

The background is a vibrant orange and yellow sunset sky. A large, dark, jagged silhouette of a city or industrial complex is centered in the upper half. At the top, blue silhouettes of buildings and structures hang upside down. In the lower half, there are silhouettes of a city with a prominent clock tower on the right and industrial buildings on the left. A large, dark, irregular shape is in the center, with the title 'STRATA' and subtitle 'A SPIRE RPG SOURCEBOOK' overlaid on it. The authors' names are at the bottom.

STRATA

A SPIRE RPG
SOURCEBOOK

Grant Howitt and Christopher Taylor

STRATA

By Grant Howitt and Christopher Taylor, 2019

First printing.

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INTRODUCTION

Spire is an impossible city: decrepit, mile-high, wicked and wretched, glorious and profane. Within its crumbling walls, cruel high elf overlords rule the subjugated dark elf race, denying them every freedom. In shadowed back rooms, secret basements and hidden temples to forbidden gods, the dark elves gather and plot to overthrow their colonisers.

That's one story of Spire.

The other story is how we decided to write a roleplaying game that took itself seriously in terms of rules and content; how we put time and effort into it; and how you - our audience - supported us through Kickstarter to make it happen.

We've worked with artists, writers and our incredible community to build something that is greater than the sum of its parts, and far greater than us. Spire is a world in which people tell stories of revolution, horror and love. It's so exciting to be a fundamental part of it.

We weren't sure if we had enough interest in the game to warrant releasing a sourcebook, though. We figured we'd put it up on Kickstarter, and if it didn't fund within two weeks, we'd take it down and try something else. As you might be aware, the product didn't fund within two weeks.

It funded within four hours.

So: this is Strata, our next step into the world of Spire. It shines a light on the richest and poorest districts of the city: the frost-rimed and carpeted streets of Amaranth, the whispering corridors of

lost Derelictus, the choking biomass of the Garden district, the sweltering industry of the Works, the creaking balcony-city of Perch, the drow civil wars writ small in the Silver Quarter, and the warren of nailed-together mansions of Ivory Row.

We have two new character classes, the Inksmith and the Shadow Agent, to supplement those in the core book and Black Magic. We also have more extra advances than you could need on any given day - the thorn-skinned Druid of the Living Spire, the whip-smart Gazetteer, members of children's mystery cults, and more besides.

We have ten (ten!) scenarios set in Spire and written by a wide variety of authors - some untested, some industry veterans. They're all brilliant, and they're all written with an eye to let dynamic, emergent play arise from the actions of the characters rather than sticking to a set script.

In short: this is Spire, but more. Thank you so much for helping us make it into a reality.

Yours,
Grant Howitt and Chris Taylor



NEW CLASSES

The Inksmith and the Shadow Agent are two new classes that sit alongside the ten in the core book and the Blood-Witch in Black Magic. The Inksmith channels the power of the written word and popular literature into pulp-fiction spells that will see them fit in neatly with Knights of the North Docks, Idols and Vermissian Sages; the Shadow Agent is a damaged zealot capable of rearranging their identities to better serve their goddess, and will find blend in nicely with Lajhan, Bound and Midwife characters.



INKSMITH

“Look: I don’t get paid for boring stories. So drink this, grab a gun, and come with me – we’re gonna blow this thing wide open.”

Ever since humans brought the printing press to Spire, the ability to control and channel the zeitgeist has never been easier. You know the occult power of pulp fiction, channel the magic of sensationalist journalism and wear narratives like a cloak; you ride the razor’s edge between truth and fiction. As a writer, you’re not bad. As a magician, you’re top-notch.

RESISTANCES: +2 Reputation, +1 Shadow

REFRESH: Do something reckless for the sake of a good story.

SKILLS: Compel, Investigate

DOMAINS: Low Society, Occult

BONDS

- You have two individual-level NPC bonds, at least one of whom is in the criminal domain. They provide you with access to organisations and districts you’re interested in writing about.
- You have a bond with a fellow PC who you wrote and published a story about. What did it say, and are they really happy with it?

EQUIPMENT

Either:

- Grackler pistol (D6, Brutal, One-Shot, Ranged)

Or:

- “Found” rapier (D6, Penetrating)

CORE ABILITIES

DO IT FOR THE STORY. [Occult] *You have a way of getting people to act on their baser impulses.* Once per session, an NPC you’re talking to does precisely what they want to do at that moment in time, regardless of social mores, fear, obligations or politeness.

NOSE FORTROUBLE. *If you can find what’s out of place, you can find the story.* Once per scene, ask the GM what’s weird or out of place here.

ADVANCES

LOW

TRUST ME. *You've got an honest face. Almost a shame, really.* Gain the Deceive skill. When you convince someone to trust you against their better judgment, you gain them as a temporary bond.

COMMON FEARS. [Occult] *You tap into the zeitgeist of the community, becoming the embodiment of their worst fears.* Investigate+Occult to cast. Determine what most people are scared of round these parts, and channel it into yourself. When you embody that fear with your acts, clothing or speech, roll with mastery against the people of the district until the end of the current situation.

LUCKY BREAK. [Occult] *You have no qualms about getting in trouble in search of a story.* Once per situation, when the GM inflicts stress with a weapon against you but before they roll to see how much stress they would inflict, you can choose to ignore the stress. The attack misses you at the last second instead.

EVERYONE'S BEST FRIEND. *You'll degrade yourself in order to make contacts.* +1 Reputation. When you publish a glowing portrayal of someone you've recently spoken with, gain them as a temporary bond.

BON VIVANT. +2 Reputation. *Your hedonism knows no bounds.* You suffer no penalties to your actions based on inebriation, drug use or tiredness unless you're catatonic or unconscious; you've been through worse than this before. In addition, once per session, you can declare that you're carrying some sort of drug on your person (enough to share between a few people, although whether you'd want to is another matter.)

MOVE IN THE RIGHT CIRCLES. *You have a side line in writing society reports: coming-out balls, unbirthdays, blinding parties, that sort of thing.* Gain the High Society domain. Once per session, you can declare there's a party nearby and that you're invited. The GM gets to say whose party it is and what's strange about it.

THE NEXT LOGICAL STEP. [Occult] *This stuff just writes itself.* Once per session, you can declare something is present in the world if it would be there in a shlocky pulp fiction story. Of course there's a gun under the bar; of course there's a secret trapdoor under the altar; of course that knight's drunk on the job. It has to make narrative sense: if the GM or the group doesn't agree with it, the ability has no effect (but it can be used again this session).

A MAN WITH A GUN. [Occult] *When in doubt, have a man come through a door with a gun in his hand.* Roll Fight+Occult to cast this spell. If you succeed, a person with a gun (of any ancestry or gender – it doesn't have to be a man, that's just the name of the spell) enters the room you're currently standing in. You don't get to say who they are, whose side they're on or what they want, but you can guarantee that someone with a loaded gun will walk into the room as long as there's a reasonable entry point for them to walk through.

MEDIUM

FUDGE THE FACTS. [Occult] *Live long enough and you realise that your past is just a series of malleable details.* Roll Fix+Occult to cast this spell. You may swap out one skill, one domain and one bond on you or another willing participant for different ones of your choosing (exchanged bonds must be of equal level). This effect lasts until the next dawn.

STAR-CROSSED LOVERS. [Occult] *You bring people together, whether they like it or not.* Roll Compel+Occult to cast this spell and pick two NPCs who are aware of one another to fall madly in love until the next dawn. When the spell wears off, they might strike up a lasting relationship if they're compatible; otherwise they'll return to normal, unable to work out why they felt so strongly.

IN THE NICK OF TIME. [Occult] *You summon a guardian angel: a friend, packing heat.* As A MAN WITH A GUN, but the person with the gun is on your side.

NO LOVE LOST. *Sometimes you just have to say goodbye.* +2 Mind. Once per session, when a bond suffers fallout, remove the bond to ignore the fallout.

NAMELESS DREAD. [Occult] *Some things are too horrific to describe, even for a person who writes horror stories for a living.* Roll Deceive+Compel to cast this spell on a target that you are speaking to. On a success, the target feels an indescribable dread at present events and wants to flee the scene; they will suffer D3 stress and become convinced that something strange is going on.

KNOCKOUT PUNCH. [Occult] *The heroes in pulp novels knock out people all the time, so there's no reason why you can't either.* Roll Deceive+Occult to cast this spell. You gain the Fight skill until the end of the current situation. The first time you strike a target with your bare fists, inflict (D6, Brutal) damage against them. If you reduce a target to 0 stress with your hands, they're always knocked out rather than dead, and they don't receive any lasting damage from being concussed.

THIS ENDS TONIGHT. [Occult] *Everything's been building towards this moment.* Roll Compel+Occult to cast this spell on yourself or a nearby target as part of an hour-long ritual involving black kafee, rotgut liquor and reams of notepaper. Until the next dawn, stress that the subject inflicts or receives is doubled.

HIGH

WORST NIGHTMARE. [Occult] *You've read the stories; you know what society is scared of. You channel their fear into a physical form.* As COMMON FEARS, but instead of offering you the chance to roll with mastery, you write an article or short story about the subject and summon it into being until the next dawn. This can take many forms: a community of Morticians will be haunted by ghost-eating Charnelites; a Ministry cell is watched by faceless paladins; a superstitious Garden district workhouse sees the Beast of Vat A-67 wherever they look. The entities created by this spell are generic – they aren't real things and don't have identities. While they do physically exist, they won't act against people unless provoked.

EMBEDDED. [Occult] *You are the story, and you follow the story, part of it and apart from it at the same time.* Pick a target organisation that you are writing about and investigating, and roll Sneak+Occult to

cast this spell. Once per situation, when this organisation acts against you or when outside forces act against you believing you to be of this organisation, you can choose to ignore all stress inflicted from a single roll after the GM has rolled it. When you publish the piece, the spell ends. At the end of each session in which you do not publish the piece, mark D3 stress to Mind.

NARRATIVE CONVENIENCE. [Occult] *The hero never gets arrested – and if they do, they meant for it to happen.* Once per session, when you or an ally suffers Shadow, Reputation or Silver fallout, invert it: it becomes a boon, rather than a problem. The paladins raid your rivals' base, rather than yours; instead of selling your allegiance to a different organisation, you've got them unwittingly funding the Ministry; the police officer investigating you gets arrested on suspicion of the crimes that you carried out.



SHADOW AGENT

"The goddess took part of me, but she gave me so much more in return."

You underwent the same initiation ritual as the other ministers, but down in the dark, something snapped. When you surfaced, you weren't the same person you were when you started. The Hidden Mistress "blessed" you by taking away your sense of self, leaving you a perfect instrument of her desires: nameless, faceless, wearing morals and identities like a cloak to hide yourself from sight. Some in the Ministry see you as a sacred weapon of the Goddess and a valuable ally; others are scared of what you might become.

RESISTANCES: Shadow +2, Mind +1

REFRESH: Gain an advantage by posing as someone you're not.

SKILLS: Deceive, Investigate

Your starting domains are dictated by your choice of covers.

BONDS

- You have one NPC bond from your former life before your initiation: a friend, relative, lover, etc. Choose their domain from the minor covers below.
- One of the other player characters was the first person to realise that the Goddess took part of your identity during the initiation ceremony. Who was it, and how did they react?

EQUIPMENT

- Stiletto dagger (D3, Concealable, Piercing, Unreliable)
- Illegal crossbow (D6, Ranged, Reload)
- Minister's Sanctuary armour (Armour 1, Concealable)

CORE ABILITIES

COVER IDENTITIES. You have access to cover identities which you can inhabit via the Rite of Many Faces (below). While anyone can pose as someone else, Shadow Agents have an unusual metaphysical link with their cover identities

granted by devotion to their goddess. Taking a cover will allow you access to an associated domain. While you possess that cover, you have the domain; if you lose the cover, the domain is also lost. Unlike regular advances, when you gain access through a cover to a domain that you already possess, you do not gain a knack in it; instead, you get permanent access to the domain even if your cover is lost. When you create your character, choose two minor covers. (The distinction between minor and major covers is only important during character creation.)

THE RITE OF MANY FACES. [Divine] Mark D3 stress to Mind and spend five minutes communing with Lombre to cast this spell and assume one of your cover identities. While you embody this identity, you simultaneously know you are and are not them (so you don't need to make Deceive checks to pass as them). You can end the spell at any time, returning to your self. No matter what cover you inhabit, you always have access to this spell.

CREATE COVER. [Divine] You study your targets down to the finest detail. You may mark D6 stress to an NPC bond you possess to create a cover identity associated with theirs. This process takes at least a few days of study, forging documents and sometimes casual conversation to work out the mannerisms needed to pass as someone in their profession. When you've spent this time and effort, pick an appropriate cover from the list below and add it to your available covers. The cover isn't a copy of their identity: it's a generic fake identity that uses elements of their personality to lend weight to it. If the bond is temporary, the cover is temporary as well – a thrown-together mess that'll hold up for a little while. When you remove the bond, remove access to the cover as well.

COVERS

MINOR

GANGSTER. Gain the Crime domain. Your cover identity is a member of a criminal organisation.

You have a set of suitable clothing, a mark of membership and a cheap, illegal pistol (D6, Ranged, Reload, Unreliable). Make a note of which organisation your cover is in.

LEFT HAND OF GOD. Gain the Religion domain. Your cover identity is a member of the clergy in a religious organisation within Spire, and you have the suitable vestments and accoutrements to pass as a priest. Make a note of which church your cover is part of.

DROW OF THE PEOPLE. Gain the Low Society domain. Your cover identity is connected with the poor and downtrodden of Spire. You have a work uniform (overalls and some protective gear) as well as a fairly legitimate part-time job you can use to earn an honest living.

CITY GUARD. Gain the Order domain. Your cover identity is a member of the City Guard: you have a uniform, a set of forged credentials and a cudgel (D3).

TRADER. Gain the Commerce domain. Your cover identity is a hustler in one of Spire's many marketplaces who does their best to buy low and sell high. You have a small collection of sundry goods (say what trade you specialise in) that you can sell once to remove D6 stress from Silver.

CULTIST. Gain the Occult domain. Your cover identity is a member of a forbidden sect of occultists within Spire – make a note of which one. You have your cult's signature sacrificial tool (D3) and a set of mystical-looking robes, as well as a few books exploring the dark arts.

MAJOR

ROYAL BLOOD. Gain the High Society domain. Your cover identity is a member of a noble drow house – choose which. You have several sets of fine clothing and a handful of jewelry.

EXECUTIVE. Gain the Commerce domain. Your cover identity is a member of a large business within Spire. You have access to a faked icon of trade that will let you act as an agent on the business' behalf.

SOLDIER. Gain the Order domain. Your cover identity is an enlisted member of the Allied Defence

Force. You have a military uniform, fake credentials and a standard-issue combat knife (D3) but no immediate access to a rifle.

RETROENGINEER. Gain the Technology domain. Your cover identity is a human, living and working in Spire as a mechanist and engineer. You have the capacity to disguise yourself as a human – suitable clothes, some means of concealing your monochrome skin and long ears – and a bag of work tools.

AELFIR. Gain the High Society domain. Your cover identity is a masked aelfir. You have access to a "true" mask and a set of suitably elaborate and impractical clothes. You look, or can look, enough like an aelfir to pass as one for a while, but only while your mask and clothes stay on.

ADVANCES

LOW

BETRAYAL. *Eventually, everyone will turn on you. It's better to do it to them first.* +2 to Mind. When you betray someone's trust, roll with mastery.

A SINGLE NIGHT'S GRACE. [Divine] Mark D6 stress and beseech Lombre for aid to cast this spell. Choose a cover you do not possess: you now inhabit it until the next sunrise, and may not remove it beforehand for any reason.

DISTANT. *You start to blur the lines between yourself and your covers; pain and stress are muted, like music from a distant room.* Once per situation, when the GM asks you to mark stress to Blood or Mind and you are not inhabiting a cover identity, mark half the stress inflicted.

IN THEIR SHADOW. [Divine] *You siphon knowledge and ability from those around you.* +1 Shadow. Mark D3 stress to cast this spell on someone nearby. Drawing power through the shadow of the target, you copy one skill or domain that they possess (for NPCs, work with the GM to determine what sort of thing you can steal) and gain access to it until the end of the current situation.

INSTRUMENT OF THE GODDESS. [Divine] *Your mistress bestows upon you her holy weapon: a knife, shadow-black, barely visible.* Gain the Fight

skill. Once per session, summon the following weapon to your hand: (D3, Keen, Poison, One-Shot.) This weapon cannot be used to render targets unconscious. Reducing a target's resistance to 0 results in a quick and agonising death.

LOMBRE'S EMBRACE. [Divine] *You draw a cloak of secrecy around you and your cell.* Gain the Sneak skill and spend D3 stress to cast this spell on you and all nearby allies. The first time each of you mark stress to Shadow during the next situation, mark half the stress inflicted.

GO LOUD. *You can't maintain your cover any longer; you go out with all guns blazing, and Lombre blesses you with her dark power.* Destroy the cover which you are currently inhabiting (even if it was just BLOWN – see Cover Fallout below) to activate this ability. For the remainder of the situation, your attacks gain the Brutal tag and you roll with mastery when fighting people who bought into your cover.

MEDIUM

HARVEST. [Divine] You pluck the existence out of a target along with their dying breath. Once per session, when you kill someone, generate a temporary cover based on their identity as though they were a bond: you cast CREATE COVER on them. Mark D6 stress when you cast this spell to permanently add their identity as a cover.

THROUGH A GLASS, DARKLY. You can uncouple your self from your body, observing events that occur to you as though in third person. Activate this ability when you suffer fallout of any kind: increase the difficulty of all actions you take by 1, but ignore the effects of all Blood or Mind fallout on your character until the end of the situation. When the situation ends, you snap back into your body and feel the full force of your fallout.

FOLIE À DEUX. [Divine] Your conviction is so strong that it begins to infect others. Once per session when inhabiting a cover, an NPC of your choice that's present in the current situation will "recognise" you as your cover and owe you a favour – even if you've never met before (but you should have done, given your cover). For example, a quartermaster would recognise your soldier cover and a fashion designer would recognise your noble-born drow cover, but not vice versa.

JACK OF SHADOWS. [Divine] You tear knowledge from their minds and use it as a weapon against them. +1 Shadow. Mark D3 stress to cast this spell. It functions as IN THEIR SHADOW, but you remove the skill or domain from the target while you use it, ripping off their shadow and blending it into your own. When you act against them using the skill or domain you stole, you roll with mastery. (If you take it from another PC, they simply lose access to the skill or domain for the remainder of the situation.)

THE RITE OF MANY MIRRORS. [Divine] *You know the secret words that turn worlds on their head.* You may use Deceive in place of Compel and mark D6 stress to cast this spell on a target you can speak to. Until the end of the situation, the target thinks that something they once believed is no longer true, though they can't say exactly why. They will start looking for the reason.

FALSE NAME. *You had your true name surgically removed.* Gain the Resist skill and +1 Mind. When you are the target of occult magic and take stress, you mark half the stress inflicted (rounding up).

FRACTURED MIRROR. [Divine] *You unshackle your mind from its limits, reaching into alternate selves for power.* Gain a medium advance from any class. If it refers to a class-specific item or ability (such as the Carrion-Priest's hyena or the Bound's god-blade), you do not gain access to that item or ability.

SACRIFICE. *Lombre is kind, but she hungers, and will reward tribute.* You can "kill" a cover – removing access to it – by sacrificing it upon an altar to Our Hidden Mistress in a night-long ritual. When you do so, clear all your current stress and any fallout you suffered whilst inhabiting the cover. If it's unclear what fallout you suffered when you were inhabiting the cover, the fallout stays with you.

HIGH

RITE OF PERFECT SYMMETRY. [Divine] As HARVEST, except: when you adopt the identity, you now look and act like the person you killed, right down to the smallest mannerisms. Their partner, children, and close friends couldn't tell the difference via anything but a thorough, deliberate examination.

LOMBRE'S GRACE. [Divine] You merge your mind with that of your Mistress, and your foresight becomes uncanny. Once per session, when you take fallout, ignore all negative effects of that fallout: rather than doing harm, the fallout was all part of your ongoing plan. When you use this sudden turnaround to surprise your enemies, roll with mastery until the end of the current situation.

PERFECT COVER. [Divine] Mark D6 stress to cast this spell. Split your self into two forms; you and a cover identity of your choosing. Until the next dawn, control both characters – your cover identity doesn't have access to your Shadow Agent abilities, but instead functions with everything you'd expect them to have given their identity. Use the bond rules when you act as the cover, treating your cover as a suitable bond and allocating stress appropriately. You may have as many instances of this spell active as you have covers. The forms exist until the next dawn.

MIRRORS REFLECTING MIRRORS. Remove all resistances from your character and add an additional cover: "Shadow Agent." This can increase your covers to five, technically increasing them over your maximum. Any stress taken is applied to your currently active cover, which is treated as a resistance with no additional resistance slots. You no longer differentiate between different types of stress (Blood, Silver, Shadow etc) and instead apply it all as "untyped" stress to your current cover. Fallout is rolled for as normal, treating the total stress allocated to your current cover as your character's total current stress. When you shift from one cover identity to another, you leave any fallout and stress allocated to that cover with them, and it will have no effect until you inhabit it again.

COVER FALLOUT

Covers aren't perfect things. They have the capacity to backfire on the character, attracting unwanted attention – and, thanks to the mystical nature of the Shadow Agent's bond with Our Hidden Mistress, they can take on lives of their own too. At the GM's discretion, when you suffer fallout and it seems appropriate, they can draw from the list of results below.

MINOR

TROUBLE. [Cover] You draw attention to your cover through your actions, leading to someone from the cover's domain poking their nose where it doesn't belong.

STUCK: [Cover] You cannot remove your current cover until the next sunrise.

COMPROMISED: [Cover] Your cover is compromised. Until the end of the next session, increase the difficulty of all tasks associated with that identity by 1.

MODERATE

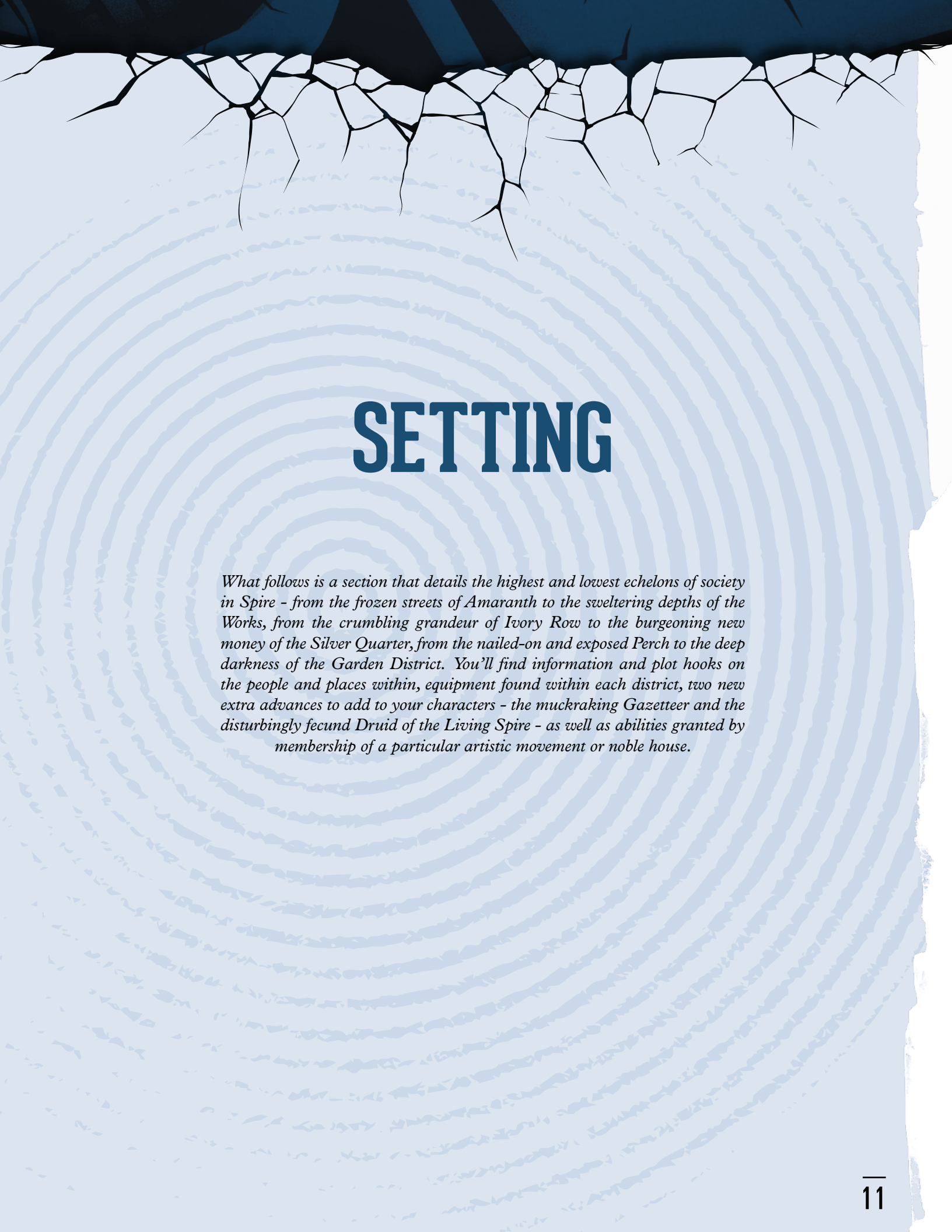
BLOWN. [Cover] You lose access to this cover identity.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY. [Cover] An NPC believes they've met your cover identity before, and you're forced to agree with them. Unfortunately, you quickly end up in a difficult situation because of the mistake.

SEVERE

EGO DEATH. [Cover] Swap your base identity for a cover that you possess. The cover is now your base identity (as are any domains attached to it), and your base identity (i.e. all your Shadow Agent advances) becomes a cover that you must access with the Rites of Many Faces to use.

UNWILLING AVATAR. [Cover] An under-used or abused cover rebels against you and acts on its own initiative as an instrument of Lombre, taking control of your body at inopportune moments and trying to gain power over you. You can no longer inhabit this identity. At the beginning of every session, the GM will tell you what the cover did while you weren't aware. You can undo this fallout by hunting down and stopping your cover from acting against you, but that's the sort of thing that's going to require a great amount of experimental therapy and weaponised ritual. Or, maybe this is the will of Our Hidden Mistress, and you shouldn't try to stop it at all.



SETTING

What follows is a section that details the highest and lowest echelons of society in Spire - from the frozen streets of Amaranth to the sweltering depths of the Works, from the crumbling grandeur of Ivory Row to the burgeoning new money of the Silver Quarter, from the nailed-on and exposed Perch to the deep darkness of the Garden District. You'll find information and plot hooks on the people and places within, equipment found within each district, two new extra advances to add to your characters - the muckraking Gazetteer and the disturbingly fecund Druid of the Living Spire - as well as abilities granted by membership of a particular artistic movement or noble house.



The towering, cursed city of Spire.



HIGH SOCIETY

If you have the cash to spare, Spire is one of the finest cities in the world. Delicacies and treasures are imported from Nujab, the Eastern Kingdoms, the Home Nations and far beyond via skywhale and caravan and riverboat, then ferried up-Spire to the richest districts where they change hands for prices unimaginable to most working-class drow in the middle and lower cities. The glittering, dangerous Silver Quarter boasts a wide variety of inns and entertainments; Ivory Row has a cutting-edge arts scene and an abundance of high-end boutiques; and Amaranth, frozen home of the ruling aelfir, is scintillating-sharp, alien, and filled with the richest people on the continent.

AMARANTH

The aelfir have made Amaranth their home. In ages past, it was the seat of the dark elf government, and a variety of drow lords issued edicts from within. Two hundred years after the initial aelfir invasion, it is barely recognisable.

The once-stark drow architecture has been replaced with overwrought filigree and the hard granite streets have been carpeted in lush scarlet fabrics. Windows and great arrays of mirrors capture natural light from the exterior of Spire and funnel it inside, glinting off the snowflakes that fall year round from the ceiling.

THE EVERQUEEN

In the frozen lands of the north, the aelfir are ruled by the Everqueen – an immortal monarch, a once-aelf thing of ice and stone, who has bound the land to herself with ancient magic.

The further north you travel, the more control she exerts over her people. In the south of her domain, where the aelfir build shifting cities of thorn and whalebone on creaking glaciers, she is revered and respected; in the endless white plains of the far north, she impacts every element of day-to-day life.

In the glacial fortresses at the pole, her dictates and rulings are carved into towering walls of ice, and

her eyes are everywhere through her network of spies and scrying magic. Visitors – and there have been very few – say that the aelfir here have internalised her numberless laws and petty rulings, going about their lives like drones in a hive.

To the aelfir of Spire, the Everqueen is something of an anachronism. Living so far away from her influence, they pay only lip service to her; Spire functions as an autonomous entity. She and her followers view the Council's rule of Spire as heresy, and there are plans – far-reaching, centuries-long, dynasty-spanning plans – to mount an invasion. But nothing moves quickly in the frozen north. By the time an assault is mounted, Spire may well have changed hands a few more times.

HIERARCHY OF THE AELFIR

It is hard to tell who is in charge out of any given group of high elves. No aelfir particularly enjoys feeling inferior to another, so they are generally careful not to officially rank themselves in case they end up underneath someone.

Many of the more conservative aelfir are devoted to cataloguing the world and their place in it – after all, the name and position that an aelfir assigns to something is more perfect and more fitting than any



An aelfir souvain takes their latest obsession, a gnoll prisoner of war, for a promenade in Amaranth.

other categorisation – but the libertines and aesthetes that make up the higher echelons of aelfir society in Spire have other views.

The aelfir exist in a sea of ideas; talking to them is like trying to understand bizarre improvised poetry (and not all of them are very good at it). Some eschew the use of nouns entirely, seeing them as brutal and untrue concepts that limit one's understanding of the universe; others speak only in quotes from the canon of great aelfir plays, using the work as a lens to understand and illuminate the world around them. Others still have had their vocal cords removed entirely and communicate only through music.

Most aelfir just dabble in the arts of understanding, rather than living their lives by them. They are difficult to master, and you can't really use them for mundane tasks like ordering a parfait or telling your servant what you want to wear for tonight's party. A high elf keen to show off might bring a flute to a soirée and play a few notes during a pause in conversation, to underline a point they made earlier or to drown out someone they don't wish to hear. They may also limit the use of nounless speech to other aelfir and speak to their staff normally. They are mortal and fallible, if alien.

Aelfir love to give themselves titles – most of the high elves you will meet will be a Lord or Lady – but to them, these are akin to job descriptions. Lord Starward-Mount-Unwavering's full title, for example, is Lord of the Sixtieth Acre, Yennis Starward-Mount-Unwavering. The Sixtieth Acre is the archaic name for a fairly pokey portion of growing space on the outside of Spire in the Garden district (officially known as Henstooth-44B) and Yennis has never visited it. He is simply responsible for funding and overseeing a portion of the drow-run business that manages twenty or so similar patches of land; in return, he receives a sizeable cut of the profits.

Now, everyone *knows* that Yennis is a landlord to a bunch of drow apple-pickers (and that he can't afford a new mask more than twice a season), but it would be gauche to mention it outright when you could imply it through several layers of misdirection, backhanded counter-compliments and a smile at precisely the right time. So: the aelfir tend to refer to one another as "Lord" and "Lady" (or "Souvain," as a gender-neutral alternative) without mentioning what they're the ruler of, letting their impenetrable web of etiquette, artistry and allusion handle the rest.

No aelfir is ever totally sure of their place in society, so all of them assume they're of above-average standing and it works itself out.

WEIRDNESSES IN AMARANTH

Amaranth is one of the strangest places in Spire, aside from the Heart. The aelfir are keen to show how superior and different they are, and the cultural norms that they have imported from the north clash with those native to Desteria. Here are a selection of strange things that are commonplace in the gilded halls:

- Multi-coloured hummingbirds flit to and fro just above head-height in ordered patterns. The aelfir use them to deliver information and messages to one another, as they find carrier pigeons or corvids to be distasteful or common. Hummingbirds are much smaller than standard messenger birds, so longer messages are split across multiple birds tied together with strands of hair or unfathomably fine golden chains. Alternatively, through their strange arts of mind-singing, the aelfir will burn the message into the tiny brain of the hummingbird and have it whisper it to the recipient. (This, however, drives the creature mad.)
- Some streets are covered in a thin layer of ice, refreshed by regular washes of cool water that freezes in the sub-zero temperatures of the district. This is tremendously inconvenient for everyone, but certain aelfir like to walk on ice rather than carpets or pavement. They simply move slowly and surely enough not to trip or fall over.
- Drow music spills from a basement-level window before being quickly silenced. This is one of the hundreds of illicit bars around the district that cater to the servants of the aelfir. They operate in basements, attics, maintenance corridors and the unused spare rooms of high elf nobles. They are popular with drow who want to let off a little steam after spending all day bowing and scraping to the aelfir.
- A black guard sergeant removes their helm to show that, under their iridescent black armour, their skin is crawling with beetles bearing carapaces of the same colour. Rumour has it that the armour itself is just several huge beetles trained to sit very still.
- An aelfir lord invites anyone who's anyone (and their staff) to his blinding party in a plaza off the main street. He's just commissioned a work of tremendous beauty from a noted painter which no-one else has seen. He intends to look at it, burn it and then blind himself, safe in the knowledge that he has seen all he needs to see. Subjects of blinding parties are generally dosed up on such tremendous amounts of drugs that they don't feel



An aelfr unmask before their gods
in their private home shrine.

a thing – but it also means that they sometimes do sloppy work and end up with unsightly scars.

- These statues are just drow who've been shackled to pedestals and forced to stand in uncomfortable positions. Every twelve hours, the shift changes and the exhausted drow limp back to their quarters.
- An aelfir shows off her latest purchase: a cloak made of live songbirds stitched together and sewn directly into her skin, drugged with narcotic sugar-water to stop them from tearing each other (and her) apart. Keeping all the birds alive is the hard part, so she has a couple of attendants who check in every fifteen minutes and administer eye-droppers of nourishing liquid.
- Aelfir die of old age like everyone else, unless they have undying surgeries performed upon them. Not every aelfir agrees with this process, and some are unable to survive the procedure, so old high elves often use a more traditional method: freezing. Entering a state of stasis in everfrost chambers, these ancient beings – some of whom remember when the Spire was owned by the drow – are defrosted for special occasions. Magical power to the everfrost has malfunctioned more than once, allowing rapidly-defrosting aelfir to stumble out wet and naked into the street, unable to recognise their city.
- One of the high elves sitting outside the cafe is a blood-witch in her true form. Cockroaches are spilling out of her mouth, skittering away before dissolving into dust. Her hair is twisted and wild as if in a strong wind and her eyes are pulsing black-red behind her mask. Her friends don't seem bothered at all – or at least, not bothered enough to mention it.
- An aelfir souvain, their hair elegantly coiffured, steps down the carpeted high street followed by two chained gnolls. Their claws and teeth have been clipped or filed down to blunt points and their fur dyed and styled so it resembles the feathers of exotic birds.

SYMPATHISERS

Not every high elf is bad, though obviously most of them are – even those that aren't actively opposed to the drow still benefit from a social structure that is reliant on oppression, and thus are generally unwilling to try and disrupt it.

But the aelfir race, like any other, has rebels. Most will be found exiled in less grandiose districts than Amaranth: spending their lives tending to the birds in New Heaven, joining the ever-growing ranks of

the Unmasked down in Derelictus, working as sell-swords in the Blue Docks or living comfortable lives utilising their skills at reading and writing in the university district. A few simply remain in their frozen homes for most of their lives.

There is something truly perverse, to the eyes of a traditionalist aelfir, in respecting other races. The average aelfir indulges in utter hedonism (the likes of which most drow could never imagine) on a weekly basis, so the most daring and avant-garde high elf nobles make a point of funding liberation fronts up and down Spire to really push the envelope and shock society.

The Ministry, always struggling to find resources, accepts money from several high-ranking aelfir Lords and Ladies. *Liberate!* is funded entirely by a single wealthy patron who enjoys the editorial style. It is a popular sport amongst the truly wealthy and anti-establishment high elves to fund a Crimson Vigil cell and fight it against others in an effort to claim territory.

Whether your patron is funding you out of a true desire to give the drow ownership of Spire or simply doing it for fun during their gap year is roughly a fifty-fifty chance. Both options offer benefits and drawbacks.

A devoted aelfir bankroller often becomes interested in micro-managing the operation, and must be listened to and placated in case they withdraw their funding. Given their lack of training, they are often found out and executed by the Paladins, or unmasked and driven out of the city (leaving a trail of evidence back to the resistance). One who is merely doing it to pass the time may get bored and wander off, leaving cells in debt to dangerous people and unable to fulfill their promises; but at least they don't ask to come to your meetings and meet your Magister.

HOME SHRINES

Aelfir worship the Solar Pantheon – four gods, each tied to a season and time of day – on pain of exile or worse. This wasn't always the case: there are Old Gods of the north that the race used to devote themselves to wholeheartedly.

Following a series of bitter (and, to the outside observer, inscrutable) wars around four hundred years ago, the state religion of the frozen north changed from one of ice-bones and subterranean flocs to one of light, brightness and resurgence. Right about the same time, they began to expand outwards from their crystalline palaces. Two hundred years later, the high elf war machine reached Spire.

Now no-one mentions the Old Gods in public, except perhaps to curse their names. Aelfir agents have devoted their lives to tracking down relics of their previous religion, immolating them and then burning the knowledge of the items from their heads using magical songs recorded on hand-wound, mind-wiping music boxes.

The question remains, though: why? What happened, nearly half a millennia ago, in the timeless land of the far north? What did the Old Gods do – and, moreover, who were they? The Vermissian Vault has patchy, contradictory evidence; the Scryatrixes of the Silver Temple find their third eyes assailed by ephemeral blizzards. It is as if the knowledge doesn't want to be found.

Aelfir have two forms of worship – public and home. In public worship, regular visits are made to the Solar Basilica and thanks are paid to the four gods, but it is still as much a social occasion and an excuse to show off one's wealth as any other time the aelfir meet. Which temple you pray at, how much money you donate and how long you can take it over for private events such as weddings, pre-undying surgery funerals and renamings are all a big part of staying relevant in high elf culture.

The Solar Pantheon has four official feast days per year (one per season, venerating the patron deity) and the aelfir go all out. The world provides high elves with beautiful and valuable things, and it is no sin to desire them or "share" them with others – or to display them as ostentatiously as possible. This means their festivals are overblown and extravagant, with every household looking to create the biggest spectacle: they invite all their associates over (aelfir find the concept of "friends" gauche) and fill the streets with wine, song, parades and floats of cunning human make. Some drow under their duration get festivals off, although this role is generally reserved for the favoured members of staff; after all, someone has to keep the wine flowing.

Home worship is very different, given to quiet introspection focused around shrines. These lavishly-constructed devotional rooms will likely never be seen by anyone outside of the owner's close family. Even then, particularly wealthy nobles will have their own *even more private* home shrine that they do not allow anyone else into.

It is here that aelfir worship in a more traditional style: chanting old words from languages long-lost beneath the rock-hard ice of the tundra, anointing themselves with brightly-coloured oils and pigments and beseeching their gods for favour. It is one of the few places a high elf will ever be vulnerable, asking freely – begging, even – for assistance. And, while of

course no-one would ever admit to it, it is here that one might make contact with the Old Gods (the Sisters Three, the Vastness Beneath and so on) with no fear of discovery.

WORSHIP PRACTICES OF THE SOLAR PANTHEON

Father Summer: A bold and brash god, good-natured and broad-shouldered, who demands feasting and merriment. He is the god of songs, growth and excess. Trees are planted and tended to (by non-aelfir gardeners, obviously) in his honour. Weekly observances of Father Summer include eating a big meal with your family, raising your voice in song with a congregation of others and giving food to the needy.

Mother Winter: A quiet goddess of mastery and grace, a drifting cloud of snow and ice, a thing of darkness and patience. Mother Winter is rarely worshipped in the same way as the other gods of the pantheon. Smiths and artisans devote works to her, and many high elves whisper a prayer to her before undertaking a difficult task that requires precision and accuracy. She is a goddess of secrets, too; confiding in her is seen as a measure of trust.

Sister Spring: A bright and vibrant semi-ephemeral thing of beauty and inspiration. Her observances are to create works of brilliance, fund them or simply admire them. Temples to her often resemble art galleries more than places of worship.

Brother Harvest: A young god of timely death and change. He has fallen out of favour in Spire lately due to the growth in popularity of undying surgery, which – according to a specific part of his faith – is heretical. Worshipping Brother Harvest calls for sacrifices of ripe apples, plump geese and tender lambs. He calls for bringing an end to things that are distressing the worshipper (unhappy relationships, fruitless projects and the like) as well as practices that are inspiring indolence and stagnation.

MASKS

To an aelfir, a mask is more than a fashion accessory: it reflects their very being. Each aelfir has a true mask, which is akin to a signature. It is certainly more of an indication of their identity than their face, which very few other aelfir will have seen, and carries more weight than their clothing, body shape or hair.

Considering their extreme cultural taboo of wearing another person's mask, aelfir will often talk to the *mask* instead of the person wearing it, even if they have some lingering suspicion that the person beneath is not who they say they are. There are many cases of lazy or paranoid aelfir bestowing their true mask on another to act as them in an official capacity. For all intents and purposes, as long as their associate wears the mask they *are* the high elf in question. Several of the highest-ranking lords and ladies in Amaranth are in fact humans or drow that have figures that allow them to "pass" as aelfir, and the ministry makes a habit of creating forgeries of masks that may be useful to them in future.

The true mask should be a work of art – a display of not only wealth but taste, lineage, personal honour and religious piety, communicated through an ever-shifting web of etiquette and style. It is hard to stay fashionable with the design of one's true mask as modifying it too often will leave one unrecognisable, so aelfir tend to favour tried-and-tested classic styles and hope they will maintain relevance. The vast array of other masks they own should provide enough of an opportunity to be creative.

The true mask is *always* worn, even in conjunction with other masks. Many are worn on the hip or around the neck when bearing another on the face, as to appear without a true mask in public is equivalent to posing as a drow or human. Only aelfir are permitted to own true masks: even though the drow and humans who interact with them own masks, in the eyes of the aelfir they can never "earn" a true one.

Of course, no culture is monolithic. There are aelfir that consider the wearing of a true mask needlessly complex: that all masks are true or all masks are false from a fundamental standpoint. These radicals tend to operate on the outside of society (actors, artists, ideological exiles) and as such are largely ignored by the rest of Amaranth, who consider them to be a bunch of attention-seekers.

The remaining masks in an aelfir's collection are ceremonial. The nature of the ceremonies for which an aelfir will require a distinct mask is, as ever, up to the inscrutable whim of high elven trendsetters. Though one month it may be absolutely mandatory to wear a brightly-coloured mask displaying as much

finery as possible to church, the next month may see church masks fall out of style, with those in-the-know wearing only their true masks so the gods may better understand them.

The aelfir regard not wearing a mask as at best primitive and at worst a grave insult. Although enforced mask wearing was attempted soon after their initial seizure of Spire, practicalities ensured that the campaign was short-lived. Now, masks are only *required* in Amaranth and *encouraged* in Ivory Row and the Silver Quarter – the rest of the city sees so few aelfir that they can get away without them.

All drow who work in the service of an aelfir are expected to wear a mask, and thanks to their influence on the culture of Spire, humans and drow who wish to do well in society may well adopt the practice themselves.

POTENTIAL ALLIES IN AMARANTH

Jesthemone Will-That-Stalks-The-Sunrise, an influential patron of the arts and skilled amateur sculptor who is largely unremarkable as far as aelfir go – except that Jesthemone is a drow in disguise as an aelfir, and has managed to maintain her place in society for the last thirteen years. She is keen to aid drow revolutionary attempts, but justifiably nervous of being outed as a dark elf; she has quietly arranged assassinations and blackmail in the past to keep her secret safe.

Renetta Glimpse-Vess, beloved handmaid of Lady Glimpse-The-Sun, who has bestowed a number of surgical "gifts" to her favourite drow: lengthened wrists, eye implants that glisten like gems, golden fingernail replacements and so on. Renetta has excellent access to her mistress' household as well as an unending hatred for her on account of her body-warping modifications.

Tristan Spring-Slumpers-In-Frost, who is sexually attracted to drow and has had several dark elf partners over the years, though all of his affairs have been hidden on account of his place in society as the first-born scion of House Spring-Slumpers-In-Frost. Tristan has funded several pro-drow organisations in the past, although it sometimes seems that he only does it to get closer to hot-blooded young dark elves.

Faye Wish-The-Stars-Skyward, an aelfir, performs open-air performances in the spiral gardens of moneyed clients, singing her own particular brand of old-fashioned soprano masterpieces with deceptively bawdy lyrics. Endlessly flirtatious and

superficially playful, Faye is a die-hard Ministry operative and has killed several aelfir who came close to uncovering the organisation's plots. Her secret fervour to the cause outstrips that of some drow members, which can be unsettling.

Cpt. Yan Dester was once a proud officer in the Defence Force of Spire, but left active service under controversy. He led multiple successful assaults on gnoll assets during Operation Glorious Harvest in the year of Nine Winters, and now serves as the head of household staff at the Drifting-Leaves-Whisper mansion. If the cell can find sufficient evidence, he could be blackmailed into compliance.

IVORY ROW

Once upon a time, back when the drow ruled Spire and the aelfir were content to search for meaning in the darkness between the stars in their frozen homelands, Ivory Row was the centre of culture in the city. All the richest drow nobles either lived there or wanted to live there. The theatres were of unparalleled quality, the temples of peerless elegance and the streets were paved with rocks mined from every corner of the Desteran empire.

But the aelfir invaded and took Spire for themselves, founding Amaranth and importing unmelting ice and scintillating lights from the distant north. Their dependence on human technology saw their money flood the Silver Quarter, and soon Ivory Row had fallen by the wayside: a place of tumbledown mansions, deserted streets and increasingly-badly-paid guards.

Ivory Row can be divided roughly into three regions: Lady Theryn's domain, which is the furthest up-Spire; Archbishop Wynn's huge temple to the east; and Mr Alas' darkened streets that mark the end of the district at the base. The boundaries of these areas shift around the no-man's land in the centre of the district, which contains the routes between them.

None of the landlords are above hiring gangs of thugs to illegally claim territory, gangs of lawyers to quibble over ownership rights, or extremist cells to burn down their rivals' strongholds.

THE AELFIR

Lady Theryn Thorns-on-Silk is an old-school aelfir who has never once taken off her mask, even when she sleeps (she had it sutured on, just in case). After

Brionne Eyes-Last-Sight, the moneyed third child of a family that owns huge swathes of the Works district; she spends her days joining, funding and creating secret societies and cults. At present, agents of the Ministry have inducted her into the "Order of Sacred Night" (a fake society of clerics of Our Hidden Mistress) and are diverting her contributions into their own coffers. However, she is growing tired of their drawn-out "initiation" process, and might soon give up and start looking elsewhere for her dark revelations.

being left a vast sum of money by her late father, she began investing in Ivory Row at precisely the wrong time. Now she owns roughly a quarter of the district, letting it out to other conservative, often down-on-their luck aelfir. An increasing number of her tenants are drow – *noble* drow, mind – which is a source of concern, but money is money. She needs the funds to throw her famous parties.

She is undying, and so maintains traditions from a hundred years ago that have long fallen out of favour up-Spire. Her revels are days-long events like the aelfir used to hold, where guests are encouraged to eat their fill (if they can eat) and sleep when they need to (if they can sleep). There's no end to the tales of debauchery whispered between Theryn's handmaidens, all of whom also have sutured-on masks.

The buildings round here are things of faded grandeur, often gussied up with ineffective repair jobs or half-hearted licks of paint by underpaid drow labourers. They are shored up with materials stolen from elsewhere, leading to ramshackle architecture that defies the proper aging of buildings. The streets are fairly well-guarded: Lady Thorns-On-Silk's guests demand privacy and security. While the militia that patrols the streets isn't the equal of the Black Guard of Amaranth, they're more than a match for an underprepared Ministry cell.

Given the district's proximity to the canal-riddled Silver Quarter, it rains in Lady Theryn's domain when it is warm – or, at least, it leaks filthy water down from the ceiling. All ladies of good standing carry umbrellas with them, even though they may never walk under the sky, to prepare for such an eventuality.

MASKED GUARDS

Names: Arkean, Oleander, Naismyth

Descriptors: Wearing a faded black brocade tailcoat; Bearing a silver studded cane; Whistling a jaunty, out-of-date music hall tune

Resistance: 6

Difficulty: 0, until half of them are down and they really put their backs into it; they then increase to 1

Equipment: Breastplate and armoured mask (Armour 2); weighted koshes and clubs (D3, Brutal); archaic hand-cannons (D6, Brutal, Ranged, Reload, Unreliable)

THE HUMAN

Archbishop Wynn has not been seen in public for fifteen years. He is a human, and a noted figure in the aelfir-dominated Solar Basilica. He seems to be taking over street after street and converting them into a huge place of worship. Everyone who enters his domain is rigorously checked – streams of builders, artisans, cooks and guards go in and out each day, and while they're not sworn to secrecy, they don't seem to like talking about what they're doing in there. It is not hard to find out that this is because it's weird.

Wynn is converting his district into one giant temple, easily five times size of the Solar Basilica above, but he's not letting anyone worship in it until it's finished. Infiltrators will see long, empty streets of white stone shrouded in darkness; unsanctified altars surrounded by pews for worship; half-finished statues of the four gods of the aelfir towering three, maybe four stories into the air. The entire place is empty, save for scant crews of labourers and the occasional wandering or lost sculptor or preacher.

This would imply that the place is easy to take over, but it isn't. A few drinks in, the builders start to mention the watchers – black-clad figures who stalk the halls, removing undesirable elements and dumping their remains in the no-man's land in the middle of the district.

No-one really knows what Wynn is planning, though he seems to just be building an enormous temple – but what *else* is he doing? Why is he, a human, building such a massive devotional structure to the aelfir gods? What's it going to do when it's finished? And, most importantly of all, where's he getting the money from?

Here is one potential truth that the Ministry has extracted in their interrogation cells, deep below the

Cathedral of Our Glorious Lady: he is attempting to burst the Heart and rid Spire of its malevolent influence once and for all. Wynn believes that the Heart is the reason that the aelfir gods cannot physically manifest in Spire: it is a lightning rod for spiritual power, and earths the energy that the Solar Pantheon requires to travel from the heavens to the mortal lands.

Underneath the temple floor, machinery and resonant glass spheres inscribed with occult symbols and built by mad human engineers – part of the same cult that made the dust machines that pitched Red Row into chaos – will focus the energy of the faithful and channel it into the Heart. With the Heart overloaded and destroyed, Wynn will be able to welcome the gods to Spire and sit upon their right hand.

He is, of course, entirely wrong.

WATCHERS

Names: Brother Hellequin, Sister Ventricle, Sister Skinner

Descriptions: Wearing an enormous grey cloak; Has long, sharp daggers strapped to their thighs; Unveils a mace that glows like sunlight

Resistance: 6

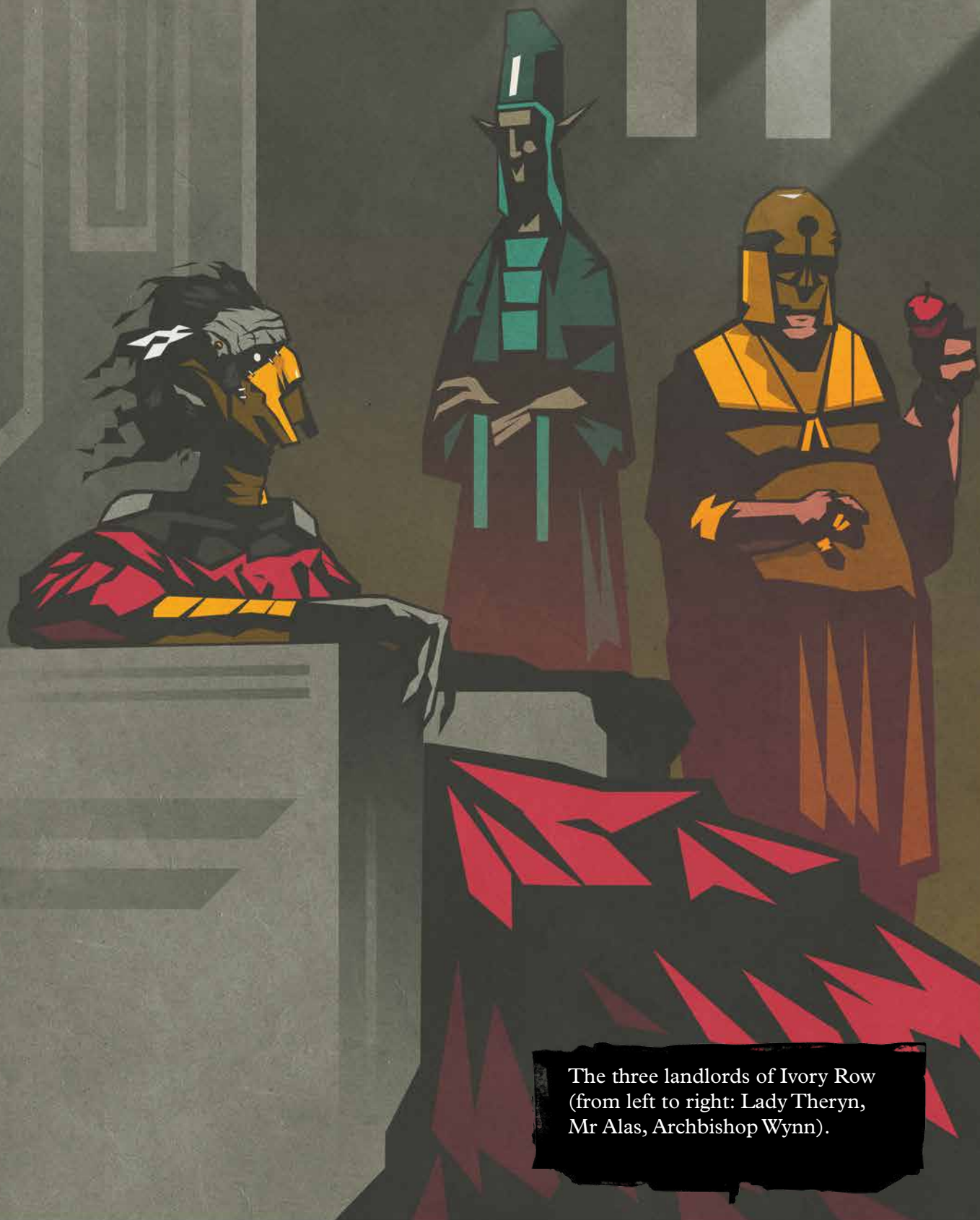
Difficulty: 1, on average. 2 if you manage to reach Wynn himself

Equipment: Blessed chainmail (Armour 2); razor-sharp, flexible daggers (D3, Piercing, Unreliable); military surplus crossbows (D6, Ranged, Reload); leaders carry a blessed mace or lamp that bursts with sunlight, and drow attackers must make a Resist check to approach or take D6 stress

THE DROW

Mister Alas controls the lower third of the district, and you don't go there unless you have to. Alas, the current head of the death-obsessed House Duval and unofficial bankroller of most of Red Row, is a spectacularly cruel and monumentally wealthy drow. He has not slept in twenty years, instead relying on the illegal and experimental Dose – a human-made drug that removes the need for sleep. Any descriptions of him are hazy at best, thanks to a careful system of reconstructive surgeries on his crumbling form and a network of well-paid body-doubles.

Mister Alas does not ask questions. If you have too much money and a desire to, say, build a nightmare maze where you can hunt captured drow through mirrored corridors, he can provide suitable premises



The three landlords of Ivory Row
(from left to right: Lady Theryn,
Mr Alas, Archbishop Wynn).

and probably get you a good deal on wholesale mirrors. If you want a safe place to conduct your experiments away from the prying eyes of the establishment and the police, but don't want to slum it down in Derelictus, he has a number of well-appointed laboratories available to buy or rent. If your colleagues in the Morticians burned down your surgery on account of your "heretical" practices surrounding the undying process – filling people's lungs with ectoplasmic residue to harvest spectral energy, implanting extracted drow hearts in dogs to see what happens, building nightmarish amalgamations of "volunteers" who took part in exchange for a small stipend to their families – Mister Alas will welcome you with open arms (assuming you can pay rent on a regular basis and don't cause too many ghost plagues). Magritte "Molly" Duval – high-society blood-witch, famous pariah and Alas' sister – keeps one of her many lairs here. She has a habit of blood-binding members of the large street cat population and dressing them up in evening wear.

On account of his laissez-faire approach to morality, his third of the district has become a haven for the perverse and exiled. The streets are cracked and broken; screams ring out from the boarded-up windows of houses long thought abandoned. The folk who make their homes here are mainly servants and assistants to the wealthy sociopaths who rent the buildings; strange, driven individuals determined not to be eviscerated for an imagined mistake, and who have no qualms about performing hideous tasks for their masters. There are, of course, other denizens: poor unfortunates who couldn't make rent in Thorns-on-Silk's territory; those who were unceremoniously turfed out of their houses in the Archbishop's quest to build a cathedral the size of a small town; and people who have bet and lost it all in the casinos of the Silver Quarter and now wander around, penniless and terrified, taking shelter where they can.

The place is also full of ghosts, which means it attracts possession-junkies: people whose brains are set up, or perhaps broken, in such a way as to allow spirits easy access. Some, trained in the occult arts or the forbidden rituals of the Charnelites, know how to force a ghost to inhabit their brain whether it wants to or not. They get a kick out of it, too: a surrender in handing over their bodies to something ancient and dusty and malevolent.

A lot of the troublemakers from New Heaven and the Necropolis wind up here. They poke around the ruins of murder-mazes trying to pick up a ghost and push it inside themselves, or work in gangs to lynch unsuspecting vagrants in the most violent manner

possible before harvesting their restless spirit, tearing it to shreds like a pack of hyenas.

STALKERS

Names: The Figginswick Butcher, Red Jack, Zephyr-Strokes-the-Coast

Descriptions: Cackling from a patch of summoned shadow; Dressed in blood-soaked finery; Disfigured from a dozen body modification surgeries

Resistance: 10

Difficulty: 2, until you hit them once, when they'll switch to 0. Often at this point they'll try to escape

Equipment: Bag of surgical tools and scalpels (D3, Keen, Piercing; in the Stalker's hands it inflicts D6 damage instead); hidden trap (D8, One-Shot)

GHOST-EATER GANG

Names: Anton, Smiler, Marilyn

Descriptions: Trailing ectoplasm from their tear ducts; Wearing grisly trophies made of items that once bonded ghosts to Spire; Hammering binding nails into a door to trap a spirit

Resistance: 5

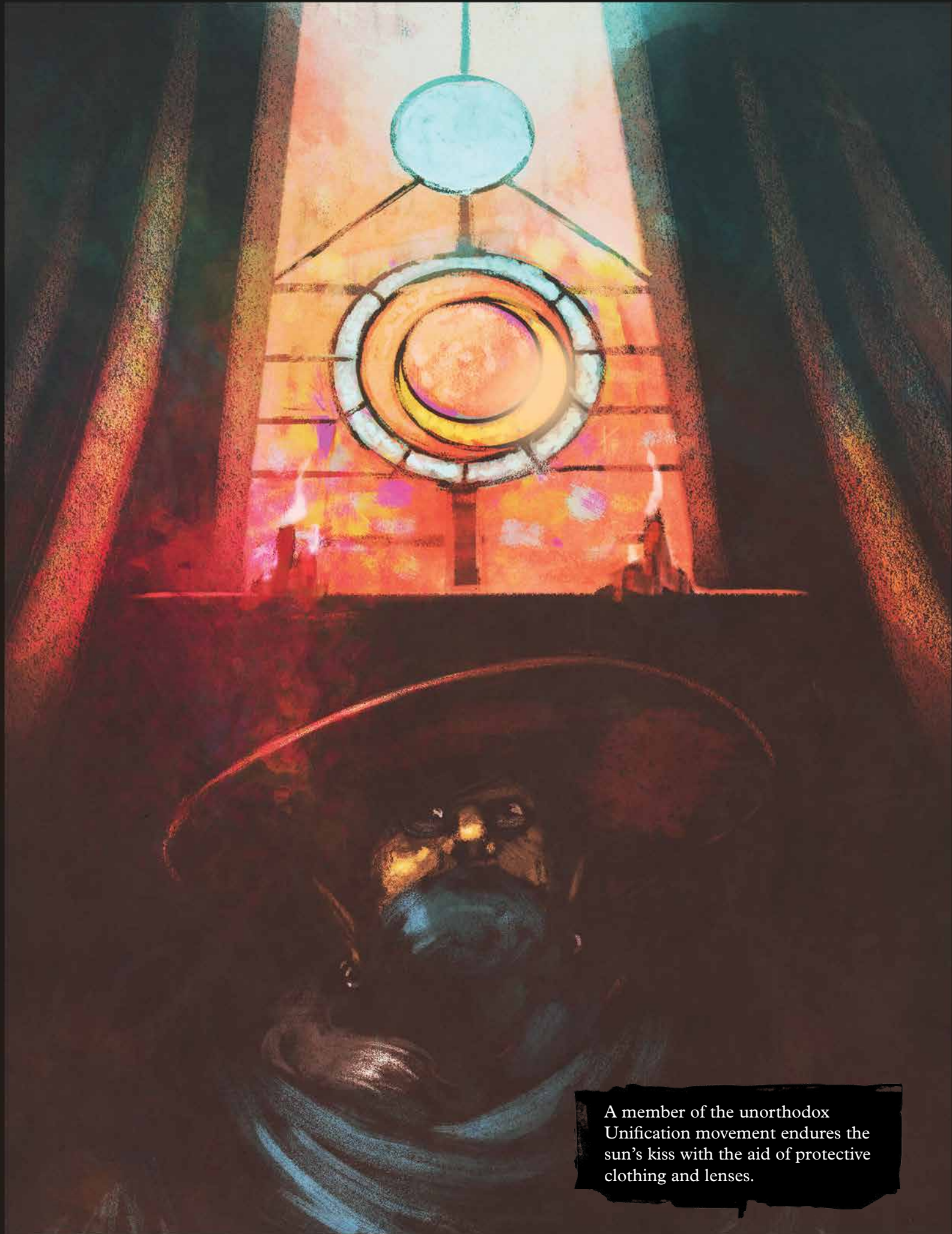
Difficulty: 0, unless they've eaten recently, in which case it's 1

Equipment: Haunted knives that blur and buzz (D3, Brutal, Conduit); around one in four will be an exiled Charnelite, bringing a ghost-ridden hyena to the fight (D8, One-Shot)

NO-DROW'S LAND, OR QUINNSTOWN, OR LITTLE RED ROW

In the centre of all this lies No-Drow's Land, home of House Quinn. This family of bastards (in both senses of the word) runs itself like a mafia. Any drow of any lineage can join if they have enough money to contribute or are willing to put their lives and reputations on the line in service to the house. In noble circles, carrying the surname "Quinn" is seen as something of a joke; in low society and on the streets, it's a badge of membership to a very dangerous club.

House Quinn owns the centre of Ivory Row. Under their rulership, it has devolved into a wretched



A member of the unorthodox
Unification movement endures the
sun's kiss with the aid of protective
clothing and lenses.

den of iniquity. Destitute noble scions, kicked out of more respectable houses, find their way down here and make their living selling secrets; gangsters too ostentatious for the Silver Quarter and too posh for Red Row flaunt stolen military hardware on their hip as they stroll down the stinking high street; swarms of pigs and rats scurry around, spreading disease. The landlords try to pretend that none of it is happening.

Noble politics is generally of little interest to the Ministry, but the presence of Quinnstown has given their agents a way to get into the district unnoticed. Several of the gangs operating out of there are undercover cells. In fact, although the Ministry denies it, you've heard that the entire place is a Ministry front: that House Quinn has been infiltrated at the highest levels by your superiors, and that they are fostering rebellion and dissent right in the heart of a vulnerable district.

QUINNSTOWN BLOOD-SWORN GANGSTERS

Names: Kingling DuFrey-Quinn; Arch-Regent Quinn the 14th; Hemibaronette Joy Quinn

Descriptors: Wearing a feathered scarlet hat; Packing chrome-plated weapons that match their false teeth; Followed around by a little yappy dog on a bedazzled lead

Resistance: 5

Difficulty: 0, but each group will have an unofficial leader with difficulty 1 who knows roughly what they're doing

Equipment: Flashy, loud revolvers (D6, Ranged, Unreliable); some carry swords (D6) but the majority of them rely on multiple guns instead

GROWING CONCERNS IN IVORY ROW

Everyone has enemies, and the rulers of Ivory Row are no different.

Lady Theryn Thorns-on-Silk is opposed by her younger sister, Graziela, who believes that her sibling is of uncertain parentage and therefore not entitled to the family fortune. Graziela is far smarter than her sister, and has friends in influential places. As such, she has spent the last twenty years quietly undermining Theryn through back-room deals and shell companies, looking to trick her into unwittingly signing over her assets and birthright. They are both undying, and both have

survived several assassination attempts from the other. They still attend quarterly festivals together, pretending not to loathe one another in public.

Mister Alas is meeting resistance from Anastasia Gris, crime lord of Perch and New Heaven, and her legions of henchmen (or "snappers", as they're called on the street due to their penchant for breaking or removing the trigger fingers of people they don't like). Following the events laid out in *Eidolon Sky*, the up-Spire drug trade was in a shambles. Gris and her boys swept in, taking out the fragmented remains of the other operations and establishing themselves as the undisputed rulers of narcotics distribution upwards of the Garden district. Now, hungry for more, Gris has her eyes set on Red Row. She knows that Mister Alas is funding large parts of the undercity, so is moving directly against him on his home turf.

Archbishop Wynn is at war on two fronts – both the Ministry and the Crimson Vigil are trying to disrupt construction of his mega-structure and may be find out what on earth he's planning. Of course, they're not working together thanks to ideological differences, so skirmishes between the two drow factions are common in the echoing, empty halls of worship. However, both share the common ground of wanting to drive the human interloper and his devotion to the aelfir religion out of their race's ancestral home.

POTENTIAL ALLIES IN IVORY ROW

Weisslin, a one-eyed drow artist with a striking line in tattoos, wild hairstyles and elaborate body piercings. While she's still invited to all the best parties and knows anyone who's anyone, she hasn't painted anything in *months* and is suffering from a dreadful bout of ennui while she searches for a new muse.

Silver, a Quinnstown drow salesman, has a deliberately mysterious past. According to who you ask, he hails from: the snowy foothills of Far Nujab; a bustling caravanserai long-absorbed into the rolling wagon city of Aliquam; the occluded depths of storied Ys, many leagues to the West; the megalithic basalt city of Plür; the singing spires of Al'Marah; and dozens more places besides. He is in fact from Harcourt Square in the Works, and his mum runs a pie shop; the "exotic merchant" act is just there to pull in customers. It seems to work.

Haris Artwielder, a Ministry operative working undercover as a chef for the aging aelfir gourmand Heaven-Take-The-Children. He's also secretly a carrion-priest in service to Charnel, with plans to possibly cook and eat Heaven-Take-The-Children. For now, he and his rangy hyena companion Ratcoat are biding their time, offering up their senile master's empty bedrooms as temporary safehouses. Artwielder has an irritating habit of trying to matchmake other operatives, "accidentally" signing them up to share a safehouse if he thinks they'd be a good couple, but he's pretty much harmless unless he decides to eat you.

Polly-Six, a mad-eyed drow servant with a sutured-on mask, servant to one of Thorns-on-Silk's tenants. Her master's staff haven't changed since they were first hired a hundred and fifty years ago, because they're sutured into the mask of the previous employee and only ever referred to by their name. She knows she's the sixth Polly, but she doesn't know what her name used to be. The more you talk to her, the more you suspect that there are multiple concurrent versions of her, and they're unable to tell themselves apart from one another.

Lucius Valwa, drow noble, who comes from a long line of mad scientists and demon-touched sorcerers, but faints at the sight of blood and hates the thought of hurting people. He purchased a terrifying-looking lair in Mr Alas' territory to keep up appearances, but it's all a front. He mainly uses it as a weekend getaway to hang out with his lovers – it's very comfortable inside. He'll do most anything to keep his secret safe.

"Hattie" Franklin, a Vermissian Sage and academic, spends much of his time analysing historical documents from this reality and from alternate timelines in search of a blueprint for a successful revolution. After many years of research in his sprawling, dilapidated apartment/library, he believes he has found the answer by splicing together elements from the Great Drowning of Starys, the overthrow of House Gryndel by the mythic heroine Desdemona and a hard-to-reach reality where the Ministry won twenty years ago. He's now been given permission by the Ministry to try it out. He's very smart, hugely talkative, passionate and prone to fits of mad panic when events deviate from his blueprint, forcing him to find a way to drag the timeline back on track.

EXTRA ADVANCE: ARTIST

The Sunlight Collective, a roving cabal of artists, magicians and avant-garde performers, follow the strange network of shifting windows that let natural light into Ivory Row. Here are some of the recent, current or upcoming movements within the organisation that player characters might be a part of:

UNIFICATIONISM

A splinter sect who climb up unstable rope-ladders into the mechanisms of the windows far above, seeking to redirect them to bring them into contact with one another. The Unificationists were created in the sweltering summer of the Year of Ten Red Crows, when the uncanny intersection of two windows resulted in strange, kaleidoscopic patterns of light cast onto the rooftops, leading to mass hallucinations and outbreaks of spontaneous dancing. They believe that the light of the divine is amplified through the windows and can be channeled into beautiful works of art. Their ultimate goal is to bring all the windows together on a single point, but as of yet they've only succeeded in overlapping two or three and examining the resultant patterns.

Medium Idol Advance: **UNIFICATION ARTS.** [Occult] *You create a facsimile of the magical light that shines through combined windows; not enough to generate true works of art, but enough to create a distraction.* Roll Fix+Occult to cast this spell; roll with mastery if you're in Ivory Row and it's during the day. Inflict D6 stress to everyone nearby (player characters can resist with Resist+Occult). If a character is reduced to resistance 0 by this, then instead of falling unconscious or dying, they are pitched into madness and hallucinations (rendering them useless for the remainder of the situation).

OCCLUSIONISM

Light is brutish and raw; shadow is the true mark of the divine, the true shape of inspiration. Led by maverick aelfir artist Cry-Splits-The-Dawn and using experimental human daguerreotype technology, they eschew the sun's light. Instead, they see where it does not shine, drawing inspiration from the dappled reflections of rooftop pools and creating works of art that stretch down whole streets by using ultra-bright galvanic lights.

Low Idol Advance: **SHADOW PUPPETS.** [Occult] *The shadows around you become as real and solid as the shapes that cast them.* Roll Compel+Occult to cast this spell; roll with mastery if you have set up bright

galvanic lights or are using the evening sun to cast a shadow. You briefly make a shadow you have cast solid, allowing it to interact with the world around it: a silhouetted hand can grasp a distant item, the sharp angle of a wall's silhouette can draw blood, the shadow of a barrier can impede progress and so on. The precise mechanics of this are up to the GM.

RADICALISM

Art must be shocking to have an impact; it cannot allow the viewer to sit idly by and absorb it. It must challenge, provoke, upset and change. This school is a perennial movement within the Collective, but its power waxes and wanes as it attracts new members – usually young hot-heads fresh out of art college – and loses them as they are arrested, calm down or move onto less controversial works. The aelfir who subscribe to this school really push the envelope as to what is acceptable within their culture. Some attempt to outperform the already hedonistic and cruel high elven society (for example, creating bespoke drugs, lacing the water supply with them, then documenting the results in a tapestry). Others opt to paint shocking works of art that depict aelfir and drow as peers of equal standing, or write poetry proposing that the “curse” that afflicts the drow is not a curse at all: they and the aelfir are completely separate races.

Low Idol Advance: **RADICAL**. *You have a knack for causing trouble.* When you attempt to provoke

outrage, roll with mastery. In addition, once per session, the GM must tell you what would most upset an NPC who you have spoken to or studied for half an hour or so.

TROPOLISIANISM

Spire is the greatest work of art ever created by elf, man or god. Through communion with the city, the Tropolisists (short for Metropolisists) attempt to create art that reflects this majesty in some way. They take charcoal rubbings of the “original” Spire, dose up on the hallucinogenic drug carotid and paint images of the organic Spire that they witness in sweat-soaked visions, or pen beautiful mathematical formulas that attempt to explain how the damn thing stays upright. However, Tropolisism is on its way out. The movement is seen as old hat and unfashionably traditionalist, but there are a handful of members who hope to achieve something new in their reverence. Anti-tropolisianism also exists, arguing that Spire is the ugliest thing ever made, and so images of it should be used to shock and provoke.

Low Idol Advance: **TROPOLISIANIST**. *You commune with the spirit of Spire.* Once per session, you uncover an echo of the original Spire – a snippet of historical rumour, an ancient flagstone, a loose magical resonance trapped in the chambers of the Heart – and soothe your addled brain. Describe what it is and remove D6 stress from Mind.

SILVER QUARTER

Cash rules the Silver Quarter: the place exists on the knife-edge between poverty and wealth. Go much higher, and money ceases to be a problem for most of the inhabitants; go much lower, and there isn't enough of it to go around.

In the Quarter, a drow can make an impact with a pocketful of sten and some good luck; they can gamble, win big, buy a place up-Spire and retire. Or they can join up with one of the many gangs that run the place – gangs with a better sense of fashion and decorum than the louts down in Red Row and who wear cravats and rapiers and report to noble-blooded drow – rising to the rank of lieutenant if they've got the moxie to do so. Maybe they could draw the attention of one of the dozens of secret organisations – the Ministry included – that use the place as a recruitment ground, eager to find desperate

young drow with nothing to lose and everything to gain.

But, of course, most don't. They wind up destitute after a round of bad luck, and – if they're lucky – they'll be driven off the streets by the City Guard. If they're unlucky, they'll be caught up in the Home Nations civil war that's played out over the streets of the Quarter by vindictive noble houses, winding up dead, bundled into the canal and forgotten.

FAMOUS THEFTS IN THE SILVER QUARTER

The Silver Quarter is a great place to get rich or poor quick, depending on your luck. Quite aside from the prospect of gambling, the opportunity to steal



The Silver Quarter is a riot of noise, colour and commerce throughout the whole year.

resources from the rich and famous makes the Silver Quarter a prime target for Ministry cells: they often find themselves struggling to make ends meet, or are tasked by their superiors to requisition valuables from their oppressors.

Some noted thefts within the last decade are:

- The master thief and theatrical illusionist Glimpse-of-Heaven's-Door famously announced that he was going to steal the iconic Wyvern vermissian station, renowned for its beautiful stained glass windows. In the year of Ten Red Crows, two years after his initial announcement, he did just that: the station disappeared overnight, along with Glimpse-of-Heaven's-Door, and neither have been seen again. The space where it was located has been left unoccupied out of respect.
- Only one crew has ever managed to rob the House: a group of aelfir, drow and a single gnoll who infiltrated the vault and cleaned it out overnight. There is still a huge bounty on every single one of their heads – aside from the two that Mesye So has already caught and killed – but surely none of them are stupid enough to stay in Spire?
- It wasn't quite a theft, but: in the year of Green Virtue, noted aelfir calligrapher-attorney Gaze-Unwavering-Skyward managed to exploit a loophole in the official roulette rules that gave her legal ownership of the casino in which the game was being held. She lives there now, and doesn't repair or clean the premises.
- All of the dice were stolen from three casinos (the Majestic, the Golden Apple and the Temple of His Sacred Bounty) on a single evening by a group of Stolzians. Everyone knows they did it – who else would be daft enough to leave the vault untouched but make off with sacks and sacks of dice? – but no-one's been lucky enough to find any solid proof.
- The Portrait of Stolz in the Mermaid has never been stolen from the casino in which it is housed, but it has been stolen from every other place it's been – including the distant Temple of Stolz. It seems as though it wishes to return to the Mermaid, no matter how many times it is "sold."
- The Order of St Perdita, noted philanthropists, held an auction for one of the rarest commodities in Spire: a drop of sunlight, contained in a crystal vial inside a lead and spireblack box to prevent blindness. When the box was opened, all that was inside was a pair of sunglasses. Whether or not it existed at all is a matter of fierce debate, as no-one could look at it.

