

Children of the Dark

Content Warning: *Children of the Dark* is a modern-day horror-action game strongly based on the “splatterpunk” and “gothic-noir” genres of 1990s-era roleplaying. As such, this setting contains violence, the supernatural, strong language, some mild sexual content, and occasional depictions of drug abuse. Darker topics—like child abuse, human trafficking, and the return of fascism in the Western world—are touched upon as well, but truly graphic details are glossed over in favor of a game that avoids real-world topics that may be too heavy or too personal for a group of friends sitting around a table and rolling dice.

Your group is the ultimate arbiter of how “mature” you want your game to be. If you want *Children of the Dark* to be a game about weird superheroes beating up the bad guys and saving the day, go for it. If you prefer a game where the heroes are only slightly less monstrous than the villains, or are grappling with serious personal problems between missions, that’s fine too. But more than anything, sit down before you play and discuss what everyone will be comfortable with. Get on the same page before you start rolling dice. Everyone will be happier for it.

Introduction

Since the earliest known times, humanity has feared the dark. Our primitive ancestors feared it so much that they mastered fire—a destructive and deadly force—to keep it at bay. As they gathered around their barely-tamed fires, they told each other stories about the things that lived in the dark, stories about monsters and evil gods.

Humanity was right to fear the dark.

In a time before recorded history, so ancient that even the earliest stories have only inklings of its occurrence, something came out of the dark to enslave humanity. This force has been known by many names, but its most powerful servants call themselves the *Anunnaki*. Whether they named themselves for the seven primal gods of Sumeria or those gods were a vestigial memory of humanity’s oppressors is unknown. But for many centuries, they ruled unchallenged.

After generations of mastery, however, they fell from their thrones. Humans had learned how to steal their power, becoming something both more and less than human in the process. Though they were celebrated as heroes by the people they liberated, these dark saviors eventually grew feared and hated for their powers and their unsavory impulses. It wasn’t long before they too were driven out by humanity, cursed to wander the earth forsaken and alone, or else hide themselves from the sight of man lest they be hunted down.

Humanity has always told stories about the things that lived in the dark, but few understand that all such stories come back to the same source. Vampires, werewolves, demons, and other horrors—all are *the Children of the Dark*, a single race with many faces, able to hide their monstrous natures from humankind so long as they refrain from using their terrible powers. The temptation of power is too much for most, however, and they eventually reveal themselves and must flee from their former friends and loved ones or be destroyed by a howling mob. The Darkchildren are powerful, long-lived, and hard to kill—but they are not immortal.

Since the earliest known times, the Darkchildren have lived among humans, born from them but separated by their terrible power and awful secrets. They loved and hated and fought in the shadows, following their own compass for good or evil.

But now the Anunnaki have returned, and the Darkchildren are once more forced into their unlikely role as saviors of humanity. Though they live in a world that hates and fears them, the Anunnaki would see that world reduced to ashes and embers, with humankind enslaved in the ruins. Even those that hew to the monstrous side of their nature can find no accommodation with the dark gods of prehistory, for the Anunnaki despise the Darkchildren and would see them all dead for the defeat suffered in ancient times.

A war in the shadows has begun. Some mortal men and women are slowly growing to understand that their world is stranger and darker than it once was, but the Darkchildren are on the front lines just for existing. Whether they want to save the world from the mad gods who seek its conquest or simply want to be left alone to pursue their own agendas, they will inevitably come into conflict with the Anunnaki. *You* will inevitably come into conflict with the Anunnaki.

For you *are* one of the Children of the Dark, part human and part legend—savior and destroyer all in one. The Anunnaki are coming for you. Humanity would hate and fear you if they learned the truth. Your power will eventually drive you mad and turn you into the monster that others think you are. Don't let any of that stop you.

Be a monster. Serve the darkness. Save the world.

Welcome to the Dark...

Welcome to *Children of the Dark*, a modern day urban fantasy action-horror game for Cortex Prime. In this game, you take on the role of the **Darkchildren**, an ancient race capable of changing from human to monster and back, and their allies as they fight a war against the **Anunnaki**, a group of godlike eldritch beings whose origins go back to the beginnings of human civilization.

This game takes many of its cues from similar “dark fantasy” novels, stories, and games, notably the classic World of Darkness games by White Wolf, the novella *Cabal* by Clive Barker (and its film adaptation, *Nightbreed*), Palladium's *Nightbane* role-playing game (which itself was inspired heavily by the World of Darkness and *Nightbreed*), Simon R. Green's *Nightside* novels, and the *Underworld* and *Hellraiser* film franchises. Just about any work that could be described as “gothic-punk” or “urban fantasy” would work within the framework of *Children of the Dark*, but those are the most obvious and direct influences.

While the game generally presumes that players will be taking the role of the eponymous Darkchildren, future options will also explore playing human characters from the mundane to the magical, as well as some of the other, stranger denizens of the setting.

This setting book requires the use of the Cortex Prime SRD or core rules book. While it outlines the methods of making a character and details ways to run a game in the world of *Children of the Dark*, much of this book's rules material is presented with minimal explanation, presuming familiarity with the frameworks and options offered in the Cortex Prime core rules.

Themes and Tone

Children of the Dark is a game about being a monster—and about being human. To fight monsters, you must be a monster. To save the world, you must damn yourself. Whether your character is one of the Darkchildren, one of the mysterious Nephilim, an “ordinary” human, or something else entirely, these themes resonate through the game as a whole.

The heart of *Children of the Dark* is rooted in the so-called “urban fantasy” milieu, though it takes a darker tone than most such works. To the protagonists, engaged in a shadow war against

ancient enemies, the world has suddenly become much stranger and much darker than they ever imagined it could be. But the player characters are not helpless bystanders in this war—they are on the front lines... whether they want to be or not.

The idea of being unwilling participants in a war for humanity's future touches on the theme of “fighting monsters.” Though the heroes give up much of their humanity for power, they remain *heroes*—at least in the classical sense of “people who perform mighty deeds.” Many of them at least try to remain heroes in the modern sense—of “people who do good deeds”—as well, though this is much more difficult.

The struggle to remain decent in the face of unceasing horror and the lure of power comes back to the theme of “saving the world.” The Darkchildren especially are fighting for a world that would reject them if it knew they existed, but the alternative is a scorched earth with humanity in chains. On a personal basis, each of the Darkchildren is fighting for themselves as well—for the people that they love, the homes they have left behind, for the possibility that they may one day be able to stop fighting.

For the Darkchildren, the fear of truly becoming a monster is ever-present. The raw power of their monstrous self is intoxicating, and they are in a constant struggle between needing to use that power and losing themselves to their darker nature. This is true for other characters as well to lesser degrees, but the idea of “monstrosity” is front and center for the Darkchildren. They cannot escape their nature.

Basic Principles

This game, like most games created by the author, follows a number of important principles that you should consider following before even picking up a piece of paper and deciding who or what your character is. Many of these principles apply primarily to the Game Moderator, so it's especially important for that individual to read this section.

The Golden Rule

The **Golden Rule**—sometimes called “Rule Zero”—says that all other rules can be changed in service to the story. This doesn't mean that rules should be abandoned entirely or that anyone can ignore the rules at any time. It simply means that if a rule is getting in the way of telling a good story or having fun, then the rule is wrong.

This also touches on the concept of “rulings, not rules.” This idea says that the GM and players work together at the table to determine what works for them, rather than relying on some “canonical” explanation from an author, a work of errata, or the book itself. Authors are fallible; editors miss mistakes sometimes. Even beyond technical issues, sometimes a rule simply doesn't work as well at a specific group's table as it did for the original writer's home group.

In short: When a group encounters an issue where the rules don't work, feel free to change the rules so that they do. It's your game now.

The Silver Rule

Cortex Prime functions at its best when the players and the GM work together to tell a story, rather than treating each other as opposition or adversaries. This style of cooperative storytelling places the GM into a position where they should be thought of less as the author of a story and

more as the production crew of a movie or television series. They direct the action, produce the sets, and act as the audience for the players.

In this context, one of the most important philosophies to adopt when running a game of *Children of the Dark* is the **Silver Rule**, or “Monarda Law,” a principle created by noted game writer Dr. Jenna Moran that can be best summed up as “Never say no.”

Where “no” closes doors, “yes” opens them. Think about the ways that “yes” can advance the story and empower the player characters. This doesn’t mean to accept everything that a player says without exception; instead, look for ways that “yes” can be interesting and fun.

When a player asks you: “Can I do X?” where “I” means their character and “X” is some course of action, use one of the four answers below.

- “Yes”, if their course of actions seems interesting and harmless.
- “How?”, if you can’t figure out a plausible way to pull it off;
- “You can try!”, if it’s seems believable yet statistically impossible;
- “Yes, but...” or “Yes, and...”, if you can think of a good catch.

Each of these answers can add enjoyment and possibilities to a game. Saying “No” rarely does. “No” should only be used when a player’s request would detract from the fun of the rest of the group in a significant fashion, and only after pursuing the previous four responses.

In short, “No” is the court of last resort, a way of closing off options rather than creating new ones.

Fun fact: In the language of flowers, the monarda means “Your whims are unbearable.”

The Copper Rule

Another principle common to *Cortex Prime* games is the notion of “failing forward.” For the purpose of *Children of the Dark*, we’re going to refer to this as the **Copper Rule**.

Essentially, this principle means that no single roll failing should result in a dead end for the players. A failure should always include a method of moving on from that failure in order to keep the adventure moving and the players engaged.

When they lose a trail, there should be a way for them to find it again, perhaps with another roll. When they are defeated by a foe, the enemy is more likely to take them prisoner than to kill them outright. When a mystery is being investigated, a failed roll leads to another clue instead of to a resolution.

In short, failure should be as interesting as success—if more dangerous and complicated. Making failure boring is a good way to lose the players’ interest.

The Red Rule

This final, but highly important, rule is about the comfort and safety of everyone at the table. People play role-playing games for many different reasons, but never to feel harassed or traumatized. The **Red Rule** essentially says that a player-controlled character can only be seduced or otherwise put into a sexual situation if the player is okay with it. Otherwise, any such attempt automatically fails.

This rule can also be extended to any situation that makes a given player particularly uncomfortable or touches upon a personal trauma. The GM exists to moderate and adjudicate the story being told at a given table, which includes safeguarding the emotional health of the players. In turn, the players have an obligation to be courteous and respectful to one another, as well as to their GM.

Unless your group is explicitly interested in exploring and confronting the traumas that they have experiences in the past through the relatively safe medium of tabletop roleplaying, then avoid it. Listen to them when they say “This makes me uncomfortable.”

Sidebar: Behind the Curtain

Children of the Dark is a game about people who are forced to hide their true selves from a hostile world, working to make a better one from the shadows despite the oppression they face from powerful individuals and a corrupt society. If you think this might sound like a metaphor for the struggles faced by women, racial minorities, and LGBTQ+ individuals in the modern world, then you’re absolutely correct.

At its core, this game seeks to be inclusive and thoughtful, putting people with marginalized identities front and center. Being a Darkchild can serve as a power fantasy for people from such groups as well as allowing them to tell stories about their own struggles in the guise of a game about shapeshifters and magic.

There are good reasons why the villains of the piece are depicted as racist, xenophobic fascists, out of touch with the modern world and incapable of understanding goodness. If you find that you’re offended by a game that positions itself as staunchly anti-fascist, pro-equality, feminist, and queer, then the author kindly suggests the following remedy: Fuck right off.

Glossary

The Children of the Dark are an ancient people with their own society and terms. At the same time, the vast majority of modern Darkchildren are new to the world of shadows, and they’re coming up with new slang all the time. The following is a list of some of the common slang terms, formal terms, and other suchlike.

Alu: A faceless humanoid servant of the *Anunnaki*. These tall, gaunt creatures have over-long limbs and lack eyes, nose, or ears. Their mouth is a sucking hole surrounded by teeth, like that of a lamprey, concealed beneath their “chin.” Sometimes known as *the Slendermen*.

Anunnaki: An ancient race of “gods” who once ruled over humanity before being overthrown and imprisoned in a hellish otherworld. Their number seems to be seven, though if they are all the original seven who ruled in ancient times is unclear. They possess near-immortality, immense mystical powers, and a desire to be worshiped with blood sacrifice.

Antediluvian Period: The semi-mythical “pre-flood” world ruled over by the *Anunnaki* before their overthrow by the *Igigi*. Almost nothing of this time survives outside of vague myths from the dawn of human civilization and a few mystical *relics*.

Bane: A supernatural compulsion or restriction possessed by *Darkchildren*. Encountering their bane can cause Darkchildren to suffer physical pain or mental anguish—or worse.

Behemoth: A *Lineage* of *Darkchildren* whose monstrous form is defined by enormous size and power. Sometimes called *hulks* or *things*. Associated with the sin of Wrath.

Bender: A *psychic* whose powers run toward mind reading, mind control, suggestion, and altering perceptions. Thought to come from the term *mindbender*.

Biomechanical: A *Lineage* of *Darkchildren* whose monstrous form is defined by the mixing of flesh with inanimate substances. Sometimes called *golems* or *borgs*. Associated with the sin of Greed.

Black Solstice: June 20, 2012. A day when the sky turned black and the sun rose as a dim red star. A day of riots, suicides, and tragedies whose full scope is still being felt over five years later. Also the day Earth was secretly invaded by the *Anunnaki*, and the day that hundreds—maybe thousands—of new *Darkchildren* went through their *First Change*.

Blackout: A darkness-induced psychotic episode suffered on occasion by a *Darkchild* after irresponsible use of their powers or being overwhelmed by the stresses of their dual life.

Brainer: A *psychic* whose powers focus on precognition, clairvoyance, and other sensory powers.

Breaker: A *psychic* whose powers stem from telekinesis—typically destructive telekinesis.

Cabal: A close-knit group of *Darkchildren*. In older times, a cabal was a much looser grouping, often based on the commonality of their *Tenebris* forms. Modern cabals are more often based on friendship, common goals, or mutual membership in a *Conspiracy*. Modern *Darkchildren* sometimes call such groups *cliques* instead. In game terms, a cabal is the player character group.

Cap: Slang term for a super-soldier or other human augmented through science instead of magic.

CAUSE: Citizens Against the Unnatural, the Supernatural, and Extraterrestrials. A mutual support network for humans and Nephilim who have suffered from occult or “alien” activity. A *Conspiracy* devoted to revealing the truth about the *Shadow War* to the public at large.

Cell: The local arm of a *Conspiracy*, or its representation in a given region. Some cells work together closely, while others barely speak to one another. A cell is typically composed of several cabals—or can be made up of people who are in several different cabals.

Cherub: A *Choir* of *Nephilim* whose powers are primarily based around defense of self and others. Plural is Cherubim.

Choir: A traditional way of dividing up *Nephilim* based around whether their powers are primarily offensive (*Seraphim*), defensive (*Cherubim*), or healing (*Malachim*) in nature.

Church of the Fallen Angel: A *Conspiracy* open to both *Darkchildren* and *Nephilim*, who consider themselves servants of Lucifer, in his guise as God’s tempting angel.

Conspiracy: A political or religious grouping of *Darkchildren*, mortals, or other beings involved in the *Shadow War*. The *Anunnaki* comprise one such Conspiracy, to which all others are at least theoretically opposed. These factions are so named for their general air of secrecy and loose framework. Most Conspiracies are composed of decentralized *cells* and *cabals* rather than having a central leadership; the *Anunnaki* are the major exception.

Cultist: An ordinary human who has sold their soul to the *Anunnaki* in exchange for wealth, status, or power, often magical power.

Curtain, the: The dimensional barrier between Earth and the Shadowlands. Entering the Shadowlands is sometimes referred to as “drawing back the Curtain.”

Darkchild: One of the *Children of the Dark*, an ancient race of shapeshifters who can transform between an apparently human shape and a monstrous shape born from nightmares. Sometimes used as *Darkchilde*. Older Children of the Dark use *Darkchilder* as the plural, but modern ones use *Darkchildren*.

Devourer: A *Lineage* of *Darkchildren* whose monstrous form is defined by endless hunger. Sometimes called *leeches* or *wendigos*. Associated with the sin of Gluttony.

Dupe: A mortal working for the Anunnaki without knowledge of the Shadow War. Some cults are filled with dupes rather than actual cultists, and many governments are run by dupes.

Elder: Traditionally, a *Darkchild* who has survived more than a century. Modern Darkchildren sometimes use this to refer to anyone who went through their *First Change* before the *Black Solstice*.

Empire Noir: A mafia-like *Conspiracy* of *Darkchildren* who seek to rule the criminal underworld with their supernatural powers. Allies in the war against the *Anunnaki*, but always looking for a profit.

Ensi: An aristocratic caste of semi-immortal sorcerer-priests who have served the *Anunnaki* for millennia. The Ensi do not die of old age, but internecine violence and the displeasure of their masters have reduced their numbers over time. Some *cultists* believe that loyal service to the Anunnaki is the path to being elevated to a place among the Ensi. Sometimes called *Shadow Lords* or *Princes of Darkness*.

Ether Society, the: A *Conspiracy* of human mystics who have studied magic since the Victorian Period. With the new surge of magical energy on Earth since *Black Solstice*, they have begun rebuilding ancient magical traditions, creating new ones, and hunting for *relics* across the world—often taking them from their traditional owners in the process.

Faithful, the: A *Family* of *Nephilim* who believe themselves to be the descendants of fallen angels.

Family: A grouping of *Nephilim* who believe in one of three different origin stories for their kind. The Nephilim Families include: the *Gibborim*, who believe they are the inheritors of a fallen civilization; the *Taken*, who believe they were the victims of an unknown species of monstrous kidnappers; and the *Faithful*, who believe that they are the literal descendants of angels.

Fallen Ones, the: An unknown race believed to be responsible for the creation of the *Nephilim*. Sometimes known as *Atlanteans*, *Lemurians*, or *Anakim*.

First Change: The first time a *Darkchild* assumes their monstrous *Tenebris* form. The First Change can be traumatic or painful for most Darkchildren, and many believe that their *Tenebris* form springs from their state of mind at the time of the First Change. Sometimes called the *Rumspringa*, after the Amish ritual in which young people are sent out into the world before assuming their adult responsibilities.

Gibborim, the: A *Family* of *Nephilim* who consider their origins to be with a forgotten civilization destroyed by the fall of the *Anunnaki*.

Girtab: The elite monstrous servants of the *Anunnaki*, hideous centaur-like creatures with the body of a scorpion, the torso of a human, and pincers instead of hands. Sometimes called *Scorpion Kings*.

Grotesque: A *Lineage* of *Darkchildren* whose monstrous form is virtually unrecognizable as anything human, or who would be almost human save for a nauseating corruption of their form. Sometimes called *freaks* or *mutants*. Associated with the sin of Sloth.

Hound: The common monstrous soldiers of the *Anunnaki*, resembling gaunt humanoid jackals with no eyes and armor sewn directly into their flesh. Hounds are often brought to Earth in packs to hunt the *Darkchildren*. More properly called *Urdimmu*.

Igigi: The so-called “gods of the earth” who are thought to be the forerunners of the Darkchildren. They overthrew the *Anunnaki* and were worshiped as gods before themselves being cast down by humanity and chased out of civilization.

Illuminated, the: A *Conspiracy* formed by *Darkchildren* and sorcerers who want to use their powers to gain influence over human society.

Infernal: A *Lineage* of *Darkchildren* whose monstrous form is defined by traits associated with demons, devils, and angels. Sometimes called *tempters* or *the wicked*. Associated with the sin of Pride.

Invidian: A *Lineage* of *Darkchildren* whose monstrous form is defined by being both inhumanly beautiful and horrifically marred. Sometimes called *muses* or *beauties*. Associated with the sin of Envy.

Kulitu: A *servitor* race of aquatic humanoids who worshiped the *Anunnaki* in ancient times and serve them once more in the modern day. Though semi-immortal, a prehistoric curse has made almost all their males infertile, forcing them to interbreed with humans to keep their culture alive. Sometimes called *Fishwives*.

Kusarikku: A *servitor* race of the *Anunnaki* who strongly resemble the Minotaur of Greek myth. These powerful humanoids serve as shock troops for their masters in the *Shadowlands*, but are rarely sent to Earth due to their low intelligence and monstrous appearance. Sometimes called *Bullheads*.

Labyrinth: A special sort of lair created by one or more *Darkchildren*. A labyrinth is a pocket dimension that overlaps with the real world, twisting the environment into something from a nightmare but giving the creators a home team advantage within its bounds.

Lineage: An archaic term for the broad categories that a *Darkchild's* monstrous appearance can fall into. Older *Darkchildren* often fell into loose *cabals* based on their Lineage, but modern ones tend to eschew such appearance-based politics. There are traditionally seven such groupings.

Magus: A user of magic; plural *magi*. Sometimes called sorcerers, warlocks, witches, wizards, or other things depending on their culture of origin. Magic has become significantly stronger since the *Black Solstice*.

Malach: A *Choir* of *Nephilim* whose powers are based around healing the body and mind. Plural is Malachim.

Mask: A contemptuous way of referring to a *Darkchild's* human shape. Some *Darkchildren* believe that the *Tenebris* is their true shape, and their human seeming merely a convenient disguise.

Midnight Runners, the: A *Conspiracy* of *Darkchildren* and their human allies. They consider the war against the *Anunnaki* a losing cause and seek to avoid the war by providing homes and aid to *Darkchildren* and their human families. Currently undertaking the ambitious task of building a secret *Darkchild* homeland somewhere in the *Shadowlands*—right under the noses of the *Anunnaki*.

Mortal: A human of non-supernatural origin, as opposed to the *Darkchildren* and the *Nephilim*. Can still gain access to strange powers, such as psychic abilities or magic, but lacking in innate mystical abilities.

Nephilim: A group of strange beings with powers over light and healing. All were once human before being taken away—sometimes for years or decades—and changed into something else. Traditionally enemies of the *Darkchildren*, currently their tentative allies against the *Anunnaki*.

Orphan: A *Nephilim* who lacks membership in any of the three *Families*.

Project Tiamat: A rogue scientific group that broke from *Ziggurat, Inc.* after finding out the truth behind the company. They now act as an independent *Conspiracy* who augment ordinary humans with science and build highly advanced weaponry for the highest bidder.

Psi Division: A *Conspiracy* of former government agents and their young charges who fled the programs that created them and joined together for mutual protection. After *Black Solstice*, most remaining government-funded psychics were slaughtered, leaving Psi Division the major power in the world of psionic ability. Sometimes called *the Thought Police*.

Psychic: A human with unusual mental powers. Most psychics are focused in one of three disciplines: telepathy (reading or altering minds), telekinesis (moving objects), or metacognition (perceiving beyond the limits of the five senses). Many psychics are the result of Cold War era government programs.

Relic: A mystically infused item of ancient origin. Most relics are thought to come from the *Antediluvian Period*.

Resistance, the: A *Conspiracy* comprised of a broad group of *cells* of *Darkchildren* who have one common goal: the destruction of the *Anunnaki*. These groups range from valiant freedom fighters to heartless terrorists—sometimes within the same cell.

Seraph: A *Choir* of *Nephilim* whose powers are based around offense, attack, and destruction. Plural is Seraphim.

Servitor: The various inhuman creatures who serve the *Anunnaki* directly in the *Shadowlands*, sometimes dispatched to the mortal world as security, shock troops, or infiltrators.

Seven Deadly Sins, the: An early European concept of the primary ways in which a person can fall from grace in the eyes of god, thought to have originated among the “desert fathers” of 3rd Century A.D. Egypt. It became common during this period for *Darkchildren* of European, Middle Eastern, and North African descent to align themselves according to the sin they perceived as being responsible for the appearance of their *Tenebris* form, supplanting prior, looser categories.

Shade: An inhabitant of the *Shadowlands* with a strong resemblance to a once-living person from Earth. Sometimes, when a person dies on Earth, a shade of them appears in the *Shadowlands*. This does not occur for all people, so there is continuing argument over whether a shade is a person’s soul condemned to a ghastly afterlife or merely a copy of that person generated at the moment of their death.

Shadow War: The current struggle between the *Anunnaki* and those aware of their invasion of Earth. This war is kept secret as much as possible to avoid humanity rising up against both the *Anunnaki* and the *Darkchildren*.

Shadowlands: A parallel dimension accessible from Earth through mirrors, deep caves, and magical portals. Strongly resembles the Earth of the ancient past—but reduced to a charred, ashen wasteland. Sometimes called *the Underworld*, *Hell*, *Sheol*, *Xibalba*, *Tartarus*, or *Shit Narnia*. Inhabited by the *Anunnaki*, their horrific minions, and *shades*, who are seemingly the souls of the dead, as well as a few *Darkchildren* and some very unlucky humans. Called *Nibiru* by the *Anunnaki* themselves.

Shedu: A *servitor* race of the *Anunnaki* who resemble Biblical angels in their true forms, but who can assume the shape of beautiful, many-winged humans. Sometimes called *death angels*.

Sigma Red: A loose coalition of former government agents who regard all supernatural beings as their enemies. A few *Darkchildren* have been accepted as allies by this *Conspiracy*, but generally only those who worked for the government in some capacity before their *First Change*.

Sirrush: A variety of different hybrid war-beasts created by the *Anunnaki* with dark magic. All resemble unholy combinations of feline, bird, and serpent in various combinations. Sometimes called *chimeras*.

Sleeper: A *Darkchild* who has not yet gone through their *First Change*. Before *Black Solstice*, most Sleepers had a good chance to live out their whole lives as ordinary humans. Since that time, more Sleepers have awakened than ever before—and they continue to awaken at younger ages. Sleepers are essentially ordinary humans, but some magical talents can discern their true nature before the First Change comes.

Sorcerer: A mortal who has mastered the ancient arts of magic, a power that has returned to Earth in full force since *Black Solstice*.

Taken, the: A *Family* of *Nephilim* who believe that their condition was forced on them by alien kidnappers of unknown origin and motives.

Tenebris: The monstrous alternate form assumed by a *Darkchild* when he or she changes shape. Each Tenebris is unique, but they tend to fall into broad categories called *Lineages*. Sometimes called *the Horrorshow* by younger Darkchildren.

Therianthrope: A *Lineage* of *Darkchildren* whose monstrous forms resemble humanoid animals. Sometimes called *weres* or *beasts*. Associated with the sin of Lust.

Ziggurat, Inc.: A major international conglomerate with its hands in social media, internet service providers, and other high-tech applications. A front for the *Anunnaki* and their cults.

Chapter 1: Rules of the Dark

The *Children of the Dark* setting uses the **Cortex Prime** rules set and presumes some level of familiarity with those rules, as well as access to the Cortex Prime System Reference Document. Rather than reconstructing the system from scratch, this chapter exists mainly to talk about which pieces of the highly-modular Cortex Prime engine will be used in this game.

Traits

Traits are the core elements of a Cortex Prime character. The primary Traits used in *Children of the Dark* are **attributes**, **skills** (and **specialties**), **distinctions**, **powers** (and **talents**), and **signature assets**.

Attributes: Characters use the three standard attributes—Mental, Physical, and Social.

Skills: Characters use the standard skill list, as well as D6 specialties.

Distinctions: Player characters have three distinctions that they use to define themselves. These work mechanically as usual, but each one has a specific meaning to the character (see below for more information).

Powers: Player characters gain powers based on their character archetype. For Darkchildren, their starting powers are based on their Lineage (their monstrous self), while other archetypes gain powers based on their innate abilities. Every player character also has access to talents, special abilities that act like SFX in the core rules or grant access to a new power trait. Talents are divided into “trees,” accessible only by characters of the appropriate archetype.

Signature Assets: These work as described in the core rules, but some archetypes have special benefits when using signature assets.

Variant Rules

This setting utilizes **stress** as the primary consequence of combat, with characters being able to suffer **mental stress**, **physical stress**, or **social stress**. As usual, suffering stress over D12 removes a character from the scene and causes them to step up their linked **trauma**. Characters cannot **push stress** unless they have an appropriate talent allowing them to do so.

Rather than having a GM pool of plot points, this setting utilizes the **Doom Pool** variant rule. Characters do not receive complications automatically for rolling hitches; instead, the GM pays the player a plot point to add a die to the doom pool. The details of this variant rule are discussed in the System Reference Document. Unless otherwise noted by a specific ability, any GMC that would normally spend a plot point to activate a power or talent instead spends a doom die of at least D6 size.

The Doom Pool is **limited**, so any uncontested roll is made against the **default difficulty** of 2D6 unless doom dice are spent to increase it. This is still referred to as “rolling against the doom pool” in the rules.

Though players can create a D6 asset by spending a plot point as usual (or a D8 asset for a stunt), this setting also uses the **action-created assets** rule, allowing characters to make an action to create an asset with their effect die. This asset lasts for the rest of the scene or until removed by player or GM action. Such an asset does not require a plot point to create. The opposition for the asset creation action is 2D6 unless the GM spends a die from the Doom Pool to set a higher

one; the difficulty is then two dice equal to size of the die spent. (So spending a D8 would create an opposition difficulty of 2D8, for example.)

Rather than keeping scenario records, characters in *Children of the Dark* use **milestones** to earn experience points (XP), which are spent to gain character upgrades, story-based benefits, and faction perks. The specifics of how milestones and unlockables work in *Children of the Dark* are discussed in their own section later in this chapter.

This setting makes extensive use of the **Mobs and Bosses** variant rule, with hordes of minor enemies being treated as a single character in some cases while extremely powerful supernatural beings (or just especially large ones) can have multiple Threat dice to represent their scale of power.

Character Creation

The process for creating a character in *Children of the Dark* is a relatively simple process. First, decide on what sort of character you want to play, then follow the steps below.

Step 0: Character Concept

Before you even begin making mechanical choices, think about the sort of story you want to tell with your character. Are you one of the Darkchildren, recently come into your power and trying to find your way? Are you a Nephilim, once human but changed against your will into something strange and terrible? Are you a mortal, human through and through, plunged into a war against monsters with only your wits and courage?

While much of this setting book assumes your group is all or mostly Darkchildren, options have been given to play other character archetypes as well. Once you have your basic concept in mind, you can move onto step one.

Step 1: Archetype

At this point, choose one of the character archetypes that best represents your concept as a starting point for building the character.

For **Darkchildren**, this includes selecting one of the available Lineages, an archetype describing your character's monstrous form in broad strokes. There are seven such Lineages, each of which gives access to different powers and talents.

For the **Nephilim**, these choices are based around the three common manifestations of their powers, known as Choirs.

The most complicated choice comes from ordinary **mortals**, whose archetype is based around their training and whether or not they possess any preternatural powers. Even humans who lack psychic ability, magic powers, or scientific enhancement of any sort are often capable of incredible feats of skill and bravery.

Choosing your archetype will typically give you a small selection of powers and one or more free talents, as well as several *highlighted skills*. Each of your highlighted skills starts at D6 instead of D4; if you would gain a highlighted skill more than once, it starts at D8 instead of D4.

Step 2: Adjust Attributes

All characters start with a D8 in each attribute: Mental, Physical, and Social. Players may step back an attribute (from D8 to D6) to step up a different attribute (from D8 to D10). This means

that a starting character may have attributes of D8, D8, and D8, or D6, D8, and D10, arranged to taste.

Step 3: Choose Distinctions

Players should create three distinctions to add to their character sheet. Distinctions can represent roles, relationships, quirks, personality types, character histories, or any other descriptor that helps to flesh out who the character is. For *Children of the Dark*, player characters need to arrange their distinctions in a specific way.

The character's first distinction is their *concept*, a statement about who they are as a person and their outlook on the world. This distinction should speak to who the character is as a person, including a short statement about their supernatural nature (if any). A concept distinction could be "Uncertain Young Darkchild," "Avenging Angel of God," "Former Government Psychic," or the like. Rolling a D4 for this distinction instead of a D8 can be used to represent a way in which your preconceptions can work against you in times of crisis.

The second distinction is your *darkness*, a statement about a vice, moral failing, or emotional scar your character possesses. This distinction should cause your character trouble more often than not, but can be a source of dark strength in certain occasions. A darkness distinction could be something like "Recovering Alcoholic," "Painful Childhood," "Doesn't Know When to Shut Up," or something similar. Rolling a D4 for this distinction instead of a D8 can be used to represent a moment where your vice overcomes your virtue in a manner that makes life harder for you.

The third distinction a character possesses is their *façade*, a statement about how others see them or how they attempt to present themselves to the world. Where the concept and darkness distinctions are about what's inside a character, the façade distinction is about the face they present to the world. Rolling a D4 rather than a D8 with this distinction can represent letting that mask slip so that people can see the "real you" beneath it.

Remember that in addition to any specific talents your character type grants, all distinctions have this SFX as well:

- *Hinder*: Gain 1 Plot Point when you roll a D4 instead of a D8 for this distinction.

Step 4: Choose Skills

Typically, each character will now have several highlighted skills. You may assign nine points among your skills, with each die step costing one point. A starting character cannot have a skill rated higher than D10.

Step 5: Select Talent

Every character starts with at least one Talent, and some start with more. Typically, at this stage, you will select one Talent for which you qualify. Check your character archetype to see if it grants additional Talents as well.

Step 6: Spend Bonus Points

At this point, your character gains five bonus points to spend on signature assets, specialties, and talents. You can spend your bonus points on:

- 1 point: Step up a skill.
- 1 point: Gain a signature asset at D6.
- 1 point: Gain a specialty in a skill rated at D6 or higher.

- 1 points: Increase a D6 signature asset to D8.
- 2 points: Gain a signature power at D6, or increase a D6 signature power to D8
- 2 points: Gain a talent for which you qualify.
- 2 points: Add an item SFX to an existing signature asset.

Step 7: Biographical Information

Last but not least, you'll want to fill in the blanks on any character information you haven't created up to this point. Work with your group to find ways to build connections between your character and theirs. Come up with a name, a background, and a "look" for your character. Think about how they dress and what others see when they look at your character. You may want to think about your character's personal history to some degree, or simply leave that to be fleshed out during play.

Advancement

Characters grow, change, and evolve over time. Their powers increase, their mastery over those powers improves, and they gain greater resources with which to wage their war. *Children of the Dark* tracks this advancement using **experience points (XP)**, which are gained as characters pursue their goals, overcome challenges, and face their inner demons, as represented by **milestones**.

Every character has a personal milestone that represents their ongoing inner struggle against the darker parts of their nature. Additionally, the entire group shares a scenario milestone, which changes from adventure to adventure. Sometimes, a given scenario might have two different milestones, or a character's faction might grant him an optional milestone to pursue. A character can only have two "active" milestones at a given time, one of which must be his personal milestone.

As noted in *Cortex Prime*, milestones have three different levels: a 1 XP level that can be hit as many times as it applies; a 3 XP level that can only be hit once per scene; and a 10 XP level that can only be hit once per session. When a personal milestone's 10 XP trigger is hit, it represents a major moment of personal growth and development; the character should then pick a new personal milestone to represent a new direction for his character, which he can begin earning XP from during the next session.

When a scenario milestone's 10 XP trigger is hit, however, it generally represents either the end of the current adventure (or at least the end of the character's participation in that significant story beat). A completed scenario milestone is not replaced until the beginning of a new scenario, but the character can continue to gain the 1 XP and 3 XP triggers if they remain applicable.

Unlockables

Players may spend their XP between scenarios to increase their character's attributes, powers, talents, or other abilities, but XP may also be spent during a scenario to gain special perks called **unlockables**.

Generally, each scenario should come with a list of unlockables that can be bought during the adventure to gain temporary or permanent benefits, such as contacts, resources, allies, or just a

quick exit from a mission gone horribly wrong. Some example unlockables are listed in **Chapter 8: Running the Shadow War**.

Additionally, membership in a faction can grant continuing access to certain kinds of unlockables, based on the individual faction and the character's rank in that faction. For more information about the sort of benefits faction membership can bring, see **Chapter 7: Factions of the Shadow War**. Faction membership itself is a signature asset.

Training

A fair bit of a character's XP will be spent on improvements to their powers, skills, and other abilities. This XP expenditure is called *training*, and it only occurs between scenarios during downtime. No specific amount of time is necessary to train, since it's assumed that a character is exercising their abilities constantly during adventures, but a given table might decide that some particular amount of time is needed to train for certain abilities.

The following are the costs required to train abilities in *Children of the Dark*:

5 XP

- Train a skill from D4 to D6.
- Gain a new specialty for a skill rated D6 or higher.
- Gain a new favored power at D6.
- Gain a D6 signature asset.

10 XP

- Step up a D6 trait to a D8 trait.
- Gain a new non-favored power at D6.
- Gain a new favored talent.
- Add an item SFX to a signature asset.

15 XP

- Step up a D8 trait to a D10 trait.
- Gain a new non-favored talent.

20 XP

- Step up a D10 trait to a D12 trait. This cannot be purchased for non-favored powers.

Chapter 2: Powers and Talents

In the context of the *Cortex Prime* rules, a **power** is a special trait representing some exceptional or preternatural quality possessed by a character that sets them apart from baseline humanity. A power may be gained through intense training, supernatural ability, or scientific augmentation, but ultimately all powers work basically the same way. A power has a die rating range between D6 and D12 that represents how far-reaching, extensive, or significant the power is.

The *Cortex Prime SRD* addresses power ratings in more detail, but suffice to say that a D6 power is relatively minor while a D12 power is nigh unto godlike. By themselves, powers just do what they say they do. They are usually not the primary die in an action, but are instead added to a dice pool when their use might impact the action's success or failure.

Some powers come along with **limits**, representing ways in which that power is flawed or can fail in the right circumstances.

Talents

On the other side of the coin from powers are **talents**, special ways in which characters can use their powers and abilities in specific circumstances. Talents take the place of SFX from the *Cortex Prime SRD*, acting in much the same way but with broader applicability. A talent might allow a character to heal others by taking on their pain, regenerate quickly from wounds, attack multiple targets with bolts of darkness, or otherwise modify the way his powers work. A talent might also allow a character to use his mundane abilities more efficiently, such as being able to squeeze off multiple rounds from a handgun with greater accuracy or quickly escape from a bad situation.

Talents are grouped by character archetype, with characters being able to more cheaply purchase talents from within their own specific archetype. For a character from a supernatural archetype, only the talents from within his specific sub-type are available at the lower cost. For example, a Darkchild from the Grotesque Lineage treats Grotesque Talents as favored talents, while Devourer Talents would be more expensive; since being a Nephilim is an inherent prerequisite for Seraph Talents, the Darkchild cannot purchase those at all.

The major exception to this are Mundane Talents. These talents represent training that any person can pursue, requiring no supernatural or mystical ability. They are considered to be "favored talents" for all characters, regardless of actual archetype.

A talent will sometimes list a prerequisite in terms of skills, powers, or other traits. The character must have this prerequisite in order to take the talent; if they were to somehow permanently lose access to the prerequisite trait, they would also lose the associate talent. Generally, a permanent loss of something a player expended resources on should result in the player being refunded those resources, which can then be spent on something else at a future time.

Talent Types

Characters may choose from the following types of talents, based on their archetype and specific abilities.

- **Mundane Talents:** Talents that can be chosen by any person, regardless of archetype.

- **Darkchild Talents:** Talents available only to Darkchildren. These talents are subdivided based on the character's Lineage.
- **Nephilim Talents:** Talents available only to Nephilim. These talents are subdivided based on the character's Choir.
- **Magic Talents:** Talents available to characters with the Sorcery power, typically unlocked by the Arcanist Mundane Talent.
- **Psychic Talents:** Talents available to characters with a psychic power, typically unlocked by the Psionic Mundane Talent. These talents are subdivided based on the character's focus.

Mundane Talents

These talents represent skills, abilities, and powers that can be gained by even “mundane” individuals. They typically enhance normal capabilities that any person could train, but they occasionally grant access to more unusual qualities, such as magic or psychic powers.

Antiquarian

Prerequisites: Signature asset D8+ and GM's approval

The relics of the Antediluvian Period are rare and powerful items infused with the magic that was common to the age. You possess such a relic and understand its basic uses, though its power sometimes runs away from you.

