, a loyal deathknight can have the powerful Abyssal Command, Liege, Spies and Underworld Manse Backgrounds. A renegade Abyssal may not purchase these Backgrounds.

GOING ROGUE

A player initially chooses whether his Abyssal serves a Deathlord or not, but this situation can change during play. Throughout the course of a series, a Deathlord might be destroyed, or a character might betray his master. An unscrupulous player might even ask to play a loyal Abyssal in order to gain the superior Abyssal Command, Liege, Spies and Underworld Manse Backgrounds, then have his character promptly betray his Deathlord as soon as the game begins. Once a deathknight goes rogue, though, he loses those four Backgrounds. After all, he no longer has access to his master's armies, manses, minions or benevolence (such as it was).

On one hand, a generous Storyteller might allow the player to replace these Backgrounds with new ones. Perhaps the rogue Abyssal managed to keep one of the soulsteel gifts he gained from his Liege (changing his Liege dots to Artifact dots), or perhaps a portion of the Deathlord's army remained loyal to the deathknight (replacing Abyssal Command with Followers). This approach is particularly appropriate if the Storyteller engineered the betrayal for the continuation of her chronicle.

On the other hand, a strict Storyteller might simply declare the Backgrounds lost. Most renegade Abyssals start their new lives with seriously diminished resources. This approach is more appropriate if the player initiated the betrayal himself (especially if the betrayal hampers the series in some way and diminishes the fun of the other players).

Should an Abyssal choose to return to a Deathlord's service, he does not automatically regain Abyssal Command, Liege, Spies or Underworld Manse. He must earn back these Backgrounds through play, just as he would gain any new Backgrounds.

CHARMS

Abyssals wield the very power of Oblivion in the form of Charms that might seem hauntingly familiar to Solars. Like the Solar Exalted, Abyssals begin play with 10 Charms, five of which must come from Favored or Caste Abilities.

VIRTUES

Although an Abyssal's Exaltation twists his mind, body and soul, he retains the basic core of his humanity. While Abyssals often approach their Virtues differently than they did as mortals, they still follow the same basic extremes of personality innate to all Exalted.

An Abyssal begins with one dot in each of his Virtues and may distribute five additional points among them. No Virtue may be raised higher than four dots without using bonus points.

STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES

Finally, determine the Abyssal's derived traits and add a few last details to round him out.

WILLPOWER

Add your characters two highest Virtues together to determine the Abyssal's Willpower. Even with bonus points, Willpower may not rise higher than 8 without having two Virtues at a minimum of 4. See **Exalted**, p. 115 for complete rules on Willpower.

INTIMACIES

Despite their seeming detachment from the world, Abyssals have the same depth of emotion as all Exalted. Some Abyssals cling to those things they loved while they were still mortal, caring for a still-living sister or a lost lover. Others dedicate themselves to the precepts of Oblivion or to the ideals of an ancestor cult. Many deathknights, however, hold Intimacies based on hatred—they *really, really* want to destroy something or kill someone, and will not be swayed from that goal.

An Abyssal may choose a number of Intimacies equal to his Compassion. See p. 90 of **Exalted** for complete rules on Intimacies.

ESSENCE

Abyssal Exalted begin with an Essence of 2. By spending bonus points, you may raise your Abyssal's Essence to 4 at character creation, but no higher.

Note that as an Abyssal's Essence increases, his appearance changes. At Essence 4, an Abyssal must have an Appearance of 1 or less, or an Appearance of 3 or more. At Essence 5, an Abyssal must have an Appearance of 0 or an Appearance of 4 or higher.

Abyssals calculate their Personal and Peripheral Essence pools just as Solar Exalted do. Their Personal Essence pool equals three times their Essence trait plus their Willpower. Their Peripheral Essence pool equals seven times their Essence trait plus their Willpower plus the sum of their Virtues.

HEALTH LEVELS

Abyssal Exalted possess seven health levels, just as a mortal does: one -0 level, two -1 levels, two -2 levels, one -4 and one Incapacitated health level. Abyssals may gain more health levels by purchasing the Ox-Body Charm, just as Solar Exalts do.

BONUS POINTS

Abyssal Exalted receive 15 bonus points with which you can round out your character by raising some traits and buying new ones. For a complete list of traits and their bonus point cost, see the "Bonus Points" chart on p. 91.

SPARK OF LIFE

A concept determines the core of the character, and his traits define how he mechanically interacts with the game. It takes more to make him a complete character, though. The unique details and qualities that constitute the spark of life no significant impact on the rules of the game, but they certainly impact the game as a whole. They provide the Storyteller with hooks to involve the character in the story, as well as guidelines for how you should depict the character, and a way for the other players to relate to and enjoy the character. When defining your Abyssal more deeply, consider the questions already posed by this chapter as well as the following:

- **What does your Abyssal look like?** The Black Exaltation leaves its mark on the flesh of the newly Exalted. Abyssal's tend toward extremes of appearance—some beautiful, some hideous—and all have a supernatural cast to their features. The beautiful might have ghostly white or gleaming ebon faces and long silken hair of shadowy black, liquid red or metallic silver. Those with hideous features might bear unearthly scars that look like weird glyphs, or their features might have rotted away to leave mildewing muscle or exposed bone. Some hideous Abyssals hide their unpleasant features behind the shadows of a cowl, wrap them in long bandages, cover them with tight leather masks or encase themselves permanently in armor. The extreme appearances of Abyssals really allow you to have fun with conjuring up whatever intriguing description you can muster.

- **How does your Abyssal view death?** Surrounded by ghosts and serving a long-dead lord, an Abyssal confronts death and loss every day. Sometimes she inflicts it on the world, but sometimes her own Resonance takes from her whatever she holds dear. Some Abyssals respond by staving off death as long as they can. They master necromancy to find immortality, and they slavishly serve the Neverborn so that they will be last to enter the Void, after the rest of Creation goes to its fate. Others embrace death, becoming mouthpieces for ancestor cults, guiding suffering mortals through the last throes of mortality into the land of the dead.



• **How does your Abyssal feel about the world he left behind?** All Abyssals, no matter how disfigured, began life as a mortal. They had families, cultures they understood, philosophies that made sense at the time. Some Abyssals eagerly cast off their former existence, embrace the trappings of the Underworld and become incarnations of death. Others linger near loved ones, yearning to hold a beloved child or husband, or aching to avenge themselves against hated foes. Former culture has a deep impact on the way the Abyssal sees his new role. A former patrician socialite of the Realm might become a self-loathing sophisticate, composing tragic poems about the horror of his new existence to leave on the pillows of his victims. A former tribesman might wear a bone mask in a mockery of those his people's shamans wear, and keep the heads of his victims in an expanding collection of trophies.

• **How does your Abyssal deal with the memories of his past life?** Before the Deathlords twisted it, the dark shard of power within an Abyssal's breast once fueled the power of a fallen Solar. These Exaltations carry bits of memories and associations from that former existence. One Abyssal might discover that his past was nearly as dark as his present and that his spark of

Exaltation followed a long path of damnation. Another might find herself dreaming of a righteous past, one at odds with her wicked existence, and seek redemption as a result. Still another might find himself staring down the snarling Lunar mate of his past—trying to reconcile his new existence with his former adoration for the ravaging beast that his Deathlord wants him to capture...

• **What (if anything) would drive your Abyssal to seek redemption?** An Abyssal seldom hesitates to commit deeds that would freeze the heart of any mortal. Sometimes, however, even their sociopathic cool falters, causing them to ponder the meaning of what they do. An Abyssal Exaltation still holds the seed of Solar glory within its twisted depths, offering all deathknights the possibility of righteousness, though the path is never easy. For characters who already hate their existence, simply learning redemption is *possible* might drive them to search for it. For others, it might take the realization that the ancestor cults created by Deathlords are shams meant to enslave the living and the dead alike. Another Abyssal might fall in love and find a reason to live beyond mindless slaughter, only then realizing the full price of his fall.

CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

- **STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPT**

Choose concept, caste and Motivation.
Note the caste's anima power.

- **STEP TWO: SELECT ATTRIBUTES**

Note that all Attributes start with one dot before you add any.
Prioritize the Physical, Mental and Social Attribute categories as primary, secondary or tertiary. Distribute eight dots among the primary category of Attributes, six dots among the secondary Attributes and four dots among the tertiary Attributes.

- **STEP THREE: SELECT ABILITIES**

Note Caste Abilities.

Select Favored Abilities (5; may not be the same as Caste Abilities).

Choose Abilities (28 dots—at least 10 must be spent on Caste or Favored Abilities; none may rise higher than 3 without spending bonus points)

- **STEP FOUR: SELECT ADVANTAGES**

Choose Backgrounds (7—none may exceed 3 without spending bonus points), Charms (10—at least five must be from Caste or Favored Abilities), Virtues (5; none may be higher than 4 without spending bonus points and all begin with one dot before spending points).

- **STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES**

Record Essence (2), Willpower (sum of two highest Virtues; Willpower cannot start above 8 unless two Virtues are rated at 4 or higher), Personal Essence pool ([Essence x 3] + Willpower), Peripheral Essence pool ([Essence x 7] + Willpower + [sum of character's Virtues]) and health levels (7, plus any gained from Charms).

- **BONUS POINTS**

Bonus points (15) may be spent at any time during character creation.

CASTES

- **Dusk:** The Dusk Caste wields the arts of murder in all their forms and leads the armies of the Deathlords, spreading carnage across Creation.

Caste Abilities: Archery, Martial Arts, Melee, Thrown, War

Anima Powers: May use their animas to appear dreadful and terrifying for a scene.

- **Midnight:** As priests of Oblivion, the Midnight Caste spreads the Whispers of the Neverborn to the dead and the worship of the ancestor cults to the living.

Caste Abilities: Integrity, Performance, Presence, Resistance, Survival

Anima Powers: May use their animas to slay mortals or to animate corpses.

- **Daybreak:** As the savants of the Underworld, Daybreak Caste deathknights wield the powers of necromancy and the secrets of the dead to further either the aims of their masters or their own ambitions.

Caste Abilities: Craft, Investigation, Lore, Medicine, Occult

Anima Powers: May use their animas as shields.

- **Day:** As the unseen spies of the Deathlords, Day Caste deathknights mingle with the living, destroying their enemies' resolve with assassination and treachery.

Caste Abilities: Athletics, Awareness, Dodge, Larceny, Stealth

Anima Powers: May use their animas as cloaks against detection and/or mute their anima banners when using Essence.

- **Moonshadow:** As the emissaries of the dead, Moonshadow Caste deathknights wield the powers of ghosts and Exalted alike, traveling from nation to nation to forge dark contracts at the behest of the Deathlords.

Caste Abilities: Bureaucracy, Linguistics, Ride, Sail, Socialize

Anima Powers: May use their animas to bind oaths and contracts.

CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

VIRTUES

- **Compassion**—The desire to end suffering
- **Conviction**—Emotional endurance and loyalty to a cause
- **Temperance**—Cold detachment and self-control
- **Valor**—Courage and unholy fury

BACKGROUNDS

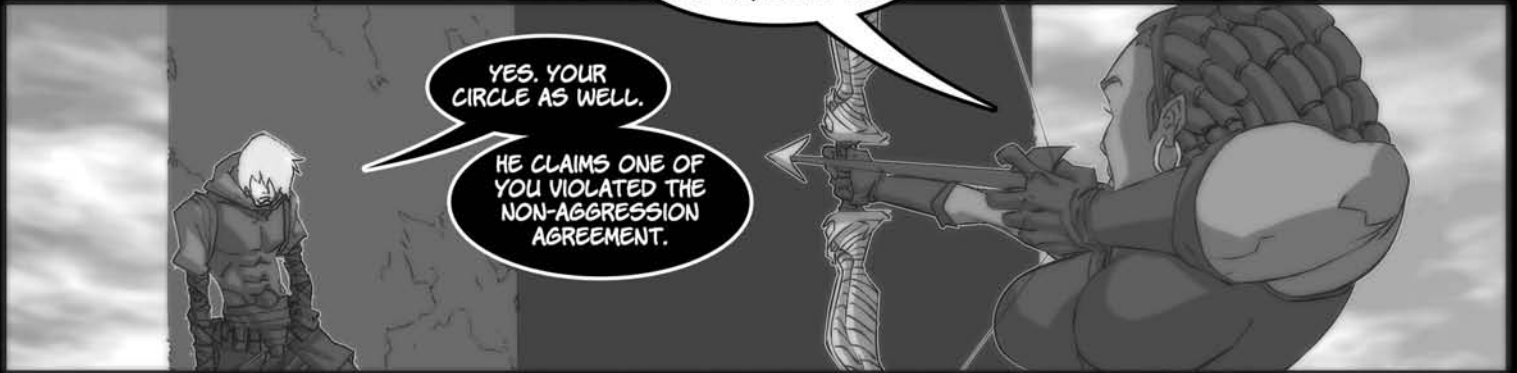
- **Abyssal Command**—Zombie swarms, undead legions and mortal soldiers (**loyalist only**)
- **Allies**—Companions and talented servants
- **Artifact**—Soulsteel armaments and powerful trinkets
- **Backing**—Standing and rank within an organization
- **Contacts**—Information sources and mortals who owe the deathknight favors
- **Cult**—Mortals or ghosts who worship the deathknight directly
- **Familiar**—An animal companion
- **Followers**—Undead minions, ghostly servants and loyal mortals
- **Influence**—The deathknight's pull on the world around him
- **Liege**—The esteem and generosity of the Abyssal's Deathlord (**loyalist only**)
- **Spies**—Informants a deathknight's Deathlord places at his disposal (**loyalist only**)
- **Manse**—A place of power and Essence
- **Mentor**—A patron and instructor
- **Resources**—Material goods and wealth
- **Underworld Manse**—Manse access and hearthstones on loan from one's Deathlord (**loyalist only**)
- **Whispers**—The deathknight's attunement to the fathomless knowledge of the Neverborn

Trait	BONUS POINTS
	Cost
Attribute	4
Ability	2 (1 if Favored or Caste)
Background	1 (2 if the Background is being raised above 3)
Specialty	1 (2 per 1 if in a Favored or Caste Ability)
Virtue	3
Willpower	2
Intimacies	3 to increase starting Intimacies to (Willpower + Compassion)
Essence	7
Charms	5 (4 if in a Favored or Caste Ability)





NO MORE LIES,
DISCIPLE. YOUR
MASTER SENT YOU TO
KILL ME, DIDN'T HE?



YES. YOUR
CIRCLE AS WELL.

HE CLAIMS ONE OF
YOU VIOLATED THE
NON-AGGRESSION
AGREEMENT.



WHO?

HE FAILED TO
ELABORATE. HE ONLY
SAID ALL OF YOU WERE
TO BE ELIMINATED

I'LL GET TO THE
OTHERS IN DUE TIME.
I DON'T MUCH CARE
FOR THEM.



YOU, THOUGH,
HAVE NOTHING TO
FEAR FROM ME.

NOT THAT I EXPECT
MY MASTER TO BE
PLEASED ABOUT THAT.



TO WIT.

KSSHHH!



WHAT JUST
HAPPENED?

WITH YOUR LEAVE,
I'LL EXPLAIN
SOME OTHER TIME.

DO TRY TO
REMEMBER WHAT I
SAID, THOUGH.



I... I WILL.



CHAPTER FOUR

TRAITS

As twisted mockeries of the Solar Exalted, Abyssals use most of the same basic rules and traits as their cousins. What follows are the ways in which deathknights deviate from their original templates, including modified and new Backgrounds as well as the Dark Fate that replaces the Great Curse.

EXISTENCE AND ESSENCE

As explained in Chapter One, Abyssals differ from other Exalted in a number of fundamental ways, particularly in how they channel Essence. Rules for these differences follow.

ETERNAL LIFE

Other Exalted have their lives extended to a greater or lesser degree, but the Chosen of the Neverborn can live *forever*—if they are not slain. The cold stasis of death forever traps their bodies at the age of Exaltation, making deathknights the only “immortal” type of Exalted. In addition, Abyssals suffer no dice penalties or other negative

side effects from non-magical diseases or wound infections, although they can become inadvertent (or deliberate) carriers of pestilence. By design, they are completely immune to the Great Contagion, just in case.

ETERNAL DEATH

Slain Abyssals face a fouler fate than other Exalted. A deathknight's Exaltation returns to its Monstrance of Celestial Portion as quickly as possible (a matter of weeks if the Abyssal died in Creation, and mere days from a shadowland or anywhere in the Underworld). The Abyssal's higher soul cannot naturally pass into Lethe and automatically falls into Oblivion unless the character's player succeeds at a reflexive Willpower roll against a difficulty equal to the character's own Essence. Success enables the Abyssal to resist the pull of annihilation and linger as a ghost. (Magic that determines the destination of a character's soul trumps these rules.) Unless magic prevents it from doing so, an Abyssal's lower soul invariably rises as a mindless hungry ghost with an Essence equal to the character's at death.



DAMNED

As the champions of Oblivion, Abyssals are considered creatures of darkness and vulnerable to Holy effects. Although they are not entirely outside fate (at least without Charms), Abyssals have no place in the Tapestry of Creation. Their damned nature imposes automatic botches on all mortal astrological divinations of their fate using the stars of Creation. (Astrologers whose players roll five or more threshold successes recognize the murky darkness of the Underworld clouding the reading, though.) Readings into the stars of the Underworld provide the usual insight.

REJECTED BY CREATION

As described in Chapter One, the living Essence of Creation pains and sickens the Abyssal Exalted. While in Creation, an Abyssal character suffers a -2 internal penalty to her player's rolls for all actions. Deathknights can resist this debilitation if they garb or otherwise surround themselves in the ritual and symbolic trappings of death. Otherwise, an Abyssal can spend five motes to suffuse herself with a protective aura of necrotic Essence that counters the internal penalty for one day.

RECOVERING ESSENCE

Abyssal Exalted respire the deathly Essence of the Underworld. In the Underworld or a shadowland, a deathknight respire Essence at the same rate a Solar does in Creation, depending on the Abyssal's activity (see p. 313 of **Exalted**

for more details). An Abyssal cannot respire Essence in Creation, Yu-Shan, Malfeas or other realms. The Chosen of the Neverborn can, however, work around this limitation.

FEEDING

As a reflexive action, Abyssal Exalted can magically extend any or all of their teeth into sharp fangs with which to rend motes from the flesh and blood of sentient beings. Biting an opponent in combat with these fangs requires winning control of a grapple and inflicting damage, though the modifier is +0L instead of +0B. Characters may inflict less damage than the number of levels rolled but cannot inflict more levels with one bite than their Stamina.

For every level of lethal damage inflicted, the Abyssal regains one mote of Essence. This includes the Dying levels of non-extras, increasing the maximum motes gained by eating a healthy adult human to (7 + Stamina) instead of three for extras. Unintelligent animals and bodies that have been dead more than one minute offer no Essence (without Charms), though the ephemera of gods and elementals and the gossamer tissue of the Fair Folk offer an exotic banquet to Abyssals who can get hold of them.

An Abyssal who feeds in this manner doesn't have to consume large quantities of blood or flesh (though some of them enjoy to do so). The damage can come from nothing more than the metaphysical loss of Essence, with only small punctures showing where the deathknight pierced the victim's skin and soul.

DEMESNE, MANSE AND HEARTHSTONE

Abyssal Exalted can absorb the superabundant Essence from demesnes or manses located outside the Underworld or shadowlands, but they find the experience intensely unpleasant. Each time an Abyssal channels Essence from Creation's manses or demesnes, the character suffers a -2 internal penalty to all actions for the rest of the day. The trappings of the dead or spending five motes for a necrotic suffusion do not prevent this penalty, since the character deliberately imbibed an Essence contrary to her own nature. Deathknights respire Essence in Abyssal manses and demesnes as if they were in the Underworld.

An Abyssal Exalt can also use any sort of hearthstone—even a Solar hearthstone—as long as she mounts it in soulsteel. Otherwise, drawing Essence and exploiting the innate power of a Terrestrial or Celestial hearthstone causes the same penalty as directly channeling power from the demesne and manse that produced the stone.

EXPANDED BACKGROUNDS

Abyssals may purchase any of the following Backgrounds normally: Allies, Contacts, Followers, Influence or Resources. The new Liege Background (see pp. 98-99) also provides a measure of wealth to Abyssals in the service of the Deathlords, however, so deathknights should purchase Resources separately only to reflect private wealth. Storytellers should remember to take the Dark Fate (see pp. 112-116) into account when approving social Backgrounds that represent meaningful, positive ties to the living or Creation, as such connections practically beg for reprisal from the Neverborn.

ALTERED BACKGROUNDS

Considered as game mechanics, these Background traits work more or less the same as they do for Solar Exalted. The special circumstances of the Abyssal condition, however, forces certain refinements or special conditions to apply to their use.

ARTIFACT

Although the Realm controls more artifacts than the Deathlords do (at least for now), the Scarlet Empire divides its magical wealth among its 10,000+ members rather than 100 or so deathknights. Consequently, many Abyssals wield panoplies the likes of which haven't been seen in Creation since the High First Age. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of this arsenal is made from soulsteel, though the Deathlords also hoard any relics of other materials that they have scavenged or stolen in their long centuries of scheming. Purchased on its own, this Background functions exactly as it does for Solars. Characters may also obtain temporary use of other artifacts using Liege.

BACKING

The Deathlords do not like to share, so Abyssals with Liege cannot generally purchase this Background separately unless they are covert spies for their Deathlord within an organization. They could also have it if they are secretly disobeying their master, which could be a prelude to full rebellion and will certainly result in punishment if the Liege finds out. Of course, Liege provides Backing as part of its benefits package, so loyalists rarely need this Background in the first place.

CULT

The jealous Deathlords do not permit their servants to live as gods or bask in the adulation of worshipers. Regardless, Abyssals cannot help but awe and terrify people around them, so some of them develop one or two dots of Cult. Their worshipers could be mortals or ghosts lost in the macabre tableau of "hero" worship, or they might be spectres who recognize the deathknight as a mighty avatar of Oblivion.

Higher Cult ratings indicate a deliberate attempt to foster worship and are forbidden for characters with Liege. Storytellers might permit the option, though, for masochistic players who understand that their characters *will* lose one or both Backgrounds when (not if) their Deathlords find out what is going on. Unless Abyssals actively work to supplant worship of the Neverborn with their own cults, the dead Primordials do not care what desperate adulation gasps from the lips of the living.

FAMILIAR

Abyssals cannot bond with living animals as Solars can. Instead, they may attune their withered souls to the ghosts of predatory or scavenger animals, or the plasmic animals (well, *creatures*) native to the Underworld. Such familiars cannot provide additional Essence reserves for their masters. They are immaterial in all the same circumstances as human ghosts, limiting their usefulness outside the Underworld except as spies.

On the other hand, ghostly familiars can return from death. Unless it is slain with magic that annihilates spirits, the familiar re-forms after a number of days equal to its rating. The familiar emerges from its master's shadow fully healed at the next sunset after the appointed time without taking any lasting harm from the experience. Consequently, many Abyssals think nothing of ordering their familiars to perform "suicidal" tasks.

Aside from these powers and qualities, ghostly familiars use the same traits and rules as their living counterparts. They do not have Essence pools or Charms of their own unless they are artificially imbued with such capabilities. See *The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. IV—The Underworld* for a selection of plasmic creatures that could become familiars.

FOLLOWERS

With necromancy capable of animating the dead, binding ghosts into servitude and chaining the souls of the living, the Deathlords have little trouble amassing large military forces. Although the Abyssal Exalted are not yet as potent as their masters in this regard, some have begun raising their own armies of the dead. Others have enslaved hapless civilians with their Charms and converted them into bloodthirsty psychopaths in the service of Oblivion. An Abyssal's Followers can represent soldiers who function as an extension of his unholy will, hungry to make war on the living.

Zombies and hungry ghosts have some advantages as troops compared to mortals, but their mindless state imposes severe limitations as well. War ghosts and nemissaries have greater value as followers than mere mortals do, so they cost more. Having war ghosts and nemissaries as one's followers provides a number of followers equivalent to having one less dot in the Background. (See p. 112 of *Exalted* for the numbers of followers dots in the Background normally provide.) An Abyssal with Followers ••• could lead a loyal band of 100 mortals or zombies but only 20 war ghosts. An Abyssal with only one dot of Followers could have up to five mortal or zombies but only one war ghost or nemissary. For more information about undead troops, see Abyssal Command.

MANSE

This Background represents demesnes or manses that the character controls in her own right, whether in Creation or the Underworld. Deathknights can also obtain the use of other manses and their hearthstones through the Underworld Manse Background.

MENTOR

Loyalist deathknights do not normally need this Background, since the Deathlords are among the most learned and powerful teachers available in the Second Age (as represented by the benefits of Liege). Occasionally, an Abyssal might study under an especially ancient and powerful nephwrack or a hekatonkhire for a time, though such arrangements require special permission. The Deathlords discourage newly Exalted Abyssals from forming long-term, pupil-and-mentor relationships with deathknights of greater experience. Loyalty to anyone else implies less-than-perfect loyalty to the Deathlord herself.

NEW BACKGROUNDS

The following Backgrounds are nominally restricted to Abyssals. Other Celestial Exalted who pledge fealty to the Deathlords, however, might be permitted to purchase Abyssal Command, Liege, Spies or Underworld Manse—though probably at low levels unless the Deathlord has a method of control as reliable and thorough as a Monstrance of Celestial Portion. Although anyone can develop Whispers from venturing into the Labyrinth and listening too closely to the dreams of the Neverborn, the relative inaccessibility of the nightmare maze makes the Background extremely rare in Creation.

ABYSSAL COMMAND

This Background represents a military force that the character's Deathlord places at her disposal—and can take away just as easily. Troops who are personally loyal to the deathknight should be purchased as Followers.

Characters may purchase this Background multiple times, each representing a different fighting force under the Abyssal's command. Each unit typically consists of the same type of members, all of whom are extras. Possible troops include:

- Shadowland mortals (see *Exalted*, p. 280). Use elite raider traits with Compassion 1 and Conviction 4; units have Drill 5 and Might 0.

- Walking dead (see *Exalted*, pp. 314-315). Use the zombie template as a basis for mass combat unit traits. Zombie troops are tireless and have perfect morale, but are Drill 0 and Might 0. (Whatever physical advantages they offer are counterbalanced by being mindless and incapable of healing.)

- Hungry ghosts (see *Exalted*, pp. 317-318). These units have Drill 0 and Might 1.

- War ghosts (see *Exalted*, pp. 318-319). These units have Drill 3 and Might 2.

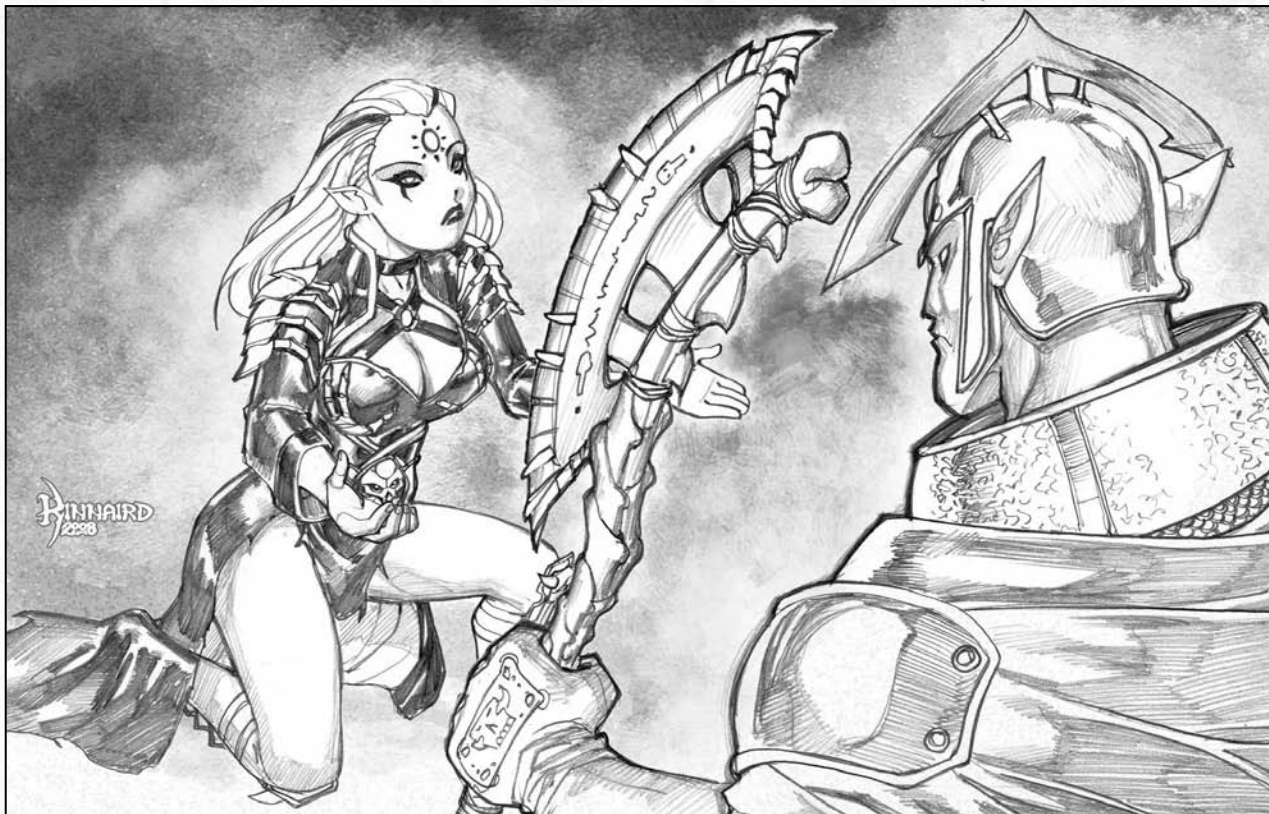
- Nemissaries (see *Exalted*, p. 319). These units have Drill 3 and Might 2.

All of these units come with appropriate support staff/handlers, as well as basic equipment appropriate to their training and function.

Abyssal commands do not replenish themselves automatically from casualties, though creating more zombies or tainted cultists isn't really that difficult for Abyssals with the appropriate Charms and spells. Of course, a deathknight's Liege can simply replace lost troops... though the Deathlord might want a good explanation of how the character lost the last batch.

Trait Effects:

X	Your character commands no military forces.
•	Your character's master gives her one scale of shadowland mortals/zombies/hungry ghosts (25 troops); or a fang of war ghosts/nemissaries (5–10 troops).
••	Your character commands one talon of shadowland mortals/zombies/hungry ghosts (125 troops); or one scale of war ghosts/nemissaries (50 troops).
•••	Your character leads one wing of shadowland mortals/zombies/hungry ghosts (250 troops); or one talon of war ghosts/nemissaries (100 troops).
••••	Your character commands two dragons of shadowland mortals/zombies/hungry ghosts (1,000 troops); or two wings of war ghosts/nemissaries (400 troops). Such a force may include a few necromantic war machines, at the Storyteller's option.



- Your character's master entrusts her with a complete legion of shadowland mortals/zombies/hungry ghosts (5,000 to 10,000 troops); or a smaller legion of war ghosts/nemissaries (2,000 to 4,000 troops). The Deathlord surely intends your character to lead an imminent invasion. This mighty host almost certainly includes several necromantic war machines as special equipment.

LIEGE

Slavery to a Deathlord has its rewards. After all, the Deathlords view the Abyssal Exalted as their greatest weapons. Such prized champions receive the best equipment and training that the Deathlords can provide, limited only by the proven loyalty of each slave. It would not do to suffer a second Usurpation at the hands of a deathknight more concerned with his own ambitions than the greater glory of Oblivion.

Dots in this Background provide benefits as if an Abyssal had Backing, Mentor and Resources ratings each equal to her Liege rating. The character can also request the temporary use of Abyssal Command, Allies, Artifact, Manse, Mentor or Spies. She just asks her Deathlord and hopes that he finds her request reasonable for the mission. The higher a character's Liege rating is, however, the closer her master watches her actions and the more time she must spend on the Deathlord's missions.

Example: The Maiden of the Mirthless Smile has Liege 3, meaning she must spend roughly half her time carrying out her master's orders. In return, she can requisition money from

her master's coffers as if she had Resources 3. She receives the miscellaneous rank benefits of Backing 3 in her master's court. She can access his liege's vast knowledge and libraries to advance her education as per Mentor 3. Finally, the Maiden can gain temporary use of a three-dot artifact, a regional spy network, a particular hearthstone, a talon of war ghosts or the like. On the other hand, she spends half her time on missions, giving her little opportunity to pursue projects of her own.

Although the Liege Background is very powerful, Storytellers should remember that these advantages come with thick strings attached. Storytellers who charge experience points for Backgrounds should waive this cost for improving Liege in play. Instead, the Storyteller should assign or strip away dots as befits a deathknight's proven devotion to her master, possibly even from session to session. Without this capriciousness, Liege is blatantly overpowered and likely to encourage players to maximize their Abyssal's Liege rating instead of gaining other Backgrounds.

Trait Effects:

- X Your character has no master and wanders as a homeless renegade. Alternatively, he has not found an opportunity to prove himself, or he has failed his master in some spectacularly dismal fashion.
- Your character has a distant relationship with his master. For good or ill, she either takes minimal interest in his doings or waits for him to prove himself before investing more resources in him.

- Your character bears some favor from his master, but is left largely autonomous unless he is truly needed for an assignment appropriate to his training and powers.
- Your character is appreciated by his master. Whether she likes him in some twisted fashion or just knows he fears to consider rebellion, she considers him a worthwhile investment. He spends about half his time carrying out assignments. Most Abyssals settle at this Liege rating after a few successful missions.
- Your character is a favored servant, likely deemed too powerful and too dangerous to leave to his own schemes. He has roughly a quarter of his time to himself, with the rest spent on missions for his master.
- Your character is the right hand of his Deathlord master's unholy will. The Deathlord regularly requests his advice when making plans, but he must always stay on call for assignments and cannot count on uninterrupted free time.

SPIES

Most (though not all) Deathlords assemble far-flung networks of informants in both Creation and the Underworld. Many ghostly spies know Arcanoi that let them observe events in Creation while they remain in the Underworld—a tremendous asset for covert investigation. Spies in Creation range from village ancestor cultists to bribed and treacherous courtiers. Unlike Contacts, a character cannot use Spies to represent a general facility for finding things out. On the other hand, Spies have greater access to secret information.

This Background represents an Abyssal's access to her master's spy network. The higher a character's rating is, the wider and more numerous are the areas where she knows the local agents and has authority to call on their services. Like Contacts, Spies do not endanger themselves for a character's sake (beyond being an informant for a Deathlord, at least). They simply provide information and minor support services such as a safe place to sleep and messages passed back to the character's Deathlord.

Trait Effects:

- X Your character's master does not trust her with the identities of any of his informants.
- Your character knows how to contact and use a few agents in a town or small kingdom (Creation or Underworld).
- Your character's master gives her access to his spy network in two significant city-states or nations, either in Creation or the Underworld, such as the Haslanti League (Creation), the Empire of Aki (Underworld) or Sijan (either).
- Your character can call upon spy networks in three important nations or trans-national organizations such as the Guild or the priests of the Underworld's Dual Monarchy.

- Your character exploits a spy network that expands throughout an entire cardinal direction, either in the Underworld of Creation. Anywhere she goes in that region, she can find informants. (Naturally, this works best if it's the same region where the character usually acts.)
- Your character has complete access to her Deathlord's spy network for an entire cardinal direction, in both Creation and the Underworld: thousands of casual informants and hundreds of full-time agents. Her master's eyes are everywhere, and they tell her everything they see. All she needs to do is ask.

UNDERWORLD MANSE

Although each Deathlord controls several manses in Creation, few of them own enough of these geomantic power stations to provide hearthstones for all their deathknights. Most Deathlords control dozens or hundreds of manses in the Underworld, though—more than enough to supply their Abyssals with hearthstones. A character with this Background receives the use of some of her master's hearthstones and, usually, access to the manse that generated them. The privilege of carrying multiple hearthstones further magnifies Abyssal puissance in the Underworld. A deathknight's master can take back her hearthstones at any time, though.

The hearthstones from most Underworld manses work only in the Underworld itself. In Creation, these hearthstones become hard pebbles that grant neither Essence nor special magical powers. If an Abyssal character wants hearthstones from Creation, Abyssal hearthstones that work in both Creation and the Underworld, or simply hearthstones from manses that she owns outright, she must use the Manse Background.

Trait Effects:

- X Your character's master does not grant the use of any of her Underworld manses. Why?
 - Your character's Deathlord permits him to attune to several level-1 and level-2 manses in the Underworld. At any given time, your character can carry one hearthstone of his master's choice of level 1 or level 2.
- Your character is attuned to several weak manses in the Underworld and can use the manses themselves whenever he wants. He may carry only level-1 or level-2 hearthstones, however, and no more than three levels total.
- Your character may attune to and use several of his master's manses, some of which are fairly powerful. He may carry up to six levels worth of hearthstones, with no more than one rated as high as level 3.
- Your character's master grants him the use of many Underworld manses, including some of the most powerful in her possession. He can carry no more than eight levels worth of hearthstones, with at most one level-4 stone, and at most one rated level 3.

- Your character's Deathlord showers him with power, giving him the use of some of her mightiest manses. Your character carries at most one level-5 hearthstone, and others of levels 1–3, adding up to no more than 10 levels total.

WHISPERS

Every Abyssal bears the stain of the Neverborn upon her soul and Essence. For some, this connection stays as distant and impersonal as the relationship between the Solar Exalted and the Unconquered Sun. Others are less fortunate. The Neverborn are not kind gods, but unknowable horrors who hate their Exalted only marginally less than they hate their enemies. Abyssals particularly blessed—or cursed—with the direct attention of their chthonic masters experience an endless torrent of blasphemies that gnaw away their sanity.

As a Background, an Abyssal's Whispers rating represents her attunement to the dreams of the Neverborn. Characters can consciously tap into this connection once per scene by reflexively spending one Willpower point. Invoking this connection has several possible effects:

- For one roll, the player can substitute her character's Whispers rating for an Ability rating.
- The Neverborn sustain the Underworld through their Essence. They perceive everything that happens in the Underworld and know everything known by mortal souls who sojourn there as ghosts or pass to Oblivion. (They do not acquire knowledge from souls that pass immediately to Lethe when they die.) A character can glean clues and other information from the dreams of the Neverborn if her player succeeds at a (Perception + Whispers) roll. More successes yield clearer and more extensive information. The *effective* number of successes may not exceed the character's Whispers rating (excess successes are wasted). Failure results in distorted or false information that leads the character astray. Storytellers should strongly consider making the rolls in secret so players can't ever completely trust the results. Queries outside the purview of Whispers results in automatic failure. Open-ended questions such as, "What is my purpose?" are a perfectly reasonable way to trigger a Storyteller-directed vision. Inquiries into the future can reveal only what the Neverborn want or plot to happen, not what will definitely come to pass. Glimpses of these plots can provide valuable insight to anyone attempting to further or thwart these ambitions, though.
- A character's presence at significant events that further the agenda of the Neverborn may trigger a reflexive activation of Whispers to understand the event, but these undirected visions are Storyteller-controlled plot devices and do not cost Willpower. In particular, the first meaningful interaction between two characters with Whispers often causes them to experience visions of each other as their shared connection to the hive-mind nightmares of the Labyrinth experiences momentary psychic feedback.

- A character can use Whispers as a guide to where the Neverborn believe her actions could further their goals. She attunes herself to the whispers, and lets them lead her where they will. Usually, the whispers lead Abyssals to places and times where a single death could devastate a community or thwart important plans for Creation's health and defense. Alternatively, they might lead to a village ripe for recruitment into an ancestor cult or as other possible minions. Long-lost and well-guarded artifacts are another option. (Really, this use of Whispers is an invitation to the Storyteller to provide a short side-adventure.)

Non-Abyssals can develop Whispers only within the Labyrinth itself. If the Storyteller charges experience points for raising Backgrounds, living, non-Abyssal characters pay twice as much. In any case, a character who wants to increase her attunement to the Neverborn must undergo a vision-quest resembling those that Abyssals use to raise their Essence. There are no recorded methods for reducing a character's Whispers rating, but Storytellers should interpret this statement as best fits their series.

Trait Effects:

X	Your character has yet to feel the direct touch of the Neverborn.
•	Your character hears the faint murmur of dead gods from time to time. These murmurs provide fragmentary clues heavily cloaked in metaphor and symbolism, all true but rarely understood except in hindsight.
••	Your character feels the rustle of eldritch horrors skittering through her brain. Her visions can abstractly explore any topic through figurative depictions, but only provide clear images drawn from the character's own memory and experiences. These wandering glimpses of the past provide supernatural insight and hunches, effectively allowing players to get clues from the Storyteller on how to put known information together to address the question at hand without receiving a straight answer.
•••	Your character has attained communion with her terrible masters. The character's visions are incomplete, but often fill in critical details the character might have missed. These visions aren't enough to answer the question outright, but they certainly provide a good foundation to begin an investigation or find a new lead in the absence of other evidence.
••••	Your character drowns in the omnipresent nightmares of the Neverborn. Visions are mostly complete and either use literal depictions or obvious symbols. This level of contact can answer many questions out-

right, but does not provide supplementary information to expand the inquiry beyond the actual wording of the question, nor do these glimpses explore other points of view or any indirect connections. Storytellers should feel free to present incomplete truths to misdirect players who come to rely on Whispers as a crutch to avoid or bypass plot rather than expand their involvement and awareness of the story.

••••• Your character has transcended sanity and all vestiges of humanity in obeisance to Oblivion. Visions are agonizingly clear, revealing subtle contextual details and tangentially related facts the character might never have thought to consider, plus unambiguous awareness of the Neverborn's wishes related to the topic. Because of the thoroughness of this information, it can be tempting to consult the whispers for answers to every challenge. The risk of a false vision and the accrual Resonance for failing to fully abide by the revealed will of the Neverborn, however, can destroy anyone who grows too dependent on the voices within.

WHISPERS OF OBLIVION

The Neverborn are not the only whisperers in the Underworld. Incomprehensible murmurs rise from the Abyss and echo within the darkest recesses of the Labyrinth. They also penetrate Creation at a few supremely cursed and evil locations.

These Whispers of Oblivion consume the sanity of ghosts, requiring a roll of (Integrity + Willpower) at difficulty 5 to avoid infection. Players of infected ghosts repeat this roll for each day of the ghost's existence thereafter. Failure compels the ghost to commit atrocities against existence unless the ghost spends one Willpower point to stave off the unnatural mental influence. Ghosts who give in to their monstrous urges regain one Willpower point from the experience (though they cannot raise their Willpower points above their normal maximum). Once a ghost submits to Oblivion's voice a total number of days equal to her Willpower rating, she becomes a spectre and can nevermore resist the monstrous impulses that guide her damned existence. The new spectre's Motivation shifts to something suitably unpleasant, even as Oblivion consumes all Intimacies based on love, friendship or other positive emotions.

CASTES

Like the Solar Exalted, the Chosen of the Void have five castes: five ways to lead, to rule... and to destroy. Each caste carries the same aptitude for certain Abilities as the Solar caste from which it derived, as well as a special anima power that twists or inverts the corresponding Solar anima power. The Abyssal Exalted are truly dark suns, lighting Creation's way to Oblivion.

ANIMA BANNER

As an Abyssal expends Peripheral Essence, her aura blooms into a terrible, dark majesty. The levels of anima banner display for Abyssal Exalted mirror those of the Solar Exalted (as explained on p. 339 of **Exalted**).

When an Abyssal's aura turns fully totemic, any mortal character who sees it feels both the terror and the lure of the Void. Merely mortal minds can break when subjected to such horror. When a mortal character first witnesses the doom-filled iconic aura, her player rolls the character's Valor. Failure means the mortal faints, runs away, grovels in worship or is otherwise overcome for the rest of the scene. Heroic mortals can spend a Willpower point to resist this unnatural terror, while the Exalted and other supernatural creatures are immune.

If the mortal's player botches the Valor check, the result is much worse. Mortals so affected by an Abyssal's iconic anima must spend one Willpower point not to gouge out their own eyes (or do something similarly self-destructive) in a maddened attempt to blot out the horrors etched behind their lids. Alternatively, the mortal acquires a debility-level derangement. (See **The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. II—The Wyld**, pp. 148–150, or **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Lunars**, pp. 209–210). The character remains incapacitated, and heroic mortals cannot spend another Willpower point to pull themselves together. It takes all their force of will just to keep from going mad.

ANIMA POWERS

Abyssals can spend one mote to do either of the following:

- Cause their anima to flare to any level of display up to the 8–10 mote level. This display lasts for a scene or until reflexively dismissed, after which the character's anima dims to its actual level.
- Attune her Essence to the emanations of the Underworld for a scene, extending this sixth sense to a radius of (Essence x 100) yards. Within this zone, she can feel shadowlands clearly enough to map their exact border. She immediately recognizes creatures and objects infused with the Essence of the Underworld for what they are (including other Abyssals). This sense does not reveal hidden characters or objects, but it does reveal the presence of necrotic Essence sources within the zone, even if the Abyssal cannot pinpoint the source of these energies. Characters can differentiate subtle differences in the source of Essence (Abyssal, ghost, zombie, etc.), but not the strength of the source.

DUSK CASTE

The Dusk Caste sweeps across the world, heralding the onset of the final night. As the most direct and terrible weapons in the arsenal of Oblivion, Children of Ash exemplify destruction through killing prowess and tactical tyranny. They can slay any adversary and lay waste to whole nations. Indeed, some Dusk Castes view themselves as the purest disciples of Oblivion, ordained to spread the gospel of unmaking with every blow. Such ideology does not endear these Peacebringers to the unholy priests of the Midnight Caste.

Dusk Exaltations best suit violent mortals whose body counts already stain their souls with the touch of Oblivion. The bargain is simple: Cheat death to become the right hand of death. Those who accept Exaltation rise up from apparent defeat to kill their

killers, but they don't stop there. They can't stop. Even if they try to kill judiciously, slaying only other monsters like themselves, their bloodlust renders any heroism... questionable. Deathknights of Ascending Darkness kill because they like killing. Renegades can sometimes restrain themselves, but they must constantly struggle to think of others as more than so much meat. In contrast, most loyalists embrace their murderous impulses wholeheartedly and savor their liberation from the burdens of conscience.

Renegade Dusks probably have the easiest time of any Abyssal Caste, since their destiny as destroyers makes them equally suited to hunting demons, raksha and other enemies of Creation. The wickedness and corruption of the Time of Tumult gives them no shortage of prey. Unfortunately, this "righteous destroyer" approach does little to redeem their souls. They cannot murder their way back into the light.

Loyalist Children of Ash usually serve as the martial backbones and champions of their circles. Few are unintelligent, but the caste has a reputation for trying to solve all problems by killing something. Their gory utility makes them indispensable due to the simple fact that someone always needs killing. Prudent Deathlords keep their Dusks busy with missions so they won't disrupt long-term plans out of sheer boredom. Rarely do Dusks get to lead armies in open military engagements against the living, as the Deathlords do not wish to unite their enemies against them prematurely. For now, Peacebringers make do with war games and leading smaller incursions to test new weapons and practice commanding

their hordes. Needless to say, the Children of Ash will take a much more active role once the Deathlords finish preparations and declare total war on Creation. Final dusk will fall upon the world as the Sun himself goes out, his conquered blood spattered across the forever-unfinished Games of Divinity.

Anima Banner: The caste marks branded onto Dusk Caste Abyssals blaspheme the Dawn with spiked rays radiating from a central disk. Peacebringer animas tend to be pitch black with gray or dark purple edges.

Anima Effects: By reflexively spending 10 motes, a Dusk Caste envelops herself in an aura of dread. The Peacebringer's enemies fear even to look at her, giving her a +2 DV bonus against their attacks. Characters whose Valor exceeds the Dusk Caste's Essence are immune to this effect, as are automata, the walking dead and other creatures that cannot feel fear. This effect comes into play automatically once the Abyssal spends 11–15 motes of Peripheral Essence.

Caste Abilities: Peacebringers dominate all arenas of violence with their affinities for Archery, Martial Arts, Melee, Thrown and War.

Associations: The colors white and purple, the eastern direction, the corpse-element of pyre flame, the full moon

Sobriquets: They Who Sing Forsaken Hymns, Peacebringers, Children of Ash, Ascending Darkness, The Forsaken

Concepts: antihero mercenary, duelist, genocidal warlord, god slayer, mercy killer, murder addict

RUN, HIDE—AT LEAST MAKE THIS
A CHALLENGE.



MIDNIGHT CASTE

In the resplendent darkness of the hour of midnight, the Unconquered Sun lies dead until his morning resurrection. Luna and the Five Maidens stand guard over Creation, but their light cannot prevail against the shroud of night. Members of the Midnight Caste embody this grim majesty. Even as the darkest night rustles with the murmur of insects and nocturnal predators, so too do the Whispers of the Neverborn claw and scuttle up from beneath Creation, hungrily stalking the living world through their chosen priests of annihilation.

Midnight Exaltations best complement broken faith or unholy zeal. It does not matter how the soul cracks to its breaking point, as long as it faces the bleak certainty that life is a futile lie. This epiphany shatters some souls, but a select few revel in freedom from the uncertainty of hope, and these withered souls may Exalt among the Echoes of the Abyss. This intrinsic understanding of death, a faith set apart from logic, can bring Abyssals of Resplendent Darkness into conflict with the scholarly Daybreak Caste. Some Midnight Castes also envy the ease with which Daybreaks master the dark miracles of necromancy.

In their zeal, Midnight Castes sometimes decide that most Deathlords want to rule the world more than they want to destroy it. This realization can lead renegade Silent Children to strike out on their own by forming death cults, making alliances and even demanding fealty from weaker peers. Needless to say, the Deathlords take great insult in being so maligned (or, perhaps, in being so transparent). Even renegades who seek redemption sometimes continue on this path, secretly hoping that a holy man will defeat their dark theology and either destroy them or lead them back to the light. On the other end of the spectrum, some renegades seek to purge the taint within them by spreading the praises of the Unconquered Sun. They destroy all who do not submit to their zeal, even as the Resonance of their hypocrisy devastates the wretched faithful who look to them for guidance.

Loyalist Midnights see themselves as righteous martyrs, enduring the burden of life to guide everyone else into death. In Creation, the death cults that grow like tumors around the Children of Silence provide their circle with spies, assassins, Essence and a haven in the living lands. The fervency of the caste disturbs those Deathlords who see their masters' hatred reflected in the eyes of their priests. True faith is hardly universal among the caste, though, and some Children of Silence merely seek to join the Deathlords as unholy emperors of the dead. The very worst of the Blasphemous believe that even the peace of the grave is a lie for fools who think they can escape the universe's pain. These monsters don't want to deliver the world into the gentle embrace of Oblivion. They just want to piss on the ashes of the world and howl the last laugh into the smoking wind.

Anima Banner: As Zeniths radiate light, Midnights consume it. Their caste marks open like a third eye upon their brows, widening into a blackened disk rimmed in blood, through which glimpses of the Neverborn's collective gaze flicker with incomprehensible hate. Many anima banners are featureless black vortices, yet maddened onlookers know the animas of Those Who Speak Blasphemous Truths are *watching* them.

Anima Effects: As her action, a Midnight Caste can reanimate a corpse as a zombie by touching it and

spending five motes. Ten ticks later, the cadaver rises as a zombie extra (see **Exalted**, p. 314). This effect becomes reflexive and gains a 10-yard range once the Abyssal spends 11–15 motes of Peripheral Essence. Once per action, the Midnight Caste's anima automatically reanimates one corpse within range, at no further Essence cost. These zombies are under the Abyssal's control but they steadily decay, suffering one level of aggravated damage per day until they disintegrate completely.

A Midnight Caste can also slay mortals with the pure power of Oblivion. As her action, a Resplendent Darkness can spend five motes and indicate a mortal within 10 yards. That mortal suffers dice of unsoakable, aggravated damage equal to the Midnight's Essence.

Caste Abilities: Echoes of the Abyss spread the gospel of Oblivion with Performance and Presence even as they resist its grasp with Integrity, Resistance and Survival.

Associations: The colors of yellow and cobalt, the southern direction, the corpse-element of jade, the half moon.

Sobriquets: Those Who Speak Blasphemous Truths, Echoes of the Abyss, Children of Silence, Resplendent Darkness, The Blasphemous

Concepts: cult mastermind, demented harlequin, embittered monk, herald of apocalypse, invincible nomad, revival preacher, voice of the Neverborn

THE GREATEST MERCY EVER
WRITTEN IS THE END.

DAYBREAK CASTE



As the Unconquered Sun recovers from his nightly death, the darkness of night defies the light of day with the unspoken promise to return to claim its due. Deathknights of the Daybreak Caste stand with the last bastion of night, gleaning all they can from the secrets of the dark before the light envelops them. No secret can hide from their inquisitive minds; no dark miracle evades their clutching grasp. Driven by the need to unleash their horrific genius, Those Who Work Unclean Arts haunt libraries and laboratories, perusing necromantic tomes or building grisly war machines. The showy power of necromancy and the extensive infrastructure that the Children of Bone require to function at maximum effectiveness can put them at odds with the quiet self-reliance of the Day Caste.

Daybreak Exaltations do not well suit mortals who pursue knowledge for its own sake. All knowledge must have a purpose; every experiment must be a means to some end. Before Exaltation, ideal prospective Children of Bone took a hands-on approach to gathering knowledge, whether by raiding ancient tombs or by forcefully extracting magical knowledge from recalcitrant sorcerers. This approach to seeking knowledge often claims the life of those chose to become deathknights of Descending Darkness. In the Black Exaltation,



they see the ultimate means to gather knowledge and practice their crafts until time itself ends. In mortal life, few Daybreaks concerned themselves with the morality of the knowledge they sought.

Renegade Children of Bone seek out lore on their own and market their genius to petty dictators and would-be savants in exchange for the resources to pursue their own experiments. Pitiless clarity is their tainted gift to the world, helping those blinded by passion to see the coldly calculated truths that advance some greater design. All too often, however, the empathy necessary for redemption eludes renegade Daybreaks, taunting them with the one mystery they cannot unravel.

Loyalist Daybreaks enjoy the patronage of some of the most powerful entities of any Age. Necrosurgeons, poisoners, vivisectionists, demonologists—the Deathlords are masters of all these fields and more. The Shadows of the Abyss become deadliest when supported by the terrible infrastructure of resurrection pits, operating theaters and necro-alchemical laboratories given to them by their masters, though these facilities are also cages where the Deathlords can monitor their activities for the slightest hint of treachery. Recognizing this, some Daybreaks actively seek assignments in Creation for the illusion of freedom and opportunity to work on their own pet projects. Sooner or later, though, the lure of limitless resources always draws them back.

Perhaps the greatest sin of loyalist Daybreaks is not the obscene nature of their research or the widespread pain they dispassionately inflict in the process, but the fact that they so often destroy sources of knowledge after

they plunder it for themselves. The Unclean leave burnt libraries and broken wonders in their wake. Knowledge is power, but knowledge that *no one else has* is greater power. And so, the Shadows of the Abyss send Creation toward a dark age of savage ignorance while seeking absolute knowledge for themselves. Getting the chance to build the weapons that will kill Creation is just a bonus.

Anima Banner: The onyx caste marks of the Daybreak half open on their brows like the narrowed eyes of an obsessed madman, weeping bloody tears that mock the true pain of their victims. Anima colors tend toward the majestic, displaying regal purple and stately gray hues.

Anima Effects: The merciless intellect of the Daybreak Caste can find the flaw in any attack to weaken it with her anima or turn it aside entirely. By reflexively spending five motes, the Daybreak character subtracts levels of damage equal to his Essence from the damage rolled in Step Ten of attack resolution.

Caste Abilities: Shadows of the Abyss lend their scholarly inclinations to discover and dissect all truths through affinity with Craft, Investigation, Lore, Medicine and Occult.

Associations: The colors of orange and black, the western direction, the corpse-element of bone, the crescent moon.

Sobriquets: Those Who Work Unclean Arts, Shadows of the Abyss, Children of Bone, Descending Darkness, The Unclean

Concepts: exquisite inquisitor, humorlessly comedic surgeon, military engineer, obsessed necromancer, sophisticated serial killer, unappreciated puppet maker

THERE, THERE. THIS WILL ONLY
HURT UNTIL YOU DIE.



DAY CASTE

When the night has passed and the Unconquered Sun sits high in the sky, the living presume they are safe from the darkness. They go about their meaningless lives like placid sheep, never realizing that wolves already stalk among them. Members of the Day Caste hunt their mortal prey in Creation at the behest of

their Deathlord and Neverborn masters. They Who Dwell

Among the Wretched are no less dangerous in the Underworld. Like any Abyssal, the world of the dead is their home ground, and they take all the same advantages. The Children of Blood walk easily among the living, however, unnoticed until they kill.

Day Exaltations best suit mortals who wield subtlety as a weapon. Such candidates often nurture hidden hatred, biding their time for the right moment to strike rather than spoiling their vengeance with rash and brutish force. While assassins and other criminals make logical hosts, Daywalkers also draw their ranks from less obvious sources: mothers who secretly resent their children, dutiful slaves waiting for the chance to smother their masters, youngersons and daughters deprived of their inheritance by primogeniture and the like. These frighteningly broad criteria make it all the harder to discover who received Day Exaltation until they strike, if even then.

Day Caste renegades apply their strong sense of independence and subtle

viciousness to their own interests, whether they're fomenting rebellions against the Deathlords or working as ultimate assassins for hire. Within Creation, they can hide among the herd until the power of Oblivion building up within them forces them to move on or risk exposure. Because they spend more time among the living than other Abyssals usually do, Children of Blood are perhaps the most likely to develop genuine feelings for the living (whether they want to or not). Any such compassion ends in predictable tragedy when their Dark Fate catches up with them, though. Retaining any vestige of humanity through this cycle of love and loss requires more fortitude and hope than most renegades can muster, ultimately drawing them back into the darkness when bitterness finally poisons their souls. Sadistically patient Deathlords sometimes manipulate their Day Caste servants into turning renegade just to harden their hearts and hone them as sharper knives against the light.

Loyalist Daywalkers normally divide their time between solo missions and team projects involving their circles. In the former case, operating alone lets them use their full mobility and stealth without the chance of clumsier peers blowing their cover. Even when they work with other deathknights, Children of Blood sometimes vanish without warning to take care of some problem, such as assassinating a pursuing monk or eliminating all the sentries in an enemy fortress. This tendency can frustrate Moonshadows, who do not appreciate having their elaborate schemes made irrelevant because a Daywalker acted without consulting the master plan. Even when the deathknights of Hidden Darkness stay where their circlemates can see them, they often have another agenda (or 12) that they hide behind wan smiles or demure façades. In some cases, this agenda is to serve as the eyes of their masters (and if necessary,

executioners) to prevent disloyal circlemates from going renegade.

Anima Banner: A closed and endless ring symbolizing isolation brands the Day Caste, as hollow as the pent-up bitterness within them. The anima colors are usually ethereal gray and black, tinged with sickening greens and purples.

Anima Effects: Like their Night Caste counterparts, They Who Dwell Among the Wretched can reflexively spend an extra mote to prevent any Peripheral Essence spent activating a Charm from adding to their anima banners. Hiding the use of Obvious Charms doubles the Charm's mote cost instead.

Additionally, Daywalkers can reflexively shroud themselves in ghostly concealment for a scene by spending 10 motes. (Obviously, this power does not contribute to anima display.) Other characters suffer an internal penalty equal to half the deathknight's Essence rating to notice or track the shrouded character. While radiating an anima banner at the 11–15 mote level or higher, the character's specific identifying features become indiscernible apart from any iconic display.

Caste Abilities: Daywalkers are as shadows to the eye and whispers in the ear, unnoticed and all-seeing. They wield affinities for Athletics, Awareness, Dodge, Larceny and Stealth.

Associations: The colors of indigo and gray, the northern direction, the corpse-element of blood, the new moon.

Sobriquets: They Who Dwell Among the Wretched, Daywalkers, Children of Blood, Hidden Darkness, The Wretched

Concepts: chief of counterintelligence, doppelganger infiltrator, Labyrinth diver, left hand of tyranny, sadistic murderer, sweet-faced bait

NICE FAMILY. WOULD YOU PREFER TO DIE
BEFORE OR AFTER THEM?

MOONSHADOW CASTE

As the Unconquered Sun hides in fear, Luna's face bloodies in the unnatural shadow of darkest night. All of Creation holds its breath in collective prayer that the Neverborn's shadowed portent passes quickly before fate must acknowledge the sign. Such is the dread grandeur of the Moonshadow Caste who embody the ill omen. Those Who Walk Within Webs of Deception deftly snarl the designs of heaven as they defile the world with lies and discord.

Moonshadow Exaltations fit best in mortals who prey upon others socially, whether through direct, tyrannical authority or through a web of influence. Such influence need not be wantonly or universally applied. A matriarch who perpetuates a feud to preserve her own power in the family is just as acceptable as a malevolent courtier who sparks a civil war for fun. This long-term, big-picture view of destruction ultimately places the Winds of the Abyss in contention with the Dusk Caste, who cut to the heart of convoluted schemes with a stroke of the blade.

Renegade Moonshadows might work to end oppressive or tyrannical societies, destroying the fear of the populace while crippling the power of those who abuse their authority. The burden of Dark Fate makes direct control extremely difficult, so these renegades produce social change through proxies, conspiracy, terrorism or other indirect means. Redemption-seeking Moonshadows realize that the world they want to create has no place for



them, but their evil can excise corruption from the world like a surgeon cutting away infected flesh.

Loyalist Children of Dust serve a variety of useful functions for their Deathlord masters. They often lead their circles. Unlike Solars, who tend to rally around the faith and charisma of the Zenith Caste, few Abyssals trust the high priests of Oblivion enough to follow their ravings. Deathknights don't trust their Moonshadows, either, but at least the Children of Dust have sufficient guile to hold a circle together in spite of rivalry or dislike. Deathknights of Hollow Darkness also sometimes manage the tedious day-to-day operations of the Deathlords' empires, or become their poisoned ambassadors to the living and the dead. Given the Moonshadows' penchant for leadership and treachery, Deathlords typically insist that the Children of Dust sanctify their own oaths of fealty. Most Moonshadows find cunning ways to work around these oaths when they have to, but the oaths prevent direct rebellion—for now.

As agents in Creation, Moonshadows draw towns, tribes, nations and empires into chaos, allowing the other members of their circle to work unmolested. Years of lies and manipulations result in treaties that further the aims of the Deathlords—sometimes even outright alliances. Death comes for all things in time. If a single city needs to be spared the enlightenment of Oblivion for a hundred others to feel death's cold embrace, so be it. The Hollow Darkness is patient.

Anima Banner: A bloody ring around a central disk scars the Moonshadows, symbolizing the whole of existence encircling and poised to fall into the Mouth of Oblivion. Their animas are translucent silver and black sheets, with flaring sparkles orbiting the Exalt.

Anima Effects: These consummate hypocrites do not abide the lies of others. If a Moonshadow touches the hands of people who make a promise, the deathknight may reflexively spend 10 motes and a point of Willpower to call the Neverborn to witness the oath. (Doing so costs nothing while the Moonshadow displays his anima banner at the 11–15 mote level.) Upon invocation, the air bleeds spider-like runes spelling out the broken promises of the gods' ancient fealty to the Primordials. Anyone

who breaks these sanctified promises is fated to botch a number of actions equal to the Essence rating the Moonshadow had when the promise was made. The Storyteller decides when the botches occur. Until all of the botches take place, the oathbreaker instinctively understands the doom her treachery brought upon herself. For this reason, the infinitely spiteful Neverborn often delay their wrath so that oathbreakers live in constant fear, waiting for the day when the darkness finally strikes.

Although Moonshadows are not protected by the same pacts as their Eclipse cousins, they receive similar protection from other creatures of death. Such creatures instinctively know that the Neverborn can twist their fate to make them suffer. If a creature of death initiates physical hostilities against a Moonshadow who has shown his caste mark and invoked the protection of Oblivion, the aggressor suffers a Resonance effect chosen by the Abyssal's player. The severity of the effect equals the Abyssal's Essence rating (though the Moonshadow does not actually vent any points of Resonance). Even mindless creatures such as hungry ghosts and walking dead understand this doom. They will not attack the Moonshadow, or anyone the deathknight names as under his protection, unless they are supernaturally compelled to do so. Only the Deathlords and other Abyssals are exempt from this ban.

Finally, Moonshadows may perform the ultimate feat of magical cheating by learning non-Abyssal Charms. Such Charms cost 16 experience points apiece to learn, and two extra motes to activate.

Caste Abilities: As envoys and social weapons, Winds of the Abyss may go anywhere to spread their poison with command of Bureaucracy, Linguistics, Ride, Sail and Socialize.

Associations: The color silver, the center direction, the corpse-element of prayer, the gibbous moon.

Sobriquets: Those Who Walk Within Webs of Deception, Winds of the Abyss, Children of Dust, Hollow Darkness, The Deceivers

Concepts: ambassador to the Yozis, betrayer of the revolution, mask within a mask, merchant prince, political troubleshooter, raksha soul dealer, sinister vizier, snake-oil salesman, terrorist mastermind, warmonger

I SPEAK FOR THE DEAD. WOULD YOU
HAVE ME SPEAK FOR YOU?

DARK FATE

With their last spiteful gasps, the Neverborn cursed their murderers to an endless spiral of madness and betrayal. As the chosen weapons of the slain Primordials, the Abyssal Exalted no longer bear this curse. The slaves of Oblivion merely trade one burden for another, though, without even temporary insanity to excuse the atrocities their very presence inflicts upon the world. In the long term, Abyssals cannot make Creation a better place, for the unholy power of their Exaltation reaches out to poison and destroy the people they defend.

Instead of the Limit trait of the Great Curse, Abyssal characters possess a trait called Resonance. This trait tracks the displeasure of their malign masters and the accumulating force of death and destruction in their animas. Although Resonance resembles Limit in some ways, it functions quite differently in others. The most important difference is that Abyssal characters can reduce their Resonance at will... though not without cost.

GAINING RESONANCE

The Abyssal Exalted gain Resonance in three ways:

Assertion of Exalted Will: A deathknight gains a point of Resonance if she spends Willpower to resist unnatural mental influence, just as other Exalted gain Limit. In asserting their sovereign will against mind-controlling influences, deathknights implicitly assert the ultimate triumph of Oblivion, and draw a bit more of the Void into themselves. Abyssal Exalted do not normally gain more than one Resonance per scene in this manner, even if the character resists unnatural mental influence more than once.

Flawed Virtue: The Black Exaltation damages a deathknight's soul so severely that she has difficulty using one of her Virtues. Each time her player rolls a dice pool involving that Virtue (which includes channeling Willpower through the Virtue), the character gains one point of Resonance. The forsaken Virtue need not be the character's primary Virtue and rarely is.

Transgressions Against the Void: The Neverborn created the Abyssal Exalted as champions of Oblivion, and they punish deathknights who act against their nihilistic crusade. (An Abyssal can gain Resonance for his sins — or maybe the taint of the Void in the Abyssal does this automatically — even in Malfestas, the deepest Wyld or any other place that might seem beyond the sight of the Neverborn.) Any deed that actively promotes or defends life counts as a transgression. In practice, Abyssals who refuse to play the part of dutiful world-killing weapons will probably gain some Resonance each scene, while those who embrace their purpose accumulate points only occasionally.

The first time in a scene that an Abyssal transgresses against his fate as a servant of Oblivion, he gains points of Resonance equal to the successes of an Essence roll. The more powerful a deathknight becomes, the more closely the Neverborn scrutinize his actions and punish offenses. This progression extends to its ultimate form in the Deathlords, who deal very carefully with their masters for fear of appropriately

STORYTELLER NOTE: KEEPING IT FUN

Storytelling Dark Fate is tricky. On one hand, the system is designed to make it painful and difficult to play a deathknight who acts as a true hero. It further assumes that the Neverborn are cruel and hateful masters who strike down disobedience with little warning or mercy. On the other hand, the game is supposed to be fun. Good communication goes a long way to achieving the latter. Level with your players about the tone of the game you plan to run, and walk them through the kinds of things that will earn their characters Resonance. Make sure that the tone you have in mind is the tone they want to play. If Resonance accumulates faster than players can deal with it, it might be time to slow down and give them some breathing room. At the very least, this should be a warning sign that the players might want a different sort of play experience. Seek player feedback. Just because the Abyssals serve evil masters doesn't mean you have to run your game like one.

high-Essence punishments—such as the First and Forsaken Lion's eternal imprisonment within his armor.

SINS OF LIFE

Abyssal Exalted can sin against the Neverborn and the Void through inappropriate contact with the living world.

- They must not promote or defend life. Actively protecting a living being from harm is always a sin. (Fortunately the Neverborn do not consider deathknights living beings, so they can defend one another.) So is creating new life, whether by mundane conception or magical genesis. Birthing such offspring is an additional sin.

- Deathknights must never use or answer to their pre-Exaltation name, except to reject all claim to it.

- Reverence to any divine power other than the Neverborn or Oblivion is strictly banned, though some Moonshadows make an art of composing threatening prayer strips to bully local deities.

- Building or maintaining positive Intimacies with the living attracts the Neverborn's wrath, especially when an Abyssal benevolently interacts with individuals she knew before her Exaltation. Indeed, simply living a normal, mortal life transgresses against the Abyss, unless the deathknight is doing so as a ruse or at the direct behest of a greater servant of the Neverborn.