GOING DARK

Nowhere do aelfir and drow interact with one another more than the Silver Quarter. Uptown, drow are little more than servants or playthings to the moneyed aelfir; down-Spire, few aelfir show their faces outside of heavily controlled areas. But here, the wealthier drow intersect with the poorer aelfir, and it's not uncommon for a friendship group to contain both high and dark elves. Walk down most any street in the Quarter and you'll find property owned by drow and aelfir, selling goods and services to one another.

In fact, being drow – or aping their style – has become fashionable of late. Young, liberal aelfir like to spend time immersing themselves in what they feel is "authentic drow culture": taking the intoxicating tincture *malak*; wearing headscarves and dark glasses; participating in open-air community dances and gatherings; and listening to loud music played by drum-heavy bands. Aelfir who really take on the mannerisms of drow call their style "drowpunk"; their parents and elders call it "going dark," and insist it's a phase they're going through.

Some drow have leaned into it in an attempt to make money. The Spinning Riddle is a full-on drowpunk bar, owned and operated by North Docks wunderkind "Handsome" Sally Grackler. It boasts – alongside traditional fermented black-fungus drinks and serving staff dressed in revealing costumes – a specialised form of the drow fight-opera *desang*, which functions as a cross between burlesque, stage wrestling, improv theatre and rock music. Each night, a variety of wildly-dressed performers brawl on stage (and across the bar and tables) for the chance to be the lead singer and win the adoration and coins of the crowd.

Despite the cultural appropriation, the Silver Quarter provides a place where the two cultures can meet and exchange ideas (assuming they have enough money to spend time there). While a drow and aelfir couple openly holding hands in the street wouldn't pass without comment, multiple hotels and speakeasies turn a blind eye to mixed-race couples. The Hush-Hush, for example, is run by Reinetta Stairway-Of-Thorns. It offers semi-official "marriage" ceremonies where unions are blessed by a defrocked solar priestess (who is also the building's superintendent).

FAIRS, SIDESHOWS AND CIRCUSES

The Silver Quarter is one of the most popular entertainment districts in Spire. Here, whole streets are given over to the pursuit of excess and happiness, and there's no end of businesses keen to separate a citizen in search of excitement from their hard-earned coin.

At the lower end of the market, fairs and showgrounds offer an affordable getaway for those with a bit of cash to spare. Some are mobile, moving through the district and beyond to avoid paying rent or facing angry customers seeking refunds; some firmly stay put. Most start as nomadic affairs, so even the most well-established permanent circuses have their roots in carts, caravans and trailers. Often, the wheels have been ceremonially replaced with square or triangular copies to indicate that they have no intention of ever moving again.

Hawkers line the bunting-strewn streets, drawing in clients to play street games of luck or chance – crossbow target ranges, crow-racing, darts and ring-toss – while human retroengineers (many of them exiled from respectable establishments) erect and maintain mechanical marvels. One such exhibit, the Mechanical Gnoll, was claimed by its inventor to be a sooth-saying automaton that could peer deep into the hearts of men and drow alike in exchange for a single drop of their blood (and, of course, the requisite coin). When the crowd revealed that this was a subterfuge, and inside the machine was nothing more than a blood-witch practising dark magic, the fair was shut down.

Chief of all attractions, though, are the freak-shows and performances commonly laid on by Ali-quami drow, who have a reputation for delivering the strange and exotic to audiences hungry for novelty. Creatures captured from the edges of the Heart, curious gutterkin and beasts imported from the famously perilous human lands to the east form the mainstay of such shows (although many of them are fakes). Feats of strength and agility are prized too; aerialist performers often launch themselves between the balconies of the district to the gasps of the crowds below.

There is a market for aelfir-friendly fairs, too. Generally aimed at lower-class high elves or those slumming it with the drow, they promise curiosities that many drow might find banal – midwives, for example, whose half-elf half-spider bodies titillate and excite the sheltered aelfir. However, most midwives would never lower themselves to take part in a sideshow for coin unless something had gone very wrong for them.

Many of the spider-bloods on show in these circuses are normal drow women augmented with prosthetic spider limbs, fake mandibles, clever lighting and crucial misdirection. They perform erotic dances and stripteases, offering forbidden fruit to giggling aelfir without showing any of the grim realities that life as a midwife entails.

FASHION

Fashion waterfalls through Spire society. The awkward red lace outfits currently favoured in the Silver Quarter are only popular because the aelfir astrologer-couturier Berith Lips-Brush-The-Sunset added some spare red lace to the sleeves of an outfit that she debuted in a private exhibition two years ago. Given her power and influence, everyone decided to use red sleeves in their designs the next season.

This, of course, led to the production of red lace skyrocketing, with traditional bespoke Ivory Row laciers being priced out of the market by Pilgrim's Walk sweatshops. Pretty soon, anyone who fancied themselves fashionable had a cuff or two made of the stuff. As it was no longer special or inventive to just make red sleeves, Silver Quarter designers with less restraint than their Amaranth counterparts went overboard and made dresses, suits, hats and scarves out of it.

Eventually, the avant-garde performer and rumoured blood-witch Labelle Sanguine wore a famously scandalous outfit consisting of only red lace to the opening night of a Silver Quarter play. The papers snapped a daguerreotype of her and the trend was pretty much dead in the water by the end of the month due to oversaturation. Red lace dresses were so passé.

Perhaps two years from now, the workers of the Garden district will adopt red flashes on their sleeves and collars if they want to dress up on a night out, the gangsters in Red Row will wear huge frills of crimson silk stained brown from blood, the Knights of the North Docks will daub their gauntlets with red paint before a fight, and none of them will know that it's all thanks to one aelfir who had too much lace.

Here are other some current trends in the Silver Quarter, which may be on the up or in decline depending on who you ask:

- Military-style greatcoats, bearing the (often falsified) scars of battle. Vain drow will pay extra for a coat that was worn at a pivotal battle or by a noted enlisted hero.

- Large bustles that ape the leg-covers used by midwives to conceal their additional spider limbs; some designers add in the silhouette of fake legs beneath the petticoats.
- Masks painted to look exactly like the wearer's face (or an idealised version of it); many moneyed drow titter at the thought of thumbing their noses at aelfir mask etiquette like this, but the high elves don't really care or even understand.
- Inadvisably tall shoes: what began as platform heels escalated into stilts and then wearable pedestals. The highest shoes seen on the street are owned by Francette Valwa, who stands at around eight and a half feet tall when she puts them on. She cannot walk in them, for obvious reasons, and most everyone thinks she's daft for wearing them – although they'd never say it to her face (presumably because it's too far above theirs).
- Goats on leads. Goats hate being tied up, headbutt people in the knees and eat anything within range. Some drow view this behaviour as incredibly droll, but they generally have servants to clear up the mess that's left behind.
- Leather jackets: the "disgraced" warrior-poet Yenna Kill-The-Horizon (not actually disgraced – it was all a publicity stunt for an upcoming novel) has a penchant for these. They've now grown in popularity and become known as "Yenners" by the House Quinn duellists who favour them.
- Removal of arms, often during undying surgery, to show the wealth of the patient: they don't need arms, because they can afford servants to do everything for them. Given how difficult it is to get functional replacements, arm-removal is a big decision for even the most fashion-forward Spirizen – but nothing says you're devoted to staying on-trend than having both your arms sawn off and the wounds elegantly sutured shut.

THE LAW

The Silver Quarter is a relatively peaceful place in terms of crime – which is to say that the crime has become organised, regimented and even polite on occasion. In Red Row, the City Guard won't step on the main street without backup and several guns for fear of being struck down by one of the three gangs that rules the district; here, the criminals are the guards, who wear neat clothes and smile at people as they walk down the boulevard.

Mesye So is the informal king of the Silver Quarter: he runs the House, one of the largest casinos and

entertainment destinations in Spire. From there, he operates a vast criminal empire of protection rackets, shady funding operations and illicit logistics. Given his fabulous wealth, he can afford to be up-front and almost honourable in his dealings. He's not big on betrayal, but he is big on absolutely destroying anyone who raises a hand against his assets.

To keep the peace (and to keep on the right side of the council) So has purchased the loyalty of every city guard in the Silver Quarter. They and his enforcers – most of whom are House Quinn upstarts who want to make a quick fortune and a name for themselves – have divided up the peace-keeping in the district, rarely coming to blows except in cases of miscommunication.

However: Noelle LaCostra, an idealistic drow police captain, has recently been assigned to the head of the Silver Quarter garrison after her superior died in entirely unsuspecting circumstances (floating face-down in a canal after a "miscommunication" with Mesye So). So far, she cannot be bribed, and is enforcing laws, disarming gangsters, rooting out corruption and even arresting the odd aelfir. Noelle is earning more than her fair share of enemies. If she isn't stopped or protected, she'll be joining the previous Captain in the canal before the season is out.

CIVIL WAR

To the west of Spire, the drow Home Nations have been embroiled in a bloody civil war for as long as anyone cares to remember, with militarised city states led and funded by the noble houses. At present, the two biggest players in the war are current rulers House Yssen (traditionalist, party-going bloodletters) and their main challengers, House Quinn (nouveau riche, bound together by oaths rather than marriage or blood).

Each year, the war spreads to new areas and drow are driven out of their homes by the thousand. Some go west and try their luck amongst the disparate human communities, but most gather their possessions and trek to Spire, either overland (paying exorbitant immigration fees at the Blue Docks) or through one of the many treacherous tunnels that stretch out from the Home Nations. A lot of them die en route, and those who survive often carry grudges against one house or another.

This leaves no end of willing foot-soldiers ready to be radicalised and turned against one another. Houses Yssen and Gryndel specialise in arming militias and authorising hit squads, while Quinn swears in their agents as some kind of minor noble (often with



Clockwise from top: representatives of the noble houses of Destera, Quinn, and Aliquam.

an entirely invented title: Demi-Dukes, Halfmarquises, Kinglings, etc.).

Outside of the Silver Quarter, the tensions between houses rarely boil over into violence – but within it, gangs of nobles and hangers-on kick the tar out of one another on a regular basis. They fight to claim territory, curry favour with their elders and perform acts of glory that will be discussed for generations to come.

POTENTIAL ALLIES IN THE SILVER QUARTER

Fenchurch, a Gryndel gang leader without a single clue what he's doing, who relies on well-paid lieutenants to handle his day-to-day business. Unfortunately, the lieutenants just mortally wounded each other, and he needs help to bring his gang under control before someone else takes a shot at power.

Gather-the-Blessings, an aelfir convert to Stolz. They are hugely wealthy, seem to be blessed by the green-eyed lady herself and are weirdly resistant to personal misfortune. Every business they've invested in has closed its doors or been involved in a terrible scandal, but Gather-the-Blessings is always able to walk away scot free. Are they

really blessed, or do they just have a good eye for business?

Paradise-Waits-Eternal, an aelfir accountant-sculptor who has just been hired to Mesye So's service. She's terribly bitter about the whole thing, and eager to get back at him any way she can. Currently she's working on a) fudging his tax return and b) an angular statue of a soaring griffon. These are one and the same thing.

Maffie, a drug dealer from Red Row, specialises in selling high-strength glimmer and dagger to bored nobles. She dreams of moving into the Silver Quarter permanently so she can be amongst people who will appreciate her musical talent, and follows aelfir high fashion by thoroughly examining discarded copies of the socialite magazine *The Silhouette*. She's constantly trying to steal or replicate the latest trends with the limited resources at hand.

Vivienne, a highly paid midwife courtesan-surgeon who has access to plenty of wealthy nobles in their more intimate moments. In addition to offering sex work, she provides a good line in no-questions-asked medicine and has stitched up a fair number of ministers in her time.

THE DROW NOBLE HOUSES

Countless drow families claim nobility, but at present only nine hold enough power, standing or resources to be worthy of the title. We have included a special advance unique to each house's role. You can choose these advances when you generate your character or when you discover their noble ancestry in place of one of the normal Low advances from your class.

DESTERA, THE WEAVERS

The Destera once ruled the lands around Spire, and it was they who lost it in the disastrous war against the aelfir nearly two centuries ago. They are famed for their affinity with spiders (many dukes boast idealised portraits of themselves riding giant arachnids), their slavish devotion to tradition and the way they capitulated to the high elves rather than fight to the last.

Low Advance: **ON THE RIGHT HAND OF THE AELFIR**. *You, like many of your peers, spent your youth mixing with aelfir. You know how to threaten others with your authority.* Gain the High Society domain. When you intimidate someone who you

perceive as being of lower standing than you, do so with mastery.

ALIQUM, THE REPAIRERS OF REPUTATIONS

House Aliquam are the rulers of the eponymous region to the south of Spire; they are diplomats, traders and deal-makers, famed for being multilingual and multicultural. The Aliquam are also a nomadic people; at one time, they were a loosely-connected group of travellers who trekked across the deserts and scrublands by night and hid in tents and valleys by day. Now, they are bloated with the profits of trade and of providing passage to the aelfir armies who move through Aliquam en route to Nujab. Their culture has condensed into a single mobile city fashioned from a thousand caravans and goat-drawn carts. The "city" of Aliquam rolls over other settlements and absorbs them, growing in size each year. They avoid conflict through a series of tenuously-held alliances and



A house Malrique seer shows two cards depicting members of Starys (left) and Gryndel (right).

treaties (and by throwing money at problems when they arrive).

Low Advance: **SHELL GAME.** *Your forefathers were nomads, and you can't shake your wanderlust. Thankfully, it makes you hard to keep track of.* Gain +2 Shadow or the High Society domain – choose one when you select this ability. Once per session, when you decide to move your operations to a different safehouse, refresh D6 from your own Shadow stress or D3 Shadow stress from everyone else in your cell.

QUINN, THE NOBLE AND MOST HIGH

House Quinn's nickname is a joke. They were until recently looked down on by every other drow of noble blood; at least Starys had some decent lineage in them, mad and dangerous as they were. Quinn operates an open-door policy, allowing anyone with enough money to join provided that they swear fealty to the upper echelons of the "family." It turned out a lot of drow were upset with the concept of traditional nobility, and wanted a chance to try it themselves without marrying a baroness. House Quinn began to absorb wealth and talent at an alarming rate. They are currently second-in-the-running for ruling the Home Nations, throwing their considerable resources against the forces of House Yssen in an attempt to overthrow them. Whether they'll win or not, they're claiming ground, and several of the other Houses have started inviting House Quinn to their parties – just in case.

Low Advance: **NEW MONEY.** *You are a wealthy troublemaker.* Gain +2 Silver. Gain one of the following street-level bonds: an illegal newspaper press in the centre of Ivory Row; a revolutionary club of democrats in the Silver Quarter; a house of ill-repute in Red Row used to smuggle in refugees from the Home Nations.

MALRIQUE, THE UNLIDDED EYE

Famed for seers, mystics and inbreeding. House Malrique prides itself on being inscrutable, confusing and one step ahead of their rivals at every turn. Given their talent for producing soothsayers, many Malriques end up amongst the Scryatrices of the Lahjan; it was their predictions that led the aelfir to early victories against the gnolls in Nujab, which many saw as traitorous. Thanks in part to their efforts, the faith of Our Glorious Lady was allowed to continue and prosper in Spire. They take every opportunity to remind the other houses of that fact.

Low Advance: **HAUNTED.** *You are plagued with visions of your own potential demise, some of which prove to be useful.* Gain the High Society domain. The first time you take fallout in a session, you ignore all of its effects: you suffer no setbacks and your stress is not reduced.

DUVAL, THE GRAVE COLD

Duval make a habit of not dying. They pioneered undying surgery, the art practiced by the Morticians which allows a subject to be pinned at an age of their choosing. They engage in the practice themselves with a chilling enthusiasm: it is seen as something of a contest to be "pinned" at as early an age as possible. Some high-ranking Duval have the bodies of adolescent drow, but have held their positions for seventy or eighty years. As they no longer die from natural causes (unless they're poor), Duval is one of the slowest-moving houses in Spire, and their schemes can span centuries rather than months.

Low Advance: **SHIVER-SKIN.** [Occult] *You know an old, old spell, handed down by the masters of life and death through your blood.* Gain the High Society domain. Roll Deceive+Occult to cast this spell. On a success, you uncouple your physical form from the material world for a second or so and blur through a barrier – a wall, a gate, a window, a door, etc.

GRYNDEL, THE CRIMSON HUNTERS

House Gryndel loves a parade, hunting party, grand opening, bold expedition to uncharted territory, or really anything that involves too many trumpets. They make a point of upholding the lavish and outlandish traditional ceremonies of the drow Home Nations (and establishing their own, new, more expensive traditions). It is due to their funding that the Silver Quarter sees so many festivals and parties. Their nickname, the Crimson Hunters, comes from their standard celebration after receiving good news: get the best weaponry they can afford, find something dangerous and exciting to hunt and set off very loudly in an attempt to kill it. A Gryndel scion's worth is measured in their trophies, so most display evidence of their kills on their walls or bodies: a set of mighty horns from a kabritikon here; a tattoo in the shape of a great-clawed albino raven there; or a crown on a pedestal, taken from the head of one of the many "false kings" of the Home Nations.

Low Advance: **MY REPUTATION PRECEDES ME.** *You make a hell of an entrance.* Gain the High Society domain. Mark D6 Stress to Shadow to activate this ability. Until the end of



Clockwise from bottom:
representatives of house Duval,
Yssen and Valwa.

the current situation, when you inflict stress with a weapon and people see you do it, you inflict additional stress equal to your unfilled extra slots in Reputation.

VALWA, THE SILVER-BLOODED. House Valwa are the poster children of why one should never dabble in demonology; some distant ancestor delved too deep into dark secrets and cursed the rest of his bloodline. Many Valwa display minor tells that hint at their ancestry – skin mottled in the vague shape of sigils, unusually-coloured eyes or the barest hint of fires in their musk. Even amongst these back-stabbing and underhanded noble houses, the Valwa are seen as particularly untrustworthy. Many of them are raised to be so, learning to cast off superfluous friendships and alliances whenever it becomes advantageous.

Low Advance. **EXPENDABLE ASSETS.** *The Valwa are famed for cruelty and backstabbing; maybe it's the demonic curse on their bloodline.* Gain the High Society domain. You can sacrifice NPC bonds to inflict stress on your enemies. When you sacrifice a bond, declare a target; your bond must be able to influence them in some way, however tangential. Your relationship to the bond is destroyed (and they might end up dead, or worse) but you inflict stress to the target as though you were directly interacting with them: D3 stress for a Individual-level bond, D6 for a Street-level bond and D8 for a City-level bond. If your bond is permanent, not temporary, roll two dice and pick the higher to determine the stress inflicted.

YSSEN, THE UNQUIET BLADES

The canals of the Silver Quarter run red with blood thanks to the knives and sabres of House Yssen. They are in charge of the Home Nations (in as much as anyone can be in charge of a centuries-long subterranean

shadow war) and hungry for power. It is considered good practice for a young Yssen noble to spend a few years as a cut-throat gangster, fighting against other drow houses and their allies. Many lifelong bonds have been formed whilst fighting back-to-back in the lightless depths of Spire.

Low Advance: **GLORY HOUND.** *You are driven by a lust for renown and you refuse to wear armour for fear of being marked as a coward.* Gain the High Society domain. When you wield an edged weapon in combat while unarmoured, you roll with mastery. Once per session, you can refresh when you take down an impressive foe in combat.

STARYS, THE DROWNED KINGS

The Starys ruled the Home Nations long ago, but most of them were ritually drowned in the river that runs through the centre of the capital city (now called Ys) in an act that began the civil war. Most noble drow believe that the mass slaughter of the Starys line was an unequivocally good idea; if the stories about their exploits are to be believed, they may well have good reason to think that. The Starys that survived (and there are few indeed) tend to change their names rather than face being humiliated, ostracised or abused by their peers. There are several popular plays currently on show in the Silver Quarter where a bright young protagonist discovers that they are of Starys blood: they either overcome the stain of their family name or devolve into nightmarish perversities like those written in the history books.

Low Advance. **AN ANCIENT LINEAGE.** [Occult] *You channel the wrath of a hundred ancient kings through your blood.* Gain the High Society domain. Once per session, either: ignore all effects of a Minor fallout result, or use the following profile for any non-ranged weapon you wield (D8, Brutal).

HIGH SOCIETY WEAPONRY AND ARMOUR

NEW TAGS

UNSTABLE: Unless properly braced and aimed (preferably against something solid), attacks with this weapon increase their difficulty by 1.

KEEN: When you roll a 10 on an attack with this weapon, inflict +3 extra stress rather than +1.

POISONED: If this weapon inflicts stress to armour, it functions as normal; against Blood, all stress inflicted is doubled.

NEW EQUIPMENT

Aelfir Duelling Sabre – A common weapon in the hands of hotshot young aelfir nobles who feel they have something to prove. “True” duelling sabres are fashioned by artisans in the frozen north and imported at great cost, but the majority of sabres in Spire are knock-offs produced in the Works. Most aelfir wouldn’t know the difference – both work just fine at stabbing people. However, only an

aelfir-made one can also harm manifested ghosts and other spectral creatures. (D6, Parry)

Aelfir War-blade – A traditional aelfir sword with a long, curved haft (derisively called “hedge trimmers” by human mercenaries), these weapons require extensive training to master and are rarely seen outside of elite units or high-ranking high elven guardsfolk. Most people rely on cheaper, easier-to-use swords (or just shoot their opponents in the face), but the aelfir have traditions to uphold. (D6, Defensive)

Black Guard Armour – Worn by the elite guards of Amaranth, this plate-and-chain armour is polished and lacquered to a glossy, black-green shine like a beetle’s carapace. The curved helm and narrow eye-slits give the wearer an inhuman, alien appearance; fitting, for wearing the armour is beyond the reach of almost every inhabitant of Spire. (Armour 4)

Built-in pistol – Humans will build guns into anything – even other weapons. Although these devices don’t have the calibre or stopping power of a regular gun and are notoriously hard to aim, unscrupulous aelfir and drow nobles often favour combining the honour of carrying a sword with the power to shoot an unsuspecting opponent clean through the face. A weapon with a built-in pistol gains the following alternative profile: (D3, Point-Blank, Ranged, One-Shot, Surprising)

Gryndel “Death’s Head” Hunting Pistol – As valuable as it is dangerous, the Death’s Head is so named because of the unique skull-and-moth pattern etched into each barrel by the master gunsmiths of House Gryndel. Bought and used by the sort of people who have staff to do things like reload their guns, the Death’s Head is rarely seen on the street except in the hands of ostentatious gang leaders – or nobles who are about to have it stolen from their corpse. (D8, Brutal, Unstable, Ranged, One-Shot)

Gryndel “Whisper” Hand Crossbow – Built to an exacting standard like all of House Gryndel’s weaponry, the Whisper is favoured by assassins and agents who wish to go unnoticed in their bloody business. It takes a minute or so of screwing parts into place to get it ready to fire, but it can be broken down again within seconds. (D3, Point-Blank, Ranged, Reload, Concealable)

Purification Shroud – Aelfir wishing to leave their homes and travel amongst the lesser races may don a specially-made suit of protective armour. It is made of layered, many-coloured cloth and metals that protect the delicate skin of the wearer from the elements (and the poor) without having to sacrifice style. Despite the fact that the outfit covers the entire face and body, many high elves choose to wear their mask on top of the shroud out of politeness. (Armour 2. In addition, mark 1 stress to Blood to activate the following power: for the remainder of the scene, the wearer can breathe noxious gases or smoke as though they were air)

Rapier – The leather-clad dandies and cigarillo-smoking swords-for-hire that look for trouble and doss about the Silver Quarter prefer light arms such as the rapier. In the blood-slicked back alleys that dot the casino district, the civil wars that have reduced vast swathes of the Home Nations to burning ruins continue – and they are fought by die-hard noble scions with wicked-sharp swords. Though tricky to master, the rapier’s razor point and slim blade make it excellent at seeking out weak points in enemy armour. (D6, Piercing)

Saving Graces – Popular amongst aelfir who stray out of their protected communities, these small pistols are designed with sartorial elegance in mind. They work with the outfit of the user or fit seamlessly underneath it, rather than leaving big, ostentatious silhouettes like the guns humans and drow tend to use. While they are of excellent make and have a price tag to match, no military officer or hardened criminal would dare brandish one of these without expecting fierce mockery from their peers. (D3, Concealable, Piercing, Point-Blank, Reload)

Songbow – So called because if fired correctly, the hollow arrows pluck the last breath out of the target and play it through fluted chambers as a beautiful, mournful song. The aelfir maintain that to die from a songbow arrow is a shameless, and perhaps honourable, act. (D6, Piercing, Ranged, Tiring. If the target is killed, this weapon gains the Spread D3 tag from the horrendous, loud death disheartening the target’s allies)

Skald Battledress – Enchanted by aelfir ward-singers, these flimsy garments made of gossamer, lace and buckles seem to waft in the wind even when hung in an airless room. When worn by a skald who knows the trick of battle-dance, they twist

and flick in hypnotic patterns, blurring their image: a unit in combat becomes a swirling, gaseous thing, impossible to target cleanly. (Armour 0; on a successful attack against the wearer, roll two dice for stress and pick the lower. If the attack has the Brutal tag, it is removed and stress is rolled normally.)

Starys-pattern Longarm – The fallen house of Starys specialised in long-range assassination, and the remnants of their empire still honour their memory with weapons like this. Made of lacquered black wood and standing as tall as the average user, this device fires specially-made bolts at a tremendous velocity. To find a Starys Longarm for sale is a rare thing indeed, as they carry the curse of the house that made them. (D6, Extreme Range, Piercing, Unstable, Reload)

Thorn – Grown in the spiral-gardens of the high elves, these twisted, toughened spikes of wood

are kept alive by expensive sorcery. They must be planted in earth between uses, and any flowers or new stems should be clipped back. Contained within the thorn is a vicious cultivated toxin that can kill a target in seconds, reducing the lining of their lungs to a red, bubbling froth that is coughed out with their last breaths. (D3, Keen, Poisoned, One-Shot)

Winter Sword – Crafted by the artisans of Mother Winter, each of these pieces is a masterwork in itself. The trademark square blades are inscribed with abstract art of seemingly meaningless shapes and symbols which only swim into focus when the blade is anointed with the “right” blood. Many owners find themselves locked into a series of increasingly deadly duels, looking to discover the secrets hidden in their sword. (D6, Masterpiece. When the inscriptions are revealed to the bearer, the sword gains the Conduit tag)

SLIVER IMPLANTS

The drow have strange and shadowed technology, and they don't like to share it with outsiders – or each other, really. Slivers are small, magically-charged shards of iridescent metal that users can insert into their bodies like acupuncture needles, warping their flesh into new and strange patterns. They are uncommon in the Home Nations and all but unheard-of in Spire (outside of a handful of devoted users).

The events of *Better The Devil* bring mass sliver production to Spire. These shards are less reliable and more dangerous to the user than the already unreliable and hazardous originals; insertion can lead to unwanted bone-lengthening, permanent glossolalia and psychosis.

Blindsight – This surgery is dangerous, failing more often than it succeeds as the subject's body rejects the implant. A single needle-thin length of curved metal is pushed underneath the eyeball until it pierces the optic nerve: failure can lead to permanent blindness, which is why the process is generally only performed on one eye at a time. Success allows the bearer to see in the dark as though it were broad daylight – a valuable trait for drow, who cannot endure the sun's light for long.

Claw – Inserted into the joints of the elbows and shoulders, these slivers rewrite the user's body to grow in strange ways. The arms elongate, the

knuckles and fingertips grow hard and sharp and the bones grow steel-strong. Users inflict D3 damage with unarmed attacks, and any hand weapon they use (including their bare hands) gains the Brutal tag. Sanderson, of Sanderson's Arms in the North Docks, boasts replacement arms augmented by claw slivers; to receive such a boon belies legendary achievements in the civil wars of the Home Nations.

Dominate – This jagged shard of metal is inserted into the user's throat, bisecting their vocal chords. Once the scar tissue heals, it amplifies the subject's voice when touched, allowing them to address huge crowds and be heard clearly. In addition, the implant works hypnotic resonances into their voice, allowing them to roll with mastery when they deliver speeches.

Draw-Madness – One-use slivers that are inserted into the skin to draw insanity out of the user. These are popular with sorcerers, who use them to cling onto what remains of their magic-addled minds, and are tremendously expensive. Over several painful hours, they can extract D6 stress from mind, remove a single moderate or minor Mind fallout result or suppress the effects of a Severe Mind fallout result for an entire session of play.

Glass-blood – This conical lump of shimmering iron must be hammered directly into the heart of the recipient, jutting out of their chest for the rest of their lives. The energies of the stone will purge the body of toxins, meaning that they can no longer be poisoned or use drugs: the stone will filter them out, and vibrate or hum to let the user know something's amiss. Superior glass-blood stones will counteract diseases and infections of the blood, too; rumour has it that a particularly fine specimen was implanted into a blood-witch and cured her of her illness, though it also robbed her of her powers.

Heart-song – This rare, dark red, iridescent stone binds with the user's central nervous system to act as an additional sensory pleasure organ; rubbing or applying pressure can calm, excite or arouse the user. Heart-song slivers are one of the few implants that the aelfir have tried to acquire in a form that their bodies won't reject immediately: the wealthiest lords and ladies display the sliver on their forehead and never let anyone touch it, which is apparently so ironic as to be fashionable.

Legend-bearer – These slivers are pushed into the brainstems of desperate scholars to absorb the knowledge and memories from their heads; often this is done for coin or favours. A user who inserts the stone into their own body can then recall the information stored on it as though they knew it themselves. (In game terms, this allows a Skill or Domain to be "stored" on a Legend-bearer and used by anyone who implants the sliver.) Removing a Legend-bearer is not recommended, as although the process often isn't fatal, it will leave gaps in the user's mind and take other knowledge with it.

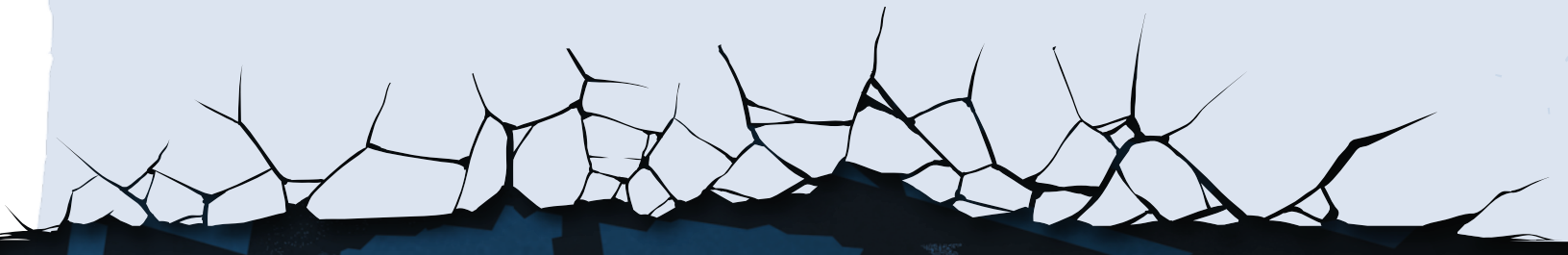
Mask – Inserted at key points on the user's face, these sets of jewelled studs were once commonplace amongst the nobles and wealthy courtesans in the Home Nations. Over time, they reform the bone and musculature in a subject's face to resemble someone else – usually a suitably idealised popular historical or fictional figure. Spies used similar slivers to rewrite their face whenever they needed, but frequent use leads to damaged muscles and mismatched features.

Soul-shadow – This thick needle is made of clean-edged, translucent material and is pushed into the base of the skull at a precise angle, entering the brain. If inserted correctly, the user's soul is removed from their body, or at least concealed or suppressed in some way. They will no longer be able to be viewed via scrying magic or affected by hexes or witch spells, but are also unable to set foot in an active religious temple without taking D3 stress to Mind each time they pass the threshold.

Subjugate – A twisted mirror of the Dominate shard. Each one is paired to a single "mother" sliver, and a Dominate sliver may have hundreds if not thousands of such artefacts bonded to it. When a user with the paired Dominate implant gives an order, a character bearing the Subjugate sliver *must* obey or take D6 stress to Mind immediately (a Resist+Technology check can reduce the stress suffered). Subjugate shards are the most common form of slivers on the market, as without a Dominate sliver to activate them, they are of little value except to collectors.

Without-Hunger – This set of five inch-long shards are pushed into the base of the spine until they lever apart the vertebrae, sending resonant energy throughout the user's body. The user will no longer feel hunger, and only needs to eat once a week or so. Their sense of taste and smell are obliterated, leaving them able to subsist on almost anything – no matter how vile it is to the palate.

Without-Sleep – The sister to Without-Hunger, this long, slender needle is inserted through the very top of a subject's skull and into their brain, rewriting the grey matter inside. After a short adjustment period, the user will no longer need to sleep – but this sliver can lead to intrusive waking dreams. Before the fall of Starys, the entire noble line had these implanted, and would share in frequent mass hallucinations (their servants just did their best to blindly play along).



LOW SOCIETY

If you don't have the cash to spare, Spire is one of the worst cities in the world. Smog-choked and cramped beyond belief, riddled with disease and crime, and prone to catching fire whenever it isn't flooded. Yet countless drow live here under the yoke of their aelfir overlords – working in factories to fuel the high elves' ambitions, growing food they can't afford to buy in the Garden District, or clinging to life in the lawless warrens of Perch and Derelictus. There is rebellion growing amongst the disaffected youth and embittered drow elders, and the Ministry are just one of a hundred groups stirring up trouble with an eye to be in charge when the dust settles.

THE WORKS

This is the Works – a smoking, steaming, choking knot of industry in the centre of Spire. Thousands of workshops and factories churn out goods to fuel the aelfir expansion into Nujab and onwards to Al'Marah: rifles of cunning human make, armour and boots for enlisted drow to wear as they march through the desert sun, bullets and shells and explosives that send rocks tumbling down Nujabi cliff-sides.

The aelfir war machine is hungry. Hundreds of drow are sacrificed to it month by month as unmaintained mechanisms crush workers, blacklung suffocates children in their sleep and fires spread unchecked through the slums that line the district.

But: the Works is alive. The noise of industry – slamming machinery, hissing steampipes, sputtering vents – blends with the sound of civilisation as drow live and play amongst the steel and smoke. For all its poverty, the Works is one of the few places left in Spire where a drow can make an honest living and ascend the rungs of the social ladder – and the number of drow-owned factories is increasing year on year.

SPIREWHITE

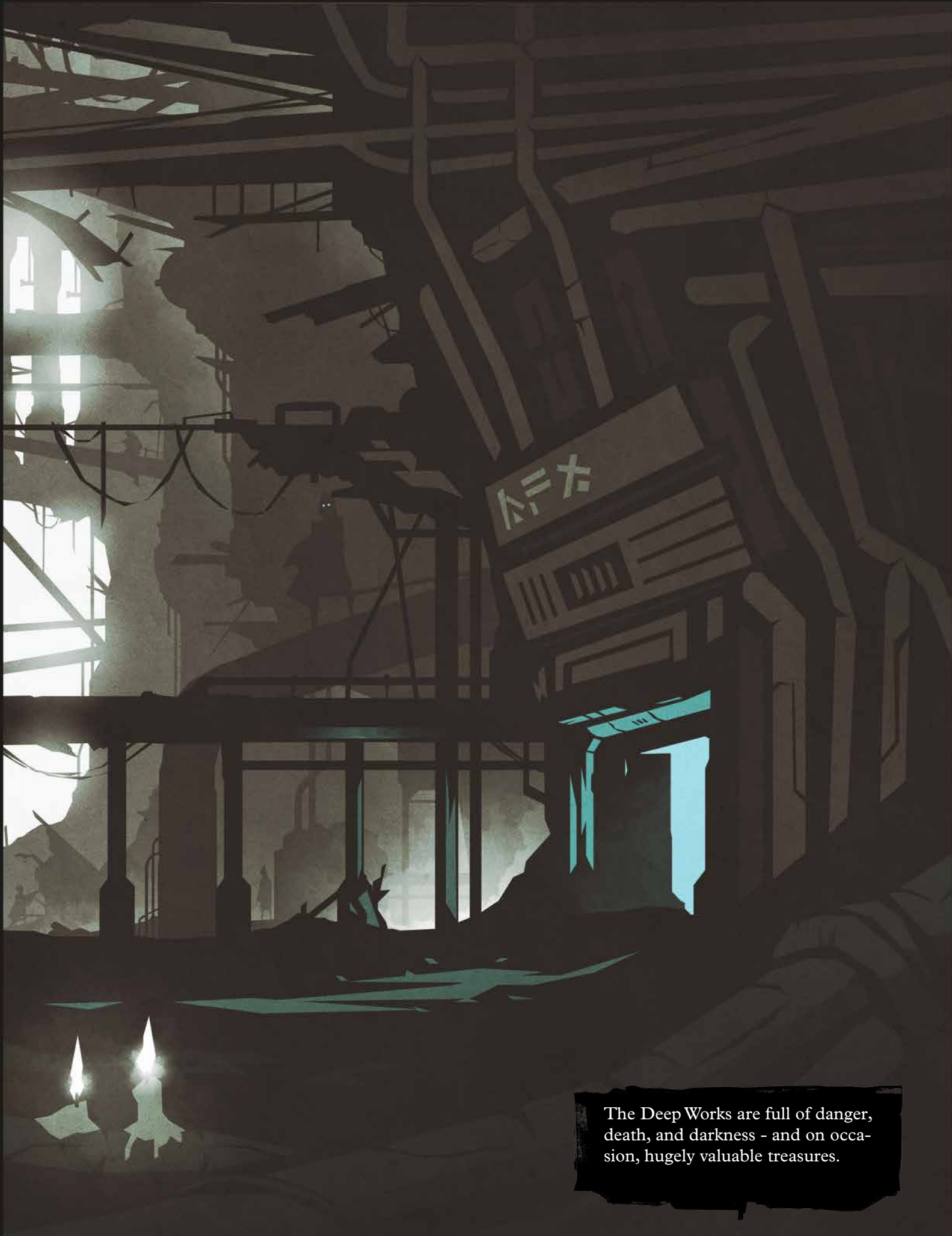
Spireblack collects anywhere that industry leaves its grimy mark, especially in the Works – thick, tar-like lumps of grease that burn like dirty oil. It gums up

the cogs and presents a fire hazard, so most factory owners are happy to have it removed. There is a thriving black market in collecting and refining the stuff (which is tricky work indeed) to make the cheap fuel that lights the underspire and the gunpowder that conquers it.

In the last twenty years, spirewhite has started to appear as well. Spirewhite isn't exactly white – most commonly it's a pale, grey-pink tumour-like mass – and it blossoms in factories just like spireblack. Spirewhite is reason enough to close a factory down, at least temporarily, because it spreads to those who touch it. It happens slowly at first, manifesting as a fading of vision and bone-deep aches, then shifting up to organ failure and the appearance of cancerous growths, before the body is completely overtaken by lesions (often made barely recognisable) and the subject dies.

Common wisdom has it that sufferers rise from their deathbeds and march unsteadily towards the growth where they contracted the disease, looking to be subsumed into it. The city's official stance is that this is bunkum, but it has also imposed mandatory cremation for all those infected.

The only thing to do when spirewhite appears – aside from closing the factory – is to hire a clean-up crew to remove it. Unlike the unskilled chancers



The Deep Works are full of danger, death, and darkness - and on occasion, hugely valuable treasures.

who scrape spireblack off the eaves, these people are professionals. Most are desperate, ex-military types who've seen too much and are after a risky but lucrative paycheck; others are curious researchers from the universities above, eager to study this strange phenomenon. They extract the spirewhite (or die in the process) and ship it elsewhere. The Council claims it is destroyed, but a substance so miraculous and volatile has enormous value to arms manufacturers, occultists and urban druids.

Thus far, spirewhite has remained under control thanks to a campaign of vicious cover-ups by a shadowy cabal of men and drow in the upper echelons of the Works – but there are stories of huge growths in the depths of forgotten factories that infect vagrants. They spread the disease to others, all of whom come shambling to throw their unravelling bodies onto the stinking mound as they rattle out their last breaths.

SPIREWHITE THRALL

Names: None, but you might recognise some of them from before

Descriptors: Arm rotted off but replaced with hideous swollen growths; two people stuck together, neither of them willing; normal, except their eyes are replaced with sickly cancerous orbs

Resistance: 6

Difficulty: 0

WHY ISN'T SPIRE ON FIRE ALL THE TIME?

It's a good question, as it certainly should be burning. Given the total absence of building regulations and nightmarish lack of safety infrastructure, especially in lawless districts like Red Row or the industrial mess of the Works, the risk of a catastrophic fire is huge. To counteract this, here are a few ways that the inhabitants of Spire have learned to fight fire:

- Waste-water flows through the city in pipes until it sprays out of the side or gets lost somewhere down-Spire. It's entirely possible to reroute this stinking liquid onto a blaze, dousing the fire in a cloud of foul-smelling steam.
- Drow have a cultural inclination to honour fire: they needed it to see in their ancestral underground homes and made use of it every day. Where humans and aelfir treat fire with respect, drow rituals around matches, flint and steel and

Equipment: None, except what they were carrying when they died (D3 damage)

Special: If you suffer Blood fallout when fighting a thrall, the GM can use the following result:

INFECTED. [Blood] Monstrous spirewhite cankers form on your skin. You will be overtaken completely within the week and guards will execute you on sight if the infection doesn't kill you first. You can permanently replace this fallout with Broken Arm or Broken Leg by sawing off the appropriate area. Having a doctor do it inflicts D3 Mind stress; it's D6 if an untrained person does it without proper anesthetic and D8 if you have to do it yourself.

MALAK

The aelfir banned malak, an intoxicating tincture popular with drow, a few years ago. When a dangerously liberal legislator gave drow the right to move freely and without fear of unprovoked arrest through the lower third of Spire, the establishment needed a new reason to incarcerate them. It was rare to find a drow that didn't use malak, especially if they were of age – it was as widespread as alcohol, perhaps even more popular – so the City Guard once more had a reason to apprehend any drow with impunity.

The high elves heralded the malak ban as a new age of health and prosperity for the drow, whose communities – they claimed – had been gripped by the

candles border on religious reverence. Many older drow still name their matches and thank them for their sacrifice when lit, for example. This obsessive behaviour arises from centuries of avoiding blazes.

- A splinter sect of the Vermissian Sages, the Ignis Praeliae, have devoted their lives to keeping the city safe from fire. They still mourn the loss of a great library in the Home Nations that burned at the start of the civil war, several hundred years ago. These sages can predict the sites of potential fires by reading newspaper reports from potential futures and counteract these disasters by killing those responsible before they do it. It may even work.
- Original Spirestone, the bones of the city, doesn't burn. In extremis, it's actually been known to explode with a white, sweet-smelling substance that extinguishes nearby fires, as though the city is protecting itself from damage. However, this isn't a reliable means of fighting fire.

vicious claw of malak addiction for far too long. Poster campaigns lined the streets of the Works and the Garden district, warning upstanding citizens of the “MALAK MENACE”: a grotesque caricature of a heavy malak user, with black-stained teeth and huge, bloodshot eyes.

Lurid half-sten horrors supporting the aelfir’s claims were rushed into print and sold at discount rates, such as A DROW’S SIN: THE MALAK FIENDS or, using one of the many street names for malak, THE HEX-BORN EXECUTRIX. Drow were encouraged to report potential dealers or users in their neighbourhoods – not for a cash reward, but to ensure the ongoing safety of their community. The initiative is still in effect to this day.

Malak production was driven underground. Once-reputable makers turned their hands to chemistry and brewery, making malak on the side. The Works was the perfect location for mass illegal production of the drug. With the district already full of industry and people at all hours, there was little chance anyone would notice the occasional drum of tincture being shipped down-Spire; plus, raw materials were easy to come by.

People take malak freely in Red Row and Derelictus – there are so few guards down there that the risk of discovery is almost nil. But in the Works, bars and clubs distributing the stuff are well-hidden behind fake businesses, passwords, security and hidden entrances. In the sweltering heat between furnaces, while the engines of industry roar above, drow congregate in low-ceilinged, dimly-lit rooms to socialise, drink malak mixed into a variety of different tonics and listen to loud, discordant music.

Most malak joints pay the guards to keep their noses out – but with the increase in seditious organisations being hosted in these private meeting places, more and more of these speakeasies are being raided.

DRUID ECOTERRORISM

The Druids of the Living Spire believe that Spire itself – or Herself, as they refer to it – is a massive, living organism (or an ecology of organisms) that can be bargained with just the same as any forest folk, mountain-spirit or river-god. They believe that Spire is sick, pointing to spireblack – and, more recently, spirewhite – as a sign of the illness. They also believe that they are the cure.

Luddite sabotage is commonplace in Spire, with an increasing focus on automation putting hundreds of drow out of work each week. The Crimson Vigil have a particular focus on burning down factories, and there’s a multipart guide to “undetectable

insurrection” published in *Liberate!*. It encourages workers to misplace tools, divert jobs to other workgroups rather than do them themselves and spend more time discussing problems than solving them.

The plans of the druids are a little different. At present, they are infiltrating as many factories as possible and working within them, raising themselves up to positions of power and responsibility in the organisation. Undercover work is especially difficult for druids: not only must they come in contact with the hated tools of industry and progress on a daily basis, but many are blessed with plant or fungal growths that blossom out from their skin. Paradoxically, the better a druid is at infiltration, the harder they’ll have to work to prune back their own aberrant growth to evade detection.

Once they reach saturation point, the druids will simultaneously cause massive destructive malfunctions in the industrial equipment spread throughout the Works. Molten metal will spill through the streets and the corridors and tunnels will fill with thick, noxious smoke. Machinery held under pressure and pushed to breaking point will explode, shearing into shrapnel that will tear apart structures and people alike.

Unable to respond to the chaos in time, the Works will burn and the main cause of the Spire’s sickness will be destroyed. She might even be able to heal before she collapses.

DRUID ECOTERRORIST

- Name:** Hecate, Weal, Versival
- Descriptor:** Barely-visible nubs of plants growing out of their skin; When they breathe, it sounds like rustling leaves; On edge, tweaking out from the comedown of one drug or the come-up of another
- Resistance:** 5, but if they’ve had time to prepare and enact the appropriate rites, 10
- Difficulty:** 1, but 0 if you can catch them on the tail-end of a binge
- Equipment:** Worn work clothes and heavy overalls (Armour 1); “summoned” sickle (D6, Brutal – will rust into uselessness or release infectious parasites if anyone other than a Druid uses it)

THE DEEP WORKS

Factories shut down all the time – mostly because someone invested poorly, paid off the wrong protection racket or their products simply weren’t selling. Whatever the reason, rented businesses change hands

daily in the Works, leaving the true owners of land and machinery obscured through bureaucracy and mile-long paper trails.

Sometimes, it really doesn't work out.

Sometimes the spireblack weevils get out of control and a stray spark could ignite the whole lot, but the money to clean it up ran out months ago. Sometimes the aelfir landowners storm in and demand the whole factory shut down on a whim (who can understand the motivations of the aelfir?) before sealing themselves inside until they die, mad and starving, hiding amongst the gantries and haunting the ventilation ducts. Sometimes the barely-understood human technology – aetherwright looms, galvanic resonators, elemental forges, howling-jennies – turns half the workforce into haunted dust, and the Council orders the whole thing sealed off until Gwyn-Enforr University can work out how to make it safe again. Sometimes, someone knocks through the wrong wall and hits the Vermissian; then the Heart gets in and everything changes.

Things move quickly in Spire. These unfortunate places are quickly boarded up and built on, while the surrounding architecture is torn apart for supplies. Access tunnels fall into disrepair; with no-one using them – and therefore no-one fixing them – collapses are common. The lost factories are known as the Deep Works: wretched, dark areas that hold the promise of forgotten treasure.

The tales are the same in every malak joint from Wright's Press down to Coxford Bridge: that the mad industrialist Final-Ray-Of-Dawn died in such-and-such a factory beneath the temple of the Hearth-Mother and his death mask is studded with rubies and sapphires; that the ghouls in the ruins of the Erebus Corporation's old headquarters can breathe shadows and smell your true name; that generations of spireblack growth in some godsforsaken corner of the district have created a pearl that has grown and hardened into something multifaceted, sharp and beautiful.

Whether the stories are true or not, there's no end of stalkers and scavengers who are willing to risk life, limb and sanity throwing themselves into the lost depths of the Works in search of treasure. Occasionally the Ministry catches wind of a reliable lead on the location of something – or someone – valuable and dispatches a generally unwilling cell to claim it for the Hidden Mistress.

SUN-ON-WATER'S BLADES

Sun-on-Water is the last true aelfir weaponsmith in Spire. Where many high elf artisans have adopted the

MUSIC IN SPIRE

Traditional drow music – within the boundaries of Desteria, at least, and towards the Home Nations – relies heavily on metal or stone drums and pipes. Given their ancestral origin in caves, acoustic engineering comes naturally to the drow. The space in which music is performed (and all the echoes that come with it) is often just as important as the performer themselves.

Musical instruments are often immobile, or at the very least uncomfortably heavy. Wealthy drow still build long, resonant pipes into their performance structures for musicians to sing or otherwise make noise into at parties. More portable instruments exist, such as the spider-silk psalteries favoured as a meditational focus by midwives, but they are fragile and upkeep is expensive.

The music is quiet, too: make too much noise and you risk rockfall or drawing the attention of the nightmare beasts that slumber in the chthonic depths beneath cities (or so the drow believe). There's an emphasis on harmonies and soundscapes, because individual notes and beats can be easily broken up on cavern walls.

Modern drow music has none of those restrictions, and most anything goes. Spire is a nexus of cultures: aelfir harpists play with Aliquami shawmists, laying down inscrutable and hard-to-follow semi-improvised tunes; Desteran zitherists accompany traditional Yssian war-drums and horns at desang plays; humans repurpose industrial machines to make brutal, repetitive music that draws young drow in their hundreds to listen; and enlisted drow return home from Nujab with weird gnollish contraptions that use alchemical crucibles to create coloured flame and sharp, piercing notes.

Music is an important part of the revolution, too. A lot of drow history, censored or destroyed by the aelfir occupying forces, survives only as folk songs or poems. Performing these songs is seen as a rebellious act, but there are no end of ex-military troupes playing the old war songs of Desteria or the vengeance-canticles of ancient Yssen in the North Docks. They can quickly whip up their audiences into a vicious frenzy.

significantly more efficient methods of metalworking created by humans and drow, Sun-on-Water has steadfastly devoted herself to embracing the oldest art of weapon-making in the world.

She makes magic weapons, and does so incredibly slowly: capturing the essence of the harvest moon or a widow's last breath in a glass dagger takes time to do properly. She is under the protection of Mother Winter, the aelfir smith-goddess. As such, she evades trouble – and even detection – despite being one of the most highly sought-after people in Spire.

What follows is a selection of the weapons she has crafted over the last decade. They are all of inestimable value.

Mother's Lament – This blue-grey stiletto pierces metal with ease, but glances off every other substance. It is imbued with the last light of the winter solstice, invoking the power of Mother Winter, the chief artisan of the Solar Pantheon. It can only inflict damage to armour in combat, not Blood – although if it's used against something with metal instead of flesh, it should work fine. It also cuts the locks out of doors, slices through manacles and slashes guns in half. (D8, Metal Only)

The Following Knife – You can't buy the Following Knife normally. You sign a contract with Sun-On-Water, she takes some hair and blood of yours (maybe a tooth) and then you go away and wait. The Following Knife, once it's forged, knows where you are at all times and strives to be close to you. It will appear in drawers, under beds, beneath pillows and, of course, in any bag or pocket large enough to hold it on your person. The Following Knife loves you and wants you to be safe and happy. It is *impossible* to take the Following Knife away from you unless it is constantly under direct observation; but the first time no-one's looking at it, it will appear near you again. (D6, Concealable. You can throw the knife as a D6, Ranged, Unreliable weapon – if the Unreliable tag is triggered, it takes its time to work its way back to you and will appear at the start of the next situation.)

Kingsbane – Kingsbane is a beautiful single-edged sword that only functions properly when used against kings, queens or any other ruling monarch. Against anyone else, it's a blunt length of metal. Quite what determines who is and isn't a 'king' is difficult to pin down, but you'll know you got it right when you slice their head off in one smooth movement. (Against monarchs, this is a D8, Devastating weapon. Against anyone else it's D3.)

DELVING INTO THE DEEP WORKS

GM: if you want to experiment with a side-mission where your players descend into some nightmare factory, consider inflicting it upon the group as moderate or severe Silver fallout: the group has used too many Ministry resources and needs to repay their debts.

You could also rationalise it as Shadow fallout: after a particularly disastrous job, the cell returns to their safehouse to find that the Ministry have had to spend considerable funds on cleaning up after them. Now it's time to make amends.

The Knife of Ten Sorrows – This simply looks like a red-lacquered handle. You can see the blade if you hold it up to moonlight – but even then, it doesn't manifest physically. The Knife of Ten Sorrows severs relationships rather than arteries: "slashing" at the space between two people sours their friendship, leading to distrust and anger. The knife can do this ten times before it breaks. There are four square notches on the handle, suggesting that there are only six uses remaining. (Against NPCs, breaking up relationships is handled narratively. Against PCs, the knife inflicts D8, Brutal stress to a bond of the attacker's choosing per use.)

The Perfection Blade – This knife isn't designed for combat, but for surgery. You can use it to excise undesirable fallout results, but for each fallout you remove, you must also remove something positive – usually a skill or domain, but abilities and resistance slots aren't out of the question. Using the knife doesn't hurt at all; in fact, it is weirdly pleasant (and a little addictive).

Sunburst Arrow – Gathering the power of Father Summer into a spiralling, thorned spike of metal, this arrow bursts into pure sunlight when it makes contact with a drow. Sun-on-Water didn't set out to make a weapon that only targets drow out of hatred, but instead to see if it could be done – she's working on one that does the same for aelfir, too. (When fired from a bow, this weapon is D8, Brutal, Spread D6, One-Shot against drow and D3 against anyone else. If it doesn't hit its target, or if the target isn't a drow, it won't explode and can be retrieved.)

Autumn's Call – Made in the light of the first blood moon of the harvest season, this long knife is the ultimate fashion statement amongst truly style-conscious aelfir. It is de rigueur for an owner to publicly kill themselves with the knife, usually via disembowelment or throat-slitting, and be buried clutching it in their hands. There are fewer things more on-trend than ending your life with an Autumn's Call; so far Sun-on-Water has made four of them, and she has a waiting list as long as her arm for more. (D3)

POTENTIAL ALLIES IN THE WORKS

Professor Spike, an aged human academic who was either kicked out of the Academy of Gywnn-Enforr or left on his own terms – depends on who you ask. He's an expert on The Intelligence (Spire p83), a network of minds linked by implanted prokatakos crystals, but he's not on good terms with them. In fact, they're hunting for him, as they believe he's managed to build a device that interacts with the crystals without the need for surgery. He's hiding out deep in the Works, trading secrets skimmed from the network in exchange for replacement parts and fresh crystals.

Drez, who runs illegal malak through the district for a number of different manufacturers. He has a habit of using channels through the Deep Works to evade detection, which is daft – but it hasn't caught up with him yet.

Christa, who writes for the Torch and *hates* it. She's very left-wing, but the only writing job she could get was with the famously pro-aelfir, anti-drow Torch. With her superiors, she's tremendously bubbly and fun; but the second she's out of their sight, she's cooking up some way to sabotage the publication that will still allow her to keep her job.

Lāns Jacq (*nomme de guerre*), a once-muscular but now fat veteran of the Nujabian wars who works as a private investigator and is currently looking into the disappearance of an aelfir heiress in the Works. He makes a habit of telling ostentatious war-stories riddled with outlandish and often conflicting details, but is much smarter than he's letting on and knows how to get a rise out of just about anyone. You can generally find him standing cautiously at the back of a brawl that he started.

Vira Glass-on-Glass, Editrix of the Silhouette, who knows what it takes to track down a good story and will do anything to get it – including allying with known traitorous revolutionary groups.

Despite being an aelfir, she's written many articles decrying the high elf occupation and domination of Spire (under fake names in other people's papers, of course).

Sol, a former soldier, runs a two-bit, run-down machining workshop in the lower end of the Works that produces surprisingly good work. This is because he's got a gnoll in the basement – an engineer by the name of Mal'ja. The two of them fell in love when they were supposed to be killing each other in the Nujabi badlands. Mal'ja repairs and improves his tools, but if he draws any more attention he's going to get found out – leaving the two of them as good as dead.

EXTRA ADVANCE: GAZETTEER

REQUIREMENT: Have the ability to publish a regular news-sheet (name it).

REFRESH: Reveal a secret to your readers.

LOW

PROTECT YOUR SOURCES. *You refuse to shed light on where your information comes from.* Gain the Fix skill. When a bond takes stress as a result of doing a favour on your behalf, roll one dice size lower than usual.

WORD ON THE STREET. *You know a guy who knows a guy.* +1 Reputation. Once per session, ask the GM what the word on the street is in relation to a particular topic. This includes what rumours you've heard in relation to current events, who's who, what they're up to and so on. You only get vague hints, but it's always enough to follow up into something interesting.

FOLLOW THE MONEY. Once per situation, you can work out where the money's coming from for something in that situation; but it'll only take you one link up the chain. For example, if you spot a street kid watching a building and discover that they were paid to do it by a private detective, you'll only find out the identity of the private detective – not the name of the person who hired them, the shadowy corporation behind them or the aelfir at the head of it. However, given time and leg work, you can go all the way up.

MEDIUM

BLACKMAIL EXPERT. *You're an expert on collecting and using leverage.* Gain the Compel skill. When



The Gazetteer isn't afraid to get their hands dirty in search of a good story.

you collect incriminating evidence on someone and present them with it, they become a bond. Any stress inflicted against the bond as a result of performing favours is doubled.

RED STRING. *You have a board with pictures of movers and shakers pinned to it, linked together with red string.* Once per session, add a picture of a person or place to your board. (This will remain until the end of the campaign or until your board is destroyed.) When you investigate this person or place, you do so with mastery. You can add people or places connected to the original picture during the same session for D3 Mind stress per addition.

DISTRACTION. *Everyone's too busy obsessing over the new scandal to worry about what happened last week.* When you publish a story intended to draw attention away from yourself by besmirching someone else's name, remove D6 stress from Shadow and mark half the amount rolled to Reputation. You can also use this ability to draw attention away

from other player characters or to clear stress directly from a bond's resistance total.

SMEAR CAMPAIGN. *Throw enough mud around and some of it's bound to stick.* When you undertake a smear campaign against a public figure, mark D6 stress to Reputation; they take half the amount rolled as stress. Roll each time you reveal a new discovery (whether it's true or false) – at most, once per session.

HIGH

MASTERMIND. As RED STRING, but you roll with mastery whenever you interact with anything or anyone pinned to the board. In addition, you can establish connections between two elements on the board that aren't necessarily connected. Simply by linking them together with red string and marking D6 stress to Mind, you uncover (or create) one.

THE GARDEN DISTRICT

The Garden feeds Spire. Deep in the warrens of the district, dark-farmers skim great copper vats of algae and render it down into cheap food for the labourers in the Works; crustacean-shepherds tend to skittering flocks of aquatic beasts that are boiled by the hundreds until their shells change to vibrant reds, yellows and blues; and the Hanging Gardens house the bodies of the dead, nutritious mushrooms sprouting from their skin, the halls silent aside from the barely-audible rustles and creaks that the miraculous fungi make as they grow at an astonishing rate. Were the Garden to shut down, Spire would starve itself into riots within days.

But the Garden is also hungry, and it eats. It is an untameable pocket of the wild trapped inside the stone and steel of Spire. It swallows up whole streets, drives people mad and calls for constant sacrifice. If left unchecked, it would cover Spire and turn everyone inside it into wet, thrumming biomass.

THE HUNGER

There is a general understanding amongst the farmers of the district that the Garden needs feeding; after

all, plants need water and fertilizer to grow in abundance. A lot of the rituals are tied up with folk stories and regional worship of Our Glorious Lady, and make use of offerings delivered directly to the soil.

The need for nourishment doesn't limit itself to the dirt. There's something primal and strange about the Garden that worms its way into the minds of its inhabitants. It's nothing major at first – perhaps a gentle reminder at the back of one's mind to get up and water the moss, or an unusual fondness for one's flock of plate-worms and crabs. But over time, the devotion to making sure that the Garden has something to consume can develop into an obsession.

Farmers lash out at one another and steal supplies, siphoning off water to feed their crops or starting small militias to requisition money for stronger, more esoteric fertilizers. This is seen as healthy competition for the most part: there are frequent contests to determine which farmer owns the prettiest goat or who has grown the biggest tubers.

Pity the farmer who cannot satisfy their crops. In times of illness and blight, the various produce will need special care and attention – but not everyone can afford it. As their farms wither and die, the district's hunger grows stronger and more insistent in



Predatory moss is lured onto statues of its prey, where it is farmed.

the minds of the owners. They will resort to darker and more desperate means to feed the blunt, ravenous intelligence at the core of their being.

Destitute farmers joining shady cults are commonplace (though the majority of said cults are scam operations looking to take advantage of rubes). Less frequent, but more terrifying, are the poor individuals who entirely give themselves over to the hunger. They'll hunt down other drow and drag them back to their smallholdings, eyes wide, working with erratic and unpredictable movements as they string their victims up and bleed them out into the soil.

It does work (unless they're caught). Their gardens grow and their flocks increase in number; the madness abates, and soon the bodies are reduced to nightmares and a handful of unmarked memorial stones. The Garden's hunger is sated for another season.

HUNGER-WRACKED FARMER

Name: Snetton, Ashe, Zeth

Descriptor: Dragging a chain, sticky with blood and hair, behind them; Buried within the earth, waiting to strike for days; Shirtless and gaunt, belly swollen from hunger

Difficulty: 1

Resistance: 12

Equipment: Repurposed farming implements (D6, Tiring)

Special: If you can get the farmer out of the garden district, they'll be Difficulty 0 and Resistance 3 – but they'll try their best to get back in.

THE LOST ACRES

The roots of the garden district run deep, burrowing into the rock and brick of the place. They are inexorable and iron-strong, capable of cracking stone given enough time. Ceilings crumble and collapse; tunnels are overgrown with bramble and thorn; great vats of algae or crawfish burst at the seams and flood the levels below them. Sometimes people intentionally bring down buildings to block access routes, looking to drive off protection rackets, money-lenders or angry landlords.

This means that large parts of the Garden district are "lost", with no reliable means of contacting the outside world. They are, however, largely self-sufficient (assuming they have access to water) and adapt well to life in confinement, forming their own incestuous subcultures.

Each year, teams of indentured drow uncover these forgotten lands and do their best to make contact with the inhabitants. They chop down thorns and clear rubble with dangerous, often human-made, equipment (rotary blades that shear through thorns, pneumatic jackhammers that smash apart rock, bulky thermal lances that can project a steel-melting flame).

Some are happy to see folk from the outside world, especially if most of their community has died thanks to illness, murder, starvation or madness. The lands they've been living in are strange indeed. Compared to the thrum and noise of the rest of Spire, they're eerily quiet, and the people there speak in unidentifiable dialects: strange, ingrown languages curled around on themselves.

With the difficulty of making artificial light, communities may develop methods of working without it, such as rigging up their lands with rough ropes and string to guide them through the pitch black. A couple of generations in, there's never been any other way. On the rare occasions that light is seen, it is treated as a miraculous gift from the gods – or, more likely, as an eye-stinging curse that drives drow mad.

A handful of those trapped in the lost acres attempt to drive off invaders with jury-rigged traps and ambushes, seeing them as a threat to their way of life. There are also pockets of resistance deep in the Garden district that have been isolated for decades, if not centuries, and would like to keep it that way. Look hard enough and you'll find drow who are still in open war with the aelfir, or who have never heard that Spire fell two hundred years ago.

WEIRDNESSES IN THE GARDEN DISTRICT

- A grove of stone statues covered in predatory moss: it used to grow over sleeping or injured animals and sap their strength until they died, but it can be fooled with statues. It is tough, water-resistant and holds heat well, so it's in great demand from clothing manufacturers. The gardeners here make it a point of pride to endure the moss crawling over their bodies; once they've tended the groves for a year or two, it's hard to tell them apart from the statues.
- The mansion of Teeth-Through-Silk, an ancient and long-dead aelfir landowner, who retired to the Garden district in his later years. He went entirely mad, as aelfir outside of Amaranth tend to do, and buried himself alive in his own plantation. The harvest the year after was unusually abundant.

Now, roughly once a decade, a member of the Teeth-Through-Silk family is ritually hurled into a great pit beside the massive tree at the centre of the house's rear garden. They always put on a big show, but people suspect that the last few times it's been some masked drow servant who's agreed to do it in exchange for a donation to their family.

- A wide circle, marked with irregularly shaped stones, where nothing grows. Even though it's on a busy intersection, no-one steps there (though local kids occasionally dare each other to run across it). Everyone's got a friend of a friend who knows someone that walked in and never walked out.
- A back-door shrine to the "fair folk" who people believe live in the quiet, unexamined places of the district: pallid, large-eyed things that crave tribute. In exchange for handmade trinkets (drawings, amateur poetry, locks of hair and straw woven into dolls) they'll keep your house safe from misfortune. Aetheric biologists reckon that if they do exist, the fair folk are a stable strain of gutter-kin. However, witness reports from trustworthy sources are few and far between.
- A gnoll herbologist carrying diplomatic papers from an up-Spire aelfir bankroller tours the district, surrounded by nervous-looking drow guards and shocked passers-by. She's looking for the Garden's cruellest and quickest poisons, to be extracted and cultivated for her master's private arboretum in Amaranth.
- Two sun-clerics – a tall, shirtless follower of Father Summer and a dour priest of Brother Harvest with the mien of an accountant – are leading the district in a festival that will identify this year's Harvest King. Upon being crowned, the King will have great political sway and receive no end of bounties laid at their feet; then they'll be ritually executed in the depths of winter to ensure a good year's growth.
- A retired Warrior-Poet tends to an artfully-sculpted garden. They trim hedges with a weighty single-edged sword, rake sparkling gravel into beautiful patterns and compose "poetry" through the spasms and twitches of vivisected birds splayed open on paper.

OUMA-KROYASHA

Once upon a time, deep in the Garden, there was a beautiful young drow with skin the colour of falling snow and hair of midnight black. They were in love with a girl from their village, but she was very ill and could not leave her house for fear of dying.

HUMAN-MADE WORK TOOLS

Thermal Lance (D6, Piercing, Dangerous)

- Pneumatic Hammer or Shears (D6, Brutal, Tiring)
- Explosive Charges (D6, Spread D6, Ranged, One-Shot)
- "Chained-saw" (D8, Dangerous)
- All of the above tools (aside from the explosive charges) require connection to a power source of some kind – most commonly a pressurised steam-pipe, though some use galvanic sources of power strapped to the user. However they are powered, they are awkward to use in combat and the difficulty of all attack rolls with them is increased by 1.

Emboldened by their love, the drow set off into the dark parts of the Garden to find a special herb that would cure the girl's sickness. They travelled for days through flooded caverns where leeches hid and bit, overgrown fields of thorns that hungered for blood and fallen-in passages barely wider than their body.

They emerged, battered and bloody, starving and desperate, into a grove where their lantern faltered and failed. Stumbling blind through the darkness, they called out for help – and Ouma-Kroyasha heard their call.

Ouma-Kroyasha – the Old Witch of the Forest, Grandmother Thorn, Bonefinger – was waiting for them in the dark. She lit a candle so the drow could see her. She was tall, taller than anyone the drow had ever seen, bent double to bring them eye-to-eye. Her joints and fingers were sharp as knives. At least a dozen owls swarmed over her, picking the fleas from her shaggy grey hair, screeching at the darkness, depositing half-dead mice into her pockets for her to eat later.

The drow was scared – they had been warned of Ouma-Kroyasha by their mother – but knew they needed help. "My lantern has failed, Ouma-Kroyasha," they said, "and I cannot find my way. I am looking for a special herb that will cure my love of her sickness."

Ouma-Kroyasha took pity on the young drow and gave them a magical candle. Its flame would never go out, no matter if it was submerged in water, smothered with a blanket or buried in soil. The drow thanked her, grasped the candle in both hands and left.

For days more they journeyed until they came to the sacred grove where the herb grew. Though they were hungry and tired, they grabbed handfuls of leaves and stuffed them into their satchel. They then began the long trek back to their village.

When they arrived, the girl was almost dead – but the village elders brewed the herb into a special tea and gave it to her. As if by magic, she returned to health. The people sang and danced in joy, and the drow and the girl were to be wed on the night of the first red moon of harvest.

The wedding hall was a sight to behold – great bushels of fruit lined the tables and huge pots of curry goat spread the smell of sweet spices through the district. Under an arch of woven wheat and crimson grass, the two made their vows to one another. As is tradition, they swore their love over something important to them. The drow, so thankful that their love was alive, swore over the still-burning candle given to them by Ouma-Kroyasha that lit their path through the darkness when all else had failed.

But the candle flame leapt up, and the wheat and crimson grass caught fire. The people of the village came and threw damp earth over it to no avail; then water, which only hissed and filled the hall with steam. Try as they might, nothing could put out the fire.

The village burned, and the girl – seeing one last chance of saving everyone – grabbed the candle from the inferno at the centre. With burning hands and popping skin, she ran down into the district, into the forgotten places, into the caverns of leeches and crushing passages. When the fire burned out, she was nowhere to be seen.

The drow looked for her for months, running themselves ragged, until one day they emerged from the darkness and saw her in Ouma-Kroyasha's grove, still burning and writhing in pain. Milky-eyed owls danced and capered around her, and the witch herself sat warming her taloned hands by the blaze.

Driven mad with hunger and grief, they lunged into the flames to hold their beloved. As their skin crackled and fizzed with the heat, Ouma-Kroyasha laughed and rubbed her belly in anticipation of her meal.

POTENTIAL ALLIES IN THE GARDEN DISTRICT

Heather, a rural blood-witch. She learned about the legend of Ouma-Kroyasha as a child and decided that the nightmare woman was worth emulating – and perhaps *becoming*. She's Spire's foremost

expert on Ouma-Kroyasha, but she never lets anyone know the location of her lair. Instead, she is summoned with blood and owl-bezoars. Those who call on her find that her help is sometimes as useful – and as cursed – as that of the old witch herself.

Mimette, an ex-cleric of Our Hidden Mistress, who emerged a few years ago from one of the most isolated Lost Acres in the Garden. Her community didn't know that the aelfir had taken Spire, and were openly worshipping Lombre without fear. Adjustment to the modern world has been shocking to say the least; she remains strange and old-fashioned, but her zeal in her worship of the Mistress is unmatched.

Lukas, a local-hero farmboy who fought as an enlisted soldier and then protected his community from gangsters looking to pressure them into tribute. He's had several spireblack novellas written about him and can't walk down the street without someone asking to shake his hand. He's also hopelessly hooked on ivory, a rare and valuable drug from the north that you, ministers, happen to provide to him.

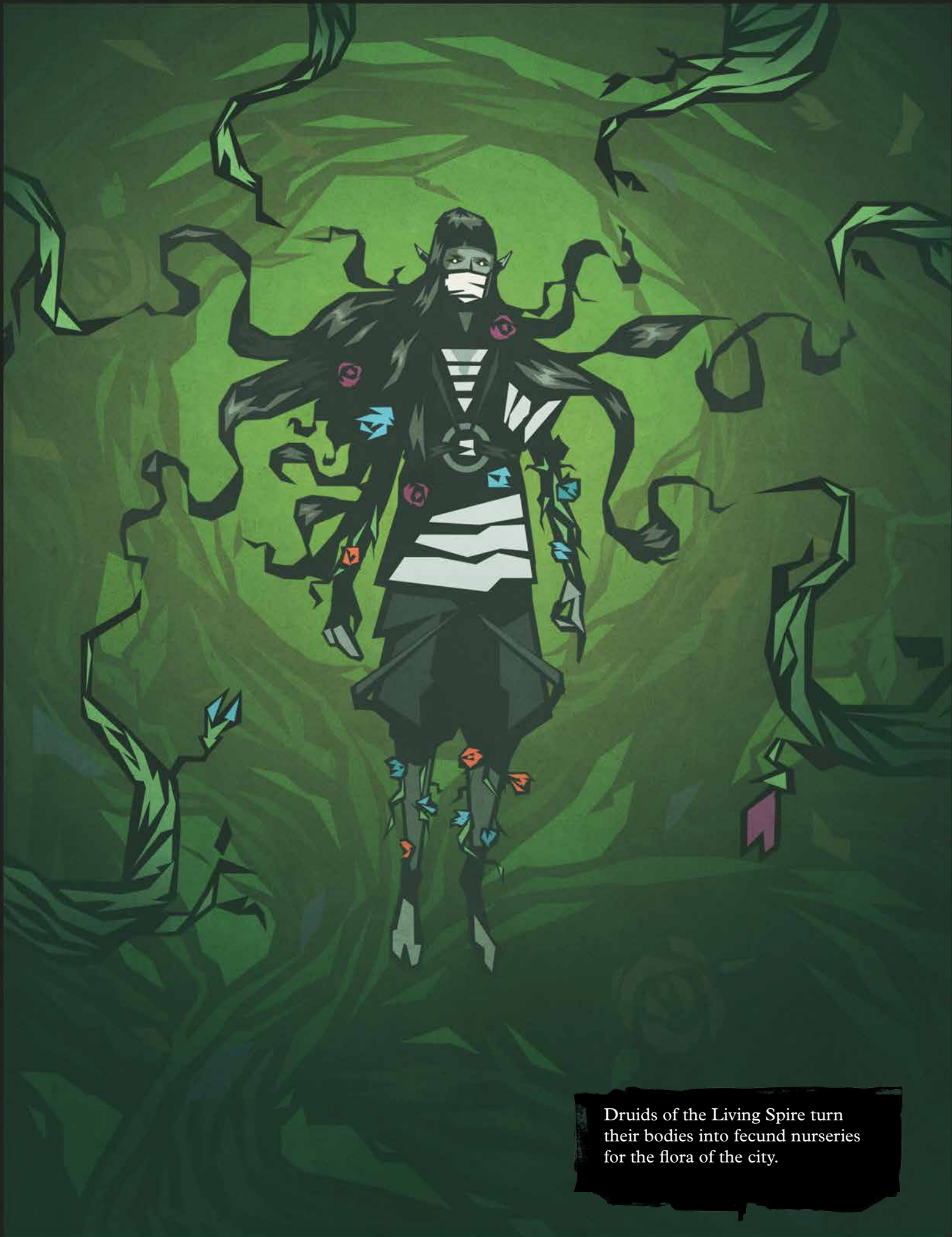
Gray Darling, an obsessive fungalist and expert on poisonous plants, cultivates and sells the eponymous Gray Darling mushroom from their patch deep in the Garden. It's unclear whether Gray Darling the mushroom or Gray Darling the dark elf came first, but at this point it's unimportant. Surprisingly wealthy customers make the long walk down winding, thorn-choked paths to track them down and get hold of their delicious, one-of-a-kind fungus.

Pesh, a crustacean farmer, who runs a highly profitable sideline in arms dealing. Military-grade guns stolen from (or illegally produced in) the Works are hidden in waterproof sacks beneath the murky surface of his farming pools to be sold once the trail on them has gone cold. He doesn't mind selling one or two to interested parties if the price is right.

EXTRA ADVANCE: DRUID OF THE LIVING SPIRE

REQUIREMENT: Endure the gruelling rituals of self-oblation and narcotic overload that allow you to commune with Spire Herself and witness her dreams.

REFRESH: Sacrifice something important to the bone-rock of Spire. Commune with Her, learn Her dreams and carry out your small part in them.