Choose a signature asset you possess at D8+. That signature asset is a relic. While you carry it, you gain a power trait at D6 associated with its use. You can upgrade this power trait with XP as though it were a favored power. You can also unlock supernatural item SFX to augment your relic. If your relic is lost or shutdown, all powers and item SFX associated with it are also shutdown. (See **Chapter 6: Magic and Mentalism** for sample relics.)

You gain the following Limit:

- **Limit:** *Half-Understood Magic.* When you use the power trait from your relic in a dice pool, both 1s and 2s count as hitches. Only 1s are excluded from use as total and effect dice.

Arcanist

Prerequisites: Know D8+, specialty in Know (*arcane lore*), a distinction related to magical lore

The secrets of magic are yours to command. Whether you are a sorcerer from an ancient tradition given new life after Black Solstice or an adept from a new magical philosophy, you have unlocked the basic secrets of mysticism.

You gain Sorcery D6 as a favored power. You can only use this power as part of ritual actions, such as creating an asset or removing a complication as a bridge scene action, attacking a mystic ward in an action scene, and so on. (See the section on *ritual actions* in **Chapter 6: Magic and Mentalism**). You can take any Magic Talent for which you qualify as a favored talent.

You also gain the following Limits:

- **Limit:** *Ritual Magic.* You may only use Sorcery in dice pools for ritual magic actions.
- **Limit:** *Utility Magic.* A dice pool containing Sorcery not be used to inflict stress.

Bulwark

Prerequisites: Move D8+

You are the wall between your allies and harm. When one of your nearby allies would suffer physical stress from an attack, you may spend 1 PP to immediately interpose yourself and suffer the physical stress in their place.

Daredevil Driver

Prerequisites: Drive D8+

You're too fast to be caught, too furious to be stopped. You may spend 1 PP to double your Drive for an action. Remove the highest rolling die and keep three dice for the total.

Dart Champion

Prerequisites: Throw D8+

No one beats you in the pub. You may spend 1 PP to double your Throw in an attack against a single target. Remove the highest rolling die from your result and keep three dice for your total.

Disciplined Mind

Prerequisites: Focus D8+

You are able to block out all distractions and focus on what really matters. When you make a roll including Focus, you may replace two dice of the same size with one die at a step larger.

Expert Tracker

Prerequisites: Survive D8+

Every piece of the environment is a clue to you. When you make a roll to track an individual or find a hidden object, add a D6 and step up your effect die.

Fast Healer

Prerequisites: Labor D8+

Clean living and hard work have their benefits. You recover from fatigue and injury more quickly than usual. When you would step back physical stress or trauma, you may spend 1 PP to step them back an additional time.

Field Medic

Prerequisites: Treat D8+

Your skills at helping your companions recover from harm are unmatched. You may spend 1 PP as a bridge scene action to step back another character's stress of any one type. If the character forfeits their bridge scene action as well, step back all stress types once or any one stress type twice.

Fleet of Foot

Prerequisites: Move D8+

You really know how to hustle. When you are involved in a chase, either as the pursuer or the pursued, you may spend 1 PP to double your Move die; remove the highest rolling die and keep three dice for the total.

Gadgeteer

Prerequisites: Craft D8+, Operate D8+

You're always tinkering with something or other. When you spend 1 PP to create a gear-based asset, that asset is a D8 instead of a D6.

Additionally, when you take an action to create a gear-based asset, you may choose to add a D6 and step up the effect die, but both 1 and 2 count as hitches for this action. Only 1s are excluded from use as total and effect dice.

Gun Bunny

Prerequisites: Shoot D8+

You just love guns. When you would suffer a complication representing being out of ammunition, or when the GM spends a doom die to remove one of your signature assets that is a firearm, you may spend 1 PP to negate the complication or keep the asset. Additionally, when you spend 1 PP to create a firearm-based asset, that asset is D8 rather than D6.

Heart of the Team

Prerequisites: Focus D8+, Influence D8+

Everyone knows they can rely on you when the chips are down. You may spend PP on behalf of any member of your cabal with whom you can communicate clearly.

Incisive

Prerequisites: Influence D8+, Notice D8+

You excel at using others' words against them, leading them into verbal traps that force them to reveal more than they intended. When you are engaged in a social interaction with an GMC, you may spend 1 PP to ask the GM a question about that character, which the GM must answer truthfully. The GM can answer vaguely, especially if the question relies on false assumptions, but any information offered must be the truth.

The GM can refuse to answer entirely by spending a die from the doom pool equal to or greater than the lower of your Influence or Notice skills. For some players, this is its own kind of answer.

Intensity

Prerequisites: Focus D8+

You're at your most dangerous when you're backed into a corner. You may spend 1 PP to add your mental stress to your dice pool. After the roll, step up your mental stress. This can result in being taken out of the scene, but opponents cannot use your mental stress in an opposing dice pool when you use this talent. If you are stressed out from the effects of using this talent, you do not suffer mental trauma.

Jury Rig

Prerequisites: Fix D8+

Duct tape can fix anything—for a while. When the GM would introduce a complication representing a piece of gear breaking down or working poorly, you may spend 1 PP to move that complication to the doom pool. The item cannot be shutdown or targeted by complications for the rest of the scene. At the end of the current scene, the item breaks completely; a permanent item (such as a signature asset) requires a bridge scene action to repair, while a temporary one is simply lost.

Knick of Time

Prerequisites: Move D8+

You have a knack for knowing where you need to be. If you are not present in a scene, so long as you are not actively engaged elsewhere, you may spend 1 PP to arrive in the current scene and give a D6 asset to an ally. You may not use this talent during the first round of an action scene.

Ladder Fu

Prerequisites: Fight D8+

Like your film heroes, you excel at turning random objects into potent weapons. When you spend 1 PP to create an improvised weapon asset, that asset starts at D8 instead of D6. You cannot spend additional PP to make the asset last beyond the end of the scene, and it cannot be used in the same dice pool as any other weapon asset. If the asset would be removed or destroyed, it is instead stepped back to D6; a D6 asset that is removed or destroyed is lost normally.

Lethal Blows

Prerequisites: Fight D8+

You don't hold back in a fight. Instead, you go for the kill. When you make a Fight attack while wielding a weapon, you may add a D6 to the dice pool and step back your highest die. Step up physical stress inflicted on a successful attack.

Master Planner

Prerequisites: Focus D8+, Know D8+

A failure to plan is just planning for failure. When you make a roll against the doom pool, for each opportunity the GM rolls, you may reroll one of your dice showing a hitch.

Natural Leader

Prerequisites: Focus D8+, Influence D8+

Whether it's barking orders or giving advice, you excel at getting the most out of others. When an ally fails a roll including an asset you created in the current scene, you may spend 1 PP to let them reroll that action.

Pocket Sand

Prerequisites: Trick D8+

You always have another trick up your sleeve. When you take an action including Trick to inflict a complication, add a D6 and step up the effect die. If the action fails, step up your mental stress.

Psionic

Prerequisites: Focus D8+, a psychic distinction

Your mind is a keenly honed tool, capable of reaching outside its own confines to influence the world around it. Choose one of the following benefits:

- You gain the power Telepathy D6 as a favored power, and you treat Bender Psychic Talents as favored talents.
- You gain the power Psychic Senses D6 as a favored power, and you treat Brainer Psychic Talents as favored talents.

- You gain the power Telekinesis D6 as a favored power, and you treat Breaker Psychic Talents as favored talents.

Regardless of your choice, you can take any psychic power trait as a non-favored power and any Psychic Talent as a non-favored talent.

Push Through

Prerequisites: Focus D8+

Pain is an illusion, though occasionally a useful one. You may spend 1 PP to add your physical stress to your dice pool. After the roll, step up your physical stress. This can result in being taken out of the scene, but opponents cannot use your physical stress in an opposing dice pool when you use this talent. If you are stressed out from the effects of using this talent, you do not suffer physical trauma.

Reckless Assault

Prerequisites: Fight D8+

When you fight without thought for your own safety, you can accomplish incredible things. When you make a Fight attack, you may spend 1 PP to borrow a die from the doom pool and add it to your dice pool. After your roll is done, step up the die and return it to the doom pool.

Second Wind

Prerequisites: Fight D8+, Labor D8+

As long as there's still fight in you, you're still in the fight. Before you make a roll including Fight or Labor, spend 1 PP to move your physical stress to the doom pool and step up your skill for that action.

Silent Steps

Prerequisites: Sneak D8+

You are one with the darkness, a master of the shadows. When you include Sneak in a roll and the opposing dice pool shows one or more opportunities, you may spend 1 PP to reroll one die for each opportunity showing. This does not activate the opportunities, but you may only use this talent once per roll.

Tactical Thinker

Prerequisites: Focus D8+, Notice D8+

Your tactical brilliance can turn dangerous situations into opportunities for success. When the GM rolls an opportunity while opposing your character, you may activate that opportunity to step back a die in the doom pool or remove a D6 doom die. You may only use this talent once per roll, no matter how many GM opportunities are showing.

Thin the Herd

Prerequisites: Fight D8+, Move D8+

You know how to even the odds when outnumbered. When you make a Fight roll against an enemy Mob, you may spend 1 PP. For each Mob die past the first, add a D6 to your dice pool and keep an additional effect die.

Thus Endeth the Lesson

Prerequisites: Know D8+

You're kind of a know-it-all—in both senses of the term. When you create an asset representing abstract knowledge or lore, you may step up social stress rather than spending 1 PP. The asset created in this manner starts at D8 rather than D6.

Two Fisted**Prerequisites:** Fight D8+ or Shoot D8+

You are an expert at fighting with two weapons. When you make a Fight or Shoot attack, you may split your skill die into two stepped down dice and keep a second effect die at no extra cost.

This talent applies to whichever skill you have D8+ in. If you have both Fight and Shoot at D8+, you may use this talent with either of them.

White Hot Pathos**Prerequisites:** Focus D8+

The depths of despair are where you find your greatest strength. You may spend 1 PP to add your social stress to your dice pool. After the roll, step up your social stress. This can result in being taken out of the scene, but opponents cannot use your social stress in an opposing dice pool when you use this talent. If you are stressed out from the effects of using this talent, you do not suffer social trauma.

Darkchild Talents

These talents all have the specific prerequisite of being a Darkchild, so they cannot be taken by Nephilim, mundane humans, or other supernatural beings without GM permission. Each talent may also require a specific Lineage as a prerequisite; Darkchildren from that Lineage treat it as a favored talent, allowing them to purchase such talents more cheaply.

Unless otherwise noted, a Darkchild Talent can only be used while in Tenebris form.

Broken Wings**Prerequisites:** Infernal or Invidian

Vestigial wings are a common motif for Invidians and Infernals alike, but this talent allows you to take flight no matter how broken your wings may seem to be. Gain Flight D6 as a favored power. You also gain the following Limit.

- **Limit:** *Learn to Fly Again.* Shutdown Flight when you suffer physical stress to gain 1 PP. Recover Flight by activating an opportunity.

Bulletproof Skin**Prerequisites:** Behemoth or Biomechanical

Your flesh is as hard as steel. You may spend 1 PP to ignore physical stress less than the die size of your Durability power. If you would suffer physical stress equal to or greater than your Durability power, you may instead spend 1 PP to step back physical stress suffered.

Creature of the Wheel**Prerequisites:** Biomechanical

Your empathy with machines extends to the use of vehicles. When you include a vehicle-based asset in a dice pool, add a D6 and step up your effect die. Additionally, when you create a vehicle-based asset by spending a plot point, that asset starts at D8 rather than D6.

Darkling Speed

Prerequisites: Devourer

Staying lean and hungry makes you faster than those who are less desperate than you. Spend 1 PP to reroll a reaction against a physical attack, adding or stepping up Reflexes. You may only use this talent once per reaction.

Devil's Bargain

Prerequisites: Infernal

When you're in a bind and way behind, you're quite willing to make a deal. Instead of spending 1 PP to create an asset, you may instead add D6 to the doom pool. The asset created in this fashion starts at D8 rather than D6.

Devil's Own Luck

Prerequisites: Infernal

Sometimes it's better to be lucky than to be good. When you roll one or more hitches in a dice pool including a Darkchild power, you may spend 1 PP to reroll any hitch dice. If any of the rerolled dice come up as hitches a second time, step up mental stress—only once, no matter how many hitches appear. You cannot use this talent to reroll a botch—sometimes, the devil's bill comes due.

Down the Rabbit Hole

Prerequisites: None

Every Darkchild has an innate connection to the Shadowlands, that dark mirror reflection of Earth. With this talent, the Darkchild can use that connection to open a temporary doorway between Earth and the Shadowlands. During a bridge scene this simply costs 1 PP, and the doorway remains open until the end of the scene or until the creator of the doorway passes through.

Opening the portal becomes much more difficult when in imminent danger. During an action scene, the character spends 1 PP and an action to make a roll against a difficulty set by the doom pool (usually 2D6 unless the GM spends a die from the doom pool to make it higher). On a success, the portal opens as normal; retain the effect die. Each time a character passes through the portal, step back the effect die; when it is stepped below D4 (or when the creator passes through), the portal snaps shut.

A portal to the Shadowlands can only be opened in an area of intense natural darkness (such as in a cavern, underground, or deep underwater), or by using a mirror large enough to walk through. If the area becomes illuminated by natural light brighter than the moon or the mirror's frame is broken, the portal collapses.

This talent can also be used to initiate an attempt to forcibly enter a labyrinth. (See "Labyrinths" in **Chapter 3: The Children of the Dark** for more information.)

Face Stealer

Prerequisites: Grotesque or Invidian

Your Tenebris form is somewhat more malleable than usual. You may touch a willing or helpless mortal and spend 1 PP. For the rest of the scene, you assume that mortal's physical appearance. Until you lose that appearance (or intentionally shed it), you are considered to be in your Mask form and cannot use other powers or Darkchild Talents. You may retain this borrowed form until the end of the next scene by spending 1 PP when you would shed it.

If you encounter your Bane, you immediately resume your Tenebris shape and lose the stolen appearance.

Feeding Time

Prerequisites: Devourer

You're always looking for opportunities to grab a quick snack. When you inflict physical stress in close combat, you may spend 1 PP to recover your physical stress if it is equal to or less than your effect die, or to step back your physical stress if it is greater than your effect die.

Additionally, if you take out a major GMC with physical stress in close combat, you may spend 1 PP to step back your physical trauma.

Fire Walk with Me

Prerequisites: Infernal

Fire may be the devil's only friend—but it's a good friend to have. You may spend 1 PP to ignore fire-based physical stress or complications (including smoke inhalation and the like).

Infectious Control

Prerequisites: Devourer or Grotesque

Even when separated from you, your flesh and blood carry something of your essence with them. By infecting a mortal with that essence, you can gain control over them.

Spend 1 PP and feed something of yours to a helpless or willing mortal; blood is traditional, but hair, skin, and saliva all work just as well. That mortal suffers a long-term mind control complication equal to your Social trait rating. Depending on the level of the complication, they are willing to obey virtually any order other than obviously suicidal ones.

If your controlled subject encounters your Bane, your control is immediately broken.

Insidious Whisper

Prerequisites: Invidian

An Invidian's obsessive nature means that it is hard for him to get certain people or things out of his mind. With this talent, it's hard for others to get the Invidian out of their mind too.

You gain Telepathy D6 as a favored power. You can use this ability to freely communicate mentally with any person you have ever touched physically, though being a great distance from them might cost a plot point at the GM's discretion. You also gain the following Limit:

- **Limit: Mental Feedback.** When you use Telepathy in an action to read another individual's mind against their will and fail, step up mental stress.

Inversion

Prerequisites: None

As far as you're concerned, even other Darkchildren aren't to be trusted. While in your Mask form, you cannot be detected by the kin scenting ability of other Darkchildren. Additionally, due

to your greater mastery of your two shapes, you can transform into your Tenebris any time rather than only on your own turn, even before making a reaction to another character's action.

Obviously, this talent still functions in Mask form, despite being a Darkchild Talent.

Kinetic Sponge

Prerequisites: Behemoth

You are the unstoppable force *and* the immovable object in one convenient package. If you make a successful reaction against a physical attack, use your effect die as an asset for your next roll or step up one of your powers for your next roll. You may spend 1 PP to use this talent if your opponent's roll succeeds.

Let's Make a Deal

Prerequisites: Infernal

Nothing assuages a person's pride more than getting one over on someone else. When you make a bargain with a mortal (either a verbal agreement or a written one), you can spend 1 PP to supernaturally bind that bargain. If the mortal fails to carry through on their end, the stipulated penalty comes due—which can be anything up to and including instant death. The agreement is held to the letter of the bargain rather than its spirit. Buyer beware.

If you fail to uphold your side of the bargain, step up social trauma and the mortal is immediately released from their half of the deal. Should they have already carried through when you renege, step up social trauma *twice*, and you cannot use this talent again until you make good on your broken promise or gain your target's unconditional forgiveness.

This talent can only be used on a mortal who enters into the bargain knowingly and willingly. Neither supernatural persuasion nor threat of force may be used to compel the mortal to accept, but simply being desperate is just fine.

Limitless

Prerequisites: Biomechanical or Therianthrope

You know where your limits are—and how to go beyond them in time of dire need, no matter how much it hurts. While you are suffering from a physical complication, you may spend 1 PP to remove that complication and suffer physical stress equal to the complication's die size. If you would be taken out by a physical complication, you may immediately spend 1 PP to negate the complication and step up physical trauma.

Machine Merge

Prerequisites: Biomechanical

You are a bizarre combination of animate and inanimate, so manipulating your form to accommodate new machinery is relatively easy for you. When you use a piece of gear represented by an asset, you may spend 1 PP to step up that asset for the rest of the scene. You may only use this talent once per asset in a given scene. If that asset is shutdown or otherwise removed from the scene prematurely, step up your physical stress.

Medusa's Gaze

Prerequisites: Invidian

You see everything, casting your jealous gaze onto the world around you. By an act of concentration, you can turn that gaze into a weapon—because if you can't have it, then no one can.

You can use Senses in an attack action pool as though it were a magical ranged weapon. You can inflict physical stress with this attack or a complication type of your choice, such as blinding or being turned to stone, chosen when you gain this talent. If you take out a target with this attack, you may spend 1 PP to impose a long-term complication with a rating equal to your Senses power.

Of Wolf and Man

Prerequisites: Therianthrope

Being part animal yourself gives you a special bond with the natural world. While in your Tenebris form, natural animals will not attack you or your allies unless you attack them first, or unless they are supernaturally compelled to do so. Any animal compelled or forced to fight you directly suffers your Social trait as a complication on all attack rolls against you.

Choose one broad type of animals this power does not work against, such as canines (wolves, dogs, coyotes), felines (lions, tigers, housecats), avians (birds), ungulates (deer, cows, giraffes), equines (horses), rodents (rats and mice), and so on.

Oracle

Prerequisites: Invidian

Contemplating your own marred beauty in a distorted reflection can give you incredible insights into problems at hand. You may spend 1 PP as a bridge scene action to step back a die in the doom pool and bank a D6 asset of your choice.

Quicksilver Healing

Prerequisites: Grotesque or Therianthrope

When you are injured, your flesh can flow like water to reform as good as new. You may spend 1 PP as an action to recover physical stress equal to or less than your Stamina power. If you are currently suffering physical stress greater than your Stamina die size, you may instead spend 1 PP as an action to step back your physical stress.

As a bridge scene action, you may spend 1 PP to step back physical trauma.

If you have suffered physical stress or trauma from exposure to your Bane during the current session, you cannot use this talent to recover stress or trauma for the rest of the session.

Shadow Blade

Prerequisites: None

The darkness of your soul makes itself manifest as a lethal close combat weapon. You gain Shadow Blade D6 as a favored power. You also gain the following limit:

- **Limit:** *Shadows Dispelled*. Shutdown Shadow Blade when in an area affected by a light-based scene distinction or complication. Gain 1 PP. Remove the scene distinction or complication to recover Shadow Blade.

Shadow Bolt

Prerequisites: None

You have learned how to coalesce the darkness within your soul into a weapon of potent destructive power. You gain Darkness Blast D6 as a favored power. You also gain the following limit:

- **Limit:** *Shadows Dispelled*. Shutdown Darkness Blast when in an area affected by a light-based scene distinction or complication. Gain 1 PP. Remove the scene distinction or complication to recover Darkness Blast.

Shadow Self

Prerequisites: None

You have learned how to let go of your sense of self, detaching your spirit from your body to go wandering as little more than a shadow. You may spend 1 PP as a bridge scene action to separate your mind from your body. While in this “astral form,” your spirit can travel as fast as thought to anyplace you have ever been physically and observe for as long as you like.

Your astral self appears as a two-dimensional shadow, almost invisible to all but the most perceptive. It cannot be targeted with physical attacks, though magical or mental attacks can target it normally. While your mind is separated from your body, your physical self is essentially helpless, though any harm done to it causes your mind to immediately return from wherever it might have gone.

Shadow Step

Prerequisites: None

You can move from one shadow to the next as easily as stepping through a doorway. You gain Teleport D6 as a favored power. You also gain the following limit:

- **Limit:** *Shadows Dispelled*. Shutdown Teleport when in an area affected by a light-based scene distinction or complication. Gain 1 PP. Remove the scene distinction or complication to recover Teleport.

Stigmatic

Prerequisites: Grotesque

You can empathically absorb others’ pain to heal them at the cost of suffering the agony of their wounds. As a bridge scene action, you may spend 1 PP and touch an injured ally. Recover their physical stress and step up your mental stress, or step back their physical trauma and step up your mental trauma.

The Wolf at Your Door

Prerequisites: Therianthrope

The senses of an animal are notoriously keener than those of a human. Yours are even better than that. When you take an action including Senses, you may spend 1 PP to reroll that action.

Thought Eater

Prerequisites: Devourer

In their eternal hunger, some Devourers turn to the realm of the ephemeral mind in hopes of finding something that satisfies them. The results were not as expected but are still quite useful.

You may touch a helpless or recently deceased mortal and spend 1 PP. You gain a D8 asset representing that individual’s memories and experiences. You also gain a skill specialty based on

their abilities, even if you do not have a D6 in a related skill. When the asset is lost, so is the specialty, though you may spend 1 PP to keep the asset to the end of the current session as usual.

Too Swole to Control

Prerequisites: Behemoth

Your rage is vast and all-consuming—far too potent to allow others to sway you from your path. When you would suffer a complication representing mind control or emotional manipulation, you may spend 1 PP to ignore the complication. If your next action is an attack targeting the character that tried to control you, step up and double your combat skill die.

Wrecking Ball

Prerequisites: Behemoth

You know how to put your maximum power into a swing, which can be a real drag if you miss. Spend 1 PP to step up or double Strength for one action. If your action fails, add your second-highest rolling die to the doom pool.

Magic Talents

Alchemist

Prerequisites: Craft D6+, Know D8+, specialties in Know (*arcane lore* and *chemistry*), Arcanist talent, Sorcery D6+

The transformation of matter from one form to another has long been considered one of the noblest of the mystical arts. Changing lead into gold is a trivial matter for one with the appropriate knowledge.

You gain Transmutation D6 as a favored power. You also gain the following Limit:

- **Limit:** *Equivalent Exchange*. When you use Transmutation as part of a dice pool, you may only transform matter into objects of similar type or value. This means that you could turn water into ice or steam, but not into mercury; or transform lead into gold but lose significant mass during the exchange. More extreme transformations last shorter amounts of time. The GM has final say on this limitation.

Blastomancy

Prerequisites: Know D8+, Shoot D6+, specialty in Know (*arcane lore*), Arcanist talent, Sorcery D6+

The power to hurl lightning bolts, fling balls of fire, and otherwise rain ruination on one's enemies is a traditional ability associated with sorcerers. Actually being able to do it is somewhat more difficult than advertised.

You gain a Blast power at D6 as a favored power. You must choose the type of Blast when this power is gained; fire, lightning, cold, force, and the like are common. When you make an attack with this power, you may spend 1 PP to change the type of Blast for that attack.

You also gain the following Limit:

- **Limit:** *Dangerous Magics*. When you use Blast in an attack roll, both 1 and 2 count as hitches. Only 1s are excluded from use as total and effect dice.

Conjurer

Prerequisites: Focus D8+, Know D8+, specialty in Know (*arcane lore*), Arcanist talent, Sorcery D8+

A true master of the arcane arts can draw upon their powers at a moment's notice. You lose the *Ritual Magic* Limit with regards to creating magical assets. Magical assets you create during action scenes cannot be extended past the end of the scene.

When you use Sorcery to create an asset as an action (ritual or otherwise), add a D6 to your dice pool and step up your effect die.

Gygaxian

Prerequisites: Focus D6+, Know D8+, specialty in Know (*arcane lore*), Arcanist talent, Sorcery D8+

Sometimes, you need to be able to fly or walk through a wall—but *later*. When you use a ritual action to create a Sorcery-based asset, you may spend 1 PP to bank that asset for later use. At any later time, you may use an action to “release” that asset, granting its effects to yourself or an ally in the current scene. An asset banked in this fashion cannot be extended past the end of the scene in which it is used.

You may not have any more assets banked in this fashion than your Sorcery trait die size, and any assets not used by the end of the current scenario are lost.

Hexenmeister

Prerequisites: Focus D6+, Know D8+, Trick D6+, specialty in Know (*arcane lore*), Arcanist talent, Sorcery D8+

Some magic is intended to help others—but not yours. You lose the *Ritual Magic* Limit with regards to creating magical complications. Additionally, when you take out a target with a magical complication, you may spend 1 PP to impose a long-term complication on that target with a starting value equal to your Sorcery trait.

When you use Sorcery to create a complication as an action (ritual or otherwise), add a D6 to your dice pool and step up your effect die.

Warding Rune

Prerequisites: Focus D8+, Know D8+, specialty in Know (*arcane lore*), Arcanist and Gygaxian talents, Sorcery D8+

The magical energy stored in your prepared spells can act as a useful counter to incoming force, draining away their magic to protect yourself from harm. When you would suffer physical stress, you may spend 1 PP and remove a banked Sorcery asset to ignore stress equal to or lower than the asset, or step back stress greater than the asset.

White Mage

Prerequisites: Focus D6+, Know D8+, Treat D6+, specialty in Know (*arcane lore*), Arcanist talent, Sorcery D6+

Your magic is focused on the peaceful arts of healing and recovery. Add Sorcery to your dice pool when helping others recover physical stress. Spend 1 PP to recover another character's physical stress as an action, or spend 1 PP to step back their physical trauma as a bridge scene action.

Wrack and Ruin

Prerequisites: Focus D8+, Know D8+, Shoot D8+, specialty in Know (*arcane lore*) and Shoot (*Blast power*), Arcanist talent, Blast D8+, Sorcery D8+

You can call down true devastation on masses of foes. When you use Blast in an attack against multiple enemies, spend 1 PP. For each enemy after the first, add a D6 to your dice pool and keep an additional effect die.

Psychic Talents

A character that takes the Psionic talent is considered to be a psychic, a person with unusual mental powers. The number of such people increased dramatically after Black Solstice, though some number of psychics have always existed. Indeed, the major powers of the Cold War all had psychic research programs going on during the conflict, some members of which survive today as part of Psi Division or Sigma Red.

When a character gains the Psionic talent, he must choose to be a Bender (telepath), a Brainer (clairvoyant), or a Breaker (telekinetic), which determines his favored powers and favored talents. Any character with Psionic can take any Psychic Talents or psychic power traits with advancement, though non-favored powers and traits are more expensive as usual.

The following powers are considered favored for each psychic type:

- **Bender Powers:** Invisibility, Mind Control, Telepathy
- **Brainer Powers:** Mind Blast, Psychic Senses, Reflexes
- **Breaker Powers:** Durability, Kinetic Blast, Telekinesis

Cloud the Mind

Prerequisites: Bender, Focus D6+, Stealth D6+, Psionic talent, Invisibility D6+

You can cloud men's minds with your psychic powers, making it very difficult for them to land a blow against you. When you fail a reaction roll against a physical attack, you may spend 1 PP to reroll that reaction, adding or stepping up Invisibility.

Additionally, if you spend 1 PP at the beginning of a scene, no one in that scene will remember your actual appearance unless you wish them to. They either remember a generic appearance of your choice or simply have trouble remembering your appearance at all.

Enthrall

Prerequisites: Bender, Focus D6+, Influence D6+, Psionic talent, Mind Control D6+

Your ability to control others can last long after you stop actively influencing them. When you take out a target with a Mind Control complication, you can spend 1 PP to inflict a persistent mind control complication on that target. The complication starts at a size equal to your Mind Control rating.

At the end of each scene in which you compel a character under a persistent Mind Control complication to act against their usual inclinations, that complication steps back. A complication that goes below D6 is removed.

A character can spend 1 PP (or a doom die) to resist a command that goes against their deepest beliefs or convictions. If they do so, your control over them does not degrade, but you cannot attempt to compel them to undertake the same action in the current session.

Force Field

Prerequisites: Breaker, Focus D8+, Psionic talent, Durability D6+

You are able to use your sheer force of will to ablate incoming attacks—though not without some difficulty. You may spend 1 PP and step up mental stress to ignore physical stress equal to or less than your Durability power, or to step back physical stress greater than your Durability power.

I Can Kill You With My Mind

Prerequisites: Brainer, Focus D6+, Shoot D6+, Psionic talent, Mind Blast D6+

Your mental assaults are especially deadly. When you make an attack against a single target with Mind Blast, add a d6 and step back the highest die in your pool. Step up mental stress inflicted on a successful attack.

Kinetic Spike

Prerequisites: Breaker, Focus D6+, Shoot D6+, Psionic talent, Kinetic Blast D6+

You can build up a powerful and concentrated burst of kinetic energy that is devastating if somewhat random. Step up or double Kinetic Blast in an attack against a single target, or spend 1 PP to do both. Remove the highest rolling die and keep three dice for your total.

Psychic Scream

Prerequisites: Brainer, Focus D8+, Psionic talent, Mind Blast D6+

You can unleash your rage and pain to harm all of those around you—friend and foe alike. Step up your mental stress when making an attack with Mind Blast against multiple targets. For each target past the first, add an extra D6 to your pool and keep an additional effect die. All of your allies in the current scene must spend 1 PP or step up mental stress.

Psychic Switchboard

Prerequisites: Bender, Focus D8+, Psionic talent, Telepathy D6+

You can communicate along multiple channels at once, as well as acting as a sort of “central switchboard” for your allies’ thoughts. Spend 1 PP to create a telepathic link between a number of willing characters up to the die rating of your Telepathy power. (So, for Telepathy D6, up to six characters.) You must know all of these characters personally, but they do not need to be present for the telepathic link to be formed. Until the end of the scene, these characters may communicate freely and silently; language is not a barrier, and simple images may be communicated as well. This form of communication is roughly as fast as normal speech.

Private communication between individuals in the link is not possible. Anything “said” by someone in the link is “heard” by everyone involved. You may only have one telepathic link active at a time.

Psychometry

Prerequisites: Brainer, Focus D6+, Notice D6+, Psionic talent, Psychic Senses D6+

You are highly skilled at picking up psychic resonances from objects and locations. When you fail an investigation or information gathering based roll, you may spend 1 PP to reroll, adding or stepping up Psychic Senses.

At the GM’s discretion, you may spend 1 PP to have a vision relating to a touched object’s former owner or events that took place in proximity to an object.

Shockwave

Prerequisites: Breaker, Focus D8+, Psionic talent, Kinetic Blast D8+

You can lash out in all directions with your telekinesis, leaving vast amounts of devastation in your wake. Step up your mental stress when making an attack against multiple targets with Kinetic Blast. For each target past the first, add an extra D6 to your pool and keep an additional effect die. All of your allies in the current scene must spend 1 PP or step up physical stress.

Chapter 3: The Children of the Dark

The Children of the Dark are an examination in contrasts. Both human and monster, mundane and mystical, divine and damned—they represent the liminal place between light and shadow. They are cursed with monstrous urges to destroy and corrupt, but they are humanity’s best chance against the horrific evil of the Anunnaki.

The Darkchildren are flawed heroes, struggling to save the world while keeping their sanity and avoiding the worst excesses of their kind. They work to protect a world that would fear and hate them if it saw them for what they really were, and they fight for a victory whose fruits they will never get to enjoy—if only because the alternative is unthinkable.

A Shrouded History

The Children of the Dark have always been with us. As long as recorded history, there have been stories of men changing shape, of women who could fly, of people who were partly divine and partly monstrous. Almost all of these stories are secondhand or thirdhand reports of the Darkchildren, filtered through a lens of myth and legend. While there are other monstrous entities in the world, some even stranger, the Darkchildren have been far more common than these other beings throughout most of history, and the only ones who are both human and monster at the same time.

Humanity can be forgiven for not understanding the nature of the creatures that have dwelt alongside them since time immemorial. The Darkchildren have always been few in number; before modern times, there were likely never more than a few hundred in the whole world at any given time, perhaps a thousand at most. Beyond their scarcity, they are so different in shape and powers that it would be hard for an outside observer to recognize them as being of a like type.

With mythology so confused and the Darkchildren so elusive, it can be maddening to pick out truth from fiction, even for the Children themselves. Some elders have created a narrative that most modern Darkchildren at least tacitly accept, if only due to a lack of any significant competing accounts.

The Anunnaki and the Igigi

According to the oldest recorded stories of the Darkchildren, their history begins before the written word. The stories of Gilgamesh and similar mythological accounts from Mesopotamia are thought to be half-remembered accounts of the struggles of early man against supernatural overlords—and of the heroic demigods who stood against them.

These stories speak of the *Anunnaki*, gods who came from the sky and used humanity as slaves. Modern interpretations sometimes see the Anunnaki as extraterrestrials whose powers are some form of super-science, while others read them as cosmic horrors who demanded worship and sacrifice. Regardless of their true nature, most accounts number them as seven beings of unimaginable power with legions of inhuman servants. They ruled over mankind with cruelty for generations—possibly for centuries or millennia.

It should be noted that the chronicles of this period use the Sumerian nomenclature for various reasons. First and foremost, the largest number of surviving relics from this period have been recovered from the Middle East, particularly in the so-called “cradle of civilization”—what

would be modern Iraq and Iran. Second, many of the mythological stories from Sumer describe the Anunnaki and their servants with greater accuracy than most other records of a similar age. Finally, the Anunnaki themselves seem to have a genuine affinity for Mesopotamian motifs, though whether that is because of some actual relationship with the region or simply a stylistic preference remains unknown.

Regardless, at some point, the slaves of the Anunnaki grew rebellious and malcontent. They sought some method of gaining the power to overthrow their masters. The stories differ here as to how they gained that power. Some say that the desperate slaves sold their souls to something even worse than the Anunnaki. Others believe that they stole the power from the Anunnaki themselves. A few even claim that a renegade overlord gave this power to his slaves to use them as tools against his fellows, a plan that obviously backfired if true.

No matter how they came to be, these semi-divine champions became known as the *Igigi*, the gods of the earth. The Igigi gained amazing powers, as well as the ability to walk unnoticed among the thronging masses of humanity. The Igigi could shift between a human disguise and a form of great power forged from their dreams and nightmares at will, making them highly skilled at asymmetrical warfare. The Anunnaki and their servants lived each day in siege, never knowing which of their slaves might actually be a demigod assassin wearing a pleasant face.

The Igigi waged their war of attrition against the Anunnaki, pushing them back step by step, until the Anunnaki finally threatened to destroy all of humanity rather than give up their prize. If they must perish, then the whole world would perish with them. A series of cataclysmic disasters struck the world—floods, fires, earthquakes, and famines—that could well have spelled the end of humankind.

In desperation, the Igigi worked a powerful magic that banished the Anunnaki and all of their followers to a dark and dismal realm from which they believed their former masters could never escape. They called this blighted dimension *the Shadowlands*, or simply the Underworld. The Anunnaki's shattered empire lay in ruins and humanity's numbers were horribly depleted by the catastrophes they had suffered, but they were finally free.

The Betrayal

In the generations following the fall of the Anunnaki, the Igigi spread out from Mesopotamia to reach the far-flung enclaves of humanity that had survived the shattering of the antediluvian empire. Dozens of cultures across the world “discovered” metalworking, literacy, and other civilized arts at roughly the same time due to the influence of the Igigi. These interventions are often remembered through myth as the coming of gods or demigods who taught humanity the basics of survival, often after a disaster of some kind—a flood, an earthquake, the sky falling, the end of the old world and beginning of the new.

Generations passed with the Igigi aging only very slowly, seemingly immortal to their subjects. Time and power weigh poorly on the human spirit, however, and many of the Igigi began to exhibit various forms of antisocial behavior. They grew ever crueler with the passage of years, filled with wrath, envy, lust, and pride. They began to see themselves as a breed separate from “common” humanity, with ordinary mortals existing only to satiate their desires. In short, they became very like the evil gods that they had overthrown.

Unfortunately for them, the Igigi were not as immortal as the Anunnaki had been. They could be slain like mortals—albeit with far greater effort needed. Additionally, they also found that the power they possessed made them far more vulnerable to certain objects or materials. Their paranoia and decadence manifested as crippling weaknesses, their supernatural abilities failing in

the presence of things that reminded them of their former humanity or that illustrated their hypocrisy. Just as their godly forms were their dreams and nightmares given shape, those forms possessed weaknesses derived from the logic of dreams—purity to counter corruption, light to banish darkness, and so on.

In short order, the people they ruled over became malcontent with the Igigi. In Mesopotamia particularly, the locals whose grandparents had fought side-by-side with the Igigi against the Anunnaki remembered the stories of cruel monsters who tormented mankind. They were not interested in simply reliving the tyranny of the Anunnaki a second time. And so, with fire and blade, they turned on the Anunnaki and broke their mighty towers.

This revolution was aided by the *Nephilim*, a race seemingly joined to the power of light as the Igigi were to the darkness. Unlike the Igigi, the Nephilim did not seek to rule—they only wished to destroy anything they considered “unnatural.” Perhaps to spare themselves the fate of the Anunnaki and the Igigi, the Nephilim never gathered in numbers sufficient to make themselves an object of fear for the humans they aided.

In the span of a generation, the Igigi were driven forth from their people, hunted to near-extinction. They lingered on in some places for longer, as a few of them were better able to control their urges, but even those who did not fall into depravity eventually exiled or isolated themselves to avoid temptation. The scattered Igigi survivors came to refer to themselves as the *Children of the Dark*, or Darkchildren, a name that has largely stuck since those ancient times.

From Gods to Monsters

Pushed out of society, cut off from their own people, the remaining Darkchildren turned to one another for solace and support. They built their own society in the shadow of humanity, staying out of sight as much as possible to avoid their extinction. The pull toward darkness never completely left them or their descendants, however, leading subsequent generations of Darkchildren to become barely recognizable as human in many places. It was never as intense as that first generation, though Darkchildren have always remained prone to the ills of moral degeneracy and vice.

Darkchildren continued to be born among humankind, giving rise to the legends of changelings. These children would be born seemingly human, only to change into their monstrous self sometime after puberty. Others would live their whole lives not knowing they were different, only to change for the first time after apparently dying, giving rise to the myths of the living dead. The Children of the Dark themselves found that when they could bear children at all—which was uncommon—such children were almost always purely human. Their numbers dwindled faster than they could renew them.

Many Darkchildren simply chose to never leave their second shape, the monstrous manifestation known as *the Tenebris*. Some entered their human shape, snidely called *the Mask*, only when they were required to go among mortals in times of great necessity. Others forswore their monstrous powers entirely, seeking to hide among the masses and pretend to be “normal.” These last rarely found happiness by their deception; more often, their dark side would emerge at the most inconvenient time, costing them everything.

Some Darkchildren worked to build connections between their hidden enclaves, keeping alive traditions of training and support. These small cabals were frequently rife with political intrigue among their members, physically isolated and socially incestuous. Their small numbers and the great distances involved still meant that many Darkchildren could go their entire long lives without ever meeting another of their own kind. Others might change once, then convince

themselves that the entire incident was a nightmare or hallucination, repressing their true nature as long as possible.

