

Blood and Glass

Index

Red Sky in the Morning	2
A world neither Brave nor New	7
Bethlehem	12
The Firefi	38
Firefi Campaigns	45
Firefi Powers	47
The Unbowed	55
Firefi Equipment	56
Firefi Personalities	57
Creatures of the Xieye	59
Powers of the Xieye	70
Creatures of the Xinshen	83
Powers of the Xinshen	94
BPN Suggestions	107
Red Sky at Night	112

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This isn't an Official SLA release, it's the work of two men who believe in SLA, nothing more.

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Thanks to Dominic Mcdowell for giving me the chance to make this in the first place, I'll never forget that, made all the difference to me and a lot of people.

Thanks to Team8 for keeping the dream alive all those years.

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This is for you all...

This is John Dodd, Last Survivor of Team8, Signing Off

Red Sky in the Morning

“We should have Farjackets for this sort of shit...” Riddle sighed as she put her rifle on her back mag plate, “Whose bright idea was it to take an early morning Blue in Downtown 2?”

“Quit griping...” Cherra shoved Riddle’s shoulder playfully.

“I like griping...” Riddle opened her faceplate long enough to stick her tongue out.

“Don’t we know it...” Tanya picked her way through the broken glass of the station front, the sign above still half illuminated.

Evenside Station...

The bulbs on the second E Flickered, turning the E into an I every few seconds.

Evilside...

“Not been here before...” Stitch flowed over the ruins without noise, the two legs it normally walked on downtown now replaced with eight arachnid limbs ending in hands. “Better condition than other areas, less breakages.”

“Evenside was one of the central terminus’s for the downtown expansion program,” Riddle looked upwards, “They built things to last in that program.”

“Yeah, but a decade without maintenance will still wreck most things...” Tanya’s hand strayed to the hilt of her claymore and she pointed at the burnt circle on the ground, “Someone’s been here recently, this is still warm.”

“Alright,” Cherra raised her arm, the Pathfinder pulsing as she turned it over, “Movement...”

“How many...?” Tark looked the entrance up and down, stroking at his tusks with his right hand as he often did when he was troubled.

“Can’t lock it up, too much distortion,” Cherra moved forwards, her deathsuit hardening to armour as she pointed into the ticket area, “Definitely something in there though...”

“Sshhh,” Tanya drew her claymore and moved into the station, opening her camera frequency to the squad. “There...”

The image flickered into life to show a group of civilians clustered around the faint glow of a fire at the base of what were the escalators, each of them knelt on the floor with their arms upraised, the faintest sound of voices, a rhythmic beat chanting from inside.

“Can’t get a line on them from here,” Riddle drew her vibro sabre. “We should go in now...”

“Yes...” Tark stood straight and flexed, his tusks flaring outwards as he reached down to his belt and put his mutilator gloves on, “Not many of them, we crush...”

“Can’t believe we haven’t encountered any of them yet,” Cherra looked around, the rain all but stopped by the remains of the roof above. “Exactly where Station Analysis said they would be.”

“Easy pay for once...” Stitch’s shoulders rippled as it tried to approximate a shrug.

“Yeah...” Cherra shook her head, “There’s something they’re not telling us here, something feels wrong...”

“Like what...?” Tanya looked over, Cherra was biting her lip, “Come on, it’s a small cult gathering and it’s a blue, they’re not paying us enough to think about it, what’s the problem?”

“It feels...wrong...” Cherra drew her flintlock, “Like the ebb is polluted in there...”

“Think too much...” Tark laid his hand on Cherra’s shoulder, drawing her back as he looked down at Tanya, “I go first...?”

“Only if you’re not going to bring the building down around us like last time...” Tanya grinned.

“Was not my fault,” Tark shrugged, “This built strong, no fear.”

“Are you going to fit down there?” Tanya looked up as Tark loomed closer.

“Have idea,” Tark mounted the end of the escalator.

“You’re not...” Tanya’s protest stopped as Tark put his other foot up and slid down into the lower levels, the hardened plastic of his armour screeching against the top of the escalator. “VATHEAD’S CRASHED THE PARTY, EVERYONE IN...”

The screaming was over before Tanya had reached the bottom of the escalator, Tark stood in the middle of the broken bodies, pulling a knife from his arm, the wound closing over the second the knife was clear.

“You do know that pulling their jaws off doesn’t stop them screaming, right?” Cherra looked at the bodies.

“Was not Tark, “Tark looked at her, then pointed at the corpse without a head, “This one I hit, rest had no jaws to start.”

“He’s right,” Riddle knelt next to one of the bodies, looking at the ragged flesh where the cultists lower jaw had been, “This was cut off with a rusty knife some time ago, makes sense why it was all murmuring and no words.”

“Alright, “Cherra nodded and tapped her coms, “Shock and Ore to Analysis station 323, BPN 1/8L00T1/907 complete, uploading images.”

Tark deactivated his gloves and placed them back on his belt, turning towards the back of the ticket hall. “Hear others...”

“No survivors,” Cherra nodded, looking around the bodies there, “Possible further contact beyond original mission parameters.”

A light breeze blew in from the lower levels, the scent of old blood above the rust and steel below.

“SA wants us to extend,” Cherra looked around the squad, “Upgrade to White, 200c a piece to bring back footage of whatever’s going on down there.”

“Easy Money,” Tark nodded.

“Lot of money...” Riddle frowned, “What do they know that we don’t...?”

“They know operatives are hungry,” Tanya smiled and shook her head, “I’m in.”

“In, “Stitch nodded, the movement just its head moving in and out of its shoulders.

“In,” Tark nodded.

“Outvoted...” Riddle sighed, “You need me anyway, none of you can sneak for shit...”

“We’ll take it,” Cherra tapped her comms again, “Alright, keep the camera’s on, let’s go, Stitch, you’ve got the lead...”

Stitch scuttled forwards, eight limbs making no noise as it picked its way delicately down into the second escalator, a second hand formed from its back and it motioned for the squad to stop as it came to the bottom.

“Hold here,” Stitch whispered, “Riddle to front, overwatch...”

Cherra stood to one side as Riddle set her rifle and aimed downwards.

“What do you see...?” Cherra glanced at Riddle.

“Nothing,” Riddle shook her head, “Sea of red, there must be a generator in there...”

“Hostiles,” Stitch whispered, “More than ten, one of them talking without a mouth.”

“Visual...?” Cherra asked.

“Camera back in tank,” Stitch sounded almost apologetic, “Clothing is a difficult concept.”

“We’ll come down...” Cherra whispered.

“Space too small, Tark will not fit,” Stitch whispered, “Not by accident there are here.”