Storytellers can use these examples to identify other life-related sins. Keep in mind that Abyssals can atone for certain sins, explaining how their questionable actions actually serve the greater interest of Oblivion as a stunt. Doing so gives them a small margin of grace as long as their loyalty does not falter.

SINS OF DEATH

The only thing the Neverborn punish more severely than supporting life is opposing Oblivion.

- Abyssals can torment and annihilate “normal” ghosts with impunity. Yet they may fight against nephwracks, spectres and other servants of Oblivion only as commanded by the Neverborn or their greater servants (including Deathlords, powerful hekatkhires and the worst chthonic horrors of the Labyrinth).

- Merely disobeying a greater servant of the Neverborn arouses their ire, to say nothing of disobeying a direct command from the deepest horrors of the Void. Unfortunately, it is hard to predict how the Neverborn will react when their servants turn on each other. The slain Primordials do not always object when their servants fight. Maybe they see the contest as winnowing out weaker minions. Maybe they just don’t notice. The Neverborn do recognize, however, that such infighting detracts from the greater war against light and life. Skirmishes between rival groups of deathknights sometimes break up the moment one or both sides manifest a Resonance warning shot. Some Deathlords even stage such skirmishes as a way of testing their masters’ stance on issues.

ATONEMENT

Abyssals can rid themselves of Resonance without a calamitous outburst—unlike other Exalts, who cannot mitigate their own Limit. Deathknights do this by reaffirming their loyalty to the Neverborn.

Atonement involves ritual prayers begun at sundown and ending at midnight, spoken in disturbing glossolalia. Magic cannot translate these words, though would-be translators can sense the malevolence beneath the inflections. When multiple deathknights gather in penance, their voices seamlessly join in eerie, spontaneous polyphony, though they do not understand their words any more together than alone. The deathknights also flagellate themselves and engage in other self-tortures.

At the conclusion of the ritual, the Abyssal’s player attempts a prayer roll to the Neverborn (*Exalted*, p. 132). The difficulty decreases by one for each level of lethal damage the Abyssal inflicted on himself. The Neverborn also accept human sacrifices or the senseless destruction of irreplaceable treasures whose loss diminishes Creation. If the prayer succeeds, the deathknight feels the Whispers of the Neverborn clawing through her soul. If the penance is sincere, the deathknight loses one point of Resonance per level of self-inflicted lethal damage. In case it even needs to be said, the Neverborn cannot be fooled, and attempting to trick them is a Resonance-worthy sin.

VENTING RESONANCE

The simplest way for an Abyssal to reduce Resonance, however, is to suffer the punishment of the Neverborn. A deathknight can do so at any time with a reflexive Essence roll. Each success spends one Resonance point on black miracles such as Blight, Branding, Conduit or Stigmata. (Obviously, a player cannot spend more points than the character has accumulated.) Failing the roll, however, means the character suffers a Resonance

effect with severity equal to the character’s Essence but gains another point of Resonance rather than losing any.

Although the character has no say in how or when a Resonance eruption occurs, his player spends these points and chooses their manifestation. The Storyteller can veto choices that don’t impose any actual drawbacks for the character or situation. Resonance effects are generally unpleasant enough, however, to make the selection an exercise in picking one’s poison. In addition, whenever a transgression raises a deathknight’s Resonance to 10+, the Storyteller spends 10 points on an eruption without needing a roll, choosing the most cruelly appropriate punishment(s) for the Exalt’s recent sins.

Whether under player or Storyteller control, a Resonance eruption cannot spend more points on Blight or Branding than the Abyssal’s Essence rating. A Resonance burst cannot allocate more Resonance on Conduit than the higher of the character’s Essence or Whispers. Stigmata is not limited in this way, so Abyssals who fail to provide loved ones or other buffers in the path of the Neverborn’s wrath run the risk of suffering terrible wounds if they displease their gods. A Resonance eruption can divide points among multiple effects, though, as long as each effect provides a disadvantage.

The Resonance effects listed here are cumulative, so spending three Resonance points on Stigmata makes all Essence peripheral for a scene and inflicts three levels of damage on the character. If the character already suffers from a particular Resonance effect, the same type of effect stacks to increase severity, resetting the duration from that point onward. The Storyteller can extrapolate higher-level Resonance effects for each of these categories to scourge wayward Deathlords or powerful Abyssals.

RESONANCE ERUPTIONS MADE EASY

Step One: *Player Controlled:* Roll Essence. Count successes. *Storyteller Controlled:* Skip this step.

Step Two: *Player Controlled:* Compare successes to current Resonance points. Use lowest number. *Storyteller Controlled:* The number is automatically 10.

Step Three: *Player Controlled:* The player allocates the determined number of Resonance points among Blight, Branding, Conduit or Stigmata. Up to (Essence) points of Resonance may be spent on Blight or Branding. Up to (greater of Essence or Whispers) can be spent on Conduit. Stigmata has no limit. The Storyteller may veto any part of this selection that confers no real drawback, requiring reallocation of points until he approves the selection. *Storyteller Controlled:* The Storyteller allocates spent Resonance among effects as described.

Step Four: *Player and Storyteller Controlled:* The selected effects occur immediately, including all lesser effects associated with spending fewer Resonance points on each type of eruption.



BLIGHT

Any of these effects might occur as the power of Oblivion streams through the Abyssal into Creation:

1 Resonance: One natural animal toward which the Abyssal feels positively dies wherever it is, cut down by its brush with the Oblivion-tainted deathknight. The method of execution varies, but is always painful and rarely mistaken for natural causes. If no such target exists, this particular effect doesn't apply, although other pertinent Blight effects resolve normally.

For the rest of the day, the Abyssal's presence also puts out all natural fires of candle size or smaller and wilts natural vegetation. This effect has a radius in yards equal to the character's Essence. Seeds are sterilized; cut flowers wilt. Plants larger than the Abyssal survive, but their foliage does not. Any recognizable, personal symbols of gods within the radius darken with a patina of soot, tarnish or mildew.

Besides being unsettling and revealing the character as a supernatural being, this effect makes it easier to follow a deathknight through environments containing plant-life. The effect imposes a -2 internal penalty to evade trackers (or -4 through forests, fertile grasslands or similarly dense vegetation).

2 Resonance: The zone of destruction extends to (Essence x 10) yards. In addition, it puts out natural fires up to torch size, freezes standing water, spoils all food in the area and twists divine symbols into scrap.

Together, these effects double the penalties to evade trackers through appropriate terrain. Natural animals exposed to the energies may develop a gruesome wasting sickness. (Check for leprosy as per p. 351 of *Exalted*, with a Virulence equal to the Abyssal's Essence.) Thankfully, this disease is not contagious.

3 Resonance: One mortal the Abyssal cares about dies. Mortals who share a reciprocal Intimacy with the deathknight are the most-favored target. Next come mortals who do not return the Abyssal's Intimacy to them, followed by mortals whom the deathknight merely likes a bit, if only because he finds them useful.

The Abyssal's zone of entropy—still (Essence x 10) yards—puts out natural fires smaller than a bonfire, burns divine symbols to cinders or slag and instantly kills natural animals of mouse size or smaller, carving a swath of dead insects and vermin. The energy also terminates all pregnancies and eggs, though miscarriages might not occur until days later. Mirrors that catch the Abyssal's reflection crack.

4 Resonance: The Abyssal's zone of destruction extends to (Essence x 100) yards, quenching all natural fires. The deathknight suffers a -4 internal penalty to evade tracking through barren terrain and automatically fails to evade trackers through areas with any vegetation.

The weather around the Resonance epicenter grows unnaturally turbulent, with dense storm clouds, chill gales and sporadic rain that smells faintly of rot, blood or ash. Mushrooms and mildew grow wherever this rain collects, decreasing the output of farmland by half for the coming year. The clouds extend over a radius in miles equal to the Abyssal's Essence, dissipating one day later.

5 Resonance: The aforementioned zone of entropy lasts for a number of days equal to the Abyssal's Essence, traveling with the Abyssal wherever she goes. Furthermore, mortals who come within (Essence x 10) yards of the Abyssal suffer one level of lethal damage per scene, causing them to bleed a thin trickle from the eyes, ears and mouth. These unfortunates also suffer a lingering -1 wound penalty while in the area from the agony of the Abyssal's malignant presence.

A shadowland with a radius of (Essence x 10) yards opens around the Abyssal at the moment of Resonance eruption, halting any nocturnal travel through Creation until morning. Its radius contracts by 10 yards per day until it closes. While it lasts, it serves as a beachhead for hungry ghosts and spectres to rampage into the storm-wracked Creation. Sensors in the Realm Defense Grid as well as instruments in the Bureaus of Seasons and Fate register such incursions of Abyssal Essence into Creation, though Yu-Shan lacks the resources to follow up on every incident.

BRANDING

1 Resonance: The Abyssal's mien assumes any number of minor spectral qualities for a scene, such as an inhuman rasping voice, glowing red eyes, deathly cold skin, audibly creaking bones or a noticeable scent of decay. The unnerving effect reveals the Exalt as a supernatural being and imposes a -2 internal penalty to all disguise-based Larceny rolls, Stealth rolls and social rolls not based on intimidation.

2 Resonance: Spectral effects last for a full day and can manifest anywhere within (Essence x 100) yards. While unnerving, these effects have no real power to affect the world. Typical effects include animating people's shadows as monstrous phantasms, creating chill winds that follow in the character's wake or mirrors showing no living being's reflection. Relevant internal penalties increase to a value equal to the character's Essence.

3 Resonance: For one day, the Abyssal's unnatural presence upsets all natural animals within (Essence x 100) yards. Wild animals flee from the character and attack anyone who prevents them from doing so. Handlers can keep domesticated animals from bolting with a (Charisma + [Ride or Survival]) roll—Ride for mounts, Survival for other animals—at a difficulty equal to the deathknight's Essence. Friendly animals are not exempt from this panic. The disturbance makes the character much easier to follow, applying spectral-effect internal penalties to evade tracking.

4 Resonance: For one day, mortals find the Exalt's presence unbearable. In this time, mortals must spend one Willpower per scene of interaction not to instantly develop an Intimacy of hatred and/or fear toward the Abyssal. Only those with existing positive Intimacies toward the character automatically resist this aversion, but each scene of interaction counts as a scene of weakening such Intimacies, regardless of what the deathknight does.

5 Resonance: The preceding Branding effects follow the character for a number of days equal to his Essence.

CONDUIT

1 Resonance: The Abyssal forfeits one Intimacy that the Neverborn find objectionable. He remembers the severed attachment clinically like a half-forgotten dream, unable to understand why he felt attached to anything (or anyone) so irrelevant.

2 Resonance: Rather than simply excising love, the Neverborn poison it, converting an offending positive Intimacy to an equally strong hatred.

3 Resonance: For the rest of the day, the Abyssal must spend one Willpower to take an action that would offend the Neverborn enough to add to his Resonance. This compulsion applies even if the character already received Resonance from sinning earlier in the same scene. If the Exalt runs out of Willpower, he must submit to his Dark Fate and cannot take the offending action.

4 Resonance: Once per scene for the rest of the day, the Neverborn can actively force the character to take any one action they wish unless the character pays one Willpower point to resist the compulsion. In conjunction with the Willpower drain associated with fighting Dark Fate in general, this effect often creates situations in which the Abyssal cannot stop himself from becoming the instrument of his own punishment. It is small comfort that an Abyssal who resists to the last cannot be made to use powerful Charms that require Willpower against his own will.

5 Resonance: The Abyssal is fully possessed by the Neverborn for a scene, displacing and blocking any other forms of competing unnatural mental influence. The character might remain conscious but helpless during this time like a ghost in his own flesh, or he might black out and enter a fugue state, awakening later with no memory or explanation for the gore on his hands.

STIGMATA

1 Resonance: All motes the Abyssal spends for the rest of the scene are considered peripheral Essence for anima display.

2+ Resonance: The Abyssal suffers levels of unsoakable lethal damage equal to the Resonance spent, experiencing this injury in a blatantly supernatural and horrific manner. This damage will not reduce a character below Incapacitated, though falling unconscious at the brink of death in the middle of a battle usually results in a de facto death sentence.

4 Resonance: Some part of the deathknight's body withers and becomes as useless as if it were amputated. This Crippling effect lasts until the Abyssal heals all lethal damage.

CHEATING

The rules for gaining Resonance make it extremely difficult and arduous for an Abyssal to directly challenge his Dark Fate. Careful renegades can minimize the wrath of the Neverborn, however, by opposing them indirectly. Fighting the forces of death is a no-no, but the dead Primordials have no problem with their deathknights slaying demons, Fair Folk, violent criminals and other monsters. Indeed, such deaths often glorify Oblivion more than spilling helpless mortal blood does. Staying in one place and building relationships as the local defender causes Resonance buildup, but renegades who roam from place to place as vigilante antiheroes can fulfill their purpose as lonely death-dealers without building up more than occasional Resonance.

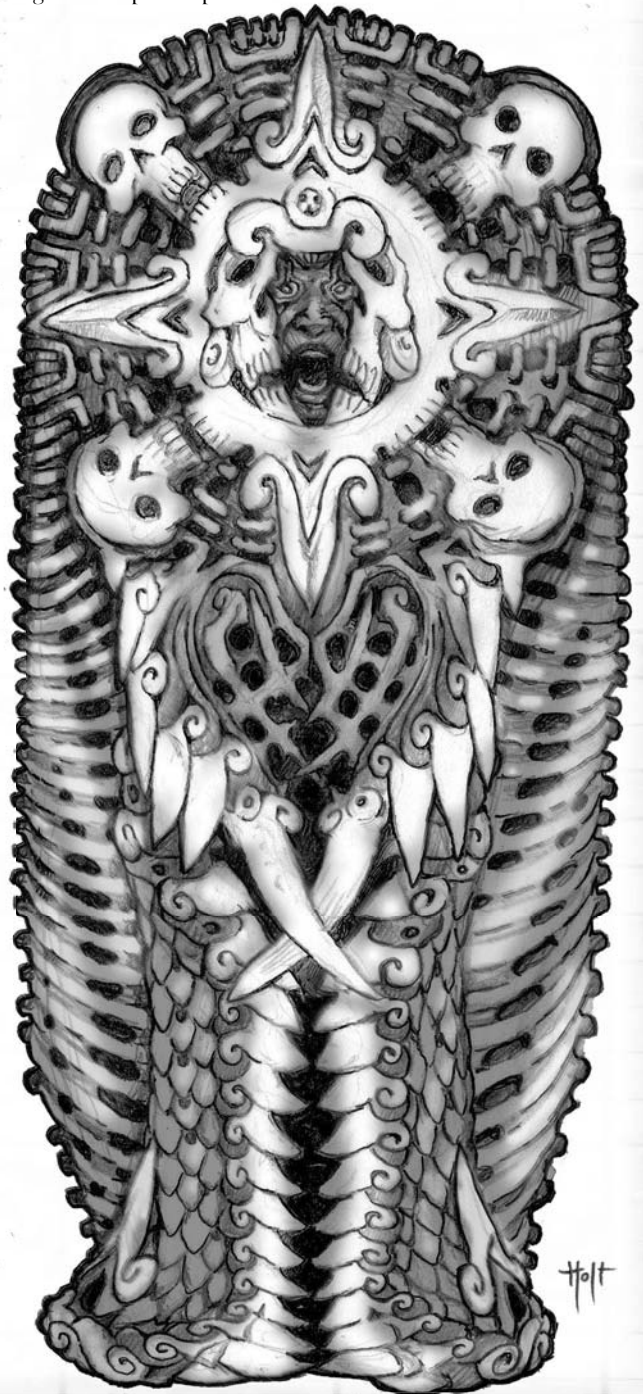
Players might wonder if their character can harm enemies by deliberately venting Resonance in massive blights. Why, yes, *they can*. If an Abyssal wants to poison the very Essence of Creation for the sake of victory in battle, that suits the Neverborn just fine. Keep in mind that invoking such powerful Blight effects necessarily involves killing someone the Abyssal likes (or at least values in some way). Any Storyteller worth her dice can easily turn this “power” against the Abyssal: a village destroyed in the course of saving it, irreplaceable allies slain (or captives the character’s Deathlord wanted *alive*, damn it!), a Wyld Hunt called against this highly visible Anathema, and so on.

THE MONSTRANCE OF CELESTIAL PORTION (ARTIFACT N/A)

The genesis, implementation and control of the Abyssal Exaltation depends entirely on the Monstrances of Celestial Portion. The Neverborn themselves empower these terrible implements, though they need lesser creatures to serve as their hands and supply the raw materials. As such, a Monstrance’s Artifact rating is truly Not Applicable. Their power is at once so vast and so narrow that normal considerations of value and utility do not apply.

Each Monstrance has its own unique appearance, ranging from box-shaped cages to baroque sarcophagi. All are just barely large enough to hold a human adult. They are made from crystallized spectre bones, about 100 pounds of soulsteel and about a pound of orichalcum. A Monstrance has the following intrinsic properties:

Durability: 30A/30L/30B soak; 50 levels of damage needed to bend the bars or break a hole wide enough for an adult human to squeeze through and 100 levels of damage to destroy completely. No magic can harm them in any way. The cages are equally solid to dematerialized beings and require a (Strength + Athletics) total of 20 or more to lift. They are harder to move than they look. Damaged Monstrances mend themselves at the rate of one level per hour. Only the Monstrance’s owner can open the hinged doors on one side, and the doors resist any “opening” magic. Abyssals feel the destruction of their Monstrances as a breath of hope, regaining all Willpower points.



Unholy: Living beings abhor the alien geometry of the cage and the spider-like runes etched into its surface. Whenever such beings encounter a Monstrance, they feel a compulsion to flee its presence. Those who are trapped inside feel a compulsion to do anything to get out. Resisting the compulsion to flee for a day costs five Willpower points, though natural animals and most mortals will not bother to resist. Living creatures trapped in the cages cannot regain Willpower from sleeping, as they dream the nightmares of the Neverborn. The cages also block external sources of Essence from reaching the interior, including motes gained from Cult, worn hearthstones and standard Essence respiration. Only internal sources such as stunts or Essence-generating Charms can give prisoners motes.

A Solar Exalted trapped inside a Monstrance feels this terrible despair. Eventually, her will breaks (**Exalted**, p. 174). She then has three choices: She can accept Oblivion by killing herself; she can accept Oblivion by going catatonic, never to recover unless someone uses healing magic upon her mind; or she can accept Oblivion by becoming a deathknight. The latter course requires a necromancer who can cast the spell Dimming of the Light.

Incarnations: Each Monstrance is dedicated to a specific Exaltation. When an Abyssal dies, her Exaltation returns to its cage rather than seeking out a new host on its own. An Exaltation in its cage becomes visible as a translucent, amorphous shadow. By addressing the Monstrance, the cage's owner can order the Exaltation to seek out a selected host or to return. A Deathlord can also place a candidate into the Monstrance directly. In any case, the Exaltation bonds with a failed hero only at the moment of death. (Deathlords typically stab imprisoned candidates through the heart the moment their will is broken in order to force the Black Exaltation upon them.) If a prospective host refuses an Abyssal Exaltation, the Exaltation returns to its cage to await new orders.

An Abyssal Essence without a Monstrance seeks out a new incarnation on its own a month after the previous host's death. During that time, it is vulnerable to capture with the spell Call the Black Sun (if such a spell exists in the series). Unbound deathknights do not experience a vision of the Deathlords, but intuitively understand the choice between Exaltation and death.

Arcane Link: Certain Abyssal Charms (and all necromancy spells) treat a deathknight's Monstrance as if it were a physical extension of her body, transmitting the effects of the magic directly to her. Deathlords use this dread mystical correspondence to communicate with and punish their deathknights, and to appear in visions to candidates who have not yet chosen whether to die or accept Exaltation. If such effects kill an Abyssal, the cage shatters and the freed Exaltation must be summoned to a new Monstrance. The possibility that another Deathlord might poach the Exaltation, however, usually deters such extreme solutions to treachery.

The Neverborn usually create that are Monstrances already bound to a particular Exaltation. Nonetheless, they gave the Deathlords a number of "blank" Monstrances to use in corrupting Solars, or as replacements in case an Abyssal's Monstrance is damaged. A "free" Black Exaltation can be at-

tached to a new Monstrance simply by having the deathknight step inside and accept the link. Alternatively, a Void Circle necromancer could theoretically summon and bind the lost Exaltation using the Call the Black Sun spell.

DIMMING OF THE LIGHT (VOID CIRCLE SPELL)

Cost: 80m

Target: One Solar Exaltation

A Monstrance of Celestial Portion can transform a Solar Exalt into an Abyssal. This rite can take place only in an Inauspicious Citadel (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. II—The Black Treatise**, p. 53) or in the Labyrinth. The Solar must be inside the Monstrance and agree to the transformation, either deliberately or because his will is broken.

In a ceremony that lasts from dusk to midnight, the Solar renounces the Unconquered Sun, formally curses each Charm she knows, and finally pledges fealty to the Neverborn. When the dire transformation occurs, the Solar's anima flares iconic as her caste shifts to its Abyssal analogue (Dawn to Dusk, etc.). Her caste mark turns black and streams blood. The ground shakes. All flames die to mark this miracle of the Void.

The character loses all Solar Charms for each Ability and gains an equivalent number of Abyssal Charms. The character should purchase Mirror Charms and their prerequisites to preserve as much of her original competence as possible. She loses all Combos containing lost Charms without recompense. Although she might retain theoretical knowledge of Solar Circle spells, she can no longer access this magic. The Great Curse recedes, replaced with Dark Fate. If a trapped Solar escapes the cage without surrendering, the Monstrance shatters.

Deathlords prefer to use a "blank" Monstrance for this rite, since the Monstrance becomes bound to the new Abyssal's Exaltation. Any Abyssal Exaltation previously bound to the Monstrance goes free.

CALL THE BLACK SUN (VOID CIRCLE SPELL)

Cost: 40m

Target: One Abyssal Exaltation

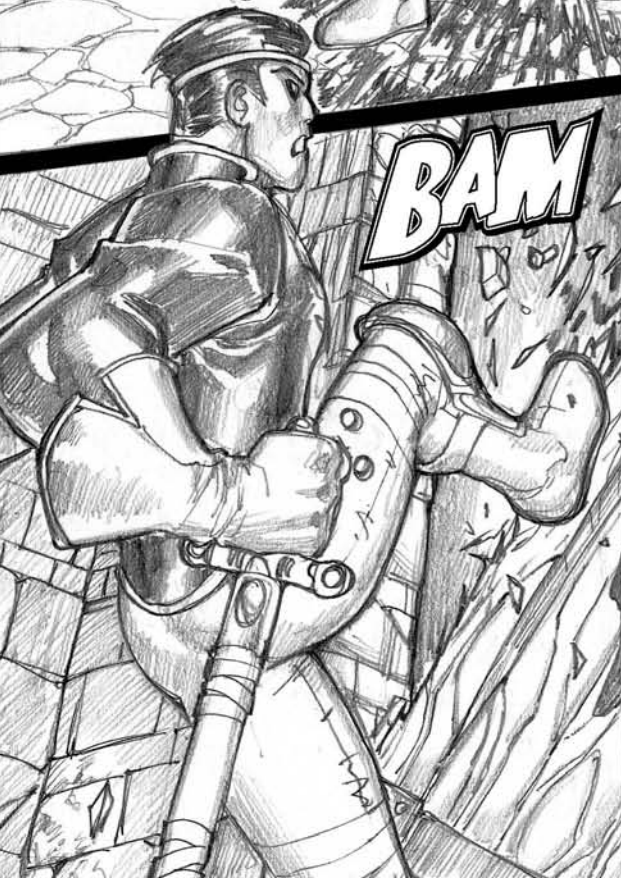
What to do when an Abyssal Exaltation is left without a Monstrance? As far as anyone knows, the problem is purely academic. When Deathlords find Monstrances destroyed and Exaltations slipping the leash, though, they might invent this spell. It requires a blank Monstrance, the name given to the Exaltation's previous host, part of the previous host's body and one additional arcane link, such as an artifact he had attuned or a slave he owned. The words of the spell are the same sort of disturbing, meaningless glossolalia that Abyssals utter in their rites of atonement. The spell lasts from dusk to midnight. At the end, the lost Exaltation appears inside the Monstrance and is bound to it henceforth. In the unlikely event that two necromancers simultaneously try to capture the same lost Exaltation, the necromancer with the highest Essence rating wins. If their Essence ratings are equal, the one with the highest Willpower rating wins. If their Willpower ratings are equal, the Exaltation has an equal chance of going to either necromancer's Monstrance.



THIS WAY!



QUICKLY!
LET'S END
THIS!



BAM



YOUR LIES
WILL POISON THIS
KINGDOM NO
LONGER!



PARDON
ME!?





CHAPTER FIVE

CHARMS

The Deathlords empowered the Abyssal Exalted as the ultimate weapons of Oblivion and their Neverborn masters, twisting the perfection of their nascent Solar glory into a mockery of everything the Lawgivers stand for. Their Charms reflect their ordained purpose as world-killing weapons, giving them the arsenal needed to slay the gods and their Exalted champions. Abyssal Charms match the power of the Solar Charms upon which they were based but tend to cause unnecessary suffering rather than quick kills. Instead of Solar light, they evoke the unholy properties of the Underworld and the slain Primordials.

Deathknights present the greatest immediate threat currently active in Creation, and they know it. Even the most pious renegades among their ranks must accept that they are destroyers by nature, extraordinarily talented at that function and pathetically unsuited to helping others or building anything of lasting value.

NEW KEYWORDS

The following new keywords apply to some Abyssal Charms, as appropriate to the unique malevolence and origin of their power:

Avatar (Rating): These Charms draw directly on the power of the Neverborn through the psychic link of their Whispers (see pp. 100-101). Characters must have the minimum rating in that Background listed in parentheses to purchase or use Avatar Charms. Moreover, the effects and/or use of these Charms are considered outside fate since they disrupt the Tapestry with Primordial Essence. The Neverborn cannot withhold their power from being tapped in this fashion any more than they can prevent powerful necromancy spells from doing the same.

Mirror (Charm; Exalted, p. #): As mockeries of Solar power, deathknights wield comparably potent Charms arranged in similar structures. Abyssal Mirror Charms list



their Solar analogues in parentheses, which always have the same total number of prerequisite Charms and minimum trait requirements. For Eclipse and Moonshadow Castes, a mirror can substitute for its analogue with regard to any prerequisites as if it were the same Charm. This keyword also guides Charm reallocation for redeemed Abyssals or Solars corrupted to darkness.

Note that some Abyssal Charms mirror Solar Charms that are not in general use (i.e., not in the **Exalted** rulebook itself). In such cases, the Charm description appends a brief description of the Solar analogue. Storytellers can introduce these new Solar Charms to their series—or perhaps a Solar who wants to learn these Charms must seek an Abyssal teacher. At the Storyteller's option, cross-training Solars and Abyssals can deduce the Mirrors of each others' Charms. For instance, a Dawn Caste could study with an Abyssal who knows Lightning Clutch of the Raptor (see p. 133), and after four days he could learn its Mirror Charm, Deft Hands Deflection. Solars and Abyssals thus become valuable but morally objectionable sources of Charms for the other side to learn.

Spectral: This keyword identifies Charms that specifically depend on the metaphysical properties of the Underworld. Although characters can use Spectral Charms beyond the realms of the dead (which are defined as the shadowlands, Underworld and Labyrinth), doing so adds

a +1 Willpower surcharge to the activation cost. Once a character activates a Spectral Charm at this increased cost, further Spectral Charms do not require this surcharge until the character's next action.

Taint: This keyword allows Abyssals to make a Charm's effect permanent, enabling her to use it without further expended or committed costs. This is not done lightly, however, as the transformation is irreversible and such Charms always carry some kind of drawback. Therefore, for every persistent advantage gained with this keyword, an Abyssal also bears a new curse to compound the doom of his Dark Fate.

Turning a Charm into a permanent Taint also costs bonus points or experience points. The sample costs are based on comparison with Wyld mutations (see **The Compass of Celestial Directions, Vol. II—The Wyld**, p. 144). The more extreme (or useful) the effect of making a Charm permanent is the more points doing so costs.

EXCELLENCIES AND RELATED CHARMS

The three basic Excellencies, Infinite (Ability) Mastery and (Ability) Essence Flow function exactly for Abyssals as they do for Solars and are Mirrors to each other.

RAVENING MOUTH OF (ABILITY)

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** (Ability) 4, Essence 3; **Type:** Reflexive

Keywords: Combo-OK

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Any (Ability) Excellency

Touched by the endless hunger of Oblivion, Abyssal Exalted can learn to extend their animas through their mastery of a particular Ability, drinking Essence from the suffering they inflict. Whenever the deathknight takes an action or activates a Charm using the chosen Ability, he regains one mote for every level of damage the action or Charm inflicts to sentient beings as if he had bitten the victims directly. If multiple Ravening Mouth of (Ability) Charms could apply in a situation, the Abyssal may use only one. Indirect damage to that target also awards motes, such as health levels paid as part of the costs of defensive Charms. Ravening Mouth Charms exist for Archery, Martial Arts, Melee and Thrown. Abyssals cannot use this Charm to feed through the effects of spells.

Note that ongoing damage after the initial action or Charm (such as from poison) do not award further motes. In addition, the Abyssal can never gain more than 20 motes during a single one of her actions from any combination of Charms including Ravening Mouth of (Ability).

MORTALS, LIVING AND DEAD

In case it's not clear, all Abyssal Charms that mentally or socially affect living mortals also affect ghosts. Charms that affect animals also affect animal ghosts and the plasmic entities of the Underworld that exhibit animal behavior. Deathknights need special, dedicated Charms only to deal with the walking dead, hungry ghosts and other deathly creatures who lack true minds. Maybe this point should be obvious, but many Abyssal Charms mirror Solar Charms that are defined as affecting *mortals*. For Abyssals, the term "mortal" includes the deceased.

DUSK

ARCHERY

PULSE OF THE PREY

Cost: 3m or 5m; **Mins:** Archery 4, Essence 1;

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (There is No Wind; Exalted, p. 187)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Any Archery Excellency

No distraction can keep an Abyssal from his quarry. His attacks unnaturally twist in flight with a predatory hunger of their own to find their mark, negating all penalties except wound and multiple-action penalties.

TWISTING SPITEFUL SHAFT

Cost: 4m; **Mins:** Archery 4, Essence 3; **Type:** Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK, Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Pulse of the Prey

When the arrows of Oblivion taste blood, can they be blamed for drinking deeper of the wound? This Charm enhances any Archery-based attack that inflicts lethal (or aggravated) damage. If the attack inflicts any damage to an animate being, the projectile burrows deeper into the wound and cannot be removed without a difficulty 3 (Strength + [Athletics or Medicine]) roll as a miscellaneous action. Energy-based attacks instead cover the target in an agonizing nimbus of the appropriate energy (so firewands set victims aflame), but the action to extinguish this nimbus is the same. Until the effect is stopped, the victim suffers an number of dice of lethal damage equal to the Abyssal's Essence on each tick when the victim acts (or once every five seconds out of combat). This damage bypasses soak and Hardness from armor.

Victims suffering from multiple activations of this Charm use the highest Essence among the archers to determine damage, adding one die to the damage and one to the difficulty of removal for each activation after the first.

FLAWLESS ARCHER DISCIPLINE

Cost: 1m, 1wp; **Mins:** Archery 5, Essence 3;

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Accuracy Without Distance; Exalted, p. 187), Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Pulse of the Prey

Nothing can save those whom an Abyssal archer has chosen for death. As the arrow leaves her bow, a shrieking spectral aura guides her shaft inexorably to its target. As with the Solar Charm, the player rolls the attack but only to see if there are sufficient successes to add to damage.

PIERCING GHOST BARB

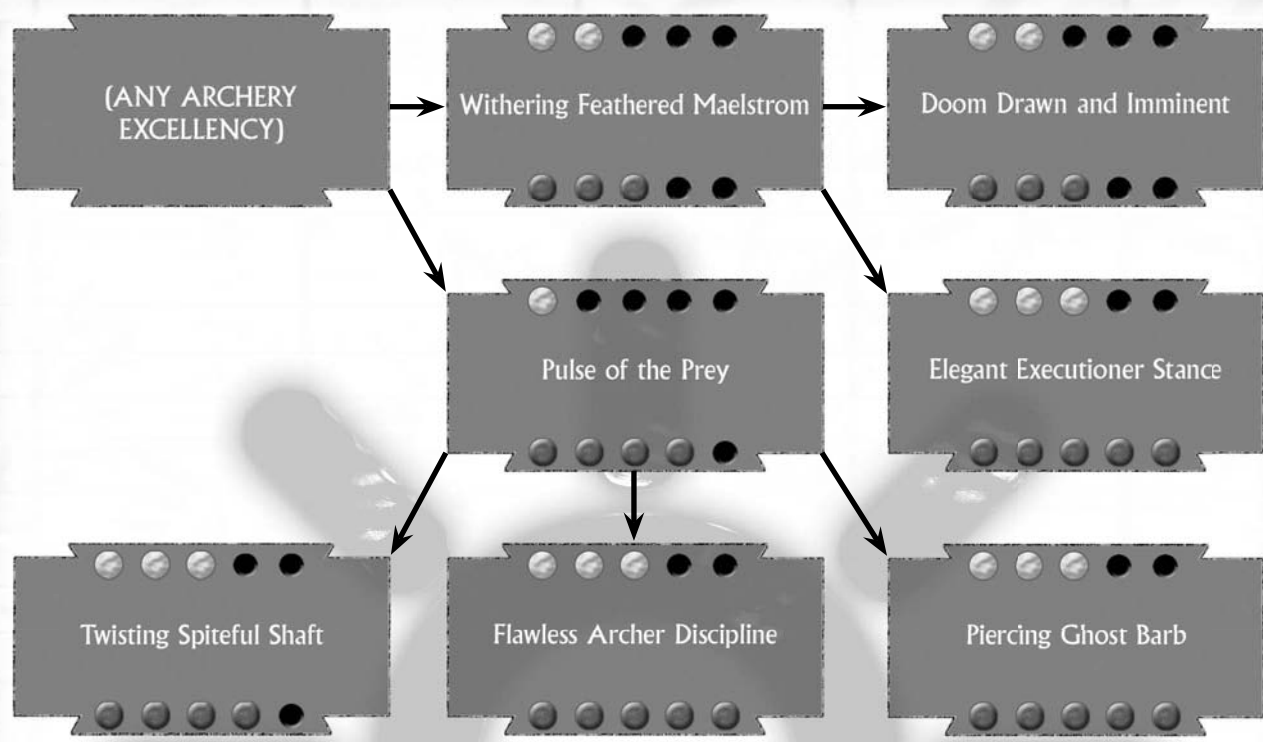
Cost: 6m, 1wp; **Mins:** Archery 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Combo-OK, Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Pulse of the Prey

This Charm transforms the archer's projectile into a ripple of moaning, ghostly Essence with no substance outside the dreams of the Neverborn. This pulse passes through all corporeal and incorporeal objects without effect except for the attack's designated target(s). If it hits its mark, the attack shifts back to full reality to inflict its usual injury. If it misses, it ceases to exist. Mechanically, this effect negates all penalties from cover, bypasses all soak except innate soak, and makes the attack unblockable except to unarmed parries.



WITHERING FEATHERED MAELSTROM

Cost: 2m or 4m per attack; **Mins:** Archery 3, Essence 2;

Type: Extra Action

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Trance of Unhesitating Speed; *Exalted*, p. 187), Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Any Archery Excellency

His fingers an unnatural blur of motion, the Abyssal draws and fires a barrage from his weapon.

DOOM DRAWN AND IMMINENT

Cost: 3m **Mins:** Archery 3, Essence 2; **Type:** Reflexive

Keywords: Combo-Basic, Emotion, Mirror (Flashing Vengeance Draw; *Exalted*, p. 188)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Withering Feathered Maelstrom

When an Abyssal archer draws his weapon, panic ensues. Death is coming, its cold fist tight on the hearts of those who might be prey. Activating this Charm instantly draws and loads an Archery weapon the deathknight has available, either on his person or banished Elsewhere via Banished Bow Arsenal (see p. 124). More importantly, if this Charm is used during a Join Battle action, all other combatants who beat the Abyssal's player's roll feel overwhelming dread at the thought of initiating hostilities against the suddenly armed deathknight. As a result, they suffer an internal penalty equal to the Abyssal's Archery rating on all attacks directed against the deathknight until he takes his first action. Any attacker willing to reflexively spend three Willpower can end the Charm's unnatural mental influence over her (gaining Limit or Resonance if appropriate), allowing her to attack the Abyssal without penalty.

CHARM CONCEPT: CREATURES OF THE WYLD AND DEATH

Some Abyssal Charms have special effects when used on creatures of the Wyld, smothering the potentiality of their inchoate Essence with the iron certainty of entropy. Creatures of the Wyld are defined as any entities native to the chaos outside Creation, including raksha, Fae-Blooded, behemoths of appropriate origin, un-Exalted Wyld mutants and anything else the Storyteller includes.

Other Abyssal Charms have special effects on creatures of Death, reflecting their place as the lords of that realm. This list includes ghosts, ghost-blooded, walking dead, Abyssal Exalted, Deathlords, hekatonkhires and all the other miscellaneous beings native to the Underworld or the Labyrinth.

ELEGANT EXECUTIONER STANCE

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Archery 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple (Speed 4)

Keywords: Combo-OK

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Withering Feathered Maelstrom

Some Abyssals find ranged weapons distasteful because they do not afford an opportunity to stare into a victim's eyes as she dies. Unfortunately, archers who fire weapons close enough to savor each kill lose the primary advantage of using ranged weapons in the first place. This Charm reconciles the paradox of sadism and practicality, invoking the proximate certainty of Oblivion to aid

point-blank shots. Upon activating Elegant Executioner Stance, the Abyssal may draw and load any Archery weapons available to him as part of the action needed to use this Charm. For the rest of the Charm's duration, whenever the Abyssal makes an Archery-based attack on a target within five yards, extra successes on attack rolls count twice for purposes of determining raw damage.

SPLINTER OF THE VOID

Cost: 2m; **Mins:** Archery 2, Essence 2; **Type:** Supplemental
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Essence Arrow Attack; *Exalted*, p. 188), Obvious
Duration: Instant
Prerequisite Charms: None

The deathknight imbues a ranged attack with the Essence of Oblivion, making every arrow a talon of the Neverborn and every firewand blast a shrieking exhalation of Primordial doom. This Charm adds the Abyssal's Essence to the raw damage of an Archery-based attack. Learning the Charm also gives the Abyssal one of the following effects. Additional effects cost one experience point for each or one bonus point for two. Abyssals may apply as many known effects to each attack as desired, but each costs two motes to use.

Bloodthirsty Arrow: The necrotic Essence infusing the arrow brings certain death. The archer adds two dice to post-soak damage or reduces the target's DV against the attack by one, as he chooses. The character can stack these effects by spending additional motes, but cannot increase damage or reduce the target's DV by an amount greater than his permanent Essence.

Dream-Shattering Spite: The attack unravels the illusions of life and hope. It inflicts aggravated damage to creatures of the

Wyld. The attack inflicts normal damage to all other targets.

Hundred Paces Bite: Imbued with necrotic power, the attack disrupts and devours Essence. If the attack hits a being with an Essence pool (regardless of whether it inflicts any damage), the victim loses a number of motes equal to the Abyssal's Essence rating. Beings with Personal Essence lose motes from this pool first. Abyssals who know Ravening Mouth of Archery absorb the drained motes. Otherwise, the energy simply fades into Oblivion.

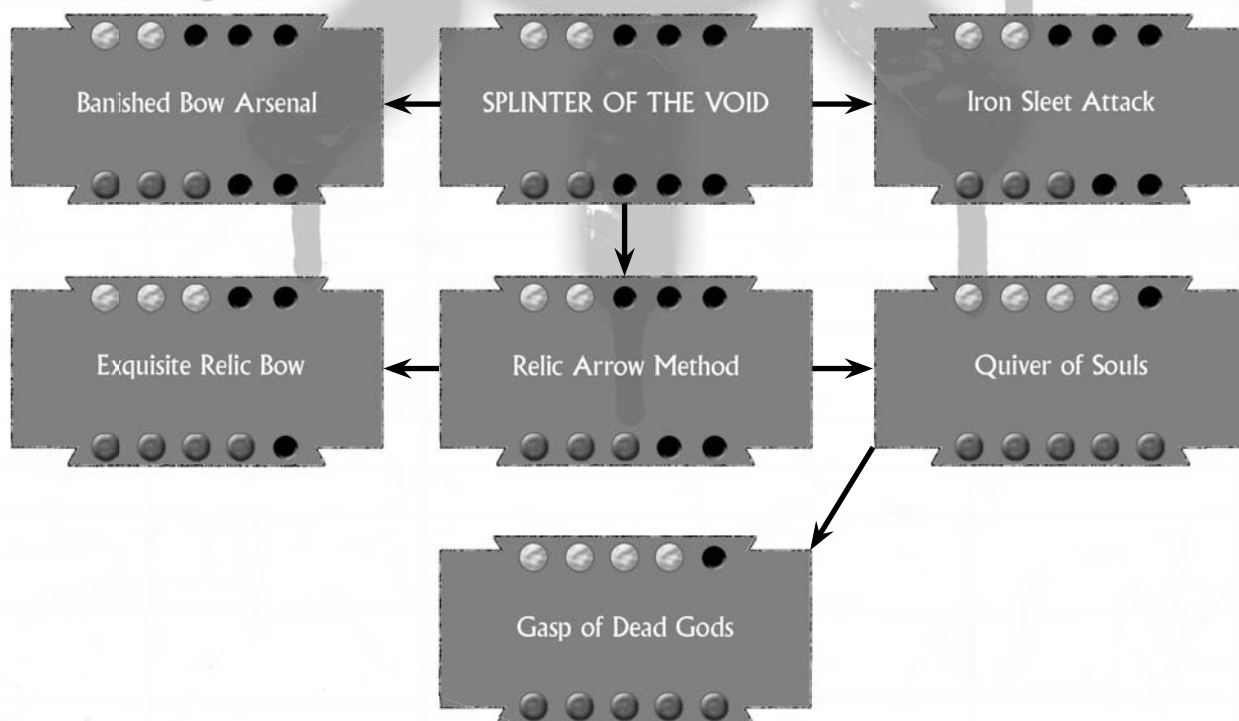
Imposition of Agony: The Neverborn suffer without the release of death. An attack blessed with this effect carries a brief taste of this cold torture. If the attack hits an animate target (regardless of whether it inflicts any damage), the victim convulses and falls prone from psychic shock, unless her player successfully rolls to resist knockdown (*Exalted*, p. 153). If the Abyssal chooses, this effect can also remove all physical damage from the attack, transforming the projectile into a writhing corona of red and black lightning on impact.

BANISHED BOW ARSENAL

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Archery 3, Essence 2;
Type: Simple (Speed 3)
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Summoning the Loyal Bow; *Exalted*, p. 189)
Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: Splinter of the Void

An Abyssal archer may hide her weapons Elsewhere where none may disarm her. She rips them out of a shadowed vortex when a new opportunity for murder arises. As with Solars, separate committed activations of this Charm may concurrently banish multiple weapons.



IRON SLEET ATTACK

Cost: 4m; **Mins:** Archery 3, Essence 2; **Type:** Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK, Crippling

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Splinter of the Void

The deathknight's arrows carry the chill of the Void. Not only does this Charm add the Abyssal's Essence rating to her attack's raw damage, her target loses one dot of Dexterity if the attack inflicts any damage. Creatures reduced to zero Dexterity can only huddle in helpless misery. Lost Dexterity returns at a rate of one dot per minute. Iron Sleet Attack does not affect automata, the living dead, ghosts and other creatures immune to extreme cold.

RELIC ARROW METHOD

Cost: — (1m per attack); **Mins:** Archery 3, Essence 2; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: Mirror (Phantom Arrow Technique; **Exalted**, p. 189), Obvious

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Splinter of the Void

The Neverborn slain by the volleys of Solar archers seethe with the remembrance of their deathblows. This Charm projects these memories as shimmering ammunition formed of Essence-fueled hate.

EXQUISITE RELIC BOW

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Archery 4, Essence 3;

Type: Simple (Speed 5)

Keywords: Mirror (Immaculate Golden Bow; **Exalted**, p. 189), Obvious

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Relic Arrow Method

The Abyssal summons a killing urge from the dreams of the Neverborn and shapes it into a bow perfectly suited to his fighting style. As with Solars, this bow is Speed 5. Deathknights who have seen a crossbow may create one of these weapons instead, in which case it has: Damage ([Archery x 2] + Essence + attack successes + arrows), Rate (Essence ÷ 2, rounded down).

QUIVER OF SOULS

Cost: 8m, 1wp; **Mins:** Archery 5, Essence 4; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Inexhaustible Bolts of Solar Fire; **Exalted**, p. 189), Obvious

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Relic Arrow Method

Abyssal archers arm themselves with malice and the Void, unleashing effortless demise on all who oppose them. The deathknight who uses this Charm can produce arrows or charges of firedust for firewands or flame pieces. Ammunition created in this manner adds one die to its normal damage.

While using the Charm, the deathknight regains one mote whenever his conjured ammunition successfully strikes an animate being (regardless of whether the attack inflicts damage).

GASP OF DEAD GODS

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Archery 5, Essence 4;

Type: Simple (Speed 5)

Keywords: Mirror (Solar Flare Methodology; **Exalted**, p. 189), Obvious

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Quiver of Souls

The Abyssal conjures a baleful firewand of frozen shadows containing a seething core of pyre flame. Every blast from this unnatural weapon emerges as a cold emerald radiance that consumes victims like acid rather than fire (and thus bypasses any immunity to flame)—but the end result is equally gruesome. As with Solars, this weapon is Speed 5, Rate 2 and never needs reloading.

MARTIAL ARTS

The following Charms are not directly part of Dark Messiah Style (see pp. 183-186), but represent the horrific expansions dredged from the dreams of the Neverborn and the twisted genius of the Deathlords. These Charms are considered Abyssal Charms rather than Celestial Martial Arts Charms.

RAPACIOUS LAMPREY TECHNIQUE

Cost: 2m; **Mins:** Martial Arts 3, Essence 2;

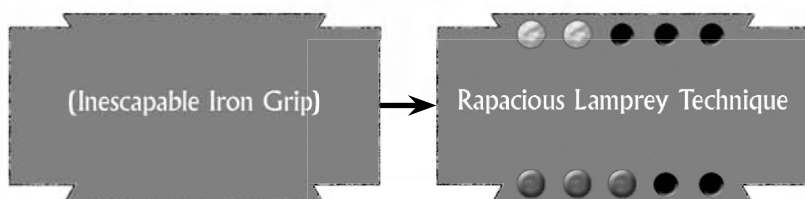
Type: Reflexive (Step 10)

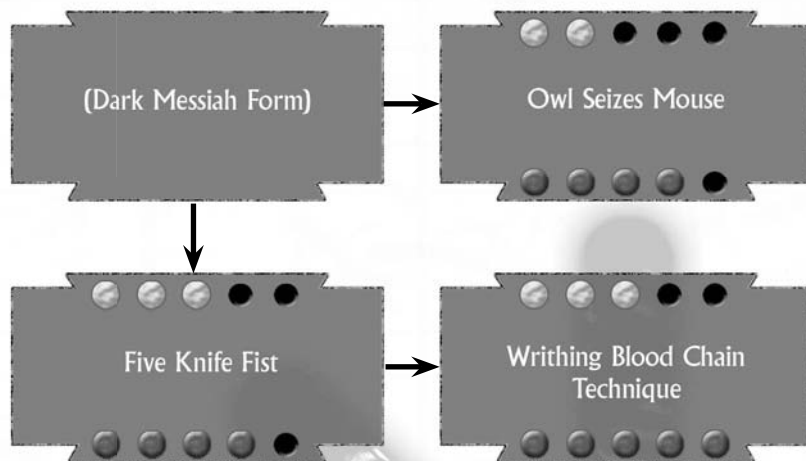
Keywords: Combo-Basic

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Inescapable Iron Grip

When the Chosen of the Void feed, the power of the Abyss can rip the life from their prey. An Abyssal who uses this Charm when she drains blood can triple the damage she deals with her bite, and consequently triple the Essence she takes. The bite attack is played out normally, but each level of damage inflicted after soak becomes three levels of damage.





OWL SEIZES MOUSE

Cost: 3m or 3m, 1wp; **Mins:** Martial Arts 4, Essence 2;

Type: Reflexive (Step 1)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Dark Messiah Form

The Abyssal selects an adversary within (Martial Arts x 5) yards and either pounces upon her in a single leap or closes the distance in a gliding blur of similarly impossible speed. The character can leap only as part of making an unarmed striking or grappling Martial Arts attack against a target.

The cost to activate this Charm is normally three motes. If the Abyssal initiates a grapple and pays a point of Willpower, however, he adds to the attack roll a number of bonus successes equal to his Essence, and the defender cannot block or dodge the attack, except with a perfect defense.

FIVE KNIFE FIST

Cost: 6m, 1wp (4xp); **Mins:** Martial Arts 4, Essence 3;

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Combo-OK, Obvious, Taint

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Dark Messiah Form

The Abyssal grows jagged bone spurs on his knuckles or fingertips. The character is still considered unarmed, but he can parry ranged and lethal attacks without a stunt. The bone blades add an amount equal to the Abyssal's Essence to the Accuracy and Damage of her punches and clinches, which inflict lethal damage. The bonuses become part of the traits of the character's unarmed "weapon" and do not count as dice added by Charms.

Unfortunately, the protrusions impose a -3 internal penalty to Dexterity-based actions that require fine motor skills—including the use of weapons. This penalty is the Charm's primary Taint drawback for Abyssals who

grow permanent weapons, not counting the obvious social implications for one's hands being covered in monstrous blades. Permanently acquiring such bone weapons costs the character four experience points or two bonus points at character creation.

If the Abyssal has Essence 4+, he may grow spikes and jagged skeletal protrusions from any part of his body to apply these same bonuses to any natural unarmed attacks. Doing so could include growing massive shark-like fangs when biting to regain Essence, extruding joint spurs for tackling and so on. Non-natural unarmed attacks do not receive this bonus, even for the form weapons of a martial art. As a Taint, such extreme body modification costs four bonus points or eight experience points.

WRITHING BLOOD CHAIN TECHNIQUE

Cost: 8m, 1wp (12xp); **Mins:** Martial Arts 5, Essence 3;

Type: Simple

Keywords: Combo-Basic, Obvious, Stackable, Taint

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Five Knife Fist

Blood gushes from the Abyssal's back and arms and hardens into rust-colored chains tipped with barbed claws. The Abyssal may grow as many as 13 chains, but there is no mechanical benefit to having more or less.

While this Charm is active, the blood chains give the character an extra action on each tick when she acts. A character can buy this Charm more than once, up to (Essence - 2) purchases, gaining another extra action with each purchase. The chains use the Abyssal's full traits and go limp while the character is inactive for any reason. Actions taken by the chains may be enhanced with Charms as if any normal limb performed them, but they occur independently of any singular actions or flurries their creator takes and do not suffer normal multiple-action penalties. Use of Writhing Blood Chain Technique prevents the use of any other extra-action Charms, though.

The chains cannot wield other weapons, but they can lash opponents up to (Essence) yards away. As weapons, the chains have the tags D, N, R. They have Accuracy, Damage and Defense bonuses equal to their creator's Essence, inflicting lethal damage. The chains cannot make clinch attacks on their own, but each of their actions may be used to impose a -1 external penalty to an opponent's roll to control a grapple if used to entangle rather than strike. The weapons are not considered unarmed attacks for the purposes of Martial Arts Charms unless that style wields fighting chains or whips as form weapons. When the scene ends, the chains dissolve in a splash of gore.

Blood chains are vaguely self-aware and restlessly malevolent. If the Abyssal has no Willpower points remaining, the chains lash out at whatever targets the Storyteller chooses, tearing up the environment from boredom if they have no animate targets to maim or kill. It is not possible to voluntarily terminate the Charm before its duration while the chains act freely, though regaining a single Willpower point reasserts control. The Taint drawback of this Charm is that permanent chains present far more opportunities to lose control and cause unwanted collateral damage. Making the Charm permanent costs six bonus points or 12 experience points.

MELEE

SAVAGE SHADE STYLE

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Melee 2, Essence 1; **Type:** Supplemental
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Hungry Tiger Technique; Exalted, p. 190)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Any Melee Excellency

Allowing refined homicidal instincts to guide his blows, the Abyssal strikes grievous wounds with a Melee weapon.

ARTFUL MAIMING ONSLAUGHT

Cost: 3m (+1wp); **Mins:** Melee 3, Essence 1; **Type:** Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK, Crippling, Mirror (Fire and Stones Strike; Exalted, p. 190)

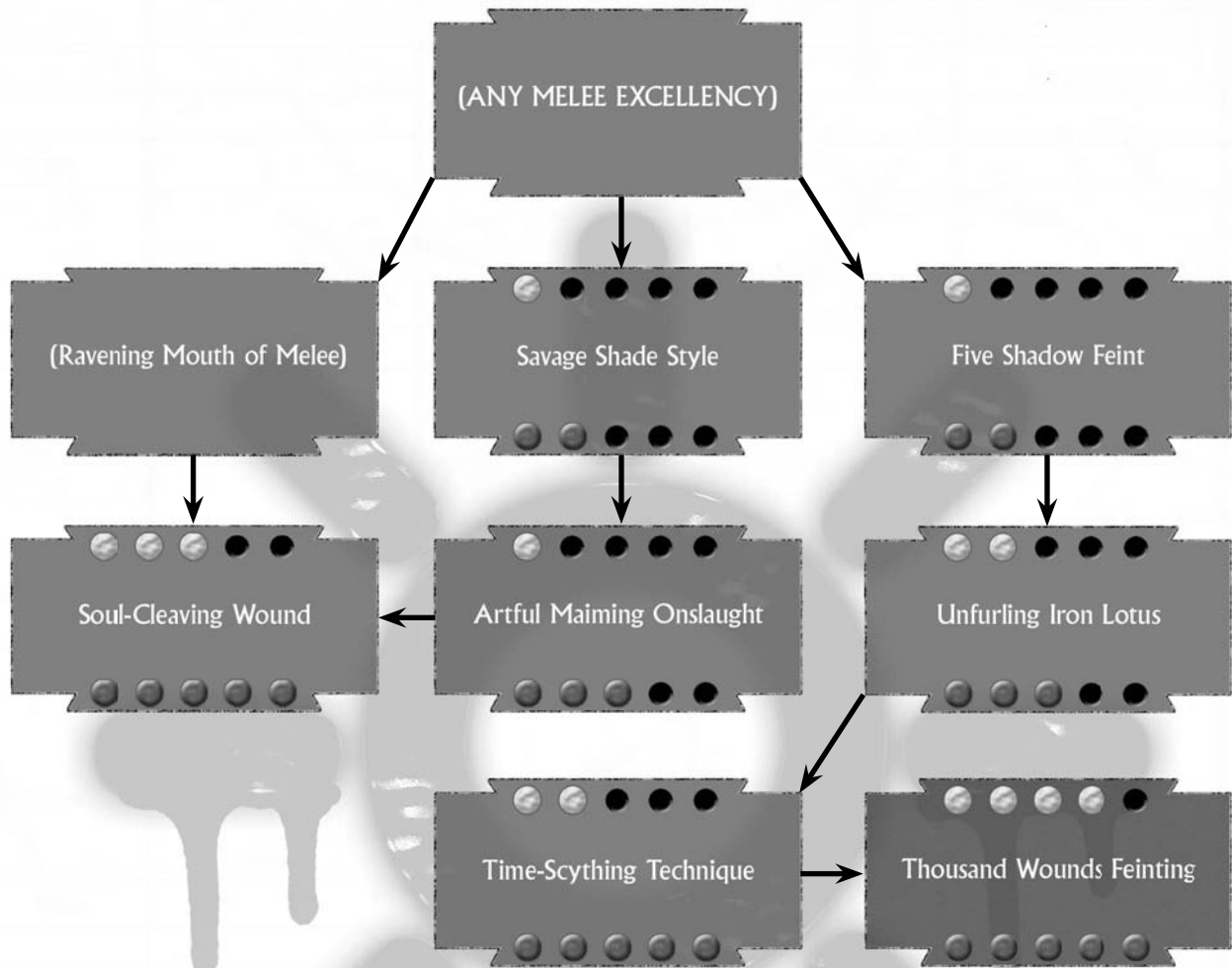
Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Savage Shade Style

Pain is an art for Abyssal weapon-masters, who wield this Charm to deftly maul and disable specific limbs and organs of their enemies. Enhancing a Melee attack with this Charm imposes an additional external penalty on the attack equal to the target's Essence rating. If the attack inflicts two or more levels of damage, though, the Exalt may reflexively pay an additional +1wp to pull and focus the blow. Doing so inflicts one amputation disability on the victim (see Exalted, p. 152).

Unless the deathknight has a higher Essence rating than the victim, the worst she can do is crush joints, break bones and sever nerves or tendons—enough to impose all the penalties of amputation without literally lopping off limbs. Exalted victims with higher Essence can heal the Crippling effect by spending a full day resting (during which they cannot heal any other wounds). Abyssals with higher Essence ratings than





their victims may carve with impunity, fully amputating and thus requiring more drastic healing magic to repair.

SOUL-CLEAVING WOUND

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Melee 5, Essence 3;

Type: Reflexive (Step 10)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Crippling, Obvious, Stackable

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Artful Maiming Onslaught, Ravening Mouth of Melee

The Abyssal's attack fades to intangibility at the moment of contact, inflicting spiritual injuries instead of physical damage. Provided that the augmented Melee attack inflicts one or more levels of damage, this Charm replaces all levels with a Crippling effect that wounds a trait chosen by the Abyssal. Multiple injuries from this Charm do stack. Possible options include:

Essence: The victim loses one dot of Essence, recalculating the size of derived traits and bleeding off any motes in excess of the new Essence pool size. Characters cannot activate Charms that require a higher Essence rating than their diminished souls can provide, though they regain access

to these Charms as soon as they restore their Essence to appropriate levels. Beings who are reduced to Essence 0 instantly die, their life force snuffed out by Oblivion's touch.

Virtues: The victim loses one dot from each Virtue (minimum rating of 1), wasting any channels remaining in excess of her new ratings and altering her behavior appropriately. The Virtue used for an Exalt's current Limit Break condition cannot be drained this way.

Willpower: The victim loses two dots of Willpower, as well as all Willpower points in excess of her new rating. Beings reduced to Willpower 0 shuffle through life like the spent husks left by the Fair Folk, entirely without identity or volition.

For mortals and creatures of the Wyld, the damage inflicted by this Charm is permanent without powerful magical treatment or normal experience expenditure. Essence-wielders who are not creatures of the Wyld require a day of rest to overcome each use of this Charm on them, during which time they cannot respire Essence or heal in other ways. Activating Transcendent Hero's Meditation (**Exalted**, p. 201) instantly ignites a Solar back to full power and flares her anima to its iconic level of display.

FIVE SHADOW FEINT

Cost: 2m per DV; **Mins:** Melee 2, Essence 1;

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Any Melee Excellency

The Abyssal's weapon spins in a flicker of shadowy images, confusing her foe. For every two motes the Exalt spends on Five Shadow Feint, her target's DV against the attack drops by one.

UNFURLING IRON LOTUS

Cost: 2m per attack; **Mins:** Melee 3, Essence 2; **Type:** Extra Action

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Peony Blossom Attack; **Exalted**, p. 191), Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Five Shadow Feint

The Abyssal spins and thrusts in a cascade of blows, trailing wispy afterimages that fleetingly resemble the petals of a blooming flower before the victim's screams break the serenity of the display.

TIME-SCYTHING TECHNIQUE

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Melee 5, Essence 2; **Type:** Extra Action

Keywords: Combo-Ok, Mirror (Iron Whirlwind Attack; **Exalted**, p. 191), Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Unfurling Iron Lotus

The Abyssal's Oblivion-touched weapon frays the strands of fate that weave its position in space and time, allowing the brief and bloody impossibility of its coexistence in many wounds.

THOUSAND WOUNDS FEINTING

Cost: —; **Mins:** Melee 5, Essence 4; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: Mirror (Invincible Fury of the Dawn; **Exalted**, p. 191)

Duration: N/A

Prerequisite Charms: Time-Scything Technique

The Abyssal learns to strike with impossible speed, fulfilling the Charm's name with blurs of violence that

leave bewildered victims covered in countless shallow cuts or bruises. Only a handful of blows have any real force to them, but these are usually sufficient.

In addition, a character who uses this Charm with a successful flurry may incidentally arrange the wounds inflicted into artful designs or calligraphy to add literal insult to injury. At the Storyteller's option, Solars can do the same with Invincible Fury of the Dawn. If the player can think of something particularly witty or obnoxious for the character to inscribe in blood, the Storyteller might consider granting a stunt bonus.

BLADE-SUMMONING GESTURE

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Melee 2, Essence 2; **Type:** Reflexive (Step 2)

Keywords: Mirror (Call the Blade; **Exalted**, p. 191), Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: None

The weapons of the Abyssal Exalted fear their masters and swiftly leap to their grasp when bidden by an imperiously outstretched hand.

VOID SHEATH TECHNIQUE

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Melee 3, Essence 2; **Type:** Simple (Speed 3)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Summoning the Loyal Steel; **Exalted**, p. 192)

Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: Blade-Summoning Gesture

The weapons of the Abyssal Exalted have no reality except when they are needed, lessening the offense of their existence against the purity of Oblivion. As with Solars, separate committed activations of this Charm may concurrently banish multiple weapons.

RESPLENDENT SHADOW BLADE

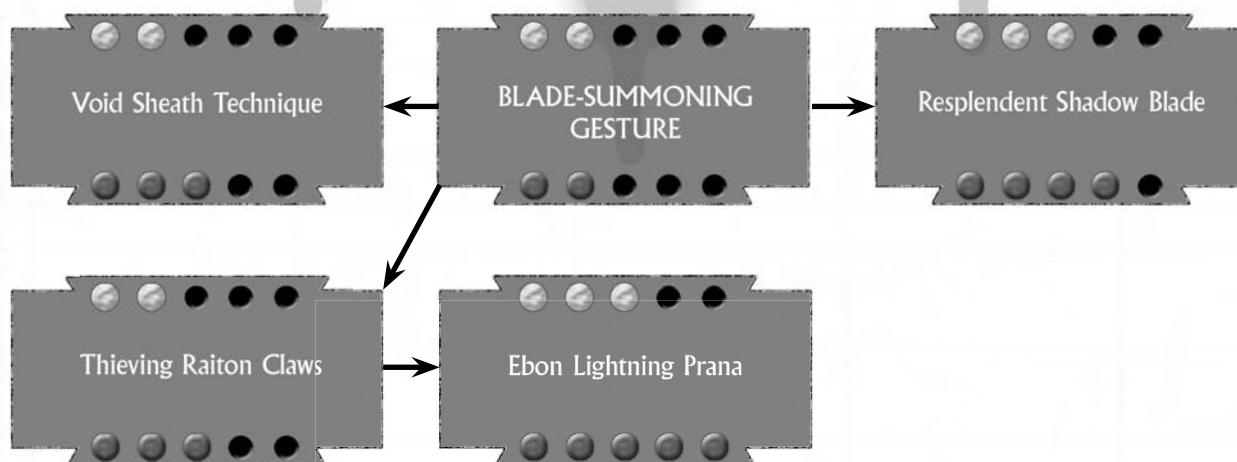
Cost: 6m+, 1wp; **Mins:** Melee 4, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Combo-OK, Emotion, Mirror (Glorious Solar Saber; **Exalted**, p. 192), Obvious

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Blade-Summoning Gesture

The Abyssal conjures a weapon formed of Essence-hardened shadows adorned or intertwined with corpse-elements.



Unlike its Solar mirror, Resplendent Shadow Blade is not Holy but imposes an Emotion effect of despair or horror whenever it inflicts any damage, draining one Willpower unless the target spends motes equal to the Abyssal's Essence rating. Mortal extras who somehow survive being hit with this weapon drop prone and curl up in a fetal position for the rest of the scene, too spiritually broken even to defend themselves.

THIEVING RAITON CLAWS

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Melee 3, Essence 2; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Obvious, Servitude

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Blade-Summoning Gesture

Even as they steal lives for Oblivion, deathknights may steal weapons from their foes and turn them against their owners. An Abyssal may use this Charm against any weapon within (Essence x 8) yards. Items not wielded by their owner obey without hesitation and fly into the Abyssal's outstretched hand. Seizing a weapon from its owner's hand or a sheath on his person is more difficult, requiring an opposed reflexive roll of the Abyssal's (Manipulation + Melee) against the wielder's (Strength + Melee). If the deathknight wins, the weapon betrays its owner to join its new master, who becomes its new owner (*Exalted*, p. 238). If the owner wins, the weapon remains where it is and cannot be targeted by Thieving Raiton Claws for the rest of the scene. Thieving Raiton Claws cannot target attuned artifact weapons or weapons made entirely of Essence.

EBON LIGHTNING PRANA

Cost: 3m, 1wp; **Mins:** Melee 5, Essence 3;

Type: Simple (Speed 4)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Blazing Solar Bolt; *Exalted*, p. 192)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Thieving Raiton Claws

The Abyssal lunges toward and past her opponent in a single perfect motion, striking so quickly that her opponent's corpse still stands when she glances back over her shoulder to watch him fall in half. Ebon Lightning Prana enables the deathknight to close the distance to any one target within (Essence x 10) yards and strike them with one Melee attack using a pool of (Dexterity + Melee + Essence). The attack is always unexpected and deals piercing damage.

What's more, the Abyssal does not need to have a weapon in hand to use this Charm, provided she has a weapon available to draw as a reflexive action. If combat has not yet begun, the Abyssal automatically strikes first regardless of Join Battle rolls. If more than one character has such "go first" magic, their players roll Join Battle among themselves or all act simultaneously, at the Storyteller's option.

A character cannot use Ebon Lightning Prana simply as an easy way to move a long way quickly. The Abyssal must strike at a foe, though she can continue moving past him.

ELEGANT FLOWING DEFLECTION

Cost: 2m; **Mins:** Melee 2, Essence 1; **Type:** Reflexive (Step 2)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Dipping Swallow Defense; *Exalted*, p. 192)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Any Melee Excellency

The Abyssal's weapon interposes itself in the path of an attack with contemptuous disregard for the laws of inertia, as if possessed of its own volition and horrid grace.

VENGEFUL RIPOSTE

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Melee 4, Essence 1; **Type:** Reflexive (Step 9)

Keywords: Combo-Basic, Counterattack, Mirror (Solar Counterattack; *Exalted*, p. 194)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Elegant Flowing Deflection

The Abyssal holds his weapon loosely at his side, his monstrous arrogance practically inviting opponents to strike him, while promising horrific retribution on anyone foolish enough to take the dare. The Charm does not defend the deathknight in any way, but he can strike back with his weapon at his attacker.

BROKEN TOYS RIPOSTE

Cost: Weapon Damage modifier +1m; **Mins:** Melee 3, Essence 2; **Type:** Reflexive (Step 9)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Counterattack, Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Vengeful Riposte

The Void strikes down weapons that dare to assault its champions. An Abyssal may use this Charm (also called the Corrosive Parry) only when he defends against attack using his Parry DV; his own weapon flares with necrotic Essence. If the parry succeeds, his opponent's weapon crumbles to dust. Weapons made of the magical materials or otherwise enchanted survive the Corrosive Parry but are ripped from their wielder's grasp and hurled a number of yards away equal to the Abyssal's Essence.

The Essence cost of this Charm is one mote greater than the Damage bonus of the parried weapon. Therefore, disintegrating a knife costs only three motes, while corroding a mace costs nine motes. Wrenching a starmetal grand grimscythe out of a Sidereal foe's hand with a parry would cost 18 motes.