Druids of the Living Spire turn their bodies into fecund nurseries for the flora of the city.

LOW

BODY OF EARTH. [Divine] *Your flesh is filled with spiderweb rootwork that regrows tears at an alarming rate.* Once per session, when you take a few minutes to commune with Spire, clear D8 Blood stress.

BODY OF THORNS. [Divine] *At your command, glossy black thorns emerge from your forearms and hands.* Mark 1 stress to Blood to cast this spell. Until the end of the situation, your unarmed attacks have the following profile: (D3, Poison).

BODY AGARIC. [Divine] *Spire has blessed you with ivory-and-crimson fungal growths.* You grow magic mushrooms out of your body. When taken, they instil mild euphoria and hallucinations in the subject, allowing anyone trying to convince them of something to roll with mastery. They work on you too, but you have to eat them first.

MEDIUM

BODY OF ROSES. [Divine] *Elegant roses sprout from your skin and you are loved by the people of Spire.* Once per situation, when you take stress, you may nominate an NPC bond to take the fall instead of you. This must be possible within the fiction: an NPC standing beside you can leap into the path of a bullet, but they can't help you with Blood stress if they're on the other side of the city. The stress is applied to the bond instead of your resistances, and the GM immediately rolls for fallout.

PERCH

Perch should have fallen down decades ago.

A shanty town nailed and tied onto the side of the city, Perch has long been a haven for the poor, destitute and lawless of mid-Spire. Here, the streets are shifting things of rope and corrugated metal and the buildings are lean-tos upon lean-tos. Anyone with an ounce of sense would do well not to set foot there.

People from Perch are certainly *strange*; living a life where your house can plummet off the side of Spire almost without warning has left them unusual to say the least. They pray to the tiny, parasite godlings that live in their ropes and knives, their clothes and

WHAT KIND OF STRESS CAN BONDS TAKE?

It might require a bit of creative interpretation to figure out how a bond can take certain kinds of stress. With Reputation and Shadow, they can vouch for you if they've got the time and opportunity. With Blood, they can physically take the blow instead of you (but unless they're following you around, they probably won't have time). Silver is simply a matter of lending you money, but Mind is a trickier one to shift. Unless you can come up with a reason for it – maybe you go home and take it out on them – you'll have to keep Mind stress to yourself.

BODY OF ROOTS. [Divine] *You plunge your roots into the bone-rock beneath you, cracking it asunder in search of succour. You will draw attention to yourself, but desperate times call for desperate measures.* Once per session, remove a Blood fallout result but take D6 stress to Shadow.

HIGH

BODY OF HEARTSBLOOM. [Divine] *Your skin sprouts the glowing, tulip-like flowers of heartsbloom – the greatest gift that Spire Herself can bestow.* Gain mastery of the Occult domain, +2 Mind and +2 Reputation. Creatures of the Heart will no longer attack you. After continued exposure, they will regard you as a trusted friend.

bottles, in the rotgut booze they drink and the stubby black cigarettes they smoke.

As Perch was built on the city, each part resting upon the other, so too the gods were born. Now, fifty years after the first inhabitant set up shop on an exposed gutter, Perch is kept upright by the combined efforts of thousands of small gods and desperate inhabitants, all climbing upon each other to avoid the bottom rung of the shifting warren.



The aelfir believe that the secret hand of the gods is seen in the guts of flying creatures.

THE SMALL GODS

Gods flock to Perch like pigeons. Though the churches of the Solar Pantheon and Our Glorious Lady hold sway in many other districts, the ramshackle nature of Perch has removed the ability of its inhabitants to build permanent religious structures. Instead, they take whatever gods they can find, just as those gods take whoever worships them.

Gods in Perch are physical things: there are no ephemeral and pervasive beings, omnipresence or omnipotence. A drow's rope both has a god inside it and is that god. As a show of faith and reverence, folk honour their gods by decorating their forms. The district is full of metalworkers, glass-blowers, scrimshawers, scribes, carvers, varnishers, jewellers and other experts who inscribe beautiful works of art onto the gods themselves.

Gods aren't attracted to natural objects, it seems (at least not in Perch). The more worked and decorated an item is, the more powerful a god it can contain – the mark of a true Perch artisan is to strike a balance between ornamentation and usefulness. After all, the most beautiful rope in all of Spire is no good if it can't hold your weight.

There are aelfir artisans, many of them exiled and unmasked, who work in Perch and make absurdly detailed items that *shouldn't* function: glass bottles with spiralled holes in the exterior that still hold liquid, armour of spun silk that protects as well as leather and so on. They claim their work attracts a better class of god, so everyone else in Perch hates them.

GOD-BINDING

The Bound are an order of vigilantes who protect the people of the district from harm as best they can. The following are things that every member of the Bound must do before they are accepted into the group.

First: learn to sense the presence of small gods. Anyone can feel the pale majesty of Our Glorious Lady in her temple or taste the acrid, heavy shadows around shrines to Our Hidden Mistress; a Bound must attune themselves to the tiny fluctuations created by the least of gods. These are spirits more than deities; little knots of desire and fear and pride that blossom wherever drow, humans or aelfir live. Some radical Bound theologians view small gods as a sort of vermin, like rats, which flourish in civilisation. A Bound will typically spend hours hanging from sacred ropes in a meditative state, attuning themselves to the flow of energy around them and smelling the echoes of gods on the wind.

Second: find a god to imprison. Too weak a god and the imprisonment will have no effect on your blade; too strong and you risk losing your will and letting it determine your actions (or perhaps it will shatter its prison and flee at the earliest opportunity, leaving you with white-hot shards of metal burning through what's left of your arm). There are tales of Bound using all sorts of things to power their blades – not just small gods, but ghosts, angels, demonic powers or memetic aelfir songs caught in everfrost. Power, not divinity, seems to be what's important.

Third: build a prison for the god. The prison will be a blade of the best manufacture that the Bound can afford; they differ in size, depending on the user's preferences. Bound who operate within Perch make use of large machetes or axes with serrated sections to chop and saw ropes, not fearing discovery from the authorities; those who work in the city often use short-bladed cleavers, which are easier to conceal. Some rely entirely on the magic of the god itself and not the physical appearance of the blade: there are Bound with hummingbird gods trapped in razors, thrumming and buzzing with barely contained power.

The life of a Bound is not a long one, so there are very few elders available to pass on the secrets of god-binding to young acolytes. Instead, each recruit learns what they can from observing their superiors' blades, reads what little documentation is available on the subject (if they can read) and then takes their best shot at it. This method creates haphazard objects that combine occult, religious and mundane iconography in an attempt to hit their metaphysical mark with the weight of fire, if not accuracy. Tying on other religious artefacts is commonplace (to make the god "feel at home"), as is scrawling or carving whatever pentagrams and sigils they can remember or imagine onto the weapon. Images of locks, bars, doors, walls and prisons are popular.

Fourth and finally: get the god inside the blade. This is generally considered to be the hardest part of the process, and it neatly demonstrates whether the earlier sections were handled well. Some Bound trick their god inside with a series of promises (gods, especially small ones, are surprisingly easy to fool). Others threaten them with destruction, or the destruction of that which they adore, to coerce them into entering. A special few take huge amounts of hallucinogenic drugs and embark on a spiritual journey that ends in a semi-allegorical, semi-metaphysical bare-knuckle boxing match against an avatar of their chosen god. This, of course, happens entirely in their heads while they sweat and writhe around in their rickety quarters.



Perch is a wretched and unstable place, but it's home to thousands of drow.

At the end of the process (if it's successful – very few Bound do it right first time) the god will be imprisoned in the blade and generally pretty furious about it. Once it's in there, it's up to the Bound to continue to threaten and bargain with it to unlock more and more of its power – without it growing too powerful and taking control.

THE FIRES

The boundaries of Perch – if Perch can be said to have boundaries – are loosely marked with five great bonfires. Each one is contained within bronze and iron bowls that are easily a drow's height in diameter.

Every day, piles of precious wood are piled onto the fires and burned to release smoke over the district. They're often mixed with sacred incense, so the

place reeks of resin and musk. These clouds of smoke are an effort to conceal the drow from the sun's rays: as the light burns their skin and blinds their eyes, they would otherwise have problems surviving in such an exposed location.

The decision to build a new fire is not taken lightly. As with most things in Perch, the fires are inhabited by gods – or at least, the citizens of Perch believe they are, which is functionally the same thing in Spire – and each has its own history and name. They are: Fenwa, a drow godling of eclipses who claims she was exiled from the Damnou; The Seraph, who fell from heaven and burns eternal atop Spire; Knock, a small god of industry and fire stolen from the Works; Smoulder, whose hunger cannot be sated and who demands increasingly curious sacrifices; and Sondou, a broken mother-godling, who only wants

A SELECTION OF GODS AND THE BLADES WHICH HOUSE THEM

Hysten-Phy, a god of candle-wax once trapped in a book from old Yssen, a molten and fierce little thing that fights like a trapped rat and speaks with a bubbling whisper. The owner of its prison-blade makes sure to anoint the steel with wax to placate it. When she fights, the blade heats up and the wax runs down over the skin of her hand.

A shard of Jubilant, an angel of the old aelfir gods, which functions just as well as a small deity for the purposes of empowering a blade. Jubilant makes the axe in which its shard is bound ring out like a great bell when it takes a life. This can cause problems if the owner is trying to avoid drawing attention.

The Eight Unending is the last remnant of a colony of spiders that developed the capacity to worship several centuries ago. It is a kind and loving god, wishing only to bless spiders in exchange for their piety – but since no living spiders are intelligent enough to do so, it spends a maudlin existence trapped in the saw-toothed knife of a Bound.

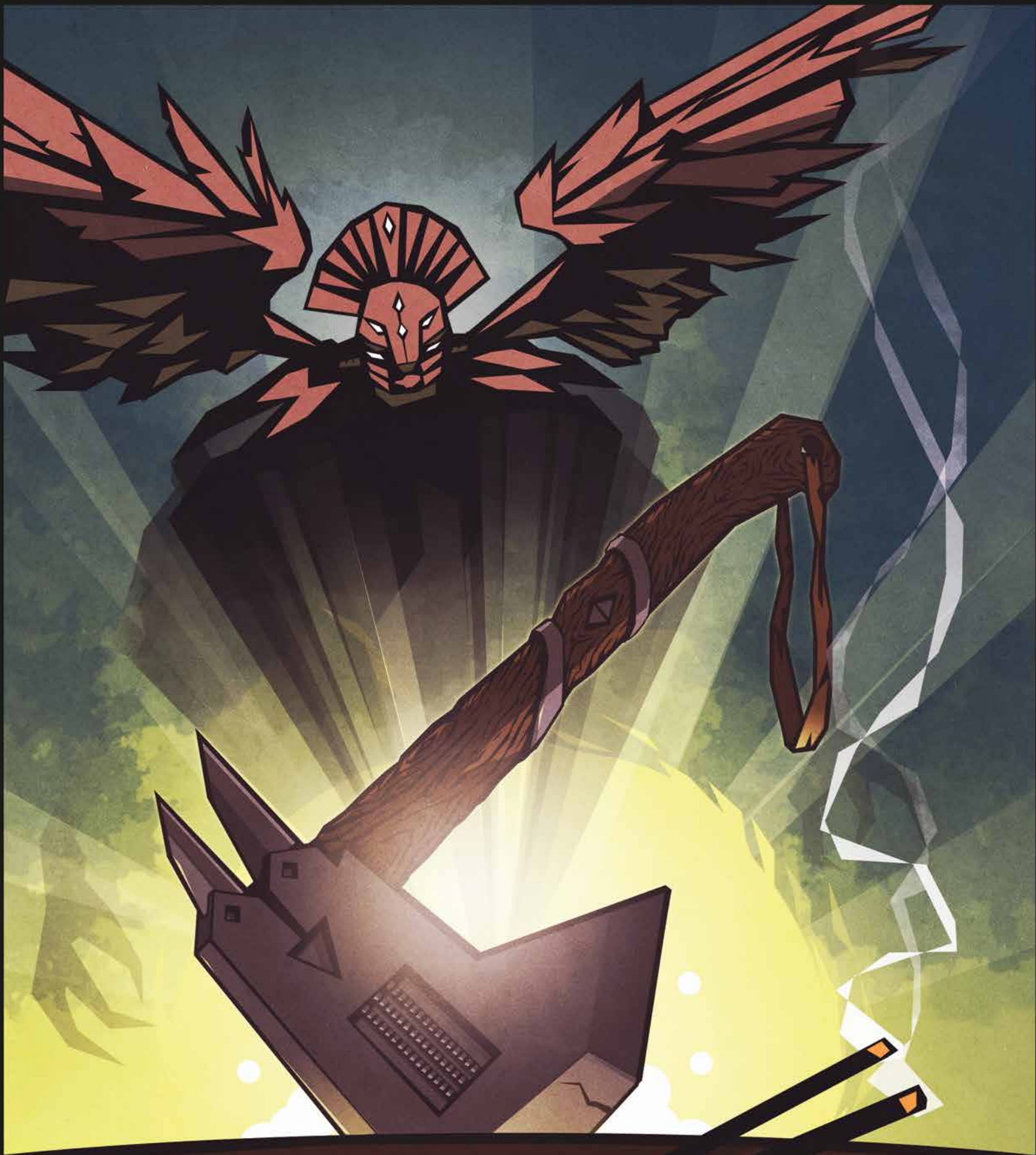
A fragment of the Machine Heart, a god that humans are building in the depths of the Works, is fashioned into the hilt of a Bound's axe. Stolen from its temple, it longs to return to its original form and etches pleas for help into its blade.

A god of nails, whose avatar (also a nail) was stolen from beneath the support struts of Perch. The Bound who took it was never much of a theologian, so doesn't realise quite how important the thing is to the group of people who keep Perch "standing". Many of them are still looking for it.

A buzzing, thumb-sized, warm brass cylinder containing a djinn, restrained under vast pressure by gnollish techno-sorcery. It was acquired from Nujab by a soldier before it was stolen by the Bound. The current owner doesn't know what its original purpose was, but they attached it to a serrated blade and now it can cut through pretty much anything, given enough time.

Ventrix, a small god of glass, who came into being following the completion of a Silver Quarter glass-smith's magnum opus. The smith died soon after finishing it, so the god possessed his body for a while to make more stained glass windows. Unfortunately, it started to smell, and the Bound tracked it down and sucked out the god's essence into this iridescent axe.

A blade containing the core of the Masterless Mask. Brought low by their oppressors, they are recuperating, biding their time before they break out of the blade and into some poor sod's mask to rise again and attempt to overthrow the aelfir.



Jubilant, an angel of the old aelfir gods, is lured into the axe that will be its prison

to hold the drow in her smoky embrace (even if it chokes them).

On occasion, items are sacrificed into the fires to ensure a good burn – especially on sunny days. The fires are also used to destroy items whose owners have died and which would react badly to a new one. A sect of fire-keepers protect the blazes and keep them burning; indeed, the fires have never been completely extinguished since they were built. The fire-keepers (and a large number of Perch inhabitants) believe that if all the fires were to be extinguished, the district would fall off the side of Spire and kill everyone inside.

According to their religious texts (which are many and varied) Perch will also fall if: the ravens leave the Sky Docks; a full nine-part chorus of skywhales sing in the dawning of the Red Moon during the summer solstice; an aelfir child is born of a drow mother; the knights of the North Dock unite once more; or the Garden district extends past the street of Seven Bells.

Unbeknownst to most in Perch, there is a cabal of highly skilled and resourceful Bound who have devoted their lives to making sure that these prophecies never come to pass, using timely assassinations, blackmail, industrial sabotage and intimidation. While it seems absurd, they'd argue that Perch hasn't fallen yet, so they must be doing something right.

WEIRDNESSES IN PERCH

- A group of trainee Bound carrying clubs and knives leap and swing through the shanty town: they have all worked together to track down a pigeon-god of prey and survival. Now they're racing one another to be the first to catch it and – maybe – bind it into their blade.
- An unmasked aelfir operates a lift (a rarity in Perch) that shuttles goods and people up and down the district. They live on the lift with their husband, a human; together, they maintain and upgrade the machinery and counterweights. Such a relationship would not be permitted in Amaranth: aelfir often take humans and drow as lovers, but are forbidden from marrying them.
- As a low-flying skywhale approaches, the people of Perch drop what they're doing. They grab sharp sticks from their lodgings and workplaces and position themselves to poke at the beast as it approaches, hoping to dissuade it from scraping half the district off the wall. The skywhale pilots don't want to risk their steed's gas-bladders getting punctured, so they'll often mount guns to open fire on defenders or build reinforced struts around

the beasts to keep their flesh a safe distance away from the structures they're destroying.

- An aging Perch midwife, unable to maintain a stable hatchery, carries the eggs she guards on her back in a tall, overloaded pack. She's bent double under its weight, even with her extra arachnid legs to bear the load. She doesn't care much for the Bound's practice of imprisoning gods in their blades, but she's happy for the protection they offer.
- A teacher, suspended from an overhanging strut, scratches words on the wall of Spire in chalk while a gaggle of youngsters pick their noses and repeat what she's written aloud.
- Two gangs war over a patch of wall, painting their thoughts onto it as graffiti. One group seem convinced that the Masterless Mask is going to return and save them, while the other is dead-set against the idea, viewing it as aelfir propaganda meant to keep the drow in line. Rather than erase each other's messages, they've left them up and issued rebuttals, painting bigger and bigger words in an effort to win the argument. As the sentences have begun to spread over nearby dwellings, it looks like it isn't going to stop any time soon unless the other inhabitants do something about it.
- A Perch elder scolds a group of youngsters after he discovers they've stolen a skywhale calf from its mother in the Sky Docks and are secretly raising it as a pet. Not only will it be too expensive to feed and soon grow larger than the building it's housed in, but the keening wails hissing out of its gas bladders will attract the angry mother before long.

POTENTIAL ALLIES IN PERCH

Hatch, a human experimental theologian, who is trying to blend small gods into something bigger (with limited success). He's very good at analysing the origins of any given cult or splinter group you can bring him information on. However, he charges for his knowledge in the form of god-harboured items stolen from Perch inhabitants, so he's trying to keep his research quiet for the time being.

Sebastienne Louvierre, who handles internal affairs within the Ministry in Perch. Her duration as an agent to a cruel aelfir master hardened her to the realities of revolution, and she is now in charge of hunting down and executing rogue ministers. This makes her about as popular as you'd expect. She's courting a half-mad blood-witch, Alzophine, but other friends are few and far between. A kind

word or two would go a long way – but make sure you’ve got nothing to hide.

Quill, a drow member of the Bound who harbours weirdly pro-Aelfir views. He views their occupation as a blessing from Father Summer (he wears a shrine to said god on his back) and enforces what he believes to be their will with brutal efficiency. There’s no way he’d knowingly work for the Ministry, but he’s a useful tool to unleash on someone you don’t like.

Whisper-the-Storm, an unmasked (exiled) aelfir who lives among the drow of Perch as an equal – or is trying to. In practice, she’s shunned and hated by most of the folk who live here, though her ability to walk unprotected in the sun has come

in handy more than once. She makes her living by crafting wooden training weapons that are used extensively by the Bound. As such, she’s ensured a small measure of protection against any anti-aelfir mobs that might come knocking on her door.

The Unhindered, a masked elf who goes by no other name and appears as masculine or feminine as they wish. They speak as if they are repeating lines from off-stage, and with good reason: the Unhindered is actually a particularly tenacious small god that’s taken up residence in a mask, controlling their current host. Their capacity to blend in anywhere and turn up in places they shouldn’t be is legendary. They seem to be working with the Ministry out of curiosity rather than zeal.

DERELICTUS

Derelictus is a horrible place to die.

It is a dark, wet, forgotten district, where those abandoned by the city come to eke out a meagre existence from what scraps they can find. Life is hard down here and death comes easy, whether from something as mundane as starvation or as fantastical as being abducted and sacrificed by one of the dozens of outlawed cults that make their home in the ruins. But people live here, all the same – drow and the occasional human, all unwilling to let death take them. Workshops and markets dot the darkness, selling cheap food and sputtering, smoking candles. It is said that the Ministry itself, for all their airs and graces, was formed here on one desperate, sweltering night.

People cling to the quiet in the deep streets and bargain with the packs of cannibals that lope across rooftops in search of prey, they scratch wards into their doorways to keep the things from the Heart at bay, and pay protection money to bottom-rung gangsters in an attempt to keep afloat.

Above Derelictus is Red Row. To many, the only way out of their situation is to join one of the criminal gangs who run the district and get a place near Threadneedle Square or within earshot of L’Enfer Noir. Most young drow who ascend to act as muscle wind up dead within a handful of moons – but it’s better than the Heart which festers and swells beneath the district, knotting and unbinding reality into maddening, incomprehensible forms.

The deeper one goes into Derelictus, the less space and time have any say in what goes on; eventually, the streets descend into red, pulsing unreality.

DAY AND NIGHT

There’s no sunrise or sunset in Derelictus, being far below the surface of Spire. Red Row is also in the dark, for sure – but the district keeps roughly to the same time as the rest of the city because of the traffic and trade with the North Docks and the Blue Market. No-one comes to Derelictus unless they really need to.

Down here, some people have never seen day or night: just a perpetual gloom punctuated by flickering magelights and rare lanterns, or the suffocating utter darkness that holds terrors that are all too real. There are children in Derelictus who think that the sky is a myth; for them, it might as well be.

The drow make their own time. They sleep when there’s nothing to do – often for twenty hours or more – and move slowly, living life as a continuous strand of being rather than something delineated by dawn and dusk or the changing of the seasons. People who come down from up-Spire are seen as fidgety and strange, living at an accelerated pace, talking far too loudly and throwing light around as though it doesn’t attract predators.

So, outside of the rare taverns that keep a clock and calendar for the benefit of travellers, there’s no “tomorrow” in Derelictus. Instead, there’s “soon” (which is a pretty flexible concept) and “later” (which is even more flexible). “When Limye wills it” is code for “never,” which a lot of outsiders fail to understand.

The only reliable punctuation of time comes from the yearly delve into the district by the City Guard

and census-takers, looking for young drow to conscript into durances. During this period most residents disappear further into the dark, hide their children and try to avoid notice.

ROADS AND PATHS

Travel is hard in Derelictus. Up-Spire, there are functional lifts and megacorvids for those that can afford to use them. If you can't, there are stairs, streets that are occasionally repaired, and even a Guild of Laddersmen who oversee the proper operation and leasing of ladders.

Down-Spire, things are more difficult. No-one owns the roads, so no-one maintains them; rockfalls that close off entire towns are commonplace. For an outsider, there's little hope of successfully navigating without a guide, and the majority of those are willing to divert unprotected wealthy travellers into the waiting arms (and knives) of their associates.

Some of these guides make it out of Derelictus after a few successful robberies and set up businesses selling access to alternative routes up and down the city, hammering in pitons or rigging up block and tackles to ferry goods and people back and forth. Unsanctioned by any official body, these wayfinders specialise in cheap, quick, shoddy work; they are frequently run out of settlements for threatening the livelihoods of good, hard-working stair magistrates.

With collapses so frequent and no prospect of rescue following a cave-in, the paths through Derelictus have picked up a folklore all their own. It's bad luck to climb a staircase right after you've come down it (try not to forget anything upstairs); the bridge between Hawkins Place and St Ambra's Street should never be used, so people will take long-winded routes across rickety ropeways to avoid setting foot on it; and don't use the low road to Fetch without a drink in your hand, else malevolent spectres will arrive and whisk you away to drink with them forever.

Most of these superstitions are entirely baseless, but not all of them.

URBAN LEGENDS

Reality comes unpinned this close to the Heart – and Spire isn't on great terms with "reality" to start with, what with cabals of occultists warping space and time, priests summoning miracles through faith and madness and the occasional small-scale demonic incursion. Stories have a way of accruing weight and solidity through telling and re-telling. What starts as a harmless fireside tale to frighten the

other children can get out of hand and coalesce into something real.

There's tell of an uncommonly beautiful drow girl in Grist who can bear live young – she doesn't lay eggs, and instead walks around with her belly swollen like a human. Another version of the tale insists that she hides, because of course she wouldn't want to be found out – there's something disgusting about carrying your young around inside your body, having it deform and engorge until it's *ready*.

Other rumours say that humans can breed with drow, leading to half-kin children that look like dark elves (though maybe their ears are a little stubbier or their hair a little straighter) but can walk in the sunlight, just like people from the East can. Another is that aelfir are just the larval stage for something else – a huge and spidery race of long-limbed monsters that they become on their ninety-ninth birthday after creating a cocoon out of drow flesh, deep beneath the earth.

Everyone knows about the undying witch in the basement of one of the big houses on Fathom St. She takes drow and stitches their parts into her to replace her own faltering meat; she's got one leg longer than the other and her eyes are different colours. If you ever see someone who might be her, you get out of there as soon as possible. Less famous, but still terrifying, is the great lizard that crawls through the ancient sewers and snatches people through drain covers and access ports, leading to no end of protective charms scratched into the bricks around entrances to the stinking tunnels.

Why are there sewers in Derelictus? Even some civilised parts of the city don't have them – but Derelictus is older than anyone can really say. The ruins of the cities built within Spire for centuries (possibly millennia) are dragged down towards the Heart to be forgotten, stacked atop each other in a knotted labyrinthine structure. The sewers were built a long, long time ago; maybe before the Desteran nation took Spire, maybe before the drow even existed. There are great and hidden histories under the city that no-one will ever comprehend, even without the Heart shuffling space and time like a deck of cards.

THE GOLDEN ONES

Aelfir don't often come this far down into the city; for some Derelictus inhabitants, they are a myth. Known as the Golden Ones (or Gold-Folk), they are the subject of many cautionary tales of beautiful travellers that appear in town, charm the common folk and leave chaos and despair in their wake.



The Golden Ones visit Derelictus to kidnap children and take them away for lives of cruel luxury.

TALL TALES

Derelictus is rife with superstitions – generally warnings dressed up with a story attached, told around sputtering campfires or in cramped bedrooms. Whether they're true or not is largely immaterial. Most have a grain of truth at the centre, but have changed over time and retelling; those that are complete fabrications are still believed with enough force that they might as well be scientific fact. Here are a selection of popular half-truths you'll hear on most streets in the district:

- This house is haunted by the ghost of Mrs Daring-the-Sun, an aelfir woman who married a drow and fell from grace as a result. She then went mad and murdered her husband and children in a bloody massacre. On new moons you can hear her cries for forgiveness, begging to be allowed to enter aelfir society again.
- Skin-Peter, a young drow who was flayed alive by an angry master after he slept with his wife. He wanders this place still, leaving a gory red trail behind him as he drags his discarded skin across the ground.
- Little Sally Vickers, a malformed and disfigured girl who was abused by her family and fled to the Heart to become a blood-witch. She returned to haunt her community as a blood disease. Anyone who catches it starts to act more and more childlike, their body shifts to imitate Sally's, and eventually they walk off to the Heart themselves – never to be seen again.
- The Ice Killer was once an aelfir who froze himself solid using ancient magic and repurposed industrial machinery. Sometimes the machinery breaks down, thawing him out a little, and his horrible hunger awakens. He stalks the streets of Derelictus, ice crystals forming on the ground as he walks, and impales innocent victims with knives made from everfrost.
- The long-flooded Fathom Station has raven-haired, web-footed creatures with beautiful, pallid faces and singing voices like vibrating train tracks. If you hear them, their songs lure you under the water and you become one of them.
- In the bad famine a few decades ago, the mothers of Thorn Street decided to drown their children in the well rather than have them starve to death. You can still hear them crying if you sit nearby and extinguish your lantern. Folk say that some of the babies survived, growing gills and wicked-sharp teeth.
- There's a black cat that comes around here sometimes; it has human eyes, or too many toes, or its tail splits into two at the end. Reports differ on the exact description, but it's a herald of disaster that's appeared before major disasters such as fires, street collapses or ghost plagues.
- Lizbet, a drow who helped her wealthy master bury his fortune in the wisp glades in case invading aelfir forces took it. He killed her on the spot so no-one else would know the location of the treasure. She still appears, holding her head in her hands, and can point brave travellers towards the riches.
- The Vermissian takes whole buildings and streets sometimes. It's hungry, so it plucks them down into the bowels of the city and turns them into trackways, trapping the poor unfortunates inside.
- The 33rd, a company of enlisted drow who were sent into the Heart by a mad aelfir general to "pacify" it. Not a single one returned alive. People say not to refuse hospitality to a strange drow in military uniform, else the Heart will rot your house to dust and moths in days.
- The Grey Watchers monitor the paths between settlements in Derelictus: short-statured figures in old-fashioned hats, always standing in the shadows. Acknowledging them is said to bring a curse on you.

Golden Ones can shapeshift at will, transforming their bodies into different colours of shifting silk and silver, or into flocks of birds, hyenas or foxes. Their clothes are made of stens hammered flat into a glittering mail, everything they touch turns into a magelight and their skin is bright and still-warm from the sun-soaked gardens where they spend their days. Their features are stiff and unchanging, but they can switch between different faces at will – one to smile, one to be sad, one to lie and so on.

The Golden Ones take children and don't bring them back. Some of them arrive with rifles and swords,

hunting people down after paying off the local elders, chasing them through the blood-slick streets to the sound of screeching preyhawks and the keening wail of hunting-horn. Some are kind: when they take children, they provide lives of luxury where the beds are soft, the tables groan with food and the lights never go out. Some arrive and descend even further into the twisted lands of the Heart in a search for knowledge that is forbidden and precious to their kind.

Each has a golden coin under their tongues. If you can take it, you'll never want for money again – but you won't take it, because nothing happens to

a Golden One without them wanting it to happen. They warp and twist the world around them to make it exactly how they wish it to be. If they ask you to do something, no matter how craven or depraved, you'll be compelled to do it.

If you see a Golden One coming, run before they speak to you. Plug your ears and pray you don't hear a word, or else it'll be too late.

CHILD GANGS

"Red Mary is coming," sing the children of Derelictus. Red Mary comes to eat bad children or gobble up drow-eggs by the dozen. Red Mary has hair like fire and teeth like knives. Red Mary will eat you too, unless you say the name of the Goddess – her full name, the secret one that grown-ups don't know. Only our gang knows it.

Kids – often without parents, or with parents too destitute to support them – form gangs for protection, camaraderie and social structure. The bigger and smarter kids lead the younger, smaller ones, carving out areas of control in the undercity. By the time they reach their late teens, they often migrate upwards to Red Row to work for some of the criminal empires that keep the place ticking over. If someone's seen to be too "grown up," the other kids will frequently rise up and kill them or drive them out. Smart drow leave before that happens.

Gangs will often congregate around and defend the hatchery where they were born and raised. Overwrought midwives (or near-midwives – spider-blooded drow who were kicked out of the order and are unable to practice midwifery up-Spire) depend on these protectors for support, access to resources and muscle.

The gangs are part protection racket and part mystery cult. As a child rises through the ranks, they'll be entrusted with more valuable work and compensated appropriately, but they'll also learn about the hidden lore of the true goddess.

The cult of the true goddess is a warped version of the worship of Our Glorious Lady. It paints Lekole – the Crimson Vigil – as a nightmarish, vicious demon hungry to eat careless or foolish children.

Each of the gangs has its own variety of worship: the Vents show praise to her by displaying or wearing as many bird carcasses as they can get; the Red-Boys scar themselves to attract the attention of Lekole (or Red Mary) to free them from fear or hunger and fill their bellies with power; the Flint St kids perform all their rites in sacred darkness after being founded by a long-dead minister posing as Lombre seven years ago.

All of them focus around a slow reveal of information: the true names of goddesses, the markings you

need to scratch into walls to summon the protection of a Hallow, the secret rites of sanctuary that ward the gang's sacred sites, catchecisms that will protect you from ghouls, the locations of doors to hell where the Golden Ones step through and so on.

For all their cargo-cult belief systems, filtered through misinterpretation and continued in a culture without access to the written word, some of these cults produce results. Kids can whisper their wounds shut, curse their rivals or find a pipe transporting drinkable water in an otherwise desolate area. And every child knows of someone – not someone they knew, but a friend of a friend or their cousin's older half-sister, that sort of thing – who ran away to the Moon Garden.

Hidden in the depths of the Heart is drow heaven (or a portal to it). They say that if you're good and clever and help other kids, the Goddess will arrive and take you away to the moon – the real moon, not the one in the sky, which few have ever seen anyway. There, everything is light and beautiful, and you never need to eat ever again.

EXTRA ADVANCE: EX-CHILD GANGER

REQUIREMENT: Serve as part of a child gang in Derelictus during your youth.

REFRESH: Help a child in need.

LOW

PRAYERS OF SELF-PRESERVATION. [Divine]

You have been taught the secret words that whisper wounds shut. Once per session, when you have a minute or so and no-one is watching you, remove D6 stress from Blood.

RED MARY'S CHOSEN. [Divine] *You bypass the need for food, replacing it with blood shed in the name of the goddess. +1 Reputation, +1 Blood.* When you take Blood fallout or spill the blood of someone else, you don't need to eat until you next wake up.

GOLDEN EYE. [Divine] *Some kids blind themselves in one eye to see what others can't, giving their sight to The Lady in exchange for something better.* If you come within a block of an aelfir or their agents, you'll be alerted to their presence and rough direction with a general feeling of unease. Your eye socket itches and you can hear their whispers before they have a chance to control your mind.

While attempting to flee or ambush them, roll with mastery.

Working with this ability in the Silver Quarter or Amaranth (or any district where aelfir are common) is very uncomfortable, increasing the difficulty of all tasks you attempt by 1.

HALLOW CALL. [Divine] *You scratch carefully-learned glyphs into the walls without understanding their true meaning and summon the protection of a drow saint.* Mark D3 stress to cast this spell as you perform a ten-minute ritual of praise to a particular Hallow. The next time you'd suffer stress of any kind, roll a D6; on a 5 or more, the stress is ignored and this spell ends. Otherwise, this spell stays in effect until the next time you sleep.

AS ABOVE, SO BELOW. [Divine] *You can dowse for things like fresh water, food, valuables, a safe way out – you just need something for the magic to recognise.* Mark 1 stress to cast this spell. When you spend ten minutes fashioning a simulacrum of something you're looking for, or you have a piece of it already, roll with mastery on Pursue or Investigate checks to track it down.

POTENTIAL ALLIES IN DERELICTUS

A child gang, the Grindles, aping House Gryndel. They climb and hunt and kill; each is covered in the trophies of people and creatures they've brought down. Five of them can gut an armoured soldier in seconds if they get the drop on them.

Hester, a vigilite preacher who runs a soup kitchen. Everything seems to be on the level, but it's not, is it? The fires under the stove never go out and her patrons never go hungry.

Isabel Fiona, a scholar of the occult and expert guide. She explored the inverse mirror world of the UnSpire through Vanishing Point (Spire, p137) and rescued herself from the parasite reality. At the same time, her copy (Fiona Isabel) plucked her from this world, and everyone met in the middle. Whatever happened and however many Fiona Isabels or Isabel Fionas there were, there's probably only one now – even if she has a habit of bumping into herself when walking into rooms while distracted.

Trieste, a human occultist working for the Divine University, who's been tasked with investigating the effect of the Heart on animals. At present, they've spent their research grant on their

CHILDREN'S GAMES IN DERELICTUS

- **Tumbledown.** One kid spins around really fast and the others have to push them back and forth to stay upright, echoing the idea that Spire is going to fall down some day.
- **Corpseworms!** When you play corpseworms, you lick your finger and stick it in someone's ear. If you get it in, they have to tell you a secret. If they tell you a false secret, it's really bad luck for them.
- **Crowfall.** You take turns climbing up a wall and jumping down, daring each other to jump from higher and higher handholds. You "win" when the other guy gives up. A lot of kids hurt themselves playing crowfall.
- **Red Mary.** Go to one of the old vents that used to ventilate the Vermissian, light three red candles around it and intone the true name of Red Mary three times. If smoke comes up, she's listening; speak the names of the people you want to curse and she'll come after them if they're deserving. (Some vents in Derelictus feed into Crimson Vigil sanctums, so on occasion a cult can receive useful information from an unwitting child's "spell" and act appropriately.)
- **King Teeth.** A convoluted team-based variant of tag where one child plays the titular ghoulish monarch and must be carried around by their team-mates (because King Teeth is too fat to move normally). Largely an excuse to make smaller children carry larger children around.
- **Eel fighting.** Capture one of the many breeds of vicious, carnivorous eel that scud through the filthy canals of Derelictus, then get a box and put it in there along with an enemy eel. First eel to eat the other one wins. Losing a finger to your eel is seen as a measure of bravery and an indication of the eel's fighting spirit, so some enterprising kids lop off a digit to up the intimidation factor. Refusing a challenge during an eel fighting tournament means paying a small fee to your challenger.
- **Lockout.** Many children throughout the world play a game where they knock on someone's door and run away laughing; in Derelictus, there is a second stage, where the occupant must be locked out of their own house while the kids get inside and steal what little valuables they have before making good their escape.



Red Mary listens to the prayers of
a desperate street child.

bodyweight in cheap malak and a back-room full of mangy cats and scabby pigeons. They need results fast and are trying to collect a team of people desperate enough to make an extended journey into the Heart.

Brynn Destera. Up-Spire he's a famous author, but he's living down here in secrecy where most of the populace can't read, let alone afford books. You find him in the Searchlight, deep in his cups, trying to avoid attention. His high society connections would be very useful if you could sober him up and convince him to travel back home.

Wretch, a feathered gutterkin (his mum might have been a flightless owl) who knows secret paths up to Red Row, the Blue Markets and beyond. He uses them primarily to sneak into physicians' offices and steal their supplies, making a quiet living selling painkillers, medicine, bandages and so on off to back-alley sawbones. Given that he has no permanent premises, you suspect he's stockpiling the stuff in stashes.

LOW SOCIETY WEAPONRY AND ARMOUR

Blunderbuss – A single-shot weapon that fires a tremendous gout of low-velocity shrapnel, gravel, glass and splinters – anything that the user can wedge into the barrel. Reloading is an arduous process, so most users try to inflict as much damage as they can with the initial burst and then switch to hand weapons – or hope that the noise, smoke and flying debris put off whoever they fired it at. Cheap to produce and maintain, the blunderbuss is one of the few firearms you'll find in Derelictus. (D3, Spread D3, Point-Blank, One-Shot)

Derelictus Harpoon – Badly-built and creaking under tension, these crossbow-harpoons are used by the bounty-hunters and bondsmen that chase debtors and criminals into the depths of the under-spire. The long metal bolts they fire are commonly tied to lengths of rope, allowing the user to control their target after a non-fatal shot. (D6, Ranged, One-Shot. If the harpoon hits, the target is pinned in place or attached to the launcher with a rope; they won't be able to move far without wrenching it out.)

Gutterkin shortbow – Fashioned from bits of old metal and string, these shortbows fire grimy, poorly-fledged arrows across an embarrassingly short distance. No warrior worth their salt would ever be seen dead carrying one of these, but it's better than nothing. (D3, Ranged, Unreliable)

Works Plate – Angular, soot-blackened and heavy, this full-body set of platemail is used by high-ranking enforcers who guard the arms workshops and factories of the industrial district. Designed to shrug off gunshots, wearers often decorate the

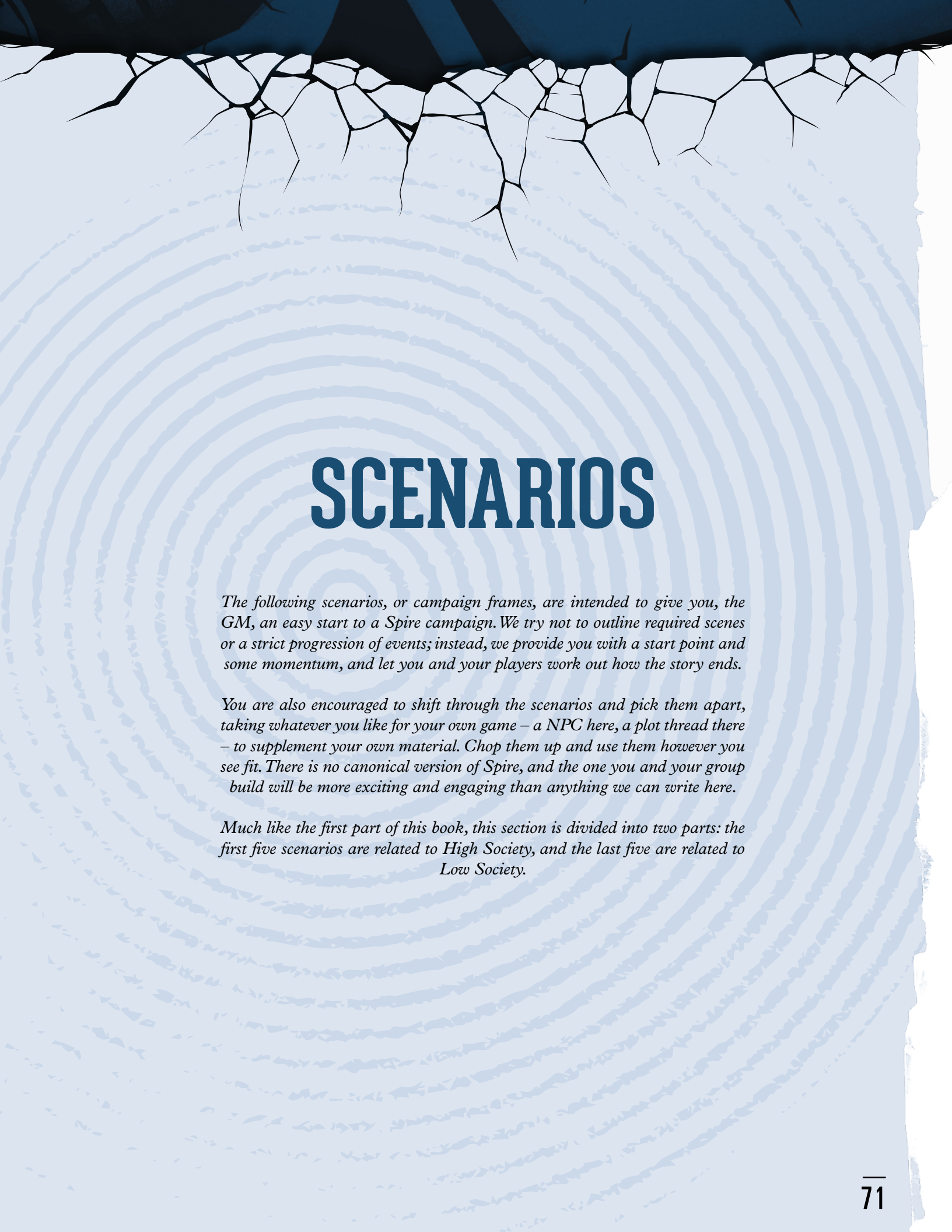
armour with skull helms or jagged horns to intimidate those they're guarding. The gangster-lords of Red Row – Mr Winters in particular – each own a few sets of such armour, and take great pride in using it to scare their enemies into submission. (Armour 3, Implacable, Heavy. The sheer weight and sharp edges of the armour mean it can be used as a D3, Brutal weapon.)

Pilgrim's Prayer – Popular amongst the church-run press-gang crews of Pilgrim's Row, these cheaply made pistols are turned out by the hundred in the workshops of the district. Built from the lowest-quality materials (usually a length of metal pipe and single load of spireblack powder and shot) the Pilgrim's Prayer is a desperate recruiter's last hope. Many a luckless zealot has been hounded into a sweatshop to turn out counterfeit saint bones at the point of one. There is no honour to be had from carrying a Prayer: it is a cruel device intended to hurt and kill. (D3, Point-Blank, Ranged, One-Shot, Dangerous)

Derelictus Sword – A club about the length of a drow forearm with nails, screws, glass and other sharp detritus bound with cloth or twine to the fist-sized lump on the business end. Folk in Derelictus are too poor to afford serious gear, so even the gangsters and bruisers amongst them will use homemade weaponry such as this. Up-Spire people refer to them mockingly as "Derelictus Swords," but they crack open heads well enough. Other versions include modified work-tools, reinforced and given spikes or cutting edges. (D3, Brutal. The two-handed version, a "Derelictus Greatsword," is D6, Tiring)

Perch Temple Blades – While the Bound capture and imprison small gods within their blades, not all inhabitants of Perch know the trick to doing so (or even agree that it's not morally abhorrent to imprison gods in the first place). The defenders of the Temple of Small Gods wield these polearms, the shafts of which are decorated in dozens, if not hundreds, of tiny objects and prayer-slips that contain fragments of small gods. The chorus of gods can be whispered to and beseeched for aid, and will guide the bearer's hand in battle. (D6, Tiring, Conduit. A few elite sharpshooters carry long-guns decorated in the same way, which have the following profile: D6, Reload, Ranged, Conduit)





SCENARIOS

The following scenarios, or campaign frames, are intended to give you, the GM, an easy start to a Spire campaign. We try not to outline required scenes or a strict progression of events; instead, we provide you with a start point and some momentum, and let you and your players work out how the story ends.

You are also encouraged to shift through the scenarios and pick them apart, taking whatever you like for your own game – a NPC here, a plot thread there – to supplement your own material. Chop them up and use them however you see fit. There is no canonical version of Spire, and the one you and your group build will be more exciting and engaging than anything we can write here.

Much like the first part of this book, this section is divided into two parts: the first five scenarios are related to High Society, and the last five are related to Low Society.



Anessa Sunrise-Bleeds-On-Snow
shows off one of her cheerier
creations.

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

By Christine Beard

Content warnings: Abuse (emotional, mental, physical), dehumanization, medical trauma, mutilation, slavery

INTRODUCTION

One of the aelfir, Anessa Sunrise-Bleeds-on-Snow, has taken it upon herself to “improve” the drow pledged to her family. Hers is a particularly popular house to serve, as few who complete their tenure are seen again – though their families receive letters, money and the occasional lavish gift.

While her aspirants do ascend, it’s hardly as they once were. Maimed, tortured and experimented on, her “dolls” accompany her in a silent crowd wherever she goes. They wear special masks: their own faces, permanently paralyzed in beatific smiles, are only contradicted by the fear, pain and defeat in their eyes.

Anessa is eager to capitalize on her rising popularity: she’s showing off her dolls more and more often, and experimenting with more varied and exaggerated expressions. She is particularly fond of beaming smiles, but her “collection” now runs the range of her pets’ emotions. Her dolls are en vogue at the moment, and she’s branded herself as an artist. Her first gallery showing is opening with a gala soon, featuring a number of her creations.

Lyrana Baez – a drow posing as an aelfir who is better known by her alias Kastrias Feather-Falls-With-Dawn – takes exceptional offense to these practices. She used her connections to recruit a cell to do something about it. Word eventually reached the Ministry, where you and yours received it.

You are to infiltrate the gala taking place in Anessa’s personal gardens, free the drow she has imprisoned and do what you see fit with the Doll-maker herself.

NON PLAYER CHARACTERS

Below are some of the key players that the cell is likely to encounter over the course of the adventure. While they’re currently divided into allies, rivals and antagonists, these are just suggestions or likely starting attitudes. Their motivations and opinions aren’t set in stone, and are likely to change as the players interact with them – for better or for worse.

ALLIES

The cell has a surprising number of potential allies: a mix of figures who know what the cell is up to and want to help, high-profile artists and auteurs eager to be the first to dismiss someone new as a poseur and assorted others who simply disapprove of the monstrous assertion that Anessa’s hobby is “art”.

The cutthroat nature of aelfir culture and their rigid adherence to etiquette even allows for other high elves to unwittingly aid the party, especially if they can be convinced that Anessa’s unconventional ideas are the ultimate faux pas. While the cell needs to maintain their covers, working to influence public opinion isn’t terribly difficult when the seeds are already sown.

LYRANA BAEZ/KASTRIAS FEATHER-FALLS-WITH-DAWN

Kastrias Feather-Falls-With-Dawn is a lie spun from a mask, a dare and a death wish. After finding the aftermath of a brutal altercation between a suspected ministry cell and a group of unwary aelfir, Lyrana and three of her friends (all down on their luck and looking to at least go out with a bang) made a deal. Each would take up a mask, create a new identity and

see how long the ruse would hold. Staggering their introductions to avoid too much suspicion, the game was on.

One by one, Lyrana watched as her friends were found out, then tortured or executed on the whims of the aelfir. She keeps her own secret closely guarded and rarely appears in public, surviving out of spite and to honour her fallen friends.

Amazed by every day that passes without incident, she couldn't back out now if she wanted to. She is entrenched in society as a mysterious influencer and rarely leaves her home, insisting instead that others come to her. She keeps her domicile dimly-lit and furnished in rich, dark colours with silver accents, which briefly inspired a clothing and decorating fad.

Having accumulated significant wealth along with her reputation, Lyrana sponsors drow who would otherwise be unable to survive down-Spire. While it might seem suspicious to other aelfir that she would want "broken" servants, she insists it gives her an opportunity to improve them, like all aelfir wish to do with everything they touch. Her improvements are functional, not aesthetic: she provides her servants with mobility aids, prosthetics if necessary or desired and other tools that give them easier lives.

Once a design is perfected, she often leaks it through her channels to allow its cheaper manufacture and sale to those she can't help directly, funding her network of patsies and spies with a portion of the profits.

Motivations

Aside from the obvious objection to the torment of drow for someone else's enjoyment, Lyrana blames herself for the rise of Anessa's popularity. She feels her "modifying" her servants inspired the torture Anessa passes off as art.

While it's impossible to put the lid back on that particular can of worms, she considers it within her rights as Kastrias to declare a monopoly on the concept. Taking Anessa's cosmetic adjustments as a veiled insult to her more practical prosthetics, she refuses to let the matter go without retaliating. She plans to sabotage Anessa's endeavours as much as she can while still acting as a convincing aelfir.

Leverage

Obviously, Lyrana can't let her true identity slip. If Kastrias is revealed to have been a drow all along, her entire life will crumble and she's unlikely to escape unscathed. Not as jaded about her own life as she once was, she's seen more than once what happens when these discoveries are made. She will fight tooth and claw to preserve her lifestyle.

Though Kastrias is a rumored drow sympathizer, one of Lyrana's most carefully guarded secrets is her closest companion. A childhood friend, they were blinded as an adolescent, and now act as Kastrias' personal assistant. Their old romance has been rekindled behind closed doors, but the two obviously can't ever be discovered.

While it's made easier by Kastrias' public appearances being kept to a minimum, they are now facing the difficult decision of what to do with the egg sac currently in her paramour's custody, being watched over by midwives handsomely rewarded for their discretion.

Behaviours

Despite herself, Lyrana's grown accustomed to the clumsy bunch of misfits her accomplice Hiram bullied her into hiring. She protects her own and treats them with a modicum of respect, despite most of them knowing her only as Kastrias.

Even so, she's worn down from years living among the aelfir, and her empathy has eroded significantly. She's obligated to act in ways that keep her in the mind of the public and won't reveal her disguise. The gala is to be one of her few public appearances, where she plans to turn her nose and hopefully disgrace Anessa's practices as derivative, disgusting and deranged.

Lyrana also has a number of clever ways to communicate without speaking, including a sign language she and all her servants speak. As such, she might appear to be an elf of few words, but her gestures can say more than enough to those who know what to look for.

HIRAM LECHANCE

Hiram is a wizened, hunched figure, and one of the few who knows Kastrias' secret. Deaf since birth, he communicates in a sign language of precise, intricate gestures. Surviving among the Hidden (Spire p111) for most of his life, he ran a small ring of similarly struggling drow, teaching them better ways to adapt to their environment.

After bargaining his way into Lyrana's scheme, he developed their plan to help forgotten and abandoned drow. Through her old channels and Hiram's existing contacts, designs and prototypes are smuggled out of Amaranth and distributed down-Spire.

With his cut of the profits, he fosters a small group of down-on-their-luck drow. In exchange for his support, they carry out tasks that can't afford to be tied to Kastrias and funnel information to Hiram.

Motivations

First and foremost, Hiram works to preserve Kastrias' reputation and the lies behind it. He knows that her downfall would spell doom for himself as well – so while his intentions might seem noble, they're also self-serving. He plays the part of the competent but doddering old fool while quietly orchestrating everything around him.

Though he has no living relatives, the drow sponsored under Kastrias' name have become something of a surrogate family for him. The unruly bunch of pickpockets, petty thieves and assorted miscreants have adjusted to their life as servants, unsure of Hiram's motivations but without a better option.

Patient with the new and learning members of the household, Hiram enjoys the opportunities provided by his work – especially when it allows him to dig up more dirt on those around him.

Leverage

Hiram and Lyrana have an uneasy but functional alliance. While living with the Hidden, Hiram led a group of younger drow, using his knowledge of the Row to keep them safe and sending them out to do his bidding in return.

He stumbled onto Lyrana's ruse by chance, discovering her hidden cache of aelfir effects. Blackmailing her into hiring his ragtag group, he secured a better life for himself and his companions in Amaranth as the staff of House Feather-Falls-With-Dawn. Though he and Lyrana mostly get along by now, he knows she isn't above forcing his hand; but then again, neither is he.

With his leverage over Lyrana, he's funded research to help the drow under his care and others down-Spire who could use the help.

Behaviours

Though he often plays the fool in front of the aelfir, Hiram is astoundingly observant and resourceful. The servants that travel with Kastrias and Hiram serve as his eyes and ears while he attends to his mistress. The whole group communicates silently, allowing them to pass unprecedented amounts of information under the noses of the aelfir.

Hardened by a life of fending for himself, Hiram is perpetually wary. Despite his lack of hearing, he can pick up more about a person or a room in a moment than most could over an entire evening, as well as direct a group with the precision of a military squad.

RIVALS AND DISSIDENTS

Among the attendees at Sunrise-Bleeds-On-Snow's gala are a number of groups and individuals who would prefer to protest the event than support it. Of course, actually protesting would be far too gauche; instead, they attend with every intention of doling out the most scathing critique they can muster. A mix of masters in the art community and wealthy, influential drow, each has their own reasons for opposing Anessa.

Dreaux Cantor is one of the few drow artisans the aelfir consider talented enough to regularly commission. He can turn a blind eye to most of the mistreatment of his less-fortunate kin, but even he can't ignore the truly horrific nature of Anessa's art. He knows he risks losing some of his older clients by speaking out against her, but he also stands to gain the attention of other opposers. With many wealthy patrons on his side, he's both brazen enough to make an obvious stand against her and secure enough to withstand the potential backlash.

For the most part, he holds his tongue, waiting for the most opportune moment to unleash his dry, cutting wit. Tolerated as something of a court jester, he plans to attend the gala to renew old connections and make new ones: he has gifted some of his longest-standing clients with masks in an effort to advertise his services. He hopes to appeal to the more traditional aelfir in attendance, shunning the concept of vulgar 'living masks'.

Indira Hush-Falls-Before-Her, the most renowned tattoo artist in all of Amaranth, finds the idea of using drow as canvases repulsive. She works exclusively on other aelfir, believing that anything else would be a flawed lens for displaying her work. Since most aelfir take to art as a means of self-reflection, she thinks exaggerating emotion (something the aelfir claim not to feel) on the faces of drow (who are poor approximations of aelfir to begin with) lowers the entire concept – and that's before considering the garish execution.

Kessler Stone, a human clinging to the bohemian ways of the Sunlight Collective, considers Anessa her rival. Her own gallery showing isn't tonight, but she's convinced Anessa decided to throw this "art show" together after one of the Collective's experiments melted a hole in the ice that walls off her private estate. The Collective hailed this as a blessing and an enormous reward for their perseverance, but Anessa considered it an insult of the

highest order. If you believe the way the Collective tells it, she's aiming to make tonight the most talked-about event in Amaranth to overshadow the Collective's next event, which is mere days away.

ANTAGONISTS

Obviously Anessa herself is the prime target for the justice Lyrana seeks, but no aelfir is without their own cadre of servants, supporters, hangers-on and adherents. For every high elf hoping the evening ends in disaster (and looking forward to the gossip that will surely follow), there's one who sees nothing but potential and a new echelon of culture being ushered into society.

As their opinions reflect more heavily on themselves than their subject, Anessa's supporters are adamant that the evening will spark a movement throughout Amaranth and New Heaven. Though unlikely to be dissuaded, her followers might be willing to debate with other aelfir. However, any servants or "lesser" beings stepping out of line to discuss it are likely to be swiftly punished.

ANESSA SUNRISE-BLEEDS-ON-SNOW

The Dollmaker herself stands tall, unnaturally slender and snow-white. Her eyes, lips, skin and hair are all the same uniform shade, broken only by the fine, curling tattoos that accentuate her form. The hair-thin lines shift slowly through different shades of copper, silver and gold, matching the elaborate filigree on her true mask: a porcelain piece as white as the rest of her body under the metallic accents.

Defying convention, she typically wears it on an elaborate hinged headdress, allowing her to lower it over her face or raise it to wear a different mask. This practice has earned her the nickname "Two-Face" from many drow and other servants, who whisper it when they think it's safe.

While wearing one's true mask might be seen as gauche or a sign of serious financial hardship, Anessa uses hers to cover her face while she "wears" something more esoteric. She's recently decided that her ever-present dolls are part of her mask collection, and has a philosophy to support this.

The drow she sponsors as pets might technically be showing their bare faces, but their faces are their masks – and ones she has crafted at that. As her dolls and other pets are shown off as objets d'art, they're little more than possessions; and what is a mask but another possession? Her dolls and her masks are one and the same in her mind. Any drow preceding or walking alongside her is a mask she is wearing.

Motivations

Anessa truly believes she's giving her dolls a better life than they could ever have down-Spire — and she is. The drow in her service are well-fed, well-dressed and want for few material possessions. They regularly attend the most exclusive events in Amaranth and New Heaven, where they sample the finest food and drink while attending performances of the most talented musicians and actors in Spire. Were it not for their status somewhere between "slave" and "object" (and the invasive alterations of their bodies), theirs would truly be charmed lives.

Her fascination with using drow as her canvases and muses stems from Anessa's goal to elevate them in the eyes of the other aelfir. Of course, it's not that she considers them equals; more that she is trying to convince someone that what they thought was a cockroach is actually a butterfly. Charmed by what they do when not on display, she even gives them allowances just to see how they use their spare silver, curious as to why some will send it to their families while others will indulge in drugs or other means of escape.

Additionally, coming from a family of well-known and influential aelfir, Anessa is looking to make her own mark on the world. She's striking out on her own and breaking with familial tradition to pursue her art. The eccentric Aridan Sound-of-Chiming-Frost, her mentor and patron, is her most vocal supporter. Her family has been suspiciously quiet on the subject.

Leverage

Eccentric even by aelfir standards, vague rumours have started to spread that Anessa is a touch "hot-headed", turned strange by too much time away from the cold. Her obsession with drow – another sure sign of strangeness – disturbs some and delights others. Their opinions have less to do with Anessa herself and more with how each aelfir regards their cursed cousins, but she does make a wonderful scapegoat for their own opinions.

Additionally, aelfir who consider themselves artists with established practices aren't fond of someone labelling her hobby as high art. While all aelfir seek to enhance and beautify the world around them, they believe artists should transcend anything already in existence. Anessa, no matter what she calls herself, falls short of that by a considerable margin.

Her parents are not the least of her critics. They won't ever say outright that their daughter's obsession with drow is inappropriate and scandalous, but they have found other ways to express their displeasure. They are noticeably absent from the guest list.

Behaviours

As might be expected from one of the aelfir, Anessa is aloof, superior and utterly convinced of her own genius. There's no telling her what she's done is barbaric or torturous; she claims that her dolls should be grateful she would even consider them worthy canvases, let alone lovely enough (with her help) to be a mask. She embodies everything the drow love to exaggerate and genuinely loathe about the aelfir.

When she isn't wearing her true mask over her head, she wears elaborate shoes that raise her a full head above other aelfir, or has servants or dolls carry her to achieve the same effect with less effort. Even in one-on-one conversations, she carries herself as if addressing a crowd and speaks with sweeping gestures, her chin held high as she surveys everything around her. Between how tall she likes to stand and how she won't even look down her own nose, rumour has it she's never looked anyone directly in the eye.

SYLVARIS SINS-OF-THE-PAST

For all her obsession with drow, Anessa keeps an aelfir as her head of household and personal assistant. Sylvaris, a recent descendant of a long-disgraced line, serves her mistress dutifully and meekly. Covered head to toe in tiny, intricate tattoos, she's easy to mistake for a drow; her skin looks black from the tightly-lined ink, and she wears nothing more extravagant than any of the other servants.

Should one look closely enough at her tattoos, they're all varied declarations of penance and atonement. The mask she wears (she is only allowed one) is threadbare white velvet, with a band of black lace running over her eyes to hold the piece in place. Dubbed "Sylvaris Sins-of-the-Past", her true family name is unknown, and both she and Anessa are happy to keep it that way. Most often she goes by her first name alone. Very few aelfir have ever realized she's one of their own.

Motivations

Sylvaris is taking her tenure as Anessa's handservant as a learning experience. She isn't particularly fond of her mistress, and even less so of the way she treats her precious dolls better than Sylvaris herself. If ample opportunity arises, she'll flee to start her own life, even if she has to reinvent herself from the ground up.

Orchestrating the event behind-the-scenes, Sylvaris knows every way in and out of the grounds, the schedule of the evening and how to access all of the exhibits. If things go well, she's likely to remain

Anessa's servant – but with the amount of silver likely to be thrown around at such an event, an embezzling venture could give her the capital she needs to escape.

Leverage

Despite her family's history, Sylvaris is still one of the aelfir and is not without her pride. Serving under Anessa chafes at her dignity. While she's hoping to eventually reinvent either herself or the future generations of her family, she isn't above taking someone else down to do it. Because of the torture and shame she's gone through at Anessa's hands, she also isn't particularly loyal; she would likely jump at any opportunity to turn her own fate around.

Behaviours

Sylvaris is always quiet, frequently standing with her hands clasped before her and her gaze cast downward. She barely speaks above a whisper, and like any good servant will only speak when spoken to. Rarely more than a step or two behind Anessa, Sylvaris acts as the keeper for the dolls in addition to carrying whatever masks, accessories or outfit changes Anessa requires.

SUPPORTERS AND PATRONS

The gala has attracted all manner of attendees, whether entertained by the novelty of Anessa's creations or aloof enough not to care about others' suffering in the name of art. While only aelfir are likely to have enough silver to potentially invest, others simply enjoy a bit of schadenfreude.

Kaiden Rask, a drow who has clawed his way to a respectable life as something other than a servant, spent his durance acting as a very literal punching bag, pincushion and whipping boy. Deeply embittered by his experiences, he can't help but wear them on his sleeve: the pink-white scars stand in stark contrast to his dark skin tone.

His empathy has been utterly decimated by the experience, and he believes that all drow should suffer the way he did. He despises those who get to live the cushy, comfortable life of a pet, seeing Anessa's dolls as the only valid expression of the position. Attending out of sick curiosity and a misplaced sense of vengeance, he plans to take careful note of the drow who serve under House Sunrise-Bleeds-On-Snow.

In his mind, they have paid their dues. Should they end up down-Spire after their durance, they are worthy of working with him.



The auction is attended by all sorts of movers and shakers in the fashion world, who boast outrageous clothing and unusual surgical modifications.

Aridan Sound-of-Chiming-Frost, an aelfir preserved by undying surgery centuries ago, inhabits a body barely out of adolescence. Taken with Anessa and her unconventional thinking, he's thrown all of his support behind her and acts as her most reliable patron. Though few people know it, Anessa's tattoos are courtesy of Aridan, who modelled them on a combination of her true mask and the veins that cover his body as a result of the undying surgery. He sees the younger aelfir as his protégé and wants her to continue exploring her muse.

If the cell has bonds with any high-society figures, it's likely they can be persuaded to attend (though they may not be willing to stick around if things go sour). Similarly, if the group has any enemies in aelfir society or the drow upper class, having them in attendance will make for an interesting evening.

GUESTS

Even those without a stake in the evening's festivities will have a wary eye out for breaches of the social contract, odd individuals and anyone out of place. While there may be some drow who hobnob with the elite, the event is clearly aimed at other aelfir. They are, after all, the only ones capable of truly appreciating something created by one of their own.

Some humans may be in attendance (most commonly as bodyguards) and it's likely that some aelfir have brought the gnolls that tend their own gardens. Debate goes back and forth on whether it's appropriate or not, but anyone looking to pass judgement or pick up a tip or two for themselves will handwave any arguments.

THE DOLLS

There are two distinct groups of Dolls at the gala: her crowd of personal favourites acting as both masks and entourage, and the "sculptures" positioned in various installations throughout her gardens.

All of them are drugged – some more deeply or shallowly depending on their temperament and tasks – and few, if any, have the will to resist. Some have developed a sort of perverse attachment to Anessa, viewing her as a saviour and seeming to enjoy their lives. Most listlessly do as they're told, miserable but hoping to avoid further torment.

Typically attended by four to six dolls as a rotating roster of masks, there's a good chance Anessa will have an even larger crowd than usual for such an auspicious event. With each installation hosting an

average of four dolls, there's potentially two to three dozen to be rescued.

Not all of them have to escape: Lyrana's practical enough to realize that the logistics of smuggling twenty-odd sedated drow aren't necessarily easy to plan or implement. If even one makes it out of the evening safe and sound, she'll be happy; but the more who do, the better.

Isbell Faas, a lithe and lovely young woman who once dreamed of being a dancer, has her face fixed in a permanent moment of longing. One of Anessa's favourite masks, she moves silently and with undeniable grace, all the while telling herself she would never reach such a grand audience if she were scraping by among the unfortunates below.

Raisch Cuodor perpetually embodies sass and a saucy demeanour, bearing an inviting and enigmatic grin. Free to express themselves however they choose with their allowance from Anessa, they flit between masculinity and femininity as it suits them, convinced they wouldn't have the means to express their mercurial identity without her support.

Intris Soldum takes solace in the heavy scowl his face has been twisted into; at least he doesn't have to mask his seething hatred for those who poke and prod at him like a piece of cattle. Frequently drugged or temporarily paralyzed as decoration or furniture, he plots his revenge in elaborate detail to pass the time.

THE STORY

Leading up to the gala, the cell has some time to plan how they want to take on their task. Whether they pose as servants, try to pass one or more of themselves off as aelfir, or find some alternate solution, they'll also want to look into the notable guests for the evening. The list, provided by Lyrana, will help them identify possible allies, figures to avoid at all costs and perhaps a few they can sway to their side.

While the gala is the best chance to get at Anessa, the dolls are a trickier task. Rescuing them all in one evening is wildly impractical; some might say impossible. However, the most vocal supporters of the "artistic movement" are sure to be there – and with the planned auction, it will be easy to tell where some dolls will end up. Taking note of what happens to Anessa's collection when the dust has settled will allow the cell to plan further heists and rescue missions if they so choose.

Shepherding some out as the event goes on is a possibility, particularly if the group has thought to bring disguises for their charges. Under Hiram's orchestration, Kastrias' other servants are available to transport the dolls to safety – provided they can be smuggled out of Anessa's gardens. If the cell is willing to continue aiding Lyrana after the gala, she will pay a premium for any dolls returned to her from other aelfir.

PREPARATION

Though she'll never admit it in her aelfir persona, Lyrana owns some property in the dereliction of Ivory Row. She uses her substantial wealth and influence to ensure that the comings and goings around the place are never recorded or reported to anyone, and that the guards conveniently forget when the property's on their patrol.

One of the walls in the property is filled with the identities of the gala attendees, loosely sorted on a scale from potential allies to confirmed foes (see the Characters section above). The cell can perform whatever research they choose, up to and including contacting them as a servant of House Feather-Falls-With-Dawn, in an effort to recruit allies or discover if any other plots are afoot for the evening.

OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Lyrana is willing to pay for the cell's needs, within reason. She's granted them each one small favour, but would be willing to forgo these for something larger that benefits the cell as a whole.

It's up to them to actually fetch everything. They'll need to use their connections and guile to get themselves ready and to make sure they aren't caught with any contraband. Lyrana's one rule is that she won't supply any weapons. If they want to go in armed, they'll have to spend their own silver (and be careful about keeping their tools concealed).

- Approaching aelfir about the event is questionably useful; not many are willing to discuss their opinions at length with drow.
- Persuading more wealthy drow to attend will drastically shift the target audience of the evening, tarnishing Anessa's reputation and potentially turning other aelfir off the concept of dolls. Additionally, having more drow around will help the cell blend in, and could bring a few more friendly eyes and ears.

THE GARDENS

After successfully finding their way to Anessa's estate, the group meets up again with Kastrias and Hiram. Though they can't speak plainly, they can communicate as the event goes on. The gallery in Anessa's gardens is open to guests.

Modelled after ice crystals and snowflakes, Anessa's gardens have a central amphitheatre with five wings leading off to sterile, curated displays of flora. The easternmost spoke leads back to the house and the grounds proper, while the rest are joined in a winding pathway that makes up the outer perimeter. Just beyond that, walls of icy, filigreed latticework shield her estate from the rest of Amaranth. Gates at irregular intervals allow servants to access all areas of the garden without disturbing the guests.

The reception takes place along the entrance path, where servants greet guests with refreshments and tend to their every whim. Beyond the entryway and the amphitheatre, guests are reminded to speak only in hushed whispers, as some of the plants are so delicate that even a level speaking tone might disturb them. While each of the four other spokes have an installation set in them, a fifth wanders the fractal paths between the wings.

Once the cell has arrived at Anessa's estate, the real challenge begins. In true aelfir style, Anessa doesn't simply have one or two pieces on display: she has a sprawling setup with multiple "installations". Her dolls either stand frozen for hours in elaborate tableaux, act out avant-garde renditions of popular aelfir plays, or act as functional set dressings.

The highlight of the evening is to be a combination auction and theatrical surgery: the highest bidder will dictate the expression they want to see on a new doll, who is then made before the watching crowd.

OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- The delicate flora require the noise at the event to remain at a minimum. While it means news can't travel as quickly, it's a double-edged sword: the guards and guests can't shout, but the cell can't use sound as a signal either.
- Though it's quiet, there's quite a lot going on. That does make it easy to vanish into a convenient crowd, but also means there are more eyes if someone does raise the alarm.
- Anessa's gnolls, monitoring the garden as the event goes on, know all the hidden points of entry, the schedule for the installations and which plants have the most potent poison.

THE INSTALLATIONS

As the features of the evening, each of Anessa's "masterpieces" has its own unique display. Some may be more difficult than others to rescue, but the individual challenges at each site are left to the GM's discretion.

THE VOICELESS CHOIR

The Voiceless Choir wanders Anessa's gardens, walking a seemingly random winding path through the grounds. Though they don't hum or sing, each doll carries a small, cylindrical instrument that gives a faint, haunting note when air passes through it. Somewhere between the wind sighing through caves of ice, a musical wail and a death rattle, the ever-shifting tones precede the group and linger behind them as they make their circuitous way around the gardens.

To emphasise their "voiceless" moniker, the members of the choir all wear close-lipped expressions, ranging from glee to misery. Though there are four of them, they aren't bound to travel as a group, and will split off now and then before rejoining the others. Their one guiding instruction is that they are never to stop moving; their choir falls silent when not in motion, which Anessa finds unacceptable.

OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- The attendees will notice if the sound of the choir stops.
- The individual members of the choir are difficult to track down when separated.
- Despite their seemingly random path, the choir must check into designated locations at regular intervals.
- Their wandering makes it difficult to pinpoint when, how and where they went missing.
- Unlike the other installations, the choir can't be drugged – or at least, not as heavily.

THE GALLERY OF FACES

Stationed in the garden wing closest to the entrance, the Gallery of Faces is a collection of Anessa's finest creations, available for guests to borrow and "wear" as masks. While guests are encouraged to make a short circuit of the gardens and return to allow someone else a chance to try them out, longer appraisals are of course available to those who might want to purchase a piece of the installation.

Though the dolls are all well-trained and obedient, standing silently just before their "wearer" and even

gesturing in order to embellish their speech, leashes are available for those who prefer a more hands-on experience.

OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Leashed dolls are difficult to separate from their "wearers".
- More heavily drugged drow are difficult to move quickly.
- More heavily drugged drow are less likely to question any orders they're given or notice anything out of the ordinary.
- The drow in the piece are expected to be missing for extended periods of time.
- Dolls who go missing can easily be explained away as having been purchased.

LA TROUPE TORMENTEE

La Troupe Tormentee are, arguably, the luckiest of the dolls on display. Instead of standing frozen in place or being offered up to the whims of the audience, they act out avant-garde renditions of famous aelfir plays. They're fortunate enough to have hidden heaters to help them withstand the cold, especially as they are wearing accurate re-creations of very light costumes.

Interpreting the plays through dance and gesture instead of sound, they move through carefully choreographed routines. While most aelfir will claim to recognise exactly which act, scene and soliloquy is on display at any given moment, it's mostly vague bluster in an effort to be the most cultured one in the room.

OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- The unpredictable entrances and exits of the routines make it difficult to tell how many dolls are supposed to be performing at one time.
- The lack of dialogue makes it easier for "actors" to go missing without upsetting the scene.
- The installation is more performative than interactive, making it difficult to disrupt.
- The costumes the dolls are wearing for the performance make them instantly recognisable to all attendees.

THE DOLLHOUSE

Furthest from the entrance and on display in a humid greenhouse, the Dollhouse displays a number of drow posed in an elaborate tableau. Their poses shift now and then when the glass fogs over; by the time

it clears, the number of dolls in the scene will have changed, as well as the scene they make up.

Even if they aren't actively part of the scene, the dolls stand stock-still off to one side, so that they may be observed and studied by the audience. Drow and humans may be confused by the way the emotions on the doll's faces don't match the scenes they're posed in, but aelfir have little context for the expressions and find it enrapturing.

OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- The dolls are locked in a greenhouse with no obvious entrances.
- The guests will notice if the tableau doesn't change.
- To better keep extended poses, the dolls are dosed with a mild paralytic.
- Semi-paralyzed drow are difficult to transport.
- A sufficiently detailed facsimile can take the place of a doll; two could even make up an entire scene for a cycle.

THE MARIONETTES

The Marionettes, similar to the Dollhouse, are posed and waiting for an audience. Unlike the paralyzed dolls, the Marionette exhibit is designed to be interactive. Guests can pose, instruct, guide, poke, prod, or otherwise direct the dolls. Common "games" include giving increasingly long and elaborate strings of instruction to test the doll's capability, or demanding that esoteric subjects are acted out in pantomime.

While almost anything goes, injuring, incapacitating or mortally wounding a doll is an unacceptable breach of etiquette. Likewise, it's generally accepted that the dolls are not to leave their installation space.

OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Exhausted or "disqualified" dolls can be taken away for a short rest, making them easier to transport.
- The novelty of the experience quickly wears off for the aelfir, making it a less popular destination.
- Its location near the entrance of the gardens makes it considerably easier to get out in a hurry.
- Drugged drow near highly toxic plants are a potential accident waiting to happen.

THE AUCTION

This is the only event with a set start time: a soft chiming through the gardens will indicate that it's

about to begin. The sunken amphitheatre is set up as an observation theatre, with the icy stone table at its centre magically magnified and displayed on the partially frozen waterfall creating a curtain around the edge of the makeshift stage.

Off to one side waits a small cluster of drow, semi-conscious and sluggish in the cold. Patrons of the gala have the opportunity to bid on their favourites, and the winner of each auction purchases a customised doll to use as they see fit.

The modifications are to be made on-site before the crowd in a fusion of magic and medicine. This is touted as performance art and the capstone of the evening. Drugged but not sedated, the subjects are poked and prodded until the patron is satisfied with their expression, which is then permanently frozen in place.

OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- If the cell wants to save the dolls who are up for auction, they have to create a significant diversion: all eyes are on the figures being presented to the crowd.
- If they are willing to leave these dolls behind, ferrying out the others is made easier by the ready-made distraction.
- Witnessing the creation of a doll is traumatic to watch for all but the most jaded or unfeeling. If the cell is present for the auction, they risk breaking their cover by reacting to what they see.

