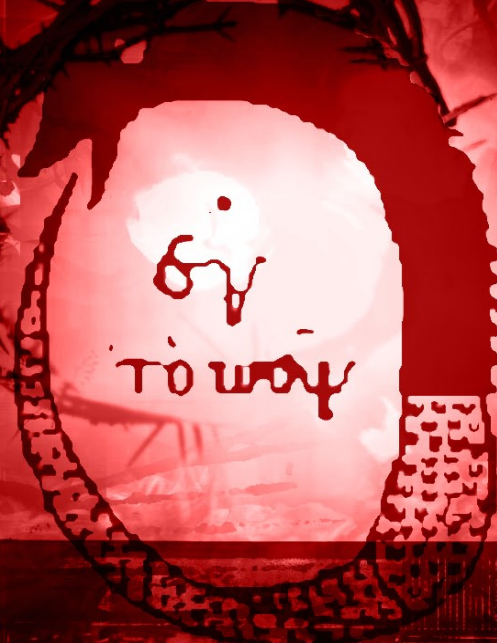


Under a Serpent's Sun



A Setting for the Burning Wheel Fantasy RPG



“We are
blind to
worlds
within us
waiting to
be born...”

- Luke Rhinehart, as quoted by Tomas Lindberg

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FULL USE OF THIS SETTING IS DEPENDENT ON KNOWLEDGE OF THE BURNING WHEEL FANTASY ROLEPLAYING SYSTEM. THIS IS NOT A STAND-ALONE CHAPTER.

Under a Serpent Sun: A setting for the Burning Wheel fantasy RPG By Radek Drozdalski and Luke Crane

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As always: Thanks Bob for your honest feedback and unending support.



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Under a Serpent Sun

An Inspired Setting for the Burning Wheel

Introduction

As far as I know, this is the first of its kind—the first Burning Wheel setting. Of course, this isn't what one would expect from a fantasy rpg, nor is it a setting in the sense that most gamers are used to. This is a collection of lifepaths, traits, special abilities and special resources. It is not a collection of maps and descriptions. Contained herein is the bare bones of a "world" to play in along with everything one needs to play out our *premise* in that world. What is paramount here is the struggle of the characters, not what the ruined cities look like or even the effects of radiation, dehydration or degradation. Those last bits are secondary and up to each individual group. It's the characters and their struggles that really matter.

The lifepath settings in Under a Serpent Sun are meant to be self-contained and played within the bounds described here. As you will soon see, the lifepaths paint a caricature of a world like our own following a cataclysm of Biblical proportions. Under a Serpent Sun joins up with the survivors just after the holocaust.

Basic Inner Workings: Illusion, Wasteland, and Sun

This setting is designed to play out intense post-apocalyptic scenarios. Unlike most after-the-bomb settings, this one deals with the emotional fallout, rather than the physical or cultural.

Humanity lives in sheltered, isolated communities scattered around the globe—the last vestiges of civilization. Life in these bubbles is tolerable, but horrifically bland. There is no more self-determination, no *joie de vivre*, no cross-cultures, sub-cultures or alternatives. All go to work, do their job, come home, seek to assuage their yawning emotional hunger, and eventually drift off to sleep in front of the television only to wake up tired and stiff to begin it all again. These are the Meek, and they are possessed of Need. Eventually life wrecks them. Each of them knows this and they seek to dull the pain. This is the Need.

Some flee this life. They escape their jobs, their families and lives, filling their Need in other ways—meds, cars, and sex are but a few ways of many. Some flee farther, outside the Illusion into the world at large—a crimson-skied wasteland. Here the realization drops like a hammer: The Meek's own life is an insignificant speck in the crumbling end. His entire life he's been led to believe that the world survived the cataclysm intact. It didn't. Beyond the walls of the homes of the Meek, there is nothing. Ashen wastes, abandoned cities, a red sun, and ruined infrastructure lie like old wounds across the face of the earth. This realization often proves too much for the Meek. The loss of all connection to what he believed true, and the evaporation of the final hope of escape, drives him to black despair and, more often than not, to suicide. Only the smallest minority have the strength of will to contain their emotions and channel their Despair into an act of rebellion. Sitting on the ebon edge of

death, these few now see more clearly into life than ever before: There is a logic to this reality, and a reason. To pull the trigger only reinforces the illusion—this World of Lies—of the Meek.

To live on is to rebel.

There is truth in that statement, but naivete as well. Logic does indeed prevail in this world, but it wears an ugly mask: An enforced system of emotional torture executed by an elite caste of immortal, indestructible sorcerers and psychics. Known as Holocaust Seed, this new breed of men was born in man's darkest hour—the closing moments of armageddon. They rose up to master their own despair and stave off the coming end. However, the answer to their queries—how do we conquer our own fear and drive off the parasitic invaders?—was terrible to behold: Foster Need and Despair, for it is that which empowers you. Thus the Holocaust Seed rebuilt civilization, as *they* needed it. The Meek serve them. Slowly, grotesquely dancing through their Need and life until they are emotionally crushed. In the end, the Meek commit suicide and further empower the Holocaust Seed and reinforce the Illusion. These sorcerers, psychics and demons grow fat off the emotional explosion lit by the suicidal end of life.

To release oneself from this world is to empower the parasitic tyrants who hold it in sway. To live on is to exist in a world of lies, despair and anguish. Can you survive? Can you break the cycle? Will you answer the call of the Final Art? Or, in your last moments of black Despair, will you be able to raise your head and ask the ultimate question? And when you are answered, will you join them...or pull the trigger?

The sun sits red and low on the horizon, halloed by a serpentine ring. Welcome to the final eclipse of mankind, painted in the colors of war.

Currency of Need, Despair and The Answer

There are three new emotional attributes/traits in Serpent Sun: Need, Despair and The Answer. They are the true currency of the setting. All characters begin with Need during character burning. Need can be transformed to Despair, either in character burning or during a moment of crisis in play.

Despair fuels the resistance. It empowers the characters who hold it, but it drives them closer to the edge.

At the end of the advancement chain for Need and Despair sits the looming specter of suicide. The whole point of this scenario is to drive your character to the edge—to drive him to suicide—while fucking up as much of the world as possible.

Sitting atop the heap, twisted and ruined, is The Answer. Characters with the Answer feed off of those with Need and Despair. Through these degenerate emotions, the Answered fuel their terrible powers. They use these powers to drive Need and Despair up even further, because the inevitable suicide fills the Answered with even greater power than the pathetic lives of their victims.

It's a vicious cycle. Abusive, raw, desperate and violent. It's a middle finger flung at hope and redemption. There is none. Revel in your death—at least it's you who'll pull the trigger, right?

Enjoy!



Lifepaths Under a Serpent Sun

The Meek Setting

Lifepath	Time	Stat	Res	Leads
Born Meek¹	8 yrs	—	3	Survival of the Fittest
Skills: 2 pts: Meek-wise, Mating Traits: 3 pts: Need, Brainwashed, Restrained by Phobia				
Child²	3 yrs	—	2	Survival of the Fittest
Skills: 3 pts: Trouble-wise, Parents-wise, Illusion-wise, Falsehood Traits: 1 pt: Abused, Disillusioned, Trusting				
Field Laborer	8 yrs	—	3	—
Skills: 2 pts: Back Breaking Labor, Violin Traits: 1 pt: Almanac				
Cattleherd	8 yrs	—	3	—
Skills: 2 pts: Husbandry, Cattle-wise Traits: 1 pt: —				
Office Laborer	8 yrs	—	5	—
Skills: 3 pts: Literacy, Bureaucracy, Soothing Platitudes Traits: 1 pt: Crushing Boredom				
Unskilled Laborer	4 yrs	—	2	—
Skills: 3 pts: Digging, Carrying, Gathering Traits: 1 pt: Mind Numbing Work, Broken				
Factory Laborer	5 yrs	—	4	—
Skills: 2 pts: Machine-wise, Jury Riggig Traits: 2 pts: Repetitive Stress Disorder, Maimed				
Courier	6 yrs	+1P	3	—
Skills: 4 pts: Streetwise, Country-wise Traits: 1 pt: —				
Driver³	7 yrs	—	4	—
Skills: 5 pts: Driving, Repair, Road-wise, Engine-wise Traits: 1 pt: Cat-Calling, Sleep Disorder				
Parent³	10 yrs	—	4	—
Skills: 2 pts: Child-Rearing, Cleaning Traits: 1 pt: Abusive, Raw-Nerved				
Victim	1 yr	+1 M	2	Survival of the Fittest
Skills: 4 pts: Meds-wise, Sorrow-wise, Fear-wise Traits: 1 pt: Repulsive Need				

Requisites

1: Need, Brainwashed and Restrained by Phobia are all required traits. 2: The Child LP is *not* a required lifepath. Players may skip this lifepath on their journey from Born Meek to their profession. This lifepath may only be taken immediately following Born Meek. This lifepath exists to allow players to take on the role of 11 year old children in the setting. 3: Character must be 16 years or older to take this LP



Survival of the Fittest Setting

Lifepath	Time	Stat	Res	Leads
Insomniac	3 yrs	+1 M	3	—
Skills: 4 pts: Inconspicuous, Wasteland-wise, Meds-wise, Dream Interpretation Traits: 1 pt: Insomniac, Dreamer				
Lock Up	6 yrs	+1 M/P	4	Meek
Skills: 6 pts: Oratory, Chanting, Philosophy, Violin Traits: 1 pt: Hate Breeds Suffering				
Wanderer	3 yrs	+1 M	3	Meek
Skills: 4 pts: Wasteland-wise, Foraging, Orienteering Traits: 2 pts: Asthmatic, Suspicious				
Scavenger	3 yrs	+1 P	4	Meek
Skills: 3 pts: Scavenging, Brawling, Firearms Traits: 1 pt: Watchful, Skeevey				
Cannibal	4 yrs	+1 P	4	—
Skills: 9 pts: Stealthy, Tracking, Hunting, Orienteering, Cooking, Brawling, Knives Traits: 2 pts: Need, Feral, Taste for Human Flesh				
Bonereader	6 yrs	+2 M	10	—
Skills: 5 pts: Ossopathy, Anatomy, First Aid, Taxidermy Traits: 1 pt: Cynic, Necrophobic				
Suicidal	2 yrs	+1 M, P	4	Meek, Holocaust Seed
Skills: 5 pts: .45, Munitions, Suicide-wise, Illusion-wise, Reality-wise Traits: 1 pt: Despair, Kiss of Steel				
Haunted	6 yrs	+1 M	3	—
Skills: 5 pts: Silencer*, Ghost-wise, Suicide-wise Traits: 2 pts: Terminal Spirit Disease, Downward Spiral				
Voice of Stars¹	5 yrs	+2 M	3	Meek, Holocaust Seed
Skills: 5 pts: Holocaust Seed-wise, Inconspicuous; Judas Window* or At the Gates* Traits: 2 pts: Nausea, Answered, Despair (see note)				
Grotesque²	7 yrs	+1 M, P	3	—
Skills: 6 pts: Stealthy, Brawling, Apocalypse-wise, Swarm-wise Traits: 1 pt: Half-Breed				
Psychotic³	5 yrs	+1 P	3	—
Skills: 4 pts: Intimidation, Inconspicuous, Knives, Brawling Traits: 1 pt: Psychotic, Death Addiction				
Old Man⁴	10 yrs	+1 M/P	6	—
Skills: 10 pts: Local Area-wise, History, Obscure History, Observation, Firearms, Mending, First Aid, Tattoo Artist Traits: 1 pt: World Weary, Tattooed, Persistent Cough				

Requisites

1: Players who take the Voice of Stars LP may choose Answered or Despair. You may not have both traits. If you choose Despair, the Voice of Stars may not ask Questions. 2: Characters who take the Grotesque LP may not take the Suicidal LP. 3: Psychotic requires Suicidal. 4: Players who wish to take the Old Man LP must start the game as the oldest character in the group.