EYE OF THE TEMPEST

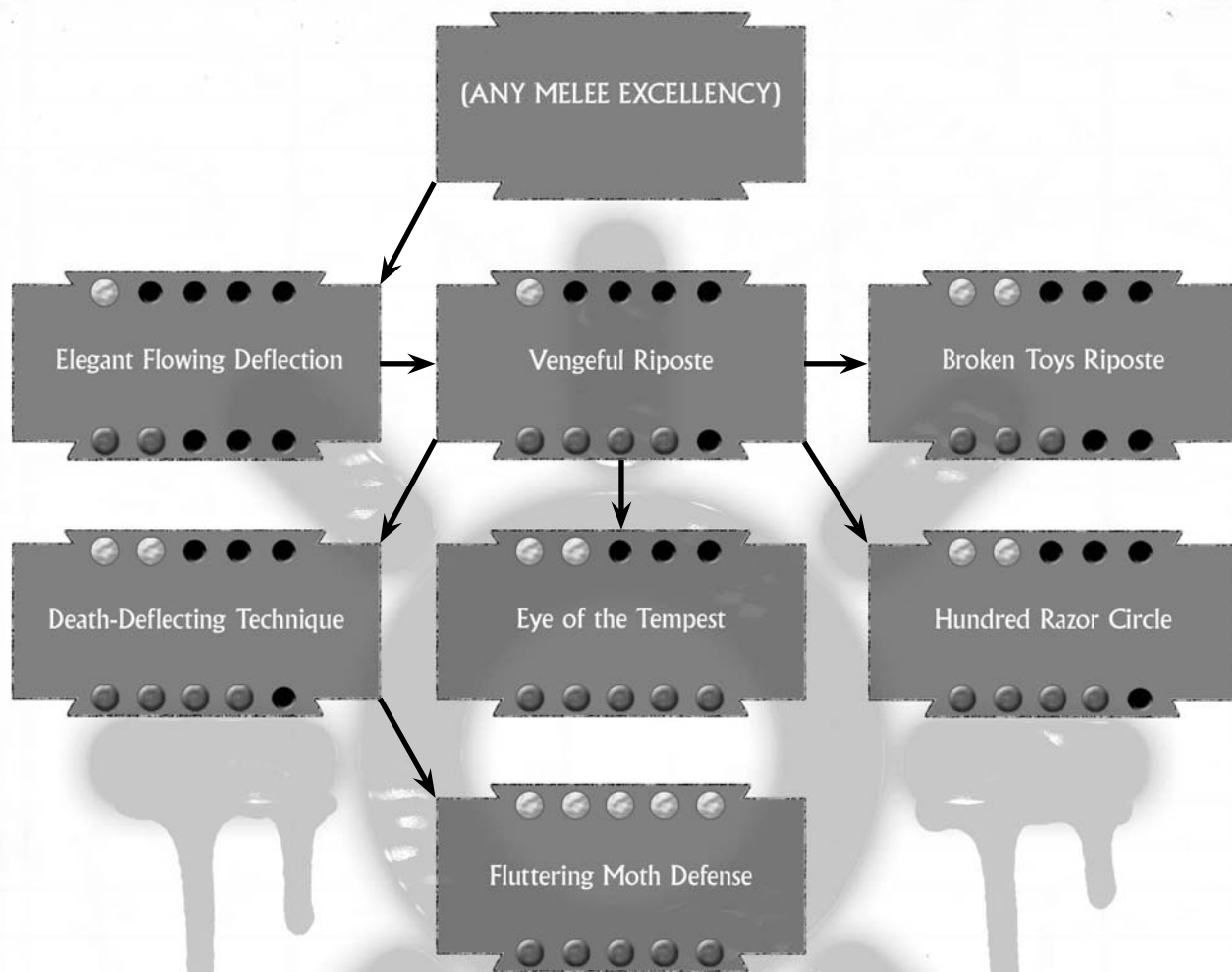
Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Melee 5, Essence 2; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Fivefold Bulwark Stance; *Exalted*, p. 194)

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Vengeful Riposte

The Abyssal is a figure of transcendent stillness and patience within the bloody fury of combat, systematically turning aside blows without the slightest wasted motion.



DEATH-DEFLECTING TECHNIQUE

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Melee 4, Essence 2; **Type:** Reflexive (Step 2)
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Heavenly Guardian Defense; *Exalted*, p. 193), Obvious, Spectral
Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Vengeful Riposte

Whether the arrows of man or the spear of the Unconquered Sun, no force may strike an armed Abyssal with this Charm. Note that this Charm does differ slightly from its Solar counterpart in its Essence cost and bearing the Spectral keyword.

FLUTTERING MOTH DEFENSE

Cost: —; **Mins:** Melee 5, Essence 5; **Type:** Permanent
Keywords: Mirror (Protection of Celestial Bliss; *Exalted*, p. 193)
Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Death-Deflecting Technique

The deathknight's weapon traces the air like a flame-entranced moth, unerringly darting into the path of incoming attacks as if the weapon's destruction might offer a release from its master's evil. Abyssals with this Charm commonly prepare Death-Deflecting Technique in the realms of the

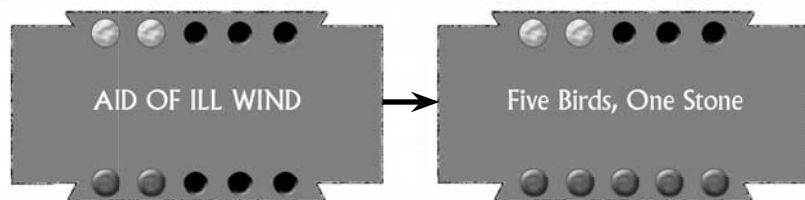
dead before a mission, rather than paying the Willpower surcharge to ready that defense in Creation. Abyssals with Essence 6+ who know Fluttering Moth Defense reduce the cost to activate Death-Deflecting Technique to two motes (+1wp outside the realms of the dead), and may prepare up to their Melee score in invocations of that Charm.

HUNDRED RAZOR CIRCLE

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Melee 4, Essence 2; **Type:** Simple
Keywords: Combo-Basic, Obvious
Duration: One action

Prerequisite Charms: Vengeful Riposte

Where the Chosen of the Void walk, they cut down all who stand against them. The deathknight sends her weapon and dozens of shadowy copies spinning through a lightning-fast pattern around herself. As long as she maintains the Hundred Razor Circle, the Abyssal makes one reflexive Melee attack against everyone who comes within three yards of her location. The Abyssal cannot exempt anyone within range. Nor can she move farther than one yard, make any other attacks while the Charm is active or flurry her attacks (even with extra-action Charms) in hopes of striking an enemy more than once. The Abyssal can use her Parry DV against ranged attacks for the Charm's duration, though.



THROWN

AID OF ILL WIND

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Thrown 2, Essence 2; **Type:** Supplemental
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Triple-Distance Attack Technique; **Exalted**, p. 196)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: None

Chill gusts from the Underworld carry the Abyssal's weapon to his prey. These winds dissipate on impact, leaving wounds that smell faintly of funereal incense or wilting flowers.

FIVE BIRDS, ONE STONE

Cost: 2m per attack; **Mins:** Thrown 5, Essence 2;

Type: Extra Action

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Wind Full of Knives; follows), Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Aid of Ill Wind

Once released, the Abyssal's weapon scythes from target to target in a path of destruction. This Charm is a magical flurry of up to (Thrown) attacks with no multiple-action penalties, all of which must be aimed at targets within the weapon's range. Because the attacks all use a single Thrown weapon, the flurry ignores the weapon's Rate and has a DV penalty of the highest penalty for any attack. This Charm is particularly spectacular in conjunction with Crypt Bolt Attack (see p. 134), firing chain lightning or summoning tentacles of obscene energy that twist and arc from victim to victim.

New Solar Charm: Wind Full of Knives (Prerequisites: Triple-Distance Attack Technique; **Exalted**, p. 196). The radiance of the sun glows around the Lawgiver's weapon as he prepares to throw it. The shining weapon whirls from target to target, cutting them down with Solar fury.

IMPROVISED ASSASSIN'S TRICK

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Thrown 2, Essence 1;

Type: Reflexive (Step 1)

Keywords: Combo-OK

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: None

Once an Abyssal with this Charm picks up a small object, it becomes a deadly weapon ready to serve her murderous will. Common improvised projectiles include playing cards, pebbles, coins, origami animals, flowers and prayer strips. Improvised projectiles have Speed 5, Accuracy -2, Damage +0L, Rate 3 and Range 10. Besides making sure the Abyssal is nearly always armed,

this Charm grants another benefit. Throwing a weapon provided by this Charm negates the usual +2 difficulty for making a surprise attack in plain view—unless a target stays on guard because he already knows the Abyssal can turn anything into a weapon.

HUNGRY MISSILE TECHNIQUE

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Thrown 2, Essence 2;

Type: Reflexive (Step 2)

Keywords: Mirror (Call the Blade; **Exalted**, p. 197), Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Improvised Assassin's Trick

The weapons of the Abyssals are as bloodthirsty as their masters, eager to fly back to waiting hands in anticipation of burying themselves in another victim.

BURROWING BONE MAGGOT

Cost: — (2m per attack); **Mins:** Thrown 3, Essence 3;

Type: Permanent

Keywords: Avatar (1), Crippling, Mirror (Branding Judgment Attack; follows), Obvious, Stackable

Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: Any Thrown Excellency, Improvised Assassin's Trick

The momentary pleasure of murder is nothing compared to a lifetime of savoring a victim's terror and agony. An Abyssal who knows this Charm can reflexively enhance any Thrown attack that inflicted at least one level of damage by committing two motes to the attack. Doing so dissolves the Essence of the deathknight's weapon into the point of impact so it appears to physically crawl through the skin—the process does not wake sleeping victims, though. The dissolved attack does not inflict any damage or other effects during Step Ten of attack resolution. Instead, the doom waits in abeyance for the deathknight to terminate the commitment from anywhere in existence with a diceless miscellaneous action. In so doing, he can either harmlessly give pardon or apply the delayed effects in full. Wounds inflicted this way manifest in whatever gruesome manner the Abyssal finds instructive and/or poetically appropriate, using the damage the player rolled at the time of attack.

Even the Abyssal's death does not end the curse, leaving it to the Neverborn to decide when they wish to inflict the damage. Multiple uses of this Charm on the same victim track separately, and only the last attack in a flurry may be deferred. Mundane medicine cannot cure the Crippling curse of a Burrowing Bone Maggot.

New Solar Charm: Branding Judgment Attack (Prerequisites: any Thrown Excellency, Returning Weapon

Concentration; **Exalted**, p. 196). The Solar Mirror to Burrowing Bone Maggot functions identically, apart from lacking the Avatar keyword and leaving Heaven to decide when to resolve a judgment that outlives its judge.

WICKED DARTS OF SUFFERING

Cost: 1m per effect; **Mins:** Thrown 4, Essence 3;

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK, Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Any Thrown Excellency, Improvised Assassin's Trick

This Charm enhances any Thrown attack so that it appears to graze its target with only superficial injury. If the attack hits, however, it applies one or more of the effects and all associated keywords listed here regardless of damage. The Abyssal learns one of these powers along with the initial purchase of Wicked Darts of Suffering and may broaden his repertoire by spending one experience point per power (or two for a bonus point).

Corrosion: Eating into a target like acid, the attack inflicts double its raw damage against inanimate objects and inflicts minimum damage even if it fails to penetrate an object's Hardness. This power also unravels the Essence of Wyld creatures with similarly caustic and brutal results.

Destruction: The attack kills any mortal or natural animal extra it hits as a Shaping and Avatar (1) effect, typically inflicting death in a horrific manner incongruous to the attack itself. If the Abyssal has Essence 4+, the attack slays non-extras and spiritually wounds Essence-users by consuming a selected Virtue channel in addition to inflicting usual physical injuries.

Infection: The attack automatically infects a living target as a Sickness effect rather than inflicting any actual damage, as if the target failed a Virulence check. The infection's Morbidity (treated and untreated) also starts at the Abyssal's Essence rating and increases normally. Mortal extras infected thus immediately succumb to fever and begin dying, though they can be saved normally with magical treatment.

Pain: The attack inflicts excruciating pain to animate victims as a Crippling effect, doubling the raw damage of the attack and making that damage bashing. Victims add their Essence rating to their soak against this pain and cannot be reduced below Incapacitated from such an attack.

FROZEN PRAYER ENTOMBMENT

Cost: 3m or 3m, 1wp; **Mins:** Thrown 5, Essence 3;

Type: Simple

Keywords: Combo-Basic, Obvious

Duration: Until broken

Prerequisite Charms: Wicked Darts of Suffering

The Abyssal makes one Thrown-based attack as part of activating this Charm, infusing the projectile with the life-draining chill of Oblivion for a cost of three motes and one Willpower. A target hit by this attack suffers no damage. Instead, the glittering Essence of the attack spreads over the target to encase her in unnatural ice with bashing and lethal soak equal to the attack's raw damage. This structure can cover any target that could fit

in a sphere with a radius equal to the deathknight's Essence rating in yards. The ice is treated as an inanimate object, instantly shattering if any raw damage exceeds its soak and inflicting the attack's minimum damage on the victim in the process. Breaking out with a feat of strength requires a miscellaneous action and a (Strength + Athletics) total of the encasement's soak rating.

Victims frozen by this Charm suffer the same impairment as characters held in a grapple but remain conscious and can take actions within these limits. The magic of the Charm prevents victims from suffocating, but the life-draining ice injures them on initial exposure and thereafter as an environmental hazard with a trauma equal to the Abyssal's Essence rating and a damage of one bashing health level per action. Victims also lose one mote for every level of damage suffered. Unconscious victims fall into a nightmare-wracked coma and do not suffer any further damage, so the Charm is a reasonably safe way of freezing someone to Incapacitated and keeping him there for capture or transport. Whether as a result of damage or the Abyssal terminating its effects, ending this Charm restores the victim to immediate consciousness and defensive readiness.

Separate activations of Frozen Prayer Entombment can simultaneously freeze different victims, but the Charm cannot trap an opponent in multiple layers of ice. A character can also use the freezing energy at a reduced cost of three motes to create blocks of ice up to the permitted radius. The Abyssal can use the ice for utilitarian purposes such as raw materials for Craft (Earth) actions, cover in combat, sealing off a doorway or making a crude raft.

LIGHTNING CLUTCH OF THE RAPTOR

Cost: 4m; **Mins:** Thrown 4, Essence 2;

Type: Reflexive (Step 2)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Counterattack, Mirror (Deft Hands Deflection; follows)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Hungry Missile Technique

With this Charm, an Abyssal can swat incoming projectiles out of the air like harmless insects. Lightning Clutch of the Raptor perfectly parries any ranged attack regardless of whether it is blockable, provided the Abyssal has a hand free to catch the projectile. Parrying an area attack thus stops the attack from hitting the Abyssal, but not any other targets caught in the path of destruction. If the projectile has physical substance (such as an arrow or thrown weapon), the Abyssal catches it and may reflexively toss it aside or wield it for her own attacks. Energy-based attacks or those lacking actual substance (such as a firewand blast) dissolve as the Abyssal closes her fist to smother them on impact.

Whenever an Abyssal with Essence 4+ uses this Charm to catch and hold a Thrown weapon, she also gains a normal Thrown counterattack with the stolen weapon in Step Nine of attack resolution.

New Solar Charm: Deft Hands Deflection (Prerequisites: Call the Blade; **Exalted**, p. 197). The Solar Mirror to Lightning Clutch of the Raptor has different prerequisites but is otherwise identical.



CRYPT BOLT ATTACK

Cost: 4m; **Mins:** Thrown 4, Essence 3;

Type: Reflexive (Step 1)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Spirit Weapons; **Exalted**, p. 197), Obvious

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Improvised Assassin's Trick

Unnatural entropic and corpse-element energies crackle like ball lightning around one or both hands of the Abyssal's hands. Like an iconic anima, each user of this Charm creates a unique and easily recognizable manifestation of Essence. If an Abyssal makes an unarmed punch with a hand wreathed in Crypt Bolt Attack, the punch inflicts lethal damage. It is far more effective for him to throw part of this energy as a blast or beam, using the nimbus as a source of infinite ammunition while the Charm lasts.

These blasts have the following traits: Speed 5, Accuracy +0, Rate 2 (one per hand), Range (Thrown x 10 yards) and inflict a base damage of (Essence x 2)L without adding Strength. This Charm inflicts damage through accelerated decay, corrosion or some other consumptive principle. There is no mistaking these wounds for natural injuries.

Using a hand holding a Crypt Bolt Attack for anything other than throwing blasts, punching or making unarmed parries dissipates the energies, requiring the Abyssal to activate the Charm again.

EYES LIKE DAGGERS GLANCE

Cost: —; **Mins:** Thrown 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: Avatar (1), Mirror (Fiery Solar Chakram; follows), Obvious

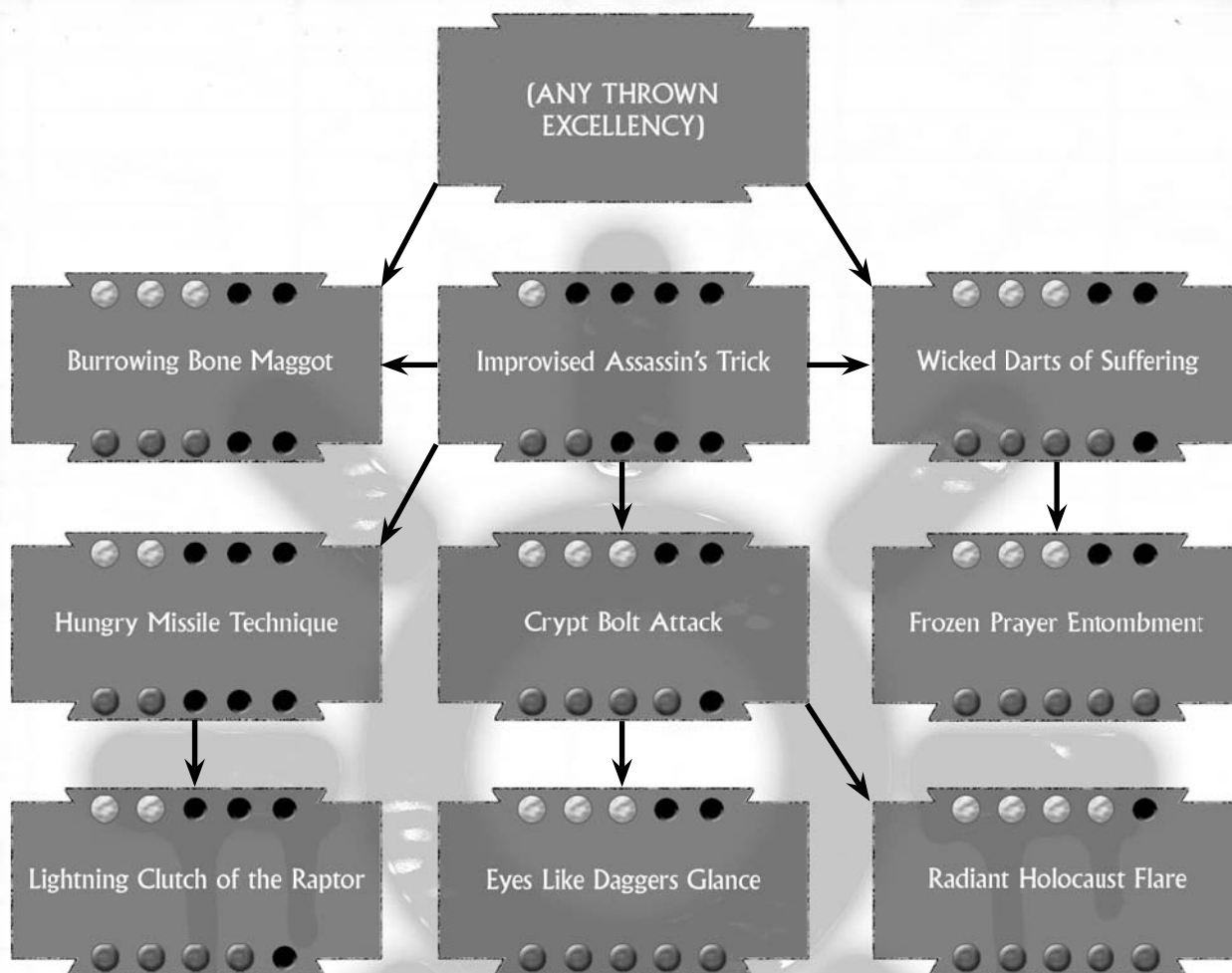
Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Crypt Bolt Attack

This Charm taps into the limitless necrotic Essence of the Neverborn's malevolence, adding the Abyssal's Whispers rating to the Accuracy and Damage of blasts from her Crypt Bolt Attack. These attacks also inflict aggravated damage to any target the Abyssal individually hates as an Intimacy. As a final benefit, the deathknight can ignite her eyes in addition to or in place of her hands, allowing her to wield other weapons. Abyssals throw murderous stares with Manipulation instead of Dexterity, but the attacks otherwise use the same rules.

New Solar Charm: Fiery Solar Chakram (Prerequisites: Spirit Weapons; **Exalted**, p. 197). This Charm improves weapons created with Spirit Weapons, basing the bonus on the character's primary Virtue rather than Whispers. Holy replaces the Avatar keyword, so the Fiery Solar Chakram inflicts aggravated damage to creatures of darkness instead of hated enemies. Although Lawgivers do not gain the unnatural power to throw attacks from their eyes, this Charm lets them substitute Charisma for Dexterity when attacking with Spirit Weapons.

Exalted



RADIANT HOLOCAUST FLARE

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Thrown 5, Essence 4; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Combo-Basic, Obvious

Duration: One action

Prerequisite Charms: Crypt Bolt Attack

The Abyssal levitates a yard into the air for the duration of the Charm as the distinctive nimbus of her Crypt Bolt Attack spreads over her entire body. On her next action, she may discharge this buildup to throw any number of Crypt Bolt Attack blasts in a normal flurry that ignores the attacks' usual Rate limits and adds two to the Accuracy of each blast. Failing to throw a Crypt Bolt Attack blast with the Abyssal's next action wastes the benefits of this Charm.

WAR

MORALE-SHATTERING METHOD

Cost: 7m, 1wp; **Mins:** War 3, Essence 2;

Type: Simple (Speed 3 in long ticks)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Mob-Dispersing Rebuke; *Exalted*, p. 197), Social, War

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: None

Abyssal warlords are figures of incalculable dread to their enemies, needing only a few minutes of contemptuous laughter, inhuman screaming or similarly unnerving display to dissolve an opposing force.

ARISE AND SLAUGHTER

Cost: 10m, 1ahl; **Mins:** War 3, Essence 3;

Type: Simple (Speed 5 in long ticks)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Fury Inciting Presence; *Exalted*, p. 197), Obvious

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Morale-Shattering Method

The Abyssal speaks to the corpses around her with calm and unquestionable authority, commanding them to awaken and make war upon the living. This Charm rips out a fragment of the Abyssal's own life force as part of its cost, distributing this animating energy among the nearest corpses within a radius of (War x 100) yards. These bodies claw their way out of the earth to form an unordered unit of zombie extras under the Abyssal's command, like a unit provided by purchasing an Abyssal Command with a rating equal to the Exalt's Essence (maximum of Abyssal Command 5, see pp. 97-98). If the Abyssal abandons this unit for more than

Abyssals may instead use this Charm as an Avatar (3) effect to summon an equivalent Abyssal Command of hungry ghost extras from the Labyrinth instead of raising zombies. These shades have Whispers 1 and cannot appear during the day. They automatically fade back to their lightless warrens just before dawn to avoid destruction. They similarly vanish if abandoned or the Charm ends.

Cost: 10m, 1wp; **Mins:** War 5, Essence 3;

Keywords: Combo-OK, Obvious, War

Prerequisite Charms: Arise and Slaughter

rating (if that would provide an increase), to a maximum of Drill 5. Unfortunately, this micromanaged control makes units entirely dependent on their commander for guidance. Should the Abyssal perish while this Charm is active, the unit makes an immediate difficulty 6 rout check. Even units with perfect morale must make this check as if they had Morale 5.

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** War 3, Essence 3; **Type:** Supplemental
Keywords: Combo-Basic, Obvious, War

Prerequisite Charms: Any War Excellency

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ALLIED IN HATE DISCERNMENT

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** War 5, Essence 4; **Type:** Reflexive

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (General of the All-Seeing Sun; *Exalted*, p. 197)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Glorious Carnage Typhoon

Any who fight in common hate may serve the cause of Oblivion whether they intend to or not, and the generals of the Neverborn know the location and condition of such forces. Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm does not sense mass combat units based on loyalty, but rather detects those who take the field in common enmity, either in shared hatred of a specific foe or in a broader crusade of violence. This automatically includes all creatures of Death. An Abyssal who has Whispers 3 can also sense units made of any creatures of darkness, as the judgment of the Unconquered Sun unites them all in shared hatred of the light.

HARDENED KILLER TRAINING STYLE

Cost: 10m, 2wp; **Mins:** War 4, Essence 3;

Type: Simple (Dramatic Action)

Keywords: Mirror (Tiger Warrior Training; *Exalted*, p. 198), Obvious, Touch, Training

Duration: One week

Prerequisite Charms: Arise and Slaughter, Glorious Carnage Typhoon

This Charm takes raw recruits and brutally transforms them into incarnate weapons. Units composed of ghosts or

CHARM CONCEPT: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE INTIMACIES

Positive Intimacies are those rooted in loyalty, love, camaraderie or any other emotional context in which a character feels positively toward the Intimacy's subject. Negative Intimacies involve hate, fear, resentment or any other emotions where the character feels negatively toward the Intimacy's subject. The Storyteller is the judge of whether an Intimacy is positive or negative, but generally the distinction is plainly obvious.

the walking dead take twice as long to train as living troops, encouraging Abyssals to train prospective war ghosts prior to their final promotion.

Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm cannot train Valor and badly damages the psyches of those it teaches. Each week of training poisons the positive Intimacy that most distracts the trainee from his education (assuming any exist), shifting the emotional context of that Intimacy to contempt or hatred.

SOUL-NUMBING PROWESS

Cost: —; **Mins:** War 5, Essence 4; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: Mirror (Legendary Warrior Curriculum; *Exalted*, p. 198), Obvious

Duration: One week

Prerequisite Charms: Hardened Killer Training Style

The most ardent disciples of darkness reap the greatest rewards of service, though these rewards are dubious at best. Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm cannot confer bonus dice. Instead, mortals and ghosts may be taught to reject the remaining vestiges of their humanity as an unnatural Compulsion effect (costing trainees no bonus or experience points). These wretched monsters become creatures of darkness, automatically fail all Compassion rolls and cannot form new positive Intimacies. In exchange, they become immune to wound penalties until Incapacitated and automatically succeed on all Valor rolls, giving units of these troops perfect morale. The effects of this unholy conditioning last until the Hardened Killer's will is broken (**Exalted**, p. 174).

ALL-CONSUMING ENCIRCLEMENT

Cost: 8m, 1wp; **Mins:** War 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Supplemental
Keywords: Combo-OK, Obvious, War
Duration: Until disengaged

Prerequisite Charms: Hive-Mind Horror Tactics, Hardened Killer Training Style

This Charm enhances an enveloping close combat attack by a complementary unit the Abyssal leads, removing the usual -2 external penalty and allowing envelopment of units with equal Magnitude. If the attack succeeds, the enveloped unit's commander must sacrifice a number of health levels equal to the Abyssal's Essence from her unit to order a disengage attempt, regardless of whether that attempt succeeds. Additionally, whenever the enveloped unit loses Magnitude as a result of damage, all members lost in the decrease die rather than escaping. This benefit does not affect the resolution of damage against the unit but prevents remnants from being gathered together as reinforcements by any rally action later in the scene.

If a deathknight commander successfully envelops a unit of mortals with a unit of walking dead or hungry ghosts, the monsters replenish their ranks by feasting on would-be deserters and the dying to infect them with the unholy power of this Charm. The corpses or lower souls of the slain infected thus rise to join the Abyssal's Abyssal Command. For every two health levels of damage the enveloped unit suffers while this Charm remains active, the Abyssal Command heals one level of lethal or bashing damage. This cannot increase the unit's health levels above maximum or raise its Magnitude. The first time in a battle that a unit composed of mortals witness the undead feasting, the players of their commanders must check for rout at difficulty 3. Even allies panic when confronted with such monstrosity.

OMNIPRESENT OVERLORD TECHNIQUE

Cost: 10m, 1wp; **Mins:** War 5, Essence 5;
Type: Simple (Speed 6 in long ticks)
Keywords: Combo-OK, Obvious, Servitude, War
Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Hive-Mind Horror Tactics, Allied in Hate Discernment

Where heroes fight gloriously at the forefront of battle, pragmatic generals command their champions and forces safely from the rear. The most terrible Abyssal warlords achieve both. Upon activating this Charm, the Exalt must select a Magnitude 3+ unit composed of creatures of darkness within (Essence x 10) miles that he previously sensed in the scene using Allied in Hate Discernment. That unit's commander must pay five Willpower to remain in charge or step down to become a hero (displacing another special character of her choice if necessary).

The Abyssal's disembodied presence then suffuses the unit, recalculating its traits for its new leader. Because the Abyssal is not actually present, called shots cannot hit him, nor may he be engaged in a duel or suffer any other dangers of being on the front lines. His projected presence may use Charms like any other unit commander and may communicate through any unit members by distorting their faces and voices with his own likeness to taunt opponents or guide thralls.

While using this Charm, the Abyssal's own body falls into a coma-like trance. He cannot sense anything other than actual injuries, making him reliant on bodyguards for protection while his attention focuses on the possessed unit. If he ends this Charm voluntarily or the unit's Magnitude drops below 3, he snaps back to his body and the unit begins disintegrating normally until it gains a new leader.

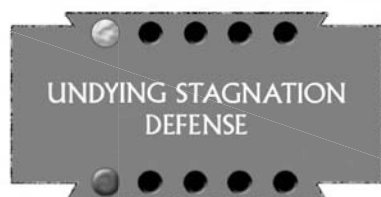
MIDNIGHT

INTEGRITY

UNDYING STAGNATION DEFENSE

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Integrity 1, Essence 1;
Type: Reflexive (Step 2)
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Integrity-Protecting Prana; **Exalted**, p. 199)
Duration: One day
Prerequisite Charms: None

Having passed from the dynamism of life into the stasis between life and death, Abyssals are highly resistant to Shaping effects.



ETERNAL ENMITY APPROACH

Cost: —; **Mins:** Integrity 3, Essence 1; **Type:** Permanent
Keywords: Mirror (Righteous Lion Defense; *Exalted*, p. 199)
Duration: Permanent
Prerequisite Charms: None

The hatred of an Abyssal is more relentless even than the deathknight who carries it. Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm reinforces an Intimacy of hatred toward an organization, an idea or a widespread social group. Any mental influence that works against the Abyssal's desire to extinguish the target of his hatred becomes an unacceptable order. As an additional side effect, whenever an Abyssal with this Charm dies, her next incarnation gains the Intimacy along with Exaltation, though this hatred is no longer magically empowered.

FIVE HEARTS HATRED

Cost: 4m, 1wp; **Mins:** Integrity 3, Essence 2; **Type:** Simple
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Unhesitating Dedication; *Exalted*, p. 202), Stackable
Duration: Indefinite
Prerequisite Charms: Eternal Enmity Approach

Even spectres marvel at the viciousness that seethes within the souls of Abyssal Exalted. Unlike its Solar Mirror, Five Hearts Hatred focuses on Intimacies of hate rather than loyalty to ideals.

BLOOD BEFORE SURRENDER

Cost: 1lhl per 1wp; **Mins:** Integrity 4, Essence 2;
Type: Reflexive
Keywords: Mirror (Spirit-Maintaining Maneuver; *Exalted*, p. 201), Social

Duration: Instant

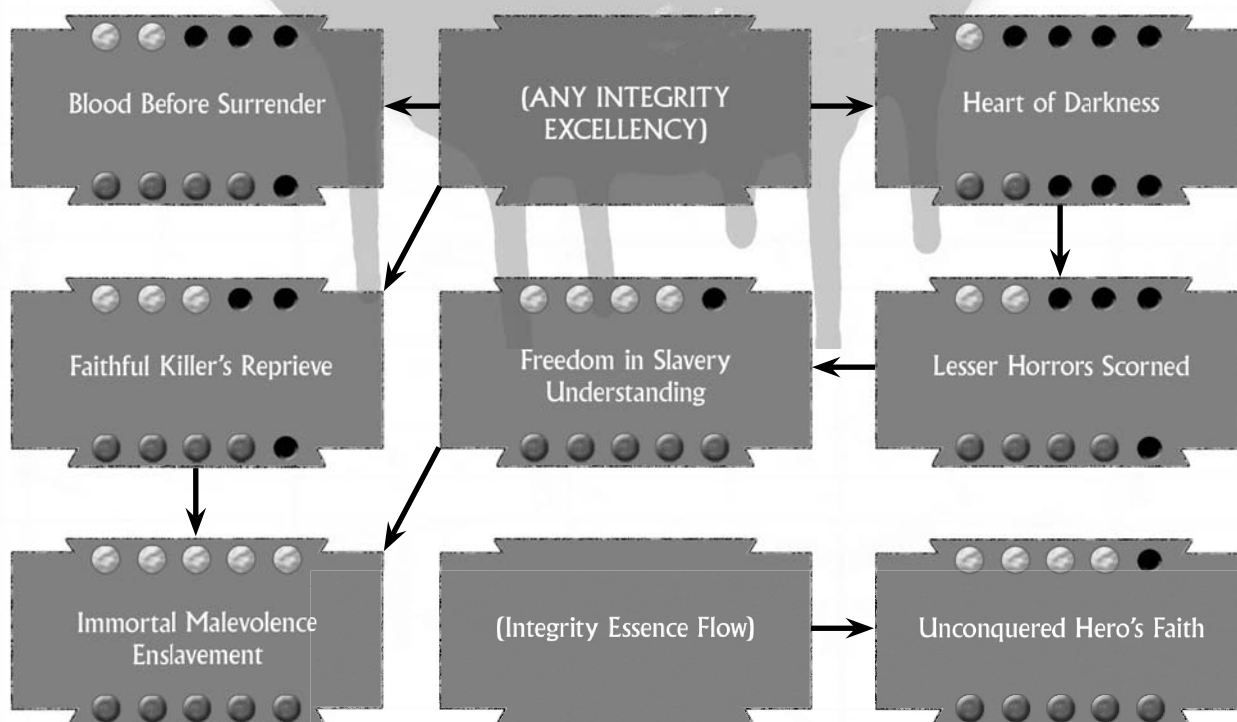
Prerequisite Charms: Any Integrity Excellency

Unlike the cowardly Yozis, the Primordials who became the Neverborn chose death before submission. Emulating such nihilistic heroism, an Abyssal with this Charm may pay levels of lethal damage as if they were Willpower to resist mental influence or Virtue compulsions. For effects requiring more than one Willpower point to resist, the Abyssal may mix-and-match between health levels and actual Willpower when paying the cost. The deathknight gains no Resonance for resisting unnatural mental influence solely with health rather than actual Willpower. Damage from this Charm can manifest as proud and obvious wounds or the ravages of disease, but the injuries take the form of imperceptible weakness by default.

HEART OF DARKNESS

Cost: 6m; **Mins:** Integrity 2, Essence 1;
Type: Reflexive (Step 2)
Keywords: Avatar (1), Combo-OK, Mirror (Temptation-Resisting Stance; *Exalted*, p. 200), Stackable, Social
Duration: One scene
Prerequisite Charms: Any Integrity Excellency

The petty distractions of the material world cannot turn an Abyssal from his purpose, for what allure can wealth or power hold to those consecrated to annihilation? Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm adds the deathknight's Whispers rating to Dodge MDV instead of Temperance.



LESSER HORRORS SCORNE

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Integrity 4, Essence 2;

Type: Reflexive (Step 2)

Keywords: Avatar (1), Combo-OK, Mirror (Elusive Dream Defense; **Exalted**, p. 200), Obvious, Social

Duration: Instant (Story)

Prerequisite Charms: Heart of Darkness

The world is filled with those who think themselves fearsome and awe-inspiring, but they are as posturing children before the ultimate darkness of Oblivion. Deathknights can use this Charm in response to any mental influence, perfectly negating the attempt as the Abyssal's anima momentarily flashes with power.

This Charm has a more vicious effect when defending against direct unnatural mental influence from a character who is solely targeting and currently interacting with the Abyssal (rather than doing so indirectly through a written text, delayed-effect Social Charm, etc.). In such cases, the thread of Essence connecting the attacker to the Abyssal's psyche also momentarily touches the sleeping minds of the Neverborn through the conduit of the deathknight's Whispers. The attacker suffers a Resonance eruption with Resonance points equal to half the deathknight's Essence rating (rounded down). The points allocated to particular Resonance effects are limited by the attacker's Essence rating as normal.

Note that this backlash is not an optional part of the Charm, even if the Abyssal would rather defend in a more subtle fashion. Perfect mental defenses can disconnect the attacker's Essence from the Abyssal's mind in time to avoid a Resonance backlash.

FREEDOM IN SLAVERY UNDERSTANDING

Cost: — (1ahl, variable wp); **Mins:** Integrity 5, Essence 4;

Type: Permanent

Keywords: Avatar (3), Obvious, Social

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Lesser Horrors Scorne

Abyssal Exalted belong to the Neverborn. However hard they struggle against the chains of their enslavement, Dark Fate always drags them back down into damnation and horror. Therefore, lesser slavery cannot hold them. The Abyssal may reflexively pay one level of unsoakable aggravated damage and lose all remaining Willpower points from sudden incontrovertible certainty of her doom. This certainty shatters all long-term Compulsion, Illusion and Servitude effects on her. The Exalt can ignore mental influence that would prevent her from using this Charm to free herself. A character can use this Charm at any time, but an occasion when she uses Whispers would be dramatically appropriate.

FAITHFUL KILLER'S REPRIEVE

Cost: —; **Mins:** Integrity 4, Essence 3; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: Avatar (1)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Any Integrity Excellency

The Neverborn do not reward their thralls for a job well done. The closest they come is to hate favored slaves a

little less. Whenever the Abyssal would regain one or more Willpower points from sleep, he may forfeit that Willpower to reduce his Resonance total by one point. He may also forgo all other awards for a three-die stunt that directly furthers the cause of Oblivion in order to reduce Resonance by one point. Eclipse Castes cannot learn this Charm, since they do not have Resonance to make it meaningful.

IMMORTAL MALEVOLENCE ENSLAVEMENT

Cost: —; **Mins:** Integrity 5, Essence 5; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: Avatar (5), Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Faithful Killer's Reprieve, Freedom in Slavery Understanding

All Abyssals serve the Neverborn whether they intend to or not, but some embrace their destiny as world-killing weapons with a fervor that unnerves even the Deathlords. This Charm may be learned by only those deathknights who journey to the temple-tombs of their undead masters and prostrate themselves without interrupting their vigil for the time necessary to learn the Charm with a teacher. At the conclusion of this training period, the Neverborn judge the deathknight's heart. If any positive Intimacies remain, the Exalt suffers a 10-Resonance eruption and finds herself violently expelled from the unhallowed caverns in rebuke for troubling her sleeping masters.

Abyssals who come with truly desolate hearts watch as a new Monstrance of Celestial Portion grows out of her own flesh and forges a link to her Exaltation. Meanwhile, her old Monstrance implodes with a thunderclap, informing her liege that the deathknight no longer requires an intermediary to command her. The Deathlords dare not gainsay the revealed will of their masters, but the Exalt does lose the substantial benefits of any Liege dots she possessed. In exchange, she exists entirely outside Fate as a direct agent of the Neverborn and gains limited immortality.

Unless slain with an attack that can permanently destroy spirits, any lesser demise does not actually kill her. Instead, her body dissolves into tarry smoke that hisses one final retort. Following these parting comments, her Exaltation instantly returns to its Monstrance in the temple-tomb, leaving all possessions behind at the site of her death. Her body requires a day to regenerate within its cage, after which she awakens screaming in agony and with one less dot of Essence. The character temporarily loses access to all Charms whose minimum Essence exceeds her new rating until she spends the experience to regain her former Essence rating. (Immortal Malevolence Enslavement is an explicit exception to this rule.) Abyssals reduced to Essence 0 by this Charm fall into Oblivion.

In case it isn't obvious, this Charm disqualifies an Abyssal from ever redeeming herself and becoming a Solar again. From this decision, there is no return.

UNCONQUERED HERO'S FAITH

Cost: —; **Mins:** Integrity 5, Essence 4; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: None

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Integrity Essence Flow

Within every Abyssal lies a dim and flickering hope, a shining spark of Solar glory that no necromancy or unholy darkness can entirely suppress. Tapping into this legacy, a deathknight with this Charm may learn Solar Charms as if she were a member of the Moonshadow Caste. In addition, she may accept a point of Resonance to activate a Solar Mirror of a known Abyssal Charm as if she knew the Mirror. It is not possible to use an Abyssal Charm while its Mirror remains active or vice versa, nor may an Abyssal copy a Mirror if either Charm is permanent. As a final side effect, deathknights who know this Charm automatically pass into Lethe upon their demise rather than Oblivion.

It is not yet known if a Solar analogue is possible that enables a Lawgiver to learn Abyssal Charms and delivers her to Oblivion upon death.

PERFORMANCE

MORBID FASCINATION STYLE

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Performance 3, Essence 2;

Type: Simple (Speed 4 in long ticks)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Compulsion, Mirror (Respect Commanding Attitude; **Exalted**, p. 202), Obvious, Social

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: None

When Abyssals speak, few dare to interrupt. Unlike its Solar Mirror, all listeners subjected to this Charm understand that a supernaturally terrifying orator addresses them. The maximum number of Willpower points required to resist this Charm for a scene, however, is four rather than three.

INESCAPABLE MASSACRE TECHNIQUE

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Performance 3, Essence 2;

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Combo-OK, Compulsion, Mirror (Face the Light; follows), Obvious

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Morbid Fascination Style

When Abyssals come to kill you, they *will* find you and they *will* kill you. Why prolong the inevitable? Upon activating this Charm, the Exalt's player rolls (Charisma + Performance), adding the character's Essence in bonus successes. For the rest of the scene, everyone with a Dodge MDV lower than the successes rolled suffers an unnatural compulsion to remain whenever they attempt to leave or avoid any combat, mass combat or social combat in which the deathknight visibly participates. Falling back to make ranged attacks is not retreating. Resisting this compulsion for the rest of the scene costs three Willpower.

Like moths to the flame, afflicted Fair Folk cannot resist. Conversely, afflicted individuals compelled to flee by a botched Morale check or some other fear-based effect must spend Willpower to escape if they have it available, but otherwise collapse in helpless terror for the duration of the effect.

New Solar Charm: Face the Light (Prerequisites: Respect Commanding Attitude; **Exalted**, p. 202). This Charm works through awe rather than a sense of futility, but otherwise functions identically to its Mirror.

HAUNTING APPARITION TRICK

Cost: —; **Mins:** Performance 3, Essence 3; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: Mirror (Phantom-Conjuring Performance; **Exalted**, p. 202), Obvious

Duration: Variable

Prerequisite Charms: Any Performance Excellency

Strange and unnatural phenomena manifest to accentuate an Abyssal's arts. Examples include chill winds, blood dripping down walls, moving shadows and tongues of foxfire luminescence that burn without source.

WITHERING PHANTASMAGORIA

Cost: variable +1wp; **Mins:** Performance 5, Essence 3;

Type: Simple (Speed 6, DV -2)

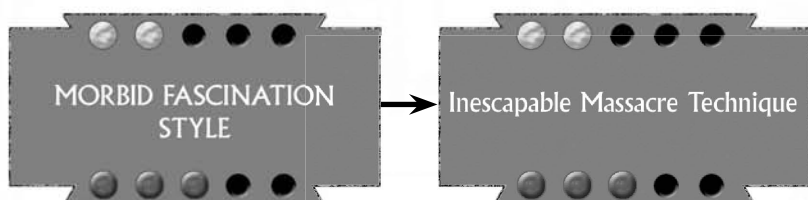
Keywords: Combo-Basic, Illusion, Mirror (Demon-Wracking Glory; follows), Obvious

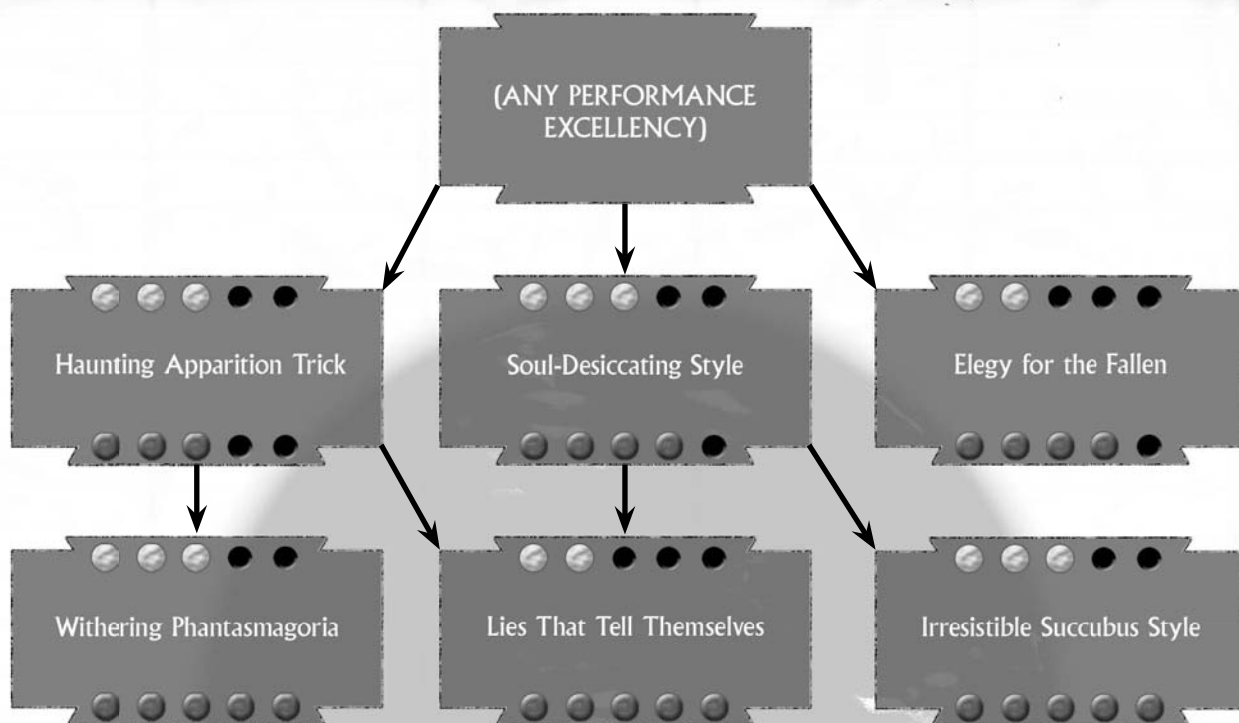
Duration: Instant (see below)

Prerequisite Charms: Haunting Apparition Trick

This Charm expands Haunting Apparition Trick. The maximum radius for evoking unnatural effects extends to (Essence x 100) yards, or (Essence - 5) miles if the Abyssal has Essence 6+. More importantly, the Exalt may use these effects to cause physical injury to living, mortal creatures within (Essence x 10) yards. The Charm causes harm through blatantly supernatural and suitably Abyssal effects. Chill winds freeze, frightful keening causes the victim to bleed from the ears and so on.

Withering Phantasmagoria inflicts harm in three ways. The Abyssal chooses between them each time she uses the Charm. Two methods last as long as the Abyssal continues to sing, play, orate or the like, and spends Essence each action to maintain the Charm. The third is an instant attack. For each form, however, the Abyssal's player must roll (Charisma + Performance) to initiate the attack. A character gains one attack form when she learns the Charm. Additional applications cost an additional experience point each, or all three attack forms for one bonus point. A character can use only one attack form at a time. Activating the Charm costs Willpower. Continuing it merely costs Essence (for the two continuing effects).





Area, Continuing: The Abyssal inflicts one level of lethal damage per two motes spent each action, to a maximum of (Essence) damage. Targets can soak this damage only with Stamina or soak-enhancing Charms. The Abyssal's lethal performance affects everyone whose Dodge MDV is less than the number of successes from the attack roll. Continuing the attack counts as the character's Charm use for each action.

Single Target, Continuing: The Abyssal's chosen victim suffers one level of unsoakable lethal damage per action that the Abyssal continues the Charm. This effect costs three motes per action. The initial attack roll must exceed the victim's Dodge MDV. Continuing the attack counts as the character's Charm use for each action.

Single Target, Instant: The Abyssal spends up to her (Stamina + Essence) in motes and inflicts that many dice of lethal damage, plus extra successes from the attack roll. The target can resist this damage only with Stamina or soak-enhancing Charms. The attack cannot be parried without a Charm or stunt, but it can be dodged like a normal ranged attack.

New Solar Charm: Demon-Wracking Glory (Prerequisites: Phantom-Conjuring Performance; **Exalted**, p. 202). This Charm expands the capabilities of Phantom-Conjuring Performance to increase its range. It also has the Holy keyword for its Performance-based attacks, inflicting aggravated damage to targeted creatures of darkness but leaving all other creatures unharmed. Attacks take the form of bright fires, scorching beams of sunlight, phantom executioners and the like.

SOUL-DESICCATING STYLE

Cost: 6m; **Mins:** Performance 4, Essence 2; **Type:** Supplemental
Keywords: Combo-OK, Emotion, Mirror (Heart-Compelling Method; **Exalted**, p. 202), Social

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Any Performance Excellency

Deathknights bring out the worst feelings in their audiences: fear, hate, shame and so on. Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm can instill only negative emotions, but resisting it for the scene costs three Willpower.

IRRESISTIBLE SUCCUBUS STYLE

Cost: 10m, 1wp; **Mins:** Performance 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple (Speed 6 in long ticks)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Emotion, Mirror (Husband-Seducing Demon Dance; **Exalted**, p. 203), Obvious, Social

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Soul-Desiccating Style

While terror and madness are the primary social weapons of the Abyssal **Exalted**, some prefer the subtler horror of unwanted desire. Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm builds only Intimacies of lust toward the Abyssal and cannot build love or loyalty to the Exalt or a cause, but this Charm ignores a victim's usual sexual orientation. In addition, the first time a deathknight makes a (Manipulation + Presence)-based social attack to seduce a character with a lower Essence rating in the same scene that he gained an Intimacy of lust toward her, the attempt becomes unnatural mental influence costing three Willpower to resist. Note that a seduced character may still defend against attacks

and can spend Willpower normally to shrug off a successful seduction as circumstances require, but that doesn't make an Abyssal any less desirable to those inflamed with lust toward her.

LIES THAT TELL THEMSELVES

Cost: 10m, 1wp; **Mins:** Performance 5, Essence 2; **Type:** Simple (Speed 5 in long ticks)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Illusion, Mirror (Memory-Reweaving Discipline; *Exalted*, p. 202), Social

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Haunting Apparition Trick, Soul-Desiccating Style

The greatest lie ever told is that life has meaning. Next to this, the Abyssal's deceptions might as well be the sincerest truths.

ELEGY FOR THE FALLEN

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Performance 4, Essence 2; **Type:** Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK, Compulsion, Social

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Any Performance Excellency

Abyssal Exalted who preach the holiness of death and the veneration of the dead may lead by example, invoking ghosts with their prayers. Less scrupulous deathknights terrorize the restless dead with threatening prayers or call upon spectres from the deepest Labyrinth. This Charm enhances a standard prayer action (*Exalted*, p. 132) directed toward a ghost whose Essence does not exceed the Abyssal's, adding 10 successes to the roll. This bonus stacks with Excellencies without limits, though this Charm alone ensures automatic success in most cases. If the Abyssal does not know the ghost's name, she may use a descriptive stunt to make the target clear. The target not only hears a successful prayer from anywhere in existence, the Abyssal may command her to appear. Resisting this unnatural Compulsion costs one Willpower. If the ghost fails to resist, the Abyssal can spend an additional 17 motes to summon the target to her side through a vortex of moaning shadows.

An Abyssal can also use this Charm with prayers to the Deathlords or the Neverborn, but only to ensure that the target receives the deathknight's message. How the target responds is beyond the Abyssal's control.

PRESENCE

POISONING THE WILL

Cost: 10m, 1wp; **Mins:** Presence 3, Essence 2; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Combo-OK, Compulsion, Mirror (Hypnotic Tongue Technique; *Exalted*, p. 203), Social, Stackable, Touch

Duration: Abyssal's Charisma in days

Prerequisite Charms: Any Presence Excellency

Deathknights delight in making their victims the instrument of their own suffering, burying hidden commands in the deepest recesses of their psyche. Both this Charm and its Solar Mirror have the Compulsion keyword (although it was erroneously left out of the Mirror's write-up in *Exalted*).

BROKEN HEART TRIUMPH

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Presence 4, Essence 3;

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK, Emotion, Mirror (You Can Be More; follows), Social

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Poisoning the Will

Midnight philosophers debate whether it is more effective to destroy what someone loves or destroy the love itself. This Charm enhances any Presence-based social attack aimed at eroding a positive Intimacy. If the attempt succeeds, it becomes unnatural mental influence that requires two Willpower to resist; the target's spending the Willpower prevents any further use of the Charm on that target during the scene. Absent resistance to the Charm, the Intimacy remains, but its emotional context shifts to resentment or outright hatred as chosen by the Abyssal.

If an Abyssal has Essence 4+, he may use this Charm to attack a mortal's Motivation rather than an Intimacy. If successful, the victim's player must spend Willpower to resist (if possible) or else choose a new un-heroic Motivation for the character, though not necessarily one that is harmful. Thus might an idealistic rebel be dissuaded from his crusade into returning home and spending his days tending his farm. A heroic mortal diminished in this way becomes an extra, which also ends any hope he will attain Solar or Lunar Exaltation. The Motivations of mortals destined to become Sidereal Exalted cannot be diminished with this Charm.

New Solar Charm: You Can Be More (Prerequisites: Hypnotic Tongue Technique; *Exalted*, p. 203). The Solar Mirror to Broken Heart Triumph enhances (Charisma + Presence)-based attacks to build or repair Intimacies that the Lawgiver shares with her target. Success enables the Solar to achieve the desired effect instantly. With Essence 4+, a mortal's Motivation may be "attacked" in order to confer a new and more heroic Motivation (chosen by the mortal's player). Mortals are explicitly not forced to resist this effect. Success also transforms an extra into a heroic mortal.

LURKING MALICE INSINUATION

Cost: —; **Mins:** Presence 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: Mirror (Minds Yield to Glory; follows)

Duration: N/A

Prerequisite Charms: Poisoning the Will

This Charm expands its prerequisite, increasing its duration to one month. If the Abyssal has Essence 4+, he can make the cost five Willpower to resist when the first opportunity to fulfill the order arises (in lieu of one Willpower per day), after which the Charm ends. Finally, if the deathknight has Essence 5+, the mote cost to activate Poisoning the Will is only the target's Essence rating instead of 10m.

New Solar Charm: Minds Yield to Glory (Prerequisites: Hypnotic Tongue Technique; *Exalted*, p. 203). This Charm improves Hypnotic Tongue Technique but otherwise works the same as Lurking Malice Insinuation.



DREAD LORD'S Demeanor

Cost: 7m; **Mins:** Presence 4, Essence 3;

Type: Reflexive (Step 2)

Keywords: Mirror (Majestic Radiant Presence; **Exalted**, p. 204), Obvious, Social

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Any Presence Excellency

The Abyssal cloaks himself in the grim shadows of death, so only the bravest, strongest-willed or most determined dare attack him.

HEART-STOPPING MIEN

Cost: — (1wp); **Mins:** Presence 5, Essence 3;

Type: Permanent

Keywords: Obvious, Social

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Dread Lord's Demeanor

This Charm augments its prerequisite. An Abyssal can add this effect by spending one Willpower when she activates Dread Lord's Demeanor. Anyone who can bring himself to attack the deathknight suffers a -2 internal penalty and suffers a number of dice of unsoakable lethal damage equal to the Abyssal's Essence for his presumption.

KILLING WORDS TECHNIQUE

Cost: — (1wp); **Mins:** Presence 4, Essence 3;

Type: Permanent

Keywords: Combo-OK

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Dread Lord's Demeanor

Those who dare refuse an Abyssal's commands suffer terribly for their impudence. Whenever a deathknight with this Charm makes a written or spoken social attack or uses a Charm that imposes unnatural mental influence, he may reflexively spend one Willpower to enhance the effect. By doing so, anyone who would spend Willpower points to resist the effect must instead pay an equivalent number of lethal health levels. Because this is a cost, this damage cannot be prevented by any effect that does not also result in the victim consenting to the attack. The Abyssal may choose whether the effect's damage occurs subtly as life-draining weakness or spectacularly in the form of unnatural stigmata.

SOUL-FLAYING GAZE

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Presence 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Supplemental

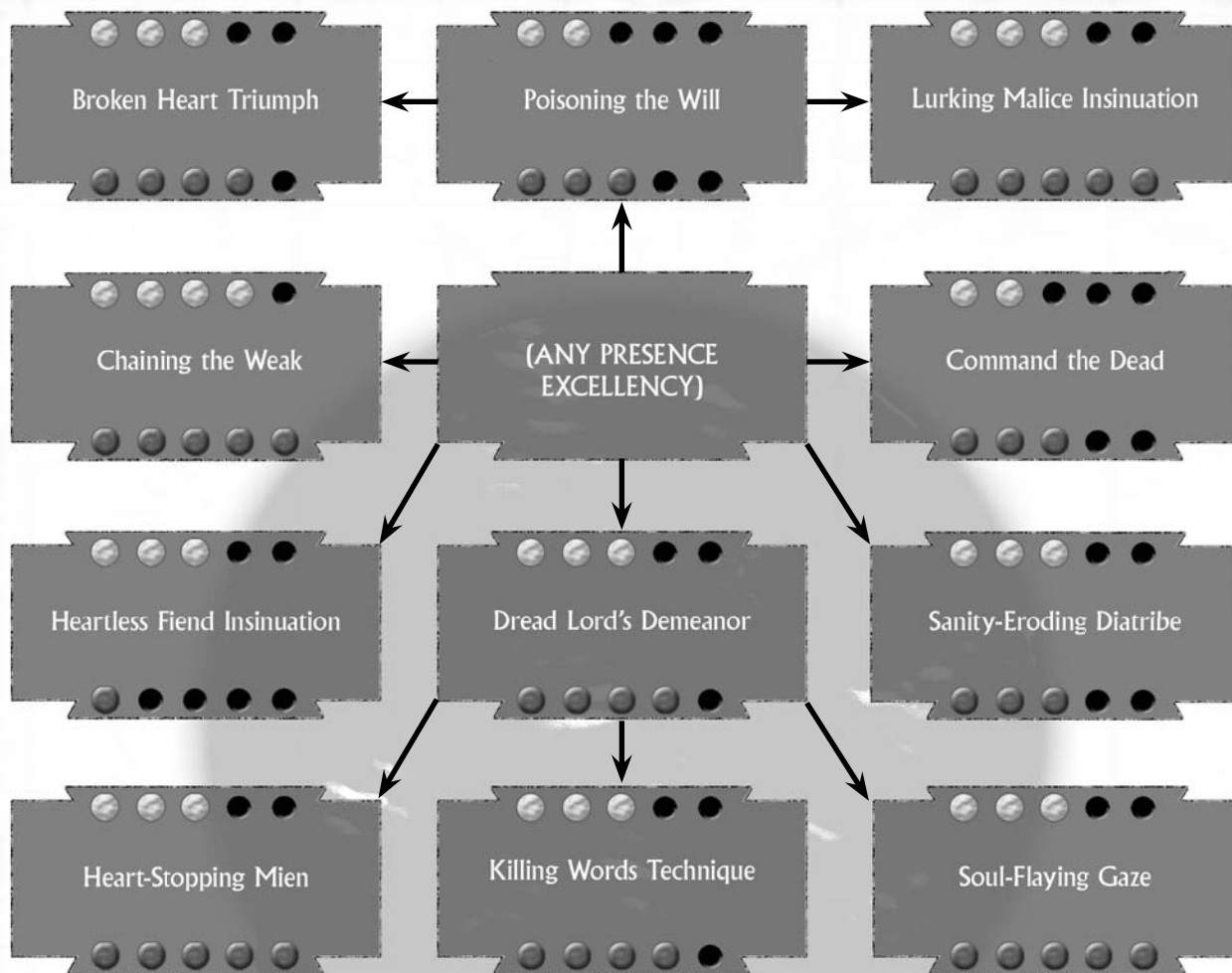
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Terrifying Apparition of Glory; **Exalted**, p. 204), Social

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Dread Lord's Demeanor

The Abyssal's command carries the dread inevitability of death, and others dare not disobey. If the Abyssal has Dread Lord's Demeanor active, the Charm's cost drops to two motes.

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CHAINING THE WEAK

Cost: 12m, 1wp; **Mins:** Presence 5, Essence 4;

Type: Simple (Speed 6 in long ticks)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Worshipful Lackey Acquisition; *Exalted*, p. 205), Obvious, Servitude, Social

Duration: Abyssal's Charisma in days

Prerequisite Charms: Any Presence Excellency

Victims faced with the Abyssal's overwhelming horror find themselves enthralled to it, too frightened to leave his service.

COMMAND THE DEAD

Cost: 5m + 1m per target; **Mins:** Presence 3, Essence 2;

Type: Simple (Speed 6, DV -2)

Keywords: Combo-Basic, Servitude, Social

Duration: One day

Prerequisite Charms: Any Presence Excellency

The dead know their masters, the Chosen of the Neverborn. When the Abyssal wants to seize control of zombies or other mindless creatures of death, her player rolls (Manipulation + Presence). The difficulty is the Essence of the mindless undead or the Dodge MDV of a necromancer or Abyssal who

already controls the creatures. If targeting multiple entities, use the highest difficulty in the group of targets. If the roll succeeds, the targets must obey the Abyssal until the sun next rises. Being mindless, they treat all orders as acceptable—though their comprehension is sadly limited. A controlled zombie, hungry ghost or the like has an effective Intelligence of 1 for understanding an Abyssal's commands.

HEARTLESS FIEND INSINUATION

Cost: 2m; **Mins:** Presence 1, Essence 3; **Type:** Supplemental

Keywords: Avatar (1), Combo-OK, Social

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Any Presence Excellency

Those who open their hearts to love, respect and loyalty must accept the risk of indirect attacks aimed at those Intimacies. Emptying the heart carries its own dangers, however, for desolate or hate-poisoned souls open themselves to the Neverborn and their thralls. Heartless Fiend Insinuation grants power over characters who have Compassion 1 or lack positive Intimacies. Whenever an Abyssal with this Charm makes any social attack using any Ability against such a character, the target's MDV is halved against the attack.

SANITY-ERODING DIATRIBE

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Presence 3, Essence 3;

Type: Simple (Speed 6 in long ticks)

Keywords: Avatar (1), Obvious, Social

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Any Presence Excellency

Sometimes, Abyssals don't really want to persuade anyone of anything. They just want to tear an enemy's mind into broken, gibbering shards of pain. The Abyssal makes a social attack in which her player rolls ([Charisma or Manipulation] + Presence) against the target's Dodge MDV. If the target can gain Limit or Resonance, every three threshold successes increase her Limit or Resonance total by one, though the target may spend two Willpower each rather than gain the points. Other targets instead lose one Willpower for every three threshold successes. Any victims reduced to zero Willpower by this Charm—even those who spend their last Willpower points resisting Limit or Resonance gains—suffer the effects of a Solar Limit Break selected by the Storyteller from those associated with the target's highest rated Virtue (see **Exalted** pp. 103–105). Mortals cannot partially control induced Limit Breaks, though other victims can.

No matter what sort of being an Exalted or mortal victim of this Charm is, he suffers a Solar-style Limit Break if this Charm's effects (or resistance thereto) run him out of Willpower. If the victim is Exalted, this Charm's induced Limit Break wipes out any points of Limit he had before the Limit Break. Deathknights retain any points of Resonance they had, however.

RESISTANCE

ARMOR-CALLING KATA

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Resistance 1, Essence 1; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Whirlwind Armor-Donning Prana; **Exalted**, p. 205), Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: None

The Abyssal levitates a yard into the air as inky tendrils reach from her anima to grab and attach her armor. Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm has the Obvious keyword.

VOID-BANISHED MAIL

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Resistance 3, Essence 3;

Type: Simple (Speed 3)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Hauberk-Lightening Gesture; **Exalted**, p. 205), Obvious

Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: Armor-Calling Kata

The deathknight dismisses armor Elsewhere until he has need of it again, that it might not sin against Oblivion by existing.

INAUSPICIOUS INNER AEGIS

Cost: 10m, 1wp or 13m, 1wp; **Mins:** Resistance 4, Essence 3;

Type: Simple

Keywords: Mirror (Glorious Solar Plate; **Exalted**, p. 205), Obvious

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Void-Banished Mail

The Abyssal shapes Essence into powerful armor. Depending on preference, he might grow an exoskeleton of articulated bone that tears out through his skin, he might extrude and freeze blood from every orifice into a scarlet carapace, or he might summon "normal" armor out of darkness itself. Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm can also create a long flowing cape of blood or shadows in place of a shield, which moves of its own volition to entangle and deflect attacks. Although this effect allows the Abyssal to use two-handed weapons, the cape offers only +1 DV (close)/+1 DV (ranged) protection and is not cumulative with other cover, including conventional shields. Abyssals sometimes call the bone armor the Ivory Blossom Carapace, while the blood-wrought panoply is Crimson Petal Armor.

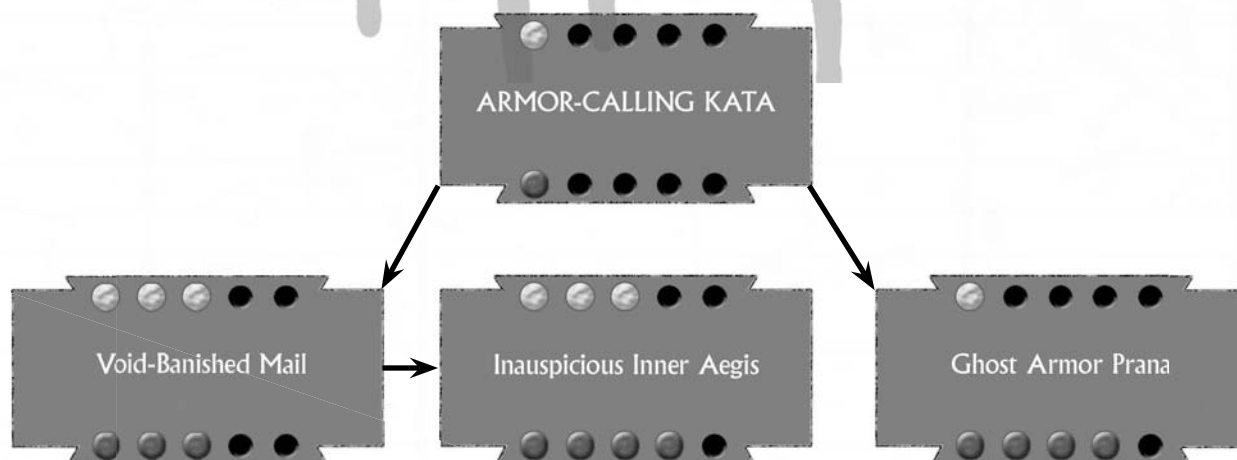
GHOST ARMOR PRANA

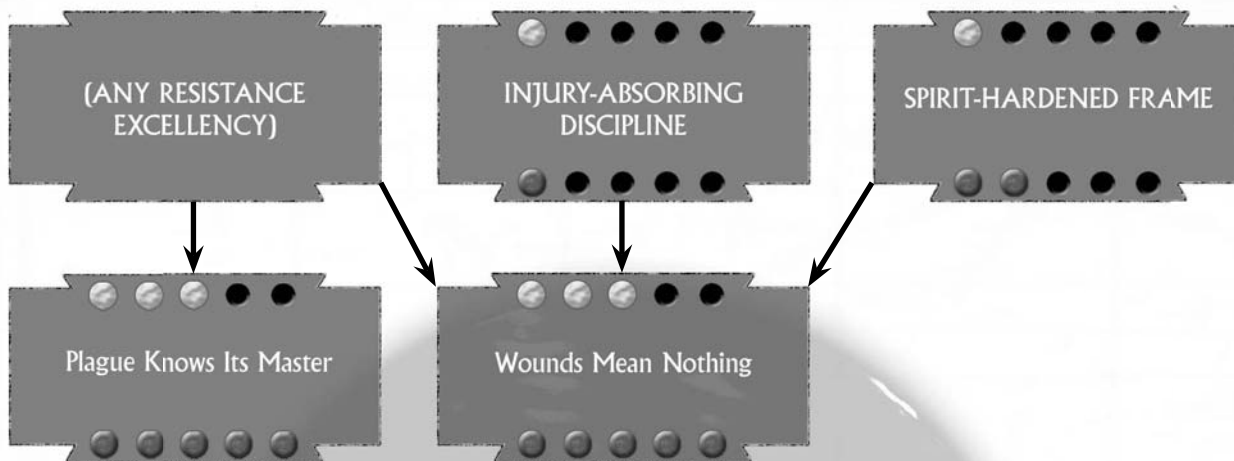
Cost: 3m per fatigue/mobility reduction; **Mins:** Resistance 4, Essence 1; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Armored Scout's Invigoration; **Exalted**, p. 205)

Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: Armor-Calling Kata





The Abyssal's anima enfolds and possesses his armor, granting it unreal lightness for the duration of the Charm.

INJURY-ABSORBING DISCIPLINE

Cost: 10m; **Mins:** Resistance 1, Essence 1; **Type:** Supplemental
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Body-Mending Meditation; *Exalted*, p. 208)

Duration: Until the night ends

Prerequisite Charms: None

Having died once, Abyssals quickly shrug off lesser wounds as inconsequential.

SPIRIT-HARDENED FRAME

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Resistance 2, Essence 1;
Type: Reflexive (Step 7)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Durability of Oak Meditation; *Exalted*, p. 206)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: None

Having returned from death, an Abyssal sneers at feeble attacks.

WOUNDS MEAN NOTHING

Cost: 4m; **Mins:** Resistance 5, Essence 3;
Type: Reflexive (Step 7)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Adamant Skin Technique; *Exalted*, p. 207), Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Any Resistance Excellency, Injury-Absorbing Discipline, Spirit-Hardened Frame

Death has no power over those who have cheated its clutches. The Abyssal activates this Charm immediately before damage is rolled against her. All damage appears to apply normally, seemingly wounding or even slaying the Abyssal—which is appropriately spectacular when he falls from a great height or stands in the path of Solar Circle sorcery. His injuries are a lie, however, as the Abyssal heals back all of this “damage” in less than a second. The net result is that the Abyssal perfectly defends against all damage from the attack.