A few people, it seemed, had the potential to awaken as Darkchildren but simply avoided the stress that would force a change through sheer luck. Darkchildren were divided on the matter of these “Sleepers.” Some believed it was better to let their kin remain ignorant to their own nature, to let them remain blissfully human until a natural death claimed them. Others thought that it was better to force a change as soon as possible, believing it irresponsible to leave a potentially dangerous creature among innocent humans. After all, a Sleeper could awaken on their own at any time without warning, and the shock of that awakening could cause the new Darkchild to go on a lethal rampage. A few callously sought to increase their race’s small numbers, caring nothing for the morality of the question.

Though Darkchildren awakening among humankind continued to create legends about vampires, werewolves, demons, and the like, the majority of Darkchildren avoided notice whenever possible. The weakest Darkchild can fight a small crowd of humans with little effort—but even the most powerful Darkchild would be wise to fear an entire community arrayed against him, armed with fire and hatred. Anonymity has always been the greatest strength of the Darkchildren, and so they wiled away the long centuries of their lives, watching the rise and fall of nations, playing politics among their own number and envying the mortal animals who lived and died never knowing of the monsters among them.

Sidebar: Traditions of the Past

Modern Darkchildren don’t have a lot of patience for the traditions of the past. The few surviving elders love to talk about the way things used to be and to look down on their juniors for not understanding “proper behavior,” but hardly anyone takes that sort of thing seriously unless the elder has something they want. Despite the break with past tradition, a few of the older habits have stayed alive in the modern nights.

The most common old tradition still in use today is that of “the second name.” It was common practice among Darkchildren of centuries past to take on a new name after being accepted into a cabal. This represented a break from their mortal life as well as acceptance into a new family. Darkchildren would still use their old names when among humans while wearing the Mask, but they typically considered their second name to be their real name from then on.

In the present, this tradition has been kept alive, if transformed. The cultural impact of superhero literature makes the idea of taking a new name something easily understood by young Darkchildren, but they no longer consider it a mark of distinction. The second name is now seen more as a “codename” or a nickname among Darkchildren. Some of the more professionally-oriented Darkchildren, like those working with the Resistance, use them as field names to avoid giving away details about their “secret identities” to the enemy. A few Darkchildren regard their Tenebris as a separate person entirely, giving that shape a new name as a means of dissociating themselves from its actions.

Other traditions survive in bits and pieces, like Grotesques giving some amount of deference to the most deformed of their number in a gathering, while most have been almost forgotten except in passing mention, like the *Blutklatsches* common among Devourers from the 17th century onward.

Black Solstice

The twentieth of June in 2012 should have been just another day for the people of the world. Instead, it became a day of terrors that lives on in popular culture as *Black Solstice*. For the Darkchildren, it was the day that their long years of lethargy came to an abrupt and shocking end.

Around two in the afternoon, New York time, the sun and sky simply went dark, like a veil had been cast across the heavens. The sun returned a moment later as a dim red glow surrounding a dead-black circle, set in a pitch-colored sky with no stars or moon. All around the world, panic reigned. Riots broke out in nearly every city, and subsequent reports noted thousands of suicides and murders, in addition to looting, vandalism, assault, and worse. There were scattered reports of monsters appearing and attacking people on every continent. People thought the end of the world had come.

Twenty-four hours later, the sun and the sky went back to normal. The people of the world woke up from their terrible delirium and began putting the pieces back together. Incidents of post-traumatic stress skyrocketed, suicide rates have remained high, and extreme religious and political movements cropped up in every country on earth.

Few knew then that the world had been invaded by an ancient enemy. Though mystics and psychics had been warning of a “great darkness” for months, the majority of people were still unprepared for Black Solstice and what came after. The Darkchildren were no exception, having settled into a comfortable equilibrium for several centuries. They lived in quiet enclaves across the world, communicating with others of their kind irregularly and avoiding notice as much as possible. These habits made them easy prey for the returned Anunnaki.

When Black Solstice came, the hidden sanctuaries of the Darkchildren were prime targets for the servants of the Anunnaki. They came down on the eldest of the Darkchildren like the hammer of god, smashing the most powerful of their kind in one bloody night of retribution. Much of the collected lore and memory of the Darkchildren was lost along with their elders, either destroyed with the sanctuaries or stolen by the assassins. By destroying the most powerful of the hated Igigi, the Anunnaki surely thought to eliminate any opposition to their conquest before their ancient enemy could organize.

Unfortunately for them, the coming of Black Solstice opened many doors—not just the one to the Shadowlands. Magical energy returned to Earth in quantities not seen since prehistory, causing adherents to the ancient arts of sorcery to suddenly become far more powerful. The psychic emanations coming from the Anunnaki caused thousands of people to go spontaneously mad—but also caused hundreds more to develop amazing mental powers.

Perhaps worst for the Anunnaki was that over the course of Black Solstice, more Darkchildren went through their First Change in one day than had appeared in the five centuries before. Since then, more Darkchildren are awakening every year, almost as if the Earth itself were responding to the invasion like a sick person producing antibodies.

Since Black Solstice, some of the few surviving elders have come out of hiding to train and educate the new generation, but they are rapidly being left behind as the legacy of a world that no longer exists. New factions and allegiances have formed, blurring the lines that once held Darkchild society—such as it was—together. The new Darkchildren care nothing for ancient history or legend, save where it can aid them in their war. Old factions have been forced to reorganize to remain relevant, or have simply ceased to exist entirely.

It’s a new world for the Children of the Dark, a more dangerous one to be sure, but one that has given them a chance they haven’t had in countless centuries—the chance to be heroes.

Sidebar: The World of 20XX

Children of the Dark started its journey toward existence in the mid-2010s. Since the time of the first draft, there has been a genuine resurgence in fascism across the globe that was written into the text, but also a series of political realignments, global conflicts, and a pandemic that are not dealt with here.

The game assumes that Black Solstice happened in 2012, and that the “present day” is 2018. The game didn’t actually see publication until 2023—another five years after the “present day.” So, when should your game be set? The answer, of course, is “whenever you want.”

“Black Solstice + 6 years” is the formula used by the game to determine the present day for a number of logistical reasons, but primarily to give the various factions enough time to settle into their current configuration and for the Anunnaki invasion to be well underway. If you want to run a more contemporary game of *Children of the Dark*, just assume that Black Solstice was six years before the current time period of your campaign. Incorporate any contemporary political or military issues you want into your campaign, or just ignore them as unimportant to the narrative.

The Nature of the Beast

The two shapes of the Darkchildren are known as *the Mask* and *the Tenebris*. The Mask is the Darkchild’s human shape—the appearance that they were born with, though sometimes slightly improved due to their supernatural good health and longevity. The Darkchild can change into another shape with an act of will. This alternate form is clearly inhuman, provoking fear and revulsion in most ordinary people. This shape, the Tenebris, is drawn from the individual’s own deepest terrors, most potent moral failings, and subconscious desires, filtered through a nightmarish palette and given horrific life.

Though they possess some commonalities, it isn’t unreasonable to think of every individual Darkchild as “a race of one.” Even Darkchildren who consider themselves kin under the old system of Lineage have stark differences between their appearances when in their monstrous shape. Two Darkchildren broadly described by others as “werewolves” might possess the similar traits of being roughly bipedal wolf-like humanoids, but one may well be little more than a hairy-faced man with fangs and claws while the other is a seven-foot-tall anthropomorphic wolf incapable of speech beyond guttural growls.

The similarities between broad types of Tenebris are known as *Lineages*. Older Darkchild society was often broken up into groups from the same Lineage, with similar Darkchildren staying among “their own kind” out of habit and tradition. Though that society has largely fallen apart since Black Solstice, elders still refer to Lineage when speaking about Darkchildren and their broad groupings.

Medieval lore from Europe and the Middle East paints the seven Lineages as being analogous to the seven deadly sins, a correlation that has largely stuck around even among non-religious and non-European Darkchildren. Modern psychology tends to talk about the action of the subconscious on the formation of the Tenebris, seeking to understand a Darkchild’s personality by examining his monstrous shape—his innermost self, made manifest. Jungian and Freudian theorists particularly have a lot to say about what the Tenebris means in regards to a Darkchild’s psyche.

Regardless of the causes or associations, most Darkchildren accept the existence of seven Lineages:

- **Behemoths:** These Darkchildren have monstrous shapes defined by immensity and raw power. They are associated with the sin of **wrath**, and often possess powers that make it easier for them to destroy or to avoid harm.
- **Biomechanicals:** Once known as *Golems*, Darkchildren of this Lineage seem to be partly or entirely made of inorganic materials in their Tenebris form. They are traditionally associated with the sin of **greed**—preferring objects to people—and their powers tend to make them durable like inorganic matter or allow them to gain the traits of machines.
- **Devourers:** Darkchildren of this Lineage are responsible for legends of vampires and other creatures defined by their insatiable hunger. They are associated with the sin of **gluttony**, and their powers make them excellent predators and hunters.
- **Grotesques:** The Darkchildren of this Lineage are the most disparate in form, often bearing little resemblance to one another—or to anything vaguely human. Grotesques encompass Tenebris forms that are entirely inhuman and not recognizably anything else, as well as forms that would be almost human save for terrible deformities that would be lethal to mortals. Grotesques are traditionally linked with the sin of **sloth**, and their powers allow them to manipulate their own bodies in horrific ways.
- **Infernals:** These Darkchildren share a common appearance as emblems of broken divinity, typically expressed by resembling demons, devils, or fallen angels, though other manifestations are known. They represent the sin of **pride**, and their powers often relate to humanity’s most primal source of power—fire.
- **Invidians:** While most Darkchildren are simply horrifying, this Lineage is all the more awful for its nearness to beauty—and for the hideous flaws in that beauty. Invidians are not simply horrible; they would be considered inhumanly beautiful were it not for the inclusion of one or more awful deformities. They are linked to the sin of **envy**, and their powers are largely subtler than those of the other Lineages.
- **Therianthrope:** This Lineage is comprised of Darkchildren whose Tenebris have strong influences from animals—either a single animal or several at once. They are associated with the sin of **lust**—not just sexual desire, but any form of base “animal” sensuality. Their powers tend to make them more animal-like as well as allowing them to control beasts.

These distinctions were considered to be much clearer in older times, but modern Darkchildren still use them as shorthand for understanding their powers and potential. Even so, the lines are often blurred in the more complex psychological landscape of the modern mind. Is a woman who turns into an animated marble statue of incredible beauty a Biomechanical or an Invidian? Is a man whose chest turns into a sucking, tooth-lined maw a Devourer or a Grotesque? These debates rage among the Darkchildren even today, though most simply say that they know in their hearts where their true nature lies.

Sidebar: Darkchild Longevity

Darkchildren do not age as humans do—though they do age. Almost all Darkchildren are possessed of unnatural longevity and vigor well into their old age. A Darkchild typically seems to almost stop aging when he makes his First Change, which for most Darkchildren is in their late teens or early twenties. A few change earlier or later—sometimes much later—but the majority of “new” Darkchildren keep the flush of youth about them for a long time. Even in “old age,” they remain healthy to a large extent, suffering few of the usual pangs of the elderly.

In their Mask shape, a Darkchild typically only seems to age one year for every five to ten that pass. A Darkchild in his fifth century of life might well seem to only be of healthy later middle years. Few survive that long, however; even for the powerful and long-lived, dangers await that can end a life prematurely. After the Anunnaki purges between Black Solstice and the present, it is widely believed that less than a dozen “true elders”—those over two centuries old—still live, and no more than a hundred who had gone through the First Change before Black Solstice.

Still, a Darkchild who avoids danger can expect a very long life indeed. Some evidence exists to suggest that Darkchildren in their Tenebris forms do not age at all while they wear their “true face.” In older times, a Darkchild whose Mask form was beginning to seem particularly old would assume his Tenebris form and resolve to simply live out eternity as a monster. It is not believed that any Darkchildren managed to cheat the reaper for more than a few decades in this manner, since remaining in the Tenebris without extensive human contact can be toxic to the psyche.

Ultimately, the matter of theoretical longevity is of little concern to the majority of modern Darkchildren. They have too much worry about whether or not they’ll live to see tomorrow to think about living centuries.

The Tenebris and the Mask

Darkchildren have two shapes: their human self, called the Mask; and their monstrous self, called the Tenebris.

Changing between the two forms is almost instantaneous. It doesn’t require an action, but it does require conscious effort. The character cannot change forms while unconscious, asleep, or otherwise impaired. In a combat situation, the character can change shape at no cost on his turn, but only once per scene. This means that a character ambushed while in human form is vulnerable until he has a moment to concentrate; more than one Darkchild has been slain over the years by such tactics. This also means that a character who changes into one of his shapes during combat is stuck that way until the danger passes.

While in the Mask, they cannot use their Darkchild power traits or Darkchild Talents. In essence, they are entirely mundane humans in this form. On the plus side, the Mask is a nearly impenetrable disguise—no form of supernatural senses reveals anything out of the ordinary about the character, save the senses of other Darkchildren. The Children of the Dark cannot hide from their own kind.

Additionally, a character does not suffer from the scourge of his Bane while they remain in the Mask. Though they may still be uncomfortable in its presence, it causes them no actual harm.

While in the Tenebris, a Darkchild has access to all of their special powers and talents, as well as possessing a few other common benefits. Primarily, a Darkchild in Tenebris form can see in even pitch darkness about as well as a normal human can see in dim light. They do not suffer from ordinary diseases while in Tenebris form, and staying in that form long enough can cure almost any mundane ailment. Even lost limbs and organs regenerate—albeit slowly.

Anything that does not kill a Darkchild outright in his Tenebris shape is essentially temporary, though grievous injuries show through to the Mask when the character changes back. A limb lost in Tenebris will seem broken in the Mask; a gouged-out eye will be puffy and swollen. Grievous injuries suffered by the Mask are not lost in Tenebris form. Darkchildren with talents that allow

them to heal with unnatural quickness can alleviate such maiming injuries by changing out of the Mask and waiting to be fully healed before changing back.

Building a Tenebris

The defining characteristic of a Darkchild is their ability to transform from an ordinary-looking human into a powerful monster. This monstrous self is known as the Tenebris, and it is unique to each Darkchild. When seen clearly, a Tenebris cannot pass for human, though some Darkchildren are lucky enough to be able to disguise their Tenebris through mundane means, such as concealing clothing or sticking to the shadows.

Many believe that the Tenebris is birthed from a Darkchild's innermost self—their fears, desires, beliefs, and failings, all distorted through a glass darkly. Indeed, most Darkchildren can see the moment of their First Change reflected in the creature they have become. Changing for the first time out of rage typically results in a shape suited for battle, while changing during a moment of jealousy creates a flawed shape that shows the whole world how ugly the Darkchild felt at that moment.

Given the importance of the Tenebris to a Darkchild, players should work closely with their GM to determine their characters' monstrous nature. While random tables are offered in each Lineage's description as a starting point, players should still think carefully about what their Tenebris means and what part of their psyche it came from.

Some Darkchild Talents physically alter a Tenebris in various ways. This can represent the character gaining greater insight into his inner world, allowing him to adjust small details of his nightmare self, or simply a gradual evolution of his self-perception. A character's Lineage never changes because of these manifestations, and their Tenebris remains recognizably theirs for those that have encountered it before.

Creating a Darkchild

To create a Darkchild character, first refer to the character creation outline in **Chapter 1**. Select one of the seven available **Lineages**; this choice will determine your starting powers, favored powers, and highlighted skills. The description of each Lineage will also discuss the mythological resonance possessed by each type of Darkchildren, which relates to their Tenebris appearance and helps determine their **Bane** and the negative behavior they undertake during **Blackout**.

Every Darkchild starts with one **talent** of their choice from among the Mundane Talents or Darkchild Talents, in addition to the free talent every character starts with. A starting Darkchild Talent chosen must be from within the character's favored talents (i.e., their Lineage).

Finally, each Lineage includes a short table of random Tenebris appearance qualities for inspiration. Players can feel free to roll on this table or choose from it if they are stuck for ideas on what nightmarish qualities their character should have. Rolling once or twice on a Tenebris appearance table—or once each on two different tables—can provide a starting point for players to work around when deciding on their monster self's appearance.

Darkchild Powers

Every Darkchild Lineage lists the favored powers of that Lineage. The powers listed with any Lineage are available to any Darkchild, though they may be more expensive to learn with advancement. Some talents grant a Darkchild character additional favored powers on top of those gained from their Lineage.

The powers manifested by the Children of the Dark are thematically informed by darkness, shadow, mirrors, and deformities of the body and mind. The GM is the ultimate arbiter of which powers from *Cortex Prime* are available to characters in their game, however, so if a given GM decides that the Darkchildren in their campaign have greater access to certain kinds of odd abilities, so be it.

That being said, here are some suggestions for appropriate powers for Darkchildren:

- **Attack:** Only Darkness Blast is truly appropriate as a ranged attack, and Weapons made from congealed darkness in close combat. Both of these are available as Darkchild Talents. An argument could be made for some Tenebris forms to have natural Weapons, such as Claws or a Bite.
- **Durability:** This is a standard power for Darkchildren and typically represents scales, a hardened carapace, steel flesh, or the like.
- **Elemental Control:** Only Darkness Control would be appropriate for a general Darkchild power. Machine Control is a standard ability for Biomechanicals, and Animal Control for Therianthropes.
- **Intangibility:** This common power for Grotesques represents a liquidity of form or the ability to separate one's body into multiple, independently functioning portions.
- **Intelligence:** Common for Infernals and Invidians, but not inherently favored by any Lineage.
- **Invisibility:** "Merging with the shadows" would be a useful ability for any Darkchild.
- **Mimic:** Grotesques have access to this power inherently, but other Darkchildren find it difficult to master.
- **Movement Powers:** Almost any Movement Power would work for a Darkchild, depending on their Tenebris.
- **Psychic Powers:** Invidians have access to some mental abilities, and Therianthropes can learn to control animals. Such purely mental powers are a natural choice for Darkchildren, but more physically-oriented abilities such as Telekinesis should be avoided. Darkchildren can take the Psychic talent to gain access to greater mental powers, however.
- **Reflexes:** A common power for Darkchildren.
- **Resistance:** The most common forms of Resistance for Darkchildren are Mental Resistance and Mystic Resistance, and their Tenebris forms are already immune to mundane forms of disease.
- **Senses:** A common power for Darkchildren.
- **Shapeshift:** This ability is off-limits for Darkchildren, save in very specific circumstances (such as the effects of the Face Stealer talent). As natural shapechangers with a single alternate form, it is thematically inappropriate for Darkchildren to have additional forms they can assume.
- **Size-Changing Powers:** Generally speaking, whatever size a Darkchild's Tenebris happens to be, that's how big it always is.
- **Sorcery:** This is not an inherent power available to Darkchildren, but they can always take the Arcanist talent to gain access to it.
- **Stamina:** A common power for Darkchildren.

- **Strength:** A common power for Darkchildren.
- **Stretch:** A fairly standard power for Grotesques, and one that some other Darkchildren gain as well.
- **Teleport:** Only available through the Shadow Step talent.
- **Transmutation:** It is strongly discouraged to allow Darkchildren to take this power, as it does not resonate with their themes.

Bane

As supernatural entities, the Darkchildren suffer from pain and weakness when exposed to objects, places, or people who symbolically resonate with their antithesis. Whether this is a Grotesque burned by exposure to substances associated with spiritual purity or an Infernal repulsed by holy rhetoric, all Darkchildren suffer from such *Banes* to one degree or other.

As a general rule, when a Darkchild is exposed to his Bane he cannot use his power traits or any of his Darkchild Talents. Some Darkchild Talents with long-term effects are canceled when brought into the presence of the character's Bane, whether the originating character is present or not.

A Darkchild wearing his Mask shape may be somewhat uncomfortable in the presence of his Bane, but he suffers no further negative effects from it. After all, a character in the Mask cannot use his powers or Darkchild Talents anyway.

Each Lineage's description notes the specific conditions of their Banes, but broadly speaking:

- When a person is the Bane, the character cannot use power traits in dice pools opposed by that person, nor can they use their Darkchild Talents on that person.
- When an object or substance is the Bane, the character cannot directly affect it with his powers, nor can he use power traits to defend against attacks made using that object or substance.
- When a location is the Bane, the character cannot use his power traits or Darkchild Talents while within the location.

Blackout

Darkchildren suffer from a peculiar condition known as *Blackout*. This ailment—partly psychological and partly mystical—drives them to commit terrible acts in moments of personal weakness. These compulsions can be triggered by emotional exhaustion or mental fatigue, or in response to repeated exposure to the Darkchild's Bane.

When a Darkchild is taken past D12 mental or social stress, rather than the character being taken out of the scene, the GM may choose to spend a D12 doom die and activate their Blackout. In this case, the character immediately steps up trauma of the appropriate sort and recovers their stress. They remain in the scene as normal, acting out their Blackout if appropriate; most characters will spend at least the next scene acting out their Blackout in addition to the remainder of the scene that triggered it. (As usual, the targeted character gains 1 XP from the use of a D12 doom die.)

Each Lineage's entry includes a section detailing the typical manifestations of Blackout, but the player and GM should work together to create a dramatically satisfying character moment. Some players may feel uncomfortable describing their character's descent into darkness and depravity. For them, the *Form Lock* option should be used more regularly.

Form Lock

Many Darkchildren grow to love the power their nightmare self grants them, growing alienated from their original human shape. Over time, the Tenebris can feel more real than the Mask—or at least safer. The subconscious fear of being harmed while in the relatively powerless Mask can become a serious neurosis for some Darkchildren. This can sometimes cause the character to suffer a condition known as *form lock*.

When a Darkchild is taken out of a scene due to physical stress *or* achieves a success with a D12+ effect die on a roll including a Darkchild power, the GM can spend a D12 doom die to impose a *form lock complication*. (Again, as usual, the targeted character gains 1 XP for being picked on by the GM with a D12 doom die.)

This complication starts equal to the character's highest-rated power trait and is long-term by default, so it is not removed at the end of a scene like a normal complication. Instead, the character must spend a bridge scene action opposed by the doom pool (and the complication die) to attempt to remove the complication. Therapy, relaxation, and human contact are all useful tools for dealing with form lock. A success with an effect die equal to or greater than the complication removes it, while an effect die lower than the complication steps it back.

The most pernicious thing about form lock is that it can reassert itself if not dealt with quickly. As long as the character has the form lock complication active, suffering further trauma of *any kind* also steps up the complication. Should the complication ever go above D12, the character loses access to his Mask form permanently, short of heroic efforts on his part (i.e., a story arc dedicated specifically to regaining his humanity).

While form locked, the Darkchild cannot assume his Mask shape, trapping him in his Tenebris. For Darkchildren who embrace the power of their monstrous self, this can be little more than an inconvenience. For those that maintain a human life alongside their nocturnal activities, it can be crippling or devastating to deal with. Older and more powerful Darkchildren (those more than a century in age) are often permanently form locked, completely unable to return to their human shape at all.

For players who feel uncomfortable with the darker aspects of Blackout, form lock is the default option for Blackout. Simply ignore the usual consequences of Blackout and impose form lock instead.

Labyrinths

A cabal of Darkchildren working in concert can use their connection to darkness and mirrors to twist an area of space into a bizarre new shape, creating a lair that all of them can use as a safe haven. This lair is known as a *labyrinth*. Labyrinths take on the properties of their makers, becoming nightmarish places that no ordinary person would ever want to enter—even if they could.

The labyrinth is a special sort of pocket dimension, overlaying and overlapping the real world. Mundane people might feel a chill walking into the region of a labyrinth, but they would see only the area as it was before being claimed by the Darkchildren. The creators, their personal guests, and supernatural beings powerful enough to force their way in see the labyrinth as it has become: a Jungian maze filled with dead ends, fearful imagery, and living spaces better suited for monsters than humans.

In game terms, a labyrinth is a signature asset. Each character that has the signature asset contributes to the labyrinth's appearance and size, with more characters creating a larger labyrinth and higher asset ratings making it ever more complex and detailed. If a character lacks

the signature asset, he can be brought into the labyrinth as a guest by those that have it, but he cannot find or enter the lair without their express permission.

Outsiders can attempt to discover a labyrinth with supernatural senses of various sorts. Simply knowing a labyrinth is there does not grant entrance to it, however. Entering a labyrinth uninvited requires an action scene, with the labyrinth acting as an opposed character that can take actions to defend itself. Successful attacking actions against the labyrinth typically remove a die from its dice pool as though they were Threat dice; once all of its dice are removed, entry is gained.

Additionally, attacking a labyrinth to gain entry immediately alerts all characters linked to it that such an assault is occurring, which can allow them to enter the battle as well if they happen to be nearby. One of the worst results of such an intervention is that the intruder might get what he wanted—but with the masters of the house at home and quite ready for him.

While inside their labyrinth, a linked cabal gains a special benefit. Their signature asset die instead acts as a scale advantage against any creature not linked with the labyrinth. This allows them to add their labyrinth signature asset die to dice pools and keep three dice (instead of two) for their totals on all opposed rolls made while within the labyrinth.

Like any other signature asset, a labyrinth can be given item SFX. Such SFX can alter the ways and means by which the labyrinth defends itself, grant its owners special benefits within its halls, or allow quick return and egress to its owners, among other potential benefits. See the end of this chapter for some sample labyrinths and their abilities.

Scenting Kin

Whether they accept it or not, all Darkchildren are related in some fundamental way. Their monstrous souls call out to one another, even in human form. Older Darkchildren call this “the scent of kinship,” while younger ones sometimes call it “spidey sense” or “brain smell.” Though this sense most commonly manifests as smell—the sense most strongly associated with memory—it can also manifest as a visual aura, unearthly music, or chills across the skin.

The short version is that a Darkchild can always tell another of his kind on sight, no matter what shape they wear, unless the observed Darkchild has a special power that suppresses this sense. This is the only known power that can penetrate a Darkchild’s Mask. The “kin scent” only works when a Darkchild can clearly see another person with their own eyes; it doesn’t work through cameras or mirrors.

This takes no special resources on a Darkchild’s part, only concentration and paying attention. It’s entirely possible for a Darkchild to miss on the subtle scent of kin if he is distracted, moving quickly, or gets only a fleeting glimpse of someone. The effort required for a Darkchild to learn to hide himself from others of his own kind makes it a rare talent at best; few Darkchildren in the modern nights are interested in hiding from potential allies when they could use that effort avoiding or defeating their many enemies.

This ability can also sense the presence of a “potential,” an individual with the capacity to become a Darkchild who has not yet gone through their First Change. This sense is more unreliable than simply scenting kin, however; attempting to discern a given individual’s potential for transformation costs a plot point. Additionally, major changes in a person’s life, such as exposure to powerful supernatural energies or significant psychological trauma, can sometimes cause a formerly “mundane” individual to become a potential. No one knows why this happens, only that it occasionally does.

The Lineages

Darkchildren often refer to themselves as family, whether they perceive that familial relationship as a close or distant one. The seven “breeds” known as *Lineages* are an ancient way of referring to Darkchild family trees, placing Darkchildren of similar appearances and powers into groups of like kind. Many stereotypes exist for each Lineage, some true and some less so, but all of them grounded in some semblance of reality.

In older times, Darkchildren rarely made friends or allies across different Lineages. Some Lineages had political or social groups within their “own kind,” recognizing other Darkchildren as relatives but not necessarily as equals. The most common organizational unit was the *cabal*, a small group of close-knit Darkchildren from the same Lineage who shared resources even if they lacked common goals. When a Darkchild of a different Lineage joined such a cabal, they were typically in a subservient position, a perpetual fifth wheel.

The modern nights have no use for such outdated cliquishness. Today, cabals of younger Darkchildren happily take on members from any Lineage, building ties of alliance based more on common goals and background than on esoteric mythology or the prejudices of their elders. In this way, modern Darkchild culture reflects the mortal culture inside which it hides—more open and inclusive, with prejudiced and traditional elders regarded as dangerously out of touch by their juniors.

Character Creation

In terms of character creation, a player chooses a Lineage for his character to be from. This Lineage determines the general outlines of his Tenebris form, his starting powers, his favored powers, his highlighted skills, his Bane, and the effects of going into Blackout. While a Darkchild can learn powers and talents associated with other Lineages than his native one, these are somewhat more expensive to acquire and develop in experience points, reflecting the difficulty that a Darkchild faces when trying to gain abilities so far outside of his native ones.

Behemoth

Hulks, Things, Destroyers

Everyone has felt the desire to break something. In a moment of frustration, smashing something can feel not just good but downright justified—but when the moment passes, you’re left with the pieces of whatever you broke and the shame of giving in. Behemoths are born from the dark place inside every human being that wants to break something and just doesn’t care what happens afterwards.

A Behemoth’s defining characteristic is the horrific rage that he felt at the moment of his First Change—a rage that still bubbles up within him at the worst possible times. Many Behemoths seem cool and collected much of the time, but that’s only because of the hard lessons they’ve had to learn in controlling the fury that lurks in their hearts. While not every Behemoth turns to physical violence as their first solution, breaking something is always on the table as far as they’re concerned. When you transform into a hammer, every problem looks like a nail eventually.

Obviously, Behemoths are traditionally associated with the sin of wrath, the uncontrolled feelings of anger that drive one person to inflict hot-blooded harm on another. Wrath is the sin

that insists revenge is best served like fast food—steaming hot and as quickly as possible. Wrath invites self-destruction through a dedication to harm others at any cost to oneself. As the old saying goes, “When setting out for vengeance, be prepared to dig two graves.” The typical Behemoth response would be, “Don’t be stupid—I intend to kill *way more* than two people.”

Tenebris: If a single word were used to describe a Behemoth in Tenebris form, it would be “big.” Regardless of the details, a Behemoth’s monstrous shape is larger than human—sometimes *much* larger. Most Behemoths are still humanoid in their Tenebris, resembling massive, hulking abominations with bulging muscles and caveman foreheads.

Others turn into massive legendary creatures, such as dragons, or freakish extinct beasts, like dinosaurs. Where a Therianthrope is an unwholesome blend of human and animal, a Behemoth’s shape is larger than any real animal of its type, or a huge animal that no longer exists—or that never existed. Such bestial shapes have little to nothing in common with the human form.

Above all else, a Behemoth’s defining characteristic is his size. A typical Behemoth’s Tenebris form ranges from a foot or so taller than his Mask to the size of a truck—and a few are even bigger.

Starting Powers: Durability D8, Strength D8

Favored Powers: Durability, Stamina, Strength.

Highlighted Skills: Fight, Labor, Move, Throw.

Bane: *David and Goliath.* Will Rogers once said, “People who fly into a rage always make a bad landing.” Being angry all the time makes Behemoths overlook small details or dismiss “weaklings” who are clearly no threat to their overpowering might. This means that Behemoths are intensely vulnerable to things that shouldn’t be a threat to a normal person, let alone a nigh-unstoppable rage monster. A single thorn, a thumbtack, a swarm of harmless white mice, or a frightened child can all act as manifestations of the character’s Bane.

In game terms, a Behemoth’s powers do not protect them from attacks made with some small, almost harmless class of objects. Choose such a type, though it should not be something particularly rare. Some common choices include “household furnishings,” “switches and thorns,” “thrown rocks,” “kitchen implements,” and so on. They cannot use their powers in reaction pools against such attacks.

Behemoths also cannot use their powers in action dice pools made to attack or hinder “harmless” targets of a particular sort, or to defend against the attacks of such enemies; work with the GM to choose an appropriate group. Such things could include small children, tiny and cute animals, or a particular gender, but it always also includes specific people the Behemoth has called out as “weaklings” or “pathetic.”

A Behemoth can gain 1 PP in a scene by designating a single opposing character as their Bane—typically by vocally insulting their strength or prowess.

Blackout: *Unstoppable Rage.* A Behemoth pushed past the breaking point becomes a force of nature, terrible to behold and equally uncontrollable. In many ways, a Behemoth’s Blackout is the simplest among the Darkchildren—they just want to break things. The character lashes out in anger, taking everything as an insult, looking for a fight, or just smashing anything that comes within arm’s reach.

Behemoths in Blackout look for things to destroy—whether that means enemies, objects, buildings, relationships, or loud-mouthed friends. The character avoids harming allies or innocents as long as they stay out of his way, but anyone who tries to interfere is liable to get stomped flat. Some Behemoths go out to find old enemies, looking to avenge past wrongs, while

others are happy to make new enemies on the spot. Even a Behemoth that avoids physical assault is likely to say things they can't easily take back later.

Behemoth Feature Table

Roll D10	Feature
1	Long arms that drag the ground.
2	A huge body with disproportionately small features, like a tiny head or delicate hands.
3	Neanderthal facial features and bulging limbs.
4	Incredibly tall, but impossibly thin.
5	Impossibly wide, like being stretched out laterally.
6	Extra limbs on a giant body, such as a second head or third arm.
7	Vaguely humanoid monster.
8	Impossibly large beast.
9	Huge extinct animal.
10	Disproportionately large features, like oversized hands and feet.

Biomechanical

Golems, Borgs, Puppets

There are people who have always felt more comfortable with objects than with other human beings. Some prefer possessions to companions, while others find worth and meaning in working base matter into finished works. People with the inclination to prize the stability of things over the chaos of individuals would easily understand the impulse that drives Biomechanicals.

A Biomechanical is forged from a mindset that places objects in a position of high importance, whether in their position, acquisition, or creation. Artists, engineers, and obsessive collectors are all potential candidates for this Lineage. Abuse victims often become Biomechanicals as well; the desire to be empty of painful emotions resonates strongly with a transformation into a form with a heart literally made of stone or steel.

Biomechanicals are associated with the sin of greed, the desire for material possessions or the condition of loving inanimate objects more than one's fellow man. Indeed, many Biomechanicals showed a predilection for covetousness or obsessive collecting before their transformation—and some still possess that characteristic after the change. A woman who loves her motorcycle more than her own children or a man who would kill for a complete set of his favorite action figures—still in the box, of course—hold in them the seeds of the Darkchildren.

Tenebris: In ancient times, Biomechanicals were better known as golems or *omphaloi*, but their existence has always been a cornerstone of the Children of the Dark. A Biomechanical is defined by his Tenebris form being mostly or completely made of nonliving matter, whether stone, steel, plastic, or more exotic materials still. Older Biomechanicals manifested as living statues, men and women with armor for skin, or people of clay and gemstones. Modern Biomechanicals often seem like cyborgs or robots, some of them entwined with machinery or vehicles to create a sort of robotic centaur.

More than any other Lineage, the progression of Biomechanical shapes from primitive statuary to bleeding-edge robotics argues that there is a cultural or psychological element to a Darkchilde's transformation. Even today, however, Biomechanicals sometimes manifest with a more "classical" bent.

Starting Powers: Durability D8, Stamina D8

Favored Powers: Durability, Machine Control, Stamina, Weapon.

Highlighted Skills: Craft, Drive, Fix, Operate.

Bane: *By Your Own Petard.* A Biomechanical's fixation of what belongs to them and their love of objects creates a chink in their otherwise impenetrable armor. This obsessive love makes it almost impossible for a Biomechanical to harm such objects, and it leaves them vulnerable to attacks by such objects. Many stories are told of metal men who were slain by a weapon forged out of the iron leftover from their creation, or statuary women killed with the chisels that cut them from stone. These are mythological remembrances of the idea that the things a Biomechanical perceives as "theirs" are the surest weapons against them.

Biomechanicals cannot use their powers in dice pools to attack a person carrying something belonging to the character, nor can they use their powers to defend against attacks from such a person. Being in the presence of one of their beloved possessions that has been broken to pieces or otherwise wrecked beyond repair also triggers their Bane. The object must still be recognizable in some way, so a favorite motorcycle melted down and forged into a set of armor won't stop a Darkchild, but a *Mad Max*-style suit of armor made from bits and pieces chopped off that same motorcycle and a knife made from a sharpened exhaust pipe will put the fear of god into them.

To count as a "possession" for purposes of a Bane, an object must have been owned by the character and kept in their home or other sanctuary for no less than a month. If it was stolen, the object must not have been in someone else's possession for more than a month, but an item that is simply lost or misplaced retains its talismanic quality against the character until it is completely forgotten.

A Biomechanical can gain 1 PP in a scene by declaring their love or need for a specific object, transforming it into their Bane.

Blackout: *Cold as Stone.* When a Biomechanical suffers Blackout, they cut themselves off from their humanity, becoming a rational, emotionless machine whose only purpose is to take care of themselves. The character looks out for number one to the exclusion of all else, helping others only when it costs them nothing and demanding recompense for their efforts. They think nothing of being callous toward people they normally love, abandoning them if there seems to be no immediate profit in it for them.

Biomechanicals in Blackout look for ways to enrich themselves—whether that means financially, materially, or by gaining power and position. They are not necessarily cruel, but their cold calculation of investment to return can certainly seem that way to their friends and allies.

Biomechanical Feature Table

Roll D10	Feature
1	Ordinary person made from inorganic material, such as clay or steel.
2	Randomly mixed flesh and inorganic material, like a patchwork doll.
3	Stitched-together corpse, made of bits of different bodies.
4	Doll-sized body made from cloth or porcelain.
5	Armor or weapons grafted into flesh.
6	Hair, eyes, teeth, and nails replaced by obviously inorganic material.
7	A mobile statue or human-shaped object, such as a scarecrow.
8	Body parts randomly replaced with semi-functional devices.
9	Wheels or treads instead of legs.

Devourer

Leeches, Wendigos, Vampires

One of humanity’s deepest fears is the dread of going hungry. Starvation has been a grim specter throughout the majority of human history, well into the modern era in many parts of the world. Even today, the richest countries in the world have people suffering from malnutrition and privation. Perhaps this is why the Devourers elicit such instinct terror, loathing, and despair—as well as a horrific attraction. They represent both want and excess, a hunger that can never be filled despite constantly feeding it. People despise those who take more than their share, even as they long to have as much.

These are the two sides of the Devourers, who are the inspiration for the various vampire and vampire-like myths across the world: hunger and desire. They feed on others and in turn inspire the same hunger in those they feed from. They are both addict and dealer, moving through the world like a living plague.

Ultimately, the Devourer’s nature is a selfish one; everyone else can starve as long as they get their fill. This has historically made them unpopular even with other Darkchildren, but the modern nights have redeemed their image in many ways. What was once seen as puerile selfishness is now often regarded as roguish individuality—at least until a Devourer’s teeth close around a supposed friend’s throat, and the “friend” gets to see how horrifying hunger really is.

As might be apparent, Devourers are associated with the classical sin of gluttony. Devourers are not content to simply consume enough to survive. Like a pig at a trough, a Devourer wants to gorge themselves to the point of senselessness, taking and taking until nothing is left to take and still wanting more. A given Devourer’s overindulgence may not be in the form of food; they might also be gluttons for drugs, sex, blood, or other “impure” vices. Some Devourers are gourmets rather than gourmands, taking the best the world has to offer and leaving behind only scraps for others. Regardless of the specifics, a Devourer’s general attitude is almost inevitably “me first”—and everyone else a very distant second.

Tenebris: Though they may be horrific in appearance, with gaping maws, razor-sharp teeth, distended jaws, famine thinness, or similar marks of their eternal hunger, they also possess a strange and unnatural charm. A Devourer may not possess the absolute beauty of an Invidian, but they often have something about them that draws others even as it repulses. Onlookers often mistake their hunger for interest or mere intensity—until it’s too late.

A Devourer’s Tenebris always speaks of hunger, need, and want, whether in its demonstration or its negative image. One Devourer might be little more than a skeleton covered by parchment skin, while another could be a grossly overweight figure with a mouth as wide as their head. Distortions of the mouth and belly are commonplace among Devourers. Their forms can be almost as nearly-human as an Invidian—or almost as freakishly deformed as a Grotesque.

Starting Powers: Reflexes D8, Senses D8

Favored Powers: Mind Control, Reflexes, Senses, Strength.

Highlighted Skills: Influence, Move, Notice, Sneak.

Bane: *Impure Hunger.* A Devourer is defined by his need to feed. Each Devourer has a particular craving that he needs to feed on a regular basis or become virtually powerless. Additionally, people who regularly deprive themselves of personal pleasures for higher purposes repulse Devourers, who think of little more than their own wants.

