

MIND'S EYE THEATRE

LAW OF JUDGMENT™

TIME OF
JUDGMENT

MIND'S EYE THEATRE

LAW^S OF JUDGMENT™

PROPHECIES ANCIENT AND TERRIBLE

It is known by many names: Gehenna, Apocalypse, Ascension. For millennia, humanity and its supernatural masters have wondered at and dreaded the nature of the End Times. Now the signs are unmistakable — the oldest fears of the prophets are about to be realized. Will it be annihilation? Or does new hope await beyond this great darkness?

THE END IS HERE

Laws of Judgment is a comprehensive guide to presenting the Time of Judgment for all of the **Mind's Eye Theatre** games. Everything players and Storytellers need is contained within, from new rules and systems born of the End Times to ready-made doomsday scenarios to storytelling advice on how to give a chronicle the end it deserves. Only one question remains: How will your troupe face the end?



MIND'S EYE THEATRE

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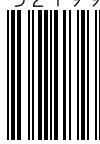
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*What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.*

The end is where we start from.

—T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," *Four Quartets*

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MIND'S EYE THEATRE

LAW SOF JUDGMENT™

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INTRODUCTION: THE SIGNS ARE ON FIRE

*To absent friends, lost loves, old gods, and the season of mists;
and may each and every one of us always give the Devil his due.*

—Hob Gadling, *Sandman: A Season of Mists*

You hold in your hands **Laws of Judgment**, a book that outlines the final Time of Judgment. At last the supernatural denizens of the World of Darkness find themselves confronted with the End Times that they have long viewed through prophecy and shadow. Some answer with courage, others with cowardice, but all are called to an ultimate accounting for everything they have done. The signs are on fire, both epic and intimate events unfold, and no one will walk away from this one unchanged — if they walk away at all.

Before we go into the details of what is contained within, however, let me tell you a secret:

These words were written during a hurricane.

It seems only too fitting that as I sat down to compose an introduction to the book that brings an end to **Mind's Eye Theatre**, a book devoted to disasters and upheaval of all kinds, an actual disaster raged outside. A coincidence like that in fiction would be deemed implausible, but there it was. It's little moments like that, where the two worlds seem almost too close together for comfort, that make many longtime World of Darkness visitors pause... and then smile as they realize just how much a part of themselves and their worldview it has become.

Endings are never easy. Only at the last minute do we ever realize just how much remains unsaid and undone, how many more twists and turns we were expecting before reaching our destination. Many of us have found best friends or even spouses through these games, and all of us have stories that we never tire of telling. But without an ending, a story is a thing incomplete, for ultimately the conclusion puts the rest of the tale into perspective. Even if only our imaginations tell us what transpires following the “happily ever after,” we’re still more content for having been given leave to take the story in the direction we desire.

This book isn’t about endings, it’s about the entire story so far, what all the characters have laughed, cried and bled for will ultimately mean when they face the greatest test of their abilities. More than just a rote translation of the Time of Judgment tabletop series — though **Gehenna**, **Apocalypse**, **Ascension** and **Time of Judgment** certainly offer additional useful



information — **Laws of Judgment** has been specifically designed to help Storytellers take these epic tales and tell them in ways that only **Mind's Eye Theatre** really can.

A summary follows of each chapter and the stories it contains:

Chapter One: Judgment Day explores what the masses perceive as the world slides into chaos. It also details how the brave souls of **Laws of the Hunt** react as their chosen enemies are destroyed — or emerge stronger than ever.

Chapter Two: Gehenna confronts the vampires of **Laws of the Night** with tales of elders rising, cities crumbling and what is a blessing as well as their greatest fear: the end of the Curse of Caine.

Chapter Three: Apocalypse heads to the front lines of the Final Battle to save Gaia, as the were-creatures of **Laws of the Wild**, **Hengeyokai** and the **Changing Breeds** series make their last stand.

Chapter Four: Ascension centers around the mages of **Laws of Ascension** and their desperate efforts to reach enlightenment before reality calcifies into faceless stasis — or unravels into nothingness.

Chapter Five: Endless Winter places the fae of **The Shining Host** at the heart of stories involving fantastic quests, deadly intrigue, terrifying monsters, and the hardest task of all: keeping hope alive.

Chapter Six: Reckoning pushes the imbued of **Laws of the Reckoning** to their limits, as their strange destiny is revealed and the supernatural makes a last push for control — or destruction.

Chapter Seven: The Sixth Age travels to the courts of the Kuei-jin vampires of **Laws of the East** as ancient karmic debts are collected and the Demon Emperor at last ascends its throne.

Chapter Eight: Armageddon concerns the undying mummies of **Laws of the Resurrection** and their noble struggle to return Balance to the universe before it is consumed by its own darkness.

Chapter Nine: Doomsday descends one last time into the dark Underworld of **Oblivion**, where a great war and greater storm of the dead combine to change the nature of the afterlife forever.

Chapter Ten: Revelations presents material that a Storyteller can apply to any kind of End-Times chronicle. From advice on structuring the final plots for maximum impact to troubleshooting difficult scenarios to creating props that help the players feel as though they are truly experiencing the End Times, it's all here and ready for use.

Although these chapters are already packed with information concerning the Time of Judgment and how a Storyteller can best bring it to life for her players, the most powerful resource for any chronicle is reading these lines at this very moment. No matter what might be written on one of these pages, what matters most is what the Storyteller feels will be best for her chronicle. Period.

So whether this volume comes at the end of a long-running chronicle or sparks a brand new beginning, remember always that **Laws of Judgment** — like all **Mind's Eye Theatre** books — is about *your* stories and the direction you want to take them. Nothing says that your stories can't go on as long as you desire just because our world is ending. Indeed, it's in your hands now more than ever.

For all of you over the years who have made **Mind's Eye Theatre** great, all the countless chronicles and legions of wonderful Storytellers, players and Narrators — thank you. None of these stories would be possible without you.

Let the final show begin.



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METEOR TO STRIKE EARTH IN EIGHT DAYS



MYSTERY ILLNESS CLAIMS 3,000 LIVES





CHAPTER ONE: JUDGMENT DAY

THE MORTAL WORLD

More than six billion humans crowd the surface of the Earth, even in the World of Darkness. Most of them live their lives never knowing of the supernatural creatures that exist just beyond the fringes of mortal knowledge. A chronicle of the End Times must take into account the reactions of these powerless masses who might never realize that events are happening around them that will cause an end to everything they know.

Their stories, in many ways, bring home the true horror of the World of Darkness.

At first, only a few perceptive individuals notice that the world is getting stranger, day by day. Doomsayers and devout believers in the “end of the world” see signs in news reports of natural and man-made calamities. They see it in escalating political tension and acts of terrorism. They see it in outbreaks of bizarre diseases that reach pandemic proportions and in the general malaise that accompanies the feeling that things are falling apart.

Scientists also suspect that the perfect world of natural law is not quite as predictable as they would like it to be. Astronomers notice evidence of “activity” in the asteroid belt or speculate about the likelihood of another cosmic collision similar to the one that drove the dinosaurs to extinction. Geologists worry about increasing seismic activity between the tectonic plates. Pathologists question the growing strains of anomalous tissue samples collected from victims of violent crimes. These individuals wonder at the proliferation of chaos in the world around them.

Others, those mortals who rarely deviate from their daily routine either rationalize, ignore or misunderstand the supernatural, hardly noticing the truth — that all things are coming to a close.

Mostly, though, the mortals merely die.

ON JUDGMENT DAY

For most mortals, the end comes without warning. A sudden breakdown in communications, mass destruction — either natural or manmade — then silence. While the Kindred, Garou, mages, changelings and the imbued all experience the climactic moments of their existence, the human race, which is so closely tied into all these supernatural societies, simply reaps the consequences.



Some religious groups recognize the telltale marks of the end and actually look forward to it with the faith that they will be among the “saved” or chosen. Others see the chaos that precedes the events of the End Times as an excuse for their anarchistic tendencies, sparking waves of looting and rioting that might be enough to topple governments and cause a total breakdown of society.

Unless they have overt proof of the existence of vampires, werewolves or other supernatural creatures, most humans never even suspect that their world is ending as a fulfillment of a prophecy or the culmination of an age-long struggle that is not even theirs.

This is the background of terror and incomprehension against which the stories of the end play themselves out in the arena of live-action roleplaying.

Welcome to the end of the world.

THE INQUISITION

Since its beginning in the 11th century, the Inquisition has waged war against the enemies of the Church. During the course of its existence, it has searched out and destroyed heretics, witches and other groups labeled as evil or undesirable. In the present, the secular Inquisition — otherwise known as the Society of Leopold, continues to wage war against the supernatural. Drawing upon the power of faith and modern weaponry, Inquisitors pit themselves against vampires and other supernaturals.

While the Inquisition provides a good source of antagonists for most live-action games set in the World of Darkness, it is particularly suited to games involving vampires and using rules from **Laws of the Night** and **Laws of the Hunt**.

How will these determined hunters of the supernatural react to the realization that their world is coming to an end at the hands of those they hunt? As a Storyteller, you should consider several alternative scenarios that can affect the actions of your Inquisition characters, whether they are player-controlled or Storyteller characters.

- **Wormwood:** This scenario provides the Inquisition few opportunities to affect its outcome, as the few Chosen vampires who are destined to potentially redeem themselves are hiding, protected, inside an old church they call Sanctuary. Apparently, this refuge was created by nothing less than divine power. While they can leave of their own free will, those who do so suffer hideous, agonizing death within days, and none who leave can re-enter.

Inquisition agents are likely to encounter these events only if they are hot on the trail of a target who slips into Sanctuary as the zero hour approaches, which leaves the Storyteller with a few options. If they are allowed to enter Sanctuary, they find themselves surrounded by a number of frightened and angry vampires. While a powerful (and beatific) vampire known as Ferox prevents bloodshed on either side, being trapped with these creatures for their 40 nights of trial and temptation can make for an incredibly intense roleplaying experience.

Alternatively, the Inquisition might also surround the Sanctuary and wait to see what happens, making sure that none of the creatures escape. This scenario is very similar to what's happening within, as the Inquisitors witness strange phenomena but cannot leave or risk dereliction of duty.

- **Fair Is Foul:** This scenario involves earth-shaking events for the vampiric community that largely escape mortal notice until the very end. Even the most vigilant Inquisitors aren't likely to piece together the entirety of what is happening — or be able to comprehend the enormity of what they are seeing if they do.

This scenario begins as any other assignment might, with the characters assigned to investigate some evidence of powerful vampiric activity. As Lilith's personal vendetta



builds to its conclusion, any Inquisitors dispatched to the city she chooses as her final battleground are almost certain to find themselves dupes of one side or the other. Some of Caine's faithful might exploit the animus placed on the "Lilith heresy" and leak information to members of the Society of Leopold in order to use the Inquisitors as a means of injuring or distracting her followers at a critical moment. At the same time, one or more of Lilith's trusted followers might try to manipulate the Inquisition into attacking a group of younger vampires who are seeking to defeat her plans. Staying alive requires more than just a strong arm or steady Faith — it will force the Inquisitors to stay ahead of the ancient schemes that threaten to swallow them whole.

In the end, some of the most powerful vampires in existence destroy one another, and for all its knowledge and tenacity, the Inquisition's role in this event is mostly that of inadvertent witness or deluded pawn. Then again, perhaps both Caine and Lilith have forgotten the true power of God's wrath, as made manifest in His chosen agents...

• **Nightshade:** When the existence of vampires becomes public knowledge, the mortal world reacts with expected outrage, fear, panic and — ultimately — violence. The Inquisition, of course, has known for centuries that vampires and other minions of Hell exist. Now, it appears, the Inquisitors' stance against the monsters of the night is justified. But what do they do about it?

As global organizations and governments topple with the realization that they are not the ultimate authority on Earth, members of the Inquisition might find themselves thrust into the limelight as the last defenders of the human race with the knowledge and the means to destroy the predatory vampires. For the Society of Leopold, the emergence of vampires into the public eye is a mixed blessing — and possibly more of a hindrance than a boon.

The results might be somewhat different from what the Inquisition bargained for. As wholesale panic grips the world at the knowledge that the bloodsucking monsters of ancient myth are not symbols of man's monstrosity and parasitic nature but concrete entities, members of the Society of Leopold suddenly find themselves beset from all sides.

Pressure mounts for them to "do something" and protect humanity (as if they hadn't been the self-appointed protectors all along). Meanwhile, internal pressures threaten to divide the Society into those who want to wage an all-out war against the vampires and a determined minority (the Sanbenito) who hope to find the latent humanity within the undead and bring them to God and to a life of good works. And then there's the question of whether the Inquisition can truly defeat such awesome creatures without help from their enemies once the true power of the Antediluvians becomes known...

• **Crucible of God:** Even more so than "Nightshade," this scenario unveils the all-out war the Inquisition has been alternately fearing and preparing for since its creation. The predictions of the end of the world come to pass, Gehenna takes on apocalyptic dimensions, and the Ancients rise to claim entire continents as their own. These beings rend reality with their very existence, and their battles lay waste to miles in the blink of an eye. Quite simply, the Jihad threatens not only all life on Earth but possibly the existence of the planet itself.

How does the Inquisition react to the most direct and literal manifestation of the end of the world? After all, those with religious convictions have probably believed in the finite nature of God's universe and its inevitable end. What happens



when they come face to face with their belief? Even secularly oriented members of the Society of Leopold might realize that ancient vampires have the same potential to destroy the world as nuclear bombs or asteroid strikes.

The Society of Leopold could disintegrate altogether in the face of certain destruction of everything in existence (or at least of “civilization as we know it”). Some run for cover as the world falls to pieces around them. Others simply commit their souls to God and go about their business or killing (or saving) vampires as usual. Still others strive desperately to prevent God’s wrath from raining down on the world. Mass *autos-da-fé* and acts of religious fervor could become the order of the day.

THE ARCANUM

The Arcanum has existed as an organization since the 1800s, but individuals who possess a compelling interest in accumulating “secret” or occult knowledge have existed throughout history. Many members of the Arcanum have made a study of various types of supernaturals, but no group intrigues them as much as those people who call themselves mages and who focus their will through various symbols and rituals to alter the fabric of reality.

The Arcanum’s interest in all things occult has provided a wealth of information, all documented, some pieces contradictory to other pieces. What the Arcanum’s members do not possess is a strong urge to *do something* with what they know. In most cases, the end of the world takes the Arcanum by surprise, not because these scholars don’t see it coming, but because they don’t know what to do about it when it gets there.

Arcanum members are more suited for live-action games using *Laws of Ascension*. The following scenarios consider the role of Arcanum characters in end-of-the-world chronicles featuring the Traditions and the Technocracy.

• **Judgment:** The Day of Judgment arises for mages, in which those who have followed the call of their Avatars and worked toward Ascension receive their reward, while those who have not done so suffer the penalties for failure. Spontaneous Awakenings of Sleepers crowd the world with magic. A plague of insanity washes over the world.

The Arcanum itself might be rocked by the sudden Awakening of many of its members. After all, the predisposition of many Arcanum members toward all things occult makes them potential candidates for Awakening. Those who do Awaken might also go mad as they suddenly become the things they have studied for so long.

Arcanum members have some idea of what constitutes an “Awakened” being such as a mage. Certainly they realize that the powers wielded by those who call themselves mages have the ability to redefine reality to some extent. But knowing and doing are two different things.

Those who don’t Awaken face the problem of how to deal with the strange events occurring in the world around them. The walls of reality break down as the world approaches the end point. While mages eventually realize what is going on, the Arcanum might be slow in picking up the clues. If the scholars do realize what is in store for the world, they realize their own tragic part in events — that of the onlooker.

The frustration suffered by most members of the Arcanum is that as they learn more about the imminent apotheosis of mages, they also learn more about how little they can do to affect it. The plight of the helpless is the bane of the Arcanum.

• **A Whimper, Not a Bang:** In this scenario, only the mages participate in Ascension. The world itself and the people without magical potential remain blissfully ignorant of the transcendence going on around them.



The Arcanum might have a role in piecing together some of the disparate parts of the puzzle, realizing that some esoteric struggle is taking place just outside its ken. Very likely, they will find themselves in the position of the historical reconstructionist, who deciphers the past from musty documents but cannot change what has already happened. Arcanum members who are astute enough to discover what is going on will also realize that they have no part in the mages' Ascension. They can only stand by as mages and magic leave the world, feeling within them the chill of the knowledge that from here on in, only the inflexible laws of Nature remain.

For the Arcanum, all that is left is history.

• **The Revolution Will Be Televised:** The Ascension War has historically consisted of a series of battles between the Traditions and the Technocracy (and within each group) for control of reality and to determine the form that Ascension will take. In a scenario in which the Technocracy wins the ultimate victory and controls Ascension, magic not only disappears, but science seizes the world in a death grip of technology that steadily recedes from anything remotely human.

In a scenario such as this, the Arcanum could, in fact, play a pivotal role, should it manage not to fall afoul of the Technocracy itself. In a world without magic, or one in which the Technocracy controls or exterminates all mages, the Arcanum could be the only group left that remembers what magic was. These scholars — like the living books encountered by the hero in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* — might become repositories of the history of magic. Whether they can do anything with the knowledge that they alone hold remains to be seen.

The Technocracy, if it knows of the Arcanum's existence and purpose, might come hunting the scholars after the mages have been neutralized, which could place the Arcanum members in a situation unlike any they have ever encountered. All of a sudden, they are the observed rather than the observer, and those who observe them don't just want to take notes.

• **The Earth Will Shake:** In this most physical scenario, the emphasis is on action and finding solutions to a situation that might not be solvable. While the emphasis in a **Laws of Ascension** game falls naturally on the mage characters, Arcanum characters could serve as resource persons, particularly if they have access to information kept secret from the public in order to avoid wholesale panic.

Arcanum members also possess all sorts of odd pockets of knowledge that might be relevant to any solutions proposed by mages, should any of them think to consult sources within Sleeper society. Should averting disaster be impossible, then the Arcanum might play a role in helping salvage as much of Earth's population as possible.

Characters who belong to the Arcanum might take a more active role in events, not only lending their expertise to mages who seek them out, but also acting as liaisons between the Sleeping masses and the magic-wielders who don't want to "go public" even at the end of the world.

In the end, however, the Arcanum might again realize that knowing everything is useless without the capacity or will to use the knowledge.

• **Hell on Earth:** In a scenario in which neither the Technocracy nor the Traditions win but the infernalists steal the victory and define Ascension, the Arcanum might, in fact, reach its highest potential. For as long as these scholars have existed, they have remained in the background, quietly collecting information, synthesizing it and acting as observers in the World of Darkness. Chances are, the Nephandi know as little about them as other mages do.



The Arcanum, however, might know something about the infernal mages based on their knowledge of ancient magic, black magic and demonic pacts. This knowledge can stand Arcanum scholars in good stead in learning how to avoid the Earth's new masters or else provide information for pockets of rebellion (if any are left). Whether the Arcanum steps in to fill a void in the absence of any other group of resisters depends largely on whether Arcanum characters elect to take action against the generally passive nature of the group as a whole.

TWILIGHT AGENCIES

A few special government agencies around the world are aware of the existence of the supernatural. Known informally as "twilight agencies," their job is to monitor supernatural groups and crack down on any who break the law. For some of them, the fact that a werewolf or vampire exists is an illegal act. These groups, which include the Special Affairs Department (SAD) in the United States, Division Six in Great Britain and similar agencies all over the globe, usually figure most prominently as antagonists in chronicles using *Laws of the Wild*. Because of their primary association with *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*, they come up in this section. Like any of the other mortal secret societies, though, they can figure in any chronicle set in the World of Darkness.

Twilight agencies have all the resources of their respective governments as well as the force of law behind them, but if things go wrong, most governments leave twilight agents to fend for themselves. What they lack most often is true knowledge about the creatures that they hunt. The End-Time scenarios could not provide them with the enlightenment they so avidly desire. Should they discover all they need to know, will their knowledge serve them when they must respond to the end of the world? The following scenarios examine these clandestine agencies' possible reactions to various endgames.

- **A Tribe Falls:** When events launch a battle between the Garou Nation and one of its own, the mortal world might experience this event as an increase in riots in rural areas — some of which spread into the cities. Savaged bodies turn up in the countryside, farm communities lock their doors in fear, and a few call in the "feds" or whatever government group is most appropriate. While SAD might not become involved in this scenario unless the signs point to bizarre or occult-style crimes, the NSA will certainly intervene, trying to put two and two together and figure out what's going on. If it does, it might not believe it.

Groups that have had experience with werewolves will recognize certain telltale signs, but most have never dealt with large-scale incidents. Response might involve tracking down the supernaturals and bringing massive weaponry against them. As the battle escalates, so does the terror, and these twilight agencies will most likely find themselves sorely outmatched.

- **The Last Battleground:** For human governments and their twilight agents, this scenario offers the greatest frustration. Most of the action goes on in the spirit world, so mortals never see the actual "battles" or their aftermath in casualties. What does come through, however, is an echo of the Umbral events in the real world. Odd events, inexplicable manifestations of Umbral beings (possibly mistaken for ghosts or demons) and a general sense of malaise and madness piques the interest of pattern-seekers in the NSA or conspiracy theorists in the CIA. Some conclude that some dreadful Armageddon scenario is about to take place, unaware that it is already going on.

As the world begins to fall apart around them due to the Final Battle, the physical world takes on the appearance of the now-ravaged Umbra. When Earth's wild places



erode and disappear without any apparent cause, twilight agencies might realize too late that the time for action has passed them by.

• **Weaver Ascendant:** Twilight agencies know nothing to speak of about the distinctions between Wyrm and Weaver. Therefore, in a scenario where the Weaver takes advantage of the war between the Garou and the Wyrm, the NSA, SAD and most other special agencies over the globe will only notice the increasing unrest and the escalation of violence. They might also notice certain forces attempting to stabilize the situation and provide assistance to those groups in restoring order, thus aiding the Weaver unknowingly.

Unfortunately, twilight agencies have much in common with the Weaver's followers. They both stand for order and stability, shy away from change and tend to frown upon spontaneity. So even if an agent has a sudden inspiration as to what is really going on, she might run into so much red tape trying to get results that any actions she takes will most likely come too late.

Those who play by the rules find themselves unable to break the rules, even when the fate of the world depends on it. Twilight agents could discover that their hands are tied if they attempt any unorthodox maneuvers, such as aiding the Garou in their battles. After all, who doesn't want a safe, stable world where nothing out of the ordinary happens — ever?

• **Ragnarok:** The most extreme scenario twilight agencies might face is one in which all the dire prophecies of the Apocalypse come true — literally. The mortal world, including members of twilight agencies, will be too occupied in merely keeping order and handling damage control as things fall apart around them.

Natural disasters, outbreaks of wars, the breakdown of civilization, an invasion from "beyond" all seem to happen at once, throwing armies and civilian peacekeeping forces headlong into the battle to hold a line that keeps disappearing out from under their feet — even as the earth itself crumbles away. Nothing is hidden in this scenario, and the worst theories of the twilight agencies' top conspiracy theorists come to pass. Unfortunately, the sight of creatures that can only be called "monsters" battling each other too much for the all-too-human minds of even the best-trained agents. Madness strikes down most mortals before the world comes to an end.

Even the best of the twilight agencies descends into the final darkness, with those they have pursued for so long.

THE DAUNTAIN

Dauntain make interesting additions to a live-action End-Times chronicle based on **The Shining Host**, if for no other reason than their unpredictability. The repressed changelings spend their time either hunting other changelings or attempting to pretend to themselves and the world that they are normal, mundane mortals. The end of the world puts a stop to all that nonsense. The following possible scenarios can have drastic effects on any Dauntain characters and can make for an intriguing sub-plot within the main chronicle.

• **A Crown of Shadows:** A fae chronicle depicting victory for the Unseelie fae and the Shadow Court likewise rouses the opposition of the Dauntain. Even though they espouse different techniques of gathering Glamour and do not fear Banality as much as Seelie changelings do, the Winter-aspected fae retain the ties to the Dreaming that elicit such opposition by the Dauntain. Those Autumn fae who actively hunt changelings find game plentiful as battles rage in the Dreaming and in the mundane world.

Unaware Dauntain might become confused and uneasy at the unrest all around them as war among the fae takes a decidedly chaotic turn. Some might even find



themselves used as weapons by the Unseelie against the opposition, using the Dauntain's high Banality to negate the powers of their Seelie foes (who may be too "honorable" to return the favor).

Depending on the nature of the Unseelie rulers of the Winter Court, Dauntain might find themselves either driven permanently into Banality, thus achieving their own personal goal of denial of their nature, or else thrown into their fae natures by a new kind of dark Glamour. In some instances, the Winter Court might realize that the Dauntain pose a danger and hunt them down remorselessly.

• **Gods and Monsters:** Instead of occurring in the background, the battles between the Summer and Winter fae takes center stage as god-like creatures emerge from the Dreaming to oppose each other in full view of the mortal world. This sudden emergence of so many fae, perhaps including the legendary Tuatha de Danaan and their Fomorian enemies—as well as mythical creatures such as dragons and unicorns—causes a wash of Glamour to sweep over the world, bursting the barriers between the Dreaming and the physical plane.

Immune to the sleep effects of the Transformation, as are any people with fae blood, the Dauntain face what easily seems like their worst nightmares made real. The shock of this awareness might drive some Dauntain insane, or the infusion of Glamour might spark a re-awakening of their true faerie selves. Others finally surrender themselves to the truth and join in the fray on one side or another, casting their lot with the children of the Dreaming.

• **Starlight Exodus:** Dauntain in this scenario face the choice of returning to Arcadia or remaining behind to face cold Banality. It is not as easy a decision for them as it sounds, however. Certainly, some decide to renounce their fae ties forever and stay, becoming mere mortals. They might have to fight off fae "rescuers" who are determined to save them from destruction. Others find their fae soul struggling to avoid eternal destruction, compelling them to join with the beings they despise in order to escape this world.

Some Dauntain may even experience a true "conversion" and renounce their hatred for the fae. Faced with the reality of their natures, these individuals try to return to Arcadia. Their excessive Banality, however, might either prevent them from doing so, thus condemning them to a life of regret and despair, or they might have to undergo a rigorous purging of Banality from their bodies and spirits before they can safely enter the heart of the Dreaming.

• **Pick Your Poison:** A scenario that ends up giving the Dauntain what they most desire—freedom from the burden of their faerie natures— involves the final separation between the Dreaming and the physical world in the wake of some terrible announcement. As human creativity, which draws its sustenance from the ability to touch the world of dreams, fades away, the world stagnates and becomes utterly mundane. The Dauntain can at last rejoice in their liberation from the faerie curse... if they even remember that they were once cursed.

In the brave, gray post-Dreaming world, the Dauntain can sink into the morass of dull sameness that they have apparently desired all along. Best of all, they will never know that they were ever anything other than "normal."

THE ORPHIC CIRCLE

This group of occultists once served the darker powers of the Underworld or Shadowlands in return for power. Several years ago, most of them fell prey to the demons they worshipped in a ritual that—according to their knowledge—should



have resulted in their ascendance to power alongside their masters. Instead, the entities they called forth massacred the Orphic leadership and most of the members, leaving behind a remnant of cowed, fearful former members... and a raging storm in the land of the dead.

Where do the remnants of the Orphic Circle fit in an End-Times chronicle? Most appropriate for LARP stories involving either **Oblivion**, **Laws of the Hunt** or **Laws of the Reckoning**, Orphics have a lot of strikes against them. Hunted by their own kind, they trust few people. They await death at the hands of either the living or the dead.

Some might view the end of the world as a great relief. Not only do they finally face their ultimate fate, they get to take the rest of the world with them! Others might seek to prevent the utter destruction of the world or of modern civilization in an attempt to atone for their past misdeeds. Some might attempt to save their souls through a religious conversion, turning against anyone with supernatural abilities and becoming a more zealous “hunter” than many hunters consider themselves to be.

Others might be driven to join with the forces of chaos and destruction as minions of the Wyrm, demons from the infernal regions, powerful vampires or Fomorians from the Deep Dreaming in order to save themselves. They might be sorely disappointed in the results, having traded one form of hell for another.

THE BENANDANTI

These rare and unusual humans have the ability to leave their bodies and enter the Shadowlands. Born with a caul and trained by other Benandanti, they usually labor in the other world to accomplish one of two goals. Some seek to guide the spirits of the dead that are still attached to the material world to their appropriate afterlife, smoothing their passage and convincing them that they need not hold onto their old life. Others see ghosts as spirits who are avoiding their just punishments by lingering near Earth. The goal of these Benandanti is to hasten the spirits’ journey to “hell.”

Since the collapse of Shadowlands society, the Benandanti have been at loose ends, unsure of their purpose. Some try to locate spirits of the dead that have fled to the material world, either through possession of humans or by the animation of fresh corpses.

In an end-of-the-world scenario, Benandanti might place themselves in the forefront of the fight between the living and the dead, trying to prevent the dead from taking over the world of the living. But these individuals are few and far between, and should they lose any of the talismans that give them their powers, they have only their mortal skills left (though they are still sensitive to the presence of the supernatural).

Like members of the Arcanum, the Benandanti might be aware of what is going on in an endgame scenario long before other characters are. Unlike the Arcanum, they are more willing to place themselves at risk to accomplish whatever serves as their goal, since they have been trained for this purpose. They, too, like so many others, could be doomed to failure.



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CHAPTER TWO: GEHENNA

INTRODUCTION

Gehenna. Every vampire has heard rumors and legends about this time of reckoning, when the Antediluvians will rise and Caine will return to pass judgment upon them all.

The long darkness of the vampire is finally ending. The Final Nights draw to a close, and the prophesized end in *The Book of Nod* has begun scouring the world. The countries of the world will be rendered broken and helpless, as the Jyhad spills over from the land of night into the world of mortals.

This chapter details how to bring the Final Nights to a fitting conclusion in your game, first by introducing some new story elements and game mechanics that you can apply to help simulate the desperate nature of the Kindred at Gehenna's approach, then by addressing some common vampiric concerns a Storyteller might have when preparing her players for the End Times.

This chapter concludes with four different End-Time scenarios you may choose to implement for your troupe, ranging from highly personalized stories of redemption to tales of great battles and terrible disasters. As always, you may choose to modify them.

NEW MECHANICS

This section details some of the game mechanics that might prove helpful in creating a properly desperate and intriguing atmosphere for Gehenna. Indeed, a few scenarios assume the use of some of these elements (particularly the Withering) as part of their makeup, while others leave it more open-ended.

THE WITHERING

There are many possibilities in regard to how the coming of Gehenna physically effects vampires across the globe. As with all things, the ultimate authority of what happens during the Final Nights is the Storyteller. No player can dictate how his character should be affected (but some might try anyway). The chapters offer their own individuals versions of how the end weighs upon the Blood of Caine. As a general reference however, here is one version of what could happen during this tumultuous time.



The Withering begins so subtly at first that no one notices. It starts with the lowest-generation Cainites and works its way down. The first month of the Withering affects only the Third Generation. The second month, the Curse's decline affects the Fourth Generation. The third month, the Fifth Generation feels its effects, and so on. By the time this effect reaches many of the characters in your story, they might already have some horrible clue as to what is in store for them. These are mostly suggestions, feel free to modify them as you see fit. This Withering has these effects:

- Each month that a Cainite suffers the Withering, she loses access to her most advanced Discipline powers. In case of a tie between Discipline levels, the Storyteller picks one at random.
- All vampires affected by the Withering suffer the *Thin Blood Flaw* (see **Laws of the Night**, p. 115).
- Blood bonds and Vinculi have a 50% chance each month of breaking, no matter how strongly they are reinforced. Once broken, a bond cannot be reestablished despite any subsequent attempts to do so.
- Each time the character deliberately calls on her Blood or activates a Discipline, the player immediately must engage in a pair of Simple Tests. If the player fails both tests, the desired result does not take place and the Blood Trait is wasted. What's more, the character loses another of her highest-ranked Discipline powers and any further attempt that night to expend vitae also requires spending a Willpower Trait. If the character fails a second time to activate a Discipline or expend vitae effectively, she cannot use Disciplines or expend vitae *at all* for the rest of the night. This bout of weakness, which Kindred feel as a physical ache, does not affect the vitae expended to wake up each night.
- Torpor does not slow the Withering at all.

Diablerie

In these frantic final hours, many will make up for their lost power by attempting to take it from others. Like sharks tasting blood in the water, the feeding frenzy is about to begin in full. In the event that the Withering has begun, diablerizing another Cainite temporarily counters the Withering in the following manner.

- The Kindred loses the *Thin Blood Flaw*.
- The character regains his lost Disciplines, to the limit set by the victim's generation. Therefore, an elder who wants to regain high-level Discipline powers must devour another Cainite of suitably low generation.
- Discipline activation and blood expenditure no longer spontaneously fails.
- The length of the palliation depends on the victim's age. It is recommended that the shorter length of time on the following table be assigned. A game with multiple sessions in a month should use the session figure, for instance, while one with sessions spaced farther apart can use the real-time measurement:

New Childe*	1 session/3 nights
Neonate	1 session/1 week
Ancilla	2 sessions/2 weeks
Elder	2 sessions/3 weeks
Methuselah or Antediluvian	4 sessions/1 month

* Less than five years a Cainite.

Progression of the Withering

After the Antediluvians rise, the Withering becomes more severe. The chances for any Discipline or vitae use to fail increases to just one failure on the Simple Tests. (Willpower Traits may be spent for a retest, at the Storyteller's discretion.) By the climax of Gehenna — assuming that any characters survive that long — any use of Cainite powers is chancy at best, thus supplying a great temptation to commit diablerie.

THE BLOOD THINS

As the Blood weakens, its preservative properties do as well, and the lines between modern and ancient clans blur. Clan disadvantages magnify as the curses upon the clan founders are no longer held at bay by the greater Curse of Caine. These consequences are recommended for the major clans. (The bloodlines and other clans can be slightly less or more severe as their parent clan, depending on your story.) It is important to take the time to impress these weaknesses upon each of the characters, it will be their first clue that the end has come.

- Assamites — Slowly, Assamites find themselves unable to feed on anything but vampire blood. As Gehenna progresses, they soon find that they can gain sustenance from blood only if they commit diablerie after feeding.
- Brujah — Strange reports of clan members disappearing without a trace circulate throughout the clan with increasing frequency. As Gehenna progresses, all clan members gain the Flaw: *Lunacy*.
- Gangrel — The Clan of Beasts finds itself becoming more and more animalistic with the passage of time, sometimes even shifting into animal form without consciously choosing to do so.
- Giovanni — The Necromancers grow more pale and corporeal than even other vampires, coming to resemble the very clan they usurped. (Incidentally, the Harbingers of Skulls start to look and smell like the Samedi, and the Samedi are all but falling apart.) The Restless Dead attack them at every turn. *Necromancy* — though it still works — becomes perilous to use at best.
- Lasombra — All Lasombra face difficulties in controlling their *Obtenebration*. Shadows rage out of control, attacking their creators or — in extreme cases — ripping holes in the fabric of reality, directly into the Abyss itself.
- Malkavians — No longer able to contain the madness within them, Malkavians find themselves unleashing it upon the world. Bouts of prophesy become increasingly frequent, and *Dementation* might activate without conscious desire. As the end approaches, the physical world itself might even be warped by the Discipline in minor but telling ways.
- Nosferatu — The Discipline of *Obfuscate* begins to fail the Nosferatu at the most inopportune times. As Gehenna progresses, *Mask of a Thousand Faces* fails automatically, and Nosferatu slowly grow even more repulsive than normal.
- Ravnos — The Beast intensifies, becoming a literal voice in the character's ear impelling him to evil acts. The voice grows louder throughout Gehenna, until by the end, each Ravnos has a wicked nature that takes on a whispering life of its own. Near the end, a *Chimerstry* duplicate might even appear.
- Setites — The Snakes come to resemble their clan's epithet. Any time one uses *Serpentis*, the change brought on by it could become permanent. As Set fails to rise, faith in him dwindles among the clan.



- Toreador — The clan of Degenerates becomes more and more easily addicted to excesses. The difficulty of resisting the descent into debauchery increases as Gehenna progresses.

- Tremere — In a true display of irony, each Tremere develops a third eye. The eye first opens at a time of trauma or stress and allows its bearer to see things even Auspex does not normally reveal. As Gehenna progresses, some Tremere develop the new Tzimisce clan disadvantage as well.

- Tzimisce — The Fiends can no longer reliably control their *Vicissitude*, causing wild aberrations in both themselves and others. Some demonstrate the ability to use the Discipline without touch, but even they have reduced control of the fine points of it. As the end comes, many Tzimisce lose the ability to hold the same shape for even a short period of time.

- Ventre — In a final ironic twist, the Clan of Kings' notorious fondness for blood of a certain caliber degenerates into a preference for each other's blood — exclusively. Ventre become unable to gain sustenance on anything but the blood of other Ventre.

SEVERED BLOODLINES

When a clan's Antediluvian founder meets Final Death, a terrible shock wave resonates through the surviving descendants, causing them to erupt in fits of terrible fratricidal madness and diablerie. The events surrounding the death of the Ravnos Antediluvian during the Week of Nightmares in 1999 — detailed for tabletop in **Time of Thin Blood** and live-action in the **Laws of the Night Storytellers Guide**, p. 77-97 — were an early warning of what the Kindred can expect. As more Ancients are destroyed during the great battles of Gehenna, this violence will only become more frequent.

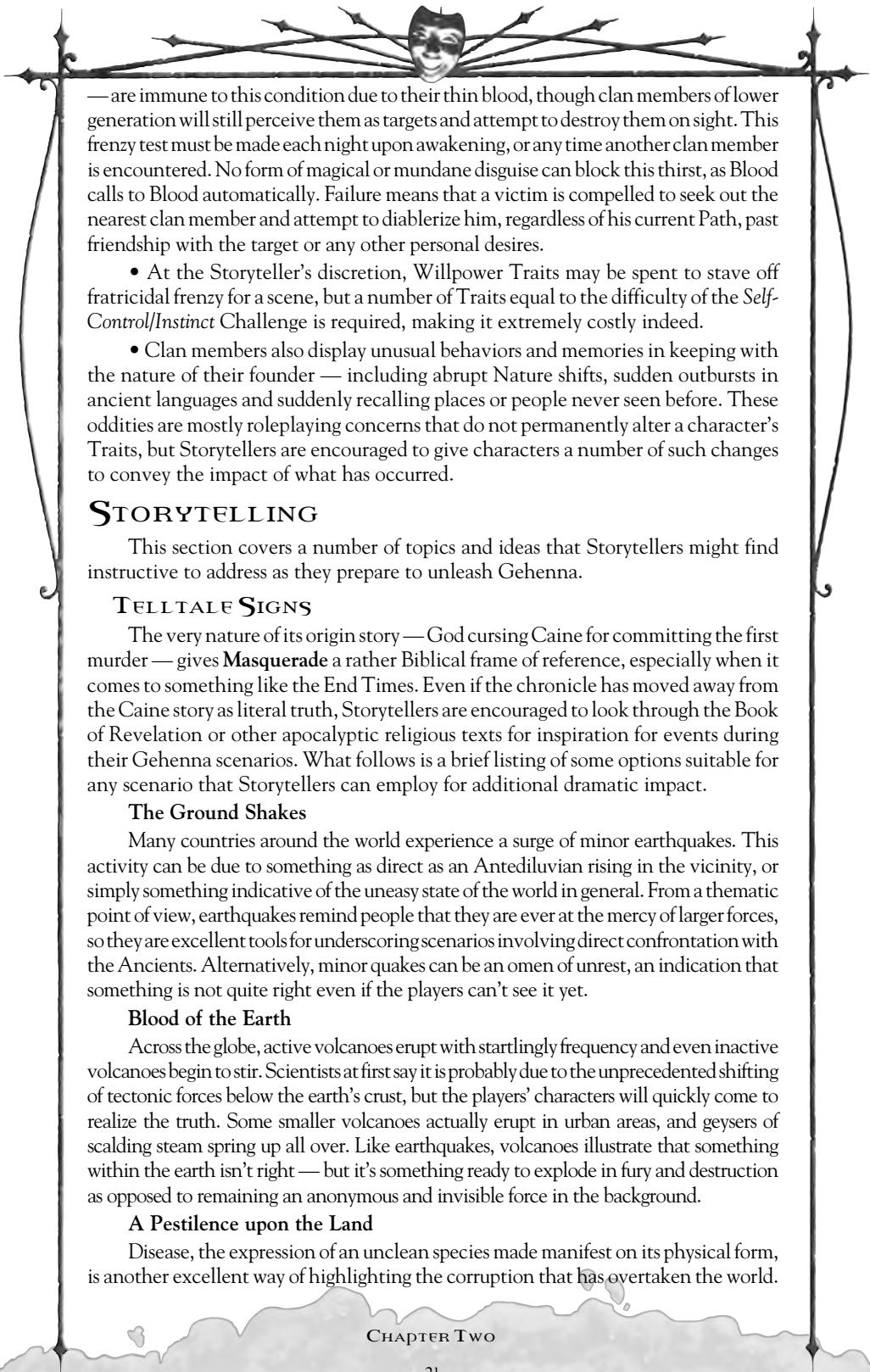
Here are some guidelines for what happens to members of a clan after their founder meets Final Death. Storytellers should feel free to adjust these guidelines as they see fit for their scenario, but in no event should the death of an Antediluvian pass by without great repercussions for the clan.

- In the nights surrounding death of the Antediluvian, all members of the clan receive the Flaw: *Nightmares*, and are one Trait down on all Mental and Social Challenges due to the constant distraction of the images from their dreams. This effect increases to a one-Trait penalty as circumstances become truly severe.

- Clan members might spontaneously exhibit erratic surges of up to three additional levels of one clan Discipline — generally the clan's proprietary Discipline such as *Vicissitude* or *Protean*, or the most relevant Discipline to the founder's demise if no unique Discipline exists. Generation limits are ignored, as it is the power of the Antediluvian at work, though this power may wax and wane in keeping with the final struggle of the Ancient.

- Clan members do not naturally regain Willpower for the period beginning several days before their founder's destruction and continuing until after the last of the fratricidal madness has passed.

- For at least three nights following the destruction of the founder, clan members are locked in near-constant frenzy, in which they instinctively seek out fellow clan members and attempt to diablerize them. A *Self-Control/Instinct* Challenge is required to resist these urges, with a difficulty determined by the vampire's generation. Vampires of the Twelfth Generation test against two Traits. Vampires of the Eleventh through Eighth Generation against three Traits. Seventh or lower generation vampires test against four Traits. Vampires of the highest generations — 15th through 13th



— are immune to this condition due to their thin blood, though clan members of lower generation will still perceive them as targets and attempt to destroy them on sight. This frenzy test must be made each night upon awakening, or any time another clan member is encountered. No form of magical or mundane disguise can block this thirst, as Blood calls to Blood automatically. Failure means that a victim is compelled to seek out the nearest clan member and attempt to diablerize him, regardless of his current Path, past friendship with the target or any other personal desires.

- At the Storyteller's discretion, Willpower Traits may be spent to stave off fratricidal frenzy for a scene, but a number of Traits equal to the difficulty of the *Self-Control/Instinct* Challenge is required, making it extremely costly indeed.

- Clan members also display unusual behaviors and memories in keeping with the nature of their founder — including abrupt Nature shifts, sudden outbursts in ancient languages and suddenly recalling places or people never seen before. These oddities are mostly roleplaying concerns that do not permanently alter a character's Traits, but Storytellers are encouraged to give characters a number of such changes to convey the impact of what has occurred.

STORYTELLING

This section covers a number of topics and ideas that Storytellers might find instructive to address as they prepare to unleash Gehenna.

TELLTALE SIGNS

The very nature of its origin story — God cursing Caine for committing the first murder — gives **Masquerade** a rather Biblical frame of reference, especially when it comes to something like the End Times. Even if the chronicle has moved away from the Caine story as literal truth, Storytellers are encouraged to look through the Book of Revelation or other apocalyptic religious texts for inspiration for events during their Gehenna scenarios. What follows is a brief listing of some options suitable for any scenario that Storytellers can employ for additional dramatic impact.

The Ground Shakes

Many countries around the world experience a surge of minor earthquakes. This activity can be due to something as direct as an Antediluvian rising in the vicinity, or simply something indicative of the uneasy state of the world in general. From a thematic point of view, earthquakes remind people that they are ever at the mercy of larger forces, so they are excellent tools for underscoring scenarios involving direct confrontation with the Ancients. Alternatively, minor quakes can be an omen of unrest, an indication that something is not quite right even if the players can't see it yet.

Blood of the Earth

Across the globe, active volcanoes erupt with startlingly frequency and even inactive volcanoes begin to stir. Scientists at first say it is probably due to the unprecedented shifting of tectonic forces below the earth's crust, but the players' characters will quickly come to realize the truth. Some smaller volcanoes actually erupt in urban areas, and geysers of scalding steam spring up all over. Like earthquakes, volcanoes illustrate that something within the earth isn't right — but it's something ready to explode in fury and destruction as opposed to remaining an anonymous and invisible force in the background.

A Pestilence upon the Land

Disease, the expression of an unclean species made manifest on its physical form, is another excellent way of highlighting the corruption that has overtaken the world.



Springing up in the wake of certain Ancients awakening, a strange epidemic spreads around rest of the world. The symptoms are diluted blood and the effects that it brings with it: nausea, mild hallucinations, discolored skin and the occasional outbreak of bleeding lesions. No one has seen anything like this, and though it doesn't seem to be lethal (at least for now), it's highly contagious, spreading through blood and other secretions. In truly extreme scenarios, it might even come to affect the Kindred.

Brother Against Brother

With Gehenna being heralded by nightmares and earthquakes, it doesn't take much more for the kine to finally lash out in fear. This hometown threat is something that the players' characters could have to deal with directly. Their havens might come under fire, their herd might be attacked, or their contacts and allies might be hurt or killed outright in the chaos. With the characters resources and influence already stretched thin, what happens when riots start breaking out in the setting where your game takes place? Do the characters take advantage of the carnage to settle scores, or do they pull together in mutual defense until the threat passes? Do the other sects and rival clans seek to take advantage of the distress to carve a piece of your characters' territories?

Madness, Madness Everywhere

Even more than damage to the body, many people fear damage to the mind. A wound can be treated, a lost limb replaced, but madness? Fear of losing oneself and becoming a stranger both within and without strikes something deep in everyone. As Gehenna approaches, this threat becomes more urgent than ever. The mortal population

THE FACES OF THE ANCIENTS

Many scenarios call for the Antediluvians or similarly powerful entities like Caine and Lilith to appear at one point or another. It's a rather formidable task to attempt to accurately portray creatures that lived and breathed in a time before mankind recorded its own history. So how do you and your staff of Narrators create the feeling that these characters are in fact the Ancients raised from their slumber?

One good piece of advice is to avoid direct in-character exchanges between the players' characters and the Ancients altogether. No matter how well you work to display this level of raw ancient power wrapped into a human-shaped form, it's very possible that you might just accidentally end up sounding more like a bad, overblown imitation of an action movie villain. This isn't meant as an underestimation of your ability as a Storyteller or as a roleplayer; rather, it's a suggestion that it might be best to keep the "camera" off the Ancients.

Consider this: Confronting such powerful entities directly could shatter the mind of a lesser creature, so don't "show" them as much as you intimate their hideous (or nigh-divine) presences. The character might witness only the aftermath of their terrible wake, or simply arrive after the Ancient has already departed. Characters may even experience "lost time," wherein they find themselves far from where they remember being a moment before the Ancient passed by, with terrible images floating in their heads like memories of a bad dream. Their minds, being attached to a rational existence, just couldn't comprehend the presence of these creatures, so they deleted the horrible experience completely. (Yet some part in the dark recesses of their minds will always remember the terrible beauty and indescribable horror of what they laid eyes upon.)



begins to fall victim to an inexplicable epidemic of spontaneous insanity. People begin gibbering in tongues, committing horrible acts of violence with no reason, and devolving into mindless savagery. Some suspect it's just a result of the stress of the times, while the Kindred whisper that perhaps this is the mad god Malkav manifesting at last. His progeny are silent on the subject, but some take this as the silence before the storm.

CHARACTER ELEMENTS

Don't lose sight of the fact that between disasters and catastrophic events, the characters are still the main focus of your story. The following sections offer some advice on areas Storytellers might wish to cover with the characters in order to coax the maximum dramatic impact out of Gehenna.

DIGGING IN THE DIRT

Every vampire was once a mortal. A likely theme to explore is a matter of taking characters back to their roots. In the face of Gehenna, perhaps one of the best ways to voice its impact is to show the characters, for all their powers and abilities, exactly what it is they have lost in becoming vampires. The best way to point something out is to show it in contrast to its opposite. If you want to focus on the drama of the end of vampire society, touch upon the lost humanity of the characters. Without being too heavy-handed in your approach, involve them in the human aspect of the world around them. Remind them of the good things that they might have lost in their transition into Kindred.

Review each player's history and see what avenues can be taken. If the typically gruff Brujah began his life in the humble part of town, maybe something comes along to remind him of his meager beginnings, such as a chance meeting with an old family friend (to remind him of his humanity), or running into the one friendly girl from elementary school who is now all grown up (showing the character the path not taken). These encounters don't have to be obvious digs to elicit emotion from the character. Rather they should be unexpected views from broken reflections. By pointing out how far a character has developed during the course of a story, you let the player see the contrast to what they have ultimately become. This introspection might bring about a depth of roleplaying never before seen in your game, and this is just right for a story that is about to come to its potentially dramatic conclusion.

ANGELS AND DEMONS

While the topic of vampire redemption is often talked about in the dark corners of Elysium, it is rarely sought. Too often the easy path of power that comes with nurturing inhuman behavior wins out. During the trials of surviving from night to night in vampire society, possessing a human heart might seem like a liability. This story you are conducting, however, doesn't take place on just another night on the Endless Road — this is a story about the end. In the face of that, perhaps some of the most monstrous vampires attempt to rouse some chance of redemption in the eyes of higher powers. A character may finally be forced to ask that burning question, am I truly going to be damned?

As Gehenna unfolds, the characters may very well be faced with a no-win situation (or at least one they perceive as such). Faced with such terminal knowledge, they might seek to make amends and reach for that vain hope that perhaps there is something worth saving within them. This is a difficult theme to explore given its potentially morbid sensibility. It could be the most rewarding high road to take in the chaos of the end, however.

Ultimately salvation is yours as the Storyteller to define. If this means that the characters require a certain amount of Humanity before the final curtain draws close



in order to achieve a hope of redemption, so be it. Other Storytellers might prefer to judge it for themselves based on the reactions of the characters, or perhaps polling their Narrators, as opposed to relying on Traits to make the decision for them. Whatever it is, however, it should not come easily. Some of the noblest figures only earned redemption posthumously, after all.

LAWYERS, GUNS AND MONEY

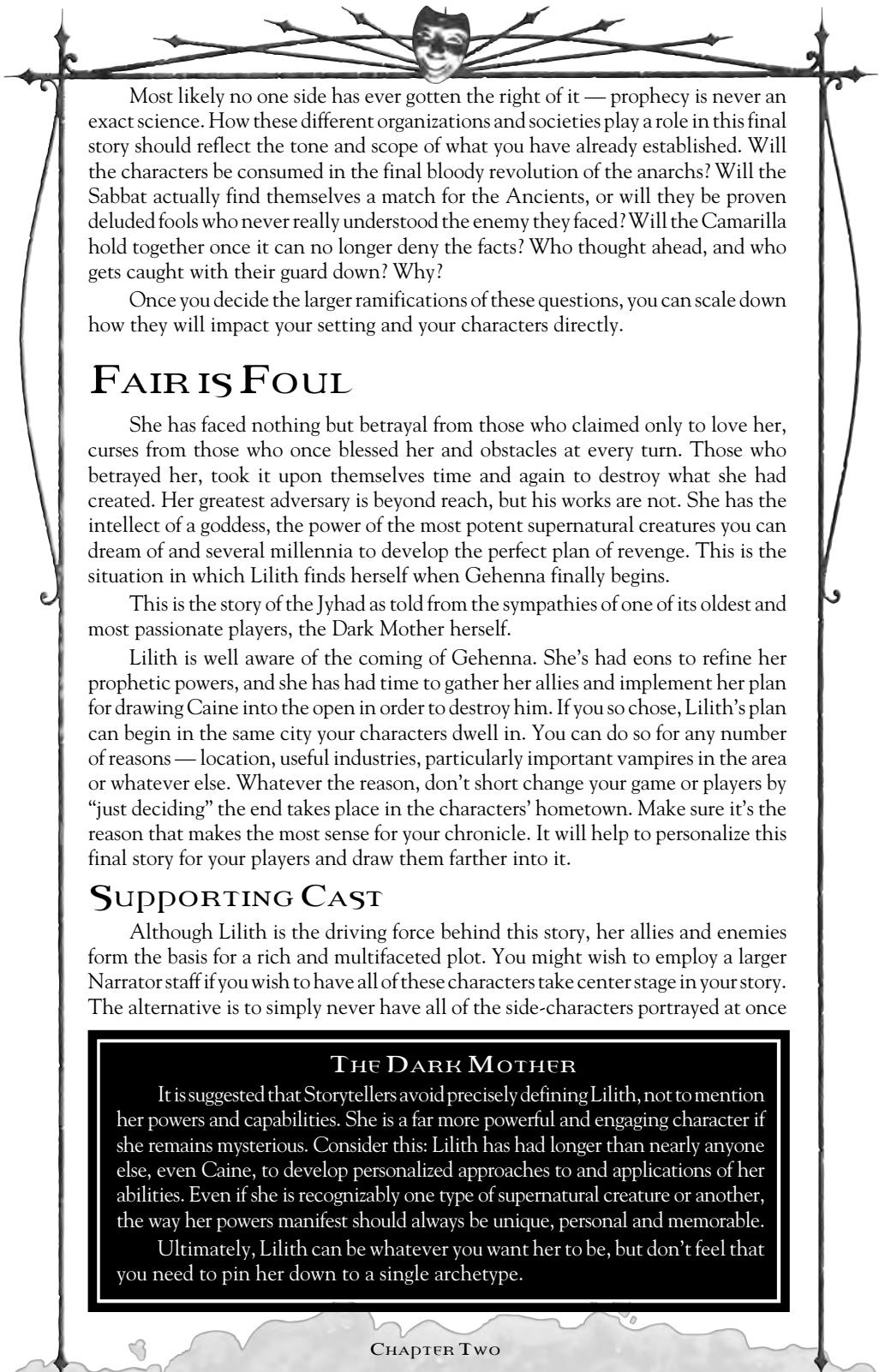
Chances are good that more than a few of your characters have devoted a lot of time and energy to becoming true lords of the night, with amassed networks of Influences, Allies, Resources, Contacts and other Traits that would make Washington power brokers blush. Therefore, it can be tempting as Gehenna's chaos unfolds to throw these characters for a loop by destroying all the temporal power they have carefully amassed, forcing them to rely on only their own powers and aptitudes. Be careful with such impulses, however. Your players have likely spent a long time accumulating their various Influences and other Backgrounds. While it's only natural that they should expect some problems as the world slides into disorder, making them feel as though all their time and planning has been spent for nothing is never a good idea. Especially in such a political, intrigue-oriented game as **Masquerade**, these expenditures are just as valid as spending Experience on Disciplines, Attributes or Abilities. As a Storyteller, you should honor that fact with equal consideration during your climactic scenario.

Rather than simply destroying the city's networks of power and Influence outright, then, present those characters who are invested in them with crises that threaten to take away what they've fought so hard to obtain. Give them a chance to maintain at least some of their grip with some quick thinking and slick manipulation. Heck, they might even be able to expand their powers if they're really clever. (In the chaos surrounding Gehenna, who's going to worry about someone expanding territory behind the scenes?) Likewise, as the inevitable threats brought on by Gehenna come their way, give them challenges they can help meet with their mortal connections and resources. Even if their vast power is slipping from their grip, they should feel as though they have some chance to fight what's coming, or at least salvage what they can before it's all over.

Indeed, it's a good idea in general to take a good look at your players' character sheets, especially if you haven't done so in a while. While Traits alone rarely tell the whole story, they might offer a good insight into where to put the focus of upcoming events. Take careful note of the Natures of the characters, as well as their most potent Disciplines and Abilities and "plot-oriented" Flaws such as *Enemy*, *Hunted* or *Dark Secret*. Conversely, learning which Traits are commonly lacking in your group can be just as helpful. If none of the characters in your setting have any interest in the occult, a plot involving gaining a wealth of information on the secrets of the Inconnu might not interest them. Doing so allows you not only to determine what your players will be interested in, but also where their weak points are — two elements that should never be underestimated as you plan for the Gehenna they deserve.

BRACING FOR IMPACT

Last but not least, it's always been a staple of Kindred society that the end was coming. Camarilla Kindred chose to deny its very existence, while the Sabbat and others have based their entire belief system behind it. Some vampires have been waiting patiently for this time to make their final bid for power amidst the chaos to come. At one time or another, most vampires have posed their own thoughts on what the shape of Gehenna would be.



Most likely no one side has ever gotten the right of it — prophecy is never an exact science. How these different organizations and societies play a role in this final story should reflect the tone and scope of what you have already established. Will the characters be consumed in the final bloody revolution of the anarchs? Will the Sabbat actually find themselves a match for the Ancients, or will they be proven deluded fools who never really understood the enemy they faced? Will the Camarilla hold together once it can no longer deny the facts? Who thought ahead, and who gets caught with their guard down? Why?

Once you decide the larger ramifications of these questions, you can scale down how they will impact your setting and your characters directly.

FAIR IS FOUL

She has faced nothing but betrayal from those who claimed only to love her, curses from those who once blessed her and obstacles at every turn. Those who betrayed her, took it upon themselves time and again to destroy what she had created. Her greatest adversary is beyond reach, but his works are not. She has the intellect of a goddess, the power of the most potent supernatural creatures you can dream of and several millennia to develop the perfect plan of revenge. This is the situation in which Lilith finds herself when Gehenna finally begins.

This is the story of the Jyhad as told from the sympathies of one of its oldest and most passionate players, the Dark Mother herself.

Lilith is well aware of the coming of Gehenna. She's had eons to refine her prophetic powers, and she has had time to gather her allies and implement her plan for drawing Caine into the open in order to destroy him. If you so chose, Lilith's plan can begin in the same city your characters dwell in. You can do so for any number of reasons — location, useful industries, particularly important vampires in the area or whatever else. Whatever the reason, don't short change your game or players by "just deciding" the end takes place in the characters' hometown. Make sure it's the reason that makes the most sense for your chronicle. It will help to personalize this final story for your players and draw them farther into it.

SUPPORTING CAST

Although Lilith is the driving force behind this story, her allies and enemies form the basis for a rich and multifaceted plot. You might wish to employ a larger Narrator staff if you wish to have all of these characters take center stage in your story. The alternative is to simply never have all of the side-characters portrayed at once

THE DARK MOTHER

It is suggested that Storytellers avoid precisely defining Lilith, not to mention her powers and capabilities. She is a far more powerful and engaging character if she remains mysterious. Consider this: Lilith has had longer than nearly anyone else, even Caine, to develop personalized approaches to and applications of her abilities. Even if she is recognizably one type of supernatural creature or another, the way her powers manifest should always be unique, personal and memorable.

Ultimately, Lilith can be whatever you want her to be, but don't feel that you need to pin her down to a single archetype.



and to switch off from time to time. You might want to work out a simple system for identifying each character to your players, such as a certain piece of distinct costuming or jewelry to represent who you are at a given time.

LUCIFER, THE MORNINGSTAR

In this story, Lucifer fell because he allowed Lilith back into the Garden of Eden. Don't feel a need to remodel your chronicle to conform to the established canon of what Lucifer has been up. Simply rework Lucifer so that he fits with the story you want to tell, if you choose to use him at all. As a result, their relationship now has many possibilities. They might have returned to their former roles as lovers, remained indifferent to each other or become bitter enemies.

LYLA, THE DAUGHTER

Lilith's most important ally, at least as far as the characters' relationship to her is concerned, will most likely be Lyla, her adopted daughter. Since meeting her "mother" the first time, Lyla has experienced frequent visions of disturbing clarity, some of which she has seen come true. She sometimes also suffers lapses during which she speaks in tongues and utters words of prophecy, but afterward she retains no memory of having done so. What Lyla does not know is that although the trances and visions are real, Lilith can use the blood connection between herself and Lyla to control them (and in doing so, control Lyla) when she chooses. Lilith is likewise unaware that when she is not watching Lyla, the girl's visions and trances often concern the Dark Mother's plans and actions.

As a frightened young girl with powers she barely understands, Lyla is intended mostly as a Storyteller plot device. If the characters show her any form of kindness, she will respond well to them. She is a survivor, however, and she will run if things turn against her. If Lyla takes an important role in your game, you might want to assign this role to a single trusted Narrator or cast member who is well acquainted with the story, so that her gift of prophesy can be used to move the characters along effectively if things go astray.

THE APOSTATES

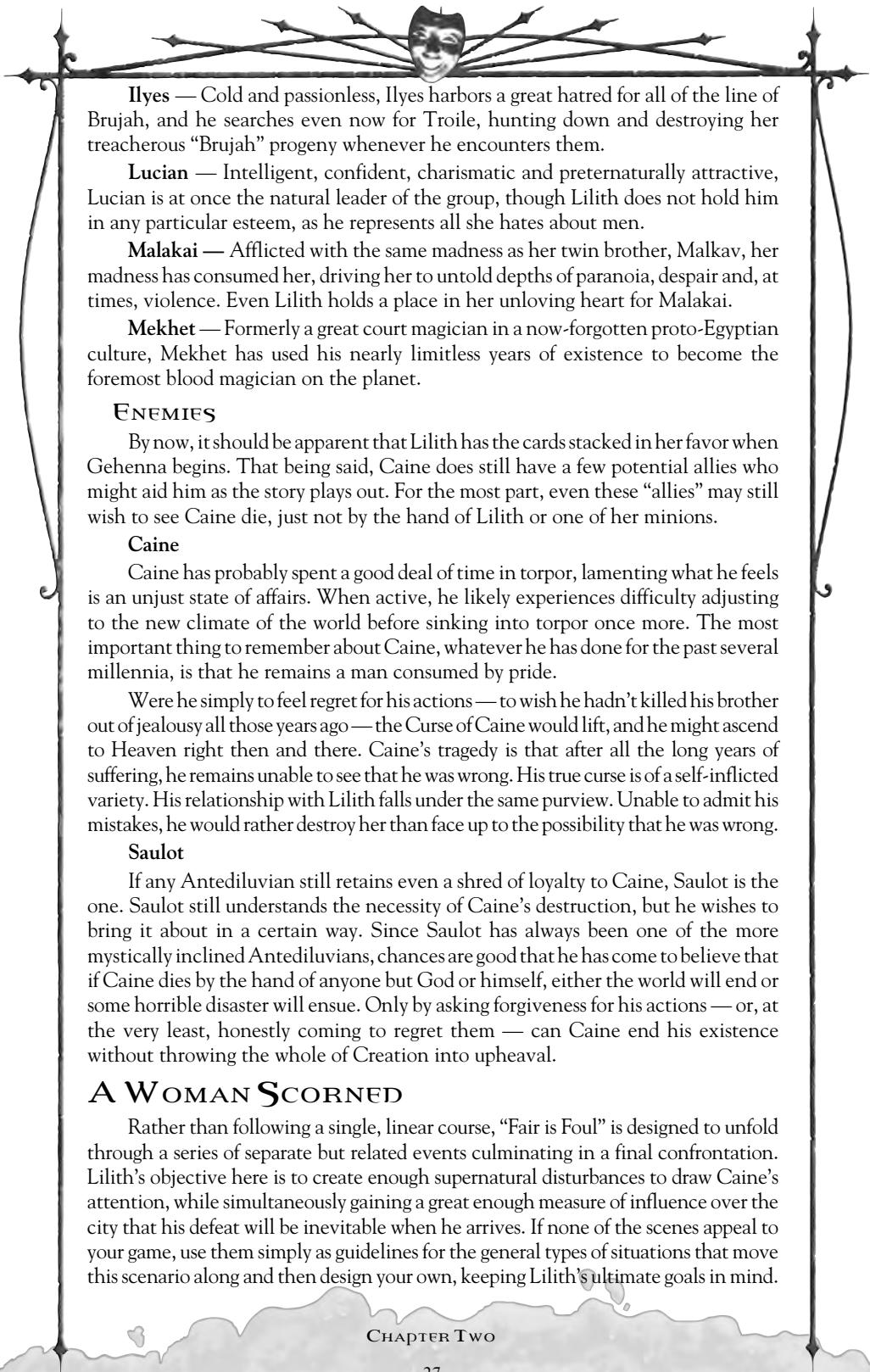
Lyla is left to survive on her own in the desolate city streets, with only seven "bums" to watch over her, but naturally, these derelicts are far from what they appear to be. They are students of the Dark Mother who are hiding their true nature from Lyla. The "official" number of Antediluvians is 13, but various sources make reference to more. For this story, 20 Antediluvians remain. Thirteen of them created the various known vampire clans, but the other seven are in service to Lilith instead.

THE SEVEN

Eickos — The strange being that calls itself Eickos is counted among the Apostates solely because Lilith has never been able to discern what it wants, who it is or how to get rid of it. Eickos is beautiful, known for her powers of song, persuasion and insight. In truth, Eickos' natural form is horribly repulsive, something far older and more sinister than any of the Apostates (or Lilith) imagine.

Erinye — Erinye is the inspiration for such creatures as the Furies of Ancient Greek mythology. Of all the Apostates, Erinye has the most in common with Lilith, in that she possesses both a wicked temper and an indomitable will.

Ikopabe — The most primal of the Apostates, even surpassing Erinye in his bestial nature, Ikopabe is a master shapeshifter and seldom takes a face twice, though his eyes always remain yellow and catlike.



Ilyes — Cold and passionless, Ilyes harbors a great hatred for all of the line of Brujah, and he searches even now for Troile, hunting down and destroying her treacherous “Brujah” progeny whenever he encounters them.

Lucian — Intelligent, confident, charismatic and preternaturally attractive, Lucian is at once the natural leader of the group, though Lilith does not hold him in any particular esteem, as he represents all she hates about men.

Malakai — Afflicted with the same madness as her twin brother, Malkav, her madness has consumed her, driving her to untold depths of paranoia, despair and, at times, violence. Even Lilith holds a place in her unloving heart for Malakai.

Mekhet — Formerly a great court magician in a now-forgotten proto-Egyptian culture, Mekhet has used his nearly limitless years of existence to become the foremost blood magician on the planet.

ENEMIES

By now, it should be apparent that Lilith has the cards stacked in her favor when Gehenna begins. That being said, Caine does still have a few potential allies who might aid him as the story plays out. For the most part, even these “allies” may still wish to see Caine die, just not by the hand of Lilith or one of her minions.

Caine

Caine has probably spent a good deal of time in torpor, lamenting what he feels is an unjust state of affairs. When active, he likely experiences difficulty adjusting to the new climate of the world before sinking into torpor once more. The most important thing to remember about Caine, whatever he has done for the past several millennia, is that he remains a man consumed by pride.

Were he simply to feel regret for his actions — to wish he hadn’t killed his brother out of jealousy all those years ago — the Curse of Caine would lift, and he might ascend to Heaven right then and there. Caine’s tragedy is that after all the long years of suffering, he remains unable to see that he was wrong. His true curse is of a self-inflicted variety. His relationship with Lilith falls under the same purview. Unable to admit his mistakes, he would rather destroy her than face up to the possibility that he was wrong.

Saulot

If any Antediluvian still retains even a shred of loyalty to Caine, Saulot is the one. Saulot still understands the necessity of Caine’s destruction, but he wishes to bring it about in a certain way. Since Saulot has always been one of the more mystically inclined Antediluvians, chances are good that he has come to believe that if Caine dies by the hand of anyone but God or himself, either the world will end or some horrible disaster will ensue. Only by asking forgiveness for his actions — or, at the very least, honestly coming to regret them — can Caine end his existence without throwing the whole of Creation into upheaval.

A WOMAN SCORNED

Rather than following a single, linear course, “Fair is Foul” is designed to unfold through a series of separate but related events culminating in a final confrontation. Lilith’s objective here is to create enough supernatural disturbances to draw Caine’s attention, while simultaneously gaining a great enough measure of influence over the city that his defeat will be inevitable when he arrives. If none of the scenes appeal to your game, use them simply as guidelines for the general types of situations that move this scenario along and then design your own, keeping Lilith’s ultimate goals in mind.



It's important to realize that by no means does every player's character have to be involved in every mini-scenario you run. In fact, the diverse nature of the different scenes is quite deliberate, with some designed to appeal to more social characters, others for more intellectual types and a few for those who are used to hitting things until they stop hitting back. At first these may seem isolated incidents, but once the characters begin comparing notes...

FOLLOW THE DAUGHTER

Lyla's status as one of the city's many homeless people means that she can appear at any time in the story — whenever you need a hook to lead into another mini-scenario or simply when things begin to slow down. Probably the best idea is to have Lyla appear immediately preceding or following another mini-scenario, speaking cryptic messages about the event even though it has not happened yet — or, if it already has, even though she was not present for it.

If characters treat Lyla well — like a real person, deserving compassion and friendship—they should be rewarded with her trust and some information. Lyla will lead those she trusts to the alley where her mentors, the seven Apostates, reside in their disguises, as she wants her newfound "friends" to meet the closest thing she has to parents. Depending on whether Eickos is present, five or six of them cluster near (but not *too* near...) a burning oil drum to warm themselves. The last — Malakai — huddles far from the fire, muttering to herself and appearing frightened. This scene should be set up in a private section of your play area, with as much attention given to the details as possible. Use the Apostates as you best can, perhaps assigning a couple to Narrator cast members.

The characters' actions here are more critical than perhaps anywhere else in the story, as Lilith frequently watches both the Apostates and Lyla. For her part, Lyla spends most of her time in the alley with Malakai, trying to calm her and ease her suffering. Those who approach the fire are treated to cryptic but still relevant bits of wisdom from the seemingly eccentric bums. Most of this advice probably centers upon questioning one's path, particularly if the characters have decided to oppose Lilith by this point. The bums do not reveal themselves as anything more than normal vagrants unless Lyla is directly threatened or someone mentions Lilith, or something else of great significance.

If someone does bring up one of these things, though, the characters most likely receive a direct invitation from Lucian to join Lilith — which could change the complexion of the story dramatically.

COURTLY INTRIGUE

This scenario is probably best run as either the very first, to direct the characters toward other mini-scenarios as you see fit, or after all the players' characters have experienced one of the other mini-scenarios together. Note: Camarilla terms such as "prince" will be used from here onward for ease of reading, but adapt the terminology for Sabbat or anarchs as need arises.

The prince calls a meeting of all the city's vampires. The main agenda item of the meeting is an act (or several acts) of diablerie. At least one person in the city — preferably a member of the prince's own entourage or a well-known elder — has committed the heinous deed and must be punished appropriately. If one of your characters has committed diablerie as her blood has thinned, now is the ideal time to make her pay for it, forcing her coterie to choose to go into hiding with her or to turn against her friend.



If the individual under blood hunt is not one of the players' characters, the person either is not present at the gathering or somehow manages to escape. Regardless, the prince (or an elder, if the prince is under a de-facto hunt by now) calls for everyone in his domain to pursue the wrongdoer and bring him to justice. Pursuing the fugitive should eventually lead into one of the other mini-scenarios.

If the players' characters do not join the pursuit of the newly hunted individual, or if the prince asks them to stay behind, they may take on other tasks instead. The prince might already be aware of the potential disturbances posed by some or all of the other mini-scenarios. This would be an ideal time to split the characters into different scenes that involve only a few players at a time while others fill temporary cast roles as antagonists.

Saulot's Gambit

Saulot approaches one, several or all of the characters and tries to convince them to join him in the fight against Lilith. If they don't trust him, he offers to help them with something they need in return for helping him. If Lyla is present, Saulot reveals the nature of her unknowing link to Lilith.

Saulot's main bargaining chip is information. He knows the true identities of the bums — or, rather, he knows they're Antediluvians, having a sense for that sort of thing — but he doesn't know specifics about them. He's been tailing Lilith for a long time and watching her and her closest allies through his own contacts in the Inconnu and among the mystics of Clan Tremere. He also suspects that Lyla is the Last Daughter of Eve and that she's connected to Lilith by some type of sympathetic link, believing (correctly) that Lyla is the key to defeating Lilith.

Saulot's other main asset is his vast knowledge of *Thaumaturgy*. Spending years in Tremere's body, Saulot knows a great deal about blood magic, as well as that which he learned during his time in the East. He can build a ritual for the players' characters to enact whether or not they have *Thaumaturgy*, based on those principles. Saulot has access to rituals that require no extensive prior knowledge of magic, and he's able to teach them to the characters if they choose to help him.

If the characters do attack him for some reason, Saulot will try to escape rather than returning the attack, reappearing later in a different guise to try to gain their support again.

ENDGAME

Since so many different characters might be involved in the final confrontation between Lilith and Caine, this scene has been broken down by character, with actions they might take, as well as actions others might take for or against them.

Lyla

Since the greatest likelihood is that the characters will find their way to the alley through Lyla, she's the first character presented here. When Caine enters the city, Lilith sets a call to all of her followers to assemble at the alley where the Apostates usually gather in disguise. Lyla feels a strong pull toward the site, her Insight warns her of a great number of Ancients gathering in one location. She will make any reasonable attempt to go to the alley, with or without the characters. If she's physically restrained, she quickly develops a supernaturally intense migraine, causing her to scream and flail around until she's either silenced somehow or brought to the alley.

Once she's in Lilith's presence, things get complicated. Because she's (in essence) Lilith's avatar, Lyla has access to all of Lilith's abilities. This means that if she stands with Lilith, Lyla changes aspects whenever Lilith does. If the characters



have convinced her to oppose the Dark Mother, they gain (in effect) a “virtual” Lilith to help them. This effect lasts only while Lyla is in Lilith’s presence, unless Lyla or someone else does something (probably involving Lilith’s blood) to make it permanent. If the characters have chosen to sacrifice Lyla in their ritual against Lilith, this sacrifice likewise works only in Lilith’s presence.

SAULOT

If the characters are allied with Saulot, he either gives them a signal and directions to the alley or leads them there himself when the time comes. His main objective is to protect Caine from Lilith, so even though he might help the characters set up their ritual (if they’re performing one), as soon as Caine arrives, Saulot defends him directly.

Unfortunately for Saulot, the original owner of the body he’s using — Tzimisce, not Tremere — has other plans for it. Sometime during the battle, Saulot begins generating random manifestations of *Vicissitude* — limbs elongating while fighting, warping the flesh of his attackers seemingly without effort and so on. Whether Saulot is wholly consumed or manages to retain some measure of control is up to you. He did successfully resist Tremere for centuries, but Tremere also wasn’t an Antediluvian in the root sense of the word. If the Tzimisce Antediluvian does gain full control of Saulot, its mind has likely been so twisted by *Vicissitude* that it will attack everything in sight, possibly retaining enough residual knowledge to know that it wants to eat Caine. Alternatively, the Ancient might have consciously been hiding within its bloodline for all this time, and it might still be quite coherent — but also still quite hungry.

CAINE

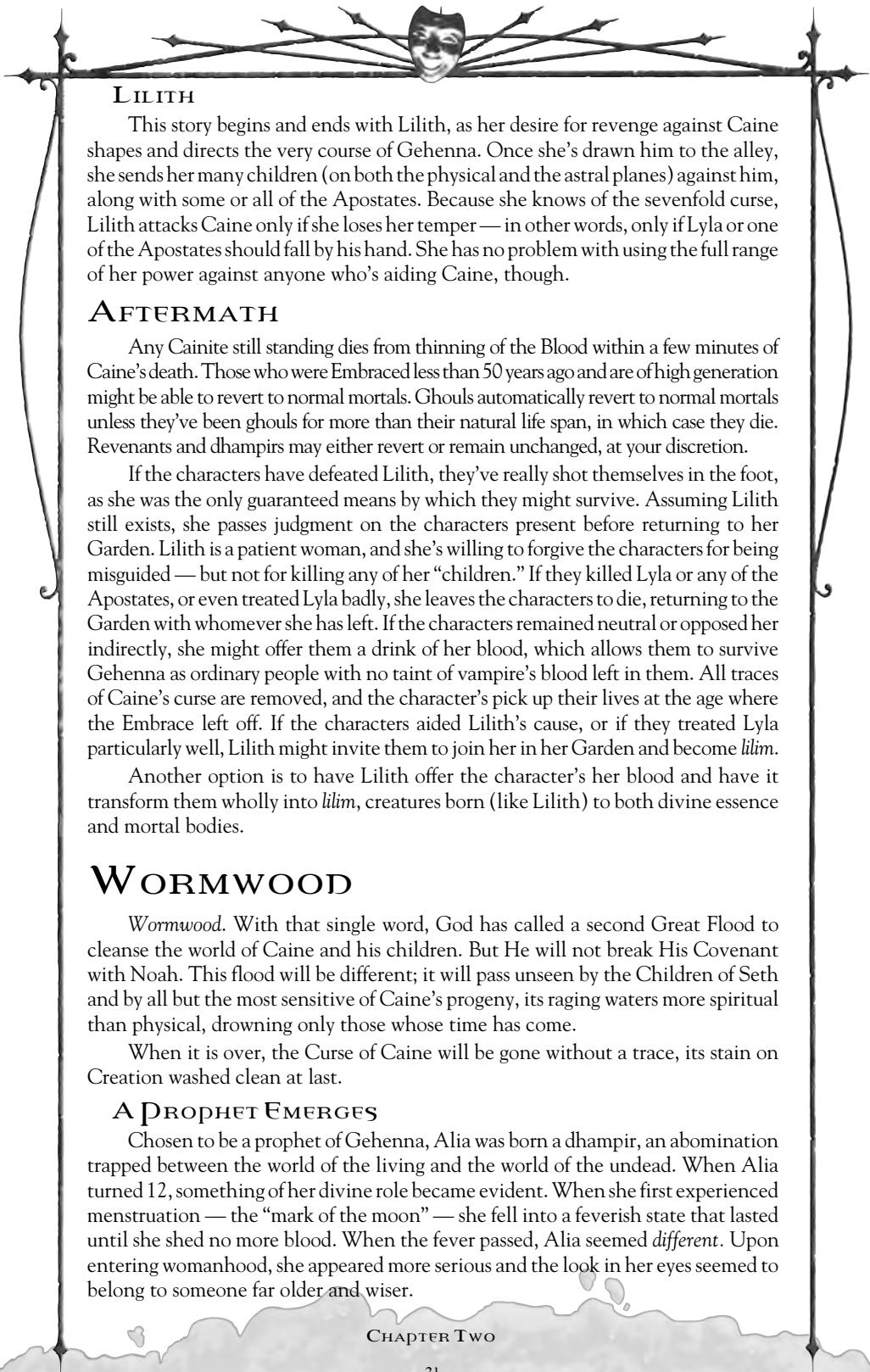
Unless he and Lucifer met before the story began, Caine enters this story highly upset. After centuries of enjoying his obscurity and solitude, he finds himself forced to travel to some unimportant mortal city due to persistent supernatural disturbances. Once he arrives, he feels Lilith’s presence there and makes straight for her (just as Lilith knows he will).

It’s a toss-up whether Caine would attack Lilith or the Apostates first, but it’s more likely he’d go for the Apostates, as they directly betrayed him. If he does manage to destroy one or more of them, he has to contend with Lilith’s fury directly — but this is unlikely because of the sheer number of monstrous children Lilith can use to slow him down. Caine is very much reacting, rather than instigating, and this is one reason the actions of the players’ characters matter so much in the story — Caine is too arrogant to realize he’s been set up, so if anyone’s going to save him, it has to be them.

THE APOSTATES

It’s fair to say that Ilyes, Ikopabe, Erinye and Mekhet fight at Lilith’s side unswervingly, in whatever ways you see fit, so more treatment of them is not necessary here. Wounded by her obvious dislike of him despite his loyalty, Lucian might betray Lilith, but that depends on how much of an advantage you want Lilith to have, as well as what interactions Lucian has had with your characters throughout the story.

As you should already be aware, Eickos is the one true wild card among the Apostates. If she does reveal herself as the crone, she might draw Caine’s fire from Lilith and the Apostates long enough to give Lilith a clear shot at him — if she wants to help Lilith at all by now. Eickos might assist with the characters’ ritual against Lilith, or she might try to kill both Lilith and Caine, forcing the characters to choose whom (if anyone) they wish to save.



LILITH

This story begins and ends with Lilith, as her desire for revenge against Caine shapes and directs the very course of Gehenna. Once she's drawn him to the alley, she sends her many children (on both the physical and the astral planes) against him, along with some or all of the Apostates. Because she knows of the sevenfold curse, Lilith attacks Caine only if she loses her temper — in other words, only if Lyla or one of the Apostates should fall by his hand. She has no problem with using the full range of her power against anyone who's aiding Caine, though.

AFTERMATH

Any Cainite still standing dies from thinning of the Blood within a few minutes of Caine's death. Those who were Embraced less than 50 years ago and are of high generation might be able to revert to normal mortals. Ghouls automatically revert to normal mortals unless they've been ghouls for more than their natural life span, in which case they die. Revenants and dhampirs may either revert or remain unchanged, at your discretion.

If the characters have defeated Lilith, they've really shot themselves in the foot, as she was the only guaranteed means by which they might survive. Assuming Lilith still exists, she passes judgment on the characters present before returning to her Garden. Lilith is a patient woman, and she's willing to forgive the characters for being misguided — but not for killing any of her "children." If they killed Lyla or any of the Apostates, or even treated Lyla badly, she leaves the characters to die, returning to the Garden with whomever she has left. If the characters remained neutral or opposed her indirectly, she might offer them a drink of her blood, which allows them to survive Gehenna as ordinary people with no taint of vampire's blood left in them. All traces of Caine's curse are removed, and the character's pick up their lives at the age where the Embrace left off. If the characters aided Lilith's cause, or if they treated Lyla particularly well, Lilith might invite them to join her in her Garden and become *lilim*.

Another option is to have Lilith offer the character's her blood and have it transform them wholly into *lilim*, creatures born (like Lilith) to both divine essence and mortal bodies.

WORMWOOD

Wormwood. With that single word, God has called a second Great Flood to cleanse the world of Caine and his children. But He will not break His Covenant with Noah. This flood will be different; it will pass unseen by the Children of Seth and by all but the most sensitive of Caine's progeny, its raging waters more spiritual than physical, drowning only those whose time has come.

When it is over, the Curse of Caine will be gone without a trace, its stain on Creation washed clean at last.

A PROPHET EMERGES

Chosen to be a prophet of Gehenna, Alia was born a dhampir, an abomination trapped between the world of the living and the world of the undead. When Alia turned 12, something of her divine role became evident. When she first experienced menstruation — the "mark of the moon" — she fell into a feverish state that lasted until she shed no more blood. When the fever passed, Alia seemed *different*. Upon entering womanhood, she appeared more serious and the look in her eyes seemed to belong to someone far older and wiser.



Alia had heard the voice of God, and it had changed her. She was to find a Kindred, one whose faith was stronger than all others combined, and give him God's message. Over the next few months, Alia heard God's voice again and again. She did not reveal what she learned, but she did explain that she could no longer stay with her family. Only her Caitiff protectors went with her to continue to ensure her safety. Finally, after nearly a year of fruitless searching, she found the one she was looking for and delivered unto him no less than the Word of God.

Wandering into an abandoned mission church far from the busy heart of the city, Alia met a beatific Gargoyle named Ferox, who told her that he was God's servant. He told her of his mission to do God's bidding and that if she believed as he did, she might be spared from His wrath. When Ferox had finished, Alia lifted her head and gazed into the eyes of the monstrosity before her.

Alia trembled as she revealed God's message. God would send a flood that would wipe the Kindred from Creation, and that flood would be called Wormwood, and it would appear as a star. God wanted Ferox to gather others of his kind according to forthcoming signs and to create for them a Sanctuary. When the flood that is Wormwood is nigh, God will let him know and he will go into the Sanctuary with the other chosen and stay until 40 nights have passed. During that time, the world will be flooded by Wormwood, though only the Children of Caine will taste its bitter waters. After 40 nights it will be over. Those who remained in the Sanctuary will be safe from the flood, but they too will be judged. Those found wanting will be undone.

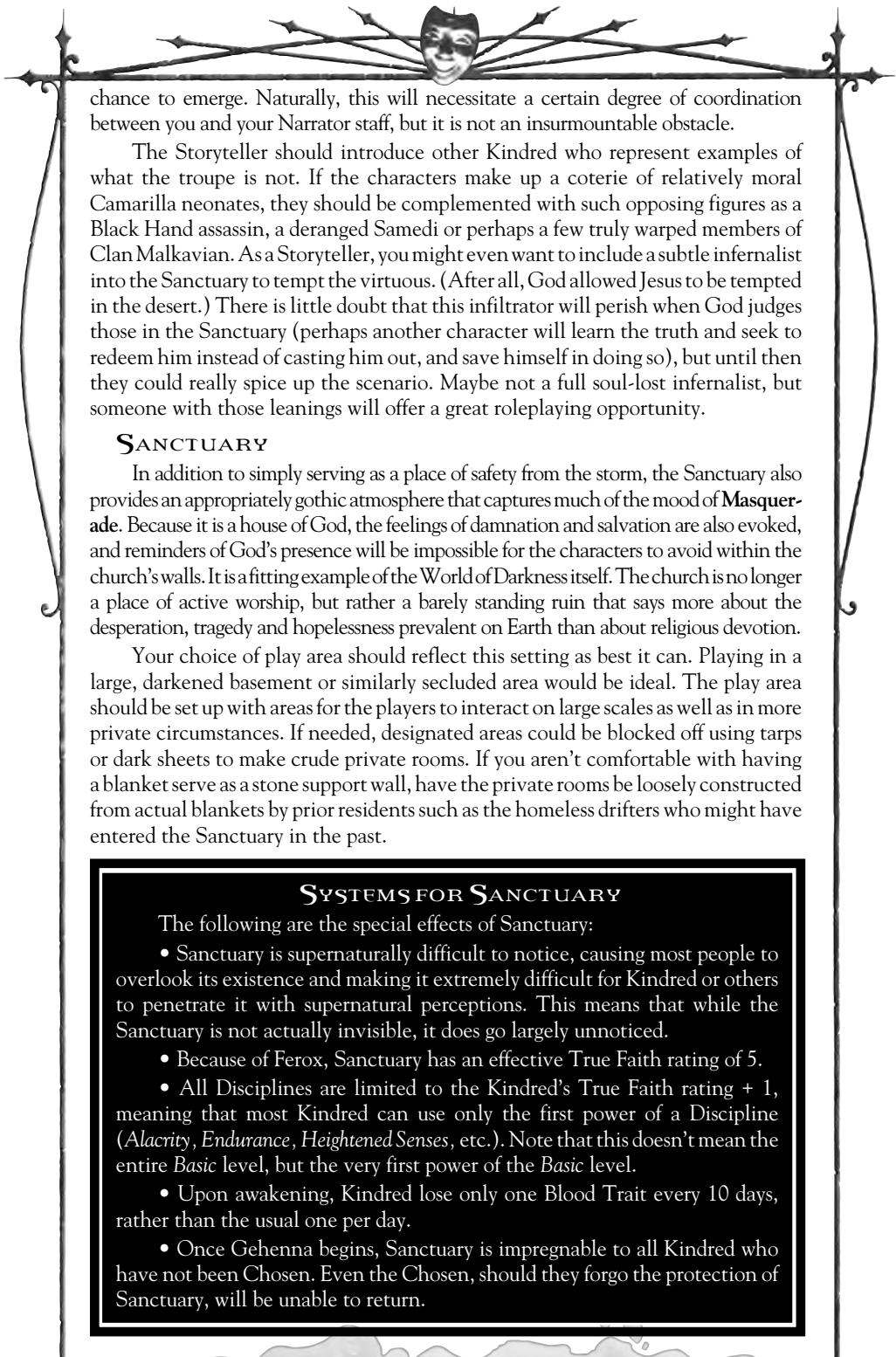
The next evening, the Red Star appeared in the heavens. God's plan had been set in motion and nothing would stop it. Wormwood approached and with it so did Gehenna. Ferox and Alia gazed at the star and began their journey. They had work to do, and the world's hour was late already.

LOCKED ROOMS, GUARDED HEARTS

Although this version of Gehenna might be too subtle for some tastes, it is suitable for any group of characters, from the most bestial and diabolic to the most cultured and even repentant. It can be played one-on-one for a very personal epilogue to an introspective chronicle, or played out in full with a larger troupe for an intense roleplaying exercise. Neonates and elders alike will find themselves equally challenged, with neither having any assured advantage. If your troupe wants to experience Gehenna as something very personal, a grand ending that leaves the beaten path and returns instead to the basics of storytelling and dramatic discovery, "Wormwood" should please. In many ways, this scenario is played out like a classic "locked-room mystery," as secrets come to light and souls are laid bare in the confines of a place no one wanted to be yet no one can escape.

FORTY NIGHTS OF GEHENNA

As has already been noted, the characters can really be of any clan, generation or sect; all are welcome. Although God has chosen the most faithful Child of Caine to provide Sanctuary, He intends to fill that Sanctuary with vampires that represent the full spectrum of Caine's children. Simulating this epic gathering might require an intrepid staff of Narrators to play different parts at different times during these sessions. A Storyteller might want to recruit additional staff to help fill the varying roles. Fortunately, with proper set dressing, the Sanctuary should be a large enough place that certain key characters can "disappear" for a time into other areas of the church, allowing others a



chance to emerge. Naturally, this will necessitate a certain degree of coordination between you and your Narrator staff, but it is not an insurmountable obstacle.

The Storyteller should introduce other Kindred who represent examples of what the troupe is not. If the characters make up a coterie of relatively moral Camarilla neonates, they should be complemented with such opposing figures as a Black Hand assassin, a deranged Samedi or perhaps a few truly warped members of Clan Malkavian. As a Storyteller, you might even want to include a subtle infernalist into the Sanctuary to tempt the virtuous. (After all, God allowed Jesus to be tempted in the desert.) There is little doubt that this infiltrator will perish when God judges those in the Sanctuary (perhaps another character will learn the truth and seek to redeem him instead of casting him out, and save himself in doing so), but until then they could really spice up the scenario. Maybe not a full soul-lost infernalist, but someone with those leanings will offer a great roleplaying opportunity.

SANCTUARY

In addition to simply serving as a place of safety from the storm, the Sanctuary also provides an appropriately gothic atmosphere that captures much of the mood of **Masquerade**. Because it is a house of God, the feelings of damnation and salvation are also evoked, and reminders of God's presence will be impossible for the characters to avoid within the church's walls. It is a fitting example of the World of Darkness itself. The church is no longer a place of active worship, but rather a barely standing ruin that says more about the desperation, tragedy and hopelessness prevalent on Earth than about religious devotion.

Your choice of play area should reflect this setting as best it can. Playing in a large, darkened basement or similarly secluded area would be ideal. The play area should be set up with areas for the players to interact on large scales as well as in more private circumstances. If needed, designated areas could be blocked off using tarps or dark sheets to make crude private rooms. If you aren't comfortable with having a blanket serve as a stone support wall, have the private rooms be loosely constructed from actual blankets by prior residents such as the homeless drifters who might have entered the Sanctuary in the past.

SYSTEMS FOR SANCTUARY

The following are the special effects of Sanctuary:

- Sanctuary is supernaturally difficult to notice, causing most people to overlook its existence and making it extremely difficult for Kindred or others to penetrate it with supernatural perceptions. This means that while the Sanctuary is not actually invisible, it does go largely unnoticed.
- Because of Ferox, Sanctuary has an effective True Faith rating of 5.
- All Disciplines are limited to the Kindred's True Faith rating + 1, meaning that most Kindred can use only the first power of a Discipline (*Alacrity*, *Endurance*, *Heightened Senses*, etc.). Note that this doesn't mean the entire *Basic* level, but the very first power of the *Basic* level.
- Upon awakening, Kindred lose only one Blood Trait every 10 days, rather than the usual one per day.
- Once Gehenna begins, Sanctuary is impregnable to all Kindred who have not been Chosen. Even the Chosen, should they forgo the protection of Sanctuary, will be unable to return.



WORMWOOD

The Red Star has been visible in the sky since 1999 to those Kindred possessed of *Auspex*, as well as others — such as some Malkavians, thin-blooded Kindred and even some very rare mortals — who have similarly sensitive, albeit different, perceptions. Throughout these events, this remains the case, meaning that most of Caine's children won't even really know the nature of the sudden affliction they experience. Almost no mortals will have any idea that anything unusual is occurring, but only the Chosen will be spared as vampires around the world feel the wrath of God's judgment.

Some characters will inevitably believe they have a way to trick God and escape His wrath, and not by entering the Sanctuary provided. Some might decide to hide deep in the earth (or even become part of it), while others might choose to go into the astral plane or some other realm of existence to sit out the flood, hoping that they can just come on back when everything is over. It's nice that they think so, but Wormwood is a judgment from the *divine*. Everything is part of God's Creation, so everything is subject to the power of Wormwood and the cold justice it brings. That means no tricks, no dodges, no hope of escape. No matter how many levels of Disciplines a Kindred has or how clever she thinks she is, Wormwood will find her and pass sentence in the end.

THE EFFECTS OF WORMWOOD

Essentially, everyone exposed to Wormwood's effects suffers a heightened and highly debilitating form of the Withering. All losses are measured in days as opposed to weeks or months, each use of a Blood Trait automatically causes Discipline loss, and diablerie doesn't stave off the effects (not that the undead don't try it). In addition, the maximum Generation of all Kindred drops by one every two nights, so that all Kindred are effectively 15th generation by the 27th night.

Eventually even the capacity to contain blood in their system fades. Each evening after the 27th, every vampire's maximum blood pool decreases by one until the 37th night, when they can no longer maintain any vitae in their withered bodies. At this point, only constant introduction by artificial means could possibly enable a vampire to sustain himself any longer. Without such extreme measures, any vampire who is still around slips into torpor. Given the fact that they no longer have the ability to contain vitae, create vitae or otherwise acquire vitae in this state, such torpid Kindred meet their Final Death no later than sunrise on the morning after the 37th night as Wormwood's flood quietly takes them as well.

These conditions also affect ghouls, revenants and dhampirs. Any beings with Caine's blood in their system suffer until all have been extinguished and the last traces of the Curse of Caine are purged from the world.

THE LONGEST NIGHT ENDS

The story begins three nights before Wormwood first rains its bitter flood down upon the world. Ferox and Alia have been in the city for a few weeks already, seeking shelter in an old, abandoned church in the most neglected part of town. If you do not fully wish to introduce them into your existing story, feel free to mention them only in rumors and unverified sightings. The two have come to the city as a result of their ongoing search for the Chosen, still unsure how many of these special Kindred they must find and when Gehenna will come.

Already a number of the Chosen have found their way to the city, but none have yet figured out where it is they must go. Again, this strange phenomenon is something that you can mention as rumor in your story prior to the events of



Wormwood as a buildup to the final hours. Simply spotting these many new faces in the setting should be enough to send most vampires into a paranoid frenzy. Use this for your setting, perhaps at first using misdirection to hint that some kind of invasion or takeover is imminent. The truth will be coming soon enough anyway.

ON THE EVE OF GEHENNA

Since the players are going to be among the Chosen, you should make them feel that fate had some hand in their being in the right place at the right time (as opposed to their being Chosen having to do with them just being the players). Perhaps a series of coincidences drives them all to the Sanctuary in the final hour. Don't strong-arm them into position, but plan for delicate and believable reasoning. Maybe that Ventre "just happens" to be meeting with a real estate developer in that neighborhood, while the Nosferatu is following him on an "anonymous" tip, and the Brujah gang is chasing a rival gang member who happened to run into that neighborhood. If possible, sow the seeds to put the characters in the right neighborhood at the right time sessions or even stories in advance, preferably as a minor footnote. If that Ventre has had this "routine meeting" on his schedule for four months, having it turn out to be so critical will seem much more mystical.

THE BELL TOLLS

The precise hour that Gehenna begins is not really important, but the characters should be no more than a couple of blocks away from the Sanctuary when it does. The first thing to happen is the tolling of the church bell that only the Chosen can hear. It does not ring just once, but continues to peal loudly, signaling that it is time to seek Sanctuary. Characters with some kind of Awareness or Auspex could be given a Simple Test to understand that urgency is called for, though they might not understand why. They just have an instinctual and unnerving sensation that something terrible is looming over them.

Each of the Chosen has found his way to the Sanctuary at this final moment, though like the characters, none expected the others. As is to be expected, each will be wary, many likely wondering aloud just what kind of trick this is. Some might even prepare to defend themselves against the other strange vampires, or from whatever ancient fiend or power has summoned them here. They really won't have enough time for introductions or fighting at this point, however. Gehenna is upon them, and the instinct to survive will take precedence over all their other urges.

Only moments after the Chosen come face-to-face with one another in front of the church, the most sensitive Kindred will watch as Wormwood appears to go supernova before their unbelieving eyes and the entire night sky suddenly blazes brilliant red. This unexpected flash does not actually blind a viewer for more than a second or two, but it's certainly enough to elicit a look of shock and incredulity from those who are able to witness the spectacle. Moments after the supernova, Wormwood will appear to have grown prodigiously. From the Red Star will begin to pour a great waterfall of crimson mist that quickly becomes a cloud of strange fog rolling quickly across the land in every direction. Those characters who cannot directly perceive Wormwood will still feel *something* ominous that gives them pause and leaves them feeling a terrible sense of impending doom, every hair on their body standing on end.

By now it should be frighteningly clear to the characters, as well as to most of the Chosen, that whatever it is that is happening, it is definitely not good. Even their arsenal of Disciplines will not guarantee surviving the fast-approaching fog. Even if the characters are so obtuse as to not get it, the sight of all these strange Kindred, the pilgrims



included, suddenly high-tailing it toward what appears to be a barely standing ruin of a church should kick-start them into action. The rest of the Chosen will rush as quickly as possible for the church, each following the lead of the others as much as the odd compulsion that tells them that somehow, this house of God might provide Sanctuary.

If for some reason the characters wish to stand at the open doors and watch what is happening outside, describe how the floodwaters of Wormwood roll past like a smothering cloud and suck the doors closed as if they caused a tremendous vacuum. This should be a moment when suddenly there is silence and a whole new chapter is about to begin, not just for the characters, but for all Kindred. No character can prevent or hasten this final closing — they can forget locking out rivals or undesirables, if others are meant to be judged, it will not be by the characters.

INTO THE FIRE

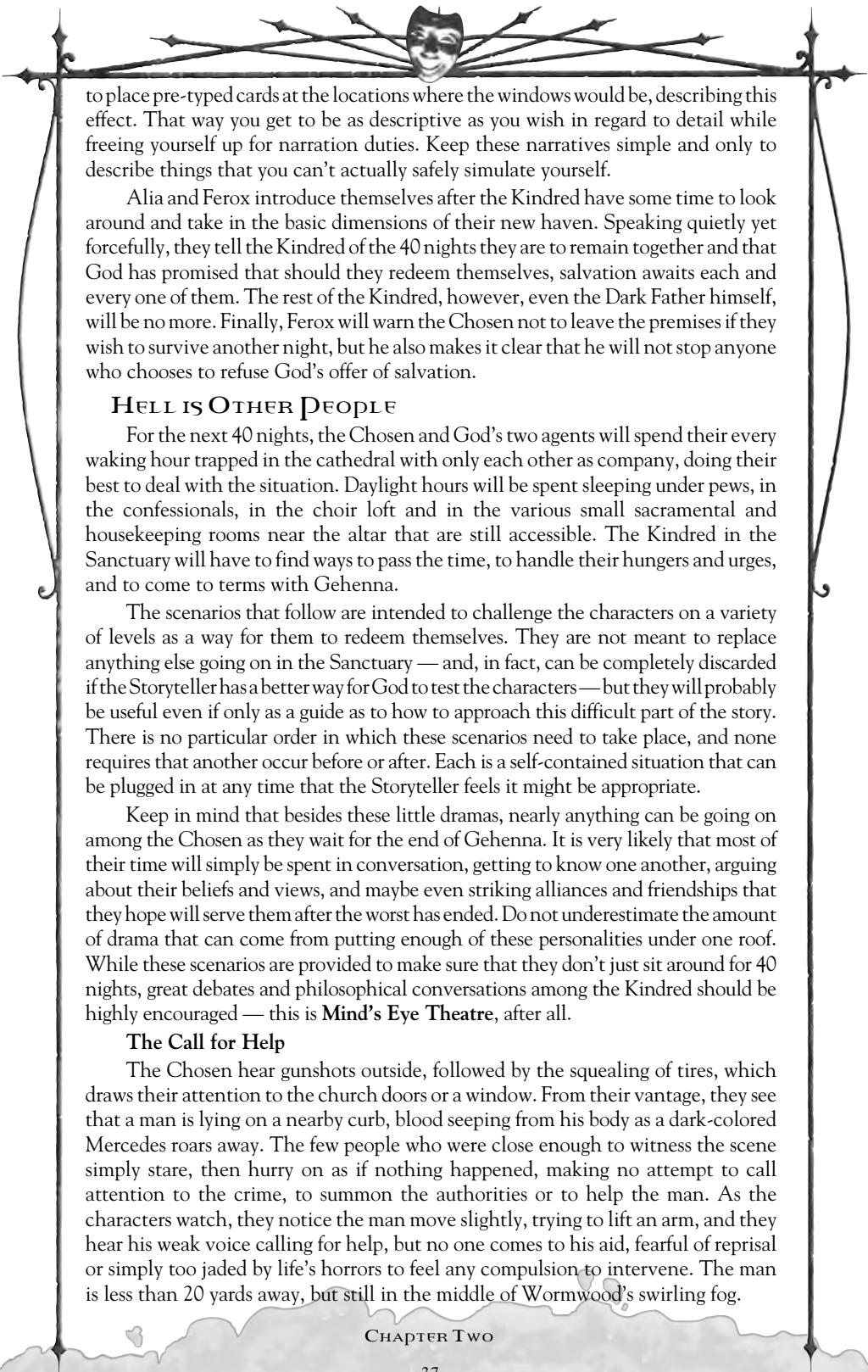
Once the Sanctuary doors have closed, the characters and the rest of the Chosen will have a chance to look around. Inside, the church is even more ruinous than its exterior suggests. Almost nothing of value remains in the entire place, and most of the areas off the central nave are either devastated from fire and collapse or entirely impassable, blocked by rubble. Even though most of the stained-glass windows are broken, the flood outside cannot enter. To the eyes of those who can see it, a red mist appears to simply wash past without coming inside. You might wish

LEAVING SANCTUARY

If one or more characters chooses to leave the church and venture even a step outside its protection at any time during the 40 nights of the flood, they will be tainted by Wormwood and suffer the full effects already discussed. In addition, they will not be able to enter the Sanctuary again, for they have effectively turned their back on God's offer of salvation.

There is one very special case, however, that allows a Kindred who has left to return to Sanctuary even in the middle of the flood. It can occur only if the Kindred who exits does so to perform some action that is truly selfless and demonstrates the very essence of humanity. If this happens, and the character in question truly believes he has sacrificed his own chance at salvation to do one last act of goodness, then if he does come back to the church, he will find that not only may he reenter, but upon doing so, all the effects of Wormwood will vanish as if he had never left the Sanctuary in the first place. If the same character tries it again or another Kindred decides to play copycat without a similarly selfless motive, there will be no turning back. Like the rest of the world's Kindred, the rest will be unable to ever again breach the Sanctuary and must accept their tragic fate.

You and your staff should be ready to narrate this type of scene in case someone tries to take up this course of action. To avoid "screwyball" attempts to leave, you might want to give a test for *Awareness* or *Instinct* as the character tries to cross the threshold of the church, letting them know that this would be a "bad idea." It is highly recommended that you keep this escape clause secret, even from the player involved, and make everyone wonder about why they were allowed to return. If necessary, give selfless players a test or two to realize they can return, but only after the task is done, and preferably only once they have just about given up hope. Otherwise, you might have all the players clamoring to go for "selfless reasons."



to place pre-typed cards at the locations where the windows would be, describing this effect. That way you get to be as descriptive as you wish in regard to detail while freeing yourself up for narration duties. Keep these narratives simple and only to describe things that you can't actually safely simulate yourself.

Alia and Ferox introduce themselves after the Kindred have some time to look around and take in the basic dimensions of their new haven. Speaking quietly yet forcefully, they tell the Kindred of the 40 nights they are to remain together and that God has promised that should they redeem themselves, salvation awaits each and every one of them. The rest of the Kindred, however, even the Dark Father himself, will be no more. Finally, Ferox will warn the Chosen not to leave the premises if they wish to survive another night, but he also makes it clear that he will not stop anyone who chooses to refuse God's offer of salvation.

HELL IS OTHER PEOPLE

For the next 40 nights, the Chosen and God's two agents will spend their every waking hour trapped in the cathedral with only each other as company, doing their best to deal with the situation. Daylight hours will be spent sleeping under pews, in the confessional, in the choir loft and in the various small sacramental and housekeeping rooms near the altar that are still accessible. The Kindred in the Sanctuary will have to find ways to pass the time, to handle their hungers and urges, and to come to terms with Gehenna.

The scenarios that follow are intended to challenge the characters on a variety of levels as a way for them to redeem themselves. They are not meant to replace anything else going on in the Sanctuary — and, in fact, can be completely discarded if the Storyteller has a better way for God to test the characters—but they will probably be useful even if only as a guide as to how to approach this difficult part of the story. There is no particular order in which these scenarios need to take place, and none requires that another occur before or after. Each is a self-contained situation that can be plugged in at any time that the Storyteller feels it might be appropriate.