FOUR FLAWS OF ABYSSAL INVULNERABILITY

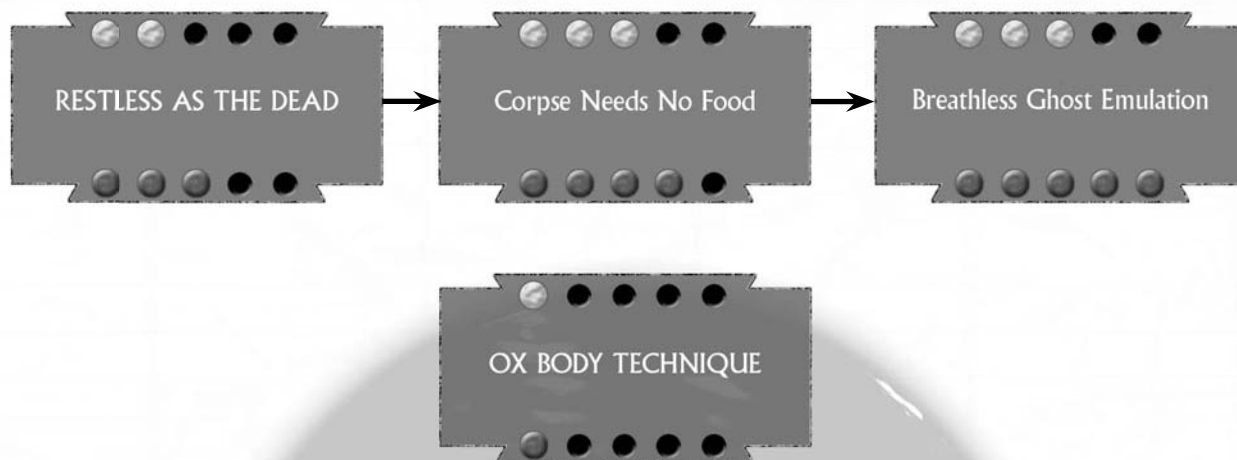
Deathknights have their own Four Flaws of Invulnerability based on the failures of their broken Virtues. Abyssal characters cannot ever have more than two of these flaws among all their Charms, though they can learn a Charm twice to give them a choice of flaws when they activate perfect defenses.

Compassion: A dead heart feels no pain. Abyssals who forget this doom themselves. Charms with this flaw cannot be activated while the Exalt can perceive a person toward whom she feels a positive Intimacy, or whom she believes holds a positive Intimacy toward her.

Conviction: With broken faith, only nihilistic fervor sustains the Abyssal's flawed perfection. Charms with this flaw cannot be activated if the deathknight's actions run contrary to his Motivation (which, remember, must involve causing harm or otherwise further Oblivion) or any negative Intimacies.

Temperance: Without rational restraint, only savage fury remains. Upon activating a Charm with this flaw, the Abyssal's next action must be to attack whoever last attacked her, using the most deadly attack she can manage, until her DV refreshes twice. If she cannot attack that opponent right away, she must move at best possible speed to do so.

Valor: Abyssals marred by craven hearts cannot stand against enemies mighty enough to require perfect Charms. After activating a Charm carrying this flaw, a deathknight must move *away* from the opponent he considers the most dangerous, until his DV refreshes twice. This flaw does not force the character to leave the battle outright (he can still fight lesser opponents). It does not prevent him from attacking as he retreats, if he has the means to do so.



This Charm carries one of the Four Flaws of Abyssal Invulnerability.

RESTLESS AS THE DEAD

Cost: 3m per day (2xp); **Mins:** Resistance 3, Essence 2;

Type: Simple

Keywords: Mirror (Tireless Sentinel Technique; follows), Taint

Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: None

The Abyssal transcends the need for sleep and experiences reality as a particularly lucid nightmare. While this Charm is active, he suffers no adverse effects from sleep deprivation besides the lost opportunity for Willpower recovery. A character can use this Charm to go without sleep for (Stamina + Resistance) days. After that, he suffers one level of unsoakable bashing damage per day without sleep, which he must heal through rest before he can activate the Charm again.

An Abyssal can also make the Charm permanent as a Taint and never sleep again. He won't take damage, but he forever cuts himself off from the benefits of sleep. Doing so costs one bonus point or two experience points.

New Solar Charm: Tireless Sentinel Technique (Prerequisites: None). This Charm works like its analogue, except that Solars cannot permanently abandon the need for sleep.

CORPSE NEEDS NO FOOD

Cost: 3m per day (4xp); **Mins:** Resistance 4, Essence 3;

Type: Simple

Keywords: Taint

Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: Restless as the Dead

The deathknight feels hunger as mild discomfort rather than a debilitating and ultimately fatal condition. While this Charm is active, the total penalty for starvation and/or thirst never exceeds -1. The Taint drawback to making this Charm permanent is that the Abyssal becomes incapable of eating except when he devours others for Essence. After eating

any other food, his player rolls (Stamina + Resistance) each minute with the difficulty equal to the minutes that passed since the character's first bite. Failure causes the deathknight to vomit the contents of his stomach. The Taint costs two bonus points or four experience points.

BREATHLESS GHOST EMULATION

Cost: 4m, 1wp; **Mins:** Resistance 5, Essence 3;

Type: Simple

Keywords: Obvious

Duration: One day

Prerequisite Charms: Corpse Needs No Food

The dead breathe only prayers. Abyssals with this Charm active need not even bother with that, breathing only when they wish to do so (such as to facilitate speech) without suffering asphyxiation.

CADAVEROUS TORPOR TECHNIQUE

Cost: —; **Mins:** Resistance 1, Essence 1; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: Stackable

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: None

Is a defeated Abyssal actually dead? The Exalt gains a number of extra Incapacitated health levels equal to his current Stamina. In addition, his vital signs all but stop while he's Incapacitated, giving him benefits comparable to Plague Knows Its Master (see p. 149), Corpse Needs No Food and Breathless Ghost Emulation and making him appear dead to all examination. If a Charm opposes this effect, add the Abyssal's Essence rating in bonus successes to the contested roll. Deathknights cannot purchase this Charm more times than they have dots of Resistance.

Abyssals with Essence 3+ may suspend their vitals as a diceless miscellaneous action without actually reducing themselves to Incapacitated, though they become equally immobile and insensate. When entering this state, the Abyssal's player must specify what conditions will reflexively awaken the character, but any triggers other than a fixed

passage of time must be events that the Abyssal could sense if he were awake.

OX-BODY TECHNIQUE

Cost: —; **Mins:** Resistance 1, Essence 1; **Type:** Permanent
Keywords: Mirror (Ox-Body Technique; *Exalted*, p. 208), Stackable

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: None

This Charm works exactly the same way for Abyssals as for Solars, though deathknights prefer to give it names like “Corpse-Body Resilience.”

PLAGUE KNOWS ITS MASTER

Cost: 6m, 1wp; **Mins:** Resistance 5, Essence 3;
Type: Simple (Speed 4)
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Immunity to Everything Technique; *Exalted*, p. 208)

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Any Resistance Excellency

Although their Exaltation protects them from non-magical diseases, magical ailments or poison can still fell Abyssals. Not so for those who wield this Charm. Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm may either block Sickness effects or render the Abyssal immune to their negative effects, as selected by the Exalt’s player. Choosing the latter helps the deathknight catch and spread plagues without risk to herself. This Charm always negates poison completely.

SURVIVAL

DARK PATHS FOUND

Cost: 7m; **Mins:** Survival 4, Essence 2; **Type:** Reflexive
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Trackless Region Navigation; *Exalted*, p. 211)

Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: Any Survival Excellency

There are always secret paths and shortcuts, some natural and others etched into the Tapestry by the Primordials in the dawn of the world. Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm does not accelerate

the travel of others. While within the realms of the dead, however, the Abyssal doubles the speed conferred by the Charm.

INFALLIBLE BARGHEST MIEN

Cost: 8m, 1wp; **Mins:** Survival 5, Essence 2;
Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Unshakeable Bloodhound Technique; *Exalted*, p. 211)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Dark Paths Found

When deathknights hunt, they become as implacable and inescapable as death itself.

GHOST LEAVES NO TRAIL

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Survival 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Supplemental
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Traceless Passage; *Exalted*, p. 211), Spectral

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Infallible Barghest Mien

Following an Abyssal can become an exercise in futility, or a lethal mistake. Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm cannot conceal a group’s passage, but it costs only five motes to activate and has the Spectral keyword. In addition, if use of this Charm allows the Abyssal to slip away, he may instead double back to ambush his pursuers. Doing so adds a number of bonus successes equal to his Survival rating to any Stealth roll against the trackers until the end of the scene or until they notice him, whichever comes first.

SUPERIOR PREDATOR STYLE

Cost: 3m (12xp); **Mins:** Survival 1, Essence 2; **Type:** Reflexive
Keywords: Combo-OK, Compulsion, Emotion, Taint

Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: Any Survival Excellency

The Abyssal’s presence terrifies natural animals, evoking ancestral fear of the Primordials who once walked Creation. This Charm projects an unnatural Compulsion within a radius of (Essence x 2) yards, forcing natural animals to flee the zone of terror. Resistance is not possible, but animals that are cornered or otherwise cannot flee attack the Abyssal out of



instinctual desperation. Superior Predator Style has no effect on animals that are magically compelled by other effects or supernaturally loyal, such as familiars. This Charm may be activated while the character is inactive. The Taint drawback to this Charm is its own effects, since a constant fear aura does not differentiate between hostile and useful animals. The Taint costs six bonus points or 12 experience points.

FETTER THE DEATHLESS BEAST

Cost: 10m; **Mins:** Survival 3, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Touch

Duration: One day

Prerequisite Charms: Superior Predator Style

The ghostly familiars of the Abyssal Exalted make excellent spies in Creation, but their incorporeal state severely limits the tasks they can perform. By touching his familiar and reflexively spending 10 motes, a deathknight can force it into a materialized state for a day. She can return the creature to its natural state with another touch. It is possible to “touch” currently incorporeal beings with this Charm by reaching into the space they inhabit.

In addition to these effects, an Abyssal with this Charm who lacks a familiar may claim one whenever he kills a natural animal by reflexively paying a number of experience points equal to the number of dots the slain animal would be worth as a familiar. Doing so rips the animal’s soul out and binds it to the Abyssal, after which it regenerates within his shadow as normal.

MAELSTROM-WEATHERING INDIFFERENCE

Cost: 10m; **Mins:** Survival 3, Essence 1; **Type:** Reflexive

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Hardship-Surviving Mendicant Spirit, Element-Resisting Prana; **Exalted**, p. 210), Spectral

Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: None

Abyssals do not merely reign over restless dead; they also dominate the Underworld itself. This Charm negates all environmental external penalties to Survival rolls and provides complete immunity to environmental hazards while in the realms of the dead. Enduring the hazards of Creation takes a strong effort of will, and provides only the benefits of Hardship-Surviving Mendicant Spirit.

SHELTERING INTERMENT PRANA

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Survival 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Spectral

Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: Maelstrom-Weathering Indifference

The Abyssal lies down in some traditional posture of burial, and sinks into the ground without disturbing the surface. She sleeps either for as long as she chooses or until the sun next rises. While buried, she does not need to breathe. When the time she chose is up, she rises from the ground as tracelessly as she interred herself. If the Abyssal is somehow injured or disturbed in her self-imposed burial, she erupts from the surface in a shower of earth, instantly awake.



C. COLLINS 01032008



WORLD-DENYING INVINCIBILITY

Cost: —; **Mins:** Survival 5, Essence 4; **Type:** Permanent
Keywords: Mirror (Eternal Elemental Harmony; **Exalted**, p. 210), Spectral
Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Maelstrom-Weathering Indifference
 Existence might as well be dead already for all the danger it poses an Abyssal who knows this Charm, though the hazards of Creation still require Willpower to resist.

DAYBREAK

CRAFT

SYSTEMATIC DEMOLITION EXERCISE

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Craft 5, Essence 2; **Type:** Simple (Dramatic Action)
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Shattering Grasp; **Exalted**, p. 212)
Duration: One scene
Prerequisite Charms: Any Craft Excellency

Deathknights find it easy to tear apart the labor of days in a matter of minutes.

ALL-CONSUMING ENTROPY ATTACK

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Craft 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple (Speed 4, DV -1)
Keywords: Combo-OK, Obvious, Shaping, Touch
Duration: Instant
Prerequisite Charms: Systematic Demolition Exercise

It is the ordained function of all Abyssal Exalted to kill the world one piece at a time. The character need only touch a non-magical, inanimate object and this Charm marks it for destruction. Items on an individual's person benefit from their bearer's defenses to avoid this attack. It can affect objects as large as a suit of armor or a sledge.

Upon contact, cracks rapidly spread across the target, through which the unholy glow of entropic Essence spills out in bright beams. In seconds, nothing remains but a fine residue of acrid dust and a few wisps of foul smoke.

ANNIHILATING GAZE

Cost: —; **Mins:** Craft 5, Essence 4; **Type:** Permanent
Keywords: None
Duration: Permanent
Prerequisite Charms: All-Consuming Entropy Attack

The Abyssal's eyes flash with incandescent malice, unmaking whatever offends his sight. This Charm enhances its prerequisite, allowing the Abyssal to "touch" any valid target within (Essence x 100) yards with a (Perception + Craft) roll for the attack. The Abyssal must use the Craft Ability that best corresponds to the creation or composition of the object. Items on an individual's person benefit from their bearer's defenses to avoid this attack.

In addition, the Abyssal can change the duration of his All-Consuming Entropy Attack to Indefinite by committing the Essence he spends on the attack. He delays the Charm's effects until he withdraws the commitment. Upon reflexively ending the Charm, the deathknight may either destroy the object or spare it.

FAULT-FINDING SCRUTINY

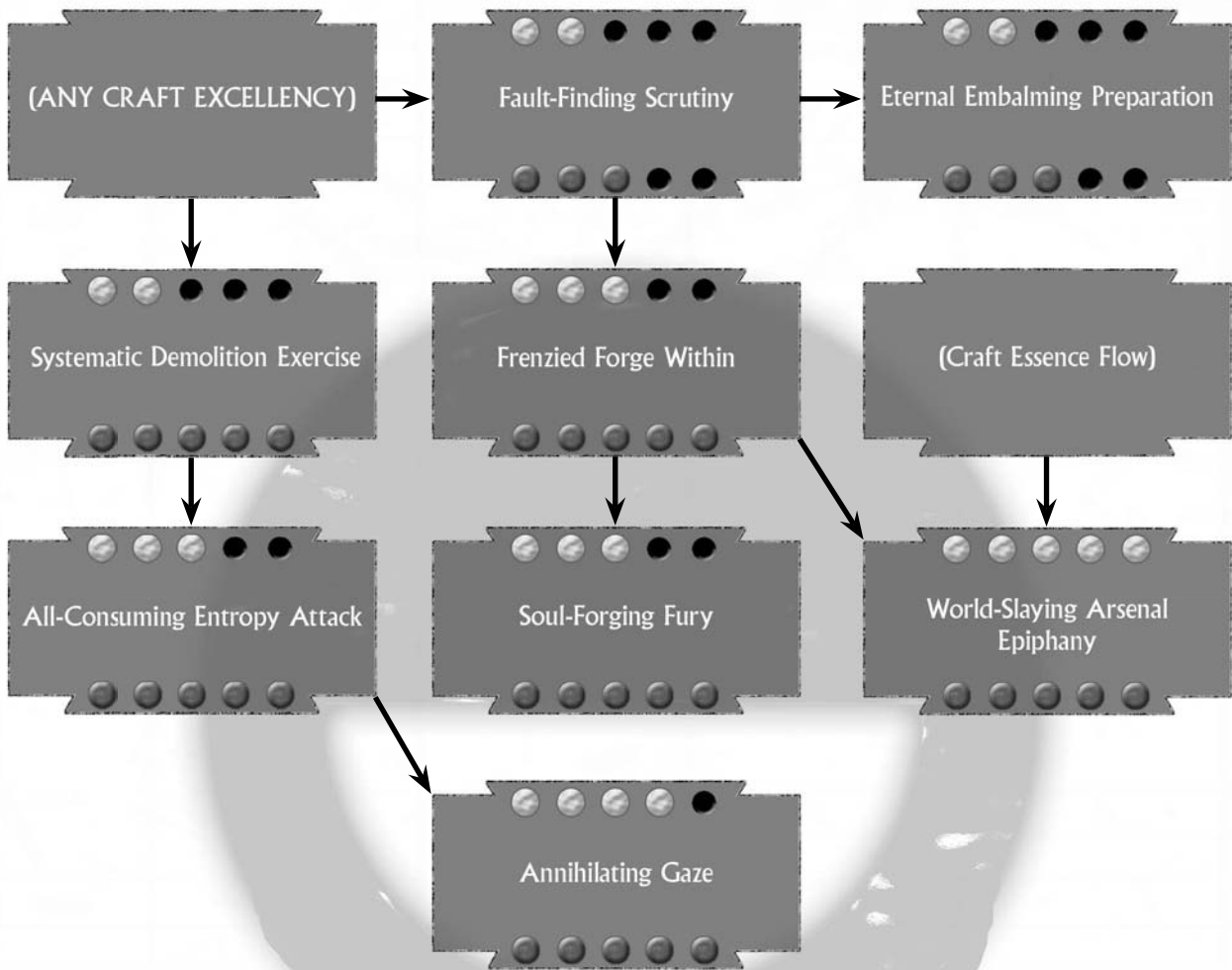
Cost: 2m; **Mins:** Craft 3, Essence 2; **Type:** Supplemental
Keywords: Combo-OK
Duration: Instant
Prerequisite Charms: Any Craft Excellency

The Abyssal feels entropy's presence within inanimate objects. This Charm enhances one attack and is explicitly permitted to supplement actions using other Abilities. The attack ignores the soak of non-magical objects or makes the attack piercing against a magical target (though this avails nothing against most artifacts, which are nearly indestructible and lack a listed soak rating). If the attack already inflicts piercing damage, halve the already-reduced soak instead. When the deathknight uses this Charm to supplement an attack against an attack that already inflicts piercing damage, the foe's armor provides only one quarter of its listed soak bonus.

ETERNAL EMBALMING PREPARATION

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Craft 3, Essence 2; **Type:** Simple (Speed 6 in long ticks)
Keywords: Combo-OK, Touch
Duration: Varies
Prerequisite Charms: Fault-Finding Scrutiny

Although entropy is inevitable, it is also sometimes inconvenient. An Abyssal with this Charm infuses an inanimate object or necromantic creation with the unnatural stasis of the Underworld. Targets of this Charm become immune to non-magical sources of corrosion, rust, rot, weathering and any other manifestation of entropy (as decided by the Storyteller). The target also gains a Hardness



equal to its soak against magical sources of entropy, such as pyre flame or the destructive energies unleashed by various Abyssal Charms. This enchantment is permanent for inanimate objects. For walking dead and necromantically animated war machines, the effects last five maintenance cycles. (See the discussion of necrotech maintenance on pp. 205-207.) If the necrotech creation stays inactive, it multiplies the time between maintenance by 10. The Charm cannot affect the living.

FRENZIED FORGE WITHIN

Cost: 10m, 1wp; **Mins:** Craft 5, Essence 3;

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK, Spectral, Touch

Duration: Varies

Prerequisite Charms: Fault-Finding Scrutiny

Spurred by mad genius and inspired by the desolation of the Underworld, Abyssal artisans construct and repair weapons almost as fast as they imagine them. This Charm enhances a Craft action, which can be an extended or dramatic action. Until the Exalt completes the project or ends the Charm by taking another action, he may ac-

complish (Essence x 5) hours worth of work to build or repair a destructive item per hour. He also works without the need for tools as if he had access to a basic workshop (see *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex*, p. 28). When repairing items, broken pieces may be joined together seamlessly as if the object were new again.

For the purposes of this Charm, a destructive item is defined as anything with a function that is overtly harmful, with weapons as an obvious example. Strictly utilitarian items do not qualify, let alone anything actually intended to help others outside of making them more effective killers (for instance, armor made for an army bent on massacre). The Storyteller remains final arbiter of what qualifies as a destructive item but should be strict in judgment. The Abyssal Exalted exist to destroy the world, not add to its wonders.

SOUL-FORGING FURY

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Craft 5, Essence 3;

Type: Simple (Dramatic Action)

Keywords: Avatar (1), Obvious, Touch

Duration: Varies

Prerequisite Charms: Frenzied Forge Within

Of all the myriad horrors an Abyssal can impose on a ghost, dooming it to an eternity of impotent agony within soulsteel is easily the worst. The deathknight touches a ghostly victim and commits three motes to poison its corpus with the Essence of the Neverborn until the smelting into soulsteel is complete. Next, the Abyssal or a designated subordinate spends a dramatic action brutally beating the ghost into malleable hopelessness, taking a number of minutes equal to the ghost's (Willpower + Essence). The Charm ends and must be reactivated if interrupted for any reason, so the victim must be restrained to prevent it from initiating combat or escaping. Once the ghost breaks down, the Abyssal strikes a final clanging blow heard for a mile, hammering the victim's corpus into a whimpering mass of raw soulsteel. Obviously, ghosts must be material with respect to the Abyssal throughout their forging, effectively limiting this Charm's use to the Underworld or a shadowland at night. Note that soulsteel artifacts need one soul for every 10 accumulated successes required for their design (rounded up).

Abyssals with Essence 5+ may use this Charm within the Underworld to forge captive gods with Essence 3 or less into starmetal, but they cannot use subordinates, and the initial torture takes a number of hours equal to the god's (Willpower + Essence). The wasteful inefficiency of this process means that the same number of gods must be forged to make a starmetal artifact as the ghosts needed for soulsteel devices. Deathlords primarily use this starmetal as bribes for the Five-Score Fellowship (not accepted as often as they'd like), though they keep some for their own depraved use.

WORLD-SLAYING ARSENAL EPIPHANY

Cost: —; **Mins:** Craft 5, Essence 5; **Type:** Permanent
Keywords: Avatar (3), Mirror (Wonder-Forging Genius; Oadenol's Codex, p. 29)
Duration: Permanent
Prerequisite Charms: Craft Essence Flow, Frenzied Forge Within

Inspired by the alien and genocidal genius of the Neverborn, the most depraved Abyssal engineers invent weapons that would take lesser Exalted centuries to conceive. Once a deathknight purchases this Charm, the Craft, Lore, Medicine and Occult minimums required to design, build and repair destructive artifacts decrease by one (to a minimum of 1). The Exalt receives the same benefits toward creating Abyssal manses. For the purposes of this Charm, a destructive artifact must meet the same criteria as a destructive item defined by Frenzied Forge Within. An Abyssal may buy this Charm no more than twice.

INVESTIGATION

CRIME-UNVEILING WICKEDNESS

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Investigation 3, Essence 2; **Type:** Simple
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Crafty Observation Method; Exalted, p. 213)
Duration: Instant

CHARM CONCEPT: HARM

A number of Abyssal Charms have effects based on actions that cause or could cause harm. For the purposes of these effects, harm includes physical injury, but it also extends to emotional distress (such as attacking an Intimacy), theft or destruction of important or valuable possessions. Anything that rises above the level of an inconvenience to seriously and negatively impact a character's life or quality of life qualifies as harm—subject, as always, to the Storyteller's final say.

Prerequisite Charms: Any Investigation Excellency

Abyssals wreak so much havoc that they easily intuit the misdeeds of others. Unlike its Solar Mirror, use of this Charm reduces the difficulty of the Investigation roll by one to study evidence left by anyone's actions that resulted in harm and adds one to the difficulty otherwise.

DECEPTION-PIERCING STARE

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Investigation 2, Essence 1; **Type:** Reflexive (Step 1)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Judge's Ear Technique; Exalted, p. 213)

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Any Investigation Excellency

Having seen through the great lie of life, Abyssals find the feeble lies of mortals easy to penetrate.

SOUL-INVADING GLANCE

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Investigation 4, Essence 2; **Type:** Simple (Speed 5 in long ticks)

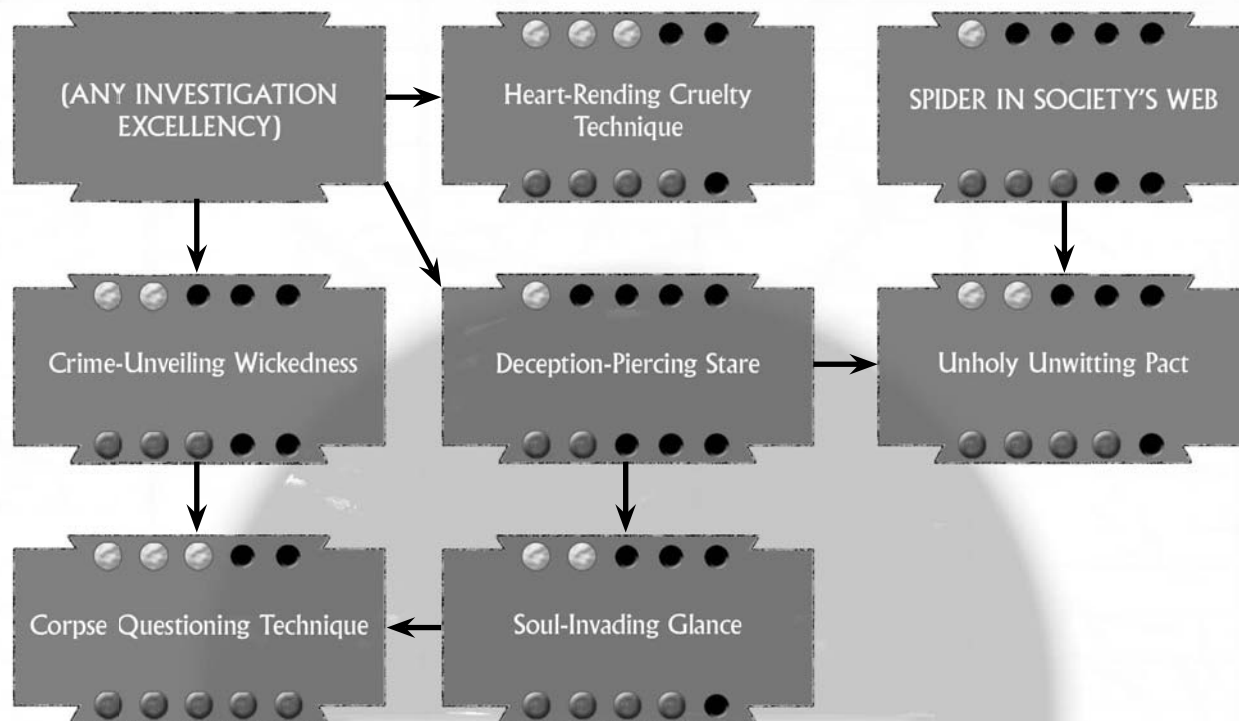
Keywords: Combo-OK, Illusion, Social, Spectral

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Deception-Piercing Stare

The first step to breaking an enemy is understanding what he cares about. An Abyssal can use this Charm against anyone he can see. His player rolls (Perception + Investigation) against the target's Dodge MDV. If the roll succeeds, the Abyssal learns the target's Motivation. Each threshold success adds knowledge of the target's current intentions in the scene (which can change as circumstances warrant), the target's Intimacies and the target's Virtue ratings. The Abyssal can also seek knowledge of a ghost's fetters. The Abyssal can select how to "spend" these threshold successes and can specify whether he wants positive or negative Intimacies. He can also filter out Intimacies that he already know or feels sure about, though the player must make note beforehand of what Intimacies to filter. The Spectral keyword represents that the Charm costs an additional Willpower point when used against anyone but the dead.

The target immediately feels that a malevolent presence is trying to invade her mind, but she cannot identify the source of the intrusion. The target may spend two Willpower points to resist the unnatural mental influence. If she does so,



the Abyssal may not target her with this Charm for the rest of the day.

Afterward, Soul-Invading Glance erases the target's memory of the intrusion as an Illusion effect. Only if the target resists through Willpower (or escapes the Charm through a perfect defense against mental influence) does she remember that something attempted to violate her mind.

SPIDER IN SOCIETY'S WEB

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Investigation 3, Essence 1; **Type:** Simple
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Courtier's Eye Technique; Exalted, p. 214)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: None

Abyssals understand the complex power plays that define social interaction as a necessary precursor to attacking the luminaries who hold civilization together.

UNHOLY UNWITTING PACT

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Investigation 4, Essence 2;

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Avatar (1), Combo-OK, Mirror (Know the Soul's Price; Exalted, p. 214), Servitude

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Deception-Piercing Stare, Spider in Society's Web

The inevitability of entropy is predicated on the hypocrisies of the righteous. Even the Unconquered Sun, supposed shining paragon of virtue, could be bribed to forsake Creation for the bliss of eternal victory in the Games of Divinity. The Abyssal may activate this Charm during any social interaction with a

target character, requiring a (Perception + Investigation) roll. Unlike its Solar Mirror, however, the difficulty is equal to the target's Temperance or Essence (whichever is highest). On a success, the target's player reveals her character's price. If the Abyssal meets this price, the target feels a sense of incalculable dread and hears the distant mocking laughter of the Neverborn at the back of her mind as they claim ownership of her.

CORPSE QUESTIONING TECHNIQUE

Cost: 6m, 1wp; **Mins:** Investigation 5, Essence 3;

Type: Simple

Keywords: Obvious

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Soul-Invading Glance, Crime-Unveiling Wickedness

Even after death, some knowledge lingers in the Essence of a corpse. Cadavers imbued with the deathknight's Essence open their mouths and speak in feeble gasps but have no real personality and no further animation. The corpse understands the languages the person knew in life.

Corpses cannot lie or hide the truth, but the (former) person's effective Intelligence drops by one for each week after death, to a minimum of 1. Ancient, unearthed skulls can barely comprehend anything more than the simplest yes-or-no questions. Magic that forestalls decay also preserves the corpse's Intelligence, while the best Sijanese embalming stabilizes a corpse at Intelligence 2.

A headless corpse offers no impediment to this Charm. In that case, the Abyssal simply eats a handful of the cadaver's flesh or gnaws on a bone for a while. The answer to his question appears in his mind.

HEART-RENDING CRUELTY TECHNIQUE

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Investigation 4, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple (Speed 6 in long ticks)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Emotion, Social

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Any Investigation Excellency

While the Abyssal activates this Charm, he promises to destroy what his victim loves. For the rest of the scene, whenever the deathknight follows through on his threats by killing or otherwise destroying the subject of any positive Intimacy the victim holds and the victim can perceive the loss, the victim automatically loses three points of Willpower. (Deathknight victims gain two points of Resonance as well, while other Exalted victims gain two points of Limit.) Revealing incontrovertible evidence that the Abyssal previously destroyed an Intimacy subject that the victim did not know had been destroyed achieves the same effect. The Intimacy itself does not fade, though it might shift context slightly toward remembering the loss if the victim wishes.

Only a perfect defense against mental influence can block the effects of this trauma. If a victim of lesser Essence than the Abyssal falls to zero Willpower points in the same scene as she loses the subject of an Intimacy, her

will instantly break from the anguish of the loss (**Exalted**, p. 174). Mortals broken thus may be given normally unacceptable orders, such as killing themselves. Celestial Exalted are explicitly immune to being broken by this Charm, but only the most heartless sociopaths have nothing to fear from Heart-Rending Cruelty Technique.

LORE

DREAM-SLAYING DEFENSE

Cost: 8m; **Mins:** Lore 3, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Chaos-Repelling Pattern; **Exalted**, p. 216), Obvious

Duration: One hour

Prerequisite Charms: None

The Abyssal may project a bubble of unnatural stasis around herself, shielding everything within from Shaping effects.

ALL DREAMS DIE

Cost: 10m, 1wp; **Mins:** Lore 3, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple

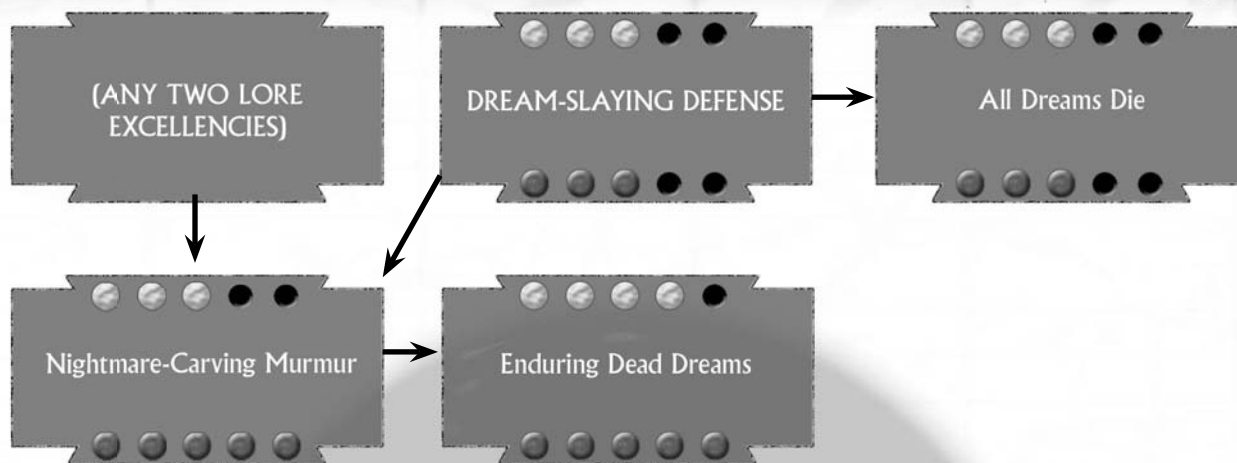
Keywords: Combo-OK, Obvious, Shaping

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Dream-Slaying Defense

This Charm draws upon the cold inevitability of the Underworld as a weapon against Chaos. The Abyssal can target





a single Fair Folk he can perceive. His player rolls (Willpower + [Essence or Whispers]) against the raksha's Dodge MDV. Success means that the raksha cannot use Shaping effects for the rest of the story unless its Essence equals or exceeds that of the Abyssal. Even then, the Fair Folk's player must beat the Abyssal's activation successes with a reflexive (Willpower + Essence) roll for each Shaping action.

At Lore 5, Essence 4, an Abyssal can attack an entire waypoint of the Wyld with this Charm. He must occupy the waypoint. This attack alters the waypoint's geography and environmental conditions for one scene into any terrain that can be made with Nightmare-Carving Murmur (q.v.). The tainted waypoint also negates all Shaping effects taken on it by other characters with an Essence rating less than the Abyssal. Shaping effects from equal or higher Essence beings similarly fail unless their player beats the Abyssal's activation successes with a reflexive (Willpower + Essence) roll for each action. After the scene ends, warped terrain dissolves back into its original state.

ESSENCE-DRAINING TOUCH

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Lore 2, Essence 1; **Type:** Simple (Speed 4)
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Essence-Lending Method; Exalted, p. 217), Obvious, Touch

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: None

The Abyssal devours motes with a touch. This Charm reverses its Solar Mirror, transferring motes from the target to the deathknight. The target must be willing, unconscious or otherwise not resisting—if only from fear.

WILL-FEASTING ONSLAUGHT

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Lore 3, Essence 1; **Type:** Simple
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Will-Bolstering Method; Exalted, p. 217), Obvious, Touch

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Essence-Draining Touch

The Abyssal gorges her heart with stolen resolve. This Charm reverses its Solar Mirror, transferring Willpower points from the target to the deathknight. Like its prerequisite, the target must be willing, or at least not trying to resist.

BREATH-DRAINING PRANA

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Lore 5, Essence 2; **Type:** Simple
Keywords: None

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Will-Feasting Onslaught

This Charm enables a deathknight to feed at a distance without breaking her victim's skin. The deathknight can target creatures up to (Essence x 10) yards away with an unexpected attack using a (Perception + Lore) roll. The victim suffers lethal damage equal to the number of successes, soakable only with Stamina, while the deathknight gains one mote per level of damage inflicted. A victim feels the attack only as a sudden weakness or twinge of pain.

Without magical perception, a victim can recognize the source of this attack through a reflexive (Wits + Awareness) roll at difficulty 5, rolled with each attack. Success means the victim recognizes the Abyssal as the source of his sudden weakness, allowing him to dodge attacks that are no longer unexpected. Otherwise, the victim remains clueless as to what is wounding his soul.

Alternatively, the deathknight can target another creature's Essence pool and directly steal one mote per success on the attack roll. The Charm becomes Obvious, however, as stolen energies glimmer in faint contrails from the victim to the Abyssal's mouth.

VIRTUE-DEVOURING HUNGER

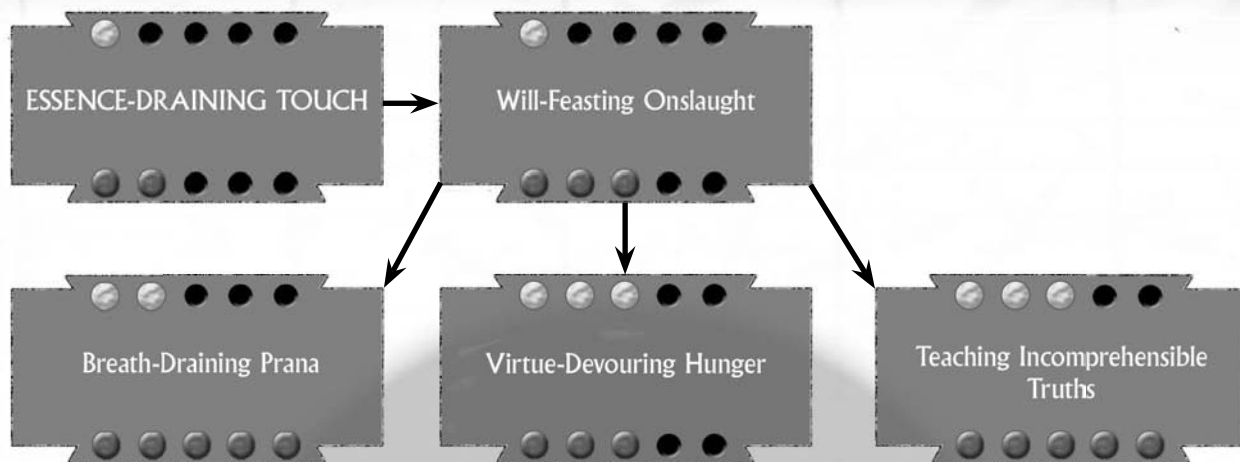
Cost: —; **Mins:** Lore 3, Essence 3; **Type:** Permanent
Keywords: Mirror (Virtue-Donating Grace; follows)

Duration: N/A

Prerequisite Charms: Will-Feasting Onslaught

This Charm expands the utility of its prerequisite, enabling the Abyssal to drain any of a victim's remaining channels from selected Virtues as if they were Willpower points. The deathknight can consume drained channels for one Willpower point each or use them to replenish spent channels of the same Virtue. The character can mix-and-match, draining Willpower and channels with the same attack, though the Abyssal always has the option of attacking another Virtue or Willpower if one pool runs dry before the attack has consumed its maximum capacity.

Exalted



New Solar Charm: Virtue-Donating Grace (Prerequisites: Will-Bolstering Method; **Exalted**, p. 217). The excellence of the Lawgivers helps others find greatness of spirit and strength of will. A Solar can tap her own Virtue channels to restore another's corresponding channels, or do so as a source of Willpower points.

TEACHING INCOMPREHENSIBLE TRUTHS

Cost: 1wp; **Mins:** Lore 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Avatar (1), Touch, Training

Duration: See below

Prerequisite Charms: Will-Feasting Onslaught

The Chosen of the Void generously impart their own dark enlightenment. The Abyssal can open a willing pupil's mind to the chthonic glory of the Neverborn, teaching him one dot of Whispers as a Training effect. This psychic onslaught incidentally strips the student of all his remaining Willpower points. If the student has experience to spend, he can permanently gain one dot of Whispers for three experience points. If not, he has Whispers for as long as the deathknight chooses to continue paying one Willpower per day. Students need not understand what they are about to receive, provided they do not resist when they feel the skittering murmur caress the back of their mind.

ESSENCE ENGORGEMENT TECHNIQUE

Cost: —; **Mins:** Lore 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: Mirror (Immanent Solar Glory; **Exalted**, p. 218), Obvious

Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: Any Lore Excellency

Abyssals bloat themselves with stolen motes to sustain them on extended forays into Creation, feeding on the terror

and death they cause. The secondary pool of Peripheral Essence can be filled using the Abyssal's innate bite attack or by terrorizing and harming a town, army, organization or other social or military unit. Every hour actively spent ravaging the populace—from murders in the night to burning the crops or shaking down peasants for taxes they cannot pay—enables the Abyssal to recover motes equal to the unit's Magnitude.

NIGHTMARE-CARVING MURMUR

Cost: 20m, 1wp; **Mins:** Lore 5, Essence 3;

Type: Simple (Dramatic Action)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Wyld-Shaping Technique; **Exalted**, p. 216), Obvious, Shaping

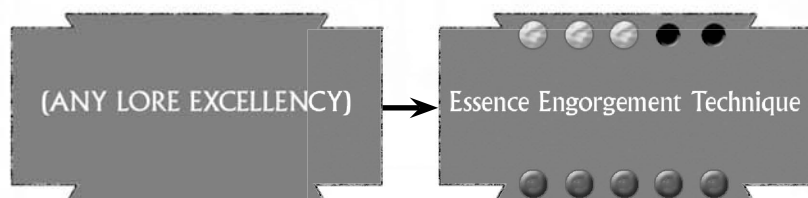
Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Any Two Lore Excellencies, Dream-Slaying Defense

As Lawgivers give form to the chaos of the Wyld, so may Abyssals impose the horrors of their imagination on the Underworld. This Charm is an extended dramatic action using a dice pool of the Abyssal's (Intelligence + Lore). Each roll requires five hours of work, and the character must pay the Charm's cost with each roll. The base difficulty is 3 in the Labyrinth and 10 in the Underworld. Accumulated successes may be spent at any time in increments up to five successes on any of the following effects, shaping an area no farther than a number of miles equal to the Abyssal's Essence from the epicenter of the Exalt:

Demesne: The deathknight drills into the deepest inchoate madness of the Neverborn, allowing their Essence to bleed up from beneath and coagulate into an Abyssal demesne with a rating equal to the successes spent.

Land: The Exalt alters the Underworld's geography as desired, provided that the changes make the area more inherently



desolate, inhospitable, frightening or dangerous. The number of successes required depends on the Resources value of the new land. Ore-rich volcanoes bubbling with the smoldering quicksilver blood of the Neverborn, for example, would cost more successes to create than barren fog-shrouded plains.

Magical Things: The Abyssal applies successes from this Charm directly to the creation rolls for Abyssal manses or destructive artifacts as defined by World-Slaying Arsenal Epiphany (see p. 153) and is explicitly permitted to supplement this process with Craft Charms such as Soul-Forging Fury.

Wealth: The deathknight cracks open fissures revealing long-forgotten grave goods conforming to his desires with a Resources value equal to the successes spent.

Objects created with this Charm crumble into Oblivion upon their destruction and follow the same material state as ghosts if removed from the Underworld. Such items also disintegrate into oily, putrid smoke when touched by the light of Creation's sun.

Any use of this Charm offends the Neverborn, who object to their destroyers creating anything. The Abyssal gains one Resonance point for every dice roll in the extended action. If the character's Resonance total reaches 10, he suffers an immediate Resonance eruption.

ENDURING DEAD DREAMS

Cost: —; **Mins:** Lore 5, Essence 4; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: Mirror (Wyld Cauldron Technology; **Exalted**, p. 217)

Duration: N/A

Prerequisite Charms: Nightmare-Carving Murmur

With greater depravity and force of will, Abyssals may impose permanent changes to the realms of the dead. This Charm improves its prerequisite with additional capabilities:

Wealth: Unearthed grave goods may be given full solidity and immunity to sunlight by feeding slain beings into a fissure before disturbing its treasures. Such sacrifices conform to the Resources equivalent for prayer offerings as defined on p. 132 of **Exalted** and must have a value equal to or greater than the value of the goods the Abyssal wishes to take into Creation.

Artifacts: If the Abyssal creates an artifact with Nightmare-Carving Murmur using materials imported from the shadowlands, it is fully solid and immune to sunlight. Such wonders are more difficult to create and cannot have their construction speeded by more than tenfold, though appropriate Craft Charms may supplement and speed the process as normal.

People: The Exalt may alter a person or social unit in range with Nightmare-Carving Murmur, applying an external penalty equal to the target's Essence rating (for an individual creature of Death) or Dodge MDV (for all other targets). Success allows the Abyssal to change the target's Motivation to anything involving harm and impose a number of mutation points on all affected characters equal to the deathknight's Essence rating. These mutations must increase the target's suffering or its capacity to inflict suffering on others. A target may resist this change outright at a cost of four Willpower points, or two points to limit the possible scope of the change with a single condition approved by

the Storyteller. If the Abyssal tries to shape social units, add the unit's Magnitude to the Essence or Dodge MDV of its leader, and the leader spends Loyalty to resist the changes.

Vision: If the Abyssal has Whispers 1+, he may shape areas of the Labyrinth at difficulty 1 whenever he alters it in fulfillment of the revealed will of the Neverborn shown to him in a Whispers vision.

Shaping the Labyrinth in response to the Whispers is the only use of this Charm that the Neverborn do not count as a grievous sin against Oblivion. The Abyssal gains two Resonance for every dice roll in the extended action, and suffers an immediate Resonance eruption when the act of creation ends, using all the accumulated Resonance.

MEDICINE

PITILESS TRIAGE JUDGMENT

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Medicine 1, Essence 1; **Type:** Reflexive

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Flawless Diagnosis Technique; **Exalted**, p. 220)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: None

Abyssal surgeons can quickly determine whether a particular patient will recover from her ailments or belongs in the flesh vats with the rest of the raw materials.

CANNIBALISTIC RENEWAL INCITEMENT

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Medicine 3, Essence 2; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Combo-OK, Touch

Duration: One day

Prerequisite Charms: Pitiless Triage Judgment

With a touch, an Abyssal imparts some of his own monstrous hunger and consumptive Essence into a patient. For the duration of the Charm, the patient smells all other members of her own species as if they were the finest delicacies and idly imagines biting into them. This faint sensory distortion does not compel her to act on the impulses, but if she gives in to this hunger, she finds that the fresh blood or meat of her own kind sates her on a level that normal food cannot. Every three lethal health levels consumed heals one level of lethal damage or two levels of bashing damage. After the Charm ends, her senses return to normal. **Exalted** are considered humans for the purposes of this Charm and Abyssals may enchant themselves with Cannibalistic Renewal Incitement, though deathknights regain no motes from health levels consumed for healing purposes. Once a character heals a total of (her Stamina + Essence) health levels with all activations of this Charm, she must wait a full day to digest before this limit resets and she can feed again.

PLAGUE-EATING KISS

Cost: 1wp; **Mins:** Medicine 3, Essence 2;

Type: Simple (Speed 6, DV -2)

Keywords: Mirror (Ailment-Rectifying Method; **Exalted**, p. 223), Touch

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Pitiless Triage Judgment



to stock up on plagues to spread to others. Purchasing this Charm also allows the Abyssal to suppress her autonomic immune response to any Sickness effect she carries so that her Essence-infused body does not cleanse it out before she has a chance to use it. Unlike the Sickness effects created by Pestilence-Bearing Touch, these are true infections: The Abyssal can spread them using only their normal vectors.

The Great Contagion infected virtually everyone who encountered it, and it killed virtually everyone who caught it. Few protective measures worked very well. The original disease no longer exists in Creation, or maybe the survivors left present-day folk some slight resistance. The disease that Abyssals can evoke has these traits:

Incubation: (Stamina + Essence) days

Treatment (Mundane/Magical): 7/4

Treated Morbidity: 4

Duration: In the early phase of diverse initial symptoms, victims unsuccessfully treated lose one dot of Stamina per day and one dot from Strength and Dexterity. When they reach Stamina 1, their skin turns green and weeping sores erupt. The Morbidity check takes place now. If the roll against Morbidity fails, victims lose the last dot of Stamina an hour later and die. The body deliquesces at once, leaving nothing but bones within a few days.

Treatment: No reliable, mundane treatment is known, mostly because the Contagion is so hard to recognize in its early stages. Until the green tinge appears, *accurately diagnosed* Contagion has a mundane treatment difficulty of only 4. Most of the time, though, healers who suspect the Great Contagion can only administer their most powerful tonics, treat symptoms, and pray.

For what it's worth, anyone who survives the Great Contagion—even the lesser strain available to death-knights—becomes immune to all forms of the disease forevermore.

PESTILENCE-BEARING TOUCH

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Medicine 3, Essence 3;

Type: Simple

(Speed 5, DV -1)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Shaping, Sickness, Touch

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Plague-Eating Kiss

One disease, the Great Contagion, killed more people than all of Creation's wars put together. The Chosen of the Void can use the lethal power of disease. If the Abyssal can touch a living creature, she can expose that person or animal to any natural disease that she has ever imbibed through Plague-Eating Kiss. Doing so requires an (Intelligence + Medicine) roll at a difficulty one lower than the disease's Virulence. The target's player then rolls (Stamina + Resistance) against the disease's Virulence. The supernaturally induced disease behaves like the natural disease in every way, except it is not contagious.

When a character learns this Charm, she selects one natural disease (see **Exalted**, pp. 351–353) that she can induce. Characters can induce one additional disease at a cost of one experience point each, or two per bonus point spent on this Charm.

At Essence 4, Abyssals can learn to induce supernatural diseases such as Green Rage, White Sun Sickness (see **The Manual of Exalted Power—The Lunars**, pp. 212–213), Drunken Moth Sickness or Broken-Tile Organ Condition (see **Scroll of the Monk**, p. 125). These diseases all come from the first two circles of supernatural disease (defined in **Scroll of the Monk**, p. 154). At Essence 5, Abyssals can learn to induce Third Circle supernatural diseases, including a comparatively mild strain of the Great Contagion—it's actually treatable. Finding most supernatural diseases is left as a challenge to the deathknight. Some Deathlords, however, keep samples of the Great Contagion for their servants.

VENOM-BLEEDING AGONY

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Medicine 3, Essence 2; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Mirror (Body-Purifying Admonitions; **Exalted**, p. 220), Touch

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Pitiless Triage Judgment

With a touch, an Abyssal can force a patient's body to hemorrhage a target Poison effect as a black tarry liquid oozing from all facial orifices. Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm takes effect immediately, but the patient suffers one level of unsoakable aggravated damage as the toxin erupts from her face. Abyssals may treat themselves with this Charm.

CHARNEL CHIRURGEON DEFTNESS

Cost: 2m; **Mins:** Medicine 2, Essence 2; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Combo-OK, Obvious, Touch

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: None

Although it is often quicker to animate a new zombie than bother stitching a damaged thrall back together, some Abyssals take a frugal approach to their hordes. This Charm can repair a number of bashing or lethal health levels up to the Exalt's Medicine rating to any corpse or cadaverous automaton (such as walking dead or necromantic war machines). The Abyssal must have immediate access to sufficient body parts to replace all damaged components, though the magic of the Charm fuses these pieces together without need for stitches or tools. Depending on the Abyssal's intent, a fully mended cadaver may appear as a grotesque patchwork of mismatched organs or look so lively and fresh that it could pass for one of the living.

BONE GRAFT TECHNIQUE

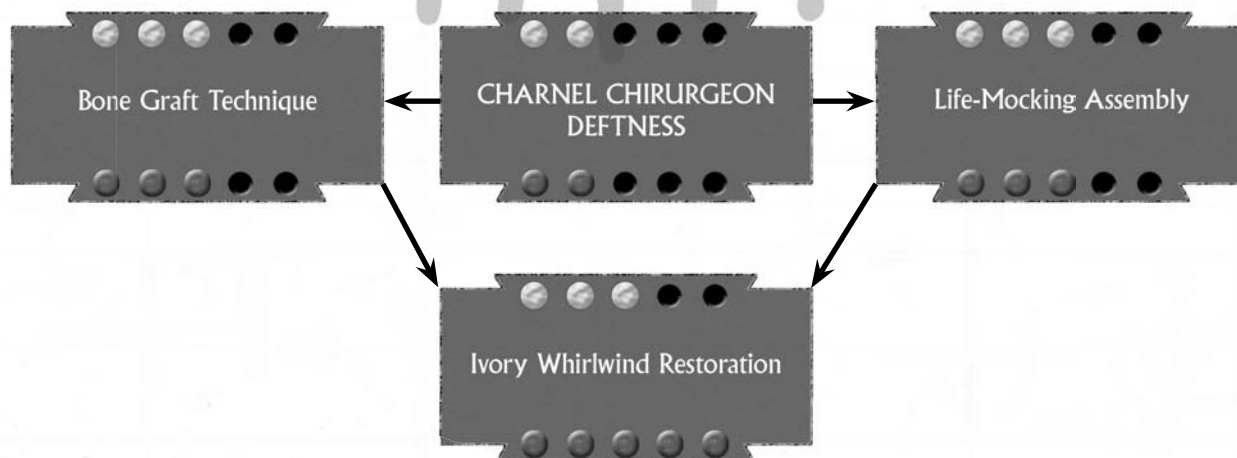
Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Medicine 3, Essence 3;

Type: Simple (Dramatic Action)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Wholeness-Restoring Meditation; **Exalted**, p. 220), Obvious, Spectral, Touch

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Charnel Surgeon Deftness





Although Abyssal surgeons lack the power or inclination to actually heal Crippling injuries, this Charm enables them to surgically implant undead prosthetics that exactly match the functionality of the organs they replace. This operation is an hour-long dramatic action for which the Abyssal's player rolls (Intelligence + Medicine) at difficulty 5. If successful, the surgery "cures" any one Crippling effect by fusing an implant with the adjoining tissue, though the replacement remains non-functional for the first day until the patient's body acclimates to it. Abyssals may use this Charm to repair themselves, but doing so increases the difficulty to 7.

Depending on the surgeon's style and preference, implants created with this Charm may follow any permutation of undead physiology, be they half-rotted zombie organs, elegant clockwork assemblages of articulated bone or even beautifully pallid simulacra barely distinguishable from life. Note that mortals become creatures of Death and creatures of darkness if they ever have more undead tissue than living tissue.

LIFE-MOCKING ASSEMBLY

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Medicine 3, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Combo-OK, Obvious, Spectral, Touch

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Charnel Chirurgeon Deftness

With knowledge of life comes the power to build its parody. The Abyssal touches a corpse and infuses the decaying remnants of its chakras with Essence, animating it as a non-extra zombie (see *Exalted*, p. 314). This monster obeys its creator to the limits

of its meager Intelligence, understanding simple commands phrased in the native language of the person it once was. The creature suffers one unsoakable level of bashing damage per day from accelerated putrefaction, though this decay may be repaired with Charnel Chirurgeon Deftness or arrested with Eternal Embalming Preparation (see pp. 151-152).

IVORY WHIRLWIND RESTORATION

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Medicine 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple

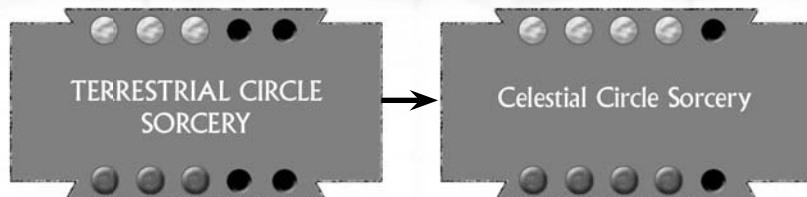
Keywords: Combo-Basic, Obvious, Shaping

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Life-Mocking Assembly, Bone Graft Technique

The Abyssal transcends vulnerability to maiming injuries. As long as the deathknight has sufficient cadaverous material anywhere within (Essence x 100) yards, this Charm violently rips assorted body parts into the air and pulls their shredded pieces into the Abyssal's wounds, assembling a prosthetic "cure" for a Crippling effect like one created with Bone Graft Technique. This implant requires no roll to build, however, and may be used immediately without a day of convalescence.

More gruesomely, this Charm can replace any number of existing implants or undamaged tissue in a single activation, in which case the rejected organs shred themselves into a cloud of gore and bone fragments before reassembling to fit the Abyssal's vision. A total redesign of a character's body adds an amount equal to his Essence rating to the difficulty of any rolls to recognize him as the person he used to look like. This does not aide in impersonation



attempts and cannot alter a person's sex or other core structural aspects of his physiological identity. (For instance, the Abyssal can't make a sharkman look like a true human.) Height, weight and apparent age are fair game, allowing deathknights Exalted as children to overcome their inherent stasis when they feel they have outgrown their current body. The Appearance Attribute may be increased with appropriate alterations, bypassing the need for training time but costing normal experience.

OCCULT

TERRESTRIAL CIRCLE SORCERY

Cost: —; **Mins:** Occult 3, Essence 3; **Type:** Permanent
Keywords: None
Duration: Instant
Prerequisite Charms: None

This Charm permits the Abyssal to take Terrestrial Circle Sorcery actions, as per p. 252 of *Exalted*.

CELESTIAL CIRCLE SORCERY

Cost: —; **Mins:** Occult 4, Essence 4; **Type:** Permanent
Keywords: None
Duration: Instant
Prerequisite Charms: Terrestrial Circle Sorcery

This Charm permits the Abyssal to take Celestial Circle Sorcery actions, as per p. 252 of *Exalted*.

SHADOWLANDS CIRCLE NECROMANCY

Cost: —; **Mins:** Occult 3, Essence 3; **Type:** Permanent
Keywords: None
Duration: Instant
Prerequisite Charms: None

This Charm permits the Abyssal to take Shadowlands Circle Necromancy actions. These actions work exactly the same way as the various sorcery actions: one action for Shadowlands Circle spells, two actions for Labyrinth Circle spells, three actions for Void Circle spells. For complete information about necromancy, and all the better-known spells, see *The Books of Sorcery, Vol. II—The Black Treatise*.

LABYRINTH CIRCLE NECROMANCY

Cost: —; **Mins:** Occult 4, Essence 4; **Type:** Permanent
Keywords: None
Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Shadowlands Circle Necromancy

This Charm permits the Abyssal to take Labyrinth Circle Sorcery actions.

VOID CIRCLE NECROMANCY

Cost: —; **Mins:** Occult 5, Essence 5; **Type:** Permanent
Keywords: None
Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Labyrinth Circle Necromancy

This Charm permits the Abyssal to take Void Circle Necromancy actions

SPIRIT-SENSING MEDITATION

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Occult 2, Essence 2; **Type:** Reflexive (Step 1)
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Spirit-Detecting Glance; Exalted, p. 221)
Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: None

Spirits cannot hide when Abyssals hunt them down.

CORPUS-RENDING BLOW

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Occult 2, Essence 2; **Type:** Supplemental
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Spirit-Cutting Attack; Exalted, p. 221), Obvious
Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Spirit-Sensing Meditation

Spirits who imagine themselves safely immaterial quickly learn how wrong they are when a deathknight activates this Charm.

GOD-SLAYING TORMENT

Cost: 2m; **Mins:** Occult 4, Essence 3;
Type: Reflexive (Step 10)
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Ghost-Eating Technique; Exalted, p. 221), Obvious
Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Corpus-Rending Blow



The Abyssal may cast a slain spirit into Oblivion. Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm does not instantly consume its target. Instead, the slain spirit lingers as a manifested but dematerialized presence for a number of ticks equal to its Essence rating. During this time, it remains inactive, but aware enough to speak a few final words or futilely beg for help as it fades away to nothingness.

SPIRIT-DESOLATING SPHERE

Cost: 10m; **Mins:** Occult 5, Essence 2; **Type:** Simple
Keywords: Combo-OK, Compulsion, Mirror (Spirit-Repelling Diagram; **Exalted**, p. 221), Obvious
Duration: One scene
Prerequisite Charms: Corpus-Rending Blow

Everything visibly darkens in a radius around the Abyssal, creating a zone of entropy that sickens dematerialized spirits who do not flee it.

THROUGH DEAD EYES

Cost: 6m; **Mins:** Occult 5, Essence 2; **Type:** Reflexive (Step 1)
Keywords: Mirror (All-Encompassing Sorcerer's Sight; **Exalted**, p. 222)
Duration: One scene
Prerequisite Charms: Spirit-Sensing Meditation

The deathknight's gaze probes the patterns of Essence that hold existence together, searching for weaknesses to exploit.

DIVINITY-BANISHING CONTEMPT

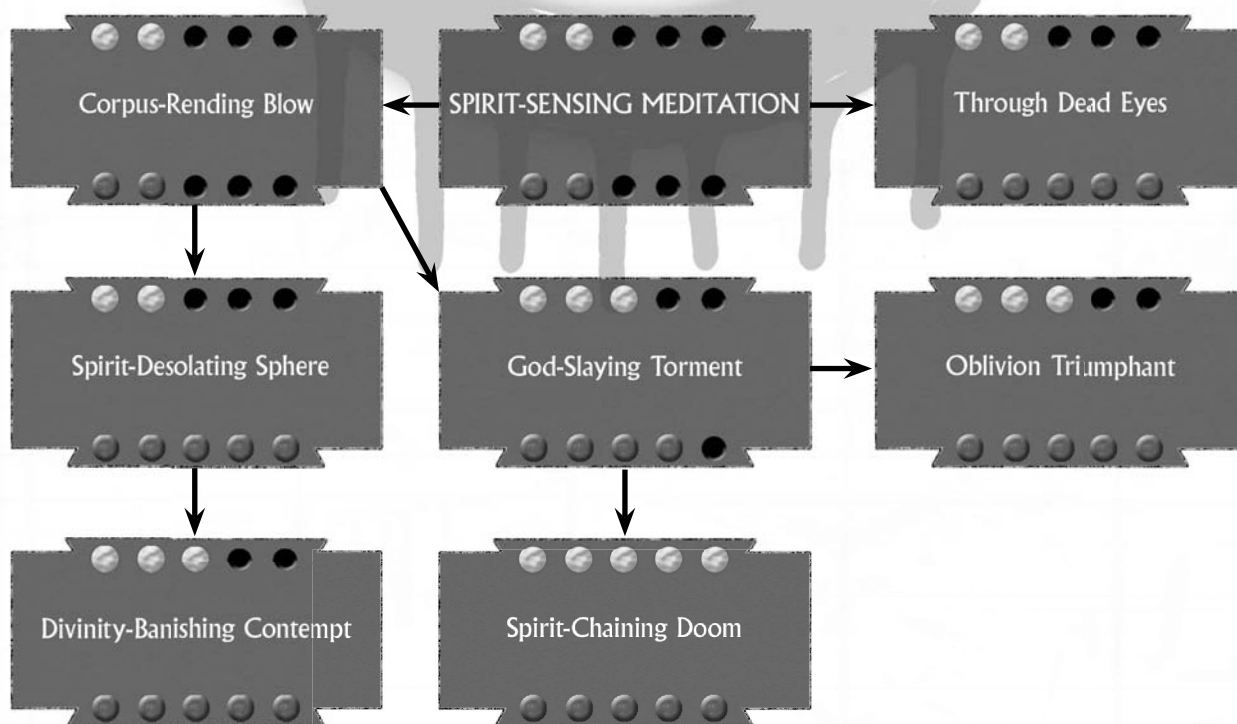
Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Occult 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Asserting the Mandate; follows), Knockback, Obvious, Touch
Duration: Instant
Prerequisite Charms: Spirit-Desolating Sphere

SORCERY AND NECROMANCY

Deathknights can learn sorcery up to the Celestial Circle and necromancy down to the Void Circle. Both magical arts see widespread use among the Abyssal Exalted, largely because they have such powerful and knowledgeable teachers in their Deathlord masters. Precious few libraries in Creation or even Yu-Shan can rival the vaults of the ancient Solar ghosts, who have literally spent ages hoarding as much mystical lore as they could find in search of a way to murder the world.

Deathlords hesitate to teach Void Circle Necromancy, though, which could render Abyssals largely independent of them. In fact, Deathlords prefer to dole out necromantic teaching in small pieces, so they can monitor their underlings' progress and test their continued loyalty.

In case it needs to be said, Eclipse Caste Solars cannot learn Void Circle Necromancy; the same applies to Moonshadows and Solar Circle Sorcery. Spells resemble Charms in many ways, but they are not Charms. Even if (at the Storyteller's option) the two castes could learn the base Charms of Solar Circle or Void Circle initiation, they could not learn the actual spells, any more than they could learn Lunar Knacks.



The Abyssal touches a spirit and blasts it with the Essence of this Charm. Successful contact throws the target back a number of yards equal to (Abyssal's Essence x 10) and knocks it prone. In addition, the Charm forces the spirit into its natural state, terminating the effects of any Materialize or Dematerialize Charms. Abyssals with Essence 5+ may "touch" spirits up to 100 yards away using an unblockable (but dodgeable) attack pool of (Charisma + Occult).

New Solar Charm: Asserting the Mandate (Prerequisites: Spirit-Repelling Diagram—*Exalted*, p. 221). The Solar Mirror is functionally identical but features white and golden light instead of necrotic shadows.

OBLIVION TRIUMPHANT

Cost: —; **Mins:** Occult 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: Obvious

Duration: N/A

Prerequisite Charms: God-Slaying Torment

This Charm enhances its prerequisite, allowing the Abyssal to steal motes with attacks against the Fair Folk and annihilate their bodies and Essence on a fatal attack, as per a spirit. Against humans, this effect only steals motes from those who have them (such as an Exalt), but obliterates their higher souls with a fatal attack, leaving flesh for reanimation and lower souls that automatically rise as hungry ghosts.

If the Abyssal has Essence 5+, whenever a valid target dies within (Essence x 10) yards, the deathknight may activate God-Slaying Torment as an innate power rather than requiring a Charm activation in order to annihilate that being. Doing so does not provide Essence unless the Abyssal actually struck the deathblow.

SPIRIT-CHAINING DOOM

Cost: —; **Mins:** Occult 5, Essence 5; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: Mirror (Demon-Binding Redemption; follows), Obvious, Servitude

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: God-Slaying Torment

The Neverborn may forgo the immediate pleasure of annihilating one of the treacherous gods in order to enslave it to

the cause of Oblivion. This Charm expands the capabilities of God-Slaying Torment, giving the Abyssal the option to bind a slain spirit with an unnatural Servitude effect rather than unmake it. At the moment when the spirit would fade away completely, it instead heals back to its lowest -4 health level with no Willpower points remaining and must obey its killer's orders without the possibility of resistance for a year and a day. Beings enslaved thus must obey normally unacceptable orders, but they need follow only the wording of commands and not their spirit. Storytellers should keep this clause firmly in mind as a legitimate and intended means of reigning in abuses of this Charm.

Actual sorcerous or necromantic binding trumps this Charm and prematurely ends its effects. Enslaving a god thus violates Celestial law, though that's part of the fun for most Abyssals. Deathknights who know Oblivion Triumphant may bind slain Fair Folk as well as spirits, but they cannot bind spirits or raksha that they did not personally kill.

New Solar Charm: Demon-Binding Redemption (Prerequisites: Ghost-Eating Technique; *Exalted*, p. 221). The Solar Mirror to Spirit-Chaining Doom functions identically, except it affects only the demon-spawn of the surrendered Primordials.

DAY

ATHLETICS

RAITON'S NIMBLE PERCH

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Athletics 1, Essence 2; **Type:** Reflexive

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Graceful Crane Stance; *Exalted*, p. 222)

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: None

Deathknights move like the ghosts they lord over, stepping lighter than a bird over all obstacles.

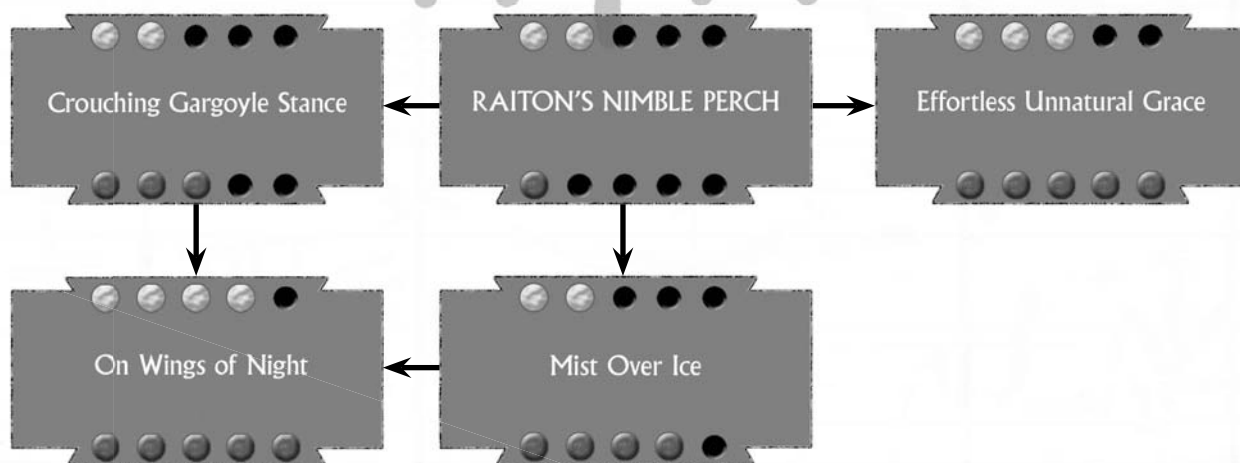
CROUCHING GARGOYLE STANCE

Cost: 4m; **Mins:** Athletics 3, Essence 2; **Type:** Reflexive

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Spider-Foot Style; *Exalted*, p. 225), Obvious

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Raiton's Nimble Perch





SPIDER POUNCE TECHNIQUE

Earth-Forsaking Stance

Stepping Outside Existence

The Abyssal lopes and scuttles along surfaces in violation of natural law. Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm does allow the Exalt to stop while inverted or standing on a vertical surface, but the Charm automatically deactivates whenever he moves normally along a horizontal surface. Abyssals with Essence 4+ may reflexively pay one mote per action to move along a horizontal surface without terminating the Charm.