The Devourer's player should work with the GM to pick a craving. This could be eating triple helpings at every meal, daily fixes of a particular hard drug, weekly ingestion of human blood, or only eating meals that have been prepared by hand from fresh ingredients. The more difficult or dangerous the requirement, the less frequently the character has to fill it, but no less often than once weekly. Each time the character avoids fulfilling his craving, all of his powers are stepped back and one of his Darkchild talents stops working; a power stepped below D6 is shutdown. For each time a "starving" Devourer feeds his craving, his powers step up again, to a maximum of their original value, and a nonfunctional talent returns to normal.

Individuals who have a strong history of willing personal deprivation are essentially immune to a Devourer's powers. They cannot use power traits in action or reaction rolls against such people, and they count as being in the presence of the character's Bane for rendering talents nonfunctional. The GM has final call on who counts for this purpose, but a good Catholic who avoids meat on Fridays probably isn't deprived enough, while a Buddhist monk who fasts regularly, a celibate priest, or a single mother who puts every spare dime she earns into her children's college fund all most likely count. Such individuals often have the ability to "repel" Devourers with the power of their faith, inflicting mental stress just from their prayers and invocations.

A Devourer can gain 1 PP in a scene by declaring that they are "hungry," stepping back their powers as though they had avoided their craving until they take time to feed.

Blackout: *Bottomless Pit.* A Devourer in the throes of Blackout is like a junkie looking for a fix. His raw need is painful to the point of obsession, pushing him to do nearly anything to satiate his hunger. Whether his need is food, drugs, or blood, a Devourer gripped by Blackout cares nothing for others save in their ability to feed him. It becomes difficult to remember that human beings are anything but walking sacks of meat, or that pets aren't food animals, or that snorting a whole kilo of cocaine now means there won't be any left later.

Devourers in Blackout abandon their responsibilities to look for something to satisfy their hunger. That might mean breaking into a butcher's shop after hours, raiding backyards for untended dogs and cats, tearing out a hooker's throat with his teeth in an alley, or prostituting himself for a hit. Nothing is too low, too cruel, or too violent for a Devourer who needs his fix. You can never trust a junkie.

Devourer Feature Table

Roll D10	Feature
1	Overly large mouth filled with razor-sharp teeth.
2	Lamprey-like circular sucking mouth.
3	Strangely hinged jaw, such as a mandibular arrangement or pharyngeal jaws.
4	Extra mouths in unusual places, such as palms of hands or instead of eyes.
5	Giant mouth in torso.
6	Long, barbed tongue that dangles from mouth.
7	Vertical mouth that turns entire head into jaws.
8	Toothed suckers on hands and arms.
9	Facial tentacles surrounding a beaked maw.
10	No lips and too many teeth in a mouth that goes from ear to ear.

Grotesque

Freaks, Mutants, Exiles

Some things defy description and beggar the ability of language to do them justice in their horror. The Grotesques definitely fit that definition. A Grotesque is any Darkchild whose Tenebris form bears so little resemblance to their human origin that an onlooker wouldn't be able to tell that they had ever been human at all. Grotesques can be missing limbs or have too many, be amorphous or crystalline, resemble bizarre chimeras, or have a small number of human features improperly welded to an obviously inhuman form. The only thing they have in common is the low revulsion and nausea that their twisted forms invoke in onlookers.

In older Darkchild society, Grotesques were often considered the lowest of the low. Their inhuman forms made it impossible for them to get along in human society in Tenebris form, unlike Devourers or Invidians who can get by with simple disguises. They are not as powerful as Behemoths or Therianthropes, and they lack the raw endurance and staying power of Biomechanicals. Their powers make them excellent sneak-thieves—but also adept assassins and spies. Even in the modern nights, Grotesques sometimes get the short end of the stick from their companions; some let it wash over them without a second thought, while others nurse slow-burning grudges that can turn into cold betrayal.

Grotesques are symbolically connected to the sin of sloth—which is traditionally less avoidance of exertion and more a spiritual condition of indifference to evil, or sorrow about the nonexistence of good to the point of apathy. Sloth is a condition of mental or emotional carelessness, a state in which a person has so little will to oppose evil that they instead enable its growth. Grotesques have a reputation for shirking their responsibilities, being unreliable, and avoiding conflict like the plague. Whether this is because they are actually lazy and indecisive or because they get sick of being treated like freaks by their own kind is an open debate.

Tenebris: Grotesques are the worst of the worst in terms of monstrosity. Often, their many freakish features are so bizarrely constructed or paradoxically combined that the mere sight of them in their Tenebris can drive ordinary people not just to fear but to actual temporary insanity.

Their protean forms have sometimes been compared to creatures more from modern literature and film than from classic mythology—shoggoths, the Blob, John Carpenter's *The Thing*—but they can also be connected to more bizarre legendary horrors. Some speak of Argus, who was covered with hundreds of eyes; or Hiruko, the boneless son of Izanami who was exiled by the gods for his deformity; or the penanggalan, which appears as a woman's head trailing a bag of internal organs as it floats through the air with a demented smile.

Some of this Lineage go the other way in their appearance—essentially human, save for some major deformity or pseudo-injury that could never be survivable for a mortal. These include people with “death marks” like perpetually bleeding cut throats, missing jaws, gouged-out eyes, sewn-up mouths, and the like. It can also include horrifying deviations from the norm like extra malformed limbs, organs on the outside of one's body, orifices in the wrong places (or too many of them), and so on.

Many Grotesques take a perverse pride in their own ugliness. The further from the human form a Grotesque is, the more uniquely awful their Tenebris shape, the more other Grotesques will defer to the one so misshapen. Among older Grotesques, the tradition of “the biggest freak in the room” was an important social marker. While it is less so in the modern nights, it persists more than the traditions of many other Lineages.

Starting Powers: Stamina D8, Stretching *or* Intangibility D8

Favored Powers: Intangibility, Mimic, Resistance, Stamina, Stretching.

Highlighted Skills: Notice, Sneak, Survive, Treat.

Bane: *Unclean.* Grotesques are the very embodiment of disgusting. Their repulsiveness makes them metaphorically—and often physically—unclean. Because of this association, they are harmed by things that represent purity and cleanliness, as well as people who embody those attributes.

The Grotesque's player should pick a single substance symbolically associated with purity, such as silver, gold, salt, cold-wrought iron, uncooked rice, fresh peaches, or something in that vein. Any character carrying that substance—in any amount, down to the size of a ring—is protected from the Grotesque's powers, as the character cannot use power traits in action or reaction dice pools against such a person. An amount of the substance greater than a fist-sized lump—so a double-handful of rice, a single large peach, or a few pounds of silver, for example—shuts down their talents that are rendered useless in the presence of their Bane.

Grotesques also suffer these penalties in the presence of a person who is spiritually and emotionally pure to an extreme degree. The GM has the final say about who qualifies, but some examples might include a nun cloistered for her entire adult life, a Buddhist monk who has spent a lifetime devoted to asceticism, a toddler who has never known a moment of sadness, and so on. Old lore suggested that virgins counted as “pure” for this purpose, but modern experience has demonstrated that a person's self-perception is much more important; a sexually experienced person who feels no shame about their lifestyle is closer to purity for this purpose than a self-loathing virgin.

A Grotesque can gain 1 PP in a scene by declaring that a person present meets their criteria of purity, or that a character in the scene is carrying the Grotesque's Bane on their person.

Blackout: *Rebellion of the Meek.* A Grotesque who goes into Blackout is less destructive than many other Darkchildren, but far more insidiously dangerous. Such individuals never directly confront others in their altered state. Instead, they shirk important duties, blow off their responsibilities, and ruin others' work through their recalcitrance, foot-dragging, or bad attitude.

At their worst, a Grotesque suffering Blackout begins thinking of all the lingering resentments they have from the slights—perceived or real—they have suffered at the hands of others, and they seek subtle, ugly revenge. They poison favorite pets, break valuable antiques when no one is around, slander their supposed friends behind their backs, lay dangerous traps, and otherwise sabotage the lives of the people around them. Grotesques avoid face-to-face confrontations, but they are happy to wreak lethal retribution from afar.

Grotesque Feature Table

Roll D10	Feature
1	Amorphous blob.
2	Gelatinous skin, possibly translucent or transparent.
3	Corpse-like gauntness.
4	Stigmata-like wounds that never heal.
5	Horrific, cancerous growths in obvious places.
6	No face—just smooth, blank skin.
7	Extra facial features—too many eyes, second mouth, and so on.
8	Body covered in festering sores or wounds.
9	Boneless bag of skin and organs.
10	Tentacle limbs.

Infernal

Tempters, Fallen Angels, the Wicked

Where there is virtue, there is inevitably vice. All light casts a shadow. While not all Infernals are “evil”—indeed, very few of them would regard themselves in such a way—they do have a dark edge to their behavior that comes from their general belief that they are simply better than the people around them. This relentless self-confidence can turn very ugly indeed when they are thwarted or slighted, but it’s uncommon for Infernals to hold grudges beyond a moment of immediate retribution. After all, no one is really important enough for them to hate in the long-term.

Infernals, more than any other Children of the Dark, represent the joy and freedom that comes from reigning in hell. Infernals often surprise others with how cheerful, happy, and positive they seem to be, but some people manage to see through the façade to the real Infernal: prideful, arrogant, self-centered, and superior to a fault. It’s easy to seem happy when you think you’re the most important thing in the universe.

While some Infernals are merely narcissists, others use their cheerfully arrogant veneer to hide a deep-seated pain. At some point in their lives, they were rejected painfully from something that meant the world to them—their family, a relationship, a career—and the sudden sense of their own worthlessness caused them to rage against the fate that befell them, even if it was their own fault. In the end, all Infernals are the sort of people who would rather curse god and risk being smote than to accept blame for their misdeeds.

Tenebris: There is little question about where the legends of demons, devils, and fallen angels came from when one sees an Infernal. Many of them have red skin, cloven hooves, spade-tipped tails, goat-like eyes, crippled wings, or a persistent smell of sulfur about them. Horns are exceedingly common among this Lineage, from tiny, delicate goat horns to curling, powerful ram horns and mighty racks of antlers.

Not every Infernal resembles the western icon of Satan either. Some possess the broken, corpse-like appearance of the *dybbuk* or *ghul*, the blue skin and tusks of the *asuras*, the black eyes and bright red skin of the *oni*, and far more. Any culture that embodies human moral failings as discrete individuals produces legends of “demons,” and the Infernals draw from all of their legends for their appearance.

Starting Powers: Fire Resistance D8, Mental Resistance D8

Favored Powers: Fire Blast, Fire Control, Fire Resistance, Mental Resistance.

Highlighted Skills: Focus, Influence, Sneak, Trick.

Bane: *Unholy.* An Infernal is incapable of acknowledging any power greater than himself. Even foes that dominate him through sheer force are just stronger, not “better.” Because of this, overt shows of faith, charity, and altruism can make them physically ill. Being reminded that others sometimes put the good of their community ahead of themselves or that some people wholeheartedly devote themselves to a higher cause is just painful.

Infernals are repelled by symbols of faith wielded by those who truly believe in them. A cross held in the hand of a pious woman, or a rabbi holding forth a Star of David will equally cause them pain. Such individuals are immune to the Infernal’s powers; he cannot use power traits in action or reaction pools against these people. Mere shows of faith are not enough—genuine belief and piety are necessary. Religious faith is not required either; an atheist who believes fervently in the power of science and reason as an unalloyed good for humankind could repulse an Infernal with a copy of Newton’s *Principia Mathematica* as much as a priest reading from the King James Bible.

Locations held as sacred to community, charity, and selflessness are anathema to Infernals. Setting foot in such a location makes them nauseous and renders them as powerless as facing a person of piety. This might include cathedrals of a religious faith, community centers built for a tight-knit neighborhood, or the offices of a charitable non-profit organization. Any place devoted to selfishness disguised as piety holds no such power; the corporate temple of a televangelist would be just another building to an Infernal.

Objects bound up with centuries or millennia of faith, piety, or charity might also act as Banes to an Infernal at the GM's call. Something like the fingerbone of a saint, a sword carried by ten generations of crusaders, or the like would be necessary to reach such a threshold, however.

An Infernal can gain 1 PP in a scene by declaring that a person, object, or place present in the scene meets their definition of holiness or faith, becoming their Bane.

Blackout: *Pride Goeth.* An Infernal might be arrogant or self-important under normal conditions, but one in Blackout becomes truly unbearable. They demean and belittle the people around them, lashing out with cruel words—and sometimes physical blows—if their desires and demands are not immediately met. They are over-critical, mean, and pompous beyond belief. They brag about their abilities and plans, taunt their enemies rather than defeat them, and generally act like cartoon supervillains.

A common error in judgment for Infernals in Blackout is to make bad bargains or bets; offering a golden fiddle as a prize in a fiddling contest when the Infernal has a tin ear is pretty much par for the course. They overpromise, certain that they'll be able to fulfill their obligations when the time comes, inevitably causing feelings of betrayal and anger when it turns out that they can't follow through—or causing even worse problems by trying to follow through anyway.

Infernal Feature Table

Roll D10	Feature
1	Bright red or blue skin.
2	Horns and glowing eyes.
3	Black eyes and claws.
4	Fangs and pointed ears.
5	Spade-tipped tail and scaly skin.
6	Cloven hooves.
7	Bat-like wings.
8	Broken, bloody feathered wings.
9	Chains growing through the skin.
10	Body made of solid darkness.

Invidian

Muses, Beauties, the Fairest

Not every Darkchild's true form is horrific. Some would be considered attractive by conventional standards—were it not for their obvious monstrosity, like a serpent coiled among roses. Invidians' Tenebris form comes from a place of envy, wishing for perfection and power at the cost of their humanity. Where other Darkchildren have powers that are primarily physical, Invidians have powers that more often border on the mental. They have the innate ability to charm onlookers, warping their perspective to something more to the Invidian's liking.

The covetousness of the Invidian is distinct from the greed of a Biomechanical. Where a Biomechanical simply loves things more than people, the Invidian is only interested in the possessions or attributes that are prized by others. It isn't the thing itself that has value to an Invidian, only the emotional investment that another person has in it and the fulfillment that person seems to derive from its possession. Whether that is wealth, good looks, intelligence, a fast car, or a good relationship, an Invidian feels seething jealousy toward the happiness of others and a need to take what makes them happy—or else spoil it.

Ironically, Invidians often inspire the same envy they feel in others of their own kind. Other Darkchildren frequently complain about the “Barbie dolls” and their unearthly beauty. These complaints never seem to understand that a merely ugly Darkchild might cause fear in a mortal onlooker, but the flawed beauty of an Invidian can provoke obsession that turns into seething hatred.

Tenebris: Invidians are universally beautiful—save for a grotesque and obviously monstrous distortion of the human form. Some are statuesque, others svelte, and some stout, but all emanate an aura of charisma and beauty that none can deny. The appearance of an Invidian is not merely “good-looking,” but actively attractive enough to make people’s hearts skip a beat or their breath stop in their throat.

Each Invidian has a unique and obvious defect or deformity that makes them obviously inhuman, aside from their unearthly beauty. This might be subtle enough that it can be disguised with heavy clothes or deep shadows, or it might be as obvious as any Grotesque’s maladaptation. Invidians strongly associate with the legend of Medusa, who was cursed by the gods after being wronged by one of their number, but they also resonate with the stories of the *kitsune*, the nine-tailed foxes of Japanese myth who steal husbands and children, and the sirens, who could control the minds of humankind with their song. Despite the mythical associations, as many Invidians are male and non-binary as female; no gender has a monopoly on jealousy.

Starting Powers: Mind Control D8, Senses D8

Favored Powers: Mental Resistance, Mind Control, Senses, Stamina.

Highlighted Skills: Influence, Notice, Perform, Trick.

Bane: *The Pain of Longing.* The great curse of the Invidian is that they want too much, but their powers fail to touch the people or things they truly desire. An Invidian cannot use their power traits or Darkchild Talents in dice pools that target the object of their obsession. They can use their powers on the people around those objects with no difficulty, but the thing itself is immune. This applies equally to an individual who “possesses” the object of their obsession: if the Invidian desires another man’s wife, both the wife and husband are the character’s Bane.

Invidians rarely keep the object of their envy for very long should they gain it. Being in the presence of a taken object—or a person with whom a relationship was gained under false pretenses—shuts down the Invidian’s power traits and Darkchild Talents as surely as if they were using those powers against the Bane. The things and people an Invidian claims from envy profit them not at all. Even if they manage to hold out against their Bane and keep the object of their obsession close at hand, the fascination eventually fades... leading them to discard or destroy the previously desired person or thing anyway.

Given these restrictions, an ascetic lifestyle of privation would be safest, but an Invidian can no more stop coveting than they can stop breathing. Because of this, an Invidian *always* has an object of obsession—whenever one is resolved, another takes over soon after.

An Invidian can gain 1 PP by declaring a person or object in their current scene to be the object of their desire—and thus, their Bane.

Blackout: *Green-Eyed Monster.* Invidians in the throes of Blackout do not merely covet—they actively take what they want. This can lead to theft, kidnapping, and worse as the Invidian uses their powers mercilessly on the people around them to get the things they desire. Once they have what they want, of course, those things offer no comfort, leading to those things being discarded or even destroyed so that no one else can have them. If the Invidian cannot take what they want, ruining it so that no one else can have it is quite good enough.

Most Invidians prefer some form of manipulation to ruin or steal from a distance, rather than getting their own hands dirty—especially given their Bane. They only reveal their part in a ploy once the time has come to rub their victim’s face in it. Unlike Infernals, who are happy to gloat in public, an Invidian generally seeks to privately deliver their cruel barbs. It’s fine if the only people who know the truth are the Invidian and their victim—preferably with the victim unable to retaliate without making the Invidian look like the wronged party.

Invidian Feature Table

Roll D10	Feature
1	Hair made of snakes or other vermin.
2	Living tattoos that show the character’s thoughts.
3	Multiple thrashing tails.
4	Fish-belly pale skin shot through with blue veins.
5	No eyes, or too many eyes.
6	Fingers that are actually smaller arms.
7	Limbs and head are on backwards.
8	Scarification across large portions of the body; the scars seem to form words.
9	Disproportionate features—too-small eyes, overly large head, etc.
10	Overly smooth features—no fingerprints, no hair, no coloration, no fingernails.

Therianthrope

Beasts, Weres, Skinchangers

Few people can say that they have not felt a shiver of fear when looking into a wild animal’s eyes. For much of human history, the wilderness might as well have been another world compared to the relative safety of villages and towns—and that world was filled with monsters. Entering the wilderness was tantamount to abdicating one’s position at the top of the food chain, to admitting that humanity did not possess mastery over nature. And yet people have always felt lured to the wilderness as well, drawn to the promise of a life of perfect freedom like that possessed by the beasts and the birds.

Therianthropes are the Darkchildren born from that dichotomy: terror and freedom as one. They are formed from a bestial instinct that lurks in the dark corners of the human mind. Almost every culture in the world has legends of men who could become animals or monstrous fusions of animal and man, demonstrating the ubiquitous nature of man’s interest in the wild. Therianthrope Tenebris forms suggest animals of power and fearful repute, typically predators or scavengers, but shapes derived from aggressive herbivores are not unknown among their number.

These Darkchildren are associated with the classical sin of lust, which is defined as not just sexual but rather as any form of “base” or “animal” sensuality. The thrill of the chase, the joy of the hunt, and the satisfaction that comes from a mouthful of hot blood and meat are all lusty emotions. Lust is often associated with poor self-control, turning one’s life into a disordered

tempest, moving chaotically from one passion to the next. Because of this, Therianthropes are often regarded by other Darkchildren as being impulsive or hot-headed; indeed, those who are called to this Lineage are often people who care less for lengthy debate than for jumping headlong into *doing something*.

Tenebris: The common feature of Therianthrope true shapes is their affinity with animals. They might find themselves transforming into the semblance of an animal they deeply feared before their First Change, their psyche latching onto that terror as something to inspire fear in others, or into a beast they respected and loved, but twisted and deformed in some fashion.

While most Therianthropes closely resemble humanoid animals with greater or lesser degrees of “human” in the mix, some are more like beasts with a few human features. Animals with human faces and hands instead of paws, centaur-like mixes of human and animal, and chimerical fusions of several different beasts have all been seen in the past. Huge examples of normally tiny creatures, such as man-sized spiders, are not uncommon either. Regardless of how animal-like their form, however, no Therianthrope in Tenebris form could ever be mistaken for a natural creature by someone who sees them clearly.

Starting Powers: Senses D8, Strength D8

Favored Powers: Animal Control, Senses, Stamina, Strength.

Highlighted Skills: Fight, Move, Notice, Survive.

Bane: *Reason Rejects Instinct*. As creatures of pure instinct and sensual existence in their Tenebris form, Therianthropes are often harmed by materials associated with science, rational thought, and civilization—things that serve as the triumph of reason over instinct. Wrought gold and silver jewelry, finely-crafted steel, and powerful sorcery all act like searing acid to the ever-healing flesh of a Therianthrope. Mass-produced items seem to have almost no power over them, whatever they might be made of, but a hand-crafted item of exquisite design and thoughtful purpose made from materials not found in pure form in nature is highly dangerous.

Therianthropes cannot use power traits or Darkchild Talents against mortals trained in sorcery. Such “witches” might seem to be products of a more superstitious age to outsiders, but to the Darkchildren, magic represents the first true triumph of humanity over nature. Supernatural beings with similar sorcerous talents have no such protection from a Therianthrope’s wrath. They also suffer this penalty when attacked with a unique item made entirely from worked metal of high value—a hand-forged sword of Damascus steel would suffice, as would hand-cast bullets made from high-purity silver.

In theory, an ordinary mortal who had completely conquered their own instincts and acted only from pure reason would act as a Bane similar to sorcerers, but in practice such individuals may as well not exist.

A Therianthrope can gain 1 PP by declaring that an object possessed by a person in the current scene is handwrought or possessing a magical aura, thus acting as their bane.

Blackout: *Call of the Wild*. A Therianthrope who succumbs to Blackout is an animal in behavior as well as in appearance. They give themselves over to pure instinct, acting without thought or rationale. They don’t explain their actions to others, instead letting those actions speak on their behalf. If someone angers them, they fight; if they are hungry, they eat; if they are bored, they run naked into the forest. They lose all capacity for proactive decision-making and instead become purely reactionary, responding to the world around them rather than planning. If they talk at all, it’s mostly in grunts and short words.

Human morality becomes a distant memory in this state. For a Therianthrope in Blackout, the world is simple. Everything is a matter of predator and prey, kill or be killed. There are friends,

who must be protected at any cost—and enemies, who must be driven off or destroyed. Other Darkchildren talk at length about the loyalty of Therianthropes, but not every animalistic Darkchild is a pack animal. More than a few regard themselves as a tribe of one, and their only friend in Blackout is themselves. There are as many jackals among their number as there are wolves.

Therianthrope Feature Table

Roll D10	Feature
1	Animal paws instead of hands and feet.
2	Hairy or scaly all over with short claws and fangs.
3	Hulking humanoid animal.
4	Centaur-like creature, animal body with a human torso.
5	Animal head on otherwise human body.
6	Animal body with human hands and face.
7	Two or more animals fused together.
8	Satyr or harpy style fusion, with animal legs and features but human torso.
9	Chimerical and uneven mishmash of human and animal parts.
10	Human-sized animal with unnatural coloring or features.

Labyrinths

One of the most important resources available to a Darkchild of sufficient worldly experience is the ability to create a labyrinth, a special sort of lair that gives him a safe place to rest and recuperate out of the sight of his enemies. To a mortal, a labyrinth could simply seem like a creepy abandoned house; when one of its owners enters it, however, they disappear from the real world and enter a phantasmagoric pocket dimension that resembles a journey into their own mind.

Labyrinths are key to a cabal's success in the long term. A well-placed lair gives them a fallback point in time of need, as well as a hidden headquarters to plot their assaults on the Anunnaki. A labyrinth is not perfectly safe, since it can be found by sufficient mystical scrutiny and broken into with enough supernatural force, but it's safer and more comfortable than most other options.

Creating a labyrinth requires a significant amount of mental investment for a Darkchild. The creator requires some days of undisturbed thought and concentration in the lair's physical location to begin building the labyrinth. This means that busy public spaces are almost impossible to turn into a labyrinth; most suitable locales are physically isolated or abandoned to begin with. As the Darkchild withdraws into themselves, the area begins to take on characteristics of their inner world. Eventually, once they have invested enough of themselves into it, they vanish from the real world as their labyrinth enfolds them.

The labyrinth exists "beside" the real location, like a ghostly overlay that only the creator can perceive and enter. Transitioning between the real place and the labyrinth is an act of concentration for the owner, but even from the real world they can still sense the status of the labyrinth as though they were within its halls.

Once the labyrinth is generated, ordinary people begin to avoid the locale. Rumors about it being haunted or cursed crop up out of nowhere. Entering the area feels "creepy" or "cold," and

sleeping there causes nightmares bone-chilling enough that few would be willing to spend more than one night there. This psychic resonance can cause mystically canny individuals who know about labyrinths to speculate if they hear such rumors but discerning the difference between a labyrinth and a “mere” haunted house can be difficult.

A Darkchild can only be bound to one labyrinth at a time; releasing their hold on an existing one causes it to wither away over the course of a few days or weeks. A shared labyrinth diminishes in size, while a singular labyrinth ceases to exist. The destruction of a labyrinth—whether intentional by the owner or from aggressive outside action—can sometimes spill over into the real world. This typically manifests as an accident or natural disaster scaled to the size of the labyrinth, such as a house fire, lightning strike, or localized earthquake.

While even a single Darkchild can generate a labyrinth given enough time, it is far more common for a cabal to pool their resources into creating a shared labyrinth that welcomes all of them as masters. Such a shared lair is safer, larger, and more comfortable than anything a single Darkchild could hope to create. Shared labyrinths can also fold space in unusual ways, resulting in lairs that are bigger on the inside than they would seem to be from outside.

Only a labyrinth’s creators can enter it freely. They must occupy the labyrinth’s physical space in the real world to do so without a special ability that permits transit from other locales, but entering or leaving the labyrinth is just an act of will. They may also guide guests in personally, bringing them along as they transition into the labyrinth. Such guests can sometimes find that they have become prisoners if their host leaves without them, since they cannot return to the real world unaided. The labyrinth may have a shadowy world beyond its barriers, but this is set dressing no more real than paper moons and cardboard seas.

Those linked to a labyrinth can also set special conditions under which non-owners can enter or leave the labyrinth without aid. This is an item SFX (see below) and typically requires a very specific set of circumstances. People who meet those conditions can accidentally enter the labyrinth, leading to the legends of men who disappeared in faerie circles during full moons or doors that only exist during certain days of the year. The conditions for leaving may not be the same as those for entering, again trapping the unwary within. Those who enter via these methods are not considered “intruders,” so the labyrinth does not act against them—nor does it alert its masters.

Size and Features

As noted earlier in this chapter, a labyrinth is a signature asset. A cabal can choose to all be bound to a single labyrinth, increasing its size and comfort as well as its overall defensibility. When a labyrinth is targeted by an effect directly, whether to find it or break in, its dice pool is equal to the total number of signature asset dice used in its creation. Thus, a cabal of five members who each have *Labyrinth D8* would create a labyrinth that has a dice pool of 5D8 to defend itself from outside intrusion.

A solitary Darkchild creating a labyrinth can’t work up the mental power for much more than a single large room (*Labyrinth D6*) or a moderately-sized house (*Labyrinth D8*). A group of Darkchildren working together, however, rapidly scales up the size of a lair. Two Darkchildren can make a shared space roughly the size of a two-bedroom apartment, three can make a large home, and four or more rapidly become a lesson in ambition, creating sprawling manors with grounds, immense interconnected spaces, and more.

The physical space occupied by a labyrinth in the real world is never much bigger than a mansion or warehouse, regardless of the number of participants involved, but the labyrinth itself

can be vastly larger. Such spaces being bigger on the inside inspire all manner of jokes from younger Darkchildren, which are entirely wasted on their out-of-touch elders.

A labyrinth becomes more opulent and comfortable for its inhabitants as its die rating increases. A D6-rated labyrinth is just a place to stash your stuff and grab a nap between missions. A D12-rated labyrinth has all manner of creature comforts, from dream-like servants to lavish feasts. Generally speaking, a labyrinth's overall comfort level is equal to the *lowest* die rating among its owners. More contributors will always make it larger, but low-rated contributions don't necessarily improve the comfort.

Nothing can be taken from a labyrinth, obviously; it exists only in a limbo-like pocket dimension where physical objects are just manifestations of the creators' psyches. Still, the food tastes real enough, and the sensation of being full lasts after leaving. Whether the servants are "real" or just figments of the owners' imaginations brought to a semblance of life is a continuing debate among Darkchildren.

The "comfort" involved in a labyrinth is also an entirely subjective experience. The interiors of labyrinths are created by the monstrous inner selves of the Darkchildren involved, not their human selves. This makes them places where a Darkchild will be comfortable in his Tenebris form—but not always in his Mask. A giant's castle with furniture scaled at twice human size will be very welcoming for a Behemoth in Tenebris, but almost impossible to live in for his human shape. Labyrinths also tend toward the nightmarish and fearful for any ordinary humans who happen to be brought into them. Even people who sleep in a labyrinth's locale in the real world will tend to have horrific nightmares that reflect the labyrinth's true nature.

Labyrinth Powers

A Darkchild who generates a labyrinth can also create special features and powers for that labyrinth. These work like item SFX for their signature asset. The major restriction on such abilities is that they cannot be hostile to other individuals linked to the labyrinth, though guests are not necessarily under any such protection if their host isn't present.

A labyrinth's SFX tend to be drawn from their creator's nature. A Behemoth's labyrinth can be difficult to navigate for intruders who manage to break in due to the immense scales involved, while a Devourer's lair might be filled with dangerous eidolon minions. A Biomechanical might find it easier to do repairs in their labyrinth workshop, while an Invidian's mental powers might be enhanced within their oracular temple.

A common item SFX for labyrinths is a set condition that allows allies to enter and leave the labyrinth without supervision. This can require a physical key the owners create, a set of circumstances that must be fulfilled such as a password or ritual action, a condition that must be met like a specific time of day or day of the year, and so on. Those who enter by this means are not intruders, and so do not provoke the labyrinth's defensive responses.

Dead Labyrinths

Over the years, it has been noted that some labyrinths outlive their creators. Typically, if a Darkchild dies within the bounds of his linked labyrinth, something of himself survives within it—a sort of ghostly echo of the Darkchild. Should all of a labyrinth's owners perish in this fashion, or leave only a single survivor who later dies within the labyrinth, their dying energies sometimes sustain the labyrinth past the point it would have collapsed.

Such "dead labyrinths" become places of true evil over time. Without a master to provide for their upkeep, they become twisted and vaguely self-aware predators, feeding from the life of

those who pass through their doors to keep themselves in existence. Legends about haunted houses, cursed castles, and forests where travelers frequently disappear without a trace likely have their roots in dead labyrinths.

Example Labyrinths

Apartment 302

No one officially lives in Apartment 302, on the third floor of the Ashfield Heights apartment complex. It's been closed up for years, officially awaiting "renovation." Other tenants hear strange noises from the apartment some nights, leading many to think it's infested with vermin or haunted. No one stays on the third floor for long if they can help it.

In truth, Apartment 302 is a regular safe haven for members of the Midnight Runners, a conspiracy of Darkchildren who seek to avoid getting involved in the Shadow War. Rumors about Apartment 302 abound in the conspiracy, but only a small handful know how to access it. Anyone in Tenebris form can get into Apartment 302 from the same city the labyrinth is in by looking into a mirror and whispering, "There was a hole here, but it's gone now." The mirror goes dark—and when they turn around, they find themselves in Apartment 302.

The labyrinth only admits one guest at a time. While one Darkchild finds sanctuary there, no others can enter without intruding. No Darkchild can stay in Apartment 302 for longer than three days before wearing out his welcome. If a guest expresses a desire to leave before then, a hole opens up in a wall not currently being observed; the guest can crawl out and wind up in an unobserved location anywhere in the same city. Should they overstay their welcome, the labyrinth swallows them up and spits them out—typically somewhere dangerous. Either way, they can't get back into Apartment 302 until at least a month has passed.

No one is sure who the labyrinth's creator is, or even if he's still alive. Guests sometimes report food and drink being left in the refrigerator upon their arrival, or a lit cigarette in an ashtray. Whether these are manifestations of the labyrinth, signs of a previous guest on his way out, or a shy owner, none really know.

Labyrinth: A dingy third-story apartment in a bad neighborhood. The door that would lead out into the hall is nailed shut, and the peephole only ever shows the front door of the apartment across the hall. The windows are nailed shut and painted black, seemingly unbreakable. The television only plays grainy black-and-white reruns from the '50s. There's water and power, but the shower takes forever to get hot. Sometimes there's cheap food in the fridge, always a day or so past its sell-by date. Everything seems dirty and run-down.

Dice Pool: 1D12 (plus special)

Features:

- **Item SFX:** *Welcome Home*. A character can spend 1 PP (or a D6 or higher doom die) while in the same city as the labyrinth to instantly travel there as though stepping through into the Shadowlands. He can only bring what's on his person, and no more than one person can stay in the labyrinth at one time. No one can stay in Apartment 302 longer than three days without being forcibly ejected. Knowing about Apartment 302 is a 10 XP Unlockable if you choose to include it in your campaign.
- **Item SFX:** *Your Mind Makes It Real*. Apartment 302 draws on the mental fortitude of its guests in times of self-defense. Add the guest's Mind trait and Focus skill to its dice pool when taking independent action.

Discofreakue

The popular nightclub currently called Discofreakue has had many names over the years since its creation. Its history goes back to at least the 19th century, when it was a high-society gentleman's club, but it has had as many different purposes as names, all of them oriented toward entertainment. The cabal that runs it has changed as well; none of the original founders remain, but an unbroken chain connects them to the original Club du Freak. When a former member dies or retires, a new member is brought in by unanimous agreement of the remaining members.

The Discofreakue entertains mortals and Darkchildren alike. The former are usually restricted to the real world side of the labyrinth, while supernatural visitors are told to approach a well-guarded door at the back of the club and tell the bouncer, "Boris sent me." If they're on "the list," they get into the real Discofreakue, a madhouse of music and drinking, with a few quiet niches for conversations that can't be had in the real world. If they're not, getting beaten and tossed into the alley behind the club is probably the best they can expect.

Members of the ruling cabal sometimes indulge their personal interests on-site, but others are expected to mind their manners, turning Discofreakue into a sort of neutral ground for Darkchildren from factions that normally have a hard time getting along, as well as for any non-Anunnaki who are "in the know." The owners themselves are thought to have ties to Empire Noir, the Midnight Runners, or the Illuminated, but no one knows for sure.

Labyrinth: Music pulses and pounds from unseen speakers while the floors are crowded with dancers from every era of the Discofreakue's history. The bar is well-stocked. Decorations include lots of mirrors and blacklights, gaudy toward the dark and gothic end of the spectrum. There are plenty of shadowy corners where a couple can sneak off to, and private booths for people who want more conversation than the dance floor would allow. The restrooms are spotless but always smell vaguely like smoke and blood.

Dice Pool: 4D8

Features:

- **Item SFX:** *Guest Pass.* Anyone who's on "the list" can get into the Discofreakue. Getting on that list usually requires a little bit more than just bribing the bouncer, though. A one-time entry to the club for a group of Darkchildren might be a 5 XP Unlockable, while a lifetime membership for one person might cost 15 XP—after all, Darkchildren have *very* long lives. Any membership can be revoked if a guest breaks the club's rules, which mostly involve not starting fights and not destroying property.
- **Item SFX:** *You're Not on the List.* When the Discofreakue takes independent action to protect itself from an intruder or throw out a guest who has broken the rules, add a D6 and step up the effect die.

McCabe Lighthouse

A lonely lighthouse sits at the end of a rocky beach on a small island off the eastern coast of America. The rest of the island was inhabited long ago but was abandoned and allowed to run to ruin. The island has been variously claimed by Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and New Jersey over the years. At this point, none of the states remember who actually owns it—and since no one lives there officially, no one much cares. Even the island's name doesn't appear on maps made in the last fifty years.

Today, the abandoned town has become a staging point for Resistance fighters carrying out attacks against Anunnaki holdings along the east coast. McCabe Lighthouse is their headquarters

due to its unique property: it exists on both Earth and the Shadowlands at the same time. When a Darkchild lights the lamp and stares into it long enough to go light-blind, they find themselves in the labyrinth.

The Shadowlands version of the island is a black tower on the edge of a hidden oasis, surrounded by high rock walls like an impact crater. The water alone would make the place a coveted location in the arid Shadowlands, and its remoteness and concealment only make it more valuable. Unfortunately, the Resistance has been doing so many raids in the area over the last year that at least one Ensi has begun to speculate about a refuge in the region.

Labyrinth: The labyrinth of McCabe Lighthouse exists like a bubble between Earth and the Shadowlands; anyone leaving the labyrinth can enter either at their choice. The labyrinth itself is every inch a Resistance bolthole, filled with weapons, maps, supplies, and sparse bunks. Resistance fighters are coming and going all the time, so the place is usually bustling.

Dice Pool: 3D10

Features:

- **Item SFX:** *Between Worlds.* Anyone who enters the McCabe Lighthouse on either side of the Curtain can exit to either as well, without spending the usual 1 PP cost or needing mirrors or natural darkness. Knowing the location of the McCabe Lighthouse—and being recognized as someone to not shoot on sight—is a 10 XP Unlockable for members of the Resistance.
- **Item SFX:** *Behind the Armory.* The Resistance has hidden weapon caches all across the island. When a member of the Resistance spends 1 PP to create a weapon-based asset within eyeshot of McCabe Lighthouse, the asset starts as a D8 rather than a D6. This asset can be extended as normal.

Versailles Castle

Not the one in France—the one in Kentucky. More technically called Castle Post, the castle was built in 1969 and inspired by European castles the owner admired. Known by locals as a “folly” for its grandiose construction, it was left unfinished when the owner and his wife divorced in 1975. It changed hands multiple times over the next four decades, never quite gaining traction with its attempts to operate as a high-end resort, a bed-and-breakfast, or a site for weddings and special events. The castle was finally sold to a group of wealthy private buyers in 2017 for almost thirty million dollars. Though it has apparently continued to be remodeled, public plans for its use have yet to surface.

In truth, the castle was bought by a cabal of young and wealthy Darkchildren associated with Empire Noir, a criminal conspiracy whose members use their powers unscrupulously for personal gain. They are remodeling the castle to be as defensible in the real world as it is inside their labyrinth, using it as a headquarters for their multimillion-dollar criminal empire. Their eventual plans include adding a private heliport and underground vaults, but they haven’t gotten quite that far yet.

Labyrinth: The castle grounds reek of decadence and gothic luxury. Walls and crenellations are more than twice as tall as they are in the real world, there are secret passages everywhere, and the interior is guarded by dozens of people who look like a cross between Roman legionnaires and Mafia bruisers.

Dice Pool: 5D6

Features:

- **Item SFX:** *Genius Loci.* When Versailles Castle takes independent action, it can add a step up or double one of its dice. Remove the highest rolling die and keep three dice for its total.

- **Item SFX: *Trove*.** While inside the labyrinth, any wealth or crime-based assets created by a member of the Versailles Castle cabal are stepped up, to a maximum of D12. Buying membership in the cabal requires being part of Empire Noir, a pile of cash, and 15 XP as an Unlockable.

Darkchild Milestones and Unlockables

The Children of the Dark are powerful, unique shapeshifters with an ancient heritage and a modern mission. Such heroic and tormented individuals are ripe for dramatic story arcs fraught with personal choices and difficult decisions. Included in this section are several suggested Milestones for Darkchildren intended to push those dramatic story beats to the forefront.

Some of these Milestones are intended for members of a specific Lineage, focusing on their traditional roles and their efforts to embrace or reject those roles. Others are acceptable for any Darkchild, emphasizing the difficulty of maintaining their human life in the face of their monstrous destiny. As always, the players should work with their GM to determine what would be most appropriate for a given campaign and a given scenario.