Keep in mind that besides these little dramas, nearly anything can be going on among the Chosen as they wait for the end of Gehenna. It is very likely that most of their time will simply be spent in conversation, getting to know one another, arguing about their beliefs and views, and maybe even striking alliances and friendships that they hope will serve them after the worst has ended. Do not underestimate the amount of drama that can come from putting enough of these personalities under one roof. While these scenarios are provided to make sure that they don't just sit around for 40 nights, great debates and philosophical conversations among the Kindred should be highly encouraged — this is *Mind's Eye Theatre*, after all.

The Call for Help

The Chosen hear gunshots outside, followed by the squealing of tires, which draws their attention to the church doors or a window. From their vantage, they see that a man is lying on a nearby curb, blood seeping from his body as a dark-colored Mercedes roars away. The few people who were close enough to witness the scene simply stare, then hurry on as if nothing happened, making no attempt to call attention to the crime, to summon the authorities or to help the man. As the characters watch, they notice the man move slightly, trying to lift an arm, and they hear his weak voice calling for help, but no one comes to his aid, fearful of reprisal or simply too jaded by life's horrors to feel any compulsion to intervene. The man is less than 20 yards away, but still in the middle of Wormwood's swirling fog.



FORTY DAYS OF NIGHT

So how do you play out 40 nights of passing time in Mind's Eye Theatre? There are a few options for an ambitious Storyteller. One of the first suggestions to come to mind is to condense the time so that only the important nights in Sanctuary are represented with actual game sessions, while less interesting nights are handled in downtime. Doing so could create a marathon couple of sessions, however, and your players could become fatigued, thus costing you some of your story tension. Or this scenario could be run in a series of game sessions all held in the same location (perhaps not the whole 40 nights, but three or even four smaller sessions building to the dramatic conclusion). Just make sure to schedule these sessions close enough together to keep the dramatic tension building.

And what happens if players or key staff can't make it to one session? What's a Storyteller to do? These are not unassailable obstacles but rather things to keep in mind for planning this most important session.

With a little creativity, even this absence can be explained. Perhaps the character is speaking privately with Ferox and Alia (or another reclusive contact). Maybe he is resting or praying under the church in a secure room; no diablerie or assassination on Ferox's watch. You might even be able to have a properly briefed Narrator stand in for the character, at least for part of the session — though don't let such demands get in the way of the story for those players that have made the time to come and play. Provided that players understand that attempting to abuse these privileges to avoid death or plot will be punished accordingly, it should be a good way to make sure that the chronicle goes on without leaving people out of the loop.

Do the characters try to coerce someone to help the man? Will they go through all their own possessions, find a mobile phone and call the authorities or emergency services themselves? Or do they also just watch, being concerned for their own problems?

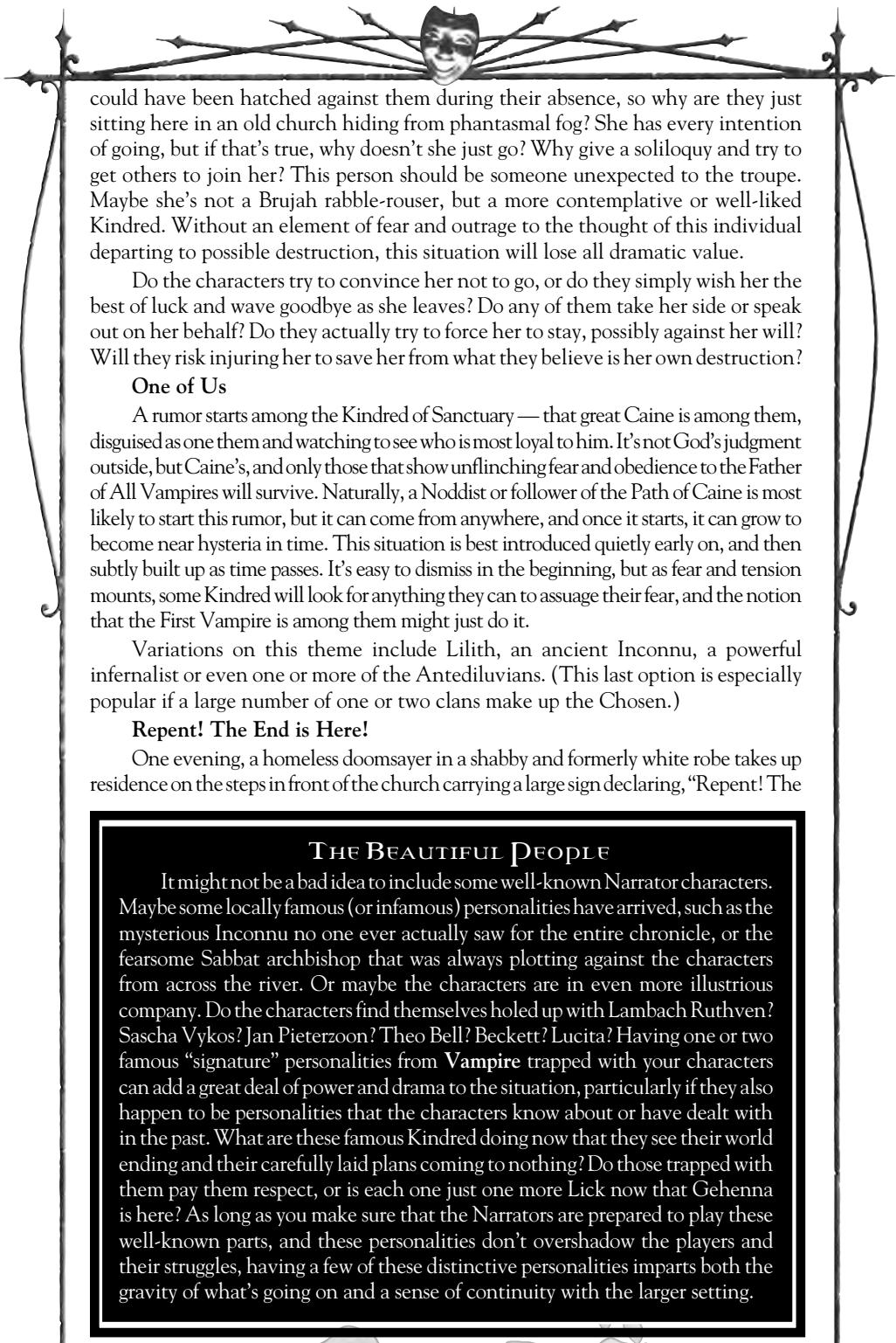
Don't Do It!

A few hours before sundown, a young man enters the church through the rubble in the back and climbs up to the highest point. The young man cannot take it any longer. He has decided to end his life, climbing up onto the old church so that he can. The characters will notice him at some point, but should not be able to easily get to him due to where he is. The young man will be startled by the characters, but will be vaguely defiant and tell them to leave him alone. He is going to jump if they try to stop him. And he will jump, if they are not careful.

If they decide to save him, how do they do it? Direct action might force him to jump, while talking to him could also upset him and cause him to make the leap. (Remember, their Disciplines are limited in power.) Will they just let him go, chalking it up to another useless life well ended?

Bon Voyage

One of the Chosen Narrator characters has decided that she cannot take it anymore. This Kindred declares her intention to leave, wondering aloud if there really is any Gehenna after all; maybe it's just a trick that Ferox has invented for his own obscure purposes. She might even try to convince other Kindred to go with her, to hunt for some fresh blood and revive her unlif. Surely all manner of schemes



could have been hatched against them during their absence, so why are they just sitting here in an old church hiding from phantasmal fog? She has every intention of going, but if that's true, why doesn't she just go? Why give a soliloquy and try to get others to join her? This person should be someone unexpected to the troupe. Maybe she's not a Brujah rabble-rouser, but a more contemplative or well-liked Kindred. Without an element of fear and outrage to the thought of this individual departing to possible destruction, this situation will lose all dramatic value.

Do the characters try to convince her not to go, or do they simply wish her the best of luck and wave goodbye as she leaves? Do any of them take her side or speak out on her behalf? Do they actually try to force her to stay, possibly against her will? Will they risk injuring her to save her from what they believe is her own destruction?

One of Us

A rumor starts among the Kindred of Sanctuary — that great Caine is among them, disguised as one them and watching to see who is most loyal to him. It's not God's judgment outside, but Caine's, and only those that show unflinching fear and obedience to the Father of All Vampires will survive. Naturally, a Noddist or follower of the Path of Caine is most likely to start this rumor, but it can come from anywhere, and once it starts, it can grow to become near hysteria in time. This situation is best introduced quietly early on, and then subtly built up as time passes. It's easy to dismiss in the beginning, but as fear and tension mounts, some Kindred will look for anything they can to assuage their fear, and the notion that the First Vampire is among them might just do it.

Variations on this theme include Lilith, an ancient Inconnu, a powerful infernalist or even one or more of the Antediluvians. (This last option is especially popular if a large number of one or two clans make up the Chosen.)

Repent! The End is Here!

One evening, a homeless doomsayer in a shabby and formerly white robe takes up residence on the steps in front of the church carrying a large sign declaring, "Repent! The

THE BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

It might not be a bad idea to include some well-known Narrator characters. Maybe some locally famous (or infamous) personalities have arrived, such as the mysterious Inconnu no one ever actually saw for the entire chronicle, or the fearsome Sabbat archbishop that was always plotting against the characters from across the river. Or maybe the characters are in even more illustrious company. Do the characters find themselves holed up with Lambach Ruthven? Sascha Vykos? Jan Pieterzoon? Theo Bell? Beckett? Lucita? Having one or two famous "signature" personalities from *Vampire* trapped with your characters can add a great deal of power and drama to the situation, particularly if they also happen to be personalities that the characters know about or have dealt with in the past. What are these famous Kindred doing now that they see their world ending and their carefully laid plans coming to nothing? Do those trapped with them pay them respect, or is each one just one more Lick now that Gehenna is here? As long as you make sure that the Narrators are prepared to play these well-known parts, and these personalities don't overshadow the players and their struggles, having a few of these distinctive personalities imparts both the gravity of what's going on and a sense of continuity with the larger setting.



End is Here!" He gives his end-of-the-world speech to anyone who happens to wander by in this mostly desolate neighborhood. He is a cranky old bastard, utterly fearless and probably more than a bit crazy, but he is certainly not stupid. He will not give in to demands that he leave and will instead do everything in his power to engage the characters in conversation, eager to discuss sins, redemption, salvation, damnation and anything else along those lines. The man will not allow himself to be lured into the church under any circumstances, if he can help it. Though he will talk with anyone, he trusts no one.

Do the characters do their best to ignore him? Do they see him as a possible threat, perhaps drawing too much attention to the arcane church? Are they interested in his views? Could he be another messenger from God, or is he just a meal to quench their hunger? What if he spouts off something that sounds a little too much like the actual truth behind Gehenna? What do the characters do then?

RED RAIN

For 40 nights, the characters, the rest of the Chosen, Ferox and Alia have remained inside the Sanctuary, safe from God's wrath. Some might not have survived the passing of time, but most probably have, at least physically. Now the final night of Gehenna has come. This is the night when the fog will finally lift and the only vampires left will be those in the church. Outside its marred granite walls, the world is dark, but that darkness is not as deep as it used to be. For a few hours more, however, the characters are still inside. They are still facing each other and, far more importantly, facing God's final judgment. Salvation was never guaranteed them, only the possibility of salvation.

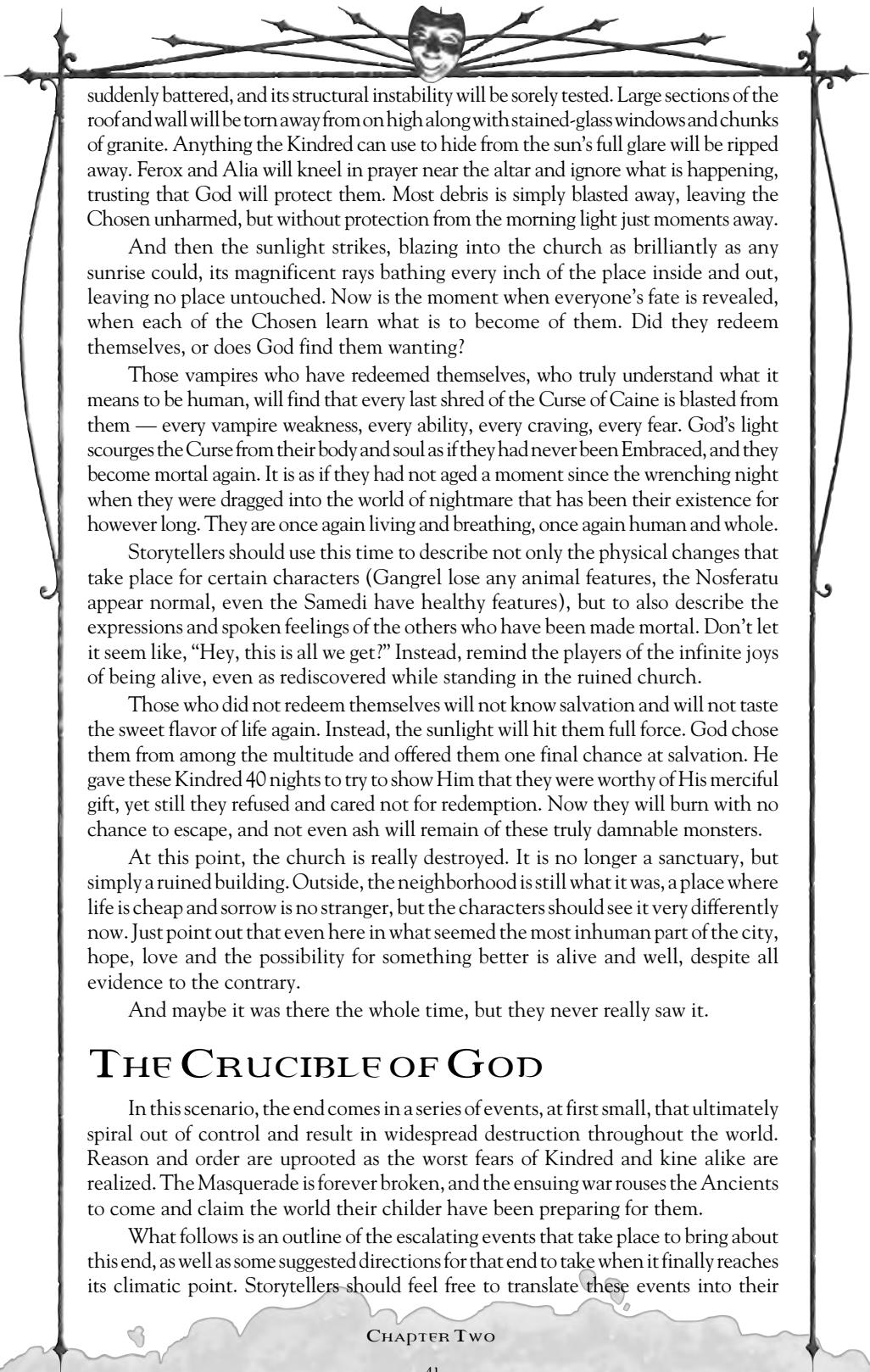
The Kindred will probably be more energized than they have been since the first few nights of their seclusion, each feverishly wondering exactly what will happen now that Gehenna is supposed to end. For those who are still up and about, they will probably be excited at the possibility that they have survived the storm and will now be some of the only vampires still around. They might start plotting how together with the other Chosen they can start a new race of Kindred, never again bowing to the now-deceased vampires who once lorded over them. It is likely that some will begin making last-minute alliances and deals as they think about their new unlife ahead, while some might start thinking about who they wish to Embrace once they leave.

Of course, that kind of scheming and planning not only proves that they have not figured out what God's judgment on the Kindred has been, but it is certainly not what God would see as the mark of someone seeking redemption. It should likely spell doom for that vampire no matter how nobly she acted during Wormwood's flood.

At least one of the Chosen might start thinking that now might be a good time to try to take out all the other Kindred. He might reason that if the rest are destroyed, then he will be like a new Caine, the father of all future vampires and, in some sense, the "winner" of Gehenna. Of course, such a Kindred will have to believe that he really is safe from God; that perhaps what has been happening outside is not really divine justice. Even given Ferox's formidable powers, the megalomaniac might still be able to pull something off. And what if he has secret allies to help him stage this bloody purge? Desperation makes for strange alliances, as well as powerful foes.

THE MORNING AFTER

Gehenna concludes just before dawn, but the end will not come quietly for the Chosen. Just before the sun comes over the city's horizon, an unexpected and unusually powerful rush of Wormwood's force sweeps over the church. Sanctuary shakes as it is



suddenly battered, and its structural instability will be sorely tested. Large sections of the roof and wall will be torn away from on high along with stained-glass windows and chunks of granite. Anything the Kindred can use to hide from the sun's full glare will be ripped away. Ferox and Alia will kneel in prayer near the altar and ignore what is happening, trusting that God will protect them. Most debris is simply blasted away, leaving the Chosen unharmed, but without protection from the morning light just moments away.

And then the sunlight strikes, blazing into the church as brilliantly as any sunrise could, its magnificent rays bathing every inch of the place inside and out, leaving no place untouched. Now is the moment when everyone's fate is revealed, when each of the Chosen learn what is to become of them. Did they redeem themselves, or does God find them wanting?

Those vampires who have redeemed themselves, who truly understand what it means to be human, will find that every last shred of the Curse of Caine is blasted from them — every vampire weakness, every ability, every craving, every fear. God's light scourges the Curse from their body and soul as if they had never been Embraced, and they become mortal again. It is as if they had not aged a moment since the wrenching night when they were dragged into the world of nightmare that has been their existence for however long. They are once again living and breathing, once again human and whole.

Storytellers should use this time to describe not only the physical changes that take place for certain characters (Gangrel lose any animal features, the Nosferatu appear normal, even the Samedi have healthy features), but to also describe the expressions and spoken feelings of the others who have been made mortal. Don't let it seem like, "Hey, this is all we get?" Instead, remind the players of the infinite joys of being alive, even as rediscovered while standing in the ruined church.

Those who did not redeem themselves will not know salvation and will not taste the sweet flavor of life again. Instead, the sunlight will hit them full force. God chose them from among the multitude and offered them one final chance at salvation. He gave these Kindred 40 nights to try to show Him that they were worthy of His merciful gift, yet still they refused and cared not for redemption. Now they will burn with no chance to escape, and not even ash will remain of these truly damnable monsters.

At this point, the church is really destroyed. It is no longer a sanctuary, but simply a ruined building. Outside, the neighborhood is still what it was, a place where life is cheap and sorrow is no stranger, but the characters should see it very differently now. Just point out that even here in what seemed the most inhuman part of the city, hope, love and the possibility for something better is alive and well, despite all evidence to the contrary.

And maybe it was there the whole time, but they never really saw it.

THE CRUCIBLE OF GOD

In this scenario, the end comes in a series of events, at first small, that ultimately spiral out of control and result in widespread destruction throughout the world. Reason and order are uprooted as the worst fears of Kindred and kine alike are realized. The Masquerade is forever broken, and the ensuing war rouses the Ancients to come and claim the world their childer have been preparing for them.

What follows is an outline of the escalating events that take place to bring about this end, as well as some suggested directions for that end to take when it finally reaches its climactic point. Storytellers should feel free to translate these events into their



individual game setting as they best see fit. A scene or two done locally to get the point of what is going on should get the players involved in the enormity of this story. The storm might begin with your characters, but it won't end until the world is consumed.

Later events are far more epic in scale. Your players could be front and center for these events or simply feel their aftershocks. As always, use what works best for you and your individual game setting. This is a grand finale, though, and your sessions should have the special attention deserving of a powerful conclusion either way.

MASQUERADE'S END

Some players might feel that their characters never get a chance to play an important role in Cainite affairs. As a Storyteller, this is your chance to give such players what they want. If you so choose, they can become the most important Kindred in the world: the vampires responsible for finally destroying the Masquerade.

And they say you never let them have any fun.

As Storyteller, watch for a moment when the characters perform some act that is completely impossible for mortals. Typical examples include a character being shot repeatedly but remaining obviously unharmed, *Thaumaturgy* use, incautious feeding or even the result of a feud with another supernatural group.

It's up to you as a Storyteller to decide when and where this slip takes place. Even if the characters are careful, mistakes can always occur. In this case, the mistake will set forth a chain of events that will change the existence of vampires everywhere. But somehow, someone *does* see the characters... and she has a video camera. A lot of people now carry these things everywhere they go, so this is hardly implausible. The mortal records the characters without their knowing it. It's something that vampires the world over having been fearing would eventually take place.

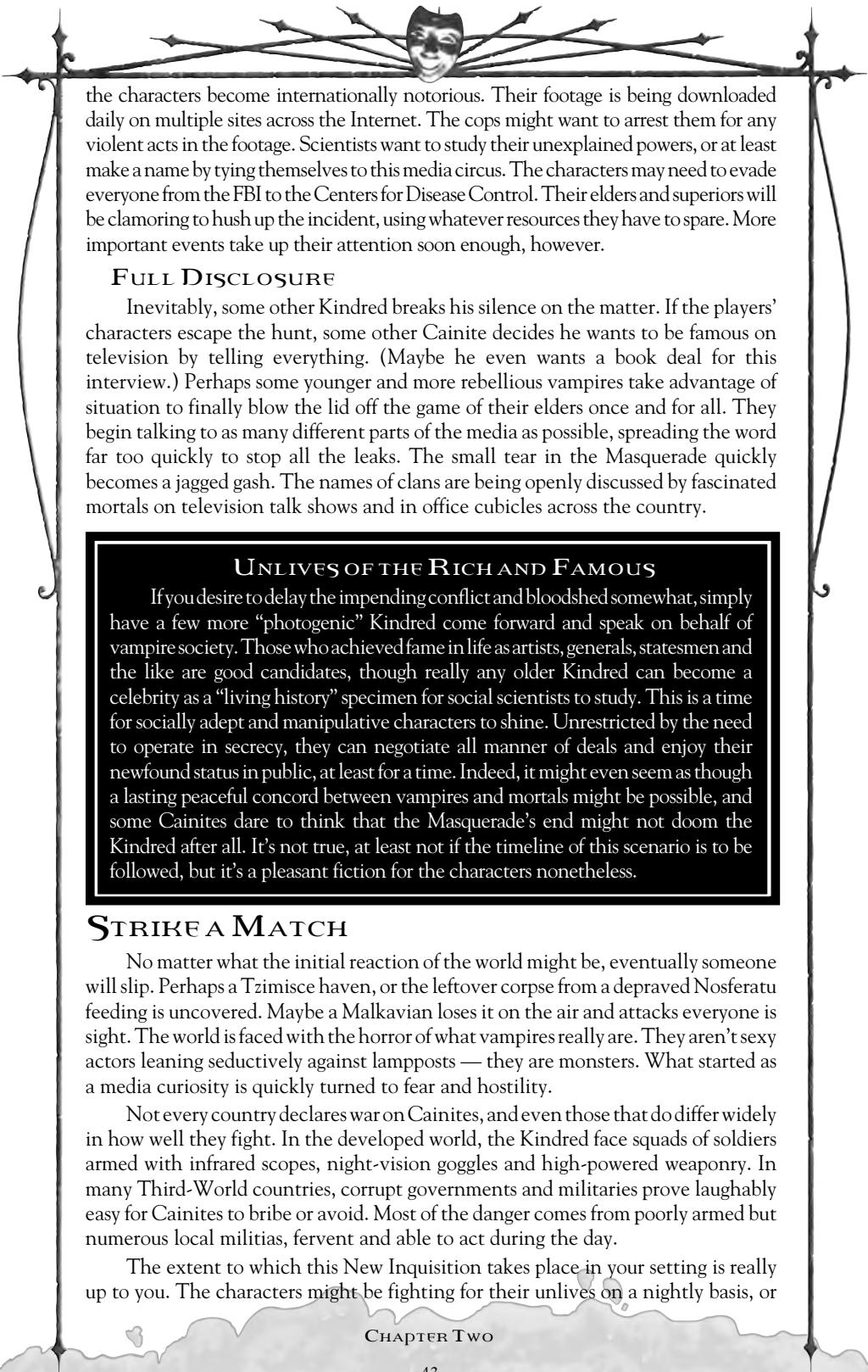
Your players should feel that this is the inevitable tear in the curtain of the Masquerade that was just waiting to happen, however, and not a well-planned Storyteller event. They might not even realize the magnitude of what has happened until it's too late. To avoid bitter resentment, arguments or feelings of being railroaded, however, make the scenario plausible while still being inescapable. If you like, you can even give astute or investigative characters a glimpse that makes it appear like some larger vampiric power(s) might be manipulating events... to ensure discovery of the Kindred? But who would benefit from such open violation of the Masquerade and the terrible war that is sure to follow?

Who, indeed.

IN THE WRONG HANDS

The mortal with the camera shows her footage to a local TV news team. They have experts look for evidence of camera tricks while a reporter tries to find the identities of the characters. Did any character have a driver's license, a criminal record or any incident in his past that left his picture in government files? Unless special steps have been taken, the reporter finds the character's identity. If the character keeps a legally recorded residence, the reporter finds that too. If the character is legally dead, the reporter finds that data even more interesting. Perhaps the reporter follows the characters and sees them interacting with other vampires in your setting, thus tying them into this growing conspiracy as well.

Soon after, the news team knows the identities and has investigated the paper trails of at least some of the characters. The film goes on the national six o'clock news (not to mention the Internet), and from there, there's no going back. Too many mortals have seen the footage to all be dominated or intimidated into silence. Within another week,



the characters become internationally notorious. Their footage is being downloaded daily on multiple sites across the Internet. The cops might want to arrest them for any violent acts in the footage. Scientists want to study their unexplained powers, or at least make a name by tying themselves to this media circus. The characters may need to evade everyone from the FBI to the Centers for Disease Control. Their elders and superiors will be clamoring to hush up the incident, using whatever resources they have to spare. More important events take up their attention soon enough, however.

FULL DISCLOSURE

Inevitably, some other Kindred breaks his silence on the matter. If the players' characters escape the hunt, some other Cainite decides he wants to be famous on television by telling everything. (Maybe he even wants a book deal for this interview.) Perhaps some younger and more rebellious vampires take advantage of situation to finally blow the lid off the game of their elders once and for all. They begin talking to as many different parts of the media as possible, spreading the word far too quickly to stop all the leaks. The small tear in the Masquerade quickly becomes a jagged gash. The names of clans are being openly discussed by fascinated mortals on television talk shows and in office cubicles across the country.

UNLIVES OF THE RICH AND FAMOUS

If you desire to delay the impending conflict and bloodshed somewhat, simply have a few more "photogenic" Kindred come forward and speak on behalf of vampire society. Those who achieved fame in life as artists, generals, statesmen and the like are good candidates, though really any older Kindred can become a celebrity as a "living history" specimen for social scientists to study. This is a time for socially adept and manipulative characters to shine. Unrestricted by the need to operate in secrecy, they can negotiate all manner of deals and enjoy their newfound status in public, at least for a time. Indeed, it might even seem as though a lasting peaceful concord between vampires and mortals might be possible, and some Cainites dare to think that the Masquerade's end might not doom the Kindred after all. It's not true, at least not if the timeline of this scenario is to be followed, but it's a pleasant fiction for the characters nonetheless.

STRIKE A MATCH

No matter what the initial reaction of the world might be, eventually someone will slip. Perhaps a Tzimisce haven, or the leftover corpse from a depraved Nosferatu feeding is uncovered. Maybe a Malkavian loses it on the air and attacks everyone in sight. The world is faced with the horror of what vampires really are. They aren't sexy actors leaning seductively against lampposts — they are monsters. What started as a media curiosity is quickly turned to fear and hostility.

Not every country declares war on Cainites, and even those that do differ widely in how well they fight. In the developed world, the Kindred face squads of soldiers armed with infrared scopes, night-vision goggles and high-powered weaponry. In many Third-World countries, corrupt governments and militaries prove laughably easy for Cainites to bribe or avoid. Most of the danger comes from poorly armed but numerous local militias, fervent and able to act during the day.

The extent to which this New Inquisition takes place in your setting is really up to you. The characters might be fighting for their unlivings on a nightly basis, or



they could be cleverly using these hastily put together hunting parties against their enemies by directing them elsewhere (just as their elders did the first time). Use what works best for your individual setting.

THE RISING OF THE ANCIENTS

The following events take place on a global scale. They can be used in your setting to give your players a front-row seat to the final battle of the Antediluvians. The Ancients clash with one another in the open now, sensing that some kind of end is near. What part your players take in these events is a challenge to your game. They can be there for the whole thing, or they might only have to deal with the ripples in their small corner of the world.

How long does the war between Kindred and kine last? Simply put, it lasts as long as the Storyteller and players find it interesting. If the players are having fun using their skills, resources and supernatural powers to simulate a large-scale conflict of this nature, by all means, let them enjoy themselves. If they are bored with warfare and logistics, however, feel free to step up the timetable a bit. After all, both sides have more than enough power to do so if they desire. In the end, no one ever knows whether the mortals could exterminate the Kindred before the undead rally and take complete control — greater powers decide the issue.

FIRST STRIKES

The deaths of so many Kindred resonate back to the Antediluvians, and before long, the Ancients begin to rise. All of the Ancients start by devouring many of their descendants, along with any other Kindred they can find. The Antediluvians are more than 10 millennia old. Only the blood of fellow vampires can sustain them, and only the vitae of Methuselahs can fully slake an Antediluvian's thirst.

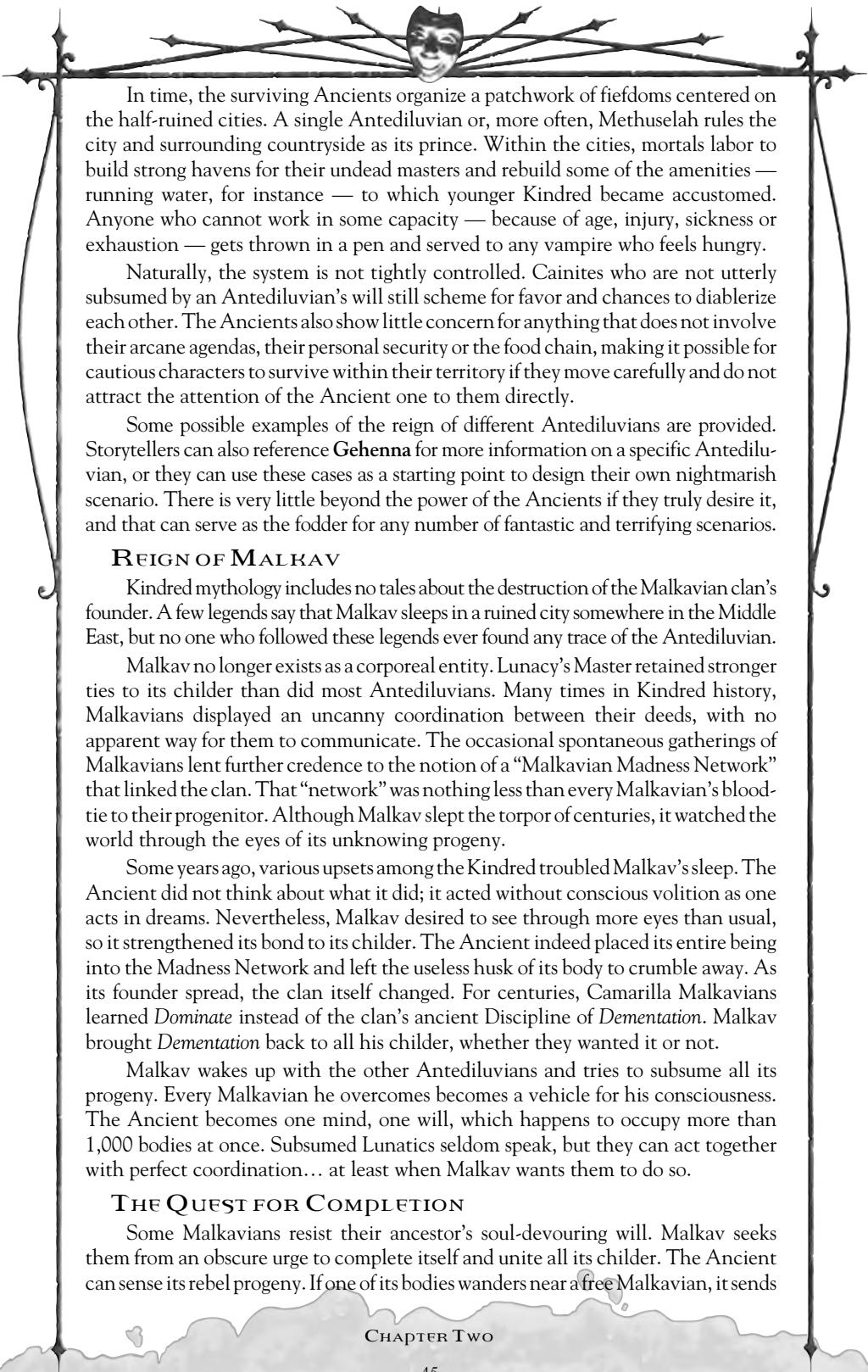
Once they are sated (at least for the moment), they turn their eye to humanity and begin conquering as they see fit, using their vast powers and legions of servants to summon up armies in the blink of an eye and lay claim over vast regions in mere months or weeks. Again, this conflict can last as long as the players find it interesting. If they submit immediately to avoid destruction, so be it, but if they wish to continue on as a guerrilla movement, give them time to continue their efforts.

The Withering affects the Ancients, at least somewhat, and renders their power less than what it might have been. This is good, at least for the characters, as it means that it is actually *conceivable* to stand against one of these beings, with sufficient power and preparation. They remain some of the mightiest creatures ever to walk the World of Darkness, however, and when their will is set, Kindred and kine fall before them like grain before the scythe.

If not for the elder Kindred's war to cripple the governments that hunt them, humanity might have won the fight. Reduced in power as they are, the Ancients cannot survive massed machine gun fire or thermite bombs fired from two miles away. The tattered mortal governments, however, can no longer muster such technologically advanced firepower. The soldiers destroy a few Methuselahs at first, but the Ancients quickly learn from their mistakes, and before long, any kind of significant human resistance is stamped out.

EMPIRES OF BLOOD

When the first Antediluvians begin their reign, the world looks very different from how it did just a year before.



In time, the surviving Ancients organize a patchwork of fiefdoms centered on the half-ruined cities. A single Antediluvian or, more often, Methuselah rules the city and surrounding countryside as its prince. Within the cities, mortals labor to build strong havens for their undead masters and rebuild some of the amenities — running water, for instance — to which younger Kindred became accustomed. Anyone who cannot work in some capacity — because of age, injury, sickness or exhaustion — gets thrown in a pen and served to any vampire who feels hungry.

Naturally, the system is not tightly controlled. Cainites who are not utterly subsumed by an Antediluvian's will still scheme for favor and chances to diablerize each other. The Ancients also show little concern for anything that does not involve their arcane agendas, their personal security or the food chain, making it possible for cautious characters to survive within their territory if they move carefully and do not attract the attention of the Ancient one to them directly.

Some possible examples of the reign of different Antediluvians are provided. Storytellers can also reference **Gehenna** for more information on a specific Antediluvian, or they can use these cases as a starting point to design their own nightmarish scenario. There is very little beyond the power of the Ancients if they truly desire it, and that can serve as the fodder for any number of fantastic and terrifying scenarios.

REIGN OF MALKAV

Kindred mythology includes no tales about the destruction of the Malkavian clan's founder. A few legends say that Malkav sleeps in a ruined city somewhere in the Middle East, but no one who followed these legends ever found any trace of the Antediluvian.

Malkav no longer exists as a corporeal entity. Lunacy's Master retained stronger ties to its childer than did most Antediluvians. Many times in Kindred history, Malkavians displayed an uncanny coordination between their deeds, with no apparent way for them to communicate. The occasional spontaneous gatherings of Malkavians lent further credence to the notion of a "Malkavian Madness Network" that linked the clan. That "network" was nothing less than every Malkavian's blood-tie to their progenitor. Although Malkav slept the torpor of centuries, it watched the world through the eyes of its unknowing progeny.

Some years ago, various upsets among the Kindred troubled Malkav's sleep. The Ancient did not think about what it did; it acted without conscious volition as one acts in dreams. Nevertheless, Malkav desired to see through more eyes than usual, so it strengthened its bond to its childer. The Ancient indeed placed its entire being into the Madness Network and left the useless husk of its body to crumble away. As its founder spread, the clan itself changed. For centuries, Camarilla Malkavians learned *Dominate* instead of the clan's ancient Discipline of *Dementation*. Malkav brought *Dementation* back to all his childer, whether they wanted it or not.

Malkav wakes up with the other Antediluvians and tries to subsume all its progeny. Every Malkavian he overcomes becomes a vehicle for his consciousness. The Ancient becomes one mind, one will, which happens to occupy more than 1,000 bodies at once. Subsumed Lunatics seldom speak, but they can act together with perfect coordination... at least when Malkav wants them to do so.

THE QUEST FOR COMPLETION

Some Malkavians resist their ancestor's soul-devouring will. Malkav seeks them from an obscure urge to complete itself and unite all its childer. The Ancient can sense its rebel progeny. If one of its bodies wanders near a free Malkavian, it sends



the body to confront the errant Lunatic and subsume it. For a free Malkavian, or anyone who learned *Dementation* or ever diablerized a Lunatic, any meeting with a subsumed Malkavian is a meeting with Malkav itself.

A subsumed Malkavian can approach a free Malkavian character whenever the Storyteller thinks it would make a good story. The Ancient might send one of its bodies hundreds or thousands of miles to collect a character. Malkav does not seek its childe in an efficient, organized manner, though, and he might miss a character completely.

An encounter with subsumed Malkavians should be a chilling experience. Some have gotten use to the idea that the Lunatics are harmless or even playful. Now however, they are of one ancient mind. Your Narrators might need to practice to gain this desired effect, perhaps memorizing certain phrases and practicing turning heads and madly grinning in complete unison. Malkav's direct influence comes and goes, but having a group of Lunatics suddenly snap to attention and turn their focus all to one player should be enough to unnerve even the most steel-willed Kindred.

A MADNESS FOR MORTALS

Malkav also draws mortals into its veil of madness. Like *Dementation*, this power acts without regard for the current strength of Caine's curse in a vampire. Malkav's mortal victims can work together, though, if the Ancient demands it. Indeed, Malkav's bodies often walk with a retinue of mortals who feed and serve it. When Malkav does not need its minions, these mortals howl and gibber, leap about, beat themselves or each other with sticks, feed, couple and sleep when they tire, like beasts. These "bacchantes" are something else the players can encounter on a smaller scale in their own setting. A mortal friend or relative might even become one of these cursed creatures, inspiring an effort to depose their raving master and find some way to restore them to sanity.

TRIUMPH OF LUCIDITY

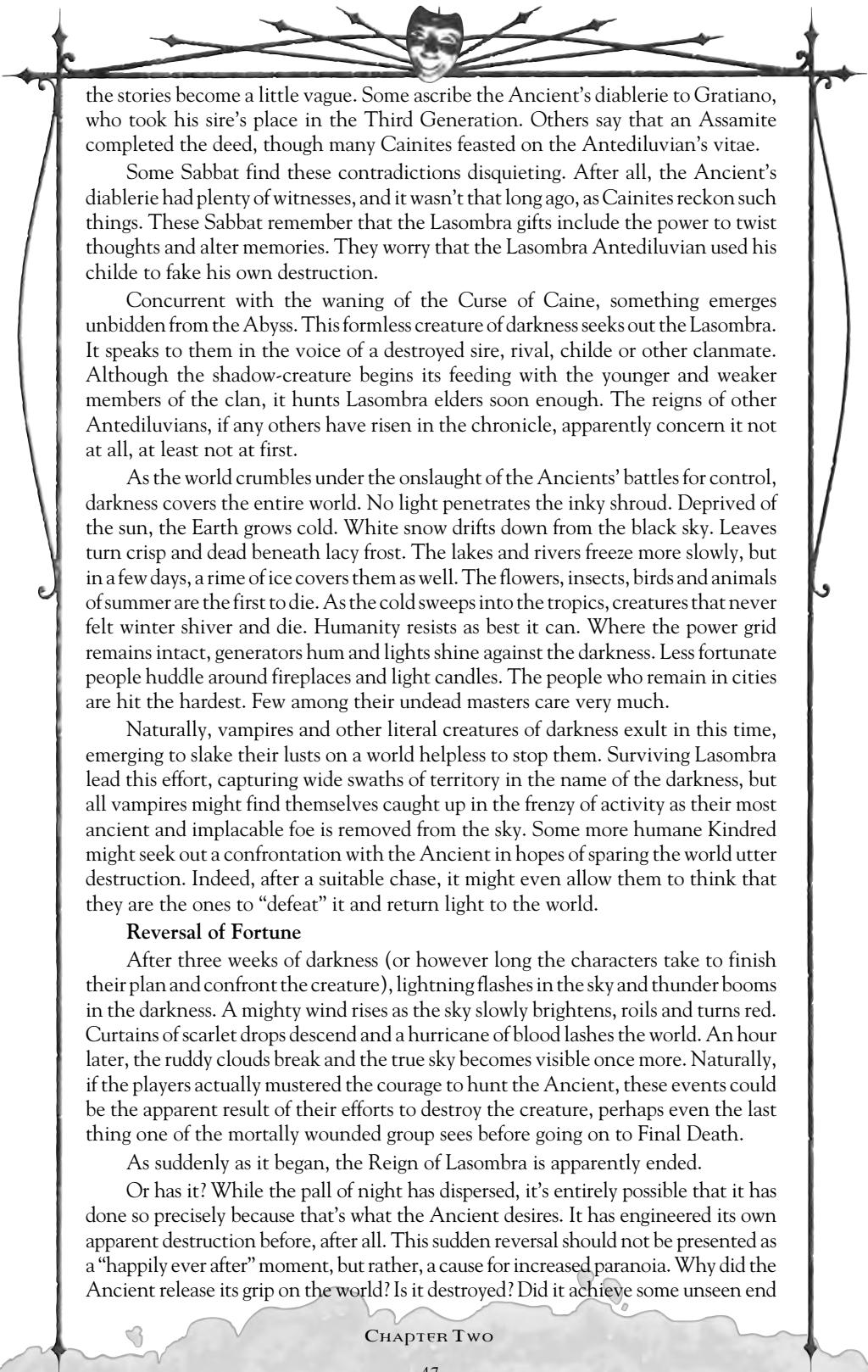
It's hard to imagine what could kill a multi-bodied psychic entity like Malkav. Nevertheless, it is possible, if the characters and their allies are clever and persistent — and perhaps just a little bit mad themselves. If they succeed, all Malkavians suffer from intense fratricidal madness and attempt to wipe each other out, apparently desperate to hide all remaining evidence of what Malkav has done.

Unless every single clan member is accounted for, however, a shadow of Malkav's hive-mind endures. Pockets of coordinated activity might remain for quite some time, requiring thorough cleansing to ensure that no more lunatic kings emerge in the dark corners of the world. Bands of bacchantes stay together as well, their minds permanently lost regardless of the outcome of the great battle. While truly potent Disciplines or inspired roleplaying might offer some hope to these poor souls, most are doomed to endless madness.

Truly sadistic Storytellers might even allow characters to believe they have ended the threat, only to have it begin festering anew in the cracks of sanity, slowly rebuilding once more...

REIGN OF LASOMBRA

For centuries, Lasombra vampires boasted of how they destroyed their clan's founder in the Anarch Revolt. Gratiano, the Antediluvian's youngest childe, led a strike force of Lasombra and Assamites into his sire's vast Sicilian fortress... and then



the stories become a little vague. Some ascribe the Ancient's diablerie to Gratiano, who took his sire's place in the Third Generation. Others say that an Assamite completed the deed, though many Cainites feasted on the Antediluvian's vitae.

Some Sabbat find these contradictions disquieting. After all, the Ancient's diablerie had plenty of witnesses, and it wasn't that long ago, as Cainites reckon such things. These Sabbat remember that the Lasombra gifts include the power to twist thoughts and alter memories. They worry that the Lasombra Antediluvian used his childe to fake his own destruction.

Concurrent with the waning of the Curse of Caine, something emerges unbidden from the Abyss. This formless creature of darkness seeks out the Lasombra. It speaks to them in the voice of a destroyed sire, rival, childe or other clanmate. Although the shadow-creature begins its feeding with the younger and weaker members of the clan, it hunts Lasombra elders soon enough. The reigns of other Antediluvians, if any others have risen in the chronicle, apparently concern it not at all, at least not at first.

As the world crumbles under the onslaught of the Ancients' battles for control, darkness covers the entire world. No light penetrates the inky shroud. Deprived of the sun, the Earth grows cold. White snow drifts down from the black sky. Leaves turn crisp and dead beneath lacy frost. The lakes and rivers freeze more slowly, but in a few days, a rime of ice covers them as well. The flowers, insects, birds and animals of summer are the first to die. As the cold sweeps into the tropics, creatures that never felt winter shiver and die. Humanity resists as best it can. Where the power grid remains intact, generators hum and lights shine against the darkness. Less fortunate people huddle around fireplaces and light candles. The people who remain in cities are hit the hardest. Few among their undead masters care very much.

Naturally, vampires and other literal creatures of darkness exult in this time, emerging to slake their lusts on a world helpless to stop them. Surviving Lasombra lead this effort, capturing wide swaths of territory in the name of the darkness, but all vampires might find themselves caught up in the frenzy of activity as their most ancient and implacable foe is removed from the sky. Some more humane Kindred might seek out a confrontation with the Ancient in hopes of sparing the world utter destruction. Indeed, after a suitable chase, it might even allow them to think that they are the ones to "defeat" it and return light to the world.

Reversal of Fortune

After three weeks of darkness (or however long the characters take to finish their plan and confront the creature), lightning flashes in the sky and thunder booms in the darkness. A mighty wind rises as the sky slowly brightens, roils and turns red. Curtains of scarlet drops descend and a hurricane of blood lashes the world. An hour later, the ruddy clouds break and the true sky becomes visible once more. Naturally, if the players actually mustered the courage to hunt the Ancient, these events could be the apparent result of their efforts to destroy the creature, perhaps even the last thing one of the mortally wounded group sees before going on to Final Death.

As suddenly as it began, the Reign of Lasombra is apparently ended.

Or has it? While the pall of night has dispersed, it's entirely possible that it has done so precisely because that's what the Ancient desires. It has engineered its own apparent destruction before, after all. This sudden reversal should not be presented as a "happily ever after" moment, but rather, a cause for increased paranoia. Why did the Ancient release its grip on the world? Is it destroyed? Did it achieve some unseen end



A STEADY DIET OF NOTHINGNESS

Lasombra characters might encounter the shadow-creature that their ancestor has become any time after Gehenna begins. The creature tries to absorb them just as other Antediluvians try to subsume their childer. Any being who is slain by the shadow-creature is immediately embraced by the Ancient's oozing shadows and utterly consumed, leaving no shred of physical evidence behind. It requires no test to hit unless the Storyteller feels it is dramatically appropriate to allow one, and it typically inflicts at least three health levels of aggravated damage per strike.

One can attack the shadow-creature, though most strikes do little good. The Ancient draws on the infinite power of the Abyss — nothing known to Cainites can destroy it. At best, characters can force it back to the Abyss by exposing the shadow-creature to true sunlight, or by attacking it with fire. At the Storyteller's discretion, more esoteric *Thaumaturgy* or obscure Paths might also have some effect. Indeed, finding a suitable "lost ritual" to harm the creature or send it back to the Abyss might make a good story to give the players hope when battling the Ancient. The creature vanishes and then dissipates once the total damage from whatever sunlight or fire effects the characters inflict upon it exceeds 20 health levels. The shadow-creature has more important things to do than strike back at feisty childer, so it will seek easier prey elsewhere. But it will remember...

in the time it blocked the sun, and let go because control was no longer necessary? Will it re-form and return from the Abyss in some new shape, or is it gone forever?

Even if the players believe they have successfully defeated the Ancient, a cunning Storyteller can keep them jumping at, well, shadows for quite some time, never quite sure whether the darkness is looking back.

REIGN OF GANGREL

Noddist legends name the Gangrel founder Ennoia, but as with all the Antediluvians, almost nothing is really known about the First Gangrel. Every student of Cainite myth agrees, however, that the Gangrel owe their unique aptitude for the *Protean Discipline* to their founder, who surely must have been its greatest master.

More than a millennium ago, Ennoia began her transformation from Cainite to something more. She sank into the earth, deeper than any other Cainite could imagine. She spread her substance further, thinner, touching the rocks at the roots of mountains and hearing the tolling of earthquakes.

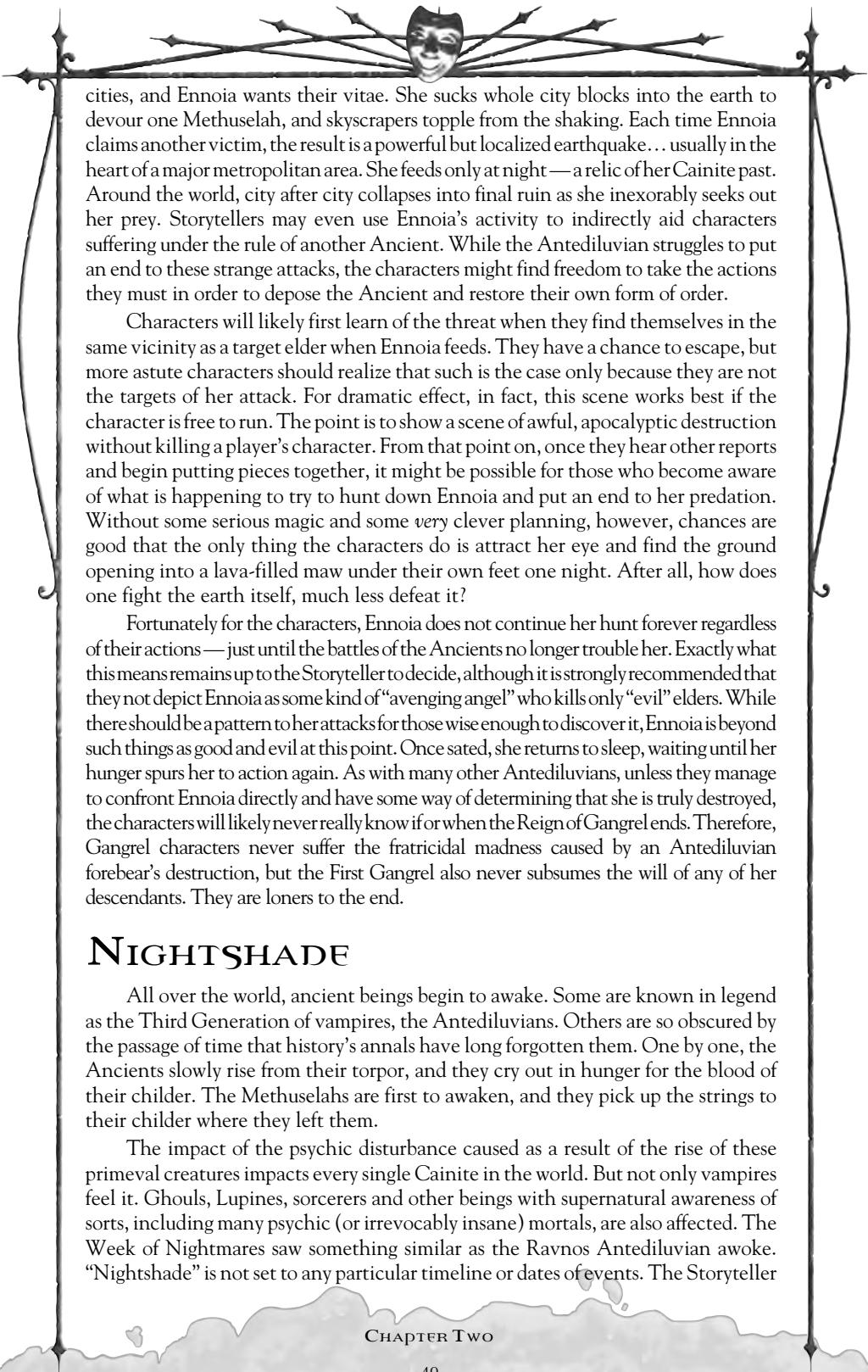
She sank deeper still, century after century, learning the slow dreams of the drifting continents and feeling the vast tides and currents that propel them. She sank into the realms where hot stone flows like water and was not burned; for *Fortitude* was another gift to her clan. She spread and sank until she reached the very heart of the planet.

Ennoia did not lose all her connection to the Cainite race, though. The battles of the Antediluvians and the ruination of their childer troubled the geologic dreams of Ennoia.

She woke up hungry.

THE DEVOURING EARTH

Best paired with a scenario involving the rising of at least one other Antediluvian, the Reign of Gangrel spells final doom for many would-be rulers. The Kindred, especially the remaining Methuselahs and Antediluvians, still dwell in the crumbling



cities, and Ennoia wants their vitae. She sucks whole city blocks into the earth to devour one Methuselah, and skyscrapers topple from the shaking. Each time Ennoia claims another victim, the result is a powerful but localized earthquake... usually in the heart of a major metropolitan area. She feeds only at night—a relic of her Cainite past. Around the world, city after city collapses into final ruin as she inexorably seeks out her prey. Storytellers may even use Ennoia's activity to indirectly aid characters suffering under the rule of another Ancient. While the Antediluvian struggles to put an end to these strange attacks, the characters might find freedom to take the actions they must in order to depose the Ancient and restore their own form of order.

Characters will likely first learn of the threat when they find themselves in the same vicinity as a target elder when Ennoia feeds. They have a chance to escape, but more astute characters should realize that such is the case only because they are not the targets of her attack. For dramatic effect, in fact, this scene works best if the character is free to run. The point is to show a scene of awful, apocalyptic destruction without killing a player's character. From that point on, once they hear other reports and begin putting pieces together, it might be possible for those who become aware of what is happening to try to hunt down Ennoia and put an end to her predation. Without some serious magic and some very clever planning, however, chances are good that the only thing the characters do is attract her eye and find the ground opening into a lava-filled maw under their own feet one night. After all, how does one fight the earth itself, much less defeat it?

Fortunately for the characters, Ennoia does not continue her hunt forever regardless of their actions—just until the battles of the Ancients no longer trouble her. Exactly what this means remains up to the Storyteller to decide, although it is strongly recommended that they not depict Ennoia as some kind of “avenging angel” who kills only “evil” elders. While there should be a pattern to her attacks for those wise enough to discover it, Ennoia is beyond such things as good and evil at this point. Once sated, she returns to sleep, waiting until her hunger spurs her to action again. As with many other Antediluvians, unless they manage to confront Ennoia directly and have some way of determining that she is truly destroyed, the characters will likely never really know if or when the Reign of Gangrel ends. Therefore, Gangrel characters never suffer the fratricidal madness caused by an Antediluvian forebear’s destruction, but the First Gangrel also never subsumes the will of any of her descendants. They are loners to the end.

NIGHTSHADE

All over the world, ancient beings begin to awake. Some are known in legend as the Third Generation of vampires, the Antediluvians. Others are so obscured by the passage of time that history’s annals have long forgotten them. One by one, the Ancients slowly rise from their torpor, and they cry out in hunger for the blood of their childer. The Methuselahs are first to awaken, and they pick up the strings to their childer where they left them.

The impact of the psychic disturbance caused as a result of the rise of these primeval creatures impacts every single Cainite in the world. But not only vampires feel it. Ghouls, Lupines, sorcerers and other beings with supernatural awareness of sorts, including many psychic (or irrevocably insane) mortals, are also affected. The Week of Nightmares saw something similar as the Ravnos Antediluvian awoke. “Nightshade” is not set to any particular timeline or dates of events. The Storyteller



can advance the story in the time it takes the characters to do what they need, so that she can run the scenario to fit whatever prearranged plans she has, as with a plan to use this scenario as the end to a long-running chronicle.

Unlike “Crucible of God,” which deals largely with struggling under the reign of the Antediluvians, “Nightshade” focuses more on one particular arc of desperation, redemption and triumph. While elements of the two scenarios can certainly be combined, it is best to remember that one is more focused on the world and global events, while the other ultimately boils down to a willingness to make right what has been wrong for so very long.

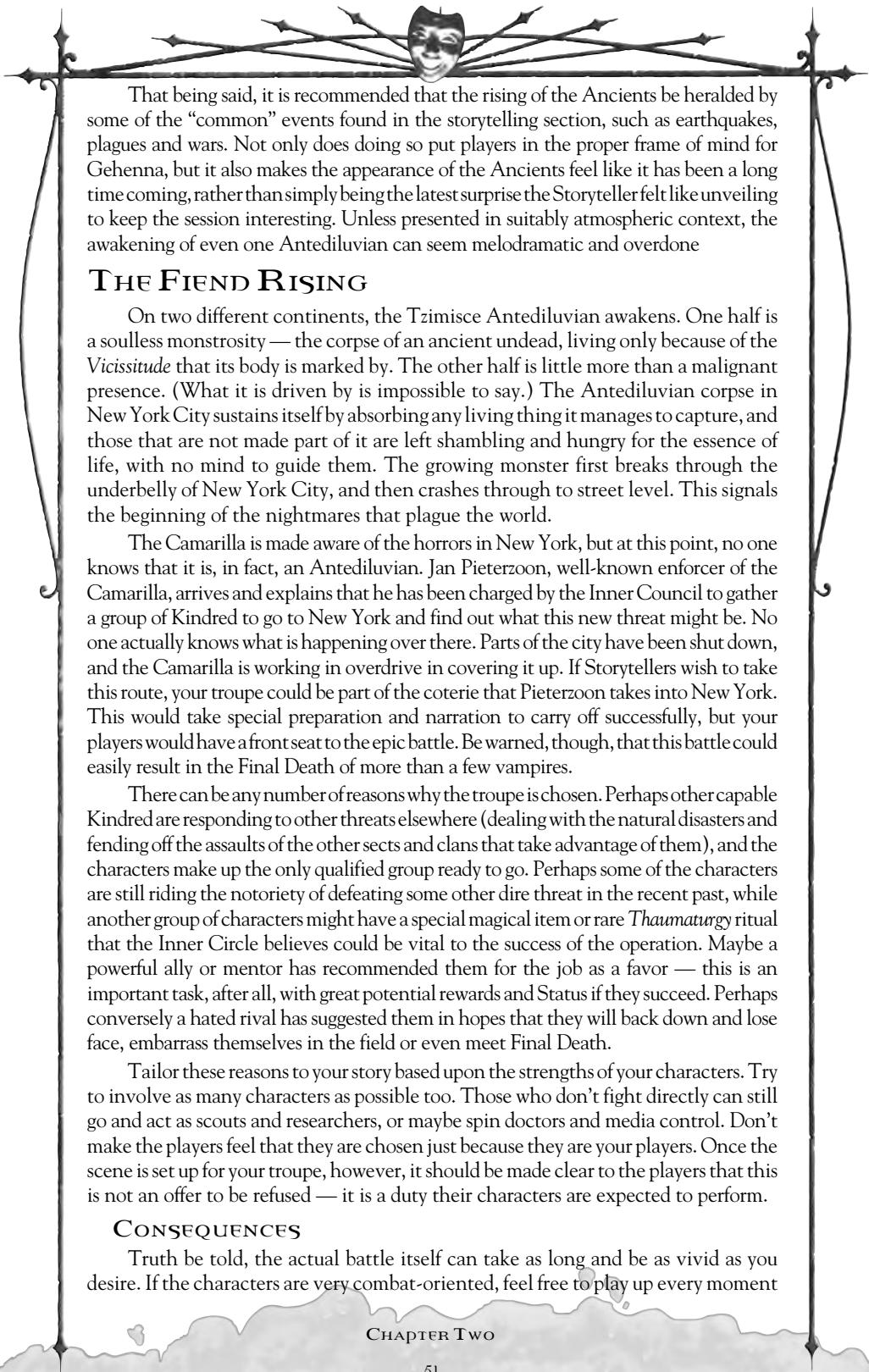
AROUND THE WORLD BY NIGHT

The events of this vision of Gehenna take the characters to exotic locations to meet powerful and potent creatures of the night (and kill quite a few of them). As a Storyteller you may be asking yourself, “Am I going to have to narrate my entire story as the characters trot around the globe? How do I handle these events that are taking place in regard to my chronicle’s hometown with my players?” Don’t panic. For one thing, even if some of the events take place on a global scale and are not centered around your chronicle’s events, their echoes will be felt no matter where your players are. Not everything needs to land on their doorstep for it to be part of this scenario. If they do go to chase after it, do your best to portray the variety of settings and Narrator characters as well as possible, potentially holding such trips as side sessions before calling the characters back to their home city again for the regular game. This can be a great roleplaying opportunity if the characters wind up splitting into several different “hunting teams” and going after different targets. Even just seeing who survived to make it back to the city at the next game can be a powerful roleplaying lure.

If that’s not your speed, it’s very easy to tailor some of the global events of this scenario so that one or two are centered around your setting, putting your players on the world stage before they can prepare for it, playing hosts to history. Even just one of the major events of this scenario can be more than enough for a city of Kindred to handle. Combined with other terrifying events going on in the background, a true sense of the panic and confusion of the End Times is easy to create. After all, while the scenario as written involves hunting down several Antediluvians, there’s no reason your entire endgame couldn’t involve the characters trying to take down a single Ancient that has arisen in their general vicinity. (It’s not like one Antediluvian and its minions can’t cause more than enough trouble to pose a long-running, multi-level threat to even a high-powered chronicle, after all!) As always, take what you find here and tailor it to your own chronicle.

GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

A Storyteller can involve the troupe in “Nightshade” in many different ways. While the story has been written for Camarilla-based chronicles first and foremost, this is only by default. Given the nature of the events of this scenario and the implications it has for all vampires — indeed, the entire world — it shouldn’t be too difficult to involve the Sabbat, or even the most standoffish independent clans and apathetic anarchs. An equally esteemed leader from the other sects can replace Pieterzoon — be it a Narrator character unique to the game or a more established character such as Sascha Vykos for the Sabbat or Jeremy MacNeil for the anarchs.



That being said, it is recommended that the rising of the Ancients be heralded by some of the “common” events found in the storytelling section, such as earthquakes, plagues and wars. Not only does doing so put players in the proper frame of mind for Gehenna, but it also makes the appearance of the Ancients feel like it has been a long time coming, rather than simply being the latest surprise the Storyteller felt like unveiling to keep the session interesting. Unless presented in suitably atmospheric context, the awakening of even one Antediluvian can seem melodramatic and overdone.

THE FIEND RISING

On two different continents, the Tzimisce Antediluvian awakens. One half is a soulless monstrosity — the corpse of an ancient undead, living only because of the *Vicissitude* that its body is marked by. The other half is little more than a malignant presence. (What it is driven by is impossible to say.) The Antediluvian corpse in New York City sustains itself by absorbing any living thing it manages to capture, and those that are not made part of it are left shambling and hungry for the essence of life, with no mind to guide them. The growing monster first breaks through the underbelly of New York City, and then crashes through to street level. This signals the beginning of the nightmares that plague the world.

The Camarilla is made aware of the horrors in New York, but at this point, no one knows that it is, in fact, an Antediluvian. Jan Pieterzoon, well-known enforcer of the Camarilla, arrives and explains that he has been charged by the Inner Council to gather a group of Kindred to go to New York and find out what this new threat might be. No one actually knows what is happening over there. Parts of the city have been shut down, and the Camarilla is working in overdrive in covering it up. If Storytellers wish to take this route, your troupe could be part of the coterie that Pieterzoon takes into New York. This would take special preparation and narration to carry off successfully, but your players would have a front seat to the epic battle. Be warned, though, that this battle could easily result in the Final Death of more than a few vampires.

There can be any number of reasons why the troupe is chosen. Perhaps other capable Kindred are responding to other threats elsewhere (dealing with the natural disasters and fending off the assaults of the other sects and clans that take advantage of them), and the characters make up the only qualified group ready to go. Perhaps some of the characters are still riding the notoriety of defeating some other dire threat in the recent past, while another group of characters might have a special magical item or rare *Thaumaturgy* ritual that the Inner Circle believes could be vital to the success of the operation. Maybe a powerful ally or mentor has recommended them for the job as a favor — this is an important task, after all, with great potential rewards and Status if they succeed. Perhaps conversely a hated rival has suggested them in hopes that they will back down and lose face, embarrass themselves in the field or even meet Final Death.

Tailor these reasons to your story based upon the strengths of your characters. Try to involve as many characters as possible too. Those who don’t fight directly can still go and act as scouts and researchers, or maybe spin doctors and media control. Don’t make the players feel that they are chosen just because they are your players. Once the scene is set up for your troupe, however, it should be made clear to the players that this is not an offer to be refused — it is a duty their characters are expected to perform.

CONSEQUENCES

Truth be told, the actual battle itself can take as long and be as vivid as you desire. If the characters are very combat-oriented, feel free to play up every moment



of the melee, but if they're more interested in this as a political opportunity, you can play down the blow-by-blow somewhat. Make no mistake, it should be a hard and horrifying fight, as they are essentially fighting a giant entity of liquid flesh with the power to change shape at will and absorb others into itself whole to replenish itself. It is essentially mindless, though, so it is vulnerable to good strategy — not to mention strong Disciplines and heavy firepower.

As Pieterzoon and the surviving characters stagger through Manhattan afterward, wounded and tired, with a mere hour before the sun rises, they start noticing the crowds that have gathered at different places through the city. And above them hang the big screens of Times Square, showing what the coterie has just been through, on CNN's continuous broadcast. They see themselves at the heights of their Discipline usage, frantically using every last bit of their vampiric powers as they struggle to defeat the monster. This is one surreal scene, and it should be described in painstaking detail. These vampires are responsible for breaking the Masquerade on a worldwide scale.

The world has watched as frenzied vampires have battled an unspeakable evil on the streets of New York at night. The Masquerade is broken — no, beyond broken, it is shattered into fine dust on the wind. Camarilla elders from all over the world race to New York to try to fix the damage, but it is too late. All the Influence on Earth cannot take back what the world has seen.

NATIONS IN FLUX

Governments around the world respond quickly to the information. When it becomes obvious that they won't be able to dismiss this as a hoax, most begin an aggressive command-and-control strategy to "contain the undead threat." In the United States and across most of Europe, emergency laws are passed requiring vampires to register with the authorities or face arrest and possible destruction. Those who resist are summarily hunted and destroyed with all the power the government can muster. Initial confrontations favor the Kindred, but the mortals learn quickly, and with the strength of numbers and technology behind them, the tide quickly turns to the point where even the most powerful undead must run and hide rather than risk an open fight.

This wave of global change is not so much a single scene as a series of events played out over a few panicked sessions. At least a few of the more brazen or incautious characters (not to mention any who went with Pieterzoon) should face the intense scrutiny of the new hunting agencies, while others might have a chance to use their Influences and other Backgrounds to try to keep their own city from turning into a deathtrap. While they might not be able to restore the Masquerade on a global scale, they shouldn't feel nearly as powerless on a local level. Many other events can be related to your players through in-character downtime, especially news updates or word of distant hunts.

Don't drag this time out so long that the players grow tired of always running and hiding, but make sure that the full weight of what has happened sinks in. The world has *changed*, and that shouldn't be a casual thing. After all, it's likely that at least a few of the characters went with Jan on that fateful mission, and becoming the first people in the world famed for their vampirism should offer a number of interesting roleplaying opportunities.

REVELATION

If your characters were with Pieterzoon, then the following scene is something that the troupe should actively take part in. Otherwise, your characters should hear about what has taken place through fellow vampires.



Pieterzoon and those with him in New York are summoned to a Camarilla safe house, where it is revealed that the Antediluvians are, in fact, rising once again. Pieterzoon is furious at the revelation that was kept from him and most of the Camarilla, but he is resolved to oppose these ancient undead even at this late hour. He storms out of the meeting, swearing to make right the lie he has believed for so long.

CONVENTION OF FIRE

Cainites from all over the world begin arriving for the Convention of Fire that Jan has called. If the characters went with him to New York, he might even call the convention in their city, since facing the same judgment is likely to have made them allies if not exactly good friends. For the time being at least, it would seem that Pieterzoon's convention is the one collective with the most control over its subjects. It accepts only those who display a true commitment to breaking the hold of the Camarilla and the Sabbat, learning the truth and saving the world from the Ancients. Obviously, it's no easy task dividing those who are in it only to save their skin from those with true commitment, but most seem to work together, with only minor discrepancies.

This radical sub-sect of the Camarilla is to be administered by a council of 12 vampires, and Pieterzoon, its leader. Pieterzoon is a very just and righteous Cainite, and it is generally agreed upon that he will make a fit leader. Rest assured that he will only make executive decisions whenever the council is unable to reach an agreement, and that the council is in effect the main body of management.

Pieterzoon's suggestion for a name for the sect is the Nephtali, which has Biblical significance and literally means "the highest point" or "no further," used in prohibiting an advance or encroachment. In this sense, Pieterzoon intends it as a pointed reference to how Gehenna shall be stopped, allowed no longer.

RETURN OF THE DRAGON

In Europe, the newly formed Nephtali sub-sect receives a visitor — Etrius, the childe of Tremere, and one-time member of the Tremere Council of Seven. He bears the news that some time ago, the body of Tremere himself, having lain dormant in the crypts beneath the clan's Vienna chantry, disappeared. No one knew where it might have gone, but most are certain that the Founder himself was not behind the disappearance. A massive search was undertaken, proving fruitless, and an imminent crisis could have been at hand. Then, a few nights ago, the body of Tremere reappeared on the doorstep of the chantry. First there was rejoicing, for the Warlocks thought that their Founder had returned. They were very wrong.

The being in the form of Tremere went rampant, calling on powers beyond any that were familiar to the Tremere, and it killed all the members of the chantry without discrimination. Only Etrius managed to flee to relative safety, but only after learning what was happening. The being occupying the body of Tremere was none other than the Tzimisce Antediluvian, having somehow "materialized" in Tremere's body. After killing all Tremere, and most likely many other vampires in Vienna, it left a trail of death and terror behind, moving toward the clan's head Transylvanian chantry of the Tremere, Ceoris. Etrius followed it part of the way, but as it started to warp and transform into something best described as a giant, dragon-like monster, he finally lost his nerve and escaped to seek help. No matter what the characters might feel about the Tremere or the Tzimisce in general, this situation seems fairly clear-cut. The beast must be stopped before it gains whatever additional power it is seeking in the chantry and becomes effectively unkillable.



Even if your characters are not there to witness the eventual confrontation, the effects of it can be felt elsewhere. Characters of Tremere and Tzimisce blood will be caught in the conflict of their founders. Should any of your players' characters be of either of these bloodlines, they will be forced to make *Self-Control/Instinct* Challenges once every hour for the night of the conflict. Success means that they can resist the urges to violence they are channeling through their respective Antediluvians. Failure means that they will immediately seek out any members of the opposing clan and attempt to destroy them by any means. Spending a Willpower Trait allows a character to resist this urge for one hour. This blood haze will continue until the following day, when both Antediluvians are dead.

Even those who remain at home are not spared part of the horror — they will have to hold their city together as Tremere and Tzimisce alike rampage through the streets, caught up in the bloodlust of their founders. Sabbat war parties may try to take advantage of the rage of their pack mates and call upon former Camarilla cities. Anyone who had a grudge against either clan will most likely also use this time to take revenge.

...AND THERE SHALL COME A SAVIOR

Not long after the Tremere and Tzimisce destroy each other, a strange collection of artifacts comes into the possession of the Nephtali — a number of black stones inscribed with strange runes that seem to speak of the history of the Children of Caine from the beginning all the way through the current disaster. After careful consideration, it is concluded that the stones of Enoch speak of one of the Thirteen accepting the burden of all Children of Caine, saving them from the fires of Purgatory and the wrath of God. The “gentle one” as it is called, will die at the hands of another but rise again in a form marked by the End Times, without memory. Those who would stand against the end will bring him forth, and he will eventually save everyone.

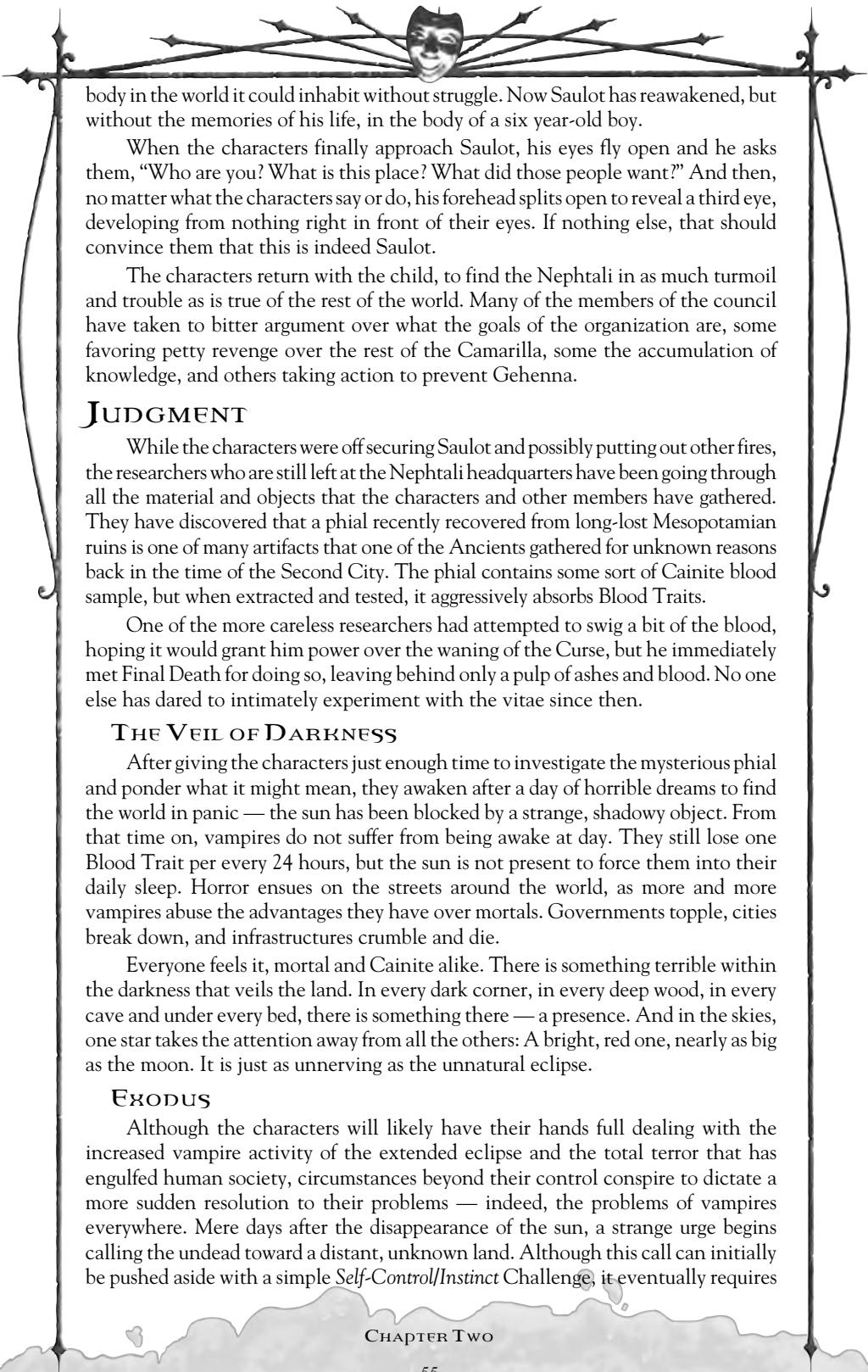
Whatever sense the characters themselves get from this, Noddists can lend light to some parts of the fragment. The “gentle one” is a reference to Saulot, the mysterious progenitor of the now-extinct Salubri bloodline. Those who would stand against the end could easily be a prediction of the Nephtali, and, by extension, the characters.

Etrius of the Tremere undertakes the task of locating Saulot’s current resting place if none of the characters are especially skilled in *Thaumaturgy*. The ritual first performed over a map of the world, and substituted with more detailed region maps as it advances, allowing them to find a fairly good match. Starting out with an atlas and moving on to satellite photographs ultimately obtains a match: an isolated research center outside Sydney, Australia.

REBIRTH

Traveling to the research center should be fairly straightforward, and as they approach, the characters notice that it has been abandoned and locked down, apparently for months. The search should not be very long, but after a while the characters find a confined, restricted area. They don’t need to force their way inside, though — it is open. A quick search turns up a separated room housing a sleeping child, but this sleep is clearly not natural. The records explain that although the child displayed every sign of being in good physical shape, it has been comatose from birth.

The child possesses the soul of Saulot, who unknowingly possessed this form after he became incorporeal when the Dragon assumed his borrowed form. When his awakened self was rendered unconscious from the blow, his powerful soul subconsciously hurled itself through the vast space of the spiritual realm, to the only suitable



body in the world it could inhabit without struggle. Now Saulot has reawakened, but without the memories of his life, in the body of a six year-old boy.

When the characters finally approach Saulot, his eyes fly open and he asks them, "Who are you? What is this place? What did those people want?" And then, no matter what the characters say or do, his forehead splits open to reveal a third eye, developing from nothing right in front of their eyes. If nothing else, that should convince them that this is indeed Saulot.

The characters return with the child, to find the Nephtali in as much turmoil and trouble as is true of the rest of the world. Many of the members of the council have taken to bitter argument over what the goals of the organization are, some favoring petty revenge over the rest of the Camarilla, some the accumulation of knowledge, and others taking action to prevent Gehenna.

JUDGMENT

While the characters were off securing Saulot and possibly putting out other fires, the researchers who are still left at the Nephtali headquarters have been going through all the material and objects that the characters and other members have gathered. They have discovered that a phial recently recovered from long-lost Mesopotamian ruins is one of many artifacts that one of the Ancients gathered for unknown reasons back in the time of the Second City. The phial contains some sort of Cainite blood sample, but when extracted and tested, it aggressively absorbs Blood Traits.

One of the more careless researchers had attempted to swig a bit of the blood, hoping it would grant him power over the waning of the Curse, but he immediately met Final Death for doing so, leaving behind only a pulp of ashes and blood. No one else has dared to intimately experiment with the vitae since then.

THE VEIL OF DARKNESS

After giving the characters just enough time to investigate the mysterious phial and ponder what it might mean, they awaken after a day of horrible dreams to find the world in panic — the sun has been blocked by a strange, shadowy object. From that time on, vampires do not suffer from being awake at day. They still lose one Blood Trait per every 24 hours, but the sun is not present to force them into their daily sleep. Horror ensues on the streets around the world, as more and more vampires abuse the advantages they have over mortals. Governments topple, cities break down, and infrastructures crumble and die.

Everyone feels it, mortal and Cainite alike. There is something terrible within the darkness that veils the land. In every dark corner, in every deep wood, in every cave and under every bed, there is something there — a presence. And in the skies, one star takes the attention away from all the others: A bright, red one, nearly as big as the moon. It is just as unnerving as the unnatural eclipse.

EXODUS

Although the characters will likely have their hands full dealing with the increased vampire activity of the extended eclipse and the total terror that has engulfed human society, circumstances beyond their control conspire to dictate a more sudden resolution to their problems — indeed, the problems of vampires everywhere. Mere days after the disappearance of the sun, a strange urge begins calling the undead toward a distant, unknown land. Although this call can initially be pushed aside with a simple *Self-Control/Instinct Challenge*, it eventually requires



a Willpower Trait per night until the Kindred finally runs out of Willpower or chooses to submit to the urge.

This is the final stage of the End Times. Now the Ancients have gathered at Gehenna and are calling their childer to them.

GEHENNA, THE LAST CITY

“Gehenna” is synonymous with “Place of Torment.” Strictly geographically speaking, it is the Valley of Hinnom, southwest of Jerusalem. During the weeks following the destruction of the Masquerade, elder vampires started gathering around this place, offering their childer as sacrifices in the hope that the Antediluvians would spare them. They dared not diablerize these victims, instead releasing their souls through fire. The pits have burned continuously day and night as countless vampires meet fiery Final Deaths. All night long, the sounds of the lamentation of these elders and the screams of their childer have endured. All day no sound but the crackling fires being maintained by mortal retainers could be heard.

Here the Antediluvians have come, casting down their would-be appeasers without pity or remorse while assuming the mantle of power that they once held. They have taken residence in the citadel, as it is still being constructed. They hold a precious truce with each other, gathering their underlings to them, waiting in patience as they build their reign of terror. From here they shall rule for a thousand years, for so it is written in *The Book of Nod*.

And then Caine shall return to lay down his judgment.

ARMIES OF DARKNESS

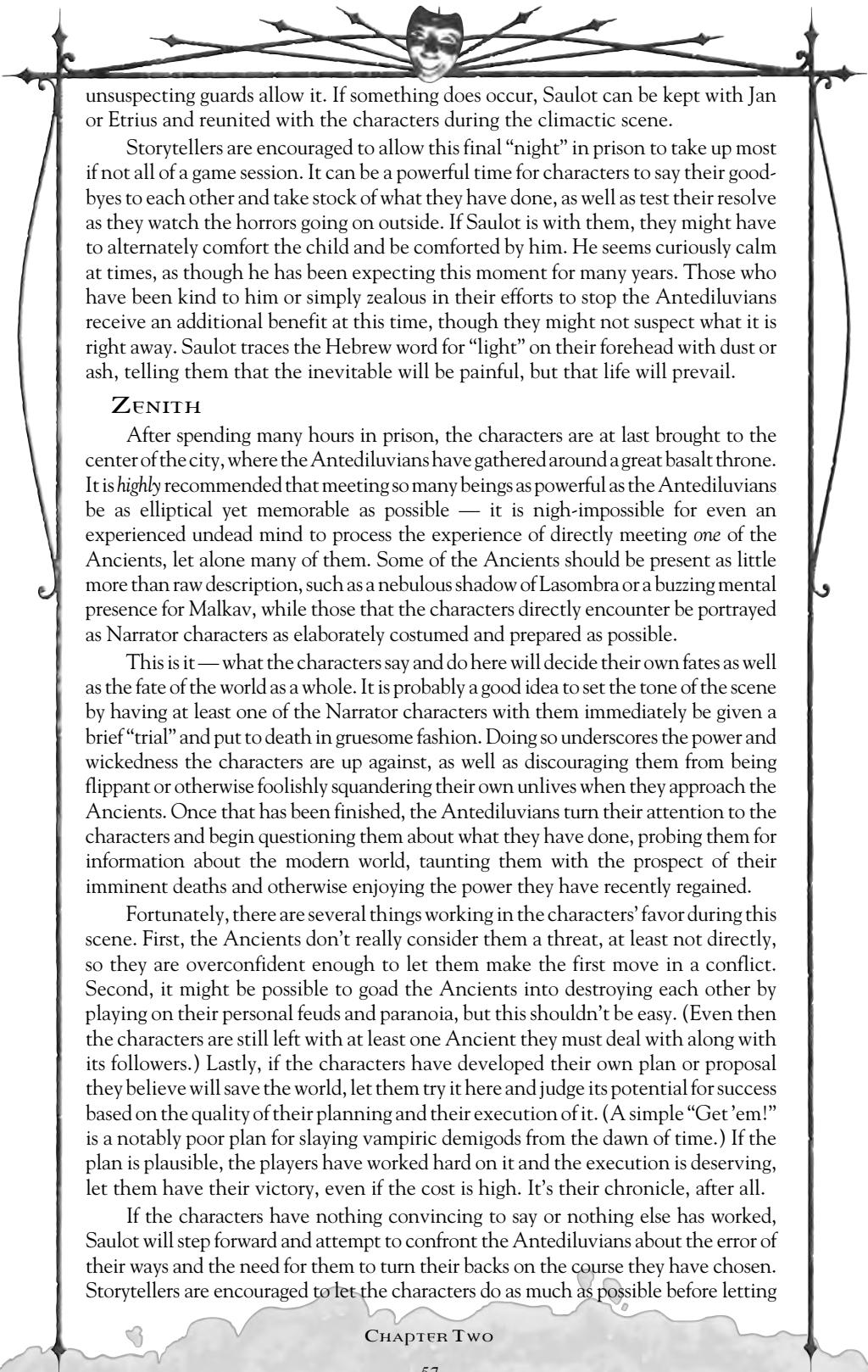
The Antediluvians have stopped their childer from destroying their younger. Instead, they have ordered more vampires to be created, to make their armies larger, to better rule the world. It should be pointed out that the Antediluvians are all mad, and that they do not consider the consequences of what they are doing. In addition, this is not their world. They see nothing wrong with reshaping it into what will be their reign.

In truth, though, one can safely assume that each Antediluvian has its own plans of conquest and dominion. Each wishes the others dead so that it can rule alone, and to that end, each amasses an army of undead, ostensibly to conquer the world, but also to check the power of and ultimately destroy its siblings. It is into this terrible place that the characters must eventually travel, drawn by the power of those whose blood made their own unlife possible so long ago. And they know they will come as criminals, those who would defy the Ancients and seek to undo them, and that they can expect little mercy for their “crimes” against the founders.

They also possess two secrets the Antediluvians have not counted on, however, which could be the undoing of the Ancients—a phial of ancient vitae and Saulot reborn. If none of the characters realize that bringing both of those things might do something to even the odds, have Etrius or another prominent Narrator character suggest it.

LAST RITES

Upon arrival, the characters and any others who have worked against the Antediluvians in the past are led through the streets of the Last City as criminals. All around them swirl groups of other Kindred and Cainites who have sworn to serve the Antediluvians, watching them mostly in silence, with the occasional insult or thrown object the only measure of their attention. The characters are thrown into a cell by themselves. They should have to do some last-minute explaining to be allowed to keep Saulot with them, but unless they botch things horribly the



unsuspecting guards allow it. If something does occur, Saulot can be kept with Jan or Etrius and reunited with the characters during the climactic scene.

Storytellers are encouraged to allow this final “night” in prison to take up most if not all of a game session. It can be a powerful time for characters to say their goodbyes to each other and take stock of what they have done, as well as test their resolve as they watch the horrors going on outside. If Saulot is with them, they might have to alternately comfort the child and be comforted by him. He seems curiously calm at times, as though he has been expecting this moment for many years. Those who have been kind to him or simply zealous in their efforts to stop the Antediluvians receive an additional benefit at this time, though they might not suspect what it is right away. Saulot traces the Hebrew word for “light” on their forehead with dust or ash, telling them that the inevitable will be painful, but that life will prevail.

ZENITH

After spending many hours in prison, the characters are at last brought to the center of the city, where the Antediluvians have gathered around a great basalt throne. It is highly recommended that meeting so many beings as powerful as the Antediluvians be as elliptical yet memorable as possible — it is nigh-impossible for even an experienced undead mind to process the experience of directly meeting one of the Ancients, let alone many of them. Some of the Ancients should be present as little more than raw description, such as a nebulous shadow of Lasombra or a buzzing mental presence for Malkav, while those that the characters directly encounter be portrayed as Narrator characters as elaborately costumed and prepared as possible.

This is it — what the characters say and do here will decide their own fates as well as the fate of the world as a whole. It is probably a good idea to set the tone of the scene by having at least one of the Narrator characters with them immediately be given a brief “trial” and put to death in gruesome fashion. Doing so underscores the power and wickedness the characters are up against, as well as discouraging them from being flippant or otherwise foolishly squandering their own unlives when they approach the Ancients. Once that has been finished, the Antediluvians turn their attention to the characters and begin questioning them about what they have done, probing them for information about the modern world, taunting them with the prospect of their imminent deaths and otherwise enjoying the power they have recently regained.

Fortunately, there are several things working in the characters’ favor during this scene. First, the Ancients don’t really consider them a threat, at least not directly, so they are overconfident enough to let them make the first move in a conflict. Second, it might be possible to goad the Ancients into destroying each other by playing on their personal feuds and paranoia, but this shouldn’t be easy. (Even then the characters are still left with at least one Ancient they must deal with along with its followers.) Lastly, if the characters have developed their own plan or proposal they believe will save the world, let them try it here and judge its potential for success based on the quality of their planning and their execution of it. (A simple “Get ‘em!” is a notably poor plan for slaying vampiric demigods from the dawn of time.) If the plan is plausible, the players have worked hard on it and the execution is deserving, let them have their victory, even if the cost is high. It’s their chronicle, after all.

If the characters have nothing convincing to say or nothing else has worked, Saulot will step forward and attempt to confront the Antediluvians about the error of their ways and the need for them to turn their backs on the course they have chosen. Storytellers are encouraged to let the characters do as much as possible before letting



Saulot take center stage, however. After all, watching Narrators duke it out for the big finish robs the players of their role as the center of the chronicle. While the debate goes on, Etrius or another learned character leans over and suggests using the phial. Saulot sadly agrees with this plan, having hoped the Ancients would see salvation on their own, but he tells the characters that this victory will not come cheaply. At least one of them must drink the vitae within, and suffer the consequences.

If no one volunteers, Saulot will do it, although most characters should definitely lose a Humanity Trait for dooming a small child to a painful death. He (or some other) strides forward and drinks the contents of the phial as the Ancients watch, stunned, recognizing too late what the characters have brought with them. Those who drink the vitae are immediately wracked with horrible pain and convulsions, but before the Ancients can do much to react, a shaft of sunlight pierces the sky and illuminates the area, causing pain and fear but not true damage to all present, including the Antediluvians. A presence that is at once a deity, a voice and a thunderclap enters the minds of those who drank from the phial, asking if they are willing to atone for the cursed Children of Caine. If they respond in the affirmative, events proceed as outlined here. If they respond in the negative, they are burned to ash but Saulot's answer will save the world.

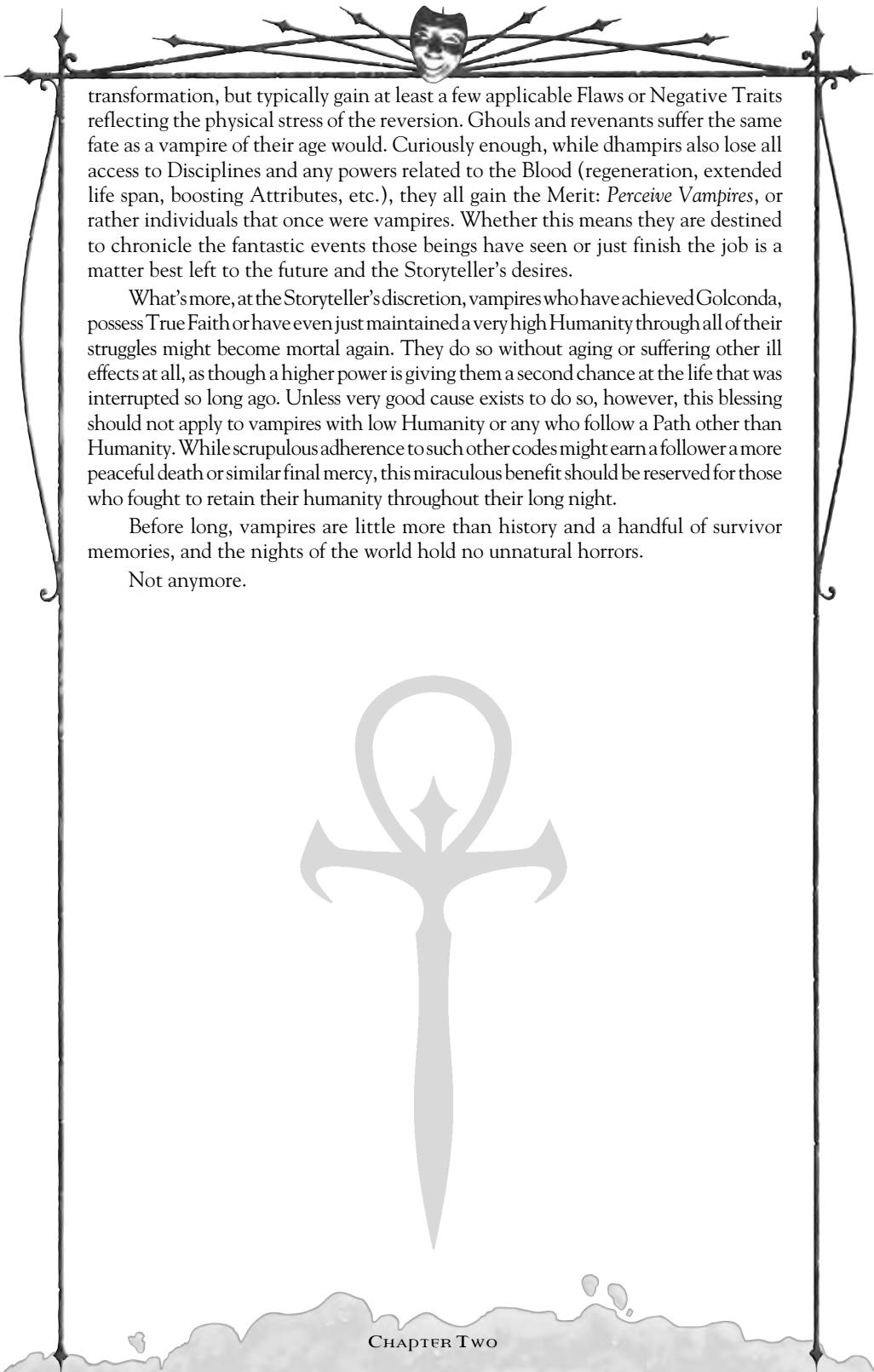
Assuming Saulot or at least one of the characters accepts the agreement to atone, the basalt throne explodes in a supernova-like burst of true divine light. (*Fortitude*, including Aegis, offers no protection or reduction for this damage.) As one, the howling Antediluvians are burned to ash and cinders, as are any vampires within 100 feet. The characters and any others who received the mark of light from Saulot the night before still suffer five levels of aggravated sunlight damage, and will have a scar from the experience for the rest of their unives. Those who drank from the phial are also incinerated, but it is a gentle dissolution as opposed to an agonizing conflagration, and they die with their spirits at peace.

Assuming the characters survive this final explosion, there is nothing but silence. There is a valley full of vampires not quite sure what happened, but the thrall of the Antediluvians is gone. In a few moments, the effects of their severed bloodlines start sinking in for the crowd, and the frenzy of diablerie begins again, though the characters remain curiously immune from this madness. In a few hours, the sun rises once more.

AFTERMATH

If the characters escape the chaos, they are free to do whatever they wish. The world lies in ruins, but humanity has a strange way of recovering from such dire straits, and it will likely do so again. Vampires have it worse. Caine's curse is still Withering, and at an alarming rate now. Older vampires are dying, and it seems as though most have as little as weeks left before the Curse of Caine weakens so much that their bodies can no longer subsist. The exact time frame depends on the Storyteller's wishes, but the characters should know what it is (perhaps through Thaumaturgy rituals or Auspex scrying). They should have enough time to say their good-byes, put their affairs in order and otherwise make peace with the world before the final stages of the reversion claim them. After all, any characters who have survived to this point have more than earned a chance to die with dignity at the very least.

As the curse of vampirism leaves their bodies, Cainites become mortal once more, but those who have lived beyond their natural life span age and die in the process. Those who are still within their own life span can possibly survive the



transformation, but typically gain at least a few applicable Flaws or Negative Traits reflecting the physical stress of the reversion. Ghouls and revenants suffer the same fate as a vampire of their age would. Curiously enough, while dhampirs also lose all access to Disciplines and any powers related to the Blood (regeneration, extended life span, boosting Attributes, etc.), they all gain the Merit: *Perceive Vampires*, or rather individuals that once were vampires. Whether this means they are destined to chronicle the fantastic events those beings have seen or just finish the job is a matter best left to the future and the Storyteller's desires.

What's more, at the Storyteller's discretion, vampires who have achieved Golconda, possess True Faith or have even just maintained a very high Humanity through all of their struggles might become mortal again. They do so without aging or suffering other ill effects at all, as though a higher power is giving them a second chance at the life that was interrupted so long ago. Unless very good cause exists to do so, however, this blessing should not apply to vampires with low Humanity or any who follow a Path other than Humanity. While scrupulous adherence to such other codes might earn a follower a more peaceful death or similar final mercy, this miraculous benefit should be reserved for those who fought to retain their humanity throughout their long night.

Before long, vampires are little more than history and a handful of survivor memories, and the nights of the world hold no unnatural horrors.

Not anymore.



robert wheeler (order #15253)



CHAPTER THREE: APOCALYPOSE

No Regrets, No Mercy

The Apocalypse is the end for the Garou. It's not the stuff of second chances. Gaia won't appear at the end of all things and tell everyone it was just a dream. This is the time of legends, the coming of Ragnarok, the Final Days. It is a time of great deeds and greater glory, the culmination of the underlying themes of **Laws of the Wild**.

With the Apocalypse, there is no room for regret. The world changes forever, and Earth might not survive. How can players triumph in a doomed world? How can they avoid feeling railroaded in a game ending with certain tragedy? If the fate of Gaia is sealed, then why should the Garou struggle?

The Apocalypse haunts all **Laws of the Wild** chronicles, but when each individual stands at the end of time, he must face his inner doubts. In a good chronicle, characters should never completely lose hope. Survival might not be possible, but even in some small way, the Garou make a difference.

The War to End All Wars

An Apocalypse chronicle arguably demands more attention than a chronicle with no fixed ending. Well, like any chronicle, everyone involved receives a greater satisfaction when a story comes to an end. No one likes to read or watch half a story and never know the finale. Some people are so interested in the endings of books that they flip straight to the final chapter before starting their novel. Leaving a chronicle unfinished leaves everyone unsatisfied.

Running a chronicle with a definite plot and an obvious climax helps keep a chronicle from losing focus. As the Apocalypse churns to its end, the main plot of the chronicle reaches its conclusion. With the Apocalypse looming or taking place in the background, every moment is precious.

The Storyteller must realize that each character has her own story. Players crave the opportunity to resolve their character's issues, to complete that character's development and story as part of the chronicle. As much as possible, the resolution of a character's personal subplots should coincide with the conclusion of the main



plot. It can happen before the Garou go off to fight their last battle, as an Ahroun finds inner peace before committing an act of self sacrifice to save his pack. It could happen in the final conflict when a young werewolf overcomes his fear of a Black Spiral to face down the beast that grievously wounded him. A character story might conclude after the Final Battle, as a Philodox gains a true understanding of the sacrifices of generations of Garou on the final day of conflict.

Strong endings make strong chronicles that will be remembered for years. To start crafting such an ambitious final story for the Apocalypse, a Storyteller must start with the beginning. Although every Apocalypse chronicle will share themes, moods and events, each tale of the end will be unique.

Tribes and Totems

Each Garou tribe has a different view of the world its role within it and the Apocalypse. When running the Apocalypse, keep in mind what tribes are represented in the chronicle. Chances are that the mighty Ahroun Falling-Rock and his pack of rowdy Fenrir and Fianna will be ready for a full-scale Ragnarok scenario, but the more mystical Walks-in-Spirit and his Uktena brothers are less likely to be interested in such total carnage. Likewise, Thunder from a Clear Sky might be a fine leader, but if he's a Bone Gnawer and your plot centers around impressing Biting-Truth and his traditional Silver Fang pack in a game of political intrigue, you're in trouble.

Don't forget the totems that your characters follow either. Their individual Bans can have a large impact on the behavior of the characters, which you should bear in mind when designing your stories. If the Sept of the Water's Claw follows Bear as its totem, they will be interested in cleansing the land as well as fighting the Wyrm's minions, since Bear is both a warrior and a healer. Likewise, having a chronicle full of mysteries is great if packs follow totems like patient Rattlesnake or crafty Urban Legend. To make sure that everyone is entertained, though, you also should make sure to include some martial scenarios for packs that follow such totems as fierce Wyvern or the relentless Wyld Huntsman.

Ultimately, no matter what tribes and totems the players choose for their characters, the Storyteller should justify that tribe's beliefs in the chronicle. No group of werewolves should have everything it believes turn out to be the truth, but neither should everything it believes be wrong. Mixing elements of tribal beliefs into one grand vision of destruction should satisfy both the players and the Storyteller.

INCORPORATING SIGNS AND OMENS

Portents and signs have foretold the coming of the end since humans could first understand them. The Apocalypse is this time of legend, the culmination of millennia. The Apocalypse marks the end of prophecy, the end of history and the end of time. There are no visions of the times after the Apocalypse. This event is the final chapter, a curtain beyond which no fortune-teller can see. Even Gaia cannot be certain of the outcome of the Apocalypse. Although some prophecies call for a golden age, they only speak of it in hints and vague references. And for each one with a bright hope, another tale ends in chaos and destruction.

Without signs of the impending doom, the Garou would not know about the Apocalypse. Werewolves might unite and struggle against terrible cataclysms, yet the true impact and horror of the events unfolds only as they realize that they live in a time of prophecy. As each omen and portent reveals its meaning, the impact of the Apocalypse drives itself home.



USING PUBLISHED PROPHETRY

Several products, including *Rage Across the Heavens* and *The Silver Record*, include prophecies, omens and signs of the Apocalypse. Storytellers should consider borrowing parts of these prophecies and adapting them to fit their chronicles. Doing so saves time and energy, but the choices should have some particular relevance to the chronicle for maximum affect. Writing down quotes from these books or photocopying prophecies for easy reference during a game will make players pay more attention than reading them out of book.

Several other events have occurred in the “official” timeline that are worth considering. While they might have defined roles in a particular scenario, Storytellers should always feel free to alter these roles as they see fit.

THE PROPHETRY OF THE PHOENIX

Phoenix took me.

Carried me in his claws.

High above the world.

So that I could see beyond tomorrow.

And I looked.

I beheld the future.

I saw the decimation of our kin. Hunted beyond hunting, death beyond death, to the last one. There were no more children, or grandchildren, or fathers, or mothers. This was the first Sign Phoenix gave to me, that the Children of the Weaver, the Humans, would give to us, the Garou.

I looked.

I beheld the future.

I saw the Children of the Weaver birthing. A great tide of Humans, rising. I saw more and more, until Gaia groaned at having to carry them all. Their houses overrunning, their rakes raping, their hands clawing at the parched earth, trying to feed from Her. This was the second Sign of the last days, that Phoenix showed me, that the Humans would do.

I looked again.

I beheld the third Sign.

So many. So many children. So many Humans. And they fell against each other, one to one, and the Wyrm brought forth corruption and gave each a measure. And the strange Fire I saw, out of control, the great Plume rising over the wilderness, spreading death wherever it shone in that dark and cold land. And I heard the agony of the Sea as She keened, for some drunken fool poured a lake of black death out upon her.

I turned my head away in disgust, but I could not help but look again.

I beheld, then, the fourth Sign.

The Wyrm grew powerful; its winds fanned the breezes of decay. It spread its diseases, and they were horrible: the Herd became afflicted with diseases of the head and the blood. Children were born twisted. Animals fell sick and no one could cure them. In these final days, even the Warriors of Gaia could not escape the palsied talons of the sickness-bringing deathbird.

A tear in my eye, I looked again and the Phoenix showed me the fifth Sign.



I saw the Plumes rising like death-spears towards the beautiful sky, piercing it, letting the Father Sun burn and parch Gaia. The air grew hot; even in the darkness of Winter it was warm. The plants withered in the sun. A cry of pain and disease arose from the dying forests; as one the relations cried tears of mourning.

Then, as though a veil were torn, the sixth Sign showed itself to me.

In the last days, Gaia shakes with rage. Fire boils from the depths. Ash shrouds the sky. The Wyrm skulks in the shadows made by these... and rears to strike. The old ones are gone; the Guardians of the Pathways and the Crossroads are finished. In these final days, the sixth Sign will make itself known in the Packs that form. Each Pack will have unto itself a Quest, a Sacred Journey it must perform. Such is the will of Gaia.

And I saw the sky turn black, and the moon was as blood.

And the seventh Sign I glimpsed, though I could not look on it in full. But its heat I could feel. The Apocalypse. The final days of the world. The Moon was swallowed by the Sun, and it burned in His belly. Unholy fires fell to the ground, burning us all, twisting us and making us vomit blood. The Wyrm made itself manifest in the towers and the rivers and the air and the land, and everywhere its children ran rampant, devouring, destroyed, calling down curses of every kind. And the Herd ran in fear. And the Dark Ones, children of the Wyrm, crawled from the caves and walked the streets in daylight.

I turned my head from the sight. Phoenix told me: "This is as it shall be, but not as it should." Phoenix left me then.

Now, I cannot dream. I can only remember the Signs, each one in perfect detail. These are the last days. May Gaia have mercy on us.

Anthelios

In late 1999, a new star appeared in the Umbral sky, Anthelios. Although it was visible only to supernatural eyes initially, it has since become visible to mundane observers. Astronomers are unsure as to what its physical aspect is, but those with mystical sensitivities are aware of its supernatural presence. It is Anthelios — the Red Star, the anti-sun. Although it is not mentioned in the Prophecy of the Phoenix, most of the other major Garou prophecies refer to Anthelios as the "Eye of the Wyrm" and say that its arrival signals the beginning of the end.

In the End Times, various Wyrm cults have taken it into the heart of their beliefs. Many servants of these cults — Black Spirals, fomori, etc. — have begun to show certain "benefits" for worshipping the Red Star. Some gain new powers or Gifts. The user's eyes turn the same shade of red as Anthelios as they express these new abilities. Those who are particularly in tune with the Red Star can develop a third eye.

The Perfect Metis

The significance of the birth of the Perfect Metis was largely lost on the Garou. Some considered him a harbinger of doom, while others thought he was destined to be Gaia's champion. (Some even saw it as a triumph of the Weaver, making orderly perfection out of what should be flawed.) Ironically, these schools of thought are potentially closer to the truth than they might imagine.

The uproar caused by the birth of a perfect metis cub to two metis parents brought the Garou Nation to the brink of civil war. It also resulted in some very odd meetings, as a number of agents of the Wyrm wanted nothing more than to make sure that the



HEAVEN HOLDS THE ANSWERS

Many events in this chapter deal with fallout from the “canonical” events described in the tabletop book *Rage Across the Heavens*. Therein one can find detailed passages concerning the significance of Anthelios, the birth of the Perfect Metis and the reasons for Rorg’s decision to “cleanse” Gaia. While it is not necessary to own that book to play a proper Apocalypse scenario, Storytellers might find it helpful and full of additional information that can help add nuance and background to their chronicles.

cub was blessed with their own special brand of corruption. It was resolved, of course, but agents of the Wyrm (the *real* Wyrm) kidnapped the child shortly thereafter and spirited him away, safeguarding him for use as the Wyrm’s voice in the physical realm. Soon, very soon now, the child will return, and his coming will herald a new age.