“Can’t fight them down here...” Cherra nodded and pointed back to the atrium, “we set up topside, draw them to us and fight them there. Stitch, can you get them to follow you?”

“Not a problem,” Stitch whispered, “Brought grenades.”

“Don’t bring the place down on us,” Cherra grinned, “We’ll give you the signal when we’re set.”

They moved back up into the atrium, Riddle and Cherra at the back of the ticket hall, Tark and Tanya on either side of the main escalator.

“We’re good...” Cherra tapped her comms, “Bring them to us.”

A half second later and a muffled boom as the grenades went off, a rushing of many feet as Stitch scuttled back towards them, diving clear of the escalator and changing in mid-air to come to a half pointing backwards. Six humans dressed in ragged clothing charged out after it, Tark and Tanya stepping in to cut three down before they cleared the door. The other three drew curved blades and turned to attack as Tark tossed aside the pulped bodies in his hands, Tanya pulling her claymore from the split torso of the third. A spit from the back of the atrium and the fourth fell as Riddle put a round through their head, Stitch rolled forwards, four knives cutting like a buzzsaw as it split the fifth through the spine, the body flopping to the floor. The last turned towards Cherra as her flintlock sparked and the cultist was blown back against the wall.

“Thought you said there were more...” Riddle did a count of the bodies on the floor.

“There are...” A woman’s voice resonated out of the depths, “We are Legion...”

“Not for long...” Riddle called, “Come out with your hands up or you’ll end up like these.”

“Oh I’m coming out...” The woman spoke again, “Yield and you may join us...”

“Stupid...” Tark tapped his fists together as he stepped sideways to leave the entrance clear.

Four cultists came through the entrance, their clothing filthy, matted with blood and dirt, each of them bearing multiple ragged scars where knives had been used to cut markings into them. They formed up, each blocking line of sight to the fifth.

“You can join us...” The woman’s voice again, “The Xieye lords welcomes all offerings...”

“Has no mouth...” Tark looked over the top of the cultists at the figure in the middle.

“Won’t have to worry about feeding it then...” Cherra nodded, flintlock aimed in the middle of the group, she looked towards the door, “Let’s go...”

“I give you one last chance to join us...” The woman’s voice again, the other cultists separating in front of her, letting the squad get a good look at her. Her mouth missing from the jaw downwards, the open wound still dripping as the blood formed an approximation of the jawbone that would have been there, “I am Janha Hark, Bishop of the third district.”

“I’ve heard enough,” Riddle snapped, “Move, now...”

Hark reached over and placed her hand on the cultist closest to Tanya, turning to face Tark. The Chagrin reached up and stroked its tusk shaking its head.

“Tark...?” Stitch looked over, its weapon still pointing towards the cultists.

“Buzz...” Tark tapped its head, “In here...”

“Too late...” Hark looked up and red tears fell from her eyes as she reached out with one hand and pointed at Riddle.

Riddle’s rifle dropped to the floor as she grunted, her hands going to her chest, the scream cut off as something unseen struck her again, a cracking sound as her chest plate seals cracked and she looked down at her body as her faceplate opened. Her mouth contorted in agony as her hands scrabbled at the plate. Her armour burst open and a hand formed of blood emerged from her shattered chest holding her heart in it, she stared in disbelief as the hand closed and she pitched forward to lie still.

Silence descended as the squad looked at the Riddle’s body, the red pool spreading out beneath her.

“DROP THEM...” Cherra screamed as she turned back to the cultists, raising her flintlock. Tanya whirled forwards, her claymore sweeping up from the ground as she moved to attack. Tark lumbered forwards from the other side, his fist closing over the head of one of the cultists, crushing it to a pulp. Tanya’s blade bit deep into the cultist that Hark had her hand on, splitting him in two, the body standing for a second as Hark took her hand away. Tark shuddered and stood still as a thin red line appeared from his groin to his shoulder, matching the injury dealt the cultist.

Blood erupted from Tark as his body opened down the middle, his regeneration not functioning as the two halves fell apart, the cultist body across the way mirroring his.

“*Kill the Vevaphon...*” Hark spoke, her voice holding a sibilant edge to it.

Stitch was already in motion as it raised its gun to aim at Hark, the movement interrupted as Cherra’s arm moved and her flintlock sparked again the explosion hurling the Vevaphon back against the wall in a broken mass as the bomb exploded within it.

“I...” Cherra looked at her hand in shock, “I...didn’t...”

“KEEP FIGHTING...” Tanya drew her claymore and swung, Hark stepped in to meet her, blood flowing up from the cultists body to form a solid shield of gore around her arm, blocking the blow of the claymore.

Hark drew her hand back and fingernails sharper than glass raked across Tanya’s wrists, opening the veins. Hark raised her hand and twin streams of blood erupted from the wounds, the streams going up into the air as Tanya’s hands were pulled back. Hark turned to face Cherra as Tanya struggled against the solid blood ropes holding her hands up.

“Run, RUN...” Tanya screamed as she took an unwilling step forwards, the blood lines making her walk forwards.

“I...” Cherra aimed the flintlock back at Hark as she stepped behind Tanya, “Tan...get out of the way, I can’t hit her...”

“I CAN’T...” Tanya struggled against the blood lines, her muscles straining against the eldritch force keeping her hands up as she staggered forwards, she looked up in terror, “RUN...”

Hark’s hands appeared above Tanya’s shoulder and cords of blood lashed out, snaring Cherra around the arms and neck, causing her to stagger forwards. She reached out to stop herself falling and her hand made contact with Tanya’s. Cherra screamed as Tanya’s hand flowed over hers, her hand disappearing up to the wrist in Tanya’s more muscular arm, the flesh joining seamlessly as their bodies were drawn together. Tanya raised her foot to try and push Cherra back but only succeeded in merging her foot with Cherra’s leg. Tanya screamed as she heard thoughts belonging to Cherra within her head, her scream reverberating through Cherra’s head, preventing her from calculating her powers. Both of them pushed against each other, only managing to become further entwined as two bodies became one.

Within seconds, it was over, part Frother, part Ebon, two minds encased in a single body of eight limbs, both trying to control the new body as the swift descent into insanity began...

Eight Hours Later

The APC rolled to a halt on the outskirts of the Evenside perimeter, Sergeant Karn cracked his neck as he stepped out of the back, looking at the rest of the squad as they reluctantly did their armour up.

“Seriously...?” Davies 125 frowned as he checked the mechanism on his gun, “Two days from the end of the tour and they’ve got us out here to babysit some Ops who couldn’t deal with their own shit?”