* These are special skills called Questions and require traits in order to be utilized in game. They cost 2 pts to open.



Holocaust Seed Setting

Lifepath	Time	Stat	Res	Leads
Holocaust Seed	3	+1 M	10	Meek
Skills: 5 pts: Reality-wise, Soothing Platitudes, Bureaucracy, Disguise Traits: 2 pts: Answered, Poison-Tongue, Blind-Hate				
Forcefeeder¹	3	+1 M	15	—
Skills: 5 pts: Language of Destruction, Surgery, Suicidal Disease-wise, Control* Traits: 1 pt: Poison-Heart				
Face of All Fears²	6	+4 P	20	—
Skills: 10 pts: Face of all Your Fears*, Soul-Slaughter*, Tools of the Trade*, Intimidation, Conspicuous. Traits: 1 pt: Cold, Covered with Scars				
Deceiver³	9	+1 M	20	—
Skills: 9 pts: Deceiver*; Illusion-wise, Falsehood, Soothing Platitudes, Seduction, Utopia-wise Traits: 2 pts: Charming, Gift of Babel, Aura of Malevolence				
Keeper of Keys⁴	12	—	60	Survival of the Fittest
Skills: 9 pts: At the Gates*, The Key*; Fabrication, Swarm-wise, Cosmos-wise, Time-wise Traits: 3 pts: Inhuman Visage, Cold, Isolated				
Dead but Dreaming⁴	24	+2 M	10	—
Skills: 12 pts: Apocalypse-wise, Swarm-wise, GBH Management; The Sense*, Heavenly Venomous Rapture*, Degeneration*, The Truth* Traits: 3 pts: Suicide-Dependent, Wasted, Dreamer, Comatose				

Requisites

1: Forcefeeder requires Holocaust Seed. 2: Face of All Fears requires Forcefeeder. 3: Deceiver requires Forcefeeder. 4: Keeper of Keys and Dead but Dreaming require Deceiver

* Indicates special skill. Costs 2 points to open and is hereafter referred to as a "question." See the Questions section for the mechanics of these abilities.

Character Traits

Blind-Hate, Downward, Spiral, Inhuman Visage, Cold, Isolated, World Weary, Tattooed, Persistent Cough, Half-Breed, Feral, Taste for Human Flesh, Cynic, Necrophobic, Watchful, Skeevey, Asthmatic, Suspicious, Hate Breeds Suffering, Insomniac, Abusive, Raw-Nerved, Cat-Calling, Sleep Disorder, Repetitive Stress Disorder, Mind Numbing Work, Crushing Boredom, Abused, Disillusioned, Trusting, Brainwashed, Restrained by Phobia

Lifepath Notes

All characters start Born Meek and there are no general skill points in Under a Serpent Sun.

Additional traits may be purchased from the Burning Wheel as per the standard rules. However, players may not take Gifted, Faithful or any other trait that would break genre. This is the bleak post-apocalypse, games are meant to be psychological and intense. Please build your characters appropriately.

All other standard character burning conventions apply.



Under a Serpent Sun Lifepath Traits and Skills

Lifepath Traits

Answered

DIE TRAIT

As the apocalypse swept the earth and burned it clean, a profound Despair took hold of the hearts of all humanity. Only a few could bear its crushing weight, most committed suicide. But among the survivors, a few managed to shout to the heavens, "Why?" Much to their awe, they were answered by a power greater than any one of them: The Despair was the answer—at least to the question of the apocalypse. We must despair to survive. Using this horrid answer, the Holocaust Seed arose, full of might and terror, able to wield power unimaginable, but dependent on Despair. And this fateful answer, of course, leads to more questions and the untapping of even greater power.

Characters with the Answered trait may perform *questions*. Questions are skills, but with "magical" effect (similar to Wolf Howls and Spell Songs).

If a character gains the Answered trait (in play or in burning) it supplants his Need/Despair trait. See the Answered and Question mechanics section for more on this.

Blind Hate

CHARACTER TRAIT

The Holocaust Seed learns not only the Answer to the calling of his power, but he also learns that humanity are blind sheep led through a world of lies. The cult of the Holocaust Seed permits no sympathy, and thus this realization evokes only a blind hatred for the unwitting and their ignorant existence.

Blind Hatred supplants the Brainwashed and Restrained by Phobia traits.

Brainwashed

CHARACTER TRAIT

Life is what it is, there is nothing else to it. My parents are wise and teach me about life. We live, love, laugh and die. Work fills me with satisfaction. If we work hard, we'll make something of ourselves. There is nothing else beyond my life. My life is good.

Cold

DIE TRAIT

This character has become remote and inured to suffering and pain. Reduced hesitation due to pain, fear or gore by 2. (Do not reduce hesitation for purposes of surprise.)

Comatose

DIE TRAIT

Once a Holocaust Seed learns to manipulate the Need via Degeneration and Venomous Rapture, his own addiction drives him into a coma wherein his mind exists and lives, but the body slowly dies. All physical stats drop to zero.

Covered with Scars DIE TRAIT

The practice of the art of the Face of All Fears is arduous and painful—his body reflects this rigor with the scars of initiation, failure and transcendence. This cicatrice lattice dulls his senses to pain—he may ignore his first Superficial wound in every engagement.

Death Addiction DIE TRAIT

The Psychotic, though rational and calm, is addicted to the act of killing. The rush provided is undeniable. Post-kill, the Psychotic is at +1D to all physical stats. This lasts for hours equal to his Will exponent. After that period the bonus fades and the Psychotic is in a neutral state for days equal to his Will. But the urge soon returns, sharpened by physical need. If the Psychotic passes through the neutral stage without having killed, each day thereafter he loses 1D of Health. A Health of zero may not recover from wounds. If his Health drops below zero, he collapses and dies. Health is recovered as soon as he makes his kill.

See the Psychotic and Death-Addiction section for more on earning this trait in play.

Despair DIE TRAIT

Despair is the transformation of Need. As the Need increases, the Illusion no longer satisfies. Some manage to break the grip of the Need, rather than commit the final act of suicide. Invariably, this breaking of the grip transpires in the wasteland. The Meek, now alone with his burning hunger, but apart from the illusion that sustained it, sees the world for what it truly is—a World of Lies where the Need is a tool, and Suicide the only escape. Yet to end life only strengthens the Illusion produced by the Holocaust Seed.

This is an emotional cataclysm—the conditioning of the Need is deeper than one can possibly know. To uproot it causes bloody psychological wreckage in the mind and heart of the formerly Meek. Sympathetic Suicidals seek out these initiates and have mercy on them. They hand them their symbol of revelation—the .45. A strong few manage to resist the crushing desire—the bleak solitude and the certainty of the end—to pull the trigger. In this act of resistance, their Need is transformed to Despair. Now they see the world as it is, and their Despair galvanizes them against it. The .45 becomes a symbol of recognition and resistance, rather than the final act.

Even so, Despair can overwhelm the strongest of us all—and the Holocaust Seed have learned to use it against us. See the Despair section for the mechanics of using, advancing and succumbing to Despair.

Dreamer DIE TRAIT

As he sleeps, his mind wanders across the dreamlands and he sees glimpses of the Holocaust Seed, the Swarm, and the elusive Gates. Such dreams are more than fanciful visions, they flash moments of the past and present—moments that the Dreamer could have never seen otherwise.

These visions grant special privileges to the Dreamer player. Once the GM determines that a vision has occurred, the player may narrate its contents. He may describe nearly anything he chooses using three elements of the following five to describe his vision: Who, What, Where, When and Why. None of the elements can specifically describe a person, place or thing. None of the elements of the vision can contravene genre/setting and the player may not narrate the death of a living character.

Once narrated by the player, the dream vision becomes as real in the game as if it had happened in play or the GM narrated it himself.

Rather than wait to be cued by the GM, the player can attempt to initiate his own dream. Doing so requires an Ob 10 Will test. It's unlikely, but possible.

Downward Spiral CHARACTER TRAIT

The Terminal Spirit Disease is incurable. It eats away at the soul, eventually consuming the host. This process drives the Haunted mad. He sees ghosts of the dreams he's destroyed, he believes he is constantly hunted and must destroy the dreams to survive.

Half-Breed DIE TRAIT

Grotesques are the cross-breeds of Diseased creatures and humanity. The nature of these creatures doesn't manifest until post-adolescence. Players who choose this path for their character may choose one trait from any Swarm creature (except Ethereal) to manifest in their character. Grotesques, once their nature is known, are often mistaken for Haunted and hunted and killed with prejudice.

Hate Breeds Suffering CHARACTER TRAIT

Lock Ups are street preachers, escaped from the Illusion but now returned to spread the word. They are philosophers lost in a world of lies and death.

Inhuman Visage DIE TRAIT

The Keeper of Keys' physical form has been warped through the hardship of his travels. His face is twisted and inscrutable, add +1 Ob to all social skill tests against the Keeper of Keys.

Repulsive Need CHARACTER TRAIT

Eventually, the Need grows within the Meek. Nothing satisfies, everything is bland and tasteless, old friends don't understand, life ceases to have meaning. This is the final death spiral of the Meek. From this point there are only two answers—escape through release of death (usually via overdose), or flight into the wasteland.

Kiss of Steel CHARACTER TRAIT

This trait represents the Suicidal's initiation into the cult of the .45. It is resignation to a fate: "One way or another, I shall die by my own hand, with the barrel in my mouth." The Kiss of Steel trait destroys the Brainwashed trait.

Nausea DIE / CHARACTER TRAIT

The Voice of Stars is one of the few Answered who have not yet been taken into the ranks of the Holocaust Seed. She lives among the ruins, possessed of a power that she barely knows how to use. Her lack of training causes terrible nausea whenever she evokes her questions.

She must make a Steel test after each use of a question—failure indicates she *must* stand and drool (from nausea).

Gaining the Nausea trait in character burning eliminates the Brainwashed trait.

Need

DIE TRAIT

All of the Meek have Need instilled in them during childhood. This deep-rooted emotion pervades the waking life—it is an abject hunger for companionship, safety, comfort and escape from the drudgery of existence.

As the Meek age, what once satisfied the Need grows inadequate. Richer, deeper, more consuming experiences are required to keep the Need at bay. Some manage to sate their Need by dint of will, some escape into the wastelands. Most do not. Life grows thin and pale for these Needy Meek—nothing can satisfy or fulfill. Eventually, inevitably, they crawl alone to a dark corner so that they may swallow poison and sate the insatiable Need with one last moment of ecstasy.

See the Need section for the mechanics of this special Attribute. A character may not have both Need and Despair. The Need trait is supplanted by the Despair trait, whether it is earned in character burning or gameplay. However, in character burning, if a character gains Despair then Need again, he starts with Need (rather than Despair).

All players should choose a starting need for their character—the physical, emotional or spiritual focus of their gnawing hunger.

Poison Heart

CALL-ON TRAIT

Call-on for Seduction and Persuasion.

Poison Tongue

CALL-ON TRAIT

Call-on for Falsehood and Soothing Platitudes.

Psychotic

CHARACTER TRAIT

The Psychotic is a Suicidal who has pushed through the Illusion and seen another level of truth: Suicide fuels the machine, all eventually commit suicide—death without suicide is release; murder destroys the illusion. Therefore, the Psychotics kill as an act of rebellion. Unfortunately, Psychotics succumb to the Death-Addiction and eventually waste away from their own need if they themselves are not killed by the Face of All Fears.