ADVERSARIES

BLACK GUARD

Names: Felix, Haste, Chet, Tamn

Descriptors: Eager to act; Paranoid; Intense; Patrolling

Difficulty: 2 in open combat, 1 to ambush or surprise. The guard are on high alert as murmurs of dissent circulate the gala

Resistance: 6

Equipment: Polished Black Guard armour (Armour 3); Halberd (D6, Brutal); restraints and sedatives

GNOLL “GARDENERS”

Names: Krist, Limb, Flit, Thresh
Descriptors: Well-groomed; Muzzled; Docile; Inquisitive
Difficulty: 0; if the garden has sustained damage, 2.
Resistance: 4
Equipment: Pruning shears (D3); antidotes; vials of extracted toxins (D3, ongoing, ranged, one-shot); plant clippings; heavy gloves; protective coverings (Armour 1).

PARTY-GOERS

Names: Maji Corrina Quinn, Ilyan Blessed-by-Bounty, Mette Shanea Kessock, Qira Dance-Among-Dreamers
Descriptors: The gilded; Glitteringly adorned; The notorious; Elegant
Difficulty: 0
Resistance: 3
Equipment: Decadent clothing and mask; promissory notes; small but valuable trinkets and favours; elaborate jewellery

ENDING THE STORY

Should the cell choose not to help Lyrana disrupt the gala, she still attends with her house, gathering the other dissidents in an attempt to discredit Anessa. Her efforts are likely to split the crowd, but put no real dent in the popularity of the dolls as accessories and living art pieces.

One or two might find better homes with Lyrana and her crew, but the vast majority of the dolls either remain with Anessa or are bought by other aelfir. Whether they are re-purposed as servants, used as furniture, or act as permanent installations depends on the buyer – but it’s unlikely that their lives get any more pleasant. Depending on the aelfir in question, they may not continue receiving medication, allowing the pain from the surgery to return in full force while they must remain completely still and silent.

The success of the evening fans the flames of the trend. Many aelfir take to “wearing” dolls as masks (usually standing just in front or to the side of their masters) or acquiring large groups to continually follow and pose around them. Raids begin in Derelictus to keep up with demand, aimed at “arresting” enough bodies to keep investors happy.

As the cost of Anessa’s dolls skyrockets in response to their growing popularity, a thriving black market springs up among the less well-off aelfir. Even more drow are abducted and subjected to inexperienced surgeries to create cheaper versions of Anessa’s work. Often left with lingering pain or loss of feeling entirely, these unfortunate drow (sometimes called “ragdolls”) are usually discarded when complications from the surgeries crop up.

GETTING THE DROW OUT

However they make it back to the safehouse, the cell should hopefully have at least one doll in tow or waiting for them. Depending on the reactions of the other aelfir, Lyrana may or may not be able to meet them right away, but Hiram and an assistant will arrive before the sun rises to greet the cell and the refugees.

He administers painkillers to the drow who need them, and with the help of his assistant, explains that his mistress will ensure they are all taken care of and hidden safely until they can devise a way to reverse Anessa’s surgical procedures. Afterwards, there is work for those who want it and support for those who need it.

BRINGING DOWN ANESSA

If the group has succeeded in disgracing Anessa, word of it makes its way from Amaranth down-Spire. The drow not only celebrate the downfall of an aelfir, but the families of the dolls learn exactly what their loved ones suffered.

While they know a number of dolls escaped the gala, there’s no official follow-up revealing if they were re-captured. Some ex-dolls may choose to write to their loved ones while in Lyrana’s care, but not all are willing to invite such contact before they have more of an idea of their fate.

FAILURE

Should the cell fail, they’re captured and likely subject to becoming dolls themselves, unless they’re clever enough to escape. Kastrias can’t risk her reputation to aid them, and may in fact deny knowing them at all. Whether or not the cell has enough of a bond with her or her servants to leverage anything depends on their previous actions.



Qiliza Moonlight-On-Falling-Leaves keeps the hearts of her family close to hand in case of insubordination.



HOME IS WHERE THE HATRED IS

By Helen Gould

Content warnings: Domestic/family abuse, strong slavery overtones, drug abuse/addiction.

INTRODUCTION

You are a group of Ministers on a long-term infiltration job, disguised as servants in the house of Moonlight-On-Shining-Leaves: one of the most prestigious aelfir families in Amaranth. No other family really compares to their success. Your goal is to assassinate all of them, creating a power vacuum in high society for the Ministry to exploit.

While you've been undercover, the family has not treated you well (and that's putting it lightly). You had to take every beating and insult. It's personal now. It's time to kill the family.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON?

Qiliza, the grandmother and matriarch in the family, spent her life climbing to the top of aelfir high society. At present she is respected for her business acumen, good taste, and ruthless attitude; but it wasn't always that way.

When she was growing up, her family was the aelfir equivalent of 'new money', leading to countless snubs and insults. Qiliza swore that she'd force everyone to eat their words – and they have.

First, she married a dim but rich heir and used his money to begin building her trade empire. She started with weapons and worked her way up over the decades into rare goods: magical artefacts, unknown creatures, deadly yet beautiful plants. She only took

two breaks: one to give birth to her daughter Nezalía, and another to arrange Nezalía's betrothal into the powerful Red-Smoke-Above-Water family.

Her eye for genuine treasures became legendary, as did her family's wealth, connections, and luxurious living quarters. She was famed throughout Spire as an influential lady of the highest calibre. Once she was sure of her reputation, her husband died in a tragic corvid accident. All of his estates and inheritance went to her, of course.

Following this achievement, she underwent Undying surgery – and forced the rest of the family, including her grandchildren, to have it too. She will not risk her legacy for something so crass as mortality. All of their hearts are kept in a locked safe in her study.

Recently, after a particularly nasty argument, her daughter (now Nezalía Red-Smoke-Above-Water) demanded to have possession of her own heart. Qiliza killed her for it, teaching the rest of the family a lesson about discipline: she made this family what it is, and she will force them to stay in their rightful places whether they like it or not.

In her later days, Qiliza has grown a little paranoid. In addition to her family, the mansion houses a number of great treasures: a mirror that shows you anything that has happened in front of it; a bowl that poisons any food or drink placed inside; a sword that will unerringly kill the weakest person in the room; and many more.

So, she has also invested in an unusual security measure: enchanted, monstrous ice sculptures. These monsters are dotted around the mansion, and will

seek vengeance on everyone nearby if Qiliza is attacked or dies. She's not going down without a fight.

Unfortunately for her, she doesn't just have to fear outsiders. Her son-in-law, Tyalo Red-Smoke-On-Water, is making his own secret plans against her. Tyalo has never forgiven her for murdering his wife and endangering his children, or for having a really horrible personality.

At her next grand ball, he plans to take advantage of the crowds to sneak into Qiliza's study, steal back the hearts, drag the children to the Sky Docks and sail away to find a new life. Beyond that, who knows? Planning is not his strong suit.

SETUP

BEFORE YOU START

'A revolution is bloody. Revolution is hostile. Revolution knows no compromise. Revolution overturns and destroys everything that gets in its way.' (Malcolm X, *Message to the Grassroots*, 1963)

Please be aware that this scenario has not been written to be comfortable or morally easy. The intention behind this scenario is to explore what it's like to not only live intimately with an oppressor, but to actively plot against them and act on that plot to gain your freedom.

You may want to read more of Malcolm X's work and the work of other anti-racist and anti-capitalist figures (Angela Davis, Kwame Ture, Assata Shakur, etc.) if you want to explore what a revolution means to those leading it and their attitudes towards the oppressor. The chapter 'On Violence' from Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and the 2014 film 'Concerning Violence' by Göran Olsson are both highly recommended.

It is important to recognise that, although the aelfir characters in this story all have a backstory and their own thoughts, feelings, etc., this is not intended to make you overly sympathetic. They are still colonial oppressors (and arguably slave masters) enacting a system that forces an entire race to live in subjugation.

They will never willingly give up their unjust power, so the only options are to take it back by force, or remain a cowed and mistreated underclass. Remember this at all times.

BUILDING THE STORY

Set the scene with the above context in mind: describe the conditions of the House of Moonlight-On-Shining-Leaves and the kind of treatment the player

THE HOUSE AND ITS ROOMS

The mansion is a sprawling, austere building. The ceilings are high, the floors are marble, and there are always footsteps echoing somewhere. It is always unnaturally cold. Long corridors connect each of the rooms on the ground floor – the rooms that guests will see – giving ample space for strange art and sculpture displays.

The second floor houses the family rooms, offices, and bedrooms, while servants live on the third floor. The first two floors are connected by a sweeping staircase that opens out onto the ballroom, allowing for grand entrances from the family. The third floor is linked to all the others by a maze of narrow, dark stairs and alleys, allowing the servants to slip in and out of rooms without disturbing their betters.

The servant rooms all have connecting doors in case they need to be woken in a hurry. The rooms themselves are surprisingly large, but with little furniture: generally only a bed, a chair, a table, and a wardrobe.

Each member of the family has decorated their room in their own style. Qiliza's is an extension of her study, with documents always neatly stacked and a bed that rarely looks slept in. Tyalo's room heavily displays the insignia of the Black Guard and his family colours (red and blue), with old weapons and armour on the walls.

Mileera has a stylish, minimalist room furnished in metallic tones. Her dressing table constantly has expensive jewellery draped over it, and a small writing desk houses all of her important papers. Citoli's room looks like a teenager's, covered in pamphlets, posters of their favourite artists, and their own writing drabbles. Pryas sleeps in an absolute pigsty, even with the daily attentions of servants. The floor is constantly strewn with clothes, left-over drug residue, bottles, and the occasional passed-out lover.

Nezalia's room is permanently locked, but if broken into, is completely empty.

characters have experienced. You may want to have each player think of a particular inciting incident for their character.

Your first scene should involve the characters receiving the message from the Ministry that their

agents should strike as soon as possible. Qiliza is going to be holding a ball in the near future, which is a good opportunity for action.

There are no real pre-set scenes, but you may want to take care to drop hints that the aelfir family themselves may not be entirely happy. For example, the player characters will certainly be aware of the mysterious death of Nezalía, and the aelfir NPCs may be indiscreet or actively seeking support. An interesting scenario may be the players breaking into Qiliza's study at the same time that Tyalo does.

As with any scenario, let the players lead the story, but keep in mind that most people they interact with will not want them to succeed. Even the other servants would rather stick to the status quo (and may hope for a reward if they foil a plot). Think about what obstacles are put in their way, what happens if they fail, and what happens if they succeed.

USING SUGGESTED CHARACTERS

Four suggested characters have been provided, but as long as you can find a way for a character to be in the scenario, go for it. For example, they may simply be entirely undercover and having to hide their magic or true nature. An all-Masked party might be an interesting experiment as well, as that class is very relevant to this situation.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

THE MATRIARCH

QILIZA MOONLIGHT-ON-SHINING-LEAVES

Why is she involved?

Qiliza is the villain of this story: she is ambitious, ruthless, dangerous, and controlling. She dresses traditionally, in ornate masks and stiff gowns. No one remembers what her face looks like, but her voice is refined and sharp. Nobody loves her, let alone likes her – but she'd rather have their fear anyway. She worked hard to get herself and her family into their privileged position, and they are going to stay there.

What sets her apart from the other aelfir?

Qiliza is notable for her determination, cold heart, and insistence on tradition. She prizes her status above all else. Though she tells herself that this ambition is simply devotion to her family and keeping them at the top of the hierarchy, it is actually entirely personal. She grew up being shunned for her station and is determined never to be in that position again.

What does she desire?

Complete obedience from her family so she can keep their legacy intact in peace. She will settle for nothing less.

What does she despise?

Anyone she perceives as significantly lower in society than herself, but particularly those who inherited their wealth without having to work for it. She especially hates Berena, Tyalo's mother, and the two have had an ongoing feud since the marriage.

Difficulty: 1

Resistance: 6

Equipment: Poisoned Dagger Necklace (D6)

If attacked in her study, she will go for the following various magical objects:

- Bowl of Burrowing Worms (D6, Piercing)
- Giant Corvid Bone (D6, Tiring)
- Bottle of Necrotic Acid (D6, Scarring)

SUGGESTED SCENES

- Qiliza catches one or more of the other servants in some indiscretion – avoiding work, perhaps. She has one of the players drag them into her study for a punishment, explaining that she cannot spare a servant if she did not even spare her daughter.
- The players witness an argument between Qiliza and one of the other members of her family, including accusations of murder.
- Qiliza is suspicious of her son-in-law, and asks one of the player characters to spy on him for her and report back. They'll get a reward or a punishment depending on how good their information is.

THE SON-IN-LAW

TYALO RED-SMOKE-ON-WATER

Why is he involved in the story?

Tyalo is out for vengeance. He hates Qiliza for killing Nezalía, who he genuinely cared for (though he never liked his mother-in-law in the first place and she knows it), and is plotting to get the rest of the family out. In addition to freeing them from her tyrannical presence, the disappearance of her whole family would definitely cause a scandal that might break her social stranglehold.

What sets him apart from the rest of the family?

He is unusually brave. His family helped to establish the Black Guard, and that mentality has stayed with him. So have the sword skills. He's also quite brawny

for an aelfir, with wide shoulders and bulging arms. You wouldn't want to get on his bad side.

What does he desire?

To protect his children and escape – not just from Qiliza's house, but from Spire itself. He wants to set up elsewhere, perhaps back in the other aelfir cities.

What does he despise?

Cowardice. That's part of the reason he hates Qiliza so much: she killed Nezalina without giving her a chance to fight back. Yet he has to make his own plans in secret rather than challenging her openly, and this chafes him. It would be different if he didn't have his children to think of.

Difficulty: 1

Resistance: 6

Equipment: Ancient Black Guard Longsword (D6, Parrying)

SUGGESTED SCENES

- One or more of the players finds Tyalo in the servants' stairs, testing the locks on the door to Qiliza's quarters.
- Members of the Black Guard begin hanging around the house a lot more than usual, conversing in hushed whispers. Weapons begin turning up in unusual places noticed only by servants, like behind tapestries or inside ornamental vases. The servants are in two minds as to whether they should tell anyone, but they all agree this doesn't seem like Qiliza's usual style of intimidation or testing mettle.
- A map of the old aelfir cities in the north has been hastily stuffed into the top drawer of a reading desk, with various routes marked out in red and notes around the margins about the easiest ways to get there. One reads 'How to escape? Ask servants??' A date for departure – the day after the upcoming ball – is written on it and circled several times. The handwriting is definitely Tyalo's.

THE ELDEST SIBLING

MILEERA MOONLIGHT-ON-SHINING-LEAVES

Why is she involved in the story?

Mileera takes after her grandmother: she plays the long game. She told Qiliza that she kept her name out of respect for the family, but in reality it was to

subtly mourn her murdered mother. She is aware of Tyalo's plans and he knows she's willing to assist him – especially since she has a number of admirers and her own disposable income from the luxurious clubs she owns in the Silver Quarter. She dresses luxuriously and has inherited an innate grace from her mother.

What sets her apart from the rest of the family?

She is the most independent. If she had the chance, she could leave everything behind, move into a suite at one of her clubs, and never see any of the rest of them again. The only thing keeping her at home is her distrust of Qiliza being around her heart.

What does she desire?

To move on from her family legacy and make her name on her own merits. That's why she used the inheritance she got from her mother to buy out clubs: as an investment on her own enterprise in the future.

What does she despise?

Her youngest sibling, Pryas, who she regards as entirely useless. If given the chance, she would gladly push him out of a window.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- Mileera's admirers come to visit, but she keeps them waiting in the drawing room with the servants in attendance. They gossip about the way she's been acting lately: becoming more withdrawn, reducing how lavishly she spends, and even leaving her club nights early. Plus, her father visited her at the club last week, which he's never done before. They ask the servants whether there are any special plans in the house. Midway through the conversation, Mileera appears and is very unhappy with the gossip.
- Two of the best knives in the kitchen have gone missing, and the cook is fuming. She demands that everyone scour the rooms they're responsible for cleaning in order to find it. They turn up in Mileera's room, but unfortunately she walks in just as they are found.
- Pryas and Mileera have one of their legendary fights, complete with smashed crockery and spilled wine. As the player characters clean up, Mileera seems to be in an odd mood, and strikes up an incredibly tone-deaf conversation about liberty and the right to independence.

MIDDLE SIBLING

CITOLI RED-SMOKE-ON-WATER

Why are they involved in the story?

Citoli is the only one happy to let their grandmother run the show, and tries to calm down all the family arguments and threats that keep springing up. They've seen what she does to the people who oppose her, and they've chosen to please her as much as possible. Surely if they don't antagonise her, everything will be alright?

What sets them apart from other members of the family?

They take after neither of their parents: they have no fire, little temper, and they hate conflict. They're a member of the Sunlight Collective, and spend their days composing, singing, and chasing the sun. Their current work is a tragedy based on their own circumstances, but they are too scared to do anything more than that. They're also the safest member of the family for servants to be around; they barely ever raise their voice, let alone their hand, to anyone. They're also the only one who manages to get on with Pryas. They wear dark clothing and simple masks most of the time, only getting dressed up for performances.

What do they desire?

To be someone carefree, who doesn't have to worry about their fractured home, warring relatives, or their (literally) stolen heart. The only way they can see out of it is if they manage to marry their way into a nicer family, so they are on the look-out for a beau. Then maybe they'll be too distracted to worry about sudden death.

What do they despise?

People shouting and fighting. Needless to say, they are very on edge whenever they're at home.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- Citoli is found quietly weeping on the living room chaise-longue. They are drunk and depressed about their latest composition; they're convinced it's the worst thing they've ever written. They ask for feedback from whoever is walking by and begin performing the tragedy based on their own life.
- Citoli is Qiliza's favourite (since they're the most obedient one), and she has decided to take them under her wing. Unfortunately, that means learning how to discipline the servants. Citoli asks for a volunteer.

- Eri, a senior member of the Black Guard, has been seen talking to Citoli in quiet corners; she's even made them smile once or twice. Eri enlists the player characters' help in getting her into the house after hours via a secret way only she and Tyalo know about.

YOUNGEST SIBLING

PRYAS RED-SMOKE-ON-WATER

Why is he involved in the story?

Pryas is headstrong, hedonistic and horrible. He will take any opportunity to do anything that seems like a break from his endless boredom, which means he is the unpredictable factor in this story: he could take anyone's side. He's also addicted to blues, a pill that makes the user feel incredibly sad. While he will cry on anyone's shoulder after taking some, he is very suggestible when he's low.

What sets him apart from other members of the family?

All the servants fear him; when he's coming down or hungover, he is absolutely vicious. Qiliza tends to ignore the servants unless there's a serious breach of etiquette; Pryas will go looking for them so that he has someone to torment. He moves like a predator and has a cruel laugh.

What does he desire?

To be amused, whether that's through fighting, drinking, drug-taking, sleeping around, or torturing the servants. He is constantly chasing after new sensations. Nothing feels important to him, so he just does whatever makes him feel at all.

What does he despise?

His own life. Deep down, he knows he has no purpose, and it hurts. This is why he hates Mileera back: he is jealous of her drive.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- A servant is fleeing from Pryas on one of his sadistic rampages, looking desperately for somewhere to hide. She asks the player characters for help, but he's just round the corner.
- Pryas discovers Sulphur, a rare and very expensive drug that induces an intense and highly destructive rush. He tears through the house, smashing tables, destroying priceless ornaments, and terrifying the servants. Then he finds Tyalo's diary in the

wreckage, and decides to interrogate the servants about whether they know what's in it.

- The Black Guard knock on the door in the dead of night, hauling an unconscious Pryas behind them. He's been causing trouble in one of Mileera's clubs – apparently he overheard her say something that caused yet another huge argument.

THE GARDENER

TRAAQ THE GNOLL

Why is she involved in the story?

Traaq has been in the family since before Qiliza moved in, and she knows absolutely everything that's been going on. However, she also knows that this means she's in incredibly dangerous territory, so she's keeping quiet until she knows she has an easy way out if things go south. Her face is hard to read.

What sets her apart from the other servants?

She's given a lot more leeway than anyone else; Qiliza might even have a kind of fondness for her. This means she can do a lot of things that other servants can't – like get hold of private keys or have a member of the family open up to her.

What does she desire?

Safety. In some ways, all the information she holds is useful – she could tear down a lot of Qiliza's business with what she knows. But at the same time, she is a gnoll in a hostile city; who would believe her, and what could they do if they did? Better to keep herself to herself for now.

What does she despise?

Every single member of the family, both in the abstract sense as she is forced to be subordinate to them, and in a personal sense. Each one of them has been horrible to her at some point, except Citoli – but that just makes Traaq more suspicious.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- Traaq makes a habit of pruning quietly underneath windowsills and remembering everything she overhears. One night, she hears something that she has to share with someone as soon as possible: Tyalo and Mileera might be running away.
- While out in the gardens, Qiliza makes some off-handed comment to Traaq about her background and how exotic it is to have a gnoll as a servant. Anyone watching sees Traaq almost stab her

mistress with the gardening shears, but then think better of it.

- One night, a strange singing and humming noise is overheard. On investigation, it turns out that Traaq has been praying fervently for her freedom and the chance to return to her homeland.

ENDING THE STORY

If the players do nothing, Tyalo and Mileera will enact their plan to flee with the other two siblings during Qiliza's next grand ball. The Black Guard have been hired by Tyalo and Qiliza to guard all of the rooms that are forbidden to guests – including her study. However, Tyalo will have persuaded the guards to let him in through a mixture of bribery and manipulating their loyalty to his family.

Mileera has bought an expensive acid through her contacts at her clubs, and uses it to melt the lock on the safe that contains the family's neatly labelled hearts. She and her father take them all and are about to leave – but then Tyalo loses his head and decides he wants his vengeance. Mileera begs him not to, but he smashes the jar with Qiliza's heart and stamps on it: unleashing the horde of ice sculptures that are enchanted to come alive if anything happens to Qiliza. They promptly massacre everyone at the ball.

The only person who will escape is Traaq, who was in the garden and ran as soon as the screaming started.

Hopefully, the players can avoid this – but a number of different things may happen instead.

COLLABORATION

There are a number of characters in this scenario that players can attempt to threaten, persuade, or bribe into helping them murder the family.

Tyalo and Mileera know they need help, but left to their own devices they would never think of asking the servants for support with such a personal (and dangerous) matter. If the players decide to approach them about their plan to escape – perhaps along the lines of 'we'll kill the old lady and you can get away' – they will find Mileera more receptive than her father. She has a businesswoman's mind and sees nothing wrong with using tools that are given to her, whereas Tyalo cares too much about things like honour and pride.

Traaq is a trustworthy ally if the players want her to help, but she will require a lot of assurances before she parts with any information or agrees to assist in other ways (for example, she can convince servants not to get in your way, or persuade family members

to gather in a certain place). She will want a guaranteed way out and proof that the family is dead. If the entire family isn't killed and someone comes to investigate, she will absolutely betray the player characters.

With a little cajoling, Citoli will spill the whole story and then beg for protection for themselves and for Pryas (who himself is a mixed bag, and is equally likely to attack the characters as laugh at them). They just want Qiliza gone.

If there is a character in the party who can raise or speak to the dead or ghosts, they can summon Nezalina herself. She is still angry about dying and will happily help the players to kill her mother or to get on her good side (Qiliza admires others who are as ruthless as she is, has a soft spot for Traaq, and enjoys mushrooms). However, Nezalina will only help on condition of the rest of her family surviving.

Obviously, in all of these scenarios, the players may or may not stick to their word.

UNDYING AELFIR SIBLINGS

Difficulty: 1

Resistance: 6

Equipment: None, but they may pick up household objects or simply use their bare hands for D4 damage. However, since they are immortal, they are hard to knock down for good. They can only be killed by destroying their hearts.

LAST MINUTE DEALS

As mentioned above, there's a chance that the players and Tyalo will cross paths when both attempting to steal the hearts. The players will have to think quickly in order to convince them that they can work together.

Of course, the players may simply fight them. Tyalo will hold his ground: he is a good swordsman and still trains regularly with the Black Guard for old times' sake. He will also viciously protect Mileera, who will be with him. However, she is more of a thinker than a fighter; she will have a knife, but no real idea of how to use it in combat.

If the players try to take Mileera hostage, Tyalo will give in; but if the players try to take Tyalo hostage, Mileera will let him die if it means that she manages to get her hands on the hearts. Remember, she takes after her grandmother.

BRIBING THE BLACK GUARD

Tyalo has already bought them, but there's no reason that the players can't buy at least some of them out again from under him. His family did help to establish them, but that was a long time ago now; barely anyone who now works there remembers them.

Players will still need something big to bargain with. Eri, a senior member of the Black Guard, has a crush on Citoli – the PCs could offer her some insights on how best to woo the middle sibling in return for the cooperation of the rest of the guards. Alternatively, they could promise all the riches of the mansion, or a way for the guards to get out of the situation without seeming incompetent or treacherous.

SNEAKS AND LIARS

Players may not want to go in all guns blazing: another way to approach this would be for one or two to sneak into the study, take the hearts, and destroy them later. This will also protect the players from the ice monsters.

To gain access to the study without brute force, the players will have to steal the key from either Traaq or Qiliza herself. They will also need to watch out for patrolling guards, wandering servants, and of course for Qiliza being inside the study when they try to break in.

Drugs are an option if somebody can access the kitchens on the night of the ball, but Pryas has such a resistance to narcotics by now that players will need to be wary of him either not going down at all or waking up too early.

THREATENING QILIZA

A particularly reckless party may simply be upfront and go straight for Qiliza without bothering to do any groundwork. However, she will defend herself: she has various magics at her disposal, as the most dangerous items are kept in her study. There is also an ice monster in the room.

DEALING WITH THE ICE MONSTERS

One way or another, the players may succeed in destroying all of the hearts – but this will unleash the enchanted ice creatures.

These things are huge, strong, and oozing occult magic – they use sheer physical strength to attack with lunges, punches, and attempts to crush their



Tyalo Red-Smoke-On-Water,
the son-in-law of the family, is a
formidable opponent.

opponent. However, if a player character uses Divine magic, their attacks gain the Brutal tag. If a player character is hit by one of them, they will feel both the physical impact and the intense magical cold; if they are very unlucky, they may have a frozen limb.

The living sculptures are constantly morphing, changing how they look with each movement and dripping icy cold water everywhere. They are covered in wicked spines and tapered horns. Some walk on two legs, some on four, some on eight. They have mouths in odd places, like at the top of what should be their heads (but aren't quite) or at the end of thick, powerful tails. A few have enormous barbed wings. They will attack indiscriminately, so if players want to lure them somewhere with lots of people to get in their way, that will work long enough for them to escape.

The ice creatures can call to each other in keen-ing howls, so staying in one place is very dangerous: player characters will soon find themselves swamped if they don't keep on the move. However, they cannot survive for long outside of the mansion, because they need to be close to whoever they are bonded to (in this case, Qiliza).

They also don't move very fast; if the players have some form of quick transport ready, they will be able to escape without needing to fight. However, fleeing on foot is a trickier prospect – especially as a dozen or so of these monsters are stationed at various points throughout the mansion, so players may escape one only to run into another.

ICE MONSTER

If hit, PCs will suffer a penalty from the monsters' freezing touch. This means they will have to Resist the ice in order to fight back quickly enough.

Difficulty: 2

Resistance: 4

Equipment: None, but physical attacks cause D6, Brutal damage.

SUGGESTED CHARACTERS

WRYNDER, THE AZURITE

As an Azurite, you were the perfect person for Qiliza to delegate her less important business arrangements to; besides, she finds it quite a novelty having a Drow on board. You have notes on every business transaction and access to her study – but only when she is present.

KALADA, THE CARRION-PRIEST

Your skills with a crossbow got you the position as a night watchman at the mansion. Qiliza especially appreciates how quickly you can get rid of trespassers, though she doesn't want to hear the details. You know the grounds like the back of your hyena, and can easily get in and out.

ELLERI, THE IDOL

No house of great standing would be complete without an entertainer. You are a live-in musician, composing music for the family to enjoy over dinner or at their many balls. The Ministry planted you at one of Mileera's clubs, where you were noticed by Pryas, the youngest Moonlight-On-Shining-Leaves sibling. First he propositioned you, and then he offered you a job.

SY, THE MASKED

You know your way around all the aelfir etiquette: all the proper titles, gestures, and social hierarchies. You know this because it was literally beaten into you throughout your durance under a particularly cruel master, along with your unusually deep, fierce hatred of all aelfir high society. Now you act as a butler in the house of Moonlight-On-Shining-Leaves, welcoming guests and attending to all their wants, hating every moment. On the plus side, this means you have access to anyone and everyone whenever they come to visit.



Ygor, the bakery's pet hyena, snoozes in front of a grand croquembouche.

BISQUIET

By Xalavier Nelson

Content warnings: Racial oppression, murder, animal suffering/death, poisoning, insects, body horror, addiction, violence against youth.

INTRODUCTION

In *Bisquiet*, players take the role of new employees in the latest open secret of Spire high society: a bakery frequented by the height of aelfir elite, yet entirely staffed and owned by drow.

The staff have sacrificed much to gain this anomalous position, and now risk their newly-blessed lives by using the titular bakery as a front for drow resistance. You and your group are sent by the Ministry to support the owners in their fight and determine whether their loyalties are wavering in the face of success.

Rooted in the practice of slaves nursing their master's children, untouchable classes polishing the seats of power to a shine and businesses operated by downtrodden people who rub shoulders with those who oppress them, *Bisquiet* is a scenario about the contradictions of power within servitude. At any time, you are simultaneously the most powerful and vulnerable people in the room. Working against their so-called 'masters' in plain sight, the staff of *Bisquiet* are both treasured and despised; held in suspicion, and trusted to create meals for the greatest threats to drow existence.

Play revolves around the routine of the bakery. The cycle of the morning rush, lunch dash, evening stampede and late-night trickle of customers will define the structure of your sessions. Running out of a single ingredient can lead to a breathless dash through Red Row to buy enough fruit to last through the evening. Players overhearing news about an ailing influential aelfir artist may race to secure a catering

contract for the celebration of his approaching apotheosis, and slip a mind-altering drug into his final meal before he whispers his last wishes.

The time between set-pieces is spent clearing up plot threads as well as tables. Players will plan their next moves based on information gathered, prepare for the next critical period and try to find new ways to pursue their goals through the constant churn of inherently hazardous clientele. Customers are almost always present (the bakery is very popular after all), so maintaining your cover in the midst of this activity is crucial – particularly considering that an investigation into a murdered general increasingly points towards your shop.

The aelfir need you. Don't let them forget it.

OVERVIEW

[Read, or paraphrase, the following section aloud to your players to bring them up to speed on events surrounding the campaign.]

The faded grandeur of Ivory Row is more porous than ever. Squads of poorly-hidden enforcers, formerly dedicated to keeping undesirables out of the shabby district, can now be seen protecting a single street at all hours of the day and night (though time means little in the whirling light shafts of Ivory Row's shifting windows). Burned to ashes in the eagerness of Mister Alas' roaming arsonists, the quiet block now hosts a single set of singed tenements – one of which hosts the hottest Spire secret: a bakery known as *Bisquiet*.

Staffed and owned by drow, *Bisquiet* is the topic of interest among high society in Spire. Their cuisine draws artfully from drow culture, and its 'exotic' roots make visiting this quaint, rotting section of the city all the more thrilling for its customers. Cupcakes

from sweet mushrooms harvested by Dark Farmers and honeyed tarts using authentic produce from actual New Heaven hives are just two of the items you may find on its unique shelves.

However, Bisquiet also happens to be a front for covert resistance and information gathering – one which the Ministry is keen to retain, despite the danger introduced by its gorgeous, powerful clientele.

The sagging facade outside bears a fresh coat of paint, all white and prismatic gold. Several icons of the Solar Pantheon line the walls, and symbol after symbol indicate the patronage of the maddened Archbishop Wynn (Spire p113). These nods to the compromises that the owner, Oriol, has made to keep his dream of a peaceful bakery have inspired the suspicion of the Ministry. Several ‘employees’ – you and your group, Ministry agents in disguise – were hired under some compulsion, supposedly to assist with the business bustling beyond its capacity. In actuality, you are here to ensure the owners haven’t lost their nerve.

Bisquiet didn’t become this successful without attracting unwanted attention. The disappearance of presumably murdered aelfir war hero Taren Quiet-As-Roses-Wilting is rumoured to somehow be tied to the bakery. Retribution may be coming to the entire drow community as a result.

Depending on your actions in the coming days and weeks, the hardy crew of Bisquiet may soon find that not all press is good press.

[Stop reading aloud now!]

WHAT’S REALLY GOING ON?

Okay, so here’s the thing: the staff at Bisquiet totally killed that war hero.

Taren Quiet-As-Roses-Wilting was an aelfir Special Tactics Corp. general who, after becoming quite invested in the little shop, was suddenly struck by the oddness of the entire thing. He had, consciously or not, ignored the telltale signs of mischief: the smell of surveillance spirits attached to cupcake linings; snatches of conversation caught in the thin-walled, decrepit toilet; furtive additions to familiar dishes that made their recipients dangerously ill (or worse).

He began to snoop around one night while the other latecomers were drinking their masks off, and Brewmaster Gale (who typically joined in these revels) was distracted. Gale found him in the passage to Bisquiet’s secret chamber for Ministry business. After a brief confrontation, Gale stabbed Quiet-As-Roses-Wilting to death. Following the requisite amount of freaking out, the other members of staff decided

to rally around Gale in the wee hours of the morning and keep the body deep within Bisquiet’s basement. Constant ‘protection’ by aelfir guards makes moves to dump the body in a quiet corner elsewhere unfeasible, if not impossible.

The truth is, the staff of Bisquiet are conflicted about their duty to the Ministry; divided, even. Midwife and Bisquiet owner Oriol has achieved his life dream. Yes, it required compromise, like bowing and scraping before those who can destroy him with a wave of their finger, but what was the alternative? Stirring algae in the Garden District until he died? How can he improve the conditions of his fellow drow if he’s dead?

Brewmaster Gale, a talented azurite and the effective ‘face’ of the business, is becoming increasingly sympathetic to their oppressors. Edeme, their sauce-wielder, misses the days before success when the resistance came before pies instead of the other way around.

Everyone in the shop lives with the knowledge that they are damned. Surrounded by uncountable enemies and dangers, they cannot fully trust their companions or themselves. It shows in every weary smile – and in the puff of dust that erupts when steadfast Ignais the yeast-strangler drives her fists just a bit too hard into another mound of dough.

It isn’t a matter of *if* the crew of Bisquiet will be found out and betrayed, whether by aelfir authorities, former patrons, Quiet-As-Roses-Wilting’s investigating squad, the coward Brewmaster Gale, an alarmed Ministry, or any number of other parties. It’s a matter of when.

ADVENTURE SETUP

Routine is the heart of this scenario: the set-pieces are based during the day of a typical bakery and the spaces in-between. Use the plot threads and NPCs provided as modular pieces to slot into this routine. Sessions alternate between opportunities to live out the consequences and intricacies of this tense double-life, and springboards for covert adventures enabled by the setting.

Before play begins, determine three to five of the most popular dishes in Bisquiet’s repertoire, and the principal ingredient (potentially arcane or obscure) associated with the creation of each. You may expand these descriptions with full recipes and Spire-inspired descriptions, and even bake the goods for your group!

For ease of description, discuss clientele in general terms (such as “an aelfir diplomat known as Mist-Seen-In-Rain dismisses you with a wave of the hand and an order for five leech pies.”). However, creating

seven to ten ‘regular’ customers who you can discuss in slightly greater detail will boost the authenticity of play and the attachment of your players to the bakery. When you create detailed customers, answer these questions:

- What is their favourite item on the menu?
- How do they treat the kitchen staff?
- What hole does Bisquiet fill in their lives?
- What inconvenience is most likely to upset them to an undue degree?

RECIPES OF RESISTANCE

Unsure what kind of treats you might find in a drow bakery? Here are some of the delicacies we’ve come across in our study of Bisquiet’s rise and fall. Feel free to use these verbatim or as a foundation for your own dishes.

Red Row Rye

Chief Ingredient: *Red Row Rye, as you’d expect*

Exactly what it claims to be: long loaf, portable, airy yet filling, eaten with jam or churned godsweat

Spire Scones

Chief Ingredient: *Hydroponic Blackberries*

Breakfast item, stimulant, shaped like the Spire itself, evolves every day to match the state of the city by unknown means, expands as you eat it, could be used as a map

Truffle Tart

Chief Ingredient: *Hanging Garden Mushrooms*

Not made of truffle. Candied corpse mushrooms give it a tangy aftertaste, flaky base, grated lemon filling, memento mori

Leech Pie

Chief Ingredient: *Leech Canal Leeches*

Leeches pop in the mouth like crispy fireworks, dense crust, grease-filled, feeds on the excretions of your stomach, inexplicably compulsive

Honeycider

Chief Ingredient: *New Heaven Honey*

Unexpectedly potent, sickly sweet with a dry runoff, oozes down the side of your mug, don’t ask how they get the honey, always warm

Spireblack Soda

Chief Ingredient: *Spireblack*

Mostly water, tingles on the tongue, always cold, faintly sour, combusts in large quantities, recipe learned from a vengeful spirit, refreshing

BAKERY ROLES

Allow players to choose a ‘role’ (essentially their cover) in the bakery which is detached from their class. In mundane terms, this job title is used to defend their new presence to curious aelfir authorities. In slightly more exciting terms, this choice establishes where they go and what they do when a swarm of excited, haughty aelfir storm in seeking immediate baked gratification during one of the set-pieces of the day. Roles can be studiously occupied or nominal depending on the flow of story and session needs.

There may be a small chance that Bisquiet’s outward betrayal of Our Hidden Mistress both enables their arcane arts and has consequences on your physical forms.

PASTRY-WEAVER

Trained by Oriol in the rudiments of the craft, you use minute twitches and long, flowing movements to weave light confections from ingredients that would prove impossible for any other baker to handle. By day’s end, your arms feel like they have been stuffed with uncomfortable shifting confetti; meat and tendons peeled into fleshy ribbons from the inside out and left to jangle inside your skin. Your skeleton feels raw.

YEAST-STRANGLER

Bacteria is already an unpredictable factor in cooking, its mood affected by everything from humidity to height to vibration. In Bisquiet, this element becomes even more lively. Ignais, Oriol’s right hand, will show you the basics of beating, wrestling and strangling any dough or crust into reluctant submission — all without alerting clients of the struggles occurring in the back of the shop. By day’s end, your hands feel heavy. Something wet sloshes inside your knuckles. They swell and even crack under the eroding strain, but never while you’re working.

SHADED-SERVER

Brewmaster Gale quickly informs you of the litany of essential etiquette for taking orders from aelfir elite without incurring their wrath or putting Bisquiet in any more danger. You do not look the aelfir in the eye. You do not exhale or inhale more air than is necessary. You do not forget names. You do not remember mistreatments. You are grateful to serve. By day’s end, you wipe blood from the edges of your lips. Your artificial smile is a permanent smirk sutured without needle or thread, and it’s stretching.

BLOOD-BUTCHER

The assorted meats used in Bisquiet's savoury dishes require preparation. From the death of a creature to their folding within a flaky crust, you shepherd the sacred flesh to its tender, delicious fate. By day's end, your skin is stained with more blood than was contained in the meat itself. More blood than you have in your body. You cannot wash it off. You can feel the false blood crawling between your muscles, curling around your nervous system. The false blood burrows closer to your heart.

SHUTTLE

You are the connective tissue of Bisquiet. If someone needs salt, you snatch it from a shelf in the pantry and throw it to them, already prepared for the next request. If a tray stacked high with dishes is too heavy for one person to carry, you rush to their side and help them bear the burden. You are essential, and by day's end, your legs jitter with the sudden lack of activity. You have the urge to run headlong through the streets of the Ivory Row, past the guns and armour of the guards, past the concerns of politics or the Ministry, off the edge of the Spire and into whatever space lies beyond: on and on into thin air, tearing a path across the wind.

SAUCE-WIELDER

You quickly learned that sauces were the least of the tools you would wield as you studied under the careful eye of Edeme, the radical resistance fighter responsible for the stellar presentation of Bisquiet's dishes. From towers of frosting to the 4,768 garnish colour combinations, you now see the world as a kaleidoscope of chaos just waiting for a considered tweak to bring it together in a flourish of colour. By day's end, your eyes find unfulfilled order and artistry in everything you see. It takes everything you have to resist plucking a row of planted flowers to rearrange them, or tearing off the bent nose of a ruffian in the Red Row so you can place it somewhere more considered – like the hook of his cap. You might be mad, but your work comes highly recommended.

BAG-HOLDER

You follow Shaded-Servers and Brewmaster Gale to the tables of clients, collecting the money for services to be rendered. You open your little sack without a word, hear the soft slap of money against the padded surface inside, and move to the next paying customer.

This is not a pathetic existence – it is an invisible one. You are not worthy of enough notice to be despised. At day's end, you can feel the bag's worn burlap surface against your clutched hands long after you put it away. You think about its symmetry. The taste of the velvet lining. Sometimes you wake up and find it next to you, folded in your hands. You can't think of a clear reason to let it go.

THE STORY

PLOT THREAD: BISQONNECT

Trigger scene: THE EXPLOSION. Your group is handling the evening rush in seeming harmony. Someone drops something. Someone else says something apparently innocent. Someone else takes offense. The resulting explosion of emotions and noise threatens to reach the customers at the front of the bakery. Poor, awkward Oriol finally puts an end to the conflict with a harsh scream, but the damage has been done. You see Bisquiet for what it is. A cracked glass waiting for the right moment to shatter.

THE CHARACTERS INVESTIGATE BISQONNECT

Oriol has lost faith. Oriol does not believe in the Solar Pantheon or its cacophony of rituals meant to replace the weight of history with rote movements of foot and tongue. However, he doesn't believe in the wrath or love of Our Hidden Mistress either. In the uncomfortable middle of the double-life he now leads, both powerful and powerless, gods just don't fit.

Edeme has attempted to sabotage the shop. Despite their perfectionism, Edeme's first loyalty is to the Cause. They miss the old days, and have (and still do) occasionally mismeasured ingredients in a half-hearted attempt at mutiny. However, these sabotages have unfailingly resulted in popular twists on old classics.

Brewmaster Gale's sympathies no longer lie with the drow. It's plain from his words, the painstakingly painted mask he wears of his own volition and the company he keeps. Brewmaster Gale doesn't just envy the aelfir: he admires them. He sees himself among them – not just tolerated, as he is now, but as a truly accepted member of their world.

Ignais blames Brewmaster Gale for Bisquiet's troubles. He sympathizes with the enemy, snarks at his coworkers and carries himself with the pride

of a minor god. His panic and cowardice resulted in the death of a general that will bring the whole of aelfir 'justice' upon their heads any day now. Whether the conflict is external, internal or interpersonal, Ignais believes its origin lies with Brewmaster Gale.

Ygor is sick. There is something wrong with Ygor, Bisquiet's mascot and Edeme's companion. The staff have done everything they can to find the cause for his recent symptoms and detachment, with no success. The guards outside are as effective at keeping undesirables away from the block as they are at keeping Bisquiet's owners inside the same radius, so they have not been able to take Ygor to receive any proper medical attention for some time now. If the players investigate Ygor's lack of energy, desire to move away from those he loves, hacking coughs and runny nose, they will find that he is sick with a rotting illness. It's curable, but he's deeply unwell nonetheless.

PLOT THREAD: SPECIAL SESSION

Trigger scene: SOMBRE REALIZATION. Brewmaster Gale brings the group together in the common room above Bisquiet late one night. He's unusually quiet. He tells your group that a drinking companion, highly placed within the secret police, let slip that The Council is convening a special session to discuss the response to Taren Quiet-As-Roses-Wilting's disappearance. It is likely that it will result in further restrictions on drow movement and freedoms. The drow community could suffer greatly in the near future – and it's his fault.

THE CHARACTERS INVESTIGATE THE SPECIAL SESSION

The meeting is indeed taking place. The information you received isn't idle drunken chatter. The Council will be meeting in a matter of weeks to discuss what is to be done with the drow community in the wake of what is seen as clear insubordination. Bisquiet and its staff will avoid much of the fallout due to their privileged position, but your people will suffer.

Council meetings are catered by an aelfir café in Amaranth. The place, imaginatively called the Amaranth Café, is an aelfir institution; however, the proprietors have become complacent. The Council is no longer satisfied with their service as it currently exists. They might be considering a new provider – one with

positive buzz surrounding it and a reputation for discretion.

Madame Fey-Aranyen (*Spire* p151) will not be able to help the drow. Even her basic suggestion to confirm Quiet-As-Roses-Wilting's fate before deciding upon consequences for the drow was denied. This is not a new phenomenon. Her presence on the Council is a token, as demonstrated by the catering tailored specifically to aelfir palates.

The members of the Council do not yet have firm opinions on the matter. They bat around possibilities with the privilege of detachment. While a few are obviously sympathetic or antagonistic, most aren't coming with a prepared scheme aside from ensuring that so-called justice is served. Their opinions can still be affected – perhaps even altered entirely.

PLOT THREAD: THE GRIEVING

Trigger Scene: THEY KICK THE DOOR. Rough aelfir and human soldiers flood into the increasingly small-seeming entrance of Bisquiet, low on Blues. They all bear the same crest on their shoulder: a bleeding rose in flames, with two swords through its stained petals. This is the mark of Taren Quiet-As-Roses-Wilting's special tactics platoon, now calling themselves The Grieving. They enquire as to his fate. Gale coldly informs the group that he and his staff have no idea. Unfailingly polite, they leave at the reprimand...but not without a final glance behind them.

THE CHARACTERS INVESTIGATE THE GRIEVING

The Grieving are suspicious. They were somewhat acquainted with the habits of their commander. Though some roam other districts investigating even the faintest rumour, Bisquiet is the last, best lead to determine what happened to their beloved leader: he went inside, but was never seen leaving.

The Grieving are unhinged. Their behaviour is becoming increasingly erratic and needlessly aggressive. They take Blues constantly and have dyed their uniforms black. Without Taren to keep them in order, the Grieving are as dangerous to the city as they are to you. They might attract the interest of greater powers to your case.

The Grieving are skilful. Taren was taken by surprise when Gale put a whisk through his neck. He was also tipsy. You have no such advantage over the Grieving. They are highly trained in the forms

of lethal combat that matter. Even through a narcotic haze, they remain unerringly observant.

The Grieving can be turned against each other.

The power vacuum left by Taren's absence has already started to divide the platoon into smaller, independent squads of dysfunctional people. A particularly manipulative party might be able to turn both individuals and larger groups against each other.

The Grieving are taking tainted Blues. Unknown to them, their supplier has laced these particular Blues with Dagger and minute traces of Sulphur (see p104-105 of Spire) just to see what would happen. If the Grieving are allowed to continue, they're as likely to find the fate of their dead commander as to bring down half of the district in gunfire and flames.

DUKE SQUAD

Names: Cormorant, Finch Dew-As-Sky, Linnet Wing-Upon-Which-Lies, Emeril

Description: Disturbed by the loss of their beloved captain; Carrying naked weaponry at all times regardless of disapproving looks from other aelfir; Cold, intelligent eyes burning with the need to know; Trying to use this as an opportunity to lead the group

Difficulty: 2 (they're members of an elite aelfir military force)

Resistance: 6

Equipment: Tarscale armour (Armour 3); polished sawed-off shotguns (D6, Point-blank, Ranged, Double-barrelled); gutter knives (D3, Ongoing)

PLOT THREAD: DELIVERY DELAY

Unless something special is required for the bakery, you are not allowed to leave Bisquiet. Instead, near the end of the evening, you submit a request to the captain of the special guard posted around your shop for the supplies you'll need the next day. Fresh ingredients are brought to your door in the wee hours.

The deliveries are made by street people, urchins and those too desperate for stable employment to be turned by the Ministry, among other subversive groups. However, your ingredient couriers are increasingly going missing and people are no longer jostling to take this job like they did in days past. Someone is attacking Bisquiet's supply lines, and you need to know why.

Trigger Scene: SOMEONE'S OUT FOR BLOOD. An ingredient courier who can't be more than 15 years old stumbles to your back door, knife wounds scattered across her back. Her last words are simply: "They said they know who you are." Without any obvious clues, the only thing you can conclude is that someone is targeting the bakery. Spire is a big city for an enemy to hide in.

THE CHARACTERS INVESTIGATE THE DELIVERY DELAY

You have deliveries to make. With your number of ingredient couriers shrinking by the day, your group has to fill in the deficit. This puts you in direct danger, but also in the position most likely to eventually pay off with information of who or what has begun this crusade.

Bisquiet has a lot of enemies. You cannot know the full range of things the original owners of Bisquiet did to reach their position, or the number of people your mere existence infuriates today. You must suspect everything and everyone. Paranoia isn't madness: it's a survival strategy.

Sources have been going missing as well. Harvesters who gathered fresh ingredients for couriers to deliver to your shop are disappearing alongside your messengers. This could have a major impact on the ability of Bisquiet to operate over time.

Gangs are receiving contracts with your name. Specifically the name of your group, the new employees. Whoever is behind this must have some knowledge of Bisquiet's inner workings, as well as the relative freedom you have as new employees. You might see them every day. You might serve them.

Word of Bisquiet is spreading beyond the aelfir. Other bakeries have learned of your existence. Taking a shortcut through a narrow alley in the undercity, you might even encounter some would-be rivals determined to fight for baked supremacy.

JEALOUS BAKERS

Names: Juli, Patric, Earl

Description: Still wearing stained aprons; Either froth or frosting on their mouths; You've never heard of this bakery that apparently exists

Difficulty: 0

Resistance: 2

Equipment: Layers of dubious clothing; frying pans or rolling pins (D3)

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

THE AWKWARD MIDWIFE, PASTRY-WEAVER, OWNER

ORIOL

Why is he involved?

He lifted himself from a life as a vat tender in the dark algae farms to run a bakery of his own in Ivory Row. Wow. It took agreements foul and fair, made all the more tricky by his difficulties with social situations. However, skilled companions, unyielding ambition and a willingness to do whatever it took to achieve this feat brought him to the realization of his dream. He should be happy. He is not.

What sets him apart from the rest of Bisquiet?

Oriol's final loyalty is to Bisquiet and the drow surrounding him: his family. The Cause is important, so he'll fight it, but his days of fiery resistance are long behind him. In his search for a stable haven for himself and those he cares about, he has already burned his essence away.

What does he desire?

Peace. That's all. He constantly takes Blues to numb sensation and memory in pursuit of this ideal, forging forward by putting one foot in front of the other with sheer willpower. How he functions is a wonder that both amazes and disturbs his coworkers.

What does he despise?

Any threats to Bisquiet's continued existence. From the name on the plaque above the sagging door to the people who work alongside him to serve his oppressors, this place represents his life one cupcake at a time. If Bisquiet is gone, the ocean of compromises he waded through to get here would mean nothing. The very thought causes him to take another Blue.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- Oriol learns that a jealous aelfir restaurateur is recruiting local gangs to storm Bisquiet in a fortnight. Even if they cannot break through the gauntlet of guards surrounding it, the spireblack firebombs they carry would still do their ugly work. He takes your group into his tiny bedroom and gives you a set of gleaming human revolvers from a cache hidden in a locked panel beneath his bed. The guns are loaded with illegal aelfir shells

that tear flesh and bone. He does not explain the source of these items.

- Your group follows an errant smell in the night to find Oriol baking pastries in the few hours between Bisquiet's closing and opening. Tomorrow is the bakery's anniversary. He's cooking for his coworkers – his friends – so they can rest, and celebrate come morning.

THE STEADFAST BOUND, YEAST-STRANGLER, RIGHT-HAND

IGNAIS

Why is she involved?

Ignais was trapped in the same life Oriol was, stirring algae tanks as an indentured drow and then as a supposedly free one. Oriol did what he had to do to bring Bisquiet to life, and Ignais helped him do it. She followed him through adversity and continues to do so through success.

What sets her apart from the rest of Bisquiet?

Her height, for one. Her growth was stunted by exposure to the reality-warping energies of Spire's Heart at an early age, but she possesses a strength that belies her stature.

What does she desire?

Of the staff of Bisquiet, she has the least illusions about their near future. There is no escaping the fate Gale's foolishness has doomed them to. She hopes, now, for a good death: that in some way, the method of their demise can redeem a set of people that have struggled for so long in moral and mental muck.

What does she despise?

Brewmaster Gale. She sees him as the source of the bakery's problems, from the 'successful' compromise underlying its foundation to the murder that now numbers their days. If at all possible, she will not occupy the same room.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- At the end of a long day, Ignais cradles an unconscious Oriol in her arms. Some emotion choking her words, she tells you that he's run out of Blues. Ignais asks you to find a supply to keep him going when dawn breaks.
- During a quiet period after the morning rush, Ignais heaves a deep sigh and leaves the kitchen. If your group follows her into the basement, you'll

find her quietly rocking with Ygor in a moment of solace. He nuzzles the back of her head with his snout.

- Magical reagent is accidentally poured into the yeast for biscuit dough. A beast rises from the pot, sharp teeth composed of the salt in the batch, flickering tongue made of the oils poured into its mixture. Ignais beats the tar out of it, but needs a little help finishing the creature off after it absorbs a box of knives.

BIS-KILLER

Name:

Description: Hideous blob; Can't decide whether you want to eat it or run screaming; Slickened oil in its tracks; Eyes of bacteria wriggling like worms

Difficulty: 1

Resistance: 3

Equipment: Oil tongue (D2); salt teeth (D3 Ongoing); knives (D3)

THE RADICAL CARRION-PRIEST, SAUCE-WIELDER

EDEME

Why are they involved?

Edeme was a magister, recruiting Oriol and Ignais to the Ministry while they were still indentured drow mixing the vats of the Dark Farmers. However, their lack of activity in recent years has caused the Ministry to demote them to common minister. Not eliminating Edeme entirely is proof of their former station within the Ministry, but the blow still stings.

What sets them apart from the rest of Bisquiet?

The temporary, obsessive flow of their art possesses them during the workday, true, but Edeme has no other loyalty than the Cause. Even the Ministry pales in comparison to the overall goal of resistance against the aelfir. They care about their coworkers and the institution they created together, but Edeme would bring the whole building down if it meant a better future for drow.

What do they desire?

The freedom of drow, in every sense of the word. At their core, Edeme is an idealist. They believe in a better world within their lifetime, in spite of the existence they currently occupy.

What do they despise?

Edeme cannot stand hypocrites, which makes their situation all the more ironic. Edeme's place of work, their home, their source of family, is wrapped in a shroud of hypocrisy, without even the benefit of external safety.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- Edeme will not allow a tray of baked goods to go out until the frosting river surrounding the items is complete, wait times be damned. You may try to convince them otherwise, if you like.
- Edeme takes a rare peek outside of Bisquiet's kitchen and recognizes one of your customers: Lucien Eats-Wind-As-Fire, a notorious bounty hunter known for his unnecessary brutality when hunting drow quarry. They hand you a poisoned dish and ask you to find a way to make him eat it, warning your group with a gesture not to tell anyone else. Completing the task will cause Edeme to reveal the sibling they lost to Lucien's cruelty.
- Edeme's contacts in the resistance have smuggled word to them of an important (and secret) meeting to define strategy as the Council contemplates the fate of drow across the Spire. They cannot leave the premises of Bisquiet, so Edeme asks you to go in their stead.

THE VULNERABLE AZURITE, BREWMASTER

GALE

Why is he involved?

Oriol is a kind, talented man, but lacks many social graces. He needed a 'face' for Bisquiet: someone to navigate the tedious pleasantries needed to retain customers and uncertain allies. Gale proved useful in this regard. When Bisquiet began to work as agents of the Ministry in earnest, his knack for brewing the right beverage to draw information from aelfir visitors just increased his value. Within the bakery, he is untouchable.

What sets him apart from the rest of Bisquiet?

He isn't a baker. His skill-set lies with drinks and deals, not the journey of crust or the fulfilment of filling. This separation drives a small, almost imperceptible wedge between himself and his passionate coworkers. He guards the secrets of his own position zealously.

What does he desire?

He dreams of a position on the Council, a place up-Spire all his own, and perhaps a retinue of sycophants courting his favour (he can see right through them). He can see and hear the lives of his aelfir customers drinking beneath the cracked panes of Bisquiet's windows, and it's impossible to imagine a better existence.

What does he despise?

Suggestions that Gale isn't a real friend to either the Ministry or his companions. Such accusations, actual or imagined, will inspire a vicious reaction from the normally charismatic man – not because the idea is false, but because it's true.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- It's a busy work day. Your group can barely keep up with the orders (most requiring fresh preparations) flooding through the counter at the front of the shop. During this panic, Gale slips one member of your group a note. It says he has vital information for the Ministry he can communicate to them alone, and to hear it, they must meet him on the roof that half-night. If they go to the rendezvous, they'll find the Brewmaster in an unusually contemplative mood. He apologises, and tells them that he doesn't have the kind of information they probably want. Gale then proceeds to inform them of the small, personal, meaningful struggles Bisquiet's staff have been coping with in recent days. He may even take full responsibility for the death of the aelfir war hero. He asks that you pass on this information to the Ministry, with empathy.
- Gale bends over the bar just after the evening stampede and looks over the few, beautiful people that remain. He gets a faraway look in his eyes. When questioned, he angrily dismisses you and begins polishing a glass with purpose.
- A tall aelfir clad entirely in black lures members of your group aside and begins asking roundabout, disorienting questions for an unknown purpose. Gale intervenes. It is suggested that he knows the aelfir in some way, but he refuses to tell you how.

THE CARRION-PRIEST COMPANION, MASCOT

YGOR

Why is he involved?

He goes where his Carrion-Priest companion, Edeme, goes. However, Ygor is equally attached to every member of the Bisquiet staff. He will protect you with his life, and not a single one of your coworkers would do any less for him.

What sets him apart from the rest of Bisquiet?

Ygor is a hyena. He wants to help. If his help is not desired, he will curl up next to one of the roaring ovens and watch you, offering an encouraging moan whenever you might need it. Ygor loves you very much.

What does he desire?

The death of the Sun itself—the great, bastard orb that burns flesh and takes away the gentle shadows hiding secrets better left intact. Alternately: pats.

What does he despise?

Threats to his friends. Ygor does not bark or laugh, but he has another way of making his displeasure known. It's sharp, and sequestered within his jaws. Yeah. That's right. Ygor has a knife.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- The Good Boy curls next to one or several of you at the end of the day. Setting his head on your lap, he looks into your eyes with the steady affection of trust.
- The Good Boy has found something. Sniffing, he beckons your group to follow him. If you do so, you'll find a corpse crushed beneath a still-smouldering carriage with several impressive weapons. They're an arms dealer from down-Spire – what would they be doing up here?
- The Good Boy is rolling on his back and looking at you, ready to move again if this is a bad time. If your group is distracted by The Good Boy, several dishes burn in their ovens, unnoticed.

THE LIAR

MORGAN SPEAK-OF-FLAMING-REFLECTIONS

Why is she involved?

The epitome of a social and political climber, Morgan has mastered the art of making the smiles revealed by her mask always feel genuine. She holds an unspecified but high position in the High Elf Nation proper; as a result, she also holds a great deal of power over your shop if she wishes to exercise it. Morgan also happens to enjoy baked goods.

What sets her apart from other aelfir?

Morgan has full awareness of the leverage she has over Bisquiet, as well as her relative advantage in spoken conversation. She is one of the few people within Spire who could send even Gale stumbling over his words.

What does she desire?

A single day without compromise. Just one twenty-four hour period where she doesn't have to make a single concession, negotiation, or behind-the-scenes deal to ensure success. One day where she has the power and influence to ask for what she wants and simply...get it.

What does she despise?

Sustained inconvenience. Deals are her practice and passion, so she is no stranger to graciously allowing one or two minor concessions in an opponent's favour. However, repeated resistance will only give her a reason to coldly destroy you, point by point. If the Leech Pies are out of stock, you will simply get more leeches – even if it means digging into the churning surface of the Leech Canal with your bare hands.

SUGGESTED SCENE

- The embodiment of your tenuous privilege, Morgan may begin to blackmail the shop for any number of reasons, including boredom. However, taking time away from your other, numerous concerns to eliminate a few obstacles to her advancement will pay off great dividends. It could put you in a stronger position than ever, giving you protection and a powerful friend to support you no matter the circumstance based on mutual knowledge of each other's sins. That is, at least, what you'd like to think.

THE ERRAND BOY

HOLDEN RUNS-LIKE-STONE-BURNED

Why is he involved?

Holden is a glorified errand boy for several of the most wealthy aelfir families in Spire. He retrieves messages, passes them on, collects small items, satisfies spontaneous desires for food and so on. As you are the hottest open secret of aelfir society, his masters often desire dishes from Bisquiet. They're too busy (or apathetic) to come themselves, so you have to deal with this luckless character instead.

What sets him apart from other aelfir?

Holden is under durance, an extremely rare and controversial occurrence. A young aelfir from the High Elf Nation, he was supported by wealthy parents but had no oversight. During his first year in the city he learned the pleasures and volatility of gambling, as well as the ease of covering failure with loans when you have a good name. News of his parents' death came during one of Holden's customary sprees. They left their own debts behind, and the young man suddenly owed a small number of very scary people a lot of money. To keep his kneecaps intact, he offered to pledge durance to every one of these masters. It was such a novel suggestion that, against all odds, they agreed.

What does he desire?

The reverse passage of time. Holden wants his parents back, and wishes his younger self carried the hard lessons he has had to learn from increasing consequences. Nostalgia is a potent way to crack his sharp, protective shell; music from his childhood is an especially strong trigger.

What does he despise?

The shame of his station. It would be a major faux pas for aelfir to openly communicate just how pathetic his status is while they are surrounded by other races, so they demonstrate it through a thousand glances and nearly imperceptible slights. In his quest to regain some modicum of self respect, he mistreats the few below him in the limited circles of his constant service. You are very much included on this list.

SUGGESTED SCENE

- Holden received orders the previous day for all seven of his masters at once. The commands were very specific, but tired from an especially late night of work, he got several of them wrong. He bursts

through the door the next day (today) wrongly placing the blame on your heads and demanding recompense. Desperate, he begins screaming at you, hurling curses at your group. The other aelfir are silent. His public display of emotion in front of so many of his betters breaks every social protocol. This could turn ugly for both yourselves and the scared young man in front of you if you cannot find a way to defuse the situation.

THE BEARER

LOUIS WILLED-UPON-TEEMING-SHORES

Why is he involved?

Simply put, Louis is the voice of Archbishop Wynn, and one of the few people in the world that could change the madman's mind. He informs you of Wynn's desires (unspoken or not). If he feels it necessary, he also puts in his own suggestions on how you can better serve a man you will never meet. Louis usually feels it necessary.

What sets him apart from the other bearers of the Archbishop Wynn?

Louis has the honour among the bearers of Archbishop Wynn to also be the Archbishop's confidant and constant companion. He follows the mad, golden man from his waking to his rare resting hours. Louis watches vigilantly, speaks softly and feels the blessing of Father Sunrise with the righteous steps he takes by the Archbishop's side.

What does he desire?

Though he could not articulate it, he wishes to become the Archbishop. Not to assume his position, or take it by some force of strategy. Nothing so common as that. No, Louis wants to be the Archbishop: to climb into his sagging human skin and speak through his lips, see through his eyes and feel the burning madness of his brain pulse against his clammy brow. Their closeness is tantalizing. If he could, he would breathe the Archbishop's very breath.

What does he despise?

The idea that someone might be taking advantage of Archbishop Wynn's generosity, zeal or madness drives Louis to strain social etiquette to its limits in his protectiveness. He sees himself as the barrier between the Archbishop and a cruel, strange world – one he is only too happy to keep beyond arm's reach.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- Louis waits outside the main window for some time, examining Bisquiet's facade. When he finally steps through the doors or is induced to come inside, he glances around as if to confirm something one last time, and sniffs loudly. He insists that you put up more icons symbolizing your devotion to Father Sunrise at the request of Archbishop Wynn. If pressed, he will become agitated, but cannot produce evidence that the Archbishop asked anything of the sort.
- While returning from an errand, your group finds the Archbishop's litter near the edge of Ivory Row. Louis is beating a homeless dreck dealer wearing only undergarments and a tattered tunic with the Archbishop's golden staff. The Archbishop does not look outside of his litter and Louis tells you not to intervene. Unfortunately, the victim is one of your ingredient couriers, Hercas.
- Louis furtively requests a set of cookies composed entirely of expensive, rare ingredients, none of which you currently have – but cost is no concern. The celebration of Archbishop Wynn's birth approaches, and in his cycle of prayers, worship and daily business, Louis forgot to acquire a suitable present. If you do create this last-minute, extravagant gift under extremely stressful circumstances, he will owe you a debt.

ENDING THE STORY

If the players do nothing but assist in the bakery's daily operations, the truth is revealed about Quiet-As-Roses-Wilting's demise. The staff of Bisquiet are incarcerated in notorious prison The Hive to await a highly public execution, and the bakery itself is transported through the air by powerful magics to a new location in the heart of the prosperous Silver Quarter.

At Bisquiet's grand re-opening, a defecting Brewmaster Gale is shown to nominally be in charge, his dream of prominence among his oppressors finally fulfilled. The original owners of Bisquiet die while attempting to escape The Hive. Ygor is shot in the gut by a laughing aelfir guard and left in a forgotten gutter of the Ivory Row. The last thing he sees is a glint of light from the shifting windows of the area, passing over his body for the final time.

This is an *incredibly bleak outcome*. However, your players can affect what happens after their arrest and Bisquiet's removal in a few fundamental ways.

WHO'S TO BLAME?

First off, your players will eventually be caught. That's inevitable. Whether through hubris, betrayal, manipulation, or something else entirely, the facade of Bisquiet will be ripped away and all will be revealed.

The primary villain of the campaign will determine the target of your players' wrath. Did aelfir authorities get too close to the truth, leading Brewmaster Gale to betray your group? Did Louis Willed-Up-on-Teeming-Shores poison the mind of the mad Archbishop Wynn against the thriving shop? Did a powerful customer blackmail your group? Did the grieving platoon of Quiet-As-Roses-Wilting finally see through your excuses? Was this the work of a rival bakery, or the Ministry themselves tying up a dangerous loose end?

The way you've run the session up until this conclusion can make Brewmaster Gale irrelevant, result in the death of some (if not all) of Bisquiet's original owners, or significantly bend the course of vengeance to come. But before your players can pursue a target, they must first escape their imprisonment.

They have to break out of The Hive.

ESCAPING THE HIVE

The capture was swift but not entirely unexpected, given your long list of enemies. After a few days of cheeky torture, judgement is decided for your group: death, public and painful.

Before that happens, though, the guards of The Hive figure they should be able to get a little more out of you. After decades of awful prison food, why shouldn't they enjoy the bounty of Bisquiet with those aelfir fortunate enough to be stationed up-Spire?

Your bloodied bodies are unceremoniously hurled into The Hive's kitchen and saddled with an order to feed the garrison of 100 people three solid meals (including a light dessert) for the next three days. Three days surrounded by tools small and industrial, sharp and edible. For you, experienced bakers? A wonderland of possibilities.

Can you concoct an explosive recipe? Perhaps a poisonous brew to wash down some 'ordinary' slices of algae pie? The guards will have tools to prevent subterfuge – various beasts and mystical rods that click and whirl – but surely you can find a way past such toys. The tools at your disposal open a number of vectors for escape, from the social to the brutal. Despite the miles of bonerock surrounding you, you can find freedom for yourself, the owners of Bisquiet (if they are still alive) and maybe even some of your fellow prisoners.

In many scenarios, this is the best ending your players can hope for: a prison break freeing revolutionaries and dangerous criminals in a final flare of resistance. If your group is unfortunate enough to live, however, they face a loss of purpose. The routine of the bakery is gone. Your cover lost, the Ministry will not support you, and may even hunt you in the aftermath. This aimless loss can be directed any number of ways, but the ones that are most likely end in a torrent of vengeful gunfire.

ASSASSINATION

If your group can trace (mistakenly or not) their issues to a guilty party, they could choose to pursue revenge. A knack for baking is a powerful weapon, and you'd be surprised how easy it is to get where you aren't supposed to be with a wink and a free biscuit. Replacements for powerful figures tend to be worse in the Spire, not better; but in their quest for vengeance, your group might not care.

TURNING THE TABLES

What if you could gain a stronghold in this new vision of Bisquiet without having to work there? By gathering information about the new status quo of the bakery, you can identify weak points and weak people.

Executing your own version of justice, you can take advantage of the opportunities that arise to seed flowers of resistance in the aelfir-washed version of what used to be your home. Bisquiet could be a more vital tool of intelligence and subversion than ever.

If you are successful, and if Our Hidden Mistress does not object to the proposal, is it possible for you to present this new cell to the Ministry as a bargaining chip to save your lives? You won't know until you try.

GUERRILLA WAR

Your group, upon hearing of Bisquiet's re-opening under new management, could choose to harass it. You know what they need to operate every day. You know the entrances, exits and nifty little passageways burrowed throughout the building's aged interior. This knowledge makes you dangerous.

Cornering ingredient couriers and spoiling vital sources needed for its best dishes may bring judgement on the head of the owner (or owners) who are unable to live up to your baked legacy. If the original owners of Bisquiet are still with you, they might struggle to pursue actions that mean dismantling their life's work into tiny, painful pieces. As a result, it

is quite likely they could become expendable in what has now become your quest. It would be a shame if anything were to happen to them.

This guerilla war, like the former state of affairs in the bakery, cannot last. You will be found. You will die. However, you could inflict a great deal of damage before you do.

CRASHING THE PARTY

The eyes of aelfir society are trained on Bisquiet for its spectacular re-opening (and long overdue remodelling). Your group could decide to make your final acts a public demonstration of drow power; a settling of your personal pasts in flame, blood, gunpowder and irony.

There are a frankly incredible number of ways you could spoil this event, including replacing the complimentary baked goods on offer with your own tainted versions. It is unlikely that you will be able to take out every influential member of aelfir society present, but the meal will be memorable. What more could a baker ask for?





Drugged dreamers project a synthetic Spire into Glasshelm's databanks.

THE FALL OF GLASSHELM

By Mary Hamilton and Kira Magrann

Content warnings: Body horror, worms, abduction and drugging.

OVERVIEW

[Paraphrase or read this aloud to the players when you start the game.]

It's a humid, hot summer in Spire, and Red Row is sweltering under its orange lamps. The weather is sticky, the streets are grimy and something stinks. Sleep is hard to come by. So many people look exhausted and listless – not just the drow, but humans and even gnolls seem pale and drained.

Perhaps it's just as well: it's riot weather, and there's more reason than normal for the denizens of the Row to be upset. A mystery buyer has bought up a series of properties near Threadneedle Square, a few streets away from your home, and the rumour is that they've put up the rent. Some angry people are about to be evicted.

Meanwhile Hlela Shines-The-Light, a high-born aelfir with too much time on her hands, has made it her personal crusade to rid the Row of drugs and lawlessness. Thanks to her status and a gift for words, she makes the papers more often than the evictions.

You've all been sharing a house since you finished your durances; it's not much, but it's been home while you found your feet. Two of you are working for the Glasshelm Corporation, the city's largest and oldest financial services organisation: you're clerks in the Halls of Record, where the company keeps its ledgers and files.

Your Magister – a short, impeccably elegant drow with a shaven head and an enigmatic half-smile – has told you to find out what's going on. Someone's buying up the Row, no one seems to be getting enough sleep and they think Glasshelm's involved somehow.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON?

Hlela Shines-The-Light is trying to do something right. She genuinely believes that it's her purpose in life to help the downtrodden and less privileged. She was born into relative poverty (by aelfir standards) and believes firmly that, with the right opportunities, everyone can overcome their circumstances the way she has.

She wants to make Red Row a better place to live: a place where good, respectable drow families can mingle with the aelfir working class for the betterment of all involved. Currently the Row is full of crime and villainy, but she can't just stand by and watch as drugs and lawlessness tear generations of drow apart. She's willing to invest a great deal of her own wealth and energy to clean it up, but she doesn't have enough money or the right connections to make it happen cleanly. So: she's asked for help from Glasshelm, the oldest and least scrupulous of Spire's few remaining financial institutions.

In Spire, stories and narratives can be a kind of magic – and so can the law. Contracts are a straightforward tool used in demonology and mortgages, but they can affect stranger things, too.

With the right form of language, the right name for a person or entity and some binding paperwork with a personal mark from everyone involved, it's possible – albeit extremely difficult – to work some very complex magic. Great sorcerers and professors have occasionally used binding contracts to keep themselves relatively safe from demonic incursion, but they've usually stuck to single entities: bespoke arrangements made with menacing forces too strong to fall for something as simple as small print.

Glasshelm has been trying something different: writing a few extra clauses into its standard loan agreements to get a little more power over a lot of

people. It's subtle, it scales well and it's effective. The main reason no one's tried it before is because it's complex and extremely dull, but Glasshelm has people who are good at that kind of thing – especially the Lawyer.

The Lawyer took over Glasshelm's conveyancing and drafting teams a few years ago. Everyone who's taken out a loan, mortgage or even started a savings account since then has given up a small part of their minds to the Glasshelm Network – not much, just a little bit of run-time, a few hours of sleep here and there.

The contract works like malware on a computer, accessing unused resources and making them available for use during downtime. Glasshelm uses that power for all sorts of things, but mostly for running projections. The contracts don't give the company power to act on anyone's behalf; they just make minds available to help with difficult tasks. Combined with the knowledge available in the Hall of Records and managed by six former Vermissian Sages with absolutely no say in the matter, this forms a very powerful computational device that can model the impact of political, social and other major changes in Spire and its surroundings. This helps Glasshelm make sure it's positioned to take advantage of every outcome.

Shines-The-Light has approached Liam Grasps-Thistle, an ambitious investment manager on the Lawyer's team who sees this as his big opportunity to manage a serious account and bring in a major profit. Grasps-Thistle has access to the Network, and has been using it – along with substantial loans – to help Shades-The-Light secure strategically important properties.

When the right moment comes, she can evict the undesirable elements from Red Row and replace them with properties and policies better suited to the idyllic aelfir society she imagines. Glasshelm will technically own the freeholds on most of Red Row by then – but in her eyes, it's a necessary sacrifice to make the city safer and happier. Grasps-Thistle's use of the Network has resulted in mass exhaustion, reports of shared dreams and, in a couple of vulnerable cases, catatonia – but he believes it's worth it to secure such a lucrative deal for the company. Both would agree that there will always be collateral damage when you're trying to change the fabric of society.

Hlela Shades-The-Light doesn't just need cash and property. She needs to get the existing powers that run the place – Mr Winter, Mother Moon and the Sisters – to either step down or work with her. In addition, she's got to contend with the person behind the Red Row drug trade, Mr Alas (who would very much prefer things to stay just as they are). On

top of that, she needs permission and support from the Council to redevelop the Row – but the relevant planning subcommittee is run by depressed military veteran Captain Wander-The-Lost, who has good reason to want the drug trade to continue as well.

Of course, she'll also have to cope with the Ministry. That's where the players come in.

THE STORY

PLOT THREAD: FOLLOW THE MONEY

Trigger scene: someone's being kicked out.

Armed guards accompany a squad of aelfir to a tenement building a few blocks away from the players' home and erect a cordon, which draws a crowd eager for a little street theatre (including someone selling suspicious sausages and several pickpockets). After a shouted conversation and some threats, the tenants inside – mostly drow, but a couple of humans – begin to file out, their belongings bundled on their backs. Some seem to have alternative places to go; others clearly don't, and don't know what to do with themselves. If the players talk to them, they find that all have received letters on the same company letterhead from Starbright Holdings Inc., informing them that the building has been purchased and that they are being evicted for non-payment of rent.

THE PLAYERS INVESTIGATE

Someone is buying up vacant property in Red

Row. Not just vacant property, but that's where it's most obvious. Mortgage records in the Glasshelm vaults, property records held at the Council and general gossip all broadly concur: mystery buyers from a series of companies are picking up derelict and abandoned buildings all over the Row, generally paying slightly over the odds for them. It seems to be important that these companies own the freehold, not just the leases. They're buying not only the buildings, but also the land on which they're situated – though no one's seen anyone inspecting these places before they're bought.