“Why we’re out here...” Karn sighed, he knew what Davies was on about though, “Come on, one of their chips is still broadcasting.”

“Yeah, Yeah...” Smith 819 sealed her helmet and followed Karn out into the open area. “So what happened to them?”

“Out on a Blue that went wrong, Station Analysis indicates that they’re still broadcasting in the area.” Karn kept his gun down as he advanced into the perimeter.

“Which Squad?”

“Shock and Ore,” Karn turned to the main entrance, motioning for the rest of the squad to form up on the entrance with interlocking fields of fire.

“Same bunch that pulled that job against Darknight on the New Paris Habitat Ring?” Smith leaned against the door and nodded inwards.

“Yep,” Karn glanced through and engaged his suit lights, “Their Frother is chipped, the chip is still broadcasting lifesigns, but they’re erratic, heartbeat at double speed, visuals are blurred.”

Within, the signs of the firefight were obvious, Karn turned to the ticketing booth as Smith followed him in, switching his comms to the Station Analysis channel.

“Sleeper team 427 to Analysis 323,” He moved into the atrium, “Moving to investigate 10-35 on squad Shock and Ore...Small arms fire, possibly explosive rounds.”

Karn looked down as he cleared the steps, looking at the body on the floor, the chestplate cracked open and chest pulped.

“Operative Riddle, massive torso trauma, no powder burns, no shrapnel,” Karn nodded, “No life signs, moving on...”

The suit beams swept over the side wall where the black bloodstain was splashed across the rear wall, then a sound, faint, like that of a rat, from the rear of the room.

“Sleeper 427, chip signals are coming from three metres ahead of you...” Analysis 323 reported.

“Moving in...” Karn motioned the squad forwards and paused at the corner, taking a snap glance at the low level. The glance turned into a stare as he leaned against the wall at the sight in front of him. He paused for a second, his hand shaking crouched down, “Analysis 323, please confirm chip signal is three metres north of my position...”

“Confirmed Sleeper 427, do you have a visual...?”

Karn looked at the mass of flesh in front of him, some of it black and ridged like a deathsuit, some of it pale, the angular edges of armour plates lodged underneath the skin. Four closed eyes mounted in the bulge that could have been its head and as his lights played over them, the eyes opened, marbled, half Human, half Ebon. The body moved, an orifice opened in the centre of the torso, broken teeth around a forked tongue, and the sound of two voices trying to speak through one set of vocal chords emerged, the body shaking violently at the sound of its own voice, the noise escalating into a shrill of terror like that of a pig squealing. Karn motioned his squad back, switching to his unauthorised sidearm and loading one of his few explosive rounds.

“427 to Analysis 323,” He said quietly, “Signal is coming from a single Carnivorous pig, chip must be malfunctioning through damage, do you require us to retrieve the chip?”

“Negative 427,” 323 sounded resigned, “Normal bounty will be paid for the pig, ensure the chip is no longer broadcasting if we have a confirmation that there are no survivors from the squad. We don’t want to be coming back this way on a wild chip hunt.”

The body stopped moving as the words filtered across the short distance and in a moment of clarity between the two minds within, the head nodded and the eyes closed.

“Confirmed 323,” Karn nodded back at the body, pulling the trigger. “No survivors,”

A World neither Brave nor New

There have always been enemies of the Worlds of Progress, those who could be fought on open ground with troops and artillery, and those who sought to corrupt from within...

Cults have always been present on Mort, most of them are smaller gangs, bound together with a common purpose, usually towards the purpose of a single, charismatic individual seeking to further their own power. As such, they are given no further notice by the forces of SLA unless they step from the realms of a slight irritation to being something that could make a difference.

The first inclination that a cult had risen to a dangerous level was in 098, when a series of assaults against shivers were recorded in sector 23. First there were disappearances, and disappearances are always possible when you work the streets of SLA, but when the bodies were found, ritual markings carved into the blood drained corpses, the shiver teams began to pay attention to the so-called blood cults.

Sleeper teams began to report increased activity on the perimeters of 23, bordering Cannibal Sector 2, from packs of mutants being butchered and stripped of their flesh (but not consumed as they would have been with other Cannibal packs) to the remains of huge mutant pigs, their bodies burst open from the inside as if some new parasite had germinated within them.

It was in 099 that the first encounter was recorded, a standard squad with APC and canine backup were sent to restore order to a disturbance in Sector 23, they found a group of humans lined up in rows in front of them, most of them encrusted with dirt and blood that clung to them even through the intense rain at the time, all of them wearing hoods covering the entire of their heads. The humans formed line and waited as the shivers disembarked the APC, not

reacting to orders to stand down or disperse. At the rear of them, a single figure, obscured by the shadows of the building above.

A faint sound of chanting from the line, the word obscured from the barking of the dogs, but analysis of the words in the aftermath of the attack from the footage captured by the suit cameras made out a single word, repeated over and over.

Xieye...

The Shiver sergeant stepped forwards and ordered the line to disperse or be fired upon. The line did not move and the shiver line engaged their browbeaters to try and drive them back. The humans stood still, weathering the storm of ball bearing rounds without injury, the rounds squashing against their bodies without causing any harm. The shiver line advanced, moving to baton and shield as they engaged the humans.

At close range, they began to realise the error they had made.

As the first hood was torn from the protestors, it was clear than their face had been mutilated, their lower jaw torn off, the wound still weeping blood, their eyes bloodshot to the point of being crimson. The sergeant ordered the dog team into the fight and for a few seconds, it seemed that the additional might of the canines would turn the fight.

Then the figure at the rear stepped forwards...

The first human in the line erupted in a storm of red spikes made of their own blood, the spikes impaling the dogs like spears. The pack did not even have time to howl as the figure stepped forwards again, this time gesturing with pointed finger, another long spear of blood impaling the sergeant through the head. It stepped

forwards again and the sergeants body exploded into spikes of blood as the first human had done. The remaining shivers broke formation and fled, their suit cameras recording no pursuit from the humans.

In debrief, the remaining shivers reported that as they had drawn closer to the cultists, they had felt a blurring in their vision and the sensation of tingling throughout their body. Each of them reporting that they found it more difficult to swing their weapons against the humans as the chanting got louder.

Having got nothing of value from the shivers, the analysis teams turned to the word being chanted by the Humans at the time of the encounter. They found that it belonged to an ancient race, engaged in the beginning of the conflict wars, and thought defeated when their planet was obliterated by Maelstrom torpedoes.

The Xieye worshipped the blood and had control of all elements of it, their armies had not been large, but with their control over all elements of living creatures, they had been deemed too dangerous to engage on a direct level.