This section also includes a number of potential Unlockables suited for Darkchild player characters that might warrant inclusion as possible rewards for a given scenario. Such objects or allies might well be the province of the player characters' enemies until those foes are defeated. Purchasing a purloined artifact with XP guarantees it stays in a character's hands rather than slipping away unnoticed, and a former enemy purchased with XP becomes a true ally rather than one more defeated foe to come back another day.

Secret Identity [General]

Many Darkchildren try to keep their monstrous nature a secret from the people they knew before the First Change. Few of them succeed in the long term, but you're determined to try.

1 XP when you lie to a mortal friend about your activities to keep your secret.

3 XP when you blow off an obligation to your allies to spend time with your mortal friends, or when you ditch a major obligation to a mortal friend to help your allies.

10 XP when you assume your Tenebris form in front of a mortal who only knew you as a human, changing your relationship forever, or when you abandon your allies in a time of great need to preserve your secret.

The Strange Case of... [General]

You don't like how different you become when you change. Not just your body, but your personality too. You feel like another person entirely when you assume your Tenebris form—and the "other you" isn't very nice.

1 XP when you act in a way obviously different from your normal behavior while in Tenebris form.

3 XP when you inflict mental or social stress on a mortal while in Tenebris form.

10 XP when you stay in Mask form through an entire scenario to avoid dealing with your "other self," or when you permanently abandon your mortal life and responsibilities in favor of your Tenebris form.

Gentle Giant [Behemoth]

You're an angry person, but there's a tender side of you that few people ever get to see. Your body may be impervious to harm, but your heart is not.

1 XP when you open up about your feelings to others.

3 XP when you reveal a potentially embarrassing secret about yourself to another character.

10 XP when you reject violence in favor of negotiation with a major foe who has hurt you badly (physically or emotionally), or when you physically attack a mortal rather than let them get too close to you.

Seeing Red Again [Behemoth]

The First Change let a monster out of you, and now you can't lock it back up. Eventually, you're not going to be able to keep it on the leash anymore.

1 XP when you lash out at others, physically or verbally.

3 XP when you physically attack someone for a verbal provocation.

10 XP when you give into your temper and beat an ally unconscious or kill a mortal bystander, or when you allow yourself to suffer physical trauma in Mask form rather than risk changing into a monster.

All the Best Toys [Biomechanical]

Collecting is its own reward. You don't just want to gather things—you *need* to.

1 XP when you talk about your personal collection of some type of object.

3 XP when you spend a scene pursuing a lead to a missing piece of your collection.

10 XP when you commit a serious and unforgivable crime to protect or complete your collection, or when you abandon your collection (or at least some significant part of it) to aid your allies or innocents.

Hoarders: Darkchild Edition [Biomechanical]

Some of your friends think you have a problem with having too much stuff. You think they're the ones with the problem.

1 XP when you keep something that is probably just junk.

3 XP when you get into a major argument with an ally over your messy habits, cluttered living space, or pack rat tendencies.

10 XP when you finally give in and get rid of all your extraneous clutter, or when you cause lasting harm to an ally or innocent because of the sheer volume of junk you won't get rid of.

The Hunger [Devourer]

None of your friends really gets it, but you're hungry all the time. It's hard to think about anything else when it gets bad enough.

1 XP when you talk about food or other cravings.

3 XP when you skip out on your obligations to your allies to feed your craving.

10 XP when you kill a mortal or cause physical harm to an ally to feed your craving, or when you fail in major task because you were so hungry that you couldn't focus.

Seductive Hunger [Devourer]

Some Devourers believe that it's better to never eat alone. Others think that you should play with your food with it before eating to give it flavor.

1 XP when you banter with a mortal about food or being a monster.

3 XP when you do something monstrous in front of (or to) a mortal you consider a friend.

10 XP when you convince a mortal friend to become as twisted as you are—a monster in spirit if not body—or when you destroy a mortal friend's life rather than let them turn against you.

Biggest Freak in the Room [Grotesque]

You're horrifying—and you know it. Rather than try to hide it, you flaunt it as much as possible. The more uncomfortable others are, the more you like it.

1 XP when you do something gross or off-putting in front of an innocent bystander or ally.

3 XP when you intentionally freak out a bystander or ally, causing them social stress.

10 XP when you cause social trauma to an innocent or ally, giving them a lasting complex about your grotesqueness, or when you refuse to take your Tenebris form in a dangerous situation to avoid scaring anyone, allowing yourself or an ally to suffer trauma.

Wretch [Grotesque]

Many Grotesques have wounds that never heal as part of their monstrous shape. Your wounds go deeper still, and your self-loathing makes it easy for you to sacrifice yourself for others.

1 XP when you talk about your own lack of worth.

3 XP when you suffer harm or consequences in another's place.

10 XP when you try to sacrifice your life for another, suffering significant trauma in their stead, or when you abandon an innocent to an unjust fate to protect yourself.

Contractual Obligations [Infernal]

Deal-making comes naturally to Infernals. Being fair with those deals, less so.

1 XP when you offer to make a trade or bargain with a mortal.

3 XP when you fulfill your half of a deal with a mortal.

10 XP when you extract payment from a mortal for a deal in a painful or lethal fashion, or when you let a mortal out of their half of a deal after fulfilling your end at cost to your reputation or safety.

Dance with the Devil [Infernal]

Infernals have always had a complicated relationship with faith. To many religions, they are the embodiment of evil—which makes some Infernals decide to play the part.

1 XP when you torment a mortal with your supernatural powers without inflicting real harm.

3 XP when you destroy a mortal's relationship, position, or purpose without getting anything out of it yourself.

10 XP when you reveal your true nature to a mortal you have tormented and either kill them horribly or beg their forgiveness for your transgressions, putting yourself into their debt.

Dangerous Liaisons [Invidian]

Invidians aren't the only Darkchildren who become involved in doomed romances with mortals, but it seems to happen to them far more often than average.

1 XP when you flirt with a mortal or identify a mortal as a love interest.

3 XP when your supernatural life puts your mortal love interest at risk of harm.

10 XP when you abandon a mortal love interest to death or worse in order to avoid danger, or when you make a major sacrifice or suffer irrevocable harm to preserve your relationship.

Fairest of Them All [Invidian]

Your Lineage is well known for its unearthly beauty, marred by the stain of freakishness, but you only see the positive things about yourself. Your vanity knows few bounds.

1 XP when you talk about your beauty or other virtues.

3 XP when you trash-talk an ally or put them down to make yourself look better.

10 XP when you harm an ally or kill an innocent mortal out of jealousy for their virtues, or when you make a major sacrifice on another's behalf and take no credit for it.

Lust for Life [Therianthrope]

Other people can mope or brood about being a monster. You're just here to have a good time!

1 XP when you make a joke about something serious.

3 XP when you spend a scene pursuing pleasure even though you should be fulfilling an obligation.

10 XP when your hedonistic ways cause you to suffer serious harm or loss, or when you pass up a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for fun to fulfill your personal obligations.

The Beast Within [Therianthrope]

You turn into a beast when you change, and you enjoy the feeling of freedom you get when you throw away your humanity. The meaning of life seems so clear when you change—and so distant when you become human again.

1 XP when you talk about the feelings of freedom and power you get from your Tenebris.

3 XP when you deal with a human social situation the way an animal would, to your detriment.

10 XP when you reject your humanity and flee into the wilderness to live as an animal for a time, or when you overcome a significant challenge with purely human abilities and not relying on your Tenebris.

Unlockables

Down the Rabbit Hole [5 XP]

Sometimes you need to reach the Shadowlands *right now*, and you don't have the time to look for a safe route. Spend 5 XP to declare that a path to the Shadowlands exists in the current scene—a space of natural darkness, a mirror large enough to fit through, or something stranger still. You can open that passage without spending a plot point or making a roll, and it stays open until the end of the scene or until you close it.

Echoes of the Elders [10 XP]

The Elders were mostly slain during Black Solstice—mostly. One of the survivors has taken a particular interest in you and will occasionally offer you advice and guidance. They definitely want something in return, though.

Spend 10 XP during a bridge scene to have a Darkchild Elder contact you and offer cryptic guidance relating to the current adventure. This might be a clue to the nature of your adversary, a hint about the enemy's location or weaknesses, or a favor called in with the powers that be to smooth the way (i.e., a bribe or blackmail). This counts as a D8 asset for the rest of the scenario when it would apply. You cannot purchase this unlockable again until you repay the Elder's favor in a future adventure.

Inside Man [5 XP/10 XP]

Darkchildren come from a wide variety of backgrounds, and they have a strange tendency to stumble across people from their mortal lives in the oddest places.

Spend XP to declare that you know someone in a group or faction featured in the current scenario. This might be a mortal hanger-on to another cabal, a Darkchild you ran into before either of you Changed, an old friend from high school who is part of the local police force, or so on.

For 5 XP, this person remembers you but not particularly fondly. They'll do a minor service for you in exchange for the promise of a favor later.

For 10 XP, you have a friendly (or complicated) history together that makes them willing to stick their neck out for you. They become a D8 signature asset for the rest of the current scenario. If you bring them into an action scene and they are killed (such as by an attack to remove the asset), you step up social trauma.

Thicker Than Water [15 XP]

The old saying goes that “The blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb”—that is, chosen kinships are stronger than mere blood ties. For 15 XP, you gain formal acceptance into another cabal, being considered a member of your own as well as the new one. This can gain you access to the other cabal's resources, contacts, and information, as well as their labyrinth if they have one. Your “blood brothers” may ask you for the occasional favor, and it's generally considered gauche to be in more than two cabals at once.

Once per scenario, you can put in a call to your allied cabal to ask for significant help. This can take the form of a D8 asset that lasts for the rest of the current scenario, a minor GMC who sticks around for the rest of the session to help out, or a major GMC who participates in a single bridge or action scene before departing.

Chapter 4: Magic and Mentalism

Magic has always been with us, from the earliest humans down to the present nights. When our ancestors painted on cave walls in red clay and blood, they were evoking the power of sympathetic magic to aid them on hunts. Shrouded in ritual, myth, and intentional obfuscation by its practitioners, magic is a force of chaos—called upon with great difficulty, and rarely fully controlled.

During the time of the Anunnaki, magic was far stronger than for most of human history. The Anunnaki themselves were masters of sorcery, and they taught their favored servants how to spill blood in their name in exchange for miraculous powers. The ritual used by the Igigi to banish the Anunnaki from the mortal realm and trap them in the Shadowlands broke magic's back for millennia afterwards, leaving only dregs behind to be called on by mortal sorcerers.

While magic can be called upon by any who know its secrets, exposure to powerful magic can change and alter a bloodline permanently, leaving its scions with unstable mystical abilities. Where these bloodlines cross and grow strong, they produce people with the ability to alter the fabric of reality through thought and will alone. Modern mystical understanding refers to such individuals as “psychics.”

Though magic was a suppressed and rare power for the last five thousand years, Black Solstice brought back its ancient might with a vengeance. Minor dabblers in the occult found themselves suddenly blessed with the puissance of mythical wizards, while government programs that had worked for decades to produce even minor mind-readers were inundated with psionic masterminds whose power they struggled to even comprehend, let alone control.

As the power of magic returns to Earth after millennia away, it becomes harder and harder to explain away the mystical occurrences and occult phenomena that are encroaching upon everyday life. Still, sorcery may yet prove to be one of the few tools humanity possesses that is capable of offering true threat to the Anunnaki. Yet it must never be forgotten that magic is a fickle ally—and no one's slave.

The Principles of Magic

Magic is a force of nature, an energy that permeates the universe and which can be drawn upon by individuals to enact change. In that sense, it is no different from kinetic or thermal energy, or from the laws of motion or quantum mechanics. The major difference is that magic responds to willpower and intent as much as it does to physical action—and since no one has perfect willpower or flawless intent, magic often goes amok if not properly controlled.

People often speak of “good magic” or “evil magic,” but there is only magic and intent. Magic is an amoral force of nature with no innate metaphysical concept of right or wrong. A spell is only as good or bad as the intention that goes into creating it, and the effect it has on the world around it. This means that a sorcerer is ultimately only beholden to themselves to determine the morality of their actions, rather than some cosmic force of judgment.

Unfortunately, the adage about absolute power corrupting absolutely is just as true with magic as it is for politics or wealth. Throughout history, those who sought mystical power were often the most venal and corrupt mortals imaginable, with saints and white witches few and far between. This is less true in the modern nights, if only because of the greater context of the

Shadow War: far more people have had the power thrust upon them or stumbled upon it accidentally, then found their better angels in the midst of crisis. There are still ample wicked magicians to be had since Black Solstice, but they seem (at least so far) to be outnumbered by those who genuinely want to help.

Sorcery and Sympathy

When scholars and mystics talk about “magic” in the context of their own abilities, they’re usually referring to the practice formally known as *sorcery*—the use of ritualized words and actions to evoke magical effects. While magic ultimately responds to human willpower and theoretically doesn’t require any outside trappings, the superhuman focus necessary to utilize magic without destroying oneself in the process means that only the most powerful magi can hope to eschew the need for rituals.

Every sorcerer has their own approach to ritual magic. Some utilize dancing and song, while others engage in animal sacrifice or the casting of runes. There are dozens (maybe hundreds) of different traditions, with more appearing all the time. The only requirement for a ritual is that it focuses the caster’s mind, keeps them in a relatively stationary area, and can be replicated precisely each time. A ritual’s length generally depends on the power and scope of the effect—bigger magic takes longer rituals.

Magic also operates on the principle of *sympathy*, the metaphorical concept of parts reflecting the whole, or of icons standing in for the real thing. In layman’s terms, this means that working sorcery on a target is much less difficult with a token representing the target in some fashion. This might simply be a doll dressed like the person the sorcerer wants to curse, their full name written in runes, or a dozen high-resolution photographs of them from various angles. It might also include a prized personal possession, a lock of hair, or a drop of blood.

The token—or sympathetic link, as scholars call it—is another method by which a sorcerer focuses their willpower and intent. Lacking such a token, the magic can become “confused” and run rampant, targeting a random person who shares some commonality with the intended target or simply backlashing onto the caster. Generally speaking, the more precise or intimate a token is, the easier sorcery becomes. Some powerful magics are effectively impossible without such a token.

Ritual Actions

The default mechanical use for the Sorcery power in *Children of the Dark* is the performance of *ritual actions*. A ritual action is normally a bridge scene action devoted to creating an asset, inflicting a complication, or removing an existing magical asset or complication from play.

The sorcerer performing the ritual must have a dedicated space for it, as well as the tools of their mystical tradition. This space might be a cleansed sanctum, a blood altar, a man-cave filled with personalized servers, or a runic well, and the tools might be silver knives, whalebones carved with sigils, or a rooted top-of-the-line tablet with aftermarket upgrades. The player must define the nature of their mystical practice, and therefore what tools and space they need for their magic.

Creating a magical asset is the easiest form of sorcery, requiring only a roll against the doom pool to generate a banked asset. This asset stays banked for the character until the scene they choose to use it, and then lasts the remainder of that scene. It can be extended past the end of that scene by the sorcerer who created it as usual. The character intended to use the asset must be present during the ritual to receive it, or the sorcerer can pay 1 PP to give it to them later.

Disrupting an asset or dispelling a complication is a similar action against the doom pool, but the die being targeted gets added to the doom pool's opposition roll automatically. An effect die equal to or greater than the targeted die removes it completely, while a lower effect die merely steps it back. A failed roll might strengthen the enemy magic, while a botch could cause horrific magical feedback resulting in the sorcerer suffering stress, creating a living spell, or summoning a demonic entity! Additionally, this is the only use of the Sorcery power that most characters can undertake during action scenes (see **Magical Challenges**, below).

Inflicting a complication (or as sorcerers usually call it, a curse) on a target is somewhat more involved. The person being cursed must be present for the ritual (and can try to disrupt it!) unless the sorcerer has a sympathetic link to them, as represented by an asset. The effect die of the curse cannot be larger than the asset used as a sympathetic link; a curse cast in person has no such limit. The target of the curse makes a reaction roll to defend against the sorcerer, rather than targeting the doom pool, and can use PP or doom dice to enhance their roll as usual. On a successful roll, the sorcerer inflicts a complication on the target that lasts until the end of the next scene that character participates in. If the sorcerer generates any hitches, the target can activate them in order to gain a clue to the identity of the nefarious caster who has afflicted them so!

Magical Challenges

Even without the ability to “battle cast,” sorcerers can prove their merit in the heat of combat. Many ancient wards, magical traps, and lethal curses can be surpassed by a mage capable of countering such power with their own. A *magical challenge* is a special sort of threat that can be attacked with Sorcery as though it were a complication, but which possesses multiple dice of its own to resist (like a Boss or Mob).

Each successful action taken by a sorcerer against a magical challenge either steps back one of its dice (if the sorcerer's effect die is lower) or removes it entirely (if the sorcerer's effect die is equal or greater). Magical challenges work best if they are paired with an active, physical challenge that the rest of the party has to deal with while the sorcerer figures out how to deal with the underlying problem.

Example Challenge: *The Burial Ground.* An enemy necromancer loyal to the Anunnaki has enacted a foul ritual to turn a mass grave into a never-ending source of fetid zombies to use as shock troops against a local Resistance cell. The heroes stumble onto the site and must face off against the necromancer (a major GMC), his first batch of zombies (several enemy mobs), and the ritual itself (a magical challenge). The challenge has a rating of 4D6; as long as it is in play, the necromancer can reinforce that many dice worth of zombies into the scene every round for free! The challenge can't do anything on its own except resist attempts to dispel it.

Example Challenge: *The Death Rune.* An ancient underground vault contains something the Anunnaki want, but they don't have any sorcerers on hand to dispel the killing curse protecting the chamber. They've stationed a group of human cultists and monstrous defenders to protect the vault until one of the Ensi can be dispatched. The heroes want to get into the vault before that happens, but any bloodshed in the entryway awakens the rune! After the first round of combat, the Death Rune enters as a magical challenge with a rating of 3D8. It acts as a D8 asset for any attack that would draw blood as well as a D8 complication for any healing action—and it acts on its own turn to issue forth life-draining bolts of force as an attack!

Battle Casting

Some talents allow the use of Sorcery freely in action scenes. Most major GMCs with the Sorcery power are assumed to have this ability innately. Most player characters with access to Sorcery start with the *Ritual Magic* Limit, preventing them from using that power to its full effect during action scenes.

Even those characters that transcend this limitation must contend with the ultimate limits of ritualized magic—the *Utility Magic* Limit, which prohibits Sorcery from being used in dice pools to inflict direct harm. Sorcery can be used to enhance, afflict, heal, or defend—but it can’t attack on its own.

The ability to inflict direct harm with magic—that is, stress—is known as *battle casting*. It is represented primarily by the Blast power. The ability to hurl balls of fire or cast bolts of lightning is often derided by “true wizards,” who focus on the esoteric parts of their art, but it is undeniably useful to casters who wind up on the front lines of the Shadow War.

A Magical World

Even before Black Solstice, the world was a magical place. Sorcery and monsters have lurked in the shadows since time immemorial. The major difference is that Black Solstice revealed the existence of the supernatural to a much wider swath of people than any time previously in recorded history, as well as making the existing magic much more powerful. Where a hoary magus in centuries past might have studied his whole life just to be able to ignite a candle from a distance, now even the most callow apprentice can swiftly learn how to immolate her foes with a gesture.

The nature of this change—and its ongoing effects—is a matter of much debate in the mystical and scholarly communities. Many historians familiar with the legends of the Anunnaki and the Igigi believe that the ritual to seal away the Shadowlands also sealed away the majority of Earth’s magical energy. Thus, when the Anunnaki broke free and the Shadowlands were unsealed, the magic came flooding back into the world.

Most magical factions in the Shadow War tacitly accept this narrative—though they all have different perspectives on what that might mean for the future. Some wonder if the sorcerers will be willing to seal away the Anunnaki again if it means giving up their godlike powers. Others fear that the growing tide of magic will allow the most powerful sorcerers to recreate the rituals that spawned the Ensi, letting them become immortal demigods of magic.

At the same time, sorcery is not the only manifestation of magic to return to the world since Black Solstice. Cryptid sightings have increased tenfold in the last several years, and not all of the creatures described match up to either Darkchild sightings or minions of the Anunnaki. More UFOs are caught on camera every year, and Fortean phenomena like rains of toads have become common enough to simply be noted in evening weather reports.

Places of Power

Perhaps most unsettling are the places where Earth’s natural laws have become weakened due to the influence of raw magical power. Ritual mounds, stone circles, and other millennia-old sites of power have begun sputtering to life, spawning both random miracles and horrific wandering curses. Animals who come too close during such a surge may be mutated into mystical creatures from ages past—or into horrors that are all too new. Even people can be infected by this free-floating magic, awakening sorcerous powers or psychic mutations.

Almost all places of power can be used as assets in ritual actions, adding anywhere from a D6 to a D12 to the caster's dice pool. A sorcerer who seizes a place of power and binds it to their own purposes can take it as a signature asset. Some places of power have other benefits (given as SFX) and drawbacks (Limits) as well.

Example: *The Blue Choctaw Cave.* This ancient cave in the Appalachian Mountains was sacred to the Choctaw tribe in ages past. The interior is filled with cave paintings and old ritual objects that have somehow withstood the passage of time. It is well hidden enough that the odds of finding it randomly are low—even from twenty feet away, the entrance is concealed unless a person knows what they're looking for. The cave is a D8 asset for any ritual casting using traditional Native American magic. Additionally, any healing spell performed within it adds a D6 and steps up the effect die. It grants no benefits to anyone who lacks at least some Native American heritage.

Example: *The Heart of the Machine.* In the bowels of a major university is a computer lab that has been forgotten by almost everyone since the 1960s. The room no longer exists on any map of the building, and it can only be entered by a hidden door in a rarely-used maintenance tunnel. Within the room is an analog-tape computing machine that has been added to by every subsequent generation of technologists until the result is a nearly unrecognizable mass of parts. The room is a D6 asset for any ritual caster whose focus is technology-based. A caster attuned to the place of power can spend 1 PP to ask any question that could be answered by access to a computer—even one not currently connected to the internet—but the machine will also ask for a small innocuous-seeming favor from the questioner, such as disconnecting a certain power line or setting up a hidden webcam overlooking a specific street corner.

New Ruins

Strangest of all are the “new ruins,” places deep underground that seem to have been carved out by human (or inhuman) hands millennia ago, but which *also* only seem to have come into existence in the last six years. All tests and forms of dating will indicate the ruins go back anywhere from five to fifty millennia, but they can appear even in places that have been previously mapped without finding any trace of such construction.

While a few of them seem to be Anunnaki or Igigi ruins, others are just as mysterious to the invaders as they are to the native populace of Earth. Anunnaki minions often move to seize such locations, given that they frequently possess some innate magical property or are the repository for artifacts of great power. The other factions in the Shadow War do their best to deprive the Anunnaki of these prizes, whether that means seizing the site for themselves and defending it, or simply looting as much as they can before destroying it utterly.

Sanctums

The labyrinths used as bolt holes and hideouts by Darkchildren are far from the only manifestation of “sundered space” known to magic. Powerful sorcerers can create sanctums that have the same basic effects, albeit at far greater cost in time and energy. The ability to create a labyrinth seems to be an innate part of a Darkchild's nature, but a mortal sorcerer who wishes to do so must expend significant effort to accomplish the same task.

Effectively, a sanctum is a magical space consecrated by a sorcerer and bought as a signature asset. A sorcerer's sanctum has only a single die attached to it, and it is incapable of independent action without an SFX allowing it to do so. Sanctums exist in the real world rather than

extending out into a dimensional labyrinth—again, unless the caster purchases an SFX to allow this.

The major thing that a sorcerer's sanctum has on a labyrinth is durability. The wards and sigils that are laid to create a sanctum grant it an existence of its own, independent from the life of the sorcerer who made it. With the return of magic to the world, many of these ancient sanctums are again returning to life, going about the tasks set for them by masters who are centuries or millennia dead.

Sidebar: Technology and Magic

Many players will be used to games where technology and magic are in some fashion at odds with one another—antithetical forces that are in opposition. This is not the case in *Children of the Dark*. Magical spells can be caught on video (though they're likely to be regarded as special effects or hoaxes), and “technomancers” who use bleeding-edge tablets instead of dusty grimoires are among the most common practitioners of the art in the modern day.

The major limitation about the interaction of magic and technology is that magic is *powered by will and intent*, while traditional technology *just works*. Technological devices can be adapted to interact with magic directly, but this is an extension of the caster's will and intent, rather than some inherent part of the device from then on.

On the other hand, with magic becoming a greater force with every passing day, even supposedly mundane people can find their “will and intent” seeping into the objects they use on a regular basis. A contract killer's favorite gun could start to like the smell of blood, or a gearhead's beloved muscle car could become preternaturally good at taking turns, with those properties outlasting the people who imbued them.

At the end of the day, the extent of interaction between magic and technology—and how much that interaction changes over the course of a campaign—is up to the people at the table and what they find the most fun.

Psionics: Opening the Third Eye

Humanity has long believed in the infinite power of the mind. Hindu yogis can train themselves to ignore pain, while Tibetan mystics posit that strong enough belief can actually take form as an independent entity called a *tulpa*. In the 20th century, belief in supernatural mental abilities became codified in the idea of “psychic powers”—or psionics. Virtually every major government had secret programs devoted to unlocking these powers in order to use them as weapons or for intelligence-gathering purposes. The idea of a secret agent who could read minds or kill with a thought was simply too alluring to pass up.

These programs had minor successes in the final years of the cold war. The United States, Soviet Union, and United Kingdom all had their own methodology for unlocking telepathic and clairvoyant abilities, enabling “psi-agents” to perform such feats as remote viewing, brief glimpses of possible futures, and reading surface thoughts. These successes came at the cost of physical ailments, mental burnout, and massive costs. By the turn of the 21st century, most of the programs had been either shuttered complete or had their budgets slashed so thoroughly that they were barely operable.

In the months leading up to Black Solstice, the remaining members of these agencies saw a startling uptick in premonitions of disaster, some of them so strong that the agents who had such

visions went unrecoverably mad. This led to a scramble for resources, requests for emergency aid, and a cross-national outreach that would have been impossible to imagine in the years before the fall of the Soviet Union. American, Russian, and British psychics all started comparing notes—and the pattern they saw utterly terrified them. These disparate agents formed the core of what would become Psi Division (see **Chapter 5**) and were at least somewhat prepared when the sun went out. The group went underground, taking as much of their research with them as possible, and have become one of the major factions of the Shadow War.

However, the capacity for psychic power is not the sole province of Psi Division. Unaffiliated psychics appear with startling regularity, many of whom are less than thrilled about the idea of being drafted into a shadowy guerilla war by a rogue multinational spy agency. And just as with magic, the power and potency of psychic abilities seems to be growing with each passing year. What once took millions of dollars of drugs, experimental technology, and gene therapy can now be accomplished with a simple near-death experience or a cocktail of prescription ADHD medications.

The Origins of Psionics

It is thought by mystical scholars that psychic powers are a manifestation of innate magical ability, brought on by ancestral exposure to potent sorceries in ages past. That is, psychics are people whose forebears got too close to powerful magical auras and had their genetic makeup altered in such a way that magic became an essential part of their nature. This “innate magic” is far more limited than true sorcery, but it requires far less in the way of exterior props to focus the mind, since the psychic’s will is already fine-tuned to produce those effects.

Those of a more scientific bent regard psionics as a genetic mutation or side effect of the increasing complexity of the human brain. There is usually some mumbo-jumbo thrown in about “quantum interactions” or the like as well, but the gist is that non-mystics typically regard psionics as a more “natural” form of ability than magic. Indeed, many refuse to refer to psychic ability as “supernatural” and instead use the term “paranatural” to avoid mystical connotations.

Calling it a genetic anomaly doesn’t tell the whole story, though. While there does seem to be a genetic component to psychic ability—two psychics who produce children are likely to pass on their abilities to at least some of those children—there is also what can only be described as a *spiritual* component as well. A person with no apparent familial history of psionics can unlock similar abilities through years of meditation and self-examination. There is at least one known case of a man who was hit in the head during a Black Solstice riot and spent five years in a coma, only to wake up with the ability to see the future and “read” objects by touch.

Unlike sorcery, there are no ancient disciplines or hidden cabals of psychics to guide modern thought on the matter. While there are traditional groups that can be recontextualized as “psychic” in the modern day—Sufi mystics, Gnostic seers, and the like—these groups tend to be both insular and isolated. They rarely write down their beliefs or practices for outsiders, and they tend to be quite defensive about non-members trying to learn from them.

Psychic Disciplines

Modern psionic theory divides practitioners up into three broad *disciplines*: telepaths, clairvoyants, and telekinetics. A telepath is a person who can sense or alter the thoughts of other beings; a clairvoyant has expanded sensory abilities about the world around them, such as being able to see the future or distant places mentally; and a telekinetic is able to physically alter the world around them by thought alone. These disciplines are better known by Psi Division’s

nicknames for them—telepaths are known as “Benders” (short for “mindbenders”), clairvoyants as “Brainers,” and telekinetics as “Breakers.”

Some experts have posited the addition of a fourth discipline—biokinesis, or “Shapers,” people who telekinetic talents are specifically focused on the enhancement or alteration of the body. These people are able to facilitate faster healing in themselves and others, become faster and stronger than normal for brief periods of time, and even force their bodies to alter in strange and unusual ways. So few of these individuals have been confirmed that no consensus yet exists on their nature or capabilities.

Psi-Tech

Though magic and technology are not incompatible with one another, practitioners of psionics tend to have a more scientific bent from the start, making them more interested in possible fusions of their abilities with technological amplifiers. Psi Division in particular has long used various devices and drugs to enhance the powers of their agents. Their nomenclature has become common use throughout the factions of the Shadow War, who call any technological enhancement to psychic ability *psi-tech*.

Psi-tech typically comes in three varieties: genetic enhancement, chemical enhancement, and technological enhancement. These are better known to psychics as *genegineering*, *chems*, and *augments*.

Genegineering is best used as a character background element (such as the distinction *Genetically Enhanced Telekinetic*) or a narrative plot device (such as a new technique intended to produce super-psychics that certainly won’t go horribly wrong, requiring the intervention of the player characters).

Chems can be typically bought by psychic characters as unlockables. They can do anything from giving short-term upgrades to a character’s powers to granting them scene or session duration SFX, typically at the cost of stepping up mental stress or trauma. Here are a couple of examples of psi-tech chems.

Doubletime [5 XP]

This chem rewires a clairvoyant’s brain to turn their psionic senses inward, creating a brief burst of super-intelligence. The character thinks so fast that the rest of the world seems to be moving in slow motion. Split the character’s Psychic Senses die (so D8 becomes two D6, for example) and assign those dice to Intelligence and Reflexes instead for the rest of the scene. The effect can be extended to the rest of the session by spending 1 PP, just like extending an asset. Step up mental stress when the chem is taken.

Firestarter [10 XP]

In physics terms, motion and heat are the same thing. A powerful telekinetic can agitate molecules fast enough to cause objects to catch fire. This chem alters the Breaker’s brain chemistry to make it easier to perform the molecular-level telekinesis that allows for feats of pyrokinesis. Shutdown the character’s Telekinesis power and gain Fire Control and Fire Blast at the same die rating. (So, for example, Telekinesis D8 becomes Fire Control D8 and Fire Blast D8.) This lasts for the rest of the current session. Step up mental trauma when the chem is taken.

Augments are best represented as signature assets, sometimes with item SFX of their own. They can be anything from power-enhancing helmets to ray guns powered by telekinesis to goggles that improve the wearer's aura sight.

Kinetic Ray

Signature Asset D6

This futuristic-looking ray gun has no obvious power source. This is because the user is the power source, activating the internal amplification circuitry with their own telekinetic power. The user must have either Telekinesis or Kinetic Blast as powers, and the D6 from this signature asset can be used on telekinetic attacks.

The owner of this signature asset can also purchase the following SFX:

- **SFX: *Charged Blast*.** Step up or double Kinetic Ray D6 for an attack against a single target. Keep three dice for the total. For each hitch showing in the dice pool, step up the wielder's mental stress.

Aura Goggles

Signature Asset D8

Through a combination of direct neural feedback and a HUD overlay, these goggles translate the wearer's psychic impressions into visual information. The user must have Psychic Senses as a power, and the D8 from this asset can be used in any pool including Psychic Senses.

The owner of this signature asset can also purchase the following SFX:

- **SFX: *Predictive Algorithm*.** Spend 1 PP to reroll a reaction against a physical or psychic attack, adding or stepping up Psychic Senses.

Chapter 5: Factions of the Shadow War

Since Black Solstice, the world has grown darker and stranger by far. While the Anunnaki move slowly and secretively, hoping to cement their power and defeat their enemies before transitioning to open rule of mankind, their invasion is pervasive enough that many people have been confronted with unquestionable proof of the existence of the supernatural. While the vast majority of those who become eyewitnesses to horror simply close their eyes and hope to never again see such things, some cannot look away.

The Darkchildren are, by their very nature, pushed to the front lines of the Shadow War against the Anunnaki—but they are not alone in the fight. Mortals of all stripes have been drawn into the battle as well, contributing information and support—and sometimes their lives—to stand against the invaders.

The Nephilim have always stood against evil, and many of them have come to the conclusion that the Darkchildren may well be on the side of the angels in the current conflict. Though they have long been enemies of the Children of the Dark, the angelic scions of the Nephilim sometimes put aside their old animosities to make alliances that cross traditional lines.

These coalitions of Darkchildren, Nephilim, and mortals are known as *Conspiracies*. Though they all stand against the Anunnaki, each group has its own ideas about how to go about that fight as well as their own goals outside of the Shadow War. Because of these conflicting means and ends, the Conspiracies sometimes wind up working at cross-purposes. This in turn leads to animosities and rivalries between groups that should be natural allies in the fight against evil—and all the while, the Anunnaki laugh.

Wheels Within Wheels

Conspiracy membership is rarely exclusive. Many groups actually push their members to join other Conspiracies in order to gain information about what their “allies” are up to. At the same time, an individual who is known to openly associate with multiple Conspiracies can be seen as untrustworthy. The standard way that some of the more militant Conspiracies deal with “double-dippers” is to treat them like mushrooms—keep them in the dark and feed them shit.

Mechanically speaking, faction membership is a signature asset, with the rating of the asset representing the character’s status within his Conspiracy as well as the level of support he can expect from his fellows. A D6 rating represents someone with basic membership in a Conspiracy—someone the other members recognize as “one of their own,” though they may not have much respect or influence in the group. Members with D8 and D10 membership are increasingly more important and influential, while D12 membership represents one of the movers and shakers of the faction—a true leader of the organization.

A character can theoretically have D6 membership in as many Conspiracies as he wishes; even if two factions are listed as “enemies” in their descriptions, the character might be openly a member of one and secretly a member of the other, or a spy working for one of them. Rising through the ranks in a faction begins to limit the character’s ability to gain trust and access in any others, however. A character cannot have D8 membership in more than two Conspiracies, and can never have D10 or higher membership in more than one Conspiracy.

All of the Conspiracies listed below use the following format for their description:

Conspiracy Name

“Quote.”

A brief description of the Conspiracy and its history.

Organization: The way the Conspiracy organizes its members.

Goals: The Conspiracy’s long-term goals other than fighting the Anunnaki.

Allies: Which Conspiracies the group considers itself on friendly terms with.

Enemies: Which Conspiracies the group considers itself on bad terms with.

Missions: The sort of missions that the Conspiracy sends its members on.

Milestone

A faction-specific milestone available to members of the faction. A character can only select this milestone if they have at least a D6 signature asset representing membership in the faction.

Unlockables

A selection of unlockables available to members of the faction. A character can only purchase these unlockables if they have at least a D6 signature asset representing membership in the faction, and many of them are upgraded at higher levels of membership.

CAUSE

“The truth is out there—like, way out there.”

The UFO craze of the twentieth century never really went away. Despite the advent of smartphones and high-definition cameras, people continued to see strange lights in the sky all across the world, sometimes capturing blurry photos or videos to back up their claims. Though such stories were popular in tabloids and online, particularly in the realm of so-called “creepypastas,” no one in the cultural mainstream took such eccentricity seriously—until Black Solstice, that is.

After Black Solstice, sightings of UFO, ghosts, and other strange phenomena jumped up dramatically. Unlike previous UFO scares in the 1950s, 1970s, and 1990s, pretty much everyone in the world now had access to pocket-sized, high-definition video cameras in the form of smartphones. Dozens of photos, videos, and testimonials made their way onto social media in the months following Black Solstice.

The majority of these were dubbed cunning fakes, but enough of them gained traction to draw thousands of people into communities devoted to aliens and conspiracy theories. This also made it easy for people to notice when prominent members of their communities started going missing. It also wasn’t hard to determine that the people who vanished were those who had posted videos or images that were more realistic than the usual ones—and that their posts were rapidly removed from social media.

Nothing is ever truly lost on the internet, though. A small core of true believers created backups of as much information as possible and then went underground. They went back to their roots, reaching out to people through “analog means”—in-person. They attended conventions and club meetings, carefully felt out the people who seemed to have brushed up against the unnatural, and created a widespread support group: CAUSE—Citizens Against the Unnatural, Supernatural, and Extraterrestrial.

Most members of CAUSE aren't full-time activists; they maintain normal lives in between sharing information on the deep web, meeting secretly to circulate important information, and doing local outreach. The few true weirdos who have essentially abandoned civilian life to go off the grid are the real core of the Conspiracy. These are the ones who investigate "ghost sightings," or who pull out their smartphones and start filming when everyone else would start running and screaming.

CAUSE initially sought to expose the existence of the supernatural to the public without getting themselves "disappeared," but there are deep disagreements about how exactly to do this. Right now, the majority of the group prefers to stay in the background, documenting the unnatural and feeding information to the other Conspiracies—when doing so wouldn't endanger themselves, of course. A small minority believes in "spreading the signal"; that is, putting out available information by whatever means possible and blowing everything wide open.

Unfortunately, CAUSE's origins as a conspiracy theory group leave them basically incapable of coming to a consensus about methods, direction, or even what's actually going on. Only a few dozen members of the group know the name "Anunnaki," and maybe half that believe that the world is being secretly invaded by those beings. The rest have theories ranging from snake people or vampires to grey aliens and polymorphic space rocks.

Organization: CAUSE is a distributed support group that exists primarily in the deep web and on social media. Dedicated chat rooms, forums, and data hubs are the only way most members ever "meet." The hardcore members who dropped off the grid after Black Solstice maintain secure servers and encryption protocols to keep their communications secure. Members sometimes recruit from science-fiction conventions, college clubs, and alien abduction support groups, which leads the group to tend toward the nerdy and asocial. A few members actively seek out weirdness to add information to the group's fairly significant pile of blurry videos, overexposed photos, and photocopied, heavily-redacted files.

The most unusual members of CAUSE are a small number of Nephilim who have chosen to secretly infiltrate the group, not out of malice but because they believe their own origins to be extraterrestrial and want to use CAUSE's resources to prove it. This infiltration gives CAUSE a lot of leeway when dealing with the Nephilim, though the few members that know anything only know that a small number of "good aliens" are looking out for them rather than opposing them. Most have never even heard of the Nephilim by name.

Goals: Members are largely interested in documenting and recording the unnatural. Some hope to eventually understand it, possibly by creating some "grand unified conspiracy theory" to explain everything unusual in the world. Some feed information to other groups to aid in the fight against... whatever it is that's causing all of this. A few still cling to the organization's original ideals and hope to expose the truth to the world as a whole.

Allies: CAUSE as a whole doesn't know enough about the other Conspiracies to consider any of them friends, but it tends to be more interested in helping small, independent groups who don't seem beholden to "the man." For obvious reasons, they're pretty suspicious about secretive organizations other than their own. Most of their contacts over the last few years have been with the Resistance and the Midnight Runners, who they mistakenly believe are the same thing—an underground support network for "alien hybrids" or something similar.