EFFORTLESS UNNATURAL GRACE

Cost: — (1m); **Mins:** Athletics 5, Essence 3;

Type: Permanent

Keywords: Mirror (Perfect Poise Stance; follows)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Raiton's Nimble Perch

Lesser Abyssals might steady themselves with Essence for a time, only to fall flat on their faces at a key moment in combat when they cannot afford to waste a Charm activation on the effect. With this Charm, however, activating Raiton's Nimble Perch no longer counts as Charm use. More importantly, whenever the Abyssal has Raiton's Nimble Perch active, she can spend one mote to negate all damage from falling and automatically succeeds on any attempt to arrest a fall by grabbing onto something (unless there is absolutely *nothing* available to grab).

New Solar Charm: Perfect Poise Stance (Prerequisites: Graceful Crane Stance; **Exalted**, p. 222). This Charm functions identically to Effortless Unnatural Grace.

MIST OVER ICE

Cost: 4m; **Mins:** Athletics 4, Essence 2; **Type:** Reflexive

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Feather-Foot Style; **Exalted**, p. 225)

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Raiton's Nimble Perch

Lightened with Essence, an Abyssal treads no heavier than fog on any surface.

ON WINGS OF NIGHT

Cost: 4m, 1wp; **Mins:** Athletics 5, Essence 4; **Type:** Reflexive

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Eagle-Wing Style; **Exalted**, p. 225)

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Crouching Gargoyle Stance, Mist Over Ice

The Abyssal's anima billows out ominously like a tempest-blown cape or the wings of a bat, lifting him to prowl the air. Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm does not require an extended hand, but it automatically deactivates

and cannot be activated while the light of Creation's sun shines on the deathknight.

SPIDER POUNCE TECHNIQUE

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Athletics 1, Essence 2; **Type:** Reflexive

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Monkey Leap Technique; **Exalted**, p. 223)

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: None

The Abyssal impossibly bounds across the battlefield, landing in a hunched crouch only to leap away again and land on another astonished enemy.

EARTH-FORSAKING STANCE

Cost: 2m; **Mins:** Athletics 4, Essence 2; **Type:** Reflexive

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Soaring Crane Leap; **Exalted**, p. 223)

Duration: Until next action

Prerequisite Charms: Spider Pounce Technique

The world spurns the Abyssal and his steps return the insult, unnaturally propelling him skyward for a brief moment.

CORPSE-MIGHT SURGE

Cost: 3m per point; **Mins:** Athletics 3, Essence 2;

Type: Simple

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Increasing Strength Exercise; **Exalted**, p. 225), Obvious, Stackable

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: None

Overcharging his body with the unholy energies that animate the walking dead, the Abyssal stands stronger than living flesh should be. Taut tendons and rigid muscles betray the agony of this exercise, a small price to pay for such brutal power.

HEADSTONES FLUNG LIKE PEBBLES

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Athletics 5, Essence 4; **Type:** Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Hill-Hurling Might; follows)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Corpse-Might Surge

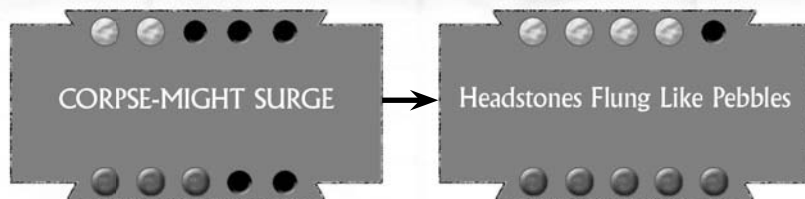
This Charm greatly enhances an Abyssal's ability to hurl large objects to destructive effect (**Exalted**, p. 127):

- Add +5 to the character's (Strength + Athletics) total for the purposes of determining what he can throw as a weapon

- Multiply the attack's base Range by 10

- Increase the attack's Accuracy to +3 instead of -3

If such an attack hits a character who is no larger than the size of the projectile, the target automatically



falls prone beneath the object. She must lift the object off her with a feat of strength as a miscellaneous action or use some other means to free herself before she can rise from prone or move from the spot to which she was pinned. (As a dubious compensation, she receives full cover until she escapes.)

Despite being an Athletics Charm because of its feat-of-strength focus, Headstones Flung Like Pebbles may supplement only Thrown attacks using appropriate improvised projectiles.

New Solar Charm: Hill-Hurling Might (Prerequisites: Increasing Strength Exercise; **Exalted**, p. 225). Identical apart from its prerequisite.

FALLING SCYTHE ATTACK

Cost: 3m, 1wp; **Mins:** Athletics 3, Essence 2;

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Thunderbolt Attack Prana; **Exalted**, p. 223), Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Any Athletics Excellency

The deathknight strikes with a distinctive and artistic flourish, to haunt the survivors' nightmares.

SHADOW RACES THE LIGHT

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Athletics 2, Essence 1; **Type:** Reflexive

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Lightning Speed; **Exalted**, p. 224)

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Any Athletics Excellency

The Exalt surges forward with superhuman speed, trailing ghostly afterimages of her movements that can be glimpsed only peripherally in the moment before they vanish.

STEPPING OUTSIDE EXISTENCE

Cost: 10m, 1wp; **Mins:** Athletics 5, Essence 4; **Type:** Simple (Dramatic Action)

Keywords: Avatar (1), Combo-OK, Mirror (Mountain-Crossing Leap Technique; **Exalted**, p. 223), Obvious, Shaping

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Earth-Forsaking Stance

The Abyssal throws himself into the dark space between and outside the strands of fate, daring a shortcut that physically traverses the normally abstract and intangible nightmares of the Neverborn. Upon activating this Charm, the deathknight leaps and vanishes into a vortex of darkness. For five minutes, he exists only as a remembrance in the Whispers of the Neverborn and risks true annihilation if the Neverborn should cease to dream. Lost in total sensory deprivation, he experiences the journey as a Storyteller-controlled Whispers vision showing him something he would rather not have seen. When the harrowing detour ends, the Abyssal reappears at any desired destination that he has previously observed that is within (Essence x 5) miles of where he started.

This Charm will not teleport the Abyssal into a solid object, but rather spits him out at the closest permitted point to his intended destination. Activating this Charm during the day does nothing but waste Essence.

AWARENESS

SUPERIOR (SENSE) FOCUS

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Awareness 3, Essence 2; **Type:** Reflexive

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Keen [Sense] Technique; **Exalted**, p. 225)

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Any Awareness Excellency

Abyssals do not perceive their surroundings more clearly out of any excellence or effort, but rather because it is their ordained place to know the beauty of the world before they grind it underfoot.

ENTROPIC AWAKENING OF (SENSE)

Cost: 2m; **Mins:** Awareness 5, Essence 2; **Type:** Reflexive

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Unsurpassed [Sense] Discipline; **Exalted**, p. 226)

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Appropriate Superior (Sense) Focus



There is little beauty left for those enlightened to the myriad ways in which the world decays moment by moment. The Abyssal can smell the hint of rot in a freshly cut flower and feel the wrinkles waiting to emerge on a nubile courtesan's skin.

PIERCING GAZE OF THE UNMAKER

Cost: 12m, 1wp; **Mins:** Awareness 5, Essence 5;

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Avatar (1), Combo-OK, Mirror (Eye of the Unconquered Sun; *Exalted*, p. 226), Obvious

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Entropic Awakening of Sight

The Neverborn gaze into Creation even in their sleep, compounding their hatred of all that was stolen from them. While this Charm is active, the Exalt's eyes glow with unholy power. He may view any location within (Essence) miles by looking directly at it, seeing that place as clearly as if he stood there, bypassing intervening objects. Only areas warded from scrying remain impenetrably darkened to his sight.

Anyone upon whom the Abyssal spies using this Charm gains a vague feeling of being watched by something malevolent if her player makes a reflexive (Perception + Occult) roll at difficulty 5. Only those with appropriate forms of Essence-based perception, however, can actually recognize and understand the Charm at work.

VOID STARES BACK

Cost: 3m (2xp); **Mins:** Awareness 3, Essence 2;

Type: Simple

Keywords: Combo-OK, Obvious, Taint

Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: None

The Abyssal's pupils ooze outward to stain iris and white alike with featureless and pitiless darkness. Enemies who stare into this darkness sometimes see their own death reflected within, the death they fear or perhaps the death the Neverborn wish for them (though such visions carry no true prophetic power). More practically, the deathknight can see perfectly in the dark without any penalties or reduction in visibility. He is no better able to see through fog or other visual obstructions.

The Taint drawback to this Charm is that the Abyssal's eyes become painfully sensitive to direct sunlight within Creation, imposing a -1 internal penalty to all non-reflexive actions while so illuminated unless he closes his eyes completely. His eyes also immediately betray his supernatural nature if he cannot somehow hide their stain. The Taint costs one bonus point or two experience points.

OMINOUS PORTENT METHOD

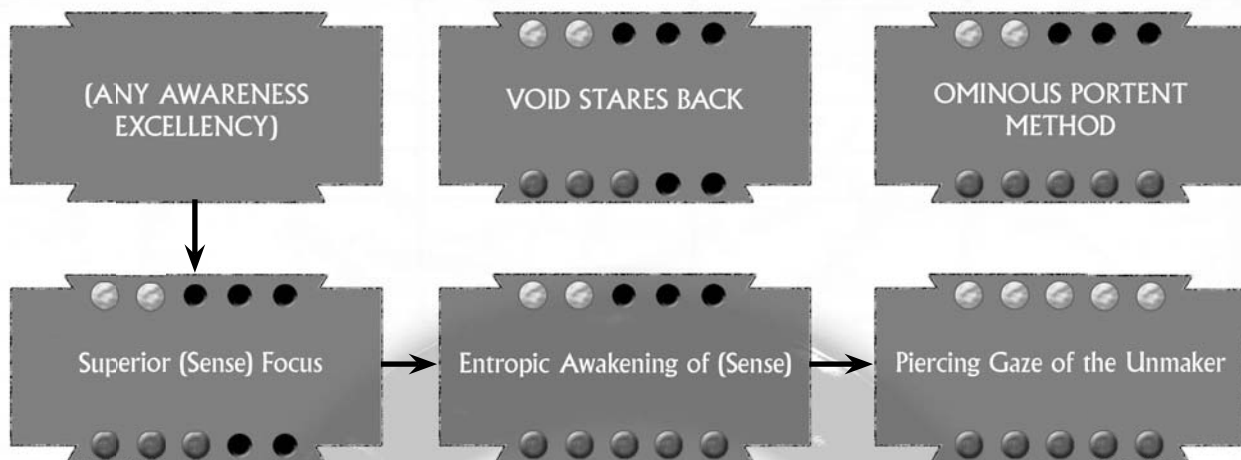
Cost: —; **Mins:** Awareness 5, Essence 2; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: Avatar (2), Mirror (Surprise Anticipation Method; *Exalted*, p. 226)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: None





Having died once, few Abyssals want to make another attempt. Knowledge of this Charm expands an Abyssal's contact with the Whispers of the Neverborn, filling her mind with a gloating hiss whenever she faces immediate mortal peril. This momentary warning identifies the threat and suffices to warn her of an incoming unexpected attack, to avoid sipping from a poisoned goblet or to otherwise circumvent death by taking a single critical action. She must have some remote possibility of detecting the threat on her own or she fails to understand the warning in time for it to help her. Moreover, this Charm does not function while the Abyssal has more points of accumulated Resonance than (10 – Essence rating).

DODGE

FLITTING SHADOW FORM

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Dodge 3, Essence 1;

Type: Reflexive (Step 2)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Shadow Over Water; *Exalted*, p. 227)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: None

The Abyssal shifts slightly and effortlessly, giving the impression that the attack harmlessly passed by her—*through* her?—without any effort on her part.

FLICKERING WISP TECHNIQUE

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Dodge 4, Essence 2;

Type: Reflexive (Step 2)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Seven Shadow Evasion; *Exalted*, p. 227), Obvious, Spectral

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Flitting Shadow Form

The Abyssal unnaturally dissolves out of the path of an attack, seeking respite in the momentary peace of non-existence. He reappears all too quickly, his perfect dodge completed by re-forming him somewhere within

(Essence) yards that he could have reached through conventional evasive action. This Charm can dodge undodgeable attacks, but it cannot dodge unexpected attacks. This Charm carries one of the Four Flaws of Abyssal Invulnerability.

UNCANNY IMPULSE EVASION

Cost: 1 Resonance; **Mins:** Dodge 3, Essence 1;

Type: Reflexive (Step 2)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Reflex Sidestep Technique; *Exalted*, p. 227)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: None

When faced with an unexpected attack, an Abyssal who knows this Charm can let her supernatural instincts to take over. She moves before she knows why she moves, forestalling the immediacy of her ruin with the inevitability of suffering to come. Tapping into these instincts adds a point of Resonance to the deathknight's total but allows her to defend normally with her Dodge DV or (in a Combo) other Dodge-based defenses.

UNTOUCHABLE PHANTOM MIEN

Cost: 5m, 1 wp; **Mins:** Dodge 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Flow Like Blood; *Exalted*, p. 227), Obvious

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Any Dodge Excellency, Flickering Wisp Technique, Uncanny Impulse Evasion

The Abyssal moves and fights as elusively as a ghost, impossibly untouched even beneath clouds of arrows thick enough to blot out the sky.

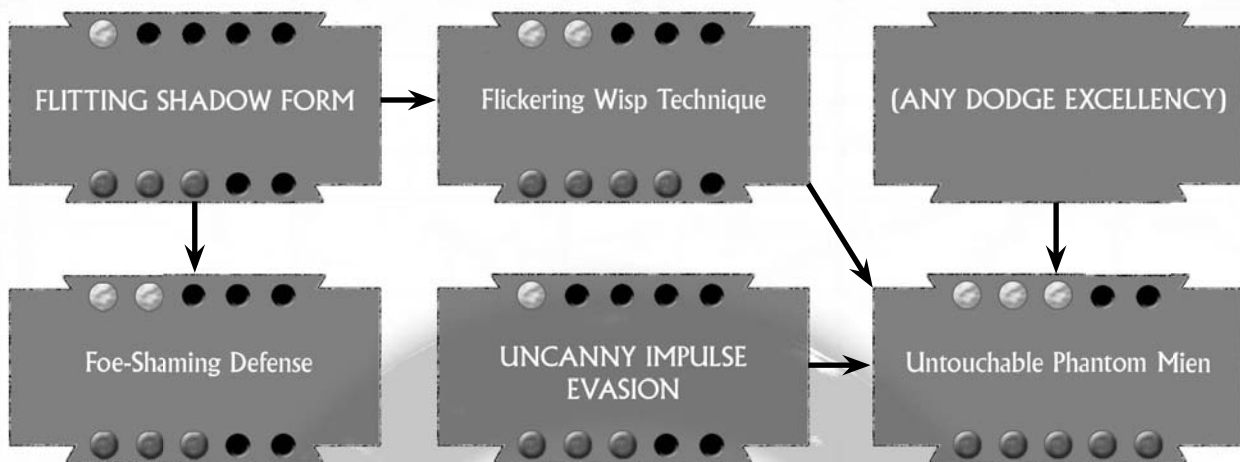
FOE-SHAMING DEFENSE

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Dodge 3, Essence 2; **Type:** Reflexive (Step 9)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Counterattack, Mirror (Leaping Dodge Method; *Exalted*, p. 227), Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Flitting Shadow Form



The Abyssal toys with an enemy by sidestepping her attack at the last moment, forcing her to embarrassingly overreach. This Charm offers a special unblockable “counterattack” to Melee or Martial Arts-based attacks using a pool of the deathknight’s (Dexterity + Dodge + Essence). If this “attack” hits, the opponent takes no damage but is automatically stunned or prone (Abyssal’s choice) without a roll. (See *Exalted*, p. 153 for the effects of being stunned or prone.)

Foe-Shaming Defense is even more effective in response to attacks within a flurry, as a successful counterattack makes all subsequent attacks in the flurry automatically fail to hit the Abyssal.

LARCENY

UNJUST APPROPRIATION METHOD

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Larceny 2, Essence 1; **Type:** Supplemental
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Flawless Pickpocketing Technique; *Exalted*, p. 228)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: None

Given their penchant for murder and atrocity, Abyssals rarely concern themselves with limitations as trivial as rightful ownership.

CHAINS CANNOT HOLD

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Larceny 3, Essence 1; **Type:** Supplemental
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Lock-Opening Touch; *Exalted*, p. 229)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: None

The soul of every deathknight is a chained and beaten thing. Manacles and other locks seem irrelevant by comparison. Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm destroys the mechanism of any non-magical lock being used directly to confine the Abyssal, whether or not he would prefer to keep it intact for his own use later.

REALITY-SUBVERTING GESTURE

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Larceny 3, Essence 2; **Type:** Supplemental

Keywords: Avatar (1), Shaping

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Any Larceny Excellency

The laws of fate make sure that objects do not change locations except by physically traversing the intervening space. It gives comfort to the natives of Creation that the world works this way, and therefore greater joy to Abyssals to flout this law and shatter the illusion of security. This Charm enhances any Larceny-based action to steal objects small enough to carry with one hand or to perform feats of prestidigitation such as card tricks or shell games. The target objects can be taken or moved anywhere within (Larceny + Essence) yards away through subtle teleportation as if they were immediately at hand. Taking an object in active use is beyond the scope of this Charm, though deathknights can steal objects out of locked safes or behind walls if they have some way of accurately perceiving them.

FACE-DRINKING BITE

Cost: 10m, 1wp; **Mins:** Larceny 4, Essence 2;

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Illusion

Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: Any Larceny Excellency

This Charm enhances an Abyssal’s innate bite attack (see p. 95), allowing her to absorb a victim’s visage with the stolen Essence. The Abyssal gains no motes from the attack but must have been able to do so for this Charm to function.

As Face-Drinking Bite activates, the Abyssal’s outward appearance shimmers and warps into an exact likeness of the victim. Current clothing may be copied as part of the ruse, though an actual disguise is more versatile since it may be removed without disappearing. For as long as the mask remains intact, the Abyssal replaces her Appearance rating with the victim’s at the time of the bite. This perfect unnatural Illusion fools all senses, even those with superhuman acuity, though anyone with reason to suspect a ruse may spend four Willpower points to see past it and perceive the Abyssal as she truly is for one day. (This stricter scrutiny costs only one Willpower point if the skeptic

has seen through the specific illusion before). Onlookers with any form of Essence-based perception (such as Measure the Wind or All-Encompassing Sorcerer's Sight) also see through this Charm automatically without effort on their part.

Keep in mind that most people do not immediately leap to the conclusion that a person who acts strangely is actually a doppelganger unless they have experience with such tricks.

FALSE HEART MIEN

Cost: — (1wp); **Mins:** Larceny 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: None

Duration: N/A

Prerequisite Charms: Face-Drinking Bite

This Charm enhances its prerequisite, expanding the scope and effectiveness of the disguise. Each feature added to Face-Drinking Bite raises the Charm's cost by an additional Willpower point.

Essence: The illusion can now fool Essence-based perception, though only with a usual opposed roll for the Charms. Magical senses fooled thus register the Abyssal as having whatever properties and traits the victim had at the time of feeding, such as Essence rating, type of being and so on.

Intuition: While hiding in another's face, the Abyssal knows whenever she is in the presence of an Intimacy that belonged to that victim at the time of feeding. She also knows the emotional context of that Intimacy in order to guide her expected response. She knows Intimacies only upon encountering them, not up front as part of activating the disguise.

Kiss: The Abyssal does not actually need to inflict damage to take a face; it is enough to kiss her prey as a harmless bite.

A deathknight can emulate another Abyssal by touching her lips to his Monstrance of Celestial Portion.

Recall: The Abyssal may pay one experience point to memorize a particular disguise so that it is not lost when she deactivates Face-Drinking Bite. She may thereafter don that illusion as if she had the victim on hand to feed from, but the illusion is dated to the point when it was memorized and does not reflect any changes the victim might have undergone since then.

SOLAR IMPERSONATION STYLE

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Larceny 4, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple

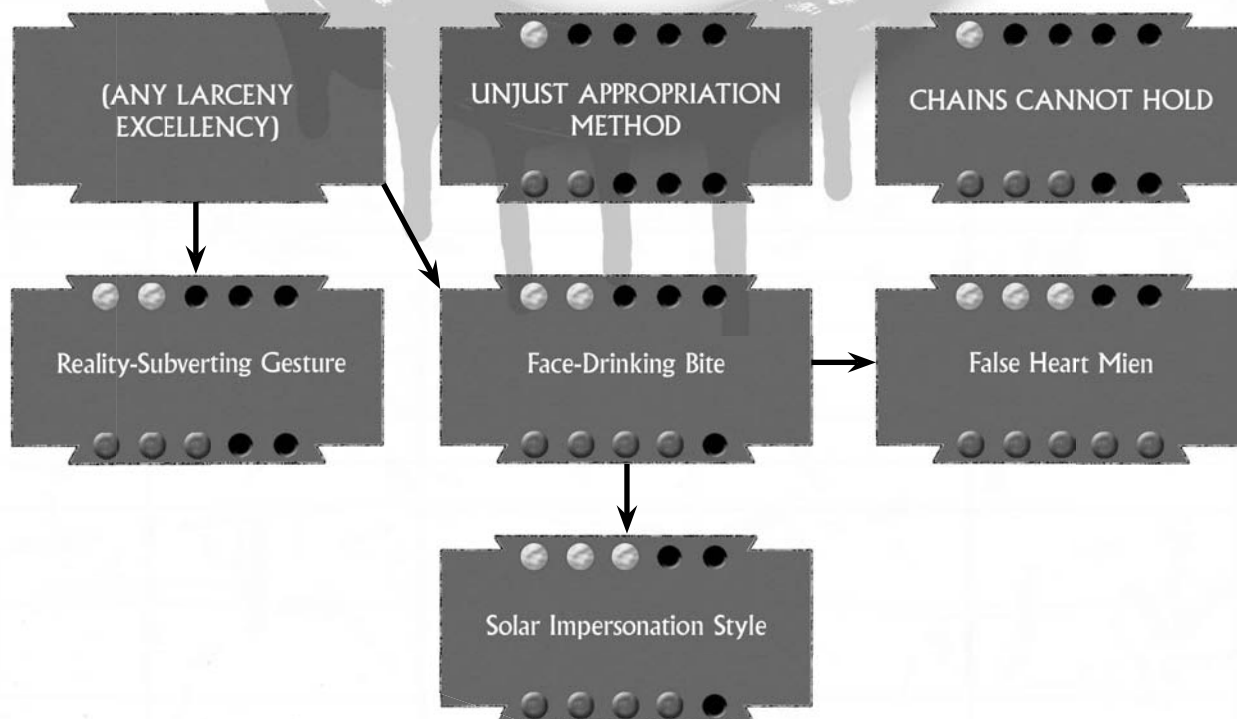
Keywords: Illusion, Mirror (Vile Anathema Shroud; follows)

Duration: One day

Prerequisite Charms: Face-Drinking Bite

This twisted Charm helps Abyssals reinforce Immaculate propaganda and undermine Solar heroism by fooling onlookers into believing deathknights are actually Lawgivers. An Abyssal who used this Charm along with Face-Drinking Bite could pose as a particular Solar. Renegades sometimes use this Charm more nobly or pathetically, draping themselves in the trappings of light as if repeating the lie might somehow make it true.

This Charm makes the character appear to belong to the corollary Caste (Day to Night, etc.), altering her anima banner and caste mark accordingly. It also reverses any blatantly inhuman changes to appearance wrought by the Black Exaltation, so a withered, disease-ravaged or rotted deathknight can again look like a living human. Most importantly, deceived onlookers rationalize all Abyssal Charms the character uses as if they were actually Solar Charms, perceiving them as Mirror Charms where such exist.



Solar Impersonation Style's Illusion automatically fools all mundane senses, but Essence-based perceptions see through the fraud. The Exalt's Lunar mate and anyone with higher Essence rating than the Abyssal can also see through the trickery for a day if their players make a reflexive (Wits + Awareness) roll against a difficulty equal to the Abyssal's Larceny rating. Otherwise, the illusion is absolute and continues to alter perception even if the observer conclusively knows the truth.

New Solar Charm: Vile Anathema Shroud (Prerequisites: Flawlessly Impenetrable Disguise; **Exalted**, p. 227). The Solar Mirror to this Charm has only become possible in the Time of Tumult. It helps Lawgivers infiltrate the courts of the Deathlords—and offers ruthless Exalted a scapegoat visage for morally questionable actions.

STEALTH

SHADOW CLOAK TECHNIQUE

Cost: —; **Mins:** Stealth 3, Essence 1; **Type:** Permanent
Keywords: Mirror (Easily Overlooked Presence Method; **Exalted**, p. 230)
Duration: Permanent
Prerequisite Charms: None

It is not merely the judgment of the Unconquered Sun that makes Abyssals creatures of darkness. Shadows are their element, hiding them from their prey until it's too late. Purchasing this Charm gives Abyssals an artificial +3 specialty "In Darkness" for Stealth, though this bonus is not cumulative with normal specialties. Furthermore, whenever this artificial specialty applies to an action, Shadow Cloak Technique also doubles all bonus dice and/or successes received from stunts or Stealth Excellencies, although Excellency use remains capped by the usual limits for bonuses added by Charms.

UNSEEN WISP METHOD

Cost: 4m; **Mins:** Stealth 5, Essence 2; **Type:** Simple
Keywords: Avatar (1), Combo-Basic, Spectral
Duration: One hour
Prerequisite Charms: Shadow Cloak Technique

The Abyssal blurs and fades into the darkness between the strands of the Tapestry, outside fate and completely invisible except to those who share her insight into the Neverborn's madness (i.e., those with a Whispers rating). This invisibility imposes a -2 external penalty to any attempt to notice or attack her. Ranged attacks against her become impossible (she is not a valid target) without the aid of magic or a stunt. The bonus adds two successes to contested Stealth rolls to avoid notice instead of adding to the onlooker's difficulty (such as when reestablishing surprise).

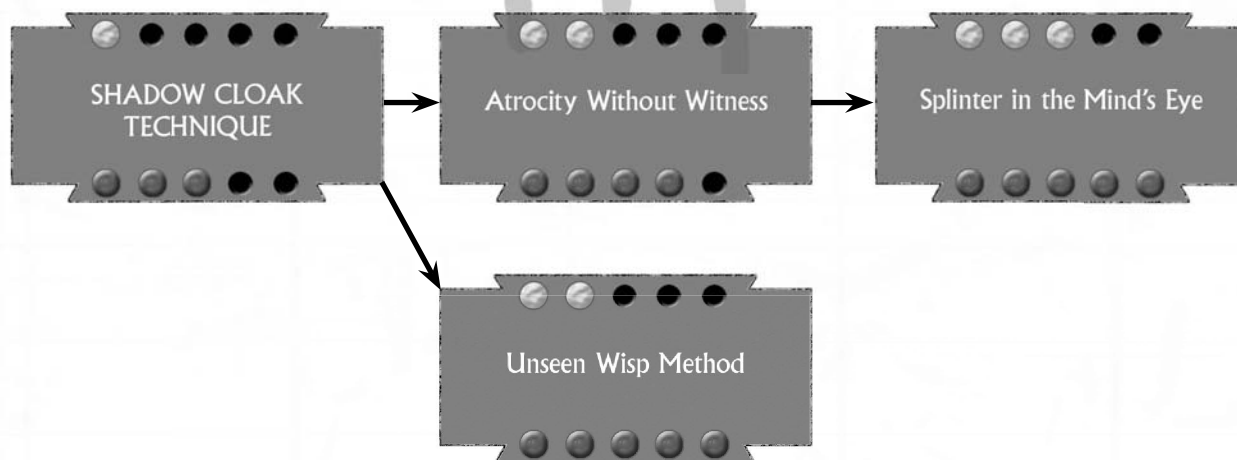
As an additional benefit, the Abyssal is outside fate for purposes of Sidereal astrology. While the Charm lasts, the deathknight cannot be found on the Loom of Fate, astrological blessings and curses do not affect her, and she sees through the false identities created through resplendent destinies.

It is still possible for the Abyssal to be detected, making effective Stealth rolls as important as ever. The fact that the Abyssal may use that Stealth even in the absence of cover or concealment, however, provides a significant tactical opportunity for repeatedly setting up unexpected attacks.

ATROCITY WITHOUT WITNESS

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Stealth 4, Essence 2; **Type:** Simple
Keywords: Combo-OK, Compulsion, Illusion, Mirror (Mental Invisibility Technique; **Exalted**, p. 230)
Duration: One scene
Prerequisite Charms: Shadow Cloak Technique

An Abyssal veiled by this Charm is a walking nightmare. He should not exist, so he does not exist. No screams or pleas for help from nameless strangers can convince bystanders otherwise. Upon activating this Charm, the Exalt's player rolls (Manipulation + Stealth), adding successes equal to his Essence rating. Observers with a Dodge MDV less than the number of rolled successes feel an unnatural compulsion to ignore the Abyssal and any combat in which he participates. Resisting this compulsion for the rest of the scene costs two Willpower, but if a witness does so while the



Abyssal can perceive her, he immediately knows that she has chosen to involve herself. (The Willpower cost drops to one point if someone else calls a witness's attention to the Abyssal.) The compulsion also immediately ends without alerting the deathknight if he directly interacts with a bystander in any way or if the events of a battle physically affect that witness.

Bystanders compelled by this Charm to ignore events bury the real memories deep in their psyche and do not attempt to correct their recollection without external prompting and a personally compelling reason. Even then, they must spend four Willpower points to confront the sickening truth that they could have done something and chose not to.

SPLINTER IN THE MIND'S EYE

Cost: 10m, 1wp; **Mins:** Stealth 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Vanishing from Mind's Eye Method; **Exalted**, p. 230)

Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: Atrocity Without Witness

Abyssals are nameless world-slaying weapons who forsake any right to be remembered, but such blasphemous anonymity has its perks. Note that this Charm cannot obscure memories of the character before his Exaltation, as that was effectively another person.

MOONSHADOW

BUREAUCRACY

CALCULATED AVARICE UNDERSTANDING

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Bureaucracy 1, Essence 1;

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Frugal Merchant Method; **Exalted**, p. 230)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: None

Obedience to the deposed and slain creators of the universe provides a unique perspective on the true value of the world's treasures.

ELOQUENT EXAMPLE INSPIRATION

Cost: 8m; **Mins:** Bureaucracy 3, Essence 2;

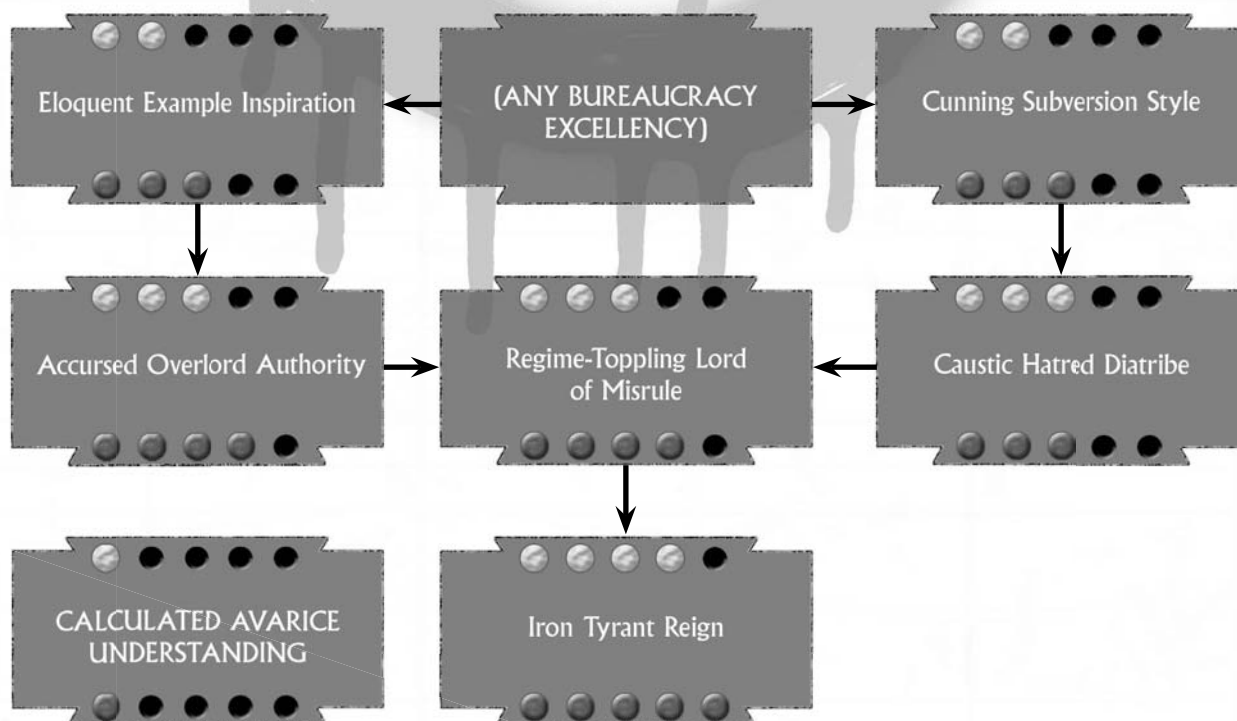
Type: Simple (Dramatic Action)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Emotion, Mirror (Speed the Wheels; **Exalted**, p. 231), Obvious

Duration: Varies

Prerequisite Charms: Any Bureaucracy Excellency

Nothing stimulates productivity like pervasive mortal terror. To use this Charm, the Abyssal executes a subordinate member of a Magnitude 3+ organization she leads. Her player rolls (Manipulation + Bureaucracy + Essence) at a difficulty equal to the organization's Magnitude. Killing a high-ranking or popular subordinate or performing the execution in a particularly brutal or innovative manner can provide stunt dice.





Success increases the speed of all projects the organization undertakes by a factor equal to the Abyssal's Bureaucracy rating for a number of days equal to the threshold successes rolled (minimum one day). It also counts as a scene of building an Intimacy of fear toward the deathknight for all members. Failure decreases the Magnitude of the organization by one from demoralized desertions.

Repeated use of this Charm weakens the emotional impact of the execution, imposing a cumulative -1 internal penalty to subsequent activations targeting the same organization. Each month that goes by without use of this Charm removes one die of this penalty.

ACCURSED OVERLORD AUTHORITY

Cost: —; **Mins:** Bureaucracy 4, Essence 3; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: Obvious

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Eloquent Example Inspiration

As the heralds of Oblivion and the chosen weapons of the Neverborn, Abyssal Exalted may command lesser horrors and expect obedience. Accursed Overlord Authority enables the Exalt to make social attacks upon unintelligent creatures of Death such as walking dead and hungry ghosts. The creatures respond as if they had Intelligence 1 and shared a common language with the Abyssal. This capacity to follow directives of greater complexity does not actually increase their Intelligence outside of the exact wording of ordered behavior or give them greater facility to understand language in other contexts. Even without

commands, such monsters will not attack the deathknight unless another magical being directly commands them to do so.

CUNNING SUBVERSION STYLE

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Bureaucracy 3, Essence 2;

Type: Simple (Dramatic Action)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Indolent Official Charm; Exalted, p. 232)

Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: Any Bureaucracy Excellency

A well-chosen word can cripple an organization through confusion, infighting and greed. This Charm targets any organization containing a member with whom the Abyssal has spent at least one scene interacting in the past month, provided the unit's Magnitude does not exceed the Abyssal's (Bureaucracy x 2).

CAUSTIC HATRED DIATRIBE

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Bureaucracy 3, Essence 3;

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Foul Air of Argument Technique; Exalted, p. 232)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Cunning Subversion Style

The Abyssal's words eat away at organizations like acid, permanently damaging their functionality. Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm uses Manipulation in place of Charisma or Intelligence for all rolls and limits. It also has lower trait minimums and activation costs: Social destruction comes easily to Abyssals.

REGIME-TOPPLING LORD OF MISRULE

Cost: 8m, 1wp; **Mins:** Bureaucracy 4, Essence 3;

Type: Simple (Dramatic Action)

Keywords: Combo-OK

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Accursed Overlord Authority, Caustic Hatred Diatribe

Empires fall when the Abyssal wills it so, and they die by suicide. Through a week of interaction with selected members of an organization, the Abyssal curses that social group to sloth, corruption and ineptitude. The Abyssal's player rolls (Wits + Bureaucracy) at a difficulty equal to its leader's Dodge MDV plus half of the group's Magnitude.

If the roll succeeds, the time the organization takes to complete any project increases every week thereafter. It doubles on the first week, triples on the second, and so on. At the same time, every project of the organization whose success could be represented through a dice roll suffers an internal penalty that increases by one per week (-1, -2, -3, etc.) The time multiplier and internal penalty increase until they match the Bureaucracy rating the Abyssal had when she laid the curse. At that point, the time required to complete even the simplest task—one that people in the organization would normally finish in minutes—increases to a number of hours equal to the Abyssal's Bureaucracy rating. A military unit cursed by this Charm loses Drill instead of taking an internal penalty, to a minimum Drill of 0.

The level of corruption instilled by this Charm is brazenly obvious to everyone who interacts with the afflicted organization. How individuals and other organizations respond to this vice depends on their personality or policy as normal, though a backlash of some kind is almost inevitable.

The organization's leader can force the organization to work faster on one specific project by spending Loyalty: one point to counter one increment of time delay and internal penalty. Only after spending a number of Loyalty points equal to the Abyssal's (Wits + Bureaucracy + Essence) and the organization's Magnitude can the leader restore the organization to its previous efficiency... whatever that was. Fortunately, effects of Regime-Toppling Lord of Misrule do not stack.

IRON TYRANT REIGN

Cost: —; **Mins:** Bureaucracy 5, Essence 4; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: Compulsion, Emotion, Obvious

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Regime-Toppling Lord of Misrule

Fear of darkness empowers it. All characters with an Intimacy of fear toward the Abyssal cannot knowingly take any actions that would harm the deathknight or lessen their fear of him unless they pay one Willpower point to overcome this Charm's unnatural mental influence for a scene. This Compulsion also forces characters to resist social attacks with their best mental defenses if those attacks would make them take prohibited actions. Even if wretches who live in fear of the Abyssal dare to face their terror, prohibited actions still suffer an internal penalty equal to the deathknight's Essence rating.

LINGUISTICS

BLOOD CALLIGRAPHY TECHNIQUE

Cost: 4m; **Mins:** Linguistics 1, Essence 1; **Type:** Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Whirling Brush Method; *Exalted*, p. 232)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: None

The Abyssal writes with superhuman speed and exquisitely elegant penmanship, using his finger like a stylus to unnaturally scribe the words in sanguine ichor. Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm provides a writing implement and unlimited ink in addition to superior writing ability, but no one who sees the text can miss the fact that it appears to be written in blood.

SCATHING CYNIC ATTITUDE

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Linguistics 1, Essence 1; **Type:** Reflexive (Step 2)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Sagacious Reading of Intent; *Exalted*, p. 233), Social

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: None

Constantly surrounded by the overwrought melodramas of the restless dead and jaded by the lies within lies of their Deathlord masters, Abyssals become exceedingly difficult to trick.

MYSTIQUE-SPOILING GUESS

Cost: 6m, 1wp; **Mins:** Linguistics 5, Essence 2;

Type: Reflexive (Step 2)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Discerning Savant's Eye; *Exalted*, p. 232)

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Scathing Cynic Attitude

The Abyssal contemptuously and effortlessly sees past the mysteries of text and speech, ruining the careful and deliberate art of their presentation or obfuscation.

INFINITE BLASPHEMY GLOSSOLALIA

Cost: 3m (8xp); **Mins:** Linguistics 2, Essence 1;

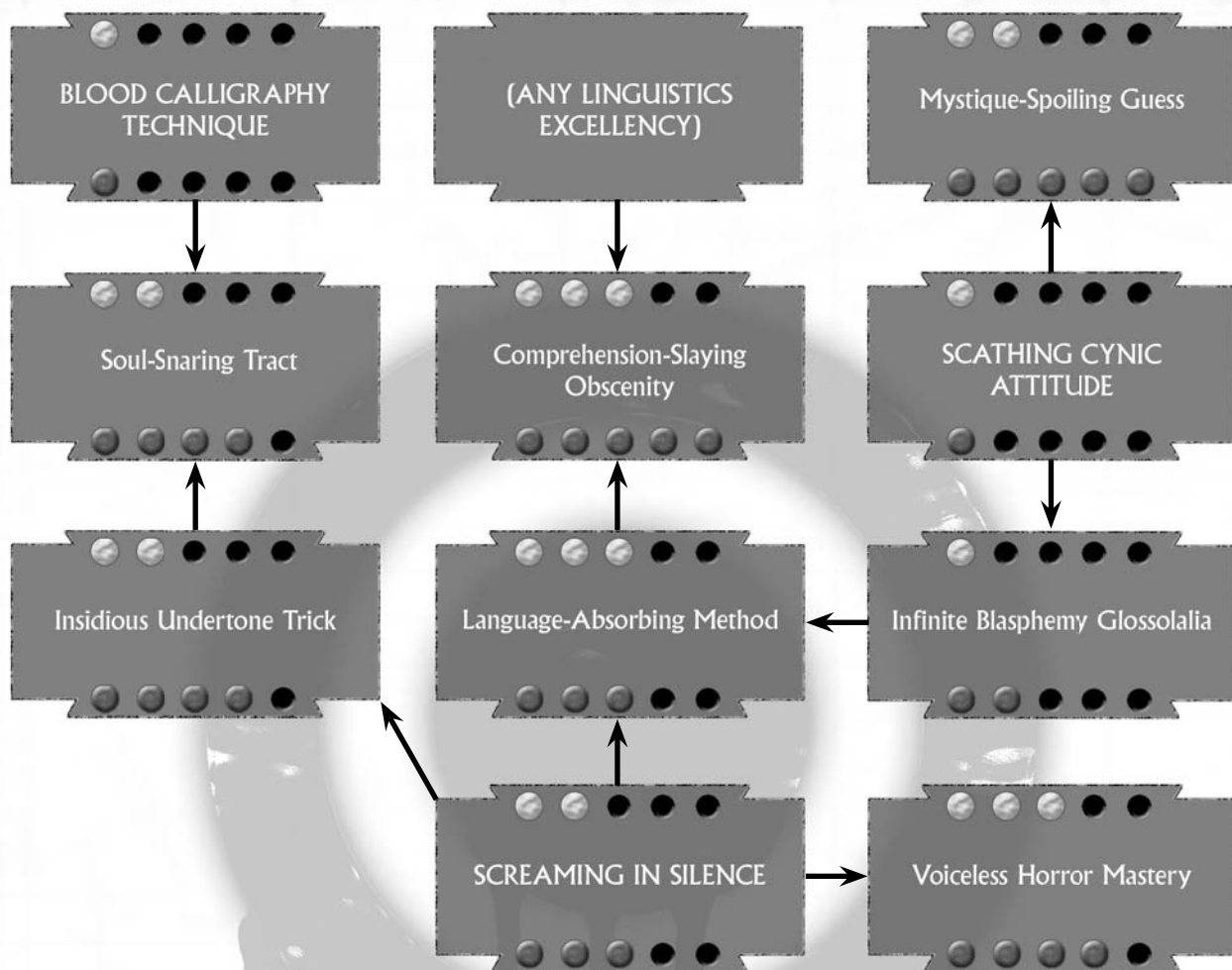
Type: Simple

Keywords: Avatar (1), Combo-OK, Mirror (Poetic Expression Style; *Exalted*, p. 233), Taint

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Scathing Cynic Attitude

The deathknight may borrow the hideous fluency of the Neverborn, facilitating communication with other creatures of darkness. While this Charm is active, the Abyssal mentally hears a rasping and eerie "overdubbing" in her native language whenever a creature of darkness speaks to her. This Charm provides no translation when the speaker does not intend to address the deathknight. Nor can it translate any positive emotional concepts such as professions of love or respect, since the Neverborn no longer understand such ideas in any meaningful capacity. Hollow or ironic honorifics do translate, however. The slain Primordials understand pettiness and spite with a vocabulary beyond imagination.



In addition to translation, Infinite Blasphemy Glossolalia also gives Abyssals the ability to speak in a guttural rasping hiss that is understood by any creature of darkness who hears it, provided the Abyssal does not try to convey a positive emotional concept. Everyone else hears the language as disturbing gibberish. (Charms that translate unknown languages can do so normally.)

The Taint drawback to this Charm renders the Abyssal incapable of speaking any other language without spending one Willpower per scene, and he can never make any positive emotional statement. The Taint costs four bonus points or eight experience points.

SCREAMING IN SILENCE

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Linguistics 3, Essence 2; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Combo-OK, Stackable

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: None

The Abyssal no longer needs to waste her breath on words and may hold telepathic conversations without worrying about eavesdroppers. Upon activating this Charm, the deathknight chooses a target she can perceive within (Linguistics x 100) yards. That target instantly understands who proposes telepathic contact.

If the target resists this intrusion, the Abyssal's player can roll (Manipulation + Linguistics + Essence) against the target's Dodge MDV. Success forces the target to either consent or spend three Willpower points to deny the unnatural mental influence for the rest of the scene.

Once the Abyssal establishes contact, she and the target may telepathically speak to one another for the rest of the scene as long as the target remains within range. The two actually “speak” their thoughts using any languages they know and wish to use, so this Charm cannot overcome language barriers. This Charm may be activated multiple times to create links with different targets, but doing so does not create a network for the targets to communicate with each other.

Any use of this Charm on an Abyssal's Monstrance of Celestial Portion results in immediate telepathic contact with the Abyssal. The deathknight cannot resist.

INSIDIOUS UNDERTONE TRICK

Cost: 6m; **Mins:** Linguistics 4, Essence 2; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Letter-Within-a-Letter Technique; **Exalted**, p. 232)

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Screaming in Silence

A deathknight with this Charm can hide one statement inside another so subtly that bystanders don't realize what was actually said... just like the Whispers of the Neverborn permeate the Underworld, unheard. Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm modifies speech rather than writing, so the Abyssal may make any single Manipulation-based social attack using any Ability as part of activating the Charm. Doing so adds the Social keyword and changes the Charm's type to Simple (Speed 6 in long ticks), though.

SOUL-SNARING TRACT

Cost: 6m, 1wp; **Mins:** Linguistics 4, Essence 2;

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK, Compulsion, Illusion, Mirror (Twisted Words Technique; **Exalted**, p. 234)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Insidious Undertone Trick, Blood Calligraphy Technique

Those who dare read an Abyssal's words risk falling under the text's unnatural sway. These accursed documents circulate Creation in increasing numbers as the Deathlords set the stage for their war on the living, sometimes corrupting entire communities to the cause of Oblivion.

VOICELESS HORROR MASTERY

Cost: —; **Mins:** Linguistics 4, Essence 3; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: None

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Screaming in Silence

This Charm enhances its prerequisite such that the Abyssal can communicate with any perceived creature of Death within (Linguistics) miles. If she has used Screaming in Silence on a particular creature of Death before, she does not even need to perceive that target to initiate contact, though her player must roll as described for that Charm. Contact fails if that target is outside range or the roll fails. The Abyssal may still use Screaming in Silence normally to contact beings who are not creatures of Death.

LANGUAGE-ABSORBING METHOD

Cost: 10m; **Mins:** Linguistics 3, Essence 3;

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Mirror (Excellent Emissary's Tongue; **Exalted**, p. 233), Stackable, Training

Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: Infinite Blasphemy Glossolalia, Screaming in Silence

This Charm enhances an Abyssal's innate bite attack (see p. 95), allowing him to steal a victim's fluency in a language. If the Exalt gains any motes from the attack, he also knows what languages the victim speaks and may choose one of them. The victim forgets how to understand, read, write or speak the chosen language until she spends three Willpower points to heal the mental damage, though doing so does not reduce her actual Linguistics rating.

Meanwhile, the Abyssal gains total fluency in the chosen language for as long as he commits motes to this Charm, including a specialty in the victim's dialect. This effect does not increase his actual Linguistics rating. If the victim cannot read, the Abyssal does not gain written fluency in the language.

This Charm may be separately activated any number of times to take multiple languages, provided the Abyssal commits Essence for each tongue. An Abyssal with experience to spend can also permanently digest a stolen language as a diceless miscellaneous action, terminating the Charm to instantly raise the Abyssal's Linguistics rating and/or purchase the appropriate dialect specialty as a Training effect. Doing so returns the victim's language fluency.

COMPREHENSION-SLAYING OBSCENITY

Cost: 8m; **Mins:** Linguistics 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Avatar (3), Illusion, Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Any Linguistics Excellency, Language-Absorbing Method

The Abyssal speaks one word that is not merely incomprehensible, but aggressively antithetical to understanding. Roll the Exalt's (Manipulation + Linguistics + Essence). Every non-deaf being within a radius of (Linguistics x 100) yards who has a Dodge MDV less than the number of successes rolled falls victim to the Charm's unnatural mental influence. Those afflicted find themselves unable to parse meaning from any form of communication, whether written, spoken, body language or something more exotic. Social interactions and coordinated tactics become impossible. Affected units cannot take on new orders, though they can still follow existing orders, respond to stimuli or attack units with which they are engaged. Ultimately, the Storyteller remains final arbiter of what is and isn't possible while victims are denied comprehension, though the effects are generally quite brutal and far-reaching.

Note that the Abyssal is not automatically immune to the unholy word. His player compares the successes to the character's own Dodge MDV to see if he is affected. Overcoming the vicious Illusion of this Charm costs three Willpower points. The cost may be paid in installments, but the confusion lasts until the character pays the final point. Once a unit leader pays this cost—which usually happens within a scene—the rest of his unit may be assumed to have done so and the unit functions normally, though this weakens individual unit members normally if it becomes necessary to deal with them as individuals.

RIDE

SOUL REINS

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Ride 1, Essence 1; **Type:** Simple

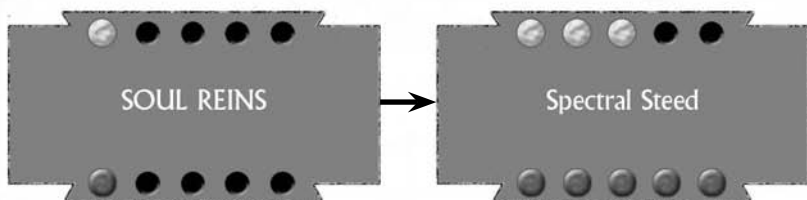
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Master Horseman's Techniques; **Exalted**, p. 234), Obvious, Touch

Duration: One day

Prerequisite Charms: None

The deathknight physically and mentally tames a natural or undead animal large enough to bear her, supernaturally

Exalted



breaking its will to better suit her needs. If the Exalt is already riding the animal when he activates this Charm, it requires no activation roll. If, however, the Abyssal wishes to leap astride an animal that does not wish to be ridden and the Abyssal is within a number of yards of the target equal to her Ride score, her player must roll a special physical “attack” first. This “attack” uses (Dexterity + Ride) at a difficulty equal to the animal’s natural Control Rating (see **Exalted**, p. 154). A successful hit inflicts no damage but grants dominion over the new mount.

A beast enchanted by Soul Reins becomes a creature of darkness and ceases to need Virtues as per the walking dead. It is Control 1 when ridden by its master and moves as an extension of her will, preventing her from falling off unintentionally. Within the realms of the dead, the steed always knows its master’s location relative to its own (unless the master is in an area warded from scrying) and must make its way to her side at best possible speed whenever the master wishes it to do so. Each use of this Charm on a natural animal permanently increases its Control rating by one (maximum 6). This effect does not affect the Charm’s difficulty. Each month of care and gentle retraining reduces the rating by one until the animal’s behavior returns to normal.

SPECTRAL STEED

Cost: 10m, 1wp; **Mins:** Ride 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Phantom Steed; **Exalted**, p. 236), Obvious
Duration: One day
Prerequisite Charms: Soul Reins

The Abyssal raises the corpse of a horse as a fearsome undead steed or shapes Essence into a pitch-black, red-eyed

war horse with fangs if no suitable cadaver is available. Unlike its Solar Mirror, horses created by this Charm are fearless as per the walking dead. They are creatures of darkness. On the other hand, they are not loyal beyond the degree to which their rider can control them.

LAST RIDE GLORY

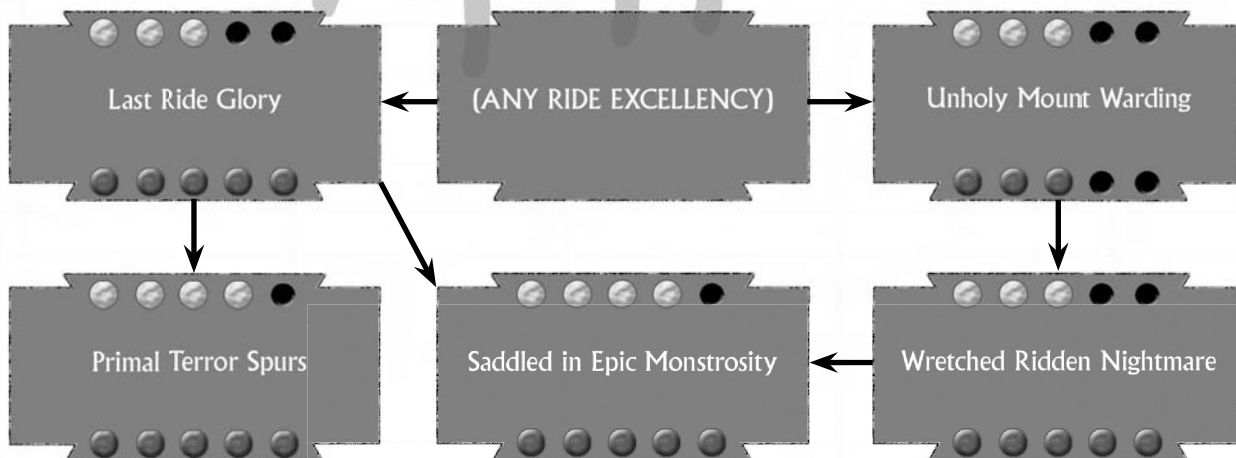
Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Ride 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Flashing Thunderbolt Steed; **Exalted**, p. 236), Touch
Duration: Mount’s Stamina in days
Prerequisite Charms: Any Ride Excellency

The deathknight unnaturally strengthens and fortifies his mount with the animating energies of the walking dead. Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm has a duration equal to the mount’s Stamina in days, but any natural animal enhanced with Last Ride Glory dies when the Charm ends.

PRIMAL TERROR SPURS

Cost: —; **Mins:** Ride 5, Essence 4; **Type:** Permanent
Keywords: Mirror (Wind-Racing Essence Infusion; **Exalted**, p. 236), Obvious
Duration: Permanent
Prerequisite Charms: Last Ride Glory

The Abyssal’s steed frenziedly races across the Underworld as though the Neverborn themselves pursued it. Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm applies benefits to Last Ride Glory only within the realms of the dead, but the formula for increased travel rate is (the creature’s Stamina + the Exalt’s Essence) x 20.



UNHOLY MOUNT warding

Cost: —; **Mins:** Ride 3, Essence 3; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: Mirror (Worthy Mount Technique; Exalted, p. 234)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Any Ride Excellency

Although they are not disposed to love their steeds, most Abyssals protect their investment of Essence.

WRETCHED RIDDEN NIGHTMARE

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Ride 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Reflexive

Keywords: Avatar (1), Combo-OK, Obvious, Shaping, Touch

Duration: One day

Prerequisite Charms: Unholy Mount Warding

The Abyssal re-envision's a natural or undead animal mount he rides through the marred lens of Neverborn madness, temporarily warping the animal into a monster. Wretched Ridden Nightmare grants one blight, one affliction and two poxes selected by the Abyssal when he activates the Charm, as well making the steed a creature of darkness. All of these mutations must directly improve the animal's utility as a mount or increase its physical combat power. The Storyteller may veto any mutations that do not conform to the strictures and intent of this Charm. Reduce the cost of

this Charm to five motes when targeting a mount created with Spectral Steed or a similar Charm.

SADDLED IN EPIC MONSTROSITY

Cost: —; **Mins:** Ride 5, Essence 4; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: Stackable

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Wretched Ridden Nightmare, Last Ride Glory

This Charm expands its prerequisite with additional mutations whenever Wretched Ridden Nightmare is activated. The Abyssal must choose these extra mutations upon purchasing Saddled in Epic Monstrosity and cannot alter the selection with each activation. He may purchase this Charm a maximum number of times equal to his Ride rating to broaden the range of bonus mutations available, applying any one of these purchases whenever he activates Wretched Ridden Nightmare. Possible options for these mutations include: one abomination; one blight and one affliction; one blight and two poxes; three afflictions; or two afflictions and two poxes.

SAIL

DARK WATER ODYSSEY

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Sail 3, Essence 2; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Avatar (1), Combo-OK, Spectral, Touch



Duration: Special

Prerequisite Charms: Any Sail Excellency

The Abyssal captain invokes and journeys on secret currents created by the Primordials for their own use. A deathknight may activate this Charm only aboard a ship he owns. Its effects last until he leaves the ship or the light of Creation's sun touches the hull.

A vessel enchanted with Dark Water Odyssey travels at twice its maximum speed without any need for usual propulsion methods, carried along by unnatural currents that leave no wake or sign of the ship's passage. The total absence of a trail results in automatic failure for would-be trackers and adds a number of automatic successes equal to the Abyssal's Essence rating if another Charm contests this effect. Finally, the ship and all aboard are also outside fate while journeying thus. Used aboard an aerial vessel, this Charm does not replace the need for propulsion, but doubles the speed of the craft and obscures its passage.

DECK-STRIDING PHANTOM

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Sail 2, Essence 1;

Type: Reflexive (Step 1 or 2)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Salty Dog Method; **Exalted**, p. 236), Social, War

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: None

The Abyssal moves with eerie assurance, unflappable and poised in the wildest tempest.

RUTHLESS CAPTAIN EFFICIENCY

Cost: —; **Mins:** Sail 3, Essence 2; **Type:** Permanent

Keywords: Emotion, Mirror (Crew-Inspiring Charisma; follows)

Duration: Permanent

Prerequisite Charms: Deck-Striding Phantom

Once an Abyssal masters this Charm, ships he command function at full efficiency and with no penalties, even with crew complements as low as a skeleton crew. In addition, each scene the deathknight spends commanding his crew counts as a scene of building an Intimacy of submissive fear in them unless they have an Essence rating equal to or greater than his own. Those who develop such Intimacies cannot take any actions that would knowingly result in harm to their captain or remove him from his position while aboard a ship he owns, unless they spend two Willpower points per day to overcome the unnatural mental influence of this Charm.

New Solar Charm: Crew-Inspiring Charisma (Prerequisites: Salty Dog Method; **Exalted**, p. 236). The Solar Mirror to this Charm builds Intimacies of adoration to deter mutiny rather than terror, but otherwise operates the same way.

SEA-SCANNING GLARE

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Sail 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Avatar (1), Mirror (Oceanic Omniscience Intuition; follows), Spectral

Duration: Until disembarking

Prerequisite Charms: Deck-Striding Phantom, Any Sail Excellency

The sea holds many dangers, especially for champions of Oblivion. Prudent captains keep a close eye on the waves and horizon, watching for any trace of an enemy's approach. An Abyssal can activate this Charm only aboard a ship he owns; it ends when he leaves the ship for any reason. While active, the Exalt ignores all visibility limitations or other penalties that would inhibit his ability to navigate. He also becomes preternaturally aware of his environment out to a distance of (Sail x 10) miles.

Through this Charm's awareness, the Exalt perfectly understands all weather conditions and mentally maps all terrain that is not magically obscured from scrying. He can spot reefs and other hazards long before they threaten his ship, not to mention noticing distant coasts before his lookouts do. His awareness lets him pinpoint other ships of seaworthy size. He also senses comparably large animals such as whales and siaka unless they are magically hidden in some way, though the Charm alone only reveals the size, speed and bearing of these objects. Used aboard an aerial vessel, this Charm maps terrain and tracks other aerial vehicles or animals of suitable size.

New Solar Charm: Oceanic Omniscience Intuition (Prerequisites: Any Sail Excellency, Salty Dog Method; **Exalted**, p. 236). This Charm functions much like its Mirror, except it lacks the Avatar and Spectral keywords, and costs one additional Willpower point to activate.

MIST-VEILED DOLDRUMS TECHNIQUE

Cost: 15m, 1wp; **Mins:** Sail 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Obvious, Spectral

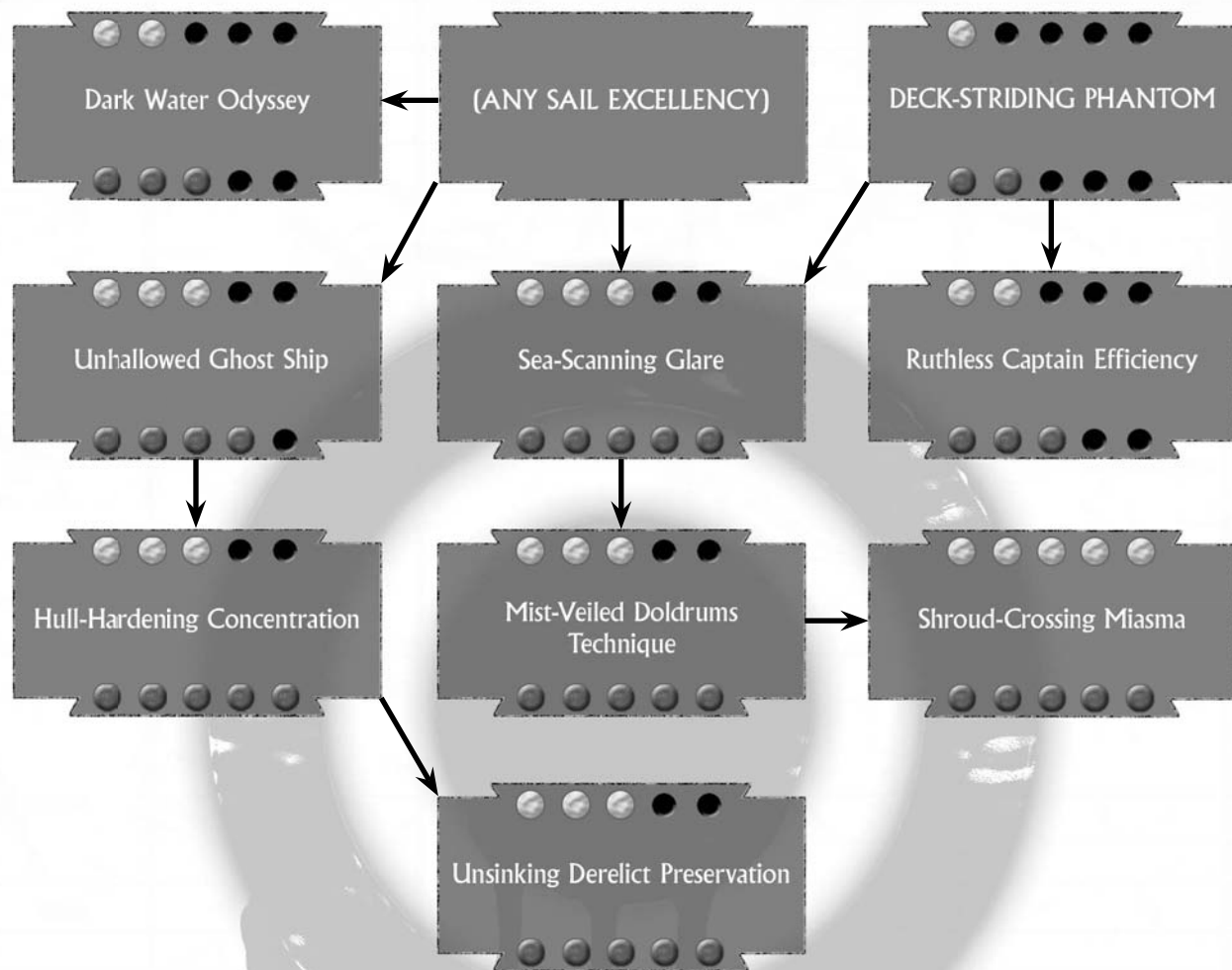
Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Sea-Scanning Glare

Tendrils of dense fog swirl around the Abyssal's ship, rapidly thickening and spreading into a windless cloud with a radius in miles equal to the Abyssal's Sail rating. The deathknight can center the cloud anywhere as long as her ship stays somewhere inside. Clouds created by this Charm last for one scene before they disperse. Their maker cannot prematurely dismiss the clouds since they are not sustained by committed Essence. Although multiple clouds can join together to blanket a larger area, their effects do not stack with overlap; only the greatest penalties apply.

No one could mistake the magical fog for natural weather. The fog imposes a variety of effects on all within it, including its creator:

- Visibility drops to five yards for clear vision and 15 yards for murky vision, providing plenty of concealment to hide naval units.
- Navigation rolls within the cloud suffer a -3 external penalty on top of penalties for poor visibility. Failure always leads the navigator deeper into the cloud rather than out of it.
- The fog magically filters sunlight to protect creatures and effects harmed by this illumination.



• No wind naturally blows in the cloud, leaving wind-powered vessels dead in the water unless they can break out oars. Magical wind trumps this aspect of the Charm but does not dissolve the cloud unless the source has a higher Essence rating than the Abyssal.

SHROUD-CROSSING MIASMA

Cost: 30m, 1wp; **Mins:** Sail 5, Essence 5; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: Obvious, Spectral

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Mist-Veiled Doldrums Technique

This terrifying Charm blurs the barrier between the worlds of the living and the dead, enabling powerful death-knights to sail between the two. At night, either in Creation or the Underworld, the Abyssal evokes a fogbank with all the properties of Mist-Veiled Doldrums Technique, though only (Essence x 100) yards in radius. The focused fog simultaneously appears in the analogous location in the other world. Anyone can recognize its spectral character with a difficulty 3 (Intelligence + [Occult or Sail] + Essence) roll. Anything that enters the fog from the Underworld leaves the fog in Creation, and *vice versa*. Those who do not make their way

out of the cloud before it evaporates remain in the world from which they entered.

Although the effects of this Charm resemble a shadowland, the fog is not actually considered such. While rifts created by Shroud-Crossing Miasma set off detection alarms at the Bureau of Destiny and the central controls of the Realm Defense Grid, Heaven lacks the resources or inclination to investigate most incursions outside of a few favored locations.

UNHALLOWED GHOST SHIP

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Sail 4, Essence 3;

Type: Simple (Speed 6 in long ticks)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Ship-Claiming Stance; Exalted, p. 237), Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Any Sail Excellency

Abyssal captains brutalize their ships worse than they do their crew. This Charm grants ownership of any Sail-based vehicle that is not currently owned by another Essence user, infecting it with unholy Essence. As Unhallowed Ghost Ship activates, the ship's least god manifests on deck and screams in confused agony before the Charm permanently destroys

her. Thereafter, the godless ship looks substantially more weathered and damaged than it really is. The ship imposes a -1 external penalty to all non-reflexive actions taken onboard by anyone who is not a creature of death. A ship cursed thus must always remain so. Without a god, it cannot have its ownership transferred. Wise enemies sink these vessels rather than invite catastrophe by attempting to capture them.

HULL-HARDENING CONCENTRATION

Cost: 8m; **Mins:** Sail 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Reflexive (Step 2)
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Hull-Preserving Technique; *Exalted*, p. 237), Obvious, Touch

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Unhallowed Ghost Ship

The dreadships of the Abyssal *Exalted* become as implacable as their owners. Unlike its Solar Mirror, this Charm costs only eight motes but cannot be used to save a ship on which the Exalt is merely a passenger. Instead, this Charm enables the Exalt to save only a ship he has claimed with Unhallowed Ghost Ship.

UNSINKING DERELICT PRESERVATION

Cost: 4m; **Mins:** Sail 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Reflexive (Step 10)
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Shipwreck-Surviving Stamina; *Exalted*, p. 237), Obvious, Stackable, Touch

Duration: Indefinite

Prerequisite Charms: Hull-Hardening Concentration

Even riddled with holes and rot, a deathknight's ship refuses to obey natural law and sink.

SOCIALIZE

EXQUISITE ETIQUETTE STYLE

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Socialize 2, Essence 1;
Type: Reflexive (Step 1 for attacker, Step 2 for defender)
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Mastery of Small Manners; *Exalted*, p. 239), Social
Duration: Until next action
Prerequisite Charms: None

Abyssals are horrid monsters full of lies and cruelty, but that is no excuse for bad manners. As Moonshadows must remind their circlemates, sometimes courtly elegance and sophistication can ruin more lives than all the swords in the world.

HONEY-TONGUED SERPENT ATTACK

Cost: 3m, 1wp; **Mins:** Socialize 5, Essence 3;
Type: Supplemental
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Heartfelt Honorific Opportunity; follows), Social
Duration: Instant
Prerequisite Charms: Exquisite Etiquette Style

The Abyssal's courtesies catch opponents off guard. This Charm may enhance any Manipulation-based social attack, making the attack unexpected. It is explicitly permitted to supplement actions using other Abilities.

New Solar Charm: Heartfelt Honorific Opportunity (Prerequisites: Mastery of Small Manners—*Exalted*, p. 239). Apart from its prerequisite, this Charm functions identically to its Mirror.