There were no ways to respond against the powers that had been demonstrated, which is why the decision to torpedo the planet had been taken. With their appearance in the lower reaches of downtown, steps had to be taken to neutralise their presence before it became entrenched.

From documents taken from all the cultures who had faced the Xieye, there were records of some who had managed some measure of success when facing the Blood Cults, and it was from their records that the weakness of the Cults was derived. It was found that while the powers used by the Xieye in many ways operated on similar wavelengths from those used by the Ebb manipulating races, their focus was far more on the physical nature of things and the study of these new powers was at first given to the

Necanthrope unions who possessed far more experience in dealing with such powers.

It became apparent that those who had spent their lives in the manipulation of mental power could not easily change their ways, and the elders of other races were brought into the project to see if there was any understanding to be had. The breakthrough came when the details were brought to the Shaktarian elders and they saw that the practises of the Blood Cults bore slight resemblance to their warrior trances and with that, the connection was made.

The Xieye powers burn the blood of those who use them, but there are ways to make the blood more potent, and when the cultists do not have sufficient blood themselves, the blood of others can be used equally well. In order to counteract their powers, a way had to be found to nullify the potency of the blood that was being used, and so years of tests were instituted, using the subjects that were captured in encounters with the cults against those seeking to find a way to stop the powers.

Many hundreds of lives were lost in those tests, but the results bore fruit. Just as the Ebb races can calculate a different world, so there were some with the strength of will to enforce their own desires on the world and properly shaped, these soldiers were able to counteract the powers of the Xieye. There was only one problem...

They were all insane...

The strength required to change the world with the power of your mind alone was found only in those who exhibited characteristics found only in those who could not function in normal society. In the entire of Mort, only one place held sufficient people who exhibited these characteristics.

Bethlehem Asylum

The inhabitants of Bethlehem had long since been forgotten by the relatives and kin, each of them consigned to the slow death of four walls and enough care only to ensure they had not killed themselves. Now there was a purpose for all the lost souls within, now they could give back to the world that had looked after them so long.

The training program was long and arduous, many did not cope with the demands placed upon them, many more could not control the powers that they were instructed in, but those that remained...

Those that remained became the vanguard of SLA's defence against the cults, thus were the Firefi formed...

The Xieye cult lost ground in many places, for while they were far more numerous, their cultists could not match Firefi training, not one to one, not even ten to one, and those with the power to stop the Firefi were not numerous enough to make the difference. For every major setback to the Firefi, there were a hundred minor victories, and soon it was enough that the cult stopped making attacks against SLA and faded to the background.

Without an enemy to fight, the bureaucrats of the world began to look at the budgets and asked if the money could be better spent elsewhere. Karma had long envied the amounts of money being given towards Bethlehem and put forwards their new plans in order to win the subsidies. With diminished cult activity, the balance of power shifted, and the numbers of Firefi personnel dwindled, those killed in action not replaced with new recruits. More than fifty years had passed since the first appearance of Rot, and many hoped that with his power base gone, there would be no further problems from him.

It was in the early months of 640 that the first appearance of another cult was found. Reported Xieye Cult activity had been reported for some time in the west side of

the city, and an operative squad had been tasked with a lone Firefi man to put an end to it. As the squad moved in, the cult chanting stopped, and the cultists turned to face those who had come to stop them.

Behind them, a crystalline creature stepped down from the altar and the cultists opened their ranks to let it through.

No words could be heard on the surveillance, but as the cameras continued to roll, one of the operatives turned into glass, and the cultists around the creature dropped to the floor, their bodies drained of all blood, only a sandy dust on the floor where they had stood. The dust roared up in a storm and lacerated the other operatives, each of them turning to glass as they perished. Still no sound could be heard, even though the cameras showed their mouths open and yelling instructions to each other. The Firefi operative fought as his squad fell, still firing at the creature as the sand filled the floor.

For several seconds, the two of them looked at each other, and then the creature pointed its hand to the floor. Each of the glass operatives turned and pointed their weapons at their former ally, then stood shoulder to shoulder in front of the creature. With another pass of its hand, the operatives were merged together into a single pane of glass which the creature stepped through, vanishing from sight.

When questioned, the Firefi operative said that he couldn't remember much of what had been said, there was only a distant memory that something had been said, he just couldn't recall the memory. Detailed analysis of the remains found at scene showed evidence of power use, but at the complete opposite end of the spectrum to that used by the Xieye Cults. Over time, more attacks were made, and in one of them, the first breakthrough in the case of the new cult was made.

One of the crystal figures was taken alive and brought back to Jerusalem, where they were probed for who, and what they really were.

It said it belonged to the Xinshen cult, a group that opposed everything that the Xieye stood for. Centuries before, a war had been fought on White earth between the two factions, with the victors taking the spoils. On White Earth were huge gates, conduits to the world of Mort, where countless millions of sacrifices waited without any knowledge of the beings that walked amongst them, and with no power to stop them.

For many centuries, the Xieye cult had remained strong enough to prevent the Xinshen from getting to the gates, but as they had been fighting wars on two fronts, both on Mort against the Firefi, and on White Earth against their rivals, their numbers and power had dwindled, to the point that the Xinshen cults had managed to secure one of the great gates, and with this gate, they had begun to bring their people over to begin their own occupation of Mort.

The Xieye cultists are infinitely more numerous than the Xinshen, but the Xinshen had nothing but time to develop their skills in their long exile. Each of their number possesses power far in excess of that given to the Xieye. The figure indicated that they were only the lowest level of their cult, known as a shard, and it would only be a matter of time before the Envoys, and after them, the Angels, would be walking on the surface of Mort.

Funding was again diverted from Karma and Dark lament to the Firefi and their operatives, with the construction of a new facility far below Bethlehem with the power to cage the creatures of the Xinshen when they came through. The two cults operated on completely different wavelengths, the Xieye using the power of the blood and body to achieve their ends, the Xinshen using the power of the spirit to change the

world around them, but without having the inherent insanity of those still learning the abilities.

Over the next years, the war between the cults heated up, making them far less of a threat to SLA, allowing the Firefi to wait for the end of the fights before mopping up the remainder. The more powerful members of the cults started making more frequent appearances, and with them, the creatures from their own world. Many thousands of civilians were converted to the cults on the promise of easy power, and as the cults powerbases solidified, so their reach grew.

The first major breakthrough in the cult war was made in late 730, when the Xinshens most senior Angel, Pattern, grew dissatisfied with the centuries of conflict and approached SLA with a view to defecting.

Intruder handled the negotiations personally, promising Pattern all the things she wanted in return for her assistance in the matter of dealing with the Xieye cults.