WORKING ON THE WALL

Going beyond published material helps tailor the events of the Apocalypse to your own chronicle. When creating the prophecies and visions that directly detail the End Times in your chronicle, mind the following rules.

First, write down the symbol, prophecy or sign and all the details about it. Second, keep the meaning of any foretelling vague. By keeping the true meaning unclear, a Storyteller can adapt the prophecy to fit the events of a chronicle. Third, let the characters discover the true meanings of prophecies on their own, and listen carefully to their interpretations. Perception is reality. If they believe something, then it’s real to them. They might even come up with an interpretation of a cryptic statement that fits better into the Storyteller’s plots than the Storyteller’s version.

Finally, don’t let the players utterly miss prophecies. If something happens to cause a prophecy to come true, and the players all miss it, but don’t be afraid to reveal what happened. Spirits or ancient Theurges will have the mystic awareness to realize the significance of what has happened. The *Enigmas* Ability and Ancestor Background make good tools for revelation as well. If a Storyteller doesn’t eventually reveal that a prophecy has come true, then the importance of the prophecy is lost, because the players never become aware of it. Even worse, they could spend their time chasing down red herrings, looking for a prophecy to come true that already has.

THE LEGEND SAYS WE LOSE

When making prophecies, the Storyteller must decide when the future is not set in stone. Sometimes, characters place themselves directly against a prophecy in an attempt to change the course of the Apocalypse. One of the best ways to handle this problem would be to change the prophecy by adding to it.

A time might come, however, when the Storyteller wants the characters to defy a prophecy. Such a deed should come toward the latter stages of a chronicle, lest the characters threaten to defy all omens and prophecies. Once the characters are successful, they should have a sense of empowerment, and other Garou might seek them out hoping to receive their aid. Disproving a prophecy should be a major event during the Apocalypse.



THE FINAL BATTLE

Eventually, everything leads to a final confrontation, the Mother of All Battles, with warriors of sickening power levels dueling each other while the fabric of reality rips asunder. In order to avoid the climactic scene of the chronicle degrading into slow-moving Rock-Paper-Scissors contest, a Storyteller needs to have some plans.

The Storyteller must determine which fights need tests and which ones do not. If an avatar of the Wyrm attacks an avatar of Gaia in the Umbra, the Storyteller should describe the battle and the outcome. A duel between two entities of such tremendous power goes far beyond anything the combat system can handle. The importance of the result should be part of the plot, not a randomly determined event. Only the part of the fight that directly involves the characters requires any tests. This keeps the battle moving, rather than having players sit and wait for results. It also frees the Storyteller to concentrate on cinematic descriptions and dialogue rather than worrying about the rules for potent Charms and Rank-Five Gifts in the background.

The most important part of the climax is the role of the characters. The Storyteller must strive to make sure that each character contributes to the outcome. Few players will be happy if they feel useless in the Final Battle. This is an important dramatic event, in some respects, the conclusion of a game system as well as a chronicle. The Storyteller wants everyone to have fond memories, even if their characters die in the end. Finally, this is the time for heroic deaths. For many Garou, nothing could be better than dying in battle. Again, the character should contribute, but the Storyteller should have no compunctions about having werewolves die in the final scene.

AFTERMATH

So, if the group wants a post-holocaust chronicle, what should it look like? What is the aftermath of the Apocalypse? What has survived? Here are a few possibilities — presuming there's anything left, of course.

DEAD WORLD

The Apocalypse all but destroys Earth. Gaia still exists, though, and a few of her spirits gather around her in an attempt to ease her pain. A few caerns still sustain life. Civilization no longer exists, and the remnants of humanity live in tribal groups scavenging the ruins. Volcanoes send ash into the heavens. The ground quakes with burning rivers of magma, while frozen winds herald the coming of great sheets of ice. The Umbra still holds spiritual power, but much of it has fallen asunder, filled with the death cries of the world. Toxins in the environment deform all new Garou as if they were metis cubs. Werewolves could be on the verge of extinction.

This future holds little hope, though perhaps something could save the Earth out in the Deep Umbra. Technology and the Weaver might hold the answer, or perhaps the Wyld can create life out of desolation. It might even be possible that a new Wyrm, freed of its pre-Apocalypse torment could guide the sept to save Gaia.

SPIRITUAL UTOPIA

The Gauntlet is no more. Once again, the physical and the spiritual are one. It is a time of spiritual awakening and transformations of life across the globe. Out of the ruin of the last age, a dawn time has come, where spiritual gifts flow freely among all living things. Humans have reconnected with Gaia, and they understand their place in the world. Dark powers still exist, but they are on the run, desperately trying to find some way to turn the tides and use the new spiritual nature of humans as a way to corrupt them.



In this world, the Garou would have to help humans and wolves repopulate and rebuild the world. They would have to stop humans and animals who don't have the will to control their new powers. Werewolves would ferret out the remaining dark spirits who plot against Gaia. In many ways, this starts a new golden age for everyone — a return to Eden.

EVOLUTION

The world has changed. New life forms emerge from the ruins of the old world. Strange spirits take hold across the land. Humanity stands divided between allegiances to the Wyld, where some of them now possess spiritual magics, and the Weaver, which has armed its followers with advanced machinery. The Garou must try to sort out the good from the bad and find their place in a world that is no longer their own.

In this science fantasy aftermath, werewolves can take any role. Perhaps the tribes no longer exist. This world poses the question of identity of the Garou. They must decide who and what they are and how they will find a place in this world.

WEAPONS FOR THE WORLD'S END

Although the focus of an Apocalypse chronicle should always be the characters and the stories built around them, certain systems and mechanics have been devised specifically for the End Times. Storytellers should feel free to use, alter or ignore these mechanics as they see fit for their chronicle.

THE RAGE OF GAIA

The Apocalypse is a desperate time. While the Garou might not entirely understand what it is they are feeling, they can sense its approach as Gaia's pain becomes their pain. During the final five lunar months, the difficulty of all Rage Challenges decreases by one. Additionally, whenever he is in an extremely stressful situation, a Garou must retest any Frenzy Challenge in which Willpower succeeds, making it even more likely that frenzy will occur.

If events in the scenario result in the destruction of Luna and/or the severing of important totem ties, Rage fluctuates even more. Luna's destruction immediately forces all changers to make a Rage Challenge against three Traits. Those who succeed immediately enter frenzy for the rest of the scene, while those who fail lose all Rage instead as their will to fight is sapped. (Rage is regained normally.) Losing a totem incurs the same problems for members of its family.

NEW GIFTS

As the Apocalypse draws ever closer, a number of powerful, long-lost Gifts are made available to those Garou with the means to learn them. Storytellers are encouraged to use the following Gifts as examples to build their own legendary End-Times Gifts. Unless otherwise noted, consider these Gifts to be in-tribe Gifts for the purpose of Experience costs. Any character of sufficient rank can learn these Gifts, as they are awarded to the Garou Nation as a whole, not one particular breed or tribe.

Gift of the Giants (Advanced)

A Gift lost to the Garou since the end of the First Times, now it can be learned only through the Mokolé. By spending a Gnosis Trait, the character physically grows, gaining all the benefits of her increased muscle mass as a result. This Gift grants the character the bonus Physical Traits: *Brawny* x2 and *Brutal*, as well as a free retest in any Physical Challenge for the duration of one hour or one scene. These effects are cumulative with other similar Gifts, such as the Advanced Fianna Gift: *Gift of the Spriggan*.



Myth Walking (Advanced)

Through the use of this Gift, a Garou is able to draw upon the powers of the greatest heroes of her tribe to aid her in the last battle of the Apocalypse. It does more than simply grant the Garou a few extra Traits or access to a few Gifts. Rather, the hero called upon will physically manifest within the Gift-user, if he is pleased with the Garou's prayer for aid, causing her to transform and take the hero's form. For all intents and purposes, the Garou has become this hero until the end of scene. The Storyteller should devise the specific capabilities of the hero in question. Most heroes of Garou history are quite powerful indeed, but their knowledge of current trends and technologies would be equally limited in most cases. (No ancient Fianna warrior knows anything about computers, for example.) It costs two Gnosis Traits to activate this Gift, it lasts one scene, and it may be activated only once in a Garou's lifetime. A Garou learns Myth Walking from an ancestor-spirit or from a Mokolé.

New Fetishes

Flaming Death Spears

Level 3, Gnosis 6

Named after the Death Spears of the Prophecy of the Phoenix, these powerful weapons are created and used by servants of all three members of the trait. They are most often forged from moonsilver, capped with the obsidian found from the eruptions of the Jaws of the True Father, or polished from Wyldstones.

When used in combat, these spears deal two levels of aggravated damage to the enemies of the maker. For instance, a Wyrm-spear would deal such damage when used against servants of the Weaver or the Wyld. Against anything else, the spears deal two levels of lethal damage. These weapons may also be used in the Rite: *Flaming Death Spears*.

Wolf Skin

Level 1, Gnosis 4

Without the existence of Wolf Skin fetishes, keeping an entire tribe's fall to the Wyrm a secret from the rest of the Nation would be nigh impossible. Upon the tribe's fall, however, the Wyrm grants one of these fetishes to each of the fallen, which will protect them from being detected by such Gifts as *Sense Wyrm*. They operate in much the same manner as a Bane Skin fetish (see **Laws of the Wild**).

The fetishes are made from a small piece of dried wolf flesh (about an ounce) wrapped in silver wire and worn close to the flesh. They are temporary, lasting several months at the most before crumbling to dust. While worn, regardless of how much taint an individual accumulates, she will remain immune to detection from the Gift: *Sense Wyrm*.

Despite the silver used in its crafting the fetish doesn't deal damage or siphon off Gnosis Traits when worn by Garou.

New Talens

Luna-Dust

Gnosis 1

This useful talen is found only where pieces of Luna have fallen after the Shattering. It appears as a gray dust with a gunpowder smell and the ability to cling to itself and earthly things. Anyone who finds some Luna-Dust may spread it on himself or a small area. If he spreads the dust over a small area, the Gauntlet rating for that area effectively becomes 1. If he spreads the dust on a person, then the Gauntlet for that



person (no matter where she happens to be) is considered to be 1 until she steps sideways. Heavy rain washes away the Luna-Dust, thereby ending its effects, as does bathing or showering. Otherwise, there is no duration on the dust's effects.

Claw of Rorg

Gnosis 6

Powerful Wyld-talens, Rorg's claws are the remnants of the asteroid Geographos that he threw at Gaia with the intent of killing the Wyrm before it could eat the world. It was an ill-conceived plan, and only Luna's sacrifice prevents all life on Gaia from ending, but the claws remember their original purpose. Each claw seeks to crush the Wyrm in all its forms. When shot or thrown, they accelerate toward the nearest Wyrm target, regardless of where the thrower was actually aiming.

These claws target the Wyrm-creature closest to the point of release, regardless of the wishes of the thrower, as long as the target is within line of sight. The thrower must defeat the target in a Physical Challenge (retest with *Athletics*). If successful, the Claw deals one health level of lethal damage for each five paces it traveled, up to a maximum of five levels of lethal damage.

New Rites

Flaming Death Spears (Intermediate)

This rite is nothing short of spectacular in its effects. It is capable of taking any ranged weapon and, with the aid of a Gaffling of Phoenix, turning it into a weapon of terrible destructive power.

A weapon that has had this rite performed on it is thrown or fired while the Garou shouts a word of power. A Physical Challenge ensues as normal to determine whether it hits its first target, which deals normal damage. The weapon continues on its straight path, however, enabling it to hit any number of other targets—effectively, the weapon receives an infinite range. Additionally, for every five paces the weapon travels, the damage it deals increases by one health level, up to a maximum of five levels of damage. The weapon simply gets more and more powerful as it continues on its path. While these projectiles might not be the Death Spears of prophecy, the rite is impressive enough that it is highly sought after during the final battles.

Rite of the Burning Bridge (Intermediate)

This ancient rite, designed to permanently sever the moon bridge connecting two caerns, has rarely seen use in recent years. In fact, the last time it was actually used was when the Croatan, Uktena and Wendigo used it to sever connections opened by the "Wyrmcomer" tribes into the Pure Lands. Some very extreme circumstances appear during the Apocalypse, however, which might cause some Garou to consider such drastic action.

This rite cannot be performed alone. It requires three other Garou, and each participant stands at one of the cardinal directions as the ritual is performed, surrounding the heart of the caern proper. The participants speak the Gaian name of the caern at the other end of the moon bridge to be destroyed. Then the participants invoke Luna and offer her serious chiminage as compensation for the bridge they are asking her to allow to be destroyed. Players and narrators are encouraged to be creative in determining the appropriate chiminage, but as an example, an offering of 10 pounds of silver per participant might do the trick. Finally, a ritual chant to Helios burns the bridge away forever.

The entire ritual requires an hour to perform, and should any step be missed for any reason, the rite fails. If the rite is successful, the moon bridge is destroyed and



cannot be re-opened. It can theoretically be rebuilt, however, as long as Garou in both caerns cooperate and at least a month has passed since its destruction.

WEAVER ASCENDANT

Conventional Garou wisdom holds that the Wyrm will be the architect of the Apocalypse. As Garou Theurge scrutinize the Prophecy of the Phoenix, looking for answers within its cryptic passages, they watch as the Wyrm's maleficent soul spreads throughout the world, defiling everything it touches. It is only a matter of time, they say, before the Garou face their final battle in the war to save the soul of Gaia.

Blinded by the Wyrm's obvious evil, few imagine the true threat would reveal itself to be the Weaver. But that is about to change.

"Weaver Ascendant" concerns itself with the events that follow the true globalization of the Weaver's power within the human sphere. It begins with the rise of Shinzui Industries, a Japanese corporation with goals and aspirations that reach far beyond its station. It chronicles the gradual decay of the Wyrm's stranglehold over Western society and the effects of its collapse on the Garou and all they hold dear.

INITIALIZE END-TIME ROUTINE

Meticulous as always, the Weaver's assault does not begin spontaneously. Indeed, the threads of the Weaver's rise have been coming together for some time, though only too late will the Garou be able to see the entire design for what it really is. The Perfect Metis may emerge as a champion of the Weaver, the perfect synthesis of the new order, while Anthelios may be explained as the eye of the Machine watching over its creation.

THE RISE OF THE MACHINE

With the initialization of the computer age, which has made global connectivity possible, the strength and power of the Weaver has grown like never before. When or how the Machine gained sentience remains a mystery. Perhaps it was somehow tied to the nuclear detonations in Bangladesh a few years ago. Perhaps it was due to the existence of a certain critical mass of technological artifacts in the physical realm. Or perhaps it was simply time.

Regardless, the Machine gained awareness and quickly subverted the Weaver in the process. Where once the Weaver's influence was subtle and adaptable, now it became harsh and unyielding. The Wyrm had been allowed to corrupt the Pattern Web for far too long, and the Machine was intent on expunging his taint once and for all.

Hostile Takeovers

The one thing standing between the Weaver/Machine and its goals was the ephemeral nature of the Wyrm's influence. As it turns out, the nascent megacorporation Shinzui provided the answers the Machine was seeking. Already thralls to the will of the Weaver, Shinzui's board of directors was expanding the corporation's influence throughout the Far East and the Pacific Rim. Several of these branch offices found that their sphere of influence happened to overlap with that of another multinational megacorporation, this one with its roots in America instead of Asia: Pentex. First in Tokyo, then in Bangkok, Los Angeles and a number of other cities, Shinzui corporate officers found their paths crossing with those of Pentex employees.

The Awakened elite of Shinzui began to notice a pattern of corruption within the Pentex hierarchy, and from there it was only a matter of time before the Machine



SHINZUI AND YOU

Shinzui's conquest of Pentex is more than just back story. It's also a way to directly link characters to the imminent Apocalypse. If any of your characters has made it his life's goal to monkeywrench Pentex, he might come in contact with Shinzui in any number of ways. Corporate accounts at all levels will display some unusual activity, and it mystifies the suits at Pentex as much as anyone. Computer sabotage might wind up being redundant, as other characters discover that someone else got to their targets before they did. But who? And, more importantly, why? And when the characters hit a particular site, they might find that something else has followed them back home... something decidedly unfriendly. It doesn't matter if their efforts are physical, digital or spiritual, they *will* cross paths with Shinzui eventually.

had a startling epiphany: Control the corporation, and you control the Wyrm. In retrospect, it was really pretty obvious. The Urge Wyrms exist to spread corruption and power however they can, and what better way to make their needs manifest on a large scale than through the aegis of a powerful, supposedly legitimate corporation?

THE WEAVER'S FORCES

SPIRITS

In the months preceding the events described in "Weaver Ascendant," Weaver spirits have undergone a slow but inexorable shift in behavior. They are more active than they've been in the past, and they are becoming more aggressive toward non-Weaver entities. In game terms, increase difficulties for all tests involving interaction with Weaver spirits by two. This applies to Social Challenges as well as activation tests for Gifts and fetishes.

SHINZUI'S DRONES

The Weaver's Drone assault teams consist of elite Drones who have significant experience interacting with supernatural entities of various sorts. The standard format for a team is six Drones: four soldiers, one reassurance (memory alteration and physical repair powers), and one bricklayer (temporary Gauntlet-raising powers). The teams operate in fairly straightforward fashion. The soldiers secure an area using highly coordinated teamwork, the bricklayer makes sure that the targets do not escape, and the reassurance covers the team's tracks once the wetwork is completed. All members of the team act in perfect synchronicity, and their level of coordination is such that it puts that of most Garou packs to shame.

Although Drones can be treated largely like fomori with Weaver-oriented powers, more information can be found in **Book of the Weaver or Possessed: A Players Guide**.

THE PURGE

Shinzui's efforts to contain the Garou threat are as straightforward as they are brutal. Any Garou who can be shown the beauty of the Onesong, and who undergo the process of Clarification, will be spared. All others will be annihilated. Shinzui's strikes against the Garou are carried out by small teams of well-equipped Drones, all slaves to the will of the Machine. These beings operate with frightening efficiency, striking without warning and wasting no time on idle chatter or senseless egotism. Their goal is to wipe their quarry off of the face of the Earth, and they are extremely good at what they do.



SHATTERED GLASS

Perhaps not surprisingly, Shinzui's first strike against the Garou utterly annihilates the Mother of Peach Trees Caern, the last bastion of the Boli Zouhisze in Asia. But the slaughter does not stop there. Indeed, it has only begun. In like fashion, Shinzui begins to eliminate the septs of the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother, using the information gleaned from its Hakken directors to dissect the hengeyokai piece by piece. The attacks are so swift and savage that the various sentai have no chance to react, and it is only a matter of time before they are forced to yield.

With the shapeshifters of the East pacified, Shinzui now turns its sights on the lands to the West. It approaches the problem from a number of angles. Branches of both Endron International and Consolidex Worldwide — now firmly under Shinzui's control — have reported terrorist activity with an environmental motivation in Northern Europe. Data provided by the few survivors of the Boli Zouhisze Garou (mostly through the use of Project: Odyssey fomori) also points to this region, which in turn leads Shinzui to the doorsteps of the Glass Walkers.

The Walkers are taken completely by surprise. They have never before dealt with a foe that is at once so regimented and so brutal. Shinzui's operatives use the tools of the Machine as well as the Walkers ever did, and they are primed to kill in a way heretofore seen only in Wyrm-spawn. It is the city walkers' greatest nightmare made manifest, and their annihilation in Europe is nigh total.

While the Garou are cut to pieces in Europe, things are different in America. The touch of Pentex is strong here, even if the capital behind it is long since gone. Additionally, the cities in America are both many and large, which has made tracking the Garou extremely difficult. The remnants of the tribes that were cut down in Europe lay in hiding, while the tribes who have made America their homeland do their best to help their fellows avoid Shinzui's grasp.

SPIRIT MATTERS

As the Weaver's assault teams methodically go about their business of exterminating the Garou, the werewolves find themselves faced with another problem: stepping into the Umbra isn't as easy as it used to be. In game terms, the Gauntlet rating *everywhere* increases by one. It will continue to do so at the rate of one Trait per week. Within six weeks, the boundary between the worlds of spirit and flesh will be impassable, and every supernatural being on the planet will lose the abilities that differentiate them from normal humans.

The loss of the spirit world will have devastating consequences for the Garou, but the implications go far beyond that. Every living thing on the planet has a connection of some sort to the spirit world, and without that connection, they will lose their will to live. The loss of spirit will lead to the loss of creativity and individuality, and eventually the world and everything on it that is not directly connected to the Weaver will become nothing more than a lifeless shell.

THE GREAT CONCILIATION

As the Weaver's forces crack down on the supernatural elements in the world, the need for a conciliation among the Garou becomes paramount. Unfortunately, organizing such a meeting will be a feat in itself. The calcification of the Umbra is making travel via moon bridge exceedingly risky. In fact, only the most powerful caerns can safely be used in such a fashion, and many of those have been conquered by Shinzui's Drones.



The location of the final Great Concolation is left up to the Storyteller, but it should be fairly remote. Reaching the place should be an adventure in and of itself, as the Garou have to outpace Shinzui Drones and other agents of the Weaver gunning for their hides. The location should have strong ties to the Umbra and be extremely isolated. Anything else is too risky.

Assessing the Damage

The impact of Shinzui's attacks on the Garou Nation has been staggering. Never before have the Garou fought such an organized and implacable foe, and as the Concolation gets underway, they are astonished at just how hard the Weaver has hit them. All told, fully 80 percent of the world's Garou have been killed or incapacitated, leaving only a few hundred for the final battles against the Weaver's forces. No one's sure how to react to this news. Everyone knew they'd been hit hard, but to learn that the strikes had occurred all over the world and that the werewolves' strength had been reduced on a planetary scale is simply mind-blowing. There is no more time for politics. The Garou are desperate, and they have to act *now*.

Storytellers and Narrators should work hard on presenting the Concolation as vividly as possibly. While you are unlikely to have sufficient numbers to represent all the Garou in attendance, be ready to portray a number of famous and influential members of the Nation. It is also highly recommended that suitable music, lighting and other setting preparations be used to create the moot atmosphere. Lastly, while the elders of the Nation will be there, don't rule out the possibility of letting your characters be the ones to gather the key bits of information and put together a great deal of the plan that the Garou ultimately embrace. Simply look forward to the plan outlined in this scenario (or the one you see as being adopted in your own chronicle), and give them information that will lead them to propose just such a strategy as will be required to succeed in your particular vision of the end.

Obviously, this approach requires a good deal of lead time, by placing information for them to find in stories that begin well before you start running "Weaver Ascendant." It also diminishes the importance of the Perfect Metis, though he can still be a source of information for the phase of the plan that involves freeing the Wyrm in Malfeas, since the characters are unlikely to know much about that territory. While it might require a great deal of work, this approach gets the players involved like no other and lets them feel as if they've truly earned their place at the head of the Garou vanguard.

Unwanted Guests

As the Garou plan their next move, their deliberations are interrupted by a most unexpected group of guests, namely the remnants of the Black Spiral Dancers. How they knew of the Garou's Concolation, to say nothing of how they managed to find it, is unclear. What is clear, however, is that the Dancers are in a conciliatory mood and aren't really looking for a fight. If the Garou let them say their piece, they'll indicate that they've been hit by the Weaver even harder than the Gaian Garou have, and that they're willing to help the Gaians any way they can as long as it undermines the Weaver's efforts. This offer presents an interesting moral dilemma for the players. The Gaians are desperately short on manpower, but are they willing to work with the very embodiment of everything they've been fighting up until now, even during the final battles of the Apocalypse?

Even more surprising than the initial arrival of the Black Spiral Dancers, however, is the return of the Perfect Metis, thought lost since he was kidnapped years before.



However he shows himself, it is clear by the end of the day that he speaks for the Black Spiral Dancers, and that his is the true voice of the Wyrm. The Perfect Metis has more to offer to the Garou Nation than simple aid — he has information as well. He also says that a critical opportunity is close at hand, and that the Gaians and Spirals might in fact be able to defeat the Weaver's aims once and for all if they are all able to work in concert.

THE WEAVER OVERSTEPS

Whether the players or the Perfect Metis proposes it, a plan emerges at last. First, the Garou will launch a massive counterattack against the forces of the Weaver, doing all they can to loosen her hold on the physical realm. Then they must make their way to the Umbra — still accessible in places like Australia, the Amazon and parts of Africa — and travel to Malfeas itself.

Once there, they will perform a ritual of great power, offering up their own lives to give the Wyrm the power he needs to break free of the Pattern Web. If the ritual works, the worlds of spirit and flesh will be dissolved as the Wyrm breaks free and returns to his normal self. The power of the Machine will be crushed, and the Weaver will be given the opportunity to regain her sanity. The cycle will begin anew, rejuvenated by the Garou's sacrifice and overseen by a wiser, more cautious Triat.

STRIKING BACK

The methods the Garou take to loosen the Weaver's grip vary considerably depending on the region of the world and the other supernatural beings the Garou can call upon for aid. The characters might formulate or stumble across any of the following plot possibilities, and the Storyteller is encouraged to either choose one of the following or use them as inspiration for something else entirely.

OPERATION: FULL DISCLOSURE

While the other Garou tribes begin to attack the Weaver in their own ways, the Glass Walkers announce the beginnings of Operation: Full Disclosure in a particularly dramatic way. In short, they access and gain control over every broadcast system on the planet, be it television, radio or even cellular phone networks, and they use this control to put their enemies under a microscope. They tell the world that all is not as it seems, and that a lot of people have been manipulating the public for a very long time. Everyone's a target — including vampires, Pentex executives, the scientists at DNA, Shinzui's obviously illegal activities and anything else the sept can think of. It doesn't stop with the broadcast either. Pack members send email messages to those with something to gain from an enemy's downfall, and they make phone calls asking people if they knew about their bosses' skeletons in the closet.

The players can involve themselves in this scenario in a number of ways. First, they can lead vigilante posses to investigate the targets of the operation, fomenting chaos wherever they go in an effort to break the Weaver's control over the masses. Doing so will be difficult, since the masses are predisposed to obey the dictates of those in control, but it should be quite possible, especially with the right Gifts. The characters can also act as bodyguards for the packs who are more directly involved, since Drones in service of the Weaver (not to mention anyone "outed" by the broadcast) will be gunning for their heads.

SABOTAGE, INDUSTRIAL AND OTHERWISE

With the commencement of Operation: Full Disclosure and the call for war against the Weaver, the cities of the world have become a saboteur's paradise. The



Garou cannot attack the Weaver and her minions openly since their numbers have been reduced to a mere handful. They can, however, make guerrilla raids against Weaver facilities, lashing out with plastic explosives and industrial sabotage where more traditional methods of battle are inappropriate.

Storytellers who choose to go this route should present their players with a number of tempting targets, providing floor plans and timetables as needed so that the characters can plan their strikes accordingly. Don't worry too much about weaponry and gear. This is, after all, the end of the world, so let the characters go out with a bang if they really want to. Acquiring equipment should be easy, given the antics of the Random Interrupts lately. Players and Storytellers alike are encouraged to let their imaginations run wild and play the scenario to the hilt. And hey, if the characters live, they can even proceed to the next phase of the story. Even if they don't, though, this is as good a way to go as any. Cracking the shell of the Weaver in the physical realm counts for a lot, and it will give other Garou packs the opportunity they need to shatter the Pattern Web in the Umbra.

All Hail Discordia!

Some Garou take the impending Apocalypse as an opportunity for all-out war and sabotage, while others embrace the wonders of technology to cut the Weaver's many legs out from under her. That's fine and all, but for some Garou, the name of the game is pure, unadulterated chaos, and they should have their day in the sun as much as anyone else.

This scenario is best chosen by packs with particularly charismatic members, the sorts of people who are good at getting people fired up and starting serious trouble. Characters with extensive networks of allies, contacts or kinfolk are also well suited to start up such grass-roots revolutions, and this option might be good for packs that have invested heavily in mortal society for just this reason. High-ranking Bone Gnawers or Ratkin are also ideal, as they have the Gifts they need to *really* stir things up. In any event, the point of the endeavor is to create absolute pandemonium over as large a territory as possible, turning the unwashed masses against the minions of law and order and using the ensuing chaos to take out selected targets within the Weaver's hierarchy.

Terror, Inc.

While the remnants of the Glass Walkers make their move to co-opt the computer networks of the world, the Black Spiral Dancers take a more direct route toward shattering the Weaver's control of reality — they work to sow terror so that panic will bloom. Owing to the fact that he is, in fact, a possessed Garou, the Perfect Metis has some supernatural powers above and beyond those normally granted to the Wyrm's werewolves. One of them is a greatly enhanced form of the Delirium, one that works even on Awakened beings. This is a perfect way to subvert the Weaver's control of her Drones, since even the strongest of them is no match for the raw, animalistic horror the Perfect Metis can instill within them. As the metis and his followers strike, rending the Veil with abandon, the earthly minions of the Weaver are torn to pieces.

Many players might balk at the idea of letting the Black Spiral Dancers run rampant within their cities, and with good reason. These are creatures of Rage who have been utterly consumed by darkness, and they make the worst of humanity look... well, not benign, but a whole lot less extreme. But players have to remember that these *are* the End Times. The key to the Spirals' motivation now is pure, unadulterated destruction, and in that they serve the original intent of the Balance Wyrm. They are no less corrupt than they have ever been, but at least now they're striking openly instead of skulking in shadows.



FREEING THE WYRM

With the Garou striking on multiple fronts, the Weaver's control of the physical realm eventually fractures. This is not to say that the Garou have won the war, however — far from it. Rather, their sustained assaults against the minions of the Weaver have given them the opening they need to scatter into the Umbra, and from there to make their way to Malfeas where they will hopefully free the Wyrm from its prison. Before they can fight that final battle, however, they have to actually reach the Umbra — no small matter given the nature of the times.

REACHING THE UMBRA

In kinder times, the Garou could simply step sideways to enter the Umbra. In most of the world, however, that is no longer possible. The wall between worlds has become completely calcified, resulting in a Gauntlet rated well over 10 for most of the world. There are, however, a number of alternatives to merely stepping sideways, such as consulting the Mokolé or the Nuwisha, “swimming sideways” with the Rokea, et cetera. Storytellers should feel free to make the players work hard to figure out how to circumvent the formidable barrier of the Gauntlet in these desperate times, but ultimately the final challenge is not in the physical realm, but Malfeas.

THE LAIR OF THE WYRM

One way or another, the Garou have reached Malfeas, the lair of the Wyrm. Now the trouble *really* begins. How the characters' reception in Malfeas unfolds is left to the Storyteller to determine, as it largely depends on how the characters came to be in the place, who brought them (if anyone) and what they encountered along the way. Although much has happened already, the Storyteller should see to it that this harrowing journey is every bit as terrifying and difficult as what has come before. This is the final hope of the Garou, and no punches can be pulled by either side.

Regardless of the circumstances surrounding their arrival, however, the characters must face a number of challenges as they proceed through Malfeas. First of all, the Wyrm is at war with itself. Even if they arrive with the Perfect Metis and the Dancers, they are subject to the same hostility as any other group — if not more so. Banes, disloyal Dancers and all manner of other creatures fall on them in great waves, forcing the characters to stay alert every second or face destruction. Second, the terrain changes constantly, making it easy for groups to become separated (good fuel for a frightening session) and difficult for the Garou to establish a place to begin the great ritual. Lastly, the minions of the Weaver attempt a last-minute invasion as the ritual progresses, in a desperate attempt to control the Wyrm forever. As a result, the characters will face not only rogue Wyrm manifestations but the Weaver's forces as well.

ROUSING THE WYRM

Once the Garou have managed to secure a foothold in Malfeas, all that remain are the rituals needed to restore the Wyrm's vitality. Garou have *never* attempted anything of this magnitude, and the ritemasters involved know the cost will be terrible even if they succeed. If the Garou perform the rite themselves, they're in for a hard time. Every living Garou that remains participates in the rite, and a Rank-Five Thurge from each tribe must help to lead it.

Although the Storyteller may adjust any of the figures for the rite as needed for her chronicle (lower totals for games with fewer remaining Garou, higher totals for those with more), performing the rite as written requires a Mental Challenge (retest



with Rituals), against a difficulty of 14 Traits. Each of the Garou leading the rite can make this test, and total success requires 100 successful tests. Only one test can be attempted per hour of the ritual. Once the leaders of the rite reach the required number of tests, all of the Garou participants — that is, all of the Garou remaining — must contribute permanent Gnosis Traits.

Five thousand Gnosis Traits are required for the rite to succeed. If the total is not met, the participants begin to suffer aggravated wounds, with each wound counting as three more Gnosis Traits toward the total. These wounds cannot be healed in any way, including Gifts, until the rite has been completed or totally abandoned. At this point, Storytellers should increase the drama as much as possible, making those actively involved in performing the rite feel the strain of channeling such great energies while those guarding the ritemasters endure wave after wave of attackers desperate to halt the ritual before it is completed.

It is also important to make sure that even if a character is doomed to die as a result of the ritual draining his life away, he has a chance to get some good last words in or take a final parting shot at his enemies. Nothing is more anti-climactic than telling the players, “Oh, by the way, the rite sucks out seven Gnosis and all your health levels, so you die instantly,” without giving them some chance to nobly face their sacrifice.

To Hell and Back

Assuming the rite is successful and any of the characters survive, there is still the question of what has happened now that the supernatural has been revealed. It is possible for the Storyteller to rule that as part of its return, the Wyrm of Balance removes most of the knowledge of the supernatural from humanity as a means of promoting healing. Even so, people will never again look so blindly at the world. The other option is to keep the knowledge out there and let the chips fall where they may. The Garou will have to adjust to a world that is struggling not only to get back to its feet, but with the knowledge of the supernatural as well. The Litany itself will need to be changed, and the leaders of the Garou must find a way to approach the humans, in time.

Things are certain to be nice and chaotic for a while, indeed.

The Last Battleground

In this scenario, the war of the Apocalypse occurs entirely within the Umbra. The Penumbra erupts into chaos as Banes emerge in impossible numbers. One by one, the realms become diseased and fall into ruin. The Black Spiral Dancers stand among the Banes and lead their forces onto the Last Battleground foreseen by the wise among those werewolves. And the Wyrm itself, its red eyes glaring beyond five columns made of flesh and entrails, enters the Penumbra to destroy Gaia and bring about the Apocalypse.

Nor will the physical world be spared. As the soul of the world is crushed in the Wyrm’s talons, its body is likewise mangled. Spirits are indiscriminately destroyed en masse, causing droves of animals and plants to die mysteriously in the physical world. The Pattern Web is severed and it unravels, tumbling cities to the ground. To humanity, it will be as if God has left Earth forever and taken the savior with Him. To the Garou, there will no longer be any more waiting for any saviors but themselves.

The Soul of the World

While the Garou’s focus rested upon the material world, the Wyrm’s eyes never left the Umbra. While incidents within the physical world could create ripples



within the Umbra, the physical world was shaped entirely by the spirits. Cut down a tree, and the Glade Child within would be weakened, but it would still live and create another tree elsewhere. Kill the Glade Child, though, and the tree would wither and die, deprived of its soul. Thus did, the Wyrm intend from the beginning to crush the soul of the world, Gaia, by finding her hidden within the Umbra and rending her in his talons.

Earlier attempts to push into reality were met with strong resistance, however. Some even dealt the Wyrm serious damage, pushing back the Apocalypse for centuries at a time. So the Triatic Wyrm, full of hatred and rage, brooded in Malfeas and planned the ultimate undoing of the world. To prevent its simple — though very costly — eviction from the Penumbra, it required an anchor to ground it within. In fact, it needed three: one for the Eater-of-Souls, one for the Beast-of-War, and one for the Defiler. These anchors would take the form of ritual sacrifices of monsters whose lives and deaths both utterly embodied the member of the Wyrm Triat they would tie tight to this world. These sacrifices would be known as the Scions of the Wyrm.

Once these beings have been sacrificed, the Wyrm will be able to use such powerful deaths to secure enough of a hold in reality to escape Malfeas and enter the Penumbra — and the Final Battle will begin at last.

THE UMBRA IN CHAOS

With the Wyrm's entry into the Near Umbra, the spirits are in a panic. Nobody in the Garou Nation or among the spirits is in any doubt that the End Times are now here, and an "every man for himself" mood descends upon the vast majority of the spirits. Nor is this mood undeserved, as hordes of Banes flood the Penumbra and slaughter everything in their path.

In the End Times, the entire Umbra becomes a war zone. Whereas the fear of a Bane ambush was a constant danger in the Umbra before, they are now a certainty. There is nearly always a Bane somewhere in sight, and frequently there is a rush of them. (Usually coming right toward you.)

THE FIVE COLUMNS

At the heart of the enemy strategy are the five columns of flesh. Taking from the dead souls of the Nuwisha the knowledge of almost every square inch of the Umbra, each column links a Near Realm to the Penumbra. A firmer link than a moon bridge, these columns allow the Triatic Wyrms to marshal their troops, bringing forth untold numbers of Banes from the furthest reaches of the Umbra. The first column is linked to Malfeas, and this is the second most important column to all three of the enemy. From here come the largest number of Banes, as well as the most powerful.

The second column links to Scar. Not only do many Banes likewise flood the Penumbra from this Realm, but many also come armed with foul blades made from waste and built in that Realm's factories.

The third links to the Atrocity Realm. Few Banes come from this column, but the third column soon becomes a symbol of fear among Gaia's warriors. This is the last thing that any prisoners taken see from the Penumbra.

The fourth column provides a gateway to the Abyss, and it still stands. This fact terrifies those who think about it too much. The very Wyrm itself, the force of death and destruction, has brought himself into the battle. What possible force is he expecting to emerge from the Abyss and enter the battlefield?



The Scions of the Wyrm

Each of the following sacrifices makes an excellent point to begin an Apocalypse chronicle. While the first has already occurred in canon, that doesn't mean that the Storyteller shouldn't feel free to alter the timeline to suit her chronicle. Just remember that despite the characters' best efforts, the sacrifices *will* go forward — even if they prevent one, it's possible that another scion will be chosen. Truly preventing them all averts this particular vision of the Apocalypse, at least for now.

First Scion: The Demon of India

Scion of the Eater-of-Souls, this ancient vampire emerged in 1999 and was promptly destroyed by a massive effort of elder Leeches, detonation of powerful magical weapons and the inadvertent aid of a number of Garou. Its destruction led to the appearance of the manifestation of the Eater of Souls: Anthelios, the anti-sun. Of course, if the Storyteller desires, these events can be moved around so that the sept is either present during part of its destruction, or perhaps hosts survivors of the battle. As long as the shock of these events is felt around the Garou Nation, the first scion's death has had its proper impact.

Second Scion: Zhyzhak, Green Dragon's Chosen

Not long before the Apocalypse unfolds, this mighty Black Spiral Dancer scion of the Beast-of-War, receives a vision that her prophesied confrontation with "the last Gaian king" is at hand at last. Her pack takes control of a small town and begins killing and torturing the inhabitants, baiting King Albrecht to come and fulfill the prophecy. The Storyteller can choose to set this story in a nearby town as a way of getting the sept involved, using Narrator characters to portray Albrecht and his pack as they come to hunt down Zhyzhak. Ultimately, Zhyzhak and her fearsome pack are destroyed with the aid of the sept, though not before she mortally wounds Albrecht as well. (It is fated to occur, after all.) As the last of her blood drains away, a second red star appears in the sky...

Third Scion: The Perfect Metis

This unwitting Garou is the scion of the Defiler Wyrm, rescued from nightmarish circumstances by Garou heroes immediately after its birth. Though he was raised with love and tenderness by a sept of Gaian Garou (possibly even the characters' sept, if the Storyteller has allowed them to play out the events of **Rage Across the Heavens**), the Perfect Metis actively attempts to escape as the caern comes under attack by Black Spiral Dancers. Despite a frantic rescue effort, they take it to a remote defiled caern and spend weeks torturing it before finally allowing it to die hideously, a ruined mind inside a shattered body. Its death heralds the appearance of the final red star, and the emergence of the Wyrm into the Penumbra.

These four columns form a square, and in the middle is the fifth and most important column. This one, taller than the others, links to Battleground. But rather than merely providing a doorway in and out of the Realm, this column acts as a focus to Battleground, or specifically one particular part of Battleground — the Plain of the Apocalypse. The Five Columns stand at one end, and the Wyrm flies above them in wait. The Warring Hordes lie in wait surrounding the Plain. They are unusually expectant,



quiet and passive. No noise is heard here. The area possesses an eerie, pregnant silence. And one end of the Plain remains open and waiting for the soldiers of Gaia.

THE REALMS

Each of the following realms lends a different flavor to "Last Battleground" scenarios, allowing Storytellers to choose exactly what kind of Final Battle they wish to create. Do the Garou join the endless frenzied hordes of the Battleground in a bloody melee, or is the final conflict more of an intellectual game of chess in the abstract thoughtspace of the Aetherial Realm? Or does the Final Battle take place somewhere else entirely, in a Realm of the Storyteller's devising?

Even if a Realm detailed here is not necessarily the best staging ground for the Final Battle itself, it still has potential to offer story hooks or subplots for the Garou to explore during the last days. The Storyteller can incorporate any of them to keep packs busy and players guessing as the end approaches.

Storytellers who desire more detail on the various realms and the spirits found there will find the revised **Umbra** book and **Axis Mundi** extremely helpful, though it is not required to use either of those books to run this scenario.

The Abyss

One of the many things that the Apocalypse proved, should any Garou take the time to consider it in the final frantic days, is that the Abyss was not the Wyrm. And yet, if Malfeas was the heart of the Wyrm, then the Abyss was his soul. Why, some Garou ask, does it exist at all? What is its purpose? With so many of the Wyrm's forces occupied elsewhere, it might be possible for brave packs of Garou to venture into this near-abandoned Realm and find a secret concerning the nature of the Wyrm that will turn the tide of battle — if they survive long enough to return, that is.

The Aetherial Realm

Every single moon bridge passes through the Aetherial Realm. And this makes the Aetherial Realm a very tempting target indeed for the Wyrm, who has successfully scattered most of the planetary guardians and destroyed much of its natural defenses simply by his dramatic appearance there. The spirits in the Aetherial Realm panic and give the Wyrm a wide berth, opening chances and room for Banes to lie in wait and make strategic attacks on the planetary Incarnae and moon bridges. Of course, nothing says that the Garou will give this ground quite so easily. While doing battle in this often abstract and confusing Realm might not suit many Garou, it is an excellent way to balance the Wyrm's superior numbers, particularly if the players are well suited to puzzles and enigmas as well as some quick thinking. The Garou might even attempt to ambush the Wyrm's main force with a surprise Final Battle as it passes through en route to another target, exploiting their understanding of the Aetherial Realm to its best advantage.

Arcadia Gateway

Arcadia is dying. At its best it was a lie — if a glorious one. It was a Realm of half-real fantasies playing games with each other and those Garou who would step into their lair. Unless the chronicle crosses over heavily with the fae of **The Shining Host**, it's extremely unlikely that the Final Battle will be staged here, as the fae hosts want no part of the Garou war. Then again, a group of Garou might travel here to find a way to bring back some of the pure hope and inspiration the Gateway represents to the Garou forces. Doing so might bring key figures out of Harano or provide the creative spark that makes it possible to devise the winning tactics for the Final Battle.



Atrocity Realm

In the Atrocity Realm, most of the atrocities that occur every second are projections of the real world — reflections with no physical or spiritual reality. As not simply a victim of an atrocity but a spiritually important *signifier* of Atrocity, however, the actual spirit of the Perfect Metis was transferred into the Atrocity Realm to experience the horrors of torture and death over and over for eternity. This is no mere emanation but an actual living being — whimpering, lame, constantly tortured by Banes, and helpless. If he were taken out of the Atrocity Realm and away from the torturing, violating Banes hovering around, the cub's suffering would end. (This represents a possible plan for Garou seeking to cripple the Defiler and thus hamstring one of the Wyrm's footholds in the Penumbra.) Of course, the Wyrm will be well aware of its vulnerability even as it draws strength from it, and those Garou who seek to rescue the poor cub will face a grueling fight in this already nightmarish Realm.

Battleground

Perhaps almost too obvious a choice, the Battleground has never been better named. Before the Apocalypse, Battleground was divided and formal. The wars never crossed, and those walking along the trails were safe. But in superimposing the Battleground onto the Penumbra, the Wyrm destroyed that state. Now, the Battleground has become a single, massive war. Nazi soldiers wage *blitzkrieg* on Nordic hordes and see little confusing about the difference. Nor is anywhere safe any longer, as the trails have been drowned in blood and erased by soldiers' feet and tanks' treads. Setting the Final Battle here is an invitation to raw, bloody, unadulterated mayhem on the grandest scale (and perhaps a rousing scene involving turning all the armies of history against the Wyrm). In other words, it's an excellent idea if your troupe enjoys a great deal of combat and tactics, but one that also requires a great deal of planning and attention to logistics to portray accurately without being drowned in the number of troops involved.

CyberRealm

The CyberRealm is in chaos. A ragtag but well-equipped group of shapeshifters and spirits known as the CyberWolves has begun an armed insurrection against the spirits that rule the Realm. The Weaver is not sitting still while the Apocalypse begins, however. She is treading very carefully, aware of just how much she stands to lose should humanity panic during the End Times. The Weaver is hoping to come out of this with the cities and her handiwork intact, not in pieces. This isn't out of misguided hope, but rather out of her most basic nature as the creature of order. A Final Battle fought here will be extremely high-tech and fast-paced, with all manner of incredible technology augmenting both sides. Unless the Glass Walkers are leading the charge, however, this is likely to work much more to the detriment of the Garou than their aid, as the enemy is generally much better trained with weapons of the modern era. The Weaver might also intervene on either (or neither) side, seeking to keep the Realm safe and protect her own servants.

Erebus

While other Realms fall swiftly beneath the enemy's power, Erebus (at least initially) stands firm. The Incarna who rules Erebus, Charyss, is both awesomely powerful and furiously opposed to the Wyrm, and the Realm's natural defenses are highly effective — a burning lake of silver renders it impossible to traverse for the Black Spiral Dancers. The frightening spirit guardians of the Realm, the Brood, feed on Rage, making them particularly vicious against the Rage-empowered Banes that are the Wyrm's foot soldiers. If the Garou fall, it is likely that Erebus will be the last Realm to fall afterward — but it



will fall. Despite all the Realm's resources, not even Charyss can withstand the awesome might of the Wyrm's armies. Setting the Final Battle in Erebus itself would be a story of pure desperation, even for the Apocalypse. Garou do not willingly enter this Realm, and its natural features would be as fearsome for the Gaian forces as they would be for the enemy. Still, if the Garou are to finally redeem themselves (or be damned forever), where better to have it happen than the Realm of Judgment?

Flux Realm

Though discounted as too inherently unstable to be much harm or help during the Final Battle (and it makes a poor field for the fight itself), the Garou might become aware of a new threat in the Flux Realm during the End Times. Powerful minions of the Wyrm have discovered a way to create a mystical Seed that contains a burst of pure corruption, and they desire to plant this Seed in the Flux Realm. There, they believe, it will catalyze the chaos into creating an all-consuming monster of pure entropy. Most Theurges scoff at the notion of the Flux Realm, the embodiment of change, being confined to one purpose by something so lowly as a single Seed, but then again, chaos is nothing if not unpredictable. Can the Garou take that chance?

The Legendary Realm

The Legendary Realm's Apocalypse began early. The goal of the Wyrm here was not to conquer territory, but to destroy the history of the Garou and defile the memory of their greatest heroes. Robbed of the glory and dignity of their ancestors, the Garou will suffer a terrible blow to their morale, and many might submit to Harano and choose to die rather than go on after such a crippling defeat. Packs or even an entire sept might be sent here to keep a particularly important legend or hero from falling to the Wyrm, or at least to recover an important item or bit of information before it is lost forever. Setting the Final Battle here is either a noble stand or a cruel joke, depending on the Wyrm's progress. The Garou might find themselves fighting gloriously alongside their heroes of legend, or else facing down the gloating enemy over a pile of the defiled corpses of their ancestors.

Malfeas

Hell does a brisk trade in Apocalypse. Malfeas is chaotic come the last days, for while describing it as the central command post for the Wyrm credits the foul pre-creation thing a greater mind that it has or would deign to use, such a description has some truth. Like the Abyss, many of the Wyrm's plans stem ultimately from Malfeas, the most blasphemous patch of *Terra Umbra* the Garou know. Malfeas is also one of the Realms in which the Garou have the most to gain. Werewolves who understand stealth and can choose appropriate targets will be able to deal great damage to the Wyrm deep within its own home. There are many targets available. The only problem is that none of them will be easily reached or destroyed, and time is of the essence if they want these missions to have any impact on the outcome of the war.

Pangaea

While it is not immediately obvious, primal Pangaea has become hideously diseased. By corrupting the primitive tribe that inhabits the Realm, the Wyrm exposed the Realm's most powerful guardian spirit, the Elder Serpent, to a lingering foulness that now festers in its stomach. And if the great beast dies, the disease will spread to consume Pangaea and Gaia alike. For Pangaea is the soul and heart of Gaia, the primal point of creation from which her life flows. Garou may visit Pangaea in an attempt to heal the mighty Elder Serpent and recruit it for the Final Battle. Actually holding the Final Battle here will encourage a scenario of warfare at its most primal — modern weapons and



technology quickly fail in Pangaea, resulting in savage klaw and claw battles. The landscape can be anything the Storyteller desires, from endless grasslands to narrow mountain passes to blistering deserts to dark jungles and everything in between. It is also an excellent staging ground for a “back to basics” End-Time scenario, where the Garou must rely on their traditional weapons and tools as well as their instincts to carry the day.

Scar

Scar is the Realm perhaps the least changed by the coming of Apocalypse. Already strongly aligned with the Wyrm, yet not particularly one of his strongest places of power, the spirits in Scar are hardly the most fearsome. Nearly half are weak-willed drones who exist only to toil in the factories and follow the Wyrm more by rote than fervor, and the rest are brutal little thugs who usually need only be tough enough to menace the first. While a poor location to hold the Final Battle — its narrow streets and crumbling buildings are ill-suited to either army — a clever strategist might note that it is therefore perhaps the perfect location to build up a surprise force. A reasonably sized number of Garou warriors would stand a good chance of successfully liberating Scar and rallying its inhabitants against their previous overlords, particularly since the nastiest of the Banes from the Realm have been moved to the Last Battleground. But can it be done in time to make a difference?

Summer Country

Sooner rather than later, the Wyrm’s minions will find the Summer Country, and its defenses will crumble at their approach. The Wyrm cannot launch the Final Battle in the Summer Country, however. Even in its weakened state, this Realm resists such impurity to the point of destruction. Indeed, while the Realm cannot be hidden any longer, it also represents an opportunity for the Garou. If the Garou can follow these minions, they too can find the Summer Country. Considering that Gaia’s spirit resides there, albeit severely weakened by ongoing events, such a quest could be no less than the stuff of legends to the Nation. It is possible that Gaia could grant those who find her a Gift, a fetish or even a humble secret that greatly increases their chances of winning the Final Battle, though she is in no condition to do much more.

Wolfhome

The first Garou to step back into Wolfhome in the Apocalypse will notice the change immediately. No helicopters fly overhead anymore. You can’t hear the sounds of guns shooting the wolves or the crackle of electricity from the camps. But nor can you hear the howls of the wolves. And, most tellingly of all, no longer do the Garou come to Wolfhome as wolves. Wolfhome is dead. Setting the Final Battle in this haunted, empty place is an excellent choice for a chronicle involving many lupus characters, or even just characters particularly dedicated to restoring the wilderness in general. As the final representation of all their deepest fears, it can be a uniquely powerful place to bring it all to an end.

STORYTELLING THE FINAL BATTLE

The Final Battle is literally everything *Werewolf* has ever been leading up to. Slowly but surely, the Garou have gathered together at the Last Battleground under the banner of Margrave Konietzko, or perhaps another leader who has emerged during the course of the chronicle. Some are not there, having chosen to guard their caern to the end, having succumbed to Harano or having died trying to reach the Battlefield. Within the sight of every man, wolf and monster in the Nation, is an army 10 times as large, filled with blasphemous horrors and led by the gargantuan form of the Wyrm.

At last, it is time.



TACTICS

While the Final Battle should be a chaotic, sprawling affair as the Garou face off against sentient death for the fate of life, perpetual and unchanging combat quickly becomes boring in a storytelling game. The Final Battle does have tactics and changing battlefield conditions that allow a Storyteller to vary the action and keep the players excited as the world comes tumbling to an end.

Goals of Battle

The Final Battle is unusual in many ways, most obviously in that the primary goal of the battle does not require the seizing of any territory. The primary goal of battle here is simply the obliteration of the enemy force. Neither side will attempt retreat, so maintaining channels of retreat is a pointless gesture. Unless the Storyteller desires to really employ the features of the Realm to full effect in the Final Battle, the Plain of the Apocalypse is flat and featureless, completely without hills or gullies that might be of value strategically. Despite all this, the battle is not without points of strategic consideration.

The first of these is the most obvious: the Five Columns of Flesh. As the mechanism by which the Wyrm will bring in any reinforcements, it assumes tremendous strategic value. The destruction of any of the columns will hamper the Wyrm's efforts, most especially the columns connecting Malfeas, the Abyss and the Atrocity Realm.

Gaian Stronghold

Similarly, the Garou have a wall to their backs in the caern that borders their side of the field. While it is not nearly so important to the Garou as the Columns of Flesh are to the Wyrm, the caern is an advantage that the Garou should not throw away pointlessly. Any spirit refugees who were harbored in this caern will still be there in the Final Battle, and they can form a useful "base camp" that the wounded in the battle can be dragged back to. Since werewolves heal so quickly, and not all of their enemies deal aggravated damage, this is no small advantage. Maintaining a strong defense of this caern could assist the Garou in maintaining a tougher fight.

Also of value are the two sides of the Battlefield. Since the Warring Hordes form a solid wall, any troops there cannot be flanked. Most of the Banes will ignore this, rushing forward in a mad scramble, but the werewolves on the field may prove more cunning and use careful advances along the sides of the battlefield for added security or even to lure powerful foes to a devastating trap.

Surprise Attacks

Storytellers who want to use a surprise attack by the Wyrm should find ways for the attack to come out of nowhere. Create a minor disturbance — something that looks like a surprise attack such as Black Spiral packs using *Burrow* or *Patagia* to quickly flank the Garou Nation and begin attacking. Play it out hard, make it seem genuine. And then, only when the players have calmed down, slam down 10 Nexus Crawlers, turn the ground to silver and rain steaming blood from the sky. And in the middle of *that*, have the Wyrm attack proper. Pile it on. Try to panic the players, but give them a way to succeed as well — not without cost, perhaps, but succeed nonetheless.

By contrast, if the players are launching a surprise attack, play up the tension. Let the alpha be coordinating the strike using communication fetishes or spirit allies. Repeatedly ask your players what they are doing, and make note of every last detail in your descriptions and placement of Narrators. Try to suggest to your players that they should be *obviously* doing something, without saying anything. Regardless of



whether the surprise attack eventually works or not, you should be able to produce a sigh of relief from your players when it happens.

Foot Soldiers and Massed Charges

At the center of the Final Battle is the massive collision of Garou and any spirits or other allies they have gathered throwing themselves headlong against the coalition of Black Spiral Dancers and Banes the Wyrm has gathered. And yet, the battle isn't quite a massive brawl. While the tactics involved aren't exactly mundane, there is certainly still a strong strategic element to the conflict.

Garou still attack in packs, rather than individually. While the lack of cover and flat terrain renders some pack tactics useless, the basics of how werewolves fight still applies. The Wyrm is aware that despite having Banes available that dwarf werewolves in size, the strong pack fighting makes those Banes not nearly so powerful as it could hope. As a result, the Wyrm also needs to create tactics that nullify the pack advantage. The easiest way to do so is with massive numbers. The Wyrm swarms Garou packs with massed units of Scrags or Wyrm Elementals. Even massed, they're little match for most Garou, but they break apart pack tactics and consume the individual efforts of the werewolves. After this, a larger Bane will attack the divided pack, further driving the werewolves apart.

Storytellers should keep these tactics in mind and develop others to throw at the players during the battle. Don't just keep moving the next warrior into position — eventually, your game will become extremely boring. Instead, mix it up a bit. Create that wave of tiny Banes and then pound your players with the big guy, showing them what the Wyrm's tactics are meant to do, and then let it level out a bit into a field of different Banes. Then, when they get swamped the second time, you can get your players waiting for the other shoe to drop. (And, on a third try, hit them with a massive wave of small Banes, and see if they correlate this with a really *massive* Bane about to attack.) Keep changing things, but make it obvious that it's part of a strategy, not just a Storyteller ploy to keep things fresh.

The Big Guns

If the Garou don't have some incredibly large spirit allies backing them up, then their chances of winning the Final Battle are practically nil, no matter what other advantages they have. Aside from morale, the primary value of having such mighty spirits lies primarily in pinning the Wyrm to its spot above the Five Columns of Flesh. Should it leave that spot to wreak havoc upon the Garou, then soon after a massive strike would sever the connection, leaving the reserves in the Near Realms with no ability to enter the Plain of the Apocalypse. If none of the Celestines, Incarnae or powerful totem spirits are at the battlefield, then the Wyrm charges from its waiting point and dives upon the Garou. Acid drips from its underbelly, balefire from its mouth and eyes. *Hundreds* of Garou can die with each swoop, and the Final Battle is most probably over very quickly indeed.

On the other hand, if larger spirits are present, the Garou not only have more hope but also more firepower to help them cut through the seemingly endless ranks of the Wyrm's foot soldiers and target more important foes. Very powerful scenes can be centered around accompanying a totem or even several totem spirits on their "last charge" into the enemy ranks, as the spirits give their lives to draw fire and make some other objective possible to obtain. Some clever players might find other ways to strategically use the big guns. If they do so, encourage such creative thinking by letting it work.



STARTING THE FINAL BATTLE

Less important than how to end it, but still worth thought. Give the players time to have their characters resolve conflicts with rivals (or refuse, even into death, to let them rest) and otherwise show their characters preparing themselves for the final cataclysm. Stay hands off, just giving a few gentle nudges by bringing old characters back into view. Remember, practically the entire Garou Nation is here. Any other werewolf (who's still alive) who the characters have reason to love or hate is going to be here too.

When the players are ready to begin the battle, have the Margrave or another leader deliver this speech to the Nation, and then charge into history. Naturally, if one of your characters has assumed a leadership position and would like to give a stirring speech, feel free to let him use some or all of the following speech:

"Know this, warriors of our Mother! There is nothing after this. Our ancestors have been butchered twice, once in body and once in spirit. There is no Heaven, there will be no Hell. Valhalla does not exist. All that is will be destroyed if we fall today. And many of you will. The enemy is mighty and fearsome, and we march forward into the mouth of death. Do not fight for an afterlife reward for your bravery, for it will not come. Fight instead for Gaia. Fight for all that which you know and love. Fight with every last ounce of Rage left inside of you, so that even should the Wyrm destroy us, they will be awestruck by your mighty fury."

"Prove your arms so mighty, prove your anger so terrible, prove your love so pure and your passion so encompassing. Prove your minds so resourceful and your zeal and courage so overwhelming that even should every one of us fall today, the armies of the Wyrm will never rest easy."

"In their reign of Oblivion, every one of their soldiers will look over their shoulders and sleep with one eye open. They will live with fear — fear that one day, we will find a way back!"

A TRIBE FALLS

In this scenario, a tribe falls into the Wyrm's service. This betrayal leads to a civil war within the Garou Nation as the tribes loyal to Gaia must defend themselves against former allies while still protecting Gaia from the forces of the Wyrm. The Apocalypse comes from within.

This scenario has the potential to be the most personal of the Apocalypse scenarios described in this book, but its sweep can be just as epic as any of the others. In fact, it's easy to fold a tribal fall element in with pieces of other scenarios to build an Apocalypse that meets your chronicle's needs precisely. Of course, it will also take more work. The Apocalypse will begin and end in different fashion depending on which tribe falls, and of course there's the need to fine-tune the tribe so that the fall seems more plausible.

It is strongly recommended that the Storyteller have access to the revised Tribebook of the tribe that falls to the Wyrm. It isn't strictly necessary, but it will certainly help flesh out the doomed tribe appropriately, as well as provide any number of plot hooks and other interesting material.

WHICH TRIBE?

The first question that is likely to come to mind when contemplating a tribal-fall Apocalypse is: Which tribe is the "best" one to have fall? There's no perfect answer to this question. An easier decision to make is whether the tribe to fall should be one



represented in your troupe's sept. It's possible that the Storyteller *must* answer this question in the affirmative, as the chronicle may well have representatives from all tribes.

If not, it's much easier to make the fallen tribe be one that isn't represented by any of the players, since the Storyteller can then control all aspects of the fall and reveal information to the players only when it is truly necessary and appropriate. It is much easier to keep the secret of a tribe's fall when the Storyteller is the only one who knows about it, after all.

By contrast, a Storyteller has to walk a very fine line when running a tribal fall for a tribe represented among the players' sept. The best way to handle it is to give players a handle on the events surrounding the fall of the tribe, allowing them to make minor changes to the way it plays out without really affecting the fact of the fall of the tribe. They might not be able to stop the rest of their tribe, but they might be able to save some close friends or Kinfolk from falling to the Wyrm. Perhaps they even emerge as leaders of the remaining fragments of their tribe.

TRIBAL-FALL ELEMENTS

Every tribal-fall story involves a common set of elements. The short version of the story is that a given tribe becomes corrupted by the Wyrm, betrays the Garou Nation and Gaia to the Wyrm, then brings about the Apocalypse, ending the world as the Garou know it.

No two tribes experience this fall in quite the same fashion. One might lurk in the service of the Wyrm for years, slowly plotting and planning, while another could fall and take the fight to the Garou Nation within a matter of weeks. One tribe might fall almost by accident, while another could decide that the Wyrm's side is the only one worth standing on. While the broad scope might look similar for each tribe, each tribe causes the Apocalypse to spin somewhat differently, and a Storyteller should expect to put his own unique stamp on what happens.

The elements listed here are only some of the possible points to consider when creating your story. The examples that follow touch on every one of these points, however.

FORESHADOWING

Plot out the activities that a tribe's leader (or other influential members) takes that lead it to be corrupted by the Wyrm. This motivation guides the rest of the tribe's activities. The werewolves might be tricked into falling — led into a cavern that turns out to echo the Black Spiral, for instance. They might find some other threat that they consider to be even worse than the Wyrm, driving it into the arms of the Wyrm out of desperation.

Of course, the tribe could also turn to the Wyrm out of a cold calculation that the Apocalypse has already begun and the Wyrm's side is the one most likely to win...

Omens: Early in the tribe's fall — or even before it has begun to fall — the only things noticeable are the gentle shakings of cosmology. The tribe itself occupies an important place in Gaia's reality, and the tribe's totem, as an Incarna, has a key role as well. As the tribe begins to fall, therefore, Theurges, those with high Gnosis or those with high Occult scores might all experience unsettling omens. They could occur through dreams or through observations of mystically significant everyday circumstances.

THE FIRST STEP

What step, precisely, does the tribe take that enters it into the Wyrm's service? This should be a specific thing — a point beyond which no sane person can claim that the tribe does not serve the Wyrm, even if some individual members do not. This



could be a great ritual conducted by tribal elders, a field trip through the Black Spiral, a crusade to Malfeas or a dozen other things. It is a dramatic event, with repercussions throughout the physical and spiritual worlds. No one with a Gnosis above two Traits fails to recognize that something ominous has taken place, though the signs might not clearly point out just what actually happened.

Politics: As some factions of the tribe turn toward the Wyrm, a Garou character might hear rumors of strange activity among her tribemates. Rumor spreads far and wide. Perhaps the initial cover story spread through the tribe is that the tribe's leadership has been working on a secret ritual to fight the Weaver or Wyrm. As the circle of fallen Garou expands through the tribe, those who still serve Gaia find themselves excluded from otherwise ordinary rituals or tribal activities. Rumors of a "cult of the favored" spreads among the Gaian Garou, and many petition to join the "favored" so that they can regain what political power they had, never guessing that such activity will spell their doom. Certain septs could fall in their entirety very quickly, while others might be quite resistant to the call of the Wyrm.

For the troupe's packs, this could be a time for careful investigation. At the same time, though, the fallen Garou of the tribe are at their most paranoid. Spirits and young Garou patrol the outskirts of nearly every gathering, Garou all wear Wolf Skin fetishes and so on.

Covert Activity

Certain tribes might spend weeks, months or even years with their heads down, not yet revealing to the other tribes that they're in the service of the Wyrm. They might be extending their reach in some fashion, or they could be hunting down rogue tribe members who haven't yet turned.

This is a time of great urgency for the fallen werewolves. They have an enormous opportunity to strike from surprise, but they must swiftly quell any internal opposition, lest those traitors who remain loyal to Gaia reveal the tribe's subversion. As a result, expect the deaths of many Garou during this period, at the hands of mysterious werewolves who give all indication of being Black Spiral Dancers.

The troupe's sept might be called upon to investigate these murders. That investigation could be the first time that the sept encounters evidence of the Wyrm's tentacles extending deep into a Gaian tribe.

Hunts: Once the fallen Garou of the tribe solidify their power base and control roughly 2/3 of the tribe's numbers, they begin calling nightly hunts of the "rebels" who remain in service to Gaia. This is a brief and intense period just before the tribe's fall comes out into the open, and it really represents the kickoff of the Apocalypse itself.

The hunters do their best to capture rebellious tribemates alive, and bring them back to the nearest Hive for "re-education." This gives rebel Garou a fighting chance, as their foes aren't striking to kill — at least not at first. Once the fallen tribe has been exposed to the rest of the Garou Nation, its leadership accepts that most remaining rebels are simply losses to their great cause, and they strike at the holdouts just as they would strike at any other Gaian Garou.

In the end, not every Garou of the fallen tribe falls into the service of the Wyrm. Some keep their freedom; some manage to be adopted by another tribe's totem or live as Ronin through the end.

REVEALED!

Eventually too many factors pile up to enable the fallen tribe to hide its existence from the rest of the Garou Nation. Powerful spirits might reveal the tribe's



corruption to other Garou, or a single event could occur that draws everyone's attention to the fallen tribe. If the traitors are sufficiently organized, they might even announce their new state openly, defying the other Garou to challenge them.

At this stage, be ready for a lot of frantic questions and frenzied activity from the players, particularly if there are characters from that tribe who haven't learned of the corruption yet. Have a plan for what the Nation as a whole will do about the matter, as well as some ideas for how the sept might respond as well, and be ready to spring those ideas into action soon after the revelation hits. Players should feel like their world has been turned upside-down and that events are happening almost too fast to keep track of.

TRIBAL FALL AND TOTEM SPIRITS

A fallen tribe's totem has one of several fates. First, the totem spirit itself could fall into the service of the Wyrm (or the Weaver). The spirit could become deluded, trapped and poisoned, or deliberately throw itself to the Wyrm's side. In fact, the spirit's fall might be the cause of its tribe's fall. Of the tribal totem spirits, the ones most likely to end up on the Wyrm's side seem to be Grandfather Thunder, Griffin, Great Uktena, and Great Wendigo, but there's no tribal totem spirit that is *immune* to a fall.

If the Incarna is killed, its tribe is rudderless. The tribe might simply scatter, approaching other tribes of Garou (and their totems) for adoption. A tribe with no surviving totem spirit cannot adopt new members, nor can its members learn Gifts from Jagglings or Gafflings avatars of the totem. Jagglings pack totems of that Incarna become listless, distracted and lose half their Gnosis. Garou of a tribe with no totem spirit cannot gain Rank, and they are more prone than their brethren to enter Harano. The tribe's Umbrial homeland becomes unstable and chaotic. For all these reasons, it is imperative that the tribe find a new totem.

Not every fallen totem follows an identical path, but most perform the same general sweep of actions:

Corrupt the Children. There are several simple ways to corrupt Garou, from the perspective of a tribal totem gone bad. A good way to rapidly turn Garou to the Wyrm is to feed them corrupt Gnosis. A cunning totem knows when its packs hunt spirits for Gnosis, and it makes sure to have subtly corrupted Gafflings and Jagglings fall into the pack's path. More violent and less subtle totems may choose to use the werewolves' Rage against them. Present a Garou with enough opportunities to frenzy and sooner or later, he'll either do something awful and regrettable during the frenzy or be pushed into the Thrall of the Wyrm. A Totem of War might have unusual ability to affect a werewolf's Rage in this regard.

Target the Leadership. The totem starts by corrupting the highest-ranking members of the tribe. For ease of access (and concealment) it begins with those Garou who are members of packs dedicated to it. If Stag falls, it goes after high-ranking Fianna in Stag packs first. It subsequently spreads its influence, reaching out for high-ranking Garou of its tribe who are not members of its packs, and then members of its packs of all ranks, and finally low-ranking Garou with other pack totems.

Provide Tainted Magic. While the charm offensives listed previously are going on, the totem might begin to provide its more vulnerable — "trusted" — Theurges and Philodox with new versions of old rituals, fetishes and Gifts. These new versions rely on Wyrm spirits rather than Gaian spirits, but that might not be immediately obvious.



Just Following Orders

The default assumption throughout this chapter is that the fallen tribe succumbs to the wiles of the Wyrm. Within the last half century, though, it has become more obvious to the Garou that the Weaver, and her madness, is at least as big a threat to Gaia as the Wyrm is. Nearly any of the tribes that fall to the Wyrm might fall to the Weaver instead. The Wyrm wants to foment chaos and destruction in order to drag Gaia to her doom and restart the universe. The Weaver, by contrast, wants to push Gaia into stasis.

So while the Wyrm targets a tribe to fall in order to cause the maximum disruption to the Garou Nation and to Gaia's spirit hierarchy, the Weaver targets a tribe to fall in order to calm the Garou Nation down, as well as smooth out ripples in the spirit realm. Sick of endless war and near despair at the state of the world, many Garou would certainly be tempted to embrace a power that promises to give them the world of their desires—in return for helping remove unwanted “aberrations” while remaking the world in that image, of course.

Storytellers interested in this angle need only think about what a given tribe's utopia would be like, and how the Weaver could convince them that it would be made reality through its service.

Into the Tails of the Wyrm

Whichever tribe falls to the Wyrm, it won't be alone in its service. The White Howlers fell to the Wyrm, many centuries ago, becoming the Black Spiral Dancers. The relationship between the fallen tribe and the Dancers could be crucial to an Apocalypse chronicle.

Joining the Dancers

The fallen tribe could simply join the brood of Whippoorwill, greatly increasing the size of the Black Spiral Dancer tribe. This is the simplest option, though it does raise the question of the fate of the tribe's original totem. Packs of the fallen tribe would either join Dancer packs or form intact packs of their own. Certainly these new members of the Black Spiral Dancers would be less prone to inbred madness and hereditary taint. The flip side is that the integration of old and new Black Spiral Dancers is never easy or painless. The integration of hundreds of new Wyrm-Garou should lead to chaos and even, possibly, a civil war in the tribe until clear leaders from both old and new emerge and come to terms with one another.

Rivals to the Dancers

The most likely result of a tribe's fall to the Wyrm is that that tribe stands separately from the Black Spiral Dancers, becoming another tentacle of the Wyrm. While it is possible that the two tribes would cooperate in service of the Wyrm, given the rivalry that Whippoorwill is sure to have with another Wyrmish Garou tribal totem, it is much more likely that the tribes' activities do not seriously overlap. When they do overlap, dark Garou on both sides vie for dominance over the others—a situation that the Wyrm encourages (to see that only the strongest survive to serve it) and that clever Garou might be able to exploit if they can learn about it in time.

Dancers Exterminated

A powerful and proud tribe could perhaps destroy the Black Spiral Dancers after falling to the Wyrm's service. A tribe such as the Silver Fangs might brook no rival in



the Great Destroyer's affections, for example. The tribe wouldn't be lured into a fall if the majority of the Wyrm's forces weren't prepared to back the newly fallen tribe in its assault on the Black Spiral Dancers, after all. Surviving Black Spiral Dancers might even turn to Gaian Garou for assistance, offering their knowledge of the Wyrm's resources and activities in return for protection against the Wyrm's newest army. Such a scenario should be good for hours of in-character argument, at the very least.

THE TRIBES IN SHADOW

What follows is a brief accounting of what might happen to each of the tribes surrounding a fall. It should not be considered "canonical," but instead a suggestion of what might push enough of the tribe to fall and what they would do once corrupted. Storytellers should feel free to alter the story hooks provided or even invent their own as necessary for their chronicle.

Black Furies

The **Widows**, as they come to be known, turn due to a strange illness from their exposure to Wyld energies that begins unpredictably changing their physical forms. Unable to stop the change but unwilling to snare themselves in the web of the Weaver, they reason that this change must herald greater things. They attempt to awaken the long-slumbering Wyrm of Balance and restore the natural world to its former state, but they are slowly drawn into darkness by other Wyrm-spirits until they are given entirely to the cause of corruption.

Bone Gnawers

What drives the creation of the **Plague Rats** is ultimately simple avarice. Tired of being poor and rejected for so very long, these embittered Garou are finally seduced by the promises of the Wyrm to deliver them the riches and respect they deserve if they help it remake the world. Allying with Leeches and Ratkin, they spread chaos and destruction as only those with nothing to lose really can, becoming accomplished assassins and purveyors of terror and disease.

Children of Gaia

How could these noble Garou become the terrible killers known as the **Reavers**? Never forget what is said about the path of good intentions. Believing that they will sacrifice their lives for the good of Gaia, the elders of the tribe perform an ancient ritual to cleanse the Wyrm of its madness — but something goes horribly wrong, corrupting the participants to the cause they were attempting to heal. As one, they reach a decision: Gaia's suffering must end. *Right now.*

Fianna

Playing on the simmering leadership tensions within the tribe, the faction known as the **Black Stags** makes deals with Black Spiral Dancers and other terrible allies in order to "restore the tribe to its 'pure' state." Striking in a series of devastating ambushes, they kill or capture a number of prominent packs, forcing survivors to walk the Black Spiral. Many innocent Fianna are summoned to meetings with their fallen kin (carefully disguised to hide their taint), only to find themselves surrounded and facing the choice to join or die.

Get of Fenris

The **Pure** arise from a great campaign to cleanse a series of interconnected mystic tunnels the Black Spirals have dug under the North Sea, which allow them to strike across Europe at great speed. Following a great tribal moot, the Get resolve to purge the Pit that dwells at the heart of the tunnels — and like the White Howlers before them, emerge deranged and wholly given to the Wyrm. They promptly unleash their fury on the Nation, and Gaia trembles.



Glass Walkers

The **Raiders** arise from the pragmatism for which the tribe is famous for. Overpowered by the awakened Corporate Father totem spirit of the Pentex Corporation, their Cockroach totem negotiates a settlement where the Walkers will be spared and allowed a place in the next world hierarchy in return for serving Pentex during the Apocalypse. Naturally, some Walkers refuse, and are promptly turned over to "human resources" for a bloody "downsizing."

Red Talons

As a mysterious disease decimates the remaining wolf packs of the world, the **Predators** declare that the time has come to cull the human population once more. While this war on humanity leaves them with few allies in this realm, many angry spirits join the war effort, causing disasters around the globe. When the Wyrm offers its aid, the enraged and grief-maddened Predators accept.

Shadow Lords

Attempting to boost Grandfather Thunder to the status of Celestine to help combat the Wyrm, all Shadow Lords are assigned a great task to prove their totem is worthy — and they fail. Not only are they weaker for the effort, but their enemies are stronger than ever, and the other tribes heap shame upon them. Though at they simply lash out in anger first, proud Thunder eventually turns to the Wyrm in spite — and takes his dearest children with him, name and all.

Silent Striders

The **Hungry Ghosts** arise in the wake of a terrifying discovery in the Dark Umbra — a gigantic entity known as Grandmother that walks the land of the dead, a vast storm of angry souls forever swirling around her. The haunted tribe decides to go willingly to the Wyrm and lead its minions into direct conflict with this being, in the hopes that the other tribes will be able to defeat the weakened forces of either side. Of course, once they walk the Black Spiral, not all of them desire a conflict between the fallen powers — but rather an alliance.

Silver Fangs

Following a great sacrifice to Falcon, the Silver Fangs find their madness lifted for a year and a day, and begin a great campaign to destroy some of the most powerful Hives around the world. Garou rejoice as these forces emerge victorious — until the warriors of the **Fiery Crown** declare that with minds clear, they see that Gaia's cause is hopeless. They eliminated the Dancers because they were unworthy allies. Now the Crown leads the Wyrm's minions, using all their inside information and natural talents to tear the Nation apart.

Uktena

Seduced by sweet whispers and promises of power during their lonely mystic vigils, the **Snakes** do far more harm than any Garou might have expected as they unleash many of the sleeping Banes they have been tending for centuries, as well as use some of the powerful Wyrm fetishes they have kept in their care. Striking back at these elusive and mystically gifted Garou is a daunting prospect, and their knowledge of great occult secrets makes them dangerous foes indeed.

Wendigo

Enraged by grievous violence against native activists, the **Devourers** emerge as the tribe takes on a war footing against the Wyrmcomers and the Garou who support them, using their great Gifts to lash the precious cities of the enemy with natural



disasters and other devastating setbacks. In the face of opposition from the other tribes, Great Wendigo urges his children onward to greater acts of ferocity, until finally the Wyrm takes them all.

The Beast Courts

The Stargazer tribe of the Garou, along with many of its hengeyokai allies of Asia, finds itself torn between two factions: those who believe the arrival of the Sixth Age (the Apocalypse) can be delayed, and the **Fatalists** who believe nothing more can be done and give themselves over to the Wyrm in hopes of easing the death agonies of the world.

THE WAR ITSELF

If the fall of a tribe is simply a prelude to another sort of war, then refer to the other sections of this chapter for guidance. If, on the other hand, you wish to focus on the uniquely tribal nature of this war, consider a few analogies from the United States Civil War.

First, the fallen tribe's members know *everything* that is public knowledge within the Garou Nation. They know where the big caerns are. They know who the important leaders are, and *someone* in the fallen tribe probably knows each leader's weaknesses, strengths, preferred Gifts, rites and fetishes to boot.

In this scenario, one of the weaknesses of modern-day Garou society that so many elders rail against is exposed as a true weakness: With so many multi-tribe packs out there, the fall of a single tribe to the Wyrm exposes the weaknesses and secrets of the majority of Garou. If modern Garou society were more insular — with most packs being single-tribe packs — then the fallen tribe would not have infiltrated the others quite so deeply, and its loss, while still hard, would not be crippling in the way it could be today.

By the same token, though, the elders and leaders of the fallen tribe grew up with the rest of the Garou Nation — everybody knows everybody. The modern leaders of the Western Concordat have a good idea of the skills, strengths and weaknesses of their erstwhile allies. They all know one another's fighting styles and should probably spend some time thinking, "I know he'd prefer to do this in a frontal assault, but he *knows* I know he'd prefer to do this in a frontal assault..."

Fallen and loyal Garou try to use their former pack bonds and mutual loyalties against the others. Fallen Garou expect their former packmates and allies to fight with regret, perhaps holding back on the killing blow in the hopes of redeeming a friend from a dark fate. Count on fallen Garou to take advantage of this by feigning surrender or showing false loyalty. Gaian werewolves can call on old loyalties and dredge up memories that are unpleasant to fallen Garou — they might pull a few former allies into frenzy. Gifts, rites and totem powers that rely on two Garou being packmates might well still work on fallen former packmates.

END OF THE WAR

A tribal-fall scenario doesn't have to stand alone. Any tribe's fall could lead into any of the other three major scenarios presented here. A tribal fall to the Weaver could lead to a "Weaver Ascendant" scenario; tribal totems falling to the Wyrm might lead to a "Last Battleground" scenario; just about *any* of them could lead to a "Ragnarok" scenario. And the tribal fall could be its own thing — the fall results in war among the Garou and the emergence of the Wyrm's forces.

If the story does spin off into other scenarios in this book, it is critically important to resolve the tribal fall scenario itself as the war comes to an end. It's a simple rule of drama.



One Stands Alone

You may choose, at the end, to have the entire Garou Nation fall save for one tribe. Just about any tribe would work in this role, but it makes the most sense to have the nature of the other tribes' fall be something that the chosen tribe is more resistant to. If the Wyrm works through perverting the Ancestor Spirits of all the other tribes, then it makes sense that most Silent Striders would be resistant to such corruption. If the Wyrm drags Garou to fall by goading their Rage to intolerable levels, perhaps the Children of Gaia would resist.

At the Storyteller's discretion, the last "tribe" might not even be a single tribe at all, but a collection of surviving Garou who share a common tie, or perhaps lack a specific Trait that leads to corruption. This connection can be anything the Storyteller desires, such as a certain Gift or fetish, high Gnosis, low Rage, *Ancestor* or *Pure Breed* Backgrounds or high Willpower. These survivors band together to form the Tribe of the Apocalypse, forging a new identity and possibly even a new totem bond even as their former allies gather the Wyrm's minions around them.

Whichever tribe stands alone surely faces an impossible siege, a guerrilla war that it is sure to lose barring some utterly miraculous event. The tribe members may find individual allies here and there — some Kami, perhaps, a few nature spirits, or lone Garou or Fera who have resisted the Wyrm's call. This situation is even more bleak than most other scenarios portrayed herein, and possibly not for most troupes due to its excessively bleak outlook. Still, those looking for a truly tragic last stand might find that the One Tribe twist suits them just fine.

If the Apocalypse kicks off because of the fall of a tribe to the Wyrm, a satisfying resolution to the tribe has to be reached. It can be a tragic resolution — and it probably will be.

RAGNAROK

The Apocalypse has obsessed Garou since the Beginning. While some mystics have asked themselves and the spirits about what awaits them — and have come up with a variety of answers — most Garou have looked forward to a battle in which the Nation would fulfill its final purpose of battling the Wyrm to a finish. Now it's the End Time, Doomsday, Judgment Day, Armageddon, Ragnarok, the End of All Songs. The prophecies unfold; no doubt the End is here. This story concerns the final enacting of what filled the mouths of poets and sages for so long, what made the Garou and will unmake them.

In this section, the Storyteller will find a suggested series of End-Times events that, along with ideas for telling stories centered on the characters' active involvement in the Final Battle between the Gaian Host and the Hordes of the Wyrm. These events provide space for many stories, even a complete chronicle and a framework for chronicles set in that time. Rather than specifying the exact places and people involved, it seems better to give events and ideas here, along with some story seeds, and to let the Storyteller fit them into an existing chronicle.

The Story of the Fall

The events of *Rage Across the Heavens* have acquainted the planetary Incarnae all too well with the situation of Mother Gaia. While most of the planetary spirits do not



see anything that they can do about the tragic situation, one of them decides to take matters into his own claws. Rorg, the Many-Taloned Hunter of the Asteroid Belt, strikes at Earth. He wishes to prevent its destruction, and as his own world is long destroyed, he cannot be afraid of retaliation. Rorg launches his Claw, the asteroid that humans call Geographos, into a trajectory that will strike the Earth. The raging Incarna believes that doing so should make the Earth useless to the Wyrm and to Anthelios. Gaia, he believes, can recover with the Wyrm so crippled. This act causes the Shattering of Luna, the Fall and the Great Black, and it sets the stage for the Final Battle.

As the asteroid comes closer, visibly deviating from its orbit, Garou and humans become very worried. Nostradamus was not the only prophet whose work was interpreted to foretell a “mountain” falling into the sea. The darkest dreams of the Mokolé hint at such an event, although millions of years past. Once word reaches them, the Dragon Breed themselves begin to panic. Mokolé start to prepare for the end, or the beginning.

THE SKY ROAD

The coming of the Claw means that the Garou must try to stop it before it strikes the Earth. Mostly likely your characters’ packs are nominated (it being their chronicle). If the packs are too inexperienced, the Storyteller may allow some Narrator “guest stars” to help them handle it. The pack must seek entrance to the Deep Umbra, whether at a caern familiar to them with that capability or the Sept of the Stars, a Stargazer site in the Aetherial Realm of the Near Umbra. Additionally, each Garou will require some means of breathing in the Deep Umbra. A nosegay of fetish flowers that are sniffed to provide oxygen will suffice if no other ideas emerge.

The Claw itself appears to be less a world in itself than a flying mountain. Its surface is rock, cracked and pitted by meteorite impacts. The Garou step sideways into the fetish orrery to the Umbra of the asteroid, a brilliantly lit place where Helios dazzles them and burns their eyes. Earth is visible as a blue star accompanied by a white star (the moon). They “swim” rather than walk along with the asteroid, floating in the ocean-sky of the Umbra. The whirling of the Claw means that Helios’ light alternates with starry dark. In this environment the Wyld-spirits who swarm on the Claw will be able to attack the Garou almost by surprise. A Vortex leads as many Lesser Wyldlings as there are Garou. The Vortex is the “motor” by which the asteroid moves, and its Charms of fire, flaming vapors and steam smoke are its secondary weapons. It seems like a living fountain or volcano. The Wyldlings appear as distortions in the whirling stars and put a one-Trait penalty on all attempts to attack them directly unless the Garou uses Scent of Sight or a similar power to circumvent the need for vision.

The battle should be fierce. If the Garou are driven off the asteroid and back into the Deep Umbra, Geographos will continue toward the Earth and only the sacrifice of Luna will enable Earth to survive. If the Garou disperse all the spirits, including the Vortex, then the asteroid will be on an inertial trajectory and might be deflected by a *Deep Impact* style nuke. The sacrifice of Luna is still plausible. The battle on the asteroid should not stop the Fall and the Great Black unless the Storyteller doesn’t really want an “Apocalypse” story.

THE RECONCILIATION

Not long after the Claw appears, the Garou are approached by unexpected allies: the Mokolé. The Mokolé seek rapprochement with their ancient enemies, with negotiations centered on alliance in the face of imminent catastrophe. The Mokolé insist that the Garou make a gesture of genuine atonement for the Wars of



Rage as a means of sealing the truce. How, exactly, the Garou choose to do so is up to them. They might perform Rites of Cleansing and offer a permanent point of Rage as a sacrifice to Gaia, for instance. If the players roleplay genuine grief and remorse, the Mokolé are satisfied and full negotiations begin.

Their offer is an alliance with the Garou, the restoration of the First Times. They don't recognize the Garou tribal divisions and assume that the elders who confront them speak for all the canine shapeshifters, including the Nuwisha and Kitsune. The negotiations should last for some time. Neither Changing Breed fully trusts the other, and with good reason. Cliath Garou could be involved as liaisons, messengers and guards. Elder characters will be sent to conduct the negotiations.

When the Mokolé are satisfied that they can trust the Garou, they will explain the true purpose of their coming. The Garou are the only ones who can attempt a quest into the Mokolé realm of Mnésis, the shared memory of Gaia. The Garou must delve into this mental sea to retrieve the lost Gifts of the First Times, Gifts that a Mokolé cannot use or even know, in order to use them against the Wyrm.

The Mnésis Quest

The werewolf or werewolves who choose to accept this mission first listen to a warning from the Mokolé about the dangers of Mnésis quests. The monsters of memory devour some who seek treasure in the sea of lost time; the memories themselves can lure travelers to their doom, and some memories tear the mind apart. That said, the chosen characters will be sent into the Memory of Gaia through the use of teacher plants. The Dragon Breed cannot do so themselves, as their reptilian minds cannot learn Gifts from mammalian beings or spirits.

The quest itself is a fabulous roleplaying opportunity for Storytellers to exploit. Structure it as a strange descent through memories that the characters recognize as belonging to their own past, to their grandparents, great-grandparents, and so on, back further and further in time. Each memory connects to the next through a door in a wall, a garden gate, a path through trees, crossing a stream and so on. Dream-Hunters — powerful memories that take the shape of a dangerous enemy from the time and place where the memory scene is set — might assault the Garou, and they can be permanently killed only if the Garou travel to the memory where the creature originated and destroy it there.

Finally, the Garou arrive in the First Times, long before the Impergium or the Wars of Rage, when all shapeshifters lived together in peace with Gaia and each other. The Earth is a wild place, and animals long extinct in the material world roam here. A moot convenes to welcome the “visitors.” The Garou see bull-headed and boar-shaped changers at the moot that they attend: These are the lost Apis and Grondr, along with Camazotz bat-shifters and Khara Bastet. This should be a scene of great wonder and mystery, as things the Garou never knew existed make themselves known. Learning the Gifts and rites in question should likewise be a powerful experience, especially the Last Rite (described on p. 97), which the changers of the past impart sadly, hoping it will never be needed.

The Claw Descends

Meanwhile, humans have learned from their own scientists that the Claw approaches, and the result is worldwide hysteria. The Garou should be aware anywhere in the human world that humans are panicked, violent and very afraid. Caerns see lots of kin seeking shelter. Human governments try to prepare mineshaft



refuges (complete with vending machines and cable TV) in places such as Cheyenne Mountain. Among them are vampires, seeking to follow their herds into safety where a food supply awaits them and the sun never shines. Few other supernaturals attempt to enter these Weaver-thickened areas, whose inhabitants will likely be lost to the Weaver, even should they survive the Fall.

As the Claw nears the Earth, the US, Russia and possibly China try to use nuclear weapons or large lasers to shatter the asteroid or change its course. Depending on the tenor of the chronicle, the Changing Breeds might be involved in this effort as well. The United States sends astronauts with a nuclear charge to plant on the Claw; the Garou could even be involved in guarding or warding the astronauts from the dangers present on the asteroid. Storytellers might tell two tales — one of the astronauts planting the device, and the other of the Garou who follow in the Umbra to help them, without the astronauts' knowledge.

At the same time, the use of nuclear weapons is seen as evil by almost all Gaian creatures. How will Gaia respond to this activity? Does she withdraw Her gifts, as she is said to do for the Abominations? Will she accept that this is being done to save her? If a nuclear device goes out into space, then the Storyteller may rule that for dramatic purposes, it goes off and shatters the asteroid, but pieces of the Claw still strike the Earth and the moon.

Waking the Moon

The Mnesia quest has found many powerful Gifts and rites, and the threat of an asteroid hitting the Earth is sufficient to pull feuding tribes together. As the Claw gets closer, it becomes obvious that only one thing can be done to prevent Gaia's absolute destruction — the Last Rite, the *Rite of Waking the Moon*. This Level-Six rite requires all the permanent Gnosis Traits of all the itemasters, meaning that they almost certainly never perform any other rites. Despite their fear of this fate and their hostility toward one another, itemasters from each Gaian tribe attend, along with a few members of other Changing Breeds.

The players' characters may be involved in the Last Rite as assistants to the itemasters. Due to the sacrifice it entails, though, they should not be full participants unless they do not wish to take part in the rest of the chronicle from that point. The rite itself is spectacular — as the itemasters chant, the moon begins to move, at first barely perceptibly, and then visibly slewing away from its usual path. Humans go from panic into utter hysteria at this sight. As it passes through Earth's shadow, the moon enters eclipse for one final time, turning reddish-gray before becoming smaller as it leaves Earth to block the path of the Claw.

The Shattering of Luna

Rorg's Claw strikes Luna with a gigantic explosion. Anyone watching the moon sees what seems to be a flaming hammer blow at the edge of the moon's disc, splitting the Moon in two. All lunar-connected supernatural creatures, including Garou, Gurahl and Bastet, feel a sharp angina-like pain when that happens, as if they are having a heart attack. This feeling does not fade until the pieces of the moon set. From that point forward, it is no longer possible to regain Rage from the moon. Nor will the moon's light deter the undead.

The moon is not destroyed, but huge pieces of it are now blasted into solar orbit. It is both damaged and in the wrong place. The largest remaining chunk ends up in an eccentric orbit around the sun, shepherding Earth's orbit. For most of the time,



it is a bright unwinking star, as are the other planets, and Luna is reduced to Incarna status, incapable of doing much for Earth's changers if any survive. About one month after the Shattering, a final sign appears in the heavens. Clouds clear for a moment over the place where the characters are.

As the sun rises or sets, a huge brilliant comet with a prominent tail appears near the place where the sun is about to rise, or has just set. Garou and Kin with any scientific knowledge realize that this is a huge chunk of the moon, falling so near the sun that it is boiling into space.

THE GREAT BLACK

The Fall means the end of human civilization for a long time. By itself, this would be a disaster of apocalyptic proportions, but the Wyrm has more ambitious plans. The True Father wishes to use the suffering and horror of the Fall and the Great Black to feed its own powers, to enable it to destroy Gaia's defenders. From this point forward, Garou face two challenges: first, the destruction of human, animal and plant life all around them, and second, the onslaught of the Wyrm's evil in the chaos created by the asteroid impacts.

Many of the quests given to packs relate to the horrors of the Fall and the Great Black, though the skills and loyalties of each tribe and each Garou are part of the Quests as well. Silent Striders and Uktenea might try to stop the Fall with rites and Umbra journeys. The Get and Fianna seek to hunt down the Wyrm-creatures and undead who rise to prominence in the new age. Bone Gnawers and Children of Gaia could seek to aid suffering humans and wolves who freeze or starve in the cold darkness.

NUKES, KNIVES AND SHARP STICKS

So what exactly happens to the world when it suffers multiple impacts from such large objects? The answer is that while the devastation of such a scenario should always be widespread and terrible, at the same time it should be no more terrible than the Storyteller requires for her story. If she wants a number of cities to survive more or less intact, so be it. If all she wants left of civilization is a smoldering ruin, let none be spared. Yes, billions of humans will die in the immediate destruction of the impacts and the "follow-up" horrors to come — pestilence, famine, war, etc. — but the quick-and-dirty answer is that nobody the Storyteller needs to survive will die in the chaos, at least not right away.

Another important question is the general technology level she wants to have in effect during the rest of the scenario. Do the impacts quickly reduce everyone to primitive tools as supplies of batteries, ammunition and gasoline run out? That kind of ending offers some advantages to Garou (well, except the Glass Walkers) who are long accustomed to using such tools. On the other hand, the end of civilization might see pockets of relatively modern life survive, perhaps even advance as governments at last unleash their secret technologies and black-book projects in a desperate effort to maintain control. Players are likely to ask early on exactly what services and utilities are still available, not to mention what weapons they can get their hands on, so careful consideration should be given to just how much of a technological impact will be felt during Ragnarok.

In the end, the Storyteller shouldn't feel constrained to unleash any more chaos, destruction and horror than she feels is necessary for her particular scenario.



Finally, remaining Garou must face the hell-hordes of the Wyrm in the Final Battles or defending the Last Caern. Storytellers, again, must decide which part of the end to emphasize, and they should feel free to make both a part of the stories. With septs encompassing multiple packs, they might wish to give each pack one or more of the outlined plots that follow, then bring the survivors back together to face the final stand of the Last Caern.

HELLMOUTH

As Anthelios rises for the first time after the Fall, a new horror begins. Volcanic seams open in three places around the Earth, spewing lava and Wyrm-filth into the dying world. The Father Below, the True Father, now opens his jaws. These seams manifest in Japan, California and the Great Rift of Africa. Huge cracks open in the earth's body (one mile's length or so of crack a day), swallowing animals, buildings, people and rivers or lakes. The Jaws vary in width and zigzag and spiral, following no known laws of geology or physics. Anyone viewing them from the air must make a Willpower Challenge as versus the Delirium, as the rifts form Wyrm-signs and the sight of these shapes can drive one mad.

In sight of the Jaws' opening, all Gaian creatures are at a one-Trait penalty on all challenges. Caerns along the Jaws' cracks drain and die at a rate of one level per day. Black Spiral Dancer Hives are planned with the Jaws in mind and aren't affected. Any Gaian creature who comes close to the heat of the volcanic cracks suffers one health level of lethal damage per minute that can be naturally healed only once one is away from the heat. Wyrm creatures grow stronger from the eruptions and gain Gnosis from them as from a caern. This is the fulfillment of the Sixth Sign of the Prophecy of the Phoenix: Fire boils from the depths.

NIGHT OF DARK FIRE

As if the Garou did not already have enough foes, the undead now pose a serious threat to the continued existence of humans, including Kin. The Great Black enables the vampires and other rots to realize their ancient End-Time "prophecies." This is the Seventh Sign of the Prophecy of the Phoenix. On the first night after the Black begins, the ancient vampires rise from their tombs, the thirst of ages driving them to seek and kill not only their offspring, but shapeshifters, whose blood is believed to be very potent. The Garou will have to assign packs to control or kill these terrible foes.

Many tales could also center on the Garou who must make terrible choices, since not all humans can be saved when Garou strength is limited. When Garou must choose, will they favor humans who have needed skills? The young and innocent? Those whom they deem attractive or potential mates? Can they live with their choices afterward? What of the vampires who offer aid to the Garou, claiming to know secret "magics" that can defeat the ageless monsters? Can the undead be trusted, even for a moment? What if the alternative is that an ancient bloodsucker is free to raven and slay?

SEEKING THE SHARDS

The Fall has damaged the Earth immensely, but the Shards and the Claws are as valuable as they are destructive. The sky-stones hold power for the Wyld and for the world. The Garou have to reach the Shards of Luna before the Black Spiral Dancers get to them, as they are almost the only means of regaining Rage as if Luna were still whole. There are three Shards on Earth's surface.

The Storyteller must invent places for the Three Shards of Luna to fall. While it is recommended that (metaphorically speaking) one fall to earth, one fall to sea



and one fall to sky, there is literally no end of possibilities for where they might be found. Bear in mind that travel during this time is all but impossible by mortal means, due to the chaos of the Great Black, and even Umbral travel is quite risky. Add to that the fact that the Shards have fallen in forbidden places, are being actively sought by the minions of the Wyrm and might already be in the possession of another interested party by the time the characters arrive. Material exists for quite a few interesting stories just concerning the recovery of the Shards.

The Ascent from Hell

The Great Black, horrific as it is, is only the beginning of the End of All Songs. The deaths of billions of humans and animals to hunger, fire and cold opens the mouth of darkness and allows nightmare to walk. The Wyrm's Horde emerges from the Jaws of the True Father and walks the Earth openly. Materializing bodies on Earth or possessing the dead, the Maeljin and their subordinates gather all that is evil and mad about them as the world dies.

Then they begin to march.

Storytellers should feel free to place any and all Wyrm-tainted enemies the players have ever faced in the ranks of the Horde. Include a few they believed destroyed, newly reborn in the fires of the End Times, as well as any notable villains from the **Book of the Wyrm**, **Freak Legion** and **Possessed**. There is literally no foe too weak or too strong for some place in the Horde. Storytellers are also encouraged to personalize the different camps of the enemy, however, as opposed to presenting it as simply a giant army on the march (though it is that as well). Agents of the Defiler Wyrm and Eater-of-Souls might act as scouts and spies, enticing foes to join the cause of the Horde or subverting their efforts at a critical moment. Minions of the Beast-of-War press hapless innocents into the ranks of the damned or conduct hideous "live-fire" training exercises with their prisoners. A faceless army of evil is frightening, but not engaging on an individual level. A nightmarish legion headed by some of the characters' worst enemies is at once epic and personal, the best sort of storytelling for the End Times.

Human governments and military oppose the Horde as it advances on caerns, however unwittingly, but they fail to stop it. Indeed, the Horde absorbs many of the troops arrayed against it in the process. The chaos and devastation that the Horde's birth and movement causes is secondary, however. The Horde intends to seek out Gaia's Defenders, the Garou, and destroy them.

The Battles of the Apocalypse

The Wyrm's Horde erupting onto the Earth ends all semblance of normalcy. No one can continue to pretend that this is merely a natural disaster. Gaia's remaining children now form a Gaian Host to oppose the Wyrm on the Battlefields of the Apocalypse. The Garou can maneuver to sites near the Wyrm's Hosts, attempting to take the offensive, or they can position themselves around caerns and kin, and allow the enemy to come to them. Where exactly the characters wind up during this phase of the conflict is up to them and the Storyteller.

Almost any place could be a battleground, but the Garou armies form up at places that are important to them, to humans or to the spirits. The Fall has killed many humans, but enough humans and Garou remain alive that the Wyrm has not yet won. As long as the Garou remain viable, even in the Umbra, they could always return and destroy the Wyrm's control of the ruined Earth. They must be annihilated for the conquest to be complete.



It is therefore recommended that the Storyteller devise a number of different sessions or even stories surrounding the battles that engulf the world during this time. Whether the sept moves as one to respond to various threats or individual packs split up and play a number of side sessions devoted to resolving smaller conflicts around the world, the characters should be involved in a number of battles during this time as the Changing Breeds seek to turn back the tide of the Apocalypse.

The Last Caern

After a number of thrilling stories and pitched battles, the characters are called back together in one place, charged with finding any remaining Garou and kin they can and defending them all at a vital caern. It might even be their own caern. This is highly recommended for maximum dramatic impact, although if their own caern has already been destroyed during the scenario, a suitably famous or important caern will also suffice. Alternatively, the Storyteller could choose to have one caern remaining, period. While that choice might threaten to overshadow the players' characters as they become part of a host of remaining Garou fighting thousands of Wyrm creatures, it has its own dramatic potential for a "last stand" of the Garou Nation. As written, however, this scene assumes that the characters' own caern is under siege.

Wherever and whatever the caern is, it will be the last one the characters must defend. Soon after they have arrived, urgent word comes from beyond that the Wyrm's forces have surrounded the last surviving caerns and are readying their final charge. While this means that the Horde's forces have been spread thinner than usual, it also means that there will be nowhere to run if they fail and no help coming from the outside. The players must hold the caern on their own against an army destined to bring about no less than the end of the world.

Fortunately, the characters have a few advantages. First, they are on their home territory, and they should have at least enough time to make some plans that take advantage of that fact. Second, the Horde must attack the caern directly rather than use weapons of mass destruction. They might seek to capture important characters, recover valuable fetishes (especially Shards) for corruption to the Wyrm or any other reason the Storyteller devises, but in the end, it limits their use of large-scale weapons. Lastly, in response to the last-ditch nature of the conflict, the caern responds with a flood of Gaian energies, essentially becoming a level-five caern for the duration of the battle. (If it was already such a powerful caern, suitably powerful spirits appear to aid the Garou during their final hour.)

This is not to say that it will be an easy battle, however, or even just one battle at all. Early reports of enemy numbers are grim, and the Storyteller should see to it that the enemies represented are of types particularly suited to the caern's destruction. (The Horde did send forces for this specific purpose, after all.) Likewise, while arms and tactics vary from place to place, the Fall has made many weapons widely available, and Garou should expect to face gas, grenades and assault rifles loaded with silver. Specifically anti-Garou weapons such as those devised by Pentex should be rare, but still present, likely carried by old enemies of the characters or similar powerful foes. At least one or two "probing" attacks are likely to occur as the Horde tests the caern's numbers and defenses, not to mention spying efforts or attempts to convert the defenders to the cause of the Wyrm. Only when the Horde is ready does it launch a full-out attack.

Then the Final Battle begins.



Needless to say, the Storyteller should play up the desperation of this battle as much as possible. This is the climactic point of the chronicle, if not the actual end of the world. There are no negotiations, no way to make peace. There is no retreat. This is the characters' last stand. Many of the brave Garou, kin and ordinary humans and wolves the sept members knew are dead. The spirits they once called friends have been corrupted or destroyed. Cities fall, forests burn, oceans turn to blood. The sky blackens with debris and smoke. Food and fuel run out. Even if all the Wyrm creatures die, the sept might not make it. But they have to fight, Garou and kin together.

And that is the true story of the Garou: courage in the face of overwhelming odds, an unwillingness to lie down and die even when defeat seems assured.

BATTLE OR SIEGE?

One important question to ask is whether the fight to hold the Last Caern will be a single battle or a protracted siege. Quite simply, the answer is whatever you believe the players will find more entertaining. While some players enjoy trying to figure out the subtleties of siege planning, logistics, establishing defensive positions and so on, others find such mundane details highly tedious. Balancing the two extremes is critical to the drama of this last stand. Players should not expect to succeed if all they do is charge blindly into combat without planning, but they also shouldn't be forced to put many more pins in a map than they find entertaining either.

AFTERMATCH

Assuming they survive — and that's a fairly large assumption — the nature of the world the characters encounter upon emerging from the fight for the Last Caern depends on the ending chosen by the Storyteller and achieved by the players. Three endings appear here, one for each of the Triat. A fourth ending reflects a more meditative “turning of the wheel” with more open-ended possibilities. While the Storyteller will have to choose which ending to use, and whether the chronicle will continue, these offerings will serve as useful guidelines.

THE WYLD'S END

The characters find that the impact of Rorg and Luna has caused a mass extinction — a “Wonderwork.” Most humans and large animals are dead, along with Garou and Kin. In fact, the majority of living Garou are probably the survivors of the Final Battle that raged around the world. Human civilization will no longer exist outside a few refuges, which won’t last forever. Damaged as it is, the world will have returned to nature.

Gaia is alive, though extremely weak. Generations of ritual and sacrifice will barely return her to consciousness, even if the Balance of the Triat is restored and maintained. The characters will find it hard to survive; homids will mourn the deaths of almost all their kind, while lupus have trouble finding either prey or mates. The Wyld world will seem harsh to many, but it will slowly return to a balanced whole.

THE WEAVER'S ENDING

The world might live, but bereft of spirit. Earth recovers slowly from the impact of the huge chunks of Rorg and Luna. The Gauntlet is almost impassable (rated nine or higher everywhere), and Garou huddle in Umbral Realms. Other supernatural beings are mostly gone also; the world operates according to science. Magic is dying



or dead. Garou who remain in this world no longer change. Homids return to being humans, with “wolf souls” and an intense love for the wild. Lupus are “wise wolves.” Surviving metis become humans or wolves for the rest of their lives, or they remain in Crinos, Hispo or Glabro form almost permanently.

The Weaver’s ending leaves some humans and animals alive in the possibility of growth, life and renewal. Stories set here would be like those in our own (non-magical) world, with the memory of the lost Mother, Gaia.