See the Psychotic and Death-Addiction section for more on earning and using this trait in play.

Suicide-Dependent

DIE TRAIT

Once the Holocaust Seed has advanced to the state of Dead but Dreaming he becomes completely dependent on Suicide for his sustenance and power. Unless infused with a Suicide, all of his questions are cast at an obstacle penalty equal to 10 minus his Will exponent. See Answered mechanics for suicide infusions.

Terminal Spirit Disease

DIE TRAIT

The Haunted are humans who have been touched by the Swarm and been infected with the Terminal Spirit Disease (TSD). See the Terminal Spirit Disease section for the mechanics of this.

Wasted

DIE TRAIT

The comatose Dead but Dreaming's body atrophies from disuse. This trait reduces all physical stats to exponent 2.

Skills

.45 ROOT: Agility/Will

This skill is not just about pulling the trigger and reloading. There is much more to it. A whole philosophy attends the use of the .45. It is as much a symbol of defiance, and a symbol of resignation, as it is a weapon.

However, this skill does also teach the character how to discharge the weapon in "stressful" situations in order to defend himself.

.45 Required

Apocalypse-wise ROOT: Perception

This character knows the snatches of the truth of history: The end of all things was triggered by the Swarm, humanity faltered under the weight of their inevitable end and mass suicide became commonplace. The Holocaust Seed rose up from among these ashes and drove off the Swarm and in turn enslaved humanity in the World of Lies.

Driving ROOT: Perception/Agility

World's got to keep going, people have to eat, deliveries need to be made. A driver knows how to operate wheeled, motorized ground transportation in a manner suited to quickly and aggressively transporting goods.

Car or Truck Required

Fabrication ROOT: Perception/Agility

This skill allows the Keeper of Keys to build, from scratch, working machine parts. It also allows him to cut, shape and stamp metal, stone and wood in order to aid in his quest for the keys to the gates.

Skill Kit Required

Firearms ROOT: Agility

This skill allows the character to use rifles, shotguns and assault rifles to kill other creatures. This skill is used exactly like Bow or Crossbow in standard Burning Wheel. In this case, it also provides for maintenance of his weapon (but not his ammunition).

AK or shotgun Required

GBH Management ROOT: Perception

This is an administrative skill that allows the Dead but Dreaming to manipulate vast databases and track the Need of thousands of Meek who fall under his jurisdiction.

GBH db Required

Holocaust Seed-wise ROOT: Perception

This skill implies some knowledge of the inner workings of the Holocaust Seed. At the most basic, the character knows that the Holocaust Seed propagate the Illusion/World of Lies. At higher skill levels/obstacle, the character might know of the specific nature of certain Holocaust Seed.

Language of Destruction ROOT: Will

This is a special jargon used by the Holocaust Seed to discuss the terms of their work and history and goals. To those without benefit of this skill, the agents of the Holocaust Seed sound as they speak profound gibberish.

Literacy

ROOT: Perception

The nature of the Office—the forms, memos and orders—demands that the office worker be literate. He can read and write as necessary. Some might even read for pleasure, but most find the affair too painful and would rather be entertained in other ways.

Munitions

ROOT: Perception

Resources are scarce in the wasteland, ammunition is no exception. The Munitions skill is the knowledge of making cordite, shot and casings. Munitions can be scavenged from household goods, or created from factory-grade ingredients.

Sample Obstacles: Ob 1, reloading cases; Ob 2, mixing gunpowder; Ob 3 mixing cordite from scratch.

Skill Kit Required

Ossopathy

ROOT: Perception/Will

Ossopathy, or Bonereading, allows a character to determine how another character died, what killed them, when they died, what they were doing when they died, the age of the recently deceased, their general health and other nuances surrounding the death.

Sample Obstacles: Nature of death (internal process), Ob 2; Age of deceased Ob 3; General health/well-being of deceased, Ob 3; Cause of death (external condition) Ob 4; Time since death, Ob 4; Activity surrounding death, Ob 5; Place of death, Ob 6; Nature of attacker (if applicable); Ob 8. Successes at a higher obstacle grant all subordinate information.

Suggested FoRKs: Surgery, First Aid, Suicide-Wise, or other applicable wises.

Skill Kit Required

Repair

ROOT: Perception/Agility

This skill allows the character to tinker with and repair machinery.

Suggested FoRKs: Jury-Rigging, Mending, Fabrication

Skill Kit Required

Scavenging

ROOT: Perception

The only way to survive in the Wasteland is to become an accomplished scavenger. Nothing is produced in the wastes, thus needs must be met by unearthing treasures from the past.

A player using his character's Scavenger skill may state what he is looking for—it can be any type of item, but it cannot be a specific or unique thing. Common household goods are Ob 2, hard to find items are Ob 3, rare objects are Ob 5, and really obscure or out of place items are Ob 7. A successful roll indicates that the character has found a reasonable facsimile of what he set out looking for.

Suicidal Disease-wise

ROOT: Perception

This wise clues the character to the nature of suicide Under the Serpent Sun—killing yourself is the only escape, but to kill yourself fuels the Holocaust Seed. It also helps the character pinpoint others who are close to the edge or even prone to suicide.

Suicide-wise

ROOT: Perception

Using this skill a character can predict how a person will end it.

Swarm-wise

ROOT: Perception

This skill indicates the character has managed to track down classified literature, or perhaps talk to a survivor of the apocalypse. Details about the Swarm—the alien creatures who invaded earth and triggered the apocalypse—their features, their abilities and their needs are available to this character.

Sample Obstacles: Basic information (that there is a Swarm and it consists of alien creatures), Ob 1; Basic knowledge of the four types of creatures, Ob 2; Understanding the Swarm is driven by the Terminal Spirit Disease, Ob 3; Knowing that the Vultures feed off sleeping humans to assuage the Disease, Ob 4; Predicting patterns of behavior of Swarm creatures, Ob 5.

Attributes of Emotion and Disease

Two of the prominent and governing emotions under the serpent sun are Need and Despair. Need is instilled in the Meek, a product of living in the Illusion. Despair is born of realizing that the Need is manufactured and the Illusion is really a World of Lies.

Both of these abilities count as attributes for the purposes of Burning Wheel—they are opened via a trait, and advance via tests and conditions, like Grief.

Need

Need represents the balms and respite required to stomach the daily indignities and inequalities of life in the Illusion. Life may be simple and good, but it always rings a bit hollow. Generally, the older and more wise a Meek character grows, the greater his Need. Inevitably, however, the Need overwhelms all forms of appeasement and life loses its luster and taste altogether. After that, there is only one answer.

Need may only be used in social skill tests or physical tests in which the character is attempting acquire something he *needs*. This does not include tests of martial skills.

I Need It

If a player fails a test, he may take a die from his Need and roll it to try to generate another success. He may do this as many times as he likes until he rolls dice equal to his Need or meets the obstacle for the test. This may only be done in tests where there is an obstacle to overcome.

Judd is trying to convince Rich to let his character return to the Illusion to warn them of impending catastrophe. Rich rolls his Will of B5 to Avoid the topic, getting 5 successes. Testing his Oratory for his Point, he rolls a mere two successes—technically, his obstacle to make the Point is 6 (defensive maneuvers set the obstacle). Therefore Judd rolls one die from his Need,



gets a success, rolls another and fails, and so on, until he either runs out of Need or meets his obstacle. Note that once he reaches six successes, he must stop.

Euphoric Need

By spending a Persona point, a player may add his full Need dice to a roll—it's similar to spending a Deeds point.

Advancing Need

Each time Need dice are added to a skill test, the character earns a test toward advancing Need. The number of dice added to the skill counts as the obstacle for advancement. The Need exponent is then used to determine the actual difficulty of the test for advancement.

Need uses special rules for advancement. If any of the exponent requirements are filled, the player needs only one test in either of the other two categories in order to advance. Unlike skills or stats, Routine tests can always be used for advancement.

If Judd ends up adding 5 dice from his B7 Need, he'd earn a Routine (remember, they count here). Using Persona for Euphoric Need always counts as Difficult test for advancement—you're adding dice equal to your skill. Obstacle equal to skill is a difficult test.

A character with a B5 Need requires either 5 Routine tests, 3 Difficult or 1 Challenging to advance plus one test in either of the unfilled categories. This is important to remember, because it means no matter how high your Need exponent, adding 1D to any roll still counts as a Routine test toward advancement.

Also note that when adding Need dice to a skill test, always count the actual number of dice rolled for purposes of judging tests for the skill advancement.

Starting Need

Need starts at B1, add one for each of the following traits the character possesses: Crushing Boredom, Mind Numbing Work, Broken, Maimed, Abusive, and Raw-Nerved.

Repulsive Need adds two to the base exponent.

Increase Need by one for each of the following traits or beliefs described by the player: addictive, dependent, paranoid, obsessive, greedy, or escapist.

Transforming Need to Despair

During character burning, if the character earns the Despair trait, his current Need is transformed into Despair. See the Despair section for more on starting Despair.

During the game, a player may choose an appropriate moment to attempt to change his character's Need to Despair. The moment should be one of significance—the first journey to the wasteland, witnessing his first suicide, encountering the Swarm or Holocaust Seed, trying to drive a bomb into a Holocaust Seed bunker. To complete the transformation, the player needs only to make a *challenging* Need test—the test obstacle is *always* one higher than the character's Need. Success indicates a dark transformation has transpired

in the character's psyche. Failure indicates that the character has come to the edge of that black pit and retreated to the velvety arms of his Need. Note a challenging Need test for advancement.

Overwhelming Need

When a character's Need reaches exponent 10, he can no longer tolerate the emptiness and hollowness of life. Light no longer fills him, instead he is overcome with a yawning void. He hungers only for release from this hellish trap.

Typically, the Meek end their lives quietly with overdoses of their many medications. Regardless of how he does it, the character with an exp 10 Need is no longer in play.

Despair

There is no hope; there are precious few reasons to carry on, all of them fragile and tottering. The world is ending slowly, again and again, there is no escape but one.

To embrace this truth—suicide is the only answer—is to also see clearly. Suicide is *always* the answer, and with each weeping release, the Illusion only grows stronger. Through this Despair, gun in hand, the Suicidal manage to stay their hand a little while. If only to delay the gratification of the demonic masters of the world that much longer.

Despair may only be used to augment physical stats or skills in which the character is actually doing something. Not for social or academic skills.

Desperation

Like Need, a player may add his Despair dice, one by one, to a failed roll in order to meet the obstacle.

Turning Despair to Anger

A player may spend a Persona point to add his Despair exponent to a "physical" stat or skill test (including martial ones).

A Suicidal with a Despair of B5 and a .45 of B4 may allocate five dice to aid his skill in shooting down a Vulture.

Advancing Despair

Just like Need, each time Despair dice are added to a skill test the character earns a test toward advancement. The number of dice added to the skill counts as the obstacle in this case. The Despair exponent is then used to determine the actual difficulty of the test.

A player with a B5 Despair uses Desperation and adds 3D of his Despair to a skill test. His Despair earns a Routine test (Ob 3 vs exp 5).

Like Need, Despair uses special rules for advancement. If any of the exponent requirements are filled, the player needs only one test in either of the other two categories in order to advance. Unlike skills or stats, Routine tests can always be used for advancement.

A character with a B7 Despair requires 7 Routine tests, 4 Difficult or 2 Challenging plus a test in either of the unfilled categories to advance.