SLA had been unable to make the breakthrough in isolating Rot and his Bishops, and in return for Pattern providing defence against Rot while the Firefi brought him down, they would grant her safe haven upon the world of Mort, allowing her to come away from the war at last.

After long months of searching, the Firefi located Rot and engaged him. As the Lord of Blood slashed his way through the forces arrayed against him, Pattern came to the battlefield and prevented his escape while the Firefi and Necanthrope Unions engaged the trap set for him. A combination of devices designed with Patterns help were activated, holding the Lord of Blood in a trap of Ebb and force that even he could not escape. True to his word, Intruder took Pattern to her new home, high in the SLA Archipelagos, where he thanked her for her assistance, and left her with the keys to her new life. As she stepped in, the second trap was sprung and already massively weakened

by her efforts to restrain Rot, she was unable to stop the Firefi from capturing and imprisoning her deep below Bethlehem, where she would never again taste freedom.

Immensely weakened by the loss of the two strongest proponents of their forces, both the Xieye and Xinshen cults drew back their forces from the front line of the war, trying to recoup some of the losses that they had suffered in the battles. The Firefi remained alert for any signs of others

trying to make a stand against them, but the influence of the cults was no longer as directed as it once was, and the factions within the cults all trying to grab their own piece of power further fractured the ability of the cult to function as a single entity. It is now the year 909, and from deep within lower downtown, both cults now draw plans against those that once broke them, the board has been redrawn, the players are back to the table.

Bethlehem

In the first years following the conflict wars, it was recognised that there would need to be a place to house those who were unable to deal with the world as it was. Many of the loyal soldiers of SLA had more scars than the ones that they carried upon their bodies, and for the most part, life unto death was the way to deal with this. There is no need to rehabilitate a soldier when there's a new battle zone to go to, and for the duration of the conflict wars, the rate of soldiers returning home was almost zero. The publicity machine of did most of the work, nothing but glorious death for those on the front line, heroes who served the greater good, each of them brave enough never to turn from the front, even when sure death faced them down across the divide.

The problem occurred within a decade of the conflict wars ending, stormers could simply be deactivated or recycled, but the number of soldiers who had spent long decades fighting wars who had joined as idealistic young soldiers, and now needed the care of those they had fought for was increasing. The issue had become that there were no longer the wars around to remove them from the field before they reached MRS (Mandatory Retirement Statute) and qualified to come home.

In 009 SD, Nicanor Alvarez, the first person to reach MRS, was brought back to Mort in a burst of pomp and ceremony. Billed as the triumph of SLA, a man who, through years of SLA training and support, had overcome the best and worst that the many worlds had thrown at him and had escaped unscathed.

The first man who would show the world how SLA rewarded its heroes...

When the ticker tape parades died down and the fanfare faded, all was well, Nicanor was well treated but carefully monitored, and it didn't take long for the cracks to start to show.

The first crack was to be the last.

While he had been in the warzone, Elia Alvarez, his long term partner, had written to him every week and was seen by many as the reason he managed to hold true to his purpose over the dark times, but twenty years is a long time to be away from someone, especially when shore leave consists of watching that shore on a TV while waiting to drop into another warzone.

The body was disposed of without further coverage, and Nicanor was brought to trial by the ministry of war. When asked why he'd done it, he replied that he'd been unable to filter out his partners talking, he no longer understood normal talking after so long listening for orders, the idea that people would talk to each other for reasons other than orders, and that in time, the noise had come to resemble comm chatter, which in turn reminded him of his time in the zones. The evening of the incident, Elia had surprised him on his return home and he'd reacted as if she were a hostile. When the battle conditioning had let go of his mind, he was sat in a destroyed apartment covered in blood.

A broken man, knowing he unable to live amongst normal people, Nicanor volunteered for service in the warzones again, where he served in a penal battalion seeking death for more than five years before it tired of evading him.

In light of this, the protocol of retirement was reviewed, regular military protocol was

simple, those who couldn't manage to keep a civil nature when not in a warzone should not be allowed to leave the warzone, and so it had been for so many years, but that was when there was nothing but war. In the years to come, it was obvious that there would be far fewer willing to sign up if it was known that SLA could not take care of those who had served it selflessly, and while the stormers were useful, many of them lacked the drive and initiative that the other races brought to the field of battle, traits that had proven decisive before and would do again.

In a time when the world of progress was finally progressing, something had to be done.

It was for this reason that Bethlehem was created

Originally the ministry training grounds and war world prep depot, Sectors 40 to 43 were a colossal barracks and training facility, over forty miles wide and as many deep. The outlying areas had been given over to civilian needs as more of the war effort was needed to process the paperwork, and only the centre buildings were still in use as military structures and training grounds. Deep underground, the facilities used to produce a lot of the stormers and the various karma labs used to upgrade soldiers before they went to the wars were still operational and albeit in far less demand, still producing. Looking at the gigantic complex, head office came up with a plan. The same facility that taught all the soldiers to fight would become the place where they went when SLA had to take care of them.

Almost like coming home.

Vast amounts of money were spent in the conversion of the facilities into something far more than it had originally been designed for. Old barracks were torn up and redesigned, comfortable living quarters were made (with specially reinforced doors) so that the inhabitants would have somewhere

safe and secure to rest peacefully. Huge advertising campaigns went out for carers for this new community, for people who would help their fellow man and receive both a career worth working for and a benefit package that would rival that of most shivers.

Many came forwards to volunteer and did indeed receive the best of training for the patients that they could. In some cases, the volunteers were given implants to enable them to restrain or subdue those they cared for. It's one thing to care for people, it's another to try and talk them down when they've killed six and are looking at you like lucky number seven.

Bethlehem got more than its share of publicity, both from those who were cared for there and those celebrities who decided that the benefits to their career for being seen to care were more than enough to offset the possibility of a maiming, and in the case of some, managing to survive the maiming worked even better for their career than they could have imagined.

The facility grew and it soon housed a great number of patients, more so than could be easily housed and as the facility grew crowded, so the debate began as to how much space and time could be reasonably put towards caring for the patients. When the number of patients became so high that the first shared rooms were introduced, the easy solution of just throw a knife in with the second patient and wait a day to solve the housing problem became apparent, but this was not to be the way forwards.

In many cases, the patients were not responding to the therapies, and not Ebb assistance or massive amounts of drugs were helping in any amount. It was in the year 78 that the concept of isolation pillars became appealing to those trying to cut corners. Inhabitants could be housed in nutrient infused Gel tubes, rendering them unable to move, but well enough. When their natural life span ran out, they could be taken out of

the tube and quietly disposed of. This solved a number of problems, in that the Gel was laced with euphoric and sedatives, and so if relations wanted to visit, all that had to be done was remove the subject from their Gel, clean them up, dry them off, present them as somewhat comatose but happy and the relatives went away with big smiles and clear consciences.