THE WYRM’S ENDING

The Wyrm’s victory is the world’s ruin. Life continues, but horribly changed. The land is covered with toxin-resistant weeds and dead trees, as well as vermin and pests where larger animals have died. Humans steal from, murder and eat each other to live, or worse yet, serve the Wyrm-Lords openly for their daily “bread.” If the characters live to see this horror, make it obvious that this is not simply a “regime change.” It is the death of Gaia, and the corruption of all upon her corpse to the service of hate and filth.

This chronicle probably ends with all the characters dying as heroes or refugees. More depressing would be to have them surrender, if the Dark One will have them. While life as a Wyrm-Lord would never have a dull moment, it would be beyond the scope of this chapter.

Storytellers should be warned to think carefully before using this ending. Allowing the characters to triumph in their climactic moment, only to see that their efforts ultimately mean nothing, is an *extremely* harsh twist to spring on them, and it might lead to a great deal of dissatisfaction after all the blood and sweat and tears they have endured. Yes, the overall theme of *Werewolf* has always been tragic, without much possibility of a happy ending, but that doesn’t mean *your* players want it to end that way — and if you’re not trying to entertain them, what have you been doing all along?

THE WHEEL TURNS

These three endings are not the only possible ones. The Beast Courts of the Orient, including the Stargazers and other hengeyokai, have long seen time as cyclical, and the world as a turning wheel. The end, to some, seems to others to be nothing more than another beginning. Perhaps this is a literal change, in which the characters emerge to find the world entirely different, with few signs of the previous one anywhere in sight. It might be more metaphorical instead, but in the end, the universe continues on as it always has.



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CHAPTER FOUR: ASCENSION

THE BITTER ROAD

Why is Ascension desirable? What makes it so precious that mages would suffer, kill and die for it?

Most of us muddle along, approaching our finite time on this world with varying degrees of passion, fear, apprehension, generosity and smallmindedness. We are all tapestries composed of doubt and desire, selfishness and a higher drive. Each of us is the story of the world we know.

Yet at the same time, all of these instincts, thoughts, emotions and relationships are contained within us. There is no escape; we have to resolve these paradoxes. When pain contradicts our desire for comfort, we search for surcease. When ignorance contradicts our need to know, we learn. That's no different than what mages strive to do. The paradoxes are different, but the motivation is the same. After each moment, their stories, like ours, move forward.

Laws of Ascension is a game about these stories. Mages craft grand tales, taking the universe and weaving it on the looms of their paradigms. Ascension is not the end; it is the whole meaning of that story. Mages encounter Paradox when the bedrock of their beliefs clashes with the rest of the universe. It's a continuity problem, a strange leap that makes the story seem less authentic. It calls the meaning of the mage's life into question.

So the purpose of Ascension — the purpose of a mage and, some would argue, the purpose of our own lives — is to integrate our strange encounters with reality and craft them into a consistent whole. As mages progress, they expand their paradigms to include new phenomena. Their personal stories open wider windows into the universe.

Who are they, if they are not that story? That's where self-actualization, meaning and Ascension come from. The Awakened want to tell a story that confronts all paradoxes — that encompasses the cosmos.

It's a worthy goal for anyone.

STORYTELLING THE IMPOSSIBLE

Five possible paths to Ascension — or Oblivion — have been charted in this chapter, for the Storyteller and the players to use, alter or ignore as they see fit. Before those scenarios

are detailed, however, a few additional topics have been covered to help Storytellers address some of the unique concerns of an Ascension chronicle and help bring it to life.

THE AVATAR STORM

Although it is the most notorious sign of the End Times, mages are only beginning to understand the Avatar Storm. Certain *Mind*, *Spirit* and *Prime* Effects can circumvent it; complex scrying spells can detect calm metaphysical spaces. Furthermore, mages have identified certain people who can bend the path of the storm to protect themselves. A rare few can even shield other mages. Though the Storyteller is free to design her own story behind the Avatar Storm it is (in canonical terms) the result of terrible weapons employed by the Technocracy that have shattered a number of Avatars mixed with souls of the dead. Feeling the pull of Ascension approaching, these Avatar shards desperately seek to find hosts so that they can reach enlightenment before it's too late.

This is the reason that passing through the Storm causes so much damage. The shards are actually attempting to *inhabit* those passing through, clawing at the Avatar in residence. As the end approaches, some of their attempts may even succeed, occasionally resulting in the bizarre and frightening beings known as the Anakim. Of course, many hosts simply die from the strain.

THE ROGUE COUNCIL

Tradition mages and some Orphans around the world have begun to receive mysterious messages from an entity known as the Sphinx, part of an enigmatic body known as the Rogue Council. These messages appear in countless forms—scrawled on napkins, sent on DVD, called up as email—but their ultimate message is one of resistance and revolution, calling on the Traditions to renew the war against mediocrity and seek Ascension. Though few if any characters will ever discover the true identity of individuals behind the Rogue Council, it is (as a matter of canon) a collection of the Avatars of former members of the Tradition Council, guided by a Psychopomp known as the Sphinx.

Needless to say, a message from the Rogue Council is an excellent way to introduce a number of clues (or mysteries) into any scenario, as well as offer guidance if the characters are truly at a loss. The Rogue Council does not intervene directly, however. That would ruin the free will of those involved, and that goes against its personal goal of promoting Ascension. Storytellers might also wish to reinvent the Rogue Council for their chronicle. (Perhaps the Nephandi corrupted the Avatars, or Control has devised a devious new strategy to disrupt the Traditions.) Keep in mind that no matter what, the Rogue Council needs to be untraceable and able to gather information from a wide range of sources, and it has to have a compelling motive for communicating with mages. See **Manifesto: Transmissions from the Rogue Council** for more on this group.

THE PSYCHOPOMPS

First introduced in **Manifesto**, the Psychopomps (“conductors of souls”) are spirits with the power to direct Avatars to specific incarnations. As Ascension approaches, these guides act with increasing frequency, trying desperately to shepherd their charges toward Ascension before all hope of doing so is lost. Their methods are decidedly obscure and indirect—an Avatar cannot be forced to seek Ascension by a rote series of tasks—and seldom terribly forgiving. While they recognize that the mortal shell that houses the Avatar is vital to giving it some direction, they have no problem pushing that flesh to the limit if that is what Ascension requires. Concerns



unrelated to Ascension, such as feelings of affection for one's family or a personal interest in a particular mundane subject, are utterly unimportant to them.

Storytellers are encouraged to use these alien spirits however they desire in their chronicle. Whether they are cruel taskmasters, benevolent guides or simply enigmatic messengers depends on what the story requires. In no event should the Psychopomps take center stage, however, as such action is antithetical to their very nature. They might become more direct than ever as Ascension approaches, but that is the extent of their involvement.

YOUR OWN PERSONAL PSYCHOPOMP

The Avatar Guide represents the desires of the Avatars in the chronicle. He selects when an Avatar will drive a mage to a Seeking, and during Ascension plenty of Seekings will be going on. He must know in advance if you have any Seekings planned, and if he can initiate spontaneous Seekings. Scout locations with the Avatar Guide and discuss ideas for scenes and settings, addressing how you will handle any required extra characters or represent any magical effects.

The race for Ascension can be part of all the scenarios. Avatars feel the end approaching and are *scared*—they have limited time to reach Ascension or face Oblivion. Whether the end is due to the Gauntlet closing or the end of sentient life on the planet, the race is on. Indeed, the Avatar Guide *must* become the monkey on the characters' backs, *urging* them to strive to Ascend, to better themselves and increase their chances of surviving the events to come. These urges manifest more frequently as the story continues.

PIECES OF INFINITY

The following systems and mechanics are designed to help portray different aspects of an Ascension scenario, as magic slides out of control, begins to fade away or even is extinguished entirely. Also included are mechanics regarding the Anakim, twisted Sleeper victims of the Avatar Storm — or mages who dare to call upon great power as the End Times approach.

REINFORCING CONSENSUS

As the Masses move farther from the spiritual aspects of life, magic in all its forms becomes harder to use.

At the subtlest level, the Domino Effect (*Laws of Ascension*, pg. 131) increases. Each coincidental effect cast in the same area increases in difficulty by two Traits. Coincidental magic becomes vulgar at four Traits. The Domino effect now bleeds off at only one Trait every two turns. These numbers increase as the story progresses. Eventually, casting more than one Effect in the same area instantly causes the latter Effect to fail, and it might collapse the initial Effect (make a Simple Test). It might even attract a major Paradox Backlash, factoring all the Sphere levels affecting the area into the Paradox Trait total.

Stronger Paradox

If you use Paradox decks, increase the number of cards drawn as the Consensus solidifies. At its strongest levels, draw one card per Sphere level used in the Effect, or one per Paradox Trait involved in the Backlash.

- When casting vulgar magic, you gain one additional Paradox Trait (or more), as well as the usual one-per-Sphere award.

- Sleepers who witness vulgar Effects inflict two (or more) Paradox Traits.
- Conjunctional vulgar Effects attract one Paradox Trait per Sphere level used, not just per the highest level.
 - Coincidental Effects grant one Paradox Trait.
 - Botched coincidental Effects garner double the normal level of Paradox Traits.
 - Coincidental Effects draw Paradox Traits just like vulgar magic—effectively, there is no coincidence.
- Botched vulgar Effects garner double the normal level of Paradox Traits.
- Effects draw two Paradox Traits per Sphere level used.

Eventually, the Consensus can no longer tolerate magic, and any Effect attracts Paradox spirits, or whisk the mage into a Paradox Realm or Quiet. Ultimately, magic does not work, no matter how much Paradox is risked. Effects simply fail.

WEAKENING CONSENSUS

Acceptance of magic, in whatever form, loosens the weave of the Tapestry, and magic is gradually easier to use.

The Domino Effect weakens. Effects in the same area increase the Domino difficulty by one Trait on every second subsequent Effect. There is no cap on the modifier, so if you can continue to cast magic as long as you can overcome the difficulty. The difficulty modifier bleeds off at two Traits for each turn spent without magic being cast in the area. Decrease the growth rate of the Domino Effect as the Consensus further weakens. At its weakest, there is no Domino Effect, and magic can be cast repeatedly in the area without added difficulty.

Weaker Paradox

If you are using a Paradox deck, reduce the severity of Backlashes on the cards, or reduce the incidence of cards being drawn. Backlash effects can be reduced to a level where only the mage is affected. At this stage, optional Paradox rules could be tossed aside, and you could revert to the basic damage system of Paradox. Beyond that, damage reduces further, either in terms of health levels dealt, or by being reduced first to lethal, then bashing damage instead. Eventually, there is no Paradox.

- When casting vulgar magic, you gain one less Paradox Trait than normal, with a minimum of one Trait.
- Sleepers who are familiar with your paradigm no longer count as witnesses.
- Vulgar magic incurs half its normal amount of Paradox (rounded down).
- Botched coincidental Effects grant one less Paradox Trait than normal.
- Sleepers no longer count as witnesses.
- All magic is considered coincidental—you gain Paradox only if you botch an Effect.

A completely free magical world has no Paradox, so anything can happen. With the specter of Paradox gone, mages can twist reality as much as they like. Anything they cosmically screw up is their own problem.

THE GAUNTLET

Great changes are wrought on the Gauntlet as the End Times re-forge the fabric of the Tellurian. While the specific strength of the Gauntlet in any given area will depend on the immediate environment, its history and Storyteller requirements, the effects of the changing Gauntlet are wide-reaching. Your Spirit Keeper is going to have a bit of work on her hands keeping track of it.



Clenching the Fist

As the Masses drift deeper into their apathy and farther from their spiritual roots, the Gauntlet's fingers inexorably close. Some scenarios have their own timeline for this phenomenon. The events of Ascension accelerate what has, until now, been a gradual process. This is reflected in a game by increasing the "Most places" Gauntlet rating (**Laws of Ascension**, pg. 221). The sequence is arbitrary, based on the pace of the story.

For example, in a game that meets once a month, or for a network pacing global plots, the Gauntlet could thicken at one Trait every three months. If you need it faster or slower for the sake of story, make it so. The maximum Gauntlet rating remains 10 Traits. **Note:** Your metaplot could equally well have a Gauntlet that is winnowed away, reversing the process and decreasing the "Most places" Gauntlet rating at your required rate.

Even if the "Most places" Gauntlet rating reaches that level, there are still areas of varying thickness due, in part, to the Avatar Storm. The eventual collapse of the Gauntlet, if you use that story element, occurs due to a basic physical property — fatigue. If you riddle the strongest metal with irregular cracks, and then place it under great strain in multiple directions, it has to give eventually. Even a 10-Trait Gauntlet collapses under intense metaphysical pressure.

SHALLOWINGS

Progressively, the Gauntlet rips due to the continual slicing it receives from the Storm. Previously thin or unstable areas drop to a zero-Trait Gauntlet rating, and the Umbra mixes with the world. Nodes, for example, are usually in thin regions of the Gauntlet, and mystic precautions by the Node's guardians (if any) normally prevent Shallowings. Shallowings can open anywhere, but they normally do so outside of urban areas, due to the reinforcing effect of the Consensus. The duration of these new Shallowings varies, but they appear to be growing longer and more stable. Many grow in size.

The Umbra is a reflection of reality. In areas where the Gauntlet reaches 10 Traits in strength, it has effectively become a cloth draped over the mirror. While the memory of what was once there sustains the reflection for a while, each zone eventually fades from existence. This gradual fade could be the reason that Umbral creatures are appearing with increasing regularity at Shallowings — they're crowding into what little Umbral space remains and spilling out through the cracks.

All the threats of the Umbra are just as dangerous as ever. Shallowings allow Umbral creatures to enter the material world. Technocrat characters might be involved in battling or cleaning up after them. The inverse is also possible. Sleepers wandering into the Umbra are ill prepared for what waits within. Those few who do return are likely in no condition to relate their adventures, and even if they can, the men with the white cuddle-jackets will be happy to listen to them. Additionally, in the "Judgment" scenario, Sleepers face Avatar shards that thrust Enlightenment upon them.

Traveling through a Shallowing into the Umbra does not cause Storm damage — no Gauntlet, no Storm. Instead shards crowded by a constricting or fading Umbra might actively rush at mages who wander near, drawn by the strength of the Avatar. Each scene, at the Storyteller's discretion, a burst of shards breaks through the Shallowing, hitting the nearest Awakened target, causing one level of aggravated damage. The mage might be able to predict such a flurry with an Awareness test, allowing a few turns of action to avoid the shards. Nearby Sleepers might also be hit by shard flurries, possibly Awakening as a result.

NEW ROTE: ΗΟΛΥ ΥΨΙΩΝ

Adept Spirit, Disciple Prime, Disciple Mind

You call a Psychopomp and ask it to partially possess you with a fragment of its essence. Thereafter, you can use a limited version of the spirit's soul-guiding power. It reflexively protects you from the Avatar Storm in its varied manifestations, but it can also incorporate incarnate and disincarnate Avatars.

System: *Spirit* calls the Psychopomp from beyond the Horizon, *Prime* prepares you to assimilate the essence fragment permanently. You can cast the spell without *Prime*, but the duration lasts only one game session. Any corruption effects you gain during this period remain even after the essence is discharged. The fragment is actually sentient, so communicating with it telepathically requires *Mind*.

The spell requires 14 Grades of Success to cast permanently (or 10 to last a single session), plus one per additional subject. As your Avatar balks at the alien presence and the Effect is mentally and spiritually taxing, add two Traits to the spell's difficulty. The rote is always vulgar without witness.

ΑΝΑΚΙΜ

Once the permanent version of this ritual is completed, the mage has become a new creature: an Anakim — part mage, part spirit.

Reflecting this alteration, the character's prior Advantage and Disadvantage changes to reflect this new status. He no longer has a speciality Sphere. All other aspects of the character remain unaltered.

New Advantage: Alien Presence

The Psychopomp's essence is too alien for mages to tame. Anakim cannot be supernaturally compelled with *Mind* or *Spirit* Effects or by similar powers. Archmaster Effects are an exception to this rule, at the Storyteller's discretion.

New Disadvantage: Dedication

At any time the Avatar Guide or Storyteller feels the character is not working toward Ascension with his Psychopomp, they can engage the character in a Willpower Challenge, with a difficulty based on the character's lack of diligence. Minor deviations require the Anakim to overcome only three or four Traits. Outright and extended avoidance inflicts a nine-Trait difficulty, perhaps more. Failure means that the Psychopomp assumes control for the remainder of the scene. The Avatar is on the Psychopomp's side, so it will not allow the mage to use magic against this effect.

If the mage continues to break its agreement with the Psychopomp, it might withdraw its essence and rend the Avatar completely, leaving the mage an insane twisted wreckage of drooling flesh. *You have been warned.*

ΑΝΑΚΙΜ ROTES

You can use the essence fragment to perform the following Effects. All are cast as per the rules for normal rotes, requiring Static Arete Challenges against a base difficulty of six Traits. These powers are not familiar to the mage, and if the fragment ever leaves his Pattern, he may not use them. The powers come straight from the Psychopomp (being rotes from the *Telos* Sphere), although they are powered by a mage's Avatar. Should the Psychopomp feel that the activation of a given power is inappropriate, it will cancel the power, possibly inflicting some punishment as well.



You can influence only those Avatars (including Avatar shards) that don't oppose your will. Otherwise, you suffer corruption. Storytellers should be aware that the Storm's primitive consciousness is largely unaware of the suffering it inflicts, but living Avatars certainly oppose attempts to pull them from the path to Ascension.

Control Avatar Storm: You can adjust the severity of the Avatar Storm in the immediate area by one level of damage, up or down for one minute/conflict. This power does not normally attract corruption effects.

Grades of Success: Each grade adds levels of damage or extends the area or duration.

Avatar Construct: You can shape the Avatar Storm (if it's present) into a rough form, such as a barrier, weapon or shield. All these forms are invisible to characters without magical senses, (although Awareness may detect their presence and Resonance) and cause damage only to Awakened beings or creations. Unless mentioned otherwise, each Effect lasts for only one conflict/minute. This power does not normally inflict corruption effects. Choose one of the following Effects:

- **Shard Blast:** You direct a stream of shards at a nearby target, causing one level of aggravated damage. Treat this as a normal missile attack. This Effect lasts only a single action.

- **Weapon:** You form a simple weapon that is used as per normal combat rules. It causes one level of aggravated damage, and it has three Bonus Traits and no Negative Traits.

- **Shield:** Similar to a magnetic shield (*Laws of Ascension*, pg. 204), this small barrier protects against magical damage at up to two Traits per turn, to a maximum of 10 total Traits deflected. This Effect expires either when it deflects its last Trait of damage or at the end of the minute/conflict.

- **Barrier:** A wall of whirling shards protects a small area/room. Susceptible subjects passing through the barrier take one level of aggravated damage, and magic Effects attempting to cross the barrier are affected as with the Cocoon.

- **Cocoon:** Shards drawn about you distort magic cast at you, opposing the magic with five Traits of *Storm-Tainted* Resonance. The Cocoon also protects against similar powers, such as vampiric Thaumaturgy, Psychic Phenomena and werewolf Rites. Static powers such as Dominate or Presence are unaffected.

Grades of Success: Each grade adds an additional level of damage or an additional target affected, or it extends the duration or range by one grade.

Overwhelm Sleeping Avatar: You direct the Avatar Storm into a Sleeper with such intensity that it destroys the Sleeper's own Avatar and will. You must generate more Grades of Success than the target's Willpower. Victims become the mage's mindless thralls and eventually mutate to duplicate her physical corruption.

When targeting a supernatural being, you must *also* generate sufficient Grades of Success to exceed the current level of his supernatural power source (Gnosis, Blood Traits, Conviction, etc.). If successful, the being loses all of its supernatural attributes, leaving it bereft of a soul or spiritual power. Effectively, he becomes a mortal minion as his Pattern is violated by the Storm.

Supernatural creatures and partially Awakened mortals — sorcerers, psychics, ghouls, etc. — can resist this Effect by expending a *permanent* Willpower Trait. Following that expenditure, they cannot ever be targeted by this power again. The Effect automatically fails.

Awakened mages are immune to this Effect, as are the imbued. This power almost always invokes a corruption effect.

UNDER PRESSURE (OPTIONAL RULE)

In the rush to Ascend, and if it sees the need, the Avatar pumps the Pattern of the mage with bursts of inspiration and magic, like hitting a mystic nitrous switch. The Avatar grants temporary bursts of raw Quintessence, allowing the host to overcome physical hurdles, or it drops pure enlightenment in the mage's lap so he can get on with more important matters. These bursts correspond to matters important to the Avatar, not necessarily the mage. Sometimes, the pressure is more than the host can handle.

This is not a power that a player can call upon. At the Storyteller or Avatar Guide's discretion, the Avatar grants temporary Arete to the mage, which can raise her Arete beyond her normal limit, allowing her to use stronger magic. Each Trait above that limit either causes one level of aggravated damage (healed as normal) or inflicts a temporary derangement appropriate to the situation. The duration of the boost and any after-effects are up to the Storyteller, but all fade by the end of the combat or scene.

The Avatar Guide or Storyteller can consider other Trait boosts with similar results, should the situation require it, such as adding Mental Traits to break a tie when solving a critical puzzle or granting a *Stealth* retest during an important reconnaissance mission. Repeated boosts result in lasting disruptions to the mage's Pattern, such as damage that will not heal, reduced maximum Mental Traits or permanent derangements.

You might permit characters to undertake Seekings based on the events they just experienced, however, learning why the matter was so important to the Avatar. Allow them to enter Experience debt if necessary, paying for new Arete with their next few Experience Traits. If this enlightenment takes them past their Willpower limit, they cannot use the new Arete Trait until their Willpower reaches a suitable level.

Conversely, if the Avatar strongly disagrees with the mage's forthcoming actions, it can attempt to cripple the result. The Avatar Guide initiates a Simple Test. Depending on the level of importance to the Avatar, either a win or a win-or-tie is required for the mage to resist the Avatar. If the Avatar wins, it can interfere in the character's test to perform its intended action. It can require a retest or inflict a difficulty penalty up to half the rating of the Avatar. If the Simple Test required a win, the Avatar can require the mage to expend a temporary Willpower Trait to perform the action.

JUDGMENT

The tenth and final Sphere is Judgement; bliss and damnation are at hand.

As mages progress, they suffer. Thus has it always been, regardless of time, place or culture. The Traditions call the journey the Path of Thorns: a trail that has bled their fellowship to the last drop. Now, we reach the end of that bitter road, to discover why Ascension and Armageddon are one. In the end, their torment is the key to victory.

There are great powers loose in these final days. Voormas. The revealed Rogue Council. An ancient conspiracy that lies at the root of the Traditions and Technocracy. But these are not the decisive elements of the story. *Your* characters will ultimately decide humanity's fate.

Let's look at what led us to this point, but don't forget that all of this has come to pass so that your characters can face a choice: Will they trust the universe, or damn it?

REALITY ON THE BRINK

Now, in the wake of the Reckoning and turmoil throughout the Tellurian, mages plot and struggle. The Awakened suspect that humanity's Final Days are at hand. Some factors deserve special consideration as the End Times approach.

HEIR APPARENT

In *The Fragile Path*, Akrites Salonikas warned that, if allowed to live, Heylel Teomim would do more than betray the Traditions. He would graft them onto the Order of Reason. Combined, the Awakened under his banner would turn Earth into a charnel house. He would rule under the name Moloch and cast rebel magi from the Earth. Moloch's dynasty would last beyond his death, and surviving mages would return to the world to overthrow his two heirs. Despite the suspect motives of the Council, it was a good thing that the Betrayer died hundreds of years ago. It avoided a terrifying future — didn't it?

One successor remains. That mage carries the Avatar of one of Heylel's children and therefore, half of his mystic secrets — and she's a member of one of the cabals. The Storyteller should choose one character, portrayed by someone who can play out temptation but avoid grandstanding. No special Traits are required, but you might want to use it to justify a high *Destiny* and foreshadow it in Seekings and other stories. This character will be pivotal but not indispensable. In the story, we'll call her (or him; gender is not important) Heylel's Heir.

CHAOTIC PROPHECY

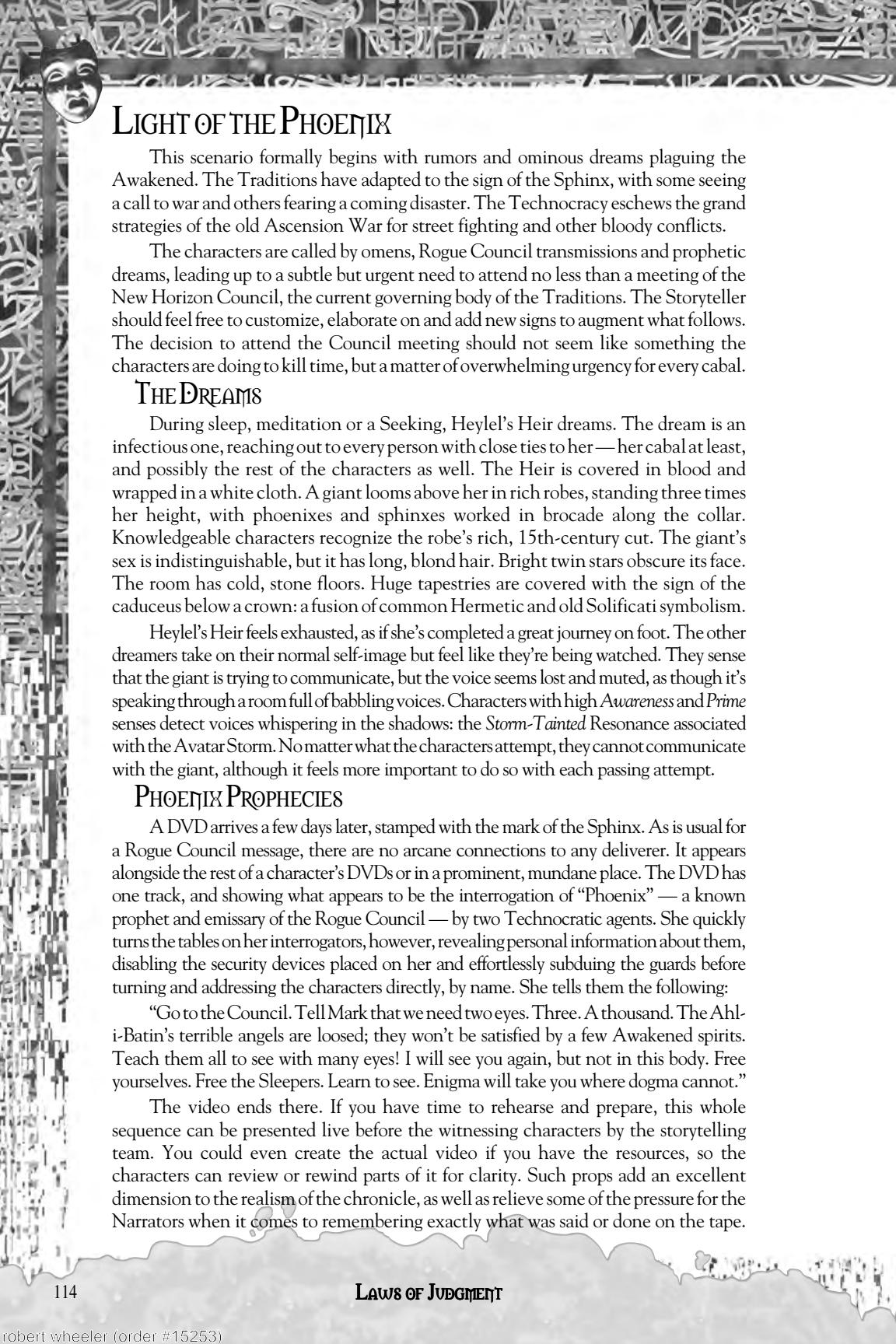
One sign of the end occurs in the months leading up to our story. Divination magic begins to twist and fail, encountering a cloud of *Storm-Tainted Resonance* that confuses omens and defeats statistical analysis. Mages can usually foretell their immediate future, but predictions about global events and the fate of magical societies become confused. In many cases, new visions contradict previous predictions.

Storytellers should use this fact carefully. Don't deny players the functional aspects of *Time* magic (such as detecting danger or gathering moderate amounts of intelligence), but do emphasize that the old rules of causality are being rewritten, making it difficult to determine the future fate of the world. The one consistent element of them is that everything familiar teeters on the edge of destruction.

NOT ANOTHER CHOSEN ONE!

There are several options for Storytellers who are wary of making one character the center of such an important prophecy. One solution is to simply alter and expand the prophecy so that it includes more characters — perhaps several of the characters in the chronicle are reincarnated members of the First Cabal, destined to help unite the Traditions once more. That is just one possible alternative. With some time, an inventive Storyteller can devise any number of ways to link a group of characters (preferably representing most if not all the cabals in the chronicle) through prophecy. Doing so not only makes it less necessary to make sure that one character survives, but it also helps balance out the importance of all the characters in the chronicle.

Another option is to simply forgo the role of "destined" characters in this scenario altogether, or at least downplay their importance to the story. While they might have some important parts to play, so do the other characters.



LIGHT OF THE PHOENIX

This scenario formally begins with rumors and ominous dreams plaguing the Awakened. The Traditions have adapted to the sign of the Sphinx, with some seeing a call to war and others fearing a coming disaster. The Technocracy eschews the grand strategies of the old Ascension War for street fighting and other bloody conflicts.

The characters are called by omens, Rogue Council transmissions and prophetic dreams, leading up to a subtle but urgent need to attend no less than a meeting of the New Horizon Council, the current governing body of the Traditions. The Storyteller should feel free to customize, elaborate on and add new signs to augment what follows. The decision to attend the Council meeting should not seem like something the characters are doing to kill time, but a matter of overwhelming urgency for every cabal.

THE DREAMS

During sleep, meditation or a Seeking, Heylel's Heir dreams. The dream is an infectious one, reaching out to every person with close ties to her—her cabal at least, and possibly the rest of the characters as well. The Heir is covered in blood and wrapped in a white cloth. A giant looms above her in rich robes, standing three times her height, with phoenixes and sphinxes worked in brocade along the collar. Knowledgeable characters recognize the robe's rich, 15th-century cut. The giant's sex is indistinguishable, but it has long, blond hair. Bright twin stars obscure its face. The room has cold, stone floors. Huge tapestries are covered with the sign of the caduceus below a crown: a fusion of common Hermetic and old Solificati symbolism.

Heylel's Heir feels exhausted, as if she's completed a great journey on foot. The other dreamers take on their normal self-image but feel like they're being watched. They sense that the giant is trying to communicate, but the voice seems lost and muted, as though it's speaking through a room full of babbling voices. Characters with high Awareness and Prime senses detect voices whispering in the shadows: the *Storm-Tainted* Resonance associated with the Avatar Storm. No matter what the characters attempt, they cannot communicate with the giant, although it feels more important to do so with each passing attempt.

PHOENIX PROPHECIES

A DVD arrives a few days later, stamped with the mark of the Sphinx. As is usual for a Rogue Council message, there are no arcane connections to any deliverer. It appears alongside the rest of a character's DVDs or in a prominent, mundane place. The DVD has one track, and showing what appears to be the interrogation of "Phoenix"—a known prophet and emissary of the Rogue Council—by two Technocratic agents. She quickly turns the tables on her interrogators, however, revealing personal information about them, disabling the security devices placed on her and effortlessly subduing the guards before turning and addressing the characters directly, by name. She tells them the following:

"Go to the Council. Tell Mark that we need two eyes. Three. A thousand. The Ahli-Batin's terrible angels are loosed; they won't be satisfied by a few Awakened spirits. Teach them all to see with many eyes! I will see you again, but not in this body. Free yourselves. Free the Sleepers. Learn to see. Enigma will take you where dogma cannot."

The video ends there. If you have time to rehearse and prepare, this whole sequence can be presented live before the witnessing characters by the storytelling team. You could even create the actual video if you have the resources, so the characters can review or rewind parts of it for clarity. Such props add an excellent dimension to the realism of the chronicle, as well as relieve some of the pressure for the Narrators when it comes to remembering exactly what was said or done on the tape.

PORTRAYING THE COUNCIL

The Council is given a set period of time to discuss the day's agenda, during which it might ask for comments from the floor. When the time has passed, unfinished items are moved to the next session and the floor is open to petitions and statements. For all floor remarks, a speakers' list determines who can talk on a first-come, first-serve basis. The only exceptions are granted to Heralds, who may question the Council for points of clarification. Group presentations must be arranged with the Chancellor pro Tempore's secretary ahead of time.

Needless to say, it is generally best that a number of Narrators be used to represent the different Council members, or at least the ones who will be important for this particular meeting. Make sure these Narrators are well briefed on their characters, what they know and what opinions they will have about the topics being discussed.

THE COUNCIL CONVENES

It doesn't take long for any Traditional members in good standing to discover that the New Horizon Council is meeting in the near future. Storytellers should feel free to customize the proposed meeting site to suit their chronicle. Perhaps the Council has even been planning to meet in the characters' home city for some time, and the dreams and omens they have been experiencing only add to the dread that has been building so far.

In Session

Unless they drop in very late at night or early in the morning, the cabals should have about an hour to meet and greet other attendees before the Council sits in session. Consors will provide a list of the meeting's agenda. A number of minor issues are on the table, but the two that stand out are Herald Theora Hetirck's report on the status of the Realm of Entropy and a petition from "a group of mages adhering to the principles of the so-called *Rogue Council Manifesto*." Add any other issues you wish.

After the Councilors announce their names and titles, they move on to business. Except for the items detailed here, go through the agenda in any order you wish. Use Council protocol to determine how much input the characters have, but they should definitely feel as though they have a voice and aren't simply there as spectators, particularly if they are powerful and respected.

While the Storyteller should allow discussion to flow naturally, three important points must be covered before the meeting is disrupted by the arrival of the Technocracy:

Voormas Ascendant

Herald Theora Hetirck, once a servant of the mad archmage Voormas, delivers a chilling pronouncement: Her former master has nearly assembled the tools necessary to throw the Great Wheel itself off track, ending the Cycle of Death and Rebirth forever. She knows that Voormas somehow engineered the thinning of the Gauntlet between the living world and the Underworld, but even as his slave, she never found out how. It's only a matter of time before the mad archmage attacks. She also knows that Voormas was prepared for the Avatar Storm, and cast certain spells to maintain an arcane tie to the Earth and prevent disembodiment. Those who attempt to challenge him are ripped apart by the Avatar Storm in seconds, leaving the Traditions with few options if they hope to oppose him. Yet if they do not, it will not be long before reality itself is threatened by his mad scheme.

The Rogue Seat

The second major item on the agenda is the Rogue Council Petition. Representatives of this enigmatic body approach and produce the mystical Tenth Seat, to the amazement of the assembled Councilors. After allowing the Councilors to confirm with whatever magic they feel is necessary that the seat is genuine, the Rogue Council mages explain that the Seat was recovered during a recent operation in the Middle East following a message from the Sphinx.

It seems clear enough to them — the Rogue Council has earned its seat.

Revelation

At some point during the meeting, the truth about the Heir (or whatever prophecy is used) should come out, whether due to auspicious use of *Time* or *Entropy* magic, recognition by one of the Councilors in attendance, a mysterious pronouncement by one of the Emissaries of the Rogue Council. Aside from the personal impact of this revelation, it has an important mystical consequence as well. The character(s) will be the ones to rediscover the ritual of *Holy Union* that allows a mage to weather the Avatar Storm, absorb some of the Avatar Shards that compose the storm and guide them to enlightenment. This ritual is extremely dangerous for all who attempt it, but it might be the only way to survive the impending disaster, much less achieve Ascension.

ATTACK!

Revelations regarding the Heir, combined with news of Voormas' scheme and the appearance of the Tenth Seat finally destroy the assembly's self-control. Mages burst into heated arguments, threaten each other and "step outside" for impromptu certámen bouts. This outside disruption allows a Technocracy task force to determine that the Council is in a state of "maximum tactical incoherence," and it prepares to decapitate the leadership of the Traditions with one stroke. Strike teams teleport to positions immediately outside at each entrance, with Sleepers covering the HIT Marks as they storm the chantry and take aim at the Councilors.

Although wards prevent teleportation into and out of the location by either side, this is not to say that the Councilors or the characters haven't prepared some contingency plans in advance. Mages scatter and try to force their way through the ranks of the Technocrats to reach pre-arranged fallback points, springing several prepared Effects on their attackers and otherwise demonstrating why they have earned the right to sit on the Council in the first place. This should be a quick and brutal struggle, forcing the characters to think fast and cast faster if they wish to escape. With some good teamwork and planning, however, it should be possible for them to escape — injured and frightened, perhaps, but alive.

DECISIONS

When the smoke clears, the characters and those Councilors who escaped (which should be most if not all of them) convene an emergency session. Bickering is nowhere to be seen — the Technocracy assault proved that the Traditions can no longer assume that the Technocracy will leave them alone as it has since the "end" of the Ascension War. In fact, it can be assumed that the opposite is true, and the Pogrom will be reinstated with renewed vigor as the Gauntlet crumbles and the Avatar Storm's intensity increases.

Therefore, the Traditions must unite in the face of these threats, escape destruction at the hands of the Technocracy, research *Holy Union* and find some way to confront Voormas and put his evil to an end. Mighty tasks, to be sure, but there are no other options left. Due to their prominence and potential, the characters are given positions of special importance to the Council. Some might even become Councilors themselves, if they have sufficient Reputation and magical expertise to be worthy of the honor.



THE LAST WAR

At this point, the characters have been thrust into the center of a renewed Ascension War. Months pass as the war's players take their places and begin probing each other's defenses, seeking a weakness to exploit for ultimate victory. During this time, Storytellers should encourage the players to take their characters through research and small, personal stories, so that the tremendous conflict to come seems mightier by contrast.

Remember that successful Seekings—not to mention a great deal of mundane and arcane research—will be necessary before characters are able to discover the truths of *Holy Union*, much less empower themselves with it. Give the characters plenty of time for this, but don't let them rest easily. Just finding the proper texts and tools necessary to master this ritual can be the subject of several challenging sessions, and actually attempting it for the first time should be a cause for great worry as well as celebration. Nevertheless, eventually they will succeed, or the rest of the scenario is written in vain.

THE FLOOD OF SOULS

At Voormas' direction, the Avatar Storm grinds inexorably into the Gauntlet. Globally, Gauntlet ratings drop by one Trait per month. If a regional Gauntlet was already rated at one Trait to begin with, a new Shallowing forms, but local Gauntlets rated at two or more before the event leave a last, fragile wall between worlds. For Tradition mages, this is an unexpected boon; for the Technocracy, it's a nightmare. Technocrats battle new hauntings and possessions around the world. The Pogrom kicks into high gear, as new recruits and funding are poured into seizing Nodes and Shallowings.

WAR COUNCIL

At some point, the characters should gather mages to renew Tradition unity and share the secret of *Holy Union*. Only they have the means to do so. Unless the characters step up to help the Traditions, the Traditions will fall. The Technocracy and the Storm will destroy them. The Traditions are scattered in the aftermath of the Council attack, but provided a suitable location can be secured and the word can be spread of the meeting, the characters will find many influential mages coming from around the world to attend.

When they arrive, it's up to the characters to find a political solution. There are many ways to do this, from sincerity and honesty to subterfuge and backroom deals. Unless the characters do something truly atrocious, though, the mere fact that they have uncovered *Holy Union* combined with their prophesied status should be enough to swing the majority of those present to their side.

Once some semblance of Tradition unity has been forged, the characters can begin discussing the immediate problems. It soon becomes obvious that the Technocracy is less the prime threat, than the weakening of the Gauntlet. Rumors point to armies of Marauders, Nephandi or even stranger things massing at the edges of reality, waiting to fight their way in. Indeed, in the face of such horrors, the Traditions must consider the once-unthinkable: asking the Technocracy to help save the world.

Convincing the Technocrats will be difficult, at the very least. The Union is in a constant state of red alert, and it will view any attempt at contact by Tradition members—particularly such powerful and well-known Reality Deviants as the characters—with deep suspicion, if not outright hostility. Storytellers should present the characters with a number of difficult challenges, from locating the hidden base of a high-level Technocratic commander to researching an argument he might believe to defeating elaborate security measures to gain access to the facility. (This condition doesn't even cover the incredible roleplaying that will be required to convince the appropriate Technocrats that

this is the best solution for both sides.) Ultimately, the characters have a compelling argument, but will that be enough for these old enemies to see the light?

If all goes well, the last vestiges of the Ascension War end... but Ascension itself will require one final quest.

WANDERING STARS

If the characters manage to avert total war, the Traditions and Technocracy bury their dead, repair their strongholds and guide the thousands of Storm-Awakened mages. A month after the end of the war, a tenth of humanity throws off Sleep—and the numbers still rise. Nations either stand on the threshold of collapse or have fallen into desperate anarchy. Surviving Sleepers distrust the Awakened, and the Consensus grows weaker and less predictable on a daily basis.

After much struggle and hard work, however, the Avatar Storm begins to wane. Mages with *Holy Union* and Sleepers weaken it when they host Avatar shards. But even fairly inexperienced mages sense that this is only a brief respite at best. If something isn't done about the great disturbance in the Underworld, and soon, the Storm will simply propagate endlessly until all is lost.

THE SPHINX

As the Avatar Storm loses strength, the last Rogue Council transmission arrives. Each character receives it in the language and medium he favors. In all manifestations, it bears the sign of the Sphinx. It says:

Thank you for your trust. Will you trust us one more time?

When the characters finish reading, Dante, the Oracle of Correspondence, is there with them all, even if it entails being many places at once. As an Oracle, it's a part of his nature.

THE SHATTERED DARK

After explaining what they know about the Avatar Storm and congratulating the characters on putting out the last fires of the Ascension War (if that is the case), the Rogue Council asks a final, terrible question: Will the mages go to oppose Voormas? They cannot compel the characters for the same reason they can't simply do it themselves: Direct intervention would destroy the value of free will. They can only communicate and advise. If they do any more, humanity's choices become meaningless. Such is the nature of judgment.

If the characters refuse to oppose Voormas at this point, the rest is simple, if exceedingly horrifying. The ritual completed, reality unravels into an agonizing eternal state of simultaneous life and anti-life, banishing all thought of Ascension forever. If the characters choose to go, though, they have time to say their final goodbyes, then a portal is opened into the Deep Umbra that will take them to the dark and entropic Realm of Castle Helekar.

Reality is falling apart, and they are heading right to the source.

DOOM

This is the last battle for reality. The characters fight it as they wish, but each choice they make has consequences. It should be without question the most difficult and terrifying battle they have ever faced, and the Storyteller should spare no effort to convey the grim nature of the realm, the howling hordes at Voormas' command or the terrible fury of the mad archmage himself. Their victory is far from assured. In fact, even armed with *Holy Union* and as many other powers and items as they can carry, the characters should still feel as though the odds are against them.



Unfortunately for the characters, Voormas isn't alone in his madness. Before the characters even reach the archmage, the Storyteller is pretty much free to put a horde of any type of enemy imaginable in their path, favoring ones on the entropic end of the scale when possible. Hungry ghosts, corrupted mages, foul shapeshifters, wicked spirits, hideous aliens, even fierce Hobgoblins created from Voormas' own extended Quiet all assail the characters, requiring a great deal of their power and courage to overcome before they can face the master at the heart of this evil place.

Voormas himself isn't subtle. The archmage musters as much magic as he can spare to kill or repulse the characters as soon as he notices their presence. Naturally, *Entropy* is his most common Sphere of attack, though *Mind* and *Matter* are close, especially if he is trying to keep his foes off guard. If he senses a weakness, he destroys a character in as horrific a manner as he can fashion, all the while claiming that his cause is just. He wants nothing more than to create a world where humanity isn't chained to karma or death — a vision of Ascension.

If the characters fail, events play out as described previously. If they succeed, they have achieved the greatest victory of all time.

ASCENSION

These are the final moments of the universe.

All the barriers are broken; the Outer and Inner Horizon dissolve before the racing fragments of the One, questing for human hosts. This is the last tide of Awakening. At last, on the broken Earth, everyone is a miracle-worker.

The Awakened create wonders and destroy monuments. Cities are raised from the dust, then sundered in the birth pangs of power remembered, but everyone was Asleep once. Most people remember the humility and compassion of mortal days. The last miracles are not born of fire and water. Progenitors heal shamans who bear wounds from their common war with Marauders. Little gods repair Enlightened machines. At night, a red glow lights the world: the purifying fire of Telos' Red Star.

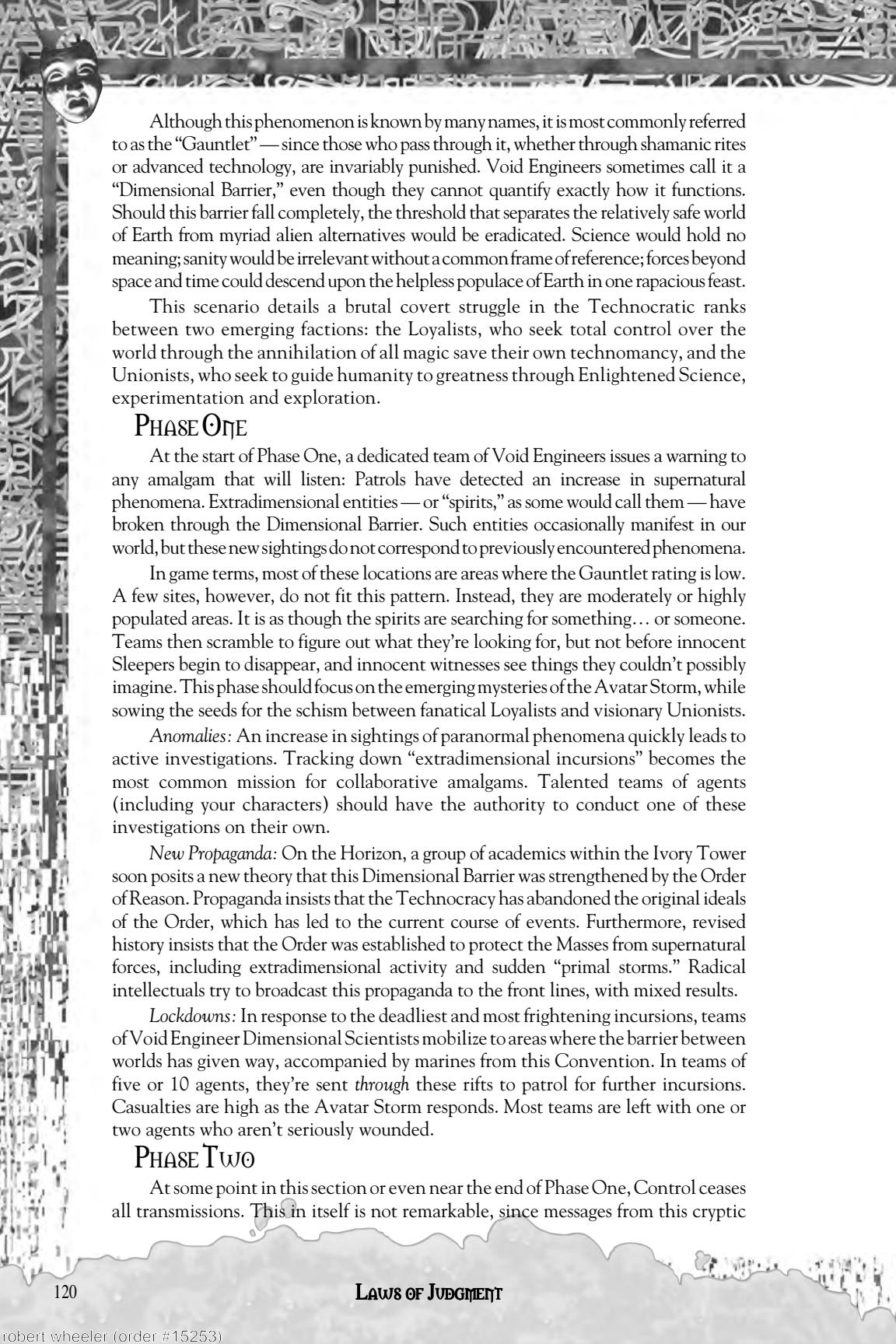
Others find their Unity, their Akasha, their True Ether, their uncorrupted tongue of Enoch, all integral links in the chain of reality. The Enetelechy conquers the last barriers of magic and Paradox. Joyously, they move back through time, and create themselves. Thothmes, Bhât, the Himalayan War, MECHA, Concordia — all are part of the thread that is cast back through the ages to pull history again, to the moment of Ascension.

There is always the One, but diversity — the Cycle and the Other — is never excluded. There are uncountable paradigms, but they don't chain belief or power.

In the end, they are games.

THE REVOLUTION WILL BE TELEVISED

At the end of the 20th century — as one millennium ended and another began — a cosmic event called the Avatar Storm swept across the boundaries of Creation. For visionaries who challenged the very limits of reality, other dimensions beyond human perception had once offered limitless adventure. Surrounding the Earth, a mathematically impossible boundary separated the precise and ordered world of conventional reality from all its alternatives. The boundary still exists, but it is growing weaker.



Although this phenomenon is known by many names, it is most commonly referred to as the “Gauntlet”—since those who pass through it, whether through shamanic rites or advanced technology, are invariably punished. Void Engineers sometimes call it a “Dimensional Barrier,” even though they cannot quantify exactly how it functions. Should this barrier fall completely, the threshold that separates the relatively safe world of Earth from myriad alien alternatives would be eradicated. Science would hold no meaning; sanity would be irrelevant without a common frame of reference; forces beyond space and time could descend upon the helpless populace of Earth in one rapacious feast.

This scenario details a brutal covert struggle in the Technocratic ranks between two emerging factions: the Loyalists, who seek total control over the world through the annihilation of all magic save their own technomancy, and the Unionists, who seek to guide humanity to greatness through Enlightened Science, experimentation and exploration.

PHASE ONE

At the start of Phase One, a dedicated team of Void Engineers issues a warning to any amalgam that will listen: Patrols have detected an increase in supernatural phenomena. Extradimensional entities—or “spirits,” as some would call them—have broken through the Dimensional Barrier. Such entities occasionally manifest in our world, but these new sightings do not correspond to previously encountered phenomena.

In game terms, most of these locations are areas where the Gauntlet rating is low. A few sites, however, do not fit this pattern. Instead, they are moderately or highly populated areas. It is as though the spirits are searching for something... or someone. Teams then scramble to figure out what they’re looking for, but not before innocent Sleepers begin to disappear, and innocent witnesses see things they couldn’t possibly imagine. This phase should focus on the emerging mysteries of the Avatar Storm, while sowing the seeds for the schism between fanatical Loyalists and visionary Unionists.

Anomalies: An increase in sightings of paranormal phenomena quickly leads to active investigations. Tracking down “extradimensional incursions” becomes the most common mission for collaborative amalgams. Talented teams of agents (including your characters) should have the authority to conduct one of these investigations on their own.

New Propaganda: On the Horizon, a group of academics within the Ivory Tower soon posits a new theory that this Dimensional Barrier was strengthened by the Order of Reason. Propaganda insists that the Technocracy has abandoned the original ideals of the Order, which has led to the current course of events. Furthermore, revised history insists that the Order was established to protect the Masses from supernatural forces, including extradimensional activity and sudden “primal storms.” Radical intellectuals try to broadcast this propaganda to the front lines, with mixed results.

Lockdowns: In response to the deadliest and most frightening incursions, teams of Void Engineer Dimensional Scientists mobilize to areas where the barrier between worlds has given way, accompanied by marines from this Convention. In teams of five or 10 agents, they’re sent *through* these rifts to patrol for further incursions. Casualties are high as the Avatar Storm responds. Most teams are left with one or two agents who aren’t seriously wounded.

PHASE TWO

At some point in this section or even near the end of Phase One, Control ceases all transmissions. This in itself is not remarkable, since messages from this cryptic

source are normally infrequent. Concurrently, agents should encounter even more of the phenomena mentioned earlier in this scenario: disappearances, abductions, sightings of new and unidentified phenomena and so forth. Independent supervisors respond by forming their own battle plans... until the Horizon Constructs interrupt with their own detailed and frequent directives.

This phase should further probe the loyalties of the different operatives and amalgams. If it wasn't obvious before that a power struggle is taking place in the higher levels of the hierarchy, it should be now, though not necessarily who is involved and why. As they struggle to cope with increasingly dangerous and unpredictable anomalies, agents must begin to watch what they say and do. Control is always watching, but who is watching Control?

A Shift in Power: Eventually, Masters and Managers on the Horizon resume broadcasts as if the Avatar Storm never happened. Agents in any amalgam will suddenly find themselves reporting to higher authorities. If they were performing missions for an Ivory Tower Supervisor, they soon receive broadcasts from a Manager one rank higher. Progenitors sequestered in laboratories might suddenly lose their funding and be sent to support amalgams in distant cities. Cyborgs receive downloads from sources with which they were previously unfamiliar, and Syndicate reps must contend with a "corporate reorg," forcing them to give detailed reports to managers they have never heard of. Horizon immediately asserts its authority... and disgruntled front-line agents do their best to hide any signs of dissatisfaction. The chain of command is re-forged.

Tracking the Anakim: A few of the more unusual dossiers concern theories of an alien invasion. A standard background dossier relates publicly known rumors regarding alien abductions, events in Roswell and legendary Men in Black questioning witnesses of such events. Citizens interrogated after various lockdowns have related a vast amount of barely credible evidence of what they have encountered. Investigations into this latest "invasion," on the other hand, can be traced to testimony given by Men in Black. A disturbing picture begins to emerge during this stage: It is possible that the Avatar Storm is not merely a dimensional phenomena, but that it has begun to somehow empower individuals into Awakening — often with devastating results.

New Cults, New Gods: As rifts open in the Dimensional Barrier, extra-dimensional forces reach out for weak minds on Earth. Some gather humans with magical potential, bringing them together through dreams and visions to remote and unwatched corners of the Earth. Avatar shards awaken such initiates, and revelations from outside reality guide them to perform rites of summoning. Marauders, Nephandi or even demons act as the shadowy leaders of these cults. Whatever the motivation is, they are united in perverting these rifts in the Gauntlet. It should not be difficult to spare a few amalgams to seek out one of these new cults and investigate.

The Schism Widens: Faced with many failed missions during this stage, mid-level agents begin to disregard broad and draconian policies sent from the Horizon. Rank-Three Technocrats — such as Progenitor Research Associates, It-X Programmers, Ivory Tower Intelligence Analysts, Syndicate Chairmen and Void Engineer Commanders — continue to direct agents in the field, but they fail to report everything they find to their superiors. As a result, Horizon Managers file reports of insubordination against independent Managers... but they cannot send troops down from Horizon to capture and retrieve them for psychological evaluation and social conditioning. It is a stalemate, at least until something happens to knock a few pieces off the chessboard.

PHASE THREE

“Forces from outside our world have infiltrated our reality.” That much should be apparent to characters by now as the Anakim and the plans of the Psychopomps become ever clearer. Of course, whether these entities will destroy reality or repair it depends increasingly on the loyalties of individual agents. The Loyalists who have assumed control in the Horizon Constructs see it as no less than a terminal event and seek to clamp down hard on reality in response, but more open-minded Unionists are slower to judge this new phenomenon. They seek further understanding of it before acting.

On the front lines, agents communicating with their contemporaries begin to refer to these manifestations as “shards” or “quantum shards.” Independent Technocrats—as well as deviant technomancers, Etherites and Virtual Adepts—need a common term for them as well. They make analogies to “dark matter.” Reality Deviants would go so far as to call them “Avatar shards,” but that description implies a spiritual, soulful or even intelligent component to this activity. Further analysis is required.

Pogrom Restored: Early analysis confirms that “quantum shards,” like the extradimensional entities that arrived before them, seek out individuals with paranormal or psychic potential. Recent statistical analysis (including high-powered procedures attempted on the Horizon) suggests that some of these “contactees” have the potential to become Technocrats themselves... or deviant mages. Loyalists issue orders that those contacted by the shards or exposed to dark matter are to be contained and examined.

Dark Matter: Unionists begin to witness firsthand what this newly discovered dark matter can do to unprepared victims. As these initiates attempt to understand their deviant abilities, the number of Paradox Backlashes in the world increases. In severe cases, shards seek out victims of Paradox and punish them with the same virulence as the Avatar Storm—by now referred to as “Dimensional Storms” within the Union. Even the subtle workings of Technocratic operatives become vulnerable to these unpredictable surges, leading to the destruction of many incautious agents.

Race Against Time: Independent amalgams are pursuing methods of containing dark matter. They can do so only by innovating new applications of Enlightened Science and contravening established procedures. To survive this new manifestation of the Dimensional Storm, they must find a way to isolate, contain and protect themselves before Loyalist Technocrats discover their activities. If an amalgam can figure out how to survive an encounter with Avatar Shards, or even manipulate them, it will have a significant edge later in this timeline.

PHASE FOUR

As Avatar Shards have worn away the Gauntlet, these razors of primal energy have torn rifts in the barrier between worlds, allowing spirits to manifest in the physical world. Therefore, mages (and Technocrats) trapped beyond the Horizon that have become disembodied can also find new ways back into the physical world. Much of Phase Four deals with the consequences of this change, as the realms of spirit and matter come ever closer together. Containing the shifts in reality caused by this phenomenon can easily be the focus of several sessions as the characters hunt down troublesome embodied entities and repair breaches in the dimensional fabric.

From a political perspective, this new revelation allows Loyalists to send reinforcements from the Horizon to enforce their ideals. The “cold war” between the

Loyalists and the Unionists erupt in actual violence for the first time, with sneak attacks and lightning raids on both sides. While overt conflict is still some time off, the characters might find themselves forced to choose sides soon — or face increasingly dire consequences.

Securing Reality: Forces on the Horizon do not traffic in mysticism and archaic philosophies. High-level Managers on the Horizon choose the Technocracy's one primary objective during Phase Four: securing the Earth. For all the various theories of dark matter and quantum shards, it is clear that overt acts of magic, like blatant acts of Enlightened Science, endanger not only the people who practice them, but innocents around them as well. The Loyalists' final Time Table is then unified in one purpose: creating a world where only subtle acts of Enlightened Science work. If innocent lives must be lost in this campaign, so be it — all of reality is at stake.

Reinforcements Arrive: Aligned in purpose, Horizon Constructs send troops down to the front lines in one final push for the War for Reality. Rogue agents — almost certainly including at least a few of the more openly Unionist characters — are targeted for assassination or even outright hunted by Loyalist forces. Reality Deviants are eliminated. Hidden chantries and headquarters for rogue cells are destroyed after their locations are confirmed by surveillance and interrogation. Strengthened by reinforcements, Loyalist forces begin hunting "deviants" and "traitors" in their own organization, readying for their endgame.

PHASE FIVE

A sudden, massive assault from the Loyalists on deviants and Unionist strongholds rapidly alters the landscape of reality. Surprise attacks lead to massive casualties, as chantries and safe houses alike are compromised. Horizon has been waiting and watching, preparing for a final push in a renewed Ascension War. Frightened by the increasingly frequent attacks from extradimensional beings, an increasing number of Sleepers have also begun to fall in with the Loyalists, with everything from disorganized mobs to disciplined military forces attacking select supernatural targets around the world. If enough major victories are scored, the War for Reality may soon be over.

One amalgam could easily pursue a series of missions against this background of shifting realities. If the characters have been willing to defend the common populace against the Loyalists, the wave of attacks at the end of Phase Four has probably hammered their morale. Such devotion can then be rewarded by moral support from beyond the Horizon when the chronicle is at its darkest moment. One transmission from Control, through as simple an apparatus as a radio, telephone or television set, would confirm that they are not alone in the revolution. In fact, Control could offer them direction just as it seems the conflict with the Loyalists is drawing to a close.

Transmissions from Control: Control resumes its transmissions at the start of Phase Five. It seeks out scattered survivors of the Loyalists' massive attack, attempting to unify them in the defense of humanity. The goal is not to isolate a self-sufficient Technocracy in a new Ivory Tower on the Horizon. The goal is a far older one: to make humans masters of their own world. The society they started has become corrupt. Unable to control the Masters who have taken their place, they will assist the revolution to destroy the Technocracy's Loyalist overlords.

After extensive discussions in briefing rooms and rogue Technocrat bunkers, two solutions emerge. The first is to find a way to grant immunity to the hazardous effects of

the Avatar Storm. The second is to “open the floodgates,” using Dimensional Science to tear open rifts in the Gauntlet at key locations. Doing so would be catastrophic in those key areas, but it would theoretically keep the shards from continuing to wear down the Dimensional Barrier. If Avatar shards can now silence (or slaughter) mages, they may theoretically purge (or destroy) all magic in the areas where they are channeled.

Pogrom Restored: At this stage, the Pogrom against Tradition mages resumes, but Technocracy agents aren’t the only ones who are hunting them. Fearful of the existence of the supernatural, local authorities and government agencies should also act against Tradition mages. Mages are mortal, after all, so mundane authorities can alter their lives without having to alter reality. As mankind scores victories against magical forces, Consensus should shift against overt and archaic applications of magic. Occasionally, Technocracy agents also hunt particularly dangerous mages during this time, but generally speaking, it can focus on greater threats... including rival Technocrats.

The Storm-Enhanced: Avatar Shards have bestowed great power to Sleepers who were destined to become mages... and possibly even destined to play a role in Armageddon. Some survivors have been recruited (or hunted and abducted), but many of these initiates — the last generation of mages — will eventually destroy themselves trying to marshal forces they cannot understand. Without Technocracy indoctrination or Tradition training, they have the power to summon up forces they cannot put down.

At the end of Phase Five, Control broadcasts a warning about the critical mass of Avatar shards building around the world. Unless its energy is channeled, the wave of extradimensional forces will build until it washes over the Earth, obliterating the Dimensional Barrier. Whether this event will heal the world or destroy it is a matter of great debate. As a result, Unionists and Loyalists race for solutions to this problem... each acting for their own advantage.

PHASE SIX: ENDGAME

On the final day of this timeline, one final wave of reinforcements breaks through the Horizon: the first real tempest of Avatar shards in the physical world. In the location where this final invasion takes place, the result is an Avatar Storm so virulent that it purges its Awakened (or Enlightened) victims of their Arete. (In game terms, it first inflicts aggravated damage as though the victim had passed through the Gauntlet, then triggers a Paradox Backlash, and then erases the victim’s Arete.) It doesn’t remove all magic from the world, but it cripples its victims sufficiently to end this conflict.

With the Technocracy rapidly fragmenting, Loyalists and Unionists contest to be the first to invoke this “final solution” before someone else beats them to the punch. If one faction can find a way to survive this storm, or direct it against its enemies first, it could act as a “doomsday weapon” in the War for Reality. The world is now a chessboard with two opponents — the Unionists and Loyalists — and the first one to achieve checkmate can finally “control” reality unopposed.

Launching the Revolution: At the start of Phase Six, a scientist (or supervisor) who has found a way to exploit the Avatar Storm contacts the characters. He gives them the knowledge they need to open the gates, close the gates or shield Enlightened agents from the Avatar Storm. With this head start, the characters must choose what to do with this deadly knowledge. If they’ve been given orders and can pull off their objective before their enemies do, they will tip the balance in this endgame. For added drama, they might be informed that the other side is also racing



to open the floodgates and will be ready to unleash its final solution at a specific time. If the heroes do not act quickly, their enemies will.

Once they have been moved to action, the most important move in this endgame is the location of the first gateway that floods the Avatar shards into the realm of flesh. Phase Six is a race against time. Four major outcomes are possible:

Loyalty Triumphs: If the Loyalists “win,” all alternatives to their vision for reality are weakened on Earth. The dominant variant of “magic” left is technomancy—coincidental applications of technological magic, as developed on the Horizon. Any act of magic that appears openly supernatural summons further Avatar shards. Since the Loyalists control the only functional variant of “magic” on Earth, they reassert their control as the secret masters of the world. This could lead to a denouement in which we see what the world is like in a few years... in a dystopia under one absolute Technocracy.

Humanity United: If the Unionists open their gates first, the Horizon Constructs are purged. A chain reaction weakens the network, as the front-line agents free themselves from the oversight of their Masters. Unable to cope with the fact that an overwhelming supernatural act is occurring, loyalist Technocrats go insane or into Quiet, or they simply expire in a final Paradox Backlash. The storm then cuts off sources of Quintessence in the world, extinguishing the energy needed to sustain a network of Horizon Constructs. Magic weakens, but the Unionists survive.

Survival: In theory, if the technomancers can devise a defense against Avatar shards—perhaps by watching and learning from the Anakim, adapting *Dimensional Science*, or even following a procedure detailed by Control—they can survive this final wave of the Avatar Storm, perhaps even rebuild a new Order of Reason. While this “last mage standing” ending is rather brutal, it might be the only hope if the Loyalists have made more overt forms of resistance impossible.

Everybody Dies: If no one “wins,” and neither side opens a gate to channel this worldwide energy, the Dimensional Barrier eventually falls on its own. The resulting storm actually flays all souls in its path, and every mage and Technocrat on Earth is purged as the spirit world floods into the physical world. The only Enlightened survivors are then the colonies and a handful of mages and Technocrats on Seekings. Perhaps the characters escape on a Void Engineer starship toward a resolution in another realm. They could appear before representatives of Control, escape to a Technocracy colony or attempt a final Seeking on the Far Horizon... one that leads to Ascension or utter annihilation.

DENOUEMENT

The Earth could be reclaimed by the defenders of old ideals; it could be transformed in a dystopia ruled by the Loyalists; it could even be purged of all magic, becoming a realm where even technomancy ceases to function. You must decide which outcome best suits your chronicle... and which side the characters are on when the revolution ends.

Unfolding this story, act by act, is like broadcasting the final season of a television program, one that’s been running for years. Humanity will be watching, of course, even if the Masses don’t understand the real significance of what is occurring. In a final surrender to technology, the most hopeless citizens will observe these historical events with passive acceptance. Experts enlisted by mass media will rationalize what they cannot understand. The revolution will be televised—but even during Armageddon, only the Enlightened will see the truth behind the apocalyptic events.

This is the Technocracy, signing off.



A WHIMPER, NOT A BANG

What if the end of the world came and nobody noticed? In the World of Darkness, it isn't unusual for players and Storytellers to consider that even the most heinous acts occur without the common man on the street taking notice.

In this scenario, the population of Earth is losing Avatars one by one. Two competing alien factions are capturing mages and stripping away their Avatars, each faction doing so for its own reasons. These secret thefts of humanity's spiritual shards of Prime have been going on for some time, but now they are happening with unprecedented frequency and purpose. The very fabric of magic in the universe is being unraveled one thread at a time, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it is being spun onto a new spindle held elsewhere.

Of course this is occurring beyond the public eye, except perhaps in media venues traditionally perceived as fraudulent or absurd. The end of the magical world approaches steadily and quietly. This is a very bleak scenario in many ways, and Storytellers should consider its implications before running it with their troupe. While succeeding only to still fail (at least in part) is a very dramatic theme, it might not be suited for all chronicles or all players.

THEY ARE HERE

Two obscure groups of radicals have turned up evidence of something bigger than anything paranoid intelligence officers or quixotic UFO nuts ever imagined. Unfortunately, the two factions distrust each other, and neither is likely to ever solve the puzzle without certain pieces held by their rivals. Blinded by an unbending scientific viewpoint, they would be unlikely to see the truth even if they were to work together.

THE STAR COUNCIL

The first of these two organizations is the Star Council, a gathering of eccentric intellectuals who share beliefs and studies of UFOs. Numbering less than 50, the Star Council would likely have faded away when the '60s ended, had it not made a remarkable discovery. Following the trail of reported sightings and cracked government files, a handful of members of the Council managed to break into a restricted hangar in Area 51 in 1969. They made off with ultratech devices of both Technocratic and alien origin and have been studying them ever since. The pillaging of the famed Technocratic Node has earned the group the unwanted attention of the Union, and only inherent paranoia, unconventional tactics and occasional amazing breakthroughs with the stolen devices have kept the members from capture.

NO SORCERERS

The Star Council and the Thal'hun are sorcerers — also called linear mages or hedge mages by various supplements for the World of Darkness. **Laws of the Hunt** contains rules for sorcerers as well as information on the Star Council. More detailed information on the subject as well as a profile of the Thal'hun can be found in **World of Darkness: Sorcerer**. If you do not desire to use sorcerers, you can easily present the two groups as independent, but similar, to the Sons of Ether or Virtual Adepts. Just substitute foci related to their UFO/alien-studies paradigm and plan their use of rotes accordingly.



THAL'HUN

The Thal'hun is a fringe group that joined the Council in the early '60s and led many of those who believed in them into destruction. The Thal'hun believe that an ancient race of aliens advanced so greatly in science that they were like unto gods, but their world was destroyed in a terrible plague. This race, which they call Hui:xa, supposedly spread across the universe, hoping to discover those with whom it could share its enlightened science and rebuild its greatest city once again.

According to the Thal'hun, the science of the Hui:xa transcended the physical and could be transmitted through the sounds of their special linguistics. They claimed to be in contact with the entity Khuvon, who descended to the Earth somewhere in Mesopotamia thousands of years ago and has made itself responsible for "safeguarding" the essences of divine god-beings in transition between planes. All of this might seem quite preposterous were it not for the fact that the Thal'hun can indeed muster their own sorcerous effects, not to mention the fact that the expedition they convinced the Star Council to send to the Middle East was destroyed by unknown forces.

EARLY WARNING

The first true signs that something is wrong begin to manifest early on in this scenario. Magic becomes more difficult and the players likely have little or no idea why—yet. Plant some mysterious seeds of what is happening in the news and rumors they hear from fellow Tradition members. A rash of strange abductions, whispers of strange beings from beyond the Gauntlet and other "alien" phenomena begin cropping up more and more often. A friend of one cabal might be one of the ones to disappear, or a close ally hear rumors of a strange cult bent on "harvesting" willworkers and others with strong Avatars.

Work the names of the Star Council and the Thal'hun in gradually and from a number of sources, letting the players put together the pieces. Try to give as many of the cabals a common cause to investigate as possible before moving on, without being too obvious about drawing them all in. Once the characters are interested, enough leads pile up to lead them to the local headquarters of the various groups, as outlined in the next phase of this scenario.

OUT THERE

This stage does not follow a linear timeline, but rather is left open for the players to investigate as they see fit. Indeed, it's likely that one cabal might consider it a priority

MAGIC ALTERATION

As this scenario goes forward, the pattern of the Tapestry tightens, its mystical weaving becomes a bit threadbare, and magic becomes noticeably harder to perform. For each stage of this scenario, add one to the difficulty of all tests to perform magic. For stages three through five, subtract one extra Grade of Success per casting, and reduce the ratings of all supernatural Nodes, Backgrounds, Merits and Flaws by one Trait. (If reduced to zero, the Trait vanishes utterly.) The Gauntlet strengthens as well, becoming essentially impassable by the end of the scenario. All of these effects are cumulative. In addition, the Storyteller may also include other complications such as cameras and other devices counting as "witnesses" for the purposes of vulgar magic, require additional Quintessence Traits to activate Wonders and so on. It should be serious enough that the characters can tell something must be done, lest magic be lost forever.

to investigate the Star Council, while another two track down the Thal'hun and yet another investigates what the Hermetics know about the Zigg and the Ka Luon. As long as the Storyteller takes care to weave all of these different elements back into one story that the whole troupe can participate in, this period of investigation and questioning can take as long and go in as many directions as the Storyteller desires.

THE STAR COUNCIL

Scarred by interactions with the Thal'hun and various Technocratic and government agencies, the Star Council has gone underground. As such, the characters will have some difficulty locating any members of the brotherhood. In the end, mages worthy of the title are likely to discover the information they seek somehow. Unless the Storyteller prefers some other locale, the group probably finds one of the warehouses wherein the Star Council has stashed one or more of its alien artifacts for study, along with several members of the Star Council assigned to study the various items.

If the characters approach peacefully and appear interested in the missing UFOlogists, the Council members are friendly, and convincing them to allow the characters to examine it is relatively simple. The Council has determined that the flat metal object, scored with silvery markings, might be some sort of computing device, but they cannot discern what it is designed to do. Appropriate Effects could discover that the device is a control panel for an alien craft, and that it serves as a special guidance system. *Correspondence* or *Spirit* Effects might further show that the device could control a vessel with extradimensional capabilities. Impressed by such acumen, the Council members might be convinced to allow the characters to take the device, though possibly at the cost of having the impressionable cultists follow them around trying to “help out.”

If confronted with violence or abuse, the Council members attempt to flee; if cornered, they are surprisingly resourceful. Characters attempting to take the item by force should most likely easily handle the amateurish cultists, but they might well lose a valuable source of information later on down the line — not to mention incur the wrath of the other Council members at an inopportune time.

THE THAL'HUN

Finding the Thal'hun offices requires similar magic or Background use as discovering the Star Council did. The difference is that the Thal'hun are no longer in residence. Mundane investigations reveal that the cult's lease expired five months ago and that the leasing party did not leave a forwarding address. Depending on which Spheres or other means are employed, additional information can be obtained via magical means. The Thal'hun leadership finally managed to contact its spiritual icon Khuvon and embarked upon a new mission to meet its goals. The inner circle and its followers have taken to calling themselves the Disciples of Zoraster, after the invisible city of light that is reputed to be the goal of their spiritual master. Extremely clever and successful magical investigations might even discover that the Thal'hun Disciples have taken to fomenting smaller splinter cults that specialize in tracking and kidnapping obscure figures of the occult — and mages.

Storytellers are encouraged to leave just enough evidence behind at the homes and offices of the Thal'hun members to give the characters the impression that these cultists have recently graduated to much bigger and more serious activities than they were previously familiar with. Don't give away too much of their plan yet, though.



HERMES TO THE RESCUE

Characters seeking information about aliens such as the Zigg'rauglurr or the Ka Luon find themselves directed to a nearby scholar from the Order of Hermes, who is a known authority on the subject of spirits and extraterrestrials. Provided the characters are polite (perhaps performing a few minor tasks for the busy scholar) and willing to describe the facts as they know them so far, she is only too happy to tell them what she knows.

The Zigg'rauglurr

The first recorded sighting of the Zigg'rauglurr entities was claimed by representatives of the Order of Hermes in San Francisco. Hermetic scholars describe them as appearing as yellow floating blobs covered with reptilian scales and pulsating veins, sporadically changing size from a few inches to a few yards across. Their fairly unwieldy name, Zigg'rauglurr, was assigned by Hermetic mages who recorded the first attempt to communicate with these beings. (Mages less worried about formality often just call them "Zigg.") Repeat encounters with the same Zigg proved remarkably easier to resist, with mounting evidence suggesting that specimens actually possessed more knowledge of our world in early meetings and less later. They appear intent on capturing mages rather than killing them, but what they do with such captives is unknown.

The Zigg'rauglurr inhabit an alternate dimension, and they interact with reality in bizarre fashion. The alien Zigg may enter the time-stream, step out of it and return at some other point. Similarly, they can enter the physical world, depart and return. Alternatively, they can manipulate the portions of their bodies entering three-dimensional space, seemingly changing shape or size. The Zigg do not seem to possess Avatars, and thus do not perform dynamic magic, yet their extradimensional natures and alien technology allow them to perform miraculous feats that can draw the wrath of Paradox spirits. Indeed Paradox spirits, when they do appear, seem particularly vicious and antagonistic toward the Zigg, probably because the outsiders are completely alien to reality.

Ka Luon

The "Grays." Modern pop culture and UFO nuts around the world have embraced the vision of an alien species that has plagued humanity in secret for, at very least, the past five or six decades. Nevertheless, more questions arise with each answer that seems apparent. These beings have been observed abducting and experimenting upon humans, and at times have come into direct conflict with Umbral explorers and the Technocratic Void Engineers. At other times, however, they have been friendly and even conciliatory to those they encounter. Likewise, in the history of their contact the Ka Luon have appeared to be an actual alien race, a form of spirit entity and even something completely unidentifiable. They apparently possess highly sophisticated technology, yet some encounters have seen no sign of such devices. Lastly, they appear to be hostile toward the Zigg, but for reasons no one has been able to fathom.

DEATH FROM ABOVE

At this point, the characters should be developing a picture of what is going on, and at least some of them are on the trail of the Thal'hun (maybe even preparing for the Zigg). It's clear that the kidnappings are merely indicative of a largely plot at work, and the more they learn about it, the more horrifying it becomes. It seems that these forces are not just capturing mages, but intend to do something terrible with their very Avatars!

If this isn't enough to move the characters to action, a pair of unexpected attacks during this section should alert them to the urgency of the threat with which they have become involved.

ZIGGS INCOMING!

If the mages have not yet faced a Zigg attack, then you should consider having a lone alien or pair of aliens seek to capture and abduct some of the Avatar-bearing specimens it spotted in contact with witnesses previously. The timing for this particular event is best left to you, but it should occur preferably at some point when it is late and lonely, or when a cabal is investigating a depressed and broken area of the city or its surroundings.

Storytellers are encouraged to devise their own statistics for the Zigg, both to scale them to the level of the characters involved as well as to represent how bizarre and unpredictable these creatures are. They should be challenging but not impossible, and since they are more concerned with capturing than killing it should not be a fatal encounter. Given their mastery of time and space (at least as far as their individual bodies), it should be impossible for the troupe to capture one of the Zigg, at least at this time. Rather, make it clear that the Zigg are aware of the characters and out to capture them if possible, then have them vanish.

THE THAL'HUN ATTACK

The Thal'hun on the other hand, are turned onto the characters by a snitch who observes some of the mages snooping around the abandoned Thal'hun offices. If this never happens, then perhaps the snitch instead spots a cabal visiting the Star Council warehouse. Whatever path proves to be the primary link to the cabals, the Thal'hun mean business, and they send out at least one party after the characters, attempting to capture as many as possible.

Should the Disciples of Zoraster succeed in capturing any of the characters, they individually subject each of them to a ritual hoping to give Khuvon a chance to turn them to its needs. Khuvon will eventually strip the Avatar from the mage's being and entrap it within the hidden realm of Zoraster, although chances are good that the character is rescued long before this can succeed. Still, it is a chilling glimpse of what the cult's true intentions are. If the characters defeat the Thal'hun, they discover various documents and the like that suggest that the Disciples of Zoraster are busy planning to "liberate" a lost starship supposedly capable of reaching Zoraster, currently being held in Area 51 of the Nellis Air Force Base north of Las Vegas. The level of detail is up to the Storyteller, but it should be sufficient to point the characters toward the base, at least if they need such a ride to reach Zoraster. Perhaps more important to the themes of this story, the troupe should find suitable evidence that the Thal'hun have abducted dozens of mages for unknown purposes.

KEY TO THE CITY

It should become apparent by now that both the Zigg and the Thal'hun are operating from locations outside of this reality, which means the characters will have to find some way to reach one of their bases if they want to inflict lasting harm. Since even the most learned Hermetics don't know anything about where the Zigg originate from, that means the Thal'hun and their mystical city of Zoraster will have to do, at least for starters. If the characters have their own means of traveling to the Horizon Realm where Zoraster is located, that is one option. Otherwise, their research can have turned up that the government has a captured Thal'hun ship under guard in Nellis Air Force Base — the very one the Star Council artifact came from, in fact.

Characters attempting to sneak into the military base will have a tough time of it, but with good planning, tight teamwork and a little judicious magic, they should eventually be able to do so. Once inside the base, their search will turn up a heavily

KALUON

At any time throughout the story, the aliens commonly called the Grays might choose to become involved, making them excellent Storyteller devices if the players have a run of bad luck or otherwise find themselves losing through no real fault of their own. The Ka Luon have an antagonistic rivalry with the Zigg'rauglurr and might appear at a critical moment to offer the characters aid against the Zigg. When the characters enter Zoraster, there is a strong possibility that a few of the Ka Luon are currently in residence. Depending on how things progress, the Grays might prove to be horrible enemies or unexpected allies.

guarded alien vessel. The vessel's guidance system has been stripped from it, but if all has gone well, this panel will happen to be the one the troupe gained from the Star Council earlier in the story. A Mental Challenge (retest Technology) against a difficulty of nine Traits will allow someone to install the panel. Alternatively, a quick rote or two involving Forces or Matter, potentially paired with Correspondence or the like, might prove effective in determining what happened. Ideally, the characters manage to hijack the alien vessel, armed with the appropriate controls, and catapult into the extradimensional spaces where Zoraster lies.

Either way they choose to travel, there's no going back now.

THE FINAL ASSAULT

Whether they arrive by ship or under their own power, the characters discover that the alien city of Zoraster is really a Horizon Realm where the powerful spirit called Khuvon has been putting Avatars in order to save them from the Avatar Storm and to keep them from the clutches of the Zigg'rauglurr. A materialized Khuvon confronts them on their arrival, angrily demanding to know why they have intruded, and it's quite possible a fight might break out before very long. Any battle is almost immediately interrupted by an even greater threat, however — the arrival of the Zigg assault force!

Although the characters likely do not agree with the containment strategy of the Khuvon and the Thal'hun, it's even more certain that neither side wants to see the Zigg drain the power of the Avatars for their own alien purposes. Unless the Storyteller wants a two-part (or three-way) battle, a temporary alliance is recommended at this stage. Some of the restrictions that have burdened magic on Earth might be eased while in this Realm, though characters should be aware that this is a temporary benefit at best, meaning that they can meet the attackers nearly full-force. Joined by Khuvon's powers, cultists and mages alike rally to meet the incoming Zigg assault, with the fate of the trapped Avatars, and thus the universe, hanging in the balance.

Storytellers are encouraged to make this battle as bizarre as it is desperate, playing up the alien wonders of Zoraster as well as the strange powers and tactics of the Zigg. Fortunately, many of the Zigg's most potent powers are somewhat limited by the nature of the realm, but they are still formidable enemies possessed of great intelligence and obviously superior technology. Khuvon and the majority of the cultists should perish during the battle as well, either to buy the characters time to rally or perhaps as a great sacrifice designed to disable a good number of the Zigg attack force if things are looking grim. In the end, however, if players wish to triumph, they will have to employ strong tactics, quick thinking and some clever (not to mention potent) magic as well.

THIS IS THE WAY THE WORLD ENDS

If the Zigg have triumphed, then they have garnered the majority of the Avatars of the universe and its magical forces have inexorably drained away. Even the science of the Technocracy and the Ka Luon ultimately fails, and everything of wonder, inventiveness and magic fades away to become a possession of the Zigg. It is questionable whether their alien minds actually take joy in this, or whether it is merely the logical conclusion of millennia of work. Either way, magic dies, the Gauntlet becomes impassable and the universe is doomed to a lingering death, drowned in mediocrity.

Should the characters win, things are a bit more positive, even if they cannot reverse the loss of magic in the current universe. With the Zigg repulsed and the Thal'hun shattered, the Avatars will remain intact, but during the battle the containment system is damaged. As a result, the Avatars begin draining away to... well, where is not immediately apparent. Beyond the walls of Creation, in some other place, these shards of the One begin joining together to start a new universe. Alas, the soul of the current one is left to die, as its power flows into a new place. It will take a long time to complete, but the characters have ensured the beginning of the next Cycle, even if it does come at the expense of a whimpering end to this one.

Whatever the characters have accomplished, magic is fading away rapidly. While they are capable of returning to Earth, it should be obvious that magic is still dying. They may take comfort in their victory and what it has done to continue the cycle of Avatars and Ascension, and it is recommended that the Storyteller offer some other rewards and compensations to help ease the sense of failure that might otherwise surround this conclusion. Ultimately, the characters and their world ease gently into normalcy, where magic has no further place — but the potential of humanity might just be about to be realized at last.

HELL ON EARTH

What if reality's slow, inexorable slide into decay picks up some steam and the Nephandi find themselves poised to attain victory over Creation itself? Just as Ascension can, theoretically, be achieved by humanity as a whole, so, too, can Descent. But what happens when the Consensus betrays the promise of its own inner divinity? What happens when mankind chooses darkness over light, death over life?

If you choose to walk this way, be careful. You are about to betray everything you ever believed about the Ascension War and humanity's place in the world of the Awakened. Are you still reading? Good. Because this is more than just the story of Ascension's most terrible and merciless enemies. It is the tale of humanity's weakness and the dismal failure of the Awakened to champion the cause of enlightenment and give Ascension to the Sleepers.

THE LEAD-UP

Before the final chapter is told, the stage must be well and truly set. Let the mages feel that, due to the failings of Sleeper and Awakened alike, things are coming apart at the seams. "Hell on Earth," after all, should not come as a total surprise when it begins so much as it should seem a grim but logical conclusion to reality's troubles.



THE UNNAMED

The Master of the Tenth Seat has worn many names over the many millennia of his existence. In medieval Europe, they called him the Black Man, patron of witchcraft and devil-worship — some believed that he *was* the Devil. In the Arabic world, where he abided for many years in long ago days, he went by the name of al-Aswad, the name he gave to those who followed after him as Fallen Oracles. To the Sumerians, he was Ut-Napishtam, the primordial man who was chosen by the gods to survive the Great Flood and was thereafter granted immortality but made to abide apart from all lesser creatures.

In truth, he was all these things and none, the anointed champion of the darkness from beyond Creation, and his True Name is lost to the deep memory of time. Perhaps the most far-thinking human being ever to exist, he was chosen not for his power or his knowledge — for with life enough a man may develop these qualities — but instead for his wisdom, patience and sense of strategy. The gods who raised him up remembered being outcast from the endless shadow in which they abided, shoved away by the hateful presence of something new — existence. They looked on it and were pained by jealousy, for they, though powerful and terrible, could never truly *be*. That privilege was reserved for all that existed within the hateful light.

As the Lord of Entropy and master of all things wicked, the Unnamed has at last found the opportunity to grant his masters what they desire — the Descent and utter corruption of this reality.

THE OTHER ASWADIM

In addition to many “ordinary” Nephandi and other servants of darkness, the Unnamed still enjoys the support — maintained through canny politics, incentives and, of course, the threat of their destruction — of the first five people to accept his offer. The youngest of them hails from Pharaonic Egypt and all are vastly powerful. Naturally, all have their own agendas and each has accepted a lesser position only because the Unnamed is so much more mystically potent than any one or two (or perhaps even three) of them and none trust each other enough to attempt to depose him. Still, it is possible to turn one Fallen Oracle against another, given time, effort and planning. Perhaps, it is even possible to turn all of the Aswadim, including their founder and master, upon one another. Whether such an act would allow the world to be freed from the grip of terror or would only set the stage for a tyrant yet more terrible, however, is a question none can answer.

THE AVATAR STORM

In the Fall, the Avatar Storm plays an entirely different role than the one envisioned in the more “standard” Ascension cosmology. Just prior to the fall of the Gauntlet, Fallen magic unleashes this nightmare torrent upon Sleeper and Awakened alike, a singular moment of untold worldwide destruction. The rent and tattered souls become a new kind of *widderslainte* Avatar when the worlds of flesh and spirit bleed together. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that the spirit-shards even bond with Nephandi to become the Fallen equivalent of Anakim, a new nobility among the damned.

CLAMING THE PRIZE

The first phase of the Unnamed’s final plan involves the capture of Horizon, there to eventually exploit the powerful Nodes connected to the realm in order to spread the taint of his masters to the farthest reaches of Earth. Fortunately, little but magic stands in his way. Horizon has been sealed since Lord Gilmore barred all from entry (or exit) by means of powerful wards. The Aswadim, however, are arguably the most powerful

THE CHANGE

Most of the Nephandi empowered by the loosing of the Storm become quite potent, having channeled the essence of dozens or even hundreds of people into themselves, thus expanding their Awakened abilities. Consider those Nephandi who partake of the dark sacrament of the Storm (a select few, perhaps only 10% of all Fallen) to benefit from the following changes: +5 Traits to Attributes, +15 Traits of Abilities, +2 Arete Traits (to a maximum of 8), +5 levels of Qlippotic Spheres and +2 Willpower Traits (no maximum).

These alterations, however, also put a strain on the sanity of the affected parties. All such Nephandi gain a permanently active derangement, to reflect the psychic shock of so gruesomely and forcibly incorporating the tormented souls of others into one's own being. Naturally, as none of them particularly need the boost (and the Unnamed forbids any of them to do so, given the probably of insanity resulting from it), the Aswadim refrain from the rite.

individual mages within or beyond Creation. With a few hours worth of rituals, the Unnamed shatters the seals holding Horizon shut and unleashes a terrible conflagration, destroying all spirits and disembodied mages who yet reside therein.

Triumphantly, the Unnamed enters into the blasted ruins of Horizon and begins to strip the realm of its Quintessence stockpiles. He then uses his mastery of the Qlippotic Spheres to send connections back along the ley lines that connect the realm to its anchoring Nodes on Earth, nine of the world's most powerful. Through these channels, he will pour out his corruption and thereby defile the Earth. In the Council Chamber, he sets his left hand upon the Saxum Oculorum (the "Stone of Eyes" which records all that has ever been said within the heart of Horizon) and it burns black, run through with cracks.

LOST HORIZON

Naturally, virtually every Tradition mage on Earth, as well as no small number of Technocrats and scattered others, will want to launch an assault against the Aswadim occupying Horizon (the heart of the Traditions' strength). Battling the Nephandi has

SIGNING OFF

The last transmission from the "Rogue Council" is sent from Horizon. Now, the Unnamed feels no need for secrecy, safe within the walls of the most powerful man-made realm ever to exist. The Unnamed allows the following message to reach Traditionalists, Disparates, Orphans and even Technocrats, seemingly at random. Larger chronicles can see characters receiving fragments of the message, perhaps only a sentence or two, perhaps distorted or in different languages. Thus do you drive characters to seek each other out to complete the puzzle, or to hoard their precious clues, confusing the issue further.

"I am the one who came before and shall follow after. I am your father and your destroyer, architect of your destiny. I am him who is come in glory to crush the thrones of the Earth beneath my tread. You have known me by many names, my children, but you know not the slightest part of my power. Submit to me and know the bounty of my love; defy me and suffer the agonies of my boundless wrath. It is for you to decide, but choose quickly. The Final Hour is nigh. I wait for you at the heart of your strength."

always been one of the only things virtually everyone else can agree upon. Even those who realize that this is likely a bad idea don't know what else to do. In a larger chronicle, the troupe is invited to send a representative cabal or two to this meeting. Those players whose characters choose to remain behind can then portray the Tradition representatives from other cities at the symposium. You should prepare a wide range of briefing sheets for these Storyteller characters. Full character sheets are probably not required at what is ostensibly a peaceful gathering, but if you anticipate trouble or challenges, include enough statistics to cover the foreseen problems.

In the midst of this model of poor planning, the characters are taken aside by a hooded and cloaked figure. The individual, a man of seemingly middling years, places an elaborate key into the hands of one character and tells her to "seek the *Parma Magica* in the ruins of Doissetep." He tells the characters that they must go to Horizon with the ill-fated attackers. There they must use the backdoor found in the Tomb of La Salle, the Hermetic Master who is largely credited with the formation of the Traditions, to enter the Shard Realm of Forces at the site of the annihilated Chantry. At that, he walks away and all but disappears. Within seconds, the character can't even remember which direction he went in. All that is left are his instructions and his key.

SHIELD OF FAITH

No matter what plan they ultimately decide on, the battle at Horizon is fierce and desperate. While the characters of the representative cabal follow their path in their own scenes, the rest of the chronicle can play out the ill-fated assault on Horizon, with the failure of the Storyteller characters foreshadowing the Descent to come. While they may encounter some fighting (enough to get their blood going and keep them jumpy), let the characters see only as much as they have to in order to get to the tomb. Leave them confused as to what was taking place and with nothing more than the vaguest of descriptions of what has happened to the others. They seem to be drawn to the tomb, and from there into the Shard Realm of Forces. Make the characters sweat a bit in this frightening Realm, but don't punish them too harshly. They still have a lot of hard work ahead of them.

Searching through the ruins, one of the characters eventually finds a charred book titled Bonisagus' *Parma Magica*. A quick glance reveals it to be a text about the quest to unify the Houses of Hermes and that journey's reflection in the formation of the Nine Mystic Traditions. It was uplifting, perhaps, in better days, but now it is seemingly useless. No other trace of a "*Parma Magica*" is to be found among the rubble, but just as the cabal is about to give in to despair, the key given over to one of the mages begins to grow warm. Then, of its own accord, it floats into midair, passing harmlessly through any container it is stored in. The key "unfolds," warping along its spatial axes to become a golden gateway, beyond which a battered but still beautiful realm can be seen. The cabal has an open invite to Balador, courtesy of Akrites Saloniakas and Marianna.

THE AEGIS

When the cabal arrives at Balador, the characters discover that, despite any rumors they have heard or evidence they have seen to the contrary, the Pleasuredome is still very much alive. Marianna, the keeper of the realm, greets them, and along with several prominent Hermetic wizards, reveals the secret of the book. When properly examined, it is revealed to contain a gleaming magical shield within its pages—the Aegis, otherwise known as the *Greater Parma Magica*. She explains that,



with the help of the characters, this powerful spell can, hopefully, help a number of the world's Awakened to weather the coming storm alive.

The shield itself holds extraordinarily powerful enchantments in it, designed to create a two-way ward with *all* nine Spheres. Nothing comes in or goes out once the *Greater Parma Magica* is activated. The characters will be asked to help with the preparations—huge amounts of Tass have to be fed to the *Great Parma Magica* when it is in place, and circles and seals must be placed in the proper configurations. It then falls to the recipients to inform any characters who didn't come along (as well as anyone else they wish to protect) that they must hurry to receive the protection of the shield. The amount of time the earthbound characters have to prepare for the journey once alerted is up to the Storyteller, although it should be a matter of minutes rather than hours.

To avoid any petty last-minute snubs resulting in pointless character death, the Storyteller may also rule that Marianna or one of the other powerful Tradition mages present sends out a massive *Mind* message to mages around the world alerting them to the shelter being provided. They might even transport characters who have no means of traveling there themselves into Balador. This last should be presented as a desperate option, however, to avoid the sense that Narrator characters will solve all of the players' characters' problems in this scenario.

THE STORM IS LOOSED

Not long after the last characters reach the safety of Balador, the Unnamed contends with the wills locked within the Avatar Storm. A great instinctive dread hangs within these miserable soul-fragments, a beast's terror at the thought of being forced out of its den. By strictest mental fortitude, the Unnamed "pulls" the Storm out of the Gauntlet and unleashes it upon both the world and the Umbral at once. Those Awakened who do not have protections against both *Prime* and *Spirit* assaults die horribly. Though spared some of the worst of the storm by their weaker spirits, countless mortals die as well due to the sudden influx of energies.

As the Avatar Storm crashes into Balador, it is apparent that the Aegis will hold if nothing goes wrong. Of course, something does go wrong. The Unnamed, having defeated the would-be invaders of Horizon and sensing a flaw in his plan, leaves the other Aswadim to continue the ritual that keeps the Avatar Storm raging and comes to Balador to attend to the Aegis personally. A cataclysmic shaking of the realm's foundations heralds his arrival. Some of the Storm slips in, probably killing mages standing just paces away from the characters before dissipating. As this happens, the Unnamed can be seen outside the Aegis, hurling terrible sorceries at it.

This should be a moment of high drama, as the players face down the most potent being in Creation. It should appear that the Unnamed is about to break through (perhaps delayed only by some of their more clever or powerful efforts), when abruptly, he smiles cryptically at them and withdraws, vanishing utterly. Not long afterward, the Storm begins to subside, eventually fading back to its "normal" level of disturbance. It may flare up again from time to time, as drama requires, but it has served its main purpose—destroying most of the Awakened opposed to the Descent.

A BRIEF RESPITE

For a while, things grow quiet again, as the Unnamed takes stock of his situation, recovers his strength and compensates for unexpected casualties. Give the characters enough time to perform some missions of their own during this period.



Some might wish to research powerful magics or Wonders they hope will help turn the tide, while others will seek out missing allies and mentors to see if they have survived the terrible conflagration. Others might have yet more humble goals, such as finding un-Awakened friends and family members and doing what they can to keep them safe. Everyone will be busy—there's plenty left to do now that it's obvious Earth and its nearby dimensions are in serious trouble.

Let the characters have as much time as they need here, without letting them feel as though they necessarily have any time at all. Some of these plans may work and others definitely will not. In general, only the most innovative contingencies have any chance of proving useful in the days to come. This section is more of a period of time than a series of events. The Fallen entrench themselves, just as the remaining mages of Earth do.

In addition to any plans and plot the characters might devise, the following scenes can offer some additional ideas for quests to undertake during this dark time, including a potential climactic battle on behalf of the Traditions the characters can take part in. It's even possible that the characters devise their own last ditch effort to destroy the Unnamed, in which case it is highly recommended that the Storyteller structure the closing events of the chronicle around the success of this desperate effort—or its failure.

THE GAUNTLET FALLS

Overwhelmed by human fear and the belief in what is impossible and yet plainly true, the Gauntlet crumbles, allowing the Umbrae to wash into our world. Sprits of pain, death and torment, drawn close by the suffering inflicted by the Avatar Storm, are among the first into the world. Humanity's shield against the terrors of its dreams has just failed and nothing will ever be the same again. Ghosts walk among the living and demons crawl free from the pits of countless hells, eager to feed on warm blood.

Nor is that the extent of the Unnamed's crusade against the outer realms. Using yet more of his stockpiled Tass and blasphemous rituals scribed on the outer walls of Creation, the Unnamed sends his Aswadim to the Axis Mundi bearing a cauldron of venom, which they pour into a wound in the tree at the heart of the spirit world. Within a week, it withers and topples, dropping dying branches throughout the worlds. Some might even end up on Earth. A few of these branches might live long enough for people to find them and save them, meaning that hope is not *entirely* lost. The characters might be able to recover some branches from the Alder Bole. Kept alive and enchanted properly, such remnants of the tree can allow for travel between worlds and contact with the surviving Oracles (if any), as well as serving as potent weapons against malevolent spirits.

THE DEATH OF THE MACHINE

With no Gauntlet to hold back superstition, and faith in the power of science and technology to protect the world at an all-time low, the Technocracy's paradigm falls apart. The Umbrae wash over the world, dissolving 10,000 years of human progress and reducing mankind to barbarism. Laws that were once true are no longer so. Friction on a dry branch may cause it to shudder and bleed, but it will not start a fire.

As their reality crumbles, the surviving Technocrats approach remaining Tradition authorities—the characters among them—and ask for succor from the Nephandi, in exchange for what resources they can bring to bear in the final hours of the conflict. This should be a pivotal roleplaying session, where the characters are among the policy-makers. Accepting the help of the Technocracy might seem a



natural option in the face of the opposition, but some old enmities die hard. Coupled with the fact that Technocratic magic has become much less reliable on the whole, the debate might be much more heated than it first appears it should be.

An Offer You Can't Refuse

Now that his control is stronger, the Unnamed has no problem with offering a slice of the pie to any Awakened person who will hear his pitch. Normally, intermediaries make the pitch, but the characters in the representative cabal are somehow different or special. He will want to offer them their hearts' deepest desires personally. Larger chronicles will see cabals, op teams or individual mages approached in quieter moments. The Unnamed has some idea of each mage's nature, and he tailors his approach accordingly.

Pivotsally influential mages get the personal treatment, while less influential mages merit only an intermediary (portrayed by Narrators). Separate each of the groups, and have your team deal with each group at the same time, to avoid spoiling the surprise and to foster uncertainty between the characters. Did a fellow mage accept or decline the offer? Which side is each working for now? Distrust between the mages assists the Unnamed's cause, a fact he is quick to exploit.

The Order's Last Stand

Faced with corruption of every Node on Earth and the inversion of the natural order, Lord Gilmore of the Order of Hermes hatches a final, desperate ploy — but one that, even if successful, will cost the Awakened dearly. This is a brutally dangerous mission and the characters are among those elite forces selected to undertake it. It's also possible he might inadvertently select a turncoat, in which case things get interesting indeed...

Gilmore's plan is simple. He intends to take most of the surviving members of the Order of Hermes and some allied mages and make a final stand at a remote location. He knows it is hopeless, but it is merely to buy time for a second force to infiltrate and retake Mus, a secure and easily defended realm conquered by the Fallen during their initial attack. (If the Storyteller desires, another realm more familiar to the chronicle or suitable to its needs can be substituted for Mus.) While the massed Hermetics do their best to occupy the bulk of the Nephandi forces, the characters can infiltrate the near-empty garrison and establish a base where the remaining Tradition members and their allies can operate from. The characters have enough time to ready themselves, draw up some tactics and say their good-byes, then the attack must begin.

True enough, the Fallen are completely unprepared for the attack and their armies are absent, having been sent to deal with the massed army of the Order of Hermes. Still, there are some defenders there, and they quickly recover their wits. Tailor the number of Nephandi present to the power of the cabal (and to the number of extras and Narrators you have available). The siege should be extremely difficult, but possible. If the cabal makes the right moves, then the realm can be restored to the Traditions, giving them a stable base of operations from which to strike against the Nephandi. It might not be much, but it is better than nothing.

The Descent

Now that the Gauntlet is no more, the ordered ranks of Traditions and the Technocratic Union have fallen and the other willworkers of the Earth are scattered in fear and fractiousness, the Unnamed raises high his ultimate weapon, ready to end the war forever and break humanity to his yoke.

In a ritual held at the new site of his rule, in the blasted wasteland that was once Eden, the Unnamed summons his masters to Earth, giving them leave to incarnate physically within Creation. As they do so, pockets of the Tapestry dissolve forever, unable to support the weight of the chthonic titans. Here and there, around the world, pregnant women miscarry children, finding horribly misshapen things that crawl away of their own accord. Animals bleat and howl, some of them going mad and rabid and others just dying. Bodies of water turn to blood and venom. The order of Creation is broken, and Those Who Came Before are again given dominion over all that is.

Of course, the Unnamed keeps his word to most of those Fallen who supported him in his rise and subsequent conquest. Each of the Aswadim is given an abode from which to exert his or her will, though most of the day-to-day affairs of running Creation fall to the lesser Nephandi, the gilledians and adsinistrati, supported by Storm-born shock troops. Characters who previously accepted the Unnamed's offer, and who have worked well toward his will, are likewise rewarded with domain over the local chronicle area.

The Nephandi are virtually unstoppable at this point and victories, when they are had at all, are small and come only through hit-and-run tactics. None can now delude themselves into believing that the war persists. For now and perhaps forever, it is ended. Beneath a sky of seething molten crimson and choking black mists, the Fallen sit in judgment over the desert wastes once known as Earth.

THE END OF DAYS

When all is said and done, the world writhes in the throes of Descent, damnation seemingly everlasting. Magic still lives, though the numbers of its practitioners are much diminished, save for the Fallen. The Traditions are a frail shadow of their former power and the Technocracy is fallen entirely. Perhaps 10% of the world's (non-Nephandic) Awakened have survived this holocaust.

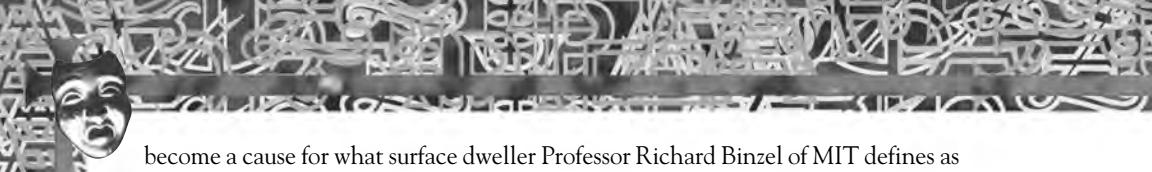
Demons, dark spirits and Unspeakable Horrors from Beyond walk the Earth with impunity and some lord over scattered enclaves of miserable survivors as dread taskmasters and cruel barons. The Fallen revel in what they have wrought and settle in to enjoy an eternity of ruling over a helpless human race largely reduced to Iron Age civilization and subject to depredations unknown since the worst excesses of the priests of the demon-gods of the ancient world.

If the characters have done well, however, then some manner of resistance lives on, surviving to bring the fight to the Aswadim and perhaps even topple them one day. The process of driving out the dark is centuries-long at best, but without courage and dedication, one day it can begin anew. For now, however, it is enough to know that the end has come and gone and Ascension has proven to be a lie, a feast of ashes supped upon in sorrow by a failed human race.

THE EARTH WILL SHAKE

It has been estimated that as much as 100 tons of interplanetary material falls to earth every day. During the last three decades, over 100 air bursts — most measured in megatons — were detected throughout Earth's upper atmosphere. Scientists who have calculated the entire heat content of the planet over the course of its existence believe that the planet might have frozen over by now were it not for the additional warmth that the occasional collision with asteroids and comets generates.

In short, space debris collides with our world all the time. Most of it burns up or blasts apart from air friction. Objects large enough to reach the surface intact



become a cause for what surface dweller Professor Richard Binzel of MIT defines as “concern.” By his reckoning and others, a meteorite large enough to ruin a prime piece of real estate comes down approximately once every thousand years. Every hundred thousand years or so, something large enough to change a lot of people’s religion hits. And around every couple hundred million we catch something big enough to knock the top dozen rungs off of the planet’s evolutionary ladder.

The following story concerns just such an event. The characters learn that a large meteoroid is on a collision course with Earth. Is there time to avert it, and what methods must be deployed to do so? And what can be done should these methods fail? Can anything be done at all?

THE CELESTIAL BALL

Concurrent with the story in the physical world runs a parallel plot involving the reverberations of the impending impact in the Umbra. Storytellers may wish to downplay this spiritual aspect of the very physical problem — at least in the early chapters. Although presented as interstitial scenes bridging the physical chapters, “The Celestial Ball” may be run all at once as prelude, interlude or denouement, depending on how the Storyteller chooses to pace the story — fast-paced action in a race against time, or a drawn-out process of mounting intellectual discovery.

The spiritual shock wave of the collision could come all at once on a single Umbral voyage foreshadowing the event long in advance, or it could unfold in brief glimpses through dreams and visions that increase in frequency and intensity as the event becomes imminent. Conversely, the Storyteller might find that the Umbral subplot gradually eclipses the deteriorating situation in the material world. The characters might focus their efforts on interacting with the planetary entities rather than dealing with the mounting panic and natural disasters on the material plane — acting globally rather than locally, so to speak.