Starting Despair

Despair is born of the unfulfilled Need. Determine the character's Need prior to obtaining the Despair trait. Add one. This is the starting rating for Despair. Add an additional +1 Despair if the character has the Nausea and/or Hate Breeds Suffering traits.

Transforming Despair to Need: Giving In

At any time prior to gaining exponent 10 Despair a character may give in and retreat back to the velvety arms of the Need. "We won the fight. There are no Holocaust Seed. The Swarm was driven off and gone forever. I just want to go home now and live a quiet life."

At the player's discretion, the character may transform his Despair to Need, and may reduce his exponent by half (rounded down). But he may *never* go back to Despair. Even if the character remains in play (which is acceptable), he has completely embraced the Illusion of the World of Lies.

Overwhelming Despair: The Final Question

Once a character's Despair reaches exponent 10, he becomes overwhelmed by the reality of it all—there is no escape and no reason to go on. There is but one journey left to take.

At this point, the character should, by all rights, kill himself in a fit of utter hopelessness. However, the player may opt, if he so desires, to have him join the enemy. At the last moment, the player can have his character wail his question to the Heavens. It is only through the terrifying gate of the darkest Despair that the answer to the final question is given: The Answer is within. To realize this requires a successful Ob 10 Despair test. For the purposes of the test, the dice are open-ended. No artha may be spent. Failing that test, the character ends his life and propagates the Illusion he has so long fought against.

If he succeeds he gains two traits, Answered and Blind-Hatred. He is now Holocaust Seed.

Answered

After forging through the fires of Despair, some manage to form a single question from their final thoughts, "Why?" In the age of the Serpent Sun, this strength of will, this final resistance, floods the questioner with power—he is Answered.

Answered

The Answered trait allows the character access to questions. Without the Answered trait, a character may not learn or use questions.

Obtaining the Answered trait eradicates Despair. It is transformed into the Answer. Suicide is no longer an option.

Answered. Questions. Need and Despair

The Answered gain +1D to all questions when they are within the presence of a Needy character. If in the presence of multiple needy characters, he may gain bonus dice equal to half his Will. When in the presence of characters with Despair, Answered characters gain +2D to all questions. This bonus cannot exceed the Answered's Will. The total bonus from combined Need and Despair may not exceed the Answered's Will.



Answered and Suicide

When the Answered is in the presence of an act of suicide he is filled with terrible energy. *He absorbs all of the suicidal's Perception and Will dice into himself.* The dice may be used to speak questions and may be metered out as the player sees fit. The total dice absorbed cannot exceed the Answered's own Perception and Will dice total. These bonus dice are discarded after they are used.

Terminal Spirit Disease

This is the affliction, inherent to the Swarm, that drove them across the gulfs of space and time to Earth.

The Terminal Spirit Disease (TSD) is a fatal plague that attacks not the body, but the spirit. And it is a wasting disease. Without some abatement or medication, the diseased eventually hollow themselves out from the inside.

TSD is a rated attribute like Faith, Grief or Taint. The exponent increases by one across a cycle of days equal to the Will exponent. The cycle begins immediately after feeding. If TSD reaches exponent 10, the creature is overwhelmed and dies.

A Vulture with a Will of B3 would gain a point of Terminal Spirit Disease every three days.

Reducing Terminal Spirit Disease

TSD can be reduced in three ways: The Silencer is a special question that allows the diseased to feed. Second, a Vulture may voluntarily "feed" another diseased creature who possesses the Symbiote trait. Lastly, a Crimson Queen may forcibly drain the diseased around her via her Hunger question.

However, the primary method of feeding and the abatement of the Terminal Spirit Disease is via the Silencer. In order to reduce the disease exponent, a Vulture must drain mental points from another character equal to his current disease exponent. Each die drained that *exceeds* the TSD exponent, temporarily reduces it by one. TSD may be reduced to zero, but not below.

A vulture with a Terminal Spirit Disease of B5, feeding off a human with a Perception of B4 and Will of B3 (7 pts), must first drain the victim of 5D to reach his TSD threshold. Once 5D are drained, each additional die from this feeding reduces the disease exponent by one.

Successfully using the Silencer on a character with the Dreamer trait automatically reduces the TSD by one. This can only be done once per disease/Will cycle per victim.

Infection

If a victim is not killed by a feeding, he is considered infected with the Terminal Spirit Disease and opens the attribute at his Will root. It is in his best interest to track down a Haunted and learn the Silencer as quickly as possible, before the disease overtakes him.

Murder: Psychosis and Death Addiction

The Psychotic trait can be earned in play. Each time a character kills a Meek or another Survivor he must pass a Despair or Need test with obstacle equal to his own Will. If he passes, he's fine. If he fails he earns the Psychotic trait. Death-Addiction soon follows.

If a character who fails the test and gains the Psychotic trait possesses Need, he automatically gains Death-Addiction. If the character possesses Despair, and continues killing after he's earned the Psychotic trait, he must pass another Despair test against his Will when he kills again—+1 Ob for every murder after the first.

Note that these traits are only earned by killing Meek and Survivors, not Seed or Swarm.

Questions

Questions are manifestations of power, a focusing of will and alignment of the spirit with the cosmos at large. They are asked by those possessed of the Answered trait. (Though one question may be asked by those with Terminal Spirit Disease.)

All questions count and act as skills in game (tests, obstacles, and advancement). All tests against all questions are open-ended.

A character may only ask one question at a time. All questions require one volley to ask unless otherwise stated.

At the Gates ROOT: Perception/Will

Perhaps the most powerful question of all, At the Gates is the means by which the Swarm have come to our world. This question teaches the user how to locate the elusive gates that they used. These gates allow the speaker to transmit mind and body across space and time. See the Special Question mechanics section for more on this.

Control ROOT: Will

Using this powerful question, the Forcefeeder can manipulate the actions of another—like jaws locked around their spine. Control can force his victim to perform *simple* commands. The obstacle for Control is 10 minus Need exponent or equal to Despair exponent, which ever is appropriate.

Control can be exerted on any target within the Forcefeeder's presence. It requires one action to issue the Control command, on the next action the victim performs as commanded. Only one Control command maybe issued per volley.

Control cannot be used to force a character to immediately commit suicide, or harm himself in anyway, though it can be used to induce a character to harm his friend.

Deceiver ROOT: Perception/Will

This question allows the Deceiver to create illusions around himself. He can change his appearance, make himself disappear from sight, or even change the appearance of his surroundings.

To use this ability, the Deceiver simply asks this question (tests the skill), and describes the illusion he creates. The successes of the test create the Perception obstacle to penetrate the disguise.

In order to see through such illusions, a player must actively state that his character is searching for oddities or inconsistencies or just trying to see past the World of Lies. Unless actively doing so, the illusion is considered to appear flawless.

The Deceiver may only create Illusions *on or about* the persons of characters with the Answered trait. Also, he may only extend his illusions into his presence (Will in paces).

Degeneration ROOT: Perception

Using this terrible question, the Dead but Dreaming can ask, "What is it that they Need? Do they Need me? Can they live without me?"

The obstacle for Degeneration is 10 minus Need. The question can be performed on anyone the Dead but Dreaming can Sense. Its effect is to cause an immediate Need test (toward advancement) in the victim. The test for the victim is automatic, don't actually roll the Need. The Dead but Dreaming can choose the level of the test so long as he meets his obstacle.

Degeneration requires hours equal to the obstacle to perform. The Dead but Dreaming can narrate a new Need for the target character.

The Face of All Your Fears ROOT: Will

The Face of All Fears can manifest nearly any terrifying visage. This question simply asks, "What do they fear most?" And then allows the Face of All Fears to project that image into the victim's mind. The result is a Steel test, Face of All Fear's extra successes add to the hesitation obstacle.

The obstacle of this question is either the Despair exponent of the victim, the Will exponent, or 10 minus Need. The casting character must choose (without consulting any numbers) which ability he is attacking before he rolls the dice.

Heavenly Venomous Rapture ROOT: Will

Using this question, the Dead but Dreaming can induce rapturous euphoria in those within his Sense range. Obstacle is equal to the Need (or 10 minus Despair) of the Victim. It requires one volley of action to induce Venomous Rapture, and the Dead but Dreaming player must narrate the sensations of pleasure that overcome the victim.

The effects of the Rapture drain the desire for all aggressive behavior from the victim and increases his obstacles by +1 for each success in excess of the obstacle. In addition, Rapture also causes a Steel test. Failure indicates the character must Fall Prone.

The Heavenly Rapture lasts for volleys equal to 10 minus Need (or Volleys equal to Despair).

Experiencing the Rapture counts as a test toward the victim's Need: note a Difficult test if the Rapture meets its obstacle (the Need), Challenging test if exceeded.

Judas Window ROOT: Will

This fundamental question allows the Voice of Stars to defend herself against the depredations of the Holocaust Seed and even some elements of the Swarm. When being attacked by another question, the Voice of Stars may chant the Judas Window question to herself as a defense and ward. Her successes raise the obstacle of incoming questions like Silencer, Soul-Slaughter, Degeneration, Control, Face of All Fears, and Heavenly Venomous Rapture. It does not effect Deceiver or Tools of the Trade.

Alternately, the Voice of Stars may distribute successes from her Judas Window to protect those within her presence.

If she gets three successes on her question, she may protect herself and two other people with +1 Ob or herself with +1 Ob and another with +2 Ob.

The effects last as long as she concentrates on her question, but no longer than her Will in hours.

The Key ROOT: Perception/Will

The Key is an adjunct to the *At the Gates* question. It allows one to travel more safely through the gates, and to bring companions on the journeys. See the Special Question Mechanics: *The Key* for more on this.

Silencer ROOT: Perception/Will

Haunted and Vultures use this question to assuage their Terminal Spirit Disease. See the Silencer section for the mechanics of this terrible question.

Soul-Slaughter ROOT: Perception/Will

The Face of All Fears is taught the art of the Slaughter of the Soul. This question is a heinous form of torture, playing on the victim's Need or Despair. The obstacle is equal to 10 minus Need or equal to the Despair exponent.

Once the obstacle is met, the torturer can choose to inflict a wound on his subject. The wound has no physical manifestation, and penalty dice are only subtracted from the mental stats.

The IMS for the Slaughter: Slaughter exponent counts as Power; additional successes add to +1 Power to the Mark result (like a spell). The Face of All Fears can choose whether he wants to inflict an Incidental, Mark or Superb hit, but this must be decided before the dice are cast. A victim may die from these wounds (or recover from them) as per the standard Burning Wheel recovery rules.

Suffering from Soul-Slaughter counts as a test toward Need or Despair (which ever is appropriate). The difficulty of the test is equal to the exponent of the Slaughter question.

Soul Slaughter takes hours equal to the obstacle to perform.

Tools of the Trade ROOT: Agility

The role of the Face of All Fears is essentially that of an enforcer. When the Meek turn violent and threaten to upset the Illusion, or the Survival of the Fittest go astray and murder, the Face of All Fears collects his tools of the trade and seeks to dispatch the wayward elements.

Tools of the Trade allows the Face of All Fears to use any item as a weapon. Mundane, everyday items like books or clocks or picture frames are Power 1 weapons; impromptu weapons like broomsticks, kitchen knives and work tools are Power 2 weapons; sharp, dangerous or legitimate weapon items are Power 3 weapons in his hands. Also, his skill exponent always counts as his base Power for IMS, rather than his physical Power stat.

Also Tools of the Trade can be used as an appropriate skill for *any* deadly weapon—swords, firearms, etc. In this case, use the question exponent and shade in place of the required skill, the damage of the weapon is as per the standard rules. Remember that question tests are all open-ended!