Sector 42 was reserved for the Gel tanks and their inmates, with those that showed the promise of being rehabilitated being allowed back into the community, or at least into the individual rooms of Sector 41. In time, it became clear that in addition to serving as a holding area for those who could not be presented back to the world, Bethlehem could also be used as a holding centre for prisoners without the need for costly care in prisons, and so the Gel tanks were extended further underground, with another twenty levels being constructed beneath the main facility. Over the years, many people tried to find out what was going on underneath the facility.

Most of them succeeded, if only by the fact that they found themselves living there.

More than a hundred years passed and Bethlehem grew, the face to the common man did not change, the finest rehabilitation centre known to the world, a place that showed that SLA industries truly did care about the people who worked for them. But the facility itself changed, and as more threats became apparent to SLA, not just the mundane threats of Thresher and Darknight, but the new threats, creatures from beyond the realms of normal space, creatures that could bend reality to their own will, to whom a tank of gel was no more than fuel for their own infernal power. Dark Lament and Karma put aside their differences at the order of Mr Slayer to develop new technologies to capture and hold these new creatures, glyph tanks that could negate ebb power and biogenetic tanks that could resist almost any damage and grow back were created, and the

creatures began to flow in, at first each one was segregated, in a tank designed for them and them alone, but as the number of creatures increased, so did the costs, and both Karma and Dark Lament made overtures to Mr Slayer for subsidy in return for their efforts. With the budget spiralling wildly to contain new inhabitants, the older buildings fell into disrepair, and over the next half century, the public face of Bethlehem went from being a shining example of the newest, most specialised care centre to being a shell, still shining and new to the public eye, in the rooms where the rehabilitated stayed, at ease and their leisure, but within the labyrinthine corridors where the others resided, neglected and dilapidated, room occupancy was now resolved by putting in a new occupant and dropping a knife in through the letter box, then waiting till morning.

The breaking point coincided with the fall of Salvation Tower.

In the aftermath of the disaster, Bethlehem was forgotten as the world turned to its immediate survival, thoughts of those who had returned from the war were forgotten in the sudden tide of unending misery that came upon all the denizens of the WoP.

Bethlehem found itself a target for all those who envied the treatment of those brave war veterans, who got all their meals every day, who received all the best that SLA had to offer while they, who still lived in the real world, had to live with only the rations that they could beg, borrow or steal. The construction of Bethlehem was far stronger than most of the buildings around it, and constructed as it was on the solid bedrock of sectors 40-42, it had weathered the damage to the outlying sectors far better than almost every other building in downtown. The results of this were unfortunate, everyone could see that the building were still standing, and worse, that regular food and supplies were going in there. It was the equivalent of leaving

chocolate bars just within the range of starving prisoners.

The raids were sporadic at first, and the perimeter defences were more than sufficient to resolve the isolated raids on the premises. But it was noted by several splinter groups, in particular Darknight and their supporters, that the perimeter was only designed to hold against a small number of attackers at any given time, and that the weapons used by the guards were mostly of a nonlethal nature. Even the automated sentry guns used tranquiliser darts, and these could not penetrate anything wearing any sort of armour. A wave of resentment was whipped up by the Darknight agitators, fuelling the tide of resentment towards those who were seen as getting an easy ride compared to the common man, who had never fought for their country, but still felt that they should have it easier than those who had.

“They fought for what we should have” was a popular line in many of the banners that found their way into the protests.

SLA was not blind to what was going on, but in the aftermath of the collapse of the tower, there was little it could do. The infrastructure was stretched far thinner than had been previously thought possible and most of the resources were being put into the rebuilding of the now devastated downtown. It was not considered at the time that Darknight would be able to put together enough of an insurrection to be able to mount a suitable threat towards the facility.

But the enemies of SLA are legion, and sometimes, just sometimes, they find common purpose within each other.

A meeting not at all by chance between several of the Bishops of the Xieye cult and the senior leaders of Darknight yielded a possibility for the plan to proceed. Cavero Dios, then Bishop of the South side, led a small contingent of his followers to the

edges of Bethlehem and waited for the security forces to move out to intercept them. In the ruins around them, more than four hundred disillusioned citizens, long goaded and prodded by Darknight, sick of living without rations, and in some cases, without TV, waited for their signal to strike.

As the guards dismounted from the Hammer APC, Cavero raised his right hand, reaching down with his right to touch one of the civilians on the shoulder. The security sergeant raised his gun and ordered them to disperse. Cavero smiled and nodded to the cultists behind him who stepped forwards and with vibrosword, cut the civilian Cavero was touching in two. Across the way, the dying shriek was echoed by the sergeant as his own body opened to mirror the civilian. There was a moment of stunned silence, and Cavero gestured again, the blood from the sergeant erupting to attack the others in the security detachment.

With a roar, the Darknight converts made their attack on the facility with makeshift explosives stolen from shiver stations across the sector over the previous months. Many were tranquilised on the open ground towards the complex, but enough got through to plant the charges and breach the main wall.

It was at this point that everyone realised what a mistake they had made.

The first patient they encountered was Rafe Peregrine, who for many years had known what was expected of him to retain his comfortable number within the facility as one of the well cared for patients. The camera footage recovered from within the facility shows the raging mob encountering him as he returned to his apartment from the food hall. It was not known until that point just how well Rafe had controlled his urges following his return to Bethlehem, but within seconds, the mob was fleeing as Rafe stood amongst his six victims, still holding his unspoiled lunch in one hand, the plastic knife in his other hand streaked with the

blood of the dying. Other bombs detonated around the perimeter as the Darknight infiltrators made good on their plans and the extent of the cover up became known.

Hordes of howling lunatics pursued the infiltrators back out the way they came, then onwards across the open ground and into downtown, free at last to enjoy whatever life they had left without possibility of being caged within Gel or hammered into submission by the guards. As the TV crews started arriving on the scene, several suited individuals took the cameras off them in short order, indicating that the incident was not to be recorded or broadcast under penalty of breaching the D notice surrounding the incident.

Like any good animal though, the Truth found a way out, and quickly into the hands of the common man. If Darknight had been expecting a revolution of the people at the treatment of their honoured soldiers, they were to be quickly disappointed.

Realising that there was nothing to be gained from looting, and that the only food in the facility was worse than they were already getting, revolutionary zeal evaporated, leaving most people just trying to make sure that they never got rehoused next to the Asylum.