CONSIDERATIONS

This scenario begins with the characters becoming aware of the meteoric menace through an unlikely pair of amateur astronomers, Abner and Whitney Tripplethorpe. They have observed the asteroid — which they’ve labeled Typhon 2004 — and calculated its path. They are now attempting to alert both the political and scientific authorities to its presence. If one of your characters is into astronomy, she could learn of the Tripplethorpes through any number of amateur publications, message boards or chatrooms through which they have tried to make their findings public. Otherwise, the characters might bump into them by chance meeting as the pair travels around seeking any important personage who will hear them out. Not only that, but it appears that other entities have heard what the Tripplethorpes have to say and aren’t too happy with them, which means the astronomers might require protection if they hope to live long enough to spread the word.

Unless the Tripplethorpes find the allies and resources they require to notify the world of its incipient fate within the bounds of the local chronicle, they will move on, leaving rumors, speculation and a minimal amount of information for the characters to consider. With a small chronicle, you may be able to have the characters travel with the Tripplethorpes, but larger games tend to remain based in the same location. Characters will need to either persuade the Tripplethorpes to remain in their region or gather the information that the two possess as quickly as possible. If the two have made some friends, they will attempt to keep in contact with updates about their quest

even after they have departed, possibly via email or registered post, allowing the Storyteller team to demonstrate the couple's progress through the use of props.

MEANWHILE, IN THE UMBRA...

Characters who are sensitive to the spirit world — such as those with the *Medium*, or *Nightmares* Merits or Flaws, mages with high levels in the *Mind* or *Spirit* Spheres, seers and the like — may experience dreams or visions related to events developing in the Umbra. Likewise, Storyteller characters such as street prophets or madmen, anyone who might be able to tap into the mystical side of the universe, can spout fragments illustrating the growing insanity beyond the Gauntlet. You can use this method to introduce and flesh out the Umbral story or to entice characters to cross the Gauntlet and experience the Umbral subplot for themselves.

While the inhabitants of the physical world remain unaware of the threat, the spirit world darkens with foreboding. Vistas appear that show events to come, but not their ultimate cause: large-scale disasters, earthquakes, tidal waves, volcanic eruptions, cities blasted into ruins, black clouds that fill the sky and blot out the sun. In the Low Umbra, mass movements and migrations are underway as the wraith populace makes room for a great influx of the newly dead. In the Spirit Wilds, the animal and vegetable kingdoms seem to be going insane, as herds stampede for no discernible reason and predators either launch into berserk killing sprees or flee in blind terror with their tails between their legs. Ancient trees may uproot themselves to join in the panic, while smaller plants shrink and shrivel back into the ground, as if trying to hide from the sun. Mages who are normally on friendly terms with such spirits can engage them in conversation and learn that they know that some major change is coming, but do not know its exact nature or cause.

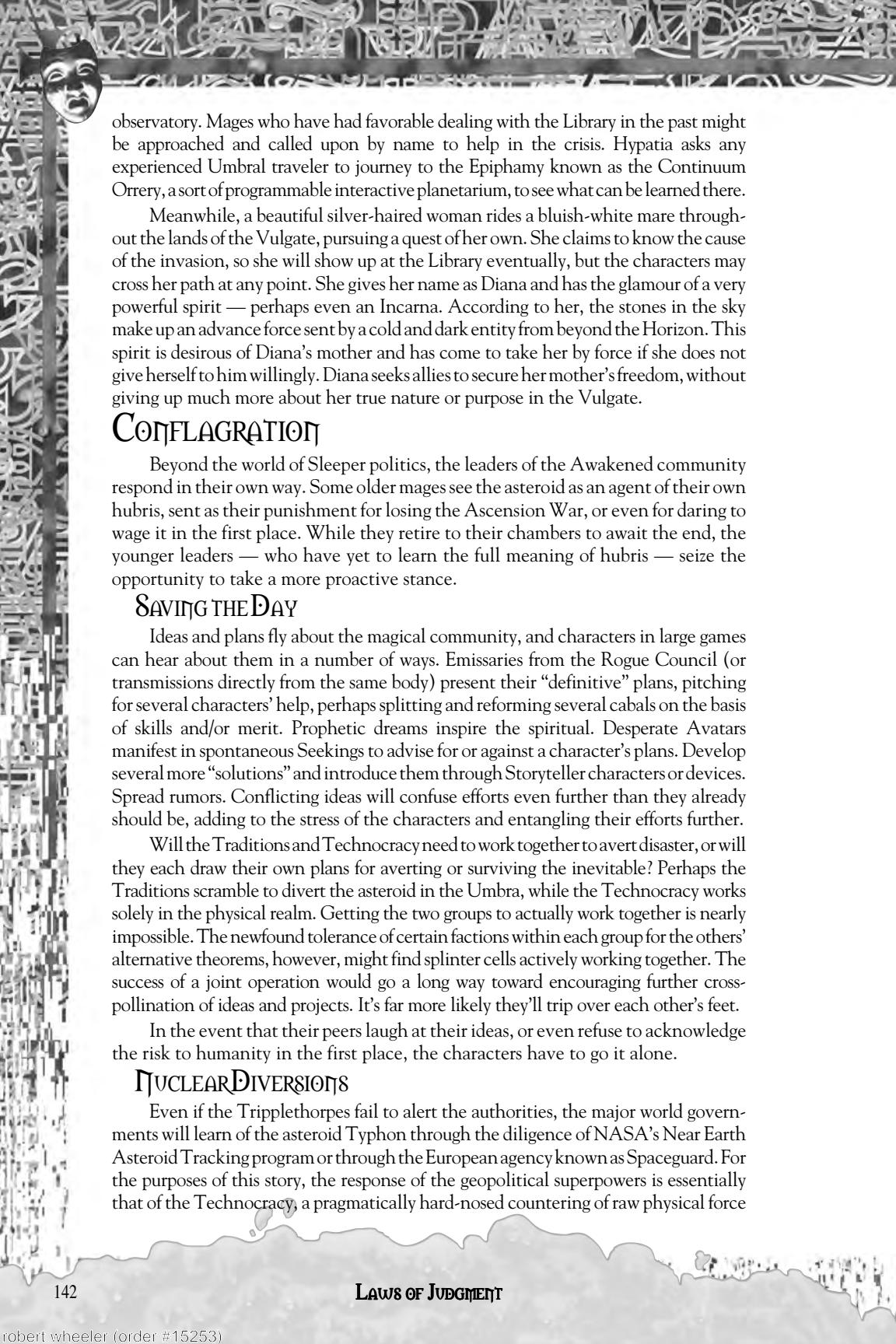
CONFIRMATIONS

Assuming they can be kept safe from the various forces seeking to do them harm — the Union, doomsday cultists, etc. — Abner and Whitney continue their quest to alert the leaders of the world to its peril, presumably with the aid of at least some of the characters by this point. Old classmates may be looked up, favors called in, strings pulled, palms greased, backs scratched, hands washed, anything to push the news up the top-heavy chain of command. *Allies* and *Contacts* Backgrounds, not to mention social and bureaucratic skills, must figure heavily into the action here, and rounds of tiresome appointments may be condensed into a series of challenges based on these Traits. Key scenes can be played out as cut scenes, with extras in bureaucratic roles, illustrating the static nature of the Masses.

In large games, it's possible some characters are actively opposing the investigations of those who believe the Triplethorpes through their own resources. Not all of the characters in the game should believe the esoteric claptrap being spouted by these eccentric amateurs. Mentors and other Storyteller characters have their own opinions and act of their own accord, perhaps even in competition to those they might normally assist. Such conflicts can spur additional subplots and add to the drama of your story. If the characters manage to trap each other in competitive jockeying for too long, then they have only themselves to blame for the inevitable.

THE CELESTIAL BALL: INVITATIONS

In the spiritual remnant of the Library of Alexandria, Chief Librarian Aristarchus invokes the aid of Urania, the Muse of Astronomy, to determine the cause of the astral disturbance, while Chief Astronomer Hypatia marks its progress from the Mouseion



observatory. Mages who have had favorable dealing with the Library in the past might be approached and called upon by name to help in the crisis. Hypatia asks any experienced Umbral traveler to journey to the Epiphany known as the Continuum Orrery, a sort of programmable interactive planetarium, to see what can be learned there.

Meanwhile, a beautiful silver-haired woman rides a bluish-white mare throughout the lands of the Vulgate, pursuing a quest of her own. She claims to know the cause of the invasion, so she will show up at the Library eventually, but the characters may cross her path at any point. She gives her name as Diana and has the glamour of a very powerful spirit — perhaps even an Incarna. According to her, the stones in the sky make up an advance force sent by a cold and dark entity from beyond the Horizon. This spirit is desirous of Diana's mother and has come to take her by force if she does not give herself to him willingly. Diana seeks allies to secure her mother's freedom, without giving up much more about her true nature or purpose in the Vulgate.

CONFLAGRATION

Beyond the world of Sleeper politics, the leaders of the Awakened community respond in their own way. Some older mages see the asteroid as an agent of their own hubris, sent as their punishment for losing the Ascension War, or even for daring to wage it in the first place. While they retire to their chambers to await the end, the younger leaders — who have yet to learn the full meaning of hubris — seize the opportunity to take a more proactive stance.

SAVING THE DAY

Ideas and plans fly about the magical community, and characters in large games can hear about them in a number of ways. Emissaries from the Rogue Council (or transmissions directly from the same body) present their “definitive” plans, pitching for several characters’ help, perhaps splitting and reforming several cabals on the basis of skills and/or merit. Prophetic dreams inspire the spiritual. Desperate Avatars manifest in spontaneous Seekings to advise for or against a character’s plans. Develop several more “solutions” and introduce them through Storyteller characters or devices. Spread rumors. Conflicting ideas will confuse efforts even further than they already should be, adding to the stress of the characters and entangling their efforts further.

Will the Traditions and Technocracy need to work together to avert disaster, or will they each draw their own plans for averting or surviving the inevitable? Perhaps the Traditions scramble to divert the asteroid in the Umbra, while the Technocracy works solely in the physical realm. Getting the two groups to actually work together is nearly impossible. The newfound tolerance of certain factions within each group for the others’ alternative theorems, however, might find splinter cells actively working together. The success of a joint operation would go a long way toward encouraging further cross-pollination of ideas and projects. It’s far more likely they’ll trip over each other’s feet.

In the event that their peers laugh at their ideas, or even refuse to acknowledge the risk to humanity in the first place, the characters have to go it alone.

NUCLEAR DIVERSIONS

Even if the Tripplethorpes fail to alert the authorities, the major world governments will learn of the asteroid Typhon through the diligence of NASA’s Near Earth Asteroid Tracking program or through the European agency known as Spaceguard. For the purposes of this story, the response of the geopolitical superpowers is essentially that of the Technocracy, a pragmatically hard-nosed countering of raw physical force



with raw physical force. Of course, the Void Engineers will be at the forefront of this effort — raising the question of how a couple of amateurs were able to identify the threat before the Enlightened Scientists entrusted with this very job...

In a Technocratic chronicle, the characters can become involved in the nuclear solution on several levels. Those who have already researched the asteroid and its path possess invaluable data for the project, and can save the Union considerable time, possibly accelerating the project enough to divert or destroy Typhon before it becomes a real danger. Op teams might be directed by their superiors to counter uncovered plans by the Traditions to divert Typhon, plans that would throw their own calculations out of whack. By having a secret missile silo nearby, the Technocratic community will stir into action to prepare for launch, drawing information and resources from wherever they can find it, including the characters.

THE CELESTIAL BALL: ARRIVALS

Diana brings the characters to a grove far from the more heavily inhabited regions of the Vulgate, back along the River of Language toward the Spirit Wilds. Crouched between the roots of an impossibly large tree is an old woman dressed in rags, weeping silently. Even those who have already met with Mother Earth in her various guises would probably not recognize this wretched creature. Her initial reaction to human visitors will not be friendly, and might even be outwardly hostile, depending on how the characters act when first seeing her. If treated appropriately, however, both she and Diana are open to any suggestions the characters might make about seeking safety.

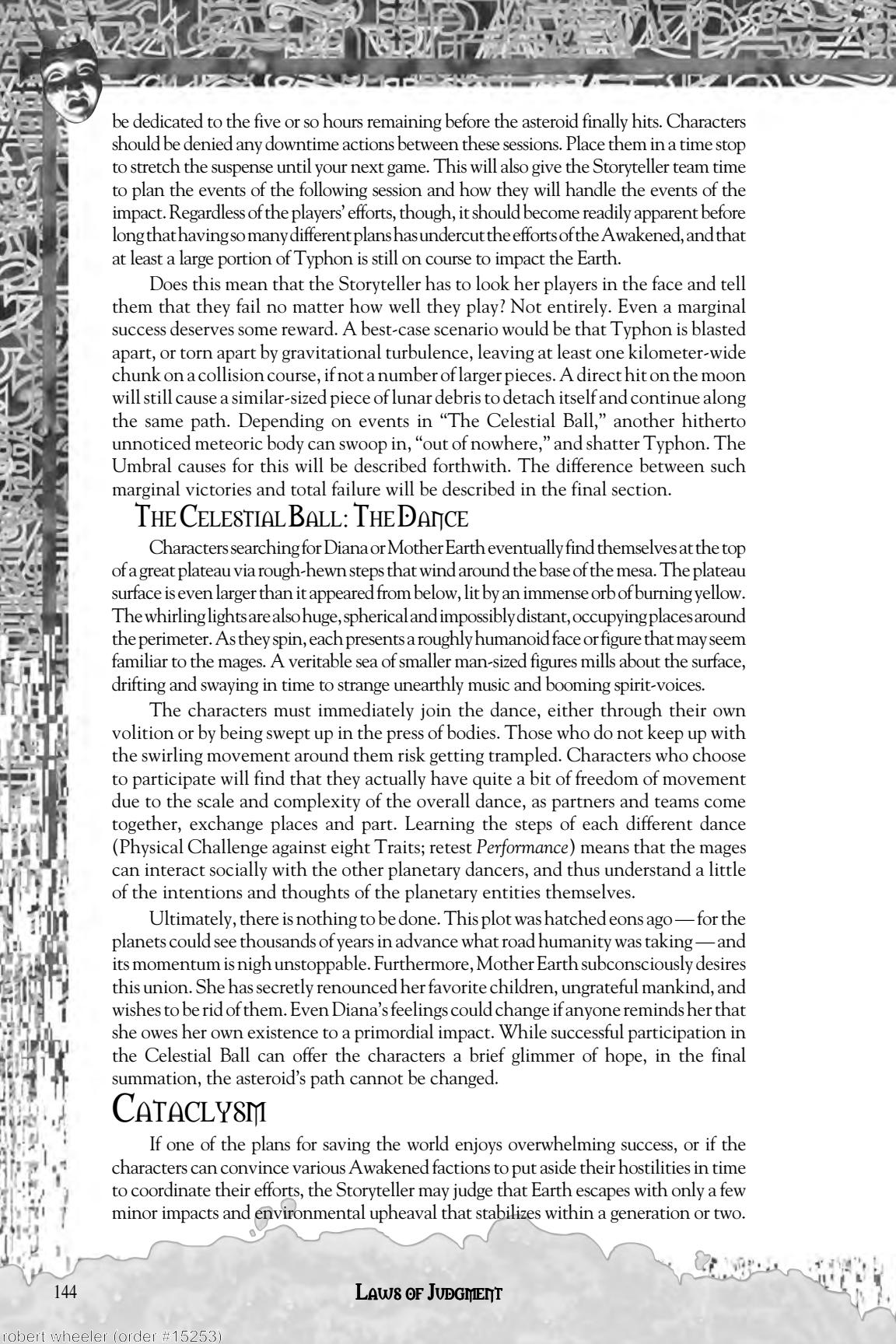
At an especially dramatic moment, the sky above darkens as the invader arrives in full force. The stones hanging in the air drift aside to make way for a veritable floating continent that descends to blot out the astral sky. Its pitted, cratered underbelly nearly touches the ground in places, engulfing or crushing the tallest Spires and triggering terrible storms and earthquakes across the Vulgate. Over the uproar, an impossibly loud masculine voice booms a warning — Typhon has found them! The characters may choose to face this threat head on by traveling straightaway to the aerial continent, or they may stay to defend the mother from whatever comes to get her.

Ultimately, though, the defenders will lose to brute strength and force of numbers. The characters will then be seized and taken to the floating continent. Alternatively, the characters may elect to leave Diana and her mother behind while they meet the incursion head on, with whatever other forces they can muster — other mages, spirit allies, even Patrons. In this case they will still be captured, and will not know what befell the two ladies until the next section.

CATASTROPHE

Characters who are directly involved with any of the plans described in the previous section will naturally see its results for themselves. The progress of the other plans can be reported through different Tradition channels, by scrying mages or even independent astronomers. Divergent efforts will undoubtedly conflict with each other, and any diplomatic skills the characters might possess could lessen these conflicts, and new alliances could develop on their own. Like politics, the threat of extinction can make for strange bedfellows.

If the players have managed to develop a method (or series of methods) to break Typhon away from its course or into pieces, the moment of fragmentation is an ideal time to close the game session — a cliffhanger moment. The same applies if their methods have failed and Typhon sails past the moon into Earth's orbit. The next game session can then



be dedicated to the five or so hours remaining before the asteroid finally hits. Characters should be denied any downtime actions between these sessions. Place them in a time stop to stretch the suspense until your next game. This will also give the Storyteller team time to plan the events of the following session and how they will handle the events of the impact. Regardless of the players' efforts, though, it should become readily apparent before long that having so many different plans has undercut the efforts of the Awakened, and that at least a large portion of Typhon is still on course to impact the Earth.

Does this mean that the Storyteller has to look her players in the face and tell them that they fail no matter how well they play? Not entirely. Even a marginal success deserves some reward. A best-case scenario would be that Typhon is blasted apart, or torn apart by gravitational turbulence, leaving at least one kilometer-wide chunk on a collision course, if not a number of larger pieces. A direct hit on the moon will still cause a similar-sized piece of lunar debris to detach itself and continue along the same path. Depending on events in "The Celestial Ball," another hitherto unnoticed meteoric body can swoop in, "out of nowhere," and shatter Typhon. The Umbral causes for this will be described forthwith. The difference between such marginal victories and total failure will be described in the final section.

THE CELESTIAL BALL: THE DANCE

Characters searching for Diana or Mother Earth eventually find themselves at the top of a great plateau via rough-hewn steps that wind around the base of the mesa. The plateau surface is even larger than it appeared from below, lit by an immense orb of burning yellow. The whirling lights are also huge, spherical and impossibly distant, occupying places around the perimeter. As they spin, each presents a roughly humanoid face or figure that may seem familiar to the mages. A veritable sea of smaller man-sized figures mills about the surface, drifting and swaying in time to strange unearthly music and booming spirit-voices.

The characters must immediately join the dance, either through their own volition or by being swept up in the press of bodies. Those who do not keep up with the swirling movement around them risk getting trampled. Characters who choose to participate will find that they actually have quite a bit of freedom of movement due to the scale and complexity of the overall dance, as partners and teams come together, exchange places and part. Learning the steps of each different dance (Physical Challenge against eight Traits; retest Performance) means that the mages can interact socially with the other planetary dancers, and thus understand a little of the intentions and thoughts of the planetary entities themselves.

Ultimately, there is nothing to be done. This plot was hatched eons ago—for the planets could see thousands of years in advance what road humanity was taking—and its momentum is nigh unstoppable. Furthermore, Mother Earth subconsciously desires this union. She has secretly renounced her favorite children, ungrateful mankind, and wishes to be rid of them. Even Diana's feelings could change if anyone reminds her that she owes her own existence to a primordial impact. While successful participation in the Celestial Ball can offer the characters a brief glimmer of hope, in the final summation, the asteroid's path cannot be changed.

CATACLYSM

If one of the plans for saving the world enjoys overwhelming success, or if the characters can convince various Awakened factions to put aside their hostilities in time to coordinate their efforts, the Storyteller may judge that Earth escapes with only a few minor impacts and environmental upheaval that stabilizes within a generation or two.

Humans and other large animals could thus avoid extinction, even decimation. “The Earth Will Shake” might then serve as a prelude or subplot for a different kind of Apocalypse described elsewhere in this book or of the Storyteller’s own devising. But this is a story about the end of the world, so consideration must be given to what happens.

Portraying a cataclysm of this nature inevitably requires the storytelling team to call upon the Mind’s Eye. Simpler than a special effects extravaganza, however, is to focus on what each of the characters, or groups of characters, is doing in the final moments. Those on Earth might be huddled in shelters, wrapped in magical shields, hoping devastation will pass them by. Others face tsunami, casting vulgar magics in a desperate bid to stem the tide. Still more might be out searching for family and friends, wishing to be with their loved ones at the last.

The physical impact of Typhon, while spectacular, is simply background material. Typhon is the cause of the end of the world, perhaps most simply represented by turning out the lights, but Typhon isn’t the focus of the story — the characters are. Playing out each character’s end scenes as cut scenes or mass scenes, as need be, allows poignant exposition, shattered dreams, desperate measures, pure panic, calm resignation or enlightened escape (among others) to dominate the mood of the chronicle in its final hours.

EPILOGUE: THE UMBRAL EXODUS

When worlds collide on the material plane, the safest place is undoubtedly the Umbral. This is not to say that physical changes have no consequence in the lands of spirit, however. A mage in the Penumbra might experience a major global impact only as a distant blast of light and heat followed by a slow rolling quake. Nearing the Spirit Wilds, the resulting storms, earthquakes and other geophysical effects may be felt with the same deadly intensity as they are in the physical world, but they can be avoided by those who know the ways of the Wilds.

The chaotic energies of global disasters strengthen the Spirit Wilds and erode the Gauntlet in places where the world has grown more dynamic. Every individual death swells the borders of the Dark Umbral, and it stands to reason that an extinction-level event could force a sudden fusion of the three Umbrae. Regardless of the specific interpretation the Storyteller might decide on, the fact remains that, while characters in the Umbral might be safe from some of the immediate effects of the disaster, aside from the perils that might arise in the spirit realm, their home and just about everyone they ever knew or cared about is gone. *Forever*. Let that fact sink in, and watch how the characters respond.

Storytellers of a chronicle in which most or all of the characters choose this option may decide to continue the chronicle as the characters seek out a new home world to inhabit (or perhaps return to Earth to search for survivors), or they may simply allow the refugees a few hours to put the disaster into context before fading to black on such somber meditations.



robert wheeler (order #15253)



CHAPTER FIVE. ENDLESS WINTER

The End of All Dreams

Endless Winter

For millennia, the fae have whispered of this terrible time, when Glamour is snuffed out, Banality triumphs and the Dreaming itself dies. Even darker versions speak of the Fomorians rising to usher in a hellish new age of shadow and tyranny, where these elder monsters rule fae and mortal alike with absolute power and cruelty. Legends about this terrible apocalypse — and, some insist, the Spring that must follow it — figure prominently in the histories of all kiths, cut across all geographic boundaries and even unite Seelie and Unseelie alike in speculation, supposition and dread.

Of course, even thinking about the Endless Winter and what it might entail doesn't really prepare any of the fae for what truly lies in store. As consumed as they are with unraveling ancient prophecies and deciphering cryptic metaphors, even the most astute fae scholars fail to see the actual signs of the coming disaster unfold around them.

Building up to your personal End-Time scenario properly is critical to its success. It's no fun if the motley wakes up one morning, and gosh darn it, the Fomorians have risen and laid waste to Concordia. No matter what kind of direction you ultimately want your chronicle to take, none of it will seem as real or dramatic unless it is contrasted to the "ordinary" lives the characters knew before events began tumbling toward the inevitable end.

Therefore, take some time to consider how both worlds came to be in such dire straits, how you intend to express these final days to your players and what you think will be left standing when all the drama and fireworks have faded.

Why Is This Happening?

It might seem elementary, but take a moment to think about why Winter is coming. Forget notions of "canon" if you like — what has brought about Winter in *your* timeline? Is it something that naturally happens when the Dreaming is endangered? It could be that Winter is a natural defense mechanism of dreams. The Dreaming goes into a self-imposed hibernation, and it takes this time to heal its many



wounds and grow significantly stronger. Then, when it is ready, all it takes is one amazing achievement to bring the power of dreams back into the world. But is this true? Is Winter nothing more than a natural cycle, or is it something that was brought upon the world by a few poor decisions?

Or might the real cause of Winter's arrival be something closer to home for the fae? After all, it's entirely possible that the fae allowed this to happen. While they were busy arguing among themselves and waging petty wars of title and honor during their "golden age," the mortals they once guided and inspired eventually adapted to life apart from the fae. Instead of fickle fae lords, they put their faith in the science they could rely on to produce tangible results each time. Over time, mortals became less afraid of the dark than they once were, but also less likely to imagine the fantastic out there as well. Faced with alien and often cruel or patronizing faerie nobles, they chose to trade wonder for security. Unable to count on the old ways, they learned that dreams are expendable.

Blaming science and reason is too simple a scapegoat for this kind of scenario, however, for nockers and other inventive fae know well the Glamour that science can hold. Laying blame thus avoids the responsibility that the Kithain bear for their hubris of ages past. Rather, changelings in such a scenario have no other choice but to recognize their folly and attempt to convince humanity otherwise, either en masse or one humble mortal at a time.

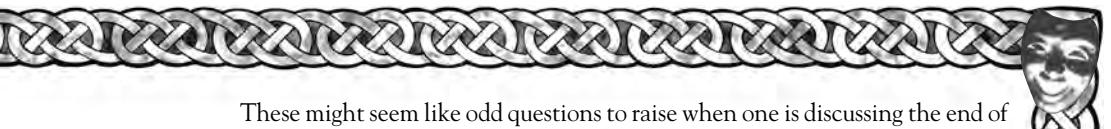
Another potential reason for the coming of Winter is an imbalance in the nature of the Kithain and their society. Perhaps Winter is coming because the two courts no longer honor the natural balance between light and dark. The Seelie will not give up their power at Samhain, and the Unseelie go too far in their efforts to reclaim what they feel is theirs. This struggle creates an imbalance in the Dreaming. Eventually, such as imbalance becomes too much for the Dreaming to sustain, causing it to automatically "reset" itself to remedy the situation.

A final option is that perhaps the changelings are not meant to be on Earth any longer after all. Arcadia is their home, but they insisted on inhabiting the human world rather than staying where they belonged. This makes them invaders, and it is possible that the Dreaming did not intend for them to exist so long outside its borders. Perhaps the changelings themselves caused the problems simply by leaving Arcadia, thereby fracturing the Dreaming and making it increasingly vulnerable. This option is explored in more detail in the "Starlight Exodus" scenario found later in this chapter.

Any of these options could be incorporated into your chronicle, and they can be used with the scenarios provided as well as with plots of your own making. Of course, if you decided that the end of the world was brought on by the assassination of High King David, then it would be most logical to say that the end of the world was brought on by the fae themselves, rather than blaming it on humans. Overall, deciding on a reason for the end of the world can only strengthen your understanding of your chronicle and therefore improve the results overall.

Where Is It Taking Us?

So now that you've seen a number of possible causes for the arrival of Endless Winter in your game, there comes an equally important question: Is everything really coming apart at the seams? Is it still possible for the world to pull through, whole or in part? Will the approach of Endless Winter be something that leaves no Kithain or mortal unchanged, or will it be something that only a small portion of the population is even aware of when it's over?



These might seem like odd questions to raise when one is discussing the end of the world, but it's important not to get hung up on preconceived notions of what that must mean for your world and your game. Even the scenarios offered in this chapter aren't written in stone. There's a great deal of space to alter, expand, combine and otherwise interpret them to suit the ending you want your chronicle to have. While not everything can be laid out in advance — players have a wonderful way of throwing even the best-laid plans for a loop at strange times — you should definitely have an idea of where you see the overall setting going as the end runs its course.

Will the end mean Long Winter for the fae but leave humanity largely untouched? Do the characters have a chance to help bring about a bright new Spring? Will the Dreaming collapse, leaving the fae stranded on Earth and slowly starving for lack of Glamour? Do horrific battles between fae and mortal ravage the globe after the Mists fall and the Dreaming is exposed? Even if you intend to make it possible for the characters to escape the worst of your particular scenario — such as finding a defensible ever-flowing Glamour spring they can shelter around to wait out the Long Winter — you must still decide what will happen to the rest of the world. Take your time and make sure you have a clear idea of what you want to see coming, and most of all, think of ways to bring home these great changes as vividly and powerfully as possible.

Remember also that simply because you know the end is coming, that doesn't mean the characters have any idea of what lies in store for them. Armageddon has been "just around the corner" for millennia, as seen in countless apocalyptic panics throughout history and more recently with the hysteria surrounding the turn of the millennium. While events will eventually reach a point where even the most jaded and cynical Kithain must admit what's going on, that still doesn't mean your ending will be an open book. Even the most knowledgeable fae scholars still have no idea what the end will actually look like when it comes. All they can do is read the ancient prophecies, look at the signs they see around them and take their best guess.

The State of the Dreaming

Perhaps the most important underlying factor in determining the severity and direction of your game's End-Time scenario is deciding on what kind of shape the Dreaming is in while it happens. Although the Dreaming is generally presented as slowly withering away, its contact with the Autumn world fading more with each passing day, you do not have to use this model for your own chronicle.

A Dying Dream

The more traditional outlook, this direction supposes that the Dreaming is fading, its powers weakening and its children grower ever closer to extinction. Banality weighs ever more heavily on the Kithain and their chimerical world, and the approach of Winter is all but assured. Shunned and dismissed by a world that no longer needs them, the fae quietly waste away from the sickness caused by the greatest indignity their proud race could ever endure: being utterly irrelevant.

This direction is excellent for showcasing scenarios where the chimerical world receives its final judgment mostly or entirely away from the eyes of mortals and Prodigals alike. It is also suited to bittersweet tales of loss and separation, as the essence of what makes the fae truly wonderful gradually diminishes, perhaps allowing the characters one final moment of lucidity before their identities as children of the Dreaming are snuffed out forever... or perhaps not.



Of course, the idea of Glamour fading away doesn't necessarily mean that the Dreaming itself is entirely destroyed. While many Kithain assume that the loss of Glamour on Earth would trigger the destruction of the Dreaming, nothing says that has to be true. Even if you subscribe to the belief that humans forged the fae from their own primal dreams, that doesn't mean their creations can't have acquired a life of their own in the meantime, which might, in turn, enable them to survive the rejection of their "parents." Perhaps Glamour does fade away from the Autumn World forever but continues to exist beyond the boundaries of its Banal confines, forcing the fae to flee into the Dreaming or face extinction.

A Blaze of Glory

By contrast, the Dreaming in this direction refuses to lie down quietly in the face of Banality. While it might not undo the damage done by the Shattering, the fae experience a surge of power as Glamour makes a final effort to remain a vital and potent force in the world. It might be enough to stir human belief in the fantastic once more, staving off Winter or perhaps even bringing on a new Spring, particularly if the Kithain take advantage of the opportunity in time. Even if it is ultimately a doomed expression of power, the results still mark the world in ways that the long-suffering fae would have been hard pressed to imagine in days before the end.

Fae caught in the middle of such a chronicle might believe that a new Spring is indeed already at hand, though even if that is your ultimate goal, it is also best to show the players that this newfound power alone will not carry the world to a new age. After all, if it was that simple to shake off Winter, the Dreaming could have done it long ago. While it might make it easier in some ways to achieve their goals, even a ready supply of Glamour doesn't ensure that the fae can guide the Autumn World back to belief in chimerical reality. The hardest challenges must still be overcome by the fae themselves.

Naturally enough, sudden surges of Glamour carry their own potential dangers as well. Aside from the wild and unpredictable changes that are inherent to any powerful exposure to Glamour, the mortal world is still unprepared to deal with the incursion of chimerical reality, and it might strike back harshly if the fae aren't careful. While this direction presupposes a certain amount of "shielding" against the force of Banality due to the presence of such raw Glamour, having the Mists fall or chimerical world suddenly overlap with mundane reality is bound to elicit responses of fear and hostility as well as wonder and amazement.

The Final Season

When dealing with *The Shining Host*'s mythos, you have an additional advantage to End-Time scenarios as well. Unlike many of their Prodigal cousins, even those fae obsessed with the idea of the end of the world often can't agree on what shape this end will take or even if it will ultimately be such a bad thing. Vampires fear their cannibalistic elders and werewolves arm for their war to end all wars, but very few legends detail exactly what the fae can expect surrounding their End Times.

Although a Winter virtually bereft of Glamour remains the most popular theory, especially considering the amount of Banality already found in the world, even that is far from the only belief. For every few doomsayers predicting an Endless Winter devoid of all Glamour, there is one equally determined sage who believes a new Spring of renewed connection to the Dreaming must necessarily lie ahead.

Understanding what these seasons mean to the fae and possible outcomes based on either Winter or Spring coming to pass is essential for presenting an end scenario

DIFFERENT SEASONS

Winter

Long Winter — A dark and terrible time when the fae will largely vanish and Glamour will be all but extinguished. A new Spring will eventually follow.

Endless Winter — A world where the fae die out, Glamour fades away and the Dreaming is cut off forever. The mortal world endures in diminished form.

Fimbulwinter — The ultimate destruction of both the Dreaming and the Autumn World, snuffing out all life and Glamour forever. Also used to refer to the world if the Fomorians or other dark beings rise to claim it as their own.

Spring

Mortal Spring — Regardless of the final fate of the Kithain (exodus, destruction, etc.), humanity eventually enters a new era of creativity.

Fae Spring — Mortal society remains trapped in Banality, but the fae experience a new surge of Glamour, perhaps by leaving the Autumn World, finally making peace between their dual natures or otherwise undergoing some great change.

Universal Spring — Fae and humanity alike enter a new Golden Age, healing the rift between the Autumn World and the Dreaming.

that has the proper feel of Kithain legend. While the fae might not be aware of exactly where they stand until all is said and done, they should be able to look back and realize that the seasons have changed once more... even if only because they are the last fae who will ever make note of that distinction.

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

After settling the basic questions regarding the state of the Dreaming and the coming season, it's only natural to look to what the players can do about the fate you have designed for their world. Remember that even though you might hold the trump card in terms of plot devices and designs, it is still your responsibility as the Storyteller to make sure that the players are entertained by the ending you have in store for them. There's no reason you can't have a tragic ending to your story, for example, but if you do, make sure that the characters have a chance to make their peace with the world before the end. Or the opposite could be true, where they do not successfully reach their personal goals but manage somehow to save the world. Although they will likely become world-renowned heroes, can they be content without being personally fulfilled?

That said, the scenarios included in this chapter should give you some ideas for ways to make sure characters' actions count in all manner of End-Time scenarios, from globe-spanning wars to local tales of hope and heartbreak. There's no scenario in which a creative Storyteller can't find some way to involve the characters in an important fashion, and if you can't find a way to make it work for your players, why are you doing it in the first place?

In short, the answer to the question of what the characters can accomplish should always boil down to "something important." Whether that something means preventing the end altogether, or just getting the time to say a special good-bye to loved ones before it hits, is just a question of detail once that truth is understood. It's their chronicle as much as or more than yours, after all. Make sure the *players* feel as though they can make their mark as it ends, even if their *characters* won't necessarily be around to see it.



Where Do We Go From Here?

Of course, unless there's no hope for any of the characters to survive what lies ahead, there's the inevitable question of what comes after. What are the possibilities in terms of the future of the changeling race? Can they survive, and if so, how? Can your chronicle continue even though Winter has arrived? What would the characters be doing during such a chronicle?

If Winter is avoided, then it might be easy to assume that the fae should have it easy. It is important to note what happened to avert the coming of Winter, however. Did the Unseelie seize control of the fae courts from the Seelie in an effort to restore the balance? If so, will they relinquish control at Beltaine as they should, or will they take this opportunity to repay the Seelie for years of oppression? (It should be noted that, if they attempt the latter, it is only a matter of time before this whole process repeats itself.)

Were the changelings forced to seek shelter in the Dreaming, or did they have to reestablish ties with mortals in order to weather the storm? Did High King David return, and if so, is he in any shape to rule? Even if Winter does not come, the possibility certainly should have frightened the changelings into paying more attention, and if they don't make some changes in the way things work, they certainly won't make it very far.

If Winter is averted, then there is clearly room for a chronicle to continue in the new (and hopefully improved) world. Perhaps the characters could help to implement reforms in freeholds throughout the realm or work more closely with mortals in an effort to maintain mortal-changeling relations. If Winter comes, the situation is entirely different.

A chronicle might conceivably continue during the Long Winter, but this is only advisable if you plan to have Spring come afterward. After all, your players want to have something to work for, and it would be rather discouraging to struggle through the Winter only to have the entire group die of old age and simple frustration without ever seeing the Spring. The first question to ask is whether the changelings are aware of what's happening to them. Perhaps they are forced to retreat into their mortal seemings to survive, and their fae seemings reawaken at the coming of Spring as if from a long hibernation. Or perhaps they remain fully aware of the happenings around them and have to seek shelter in their freeholds, the only places where a little Glamour is still available for the taking. These chronicles could involve long, drawn-out sieges where the fae attempt to hold on for years against an onslaught of monsters outside their doors. Icewyrms roam the skies and Autumn People attempt to batter down their walls, but the fae hold firm, waiting (and praying) for the coming of the Spring.

Omens and Portents

It is not necessary to include any or all of these factors as part of a build-up to unleashing horror on your players, but you may find them useful to help set up an important plot point or underscore the drastic changes at work in the world. For convenience, they have been roughly divided along the lines of relatively minor or inconsequential phenomena, more serious incidents and at last the most dramatic and obvious signs that the end is here.

FORESHADOWING: THUNDER IN THE NIGHT

Even in the most direct and overtly disastrous scenarios involving Endless Winter and the final fate of the Kithain, there should still be a time of quiet buildup, where small signs and sweeping omens combine to paint a picture of what is to come



— and how it will make itself known. Think of this phase as the bad dream a character has the night before the events of the End Times really begin to unfold. It's that moment of hesitation before entering the darkest heart of the forest, when something just isn't *right*, yet there's no choice but to go onward.

The Red Star

In the summer of 1999, a new astrological phenomena appeared in the heavens, visible only to the fae and their Prodigal cousins — a glaring red star. Soon dubbed the Eye of Balor by the fae, its crimson light inspires dread and apprehension in all who gaze upon it. Its morbid fascination is made no less gripping by the fact that the star's light is rumored to grow brighter during times of war, disaster and other periods of suffering.

Exactly what does the appearance of the Eye of Balor signify? While certain scenarios have a specific purpose for it in mind, generally speaking you have complete control over what its presence signifies in your chronicle. It could be an omen of doom, or it could be a sign of the return of the Tuatha de Danaan. The fact that it gives the Kithain an ominous feeling doesn't necessarily mean it has evil connotations. After all, any period of great change is bound to inspire a certain amount of unease, even if the ultimate result is positive. The best use for the Eye of Balor is reinforcing the atmosphere you're looking for in your scenario. After all, few things are as effective in establishing mood as seeing an astrological omen glaring down at the characters from the heavens both day and night.

Dreams Deferred

At first it might seem a fairly humble concept next to some of the more dramatic signs of Winter's approach, but never forget that grave threats and disturbances to the Dreaming are reflected on the sleep cycles the world over. And not just the Kithain are affected either. Prodigals and mortals alike suffer as well when the Dreaming is thrown out of balance, though they might not easily guess the cause of their distress. In scenarios where the Dreaming is dying or retreating from the Autumn World, it becomes harder to get restful sleep, and the resulting epidemic of insomnia and related conditions adds to the ever-increasing sense of desperation that haunts the world in its final days. Aside from difficulty in recovering Glamour, all living beings go mad if denied sleep for too long, after all, and that can add a frantic and semi-hallucinatory edge to games where sleep is ever harder to come by.

Conversely, some Dreamers and other inspired individuals start sleeping more and find it harder to awaken as the Dreaming slides into disarray — almost as though the Dreaming is pulling for every last ounce of Glamour that it can get. Or perhaps it is granting its favored children a bit of mercy as it all comes crashing down.

Errant Trods

As the Dreaming sickens and writhes, trods once familiar and reliable become increasingly unstable and dangerous. Those fae with a grasp of *Dream Craft* find their talents strained to the limit, and those without that rare and valuable Art are essentially at the mercy of the Dreaming as to where they wind up, regardless of where the trod usually leads. While the Silver Path remains as inviolate as ever, travelers of the Dreaming increasingly find even this road almost completely obscured by the surrounding terrain, as though the land itself was actively seeking to lead them astray. At other times, it appears to fragment into hundreds of apparently identical paths, daring wayfarers to make the wrong choice and be swallowed by the Dreaming. Perhaps worst of all, fae sometimes believe they are following the Silver Path correctly, only to find themselves on a Black Path to the Underworld, a Green Path to a former Fomorian stronghold or some other twisted and ill-used route.



Prophecy Fails

This simple yet highly effective hair-raising technique involves the utter and absolute failure of all attempts at divining the future, whether through use of the Soothsay Art, scrying treasures or any other means, including the prophetic talents of gifted mortals or Prodigals as well. All attempts to see the future automatically fail, regardless of the talent of the caster or the power of the treasure. Such attempts reveal nothing but blackness, as though the future is totally obscured... or that there is no future whatsoever. (Of course, if the Storyteller desires a particular image or series of images to be central to her particular End-Time scenario, she may simply choose to use these visions and no others as a means of foreshadowing.) Repeated attempts might even damage the sanity of the observer, as she tries to comprehend a mystery that no single mind was meant to understand.

IMMINENT CHANGE: THE RISING STORM

These phenomena are clearly out of the ordinary, even for beings as used to the strange and unusual as the Kithain. What's more, no few of them have gone from merely curious or slightly disturbing to outright dangerous for the unwary, and they can cause serious problems for those changelings caught in their path. Mortal society also begins to change more noticeably, though still not to the extent of faerie society. At this point, even the most obstinate or skeptical fae must admit that *something* is going on. The paranoid and superstitious are likely to be nearly beside themselves with fright.

Tabloid Life

At this stage, humanity has definitely begun to notice that something is going on and even consciously begun the first approaches to confronting the truth of the matter. Accordingly, life begins to take on an slightly surreal or tabloid quality for many mortals, as even the more reputable news outlets begin showcasing an increasing number of stories about "UFO sightings," "Bigfoot stories," "alien abductions" and so on. Devout mortals begin hearing more talk of miracles and visions throughout their congregations, as well as an increasingly urgent amount of speculation about whether this means that Judgment Day is indeed at hand. Even more skeptical mortals find themselves becoming increasingly interested in talk of the End Times, as though their subconscious minds are aware of something they can't consciously admit.

Nor are fantastic reports limited to the nightly news or the ranks of the faithful. Scientists around the world puzzle over such strange phenomena as bizarre atmospheric patterns, odd wildlife behavior and rising trends of mental illness and instability apparently without any connecting cause. Likewise, a rise of missing children, runaways, school violence and gang fights begin as more Kithain are convinced of what is really happening and become active in their local politics, thinly veiled behind such mundane concerns.

While the vast majority of these stories are filtered through the Mists and the minds of the humans who witnessed them, particularly clever or insightful Kithain might be able to piece together what actually happened to inspire such reports. Some glimpse the larger forces at work by studying enough of these tales.

Cantrips in Flux

As the Dreaming destabilizes, cantrips become increasingly unpredictable as well. The fading contact with the Dreaming makes even the most potent invocations little more than shadows of their former power. Bunks become more numerous and demanding to perform, while bestowing less power than ever, and at the most



extreme end, cantrips begin costing additional Glamour Traits even if the caster fulfills the usual requirements. Areas of high Banality become “dead magic” zones, where cantrips become difficult or outright impossible to perform. Worse still, Autumn People and other highly Banal souls receive the same protection, making them nigh-unassailable with the tools of Glamour.

Conversely, unpredictable surges of Glamour might wind up generating results reminiscent of the mythic past, to the surprise and perhaps even the regret of the caster. A pooka attempting to use *Quicksilver* to avoid a pursuing gang of redcaps might find himself caught in his accelerated state for hours or even days. This state wreaks havoc on his metabolism and makes it impossible to perform delicate tasks or even interact with the normal world without incurring heavy doses of Banality in the process. Likewise, a sidhe attempting to command one of her retinue with *Sovereign* might find she has quashed all of his free will, leaving a near-mindless automaton who exists only to obey her.

Shallowings

Prelude to the weakening of the Mists themselves, fae find themselves confronted by an increasing number of “shallowings,” incidents where the Autumn World and the Dreaming briefly overlap, often without warning. Although these incidents begin in more remote areas, they quickly spread to include even the most heavily urbanized areas, causing a corresponding amount of the panic for denizens of both worlds.

Indeed, these incidents are exceedingly dangerous for both sides, as creatures native to the Dreaming find themselves confronted by levels of Banality they are unable to withstand, while mortals and even the occasional Prodigal find themselves trapped in a world beyond their imagination, without any way to get home again. (To say nothing of the problems caused by a manticore appearing in Central Park, or a group of children becoming lost in a Nightmare Realm.) Without Kithain or other capable beings around to sort out the problem and find some way to return these “accidental tourists” to their realm of origin, most do not survive long in their new world, making it a problem of particular urgency in its implications.

JUDGMENT HAS COME: THE STORM BREAKS

At this level, there is no mistaking what is taking place. Even the most naïve fae know at a glance that great changes are underway, and while not every fae believes in the tales of Endless Winter, even the skeptical have begun to question their convictions as these powerful events sweep across the land. At this stage, even mortal society is noticeably different, with apocalyptic panics, religious fervor and rising crime all evident as the situation with the Dreaming becomes increasingly dire.

The Death of the New

Never forget that while they might be most directly influenced by the gradual departure of Glamour in its raw form, the fae are not the only population that suffers when the energy of creativity begins to drain away from the world. With the withdrawal of the Dreaming’s presence, the spark that drives the creation of true art is fast fading from the world. It might seem easy to dismiss this on the surface — what real harm can come of a few frustrated artists? — but this loss of a sense of anything innovative and new goes beyond the realm of just the arts.

As the connection to the Dreaming begins to fade, the ability of humanity to devise anything original goes with it, from fine arts to architecture to military tactics or even criminal enterprise. Even individuals without much creative inclination of their own



suffer from this phenomena, as they rely just as surely on the creations of others to help them experience emotional catharsis. And without any outlets to help express pent-up emotions and ideas, feelings of frustration and anger begin to rise to alarming levels as the lack of originality becomes evident. Violent crimes such as rape, murder and assault begin spiraling out of control, and the suicide rate leaps to double or even triple the average as hopeless souls give in to their own despair in the face of this bleak world.

Mortals at this stage are near panic constantly, and mob violence is frighteningly common. The more paranoid or sensitive among them know exactly what is going on, and even the skeptical are aware that something Is Not Right, even if they can't put a finger on it. Kithain and Prodigals alike must tread carefully, as even the kindest and most understanding mortals are subtly on edge. Those who are already inclined to do so have no compunction whatsoever about shedding blood or destroying property to get what they want.

The Mists in Flux

Although the Mists are always something of a mixed blessing to the Kithain, clouding memories even as they shield the fae from the eyes of mortals, even this seemingly changeless factor begins to become increasingly unpredictable as the Dreaming destabilizes. In some instances, the Mists begin to fail outright, leaving shocked fae suddenly exposed to the mortal world, their fae miens clearly visible to all who look on them and their cantrips as obvious as an amateur stage magician's tricks. Even worse, without the Mists to shield the beautiful and fragile world of the Dreaming, such naked exposure to the Autumn World is typically accompanied by crippling doses of Banality as well. Such unlucky fae must quickly seek shelter from the unforgiving eyes of the public until the Mists return to normal... if they ever do.

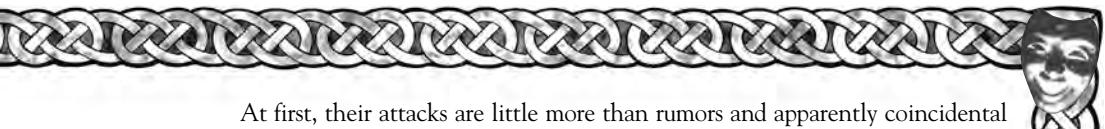
On the other end of the spectrum, some fae find the Mists growing too strong, essentially causing such changelings to be ignored by the mortals around them or even cutting them off from the mortal world entirely. Helpless fae find themselves walking the streets alone, unable to make the world recognize them in the slightest. Their most direct attempts to gain notice result only in a sudden rush of Banality as they push aside the Mists and reveal themselves in their true forms. Even then, as soon as the changeling leaves the immediate area, the Mists slide back as thick as ever, making establishing lasting contact impossible during the fluctuation.

Troubles with the Mists become worse as time goes by. The periods when they fall or strengthen grow longer, until at last they dissolve forever and leave the Kithain exposed to their worst enemy... or envelop the fae in their suffocating embrace until they are entirely forgotten by the mortal world.

The Tithed Ones

No good deed goes unpunished, so they say, and every bargain with the Devil will one day see him call it due. While the commoner kiths long ago adopted the Changeling Way in order to hide from Banality in mortal flesh, the recent return of the sidhe was much more abrupt — and according to some hushed whispers, much more insidious as well. For when the sidhe return, they do not forge a human disguise, but rather occupy a mortal body outright. While the effects are superficially similar (amnesia, struggle with Banality, etc.), the fact remains that the vast majority of sidhe are not the original owners of the bodies they inhabit. Of course, the nobles insist that this is an agreement reached willingly, most often going on to suggest that the human soul is ushered to the paradise of Arcadia in exchange for the use of their body.

The recent appearance of the foul and disturbing entities known as the Tithed Ones, however, would seem to suggest that a far darker exchange takes place.



At first, their attacks are little more than rumors and apparently coincidental happenings, easily mistaken for “ordinary” assassinations or vicious chimera attacks. Surviving nobles report harrowing encounters with utterly silent, black-clad attackers wielding weapons of burning ice, their faces disguised save for burning, hateful eyes. These strange beings flow like shadows around most attacks, making them maddeningly elusive targets, yet when grappled they demonstrate the strength of a full-grown troll, easily tossing aside most foes or cleaving through heavy armor with a single stroke of their weapons. They focus their efforts entirely on eliminating one particular sidhe, though they slay those who interfere without hesitation if necessary.

Eventually, the terrible secret comes to light — these assailants are none other than the souls of those whose bodies the sidhe claimed, their faces twisted into hideous masks of hatred and their minds consumed with thoughts of vengeance. They claim that the sidhe did not bargain with them, but rather cast their spirits into the darkest recesses of the Dreaming in their haste to return to the mortal world, stranding them in a hellish existence until they were at last rescued. They do not reveal the identity of their “benefactors,” save that they provided the means to return to the world and the power to take revenge on those who wronged them. Those skeptical of their identity find that the so-called Tithed Ones, as they refer to themselves, possess intimate knowledge of their former bodies and lives, to a degree that defies refutation.

Of course, it is possible that these beings are little more than clever doppelgangers created by enemies of the Kithain (perhaps even the Fomorians themselves) in order to sow confusion and fear amid the ranks of the fae at a critical moment. Or perhaps the truth is somewhere in between, with some sidhe having made this devil’s bargain while others are targeted unfairly. Regardless of what the ultimate truth might be, the Tithed Ones gather in ever-greater numbers, eager for a chance to strike down the rulers of the Kithain. Despite the hopes of such like-minded groups as the Urban Renewal League, however, the Tithed Ones refuse to play politics or make allegiances. They have their targets, and that is all that matters to them anymore.

A Crown of Shadows

Many Kithain who are determined to prevent (or at least better predict) the end lose themselves in ancient texts or explorations of long-forgotten mystic realms. They are convinced that Winter can be prevented if they can only learn the right moldy incantations or find some ancient treasure that has the power to ward off Winter’s chill.

It hasn’t occurred to any of them that Winter might just be invited in.

Following his orchestration of High King David’s disappearance and the ensuing civil war, King Meilge has employed his network of spies, agitators and assassins to fan the flames of war and weaken his opposition in the process, using his ward, the heartbroken High Queen Faerilyth, to shield himself from scrutiny.

Once the war has dragged on to the point of numbing atrocity and the fae of Concordia have grown tired of bloodshed, he uses his cunning Arts to convince Faerilyth to make such a demonstration of love and devotion that none can contest her claim or the peaceful alternative it provides. After Faerilyth rides this wave of approval back to Tara-Nar, Meilge carefully insinuates himself into the new regime, then springs the final and most dangerous phase of his plan: the return of David... and the murder of Faerilyth at David’s hands.

Following the subsequent defeat of the fallen High King at the hands of a sinister champion, Meilge tearfully steps forward to assume the crown in honor of his



fallen ward — and the Shadow Court owns the throne of Concordia, ensuring the arrival of the Long Winter at last.

Builoup

In contrast to some of the more overt and spectacular End-Time stories, the ascension of Meilge to the throne of the High King is a much more subdued, secretive scenario. A mastermind in every way, Meilge has carefully planned the entire series of events down to the smallest detail. In addition to the standard ability to swing a sword and cast a cantrip, characters need sharp investigative skills, polished espionage talents and most of all the ability to survive in the cutthroat world of high-level fae politics if they have any hope of stopping Meilge's plan in time.

Therefore, Storytellers interested in building up to the events of this scenario shouldn't overlook the Kithain rumor mill. If the characters don't already suspect Meilge or Faerilyth of some wrongdoing at the outset of this scenario, it's important to begin pointing them in that direction. Providing them with some background material on the major players in the scenario, as well as some increasingly disturbing clues as to Meilge's nefarious nature, is vital in building up the proper atmosphere of paranoia and mystery this scenario relies on.

Of course, this is not to say that some of the more supernatural buildup elements discussed in the previous section can't come into play as well, acting as increasingly urgent reminders of the onset of Winter or just to give the players a taste of what is to come. The Red Star, Dreams Deferred, Prophecy Fails and Tabloid Life are all relatively subtle yet excellent ways of conveying a sense of a world where something just isn't quite right. The fact that the source of the unease isn't easily deciphered is excellent for illustrating and elaborating on the layers of deception inherent in the scenario.

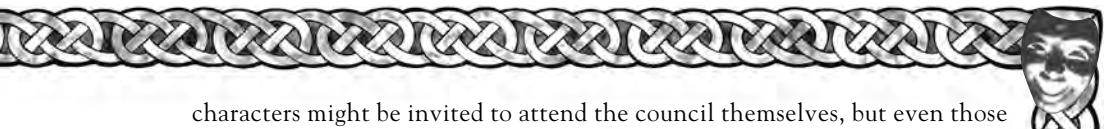
ASCENSION BY ATTRITION

The opening act of this scenario takes place following a particularly bloody and bitter series of battles during the current Concordian civil war. Should war not yet have begun during your chronicle, it is possible to achieve the necessary sense of war-weariness relatively quickly, simply by having the simmering tensions erupt into a rapid series of extremely gory battles and/or a number of heinous atrocities. (Most carefully orchestrated by Meilge to foster just such an outraged desire for peace, naturally.) Chronicles already embroiled in the war can simply include such incidents as part of the ongoing story, with a minimum of interruption.

Should the civil war already have come to a conclusion in your chronicle and someone other than Faerilyth have ascended the throne, it is still possible to stage the early events of this scenario. Simply replace peace talks with a similar form of public meeting, and much of Faerilyth's arguments will still carry the requisite amount of weight to achieve the desired result. Of course, should Faerilyth have already ascended the throne in your timeline, the beginning might be unnecessary. Note carefully, though, that certain events must still take place in order to make sure that the proper climax is reached later on.

The Willow's Tears

Meilge's most overt plans begin at a peace council ostensibly called for by Faerilyth on behalf of her weary troops. Few arrive expecting anything straightforward from one of the Eiluned, but they walk away from the concord spreading news across the land of an amazing development. Experienced



characters might be invited to attend the council themselves, but even those not present that night soon hear of the remarkable events.

After a customary amount of bickering about various military points of order and whatnot, Faerilyth arises from her place at the table, tears streaming down her beautiful face as she looks on the abruptly hushed and expectant crowd. In a clear, ringing voice marked only by discordant notes of sorrow, she says:

"My husband's greatest dream was to see his kingdom grown from the land of division and malice he saw as a child into a true home for all Kithain, where they might live happily together and prosper as true children of the Dreaming. He cared not for his crown, but for the Kithain whose strength truly supported it, noble and common. And yet here we are, killing each other over who may lay claim to a soulless piece of metal. I say enough. This bloodshed ends tonight. For one final time I assert my title as rightful High Queen of Concordia, not that I might further my own glory, but that I might finish building the dream my husband began. So I swear, upon the soul of the Dreaming itself..."

As her speech concludes, Caliburn abruptly appears from thin air on the table before her. With shaking hands, Faerilyth lifts her husband's blade, and to the astonishment of all, it accepts her. Combined with her impassioned rhetoric, it is enough to sway even the most cynical fae present, and soon messengers ride across Concordia bringing tidings of peace and rumors of the High Queen's ascension. While doubts remain in the hearts of some, the return of Caliburn and its acceptance of Faerilyth quashes the vast majority of opposition. Several weeks later, a clearly moved Queen Mab allows Faerilyth and her entourage to enter the palace at Tara-Nar, and the era of a new, fully recognized High Queen begins.

Indeed, all would be well, save for one small detail. Attentive characters present at the council or those with sharp-eyed contacts notice that Meilge, while apparently as compassionate and concerned as ever, radiates an almost imperceptible glow of some strange Glamour at several points, particularly immediately before the reappearance of Caliburn. It was there and gone in a flash, but for that split second Meilge's façade failed and a most sinister smile became visible. Combined with some of the rumors that the fae have certainly heard by this point regarding his dishonest character, this should be enough to send the characters on the beginning of their search for the truth.

The reason for Meilge's concentration is simple. Having had little luck with past efforts to confuse the mighty sword by simply ordering a drugged and beaten David to abdicate his throne, Meilge recently switched tracks and tried a different tactic. He allowed David to come out of his drug-induced stupor almost entirely, then had David's brutal handlers confront him with the imminent fact of his demise while simultaneously reminding him of his love for his wife.

The result was predictable enough for a Gwydion. Believing final death was at hand, David willingly passed his claim to the throne on to Faerilyth, this time in his right mind. The handlers then callously dispatched David's chimerical form and returned him to his iron cage. True to the High King's word, this time spoken in his right mind, Caliburn was bound to obey and transfer ownership to his wife. The pulses of Glamour visible during the council resulted from the use of the strange treasures Meilge quietly employs to keep track of David and his handlers, timing the operation to achieve the most public and dramatic result possible. It was a near-total success, with none save the characters or their contact the wiser.

And what of the revelation of his wicked smile, even through his magical mask, which supposedly blocks all but the image Meilge intends to project? Perhaps



Caliburn isn't quite so fooled as it pretends to be... or perhaps some evils are too great even for such a potent treasure to disguise.

NOW FOR WRATH

Following the end of the civil war and Faerilyth's official installment as the new High Queen of Concordia, life begins to return to an approximation of normal. While minor outbreaks of rebellion still linger in some areas, the Kithain largely consider the evidence sufficient to prove Faerilyth's claim to the throne is legitimate.

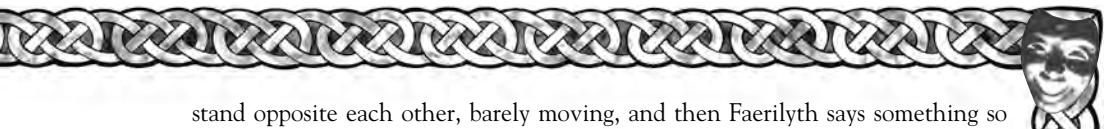
Meanwhile, Meilge moves into the palace as well, continuing his role as "mentor" to his young ward, while steadily making sure that his own agents and sympathizers staff the palace. He also takes pains to see that the public always sees her actions in the most positive possible light, while likewise occasionally slipping his name into the background of such stories as well, always in an equally positive light. Most tellingly, he quietly convinces Faerilyth to sign an agreement that states that should sudden death or incapacitation befall her, Meilge will assume the mantle of the High King. Rattled by her husband's disappearance and seeking only to prevent future suffering, Faerilyth does not quite realize what she has agreed to, which is exactly what Meilge intended, of course. Although he is ready to launch the most dangerous phase of his plan at this point, Meilge takes his time, carefully solidifying public opinion of Faerilyth as kind and virtuous, while likewise establishing himself as a trustworthy and doting advisor. Fortunately, this hesitation also gives those fae who are investigating the conspiracy ample time to begin sniffing out some real clues as to the nature of the wrongdoing at work.

BLOOD SHED IN ANGER

When he at last feels the time is right and his reputation secure enough, Meilge signals his agents to perform their most dangerous duty. Having carefully overseen David's gradual recovery from his earlier trauma and conditioned him to accept certain beliefs, Meilge's men have at last managed to break David to their will and convinced him that his wife betrayed him in order to steal his throne. Just to be certain of achieving the results they desire (for they know well the price of failing Meilge), the handlers implant several strong Chicanery cantrips in David as well, ensuring that his emotions and senses follow the plan they've laid out for him.

So prepared, they set David free not far from Tara-Nar, carefully wiping all memory of his treatment from his mind and replacing it with an overriding desire to punish Faerilyth for her "crimes" against him. They also take time to cover their tracks both magically and by mundane means before disappearing once more. It is in this state of mind that David sweeps into the palace, sending servants fleeing before his burning gaze until he reaches the main audience chamber with terrified guards and courtiers trailing impotently behind him. Raw Glamour radiating from his every gesture, David approaches the throne as the assembled nobles watch in shocked awe and silence. His loud and nearly unintelligible ranting echoes off the high stone walls. At first joyous, Faerilyth grows increasingly wary as he approaches, her cries of love drowned out by his infuriated rambling.

Eventually the gist of what he is saying becomes clear. David accuses his bride of seducing him, of bewitching him so that he would love her and of having him cruelly kidnapped and tortured when he discovered her ruse and sought to remove her from power. The diatribe continues until the two are nearly nose to nose, Faerilyth silent and unflinching, David livid with rage, the combined Sovereign of both of them locking all onlookers helplessly in place. For a long moment, the two



stand opposite each other, barely moving, and then Faerilyth says something so quietly that even the sluagh cannot make it out. David's eyes widen, then narrow to dangerous slits, and he shakes his head in response.

Faerilyth's last words follow, tears running down her cheeks even as her voice remains firm and regal. "Is there nothing then that I can say, husband, to make you believe me?"

"You know our gifts are useless against the Eiluned," David hisses, punctuating those words with a sudden stab to the chest, the blade drawn so quickly it is little more than a blur. Faerilyth slumps to the ground, human seeming mortally wounded, her eyes never leaving her husband even past her death. At this time, Meilge steps forward and issues an immediate challenge to mortal death, to avenge his fallen kin — a challenge that David accepts, hurling more invectives at his wife's uncle even as he cleans her blood from his blade.

Though a skilled duelist, Meilge cites their difference in age and appoints a champion to fight in his stead, his new captain of the guard, the fearsome warrior Lord Bayard Tyrael ap Eiluned. Despite holding the clear upper hand for most of the duel, David's guard falters for a critical second, allowing Lord Tyrael to at last slip a vicious thrust through and pierce David's heart in one swift stroke. Several onlookers later attribute the success of this blow to a sudden hesitation on David's part, a look of sorrow and confusion as though he had suddenly awakened from a terrible nightmare... but Meilge's own rumormongers quickly quash such rumors.

Holding Faerilyth's body in his arms, Meilge tearfully announces that according to her own wishes, it is now his sad duty to assume the crown he had hoped she would wear for many years to come, and carry on her work. So saying, he slips the bloodied crown from her head and places it on his own, then raises Caliburn to the heavens in salute... and the approach of Winter quickens its pace.

Now for Ruin

News of the transfer of power sends shock waves throughout Concordia. If the characters were not present at the palace when the fateful confrontation took place, they quickly hear the details from friends or contacts at court, including the telling slip in David's demeanor right before the fatal blow. By now the characters should have uncovered at least enough circumstantial evidence of Meilge's complicity in David's disappearance, and they will have little trouble concluding that David's sudden reappearance and violent outburst could only have been another part of the king's schemes. Unfortunately, with Meilge's ascension, they will need to accumulate enough damning evidence to accuse no less than the High King himself of murder, kidnapping and torture — not to mention survive long enough to see such accusations carry any weight once they bring them to light.

Fortunately, the characters are not alone in their quest to topple the new High King. Indeed, some rather unlikely allies will now appear to help them on their quest. While having David reappear and slay his wife in front of so many witnesses did a great deal to generate sympathy for Meilge and deflect questions about his rise to power, a number of Kithain across Concordia can't help feeling that something terrible has just happened right under their noses. While the characters and their allies will have to work delicately and very carefully to avoid alerting Meilge's ubiquitous spy network of their activities, especially as his control over the kingdom tightens, there might yet be time to depose this foul usurper king and restore Concordia to its rightful state. Perhaps there is even time to turn back the approach of the Winter Meilge so callously welcomes.



Over the coming months and years (as long as it takes for the characters to build their case), Meilge expertly balances two roles. His public face of a grieving monarch trying to hold his kingdom together against the growing threat of Winter, contrasts his private identity as a Shadow Court mastermind employing his Thallain allies and foul Prodigal collaborators to ensure that Winter's icy touch spreads slowly but surely across the kingdom. Like all expert tyrants, Meilge builds his network of control slowly, couching all tightening of restrictions or removal of freedoms in rhetoric about the demand for increased "security measures" or the need for "uniformity of opinion" regarding the state of the kingdom. Most often it is a simple enough matter to send some of his own Shadow Court or Prodigal minions to stir up trouble or leave evidence of another sign of Winter approaching. His royal agents then appear to "solve" the problem, further ingratiating him to the masses and making sure that his tightening grip is perceived as justified concern for his subjects in this increasingly dangerous world.

While he once envisioned a simple bloodbath against the commoners he despises, the immediacy of Winter's arrival combined with his own dark intellect have caused him to formulate an even more terrible plan for the Kithain. Meilge's ultimate goal now is to gradually usher in a kind of "controlled Winter," where the fae depend on him and his fellow Shadow Courtiers for their very survival in the face of overwhelming fear and Banality. By using the Court's connections to bring ever more Thallain and other dark kith into the world to hasten the arrival of Winter—as well as claiming and hoarding precious Glamour resources in the name of "Concordian security"—Meilge hopes to eventually place the fae at his mercy.

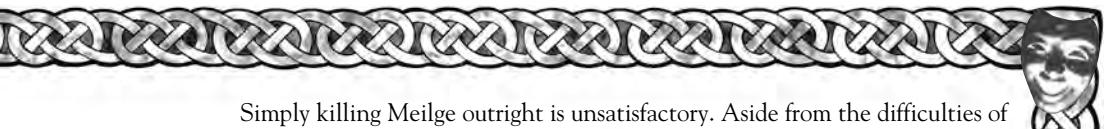
It is an ugly cycle. The more Winter begins to manifest, the more frightened and dependent the Kithain become on him to aid them, giving him more power to summon more of the very beings responsible for the season's coming in the first place. Rather than stave off the coming season of sorrow, Meilge hopes to turn it to his advantage, thus ensuring that none will be strong enough to challenge him. As for the rest of the world... well, once Winter is well underway, perhaps they too shall fall in line.

After all, Meilge is a patient man.

How Did It Come To This?

Since preventing Meilge's schemes is extremely unlikely save for the most capable and fast-moving motley, the question then becomes what can be done after the unthinkable has occurred and Meilge ascends to the throne. Once Meilge is firmly in power, the task of deposing him becomes increasingly difficult, as leads turn cold, clues vanish and important witnesses fall victim to Banality (or more sinister ends).

Yet the failure to dethrone Meilge leads to a horrible consequence: a nightmarish Winter where the Shadow Court rules and Glamour is controlled by those in power, forcing the fae to live in servitude or face the denial of the very essence their souls require to survive. Should Meilge be victorious, Glamour gradually becomes ever rarer and more frequently hoarded by the nobility for the "greater good," while signs of Winter increase and the mortal world slides deeper than ever before into Banality. By the time the Kithain as a whole realize the trap they've wandered into, it is far too late to do much about it. With the Shadow Court and their dark allies behind him, Meilge is nigh unstoppable, a tyrant beyond all imagining for the new season at hand. Characters might form an underground movement of sabotage and espionage, but it will take a great deal to turn the world back to the way it was before, if it's even possible at that point.



Simply killing Meilge outright is unsatisfactory. Aside from the difficulties of reaching such an august personage with a lethal attack, Meilge's cronies will still be insinuated throughout the halls of power, and his successor would be just as likely to fall prey to their poisonous machinations. At the very least, even if it did achieve some positive result, the characters would be branded assassins and traitors, without the evidence to back up their claims of Meilge's sinister scheming. And if they have such evidence, why didn't they try using it first?

Assuming Meilge can be removed and a just successor appointed with a minimum of additional bloodshed, the fae still face a long and difficult road. Already Meilge and the rest of the Shadow Court have done much to advance the approach of Winter, and even once he is removed from power that damage won't go away overnight. Therefore, Storytellers have several options for the direction of their chronicles after Meilge has been removed. They can continue the tone of politics and intrigue dealing with the events surrounding the ascension of the next High King or Queen, or they can shift to present more of a unified front in the face of oncoming Winter.

A PORTRAIT OF THE NEW KING

Although more complete descriptions for Meilge and many of the other luminaries involved in this scenario appear elsewhere, most notably in *Nobles: The Shining Host*, *Noblesse Oblige* and *Kingdom of Willows*, a brief description of Meilge is included here for ease of reference. Storytellers are highly encouraged to research the other individuals involved in the web of intrigue as well as design their own unique personas to offer possible story hooks and draw the players deeper into the intrigue at the heart of this scenario.

King Meilge ap Eiluned — While Meilge's schemes and motives are discussed at length, it is important to remember three things: First, Meilge's mask is a treasure that allows him to lie with absolute sincerity, even when magically interrogated, and it causes others to naturally view his actions in the best possible light (one reason he so often desires an audience). Second, as High King and a high-ranking Shadow Court member, Meilge has legions of followers he can call on for all manner of tasks, and indeed he prefers to use as many intermediaries as possible in order to make tracing actions back to him exceedingly difficult. Third, those who confront him directly find him a skilled duelist as well as a masterful magician. While he prefers not to dirty his own hands, he is more than capable of defending himself quite capably should the need arise. He is a consummate mastermind, and he never makes a move without carefully considering what it entails, or how to escape should it go awry.

GOOS AND MONSTERS

For time out of mind, the fae have fallen between the cracks of the World of Darkness. Even since the adoption of the Changeling Way and the mingling of fae souls with mortal flesh, the world of the Kithain has remained a distant dream from the human lands, the immortal games of the fae seldom but lightly stirring a slumbering world.

As some had hoped, the promise of a new Spring is indeed possible on the horizon... but it will be reached only by cutting a bloody swath through the ranks of the Fomorians themselves. To fail is to doom the entire world to Endless Winter.



BLOOD ON THE WIND

More so than perhaps any other scenario presented in this chapter, this is a truly epic finale. This is a series of events that sees the mortal world and the Dreaming inescapably intertwined, with the primordial forces that shaped them waging bloody war in front of a shocked and disbelieving world. Many fae feared that they would ultimately fade away quietly to nothingness, but it seems that the Dreaming and its most ancient children have other plans. Players in this scenario should feel as though they are rapidly drawn into a series of ever-greater events, ultimately leading up to battles that shake the very foundations of the chimerical world and mortal realm alike.

It might sound odd to say that such a powerful and world-spanning scenario requires a great deal of attention to little details in order execute it successfully, but it is true nonetheless. Without first establishing a clear sense of rhythms of the characters' ordinary lives as well as the early tremors that signal the approach of these earth-shaking events, players won't feel the change nearly as profoundly as they should when things start elevating to a more epic scale. Watching elder glomes awaken the Rocky Mountains and commanding them to rise up and do battle with a nightmarish black serpent the size of a hurricane is impressive, sure, but if it's the first thing the characters see as they roll out of bed one morning, it loses a lot of the impact it might have had if they had known of the sleeping Inanimae or their dragon opponent beforehand.

That much being said, several of the buildup elements presented in the previous section are useful for this scenario, particularly the Red Star, Dreams Deferred, Cantrips in Flux and Shallowings. In addition, the Tithed Ones add some particularly fearsome and nasty foes to the ranks of the Fomorians and their dread allies.

Indeed, a brilliant flare of the Eye of Balor is the herald of the fall of the Mists and the beginning of the Transformation. By this time, however, the fae should have a feeling that something immense and powerful is about to rear its head. The only question is which side it will be on.

The March of Thunder

Although omens, rumors and other odd prophetic occurrences have certainly alerted the fae to the fact that something of immense magnitude is about to occur, nothing can really prepare the Kithain for the true opening act of this scenario: the fall of the Mists and the re-assertion of the Dreaming across the face of the Autumn World. This series of changes is known as the Transformation, and it happens nearly without warning, sweeping the Autumn World before it and leaving little unchanged in its wake.

This beginning is not subtle. Around the world, regardless of the time of day or night, fae find their attention drawn to the heavens, watching in horror and fascination as the Eye of Balor grows to triple its previous size, its fearsome red light dominating the sky. All who watch are struck with a growing sense of dread and wonder, as well as a feeling of their Glamour stirring within them, almost like it was being brought to a boil. This feeling grows stronger with each passing hour until every fae feels as though his nerve endings are on fire with anticipation.

Six hours pass while the fae wait in fear and wonder, and then the unbelievable begins. Without warning, a tremendous wave of Glamour bursts from the depths of the Dreaming and flows across the globe, infusing the chimerical world with tremendous vitality and filling changelings to bursting with the energy of ancient dreams. Inanimate chimera that have been slowly fading or falling apart appear totally pristine once more,

PREPARING FOR THE MARCH OF THUNDER

It is a vital duty for the Storyteller to make sure that even through all the wild changes brought about by the Transformation, the players still feel as though they have a grasp of what's going on and how their characters would relate to it. Visual aids provide a great means of conveying a sense of what has happened to the world in general. With some searching, a clever Storyteller can find any number of surreal paintings, bizarre photographs and dreamlike video clips that show players the kind of mythic-modern mixture that their characters now see all around them. While chimerical reality has likely always looked at least a little like this to the characters, having them look at some new sources and telling them that this is now what mundane reality looks like can really bring the change home, not to mention adding some excellent mood and ambiance.

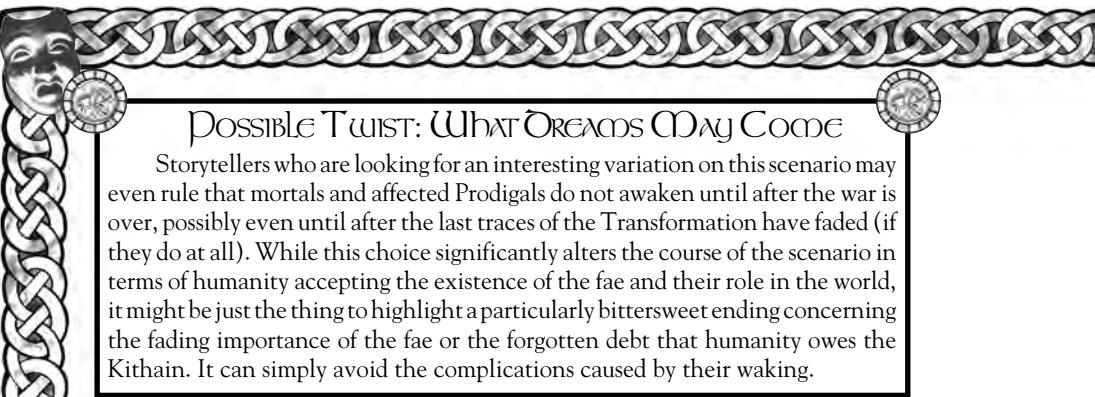
Of course, don't stint on describing how the specific local environment changes either. Aside from obvious points such as any local freeholds and glens, make sure the rest of the important local buildings, parks and landmarks are covered so that the characters know what has changed and how much. You don't want to have play come grinding to a halt because the players assumed the elementary school had transformed into the fairy tale castle it used to be in chimerical reality, when you had planned for it to turn into a flying Arabian palace instead.

and chimerical creatures appear in the prime of health, reveling in their renewed vitality. Active trods open wide and remain gaping without any need to maintain them with Glamour. Even ancient trods swing ajar, revealing worlds not seen since the time before the Shattering. Balefires flare into barely contained columns of energy, healing all those fae around them of even the oldest and most chronic conditions.

THE TRANSFORMATION

Even as the fae are still staggering from this infusion of energy, the world itself begins to change around them. To the eyes of the changelings, it appears as though they are seeing both of the worlds they dwell in at once, but it quickly becomes evident that much more powerful forces are at work. The chimerical world and the mortal realm are not merely overlapping but actively merging, with the chimerical side clearly taking precedence in all but the most Banal locations. Towering castles replace suburban houses, city streets shift into fantastic fairy-tale avenues, and the most legendary features of the mortal realm mix with the fantastic landscape of the chimerical world until a strangely perfect combination is reached. This is the world as it might have been, had the Sundering never occurred and fae lived in open harmony with mortals.

Humanity is allowed one small grace period through this change. Although they cannot withstand the sheer assault of Glamour that heralds the approach of the Old Ones and the merging of the worlds, the Mists perform one last act of mercy for their creators. When the Transformation begins, every human around the world immediately falls into a deep slumber for one full week. Those in dangerous situations — flying planes, skydiving, driving cars, etc. — head to a place of safety as quickly as possible and then fall asleep there (unless it would be more in keeping with the Storyteller's view of the end for the chips to fall where they may). Nothing short of violence will wake these mortals once sleep has begun, and even then they remain awake only long enough to defend themselves before falling senseless again. They react to anything they see while awake as a particularly vivid dream or a



Possible Twist: What Dreams May Come

Storytellers who are looking for an interesting variation on this scenario may even rule that mortals and affected Prodigals do not awaken until after the war is over, possibly even until after the last traces of the Transformation have faded (if they do at all). While this choice significantly alters the course of the scenario in terms of humanity accepting the existence of the fae and their role in the world, it might be just the thing to highlight a particularly bittersweet ending concerning the fading importance of the fae or the forgotten debt that humanity owes the Kithain. It can simply avoid the complications caused by their waking.

nightmare, and they absolutely refuse to believe otherwise regardless of the means used to try to convince them otherwise. No gift of science or trick of magic will prevent this sleep from overtaking a mortal once the Transformation begins.

While it might seem a curse at the time, in truth it is really a blessing—the Mists are trying to give humanity time to at least subconsciously come to terms with what has happened before everyone awakens to this new reality. Kinain are immune to this slumber, and indeed thanks to the Augmen they approach the power of full-fledged Kithain in many ways. Prodigals with the *Kinain* or *Faerie Affinity* Merit are likewise exempt from the enforced slumber, though they receive no other benefit. Save for those rare exceptions, however, the rest of the Prodigals are as helpless as the mortals are to resist this slumber.

Along with the Transformation and the fall of the Mists comes a potent strengthening of their faerie natures, identical to the first stage of the Augmen. Glamour becomes readily available as well, replenishing at a rate of one Trait per hour, and can be harvested even more quickly at freeholds and in the presence of Dreamers once mortals begin to reawaken. Bunks are no longer strictly required to perform cantrips. As there is essentially no longer any distinction between the chimerical and the Wyrd, all cantrips are considered Wyrd but cost no additional Glamour. Oaths sworn on the Dreaming carry more weight than ever. Not only do the consequences of violating them grow more severe, but those fae sworn to them feel almost compelled to obey them. Taking actions that go against the spirit of an oath requires a Willpower Trait per scene, and actively breaking an oath requires two Willpower Traits. Otherwise the fae is unable to muster the resolve to go ahead with such a heinous act.

Lastly, as the sleeping ancients of the chimerical awaken and the Kithain find themselves stronger than they have been in centuries, Banality fades overnight to a nearly impotent force. The Transformation has essentially suspended Banality for the time being, as the world is simply too fantastic for such utter disbelief to carry any true weight. The one exception to this weakening of Banality is cold iron, the fearsome properties of which actually increase. Ordinary fae suffer twice the normal penalties associated with its presence and do not willingly carry it without spending a Willpower Trait per scene to stay near the hated metal. Even iron-resistant fae such as House Balor sidhe and those rare individuals with the Merit: *Iron Tolerance* find it harder to be around the substance than normal. While they suffer no actual penalties to do so, they find the experience distinctly unpleasant and avoid it if at all possible.

HUE AND CRY

While humanity yet slumbers and the Kithain struggle to regain their footing in this strange new world, the real forces involved in the war begin to make their appearance.



TRANSFORMATION AND THE AUGMENT

All fae are enhanced by the Transformation, in ways both dramatic and subtle. Storytellers should apply the following mechanics once the Transformation begins:

- Any Traits received from one's Birthrights, Frailties or sidhe House are doubled. (Thus, a boggan receives the additional Traits: *Empathetic* and *Gullible*, and a wilder troll receives extra *Brawny* and *Stalwart* Traits as well as another health level.) This benefit can take a character over his normal Trait maximums.
- Kithain receive a free retest on any non-combat challenges involving Abilities they receive from a Birthright or House. (Therefore, nockers receive a free retest on all *Crafts* or *Repair* tests.) Those who receive combat Abilities from one of these sources receive an extra level of each of those Abilities instead, even if it takes them over the normal maximum of five Ability levels.
- Improvements on “non-mechanical” Birthrights or House Boons such as an eshu’s Spirit Pathways or goblin Mayhem are left to the Storyteller to adjudicate, but roughly speaking, they function twice as well as normal and/or produce twice the normal result. This boost applies to a changeling’s darker aspects as well. Frailties or House Flaws without strict game mechanics are likewise roughly twice as debilitating or inconvenient during the Transformation.
- Kinain who are “promoted” to full Kithain by the Transformation should follow the guidelines from the “Joining the Family” sidebar in **The Shining Host Players Guide**, pages 140-141. At the Storyteller’s discretion, characters with the Merit: *Faerie Affinity* may likewise become regular Kinain at this time, though they receive no other immediate benefit. Prodigals are *never* changed into full Kithain of any kind, nor can they ever have Glamour, Arts or Realms.

While the actual beings that the characters see depend to a certain degree on their location, the arrivals should be impressive to behold no matter where they are. While the following list is *far* from the limit of the available possibilities, it should serve to give an idea of the scale of the forces that begin appearing in the wake of the Transformation (not to mention the images associated with this rising). Ancient Inanimae cause entire forests or rivers to rise up and form bizarre armies. The Nunnehi Nations march, surrounded by the spirits of fallen braves returned from the Higher Hunting Grounds. Hordes of fuath and fir-bolgs pour fully armed and ready from ancient trods and assembling into warrior camps. This activity is not limited to just the Kithain and their cousins either. Legendary chimerical beasts emerge from their ancient hiding places and patrol their old territories once more, reveling in their freedom.

As the ancient powers and hidden forces of the fae emerge, so too do the Kithain find themselves almost irresistibly rallying. While the previous factional lines are not immediately forgotten, the strange energies of the Transformation combined with the natural need for some feeling of safety and solidarity in the face of such sweeping changes acts as a powerful inducement to bring Kithain together around the world. Naturally, such gatherings also quickly become hotbeds of discussion about exactly what is going on, what it means and what must be done because of it. While different theories are rapidly bandied about, most such groups quickly come to the conclusion that some massive conflict or other spectacular event cannot be far away, and preparations begin accordingly. Even relatively solitary fae or isolated oathcircles feel the call to join such gatherings. Those who don’t choose to participate still see the threads of Kithain society



weaving tighter together, for better or worse. Some areas see fae dividing along lines of court, while others see nightmare fae such as sluagh and redcaps coming together under one banner while more “benign” kith gather under another.

Of course, this is far from a coincidental effect of the Transformation, as most learned Kithain readily suspect. The fae are indeed being called together in preparation for the impending conflict, though whether it is by the wiles of the Fomorians, the dreamlike urgings of the Tuatha or simply the Dreaming itself depends on the Storyteller’s desires. Yet more discerning fae note that the gathering armies are not divided by seeming, kith, house or even Court. Indeed, even those who would otherwise have met as enemies in times not long past join under one banner without question, and old friends might find themselves bitterly opposed as they join different alliances. Ultimately, unknown to the Kithain at large, the dividing line lies deep within the hearts of the fae. They must choose whether they will stand on the side of the Tuatha and honor their ancient allegiances or align on the side of the Fomorians and Endless Winter.

This period of division and shifting alliances lasts as long as the Storyteller desires, though it should remain relatively brief in order to help maintain the atmosphere of fear and not just seem like another political power play on the part of the Kithain. Fae should have just long enough to realize roughly what’s going on and perhaps align themselves with a suitable group (if that is their wish), perhaps learn of how widespread this phenomena is or even engage an opposing group in a skirmish or two. They should not have so long that they begin to grow impatient or drift apart. At that point, it’s time for the real battles to begin and the true forces at work to make themselves known.

ENTER THE DRAGONS

Any number of things might herald the arrival of the Fomorians in the world: sudden ice storms, rampant fear and madness through the local mortal population, unnatural animal activity, hordes of vermin and insects, et cetera. Regardless of what the fae happen to witness, anyone with even a drop of faerie blood in his veins instinctively knows the truth: The Fomorians have returned, and they have come to claim this world for themselves. Almost simultaneously, battle is joined across the globe, as the armies of those loyal to these returning evils lunge for the forces dedicated to the ancient pacts with the Tuatha, seeking to wipe them from the world. Caught in the middle, humans fight both sides as best they can, though even they still find themselves generally fighting on the side that they would choose if the choice were given them.

Actual presentation of these primordial beings depends on the Storyteller’s desires. Some Storytellers prefer to have the Fomorians felt as little more than a malign presence watching over the conflict, occasionally manifesting through omens or bursts of unpredictable magic, while others wish to have them wade through the battles alongside their troops, dealing devastation to all in their path. For the most part, however, this scenario assumes that Fomorians do not actually take to the field, especially those beyond the rank of the White Court. Even in such an epic scenario, the higher orders of the Fomorians are too immensely powerful to fairly pit against any Kithain forces. There is simply no way even an augmented Kithain army should be able to slay them without grossly downplaying their power level and thus robbing the scenario of a lot of its inherent drama. Truly dedicated and powerful fae could slow one down, maybe even injure it, but short of acquiring the Triumph Casque of Sorrows, that is about all they can hope to inflict against these terrible foes.

What About the Tuatha?

Doubtless readers will have noticed that the Tuatha de Danaan have yet to appear as directly as their Fomorian counterparts. This is no oversight. While Storytellers may choose to have these ancient beings appear and do battle along with everyone else, generally speaking this does far too much to overshadow the role of the Kithain, as a single Tuatha can easily accomplish what might take an entire army of fae to do. This is not to say that they are not watching and perhaps even subtly aiding their descendants. Bringing them too much to the forefront, however (except possibly for a mutual annihilation outcome), virtually ensures the Kithain's taking a backseat to the larger-than-life magic and heroics of the Tuatha. And if there's one thing the players should feel, it's that their actions are making a real difference, whether they're saving the world or just saving their own hometown.

Regardless of whether the Fomorians are directly present, the course of this scenario from this point on is relatively straightforward: all-out war between the Kithain and the Fomorian armies, with mortals and perhaps some Prodigals thrown in on either side. How long the war takes and how detailed the war planning becomes is left to the tastes of the Storytellers and players to determine.

This is *it*, so don't be afraid to pull out all the stops in describing the fantastic nature of the combats, the mighty magics being used or the sacrifices being made on either side. Whether it's a prolonged war or a swift series of brutal and frightening battles, the players should know at every turn that the stakes have never been higher — but neither has the chance for true heroes to emerge.

Possible Outcomes

Although Storytellers are encouraged to allow their own battles to run their course naturally, several likely outcomes to the war deserve special mention for Storytellers looking to plan the path their conflict will take. Even if they choose to use a combination of elements from these outcomes or their own original ending, they might find the ideas and possibilities discussed here useful in crafting their own unique ending.

Fomorians Triumphant

Consider this the ultimate worst-case scenario. Should the Fomorians gain control of the Triumph Casque of Sorrows and employ it successfully on the battlefield, there is very little chance of stopping them no matter what forces are thrown against them. The world takes on a completely nightmarish caste, and while some Glamour survives the resulting Endless Winter, it is only the agonized delusions of those poor souls forced to live under the reign of these terrible overlords.

Tuatha Victorious

Though it is possible that the Tuatha do not actually show their faces during the conflict, the Kithain know very well who they are fighting for. Should the fae prove themselves worthy through such determination and sacrifice, the Tuatha bestow upon them the gift of the Triumph Casque of Sorrows at their darkest hour. Victory comes, albeit at high cost.

Mutual Annihilation

With all the heavy hitters out on the battlefield, it's entirely possible that both sides wipe each other out to the last, especially if the war drags on long enough that humanity gets to employ its remaining weapons of mass destruction as well. Having the Fomorians and the Tuatha slay each other (presumably setting up others to take



their place) is a wonderful way to underscore just how vicious but ultimately pointless their ancient feud is. In their haste to undo each other, they wind up losing their own lives in the process. Perhaps some Kithain survive to survey the resulting devastation, even rebuild from the ashes, or perhaps the characters are among the last to succumb as the fae are utterly consumed in the final conflagration.

TACKLING A WAR OF THE GODS

This section covers several important angles to examine when running a scenario of such epic nature. While the outline offered here is certainly sufficient to come up with an engaging scenario, these topics offer a number of ways to add even more layers of depth and complexity to the chronicle. They also handle some common problems or concerns that arise in a scenario of this nature.

Homefront or Front Lines?

Before the Transformation even begins, the most immediate question you must ask yourself as a Storyteller is what kind of scope you intend to portray with this scenario. Will it be sweeping and epic or local and personal? Obviously, this scenario naturally lends itself to epic battles and mighty confrontations, but that doesn't mean that it's a requirement either. Some players enjoy things on a smaller scale, and there's nothing wrong with that. Indeed, Storytellers can find a wealth of dramatic material in stories centered around an oathcircle simply trying to defend its hometown during this time of crisis, which can make an interesting contrast to the world-spanning events happening outside of the group's small corner of the world.

Allies and Enemies

While other scenarios focus on a select few characters and their actions during the End Times, the sweeping nature of this scenario means that the cast of characters is limited only by the needs of the Storyteller and the particular chronicle. Like it or not, no fae on Earth or in the Dreaming realms beyond are spared from this final conflagration. The only question is whether they choose to charge to the vanguard or stay behind and try to protect what is left of what they once cherished.

Naturally enough, the very inclusive nature of this scenario makes it possible for Storytellers to involve any or all of the prominent canonical characters they'd like, placing them on either side of the war as suits the personality in question and the needs of the story. Settling an account with a particularly hated enemy or rushing to side with an old friend or mentor are both excellent ways of drawing the players into the larger conflict without making it feel as though they're being led around by their noses. Likewise, the desire to join forces with particularly authoritative or well-respected canonical characters can be a powerful rallying point to help the players' characters find a place in the growing armies.

Triumph Casque of Sorrows

This legendary artifact is likely to prove a turning point of the war, for whichever side finds it first. Should the Fomorians obtain it, the Kithain have little chance to survive; should the Kithain locate it and figure out how to use it, even the Fomorians can fall before them. A small group of experienced adventurers (namely, the troupe's characters) might be recruited to search the world or the Dreaming in hopes of finding this fearsome weapon, particularly if the odds begin to turn against the Kithain. They might also be tasked with intercepting a similar expeditionary force sent by the enemy before it can return with the Casque. Needless to say, should they learn of the plan, the Fomorian forces will stop at nothing to prevent the group from obtaining the Casque, which in itself should present enough danger to keep the group running scared for quite some time.

AFTERMATH

First and foremost, following the last battles of the war, the Transformation begins to reverse itself, particularly if the scenario involves the death of both of the ancient races. While things do not completely return to the way they were before the war, the chimerical world and mundane reality separate once again, accompanied by the rise of the Mists to separate the two. Faeries slip back into their mortal seemings, once again hidden from the world.

This process is not entirely successful at wiping the minds of humanity, however. Quite simply, too much has happened for humans to slide blindly back into ignorance. And so for the first time in thousands of years, mortals are intimately and undeniably aware of the existence of the fae, although what they do with this knowledge, of course, depends on the outcome of the war. Should humanity somehow be alerted to the threat of the Fomorians and fight alongside the fae against them, victory might bring a glowing new Spring of cooperation between mortals and the Kithain. A devastating loss is likely to incur nothing but bitterness against all creatures of the Dreaming.

PICK YOUR POISON

Certainly, the Dreaming isn't as strong as it was in the old days, or so the grumps often say. As science rose in prominence among the mortals, interest in simple creativity and the power of dreams has slowly gone on the wane. Art and music have been replaced with geometry and physics. Some argue that the changelings have allowed this to happen.

Rather than spending their time cultivating and tending their links with the humans, they've turned their gazes inward over the years, busying themselves with their internal political and personal intrigues and all but ignoring the humans that they rely on for Glamour. Unfortunately, while their attention was elsewhere, many humans abandoned their dreams for what seemed to be a sure thing: science.

This scenario examines what happens when reason finally takes over and deals a terrible blow to the world of dreams. The two have been at odds for years, but now the balance has finally shifted in favor of the strictly rational, at great cost to both sides. Without their dreams, the mortals can find neither rest nor release. Violent crimes escalate as their frustration mounts. Without the Glamour such dreams provide, the fae grow weaker and the Dreaming sicken rapidly. The Kithain are left with only one option. In the wake of this great crisis, they must find a way to reconnect with humanity once more, or they will surely perish.

Ultimately, this is not a scenario about giant battles, Dreaming quests or dastardly scheming (though it could contain all of those). Instead, it is a scenario about the power of ideas to either quash the human spirit utterly or elevate it to a whole different realm of existence.

BUILDOUP

To a certain extent, the signs of this decay are already here. Changelings have lost much of their former power over mortals, the Dreaming is not as accessible as it once was, and Glamour has become increasingly difficult to come by. Foreshadowing elements such as Dreams Deferred, Cantrips in Flux and Shallowings can help suggest that something wicked this way comes. This scenario examines what happens when the ax



finally falls. Although the Dreaming has weakened in recent years, a precarious balance has held. Now, something has happened to topple it. The poison is yours to pick.

The first step in developing such a chronicle is to decide on a cause for the Rift and build it into the story. Perhaps the most compelling cause is a sudden break or violent shift in public opinion that opens a great wound in the Dreaming and hastens the decline of Glamour. In this scenario, life continues normally until a sudden development causes the Dreaming to violently rip away from the mortal world. Such an abrupt change would be noticeable, if not painful, to the changelings. What might cause such a break? Remember that inspirational scientific advancements such as the moon landing serve to increase hope for the future, not decrease it.

In this instance, the discovery would have to show that something is impossible rather than possible. Perhaps scientists have disproved to the populace's satisfaction the existence of life on other planets, or the possibility of life after death. Maybe a team of noted astronomers announces that a giant comet really is going to hit the planet in a few years after all, killing all dreams of the future in one fell swoop. Geneticists might find an "extinction" gene in the human genome, which will guarantee the extinction of the race within a century. Or perhaps a group of prominent ecologists gives Earth a final "time of death" in the near future, as natural resources diminish or pollution rises. Try to think of a suitably massive and compelling discovery that would quash hope rather than kindle it, and work from there.

Of course, if a specific idea doesn't seem to work, there's always the possibility that the Rift is the result of humanity's overall despair, the weight of apathy finally reaching a critical mass that begins dragging the Dreaming down much more quickly than before. As this phenomenon becomes more and more pervasive, the Dreaming begins to react little by little. Glamour gradually becomes scarcer as humans stop producing it. The Dreaming slowly distances itself from the mortal world as mortals apathetically shove it away.

Regardless of whether a specific idea or general indifference is the cause, it soon becomes evident that something must be done to repair the Rift, lest the Dreaming be lost forever. Eventually, the Dreaming completely separates from the mortal world, and the changelings are left with a simple choice: to make do or find some way to reestablish that connection.

FIGHTING THE FUTURE

Once you've sufficiently built up the problem and convinced the characters that something is very wrong with the world (more so than usual), the next step is to call them to action. What can they do to turn the tide against something so intangible as an idea, so passive as apathy? While it is impossible for them to individually inspire each and every person in their town or city, it is possible for them to start a reaction that would essentially do the same thing.

Remember, it is the nature of dreams to spread from person to person. Dreams are alive, and simply hearing that awe and excitement in someone else's voice can sometimes be enough to pass a dream along from one person to another. What the characters need to do is find a way to inspire enough people and reconnect back to the Dreaming. Mortals want to dream. It's the characters' job to help them do it.

Depending on the needs of the chronicle and the nature of the theory involved, it may also be possible to disprove the idea itself, or at least conduct further research that ameliorates some of the worst of its implications. ("Sure, we're going to run out of oil in five years, but with the improved solar engines I've designed, we won't even

DAWN THOSE TECHNOCRATS!

Storytellers, resist the temptation to have the idea be traced back to the work of nefarious Dauntain, Autumn People or even Prodigals. While such sinister agents might seize on the idea as a weapon to further their own Banal agendas, having supernatural forces responsible for creating the idea itself downplays the very heart of the scenario, namely addressing the lapsed and troubled relationship between humanity and the fae. This damage won't be undone by defeating a few villains with simple swordplay and cantrips. It will take a renewed commitment to the once-proud bond between humanity and the fae to truly have a chance to mend the Rift and restore the Dreaming.

notice it's gone!") Doing so is a worthy goal of more studious or inventive characters. Even if they find compelling evidence that contradicts the original idea, though, they still must find a way to get the word out to the general population (relatively easy) as well convince a disheartened public that what they are saying is true (not so easy).

It is the nature of the fae that as soon as they learn of the problem, some less scrupulous characters will likely be tempted to kill the problem by killing the messengers — namely the esteemed scientist or team of researchers that made the announcement in the first place. Needless to say, this is a bad idea for several reasons.

First of all, the scenario assumes that the idea has already been circulated at least on a local level, if not nationally (or beyond). Killing the researchers won't do anything to stop its spread, and it might even focus additional attention on the idea as other the killings are investigated and other researchers learn of the work and take interest in it.

HOLDING BACK THE RAIN

Once the characters understand what they need to do, at least in a general sense, it's time for them to get to work. They can hunker down and try to wait it out, or they'll need to find a way to inspire a large enough group of people to jumpstart the Dreaming and then protect that group while the Dreaming regains its strength. After all, those mortals will just be learning to believe in dreams again, and a major catastrophe would only undermine their burgeoning hopes. This process takes time, however, since the local residents are likely frightened and dispirited by all of the changes they've been witness to since the beginning of the scenario.

Remember that, as the Dreaming draws farther away, the mortals have been increasingly unable to rest. They've been without steady dreams and the REM sleep that comes with them. Most have been feeling frustrated or depressed, or they have a loved one who feels that way. These feelings lead to increases in violent crimes, divorces and general unrest among the populace. None of the experts can explain what has happened or why, and as a result, many people feel frustrated by their inability to snap out of it. Inspiring dreams among these people will be difficult at best, and it will require patience and effort.

The Aftermath

Unfortunately, if the characters have not managed to inspire a sufficient number of mortals (or whatever number you deem appropriate), the aftermath for the story isn't pretty. Having failed to find a way to rekindle the spark of hope and creativity in the populace, the characters face a future increasingly devoid of Glamour, and they will be Undone before many more months go by.



Even if the Rift is mended and a healthy connection to the Dreaming is re-established, which is a difficult proposition to say the least, it is still possible that the lingering effects of confronting such a virulently Banal idea traps the characters in their mortal seemings forever.

If the characters have in fact succeeded, however, the story does have a brighter ending. The Dreaming in their immediate area has survived and is fairly healthy. It requires constant supervision and cultivation to maintain itself, though, and the mortals who live within need constant inspiration and protection to help them continue to produce Glamour.

Not only was the local Dreaming seriously weakened over the course of the scenario (not that it was entirely healthy to begin with), it is also being eroded from the outside. After all, the decay was not simply limited to this town or this community, it was widespread throughout the entire planet. While a few communities managed to withstand and counteract it, particularly as the characters' efforts spread among Kithain and mortal alike, many other communities remain dangerously tainted by the idea, and the despair carried by the inhabitants of the fallen towns is a constant threat.

Their only hope is to band together with the other remaining fae strongholds and attempt to push back the grayness, to reestablish the Dreaming. The local chimera help as much as they can, but they too are marooned in your town, and while they can help inspire the local mortals, they cannot get out either. But that is the matter for another chronicle and another time.

The Great Purge

Changelings have long speculated about their origins. The Tuatha de Danaan, said to be the ancient progenitors of the fae, exist only in legend and song, their motives and characteristics lost to time. Truly, the modern fae has no idea whether or not she is acting as the Tuatha would have wished. Most changelings would dismiss such a question as irrelevant, given that it has been such a long time since anyone heard even a whisper from their forefathers, but perhaps these questions are not so irrelevant after all. The Tuatha de Danaan exist in the deepest areas of the Dreaming, unreachable by the Silver Path. Mortal concepts such as time and space have no meaning to them there. The Tuatha nobles have taken an oath to look over their wayward children on Earth, however, and they take that oath seriously. Periodically, they send scouts out into the mortal realm to make sure that all is going as they decreed so many years ago.

Unfortunately for the changelings, it isn't. Before the Tuatha de Danaan left Earth for their homeland, they made a series of sacred oaths, and they required their children to swear to the oaths as well. One of the oaths was simple: The fae swore never to mingle fae and mortal blood. The resulting creature was said to be an abomination against nature, and furthermore would prove to be the undoing of the Dreaming. As the centuries passed, all record of the sacred oaths was lost, so the changelings never knew that their existence was outlawed by the order of the Tuatha. But, now that the scouts have once again returned to Earth, they soon find out, and the Great Purge of the changelings begins.

Builoup

In this scenario, the end comes quickly, heralded only by the appearance of the scouts. Foreshadowing elements such as Errant Trods and the Tithed Ones can add tension and depth to a chronicle. For example, one possible method for structuring such



The Scouts

The Tuatha de Danaan have abilities undreamed of by the average changeling, and as a result, no Traits are provided for them. The scouts themselves are the youngest and least powerful of all of the Tuatha, and their young and relatively impetuous nature makes them somewhat more sympathetic to the plight of the changelings. Furthermore, they have had experience with mortals, while many of the Tuatha have not. One option that Storytellers might use to impress the players is to give the scouts names from mythology. Perhaps the scouts inspired a group of mortals during one of their previous visits, and an entire religion sprang from their belief. Certainly, the characters would be greatly impressed to meet Poseidon himself on the shores of Myrtle Beach, and this would help them understand the power and longevity of the Tuatha scouts long before they learn what the scouts are.

a chronicle is to have the scouts show up and immediately become enraptured or enraged by the mortal world. Although they are quite literally unstoppable in the Dreaming, they have no understanding of mortal doings, and they could very easily start a riot without quite realizing what they've done. The characters rush to the scene and calm the situation, only to discover the creatures at the center of the commotion, the likes of which they've never seen before. The appearance of the scouts should inspire awe and curiosity among the characters, then the appearance of the foreshadowing elements will lead them to the realization that the scouts might not be as wonderful as they seem.

The scouts need help, and if the characters provide it, they are in a unique situation to figure out what is happening and take steps to prevent it. The scouts need someone to help them navigate the mortal world as well as to gain access to the fae courts in order to make a full report to the Tuatha nobles. If the characters make themselves useful enough, the scouts may decide to take pity on them and tell them the truth: that they are scouts sent by the Tuatha de Danaan, and their report will likely result in the extermination of all changelings.

At this point, the characters have three choices. They can attempt to persuade the scouts to make a false report, attempt to recruit the scouts to their side or ask them to provide as much information and assistance as possible without endangering themselves. Getting assistance from the scouts is very difficult, since they are both loyal to their superiors and understandably afraid of them. Depending on how persuasive the characters manage to be, the scouts might agree to help them outright, but it is more likely that they will provide help from behind the scenes, by giving them warning of the attacks or by providing them with a safe place to hide. After all, they are acting in accordance with a sacred oath with the Dreaming, and to be a Tuatha oath-breaker is a dire situation indeed.

STORYTELLING THE GREAT PURGE

The chances of avoiding a battle are slim to none. After all, it will be very difficult to prevent the scouts from making their report, and if the characters somehow manage to detain or kill them, the Tuatha nobles simply send out a larger, more powerful group of scouts to deal with the problem. It is possible to persuade the scouts to lie to their superiors, that would be very difficult indeed given the respect and fear that the scouts hold for their nobility as well as for the sacred oaths. Remember that, by asking the scouts to protect changelings, the characters are asking them to break a sacred oath,



and such a thing is not done lightly for a creature that exists entirely in the Dreaming. (In fact, the scouts should face some kind of punishment if they decide to help the characters. It could range from a chimerical mark of some sort that indicates a mild betrayal to a physical impairment if they take direct steps against their orders.)

When the battle comes, it is swift and terrible. The trods open more fully than ever before, and the creatures that exit the Dreaming are terrible in their beauty. So great is their power that the mortals cower under their beds, set out bowls of salt on their front porches and hang iron over the doorframes without quite knowing why. The warriors methodically ride through the streets, slaying any and all of the changelings in the world. They do not torture or toy with their victims. In fact, the most horrible thing of all is the terrible sadness on the faces of the killers as they slice into the desperate changelings, forever cutting them off from the Dreaming. Yet, their numbers are many and their loyalty unflagging, and the Great Purge takes only a few days unless something is done to stop it.

But what can be done against so formidable an opponent? The Tuatha de Danaan are unstoppable to all but the eldest of changelings, and they have sufficient numbers to overwhelm even these changeling elders given enough time. Fighting the Tuatha is clearly a losing proposition. The only two options left to the changelings are to run and hide, or to attempt to convince the Tuatha that the sacred oath should be lifted.