Enemies: Just like not having close friends due to misinformation, CAUSE doesn't have any serious enemies. They've heard rumors about a rogue government agency that sounds a lot like the "Men in Black" of UFO lore, so they generally try to steer clear of Sigma Red. The Illuminated would ring a lot of alarm bells for pretty much every member of CAUSE thanks to their history as a conspiracy theory social group. As social maladjusts and conspiracy theorists, members sometimes have personal prejudices that make them difficult to get along with, and which ultimately only hurt the group's overall cause.

Missions: Almost all CAUSE missions are going to be about gathering information in one way or another. They ask members to document strange happenings, take photos of weird occurrences, and catch monsters on video. A member might occasionally be tasked with contacting another faction, recruiting a new member, or stopping a rogue member from exposing their network.

Milestone: For the CAUSE

You are devoted to discovering the truth at any cost. Documenting the weird is only the first step toward revealing it to the world. You're gonna blow this whole thing wide open!

1 XP when you propose an outrageous theory to explain something unnatural.

3 XP when you run toward trouble instead of away from it so you can get video or photographs.

10 XP when you publicly reveal all of the evidence you've gathered about the supernatural, exposing yourself and your allies to potentially lethal scrutiny, or when you allow your collection of evidence to be destroyed rather than risk publicity.

Unlockables

- **From the Archives [5 XP]:** Something useful or pertinent for the current mission was caught on camera in the past by another member. Gain a D8 information-based asset for the rest of the session.
- **The Truth is Out There [10 XP]:** There are plenty of people in important positions who are sympathetic to the CAUSE, even if they don't know exactly who they're dealing with. A quick phone call or email can get one of them to help you out in some significant but non-dangerous fashion, like getting you out of county lockup with no record or passing you a grand in unmarked (if slightly bloodstained) bills.

Church of the Fallen Angel

"Abashed the devil stood and felt how awful goodness is and saw Virtue in her shape how lovely: and pined his loss."

In classical Judeo-Christian mythology, the devil isn't God's enemy but His servant. This angel of temptation—call him Lucifer, Azrael, Satan, or what have you—offers mortals earthly rewards that would surely damn their souls if taken. He lures the just toward injustice, the good toward evil, and the righteous toward damnation. He does this not because he *wants* mortals to go to Hell, but rather because he wants them to prove their worthiness to enter Heaven and to choose good of their own free will. This is his task from God: to be a harrier of mortal souls.

The Church of the Fallen Angel is a centuries-old religious organization that devotes itself to Lucifer in his guise as the “tempting angel.” This group holds that Lucifer is God’s servant, testing and tempting mortals to wickedness in order to separate the gold from the dross. The Darkchildren and Nephilim who are the heart of the Church view themselves as God’s servants in the same vein as Lucifer, set among men as wolves among sheep, to cull the weak and leave behind only those whose faith is strong enough to avoid temptation.

Though Darkchildren and Nephilim have largely been enemies for the majority of human history, this organization has long acted as a bridge between the two groups. Sometime in the Middle Ages, Nephilim of a more religious bent began to wonder if any of the “demons” they hunted could be turned back to a righteous path. This toleration—limited though it was—allowed the two groups to form a syncretic faith that has persisted to the modern day.

The Church has hidden itself within the trappings of other Abrahamic faiths, its members becoming priests, rabbis, or imams as the local culture demanded. Though Church members must often engage in unsavory acts themselves in order to effectively tempt mortals, they spend much of their personal time undertaking acts of contrition, prayers, and more extreme measures to cleanse themselves of the taint they take on from their actions. In private, they often perform ceremonies devoted to Lucifer, asking for his intercession with God to lead them away from the temptation they deliver unto others.

The Church regards the return of the Anunnaki as nothing less than an abomination against the Lord. They see the Shadow War as a holy crusade for the souls of humanity itself. Some quietly whisper that the coming of the Anunnaki is a sign of the End Times, when God will cast down the wicked into Hell forever and uplift the righteous in eternal glory. Many tempters fear that they will be in the former category instead of the latter.

Organization: The Church of the Fallen Angel takes much of its organizational inspiration from the Eastern Orthodox Church, given that the Conspiracy started in Constantinople during the Middle Ages. Each city is treated as an independent parish, with its priests (or rabbis or imams) reporting to a regional bishop; these bishops are autonomous and considered equals with no authority to interfere in each other’s region without invitation.

As an organization with a central hierarchy and clear leadership, the Church was a prime target for Anunnaki agents during Black Solstice. Many individual parishes were wiped out completely as their mortal members huddled together for comfort. Almost all of the current bishops were killed as they gathered to discuss whether or not the End Times had come. The Church survived the “Solstice Purge,” though much diminished. The new bishops are less powerful and less wise than their predecessors, while the surviving parishes made it through mostly due to being insignificant or well hidden.

Most members of the Church are mortals who have been brought into the Conspiracy by an ordained Nephilim or Darkchild, generally by being judged “worthy” after withstanding a terrible temptation. Many members consider themselves Christian, Jewish, or Muslim, albeit with a somewhat different denomination than usual. Members meet at least once a month to pray for God’s forgiveness, share stories of their temptations, and pick targets for their missions.

Goals: The Church has always concerned itself with the eternal rather than the temporal. Its goals outside the Shadow War have remained largely unchanged; they identify mortals who stand at the precipice of moral choice and tempt them to leap off it. They find individuals who have

already begun walking a dark path and lead them ever deeper into depravity to see if they'll balk and turn back or fail and be damned.

Some members prefer to tempt those who are already supposedly righteous and test them to destruction. Either way, the result is the same: those who give in to temptation are destroyed after they prove themselves irredeemable, while those who resist and prove themselves godly are thereafter left alone or aided in rebuilding their lives.

Allies: The Church works closely with both the Resistance and the Midnight Runners, considering them potential recruiting grounds for “worthy” Darkchildren as well as allies in the war against the Anunnaki. Church members sometimes work with Resistance cells as a sort of field chaplain, while others provide spiritual guidance in Midnight Runner safehouses. They have maintained a wary peace with the Illuminated for decades, though neither group cares much for the other.

Enemies: When members of the Church run into Empire Noir gangbangers in the field, it's an even question about whether they'll put aside their mutual animosity long enough to work together or just let the mission slide in favor of bashing each other's heads in. The Church views Empire Noir as unrepentant sinners; Empire Noir sees the Church as sanctimonious assholes. They're both pretty much right. The only other group they have regular problems with is the Ether Society, who spread their magical corruption far and wide with no regard for decency.

Missions: The Church is less interested in grand social actions than in intensely personal ones. They identify individuals whose damnation or salvation could turn the tide of the Shadow War, then test them to the breaking point. They often serve as “sparrows” for mixed-faction cells, using their skills at temptation and persuasion to get targets to give up information, turn on their allies, or uncover secrets. The Church is also deeply interested in artifacts of Igigi and Nephilim origin, treating them as sacred relics and housing them in sanctums across the world.

Milestone: Tempting Angel

Members of the Church of the Fallen Angel believe their true purpose in the world is to test the faith of the pious, separating those with true belief from those who merely mouth the words. When you see someone flouting their goodness, your duty is to push them into a crucible and see if their belief is gold or dross.

1 XP when you tempt a supposedly moral mortal to wickedness.

3 XP when you inflict social stress on a mortal of great piety or faith.

10 XP when you lure a person of previously upright morals into giving up their faith, or when you recognize their virtue as being worthy in and of itself and undertake dangerous action to help or protect them.

Unlockables

- **Forgive Me, Father [5 XP]:** Confession is good for the soul. Spend a scene engaging in a ritual confession and penance with a higher-ranking member of the Church and either recover all of your social stress or step down social trauma.
- **The Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch [10 XP]:** By impressing the local diocese with the urgency of your need, you have been loaned a genuine relic of the faith. This is a D8 signature asset with an associated SFX and the *Gear* limit. You keep the asset until the end of

the current scenario, and then must either return it or purchase it as a permanent signature asset. If it is lost or destroyed, there will be hell to pay.

Empire Noir

“Judge if you want. We’re all gonna die someday—I intend to deserve it.”

The temptations of power are many and varied. Wealth is just the tip of the iceberg for people willing to break the law for their own gain. When a person has supernatural powers and an impenetrable disguise while using them, this temptation can become overwhelming. Almost every Darkchild lives outside the law to some degree, existing on the fringes of human civilization, but the elders of their kind prevented the worst excesses by coming down like the fist of god on anyone who threatened to draw too much attention.

Since Black Solstice, the only significant social pressures keeping novice Darkchildren from turning to a life of crime have largely vanished. More and more Darkchildren are awakening every year, and their increased numbers are proportional to the humans they live among—that is to say, the vast majority of them are from poor and lower middle-class families, and a large number of them from major cities. Where there are cities and poverty, there is crime.

Darkchildren who were part of existing gangs quickly came to dominate those gangs. Turf wars that had been quiet for years blossomed into bloody warfare all across the world, but most especially in traditional hubs of gang activity like New York, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, Moscow, and Tokyo. Police heard wild tales about monsters who were immune to bullets; most such stories were written off as products of tall tales, fearful crooks, and major drug abuse.

By the time federal agencies started taking these stories more seriously, most of their leadership had been suborned by the Anunnaki. Police forces across America, Europe, and Asia became ever more militarized, turned into tools with which to hunt the Darkchildren. The only way for the criminal Darkchildren to survive was to organize.

The leading crime families of Asia—the Yakuza, the Triads, and the Tongs—were the first to make a move toward bringing in all monstrous criminals under their aegis. It took years of blood, negotiation, and ruthless manipulation, but agreements were finally reached that established a global crime syndicate that became known as Empire Noir. Today, “the Empire” controls vast swaths of the international drug trade, prostitution, gambling, and other unsavory activities.

The only thing that keeps the other Conspiracies from regarding Empire Noir as an enemy is that it is just as dedicated to fighting the Anunnaki as any other group composed primarily of Darkchildren. It simply prefers to turn a profit while doing so, and it sees nothing wrong with exploiting ordinary humans along the way.

Organization: Empire Noir is run by a global council, with the leadership of each region selecting a representative to that council by whatever means they see fit. The council cares almost nothing about the internal politics of its “subsidiaries” as long as three basic principles are obeyed: kick a percentage up the ladder, don’t work with the Anunnaki, and don’t kill other Darkchildren if you can help it.

While Darkchildren are a minority of Empire Noir’s membership, almost their entire leadership is made up of the supernatural shapechangers. The global council is said to be entirely Darkchildren, though few outside the Empire know much about them; the little bit of information

that has escaped the group's code of silence suggests that the council has eleven to thirteen members.

Goals: Empire Noir exists for one reason: to make money by any means. Each branch of the Empire has its own specialties, whether that's smuggling drugs across international borders, running the prostitution trade in a city, or pulling off heists, but most of them dabble in a little bit of everything. Having supernaturally powerful muscle backing your plays can make even the most dangerous crimes seem safe.

Allies: The grand council of Empire Noir considers the organization to be allies with any Conspiracy populated primarily by Darkchildren, whether the other group returns the favor or not. After all, all Darkchildren are family. The only Conspiracy this doesn't apply to is the Church of the Fallen Angel, who the Empire sees as self-righteous hypocrites that have been tainted by their association with the Nephilim.

Enemies: Empire Noir distrusts Conspiracies primarily populated by ordinary humans, though they hold special rancor for Sigma Red, who they see as nothing more than feds with better guns. Their brief contacts with Psi Division have made them wary of working with the group again; no criminal enjoys the idea of people being able to read their minds. The only faction they will outright refuse to work with is Project Tiamat. There are too many hard feelings from the early days before the Project split off from Ziggurat Inc., back when Darkchildren were frequently kidnapped as "test subjects."

Missions: The council hardly ever passes down orders to subsidiaries unless helping another Conspiracy out in an operation against the Anunnaki. As long as revenue flows upward and secrecy is maintained, each gang is left to its own devices. When those things don't happen, blood flows. A subsidiary of Empire Noir might also ask the occasional favor from a visiting member, like helping to collect a debt, removing a threat to their gang, or providing backup during a "job." Some Darkchildren in the Empire also act as "floaters," moving between gangs that don't have a supernatural member of their own and pitching in when things get tough.

Milestone: Street Life

Life on the street was tough, so you had to be tougher than the street. You don't take disrespect—not to you or your crew.

1 XP when you make a show of being tough or mean in front of your allies.

3 XP when you feel "disrespected" by another person and turn it into an argument or fight.

10 XP when you destroy an alliance or valuable contact through your violent behavior, or when you accept public personal humiliation to help your crew accomplish a significant goal.

Unlockables

- **Guns, Lots of Guns [5 XP]:** A real gangster always knows where to get a piece. Spend a bridge scene meeting with a fellow low-life. You gain a D8 weapon-based asset that lasts for the rest of the session, or a D6 weapon-based asset with an appropriate SFX.
- **I Can Do This Thing for You... [10 XP]:** Sometimes even a hardened criminal needs plausible deniability or at least the appearance of clean hands. Spend a bridge scene meeting with one of your criminal contacts and name a serious crime you want committed on your

behalf, such as murder, kidnapping, grand theft, or the like. As long as there is no supernatural resistance involved, your contact will have it done by the end of the session—but you’ll owe them one. If supernatural resistance is involved, they’ll fail spectacularly, but you don’t owe them anything and you learn something significant about that opposition’s nature and powers.

The Ether Society

“Sufficiently advanced magic is indistinguishable from technology.”

The Society for the Study of the Luminiferous Aether began as a gentleman’s club in Victorian England, a haven for scientifically interested scions of privilege and the less well-off scientists for whom they acted as patrons. As the physical world’s mysteries became better understood and the concept of the luminiferous aether was dismissed as so much twaddle, members drifted away from the society, leaving behind only stodgy die-hards, fringe theorists, and people too disgraced for more prestigious clubs.

During the archaeology boom of the interwar period, the group reinvented itself as an explorer’s club, shortening its name to the Ether Society. It funded digs and expeditions around the world, seeking grand truths underlying reality. The Ether Society discovered evidence of an ancient civilization, predating the oldest known human civilizations—one with powers so great that they might as well have been magic. The Society collected relics left behind by this “Antediluvian Civilization,” as well as scattered lore and writings indicating the existence of supernatural beings who lived in the shadows even into the modern day.

By the end of World War II, the Ether Society had contacted several such beings, treating them as potential allies in the search for knowledge. A few members of the Society had even begun to recover the secrets of magic—albeit greatly weakened from the supposed powers of prehistoric sorcerers. Between its contacts in high society and its connections with the Children of the Dark, the Ether Society experienced a resurgence in prominence and prestige.

Though it represented itself as a group of people searching for truth, the Ether Society became decadent and soft in the decades following its return to importance. Most members joined for social reasons, while only a tiny number of doddering old men still cared about mysticism and the secrets of the ancient past. To the disgust of those elders, the Society even started admitting women and non-whites!

When Black Solstice came, the Ether Society was just as unprepared as any other group. Members flocked to its lodges across Europe to ride out the chaos. Some of them were initiated deeply enough to have heard stories about magic and monsters. Seeking something that would explain the horrors of a black sun, they opened the ancient tomes and vaults of the Society—and found themselves empowered.

Around a dozen lodges managed to survive the chaos of Black Solstice. The London club—the original home of the Society—burnt to the ground during the riots, but the second-oldest lodge in Vienna survived unscathed. The Viennese Society members reached out to other survivors and traded stories of impossible happenings, of fire conjured from thin air and monsters banished with a few words.

Several lodges had also offered sanctuary to newly changed Darkchildren. Many of them would join the Society that had sheltered them, using their innate connection to the Shadowlands

to help their mortal brethren explore the edges of human understanding. An era of magical exploration began—one that all too soon brushed up against the horrors of the Anunnaki.

The Ether Society initially approached the Anunnaki as potential allies. The writings of the Society's previous members indicated that the Anunnaki might be the originators of the Antediluvian Civilization that had fascinated the Conspiracy for almost a century. Unfortunately, it took the loss of the Madrid lodge for the Society to understand that the Anunnaki were not interested in allies—only in slaves.

Even now, throwing its resources and knowledge into the Shadow War, some members wonder if opposing the Anunnaki is truly the correct choice. They imagine all that they could learn from such ancient, powerful beings, not to mention potential immortality. For the time being, knowing that such an alliance would earn them many enemies and lose their Darkchild members—who would take a great deal of the Society's secrets with them when they left—is the only thing that keeps a significant portion of the Society from reaching out to the Anunnaki once more.

Organization: The Ether Society is descended from a British gentlemen's club of the Victorian Period, and it still bears the marks of that origin. Each major European city has (or had) a "grand lodge," usually in an older, moneyed part of the city, at which members could meet to hold discussions, exchange information, and enjoy a drink in good company. The Society also has many trappings of a mystery cult, like the Shriners or Masons, with levels of initiation and semi-historical rituals intended to fill a member with awe at the Society's age and power.

Due to this, a gathering place for Ether Society members is typically known as a lodge, even if the Society has never established a formal chapter in the region. Indeed, every organized group of members in the Americas, Africa, or Asia is part of such an informal gathering. In theory, every "lesser lodge" reports back to one of the grand lodges of Europe; in practice, they're usually left to their own devices. The leader of a grand lodge is called a captain, while lesser lodges are guided by deacons.

Because of its origins, the Society has a reputation for being somewhat conservative, though that is changing rapidly since Black Solstice. Women have been allowed as members since the 1960s, but only in the last five years have there been any female lodge captains. In the modern day, the major form of conservatism left to the Ether Society is based on social position; membership has traditionally only been open to people of means or aristocratic heritage, and that has largely not changed. The only exceptions to this general rule are Darkchildren, who are considered to be descended from the nobility of the Antediluvian Civilization, which qualifies them by right of blood.

Goals: The Ether Society seeks to recover lost secrets of sorcery, collect ancient mystical relics, and piece together the truth about the hidden world of the supernatural. Their membership is about evenly divided between people who possess genuine curiosity about the true nature of reality and selfish pricks who want to know "the real magic" and don't care who gets hurt on the way.

Allies: The only other Conspiracy that the Society is on truly friendly terms with is Project Tiamat. They see the scientists of Tiamat as kindred souls, people who want to know the truth and are willing to go to nearly any length to find it. Most other Conspiracies are regarded as tenuous allies of convenience at best.

Enemies: The Society look at the Illuminated as a dark mirror of itself—what happens when your thirst for power eclipses your desire for understanding. The two groups clash over the same tombs and relics frequently enough that there's genuine bad blood between them. The Society also dislikes the Church of the Fallen Angel, though more for being tasteless zealots than for any actual conflicts. In turn, the Church despises the Society as pagan sorcerers who would be better off as kindling.

Missions: Almost any Ether Society mission is going to be about exploration and recovery of ancient knowledge or relics. This can be anything from delving into a newly uncovered ruin or a smash-and-grab run in a museum to steal something the curators didn't realize was magical. Of course, since most members are affluent or from "good families," their first inclination is to simply buy the things they want, with theft as Plan B. This means that members are sometimes sent to purchase (or negotiate for the purchase of) antiquities of various sorts.

Milestone: The Last Crusade

Hunting for the relics of the past is never easy, especially when every hunt is also a race against the Anunnaki. Difficult decisions must sometimes be made in the field, and you're the one who has to make them.

1 XP when you interpret a clue in the search for a relic or make a historical comparison.

3 XP when you violate a territorial boundary—such as a national border, gang's territory, or simply breaking and entering—in the hunt for a relic.

10 XP when you destroy a priceless artifact rather than allow it to fall into enemy hands, or permit such a relic to be taken by the other side rather than destroying a piece of history.

Unlockables

- **Secrets of the Ages [5 XP]:** The Ether Society has one of the grandest collections of esoteric knowledge in the world. Spend a bridge scene contacting the Society and having them pore through the records on your behalf. Gain a D8 information-based asset regarding a specific topic (such as a particular Know specialty) for the rest of the session.
- **The Threefold Law [10 XP]:** There are many ritual sorcerers among the Ether Society capable of laying curses. Spend a bridge scene participating in a ritual working and name a specific individual who is known to you by name and appearance. If that person is an ordinary mortal, you may inflict any magical bane upon them you wish, up to and including death; if they are supernatural, they instead suffer a persistent D8 magical complication of your choice that lasts until the end of the current scenario (unless they take action to end it sooner). Step up your mental trauma for participating in this mind-bending ritual.

The Illuminated

"Illumination is the place where you gain knowledge that there is none but you to take care of yourself."

Were you to ask the Illuminated about their origins, they would tell you of scholar-priests who invented literacy in Mesopotamia. They would speak of Egyptian sorcerers, of Etruscan mystery cults, of Taoist alchemists in medieval China. They would go on at length about the ancient traditions of their order, about how they have shaped human society at every turn over the course

of its history, hiding in the shadows until the modern day, when they have chosen to reveal themselves to potential allies and turn the tide against the Anunnaki.

All of that is a lie.

The group calling itself “the Illuminated” actually arose as a self-help group in San Francisco during the 1970s. Their founder, Guru Ashanti (born Ashley Gibb), claimed to have visions of a prehistoric civilization that had existed before Atlantis; the destruction wrought by the coming of the planet Nibiru cast down their crystal towers, but their spirits lived on in their half-human descendants. Ashanti taught people to “open their chakras” so they could confront the traumas that held them back from success, which were thought to be race-memories passed down from their Atlantean ancestors.

Ashanti had a serious drug problem—which is saying something for the ‘70s—but copious amounts of charisma. She drew a few dozen hardcore followers, some of whom had plenty of money to throw at the “guru.” The Illuminated probably would have faded into obscurity except that it became co-opted by notorious land developer Chad Turk. He saw the money-making potential in a modern mystery religion and made his way into Ashanti’s inner circle; the guru was kept complacent with drugs and warm bedmates while Turk became the spokesman for the group.

Turk turned Ashanti’s ramblings into a more coherent narrative and threw in his own doses of Near Eastern mythology, psychobabble, and hierarchical ranks that required members to donate ever more time and money to gain. During the ‘80s, a number of Darkchildren infiltrated the cult, attempting to determine if it had any real power behind it. Despite determining that it was all a sham, they stuck around and made their way into high-ranking positions, seeing the group’s potential as a recruitment tool and information network.

Guru Ashanti passed away in her sleep in 1998, while Chad Turk died of a major heart attack five years later. By then, the entire inner circle was made up of elder Darkchildren using the Illuminated’s resources to uncover real ancient secrets—though they still only fed pablum to the mortal members. As of Black Solstice, no member of the Illuminated below the inner circle knew the group’s real origins; Turk had assiduously persecuted journalists and politicians who looked too closely at the group, while the elders had good cause to play up hokey new age crap to conceal their actual supernatural activities.

When the Anunnaki returned, the inner council of the Illuminated were among the Darkchild elders who were destroyed. This left the majority of the organization with only the false history made up by Turk and propagated by the elders. When actual sorcerers and newly awakened Darkchildren began joining the group, they knew only the party line. The lie had become the truth.

There may be records in some dusty archive somewhere that would reveal the true origins of the Illuminated, but it’s just as likely that the modern membership would dismiss such stories as attempts to discredit their “grand traditions.” In the meantime, the Illuminated continue on as much they have before—except that profit, power, and gaining influence now move alongside fighting the Anunnaki.

Organization: The Illuminated are one part international self-help group and one part mystery religion. New members are “Initiates of the Illumination,” and gaining rank is quickly impressed on members as the most important thing they can do. Rank is gained by volunteering time and donating money, with higher ranks requiring more and more of both. By the time a member finds

out about real monsters and magic, they've probably already left behind families, jobs, and most of their personal interests in favor of serving the organization.

Darkchildren and sorcerers are "fast-tracked" to higher ranks, but they're still expected to get their hands dirty for the Conspiracy to prove their loyalty. Members who devote their lives to the group and put in twenty to thirty years (and well over ten million dollars in accumulated donations) can wind up on the inner council, which makes large-scale decisions for the Illuminated as a whole.

Goals: Even before Black Solstice, the Illuminated was a multibillion-dollar organization, and its value has only increased since then as people seek meaning in mystical-sounding mumbo-jumbo to deal with the stresses of modern life. The organization accounts dozens of A-list celebrities as members, including at least two Academy Award winners, as well as several billionaires. Recruiting important, famous, and wealthy people—and then getting them to empty their wallets into the group's bank accounts—remains their first and foremost goal. Fighting the Anunnaki is very much a side hustle for the Illuminated.

Allies: The Illuminated consider the Ether Society to be kindred spirits, even if their group is a paltry century and a half old. The Society thinks the Illuminated are hokum-peddling pretenders to a grand tradition, but they are tolerated as fellow seekers of the occult. The Illuminated also gets along surprisingly well with Empire Noir; the two organizations are both profit-seekers, but the Illuminated find the Empire's methods to be a little brutal for their taste.

Enemies: The Illuminated look down on the Resistance and the Midnight Runners alike as penniless vagabonds constantly showing up with their hands out. The Resistance thinks the Illuminated are soft do-nothings, while the Midnight Runners think the prominently public organization draws too much heat for everyone else. Almost no one would be willing to tolerate the Illuminated if it weren't for the fact that they fund virtually the entire Shadow War effort. None of the Darkchild-oriented factions can *afford* to be enemies with the Illuminated.

Missions: The Illuminated often puts its members into mixed-organization cells to represent the people who hold the purse strings and protect their interests. They also see profit in having foreknowledge of Conspiracy activities that might harm the bottom line of people opposed to the Illuminated, or acting as a third party for wealthy individuals who need to vanish after drawing too much Anunnaki attention. Almost any mission the Illuminated sends its members on is ultimately about turning a profit, gaining influence, or recruiting new members.

Milestone: Monster, Help Thyself

Just because you're not human doesn't mean you should stop trying to actualize your potential. With self-confidence, rigorous spiritual discipline, and the aid of your mentors, you can grow into the best version of yourself. It's kind of expensive, but self-perfection always is.

1 XP when you spout off psychobabble or a New Age aphorism as advice.

3 XP when you spend a scene performing errands for your local Illuminated chapter or make a donation you can't really afford.

10 XP when you make a significant sacrifice for the Illuminated—your job, a relationship, or the like—or when you reject their navel-gazing nonsense and leave the Conspiracy for another one.

Unlockables

- **Actualize Your Potential [5 XP]:** They might be New Age charlatans, but the meditative and introspective processes used by the Illuminated can actually help people recover their inner balance. Spend a bridge scene visiting an Illuminated self-help workshop. Recover all mental stress or step back mental trauma.
- **Money, Dear Boy [10XP]:** There are few problems that cannot be solved with sufficient monetary investment. Spend a bridge scene contacting your superiors in the Illuminated and explain your current dilemma; if it can be solved by money, it is resolved at the beginning of the next scene. This might include bribing a reporter to kill a story, paying off a witness, hiring private transport, or acquiring a valuable but mundane item. If the problem can't be solved by money, you learn why that is and gain a significant piece of information about what would be more effective.

The Midnight Runners

"There is no cowardice in living to fight another day."

After Black Solstice, hundreds of new Darkchildren awakened to their powers and true nature in the United States alone. No one really knows how many, but it was obviously far more than had existed at one time for millennia—perhaps ever. When Darkchildren started being hunted down, their friends and allies looked for reasons behind the killings. What they found was the Anunnaki, an ancient, godlike force that controlled a parallel dimension and had countless monstrous servants at their disposal.

It's really no surprise that some Darkchildren decided to keep their heads down, go into hiding, and try to stay off the radar. These unofficial "friends of friends" worked hard to find new Darkchildren before the Anunnaki could get to them, help them drop off the grid, build new identities in new locations, and teach them how to use their powers without drawing too much attention. After rebuffing several efforts by the Resistance to bring this network into the fold, the Conspiracy became more organized, eventually forming into the Midnight Runners.

The Midnight Runners act like the Underground Railroad of the 19th century, smuggling Darkchildren (and sometimes their mortal families) to safety in places far removed from those in which they first displayed their powers and drew the attention of the Anunnaki. These safehouses range from disposable flophouses in the worst parts of town to rural farms far beyond the city lights posing as "work retreats" for metropolitan yuppies and halfway houses for abuse sufferers.

Much of the Conspiracy's mortal membership is drawn from relatives and friends of Darkchildren that the Midnight Runners have helped in the past, offering their time and money to keep the organization functional. Many of them permit use of their homes as temporary safehouses, while others keep an eye out for signs of a new Darkchild so they can tip off the Midnight Runners before the Anunnaki catch wind.

The organization maintains multiple safehouses in every major city in the United States, Europe, and East Asia. They have little to no presence in Africa, the Middle East, or Russia, though recent efforts have been made to open up those venues to the network. The Midnight Runners base their senior leadership (such as it is) out of Australia, which the Anunnaki seem to have very little interest in for some unknown reason. The only reason that more Darkchildren aren't funneled to the "Land Down Under" is because of the distance, expense, and danger;

traveling internationally is a good way to catch the attention of the authorities in Anunnaki-subverted countries (which is most of the first world).

Organization: The Midnight Runners are one part underground support network, one part fugitive railway, and one part anarchist commune. They have a “senior leadership” that mostly consists of people who have been organizing since the early days after Black Solstice. Regional leaders are basically people who stepped up when needed and just kept going. There’s no real hierarchy to the Midnight Runners, just cells with friends-of-friends who keep an eye out for each other and are willing to drop everything at a moment’s notice to bug out.

Goals: The Midnight Runners don’t fight the Anunnaki if they can help it. While individual members might work with other Conspiracies in confrontational ops, the group as a whole considers fighting the Anunnaki to be a losing proposition. Instead, their goals are to help as many Darkchildren out of the line of fire as possible. One of their long-term goals is to create a hidden “homeland” for Darkchildren, somewhere beyond the reach (or at least notice) of the Anunnaki—perhaps even in the Shadowlands themselves.

Allies: Though they dislike Empire Noir’s tactics and ruthlessness, the Midnight Runners frequently have to work closely with criminals. The Empire’s contacts in human trafficking and identity theft go a long way toward making the Runners’ jobs easier. They still find it best to not ask questions whenever possible. The Midnight Runners have also found a strange kinship with the Church of the Fallen Angel, who view helping other Darkchildren as one of their holy writs.

Enemies: There’s a lot of bad blood between the Midnight Runners and the Resistance. They’re two sides of a coin, and neither of them likes the reminder that the other option exists. The Midnight Runners claim to be looking for peaceful lives, while the Resistance calls them feckless cowards. The Resistance claim to be standing up for Earth, while the Runners call them insane terrorists. Meetings between the two groups almost always turn into shouting matches and ugly recriminations.

Missions: Midnight Runners work constantly to find young Darkchildren and transport them to safety (or at least greater safety). They establish safehouses, do community outreach, scout locations for Anunnaki influence (so they can avoid it), and—if all else fails—fight. Their missions are usually about avoidance and intelligence, but the Midnight Runners are not cowards. They simply believe that fighting a losing cause isn’t noble or heroic—it’s foolish.

Milestone: After Midnight

Others sometimes misunderstand your allegiance to the Midnight Runners as a sign of cowardice or pacifism. The truth is that you’re not afraid to fight—you just don’t want to throw away your life in a pointless gesture of futility.

1 XP when you suggest retreat or come up with a plan that avoids direct confrontation entirely.

3 XP when you lead a group of noncombatants through dangerous territory or offer shelter to members of another Conspiracy.

10 XP when you abandon your allies ahead of a confrontation you consider unwinnable, or when you choose to stand by them despite believing that you’re all certainly going to die.

Unlockables

- **Go to Ground [5 XP]:** Everyone needs to hide out sometimes. As long as you can contact the local Midnight Runners cell—by phone, email, text, psychic hotline, whatever—they can put together a safe house for you. It might not be comfortable or posh, but it has all the essentials and can't be connected back to you or your allies. Unless you draw major attention to yourselves, your enemies won't be able to find you for the rest of the current session.
- **Always a Way Out [10 XP]:** The Midnight Runners are masters of a speedy exit. When you are in a tight spot where retreat would be necessary but unlikely, you can buy this unlockable and reveal how you planned for this situation in a flashback. A Midnight Runners rescue team shows up and extracts you from the current situation, but not without incident. You (and any of your allies you choose to bring along) escape the current scene, but you lose a signature asset, an NPC ally in the current scene dies, or you step up trauma of your choice.

Project Tiamat

"The distance between insanity and genius is measured only by success."

The Ziggurat Corporation hosts a great many covert operations and secret departments, many of which don't know who they really work for or that the others exist. One of these projects was a work group code-named Project TIAMAT, after the Sumerian "mother of monsters." The group was provided biological samples of unknown origin and given a nearly unlimited budget to research them.

The discoveries that Project Tiamat made during the following months were revolutionary. The researchers believed that they could open up an entire new era of bio-medical advances, everything from curing genetic disorders to human enhancement. They developed "super soldiers" that they were told would help the government fight the war on terror. When their employers began to demand ever more horrific modifications to humans and animals, many of the scientists began to have moral reservations.

A series of encounters with Sigma Red, Psi Division, and the Resistance convinced the lead researchers that their employers were corrupt and possibly even of "extraterrestrial" origin. They quickly moved as many resources to hidden laboratories as possible, destroyed what they couldn't transport, and burned down their original facilities to cover their tracks. Their new facilities were poorly funded compared to their previous efforts but less morally offensive.

Today, Project Tiamat acts as a think-tank developing weapons, defenses, and countermeasures for several of the other Conspiracies. Tiamat scientists and engineers stay in secluded laboratories where they can experiment in relative safety and privacy. They also send "field agents" into the line of fire to collect samples from Anunnaki minions, since they can no longer rely on their former employers to supply such samples without question or cost.

Project Tiamat is one of the smallest of the Conspiracies, consisting only of scientists who fled the original Ziggurat work group, the few experts they've managed to recruit since then, and a very small "civilian" work force who serve as lab assistants and the like. They have a footprint disproportionately large to their size, though, since many of the other Conspiracies rely on them for scientific expertise and cutting-edge gear. Psi Division relies on them for the drugs that enhance their members' psychic abilities and help keep them mentally stable, while more than a few Sigma Red operatives are beneficiaries of the super-soldier treatments.

The biggest shortcoming of the Conspiracy is their continuing insistence on viewing the Shadow War and its participants in purely scientific terms. Most Tiamat scientists staunchly disavow the possibility of the “supernatural,” viewing unexplained phenomena as just that—unexplained but still somehow within the realm of the material universe, even if exploiting some hitherto unknown physical laws. Unfortunately, magic is very much real, a chaotic and chthonic force which follows few, if any, predictable rules. This blind spot often leaves Project Tiamat at a disadvantage when dealing with the more extreme ends of the supernatural world.

Organization: Project Tiamat refers to its cells as “research groups.” Each group consists of one to four actual scientists and perhaps twice as many assistants who might or might not be in on the Conspiracy’s secrets. Every research group has a specific focus for its work, in disciplines ranging from field medicine to hyperkinetic weaponry. Most research groups also include one or two field agents who risk life and limb to bring back resources, supplies, and samples.

There is no central leadership in Project Tiamat. Each research group is essentially on its own, only contacting other research groups when absolutely necessary. A research group usually has personal contact with cells from two or three other Conspiracies; they’re typically wary of speaking to anyone outside their usual contacts, even more so than most Conspiracies.

Goals: More than almost anything else, the researchers of Project Tiamat want to *understand*. They see a world spiraling into chaos, suddenly filled with magic and monsters, and they want to uncover the knowledge that would make everything make sense again. Right next to that is the desire to improve the quality of life for all humankind. They’re not mad scientists from a horror movie; their research into the horrific and the strange has only made most of them more committed to their mission.

Allies: Project Tiamat is theoretically allied to every other Conspiracy that opposes the Anunnaki. In practice, they are significantly friendlier with Sigma Red and Psi Division, Conspiracies that primarily employ mortal humans and utilize scientific means to pursue their agenda. They are far warier with any Conspiracy whose membership is primarily Darkchildren, Nephilim, or sorcerers.

Enemies: The only Conspiracies that Project Tiamat truly finds itself at odds with are Empire Noir and the Church of the Fallen Angel. The former are petty criminals—monstrous, supernatural criminals at that—and the latter are superstitious cultists. They still work with both groups since they fight the Anunnaki, but their relationships with them are decidedly cool. They also don’t much care for the “woo” being peddled by the Illuminated, but they’re happy to take the organization’s money.

Missions: The majority of Project Tiamat members avoid “the field” with a passion. Still, almost every research group has one or two field agents, either scientists who crave more adventure than they can find sitting in a lab or “lab assistants” with enough scientific know-how to differentiate valuable data from pointless distractions. When in the field, Tiamat researchers are typically trying to find specimens, take samples, or field-test their equipment. All three of these are equally dangerous for the people stuck with the job.

Milestone: For Science!

You are a researcher, first and foremost. While you want to win the Shadow War as much as anyone else, you can't help but be excited about the opportunity to test your pet theories and inventions under field conditions.

1 XP when you talk about your scientific specialty.

3 XP when you successfully take an action to create a science- or technology-based asset.

10 XP when you recklessly endanger innocent bystanders or cause real harm to your allies in pursuit of scientific knowledge, or when you pass up the opportunity to significantly advance your understanding of the universe to keep others from harm.

Unlockables

- **Auto-Didactic [5 XP]:** You excel at picking up new information quickly, though not necessarily at retaining it. Spend a bridge scene researching a Know-based topic. For the rest of the session, you gain a Know specialty regarding that topic and you double your Know die whenever making a roll including that specialty.
- **“Tell Them Carl Sagan Sent You!” [10 XP]:** There's no problem that sufficiently advanced science can't solve. When you are faced with a situation that would normally require magic to overcome (such as banishing a servitor, healing a mystically petrified ally, breaking a curse, or the like), spout off some techno-babble relevant to the issue at hand and spend an action cobbling together a device from the depths of a mad science fever dream. You may attempt to solve the problem using your Know skill as though it were the Sorcery power, and you have a D6 asset while doing so. This asset is lost at the end of the scene, whether you solve the problem or not.

Psi Division

“If I wanted your opinion, I'd read your mind.”

Since the 1950s, the United States, the Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom have all had covert programs designed to explore the possibility of psychic ability. While these programs were thought to be decommissioned by the early 1980s, they were instead moved off the books and even further out of the public eye. The programs had all largely learned the same thing by then: that psychic abilities were real, if extraordinarily rare. The most powerful telepaths and telekinetics they had discovered were a long way from being useful as spies or secret weapons; most could, at most, vaguely sense a target's surface thoughts or mentally move objects of a few grams in weight.

Still, the existence of the ability made these three governments deeply interested in honing it. The Soviet Union pursued the possibility of augmenting psychic individuals with drugs to boost their powers. The United States instead looked to the possibility of genetic engineering to identify and enhance the genes that caused psychic ability. The United Kingdom turned to intensive training, meditation techniques, and altered states of consciousness designed to unlock the mind's potential. All three avenues of research had limited success.

It was only after the fall of the Soviet Union that the U.S. and U.K. programs were able to begin working together and sharing information more freely. With Russian scientists fleeing to the West and Soviet documents falling into American and British hands, the new international program decided to try combining all three approaches. Their test subjects were largely children, identified through genetic profiling and subjected to years of experimental drug treatments.

The oldest subjects of the experimentation were in their late teens when Black Solstice came. The youngest were barely out of diapers. When the sun went black and the stars vanished, every telepath and precognitive among them felt a shattering wave of fear. Many had visions of the Anunnaki or their minions—and it was these visions that encouraged them to close ranks as quickly as possible to conceal their existence from this terrible threat.

Since the program—nicknamed “Psi Division” by the few people who knew about it—didn’t exist in any official capacity, it was easy for the test subjects and their handlers to stay off the Anunnaki’s radar for the first few months after Black Solstice. They used this time to erase any unofficial records of their existence, which sometimes involved actual mind wipes, and to squirrel away several years’ worth of discretionary and operating budgets into private accounts.

By the time the transition period was over, Psi Division was essentially a rogue agency of the American and British governments with a self-directed budget and agents who were mostly teenagers and children. The directors of the program are largely career government employees near retirement age who have been with the program since the beginning, but none of the empowered individuals working for Psi Division are older than twenty-five.