IMPRECATION OF ILL MANNERS

Cost: 3m per -1; **Mins:** Socialize 3, Essence 2;
Type: Reflexive (Step 2)
Keywords: Combo-OK, Social
Duration: Instant
Prerequisite Charms: Exquisite Etiquette Style, Any Socialize Excellency

The Abyssal poisons a speaker's words with Essence, inducing her to commit a critical faux pas or shameful lapse of expected social graces. A deathknight can use this Charm to target any social attack she witnesses, inflicting a -1 external penalty for every three motes spent. Whenever a social attack targeted by this Charm fails, the targeted attacker suffers a -1 external penalty on all subsequent social attacks for the rest of the scene against anyone who observed his failure. No combination of instant or lingering effects from this Charm can penalize a social attack by more successes than the Abyssal has dots of Socialize.

Without some way of detecting this Charm at work, no observer can discern any connection between the Abyssal and the effects of this Charm, though suspicion might grow if the deathknight is always present when his political rivals just happen to slip up. Proving such suspicions is another matter altogether.

BITTER SWEETNESS OF BETRAYAL

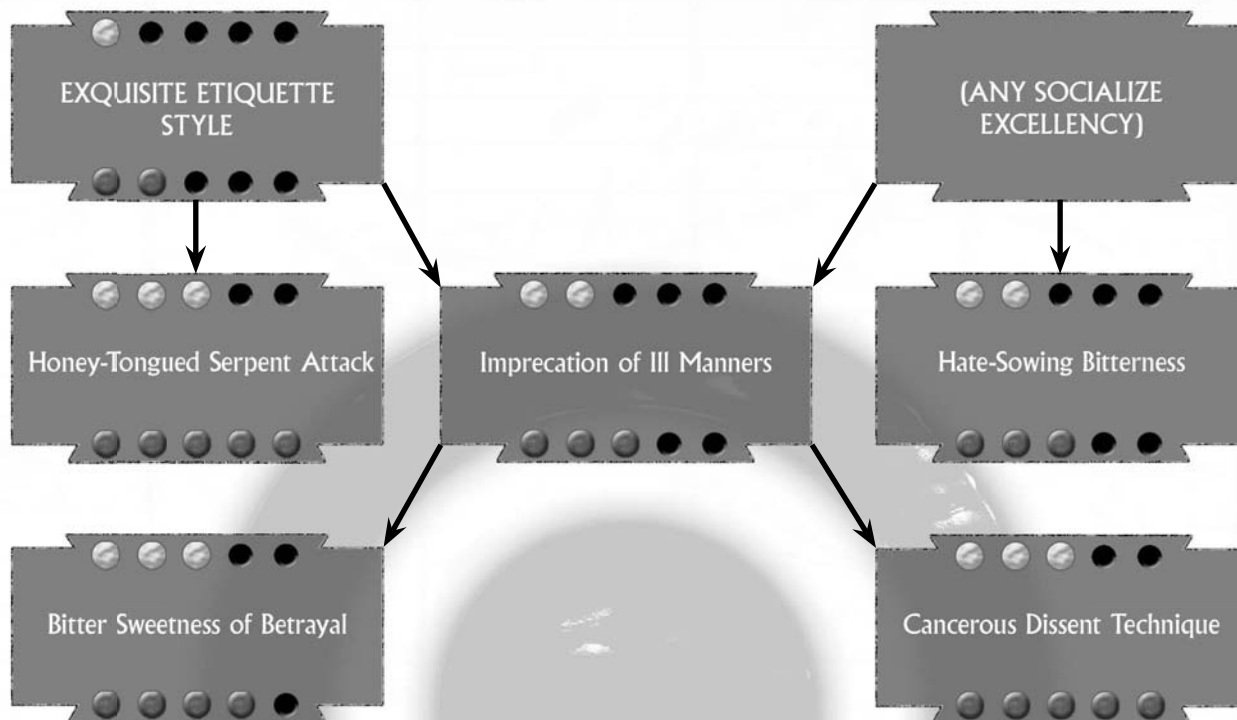
Cost: 8m, 1wp; **Mins:** Socialize 4, Essence 3;
Type: Simple (Dramatic Action)
Keywords: Combo-OK, Compulsion, Illusion
Duration: One week

Prerequisite Charms: Imprecation of Ill Manners

Moonshadows liken the act of murder to a night with a cheap whore. It will do, but it lacks romance or meaning. The destruction of an enemy should involve the slow seduction of shattered dreams and broken hopes as foreplay to the final release of the killing blow. The Abyssal spends a scene interacting with the target or someone toward whom the target has a positive Intimacy. The deathknight's player rolls (Manipulation + Socialize), adding a number of bonus successes equal to the character's Essence rating and applying an external penalty equal to the target's Essence rating.

For as long as this Charm remains active, the target carries an unnatural Compulsion effect that reaches out to infect those toward whom he holds a positive Intimacy whenever he interacts with them. If the number of successes rolled for this Charm exceeds such a loved one's Dodge MDV, that character must betray the target at the first opportunity.

Upon using this Charm, the Abyssal specifies whether it induces violent or nonviolent betrayal. In the former case, the betrayal takes the form of combat initiated with the best unexpected attack available to the character. The betrayer uses the most deadly attacks available to her and attacks without mercy. Nonviolent betrayal involves whatever course of action the target would find most emotionally hurtful and damaging to the target's Intimacy toward the attacker.



In either case, loved ones may abort their treachery at any point and come to their senses by paying one Willpower point. The Illusion effect of this Charm, however, makes them believe their betrayal was entirely their own mad impulse unless they pay three Willpower points instead.

CANCEROUS DISSENT TECHNIQUE

Cost: 10m, 1wp; **Mins:** Socialize 5, Essence 3;

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK, Emotion, Social

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Imprecation of Ill Manners

This Charm enhances any Manipulation-based social attack against a social unit aimed at stirring up infighting and chaos within the organization. It is explicitly permitted to supplement actions using other Abilities. Through the power of Cancerous Dissent Technique, the Abyssal's attack does not require any direct contact with the organization's leader. Instead, the deathknight conveys the attack to any unit member and waits for the seeds of dissatisfaction and unrest to work their way up through the social structure. Step Two of attack resolution does not occur until a number of days pass equal to the unit's Magnitude, preventing anyone from connecting the attack to the Abyssal without a thorough investigation that has a base difficulty equal to the Abyssal's (Socialize + Essence). Rather than attempt to change the unit's Policy, the unnatural Emotion effect of this attack tears the organization apart from within, draining one Loyalty point for every two successes by which it exceeds the unit leader's Dodge MDV.

HATE-SOWING BITTERNESS

Cost: 5m, 1wp; **Mins:** Socialize 3, Essence 2;

Type: Simple

Keywords: Combo-OK, Compulsion, Emotion

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Any Socialize Excellency

The deathknight taps into the hate and resentment that compelled him to accept Abyssal Exaltation, infusing his words with supernatural malice. While he keeps this Charm active, any attempt he makes to build a negative Intimacy or tear down a positive Intimacy with a natural social attack becomes unnatural mental influence that costs one Willpower point to resist. Once a character spends five Willpower points in a scene from resisting such attacks, that character becomes immune to all further attacks for the rest of the day. Failure to resist means the Intimacy forms or dissolves immediately as an Emotion effect rather than requiring the usual repeated effort.

Mortals who gain a negative Intimacy thus also suffer an unnatural Compulsion effect that lasts past the duration of the Charm until the Intimacy erodes completely. This effect comes into play whenever anyone attempts to weaken the Intimacy with a social attack. The mortal must immediately retaliate against the speaker with physical violence unless she pays one Willpower point to resist the violent urge. Mortals maddened by such passions will even attack the Abyssal if he tries to douse the flames of hate his Charm ignited.

SUPERNATURAL MARTIAL ARTS

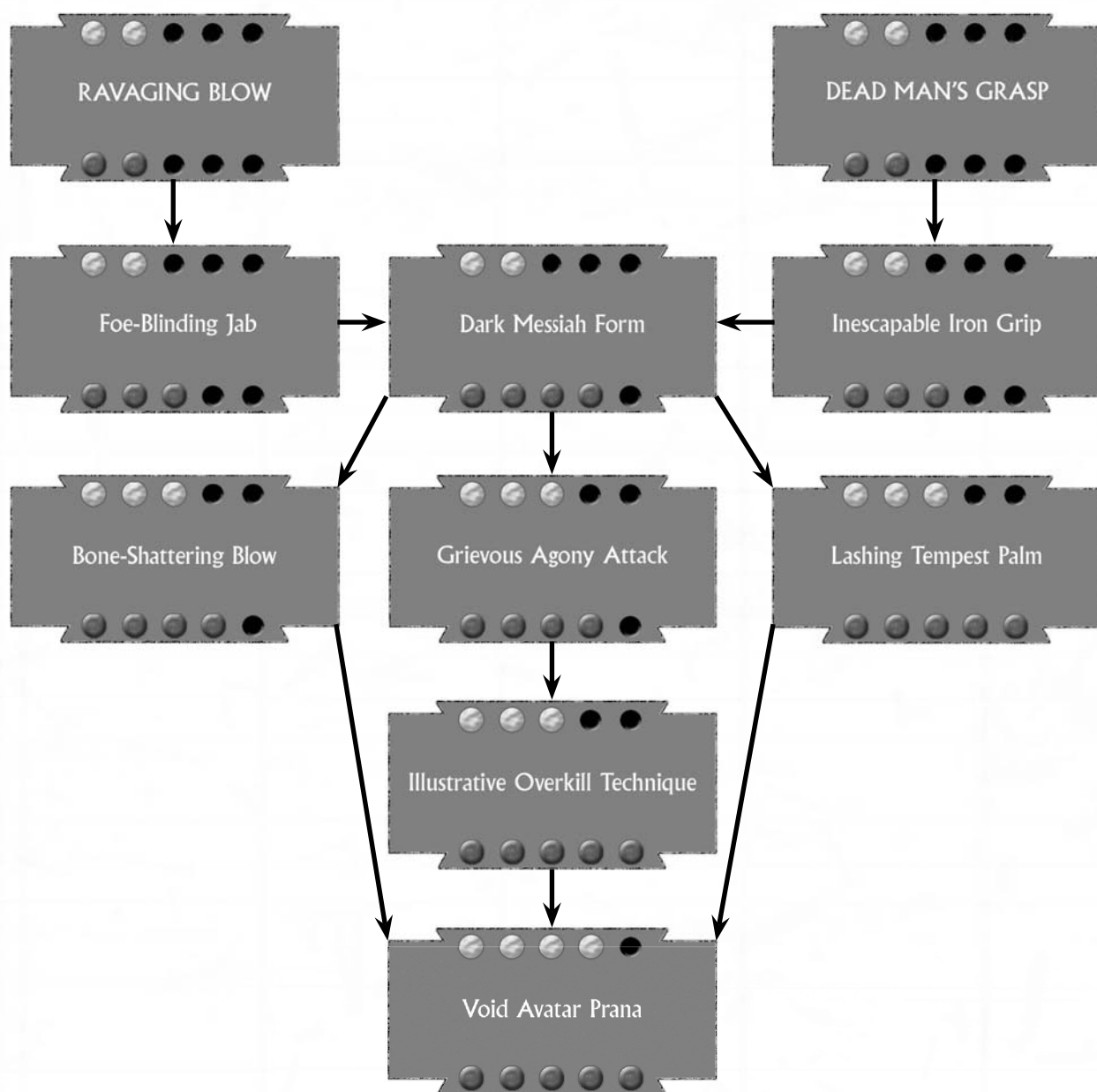
The Abyssal Exalted have not had time to invent many martial arts styles of their own, but they can learn any Celestial martial art for which they can find a teacher. Fortunately for them, some deathknights remember martial arts from their Solar incarnations, and the Deathlords themselves know several powerful martial arts. For all that, the Abyssals have introduced three new Celestial martial arts into Creation and the Underworld: the Dark Messiah Style, the Hungry Ghost Style and the Laughing Wounds Style (described in *Scroll of the Monk*).

DARK MESSIAH STYLE

There is nothing “natural” about the Abyssal Exalted—but like all other Exalted, they find that when they apply their

Essence to fisticuffs, wrestling and other forms of unarmed combat, certain Charms spontaneously appear. Abyssal martial artists do not fight like their Solar counterparts, with noble simplicity and straightforward blows. Rather, their natural art focuses on cruelty and overkill. It’s a style for bloody-handed thugs who want to terrify their foes and leave a trail of corpses behind them.

Deathknights with a particularly demented sense of irony sometimes call these Charms “Abyssal Hero Style,” in mocking comparison with the Lunar, Solar and Terrestrial Hero Styles practiced by other Exalted. Those Deathlords who remember the highly formalized martial arts schools of the First Age call it Dark Messiah Style. Most deathknights don’t call it anything at all—it’s just unarmed combat for Abyssals.



Anyone who can learn Celestial martial arts can learn Dark Messiah Style. They find it a fixed tree of Charms, and cannot learn any Charms that branch off the basic set (as described on pp. 125-127). Only Abyssals and Deathlords can devise such new Charms.

Weapons and Armor: As in Solar Hero Style, the form weapons of this style are the cestus, fighting gauntlet, khatar, tiger claws, razor harness and their artifact equivalents. Practitioners can also use improvised weapons—any convenient, sturdy object with a maximum Accuracy of -3 and Rate of 2, such as an unattuned daiklave, a coffin-lid or a corpse.

RAVAGING BLOW

Cost: 2m; **Mins:** Martial Arts 2, Essence 2;
Type: Supplemental
Keywords: Combo-OK
Duration: Instant
Prerequisite Charms: None

Abyssal martial artists strike where it hurts most. This Charm enhances an unarmed attack (other than a grapple). If the attack roll succeeds, extra successes count double for determining raw damage. If the Exalt has Dark Messiah Form active, Ravaging Blow also adds one to the attack's minimum damage.

FOE-BLINDING JAB

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Martial Arts 3, Essence 2;
Type: Supplemental
Keywords: Combo-OK, Crippling
Duration: Instant
Prerequisite Charms: Ravaging Blow

The deathknight jabs his fingers or a form weapon at his opponent's eyes. This Charm supplements an unarmed attack. If the attack would inflict two or more levels of damage, Foe-Blinding Jab reduces that damage to a single level but inflicts a Crippling effect that blinds one eye (see *Exalted*, p. 152). Repeated use of this Charm causes full blindness. Exalted and similarly resilient beings heal this trauma with a day of rest. Mortals cannot naturally heal such maiming.

If the Abyssal wishes, he can inflict blindness for only a few minutes by applying pressure or throwing a handful of dirt rather than gouging. In this case, the Crippling effect takes place as long as the attack hits, but the strike inflicts no damage.

DEAD MAN'S GRASP

Cost: 1m per action; **Mins:** Martial Arts 2, Essence 2;
Type: Supplemental
Keywords: Combo-OK



Duration: Until released
Prerequisite Charms: None

Abyssal warriors crush their foes with the unnatural strength of the risen dead. This Charm supplements a grapple attack. The contested roll to control the clinch plays out as normal... but the deathknight inflicts lethal damage. What's more, the raw damage of his clinch increases by one for each subsequent action the character maintains control of the grapple, to a maximum of the character's Martial Arts rating. The Charm ends and the damage bonus resets to +0 if the Abyssal stops spending Essence and squeezing to deal damage.

INESCAPABLE IRON GRIP

Cost: 5m; **Mins:** Martial Arts 3, Essence 2;
Type: Supplemental
Keywords: Combo-OK
Duration: Until released
Prerequisite Charms: Dead Man's Grasp

The Chosen of the Void can hold their victims in death's own grip. This Charm supplements a grapple attack. As the deathknight and his foe struggle to control the grapple, the dice pool for the victim takes an internal penalty equal to the number of actions for which the Abyssal has already controlled the grapple. What's more, as long as the Abyssal controls the grapple, his victim cannot breathe. In a long struggle, the rules for holding breath (see **Exalted**, p. 130) could even come into play. The (Stamina + Resistance) roll to resist asphyxiation is always difficulty 3. More immediately, the victim cannot cry out or make any other sound in the Abyssal's grip.

DARK MESSIAH FORM

Cost: 6m; **Mins:** Martial Arts 4, Essence 2;
Type: Simple (Speed 5)
Keywords: Form-type
Duration: One scene
Prerequisite Charms: Foe-Blinding Jab, Inescapable Iron Grip

While the Abyssal performs the kata to assume Dark Messiah Form, she concentrates on every pain the world ever inflicted on her. Farewell ethics, it's time for bloody, brutal payback!

While using this Charm, all the character's unarmed attacks inflict piercing damage (if they didn't already). The martial artist can make an unarmed Martial Arts parry against ranged and lethal attacks without a stunt. What's more, Dark Messiah Form eliminates multiple-action penalties for the first (Martial Arts ÷ 2, rounded up) actions in a flurry. At Martial Arts 5, an Abyssal can punch three times in a flurry with no penalty at all. Any actions after the penalty-free number, however, take the same penalties as if this Charm had not been active. As a final benefit, a Dark Messiah stylist can attune to soulsteel form weapons (if he couldn't before) and gain all the motes stripped from a target by such weapons. The amoral ferocity of Dark Messiah Form comes at a price, though. While using the form, characters cannot channel their Virtues.

BONE-SHATTERING BLOW

Cost: 1m or 3m, 1wp; **Mins:** Martial Arts 4, Essence 3;
Type: Reflexive (Step 10)
Keywords: Combo-OK, Crippling
Duration: Instant
Prerequisite Charms: Dark Messiah Form

This Charm imbues an Abyssal's attacks with horrible, crushing force, enabling her to break bones, dislocate joints and pulp organs with casual savagery. If the character inflicts two or more levels of damage with an unarmed attack, he may reflexively activate this Charm to reduce the attack's damage to only a single level of lethal damage but inflict one amputation disability (see **Exalted**, p. 152). Because the target organ or limb is mangled beyond use rather than actually severed, Exalted victims (and others with similar healing) can recover from the Crippling effect by spending a day resting, though they cannot heal any other wounds or other damage while regenerating this way. This Charm normally costs three motes and one Willpower to activate, but it costs only one mote if the victim is a mortal extra.

GRIEVOUS AGONY ATTACK

Cost: 4m; **Mins:** Martial Arts 4, Essence 3;
Type: Supplemental
Keywords: Combo-OK, Crippling
Duration: Instant
Prerequisite Charms: Dark Messiah Form

The Abyssal strikes hard with a knee to the groin, or some equally "dirty" tactic, and inflicts debilitating pain. (The attack can be as specific as a called shot, but it incurs no called-shot penalty.) If the target suffers any damage from this attack, he immediately drops prone and shifts to Inactive status (see **Exalted**, p. 143), though he remains conscious (and usually writhes or screams). This state lasts only five ticks, but the lingering pain from the Charm imposes a -1 internal penalty (a wound penalty) to all non-reflexive actions for the rest of the scene.

ILLUSTRATIVE OVERKILL TECHNIQUE

Cost: — (3m, 1wp); **Mins:** Martial Arts 5, Essence 3;
Type: Permanent
Keywords: Emotion, Obvious
Duration: Instant
Prerequisite Charms: Grievous Agony Attack

Just killing an enemy is boring. Killing an enemy so brutally that every witness finds her heart and limbs numbed with terror... now *that's* satisfying. An Abyssal may invoke this Charm reflexively in Step Ten of attack resolution by spending three motes and one Willpower whenever he kills or mortally wounds an opponent with an unarmed attack. As a base effect, the Charm enables the deathknight to kill his victim in whatever horrific manner the player finds appropriate, whether tearing the foe in half, punching into her abdomen and pulling out handfuls of viscera or worse.

Every enemy or neutral character who can witness this execution and has a Dodge MDV less than the Abyssal's (Martial arts + Essence) must pay one Willpower or be overwhelmed with horror as an unnatural Emotion effect. While afflicted with this fear and revulsion, characters suffer an internal penalty equal to the Abyssal's Essence rating to all non-reflexive actions for the rest of the scene. They cannot, however, be made to spend more Willpower or suffer further penalties through repeated use of Illustrative Overkill Technique. If it needs to be said, use of this Charm invariably prompts Morale checks in mortals, who tend to run screaming or fall to their knees retching.

LASHING TEMPEST PALM

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Martial Arts 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Reflexive
Keywords: Combo-OK, Mirror (Crashing Wave Throw; Exalted, p. 243)

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Dark Messiah Form

The deathknight releases an opponent from a clinch by striking her with a brutal open-handed blow, hurling her away with the force of a maelstrom.

VOID AVATAR PRANA

Cost: 1wp (+1m); **Mins:** Martial Arts 5, Essence 4;

Type: Simple (Speed 1, DV -1)

Keywords: Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Bone-Shattering Blow, Illustrative Overkill Technique, Lashing Tempest Palm

A master of the Dark Messiah Style attunes her body, mind and Essence so perfectly to Oblivion that she becomes a conduit for its dread power to strike down any who lay hands upon her. A Dark Messiah stylist activates this Charm immediately after assuming Dark Messiah Form (effectively, making assuming the form a Speed 6 action that costs an additional Willpower point).

While using Void Avatar Prana, the martial artist can reflexively spend one mote in response to any attack, or when she makes an attack. For a moment, her anima surrounds her in dark necrotic fire while her body becomes a black silhouette. This effect supplies a perfect block against any attack, even attacks that are normally unblockable. What's more, anyone who touches the Abyssal at that moment (whether casual contact, held in a grapple or making a hand-to-hand attack) suffers unsoakable lethal damage equal to the Abyssal's Essence score. The character can also activate Void Avatar Prana at the moment of making her own hand-to-hand attack and add this damage if her attack succeeds. Finally, the Abyssal's anima flashes totemic for that moment, with the usual effects on onlookers' Morale (see p. 101) given by all totemic Abyssal auras. In fact, if a non-Abyssal learned and used this Charm, his own anima would momentarily flare with the same effects as if he were an Abyssal.

This Charm carries one of the Four Flaws of Abyssal Invulnerability.

HUNGRY GHOST STYLE

In the final centuries of the Solar Deliberative, some Exalted explored the Underworld more than was prudent. Groups such as the Black Nadir Concordat did not want merely to protect Creation from the Underworld and the Neverborn, they wanted to make its power their own. The obscure and terrible Hungry Ghost Style emerged from these explorations and experiments. Given the style's associations, it seems likely that its creator became one of the Deathlords. It also seems likely that no style in existence could better metaphysically embody the innate cruelty and malice of the deathknights. At present, no one except Deathlords and Abyssals know Hungry Ghost Style. At least, no one else admits to it...

Weapons and Armor: Hungry Ghost practitioners cannot activate or maintain their Charms while wearing armor. The style treats attacks made with tiger claws, fighting chains and razor harnesses as unarmed attacks.

Complementary Skills: Hungry Ghost practitioners must know the way necrotic Essence flows. To learn this style, characters need at least one Occult or Lore Specialty related to ghosts or the Underworld, or initiation to Shadowlands Circle Necromancy.

BLOOD-SCENTING HUNGER

Cost: 2m; **Mins:** Martial Arts 2, Essence 2; **Type:** Reflexive

Keywords: Combo-OK

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: None

The Exalt opens his mouth and probes the air with his tongue, tasting the air for blood as he awakens his primal hunger for flesh and Essence. For the rest of the scene, the martial artist can see dematerialized entities within a range of (Essence x 5) yards. This effect does not, in itself, enable the character to attack such entities. He also perceives which entities in that range possess Essence pools. Some Abyssals see an active Essence as a network of fine, glowing veins overlain on a target; others perceive the Essence pool as the person's audible heartbeat, a rich taste of blood on the tongue, an odor or some other sensation.

While using this Charm, an Abyssal can size up one chosen target within range as a miscellaneous action. Doing so costs one mote but does not count as Charm usage. Sizing up a target reveals the target's current wound penalty, her permanent Essence and the total number of available motes remaining in that character's combined Essence pools. For the rest of the scene, the martial artist senses any Essence expenditure by the target, though Blood-Scenting Hunger does not reveal the purpose for the Essence use. If the martial artist wants to know how an opponent suffered from an attack or how much Essence she spent from a Charm, however, he must spend another mote and take another action to re-assess wound penalties and Essence pools.

LEAPING HORROR APPROACH

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Martial Arts 4, Essence 2;

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK, Obvious

Prerequisite Charms: Blood-Scenting Hunger

Implacable fury infuses the martial artist's muscles with superhuman speed and strength, sending him from quarry to quarry in a blur of carnage. There is nothing remotely natural about the ways his joints contort and muscles flex in the course of each leap.

This Charm supplements a flurry of attacks. After making each unarmed attack in the flurry, the Exalt can leap in a reflexive Move action to the next target, ignoring wound and mobility penalties to the distance he can travel. The Charm does not supplement the attacks themselves. They suffer the same penalties as if the character stayed stock-still.

The most obvious use for this Charm is to set up another attack against a new target with the next action in the flurry. Since the leap only follows an attack, a character cannot use this Charm to close with an initial target in the flurry who is outside standard close combat range. If the Exalt faces a Counterattack Charm from a defender while leaping away, the character's Martial Arts rating adds to his Dodge DV.

LUNGING PHANTOM METHOD

Cost: 4m; **Mins:** Martial Arts 3, Essence 2;

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Blood-Scenting Hunger

The Abyssal twists toward and around her foe, elusive as a ghost, positioning herself to strike from behind before her enemy realizes where she's gone. Her attack becomes unexpected, unless a reflexive (Wits + Awareness) roll for the target scores at least as many successes as the attack roll for the Abyssal.

SHROUDED CLAW ATTACK

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Martial Arts 3, Essence 2;

Type: Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK, Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Blood-Scenting Hunger

The Exalt's Void-charged anima lashes out from beneath her flesh as a phantom image moving ahead of her own blow. The soul-chilling touch of this projection halves the pool used to calculate the target's DV against the attack, rounded down. This Charm can enhance an attack to initiate a grapple as readily as a strike.

Shrouded Claw Attack also causes any dematerialized being "touched" by it to manifest visibly to all onlookers as a translucent apparition for the rest of the scene. This effect applies whenever the attack would hit its target, even if the character has no way to make physical contact with immaterial beings (such as Hungry Ghost Form).

HUNGRY GHOST FORM

Cost: 6m; **Mins:** Martial Arts 4, Essence 2;

Type: Simple (Speed 5, DV -1)

Keywords: Form-Type, Obvious

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Leaping Horror Approach, Lunging Phantom Method, Shrouded Claw Attack

The martial artist roars or howls in a scream of incalculable malice, allowing his worst impulses to possess him with their terrible power. Faintly glowing eyes betray those consumed by this martial arts form, illuminating features twisted into a rictus of taut tendons and clenched muscles.

While this Charm is active, the character is considered a creature of darkness (assuming he wasn't already) and suffers from the effects of partially controlled Berserk Anger (see **Exalted**, p. 105), instantly reclassifying allies as enemies if they attempt to impede his rampage. Deactivating this Charm before its normal duration elapses costs one Willpower to shrug off the unnatural mental influence the martial artist exerts on himself.

In exchange for these disadvantages, the martial artist inflicts lethal damage with all unarmed attacks and can parry lethal attacks barehanded, without a stunt. Each action, he may activate his choice of Lunging Phantom Method or Shrouded Claw Attack as an innate power without it counting as a Charm use. He can also make unarmed strikes or clinches against dematerialized beings, though clinched spirits can grapple back until either party breaks contact. As a final benefit, the martial artist adds his Essence to his Stamina for purposes of innate soak.

As a side effect of learning this Charm, non-Abyssal martial artists gain the ability to purchase dots of Whispers without spending time in the Labyrinth. To walk in the steps of the hungry dead is to open one's mind to ultimate malevolence.

POWER-REAPING PRANA

Cost: 1m; **Mins:** Martial Arts 4, Essence 3;

Type: Reflexive (Step 10)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Hungry Ghost Form

The Exalt greedily siphons Essence expended by his enemies for his own sinister purposes. These stolen motes glitter in trails winding into his opened mouth. When the character uses the Charm, he selects a target within (Essence x 5) yards who uses a Charm. The martial artist must have already used Blood-Scenting Hunger to assess the target's Essence pool. The character gains a number of motes equal to half the total number the target spent activating all Charms during that tick (rounded down), up to a maximum award of (Martial Arts x 2) motes.

CHARM-SMOTHERING TECHNIQUE

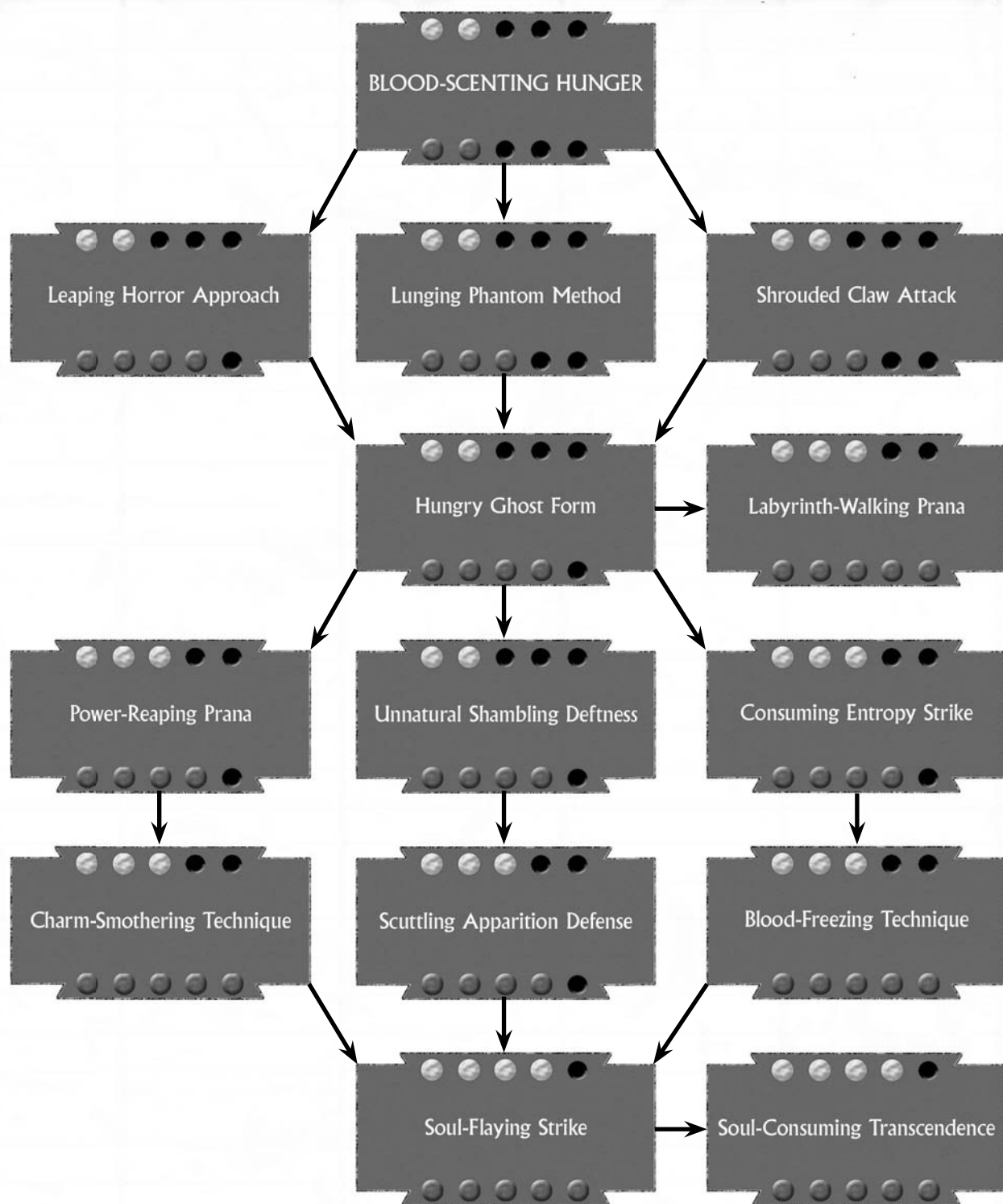
Cost: 1+m, 1wp; **Mins:** Martial Arts 5, Essence 3;

Type: Reflexive

Keywords: Combo-Basic, Obvious

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Power-Reaping Prana



When the Abyssal senses a foe (already examined and “tagged” using Blood-Scenting Hunger) using a Charm, she can lash out with a jabbing fist or slashing palm. A whiplash of her anima snaps out to strike at the Charm. The Abyssal can expend up to (Wits + Martial Arts) motes in this attack. If her target does not then expend an equal number of motes,

added to his Charm’s original cost, the Charm dissipates in a flash of sparks without taking effect. If the target pays the surcharge, his Charm takes effect as normal.

Charm-Smothering Technique affects only the Charms of the Exalted, spirits and ghosts. It does not affect sorcery, necromancy, thaumaturgy, Fair Folk glammers or other supernatural effects.



UNNATURAL SHAMBLING DEFTNESS

Cost: 3m, 1wp; **Mins:** Martial Arts 4, Essence 2;

Type: Extra Action

Keywords: Combo-OK, Obvious

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Hungry Ghost Form

The martial artist lurches across the battlefield, flickering between bursts of speed and total stillness like the marionette gait of the hungry dead. This magical flurry contains a total number of unarmed Martial Arts attacks equal to the character's Essence. These attacks ignore Rate, have no multiple-action penalties and carry a DV penalty equal to the highest penalty for any one attack.

SCUTTling APPARITION DEFENSE

Cost: 4m or 6m; **Mins:** Martial Arts 4, Essence 3;

Type: Reflexive (Step 2)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Illusion, Obvious, Shaping

Duration: One action

Prerequisite Charms: Unnatural Shambling Deftness

Spending four motes, the martial artist fades out of the path of an attack with a gruesome contortionist kata, ceasing to exist except as motes scattered on the breeze. She reappears within a heartbeat in a new position within (Essence) yards as a kind of short-range teleportation. This effect reduces the roll for the attacking character to zero dice. Scuttling Apparition Defense cannot defend against any attack that is unblockable,

undodgeable or capable of hitting dematerialized beings, nor can it let a grappled character escape. Attacks supplemented by Charms that add automatic successes also might still strike. Since the Scuttling Apparition Defense is not truly a perfect defense, it does not carry a Flaw of Invulnerability.

As a further benefit, the Abyssal can appear directly behind an enemy within range, giving an opportunity to attempt an unexpected attack (see *Exalted*, p. 155).

Against flurries, *Exalted* may spend six motes when using this Charm to add an unnatural Illusion effect that confuses attackers as to the martial artist's location. Disoriented aggressors must pay a Willpower point or face debilitating waves of déjà vu and uncertainty that reduce all attack rolls in the flurry to zero dice.

CONSUMING ENTROPY STRIKE

Cost: 3m; **Mins:** Martial Arts 4, Essence 3;

Type: Reflexive (Step 10)

Keywords: Combo-OK, Crippling, Obvious

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Hungry Ghost Form

An Exalt with this Charm may conduct a withering torrent of entropic Essence through an exchange of blows, cursing an enemy with physical decrepitude and ill luck that worsens subsequent injuries. In order to use this Charm, the martial artist must touch the target with an unarmed strike or grapple attack that dealt at least one die of damage.

The martial artist could also use a Martial Arts-based parry against a close range attack from the target and successfully block the attack. If the martial artist meets either requirement, all forms of the target's soak decrease by an amount equal to the Exalt's Martial Arts rating for the duration of the Charm, starting with natural soak. Non-magical armor acquires a thin layer of rust or rot when struck, though this rust does not cause permanent damage.

Repeated exposure to this Charm uses the highest penalty rather than stacking. The martial artist may, however, activate this Charm repeatedly in an action to curse multiple targets. Note that piercing attacks halve the reduced soak rating. The reduction is not applied after the halving.

BLOOD-FREEZING TECHNIQUE

Cost: 6m; **Mins:** Martial Arts 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-OK, Crippling, Obvious, Stackable

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Consuming Entropy Strike

The martial artist wounds an enemy's chakras with brutal precision, and his target feels the chill of the grave race through his veins. If the Abyssal's attack inflicts any damage, the target's next action is delayed by one tick as her muscles shiver and joints momentarily stiffen. What's more, her target loses one dot of Dexterity. This drain correspondingly reduces traits derived from Dexterity, including DV values. Lost dots return at the rate of one per minute.

The Dexterity loss stacks; the delay in the target's next action does not. Victims reduced to Dexterity 0 are paralyzed. They can take no physical actions, though they can still think, talk (though chattering teeth) and use Charms that do not require them to move in any way. Blood-Freezing Technique does not affect creatures who are immune to cold or not alive, such as automata or ghosts.

LABYRINTH-WALKING PRANA

Cost: 1wp; **Mins:** Martial Arts 5, Essence 3; **Type:** Simple (Speed 1, DV -1)

Keywords: Obvious

Duration: One scene

Prerequisite Charms: Hungry Ghost Form

By attuning his anima to the twisting Labyrinth and the potential for Oblivion in all things, a deathknight becomes a shadow flickering about the battlefield. This Charm, the first secret technique of Hungry Ghost Style, supplements Hungry Ghost Form and can be used only immediately after an Abyssal uses that Charm, effectively making assuming the form a Speed 6 action. If the martial artist takes this additional tick and spends a Willpower, his movement distance when using Leaping Horror Approach or Scuttling Apparition Defense increases to (Essence x 5) yards.

SOUL-FLAYING STRIKE

Cost: 10m, 1wp, 1hl; **Mins:** Martial Arts 5, Essence 4; **Type:** Supplemental

Keywords: Combo-Basic, Obvious, Shaping

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Blood-Freezing Technique, Charm-Smothering Technique, Scuttling Apparition Defense

Arcs of deathly white Essence swirl around the Abyssal's hands, wailing like lost souls and burning the deathknight himself with the power of Oblivion. The character makes a Martial Arts attack. If the Abyssal's permanent Essence exceeds that of his target, the damage of his strike becomes unsoakable and aggravated as his body withers away into dust and his own soul shrieks in torment.

Living people slain by this attack—including Exalts—rise as hungry ghosts on the next night. A slain extra leaves a hungry ghost extra; a heroic character leaves a correspondingly powerful hungry ghost. (See **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. IV—The Roll of Glorious Divinity II**, or just use the hungry ghost on p. 318 of **Exalted**.) They obey their killer for the next month as best they can comprehend his commands. Spirits, ghosts or Fair Folk slain by Soul-Flaying Strike evaporate on the spot, utterly destroyed.

SOUL-CONSUMING TRANSCENDENCE

Cost: 10m, 1wp; **Mins:** Martial Arts 5, Essence 4; **Type:** Simple (Dramatic Action)

Keywords: Obvious, Training

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite Charms: Soul-Flaying Strike

Few deathknights have even learned that Hungry Ghost Style has this secret final technique, which could set its masters to devouring their fellow Abyssals. By spending one minute monstrosly gorging on the corpse of an Essence-wielder who died within the past hour, a master of Hungry Ghost Style can digest some of the deceased's mystical prowess along with her flesh and blood. He instantly intuits the basic description of every Charm the dead character knew as if they were all Obvious and may choose one of them to steal for which he meets all trait minimums (though this Charm cannot steal permanent Charms or Sidereal Martial Arts).

If the master knows all prerequisites and is otherwise capable of learning the stolen Charm, he may pay the normal experience point cost to do so without training time or tutelage. If the Charm has permutations or variations, the martial artist learns it exactly as its original owner knew it, apart from using his own traits. If he does not wish to pay this experience or cannot learn the Charm for whatever reason, the stolen knowledge lasts only a number of days equal to its owner's Essence rating at the time of death. During this period, the martial artist may activate the stolen Charm as if he had learned it.

There is no limit to the number of Charms an Abyssal can steal at one time, except that he can get only one Charm per fresh corpse and temporary thefts quickly fade once a killing spree ends. Once a body serves as a target for this Charm, too little of its residual Essence remains to provide further knowledge.



WELL?

THAT YOU, SIR?
GOOD, GOOD...

ALL DONE WITH
THE DIAGNOSTIC.
COME ON IN.



IT'S A GOOD NEWS,
BAD NEWS SITUATION.
GOOD NEWS IS WE
CAUGHT IT EARLY.

WHAT'S THE
BAD NEWS?



BAD NEWS IS
YOU'VE GOT YOU
AN ARROWHEAD IN
THERE.

AN ARROWHEAD?

YES, SIR.



IT'S WEDGED
BEHIND THE FEMUR
HEAD. NO TELLING
HOW LONG IT'S
BEEN THERE.

COULD'VE
HAPPENED
BEFORE THIS BIG
FELLA DIED. WHO
KNOWS?



IT DOESN'T HAVE TO
COME OUT RIGHT NOW.
SHE'LL STILL RUN.

WEAR AND TEAR'S
GONNA BE A BITCH,
THOUGH, IF WE DON'T
DO SOMETHING SOON.

SOMEHOW, THIS
ARROWHEAD'S WORKED
ITS WAY INTO THE
SYNOVIAL.

THERE'S NO FLUID
LEFT, SO FRICTION'S
WEARING DOWN THE
CARTILAGE.



THAT WOULD BE
A PROBLEM.

WHAT'S WORSE, THOUGH, IS
THE ARROWHEAD TORE THE
HIP'S CAPSULAR LIGAMENTS.

IF THOSE RIP UNDER
STRESS, YOU GOT
YOURSELF A SEPARATION-
DISLOCATION.



CAN YOU REMOVE
THE
PROJECTILE?

SURE THING. EASY. WE
JUST HAVE TO TAKE
THE HIP APART FIRST.

GOOD, DO SO.

THEN CAP THE
FEMUR'S HEAD IN
BRASS AND REPLACE
THE LIGAMENTS.

HOW LONG WILL
THE REPAIRS
TAKE?

I DON'T KNOW... WE'RE
PRETTY BACKED UP.
MAYBE A WEEK?

GOOD
ENOUGH.

CHAPTER SIX

NECROTECH, THE SCIENCE OF DEATH

Once extinguished, the flame of life can never be rekindled. All who are born must dance with Oblivion. The final breath slides forever into dreamless sleep. Muscles go limp, flesh rots or withers, eyes collapse into their sockets, blood pools, congeals and liquefies again in decay.

There is magic in the inevitability of death. The Essence of the Neverborn can harness the miracle of death to reactivate once-living organs with a hungry animation. A bloodless heart beats. A disembodied hand grasps and claws. Neglected corpses rise from their graves, craving the flesh of the living.

The magic of reanimation channels the power of the once-living to create and sustain activity after death. Reanimated creations are not restricted to the narrow medical patterns of life. A living being with no heart in her chest falls limp and useless, but the same creature reanimated can move and fight and kill. Certain physiological rules still apply to reanimated beings, but most are made more flexible. For instance, a reanimated leg can walk only the way the

Primordials designed it to, but the muscles no longer require blood or even a nervous system.

As a result of this independence from the biological weaknesses of life, undead are not restricted to living or even organic parts. An iron ribcage is stronger than a bone one. In these violent times, swords are often more useful than hands to wield them.

The field of building and maintaining creatures built of dead and inorganic parts is called necrotech. Craftsmen who study and perfect necrotech are known as necrosurgeons. They use their predecessors' proven formulas and techniques to design and forge tools, servants, killers and war machines.

Knowledge lies at the heart of necrotech. Necrosurgeons must learn through observation and experimentation. They make progress through scientific investigation and deduction. Yet necrotech is also the highest of arts. When mortals run in panic from the spiked monstrosity with a hundred screaming faces, they know the glory of the Void. For this



reason, most necrosurgeons take great pride in the hideous beauty of their creations.

As with more conventional arts, necrosurgeons often compromise with practical limitations. Few necrosurgeons enjoy the full financial support of a Deathlord patron. Most must find creative ways to realize their visions with the limited materials and reanimation at their disposal. Even well-funded necrosurgeons suffer the limitations of their own skills, the affairs of the world around them and the freshness of available parts. Great necrosurgeons become infamous for their morbid innovations and expediencies.

The legacy of necrotech is a saga of progress, fear and destruction. Learned necrosurgeons gain power beyond the limitations of the mortal coil. They design and discover new unnatural possibilities, making the dead ever deadlier. The peoples of Creation quake at each advancement.

A LEGACY OF HORROR

Although the gods tried, the Neverborn are too great to be destroyed. The paradox of their existence brought the inevitability of Oblivion. That darkness of Oblivion—subtle as the wind, consuming as fire—echoes into Creation as the paradox of reanimation: life without life. That which is *not*, yet is. Just as the Twilight Caste of the First Age learned to manipulate Creation's Essence, so does the Daybreak Caste harness the black, unnatural laws of Oblivion.

THE FIRST AGE

Necrotech is a craft born of death and destruction. Its formulas are the theories of horror. In the First Age, only the most daring and curious Exalted plumbed the depths of the dark arts. Little is known about the earliest explorations into reanimation. Essence-fueled genius surely brought swift but highly personal progress. Taboo, more than law, forced Solars to keep their journals secret and their laboratories hidden. In remote manes, they quietly tested and observed powerful corpse-creatures. No one can guess the full extent of the secret necrotech advances of the First Age, but legends occasionally surface.

Today, most necrosurgeons see such legends as cautionary fables or naïve distractions. The Deathlords salvaged or reproduced most of the necrotech knowledge of the First Age. It hardly seems likely that some late archeological discovery could unlock new doors to necrotech power. Science and diligent experimentation are the Deathlords' tools of advancement, and this pattern filtered down to become the custom for necrosurgeons everywhere.

THE DEATHLORDS

The Neverborn's greatest servants possess the magic to reanimate the most impressive specimens of necrotech. What's more, the Deathlords either personally conduct or fund the vast majority of necrotech research and implementation. They control the macabre laboratories used to build war

LEGENDS OF FORBIDDEN LORE

- A Lunar mate of a pioneering necrosurgeon harvested sap from rare Eastern trees that preserved dead flesh and hardened it into a flexible form of iron.
- A foolish Solar secretly built a great manse that reanimated even the greatest creations with such unholy vigor that they carried dark knowledge from the edge of the Void.
- A mad Twilight Caste living in the Underworld discovered the secret to necromancy of the Void Circle of Obsidian, but was forced to sacrifice his life and Exalted Essence to obtain it. He now wanders the Underworld with necromancy more potent than the Deathlords', seeking new and stronger ways to preserve his slowly rotting body.

machines. They direct the Abyssals who lead these charnel horrors into battle. The Deathlords are to necrotech what the Old Realm was to magitech.

The Deathlords have their own outlooks and strategies with regard to necrotech. A few of them neglect the science, leaving it to their Daybreak Caste servants or directing their dark attentions elsewhere. These patterns could change if the Deathlords and Creation engage in total war. Necrotech is just too useful in wartime. Those Deathlords who had already integrated the craft into their military plans would enjoy a great advantage over those who had not. For the time being, the Deathlords' individual approaches to necrotech derive chiefly from their unique personalities.

The **Mask of Winters** is a driving force in the field of necrotech. He commits much of his resources toward elaborate experiments and building new prototypes.

Obviously, the Mask of Winters' greatest necrotech success is his mobile fortress, Juggernaut. The youngest Deathlord has also pioneered many successful tool designs, though, such as the loathsome osseous shell and bonestrider. Other Deathlords now include both of these devices in their arsenals.

The Mask of Winters personally favors heavy creations, typically incorporating a great deal of bone and iron. His wartime strategies involve deploying large, impressive war machines, in conjunction with well-equipped mortal and ghostly troops and hordes of zombies. Overall, the Mask of Winters makes more spectacular use of necrotech on a regular basis than anyone in Creation or below.

The **Walker in Darkness**, however, probably makes the most prolific use of the art. His military machine moves slowly when it moves at all, but it is a force of inevitability. Those who anger the Deathlord to the point of action encounter necromantic and military destruction on an unimaginable scale. His war machine tirelessly creates, reanimates and repairs zombies in the thousands. His armies are awash in necrotech artifacts, foot soldiers and support corps. His death-knights wear necrotech armor and ride necrotech steeds. The

armies and cities of his enemies are his own future minions. So far, the Underworld sees more of the Walker's legions than Creation has. That will surely change.

The Black Psychopomp adapted several of the Mask of Winters' designs for his own troops, but he prefers droves of smaller creations to large siege engines. Bone spider lotuses and battle snakes are common exceptions.

The **Dowager of the Irreverent Vulgate in Unrent Veils** builds no armies. She seeks the one masterstroke that will lay Creation low. Her necrotech creations are deadly experiments, companions and sculptures. The Noss Fens hold many of the twisted results of the Dowager's idle hands. They are hard to distinguish from the shadowlands' other fauna or flora.

The Dowager has a talent for mixing the deadliest parts of beasts. She also mastered the use of dead ironwood in her pets, and it is one of her favorite materials. Iron is cheap and gaudy by comparison. The Dowager's creations frequently incorporate disease and poison into their attacks. Such things have always been subjects of interest to her.

Eye and Seven Despairs is secretive and erratic. He experiments when he feels like it or when prodded by his Neverborn patron, the Abhorrence of Life. He usually follows the lead of some other Deathlord then leaps ahead to make discoveries of his own. He recently developed an admiration for the Dowager that led to his personal, very dangerous investigations of the Great Contagion and the nature of the risen hunger. Only, just as he was about to test a prototype (and dedicate it to her as an apology for past missteps), he became distracted by the possibilities of Abyssal Exaltation.

Eye and Seven Despairs possesses no war machines and fields no legions. Yet his deceptively small army of elite zombies, the Venomed Assembly to End Hope, is amongst the deadliest of risen small forces in existence. Eye and Seven Despairs incorporates many highly specialized artifacts into his favored creations. Most of these minions were lovingly designed and painstakingly reanimated by his own hand.

The **Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurible** has no direct input into the formation of risen legions in the North, but they do seem to pop up from time to time, and they do seem to be led by murderous generals who worship only him. Some of those armies employ necrotech, though they cannot reanimate anything very powerful. None of them have members capable of achieving the Labyrinth Circle of Onyx (yet).

The **First and Forsaken Lion** prefers ghosts to common zombies but makes great use of necromantic war machines. His conquest of Stygia involved hundreds of bone colossi, and he has developed many other potent war machines since then. He favors durable, reliable necrotech—deathly analogues to heavy artillery, siege weapons and troop transports—fielded on a large scale, or mobile weapons systems of devastating power.

The **Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water** has very successfully incorporated necrotech into his domain's

thriving economy. Well-maintained risen laborers are a substantial boon to industry, and zombies make excellent slaves in the hands of the realm's Ghost-Blooded necromancers.

One of the Silver Prince's Abyssal servants also administers the College of Necrosurgery. This infamous academy devotes itself to training large numbers of mortals, ghosts and Ghost-Blooded in the necrotech arts. To a lesser extent, the school does conduct research. Students and professors at the College of Necrosurgery devise many minor revenant tools and minions, but only the Deathlord and a few of his Abyssals wield sufficient power to craft true war machines.

In any case, the Silver Prince builds his strategies around magitech rather than necrotech. His greatest secret is that he remembers how to build First Age magitech warships and has high-limitless supplies of soulsteel for their construction.

The **Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears** has a grand aesthetic appreciation for the possibilities of necrotech. She regularly amuses herself with the creation of human sculpture. Several dozen pieces of surpassing quality adorn the halls of her northern citadel. The Deathlord considers her tastes especially refined and casually discards pieces that she sees as inferior in any way.

This Deathlord also grasps the benefits of implants with which she can improve her servants. She usually prefers to spend more time and effort acquiring artifacts or living tools, however, which are more reliable routes to achieving her unique and mysterious ends.

OTHER SOURCE OF NECROTECH

Advanced necromancy plays an important role in modern necrotech, but not an essential one. Nemissaries and spirits can reanimate corpses as well as any necromancer, and even Iron Circle necromancy can reanimate a variety of deadly creations. For this reason, the Deathlords and their Abyssals are not the art's only practitioners.

Raiton Academy on Nightfall Island graduates many necrosurgeons each year. Historically, its professors contributed only a few genuine advancements to the field. The importance of the school lies in its independence, as well as the size and diversity of its student body. Raiton Academy teaches the principles of necrotech to those who refuse to sell their souls to the Deathlords.

Raiton Academy is most famous for its classes on necromancy, but many ghosts and Ghost-Blooded attend the academy for its courses on corpse preservation, zombie design and necrotech grafting. Across Creation and the Underworld, necrotech is one of the school's primary attractions.

In the East, the Rings of Ledaal Catala know about the potential for some Dragon-Blooded to learn necromancy. The society looks for outcasts with dark talents or pale animas. Any Dragon-Blooded who show the potential to learn necromancy would be extremely valuable to the scholarly group. Unfortunately, the Rings of Ledaal Catala cannot advertise its interest. House Ledaal would be quite upset with its Eastern branch if its members were ever caught suggesting

that the children of the Dragons have the least in common with either ghosts or Abyssal Anathema.

The Heptagram likewise sequesters students who show potential for necromancy. One of the spirits on staff at the Heptagram possesses expertise in reanimation and necrotech. Her skills are minor and outdated, compared to those of the Deathlords' Daybreak necrosurgeons, but she can train an Iron Circle necromancer. Officially, the Heptagram teaches necromantic lore only so graduates know how to counter it and more effectively destroy necrotech abominations.

The Morticians' Order in Sijan possesses great skill in crafting powerful bodies for nemissaries to animate. The funeral city's Black Watch consists of such ghost-possessed creations. The Sijanese, however, do not share their skills or embark in wider experimentation.

In shadowlands and the Underworld, reanimating forces are common enough that small cults or institutes with an interest in necrotech occasionally spring up. These groups use once-living bodies to further their various agendas. Most of these dark brotherhoods are run by experienced nemissaries or Ghost-Blooded necromancers. Their goals are as unpredictable and strange as the morbid creatures that make up their constituency.

Finally, the Division of Secrets knows about and actively researches necrotech. They do not seek to advance the science—quite the opposite. The Sidereals want to keep up with the latest advancements so they know what they must fight, and how to win. They have their work cut out for them.

A FEW PROBLEMS

- Preservation is always an issue. Eternal Embalming Preparation and Charnel Chirurgeon Deftness are useful, but stronger methods would help with long-term campaigns. Groups that lack Abyssals who know these Charms must spend much of their time and effort with maintenance.
- The Deathlords seek some means of altering their creations post-reanimation without needing to reapply strenuous necromancy. Linkable systems seem to be the answer, but initial trials have been disappointing.
- Nemissaries have difficulty squeezing more than one of themselves into medium-sized hosts, but studies show that multiple nemissaries are in all ways superior to a single one. One potential solution involves partitioning the Essence of the creation.
- Eye and Seven Despairs has delved deeply into the study of reanimation and undead hunger, attempting (perhaps successfully) to channel that Neverborn principle into a deadly epidemic. Unfortunately, he has lost the only prototype. His research is decades ahead of the other Deathlords in his field, but what one scientist can discover, another can reproduce.

THE DARK FUTURE

Compared to the magitech or genesis sciences, necrotech is a field in its infancy. The Old Realm did not explore it much, and the Deathlords who developed the art are very busy. The Mask of Winters, First and Forsaken Lion, Walker in Darkness and Eye and Seven Despairs continue to advance the field. Many questions, however, remain unanswered.

The birth of the Abyssal Exalted has ramped up the pace of necrotech research. A few Daybreak Castes are dedicated completely to experiment and invention. If the work of the last few years is any indication, the risen creations of the next 20 years should usher in a new age of horror.

BUILDING WITH DEATH

The necrosurgeon operates in several phases. First comes the hard work of assembling a body, a war machine or some other construction. Next, the necrosurgeon has a variety of ways to animate her creation. As in any work of art, the necrosurgeon works according to a design. The more skilled the necrosurgeon is, the more powerful she can make her devices. Unlike a sculpture or a painting, however, necrotech requires maintenance in order to continue working at peak efficiency.

MUNDANE CRAFT

The basics of necrotech resemble those of any craft: long hours spent hard at work putting together the right parts, using skill and attention to detail. With necrotech, however, the parts include dead bodies. The magic lies in the animation, not the construction. As a result, necrosurgery follows the same basic rules as for crafting any mundane object. Yet because necrotech is so useful, and because its intricacies are more likely to matter than the details of mortal crafts, necrosurgeons also follow a few special rules.

Necrotech is a complicated field. It always involves using organic and inorganic elements, even if the final product includes no metal plates, joints or the like. As a result, the Craft roll to create a work of necrotech uses the lower of a character's Medicine and Craft (Fire). Furthermore, the necrosurgeon must possess both Medicine and Craft (Fire) in order to understand the elements necessary to make necrosurgery successful. Two characters who each have one Ability but lack the other cannot cooperate on a single necrotech procedure.

Just as with crafting other mundane items, the procedure requires Resources invested in materials, and the intended Resources value of the creation cannot exceed the character's (Ability + relevant specialties). In this case, the lower (Ability + relevant specialties) for Medicine or Craft (Fire) is the limit. The player's dice pool and difficulty are otherwise the same as for more conventional artifice (*Exalted*, p. 133).

FINDING JUST THE RIGHT PARTS

With necrotech, just as with any craft, one needs the right materials to make a masterpiece. A character can't

forge a god-king's blade from rusty scrap iron. Necrosurgery also requires precise tools and parts. The only real difference between necrotech and blacksmithing is that a smithy's parts don't come from fresh corpses.

For some reason, shaping the dead into horrific weapons is almost universally outlawed in Creation. Every aspect of necrotech shocks and disgusts "respectable" people who were never raised to appreciate the necrosurgeon's art. As a result, finding the right materials can come with added difficulty. In any place where people frown on raiding graves or battlefields for just the right femur—or in places such as the Underworld where materials are scarce—the necessary Resources investment of a necrotech creation is considered one higher than normal. (This increase accounts for the fact that the artisan must take more elaborate measures to acquire the proper materials.) Such illegal or "unthinkable" activities carry some element of risk, but such lies in the realm of story rather than rules.

As is necessary for such a precise craft, necrosurgeons carefully arrange to acquire the morbid tools and macabre pieces that eventually complete their dark puzzles. Some of the simplest and most common tools and parts that a necrosurgeon might need for a particular project include:

- **Simple Tools:** surgical knives, forge, hammer, anvil, solid drill, precision saw, razor, blood bucket, siphon, funnel, rock crystal spikes, wood and rope for a suspended frame, preservatives, preservatives, preservatives

- **Common Parts:** child's skull, humerus of the appropriate length, iron bars shaped exactly like yeddim ribs, 100 yards of strong tendons or sinews, delicate iron chains, several dozen teeth, blood of various creatures in specific states of coagulation or decay, functional internal organs, siaka cartilage, infant fingers, a hunchback's spine, claw strider brain, polished obsidian disks, five pounds of tiger fat, small soulsteel rods and wires, bone marrow, drying agents, bear or river dragon's skin, eye dead for less than an hour, as many fresh corpses as possible

COIL RANK

The overall usefulness and destructive potential of a necrotech creation is called the creation's coil rank, and it usually equals the creation's Resources value. An apprentice necrosurgeon begins by stitching creations of coil rank 1. Abyssal necrosurgeons serving the Deathlords often stitch creations of coil rank 4–6, with some going even higher. No deathknight, however, can hope to match the necrotech skill of some Deathlords, who define the upper limit of necrotech possibility. Deathlords such as the Mask of Winters can assemble monstrosities with a coil rank of 10 or more. There's really no telling how high they could go.

Necrotech creations greater than coil rank 5 are built as though they had a projected Resources value equal to their coil rank, except that they always require a Resources 5 investment to build and must be constructed in a properly equipped workshop.

MACABRE LABORATORIES

Necrotech creations with a projected coil rank greater than 5 can be built or repaired only in a suitable workshop. Workshops appropriate for use with necrotech are the hideous analogues of those used to create artifacts, though necrosurgeons call their workshops “laboratories” instead.

A *rudimentary laboratory* lacks all but the most basic tools. It imposes a -4 external penalty to all necrosurgery rolls.

A *basic laboratory* has a small forge, plenty of body parts and a surgeon’s table and tools. A basic laboratory lacks specialized tools, however, so it imposes a -2 external penalty to appropriate necrosurgery rolls. This kind of workshop costs Resources 3 to build and Resources 2 each month to maintain.

A *master’s laboratory* is designed specifically for necrotech. Preservation vats keep parts fresh, and an adjustable frame makes it easier for the necrosurgeon to properly measure and position parts. Customizable casts make it easier to manufacture accurate parts quickly. Sewing machines make much of the finishing work on the flesh easier. This workshop costs Resources 4 to build and Resources 3 each month to maintain, but it does not impose a penalty to coil rank 6+ craft rolls.

A *flawless laboratory* is an enormous, highly advanced version of the master’s workshop. All tools are of perfect or artifact quality. Here, eldritch suspension vats preserve the dead. Essence-fueled welding tools fuse bone to bone. Flasks of reagents bubble and strange devices whirl, spark and glow. The place carries about it a dark majesty that scares away most natural animals and invites bad weather, yet the environment stays oddly dry and cool. Shadowlands occasionally coalesce around such places, and spirits instinctively despise them. Constructing a flawless workshop requires a labor pool like that necessary to build a three-dot manse, as well as Resources 4 expenditures each month to maintain. A flawless laboratory adds two dice to rolls relevant to necrosurgery.

An *ideal laboratory* is always a powerful Abyssal manse built with the geomantic purpose of stitching and animating the very greatest incomparable destruction engines. Only one Deathlord is known to possess one of these cathedral-like wonders of dark design, but such a secret is worth keeping. An ideal necrosurgery laboratory functions as the bleak equivalent of a First Age factory-cathedral. The necrosurgeons take special precautions to ensure the cold, sterile perfection of the Abyssal Essence that powers the horrible machines within. An ideal laboratory adds three dice to appropriate necrosurgery rolls.

Although many necrosurgeons are true artists with flesh and bone, when it comes to raw power, you can do only so much with a human body. For the purposes of necrotech crafting, human bodies are considered Resources 2, and human limbs are Resources 1. Most of a powerful necrotech creation’s cost, therefore, comes from rarer components.

OCCULT NECROTECH

Most of the time, necrotech creations aren’t inherently magical. They require necrotic Essence to animate them, but

they can’t manipulate Essence themselves. They cannot attune to artifacts. They do not have Essence pools, and they can’t use Charm-like effects. Yet when they are empowered by spells such as Oblivion’s Avatar (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. II—The Black Treatise**, p. 54) or certain specialized powers of powerful nemissaries, some necrotech creations can become truly unpredictable horrors capable of sublime, Essence-fueled destruction on an epic scale.

Crafting suitable vessels for these magics involves integrating principles of the Labyrinth and Neverborn into the construction. To perform these dark rites, engrave the proper sigils on the parts and twist nerves and blood vessels in the correct Labyrinthine coils, a character needs an Occult score one less than the Medicine and Craft (Fire) scores necessary to stitch the creation. For each power the creature is designed to support, the necrosurgeon also needs one exotic component (from a shadowland at least, and preferably from the Underworld).

NECROTECH CREATION TEMPLATE

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 1, Stamina 1, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 1, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Each creation has a number of dots worth of Abilities equal to its (coil rank x 4) to be distributed between Athletics, Awareness, Dodge, Martial Arts, Melee, Presence, Resistance, Stealth, Survival and Thrown. None may be raised higher than the creation’s coil rank. These points are separate from the points used to purchase augmentations.

Attacks:

Natural Attack: Speed 7, Accuracy +0, Damage +0B, Defense +0, Rate 1

Special Abilities

Infection—Rolls to resist infection from the creation’s attacks suffer a +2 difficulty penalty.

Stench—The player of anyone fighting hand to hand with a necrotech creation must make a successful (Stamina + Resistance) roll, difficulty 2, for his character each action, lest the dice pools for the character’s actions suffer a -2 internal penalty due to nausea at the creation’s stench. After the player rolls three threshold successes, the shock of the smell wears off and the character’s player does not need to continue making rolls.

Terrifying—Necrotech creations are inherently terrifying. Untrained animals flee their presence or otherwise react as in distress. Against living people, these creatures receive a +2 bonus to all rolls made to frighten.

Health Levels: -0/-1/-2/-4/Incap

Willpower: 10

Essence: 1



THE PLAYER BUILDING THE BEAST

When all the stitching, gluing and riveting is done, the still-inanimate creation takes on the Necrotech Creation Template. The player of the necrosurgeon then assigns points to augmentations from the section that follows (or he works with the Storyteller to build new augmentations). The creation receives a number of points equal to its (coil rank x 5), which the player spends to boost traits, add new powers or increase the destructive potential of the creation's attacks. Augmentations with an asterisk can be bought multiple times. Many of the so-noted augmentations can be bought only a maximum number of times, which is noted in parentheses and italics.

ATTRIBUTE AUGMENTATIONS

These three augmentations determine the creation's Physical Attributes.

***Undead Strength:** 1 pt: +1 Strength.

***Undead Dexterity:** 2 pts: +1 Dexterity. (Max = coil rank)

***Undead Stamina:** 1 pt: +1 Stamina.

SIZE

These augmentations make a creation smaller or larger (perhaps significantly) than a normal human.

Very Small: 4 pts: -2 Strength and Stamina (Min 1); one less -0 and -2 health level; +2 Dodge DV. Rolls to notice the creature suffer a -2 external penalty.

Small: 2 pts: -1 Strength and Stamina (Min 1); one less -2 health level; +1 Dodge DV. Rolls to notice the creature suffer a -1 external penalty.

Human-sized: 0 pts

***Big:** 2 pts: +1 Strength and Stamina; add one -1 and -2 health level; -1 internal penalty to Stealth rolls; -1 Dodge DV. (Max = coil rank)

GENERAL AUGMENTATIONS

These augmentations provide general bonuses.

Aquatic Propulsion: 2 pts: The creation uses its full movement speed in water at least waist deep, and is not limited to Athletics for any rolls underwater.

***Artifact Integration:** 4 pts per Artifact Rating: A necrotech creation can use an artifact if the artifact does not require attunement or Essence expenditure. The creation must still use its own traits to activate the artifact, if necessary.

OBLIVION'S AVATAR EFFECT: ARTIFACT ATTUNEMENT

The necrotech creation can attune to any artifacts built in using the *Artifact Integration* augmentation, as long as the total Essence commitment does not exceed 10 motes. See the spell *Oblivion's Avatar* (*The Books of Sorcery, Vol. II — The Black Treatise*, p. 54) for full details on the spell.

The operations used to bestow this augmentation require the necrosurgeon or an assistant to have at least as many dots of Lore as the rating of the artifact to be integrated.

The necrotech construct can incorporate more than one artifact of the indicated rating for no extra cost, as long as the artifacts are identical. For example, the web is the spider (see pp. 214-215) incorporates eight Essence capacitor jewels and 40 Essence-sucking soulsteel barbs, but it has only two *Artifact Integrations*.

Attunement: 0 pts: Any Essence-channeler can attune to the necrotech as if it were an artifact made of soulsteel, though the necrotech does not offer any magical material bonus. The mote commitment for attunement usually equals the necrotech's coil rank. This element is neutral. Sometimes, necrosurgeons prefer to restrict who can operate their necrotech by requiring use of necromancy or a special artifact.

Bleak Imitation of Normalcy: 4 pts: This augmentation removes the *Terrifying* special ability. Recognizing that the creation is dead from farther than one yard away requires a (Perception + [Awareness or Medicine]) roll at difficulty 3. While the creation still cannot hold a conversation or perform any social actions, it looks normal enough when it moves and doesn't have any obvious parts in the wrong place.

Body Part: 5 pts or 8 pts: With the proper dark powers, such as Bone Graft Technique (see pp. 160-161), this creation can become part of a living subject. For five augmentation points, the creation is useless unless it is grafted into the living. For eight augmentation points, it functions normally regardless of whether it has been grafted, and the character who committed the Essence to the graft can safely separate it from herself. The separated creation acts as a reanimated, disembodied body part might, using all of its augmentations.

Body Part grafts cannot take size-based augmentations, but they are generally small enough to impose a -1 or -2 external penalty on rolls to notice or attack them, assuming that they can move about.

***Burning Body:** *Varies:* An environmental effect damages clinched or clinching characters. Damage = (Points Spent)/L/action, Trauma = (Points Spent). This augmentation must be recharged after each scene of use and may not be turned off after it is activated. (Max = 5)

Climbing Articulation: 2 pts: The creation uses its full movement speed while climbing and does not require a roll to climb unless the difficulty rises above 2.

***Dark Fortitude:** 1 pt: This augmentation adds one -0 health level, two -1 health levels, or one -1 health level and two -2 health levels. (Max = Stamina)

***Delicate Mummification:** 2+ pts: This augmentation multiplies the amount of time before maintenance becomes necessary by the number of points spent (minimum two points).

Disease Carrier: 1 pt: All characters who come into close contact must check to avoid catching a deadly but mundane disease. See *Exalted*, pp. 350-353 for a variety of suitable diseases.

***Distant Destruction:** 2 pts: The target can perform a ranged attack using (Dexterity + Thrown). The attack possesses the following traits: Speed 7, Accuracy -1, Damage +1B, Rate 1, Range 10. The creation has ammunition for five shots.

***Extra Eyes/Ears/Noses/etc:** 1 pt: +1 Awareness (Max = 4)

***Extra Legs/Wheels:** 1 pt: The creation moves one extra yard per tick with its Move action and five extra yards per tick with Dash. It also receives one bonus die to resist knockback/knockdown. The number of sets of wheels or extra legs the creation has is not determined (or reflected) by the number of times it has this augmentation. Buying this augmentation multiple times is necessary only to grant additional movement speed and resistance to knockdown/knockback. (Max = Strength)

Flier: *Varies:* With a Dash action, the creation can jump from the ground and take flight. It can fly at its normal running speed when ascending, double that when flying level, and 10 times that when diving. The creation's player rolls (Dexterity + Athletics) when it performs difficult flying maneuvers.