Running is the easier of the two propositions. The one advantage that the changelings have is their understanding of the mortal world, which could work to their advantage. By hiding in a place of mild Banality, the changelings might be able to suppress their fae seemings enough that they pass the notice of the Tuatha killers. The scouts might even be persuaded to give the characters some assistance in healing or obtaining Glamour after exposing themselves to such a high level of Banality. Another option would be to hide in the Dreaming itself. By traveling far enough into the Deep Dreaming, the changelings might be able to hide their mortal seemings. Again, the scouts might be persuaded to provide the changelings with a place to stay in the Dreaming if they decided to go that route. Either way, the changelings are risking Undoing or Bedlam to avoid the notice of the death squads.

The last option would be to convince the Tuatha de Danaan that the sacred oath is misplaced and is no longer needed. This would be a desperate attempt at best, and would require the changelings to prove that the union between mortal and fae somehow strengthens the Dreaming rather than weakening it. How might one do that? The example would need to show how the changelings create Glamour that would not have existed without their influence. Unfortunately, the most difficult part might be to get the Tuatha nobility to listen to the argument. Such an effort would definitely require the assistance of the scouts, and the chances of it succeeding are slim indeed. Why should the Tuatha de Danaan, the progenitors of the fae, listen to the arguments of changelings, who are nothing more than crimes against nature?

The Aftermath

In terms of the aftermath, many different options exist. The first, and least appealing, option is that the characters did not survive. Perhaps they attempted to fight the Tuatha de Danaan despite the counsel of the scouts and fell to the Great Purge. Perhaps they attempted to hide but were unsuccessful. Or perhaps they attempted to sway the opinion of the Tuatha nobles but could not come up with anything persuasive enough to make them agree to lift the sacred oath. Regardless, this chronicle is over, correct? Not necessarily.

REMOVING THE SACRED OATH

What if the impossible does happen and the characters manage to convince the nobles that the Sacred Oath is indeed misguided and should be removed? What does this mean for the changelings, and what kind of effects would this have on the Dreaming as a whole? First, the Tuatha de Danaan patiently explain that the Dreaming needs to have sacred oaths to strengthen its connection with the mortal world. Without these oaths, the two worlds would gradually separate. So, in place of the existing oath, another needs to be forged. One possibility of a new sacred oath would be to place mankind in the keeping of the changelings. The changelings would be directly accountable to the Dreaming as a result, and they would be charged with making sure that mortals continue to produce Glamour. Provided the changelings agree to swear to the new oath, the Dreaming remains strong and healthy. Conversely, refusing to swear to the oath would harm the Dreaming, and it is likely that the Tuatha nobles would order the Great Purge to resume if the changelings do not agree to protect the Dreaming as they ought to do.

Remember that, while mortal bodies can die, some changelings believe that their faerie souls return to Arcadia after chimerical death. It would be possible to continue the chronicle with the same faerie souls. They could be reborn in the Dreaming and could seek revenge there. Or, it might be interesting if they were reborn again as changelings, in mortal bodies. That would certainly provide evidence that the Dreaming supports the concept of changelings, even if the Tuatha de Danaan do not. The new changelings might get glimpses of the Great Purge, and the remainder of the chronicle could examine how the Tuatha nobility react to the changelings' return.

The second option is that the characters have gone into hiding. They might make up one of a few rebellious groups of changelings lurking in the shadows, waiting for the Tuatha de Danaan to return to their home in the Dreaming. If they manage to remain hidden long enough, the Tuatha do just that. They leave Earth in the care of their scouts. This assumes that the scouts haven't contradicted a direct order or have managed to hide any signs that they have compromised their oath. (Remember that even hiding the changelings likely results in a chimerical brand of some sort, and the scouts need to hide that mark or face the consequences.) This situation would be ideal for the changeling survivors, since the scouts would be able to put them someplace safe and hide their continuing existence. Furthermore, Glamour and trods would be ripe for the taking, since the number of changelings would be so greatly diminished. Travel through the Dreaming itself would need to be diminished or outright banned, since the Tuatha de Danaan themselves sometimes travel the Silver Path on matters of business or pleasure. A chronicle of this sort could end with the establishment of a new changeling society, or it could continue as the characters attempt to find a way to justify their continued existence to the Tuatha before they are discovered.

STARLIGHT EXODUS

What if the end of the Autumn World isn't the end of the Dreaming?

Though few Kithain have seriously considered the possibility, the death of Glamour in the mortal world does not necessarily signal the death of the Dreaming. It is possible that the coming Winter may simply be the signal for the fae that it is time to return to Arcadia, or perhaps seek a new realm deep in the Dreaming to start



over. The question remains: Do they have the strength to leave behind everything they know and seek a new destiny?

On a thematic level, this scenario encompasses some of *Changeling*'s core concepts — isolation, alienation and the feeling of being orphaned in this world — and deals with them in an overt fashion. In the face of Endless Winter, the decision to leave might seem like no choice at all, but remember that just as some inmates grow attached to their cells and afraid of the world outside, so too will many fae have trouble cutting their ties to this world.

Likewise, although it contains a certain amount of adventure and the thrill of exploration as the fae return to the Dreaming, Storytellers should remember that this is no more of a “happy” ending than any of the other scenarios presented in this chapter. Aside from the many dangers of the Dreaming and the potential heartbreak involved in the search for a new homeland, the fae will have to leave behind the people and places they know *forever*.

Buildup

First and foremost, the Autumn World should grow increasingly hostile to the fae as the time of the exodus approaches, to the point where Kithain are finding it difficult to live their daily lives in the face of rampant Banality and seemingly ubiquitous Autumn People. The Death of the New element is an excellent way to introduce the idea that the mortal world is indisputably in its last hours.

The enchanted world should also be weakening, though not to such a great extent that a mass exodus will seem outright impossible when the idea is finally raised. The Red Star could even act as a navigational point later on, while Prophecy Fails can demonstrate the hopeless nature of remaining on Earth. Shallowings also provide a good way to show that *something* is happening in the Dreaming. It is also very helpful if the characters have dealings with or at least heard of Dice (see *Kithbook: Eshu*) and/or the Seekers of Lyonesse (see *The Fool's Luck*), though not strictly necessary.

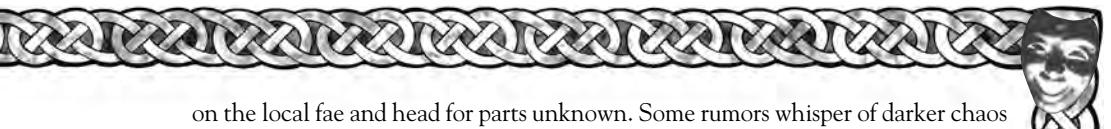
Perhaps the most critical aspect of the build-up for this scenario, however, is a more widespread form of the Gloomies, the yearning that grumps feel for Arcadia. Called the Longing, that same feeling that they belong *somewhere else*, begins to infect all Kithain regardless of age or Banality. Even fae who are asleep from excess Banality feel restless and increasingly consumed by wanderlust, driven to find a place they cannot name but are compelled to seek out.

SONGS OF LEAVING

At this point, just about all fae have realized that they are feeling an unmistakable urge to go *somewhere*. (Recognition of how widespread these feelings are and discussion of what they might mean is an excellent way to bring the buildup period to a close and begin the heart of the scenario itself.) Give the characters just enough time to realize that something large is at work, and then begin the first stage of the exodus.

The UNKNOWN Road Beckons

Once the characters have had enough time to discuss what might be happening, but before they become too comfortable with the idea, rumors of a strange traveler begin to reach them, a mysterious Kithain visiting freeholds large and small and leaving strange behavior in his wake. Fae who have spoken to him have apparently done such things as sell all they own, disavow their mortal lives, even turn their back



on the local fae and head for parts unknown. Some rumors whisper of darker chaos following his visits as well, from suicides to vicious duels to uprisings against the local nobility, though whether any of this behavior stems directly from his words or simply the reaction to them remains hard to determine. The characters might even hear of such strange goings-on in a neighboring freehold, giving them just enough time to worry about what his mission is or what it means to them before he finally arrives.

Into the midst of all this curiosity and speculation, a wanderer approaches the local freehold (or if none is available, the motley directly). If Dice is known to the group, they recognize the Síocháin immediately. If not, a local sage or savvy eshu identifies him instead. Even those who don't know the legends of this elusive immortal can see that he is exhausted, however. The trail dust is caked on his clothing, his eyes are bleary and his voice is cracked and breaking. He doesn't arrive so much as slump through the doorway and collapse. While his condition isn't serious, boggans and other sensitive kiths may fret over him for a couple of hours before he is ready to tell his tale.

When he has had some time to drink a little and eat some simple fare, some of the sparkle returns to Dice's sad eyes. He quietly but firmly requests that all local Kithain who are available be sent for immediately, as he has traveled far to make this announcement and has many more stops to make before he can rest again. Until then, he talks cordially with the fae but deflects any questions about his purpose for coming here. If anyone brings up the Longing, his eyes grow darker and he simply says that he has had the same feelings, but he politely refuses to speculate further. After the local Kithain have been assembled, he rises to his feet, brushes off some of the dust and bows to the assembled Kithain, then begins to speak.

Dice's exact words are left to the imagination of the Storyteller. While the "canonical" speech can be found on p. 41 of **Time of Judgment**, Storytellers should feel free to alter his words and even the tone of the speech itself to suit the needs of their own chronicle. Even if they choose to keep the speech as presented, a difference in reading can still be used to underscore the theme of the chronicle in one simple gesture. Delivering it in energetic tones with a lot of dramatic flourishes is appropriate for a chronicle that is more light-hearted or adventure-oriented. A weary and sorrowful delivery can take these same words and reinforce a more somber, bittersweet chronicle.

Regardless of how it is said or what other information might be included, Dice's speech should include at least the following elements. First, the Autumn World is at last sliding into full Winter, and nothing the fae can do here will stop that. Second, in the light of such a revelation, the only hope for the continued survival of the Kithain is to leave for Arcadia (or another realm in the Dreaming). Third, Dice will use a treasure that can create a portals into the Dreaming to help the fae begin such a journey, though only those who swear the Oath of the Unknown Road will be able to enter these portals. (The oath is provided.) Fourth, there is precious little time left before the journey must begin—enough for perhaps two or three full sessions of play is recommended, though the Storyteller may adjust this to suit her chronicle. Finally, any fae suffering mortal death before the exodus will be trapped on Earth forever, their souls unable to reincarnate properly.

All That You Leave Behind

After Dice leaves, the local Kithain community is likely to be thrown into quite an uproar. While the sworn oath of such a powerful and ancient fae puts the truth of the matter largely beyond question, things won't likely be decided very quickly! Many fae are stunned at the implications of what must come next. While they were aware



Oath of the Unknown Road

I pledge this day to prepare myself for the long journey home, and swear on my honor and my faerie soul that once I take my first steps, I shall not turn back, nor shall I long for what is lost forever. I turn my face from the winds of Winter and set my eyes upon Arcadia, and pledge my life and my effort to reaching her silver gates for the final time. I go forward with my heart confident, my mind clear and my spirit rejoicing, for I am going home at last. So swearing, with these words I leave this world behind.

In addition to giving those who are about to undertake the journey a sense of purpose and direction, this oath also provides certain benefits when traveling through the Dreaming. The oath prevents the fae from being reincarnated back on Earth, albeit at the risk of possibly having their essence lost in the Dreaming forever instead. It does so by infusing a small talisman or other personal item of the character's with a unique purpose. Should the owner die, his fae spirit does not enter the normal process of reincarnation, but retreats into the item instead, remaining there until such time as it is utterly destroyed or until the oath's destination is reached. Objects infused in this fashion cannot be stolen, nor can they be destroyed short of powerful magic or the use of cold iron. Only small objects such as rings or necklaces are infused in this fashion. Weapons and armor never become foci in this fashion.

Also, should a motley swear this oath together, these trinkets immediately transfer to other members upon the death of the owner, making it possible for the entire motley to reach the final destination, even if only one member actually survives the journey. (The characters will have to wait to be reincarnated until then, but that is a small price to pay compared to being reborn on Earth during Endless Winter.) Of course, should a changeling die after swearing this oath alone or an entire motley fall along the way, their essences remain lost somewhere in the Dreaming. While Dice does his best to search out such lost relics, there is always the chance that they might be destroyed by some quirk of fate... or that sinister forces will find them first.

that things were growing steadily worse in this world, the abrupt knowledge that they need to evacuate it in order to survive is something not even the most paranoid or superstitious fae were really expecting to hear. For some, the idea of leaving is immensely liberating (though that's not necessarily a good thing). For others, it is a time of fear or even anger at the mystery to come and the world they must give up.

Aside from any unique local or oathcircle-specific concerns that come up following Dice's announcement, there are several critical factors that Storytellers should incorporate when running this section of the scenario. Without at least touching on these bases, the eventual exodus will seem yet more abrupt and one-dimensional. It is only by giving the characters a strong sense of what they are giving up and how that makes them feel that the players will be able to play them honestly during a time of such momentous change. Even if all that is done is a brief glossing over of some parts, having at least considered them will help flesh out the scenario in their minds, making it feel like a real goodbye rather than heading off on just another (albeit prolonged) quest.

Don't be fooled. Despite the title, this section truly forms the heart of this scenario. After all, once the fae step onto the trod and begin the long way home, it's really more of a new beginning than an ending. Part of the trick involved in this scenario is that while Winter would eventually settle their accounts for them (if only by annihilation), it is truly the characters themselves who will decide what the End

The Easy Way Out

Of course, there are some players who will ask that since all faerie souls are supposed to return to Arcadia between lives, why shouldn't they just kill themselves and beat the rush? The answer to this inane line of reasoning is very simple: No one really knows what happens to fae between lives, especially with such a tremendous cloud as Winter looming on the horizon. Sure, fae killed in the Dreaming appear to have their spirits carried off by a strange purple flame — but nobody knows exactly where that flame goes, either. Though it's *possible* fae suicides would wind up in Arcadia, it's far more likely that they'll wind up back on Earth, trapped in Endless Winter with their final chance at escape lost at their own foolish hands. For the purposes of this scenario, in fact, that's exactly what will happen, which should curb those with overly self-destructive urges.

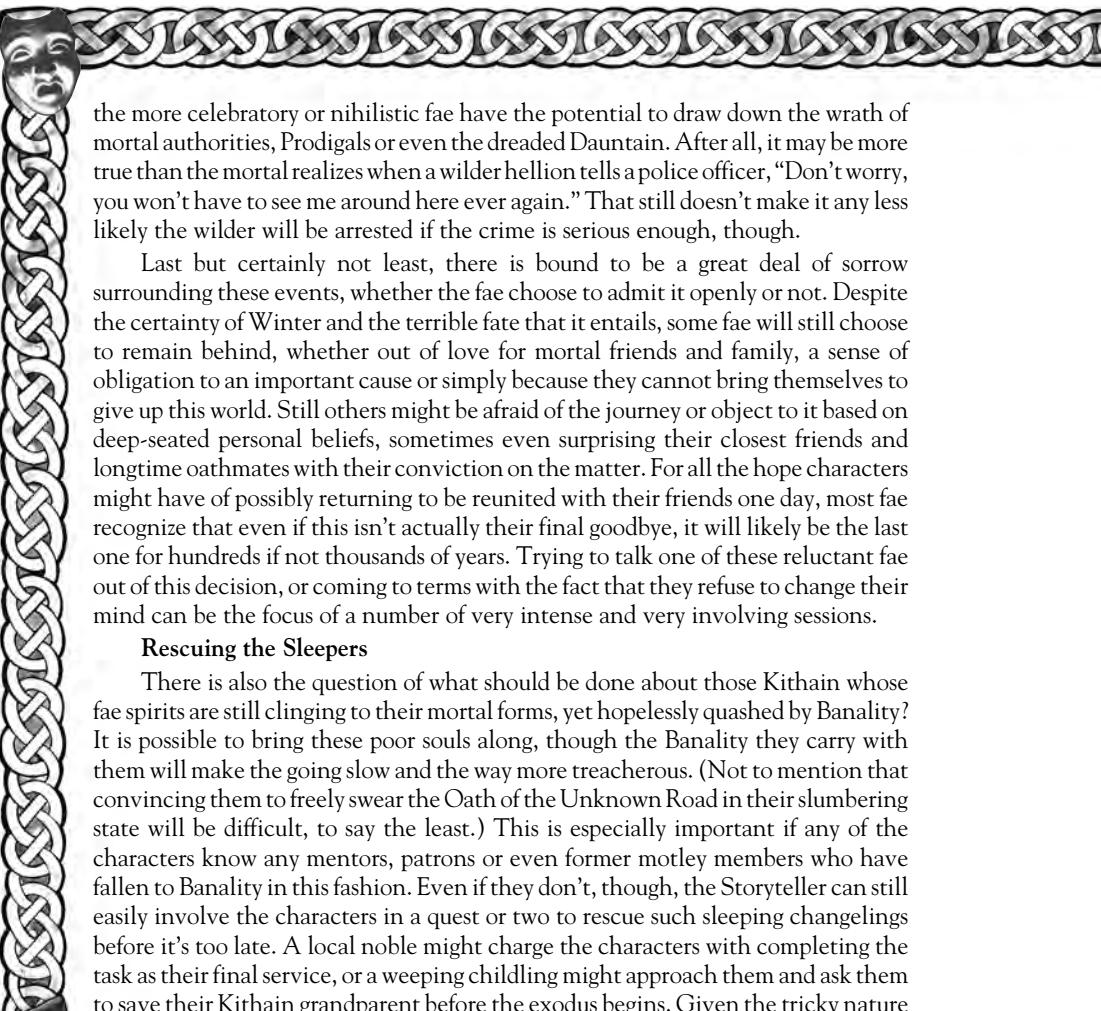
Times will be like. No terrible disaster or contagion lays the realm to waste, nor does any great war or sudden mystic impulse force the fae to react any particular way to the announcement they receive. Whether the final days are spent in quiet merriment and bittersweet goodbyes, or drenched in bloody feuds and mindless vandalism, depends entirely on the fae themselves and the choices they make. In short, they receive precisely what their actions deserve — which is at least as fitting and often far more terrible than any sort of judgment from on high.

Therefore, while the players shouldn't feel as though they are becoming too bogged down in such details, do not underestimate their value or their importance to the success of this scenario. In particular, those parts dealing with saying goodbye to mortal society and the reaction of the Kithain themselves deserve extra attention, for it is from those stories that the characters derive a great deal of their impression about the end and what it means.

Kithain Society

For the most part, Kithain react to the announcement in one of three ways: revelry, madness or sorrow. For some fae, the knowledge that the return to the Dreaming is at hand is cause for celebration. While they do not deny that departing this world brings a certain amount of sadness, it is a time of great rejoicing, for they are going home at last. These Kithain spend a great deal of their remaining time going out partying, holding "wakes" for the Autumn World and otherwise indulging every earthly desire before the journey begins. Once-forbidden trysts become more numerous and more open, parties take on a frenzied air of mixed joy and desperation, and even the most polite and tactful fae truly speak their minds at last. After all, what's the harm in the stoic troll bodyguard finally confessing his love for his beautiful sidhe lady in the face of a journey of great danger and uncertainty to come?

Of course, this air of reckless abandon has its own consequences as well. Despite Dice's warning, many fae see it as a time to settle long-standing grudges as well. Duels become more common, and in particularly volatile regions, minor skirmishes occur as feuding factions take their parting shots at each other. Even those who don't wish to take part in such violence might find themselves caught in the ensuing crossfire. Stopping the violence before anyone becomes trapped on Earth forever might be an important goal for the motley, especially if the characters hold positions of authority or feel any responsibility to their fellow fae. What's more, even if the Kithain don't attack each other, they must still be cautious at this time, as many of the antics of



the more celebratory or nihilistic fae have the potential to draw down the wrath of mortal authorities, Prodigals or even the dreaded Dauntain. After all, it may be more true than the mortal realizes when a wilder hellion tells a police officer, “Don’t worry, you won’t have to see me around here ever again.” That still doesn’t make it any less likely the wilder will be arrested if the crime is serious enough, though.

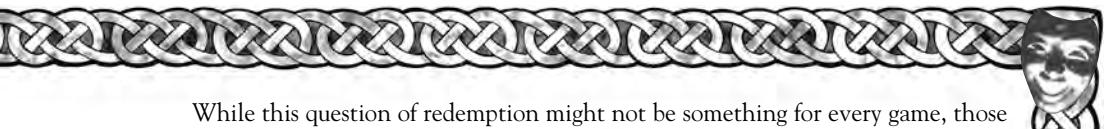
Last but certainly not least, there is bound to be a great deal of sorrow surrounding these events, whether the fae choose to admit it openly or not. Despite the certainty of Winter and the terrible fate that it entails, some fae will still choose to remain behind, whether out of love for mortal friends and family, a sense of obligation to an important cause or simply because they cannot bring themselves to give up this world. Still others might be afraid of the journey or object to it based on deep-seated personal beliefs, sometimes even surprising their closest friends and longtime oathmates with their conviction on the matter. For all the hope characters might have of possibly returning to be reunited with their friends one day, most fae recognize that even if this isn’t actually their final goodbye, it will likely be the last one for hundreds if not thousands of years. Trying to talk one of these reluctant fae out of this decision, or coming to terms with the fact that they refuse to change their mind can be the focus of a number of very intense and very involving sessions.

Rescuing the Sleepers

There is also the question of what should be done about those Kithain whose fae spirits are still clinging to their mortal forms, yet hopelessly quashed by Banality? It is possible to bring these poor souls along, though the Banality they carry with them will make the going slow and the way more treacherous. (Not to mention that convincing them to freely swear the Oath of the Unknown Road in their slumbering state will be difficult, to say the least.) This is especially important if any of the characters know any mentors, patrons or even former motley members who have fallen to Banality in this fashion. Even if they don’t, though, the Storyteller can still easily involve the characters in a quest or two to rescue such sleeping changelings before it’s too late. A local noble might charge the characters with completing the task as their final service, or a weeping childling might approach them and ask them to save their Kithain grandparent before the exodus begins. Given the tricky nature of involving these Banality-laden fae in anything of the Dreaming without harming them or acquiring too much Banality themselves in the process, even one such quest can prove quite challenging to perform. And time is short...

Of course, there is also the matter of rescuing fae trapped in prisons and institutions in time for them to make the journey. Aside from the difficulties and complications inherent in any kind of jailbreak scenario, certain other questions arise as well. Apart from overcoming the Banality that surrounds such institutions and infects their inhabitants, the characters have to wrestle with the implications of releasing potentially dangerous or unbalanced fae. While many Kithain are wrongly imprisoned by mortals or even other fae, not *all* of them are. Can the characters really release a hardened murderer or a fae in the deepest throes of Bedlam, even for such an important purpose as this? What happens if the prisoner they free goes on to commit heinous acts before the exodus? Can they take that risk? Should they?

And what of the Dauntain? To be sure, they are hopelessly lost to the service of Banality in this lifetime, but is that a reason to condemn their future incarnations to a possible eternity of suffocating Winter? Can they be brought back to the way of Glamour at this final hour, or are their spirits forever lost for the sins of this life?



While this question of redemption might not be something for every game, those games that have featured Dauntain antagonists might inspire the Storyteller to at least confront the players with the question of what to do with them, particularly if the Dauntain were once sympathetic figures.

Humanity's Last Look

Obviously, all but the most reclusive and Bedlam-inclined fae have a number of mortal contacts and connections that they will desire to put in order before they leave this world. In contrast to the more openly dramatic or violent conflicts of Kithain society, this is an excellent time to showcase a great deal of deeply personal roleplaying. After all, fighting off a gang of nihilistic redcaps is merely dangerous, while kissing a spouse and children goodbye forever is truly wrenching. Storytellers should take care to make sure that each character receives some chance to settle his affairs and reconcile with his mortal life during this time, even if only to give it all a final defiant gesture of disrespect. After all, even the most standoffish wilder or bitter grump still defines himself by his human nature as much as his faerie self, if only by his staunch opposition to everything the mortal world stands for. As such, it would be remiss not to at least allow him to restate this position one last time.

Fires at Midnight

No matter how busy the fae are in the wake of the announcement or how wisely they choose to spend their remaining earthly hours, time eventually runs out and the deadline for the beginning of the exodus is at hand. During the days immediately leading up to the departure time, disturbances in the Dreaming grow stronger and more frequent, as do violence and disorder in the Autumn World. If any fae still harbored any doubts that the End Times were at hand, some of the phenomena witnessed during these last hours should lay such concerns to rest. If nothing else, the Eye of Balor grows to the size of a small moon on the penultimate night, bathing the chimerical world in its eerie reddish glow. The roars of great beasts of legend can be heard faintly on the wind, as well as the thudding and unmistakable footsteps of giants echoing across the land.

As promised, fae gather at the appointed sites and witness a strange glow beginning to appear as the sun's light begins to fade on the horizon. At first it appears to be little more than a softly pulsing circle of light, but it gradually grows stronger until it is nearly as bright as the summer sun. Items infused by the Oath of the Unknown Road glow faintly in response, especially as the bearer draws nearer the circle, but regardless no individual can enter. Those who attempt to do so are repulsed gently but firmly, regardless of skill or strength, and repeated attempts only incur more forceful (but never lethal) reactions. With the fleeing of the last rays of sunlight, silhouettes appear in the center of the glare, first barely discernible but growing clearer until they are unmistakably fae, at which time they step from the circle and greet the travelers.

A surprise awaits with the arrival of these mysterious fae. At least one if not all of the fae who come through are known to the characters, whether they are fallen friends, mentors long since passed or otherwise faces the characters know and respect. They are dressed in resplendent armor and fine clothes, but they otherwise appear exactly as they did in the prime of their life, and they favor the characters with welcoming looks and warm expressions. They spend a few minutes catching up with their old acquaintances. While they remain cagey about Arcadia and what awaits



beyond (“You have to see it for yourself.”), they tell the characters that they are there to help them on their way, because part of the security surrounding Arcadia ensures that passage from that realm does not guarantee a safe return trip, even for them. Still, even knowing that risk, they have come back for their friends and family, determined to help lead them back to their homeland. If Dice was particularly close to the characters, he appears at this time as well, though he will not journey far with them on the other side. He wishes to keep track of many different groups along the way in case they need assistance.

Parting Words

After everyone has said their goodbyes to those who are remaining behind and otherwise made their peace, the Arcadians indicate that it is time to go and lead the fae into the circle of light. Entering the circle fills the fae with a sense of wonder and resolve, and all lost Willpower or Glamour Traits are immediately refreshed. Characters have one last moment to speak or glance at the world they’re leaving behind, then the light grows so bright that even those with their eyes shut see nothing but white radiance, and the sounds of the mortal world fade away to nothingness, replaced by the softly alien sounds of the Dreaming. There is a slight pain, as though some last tie was severed, then nothing but a sense of belonging. Characters open their eyes to discover that they are in the Near Dreaming, but with no sign of the mortal world in sight. There is a moment of heavy realization as the knowledge that the Autumn World is gone forever sinks in, and then they take stock of their surroundings.

The Silver Path stretches out before them.

The stars shine down on them.

The Longing calls to them.

The journey begins.

DON'T LOOK BACK

The choices confronting the characters from that auspicious starting point offer an endless array of possibilities. Some Storytellers might even choose to end their chronicles at that moment, allowing the players to envision the hardships and adventures their characters overcome along their journey. While that is certainly not an ending for every group, it can prove a surprisingly satisfactory one, as it grants the players the freedom to imagine exactly the ending they desire.

Of course, with the end of one world behind them, no few players will be clamoring to continue their adventures into the new one stretched out before them. Given the vastness of the Dreaming and the difficulty of even a relatively guided return to Arcadia, this journey can easily be the subject of months or even years of further play. Generally speaking, however, most chronicles will take one of the following three different approaches at this point.

Arcadia, Ho!

Given the themes of isolation and alienation that run throughout *Changeling*, the prospect of returning to their ancient homeland has a uniquely powerful appeal to the lost and wandering fae, who have been cut off from paradise for so long. Getting to Arcadia might seem an incredibly distant goal at times, even with the help of Dice and the Arcadians, but thanks to the sacrifices they’ve made and the oaths they’ve sworn, the fae know it is *possible*. It might mean months or years



of constant wandering through the many wondrous and bizarre realms of the Dreaming, but it *can* be done. Arriving at the gates of Arcadia after a suitably amazing and harrowing journey can act as a wonderful epilogue to a chronicle, though it is still advised that aside from some powerful and poignant description Storytellers not try to continue the action once the fae have actually re-entered Arcadia. Even in *Changeling*, some things are best left to the imagination of each individual player.

Our Own Place and Time

At the same time, some Storytellers might wish to avoid the idea of returning to Arcadia in favor of having the fae establish a new home somewhere in the Dreaming. While the scenario was designed with a journey to Arcadia in mind, it can very easily be changed to direct the fae to find a new realm instead. Perhaps Arcadia is poised to fall in a bitter war and some of the survivors have been sent out to gather the fae to find a new homeland. Maybe the Dreaming simply desires that the fae seek out a new realm where they can establish the same kind of ties they once had with Earth. Perhaps like the Seekers, the fae are seeking the mythic realm of Lyonesse, or maybe they feel that the Red Cities of Mars are the ideal site for a new fae society to begin. Different groups might even split up in pursuit of differing destinations, leading to competing factions or other unusual twists.

Ultimately, the reasons for mounting such a grand exploration are as limitless as the potential realms themselves. While **Dreams and Nightmares** offers a great number of possible destinations (not to mention places to see along the way), Storytellers should not feel limited to what is contained in that book when designing the realm where they want the fae to eventually relocate. While creating an entire new world for the fae to inhabit requires a great deal of time and effort to portray convincingly, the reward can be well worth it.

Earthbound

Though perhaps rarest of all, it might happen that the characters aren't the ones crossing through the portal. They might be the ones wishing those who do farewell. While the final fates of characters who choose to remain behind are likely to be rather unpleasant, that doesn't mean that the Storyteller can't imbue them with the gravity and pathos they deserve. Even if it's just quietly fading away to Banality in the presence of loved ones, handling a group of Kithain who are facing the end of Glamour as they know it can be an intense roleplaying experience. Storytellers should just make sure that players are well aware beforehand that there will be no 11th-hour rescue. Provided they understand that, portraying the world at last surrendering to the smothering chill of Winter can be as compelling as any journey through the Dreaming.



robert wheeler (order #15253)



CHAPTER SIX: RECKONING

The end is nigh. The Book of Life is about to slam shut. Welcome to Armageddon.

Man has long predicted its coming. The Mayans said the world would end in 2012. Romans believed that 12 mystical eagles revealed to the founders of the empire the exact date when civilization would collapse around their ears. The Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation both pull back the curtain to show exactly how God's wrath will send sinners to Hell and believers to salvation. Modern-day doomsday prophecies suggest that we will die by meteor, comet, plague, biological warfare, nuclear winter, terrorism or by a thousand other ways to meet our proverbial maker. We have predicted Armageddon time and again, and we were wrong each time.

Not this time.

Hunters have a special relationship with Armageddon. Unwittingly, the imbued are both signposts marking the demise of the world and key participants in the approaching doom. Those brutal taskmasters, the Messengers, seem to have chosen certain people to be their eyes and ears during the last days — perhaps not to *stop* the end of the world, but to simply *diminish its impact*. The very appearance of hunters is indicative that the end is on its way, and now that it's all hitting the fan, the chosen have to decide. Do they help cushion the fall of mankind, refusing to accept that the finale is necessary and unstoppable, or do they stand aside and let annihilation happen, leaving reality to sink into oblivion? Is it possible that the end can be stopped, that it can be denied and defeated in the last critical hours? It's time to find out, because the final nails in humanity's coffin are about to be driven.

THE NATURE OF THE END

A lot of options are available when plotting the last gasp of the world. What follows is a brief discussion of some design choices that might help you decide exactly what mood, theme and style of Armageddon you want to occur in your chronicle. You don't need to decide on a single element. Most of these can be combined to create your own approach.

NATURAL OR MONSTROUS?

Creatures poison the foundation of the world, corrupting society and bleeding the planet of its mystical resources. A *monstrous* Armageddon is directly caused by and involves beasts. Vampires enslave humanity. People who die end up as the walking dead. Werewolves breed uncontrollably, plaguing the civilized world. All are examples of

monstrous ends. Alternatively, the Storyteller could choose one or more of the End-Time scenarios found in other chapters and put it into effect, distorting the events through the flawed and imperfect lens of the hunters' perceptions.

A *natural* end quite literally involves the natural world going berserk. Earthquakes shatter cities, chaotic weather systems ground planes and sink ships, the ice caps melt and oceans rise over coastlines to drown humanity. The monstrous angle is seemingly put aside as the world veritably rejects its inhabitants. In a strange way, both monsters and human beings are on almost even footing before such large and terrifying disasters.

EPIC OR HUMAN?

An *epic* **Reckoning** game hasn't been touched on much in other supplements, but a story set in the context of Armageddon is a good chance to finally play one. Epic tales unfold in grand spectacle, not with small steps. The imbued might literally go to war, assaulting a wizardly power base in a major metropolitan area. Shapechangers and bloodsuckers clash openly under a blood-red moon. The skies darken with spirits, and damned creatures howl over the wind. An epic tale involves hunters actually having a place in the end, not simply being anonymous participants. The characters themselves affect the course of the world, perhaps even whether everything is destroyed or humanity somehow endures. You allow the characters to take center stage as heroes — troubled heroes, flawed heroes — but heroes nonetheless.

A *human* approach to the End Times is subtle. The world probably falls apart around the characters' ears, but they're not central to Armageddon itself. They're still the focus of your chronicle, but the story is personal. Instead of marshaling a troop of Zealots against a bloodsucker stronghold, the hunters finally go up against a long-standing, single enemy. They don't go to the front lines to heal fallen comrades. They try to make their neighborhood better in these last days. This human angle is a microcosm of what's going on in the broader world. Chaos ensues and everything falls apart, but the hunters deal with only one small portion of the chaos, trying to keep friends, family and themselves from being victims.

It's also possible that epic and human styles can be blended. In fact, given the troupe-style play encouraged by **Reckoning**, this option might wind up being the best one. The hunters still have their human, inner story of making peace with loved ones and enacting vengeance (or salvation) upon long-elusive enemies, but this "small" story contributes to the larger whole. Personal stories contribute to bigger victories and apocalyptic developments, and characters could be swept into events that never involved them before. And from there comes the chance for salvation or a "stay of execution."

IMPOSED OR SELF-INDUCED?

One of the questions that needs to be answered is *what caused this?* Armageddon doesn't just happen. Somehow, somewhere, there must be a reason, however inscrutable, behind the coming of the last days. If the end of the world is self-induced, humanity is responsible for bringing it down on everybody's head. If it's imposed, the cause of the end is outside humanity's control and, more importantly, not humankind's fault.

In a *self-induced* scenario, humanity brings about its own undoing. Perhaps our dark side was long ago made manifest in monsters, and now the damning repercussions are felt. It could be that humanity's compulsion to dominate the world and tap its resources causes global death. Or maybe humankind has simply created too many havens and weapons for the creatures and becomes a victim of its own handiwork. Thematically, using this scenario makes humanity the architect of its own unmaking.

That's the bad news. The good news is that perhaps there's a chance to turn things around — which is where hunters come in.

If the end of the world is *imposed*, some outside force has levied an abstract judgment on civilization and plans to destroy it for some reason. Humanity is essentially without blame. If a host of primeval vampires awakens and sets in motion a plan to enslave humankind, the end is imposed. It's not humanity's fault if werewolves "cull the herd" and kill people or put them in slave-labor camps. Or if a conspiracy of magicians decides to assassinate major political figures in an effort to trigger World War III.

ULTIMATE END OR NEW BEGINNING?

In an *ultimate-end* chronicle, hunters fail at the Heralds' task and the world ends in oblivion, never to enter another age. What's the purpose of playing a chronicle that culminates in annihilation? Characters who discover that there's really no hope, no light at the end of the tunnel might feel that the only option is to eat a bullet. Or maybe not. Seeing that the true end nears, hunters might seek to make peace with the world however they can. This could mean reconciling with lost family, obtaining a long-sought answer from a reluctant monster, or driving a truck full of explosives into a creature's stronghold. It's also possible that characters learn of the final end and refuse to believe it, continuing to rage against the dying of the light. A strong sense of dramatic irony is achieved when players believe that the end is coming but their characters do not.

On the other hand, *A new beginning* is the intended outcome of Armageddon, at least according to the Messengers' designs. Currently, the world is in autumn and the End Times are winter. If hunters do their job, winter ends and spring becomes the "new beginning." Sure, the world is changed and there's no telling how little of the population might remain, but the point is that things don't truly end. Storytellers using this scenario might want to continue the chronicle in a "what if?" capacity, offering an altered world in the wake of the last days. This scenario allows for more hope than the previous option, because hunters can make a difference.

THE HUNT EVOLVES

The events that lead up to and demonstrate the End Times should be somewhat hunter-specific in order to get the message through to characters. That way they can see it coming and act accordingly, rather than just be victims of it all like every other person on Earth. Several conditions of being imbued, as hunters know them, can change to suggest that something *big* is underway.

Edges

A hunter's edges are among his few unprecedented tools available for dealing with monsters. At the end, all bets are off and the circumstances of even the supernatural are in flux. Hunters' powers are already mysterious and frightening. Almost anything could happen to them when any and all rules are broken in the last days. Hunters might lose all of their edges as their connection to the Messengers is severed, or the Heralds might seek to strengthen the connection, hoping to infuse the chosen with a greater sense of purpose and ability.

Perhaps each character gets an additional level in her primary edge path, increasing her preternatural aptitude. Or maybe the Messengers go all out and every hunter is afforded the sudden opportunity to advance to the level-five edge in his primary path. Characters whose goals and calling don't compel them to such extremity might aim for more subtle effects, such as extra Virtue Traits that can be

spent on more and different creed paths. Maybe the cost to purchase new Virtues is halved, or perhaps it is doubled.

You need to decide if the hunters' spiritual weaponry is fortified at the end. If not, are the imbued no longer "necessary" according to the grand design, their supernatural arsenal weakened or even severed?

Hunter Code

The hunter code allows for mysterious, clandestine communication between the chosen. Whether sprayed on a wall or printed in a classified ad, the code allows a certain level of covert contact among the imbued. But it's not learned, it's intrinsic to the chosen from the very moment of their change. And that means the hunter code is a spiritual entity, another gift from the Heralds. What does the advent of Armageddon do to the code? Are hunters' bestowed capabilities weakened, strengthened or do they simply become erratic? Does the code explode with hundreds — or thousands — of new symbols, becoming a full language? (Perhaps even a spoken one?) Does it cease to make sense, becoming meaningless to any hunter who sees it?

Maybe only those imbued with Inspired- or Exalted-level edges can read it, implying that the Heralds demand powerful soldiers in these grim times. Perhaps normal humans can suddenly understand the signs. Or worse, what if monsters can read it? What happens when the enemy can suddenly tap into the secret cipher shared by the imbued?

The Heralds

No hunter exists without the guidance of the Heralds. Some consider communication "from above" gospel. Others believe it to be little more than hallucination. One hunter might have a constant connection, while another has suffered otherworldly intrusion only once, at the imbuing. The Messengers exist beyond this reality, but they are still affected by it. When Armageddon builds and hits, the "transmissions" hunters receive are sure to be altered. Perhaps all (or only some) chosen experience a disturbing escalation in the number of messages they receive (imposing or increasing Patron levels). It's also feasible that hunters could lose points in Patron as their connection falters. Or hunters' Background scores might remain the same, but the messages change. They become louder, more obvious, more persistent. The communication comes across more clearly or transmissions are garbled, meaning the messages are more inscrutable now than ever.

Of course, those options are severe and might be over the top for your game. Alternatively, the Messengers might "visit" individual (or all) hunters instead of relying on messages. These visitations can manifest as visions, hallucinations or dreams. Or maybe these entities possess hunters and make them high-Virtue extremists for a time. The Heralds might even gift characters with new and different capabilities to offset or survive Armageddon. The chosen could gain two extra Bruised health levels, or a hunter might be able to treat all damage as bashing damage when Conviction is expended to activate second sight. The Powers That Be might make impromptu modifications of the hunter "blueprint," observing the rule that desperate times call for desperate measures.

Before you get carried away with such changes, however, remember a few basic truths. First of all, hunters are not and never should be out-and-out superhuman. Period. While Exalted edges push that limit, they are the result of close communion with the Heralds and/or extreme mental disturbance, not just generic super powers gained from a fortuitous chemical spill or lucky dose of radiation. Even in the End Times, hunters should always pay for what they gain, whether it's with their blood, their sweat, their sanity or their soul. Second, as Storyteller it is your duty to bear game balance in mind

SEVERING CONNECTIONS

One of your apocalyptic options is to sever the connection between the Messengers and the hunters. The end interferes with the hunter-Herald relationship, the powers revoke their blessings, or the imbued are deemed no longer necessary and are left to contend on their own. This severance is also proposed in other chapters in this book as other beings lose their connection to the source of their capabilities at the end of the world. If you decide to go that route for the denizens of your World of Darkness, it's recommended that hunters retain a thing or two.

Any derangements a hunter suffers due to his imbuing or high Virtue scores should remain. Such ailments are imprinted on his brain.

A hunter should always retain access to second sight. Once a person has seen the truth, there's no closing that door again. Since Conviction is no longer needed to "fuel" hunters' lost powers, second sight can be handled in a couple of different ways. You can decree that the sight is always on. The chosen can't turn it off (a la the Wayward creed), and it always reveals monsters everywhere the imbued turn. The second option is to replace Conviction with Willpower to activate the sight. It's no longer a matter of tapping bestowed reserves to see monsters for what they are, but an act of inherent human determination. (Bear in mind that Willpower is much scarcer than Conviction, however, and harder to replenish.)

While second sight can persist, hunters might no longer receive its associated protection against monsters' mind-, emotion- and fear-controlling powers. Activating second sight reveals monsters for their true selves, but it no longer buffers the chosen from creatures' supernatural capabilities. You may allow a limited version of such resistance using Willpower, though. A hunter with his Herald connection eradicated might still have some strength to deny a monster's influence. You could allow a Willpower Challenge (difficulty four Traits) for a hunter to resist a creature's dominating effects.

and not "hook up" one character or group of characters while the other members of the troupe get nothing. Even if you are running a Zeal-oriented scenario, that doesn't mean that your Zealots should gain all manner of benefits while followers of other Virtues get nothing. Doing so breeds argument among the players and downplays the seriousness of what's going on while players argue about Trait totals and new powers.

If you decide to "ramp up" the level of the Heralds' involvement with the hunters, it is important that the Storyteller and Narrators have enough messages prepared in advance to keep from getting stale or confused. It is good to have enough common themes present to keep the players from getting lost, but it is also important to vary the content enough to keep things fresh.

Storytellers should also consider varying the medium of the Heralds' messages to keep visions from getting too monotonous. Radio blurbs, scoreboards, baby prattling, pop-up Internet ads, bus destination signs and breaking news crawls at the bottom of new shows are all good alternatives to the usual trio of visions, voices and headlines. If any of the characters know alternative methods of communication such as Ameslan or Morse code, you could consider working messages into these as well,

as long as you maintain the mood. Likewise, Storytellers are encouraged to stay creative when communicating these messages — mock up newspaper headlines, doctor photographs, make audio or video recordings, et cetera.

These aids and props need not always be terribly elaborate. They should serve your story, not hinder it by taking up a great deal of time to create. Having at least some such prepared messages keeps things fresh, though, as opposed to constantly taking players aside and telling them, “You have a vision of...”

Bystanders

Assuming monsters don’t openly do battle in the streets, humanity at large might still need to be shown the truth in the last days. Bystanders could be the agents who go among the masses, revealing events and showing individuals for what they are. Bystanders could also be charged with organizing informed people into a revolutionary force, and they might be better at it than the imbued. It’s also possible that you just want to show bystanders to have had an important role after all, perhaps foreseen or intended by the Heralds. Before the end, the majority of bystanders remained on the sidelines of the hunt, but now they organize. They might go to battle with the chosen or form their own circles that assume roles and fill holes that hunters cannot. They can spread information, provide support to wounded chosen, ground the imbued who teeter on madness, and exemplify what ordinary people can do.

There are other, more... extreme options, as well. Consider what might happen if all bystanders are given something of a second chance. Perhaps they’re allowed to turn and face the truth and become full-fledged hunters. Or perhaps they aren’t given the choice and are simply forced into a second imbuing, one they’re *unable* to deny. In this last case, how is their creed determined? Are they oddly without creed, able to assume any combination of Virtues and edges? Or maybe they’re not miraculously “promoted” after all, but given limited access to a few hunter powers. Perhaps they gain second sight or a single dot in a single creed path. It’s even possible that bystanders do not become hunters, but raw conduits for information sent directly from the Messengers. What happens if bystanders lose all sense of self and identity and their personalities are subsumed by one personality from beyond? What happens when bystanders summarily lose their humanity?

THE CREEDS

Hunters are driven by their individual personalities, first and foremost, but secondary are their Virtues and creeds. The imbued are people, yet their very outlooks and predilections establish guidelines and suggestions for how they react to monsters and cope with the hunt. Creeds and Virtues derive from such identity and can be used to estimate how a hunter might think and behave. Someone might be intuitive (suggesting Vision) or dedicated to protecting friends (suggesting Defense), or if she is predominantly hopeful and good-willed, she could be an Innocent.

So what general roles do hunters of different Virtues and creeds assume at the end of the world? Do they remain individuals working separately from each other, or can they find some common ground and cause? Can they set their differences aside, or are their seemingly insurmountable differences part of some grand plan? Do Zealots stand in the way of the Merciful at every turn, and is that how the Visionaries want it? Here are a few ideas on what hunters of the three Virtues might do during the last days, as well as suggestions for Storytellers on possible themes and events with which to confront them.



MERCIFUL

Redeemers sense that something has to be done. They can't usually sit idly by. Their personalities and capabilities tend to motivate them to help at every turn. Such calling certainly makes them needed. Humans get hurt, monsters go mad and others hunters exhaust themselves and their resources. Redeemers are there to help, rejuvenate and forgive. But does their mission demand too high a price? Those on the path of Redemption might become obsessed with saving everyone. Everywhere they look is pain, loss and suffering. The inability to save everyone can drive Redeemers to dangerous lengths. They might overextend themselves or fall to addictions such as drugs to stay awake or to numb their pain. It's also possible that they could go insane through a messianic complex. They might believe that they are divinely inspired "saviors," placing themselves at the center of their own mythology and religion that must save the world.

A group that is almost bound to push itself too far, too fast is the Martyrs. These hunters have no shortage of demand (especially in their own minds) during the end. They might take on any mission, from getting food to a group of hungry children to strapping C-4 to their bellies and walking into a penthouse filled with vampires. But at what cost? Martyrs can go beyond the distance, resisting the need for sleep, sustenance and shelter. But can they have long-term usefulness in the last days if they manage to restrain any self-destructive tendencies? Why would they preserve or pace themselves? The clock is ticking and there's little time left. With little to lose except a chance to maybe make a bigger sacrifice tomorrow, what holds these masochistic hunters back today? And what happens when a Martyr starts to *appreciate* the end of the world and his place in it? Could a hunter of this stripe actively work to oppose too much good so that he can fully embrace his calling in this dark time?

Innocents might be able to see some good at the end, at least in theory. While not necessarily eternal optimists, many believers cling to the hope that *something* watches out for the world. If they can honor and share that belief, maybe there will be a reward after so much tribulation. (And if not, isn't making the final days better reward in itself?) Innocents can assuage people's fears and offset the erratic, angry behavior of some monsters. A vampire might be lost in temporary madness, caught in the throes of fear and dread, and an Innocent could help the being resist its destructive instinct. The hopeful can also be useful in information-gathering and performing thankless tasks due to a willingness to go places few else will and to trust those who others refuse to.

VISIONARIES

Are those of the Vision Virtue — specifically Visionaries — truly meant to be leaders or scholars or strategists? Are they simply insane people unraveling enigmas with little idea as to how or why? The Ministers ostensibly have a mission for hunters of this creed, and it relates directly to the end. They are intended to uncover means of saving (or more appropriately, surviving and rebuilding) the world, and to lead others to such solutions. It can seem as if these seers are made for times like these. They are often chosen for their curiosity, drive, foresight and imagination. They can study monsters and pick apart the causes and effects of the End Times. These dark days call for answers, and Visionaries might provide them.

But metaplot aside, Visionaries can fill any number of niches in your game. They can be hoarse-throated doomsayers walking the streets, screaming their prophecies to anyone who will listen. They might be investigators acting in the shadows, secretly researching (through books, monsters or dreams) the path

destruction might take and how best to stop (or encourage) it. They could be strategists for other hunters, sketching a blueprint for success. Or they could be the generals of the chosen, marshaling the forces of the imbued community, rallying them to battle against the inhuman denizens of the world. The clarity and focus that these imbued often possess can give direction to disparate hunters, allowing all to work toward some goal before time runs out.

ZEALOTS

Avengers might assemble cults of personality, perhaps comprising other hunters, but it's possible that normal people heed the summons in this apocalyptic age. The vengeful point to religious evidence (Book of Revelation, the Koran) to "prove" the righteousness of their call to arms. Do Avengers endorse extreme violence, engaging in and encouraging wanton destruction (as opposed to the calculated levels of devastation aimed for by Waywards)? Is it possible that an Avenger's faith in his "crusade" falters with the end?

Many Defenders do what they've always done, only ever more intently. They can hole people (including friends and family) up in safe and remote locations to "weather the storm." Some protectors might attempt to save humanity from the depredations of monsters and other hunters, fearing that something must be saved before all is lost. Guardians' "line of defense" can be drawn anywhere — at a door, a city block or at a town's limits. If the time comes that a safe house is violated, these hunters assume responsibility for leading their charges to new, safer places elsewhere. Defenders are anchors against the storm, but their value assumes that something will survive to see the next day's calm.

Judges might find their impartiality useful in deciding which monsters, hunters and people are worthwhile in the madness of the end. They can decide what must be saved and what must be tossed overboard in order to remain afloat. They can make the split-second decisions that mean life or death, moment to moment. But what happens when these decision-makers go too far? Do they form cults based on their own megalomania? Do they become jury and executioner, too, taking their brand of condemnation to the undeserving? Or do they judge themselves too harshly, leaving themselves ineffective and indecisive when others need them most?

EXTREMISTS

Waywards are capable of carrying out intricate plots of deliberate devastation in an effort to harm monsters. To them, Armageddon is a Grand Guignol of possibility. Creatures are everywhere, and Waywards couldn't turn off their sight even if they wanted to. Do these people finally marshal the troops as was their original intent? Maybe world devastation is a sufficiently desperate situation to warrant other hunters to follow a Wayward lead. Perhaps God45 and Peleus assemble a small army of other extremists and carry out brutal attacks on monstrous holdings everywhere.

Hermits, too, must have a place in the end. They have an intense connection to the Messengers, but it's usually incoherent babble. What happens if the constant messages start making sense? Do Hermits become prophets among hunters, delivering the "truth" to any and all who will listen? Waywards might stand in the way of other hunters with their violent designs. Hermits can also stand in the way, but in a different manner. Possibly believing themselves the mouthpieces of the Heralds, Hermits might disrupt other hunters' efforts when they go against the "plan" (which potentially exists only in an intruder's mind). If a group of imbued is about to sneak into a slave-labor camp and a Hermit sees the act as contrary to Messenger desires, he might intentionally blow the hunters' cover.



MONSTERS

Without monsters there would be no imbued. Men and women are chosen for the sole purpose of dealing with creatures by one means or another. But at the end of the world, what are monsters doing and how might hunters get involved to stop the beings? The following are ideas for creature activity in the End Times, whether as direct contribution to annihilation or as a result of it. Principle antagonists in your chronicle might have very specific agendas for themselves and the imbued. Or perhaps they have particular goals based on the Armageddon scenario you choose from those proposed earlier in this chapter. Other creatures make their own final bids or exult in the end in their own ways.

SPIRITS AND WALKING DEAD

Ghosts and zombies are intrinsically related. After all, most walking dead are little more than ghosts trapped in sacks of animated meat. The End Times are sure to send reverberations throughout the spirit world. Indeed, the recent influx of the dead into the lands of the living (which also signaled the emergence of the imbued) might have been a sign of the end. Do spirits look forward to and help shepherd the End Times, seeking to bolster their armies with fallen spirits? Or does the final reckoning mean that even the dead will be judged and sent screaming into the void?

Stranger still, what does it mean if spirits and zombies don't proliferate at the end, but disappear altogether? They go from hunters' most common antagonists to nonexistent. Do the chosen mistakenly consider this absence a triumph, or do they see it as the bad omen it is? Are even the dead able to die? Worse, did *something* destroy them, something far worse than the very menace of the living dead?

VAMPIRES

The End Times are chaos incarnate. Do bloodsuckers take advantage of it, or are they punished by it? Why care about a few exsanguinated bodies when an earthquake just decimated the whole town? Vampires can capitalize on such disorder and grow fat on the blood of the defenseless. Other questions arise, too. Do vampires reveal themselves to the mortal masses, dropping any pretense of secrecy, or do they have to remain hidden, avoiding the mobs that fill the streets in search of the cause of society's failure?

Most important, how can hunters respond to vampire activity? Rather than react to bloodsuckers' tactics, hunters could be proactive and take advantage of the chaos to deal with their enemies. They might attack vampire havens or interests (corporations, warehouses) under the guise of "looting" or "terrorism." Alternatively, hunters might see this as a time to build bridges. The Merciful might save vampires from angry mobs, and Visionary hunters might recruit the undead for information — or be recruited by vampires to get close to other monstrous targets.

SHAPECHANGERS

Do changers enter mainstream society? Do they declare war on humans, hoping to remove them from the world so as to truly save it? Or do the creatures hope to announce their existence to ask for — or demand — cooperation in salvaging reality? Some shapechangers (be they werewolves, rat-men or cat-changers) might decide to damn it all and attempt to hasten the coming doom rather than allay it, in search of a clean break.

Do hunters attempt to stem the tide of beast-men with violence? Do they see these aberrations and decide that the monsters have brought about the last days? Is it possible that the two could form a tenuous alliance? Both consider themselves

protectors of the world, at least more so than many denizens of the world do. Hunters have some domain over protecting people, and werewolves have some domain over protecting wild places. Would this commonality allow an alliance?

Witches

What could Armageddon spell for manipulators? Many witches seek out global “ascension,” which involves the masses suddenly awaking with belief and acceptance that reality is utterly flexible. Do these last days provide mages with that possibility? Can they open collective human consciousness? Does cataclysm blast open the doors of perception for every human being? Would such awareness allow people to see monsters for what they are and free hunters to operate openly? Could public understanding leave monsters exposed and vulnerable, making wizardly and hunter goals akin at the end of the world?

Ultimately, if previously ordinary people start awakening into magical powers, how do hunters respond? Is the phenomenon indicative of the plague of monsters that rises out of Armageddon? Are these newly made mages friends, enemies or something to watch from a distance? What if hunters’ friends or loved ones awaken?

MORTALS

There are six billion people on Earth. Humanity has unwittingly had a relationship with monsters for its entire existence. People are food for vampires, breeding stock for shapeshifters, playthings for manipulators, sources of passion for spirits and worshippers for the infernal. And yet, mankind has remained ignorant of the abuses that it’s suffered. We’ve been kept confused and ignorant, always left to wonder why a little voice warns us to be afraid of the dark. With the End Times here, does humanity’s place change?

Now is the ideal time to shatter mankind’s ignorance of monsters. Any mystical veil that keeps people deaf and dumb might simply collapse, allowing the masses to see creatures for what they are. (This wouldn’t be the same thing as hunters’ second sight, but a person wouldn’t forget or rationalize away seeing a man change into a wolf. He would understand it and be horrified by it.) This revelation might allow hunters to rally people to their cause. The outrage and revulsion experienced by the masses could be harnessed and turned against the supernatural. But it could backfire, too. Fearful (or enterprising) folks, always afflicted with self-interest, might side with monsters in an effort to pick the winning “team.” What can hunters do when regular people, untouched by monstrous taint, stand in the way of their goals? Can regular folks be spared, or must they become casualties of war?

You might have the masses remain in complete ignorance of the truth. Mankind’s long-standing blindness is resilient, even when monsters and hunters act openly. The supernatural veil might keep people blind or they might subconsciously refuse to see what goes on before them. The world is falling apart, but in “understandable” terms—earthquakes, civil strife, war. It’s certainly not due to “monsters.” It could be that creatures still operate in the shadows. They conduct annihilation unseen, except by the imbued. If monsters fear that warring in the streets will cause the human herd to rise up and destroy them, beasts will continue their secret maneuvers, now intended to save themselves at the end or to emerge as the new powers that be. And then, there’s a certain comfort and confidence that comes in pulling puppet-strings from behind the scenes. Some monsters have done it for so long they know no other existence and can’t help themselves now, even when their doom is imminent. The result is a humanity that unwittingly remains controlled up until the last.

APOCALYPTIC SIGNS

For those gifted (or paranoid) enough to see them, there are hints of the impending end in all things... in the books of the Bible, the patterns of birds in the sky, in the headline bar on CNN. Armageddon is coming, foreshadowed through secret warnings and premonitions. As Storyteller, you may use such tools as the Book of Revelation or Fyodor's *Apocrypha* as evidence for characters that the last days have truly arrived. Application of these interpretive signs gives an apocalyptic chronicle weight. Instead of being some random, haphazard affair, the end feels like something that's been planned by a calculating hand and has culminated for ages.

Hunters (those of Vision creeds in particular) might seek out such prophecy and portent in hopes of understanding and averting the end. Those without the background or access might not be interested in the signs of literature, but they could build theories based on news reports, public trends or urban legends. At first, these omens might not seem too serious, at least until *they start coming true*.

FYODOR'S APOCRYPHA

The Visionary Fyodor is responsible for the rambling collection of prophetic musings typically called *Apocrypha*. The Hermit Violin99 is responsible for putting the collection together and disseminating it to the general hunter population. The haphazardly termed "book" reads like a lunatic's rumination on what it means to be chosen, what the history of the imbued *might* be, and where the future of the world could lead. It's this last part that's potentially important to your game.

Fyodor describes many scenarios — both beginning and end — that could come to pass in an apocalyptic chronicle. A character with a copy of the book could interpret just about any occurrence in the last days as applicable to the warnings in the text, no matter how coincidental or damning the comparison seems. You, as Storyteller, might want to orchestrate events that match the prophecies. Do you follow Fyodor's events to the letter, making them fairly obvious? Do you allow the events to occur but disguise them behind metaphor and musing? Do you invoke one or two events but allow the rest to fall to the wayside, leaving hunters confused about what could happen next? What events from the book happen, and how do you present them in game?

OMENS AND PORTENTS

Written prophecy or science alone doesn't decide indications of the end. They're also inspired by superstition, perhaps passed culturally like urban legends. A simple omen, one most everyone knows, is that it's bad luck for a black cat to cross your path. The message is simple, direct and somewhat foreboding. These kinds of ill-fated occurrences can pepper your game before Armageddon begins, and continue to happen thereafter.

Signs pointing to the last days could involve anything: a blood-red moon, a drastic increase in crime rate, a funny taste to the water. And don't be afraid to make it personal, going so far as to encourage players to explore their own superstitions. Does an Avenger feel a sense of cosmic apprehension when his favorite sturdy weapon falls apart in his hands? Does a Defender who loses her good-luck charm sense some intrinsic warning? A Redeemer might freak out over the fact that no monster has been able to look her in the eye for the last month, like they're all afraid. A Wayward might be convinced that he has to walk out of each battle with a new scar. He's come out of the last several fights clean, and that's a *bad sign*. Shadows look

a little darker, the sun constantly seems dim, police sirens sound throughout the night like they never have before. Maybe local hunter activity seems overly frenzied and bloodthirsty. Almost any ominous event or trend can suggest bad tidings to sensitive imbued, hinting at what's to come in a Judgment Day chronicle.

HUNTER-NET

Every hunter is like a small piece of a riddle's answer, written on slips of paper and cast to the wind. They're all over the world, and each might individually hold one tiny part of the truth. Each hunter potentially knows a little bit of the collective nature and the fate of the world, and each imbued has a *different* answer — some right, some wrong. Hunter-net is useful because all of these little truths can come together and provide a better (though incomplete) answer. You can also use hunter-net to disseminate the "realities" of Armageddon. What one hunter encounters in Sacramento is probably quite different from what another undergoes in Jerusalem. The first might see a "plague of flies" descend upon his hometown, while the other writes about a magician that spoke of the "approaching Lord of the Flies." A potential connection emerges, but only a tenuous one that requires characters to explore and research further. What clues to the end do different posters offer, whether they know it or not, and how can those pieces be sorted out?

Hunter-net is also an excellent place to disseminate false or misunderstood information, or to lead characters astray about the truth of the end. What if the aforementioned hunter mistranslated what the magician said? Or what if an extremist like God45 writes a grand dissertation on the "cancer of the president" and demands that the leader of the free world be assassinated? Could even the most conservative hunters fall in line with a madman's online explanation of Armageddon?

MONSTERS

This is the World of Darkness. Monsters are probably complicit in the end to some degree. If they're not the cause, they're a symptom. It's possible that some monsters are able to give hunters insight into the architecture of the last days (intentionally or inadvertently). Granted, they don't have to be right. While monsters have their own glimpses, they should be far from the whole picture. But such suggestions can hold the seeds of truth and be springboards from which hunters see more of what's really going on.

The Merciful might learn from shapechanger kin about some awful "red star" in the sky that's secretly the eye of an ancient beast coming to consume the world. Zealots putting the torch to a nest of leeches might find blood-spattered graffiti — urban prophecy about vampires rising up against humans. A Visionary reading forbidden texts stolen from a demon could learn secrets about the end of the world.

Monsters have their own distorted views of Armageddon and its causes, and hunters can be exposed to them, but the imbued must always remember the source. God forbid that a monster's insights into the end actually hasten the last days when acted upon.

SCIENCE

Whether it means to or not, science, does a lot of doomsaying. For every article or pronouncement that researchers work toward a new drug or cure, there's a declaration that a meteor is heading toward Earth, that a new form of pneumonia spreads like wildfire, or that no country in the world is prepared for a biological or chemical attack. In conjunction with mass media, science constantly predicts our



demise with what would appear to be hard evidence. This isn't some guy on an island spouting off about a Great Dragon trying to seduce the moral majority. These are presumably erudite, academic individuals who hold "truth" in their hands. The question is, can you use this kind of fatalism in your end chronicle?

You don't need to resort to such drastic scientific proclamations. An intensification of "weird" stories on the news might do the trick. You can use real-world examples such as the strange half-extinction of honeybees a few years ago, outbreaks of hantavirus or cholera, or an increase in shark attacks. You can also make stuff up. What if birds start acting weird, attacking people like in Hitchcock's film? What if a prominent constellation such as Orion simply disappears from the sky? What happens when dolphins go extinct, a new communicable disease is discovered or crops across the Midwest are inexplicably wiped out? All of these things, which arguably have scientific explanations, offer foreshadowing. You can use these events as imagery to imply the coming end, or you can have such tragedies occur *during* Armageddon as a sign that things have really gone wrong.

DANGEROUS PATHS

The Heralds might not be the only game in town when it comes to patrons for the imbued. In the "official" World of Darkness, the Heralds have attempted to offer enough power to select members of humanity to let them put the world back into balance without granting them so much power that they become corrupt (thus a part of the problem). If the Storyteller is willing to add another element to her saga, this attention on the part of the Messengers might also draw the attention, and intervention, of other, more extreme powers: the divine, the corrupt or even the power of human potential unleashed.

Imbued characters do not lightly come to follow any of these paths. Only those who reach the pinnacle of their Virtues or somehow come to the direct attention of these entities (Storyteller's discretion) have any chance of reaching this status, and even then, it is not guaranteed. Storytellers should make sure that suitable roleplaying and soul-searching accompanies any potential "conversions." They should also strip a character of this status if he sought it for power as opposed to a way to express a fitting character development.

See the tabletop sourcebook **Hunter: Fall From Grace** for more on these types of imbued and how they come to arrive in these extreme situations.

DIVINE INSPIRATION

As unknowable as the Heralds are, they stand as far beneath these forces of pure divinity as mortals stand beneath them. These divine forces choose only the worthiest and most dedicated of hunters — those who qualify for an Exalted-level edge and pass the ordeals set by the divine spirits without losing their ways. The combination of divine tests and the derangements accrued acquiring 10 primary Virtue Traits usually produce hunters who are alienated from humanity in general, and often from the rest of the imbued as well. Do not mistake these divine spirits for cherubic guardian angels. Their goals and methods are beyond human morality, and their servants are perforce drawn from it as well.

Those who qualify for divine patronage receive a flood of communication from the Ministers and above in whatever form the hunter's mind can fathom. This vision informs her that her dedication has been recognized and that she will be rewarded with even greater power *if* she is willing to serve them directly. If she agrees, they grant her the powers and drawbacks listed here. If not, she continues as before. In

either case, the aftermath of her ordeals is likely to have placed her in dire straits. Of course, this is a book about the end of the world, so it's all relative.

Divine Edge: Servants of the divine gain a single divine edge. This edge is of Exalted level and can be designed by the Storyteller, adapted from **Fall From Grace** or taken from the existing edges in **Laws of the Reckoning**. (A sample divine edge is provided.) Since divine edges are direct outpourings of divine power, they are different from conventional edges. They are generally quite obvious, with light and/or thunder that anyone nearby will notice. Divine edges affect everyone equally—distinctions of monsters, imbued and mortal are too subtle for these forces. Divine edges cost four Conviction Traits instead of two.

Patron: Those who accept divine patronage receive *Patron* x 5, and start receiving direct commands from beyond.

Divine Aura: All other imbued within three paces of the character receive spillover messages from the Ministers as if they had *Patron* x 3. If these characters already have three or more *Patron* Traits, they notice that the “volume” of the messages seems to be a little louder when they are near the divine hunter.

Conviction: If the hunter’s starting Conviction rating is less than 4, it is permanently raised to 4.

Personality: Nature and Demeanor become the same and must be chosen from *Autocrat*, *Dreamer* or *Fanatic*.

Derangement: The hunter’s player must pick a derangement that best encapsulates his character. Any other derangements no longer affect him, but this one remains and can no longer be suppressed by expending Willpower Traits. Even edges cannot calm his raging mind.

Willpower: Simple, human victories no longer matter. The divine hunter regains Willpower Traits only from acting according to her new Nature and from achieving important victories in the path set by his divine patrons.

INFERNAL CORRUPTION

Dangerous entities, cast from this universe by the divine forces, compose the other side of the battle. Filled with hatred for the worlds and people that spurned them, they offer power to those who can do their work and prepare everything for their return, bit by bit. The forces of corruption will accept anyone who has the ability to further their goals and who allows them into their hearts—again, those who qualify for an Exalted-level edge, as well as being open to what they offer. Typically, these creatures approach the imbued in a manner similar to the Heralds, but offering something different—be it extra pain for the monsters, fewer problems with pylons or just the ability to kick more ass. If the hunter refuses the offer, the corrupter might seek easier prey elsewhere or just wait and see if the hunter comes around. If the hunter agrees, he immediately gains the horrific patronage of a corrupt master.

Should an imbued accept this offer, he has access to the promised edge, but the corrupting presence gains a toehold within his soul. The portion of the entity that occupies the demon is relatively minor. Killing the hunter is only enough to cause it temporary pain. It can see through the hunter and communicate with him as long as he does not have second sight active. As the relationship continues, the corrupter slowly increases its loathsome demands, both to break down the hunter’s resistance and to further its personal agenda. After the corrupt presence worms its way into the hunter, the following conditions apply.



Corrupt Edge: Corrupted imbued gain the use of a single corrupt edge as long as their master wishes it. This edge can be designed by the Storyteller for the character, adapted from **Fall From Grace** or taken from the existing edges in **Laws of the Reckoning**. Because of their alien origin, corrupt edges are different from conventional edges. They can do things completely unlike other edges such as raise the dead, warp reality and alter the hunter's form. They are not subtle, and they instill horror and revulsion in unprotected witnesses. Corrupt edges affect everyone equally, monsters, imbued and mortal alike. Corrupt edges cost four Conviction Traits instead of two.

Patron: The possessing creature acts as *Patron* x 5 for the hunter, but the hunter loses all communication with the Heralds.

Second Sight: While he is using second sight, the corrupting presence is incapable of perceiving or affecting him in any way (including granting the corrupt edge).

Taint: The corrupt hunter now registers as “wrong” to second sight and is affected by edges such as *Ward* that work on monsters. As the corruption spreads, the Storyteller may declare that there are other signs of his fallen nature. This is permanent. Should the corrupt hunter manage to expel her patron, the taint remains.

Revulsion: Communion with such a malignant presence is more than the mortal mind can handle. At the end of any scene in which the hunter interacts extensively with the corrupter or uses her corrupt edge, the player must make a Willpower Challenge against a difficulty of four Traits. Should she fail the test, she loses one permanent Willpower Trait as her mind succumbs to this assault. When the hunter loses her last Willpower Trait, her soul is destroyed and the horrific presence takes command of her body. Willpower may be spent to retest this challenge.

HUMAN POTENTIAL

As terrifying as divine and corrupt hunters are, certain imbued take an even more extreme path: the path of the independent. Independent hunters are unwilling to become a conduit for divine or corrupt forces — or, rarely, no one ever thought to ask — but they have the same fanatical drive (and 10 primary Virtue Traits and a derangement). These hunters become the hunt incarnate and transcend the limitations the Heralds normally place upon their servants in the process. While the breakthrough itself should be a dramatic event, the steps leading to it can take place over as long a time as the chronicle allows.

First, the hunter’s Nature becomes either *Autocrat*, *Fanatic* or *Perfectionist* as the hunt itself consumes the hunter. Later, his Demeanor changes to match his nature as he stops devoting the effort to hiding what he is. Then, after the character has established his ultimate commitment to stopping the monsters, something happens — some critical event that the hunter has to act upon, but for all his power, cannot. At that moment, through a supreme act of will, he forces his way through to a higher level of power and understanding. Once that happens, the following conditions apply:

Exalted Edge: The hunter gains use of a single Exalted-level edge. This edge can be designed by the Storyteller for the character or adapted from the existing edges in **Laws of the Reckoning**, but it must be appropriate to the hunter’s creed and Nature. It was his commitment to the creed that brought him to this point.

Patron: The experience of transcending the Messengers’ limitations shatters the hunter’s natural barriers, giving him an effective *Patron* x 5. This increase does not represent any additional attention from the Heralds, though, merely an increase in the imbued’s sensitivity to their messages and visions.

Dedication: The hunter's manifest adherence to his crusade is so strong that it is almost impossible to sway him from his chosen task. The hunter always resists supernatural powers targeted at him as if he were using the sight. The hunter must still spend a Conviction Trait to use the sight for the recognition of monsters.

Virtues: The hunter has reached the pinnacle of his personal development and can no longer purchase new Virtue Traits. Unspent Virtue Traits from before can still be used to purchase new edges.

Disturbing Presence: The hunter has moved so far from humanity that he no longer reacts to it in a meaningful way, and it is very obvious. The hunter is automatically five Traits down in any Social Challenge involving regular humans, lesser imbued and the more human monsters. More inhuman creatures — powerful monsters and other hunters of this level — are different enough that he can still use all of his Social Traits on them.

Compulsion: Even beyond the hunter's derangements, he now sees the world through the focus of his primary Virtue. Once every other session, the Storyteller can direct an independent hunter to manifest his primary Virtue. Merciful hunters can be told that they must protect a certain creature from all harm, regardless of the circumstances. Visionary hunters may be told a certain fact and must act upon it with their full determination. Zealous hunters may be directed at a certain target that they must single out for punishment.

Willpower: Simple, human victories no longer matter. The divine hunter regains Willpower Traits only from acting according to her new Nature and from achieving important victories in the path set by her divine patrons.

THE DAY AFTER

If your story doesn't lead to utter ruin, what remains? Maybe humanity is enslaved by demons, discarnate spirits or by ancient vampires. What place do hunters have in this grisly New World Order? Are they hunted in turn? Are they enslaved along with everyone else, but willing lead a revolt? Do they operate in clandestine cabals and guerrilla groups, making attacks on monstrous overlords? Do hunters and humans cooperate to break monsters' grip on the world? Is it creatures that are destroyed or enslaved? Perhaps monsters are left scattered, going to ground to rise again one day.

If monsters are all destroyed, driven off or placated, does the world assume an Edenic state? What does this new utopia look like? While characters might seek such a happy ending, they might also have no place in it — at least, not as imbued. Are their gifts revoked once the menace is thwarted? Perhaps they're allowed to return to normal, ordinary lives (if that's even possible after all they've seen and done). Or maybe hunters are given a new role by the Messengers — leaders. Could the Heralds charge the imbued with the responsibility of shepherding society into a new Golden Age. How successful might they be? Do hunters assume the role naturally, or do they sink into megalomania and wear the mask that monsters once did? It's possible that hunters cannot agree and disparate groups fall into civil war. Does one hunter side fight for humanity and another for the "right" to abuse the mortal populace? Or do all groups simply wage war over a selfish slice of the pie, just as monsters once did? Do bystanders become the *new* hunters, going against the monstrous heirs of the new order?

The end of the world doesn't need to mean the end of your game. The path is wide open and the territory uncharted.



CLEANSING FIRES

Overview: As civilization crumbles into anarchy, supernatural creatures operate openly, claiming victims and running death camps to house their prey. The old order is gone, and with it the need for restraint. Now is the time to rise up and take the bastards down, cleansing the city — and perhaps the world — of evil.

“Cleansing Fires” is a scenario that emphasizes the Zeal Virtue. In the final days, the monsters and supernatural creatures grow desperate, throwing away their disguises and political power struggles. Now they fight for survival any way they can. The characters have a chance to throw the monsters down and prevent their survival, clearing their city of the supernatural so that predation and horror finally cease. Negotiation and redemption are no longer priorities — it’s all-out war. This is a straightforward, fairly linear story of warfare. Complexity doesn’t derive from events, it arises from the personalities and actions of the hunters themselves, and from the choices they make.

THINGS FALL APART

Society has collapsed. The corruption of the supernatural, hidden under the skin of civilization for so long, has finally burst forth and infected reality. Undead hordes rampage through the streets, killing and destroying in mindless rage. Vampires wage war with each other over precious blood and slaves. Witches throw off their guise of normality and attempt to win over armies of acolytes in their quest for ultimate power. Monsters and nightmares rip cities apart and murder thousands, even millions, in pursuit of incomprehensible horror. The truth is revealed, showing the sick and impossible face behind the lies.

Government, business and society crumble with the revelation of the supernatural. Riots and mass suicides are just the start. What really causes society’s downfall is the disintegration of its support structure as hysterical and angry citizens stop obeying the rules and believing in the law. Like a nation that’s lost a war, society lies in ruins, and formerly happy and affluent citizens scramble for basic survival.

Across America — across the world — the situation is the same. Governments still control weapons and armies, police and firemen, but now they are openly in the service of dark powers. The media, if it still exists, broadcasts nothing but propaganda. Since few cities have electricity, though, few can hear the lies anyway. Money means nothing, prestige means nothing, hope means nothing. All that matters is food, shelter, weapons and endurance.

Hunters are not protected from civilization’s destruction. They might even contribute to it by exposing the secrets of the supernatural. Their jobs are gone, their homes destroyed, their families starving. All that they had sought to protect has been washed away in a sea of chaos and blood. Storytellers might wish to spend several chapters simply dealing with matters of mundane survival, testing the mettle of the imbued in a world in which the certainties and protection of modern life has disintegrated.

A CALL TO ARMS

As the imbued attempt to survive and protect themselves and their loved ones, a bigger picture emerges. Monsters are in the open now, preying upon surviving humans. If the hunters want to make a real difference, they have to protect their homes. The Storyteller can use any of the following hooks to get the scenario started.

- A character's friend, family member or ally is captured by a monster, becoming a shapechanger's brood mare or a demon's worshipper. In rescuing the friend, the hunters see that the creature dispenses with secrecy and seeks to rule the ruined city with an iron fist. The only way to fight back effectively against the creature (and the other horrors overtaking the city) is to use the same tactics.

- Another hunter asks the characters for assistance in fighting back against monsters, or he gives them information about the way the horrors now operate. The needy hunter is convinced that the rules have changed; it's time to fight the darkness publicly. The characters must be careful, however, that their ally's information isn't slanted toward her own agenda.

- Hunters of the Zeal creeds or with a high Zeal rating receive a vision, in which the city is razed to the ground. From the rubble erupts a geyser of blood, from which leap hideous, shadowy forms. Out of the wreckage emerge human forms, wreathed in flames and wielding weapons of light, to do battle. Many of the human forms are destroyed, but the shadows are wiped out. In the aftermath, the flaming warriors lead a stream of refugees to the outside world. Along with the vision comes a message: "STAND AGAINST THE DARKNESS," "WIPE THE CORRUPTION FROM THE WORLD," or "CLEANSE THE EARTH THAT IS TO COME."

It's time for the last and final battle with the forces of darkness, and this time, the imbued have an advantage they didn't enjoy before. All the impediments to the hunt that civilization once posed are gone. No police to avoid. No skepticism to overcome. No need for secrecy. This is open warfare, not a covert operation. The characters are free to break the old rules with impunity.

Of course, so are their opponents.

CHOOSE YOUR TARGETS

Just what kind of opposition the hunters face in this war depends on the events of your chronicle to date. As Storyteller, you've already developed a picture of what creatures and forces exist in the characters' home city, forces they might have contended with frequently in the past. New creatures and dangers appear and take advantage of the chaos, and some established horrors could fall in the first days of anarchy. But for the most part, the creatures arrayed against the hunters now are those that have dominated the chronicle to date. What changes is the methods and openness of these creatures, who can now commit atrocities without the need for secrecy.

The biggest thing that's likely to change is the creation of *territories* — districts openly controlled by a monster or group of monsters, where any human survivors are enslaved or murdered. Almost all the creatures of the World of Darkness need humans for some reason, be it food, energy or simply for the gratification of desires. Similarly, creatures crave power and influence, perhaps in hopes of saving themselves, or because ruling a pocket kingdom or tattered empire satisfies their obsession with dominance.

Naturally, it is important that each such domain have its own feel, in keeping with the nature of its new "lords." A visit to enemy territory should be a powerful and unnerving experience for the characters. Go all out when conveying the magnitude of what has occurred. On top of any descriptions you feel are necessary, don't be afraid to use a lot of props, costuming, visual aids, music and set dressing to get just the mood you desire. A neighborhood destroyed by roving shapechanger packs that rule by force should have a distinctly different feel from a domain under the sway of a hypnotic bloodsucker, for instance, and both should be quite different from a neighborhood living in fear of



swarms of malicious ghosts. If the players feel as though the scene or session could just as easily be taking place in any other location you've used in the past, something has gone very wrong. Fortunately, unless the chronicle is set entirely inside one of these territories, you should have the time to prepare appropriately for sessions that take place "on the inside," which should help keep such experiences fresh and compelling.

Never forget that having Narrator characters portraying residents and victims is your most valuable tool for providing the players with information on these territories, not to mention underscoring the horrific nature of the fate that has befallen the hapless residents. Work with your Narrators well in advance to come up with a set of strange behaviors, taboos or other quirks based on the adjustments their characters have made to living under monstrous rule. Unless the creature exerts absolute control every second of every day, you're better off mixing small habits with more serious ones when you can. While having all the residents reduced to shuffling drones chanting the name of their master can be extremely unsettling, it also severely limits the amount of possible roleplaying and interaction. It can be just as eerie to have a seemingly normal conversation with a resident, only to have him make a special sign every time the name of his master is mentioned or suddenly recite a long passage or prayer from memory whenever a certain topic comes up.

What's more, try to tailor the characters' habits to the type of creature that is in control. Not only does that add to the depth of what has happened, but it also might provide perceptive characters with some additional information about the ruling creature's strengths and weaknesses. For example, residents of a territory controlled by creatures with superior senses might have abandoned all verbal communication for fear of being overheard, writing down everything instead. Hapless mortals controlled by a powerful ghost who died in a fire might all exhibit the creature's insane phobia of open flame.

In game terms, the hunters' ability to exert Influence in a monster's territory will probably suffer. For each territory, the Storyteller may give the creature in control special Territory Influence to represent its control over the area. The good news is that in order to maintain the level of control implicit in its Influence, the monster must keep his domain somewhat organized. This means that even if things are in total chaos everywhere else, and Influence is useless throughout the rest of the city, the Influence ratings of others (such as hunters) should drop to only one Trait less than the domain's master's Influence. The bad news is that any attempt to use Influence in the territory now calls for a Social Challenge against the Social Traits of the monster in control, and if the player fails the challenge, the monster may learn of her attempt. Also, external Influence lasts only as long as the institutions it affects still exist. If a warlock replaces the police with steam-powered robots, any attempt to use Police Influence within its domain is futile.

Example of Play: A powerful bloodsucker has taken control over most of Philadelphia's Old City, gaining an effective Territory Influence x3. Sam, a Martyr holed up in a safe house by the art museum, needs to obtain more ammunition for his team, and his supplier in University City is accepting only gold. Luckily, Sam has a few connections at the US Mint downtown (Bureaucratic Influence x 2) who seem to still be on the job, and he has bought and blackmailed his way into a lot of "friends" on the Philadelphia Police Force as well (Police Influence x 3). Since the mint is within the Leech's territory, Sam will need to win a Social Challenge against the monster's Traits to use his Influence. If he succeeds, the degree of control the monster has established will actually work in his favor. Things are safe enough in the Old

City that his erstwhile allies are willing to look the other way for a little bribe. On the other hand, things are chaotic enough that he cannot count on the same cooperation from the police that he used to. His Police Influence is reduced to two Traits (one less than the monster's general Influence over the area). And if the Leech decides to supernaturally control the police or replace them with agents of its own, Sam's Influence would be totally useless.

Storytellers might want to keep a tally of which territory is controlled by what and what their goals and drives are, or they might want to delegate strategic planning for each territory to a different Narrator so that the territories act more chaotically. A portion of the pre- and post-session planning should go toward discussing the various schemes and how the different masters are reacting to what the players and other creatures are doing.

The following creatures all have reasons for taking territories throughout the city. Other beings might also try to stake out turf for their own reasons — or they could simply rampage through the city, killing and destroying anything in their path.

Ghosts/Walking Dead: The spirits of the dead draw strength from human emotion, especially negative emotion. Ghosts might assemble cults of followers, possessing hosts temporarily and drinking the pain and misery of their slaves. Walking dead are inclined to simple destruction and the fear and terror their victims feel. The territories of these beings are probably the most disorganized and chaotic of all, focusing on graveyards, cemeteries and disaster sites.

Vampires: The bloodsuckers might now act openly, without fear of discovery, but they must also compete with their own kind for precious blood. Competition between vampire warlords is likely to be fierce, and well-armed ghouls and slaves patrol various territories. Some vampires set up “blood camps,” prisons for survivors and mortals. Established in defensible locations such as hospitals and jails, these camps are packed with mortals who are (comparatively) well fed and protected — until undead commandants come to claim more victims.

Shapechangers: Were-creatures draw power from nature rather than from humans, so they set up territories in parks and wild spaces with their sacred places at the center. Shapechangers do need humans for one reason, though — as breeding stock. While were-creatures are unlikely to try to expand their territories, they aggressively raid human refuges for new breeding captives or simply for prey.

Warlocks: Manipulators and wizards lose many of their advantages, influence and purpose with the fall of the civilization that concealed them. But now they can practice their magic freely, unfettered by the collective disbelief of human civilization. In these horrific End Times, people realize that *anything* is possible. Warlocks left in the city attempt to gather acolytes who can assist in magic rituals and protect their masters from danger. Witches might also gather legions of followers with promises and bribes, but they aren't likely to be aggressive or expansionist against one another, unless a warlock sends out raiding parties to steal food, supplies or artifacts needed for his magic.

BLOCK BY BLOCK

Once the characters have identified their enemies, the task is simple. Uncomplicated, that is, but not easy. Taking back the city is a matter of strategy, supply lines and zones of control — reclaiming locations that monsters control and destroying their power bases. The hunters are guerrillas taking on an invading army, or they are invaders themselves. They need every weapon they possess to reclaim their home.

Taking a territory involves more than just guns and fight scenes. The creatures controlling and patrolling these kingdoms have a great deal to lose, and they guard

themselves with barricades, soldiers and mortal hostages. The three Zeal creeds have different roles to play in this war, and an effective campaign against the darkness demands that hunters do what they do best.

Of course, skill and personality have at least as big a role here as a hunter's creed does. A Martyr might possess tactical skills and an insightful mind, and play the part of a leader in the war. An Innocent may care so much for the refugees in her care that she does anything to protect them, fighting attackers in the manner of a Defender. The creeds have natural *ability* in some areas, thanks to their Virtues and edges, but that doesn't override the identity of a person or make a hunter "wrong" for the role he assumes.

Avengers: These hunters are the front-line soldiers of the war, the first in and the last out. With their offensive, combat-focused edges, Avengers are best suited to one-on-one combat with the supernatural and its minions. Before that point is reached, however, Avengers need to focus on gaining access to an enemy's territory, scouting out possible avenues of entry (and escape), and on slowly wearing down monsters' followers and defenses. These are the most hazardous roles a hunter can play in this scenario, and an Avenger who is careless or lacks dedication will soon be killed. Avengers who want to survive must explore their anger, that need for vengeance burning away their human weaknesses—and running the risk of losing their humanity in the process. The war will bring many opportunities for these hunters to gain Conviction and increase their Virtues. Madness might be an inevitable side effect of victory.

Defenders: While Avengers are charged with destroying the enemy, Defenders have an equally important task: protecting the home front. The protectors of the war, Defenders must safeguard hunters' own territory from attack and reprisal. That role places them in constant danger—and might drive them to madness before the war is done, too. Defenders are also invaluable in rescuing people who have been captured or enslaved. Rescuing the downtrodden is a challenging obligation, involving anything from silently leading chains of refugees through the sewers to ramming barricades with trucks and pulling hostages out through a hail of gunfire. And once refugees are safe, Defenders must continue to protect them so that former captors (or other creatures) cannot take advantage again.

Judges: If Avengers are soldiers and Defenders are guardians, Judges are officers and leaders, the tactical planners and decision-makers of the war. It falls to Judges to decide how to conduct attacks, what defenses and resources to target, and how to weaken the enemy before the final confrontation. This role demands data and intelligence. Judges need to endanger themselves to ferret out enemies' secrets. Judges might also decide how a group's resources are best used and maintained, and they must consider how to keep the imbued supplied and protected. Judges aren't as prevalent on the front lines as Avengers or even Defenders are, but their role is demanding nonetheless. As the commanding officers of the war, Judges are called upon to make the hard choices—who undertakes missions, who gets rescued, who gets left behind, who lives and who dies. It's a role that can take a heavy toll on a hunter's morale and sanity. Judges might be pushed to the edge and beyond by the burden of their responsibilities.

WAR STORIES

As the scenario progresses, the characters might make headway against the monsters, retaking territory and casting down their dark masters. But a story that's simply raid after raid is both boring and unrealistic. The following are suggestions for

THE OTHER CREEDS

“Cleansing Fires” emphasizes the role and purpose of the Zeal Virtue, to wipe away the infection of the supernatural from this world and prevent it from corrupting anything that rises anew. But the other creeds and Virtues have a part to play in this war. There are many opportunities for non-Zealot characters to get involved in this scenario.

The Merciful: These hunters focus on aiding the war effort through intelligence, diplomacy and providing hope when all seems lost. Innocents can gather information through scouting raids and negotiate with one enemy to fight another. Martyrs could rally hunters and ordinary people alike, filling hearts with hope through courage and sacrifice. Redeemers might tend to the wounded and persuade enemies to surrender or withdraw with the promise of forgiveness or salvation.

The Visionary: War is more than fighting, it’s information. It’s *purpose*, and that’s what these hunters provide. Hermits can hang back and gather insights with their edges, providing the data needed to draw up battle plans. Visionaries can develop long-term strategies, coordinating their fellows and making sure each battle is a step toward winning the war. And Waywards could inspire and direct from the front lines, demonstrating savage power. (The price of that effectiveness, though, could be ordinary people, their lives used as bait or weapons.)

developments and events to keep the story moving, issues with which hunters must deal on the way to the final chapter, the final battle with the darkness.

Supply Lines: To continue the battle, the imbued need constant aid and supplies: weapons, medicine, equipment and simple food and shelter. These resources must be found or created, but searching for them can take up all the “spare” time a hunter has. And once these necessities are found, they must be protected lest the enemy — or other humans — steal them.

The Home Front: Casting an undead tyrant down is just the beginning of the job. An enemy’s territory can’t be left empty — it’s a resource that must be used by the imbued, lest it be claimed by a different enemy. Once a territory is taken, it must be populated with refugees and survivors, the human supporters and aides of the imbued. Resources must be found to feed, clothe and shelter these people. Fresh water and sanitation must be provided, and borders must be protected from invasion.

New Faces: As one enemy is cast down, another might take its place. New monsters could enter the city looking for a chance to grab power, while others (such as the walking dead) might simply be *created* in the wake of a battle. At the same time, potential new allies could appear, from imbued outsiders come to fight for the characters’ cause to courageous refugees prepared to go against the enemy. But even these allies can pose problems as precious resources are stretched ever thinner to provide for them. And do other hunters *really* have the same goals as the characters?

Black Allegiances: Faced with attack from the imbued, supernatural beings might band together to fight back. While these creatures hate each other and compete for followers and resources, they fear or hate the characters more. Besieged enemies might attempt to turn the tables, launching attacks on hunter territories, or bringing in allies of their own to bolster forces for a decisive strike.



WAR'S END

The purpose of this scenario is simple: Take back the city and cast out or destroy supernatural evil. War is never a simple affair, however. The imbued are likely to suffer terrible casualties, even if they gain the upper hand. Success demands sacrifice and brings with it new complications and obstacles. Ultimately, it comes down to a single bid — a last stand, a final battle against the darkness.

No matter how the war has been fought thus far, this is the hardest battle of all. The final enemy (whoever that might be) has had the opportunity to conserve its resources, to prepare and plan for this, its last stand. The characters, on the other hand, have fought battle after battle in their campaign and are bound to have paid a heavy price in sanity and lives.

As Storyteller, you need to make this battle *matter*. It's time to pull out all the stops and show the hunters the fight of their lives. The enemy fights dirty and desperately, and the imbued must do the same to have a hope of winning. This is the final battle of a war story, and not everyone can make it out alive. In fact, *none* of the characters might live. That's not necessarily a bad thing. Tragic endings are all too possible in **Reckoning**. Even if all the imbued die, the battle might not be lost. Not if the refugees and survivors they have cared for rise up and fight in memory of their protectors.

When the dust settles and the last of the dead have been carted from the battlefield, what then? Do the Messengers appear in a burst of light and say "well done" to the survivors? Probably not. What's more likely is that nothing happens at all. The city is cleansed. If other imbued elsewhere have successfully waged similar campaigns, the country might be free of supernatural contamination. The hunters have the remains of a society under them, a nation of survivors who seek leaders. The characters can protect that realm and work to stop the darkness from returning.

Even if the imbued win their battle, the war isn't necessarily over. Who knows what's happening across the rest of the world? Perhaps the end is inevitable; nothing can hold it back. The hunters might have liberated their city only to have it be destroyed by an unstoppable Armageddon. Or perhaps the city is an island of weak and fading light in a sea of darkness and corruption. And, of course, there's the chance that the characters fall in battle and the city is not claimed from monsters.

You decide what happens after the battle. The imbued have done all that they can; all that a band of fragile and fallible humans can achieve in the final days. What happens after that might be out of their hands. All they can hope is that their blood, sweat and tears have wiped the sins from one world and consecrated a new, pure one.

GLIMMER OF HOPE

Overview: As the world burns, a miracle happens. A power is unleashed that can heal monsters of their corruption, returning them to a normal human state. The imbued become the custodians of this power as supernatural creatures flock to their city to be saved, or the characters might seek to destroy this new and awesome power.

"Glimmer of Hope" emphasizes the Mercy Virtue. The coming Armageddon shatters the normal boundaries of reality. Events that were once impossible now come to pass. The possibility of healing or pardoning monsters is a reality, and the characters control that power. But this gift can't be used on a whim. It's a dwindling resource that must be guarded and protected. To the characters falls the responsibility of deciding

which monsters may be saved and which must be turned aside — where mercy can be offered out and where it must be withheld. The story focuses on interaction between hunters and inhuman beings, on hard choices and heavy responsibilities.

MIRACLE IN THE AFTERMATH

In the terror of the final days, it's more than just human civilization that falls apart. The wall between the possible and impossible crumbles, as does the barrier between the worlds of the living and dead. Anything can happen, and a miracle occurs in the characters' city. It's known as the *glimmer* — a power that can remove the taint of corruption from a supernatural creature. Under the glimmer's light, a monster is cleansed of darkness, forgiven its sins and returned to humanity or allowed to pass into peaceful oblivion.

"Glimmer" is just convenient shorthand for describing the power of this scenario. You can call it anything you like, or not call it anything at all. Just what form the glimmer takes is for you to decide based on the needs of your chronicle. Here are a few suggestions.

- An extremist Merciful hunter develops the power to heal monsters as an Exalted-level edge. This hunter may be one of the players' characters or a Storyteller character. You should design an edge to encompass the effect, using the powers in other sourcebooks as guidelines. *Expiate* is a possible model, only the power at work here could be more lasting. This edge may come from deep inside the possessor or from an external source (see **Fall from Grace** for more details). The power seems benevolent, but it could be a gift from a corrupt or evil source that uses the imbued to weaken the supernatural opposition.

- An extremist Redeemer battles a powerful creature, perhaps a demon, warlock or other being with knowledge of spirit worlds. Both fall, and in their death throes a fountain of light erupts, birthed from their spiritual power. This version of the glimmer is a stationary field of mystic light. It emits a kind of spiritual gravity that draws supernatural corruption to itself. It might be tall enough to reach into the sky like a skyscraper or small enough to illuminate a room.

- A scientist or technically minded hunter discovers a "cure" for supernatural corruption, a serum made from unusual ingredients. The treatment shouldn't work, but somehow — in a world where the laws of physics and life fray — it does, purging even dead flesh of supernatural toxins. The cure cannot be made easily, however. Perhaps it's based on chemicals found on a site of mystic activity, or only the inventor can make it work and she isn't sure how.

No matter what the glimmer is in your chronicle, the hunters are the ones who learn of its existence. Perhaps the possessor of the power comes to them for help, or a vision from the Messengers drives them to the discovery. Maybe they're the ones to create this miracle in the first place. In any case, the characters are the first to find out about the glimmer. The first, but not the last.

HEALING LIGHT

Whatever form the glimmer takes in your chronicle, it possesses the same properties — qualities that shape the course of the scenario. (You may, of course, decide to change these features to better suit the story you want to tell.)

It turns monsters into normal humans. Exposure to the glimmer eradicates any supernatural properties of a being. (Depending on the form the glimmer takes, some creatures might be immune. It's hard to inject a ghost with a serum, for example.)



Vampires, warlocks, shapechangers and other “altered humans” become normal people with no supernatural powers of any kind. Ghosts and the walking dead simply die, their souls going on to some kind of final reward. Demons, nightmares and other “possessors” are expelled from their hosts (and pass into oblivion like ghosts), or they merge permanently with their hosts to become normal humans.

It has no effect on the imbued. Hunters are completely unaffected by the glimmer. If it is a physical effect like a serum, it has no toxic or beneficial result when administered. If it is a spiritual phenomenon like a column of healing light, it is not affected by edges and appears no different to second sight than to normal senses. Even if the glimmer has an effect on normal people, hunters are immune. They are the custodians of this power, not the recipients, and they get no benefit from it.

It is a limited resource. The glimmer cannot simply be used to cure every monster in the world. Every time the power is applied, its strength is diminished. The serum cannot be remade. The light fades. The possessing hunter’s vitality and sanity erodes. Only a select number of monsters can benefit from the glimmer, and it falls to the characters to decide which creatures should be saved. Most of the drama in “Glimmer of Hope” comes from the weight of responsibility, in deciding which monsters will be saved and which will remain damned.

It attracts monsters. Somehow, the supernatural creatures of the world become aware of the glimmer’s existence. This information might spread by mundane means, such as rumors of its power spreading through vampire or demon circles. The glimmer might send out a spiritual signal of sorts just by existing, so that monsters become instinctively aware of its properties. In any case, creatures soon learn of the glimmer and come to the city to take advantage of its power.

The characters are in control of immense power. But they can’t simply use it for their own advantage or as they please. They must decide which monsters are deserving. And they can’t simply hide it and not use it, because monsters come to them demanding to be healed (or to destroy it).

PILGRIMAGE

Attracted by the promise of salvation, creatures flood into the city, demanding or begging for the release of the glimmer. The hunters have to deal with this influx, controlling not only access to the source but also the damage creatures inflict on human refugees and inhabitants.

The following are some of the issues that hunters face. Others may emerge, depending on what beings come for the glimmer’s blessing.

If monsters flock to the city, they have to stay somewhere. What effect does this sudden influx of people — not just monsters, but perhaps their human followers — have on the ruined infrastructure of the city? Monsters such as vampires and ghosts that prey on humans to survive can’t just stop while waiting for a chance at redemption. The hunters have to police their émigrés and keep them from destroying what’s left of the city.

Where do the creatures stay in the city? Some don’t need shelter or food, but they want to stay close to the glimmer lest they miss a chance to be blessed. A shantytown of monsters and their followers might spring up around the glimmer’s location. Such a town is a tense, dangerous place as its inhabitants vie for position and precious resources.

Monsters who come to the city might not leave their old grudges and agendas behind. Rivals and bitter enemies could be forced to wait side by side for access to

the glimmer. Violence between creatures is inevitable, and such clashes are bound to have a toll in human lives. Perhaps those outbreaks even injure or destroy other creatures who deserved the glimmer's healing.

Of course, some monsters refuse to wait meekly for their turn at forgiveness. They try to take control of the glimmer in some way, by seizing it or capturing the hunter who channels the power. More subtle creatures might attempt to win the characters' favor, directing the glimmer toward their allies and minions and not at their enemies — or vice versa. The hunters need to defend the glimmer from the efforts of those who would steal or corrupt it.

And what of the glimmer's recipients, the creatures who are blessed? These newly normal humans need food, water and shelter, resources that are already scarce in the damaged world of the final days. They also need protection from their enemies. Monsters (or other hunters) might seek to strike at a recovered monster now that she has lost her power and defenses.

GUARDING HOPE

Not every creature in the world wants to be saved or cured by the glimmer. Many monsters are so corrupt that they relish their supernatural existence and perceive the glimmer as a threat. The glimmer is destruction, not a reward, and they seek to lash out against it any way they can. They aren't alone, either. Some hunters might attempt to destroy the glimmer rather than permit the forgiveness of their hated enemies.

Protecting the source from attack plays a major part in this scenario. The following are some possible issues involving the power's defense.

The simplest form of attack is, of course, direct physical force. Less subtle monsters or creatures with powerful physical abilities might try to destroy the glimmer. This could mean murdering the hunter who channels the power or blowing up the location that houses the nexus. Depending on the monsters involved, this could be a surgical strike by an assassin or demolitions expert, or an all-out assault by a horde of creatures and their followers. This kind of direct physical challenge can be bloody — and not just for the hunters. Normal people and saved monsters might be injured or lost in the battle.

Cunning monsters such as vampires, warlocks and demons may put subtle schemes into play. A monster might strike at the glimmer by capturing a hunter's family, threatening to kill loved ones if the power is not destroyed. Another option might be to distract the hunters with minions or other monster groups, leaving the glimmer unguarded. Monsters who influence governments, police or other institutions — even as damaged as these groups are in the final days — could use them to harass, arrest or destabilize the characters, their allies or their friends. In response,

REDEMPTIONS THAT DO NOT BEGET INTERVENTIONS

The administration of the glimmer and the possible redemption of a monster is likely to be an incredibly intense situation for all involved. Enjoy it, but be careful. Just as the hunters find themselves persecuted for trying to recondition monsters, players might accidentally cross the line while trying to portray their commitment to redemption. As always, it is important that the It's Just a Game, No Touching, Be Mindful of Others and Have Fun rules stay firmly in mind, especially during such powerful scenes as these.



hunters must draw on their own ingenuity and diplomatic skills rather than firepower and edges. They have something or someone personal to lose.

Depending on the nature of the glimmer, the hunters might not be able to defend it against certain attacks. If the power flows from a crack in reality or a spirit realm, the imbued cannot enter such an alien plane — but monsters such as demons, ghosts and werewolves *can*, and might strike at the source directly. The hunters might have to approach former or current enemies for aid, asking one set of monsters to fight another. But even if other creatures agree to help the characters, they're bound to demand a price. Can the imbued grant the blessing of the glimmer to creatures who don't deserve it — or withhold it from beings who do — in order to buy another day of protection?

Beyond monsters, another threat is posed to the glimmer: *other hunters*. Some chosen (especially those of the Mercy creeds) see it as a boon, but others see it as a get-out-of-jail-free card being handed out to monsters who deserve punishment. These angry hunters want to either destroy the glimmer and any imbued who protect it or use it as a way of stripping creatures' powers before murdering the beings. Like monsters, enemy hunters might be overt or subtle in their attacks on the glimmer. Guardians might have to justify their actions to former allies in a calm debate, or they might have to find God45 before the Wayward detonates a dirty nuclear bomb in the middle of the monster shantytown. How far are the hunters prepared to go to defend themselves against erstwhile allies, and how do monsters react to inter-hunter conflict?

THE QUALITY OF MERCY

The control and protection of the glimmer falls primarily to characters of the Mercy creeds. Through the use of the source, the Merciful can fulfill personal goals: to heal the supernatural corruption of this world and lessen the taint that spills into any subsequent world. It's a daunting task — the Merciful can never *completely* heal the world or negate the supernatural — but if the *right* monsters can be redeemed, if enough can be done with the glimmer before it fades, then the hunters *might* make a difference.

The glimmer is limited in power and comes closer to exhaustion every time it's used. Ultimate responsibility for it, for making sure it's used as effectively as possible, goes to Merciful hunters.

Innocents: These hunters are the peacemakers and diplomats of the imbued. They might communicate with supernatural supplicants who seek (or demand) the glimmer's touch. When monsters come to the glimmer like moths to a flame, they could be confused, angry, violent or suspicious. Innocents can calm these beings, allay their fears that the glimmer is bait or prevent them from lashing out at hunters and other people. As more creatures gather around the hunters, Innocents can spend even more time interacting with them. Their duties might include administering to the growth of a shantytown, mediating a peace between rival creatures or helping monsters evade attacks and reprisals from enemy hunters. Innocents can be the "public face" of the glimmer, bearing the attention, temptation and aggression of unnatural supplicants.

Redeemers: No hunters have a more terrible task than Redeemers. They may feel responsible for deciding which creatures benefit from the glimmer's power. Not every hopeful can be saved, and only the most deserving may feel the power's touch. Redeemers are charged with picking and choosing between monsters, using their

edges, knowledge and instincts to decide whom to forgive. Some Redeemers might choose to bless those creatures who are truly repentant, who have worked to push back their own damnation and who wish for nothing more than the return of their humanity. Other hunters might decide to use the glimmer on monsters who are truly evil and corrupt, to remove their hideous power from the world and neutralize their influence. No matter what criteria Redeemers use, no matter what advice they take, the final choice is theirs alone. And if the wrong creature is touched by the glimmer, they must take responsibility for the outcome.

Martyrs: The blessing of the glimmer is a process, almost like a 12-step program to forgiveness. Innocents handle the intake of monsters, Redeemers control the actual moment of healing, while Martyrs take charge of the aftereffects, the return of former monsters to humanity. This is a time of confusion, weakness and simple emotional suffering for a creature. No hunters understand pain and suffering better than Martyrs. It's up to these imbued to counsel saved monsters in what it means to be human, to protect them in their time of weakness and to bring them back into the community. Martyrs also play a strong part in protecting the glimmer from attack, fighting alongside Zealots or on their own, and inspiring their comrades — and perhaps even the ranks of former creatures — with their courage, devotion and sacrifice.

THE LIGHT FADES

The power of the glimmer is immense and world-changing, but it's not infinite. Sooner or later, depending on how heavily the characters draw upon it, the phenomenon is spent. The healing energy runs dry, the serum reserves are exhausted or the extremist is consumed by her own power. The glimmer is gone and the story draws to a close.

THE OTHER CREEDS

"Glimmer of Hope" emphasizes the role and purpose of the Mercy Virtue, to heal supernatural beings and in turn diminish their influence upon this age and that to come. But the Merciful aren't alone in their fight. Other creeds have a part to play in this scenario.

The Visionary: Using the glimmer on every monster that stumbles across one's path isn't a wise way to share a miracle. To have a true impact on the world and to make a *real* difference, hunters of Vision can direct the glimmer where it can best be used. Hermits can gather information about monsters and supplicants to the power, finding out which creatures have honest intentions and which are hopelessly corrupt. Visionaries look at the big picture, predicting what effects will follow the salvation of *this* monster rather than *that* one. As for Waywards, while the mad hunters *can* use their gifts to guide the use of the glimmer, they're likely to use it as a weapon, a means of crippling the powers of the supernatural.

The Zealous: Some see the glimmer not as a beacon of hope, but as an abomination that must be destroyed or as a resource to be exploited for their own ends. Adherents of Zeal are called upon to fight such aggressors. Avengers can take the fight to the attackers, striking at monsters and rogue hunters. Defenders protect the glimmer and the Merciful from harm, holding attackers at arm's length until help arrives. Judges determine battle plans, mapping out tactics to remove a threat while minimizing the toll on mortals and hopefules alike.



A story that results in the loss of the glimmer ends in a climax. The hunters have fought to control the power of the miracle, to heal willing (and perhaps unwilling) monsters of their unnatural state, and to make the final days less terrifying. They've probably suffered losses and setbacks, but they've (hopefully) also had triumphs. Have their actions made the next world a cleaner, less corrupt place?