The Truth ROOT: Will

Using The Truth, the Dead but Dreaming can help any other question in his presence. Also, via an Ob 5 Truth test he can extend the range or area of effect of an appropriate question by x100, plus 10 paces per extra success. (Must have an "area of effect," "Presence" counts as an area of effect.)

It is by means of this question that the illusion is maintained over vast areas.

Special Question Mechanics

Silencer

Silencer is the method by which the Swarm Vultures and Haunted men feed. It is called “Silencer” because its victims inevitably die quietly in their sleep.

The victim must be at rest, sleeping or stationary. Victims who are fed upon while awake experience a noticeable sensation of euphoria. The Vulture must be within his Will in paces of his victim to perform the Silencer. This distance may pass through walls and other solid objects. The Silencer himself slips into a dream-trance as he feeds on his victim.

Silencer Obstacles

The obstacle for the Silencer is equal to the victim’s Will.

Touch of Silence

The Vulture (or Haunted) gains +1D to his Silencer if he is touching the victim as the question is performed. Also the Need trait grants +1D.

Time for Silence

The Silencer requires hours equal to 10 minus the Silencer exponent to perform. Extra successes also can be used to reduce the time it takes to feed. 10% per extra success.

Terminal Spirit Disease Threshold

See Terminal Spirit Disease on page 18.

A Vulture sits on the roof of a tottering house. In the room below him (4 paces distant) sleeps a child (Will B3). The Vulture (TSD B1) rolls his Silencer question and gets four successes—one over his obstacle. The child loses one mental point and the Vulture has met his TSD threshold of 1.

Silencer Over Time

A character with Silencer may find it necessary to drain multiple victims simply to meet his Terminal Spirit Disease tolerance. Dice drained from multiple victims over time all count toward meeting the TSD threshold.

A Haunted character with a TSD of B5 may drain 1 die one night, 2 dice the next and 3 more the following night (6D total) and thus reduce his Terminal Spirit Disease by one to B4.

The Silencer may be performed over multiple sittings, as the Vulture or Haunted attempts to drain enough to meet his Terminal Spirit Disease exponent.

Reusing the same host to fulfill his hunger grants the Silencer +1D on further feedings.

Recovering from the Silencer

Lost mental points may be regained via the standard BW advancement rules.

Dying from the Silencer

A character whose Will or Perception is reduced to zero is rendered comatose. Use the rules for recovering from a Mortal Wound in order to regain 1D of Will and/or Perception. A character with the Dreamer trait may sit with the comatose character and use his Will to *help* in the Recovery test.

Characters whose Will or Perception drop *below* zero are drained of their spirit and die silently.

At the Gates

The question At the Gates allows the Answered or Diseased to locate mysterious gates and transmit themselves through them. Gates appear in our world as completely mundane objects or features that bear some unique flaw. For example, a window missing one of its panes or a lake whose ripples flow against the wind.

Once opened, a gate can transport a character to any location desired. If done properly, the process is instantaneous. If done incorrectly, it can take a lifetime to recover.

Detecting Gates

It is an Ob 5 At the Gates (AtG) test to detect the presence of an extant gate. Alternately, the *player* can attempt an Ob 8 AtG test to narrate the presence of a gate. In this case, the power of authorship of the environs is handed over to the player momentarily. The player may only test this ability once per situation.

Double obstacle penalty applies to detecting gates with Perception.

A gate may be opened via its Key, which grants a large degree of control over the transmittal stage, or it may be opened using the At the Gates question. See below for obstacles. See the following section for more on using keys.

Using At the Gates

Using the AtG question, the Answered or Diseased may pass through the gate (and only the one who found it may pass through.) A gate can take the character anywhere in an instant, but they are wild and sometimes unpredictable. The process of using them is incredibly risky and could possibly end a character's life!

Once the gate is found, the player may state his destination and test her AtG question using the following obstacles (transmission is instantaneous):

- | | |
|-------|--|
| Ob 20 | Heard vaguely of destination |
| Ob 18 | Heard of destination described in detail |
| Ob 16 | Saw destination in a vivid photograph or descriptive video |
| Ob 14 | Been to destination once a long time ago |
| Ob 12 | Has seen the destination in dreams |
| Ob 10 | Been to destination a few times |
| Ob 8 | Familiar with destination |
| Ob 6 | Intimately familiar with destination |

Successfully meeting the obstacle indicates the character and all his belongings are instantaneously transported to the desired destination. Once a gate is detected and used, it remains fixed on the chosen destination and will only transport the character to that location.

At the Gates Failure

Do not undertake the At the Gates question without understanding and agreeing to the inherent risks:

No Successes—The gate transports the character to the neverwhere, the home of the Swarm. The player must quickly find a gate in order to return the character home.

One Quarter Successes—The gate transports the character's physical body into the Dream. She exists only in other characters' Dreams. She does not age as she embodies the memories of herself in life. She may return to the waking world via a found gate and an AtG test. Best choose some place familiar!

Less than Half—The character's concentration faltered as she uttered the question and she arrives at another destination—in time. The player may choose a time and place from her past (from her lifepaths, prior to play) where she appears.

Half—The gate fails to transmit, the character remains where she was as she was.

More than Half—The character appears at a location of the GM's choosing.

Missed by One or Two—The character appears at her desired location a few hours after her departure. She is missing something from her person.

The Key

This queer question mixes clairvoyance and craftsmanship to better allow the Answered to navigate the gates.

Once a gate is found, its key must be determined and then physically manufactured. The key to any given gate is not what appears obvious—to fix the flaw in the design. The true key to a gate is the flaw that exists on the far side, the destination. To see this, one must study the gate minutely using this question.

Determining the Nature of the Key

The obstacle for determining the nature of a key is Ob 3 plus the obstacle for using the gate divided by 4 ($3 + (x)/4$ rounded up).

To determine the nature of the key for a gate that the Answered intends to use to travel to a destination he has seen in his dreams (ob 12), the obstacle is $4 (3 + (12)/4 = 6)$.

Success indicates that the GM reveals what key is necessary to control this gate. He may dictate special materials necessary, particular shape or other odd requirements for the creation of the key.

If the *player* wishes to state the nature of the key, the obstacle is 3 plus the gate obstacle divided by 3 ($3 + (x)/3$ rounded up).

To state the nature of the key for a gate that the Answered intends to use to travel to a destination he has seen in his dreams (ob 12), the obstacle is 6 ($3 + (12)/3 = 7$).

Success here indicates that the player can state the material nature of the key. The only stipulation is that it cannot be something currently in existence in the form necessary. Keys must be created individually for each gate.

Studying a gate requires days equal to the above obstacle.

Making the Key

The obstacle to create a key is equal to the obstacle of the destination desired via the gate minus the Key question exponent. Fabrication may be FoRKeD into this test.

A Keeper of Keys with a B5 Key question who is making a key for a gate to a destination seen in dreams would need to pass an Ob 7 Key test. (Ob 12 minus exponent 5).

Success indicates that the character has made a master key. Each key is made for a specific gate and can only be used to travel through that gate.

It is vital to remember that once created, the key is a physical thing that may be lost, stolen or broken. Treat them with great care, as they unlock one of the greatest secrets of life—travel without movement.

Creating Subordinate Keys

Once a master key is fabricated, the Keeper of Keys may then create “subordinate” keys from it. Each subordinate is built separately, and requires a successful Key test equal to half the obstacle (rounded up) of the original key creation. See below for using subordinate keys.

Key Time

It requires 1 day per obstacle point to create a key.

Using Keys

The first use of a key is for finding its gate. The character with a key always knows the location of its gate—the key tugs him gently in that direction.

Secondly, extra successes on the key-making test count as bonus dice for the At the Gates test when travelling through the gate.

The Keeper of Keys gets 9 successes total versus Ob 7—two over. This grants +2D whenever using this key to travel through its gate.

Using Subordinate Keys

Subordinate keys can only be used in the presence of and in conjunction with their master key. Possession of a subordinate key allows the bearer to travel through the gate along with the bearer of the master key. They arrive at their destination together.

The Swarm

Hellbent

Hellbent roam the wastelands fulfilling the commands of the Angel of Genocide, constantly in search of Vultures to feed them. Most are lost, enraged creatures — slowly dying of a burning hunger.

Wil B2, Per B2/4 | Agl B4, Spd B4, Pow G5, For G5

Health B5 | Reflexes B4 | Steel G6 | Spd Multi x4 | Mortal Wound G11

Su B5 | Li B14 | Mi G2 | Se G5 | Tr G8 | Mo G11

Terminal Spirit Disease: B6

Skills/Questions: Brawling B6, Throwing B3, Climbing B5, Stealthy B4, Intimidation B7

Traits: Terminal Spirit Disease, Symbiote, Massive Stature, Devastator, Brute, Numb, Iron Skin (5D per location, 6D body), Sweet-Fleshed, Chuntering, Blind, Void Dweller, Keen Hearing and Smell (+2D).

IMS: Iron Fists— I: B4, M: B7, S: B10, VA 1, Add 2, Fast. Long.

Vulture

Vultures comprise the body of the swarm, they are both its scouts and its supplier of sustenance. Without them, the Swarm would starve and die of its terrible disease.

Wil B2, Per G5 | Agl B5, Spd G5, Pow B1, For B4

Health B4 | Reflexes B6 | Steel B4 | Spd Multi x2/10 | Mortal Wound B9

Su B3 | Li B5 | Mi B6 | Se B7 | Tr B8 | Mo B9

Terminal Spirit Disease: B1

Skills/Questions: Silencer* B6; Stealthy G6, Climbing G2, Dreamer-wise B4, Swarm-wise B7, Angel of Genocide-wise B6

Traits: Terminal Spirit Disease, Symbiote, Vulture†, Diminutive Stature, Booming Squawk, Void Dweller

† Winged and vaguely shaped like a terrestrial vulture.

IMS: Beak (+2 Power) I: B2, M: B3, S: B4, VA 1, Add 1, Fast. Short

Angel of Genocide

The Angel of Genocide is a strange and potent being. Undoubtedly a leader of the Swarm, these queer creatures stand over 8' tall, are slender and humanoid, but possess wings in place of arms. They are masters of many questions, and some even posit that the Holocaust Seed learned their questions directly from the Angels of Genocide.

In conflict, the Angels prefer to command from the rear—issuing orders and supporting the Hellbent with their questions. However, their name comes from their ability to wreak terrible havoc with their oddly shaped arm-wings

in close quarters. These limbs become psychic weapons in combat, and do damage/IMS using the Angel of Genocide's Will as the Power. (Yes, that means Gray damage). See the Scourge question for details.

Wil G6, Per G4 | Agl G6, Spd G6, Pow B3, For B3

Health B5 | Reflexes G5 | Steel B9 | Spd Multi x12 | Mortal Wound B9

Su B3 | Li B5 | Mi B6 | Se B7 | Tr B8 | Mo B9

IMS: Scourging Wings I: G5, M: G9, S: G13, VA 2, Add 2, Fast. Longer. Devastator.

Terminal Spirit Disease: B3

Skills/Questions: Command G6, Conspicuous G8, Aura Reading G5, Astrology G5, Star Navigation G5, Stealthy G5; Burning Darkness* G5, Deceiver* G5, Flame of Eternity* G8, Control* G4, Scourge* G6, The Sense* G7

Traits: Terminal Spirit Disease, Symbiote, Massive Stature, Winged, Cold, Frail, Nimble, Slender, Armless, Immortal, Imperious, Void Dweller, Celestial Sight

Crimson Queen

The Crimson Queen is an elusive and bizarre creature that accompanies the Swarm on its endless journeys. She floats in air, exuding a red mist—ephemeral, remote and deadly.