No longer needing to keep the pretence up, over the next few years, SLA allowed the main facility of Bethlehem to fall into complete disrepair, no longer even bothering to maintain the perimeter defences or the guards within. Instead they let the lunatics police the Asylum, and more gravitated to it, even many of those who had escaped, finding no place for themselves within the world outside, they went back to the only home they'd ever known. All the while, all the funding that had gone into maintaining the public visage now went into reinforcing the underground bases, building more and more secure facilities whilst letting the public remain aware that the only things in those sectors were the insane. Against

the common man, a better defence could not have been created.

As the proliferation of the Xieye and Xinshen Cults became more and more apparent, SLA started to once again combine the talents of the best that Karma and Dark Lament had to offer, drawing their best scientists into a united research project which would find a way to combat the growing power of the cults. The department got the best of the research grants and funding and became unpopular with other departments, forcing another cover up. The department was moved into the bowels of the Bethlehem facility, and the lunatics were forced outwards into the outlying buildings, leaving the main buildings secure within a perimeter of insanity. The Asylum proper still housed many prisoners, but these prisoners were now held and experimented on, and the research mounted up. The abilities and nature of the cults became a primary focus of study and new research allowed SLA within years to start to turn the tide on the cults.

It was in 389 that the first decisive attack on the facility by cult forces was made. Recorded on the long range cameras and microphones that had been well maintained to monitor the area, Cavero made his return, having long since been given immortality by his patron, leading a force of cultists more than a hundred strong in a direct move against the Asylum. As he and his forces made their way into the ruined grounds, the lunatics scattered before them, but in the ruins, one woman stood alone. Dressed in a long black duster with a wide brimmed hat covering her eyes and a white shirt underneath the coat with the trousers of regular SLA infantry, she stood against the assembled cultists and raised one hand, palm extended.

"I am Durand," Her voice carried across the wasteland "of the Firefi, you should turn around, there is nothing here for you"

Cavero reached down with his left hand and touched one of his cultists on the shoulder, raising the other hand to gesture at Durand. With no response from the woman before him, Cavero gestured to his other cultists and his sacrifice was split down the middle. Durand stood in silence as the cultist holding the sword opened like the sacrifice and both bodies fell to the floor without a sound

“You have no purpose here” Durand paused and raised her hands to the side, extending her arms outwards and encompassing the ruins around her. “And my faith is such that your powers will not work on me, nor will they work on those who stand with me”

From the ruins all around walked other men and women, each dressed in the same manner as Durand, but moving to take up position behind her, forming a wedge leading back to the edge of the Asylum. “We are Firefi” Durand looked Cavero in the eye, “This is our home, and your welcome is now overstayed”

As one, the Firefi swept their long coats back over their hips to reveal long barrelled revolvers

Cavero waved his followers forwards and with a roar, they closed the distance towards the Firefi. With a rustle of cloth, all the revolvers came up and with a single volley that echoed for miles around, sent the cultists to meet their gods. The cultists that remained charged, but the Firefi met them with co-ordinated volley fire until no more stood against them.

As the smoke cleared, hundreds of bodies littered the ground, but Cavero’s was not amongst them.

With the first instance of the Xieye cult taking direct action against SLA, what had been a low funded project for many years was suddenly given a massive influx of funding and support. Up until that point, both the existence of the Firefi and the

Xieye cult were nothing more than Urban Legends, stories told by operatives to frighten other operatives. The operations of the Firefi and the nature of their abilities was still held under D notice, much to the chagrin of the Ebon high council and several very high level necanthrope unions. Analysis of the abilities used by the Xieye cult showed a similarity to Ebb powers, but those using the abilities were all pureborn human, there were no traces of Ebb usage from the area and despite several Ebb sensitive squads taking BPNs in the area, none of them could find any traces of any sort of power out of the ordinary.

The truth of the matter is that the operatives of Firefi were all residing deep within the central facility of Bethlehem, behind massive layers of glyph encrusted plating, far beyond the reach of anything but the most powerful of Necanthropes, all of whom had already been spoken to by S1, so that there could be no misunderstanding that the Firefi were not to be compromised in any way.

The Xieye cult became more ambitious in their means and aims, seeking to draw out the Firefi in order to catch one of them and find out the source of their power, but all they managed was losing their own people in the process. Each time that the two sides met, the Xieye cult could not match the organisation or tactical expertise of the Firefi, and while the Xieye cult only had the standing forces they engaged with, the Firefi had access to the best of the Necanthrope Unions, able to fold new reinforcements in within seconds. The combination was proving impossible to resist by the cult, and so in their desperation, their leaders entered the fray.

The Lord of the Xieye cults made his first appearance in SLA records in year 587, at a routine drugs bust deep in Crosstown Traffic territory. Operative squad Torsion, with an average SCL of 4.6 and a flawless record, was reported missing after the initial contact was made with their gang contacts. The backup shiver unit went missing as well,

and the three operative squads sent in to recover the situation, and the six operative squads with shiver backup that followed them.

Head Office authorised the use of the Venetis Necanthrope Union to investigate the matter. The union folded in and encountered a slaughterhouse. Everywhere huge pools of blood littered the ground, some suspended in mid-air within sacks made from the deconstructed remnants of the squads who had gone in before Venetis.

In the centre of the estate was a gigantic pool, filled with the blood of more than a hundred people, the edges surrounded by Glyphs and each of the four doors held by a bishop of the Xieye Cult.

The surface of the pool rippled and a creature rose up from the blood, standing over twenty feet tall, humanoid in shape but lacking skin or facial features, it reached up with one dripping hand and pointed to the union. The squad found themselves bound by powerful chains made of blood, bringing them down towards the pool, their abilities negated by the glyphs and the power of the creature before them. As they found themselves being brought towards their own slaughter, Tyrus, the leader Venetis, pressed a button on his deathsuit. The southern door exploded in a cluster of shards as thirty Firefi specialists were folded in and launched an assault. The creature in the pool clenched its fist and the lead Firefi operative collapsed to the floor, all the bones in his body crushed to powder as his blood rebelled against him, using his own muscles to render him to pulp. The remaining operatives opened fire, the shots striking the creature and dissipating harmlessly or not even making contact in the first place, the muscles of the operatives jerking aside as they tried to target their weapons upon it.

The creature gestured again and two of the Firefi turned their weapons to their own heads and fired. Venetis struggled with the

bindings, trying to raise their gore cannons against the creature as it gestured again, more and more of the Firefi falling with each second.

Another shift in the atmosphere occurred as several necanthrope unions folded in and behind them, Durand and the remaining core of the Firefi. The creature paused in its slaughter and looked to the surveillance cameras carried by Venetis.