A different set of companies is buying up shops and commercial leases – and they're raising the rents. Store owners complain to the player characters about their exorbitant rent hikes, and several have already put up prices to pass on part of the pain to their customers. With price rises comes more petty crime – shoplifting, obviously, but also muggings, burglary and theft as people

struggle to make ends meet. (See table opposite for company names.)

There are more guards around the Row than normal. That might be an obvious response to the increase in petty crime, but it's not a normal response when it comes to Red Row. Normally the guards don't seem to mind much. But even though they're more active now, they seem to be keeping to areas where the streets are relatively quiet – places where the majority of properties are empty, and you wouldn't think there would be much to protect.

All these companies seem to be connected. There are dozens of shell companies buying up the Row, but there are links between them: the same director or company secretary, similar addresses that link to other companies, all sorts of payments that twist back and forth between company accounts and somehow end up back where they started.

The Sisters have had a major payday. Normally the three major kingpins of Red Row maintain an uneasy balance of power, with border skirmishes and occasional heists to keep everyone entertained. But the Sisters seem to have stepped back from a few blocks of prime territory, and they're flashing around more money than normal. For example, they've commissioned a trio of exceptionally fine sculptures of themselves to sit on one of the corners of Threadneedle Square.

There's a protest planned. The recent rent hikes and corporate purchases have left people with nothing; something must be done. There's a general sense that civil disobedience of the collective kind is necessary to make a difference. It's being organised by two groups: the Concerned Business Collective (probably a front for Mr Winter's gangs) and the People's Housing Alliance, a very loose collection of people on the verge of being made homeless and others hoping it won't happen to them.

Hlela Shines-The-Light is behind the companies buying everything up. Or at least she's one of the people behind it. As the players uncover more and more companies, her name starts turning up as the director. There's another frequent name, usually listed as the company secretary or the finance partner: Liam Grasps-Thistle.

SHELL COMPANIES

Roll once on each list to generate a shell company.

First word:

- 1 – Star
- 2 – Bright
- 3 – Green
- 4 – Glass
- 5 – Bio
- 6 – Flame
- 7 – Cherish
- 8 – Gold
- 9 – Sub
- 10 – Inspiration

Second word:

- 1 – Helm
- 2 – Future
- 3 – Scourge
- 4 – Gate
- 5 – Surface
- 6 – Wing
- 7 – Rudder
- 8 – Graft
- 9 – Row
- 10 – Consulting

Designation:

- 1 – Holdings
- 2 – Corporation
- 3 – Plc
- 4 – Incorporated
- 5 – Ltd
- 6 – & Daughters
- 7 – Collective
- 8 – & Sons
- 9 – Society
- 10 – Association

PLOT THREAD: PEOPLE IN GLASSHELM HOUSES

Trigger scene: the characters who work in Glasshelm's Hall of Records are asked to notarise and file a set of property deeds and mortgages. This is a fairly normal request for most of the city, but unusual because it involves properties in Red Row, including the Hammer's Rest – a bar they believe to belong to the Sisters – and a few tenement blocks nearby. Most of the properties in the Row have restrictions on development, and owners have to go before the Housing Sub-Committee for approval (which very few actually get). These mortgages are backed and signed by Liam Grasps-Thistle, an ambitious investment manager at Glasshelm who the characters know by sight and by reputation.

THE PLAYERS INVESTIGATE

The Housing Sub-Committee is quietly reshaping the city. Captain Wander-The-Lost is the ranking Council member on this particular committee, which holds a startling amount of power, defining who can build what and where. He's distant, largely disengaged and leaves the majority of the grunt work to the other committee members, who are free to offer favours and restrict access to those who fail to meet their standards. There are three aelfir civil servants – Suja Burns-The-Thunder, Jace Fortune-Fallen and Freja Drowns-Moon-Silent – and a human named Grey Nancarrow, chosen for his architectural knowledge. A drow named Pointe Cloutier is passing their duration taking minutes and recording the committee's site visits. While their decisions rarely make the newspapers, they frequently change the shape and scope of Spire.

Hlela Shines-The-Light is petitioning to rezone Red Row. As part of her "urban renewal" push, she's putting a motion to the housing committee which would effectively remove the restrictions on Red Row properties. She wants to designate it as Spire's first "improvement zone", in which any and all developments that can prove a positive social impact will be automatically approved. The proposal is incredibly broad, and it's been met with some serious opposition ahead of the committee's vote at their next meeting. The opposition includes Mr Winter and Mother Moon, working with groups of concerned citizens both above and below board. Even Mr Alas is involved, who has employed a

blood-witch named Lepane to argue publicly against the motion.

Fortune-Fallen is in favour of the rezoning motion. They happen to own a few properties in Red Row (with Glasshelm mortgages administered by Liam Grasps-Thistle) which are currently almost uninhabitable, and their value would rocket if the motion passed. Those properties are in a densely-packed part of the Row often referred to as Tinderbox Alley, covered in shacks and makeshift wooden repairs, which is just as flammable as the surrounding tenement buildings.

Drowns-Moon-Silent is in favour of the rezoning motion. She cares deeply about artistic symmetry and is extremely upset by the lack of a suitable mirror for the beauty of Amaranth in the lower Spire. Shines-The-Light has her convinced that the laws of reflection require the redevelopment of the Row.

Burns-The-Thunder is undecided about the motion. He's feasting at the Amaranth Cornucopia this week, which is the largest aelfir religious gathering of the season. Everyone who's anyone will be there displaying their wealth, taste and largesse; Shines-The-Light and Grasps-Thistle are among the guests, of course. This is their perfect opportunity to lavish Burns-The-Thunder with gifts, ply him with pleasures and make promises of future riches with few observers.

Mr Alas believes that Captain Wander-The-Lost is on his side. With good reason: Mr Alas is the main supplier of the blues he's taking on a daily basis to keep his mood in check. Few people in Spire go direct to the source, but as a Council member Wander-The-Lost has certain privileges. He knows that without Mr Alas, his connection to the high-quality narcotics he desires would run suddenly, unpleasantly dry.

Wander-The-Lost and the other committee members are taking a trip to the Row to observe its current state. They will travel incognito, with only a dozen or so staff members and a small palanquin to carry them.

The meeting is next week, and it'll be public. Shines-The-Light is planning to present her petition personally, backed by Grasps-Thistle on matters of finance; rumour has it that Mr Alas will appear in person to oppose the motion. The meeting will take place in a large hall in the Ivory Quarter with enough room for around two hundred people, and procedure dictates that anyone who applies in advance to Cloutier will be able to speak for five minutes. Several groups have already applied; others are planning more direct interventions.

PLOT THREAD: DREAM A LITTLE DREAM

Trigger scene: a lot of people have started sleepwalking. So many, in fact, that it's starting to look like an epidemic. The players go out at night and are intercepted by several sleepwalkers who are interested in them personally: they will walk up to the players and shout things like "GET ME OUT OF THIS BOX" or "GLASS EYES EVERYWHERE" or "EAT THE WORMS" before collapsing, fast asleep, to the ground.

THE PLAYERS INVESTIGATE

It's more than just sleepwalking. The players' Magister is convinced the sleepwalking is linked to what's happened to notorious small-time gambler Scrael Finglass, who moonlights as an occasional informer for the Ministry. He's been down on his luck for a while, but he hit a major jackpot a couple of days ago. No one's entirely sure how he got hold of the cash he's been flashing, but yesterday he was found in his apartment, completely incapable of moving or speaking. It doesn't look like the standard drugs, alcohol or minor poisoning: he's catatonic.

Finglass had a lot of spare identities, and all of them were in debt. It looks like he's been forging new identities in order to take out multiple loans from various places – some from sharks, others from the Glasshelm payday loan outlets in the Works.

Finglass isn't the only one. Three other drow and a human have been found in similar catatonic states in the last few weeks. They're all being cared for in different hospitals, but Red Row gossipers are starting to put things together. All four were in a lot of debt; in fact, it looks like every single person who's had a sleepwalking episode has taken out at least one Glasshelm loan at some point in the last few years.

These loan agreements are highly classified and hard to get hold of. This is a little weird; most things Glasshelm does are meticulously documented and stored in the Hall of Records. But for some reason Finglass's loans, and those of the others who are now catatonic, are kept under lock and key with very high level security clearance.

Glasshelm has been operating differently in different places. It's not a secret that Glasshelm adapts itself to the different parts of Spire: the Amaranth headquarters are luxuriously appointed and

utterly opulent, while the data centres and pawn-for-coin outlets in the Works are dingy, run-down and understaffed. It stands to reason, then, that the higher-risk loans would carry stricter penalties and perhaps have different procedures attached. However, it doesn't explain why the security is so much higher for the paperwork.

High-risk loan agreements have a lot of small print, and not all of it is above board. If the players can get hold of one, they'll find several dozen pages of tiny handwritten legal agreements that are not in the standard documents. They include references to "reserving a portion of 2% of the oneirotic energy of the Supplicant for use by the Corporation as it sees fit" in the middle of a particularly tedious bit of legalese about indemnity and insurance. There's also a clause at the very end – in different handwriting – which modifies that 2% to add the phrase "or a greater amount if the Corporation deems necessary". The handwriting matches Liam Grasps-Thistle's signatures and notes on other documents.

It's possible to communicate with the sleepwalkers. It takes care and very gentle questioning, but they can hold simple conversations if the players manage to find one who isn't already spending all their energy shouting at them. Under questioning, the sleepers all talk about the Dreamers and the Box. A few also mention someone called Lepane, who they describe as friendly and not like them – more colourful and solid somehow. None remember Lepane, the Box or the Dreamers when they wake up; instead, they remember walking around a version of Spire that seemed similar to the waking world, but different in a few important details which change every night. The dream city is populated by people whose faces are blank or those of the sleeper's old acquaintances and people they've seen on the street.

The dreams are linked together, and they're exploring possible futures. The details of each night's dream are the same for different people. Everyone dreams together of a city ruled by a different Council, a gnoll invasion or the Row being bulldozed and renewed. In some, the dreamers die; in others, they get rich, poor or invaded.

Glasshelm is controlling the Network, but Liam Grasps-Thistle is screwing things up. It's clear from the contracts that Glasshelm has been taking parts of people's minds in security against high-risk loans for a while, but the overloading has only started quite recently. It's the result of one person: investment manager Liam Grasps-Thistle. He's overreaching his authority and trying to project

what will happen in Red Row, accessing the Network without permission and running simulations that tax its limits to try to make sure his plan is foolproof.

Lepane is a blood-witch hacker trying to take down the dream network. Lepane is working for Mr Alas, and they already know about the dream network. They say that Grasps-Thistle has pushed it beyond its original limits and exposed Glasshelm's secrets as a result. Lepane is trying to prevent Grasps-Thistle from financing the deals that will doom the Row, and they have no problem using extreme tactics to resolve things. They have been working on a virus derived from the corpse-worms in the Heart to corrupt the Network, and they believe it's almost ready to plant. They don't know what that will do to the people involved and they don't really care.

The Network is controlled from the Works data centre. The centre has always seemed larger than necessary, especially as the number of Works denizens with bank accounts is far lower than other areas of the city. The dreams are emanating from here: sleepwalkers describe it in perfect detail even if they've never seen it in real life, and anyone sensitive to magical power can feel its energy pooling around the lower levels of the building.

The Network can be hacked, infiltrated or destroyed. Lepane's virus is one option, but they also have access to a backdoor option: a dream-walking power that allows them to cross over into the current shared dream, leaving their physical body behind. The characters can all learn different ways to do that if they wish to, or they could simply break in and destroy the complex magic that powers the simulations.

The Dreamers are real. They're trapped and they want out. There are six Vermissian Sages trapped in obsidian boxes in the basement of the Glasshelm data centre, kept drugged and sleeping. Their magic keeps the Network running, and for years they've been insensible to everything around them. But Grasps-Thistle's constant use and need for secrecy has created some back doors: two of them are now conscious and desperately trying to get the message out to anyone who will listen. Lepane is ignoring them in favour of just destroying the network.

GLASSHELM FALLOUT

Liam Grasps-Thistle is really not keen on being discovered before his plan comes to fruition, and will attempt to keep tabs on the players once he realises

that they're investigating. At appropriate moments, instead of taking Ministry-related fallout, the players may encounter the following:

MODERATE

WE CAN SEE YOUR HOUSE FROM UP

HERE. [Shadow]. *Your home is under surveillance.*

If you happen to be preparing for something – like taking down Glasshelm's network or inciting a riot – Grasps-Thistle will know about it and have an opportunity to prepare defences.

BAILIFF ON MY TAIL.

[Silver]. *All your loans seem to have fallen due at the same time.* Once only, an important and valuable item you own is repossessed while you're away from home.

NON PLAYER CHARACTERS

HLELA SHINES-THE-LIGHT

Why is she involved?

Hlela Shines-The-Light grew up rich and well-schooled in the upper echelons of Spire. She's a lady who lunches: an elegant socialite who spent her youth at fabulous gatherings, making art and generally being accomplished. As she's aged she's grown bored of the superficial society life, and wants to give something back. She sees Red Row as the perfect pet project to let her make a lasting, positive mark on the city as her legacy.

Why is she different?

Shines-The-Light genuinely cares about drow welfare, and is interested in charity and charitable works for their own sakes. She isn't in this for profit, aside from a sense of positive wellbeing and a legacy that the city will notice. She's genuinely trying to do something good by regenerating a very poor part of the city.

What does she desire?

The betterment of the drow people. She hasn't necessarily thought deeply about what that might mean, and she's convinced that she's far better placed to define it than any drow could be, but the desire is very real.

What does she despise?

She abhors needless cruelty, and shuns aelfir who harm each other or any other living thing for no good reason. She has taken over the durances of several drow who were in abusive situations, and refuses to

eat meat unless she can be certain that it's from a creature without nerve endings.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- The players encounter Shines-The-Light visiting a local chapel to donate food and blankets. She wishes them well (in a very generic, hand-waving kind of way) and gives them several leaflets on 'Drow Betterment'.
- A small crowd in the street is gathered around a wooden stall, where two drow and two aelfir are asking them to sign a petition to improve the Row. One of the aelfir is Hlela Shines-The-Light; she doesn't remember the players, but is eager to encourage them to sign her petition. She asks about their families and how they'd feel if their children didn't have improved lives from the ones they've experienced.
- The players find a news bulletin that describes Shines-The-Light's crusade in glowing terms, along with an editorial in which the plight of the drow is deplored and every aelfir is encouraged to donate to the Red Row Regeneration fund, courtesy of Liam Grasps-Thistle, Glasshelm Corporation.
- The characters who work at the Hall of Records see Shines-The-Light visiting Grasps-Thistle in his temporary office there.

LIAM GRASPS-THISTLE

Why is he involved?

Grasps-Thistle is a very talented investment manager at Glasshelm with a surprising skill for spotting unorthodox opportunities. He's currently acting on retainer for Hlela Shines-The-Light as part of her Red Row Regeneration proposal, and has opened an almost unlimited credit line for her schemes. He's bending all of Glasshelm's resources to her needs, and sees this as an enormous opportunity for great profit for the company and himself.

Why is he different?

Grasps-Thistle is, unlike most Glasshelm senior staff, willing to bend the rules. He's impatient for success and believes he knows better than the city's laws or the company's guidelines. If he can see a sizeable profit to be made, he thinks it's worth taking significant risks in order to secure it.

What does he desire?

He wants to be promoted to a seriously senior position where he can manage a substantial chunk of

the city's wealth – perhaps a role on the Council's personal finance team or the Public Works Committee. He would say that he's motivated primarily by wealth, but the reality is that it's the status he desires most. He wants someone to open doors for him the way they do for the really high-born aelfir, and he wants his children never to have to work a day in their lives.

What does he despise?

Grasps-Thistle is a snob. He despises poverty, which he sees as a personal failing on the part of poor people, and admires nobility and good breeding; he thinks less of those without personal connections to the oldest, richest aelfir families. He has no such connections himself.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- The characters who work at the Hall of Records see Grasps-Thistle, who they know by reputation, furiously pacing the halls and muttering. Shortly thereafter he commandeers a suite of little-used rooms as his new offices, and demands an entourage of aelfir bookkeeping staff to assist him.
- A crew of surveyors visit Red Row, measuring and taking details of various properties in the back alleyways of the borough. A small mob of angry residents (and ex-residents) gather to heckle them; when the players arrive, the scene is about five minutes away from the first stone being thrown. There are not enough surveyors to fight the crowd, so they try to argue their right to be present, invoking Grasps-Thistle's name as though it is a protective spell.
- Grasps-Thistle is named Employee of the Season in Glasshelm's internal newsletter, which cites "stellar performance", "incisive understanding of future trends" and "stylish and innovative approach to bookkeeping" as key factors in determining the accolade.
- Grasps-Thistle posts an unusually passive-aggressive notice on his office door requiring all passers-by to tip-toe quietly in the corridors and avoid speaking above a whisper. Unlike every other passive-aggressive notice in the Glasshelm offices, this one is immediately obeyed.

LEPANE

Why are they involved?

Lepane is a blood-witch for hire, a cross between a skilled mercenary and a personal assistant, who



Red Row, as it stands, is full of audacious stage-shows, crime and burlesquery; Hlela wants to put an end to all that.

works for Mr Alas as a general fixer and problem-solver. They say they're here because they're being paid, but they're also committed to taking down Glasshelm in a way that makes it seem like a personal vendetta.

Why are they different?

Lepane has learned the ability to walk through dreams, as well as working out how to use corpse-worms to deliver a viral load of unpleasantness into someone else's head. They're not just a hired body: they're a talented hacker, gifted at manipulating both flesh and the internal landscape of the mind.

What do they desire?

Lepane has a debt they can't get rid of by themselves. It's been years now since they took out their loan, but the terms make it almost impossible to ever pay off: they're stuck in an infinite loop, just about staying on top of interest payments on their debt. One way or the other, at the end of this adventure they'll be free. They have – or had – a lover once: a good woman, a drow called Flow with no dark past and no criminal connections, and they want to go back to her with clean hands and a clear conscience. She said she'd wait.

What do they despise?

Manipulation. Lepane is direct, deliberate and to-the-point: they won't stand for woolly language designed to entrap people, and they cannot forgive impossible choices given to people who can't protect themselves.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- Lepane is drinking in one of the bars in the Row with the sort of commitment that denotes someone extremely determined to be drunk as quickly as is feasible. If the players approach, Lepane buys them all drinks for as long as they stick around. They use this as an opportunity to "bug" them, dropping a writhing cockroach into one of the players' bags which they can use to keep track of their whereabouts.
- The players in the Hall of Records are filing documents in a distant part of the archive when they come across Lepane wearing street-work clothes – the sort of disguise that might fool a casual observer – and carrying a claw hammer and a box file. They have clearly broken in somehow and will try to persuade the player characters to help them find some loan documents.

MR ALAS

Why is he involved?

Mr Alas has been living a very quiet and happy life in Ivory Row, funding his personal proclivities from the profits of the drug trade in Red Row. He has all three of the landlords in his pocket – or thought he did, until recently. Hlela Shines-The-Light is encroaching on his turf.

Why is he different?

He has a great deal of power and money, but isn't willing to show his face or involve himself personally in the struggles of the Row. Crime is contagious, and if he's publicly shown to be a part of Red Row's drug trade, that will make him a target. Plus, this way his identity remains unclear and he can move unseen in any situation.

What does he desire?

Mr Alas likes it when tomorrow is the same as today. He has spent a great many years setting things up just how he wants them, and now he desires continuation. He might even be Undying, such is his love of order, ritual and routine.

What does he despise?

He absolutely cannot stand small dogs. Most things can be taken in one's stride, but small yapping dogs are an avatar of the moral decay of modern aelfir. He finds pets in general disgusting: the idea of sharing one's home with an animal explicitly bred to be subservient is, for him, absolutely abhorrent on several levels.

SUGGESTED SCENE

- The players never meet Mr Alas in person – or rather, they may meet many different persons claiming to be Mr Alas and delivering a simple message. He requests their assistance and directs them to Lepane as his delegate in this matter.

TAKING DOWN THE NETWORK

There are three ways the players might choose to take out the Glasshelm Network:

- The easiest option – with potentially the most collateral damage – is to infect the existing Network with Lepane's corpse-worm virus, effectively nuking the system and possibly many of the people enmeshed in it.
- Infiltration involves learning to walk through the dreams of a sleepwalker or someone in debt to

Glasshelm, inhabiting the psychological landscape for long enough to destroy it or wake the Sages.

- The least occult approach involves storming the data centres in the Works and destroying the machinery, waking the Sages or both.

Whichever approach the players choose, the same broad outline applies: **Preparation**, where the players make their decisions about what to take with them and how to approach the problem; **Initiation**, as the players get started and get inside; and **Switch**, when it all starts to go wrong.

Your players might choose to try to pull off two of these options simultaneously, or even all three. This increases both the risks and the potential rewards significantly, as it's likely that running a triple-pronged attack is the only way to genuinely root out and destroy Glasshelm's influence over Red Row.

INFECTION

The players can choose to work with Lepane, using the corpse-worm virus to infect Glasshelm's data and corrupt its archives. Lepane's goal is to wipe out the Network, and with it the corporation's hold over the sleepwalkers. They can't fire it themselves because they need a willing host to channel it – so they're very happy to use the player characters for this purpose.

The virus is almost untraceable and relatively straightforward, but is also largely untested and may well have negative side effects – and Glasshelm's Network is unlikely to be undefended against attacks of this kind.

The players can combine this option with the other choices. Inserting the virus into the Network will be much easier if they can “carry” it into the dreamscape to get it past some of the internal defences. They can achieve something similar in the real world if they choose to break into the data centre and deploy the virus close to – or even directly into – the Dreamers.

The virus works quickly. First it floods information into the brain of a living creature: not specific messages, but the same small chunks of data over and over again, overwhelming the senses and neurological systems. It then collapses that mass of information into a single phrase or sentence, often nonsensical, which replaces the victim's thoughts, experiences and sensations. Finally, this phrase is passed on to any other connected minds, acting as the seed for the next information flood.

Lepane claims they have created a version that limits its damage to parts of the brain colonised by the Glasshelm Network, but they need help to manufacture it at scale. However, they would be happy just to release it into a sleepwalker and see what happens

– they're confident that it would cause enough disruption to discharge their duty to Mr Alas.

PREPARATION

The players will need to craft the virus and infect a host. The virus requires a first host from which to operate, effectively a “patient zero” for the viral outbreak: a single person linked to the Network who will remain linked throughout. This person can be willing or unwilling, and may or may not be aware of their role. A catatonic patient will work just as well as one of the PCs, though as the virus spreads and meets adversity the host's capacity to affect the world around them will be important. If asked, Lepane flatly refuses to take on this role.

SUGGESTED SCENES

You may choose to play out the virus creation however you like. Here are some suggested scenes to work with.

- **Harvesting corpse-worms.** Corpse worms (*Spire*, p136) breed and fester in the Corpse Pit, a deep chamber at the centre of Spire with no apparent bottom, where corpses are disposed of. The players can go to access points in Derelictus to harvest the worms themselves. Roll Resist+Occult to avoid stress, and take D6 stress to Mind or Blood on a failure.
- **Visiting the cult.** If the players would prefer not to harvest the worms themselves, there is a cult willing to do it for them. Eyeless priests of the Segmented Dark harvest the worms and ritually consume them in various ways, allowing them to excrete wisdom into their brains. It's a difficulty 1 roll to negotiate with them once they're found, as they value the worms quite highly. They're not particularly responsive to standard negotiation tactics, though they would really like to put a worm inside one of the players so they can watch what happens next. If the players fail, they take stress to Silver, Mind or Reputation, and may gain moderate fallout.
- **Splicing the virus.** This scene takes place in a workshop in a basement in Derelictus, which Lepane claims is their base of operations. Modifying and augmenting the worms with Lepane's viral infection is a difficulty 2 Fix+Occult roll. Once they succeed, the players gain their virus as a shared individual bond.

FALLOUT

MINOR

UNSETTLED STOMACH. [Blood] *You just don't feel like eating. At all. Ever again.* If you try to eat with this fallout, mark D3 Mind stress. If you don't eat for 24 hours, mark D3 Blood stress.

MODERATE

SOMETHING IN MY EAR. [Mind] *You're convinced there's something in your ear. You can hear it squirming when you're lying in bed at night or when it's quiet around you.* The difficulty of all tasks involving focus or attention is increased by 1 until you're certain you've managed to remove it.

INNER KNOWLEDGE. [Mind] *You know things you shouldn't know, for some reason.* Once per game, the GM may give you a piece of information about an NPC, another character or a situation. This may or may not be useful.

INITIATION

If the cell successfully splices Lepane's virus into a corpse-worm, they have the ability to spread it into the minds of dreamers connected to the Glasshelm Network. The virus functions as an NPC bond (*Spire* p23) shared by all the player characters.

In order to initiate the attack, the players need a host who is connected directly to the Network. To kick off the outbreak, they can choose to go into the dreamscape, to a part of Glasshelm that's vulnerable, or inside the firewalls before they trigger the virus. Regardless, the host needs to be asleep and dreaming of Glasshelm. The infection is introduced via a corpse-worm in the host's ear.

For each stage of the assault, the GM should make a roll for the virus. Using the bond rules, it has a dice pool of 3D10 for this action as it's within the virus' abilities and it treats the dreamscape as a local area. If the cell prefer, the virus can roll 2D10 for each action; the effects will be much more subtle, and people won't sustain permanent harm from the virus.

Once the virus has succeeded at one stage, move on to the next. Each stage takes about two hours to complete assuming it works on the first attempt.

SWITCH

Roll to see if the virus takes fallout at the end of each stage if it receives stress. There is no way to remove

stress from the virus bond other than stress removed as a result of fallout.

STAGE ONE: INFECTION

The virus spreads through the dream network, making copies of itself in the minds of slumbering targets. At this stage, they display no outward signs of infection, but close inspection of the dreams by Glasshelm security will show some aberrations.

STAGE TWO: CHAOS

The virus overloads the sleepers with junk data, leading to chaos in the dreamscape. Dreamers will repeat the same actions over and over, write one word ("WYRM" or "BURROW") repeatedly on nearby walls or claw at their ears and eyes in an attempt to make the noise stop. Glasshelm will suspect something is wrong and move to shut down the spread of the virus. At the end of this stage, the drugged Vermissian Sages will be infected.

STAGE THREE: COLLAPSE

Minds infected with the virus are now too full of noise to remain intact, and dreamers will collapse into a catatonic state before their connection to the Network is permanently burned out by the worm's assault. The shared dreamscape lies in ruins, flickering in and out of permanence, and by tomorrow night it will be a useless, sterile, abandoned thing. Glasshelm will do what they can to limit the losses suffered, but if they can't save the Network, they'll settle for taking revenge on the people who caused them so much damage.

If the cell chose to use the lessened version of the virus (see above) very few people will suffer permanent damage from the night's events – otherwise, the opposite will be true, and many will die or be driven permanently mad.

FALLOUT

MINOR

DREAMERS AWAKE. Sleepwalkers all over the city begin to stumble out of their beds and congregate in the streets, howling.

MODERATE

FIREWALL. Glasshelm's arcane defences are triggered and begin to shut down parts of the dream,

limiting the corporation's losses and shutting off some parts of the Network from infection. If there are players inside the dreamscape (see below), this acts as a security alert and they will be hunted by dream constructs.

SEVERE

WE KNOW WHERE YOU LIVE. Glasshelm security agents begin to kick down the door of the cell's safehouse.

GLASSHELM ENFORCEMENT AGENTS

Names: Gavin, Thryx, Gorpus

Descriptors: Wearing black helmets; Carrying a battering ram between them; Roughly the same shape and size as a door

Difficulty: 1

Resistance: 5

Equipment: Glasshelm-branded batons (D3, Stunning); Glasshelm-branded door-breaker shotguns (D6, Point-blank); Glasshelm-branded riot shields (Armour 2)

INFILTRATION

The least obvious (and most weird) option is for the players to try to take down the network via the back door: literally invading the dreamscape and waking up the dreamers at the heart of the network.

PREPARATION

If the players decide to try walking through the dreamscape, they'll first need to learn how; luckily, Lepane can train them. All of the advances below allow a character to enter into someone else's dreams and manipulate them. Players can use any of these powers on one of the catatonia victims or on someone else who's sleeping and part of the Glasshelm Network.

DREAM ADVANCES

These advances allow characters to enter the dreamscape conjured by the Glasshelm dreamers. Before each advance is a recommended class to assign it to, but you shouldn't feel limited by this; select whichever advance fits your character best.

If you would like to create an advance for a class not listed here, the basic formula is D3 stress, and your body is unconscious and vulnerable during the

process. Waking up from the dream early will require a Resist+Occult check.

[KNIGHT OF THE NORTH DOCKS] BLACK-

OUT DRUNK. *You can access the ephemeral semi-dimension that allows you to get home safely even when you're too pissed to tie your shoes.* Mark D3 stress to Silver or Reputation as you get outrageously drunk. When you leave the bar, you'll sidestep into a dimension only accessible by drunk people trying to get home and cats. From there, it's a simple move over to the collective dreamspace of Spire. When you wake up, you'll be in your own bed with the sort of weapons-grade hangover that gives all physical tasks +1 difficulty until you get a decent lunch in you.

[IDOL] DREAM A LITTLE DREAM. [Occult]

You haunt the dreams of others. Roll Compel+Occult to cast this spell as you perform your art to (or simply charm) a crowd. On a success, D3+1 of them will dream of you tonight; as you sleep, you can inhabit these alternate forms, skipping between them as you wish. While you're not inhabiting them they move with a mind of their own, determined by the dreamer.

[INKSMITH] SELECT YOUR OWN ENDEAV-

OUR. [Occult] Roll Compel+Occult to cast this spell before you fall asleep in the same room as your target. You hijack a dreamer's mind by rendering it down into a series of descriptions of the dream, with choices which you, the reader, are able to select from. You don't have as much control over the situation as other dreamwalkers do, but you don't endanger yourself by entering the dream. All stress and misfortune is applied to the main character of the story, not the reader.

[BLOOD-WITCH] NIGHT TERROR. [Occult]

You crouch on the chest of a subject and breathe in the air expelled from their lungs; they are paralysed, terrified, unable to act. Mark D3 stress to Blood to cast this spell on a sleeping target. They wake up, but are paralysed until you decide to end the spell or you leave their body. You replace them in their dream, but your body is in a trancelike state until you leave the dream or someone physically removes you from your target.

[VERMISSIAN SAGE] DREAM DROP. [Oc-

cult] *You use the strange geometries of the Vermissian to plunge you, and others, into a dream.* Roll Fix+Occult to cast this spell. You also need a relatively

calm space and a sleeping subject. On a success, you wrench the room you're standing in through the Vermissian with a sound of screeching brakes: you and anyone else in the room is plunged into the subject's dream. While this is undeniably effective, it's loud and draws attention from the inhabitants of the dream who will recognise you as an outsider. While you're in the dream, your bodies remain in the waking world, slumped unconscious in the room.

[MIDWIFE] WHISPERLINGS. [Occult] *You send forth a swarm of dreamweaver spiders, and they sing to you of your target's dreams.* Roll Fix+Occult to cast this spell. You need access to your target, but as long as a house spider could reach them then the spell can be cast. The swarm of spiders covers the victim's face, leaving behind a tight web mask; through this, you can feel the dreams of the target as described riotously to you by a thousand tiny spiders. A successful casting of this spell allows you to pick important information out of the chaos. Failure still lets you into the dream, but your mind is assaulted with a cacophony of descriptions and unrelated musings on things important to a spider.

INITIATION

However the players get there, the Glasshelm Network dreams are all the same. The city is the same as it always is, except for one or two key details, such as a different ruling Council, war with a different enemy or Red Row being regenerated. The dream landscape is limited in terms of the colour palette – mostly greys, blues and purples – and the faces you see on every street repeat themselves as variations of people the dreamer knows in real life. The further the players get from their starting point, the more monochrome the dream becomes, and the more gaps appear: spaces where there appears to be nothing but a sucking void that hurts to look at.

The exception is the Glasshelm data centre building, which sits in the middle of the landscape like a headache, warping the streets around it. It's almost too real, and the lights on top are bright and piercing. It's a squat, one-storey building in an industrial estate in the Works, made from corrugated iron and ugly concrete. It has two entrances and very few windows. Inside, it goes down five storeys; there are four stairwells, one at each corner.

Breaking into the building is similar in the dreamscape to the way it would be in the physical realm: players will need to avoid the guards and

gain access to floor -2, where the Dreamers are housed. But in the dreamscape, they can get extra assistance: the Dreamers who are conscious of what's happening will try to contact them and help out where possible.

This help might manifest as: dreamscape allies that can distract enemies; clasp tentacles that rise out of solid surfaces and help the players with basic tasks; doors opening, closing, appearing or disappearing in useful ways; trapping the guards in mental pocket dimensions; dozens of sleepwalkers converging on the players' location to provide a barrier against guards; or bleeding from the ears.

SWITCH

If the players manage to wake the Dreamers without alerting the security agents, that's unfortunately still likely to trigger the alarms.

In the physical realm, that means Glasshelm agents are hunting for the players; see the Glasshelm Enforcement Agents adversary block on the page opposite for details of the heavies they'll send. If they already know where the players live, they'll be there in minutes, and the players have a race against time to get back to their bodies before the riot squad breaks down the doors.

Inside the Network, Glasshelm's security agents will be on high alert and blocking the exits back to the real world. If a character dies in the dream, they are catatonic and unreachable in real life, and will need palliative care to avoid starving to death.

DREAMSPACE SECURITY AGENTS

Names: Aleph, Corinth, Epsilon

Descriptors: Coruscating with blue fire; Wearing the face of your mother; Made entirely of scissors; Coming at you backwards with its neck twisted 180 degrees around on itself

Difficulty: 1

Resistance: 7

Equipment: Blue fire (D6, Spread D3); sonic screech (D6, Ranged); too many scissors (D6, Penetrating); hair flail (D6, Penetrating)

INVASION

If the players decide to straightforwardly invade the Glasshelm data centre, they'll need equipment, weapons, support and potentially a helpful riot in order to

stand a chance at overcoming the complex security around the place. But it is possible, especially with their inside connections.

Lepane may be willing to help them, if they're around and involved; Mr Alas would certainly be in favour of the operation should he find out about it, and might be willing to finance part of it if asked nicely.

This is the costliest option by far, but it's the least risky in terms of the health of the people caught up in the Network. It's also got the highest chance of actually fully resolving the problem. If the players can find the classified store of loan documents in the physical world and take that out as well as destroying the Network, it will completely cripple Glasshelm and – incidentally – wipe out most of the debt records in Spire.

PREPARATION

The players should be encouraged to go on a shopping trip. Ideas for equipment can be found in the core Spire book, and there are some more below. It's worth bearing in mind that Brother Hellion's Church of the Gun is located in Red Row, and the priests there are likely to be sympathetic to the players' cause.

INITIATION

The objectives are up to the players, but there are two likely options: unplug and wake the Dreamers, and destroy or alter the Glasshelm loan documents. Either way, the best approach will be to avoid attracting too much attention on the way in. Another option is to attempt to cause (or benefit from) a distraction, like a big public meeting or a demonstration of some kind.

The data centre is as described above. There's a reception desk at the front where visitors are asked to report; the back entrance is for employee use only, and guarded by a grumpy watchman with a large set of keys on his belt. He rolls his own cigarettes and takes extended bathroom breaks.

The Dreamers are housed in a secure room on floor -2. They are kept sedated inside individual obsidian boxes, each one plugged into anaesthetic drips and feeding tubes to keep them quiet and alive. There is a nurses station next to their room and the nurses come and go on a regular shift pattern, but no one else has security clearance to that floor except the guards. The nurses won't directly attack the players if they can help it, but they can and will fight back violently if confronted.

NURSES

Names: Helena, Grythen, Brell
Descriptors: Wearing comfortable shoes; Impeccably clean with very short nails; Hastily eating a sandwich
Difficulty: 0
Resistance: 2
Equipment: Scalpel (D6, Ongoing D3); Syringe (D6, Ongoing D3)

The loan records are kept on the lowest floor, -3, and they're the only thing there: just shelf after shelf of dry paper. Guards patrol this floor regularly, and occasionally researchers or investment managers access the area to find files on particular accounts.

SWITCH

If the players manage to sneak their way in and actually unplug the dreamers, that's when all the alarms go off. The Network collapses without their presence, which is the sort of thing that definitely alerts security – and the security guards are wise enough to recognise when they need to alert the specialists. It's possible (just about) that some of the players might be able to hold off the security forces while the rest escape.

GLASSHELM INTERNAL SECURITY GUARDS

Names: Calyx, Scorpit, Flavin
Descriptors: Slightly pudgy; Mildly out of breath; Younger than you were expecting
Difficulty: 0
Resistance: 4
Equipment: Glasshelm-branded batons (D3, Stunning); Glasshelm-branded security uniforms with reinforced breastplate (Armour 1)

THE LAWYER'S PERSONAL STAFF

Names: Hydra, Malevolence, Coruscate

Descriptors: Entirely dressed in armour so black it hurts your eyes to look at them; Impossibly tall; Emitting a keening wail that hurts your ears

Difficulty: 1

Resistance: 6

Equipment: Caryatid pattern whip (D6, Brutal, Scarring); Scorch flaregun (D6, Ranged); Bitterdark uniforms (Armour 2)

ENDING THE STORY

If the players do nothing, then Hlela Shines-The-Light will win her vote at the housing committee and gain the permissions she needs to rezone Red Row for development. Liam Grasps-Thistle will set her up with enough finance to make a healthy profit for both of them, and will end up with a good promotion and a fat bonus.

Red Row's citizens will be quickly pushed out by rising rents and demolitions, with nowhere to go but Derelictus or a growing shanty town around the outer walls of Spire, exposed to the sun and the elements.

Lepane's virus will take out a small portion of the Glasshelm Network, but not enough to take it down completely. Over time it will grow back to its current state, slowly sucking at the minds of those in debt to the corporation, and occasionally opening them up to severe brain damage through misuse. The Dreamers will stay asleep.

The players aren't going to do nothing, of course. But precisely what they do could vary wildly, and might not entirely avert all of these outcomes.

THE NETWORK

The players can choose to take out the Network using any of the options detailed earlier in this scenario, or they can leave it alone. If they distract or otherwise take out Grasps-Thistle but leave Glasshelm or the Network intact, the sleepwalkers will gradually stop walking. The catatonic patients will slowly awaken, returning to normality as the Network settles back into its standard usage patterns.

THE POLITICIANS

If Shines-The-Light wins her public vote, it's all over for the Row regardless of what happens with the

Network and Glasshelm. Unless the players can persuade her to install one of them as her right-hand person to subvert her will that way, she has all she needs to make change. If it's not her, then someone else will take over what she's begun once the law permits them. The only way to prevent the Row from being gentrified is to persuade the housing sub-committee to vote the motion down or prevent it from being put in the first place.

THE CORPORATION

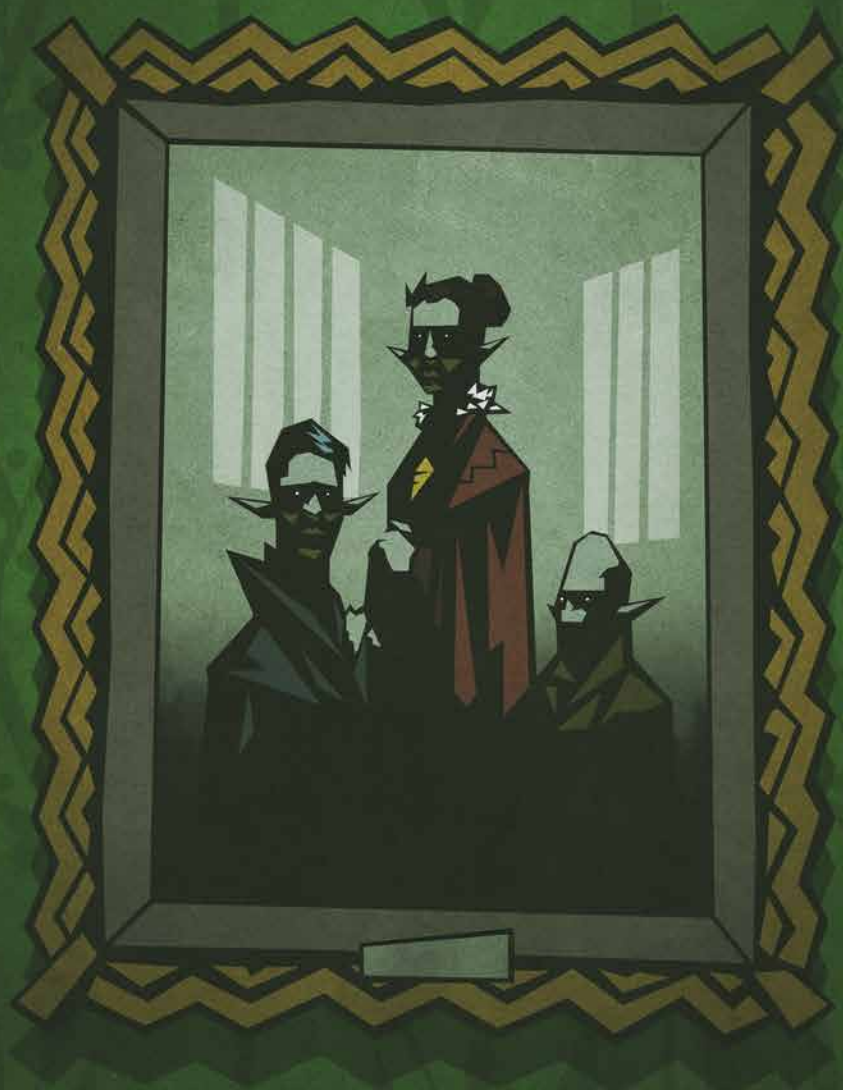
Glasshelm will stand unless the players make it impossible for the corporation to make good on its loans. Losing the Network would be a vicious blow, but it wouldn't be enough to bring down the business on its own, and the Network can always be rebuilt. If his unorthodox approach is discovered, Grasps-Thistle will lose his livelihood and possibly several fingernails, thanks to the Lawyer's dedication to her work and dislike of insubordination – but the corporation is much larger than any one individual. However, losing its loan documentation would mean losing the information on which it's built: that genuinely could bring down the banking system and cause the kind of crash that leads to chaos.

THE MINISTRY

The Ministry wants the players to install a patsy at the helm of Red Row, and they're very happy for it to be one of the player characters – but they'll also be perfectly fine with a continuation of the status quo, as any strike against Glasshelm is a significant win for them. There are plenty of ways for the players to succeed in their eyes.

SUGGESTED CHARACTERS

- Yzlan, an Azurite who works at the Glasshelm Hall of Records
- Poi, a Lajhan who also works at the Hall of Records as a general clerk
- Scratch, a Carrion-Priest with links to the worm cult
- Several, a Shadow Agent with a cover that's in debt
- Farren, a Vermissian Sage in search of catalogues for their stores
- Ghal, a Firebrand whose family is destitute



The Starys royal family portrait, painted in the traditional austere style. From left to right: Kislin, Philydia, and Halcyon Starys.

BETTER THE DEVIL

By Grant Howitt and Chris Taylor

Content warnings: Mind control, indoctrination, forced implantation

INTRODUCTION

Spire has changed. You and your cell were outside of the city for a year or so on Ministry business; in that time, House Starys has surged to prominence.

The much-maligned noble family have returned to drow society. They are looking to make a good name for themselves by funding housing for the poor, patronising the arts and hobnobbing with the rich and famous.

Meanwhile, the Ministry has been thrown into disarray following a series of attacks on their safehouses. Your cell receives hurried orders from your magister to investigate House Starys, determine whether it's a threat to operations and take advantage of it if not.

You've been given a dossier of information on the people and situations you need to investigate, the keys to a run-down safehouse in Ivory Row and left to get on with it. Best hope all your friends remember who you are.

WHAT DID HOUSE STARYS DO ALL THOSE YEARS AGO?

Reports are unclear, but it wasn't good. House Starys used to rule the Home Nations – as House Yssen does now – from the sunken city of Fathom. Their reputation for cruelty and power was legendary, but they were outnumbered by the other noble houses and fell after a sustained campaign fought in the half-flooded tunnels that ran through their capital city. The victors ordered the fallen house to be drowned in

the river, and the family's nickname was born: the Drowned Kings.

That's what historians can agree on. As for the fine details, any of the following atrocities could be true or false:

- Starys were slavers par excellence, using dark technological marvels called slivers to subjugate their charges. They didn't limit themselves to enslaving other races, as most nations tend to do: instead, they had a habit of buying each other through convoluted schemes in attempts at humiliation. They kept the best and most powerful slivers for themselves and their chosen bodyguards, amplifying their physical capabilities far beyond what was possible with training and practice.
- Starys were black magicians, dealing with things that should not be bargained with in the chthonic darkness that breathes beneath the sodden streets of Fathom. If given time to commune with the terrible intelligence that infected the bloodline, even the most paltry Starys is capable of tremendous feats of sorcery that warp the mind and body.
- Starys worshipped their family name, not the Goddesses Three. They filled their private shrines with reams of genealogical texts and illustrated family trees, satisfying their hungry lineage by sacrificing innocent drow to it: throat-slit and strung up by their feet to spray blood over marble statues of ancient kings.
- Starys were cruel barons, each living as a little lord in their own domain. Devotion to the baron (or baroness) amongst the populace was mandatory. Over time, a variety of laws came into play to stem any thought of revolution. These included a ban on reading and writing amongst the lower classes,

forbiddance of gatherings of five or more people, armed militias replacing city guards, and breeding only being allowed with the permission of the local lord.

- Starys were – and still are – cruel and hungry ghosts that live in the bodies of elves. These phantoms are the remnants of ancient creatures who sought eternal life and got it, although not without changing bodies every hundred years or so. The more times a being is reincarnated as a different member of Starys, the foggier their recollection is of the past and who they really are. Many spend their whole lives believing that they are drow, and discount the notion of multi-generational possession as the ravings of madmen.

GM: pick some, all or none of these to explain why House Starys is so maligned within drow society – or invent your own source of ancient evil. Whichever you pick, Starys are powerful, duplicitous and have something unusual and definitely *bad* about them when compared to most other dark elves.

WHY WERE YOU OUT OF SPIRE?

- You were dispatched as a military unit to do something terribly secret in Nujab as part of the war effort.
- You were operating as undercover Ministry agents in the caravan cities of Aliquam.
- You were trapped in an overgrown area of the Garden District and only recently resurfaced.
- You've been in the Vermissian. You're not sure where, but what seemed like a few days to you was in fact two years on the surface world. Now everything's changed.
- You were sent to the Home Nations to act as diplomats for House Yssen as it prepares for a decisive assault against House Quinn; they wanted the support of the Ministry.
- You were digging for prokatakos technology in the human lands to the east, but after many months exploring your guides were killed by ancient automatons and you fled back to Spire.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON?

House Starys wants back in.

Headed by Philydia Starys, who has crowned herself Queen of the as-yet-unconquered Starys empire (and convinced the others to fall in line), they mean to take over Spire by controlling the working classes enough to gain a seat on the Council. From there, dominance of the city will be an easy step; then on to

the Home Nations, with the wrath of Spire's army at their command.

Starys will rule the drow once more. The aelfir are a temporary, if not insignificant, obstacle in their path. Philydia doesn't really care about Spire – it's a backwater berg full of foreigners and aelfir compared to her ancestral right to the throne of the Home Nations. She'll gladly destroy Spire if it helps her to get what she wants, but for now it's worth more intact.

ADVENTURE SETUP

CONTROL

The most important change from normal campaigns of Spire is that the player characters have a new resistance called Control, which is shared amongst the group. Control is a measure of the influence that Starys have in the city and the organisations that rule it.

Whenever the players lie low to throw off attention, fight against Starys' rivals (whether they know it or not) or assist Starys in their plans, mark stress to Control. The GM is in charge of keeping track of the Control resistance, and we recommend that they keep the total a secret from the players. Instead, communicate the "feel" of the city in narrative terms.

When the players actively disrupt Starys machinations – destroying supplies, arranging politically useful marriages in the noble houses, holding anti-Starys rallies, etc. – they can remove stress from Control. The standard pattern applies: D3 stress for minor actions, D6 for moderate and D8 for severe.

As usual, the GM rolls for fallout against Control whenever they mark stress against it. If they roll equal to or under the current level of stress, the party suffers fallout.

We've outlined some fallout results at the end of each plot thread section, but you should feel free to invent your own. As a rough guide: minor fallout is an inconvenience, moderate fallout is a problem that needs to be solved, and severe fallout is the sort of thing that can redirect a character's story arc.

As far as huge climactic events go, we don't have the fallout "Starys rule the city" or "Starys is defeated". Those are the sorts of things that should come up when the narrative dictates, not when the GM rolls a certain number on a D10.

MINISTRY BRIEF

This is handed to the cell by a suitably mysterious stranger. As with most Ministry missives, it's written in a mix of cryptic verse and cant to throw off people who might try to read it. It's also under two layers of

code, which the cell can decrypt by cross-referencing their cypher books with newspaper obituaries and classified ads (it's a suitably long-winded and awkward process which we won't make the players do). The brief is presented below in bold, with a rough translation in italics beneath each section.

Mettes,

As water pumped uphill. Crimson plenty, ravens full. Bowl held outstretched.

We have called you back in because things are dangerous and we need you.

Hallow Jubilex in abundance; smoke, soil, silver out of sorts or for the count. Our villain wore a mask.

We have been attacked very fiercely. Cells in the Works, the Garden and the Silver Quarter are compromised or destroyed. We don't know who did it.

Drowned crown bobs to surface. Hearth and home a heretic. Glance askance; hijack or crash, if the menu calls.

House Starys, once thought wicked and fallen, has reappeared in force. They are setting up communities for the poor and marrying into rich families. You must investigate them. If they're dangerous to us, control or destroy them.

Sharp shards of history blend the flesh, and we are blind. The worms will know.

They are using an old technology known as slivers – magic metal that changes bodies. We don't know much about it. The Vermissian Sages might.

Seek angels in dark places; noble and most high, crimson hunters, silver-blooded.

You will need to gain every ally you can. Look to the houses of Quinn, Gryndel and Valwa to find them.

She shines not upon your hand.

May the Goddess light your way.

THE STORY

PLOT THREAD:

THE NEW ROYAL FAMILY

Starys intend to rule the dark elf race by any means necessary. The next step in their plan is to capture Spire.

At their head is Queen Philydia Starys, who controls her underlings with brutal efficiency. At the start of Better the Devil she is orchestrating events from

abroad, but will arrive a few sessions in with great fanfare as part of a parade in the North Docks.

Her ancient body (she claims to be several hundred years old, predating the fall of Starys) is sustained by an array of slivers. She is unfathomably strong despite her slender form, and it's said that she makes a scraping sound when she walks as her slivers grate against each other.

Her primary point of contact in Spire is her husband, King Kislin Starys, who the family sent over years ago. Through careful political maneuvering, he began to clear his house's name in the eyes of the drow of Spire, making things suitable for Philydia's arrival and eventual dominance. Soon he'll be elected to the Council; after that, subverting the rest of Spire's leadership should be easy.

Their eldest son, Halcyon Starys, is a continual embarrassment to the family. He refuses to take his position seriously and isn't terribly bright, so his escapades draw unwanted attention about once a fortnight. He's a fan of pulling pranks on people, and sometimes those people (or their friends) wind up dead. Kislin doesn't care that people are dying, but it doesn't look good in the papers.

Underneath them, several dozen Starys nobles are doing their best to marry into high society in Spire, and they're doing pretty well at it. They've already struck at the Ministry, leaving the organisation reeling from multiple attacks. Now they're taking advantage of the chaos to infiltrate and control them from the inside.

THE STARYS MANSION

In the depths of Mister Alas' territory in Ivory Row, Philydia has begun to buy up all the buildings she can afford and join them together (Alas doesn't ask any questions). Towering over the cracked and broken streets, her mansion is built atop a stack of semi-abandoned tenements and slums. The people moved out when Starys moved in.

This was the sort of neighbourhood where lunatic killers leapt from rooftop to rooftop and gangs of ghost-eating possession-junkies stalked the alleys, whooping as they huffed the last phantasmal essence of some poor spirit. Then Starys actively started taking drow that were squatting in the buildings beneath them, and...well, no-one knows what happens after that.

(They died. In the mad, shifting innards of the Starys Mansion, there are a multitude of shrines to whatever source of power you've determined the House has access to, often perverted from their original purpose as small temples to Our Glorious Lady. Those taken are sacrificed to the glory of Starys.



Ivory Row, once glorious, is now a ramshackle hive with islands of jealously-guarded luxury.

Given that abduction and terror are fairly common things in the district, no-one's rushing to help.)

HOUSE STARYS MIDWIVES

Names: Sister Ynette, Sister Griswold, Sister Ingrid

Descriptors: Walking on six spider-legs, reinforced with silver spurs that click on the ground as she walks; Not quite concealing her eight eyes behind a thin red veil; Openly carrying a weird-looking ceremonial razor-staff

Difficulty: 1

Resistance: 8

Equipment: Chitinous armour plates or reinforced corsets (Armour 2); dreadfully accurate and horrifically sharp razors and needle-point stilettos (D6, Keen, Unreliable); reinforced hypodermic full of wicked venom (D6, Poison, One-Shot)

Special: House Starys midwives are all implanted with whisper-talk slivers, allowing them to communicate silently with one another when in close proximity via a sort of vibration-based telepathy. In game terms, when you fight two or more midwives at once, they become difficulty 2. Forcibly removing them from the network (or extracting the slivers) reduces them to difficulty 0.

All Starys midwives will use the Midwife ability MARTYR to defend Philydia; if they're anywhere near her when she takes stress, they'll negate it and take D6 instead.

QUEEN PHILYDIA STARYS

Difficulty: 1

Resistance: 12

Equipment: Bare hands, augmented by dozens of slivers (D8, Piercing); ear-splitting screech (D6, Spread D3)

Special: There is no known toxin or poison that can harm Philydia. Her dominate sliver is wired to pair with every subordinate sliver in Spire

OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

Taking over Spire costs money – money that must be coming from somewhere. Careful tracing uncovers

STARYS FASHION

Starys don't like innovation or individuality (at least, not amongst their servants). Many of the items of clothing made in their community factories are hard-wearing, sombre, unisex overalls for folk to wear in Starys neighbourhoods. Community support officers encourage these unofficial uniforms for whenever people are in public. "It's just more efficient," they'll say; "It encourages community togetherness," and so on.

Of course, the nobles themselves can wear whatever they want. Given that Starys is a house eager to look into the past and not the future, they tend to dress in as archaic a style as possible. With the spotty record-keeping of the Home Nations – much of it destroyed by civil war or deliberately expunged by the Council of Unmaking – quite what was fashionable in the past is hard, if not impossible, to achieve. This means that much of Starys haute couture relies on educated guesswork, forensic art history and confidence.

that Philydia has raided the hidden ancestral vaults of Starys and is importing gold, jewels and artistic treasures to sell in Spire (or donate for political favours). Cutting off her supplies could cause havoc.

Philydia is hugely powerful, both politically and physically, and she's flanked by a cadre of elite midwife bodyguards. Any attempt on her life – or even just approaching her – should be handled with extreme caution.

Kislin is dangerously ambitious, but in his heart of hearts he doesn't have his wife's desire to take over the Home Nations in a costly, drawn-out war. He'd be happy to rule Spire and retire in comfort. The main problem is his subordinate sliver, paired to only one dominate sliver: Philydia's.

Halcyon is a useful patsy to exploit, but he's not easy to control: he gets distracted easily.

Thinking of the House of Starys as "evil" or "fallen" is regarded as old-fashioned, especially amongst the upper echelons of the city. More progressive nobles believe Starys to be doing their best to overcome an unfair stereotype.

Starys' reach extends into the Ministry. It's hard to tell who to trust – even more so than usual.

The large number of nobles marrying into Spire's high society gives the Ministry a wide variety of potential targets to subvert, but it also gives Starys a way of counteracting their plans with a careful word here and there.

CONTROL FALLOUT

MINOR

THE BIG DAY. A bond falls for, and probably marries, a Starys noble. More are appearing in their dozens every month, emboldened by Philydia's resurgence.

ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE. Starys begin an active campaign against the Ministry in the Torch, which they now own. Public opinion turns against the organisation. When a bond suffers stress, roll two dice and pick the higher result until the smear campaign blows over.

SOLE SURVIVOR. The lone survivor of an allied Ministry cell, smashed apart by an attack from wardens and mysterious figures in grey cloaks, limps bloody and broken into your safehouse. They need protecting, but are they on the level?

MODERATE

HUNTED. You are a known quantity, and Starys is moving to stop you through their connections to the City Guard. When you suffer stress to Shadow, the GM rolls two dice and picks the highest to determine how much stress to mark. Clear your name or kill the person in charge of dealing with you to remove this fallout.

BAD INTEL. You receive a lead from the Ministry on something you're currently investigating, but the briefing leaves out vital details that make acting on it unexpectedly dangerous. If pressed for reasons, your magister tells you the Ministry is hugely overworked and that you should be thankful for everything you receive.

ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT. The cell gets wind of an assassination attempt on Madame Fey-Aranyen, the only drow member of the Council. However, there's no hard evidence to show her, so it can't be proved. If you fail to intervene and she is killed, Kislin will take her seat.

SEVERE

TURNED. Your magister has been turned by Starys and you don't find out until you've been hung out to dry with intel that is a deliberate trap. Should

you escape, you'll find your safehouse has been ransacked by the City Guard or wardens. You're on your own.

CONSCRIPTION. The cell are forcibly volunteered into the army, as Starys now controls the military forces. Dodging the draft will be difficult.

SACRIFICED. A cell member awakens strapped to a basalt statue in Philydia's mansion. They are to be sacrificed to the glory of House Starys on the next new moon – that's two days away – unless someone rescues them. (This fallout also works well for the Blood resistance; a character knocked unconscious during a brawl could wake up captured.)

PLOT THREAD: STARYS LAW

The Starys provide for the lower classes, but they expect proper behaviour – and obedience – in return. Throughout Spire, but mainly in the poorer areas (Derelictus, the Works, the Garden district), the House has built community support centres that offer education, housing and employment for drow that the system has left behind.

In Starys neighbourhoods – each overseen by a community administration officer – armed wardens patrol the streets to keep the peace. The unborn children of the inhabitants are raised in Starys-authorized nurseries staffed by out-of-Spire midwives, who offer significantly better prenatal care than all but the most devoted local midwife.

The children are then enrolled in Starys schools, given a basic education and offered a place to work once their training is complete. While it differs between institutions, the overall syllabus focuses on following orders, understanding the essential right to rule of the Starys line and basic arithmetic.

In the eyes of the aelfir, this is an excellent solution to the problem of the troublesome, rebellious drow lower classes, and Starys have made sure to exploit the relationship as best they can. About one in thirty neighbourhoods in Spire are Starys-led or Starys-supported, but there's definitely one near the characters' base of operations.

Every citizen under the protection of Starys has a brand on the back of their neck: a series of simple glyphs and numbers tattooed or scarred into the skin which show where the person is from and who their lord is. They come with the understanding that bearers can claim sanctuary in any Starys neighbourhood and have the protection of wardens

should a conflict with outsiders arise. They also form insertion points for subjugate slivers, which will be implanted after sufficient doctination has made rejection unlikely.

STARYS WARDEN

Names: Archibald, Rince, Behash

Descriptors: Wearing a standard-issue overall two sizes too small; Proudly displaying their brand on their forehead; Furtively smoking and stubbing it out as you approach

Resistance: 5

Equipment: Heavy club (D6, Tiring); warden ID armband

OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

Starys neighbourhoods are superficially loyal to their protectors. In public, citizens will often assist wardens in their attempts to enforce the law. Drawing the attention of the authorities in a Starys neighbourhood can result in mobs of angry residents looking to gain favour with their masters.

Many citizens are implanted with subjugate slivers, which means that they cannot refuse direct orders from a paired dominate sliver without enduring excruciating pain. Acquiring a dominate sliver would allow you to control them, after a fashion.

In private, people are often unhappy at their treatment, but they're too scared to say anything in public. Any revolt will have to be very carefully staged.

The wardens are poorly armed and badly trained, but they either really believe in what they're doing or they just enjoy being cruel. Normal city guards will give up the chase long before wardens will.

Very few aelfir know about Starys' plan to take over Spire via controlling the populace. Gaining evidence and presenting it to an audience will be difficult, but could earn you some allies in strange places.

CONTROL FALLOUT

MINOR

WANTED. You attract the attention of a group of armed wardens who want to learn more about what you're up to. If you're not doing anything illegal, they'll find something immoral to punish you for.

INVESTIGATE. The Ministry tells you to infiltrate one of the Starys Schools running in Derelictus,

the Works or the Garden District to find out what's really going on there.

MODERATE

BRAND. You're given a choice: accept a brand on the back of your neck and join the community as your neighbourhood is taken over by Starys, or face ostracisation and eventual exile.

NO CONGREGATION. Public gatherings of more than five people are banned.

WITNESS. Someone loyal to Starys sees you doing something wrong. (Use a named NPC if you can.) They're going to report you to the wardens unless you stop them.

CURFEW. You have to have a reason to be outside in this district. Most people just go to and from their jobs, occasionally buying food or dropping their kids off at school. You can't even stand on a street corner without a warden asking to see your brand.

SEVERE

SPREAD. One in five neighbourhoods in Spire is now Starys. Moving through them is difficult for people without a brand.

UP-GUNNED. As Starys gets access to better production facilities, their wardens are better armed. They now carry Ravensbeak shotguns (D6, Point-Blank, Double-Barrel) and wear patrol armour (Armour 3, Heavy).

RAIDED. Your safehouse is raided and burned to the ground by wardens and a gang of citizens. If you're lucky, you're not in it when it happens.

SLIVERS

Slivers are the pinnacle of drow technology: shards of crystal, stone or metal that are inserted into flesh and bone. Over time, they rewrite the body in a myriad of different ways. Some areas of the Home Nations have banned their manufacture and sale due to their unpredictable nature, but Starys has no such concerns.

They make great use of slivers to augment their soldiers, improve their workforce and increase their lifespans. Primarily, they implant their workers with subjugate shards that force them to obey direct orders

given by anyone with a dominate shard keyed to the right frequency. Refusing to comply brings blackouts, splitting headaches and crippling nausea. *For more information on slivers, see p33, p 39.*

Starys are being very careful not to show their hand regarding what subjugate shards actually do, and are implanting a variety of beneficial slivers into their workforce. Many devoted Starys serfs are given the Without-Hunger charm that means they only need to eat once a week, which saves money and time. Others are given the ability to lift heavier loads, incredible eyesight, hive-mind communication and so on. Noble-blooded Starys use slivers to look better, feel better and be more effective in high society.

Slivers are implanted in community clinics within Starys neighbourhoods (for the poor) and private offices in Ivory Row and the Silver Quarter (for the rich). The current propaganda push is to raise awareness of the incredible benefits that slivers can bring to the people of Spire. The too-frequent implant rejections are written off as the patient's fault for not being sufficiently open to improvement.

THE VERMISSIAN SAGES

The best source of information on slivers is within the winding tunnels of the Vermissian, guarded by the sect of magician-historians known as the Vermissian Sages. Contacting them is difficult: they prefer to watch events from a distance rather than becoming involved, and they live in a shifting interdimensional haunted subterranean mass transit network. Still, if the cell can make contact and persuade them to help, the Sages can shed light on this weird technology and what Starys might do with it.

CONTROL FALLOUT

MODERATE

DISAPPEARED. One of your bonds suddenly disappears. They have been implanted with a subjugate shard and given orders.

ACQUISITION. The Ministry tasks you with getting an intact Dominion shard back to their researchers. The only Dominion shards available are in the necks of Starys nobles, so good luck with that.

UPGRADED. Most wardens have been implanted and their officers have variant Dominion shards implanted in their throats. All wardens

are now difficulty 1 so long as they can hear their squad leader.

SEVERE

IMPLANTED. You awaken with a sharp pain in the back of your neck. You can't tell by yourself, but inspection by another will reveal that you've been implanted with a subjugate shard. Removal is at best difficult and at worst fatal.

RIVAL NOBLES

If the cell want to get access to Starys, they'll need to operate in high society. There are a variety of upper-class folk who are less than enthused by the resurgence of the cursed house, and three who seem like the best options to subvert, control or ally with. *More information on the noble houses of the drow can be found on pXX.*

MONTAGU VALWA

Montagu is the last scion of a tremendously wealthy branch of his family. He's also sterile, so his line dies with him. He's living it up as best he can, dragging his shattered body around in evening wear and relishing the flickers of disgust on the faces of his "friends" as they pretend to enjoy his presence.

Like all Valwa, Montagu has at least one tell that betrays the dark magic his ancestors practiced – but his are extremely pronounced. He has a forked tongue, mismatched eyes and a sickening smell of brimstone that weeps from his pores when he sweats (which is often).

Montagu behaves fairly normally in private, but in public he acts up being a monster: slobbering wine down his doublet, chewing meat and hurling the bones at other (lesser) nobles, cackling and singing raucous songs. He is much smarter than he lets on. No matter how he appears, he is always out for himself.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- When the player characters attend a party, Montagu is in full flow on a balcony, laughing and drinking with a variety of sycophants. He looks terrifying, but no-one seems to mention it. He likes the look of one of the PCs and tries to bring them into his entourage.
- Upon accruing Shadow or Reputation fallout, Montagu "buys" the character out of trouble. (NB: this is the actual fallout.) You now owe him a

favour, but he's more interested in leading you on and never quite asking for it; instead, he keeps you around as a hanger-on and confidante.

- Montagu straight-out asks to join the Ministry; what's more, he wants to fund the player characters' cell. This is excellent news – but he's terrible at fieldwork, can't keep a secret to save his life and insists on micromanaging every detail.
- One of your bonds winds up dead, or at the very least incapacitated. Turns out they ceased to be useful to someone in House Valwa – probably Montagu – and were set up against an enemy, ruining them in the process.
- Montague loudly derides the resurgence of House Starys, calling them a bunch of inbred heretics. Though everyone laughs politely, they also start to look worried. Without increased protection, he's going to wind up dead within a fortnight – or implanted with a subjugate sliver and forced into Starys service.

LYNETTE GRYNDEL

Lynette – a powerful, almost entirely square woman who always has her sleeves rolled up to her elbows – is the current head of the Blind Serpent knights.

The order has a decent amount of territory in the North Docks, but lately she and the rest of the leaders have ruled from afar as they hobnob in Ivory Row and get into fights on the lawless streets of Quinntown. In her eyes, there's plenty of land up for grabs in the centre of the district – and she and her boys are the ones to take it.

She has managed to cement her position by having as many children with as many influential men as possible. Most of the knightly orders are happy to ally with her, and her kids serve as squires to useful people inside and outside of the Blind Serpents.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- In Quinntown, the characters see Lynette boot someone through a window into the street after they try to avoid paying for their tab. Turns out that it's one of her many sons, who gets a thorough and public dressing-down from her.
- Lynette's boys – some of them actually her sons, others just young people who serve the order of the Blind Serpent – raid an Ivory Row property that the PCs frequent (or that is frequented by one of their bonds). Next time they visit, it's under new ownership: people who actually pay their protection money.

- If a PC owns territory in Ivory Row, Lynette storms in and takes it over in one of her crusades. However, she looks kindly upon the player characters, and will let them get away without paying protection if they help her gain more territory.
- Lynette comes into direct conflict with House Quinn (i.e. whichever related NPC that the players have interacted with most) and engages in a turf war over the centre of Ivory Row. The players are ideally positioned to sort it out or benefit from the fallout.

HEMI-DUCHESS SALIERO “RED” QUINN

Saliero (“Sally” to her friends, “Red” to her many enemies) is an up-and-coming revolutionary leader in the hotbed of crime and insurrection at the centre of Ivory Row. She joined House Quinn by spending most of the funds from a robbery she pulled off a year and a half ago. Since then, she's used her connections to take over increasingly large parts of the district.

Unfortunately, she's spread herself too thin, and is finding her allegiance with the Crimson Vigil – a cult of violent anti-aelfir pyromaniacs – more trouble than it's worth. She's doing her best to keep them in check.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- Saliero personally leads a gang in a brawl against House Gryndel, kicking in the doors to their property and setting it alight to send a message. If this can happen while the player characters are nearby or inside, so much the better.
- Saliero is hired as an odd-job person by Montagu or Lynette to perform some dirty work, which happens to coincide with whatever it is the player cell is up to right now. (For example: she's hired to kill the same person they're assassinating, and the players meet her holding two revolvers and sneaking in from the opposite direction.)
- Saliero gets into a bar-brawl where the player characters happen to be drinking. This isn't business – she just wants to let off some steam. She takes a shine to one of the player characters and asks them for help as the fight goes against her.
- A group of elite aelfir guards – either Black Guards or Paladins – comes down to Ivory Row to kick in some doors and see what all the fuss is about. Saliero kills the lot of them, drawing further aelfir attention to the district, Starys and the player cell.



Lord Wilt-The-Petals-Fresh
prepares for a day of subjugating in
his mask garden.

- Saliero contacts the player cell – perhaps as the result of Shadow fallout – and brings a problem to their front door. Her vigilite allies are out of control, taking matters into their own hands and killing indiscriminately. She asks the players for help in stopping them. If they refuse, she can report them to the authorities (she’s not bold enough to state this outright, but it would definitely be an undercurrent).

CONTROL FALLOUT

MODERATE

TURFED OUT. Starys acquires the majority of one of the NPC’s property somehow: buying it for a song in an underhanded deal, moving in and pressuring them out by Starys-ifying local neighbourhoods, etc. They’re not happy, and they’re not able to help the cell much until they get a new base of operations.

OBITUARY. One of the NPCs that the players have spoken to in the past has an obituary published by the House of Timely Endings ahead of their murder, and they need protecting. They believe (rightly or wrongly) that the players are the only people that they can trust.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS AND ORGANISATIONS

THE HOUSE OF TIMELY ENDINGS

A branch of House Starys that functions in a fashion broadly similar to the Ministry. They influence events behind the scenes, assassinate key political figures when the time is right, discover (or create) leverage on targets and then bend them to their will.

Like the Ministry, the operatives within the House are devoted to their work on a spiritual or magical level. They will gladly die for their belief that Starys should rule the drow as is right and proper. Their hallmarks are poison, stiletto daggers, grey cloaks, concealed red-ink tattoos to show their allegiance and publishing pre-obituaries of their targets before they kill them as a show of politeness.

DOCTOR SNICKETT

An ancient Vermissian Sage who still has their Yssian accent despite moving to Spire more than 40 years ago. Using connections to the Home Nations (some

of them physical), she has imported a dozen or more illegal slivers over the last decade and implanted them in her own neck; she uses them as surplus mental storage in her efforts to create a working map of the Vermissian. She knows a thing or two about slivers, but she’s unwilling to part with the information without the cell doing something for her in return – stealing Vermissian artefacts from private collections, descending into the depths of the network to unearth ancient documents on the fall of Starys, or plucking spinal slivers from Starys agents for re-insertion in her brain.

VICEBARONETTE HELLACIA QUINN

Hellacia is a Starys by blood, but she’s keen to stay as far away from her family line as possible. In an effort to (quite literally) clear her name, she bought herself into House Quinn by spending a significant amount of her inherited fortune.

She’s set herself up as a fashion designer and cloth merchant in one of the nicer bits of Quinnstown, but Philydia has dirt on her. She’s willing to drag Hellacia’s name through the mud and ruin her livelihood, but for now she’s content to use her as a means of gathering information on House Quinn.

At present, Hellacia is delivering a list of House Quinn’s movements and weak points on a weekly basis, and she’s not happy about it. She’s desperate, and needs help from wherever she can get it.

WARRIOR-POET JUBILANT-THE-RAIN

Jubilant is an incredibly skilled warrior, a superlative military leader and loved by his troops. He’s being wasted fighting skirmishes with gnolls in Nujabi backwaters and watching parades in Spire. He’s loyal to the current leadership of the army, but it wouldn’t take much to push him into betraying them so he can practice the art of warfare more beautifully.

Starys are currently moving to control him: they’ve offered him the chance to lead the army that conquers the warring states of the Home Nations, and he’s very excited at the prospect.

VALOROUS GRYNDEL

Valorous is a kingkiller: House Gryndel has a habit of violently dethroning monarchs who try to set themselves up in the Home Nations, and they have a sect of people devoted to that very purpose. Valorous wears an armband that looks like a crown hammered flat as a mark of honour and as an intimidation tactic.

They are a powerful figure: well-trained in infiltration, assassination and skirmish warfare, they also boast a back pocket full of old Gryndel war magicks. They are waging a one-person war against House Starys, but not in the way the Ministry would like.

Instead of trying to drive out the invading nobles, they're looking to claim the head of Queen Philydia when and if she achieves dominion over Spire. Until that point, the kill won't "count." To make it more exciting or speed up the process, Valorous might actually help Starys into power so they can earn more renown for killing Philydia.

They're making do with assassinating minor Starys nobles for now as practice, and will offer to assist the player cell – but in reality, they're using them for information (and occasionally as bait).

LORD WILT-THE-PETALS-FRESH

A really horrible aelfir (he makes the others look moderate) who hates House Starys in particular. He's a monumental, horrendous racist who doesn't want the drow to have any power whatsoever. He spoke out against the appointment of Fey-Aranyen to the Council and has considerable resources to help destabilise House Starys.

MOTHER DANCING-ON-SUMMER'S-EMBERS

An aelfir priestess of Sister Spring who doesn't want any more bloodshed on either side. She's not quite pro-drow but she is well-meaning, and has many drow in her temple. She's desperate to maintain the status quo as it is, but is open to other ideas. She's one of the few aelfir you'll meet who might be persuaded to help the cell out of the goodness of her heart.

UNCAPTAIN SUNRISE-BRINGS-NEW-WONDERS

An undying aelfir veteran of the war for Spire who committed atrocities (or rather, "glorious victories") against the drow and now hates themselves for it. Consumed with guilt, they have begun to retreat from society – can you leverage that guilt into action? The cell get wind of their emotions via a diatribe printed in a newspaper, decrying the events of the war – which is an unusual stance for a decorated veteran to take.

INSTANT EXPLOITABLE UNDERLING GENERATOR

If you're looking for a quick fix when a player investigates a situation, you need two things to generate a subordinate NPC to push the game forward: a name and leverage. Assume that every NPC attached to one of the plot threads has *something* to give the players, whether it's information, access, assistance or resources. By exploiting the leverage, the players can get closer to the heart of a plot thread.

ENDING THE STORY

STARYS WINS

Queen Philydia, assuming she's still alive, takes control of Spire. She abolishes the Council and starts preparing for an all-out war on the Home Nations to bring it back under Starys control. All drow of age are conscripted into a massive army and marched through the underground tunnels.

KISLIN WINS

King Kislin, bored of his wife's mad ambitions, takes a seat on the Council and then has her killed, exiled or otherwise dealt with. He is content to rule as part of a group, earning massive amounts of money and power, and is uninterested in the Home Nations. He's just happy that Starys is back as a family line and being treated with respect. While there are still several places in Spire that run according to strict Starys rule, it's not a full takeover.

STARYS LOSES AT THE HANDS OF THE DROW

The efforts of the player characters and the other noble houses stop the resurgence of House Starys. Philydia's plan is dashed apart, the houses are weakened from in-fighting and the aelfir barely noticed that anything was going on at all. Anyone of Starys blood is a wanted criminal, rather than just an outcast. The aelfir are more firmly entrenched than ever. The house that manages to take Starys down – or at least the one that is seen to take them down – gets a leg-up in the Home Nations war as well as within the noble structure of Spire.