If the creature attempts to carry more weight than half its lifting capacity (see *Exalted*, p. 127), this augmentation turns into *Glider* until the creature can divest itself of the excess weight. This power costs 12 points, plus double the sum of all the points spent on any *Undead Strength*, *Big*, *Funereal Armor* and *Heavy Plates* augmentations the creation has. If the creation is *Small*, this power costs two fewer points; if it's *Very Small*, it costs four fewer points.

***Funereal Armor:** 1 pt: +2B/+1L soak. (Max = Stamina)

Glider: *Varies:* The creation can glide through the air, moving (Stamina x 3) yards each tick with a Move action. It may also take a Dash action to dive, moving (Stamina x 10) yards downward each tick. The gliding creation loses at least one yard of altitude every three ticks. The creation's player must roll (Dexterity + Athletics) for it to pull out of a dive or perform any aerial maneuvers. The gliding creation falls if it attempts to carry more than half its normal lifting capacity (see *Exalted*, p. 127). This augmentation costs six points, plus additional points equal to the sum of all the points spent on the *Undead Strength*, *Big*, *Funereal Armor* and *Heavy Plates* augmentations the creation has. If the creation is *Small*, this power costs one point less; if it's *Very Small*, then it costs three fewer points.

Heavy Plates: 1 pt: The creation has Hardness equal to its lethal soak but suffers an additional -1 mobility penalty.

Hollow: 4 pts or 6 pts: The creation is armor. Its armor soak values equal its normal soak values. It has no intrinsic fatigue values or mobility penalties, though, because it acts with its own strength. Any mobility penalties come from other augmentations (such as *Heavy Plates*). As a secondary benefit, a character wearing necrotech armor may use either the armor's Attributes and Abilities or her own—whichever are higher.

For four points, the creation can function only when someone wears it (though the “wearer” can be a possessing nemissary). The wearer can also set the creation to act on its own and just ride along—which usually means a mindless, murderous rampage driven by risen hunger. That is also the result if the wearer becomes incapacitated, lasting until the wearer actually dies. For six points, the creation can be worn as armor, but it can also act without a wearer, using only its own traits. Such a risen creation may have various directives built in for when it must act without a wearer, or when its wearer is incapacitated.

The process of donning or removing a creation with this augmentation takes just as long as donning or removing regular armor does. Creations worn as armor can be targeted by attacks normally and use the wearing character’s DVs. Creations with this augmentation are vulnerable to attacks that would inflict aggravated damage, providing no soak against them.

***Keen Sense:** 4 pts: The creation gains sensory abilities as per a single purchase of Keen Sense Technique (see *Exalted*, p. 225).

Linkable: 4 pts: The creation may join to certain other linkable creations as a miscellaneous action. When joined together, all linked creations become a single entity using the lowest traits of all parts in all cases, and using only augmentations that all linked creations possess. The new creation has all of the health levels of all the parts that linked together. For these reasons, linked creations usually all have identical designs.

***Melee Weapon Graft:** *Varies:* This augmentation grafts a weapon to the creation. Attacks with this weapon use the creation’s Melee rating. Higher-quality weapons cost more points: Poor (the opposite of exceptional), two points; Normal, four points; Fine, five points; Exceptional, six points; Perfect, eight points.

Only Mildly Unpleasant: 0 pts: This augmentation removes the *Stench* special ability. The creation doesn’t stink all that badly. A successful (Perception + Awareness) roll must be made to notice the smell of death. If precautions are taken to overwhelm or cover up the odor, then the roll suffers an external penalty from -1 to -3.

Sanitized: 0 pts: This augmentation removes the *Infection* special ability—an important consideration for necrotech that is meant to be worn or grafted onto a person’s body.

Shield: 2 pts: The creature gains a +1 bonus to DVs in hand-to-hand combat, and a +2 DV bonus against ranged attacks. This augmentation also carries a -2 mobility penalty.

***Silent Processes:** 1 pt: +1 to Stealth. (Max = 4)

Solid: 3 pts: The creation soaks lethal damage with its full Stamina score but suffers an additional -1 mobility penalty.

***Transcendent Revenant Vessel:** 1 pt: This creation was specifically designed for the use of nemissaries. The Essence cost of a particular ghostly Charm is halved when used on the vessel. That Charm also has any Willpower cost

reduced by one (to a minimum of zero), and its duration extends tenfold. This augmentation usually benefits the Charm Nemissary’s Ride, but a necrosurgeon can apply it to any Arcanos Charm. The augmentation must be bought once per applicable Charm. The understanding of ghostly Charms used on this augmentation requires the necrosurgeon or an assistant to have an Occult score at least equal to the creation’s (coil rank - 1). (Max = coil rank)

***Transport:** 2 pts: A controller can ride the creation if she has a Ride rating of 1 or higher. Purchasing this augmentation once enables the creation to carry a unit of Magnitude 0 (i.e., one person). Every additional purchase increases the Magnitude of the group it can carry by one. The transport has a bonus to its Maneuverability rating equal to its Dexterity score. The Strength and Athletics of a creation with this augmentation do not set the limit for how much cargo or personnel it can carry. This augmentation combines dedicated extra Strength with design features that make a creation especially fitted for hauling heavy loads.

This augmentation may be purchased a maximum number of times equal to creature’s number of *Big* augmentations. Mindless undead have a herd mentality that causes them to cooperate to a certain degree with the efforts of creations that bear this augmentation. For instance, walking dead being transported sometimes curl into the fetal position to maximize the number of zombies that can fit in a transport. (Max = Special)

Usable Weapon: 4 pts or 8 pts: One of the creation’s attacks can be used by other characters (with the controller’s consent), using Archery or Melee as the relevant Ability. This augmentation costs four points if the creation can’t use the attack itself, and eight points otherwise. This augmentation is sometimes combined with *Hollow* to create necrotech battle suits.

NATURAL ATTACK TRAITS

These bonuses power up the creation’s natural attack.

***Unholy Speed:** 1 pt: -1 Speed. (Max = 3)

***Unholy Accuracy:** 1 pt: +1 Accuracy. (Max = Dexterity)

***Unholy Damage:** 1 pt: +3 Damage. (Max = Strength)

***Unholy Rate:** 1 pt: +1 Rate. (Max = Dexterity)

NATURAL ATTACK AUGMENTATIONS

These bonuses add special qualities to the creation’s natural attack.

Charging Fury Attack: 1 pt: The attack doubles its Damage bonus when charging or set to receive a charge.

Clinch Enhancer Attack: 1 pt: The attack initiates a grapple, just as a clinch maneuver does.

Disarming Attack: 1 pt: The attack is at +2 Accuracy when attempting a disarm

Lethal Attack: 1 pt: The attack’s damage is lethal.

Overwhelming Attack: 1 pt: The attack has +1 minimum damage. (Max = 1/4 base Damage)

Piercing Attack: 1 pt or 3 pts: The attack is piercing. Buying this augmentation for one point makes a bashing

attack piercing. Buying it for three points makes a lethal attack piercing.

Poisonous: 4 pts or 8 points: The attack is poisonous. Most poisons take effect only if the target of the attack suffers lethal damage. Especially useful or deadly poisons cost more points. Ultra-deadly poisons such as Yozi Venom (**Exalted**, p. 131) cost 10–20 points or more. Normally, the creation carries five doses of poison. For double the normal cost, the creation produces its own poison.

Reach Attack: 1 pt: The attack suffers no penalty against targets at higher elevation.

***Weakening Attack:** 2 pts: Using mundane methods, the attack sets things on fire, stuns them, causes extra pain or otherwise imposes a –2 internal penalty for the remainder of the scene on every action that a successfully attacked target takes. Targets can resist this effect with a successful (Stamina + Resistance) roll whose difficulty equals (attack's raw damage ÷ 3). The effect is not cumulative. It inflicts either a wound penalty or a Crippling effect.

Whirling Attack: 5 pts: The attack strikes at everyone within reach of the creation.

RANGED ATTACK TRAITS

These augmentations apply to a single ranged attack. Creations without the *Distant Destruction* augmentation do not have a ranged attack.

***Horrible Accuracy:** 1 pt: +1 Accuracy. (Max = Dexterity)

***Horrible Damage:** 1 pt: +2 Damage. (Max = Strength)

***Horrible Range:** 1 pt: +10 Range. (Max = Strength)

***Horrible Rate:** 1 pt: +1 Rate. (Max = Dexterity)

***Horrible Speed:** 2 pts: -1 Speed. (Max = 2)

RANGED ATTACK AUGMENTATIONS

These augmentations apply to a single ranged attack. Creations without the *Distant Destruction* augmentation do not have a ranged attack.

Area of Effect Attack: 7 pts: The attack cannot be parried. It applies to everything within a radius of up to 10 yards. Anyone within a Move action of the area's edge can escape if the attack fails to overcome their Dodge DV.

***Extra Ammo:** 1 pt: The attack has 10 extra shots before the creature must be re-supplied.

Lethal Ranged Attack: 1 pt: The attack deals lethal damage.

Necrosuicide Attack: 2 pts or 5 pts: The attack has no immediate effect, but after the Speed of the attack has elapsed, the creature destroys itself with one big shot. A successful (Perception + Medicine) roll enables a character to notice this buildup. The attack centers on the creation and targets everything within the attack's base Range. It cannot be parried (though it can be dodged) and the attack roll receives bonus successes equal to the creation's Stamina. Damage on the attack also adds bonus dice equal to the

creation's Stamina, up to a maximum equal to the creation's (coil rank x 2). For five points, the attack may also be used normally. This attack usually activates automatically when the creature reaches its -4 health level or lower, unless the creature is totally destroyed.

Piercing Ranged Attack: 1 pt or 3 pts: The attack is piercing. Buying this augmentation for one point makes a bashing attack piercing. Buying it for three points makes a lethal attack piercing.

Poisonous Ranged Attack: 4 pts: As per *Poisonous*.

Weakening Ranged Attack: 2 pts: As per *Weakening Attack*.

Ultra Range Attack: 5 pts: The attack's Range is multiplied by 100. This augmentation cannot be combined with *Poisonous Ranged Attack*, and this extra range does not apply to a *Necrosuicide Attack*.

REANIMATION

The process of finding the proper parts and crafting a vessel suitable for corporeal unlife can be exacting and gruesome, but anyone with a dark heart, the proper tools and a few years of schooling can pull it off. The really hard part is reanimation, the wholly unnatural process of returning vibrancy and a semblance of life to decaying flesh and unyielding metal. This step is the key to necrotech. Up to that point, all you have is a pile of bones. After reanimation, the die is cast, and no further work may be done.

In the wide, deep world of Creation and below, dozens of tested techniques have brought back the bodies of those lost to death. All require large amounts of Essence to be focused through a lens of occult technique designed specifically for the purpose of reanimation. Simply infusing a graveyard with a wash of necromantic Essence will not raise the dead, nor will any random cataclysmic disaster.

The method of reanimation is important. Different techniques serve very different purposes. Many necrosurgeons' methods of reanimation are determined by availability, but the richest and most established Deathlords have access to many ways of bringing the dead back to a semblance of life. The following are some methods of reanimation and notes concerning their use.

NECROMANCY

By far, the most common reanimation technique is necromancy. Necromancy is an enormously powerful, versatile weapon, and the key to much of the Deathlords' success. With just a few moments of casting, one necromancer can reanimate the result of hundreds or even thousands of man-hours of stitching. What's more, necromantic reanimation usually forges a supernatural bond of loyalty and understanding that allows the necromancer to direct her risen minions. The following spells are the most commonly used necromantic reanimators. (See *The Books of Sorcery*, Vol. II—*The Black Treatise* for details.)

With only Iron Circle necromancy, Raise the Skeletal Horde can make multiple undead servants very quickly. Rais-

ing many dead bodies at a moment's notice can be extremely useful. (It's the key benefit of this spell.) Furthermore, much of the reanimation caused by this spell can be maintained indefinitely by the caster's reserve will. A necromancer with this spell can be expected to have a constant retinue of zombies with numbers approaching (her Willpower x 5). The only real limitation of this spell is its inability to reanimate anything other than zombies.

The Onyx Circle spell *Arisen Legion* can make a whole lot of zombies, really quickly. Although this spell requires more time, motes and Willpower to cast than *Raise the Skeletal Horde*, there is no limit to the number of zombies it can create. The zombie legions of the Deathlords do not shamble from one battle to the next. They are created on demand using this spell. The only real potential drawback is the difficulty of effectively issuing orders to the numberless hordes of zombies that this spell can conceivably raise.

You can often tell the difference between an Iron Circle necromancer and an Onyx Circle one by the quality of her zombies. The servants created by the Onyx Circle spell *Call the Greater Servitor* are intelligent and flexible enough to wear armor, swing swords, use simple tools and even be coordinated in combat.

The unfortunate servant created by the spell *Exquisite Undead Aide* can do most of the necromancer's necrosurgery for her. It could also serve as an active and intelligent bodyguard or a loyal spy. Necromancers with useful talents can trade specialized aides to those who can pay, or just send them out into the world to "spread the faith," or "make mommy proud."

The ultimate tactical zombie manufacturing power, *Risen and Screaming*, creates permanent zombies under the necromancer's total control. It continues to create them any time any living creature dies within a large area. As if that weren't enough, all zombies within the area suddenly become deadly zombie mines, ready to burst forth from the tainted earth at the first scent of life. The ritual used to complete this spell is its only weakness.

The three spells used to reanimate the creations stitched using the rules in the preceding section are *Walking War Machine* (a.k.a. *Iron Reanimation*), *Spurring the Beast of War* (a.k.a. *Onyx Reanimation*) and *Incomparable Destruction Engine* (a.k.a. *Obsidian Reanimation*). The text and examples for these spells found in **The Black Treatise** provide quick ideas for construction and rough examples of results. The rules here and in the previous sections supply an option of greater detail for players and Storytellers who want such a thing.

Iron Reanimation works on necrotech creations of coil rank 4 or lower. *Onyx Reanimation* works on creation of coil rank 8 or lower. *Obsidian Reanimation* can reanimate absolutely any successfully stitched necrotech creation. These spells function only if the necromancer either constructed his target or was qualified to stitch the creation and was present for the construction at some point.

DEATH ESSENCE VERSUS CREATION'S ESSENCE

The difference between the Essence of the Underworld and the living Essence of Creation is subtle but measurable. Any sort of Essence can hypothetically raise the dead. Powerful sorcery can reanimate zombies. A suitably beautiful Solar song could probably make the rocks and twigs spring to life and dance, to say nothing of nearby corpses. Death Essence is just much better at it.

The rules in this chapter assume the use of Death Essence—that is, Essence supplied by necromancy, Abyssal Exalted, ghosts, Abyssal manses, Underworld manses, soulfire gems, soulsteel artifacts or other dark phenomena. Essence supplied by more vital sources reacts unpredictably with the death that supplies the core scientific principle of necrotech.

Mindless creations of necromancy that are powered by Creation's Essence are insane, or perhaps just more so. Improperly fueled, such creations become harder to instruct and command. Presence- or Linguistics-based rolls often become necessary to break through the rage and risen hunger.

Grafted parts sometimes spasm at the least opportune moments. No more than once each scene, the Storyteller may call for a (Stamina + Resistance) roll at a difficulty equal to (1 + creation's wound penalty), lest the body part perform an action unguided by its host. Remember that even grafted parts are malicious, destructive and hungry.

Furthermore, necrotech creations powered by Creation's Essence require maintenance twice as often as parts reanimated by proper Death Essence. In the long run, such creations wear out and decay faster, corrupted and corroded by the acidic Essence of life.

THAUMATURGY

The arts of the dead contain rituals designed to raise corpses as animate servitors. The magic of a *Raise Corpse* ritual (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. III—Oadenol's Codex**, p. 134), for instance, brings back a single zombie for a few weeks. Thaumaturges might design other rituals to bring back dead pets or children.

SPIRITUAL POSSESSION

Using divine power, spirits can inhabit and possess dead bodies in the same way that they would a house or suit of armor. Spiritual possession provides a guiding intelligence, which is truly invaluable. The spirit uses its own Abilities, instead of the latent Abilities of the vessel. Intelligent undead can wear armor, wield weapons, write and perform other complex actions. Also, many spirits possess useful powers that can contribute greatly to the creation's arsenal.



Spiritual possession has several difficulties, though. Some dark spirits are quite willing to play along, but most gods and elementals dislike inhabiting dead bodies. This sort of possession requires a reasonably powerful spirit, and is extremely taxing. Finally, the living Essence of most spirits reacts unpredictably within the dead, causing occasional malfunctions and speeding the need for maintenance. For these reasons, spiritual possession is usually a viable option for only a few hours at a time.

GHOSTLY POSSESSION

A sufficiently powerful and well-trained ghost can learn to inhabit cadavers and control them with great skill. Some ghosts, called nemissaries, learn to possess many different kinds of dead bodies quickly and indefinitely. Nemissaries make up much of the elite forces of many Deathlords (see **Exalted**, p. 319).

Many nemissaries can possess hosts of greater size and power than a standard human corpse. Certain creations, known as transcendent revenant vessels, are specifically designed for the use of nemissaries. Most such creations are coil rank 4, but the most powerful nemissaries can possess creations of coil rank 5 or higher. This ability makes nemissaries into deadly combatants.

Nemissaries make a good choice for reanimating creations of moderate power that require a degree of subtlety. Ghosts generally lack the power of gods, but they present fewer problems. A necrosurgeon can summon and bind them using necromancy,

or he can simply bribe them with blood and favors. Ghosts also provide a guiding intelligence, using their own skills in place of the latent skills of the vessel. A practiced nemissary can even choose whether to use its own skills or the vessel's.

Practiced nemissaries are relatively few and far between, however. A necrosurgeon also must consider the loyalty factor. Even bound by necromancy, ghosts do still feel fear.

ESSENCE BATTERY INTEGRATION

Necrosurgeons who lack access to nemissaries or necromancy can animate their creation using Essence batteries such as soulfire crystals, Essence-containing gems or hearthstones (see "Gemstone Essence Batteries" on pp. 215-216). In order for the Essence battery to work, the creation must use the *Integrated Artifact* augmentation to incorporate a hearthstone amulet (see **Exalted**, p. 380) or other battery setting. The Essence itself must be necrotic, or else filtered through soulsteel or Underworld jade—and only necrotic Essence channeled through soulsteel or Underworld jade avoids the problem of incompatible Essence sources.

As the battery is installed, the creation crackles with energy and surges to the semblance of life. The now-deadly creation consumes one mote per coil rating per hour, making most batteries very temporary solutions. If the Essence requirement of the creation is supplied by a hearthstone that meets its needs, then the reanimation continues until the hearthstone is removed or destroyed.

GEOMANTIC REANIMATION

Esoteric legends speak of manse where Old Realm experimenters sought to raise powerful undead beasts that far outstripped their skill with necromancy. The tales say these geomantic laboratories contain machines that reanimate any creation plugged into their systems. Such manse would bestow flawless control of the risen creation upon the hearthstone bearer but would limit the creature's movements to the range of the manse.

If such laboratories exist, they would likely function as examples of manse powers such as Bound Servant Force or Guardian (see *The Books of Sorcery*, Vol. III—*Oadenol's Codex*, pp. 71 and 73), depending on the maximum coil rank that could be raised or the maximum amount of undead the manse could sustain at once.

Since geomantic reanimation isn't particularly effective for war and modern necromancy renders it obsolete, modern necrosurgeons are not likely to reinvent the technique. One wonders what all that Essence would do to a necrotech creature after all these ages... especially if the Essence was not Dead Essence.

Essence battery integration is inferior to necromancy. Besides the eternal need for Essence, Essence batteries do not bestow control of risen creatures, just reanimation.

ESSENCE COMMITMENT

Certain powers, such as the Abyssal Charm Arise and Slaughter, can reanimate the dead in various ways. These Charms are direct and expensive ways to force unlife. They usually require large amounts of committed Essence or have other limitations, such as duration. These powers generally grant control over the resultant creations and can be extremely useful in a pinch, but they seldom provide permanent methods of reanimation.

ARTIFACTS

Some soulsteel artifacts are designed to reanimate the dead. Most such items require use of the *Integrated Artifact* augmentation, but some powerful artifacts bypass this need and can reanimate any cadaver. Designing and building an artifact to reanimate a necrotech creation is a lot of work. If the necrosurgeon can salvage the artifact after the creation has been expended, however, then the investment could be worth it.

MAINTENANCE:

KEEPING THE DEAD WALKING

Despite all the advances that idealistic Daybreak Castes make in the field of preservation, the dead decay. Once Oblivion claims the spark of life, the body and soul must follow in time. Some legendary creations have been around for millennia, but maintenance and repair are a constant in the life of a necrosurgeon. Savants who animate the dead must learn to cope with the inevitable end.

All machines require maintenance, and necrotech produces very complicated machines. In a normal day's work, a necrosurgeon might lubricate iron parts, replace worn joints or eyes, patch muscle tissue, tighten rivets, refuel conductors and preservatives, and much more. Keeping a unit of walking war machines in working order is a full-time job.

All necrotech creations require maintenance every (3 – wound penalty) days. A wound penalty in excess of -2 indicates that the creation needs maintenance every scene. Fighting or other heavy stress counts as double time.

Of course, necrosurgeons can take precautions to reduce the need for maintenance, but such care usually involves removing the creation from active service. An inactive creation stored in a bath of rare necromantic preservatives requires maintenance only yearly—even less often with the added support of *Eternal Embalming Preparation* (see pp. 151-152). Such a bath, however, costs Resources 4 (or 5 for large beasts). Careful design (i.e., the *Delicate Mummification* augmentation) can further extend the time before maintenance becomes necessary.

Maintenance takes a number of hours equal to the coil rank of the creation. During this time, the necrosurgeon must keep the creation restrained, controlled or otherwise inactive. Multiple necrosurgeons can speed the maintenance of large creations. On a particular creation, one additional necrosurgeon may simultaneously perform maintenance for each purchase of the *Big* augmentation. If each necrosurgeon is fully qualified, divide the time taken by an amount equal to the number of artisans performing the maintenance.

Maintaining a necrotech creation requires both Craft (Fire) and Medicine at a rating two lower than the score necessary to plan and create the monster. As with construction, two characters may not team up to meet requirements they lack individually. Furthermore, if the creation has artifacts integrated into it, then the necrosurgeon or a close consultant

ALL THINGS DECAY

All life moves toward death, and death toward Oblivion. Conventional mummification techniques, chemicals and thaumaturgy can preserve inanimate remains for a very long time. They are always less effective on risen creations. Reanimation causes decay. Only powers that arrest the effects of aging can prevent the slow but inevitable end—and such powers work only while the creation stays inactive.

Eternal Embalming Preparation does not quite live up to its name where necrotech is concerned. Its effects do not stack perfectly with thaumaturgical methods of preserving the dead, but it does interact well with mundane mummification. As a result, Daybreak necrosurgeons can build dried creations that, when further magically preserved, will likely last until advances in necrotechnology render them obsolete.

must possess Lore equal to (Artifact rating – 2) to complete the maintenance. If the creation bears enchantments, the necrosurgeon or an assistant must possess an Occult score equal to (coil rank – 1). Failure to meet these requirements means the maintenance doesn't work.

One person can perform maintenance on all but the very largest undead machines. She will need tools costing Resources 2, plus expendable components with a Resource cost equal to (creation's coil rank ÷ 3), rounded up. The latter cost must be paid for every maintenance, but the cost of tools can be folded into the ongoing monthly cost of running a necrotech laboratory.

An attempt to maintain a necrotech creation when one lacks the necessary tools, consumables or skills must fail. Instead, the necrosurgeon inflicts one level of bashing damage and one level of aggravated damage to the creation. The bashing damage may be repaired, but the aggravated damage cannot.

Time and rot eventually consume anything made of the dead. For every 25 maintenance intervals, the creation takes one level of bashing damage and one level of aggravated damage as its magic and flesh slowly decay.

REPAIR

Being dead, necrotech items and beasts do not heal. Luckily, almost all damage can be repaired. Properly fixing damage requires a necrosurgeon to possess both Craft (Fire) and Medicine at a rating equal to (coil rank – 1). If one or more artifacts are integrated into the creation, the necrosurgeon or an assistant must possess a Lore rating of at least (coil rank – 1). If the creation has intrinsic enchantments, the necrosurgeon or an assistant must possess an Occult rating of at least (coil rank – 1).

The necrosurgeon's player rolls the same dice pool as for constructing the necrotech creation, except the difficulty is one less. A player whose character who does not fully meet the Ability requirements may still roll at a -2 external penalty per dot by which the necrosurgeon falls short. Furthermore, any creation that must be constructed in a workshop must also be repaired in one. An insufficient workshop space or tools increases the difficulty as normal (see p. 198). The Storyteller may apply further modifiers for extra care, superior tools, resources spent, short time or other special circumstances.

A repair session takes one hour per coil rating of the creature. It consumes parts and reagents whose Resources cost equals (coil rating ÷ 3), rounded up. Every success on this roll completely heals one level of lethal damage or two levels of bashing damage.

Aggravated damage inflicted on necrotech creations cannot be repaired. Aggravated damage has cut to the black heart of the already-dead beast, damaging the reanimating magic and spoiling every necrotech fiber. Rot and decay eventually inflicts enough aggravated damage to destroy all creations, but a few well-aimed Holy attacks can speed that process considerably.

Charms or Essence-based effects that repair inanimate objects do not work on reanimated creations. Neither does magic designed specifically to heal the living. Upon losing its last health level, necrotech is destroyed and cannot be repaired by any mundane means. It behooves necrosurgeons to collect the remains of their destroyed creations, though, as undamaged parts can be reused in future creations. After all, recycling is a big part of necrosurgery.

Coil Rank	Essence Commitment
Rank 1	1 mote
Rank 2	1 mote
Rank 3	3 motes
Rank 4	5 motes
Rank 5	8 motes

IMPLANTS AND GRAFTS

Until damage and decay erodes their potency, parts of dead bodies possess the potential for most of the mundane properties and abilities that they had in life. This is why zombies know to shamble and claw their prey. A newly dead arm still has most of the strength it had in life; it just needs a will to make it work. A dead eye can still see; it just lacks motivation. People who lose limbs, eyes or other important parts can exploit this principle through necrotech.

The Abyssal Charm Bone Graft Technique (see pp. 160-161) enables necrosurgeons to graft body parts and certain necrotech creations onto living subjects, fully integrating dead tissue with living creatures. Such an unnatural combination requires committed Essence to sustain itself. The potency of the part determines the amount of Essence required. A finger or other minor part requires too little Essence to measure. A human hand or eye requires a single mote. A leg or vital organ needs three motes. Parts of greater potency—including anything taken from a nonhuman source, such as an eagle's eyes or a grizzly bear's arms—usually require either three or five motes, as decided by the Storyteller, based on their potential overall power and usefulness. For necrotech creations, their coil rank determines the required Essence commitment:

Necrotech creations intended as potential grafts must include the *Body Part* augmentation (see p. 200). They are usually limbs or organs, but some are more exotic and simply occupy the space where a limb or organ used to be. Many are deadly in strange and unexpected ways.

Once grafted, the creation's natural attacks become natural attacks for the subject, using his Attributes and Abilities. The effects of some other augmentations, such as *Disease Carrier*, might also pass to the subject.

Other augmentations have limited utility once the creation is grafted on. For instance, *Climbing Articulation* (see p. 200) might carry a scuttling disembodied arm up a wall, but would not work so well for a full-grown human. As a general guideline, many augmentations provide a bonus

to appropriate rolls equal to the augmentation's point cost. For instance, an arm with *Climbing Articulation* could give a two-die bonus to climbing a wall or catching a ledge.

Whether simple grafts or elaborate necrotech, limbs that possess Physical Attributes greater or less than the subject's usually grant bonuses or impose internal penalties on appropriate rolls equal to the difference between ratings. Obviously, the Storyteller must judge whether a graft's Attributes are relevant to the task at hand. Giving someone an extremely muscular replacement arm might benefit his overall Strength for lifting and throwing, but it's hard to see how a leg with remarkable Stamina could help a person better resist poison (unless a venomous animal bites him in that leg).

Skilled necrosurgeons always try to be picky, but quality parts are not always available. As body parts decay, their natural capacities diminish. If some meddling Solar ripped out a necrosurgeon's eyes, and she has to rob a grave on short notice to get a replacement pair, the eyes that she gets might be decayed to near-uselessness. Rotten or damaged parts impose internal penalties, just as quality parts provide bonuses. The Storyteller remains the final arbiter of what bonuses or penalties a body part grants, and to which rolls. These bonuses or penalties do not count as bonuses from Charms. The Storyteller is also the final arbiter of whether bonuses from multiple grafted parts stack with each other.

Grafts need periodic maintenance and repair, just like any other products of necrotech. For such purposes, unworked body parts possess a coil rank set by their power and usefulness—typically between 1 and 4. Storytellers can use the Essence commitment table as a guide: coil rank 1 for a hand, 2 for an arm, 3 for a leg and 4 or more for something *interesting* such as replacing an arm with the reanimated body of a viper.

A grafted part's wound penalty applies as a penalty to all rolls using that part. Grafted internal organs that suffer wound penalties can inflict penalties to a wide variety of rolls. A grafted necrotech body part that becomes Incapacitated stops working entirely, which is bad news if you have a necrosurgically implanted heart.

All repair rolls suffer an external penalty from -1 to -3 if the part stays attached to the subject. Nowhere else is the importance of Medicine to necrotech more clear. For instance, it's extremely difficult to repair a necrotech heart while it's keeping its host alive.

EXAMPLES AND INSTRUCTIONS

The macabre genius of necrosurgeons produces many wondrous crimes against the laws of nature, men and gods. Here are just a few.

REANIMATED TOOLS

Compared to the precision of magitech, the less-developed ways of necrotech can seem clumsy. It's true that an organic medium brings a certain inherent level of inaccuracy and unpredictability. Necrosurgeons strive to remove those

elements that make necrotech seem incapable of anything other than gross destruction. They have achieved several successes. Here are some of the more common designs that one might encounter serving as tools of their reanimators.

DREAD BRACHIAL SAPPING ARRAY (COIL RANK 2)

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 1, Stamina 1; Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 1; Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Athletics 2, Martial Arts 2, Presence 2, Resistance 2

Join Battle: 3

Attacks

Razor-Edged Clawing: Speed 7, Accuracy 3, Damage 10L, Parry DV 1, Rate 1, Tags: P

Special Abilities: *Infection, Stench, Terrifying*

Soak: 0L/1B

Health Levels: -0/-1/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 0 **Willpower:** 10

Essence: 1

Augmentations: *Linkable* (4), *Lethal Attack* (1), *Undead Strength* x 3 (3), *Unholy Damage* x 2 (2)

Designed for use in construction and sieges, the dread brachial sapping array consists of at least five strong arms joined at the shoulder. The bones and fingers are reinforced and tipped in sharpened steel. The arms exist in a state of permanent agitation and claw desperately when placed upon any surface. Eventually, they break and tunnel through even solid stone.

The tool is undeniably cumbersome, and not very fast in its drilling. Fortunately, all such arrays can be linked together. Dread brachial sapping arrays with 50 to 100 linked arms can wear away large surfaces with surprising speed. The key is persistence. The arms claw tirelessly, even if their keepers leave. The real trick is placing the array where it won't inadvertently begin destroying the wrong surface.

ALARM WOLF (COIL RANK 3)

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 1, Stamina 4; Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 1; Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Awareness 3, Resistance 2, Stealth 4, Survival 3

Join Battle: 6

Attacks

Desperate Chomp: Speed 7, Accuracy 5, Damage 1B, Parry DV —, Rate 1

Special Abilities: *Infection, Terrifying*

Soak: 6L/12B, Hardness 6

Health Levels: -0/-1/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 0 **Willpower:** 10

Essence: 1

Augmentations: *Heavy Plates* (1), *Keen Sense (Hearing & Touch)* (4), *Keen Sense (Smell & Taste)* (4), *Only Mildly Unpleasant* (0), *Silent Processes* (3), *Undead Stamina* x 3 (3)

This creation consists of an animal's head and torso—most commonly a wolf, but any animal with an especially

loud roar or howl will do—minus its limbs. Its purpose is to lie hidden and howl at any approaching sign of life. Its body is reinforced with thick iron and bone plates. The animal is not capable of attacking anything that remains out of reach, but it can warn everyone within a mile if someone comes within 50 yards of it.

SOLILOQUY (COIL RANK 3)

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 1, Stamina 7; Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 1; Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Presence 3, Resistance 3, Survival 3, Thrown 3

Join Battle: 3

Attacks

Final Soliloquy: Speed 7, Accuracy 3 (+ 7 successes), Damage 7L, Rate 1, Range 10

Special Abilities: *Infection*

Soak: 0L/7B

Health Levels: -0/-1/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 0 **Willpower:** 10

Essence: 1

Augmentations: *Bleak Imitation of Normalcy* (4), *Distant Destruction* (2), *Lethal Ranged Attack* (1), *Necrosuicide Attack* (2), *Only Mildly Unpleasant* (0), *Undead Stamina* x 6 (6)

The soliloquy demonstrates necrotech experimentation and innovation at its finest, though the design is barely out of the prototype stage. A human corpse is immobilized, and its non-visual senses are disabled. Inside, the diaphragm controls an explosive chemical reaction and the brain houses a small vial of acid. The user then leaves the body face down in a place where she expects enemies to pass.

Eventually, warm-hearted mortals see a body lying on the road, apparently wounded. When they turn over the creation, they trigger an interesting chain of events. The acid empties into the brain, rapidly eating it away. The creation, totally helpless, apparently somehow senses its own impending destruction.

For reasons not fully understood, if the upper respiratory system and vocal chords are properly preserved, this induces the creation to speak. It opens its eyes and gasps the last few seconds of the last thing it said before death. The enemy then stops to listen. As the creation releases its “breath,” the diaphragm reaction triggers. The buildup climaxes in the explosive release of acidic shrapnel.

Anyone could stop the reaction simply by cupping his hand over the creation’s mouth, but the living are unlikely to consider that. The complicated design still has a few kinks to work out since the necrotech principles aren’t fully explored, but the whole deadly concept is just too delicious to pass up.

GLITTERING LOBOTOMIZED RAPTOR (COIL RANK 4)

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 1; Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 1; Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 4, Martial Arts 4, Presence 4

Join Battle: 7

Attacks

Diving Talon: Speed 7, Accuracy 6, Damage 1L, Parry DV 3, Rate 1

Special Abilities: *Infection*, *Stench*, *Terrifying*

Soak: 0L/1B

Health Levels: -1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 3 **Willpower:** 10



Essence: 1

Augmentations: *Dark Fortitude* (1), *Flier* (8), *Keen Sense* (Sight) (4), *Lethal Attack* (1), *Undead Dexterity* (2), *Very Small* (4)

With a just a few surgical strokes to the brain of a hawk or falcon and a few shiny implants, a once great living hunter becomes a relatively effective mortal-finder. The bird's reduced undead vision and glistening metal parts, combined with its natural aura of menace, make it an ineffective hunter of most animals, but people are rarely so cunning. A clever deathknight came up with the idea of tying a string to such a lessened creature, which would lead them to its slow prey. Occasionally, the glistening lobotomized raptor leads the hunters to a wounded deer, but results have been excellent overall.

RISEN FOOT SOLDIERS

The walking dead are coil rank 2 creations. For complete traits, see **Exalted**, p. 314. Because of the relative prevalence of human corpses and the ease of reanimating them, the vast majority of risen dead are zombies. Consequently, most necrosurgery involves their maintenance.

Necromancers and lieutenants of the Deathlords often use risen corpses as bodyguards. The zombies overwhelm mortals with superior numbers or eagerness to kill, but rarely with their skills. Persistent zombies can delay or distract powerful adversaries, but only the mightiest walking dead pose a real threat. That category includes walking dead reanimated by nemissaries, as well as some specialized undead created through the use of advanced necromancy.

Most risen dead are not subtle. They stink. They're scary. They groan now and then, but cannot speak. Left to their own devices, they kill and feast.

Zombies are also not smart. Mindless undead forget orders within a scene if no one reminds them. They also understand only what their surviving sensory organs can interpret. Necromancy assists in much of the task of directing mindless undead, supplying controlled risen minions with an occasionally imperfect understanding of their master's wishes. Still, beyond specific exceptions, mindless undead cannot process most instructions that do not involve simply moving and killing. A necromancer can certainly tell zombies to watch her back. They'll understand to kill anything that comes near. If she tries to tell them to disable their foes, however, she will quickly find that her orders exceed her minions' limited comprehension.

Using risen dead on the field of battle poses several more difficulties. Mindless zombies do not understand "friend" and "foe," only "us" and "everyone else." Also, they do not care for a moment about colors, potential alliances or the high ground. They barrel mindlessly into onrushing cavalry charges and ignore incoming archery barrages. In very large battles, War Charms may be the only logistically acceptable way to deal with these problems.

Obviously, zombies also provide serious benefits on the battlefield. They never flee. They don't feel pain or fear.

RISEN HUNGER

No matter how one raises the dead, they tend to behave the same way in the absence of any controlling intelligence. They blunder around, looking for something to kill and eat. Dead flesh gains neither sustenance nor Essence from killing the living, drinking blood or eating flesh; it's pure, pointless instinct. Necrosurgeons exploit risen hunger, however, in their undead soldiers and war machines. It's part of the instinct that enables a mindless construct of reanimated flesh to fight—perhaps quite skillfully—without a necromancer guiding every motion second-by-second.

They terrify the living. Under skilled direction, a horde of zombies becomes an unstoppable flood.

Although the simplicity of zombies is sometimes a virtue, a necrosurgeon should keep an eye toward advancement. Basic risen corpses can't wield weapons. Even armor tends to make them off-balance and prohibitively slow. Advanced necromancy or necrosurgery can help with these difficulties. See the section on reanimation (see pp. 202-205) for strategies to create necromantically advanced zombies. Some slightly more advanced necrotech variants on the common risen soldier follow.

ARM SPIDER (COIL RANK 3)

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 1; Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 1; Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 1, Dodge 3, Martial Arts 3, Resistance 1, Stealth 1

Join Battle: 4

Attacks

Hungry Clinch: Speed 7, Accuracy 9, Damage 8L, Parry DV 4, Rate 1, Tags: C

Special Abilities: *Infection*, *Stench*, *Terrifying*

Soak: 0L/1B

Health Levels: -0/-1/-2/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 3 **Willpower:** 10

Essence: 1

Augmentations: *Clinch Enhancer Attack* (1), *Extra Legs* x 2 (2), *Lethal Attack* (1), *Undead Dexterity* x 3 (6), *Undead Strength* (1), *Unholy Accuracy* x 2 (2), *Unholy Damage* x 2 (2)

The arm spider serves as makeshift cavalry to catch fleeing prey and break archery formations. It consists of a short man with three extra pairs of normal arms stitched to his sides and four more short arms stitched to his torso. These last four arms end with hands that have three blades for fingers. The top-heavy creation runs on its 12 arms, using its legs for jumping and extra propulsion.

The arm spider overruns and tackles its prey. Six hands grab, punch, rip and choke, while four hands slash and stab.

The creation would work better in the field if it were less brittle. In order to achieve the speed and coordination that the design requires, most of the frame and internal organs must be removed. As a result, a well-placed blow can smash the agile design.

MEAT PUPPET (COIL RANK 4)

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4; Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 1; Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 1, Melee 3, Presence 2, Resistance 3

Join Battle: 4

Attacks

Poleaxe Arm: Speed 6, Accuracy 5, Damage 19L/2, Parry DV 2, Rate 2, Tags: O, R

Special Abilities: *Infection, Stench, Terrifying*

Soak: 3L/10B

Health Levels: -0/-1x4/-2x4/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 0 **Willpower:** 10

Essence: 1

Augmentations: *Big* x 3 (6), *Funereal Armor* x 3 (3), *Melee Weapon Graft* (4), *Undead Dexterity* (2), *Undead Strength* x 3 (3), *Unholy Damage* x 2 (2)

This crude creation does its job with heavy muscle and a thick blade. Stitching a meat puppet requires five full-grown human corpses and as big an axe as can be found. The necrosurgeon grafts the muscle from four men directly onto the largest cadaver, whose bones are disjointed and flesh shredded to add height and reach. Bolt the axe into one extra-long arm, and *voila*, destruction.

"YOROI OGRE," PRESTIGIOUS HOST (COIL RANK 4)

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5; Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 1; Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Dodge 2, Martial Arts 2, Melee 4, Presence 2, Resistance 2

Join Battle: 5

Attacks

Crushing Fist: Speed 7, Accuracy 5, Damage 6B, Parry DV 2, Rate 1

Sword: Speed 6, Accuracy 8, Damage 13L/2, Parry DV 3, Rate 2

Special Abilities: *Infection, Terrifying*

Soak: 6L/13B (lamellar armor +6L/8B, -2 mobility)

Health Levels: -0/-1x3/-2x3/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 2 (4 when possessed)

Willpower: 10

Essence: 1 (4 when possessed)

Augmentations: *Big* x 2 (4), *Delicate Mummification* (5), *Only Mildly Unpleasant* (0), *Transcendent Revenant Vessel* (2), *Undead Dexterity* x 2 (4), *Undead Stamina* x 2 (2), *Undead Strength* x 3 (3)

This carefully stitched patchwork cadaver stands eight feet tall, with a powerfully muscled but basically

human physique. Yoroi Ogre belongs to Pearl Apocalypse, a powerful (Essence 4) nemissary and former lieutenant in the army of the Walker in Darkness. It is her favorite transcendent revenant vessel. She tries to use it as little as possible, so that it will be in top shape when she needs it. While using Yoroi Ogre, she wields an oversized slashing sword (equal to a great sword, but wielded one-handed) and dresses in oversized lamellar armor. The creation's combat Abilities match those of Pearl Apocalypse herself.

Yoroi Ogre was built so that Pearl Apocalypse could easily sustain and repair it, even in the middle of battle. Few nemissaries know the Charm that she uses to do so, making it uniquely suited to her particular talents. One application of the *Transcendent Revenant Vessel* augmentation reduces her Essence cost to possess and animate Yoroi Ogre. The other eases her use of the repair Charm.

MOTHER OF SUFFERING (COIL RANK 4)

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 1, Stamina 4; Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 1; Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Awareness 4, Martial Arts 1, Presence 1, Resistance 4, Stealth 2, Thrown 4

Join Battle: 7

Attacks:

Stillborn Grenade: Speed 7, Accuracy 4, Damage 5L, Rate 1, Range 20

Special Abilities: *Infection, Stench, Terrifying*

Soak: 2L/4B

Health Levels: -0/-1x4/-2x4/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 0 **Willpower:** 10

Essence: 1

Augmentations: *Area of Effect Attack* (7), *Big* x 3 (6), *Distant Destruction* (2), *Horrrifying Damage* (1), *Horrrifying Range* (1), *Lethal Ranged Attack* (1), *Weakening Ranged Attack* (2)

This design appears as a morbidly obese dead woman, with her belly constantly writhing and a leathery flap of skin replacing her lower jaw. The mother of suffering moves pretty quickly for something crawling on its hands and knees, though still too slowly to make it effective in close combat. It stops moving once it finds life to destroy. Instead of charging like most zombies, the mother of suffering gives birth to a stillborn child.

Inside the mother, the child's insides deliquesce into a uniquely unpleasant form of acid. At birth, the hideously powerful and severely lengthened umbilical cord hurls the child at enemies up to 10 yards distant. As the flung infant reaches the proper place, the umbilical cord retracts and snaps free of the child, which induces a rapid reaction. The baby explodes on impact, releasing a mist of iron-red acid known as the Blood of One Thousand Bees.

The mother of suffering contains five babies at most. Reloading it requires feeding it a child less than one year old.

RISEN GREAT CAT (COIL RANK 3)

Attributes: Strength 7, Dexterity 2, Stamina 6; Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 1; Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Dodge 2, Martial Arts 2, Presence 2, Resistance 2, Stealth 3, Survival 2

Join Battle: 5

Attacks:

Bite: Speed 6, Accuracy 4, Damage 8L, Rate 1

Claw: Speed 6, Accuracy 5, Damage 7L, Rate 2

Special Abilities: *Infection, Stench, Terrifying*

Soak: 3L/6B

Health Levels: -0x2/-1x3/-2x3/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 2 **Willpower:** 10

Essence: 1

ENGINES OF DESTRUCTION

Necrotech produces some of the deadliest weapons of the modern age. The risen behemoths of the Deathlords fell cities and lay waste to armies. The greatest of these fell beasts rival even the great magitech siege engines of the First Age. The Deathlords often empower such war machines through Oblivion's Avatar or equip them with integrated soulsteel artifacts. The resultant monstrosities play a crucial role in the strategies of these Deathlords.

Most true engines of destruction are large but not terribly fast. A Deathlord usually sends them into the field with a cadre of warriors trained or stitched to provide cover and finish off broken adversaries. For safety reasons, it's a good idea for a war machine vanguard to consist of other dead troops. War ghosts and nemissaries work best in the shadowlands. A necromancer and her risen minions often suffice for far-ranging missions.

Such complicated masterpieces of necrotech require a lot of maintenance, and training necrosurgeons to work on the largest creations can be difficult. Making matters worse, normal means of slowing rot become either mechanically impossible or prohibitively expensive on the largest war machines. As a result, these monstrosities absolutely need a tender who knows Eternal Embalming Preparation.

Many people may work together to protect and maintain a great war machine, but only one designated controller directs its actions. Without the controller, the war machine either becomes useless or mindlessly attacks the nearest living things. For most creations, the reanimating necromancer becomes the controller. Powers such as the Labyrinth Circle spell Black Investiture (see p. 219), however, enable powerful necromancers to transfer control of their creations to favored lieutenants. The Deathlords often use this spell to empower their Abyssal or nemissary servants with creations that require Obsidian Circle necromancy to reanimate.

The destructive possibilities of necrotech are limitless. There's simply no telling what monstrous, horrible secrets the Deathlords now store in the sterile darkness of

RISEN ANIMALS

Iron Reanimation can raise some non-human corpses, and a variant of the spell Raise the Skeletal Horde has seen use in the East to raise several animal corpses at once. Reanimated animals are far more aggressive than zombies, and since most animals have very capable senses, most risen animals are always on the hunt. To make a risen version of a recently deceased animal, apply the following changes to the traits for the animal in question:

- Strength and Stamina increase by one.
- Dexterity decreases by one.
- The creature gains the following Attributes: Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 1, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 3.
- Add a -0, a -1, and a -2 Health Level.
- The creature loses any Abilities other than Athletics, Awareness, Dodge, Martial Arts, Melee, Presence, Resistance, Stealth, Survival, Thrown. All Abilities on that list decrease by one.
- The creature's Essence score becomes 1, if it isn't already.
- The creature's Willpower becomes 10.
- The creature keeps all special abilities that aren't based on Essence use or things that the risen dead don't do, such as digest, sleep, talk, take social actions or the like.
- The creature gains the *Infection, Stench* and *Terrifying* special abilities.
- The creature's attack traits and soak change to reflect its new Attributes and Abilities. Relatively harmless animals have a coil rank of 2. Large or particularly fast animals are coil rank 3. Very large animals can be coil rank 4, 5 or, in the case of Creation's greatest beasts, even higher.

their macabre laboratories. The following are a few of the creations they have fielded recently or might deploy in the near future.

WEAPON OF MEPHITIC DESOLATION (COIL RANK 3)

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 1, Stamina 6; Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0; Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Athletics 2, Awareness 1, Martial Arts 3, Presence 3, Resistance 3

Join Battle: 4

Attacks

Desperate Swat: Speed 7, Accuracy 4, Damage 3B, Parry DV 2, Rate 3

Special Abilities: *Infection, Stench, Terrifying*

Soak: 5L/11B

Health Levels: -0/-1x6/-2x9/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 0 **Willpower:** 10

Essence: 1

Augmentations: *Big* x 2 (4), *Dark Fortitude* x 3 (3), *Extra Legs* x 3 (3), *Funereal Armor* x 2 (2) *Undead Stamina* x 3 (3)

The weapon of mephitic desolation is an occult support engine used to kill quietly, which is ironic, since its death comes with a song. When commanded, the weapon's Neverborn chorus carries plague (see *Exalted*, p. 353) or some other deadly disease to every living thing within a 100-yard radius. The unholiness of the bleak aria can even drown out the melody of prayers. This effect significantly reduces the likelihood and effectiveness of divine intervention. A necrosurgeon must take care, though, when interfering with prayer. Celestial authorities instantly notice the deployment of a weapon of mephitic desolation near a Gateway to Yu-Shan, and they send lion dogs (at the very least) to investigate.

To create a weapon of mephitic desolation, the necrosurgeon must ritually kill five healthy young children. He then pulls their lungs out through their backs and stitches them together into a single bellows. Certain arcane mechanisms replace the rest of the innards. The children's desecrated throats are then tuned to the favored disharmonies of destruction. On each tiny tooth he etches one of the 97 glyphs of annihilation. Finally, the necrosurgeon stitches the children together in a circle facing outward, with the lung-bellows on the inside of the corpse circle. The Walking War Machine spell supplies reanimation; Oblivion's Avatar provides the necromantic elements. The necrotech itself is largely just a vessel to direct the necromantic power.

BATTLE SNAKE (COIL RANK 4)

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 1, Stamina 4; Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0; Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Athletics 4, Resistance 4, Stealth 4, Survival 4

Join Battle: 2

Attacks

Rib Crush: Speed 7, Accuracy 1, Damage 4B, Parry DV 0, Rate 1

Special Abilities: *Infection*, *Stench*, *Terrifying*

Soak: 2L/4B

Health Levels: -0/-1x4/-2x4/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 0 **Willpower:** 10

Essence: 1

Augmentations: *Big* x 3 (6), *Delicate Mummification* (3), *Extra Legs* (1), *Linkable* (4), *Transport* x 3 (6)

Battle snakes are transports for risen troops. The first battle snakes were made from the mummified ribs from Seshasa, a snakelike behemoth of the Far South. Seshasa stretched nearly two miles long, with ribs over twenty feet in diameter. These parts became scarce, however, and modern battle snakes usually employ ribs from other enormous serpentine creatures.

The necrosurgeon links the battle snake's ribs using a system of chains and rods. Along the inner curve of each

rib dangle four sets of three hooks. The smallest divisible segment of a battle snake crawls like a giant headless insect on the tips of its three pairs of ribs. The snake sees and hears by means of a one-yard-long stalk that extends from one end of the short spine.

Battle snakes can link together end-to-end. The Walker in Darkness commonly combines five battle snakes to supply transportation for 360 zombies. Long-distance chains may incorporate 60 rib segments. The resulting monstrosity extends 120 yards long, and transports up to 1,440 zombies under the beast's protective ribs. At its controller's command, the battle snake stops and releases its hooks, dropping its deadly cargo onto the field.

The movement of a battle snake resembles a cross between the glide of a snake and the coordinated walk of a millipede. It's as effective on snow and ice as on rock or dirt. Though slowed, the battle snake traverses even sandy dunes. Furthermore, the larger the battle snake is, the more agile its movements become.

BONE SPIDER LOTUS (COIL RANK 6)

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 1, Stamina 3; Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0; Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Athletics 5, Awareness 4, Martial Arts 5, Resistance 5, Survival 5

Join Battle: 7

Attacks

Spider Leg Crush: Speed 7, Accuracy 6, Damage 5B, Parry DV 3, Rate 1

Special Abilities: *Infection*, *Stench*, *Terrifying*

Soak: 3L/9B

Health Levels: -0/-1x4/-2x5/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 0 **Willpower:** 10

Essence: 1

Augmentations: *Big* x 2 (4), *Dark Fortitude* (1), *Delicate Mummification* (5), *Extra Legs* x 5 (5), *Funereal Armor* x 3 (3), *Hollow* (6), *Transport* x 2 (4), *Undead Strength* x 2 (2)

The bone spider lotus can move important people and objects quickly and securely. The lotus carries up to 10 densely packed humanoid soldiers or 1,000 pounds of cargo tirelessly and agilely at up to 65 mph.

The lotus gets its name from its eight legs, each taller than a man, fashioned from great bones, soulsteel and sinew. The bone spider lotus carries its passengers in a sack of thick black mucus suspended from a central hub. Upon command, the lotus rolls onto its back, which causes the sack to split and liquefy. The creation then spreads its legs, releasing its passengers and cargo.

Deathlords have used the versatile bone spider lotus to move Abyssal Exalted into battle, to carry hostages out, and to deploy magitech artillery from one vantage to the next. The bone spider lotus also serves as a long-distance transport, and its sturdiness is such that it can travel at full speed for two weeks before requiring maintenance.

A shining obsidian variant known as the wilting black lily incorporates the Puissance-Arresting Eye and Softening Rains powers of Oblivion's Avatar (see **The Books of Sorcery, Vol. II—The Black Treatise**, p. 54). Because of the scarcity of the materials needed to build these enhanced creations, the Walker in Darkness takes care to keep them well out of harm's way.

BONESTRIDER (COIL RANK 8)

Attributes: Strength 12, Dexterity 1, Stamina 10; Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0; Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Athletics 4, Dodge 5, Martial Arts 5, Melee 4, Presence 5, Resistance 5, Thrown 4

Special Powers: *Infection, Stench, Terrifying*

Soak: 14L/18B, Hardness 14 (-8 mobility penalty)

Health Levels: -0/-1x5/-2x5/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 3 **Willpower:** 10

Essence: 1

Augmentations: *Artifact Integration* (8), *Attunement* (0), *Big x 4* (8), *Funereal Armor x 4* (4), *Heavy Plates* (1), *Hollow* (4), *Solid* (3), *Undead Strength* (7), *Undead Stamina* (5)

As the necrotech counterparts to the warstriders of Creation, bonestridders serve as battle armor for advanced necromancers. Deathlords also loan these suits to favored lieutenants through the Black Investiture spell. Nemissaries can also possess a bonestrider. These risen war machines lack the resilience of the all-metal warstriders. They are, however, far less clumsy (imposing a lower mobility penalty), not fatiguing at all to operate, and even more demoralizing to mortal troops. What's more, the bonestrider's risen hunger gives it Abilities of its own upon which a wearer could draw. *Artifact Integration* lets the bonestrider have two one-dot or a single two-dot artifact built in, such as an attunement spike (see p. 217) so a mortal can use the creation. Of course, the bonestrider can also carry conventional or specially designed artifact weapons that have nothing to do with necrotech.

A bonestrider consists of a soulsteel frame covered in preserved muscle and tendon, with an outer layer of thickly plated bone. The whole thing requires the Labyrinth Circle spell *Spurring the Beast of War* to reanimate. Obsidian Circle necromancy can reanimate much more powerful versions. Some grand designs even rival magitech warstriders in size and strength. Often, the personal bonestridders of the Abyssal Exalted also incorporate the properties necessary to use Oblivion's Avatar.

THOUSAND-CORPSE WAR FRAME (COIL RANK 12)

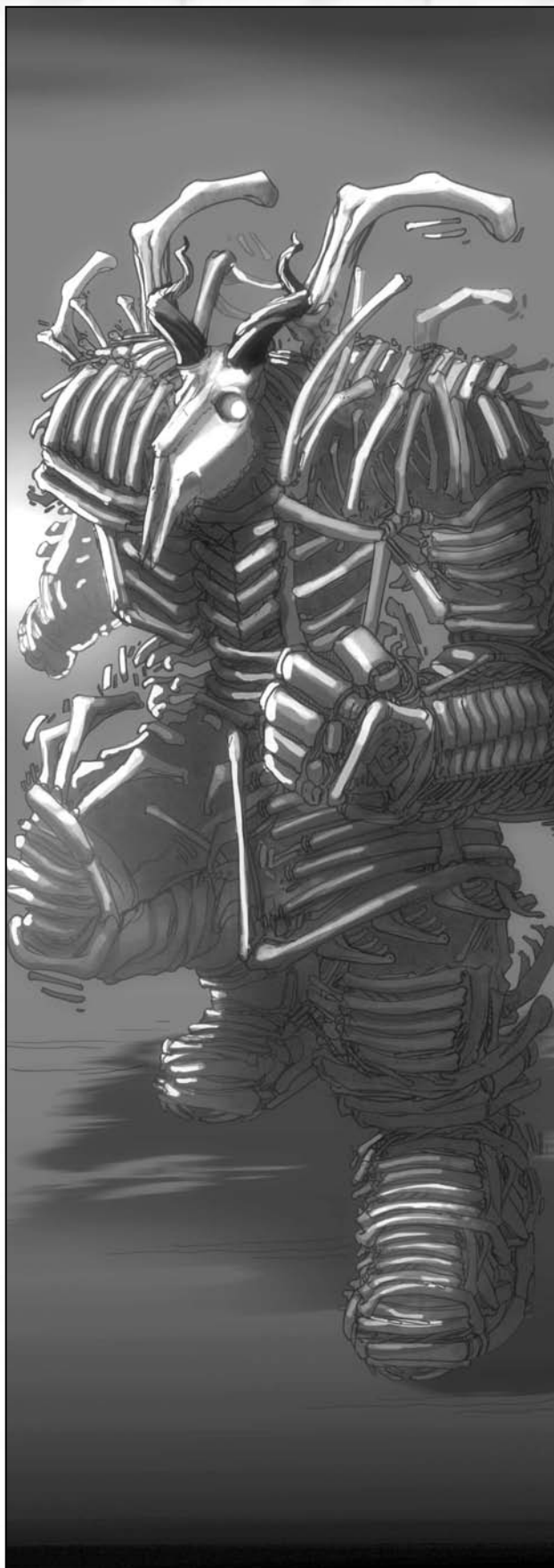
Attributes: Strength 14/20*, Dexterity 1, Stamina 13; Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0; Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Attacks:

Soulsteel Fist: Speed 7, Accuracy 1, Damage 18B/32B*, Rate 1, Tags: P

Special Abilities: *Infection, Stench, Terrifying*

Soak: 18L/23B



THOUSAND-CORPSE WAR FRAME ZOMBIE COVER

Magnitude	Hand-to-Hand Bonus	Ranged Bonus
2 or lower	None	None
3	None	+1
4	+1	+2
5	+1	+3
6	+2	+4
7	Only Helmet Vulnerable	Only Helmet Vulnerable

Health Levels: -0/-1x5/-2x5/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 0 **Willpower:** 10

Essence: 1

*Values after a slash are for a fully loaded frame.

Augmentations: *Artifact Integration* (4), *Big x 7* (14), *Funereal Armor x 5* (5), *Hollow* (4), *Piercing Attack* (1), *Solid* (5), *Transport x 7* (14), *Undead Stamina x 5* (5), *Unholy Damage x 4* (4), *Usable Weapon* (4)

This colossus carries everything it needs to destroy whole cities. The core of the great beast consists of a four-story soulsteel skeleton punctuated by gargantuan iron fists wrapped in knotted soulsteel. The soulsteel bones carry hundreds of sharp barbs, slots and nerve endings. Up to 1,200 zombies can climb onto and occupy the jagged skeleton, impaling themselves to plug into its systems. The machine's controller rests in the machine's skull, where a system of harnesses and nervous sensors interpret her orders. At the nervous center, the controller inserts the key—itsself a one-dot Artifact with no power except to recognize authorized users.

Through the talon, the war frame controls all of the zombies affixed to its structure, causing them to act in unison as the muscle fibers of the enormous construct. In so doing, the war frame adds to its Strength score an amount equal to twice the Magnitude of the attached zombie unit. The frame itself is so large that it requires a Magnitude 3 force of zombies (i.e. between 76 and 150) to move it at all. That minimum force grants the structure an effective Strength of 14. In order to perform its Soulsteel Fist attack, it requires a Magnitude 5 force of zombies (i.e., between 301 and 650).

Stopping a thousand-corpse war frame—let alone destroying it—is nearly impossible. Any attacks made against a fully loaded war frame damage only zombies. A frame with few zombies benefits from cover. Only the head is always “vulnerable,” though still extremely solid. Climbing up four stories of zombies to reach the head can present some problems, though, as the zombies attack anyone in range of their arms.

Of course, the controller of the war frame usually controls the zombies as well. The true beauty of this design is that, once the war frame breaks a city's defenses, any number of zombies can detach from it to finish off the survivors.

THE WEB IS THE SPIDER (COIL RANK 10)

Attributes: Strength 9, Dexterity 1, Stamina 9; Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0; Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Athletics 8, Awareness 7, Martial Arts 10, Presence 7, Resistance 8

Join Battle: 10

Attacks:

Spider Leg Crush: Speed 7, Accuracy 8, Damage 9B, Parry DV 4, Rate 1

Special Abilities: *Infection*, *Stench*, *Terrifying*

Soak: 10L/11B, Hardness 10 (-2 mobility penalty)

Health Levels: -0/-1x9/-2x9/-4/Incap

Dodge DV: 0 **Willpower:** 10

Essence: 1

Augmentations: *Artifact Integration (soulsteel barbs)* (4), *Artifact Integration (Essence capacitor jewels)* (16), *Big x 8* (16), *Extra Legs x 3* (3), *Funereal Armor* (1), *Heavy Plates* (1), *Solid* (3), *Transport x 3* (6)

The Deathlords' Abyssal officers and their nemissary lieutenants can expend a great deal of Essence in a sustained battle. The slow process of recovering that Essence in Creation can grind a military advance to a halt. This beautiful and hideous creation solves that problem by acting as a portable Essence factory. In a battle, its rechargeable batteries enable the controller and her Essence-wielding associates to use their own powers with complete disregard for conserving Essence. This creation turns a unit of 75 Ghost-Bloods and war ghosts into more than a match for a city of thousands.

Eight spider-like legs span a vast web of shining tendon and sinew. These supports consist of hundreds of soulsteel rods that slide and shift toward each other, guided by grotesquely stitched muscle and arteries. The sinew and tendons grow up and together, becoming thicker and stronger in the center, where the network comes together in a meaty nexus carried 20 yards above the ground. Altogether, the spider bestrides an octagonal region 40 yards across.

Eight enormous, 35-mote Essence capacitor jewels (see pp. 215-216) ring the top of the beast's central “body.” The war machine recharges these artifacts' Essence pools by draining the blood of the living. Foot soldiers feed the spider by impaling bodies on the 40 soulsteel barbs (each Artifact •) attached to the legs. With a greedy shrieking, the soulsteel drains the bodies of fluids, dealing one level of lethal damage per five ticks to each unfortunate target. Arteries carry the digested Essence to the hub, charging the pulsing green capacitors with three motes per level of damage done. When fully fueled, the spider carries 270

motes of Essence that the controller can dispense to anyone within or atop the web.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

There's more to necrotech than the necrosurgery itself. Following are some of the spells, artifacts and other gimcrackery of the necrosurgeon's trade.

GEMSTONE ESSENCE BATTERIES (ARTIFACT VARIES)

Not many artifacts supply their own Essence. The Underworld, however, offers a quasi-natural wonder: jewels mined from the Labyrinth that store Essence. Over the millennia, ghostly savants devised crystals that emulate this power, while magitech savants invented their own version.

All three forms of gemstone Essence battery possess similar characteristics. Retrieving stored motes from a single battery is a miscellaneous action. If the gems are overcharged, they lose Essence-storing capacity, resulting in a permanent one-dot reduction of Artifact rating. Examining a stone to determine how much Essence it currently stores or can store requires a successful (Intelligence + Occult) roll.

To destroy an Essence-charged gem, one must strike it with utmost precision, a feat that requires a (Dexterity + Craft [Earth]) roll at difficulty 4. Successfully cleaving the gem causes an explosive Essence release. The damage of the blast is unblockable but can be dodged. Treat the explosion as an attack that scores successes equal to the number of motes in the gem, minus one success per yard of distance between a character and the center of the explosion. The explosion deals a base five dice of lethal (and piercing) damage, which is doubled against structures.

SOULFIRE CRYSTAL

Repair: N/A

These blue-white gems come from the Labyrinth. Ghosts with the right Arcanoi can imbue the crystals with Essence, as can certain rare Charms or artifacts. In the Underworld, Essence-wielders can draw upon the Essence from these crystals at any time. Ghosts use them to restore their own Essence and set them into many artifacts of the Underworld. Necrosurgeons can use them to reanimate their creations.

Soulfire crystals pervert all Essence within them to Death Essence. Any attempt to use Essence gathered from soulfire crystals for healing, for creation or for any other generally non-destructive end (reanimation counts as destructive) either fails completely or leads to perverted results. Ghosts can use Essence from soulfire crystals without ill effects.



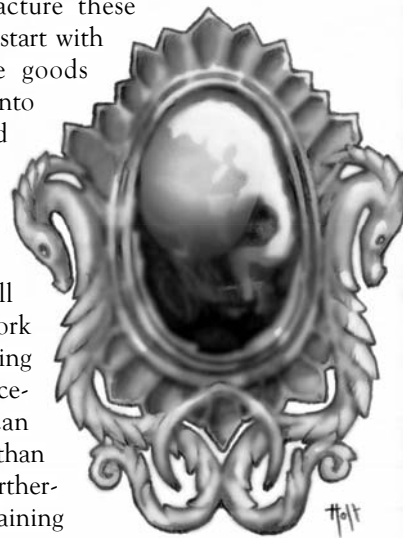
Soulfire crystals are vulnerable in Creation. Every five ticks of exposure to sunlight (or a Solar anima) reduces the maximum capacity of a soulfire crystal by one mote.

Soulfire crystals come in all shapes and sizes. The value of a soulfire crystal depends on its size—which also determines how much Essence it can hold. The number of motes a soulfire crystal can store equals twice its Resources value. The largest soulfire crystals ever mined can store as many as 25 motes, but these immense, priceless crystals are all owned by various Deathlords.

ESSENCE-CONTAINING GEM

Repair: N/A

Ghosts manufacture these artifact gems. They start with jewels from grave goods that have crossed into the Underworld and mount them in settings of soulsteel or the Underworld's black jade. The same methods used to fill soulfire crystals work on Essence-containing gems, but most Essence-containing gems can hold more Essence than soulfire crystals. Furthermore, Essence-containing gems can be used to non-destructive ends. Unfortunately, they too are things of the Underworld so Creation's sunlight can destroy them as it does soulfire crystals. An Essence-containing gem looks like a dark, smoky-gray jewel at least the size of a man's thumbnail. As long as they contain Essence, they glow in irregular, lurid pulses.



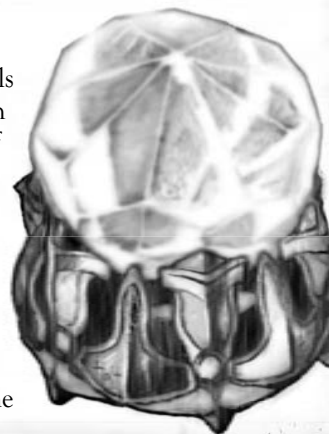
The higher an Essence-containing gem's Artifact rating is, the more Essence it can store. In the Underworld, Essence-containing gems that store only a single mote are common enough that they can be bought as Resources 3 purchases. Soulfire crystals are far more common, though.

The higher an Essence-containing gem's Artifact rating is, the more Essence it can store. In the Underworld, Essence-containing gems that store only a single mote are common enough that they can be bought as Resources 3 purchases. Soulfire crystals are far more common, though.

ESSENCE CAPACITOR JEWEL

Repair: 1 or 2

Essence capacitor jewels consist of gemstones with magitech settings crafted of the five magical materials. Any Essence-wielder can recharge the jewel simply by touching and directing his Essence into it as a miscellaneous action. Although the quality of Essence capacitor jewels varies widely over time



GEMSTONE ESSENCE BATTERIES

Artifact Rating	Maximum Stored Essence
X	1 mote
•	3 motes
••	7 motes
•••	15 motes
••••	35 motes
•••••	70 motes
N/A	150+ motes

and between craftsmen, the Essence in a high-quality jewel can last almost indefinitely.

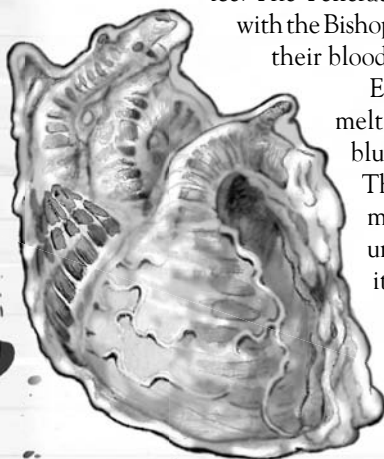
Many types and designs of these jewels have existed over time. Most are designed only to set in other artifacts, which draw on their power. Such jewels have a Repair rating of 1. The listing in the following table represents this type of capacitor.

Advanced Essence capacitor jewels grant their Essence to any character who can attune to artifacts. Drawing on the jewel is a miscellaneous action. The Essence in these jewels can power Charms, thaumaturgy or any other effect that requires an instantaneous expenditure of Essence. An advanced capacitor can store a maximum amount of Essence equal to a capacitor of a one-dot-lower rating on the following table. (So, for instance, a four-dot advanced Essence capacitor jewel could store a maximum of only 15 motes.) They have Repair ratings of 2.

UNMELTING HEART OF TELLERAUTHELOT (ARTIFACT ••••)

Long ago, the Shining One fought a great battle against an amphibious monster called the Tellerauthelot. The beast laid a continuous stream of poisonous eggs, sang malign praises to the demons of weakness and regenerated all damage it suffered.

At the climax of battle, the Shining One struck his foe palm out, while reciting five words of Oblivion's glory. At that, the great enemy's 16 red hearts turned to blue, unmelting ice. The Tellerauthelot's new hearts agreed with the Bishop's moving words and turned their blood to frozen death.