Wil G4, Per G8 | Agl B2, Spd G4, Pow B2, For G8

Health G6 | Reflexes B6 | Steel G10 | Spd Multi x3.5 | Mortal Wound B12

Su B5 | Li B8 | Mi B9 | Se B10 | Tr B11 | Mo B12

Terminal Spirit Disease: B4

Skills/Questions: Soulrot* G8, Hunger* G6, Burning Darkness* G6, The Sense* G8, Fevered Circle* G7, At the Gates G10*

Traits: Terminal Spirit Disease, Symbiote, Gigantic, Serpentine, Ethereal, Remote, Crimson, Void Dweller, Dreamer, Celestial Sight

Swarm Traits

Brute DIE TRAIT

The Hellbent does not know when to stop. Will and Perception don't count for purposes of incapacitation.

Celestial Sight DIE TRAIT

Angels of Genocide do not see as men do, they look into a spectrum of auras invisible to the human eye. This trait allows them to see auras (and use the Aura Reading skill in if they have it). It also grants them the equivalent of the Observation skill at their Perception shade and exponent.

Using the Sense in conjunction with Celestial Sight and Aura Reading grants the Angel of Genocide strong empathic powers over a great range. Very hard to sneak up on creatures whose Perception tests extend for 50 paces on all sides and can also give read on the moods of those who approach.

Ethereal

This creature is not corporeal. Humans and human-made object cannot harm ethereal creatures (but Tools of the Trade and other questions can harm them). Ethereals float gently in the air. Blowing wind blurs their appearance, and they react with corporeal elements like fog or smoke.

Numb

DIE TRAIT

Hellbent are dead to pain and do not suffer the effects of Superficial Wounds. However, three Superficial Wounds still equals -1D.

Sweet-Fleshed

CHARACTER TRAIT

Contrary to all logic, the Hellbent creature's innards are sweet and edible.

Symbiote

DIE TRAIT

All members of the Swarm exist in a symbiotic relationship. This relates primarily to the Vultures who are the only members of the Swarm that can directly feed off of that which gives them respite from their disease—dreams. Vultures may give Silencer-gathered, TSD-reducing dream “dice” to other members of the Swarm. Each die fed to another member of the Swarm reduces that creature's TSD and subsequently raises the Vultures TSD exponent. Feeding requires physical contact.

Terminal Spirit Disease

DIE TRAIT

The Terminal Spirit Disease is the sickness that eats away at the souls of the Swarm and drives them to cross impossible distances in search of sustenance and salvation.

Void Dweller

DIE TRAIT

Creatures of the Swarm are capable of surviving in vacuum for short periods of time. Therefore, they are little effected by the heat, cold or air quality. It is acceptable to reduce all IMS due to burning by 3/4.

Winged

DIE / CHARACTER TRAIT

This creature bears wings and may fly via them. It requires 3 actions to take flight. While in flight the creature may fly or glide. Flying gives the creature x10 Speed multiplier.

Swarm! Questions

This section only describes questions specific to the Swarm. Questions available to the Holocaust Seed and Swarm are listed in the above Questions section.

Burning Darkness

ROOT: Perception/Will

This rather aptly named question is hideous to behold. By flexing his will, the Angel of Genocide can absorb ambient light into himself—dimming available light in a globe around him. Simultaneously, the creature retransmits the light energy in searing waves of heat. This question affects an area equal to Will in paces around the Angel. Base obstacle for this ability is 1, each additional success of the Burning Darkness reduces the light level. Light levels are described under Mage Light in the Character Burner (page 180).

In addition, those in the presence of the Angel of Genocide who do not have the Void Dweller trait or a Holocaust/Scar Suit, take damage as if they'd been burned. In practical terms, this means that the question does damage equal to 1/2 Will exponent (Black scale), +1 Power per extra success. Roll DOF for IMS (as a bomb). This counts as a Longest Weapon in Fight!

Fevered Circle ROOT: Perception/Will

The Crimson Queen serves one known beneficial function among the Swarm—she is their communicator. This question allows her to telepathically communicate with Terminal Spirit Diseased creatures within 1.5 kilometers (~1 mile). Obstacle to reach a Swarm member is 10 minus target creature's Will (Gray Will reduces this number by 2). Additional successes can increase range, if desired. Once she has established a link, the target creature may respond to the Queen until she closes the link. She may maintain links equal to her Will exponent.

Flame of Eternity ROOT: Perception/Will

Even the Swarm suffer harm in their endeavors and require care to recover. The Flame of Eternity allows the Angel of Genocide to treat Swarm wounded as if he had the Surgery skill. All obstacles as Surgery.

Hunger ROOT: Will

The Crimson Queen possesses a voracious appetite and her mere presence can exacerbate the Terminal Spirit Disease. Obstacle for this question is the target TSD exponent. Each success over obstacle increases the TSD of her victim by 1 and decreases her own TSD by the like amount. In addition, increase of TSD causes a Steel test in the victim—hesitation increased by extra successes. Hunger can also cause Steel tests for all non-Swarm in the Queen's presence. Obstacle is 10 minus Need or equal to Despair. Answered do not have to heed this question.

Scourge ROOT: Perception/Will

The Scourge is the question that turns the Angel of Genocide's wings into instruments of destruction. The wings count as weapons, but Will counts as weapon Power. Wings are a Fast, Add 2, Longer weapon. Also, this question counts as weapon skill for close combat. Scourge also grants the Destructor trait—all breaches against materials count double.

The Sense ROOT: Perception/Will

The Angel of Genocide can use this question to extend his "sense" of auras across a wide area. Base Ob is 2. This extends the sense 10 meters around the Angel. Each additional success increases the radius by 10 meters. Within the Sense, the Angel can attempt to detect other questions being spoken (10 minus Obstacle of question is the Sense Ob), the presence of Swarm (Ob 2), Grotesques (Ob 6) and Dreamers (Ob 5). (The obstacles listed are for Perception tests, not Sense tests.)

Soulrot ROOT: Will

The presence of the Queen is corrupting; she is the most infectious of all the Swarm. She does not even need to feed on a human to transmit the Terminal Spirit Disease. Merely being in her presence while she asks this question is enough to be infected. Obstacle is Perception + Will - Need. Or

simply Perception + Will for those without the Needy trait. Meeting the obstacle indicates the character has been infected with the Terminal Spirit Disease. See above section on TSD for more on that!

Steel Questions

Use these questions in place of those in the Character Burner. Steel starts at B3, answer the following questions/conditions to raise or lower that number:

- If the character has Need, subtract one from Steel or if the character has Despair, raise Steel by one.
- If the Despair attribute is exponent 5 or higher, raise Steel by one.
- If the character has the Kiss of Steel trait, raise Steel by one.
- If the character is Psychotic, raise Steel by one.
- If the character has the Answer, raise Steel by two.
- If the character has Terminal Spirit Disease, raise Steel by one.
- If the character is a woman and has given birth to a child, raise Steel by one.
- If the character has ever been wounded and has the Old Man, Psychotic, Grotesque Scavenger, Force Feeder or Face of All Fears lifepath, raise Steel by one.
- If the character has ever been wounded severely, answered “no” to the above question, and has a Will of 4, reduce Steel by one.
- If the character has a Will of 5 and has been tortured, raise Steel by one.
- If the character has a Will of 3 and has been tortured reduce Steel by one.
- If the character has fought the Swarm, raise Steel by one.
- If the character has murdered, raise Steel by one.
- If the character has witnessed a Suicide and does not have Need, raise Steel by one. If the character has Need, subtract one.
- If the character has never witnessed any violence whatsoever, subtract one from Steel. (The character has lived a sheltered life.)
- If the character has never engaged in competitive play or sport, subtract one from Steel.

Starting Steel can never be reduced below one. Players may purchase Gray shade Steel for their characters by expending 5 “points” from the questions answered above. This is, of course, subject to GM approval.

Resources of Serpent Sun

Pooling Resources

Resources in the Under a Serpent Sun setting are scarce to say the least. Bearing that in mind, players may pool their characters’ resources during character burning in order to purchase some of the big ticket items. They

may pool all of their resources or just a fraction. The drawback is that only one character actually gets ownership of the purchase. Still, pooling resources for a truck or bunker could be quite beneficial to all involved.

Resources	Rp Cost
Work Clothes and Shoes	2
Rags	1
Leather	3
Wasteland Gear	3
Knives	3
.45	4
AK	10
Shotgun	6
Meds	4
Tools	8
Truck	20
Auto	25
Life/Home	6
Holocaust Suit	30
Six Claws	20
Scar Suit	50
GBH Db	100
Bunker	50
Life support	10

Leather— Suicidals, Wanderers and Scavengers tend to prefer sturdy leather jackets to protect them from the elements in the Wasteland.

Wasteland Gear— A rucksack, canteen, matches, gloves, pocketknife, gun belt, goggles and a breathing mask are essential to surviving out there.

.45— The fabled Colt M1911A1. This resource is only available to characters who have taken the Suicidal lifepath. Ammunition comes with the pistol, take as much as you think you'll need.

AK and shotgun— These dangerous weapons can only be found in the wasteland. They are all too often needed to fight off attacks from Swarm creatures, or bands of psychotics. This purchase is only available to characters who were Scavengers, Old Men, or Psychotics. Ammunition (and magazines) is included in the purchase of the weapon.

Meds— There are two types of meds, pain-killers and amphetamines. A player may take up to 20 ampules of each per 4 rps spent.

Tools— This is what's needed to perform at work. This resource also represents resource cost for "Skill Kits" (aka, skills that require tools). If a Meek cannot afford tools, it is assumed he rents them from his job and pays out of his wages.

Truck— Some manage to save their pennies and purchase their own truck. Some steal it. Either way, maintaining it is expensive and time consuming. This resource can represent a pick-up style truck or a cube/delivery truck. The choice is up to the player when the purchase is made. The Truck counts as property when factoring Resources.

Auto— More expensive and more luxurious (and prestigious) than a truck, the auto is the symbol of success among the Meek. Many spend their whole lives saving for one, and spend their remaining days caring for it. The Auto counts as property when factoring Resources.

Life/Home— This resource represents having a place to live, friends and family that the Meek can rely on. Meek who do not have a “life,” live under the good graces of others, have no privacy or a space of their own and often have few friends. This resource is only available to characters whose last lifepath was in the Meek setting. Life/Home counts as property when factoring Resources.

Holocaust Suit— This specially designed suit allows the Holocaust Seed to walk among the Meek undetected. Woven into the suit is a Deceiver question (B6) that projects an image of however the Holocaust Seed desires to look. Test the suit when creating the image to determine the Observation obstacle to penetrate the disguise. The image includes clothes and body features. Each suit can only hold one image in its memory at a time. It requires about a day to reprogram the suit—the process is intuitive however, and can be performed by anyone.

Holocaust Suits also provide 3D of armor coverage per location and protects against radiation, biological and chemical agents.

Six Claws— The so-called Six Claws are a special device designed for the Face of All Fears. They can be used as a weapon whose Power is equal to the successes of a Tools of the Trade test. Or they can be used to aid in Soul-Slaughter—adding +1D to the question when performed. Six Claws are only available to characters who have taken the Face of All Fears lifepath.

Scar Suit— Like the Holocaust Suit, the Scar suit protects completely against the elements (nuclear, biological and chemical) and provides armor protection—in this case 6D of protection per location. The Scar Suit does not hide the wearer, though. In fact, it does just the opposite, adding +1D to all Intimidation, Interrogation and Conspicuous tests. The Scar Suit is only available to characters whose last lifepath was Face of All Fears.