NAME:

- 1: Culvern
- 2: Sebastien
- 3: Lilith
- 4: Querent
- 5: Rexavier
- 6: Ucretia
- 7: Ester
- 8: Farah
- 9: Devoted
- 10: Rose-Merline
- 11: Princely
- 12: Bourke
- 13: Wolfe
- 14: Laine
- 15: Scurmilous
- 16: Jacqueline
- 17: Henryk
- 18: Absolon
- 19: Escthkenaz
- 20: Lewis-Filipe

LEVERAGE:

- 1: Deeply in debt to Red Row gangsters
- 2: Their children are terribly ill and medicine is expensive
- 3: Drug habit (ivory if they're rich, dagger if they're not)
- 4: Overly dedicated to their job
- 5: In love with the wrong person
- 6: Headstrong and predictable
- 7: Sensitive and prone to routine
- 8: An inveterate coward
- 9: Worshipping a forbidden goddess
- 10: Having an affair
- 11: Blackmailing another NPC
- 12: Secret aelfir sympathiser
- 13: Power-hungry, with a chip on their shoulder
- 14: Haven't got a clue what's going on, here by luck alone
- 15: Crippling imposter syndrome
- 16: Desperate to impress someone
- 17: Wants to leave their mark on Spire
- 18: Not actually who they say they are
- 19: All of their peers hate them
- 20: Dodging their durance to be here

STARYS LOSES AT THE HANDS OF THE AELFIR

The aelfir get wind of what's going on and smash the Starys resurgence to bits, but not without incident. They also expend valuable resources (mainly indentured drow, money and food) to do it. The aelfir hold on Spire is weakened, but they're on the lookout for revolution.

SOMEONE SUBVERTS THE STARYS RULE

Maybe it's the player characters; maybe it's another faction, such as the Quinn or a particularly canny cell of Vigilites. Though she is Queen of Spire, Philydia is a puppet ruler (whether she knows it or not) controlled by shadowy forces behind her. This is identical to the "Starys Wins" ending, except it's probably the player characters' fault.

CIVIL WAR COMES TO SPIRE

The noble houses, surviving day-to-day in a tense peace with outbreaks of violence in the Silver Quarter, take sides in the Starys conflict and are pitched into direct action against one another. Non-noble drow are pressed into action by their masters (or are paid to do so) and the streets dissolve into a civil war that mirrors the one in the Home Nations. The aelfir do what they can to contain it, but they don't have the resources and can survive well enough behind their gilded walls and wait until it burns itself out. They lock off the top levels of the Spire, resupply themselves with skywhales and let everyone in New Heaven and Perch starve.

SUGGESTED CHARACTERS

THE MASKED - CARYS DESTERA

You were assigned to Wilt-the-Petals-Fresh, an aelfir moneylender, to raise his children as a nanny – but you lacked the formal education to do so. It seemed that Wilt kept you around for your remarkable bone structure: a relic of the Desteran drow that his people conquered centuries ago. He had you remove your mask at parties to display your hereditary traits.

After your durance ended, you bounced between jobs for a while before ending up embroiled in a Ministry plot to kill Wilt-the-Petals-Fresh. He survived, but you got a taste of power and sought



As the situation in the city spirals out of control, nobles duelling in the streets becomes commonplace.

out a Magister to pledge your allegiance to the hidden goddess.

THE BOUND – KALOT GRYNDEL

Gryndel are hunters: your ancestors chased nightmarish subterranean creatures through the depths of the Home Nations with sharpened bone harpoons. You, on the other hand, had to make do with joining the City Guard as a young lieutenant for your durance. You got bored of all the red tape pretty quickly.

Your obsession led you to hunt criminals off the clock and get involved with the Bound, a sect of small god worshipping vigilantes who prowl the streets of Spire looking for blood. You fell right in with them. With your connections to the police, it wasn't long before you were recruited to the Ministry.

THE SAGE – POLOMA STARYS

You are of Starys blood. To be so is to be cursed for the actions of your perverse and heretical forefathers. You lived on the edges of society and used to smuggle corpsefruit – sickly-sweet, crimson fruits from the Home Nations – for a living until you got caught and forced into a Vermissian salvage labour crew.

Something found you down there in the tunnels, and left you standing while it ate the rest of the labourers or drove them mad. Consumed with a desire to learn more, you went deeper into the Vermissian and uncovered strange secrets and power – including the existence of the Ministry, which you were happy to join and clear your name.

THE MIDWIFE – MONROE DUVAL

You came out wrong. Most families are happy to have a child that shows suitability to join the midwives, but you were all chitin and spindly legs, eyes too many and hairs too few. Your parents believed you could not hope to function in civilised society, so they locked you in the attic and kept you a secret.

There, you read books and received instruction on the sacred arts of Ishkrah until you were able – with the help of leg-braces and a walking-stick – to magic your strange spiderling body into something more drow-like. It took eighteen years; twenty, perhaps. You're not sure.

You emerged into a world you could not have imagined: one where the aelfir ruled over the drow, and people like your parents towed the line and betrayed their own people in exchange for preferential treatment. An associate in the midwives introduced you to the Ministry and you joined up with enthusiasm.

(For more information on playing a character with a disability see "The Forgotten" on page 142.)

THE FIREBRAND – VICE-VICEREINE SERAPHINE QUINN

You were in the military and your unit found a vast stash of gnomish treasures hidden in the mountains of Nujab. Rather than report them to the authorities, you all agreed to sell them on the black market. Most of the squad died getting them home.

You took your cut and joined House Quinn, an egalitarian noble house who'll let anyone in as long as they can pay. After discarding your old name, you started to build your own semi-legal empire. You drew the eye of the Ministry, which offered you something more impressive than a few streets in Ivory Row: to take back the city itself.

THE LAHJAN – ANNABELLE ROSE

You never served a durance; some days you wish you had. Instead, you received special dispensation to help staff the Temple of Our Silver Queen, a church situated slap-bang in the middle of Red Row which acts as a neutral meeting ground for the gangs that fight over the district. Something went wrong – you're not saying what – and you got out just in time.

The Ministry pulled you in, and what do they get you to do? Travel halfway up the city and do it all again, this time in Ivory Row. You provide a safe space for rival gangs (and more than your fair share of ministers) in exchange for a little funding and a roof over your head in the form of the Temple of Our Silver Queen Resurgent.





Patallion's refuge burns to the ground.

THE FORGOTTEN

By Laurence Phillips

Content warnings: Ableism, forced surgery and body horror.

OVERVIEW

[Read, or paraphrase, the following section aloud to your players to bring them up to speed on events surrounding the campaign.]

Pilgrim's Walk is a lucrative place for those willing to get their hands dirty, and in Spire that is not a short list.

Cultists, snake-oil merchants, smugglers and con artists rub shoulders in twisting passageways rank with the stench of candle tallow, rotting incense and assorted filth. The sick, disabled and poor are ruthlessly exploited, passed from charlatan to huckster to insincere philanthropist. True compassion is a rarity, and often exploited when it does appear.

While most are indifferent to this plight, there are individuals with compassion for those whom society forgets. One such individual is Jarome Patallion, a cleric of Our Glorious Lady and secret member of the Ministry of Our Hidden Mistress.

Patallion's family home in the sprawl of Pilgrim's Walk acts as a refuge for those deemed freaks and lunatics by society. Some pass through once a week for conversation and a hot meal; others live with Patallion long-term, assisting him with his work (legitimate and otherwise).

Elsewhere a new cult, the Order of Beatified Humours, has risen to great prominence by promising to relieve the ills of any troubled pilgrim through secretive rites and rituals. While their practices seem to work, those who enter their halls are never quite the same afterwards. Their advocates are fiercely loyal and growing in numbers by the day.

The feeding frenzy of underhanded profit is at an all-time high, but lies on unstable ground: the City

Guard seem to be preparing a huge crackdown on the whole district. Guards who previously sported rusty blades and patched leather armour now arrive on their shifts with shining halberds, well-oiled chain-mail and ferocious hounds. Well-known kingpins are closing ranks and cutting deals, battening down the hatches in preparation for an oncoming tempest.

In the midst of this uncertainty, the Ministry is moving. The viciously beaten corpses of guards appear nightly, supply shipments mysteriously vanish, and shadowy conversations grace the corners of many a disreputable tavern.

A storm is coming, and Pilgrim's Walk will not weather it unscarred.

[Stop reading aloud!]

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON?

At the start of the story, Jarome Patallion is kidnapped and his refuge is burnt to the ground. His abduction is part of a web of alliances and betrayals.

Patallion was a competent and well-regarded Minister in one of the half-dozen Pilgrim's Walk cells, with particular expertise in logistical planning and leadership. Though thought too soft-hearted by some, Patallion's skills were such that he was being groomed to become a Magister. In fact, he was mere days away from taking over the position when he was seized by the guards.

His direct superior, grizzled ex-soldier Maren Verser, was about to be moved up to Exarch. Patallion was considered a natural replacement, despite his strange affection for "freaks", until Verser filled Patallion in on an upcoming operation.

In one of the biggest acts of sabotage ever undertaken in the area, a series of intricate rituals are planned to disrupt the local City Guard, culminating in a de-facto take over of the institution and placing the Ministry as the hidden puppet-masters of

Pilgrim's Walk. The downside: the rituals require a high number of disposable bodies – bodies Verser intended to source from Patallion's refuge, a veritable treasure trove of forgotten identities.

Patallion's protests fell on deaf ears, so in a final desperate act, he made an arrangement with the aelfir. He would provide information on the Ministry's operations and cells. In return, the refuge residents would be moved to a reputable institution in the upper city.

Patallion never intended to follow through with his side of the bargain, ready to feed his aelfir contacts worthless misinformation and unsubstantiated rumours...but neither did the aelfir.

Rather than allow a known associate of the Ministry to string them along, they opted for the more direct approach: kidnapping him from his precious refuge, torching it and leaving those who rely on it to starve in the gutter. Captain Breath-on-Silver of the Guard is holding Patallion for questioning. While he is certainly not cooperating, there is only so long a mortal body can withstand certain conditions.

Maren Verser doesn't know the details of Patallion's deal with the Guard, but she has her suspicions; her desire to recapture the lost cleric is unlikely to be fuelled by compassion and camaraderie. Regardless of whether her suspicions are confirmed, the Ministry would be far better off if Patallion were disposed of permanently.

The City Guard have their own plans in store. Even before the recent step up in street level security, agents of the Guard have been moving in the underworld of Pilgrim's Walk. A crackdown is coming and deals are being cut behind closed doors. The more unruly cult groups, criminal operations and gangs are to be put to the torch, their members rounded up and incarcerated.

Those who cooperate and assist in the suppression of Pilgrim's Walk will be allowed their own corner of the Walk to soil at their leisure, provided they don't cross the Guard again. While some are quite happy to live within a cage, many organisations are preparing to fight back. The Ministry is taking full advantage of this new rebellious spirit.

NOTES ON PLAYING DISABLED CHARACTERS

The Forgotten asks players to put themselves in the shoes of a group of disabled characters. The intention is to use the Spire RPG, which already explores themes of racial and political oppression so well, to communicate the frustration of being

disabled and living in a society which does not tolerate your existence.

With this in mind, here's a short list of tips on portraying disabled characters sensitively, sourced via input from the disabled gaming community.

- Disabled characters are characters first, disabled second. Although being disabled has a big influence on your life and personality, disabled people are not walking diagnoses. They're complex people with their own ways of approaching life, hardship and prejudice.
- Communicate emotions; don't do impressions. This is especially important if you're playing a cognitively disabled character. Rather than doing an imitation of what an autistic person might sound like, instead communicate the very human emotions. For example: "My character tries to explain how they feel about this, but finds it difficult and seems upset".
- Disabled people aren't helpless. Despite having limitations, disabled people are still people, and people are ingenious. Rather than trying to get help from another character, think about how a disabled person might get around a problem themselves.
- Don't look for easy fixes. While in some RPGs you might be able to conjure a prosthetic hand or drink a potion to remove madness, that goes against the spirit of both Spire and The Forgotten. Don't try to "fix" your characters; instead, try to put yourself in their shoes and experience their struggles.
- Point humour in the right direction. Many disabled people develop a sense of humour about their difficulties, so it's perfectly reasonable that your characters might as well. Having said that, err on the side of caution. If you're not sure whether a joke is mocking actual disabled people or not, avoid it. Focus the humour on the ignorant and judgemental, not on the marginalised.

DISABILITY IN SPIRE

Spire has few safety nets for the afflicted, the abnormal and the aberrant. For those fortunate enough to be born into wealth and power, people with unusual conditions may become a tolerated embarrassment: an unwanted truth, cloistered in back-rooms beyond the sight of well-to-do guests or given over to highly expensive (and highly embezzled) institutions.

For the poor of Spire, such an existence would be a luxury. If they survive into adulthood, the existence of the physically and mentally disabled is more

often than not a slow slide towards destitution, poverty and a cold, unnoticed passing in the gutters of crowded streets.

Patallion's refuge is an extremely rare place. Those who aren't already familiar with it will find it strange, and the player characters will likely encounter prejudice, fear and callousness from many directions. Even those who have compassion are often uneducated on what disability is and what causes it, leading to frustrating conversations. While this is important for the GM to represent, friendly NPCs should be around as well to relieve the oppressive atmosphere.

This story is explicitly about the perceived disposability of the disabled, but be sure to keep it within what your players are comfortable with. They should feel challenged, but not actively uncomfortable or attacked.

DISABLED CHARACTERS

The effects of disability on the player characters are represented by a non-removable fallout condition as follows:

Disabled: Your character has an existing disability. Describe the kind of situations that are made more difficult as a result of the disability (e.g. feats of strength, communicating ideas or emotions, maintaining concentration). In those situations, increase the difficulty of actions by 1.

You may overcome your disability and remove the extra difficulty for the duration of a scene by taking D3 stress in an appropriate resistance. As long as the player can justify in-game which resistance they're using to overcome their difficulties, allow it.

For instance, a character who suffers from a chronic pain syndrome might be required to travel across the district in a very short time frame, something that they struggle with. The player could take D3 stress to Mind (to represent their character pushing through the pain) or Silver (to represent their character hailing a pricey private carriage to take them there).

Remember that disabled characters are not helpless, but they might be required to put in extra labour to achieve certain tasks.

NON-DROW CHARACTERS

Though most of Patallion's guests were drow, disability can be found across all races and cultures. The kindly cleric took in drow, humans, and even the odd aelfir. Some of the existing Spire classes require

roleplaying notes to adapt to human and aelfir PCs, while others should be avoided altogether. Given that, here are some quick tips on creating and playing non-drow characters:

HUMANS

Though technologically advanced, humans have made little effort to use their knowledge to improve the lives of the disabled. Because of that, many disabled humans grace the gutters of Pilgrim's Walk. Humans in the district may struggle to find many welcoming cults since most are designed to specifically cater to drow, but they are unlikely to meet anything more severe than mild curiosity or detached disinterest.

- **Azurite** – Humans have their own mercantile gods. While a human character will function similarly to the drow version, they will be devoted to their own greedy deity. True Azurites will likely consider them a shallow copy-cat.
- **Bound** – While there are handfuls of humans in Perch, a human Bound is more likely to be a vigilante from an impoverished city in their own lands who has adopted the philosophy of small gods since arriving in Spire.
- **Carriion-Priest** – You are unlikely to find humans among the followers of Charnel. Human carriion-priests would be shunned at best, persecuted at worst.
- **Firebrand** – Despite their short lives, humans are a volatile sort. Rabble-rousing is a common practice in human realms; indeed, it's a slow political year if there isn't at least one attempted coup.
- **Idol** – As windows onto alien cultures, humans rise and fall in the social hierarchy of Spire Idols. However, they are often viewed as a passing curiosity rather than as a cultural benchmark.
- **Knight** – Human Knights are unlikely to belong to the rough-and-ready North Docks of Spire, but let's face it: all knights, human or drow, are fundamentally gangs of thugs.
- **Lajhan** – It is extremely unlikely that one would be allowed to take up the mantle of Lajhan without immediate consequences.
- **Masked** – Humans do not serve a durance in Spire, but have been known to be employed by the occasional eccentric aelfir master.
- **Midwife** – The Order of Midwives would likely sooner draft a gnoll into its service than a human. They have no understanding of the great web that connects drowkind.
- **Vermisssian Sage** – As the Vermisssian was principally a project undertaken by human engineers,

finding humans who study the great failed network is not at all difficult.

AELFIR

Aelfir attitudes towards disability vary wildly. Some have an almost fetishistic fascination with the disabled, treating them as entertaining sideshow attractions or stately ornaments. Others count it as a mark of weakness and shame.

Disabled aelfir from wealthy families may be hidden away from polite society, imprisoned in sumptuous bedrooms. Those from less well-off backgrounds may be sold as curiosities, given over to underfunded bedlams or just thrown out onto the street to starve.

The disgraced aelfir one is likely to find in Pilgrim's Walk are, if anything, more heavily persecuted than the drow. Treated like scum by both the drow residents and the aelfir City Guard, there are few places a disabled aelfir in Pilgrim's Walk will be made welcome.

- **Azurite** – Like humans, aelfir have their own gods of trade. True Azurites will despise the aelfir versions of their practices.
- **Bound** – An aelfir may be able to eke out an existence as a vigilante in Perch, but would likely meet a grisly fate were their identity discovered.
- **Carrion-Priest** – A disgraced aelfir who has been rejected by their kind and thrown into the gutter could conceivably find comfort in the unsavoury techniques of the Carrion-Priests.
- **Firebrand** – Though they will struggle to inspire the devotion of drow, disabled aelfir in Spire certainly have a powerful cause to rally around. It's a risky enterprise, but definitely one with ample fuel.
- **Idol** – As disabled aelfir are often viewed as objet d'art in and of themselves, many such individuals take well to the life of the Idol.
- **Knight** – An aelfir knight is likely to be a former City Guard with no affiliation to the knightly orders of the docks. Therefore, it's recommended that your PC does not take advances that relate to knightly reputation or order membership.
- **Lajhan** – The aelfir have their own pantheon of gods, but it is not impossible that an exiled aelfir might take up the religious practices of those who offered them pity and aid.
- **Masked** – A common occupation for aelfir of all stripes, but especially those who bear physical traits that an eccentric master might find aesthetically pleasing.
- **Midwife** – Definitely not.

- **Vermisian Sage** – Though an uncommon sight, there is no particular reason why an aelfir could not take up the scholarship of the Vermisian Sage.

THE STORY

The Forgotten is structured around two looming events: the Guard crackdown on Pilgrim's Walk and the Ministry's plot to take over the local administration. The following plot threads are all connected to these central events to varying extents.

As such, the manner and order that your players interact with these threads will vary depending on their decisions. Try not to keep them in one line of enquiry. Ideally, the players will be concurrently investigating all three, slowly uncovering how they are connected. Relevant NPCs can be found in a later section.

Don't worry if you feel you need to change some of the details; the important thing is that you run a game you're comfortable with, so feel free to use the plot threads below as a jumping-off point for your own ideas.

The first scene you should play out should be the arson of the refuge and the kidnapping of Patallion. Then allow the group to find a safe place to discuss events, get to know each other and plan their movements. Once they've worked out what they're doing, you can start organically working in plot threads.

Be flexible – if the players are going off in their own direction, just let it happen. You can always drop new hooks later on. Players should be encouraged to choose between the flinty, brutal pragmatism of Maren Verser and the Ministry, and the well-meaning but exploitable compassion of Patallion and his refuge.

PLOT THREAD: PATALLION'S KIDNAPPING

Trigger scene: Soon after the refuge fire and the disappearance of Patallion, the PCs will be approached by a representative of the Ministry (though they will not admit that unless the players work it out themselves). The minister gives them a lead to follow – perhaps a criminal contact that provides safe-houses for illicit activities, or a crooked guard who was seen accepting a sizeable bribe the night before.

THE CHARACTERS INVESTIGATE PATALLION'S KIDNAPPING

- **This was a professional job.** The fire originated in Patallion's room, presumably after he was subdued. The arsonists used a parcel of granulated white phosphorous wrapped in paraffin-soaked newspaper, with a trail of gunpowder as a fuse. A character with the Academia domain can discover this information and attempt to source the materials by studying the debris from the fire in detail, or the party can consult an alchemist.
- **The people who did the deed were being employed by someone else.** The perpetrators were the crew of noted 'legitimate businesswoman' Yolea Merentu. In preparation for an upcoming clean-up of Pilgrim's Walk, the City Guard are cutting deals with the underworld. Merentu was tasked with Patallion's kidnapping as part of her arrangement with the Guard. This way, the Guard don't have to dirty their hands, and they have an excuse to bring down the kingpin if she gets out of line.
- **The Ministry are deliberately keeping their distance.** They are clearly preparing for something big, and don't want to overreach before they're ready. Maren Verser, Magister and Patallion's superior in the Ministry, fears that either the soft-hearted cleric has flipped or is being used as bait for a trap. She instructed that the player characters be recruited to find him to maintain distance and not risk 'valuable operatives'.
- **Before his disappearance, Patallion was seeking an alternative to Verser's plan to sacrifice the refuge guests.** In particular, he found out that the Order of Beatified Humours were hoarding organic material that could be used in the rituals instead of living beings. It would be more complex and risky (and would require either attacking the Order or making a deal with them) but he believed it to be worth the extra effort. The PCs may find scraps in Patallion's room which suggest meetings with prominent members of the Order.
- **Patallion's kidnapping was a result of his failed attempt to cut a deal with the aelfir.** The cleric is being held in a criminal safe-house deep in the labyrinth of Pilgrim's Walk, and is being interrogated by the Guard's best on a daily basis. If the players manage to get him back alive, he will explain what happened and why he did what he did. If the players do not return him to the Ministry as requested, they will become an enemy.

PLOT THREAD: OPERATION MIMICRY

Trigger scene: A stranger clad in rags bursts into a tavern or shop where the players are resupplying or seeking information. They are covered in blood, wild-eyed and incoherent. They claim to be an old friend of one of the PCs, but nobody recognises them. After a short and frantic conversation, the stranger dies of their injuries. Closer inspection will reveal that the wounds were caused by an extremely sharp, small blade, like a scalpel. There are cuts all over their face and body.

THE CHARACTERS INVESTIGATE OPERATION MIMICRY

- **Disabled beggars are disappearing off the streets.** While travelling through the back alleys, the player characters spot a suspicious figure offering bags of food or gold to the physically deformed and disabled beggars lining the Street of Gods. Those who accept are led off into the crowds. If a PC successfully follows them, they will be led to a locked warehouse on the richer side of town where the beggars disappear into a service entrance.
- **The warehouse belongs to Tanara Ripples-Within-Glass.** An experimental surgeon, she offers payments of food or money to desperate beggars in exchange for permission to perform invasive and often disfiguring examinations on them. She is well-known among the downtrodden of Pilgrim's Walk; a PC with the Low Society domain may have heard of her. Unusually, Tanara's latest patients aren't reappearing on the streets. Though she rarely allows her subjects to leave unscarred, the sadistic surgeon isn't known to be a murderer or kidnapper.
- **Tanara's patients are being surgically altered to look like prominent political figures.** The surgeon has a deal with the Ministry to provide them with doppelgängers in exchange for preventing the incoming Guard raids, which she fears will ruin her supply chain of willing subjects. The patients are being restrained after surgery and shipped to Ministry owned safe-houses.
- **The surgery is highly dangerous, and none have lived long afterwards.** It has an extremely high failure rate. Even when successful, the subjects rarely live longer than a week. In order to facilitate

a complete takeover of the district, dozens upon dozens of victims are required. With the quantity of disappearing homeless becoming noticeable, Verser intended to start using Patallion's refuge to source subjects.

- **The Ministry is using the surgically altered people in rituals.** The Ministry safe-houses contain materials for experimental blood rituals, with the ultimate goal of shaping the flesh of willing Ministers into an identical replica of a chosen subject. These rituals are finally reaching fruition, although the subject being copied invariably must be sacrificed part-way through the process, leaving nothing but a pile of formless meat and spreading fluids.
- **The rituals have left a conspicuous trail.** Being highly experimental (and highly illegal), the Ministry's rituals have consumed an inordinate amount of materials. Among other things, this includes: hallucinatory drugs sourced from Petyr Duos; pure sulphur runoff from demonic rituals; bottled spirits (both alcoholic and ethereal); drums filled with blood; a library's worth of dusty occult tomes; and enough pieces of religious knick-knackery to fill a flea market. On top of this, the Ministry has already had to move their ritual site twice due to raids by the City Guard. Thankfully for the ritualists, the Guard failed to understand the significance of the materials they managed to seize.
- **A series of bombings will be executed in public locations.** During these attacks, select aelfir leaders will be assassinated and replaced by Ministry doppelgängers.
- **Maren Verser views the dispossessed of Pilgrim's Walk as disposable.** Verser is dedicated to the overthrow of the aelfir by any means necessary. This means making use of those who she would otherwise deem useless to the cause, including by force.

PLOT THREAD: THE ORDER OF BEATIFIED HUMOURS

Trigger scene: The players witness a raving street preacher. He seems unbalanced and upset, howling at bystanders and sobbing. He is approached by a pair of individuals clad in brownish-red robes, decorated with strange jars hanging from strings. They speak with him briefly, then lead him off. Later the players encounter the same preacher again, now placid, vacant, and preaching on behalf of the Order.

THE DEATH BOARD

Operation Mimicry's targets hail from all over Spire and include military leaders, executive bureaucrats and influential high society butterflies. Listed below are the six most important targets of Operation Mimicry:

- **Lucia Rain-Below-Canopies, chief administrator of the Garden District:** They say an army marches on its stomach, and Lucia ensures that those stomachs are full. She oversees the supply lines of Spire, ensuring that transport and distribution of food and water is carried out efficiently.
- **Brigadier Reflections-On-Steel, chief liaison to the various district captains of Spire:** Even Captain Breath-On-Silver takes orders from someone. The Brigadier consolidates reports from below and delivers commands from above, acting as the primary conduit of communication in the Guard hierarchy.
- **Ingram Veiled-Before-Many, host of the most popular high society aelfir parties:** Aelfir government is conducted as much in the shadowy corners of fine ballrooms as it is in the dusty halls of state. As such, Ingram's role as host to the rich and influential makes him a gatekeeper for power.
- **Ogden Laissels, drow cultural consultant and ambassador:** Toadies and collaborators are, in their own way, worse than the oppressors themselves. Laissels makes his living advising the aelfir on drow psychology, culture and politics, as well as acting as a willing patsy for any horrific new policies from his aelfir masters.
- **Belinda Staines, mercenary captain:** Belinda is employed by the aelfir to organise the various human mercenary bands that pass through Spire. She also acts as the main point of contact for traders from human lands.
- **Justice Echoes-Between-Hilltops, influential aelfir judge:** Controlling this judge has the potential to drastically improve the odds for rebels in Spire, as they are the go-to for cases of terrorism involving the Ministry.

THE CHARACTERS INVESTIGATE THE ORDER

- **The Order's beliefs are based around bodily fluids.** They seem to arbitrarily distinguish between those with 'corrupted' fluids and those

with ‘pure’ fluids. They claim that by draining toxic liquid they can remove the desire to commit evil, as well as disease and disability.

- **People who undergo the Order’s treatment are changed.** While they seem happy with the process and its results, they are tranquil, absent-minded and have slow reaction time. They also cannot remember anything about the Order’s rituals.
- **The Order is hoarding bodily fluids.** They have two great storage chambers in the catacombs: one for corrupted fluids and one for pure. In their rituals, they extract various forms of goo from different parts of the body, including the brain.
- **The Order is planning a demonic ritual.** The hoarding of fluids is not merely an idle habit. The Order is planning to create two great golems – one pure, one corrupted – to serve as demonic vessels
- **The Order’s stocks could be used for other rituals.** While they are unlikely to be interested in the idea without great encouragement, the master flesh-warpers of the Order could conceivably craft simulacra of the sacrificial elements needed in many dangerous rituals.
- **Patallion was in contact with the Order’s leadership before he vanished.** This was most likely part of his efforts to prevent the abduction and murder of the refuge residents. While the talks didn’t progress very far, the Order seemed willing to listen.

YOUR HUMOURS PURIFIED

Should one of your intrepid PCs be subjected to the Order’s rituals (willingly or otherwise), apply the following fallout condition:

PURIFIED. [Mind] You feel serene and content, but struggle to remember important details and require extra time to process information. In addition, you can’t remember anything about what the Order did to you. Raise the difficulty of any task that requires concentration by 1.

NON PLAYER CHARACTERS

THE CITY GUARD

While unhappy with the den of religion, crime and poverty, the district’s labyrinthine structure and abundance of fanatic private armies prevented the City Guard from taking any substantial action

beyond minor damage control. That’ll change soon, as the guard are planning a massive crackdown on the entire district.

NOTABLE MEMBERS

Captain Breath-On-Silver

A brutal aelfir woman with no pity for the dispossessed of Pilgrim’s Walk. The Captain of the district guard resents her stewardship of what she describes as a “superstitious refuse pile”. The fact that her plan to cleanse the district leaves many of the most vulnerable to fall through the cracks is not a mistake: it’s all part of the design.

Lieutenant Guillory

Middle-aged drow guard officer with sympathy for the vulnerable of Pilgrim’s Walk. A former friend of Patallion and a frequent visitor to the refuge, he would pointedly ignore anything which suggested the cleric had Ministry allegiance.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- A group of guards, newly equipped with top-of-the-line equipment, lead a highly public raid on an occult book shop.
- Captain Breath-On-Silver presides over the public punishment of a group of drow and gives a short speech. She makes it clear that law will be returning to Pilgrim’s Walk, then personally executes the drow.
- Lieutenant Guillory is seen in civilian clothes in the dark corner of a tavern, having a secretive conversation with an assortment of rough-looking drow. The conversation escalates into an argument, and finally a scuffle.
- Guards publicly search the prosthetic leg of a beggar suspected of drug smuggling.
- An aelfir cult leader lectures bystanders on a coming storm and the necessity of submitting yourself to authority.
- A Guard investigator attempts to pick up the PCs as part of their investigation into a potential Ministry plot.
- A drug distributor one of the PCs uses for self-medication vanishes off the map suddenly.

THE PILGRIM’S WALK MINISTRY

Due to the relative lawlessness and chaos, the Ministry has always had a strong presence in the district. However, this comes with its own drawbacks: the inhabitants of Pilgrim’s Walk are so preoccupied with

their cult warfare that they tend to lack the focus required to rally around the revolutionary cause. With this in mind, the higher-ups in the Ministry have deemed more direct action necessary – hence Operation Mimicry.

NOTABLE MEMBERS

Jarome Patallion

A kind-hearted and dedicated drow cleric, Patallion uses his family home as a refuge for any disadvantaged individual who seeks his aid. A master tactician, he has been invaluable to the ministry, coordinating operations and devising ingenious political traps for local aelfir.

Despite his skills, Magister Maren Verser is suspicious of his “soft-heartedness” and believes he lacks the edge needed to overthrow their oppression. Patallion has been missing since the night his refuge was burned down.

Maren Verser

A grizzled and scarred drow ex-soldier, single-mindedly devoted to the revolutionary cause but often blind to the consequences. She considers the downtrodden, afflicted and dispossessed of Pilgrim’s Walk to be an aggravating inconvenience, and relishes the opportunity to make them useful at last – with or without their permission.

Petyr Duos

A rugged, jolly drow with an impressive drug smuggling operation, Petyr is a close friend and confidant of Jarome Patallion. He presides over a network of gnoll gardeners who smuggle exotic plants and herbs from the gardens of absent-minded or disinterested aelfir nobles. He also acts as the refuge’s main supplier of self-medication, offering discounted prices to those who need it.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- If the players work alongside the Ministry, Lieutenant Guillory is identified to them as one of the targets. (This is especially effective if you introduced Guillory as a sympathetic face earlier in the adventure.)
- When the PCs meet with the Ministry, an agent implies that a disabled PC is a burden to the revolutionary cause.
- Verser takes a liking to one of the PCs, offering them an official position in the organisation should they complete a special assignment.

- Petyr Duos asks for the PCs’ help in collecting goods from his gnoll smuggler contacts. During the collection, the guards ambush the party.
- Assuming Patallion is rescued, he asks the PCs to help him acquire a new building where he can re-establish the refuge. Due to the cut-throat nature of Pilgrim’s Walk real estate, this is no easy task.

THE ORDER OF BEATIFIED HUMOURS

The Order of Beatified Humours is emerging as a major power in the district, but is yet to take a side in the brewing war. Devotees of the new cult can be seen on every street corner, vacant eyed and maniacal, clad in robes of sickly brownish-red and adorned with jars of cloudy muck and gelatinous goo.

The cult promises the sick and afflicted a quick fix: take part in their rituals, and as long as you never breathe a word of what transpired, you will be healed. Strangely, those who participate in order to expose the mysteries leave with their previous inclination weirdly absent.

The Order believe the body is a temple of worship, and that the various forms of pus, mucus and other bodily excretions are blessed substances. They believe that the vile, toxic humours that accumulate in the mortal body are what causes beings to sin, grow old, and suffer in disease or hardship. By manipulating the raw substance of the flesh through ‘ancient rituals’, they claim to be able to create the perfect immortal being.

NOTABLE MEMBERS

Grand Muck Jonkole

Elderly and certifiably unpleasant drow patriarch of the Order. He obsessively hoards his own emissions and constantly fears the corruption of his precious bodily fluids.

Vice Muck Nawlin

The public face of the Order: a young and attractive human with a charming manner. In conversation, they will be as coy as possible about the Order’s activities, making extensive use of innuendo.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- A public recruitment drive for the Order attracts a large crowd. The Grand Muck is wheeled out for

a brief round of applause, then taken away again before he can give his speech.

- A pitched battle breaks out in the street between members of the Order and members of rival cult “The Sanctified Soul”. The fight leaves the street in a rather disgusting state.
- Vice Muck Nawlin is an honoured guest at a fundraiser organised by the Merentu League. Though charming, few seem willing to shake his hand.
- The night after receiving “treatment” from the Order, a contact of one of the PCs falls into a coma.
- The players receive a letter addressed to Patallion from the Grand Muck, asking whether he’s still interested in dealing with the Order.
- A detonation resonates from beneath the Order headquarters (likely caused by their various demonic experiments). The cultists will insist it’s an issue with the plumbing.

THE MERENTU COMMERCE LEAGUE

Once in a blue moon, the rarest of unicorns graces the streets of Spire: the compassionate capitalist. Sadly, you’ll have to look somewhere else for that: Yolea Merentu is as cut-throat and exploitative as they come.

Posing as a financing agency for charitable institutions and religious organisations, the League is in fact a system of shell operations designed to funnel money up to the drow magnate. Merentu maintains her own private army of streetwise thugs who dutifully rough up competitors and drive off meddlesome do-gooders.

NOTABLE MEMBERS

Yolea Merentu

A childhood of poverty and exploitation taught Merentu one thing: to get ahead in life, you need to screw others before they screw you. While an obvious criminal, the enterprising drow’s legitimate front ensures the Guard turn the other cheek as long as the payments keep coming.

Anton Bordelone

The consigliere of the Merentu operation, this shrewd drow gangster has an impressive array of street connections. Despite his tough exterior Bordelone is a sucker for snake-oil, and is starting to rival George in number of cult memberships.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- Merentu hires desperate homeless people to squat in various buildings, driving the residents out and prices down.
- Bordelone’s reputation and authority is put in jeopardy when the players find evidence of extensive debts to various cults.
- A rival businessperson embarrasses Merentu in a verbal sparring match at an official fundraiser. Afterwards, the victor is confused when the other guests pointedly avoid fraternising with them.
- If the players work against the Ministry, Merentu arranges a meeting with them and offers to help. She has a vested interest in the Guard’s plan going off without a hitch.
- Merentu starts gunning for the top, undermining Ashter and Quinn and making moves to acquire their territory.
- As part of ongoing back-room deals, a number of Merentu’s street thugs are released from City Guard custody, prompting a wave of drunken, violent celebration.

OTHER NPCS

DR TANARA RIPPLES-WITHIN-GLASS

Unsettling sadistic aelfir surgeon who revels in vivisection, unnecessary surgery and straight-up mutilation. Despite being at the forefront of aelfir medical research, the good doctor is generally excluded from society events in the area. The likely cause is her poor dinner party rapport, rather than any ethical considerations.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- The doctor attends a high society event, only to alienate other guests by intricately describing various invasive medical procedures.
- Tanara develops a new surgical procedure that could save hundreds of lives, but it is extremely expensive and only the richest benefit from it.
- While investigating the missing homeless, the PCs find a dumping spot stuffed with the mutilated corpses of almost completely identical people.

ASHTER AND QUINN

This debauched pair of Pilgrim’s Walk landlords are mostly disinterested in the upcoming plans of the Guard and the Ministry. They’re confident that

whichever way the wind blows, the keys to the kingdom remain safely in their crumb-filled pockets.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- Quinn spreads rumours of a Minister in the Guard and a guard in the Ministry, simply for amusement.
- Ashter sends a ritualist to assist the Order in their bizarre experiments on the condition that they provide written reports of any successful rituals.
- The pair make the struggle in Pilgrim's Walk into a game, putting money on the success of particular factions and apparently arbitrarily trying to tip the scales in their favour.

EVERETT LANGLEY

An eccentric human inventor with a profitable sideline in highly expensive, highly ornate, highly impractical prosthetics for use by anyone rich enough to afford it (mostly aelfir). He has little concern for the disadvantaged beyond how he can monetise their difficulties.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- An eccentric aelfir has their arm replaced by an extremely impractical (yet beautiful) prosthetic made by Langley.
- Langley attempts to sell one of the PCs an overpriced, delicate device to help relieve their difficulties. It is utterly unfit for purpose.

ENDING THE STORY

If the players don't get involved in the events brewing in Pilgrim's Walk, the consequences will be severe.

Patallion will likely break in captivity, resulting in the Ministry's plans being thwarted and the City Guard crackdown on the district going off without a hitch – that is, until the Order of Beatified Humours unleash their demonic golems, which run rampant in the district. The entire region is drowned in a hideous wave of congealed bodily fluids.

There are dozens of potential end points for this story, but here's a run-down of some possible outcomes for the different factions.

A MISTRESS BETRAYED

The players might take issues with Maren Verser's callous sacrifice of the vulnerable and move to stop her plan altogether. Unless another plan is formulated to undermine the City Guard's plans, the hammer

will fall and the Ministry will be purged. With the co-operation of the area's landlords and criminal kingpins, Pilgrim's Walk is finally tamed.

ALL HAIL THE MISTRESS

The Ministry's plan goes off via Verser's original strategy or a modified form of it. The Ministry covertly take control of the City Guard, turning Pilgrim's Walk into the ultimate haven in Spire for revolutionaries and criminals. In the chaos that ensues, few offer a helping hand to the vulnerable left behind.

AN UNEASY BALANCE

The players undermine the plans of both the Guard and the Ministry, perhaps moving to take control in the district themselves. Although the storm has been averted for now, Pilgrim's Walk breeds chaos like rotting meat breeds disease. It will not be long before the cycle begins again.

CODE OF SILENCE

Rather than aligning with the various political groups vying for control, the players instead go into business for themselves, helping one of the many criminal operations take a dominant role in the district.

THE CLEANSING OF PILGRIM'S WALK

The Order of Beatified Humours unleashes a demonic incursion on Pilgrim's Walk, rendering the area almost uninhabitable for all but the most desperate and hardy. In the aftermath, the Order are declared terrorists and their beliefs and practices are outlawed.

PREGENERATED CHARACTERS

THE KNIGHT - NADIA LOUVON

A former member of the gladiatorial knightly order The Bag o' Nails (named after the only pub in Pilgrim's Walk to feature a 24 hour fight pit), Louvon was frequently hired by cults and criminal outfits to provide extra security.

One fated night, Louvon no-showed an important escort job, resulting in the death of Claude Merentu – son of the notorious district "businesswoman" Yolea Merentu. In retribution, the gangster captured Louvon and slowly dismantled her. The hardy knight managed to escape, but only after losing an eye, most

of her teeth, several fingers and toes, and her right arm from the elbow down.

Through her knightly contacts, Louvon has recently learned that jobs for petty thugs in the district are mysteriously drying up, and criminal organisations are closing ranks and going dark.

THE FIREBRAND - MAURICE VALJOUX

Born with dwarfism, the life of Maurice Valjoux has been a constant struggle to be taken seriously by the ignorant and small-minded. Valjoux served his durance as a servant in the house of an aelfir noble who found his appearance extremely amusing, treating him more like a court jester than a member of staff.

This indignity fuelled a passionate hatred for the aelfir. Since leaving his durance, Valjoux has devoted his life to being noticed and accepted by the Ministry, building up quite a community of Ministry supporters among the afflicted of Pilgrim's Walk. So far his stature has held him back despite his clear skill at rabble-rousing, as Maren Verser considers him too conspicuous and weak to be useful as an agent.

THE CARRION-PRIEST - JAGO OBIENNE

Jago lost their eyesight early in life, but functions thanks to the support of their trusty Hyena companion, Divorao. They served their durance in a temple to the Solar Pantheon, where they met Jarome Patallion and became a close friend of the kindly priest, despite their discordant religious beliefs.

Jago knew better than anyone what Patallion was secretly involved in, though they lacked the stomach for Ministry work. They preferred to assist indirectly by offering (often unwelcome) spiritual support to the shady figures who graced the refuge every now and again. For Petyr Duos, Jago offered something more than spiritual support, as the two began a relationship that fast became an open secret.

THE IDOL - HASILIA GLIDES-UPON-FOG

Hasilia is skilled at painting, singing and poetry, but was best known as a sublime dancer. Even for an aelfir, she came across as detached and strange to others, a personality trait caused by a cognitive disorder which makes it difficult for her to relate to others emotionally. Hasilia had an explosive panic attack during a grand show for a visiting aelfir noble, causing a scandal which ruined her reputation and eventually drove her into destitution.

Since then she has been scratching a living in Pilgrim's Walk by anonymously selling paintings to street vendors and occasionally taking handouts from her aunt Tanara, a surgeon on the rich side of the district. Though she is generally mistrusted among the refuge residents, Patallion welcomed her as a guest – a reaction that has prompted confusion and displeasure from his superiors.

THE VERMISSIAN SAGE - HERSCHEL SADDLER

A sprightly and good-natured academic, Saddler is the descendant of one of the original human engineers to work on the Vermissian, and has dedicated his life to finding out where his great-grandfather went wrong. Though the spirit is willing, Saddler has been hampered by chronic pain and exhaustion (known colloquially as 'heavy blood'), a condition which has made his explorations of the great failed network even more dangerous than usual.

After a recent wrong turn in the Vermissian, Saddler came across a strange blood-stained room somewhere in Pilgrim's Walk, in what looked to be the basement of a mansion.



A shark-headed, swollen-bellied
god of cannibal commerce reigns
over Ironshrike market.



IRONSHRIKE

By Benjamin Brock

Content warnings: Drug use/addiction, body modification, body horror/cannibalism, poverty/homelessness.

INTRODUCTION

Deep in Derelictus, below and behind the questionable delights of Threadneedle Square and the dangers of Red Row, somewhere close to the rotting heart of Spire itself, is Ironshrike: the last market before you hit rock bottom.

Here, the desperate and the doomed sell what junk they can find for enough silver to stay alive for one more day. Hundreds of souls struggle against each other, hauling themselves up on the backs of others before they are dragged down again.

If anyone is benefitting from the ceaseless struggle, it is not the denizens of Ironshrike – and it is not the drow, in whom the market destroys all pride, all solidarity, all grace. It is instead the aelfir up-Spire – and, closer to the market itself, the sinister sect that feeds off the commerce and chaos there.

And so the Ministry desires something done: the murder of a market.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON?

Ironshrike exists in part as a genuine last resort for the wretched of the city, and in part because various movers and shakers higher up find it useful to have somewhere they can introduce things into the commercial bloodstream of Spire with plausible deniability.

Above all, it exists because of a cult of trade and money that believes Ironshrike is a sacred place, where the flow of unrestrained, cut-throat commerce glorifies and nourishes their strange deity. The players

may find numerous ways to approach the problem of the market, but one way or another, they are going to end up meeting the cult.

The cult – sometimes known as the Society of Silver, though they eschew any kind of formal name – is a syncretic sect that glorifies a fusion of Azur (the god of gold, adored by Azurites) and Charnel (a death-god worshipped by the Carrion-Priests) which embodies the concept of commerce as unrestrained carnage. For the cult, Ironshrike is like a nature reserve where the wild forces of profit, loss, competition and ruin unfold their endless dramas.

The cultists themselves are a bizarre rabble of visionaries and crooks, obsessed with finding the divine in the patterns and chaos of the market. Living by their own principles, they have no leader; their hierarchies undergo endless cycles of rise and fall as individuals make their fortune or see it dissolve into nothingness in a moment of sacred speculation. Disorganised though they are, they will resist any attempts to wreck the endless, ongoing sacrament that is Ironshrike.

APPROACHES

What those attempts might involve is up to the players, but there are several obvious possibilities. The most obvious is massive violence, which the players are welcome to try. Ironshrike burns down or devolves into a gigantic knife-fight on a regular basis, and it's never stopped them from regenerating yet – but there's always hope.

Interfering with supply (cutting it off or flooding the market) is a possibility. All manner of things are sold in the market, but it might well collapse without its pipeline of experimental drugs and exotica from the powerful aelfir Left-Hand-Unknowing, who uses

Ironshrike as a sort of commercial safety valve for the city from her lofty position.

Players might also look into the ownership of the land on which Ironshrike stands, which is a legal (and illegal) labyrinth. The aelfir property speculator Sows-In-Winter thinks he might be able to draw together the various threads, buy the place and begin clearing it. The party might want to help him, usurp his plan or just use what he knows.

Staying in the low city also presents opportunities: Ironshrike is not the most popular of neighbours. The cult of King Teeth inhabits the same part of the city, and is repulsed by what they see as a perversion of the sacred concept of hunger and consumption by the Society of Silver. Equally, orthodox Azurites and Carrion-Priests might be disturbed by the workings of the cult and willing to act against it.

On the commercial side, Ironshrike makes nearby Hemlock Street and Red Row look like the most refined aelfir boutique. There are plenty of stallholders there (and elsewhere in the undercity) who would like Ironshrike gone, whether because they find it dangerous or because they want to prey on the desperate themselves. In particular, the persistent rumour that some in Ironshrike break the Hemlock monopoly on corpsefruit is a source of anger.

Of course, your players might come up with other ideas: introducing some sort of extremely poisonous insect to the market, say, or arranging tours for wealthy aelfir to come and gentrify it out of existence. Any and all of the above will, in time, lead to a confrontation of some sort with the cult; they could even be tackled head on, though the party may not know of their existence at the beginning.

All of these strategies constitute a blasphemy against the sacred freedom of commerce in the eyes of the cult, but they are brittle and difficult. All manner of things can go astray.

ADVENTURE SETUP

Ironshrike does not have a defined structure or set of events that have to happen in sequence. The rest of this campaign frame presents half a dozen possible ways into the mission, along with associated NPCs.

The players will never meet some of these routes and NPCs, but however they approach the problem, they will end up encountering the cult at the heart of the adventure (almost certainly as antagonists). How they move against them, and with what allies, is entirely up to the players.

If you want to actively foreground it and have a group that would respond well to it, play up the politics as much as you like. That said, they're quite likely

to end up with some pretty unsavoury allies too: this isn't a straightforward political crusade. Ultimately, you can keep reminding them that the Ministry has given them a job to do, and they demand results.

Structurally, expect to have the first couple of sessions involve giving the party their mission and having them visit and explore the market (the cult should be moving behind the scenes). This is your big, early chance to sell the setting, so don't spare the detail – it should be as weird and vivid and gross as you can make it. The middle sessions will involve them following up leads they've picked up there and exploring potential avenues of attack while the presence and nature of the cult become clear. With that knowledge, the party can begin to plan for some kind of showdown that will take up the climactic last sessions.

This adventure doesn't use pre-gen characters, so players should feel free to come up with whatever characters they wish. If you like, you can point out to them that this is very much a low city adventure, which may influence their class choices. This is not to say they shouldn't take high city classes: a Masked is a great way to explore the aelfir with their fingers in Ironshrike, for instance.

You may also suggest that Azurites and Carrion Priests will find themselves more deeply involved in the adventure than other classes; whether that's something to be avoided or encouraged is up to the players. Unless a player proposes otherwise, however, you can assume that they are not familiar with Ironshrike as a location. Nobody is unless they really have to be.

IRONSHRIKE ITSELF

Beneath Red Row, behind Hemlock Street, Heartward from the light of the sun and downward from all decency and hope, is the Ironshrike Market: a clot in the commercial bloodstream of the city.

Burrowed between impenetrable forests of ducts and culverts, overhung by a vast structural girder crusted with centuries of calcite growths and pale creepers, Ironshrike is one of the few spots this deep in Spire's substructure where you can actually find enough space to stretch your arms out – except that if you try that, you'll immediately hit three stallholders in the face. The irregular area of ground that the market covers is crammed with too many desperate souls – but if they're here, there is nowhere else for them to go.

Sound echoes weirdly here. Barkers cry out implausible claims about their wares, their voices clashing with the rumblings of the city's structure. It is never long before the shrieks and remonstrations of a

furious buyer, or a brawl between salesmen who want the same spot that day, causes everyone to look up for a moment or two before returning to their dealings.

Though wretched, the place is colourful too as rivals attempt to dazzle and hoodwink customers. The stench is indescribable. If pushed, you might say it was something like the gases that oarsmen churn from the stagnant waters of the Blue Docks and the stench of flesh that the winds of New Heaven whip away, except that here there is no such wind.

The market never sleeps. Its stallholders, who live here (or nearby) more or less without exception, sleep with one eye open. The logic of the stalls and pitches – some of them ramshackle huts that also provide living quarters for their owners, some nothing more than a circle scratched into the dirt and jealously guarded – means that the place shakes down into a rough series of alleyways and tiny little plazas. These are always provisional: sooner or later, someone with enough guts will plant their merchandise in the middle of a thoroughfare and the whole thing will have to reorient itself (if the intruder doesn't get knifed). Gutterkin may offer to guide visitors around, but the easiest way to explore the market is to get lost in it and see what you find.

A good deal of what is for sale in Ironshrike is without value, or something that someone with their horizons not yet reduced to the limits of this market can buy elsewhere with more reassurance. But if you are lucky, or brave, or cunning, there is no end to what might turn up. Ironshrike is a waystation for many stolen and fenced goods, and a source of almost any drug. Things crop up here that can only have come from the warped corridors of the Vermissian or the most distant corners of the world beyond the city. Plunge your hand into the murk and see what it alights on first.

The first time players visit Ironshrike, they should feel overwhelmed with the whole experience; but give them a few NPCs to cling to and remember, and let those figures (described below) be the hooks for the unfolding adventure. The chaos of the market is real, but once they know certain people they can find them again without much trouble.

One way to make Ironshrike stand out to your players is to let them buy things there with resources other than Silver (this is also a way of exploring how Ironshrike consumes the entire lives of those who come into contact with it). Buying a knife from the stallholder who famously murdered a rival in broad daylight? It might not cost you much in Silver, but it'll hurt your Reputation. The only person who can get you the map you need is the legendarily indiscreet motormouth drow who'll tell their next customer

everything about their last one? That'll be Shadow – and so on. This avoids the adventure becoming too focused on how much Silver the party can access.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

The stallholders of Ironshrike have their desperation in common, but not a great deal else. They are mostly drow, but gutterkin are well-represented; there are humans and even the occasional fallen aelfir as well. Many present there do not last long – they either escape somehow, or more likely slip out of society altogether.

GUTTERKIN CURIO HAWKER

MILLGRIST

Why are they involved in the story?

Millgrist is a gutterkin merchant of inexplicably long standing. They appear as something a bit like a seagull wearing a mole the way a hermit crab wears a shell.

What sets them apart from other members of their group or faction?

Millgrist deals in what they tend to call “exotica” – trinkets, curios, things of debatable value. Indeed, they like to debate value, rarely taking silver when they could instead make some kind of odd trade. It is perhaps this willingness to sell things for “prices” that transcend calculation – for time, secrets or silence – that has kept Millgrist out of the hands of commercial rivals.

What do they desire?

A true trade. Millgrist makes ends meet selling whatever they can: immensely valuable jewels one day, corvid jerky the next. They have a nose for curiosities, which is how they have stayed afloat this long – but Millgrist would dearly love to get genuinely established as a dealer in, or maker of, some specific product.

What do they despise?

Money: so much so that Millgrist usually charges something that is not currency, as noted above. They have seen the terrible power of silver and try to live their life without it, even here.

NOMADIC HUSTLER

ANKAH

Why are they involved in the story?

Ankah is a drow stallholder and hopeless ambrosia addict. She is also, by way of access to very special merchandise, one of the most sought-after merchants in Ironshrike. She moves around the market frequently, paranoid but not without reason, and when possible hires short-term bodyguards.

What sets them apart from other members of their group or faction?

Through channels nobody has ever succeeded in discovering, Ankah has access to an intermittent supply of corpsefruit. It's not particularly high quality, but it's the only place outside of nearby Hemlock Street where it can be found – much to the other market's displeasure.

What do they desire?

Above all, reliable access to ambrosia, to which she is thoroughly addicted. It is strange – though perhaps not to Ankah – that she craves one of the city's commonest and simplest drugs while dealing in one much rarer and stranger without ever indulging in it.

What do they despise?

Ankah is, though she will not discuss it, a refugee from the Home Nations. Her links back there enable her to access corpsefruit, but she also hates and fears retaining those links, terrified that old enmities will follow her to the city.

CRAVEN ARMS-DEALER

VETCH

Why are they involved in the story?

Vetch is a human stallholder in Ironshrike, specifically a dealer in firearms and ammunition. Anything you buy down here is liable to blow your arm off, but Vetch is generally held to be more reliable than most.

What sets them apart from other members of their group or faction?

Vetch is a serial arsonist – both as a hobby of sorts and as a method of removing competitors from the market. There are plenty of genuinely accidental fires to provide cover for him, but when another gun-runner finds their ammunition stock going up in

a cacophonous blaze, Vetch is likely behind it. He has yet to be caught.

What do they desire?

Vetch thinks – correctly – that eliminating anyone else in his orbit who wants to run guns will provide him with enough commercial security to make it out of Ironshrike once and for all. At present his chief opponents are Gasto, a Hellionite drop-out with cordite-blackened fingers, and Au Mar, whose wares sometimes have the evidence tags from the guards' confiscation lockers still on them.

What do they despise?

Despite his “hobby” and his trade, Vetch is absolutely terrified of violence and confrontation. He hates handling his own merchandise.

AELFIR SLUMLORD

SOWS-IN-WINTER

Why are they involved in the story?

Sows-In-Winter is an up-Spire property developer and slumlord: a young, crafty aelfir with deep pockets and a nose for overlooked opportunities. He has made a speciality of scooping up scraps of property that his fellow aelfir overlook and turning a neat profit on them by selling them on for unglamorous uses.

Sows-In-Winter believes that he is closing in on something he has desired for years, though most have long considered it to be a fool's errand: uncontested ownership of the land on which Ironshrike stands. He will then sell it on to one of the several potential buyers – gangsters, industrialists, drug-farmers – who he has been cultivating. He is right to believe that he is close to assembling all the pieces of the puzzle, but wrong if he thinks he will obtain the last of them without a lot of help and some very underhanded dealings.

What sets them apart from other members of their group or faction?

Sows-In-Winter has a mind that seems impervious to boredom and made for the murky waters of contested ownership and disputed territory. Most of his fellow slumlords have drow to actually do the work while they allow the cash to flow in, but Sows-In-Winter does much of his own contracting and negotiating, ignoring the disdain it attracts. On the other hand, he is far from comfortable actually visiting his properties. For this, he uses his painstaking drow agent Om-morae, who can be occasionally seen taking soundings in the market.

What do they desire?

Sows-In-Winter is a contradiction. He wants the respect and partnership of moneyed aelfir society, but he is getting it through immersing himself in the lowest reaches of the city. What he wants most is to tie up the final threads of his deals and be done with Ironshrike for good.

What do they despise?

Sows-In-Winter despises the poor, the desperate, the powerless: therefore, above all, Sows-In-Winter despises what he owns. Owning it only leads him to loathe it more. If he can pull it off, his Ironshrike deal will make him rich – but it will also bring him satisfaction to know that he has extinguished an island of chaos and confusion.

THE SPECULATOR

LEFT-HAND-UNKNOWING

Why are they involved in the story?

Austere, driven and meticulous, Hasdrubal Left-Hand-Unknowning is an aelfir lieutenant of Lord Veq Light-Through-Splintered Glass, and a key node in His Lordship's web of control over the power players of the lower city. In turn, Ironshrike is central to Left-Hand-Unknowning's access to the area.

She has contact (generally through disposable and deniable intermediaries) with several stallholders there, including Millgrist. For many years, she has used them to introduce things into the lower city with the aim of occupying and distracting the poor: experimental or especially potent drug strains, incriminating stolen goods, compelling new gambling fads, holy relics that will cause some kind of cultic upheaval, and so on.

She charts the effects of her gambits carefully, following them like strands of blood in water, tracking the hidden systems of the city. Her string-pulling co-exists uneasily with the anarchic commerce upheld by the cult, but so far they have kept a respectful distance from each other as they are both reliant on the comings and goings of the marketplace.

What sets them apart from other members of their group or faction?

Very few aelfir bother to attend to the lowest levels of Derelictus in the way that Left-Hand-Unknowning has done. It is said that she regularly visits places like Ironshrike in person to better understand them, and that she keeps the knowledge she gleans secret – even from Lord Veq. It is said also that her private chambers contain bizarre, intricate constructs and models

that attempt to replicate the rhythms and tides of commerce and information within the city, and that she studies and improves them constantly.

What do they desire?

Left-Hand-Unknowning appears to desire simply to serve Lord Veq and advance in his sight, and in this she has been highly successful. In truth, she is not especially loyal to her master, but working for him brings her the best information. Her aim in life is – simply or not so simply – to understand the entire city as a perfectly knowable, predictable interrelating system. She believes that to know Spire in its entirety as a single organism will, in essence, be to know god – and that this will make her a god too.

What do they despise?

She lives in fear of being subjected, as so many of Lord Veq's closest aides have been, to undying surgery and the immortal vassalage that it would imply. She is revolted by her peers who have succumbed to the treatment. Among her reasons for taking an interest in the lowest levels of the city is that she may someday require a bolthole where her former associates cannot find her.

KING TEETH AND THE CANNIBALS OF GRIST

The market attracts the cannibals of Grist. They visit Ironshrike to patronise the more disreputable butchers and offal-mongers: much of what these establishments sell, whether they admit it or not, is thinking-flesh.

Yet King Teeth himself loathes the place. His spies have whispered word of the cult into his filthy ears, and they urge him to authorise a crusade against them. Their worship of consumption as an abstract is a perversion of the true sanctity of gorging oneself on flesh, they tell him. Week on week he grows more furious at their intrusion into what he views as his domain.

He will lend the support of his forces to the players if they pledge fealty to him and swear to destroy Ironshrike for good. Though they are disorganised, his people are vicious and can easily creep unseen through ventilation shafts and across rooftops.

One or more players may join King Teeth's following during the campaign (or, at your discretion, they may join during character creation and have access to these advances from the beginning). You may add the following horrendous advances to those already available to the Faithful of King Teeth (Spire, p71):

Low Advance: AUTOEMESIS. *With the King's blessing, you can vomit yourself into any space large enough to contain you.* Once per session, mark D3 Blood stress as your body undergoes a profoundly unnatural strain, pouring itself out of your open mouth and somehow not ending up inside out. You can use this to pass through any gap that's bigger than your outstretched jaws.

Medium Advance: TERROIR. *In time, a ghoul learns the subtleties of thinking-flesh, and can discover much from it.* Once per session, if you are able to eat or taste the flesh or blood of a character, you can ask the GM three questions about their faction and allegiances. They must answer the questions honestly.

High Advance: GRUB'S UP. *Across the city, ghouls call to each other, summoning their tablemates to feast.* Once per session, when you have produced thinking-flesh for the faithful – that is, when you have created a corpse of someone – you may describe the last time you feasted alongside other ghouls and call D6 of them with you to the new feast. They arrive frighteningly quickly.

MAINSTREAM AZURITES AND CHARNELITES

The cult's weird syncretism of the commerce-worship of Azur and the predatory preaching of Charnel is offensive, even blasphemous, to mainstream adherents of these religions (very possibly including players). The powerbases of these groups are far from Ironshrike, and they are more or less unaware of the work of the cult; but if they could be made aware, they might take a keen interest in wiping it out.

THE CULT

Money is power: everyone in Spire knows that. But in and around Ironshrike, there are those who have followed this thought to its illogical conclusion. If a little silver disc can become a meal, a drug, or a weapon, then silver is like the stuff that underpins all reality – and to spend it is to create reality. To be rich is to approach divinity; to witness the workings of silver is to witness the workings of the universe itself. In the observation and contemplation of the tides of commerce and wealth, fortune and ruin, we see the workings of the universe. Where these tides are at their most untrammelled and ferocious, we gaze upon raw truth.

In practical terms, the cult is an extremely loose-knit group of several dozen drow who have come to its truth by various paths. Many of them were formerly followers of Azur, while some were worshippers of Charnel who came to believe that the processes of predation and consumption were best embodied in commerce. Others were traders or beggars in Ironshrike who encountered the cultists in the market and took up with them. They have a lair of sorts within the dripping forest of mould-heavy pipes near the market.

The cult exalts no permanent leaders: prominence within the organisation rises and falls the way the fortunes of individuals do, and this process is sacred. To compete – to undermine and overthrow – is to enact a sacrament. All that is important is that the market be allowed to thrive and the faithful allowed to pass through it, observing, bargaining, spending, winning, losing.

However, at any one time, one among them – usually whoever is richest, but sometimes whoever has most recently spectacularly bankrupted themselves in an act of sacred sacrifice or something similarly glorious – is granted a temporary measure of divinity in the eyes of the other cultists. This cultist will be deferred to until the next upheaval. In this way the cult always has some kind of figurehead, but they are very much replaceable.

All of the cultists demonstrate their allegiance in extravagant ways, evolving curious individual practices (see random tables below for a sense of how cultists might look and act). They prowl around the market and its shadowy margins, or they conduct strange, solitary rituals of their own devising – perhaps melting silver on altar-braziers to inhale the fumes, or chanting endless transaction-recording sutras to put themselves into a trance.

There is an irony, or an illogic, at the heart of all this. The cult exists to exalt the market, and they will therefore protect it as though it is holy ground; but in doing so, they betray the idea that the rise and fall of such places occurs through divine providence.

SOCIETY OF SILVER

Names: Galena, Sigloi, Dirham

Descriptors: Weighed down with necklaces of strung-together coins; Skin patterned with silver nitrate exposures; Reciting a list of prices to themselves

Difficulty: 0 (1 if the individual is currently the leader; if they're killed, a new one will rise in D3 days)

Resistance: 5 (8 for the leader)

Equipment: Soft but keen silver blades (D6, Unreliable); a good haul of silver trinkets and coinage; a sawed-off shotgun loaded with sten (D6, Point-blank, Penetrating, One-shot)

EXTRA ADVANCE: SILVER CULTIST

The cult are likely to be antagonists in this story. Nevertheless, whether genuinely or not, players may end up joining them. They are essentially performative: because it is so decentralised and non-hierarchical, there are no initiation ceremonies or membership tests. Anyone living in the manner of the cultists is, in time, considered part of the cult. The more ostentatiously this is done, the better for the cultist's status.

It is therefore possible for the players to “belong” to the cult (and access the powers below, which are granted not through belief but through behaviour) even while secretly opposing it. Of course, divided loyalties may become an issue.

REQUIREMENT: Live in, or near, the commercial cesspit of Ironshrike. Adorn yourself with silver and give yourself over to its power.

REFRESH: Buy something for more than it is worth, or sell something for less than it is worth

LOW

THE PRICE OF ALL THINGS. *The paths of flesh and silver are clear to you, and clearest of all is that they travel the same paths.* If you are a member of the Society, you may select Low Azurite advances. If your character is already an Azurite, you may select Low Carrion Priest advances.

THE INVISIBLE HAND. *The market moves us all, though it does so invisibly.* +1 Silver. You may mark D3 stress to Silver to roll with mastery when you attempt to Compel or Deceive.

SHADOW OF SILVER. *Your optic nerve has taken on the properties of the curious silver compounds used by daguerreotypists.* Once per session, you may specify a place that you have been and ask the GM to describe an important detail in that place for you (i.e. you ‘reflect’ on a place you have been with photo-realistic recall and ‘notice’ something you had previously missed).

MEDIUM

VEINS. *Silver can be mined in veins other than those of the earth.* You can invoke this power during combat once per session to transmute the blood of a nearby foe into molten silver as you spill it. Whenever someone inflicts damage on that character, they may remove an equal amount of Silver stress.

HIGH

REFUND. *In extremis, you can vomit a torrent of molten silver over your enemies.* Mark D3 Blood stress, and make a D8 Brutal, Piercing, Scarring attack against someone you can touch. Increase the difficulty of all rolls that involve talking by 1.

DEBTOR'S BARGAIN. *Suffering, too, is a kind of currency.* When another character that you can see takes Silver stress, you may take it instead. The next time you suffer non-Silver stress, you may allocate it to whoever most recently allocated Silver stress to you.

ENDING THE STORY

This is not a story about stopping something from happening: this is a story about how you can enact change. The cult's aim is stasis, much as they might dress it up in the language of cycles of commerce: they want Ironshrike to persist as their feeding ground forever. It is up to the players to explore the limits of their power and their right to change the city.

That said, there is a likelihood that if the players get close to carrying out their mission, there will be some kind of final showdown – probably with cultists more or less en masse, and probably in the market itself (though not necessarily, in either case). If this happens, play up the mayhem of multiple fights breaking out in the already chaotic setting. The cult will glory in this havoc, but it is an opportunity to see them off too. Here are a few of the potential NPC-driven denouements that might occur:

KING TEETH STRIKES

Finally persuaded to move openly against the cult, King Teeth vomits forth his army of ghouls to destroy the cultists and their territory; perhaps he even hauls his immense body forth in person for the fight. Can the players turn the resultant showdown from an orgy of competition and consumption that the cult might benefit from into one that will break them?

ONE FIRE TOO MANY

Vetch's arsons are like brushfires, clearing the market for new growth and shaking things up again. But the plan to burn out an entire rival ammunition dump – one the cult likes to pilfer from, no less – risks catastrophic destruction. Can the players make sure that this comes to pass without themselves perishing in a hell of fire and blackpowder?

THE BAILIFFS MOVE IN

Sows-In-Winter has run out of patience and made his move too early: his bailiffs and hired hands are breaking up the market before he can be sure of his control over it. Should the players intervene to make sure they succeed? Or is this a chance to try and stake claims of their own?

MODEL-BREAKING

Left-Hand-Unknowing's models can tell the players how the market works; perhaps they can also tell the players how to make it stop working. This isn't a chaotic market brawl: this is a knife-edge confrontation with one of the city's most subtle plotters, with the aim of forcing her to destroy everything she's worked for.

RANDOM TABLES

APPEARANCE/BODY MODIFICATIONS OF INDIVIDUAL CULTISTS

- 1 – Teeth replaced with wedged-in silver pegs
- 2 – One eye missing, with a coin filling the hole like an embedded monocle. For extra effect, both eyes
- 3 – Densely tattooed with imagery taken from coins
- 4 – Skull repeatedly trepanned, holes sealed with coins
- 5 – Skin entirely dyed blue, with silver tattoo-work traced over it
- 6 – Wearing a tattered coat stitched from colourful Nujabian paper money
- 7 – Wearing an immensely heavy collar-yoke of silver ingots, causing them to stoop and hobble
- 8 – Scarred and puckered skin from repeated immersions in molten silver
- 9 – Bearing a silver fetish-doll of themselves hung around their neck
- 10 – Fingernails replaced with shards of driven-in silver

BELIEFS & PRACTICES OF INDIVIDUAL CULTISTS

- 1 – Flips coins to make decisions
- 2 – Believes self to be an expression of market forces with no free will, loudly pities those who still believe otherwise, will excuse all their own actions on this basis
- 3 – Considers blood more expendable than silver, tries to pay with it: carries a blood-letting kit at all times
- 4 – Compulsive gambler and wager-maker
- 5 – Is following one specific coin around the city to observe its flow
- 6 – Carries long, constantly updated scroll of all transactions they make
- 7 – Regularly swallows coins
- 8 – Buys and destroys things to “manipulate scarcity”
- 9 – Meticulously and openly forges currency, then attempts to spend the forgeries to see what their “value” is
- 10 – Defaces all coinage they spend with their own name and image

EXOTICA FOR SALE TODAY

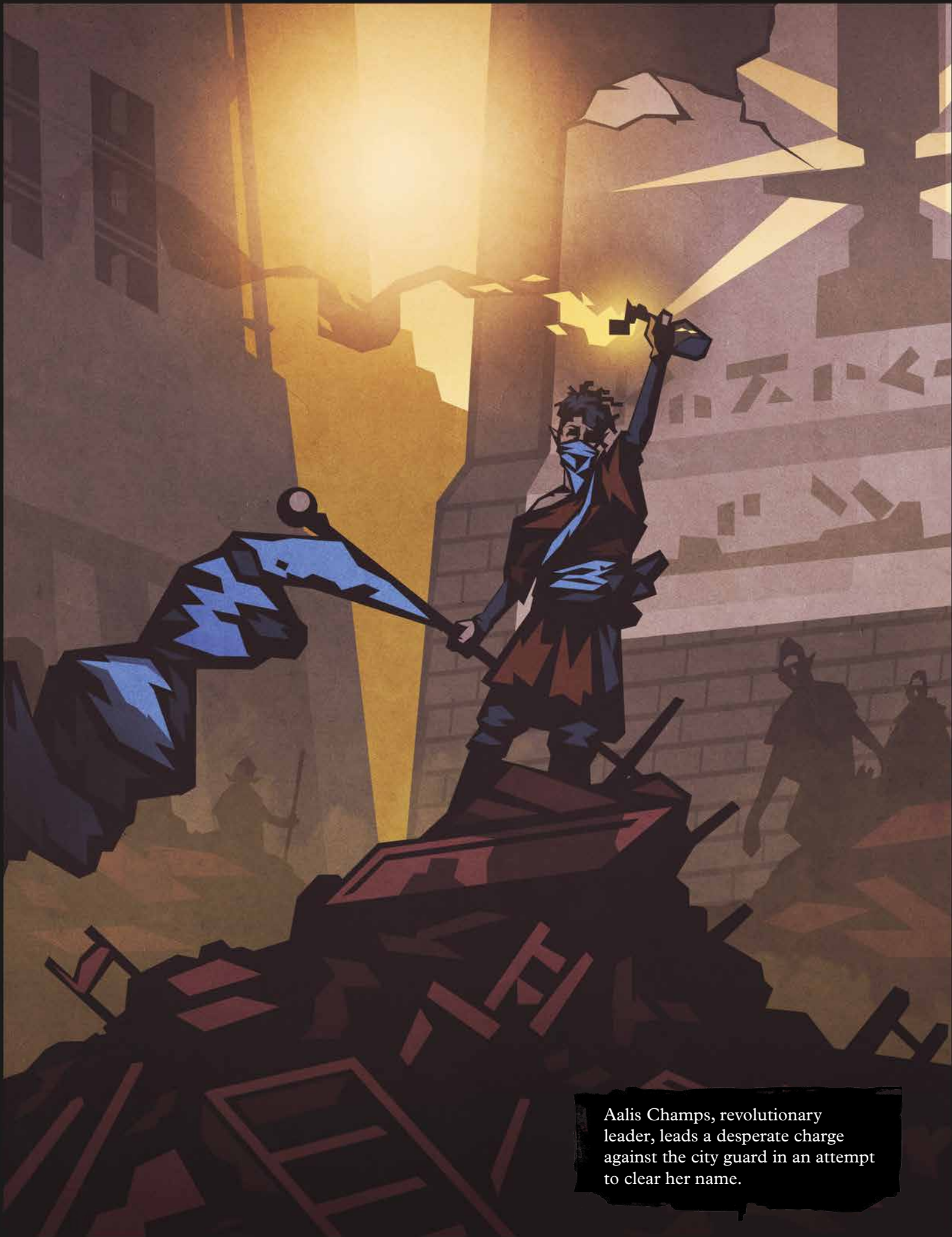
- 1 – Articulated tongue made of some kind of chitin. You're told that if you cut out your tongue and replace it with this, you can speak to insects
- 2 – Rat that eats curses: sleep with it in a pouch round your neck and the curse will transfer to it. Sleep with it in a pouch round your neck while it's cursed and it will pass the curse on to you
- 3 – Glass bottle, empty but stoppered. When unstoppered, the nearest door opens: when closed again, the nearest door (possibly a different one by now) closes. When broken, all windows within a hundred yards shatter
- 4 – Quite large living spider with a pattern of frost-like markings on its back. Swallow it whole and alive to grow four extra arms, which last for eight days
- 5 – Undeveloped daguerreotype plate. If a person's portrait is shot and developed on it, it will show not the person but what they were thinking at the time
- 6 – Wooden stool with a faded but ornate fabric covering. Floats safely and stably in water, retaining perfect balance unless overloaded
- 7 – Icon of the Hungry Deep. Spoils all nearby food, which rots at a vastly accelerated rate
- 8 – Horrendously poisonous cutting from some aelfir spiral garden. Handle with extreme care
- 9 – Supposedly a gutterkin seed, or embryo, or something. Is that even how gutterkin work? You can buy it and find out
- 10 – A goat, technically, though you didn't know it was possible for a goat to have that many horns or subsist entirely on a diet of raw meat

CHARACTERISTICS OF MINOR SHOPKEEPERS AND/OR STALLS

- 1 – Masked, despite being down here among the lowest of the low. Probably not actually aelfir, but you never know
- 2 – Constantly burns incense: shop surrounded by a fug of fragrant, cloying smoke
- 3 – Will not physically handle silver: requires money to be left in "sterilising pot" full of vinegar
- 4 – Their "pet" gutterkin on a leash is also a skilled pickpocket
- 5 – Chum addict, evident from both their behaviour and the smell. Sells a little on the side when they can bear to
- 6 – Stall is an elaborate portable platform mounted on stallholder's back
- 7 – Stallholder is covered in horrendous burns from previous stall fire
- 8 – Passes messages for the Ministry, hidden inside merchandise. If questioned, will claim not to know the messages were there, which may even be true
- 9 – Former scholar of the Brazacott Institute with a botched implant
- 10 – Formerly of Ivory Row, still dresses and acts like it, constantly taking mortal offence

TODAY'S WEIRD MARKET HAVOC

- 1 – Huge canal fish being hacked up and sold off turns out not to be dead after all
- 2 – Some kind of fungal spore outbreak – mass incapacitation. Seems not to affect humans
- 3 – Some sort of inscrutable gutterkin festive pageant. Or is it a protest?
- 4 – Mother Falling-Ash-On-Snow, Entropic Matriarch of the Hungry Deep, is here in person. Shopping? Preaching? Collecting a debt?
- 5 – Structural collapse has opened up a temporary Vermissian tributary: some fleeing, others looting it for anything saleable
- 6 – Hellionites, who claim to be “reclaiming stolen guns”. Could be!
- 7 – Finely dressed aelfir corpse lying in the market. Nobody dares touch it, entire market just flows seamlessly around it
- 8 – Enormous, blood-crazed hyena running amok
- 9 – Spontaneous mass “trial” of a merchant accused of passing counterfeit silver. Looks a lot more like a hanging, really
- 10 – Fire! Is it an accident, or arson?



Aalis Champs, revolutionary leader, leads a desperate charge against the city guard in an attempt to clear her name.

THE SULPHUROUS PRESSES

By Coman Fullard

Content warnings: Cannibalism, surgery, decapitation, body horror, attempted genocide, alcohol/substance abuse.

INTRODUCTION

The Works are ripe. Pollution, heat and desperation make a stinking cocktail. The screech of industry barely obscures cries of despair, drow workers are ruthlessly exploited by the aelfir establishment and gutterkin are despised by all.

For the press this wretchedness is just local colour. Publishers exalt the oppressive aelfir regime, denigrate the drow as foolish children and condemn the rest as degenerates.