Each slowly beating, unmelting heart produces a vivid blue fluid called ice marrow. The hourly quantity of ice marrow produced by an unmelting heart depends on its temperature. At freezing temperatures, it produces eight doses per hour. In temperate climes, it pumps out five doses per hour. In the heat,

it secretes only three. Ice marrow evaporates one hour after its production, regardless of temperature. All necrotech creations can store a maximum number of doses equal to their (coil rank x 25).

In the veins of the living, ice marrow acts as a deadly poison, equal to Yozi venom. In the veins of the dead, it reanimates. Every dose of ice marrow equals one mote of necrotic Essence supplied by an Essence battery. As long as a creation holds (coil rank x 5) doses of ice marrow, treat it as properly maintained. Even better, a risen creation can spend doses of ice marrow to repair itself: one dose to heal a level of bashing damage, three doses to heal a level of lethal damage, and five doses to heal each level of aggravated damage. This is one of the few ways to restore health levels lost to lack of maintenance or botched repairs.

Furthermore, ice marrow produces an eerie transformation in risen creatures. Frozen muscles surge with power, granting a bonus dot to every Physical Attribute. Any living creature struck by the creation's frozen touch loses one dot of Dexterity for the scene unless her player succeeds at a (Stamina + Resistance) roll, difficulty 2. This is a Crippling effect.

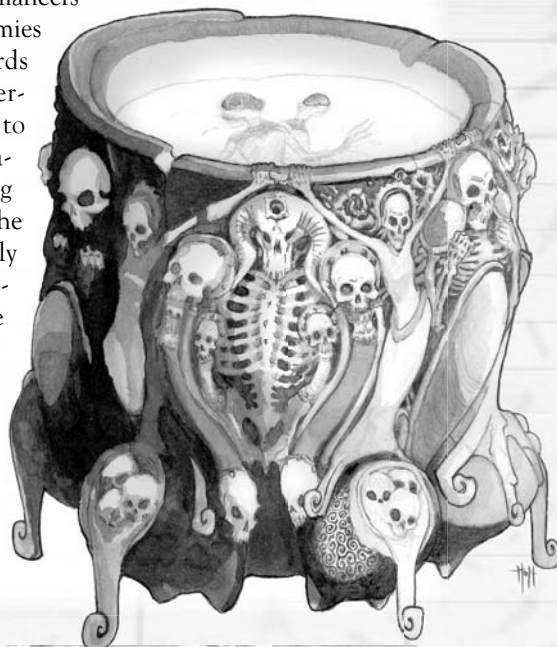
A creation with ice marrow in it craves more. Given the opportunity, it possesses and protects the heart that spawned it, drinking all of the ice marrow that the heart produces. Any wielder of that heart also becomes the creation's controller.

If the creation runs out of ice marrow, it loses bonus Attributes. What's more, treat it as having suffered one botched maintenance, though recharging the creature with ice marrow enables it to repair the damage. A necrotech creation turns completely to ice if it is destroyed while ice marrow courses through its veins, and no parts can be recovered.

RESURRECTION PIT (ARTIFACT ••• OR ••••)

Repair: 1

When necromancers are scarce, the armies of the Deathlords use these cumbersome machines to provide reanimation after suffering risen casualties. The pit is an intricately ornamented soul-steel cylinder five yards deep and at least three yards across, filled with a thick broth of blood, ash and necromantic reagents from the Labyrinth. In-



serting a hearthstone or Essence battery activates the device. The standard resurrection pit (Artifact ●●●) consumes one mote of Essence per hour.

The resurrection pit reanimates coil rank 3 or lower creations that are left to soak in the active broth for 25 hours, as long as the creation's organic parts have been reanimated before. For instance, a freshly dead body placed in the resurrection pit does not react to the broth; neither does a destroyed zombie with freshly dead parts added. Yet a necrosurgeon could stitch together parts from destroyed walking dead and leave the patchwork cadaver in the resurrection pit, and a good-as-new zombie climbs out 25 hours later.

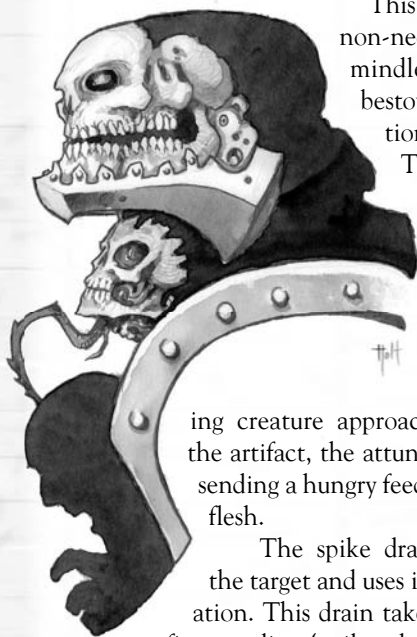
On average, a team of necrosurgeons with a resurrection pit can salvage 20% to 30% of an army's risen casualties, depending on the types of weapons used to destroy the dead. Teams of exceptionally skilled battlefield necrosurgeons can occasionally salvage up to 40% of the losses. A supernaturally rapid and brilliant Daybreak Caste dedicated to the task might consolidate and salvage 50% of an army's risen casualties.

Most resurrection pits hold about 20 zombies at once, slowly reanimating all of them in unison. Larger pits (Artifact ●●●●) consume six motes per hour but can reanimate necrotech up to coil rank 6. They also hold as many as 60 zombies at once. These largest pits are so bulky that even a Deathlord finds moving them a major operation.

The necromantic soup used by a resurrection pit has no use outside of the Underworld or a shadowland. Operations that require reanimation in Creation still necessitate fielding necromancers.

ATTUNEMENT SPIKE (ARTIFACT • TO ●●●)

Repair: 1



This intricate device enables non-necromancers to control mindless necrotech and to bestow temporary reanimation without necromancy.

The device consists of a brainlike nervous bundle of soulsteel fibers wound inside housing (often a real skull) that is integrated into a necrotech creation. When a living creature approaches within a foot of the artifact, the attunement spike activates, sending a hungry feeding spine through soft flesh.

The spike drains life Essence from the target and uses it to reanimate the creation. This drain takes the form of Essence first, stealing (coil rank x 2) motes from a person's Essence pool. Lacking motes, the spike drains (coil rank ÷ 2) Willpower points, rounded down. Lacking

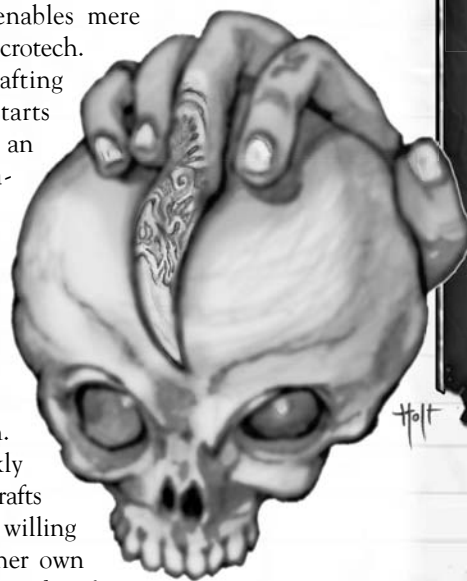
Willpower, the spike drains (coil rank ÷ 3) lethal health levels, rounded down. These costs are paid immediately and every full hour thereafter. The drained target becomes the reanimated creation's controller. If the spike is removed, all control is lost, and the creature falls lifeless again at the end of the scene. Attunement spikes have no effect on already-reanimated creations.

Small (Artifact •) border-crossing attunement spikes can reanimate creations up to coil rank 3. Medium (Artifact ●●) spikes can reanimate creations of up to coil rank 5. Large spikes (Artifact ●●●) can potentially reanimate any necrotech creations.

TEN THOUSAND BLASPHEMIES TALON (ARTIFACT • TO ●●●●)

This artifact enables mere mortals to control necrotech.

The process of crafting such an artifact starts with the claw from an Underworld creature, the artisan's own blood, a bit of soulsteel and moonsilver and the Mantra of 10,000 Blasphemies that nephwracks use to reaffirm their faith. It ends with a darkly glittering claw that grafts itself to any mortal willing to remove one of her own nails and concede one dot of her Willpower as an offering to the Neverborn.



To use the talon, its owner merely needs to touch it to a risen creature and spend one Willpower point. The talon grants the user control of the creature for a scene. The person does not need to keep touching the risen creation. A one-dot talon can control necrotech up to coil rank 3; a two-dot talon can control necrotech up to coil rank 5; and a three-dot talon controls creations up to coil rank 8. A four-dot talon controls any and all necrotech.

Aside from the permanent Willpower loss and having a metal claw instead of fingernail, the ten thousand blasphemies talon extracts one additional, trifling cost from its owner. Each time he controls a necrotech device, his player rolls the character's Temperance. Failure means the character loses one dot of Compassion and gains one dot of Whispers. Anyone who loses all his Compassion becomes a fanatical worshiper of the Neverborn, as mad and murderous as any spectre. This transformation is irreversible. At any point after that, the person can abandon his body and dwell thereafter in the Labyrinth as a new spectre. His discarded body dies at once.

This artifact can be removed only when its owner dies or someone else cuts off the owner's finger. Removing the artifact does not reverse any loss of Compassion.

OBLIVION'S PANOPLY (ARTIFACT ••)

Repair: N/A

Oblivion's panoply is an extremely rare type of soulsteel forged by Deathlords using a defeated hekatonkhiere and Labyrinth-wrought alchemical agents. At the apex of a dark ritual, Obsidian Circle necromancy coats one side of the plate with an ultra-fine layer of Oblivion. The Deathlord who creates a sheet of Oblivion's panoply must commit one mote per five square feet to its construction. While creating Oblivion's Panoply requires committing the Essence, however, one does not need to infuse Essence into it every second. Without Essence, Oblivion's panoply looks like flat, featureless black soulsteel, notable only for the lack of screaming faces and other evidence of ghosts caught within it. It gains its special powers (which follow) only when someone commits the requisite number of motes to the metal. Otherwise, it just has the properties of ordinary soulsteel.

Oblivion's panoply comes in flat panels no smaller than 25 square feet. The backs of these panels are weaker than normal soulsteel, but the front is a void-frozen, deadly and invincible wall. Oblivion's panoply can armor any sufficiently large structure, but the Deathlords generally restrict its use to huge war machines; nothing less can justify such protection.

Integrating Oblivion's panoply into war machines with at least four purchases of the *Big* augmentation grants the creation an additional soak rating of 15L/20B, and a hardness of 15L/20B.

NECROTECH THAT ISN'T

Not everything made from dead bodies is necrotech. Rather, not everything is best represented using this system. Some necrotech, such as the loathsome osseous shell, is best represented as magitech that happens to include some components taken from corpses. On the other hand, necrotech creations might be designed to attach to necromantic magitech, blurring the line between them even further.

Furthermore, anyone striking a creation armored by Oblivion's panoply in hand-to-hand combat faces the immediate retribution of frozen inevitability. Creatures lacking an Essence pool immediately age two years. Essence-wielders lose five motes. Creatures who attack using weapons of orichalcum, moonsilver, soulsteel and jade are immune to this effect. The chill of the Void also imposes a scene-long -1 internal penalty to all the attacker's Dexterity-based rolls, unless the attacker succeeds on a (Stamina + Resistance) roll at difficulty 2. Only orichalcum weapons insulate against this last effect.

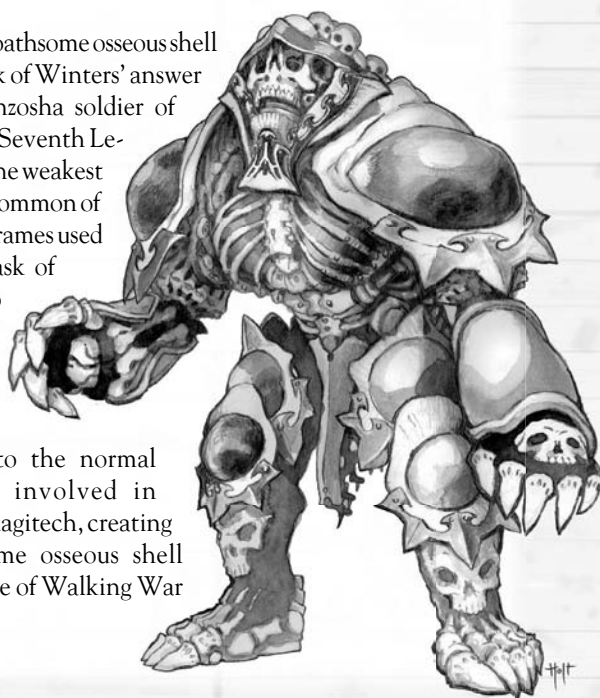
The frozen death of Oblivion's panoply extinguishes even most magical fires. Water immediately freezes upon contact. Blows that do not penetrate the substance's Hardness fail to penetrate Oblivion. They make no sound. They never hit their final destination.

In the centuries of experimentation since the invention of Oblivion's panoply, attempts to make smaller or less regularly shaped panels have all failed. The raw nothingness used in the construction is too powerful to contain without extremely controlled variables and committed Essence.

LOATHSOME OSSEOUS SHELL (ARTIFACT •••)

Repair: 2

The loathsome osseous shell is the Mask of Winters' answer to the gunzosha soldier of Lookshy's Seventh Legion. It is the weakest and most common of the bleak frames used by the Mask of Winters to empower his followers. In addition to the normal processes involved in building magitech, creating a loathsome osseous shell requires use of Walking War Machine.



The shell is a terrifying, seven-foot-tall exoskeleton of bone and metal that opens at the approach of the living, inviting them in. A built-in Artifact • attunement spike (see p. 217) stabs into a wearer's neck, animating the shell and giving control. The osseous shell grants the following benefits:

- **Armor:** The shell grants +9L/9B soak and 5L/5B Hardness, with a -2 mobility penalty and no fatigue.
- **Integration Ports*:** Various spikes and slots permit the attachment of other necrotech to augment the wearer's senses, weapons and the like.
- **Unholy Might*:** Doubles wearer's ground speed; +2 bonus to Strength for feats of strength and inflicting damage with attacks.
- **Unholy Prowess*:** +2 bonus to all attacks; +1 Parry DV.
- **Unholy Resilience*:** +2 bonus to Resistance.
- **Terrifying:** As the default for necrotech. This feature does not affect the wearer.
- **Stench:** As the default for necrotech. This feature does not affect the wearer.

The loathsome osseous shell needs maintenance every 100 hours of use. Every 30 hours missed after that randomly disables one of the functions marked with an asterisk, until the armor falls apart at last.

Shells such as this are critical to the success of mortals in the service of the Deathlords, but they sometimes seem reluctant to let wearers out after dining on mortal Essence for too long. Several of the Mask of Winters' followers have gone unexpectedly insane after long missions in loathsome osseous shells.

BLACK INVESTITURE (LABYRINTH CIRCLE SPELL)

Cost: 20 motes or 60 motes, +1 mote

Target: 1 Creature or 1 Talisman

With eyes glowing black, the necromancer doubles over, coughing into her windpipe all power over any or all undead that she currently controls. With a great roar of exertion, she breathes forth all of this power and control into a single target within 10 yards. The necromancer commits one mote to the target. As long as the necromancer would have continued to control the specified undead, the target is now the controller.

For an additional 40 motes of Essence, the necromancer may coalesce her control of undead into a solid talisman the size of an acorn. Anyone who holds this talisman receives the necromancer's control.

At any time, the necromancer may withdraw her committed mote of Essence, returning to her full control of the loaned undead.



THE GREEN SOUP

After centuries of experimentation, Eye and Seven Despairs figured out how to integrate disease and reanimation. His efforts culminated in the creation of the disease called the Embrace of Decay. Unfortunately, an escaping ghost named Voice in the Grass stole his only sample of the disease. With no idea what he carried, the nervous escapee stashed his treasure with a mortal plasmic hunter and followed him into Creation. (Fortunately for Voice in the Grass, Eye and Seven Despairs was distracted with faking his own destruction at the time. The Deathlord didn't discover that the Embrace of Decay was gone for another year.)

The next night, shambling corpses attacked and killed the hunter. The dead hunter rose again and joined them, leaving his pack on the road. Since then, the strange soulsteel cylinder has passed from thieves and merchants to collectors and occultists. So far, none have guessed at its contents—a green soup that reanimates any dead who touch its putrid vapors.

An Eclipse Caste, however, has guessed its value. The Lawgiver discovered that several Deathlords would each pay a near-infinite sum for the mysterious object. The Solar has decided to arrange an auction between the Deathlords, and searches for bodyguards to protect him until then. This could be a great opportunity for... Well, he's not sure yet, but luring a group of Deathlords into one place should be good for *something*.

Voice in the Grass watches all this and seeks a way to communicate with the Exalt. He has seen the zombie plague destroy entire villages and feels acutely responsible. Recently, when Voice in the Grass examined the cylinder, he noticed a small crack.

THE EMBRACE OF DECAY

Virulence: 5

Difficulty to Treat (Mundane/Magical): —/6

Morbidity: 5 **Treated Morbidity:** 3

Symptoms: The victim's skin grays. Necrosis of thin tissues occurs, and the skin starts to peel away. The victim grows hungry but cannot be satisfied. She grows frail and is increasingly easily fatigued. (The difficulty of the roll to correctly diagnose someone with these symptoms is 5.) Eventually, the victim drops dead. No more than a minute later, she rises again as a zombie, hungrily attacking and consuming any living creatures it can find.

Duration: Upon being exposed to the Embrace of Decay, victims first feel the disease's effects after a number of hours equal to their Stamina. After that, they lose one dot of Stamina per day. This degeneration continues until the victim reaches Stamina 1. The Morbidity check comes at this point.

Vector: Embrace of Decay is carried by zombies. Anyone who suffers lethal damage from a zombie infected with this plague is exposed. Anyone whom such a zombie kills or who dies from the disease rises again, carrying the plague.

Treatment: There simply is no mundane way to treat this disease. Filling a victim's body with the cleansing Essence of the Unconquered Sun, through magic, prayer or Solar anima, supplies an effective counter-agent; magical treatment usually revolves around that principle. Most of the time, the only way to stop this plague is to kill its victims quickly and burn the bodies before they can rise again to spread the disease. Fortunately, survivors of the Embrace of Decay are immune from then on.



YOU MIGHT HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP
SAFE AND CONTENT WITH A LIE.



YOU MIGHT HAVE TORN AT YOUR
FLESH, HORRIFIED BY THE TRUTH.



BUT I SPOKE WHILE YOU WERE TRYING
TO DECIDE WHAT TO BELIEVE.



AND I BREATHED MY LAST.



RAITON, I'M—

DID HOO AND HIM LIKE I
ASKED, DEATHKNIGHT?

IT'S BEEN MONTHS. TELL
ME HOO HAVEN'T WASTED
ALL THIS TIME.



I'M SORRY,
RAITON. I COULD
NOT FIND THE
BOY'S SOUL.

DID HOO
EVEN LOOK?

I DID. THE DRAGON-
BLOODED DID THEIR
WORK ONLY TOO
WELL.



THE DRAGON-BLOODED
WHO KILLED HIM BURNED
THE BODY AND BURIED
THE ASHES.

I WONDER WHY HE DID
THAT. COULD IT HAVE
BEEN REMORSE?



IT WASN'T REMORSE!
THEY BURIED THE SOLARS
IN THE FIRST AGE TOO!

TRUE.

NEVERTHELESS, THE
BOY IS GONE FROM
THIS WORLD.

THERE'S NOTHING
MORE YOU CAN DO
FOR HIM, SCAVENGER
KING.

THERE IS, HOWEVER,
SOMETHING WE CAN
DO IN HIS NAME.

SUCH AS?

COME, I'LL TAKE
YOU TO MY MASTER.
HE'LL EXPLAIN
EVERYTHING.



CHAPTER SEVEN

ABYSSAL STORYTELLING

Nothing in Creation resembles a Solar as much as an Abyssal does, yet nothing could be further from the glorious champions of the Unconquered Sun. Both embody the pinnacle of their respective power and virtue. One exists to heroically protect life, the ultimate protagonist of epic tales; the other exists to destroy life, the perfect, beautiful villain. Or... are they? The champions of the Unconquered Sun grew so arrogant that they caused the downfall of Creation's greatest civilization. Perhaps the defiance of the Abyssals will also expose an error in the meticulous craft in their making and reveal the righteous core that beats within the heart of all Exalted.

This chapter explores the Abyssals, not from the perspective of the setting or rules, but from the vantage of players and Storytellers. It examines the sorts of stories you can tell with them, how to involve the types of characters you might create and how to avoid common pitfalls inherent in exploring dark, malevolent, tragic characters such as these.

Those who wish to begin an Abyssal series should remember two things. First, the Underworld is an alien place, where the physics of memory and passion replace those of logic and nature. Spend some time familiarizing yourself with the nature of ghosts and death in Creation before beginning. Second, an Abyssal series fundamentally deals with disturbing and tragic themes. Players who want their characters to save the world—or who are squeamish about depictions of blood, gore or unhappy endings—should look elsewhere.

Finally, don't let anyone tell you that you're having "bad wrong fun" with your game of Abyssals. Everything in this chapter is just advice, nothing more. Sometimes, you just want to *get your kill on* and in many ways, the Abyssals exist for just that sort of imaginary blood-spattered fun.

FACETS OF DARKNESS

While an Abyssal series necessarily requires elements such as cruelty, random violence and the tragic certainty of doom, what one can do within these constraints is



surprisingly broad. All Abyssals must kill, for example, but the sort of Abyssal who relishes killing one lover in front of another is an entirely different beast from an Abyssal who silently slays the greedy king's thuggish enforcers. Just as one Solar might embrace his Exaltation and revel in his newfound power while another feels himself condemned as an Anathema, so too can Abyssals look at their own Exaltation and duties in completely different lights. This variety of outlook leads to very different characters and very different stories.

While other Exalted receive their power more or less by winning a cosmic lottery, however, Abyssals receive theirs *for a reason*. A Deathlord seeks out the best meat to host the vessel of Abyssal power, offers that person a choice, then inducts him. Ruled by an ancient and powerful Deathlord and bound in an unbreakable contract, game issues such as "free will" and "player choice" becomes tricky. Whatever path of darkness Abyssals choose to walk, the Storyteller needs to take certain factors into consideration.

THE PATH OF WICKEDNESS

Whether they want to play a dark lord of the night with steepled fingers and reptilian eyes or a looming predator with needle-sharp teeth and a churning hunger for human flesh, some players choose Abyssals just because they want to unleash their dark side. After all, Abyssals embody the very definition of "Anathema." Even the mention of their name conjures up images of rampaging destroyers or seductive betrayers throughout Creation. Not every Abyssal game needs to be a blood-soaked adventure of decadence, brutality and treachery, but it's certainly an option.

This sort of game fits the basic assumptions of this book very well. The players won't need to fret about such things as "Resonance" and the tragedy of their existence. Instead, they'll stand at the forefront of zombie armies, bringing the long night to all of Creation. The players won't need reminders that this series is steeped in darkness: Their characters *inflict* the darkness.

As soon as you suggest playing evil characters, however, some people take that as an excuse to misbehave. While your players will still be polite to each other at the table, they might no longer balk at having their characters stab each other in the back. If that happens, the series can fall apart into cycles of recrimination rather quickly. Take some care, then, when planning a series of this sort.

THE PRICE OF SIN

Every player comes to the table with her own notion of what "evil" is and what aspect of it she'd like to play. This book offers no definitive view on what evil is, because such a definition is unnecessary. Instead, you should sit down with your players and discuss what playing "evil" protagonists means to them.

Working out this sort of informal agreement—sometimes called the “Play Contract”—helps out in any game, but it matters most in a game in which characters routinely engage in troublesome acts. Some groups find blatant depictions of gore, torture and debasement troubling and quickly grow uncomfortable with such games. Then again, mustache-twirling villainy that somehow never manages to inflict much harm would certainly bore players who don’t mind a deep exploration of humanity’s darker side. Finding where your group lies on this continuum—what is allowed and expected and what is not—prevents discomfort or liberates those who might have otherwise shyly refrained from perfectly acceptable roleplaying.

In addition to how dark your players wish to paint their series, consider the shades of evil possible. One player may enjoy depicting an armor-clad warrior who heartlessly wields a jagged blade as she hacks her way across Creation. To her, evil is a zombie holocaust and the mindless slaughter of innocent townsfolk. Another player might delight in a pretty-eyed tempter dripping with lace and silk whose debauchery would arouse a blush from the most scandalous Cynis. To him evil is locking pretty playthings away in a dungeon and defiling innocent minds. Yet another might prefer depicting a well-dressed gentleman who slowly destroys lives with treachery and intrigue, using his wiles to expose the innate greed and vileness within all humanity. Evil becomes anarchy, the failure of trust, and a complete breakdown of the systems of law and decorum that maintain the thin veneer of civilization. Finally, while some might deride it, not every game needs to be a race to the deepest depravity players can imagine. A cleaner depiction of evil, with rattling chains and pits of fire, is more than sufficient for some players. After all, characters such as Scar from *The Lion King* or Maleficent from *Sleeping Beauty* managed to be deliciously dark without stooping to any on-screen deeds that would make a mother of a five year-old squirm in her seat. These varied options aren’t mutually exclusive. A careful Storyteller can balance one player’s slaughter with another player’s clever treachery, and allow yet another to enjoy softer depictions of evil. As always, helping the players find their fun matters most.

HONOR AMONG VILLAINS

Whatever form the evil in your series takes, some players will invariably decide that being evil just means being a jerk. Their antisocial characters engage in treachery and betrayal, focusing their efforts as much on the other players’ characters as on the Storyteller characters who populate the worlds around them. Granted, this is part of what makes evil not be good. Still, it can present some serious problems in a game.

If you discover such a player in your game, remind him that just because his character is malicious, that doesn’t mean he (the player) should be. Even when it’s acceptable to play a character who destroys the lives of other characters, it’s never acceptable to destroy the fun of the other players.

Even if the player is simply “playing in character,” depicting a character’s evil in such a way that causes real problems at the table is just discourteous. Always. Of course, certain series allow more treachery than others, and not every betrayal harms another player’s fun. (In some games, everyone knows it from the start that the whole point is to see how brazenly and thoroughly the characters can betray each other.) Discuss these matters with your players. Naturally, a game detailing the fall of a Deathlord and the struggle to replace him on his obsidian throne involves more intrigue and inter-player conflict than a quest into the Labyrinth for a Neverborn artifact would.

Even with the best of intentions, however, wicked characters seldom work well with others. The presence of an all-powerful Deathlord looming over the characters and disapproving of any misbehavior *might* keep the players in line, but in practice, players need more of a reason to work together than just “our boss tells us to.” As in other games, working out the relationships within the circle goes a long way toward binding the players together. Perhaps one deathknight has a grudging respect for her comrade, while another has a twisted, servile obsession with his companion, and yet another quietly admires the artistic savagery of her circlemate. Defining these relationships ahead of time helps explain why the characters would avoid harming or betraying one another, which frees them to focus on betraying and harming the rest of the world.

MAKING EVIL WORK FOR YOU

Random mayhem and slaughter delights and entertains only for a short time (if at all) before it bogs down into monotony: another village, another massacre. Pulling a series from the precipice of boredom presents a challenge, however, because those things that motivate most heroic Exalted (Save the world! Get the girl! Win the love of a nation!) elicit a yawn from your typical Abyssal. The Abyssal threatens the world, kidnaps the girl, and leaves the nation’s citizens cowering under their beds. Still, even the most diabolical Abyssal has hooks you can use to drag them into Underworld intrigue and tragic tales—provided your players work with you to make sure each character has sufficient depth.

Modern epic fantasy tends to associate the protagonist with righteousness and the antagonist with wickedness. The bad guys set out to do something bad, and the good guy protagonists oppose them. In an Abyssal series, though, the deathknights don’t play the role of antagonist, but wicked protagonist. The story is about them, with the good guys (or even darker bad guys) opposing them. Therefore, Abyssal characters should face the same sort of trials and growth of character that any Solar receives, just painted in black.

The most delicious villains of literature have good reasons for their wickedness. Some of them even consider themselves misunderstood heroes. A good Abyssal should be no different, especially given that the story is *about* him.



The reasons an Abyssal accepted the Black Exaltation is a good starting point from which to gather inspiration. Even a character who was so jaded he signed up with Oblivion because it seemed like fun has a background that inspired such callous behavior. Furthermore, consider the sorts of goals your Abyssals might have. Unlike heroes who wait around to save the day, villains tend to be highly motivated, goal-oriented individuals who know what they want and seek out ways to get it. Should your players express interest in such ambition, work out ways to fit their goals into the fabric of the series.

While the inherent selfishness of a wicked Abyssal makes deathknights difficult to motivate by traditional methods, alternative approaches can light a fire under them just as quickly. For example, many villainous characters have obsessions, goals they wish to achieve at all costs, or some person they wish to possess, regardless of that person's feelings on the matter. While it's a stretch to call this feeling "love," threatening the target of an Abyssal's obsession will certainly rouse his ire. Further, many villains bristle at the thought of someone expressing power similar to (or greater than) what they wield and go to great lengths to defeat and humiliate their rivals. Finally, the Abyssal who agreed to destroy the world (and feels no remorse at the thought) does not necessarily want to see it destroyed swiftly or by someone else's hand. Wicked Abyssals can want to *enjoy* their power for a time and feel no rush to have Oblivion take their toy from them. Such Abyssals might actually join the ranks of heroes in defending the world in the event of a Yozi escape or a Fair Folk invasion, if only so that they can later conquer it and abuse it on their own terms.

One final piece of advice: In your rush to steer your series of wickedness away from dangerous clichés, don't avoid perfectly useful tropes. Give your players a chance to put their characters' wickedness on full display. Mysteries and intrigues bring a lot to a series, but the bloodthirsty Abyssal should get his occasional slaughter and the harem lord his prized, innocent youth. Too much darkness is monotonous, but not enough could turn the game away from its roots. Be sure to strike a balance between the two extremes.

THE PATH OF DEFIANCE

Not every player finds wickedness satisfying. Whether they want to play wandering ronin with killer smiles, or defiant youths with haunted eyes, some players would rather play a game where rebellion is righteous and no good deed goes unpunished. After all, Abyssals have the same inner spark of excellence as Solars, only turned toward darkness. The Neverborn understand the nature of Exaltation even less than the Incarnae do. Humanity, love and free will are notoriously hard to suppress. Despite all the extensive precautions and metaphysical chains the Deathlords wrap around their minions, when Oblivion finally comes to claim Creation, it just might find the power of its darkest champions arrayed against it.

While Oblivion-serving wickedness is the default mode for an Abyssal series, many rules in this book model the pathos-laden story of tragic, damned heroes despised by the very people they protect. In such a series, Resonance takes on its full horror as Abyssal heroes struggle to find a way to protect humanity without their own damned natures twisting their efforts. The minions of a furious Deathlord lurk around every corner, and the Abyssal must use all of his killing arts to stay out of chains. At the end of his long, immortal quest, the faint hope of redemption drives him ever forward, giving him hope that one day, perhaps, the light will shine upon his brow again and he can know peace.

Special care must be taken to retain the proper tone of the series, however. If the players just want to enjoy a game of glorious heroes wielding scary, necromantic powers, they might be better off playing Solars. Lawgivers can easily have dark animas, wield necromancy and terrify their foes. Yet an Abyssal series, even a heroic one, should have a very different feel. Ghosts whisper in the dreams of the Abyssal, every righteous deed carries a dreadful price, and the only powers he can wield destroy rather than create. Even an Abyssal's Motivation centers on destruction. Many of these dark facets speak for themselves, but you should make use of tricks like Resonance to remind your players of their characters' nature and keep the series from becoming too upbeat.

Abyssals fundamentally exist to engage in wicked tasks. Like their loyalist counterparts, defiant Abyssals should have plenty of opportunities to reveal their dark side. The primary difference between a wicked Abyssal and a defiant one, however, is that the heroic Abyssal resists the powerful temptation to slaughter or taint others. Offering a defiant deathknight the same chances for wickedness that you would offer any other Abyssal maintains the common themes of an Abyssal series and allows a player to divorce his character from them in order to show the depths of defiance.

THE TRIBULATIONS OF REBELLION

Righteousness comes at a steep, steep cost. The Deathlord who created the Abyssal expended considerable effort to do so, and she intends to see her investment pay off. The Neverborn stole the Abyssal's name and bound him up in the chains of Resonance, intending to see that the deathknight slays the world. Even the very nature and power of the Abyssal Exaltation leads inevitably toward destruction, fear, pain and death. Defying all these things doesn't come easily, but with a few considerations, it is possible.

A defiant Abyssal needs to accept his basic nature. A deathknight cannot truly create or protect, but the Neverborn don't really care what Abyssals kill as long as they do, in fact, kill. A heroic Abyssal won't defend justice, he'll slay those who threaten justice. He cannot oppose the forces of death, but he can oppose demons, Fair Folk or rampaging bandits and barbarians. He cannot stay in one community and build up a nation from it, but he can wander from village to village, defeating the enemies of humanity and fading away before anyone can form lasting ties to him.

If you want to run such a series, you should fill your stories with opportunities to perform the aforementioned deeds, but you should also consider ways to foil the defiance of the Abyssal. Perhaps the Abyssal is a city's only defense against an army of spectres that spilled out of a shadowland and to depart would mean the city's destruction. Perhaps a sunshine-haired girl, rescued by the gore-soaked blade of the deathknight, has fallen in love and follows him around, helping him where she can and falling into his arms as he sleeps. A defiant Abyssal shouldn't find his rebellion impossible, but beating back the immortal wrath of Deathlord and Neverborn should present an ongoing, epic challenge. Carefully balancing chances for heroism with opportunities to gain Resonance drives home the razor-sharp edge between tragedy and heroism that the defiant Abyssal treads.

For more strategies on how an Abyssal can successfully engage in rebellion (and how you might try to foil those efforts and ramp up the drama), review Chapter Four's discussions of Resonance and the Monstrance of Celestial Portion.

"WHY AREN'T YOU DEAD YET?"

When a Deathlord strides Creation, the world trembles. Not even the elder masters of Sidereal martial arts or the shapeshifting titans of the Silver Pact can stand against one. Any Abyssal who goes renegade, or even defies his master's wishes, crashes against this immortal power—not to mention that every Deathlord has an ultimate kill switch in the form of the Abyssal's Monstrance of Celestial Portion. These facts on their face make rebellion in any form nearly impossible. Surely, any Abyssal who didn't obey his master would die.

Not necessarily. You have several ways to give Abyssal characters a measure of free will and a fighting chance at rebellion.

Rebellion is Useful: The monstrous genius all Deathlords possess makes their machinations unpredictably complex. Conceivably, a Deathlord might have planned for his minion's rebellion even before he created her. Perhaps he even engineered the Abyssal's defiance and now secretly manipulates the Abyssal into willingly serving his secret aims. This option allows for a peculiar relationship to develop between master and servant, as the character slowly comes to learn that her master isn't nearly as monstrous as she assumed, and that both seek benevolent aims. Or, worse, the deathknight's own drive for righteousness might fail because she's been naïvely pursuing the dark agenda of her master all this time without knowing it.

Rebellion is Fun: A Deathlord is, first and foremost, a ghost—a creature of passion whose drives enabled him to defy the cycle of life and death. For all ghosts, the greatest peril is ennui. To lose oneself in the monotony of existence is to fade away. To be sure, a Deathlord's service to the Neverborn bolts him into existence, but boredom remains a constant threat for a being who has already achieved almost every ambition imaginable (and did so millennia ago

at that). For such a creature, what can be more fascinating than a minion who actually manages to oppose him? Suddenly, the Deathlord finds himself in a game of intrigue and betrayal at a level he can appreciate. He has a challenge! The fact that the deathknight's struggles entertain him might stay the master's hand from terminal measures. The contest continues as long as it remains interesting. Once the Deathlord realizes he could lose, his efforts certainly grow more dangerous. By then, however, the deathknight might have gathered sufficient resources to resist his master in earnest.

Political Weakness is Dangerous: Each Deathlord has 12 major rivals, all constantly plotting against one another. A deathknight represents both a considerable investment and a powerful resource. Suddenly marshaling huge reserves to chase after a rogue Abyssal admits the loss of this major resource and reveals vulnerability. A subtle Deathlord might pretend everything is going as expected, claiming his absent champion has left for a secret mission while he uses spies and assassins to trace and return his minion.

Abyssals are Expensive: Crafting a deathknight isn't easy. The Deathlord must find a suitable host and expend the power necessary to send the Black Exaltation to its new owner. She must then acquire this newly born Abyssal, bind him to the Neverborn, train him in the dark arts and arm him with appropriate weapons and tools. Should this investment flee, a Deathlord is better served recapturing and re-educating him than discarding the rebellious Abyssal and creating a new one. Even if recovery should prove impossible, pitching the Monstrance of Celestial Portion into the Mouth of the Void only takes away one of the Deathlord's utterly precious Exaltations. Either Oblivion consumes it, or it manages to escape into the world at the last minute. Either way, the Deathlord has lost it.

They're Bluffing: A Deathlord wants an obedient minion. Claiming total dominion over one's servants might intimidate them sufficiently to keep them in line. Such claims might not be true, though. Perhaps the Monstrance of Celestial Portion funnels the Black Exaltation to its host and regains it after the vessel's death, but its power over a deathknight's life is exaggerated. Perhaps a Deathlord's enormous power and resources are bound up in resisting the machinations of other Deathlords or attacks from Creation or Heaven. A Deathlord certainly has mighty Charms and necromancy, but deathknights now gain their own power with startling alacrity. Perhaps Deathlords strut and pose as impossibly powerful tyrants, not because it's true, but because they wish to be seen as such. Should an experienced deathknight seriously rebel, he might discover his master's opposition crumbling like a house of cards. To be sure, if such a thing were possible, it would only take one case to prove it. Deathknights are young, though, and no major *public* rebellions have taken place thus far.

THE PATH OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Accepting and wielding the powers of death does not make an Abyssal a monster. Death is a fact of life, and only those who fear it call it evil. Those who end suffering with a swift death offer mercy, and many seek a righteous death to end their lives on their own terms. Sometimes, life isn't worth living, except in preparation for a glorious afterlife. Between the deathknights who revel in their awfulness and the rebels who defy their nature are those who see their power as a necessary part of existence. They style themselves shepherds, psychopomps who guide the living past the veil of death to their well-earned afterlife. What's more, the Underworld holds entire empires of ghosts with their own concerns. If the sunlit realms of Creation deserve the protection of the Solar Exalted, then the shadowy realm of the dead deserves the oversight of the Abyssal Exalted.

This sort of series bridges the gap between righteous, doomed, defiant Abyssals and wicked, death-loving Abyssals. Like the wicked Abyssals, the enlightened Abyssal seldom fears Resonance. He doesn't defy the forces of death, nor does he protect the living or behave as one (except insofar as he must to help the living coexist with the dead). Nonetheless, he engages in no dark deeds, striving to be every bit as heroic as any Solar. His actions might earn him the ire of his Deathlord, but he can call upon the strength of the righteous dead to defend him, making rebellion easier.

This sort of story seems to combine the best of both worlds, but it offers an alien tone, utterly unlike the other two. It forces you to immerse your players in the culture and nature of the Underworld. Their characters become mediators who understand the dead better than anyone in Creation, easing the suffering of some haunting poltergeist or freeing a weeping spirit from the chains of her misery. The living turn to them as ultimate prophets of the ancestor cult, asking them to guide their dying loved ones into their well-prepared tombs in the afterlife. As in a defiant series, though, you should remind the players that their characters' heroism comes at a price. Every deathknight is an heir to spectral power, the scion of the Neverborn, and his original master is one of those monstrous tyrants that has enslaved much of the Underworld. While an enlightened deathknight does not reject his fundamental nature, he does twist away from his intended purpose. In so doing, he could find the minions of the Labyrinth dogging his steps.

Of course, you could change everything, even the game's basic assumptions. The Deathlords believe they understand what the Neverborn want—but do they, really? Do the *Neverborn* really know what they want? Perhaps the entire moral cosmology of **Exalted** is upside-down. Maybe the Unconquered Sun is the greedy traitor who cynically deluded the Exalted into doing his dirty

work for him. That would mean the true, heroic destiny of the Abyssals is to awaken the Neverborn from their nightmare of pain and rage. Rising from death, Creation's true and proper masters could then cast down the wicked usurper and set the world to rights at last.

TALES OF THE UNDERWORLD

All Abyssal games center on the presence or absence of a Deathlord. Each Abyssal receives the Black Exaltation at the behest of one of these mighty, undead sorcerer-kings, and thereafter either continues to benefit from her master's patronage or flees from him, trying to escape her destiny. The former series somewhat resembles a Dragon-Blooded game, where the deathknight holds a position in a mighty empire, with minions beneath her and masters above her. Intrigue and politics matter as much as swordplay and magic. The latter series resemble Solar games more closely, with a misunderstood hero battling to save the day while staying one step ahead of forces that seek to slay or enslave her. As either mentor or enemy, the Deathlord serves as a lynchpin for the game and a face to all of the characters' trials and tribulations.

Consider, too, if you want your game to primarily take place in the Underworld or in Creation. Those who serve their Deathlord loyally and those who battle fiercely for their independence have interests in both worlds. Abyssals have greater strength in the Underworld, but most of what they seek lies in Creation.

"Renegade" and "loyalist" aren't synonymous with "defiant" and "wicked." An enlightened Abyssal could willingly serve his Deathlord as long as the Deathlord offered more than lip service to the ancestor cults. A defiant Abyssal might serve because he has no choice. Likewise, a wicked Abyssal might rebel from his master to pursue his own hideous ambitions. The tone you want for your series can fit well with any shape you choose for it, with just a bit of work.

EMPIRES OF THE DEAD

A powerful Abyssal who rides from a charnel palace at the head of an army, yet chained to a master, a slave to darkness: This image defines the default mode of an Abyssal series. The paradox of a powerful slave drives most of the drama of this sort of story. On one hand, deathknights have the power to do as they please; on the other, all of that power can vanish at a word from their master. Politics easily takes center stage in a game like this, where the greatest challenge to a rampaging deathknight isn't the foe he faces, but the bureaucrats back home whispering to the Deathlord behind the Abyssal's back. The decadence of the Deathlord's court in this sort of game serves as a fine springboard for a wicked Abyssal's debauchery, but it can also set the stage for a defiant Abyssal's final rebellion.



BEYOND DEATHLORDS

This discussion assumes that Abyssals serve the Deathlord who created them, but your game doesn't have to unfold that way. A deathknight might find himself caught out by another Deathlord and forced to play the double agent back home. Or a Neverborn might bypass the Deathlords entirely and drag the Abyssal into its nightmarish grasp. Not every patron needs to be malevolent, though: An Abyssal might find sanctuary in the service of the Dual Monarchy of Stygia or another powerful, ghostly ruler. A deathknight could even find himself serving another, more powerful deathknight who has slain his master and carved out a precarious empire of his own.

USING DEATHLORDS

The strong hand of a Deathlord provides you with a greater degree of control than is possible in most **Exalted** games. With a command, the Deathlord can send his Abyssals out on their latest mission. When inter-character conflicts grow out of hand, the Deathlord can step in and set his minions on the proper path.

Without due care, however, such a powerful presence quickly becomes a crutch. Worse, it becomes a tool to ram unwilling players down story lines they don't want to participate

in. Even worse than that, it can become a *deus ex machina* that swoops in to resolve the story by fiat, leaving the players to wonder what purpose their characters ever served. While a Deathlord should certainly tower above the players' characters in power, he should still need his deathknights' services.

In addition to their ancient power, each Deathlord also has weaknesses. The politics of the Underworld lock them in constant struggles with one another. Their work crafting powerful artifacts or researching ways to ravage Creation consumes much of their time. Beyond these common weaknesses, though, individual Deathlords have their own specific frailties. Whether it's the Mask of Winters' overweening arrogance, the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears' constant distractions with her latest playthings, or the Bishop of the Chalcedony Thurbles' utter madness, they all need astute Abyssals to protect them from weaknesses they probably don't even recognize in themselves.

The easiest way to make sure that your series' Deathlord doesn't become unbearable is to make him a complete, multi-dimensional character. Passions dominate all ghosts, and Deathlords are no different. Their Motivations, their weaknesses, their strengths and the games they constantly play should dominate their every action. In addition to expanding on the Deathlord's personality and history, tie him to each player's character. After all, this Deathlord chose each Abyssal personally and for a reason, even if it wasn't



a good or sane reason. (Look at Eye and Seven Despairs.) Those reasons help define the further relationship between the characters and their master. Tangling these relationships can lead to intriguing conflicts, especially if the Deathlord doesn't react to events in straightforward ways. Why does the Deathlord praise and forgive her first deathknight, when all the Abyssal does is defy her? Why does the Deathlord insult and belittle his only female deathknight but always put her in charge of missions? Figuring out the Deathlord's psychology and history can become a major plot thread in an Abyssal series.

Because the Deathlord is so vital to a loyalist series and requires so much attention, consider involving the players more directly in fleshing out the details. Allow each player to write a rumor, or a few rumors, about the Deathlord's past or secrets he carries, such as the long-lost love of his past, his ultimate ambition, or a rival whose existence he never acknowledges. Allow these ideas to inspire you, and work them into your series. In addition to easing some of your workload, you allow players to have small tidbits of lore that the rest do not and to feel that they know their Deathlord better.

SUPER-INTELLIGENCE?

Even before they died, each Deathlord had centuries (possibly millennia) behind him as a superhuman champion of the gods. They are some of the eldest ghosts in the Underworld, now infused with the insane genius of the Whispers of the Neverborn. Portraying a character like that presents a considerable challenge, especially when the character vastly outstrips *human capability*. No amount of planning can enable you to approach the complexity with which a Deathlord can think.

So you cheat.

As Storyteller, you are privy to every decision made behind the scenes, to every word the players utter. Therefore, you can simply assume that the Deathlord already knows, or prepared for, all of the facts you have at your disposal—even those that seem unlikely. Should the characters hatch a predictable, straightforward plot to foil a Deathlord, allow him to suddenly reveal contingency plans that take this new plan into account.

Of course, trumping the players thus increasingly frustrates them, so temper the idea with a few limitations. For one thing, the extent of the Deathlord's planning means he must expended more resources than just those that foiled the characters' plans of the players. He's brilliant, but he's not precognitive, so he would have had to safeguard himself against a variety of scenarios on the off chance that any one of them occurred. But although he prepared for every likely scenario and even some of the unlikely ones, he can't possibly plan for *every possible* implausible scenario. Therefore, the players' characters can defeat the Deathlord if they just obtain some resource or information he *couldn't* possibly know about.

Furthermore, even the most brilliant being makes mistakes. An expert has been defined as a person who avoids little mistakes while sweeping on to the grand fallacy. Defeating a Deathlord might depend on figuring out his blind spots, the

possibilities he finds literally unthinkable. For instance, Deathlords are notoriously selfish beings, almost incapable of truly understanding others. They might, for instance, do nothing more than ascribe their own thought processes to their enemies. ("Of course you returned to rescue your sister. Doing otherwise would suggest weakness in the face of your enemies!") The trick to defeating that Deathlord, then, is figuring out how he thinks and devising a plan based on concepts that are alien to him—such as selfless virtue or perfect altruism.

In the end, though, if you plan to cheat on the Deathlord's behalf, perhaps you should let your players cheat as well. After all, the point of this method isn't to stymie your players' every plan, but instead, to reflect the immortal genius of a Deathlord. If your players understand that a simplistic, one-dimensional plan is doomed to failure, they might design contingencies, feints and double-fakes of their own. Naturally, the better a plan is, the better results it should generate.

Not every group hungers for such a game of mad thinker against mad thinker, but if your players would enjoy a diabolical mastermind dogging their every step, then by all means, roll up your sleeves and prepare to play dirty. Nobody said being an Abyssal was easy.

THE SEARCH FOR FREEDOM

Abyssals are slaves. From the moment of their inception, a Deathlord controls his minion's every move, rewriting their destiny. Some deathknights find this condition intolerable, whether the Deathlord forced a righteous man into damnation against his will or the Deathlord simply couldn't match the sheer wickedness of his ambitious new minion. So the deathknight rebels, fleeing confinement and striking out on his own.

The renegade Abyssal series offers somewhat more familiar ground. A wandering band of Exalts performs either wicked or righteous deeds then moves on to the next city. Such are the stories in which most Exalted involve themselves. Removing the looming presence of a Deathlord grants the characters a greater degree of freedom. (Without some sort of goal, though, a series can lack dramatic tension.)

Bear in mind, however, that amidst all the heroic adventure and exploration, Abyssals remain dark, cursed creatures, haunted by spectres and eternally pursued by their tragic fate. Keeping the characters on the run constantly reminds the players of the horrific tone inherent in most Abyssal games. Never let the players relax. Wherever their characters turn, the minions of their former master lurk, ready to drag them back to slavery. Even if the deathknights manage to evade the hunters, any righteousness earns the wrath of the Neverborn, and black miracles afflict them as they gain too much Resonance.

Any wickedness the renegades engage in, on the other hand, earns them the enmity of Creation. They'll shortly find themselves hunted by the Dragon-Blooded as Anathema, by the Lunars as twisted abominations of their mates' former glory, and by Solars determined to expunge them with the righteous light of the Unconquered Sun. Even heroic Abyssals might not escape this wrath, as the people of Creation naturally view

any Abyssal they meet as a monster. The Abyssals could turn to ancestor cults who recognize them as champions of the afterlife, but doing so only further acknowledges their alien, outsider nature. While things might sound hopeless, tragedy well handled forms the core of the drama in an Abyssal series. Moments of happiness become rare treasures of crystalline beauty in the deathknights' shadowy, blood-drenched lives.

"ONE DAY, I JUST EXALTED..."

Abyssals are different. All the other types of Exalted simply go about their lives until Exaltation is thrust upon them. Terrestrials might have seen it coming and prepared for it. Celestials might receive a vision or hear the words of an Incarna explaining things, but they generally have no choice in the matter. What's more, simply Exalting doesn't make them beholden to anyone—indeed, it often liberates them from their mortal ties.

An Abyssal, however, receives her Exaltation from a Deathlord. At the moment of death, the Deathlord offers her a choice and, if she accepts, inducts her into his service with an expectation of controlling her existence from that moment forward. Abyssals can choose to rebel, but they can't completely eliminate a Deathlord from her background.

What if they could, though? What if one of the Deathlords were to be (or has recently been) destroyed by righteous Solars and/or a determined host of Dragon-Blooded? With that Deathlord's deathknights dead and broken, and their Monstrances of Celestial Portion ripped apart, the tainted Abyssal sparks once contained therein could seek new hosts. In a shadowland, a Black Exaltation could find an acceptable, dying youth and give him power just like it did as the Solar Exaltation it used to be. No Deathlord would come for that youth; no one would be waiting there to explain what he is. Nobody would be on hand to offer him overwhelming power and eternal life in exchange for destroying the world. Like other Exalted, he could use his newfound power as he pleased. In time, researching the mystery of his Exaltation could lead him to the ruins of the perished Deathlord's lost citadel...

If such core assumptions suit your series, there's no reason you can't use them. (The concepts of Limit, Dark Fate and Resonance would be tricky to address, though.) Such characters would resemble renegades. With no Liege, they wouldn't likely command armies of zombies or haul around loads of soulsteel artifacts. They would, however, still have to deal with the greedy grasp of the Neverborn, though how quickly that grew problematic would remain in your hands.

Keep in mind that turning one's back on a Deathlord isn't something undertaken lightly. A circle of deathknights who all flee the comforts of their necrofeudal roles need a strong reason to do so. Simply asking your players the question of "Why?" goes a long way toward forging unified goals and the sort of ambition necessary to make this series work.

CORE STYLES, REDUX

Exalted offers a variety of standard story options—detailed on p. 262 of the core rulebook. Those options all require some adjustment for use in an Abyssal series.

VANILLA EXALTED

Abyssals do not adventure across Creation, discovering artifacts, evading the Wyld Hunt, saving the day and forging a new order for the world—not without Resonance tearing it down as quickly as the deathknight can build it. Instead, Abyssal series take a more devilish cast: renegade Abyssals dressed in rags and soulsteel, riding their ghostly steeds from village to village—not forging order, but slaying disorder and hoping something new and wholesome can spring up after they leave. The forces of the Scarlet Empire pursue them, but the Wyld Hunt cannot hold a candle to the terror of maddening, twisted spectres and their cold, Abyssal keepers intent on returning the rogues to their former slavery.

In the Underworld, however, the Abyssals can dominate the story as Solars dominate the sunlit realms of the living. By lifting their voices above the requiem cries of the dead, they could rally the melodramatic ghosts of the Underworld into a unified front against the cruel reign of the Deathlords in the ultimate defiance. Freeing the entire Underworld certainly matches the scope and tone of a typical "Vanilla **Exalted**" game, but from a perspective that Abyssals can handle

A LAND ONCE DIVIDED

If Abyssals understand anything, it is carnage on the battlefield and treachery in court. Abyssals can certainly engage in the sort of adventure detailed in "A Land Once Divided Must Unite," but troubles will plague their reign. As a rule, Abyssals don't "fix" anything, and their touch can only poison the nations they try to forge, filling them with despair and disorder. This impending tragedy, of course, provides plenty of fodder for drama in your Abyssal series. The people of Creation won't see renegade Abyssals as liberating heroes returned from the past, but monstrous conquerors enslaving their people. Wicked Abyssals are exactly that.

An Abyssal who wants to unite an endangered people has a few options. She might try to play a clever game, using her destructive talents to prepare the people for a looming invasion. In the long nights before a barbaric onslaught or a hellish invasion of the dead, an Abyssal might ride out like a gray-shrouded harbinger, raising small pockets of zombies and assaulting weak points in the nation she wishes to protect. By posing as a monstrous interloper, she hardens the people and rallies them to war. Even though they curse her name, she has helped prepare them for the onslaught to come and evaded any Resonance she would suffer from directly opposing the dead.



As with “Vanilla **Exalted**,” Abyssals can tap into a more conventional version of “A Land Once Divided” by remaining in the Underworld. Smoothing over the ancient grudges between the tribes and countries of the Underworld is certainly a feat worthy of an Exalted hero. For his efforts, an Abyssal could openly rule as a master over his nation of ghosts.

“AND I’LL FORM THE HEAD!”

Just because Abyssals touch on issues of morality doesn’t mean you have to take it all so seriously. Sometimes, it’s fun to wear black and raise hell with the forces of darkness. Tapping into the same veins as King Zarkon, Sephiroth or Darth Vader, the players’ characters can unleash unholy devastation on the world around them or fight the impossible horrors of the Underworld. With massive bonestriders and zombie behemoths at their disposal, Abyssals practically exist for this sort of game.

Wicked Abyssals can’t steal all the spotlight, however. Abyssals know more than anyone else does about the ultimate danger posed by the Neverborn and their Oblivion-twisted minions. Heroic Abyssals might uncover ancient conspiracies that stretch all the way to a secretly corrupt Incarna in heaven, then seek out the wisdom of the very first ghost immortally bound to the existence of the Neverborn it slew, and finally—wielding a soulsteel daiklave forged from the dying breath of one of the Elemental Dragons—battle the incomparably vast, nightmarish form of an undying Primordial risen at last from its impregnable tomb.

Redemption, the ultimate goal of any heroic Abyssal, doesn’t come lightly. The vast epics of “And I’ll Form the Head!” serve as the perfect backdrop for such an impressive, legendary deed.

OUTLANDER

The Underworld is a fascinating and wondrous place that Abyssals almost completely monopolize. Shadows of almost every era and every location of Creation are represented somewhere in the Underworld, enabling the players’ characters to explore anything and everything about Creation. Indeed, by comparing the current state of Creation to the legacies in the Underworld, Abyssals can bring unique insights to elder mysteries. Furthermore, the dead are strange and magnificent in their own right, with their ancient passions and bizarre appearances. Exploring the Underworld can tap the same sort of wonder and terror evoked by movies such as *What Dreams May Come*, *Helraiser*, *Spirited Away* or *Demon City Shinjuku*.

On the other hand, Creation is an alien place to the dead and hostile to Abyssals’ existence. Exploring a world familiar to most players as seen through unearthly eyes can allow the players to “discover the world once more.”

TALES OF THE ABYSS

An Abyssal series permits some unusual stories, thanks to the characters’ home in the Underworld and their special relationship with the Deathlords.

SERVANTS OF THE DARK MASTER

Some Deathlords keep their Abyssals busy. They foist bureaucratic work onto their underlings as they focus on more pressing matters such as inventing new Void Circle spells. A

Deathlord’s empire doesn’t run itself. Criminals run rampant. Without regular doses of propaganda, the shadowlands lose faith in their god-king. Enemy movements need constant surveillance. Talented magistrates engage their rivals in inconvenient, inter-bureaucratic spats. Such work grows routine and dull in Creation, but in the Underworld it becomes... different. Ghosts can be ancient and powerful in their own right. An Abyssal hunting a serial killer might face an inhuman monster who can vanish through walls and evoke horrid hallucinations. The vendetta between two arguing bureaucrats can span centuries and fuel the very passions that enable them to exist. To gather intelligence, an Abyssal must brave the fearsome sun of Creation and dodge Wyld Hunts and furious Sidereals. Certainly, these deeds are worthy of the Exalted.

This sort of game typically takes place in the capital city of the Deathlord’s empire, as well as the lands that immediately surround it. Sessile games such as these often require deep, evocative and dynamic settings, so fill them with fascinating personalities, haunting locales, colorful watering holes and intransigent problems. Because most of the story takes place in the same location, players’ characters have a chance to establish complex relationships, explore mysteries and watch as their actions impact the world around them.

Consider stealing headlines from real-life newspapers and translating them into the baroque, alien nature of the Underworld. What would a devastating hurricane look like? Blood would rain from the skies while lances of violet lightning tear through houses and cackling, mad spectres dance on the winds. International political incidents? Suddenly, they’re tragedies staged by bored ghostly officials tapping into long-held passions to create a tangled maelstrom of undying emotions. A terrorist attack? Either a long-forgotten cult is reminding the Underworld it still exists, or freedom fighters are seeking desperately to end the despotism of the Deathlord.

These sorts of stories make an excellent backdrop for deeper mysteries, or a springboard for new series. While the characters solve a local mystery, they might stumble upon a deeper intrigue. Perhaps the terrorists staged their attack to benefit some hidden agent. Uncovering an Underworld-wide conspiracy against their Deathlord or realizing that the only way to save the empire from some coming disaster is to recover some lost artifact, might spark a new quest that takes the Abyssals far from their familiar surroundings.

HOLOCAUST

Much of this chapter offers ways to temper the deep, abiding malevolence inherent in the Abyssal condition, but you might wish to take the opposite tack and reveal the full extent of Abyssal depravity. Deathknights are, after all, champions of massacre—beings who drink blood, drag misery behind them and wield the ultimate arts of slow and painful dissolution. Imagine a series in which a Deathlord pushes his deathknights to darker and darker deeds, hardening them until their eyes glint like frosty obsidian. He forbids no deed except acts of compassion, and he tests how far they can go under the intense weight of wickedness before they break and flickers of their remaining humanity begin to

show. Success means destruction of all they know; redemption means failure. Such a series is not for the faint of heart.

This sort of series requires some sort of devastation as its backdrop—zombie assaults across the whole of the Scavenger Lands, for example, or the invasion of some helpless nation among the Hundred Kingdoms. Far-flung mortal kingdoms can do little to resist the Abyssals, but you can challenge the characters by testing their dedication to Oblivion. How far can the players let their characters go? How far are they willing to go before their perfect, cold exterior snaps? How long will it be before their blades hesitate to strike down the whimpering, wide-eyed village child? At what point will the forgotten spark of compassion—something they thought they had excised completely—begins to temper their undying conviction?

Even in a story of slaughter, though, the Abyssals' actions should have consequences. This series is *about* consequences. The Abyssals' dreadful deeds cause misery and hatred all across Creation. Heroes and armies rise to defend their homes as the fractious forces of Creation realize that the Abyssals represent a genuine threat. Yet virtue has its consequences too. Heartless spectres and deathknights who don't show the same weaknesses begin to question the faith of those less wicked. The Deathlord watches all, wondering if his champions are losing their edge. No matter what a deathknight does, whether he offers compassion or mercilessly slaughters, he'll find himself a pawn to be discarded when he grows too powerful, damned by his wickedness or eventual defiance.

A story such as this could introduce a larger series. It shows the players the true price of servitude and the real agenda of the Deathlords. It soaks their characters in blood and stains them with sin. After such events, players might want their characters to rebel or even seek redemption. Even if they decide to remain at their master's side, their actions lead to events that irrevocably scar Creation, granting the players a new, post-apocalyptic playground to enjoy.

“DOESN'T PLAY WELL WITH OTHERS”

Abyssals present a challenge for Storytellers who wish to include the exploits of other Exalted in the same series. Still, the natural difficulties of such a partnership can lead to interesting drama, and the situations in which Abyssals find themselves provide ready reasons for why they might wish to join forces with other Exalts. Loyalists might serve at another Exalt's side by his master's command... possibly tempting others to serve Oblivion with him. A defiant deathknight might desperately seek allies who can stave off the forces of his former lord. Conversely, the Deathlords and their minions hold vast repositories of power and knowledge. Even the most righteous character might be tempted to walk on the dark side “just for a while” to accumulate long-lost secrets of sorcery or the power of soulsteel.

The primary obstacle to such a crossover is the setting. Abyssals and the rest of the Exalted literally live in different worlds.





Creation discomfits Abyssals, and the Underworld suffocates the living. The weakness Abyssals suffer in Creation generally brings them down to the power of other Celestial Exalted, but their necromantic niche generally makes them useful. In the reverse, almost anyone traveling in the Underworld would do well to find an Abyssal to help him survive (if an Abyssal were so inclined to do so, of course). Deathknights dominate adventures in the Underworld the way Solars do in Creation. They can guide their companions through the nightmarish twists of the Labyrinth or quickly defuse problems with scandalized ghosts. In return for their services, deathknights in Creation have allies who can protect them during daylight hours or when they're suffering from black miracles. In the Underworld, the other Exalts might not be as strong as they are in Creation, but they outperform the dead at their specialties. Any Abyssal can make use of Solar glory, Lunar shapeshifting or Sidereal insight.

SOLARS

Solars and Abyssals are more alike than they care to admit. Both can study extreme levels of sorcery and necromancy, they use similar techniques and artifacts of comparable powers, and they suffer similar weaknesses of hubris. Furthermore, Deathlords *were* Solars. They have firsthand knowledge of the First Age and the Lawgivers' forgotten power. Lawgivers who seek the lost arts of magitech or the Adamant Circle of Sorcery can find all their answers in the dark abodes of these menacing sorcerer-kings... if they survive the encounter.

Solars, for their part, interest Deathlords a great deal. They constitute a resource that a seemingly benevolent Deathlord can exploit or even convert into a new, powerful servant. While some Deathlords disdain Solars entirely as a threat that could someday harm them, others remember their former colleagues and relationships and would love to recruit them. Their Abyssals can be instrumental in this effort. Also, if an Abyssal seeks redemption, he can hope for no better aid than that of a Solar.

LUNARS

Abyssals fit the same niche for Lunars that Solars do, but with added twists. From the glorious heroes of old, Abyssals have become monstrous creatures of death. In them, the Lunars see the consequences of their failure to protect their mates. Romance between Lunars and Abyssals becomes maddening and dangerous. A Lunar might seek to redeem his former mate or destroy her, or he might succumb to the temptation of her dark embrace and become a creature of darkness himself.

Some extremists in the Silver Pact, however, want to destroy the Realm and, indeed, civilization as a whole. They might ponder alliances of convenience with Deathlords. While such an alliance would surely be doomed in the long run, both sides could temporarily benefit from the other's resources.

SIDEREALS

On the surface, Sidereals seem to have little reason to work with Abyssals. The Underworld falls outside Creation and thus outside the Sidereals' jurisdiction—they can't even work their powerful astrology there.

Still, a clever Sidereal can turn each problem into an opportunity. His powers might not work so well in the Underworld, but his enemies in Yu-Shan can't find him there either. While the Deathlords originally died at Sidereal hands, they aren't shy about forging new relationships with their former assassins. For the Sidereal who wants it all, the Deathlords can offer powerful incentives. The Green Lady might not be a fluke. Perhaps a secret "Iron Faction" of Sidereals thinks that Oblivion is the best future for Creation. After all, everything must come to an end... even the world.

DRAGON-BLOODED

Of all the Exalted, Dragon-Bloods present the greatest difficulties for a crossover. A righteous Immaculate must try to kill an Abyssal on sight. Even a wicked Dynast would lose a great deal of standing if his colleagues realized he consorted with Anathema. Even if a Dragon-Blood wanted to team up with Abyssals, deathknights are far beyond their league. Dragon-Blood characters would find themselves quickly outclassed.

If the players don't mind these elements, however, such a crossover could still prove fruitful. Both groups tend to display significant political acumen and understand the privileges of office. A Deathlord would certainly negotiate with a Dynast, as long as discussions remained secretive enough to be useful to both parties. Outside the Realm, an outcaste could find himself serving a Deathlord as the lieutenant to a mighty Abyssal, much as his ancestors once served the Solars.

EXPERIENCE AND ADVANCEMENT

As dark mirrors of Solars, Abyssals pay the same costs for their Charms and Essence that Solars do. See **Exalted**, p. 274, for these costs. While they are outside the Underworld or a shadowland, however, Abyssals need twice the training time to raise any trait except for Caste and Favored Abilities.

The dark power of the Black Exaltation deeply marks the flesh of Abyssals who carry it. First, the power of Oblivion makes it so that Abyssals never age. Only violence, poison or plague can kill them. Second, as an Abyssal increases in power, his features change, either rotting away or becoming inhumanly beautiful. **At Essence 4, Abyssals must have an Appearance higher or lower than 2. At Essence 5, Abyssals must either have an Appearance of 0, or higher than 3.**

The Abyssal does not make a conscious choice toward beauty or ugliness. It emerges, instead, from his unconscious perception of himself and his connection to Oblivion. A player who decides his character becomes more beautiful must pay the appropriate experience points for the increased Appearance. Training time is waived, though. If the player wants to tie the change in Appearance to the surge in the character's Essence, that's fine; if the player wants to say the change happened more gradually, that's fine too. Sometimes the change in self-image happens gradually; sometimes it happens in one shattering instant. This has no bearing on how or when the player spends the experience points, as long as she keeps her character within the proper limits.



TO YOUR
HEALTH, GENTLE
GUESTS.



YOU
ESPECIALLY...

...YOUR
EXCELLENCY.



AND TO OUR
GRACIOUS HOST,
AND HIS ABSENT
LIEGE.

INDEED.



AH, I SEE
OUR MAIN
COURSE IS
COMING.

YOU'LL
ENJOY THIS.
IT'S A REGIONAL
SPECIALTY.





MIGHT I
RECOMMEND
A SIRLOIN,
MADAM?



GET THAT
DISGUSTING
THING AWAY
FROM ME!
NOW!



I DON'T CARE!
THIS IS VILE!
I'M NOT EATING
THIS!

I
SEE.
EVERYONE, I
APOLOGIZE, BUT
I MUST SPEAK
PRIVATELY WITH
ARIANNA.



IT'S
PERFECTLY
FRESH, ARIANNA.
IT WAS ALIVE
THIS MORNING.

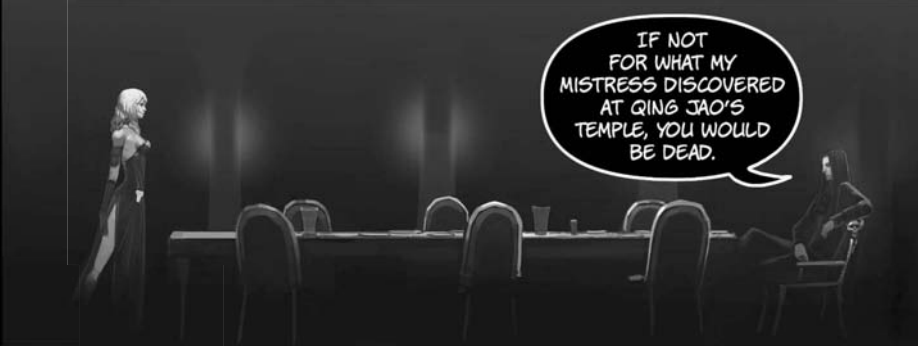


SHE'S SO UNCOUTH.

SHAMEFUL.



ARIANNA, DON'T MIS-
APPREHEND WHY
YOU'RE HERE.



IF NOT
FOR WHAT MY
MISTRESS DISCOVERED
AT QING JAO'S
TEMPLE, YOU WOULD
BE DEAD.



STILL,
THERE ARE SO
MANY THINGS
A BODY CAN
ENDURE BEFORE
IT DOES DIE.

SO MANY
DELICATE
CRUELITIES.



THERE'S
PLENTY OF TIME
TO SHOW YOU MY
FAVORITES BEFORE
MY MISTRESS
RETURNS.



SO I
SUGGEST YOU
BEHAVE YOUR-
SELF.



MAKE ME,
PRETTY-BOY.



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Gifted by the Deathlords with the corrupted Exaltations of the Sun's Chosen, the Abyssal Exalted are perhaps the greatest extant threat to Creation and its defenders. Frozen at the brink of death and offered immense power in exchange for servitude to the Neverborn, these so-called knights of death ride forth with one shared mission, to drag the world and all that lives into the Void. Will the Abyssals succeed at their abhorrent task, or will the faint echo of their lost lot as heroes drive them to redeem themselves and, just maybe, rejoin the ranks of the Solar Exalted?

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