GBH Db— Dead but Dreaming may purchase a hive for themselves. The Db purchase represents that the Dead but Dreaming maintains the Illusion over a population of Meek—generally a few thousand. The Db allows the Dead but Dreaming to use his Management skills to track the whereabouts, relations and Need of those in his charge. The GBH Db counts as property when factoring Resources.

Bunker— A well-defended, concealed and supplied safe house. Bunkers can be under the Meek cities, or scattered in the wasteland, it's up to the player at the time of purchase. Bunkers make fine places to house GBH Dbs, Life support systems or even Suicidal settlements. The Bunker counts as property when factoring Resources.

Life support— The Dead but Dreaming require artificial support as their bodies start to waste away under the strain of their duties. Under life support, a Dead but Dreaming can extend his life nearly indefinitely.

Firearms

.45

I: B4, M: B7, S: B10. VA 2. DOF: I: 1-2, M: 3-5, S: 6. Magazine: 7. Ammunition Type: .45 ACP. Range dice: 1D optimal, 1D extreme. Max Range is 30 meters.

AK

I: B5, M: B8, S: B12. VA 3. DOF: I: 1-2, M: 3-4, S: 5-6. Magazine: 30. Ammunition Type: 7.62mm. Range dice: 2D optimal, 3D extreme. Max



Range is 400 meters. Action: 1, 3 or 10 rounds discharged per action. 1 round shot is as listed and follows the standard missile weapon rules. 3 rounds is +1 Ob to hit, but roll two DOF and choose the best result. 10 rounds is +2 Ob to hit, but roll three DOF and choose the best result.

Remington 12 gauge

I: B4, M: B7, S: B12. VA 1. DOF: I: 1-2, M: 3-4, S: 5-6. Magazine: 7. Ammunition type: 12 gauge shell. Choked range dice: 1D optimal, 1D extreme. Effective Range: 70 meters. Action: 1 round discharged per action (if used in the Fight! mechanics, it costs 1 action to chamber the next round.)

Special Rules: Opening choke: +1D to Firearms skill to hit. Opening the choke also reduces Superb result to B10. Unchoked range dice: 2D optimal, 2D extreme. Effective Range: 40 meters. Setting choke (open or standard) takes one action.

Meds

Painkillers

Painkillers reduce +1 Ob of pain penalty per *effective dose*. An effective dose is ampules equal to half of the character's Need (round up) or equal to their Despair, whichever is appropriate.

Three "effective doses" will also temporarily suppress -1D of wound penalty. Each effective dose temporarily reduces Will by 1D. For every two effective doses add +1 Ob to Perception tests. If Will drops to zero, the character falls unconscious. If the number of *ampules* taken exceeds 4x the character's Health exponent, the character suffers respiratory depression and takes a Mortal Wound.

The effects of painkillers last about four hours.

A character with a Will of B5, Despair of B5 and a Health of B6 is wounded—+1 Ob, -2D. He requires 5 ampules of painkiller per +1 Ob reduced. He slugs 5 ampules to nullify his +1 Ob penalty. Then he swallows another 15 ampules of painkillers to reduce his wound penalties from -2D to -1D.

He has consumed four effective doses of painkillers—his Will is temporarily reduced by four to B1. He also suffers +2 Ob to all his Perception tests. Time for some amphetamines!

Amphetamines

Amphetamines increase Perception and Reflexes by +1D per effective dose. Three effective doses add +1D to Speed. An effective dose is a number of ampules equal to half the character's Need or equal to his Despair exponent, which ever is appropriate.

Stats may only be increased by half, rounded down.

Consuming more *ampules* than 3x the character's Health exponent causes a coronary infarction. The character suffers a Severe Wound.

The effects of amphetamines last about an hour. After the effects have worn off, the character suffers an overall +1 Ob to everything

for hours equal to 10 minus Health—unless the character downs more amphetamines.

Meds and Need and Despair tests

The number of effective doses consumed in one sitting counts as the obstacle for a test against Need and Despair.

Meds, Terminal Spirit Disease and Answered

Count TSD as Despair for purposes of meds for Haunted or other infected characters. Meds have no effect on characters with the Answered trait.

Appendix: Ammo Check

In the spirit of not counting paces, how about a mechanic for not counting bullets? This is for use with firearms with magazines in Range and Cover.

Using the Ammo Check mechanic, a player fires off and logs *magazines* worth of ammunition rather than individual bullets. After an exchange of Range and Cover conflict, each player who participated makes a Firearms (or .45) skill check for his character. This represents the character ducking behind cover for a moment and popping his magazine to check his rounds. The better skilled he is, the more likely he'll be able to conserve ammunition and really make his magazine last.

Test the skill at the end of each exchange at Ob 0 (yes, zero) and apply the following obstacle penalties:

- +1 Ob for each volley in which the weapon's positioning dice were used
- +2 Ob for each Steel-based maneuver performed
- +3 Ob for a full-auto burst (the 10 rounder described under the AK)

The above modifiers are for total volleys for the Range and Cover conflict. They can stretch across multiple exchanges.

Add bonus dice to the test based on the following conditions:

- +1D if your magazine is larger than your opponent's
- +1D if your weapon has a longer range than your opponent's
- +2D if your magazine is twice as large as your opponent's

If you fail the test, you've burned a magazine of ammunition and mark it off your gear list. If you pass, you're fine for another exchange.

Out of Ammo and Reloading

Fail the Ammo Check test, and you may not shoot on your next volley. You automatically reload during that volley.

If you managed to win the positioning test while you're out of ammo, you can still maneuver buy cover and prevent your opponent from shooting at you!

Also, very important, if you begin a volley with an empty magazine, *you can't use that weapon for positioning dice in that volley.*

You're Out, Buddy!

After a particularly intense burst of fire in one *volley*—in which *both* players discharged their weapon—either player may spend a Fate point to call for an ammo check right then and there. *Both* players test their skill against their current Ammo Check obstacle. If either fails he is subject to the Out of Ammo rules above.

Scenarios Under a Serpent Sun

What follows are some very general set-ups for play in this world. In the scenarios where players take on the roles of Meek or Suicidals we seek to play out the “act of rebellion” against the Seed and the Swarm—the act of survival in the face of overwhelming despair. In the scenarios where players take on the roles of Holocaust Seed, we seek to subvert that act of rebellion and transform it to Need so that the Meek (and Suicidal Survivors) can be controlled.

It sounds hopeless, and rather too bleak to play, but there is some grist to grind and some good play to be had:

Suicide Nation

Players take on the roll of Meek—3 LP characters from the Meek setting are recommended—who join together to flee the illusion. At least one of the Meek should take the Victim lifepath—he was chosen by the Holocaust Seed to commit suicide. In this case though, the player takes over before the final act and begins play with the decision to uproot his life, and flee the Illusion rather than give in to the black desire.

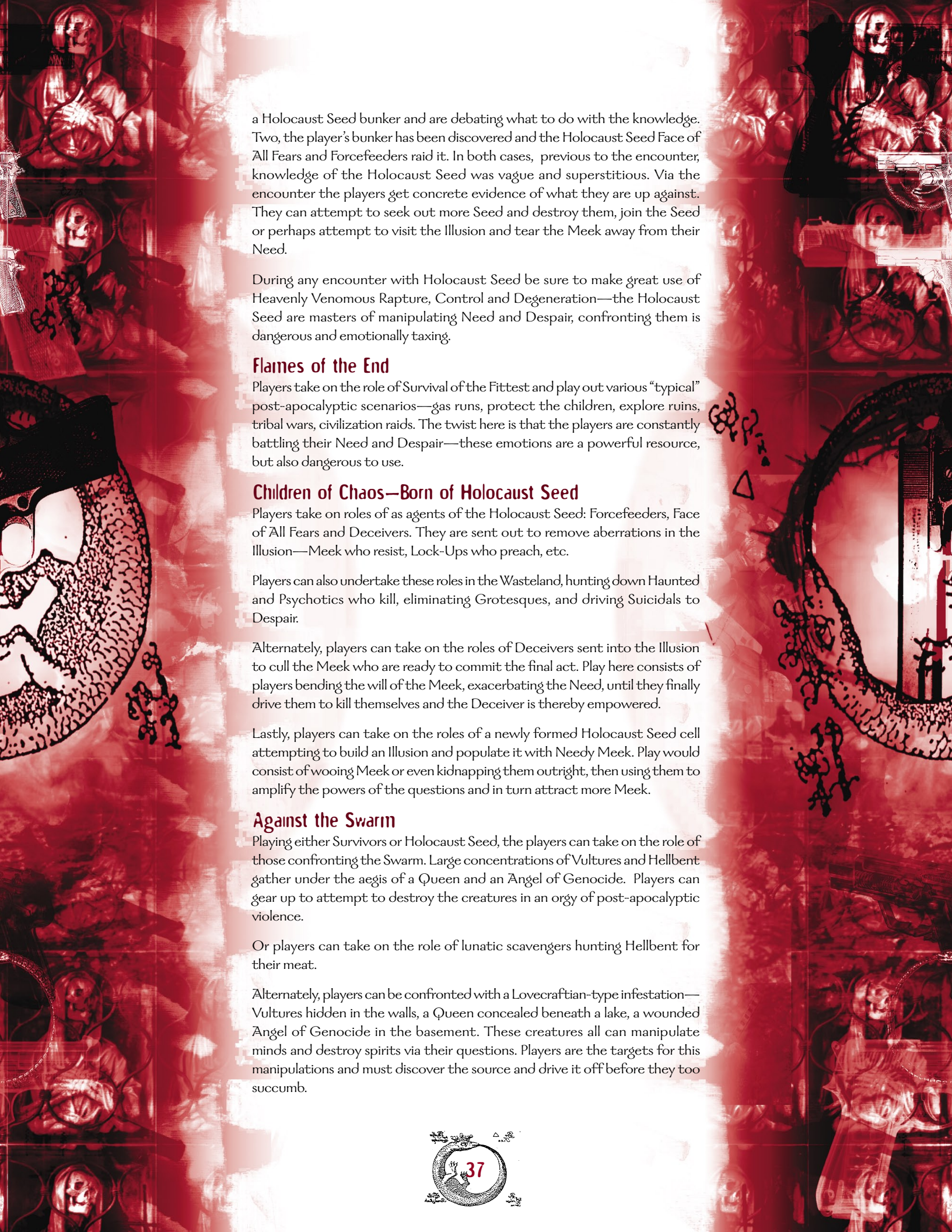
As the characters flee into the wasteland, they are confronted with reality as it is—their home is but a tiny island in a sea of roiling mayhem—there is no escape, and no turning back. They are forced to deal with their Need here in the wasteland—none of their crutches exist there and they must transform themselves. Some will commit suicide, some will go psychotic, some will simply translate their Need and exist in the wasteland as they did in the Illusion, and some will realize their Despair.

The Final Curtain Torn

Players begin the game as Meek characters—3 to 4 LPs. A suggested opening for play is the characters witnessing a Swarm raid into their beautiful city (a couple of Hellbent start wreaking havoc, possibly led by an Angel of Genocide). Via the destruction, the players see cracks in the illusion. Deceivers and Face of all Fears come shortly thereafter—under the guise of government officials (via the Deceiver question). They begin asking painful questions. This provides an alternate possibility for motivation for escape from the Illusion.