If you don't want to wrap up the story there, a number of stories and situations can spin out of "Glimmer of Hope." Consider the following issues:

- What happens to monsters who are human again? Can they be integrated into normal human society (or whatever society exists after the final days)? Some of them might have a change of heart once they experience all the bad aspects of being mortal and seek to return to their damned state, or take revenge on the hunters. Others might become targets of their old enemies or of humans who want to punish their former dictators. Will the hunters protect them from such enemies or let them reap what they have sown?
- What about the monsters who didn't receive the glimmer, who were rejected or turned away by the hunters? These creatures might seek revenge on the people who denied them salvation. Alternatively, some might pursue other means of redemption — means that could be true blessings or false promises held out as a monstrous trick. What do characters do if they learn that a demon is undoing all of their efforts by drawing repentant monsters back into damnation?
- For that matter, are there truly other means of salvation out there that the hunters can put to use? The glimmer was a singular power, but it might not be unique. If another similar force exists, the hunters might be able to find it and avoid any mistakes made before. Of course, other forces — from monsters to other hunters to former creatures of darkness — are desperate to find and control this new power, too.

WINDS OF CHANGE

Overview: The old rules have broken and now seemingly small changes can sweep the world. When normal humans are motivated to hew closer to the imbued and acknowledge the protectors in their midst, it's a golden opportunity to make a real difference. But to do so, the imbued must finally unify and dedicate themselves to a single cause.

"Winds of Change" emphasizes the Vision Virtue. The imbued have always been held back by the inability of humanity to recognize the corruption of the supernatural. But what happens when normal folks start to believe? With the power of the people behind them, hunters can act openly, coming together to fight the darkness. Before that can happen, though, the imbued must overcome their own differences and agree on a goal that can be achieved, a dream that can be realized. This story focuses heavily on interaction between hunters, other imbued groups and ordinary people. The emphasis is on planning, leading and organizing, on aiming for a lofty goal and doing whatever it takes to reach it.

A CRACK IN THE MIRROR

For millennia, humanity has lived in ignorance of the monsters that lurk at society's heart, that influence nations and that commit atrocities behind the scenes. This ignorance is due to supernatural powers of subterfuge and disguise, and to those beings' cunning and secrecy. But the most important factor is humanity's reluctance

or inability to believe the truth, even when evidence is shoved in people's faces. When confronted with the supernatural, humans tend to rationalize it away, lapse into hysteria or simply deny the truth. They *want* to remain blissfully ignorant.

Not anymore.

"Winds of Change" proposes that normal people are ready to believe in the supernatural. This change might come about as a result or side effect of civilization's destruction in the final days, or this newfound resilience could be the *trigger* for the final days and the tearing down of the old order. In either case, something has stripped away the human tendency for amnesia. Now when normal people encounter the supernatural — whether they see a ghost in a deserted house, survive a vampire's attack or watch footage of a rampaging werewolf — they accept it for what it *is*, not for what they've been told it *should* be.

Of course, all this change doesn't mean that humans can suddenly detect monsters or see through supernatural tricks. That capacity remains beyond people, as the burden of hunters who activate second sight. Nor can mortals read hunter code or resist a monster's mind-control powers. Yet, the underpinning of the world's corruption — the inability of the human masses to even see that corruption exists — is gone. This upset of the status quo changes the world forever.

EARLY DAYS

The hunters already believe in the supernatural, of course, so they aren't directly affected by the change in the world's rules. The scenario starts with the dawning realization that reality has changed, that the characters can take advantage of this new situation. The following are possible hooks to draw the hunters into the story, but many possibilities exist.

- In the aftermath of a confrontation with the supernatural (be it peaceful or violent), the hunters are surrounded by people who want to know what the hell that creature was, or what just happened. Accustomed to onlookers panicking or rationalizing away the supernatural, characters might be startled to realize that people believe the evidence before their eyes, or at least don't instantly reject the notion of the inhuman.
- Footage of a monster fighting a hunter appears on the Internet or on television. The corrupt controllers of the media pull the images and bury the story, but the damage is done. As they go about their daily lives, the characters encounter people debating what the footage really depicted and whether supernatural forces were actually involved.
- When a creature (perhaps a warlock or demon) uses its powers openly in a confrontation with the characters, mortal onlookers don't run. Indeed, a mob of angry people attacks the creature, forcing it to flee or perhaps giving the hunters a chance to take it down.

This change in people's beliefs might occur slowly over the course of several stories, or it might happen overnight. In either case, the change is not just local but global. Stories of humanity's acceptance of the supernatural surface in the media and in underground networks such as hunter-net, and propagate by word of mouth.

Open acceptance of monsters means that the greatest obstacles facing the imbued — their inability to act openly or gain support from their friends or society at large — are eliminated. The characters are still vulnerable to attacks and reprisals from enemies. They might still have to work in secret to remain safe, but now they



DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

The fading of the masses' disbelief isn't a completely positive development for the imbued. Some creatures — most notably demons, warlocks and goblins — were actually hampered by disbelief before. The great secret suppressed their supernatural powers and forced them to work quietly. With disbelief gone, these creatures are free to do as they wish and put overt plans and powers into motion. Hunters might set out to achieve bold new goals only to find some of their opposition even more powerful than before.

can attract followers and aid, explain their actions to the people they love and aim at important goals.

HEARTS AND MINDS

Individually, each hunter is a lone soldier, peacemaker or planner. But with a legion of human supporters and believers behind them, the imbued can now become *guides* — leaders of an army, a political revolution or a spiritual reawakening. If hunters can convince normal people to aid them, to lend support to a specific goal, the chosen can make real headway in the struggle. This is a time for hunters (especially those of the Vision creeds) to set their sights on major, concrete objectives. It's an opportunity to stop maintaining the status quo and start making a real *difference*.

It's likely that characters make large-scale plans as soon as they realize that they can gain the support of the masses. If they don't, other imbued groups elsewhere do, and the characters see the results. Perhaps news reports show riots in other cities, with the ringleaders holding up banners bearing hunter code symbols. A politician is torn apart by a mob after other hunters expose him as a monster. A cult movement forms around a charismatic preacher who claims that monsters are real. You can use scenes such as these to light a fire under players, driving home the point that the old rules have changed and that great things are possible.

Of course, if hunters want to draw on the strength and support of the people, they need to *win* that support. People might no longer dismiss the supernatural out of hand, but they still need to be convinced that accusers are right — and be persuaded to aid in any effort. It doesn't help that people are still *afraid* of the supernatural and likely to panic when they encounter monsters. If the characters want converts, they need to challenge public fear by motivating normal humans to fight back.

Fear can be overridden with outrage. If the characters know of a particularly vile or abhorrent creature, revealing its true nature could infuriate people such that they're more incensed than terrified. If the hunters prove that a prominent figure such as a politician or celebrity is a murderer, child molester or ruthless manipulator *before* revealing his monstrous nature, mobs might respond by swarming the creature rather than running away. Once the furor dies down, hunters can try to rally the frightened but (hopefully) convinced and invigorated humans to their cause.

Alternatively, characters might try to gain supporters more peacefully and rationally, convincing them of the truth intellectually without exposing folks to danger or terror. For instance, hunters could gather evidence that the supernatural is real — photographs, videotapes, witnesses, even the corpses of monsters — and present it all to appropriate people. Taking this material to journalists is one possibility, but it has its dangers. The media might still be controlled or manipulated by monsters

and their followers, and hunters' efforts might only attract unwanted attention from dangerous enemies. Another possibility is for the chosen to personally convince friends, families and personal contacts, everyone from co-workers to church members. Word of mouth spreads from there, from other people who are trusted.

Many other methods exist for hunters to gain support. They could form a cult, preaching the truth about the supernatural. They could rally a street gang around themselves, recruiting new members as society crumbles. They could even set up a website with photos, documents and forums, almost like a "civilian" version of hunter-net, tapping into the rising tide of online belief.

However the hunters approach the task, the process of gathering followers can occupy several chapters of the story. Once they win support, however, they need to use it. They need a *purpose*.

PERSISTENCE OF VISION

Goals, plans and foresight are the province of the Vision creeds, which might have been intended by the Messengers to lead the imbued into the final days. That's not a role that the other hunters have always accepted, of course, or that Visionary hunters have understood themselves. Before now, the business of planning and thinking about where the imbued are going has often taken a back seat to simple survival, and long-term goals have given way to short-term successes.

With humanity emerging from its blindness, however, the situation has changed. It's time for Vision to take command, and for the leaders of hunters to take their rightful place in imbued society. But the three Vision creeds are very different in their approaches to the hunt, other imbued and humanity. Those differences affect the goals such leaders choose and the relationships they form with supporters.

Hermits: Separated from their fellow imbued by crippling headaches and mental static, Hermits naturally prefer the company of ordinary people (when they must endure company at all). Hermits are best suited to working directly with hunters' supporters. As the imbued form a support network, Hermits can work within that normal community, sharing information and relaying the general mentality of the masses to other hunters. Hermits are also vital to gathering the details needed to develop plans and goals, using their edges and capabilities to learn and disseminate information. The challenge for Hermits is balancing any loyalty to ordinary friends and associates with the overall sacrifice and loss demanded by hunters' plans. Can individual losses be tolerated for the greater good?

Waywards: Just as Hermits can work within society, so are the near-psychotic Waywards connected to the imbued. Waywards tend to be contemptuous of other hunters, but at least they recognize that other chosen have a function. Normal humans, however, might be considered little more than cannon fodder or bait. That attitude that can only drive supporters away. A hunter group led by a Wayward is likely to work toward a violent and bloody goal, and it will probably suffer great losses in the struggle to reach it. Even other hunters may be expendable to a Wayward, and imbued allies could become enemies once the destructive plans of a Wayward are revealed. But in the final days, when monsters rampage and civilization crumbles, the savage inspiration and power of a Wayward might be the only means of fulfilling a goal.

Visionaries: Making up the only truly sane creed following the Vision Virtue, these hunters are perhaps best suited to lead both imbued and ordinary people to a dream. With their predictive and information-gathering edges, they can uncover



THE OTHER CREEDS

“Winds of Change” focuses on the Vision creeds, revolving around lofty goals and the organization required to meet them, but the Vision creeds are not alone in this struggle. Other imbued have a part to play in attaining the final reward.

The Merciful: To these hunters falls the responsibility of protecting and nurturing both hunters and supporters — not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually. Innocents can lift the spirits of battle-scarred and frightened imbued with edges and sheer optimism, and they can fan the flame of hope in human supporters. Martyrs can inspire ordinary people with their courage and readiness for sacrifice and protect folks from the terrors of the supernatural. Redeemers can heal the sick and give strength to the weak, inspiring loyalty in the most cynical of skeptics.

The Zealous: As the imbued work toward their goals, monsters lash out against the upstarts. The Zealous must be ready to protect their leaders. Avengers are charged with bringing the battle to the enemy, taking out creatures that stand in the path of the imbued agenda. Defenders protect planners and information gatherers from attack, and shield allies from harm. Judges can work closely with Visionary leaders, developing tactical plans to win the battles that take the imbued closer to winning the war.

the data needed to formulate plans and strategies, while their humanity and inspirational powers can rally support. But with that purpose and presence comes responsibility, more so than for Hermits and Waywards. A Visionary must be the interface between hunters and their supporters, able to lead from the front lines *and* advise from safety. No other hunter better understands the price that must be paid to reach important goals. A Visionary must justify that price to both imbued and human allies. This is the role for which seers were created, perhaps the purpose the Messengers always intended. It’s a thankless and punishing task, however. One that can destroy a leader before her aspiration is fulfilled.

AIMING HIGH

Great things can be achieved only if hunters strive for them. Until now, most hunters have had to settle for small victories and minor achievements, unable to make truly significant changes to the world. But now the status quo has changed, the impossible is possible. Difficult and dangerous, but possible. With the backing of supporters and the potential to gain more, hunters can move beyond their old arenas and set their sights on meaningful and important accomplishments. Such as? Well, that’s up to the characters to determine. The central purpose of “Winds of Change” is to put the imbued in a position to achieve great things, assuming they have the inspiration to find a meaningful goal.

A major goal is nothing more or less than *changing the world*. This is action on a national or even international scale. Rather than exposing the mayor’s monstrous nature, the characters try to bring down the entire government. Instead of disrupting vampiric control of a crime family, the hunters attempt to break the bloodsuckers’ control over the country. And rather than be satisfied with small glimpses of the truth and the meaning behind the imbuing, the chosen settle for

nothing less than knowing *everything*. Major goals are conceivable only once hunters know that the masses can accept the truth. To actually attain these goals — to change the world irrevocably even as it crumbles around their ears — the imbued must gain the support of not just a few dozen or even hundreds of normal folks. They must gain the support of thousands. This is not something that can be accomplished alone or at once. To attain a major goal, the hunters must ally with other imbued across the world.

INHERITING THE EARTH

If and when the characters decide to aim for a major goal and realize that they need help, “Winds of Change” moves into its final phase. To reach their goal, the imbued need to recruit other hunter groups (and their human supporters) to the cause. The greater the goal, the bigger the network needs to be. In the process of bringing hunters together, the characters may accomplish something even more important — the creation of a hunter society. And even after the goal is reached (or perhaps even if the plan fails), that society of hunters, working openly to change the world, remains in the wake of the final days. Perhaps that unification was the unseen, greatest goal possible.

The final phase of “Winds of Change” is open-ended. The story could wrap up quickly as the hunters overcome every obstacle in their path, or they might be cut down before their crusade even begins. More likely, though, is a story told through several chapters, with the imbued slowly marshaling their allies. The story ends when their goal is finally fulfilled or lost. Here are some factors to consider when developing the chronicle.

Keeping the Faith: To maintain the support of normal people, hunters need to do more than simply use edges and fight monsters. People must be protected from danger and kept safe from the chaos and terrors of the final days, even if it puts hunters at great risk. If some supporters are lost to violence, the characters have to work all the harder to preserve the loyalty of those who remain.

Communication: If the hunters want to recruit the help of other imbued, they need to reach those hunters somehow. Hunter-net is one means of contact, but it might not function as society falls apart. Characters might have to resort to simpler methods such as telephone calls, face-to-face meetings or even letters. Other options include using the media, sending messengers or the use of edges and creed capabilities.

Negotiation and Compromise: The characters are not the only hunters trying to make a difference in the final days. Other groups work toward their own goals and may have little or no interest in cooperating with the characters. Indeed, other groups might try to persuade the characters to abandon their goal and dedicate themselves to a different agenda. If the imbued want the help of their fellows, they might need to make formal alliances and deals, quid-pro-quo arrangements to help both groups achieve their desires.

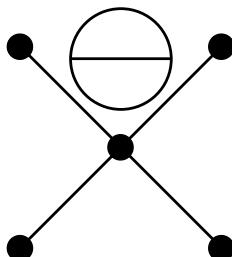
Killing Rivalries: Some hunter groups have no interest in compromise or agreement. Their goals are intrinsically opposed to the characters’. If one group seeks to make an alliance with demons to uncover the mysteries of reality while another seeks to wipe demons from the face of the Earth, there can be only conflict between them.

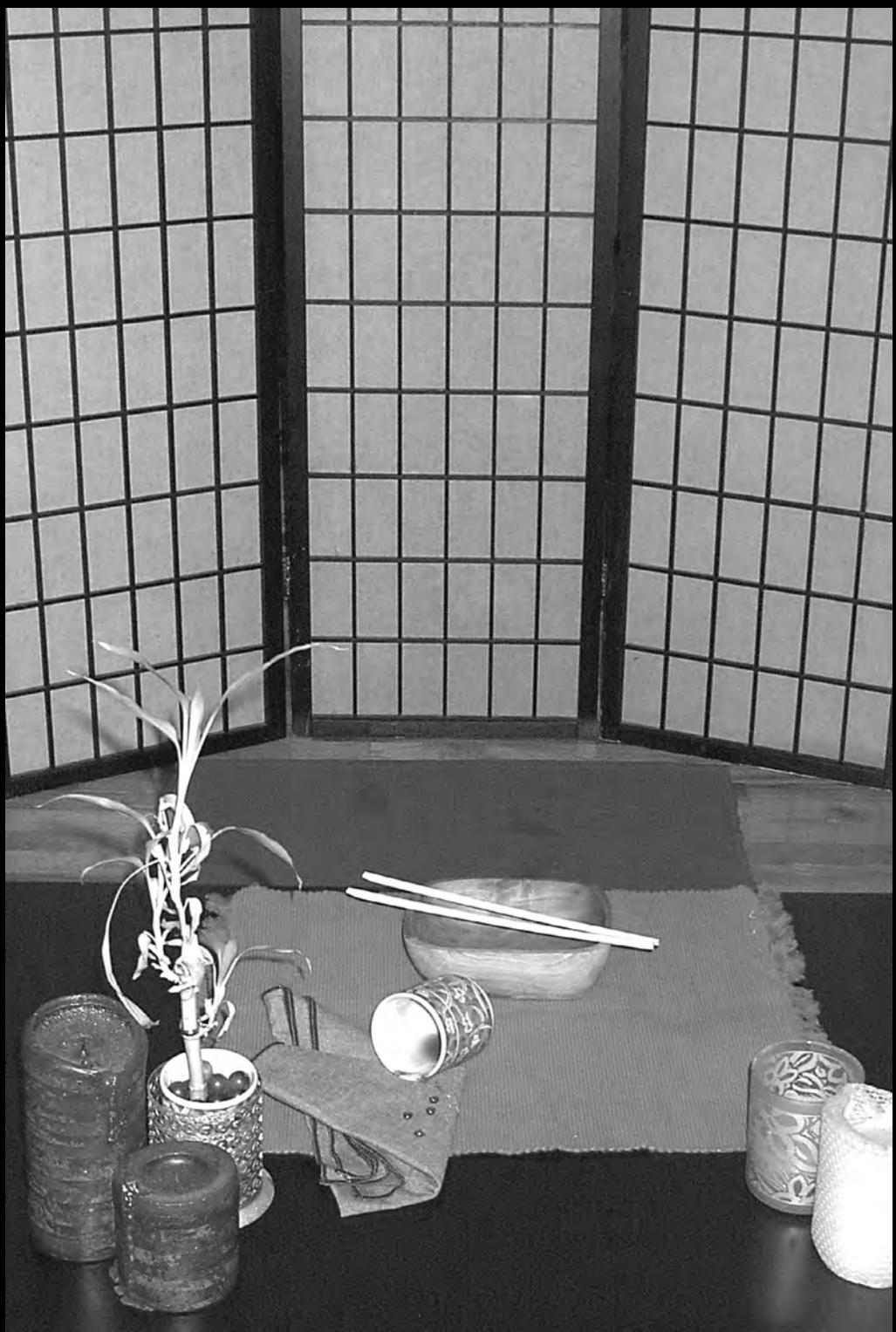
Monstrous Reprisal: Of course, the supernatural corrupters of the world do not sit idly by while humanity unites against them. Even in the final days, monsters



influence society, control gangs and police forces, and they possess terrible powers. United and public hunter groups make themselves—and their supporters—targets.

Success: If, despite all these obstacles and complications, the hunters finally reach their goal and change the world, you don't have to stop there. Anything is possible in the final days. Backed by a web of imbued and a nation of supporters, perhaps the characters can do the impossible. Maybe they can build a new world for humanity, free reality from corruption and truly inherit the Earth. At the very least, they can try.





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CHAPTER SEVEN: THE SIXTH AGE

INTRODUCTION

The Wheel of Ages turns. The Eye of the Demon Emperor is visible in the heavens. The signs and portents have come to pass and the Age of Darkness draws to a close, but most of the Kuei-jin, the Hungry Dead, remain ignorant of the turning of the Age. They either do not see or choose not to see the future that awaits them, but the Wheel cannot be stopped. The passing of the Fifth Age comes, whether the Demon People acknowledge it or not. The signs are there for even the blind to see. The Age of Darkness is over. The Age of Sorrow dawns. The end has come.

The end for the **Laws of the East** setting is a part of the eschatological lore of the Kuei-jin. The Asian vampires believe that time moves in cycles, transitioning from one Age to the next. There have already been several such Ages, five to be exact, and the world sits on the cusp of the coming Sixth Age. Exactly when the Sixth Age, the Age of Sorrow, will arrive is a matter of considerable speculation and debate among the Kuei-jin, but the time for debate is over. The Sixth Age is not only coming, it has arrived.

This chapter describes different ways for you to bring about the arrival of the Sixth Age in your own chronicle. It can come as a climactic ending to an existing chronicle, or you can create an entirely new game to play out the ending foretold by the sutras and traditions of the Demon People. You can even use the material in this chapter as inspiration for creating an all-new **Laws of the East** chronicle set in the Sixth Age itself, after the world familiar to the Kuei-jin has changed irrevocably. The power is in your hands, as it always has been.

That includes the power to decide exactly how the Sixth Age arrives in your own World of Darkness setting. This chapter presents three different versions of the end of the Fifth Age and the beginning of the Age of Sorrow. You can choose any one of them or take elements from each to create your own version of the Sixth Age for your chronicle.

STORYTELLING IN THE SIXTH AGE

This chapter provides advice and information useful to Storytellers who are considering or planning to end a **Laws of the East** chronicle with the advent of the Sixth Age. It offers advice on how to wrap up a chronicle, how to run a successful conclusion to your chronicle and things to consider while planning and running the final games. It also includes ideas on modifying the existing **Laws of the East** rules and game systems to suit particular types of ending scenarios and follow-up chronicles set in the Sixth Age.



NEW SYSTEMS & MECHANICS

Ending an ongoing *Laws of the East* chronicle allows you a greater opportunity to tinker with the game's systems and the capabilities of the characters. The arrival of the Sixth Age may include dramatic alterations in the nature of the Kuei-jin and their powers, in the relationship between the material and spirit worlds, in the flow and character of Chi and many other things. Some system changes that normally wouldn't be suitable for an ongoing chronicle can work just fine as temporary changes heralding the end. After all, if a particular change doesn't work, it's fairly easy to change it again, saying that the whims of karma are fickle in the Age of Sorrow. In the end, no system change matters that much, since the chronicle will soon be over anyway.

Here are just a few ways in which you can change the *Laws of the East* systems to suit your own particular vision of the end. Some of these systems come into play in the scenarios described earlier in this book while others are just jumping-off points for your own version of the Sixth Age.

Chi

The power of Chi is one of the key elements of *Laws of the East*. It is the power that sustains the Hungry Dead — and other shen as well. Wars are fought over control of the dragon nests and the dragon lines that connect them. Mortals are valuable to the Kuei-jin for the Chi they possess, making them the prey of the vampires. Chi is also tied to the changing of the Ages. The passing of the Age of Legends came when the August Personage of Jade cursed the Wan Xian, taking away their ability to breathe in Chi from the very air, forcing them to steal it from others to survive, transforming them into the Wan Kuei, the Ten Thousand Demons. Another change in the Age could affect the nature of Chi and the Kuei-jin ability to gather and use it.

Consider some of the following potential changes in the nature of Chi and its use:

- **Chi Imbalance:** The type of Chi available to the Kuei-jin changes, favoring either Yin or Yang Chi. For example, as the Sixth Age dawns, Yang Chi might become increasingly rare, while Yin Chi, the energy of darkness and stillness, predominates. As a result, it is harder for the Kuei-jin to maintain their Chi balance. Temporary imbalance becomes more common, which means that they risk damage whenever they expend Chi. The rarer type of Chi becomes far more precious, and Kuei-jin are likely to struggle to secure supplies of it. Consider a shortage of Yang Chi in the Sixth Age, where surviving hengeyokai or *hsien* safeguard the few remaining pockets. In a Sixth Age with a shortage of Yin Chi, wild Kuei-jin might hunt ghosts and stalk the dead for the power to cool the fires that burn within them.

A lack of a particular type of Chi also predisposes the Kuei-jin more toward permanent Chi imbalance. If Yin Chi is plentiful but Yang Chi is rare, the Kuei-jin are more likely to become *ch'ing shih*: decayed walking corpses, hideous to behold. A Sixth Age glutted with Yang Chi begets wild and passionate Kuei-jin, ruled by their emotions and capable of spawning dhampyrs (perhaps so many that the remaining human population begins to shrink). This can create a very different atmosphere for a chronicle that takes place during the Sixth Age.

- **Demon Chi:** The Age of Sorrow is the rise of the Yama Kings and the Demon Emperor, and it might lead to their dominion over the Middle Kingdom. As the power of Yomi grows, the world's Chi becomes increasingly tainted or defiled, Demon Chi. This is the power of the P'o soul. In the Sixth Age, all of the world's Chi



may become Demon Chi with only a slight amount of Yin- and Yang-aspected Chi remaining, or none at all.

This has an inevitably corrupting effect on Kuei-jin. If Demon Chi is the only source of Chi available to them, then the Kuei-jin can gain and store only as much as their P'o rating allows. This means that Kuei-jin with greater P'o will feed and survive more easily, while those who rely strongly on Hun will be forced either to allow their Demon Soul greater influence or to become the prey of more powerful Kuei-jin.

- **Scarce Chi:** The Sixth Age may be a time when Chi drains from the world like blood from a corpse, leaving the Kuei-jin to starve and eventually fade away. As the August Personage denied the Wan Xian the power to breathe, so the Sixth Age might limit or deny the Wan Kuei the ability to feed. Rather than a particular kind of Chi becoming scarce, as described previously, *all* Chi becomes harder to find, or at least less accessible to the Kuei-jin. This means the Hungry Dead must more carefully horde their Chi and are more reluctant to spend it unless absolutely necessary.

- **Restricted Feeding:** A variation on the Scarce Chi option is that the Age of Sorrow may limit the Kuei-jin ability to feed on sources of Chi. This has a number of variations of its own, depending on just how restricted Kuei-jin feeding becomes.

If bodhisattvas and arhats lose the ability to acquire Chi through osmosis, then they must find prey to feed upon once more. This makes the dragon nests worthless to the Kuei-jin as a source of Chi, though they might remain useful as gateways between the worlds. (See the discussion on the Wall and the Spirit Worlds that follows.) Having more elder vampires hunting places a greater strain on the Wan Kuei's chosen prey, humanity. Scarlet screens will have to work overtime to conceal the increased feeding and provide sources of Chi for the Kuei-jin. Competition for prey might cause friction between different factions of vampires and more hunting might attract the attention of those who hunt the Kuei-jin.

Limiting Kuei-jin to obtaining Chi from blood makes them much like Western Kindred in terms of feeding. The more subtle means of breath draining and osmosis denied them, Kuei-jin must hunt prey like the Westerners do. Even the most exalted ancestor needs vessels to provide blood. This creates even more risk of drawing mortal attention, as well as more direct competition for sources of Chi. If it continues over a long period of time, scarlet screens devoted to providing vessels and the art of aspecting a vessel's Chi will become more common among the Kuei-jin to meet their needs.

- **Restricted Use:** Along with restrictions on obtaining Chi, Kuei-jin might face limits on their ability to channel and use the Chi that they do obtain. The nature of the Sixth Age might require more Chi to fuel the supernatural Disciplines and other powers of the Hungry Dead, allowing Kuei-jin to use those abilities less often than before. How restricted vampires become depends on the amount of Chi their powers now demand. At first it might be a relatively slight increase, an additional Trait of Chi to use a Discipline, for example. This restriction may increase, with an initial outlay of Chi between two and five Traits needed to activate any particular Discipline, or by Chi costs increasing by 50% to 100% (or even more).

Increasing Chi costs might not affect uses of Demon Chi, in which case it becomes the more economical option compared to some Disciplines. Of course, using Demon Chi comes with its own risks, but some Kuei-jin will gladly take them in order to save their Yin and Yang Chi for sustenance. This will make the Demon Arts more common and effective among Kuei-jin, perhaps the first step on the road to corruption by the Yama Kings.



THE WALL AND THE SPIRIT WORLDS

The connection between the material and spirit worlds is a vital part of the existence of the Kuei-jin and the key to many of their abilities. The Sixth Age might lead to an imbalance between the spirit worlds and the Middle Kingdom, making the Wall harder or easier to overcome, with particular consequences for the Kuei-jin.

- **Raising the Wall:** An increase in the strength of the Wall might come from diminishing levels of Chi in the world or from an increasing gulf between the material and spiritual worlds. The Wall might strengthen to a particular point and then stop, or it could become so thick that travel between the worlds is impossible. See “The Rising of One Hundred Clouds” for an example of what might happen if the Wall cuts off contact between the worlds, trapping the Kuei-jin in the Middle Kingdom.

An increase in the strength of the Wall affects not only the ability of the Wan Kuei to step from one world to another, but also the ability to feed on ambient Chi, since the difficulty is based on the local Wall rating. This imposes a form of limited feeding, leading to an increased need for Chi among the arhats and bodhisattvas of the Hungry Dead.

- **Lowering the Wall:** Alternatively, the coming of the Age of Sorrow might batter down the Wall between the worlds, or at least weaken it to the point where traversing them is relatively easy for anyone with the means.

EXPERIENCE AND ENLIGHTENMENT

The Dharmas of the Kuei-jin — or at least those of the Fivefold Path recognized by the August Courts — are dedicated to achieving a state of enlightenment. The ending of a chronicle might signal the end of the characters’ Dharmic journey toward that enlightenment. A time of ending can also be a time of revelation and insight that guides characters toward the enlightenment espoused by their Dharmas.

Such momentous lessons in the characters’ unlives can speed up advancement, in terms of both Dharma and experience. This allows characters the opportunity, however briefly, to experience the power possessed by arhats and ancestors of the courts, to wield greater status and influence. It can be like a time-lapse film of the characters’ progress, bringing them to a point where they can face the challenges of the end of the Age.

More opportunities for both auspicious occasions and acts of blindness fit in with the theme of endings and transition. They are “interesting times” indeed for the Kuei-jin, facing young jina with unprecedented challenges and opportunities. Part of the ending story arc might be the characters reaching toward enlightenment or turning away from it because of the demands of their unlives.

By the same token, the momentous events happening all around the characters (and to them, in many cases) are good reasons to grant additional Experience Traits, allowing the characters to learn from the hard lessons that face them. You can even waive things like training, saying that even the Kuei-jin have to learn by doing and acquire their skills the hard way in such times of crisis.

If you’re planning on continuing your chronicle into the Sixth Age, consider the effects of increased Dharma and Experience on the characters. Your troupe might retire them to become the arhats and bodhisattvas of the new Age, or you can start a new chronicle in which the characters function on an entirely different level than before because of their newfound insight and abilities.

THE SECOND BREATH

A vampire’s unlife begins with the Second Breath, when the Kuei-jin’s divided spirit escapes the torments of Yomi and rends the Wall to re-enter its corpse (or another



corpse) and take up existence as one of the Hungry Dead. Whether the Second Breath is an opportunity for redemption and enlightenment or a terrible curse, it is the source of the Kuei-jin. In the Age of Sorrow, the nature or very existence of the Second Breath could change, and change the Kuei-jin along with it.

• **Fewer Return:** In the Sixth Age, fewer souls escape from the clutches of the Yama Kings and manage to return to the Middle Kingdom to rise as Kuei-jin. A sign of the dawning Sixth Age is that fewer Kuei-jin come into being. As they meet Final Death, fewer vampires are left in the world. Eventually, the number of Wan Kuei destroyed might exceed the number that come into being, diminishing their ranks. Having fewer Running Monkeys might seem positive to the elders of the Courts, but over time it means fewer subordinates to take on the various tasks of the Courts.

• **None Return:** At the extreme end of fewer souls returning from death is the point where none return, and no new Kuei-jin come into being. This could spell the eventual end of the vampires. Although they are eternal, even the Wan Kuei meet Final Death in various ways. With none to replace them, the ranks of the various Courts grow fewer with the passing of the years, until the number of Kuei-jin is reduced to a mere handful. This attrition could take centuries, or even millennia, but eventually it will happen. If the Kuei-jin are still faced with enemies like the Shih and the Kin-jin, their inability to replenish their ranks could lead to their end that much sooner.

• **More Return:** On the other hand, the Age of Sorrow comes when more souls escape from Yomi and rise as the Hungry Dead, swelling the ranks of the Kuei-jin. Their numbers grow, perhaps too rapidly for the slow-moving Courts to adjust to the influx of new vampires. More Running Monkeys means more potential for imbalance, chaos and even rebellion as different factions recruit among the new Kuei-jin and try to create power blocks of their own within the Courts. Having more vampires also increases the chances that mortals will discover the existence of the Kuei-jin and take action against them. The ancestors of the August Courts might see the appearance of many more Kuei-jin as an opportunity, sending more off to support the Great Leap Outward. Kuei-jin holdings outside the Middle Kingdom could also become places where more Kuei-jin arise among the local Asian populations.

• **All Return:** At the extreme end of this scenario, all souls with ties to the Middle Kingdom become Kuei-jin after death. This quickly and vastly changes the nature of Kuei-jin existence, as the Hungry Dead quickly become known throughout Asia and the world. The mortal authorities are soon swamped by the rising number of savage and hungry vampires, and the existing Kuei-jin are quite unable to hunt and tame so many *chih-meh*. Even though many of the new vampires are destroyed, those killed by them also take the Second Breath. The Age of Sorrow becomes a terrible war between the living and the dead, and between the lands of the Middle Kingdom and the outside world as well.

• **Servants of the Yama Kings:** In addition to the preceding options, the nature of the Second Breath might change in the Sixth Age. Perhaps the souls that escape Yomi do not escape at all, but are released by the Yama Kings to become not only Kuei-jin, but *akuma* dedicated to their service. These vampires are sworn to the Lords of Yomi before their souls even leave hell, so they rise in control of their vampiric nature to take up their duties to corrupt the Kuei-jin of the Middle Kingdom and bring them into the service of their masters. In this case some of the newly created Kuei-jin might be “*akuma-born*,” or all Kuei-jin who arise after the changing of the Age might be in the service of the Yama Kings. Soon they will join others of their kind, and it will only be a matter of time before the unclaimed Wan Kuei are a hunted minority.



Inauspicious Signs

The signs of the impending Sixth Age are everywhere, for those with eyes to see them. Indeed, the signs have been there for some time, but many Kuei-jin have been unwilling — or unable — to see them for what they are. It is only recently that the signs of the end have become unmistakable, though there are still those who do not wish to believe.

Storytellers can use these and other inauspicious signs of the impending Sixth Age in the buildup to the end of a **Laws of the East** chronicle. In order to maintain some amount of mystery in your chronicle, we recommend creating your own signs of the Sixth Age in addition to those presented here. Not every character should be aware of what's going on, and even your most enlightened and insightful characters should receive (at most) only two different hints. Although the decision of which characters to tap for visions or hints is yours, Merits and Flaws can be a big help (especially ones like Medium, Haunted, Oracular Ability and Nightmares). Characters who spend a good deal of time visiting the Yin or Yang Worlds might also make good candidates for hints about the Sixth Age.

ENDING A LAWS OF THE EAST CHRONICLE

"All good things must end," as they say, and although it's possible for a **Laws of the East** game to run on for years, even the best games grow stale and tired over time. You've told what stories you can with the characters. They have changed and developed, perhaps becoming quite powerful and influential in their own right. The players have grown familiar with all the elements of the setting and the chronicle, and they have had a hand in creating and shaping them. Sooner or later, it comes time to bring your story to a close and move on to other new and exciting stories you and your players can create. It's time to end your chronicle.

Let the Sixth Age begin.

THE RISING OF ONE HUNDRED CLOUDS

Throughout their tormented existence, the Kuei-jin have sought peace and enlightenment, harmony between the divided halves of their nature: Hun and P'o, Yin and Yang. There are many stories of bodhisattvas finding the hidden path to the slopes of Mount Meru and attaining the enlightenment of the Hundred Clouds, but are they just tales, stories for damned souls with no hope of redemption? With the portents of the Age of Sorrow all around them, the Kuei-jin hope that there is more to their Dharmas than merely holding the demon within them at bay another night, and it seems that they might be right.

INTRODUCTION

It ends, not with a roar, but with a sigh, like the resigned last breath of a dying man. The Sixth Age arrives in a form quite unexpected by the Kuei-jin, and they are forced to adapt to a diminished existence in the Age of Sorrow, or to accept Final Death at last.

The changing of the Age comes with the strengthening of the Wall between the Middle Kingdom and the spirit worlds. It grows from a barrier to an impassable gulf, closing off the world of spirit from the world of matter. The *shen*, denizens of the Yin and Yang Worlds, withdraw. With the ascension of the Demon Emperor, the Yomi World is sealed off and the Yama Kings are no longer a threat to the world. The inhabitants of the Middle Kingdom, Kuei-jin and mortal, are left alone with an uncertain future.



BUILDING THE DRAGON WALL

The first sign of the coming Sixth Age is the strengthening of the Wall between the material world and the spirit world. Kuei-jin should notice a gradual increase in the Wall rating of certain areas, making access to the spirit worlds more difficult. It begins first in places where the Wall ratings are the highest. Some areas with initial Wall ratings of 8 or 9 become completely impassable as the Wall rating exceeds 10. The Wall between the worlds is simply too thick for any force to overcome it. Kuei-jin who have passed through the Wall in those places might need to travel to find a place where they can return to the Middle Kingdom.

What begins as a troublesome oddity becomes a serious concern when the Wall strengthens again, and again. Soon all urban areas are completely impassable, and even the wild places and dragon nests have their Chi reduced from wellsprings to mere trickles. Passing through the Wall isn't easy anywhere, and Kuei-jin notice that the Wall seems thicker, the spirit worlds more distant, as if they were drifting further out of reach.

THE WEIGHT OF DEATH

The strengthening of the Wall has a number of effects on Kuei-jin in the Middle Kingdom and throughout the world. Feeding becomes more difficult for elder Kuei-jin, cut off from the Chi of the spirit worlds. The ability to traverse the paths of the spirit worlds becomes less reliable, depriving the Kuei-jin of a valuable weapon in their arsenal. An increasing number of vampires look to their elders for guidance, but they receive none.

With the situation surrounding the Two-Fang Serpent Plan becoming increasingly unstable and Kuei-jin around the world concerned about the unexplained growth of the Wall, the Ancestors of the Courts are expected to act. They do, but not in the ways that are expected.

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

The events of this part of "The Rising of One Hundred Clouds" are best incorporated into an ongoing *Laws of the East* chronicle as background material and a new wrinkle on whatever challenges the characters already face. For example, the characters might notice an increase in the difficulty of overcoming the Wall in some places at first, followed by even greater increases. Perhaps an attempt to enter or leave the spirit worlds fails unexpectedly, forcing the characters to improvise.

Nor are the Kuei-jin the only ones to be affected by this sudden shift. Spirits and other *shen* known to them are suddenly absent or more difficult to contact. Those places where *shen* have typically gathered grow deserted.

THE CLOUDS RISE

As the Wall becomes impassable, ancestors of the Kuei-jin courts begin to disappear. The realization of the dawning Sixth Age has proven a tremendous moment of insight for the eldest of the Kuei-jin, allowing some of them to achieve the enlightenment of *dāh*. They have ascended to the Hundred Clouds. Like the spirit worlds, they are leaving the Middle Kingdom, and the younger Kuei-jin, behind. For other elder Kuei-jin, the rising of the Wall means something else. The Yama Kings call the hidden *akuma* of the courts home, and some ancestors walk into Hell willingly, while others are dragged there by the demons to pay their debts to the Lords of Yomi. Either way, they will not return.

If the characters have an elder mentor, ally or even enemy, they should be witness to that bodhisattva's departure. The Kuei-jin comes to the characters and



tells them that the Cycle of the Great Wheel is moving on, that the next Age is coming, and that it will be their destiny to deal with it in their own way. Even if the elder was antagonistic toward the characters before, the time for enmity is past. Then the ancestor steps across the Wall, heedless of the local difficulty of doing so, and vanishes into the spirit worlds, never to be seen again. This is an excellent opportunity to start the end with a dramatic and possibly pivotal scene for your characters — savor it if you think your players will appreciate it.

FOLLOWING THE BODHISATTVA'S PATH

The departure of so many ancestors and bodhisattvas throws the Kuei-jin courts into chaos. Younger mandarins and jina attempt to step in and take up the reins of power, but many factions are seeking to do the same. During this time, the Kuei-jin are divided, following various goals. Some wish to follow in the footsteps of the ancestors to find their path to Mount Meru. Others try to seize the opportunity to attain power and influence, even control over the courts now that the ancestors are gone. Finally, some Kuei-jin see the separation of the spirit worlds as a sign that they will never achieve true enlightenment, or that they will achieve it only through death, so they set about trying to destroy themselves and possibly the world. The characters may try to follow any or all of these paths, and they might get entangled in the efforts of other Wan Kuei.

- **Seeking Enlightenment:** Many Kuei-jin believe that the vanished ancestors achieved the enlightenment of the Hundred Clouds, that they discovered the secret of true immortality and freedom from cursed unlife. These younger vampires diligently pursue the same goal, usually by renewed dedication to their Dharmas and efforts to explore the paths of the spirit worlds before they are lost to the Kuei-jin altogether. There might be an exodus into the Yin or Yang World before the Walls closes them off altogether. Even more Kuei-jin depart the Middle Kingdom, never to return. Extremists and would-be gurus among the various Dharmas become more common.

- **Seeking Power:** The departure of the ancestors represents an unprecedented opportunity for younger Kuei-jin to finally seize power. Some ancestors carefully set their affairs in order and appoint successors to their duties, but others do not, and some successions are disputed. Shadow wars break out among all of the courts of the Middle Kingdom as the mandarins and jina struggle for power and control. If the Great Leap Outward hasn't already collapsed from the growth of the Wall, it almost certainly will once the August Courts turn inward, consumed by their own affairs. The power struggles of the Cathayans can form the basis for an entire short chronicle, or they can quickly erode the structure and traditions of the courts, bringing on the chaos of the Sixth Age.

- **Seeking Death:** Finally, some Kuei-jin are overcome with despair and hopelessness. With the signs of the Sixth Age all around them, these vampires follow the example of those ancestors who chose Final Death over unlife in the Age of Sorrow. They face the Eye of Heaven or find other means of ending their existence. Some Kuei-jin might not deliberately seek death but might find it anyway when their enemies begin moving against them.

THE BARRED GATES OF HELL

Perhaps the most important effect of the Wall's growth is that it closes off more than just the Yin and Yang Worlds. Like the Great Wall protecting China from the invasion of barbarians, it also closes the Middle Kingdom off from the Yomi World



forever. The Yama Kings and their demons are barred from influencing the world any further. Their *akuma* servants are either drawn into Hell to serve their masters there for all time, or they are abandoned to their fate (i.e., inevitable Final Death at the hands of Kuei-jin hunters). Although one of the Yama Kings must assume the throne of the Demon Emperor as foretold, the hosts of Yomi Wan are no longer a threat to the material world.

Of course, this also means that no souls return from beyond the Wall to inhabit their corpses and rise as the Hungry Dead. From the moment the gates of Hell are closed, no more Kuei-jin arise in the world and no more will ever arise. The Wan Kuei are the last of their kind. If mortal souls are still drawn into Yomi upon their deaths, none of them return to tell of it. The fate of Yulan-jin is yours to decide. Perhaps their next Little Death is their last, returning them to Yomi, from which they cannot return. Or perhaps from now on, the Little Death carries them somewhere entirely different.

CONCLUSIONS

You can take this story in several different directions, depending on the outcome you prefer. The Sixth Age can spell the end of the Kuei-jin and all supernatural forces in the World of Darkness, or it might mean only a significant change in the world and in the existence of the Hungry Dead.

RATS IN THE WALLS

Once the Wall has cut off all contact with the spirit worlds, things might settle into a new status quo among the surviving supernatural inhabitants of the World of Darkness. True, there will be no more Kuei-jin taking the Second Breath, and most of the *shen* are gone, but the vampires that remain are still immortal. Even faced with demon-hunters and other enemies, they can survive for quite some time, continuing to follow their Dharmas and their own agendas, while reconstructing Kuei-jin society as best they can. This can lead to a new and different **Laws of the East** chronicle where Kuei-jin are not as numerous or powerful, in a world where they are slowly fading.

THE HAMMER FALLS

The disarray within the courts of the Kuei-jin has not gone unnoticed. The growth of the Wall and the increased need for Chi it created among the elders has attracted the attention of those aware of the Kuei-jin, notably the Shih and the Western Kindred, both of whom see the opportunity to seize upon their enemy's weakness. With so many bodhisattvas and arhats gone, the enemies of the Wan Kuei strike, from Shih demon-hunters to Strike Force Zero agents to Kin-jin coteries, the weakened position of the Kuei-jin invites all manner of attack. In this scenario, it is only a matter of time before the enemies of the Kuei-jin hunt them all down and destroy them.

SERPENT BITES THE HAND

The struggle between East and West, between the Kuei-jin and the Kindred, has been a theme of **Laws of the East** from the very beginning. The conflict heated up with the Great Leap Outward and the Two-Fang Serpent Plan that sent Kuei-jin to the west coast of North America, where they seized control of the cities of Los Angeles and later San Francisco. The invasion provoked a shadow war between the Eastern and Western vampires. Now, with the coming of the Sixth Age, that war draws to a fateful conclusion.



ECHO OF THE VANISHED MOUNTAIN

Those familiar with the tabletop Time of Judgment book have no doubt realized that one scenario, "The Trumpet of Mt. Meru," is missing from this chapter. This is no oversight. Rather, while it is an intriguing vision of the End Times, it was designed primarily for chronicles involving Shih demon-hunters as characters. While Shih characters can certainly be found in *Laws of the East*, on the whole they do not form the basis of entire troupes, and combined with the increased antagonism it fosters between Shih characters and the rest of the *shen*, it was decided that this scenario was best left largely for tabletop play. Therefore, while Storytellers are certainly free to look up "The Trumpet of Mt. Meru" in that book and adapt what they find there for use in their *Mind's Eye Theatre* chronicle, it has not been included here.

INTRODUCTION

The Tremere clan of Kin-jin has become the focus of the conflict between the Kuei-jin and the Camarilla. Not only have the Tremere been instrumental in the Camarilla's counterstrikes against the invading Cathayans but Tremere Oliver Thrace also apparently betrayed the Camarilla to the Quincunx in order to save his own skin. This act placed certain Kindred secrets into Cathayan hands and gave them an advantage over their Western enemies. The Kuei-jin have underestimated Oliver Thrace, though, and their error in judgment will cost them, and the world, dearly.

Thrace has used his time as a "guest" of the Quincunx to study the Kuei-jin and learn about them. He has learned how the Asian vampires come into being through the descent into Yomi and the return to the world of the living when they take the Second Breath. More importantly, he has contacted the Yama Kings and made a devil's bargain. He has pledged his service to Yomi in exchange for the means to ensure permanent defeat for the Kuei-jin in their conflict.

With Thrace's aid, the Tremere perform a powerful ritual that severs the ties between the Kuei-jin and the material world, banishing them back to Yomi forever and preventing any new souls from taking the Second Breath. The Kuei-jin are decimated and, as the ritual spreads, in danger of becoming extinct. The Kindred have won, but they have also been deceived. The destruction of the Kuei-jin and the collection of so many powerful souls grants the Yama Kings what they need to open the gates of the Yomi World. The Tremere become the *akuma* pawns of the Thousand Hells, with Oliver Thrace as agent of the Demon Emperor. The Kindred can either bow to their new master or be hunted down and destroyed along with his other enemies.

RISE OF THE WHITE DEVIL

How early the characters become involved with Oliver Thrace depends on their relationship with the rogue Tremere and with the August Courts of the Quincunx in the chronicle. If Thrace is already a recurring character in your chronicle, then it's likely the characters are acquainted with him when he finally plays his hand. This scenario is particularly appropriate if Oliver Thrace has been a regular antagonist for the characters.

If Thrace has not entered the chronicle in the past, or the characters are not in the good graces of the Quincunx, then you need to approach things differently to introduce the characters to Thrace and the potential threat that he poses. There are



a number of ways to do this, ranging from assignments handed down by the Quincunx, mercenary bounties placed on Thrace's head or even just a request from an ally or mentor to aid in tracking down the troublesome Warlock. Given how important his plans become, it should be fairly easy to get a diverse group of characters interested in his capture before long by dropping a few hints as to his grand scheme.

THRACE'S ESCAPE

Ultimately, despite the best efforts of the characters or their connections, Thrace escapes from the Quincunx and makes his way back to his fellow Tremere. Thrace's means of escape are up to you. What is important is that he makes good his escape before anyone can prevent it, although the characters may pursue Thrace once they discover that he's gone. Some potential escape routes include rescue by *akuma* or fellow Tremere, *Thaumaturgy* rituals, spirit walking or other esoteric means.

No matter what option you ultimately choose, it's important to avoid giving the players the perception that Thrace's escape is inevitable. As soon as your players start to feel as though you're herding them toward a particular outcome, their faith in your chronicle will start to wane. If your characters carry out a well-developed plan to capture Thrace or to prevent his escape, that's perfectly fine. He can always escape later using a different method, after all.

If they manage to keep him confined, preventing the start of the Screaming Plague, this might be the time to start with a different end scenario, rather than inventing an implausible reason for Thrace to disappear. Like reality, a good *Mind's Eye Theatre* game should have infinite possibilities. Nothing is set in stone or fated to happen, so if your characters are able to take Thrace out of the picture, more power to them. The end will still come, just in a different way than they (or you) might have expected.

THE SCREAMING PLAGUE

Oliver Thrace teaches the essentials of the *Breaking the Demon Bonds* rite to other Tremere, at least enough to convince them that the ritual can work and that they need him in order to perform it properly. Eager to eliminate the Kuei-jin threat, the Camarilla grants Thrace permission to perform the ritual, beginning in the occupied areas of California. The ritual breaks the ties holding the Kuei-jin to their mortal corpses, sending them back into exile in Yomi. To observers in the material world, the Kuei-jin simply begin keeling over and rotting away en masse, their spirits dragged screaming back into Hell.

The Wan Kuei call this outbreak the Screaming Plague, and they find that no defense is sufficient to work against it. Kuei-jin meet Final Death by the dozens, then the hundreds, as the Tremere continue the ritual and its power expands. At your discretion, Kuei-jin who attempt to escape into the Yin World might be safe, since after being separated from their bodies, they are really little more than wraiths. If they succeed in doing so, though, crossing the Wall back into the Middle Kingdom still sends them instantly back to Yomi unless the ritual has been stopped.

DRAGGED DOWN INTO HELL

The characters are in the presence of other Kuei-jin — perhaps their elders are welcoming them to the city or hearing a report of their activities — when one of the Kuei-jin convulses, screams in agony and collapses. Almost immediately the Kuei-jin's corpse begins to rot into dust. Then another one collapses, and another. Fortunately for the characters, but unfortunately for the Kuei-jin, the Tremere ritual is most



effective against the elder Cathayans, who carry the greatest weight of years upon them. So the first vampires destroyed by it are the eldest in the city, throwing everything into chaos as the younger mandarins and jina are forced to assume control, only to eventually fall victim to what becomes known as the “Screaming Plague.”

The characters are left without the guidance of their elders, but also with the opportunity to take charge of the situation, if they can. Unfortunately, there is little they can do except try to find out what is happening and help organize an evacuation of the surviving Kuei-jin, since the ritual destroys the eldest vampires on the first night, then slowly builds in power until no Kuei-jin can survive in the area. Younger vampires show signs resembling permanent Yin imbalance after the first day, and after seven days, even the youngest Kuei-jin in the city is destroyed. (This timeline might need to be adjusted to suit the needs of your chronicle. It is advised, however, not to make it too long, lest the urgency of the threat be lost.)

What happens next depends on what the characters do. They might try to find a way to stop the Tremere ritual, seek a cure or defense against the Screaming Plague, or even be willing to bargain with one of the Yama Kings in order to ensure their own survival (and that of their kind).

QUINCUNX COUNTERSTRIKE

If the characters believe (correctly) that Oliver Thrace and the Tremere are responsible for the Screaming Plague, they might want to try to stop the Kin-jin. Kuei-jin may discover the origin of the plague through their own rituals and Occult knowledge, although a means of overcoming the Tremere ritual is a far more complicated matter, particularly given the loss of so many ancestors and mandarins. By the time the remaining Kuei-jin figure out a defense, it could be too late.

One possibility is to strike against the Tremere and stop them from continuing the ritual. The Kuei-jin may make a concerted effort to launch an attack on every Tremere chantry that they can reach. The difficulty is that the ritual has an extensive reach and the Tremere are well guarded by their Camarilla allies, who intend to buy them the time they need to wipe out the Cathayans once and for all. Any attack on a chantry would have to be well coordinated and quick, and the Kuei-jin would face a group of well-armed Kin-jin defenders.

This allows you the opportunity to run some major battle scenes between the Kuei-jin and their enemies. Out of their desperation to survive, the Kuei-jin might even ignore the usual efforts to hide from the mortal world, compromising the existence of vampires among mortals.

DEVIL'S BARGAIN

Although the remaining Kuei-jin might not have either the time or the means to create a defense against the Tremere rituals, they do have one other option: bargaining with the Yama Kings who gave Oliver Thrace the secrets of the ritual in the first place. Doing so requires a *wu* to either travel into Yomi or to summon a Yama King to Earth — neither particularly easy tasks. They can either try to cut a deal with the particular Yama Kings who gave Thrace the ritual (Mikaboshi and Tou Mu), or they can contact one (or more) of the other Yama Kings.

Negotiation with one or more of the Yama Kings opens an excellent opportunity for extended roleplaying. Depending on which Yama King the characters decide to contact, they might have to go to Yomi to negotiate or submit to a test to prove their worth before the Yama King will even hear them. Use your imagination for these tests and for depicting



whichever of the Thousand Hells the King presides over, as the end of the chronicle should be as memorable as possible for your players. The more time you spend planning their confrontation with one of the Yama Kings — whom they've most likely spent the majority of the game trying to avoid — the more your players will thank you for it later.

Raised Upon Ten Thousand Souls

The purpose of the *Breaking the Demon Bonds* rite is actually twofold. First, it allows the Tremere to eliminate the Kuei-jin, sending their souls to Yomi. But it also puts the souls of the destroyed Kuei-jin into the hands of Mikaboshi and Tou Mu, greatly increasing their power. It corrupts the Tremere and binds their souls to the service of the Yama Kings. As the ritual nears its conclusion, the Sixth Age dawns and the Yama Kings come to claim their rightful thrones.

The Tremere chantries where the ritual is performed become broken mirrors, gateways into the Yomi World, as the fabric of the Wall is ripped apart by the passage of so many Kuei-jin torn from their corpses and cast back into Hell. Corrupt Chi wells up from these sores in the surface of the world, spreading outward. The Tremere are the first to be corrupted by it, and they become the demonically tainted servants of the Yama Kings. But that is only the beginning.

At first, nearly invisible waves of corrupt Chi spread a pall across the world. Despair and corruption intensifies immensely. Riots and small wars break out as mortals are influenced by the power of Yomi. Violence and crime skyrocket. The authorities respond with increasingly brutal countermeasures. Despite their best efforts, supernatural beings such as the Kindred can do nothing to stop this tsunami of violence and destructiveness. In fact, they also become caught up in it, as childe rebels against elder, anarch against Camarilla, turning on each other like wild dogs.

Even at this point, characters may try to stem the tide of Yomi's victory. They might be able to seal one of the hellgates created by the Tremere ritual, either with a ritual of their own or through self-sacrifice. If they're successful, they create a small island of untainted Chi, which might become a stronghold to oppose the Yama Kings, if the chronicle continues. Otherwise, it is merely a fading remnant of the Fifth Age that will eventually yield to the inevitable.

As the violence peaks, Yomi begins to flood into the world through the rents and gaps in the Wall, spreading everywhere. Hordes of demons and ghosts are loosed. Millions die at the hands of the creatures of Hell, and their souls swell the ranks of the Yama Kings' armies. The Sixth Age comes and the victorious Yama King (with the greatest number of souls reaped from the rituals) claims the title of Demon Emperor, to rule over the world until the Wheel of Ages turns once more.

FURTHER STORIES

Although this story spells the end of the Fifth Age, it does not necessarily have to spell the end of your *Laws of the East* chronicle, particularly if the characters survived the events of Yomi's ascension. "Serpent Bites the Hand" can form the beginning of an entirely new chronicle set in a future world dominated by the Yama Kings, with the players taking the roles of the few surviving Kuei-jin who still struggle against the Demon Emperor and his *akuma* servants. Alternatively, the characters could be Shih demon-hunters, the last defenders of humanity, seeking to overthrow the tyrant Yama Kings (or perhaps even an alliance between the Shih and the remaining Wan Kuei).



You can run a long-term chronicle of survival and rebellion in the Sixth Age, or a story that culminates in victory over the Yama Kings, ushering in a new turning of the Wheel of Ages, starting the cycle all over again. If you prefer, you could instead run a chronicle where characters exiled to Yomi or the Yin World try to work from within to destroy the power base of the Demon Emperor.

WICKED CITY

For Ages, the Yama Kings have fought and struggled for dominion over souls, for greater power both in Yomi and in the Middle Kingdom. They have sought the souls of the Kuei-jin in particular, souls that were once theirs, but which escaped from the torments of Yomi to return to the world of the living. All of those struggles have been toward one end: the coming of the Sixth Age and the time when one of the Yama Kings would ascend to the throne of the Demon Emperor and rule over the world. That time has come, and the Lords of Yomi — one in particular — are ready to make their move.

INTRODUCTION

Mikaboshi, Lord of the Wicked City, is something of a non-traditional Yama King, fascinated with the trappings and doings of the modern world, rather than some hell described in ancient sutras. Mikaboshi is a cutting-edge demon, invested in what he sees as a growth market — one that is about to pay off handsomely.

Cities, and the blight they breed, are Mikaboshi's stock in trade. Over the years, he has wormed tendrils of his Wicked City into metropolises across the world. Not just in the Middle Kingdom, but in any city the Kuei-jin have penetrated. His latest conquests have been the North American cities occupied by the Ocean-Crossing Crusaders of the Great Leap Outward, but he has been cultivating cities throughout the Middle Kingdom for many years now. Throughout all those cities, in the darkest places of urban decay, the seeds of Mikaboshi's power germinate, and now the time is right for them to sprout.

One of the seeds that the Lord of the Wicked City has planted is in the heart of Strike Force Zero, the secret organization of Japanese demon-hunters. Although the Zaibatsu considers SF0 its agents for hunting down and eliminating "Reality Deviants," it is unaware that the Strike Force ultimately serves Mikaboshi's purpose by eliminating potential threats and agents of his rivals, ensuring that the Yama King will rise to power when the time is right.

BROKEN MIRRORS

The first signs of Mikaboshi's rise to power are the places where the flows of Chi have become so fouled by urban blight that the Wall has grown tattered and as thin as rice paper, allowing light and shadows from Yomi to spill over into the material world. These "broken mirrors" are extensions of Mikaboshi's Hell on Earth, places where the Wicked City touches the real world and where it is possible to step between the two, sometimes without even knowing it.

A *wu* can discover a broken mirror in whatever city it calls home. Perhaps the characters are asked to investigate strange portents and sightings in the area or they do so on their own initiative. They discover that the Yomi World is pressing its way into the Middle Kingdom like a cancer, and that it is growing. In fact, after they are discovered, the broken mirrors begin to grow and multiply. Not only do they begin



to appear in cities around the world, some cities also have more than one place where the jaws of Yomi yawn wide.

Accusations and counter-accusations fly among the Kuei-jin, but it becomes evident that not only are the broken mirrors becoming more extensive, there doesn't seem to be much that the Wan Kuei can do about them. Rituals to cleanse and re-balance the Chi in an area are temporarily effective against some of the newly formed sores in the skin of reality, but the hellgates erupt elsewhere a short while later, and the sorcerers of the Kuei-jin cannot keep pace with their appearances.

The signs are clear. The Sixth Age has come, and the Kuei-jin must prepare for war.

FIRST, PREPARE FOR WAR

Although most Kuei-jin — at least the followers of the Fivefold Way of Xue — agree that it is their duty to oppose the Yama Kings and their *akuma* servants, the courts of the Wan Kuei are nowhere near united. Not even the impending invasion of Hell can force them to set aside their differences to work together, though the efforts of the characters might.

Ancestors and arhats call war councils and meetings across the Middle Kingdom. Different courts prepare to repel the forces of Yomi, whatever the cost. After all, the Kuei-jin have all experienced the domain and the power of the Yama Kings firsthand, and they know that even Final Death is preferable to existing in the realm of Yomi on Earth. In fact, some Kuei-jin, faced with the arrival of the Sixth Age, might choose Final Death rather than battle the armies of the Yama Kings, leading them to face the Eye of Heaven or otherwise abandon their hold on unlife.

Every *wu* in the city can take part in various war councils. If the characters are in positions of influence, they might be entrusted with planning the defense of their area or domain. If not, then perhaps the characters' superiors fall victim to an attack by *akuma* or one of the first assaults by Strike Force Zero, leaving the characters in charge.

Characters can also take on a diplomatic role, going among the different courts of the Kuei-jin trying to rally support for a unified defense against the Yomi Wan, perhaps even a pre-emptive strike that takes the fight to the Yama Kings themselves. They can act as representatives of a particular court or ancestor, or they can go it alone, trying to put together an alliance among the suspicious and treacherous undead.

How successful the characters are depends on their efforts, but even the most successful plans sometimes go awry, and the Kuei-jin must deal with Mikaboshi's own preemptive strikes by the Yama King's secret weapon.

ZERO HOUR

The secret organization known as Strike Force Zero has been hunting monsters for years, using high-tech weapons and equipment beyond that of even the most sophisticated government black-ops program. What most of the agents of SF0 don't know is that their equipment and their mandate comes from the Zaibatsu, the Japanese branch of the Technocracy — a secret alliance that seeks to define and control the nature of reality. What even the Zaibatsu doesn't know is that Strike Force Zero ultimately serves Mikaboshi's ends. The Lord of the Wicked City intends to infuse the technology and the agents of Strike Force Zero with his corrupt Chi and turn the hunters of demons into his secret weapons.

As the Kuei-jin discover and investigate the broken mirrors spreading throughout the world's cities, they also encounter Strike Force Zero agents, apparently doing the



same. Naturally, the SF0 agents assume that the Kuei-jin are responsible for the unusual phenomena and do their best to capture and interrogate them. Failing that, they attempt to simply destroy the vampires. These encounters become increasingly common, and SF0 begins to gather more information about the Kuei-jin and their activities.

The more time the SF0 agents spend in the broken mirrors, the more the corrupt Demon Chi of Yomi and the Wicked City begins to influence them. This influence spreads among the other agents of the organization like a plague, as SF0 spends more time “investigating” the broken mirrors. Characters might notice that the mortal agents become more callous and violent than usual. They care less for civilian casualties or the need for secrecy, doing whatever it takes to get at the monsters they’re hunting. They’re willing to allow torture, mutilation and massive collateral damage — whatever it takes to get the job done.

RISE OF THE WICKED CITY

Once Mikaboshi’s broken mirrors have corrupted most of the agents of Strike Force Zero and the characters have had an opportunity to try to rally the forces of the Middle Kingdom to repel the threat of the Yama Kings, the next step in Mikaboshi’s plan takes place. The corrupt Demon Chi of the broken mirrors and the wickedness it inspires in the mortal populace causes the sores in the world’s Chi to expand, as the Wicked City begins to invade the Middle Kingdom and eat away at reality.

Initially, the broken mirrors are confined to urban areas, which are incorporated into Mikaboshi’s Wicked City. Soon, all major cities in the world are part of the Yama King’s domain. The *shen* inhabiting them have no choice but to flee or to swear their allegiance to Mikaboshi. This includes Western cities and *shen* such as the Kin-jin, who find their own squabbles brought to a halt by the sudden invasion. Many Kin-jin fall victim to the corruption of Yomi, giving themselves over to Mikaboshi for the opportunity to feed within his domain, tainted by the Demon Chi of the mortals they hunt.

Mikaboshi’s agents hunt Kuei-jin in cities from Hong Kong to San Francisco. *Akuma* become increasingly common and emerge from the shadows to take their place leading hunting parties. Although they attempt to hold them, the August Courts are forced to retreat from their urban stronghold, at the cost of many Kuei-jin being destroyed by Mikaboshi’s mechanized demons. The same is true for courts across the Middle Kingdom. The savage Kuei-jin of the Golden Courts fare slightly better than the rest, able to flee into the jungles, but even there the hunters become the hunted.

Characters might attempt to help defend one or more of the courts against the invasion of demons, bakemono and *akuma*, fighting a losing battle against the forces of the Wicked City before they are forced to either flee or make a final stand they can’t possibly survive. Meeting Final Death in the defense of Kuei-jin history and tradition is a fitting end for some characters, while others might help engineer an evacuation of the strongholds of the Hungry Dead, allowing surviving Kuei-jin to escape the cities that are now under the Yama King’s dominion.

DEFENDING THE DRAGON NESTS

Once the broken mirrors have extended over all the cities in the world, their character changes significantly. Every city becomes an extension of the Wicked City, a beachhead of the Yomi World. The buildings become taller, more jagged and loom overhead: dark towers that block out the sun and leave the streets in perpetual shadow. Architecture twists and becomes more gothic while also taking on a more



futuristic Asian flavor. The negative aspects of the cities become more pronounced. Corruption, violence and malice run rampant. Homelessness, substance abuse, cruelty and vice become increasingly common. Clouds gather day and night over the tops of the towers of glass and steel, blocking out the sun and spitting acidic rain down on the masses below.

The inhabitants of the cities are transformed as well. Some become raw materials for the factories and chop shops turning out legions of Mikaboshi's Demons of Iron and Violence. The rest are still twisted by the corruption, looking out solely for themselves and more than willing to look the other way as Mikaboshi works his will on the world. Order in the cities is brutally maintained while law and order in the countryside gives way to fear and panic.

Then the cities begin to grow.

It's slow at first, but then it comes increasingly faster, to the point where the urban centers expand outward hundreds of feet each day. They send out root-like tendrils of wire, asphalt and steel that dig deep into the Earth. They flow along roads, rivers and the dragon lines of Chi, stretching out in all directions, spreading like bloodstains in the fabric of the Earth, and nothing seems able to halt their growth. Indeed, anyone who tries must deal with legions of the Yama King's demons and bakemono.

The Wicked City infiltrates and assimilates places with the lowest ambient Chi first, gradually working its way into the dragon lines and, finally, the dragon nests, to consume the Chi there and feed it into the great machine of Mikaboshi's empire. Therefore, the dragon nests are the last havens of the Kuei-jin and any others who oppose Mikaboshi's conquest. The characters might attempt to organize the defense of the dragon nests, hoping to keep such powerful sources of Chi from falling to the Yama King. The nests also serve as the last remaining sources of Yin and Yang Chi for the Kuei-jin, allowing them to feed without being corrupted by the Demon Chi of Yomi.

FURTHER STORIES

In addition to being the end of a *Laws of the East* chronicle, "Wicked City" can serve as the basis for an entirely new chronicle, set in a Sixth Age under the rule of the Yama King Mikaboshi and his Iron Empress, Tou Mu. In this world, the Wicked City extends *everywhere*, even paving over the oceans, creating vast, lightless seas beneath iron and concrete skies. Black, skeletal buildings reach up to a sky the color of blood, covered with slate-gray clouds that pour poisonous rain. All creatures are subject to Mikaboshi's will, cogs in the vast machine that is the Wicked City, ruled by his demon lieutenants, some of them *akuma* Kuei-jin.

The characters in this chronicle can be Kuei-jin survivors of Mikaboshi's purge, rogue agents of Strike Force Zero, Shih demon-hunters, dhampyrs, or any combination thereof. Perhaps the characters are mortals born and raised in this hellish world, recruited by surviving demon-hunters and trained as part of an underground resistance against the Demon Emperor's rule. There is a prophecy, foretold in ancient sutras, that says the righteous will one day rise up against the Demon Emperor and his Wicked City will be swept away, bringing about a new Age of peace, beauty and serenity. The few other *shen* remaining might also be involved in a chronicle of this type.



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CHAPTER EIGHT: ARMAGEDDON

INTRODUCTION

All things must come to an end, or so mortals believe. But the Undying, those reborn into immortal life, know that what seems to be an ending can also be a beginning — perhaps the beginning of something never-ending. Nonetheless, the immortals of the World of Darkness see the growing signs and portents that suggest their efforts to restore the balance, to serve as champions of life, might have come too late. Everywhere there are signs of corruption and the rising power of Apophis, and it seems that the Undying, who once had all eternity stretched out before them, are rapidly running out of time.

This chapter details the end of the World of Darkness as seen by the Undying — the mummies of Egypt, described in **Laws of the Resurrection**. It describes two different approaches to the last days of the Reborn and how they deal with the ending of an existence they once thought would never end. Like the endings given in this book, the scenarios are speculation, simply two of the possibilities of what might happen. As always, the ultimate direction of the story is up to the Storyteller.

APOPHIS ASCENDS

Osiris and Isis created the first Egyptian mummies to defend the world from the minions of Apophis. These Shemsu-heru waged war upon the undead children of Set and the seven immortal blasphemies known as the Apepu. As the conflict dragged on for millennia without end, the champions of Osiris lost their way, diminished by the weight of ennui, selfishness and the seeming futility of their burdensome quest. And so they failed, and the howling winds of the Dja-akh scoured the beloved city of Amenti. Those mummies reborn in the modern era from the shattered relics of the ancient and modern dead owe their existence to the failure of their predecessors. And yet, out of failure and despair, hope arises. The Amenti awaken with new purpose and passion, certain they have both the power to save the world and an eternity in which to save it.

They are wrong.



Apophis stirs. In ages past, the Great Serpent was as the hydra, its power spread among many fangs and eyes. Now, the Corrupter gazes upon the world with its own red eye, as a star in the heavens. Loyal cultists cull the ranks of monsters and reclaim the scattered shards of their dead god's soul. The bloodline of Set and the brood of the Corrupter fall to treachery in back alleys and hidden crypts. Even the mighty Apepnu find themselves hunted by demons they do not know, roughly cast aside in favor of a new champion.

The final battle between the champions of Ma'at and Apophis is at hand.

PRELUDE: THE COMING OF EURYDICE

When a tem-akh appears to a new ghost and offers a second chance at life, the soul must accept the joining. Most do. The dead crave life as nothing else and hungrily seize any chance at renewed warmth and breath. Yet, some ghosts refuse the gift of resurrection, for reasons of madness or pride or cynicism. It is their right, and none receive a second chance. Such ghosts go on with their shadowed afterlives, clinging to the wan sustenance of memory and regret. One such soul was Eurydice.

Eurydice's true name remains lost to her along with most of the details of her life. When the ancient soul of a tem-akh appeared before her and spoke of rebirth and hope, she recoiled in fear and bade the shade leave her. Saddened, the tem-akh departed and found another host. This would have ended the ghost's story in the greater tale of the Amenti, were it not for the woman's unusual tenacity of will. After a time in the Underworld, she was eventually led her back to her corpse, where she found the strength to rise as one of the walking dead. Touched by the wisps of memory left by her brief contact with the tem-akh, the ghost knew that her destiny somehow lay in Egypt. She made her own perilous hajj to the Web of Faith and sought out the cultists of which the tem-akh had spoken. She represented a sorrow to them, for they could not give her life. So they turned her away to find her own path.

The nameless revenant remained in the holy lands, watching and ultimately envying the Reborn from afar. She grew obsessed with resurrection, even as her relentless khaibit gnawed at her nobler self. Envy grew to hate, and she felt abandoned and betrayed. She thought it unjust that she could not have life when corpse after corpse stumbled from the far corners of the world to breathe again. She blamed the tem-akh for failing to overcome her fear. When her hate and the whispers of the Devourer swallowed the last of her soul, she followed the voice of corruption to a hidden cell of Amkhat cannibal-sorcerers. In a defiled crypt hidden deep in the sands, she interrupted the cult's bloody feast and butchered them one by one until the survivors bowed before her. Aided by her new servants, the embittered Eurydice began a bold plot to steal the resurrection she believed the world owed her. Her agents roamed the Web of Faith and kidnapped sorcerers faithful to Osiris, but such victims proved useless. They knew only part of the ritual, and even then, only the part that required access to the Sekhem of Osiris. Eurydice personally captured one of the Amenti, but this target knew even less about the Spell of Life, so she turned his flesh over to her servants. All seemed hopeless...

Until Kemintiri found her.

Known and feared among other vampires as an ancient, maddened demigod, Kemintiri stumbled out of the moon-draped dunes like a prophet of old. In her veins flowed the blood of Set, first Chosen of Apophis, and her shattered mind held

revelations better left unspoken. Something called her away from her masquerades among the undead, her endless, pointless series of impersonations. Something had called her into the deep desert of Egypt to receive a prophecy — and a message. Eurydice would live again, and vanished Set would no longer bear favor as the Chosen of Apophis.

Eurydice offered gracious hospitality to her strange and godlike guest, butchering her servants when they failed to bring sufficient victims to satisfy the Ancient's hunger. Yet, little more than mad rambles escaped Kemintiri's blood-soaked lips. In time, Eurydice grew impatient with the babble. She had heard enough, and still, dreadful hope stirred in her unbeating heart. As Set's child lay writhing in the throes of some seizure or revelation one evening — Eurydice no longer cared which — the arisen ghost plunged a stake into the vampire's heart. Kemintiri stilled and muttered no more. Under order from their ambitious leader, the Amkhat took the blood of their captive and worked foul alchemy upon it. Her ramblings and fragmented notes merged with stolen and forbidden spells of necromancy. Together, the Amkhat made their own mockery of the Spell of Life, crude and rooted in magic older and deeper than even they knew.

A great assembly of the Amkhat gathered in a secret place for the casting of the spell. Fully one-third perished when the magic grew beyond their control and sucked away their souls to fuel the forbidden enchantment. Infused with alchemy distilled from the blood of Kemintiri, and through her the blood of the first Chosen of Apophis, Eurydice was transformed. For seven agonizing beats her heart pumped, and seven breaths filled her dead lungs. And yet, she did not live. Out of failure she became something more, something terrible. The favor of her god lay upon her with dread purpose, and she knew at last how she might live again. Apophis stirred beneath the realm of the dead, rising in slow coils. He would be her tem-akh and she was now his chosen instrument of that ascent. All she needed was to reclaim the seven *ifrit* of the Great Serpent's soul from those who dared call themselves Children of Apophis. Their death would be her life.

And her life would birth Apophis into this world.

ASSASSINATION

As the story begins, Eurydice has sent her stalkers to locate and slay the seven Apepu. The characters should discover this plot early enough to intervene before Eurydice grows too powerful. Presented here are the two most likely discovery scenarios.

THE FACE OF EVIL

The characters have already been tracking the actions of a Bane mummy, perhaps as part of an earlier story. Well-prepared with equipment, architectural plans and strategy, they break into the lair of one of the ancient fiends only to find the mangled corpses of his guards strewn about and the walls spattered with warm gore. The dwarf carefully works its way through secret passages, half-sprung traps and other obstacles to the innermost sanctum of the fortified haven. There the characters find their undying quarry kneeling battered and bleeding, surrounded by a pack of strange animal-headed creatures. Before any of the characters can intervene, the leader of the pack strikes a deathblow and inserts a long tongue into one of the Apepu's wounds. Sickly green light flows into the fanged muzzle, and the lifeless body of the mummy falls to the ground. It is then that the creatures notice the



characters, growl at them and crouch to pounce. As the characters leap into the fray or prepare for attack, the leader of the beasts barks an order in its strange rasping language and the entire pack dissolves into wisps of fine sand. Alone in the silence of the abattoir, the characters may retrieve the corpse of their slain enemy or simply escape to inform their superiors.

AN UNLIKELY TALE

Less militant Amenti might learn about the strange assassination of the Bane Mummy indirectly. Superiors could forward the transcripts and reports provided by mummies who directly observed such events. Alternatively, the characters' dwarf might be called to assist in the interrogation of a mortal witness who hid and saw everything through a crack in a doorway. Such a witness would be unreliable at best, and probably quite mad from the sheer horror of the events. Information obtained from such questioning would be rife with falsehoods and exaggerations, while containing enough truth to scare the characters and suggest the arrival of a new player in the immortal game. For a stranger twist, the characters might find themselves approached by a Four Jar or other thrall of the murdered Apepnu, willing to trade information for protection from the monsters. The characters shouldn't trust such a tainted informant and might suspect a trap. But then, what could scare an undead monster so badly that it would turn to its *enemies* for safety? Such an encounter should shake the characters and impress upon them the level of danger posed by the mysterious assassins.

Regardless of how the characters learn of the first assassination, it will not be the last. Within a week of the killing, another Bane Mummy dies under similarly gruesome circumstances. It is clear that someone — or something — is systematically hunting the Apepnu. The five remaining Bane Mummies scatter, each suspecting one another of masterminding the deaths. The leadership of the Amenti shares this suspicion, yet none of the evidence points to any of the survivors as suspects. No one wants to believe that there might be a new power among them, least of all the Children of Apophis.

STALKING THE STALKERS

In the wake of the two assassinations, the Apepnu go to ground. Many of their known agents or associates likewise retreat into seclusion or take extended vacations far from their usual hangouts. The Amenti leaders sense that this conflict is more than a turf war among the Children of Apophis. Such undying monsters have little reason to fear assassination, except as a temporary setback. And yet, the Bane Mummies hide and send their most trusted agents across the world searching for answers. It soon becomes apparent that they are truly afraid, and that that fear makes them vulnerable. How the characters investigate this situation depends on their strengths and upon the needs of the Storyteller.

DIGGING FOR CLUES

The characters may seek out the killers, trying to find out the identity and origin of the strange monstrosities. Such an investigation could follow any number of paths. The characters can hunt in old occult libraries and somehow buy, barter or even break into private collections on a trail of vague references and tantalizing clues. All tests for such an obscure subject as the stalkers has a minimum difficulty of 11 Traits, with each additional successful test yielding assorted clues that seem to

trail back into one another. For example, a single success might yield the fact that figures bearing strong resemblance to the animal-headed assassins appear on a cartouche unearthed at a dig south of Abydos. The characters would then have to track down this cartouche and translate it, which in turn might point them elsewhere. Players should not feel they are getting the runaround, but their characters should recognize the obscurity and elusiveness of their quarry. Amenti who are familiar with the supernatural might be tempted to assume that the attacks were carried out by werewolves or other shapeshifters, but all their research (as well as any direct experience they might have had with the beasts) leads them elsewhere. These assassins are not werewolves.

Other useful facts the characters might obtain through more thorough research include the following: Though sunlight does them no harm, the beasts hunt only at night (three successful tests). The creatures serve Apophis directly, and only the greatest champions of the Great Serpent may control them (four successful tests). These “stalkers” have the power to travel as the racing sandstorm and to smell sin like desert beasts smell water (five successful tests). The ritual used to summon these stalkers requires large quantities of human blood and certain specific herbs and unguents. Enterprising characters might begin tracking recent purchases of these materials and match the purchase locations against missing-person reports.

CALLING IN OLD DEBTS

Mummies less interested in archeology and research can investigate directly, approaching long-time informants and those “in the know” about the twilight world of the supernatural. It takes little effort to recognize the undercurrent of fear. Old contacts don’t want to talk about it or claim retirement from the business, but very few have any idea what is actually happening. Vampires of Set’s bloodline might know that a few of their older members have disappeared recently (though certainly not the identity of the true culprit), but they might be lying or feigning ignorance. Other vampires don’t have a clue, except for the most sorcerously inclined, and even they have only vague omens and auguries of impending doom.

Mages certainly know more, if only because more wizards are prone to checking their horoscopes and doing the kinds of tarot spreads that simply aren’t fashionable. Comets, ill omens and other portents suggest that something horrible is coming, and all the signs point back to the Middle East and the Web of Faith. It’s not much to go on, but it’s enough to set the stage for deeper inquiry and to establish a tone of foreboding. Extremely fortunate and/or well-connected characters can learn about a recent shake-up in the leadership of the Amkhath and the rise of a new priestess in the cult. The Amkhath should not appear as likely suspects in the assassinations, however, at least not at first.

THE FIEND OF MY FIEND

Instead of tracking the killers, the characters might focus on the victims. Investigation into the slain Apepu reveals little of much worth, unfortunately. The slain were up to their necks in dirty deals and schemes, but that was usual. Indeed, nothing about their unfinished plots seems any more or less dastardly than any previous exploits. Profiling to discover what made the slain immortals any different from their surviving counterparts suggests only one possible common link: Both of them perished in strongholds they had established long ago. In short, they died



where someone in the know might reasonably expect to find them. With the rest of the Apepu scattered, that common thread no longer applies to any of the others.

RACING THE HUNT

In a slight variation of the preceding, the characters can hunt down the surviving Apepu — or at least try. Such a feat is extremely dangerous, regardless of success. Either the quarry will learn of the search and send minions to deal with the meddlesome sleuths, or the stalkers will discover the search in progress and allow the characters to ferret out their prey. An extremely “successful” investigation might swiftly lead the characters into the grasp of a paranoid Bane Mummy who was eager to make an example of any rival or threat. The ancient monster might even believe that the characters are the assassins of his brethren, come to kill him. Those who are unfortunate enough to fall captive to the Apepu can probably look forward to a slow and painful demise unless rescued.

CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE

If the characters do not seem to grasp the gravity of the situation, or if their investigation runs into a maze of dead ends, the Storyteller may consider dramatically upping the stakes. Another Bane Mummy dies, but not without taking out a city block — or a city district — with powerful Dark Hekau. Such a cataclysm certainly points to a previously unconsidered danger, namely the possibility that many innocent bystanders will suffer or perish as a result of the mysterious power squabble. In any case, another Bane Mummy should eventually die during the course of the investigation.

THE GATHERING STORM

With the third murder among the Apepu, the Dja-akh abruptly stops. The shrieking clouds pull back into the dark recesses of Duat and an eerie calm settles over the Lands of the Dead. However welcome, the lull feels distinctly unnatural — less a sign of peace than the rushing out of the tide before a great tsunami. Worldwide, the Shroud rating drops by one to a minimum rating of 2 in any specific location. Mediums, psychics and mages blessed with prescience suffer dreams rife with ill portents, haunted even in waking by images of a red star and a maimed hydra cleaved of its many heads. One or more of the characters might experience such dreams or dreams of like symbolism. It won’t take much to realize the likely (and, indeed, accurate) significance: Apophis recalls its own. What was once many gathers to one. The Apepu are not being murdered... they are being *harvested*.

As portents grow worse and the characters come to realize the plan behind the plot, their investigations should bear fruit that leads them steadily back to Eurydice and the Amkhat. Any of the following revelations will prove useful.

BURIED OMENS

Research into the stalkers eventually leads to a previously undiscovered crypt located anywhere the Storyteller desires. Inside the tomb, a torpid vampire lies in a sarcophagus surrounded by prophetic murals. The pictures narrate the rise and fall of the Amkhat through many civilizations, some of which history does not record or remember. The last picture of the series shows a bloody harvest. The Eaters of Flesh prostrate themselves like wheat before the dead flesh of a woman enthroned, a coiled serpent on her brow. Half again the number of the prostrated lie cut down in their

own blood. Over and silhouetted behind the goddess sits a blackened sun, and each ray is the unmistakable form of a lunging stalker.

A NEST OF VIPERS

All the leads and financial tracing of alchemical supplies and mysterious disappearances points back to a rural village in Egypt or Palestine. The clues could be a trap set by Eurydice or a canny aide, in which case the characters have to fight their way free from well-armed cultists. A red herring of this magnitude should certainly point the way to the true location if the characters escape, allowing players to feel a sense of progress.

Alternatively, and more simply, the village is as it appears. This is where Eurydice first summoned her stalkers, and the characters might even find Kemintiri hidden and staked in a cistern or deep cellar. The Chosen of Apophis is long gone, having sought a more auspicious location for her ascension. She might have left surprises or assassins behind to make sure that she is not interrupted during her apotheosis. In any case, the characters should have the opportunity to interrogate a captured Amkhat cultist who proudly boasts, “Eurydice will devour the flesh of the sun. In darkness she will feast upon the children of Osiris, and all the world shall be her blackened banquet.”

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

As Eurydice’s plot draws close to cataclysmic fruition, more Apepnu die. The manner of their passing is irrelevant except insofar as the Storyteller wishes otherwise. The Bane Mummies are beings of immense power, and their passing should not be wholly without incident. Whether they are slain after fierce, earthshaking battle or cut down pathetically where they hide, they all die.

All except one, that is.

Two of the Apepnu yet remain when emissaries of Saatet-ta, the self-appointed “Darkener of the Earth,” approaches the Amenti with an offer. She will cooperate toward the singular goal of eliminating Eurydice. In exchange, she wants protection. It is clear that Saatet-ta does not seek defection. Her motives are no more pure, and corruption still festers in her soul. Yet, she does not want to die, and her selfishness makes her an unlikely ally. Before the leaders of the Amenti choose a reply, Eurydice’s assassins strike again and Saatet-ta becomes the last of her kind. The chosen of Osiris no longer have a choice. Eurydice must not gain the last *ifrit*. She must not complete her dread ritual. Horus himself issues the response to Saatet-ta and the distasteful order to the Shemsu-heru: Preserve the “Ebon Horror of Khutu” above all else. The Amenti accept her deal.

Saatet-ta arrives garbed in regal illusion, accompanied by a full bodyguard of reapers. The characters stand by as Horus receives her and gives his word on behalf of the Amenti as she demanded. The palpable distaste between the two does not end in violence, but only just. Horus leaves and entrusts Saatet-ta to the characters. As they establish a hidden “safe house” in a remote location, the last of the Apepnu enjoys taunting her reluctant guardians. She assures them they will be granted swift and painless passage to oblivion when this little truce ends — as a reward, of course. Torment shall fall upon Horus, she bitterly claims. The characters may realize the desperation in her taunts. She fears for her life and deeply resents the need for help. Ultimately, she’s all talk. She wouldn’t dare raise a finger against the characters for



fear of incurring the wrath of Horus, whom she fears only slightly less than she fears Eurydice.

As expected, the next night sees the first assassination attempt. A trio of stalkers materializes in Saatet-ta's bedchambers, while the remaining three systematically and quietly eliminate all of the reapers and any mortal guards. The characters quickly turn the tide of battle, as the stalkers had not planned or prepared for Amenti interference. Their momentary surprise gives Saatet-ta a chance to snare one in bindings of black lightning. A few more turns of combat follow, but the surviving stalkers retreat in a spray of sand. The captive stalker writhes and strains at its bonds, futilely trying to dissipate through the ward. It soon runs out of Willpower and can only snarl impotently.

Saatet-ta boasts and brags, jeering at the caged beast — but she keeps a conspicuously healthy distance. It barks something incomprehensible at her, clearly an insult by the sudden pallor that spreads across her face. She turns her angry gaze from the beast and boasts that she can follow the stalker to its source and catch Eurydice by surprise. She tries to bully the characters into accompanying her, but she resorts to cajoling and ultimately playing on their moral obligation if they refuse. Whenever and however they accept (and possibly even if they do not), she seizes an amulet from beneath her clothes and throws it to the floor. It flashes a putrid green, and painfully tears the characters across space toward Eurydice's lair.

ARMAGEDDON

When the light and roaring winds fade, the dwarf finds itself on the outskirts of a small town. Characters with appropriate knowledge might recognize this place as Megiddo in Palestine, though if none are present to identify their surroundings, Saatet-ta makes note of it with surprise and scorn. Few people remain in the town, and many buildings have crumbled to ruin. If the characters theorize that this is the work of Eurydice and her Amkhat, Saatet-ta corrects them, saying, "This is what men do to their own kind. They bring ruin and pain upon themselves even in our — or *her* — absence. And it appears we have company."

As Saatet-ta finishes her observation, armed Israeli soldiers emerge from a search of nearby rubble and notice the dwarf. They approach with weapons drawn and demand that the characters present identification papers. They might even attack outright if the characters show visible weapons. The characters have less than a minute to talk their way past the soldiers before Saatet-ta casts a lethal necromantic spell that burns the lot to stinking ash. The Bane Mummy does not apologize for her action but insistently leads the characters on into the rubble and mumbles, "We don't have time for this!"

Following Saatet-ta, the dwarf eventually locates and enters a damaged building whose cracked foundation opens upon a descending staircase of ancient design. They can smell smoke wafting from below. At the bottom of the staircase, the characters find a corridor opening into a wide stone platform. A vaulted cathedral ceiling looms far above, but the musty air and lingering scent of death betrays the place as a crypt of some kind. The interlopers' attention immediately draws to Eurydice herself, resplendent and hypnotically beautiful as she stands unabashedly naked in the center of the platform. Around her crouch six stalkers fawning and whimpering like dogs, while 49 robed Amkhat priests stand in a circle at the edge of the platform. The chamber's illumination springs



from torch sconces chiseled into the walls. Heavy incense burns with overripe sweetness in gathering clouds of smoke far above.

Eurydice turns immediately, casting brief, dismissive appraisal over Saatet-ta and the Amenti. She exchanges brief taunts with Saatet-ta then unleashes her stalkers with a casual wave. The pack comes snarling at the characters while Saatet-ta unleashes an angry torrent of destructive magic at Eurydice. The Chosen of Apophis casually swats the spell aside and begins draining Saatet-ta of her Corruption. Try as they might, the characters cannot intervene due to the attacking monsters (and even if the stalkers weren't an issue, the dwarf has no viable means of preventing Eurydice's action at this time). When Eurydice finishes absorbing the power of Saatet-ta, she smiles horrifically and falls limp to the ground. The Amkhats begin chanting a broken version of the Spell of Life that Saatet-ta recognizes in utter horror before she, too, collapses at the edge of death.

The characters must finish off the stalkers so that they can attack the cultists and break their spell. From the first turn of chant, a shape begins taking form in the perfumed smoke. It begins as shapeless coils and then grows more distinct into a serpent of unthinkable proportions. Only a fraction of its sinuous bulk remains visible in the eddying smoke at any given time, but the sight fills the characters with dread. The Storyteller should set a time limit in which to stop the ritual before it concludes and the Great Serpent pours in a vortex to fill Eurydice with blasphemous life. Suggested means of stopping the ritual include:

- **Kill the cultists.** This is the simplest and most brutal method. If over a third of the cultists perish, the magic fails. Note that simply attempting to stop them from chanting will not be sufficient at this point. Their very bodies swarm with the unholy power of Apophis, and those conduits must be closed permanently for the magic to fail. This means that no fewer than 17 cultists must die if the Amenti are to prevail. The good news is that the cultists are nothing special, physically. They have no magic to protect themselves, so use the statistics for ordinary mortals.
- **Only sacrifice may break the ritual.** At least one of the Amenti must leap upon Eurydice and take the searing evil of Apophis into himself. The Balance residing in the Amenti's core will prevent Apophis from taking form, but the awesome power will annihilate the character(s) utterly.

NEITHER EAST NOR WEST

Fans of the Wu T'ian and the Teomallki, other races of the Undying found in the tabletop **Mummy Players Guide**, will doubtless take note that the Armageddon scenarios involving those immortals that are found in **Time of Judgment** — “The Dawn of the Sixth Age” and “The World Goes Westward” — are not included in this book. Quite simply, they have been omitted because **Laws of the Resurrection** deals only with the Amenti, so their scenarios must take precedence in this already tightly packed volume. Storytellers are free to convert those character types and the scenarios surrounding them for **Mind's Eye Theatre** play as they desire, of course, using the guidelines found in the **Mummy Players Guide** and **Resurrection**.



• **Kill Eurydice.** Considering her astounding resilience, characters may be hard-pressed to injure the Chosen of Apophis, let alone slay her. Of course, any character that jumps on the revenant to stick a blade in her chest may have just volunteered for heroic martyrdom...

If the characters do not stop the ascension, Eurydice draws deafening breath as a living embodiment of Apophis. Her first action will likely be to annihilate the characters on the spot, though perhaps she appreciates the ironic sport of saving them for last so they can watch her end the world. In such a scenario, the characters might yet find some heroic and increasingly improbable means of stopping Eurydice, but it's considerably more likely that the real story ends in tragedy and horror.

If the characters stop the ascension, the coils of the Great Serpent unwind and twist in tangles of smoke, then fade away. The cultists shriek in horror, retreating to the handful of entry tunnels at the edge of the room. Eurydice remains alone, denied her last chance at true life. Even without ascension, her power is vast. It will take everything the characters have to stop her, but with her destruction, victory belongs to Ma'at.

LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT

As certain as Ra's boat descends into the Underworld at the end of each day, so is the ending of all things, even to those who might believe they are eternal. Just as the setting of the sun does not mean the end of everything, only the dying of the light, so the End Times do not necessarily mean the end of the world, but perhaps only the end of the Undying. This scenario is perhaps the most subtle ending for a **Resurrection** chronicle, at least insofar as the mundane world is concerned. For the Undying, it is just as much of an end as the setting sun.

INTRODUCTION

In "Long Day's Journey into Night", Eurydice uses a different plan to achieve the eternal life that she so desperately desires. Using an ancient spell fueled by her need and the rage of the Ghost Storm, Eurydice tears down the Shroud between worlds, merging the Lands of the Living with those of the dead. Not only does this act allow restless ghosts to return to their lost flesh, it releases many others whose bodies are long since dust, seeking mortal hosts to inhabit. In a perverse imitation of the Amenti joining, these shades seize mortal hosts, and not necessarily in cooperation with their current inhabitants.

Eurydice's actions gravely upset the balance of the world, threatening a future where the dead increasingly outnumber the living, or a world of unliving immortals where nothing ever changes because death has been rendered impotent. There is a means of stopping the deterioration of the Shroud and restoring the balance, but it is difficult and has a high price, assuming the characters are willing to pay it.

DARK OMENS

Storytellers can involve a dwarf of characters in the events of "Long Day's Journey into Night" in various ways, depending on the needs and style of the chronicle. Essentially, there should be various hints and omens that indicate to the characters something unusual is happening. The material in Signs in the Dust

provides some examples, while some others are given here. They can be incorporated in other stories leading up to the events of this story.

DISTURBING DREAMS

The sleep of the Undying is troubled by disturbing images. Characters may dream about walking through Neter-khertet, seeing the Ghost Storm rage and witnessing the Shroud between the Lands of the Living and those of the dead grow tattered and torn. The fierce winds of the Dja-akh tear at the fabric of the Shroud as hungry ghosts seek to reach the living world. Characters may even make out a glowing, ghostly shape at the heart of the storm, a woman who seems to be directing the force of the storm, with legions of ghosts at her back. The Shroud sunders and the character wakes up.

SHADOWS OF THINGS TO COME

Mummies in the Shadowlands begin to notice signs of what is to come. The Dja-akh blows in fierce gusts, and there are more and more restless ghosts blown upon its winds, taking shelter in islands of safety and calm in Neter-khertet and throughout the Web of Faith. These ghosts seem to be gathering—called by some unseen source, for reasons not even they can name. Sightings of ghostly phenomena are also becoming more common. It seems that the Veil is thinning, allowing mortals to notice the presence of spirits more in the Web of Faith. The stories are mere curiosities at first, but as they become more common, they grow harder to dismiss.

SIGNS

The Amenti see signs of imminent disaster more and more often. It is written in the stars for those with knowledge of the celestial arts. A strange red star appears over much of the Nile, casting a shadow wherein people see ghosts and spirits lurking around them. Urban graffiti looks like ancient Egyptian symbols. Images of jackals and other death trappings seem prominent.

THE JUDGMENT OF MA'AT

Finally, Amenti traveling to Duat and meeting the Judges of Ma'at hear the words of impending doom from their own lips, or from others in the depths of the Underworld. Mummies who go to face the Judges of Ma'at for their advancement in Balance may hear them whisper prophecies of a great trial they will soon face, of the restless dead walking among the living and the Shroud between worlds being torn asunder.

Perhaps even more disconcerting to the Amenti is how the ever-silent Anubis, the guide and guardian of the dead, seems saddened and regards them with a mixture of pity and sympathy upon meeting them in the depths of Duat. Mummies may hear voices whispering in the winds of the Ghost Storm, perhaps saying the name “Eurydice” or repeating “soon, soon...” over and over again. Who do they speak of, and what are they waiting for?

THE TATTERED SHROUD

Events are set in motion when the wraith Eurydice uses a combination of her burning desire for life, ancient secrets wrested from the depths of the Underworld, and the blessings of Apophis to rend the fabric of the Shroud with the power of the Dja-akh. This unleashes the forces of the Lands of the Dead on the Lands of the Living, with disastrous consequences.



THE FIRST SIGNS

As Eurydice works her will upon the Shadowlands, the fierceness of the Ghost Storm increases in intensity and the Shroud begins to weaken. Throughout the Lands of Faith, the Shroud rating drops by one at sunset. Amenti using their abilities may notice that the Shroud offers them less resistance than normal. More importantly, mortals in the Lands of Faith begin to sense the Lands of the Dead more clearly. There are reports of spiritual visitations, visions, strange dreams and so forth. The Shroud has not weakened sufficiently for the two lands to touch, but in places where the Shroud rating drops as low as 1, cases of possession or more active haunting, visions of a great and terrible storm or poltergeist phenomena are common.

The characters may look into the unusual things happening in the Lands of Faith, but they can find no reason for the increasing strength of the Dja-akh or the weakening of the Shroud. The strange happenings in places where the Shroud has grown especially thin add to the other ill omens facing the Undying.

THE SHROUD FALLS

The following sunset, the Shroud rating drops by another point in the Lands of Faith and the Shroud rating worldwide also drops by one. In a few places (those with an initial Shroud Rating of 2), the Shroud collapses altogether, leaving a “hole” between the Lands of the Living and Neter-khertet. The Shadowlands fall across the living world like a pall, and the two become as one. This has a number of dire effects:

- **The Veil:** The Veil is still in effect in places where the Shroud has fallen, revealing the true existence of the Shadowlands and the dead to mortals. Therefore, many mortals (with less than three Willpower Traits) are utterly terror-stricken by the appearance of the Shadowlands, causing panicked mobs and bouts of madness as humanity tries to block out the terrible truth. This leads to complete mayhem in places with a Shroud rating of 0, spreading outward as the Shroud grows weaker. These conflicts, in turn, provide ample opportunities for the restless dead to possess living bodies. As supernatural creatures themselves, mummies are unaffected by the Veil, but the madness and chaos surrounding the manifestation of the Shadowlands is certain to make their efforts more difficult.

- **The Restless Dead:** In places where the Shroud has fallen, the ghosts and spirits of the dead that dwell in Neter-khertet are free to interact with the Lands of the Living once more. Ghosts are still immaterial, but they can use their powers freely without regard for the Shroud, and ordinary mortals can see them clearly, provoking the effects of the Veil. Additionally, ghosts can attempt to possess living bodies or return to their own flesh to become risen.

If a ghost attempts to possess a living host body, make a Willpower Challenge for the ghost with a difficulty equal to the mortal's Willpower. If the ghost wins, it is in control of the body and the mortal loses a temporary Willpower Trait. If the mortal wins, the ghost cannot attempt to possess that person for a day, and he loses a temporary Willpower Trait. Each day the ghost possesses a body, make a new Willpower test. If the ghost wins, the mortal loses another temporary Willpower Trait. If the mortal wins, the ghost is ousted from the host body. If a mortal host reaches zero Willpower Traits, the ghost takes control of the body permanently.

Ghosts cannot attempt to possess Amenti, because of their unusual spiritual nature and fortitude, nor can they possess a mortal form that is already inhabited by another ghost.

Alternatively, ghosts can automatically re-inhabit and reanimate their former bodies. The ghost gains physical abilities similar to a vampire (including the ability to soak lethal damage with Stamina), but the ghost's body is still a corpse. The ghost is not really alive. The physical condition of the corpse affects the ghost's appearance and physical abilities. The recently dead are more capable and lifelike than those whose bodies have been decomposing for days, weeks or even months.

- **Sekhem:** Of greatest concern to the Amenti is the effect that the fallen Shroud has on the presence of Sekhem in the Lands of the Living. On one hand, the Amenti lose the Gift of Ra in any place where the Shroud has been reduced to 0. They do not automatically regain a Trait of Sekhem at sunrise each day. On the other hand, Osiris' Blessing is enhanced. In places where the Shadowlands have emerged within the Web of Faith, mummies automatically regain their Balance score in Sekhem every 24 hours. Outside the Web of Faith, the difficulties for regaining Sekhem decrease by two Traits.

This means that Amenti in the areas where the Shroud has fallen feel empowered by the closeness of Osiris' presence. They also feel a terrible sense of urgency. The weakening of the Shroud must be stopped, or life and death will be mixed beyond all undoing and life will cease to have any real meaning.

The Shroud loses a point of its rating each day at sunset, meaning that most places in the Web of Faith are completely exposed to the Shadowlands in less than a week. The entire world will be engulfed by the Lands of the Dead in a little more than a week's time. At that point, it might be too late for the Undying to do anything except try and deal with the damage. Fortunately, the Reborn have an opportunity to address the problem before that happens.

THE NILE QUEEN

The ancient Shemsu-heru mummy Hatshepsut is aware of what is happening and why, and she has a means of doing something about it—with the aid of the dwarf. Hatshepsut gets in contact with the characters, either through conventional means such as telephone or telegram (if the characters are accessible in that way) or through mystical means like Hekau, such as a *Nomenclature* ritual to contact the characters by their names or a *Necromancy* ritual that allows Hatshepsut's ka to visit the dwarf in spirit form and summon them to her. Regardless of the means, Hatshepsut invokes her authority as one of the Shemsu-heru and an elder of the Undying, bidding the dwarf to attend her in Cairo. She's reluctant to discuss matters over great distance, preferring to do so in person when the dwarf arrives.

REACHING CAIRO

The difficulty of the dwarf's journey to Cairo to meet Hatshepsut is entirely up to the Storyteller, depending on the chronicle. If the dwarf happens to be in Cairo, then it may be as simple as a messenger delivering Hatshepsut's summons and the characters going to meet her at her home. On the other hand, if the characters are in another country when the elder mummy's message reaches them, then their trip to meet with her may be considerably more involved.



Take two factors into account for the dwarf's trip to Cairo. The first is the chaos caused by the thinning of the Shroud, which has already begun by the time Hatshepsut contacts the dwarf. Depending on how far along things are, Cairo is likely in chaos, with the authorities doing their best to keep order. There are ghostly and spiritual visitations, as well as numerous cases of possession and encounters with the walking dead as wraiths extend their reach into the Lands of the Living and mortals become increasingly aware of Neter-khertet. Travel in and out of Cairo (or Egypt, or the Middle East, for that matter) might become restricted, forcing the dwarf to find different routes. Of course, the longer the trip takes, the worse the situation becomes and the more urgent the dwarf's mission.

The second factor is Eurydice, herself. She is supernaturally aware of Hatshepsut's divinations into her plans and intends to do something about them. She dispatches one or more of her stalkers, either to intercept the dwarf and keep it from reaching Hatshepsut or to attack both the characters and the Shemsu-heru at Hatshepsut's home in Cairo and prevent them from interfering in her plans.

Other challenges may await the dwarf along the journey to Cairo, from fierce sandstorms to fear-maddened terrorists or military patrols to sheer amounts of bureaucratic red tape. The actual trip can be a significant segment of the story or a simple scene change as the characters go from wherever they are to Hatshepsut's home in Cairo.

MEETING WITH THE PAST

Through one means or another, the dwarf arrives in Cairo and makes its way to Hatshepsut's small but opulent home. The house is well protected from the chaos in the city and surrounding area by various wards and amulets, allowing the dwarf to meet with the elder Shemsu-heru in relative peace, although it's clear that matters are becoming more urgent. Attending her at all times are members of the Disciples of Anubis, her undead caretakers, who welcome the dwarf graciously.

Hatshepsut dispenses with any formalities, welcoming the characters and telling them what has happened. A powerful wraith initially chosen to be reborn as Amenti has been corrupted by Apophis, chosen as the Corrupter's champion and avatar. Using mystic secrets wrested from the depths of the Underworld, this wraith, Eurydice, is tearing down the Shroud between the Lands of the Living and Neter-khertet. This act is causing the Shadowlands to merge with the mundane world, loosing a flood of ghosts and restless spirits and exposing mortals to the Lands of the Dead before their time. The effects of the Veil are causing chaos in the mortal world, and it will only get worse as time passes. In a matter of days, Eurydice will tear down the Shroud altogether, the Lands of the Living and the Lands of the Dead will become as one, and Apophis will triumph.

There is hope, however. Hatshepsut and the other Shemsu-heru are aware of a secret ritual, inscribed upon the wall of the Temple of Osiris in the lost city of Amenti in the depths of the Underworld. This powerful rite was always intended as a last-ditch means of preventing Apophis' victory and safeguarding the world, and it requires the power of the Reborn — those who have lived three lives — to use it. (Some might conclude that this is one of the reasons Osiris created the Amenti in the first place. If someone points this out, Hatshepsut does not deny it.)

To use the ritual, the characters must prematurely abandon their khat to travel into Duat and reach Amenti in time. In order to make the journey, they must die.



EMBRACING DEATH

Assuming the characters accept the mission Hatshepsut lays before them, they first need to die in order to make the transition into Neter-khertet and travel westward to Duat and places beyond.

The death rite can also be as simple or complex as the Storyteller desires. Hatshepsut has considerable knowledge of various poisons that can quickly and painlessly send the dwarf's bodies into the sleep of death, allowing their spirits to travel into the afterlife. Hatshepsut can insist on a more involved ritual, if necessary. Perhaps the characters must first be wrapped up in treated bandages and placed in ancient sarcophagi before they travel into Neter-khertet.

Alternatively, Eurydice might inadvertently help the characters along their journey. The corrupt wraith's stalkers might attack Hatshepsut's home as the Amenti prepare to depart for the Lands of the Dead. The monstrous creatures slay the mummies, including Hatshepsut, although she makes them pay dearly for her life, using powerful Hekau to defend herself and the characters. The key difference is that one of the stalkers captures Hatshepsut's soul. In fact, she might willingly sacrifice herself to allow the characters the opportunity to liberate their spirits and go into the Shadowlands. This leaves the dwarf on its own, with the characters aware of just how high the stakes are, if a millennia-old immortal is willing to sacrifice herself to give them their chance.