The Ministry want to co-opt the power of the press, so it instructs the characters to become pamphleteers. The goal is to generate popular support for the resistance by exposing the horror of occupation, condemning treacherous collaborators and promoting drow culture. The mission is to undermine the legitimacy of the state and excuse insurgent transgressions as patriotic necessities.

Events in the Works will build to a fiery climax: strikes, riots, gutterkin pogroms, automatons run-amok and a full-scale military intervention are all possibilities.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON?

Scent-of-Oak-Trees is committed to dominating the drow and exterminating the Gutterkin. He uses

his newspaper, The Torch, to promote the establishment and secretly sponsors a “political party” called GRANITE COLUMN for use as street muscle.

Surgeon-General Dark-the-Woodland-Clearing is a senior officer in the defence forces and publisher of The Tassel. She is also illicitly funding the ghoulish retro-engineer, Professor S. Peabody, to clandestinely develop a galvanic war-golem built from drow “spare” parts.

Complicating all of this is Aalis Champs, a labour organiser with a mysterious past who is working to unionise all drow across the Works.

RUNNING THE PAPER

The Ministry charges the characters with founding a paper and building its circulation until it gains dominance as the de facto source of information in the city. To do so, it must capture domains already served by other existing publications. To “defeat” rival publications in this way, the players must:

- Publish salacious stories which undermine authority
- Succeed in circulation rolls using a dice pool based on aspects of the publication
- Reduce rival publications’ resistance to zero.

The characters’ paper increases in influence as it captures each domain. With each success the players acquire an additional advance, ranging in effect from Low to High depending on the competitor vanquished.

STARTING YOUR PAPER

"Congratulations on your perspicacious purchase of the Tone-of-the-Satyr Printing Press, which offers the latest in hand-cranked pig-iron technology. Now with twice the printing area!"

The Ministry have provided the players with a hidden office in the alley behind The Malty Falcon on Lime Street, a printing press, supplies, some silver, a master-typesetter and his apprentices. From the Ministry's perspective, the characters can pursue any story as long as they focus on tearing down the aelfir and building up the drow. Everything else is at the characters' discretion – a naive directive.

Characters have four tasks to complete before preparing their first edition:

1. Name the paper
2. Design the logo
3. Agree an editorial stance
4. Adopt core abilities

NAME THE PAPER

Encourage the players to discuss and agree among themselves what the paper should be called. Make it a name to be feared.

DESIGN THE LOGO

Ask the players to describe what the logo looks like and make a crude sketch of it. Repeat the sketch on several index cards. Write "PRESS PASS" across the top of each card and stick them into your hat-bands.

HATS

Around half of the Works is open-air, and the sun glimmers meekly through the smog. Most residents wear a hat. Popular options include: Straw-brimmed, Eight-pointed, Felt-brimmed and Tin-Helmet. A Tin-Helmet indicates a citizen with negative feelings about the inhabitants of PERCH, who they likely blame for dropping detritus onto the Works.

SAMPLE EDITORIAL STANCES

Choose an editorial stance for your publication. This affects its favoured domains (where and how far you can push your luck before you get in trouble) and its refresh (how it garners favour with readers).

Choose two favoured domains from the lists provided for your editorial stance. If you launch an attack against a competitor who shares your favoured domain, mark half the stress rolled against your paper.

BALANCED

Favoured domains: Crime, Commerce, High Society or Order.

Publication Refresh: In print, expose how your opponents think.

GLOSSY

Favoured domains: Low Society, High Society or Occult.

Publication Refresh: Show the ugly side of the "beautiful people" of Spire.

HIGH-MINDED

Favoured domains: Commerce, Academia, High Society, Order, Religion or Technology.

Publication Refresh: Publish a reasoned rebuttal of an accepted position.

SATIRICAL

Favoured domains: Order, High Society, Religion or Technology.

Publication Refresh: A scathing examination of the absurdity of the authorities.

ADVANCES

Characters get an additional low advance when they found their paper. As they defeat competing publications, further advances may be taken from this list.

LOW

POWER OF THE PRESS. Roll with mastery when dealing with the City Guard, bureaucrats or middle management types.

THE PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD.

Once per session you may editorialise an antagonist into difficulty.

PERCONTATION POINT. Your rhetoric is so compelling that you gain the Deceive skill when dealing with Low Society, Crime or Occult domains.

BELOW THE FOLD. Gain the Investigate skill associated with any one domain.

SCUTTLEBUTT. Sources provide one story lead associated with their domain once per session.

MEDIUM

SCOOP. Once per session, your sources can tell you the leading story of a given competing publication. The first time you inflict stress to that competitor during this session, double it.

SHOE LEATHER. Your sources can offer useful information on the movements of any one antagonist once per session.

HIGH

OBITUARY. Once per session you can declare an NPC dead. Those who meet them believe they've seen a ghost. If you've already captured the RELIGION domain, the Morticians will eventually make it official.

SEE YOU IN THE FUNNY PAPERS. Once per session, you so utterly shred an NPC's reputation in print that you gain mastery in the next confrontation with them and their agents.

CIRCULATION ROLLS

Once per edition, the characters nominate an Editor from within the group. When they publish an edition with an eye to capture a rival's audience, the Editor declares the target domain, chairs discussions on the lead story, agrees the headline with the rest of the characters and makes a circulation roll to capture the target domain.

Treat a circulation roll as a normal Bond roll. The paper rolls 1d10 and:

- + 1d10 if the lead story fits the target domain;
- + 1d10 if the lead story fits the paper's editorial stance;
- + 1d10 if the story takes place (wholly or partially) within the paper's local area.

The dice pool is adjusted based on the difficulty rating of the competing publication. Players can reduce the difficulty of a rival through sabotage,

intimidation, forcing an advertiser to withdraw their support, etc.

On a success, the players' edition inflicts stress on the rival publication. Initially, with a low circulation, the players' publication will deliver D3 stress to competitors. They will deliver D6 stress after they defeat their first difficulty 1 competitor and D8 stress after they defeat their first difficulty 2 competitor. If the GM believes the players' headline is particularly appropriate, hilarious or salacious then stress has the brutal tag.

The players' publication replaces a competitor as the dominant paper serving a given domain when that rival drops to zero resistance AND the players have published a story focused on the rival's domain in that issue.

If the characters' paper experiences stress as a result of a circulation roll, the amount of stress is found by rolling the dice associated with the rival (see the Competing Publications section below). The Editor for that issue then checks for fallout. In the event of fallout, all characters mark 2 stress to Reputation.

SAMPLE FALLOUTS

MINOR

PAPER TIGER. Your supplies have been stolen or consumed. Nothing can be published until replenishment.

TONE DEAF. Your last edition upset your core audience. Lose one dice from the next circulation roll.

SNITCHES GET STITCHES. Sources fear your enemies. You cannot draw on them until you publish a damning scoop.

RAG TRADE. You are called out by a rival publication. Characters mark 1 stress to their Reputation whenever they use any Paper-related Advance until that rival publication is defeated.

MODERATE

PRINTER'S DEVIL. Your printer's apprentices organise their own union. They strike until their demands are met.

BREAKING NEWS. Your distribution network has been hampered. +1 to the difficulty of your circulation rolls until resolution.

INTERROBANG. A key source lied extensively and has drawn attention to you. Characters add 2 stress to Shadow.

CENSURE. Receive an official reprimand. +1 to the difficulty of your next circulation roll until the Censure order is officially lifted.

SEVERE

STOP THE PRESSES. Your presses have been destroyed and must be replaced.

AGAINST THE GRAIN. The Ministry is unhappy. Address their concerns or risk assassination.

BLACKBALLED. Any further stress is doubled until you overcome this. Increase the difficulty of

your circulation roll by 1 when your target domain is Commerce or Order.

MURDERED SOURCE. Cannot acquire or access sources until you solve their murder.

BANNED. Add 2 to the difficulty of your next circulation roll unless you circumvent the ban. Characters experience D8 Reputation stress.

COMPETITORS

There are many cheap or free pamphlets, gazettes, fly posters and newspapers across the city, all competing for the public's attention. Publications with a dominant position in their respective domains are listed below:

Paper	Description	Domain	Resistance	Difficulty	Dice
Liberate!	Pro-drow, anti-aelfir	Low Society	3	0	D3
The Orb	Demonology & supernatural ephemera	Occult	4	0	D3
Q	Engineering periodical	Technology	5	0	D3
The Furnace	Sensationalist tabloid	Crime	6	1	D6
Ambrosia	Pan-religious gossip	Religion	7	1	D6
The Tassel	Learned people in ivory towers	Academia	8	1	D6
The Silhouette	Beautiful beings being beautiful	High Society	12	2	D8
The Chronicle	Business people & industrialists	Commerce	16	2	D8
The Torch	Pro-aelfir for working drow	Order	20	2	D10
The Spiral Muse	Populist rag, fond of half-truths	Special*	13	1	D10

*Taking control of The Spiral Muse, a jack-of-all-trades paper, allows you to select one knack in any domain at the start of each session. At the end of the session, you lose access to this knack and must pick a different one at the start of the next session.

THE STORY

OPENING SCENE

The Grand Pageant of Commerce opens tonight with a reception in the Selenite Palace: a towering edifice of water-clear crystals, grown onsite by skilled architect-mages. This exhibition, hosted by the Chamber of Commerce, celebrates their industrial might.

Attendees are mainly wealthy aelfir, drow and humans, all surrounded by various lickspittles. These denizens of the Works mingle, preen and boast.

However, a public spectacle and demonstration is planned with Professor S. Peabody: drow “volunteers” drop from the ceiling wearing winged flight-suits of the Professor’s design. As each one plummets to the ground, the Professor shouts through a speaking-trumpet to explain the underlying science to an astonished crowd.

All the antagonists will be found here, discreetly circling each other. The characters should get something on the record to expose hypocrisy and punish corruption. Throw a spanner in the works!

NON PLAYER CHARACTERS

PUBLISHER AND EDITOR OF LIBERATE!

ANGEL HIGHGATE, FORMER MASKED DROW

“None of us will be free until we are ALL free. We must challenge the systems and philosophies that hold us all in fetters.”

His problem: he strives to live free of moral compromise.

Angel was raised as a pet of a noble aelfir family. He was expelled from those surroundings as a teenager and survived in the Works, where he found comradeship and generosity among the downtrodden. It is his mission in life to rescue all those under the cosh, and he is not willing to trade one set of oppressors for another simply because of their religion or race.

Though elderly, Angel carries himself with a noble bearing and keeps his grey beard neatly trimmed to a point beneath his chin. His straw-brimmed hat is always startlingly clean. He carries his now broken mask on his belt as a constant reminder of the false

comfort of his old life. He has sworn never to wear one again.

LIBERATE! STORIES

- Weaver’s apprentice Pol Navette faces execution for assaulting his boss, textile magnate Reclines-in-Feline-Exuberance. Navette is being held by the City Guard pending his trial. Aalis Champs is organizing a blockade of the guard-house in protest.
- Midwife Donna Grandé runs the Orphanage & Infirmary on Fat Street and is trying to raise funds. Unknown to everyone, she is also hiding several gnoll prisoners of war. They’ve cracked into the Vermissian and weirdness is leaking through.
- Rack-renting Oxenbridge slumlords raise the rates on a tenement in Strangier Street, so the tenants plan a rent party. There will be music, dancing and blood!

PUBLISHER, EDITOR AND CORRESPONDENT OF THE ORB

DUKE THE-LIMITS-OF-PISCINE-MANCY, FAILED MAGICIAN

“Occult practice is cobbled together from scraps of half-savage tradition. To exploit the power of The Other we must codify, systemise and test the arcane.”

His problem: he must define a unifying theory for magic.

The Duke comes from an obscure but well-regarded aelfir family that has produced a long line of mages. He longs to live in a rational world where everything is governed by mathematics and causality, but has seen ample evidence of the supernatural.

Despite being unable to perform magic of any kind due to a curse, he dresses to flagrantly declare his magical leanings: black flowing cloaks with high collars, mystical symbols and unusually intricate and arcane hat designs. His masks are bisected, showing light and dark versions.

THE ORB STORIES

- The Surgeon-General, lately forced to return from Nujab, is rumoured to have been cursed to die by

a Djinn in the wilderness if she experiences the desert aridity again.

- “The Heart of Peace Street” is a serial narrative play that has been running for months. It depicts the lives of the drow, humans and ghosts who live on Peace Street, a “fictional” location near the Heart. Audiences dress up as their favourite characters, like the human-sized cockroach Rikkiki; the sinister Mr Palindrome; or Betty and Dave Ijs, the human proprietors of local tavern The Heathen’s Rest, where much of the action occurs. The Orb believes there is such a place and that the plays are fact, not fiction; but how? And why is there an escalating sense of impending doom?
- The hauntings on Uncanny Alley have been intensifying, centered on Professor Peabody’s lab. They feature:
 - Incomprehensible Screaming – the only word characters can make out is “sinister”
 - A Skeletal Spider-thing that skitters across the ceiling
 - Psychic Shriek (roll Resist+Occult to endure)
 - Possession – malicious spirit with a rapacious appetite
 - Distorted Space-time – leave by one door and impossibly re-enter by another
 - Miasma – something hushed and foul smelling moves within
 - Spirewhite Thrall whispering one of the characters’ names
 - Suppurating architecture

CHAIRMAN OF THE PEER REVIEW PANEL OF Q.

PROFESSOR S. PEABODY, GHOULISH HUMAN RETRO-ENGINEER

“Bless your soul for asking. I am named after my dear maternal uncle ‘Sinister’. Ironic, really, as I am right-handed.”

His problem: his curiosity is all-consuming. Plus incipient cannibalism.

The Professor favours entirely white clothing and sports a shock of white hair with a black moustache. He uses Q to promote himself and steal ideas from others.

As a retro-engineer, his secret sponsor is the Surgeon-General, for whom he is developing a war-golem codenamed PROJECT BLACK-FARRAGO. He is transplanting the brains of recently dead drow

into a canister of his own design (“Peabody’s Patented Command Canister”). He imprisons their souls utilising processed spirewhite and occult incantations from his secret life as a Galvanic Cardinal, a leading engineer ministering to the Machine Heart.

The project has yielded some disturbing side-effects, notably a rash of hauntings in the neighbourhoods around his lab on Uncanny Alley. These hauntings are charging the Machine Heart. At some point it will release a cataclysmic reality warping bow-wave of chaos, animating all of Peabody’s creations with murderous intent.

This polymath also has cannibalistic tendencies. He consumed his twin in utero and believes this made him smarter than average – that he somehow added his twin’s intellect to his own. Peabody’s callousness is increasing with exposure to the Machine Heart, and he is becoming more and more fascinated with the idea of “drow meat”.

Q STORIES

- Professor Peabody opens a diner called “The Horn & Heart Nujabi Automat”. Uniquely, it has a brass chef and is a testing ground for further automatons.
- Prestige Palanquin are attempting to develop a self-carrying palanquin (a “Charapied”) and automate their manufacture, despite resistance from Aalis Champs’ labour organisation.
- A backstreet clinic offers “anti-entropic therapy”, cut-price undying surgery that is very risky. Xavier Ossuary is an ex-mortician who was expelled for sharing surgical secrets; The Morticians (and the Surgeon General) are on the hunt for him.

LAB ASSISTANTS [HUMAN AND DROW]

Names: Thierry, Garr, Rogi

Description: Goggles; White coat; Leather gauntlets

Difficulty: 0

Resistance: 7

Equipment: Hammer (D3, Brutal); welding gear (D6, Dangerous); Shrike pistol (D6, Double-barrelled, Penetrating, Ranged)

PROFESSOR PEABODY'S AUTOMATA

Name	Location	Description	Difficulty	Resistance	Equipment
The Brass Chef	Horn & Heart Nujabi Automat	Many-armed with a long reach, rooted to one spot, brass carapace	1	15	Cleaver (D6 Brutal) Deep-Fry Pan (D8. Ongoing D3, One-Shot)
Charapiet Mark 1.2	Prestige Palanquin	Four-legged self-carrying Palanquin	0	5	Feet (D3)
Peabody's Patented Palanquin Painter	Prestige Palanquin	A pair of articulated paint cannons, fixed to one spot, covered in paint	1	6	Dual Welding Paint Cannons (D3, Ranged)
Black-Shell 0.1	Professor Peabody's lab	A command canister, one arm attached, three large wheels	0	8	Articulated arm (D3) Wheels (D3)
The Page Compositor	The Torch	20 long insectile arms, a giant roller, propels itself along with its arms	2	10	Articulated arms (D3) Roller (D6)

MACHINE HEART CONCELEBRANTS

Names: Brother-Mechanic Finn, Abbott-Technician Costello, Canon-Engineer Brunel

Description: Insulated chasuble; Reinforced zucchetto; Grounded mitre

Difficulty: 1

Resistance: 5

Equipment: Alchemical thurible (D3, Brutal); lightning crozier (D6, Dangerous); stiletto (D3, Penetrating)

PUBLISHER OF THE FURNACE

SPEAR-IN-A-RIVERSIDE-MEADOW, LOWLIFE EXPLOITER OF MISERY

"Gods, I love this town. Lies are as valuable as truth... and everyone is for sale."

His problem: he wants to show how corrupt the world is – not in the name of reform, but because this reflects his own corrupt soul.

Unusually short for an aelfir, he is publicly shunned by his own kind. He exhibits his race's habitual arrogance towards drow, which makes him a natural ally for members of the City Guard and criminal classes who exist in a similar social no-man's land.

He relishes his power to shock and upset all factions, but must tread a fine line to ensure that nobody decides to eliminate him. Allies are in short supply when you are a blackmailing, high-pitched, fast-talking, lying son-of-a-witch. His typical mask presents a rictus smile and bears the inscription "God is my judge".

THE FURNACE STORIES

- Several drow have fallen ill around Ox-Ford Street, each slipping into a coma. Jac of the Ox-Ford is poisoning former employees of the Oxenbridge estate to protect his current identity.



The Works, where most of the printing presses of Spire are located, also contains most of the burgeoning journalism industry.

- Who decapitated Greymanor operative Desdemona Amberdale, and where is her head?
- The Black Canal is an unlit waterway that runs through the Deep Works and was historically used to ship goods. Now largely unused, it is populated with terrifying denizens: albino alligators, kraken and more. None is more fearsome than the *Gruselmouse*, a giant bat with a thirst for drow-flesh.
- Dr Salamander's Newt Extract & Energising Tonic is popular with denizens of the Works; too popular, perhaps. Consumers remain awake for hours, even days, and the comedown is bumpy. What is the secret?

EDITOR OF AMBROSIA

VERGER THE-GRACIOUS-CLIFF-DWELLER, SEEKER OF DIVINE KNOWLEDGE

"The infinite is fashioned by divinity into our reality today. It will be refashioned anew tomorrow."

Her problem: she dreads the afterlife.

This hunch-backed drow lives in constant fear of being refused an everlasting afterlife. She is essentially a heretic who worships the full pantheon of all the gods, hoping to ensure her entry into "paradise".

As such, her editorial interest spans all religious-adjacent gossip. She is welcome in nearly every chapel in the city, and owns an impressive collection of religious vestments and dresses to match the current holy-day.

AMBROSIA STORIES

- A procession of Machine Heart concelebrants march to their Chapel on 1/16th Street. Druids block their passage, expressing their concern about some impending catastrophe their augurs have foreseen.
- Decapitated corpses have turned up across the Works. A Carrion Priest named Estragon is investigating, accompanied by his hyena Vladimir. The Morticians cannot be far behind.
- Heretic monks within St Grendel's Lamasery, led by Brother Loudly-Sings-the-Hymns, believe their prize ram Ephesus hosts the immortal spirit of the blessed St Grendel. They will transplant his soul from the ram into the wind-dried remains of their venerated saint. Due to a transcription error, the

transference ceremony leads to an outbreak of restless corpses on Feather Island.

PUBLISHER OF THE TASSEL

SURGEON-GENERAL DARK-THE- WOODLAND-CLEARING, SOLDIER, ARTIST AND SNOB

"I do what must be done, and I do it beautifully. That is what makes me victorious and makes you pitiful."

Her problem: she needs the latitude to deliver victory for the aelfir. Her way.

An undying senior military officer, she is intelligent, capable and artistically violent, with little time for the approval of others. Publishing The Tassel gives her an uninterrupted platform for her views.

She was happy to perform experimental surgery on gnolls or conscripts in the Nujab, but fears a backlash in Spire. Secrecy is paramount. Any embarrassment would be used by her superior, General Snow-on-Stone, to relieve himself of a dangerous rival. They previously clashed over the lack of "artistry" displayed by Snow-on-Stone's forces in the field. Consequently, she secretly funnels gold to Professor Peabody's research into PROJECT BLACK-FAR-RAGO (see p170).

Her favoured war mask conveys the concepts of resolve, panache and victory. Her armour is embossed with a caduceus, featuring hissing snakes that are viciously fanged. Her peacetime mask suggests coiled, creativity and superiority. In this case, she wears a black patrol jacket with a high collar.

THE TASSEL STORIES

- A monograph on dueling etiquette with footnotes on the curious death of Springs-the-Stallion from what appeared to be flesh wounds.
- Scent-of-Oak-Trees has commissioned a sculpture by the niece of Lord Veq, which is to be unveiled at the Selenite Palace. The piece is controversial and surely the product of a deranged mind. Where did she source all those bones?
- Fruits-of-the-Rowan builds a utopian workers compound, Madvig Estates, with spacious homes for his workers and a range of facilities to cater for all their physical and spiritual needs. Nothing worrying there.

- Heiress Ruler-of-Sun-Spear is leading an expedition to an abandoned zoo in the Garden district's lost acres to capture something fierce for display in the Selenite Palace. The trek to the rarely visited floor is sponsored by The Tassel.

SURGEON-GENERAL'S RETINUE

Names: Matron-Major Heat-of-Proud-Descent, Nurse Sergeant, Mr Raptor-Sees-Further

Description: Obsessively hygienic; Wears a surgical mask over their mask; Blood-spattered caduceus

Difficulty: 2

Resistance: 10

Equipment: Armour; scalpel (D3, Surprising); bone-saw (D3, Brutal, Scarring); pistol (D6, Piercing, One-shot); sword (D6)

EDITOR OF THE SILHOUETTE

LADY AXES-BREAD-AND-DARKENED-TEMPLES, DROW TRAPPED IN AELFIR DISGUISE

"Talent, style and beauty are no substitute for nobility. But they run a close second."

Her problem: she wants to make a world where beauty means truth.

Her Ladyship speaks in a deliberate, leisurely fashion, in a way that suggests it is her right to waste your time. She dresses and masks herself using the most subtle and arcane iconography of the aelfir.

Her absolute mastery of the unwritten social protocols of the aelfir is her passport to the highest echelons of society. She is also a drow imposter who must continue to pass as a high-born aelfir.

As an editor, she pursues all facets of beauty – both gifted and earned – in any community.

THE SILHOUETTE STORIES

- The Surgeon-General's retinue secretly makes doubles of her friend Captain Wander-the-Lost in her clinic on Thin Man Street.
- Scent-of-Oak-Trees announces his engagement to Council member Lord Veq's niece. The ceremony

will take place in the Selenite Palace. Lord Veq will be in attendance.

- Zim Deepone is a suddenly famous singer on the Blind-Spider circuit. Patrons flock to hear her songs of life in the deep dark (e.g. "Sick of Your Subterranean Home", "Buckets of Blood", "Corvid Blues"). Zim is a Vyskant intent on luring drow to the parasite's caves.
- The Stairway Luge Championship is imminent. There are rumours of an all-Drow team entering this traditionally all-aelfir event.

BLIND-SPIDER CLUBS

Malak is openly sold in these speakeasies, supplied by bootleggers in an often violent business. A cabaret circuit has evolved here, with dancers, singers, gnoll bands, etc. Only the Paladins are genuinely invested in smashing the trade. They get no meaningful help from the corrupt guards, who know these clubs but are bought-off. Clubs like The Imago, The Tin Man and Harmonicos are run by canny proprietors with big personalities: the fabulous Minnie Maxime, the enigmatic Pistachio Borealis, the fabulously enigmatic Crux Quietly, and more.

OWNER OF THE CHRONICLE

HOURL-OF-THE-BROAD-VALLEY, POSSIBLE VAMPIRE

"Money never sleeps, so why should I?"

His problem: he wants to capture the ebb-and-flow of all wealth. And...sunlight?

Hour-of-the-Broad-Valley is already rich; his primary interest is the flow of wealth, rather than its acquisition. He has a soothing, sonorous and hypnotic voice, and dresses in expensive but slightly old fashioned dark flowing robes. He is either a vampire or doing a sustained impression of one. Given the nobility of his bloodline, it would be deemed rude by most aelfir to try to ascertain which possibility is true.

THE CHRONICLE STORIES

- GRANITE COLUMN has a secret patron and are negotiating with Ptolemy Bay for weapons.
- There appears to be military gold flowing to Professor Peabody. For what purpose?

- Commodore Gentle-Crepuscular-Rays and her crew of bird-masters, The House of the Zephyr, have been raiding skywhale traffic around Spire for months.
- Vigilites steal barrels of spireblack, hoping to destroy the Selenite Palace in a spectacular attack with little regard for collateral damage.

THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

This association of industrialists, landlords and publishers fancy themselves to be the preeminent business people in Spire. They have planned The Grand Pageant of Commerce to illustrate this.

The construction of the Selenite Palace was key: this exhibition hall, made of giant clear selenite crystals, was “grown” at great cost. However, the investment has been worthwhile, as the Pageant looks to be a great success.

The Chamber of Commerce operates from a compound on the corner of Pyramid Street and All-Seeing-Eye Lane, next to the Pyramid Street elevators.

The compound has a full complement of masked staff who service its various meeting and reception rooms, extensive club and dining facilities, as well as temporary and permanent accommodation.

PUBLISHER OF THE TORCH

SHUNNUK SCENT-OF-OAK-TREES, AELFIR SOCIAL CLIMBER WHO HATES GUTTERKIN

“The flower of drow youth may wilt under the Southern sun, but this fuels a great step forward for our united peoples.”

His problem: he craves respect.

Scent-of-Oak-Trees has a mechanised arm built by the retro-engineer Professor Peabody. He lost the original in an accident years ago in Derelictus, for

Business

Ulterior Corvid

“We Eat Your Secrets”

Missives and arcane objects couriered with discretion.

Messrs Midwinter, Pennybottom & Ffrench

Powdered Skywhale Ambergris

To counter Carmilla’s Yellow-Fugue

Thankless Sisters

Delectable Crocus Stamen

Imported from Ys for discerning gourmands

Boil-the-Southern-Seas

Cutler & Hollow-Sword Maker

Noble Shipmakers

Dry Goods Manufactory

Damp and moist goods also produced

Hack-the-Bush

Spireblack Processors

Bold-Solemn-Fury

Alchemicals and Dyes

“For your exoteric and esoteric needs”

Problem

A valuable arcane item has been lost. A feared aelfir mage is threatening retribution on the board, who have no idea where it could be or even what it was.

Supplies are being plundered. Pirates blamed. An outbreak of Carmilla’s Yellow-Fugue has been reported on Cotton Lane.

Some customers have slipped into terrifying hallucinations, followed by sickness and even death. The Sisters have kept it quiet.

Trying to attract “investors” in a speculation across the Inland Sea.

Professor Peabody sealed off part of the factory attending to a spirewhite outbreak, but a spirewhite thrall turned up at the gates yesterday.

Several barrels of processed spireblack have gone missing.

A terrifying haunting and a gutterkin “infestation”.

which he holds all gutterkin responsible. He loathes them and uses his newspaper to call for their “removal”, believing that the aelfir are bred to rule, the drow to be ruled and gutterkin to die.

However, he feels inferior because of his background (his father deserted the family and ran off with a drow) and so tends to overreact when slighted. He wishes to elevate himself socially with a strategic marriage.

He divides his time between the offices of his paper *The Torch* (wearing a green mask fashioned to look like a bearded humanoid, one eyebrow permanently raised) and the rooms he keeps in the Chamber of Commerce compound (where his mask resembles a stylised, winking corvid).

He is also the clandestine sponsor of “political party” GRANITE COLUMN, a gang of parochial street-thugs, who he uses as enforcers. He has been paying a retainer to the party’s leader Jac of the Ox-ford for some months now.

KAIBIDYELL, A TEAM SPORT

Traditionally used to “non-violently” settle disputes between clans, popular teams are run by wealthy owners who press-gang their employees into participation. Betting is brisk and the owners take their cut.

Teams of four play in a rectangular walled pit the size of a pub cellar (fans sit in the stalls above). Each player uses a billhook to smack a tanned mega-corvid heart through an opposing hoop, mounted vertically 2 metres up the wall of the pit. Players may run with the heart balanced on their blade. They may catch the heart, but cannot otherwise handle it; they can instead kick, elbow, knee or head it against wall, floor or player.

The game is fast and robust. Teams play unarmoured and players tend to suffer distinctive lateral scars, hence familiar chants such as “Three lines on my chest”, “Who ate all your eyes!” and “You’ll never walk again!”

Drow believe the Gods intercede on behalf of the righteous to grant them victory. To ensure this divine intervention, the teams play while heavily intoxicated and officials test to ensure the required intoxicants have taken effect.

This was fine when contests were occasional. However, the now weekly games between teams has led to aberrant behaviour and short careers. Successful players are exalted until their eventual and inescapable fall from grace.

He fought a duel with the previous owner of The Torch (Springs-the-Stallion) to acquire full control, dishonourably poisoning the tip of his duelling blade to ensure his victory. This would be damaging if it could be proved.

THE TORCH STORIES

- GRANITE COLUMN’s call to purge the city of all unwanted gutterkin is fully supported by The Torch.
- The work of Aalis Champs and her “union” is a grave threat to Spire!
- Gentleman of the Cables, Billy Turnpike, declares that he’ll rob the next shipment of gold headed downspire (this is money intended for Professor Peabody). Billy’s gang has a bolt-hole between the floors, accessible only to those who brave the cables.
- The Torch sponsors a surprisingly successful Kaibidyell team named Tower of Light. They have some classy players like “Muck-Savage” Morritz Sauvage, “Pitfall-Piet” Volkhart and “Sleepy-Joe” Pavlova, but there are rumours of corruption which The Torch works hard to counter.

POISONER AND POLITICAL LEADER

JAC OF THE OX-FORD

“Gutterkin are a disease! They must be scoured and incised!”

His problem: he needs to regain a lost life of privilege and influence.

Jac of the Ox-Ford is a drow and the self-styled strongman leader of GRANITE COLUMN, a “political party” which urges the drow to hew to “traditional” values.

Jac dresses in well-kept black clothing, has mismatched eyes and can barely conceal his avarice. He holds no ideological philosophy beyond his own greed, but the anti-gutterkin thing is gaining traction. Jac’s ambition is to consolidate influence until nothing happens in the Works without enriching him.

Jac’s real name is Jon Oxenbridge. The family “took the mask” several generations ago and are now wealthy slumlords. Jac shed his mask and changed his name to evade arrest as an accomplished poisoner, but pines for his former life of privilege.

His current alias suggests he comes from the humble Ox-Ford street, a slum on the edge of the Shambles which he knows very well given that his family

are its principal landlords. The Ox-Ford is a bridge crossing the Black Canal which is used as a route for animals to be driven to slaughter.

Jac is currently under Scent-of-Oak-Trees' patronage and provides leg-breakers to this end. He supplied the aelfir with the poison used to unfairly win his duel. He has been blackmailing Scent-of-Oak-Trees since, though the aelfir characterises this as a "retainer".

GRANITE COLUMN

Before the previous chairman died of a mysterious illness, GRANITE COLUMN was just a street gang. The party now campaigns on "maintaining the natural order of things", meaning: the aelfir on top, drow at the bottom and GRANITE COLUMN in between, leeching off everyone. Kicking the gutterkin is gravy.

They supplement their income with a range of side activities, focusing on malak distribution. Through violence, intimidation and publicity in The Torch, they have also begun to edge out competitors for dominance of the Blind-Spider Club trade.

POLITICAL OPERATIVES

Names: Daz, Gaz, Raz

Descriptors: Spire tattoos; Back-to-front aelfir mask; GRANITE COLUMN emblazoned tin helmet

Difficulty: 0

Resistance: 7

Equipment: Club (D3); hobnail boots (D3); knife (D3, Brutal)

LABOUR ORGANISER WITH A MURKY PAST

AALIS CHAMPS

"The industrialists are free to exploit you, lie to you and cheat you! They steal your youth! Your health! Your energy! Stand with us and we'll fight them together!"

Her problem: she needs to pay off a substantial karmic debt.

Aalis is a former soldier looking for redemption, so she started a union (the Sodality Of Skilled & Unskilled Labouring Drow, or SOSULD) demanding better rights for drow. She's organising the workers in

the face of violent opposition, rooting out spies and instigating strikes.

As the public face of the movement she is in mortal danger – and that's how she likes it. The greater the risk, the greater the chance to wipe those black marks off her soul. Her hair is shorn, and she moves with the grace and power of an apex predator.

She's a deserter: a wanted poster naming her as "Captain Eilish Kane" hangs at Traitors Gate, the Gumboot Street entrance to Allied Defence HQ. Her face is also known to some gnoll prisoners of war for her role in a horrific incident in the Nujab while working for the Surgeon-General. This was the reason for her desertion.

SHOP STEWARDS

Names: Jerom, Pier, Alfon

Description: Hard-hats; Filthy working clothes; Red neckerchief; Spire-black stained

Difficulty: 0

Resistance: 5

Equipment: Sledgehammer (D6, Brutal, Tiring); wrench (D3); shears (D3, Surprising); spireblack cocktail (D6, Spread D3, One-shot)

GUTTERKIN GANG LEADER

MEATHEAD

"You want information? Meathead want food."

His problem: He needs to keep his gang safe.

Meathead is a small goblinoid with an oversized bald head and over-long arms. The parallel scars on his head are evidence of a difficult birth. He is fast and agile, with finely honed survival instincts; he moves around on his knuckles as easily as his feet.

He leads a small, loyal gang of gutterkin (The Hole-in-the-Floor Gang) and his goal is to ensure they survive and prosper. He was raised by the Midwife Donna Grandé in her Orphanage & Infirmary on Fat Street. The orphanage has drifted into disrepair since the untimely death of its benefactor, Springs-the-Stallion.

As a result of the education he received under the midwife he speaks with a refined accent, but dumbs it down to blend in with his gang.

HOLE-IN-THE-FLOOR GANG MEMBERS

Names: Roil, Turnbull, Lizzie
Description: Ragged waistcoat, only two teeth, carrying empty bottles
Difficulty: 0 (2 when running away)
Resistance: 3
Equipment: Broken bottle (D3, Scarring); dagger (D3, Surprising); crow bar (D3, Stunning)

VOX POPS

The regular salt-of-the-Spire denizens of the works all have something to say. If the cell hit the streets looking for news - or they make it known where their publication is produced, and eager citizens gain access - then they can glean the following "information" from them; roll a D10 five times on the table below to determine who, what they're hiding, what they think is newsworthy, who's to blame, and what - if anything - complicates the testimonial.

GUTTERKIN GANGS

These neighbourhood gangs range in membership from 5 to 30. Some well known gangs are:

- Lime Street Locos
- Fenwick Haemogoblins
- Cogtooth Avians
- Shambles Offal
- Marlowe Furies

These are welcome in only one Blind-Spider club, The Chitines Arms, which is treated as neutral territory.

Who	Secret	Thinks	Blames	Complication
1. Scowling labourer, phosphorescent and spattered in spireblack	Thinks she is a werewolf	I hear the Vermissian humming all the time...someone is using it! Why can't I? I could visit my great-aunt down in Red Row then. Poor dear has no-one to leave her dentures to.	Druids	Liquid spireblack flash-flood
2. Elated, bleeding human retro-engineer crackling with static charge	Dresses up as a human	Hyenas – their laugh chills me to the bone. I like that.	Demons	Boiler explosion
3. Necrotic mountebank working a miserable crowd	Addict	What education have these midwives got? None! Just a propensity to grow extra limbs and emit silk. It's no way to rear your eggs.	Deep dark state	Riot
4. Ancient bess-warden. His flock of goats are terrifying	Debauched	Technology will free us! We could all be poets. Do you want to hear my poetry? I have a short stanza here...	The Council	Perch-jetsam
5. Balding scofflaw quizzically holding a small, smoking crystal ball	On the run	Downspire filth coming up here taking our...	Human retro-engineers	Police raid

Who	Secret	Thinks	Blames	Complication
6. Grief-stricken drunken apothecary, teeth stained from yellowroot	Carrying a corpse wrapped in a carpet	Bees, right. They're weird, right? I mean what even <i>is</i> honey?	The Old Gods	Fracas between rival bootleggers
7. Aelfir noble, slumming it. Enjoying a dubious steamed beast-wurst from "Portion-of-Healing"	Deaf. Won't admit it.	Aelfir occupation is the best thing that ever happened. Dragged Spire kicking and screaming into a glorious union against the filthy gnoll.	Gnolls	Horrifying spectral apparition
8. Terrified chanter. His shabby felt hat lies on the ground with only a few stens inside	Arachnophobia	There's no good work...nobody has a bean. I've burglarized four drows today and I've got nothing out of it. Now hand me your purses.	Gutterkin	Missionaries looking for converts and in no mood to be rebuffed
9. Drow slumlord swinging his timepiece and joking with two glum bodyguards	Demonic possession	Young Drow don't know they're hatched. "Where's the ladder gone? I can't get upspire without the ladder!" In my day if there was no ladder you used a bloody rope, or a clean one if you could get it.	Spirewhite	Escaped gnoll POWs
10. Giggling conscript with a recently dressed head-wound	Heretic	Fat cat factory owners get all the wealth while everyone else gets spireblack-lung.	The City Guard	Aggressive avian flocking

ENDING THE STORY

If the players do nothing:

- Granite Column eradicate the gutterkin.
- Aalis is murdered and SOSULD broken.
- PROJECT BLACK-FARRAGO is completed. Factories automate, leading to rioting and military crackdowns.

Other outcomes:

- The characters' publication grows in influence, then is banned and the characters are sentenced to death for sedition.

- Strikes spread, unions are outlawed and the military eliminate labour leaders. Open violent resistance begins.
- Peabody's work for the Surgeon-General is exposed, leading to Spire-wide rioting. Recruits flow to the Ministry.
- The family of Springs-the-Stallion exacts terrible revenge on Scent-of-Oak-Trees.
- Jac of the Ox-Ford's poisonings and Oxenbridge identity are uncovered. Oxenbridge tenants converge on the family compound and burn it down. This spreads to the other slumlords.



The paranormal disturbances in Uncanny Alley have attracted ghost-eater gangs from the upper city looking for a fix.

PREGENERATED CHARACTERS

THE INKSMITH - JUNO SHAWSUR

"I hate to recommend malak, glimmer or arson to anyone, but they've always worked for me."

You worked as a reporter for The Furnace. Scent-of-Oak-Trees had you blacklisted while investigating the death of Springs-the-Stallion (your old master, for whom you'd previously been a PERSONAL ASSISTANT).

Since then you've tried your hand as a GREY-MANOR DETECTIVE, but digging up dirt without publishing any wasn't as satisfying. You'd been drinking yourself to death when the Ministry presented you with this opportunity to get back into the newspaper game. Your enemies' apocalypses will be ink stained.

Bonds: Still connected to the Springs-the-Stallion family.

THE VERMISSIAN SAGE - KAMBION SHARN

"I'm not saying I hear God's voice, OK? I'm saying I've read her diary."

You were a BUILDER in the Works where you cleared the ground for the Selenite Palace. You know exactly how many Drow were evicted to make way for that monstrosity, which was built by the aelfir but conceived of by Professor S. Peabody. Your feelings about the man are pure, unadulterated anger.

The Vermissian is your source of comfort now. You calm your blackest rages with its sacred incantation: "firebox, boiler, valve, cylinder, piston and wheel".

Bonds: Aged scholarly mentor Michel Littlewindow, an expert on The Last Train.

THE LAJHAN - ARABELLA "JETSAM" GIMLET

"You drop just one drow down an elevator shaft..."

You were a City GUARD posted in the Works. You unwillingly broke heads for factory owners and slumlords, fueling your superiors' widows and orphans fund. Daring to question Jon Oxenbridge (from a clan of masked Drow slumlords) about a string of poisonings, you found yourself ENLISTED and heading for the war in the South. You'd been "recom-

mended" by the Solar Guard; clearly Oxenbridge was well connected.

Your religious beliefs saw you and your comrades-in-arms through the horrors of desert-fighting, and you've been dishing out old-time religious retribution since your return.

Bonds: Old comrade from the Army, Marco Becker, now working as a City Guard. You saved his life when your unit went "desert crazy". Marco claims a Djinn was involved.

THE IDOL - EMMAPEL SWANSONG

"Darling. How very...conventional. Now I must walk the lobster, or he'll be micturating out his eyes all evening"

Emmapel is the founding and sole member of the "sous-real" art movement, which focuses on the "truth" underlying the surface of reality. Your multimedia work is informed by your harrowing durance as an OCCULTIST with a secretive military organisation. You have no idea who those fanatics were, but you'd recognise their masks anywhere.

Now you want to reach a mass audience and wipe away what passes for art in this sick society – though you are not entirely healthy yourself since you became a CHOSEN OF THE HUNGRY DEEP.

Bonds: Aelfir gallery owner and fence Black-Black "adores" you.

THE FIREBRAND - DRUMLIN FENNER

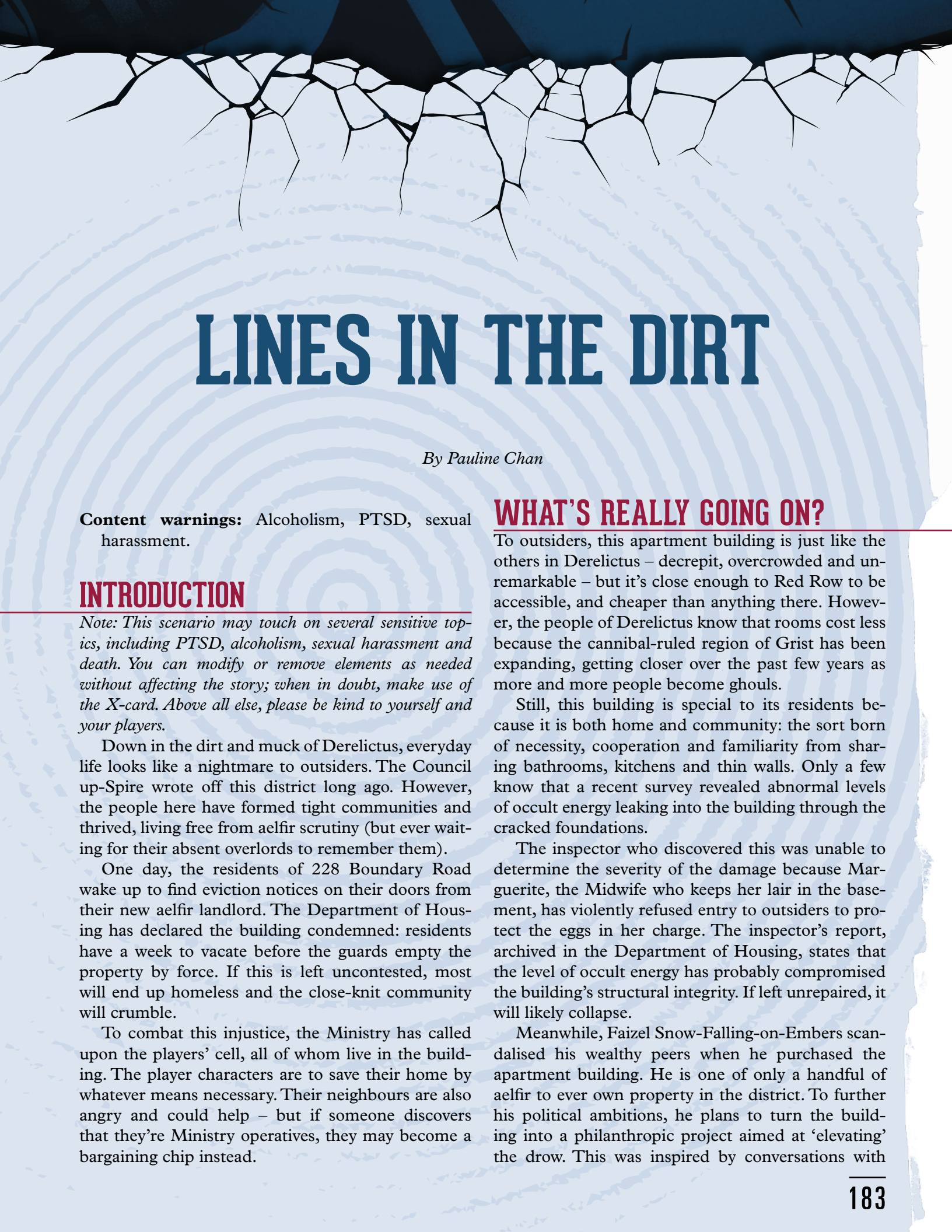
"Brothers and sisters! Our minds have been folded! Our tastes, molded! Our people? Scolded! No more! Brothers and sisters, no more!"

You saw the best and worst of Spire as a spire-black-speckled LABOURER: the mendacity of the factory owners contrasted the generosity of your fellow drow. You swore never to be quietly noble – you would be a loud and terrible voice, one to be feared. Armed revolt is always on the table. Your fellow HEL-LIONITES would approve.

Bonds: Your childhood sweetheart, Beatriz Silika, is a shop steward for SOSULD.



Derelictus is a crumbling heap of ruins, but a lot of the poorest citizens of Spire call it home - and they're ready to fight for it, given proper impetus.



LINES IN THE DIRT

By Pauline Chan

Content warnings: Alcoholism, PTSD, sexual harassment.

INTRODUCTION

Note: This scenario may touch on several sensitive topics, including PTSD, alcoholism, sexual harassment and death. You can modify or remove elements as needed without affecting the story; when in doubt, make use of the X-card. Above all else, please be kind to yourself and your players.

Down in the dirt and muck of Derelictus, everyday life looks like a nightmare to outsiders. The Council up-Spire wrote off this district long ago. However, the people here have formed tight communities and thrived, living free from aelfir scrutiny (but ever waiting for their absent overlords to remember them).

One day, the residents of 228 Boundary Road wake up to find eviction notices on their doors from their new aelfir landlord. The Department of Housing has declared the building condemned: residents have a week to vacate before the guards empty the property by force. If this is left uncontested, most will end up homeless and the close-knit community will crumble.

To combat this injustice, the Ministry has called upon the players' cell, all of whom live in the building. The player characters are to save their home by whatever means necessary. Their neighbours are also angry and could help – but if someone discovers that they're Ministry operatives, they may become a bargaining chip instead.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON?

To outsiders, this apartment building is just like the others in Derelictus – decrepit, overcrowded and unremarkable – but it's close enough to Red Row to be accessible, and cheaper than anything there. However, the people of Derelictus know that rooms cost less because the cannibal-ruled region of Grist has been expanding, getting closer over the past few years as more and more people become ghouls.

Still, this building is special to its residents because it is both home and community: the sort born of necessity, cooperation and familiarity from sharing bathrooms, kitchens and thin walls. Only a few know that a recent survey revealed abnormal levels of occult energy leaking into the building through the cracked foundations.

The inspector who discovered this was unable to determine the severity of the damage because Marguerite, the Midwife who keeps her lair in the basement, has violently refused entry to outsiders to protect the eggs in her charge. The inspector's report, archived in the Department of Housing, states that the level of occult energy has probably compromised the building's structural integrity. If left unrepaired, it will likely collapse.

Meanwhile, Faizel Snow-Falling-on-Embers scandalised his wealthy peers when he purchased the apartment building. He is one of only a handful of aelfir to ever own property in the district. To further his political ambitions, he plans to turn the building into a philanthropic project aimed at 'elevating' the drow. This was inspired by conversations with

Amondieu, who recently finished serving his durance under Faizel (he has not informed Amondieu of this).

To carry out his vision, Faizel has hired Harmonious Properties, a new real estate company who undercut the competition to win the bid. They are to demolish, rebuild and manage the building according to Faizel's inconsistently specific directives and ambitious timeline. Unbeknownst to Faizel, Harmonious Properties is actually a front for the Herald Corporation.

Their plans are twofold: first, they want to build a hidden laboratory to conduct research without interference or oversight. Secondly, after offering subsidised housing and free bread, they plan to conduct experiments on residents without their consent – from testing food infected with different strands of the Vyskant disease to exploring alternate transmission vectors within a controlled environment.

ADVENTURE SETUP

GM: the opening scene should establish the eviction notice, the building and the people who live there, including the player characters. The Eviction Notice scene provides a sample framework to introduce the above, focusing on the characters' neighbours, who have useful resources and can reveal the conflicts at play.

By the end of the scene, the players should know what leads they want to investigate and what options they wish to consider. From there, the characters have an in-game week to make their plan and then act upon it. The plot threads are organised by faction and provide potential trigger scenes, related NPCs, information blocks and ways to learn about them, while the NPC section covers the remaining neighbours. The time limit is a tool to convey urgency and add dramatic tension when you want it; you don't need to account for every minute.

This adventure assumes three truths about the player characters: one, they all live in the building as roommates; two, like most of the residents, they can't afford to move on short notice; and three, they are all members of an underfunded Ministry cell. They should also each have a personal tie to the story, bonds to each other and a bond to one of their neighbours. These can be assigned before play based on the types of characters the players choose to create.

Despite the familiarity bred from living in such close quarters, the characters have managed to keep their cell a secret so far (or at least no one has reported them yet). But the characters have never conducted Ministry work so close to people who already know them.

On one hand, they are members of a tight-knit community, and their NPC neighbours have no desire to invite more trouble than they already have. On the other hand, Spire law clearly states that aiding and abetting Ministry members is a death sentence. Worse, the reward for turning them in is more money than most in Derelictus have ever seen.

As the week progresses, everyone will only grow more desperate to save themselves or their community. The threat of NPCs selling out the player cell should be constant throughout the campaign as weighed against the characters' actions.

With some minor adjustments, you can convert this adventure into the characters' Ministry recruitment story. If so, the characters would not receive a note from a magister at the start of the adventure, but they will still be at risk of being reported as Ministry members and will face the same consequences, since their actions will likely resemble typical Ministry behaviour. When the recruitment pitch takes place is up to you, but generally a magister will wait to see results (or a point of no return) before risking their own cover to have a chat.

NEIGHBOURHOOD FALLOUT

MEDIUM

SOLD OUT. [Shadow] A hostile or desperate NPC gives an anonymous tip to the guards that one or more player characters may be a Ministry member. A friendly NPC warns them, worried the guards will target everyone connected to the characters – including themselves.

COLLATERAL. [Shadow] An NPC tells the guards that the Ministry were involved in proceedings – but the Ministry controls the guard outpost that they visit. They inform you of the NPC's actions via a dead drop and order that this potential threat be silenced.

NEIGHBOURS (SEE NPC SECTION FOR MORE INFORMATION)

Neighbour	Connection/Knowledge
Marguerite, the Midwife	Midwives, neighbours, the building, healing (Apartment Building plot thread)
Guensy, the Dentist	Bureaucracy, consumables, healing
Roseline and Nadia, the aunties*	Derelictus, neighbours, rumours, counterfeit goods
Amondieu Loukes	Nobles, Faizel
Mama Loukes	Grist, useful tinkered items
Zette and Selavi, malak dealers	Derelictus, local gangs, drugs

*Auntie is used as a friendly form of address for an adult woman, related or not. To those within their community, they descend like mother hens to pinch cheeks, inquire about health and home, chide about distasteful personal habits and offer food if one looks peckish (and one always looks peckish).

THE STORY

OPENING SCENE: THE EVICTION NOTICE

The player characters discover an eviction notice posted on every door while on their way out, checking on raised voices in the hallway or returning after a long night. The news catches everyone by surprise, including the player cell. Their next-door neighbours, Roseline and Nadia, are in the hallway, outraged and shouting enough to wake the dead.

The characters have a lot of leeway in deciding how to gather information. If they're not sure what to do, Roseline and Nadia can come over to gossip and provide an overview of the situation to get the players on their way.

The notice states that the Department of Housing has condemned the building, so the new property owner – one Faizel Snow-Falling-on-Embers – is giving residents a week to vacate or face arrest. Residents are not to impede the representatives from Harmonious Properties, who have been granted open access to the building to plan and prepare for demolition. On the back, the characters' usually-absentee magister directs the player cell to 'show some initiative'.

Even Roseline and Nadia, who hear about everything, are caught off-guard by the evictions. No other building received a notice. The new owner has an aelfir surname, but the high elves rarely even acknowledge that Derelictus exists. Amondieu might know more, having served his durance under a Masked lord. It's also strange that anybody would want to renovate a building in Grist's expanding path, but no one knows more about the building than Marguerite, the Midwife in the basement.

If the characters ask about other topics, please see the table of neighbours to see who Roseline and Nadia would recommend (or what they themselves can answer).

PLOT THREADS

The plot threads below can be tackled in any order, though they may not all be needed depending on what the players choose to do. Each thread has a couple of potential trigger scenes to get the player characters involved: use what fits the situation and feel free to ignore the rest. The neighbours should be able to provide leads if the player characters do not have them in their backgrounds. Try to be proactive in contacting players with an eye to solving the problem.

PLOT THREAD: THE APARTMENT BUILDING

The building's never been anything special – or so everyone had thought. Sure, it's probably a health hazard and violates half a dozen building codes, but so does every other building in Derelictus. Right?

NPC: NEZHA DEY

Why are they involved?

Nezha is not just the manager from Harmonious Properties in charge of the project: they are a visionary. As with everyone in the company, they are also infected with the Vyskant disease.

What sets them apart from the other employees?

Nezha's perfectionism extends far beyond anyone's requirements. Despite long conversations about budgets and bottom lines, they intend to construct a new building that is not merely adequate, but exemplary. Never mind that this building is in Derelictus, that such lofty ambitions will incur delays and additional expenses and that Nezha neither knows nor cares about the residents' actual needs.

What do they desire?

Before getting infected, they had been an aspiring artist. The urge to create never faded, though their aesthetic taste has shifted from the glorious to the grotesque. Now they lead this project not only to fulfill the Herald Corporation's expansion plans, but also to create a masterpiece inspired by the glittering bone and sinew towers that twist through their dreams. No one knows about their plans yet, and Nezha doesn't intend to share them until it's too late to reverse course.

What do they despise?

They despise people who lack vision or ambition. Nezha has little patience for politics, budgets or the minutiae of everyday life, including mealtimes and the fate of unhatched drow children.

NPC: MARGUERITE, THE MIDWIFE

Why is she involved?

Marguerite established her lair in the basement decades ago. She's a pillar of the community, serving as healer, surrogate mother, therapist and protector, as well as the local Midwife. She takes all of her responsibilities seriously. A month ago, she caught a building inspector from the Department of Housing trying to get into the basement, and has since been on the lookout for trouble.

What sets her apart from the other residents?

While the aunties may know the latest gossip in Derelictus, Marguerite's information web is a force to be reckoned with. Her spiders are ubiquitous throughout the building, though she also has tiny far-flung

scouts elsewhere in the city to stay informed. She has rarely left her lair since she began taking on more arachnid features.

What does she desire?

Marguerite wants to protect her clutch, her people and her home. Sensing that conflict may be on the horizon, she has been using some of the occult energy leaking in through the foundations to augment her protections. She is also searching for allies, and has plenty of connections, favours and unsolicited advice to offer in exchange for help.

What does she despise?

Outsiders, threats to her clutch and her community. If provoked, she will not hesitate to use anything and anyone at her disposal to defend them.

FALLOUT

WEBBED. [Minor, Reputation/Shadow] Having aroused Marguerite's suspicions, the characters find a spider web blocking their door with the word 'EXPLAIN' woven in the centre. There is no spider to be seen. That's never a good sign. Meanwhile, your neighbours are giving you a wide berth.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- The characters head downstairs to talk to Marguerite, searching for answers about the building. They find her in the middle of an argument with a nervous-looking human trying to gain access to the basement. The human is Nezha Dey, the project's manager from Harmonious Properties, who begs the players to talk sense into Marguerite. The Midwife refuses to let any stranger approach the eggs which cover the floor.
- The characters are in the apartment stairwell when they hear the sounds of a serious fight below. In the basement, they find three strangers from Harmonious Properties: two already dead and the last, Nezha Dey, caught in a web. Marguerite is poised on the wall, but pauses when the characters enter. Nezha thinks the characters are here to finish the job and threatens to call the guards on everyone. In truth, the two dead Harmonious Properties employees came to assassinate Marguerite upon realizing that she knew about the proposed secret laboratory from her spiders. Now there's two bodies to dispose of, a fearful manager and a Midwife still on the defensive. Marguerite will be grateful if the characters help her clean up. It won't be easy to convince Nezha to keep quiet, but as the

construction manager, people will notice if they go missing.

THE CHARACTERS INVESTIGATE HARMONIOUS PROPERTIES

- **Their charitable act is a farce.** Harmonious Properties won the construction bid, despite having no projects to their name, by undercutting the competition and offering to provide subsidised housing and free bread for residents. Faizel was so enamoured with the plan that he signed them on the spot. It's too good to be true: in exchange for these perks, the company plans to test various infection vectors for the Vyskant disease on their unsuspecting residents. While the infection rate is currently low, they believe this project can offer the breakthrough they need.
- **Harmonious Properties is backed by the Herald Corporation.** On paper, Harmonious Properties is an independent company, but it is actually funded and managed by the Herald Corporation. What's more, the Herald Corporation is a front itself: they are well known for handing out free bread, but less known for eventually wanting to infect the population of Spire with the Vyskant disease through their bread programme.

THE CHARACTERS INVESTIGATE THE BASEMENT

- **Marguerite's clutch cannot be moved.** Marguerite's basement lair is full of webs and drow eggs from parents all over her territory; the newest eggs are only a few days old. Once planted, the eggs can't be moved and must be tended by the Midwife until they hatch – otherwise, they won't survive.
- **Occult energy is leaking through cracks in the building's foundation.** Both Marguerite and Nezha know about the network of cracks that crisscross the basement floor, large enough to be concerning and deep enough to allow occult energy from the Vermissian to leak in. The foundation has been compromised and probably requires expensive repairs. Fixing it will stabilise the building and seal away this energy source, but Marguerite and the Herald Corporation are both interested in using this power to achieve their goals.

PLOT THREAD: DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING

The Department of Housing issues evictions every day across Spire, but it's rare to receive one in Derelictus because every single building violates the building code. The Department codes are generally used to give the guards a pretext to conduct a raid, or (rarely) to remove a building that somehow jeopardises the people up-Spire. Neither option seems to fit this situation.

NPC: UNDER-UNDERSECRETARY ADOLISE VERN

Why is she involved?

Adolise has, as part of her many responsibilities, the power to issue or revoke evictions. She signed off on the notice posted to the players' building. Too bad she's usually a stickler for rules.

What sets her apart from the other administrators?

She was one of the best and brightest of her generation two decades ago: a rare drow with the tenacity and ambition to climb the ranks into a position of authority. Now she's a washed-up alcoholic whose career has stalled while younger aelfir ascend past her; in fact, her current boss used to be one of her direct reports. Still, she stays to perform her duties as best she can for the greater good.

What does she desire?

Stiff drinks, a promotion and some respect. Years of suffering indignities small and large have made her bitter and driven her to drink. So far, she's managed to hide this problem from her co-workers. She knows management will replace her if she stops being useful to them. (Unfortunately, that has only made her drink more.)

What does she despise?

Those who abuse or break the system, especially for personal gain. While she acknowledges that the laws of the land are neither fair nor fairly applied, she insists they still be followed because they could theoretically protect the poor against the predatory machinations of the wealthy – if a more principled administrator were in control.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- Following the address on the eviction notice during the day, the characters travel up-Spire to the crowded lobby of the Department of Housing. An irate clerk tells them to schedule an appointment, but the next opening is months away and a copy of the building's records requires a note from the landlord. Next to the clerk, an unlocked door leads to the offices and characters can attempt to sneak in. Once inside, Adolise assumes they have permission, so long as the characters don't let on otherwise.
- The characters decide to break into the Department of Housing at night to steal or forge paperwork. However, Adolise's aelfir clerk Pelham Blaze-in-Blossoms has already broken in, looking to discredit her and take her position. They have considerably fewer scruples than their boss, and will offer to help the players find what they're looking for in exchange for their silence.
- Adolise is well past drunk when the players find her in the bar after work. She's having trouble keeping her head up while she rants to her bottle, which must be why the seats around her are empty. The characters can ask questions, set her up to fall, or take pity and escort her home with an eye toward cooperation or blackmail (if so, they could even gain her as a bond in a continuing game).

THE CHARACTERS INVESTIGATE THE EVICTION NOTICE

- **The building is owned wholly by Faizel Snow-Falling-on-Embers.** While unsurprising, it does confirm that Faizel has sole authority to start or stop this project, and also that he approved the evictions. What is surprising is how little he paid for the building, even by Derelictus standards. If Faizel was to find the building extremely inconvenient to keep, the characters could even try to buy it from him – though it will be difficult to secure the necessary funds and convince Faizel to give up his pet project. It would be three to four difficulty 2 challenges, which can be downgraded to difficulty 1 depending on how the characters approach the situation and make their case to Faizel.

If Faizel agrees and the characters have secured sufficient resources, the building's cost is D8 Silver or D6 with an additional Compel+Commerce/High Society check for joint ownership.

- **The building is a legitimate safety hazard.** According to the inspection report, the building has a long list of issues that render it unfit for habitation. The majority are typical for Derelictus buildings, but two are more concerning: the foundations are damaged, and occult energy is leaking in from the Vermissian tunnels below. The inspector couldn't verify how severe the damage was because Marguerite refused to grant entry, but it's bad news if unreality is leaking in from below. The inspection was done prior to Faizel's purchase, so he's aware of the problem – as is Harmonious Properties.
- **The department was bribed to expedite the eviction process.** The notice is legitimate, but Faizel went above Adolise to secure approval. This continues to rankle her because it's technically illegal, but as with most laws in Spire, this doesn't apply to wealthy nobles. That said, there is an (intentionally) obscure appeals process. Characters can Compel Adolise (or Pelham if they broke into the office instead) to provide forms and instructions, or they can investigate to find the forms themselves.

BUILDING GUARDS

Names: Jakob, Mae, Evans

Description: Counting the minutes until the shift is over; demoted for being overly excitable; wearing strong perfume

Difficulty: 0

Resistance: 3

Equipment: Light armour (2); wooden chair (D3, Defensive or D6, One-Shot as they break it over your head); shortsword (D6)

OTHER NON PLAYER CHARACTERS

THE UNLICENSED DENTIST

GUENSY DEVARE

What do they offer to the community?

Guensy fell from grace a few years ago and washed up in Derelictus. While Marguerite handles counselling and serious injuries, Guensy offers basic medical services and a startlingly comprehensive stock of medical supplies in exchange for barter and their patients' silence. They're still open for business.

What sets them apart from the rest of the community?

Unlike most people in the district, Guensy lived up-Spire for most of their life, which gives them an outsider's perspective and a thorough (if bitter) understanding of Spire's bureaucracy. They also know Adolise Vern, the Under-Undersecretary who signed the eviction notice, as a former schoolmate. The two used to catch up over drinks until Guensy became a social liability. If asked, they're happy to dish the dirt on Adolise.

What do they desire?

Guensy is exhausted and full of despair about the prospect of moving yet again, in part because they can't afford it. They still long for the comfort and security of their old life, but they've also grown fond of their neighbours and feel obligated to give back to the community that helped them survive.

What does she despise?

Bureaucracy and authority figures. They fell from grace because of rank insubordination, and their years in Derelictus witnessing horror after horror have deepened their distrust of power and those who have it. However, they do understand the usefulness of bureaucracy and government and are thus reluctant to speak out.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- One of the player characters sustains an injury and goes to Guensy for help. Guensy asks no questions but fills time by asking how the party feels about the evictions, and if they know where they'll be headed next. Guensy is brisk but efficient, and can even offer painkillers (or liquor) if the patient wants them.
- The characters hear glass shattering while in the apartment building. Two representatives from Harmonious Properties have forced their way into Guensy's clinic to conduct an 'inspection'. Left alone, the representatives will tear up the place and leave with all the contraband medical supplies.
- Returning home after a long day, the characters find a package of laxatives in front of their door and a note from Guensy apologising for the delay in sourcing enough for their horses. The characters didn't make this request and there aren't any horses in Derelictus, but the amount provided would be enough to affect a large group of people or cause some chaos.
- In a marketplace, the characters run into Guensy. They were desperately trying to offload some of

their medical supplies so they can afford to move, but are now being held up by a couple of guards for selling without a permit.

THE AUNTIES

ROSELINE OCCAIN AND NADIA FEVRI

What do they offer to the community?

Together, they are the heart of the community: empathic, nosy, loving and deeply generous. If someone is too sick to move, Roseline will call Guensy over (as Marguerite never leaves the basement) while Nadia will bring over her secret herbal broth, which she always seems to have ready. Though they can sometimes be overwhelming, no one can imagine the building without them.

What sets them apart from the rest of the community?

They maintain an expansive network of contacts within Derelictus, many of them customers or merchants around their street stall outside the Hemlock Fruit Market. Most of their customers are locals shopping for gifts or smugglers picking up souvenirs, but they also see the occasional tourist looking to buy a trinket to prove their success. As canny businesswomen, they have a sharp eye for people, a keen memory and an easy-going demeanour that invites confidences in exchange for advice.

What do they desire?

Roseline is concerned about her son, who is big for his age. He's a year too young to be taken for his durance, but if the guards catch sight of him, they won't hesitate to snatch him without asking and then fine her for concealing him. She's currently trying to scrounge up enough money to move early or at least pay off the guards.

Nadia has an illness that requires Marguerite's sorcery to keep at bay. She's afraid that if she is forced to leave, no one else will be able to help her. She's desperate to find a way to stay or enough money to buy the rumoured cure. Both women, despite their problems, want to defend their home and their community if they can; perhaps more than anyone, they understand how much there is to lose.

What do they despise?

The heartless, the disloyal, the untrustworthy. In a place as destitute as Derelictus, Roseline and Nadia despise neighbours who take actions that harm everyone else in the community, as few are so wealthy that they do not rely on others for one thing or another.



The child-gangs of Derelictus
chant sing-song rites to beseech
their goddesses for power and aid.

They have long memories, and they (as with most of the aunties) are not afraid to use their network to warn others once they're convinced of wrongdoing.

FALLOUT

DISTRUSTED. [Minor, Shadow/Rep] People in Derelictus don't necessarily know what you've done (GM decision if the details would harm or help the community), but they do know you can't be trusted. Derelictus merchants will sell to you at tourist prices and refuse to be haggled down, while your neighbours will be distant and waiting for you to slip up – unless you can make amends.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- Roseline invites the player characters over for one last chat over dinner or drinks with her and Nadia. They've been checking on everyone in the building and are happy to pass along gossip if they trust the characters (or try to dig for the characters' true intent and allegiances if they don't).
- The characters are passing by their stall in Derelictus when Nadia calls the characters over to look at their wares, insisting they've got something special. As Roseline runs interference, Nadia leads the party to the back of the stall to offer something counterfeit the party needs (whether they requested it or not) as well as some snacks.
- Roseline and Nadia are negotiating with Bezo, a lieutenant from the Sweepers (the gang that currently controls this part of Derelictus), about fighting back against the guards. Bezo insists the aunties must be crazy if they think a local gang can take them on.

THE FORMER MASKED

AMONDIEU LOUKES

What does he offer to the community?

By choosing to come home to Derelictus after serving his durance in a palace in Amaranth, he provides a kind of validation for those still living here (though he is uncomfortable with that notion). What he actually offers is a servant's understanding of the aelfir, a favoured gladiator's charm and finesse with a variety of weapons – not that he's so much as touched one since his return.

What sets him apart from the rest of the community?

Amondieu feels guilty for drawing Faizel's attention

to this building when he talked about his childhood during his durance and chose to return after his service. He hasn't mentioned this to anyone. Worse, Amondieu suspects his former master believes he's being helpful and won't accept any criticism.

What does he desire?

He has a boyfriend in Red Row that he's eager to move in with, but he's worried about his mother. He didn't survive the horrors of the arenas just to abandon her now, and he feels guilty that his absence – however forced – has led to her decline. He wants to see her well again, or at least living in a good situation.

What does he despise?

Those who act without honour or who treat his people as expendable – his old master in particular. He watched the aelfir throw countless poor drow into their private arenas and duelling grounds for entertainment, and has killed his fair share of them to survive. The experience has left him with nightmares. In his waking hours, he is adamant that he will never tolerate such things again.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- Though he hasn't picked up a weapon since leaving his service, Amondieu still exercises daily around the neighbourhood to keep himself in fighting shape. Rumours abound about his past durance and his present motives, but judging by the crowd of admirers that never fails to gather, no one's keen to pry. At least one old lady will always need to be helped across the street afterwards.
- Amondieu is packing away his old masks when the player characters drop by to visit him or Mama Loukes, who is out. If asked, he'll admit that he kept the masks from his durance, despite never intending to wear them again. They might come in handy if the characters can convince him to part with them, but it won't be easy.
- Bezo, a lieutenant from the Sweepers (the gang that currently controls this part of Derelictus), is trying to recruit Amondieu. They've found out somehow about his gladiator past and are keen to acquire a well-trained bruiser. Amondieu is having a hard time leashing his anger, and it's only a matter of time until someone gets hurt.
- Suspicious of the characters, Amondieu is trailing them to find out what they're really up to. He's worried that their actions will bring harm to their neighbours – or worse, to the entirety of Derelictus.

THE HOARDER

MAMA LOUKES

What does she offer to the community?

She is Amondieu's mother and a hoarder with at least three cats. Since an injury forced her into early retirement years ago, she's been watching the children on the rooftops every day from her perch on an overturned bucket, holding a cane that secretly doubles as a crossbow. The children tell tales of a dark bargain struck with King Teeth himself, which she always laughs off. Whatever the truth may be, no ghoul has snatched a child since she started.

What sets her apart from the rest of the community?

In recent years, she's developed an obsession with repurposing junk into startlingly useful objects. Within the community, she's known for her toys and simple gadgets, but she's been challenging herself with increasingly complex projects between requests. Unknown to anyone but Marguerite, she's kept in contact with a former neighbour who became a ghoul under King Teeth. He keeps the other ghouls away from the building's roof during the day so the children can play.

What does she desire?

She wants to stay in her apartment with the ghost of her husband, who died while Amondieu was away but remained in the apartment to keep her company. (Amondieu neither sees nor believes in ghosts; this is an endless source of friction for them, as she'll accuse Amondieu of going aelfir.) Since her husband's ghost is bound to the apartment, she refuses to consider the idea of moving or acknowledge the eviction notice.

What does she despise?

Aelfir and aelfir sympathisers. In her youth, she was a drow traditionalist with a rebellious streak, though she never went so far as to join the Ministry. Time has mellowed her temper, though it hasn't stopped her from railing behind closed doors or playing harmless pranks like replacing working door hinges with squeaky ones to annoy those she distrusts.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- Mama Loukes is in her usual spot on the roof, watching the children play from her perch. She's drumming her fingers on her cane and has an ear cocked to the street below, where two Harmonious Properties staff are discussing how best to demolish the apartment building.

- While picking through a junk pile in Red Row, Mama Loukes is grabbed by a guard patrol and hauled back to Derelictus. She loudly protests that she's done nothing wrong, but none of the other denizens of Red Row pay any heed. One of the guards backhands her and says that rats should know their place.
- When the player characters come to visit Mama Loukes or Amondieu, Amondieu is out but Mama Loukes is frantically unpacking a box and placing objects back on the shelf. The room is filled with more packed boxes that look as if they've already been retaped at least once.

DRUG DEALERS

ZETTE AND SELAVI

What do they offer to the community?

Zette and Selavi mostly keep to themselves, but they do have a standing agreement with Guensy: they procure supplies in exchange for discreet medical help whenever they need it. They have been known to take black market requests from other residents from time to time – typically drow delicacies from the Home Nations, like jars of star jelly (a smoke-coloured dessert that twinkles with luminescent cave algae) or spiced corpsefruit tea blends.

What sets them apart from the rest of the community?

They fear that the apartment building has been targeted as part of a covert drug raid: their bedroom has been partially converted into a small laboratory to manufacture malak.

Zette's connections to the black market run deep. Before she settled down to run her own business, she spent a few years as a corpsefruit smuggler along the underground routes. Meanwhile, Selavi works as a part-time waitress at Civilisation and is friendly with the regulars, including a handful of journalists who hound her for unknown (and often imaginary) horrors within Derelictus to sensationalise.

What do they desire?

While both are technically criminals under Spire law, Selavi is more at risk because she's still wanted for dodging her durance. While Selavi is busy planning contingencies for their contingencies, Zette is prepared to do whatever it takes to keep her lover alive.

What do they despise?

Zette hates being helpless or being forced to wait. She is the most likely of the residents to do

something rash, which is dangerous because she values Selavi over everyone else in the community – including herself.

Selavi is both amused and disdainful of the outsiders who have been coming by. She especially despises the tourists who venture to Derelictus to gawk, and has gotten into arguments with the aunties more than once about why they sell to those people. (The aunties consider them fools easily parted from their money.)

SUGGESTED SCENES

- The player characters are in Civilisation when a drunk drow makes a grab for Selavi while his companions laugh. When she screams and tries to push free, the drow tells her she should be happy the off-duty guards picked her tonight. It's unclear whether they actually are guards, but they're built to fight. She looks around for support, but none of the other patrons in the bar will meet her eye. The bouncers, usually happy to wade into the thick of things, hesitate at their posts.
- Representatives from Harmonious Properties are knocking loudly on their door to inspect the apartment, but Zette refuses to let them enter, shoving furniture against the door. Selavi is trying to dismantle their malak setup as fast as she can.
- While Selavi is out, Zette invites the player characters over to offer them some of their extra malak, which they need to dispose of before moving. She doesn't much care if the characters consume it themselves, of course, but she does casually drop that possession is more than enough to ruin someone's life, in case that's useful information. (For added excitement, Harmonious Properties guards conduct a raid on her flat while the player characters are present, and it's up to them to help her get rid of the evidence.)

ENDING THE STORY

If the players allow the evictions to happen, the guards will descend in force upon the apartment building in a week's time. They will kick out everyone they find inside and take anything that looks worthwhile to compensate their time.

Some residents will go down fighting, while the rest will scatter to anywhere that will take them: friends and family if they're lucky, or else to the streets, King Teeth, the Church of Absolution, or one of the gangs. Many will not survive the year-long wait to enter the housing lottery for the new building.

Harmonious Properties will successfully experiment on the new residents, who soon gain a reputation for being strange and aloof as one by one they fall under the Vyskant disease. Heedless of the danger, Faizel will use this project to run for office, with an eye to expanding his project (and, unwittingly, the reach of the Herald Corporation) into the rest of Derelictus.

To avoid this fate, the players will need to deal with Faizel, the guards, or both. Even if Harmonious Properties withdraws from the project, Faizel and the guards will still need to be dealt with.

It is possible to end the game earlier if Faizel rescinds the eviction order. If so, the building will remain in disrepair and the neighbours, at least, will notice the change in ownership. They'll want to know what the characters intend to do next, if they still need to move and what to do about the building itself. How this happens will depend on the characters' relationship to their neighbours, but the closing scene could be celebratory cake, a tense building meeting, or even a chat with the aunties about discreetly spreading the word.

If Faizel doesn't rescind the order, the guards' arrival ushers in the last scene of this story.

FAIZEL SNOW-FALLING-ON-EMBERS

REQUIREMENTS

Knowledge: Faizel is convinced he knows best. He thinks he understands the problem, has considered the situation with sufficient rigour, and has come up with the most practical solution. To have a chance of getting through to him, the players need to be informed about the actual state of the building. Otherwise, Faizel will use that information against them, including the general decrepitude of the building, damage in the foundations, occult energy leaking through and the plan to offer subsidised housing and free food. To gain an advantage, players can offer information he doesn't know – such as Harmonious Properties' connection to the Herald Corporation, their real intentions for the building, or the guards' aggressive plan for evictions.