More than that, most of Psi Division’s “agents” were largely raised in laboratory and training environments, and so they have very little experience with the real world. That doesn’t stop many of them from being hardened killers; one of the main uses of psychic agents before Black Solstice was assassination through undetectable means. Still, the age gap between the agents and their handlers is only more dramatic now that what little oversight the group had before Black Solstice is gone completely. Many of the most powerful agents—the children currently under thirteen years old—are beginning to wonder who should be giving the orders and who should be taking them.

Organization: Psi Division organizes itself into cells, like many Conspiracies, but its cells strongly resemble the structure of an American or British covert intelligence agency. There are administrative and research groups, support cells, and field cells. Psi Division prefers to work with its own people, but its members sometimes get “loaned out” to Sigma Red, Project Tiamat, and other Conspiracies as specialists.

The original joint program’s directors are still in charge of the group, but most of them are men in their sixties or seventies at this point. Almost every other member of the Conspiracy is an artificially enhanced psychic of twenty-five or younger. More powerful and skilled psychics are assigned to field cells, while weaker psychics or those suffering from more severe drawbacks (as sometimes happens due to the extreme mental and physical enhancements they undergo) remain in support capacities.

Goals: Psi Division used to be a government agency so secret that even the last several presidents and prime ministers didn’t know it existed. Now that they’ve gone underground, their primary goals are remaining hidden and rooting out the corruption that has infected the major governments of the world. Psi Division’s handlers are still highly uncomfortable with the fact that the other Conspiracies know they exist at all, but working with them is a necessary step to defeating the Anunnaki. In the meantime, they gather as much intelligence on their “allies” as they can in preparation for the day the Shadow War ends and the next war begins.

Allies: Psi Division is most closely allied with Sigma Red and Project Tiamat, Conspiracies that also utilize super-science and human ingenuity to accomplish their goals. Some members of Psi

Division are also covertly aiding CAUSE; a few are using the group to suppress information about the supernatural, while others are feeding information to the group in the hopes of someday coming out of the shadows.

Enemies: Empire Noir has been on Psi Division's shit list as long as they've known about the criminal Conspiracy's existence. As far as Psi Division is concerned, the members of Empire Noir are just cheap thugs with too much power, and they only work together in the most desperate of circumstances. Psi Division might be the only mortal-run faction that truly makes members of Empire Noir nervous. Dudes with guns aren't scary, but something about the idea of having their minds read—or altered—is chilling even to shapechanging street criminals.

Missions: Psi Division has fairly heavy needs for its members. Psychic agents are kept in top condition to use their powers with a regular course of drugs and gene therapy, both of which require laboratory space and raw materials. Missions frequently involve securing resources or scouting locations for new facilities. The organization also goes on regular "recruiting drives," in which they investigate rumors of psychic phenomena in order to determine if the root cause is someone who can be trained... or one of the many program children who went missing on Black Solstice when several labs went silent.

Milestone: Mind Over Matter

You may be young, but you've seen things—done things—that would make someone twice your age sick with regret. When you see normal children doing normal things, you can't help but be struck with a sense of loss and envy—which can bloom into cruel jealousy all too easily.

1 XP when you show interest in something normal children your age do or clumsily try to cover up such interest.

3 XP when you make a personal bond with someone your own age who doesn't know the truth about you.

10 XP when you accept your fate as a living weapon and sever any nonessential ties, or when you embrace your youth and make a major life change that makes your participation in the Shadow War more difficult or impossible.

Unlockables

- **Booster Drugs [5 XP]:** It's well known that Psi Division has access to chemical enhancements that allow psychics to become far more powerful at the risk of damaging their psyche. When you purchase this unlockable, choose one of your psionic powers to be enhanced by a booster drug. For the rest of the scene, step up and double that power whenever you use it in a roll. If a roll including that power fails, step up mental stress.
- **Eternal Sunshine [10 XP]:** They don't like doing it because it can draw attention, but desperate times sometimes call for desperate measures. Spend a bridge scene contacting Psi Division and choose an individual or small group of people who lack supernatural defenses and who have dangerous knowledge or a bad relationship with your group. By the start of the next scene, the target or targets will have forgotten everything you need them to forget. Step up your social trauma.

The Resistance

“There are two things every person has a right to: liberty and death. We will have one—or we will have the other.”

More than any other Conspiracy, the Resistance views fighting against the Anunnaki and their minions as its primary mission. Everything else comes in a very distant second to striking back against the invaders and making the secret occupation of Earth as costly as possible. In the minds of many of its members, the Resistance’s sole purpose *is* the Shadow War. This attitude doesn’t win them a lot of friends in the other Conspiracies.

While the Resistance views the other Conspiracies as allies—however tentative—their perception of themselves as “the front line” makes them seem condescending to members of other groups. Worse, they largely see themselves as soldiers in a guerilla war where there are no rules of engagement. In many ways, the Resistance is as much a terrorist organization as it is a group of freedom fighters.

The Conspiracy’s policy about collateral damage is flexible at the best of times. Individual cells can choose to demonstrate more restraint when dealing with dupes, but the leadership (such as it is) doesn’t care one way or the other about mortal casualties—only about Anunnaki ones. Some Resistance cells will happily bomb a church to kill an Anunnaki cult leader, even if most of the people present are innocent. Others avoid civilian casualties whenever possible, but the organization as a whole doesn’t care one way or the other. That “moral flexibility” worries outsiders.

The Resistance is organized into fairly traditional cells, like terrorists and freedom fighters throughout history. Every cell acts more or less independently, trading information and using various forms of backchannel communications to stay in contact. Several cells in the same region will sometimes work together for a particularly large operation, and regional groups sometimes recognize one of the local cells as a “leadership” cell. But no one seems to know who gives orders to the group as a whole—if anyone does at all.

The Resistance is the faction about whose origins the least is known. Their secrecy and decentralized nature mean that there are plenty of rumors but no solid knowledge about the beginnings of the Conspiracy. The most common rumor is that the Resistance was established by one or more Darkchild elders who survived the Anunnaki purges; some believe that those elders still run the organization, pushing the Resistance one way or another from the shadows.

Organization: The Resistance is a traditional cell-type conspiratorial organization. Each cell is largely independent, having contact with only one or two other cells in their region so that exposing one cell leaves the organization as a whole untouched. Some cells take on informal leadership roles in their region, sharing information and organizing combat actions that need extra firepower to succeed.

The Resistance utilizes connections to mortal political activism groups to conceal its own activities, passing messages through mortal intermediaries. Some of these allies are aware of a “direct action group” that sometimes targets illegal government facilities, but almost none of them know that they work for a shadowy conspiracy of monsters. The best asset is a deniable asset, after all.

Goals: The Resistance has almost no goals to speak of beyond destroying the Anunnaki and staying alive—and even that second part is optional for some members. While many Resistance fighters have ideas about what the post-Anunnaki world should become, most of them are

focused on the next mission to the exclusion of all else. More than any other Conspiracy, the Resistance exists *only* to fight the Anunnaki and their minions.

Allies: The Resistance is willing to work with any other organization that can give them resources, personnel, or information. They have particularly close ties with the Church of the Fallen Angel, which often acts as a spiritual counterpart to the Resistance. While they are leery of Conspiracies that are primarily mortal—like Sigma Red—they very much hold the position that they can’t afford to be choosy when it comes to allies.

Enemies: The only real enemies of the Resistance are the Anunnaki themselves, but the Resistance considers the Midnight Runners to be a bunch of cowards who bleed the “real heroes” of resources and potential recruits, barely better than traitors. When the two groups meet, it almost always turns into shouting matches, though it usually avoids coming to blows. Still, the Midnight Runners sometimes have useful information, which keeps them slightly above “enemy” status.

Missions: Almost everything the Resistance does is designed to strike back against the Anunnaki in one way or another. Combat operations are the most common way of doing this, though destroying infrastructure, rescuing prisoners, capturing high-profile enemy assets, and disrupting enemy lines of supply and communication are part and parcel of the mission. The Resistance is perpetually short of manpower; between personnel attrition and the ubiquity of enemy operations, the Resistance always has more irons in the fire than it can reasonably handle alone.

Milestone: Friendly Fire

Until the Shadow War is won, every person who isn’t a member of the Resistance is potentially with the enemy. Even members of other Conspiracies are suspect if they can’t get with the program. The Anunnaki aren’t going to just leave because you ask them real nice—you have to make the occupation so bloody and costly that it becomes unsustainable.

1 XP when you propose a course of action that would cause collateral damage, either in human casualties or the goodwill of other factions.

3 XP when you risk the lives of your allies or innocents for a chance to strike at the Anunnaki.

10 XP when you sacrifice innocent lives for the chance to take out an important Anunnaki asset, or when you hesitate at the last minute because of those innocent lives and allow the chance to pass you by.

Unlockables

- **Lunatic Fringe [5 XP]:** The Resistance recruits from many different subversive groups and turns them against Anunnaki targets, often without full knowledge of what they’re up against. Spend a bridge scene calling in backup. For the next scene, you gain the services of a **Mob** of normal humans rated 3D6 who are happy to help you strike back against... whoever they think it is you’re fighting. When the scene ends, they disperse back to where they came from, possibly with a greater knowledge of the Shadow War than they previously possessed, and likely with some number of casualties.
- **Terror Tactics [10 XP]:** Sometimes, you have to go loud. Spend a bridge scene meeting with your Resistance contacts and arranging a “demonstration.” This can be part of your attack on a target, a distraction, or an attempt to remove a non-supernatural enemy from the board. At

the start of a scene during the current session, choose one of the following benefits: add a scene distinction of your choice representing the aftermath of your plan; all foes in a action scene suffer a D8 complication; a single enemy starts the scene with D8 stress of your choice; or a single non-supernatural foe is killed or taken prisoner. Choose one of the following drawbacks: there are civilian casualties; the enemy found out about your plan and laid a trap for you; or stiffer resistance than you expected steps up one of your trauma types before the scene begins.

Sigma Red

“Here there be dragons—and we’re the goddamn dragon slayers.”

The Anunnaki invasion did not go unnoticed by the powers that be—namely the governments of the world and their various intelligence apparatuses. The Anunnaki forces that crossed over from the Shadowlands during Black Solstice largely did so in distant places, far from civilization, but they were not invisible. A few witnesses managed to escape the things that came from the dark, taking stories about monsters with them.

Despite the chaos of that terrible day, the governments of the world endured. Many intelligence assets were lost, and it took months to rebuild them. By then, enough diplomats, agents, and spies had compared notes to realize that something was terribly wrong, though none of them suspected invasion by ancient supernatural monsters from another dimension. Those who still had faith in their superiors kicked their suspicions up the chain—and usually got killed for their trouble. Seeing this convinced the rest to stay silent and form their own plans.

As extremist political and religious ideologies began to take hold across the first world, the loose brotherhood of people “in the know” were gradually suborned, eliminated, or discredited. A few managed to get out ahead of the falling axe, taking state secrets, resources, and connections with them—and tearing down quite a bit of those things behind them. Because of the actions of these “rogue agents,” a large number of dangerous technologies were kept out of the hands of the Anunnaki, and broad swaths of the American and European surveillance apparatus were effectively crippled.

Still, even with the “surveillance state” rolled back by a decade or more due to personnel attrition and infrastructural loss, the potential of the enemy-controlled governments of America and Europe to spy on their citizens was simply too great. The remaining individuals began to carefully reach out to one another, creating what was effectively an independent intelligence agency, beholden to no government and using the resources they stole on the way out the door to perform counterintelligence operations against their former states.

Several of the science and engineering personnel acting as support for the newly formed organization began referring to the group as “Sigma Red” for unknown reasons. When asked about it, they usually just chuckle and say it’s a math thing.

Organization: Most members of Sigma Red were members of one government agency or another before going independent, and they still observe many of the forms of such employment. Now, they do their work without as much paperwork and with significantly less resources, but they still refer to themselves as “agents” or “operative” and report to a director. The organization is one of the most hierarchical of the Conspiracies involved in the Shadow War, which would

make the whole thing extremely vulnerable to subversion were it not also comprised of people who spent their former lives professionally honing their paranoia.

Sigma Red has three “divisions”: Research, Investigation, and Operations. The Research Division develops weapons, analyzes evidence, and provides logistical support for the other two branches. Investigation is devoted to uncovering Anunnaki operations, rooting out enemy agents and assets, and determining if a given “unnatural event” requires subtlety or force in dealing with it. The Operations Division is the heavy hand of Sigma Red, soldiers and assassins from a dozen countries now lacking any accountability save to the “agency” itself.

Goals: In a certain sense, fighting the Anunnaki is a secondary goal for Sigma Red. The organization’s actual goal is rooting out the conspiracy that has undermined the world’s governments and removing its influence. If the Anunnaki departed Earth tomorrow, Sigma Red would largely consider its job over and done with. A few agents are concerned about the “supernatural” threat in a post-Anunnaki world, but they understand that there probably won’t *be* a post-Anunnaki world if they screw this up.

Allies: The agents of Sigma Red work closely with the researchers of Project Tiamat and the psychics of Psi Division, though both groups somewhat distrust the “feds.” Everyone involved feels better about working with other humans instead of whatever the Darkchildren and Nephilim are. Even weird or altered humans are better than actual monsters.

Enemies: Sigma Red views Empire Noir as a bunch of criminal scum who need to be thrown into prison somewhere unpleasant for the rest of their unnatural lives. Empire Noir isn’t any fonder of the “feds,” so the two Conspiracies try to avoid one another whenever possible—and occasionally undermine one another’s “side projects” in their spare time. They also think the members of CAUSE are a bunch of rumormongering idiots who are going to get themselves (and maybe everyone else) killed.

Missions: Sigma Red missions involve investigation of supernatural events and the resolution of those events, through means subtle or direct as the situation calls for. They also frequently involve counterintelligence operations, rescuing potential allies and assets from the Anunnaki, and generally whatever a spy agency or federal police force would be called on to do in less horrible circumstances.

Sigma Red tries to help out humanity wherever they can without exposing themselves too badly. Because of this, they often wind up getting involved in supernaturally-oriented cases that don’t have a grand effect on the Shadow War as a whole, but whose resolution improves the lives of the people involved. Where a Resistance cell might decide that overturning a minor Anunnaki cult isn’t worth their time because it lacks influence or reach and would expose the Conspiracy to undue risk, Sigma Red is more likely to choose to view the situation as an opportunity to lessen the grip of the Anunnaki on the lives of average citizens.

Milestone: Mirror Maze

Being a member of a shadowy organization is like being lost in a maze of mirrors: what seems like a way out could just be your own reflection. You don’t intend to get lost. Just because you’re paranoid doesn’t mean they’re not out to get you, but you can sometimes carry things too far.

1 XP when you intentionally obfuscate your meaning to maintain operational security.

3 XP when you turn against an ally or contact because you believe they've been compromised.
10 XP when you sacrifice innocent lives or personal relationships to maintain operational security, or when you knowingly walk into a trap to save an innocent life.

Unlockables

- **Surveillance State [5 XP]:** It's hard to hide from people as well-connected as the spooks in Sigma Red. Spend a bridge scene contacting the faction and name a person who's missing or hiding. If they're anywhere on Earth and still alive, Sigma Red can tell you their general location as of their last public appearance, as well as give you a live feed of their present whereabouts if they're not taking extreme precautions to avoid traffic cameras, security feeds, and the like. For the rest of the session, this acts as a D8 information-based asset when tracking or pursuing the target.
- **The Man from SHADOW [10 XP]:** Sigma Red doesn't have the same intelligence-gathering capabilities as a government agency, but it doesn't miss a lot. Spend a bridge scene contacting Sigma Red and ask them to gather information on a particular group, person, or event. By the start of the next scene, they have put together a profile containing everything publicly available about the target as well as at least one major secret determined by the GM. For the rest of the scenario, this information acts as a D8 asset when taking indirect action against the target.

Chapter 6: Lords of Heaven and Earth

The Shadow War is ultimately a conflict with two sides: the Anunnaki and everyone else. Though the other Conspiracies may bicker among themselves for resources, territory, or ideology, the Anunnaki look down on all of them as petty annoyances to be swept aside before consolidating their hold on the world. The Anunnaki brook no opposition, they want no allies, and they accept nothing less than abject servitude.

For all of that, the Anunnaki themselves are largely a mystery. When people refer to the group, they can interchangeably mean either the immortal, god-like leaders of the invading forces, or the invading forces as a whole. Anything known about the Anunnaki—in either of its meanings—is a combination of observation, guesswork, and blue-sky theorizing. Their objectives are broadly understood to be the elimination of the Children of the Dark and global conquest, but their motives and long-term goals are opaque.

The minions of the Anunnaki have been the best source of information about the enemy. Many of them are happy to brag about the omnipotence and infallibility of their masters. Unfortunately, none of the rank-and-file servitors of the Anunnaki know much more about their masters' goals than anyone else does. There is no need to question in order to serve.

Because of this, one of the most important aspects of the Shadow War is gathering intelligence. Anything that can point to the enemy's plans, goals, or motives is one more data point that can be used to get out ahead of those plans and possibly derail them. Knowledge is power, and for the moment the Anunnaki know far more about their opposition than the Children of the Dark and their allies know about the Anunnaki.

The Anunnaki

They ruled mankind before writing, in the time when agriculture was new and the first cities were still being built. They enslaved and they killed and they tormented for generations uncounted. Against all reason, they were defeated. They could not be killed, so they were cast into a darkness beyond death. They dwell there still, coveting the world from which they were banished—and hating the Igigi, whom they blame for their exile.

This is all that is known for certain about the Anunnaki. Almost everything else is guesswork, conjecture, myth, legend, and hearsay. Even their numbers are unknown, though most legends count them seven—the same number as the traditional Darkchild Lineages.

What seems certain, however, is that the chains on their prison have somehow been loosed. Their minions stalk the sunlit world once more, moving slowly to cement their masters' hold on Earth. The Anunnaki act more directly than they have done in centuries, perhaps millennia. New cults are being formed to worship them, and their cultists infiltrate the halls of power.

Most who know of their existence believe this is all a prelude to their eventual escape from the Shadowlands and a true return in force to Earth. Whether they intend to conquer and rule once more or to lay waste to the world that humiliated them is unknown, even to their own followers. Various servitors have claimed one or the other as their goals at different times to different groups. Perhaps each of the Anunnaki has their own plans, and once the defenders of Earth are defeated, they will turn upon one another.

Regardless of the truth, the first step is the same: Destroy the Children of the Dark utterly.

The Seven

At the top of the Anunnaki hierarchy are the Anunnaki themselves. They are sometimes referred to as “the Seven,” “those who decree,” or “our masters,” but the number may be a deception on their part. Even their highest minions refer to them by different names at different times; the distinction between names and titles seems vague to the less-human creatures that serve the Anunnaki.

The commonly held beliefs name the Seven as:

- **Enlil:** Thought to be the “king” of the Anunnaki, or perhaps first among equals. Sometimes called “Lord Wind” or “the Storm King.” Generally regarded as the strongest of the Anunnaki, though what “strong” means in this context is up for debate.
- **Enki:** Associated with water and creation, sometimes called “Nudimmud” or “the Fisher.” Crafty where Enlil is powerful, cunning where Enlil is forceful; some call him “Enlil’s Shadow.”
- **Ereshkigal:** Though Enlil and Enki are thought to be more powerful than their “dark sister,” Ereshkigal is far more feared by her minions and enemies alike. The king and his shadow are content to rule from afar—but the Night Princess is a warrior born who leads her armies from the front. Few who have laid eyes on her have lived to speak of it.
- **Inanna:** The “Queen of Heaven” delights in corrupting mortals and building cults, though her cults tend to implode in horrific ways due to the demands she places on them. She prefers humans as her minions to the creatures other Anunnaki use, though she has no greater love for them than any of her kind.
- **Nergal:** The “Lord of Graves” seems to collect Shades to a greater extent than his fellows. His kingdom in the Shadowlands is little more than a vast and sprawling necropolis, inhabited by the dead—and those who envy the dead.
- **Ninshubur:** The most mysterious of the Anunnaki, Ninshubur has variously been described as female or male, or both, or neither. They are known for their close relationship with Inanna, as well as being a master of sorcery.
- **Shamash:** Various named “Utu,” “Larsa,” or “the Black Sun,” Shamash is the most subtle and indirect of the Anunnaki, generally named as their master of intelligence and spycraft. He is thought to be primarily responsible for the subversion of governments across Earth.

Even these tidbits of information have cost lives beyond counting. The Anunnaki hold their secrets dearly, and they are powerful enough to enforce their secrecy. Their first major act during Black Solstice was to strike at the enclaves of the eldest Darkchildren, slaughtering them and destroying centuries of accumulated knowledge in a single day.

Still, this opening salvo seems to have depleted their ranks to some degree. The elders didn’t go quietly, and few of the Anunnaki’s most powerful minions escaped the battles alive. The Anunnaki have spent the last six years rebuilding their forces, subverting and infiltrating mortal institutions to weaken them from within, and fighting the Shadow War against various guerilla movements.

Of course, the Anunnaki mostly don’t involve themselves in the Shadow War personally. The day-to-day delegation of tasks falls to their servants and slaves.

Lords in Shadow

The Anunnaki rule from on high, deciding on the grand strategy of the Shadow War but mostly leaving its execution in the hands of trusted viziers, generals, and advisers. The highest of these are the Ensi, sorcerer-priests who traded their humanity for power so long ago that few of them actually remember what being human was like.

Best estimates place the Ensi's numbers between three dozen and three hundred serving each of the Anunnaki, less than a hundred of them all told. The information gathered over the last six years indicates that there were once far more of them—perhaps thousands, or even tens of thousands. Their numbers have been in slow decline since the exile of the Anunnaki. Though they apparently cannot die of old age, they can be killed through violence and accident—which is happening far more often since the beginning of the Shadow War.

Several millennia have been sufficient to dwindle their ranks such that only the most powerful, most ruthless, or most careful of them remain. The Ensi only risk their immortal existence at the direct command of their masters. It is unknown whether the Anunnaki cannot elevate more Ensi or simply choose not to, but the youngest of them seems to predate the Bronze Age Collapse in 1200 BCE, so no new Ensi have joined their ranks in over three millennia.

During the thousands of years of their lives, they have formed their own internal hierarchies, some of which are formal and others of which are ever-changing based on the favor they are shown from their Anunnaki masters. They often style themselves with ancient noble or political titles, such as caliph, vizier, and the like.

The Ensi effectively form the ruling class of the Shadowlands, taking their directives from the Anunnaki but being responsible for the daily operations of the Shadow War and the subjugation of humanity. The Ensi are ancient and powerful, but largely ignorant of the modern world. This in turn makes them reliant on their own servants—human turncoats, elder shades, and powerful servitors—to advise them on the best ways to deal with human and supernatural resistance.

Each Ensi has control over a Shadowlands territory and its corresponding Earthly region, ranging in area from a single city to hundreds of thousands of square miles. Some directly govern the major Shadowlands cities in their territory, while others act as regional governors, leaving control of city-level operations in the hands of minions.

The only universal constants among the Ensi are these: they are old, powerful, utterly ruthless, and magically proficient. They would rather flee and lose a battle than fight to the last and lose their long, wretched lives. Too many such failures can risk their masters' wrath, so they tread a careful line between efficacy and personal preservation.

Servitors

Below the Ensi are a multitude of inhuman creatures collectively called servitors, though many Darkchildren simply call them “minions.” Scholars speculate about the origin of the servitor-races, though most agree that they are creations of the Anunnaki rather than being natural. A few think that the servitors—and the Anunnaki themselves—are not even of terrestrial origin, that they are from another world or dimension beyond the one inhabited by humanity. Many of the servitors are certainly alien enough to make it plausible.

The most powerful and elite of the servitors, often thought to stand equal in might to the Ensi, are the *Girtab* (or “scorpion-kings”). These horrific creatures are similar to centaurs, though their upper body is only somewhat humanoid rather than fully human, and their lower body is that of a horse-sized scorpion. Their human-like arms end in massive pincers; where the mandibles would be on a scorpion, they instead have a cluster of short, chitinous arms smaller than those of a

child. Their scorpion tail ends with the expected stinger, filled with a venom that can melt human flesh and liquefy most people in minutes.

Standing in equal authority (or near-equal) to the Girtab are the *Shedu*, creatures that resemble Biblical angels in their natural form—a cluster of eyes, wings, and wheels of black fire—but who can assume the shape of beautiful many-winged humans. Shedus are rarely deployed in combat situations, but they are often used to organize and communicate with cults.

Below the Girtab and Shedus are a collection of semi-human monstrosities. These include the *Kulitu*, a piscine race that combines the worst traits of fish, amphibian, and human; the *Kusarikku*, tall and powerful humanoids with horned, bull-like heads and bodies covered in fine coppery scales; and the *Alu*, faceless humanoids whose tall, gaunt bodies are freakishly flexible. Other, stranger creatures have been known to serve the Anunnaki, but it is rarely understood whether such beings are representative of another servitor race or unique horrors.

At the bottom of the Anunnaki hierarchy are the *Urdimmu*, better known to the Darkchildren as “Hounds.” These foot soldiers resemble jackal-headed humanoids with armor plating fused directly into their flesh. They are sometimes brought to Earth in “packs” to hunt Darkchildren or defend Anunnaki holdings. Their numbers in the Shadowlands seem almost limitless, but their obviously inhuman nature makes their large-scale deployment on Earth unfeasible in the short term. Other servitors treat them as little more than clever animals, and they are never encountered without another servitor or human cultist as a “handler.”

Beneath and beside the hierarchy are a wide variety of hybrid war-beasts obviously created with Anunnaki sorcery. A *Sirrush* cannot pass for anything earthly in even poor light. Most of them resemble combinations of cat, bird, and snake, like the griffins of ancient mythology. These chimerical creations are sometimes used as “guard dogs” in Anunnaki temples or other places out of human sight.

Shades

Special attention should be paid to the most common denizens of the Shadowlands: *shades*. Though they labor under the Anunnaki, they bear none of the privileges of rank that being a true servitor brings. Shades are slaves at best, a moment’s sport or a quick snack at worst. The vast majority of work in the dark empire of the Anunnaki is performed by chain gangs of shades, watched over by a few servitors who would rather be doing nearly anything else. As long as the work gets done, no one cares how many shades perish in the effort; after all, there are always more.

At a glance, shades look human enough. Up close, however, it becomes easier to notice their sallow pallor, the greyish tone of their skin, the washed-out color of their hair and eyes. They look sickly and ashen at the best of times, with many of them bearing bloodless wounds and scrapes, missing limbs, or other horrific injuries. Shades cannot heal naturally, but only the most grievous of wounds can kill them. They still feel the pain of their injuries, though, making their existence an exercise in misery and agony.

Such is the fate of every human that has ever lived, so it seems.

The common theory about shades is that they are the souls of dead mortals, drawn into the Shadowlands after their bodies perish. This bleak and pitiless land may have been the inspiration for early religions’ notions about the Underworld, Hades, Sheol, and the like. Many involved in the Shadow War have been driven to despair by the notion that this horrific afterlife awaits them and all of their loved ones.

This theory is supported by the fact that shades simply appear in the Shadowlands rather than being born like humans, and that the appearance of a new shade is almost always after a death in the corresponding location on Earth. Such transference doesn't seem to be immediate; it might be days or weeks before the shade manifests. This is also supported by the physical resemblance between the recently deceased and the new shade, and the fact that the shade will answer to the dead person's name.

Some theorize instead that a shade isn't the soul of a dead mortal, but is instead a sort of psychic impression made by a mortal's death, like a footprint left in wet cement and then filled with rainwater after the cement dries. The water has the shape of the foot, but it isn't actually the foot. This theory would explain the discrepancy between the time of death and the manifestation of the shade, the slight physical differences between the mortal and the shade, and the fact that not all mortal deaths generate shades. Children who haven't yet hit puberty almost never do, and there have never been any recorded instances of infant shades. Some adults don't either, though no one is certain why.

Shades seem to have none of the memories of their once-living counterparts, though they do exhibit basic language skills and some understanding of their counterpart's culture and society. Shades don't seem to age either, though few last more than a handful of decades after their appearance in the Shadowlands. Those that do are generally counterparts of people who died far from civilization and managed to avoid Anunnaki slave-hunters long enough to join one of the few hidden enclaves said to lie out in the far wastes.

Rumors abound regarding "elder shades," those rare few that have survived longer than a human lifespan without falling into agony and degradation. Such beings are valuable to the Anunnaki, since they have had multiple human lifetimes to improve their skills and abilities, and they are often far better informed about the Earth realm than the Ensi, who have been separated from their human origins for millennia. For their service, the Anunnaki can offer them luxuries and keep their bodies from disintegrating, but they still regard even elder shades as lesser beings who exist only to serve.

Cultists

To those that fight in the Shadow War, few opponents are regarded with more pity and disgust than cultists—those mortals who have betrayed their own world for the promise of power under Anunnaki rule. As their name suggests, most true cultists—as opposed to dupes who serve the Anunnaki unknowingly—are members of secretive religions that venerate the Anunnaki as living gods. Most cultists have never seen a true servitor of the Anunnaki, but almost every cult is led by the one among them who has. These cult leaders often wield sorcery learned from Anunnaki servitors or bear relics loaned to them by their hidden masters.

Cults run the gamut from small bands of crazed psychotics spilling blood for their dreadful gods to urbane mystery religions that draw in wealthy elites looking for something to fill their spiritually empty lives. Cults recruit at every level of society, in every conceivable demographic. Anyone could be a cultist; the kindly old cat lady down the street might be making offerings in her basement. This possibility—that any seemingly normal person could secretly be serving the enemy—makes it difficult for the Conspiracies to trust those outside their own factions... and sometimes within them.

Cults serving the Anunnaki have no common beliefs to speak of; most don't even include the name "Anunnaki" in their rites. A cult's members might believe that they worship some neo-pagan pantheon, or think they have secret knowledge of the origins of humanity, or be

extremist members of a previously existing religion with highly divergent practices. A cult's leader might be a cynical manipulator using the people under him, or he might be a true believer that regards his "handler" as a divine being.

The servitors of the Anunnaki who promulgate cults are extremely good at subverting mortal faith to their own ends. They offer tiny pieces of truth or power, wrapped up in layers of lies and conflicting obligations. Such cults exist mainly to act as sources of information for the Anunnaki, a "fifth column" of informants who watch for unusual occurrences and report them to their cult leaders. They also serve to increase fear and paranoia for the enemies of the Anunnaki, to generate chaos in mortal society, and to lay the groundwork for a humanity more easily controlled.

Cults serving the Anunnaki sometimes even wind up fighting each other unknowingly. This can be inconvenient depending on the circumstances, and the enemies of the Anunnaki sometimes lure cults into such opposition. Small cults can frequently be disrupted by removing their leadership, while larger ones often require their power base to be broken in more dramatic fashion.

Most of the operations undertaken by the Anunnaki on Earth are spearheaded by cultists. The Anunnaki frequently use dupes who know nothing of the Shadow War, but their orders are typically given by a cultist in a position of power and authority. Most of the world's governments have been effectively subverted by cultists at this point. A majority of world leaders and representatives may not be stooges of the Anunnaki, but there are certainly enough of them to bog democracies down in constant partisan politics, directly control many small dictatorships, and fill the ears of autocrats with the right kind of whispers.

Ziggurat, Inc.

One part global conglomerate and one part secretive terrorist organization, Ziggurat Incorporated is one of the most prominent and powerful Anunnaki cults. Ziggurat's corporate logo—a rainbow-colored, seven-stepped pyramid—can be seen on buildings around the world. Their subsidiary companies make everything from children's toys to high-end computers; their research branches include agriculture, genetic engineering, quantum computing, and pharmaceuticals.

The back end of the corporation is responsible for looting cultural heritage sites, pouring money into the campaigns of compromised politicians, suppressing human rights in the third world countries they use for cheap labor, and generally acting like every other major corporation—except for their knowledge of the supernatural. Many of their corporate activities are fronts for other, less mundane actions. Cultural heritage sites are looted for magical relics; supported politicians are Anunnaki cultists; and suppressed peoples are often offering aid and comfort to anti-Anunnaki forces.

The vast majority of the company's employees are unaware of these more sinister activities, of course. The corporate board members are "in the know," as is anyone in the company with a position of vice president or higher. The company uses various forms of loyalty testing and psychological analysis to ensure that only people who possess appropriately flexible morality achieve significant rank in the organization.

Individuals can also be initiated early for necessity; elite security specialists and strike team members almost always have to know the truth to some degree. People involved in projects that come to the attention of the board are also frequently singled out for quick advancement. These individuals are the corporation's greatest security vulnerability; almost all inside intelligence

about Ziggurat has come from people who were told the truth too soon and fled or defected rather than submit to inhuman masters.

Almost every Conspiracy knows the truth about Ziggurat to one degree or another, but the corporation's wealth, prominence, and public persona protect it from most forms of direct retribution. Any large-scale attack against Ziggurat can be spun as corporate espionage, terrorism, or random violence—all of which allow the Anunnaki-compromised governments of the world greater cover for cracking down on “militants” or other “enemies of the state.”

Because of this, actions taken against Ziggurat follow the same pattern used elsewhere in the Shadow War: infiltration, deniable attacks against distant targets, and full-on assaults only when necessary or out of the sight of the public. To many Darkchildren, Ziggurat is the face of the enemy, even though they are only one cult among many. The monolithic corporation provides an easy target for angry revolutionaries—which may be the point of their existence.

Some members of the Resistance worry that Ziggurat is *too easy* of a target. They speculate that Ziggurat is essentially an enormous distraction—a vast stalking horse intended to lure Darkchildren into attacking them so that better-hidden groups can enact retaliatory strikes. The Anunnaki seemingly care nothing for wealth as measured in human terms, so the idea of throwing away billions of dollars yearly just to distract their enemies is hardly unimaginable.

Ultimately, the cost of ignoring Ziggurat is too great for most Conspiracies to bear. Even if they're only a distraction, they're a distraction whose actions are measured in human lives and misery.

Dupes

Special consideration must be given to the ordinary people who carry out the will of the Anunnaki every single day without ever knowing about the horror they are unwittingly part of. Such folks are usually called “dupes” or “cutouts” by the Conspiracies, and every faction taking part in the Shadow War has their own opinion about them.

Dupes aren't out to destroy or conquer the world. They don't know their ultimate masters are hateful immortals with a grudge against Earth's inhabitants. They get up every morning, eat breakfast, kiss their families goodbye, and go punch a clock at their job. They might be security guards working for an Anunnaki-owned holding company, scientists working on what they think is a cure for cancer but is actually a bioweapon for use against civilians in another country, or mid-level bureaucrats who rubber-stamp directives from their bosses even if the orders look a little odd.

These semi-innocent bystanders vastly outnumber all the knowing human servants of the Anunnaki. They generally have little to no power, authority, or influence, and they're just trying to get by in a world that seems a little darker every day. They're not heroes—but they're also not villains or monsters. They're part of the system that the Anunnaki have corrupted; that system was once designed to protect citizens, but now it works to exploit them instead. They are part of that exploitation, whether they know it or not.

Because of these various factors, many factions have a “no killing” policy for any mortal who isn't provably an Anunnaki agent or cultist. They avoid collateral damage whenever possible, not just to avoid adding more fuel to the “War on Terror” commonly used as a cover story for Anunnaki-sponsored raids, but because the people who get caught in the crossfire are—by and large—not guilty of anything worse than wanting a normal life.

Some of the more violent Conspiracies don't care about dupes at all. Anyone who works for the Anunnaki—no matter how far removed, no matter how unknowing—is the enemy to them.

To such factions, the Shadow War is truly a war, full of casualties and bloodshed. A few try to abide by the traditional rules of engagement (such as Sigma Red), while others fully embrace asymmetrical warfare and guerilla tactics (like the Resistance). Either way, individual cells often try to show more mercy and restraint than their parent Conspiracy as a whole.

A small number of anti-Anunnaki groups (like Empire Noir and the Illuminated) have no qualms whatsoever about killing anyone who gets in their way—mortal, cultist, or servitor. For these groups, killing is just another tool in the box for their ultimate ambitions, which extend well past the end of the Shadow War. Despite their reputation as casual murderers, even members of these groups often find themselves developing a conscience when they work with cross-faction cells for long amounts of time.

Sidebar: Tone and Dupes

Chapter 8 goes into more detail about how to set the “tone” of a *Children of the Dark* campaign and has useful advice about how to treat bystanders in lighter or darker games. This general advice also applies to dupes, who may be opposed to the characters but are not actually evil.

To sum up: in a lighter game, heroes can choose to knock out or incapacitate bystanders (and dupes) at will; in a darker game, taking out ordinary mortals with weapons puts them at risk of dying, while using supernatural attacks to do so usually kills them outright. Lighter games ignore or handwave collateral damage; darker games make it a central feature of combat with supernatural powers.

Goals and Strategies

The long-term goals of the Anunnaki—their endgame, if you will—is unknown, and perhaps *unknowable*. They are beings of immense power, impossible age, and monstrous appetite. If they were ever human, like the Ensi who serve them, that time passed before recorded history, and there is strong reason to believe that they were never human at all. The Anunnaki keep their own counsel, and even their nearest servants are rarely informed as to the reasons behind their masters’ decrees. Still, the short-term goals and desires of the Anunnaki can be inferred from their actions and activities in the Shadow War.

First and foremost, the Anunnaki seem to desire *rulership*. They are not out to eliminate humanity, or they could have done so once they had subverted even a single person with access to nuclear weapon codes. They want to rule humanity, not destroy it. On the other hand, they are perfectly willing to undertake the controlled culling of the human species in order to make their subjects more tractable. They simply won’t take actions they judge to be detrimental to the survival of the species as a whole.

Secondly, they seek *influence through proxies*. Their infiltration of human society focuses on gaining leverage over powerful individuals, replacing their inner circle with Anunnaki sympathizers, and eventually converting those people into outright (if hidden for now) cultists. When they can’t gain an important target’s worship, they simply provide them with other enticements to gain their cooperation, which can range from blackmail to bribery to hostage-taking.

Third, they want to *avoid open confrontation*. While the Anunnaki do not seem to fear humanity, they do observe the masses with caution. They lack the resources to engage in mass warfare with six billion people, then hold all of humanity in bondage for eternity while dealing

with endless violent uprisings—or perhaps they simply lack the interest in doing so. Either way, the Anunnaki strategy focuses on subverting existing structures rather than destroying and replacing them. The Anunnaki want the conquest of humanity to be a *fait accompli*; by the time that humankind even realizes there's a war, they will have already lost it.

Finally, they want to *eliminate threats*—which means the total destruction of the Children of the Dark, the Nephilim, and any other supernatural being that won't bend the knee. For these, their real enemies, there can be no compromise or accommodation. For the insult given to the Anunnaki by the Igigi in ancient times, the Darkchildren must not be permitted to survive. The Anunnaki learned their lesson the first time; this time, they will not overlook any potential threat to their rule.

Weaknesses

For all their power and inhumanity, the Anunnaki can be understood through their vices and moral failings. They are old and set in their ways. They are proud to the point of arrogance. They are wicked in a way that does not permit an understanding of goodness. They are selfish and fractious, each of them acting in their own interests to the exclusion of anything else, and cooperating only under threat or necessity.

Perhaps most importantly and least obviously, they are *afraid*. The Anunnaki once ruled the Earth, but they were overthrown and banished for millennia. They move with an overabundance of caution now because they do not relish the thought of overreaching and being once more sealed away. They act through agents because they do not wish to expose themselves to harm.

Even as they proclaim their immortality and ineffability to their minions on a daily basis, they live with the knowledge of their greatest failure—a failure that was handed to them by a humanity far less advanced than the modern breed, and by supernatural champions far less numerous than those that now exist. Though the Anunnaki had some inkling of the passage of centuries, the scope of what humanity has accomplished since the ancient times—and accomplished without the Anunnaki to guide them or magic to aid them—is simply staggering.