There Will be Another Dawn—We Will Reap as We Have Sown

Starting in the wasteland, players take on the roles of various members of the Survival of the Fittest. At least one or two member of the group should be Suicidals. There are two ways to play this: One, the players have discovered



a Holocaust Seed bunker and are debating what to do with the knowledge. Two, the player's bunker has been discovered and the Holocaust Seed Face of All Fears and Forcefeeders raid it. In both cases, previous to the encounter, knowledge of the Holocaust Seed was vague and superstitious. Via the encounter the players get concrete evidence of what they are up against. They can attempt to seek out more Seed and destroy them, join the Seed or perhaps attempt to visit the Illusion and tear the Meek away from their Need.

During any encounter with Holocaust Seed be sure to make great use of Heavenly Venomous Rapture, Control and Degeneration—the Holocaust Seed are masters of manipulating Need and Despair, confronting them is dangerous and emotionally taxing.

Flames of the End

Players take on the role of Survival of the Fittest and play out various “typical” post-apocalyptic scenarios—gas runs, protect the children, explore ruins, tribal wars, civilization raids. The twist here is that the players are constantly battling their Need and Despair—these emotions are a powerful resource, but also dangerous to use.

Children of Chaos—Born of Holocaust Seed

Players take on roles of as agents of the Holocaust Seed: Forcefeeders, Face of All Fears and Deceivers. They are sent out to remove aberrations in the Illusion—Meek who resist, Lock-Ups who preach, etc.

Players can also undertake these roles in the Wasteland, hunting down Haunted and Psychotics who kill, eliminating Grotesques, and driving Suicidals to Despair.

Alternately, players can take on the roles of Deceivers sent into the Illusion to cull the Meek who are ready to commit the final act. Play here consists of players bending the will of the Meek, exacerbating the Need, until they finally drive them to kill themselves and the Deceiver is thereby empowered.

Lastly, players can take on the roles of a newly formed Holocaust Seed cell attempting to build an Illusion and populate it with Needy Meek. Play would consist of wooing Meek or even kidnapping them outright, then using them to amplify the powers of the questions and in turn attract more Meek.

Against the Swarm

Playing either Survivors or Holocaust Seed, the players can take on the role of those confronting the Swarm. Large concentrations of Vultures and Hellbent gather under the aegis of a Queen and an Angel of Genocide. Players can gear up to attempt to destroy the creatures in an orgy of post-apocalyptic violence.

Or players can take on the role of lunatic scavengers hunting Hellbent for their meat.

Alternately, players can be confronted with a Lovecraftian-type infestation—Vultures hidden in the walls, a Queen concealed beneath a lake, a wounded Angel of Genocide in the basement. These creatures all can manipulate minds and destroy spirits via their questions. Players are the targets for this manipulations and must discover the source and drive it off before they too succumb.

Lay Your Fears to Rest

This is a variation on Angel of Genocide in your-basement scenario. The players discover the wounded Angel (Severe Wound) with the body of a destroyed Face of All Fears. The Angel of Genocide is wounded and dying of the Terminal Spirit Disease (B8 TSD). Will they aid him in taking revenge on the Holocaust Seed and perhaps use him to their advantage? Or will they turn him over to the Seed and attempt to earn good graces.

Release Me

Players begin the game in possession of a Key. The strange artifact gently tugs at the bearer to be brought to its gate. The players do not know that this key will lead them to Neverwhere—the home of the Swarm. In fact, it is the *only* key for that gate. They also don't know that every Holocaust Seed and Angel of Genocide within one hundred miles is looking for what they have. The players can attempt to take sides, or to play the two groups off of each other. This scenario will play quickly and bloodily.

For We are Enslaved

Players take on the roles of Suicidals, Lock-Ups, Scavengers and Old Men who decide to reenter the Illusion in an attempt to “rescue” friends and family. Unfortunately, the subjects of the rescue will not willingly cooperate with those “insane bastards”. Deceivers and Face of All Fears are dispatched to remove the aberrants. Can the players convince their loved ones in time? Or will they be captured and broken?

Final Psychotic Eclipse—Painted in the Colors of War

Of course, the ultimate campaign for Under a Serpent Sun is to start with Meek defeating their Need and fleeing into the wastes. There they encounter Holocaust Seed and Swarm. Realizing that the Seed are demonic tyrants, they take up the fight against them and destroy them. This in turn, shatters the illusion in which their friends and family still exist. The players return to rally their former community and take up the fight against the Swarm themselves—in vain hope that they can drive them off and rebuild their home in a more humane and compassionate scheme than that of the terrible and greedy Seed.

Or you could just pull the trigger...

Designers' Notes

Homage: Credit Due

We want—no, need—to give credit where credit is due. This piece is a homage to the passionate and emotional music of the death metal band At the Gates. 99% of the quotes, lifepaths, spells/questions, skills and traits are taken straight from Tomas Lindberg's lyrics on the *Red in the Sky is Ours*, *Gardens of Grief*, *Terminal Spirit Disease* and *Slaughter of the Soul* albums. We want it known that we are evoking *his* brilliance here—we are merely his humble admirers.

The concept of suicide as a morose act of rebellion is Tomas'. (This idea fascinated me (Luke) the most out of all his writings, and I chose to focus on it.)

Of course Tomas' lyrics are brilliant, but we would like to note that they wouldn't be much more than bad poetry without the passionate and evocative music of the musicians of At the Gates—in particular Jonas and Ander Björler.

Though At the Gates no longer exists as a band, we still highly recommend picking up their music. 1995's *Slaughter of the Soul* on Earache Records is an all-time favorite of mine. Since then, Tomas and the Björlers have gone on to other projects, namely Tomas' Motorhead-reborn Disfear, and the Björler's The Haunted (who doth rock).

An homage it may be, but the structure of the world presented in these pages is ours. Dro and I cobbled it together from inferences, obscure references and hints—trying to build something coherent, playable and cool. In order to do this we pulled lyrics freely from the At the Gates songs, creating a pastiche of Tomas' ideas, and building something entirely new.

I sincerely hope you enjoy it.

Dro's Notes

I think that it was Luke who first mentioned a music-inspired setting for BW, but that's really not important now. When I offered At the Gates as our starting point for setting design, Luke was a little skeptical. It was Oshii's sepia-colored *Avalon* that helped us visualize Under a Serpent Sun, and finally convinced Luke to do it. After that it was just one night of brain-storming, during which we designed all lifepaths, traits, some spells (which are now known as questions) and finally came up with mechanic for Need/Despair. After two weeks and two drafts we got almost everything in place.

Here we are two weeks from that crazy night when we started to pile up ideas, checking lyrics and listen to albums that we knew so well in search of inspiration. I cannot myself recall if something like this has been done in the past (and I do not think that anyone was insane enough to try it). So here it is—a complete post-apocalyptic setting inspired by a metal band for an rpg.

I'm very pleased with the way it turned out, and I hope that this "experiment" convinces you that BW is quite a versatile tool—you can definitely do more than just fantasy with it.

Play on!

Credit Due (Official)

Ok, Luke took care of credit and it's due. So I'd just like to say (once again) thanx to At the Gates and Tomas Lindberg for setting up new standards in music. And thanx to all the bands that were created and powered by AtG members after their split (The Haunted, Lock Up, Cradle of Filth, The Crown, and Disfear). Once again thanx for a great music, commitment to the scene, and not forgetting about your fans.

Credit Due pt. II (Personal)

This is my first time working on an rpg thing, so it's quite important for me to mention a couple of souls—because without them I would never have made it up to here.

First, thanx to Luke (damn, it's very hard to find an individual who shares the same passion for music and games that you do) for putting up Burning Wheel and allowing me to be part of it. Next thanx goes to the Game HQ and NERDNYC crews, without you guys my existence would be very dull and monochromatic.

Next, it's time to say thank you to all people involved in the project known as the "Forge" (www.indie-rpgs.com), whose ideas inspired us and opened our eyes for a whole new world of possibilities. I would especially thank all those who helped us out during the GenCon Indy 2003. Luke already gave out names, but I'd like to add Vincent Baker and Jürgen Meier to the list.

Last but not least, I have to mention couple of my friends: Adam 'AWO' Obszynski, Rafał 'Hliq' Zielinski, Maciek 'Coval' Kowalski, Radek 'Dhaerow' Miodek, Wojtek 'Gajos' Puzyrewski, Lukasz 'Lysy' Grams and the rest of the Koszalin RPG Crew—without you my life wouldn't be so cool, and I would not be here right now thanking you all for your never ending support.

The Nature of the World and Wastes

I would like to say that we are not forcing people into thinking that the wasteland, is sunburned, dead and dry desert with burned down cities and gangs of scavengers roaming countryside. (The word wasteland evokes those kind of images.) The nature of the wasteland solely should depend on individual GM/group preferences: Forest, cities, villages, grass can all be used in addition to the more popular conception of post-apocalyptic wastes. But no one is saying that if you get out of the illusion you must stumble into a god-forbidden, scorched land.

Luke's Notes

This all started as something of a dare. Dro and I were sitting around over the holidays doing absolutely nothing except waxing fond about metal, as we often do. Dro made some "wouldn't it be cool" remark regarding a setting based on the At the Gates material. "Could it be done?" he asked. I ignored his fevered brain and went on waxing fond.



Later, we saw Oshii's *Avalon* and returned to the subject of post-apocalyptic. Dro once again said, "Wouldn't it be cool? Do you think it could be done?" Tired of sitting around, tired of the holidays and quite done homaging Tolkien, I said, "You want to do it? Let's do it. Right now." Three weeks later, this is what we have as a result.

Who knew? I didn't. Thanks, Dro!

Credit Due Part Two

Two of my abiding passions are heavy metal and roleplaying games. Obviously the former inspires the latter. But the latter isn't without its debts, either. I would like to acknowledge the influence of everyone at www.indie-rpgs.com on this work. In particular the work of Ron Edwards (*Sorcerer*), Paul Czege (*My Life with Master*), Jake Norwood (*The Riddle of Steel*), Jason Roberts and Michael S. Miller (*FVLMINATA*)—all of which I find amazing and inspiring. Also, I can't forget my brief conversations with Ralph Mazza, Mike Holmes, Matt Wilson, Wilhelm (Rafial) and Alexander Cherry. Your keen minds and willingness to share have left me simultaneously humbled and enervated.

Thank you all.

Suicide is the Answer

I am not going to include a somber PSA about suicide here. I will note that this is a game and merely a realm of possibility—ultimately fiction and meant to push boundaries—not reality or even a suggestion of one. We all make our own choices, personally I hope we all choose to fight Despair and push back against the Holocaust Seed.

That said, this chapter—much like the Great Spiders—has been something of an expiation for me. Having confronted suicidal thoughts in the past—and constantly subject to an ugly despair—it felt good to put it all on paper, describe it and poke at its warts and bruises. The dark creatures of our psyche are never as scary in the light of exposition as they are in our minds.

Artha in Under a Serpent Sun

In order to facilitate the premise of play in this setting, Need and Despair must constantly be on the line—players must constantly be tempted to use those dice and edge their characters toward self-destruction.

Use only Fate and Persona points. No Deeds are rewarded or spent. (Yes, that means no epiphanies, but I don't think that is a terrible sacrifice in this setting since long-term play is unlikely.)

The Ugly Truth (Spoiler ?)

I think differently about the setting than Dro does in this one regard: There is *nothing* left. The Meek exist in a glistening world of *illusions*, living out lies. What they see, what they own, where they live is nothing but charred, ruined wreckage. The Holocaust Seed walk among them unseen, studying them and preparing them to serve their hunger for suicide.

There, I've said it. I couldn't bring myself to admit such a hopeless truth in the body of the rules. But I felt I had to tell somebody!