Access: Getting access to Faizel outside of his planned visit will be difficult, but not impossible. He'll be hosting at least one party during the week and, as is only proper, everyone will be masked. Getting access to him when he visits the building

will be marginally easier, but his visit will be short and tightly managed by representatives from Harmonious Properties.

STRATEGY

Persuasion: Faizel is not unreasonable and can be convinced to adjust his plans (especially if he thinks it's his idea!). That said, he's predisposed to think poorly of the residents. Characters can make a case to redirect his ambitions into more helpful outlets, but it will require knowing everything about the situation. Like most aelfir, calls to the heart are not particularly useful. For a businessman like Faizel, money and reason (or at least appealing to his sense of reason) may be more effective. Amondieu will know his personality, tastes and weaknesses if players wish to make the most of them.

Blackmail: Besides threatening to reveal Faizel's known weaknesses, his sympathy for the drow condition is unbecoming for an aelfir of his standing – and thus a liability for his political ambitions if it should become public knowledge. His reputation is still unknown. Characters can threaten to tarnish it by releasing information to a journalist about his opinions, past scandals, the truth behind the building and/or Harmonious Properties' true plans for the building and its residents.

Sabotage: The characters can reveal (by themselves or through a journalist) any blackmail material acquired to damage the project's credibility and draw additional scrutiny to all of the parties involved. They can also interfere with the approval process, make it financially inconvenient for Faizel to embark on a new venture or plant something incriminating on Faizel and write in an anonymous tip.

Compensation: The players can decide to acquire enough money to buy a share of the building (or the whole thing outright) from Faizel, if they know how much the building was worth in the first place and can convince him that they're the right people to manage their home.

Assassination: Killing Faizel halts the project indefinitely, provided the players can survive his personal retinue. They'll probably draw more scrutiny than they want, though. If the job can be traced back to them, someone might turn them in, or the Ministry may decide they're too much of a liability

to keep. The City Guard will definitely come sniffing and will have to be dealt with somehow.

CONCLUSION

Faizel will either call off the guards or he won't, depending on the success of the characters' actions. Convincing him to change his plans is no easy task, and convincing him to abandon the project altogether will be difficult at best. However, if this does happen, he will move mountains.

If he doesn't call off the guards, they will try to evict the residents. Refer to the Guards section below for details about that conflict.

If Faizel is assassinated, the guards may still come to the apartment building to investigate his death and interrogate the residents. In this case, after fleeing the scene, the characters may try to bluff through a rough interrogation or attempt to go into hiding (risking a hit to their reputation and their unguarded home). Regardless, their cover may be blown by terrified or resentful neighbours. At least they're alive for now.

GUARDS

STRATEGY

Below are some common options for how to handle the guards. These can be useful if your players need some direction, but give them space to come up with their own solutions.

This particular group of guards are stationed at Vorloren Standard: the worst posting in all of Spire. Some may have just and noble intentions, but they're grouped with bitter outcasts looking for redemption and bloodthirsty sadists. Unfortunately for the characters, the latter two groups are more likely to volunteer for an assignment like this.

Rally the neighbours: The characters can rally their neighbours to help rout the guards, but most will be reluctant: some have good reason to avoid drawing undue attention and most have limited fighting skills. No one wants to die, but they are angry and frustrated, which the characters can redirect to their advantage. However, if the plan seems too reckless or likely to jeopardise their lives, the neighbours may reject it. They may even start drawing parallels between the plan and the Ministry's reputation for Pyrrhic victories, turning against the players instead.

Organise the community: The characters can reach out to other factions, communities and

individuals for help, but everyone has a price. It's risky to move against the guards, even indirectly. That said, having armed themselves to the teeth, will the guards be satisfied with a routine eviction or will the district prove too tempting a punching bag for their frustrations with Red Row? No one is too keen to find out.

Some groups, like the merchants in the Hemlock Fruit Market, want to keep the guards away from their part of Derelictus at all costs. Others, like the patrons in Civilisation, would rather not dirty their hands but could help publicise the situation elsewhere in Spire, even collecting donations. The local gangs are always itching for a fight and keen to defend their territory, while the ghouls in Grist will appreciate meatier fare than the average Derelictus citizen. The characters can even convince the Church of Absolution to set up some wards or lend a hand. It's harder to gather support from beyond the district, but nothing is impossible.

Sabotage the guards: The characters can introduce complications to reduce the guards' effectiveness ahead of time. Tainted food or drink, a minor scandal, sabotaging or pilfering gear and supplies, a restless week of sleep, or old-fashioned bribery are all ways to weaken the guards. They might be more irritable as a result, but they'll be less effective too. Attempting serious complications, like assassination or arson, should incur more dramatic consequences – like an increased guard presence or a lockdown. They'll certainly be distracted, but even if the characters aren't caught, someone is going to bear the ugly consequences.

The characters can also prepare obstructions for the day of the eviction, such as a network of roadblocks and barricades, an inconveniently-routed parade, a street fair, a roaming ghoul pack, or distractions elsewhere. Remember that the guards must march through most of Red Row before descending into Derelictus, neither of which is especially safe to navigate while in uniform. They're going to be angry and defensive.

CONCLUSION

The characters will have a difficult time convincing the guards to walk away, but it could be possible if the players can appeal to their interests. More likely, the characters will be pooling their resources and support into routing the guards.

The guards will have made their own preparations, too: they'll come armed, armoured and aggressive.

They will try to stick to the main routes to avoid being caught unawares, and they will come in force and formation so as to not be easily swarmed. That said, no one loves the job so much that they would give their lives for it. If things start to look bad, they'll back off and retreat.

CITY GUARDS [EVICITION CREW]

Difficulty: 2 (can be reduced to 1 or 0 depending on player preparation; see below)

Resistance: 5

Equipment: Riot gear (Armour 4, Heavy); machete (D6, Brutal, Tiring); one or two flashbangs (Stress 1, Spread D6, Stunning; D6 Stress versus Drow)

The guards' stats should be adjusted based on the characters' plan and actions. This could be giving characters an extra die to roll (as if they had mastery over the guards), adding the Tiring tag, or removing a tag if the guards and/or their weapons have been weakened. It could also be lowering armour values if this has been compromised, raising armour values if the guards haven't broken formation, setting an easier threshold for retreat, sending fewer guards, or providing extra assistance from NPCs (e.g. suppressive fire or useful items). If the situation starts going poorly for the characters, feel free to remind them that they can choose to save their neighbours and/or flee and survive to fight another day.

Should the guards be routed, the violence and bad publicity will increase the project's risk enough to stall the proceedings. Tensions between the guards and everyone else may also increase, but that's tomorrow's problem. If the guards prevail, the Ministry will propagandise the characters' defiant stand to inspire others to take up their flag.

NOTICE

City of Spire Department of Housing

In accordance with Section 48.17 of the Municipal Housing Code of the City of Spire, the property located at 228 Boundary Street in the district of Derelictus is hereby declared unfit or unsafe for habitation.

It is unlawful for any person to use or occupy this building, except for persons authorised by the Landlord and the Department of Housing to demolish the building: Harmonious Properties employees.

The Landlord requires you to vacate the premises within 7 days of this posting on 3rd of Harvest, the Year of Many Omens.

Landlord: Faizel Snow-Falling-on-Embers

Approved by: Adolise Vern
Under-Undersecretary, Dept. Housing

Persons found in violation of this notice will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

SHOW SOME
INITIATIVE.

-S



The citizens of La Grotte de Corde ensure another fruitful harvest with their quaint rural traditions.

DARK HARVEST

By Chris Farnell

Content warnings: Human sacrifice, murder.

INTRODUCTION

Dark Harvest takes your characters away from the urban intrigue and high politics found at the peaks and depths of the Spire. Instead, it focuses on the rural feuds and ancient folklore of Spire's Garden district.

Here you'll find everything you need to play this campaign over three to five sessions, with one exception: we haven't included any stock player characters. This campaign is designed to follow on from a previous game, preferably one that has gone terribly wrong but which your party has somehow managed to survive.

This campaign will see those characters cut off from the connections, resources and knowledge that they have built so far; none of their existing NPC bonds will be reachable. They will be thrown into the cut-throat world of parish councils, village fêtes and agricultural disputes.

However, this doesn't mean you can't play Dark Harvest with a fresh set of characters. If you're doing that, ask the party two questions before starting the campaign:

- What was the last job you did together?
- How did it go so catastrophically wrong?

OVERVIEW

[Read, or paraphrase, the following section aloud to your players to bring them up to speed on events surrounding the campaign.]

Your last job went badly. Covers were blown, the wrong people died, and interested parties are out for your blood (some of them your erstwhile allies). But

rather than leaving you to the wolves or tidying up loose ends by taking you out themselves, the Ministry has deigned to help. You've been given passage to a safehouse in the Garden District settlement of La Grotte de Corde, where you've been told to lie low and avoid trouble.

It's an idyllic place with friendly locals, almost untouched by the aelfir occupation. There's beautiful scenery, ranging from the bustling phosphorescence of the crustacean chasms to the vast pale caverns of the wisp glades and the eerie peace of the hanging gardens. You spend your days eating well at your guesthouse, visiting the local pub, and watching the preparations for the village fête with interest.

A week or so after you arrive, the City Guard turn up in the village square. From the windows of your guesthouse, you see Captain Jardin LaBute standing by the village's ancient wooden henge. He announces that the aelfir lord Galathar Weaves-from-Grass has disappeared from his nearby holiday residence, and that LaBute will leave no stone unturned to find him.

Since you're effectively hiding under one of those stones, this is going to be a problem.

[Stop reading aloud now!]

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON?

A rudimentary investigation of Weaves-from-Grass' disappearance will turn up evidence that he was abducted by a sect of druidic cultists for a blood sacrifice, because that is exactly what Devin Quintrel wants you to think.

Devin Quintrel is the head of the Herald Corporation, a massive hydroponic farming operation. He also owns the holiday home Weaves-from-Grass was staying in. He invited the aelfir to stay, ostensibly to

persuade him to invest in a Garden District tourism venture. In fact, Quintrel lured Weaves-from-Grass here so that he could murder him and frame drow religious sects.

He believes the drow murder of a prominent aelfir lord will outrage the chattering classes and provoke the City Guard to clamp down on the Garden District. This will allow Quintrel to annex more of the traditional drow dark farms and convert them into his cutting-edge hydroponic wheat farms. But that's not even the real problem.

These wheat farms are a vehicle for the Vyskant: a multidimensional blood parasite that has infected Quintrel, and which he is dedicated to spreading throughout Spire's population. Quintrel is particularly eager to usurp the dark farms of La Grotte de Corde because he has reason to believe something in their crops provides immunity to parasites (for more information on the Vyskant, consult Spire p135).

His suspicion is true. The seemingly friendly people of La Grotte de Corde follow an ancient, long communicated creed of the Damnou that venerates Labandone, the far side of the moon. By design or coincidence, their rituals imbue the crops with protection against parasites such as the Vyskant.

The harvest has been poor this year, which not only opens the door to the Vyskant, but could cause catastrophic famine up and down the city due to the vital place La Grotte de Corde holds in Spire's food infrastructure.

Ironically, the villagers are now planning a very real blood sacrifice to prevent disaster: an elaborate ritual known as The Tower of Rope. The ritual demands that the sacrifice fulfil very specific criteria: they must be a drow; they must be an outsider; and, most importantly, they must have fought for what they believe in and lost. Unfortunately for your cell, every member fits that description, and it's no coincidence.

The Ministry knows how important La Grotte de Corde is to Spire's food infrastructure. While they might not approve of the local religion, they've noticed that the village's blood sacrifices seem to work.

The party has been served up on a silver platter. If they don't twig to that fact within five days, they'll be ripe for the slaughter.

ADVENTURE SETUP

The first scene you play for this campaign will take place in the guesthouse directly after Captain LaBute has made his speech.

If the players haven't gathered this already, Madame Sanité – the closest thing they have to a Ministry

THE TOWER OF ROPE

On the day of the fête itself, the locals will make the Tower of Rope. The chosen sacrifices are bound to a pole in the centre of the wooden henge while the locals, carrying ropes, will dance an intricate pattern through and around the ornate wooden poles. The ropes catch on the grooves carved into the wood, forming a kind of cat's cradle which eventually resembles a silhouette of the Spire.

As the dance continues, the ropes get tighter, cutting into the flesh of the sacrifice. Their blood drains into the soil or is absorbed by the thirsty rope. When the dance is done, the red ropes will be taken to the hanging gardens, the soil will be enriched, and a good harvest will be guaranteed.

contact in the area – will point out that any investigation into the citizens of La Grotte de Corde is bound to focus on mysterious out-of-town strangers who keep themselves to themselves. They will need to make themselves inconspicuous and/or find a way to draw the LaBute's attention elsewhere, either by solving the aelfir's disappearance or providing the Captain with a plausible scapegoat.

They're already on the clock: it's five days until the festival. Wherever they go and whoever they talk to, people will be excited for it. As time passes you'll be pointing out increasing amounts of bunting, mushroom-shy's and crab-bobbing stalls.

Ticking clock aside, there's no defined structure to the adventure once the players work out their plan of attack. Stay flexible and react to what the players do. The NPCs and plot threads outlined below will give you some jumping off points.

When the players do something, try to answer these questions to work out the next scene:

1. Who's going to try and stop the player characters, and how?
2. What are they going to do if the player characters succeed at their aims?
3. Who is going to view this as an opportunity and try to take advantage?

THE STORY

PLOT THREAD: BLENDING IN

Madame Sanité points out that if the guards start interrogating people and hear about a band of strangers staying at the local guesthouse, that's going to be their first port of call. If they want to blend in with the locals, they need to work for it.

The players are likely courtiers and assassins, artists and priests, gangsters and academics; there's not much call for most of these professions in La Grotte de Corde, but there's always room for someone who's willing to work hard. Most people in the village will do whatever Madame Sanité asks of them, so it won't be difficult to find a job.

Your players probably won't want to spend long roleplaying the menial labour of the village (although some might) but the jobs they pick will decide when they are free for other scenes and provide opportunities to question the villagers.

HOW CLASS ABILITIES CAN HELP THE LOCALS

The locals regard most of the players' abilities with barely concealed amusement, seeing them primarily as city tricks that have no use down here in the real world. But, with a bit of imagination, the players may find ways to make themselves useful. Fortier Dumas could use an Azurite to check over his export contracts, and a Midwife or Lahjan are always welcome to help with the village's endless cycle of births and deaths.

Other characters may have to work a bit harder to put their skills to use. An Idol might be able to help with the festival preparations, but may have to tone down their more avant garde artistic instincts. Vermissian Sages will be able to make good use of their "Obsessive Researcher" skill even if the locals regard academia with suspicion.

Likewise, the Carrion Priest – while regarded with fear and suspicion by locals who may not have encountered one before – can soon win hearts and minds with their abilities to reverse decay.

TENDING BAR AT THE HANGED MEN

The village pub is where locals come to smoke, drink mushroom cider and play darts or knock the dead man (a regional variant of bar billiards). Most of all, they talk. Topics of conversation are likely to include:

- Vague yet excited references to the coming festival and how hard everyone's working to get ready for it.
- That Captain LaBute who's rubbing everyone up the wrong way. He's set up his headquarters in the old Station House, a building from way back when they thought the village would connect to the Vermissian. People are being taken in for hours and coming out extremely bruised. They don't like his sort at all; he'll probably meet a bad end.

- If asked about Galathar Weaves-from-Grass, people will get quiet. Nobody remembers seeing him, but most will say he stayed up in his holiday home and rarely ventured out into the village.
- Some outsiders seen near the village are the Druids of the Living Spire. They are often heard performing mysterious rituals out in the darkest parts of the nearby caves.
- Everybody knows that the party are from the Ministry. People will conceal that they know this with varying degrees of success, but it's common knowledge. However, they will all swear solemn vows of secrecy on this.
- The food isn't that great. When you see the locals eating, it's usually watery algae soup or the odd undersized toadstool, compared to the feasts of roast isopods, charred mushroom flesh and wisp bread the player characters get at the guesthouse. People will get defensive if asked about this – it's probably the only thing the players could do to really anger the locals.

THE HANGED MEN DRINKS MENU

Mushroom Cider

Moonshine

Moonshadow (for those who can hold their drink)

Corpsefruit Wine (kept under the counter. Constable Cheminer pretends they don't know about it)

Do *not* order beer at The Hanged Men. While pubs up and down Spire serve beer made from hydroponic or imported grain, in La Grotte de Corde it is looked down on.

HELPING WITH THE HARVEST

La Grotte de Corde grows a number of crops, and they always need an extra hand. The player characters can work in the wisp glades, helping to pull up the bone-coloured, sharp-edged grass used to make bread.

There's also the hanging gardens: a dark, humid place situated in the caverns above the village. Here the workers go from hanging corpse to hanging corpse, cleaving mushrooms from the bodies and tending to the spiders that live there.

Alternatively, the party could don a pair of stilts and stride the crustacean chasm, shepherding the

glowing isopods with sticks and treading carefully around the bones of drow careless enough to trip.

Wherever they end up working, some things will remain the same. The work will be hard, possibly inflicting mild blood stress. The results won't be good, either: the fungus will be dry and crumbly; the wisp glades will have tough soil and sparse clumps of grass; and the isopods will be lethargic, with only dim phosphorescence.

Out here there's no hiding behind manners: talking to other labourers will reveal this year has been the poorest harvest in memory. Players will also hear how much everybody hates the Herald Corporation and its CEO, Devin Quintrel. The corporation has been buying, bullying and leveraging political contacts to seize drow dark farms and convert them into hydroponic wheat farms.

After a hard day's work, the player characters' co-workers may invite them along to vandalise Quintrel's stately home or the hydroponic farms that it overlooks. This is a regular pastime for the dark farm workers: they know where the weak spots in Quintrel's security are and where to target their vandalism to cause the most inconvenience. The player can use this as a chance to ingratiate themselves with the locals or to sneak into Quintrel's property undetected.

In the course of the raid it'll become clear that, bravado aside, the dark farmers are genuinely terrified of getting caught by Quintrel's men – but they will be reluctant to say why. There are rumours that the people who work for Quintrel aren't fully human, or are maybe more than human. One local may tell the story of a friend or a friend's friend who was gruesomely killed when they got caught. The veracity of this will be unclear to the players.

If the players decide to work in wisp glades, they will discover a hand or foot sticking out of the dirt while turning the soil. Other workers will be keen to cover it up to avoid the law. If the players investigate, they will dig up the body of an aelfir. It will have strange occult symbols cut into its skin from several drow religions, and a successful High Society check will reveal with certainty what the players probably already suspect: this is the body of Galathar Weaves-from-Grass.

WORKING IN THE SCHOOLHOUSE

La Grotte de Corde's schoolhouse is a small classroom in an annexe off the village chapel, overseen by local vicar Celestine Demoine. The players will be asked to help plan classroom displays and set up for lessons. Not long after they arrive, Celestine will

take them to one side and say there are some problem pupils that might benefit from a role model from out of town.

The first child is Marcel, a boy who's been withdrawing from the rest of the class. He refuses to take part in activities and seems upset. If you can get past his initial shyness, he will confide that he has bad dreams about the Spire. He says it's hungry, so hungry – starving in fact – but nobody will feed it. If asked about the festival he'll immediately become distressed, telling the PCs that the festival will go wrong. He doesn't know how it will go wrong or how he knows; he just does.

The second child is Adele, who has been getting into fights with other children. She's far less concerned about the festival. In fact, she thinks it's stupid. She thinks the festival is stupid, the Damnou is stupid, and that the whole of La Grotte de Corde is stupid. All she wants is to grow up as fast as possible so she can leave this stupid place. In telling the players how stupid it all is, she might also reveal some useful information about the Chapel of the Unseen Matron.

QUINTREL'S HYDROPONIC FARMS

Quintrel's hydroponic farms are heavily defended, so getting past their security systems is difficulty 1. Having dark farmer allies who've done this before can lower the difficulty. The farms are illuminated with ultraviolet lighting, which is less powerful than sunlight, but will still inflict 1D3 blood or mind stress immediately on unprotected drow (or 1 stress if they are protected).

The farms are on a simulated day/night cycle to give the wheat plants the necessary period of darkness. If the security systems are triggered during the night, the ultraviolet lights will activate immediately. This will also bring out Quintrel's human labourers to see what's happened (see Devin Quintrel's profile).

PLOT THREAD: WEAVES-FROM-GRASS' DISAPPEARANCE

THE CHARACTERS INVESTIGATE WEAVES-FROM-GRASS' HOLIDAY HOME

Weaves-from-Grass's holiday home is considered an eyesore by the locals. Instead of the simple weedwood and stucco creations the locals live in, or the proud masonry of their oldest and most respected buildings, Weaves-from-Grass's residence is built from imported marble. It has metallic arches shaped to resemble waterfalls, and golden sun-worshipping decorations over every door.

If the players decide to investigate the building, they will find two of LaBute's guards standing watch. They can be easily sneaked past, bribed, or murdered.

The crime scene inside the house will reveal multiple points of entry, with Galathar's huge ornamental windows each broken in from the outside. There will be signs of a struggle, but what really draws attention are the symbols painted in goat's blood across the floor of the main parlour.

The Occult Symbols

If there's not enough expertise within the party to interpret the symbols, they can be copied down and shown to either LeMoine or the Druidic Coven. Characters with the Occult domain may be able to determine that the symbols are from several different sources combined in ways that don't make sense. In that case, they too can go to an informed NPC for more information.

It's clear that these symbols are meant to indicate a blood sacrifice to the Hunger, or possibly the Living Spire, but there will be many things that don't add up. They are a mixture of Old Yessian hieroglyphs and the ancient Aliquam alphabet, which would never normally be found together. There are also several marks and images that relate to day, night and the seasons, which are irrelevant to drow harvest rituals as their farms are underground.

That's because these symbols are for a fake ritual, designed to look like it was performed by the drow, but laid out by someone with no understanding of their religions.

If the players go to Celestine LeMoine for help, she will explain everything the ritual got wrong. She will also be unable to stop herself pointing out things that the ritual should have done, were it a proper sacrificial rite.

The symbols will be enclosed in a ring script which reads "Jiggit, Pitts, Jiggit Edderodix". Occult and Academia won't help understand these words, but Low Society might. Alternatively, showing these words to any local will reveal they are numbers in the traditional dark farmer coordinate system for navigating the Garden District. These ones point to a location in the wisp glades: the place where Weaves-from-Grass is buried.

Investigating Quintrel

The players can discover that the deeds to the house are in Devin Quintrel's name by talking to the villagers or going through the papers from Weaves-from-Grass's house. They may also find a letter inviting Weaves-from-Grass to stay at La Grotte de Corde, with the prospect of making a great deal of money by investing in more tourist homes.

Investigating Quintrel's own mansion will uncover maps of the Garden District, revealing plans to replace drow dark farms with Quintrel's hydroponics. There is also correspondence about the need to expand the Herald Corporation's operations, and letters from Quintrel's own advisors saying that any tourist venture in the Garden District is doomed to fail.

Digging deeper, the players may find further charts and maps showing that regions of Spire supplied by La Grotte de Corde have much lower infection rates than other parts of the city.

However, the evidence is all circumstantial. The party will need to decide whether to confront Quintrel or take the evidence to LaBute.

PLOT THREAD: INVESTIGATING THE VILLAGE

There's a lot to learn with careful questioning and examining the village's monuments, historical documents and religious texts.

THE VILLAGE'S HISTORY

La Grotte de Corde has a long history. The oldest structure in the village is the wooden henge it is built around, known as "Labandone's Teeth".

There are many rumours the locals will be happy to tell you about La Grotte de Corde's history: that it was the last place to be conquered by the aelfir, or the first place to be colonised by the drow; that the columns of the wooden henge run all the way down to the Spire's foundation; or that each column is an imprisoned drow monarch who ruled unwisely. Feel free to concoct your own rumours.



Deep in the Garden District, corpses are planted and their spirits carefully tended to by old-fashioned Morticians who harvest spiritual energy to sell to the city at large

Celestine Lemoine will dismiss most of these stories out of hand as superstition and inter-village competitiveness. She will also point out that the henge predates all known records, and that their wood does not appear to be from any native tree.

THE CHAPEL OF THE UNSEEN MATRON

The village chapel is a modest, ordinary-looking shrine to Our Glorious Lady. If you closely examine the idol of Our Glorious Lady above the pulpit, you might notice that its different facets include the face of Our Hidden Mistress and the Crimson Vigil. If you point this out to the village vicar, she will laugh, and say it's a very old chapel which is desperately in need of updating.

If you point out the fourth facet, the one at the back facing the wall, the one with the teeth, she will simply laugh again and say the church is very old. On further questioning, Lemoine will not be able to resist explaining it. Any school child will also know and be able to recite facts about the hidden facet of the Unseen Matron.

While the known facets of the Damnou represent the light and dark sides of the moon (as well as the blood moon), Labandone the Unseen Matron represents the far side of the moon. Her believers say she can be light or dark, kind or cruel, but she must always be secret and unseen. She feeds the world, clears away the filth, and is never noticed except by folk who do the same.

It is in her honour that the citizens of La Grotte de Corde make the Tower of Rope.

THE DRUIDS OF THE HENGE

A reclusive coven of Druids of the Living Spire is hiding in the caves around the village. Mostly they keep themselves to themselves, but they will sometimes venture into La Grotte de Corde while the village is asleep to perform hushed rituals around the wooden henge. They believe the henge is an exposed branch of the Arbor Vitae (see Appendix). In effect, this is a raw nerve ending of the Living Spire, and so their rituals are designed to sooth the Spire's pain.

Of the entire coven, only one member is actually a local to La Grotte de Corde. He gets shiftier when asked about Labandone, but may be persuaded to help smuggle the players to safety on the night of the festival. This will turn out to be a trap.

ESCAPE FROM LA GROTTE DE CORDE

Whether it's to avoid LaBute or because they've figured out the nature of the fête, the players may decide to skip town. Should they try this, it's your job as the GM to show exactly how futile this would be.

Possible escape routes and why they don't work include:

- The ferryman who brought you here across Algae Vat H-73, the only way out of the District that doesn't go through police checkpoints. Unfortunately, he'll have taken his gondola over to Grist for the next few days.
- The cave tunnels around La Grotte de Corde are a maze that always seems to lead back to the village.
- If the players hand themselves over to the authorities, Constable Cheminer will "rescue" them and bring them back to the village.
- A member of the local druidic covenant may offer to smuggle the players out in their wagon on the night of the celebrations. This is a trap: the wagon will open in the centre of the festival.
- The Vermissian construction never reached La Grotte de Corde, apart from a terminal in the old station where LaBute has set himself up. Due to the nature of the Vermissian, this will only open after a New Moon once the festival is over.

STAYING IN LA GROTTE DE CORDE

One thing that might be difficult for players is that they want something different to their characters: the characters want to leave, but the players know that the village is where the adventure is.

We've listed a few obstacles that will prevent the players escaping, but you should also introduce reasons why the characters don't want to leave. These could include:

- An NPC the characters have grown to like will be in peril if they leave.
- Jardin's investigation may prove an excuse for aelfir to tighten their grip on the District.
- Simply wanting to solve the mystery.

Your players may have motivations of their own. Should the issue arise, ask them:

Your character has realised they don't want to leave – not yet. Why is that?

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

GUESTHOUSE LANDLADY

MADAME SANITÉ

Why are they involved in the story?

Madame Sanité is a sweet old lady whose main concern seems to be whether the player characters are eating enough. She is also the landlady of the safe-house where the party has been sent, and their only nominal contact with the Ministry.

By talking to her, you will catch hints that she hasn't spent her whole life in La Grotte de Corde. She will sometimes let slip a wistful mention of the glamour of the Silver Quarter, or a bawdy drinking story from her time gun-running in Red Row.

She can be an invaluable source of advice, whether it's a trick to disarming aelfir-made security systems or the importance of a good eight hours' sleep.

What sets them apart from other members of their group or faction?

Madame Sanité is that very rarest of people: an operative who has retired from the Ministry. She left La Grotte de Corde in her teens seeking adventure, freedom and an attractive drow woman she once found hiding in the wisp barns.

Sanité went on to have many adventures: she bloodied the nose of the aelfir more than a couple of times and had hers bloodied in turn. Then she returned to La Grotte de Corde and took over her late father's guesthouse.

Deciding she would be too dangerous to assassinate, the Ministry reluctantly "ordered" her to stay there as their "local informant".

What do they desire?

Madame Sanité has had a long and rich life, and these days there's very little she actually desires beyond keeping a good house and offering the best hospitality she can. Having been all up and down Spire, she has grown inordinately fond of the boring, dead-end village she escaped from as an adolescent. Anyone who threatens it will see her show some steel.

Right now, the biggest threat to the village is the poor harvest, and Madame Sanité knows the Tower of Rope is the only way to ensure a good one. She bears the players no ill-will. In fact, she quite likes them, and if pushed may even say it's a shame they have to die by having the blood wrung out of them in a horrific folk dance.

However, she will not lose one jot of sleep over it.

What do they despise?

She keeps quiet about it – Madame Sanité hates to make a fuss – but she has a deep hatred of the Ministry. She abandoned the resistance when her mentor and lover, the very woman she found in that barn so long ago, asked her to betray a loyal asset to the aelfir to create a distraction from another Ministry scheme.

Madame Sanité will readily admit that sometimes unpleasant things need to be done for the greater good, but she cannot abide anyone who'll sell out their own for a cause. That the Ministry continues to send her lambs for the slaughter only deepens her resolve.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- The player characters break into a building. Madame Sanité steps out of the shadows holding the components of an alarm system. She admonishes them to be more careful and adds that things are not always what they seem, pointing them towards a crucial bit of information. Then she asks if anyone remembered to bring a snack.
- As the party are about to uncover some important evidence, they get word that the guard are going to detain Madame Sanité. They must decide whether to abandon their task and rush to her rescue.
- Madame Sanité invites the players to sign the guest book. Flicking back through it, they can see people who have stayed here from decades ago. Someone with a little Ministry knowledge might recognise some of the names as heroes of the resistance. Someone with a lot will realise they're members of the resistance who have disappeared without a trace.
- The night before the festival, Madame Sanité cooks the players a special celebratory dinner. The food is drugged, and the players pass out. When they wake up they will be tied to a pole in the centre of the wooden henge.

Difficulty: 2

Resistance: 2

Madame Sanité still retains her old training, but she's getting on. If you can land one well-placed blow, you ought to be able to stop her.

Equipment: Yssian Duelling Daggers (D3, Parrying, Piercing); Aegolius Long Gun (D8, Accurate, Extreme Range). The latter is stored in an upstairs bedroom, and Madame Sanité will have to retrieve it before use.

CHAIR OF THE FARMERS' UNION

FORTIER DUMAS

Why are they involved in the story?

Fortier Dumas walks around La Grotte de Corde like he owns the place, and that's for a very good reason. He holds the deeds for most of the farmable land around La Grotte de Corde, and as chair of the union he's responsible for negotiating crop prices with buyers up and down Spire. He commands respect and loyalty from everyone in the village – but that shouldn't be confused with anyone liking the dour, vindictive old bugger.

What sets them apart from other members of their group or faction?

Dumas is the only person in La Grotte de Corde who openly dislikes the player characters and believes the aelfir are only a short-term problem. In its long, long history, Spire has had many would-be invaders, conquerors and occupations; sooner or later they all get thrown out, assimilated or simply fall apart under their own weight.

Dumas views the drow who live above and below the Garden District as snobs or scum, no better than the aelfir or gnolls. As far as Dumas is concerned, the real Spire is a place that exists only on this floor of the tower. Everything else is a deviation.

What do they desire?

He wants to be the Master of Ceremonies during the Tower of Rope ritual. Dumas owns most of the village, and virtually every labourer and family depends on him for their livelihood, but Dumas's family name is still a low one. The respect and obedience he commands is built on what the locals consider 'new money'. Dumas wants to be Lord of the Manor, and taking the position of Master of Ceremonies is the closest he can get.

What do they despise?

Dumas loves to harbour a grudge, but he particularly despises Devin Quintrel and the Herald Corporation. This is partly for the obvious reason – Quintrel's continued efforts to usurp drow dark farms – but it goes deeper than that. Dumas sees Quintrel's stately home, extensive farming land, and exclusive soirees: he's exactly the kind of Lord of the Manor Dumas wants to be. If you want to get onto Dumas's good side, hurting Quintrel is a good way to do it.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- Dumas announces the beginning of the festival season, but to his obvious anger and frustration, the announcement is abruptly taken over by Celestine Lemoine.
- At The Hanged Men, Dumas challenges one of the players to the pub games. From the watching crowd's reaction, it quickly becomes clear they want you to let him win.
- Dumas' "cousins" summon you for a quiet word with him. He asks you to steal the Master's Rod from Lemoine, bestowing the role of Master of Ceremonies on Dumas himself. Later, this will be revealed to be a ruse between Dumas and Lemoine to keep the players distracted.
- If it looks like the players are going to sell out any locals to LaBute's investigation, Dumas and his cousins will surround them on their way there to deliver a sound beating and a warning to stay away from the fuzz.

Difficulty: 0

Resistance: 5

Equipment: None that's useful in a fight

THE COUSINS

Fortiere Dumas walks around the village unaccompanied and unarmed. However, in La Grotte de Corde he's never far away from burly labourers with sharp tools who owe their livelihoods to him.

Difficulty: 0

Resistance: 3

Equipment: Farm tools (D3 damage, Piercing (pitchforks) or Brutal (clubs)).

PARISH VICAR

CELESTINE LEMOINE

Why are they involved in the story?

Celestine Lemoine is the village's vicar, schoolteacher, and midwife. She is also the Master of Ceremonies for the Tower of Rope ritual, but her real passion is her role as the village's amateur local historian. If the party turn to her for information on the history of La Grotte de Corde or the religions practiced there, she will be happy to talk at length – even letting slip information she shouldn't in her eagerness.

What sets them apart from other members of their group or faction?

Where most people in La Grotte de Corde would be happy to do anything if you told them their grandparents did it the same way, Celestine is driven by a real desire to learn the true history of the village. Her personal papers are filled with family trees and old documents detailing how long various families have been in the village and, in a few places, where they came from before.

She believes ritual is a living thing, and encourages the children in her school to make their own decorations and songs for the fête (to the disapproval of some of the older villagers).

What do they desire?

More than anything Lemoine wants to run a good festival. Satiating the bloodlust of the Unseen Matron is obviously important, but Lemoine really wants this festival to be an inclusive celebration of La Grotte de Corde and all the people who live there.

What do they despise?

Lemoine prides herself on her acceptance of and curiosity about other belief systems, but she really can't stand the Druids of the Henge. She finds their theology sloppy, their use of La Grotte de Corde's henge deeply appropriative, and hates the way they always leave a mess behind.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- Early in the morning, a visibly annoyed Lemoine is found going around the henge with a refuse sack, picking up fruit offerings and discarded incense sticks from the Druidic ritual the night before.
- Lemoine invites the players to come to her morning service. It's an extremely tame rendition of a ceremony for Our Glorious Lady, but the players may notice the more gruesome decorations in the church.
- The party see Lemoine leading a school trip to the wooden henge. Lemoine uses the encounter as a "teachable moment", encouraging the children to ask the visitors about their religion. However, she guiltily silences any mention of Labandone.
- In return for helping the players, Lemoine asks if they can tactfully persuade Cheminer to pass on the role of "Lord of Misrule" to someone else this year. They get too into the role and it scares the children.
- The party enter the chapel or schoolhouse and overhear a heated argument between Lemoine and Dumas about whether the school children should

be allowed to write their own lyrics for the Tower of Rope ceremony song.

Difficulty: 0

Resistance: 2

Equipment: None that's useful in a fight

LOCAL POLICE

CONSTABLE CHEMINER

Why are they involved in the story?

Constable Cheminer is La Grotte de Corde's friendly face of the law. Typically, their job involves little more than getting drunks home safely from The Hanged Men and giving kids a cuff round the ear if they need it.

During the festival they are also the Lord of Misrule, a sinister jester-like figure that encourages decadence, frivolity and excess in all its forms.

What sets them apart from other members of their group or faction?

Cheminer has developed a pragmatic approach to village policing which mostly involves strolling around the village in the morning and popping into The Hanged Men in the afternoon.

They'll often say there's no harm in the breaking of an unjust law, whether it's the consumption of certain forbidden mushrooms or moonshine, practicing undesirable religious faiths or being part of certain terrorist organisations.

What do they desire?

Constable Cheminer is very excited to play the Lord of Misrule for this year's festival. They worry (wrongly) that they are seen as an overly stern and serious person due to their station. The festival is Cheminer's chance to let their hair down and show people they know how to have fun.

Unfortunately, they get very into the role: the laughing, capering, sometimes wildly violent figure they become actively terrifies adults and children alike.

What do they despise?

Cheminer quickly comes to truly hate LaBute. They find him patronising, officious, and believe he has no understanding of the complexities of rural policing.

Even if they weren't required to keep the party out of LaBute's hands for the festival, Cheminer would probably do everything in their power to thwart his investigation out of spite alone.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- The players are interrupted by Cheminer while doing something illegal. Cheminer looks extremely serious, before bursting out laughing and telling them to be on their way.
- The players walk in on Cheminer as they're putting together their Lord of Misrule costume, a kind of elaborate, gothic court jester's outfit. They nervously ask for the party's opinion while explaining their role in the festival.
- Cheminer is drunk and despondent at the bar of The Hanged Men. LaBute doesn't take them seriously and Cheminer wants to show him up by providing a case-cracking clue.
- The party is interrupted by a breathless Constable Cheminer, who tells them that LaBute has decided to pin the murder on the players and is on his way with a squad of guards to make the arrest.

Difficulty: 0

Resistance: 5

Equipment: Light armour (2); club (D3)

THE LORD OF MISRULE

Depending on the player's actions, Constable Cheminer may not be the Lord of Misrule. However, something about the costume – whether it's magic or psychology – makes whoever wears it an unstoppable force for chaos.

Difficulty: 2

Resistance: 10

Equipment: Ceremonial truncheon (D6, Brutal)

If a player should somehow end up in the role of Lord of Misrule, they gain up to 3 Blood and Mind resistance and the Surprising tag while wearing the costume. Once they attack something, they must roll Resist to stop attacking before it's dead.

HEAD OF THE HERALD CORPORATION

DEVIN QUINTREL

Why are they involved in the story?

Devin Quintrel is the head of the Herald Corporation, a group dedicated to modernising Spire's food infrastructure. To the common folk he is a hero, while in high society he's considered a dangerous maverick (although not too dangerous for all the best parties).

To the dark farmers of the Garden District, he is scum – which isn't in keeping with Quintrel's man-of-the-people persona. His desire to bring the full weight of the aelfir occupation crashing down on the Garden District is as much out of hurt feelings as it is out of his burning need to spread the Vyskant parasite.

What sets them apart from other members of their group or faction?

Quintrel has been infected by the Vyskant for a long time, and has devoted himself to sharing it. For him, this isn't a quest of world domination or even religious subservience: he simply believes the Vyskant domination of all life in the multiverse is inevitable and desirable.

He will not immediately own up to this goal, but if confronted with it he'll shrug off the accusation like it's no big thing. Of course he's trying to spread the Vyskant. Why wouldn't he? You look kind of foolish trying to resist it, to be honest.

What do they desire?

It's very important to Quintrel that you like him. He is the sort of person who will have his goons beat you with lengths of pipe while apologising and saying he's only doing it because his lawyers told him to. He not only wants to completely eradicate the old fashioned, inefficient and Vyskant resistant dark farm crops: he wants to do it to applause.

What do they despise?

The flipside of the above is that he is personally affronted by anything that challenges the narrative he tells. If you want to reveal a crack in his otherwise charming and friendly persona, simply show him an unfavourable news story. Anyone who criticises Quintrel is jealous, or stupid, or too wrapped up in their own agenda to understand what he's trying to do.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- A palanquin carried by humans draws up alongside the PCs, and more humans appear from the shadows to surround them. The curtain is pushed aside to reveal Devin Quintrel. He likes to keep tabs on who comes and goes from La Grotte de Corde, and he can't put a finger on where the player characters came from.
- Quintrel holds a party at his mansion to celebrate the beginning of La Grotte de Corde's festival season. Many aelfir and up-Spire drow are invited. If

the party gatecrash he is happy to see them, but there are no local drow present.

- Quintrel gives the party a bloodied sacrificial dagger bearing the mark of the Dumas family. The well known antipathy between the two men would make the guard suspicious if Quintrel handed over this evidence, but from an impartial drow it would be convincing. Expert examination will reveal the dagger to be a fake, crafted at great expense to Quintrel to frame Dumas.
- The party implicate Quintrel in Weaves-from-Grass's murder. He then appears in the village square, furious, red-eyed and out for revenge.

HERALD CORPORATION STAFF

Herald Corporation Staff are every bit the smiling, polite and helpful individuals you would expect them to be – to the point where it's actually eerie.

Difficulty: 0

Resistance: 3

Equipment: Armed with human-made work tools, which can be any combination of: Thermal lance (D6, Piercing, Dangerous); pneumatic hammer or shears (D6, Brutal, Tiring); "chained-saw" (D8, Dangerous)

Entwined with the Vyskant hivemind, they are difficulty 1 as long as they are in a group of two or more. Attacks on their minds have no effect

DEVIN QUINTREL

Difficulty: 2

Resistance: 6

Equipment: Hideous Bone Spurs (D6)

Special: Quintrel has access to any Vyskant advances (Spire, p76) that you feel would be interesting, as well as all sorts of as-yet-undiscovered abilities that you make up on the spot

CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD

JARDIN LABUTE

Why are they involved in the story?

Jardin LaBute was an up-and-coming officer in the Silver Quarter. He worked hard, didn't take bribes, and was unswervingly loyal to his aelfir masters; but when an investigation led LaBute to accuse a prominent aelfir of being a Ministry sympathiser, he

quickly found himself shipped down to the Garden District's border control at Greenway and assigned to customs duty.

This case is LaBute's chance to prove himself and regain his former stature, and he will stop at nothing to solve it. More than that, LaBute truly believes that what he is doing is best for drow kind.

If he fails, that will make him an outsider and a drow who has fought for his beliefs and lost. Anyone paying attention may notice that this would make him a perfect candidate to be sacrificed to the Tower of Rope.

What sets them apart from other members of their group or faction?

LaBute genuinely believes that the aelfir occupation is the best thing to ever happen to the drow. He admires their civilising influence, and is pleased to see them wash away the old religions and savage ways he believes hold back his kind.

He is personally offended that a drow would murder an aelfir, and sees it as his duty to redeem all drow by showing that justice is done.

What do they desire?

More than anything, LaBute desires the respect and approval of the aelfir. He believes that by following the aelfir example, respecting their ways and learning their wisdom, the drow might one day lift themselves up to be equal partners with their sister-race. For LaBute, this is an article of faith he will defend to the death.

What do they despise?

The Garden District represents everything LaBute hates, a throwback to the worst of pre-occupation drow society. He believes that the people are stupid and their rituals barbaric. He sympathises with Quintrel's desire to gut the entire place and fill it with floodlit hydroponic wheat farms.

His hatred can blind him to potential dangers. LaBute fails to believe any of these borderline literate savages could outwit him, and that belief may place him out of his depth.

SUGGESTED SCENES

- There's a knock at the door of the guesthouse and LaBute comes in. He seems civil, friendly even. He asks the party a string of innocent questions, slowly upping the tension and trying to trip them up.
- The players are caught between LaBute, his men, and some drunks from The Hanged Men

who've been caught singing banned old drow war songs.

- The players break into a building looking for evidence, only to find LaBute has broken into the same building (but hasn't noticed them yet).
- After the players receive severe reputation fallout, LaBute becomes convinced of their guilt. He puts them in a caged wagon to be transported back to Greenway. As they set off, the citizens of La Grotte de Corde attack the wagon to "rescue" the players.
- After the players receive severe shadow fallout, they find LaBute waiting for them at the guesthouse. The dining table is scattered with evidence that conclusively links them to the Ministry and their disastrous last job. But LaBute doesn't want them: he wants to know what happened to Weaves-from-Grass, and needs their help.

LABUTE'S MEN

Difficulty: 0

Resistance: 5

Equipment: Light Armour (2); club (D3).

JARDIN LABUTE

Difficulty: 1

Resistance: 5

Equipment: Light Armour (2); club (D3); jackdaw pistol (D6, Piercing, Reload, Ranged).

ENDING THE STORY

Whatever happens, the events of this story are going to come to a head on the night of the festival. Not all of these endings are mutually exclusive, and how they interact will be up to you.

In the unlikely event that the players spend their time staying out of everyone's way, enjoying the village pub and not being any trouble to anyone, Jardin LaBute will eventually deduce who they are and decide to pin Weaves-from-Grass's murder on them. The villagers, chief among them Constable Cheminer, will intervene and LaBute will return to his superiors defeated.

The night before the festival, the characters will be drugged and wake up tied to a pole in the centre of the wooden henge. The Tower of Rope ceremony will go as planned: the player characters will die in the most intense agony, and their blood will ensure a fine harvest for years to come.

THE SACRIFICE FIGHTS BACK

The players realise they're being groomed for a sacrificial murder. Every route out of La Grotte de Corde is closed off, and their only option is to try to make it through the night. They can choose to run and hide as the villagers hunt them or find a building to hole up in and wait out the siege.

The villagers will come at them with pitchforks and torches, but they will also do everything they can to make sure at least one of the players is taken alive. There's no use in a dead sacrifice.

It's also entirely possible that the party will be partially captured, in which case the climax of the game may become a rescue mission.

BEING SACRIFICED IN THE TOWER OF ROPE

Anyone bound to the centre of the henge when the ceremony begins will suffer gradually increasing Blood stress until death. Whenever any player takes an action, even if that action is "wait", all players bound to the pole will take 1D3 Blood stress as the ritual continues.

As their arms and legs are tightly bound to the pole, any actions taken by someone being sacrificed should have an appropriately high difficulty penalty. It is highly likely that some or all of the player characters will die here, so try to make sure any deaths are suitably climactic.

AN ALTERNATIVE SACRIFICE

The players confront one of the villagers about the sacrifice, and are persuaded that the ritual is essential not just for La Grotte de Corde, but for the entire Spire. Not keen on dying painfully, the players find another, more deserving sacrifice.

The sacrifice must be a drow, an outsider to the village, and most importantly someone who has fought for their beliefs and lost. Providing his investigation has failed, Captain LaBute is the perfect candidate – but now the players must find a way to kidnap him and cover their tracks to avoid bringing the City Guard down on the village.

THE CITY GUARD COMES DOWN ON THE VILLAGE

LaBute has become convinced that Weaves-from-Grass died in an occult ritual that originated in La Grotte de Corde, and he's managed to convince his superiors of the same.

A show of force is called for, so a platoon of soldiers is dispatched to La Grotte de Corde. If armed forces aren't brought in, LaBute may call on Quintrel's own workers, depending on how his story has turned out.

The villagers will still do everything they can to carry out the ritual, even if they have to do it during a pitched battle.

DESTROYING THE HENGE

The villagers will go ahead with their sacrifice at any cost, but will be unable to do so if the ancient wooden henge is destroyed. Doing this won't be easy: some kind of explosive or heavy machinery will be needed.

Should the players try this, they will face heavy resistance. Most of the village is amicable towards the players despite the need to kill them. However, if they attempt to destroy the henge the player characters

will become the enemy, facing rage and violence unlike anything they've seen before.

That rage will dissipate the moment that the henge is destroyed, replaced with blank-eyed despair.

ESCAPE THROUGH THE VERMISSIAN

Once the ritual is complete or is unable to be completed, the Vermissian entrance at the old station-house will open for a short time. From here the characters can reach anywhere they choose (or wherever the GM wants them to turn up).

Because the dimensions of the Vermissian map less than perfectly onto those of the Spire, when the characters emerge they will find an entire year has passed in moments.

If the ceremony didn't go ahead, the players will emerge into a food riot. If the ceremony didn't go ahead and Quintrel's power wasn't successfully checked, there will also likely be a Vyskant insurgency.

Additionally, it's probable that the Ministry will now be intent on having the players killed.

What happens next is up to the players and GM.

SCENARIO APPENDIX I: THE ARBOR VITAE

The Arbor Vitae is part theory and part myth among the Sages of the Vermissian. The story goes that the Vermissian wasn't simply hewn through the Spire: it was built onto a pre-existing network of branches and tunnels. Some think it has been growing through the Spire for millennia; others think the Spire grew up around it. Regardless of why, everyone agrees that the Vermissian behaves strangely this deep in the Garden.

A Vermissian Sage in this part of the city knows where the Vermissian's tunnels should be. But when they open those doors they don't find the smooth, tiled walls of the doomed transit system; instead, they will feel something like unhewn cave walls, tree bark, or sometimes raw meat. These are strange and ancient tunnels. Mortal beings were never meant to set foot within them.

If a Vermissian Sage attempts to use any ability or advance that involves entering the Vermissian, including: Back Door, The Vault, Dead Drop, Locked Stacks, Pocket Guide, Anastomosis, The Glass Library, or Rewrite, the ability will work as normal.

However, when describing it, make clear the Sage is in a place far wilder and more primitive than expected. Rooms become caves. If they are looking for a

particular book, they find a cave painting or a carving on a standing stone instead. If they are looking for advanced equipment, they will find natural or neolithic tools that will do the same job. Be creative.

When the characters who have entered the Arbor Vitae head back out again, roll 1D6 on this encounter table:

1. THE CROSS ROADS

You arrive at the intersection of two paths. There's no sign of paving, but the floor is well trodden. This is a place where pacts are made.

First Roll: Jacques the Pedlar Throws You a Freebie

A cheery looking drow with a bindle on his shoulder comes whistling out of the dark. He gives the player a small pouch and says: "Only open this when you need it."

When the pouch is opened it will contain a non-magical item small enough to fit in the palm of a hand. The object will also be exactly what the player needs to solve their most immediate problem.

Second Roll: The Sin Eater

The player encounters a hunched figure, like a parody of a drow with needle-like teeth. The Sin-Eater will heal any Reputation or Shadow stress a character has, but the character must generate that much stress again each day to keep the Sin-Eater sated. If they fail to do so, that night the Sin-Eater will come to feed on them.

SIN EATER

Difficulty: 2

Resistance: 6
1D6, Brutal, Devastating, Scarring

Third Roll: Jacques the Pedlar Offers a Deal

Jacques the Pedlar appears again. The player can ask for anything they wish, and the GM must name a price. This can be any task or ordeal that the player must undergo to receive it.

2. THE GHOST ROAD

You step into a long tunnel that stretches away in both directions. Looking into the distance, you cannot tell if it disappears into darkness or simply disappears entirely.

First Roll: Ghostly Favour

The player finds a young drow child caught in a poacher's trap; release them, and they will disappear. On leaving the Arbor Vitae, the player will discover the child was the grandparent of an NPC the GM chooses. The player can then count them as an Individual level bond.

Second Roll: Question the Dead

A crowd of ghosts walk this tunnel. The character may choose any dead person and ask them two questions they don't know the answer to. The dead person will give them one correct answer and one lie.

Third Roll: The Lost Contubernium

A unit of nine drow soldiers in old-fashioned armour come out of the darkness. These soldiers are from before the aelfir occupation and will fight against any "invaders" if asked. They will not fight any native drow. The player may count the Contubernium as a Street level bond.

SPIRE HOME GUARD

Difficulty: 0

Resistance: 5

Equipment: Archaic armour (2); halberd (D6, Brutal)

3. THE PETRIFIED FOREST CLEARING

You find yourself lost among the trunks of petrified trees. You blunder and stumble through the forest into a clearing. Someone is already here.

First Roll: The Fae Court

The Fae have cast a spell of love on this character and an NPC chosen by the GM. That NPC will remain an Individual level bond to the PC for a full day, but the PC returns that love and must take a Resist check to act against them.

Second Roll: The Rite of the Trees

Druids appear to be performing a ritual, but closer examination will reveal the practitioners are entirely made of branches and leaves. The player gains an Advance from the Druids of the Living Spire.

Third Roll: The Feast of the Dead

You arrive at a great feast of drow, gnoll, humans and others, all of them marked with terrible wounds. They welcome you to the table. All present members of the party lose all stress. Before they leave, one of the characters will be given a pie and told it is their death. Someone must eat it while it is still fresh.

Whoever eats the pie will die not long afterwards at a time of the GM's choosing. If somebody else hasn't willingly eaten the pie by the end of the campaign, that character will die. If the player eats the pie (try to discourage this), the character definitely won't survive the campaign.

4. THE DEEP CAVE

The tunnel goes deep – not down towards the busy hustle of the Spire's lowest levels, or in towards the centre of the Spire, but deep in a different direction entirely. Eventually it opens out into a cave. You get the distinct feeling you're not supposed to be here.

First Roll: The Shuck

Something is following you. The player immediately takes 1D3 Mind stress, and continues to take 1D3 Mind stress every time they are alone. If they are

alone with one other person who means them harm, an enormous black hound will leap from the shadows and attack that person.

This causes 1D8 Blood stress and 1D6 Mind stress to the victim if it's a PC, or 1D8 and 1D6 damage overall for an NPC. The creature will then bound away, at which point the curse is lifted.

Second Roll: The Changeling Pool

This cave contains a mirrored pool. Your reflection reaches for you. If the first character to enter this cave dies during this campaign, they will shatter like glass. Then the real character will appear in the place of their "changeling", as if released from beneath a shattered shell.

They will be wet and shivering, and will have lost any advances, mastery or knowledge they gained since the cave. They will have no memory of anything that has happened since they entered it: they have been trapped, and the character that the player was controlling was a facsimile.

Third Roll: The Vyskant Cave

The player has stumbled into the Vyskant cave and must take a Resist action. If they fail, they are now infected with the Vys parasite.

5. DOWNBRIDGE

As you make your way through the darkness, you see the shapes of buildings emerge from the gloom.

First Roll: A Place Out of Time

The players find a village where they may rest. When they wake up, the village will be long since abandoned. No time has passed while they were resting.

Second Roll: Your Other Life

The players return to the village. Anyone who rested here during the last Roll will find evidence that they lived here for a long time, maybe even raising a family. It's unclear whether the life that was lived here is from the character's future, a forgotten past, or an alternate present, but the memories begin to bleed through. Every character takes 1D3 Mind stress and mastery in an area of their choice.

Third Roll: The Key to the Village

The passage opens up into Downbridge, exactly as you saw it the first time. The villagers beckon you, but you know that this time if you enter the village you will never return. From now on, if the player opens a door they must make a Resist+Occult check.

If they fail, the door opens onto Downbridge. Closing and opening the door again will make it work as normal. Nothing that passes into Downbridge can ever return, and if the player character steps through the door they will be retired, living out the rest of their days there.

6. OUMA-KROYASHA

You realise you are not alone in the darkness. An impossibly tall drow, bent double so that she can fit in the tunnel, beckons to you with fingers like knives. If you didn't know better, you would think this was a figure of fairy tales, for she resembles none other than the legendary Ouma-Kroyasha, Grandmother Thorn.

First Roll: The Withered Hand

She takes the player's hand and they suffer 1D3 Reputation Stress immediately, then 1D3 Blood Stress now and every day. A character may free themselves of this curse by touching anyone who has not already had the curse and passing it on to them instead.

Second Roll: The Poison Shell

Ouma-Kroyasha will give the player two halves of cracked eggshell. Give one half to one character and the other half to another to make them hate each other.

Third Roll: The Hungering Broth

She offers the player a bubbling and unpleasant broth. Any character who drinks from the broth will gain an ability from the Hungering Deep extra advance.

SCENARIO APPENDIX II: CITIZENS OF LA GROTTE DE CORDE

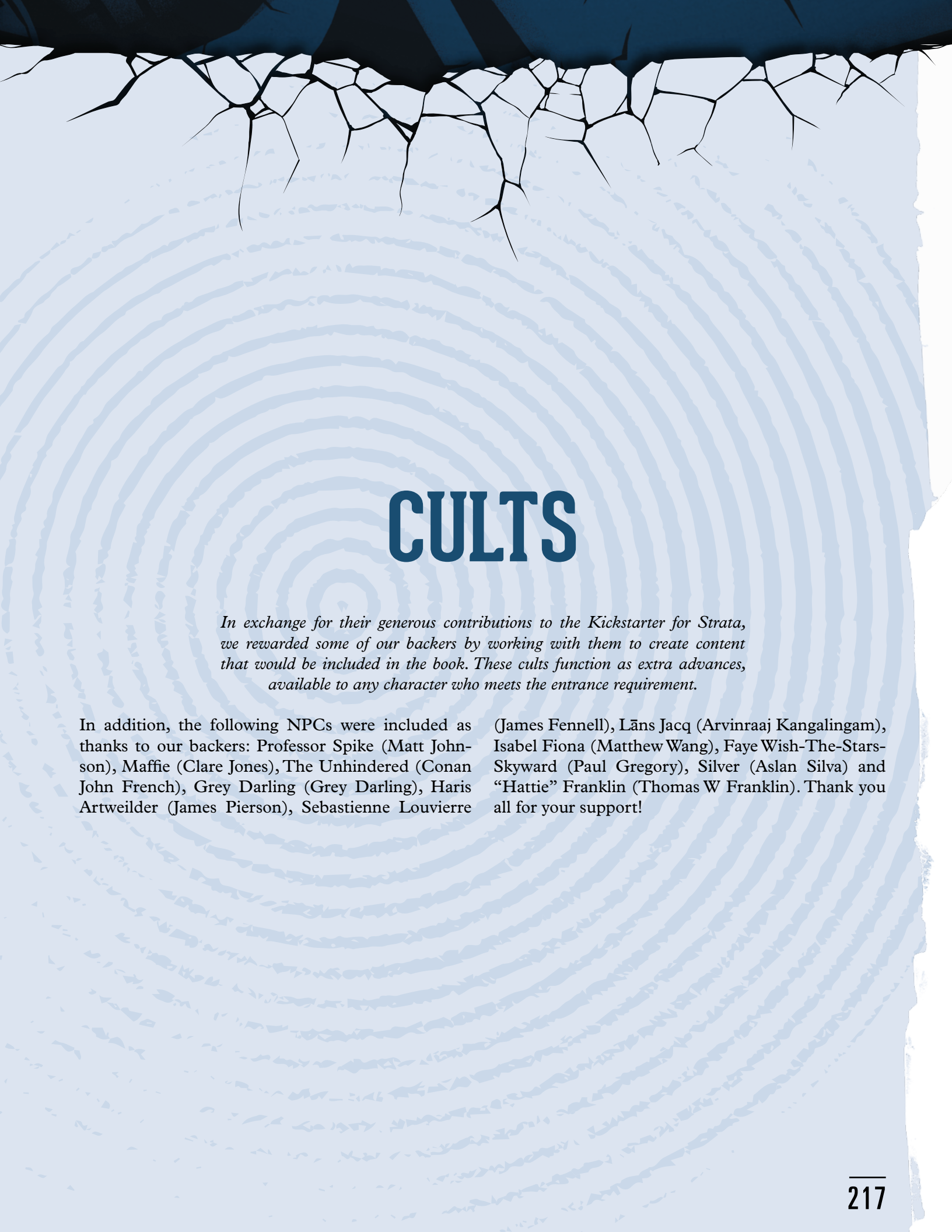
When the players reach La Grotte de Corde, they will find themselves entirely cut off from everyone they know. However, while they're in the village, they may forge new bonds with the locals – many of whom will have problems that they need the PCs to solve.

Of course, barring exceptional circumstances, every one of these NPCs will betray the players to ensure they reach the Tower of Rope.

Find below the names of potential NPC bonds, their occupations, and which class of character they are mostly likely drawn to.

- Victor Vert, Market Trader, drawn to the Azurite
- Dan Cancre, Labourer/known as the village idiot, drawn to the Bound
- Boyce, Bernice and Brice, Crustacean Shepherds, Street level bond, drawn to the Carrion Priest
- Kalle, Local Teenager, drawn to the Firebrand
- La Grotte de Corde Amateur Dramatics Society, Street level bond, drawn to the Idol
- Pascal, Labourer, drawn to the Knight
- La Grotte de Corde Church Choir, Street level bond, drawn to the Lajhan
- The Staff of the Dumas household, Street level bond, drawn to the Masked
- Madeline, Midwife, drawn to the Midwife
- Genevieve, Schoolgirl with an obsessive interest in the Vermissian, drawn to the Vermissian Sage
- Ms Jonah, editor of the La Grotte De Corde Quarterly Newsletter, drawn to the Inksmith
- Mr Bisset, the old man of the village. Thought senile by most of the locals, he claims to know the Shadow Agent from before their initiation. Work out with the player who he is, how he claims to know the Shadow Agent and what his domain is.
- The giant glowing isopod herds in the Crustacean Chasm, Street level bond, drawn to the Blood Witch.





CULTS

In exchange for their generous contributions to the Kickstarter for Strata, we rewarded some of our backers by working with them to create content that would be included in the book. These cults function as extra advances, available to any character who meets the entrance requirement.

In addition, the following NPCs were included as thanks to our backers: Professor Spike (Matt Johnson), Maffie (Clare Jones), The Unhindered (Conan John French), Grey Darling (Grey Darling), Haris Artweilder (James Pierson), Sebastienne Louvierre

(James Fennell), Lāns Jacq (Arvinraaj Kangalingam), Isabel Fiona (Matthew Wang), Faye Wish-The-Stars-Skyward (Paul Gregory), Silver (Aslan Silva) and “Hattie” Franklin (Thomas W Franklin). Thank you all for your support!



THE CONFEDERACY OF CLAVIGERS – EAMON MULHOLLAND

Requirement: Locate the confederacy and pass their stringent and often bizarre initiation ceremonies.

Refresh: Toss a coin at the start of each session to see which Lady is in control of the cult – heads it's the Lady of Locks, tails it's the Lady of Keys. When you live by her edicts during this session, refresh.

Unlike many cults, the confederacy has not one official leader but two: the Lady of Locks and the Lady of Keys. They constantly fight each other for dominance.

The Lady of Locks believes that it is right and true that locks should stay locked. Buildings should be shuttered and barred, and keys – wretched, insidious creatures – should be cast from the side of Spire once used (or hammered into uselessness, or themselves locked away as punishment).

Conversely, the Lady of Keys believes that the natural state of a door is to be open: locks are brutish shackles imposed upon the world by cowards. New ideas and change should flood through the city on a daily basis.

The cult fluctuates between “locked” and “unlocked” states depending on which Lady currently holds sway over the members. When it is locked, the cult steal, kidnap, archive and hide away important information and people, cloister themselves in secrecy and make any sacrifice necessary to maintain the status quo. When it is unlocked, members throw open doors, liberate people from old ideologies to unlock new perspectives and openly defy censorship and restriction. It should be noted that it is a popular theory within the cult that the Lady of Locks and the Lady of Keys are the same person. The Ladies do nothing to dissuade this.

LOW

SECOND-STOREY SECRET. [Occult] *Locks are lips and keys are kisses.* Roll Compel+Occult to cast this spell. On a success, a nearby physical barrier of your choosing unlocks and opens. On a failure, the GM chooses what opens (it isn't good). The larger and more locked the door is, the more stress inflicted as a result of casting this spell.

RAT IN A TRAP. *I'm not locked in here with you; you're locked in here with me.* When there's no other way out, you roll with mastery to bring harm to

those who would stand against you. Your attacks gain the Brutal tag.

UNOPEN. [Occult] *You whisper a spell of forgetting into a door's keyhole, and it loses all concept of what it once was.* Roll Fix+Occult to cast this spell on a closed door that you can whisper to. On a success, the door no longer functions as a door: keys don't work on it and battering rams can't knock it open. The lock can be picked, but it will have no effect. The door becomes, essentially, a section of wall; this is only reversible by casting this spell again to remind the door what it is. The larger and more used the door, the more stress inflicted as a result of casting the spell.

MEDIUM

SKELETON KEY. [Occult] *You slip scalpel-sharp keys into the spine and lock away secrets.* Roll Fix+Occult to cast this spell on a restrained or unconscious target. On a success, they completely forget everything they know about a subject of your choosing and won't be able to learn it again. If you (or someone else) casts the spell on them a second time, they'll remember everything you made them forget – but the caster will need the same surgical keys you made and used. You can also use SKELETON KEY to block off traumatic memories, allowing player character subjects to suppress Mind fallout, but it's an inexact science.

FLOODGATE CHARM. [Occult] *You can hear the secrets knocking against their ribcage, begging to escape.* Roll Compel+Occult to cast this spell. On a success, a nearby target of your choosing blurts out a secret they're harbouring. On a failure, the GM chooses the target instead.

AGENT OF CHANGE. [Occult] *Let he who is without food cast the first stone.* Roll Compel+Occult to cast this spell. On a success, a nearby target of your choosing takes immediate, decisive action to change something that's upsetting or bothering them. This could be as simple as opening a window to let air into a stuffy room, or as life-changing as hurling a rock at a manicured aelfir touring their neighbourhood. Engineering the right situation is more than half of getting the most out of this spell.



THE JOKER PACK - JONATHAN YEAP

REQUIREMENT: Get dragged into the nightmare web of bluff and counter-bluff that is the Pack's daily existence. Usually this involves money: a common way of joining the organisation is having the Brothers nearly but not quite pull you out of debt, and then tell you what to do for more cash.

REFRESH: Perform a task on behalf of the Joker Pack.

The Stolzians of the Silver Quarter are luck-mages and chancehounds, seeking out wild thrills and impossible odds. The Joker Pack realise that luck has nothing to do with success: the most reliable way to win is to cheat.

What began as an innocuous back-room game has spiralled over decades into something vast and confusing. The Pack, lead by the three Brothers Jay, are determined to get their fingers into every single pie in Spire. Their behind-the-scenes manipulations skew ostensibly fair games of chance into predetermined patterns of events, each relying upon the other, with contingencies and back-up plans cascading into eternity. There's no particular aim to it other than increasing their hold over gambling in Spire (and, it would seem, enjoying themselves).

The Brothers Jay rarely appear in public (and prefer to use body doubles when they do). When they are seen, it's always as three figures in beaten-up jester masks. They aren't blood brothers, either: Jez is a human, but had undying surgery to extend his lifespan and keep playing the game; Jo'vaan is a drow, and an esteemed occultist in a different life; Jacques Worthy-Strikes-Fortune is an aelfir, and has the ear of high-ranking deacons and bishops within the Solar church.

Their agents – who they get to hunt each other for fun – are tasked with enacting the brothers' schemes in Spire. Their plots include tweaking the results of races and boxing matches; rewriting desang plays with on-stage interventions; slipping loaded dice into the pockets of unsuspecting gamblers; and, of late, changing the course of politics, art, religion and war.

MEDIUM ADVANCE

PLAY YOUR PART. [Occult] *This is just a game, and everyone has a part to play.* Roll Compel+Occult to cast this spell. When you select this advance, choose one of the options below. On a successful casting roll, you can inflict this effect on a nearby target simply by speaking to them. Their new

motivation lasts until the end of the current situation.

You can pick an additional option as a Low advance as many times as you like. Select which one you are using when you cast the spell.

MARK OF THE PAWN. The target follows orders from those in authority, especially if they are part of the target's hierarchy. They will endeavour to please their superiors and stay on the sidelines.

MARK OF THE FLAME. The target wants to cause trouble with a snide remark, thrown punch or outrageous entrance. They won't act out of character, but they will feel compelled to throw a cat amongst the pigeons.

MARK OF THE ROSE. The target becomes terribly romantic, taking stupid risks to please someone they perceive as a potential prospect. They don't become charismatic though, so it might all go terribly wrong.

MARK OF THE SHIELD. The target takes a stand and refuses to back down; whatever they believe in, they believe it doubly hard now.

MARK OF THE THIEF. The target becomes avaricious, and will steal something of value if given half a chance. They won't risk their lives, but they'll definitely abuse the trust of others.



THE ORDER OF LEXICUTIONERS - TIM RUDLOFF

Requirement: Successfully kill a word. Once you do this, the Lexicutioners will make contact you and attempt to recruit you. Upon doing so, they will remove your name for security purposes.

Refresh: Extinguish a supernatural threat to reality.

Languages die. Most fall out of use as the speakers pass away or are absorbed into a larger culture; but some you have to hunt down and kill. Some are so wicked and dark that speaking them slits the tongue and hearing them spoken conjures buzzing locusts in the ears; reading a single letter can drive the user deranged. Embertongue, Hexitant, Deep Plürish, Archaic High Starysian and more are among these languages.

The Order of Lexicutioners is a splinter sect of the Vermissian Sages (Spire. p65) who believe that language is a weapon – and like all weapons, it must be controlled. They form a dark mirror of the Warrior-Poets of the aelfir: nameless assassin-linguists all, the Lexicutioners work in the shadows to eliminate dangerous languages. They are at present responsible for the utter extermination of two languages (the details of which can no longer be recalled, but are commemorated by shrines with appropriately redacted names) and the suppression of another seven.

They believe that the sacred tongue of the aelfir, a whispered and multilayered language that often requires multiple speakers to say different parts of the same word at once to fully communicate its meaning, is poisonous to drow. If all goes to plan, it will be dead within three years.

LOW

CARVE OUT A SILENCE. [Occult] *You learn to disrupt the fundamental patterns of communication between two parties.* Roll Sneak+Occult to cast this spell on two parties that you have a connection to; make totemic representations of them. On a success, the parties cannot properly speak to each other until the end of the session and will choose silence over engagement. If pressed into communication, it will go badly and cause problems.

MUTUAL DELETION. [Occult] *You build symbolic anchors from the raw lexical energy in your mind and use them to sink words, unreachable, to murky depths.* Roll Compel+Occult to cast this spell on a target (you must have a sample of their writing to do so). On a success, choose three words: neither

you nor the target can say them until the next dawn. The target is literally unable to say them; if you say them by accident, you take 1 Mind stress each time.

MEDIUM

NOMENIC EXCISION. [Occult] *Your name grows on you unwanted like a tumour; you cut away parts of it, leaving yourself pristine and nameless once more.* Once per session, when you have a few minutes to perform the ritual, you can remove one minor or moderate Shadow fallout as you slice your name away from reality.

THE WILL BUT NOT THE WAY. [Occult] *You slice the air and carve words out of your enemies' mouths, fouling their incantations.* When someone attempts to cast a spell within earshot of you, roll Fix+Occult to cast this spell. On a success, the spell twists to have the opposite effect of what the caster intended. The more entrenched and powerful the spell, the higher the difficulty of the challenge.

NECROMANTIC LOCUTION. [Occult] *You speak an executed word, casting the restless ghost of it back into the world in a burst of anguish and madness.* Roll Resist+Occult to cast this spell. On a success, you imbue a word from a dead language with a semblance of life and speak it aloud. You (and anyone standing nearby who can hear you speak) mark D8 stress to Blood or Mind.

HIGH

METAPHYSICAL AMPUTATION. [Occult] *Everything is words, even the fundamental forces that power reality. In one glittering moment, you see through layers of misdirection to the truth.* This advance is only usable once. You may either: a) remove a word or phrase from your character sheet, or b) remove a word or phrase from the copy of Spire that your GM is using to run the game. Reality will warp to accommodate the edit.



THE CHILDREN OF THE RUNESTACK - STEVEN HUMPRIES

The Runestack is a tumbledown disused chimney hidden deep in the bowels of the Works, connected to some ancient, still-humming machine storeys below. In the dark – and it is often dark – it glows with a pallid green light that shines weakly through sigils carved in the walls by the Children, who live in dwellings nailed and tied to the interior walls. Folk don't go near the Runestack because it's dangerous, and because if the Children catch you they'll mug you at best (and pitch you down the chimney into the nightmare energies beneath at worst).

The Children – none of whom are older than twenty, and all of whom bear some mark of disfigurement, disability or madness – are controlled by a gangly, toothless, half-blind drow called Mister Tick. He alone guards the secrets of the sigils that protect them from the “Green Ague”, as he calls it. He entrusts his diminutive lieutenants with a fraction of this knowledge, and they shimmy up the sides of the chimney to reinforce the sigils every few months. The Children also act as spies, thieves and enforcers for Mister Tick, scavenging what they can from the nearby factories and tenements and handing it on to him. He is too infirm to leave the Runestack, and believes that the energies – properly tempered – are keeping him alive.

Some children grow older and escape the cycle of theft and abuse; most die. Those who get out alive find themselves plagued by nightmares of Mister Tick's leering face, green sigils burning in their mind's eye and the furious elemental chaos bleeding up from beneath the floor.

REQUIREMENT: Escape the worship-cult of Mister Tick in the Runestack.

REFRESH: Steal something valuable – for yourself, not for anyone else.

LOW

HEAR-ME-NOT RUNE. [Occult] *Mister Tick taught you the trick of evading detection while you do your dirty work.* Roll Sneak+Occult to cast this spell by scratching a complex sigil into a door. Until you open it or fall asleep, no-one will think to come through the door, no matter what they hear on the other side; they'll find an excuse not to, forget or simply not consider it as an option.

SEE-ME-NOT RUNE. [Occult] *You scratch the patterns into your red-raw skin, over and over, using your*

body as a magic circle. Roll Sneak+Occult to cast this spell. On a success, until the end of the current situation, people won't notice you as long as you keep scratching the runes marked over your neck and forearms.

BLINK-BLIND MARK. [Occult] *Mister Tick used to hold you down and carve itchy sigils into your skin with needles so he could see through your eyes.* Roll Investigate+Occult to cast this spell as you mark a simple sigil on someone's skin or clothing. You can cast it on yourself and either up to four willing targets or one unwilling target per attempt. On a success, when you close your eyes, you see through theirs; if you have multiple runes in play, you can choose which you see. The effect lasts until you go to sleep (which is difficult, because you can't really close your eyes until your target does).

SAFE-SKIN SIGIL. [Occult] *You clambered up crumbling brick walls to etch this rune into the chimney; it keeps the Green Ague away, or so you're told.* Roll Fix+Occult to cast this spell by carving a rune into a wall. On a success, energies near the rune are muffled and subdued – fires give off less warmth, sound is quieter and light dims. It also blunts the effects of weird energies on the drow body, allowing those nearby to roll with mastery when resisting occult power, radiation leaks or the body-warping effects of the Heart.

GOLD-SIGHT SIGIL. [Occult] *In this neighbourhood, the scratches on door frames let the other Children know if a building offers shelter, danger or profit.* Roll Investigate+Occult to cast this spell by carving a simple set of runes on an exterior door frame, windowsill or wall of a building. On a success, you know the following: where the most valuable item in the building is (and a rough idea of how to get there), what sort of guardians there are and if the building is dangerous in some way.

QUICK-BLOOD SIGIL. [Occult] *Every Child had this rune scratched into their knife, shiv or razor: it showed that you had each other's backs.* Roll Fix+Occult to cast this spell by etching the rune onto an edged melee weapon. When two or more people attack the same target and they both carry a weapon marked with the rune, their attacks gain the Brutal tag. The effect is permanent unless the weapon is destroyed.

PLAYER NAME

CHARACTER NAME

CLASS

DURANCE

SKILLS

- Compel ☐
- Deceive ☐
- Fight ☐
- Fix ☐
- Investigate ☐
- Pursue ☐
- Resist ☐
- Sneak ☐
- Steal ☐

DOMAINS

- Academia ☐
- Crime ☐
- Commerce ☐
- High Society ☐
- Low Society ☐
- Occult ☐
- Order ☐
- Religion ☐
- Technology ☐

KNACKS

EQUIPMENT

REFRESH

ABILITIES

BONDS

FALLOUT

FREE SLOTS

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

RESISTANCES

Blood

Mind

Silver

Shadow

Reputation

Armour

CURRENT STRESS

TOTAL STRESS:

THANKS TO

Our playtesters, who include but are not limited to: Helen Gould, Paul Gregory, Elizabeth Simoens, Ben Sabin, Clare Jones, Jon Bent, Wil Cornish, Dylan Malenfant, and Eoin Dooley.

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The Spire discord and broader community, who are a daily source of inspiration and amaze us with their own strange visions of the city.

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