The Anunnaki are from a far more primitive time, and the complexity of the modern world is beyond their ken. They are more than intelligent enough to understand concepts like advanced physics, chemistry, spaceflight, the internet, and the like—but they lack the cultural context to understand *why* those things matter, or to truly comprehend how pervasive technology is to the modern human. They are slow and reluctant adopters of modern technology and ideas, and their servitors follow their lead.

Similarly, the Anunnaki are used to giving orders and being obeyed. They do not brook insubordination, and they respond poorly to having their orders questioned. They are so accustomed to perfect subservience that a minion asking for clarification of an order can be interpreted as disobedience—and the subsequent culling of the ranks does nothing to help with institutional memory or competence. Servitors would rather obey instantly, acting on erroneous understanding of vague commands, than risk being seen as disloyal. In turn, the higher servitors expect the same perfect obedience from their subordinates, which leads to a situation where the rank-and-file minions rarely understanding the reason behind their orders, and sometimes not even having those orders conveyed to them accurately.

Because of their bruised egos and inability to let go of their ancient humiliation, it is not enough for the Anunnaki to simply destroy the Children of the Dark. Their enemies must be *crushed* and made to see the folly of ever standing against the true rulers of Earth. While their

ultimate goal is the utter destruction of the Darkchildren, this desire to dominate their foes means that they often take foolish chances for the opportunity to demonstrate their power.

They capture Darkchildren alive so that the “rebels” can be publicly executed later as a show of power, which sometimes leads to the prisoners being rescued by their allies. They leave holes in their defenses as temptation to lead their enemies into traps, which becomes disastrous when the troops on the ground have no idea why they are ordered to create such holes. The Anunnaki can be subtle—as evidenced by their subversion of the world’s governments—but in situations where they believe they have the upper hand, they and their servitors tend to become grandiose, overconfident, and downright smug.

Perhaps the greatest weakness of the Anunnaki and those who serve them is their inability to comprehend virtue. They see all goodness as performative—a public display meant to shield oneself from criticism or to hide one’s flaws. They do not believe in the concepts of altruism, charity, or kindness for its own sake. They lack empathy and cannot conceive of an individual putting another’s welfare ahead of their own for anything but the basest and most venal of reasons. They do not understand hope, love, forgiveness, or self-sacrifice.

In the end, the greatest threat to the Anunnaki is not the monstrous power of the Children of the Dark, but the very human virtues the Darkchildren possess under their horrific façades. A Darkchild’s capacity for *humanity* is a bigger danger to the Anunnaki than any force of arms could ever be.

Chapter 7: The World After Dark

The world of *Children of the Dark* is not our Earth, though it bears many similarities. This world is one in which the supernatural has always existed, though it has been hidden and subdued for much of human history. It is a world shrouded in darkness, where ancient entities bear ill will toward mankind and even humanity's champions dabble with chaos and madness to gain their powers.

This supernaturally-influenced world of dark bargains and moral compromise can be thought of as a *paranormal noir* setting. Like a traditional detective noir, allegiances are uncertain, heroes are morally dubious, and villains are separated from the heroes by degree rather than kind. The Darkchildren are monsters themselves, filled with impulses and drives that often lead them to prey on humanity. The Anunnaki are the villains of the piece only because their ultimate ends would see the Darkchildren slaughtered and humanity extinct or in chains.

At the same time, the world is a place where the paranormal has existed alongside mankind since the earliest times. Magic is real, preserved in secretive traditions passed down from prehistory and made suddenly far more powerful in the wake of Black Solstice. Psychics can read minds, bend wills, and break bones with their thoughts. In a world where almost anything is possible, logic and reason can break down, leaving only paranoia and distrust.

The heroes and villains both have a vested interest in keeping the Shadow War out of the public eye as much as possible. The Anunnaki have vast but not limitless resources, so subverting humanity's leaders and institutions before their ultimate conquest is a necessity. If mankind knew about the Anunnaki, it's entirely possible that humanity would put away its petty squabbles long enough to strike back against their monstrous foe—and the Anunnaki are especially cautious, given that it happened to them once before.

Unfortunately for the Darkchildren and their allies, simply exposing the Anunnaki without laying the groundwork for such a revelation could potentially cause a backlash that would do as much damage to them as to their enemies. After all, the average person will look at a Darkchild and see a monster out of myth and legend, a creature to be destroyed with fire and sword, not an ally in the fight against a greater evil—and they wouldn't be entirely wrong.

Even more human warriors—psychics, sorcerers, super-soldiers, and the like—must contend with the fact that many of them have committed numerous criminal acts just to stay alive under Anunnaki rule. Furthermore, revealing themselves to large numbers of people risks a counterstrike from Anunnaki forces trying to suppress the information before it spreads. For the moment, at least, the Conspiracies are better off working from the shadows, building their networks and power base before revealing the truth to the public.

Everyone knows that a day is coming—possibly soon—when the existence of the supernatural can no longer be hidden. No supernatural veil hides the actions of the Darkchildren from humanity, only their own discretion and the general disbelief of the common person. Eventually, one side or the other will make one mistake too many, and the Shadow War will turn from cold to hot in an instant. The outcome of open warfare with the Anunnaki is uncertain, and so the Shadow War continues... for now.

America After Dark

The United States has been the last true global superpower since the end of the Cold War. American trade dominates the global market, while American products and culture set the tone for countries around the world. China continues its rise toward regional hegemony, while Russia tries to recapture the olden days when the Soviet Union cast its long, red shadow across Europe and Asia. For now, though, America reigns supreme, if not unchallenged.

Even before Black Solstice, America was ill. Its institutions, infrastructure, and traditions had been built in the post-war period with the Cold War as a driving factor. With Russia a shell of its former self, America's military-industrial complex was left without a single grand enemy to justify its existence. The "War on Terror" renewed the nation's drive for adventurism in foreign nations, propping up a military force with a budget larger than that of the next two dozen countries put together.

Government dysfunction had set in at almost every level—regional, state, and national—as rapidly advancing technology and changing demographics left the ruling elite out of touch with the people they supposedly represented. Wealth concentrated itself in fewer and fewer hands, making a few thousand people wealthier than the rest of the world's population combined. Movement from rural areas to urban ones combined with the country's political system created a federal government in which three-quarters of the population was represented by only a quarter of the elected seats of government.

The terror attacks of September 11, 2001, metastasized the growing imbalances into a cancer eating away at the core of the country. The United States had long flirted with authoritarianism and reactionary policies, but a major terror attack on American soil allowed the government to grant itself greater powers than any prior point in history. The surveillance state began to take shape, bringing with it greater restrictions on travel, militarization of the police, and the hardening of anti-immigrant sentiment into policy.

The global financial crisis of 2007-08 was just one further symptom of America's illness, as was the rise of the "alt-right" and other resurgent fascist movements. Citizens drowned their fear and poverty in conspicuous consumption, mass market entertainment, and a vast array of the modern equivalent of bread and circuses. The symbols of American liberty became as sacrosanct as any religious icons, even as the fundamentals of those liberties were eroded by the growing surveillance state and the influence of corporations on both public policy and public opinion. Social media served as both opposition to these trends and another vector for their spread.

Black Solstice fully catalyzed these fears and societal ills, turning them into a toxic stew. America went from merely sick to actively tearing itself apart. Most people just wanted things to go back to normal—where "normal" meant "quiet," a state in which they could pleasantly ignore the unpleasantness around them.

The Liberty Party

Shortly after the elections of 2012, a group of radical conservatives from multiple political groups banded together to gain control of the federal government through populism and grassroots fearmongering. Following the model of the Tea Party movement of a few years before, they suborned existing party structures to primary moderate politicians in previously safe districts, replacing them with more extreme and authoritarian candidates. This movement called itself the Liberty Party.

The Liberty Party capitalized on the lingering fears from Black Solstice, racial resentments, and generational divides to leverage greater voter turnout for their hand-picked candidates while enacting legislature that disenfranchised the supporters of their opponents. They gained effective

control of the House of Representatives and the Senate in the midterm elections of 2014. Their ultimate triumph was creating enough chaos and dysfunction at the federal level to push every credible conservative out of the 2016 presidential primaries.

The remaining candidate was woefully unqualified and widely hated, but was malleable to the Liberty Party's interests, having essentially no platform of his own other than a desire to be president. A series of well-timed incidents lowered voter turnout for the progressive candidate in critical battleground states enough to allow the Liberty Party's chosen puppet to enter the White House despite losing the national popular vote by a significant margin. This also served their purposes by eroding confidence in democracy and making the authoritarian practices they espoused seem more appealing by contrast to the general dysfunction of the government.

The Liberty Party in 2018 controls all three branches of the federal government, as well as over half of the state-level governments. They have resisted all efforts at removing their extremist members from office through a combination of gerrymandering, voter suppression, authoritarian legislation, populist appeals to tribal identity, and a cult-like devotion to causing pain and embarrassment to their political opponents. In many ways, the Liberty Party's only benefit to its adherents is in feeling superior to their opposition; their base has become convinced that living under a freeway in a cardboard box would be fine as long as their liberal neighbor doesn't get a box.

The Rise of Nouveau-Fascism

In less than six years, the United States has become a de facto fascist state. A single party controls all of the levers of national government, using its vast power and reach to diminish civil liberties further with each passing day. They foment resentment between disparate groups in order to keep them from banding together against oppression. They pass legislature that forces ever more people into poverty and desperation. They build mutually beneficial relationships with corporations to intrude deeper into daily life while keeping the citizenry distracted with entertainment and technological toys. They embrace extreme religious groups to gain influence with their faithful.

At a local level, people no longer feel like they can trust their government. As the government increasingly ignores them except to extract wealth and suppress protest, people turn to one another for protection, whether that means embracing local gangs, forming "people's militias," or joining the local branch of the Liberty Party in hopes of getting special favors or attention. A significant minority of the country has also begun participating in "opposition movements," which can mean anything from fully-online social media protest groups to homegrown anti-fascist cells.

Small towns and rural communities have become ever more hostile to "urban liberals" at the provocation of their populist leaders, some of them to the point that anyone passing through is automatically treated as a criminal. More than a few have become essentially independent from government above the county level, avoiding contact with the outside world and becoming strange in their isolation. Religions twist from offering aid and comfort to promising hellfire and damnation to unbelievers—sometimes to be hastened along by the especially devout.

The cities crowd to bursting, pushing up crime rates to their highest level in decades. Missing persons cases have become so prolific that it has become common policy for police departments to lie about them rather than risk inciting public inquiry or panic. Police forces are increasingly militarized to deal with crime epidemics and heavily-armed gangs, only to have their weapons turned against protestors, the unhoused, and the poor by orders from their superiors. In many

places, the police are just another gang—albeit one with official sanction and a government-sponsored budget.

The Anunnaki know that they cannot stand against a united humanity, so their short-term strategy is to divide and conquer. By turning neighbor against neighbor, they make their war against humanity less visible. By breaking down the old social order and removing the social safety net, they turn societies into desperate, grasping individuals, each looking out for their own best interests and willing to cling to any force that offers them salvation. Their intention is apparently to make humanity so miserable that, by the time the Anunnaki reveal themselves, most people will simply bend the knee willingly.

The center cannot hold, and the gyre widens daily. All goes according to the plans of the Anunnaki.

Europe After Dark

The departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union following the 2016 referendum (colloquially known as “Brexit”) threw European politics into disarray as well as shattering the British economy. When the “no-deal” option was invoked in 2017, Scotland and Ireland immediately began pushing for independence from the UK so that they could rejoin the European Union, which in turn pushed England into harsher political stances against its Scottish and Irish citizens, and into open oppression of both immigrants and British citizens of immigrant descent.

The withdrawal of the UK from the European Union emboldened several other right-wing governments in the region to pushing for withdrawal as well, primarily so they could resume oppressing their own citizens and pursuing local military ambitions unchecked by the regulations and economic power of the EU. So far, none of them have successfully withdrawn (though given the ongoing economic collapse of the UK, “successful” is a loaded term), but Poland and several other Eastern European nations have made major strides toward separating themselves from their allies.

Russia continues to push its interests in the region as well, seeking a return to its Cold War era eminence in global politics through military might, influencing local governments, buying off politicians in neighboring states, and blatant violations of international law. The nation has become a de facto kleptocracy run by the Russian mafia and various oligarchs who extract everything of value from their citizens while offering little to nothing in return. Their leaders have begun dreaming of empire once more, looking west to former Soviet-held republics as their first targets.

In general, the same trends affecting the United States are true in Europe as well: the rise of nouveau-fascist political parties, the ascension of reactionary politicians, a slide into ethnocentric populism, and the fracturing of alliances. Economic crises abound, and the Euro is quickly becoming unstable, especially with Russian-backed cryptocurrency flooding the world markets.

The continuing chaos in the Middle East and North Africa offer additional pressures in the form of a refugee crisis that has inundated the EU with hundreds of thousands of people whom it is ill-prepared to care for. Indeed, almost every major city in the EU has gained shanty towns and walled camps filled with tens of thousands of refugees who subsist on meager charity and the predations of the black market.

The Anunnaki strategy of “divide and conquer” in Europe is less about the urban/rural divide and exploiting class differences than it is about reawakening nationalism and stoking ethnic prejudices. These are kept at a high boil by right-wing terrorism, both stochastic and direct, and by Anunnaki-sponsored atrocities that allow subverted governments to grant themselves ever more power in the name of “national security.”

As America balkanizes, Europe instead stands poised on the precipice of returning to the status quo that made bloodbaths like World War I possible.

Sidebar: ...And the Rest

The focus of *Children of the Dark* is primarily on the United States, with a looser focus on Europe. Almost nothing about Africa, Asia, South America, or Polynesia are discussed in depth in this book. This is largely because the author is from the United States and does not feel qualified to write at length about the modern political, economic, and social situations of those regions.

No group or individual is intended to be excluded through this omission. It can be safely assumed that there are Darkchildren and Nephilim operating in every corner of the globe, along with heroic and villainous mortals from every nation on Earth. The Anunnaki make no distinction between human groups, save as it profits them to exploit those divisions, and the heritage of the Igigi and the Anakim belongs equally to all of humankind.

Should a reader more familiar with those regions and the ways in which they might react to Black Solstice have ideas, feel free to reach out to the author for a collaboration. More voices are always welcome!

The Shadowlands

The Darkchildren have always known that Earth is not the only world. The oldest legends speak of a shadowy realm of the dead where powerful Darkchildren could venture if they dared. Virtually all of the oldest cultures on Earth speak of this place: Sheol, Hades, Xibalba, and a thousand other names. They all speak of a lightless underworld where the shades of the dead gather in eternal sorrow, and which only the greatest heroes would ever willingly seek to enter.

Darkchildren know this realm as **the Shadowlands**.

History

No one knows if the Shadowlands existed before the banishing of the Anunnaki or if it came into existence with their expulsion from the Earth realm. The oldest records held by Darkchild elders and the Nephilim only begin with the Anunnaki being banished from Earth, so that is where the realm’s history truly starts.

After the Anunnaki were toppled from their thrones, the Igigi found that mirrors and places of deep natural darkness seemed “thin” to their supernatural senses. Experimentation led to the discovery of their natural ability to turn such liminal places into doorways leading to a parallel world of darkness and ruin. It was soon discovered that this was the place where the Anunnaki had been sent when they were banished, so such experimentation quickly became taboo out of fear that the enemy might be able to return to Earth should the doors stay open too long.

When the Igigi were overthrown in their turn, the taboos fell apart. The survivors were too desperate to abandon any potential advantage, so they soon began to use their access to the

Shadowlands as a means of hiding from their enemies. Only the most powerful Igigi could open the pathways to the dark realm; since they were the primary targets of the Nephilim and their human allies, the few who survived the purges were often forced to spend years or decades at a time hiding out in the Shadowlands, dodging both Nephilim hunters and Anunnaki hounds.

As the Igigi faded into history, their descendants had to rediscover the lost lore of their time. These early Darkchildren had no access to the Shadowlands and knew it only as a place of myth. Centuries passed before any of them would return to the Shadowlands, finding it just as inhospitable and dangerous as their Igigi forebears had done. Still, these cabals were able to create the first Labyrinths by exploiting the boundary between Earth and the Shadowlands, effectively forming “bubbles” between the two worlds. Travel to the dark realm was still the province of the most powerful of their kind, but any Darkchild with basic training could form a Labyrinth with a little time and effort.

It was found during this time that the Anunnaki were truly barred from Earth; nothing they did seemed able to penetrate the barrier between the worlds from their side, and even the doors opened by the Darkchildren were impassable to them. They could still use their immense powers to subtly influence the minds of mortals, especially those who encountered relics left over from the time of their rule, but they could not physically return to Earth by any means.

Souls affected by the Anunnaki influence sometimes built cults to dark gods, performing blood rituals intended to weaken the bonds trapping their masters. Very rarely and with great effort, they were sometimes able to call servitors to Earth, where they would wreak vengeance on the spawn of the Igigi and work toward the return of the Anunnaki. When Darkchildren would hear of these “demon cults,” it would frequently be enough for even rival cabals to set aside old enmities and work together to end the threat.

The few Darkchildren powerful and brave enough to venture into the Shadowlands came back with stories of hellish kingdoms of the dead, ruled by the ancient enemies of their people. The Anunnaki had enslaved humanity’s afterlife, turning it into a hell like that feared by many faiths. The Anunnaki built monuments to their awful grandeur, palaces and statues far greater than any in the living world. They filled their fetid city-states with servitors and war machines, battling against each other for purposes and reasons unknown to the outsiders.

These explorers also spoke of monsters not controlled by the Anunnaki, fearful things that even the Darkchildren would find dangerous, as well as ruined cities that seemed to not match up with anything on Earth. Some of these cities had long since been picked clean by Anunnaki scavengers, but others still held wonders and relics beyond anything created by mankind. Of course, many of the explorers never returned at all—but every reward had its risk.

The coming of Black Solstice changed everything. No longer were the Shadowlands barred to all but the most powerful Darkchildren. Now, even the weakest novice fresh from their first change could rend open the walls between the worlds. On the other hand, the servitors of the Anunnaki could also come to Earth freely, no longer requiring copious ritual and blood sacrifice to call them across.

The Anunnaki themselves seem unable or unwilling to return to Earth as of yet. No one is sure if they need a certain level of control in order to breach the barriers between worlds, or if they simply prefer to keep a safe distance until their conquest is complete.

The Lay of the Land

The most notable feature of the Shadowlands is the one that gives it its common name—a lack of light. There is no sun visible in the Shadowlands, nor a moon or any stars. The sky is an

impenetrable black void; staring into it too long can cause visual hallucinations like those experienced by a person clenching their eyes shut too hard. An occasional reddish cloud races across the sky, moving quicker than the wind would seem to allow, but never shedding a drop of rain.

Despite the lack of apparent celestial bodies, there is some slight amount of illumination in the realm, roughly equal to a night on Earth with a crescent moon. This “anti-light” lacks any apparent source, seeming to come from the sky as a whole. Darkchildren and other creatures of shadow can see fairly well in the anti-light, about as well as a normal human at twilight. Ordinary humans find the gloom oppressive, pervasive, and nearly impenetrable.

The Shadowlands are a parallel world with a geography nearly identical to that of Earth. The continents and major landmasses are in the same places, but where water normally exists on Earth, the Shadowlands are a dry and dusty wasteland. Indeed, in most places it seems that there was *never* any water—land features carved out by erosion, rivers, and tides seem instead to have fallen in on themselves from earthquakes and magma flows. Where the oceans should be are instead vast rocky plains, occasionally broken by fissures and crevices.

What little water exists in the Shadowlands appears in the form of cenotes and oases, tiny pockets of stagnant water in hidden or isolated locations scattered across the face of the world, and the occasional shallow creek that springs from rocky outcroppings, runs for a few hundred meters, then disappears into the ground just as suddenly. The cities of the Anunnaki are built around large permanent watering holes, though neither they nor their minions seem to have need of food or water in the normal sense. Places of intense volcanic activity on Earth sometimes correspond to major oases in the Shadowlands, but this is by no means a perfect guide.

Despite the arid environment, there is some amount of wildlife in the Shadowlands. Most of it can be found near the cenotes and oases, which are often home to large populations of fish, crabs, insects, spiders, stunted plants, and sea birds. They are also home to horrifying predators of clearly monstrous origin, some of which may be inspirations for some of Earth’s mythological creatures. The open wastelands are home only to burrowing animals, arthropods, and creatures that seem to hunt more for pleasure than necessity.

People and Places

The most unusual features of the Shadowlands are its native cities and populations—namely, that it has them at all. Places of long human habitation on Earth, as well as more recent cities with large populations, seem to generate “echoes” in the Shadowlands. These locales spontaneously generate buildings, streets, and other construction that mirrors that of its Earthly counterpart, though often in twisted or baroque stylings. A skyscraper on Earth might have a reflection in the Shadowlands that is instead made of black basalt, carved in cuneiform and accented with tarnished bronze décor.

The only seeming guide as to what appears in the Shadowlands is that such buildings tend to be places of long occupation, intense emotional interest, or near-constant bloodletting. This means that apartment blocks, old office buildings, slaughterhouses, prisons, museums, and similar structures are more likely to have Shadowlands reflections than suburban homes, sleek corporate offices, or modern automated factories. Indeed, there are plenty of buildings in the Shadowlands whose Earthly originals have long since been torn down or replaced.

Generally speaking, any location constantly inhabited by humans for more than five centuries has a reflection in the Shadowlands, as does any urban area with a population of more than one hundred thousand people. Larger and more populous cities create larger and more elaborate

Shadowlands reflections, but even tiny towns with long histories have mirror versions in the dark realm.

Similarly, the “native” population of the Shadowlands is reflective of that of Earth. Instead of being counterparts of existing people, however, the folk of the Shadowlands seem to be mirror images of the dead. A shade comes into being when a mortal dies, appearing in the Shadowlands near the place where their human counterpart passed away. Sometimes this happens right away, and sometimes it takes several days or weeks. In a rare few instances, no shade comes into being at all, and no one knows why. Infants and young children never generate shades, and teenagers rarely do so.

Shades have the appearance of their human counterpart, as well as the basic knowledge possessed by that person since childhood—their name, their native language, and the like—but no specific memories of their time among the living. Because of this, scholars aware of the Shadowlands sometimes theorize that shades are not actually the spirits of the dead, but rather a psychic impression left by a human’s death as their soul departs for realms unknown.

A shade is a miserable creature, defined by a loneliness and longing for a life they cannot truly remember. They do not age or suffer from sickness, but they do not heal naturally like humans, meaning that every shade is eventually condemned to an eternity of suffering as minor injuries accumulate. They can die from serious wounds, such as decapitation or complete dismemberment, but injuries that would kill a human (such as disemboweling or having an arm ripped off) will only leave them in deathless agony.

Shades do not need to eat or drink, but they crave warmth that other shades cannot provide. This makes them obsessively seek out the few mortals who dare to enter the Shadowlands, hungering for their company and attention. Some shades have learned how to heal or invigorate themselves by drinking freshly spilled blood, so blood offerings can often compel them to offer aid or information. The blood need not be human—indeed, most shades are horrified by the idea of harming a living person—but a small number of shades are damaged or insane enough to become roving ghouls seeking mortal blood to satisfy their unholy hunger.

The Anunnaki have their servitors regularly patrol major Shadowlands cities near their capitols, pressing shades into slavery as miners, laborers, and other menial servants. Their fell magics can repair damaged shades, but they only do so for servants that would be difficult to replace, so these slaves are often forced into stiff competition to prove their worth to their masters. Especially useful or clever shades sometimes find themselves in positions as overseers or trustees, keeping their own kind in line to keep the favor of their wicked overlords.

Anunnaki Citadels

Imagine a boot stamping on a human face for all of eternity—that is life in the citadels of the Anunnaki. One part Mesopotamian city-state, one part mystical Orwellian nightmare, and one part Dante’s visions of hell, the seven capitals of the Anunnaki are monuments to their sadism, evil, and power.

Though the Anunnaki have their roots in the Mesopotamian region of the Middle East, their exile to the Shadowlands began a diaspora that caused them to settle in widely disparate parts of the dark realm. Today, only the first city of the Anunnaki, glorious Uruk, remains in that area, home to Enlil and his armies. The other six Anunnaki have spread far and wide from their archaic homeland, putting as much distance between one another as possible. The other six citadels are thought to lie in Shadowlands regions analogous to central Africa, Siberia, southern China, the Australian Outback, the American Midwest, and the Andes Mountains.

Unlike most Shadowlands cities, the Anunnaki citadels were actually constructed from the ground up, rather than being reflections of Earthly cities. This means that they contain only the stylistic elements approved of by the Anunnaki and their Ensi lieutenants, which tend toward those of the Bronze Age, particularly those of the Sumerian and Akkadian civilizations. Some of the Anunnaki have adopted “local” styles (that is, those used by humans in the Earth-analogue region of their citadel), particular Ninshubur (who styles their courts after the Incan civilization) and Shamash (whose architectural preferences reflect Qin Dynasty China).

The primary inhabitants of any citadel are shades, held in bondage for centuries without end. None of the Anunnaki show any particular kindness or sympathy to their slaves, though their cruelty sits on a spectrum from disinterested (Enlil and Enki) to actively torturous (Nergal and Innana). Ereshkigal is the only one of the Anunnaki to use shades in her armies; the other Anunnaki seem to regard arming humans (even dead ones) as pure folly. Even then, Ereshkigal’s slave-soldiers operate under harsh restrictions, and they have no more freedom than any other creature serving the Anunnaki.

Few outsiders have entered a citadel and lived to tell the tale. What little information has come out of them indicate that the shades who dwell within are a cowed and captive lot, living under constant magical surveillance and control. Those few who show any spirit are broken through torture or hard labor, or are pressed into service as subjects of horrific magical experiments. Powerful servitors do as they like with shades and weaker servitors. Much of a citadel seems to be dedicated to propitiating the ego of its master, filled with temples, statues, and monuments to Anunnaki glory, while the remainder is a massive factory using shade slave labor to mine and smelt ore, and to forge weapons and armor for the armies.

Prior to Black Solstice, the citadels seemed to be in a state of near-constant war with one another. Their great armies marched across the black and lifeless plains of the Shadowlands to clash in distant wastelands far from any Anunnaki citadel for reasons that were inscrutable to outsiders. The battles certainly weren’t over territory or resources, so scholars theorize that the battles were somehow related to status or glory, or were part of a complex, multi-generational ritual of some kind.

While the largest battles seem to be over with the invasion of Earth, armies still move and clash in the Shadowlands at the direction of the Ensi and other high-ranking servitors. It is currently unknown whether these battles are at the direction of their overlords, in defiance of them, or without their knowledge.

More disturbing to the Conspiracies that stand against the Anunnaki are the rumors that each of the citadels holds a growing population of enslaved mortals, taken from Earth and spirited off to the Shadowlands. There are places on Earth where even hundreds of missing people each year would not be noticed, and more than one “minor” atrocity in a war zone could well serve as cover for an Anunnaki slave raid. Several of the Shadow War factions are planning fact-finding missions, but any expedition into Anunnaki-held territory is fraught with peril.

Anunnaki Outposts

The Anunnaki have spent most of human history at war with one another, for reasons unknown to outsiders. These conflicts almost never occur near the citadels themselves, but rather in open territory between the capitals of the aggressors involved. Because of the need to stay alert for attacks from rival Anunnaki, the lords of the Shadowlands keep “outposts” on the edges of their territory. These Shadowlands cities are used as forward bases for their armies as well as stockpiles for weapons and secondary factory locations for their implements of war.

Almost all of the large Shadowlands cities—those whose Earthly counterparts have a million or more people living in them—are home to an Anunnaki garrison. Such a garrison usually consists of one or more Ensi, a dozen powerful servitors, and a few hundred hounds and sirrushes, served by a thousand or more shades.

It is from these local garrisons that forces are dispatched to Earth when the Anunnaki strike out against the Children of the Dark—and it is these outposts that are the major targets of the Shadow War. While the citadels seem far too defended to strike at directly, outposts are almost always understaffed, poorly informed, and stretched thin with their new responsibilities. With only a few dozen personnel to control areas that are home to millions of shades (and similar numbers of humans on Earth), the servitors are frequently forced to rely on cultists and dupes to carry out their will rather than seeing to threats personally.

A common theory held by the more militant Conspiracies (such as the Resistance and Sigma Red) is that the most successful strategy against the Anunnaki in the long run will be one of attrition. By wearing down the outposts and picking off the Ensi, the hope is that the Anunnaki will be forced to scale back their efforts on Earth or come out of their citadels to deal with matters personally, thus exposing them to potential assassins. Whether this is true or not, outposts are a frequent target for attack, infiltration, and sabotage.

Some Ensi counteract the potential threat by staying mobile, keeping their forces in the general area of their assigned territory, while others hunker down and turn their permanent bases into literal fortresses. Many Ensi have been in their positions of command for decades or even centuries, while others have been replaced multiple times just since Black Solstice. New York's Shadowlands version, known as Black Gotham, is particularly notorious for having a new Ensi governor every few years as the previous one is disgraced or killed. On the other hand, the Ensi commander of Crescent City (the Shadowlands version of New Orleans) has held her post for almost three centuries.

Lost Islands

Though the Shadowlands are inhospitable to humankind—indeed, they seem to be the inspiration for several cultures' ideas of what hell looks like—there are those who would find it preferable to life on Earth. Political exiles, oppressed religious and ethnic minorities, and misanthropes of all stripes might well consider the lightless realm to be safer or more welcoming than whatever suffering awaited them back home.

For all of known history, there have been isolated communities of normal humans surviving in the Shadowlands, usually around freshwater cenotes but sometimes as nomads drifting from one oasis to the next. These groups rarely exceed a few dozen individuals at most, and even that many people can place harsh demands on available food and water. Starvation and dehydration are constant threats in the wastelands of the dark realm, even discounting Anunnaki patrols and the vicious monsters that dwell there.

The few permanent settlements of mortals in the Shadowlands are known as “lost islands,” and they are almost universally on small mountains with ready supplies of freshwater—what would be volcanoes on Earth. The locals survive through fishing and limited agriculture; plants do grow in the Shadowlands, even without sunlight, but they tend to be pale and sickly. Mushroom farms do better, but they need to be supplemented through other means.

While most lost islands are home to ordinary people, if somewhat desperate and impoverished, a few are instead inhabited by vicious cannibals who raid Shadowlands cities for shades to devour as food. Generations of this behavior has turned the people who engage in it feral and

violent, partly due to social reasons—it's hard to be pleasant when anyone you meet looks like dinner—but also because of the long-term physiological effects of widespread cannibalism, which include prion disease and neurological deficits from malnutrition. Such cannibal communities also tend to be horrifically inbred, which doesn't help matters at all.

Mystery Ruins

There are numerous locations in the Shadowlands known as “mystery ruins.” These locales are ruined towns or cities built in a style that matches nothing native to the region on Earth, and which do not match the iconography or known building styles of the Anunnaki. Most of them are far from any nearby population zone, or in locations where no Earthly city was ever known to exist. In short, no one knows who built them, where they came from, or why they exist, and they defy the “rules” of Shadowlands city formation.

There is writing in some of the mystery ruins, something roughly akin to cuneiform or hieroglyphs but not matching any known Earthly language. Scholars among the Conspiracies have taken to calling it “Enochian,” after the “language of angels” invented by 16th-century occultist John Dee, as the Nephilim claim that it is the language of their Anakim ancestors. Because of this, the Darkchildren and Nephilim sometimes refer to the people responsible for the mystery ruins as “Enochians.”

The Anunnaki generally avoid mystery ruins, which would make them excellent hideouts for their enemies, save for the fact that the ruins are universally filled with horrific monsters and deadly traps, on top of just being difficult to navigate due to the hazards intrinsic to being several-millennia-old ruins. Still, those that brave them frequently find relics and lore that make the risk enticing nonetheless. Amulets filled with the knowledge of lost spells, blades capable of cutting steel like butter, and clues to the true nature of the Anunnaki and the Darkchildren—all of these and more have been found in mystery ruins.

Chapter 8: Running the Shadow War GM Advice and Adventure Creation

Campaign Models

(intro)

Shadow Warriors
(standard campaign)

Monster Relocation Program
(Darkchildren starting new lives far from home)

Into the Unknown
(exploring the Shadowlands)

Before the Dark
(playing before Black Solstice)

A World of Insufficient Light
(modern timeline, but no Shadow War)

Monsters+Hearts
(CW-style supernatural drama)

The Conspiracies and the Shadow War

The Truth is Out There

The *Children of the Dark* setting has a great many secrets in it. What are the Anunnaki, and what are their ultimate goals? Where did they come from? What are the origins of the Nephilim and the Darkchildren? Who were the Igigi?

For the vast majority of these questions, there is no “canonical” answer. Nothing in this book or any future *Children of the Dark* supplement will give an authoritative explanation to the “big mysteries” of the setting. Some readers will clearly consider this an affront to their narrative sensibilities; others will cheer it for leaving enough “white space” for an individual GM to come up with their own solutions. There’s no real way to make both camps equally happy, so the game errs on the side of “leaving mysteries as mysteries.”

That being said, here are some potential answers for the “big secrets” of the setting. Feel free to use any of them or none of them at your discretion.

Chariots of the Gods

(ancient aliens)

Could It Be... Satan?

(demons)

The Man Behind the Curtain

(humans who use theatricality to confuse enemies)

The Mythos Solution

(eldritch horrors)

Parents of the Dark

(evolved Darkchildren)

Chapter 9: The Night is Full of Terrors

Mortal Foes

Intro text.

Angry Mob

People's Militia

Beat Cop

SWAT Team

Rogue Cop

Prepper Nutjob

Horde of Cultists

Supernatural Foes

Intro text.

Rampaging Behemoth

Seductive Leech

Mutant Freakjob

Demonic Tempter

Envious Muse

Bestial Avenger

Heavenly Warrior

Celestial Healer

Guardian Angel

Anunnaki Servitors

Intro text.

Girtab

The Scorpion-Kings

Shedu

The Death Angels

Kulitu

The Deep Ones

Kusarikku

The Brass Bulls

Alu

The Faceless

Urdimmu

The Hounds

Sirrush

The Chimeras

Urmahlullu

The Cursed

When one of the Ensi wishes to “reward” a faithful mortal servant, they will sometimes enact a ritual to transform the poor soul into one of the *urmahlullu*. These creatures are centauroid mockeries of the human form. From the waist up, they are powerfully built humans, but where their legs should be is the body of a great beast, such as a lion, a huge goat, or a boar. Their faces are also twisted to become more animalistic, and their minds are altered to match.

Becoming an *urmahlullu* is considered a great honor by the Ensi, since such creatures can no longer die of old age or mortal ailments, but they can no longer dwell on Earth due to their freakish appearance, typically becoming personal servants to the Ensi in their lightless homes in the Shadowlands. Few of the *urmahlullu* consider their state to be a blessing for very long.

Elder Shade Assassin

Historical Murderer

Shadow Cult Leader

Human Quisling

Creatures of the Shadowlands

Intro text.

Griffin

These hybrid beasts seem to dwell primarily in or around the mystery ruins of the Shadowlands, defending them from intruders—or perhaps just defending their territory, which happens to be mystery ruins. No one is quite sure of the cause and effect at work there. Known as *Anzû* by the Anunnaki, these carnivorous beasts seem to be the inspiration for the myths of the griffin: a four-legged creature with wings that blends traits of lions and eagles.

Hydra

This monstrosity lives in and around the cities of the Shadowlands, particularly Anunnaki citadels and outposts. While servitors sometimes try to capture and train these creatures, which they call *ušumgallu*, they are more often regarded as vermin. Like the mythological creature for which it is named, a hydra is a huge snake with many heads; fortunately, unlike the Lernaean hydra of Greek myth, this one does not grow more heads when they are severed, though it does heal with unnatural speed.

Lilin

“Lilin” does not really refer to a single type of creature but an entire category of strange beings that live in the wastes of the Shadowlands. These shadowy beings seem equal parts flesh and darkness, taking many different shapes. They will often stalk humans or Darkchildren who go abroad in the Shadowlands, and they only avoid hunting minions of the Anunnaki because of the large numbers that they usually travel in.

Mermaid

Called *kuliana* by the Anunnaki, these aquatic monsters are one of the reasons why oases in the Shadowlands are viewed with suspicion, even by those desperate for the water they provide. Some oases are home to these creatures, who dwell in the deep waters, feeding on fish, unless they sense larger prey. They will wait until a creature is drinking to rush up to the surface, latch onto them, and drag the poor soul into the depths to drown.

A mermaid has only a vague resemblance to the whimsical creatures for which they are named. They look more like anglerfish or moray eels, but with arms. Their heads seem to be mostly mouth and eyes, and their clawed hands are immensely strong.

Wyvern

This strange beast can be found throughout the Shadowlands, particularly near cenotes and other sources of water. While they typically subsist on the fish and birds that congregate at these far-flung oases of life, wyverns are unafraid of humans and will happily prey on both shades and the living. A wyvern resembles a man-sized serpent with two forelegs, a pair of wings, and a crown of small horns growing from its brow. The Anunnaki call these creatures *bašmu*, meaning “venomous snake.”

Appendix: Recommended Media

Film and Television

Nightbreed. The single most important visual reference for the *Children of the Dark*, and one of the author's favorite films. If you look at nothing else on this list, watch this one. (And find the Director's Cut if you can manage it.)

The X-Files. Is there anything more 90s than *X-Files*? As a game emulating the feel and look of 90s-era horror-action games, *Children of the Dark* leans a fair bit on this show (and its lesser-known but equally good sister show *Millennium*) for the look and feel of the world. Go ahead and imagine any nighttime scene with a blue filter on it.

Stranger Things. Yes, it's set in the 80s instead of the 90s, but there are few better modern shows that capture the feel of the "nosebleed psychic" genre than this one. Eleven is straight out of Psi Division, and the efforts of the older kids to get to "the truth" smacks of CAUSE.

Fear Street. This trilogy of Netflix films is one of the first things to come out of a burgeoning wave of 90s nostalgia. Worth it for that if nothing else, but it's got some genuinely great representation of minority characters opposing structural injustice that happens to manifest as gnarly monsters.

Literature

Cabal, by Clive Barker. This might not have been the first story to explore the idea of a hidden society of monstrous shapechangers who mostly just want to be left alone, but it's one of the most stylistically important influences on *Children of the Dark*. It's also the basis for the film *Nightbreed*.

Firestarter, by Stephen King. The origins of Psi Division and the terminology for psychics are taken almost directly from King's works, particularly from this early novel that deals with a covert government agency trying to instill psychic powers into unwitting subjects. A grown-up Charlie McGee wouldn't be out of place at all as a player character in *Children of the Dark*. Also check out his later novel, *The Institute*, for a deeper dive into psychic shenanigans.

The Twisted Ones, by T. Kingfisher. Genuinely one of the most unsettling things this author has ever read. An amazing take on ancient magic, strange otherworlds, and monstrous transformations. Don't read it alone in the dark.

Other Games

Nightbane. Originally called “Nightspawn,” this role-playing game by Palladium Books was one of this author’s personal favorites for many years. *Children of the Dark* probably wouldn’t exist if it weren’t for *Nightbane*.

Nightfall. This deck-building game from Alderac Entertainment Group just drips with splatterpunk style. It’s a good look at the way the world could wind up if the Shadow War were to ever “go hot”—a ravaged apocalyptic wasteland where human survivor settlements are fortresses against the creatures that walk by night.

The World of Darkness. The first horror role-playing game setting to enter the mainstream consciousness, the World of Darkness and its myriad lines—*Vampire: The Masquerade*, *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*, and so on—continue to be huge influences on the role-playing industry to this very day.

Chill. Though not as well-known as *World of Darkness*, this earlier horror RPG dripped with style and substance, placing the player characters in a world-spanning conspiracy designed to protect humanity from the things that go bump in the night. A recent new edition has brought the game line into the present and comes highly recommended by this author.

Delta Green. A major influence on the development of the human-oriented conspiracies of *Children of the Dark*, this Cthulhu Mythos campaign setting asks serious questions about what people are willing to do and what they’re willing to give up to fight monsters. Though it veers into “copaganda” at times, it’s still a seminal influence on the modern horror RPG genre.