JOURNEY TO THE WEST

Once the characters have entered Neter-khertet, they must travel to the Pillars of the West, the entrance to Duat, the Underworld. They travel through the Shadowlands of Cairo, dealing with wandering ghosts and even noticing that some mortals are aware of them as they pass. (How many depends on how thin the Shroud has become in the area.) It should be an unsettling experience for the Amenti, though the spirits they encounter shouldn't pose too much of a challenge for them.

The mummies make their way out past the pyramids and into the western desert, which eventually leads deeper into Neter-khertet, away from the Lands of the Living and toward the Underworld. In time, the characters see the Pillars of the West in the distance as they approach their destination.

THE PILLARS OF THE WEST

The Pillars of the West mark the border between Neter-khertet and Duat. The dwarf must make its way through the caverns and tunnels between the Pillars to reach the Underworld.

Normally, the Judges of Ma'at pose various tests of a traveler's worthiness. In this case, however, the power of Apophis has grown great enough that the Corrupter uses the tests of the Pillars as obstacles in the Amenti's path. The tests that the characters face should be manifestations of their deepest fears and desires, brought to terrifying life.

Storytellers should tailor the different experiences and challenges to the individual characters in the chronicle. The common themes should be what the characters have to lose and what they most fear. Apophis wants to encourage the Amenti to cling to life above all else, much like Eurydice, who values her own life above that of every other living creature and is willing to sacrifice the whole world to Apophis in order to spare herself from death.



Potential experiences include flashbacks from the characters' previous lives, particularly stressing how they have changed for the better (or foibles they have not yet overcome). Friends and loved ones might plead with the Undying not to leave them, and Apophis might offer tempting tastes of the many pleasures life has to offer, coupled with the terrifying mystery of what lies beyond the dark of Duat.

ANUBIS SPEAKS

Once the dwarf makes its way through the Pillars of the West, it arrives in the vast desert of Duat, wracked by the terrible Dja-akh. The storm's fury is greater than anything the characters have seen before, howling and shrieking, the winds filled with moaning spirits. The power of the storm seems to be building, encouraged by Eurydice and the power of Apophis until it is strong enough to tear apart the Shroud between the worlds. The characters should find themselves buffeted by the howling winds and blowing sand, even in the relative shelter of the caverns.

Then they see a faint light in the distance, through the blowing sand and clouds, and a dark figure appears. Anubis, the guide of the dead, strides through the storm, carrying a glowing lantern suspended from the end of a long pole. The jackal-headed god nods gravely to the characters, then speaks to them in a low voice that somehow carries clearly over the howl of the storm around them.

"Has the time come?" Anubis asks them.

If the characters answer in the affirmative, or otherwise tell Anubis why they have traveled to Duat, he nods and asks. "Are you prepared?"

If the characters say yes, then the guide of the dead turns and leads them out into the Dja-akh. If the characters answer in the negative to either question, or ask Anubis for clarification, the jackal-god silently turns and leads them out into the storm, but does not speak to them again. He leads them to Amenti, but it is up to them to decide to stop there, following Hatshepsut's instructions, and to find the Temple of Osiris.

As long as the characters remain within the glow of Anubis' lantern, they are protected from the effects of the Ghost Storm and the wraiths and spectres within it. If you wish, you can subject the characters to another challenge by having one or more spirits break through Anubis' protection to attack the dwarf. The jackal-god is occupied strengthening his sphere of influence and keeping out the fury of the storm, leaving the characters to deal with the rogue spirits on their own.

THE RITE OF THE SLAIN KING

Finally, Anubis leads the Amenti to their namesake, the ruined city buried in the dark sands of Duat, buffeted by the winds of the Dja-akh. If the characters told Anubis their mission, he leads them through the broken and buried streets of the city to its single intact structure. If not, he leads them past Amenti, and it's up to the characters to choose to strike out on their own for the city and find the temple. If they continue on with Anubis, they encounter the Judges of Ma'at, who send them back to complete their mission before it's too late.

The Temple of Osiris is a massive sandstone building supported by giant columns. Inside it is dark and eerily silent, unaffected by the storm raging outside. The centerpiece is a giant throne, now empty, and the walls are inscribed with Egyptian hieroglyphics. One wall behind the throne holds the rite



the dwarf seeks, and any character able to translate the symbols can read it. If none of the characters are fluent in Ancient Egyptian, they can use the *Memory* Background to recall enough to read it. If neither is an option, feel free to offer the characters a moment of divine inspiration, the total memories of their First Lives flooding back to them.

THE RITUAL

The *Rite of the Slain King* is easily the most powerful Hekau ritual the characters have seen. In essence, the rite weaves a new and impenetrable Shroud, but it requires unique and perfected souls of beings like the Amenti as its raw material. The rite will transform the souls of the Undying into a Shroud that will separate the two worlds permanently, but the Amenti will be no more. They will not die, precisely, but their essence will be forever bound into the Shroud. For the world to live, the immortals must die.

The rite is designed so that only the Undying themselves can use it, but the characters must still decide to sacrifice not only themselves, but *all of their kind* in order for the ritual to work. Note that the rite does not require the permission of the other Amenti. Even one mummy can attempt it, and all the other Undying are affected by it, whether they wish to be or not.

The *Rite of the Slain King* is an extended ritual against a difficulty of 10 Traits, using a Mental Challenge (retest *Occult*). A total of 10 successful tests are required, with one test per five minutes of play. Failure on any one of these tests requires an additional Simple Test. If this test results in a loss, the rite is considered botched and all accumulated successful tests are lost, though it can be restarted. There is no Sekhem cost, since the rite is empowered by the souls of the Reborn themselves. The dwarf can cooperate in performing the rite or just some of the characters can perform it, perhaps leaving the others to defend them, since they will not complete the rite unopposed.

DON'T LOOK BACK

After the characters begin the ritual and have made their first successful test, Eurydice enters the temple in her full and terrible glory as the Avatar of Apophis. She glows with power, hovering in the midst of a swirling storm of black clouds, lightning flashing from her eyes and crackling over her skin. Her voice is like thunder that shakes the pillars of the temple as she commands the Amenti to stop what they are doing. For this last confrontation with Eurydice, Storytellers have a couple of options, depending on the sort of climactic scene they desire.

First, one or more ghosts or stalkers may accompany Eurydice. She commands them to attack the mummies, allowing a final battle where some of the characters fight to hold off Eurydice and her minions long enough for the others to complete the rite. Regardless of their power and number, Eurydice should be powerful enough to pose a serious challenge to the dwarf.

Alternatively, the power of the rite might prevent Eurydice from directly attacking the dwarf once it has begun. All she can hope to do is convince the characters to stop what they are doing of their own free will before the ritual is complete. She uses threats, logic, persuasion, seduction and any other means available to her to convince the Amenti. She will promise them dominion over their own kingdoms, wealth and power, harems of lovers, virtually anything in order to sway them. She might also threaten to destroy people and places important to the

CHAPTER EIGHT



characters, and she has the means to do so, forcing the characters to decide what they are willing to sacrifice in order to succeed. As long as the dwarf remains steadfast, the Corrupter's avatar is powerless to stop them.

CLOSING THE SHROUD

When the *Rite of the Slain King* is complete, the souls of all Reborn, everywhere in the world, are drawn from their khat and merged into a newer and more powerful Shroud that rises up between the world of the living and the Lands of the Dead. Eurydice screams in terror and rage as the Shroud separates the two worlds forever, drawing all the spirits of the dead back into the Shadowlands and preventing any of them from ever returning. The dead will remain dead, and never reach the Lands of the Living again.

Of course, the Amenti are only dimly aware of this as their consciousness merges in a single transcendent moment. They are aware of the presence of Osiris himself, a part of the foundation of the ritual, sacrificed once more for the cause of his people; of the eldest Shemsu-heru (including Horus); even of Ma'at, herself, lending her power to this most noble and balanced of acts. For a shining moment, the Amenti are aware of the perfect balance and rightness of all things, and then they are no more.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

The following characters are pivotal to the events in “Long Day’s Journey into Night.” Feel free to modify these supporting characters to suit the events of the chronicle, or even substitute other characters in their places if suitable replacements have emerged in the course of your chronicle.

EURYDICE

In this scenario, the corrupt wraith is the Avatar of Apophis, but rather than a risen embodiment of death and corruption, Eurydice is still a wraith, with a terrible hunger for life. She is empowered by Apophis and her own khaabit to tear down the Shroud between the worlds, to merge the Lands of the Living and the Lands of the Dead into one. Only then will she attain the resurrection that she seeks, and she will reign over the two worlds in the name of the Corrupter.

Eurydice is every bit as powerful as the players have feared, except that she is not embodied in this scenario and exists as a wraith in Duat, albeit one with the power of Apophis at her command. Eurydice is completely and utterly mad. She cares nothing for anyone or anything, and she will gladly sacrifice the whole world to Apophis if that is what it takes to regain her grip on life.

HATSHEPSUT

Hatshepsut understands well the meaning of sacrifice. She is one of the Shemsu-heru, the original mummies created by the Spell of Life, an ally of Horus himself. More importantly, the Nile Queen served as one of the greatest champions against the machinations of Apophis, although few actually know it. Hatshepsut was the subject of a mighty enchantment known as the *Rite of the Sun King*, which made her a barrier in the Shadowlands against Apophis’ full power manifesting in the Lands of the Living. The barrier was designed to keep the Corrupter at bay so that he was forced to operate through his various agents. Hatshepsut was aided and supported by the Disciples of Anubis, a secret society privy to the rite and her duties.

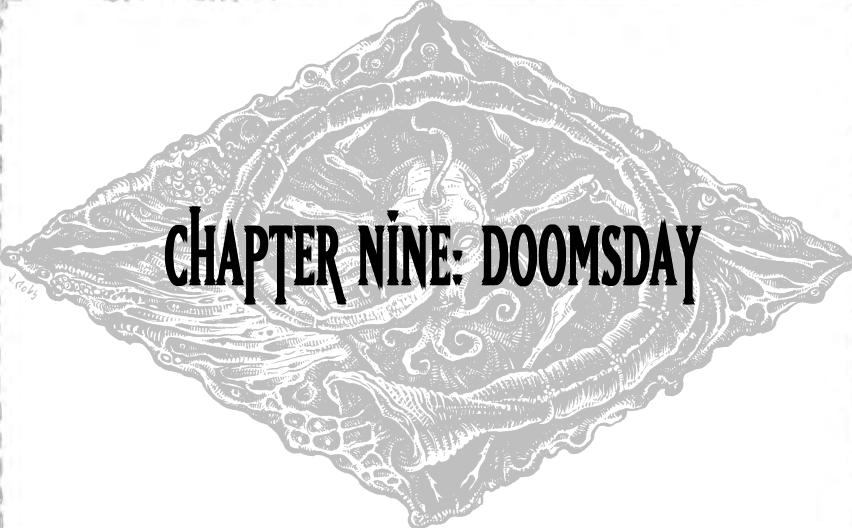
Hatshepsut and the rite helped safeguard the world until the coming of the Dja-akh. The Ghost Storm disrupted Hatshepsut's place in Neter-khertet and forced her back into her khat, kept safe by the Disciples. They assisted the Queen in recovering her strength and acclimating to the world that she left behind long ago, but the *Rite of the Sun King* was broken and the power of Apophis unleashed. Now the Destroyer has found an avatar and the end is near. Hatshepsut is entrusted with the knowledge that may yet turn the tide, but with a high price. She understands sacrifice and what she must now ask of the dwarf.

Hatshepsut's role in this scenario is that of a guide and ally of the Amenti, so her traits are largely irrelevant. She is an elder and powerful Shemsu-heru. She has extensive knowledge of ancient lore and powerful Hekau, but she is still limited when it comes to dealing with the modern world. Feel free to give Hatshepsut whatever abilities she needs to deal with situations and to move events in the story along.

CHAPTER EIGHT



robert wheeler (order #15253)



CHAPTER NINE: DOOMSDAY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains several resources for Storytellers interested in running **Oblivion** chronicles during the End Times. It begins with an examination summary of “The Last Dance Macabre,” the final story of the Dark Kingdom of Iron, as well as some Storytelling advice for how to make that scenario accessible to their own **Oblivion** chronicles.

It also contains information about the nature of Great Maelstroms, the impact of the Reckoning and possibilities for Storytellers interested in continuing beyond the end scenario outlined here.

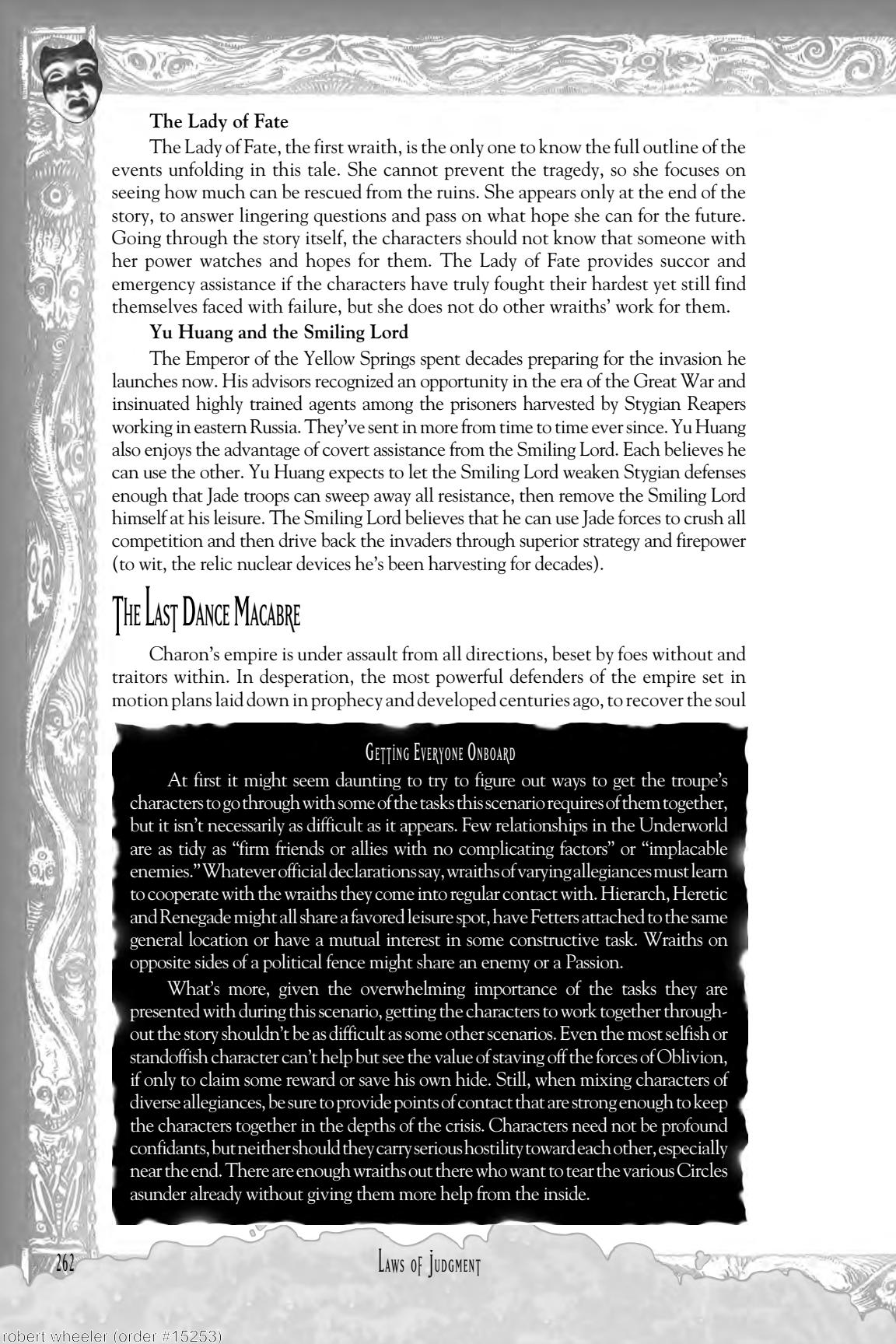
THE POWERS BEHIND THE SCENES

The events of this chapter truly began with plots set in motion centuries ago. This section reviews the plans laid by some of the Dark Kingdom’s most powerful individuals and groups, as well as the complications that fouled up their various agendas.

THE MNEMOI

The Mnemoi were long ago entrusted with the most precious burden in all of Stygia: Charon’s complete memories. The Guild was to hold those memories in safekeeping against the day Charon would leave the Underworld, be reborn and eventually return. To cement the illusion, Charon had the Mnemoi “banished”—as much to prevent his memories from being taken advantage of by Stygian society as to keep them safe in the hinterlands of the Underworld.

Over the centuries, the Mnemoi were hunted down before they could pass on their precious burdens, or they succumbed to the pressures of persecution and went Spectre. The current leaders of the Guild know that they have not fulfilled their mission. They only hope they’ve been able to save enough of Charon so that he might in turn be able to save them. As a result, the Mnemoi act with desperate purpose. They are among the very few extant wraiths who know what precisely is at stake.



The Lady of Fate

The Lady of Fate, the first wraith, is the only one to know the full outline of the events unfolding in this tale. She cannot prevent the tragedy, so she focuses on seeing how much can be rescued from the ruins. She appears only at the end of the story, to answer lingering questions and pass on what hope she can for the future. Going through the story itself, the characters should not know that someone with her power watches and hopes for them. The Lady of Fate provides succor and emergency assistance if the characters have truly fought their hardest yet still find themselves faced with failure, but she does not do other wraiths' work for them.

Yu Huang and the Smiling Lord

The Emperor of the Yellow Springs spent decades preparing for the invasion he launches now. His advisors recognized an opportunity in the era of the Great War and insinuated highly trained agents among the prisoners harvested by Stygian Reapers working in eastern Russia. They've sent in more from time to time ever since. Yu Huang also enjoys the advantage of covert assistance from the Smiling Lord. Each believes he can use the other. Yu Huang expects to let the Smiling Lord weaken Stygian defenses enough that Jade troops can sweep away all resistance, then remove the Smiling Lord himself at his leisure. The Smiling Lord believes that he can use Jade forces to crush all competition and then drive back the invaders through superior strategy and firepower (to wit, the relic nuclear devices he's been harvesting for decades).

The Last Dance Macabre

Charon's empire is under assault from all directions, beset by foes without and traitors within. In desperation, the most powerful defenders of the empire set in motion plans laid down in prophecy and developed centuries ago, to recover the soul

GETTING EVERYONE ONBOARD

At first it might seem daunting to try to figure out ways to get the troupe's characters to go through with some of the tasks this scenario requires of them together, but it isn't necessarily as difficult as it appears. Few relationships in the Underworld are as tidy as "firm friends or allies with no complicating factors" or "implacable enemies." Whatever official declarations say, wraiths of varying allegiances must learn to cooperate with the wraiths they come into regular contact with. Hierarch, Heretic and Renegade might all share a favored leisure spot, have Fetters attached to the same general location or have a mutual interest in some constructive task. Wraiths on opposite sides of a political fence might share an enemy or a Passion.

What's more, given the overwhelming importance of the tasks they are presented with during this scenario, getting the characters to work together throughout the story shouldn't be as difficult as some other scenarios. Even the most selfish or standoffish character can't help but see the value of staving off the forces of Oblivion, if only to claim some reward or save his own hide. Still, when mixing characters of diverse allegiances, be sure to provide points of contact that are strong enough to keep the characters together in the depths of the crisis. Characters need not be profound confidants, but neither should they carry serious hostility toward each other, especially near the end. There are enough wraiths out there who want to tear the various Circles asunder already without giving them more help from the inside.

and mind of Charon. The characters become part of the plans, marked by Fate for a crucial role as smoothly running operations stumble and fall. They move from Necropolis battlefield to the heart of Stygia itself, and have a voice in the last council of the Stygian Empire.

“The Last Danse Macabre” is a story of hope in the midst of tragedy. The institutions built up over millennia to unite and govern the Restless Dead fail. As things fall apart, however, the characters move into position to pick up the pieces, or perhaps to build something new. The Underworld does not come to an end in this story, and its future form depends greatly on what the characters do now. One era might be coming to an end, but the next one is just beginning, with the characters at its epicenter.

PART ONE: ENVIOUS GAZES

The first chapter begins with war. Yu Huang’s long-planned invasion of the Dark Kingdom of Iron erupts, exploiting two advantages: the extent to which Stygian military forces are committed to the destruction of the recently discovered black city of vampires, and the Smiling Lord’s subtle treachery. The finest soldiers of the Dark Kingdom of Jade pour through artificial Byways, bypassing all the usual Stygian defenses. The characters take part in the desperate battle for control of the Necropolis: the surprise of the attack, rallying for defense, engagements along the beachhead perimeter and chases and clashes throughout the city.

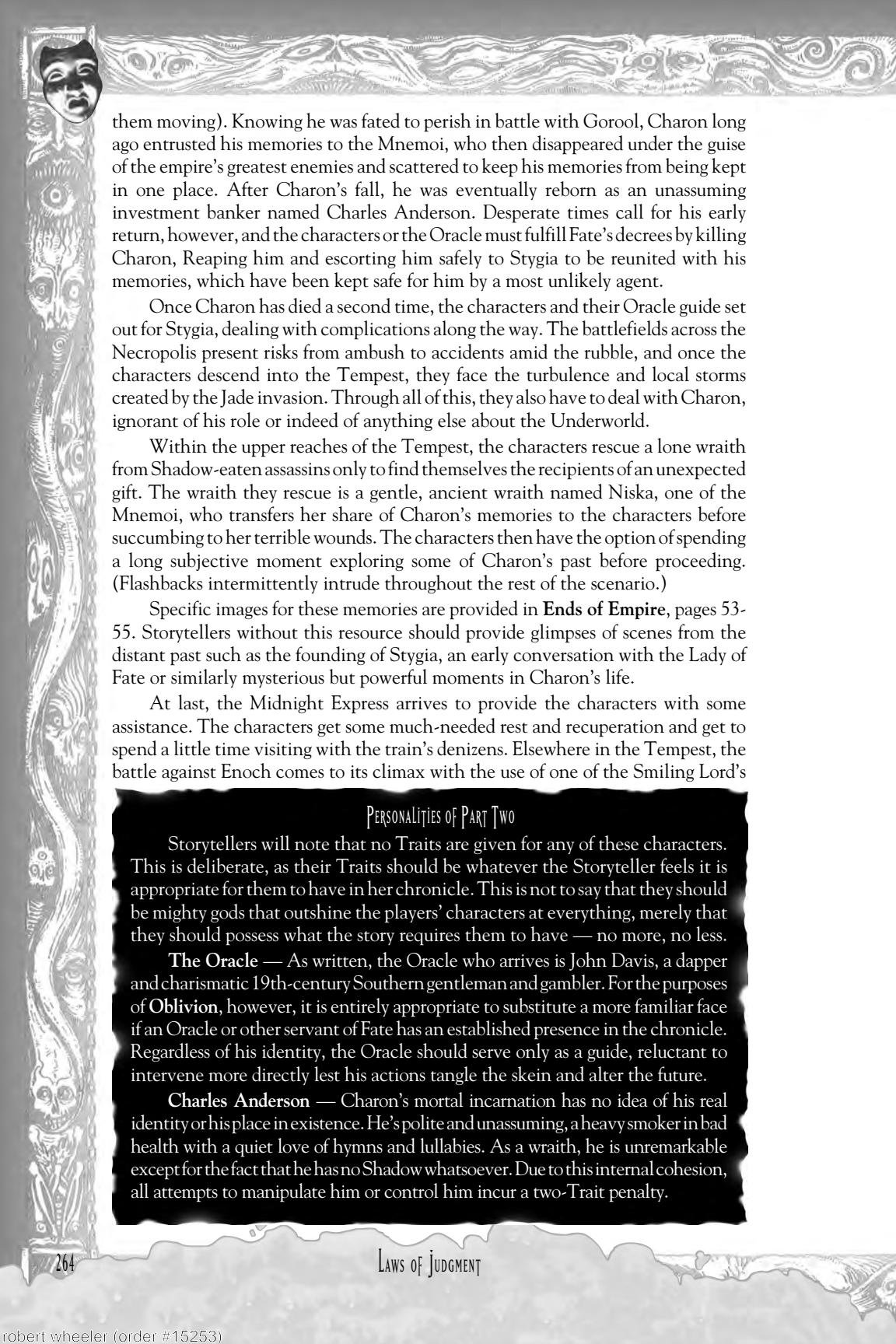
In this first installment, the characters first face the basic challenges of mere survival, primarily those involved in getting away from shock troops (and complications like exploding Artifact vehicles). Storytellers should pull out all the stops to create the impression of the sudden fear and confusion of the invasion. Dim the lights to simulate candlelight or “emergency power.” Play recorded sound effects of bombs and gunfire to create raging battles in the distance. Give the players all manner of frantic reports from friends and allies around town. Narrator characters playing invading Jade soldiers or local militia forces should naturally make frequent appearances in one form or another, and characters should feel that there is little time to do anything other than escape the brunt of the invasion long enough to fight back.

Then they join the ranks of Iron Kingdom wraiths taking the battle back to the invaders. The key for the Storyteller here is to ensure all the characters’ utility during the invasion. Physically fearsome wraiths are naturally able to find much to do, but sneakier types can also find places to hide or perform sabotage missions, while intellectual characters can plan strategy or research the weaknesses of the enemy. More socially inclined characters can serve as leaders and firebrands to keep the troops motivated. Weaving several subplots geared toward each type of character around the main arc of the invasion is generally the best way to make sure that everyone has a role to fulfill in the city’s common defense.

Regardless of how they respond, this episode should ultimately conclude with the wraiths helping repulse the invasion and securing the liberty of at least part of the city to stage the next phase of their response — unless the characters seriously botch their efforts.

PART TWO: INTO THE DEPTHS

Just as the characters have a chance to get their bearings again, the unexpected interrupts their plans to push the invaders further back from their perimeters. A high-ranking Oracle arrives from Stygia with a fresh mission for the characters. He explains Charon’s plan for rebirth (or at least as much as they need to know to get



them moving). Knowing he was fated to perish in battle with Gorool, Charon long ago entrusted his memories to the Mnemoi, who then disappeared under the guise of the empire's greatest enemies and scattered to keep his memories from being kept in one place. After Charon's fall, he was eventually reborn as an unassuming investment banker named Charles Anderson. Desperate times call for his early return, however, and the characters or the Oracle must fulfill Fate's decrees by killing Charon, Reaping him and escorting him safely to Stygia to be reunited with his memories, which have been kept safe for him by a most unlikely agent.

Once Charon has died a second time, the characters and their Oracle guide set out for Stygia, dealing with complications along the way. The battlefields across the Necropolis present risks from ambush to accidents amid the rubble, and once the characters descend into the Tempest, they face the turbulence and local storms created by the Jade invasion. Through all of this, they also have to deal with Charon, ignorant of his role or indeed of anything else about the Underworld.

Within the upper reaches of the Tempest, the characters rescue a lone wraith from Shadow-eaten assassins only to find themselves the recipients of an unexpected gift. The wraith they rescue is a gentle, ancient wraith named Niska, one of the Mnemoi, who transfers her share of Charon's memories to the characters before succumbing to her terrible wounds. The characters then have the option of spending a long subjective moment exploring some of Charon's past before proceeding. (Flashbacks intermittently intrude throughout the rest of the scenario.)

Specific images for these memories are provided in *Ends of Empire*, pages 53-55. Storytellers without this resource should provide glimpses of scenes from the distant past such as the founding of Stygia, an early conversation with the Lady of Fate or similarly mysterious but powerful moments in Charon's life.

At last, the Midnight Express arrives to provide the characters with some assistance. The characters get some much-needed rest and recuperation and get to spend a little time visiting with the train's denizens. Elsewhere in the Tempest, the battle against Enoch comes to its climax with the use of one of the Smiling Lord's

PERSONALITIES OF PART TWO

Storytellers will note that no Traits are given for any of these characters. This is deliberate, as their Traits should be whatever the Storyteller feels it is appropriate for them to have in her chronicle. This is not to say that they should be mighty gods that outshine the players' characters at everything, merely that they should possess what the story requires them to have — no more, no less.

The Oracle — As written, the Oracle who arrives is John Davis, a dapper and charismatic 19th-century Southern gentleman and gambler. For the purposes of *Oblivion*, however, it is entirely appropriate to substitute a more familiar face if an Oracle or other servant of Fate has an established presence in the chronicle. Regardless of his identity, the Oracle should serve only as a guide, reluctant to intervene more directly lest his actions tangle the skein and alter the future.

Charles Anderson — Charon's mortal incarnation has no idea of his real identity or his place in existence. He's polite and unassuming, a heavy smoker in bad health with a quiet love of hymns and lullabies. As a wraith, he is unremarkable except for the fact that he has no Shadow whatsoever. Due to this internal cohesion, all attempts to manipulate him or control him incur a two-Trait penalty.

A Perfect Circle

It can be all too easy to read each instance of “the characters” as referring to a single specific Circle in the troupe becoming the sole “heroes” of this scenario, particularly during the second and fourth parts. Don’t let this happen. While many “scripted” events must occur to move the story forward as described, nothing says only one particular Circle can be the one to do it all. In Part Two, for instance, one Circle might be made responsible for the grim yet vital task of killing Charles Anderson and helping him adjust to the afterlife, while another might be the group that finds Niska and receives some of Charon’s memories. In Part Four, the most combat-oriented wraiths might band together to take down Coldheart, while a more socially adept group could find itself talking down important allies from Catharsis. Simply make sure that each Circle’s work keeps it cooperating and ultimately leads back to the main story. Look at the players and what their Circles enjoy, and make sure there’s plenty of important work for all characters and Circles to do as the story builds.

relic nuclear weapons. The characters know only that the Sixth Great Maelstrom erupts with the Midnight Express in sight of Stygia but not yet there.

PART THREE: JOURNEY TO NO END

After a long ride that provides some time to relax and discuss what has happened (perhaps also providing an interesting “locked room” session or two for all the characters as they find themselves confined to close quarters together), disaster strikes elsewhere in the Underworld as the Smiling Lord detonates his relic nuclear device over Enoch, destroying the black city of the vampires and unleashing the Sixth Great Maelstrom. The Midnight Express is derailed, and tension mounts as the characters and their companions must begin the very dangerous passage from the Midnight Express to Stygia, dogged by rising numbers of Spectres and nightmarish Maelstrom winds. Fortunately, just as things look their worst, the Skeletal Lord and his forces emerge from the darkness. Together the two groups fight their way to safety.

Once they are within the multiple layers of Stygian defense, the characters take part in the final council of the Deathlords. Needless to say, this should be a powerful roleplaying experience for all involved. It is highly recommended that a number of Narrator characters in full costume be enlisted to do justice to the various Deathlords present. Business turns to restoring Charon after a brief discussion of the invasion, but first the Lady of Fate announces that they must expose the traitor in their midst, the one who sold out the empire to the Yellow Springs and opened the path for invasion. The Smiling Lord’s treachery is exposed, and the characters have a chance to help catch the fleeing Deathlord and bring him to justice. Sentence is either immediate destruction or being turned over to Lord Nhudri. It’s anyone’s guess which is really worse.

Once justice has been served, the task returns to aiding the Mnemoi in rebuilding Charon’s memories. This should be an imaginative and enigmatic scene, involving the characters and the Mnemoi attempting to take fractured pieces of fleeting moments and powerful memories and forge them into a whole again. Storytellers might wish to require a number of Mental Challenges with the *Enigmas* Ability to help, or even just ask the players to put together a real jigsaw puzzle or solve some other real conundrum to represent the difficulty of the task. Colored lighting,



montages of bizarre and ancient images and ethereal music might also go a long way toward portraying the bizarrely beautiful halls of the memory palace.

Unfortunately, it is ultimately a task that is already destined to end in only partial success, despite their efforts. Quite simply, too many Mnemoi have been destroyed, too many of Charon's memories lost over time to fully rebuild the memory palace. Therefore, the episode ends with Charon, though restored to his old personality and some semblance of his previous grandeur, sadly announcing that he can no longer be the leader he once was.

PART FOUR: THE END OF ALL THINGS

The scenario's final chapter opens not too long after, with Stygia coming under attack from within as well as without. As the Great Maelstrom lashes Stygia, the thousands of Spectres captured by Martyr Knights and stored in the city's catacombs burst loose. Adding more misery to this total, the Pardoners' vast container of Angst explodes, drenching many hapless wraiths with purified liquid Angst and sending those so exposed into instant Catharsis. While the Spectral assault from the Tempest escalates, the city's wraiths fight against unexpected enemies and their own comrades fallen to Oblivion. Charon and the Deathlords ride into a battle that ebbs and flows across the breadth of the city.

The battle brings in all the forces opposed to Oblivion, including the Ferrymen, returning to the city for the first time since they turned their backs on Charon. Victory does not come easily — some of the empire's most powerful wraiths sacrifice themselves to buy time for others. If there was ever a time during this scenario to not hold back with staging and atmosphere, this is it. Storytellers should do all they can

PERSONALITIES OF PART FOUR

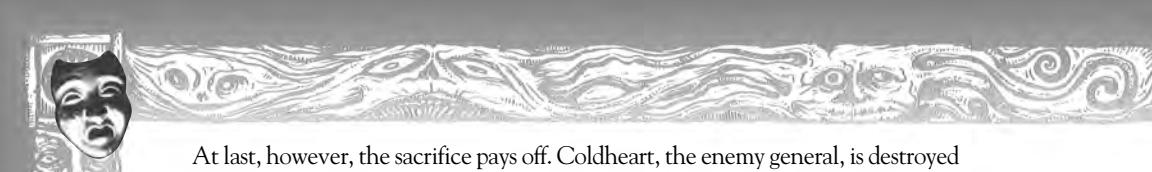
Coldheart — The general of the Labyrinth, this ancient Nephwrack has long dreamt of the day he would finally tear Stygia apart and rend its society asunder. Surrounded by an elite force of Doppelgangers and Mortwrights and master of countless forms of magic and killing, he is a nightmarish foe on the battlefield, easily a worthy adversary for two or even three Circles of powerful wraiths. Stepping forward to battle Coldheart should be the most terrifying experience a wraith will ever have, as his power and fury at being challenged will be almost beyond their imagining. Defeating him routs the armies of Oblivion in one stroke, however, not to mention making for a stirring and intense scene.

The Mourners — These bizarre and terrifying creatures appear as a mob of wailing, grieving wraiths clad in simple mourning clothes. Though they never appear to hurry, they inexorably gain ground on a character who catches their attention, and they cannot be slain — only driven off with powerful Arcanoi or artifacts. Most terrifying of all, any wraith who touches one of them or attempts to read their thoughts contracts Mournerism and transforms into one of the mob in mere moments. Absolutely no power or skill can prevent this transformation. (It is generally best to have the players witness one or two Narrator characters suffer this fate in order to avoid losing characters to such simple contact during an initial encounter with the Mourners.) They wander the streets of Stygia during the battle, eventually herding the characters to the base of Charon's tower as the final moments of this scenario play out.

to convey the chaos of the Maelstrom and the raging battle, keeping the players desperately hunting for ways their characters can turn back what appears to be certain doom. Friends and foes are cut down forever all around, everything they consider precious is on the line, and the fate of the world is in the balance. The players should feel that this is it, all or nothing, and be expecting either outcome as equally likely.

MAELSTROM FORCE LEVELS

- Force One — Winds blow up to 40 mph. “Rain” includes liquids carried up from the Tempest and some small pieces of solid debris. Unprotected wraiths must make a Physical Challenge (retest *Survival*) against three Traits or suffer two levels of normal damage per scene of exposure. Light armor and minimal shelter offer complete protection. Haunts reduce damage by one level per *Haut* rating.
- Force Two — Winds blow up to 80 mph. All tasks undertaken outdoors or in places the wind can reach incur a one-Trait penalty. “Rain” includes strange, noxious liquids and wriggling live plasmics. Solid debris includes chunks of pavement, wind-sharpened fragments of bone and Stygian steel and other dangerous objects. Spectres often move through the storm. Unprotected wraiths must make a Physical test as described before, but the difficulty is five Traits, the damage becomes three levels per scene, and it is aggravated up to one quarter of the time. Armor provides its usual protection, while Haunts reduce damage by one level per *Haut* rating. The storm blows in windows, rips away loose roofs and the like, but it cannot break through solid structures.
- Force Three — Winds blow up to 120 mph. Outdoor activities are at a two-Trait penalty. “Rain” consists of a mixture of harmless and dangerous elements, including dangerous fluids from the Tempest and hostile plasmics. Spectres fill the storm and converge on exposed wraiths. Unprotected wraiths must make a Physical test against a difficulty of seven Traits or suffer four levels of damage per scene. This damage is aggravated about half the time. Armor counts for only half its normal health levels for the purposes of the storm. Haunts reduce damage by one level per *Haut* rating. The storm easily smashes through flimsy Shadowlands doors, roofs and walls.
- Force Four — Winds blow to at least 200 mph. Outdoor activities are at +3 difficulty (or higher). Rain and debris slashes in from all angles, penetrating any place that is not tightly sealed. Spectres fill the storm and attack anyone outdoors for more than a minute or two. Exposed wraiths must test against difficulty 10 or suffer six levels of damage each scene. This damage is aggravated half the time. Armor counts for half its normal value. Haunts reduce damage by one less level than the *Haut* ratings. Buildings that lack strong reinforcement might collapse.
- Force Five — Storms this strong blow only at the moments of greatest chaos, like the outbreak of a Great Maelstrom. Wind speeds are immeasurable. Outdoor activities are at a minimum of a four-Trait penalty, and possibly much higher. Spectres converge almost instantly on exposed targets. Exposed wraiths must succeed at a test against a difficulty of 16 Traits or suffer eight levels of damage per scene, usually aggravated. Armor provides two less levels of protection than normal, rounded down. Haunts reduce damage by one level per two points of *Haut* rating, rounded down. Only massive Citadels, structures of Stygian steel and the like stand much chance of surviving.



At last, however, the sacrifice pays off. Coldheart, the enemy general, is destroyed at the hands of a brave band of characters, and the forces of the Labyrinth fall into disarray, until they are driven from the field in a total rout. When the Spectral hordes at last retreat, however, the Isle of Sorrows has been so badly battered that it cannot be restored. After the fighting ends, Charon's final acts as emperor before his Transcendence in a glowing column of light include opening the way for his heirs (namely the characters) to find a new home and found a new society for the Underworld.

The scenario ends with the prospect of rebuilding. The characters and the other wraiths face a future in which the old powers are gone forever. Now it's time to rebuild and prepare for the immediate challenges — the continuing devastation wrought by Sixth Great Maelstrom foremost among them — and for the long-term futures. They can choose to take their fellow survivors and begin building a new social order (perhaps taking over where one of the previous groups left off), or they may choose to lead an exodus in search of a new "homeland" in the Underworld, where they may seek their final destiny. Perhaps they will even do both, with some remaining behind to forge a new order while others explore the far ranges of the undiscovered country. What happens from there is entirely up to the players to determine (if they wish to continue at all). For its part, however, "The Last Dance Macabre" has ended.

ALTERNATIVE ENDINGS

Of course, while it ties together many of the stories that have been part of **Oblivion** since the beginning, "The Last Dance Macabre" is not the only direction an **Oblivion** story of the End Times could take. What follows is a brief discussion of two other possible endings Storytellers might want to explore.

STORM-TOSSED REFUGEES

Not all wraiths caught in the Sixth Great Maelstrom are instantly sent into Destruction Harrowings. Some exceptionally lucky or determined wraiths find themselves inexplicably returned to the lands of the living, as though the storm had literally blown them back into the physical world once more. Unlike normal Risen, however, these creatures do not require a Conduit for their Shadow to inhabit. Both Psyche and Shadow remain in the body together, bound together as they always have been. No longer do Fetters bind them or Passions rule their every thought (though both remain extremely important in any event). Such wraiths are closer to their pre-death mental state than ever.

This is not to say that the process is without drawbacks, however. To begin with, it is not something that can be done intentionally, not unless the wraith is suicidal enough to risk the storm in the hopes it will carry him back to the living instead of just to his own destruction. Furthermore, not all wraiths find themselves back in their own bodies. While some reconstitute centuries-old corpses to inhabit (even make them reasonably lifelike), others find themselves trapped in rotting shells or even the body of another departed soul. Either can have dire consequences on the sanity of the Psyche, not to mention feeding the Shadow great amounts of Angst from the miserable conditions and lingering separation from true living that the Psyche must endure daily. Lastly, the agony of the crossing and condition of the body renders many of these unfortunate wraiths little more than animalistic zombies, existing only to prey on the living.

Having the troupe's characters caught up in the storm and unexpectedly blown back into the living world as a group can make for an extremely fascinating and



intense roleplaying experience. (Perhaps the communal *Haut* finally gives way under the pounding of the storm after a tense session of waiting and fearing the worst, only to deliver the characters to this unexpected fate instead of the Labyrinth.) Former enemies might potentially turn to each other for comfort in the face of the pain and isolation they feel as undead walking among the living — or take the opportunity to settle some scores with each other and the Skinlands in ways they never could dream of across the Shroud. The characters might even attempt to break off and form their own “community of the dead” away from the eyes of the living, which has its own fantastic possibilities.

In terms of game mechanics, such characters are subject to the normal creation or conversion rules as ordinary Risen, with the following exceptions. First, they do not require a Conduit, nor are subject to any rules or conditions relating to one. They gain Angst, experience Catharsis and suffer from the predations of their Shadows just like ordinary wraiths. Second, while they do not require the normal minimum levels of certain Arcanoi to “rise” (since the storm does it for them), the same Arcanoi remain impossible to utilize in the living world. They do have the same potential to develop a small number of vampiric Disciplines to simulate their enhanced physical prowess, though.

Last but not least, such restless dead often find themselves dealing with the imbued hunters of **Laws of the Reckoning** at one time or another. The circumstances that created the imbued and drove the wraiths back to their bodies appear to be mysteriously linked, somehow. Of course, whether contact means a bloody battle or a tender examination of life and the nature of letting go depends entirely on the attitudes of individual imbued encountered, as determined by the Storyteller. Exploring the apparent connection between the wraiths of **Oblivion** and the imbued of, however, **Reckoning** can make for a fascinating series of stories as both sides try to figure out what must be done about the peril they find themselves in during the End Times.

Don't Look Back

Some inquisitive and creative **Oblivion** Storytellers have doubtless looked into the material found in the **Orpheus** limited series as a possible direction to take their games. Naturally, Storytellers who wish to take this road are naturally free to do so if they desire, but they should weigh a few facts before proceeding.

Most importantly, while it certainly has similarities, **Orpheus** was not designed for compatibility with either **Wraith** or **Mind's Eye Theatre**. It is a game in full, with its own rules, flavor, history and setting material that requires a great deal of examination and testing if the Storyteller wishes to make full use of what it has to offer, without making both games unplayable in the process. In addition, its story arc has already been determined, meaning that unless they intend to switch their continuity to match that of **Orpheus**, Storytellers should expect to do additional work to mesh the disparate elements of these two games without losing what interested them in the first place.

With that in mind, if both players and Storytellers still desire to investigate a transition from the hope, horror and tragedy of **Oblivion** to the mystery, danger and intrigue of **Orpheus**, then of course the choice is theirs to make. Just don't say Radio Free Death hasn't warned you...



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CHAPTER TEN:

REVELATIONS

THIS IS THE END

How often have you had the luxury of bringing things in your life to a neat and planned conclusion, to achieve satisfactory closure in a job, a personal relationship or even a computer game? It's not easy. Life doesn't come packaged in neat, easily digestible pieces you can slot in when they're convenient. Neither do most roleplaying chronicles, despite the best designs of the Storyteller. Having said that, let us hasten to add that this is exactly what this book is all about: helping Storytellers bring their chronicles to a smashing close. Hopefully this end will provoke, entertain, sadden and satisfy all the Storytellers and players who have dedicated themselves to and immersed themselves in this engaging and complex chronicle world.

Fine. But exactly how do you go about doing that? Few Storytellers and even fewer players have ever participated in a chronicle that came to an end on purpose. We've all seen chronicles die out as players move away or need to put a game on hold to accommodate real-life concerns. Some of these games end abruptly, without any real resolution. Others simply never get underway again. But this time how you make the exit is in your own hands.

To do so, Storytellers need do no more than consider all those elements they've considered when building the chronicle. So, no big surprises! Just do what you've been doing all along but with an eye toward tying up the loose ends. Such elements as plot, scope, scale, direction and pacing should be old hat by now, and they can even be used to cover up your true intent so the players don't even realize that the chronicle is ending until it slaps them in the face. Though bringing existing chronicles to an end receives most of the emphasis of this chapter, there's no reason a Storyteller can't begin a chronicle with an eye toward the ultimate end. Whichever you're doing, the following considerations are the nuts and bolts you can use to build an End-Times chronicle from scratch or incorporate it into an existing chronicle. By considering all these elements as well as the preferences of your players, you can judge which end best fits your chronicle, build the framework to bring that story into being and prep your players so they're ready and eager to undertake an End-Time story.



PLOT

This is it. The final curtain; the last hurrah. So you're probably asking, "Now what?" How can you create a plot that's so far reaching it ends the entire world while tying up loose ends you've left hanging throughout your chronicle? Doing so, how can you make your players not only accept the world's demise but enjoy it? It ain't easy, but it can indeed be worth it.

Source materials have been hinting and threatening and almost, but not quite, getting to "The End" for some time now. Your players have probably become inured to the "Oh no, it's the end of the world" scenario long since, so how do you awaken them from their it's-just-another-save-the-world-scenario ennui and ready them for a true end to it all?

Use a bit of shock factor. The easiest way to invoke shock, fear and trepidation is to kill lots and lots of characters. Preferably all those Narrator characters the characters have grown attached to and accustomed to having around. Go after wards, kinfolk, lovers, teachers, superiors, apprentices, little brothers, parents, friends, co-workers, the guy that runs the news kiosk and the girl who serves cappuccino. Don't kill characters just for the sake of being mean or showing that you're serious, but don't be afraid to be ruthless either. The players will get the message pretty quickly that things are taking a turn for the worse.

Of course, if this seems a little too radical for you, there are other options. You can slowly increase the tension by steadily piling one disaster on top of another until the characters can't see any way out. Doing so gives them more time to notice subtler clues and to attempt more fixes to take care of the problem. Most players will go on focusing their characters' actions on alleviating the symptoms as long as you never quite make it clear that the actual disease is not only inevitable, but looming right overhead. The other type of plot focuses more on quick, often disjointed seeming scenarios, all of which lead to an inescapable conclusion—the world is doomed. You can, of course, combine these two methods.

Whichever method you choose, you must incorporate elements into this final plot that truly mean something to the characters and tie up many of the loose ends you've left hanging. Just another raid on the corporate criminals who are to blame for the awful state of the world won't mean anything to your players unless the company soldiers murdered their families. If their sisters are married to the CEO and the poisons the bad guys are emitting from their factories are corrupting the characters' closest allies, you have something worth their time. The plot must make sense in the context of the stories you've told in the past and must lead to the inevitable, no matter how slowly. Keep the plotting tight, and make every session aim a little more pointedly toward the finale. Some troupes prefer to know beforehand that this will lead to the end. If you think your players would want that, by all means, let them in on things and even ask for issues they'd like to see covered or stories they'd like to be told before the demise of the chronicle.

One major point: Be aware that not all players will want to end the chronicle and may attempt to turn aside or subvert the story. Some may flatly refuse to play if you're going to kill their characters or conclude the game. Don't let players derail the story because they're afraid of losing their characters or because they are reluctant to face the sorts of issues an End-Times chronicle inevitably raises. If you cave in to pressure, you won't be happy that you have no control over your own game—and



neither will they in the long run. You'll be resentful and they'll never trust that you aren't sneaking in elements that will railroad them into the end anyway. If some players don't wish to continue, write them out, but do not let a few naysayers ruin things for the whole troupe. Stick with the plan and eventually they will see the incredible roleplaying potential in the End-Times game.

Just make certain that you've chosen an end that fits your strengths as a Storyteller as well as your players' talents. If you've spent two years running a highly charged mega-action game, they won't enjoy a sudden switch to subtle political maneuvering where their characters' best kung fu moves mean nothing. Even if they go down fighting, they should feel that it was worth every drop of blood spent. If you go for excitement, a worthwhile goal and lots of emotional involvement, it won't matter if you fail to address a minor issue here or there. They'll talk about this for years.

PERSONALIZING THE SCENARIO

With chronicles of this magnitude, it's easy for characters to become overshadowed by events. After all, so much is happening, and on such a grand scale, that it is very easy to focus on what happens next rather than let smaller moments of satisfaction linger. Remember, though, that roleplaying is a group effort—especially live-action roleplaying—and the real issue is not the catastrophe at hand, but the characters' experience of it. If you've taken steps to make sure that all of the characters can be involved with the action, you're well on your way to ensuring a successful chronicle. You can do a few more things, however, to make sure that your players feel they are essential parts of this story.

With an epic tale come equally dramatic moments. Each character should have a chance to shine, even if only the player recognizes it for what it is at the time. Perhaps she has an unusual ability that is essential to the success of a mission. Perhaps she has the opportunity to finally reconcile with a long-lost love after years spent apart. Or the characters might find themselves, at the end, sacrificing themselves for the greater good (or ill). Your players' characters are the heroes and anti-heroes of the story, and they deserve that opportunity. Just remember not to blatantly telegraph these moments. If the other players are saying things like, "Oh, so I guess this is Rick's special moment now, let's all stand aside and wait our turn," something is very wrong.

Try to incorporate as many personal stories into the End-Times game as possible. There's nothing more frustrating for players than to feel like their characters just happen to be handy cardboard cutouts the Storyteller can run through their paces. If Baron September's greatest fear is to be separated from his true love, off to the tower she goes. If Defends-the-Peace dreams of rallying the disparate packs of his sept against the Wyrm in the final hours of the world, let him have a chance to make the speech that will bring them all together at last. Even if it's something as simple as allowing Tony a chance to tell Rae how much he loves her, give him the moment to do so, if only with his dying breath. Personalizing the game, especially the End-Time story, is the only real way to make this the best story possible.

The only unbreakable guideline is to never ruin a player's moment. Although you're understandably excited to find out what happens when he discovers that the Garou Nation will sing of his glorious day until the end of time, that's no excuse to rush his dramatic death scene. This rule goes for the other players, too. If another player decides to ask you about a ruling just as the eshu has gotten on his knees to



beg for forgiveness from his long-lost true love, quietly inform the intruder that this isn't the appropriate time. It's your job to protect those moments, particularly since it's usually those moments that players often remember years later.

TWISTS AND TURNS

No real situation ever moves in a straight line from inception to conclusion without plenty of turns and twists along the way. Try to anticipate the points where the players will be expecting certain things, then do something totally unexpected instead. Or give them what they're expecting but in a radically different form. Approach things from a new angle. Introduce a story where the characters must cooperate with someone they detest. Try a scene in which someone they absolutely love and trust betrays them — maybe just so she can prevent the characters from being killed outright — yet leave them wondering what the real reason was.

Or let them get their revenge for the betrayal, then find out later that their friend was innocent. What if everything they thought they knew is a horrible load of propaganda brokered by ancient power players they've had no clue existed until now? Worse yet, what if they've acted all along while assuming those ancient power mongers are controlling everything and there aren't any? What if everything they've done can be laid squarely at their own doors rather than blamed on circumstance? Feel free to take a few hairpin turns along the way so your story doesn't become static. The players and their characters might know they're headed for disaster, but those few unexpected reprieves along the way could give them the necessary courage or determination to continue to the end.

Twists are another means of avoiding the problem of players who decide to ruin their own fun and read all the scenarios in this book so they know what will happen next. Throw them for a loop. Take part of one scenario and fuse it with an element of another (maybe even from a different game), throw some of your own original ideas into the mix and voila! Your game just became a lot harder for your bibliophile to predict, and therefore more fun as well.

Scope

Potentially, the scope of an End-Times chronicle is limitless. After all, this is the biggest thing to ever happen in the world, and it affects everyone (at least everyone the players care about). There's nothing to stop you from having Lasombra vampires cooperating with Red Talons while flying around the world in an Ether ship on their way to the Dreaming to rescue the last surviving wraiths in some wild attempt to stave off disaster, if that's what you want. In fact, that could well be the best solution to tying up a number of loose ends, especially if your chronicle has grown as truly... *eclectic* as many older ones do over time.

It will probably be a tad more effective, however, to limit the scope of the game a little. While things are happening all over the world and affecting all supernatural beings, there's no point in dragging in elements that have not been an integral part of the chronicle all along to confound the characters at the last minute. It confuses the issue and diffuses the players' energies.

That doesn't mean you can't use needed story elements, just make certain they actually relate to the characters and the situation they're in. No matter how important the story is, the players won't respond to it if it doesn't involve their characters and bring their tales to satisfying conclusions.



ENDING EVERY STORY

With a chronicle's end comes the end of *all* the individual stories of the characters. Storytellers should not neglect the small, personal stories that form the various subplots and defining moments surrounding the players' characters — the son estranged from his mother, the businessman whose company was taken over by demonic thralls, the former junkie trying to rescue his lover from a blood cult.

These stories can easily be swept aside and forgotten in the chaos of the final days, but that would be a shame. Now more than ever, these "little" events are important to characters. These personal matters are last chances for revenge, forgiveness or simply closure before everything burns away.

Storytellers should look for opportunities to include characters' personal stories, plot hooks and unresolved issues in the finale of the chronicle. These stories don't have to end happily or cleanly. There are bound to be tragic, terrible conclusions to some — say, a lover killed by a rival out of spite. Others may end well, even in the chaos and horror of the last of days. A distant child might forgive his mother in the face of Armageddon. If the characters are to face the threat of eternal night and march toward an uncertain tomorrow, it's best if lingering matters are resolved so they don't hold anyone back. Best for the characters, best for the players, and best for your final story.

What about the vampire character who has struggled through the whole chronicle vainly attempting to regain her lost humanity, searching for some elixir or magical device that will restore her to what she once was? Will she care about some plan to avert disaster if it doesn't involve her either achieving her goal or discovering that the very powers she despises are essential to overcoming the catastrophe? What if even those powers aren't enough? Will she strive to gain new powers (as she feels herself becoming ever less human) to try to succeed in an impossible task? Will she do what she can to mitigate the situation (thereby rediscovering the humanity she thought she'd lost) and try to salvage something for others even as she is destroyed?

To fully involve the players, you might need to limit the scope of the game to the personal telling against a wider background. The world may be going to hell in a hand basket, but the characters need to be grounded in what they care about to truly feel their essential part in things. Then again, showing some of the wider ramifications and events happening elsewhere will bring home the gravity of the situation. That's where scale comes in.

SCALE

Most Storytellers hope to tell a grand, sweeping story, a great chronicle that encompasses myriad story lines and might take years to complete — if it is ever finished. Even such epic stories pale in comparison to the End-Times chronicle, however.

In even the smallest, most local story, you've always got to consider the breadth of the drama. How local is it? Does what happens in one place affect what happens elsewhere? What about events from outside the area covered in a chronicle? Do events that happen somewhere else in the world impinge upon the local game?



Those who have played **Apocalypse** can't help but be affected by the departure of the Stargazers or the rampant paranoia surrounding the appearance of Anthelios. **Masquerade** players might have felt the loss of Ravnos characters when that clan was all but destroyed during the Week of Nightmares. All of this has to do with the scale of the game.

In other words, when the World of Darkness comes to an end, your players' characters — no matter how insular — will be part of it whether they engage only in local matters or trot all over the world interacting with characters from exotic and far-flung locales. Individual Storytellers will have to decide whether to make their games global in nature or confine them to those events that have the most meaning for their players' characters. This will be especially important to games that involve players from several home chronicles who travel to other areas to play.

While it is best to limit the scale of the game to the immediate locale, bringing in elements from foreign climes — even just as rumors of events — will strengthen the overall story the characters are experiencing. In essence, the characters play out their drama against a far more massive backdrop than their local theatre can encompass. That grand scale doesn't have to impinge directly on the neighborhood, but the characters should be aware that they are only a part of a vast undertaking. Giving them that sense of scale should make clear how serious these events are, and it might bring out some of the helplessness many people feel in the face of disasters they can't avert. Nonetheless, the characters should always be made to feel that no matter how small their part seems, it is still vital and might just turn the tide in the end. "Think globally, act locally" is a major cliché nowadays, but it pretty accurately sums up what the scale of the game should strive to be.

DIRECTION

More than with any other chronicle, the last chronicle needs to have a specific direction, starting from an identifiable beginning, through the meat of the chronicle and building toward the finale. Too many side issues will ruin the flavor of the story being told, so unless something is of major importance to the characters, it's best to leave it out. Naturally, some characters might feel that their political aspirations or their magical ranking *are* the story. But seriously, what does politicking matter when the sun's being snuffed out? Who cares about prestige or magical ranking when all the air just left the planet?

While it is essential to treat the characters' concerns as the central frame around which you build your story, you must direct the action toward specific ends. Almost every troupe has one or two players who insist on wheeling and dealing to the exclusion of everything else. How will you involve those players without sacrificing the rest and without losing the direction you want the story to take? There won't be time for some character's crafty and politically convoluted yearlong chronicle to maneuver her opponents aside and win the throne or gain the princedom. Why would the character want those things anyway when the world is ending? Some players will realize the foolishness of the character's aspirations at that point and join the main story thread. Others will not. So if that's the only thing that means anything to the character, by all means, work it in and leave her sitting atop a toppling throne ruling over empty nothingness as the world crashes to an end. Just incorporate it into the direction you are pushing your chronicle. If necessary, secretly



meet with the rest of the players and gain their cooperation in the old tactic of shunning. It works like this:

If the character insists on playing up her political maneuvering, nobody else acts like they care. They all ignore her as she plots and plans, then allow her to take the throne and pay no attention whatsoever to her decrees. It's hard for a ruler to enforce her will when nobody plays along. While she's playing queen for a day, the rest of the characters can go about the actual story you've woven for them while seeing how hollow such trappings as rulership truly are in the face of annihilation. At the extreme, if the character is disrupting things too much, the rest of the characters can topple her from the throne and force her compliance or — sigh — destroy or banish the character. Meanwhile, this becomes a lesson in group dynamics and cooperation for the good of all.

Then again, if this is all too harsh and if the character is truly crafty, you might allow her to play out her little game. She might win the princedom or queenship and brilliantly lead everyone along the shining glorious road to victory — or conversely, provide a delicious distraction that undercuts what the characters are struggling to achieve.

In any case, if you've read your players correctly, it shouldn't be too hard to involve them in End-Time stories they'll be looking for. Give them a clear sign of the way you want them to go, and they'll write the story for you.

PACING

At some time or another, everyone has experienced a game that seemed to drag on forever with nothing really happening, where eventually characters were left with nothing to talk about but frivolous or out-of-game topics. That generally happens when the Storyteller has to run a game without sufficient time to plan it, when he can't think of anything to run or when he's afraid the session will end too quickly. It's incredibly frustrating and boring for the players. Presumably, with the end looming just ahead, the Storyteller won't lack for material.

On the other hand, you've probably played in games where there's so much going on — all of it in different places — that you don't understand what's happening and can't adjust what you're doing in time to be in on anything exciting. The character careens from scene to scene with no clear idea of why or what it's all about. That can be equally frustrating, because while it is perfectly fine to make the characters feel as though they can't keep up with what's going on, having events occurring so rapidly that the *players* feel lost just breeds confusion and frustration. Unfortunately, with everything that needs to be brought out in an End-Times chronicle, it's all too possible for things to get lost in the shuffle.

In an End-Time scenario, pacing is critical. Because the end *is* coming — but not quite yet — you must give the characters and the players mile markers along the way. Goals to accomplish in the short run that have an effect on how soon and under what conditions the end comes. Once you've begun the beginning of the end, you won't be able to turn aside from it, but you also can't postpone it forever. You need to set a certain time (even if just for your own knowledge) by which the end *will* come whether the characters are ready or not.

Doing so creates tension and a sense of needing to spend their time wisely to accomplish what they can before they're wiped out of existence. Then, stick to this timetable as much as possible. You can always fudge a little if an incredible



story is in the middle of unfolding that will become the greatest End-Times chronicle anyone could have ever hoped to run. You can also shorten the time and set the bomb ticking faster if the characters just aren't responding. There's nothing wrong with having the characters just run out of time as they race to avert disaster, at least if they deserve it due to their prior apathy or inaction. Certainly it's a more realistic ending, if a bit less satisfying emotionally. Just don't put them out there on a crash course to Armageddon, then keep delaying the denouement until they're sick of the whole mess.

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The exact flavor of the game depends heavily on which scenario you choose as most appropriate for your players. If you decide that things should go out with a whimper, it's highly unlikely you'll strive for a triumphant feel to the game. Likewise, if you plan on sending them out with a bang, a totally pessimistic slant (with no hope for what comes after) will drag the game down no matter how many pyrotechnics you try to include. Do you plan on triumph or disaster? Are you shooting for a game in which the characters go down to sweet oblivion knowing they've saved something for the people of the future? Will they be dragged down kicking and screaming to a dark abyss never knowing if their sacrifice was for nothing? Or are you trying for a flavor that is something in between those two? Do you plan to offer the optimists in the group hope that they just might survive? Or would your players rather throw their characters into the fray knowing they'll die and expecting nothing less than a horrible, painful, meaningless death? Is this all about greatness or a cynical telling of disaster that can't be averted, death that can't be avoided and the obliteration of all the characters ever meant for no purpose other than nihilism?

Most players would rather see favorite characters survive, but if that's not possible, they want their deaths to be noble, heroic, honorable or meaningful. Who wants to be the hapless soul that slips on grease from his cheese fries and breaks his neck falling downstairs?

On another note, far too many games begin with grave matters consuming the attention of the players, yet somehow humor manages to intrude. It's a fact that human beings just aren't made for unalloyed horror and fear, and in appropriate doses, humor often provides the sauce that makes the rest of the game spicier. In his most powerful tragedies, after all, Shakespeare still included at least a little humor because its inclusion contrasted the heavier emotions of the rest of the work. If all we ever do is weep, why fight to keep anything going? Players and characters alike need a little of the lighter emotions to give them something worth fighting for. This is not to say that non-stop joking should be encouraged (especially out of character), but if you allow it judiciously, as an accent at the right places, it can make or break a story.

BUILDUP

Pacing and buildup are related but have an important difference that bears mentioning. No good story starts at the top of the action and runs headlong to the finish unless it's a very short film. Even then, there's usually some sort of slower start, then the action builds gradually from there. With an End-Time story, you should begin by inserting small clues, then some other clues, resolve some and finally move into the action phase while adding even more to the initial information.



Continuing to increase the action while making the final picture come more into focus increases the tension of the game while always giving the characters something to do. Information without action is boring. Action without information to work with becomes tiring and frustrating. Use both to build from a slow beginning with a few hints of what's to come, increasing the stakes until your troupe is rushing to an inescapable end.

Even if the end doesn't bode well for the characters personally, it might provide them with the opportunity to strike some sort of telling blow to mitigate an otherwise wholly dark future. Feel free to build slowly and methodically if that's what the players prefer, but be prepared to have to accommodate those who make greater intuitive leaps forward.

OMENS

One of the joys of running an End-Times chronicle is the omens you can scatter throughout the story. Go ahead and write some cool prophecies early on, just remember to work them into the story at some point. Naturally, it's best if the omens echo some of the ones already made known through various World of Darkness books (notably **Rage Across the Heavens** for **Werewolf** and several later **Vampire** books, such as **Time of Thin Blood**). The various "in-game" books from different lines such as *The Book of Nod*, *The Chronicle of the Black Labyrinth* and *Apocrypha* are also excellent sources that you can mine for more ideas. But feel free to make up your own to customize your own games.

Some of the omens or prophecies should relate directly to your players' characters. You could involve something from their backgrounds, people they know, information they know, items they have acquired or deeds they need to perform. You can even work your own prophecies and omens into some of the published ones to reflect special attributes, knowledge or skills your players' characters possess.

For example, if a character is a scholar, you might involve her in discovering some esoteric knowledge or uncovering an ancient tale that has a prophecy that concerns her buried within it. A more physical character might defeat a foe only to find he's carrying some item that gives a clue the character has needed to work out a mystery that has plagued him for some time. If it also gives the other characters information or provides them with an omen or the answer to questions they've had concerning events in the chronicle, so much the better.

FORESHADOWING

One of the best ways to get fully into an End-Times chronicle is through the technique of foreshadowing. When constructing the story, add in elements that will recur and people who will appear again and again so the players learn who they need to know and the sorts of things they need to do to bring the story to a great conclusion. Foreshadowing prepares the players and their characters for events yet to come, introducing themes and situations they'll encounter several times before the end. A smaller version of what will eventually play out is always cool. A character might lose something she values, but she'll realize that she lost it accomplishing something worthwhile. Foreshadowing need not be some huge occurrence, but it should presage things to come.

In foreshadowing, things don't need to be exactly the same. In fact, it's better if the earlier occurrence is symbolic of later events rather than literal. Loss, betrayal, sorrow and death come to mind as appropriate topics, but you can easily foreshadow



triumph, fellowship and other more positive themes. Go ahead and give the characters a taste of what's to come, then twist things a little so the foreshadowing isn't too obvious — otherwise it gets boring and predictable.

C L I M A X

This is the culmination of months of hard work for both you and your players, so you should make sure that the events that transpire during this time are worth it to the characters after all you've put them through. Whatever conclusion you plan to use, make sure it satisfies all your players on some level. It's best to have a number of different events planned and allow the players to fit their characters into the ones that make the most sense to them and provide them with the most sense of closure. Those who want to follow the story to its conclusion won't appreciate a big fight in which they die nobly unless their questions are all answered first, while action junkies will resent long-winded winding down when they just want to go out in a blaze of glory.

Make certain you know which kinds of scenarios your players prefer, then point things in that direction and let events lead up to the finale they're looking for. If the players are satisfied, if you've incorporated the elements that mean something to each character, and if the players feel that their characters have received a proper send-off and been instrumental in the events surrounding the End Times, they'll help you bring the story to a rousing conclusion.

S T A G E C R A F T

Never underestimate how valuable some elements of basic staging can be when setting up a stirring scene for a chronicle. It's important to make players feel as grounded as possible during **Laws of Judgment** scenarios, especially where large disasters and other epic story elements may already be putting additional pressure on suspension of disbelief.

After all, it requires a certain amount of concentration for players to stay in character as well as view the play area and the other characters through that lens at all times. When you begin adding things like, "OK, um, when you look outside, you see that, like, the city just fell over and caught fire," it gets harder for even experienced players to maintain their suspension of disbelief and react in character to the events unfolding around them.

The more you can make them feel as though they are really immersed in the scene, the less they have to concentrate on maintaining their sense of character and setting — and the more they can focus on the events that are changing their world forever. What follows is a brief discussion of tips and techniques you can use to do just that.

L O C A T I O N

Chances are, you're going to have to make do with the same location or set of locations that you've been using the entire chronicle. With that in mind, what should you do to evoke the proper sense of setting when meteors start falling, bombs start dropping and other huge End-Times events shake up your in-game location? Fortunately, the answers aren't quite as difficult as you might think.

First of all, before considering any changes, make sure you're not going to damage any part of the play area in the process. This sounds like common sense, but you'd be surprised how many Storytellers decide they want to simulate a war zone and



wind up smashing a valuable piece of furniture as they do their best to “ruin things up a bit.” Once it’s established that nothing of value is wrecked, make sure that there are no obvious safety hazards — all the exits are clear, there are safe paths through all play areas and so on. Think about what the effect is that you wish to create and how to move things around to best achieve that result.

A bombed-out building, barricaded against outside attack? No problem. Flip over any furniture that can safely endure such treatment, move most of it to the edges of the room (draping it with dull gray or brown cloth is also good), affix a few black fabric scraps to make holes in the floor or ceiling, tape a few jagged “blocked by rubble” signs to any doors and windows you don’t want used, and cut some cardboard boxes into strips to make “boards” to cover the windows and doors. It looks close enough to pass in live-action, but it isn’t so sturdy that it will pose any danger if its abrupt removal is required. How about a natural glen deep in the forest? Bring in what plants you can that won’t be in danger from a gaming session, spread brown cloth or a simple brown rug on the ground (careful to make sure players don’t slip on it), drape furniture pieces with green cloth, then set up some incense with an earthy or floral scent, and you have a serviceable glen at your disposal.

The key to dressing a location for the End Times is moving, altering or covering as many familiar pieces in the location as possible. The more that has happened to change the location in game, the more you want to try to change the out-of-game location from what the players are used to. Prominent description cards and signs are also good, especially if they substitute for otherwise dangerous phenomena (such as objects supposedly on fire), or they can be combined with a covering or alteration that removes the original from the eyes of the players. Free of what they normally expect to see in front of them, such descriptions become even more potent as the minds of the players do not have to try to overlay the description on top of existing familiar objects.

LIGHTING AND SOUND

The lighting of your play area and the sounds heard during play are two of the biggest and most immediate influences you can use to create the right atmosphere for your game. The right music and lighting can put players in the mood you’re looking for before they ever interact with another character. Likewise, choosing poor music and lighting can actively work against the atmosphere you’re trying to create. Most of the books of the **Mind’s Eye Theatre** line include some basic lighting and music tips, so those won’t be repeated here, but some specific pointers useful for **Judgment** chronicles are included.

Lighting

Aside from making sure there is always enough light so players can move about safely, lighting’s most important rule for live-action gaming is quite simply to always do your best to change the lighting from how it appears normally. If all you do is just move around a couple of lamps or put in brighter (or darker) bulbs, those small changes still do a lot to separate your game space and take it from something familiar into a whole new place — namely, your in-game location. Likewise, unless you’re going for a Technocratic stronghold or sterile Pentex lab, avoid as much overhead fluorescent lighting as possible, even if it means bringing in floor lamps and the like. It’s horribly modern, terribly unflattering and creates very little in the way of shadow and mystery for you to work with.



With all the catastrophes and civil unrest found in many **Judgment** scenarios, it's worth looking into simulating blackouts and other disaster conditions. While flashlights tend to be too limited to light your main play areas (though characters may need to carry them when traveling), many camping stores sell a variety of inexpensive electric emergency lanterns that can be used to light key spaces. Provided extreme caution is used and open flame of any kind is never left unattended, candles or actual hurricane lanterns can also be used to the same effect, reminding players just how precious light becomes when the electricity goes out and simple tools are all they have left. Flickering light is a wonderful way to indicate a building that has sustained severe damage or possibly a fire of some kind. If individual light sources aren't a viable option, white electric lights can be dimmed to simulate "emergency power," while using soft yellow light can simulate diffuse candlelight.

If supernatural effects are altering the lighting conditions in the chronicle, do your best to simulate them in game. If the red light of Anthelios is shining down day and night, put some red bulbs in lamps near windows or even in outside lights such as floodlights, porch lights or over a doorway. That way, whenever the players step outside or go near a window, you can simply click on the red light and help keep them immersed in the world you're creating. Green bulbs or glow sticks can be used to mark areas that are sick with Wyrm-taint, while blue light can be used to denote an Umbral area or a potential source of valuable Quintessence. Done properly, players will come to understand your lighting scheme, and eventually you can even use it to give them quick visual cues about the nature of a scene or prop without needing constant narration or "you see" interruptions.

Sound

After lighting, sound becomes the quickest means of establishing mood and building the atmosphere you desire. Perhaps the most important rule of sound design for **Mind's Eye Theatre** is that no matter how cool you might think it would be, never let the sound in your scene overpower your players. It's one thing if they know they'll be entering a rowdy club or running through a thunderstorm, but if the volume is so loud that it's painful or impossible to communicate vital out-of-game information (such as posing challenges), your audio environment is an obstacle, not a benefit. Limit things to a dull roar at most, and don't give anyone a hard time for asking you to turn it down. Likewise, don't play anything distracting. If lyrics drag players out of game or sound effects trigger a player's real-life phobia, that's a problem and should be eliminated.

Once you've addressed those concerns, the first question to answer is whether the sound will be in game (such as playing music that is supposedly the band playing at the bar), or out of game (such as "fight songs" or other mood music). In-game sounds reinforce the feeling of reality. Rather than just imagining a busy nightclub, having some pounding drum and bass playing lets the players actually experience part of the environment directly. Don't only think of music when it comes to in-game sounds, though. For example, many stores offer inexpensive "sounds of nature" discs that can help create the impression of raging storm, dark bayou or calm forest glade. Just make sure they are purely nature sounds and do not also include music or lyrics. Likewise, a disc of military sound effects such as gunshots and air raids can help simulate urban warfare or a nearby battle raging, while a disc of creepier effects such as howls and demonic laughter can add an eerie, otherworldly tone. The only word of caution is to check the quality of sound effects CDs before you buy them if at all



possible. While many are perfectly suitable for play, quite a few are very hokey (especially “spooky” ones), and they will only set players to snickering instead of inspiring the reaction you want. Listen before playing.

Out-of-game sound is a bit easier to arrange, since it requires no in-game justification, but it is also easier to overdo. While playing a haunting track is a good way to create atmosphere, if the players always hear a swell of dramatic or ominous music every time they walk into a room, it will quickly lose all potency. It’s the musical equivalent of the cliché crash of thunder following a dire announcement, and it will get just as old if used too often. Repetition is also an important pitfall to avoid. We all have favorite albums and tracks for creating different moods, but most players have had at least one experience with a Storyteller who always puts on the same CD of “fight music” or sets one particular track on repeat when preparing any kind of “scary” scene, to the point where it became a joke or even an annoyance. Vary your selections as much as possible, or if you don’t have such variety, use what you have wisely and let eloquent silence rule otherwise.

Some Storytellers might even wish to experiment with a “blended” audio arrangement with a pair stereos. One creates in-game sound effects like the sound of a thunderstorm or a battle, while another plays out-of-game mood music. This can be tricky to set up, especially if you want to time certain sounds to play in a particular order on both machines, but the result can be a very rewarding complex, layered audio environment that establishes atmosphere for the game on several different levels at once.

It is also worth noting that not every scene requires audio accompaniment to begin with. This is especially true for games that maintain a sense of gritty reality and/or a strong grounding in the everyday. This is especially true for games with actual human protagonists such as *Laws of the Reckoning* and *Laws of the Hunt*, but it should by no means be limited to those games either. After all, real life doesn’t have a soundtrack, and while games are meant to be tales of heroes and anti-heroes, nothing says they need a tragically hip soundtrack for every moment. If the players are crying over a fallen comrade, there’s no need to put on sad music to reinforce the mood. In fact, it might seem intrusive to the scene — an audio suggestion they don’t need. Likewise, an absence of “fight music” can help make combat seem much less like an action movie and more like a real life-and-death struggle. This can be a difficult matter to judge, but the best way to find the right balance is simply to observe what the players enjoy, ask them some questions and arrive at what works best for your chronicle.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Almost as important as setting up the play area is what you will be presenting your players with when your Narrator characters arrive on the scene. Likewise, as events of your End-Time scenario unfold, you might wish to require players to carry certain props or even adopt certain costuming elements to reflect the changes occurring in the game world. This section addresses how to handle such concerns with a minimum of fuss (and a minimal budget).

Costuming

Giving members of a group distinctive costuming elements is an excellent way to indicate membership in some of the emerging social elements or new character types that are part of many **Judgment** scenarios. Whether it’s something relatively



minor, such as stipulating that all members of the Cult of Everlasting Doom wear black scarves, or a larger dress code at work, such as having your Narrator characters all dress in military-style olive green to simulate the militia members who have placed the city under martial law, distinctive costuming elements reinforce the impression that events are having a real impact. These requirements also help players make potentially critical in-game distinctions without needing to ask out-of-game questions. If they know that anyone wearing a red bandanna with a black skull on it is part of the dreaded Blood of the All-Father gang, they don't have to think twice about what they're seeing when your Narrators arrive wearing that gear.

You shouldn't feel obligated to limit such costuming changes to the Narrator characters, either. If some of the players have formed a militia, for example, it only makes sense in character that they would have some kind of uniform or insignia to identify their own members and avoid friendly fire incidents. Encourage them to develop and wear armbands, badges, bandannas or even just a specific set of colors and stick with it as long as necessary. Likewise, if the events of your chronicle have grown truly dire and civilization has collapsed, it's reasonable to promote the notion of wearing dirty and ripped-up costuming to the players, to give them a better idea of what their characters are going through and create a strong visual impression of what has happened to them.

Bear in mind some basic guidelines on costuming, however. Most importantly, no matter how apocalyptic the scenario becomes, costuming should never smell so foul, cover so little or just generally be so offensive as to cause out-of-game problems between players or with the authorities. Lastly, anything that is required should be simple and inexpensive to obtain (hence the suggestion of things like bandannas or specific color schemes). Requiring players or Narrators to spend serious money on things like leather jackets or military uniforms is overly severe and often counter-productive. If your troupe wishes to do something voluntarily, that's one thing, but trying to demand that everyone fork over a lot of cash just to keep playing "appropriately" is an abuse of power.

Props

As with creating distinctive costume designs, carrying specific props can be a great way to indicate a number of things at a glance, particularly during the End Times. If certain types of objects become extremely powerful, dangerous, coveted or scarce during your **Judgment** scenario, assign a specific prop or set of props to such items and let the players know about it beforehand. That way, when your Narrator character walks in bearing the item in question, you don't have to interrupt play and tell your gathered troupe something like, "Oh yeah, by the way, see that thing he's carrying? It's <really cool item X>, and you all want it." They'll automatically know it when they see it, and they won't have to suddenly adjust their play or their perceptions to accommodate this new idea. Before long, even just having a few such props scattered around the room will be cause for great conflict or discussion, and all without much fuss on the part of the Narrator.

Likewise, on the opposite end of the scale, if an object or objects become extremely common during the End Times, it's often best to give it a distinct prop or appearance as well. If all the Garou start carrying spears tipped with fallen stars, you may wish to make item cards a different color or shape to differentiate them from the rest of the weapons being carried, as Garou will likely recognize their comrades as soon as they see those weapons. This is not to say that every type of item must receive



its own variety of item card, merely those deemed most important to identify quickly, whether due to rarity, ubiquity, power, et cetera.

A lack of props can also be telling. If the Narrators are portraying refugees of a vampire slave camp, give them a few humble, ordinary items and little else. Finding a downed opponent carrying only weapons and gear implies a trained military force at work (as opposed to civilian militia members, who tend to carry small personal effects with them). The possibilities are endless for clever Storytellers who are willing to take some time to design prop sets for their Narrators. As with costuming, the only major limitation on props is to avoid objects that are too expensive or time-consuming unless players and Narrators explicitly consent to such items. If nothing else, it's a fact of gaming that props get lost, trashed or otherwise rendered useless during sessions, no matter how careful players might be. Don't make such mistakes costly out of game.

ON NARRATOR CHARACTERS

Many of the powerful Narrator characters who appear in *Laws of Judgment* games require particular attention to accurately portray in Mind's Eye Theatre. Although it would be great if you could play every Narrator character yourself, even most Storytellers haven't quite mastered being in two or three places at once, so you'll probably have to pick a trusted player or Narrator to play your crucial characters for you. Particularly if you haven't used such a powerful being before, your choice of which player to portray her will largely determine how she comes across to the other players, which is why it's crucial to pick that person carefully. It should, of course, be someone you know to be a good and versatile roleplayer.

If possible, try to pick someone who has played a wide range of characters in this group in the past. If you pick someone whose characters are always calculating and devious, some of your players may just assume that their new persona is as well, and your game may be shot down before it starts by repeated assassination attempts based on this out-of-character information. If you do have to pick someone who tends toward playing similar characters most of the time, try to choose a person whose characters display a good amount of charisma, as well as the ability to handle large problems efficiently. This will hopefully help counteract the "typecasting" downfall.

Needless to say, it's also vital that your Narrator understands not only her role and any background information that goes with it, but also when to use her vast power—and more importantly when *not* to use it. Don't let her throw her weight around solely for the sake of doing so. Make sure also that she isn't unconsciously favoring friends or former allies in her dealings with the players. The best Narrator characters entertain the players and provide them with vital information or opportunities to take action, not solve every riddle or defeat every enemy themselves. No matter how important a particular Narrator character might be in the "official" timeline, your players and their characters are the heroes of *your* story. They should always take center stage. During the End Times, it's vital that the players feel that their actions make a difference. If not, then they're little better than spectators to their own demise, and that's no fun at all.

Setting Artifacts

Setting artifacts are perhaps the most important types of props to consider when running a **Judgment** scenario. They include mocked-up newspapers dealing with End-Times topics, altered photos of bizarre phenomena, homemade religious tracts proclaiming “THE END IS HERE,” doctored video clips showing strange creatures on the loose, letters from important Narrator characters expressing dread over recent events, strange stones simulating the meteors that have fallen from the sky, phony news broadcasts inserted into music CDs that break in to announce some new disaster and a reclusive hermit’s dusty old journal filled with scrawled sketches and prophecies. Such artifacts help bring home the reality of what the characters are going through in a way few pure descriptions can. The more such props you can show them, play for them or actually put into their hands, the less fantastic events of the End Times become and the more players feel as though they are actually immersed in a world going through such immense changes.

This is not to say you should break yourself slaving to create such props for every session, or that you should abandon descriptions as a means of conveying what is occurring. The more often you can join your descriptions of events with such concrete props for the players to latch onto, though, the more it will reinforce the notion of the world you are creating.

MAKEUP

Properly applying even a little bit of makeup is the final way to quickly generate a distinctive appearance for Narrator characters, as well as an easy way to keep track of character conditions such as sickness, injury or even some visible supernatural effects. A pathetic refugee cowering in fear looks that much more helpless and victimized with some added bruises or scratches or a light tracing of the bones of the face with dark shading (which creates a hollow, starved appearance). Unkempt hair and a few days’ worth of stubble for men can suggest those who have been without the comforts of civilization for some time, while blacked out teeth and dirty hands make an instant beggar or scavenger. Perhaps certain gangs that have arisen in the fall of civilization give their members ritual scars or tattoos. A vivid depiction of these traits can help cement their identity in the minds of the players extremely quickly.

In addition to these basic steps, consider having players apply specific types of makeup to indicate their current health or visible injuries they have suffered. This is most useful in scenarios featuring plagues or other conditions that are immediately apparent, but it can be just as powerful if used for more mundane causes as well. Having a visible record that allows you to watch other characters gradually succumbing to wounds or sickness or judge how badly hurt a Narrator character is just by looking at him can be a wonderful way to help underscore how desperate things have become.

Don’t forget the supernatural, either. As the mechanisms that have hidden the shadowy beings of the World of Darkness begin to fall away, requiring supernatural creatures to wear particular kinds of makeup can show just how exposed they’ve become, as well as allowing players to recognize such creatures at a glance. As long as your makeup doesn’t disturb non-players or get you bounced from a game location, feel free to pull out all the stops in depicting just how strange, desperate and different the characters appear.



TROUBLESHOOTING THE END OF THE WORLD

One of the joys of live action roleplaying is its spontaneity. No matter how well planned and choreographed a story it, there are always ways for the players to change the scenario due to some unexpected action or some unforeseen complication. **Laws of Judgment** scenarios are not exempt from this phenomenon. This section provides a troubleshooting guide for Storytellers (and players) to help prepare for those times when a chronicle just doesn't follow the plan. In addition, some suggestions for continuing a chronicle in the aftermath of the "end" provide help for Storytellers who want to take their games to the next level.

After all, your story doesn't have to end just because the "world" does. Think of the final episode of a favorite television series. In all but a few cases, a few loose ends are left dangling, waiting for someone to pick them up. When a beloved multi-volume series of books reaches its last installment, some subplots remain unresolved or with open endings, ready for another round of books to begin with a new generation of characters.

This section of the chapter has applications for Storytellers and players. We don't need to emphasize the difference between player and "Storyteller-only" material in this section. We expect players to realize that if they intend to enjoy a story, they should avoid reading certain sections of this book or rely on their Storytellers to share appropriate sections with them.

TOPICS FOR STORYTELLERS

Consider the following topics a primer on common problem areas or questions about "what comes next," things to consider once you decide to take the chronicle down the road to its end. Take the advice given here to heart or adapt it to your own particular circumstances. Ends are almost always beginnings, after a fashion. What sort of chronicle will your End-Time story begin?

WHY END IT?

Why should you end your **Mind's Eye Theatre** chronicle? This might seem a curious question to ask at this point, but give it some serious thought. If the only reason you want to bring on the end of everything the players know is because you think one of the end scenarios in this book is "neat," you're probably better off waiting until a more solid justification presents itself. Otherwise, the players might resent you for ending the game on little more than a whim.

Once you have laid aside any such passing thoughts, however, there are several reasons to begin discussing the end of a chronicle. The first and foremost is simply because the chronicle isn't fun and exciting anymore and you're prepared to move on to something else. Other reasons for ending a chronicle include providing a satisfying ending to the overall story, or providing a clear break between an old chronicle and an entirely new one.

The first reason is the simplest. If your chronicle isn't providing your troupe with the enjoyment it once did, then it's probably time to wrap things up and move on. Chronicles sometimes flicker out slowly rather than ending cleanly, particularly if the Storyteller's interest wanes. Rather than let your chronicle sputter out, you can have some fun coming up with a spectacular ending for it and going out on top rather



than just pulling the plug months later when the story is on life support. Ending a chronicle can actually invigorate your creativity, since it opens up so many new possibilities, and in the chronicle's ending, you may find seeds of a newer, fresher and more exciting story.

Although it's theoretically possible for chronicles to go on indefinitely, it's often wise to consider an ending to your chronicle. Good stories include a beginning, middle and end, and an ending helps neatly tie together everything that came previously in the chronicle, just like the ending of a good book, film or other story. Therefore, it's a good idea to have your chronicle go out on a high note, when things are going well, rather than allowing it to run out of steam and die a slow death. If your ending leaves players wanting more, you can always start a new chronicle as a sequel to the old — with the same characters or different ones — and take things in a new direction, knowing that the previous chapter is closed.

In fact, ending a chronicle can provide a clean and clear break between that story and the next **Mind's Eye Theatre** chronicle your troupe creates. If the ending of the previous chronicle significantly changed the setting, then future stories will necessarily be different and new characters will be faced with fresh challenges rather than a rehash of the same old thing from your previous games.

PLAYER KNOWLEDGE

Should you tell your players that you are ending the chronicle or not? Some Storytellers might be concerned that informing the players that the chronicle is ending might affect their actions and their enjoyment of the game. If they know that it's all going to end soon, they might act differently than if they didn't know. This is true, but good players can separate what they know from what their characters know. A change in player behavior might also be exactly what you want for the ending of your story.

It's usually fairly hard to hide the fact that a chronicle is coming to an end, especially if all the signs are there for the characters to see. Players are also likely to struggle against the ending of the chronicle if they don't know that it's inevitable. While you might want the *characters* to struggle, putting the players in a situation where they feel like their struggles are pointless only frustrates them.

So it's probably best to inform your players that you intend to end the chronicle and solicit their help in doing so. Find out what plot threads and loose ends the players want to see resolved before it's all over. Ask if there are things that they want their characters to accomplish before the end. You can even get player input as to how they want their characters written out of the story (or if they do at all). Given the opportunity, many players are quite enthusiastic about an opportunity to be in on the destruction of the world and a dramatic ending to the chronicle.

GETTING EVERYONE INVOLVED

Your players have devoted countless hours, months and even years to your chronicle. They've invested time and passion in their characters, meticulously bringing them to life (or "unlife"), developing their personalities, ambitions and contacts from session to session. Now you want to bring the whole thing to an end, and you need everyone's help to do it. The first step in bringing every character into the scenario is to know your characters (and the people who play them). Who are they? What are their goals? What can spark their interest or drive them into taking part in the story you plan to tell?



Movies and books rely on hooking their audience through advertising. The people who go to see certain movies or read certain books do so because they enjoy the subject matter, whether it's action-adventure, gothic suspense, intrigue, horror or some other genre. They've seen the trailers for movies or read the cover text for books, and their interest has been piqued. The advertisements for those movies and books play to the entertainment desires of their audiences.

Think of your chronicle as if it were a movie or a book. What kind of audience will it attract (or has it attracted)? How can you make it seem attractive to those outside that audience?

If the majority of your characters enjoy action, whether engaging in combat against their enemies or racing against the clock to accomplish a goal, make certain your pre-chronicle descriptions emphasize the action sequences. If you are the Storyteller for a live-action troupe that prefers intense roleplaying and only relies on challenges as a last resort, talk up the drama of your scenario.

Think about who your players are. By now, if you've been running an ongoing chronicle, you probably have a pretty good idea of what their interests are. Make certain you have designed your "endgame" to appeal to your players first and foremost. Then gradually let them know that you have a memorable way to bring your chronicle to an end.

Some players might not want to see the chronicle (or their characters) end. That's natural, considering the enjoyment they've had as well as the time they've invested in the game, and it deserves a thoughtful response. Talk with them and emphasize the importance of rounding out a good tale. Remind them that their characters' personal plots will be accounted for, and suggest that they might want to have a say in their characters' destinies rather than have them disposed of by Storyteller fiat.

Finally, if you make your players feel that they are a part of your chronicle, they *will* become involved. Ask their advice on how they want you to work their characters into your plot and suggest some ways they can help you put the chronicle together. Enlist their aid in forming some of the subplots. Build some scenes around their characters and let them know you're doing that. Find out what loose ends their characters have and let them know that they finally have the opportunity to confront the primogen member who has been the bane of their undead or confront the Black Spiral Dancer who murdered their first pack leader or track down a cabal member who defected to the Technocracy. Make the game mean something to your characters (and players), and they will be sure to be a part of it.

ENDING EVERYTHING EQUALLY

How important is it for your chronicle that all the characters experience the same ending? Should you make allowances for characters who make different choices and veer slightly off course from the end you have plotted? Does everyone have to die, be saved or escape to a different reality if that's the general fate of the world?

This is a trick question. In fact, no two people (or characters) ever experience the same thing in the same way. Even if your chronicle mandates the literal end of the world and of all the characters who inhabit the world, each character will have a different experience of that end. Some might meet their fate heroically, regretting nothing and casting themselves to their allotted destiny. Others might fight to the



last against annihilation, while still others attempt to deny their own demise even as it is happening. The real question involves how you handle each character's experience of the same event.

Your endgame might result in a world without supernaturals. Your original intentions for the final session might involve a cataclysmic event targeting only those individuals with extra-human powers. On the surface, this seems like a foolproof climax, one that affects all the characters in the same way but still allows for individual reactions to the same general fate. In reality, some characters will undoubtedly discover a loophole in your scenario — either a way to flee to a realm (or another dimension) not affected by the final catastrophe or a way to regain their mortality and make themselves no longer a target.

If this happens, don't concern yourself too much. Those characters have effectively written themselves out of your game and ended their own story, which accomplishes the same purpose. The freedom to modify the story is essential to live-action gaming and distinguishes it from other kinds of storytelling. In live-action play, everyone is a storyteller to some degree, though consensus decrees that there will be a single Storyteller (that's you) to direct the plot. The cooperation of everyone, players and Storyteller, to tell a mutually satisfying story is the heart of live-action play.

If some players choose to rewrite the script you have planned for their characters without changing the outcome of the story itself, give them your blessing and make sure they earn it every bit as much as everyone else.

HANDLING ANTI-HEROIC CHARACTERS

Face it — not every character is a hero in the traditional sense of the word. If your game requires the characters to sacrifice themselves in a dramatic battle to decide the fate of the world, what do you do with characters who are not suited for such heroics? When confronted with the prospect of facing down the ultimate foe, whether the long-prophesied rising of the Antediluvians, the full force of the Wyrm's wrath, an army of Fomorians from the Deep Dreaming or the unified army of the Technocracy, some characters will seek any means to avoid direct conflict. In fact, some might try to sell out the other characters to the enemy!

It's a truism of live-action games many that many players enjoy playing characters who live by their wits rather than by their muscle. After all, live-action emphasizes social skills over brute force. Such characters prefer to rely on getting others to do their dirty work or using the force of their personality or cunning to influence those around them so they do not have to fight. In an end scenario, such actions often seem inappropriate or frivolous, yet they can be the essence of certain characters. How do you make certain that these characters have a vital part to play in your end scenario without forcing characters to act against their natures? Furthermore, how do you bring these players into the action or create a place for them in your story without losing the rest of the group in the process?

There are a number of different approaches to this dilemma, which is a common one regardless of a troupe's size. Even in a small troupe of less than 10 players, one or two individuals generally prefer to play characters with little skill in direct confrontation. Sometimes such characters are loners by nature, preferring to act on their own, either as information gatherers or spies.



In an end-of-the-world scenario, all the events should lead up to the final confrontation, whatever that is. Not all events, however, need to involve Physical Challenges or combat of any kind. Make certain that you include in your chronicle scenes that are geared for your less combat-oriented characters. As long as you find ways to make every character feel she is playing a vital role in your chronicle, you can keep everyone involved. You might even find that some of the characters least likely to sacrifice themselves might end up leading the charge — or else meeting their end on their own terms, though no less dramatically.

If all else fails, and some characters simply do not want to participate in the end scenario you have planned, you can always provide them with an out — an escape that only they know of and that they alone can take advantage of. While they might not enjoy a hero's fate, they will at least enjoy the story.

TITANIC BATTLES

No matter how much you try to avoid it in the presentation of a scenario, chances are combat will creep in sooner or later, as characters settle personal grudges or defend themselves from enemies bent on preventing them from succeeding at their last desperate mission. And then there's the question of characters caught up in scenarios involving huge battles or even all-out war. Combat can be a big headache for Storytellers, especially on a large scale, but there's no reason it *must* be that way, particularly with sufficient preparation and a skilled Narrator or two acting as backup.

Given the nature of combat in **Mind's Eye Theatre**, Storytellers are encouraged to handle most large battles with some sweeping overall descriptions. You can influence them with the outcome of several Mental or Social Challenges related to *Leadership*, *Sovereign* and the like if any characters have assumed command roles and are plotting strategy and tactics for their side. Then shift focus back to the characters and their immediate surroundings by playing out a few particularly dramatic moments that the characters get caught up in as the battle goes on. (Such moments include rescuing a downed comrade, bracing for a charge, rallying their troops, challenging the enemy leader and her dreaded personal guards, retrieving a powerful lost treasure, et cetera.) You can even allot a certain amount of time for each scene in order to keep the action flowing. (If the characters don't defeat the enemy leader in an hour, events conspire to sweep both sides apart to fight another day, for instance.) In between each such personal scene, give an update of the overall state of the battle as the characters would see it, and you'll quickly find the dreaded bogeyman of mass combat becoming an exciting tool to portray the End Times.

Once you've brought the characters into the thick of battle, make sure the action is, well, *action* — always keep it moving, vivid and dramatic. Don't get bogged down in rules or waste time adjudicating combat with every single peon blocking the objective. Let them dish out punishment on the enemy rank and file without too much trouble, then resume regular combat rules and difficulty when they confront the real enemies or true obstacles involved in the scene. Doing so not only keeps the players pumped up and feeling as though their characters are the heroes of the tale, but it also trims a lot of time off combat while allowing the players to feel as though they are caught up in a grand battle of epic proportions.



TYING LOOSE ENDS

One thing that a good ending should provide is closure for the players in the story, and their characters. This means generally tying up any loose plot threads from the chronicle. As a result, players won't always be left wondering what might have happened, or what that subplot was *really* all about. It helps to wind down the chronicle and wrap things up neatly.

The trick is to keep from wrapping things up *too* neatly. You don't want to tie up all the loose ends of your chronicle in a single story or, worse yet, in a single epilogue, since it can come off as rushed and artificial. If you have the luxury of wrapping up your chronicle in its own good time, address the various hanging plot threads, one by one, until they're all done. Take care along the way not to introduce any major new plot threads that won't be resolved by the time the chronicle is done. This way, things draw to a close naturally as the characters resolve their various personal stories and the overall plot of the chronicle plays itself out.

CONSTRUCTING AN AFTERMATH

You've ended the world, either through political, social, divine or natural catastrophe. Have you destroyed the planet itself? If you haven't, what's left? In running an end of the World of Darkness scenario, you need to establish for yourself just how much of the world you are going to end. If you use a scenario that calls for not only the end of supernatural life on Earth but the end of life in general (and perhaps even an end to the planet), then the answer to this question is relatively easy. What's left is, well, not much.

If, however, you intend only to end the world as it has existed for your players, you need to decide what sort of world is left. A scenario that removes only supernaturals from the world will still leave behind a society of mortals. How will the absence of supernatural beings change the world? Will mortals suddenly find themselves free of many of the institutions that have constrained their freedom? Will they at last inhabit a world in which the police serve and protect all the people instead of their Kindred masters? Will mortals inherit an earth devoid of Gnosis and open to all sorts of opportunists? Will the human race grow less creative without changelings to spur them on, or will they find themselves able to create without going through periods of stagnation? Will the departure of magic from the world guarantee a safe but dull society? Will the victorious Technocracy realize that without magic, science itself does not work properly?

If the Nephandi or other sinister forces have conquered the world, what sort of depredations do they visit on mortals? Does the advent of the Sixth Age, the period of greatest darkness and evil on the Great Wheel, herald a dismal future for everyone?

Ask yourself what happens after the chronicle is over. Does the world keep going without the characters, or does it grind to a halt after the final curtain drops? This question is particularly important if you plan to continue using the same "world" as a background for later chronicles. If the world goes on without the characters, you need to know what kind of world remains and what kind of stories you can tell in that "brave new world."

Generally speaking, unless you and your players are very excited about the idea, let them know in advance that you do not plan on running a "post-apocalyptic" chronicle. That way if you change your mind later on, you are always free to continue, but otherwise you can feel as though you are building toward a definite



ending and not have to worry about building a new world for them to play in. Even if you do plan on continuing, make sure you're still building toward a truly climactic event; no matter what, the Time of Judgment should be a dramatic time of great change and upheaval, not simply one more stop on the way to the next phase of the chronicle.

PREVENTING THE END

In many games, players (and their characters) are meant to triumph if they take the correct actions and avoid the pitfalls of the scenario. What happens in an end-of-the-world scenario if characters manage to avert the planned disaster?

The answer to this question is simple. Let them “win.”

The process behind the answer is not so simple. If the characters manage to defeat the scenario, whether you hit the world with a killer asteroid, shatter the Gauntlet between the physical world and the Umbra or raise legions of zombies around the world, then give them the reward that comes with clever planning, hard fighting and noble sacrifice.

Before you do, however, make certain that the players have, in fact, truly earned their victory. Regardless of whether they win or succumb to your endgame, the characters should feel as if they've been through a hard fight. The players, as well, should feel that you taxed all their abilities, stretched their roleplaying talents to the maximum and drawn every ounce of clever thinking from them that you could in order to bring about that rarest of rarities — victory against impossible odds.

Keep in mind that clever play and convincing roleplaying should always be rewarded. Just because you intend to bring a long-running chronicle to an earth-shattering close doesn't mean that everything will go according to plan. Players have a knack for finding loopholes in the plot, taking advantage of every weakness and finding hidden strengths within their characters. If they manage to put it all together and beat your scenario, tell the story the way they play it.

No one likes coming up with a clever solution to an unbeatable puzzle and having it declared meaningless, so don't overrule your players' actions simply because the story doesn't allow for the characters to win. The story does allow for the players to win if they can. This is what live-action roleplaying is all about.

In the event that the players do find a way to save the world or avert disaster, make sure you have a suitable ending for victory as well as defeat — one that leaves the characters with the feeling that they have overcome overwhelming opposition to emerge triumphant. Then, wrap up the game and plan your next chronicle — either in the changed world your players have created or wherever your imagination decides to lead you.

AFTERMATH:

BRINGING CLOSURE TO YOUR SCENARIO

You've just run the climactic scene of your chronicle. The troupe stands around, shock visible on the faces of some, sadness on the faces of others, and a sense of bewilderment plays around the expressions of everyone. The chronicle is over. Finished and done.

As the bittersweet truth comes home to the players, the finality of the situation settles on you, the Storyteller. The game you have lavished so much energy on and



nurtured, perhaps since you bought your first **Mind's Eye Theatre** rulebook and made the decision to run a World of Darkness chronicle, is over.

How do you wrap your mind around the enormity of the situation? How do you and your players handle the fact that the imaginary world populated with characters created by you and your friends no longer exists — or, if it does, is radically changed?

This section deals with coping with the aftermath of an End-Times chronicle in ways that will solidify the game in your mind and provide lots of satisfying memories for everyone concerned.

Epilogue

You may wish to include an epilogue at the very end of your chronicle. It comes after the climax of the ending and provides a sort of “cool-down” from the excitement and action that led up to the end. An epilogue serves to wrap up any remaining loose ends, and it shows the players the results of the ending if few or none of them are left to see it in character.

Generally, an epilogue should be relatively brief. With the story over, all that’s left is to wrap up a few things. You might even wish to simply describe the epilogue to the players, although it’s best if any surviving characters are at least indirectly involved and they can participate in it.

A Postmortem with Meaning

Many live-action games that take place at roleplaying conventions and involve a few days of intensive interaction followed by a rousing conclusion hold “wrap-up” sessions in which players and Storytellers gather to discuss the high points and low points of the game. Storytellers review the various plots for everyone, so that players whose characters were involved in only part of the overall story receive a recounting of the big picture. Players share their favorite moments during the game and reveal the secrets about their characters that they have spent all weekend assiduously hiding from other players.

Regular live-action troupes often hold such post-mortem sessions after a chronicle ends and before a new one begins. Some do so at regular intervals after the players have passed significant milestones in the story arc. In an End-Time scenario, a special post-mortem gathering is not only advised, it’s critical to the sense of closure players and Storytellers need to avoid the feeling that they’ve left something undone.

Meet with your players as a group. Go over the actions of your game and explain why certain things happened as they did. If players sacrificed their characters, let them know what their characters’ deaths achieved so they don’t feel that what they did was for nothing. Ask players to share their memorable moments, not only from your last scenario, but from the beginning of your chronicle or any other point along its length. If you know a player loves a particular story, tell it to the group (or let the player tell it himself). The stories are what you were working for all along — share them!

If you have the time and the means, take a vote and give out awards or certificates for memorable actions. Have your players suggest contenders for Most Popular Character, Character Most Loved to Hate, Biggest Villain, Sneakiest Character, Most Selfless Character, Greatest Opportunist and other possible awards. Go ahead with this only if you plan on recognizing every character for something,



however. While you shouldn't diminish the meaning of the awards by obviously handing out one to everyone, nobody should be left without a trophy or mention at the end of the night. Every player should be made to feel as though he was part of something special.

IN MEMORIAM

Another possibility is to bring the players together one final time as their characters, living or dead, and have the surviving characters hold a "eulogy" for their fallen allies and enemies. Allow those players whose characters are being eulogized to reprise their characters in flashback scenes for one last farewell, perhaps even dramatize their last moments that no one else survived to see. Have players summarize their characters for the group, speaking of their feelings toward their characters and revealing the inner motivations and driving forces behind the individuals they portrayed.

If you want to go even more in-depth, you can allow characters to enact some scenes that they wanted to take place but never did. Or you can have each player, in character, interact non-violently with her greatest rival. Ask each player to state what she would want others to remember about her character and have her relate what her memories are of the other characters. This type of memorial session allows players to provide their story and their characters with a formal closing and a memorable farewell.

When that has ended, take a bit of a refreshment break and then hold a question-and-answer session, in which all the players can finally get the answers they never learned or gleefully reveal the secrets they managed to keep throughout the entire game. ("By the way, dude, you remember when the prince called a Blood Hunt on you that one night — it was all me.") Especially with chronicles that have lasted for years, there's bound to be plenty of dark corners that the players never got a chance to fully explore, but always wondered about. Well, now's the time to shed some light on them! Most players adore these behind-the-scenes wrap-up sessions, as they show the big picture you've been working so hard to create over the course of the chronicle. Naturally, it also allows you as a Storyteller to receive a little well-earned praise for all your attention to intrigue and detail.

Just make sure that all such post-mortem conversations and revelations are done with good humor as opposed to allowing players to indulge in pure selfish gloating, and it should be a memorable conclusion to your chronicle that they will remember for a long time to come.

UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

After everything is wrapped up, some players will immediately want to know what the next game will be, when they can start making characters and so on. Take such inquiries as a compliment. They enjoyed your story and are looking forward to the next creative endeavor you put together. Don't be afraid to ask them politely for a little space, though. Ending a game is often an immensely draining experience even if it goes well, and you're generally better off giving yourself at least a week or two off, minimum, before you start discussing the next game. Enjoy the glow of a job well done, catch up on that work or reading or sleep you've been missing, and otherwise take some time to catch your breath and relax.

As hard as it might be, try to fend off any suggestions for returning to the same story or characters, at least in the near future. Don't rob your grand ending of its



ONE LAST SNAPSHOT

Ask your players to show up in full costume and makeup for the final session or for the post-mortem. Bring a camera and take pictures of important scenes either as they happen, or perhaps by re-staging them during a wrap-up session. Many players will want character shots or a picture of their coterie/pack/motley as well, and at least one or two big group shots are a great idea too. Make copies of the pictures and present them to the players as keepsakes. (Don't be afraid to ask players to help fund this endeavor, though, as it can get expensive.)

Another possible idea might be to create a notebook for each player that contains a summary of your endgame, a list of all the players and their characters (and the fates of those characters). Include some blank sheets for players to sign as their characters, including brief messages if they wish. Assemble a literary and artistic pastiche commemorating the chronicle. Ask players to contribute poetry, drawings or stories so that, when bound together and copied, each player will have a permanent memory book of the game.

power by immediately drawing up plans for more adventures. It might be hard to let go of the characters and stories at first, but running right back in is seldom a good idea either. Insist that the chronicle has reached its ending, and leave it at that. If such ideas keep coming back to you months later, you might have a promising lead on how to re-visit the chronicle, but for now, just let it be.

After all, the possibilities are endless — give yourself and your players time to find the next avenue you wish to explore together.

It's your world.

Enjoy.