“I am Rot, Lord of the Blood, your time is coming to an end” It said as it sank back down into the pool “I shall be coming for you soon enough”

Looking at the footage of the creature from the squads and shivers that had been destroyed, it was obvious that the creature would require something more than SLA immediately had to offer. Intruder was placed in charge of directing the Firefi training, and in addition to the operatives at Bethlehem, he was offered the best of the soldiers who had encountered similar powers on other worlds, whether they had escaped with their sanity or not. Intruder ordered the construction of a new facility on the edges of Bethlehem, heavily shielded from all ebb and cult abilities, where he could supervise the training of the warriors who would spearhead the fight against the Xieye cult.

This facility had the best of everything that SLA had to offer, necanthrope unions who were sworn to secrecy, senior members of the Firefi who had spent decades fighting the cult, and the best implants that Karma could provide. Bethlehem had been the beginning, this new place would need another name, something to symbolise the beginning of SLA’s war against the cult.

Intruder called it Jerusalem

Every person who had been called to Jerusalem had experience of fighting the cults, and each one of them had survived, whether by luck or judgement, they knew

what they were facing, and they knew that they had to learn the abilities on offer if they were to ever survive their next encounter. Small scale fights continued for years, the facility grew and those who survived taught their skills to the next generations.

The main grounds of Bethlehem stretch over three whole sectors, each with a particular part of the grounds held within them. The sectors are linked by a series of underground tunnels, accessible from many different points within the sectors. The main building of Bethlehem and the building that most people associate with the name is located in Sector 41, bordered on the sides by 40 and 42. The perimeter defences are mostly concentrated in 40 and 42, leaving the majority of 41 to be taken up by the ruins of the old asylum and the rebuilt new structure.

The Boneyard

In sectors 40 and 42, the ground surrounding Bethlehem is littered with hundreds of thousands of bones, animals, beasts, and humans alike. The grounds are easy pickings for the airborne predators that lurk in the area, and they wait from the high hides up above the sectors for creatures to wander in and fall.

The primary defences of Bethlehem are unobtrusive, being glyph based defences sunk into the ruins of sectors 40 and 42, some that drain power, some that drain life.

Creatures that stray into the area find themselves getting weaker, till they fall upon the ground and their bodies are eaten away over time. The remains of hundreds of years of death upon the ground have created a white landscape, marred by streaks of black and grey where the creatures scavenging the bones move them aside.

There are no shortage of scavengers in the area, and the prospect of easy pickings often outweighs what should be natural curiosity

as to why so many creatures should be dead there.

In downtown, the perimeter is known as the Boneyard, a place where no sane person treads. There are whispers of dark forces at work within the Asylum that seek to add the living to the dead, and SLA does nothing to quell these rumours. Most of the things that people would find in Bethlehem are things that SLA does not want found, if the price of secrecy is the death of the curious, it would not be the first time that the price has been paid without concern.

Entrances to the main buildings are hidden within the buildings of downtown, in the remains of ruins, hidden from prying eyes by tons of rubble and debris. These entrances are independently powered and can only be accessed by those with a Firefi clearance card.

Anything forcing entry will cause the explosives within the gate to detonate, taking the building, the tunnel, and the intruders with it. There are cameras mounted within the ruins where the entrances are, so the monitoring teams can check on what was causing the problem before it was destroyed.

The Tunnels underneath the Boneyard are shielded from the draining glyph defence system, providing a safe passage for all those using them. However, in the event of a tunnel being penetrated, explosives are placed at points all the way along each tunnel. These can be detonated within seconds of a breach being detected if the monitoring station deems it necessary. However, this is not usually the course of action in the event of a breach. It is always preferred to avoid collateral damage by sending a team down to the tunnel to capture or terminate the intruder, but in the event of a breach by more enemy than would be prudent to fight, the detonation function is always used.

There are four primary roads into

Bethlehem, not so much constructed roads as areas where the bones of the dead do not lay more than a foot thick. These areas are still lined with glyph drain mines, actually more powerful than the regular mines that line the outer area, but usually deactivated except in times when the watchtowers see something approaching on them. These particular mines operate in single bursts of draining power, causing significant damage in sporadic bursts. Those travelling down the road think that they have strayed onto the areas where the mines are not active, not knowing that they are just walking further into the snare. The mines are turned off once a week and a squad of edges clears the most recent bones from the path to keep the ways clear.

Bethlehem Perimeter.

Beyond the Boneyard are the outer walls of Bethlehem. Over a mile long and equally wide, standing more than five hundred feet at the highest point of the Kaleidoscope Crossing the walls are made up of stone that was old when it was first laid. Over five feet thick when built, most of the walls still stand, and the areas that were breached still remain formidable to those trying to gain access. There are still the huge holes in the wall where the cultists attacked over six hundred years ago, and rain and sludge cover these openings, built up over several centuries. It looks as if nothing has been done with them since the riots back in the 300's, the walls stand as a crumbling monument to all the bright things SLA might once have been. The insides of the outer rooms were stripped clean of anything valuable within the year following the cult attack, but then the new inmates were moved in, and those inmates were very protective of their new home. The structure remains intact now, the halls devoid of life and light, a ghostly monument of a better world. The levels are all intact, although the outer layers are all devoid of any decoration save fungi and water. The original construction of the building was vast and labyrinthine and when the time to rebuild

most of it came, SLA saw little point in changing that. There are endless long corridors leading to dead ends and rooms that have been long sealed, none with anything more to offer than the dust of the original occupants.

Bethlehem Perimeter covers an area more than three hundred feet into the structure, with the doors and vaults within sealed with old keys and bars. Still in good order despite centuries of neglect, these vaults contain the remnants of the place that Bethlehem once was.

Kaleidoscope Crossing

The centrepiece of the Asylum in its glory days, a vast mural of the empire as it once was. The roof of Bethlehem appears to be a multi-faceted stained glass window, over four hundred metres square, starting at the four edges of the building and coming together in the middle, each point of the compass has a different mural depicted upon it. On the northern edge are the blasted plains of Dante, with a company of SLA soldiers holding a flag upon a hill. On the eastern edge is a mosaic of every Red colour the WoP has ever known. On the southern Edge is an image of Mr Slayer standing in head office. Finally on the Western Edge is a depiction of every race that WoP has ever known, including many that no longer exist.

This roof is the public façade of Bethlehem, the only construction to be carried out after the attacks. There are no records that remain of the first Kaleidoscope Crossing or the images held upon it, because SLA wishes there to be no record of what the Crossing looked like. The roof has the appearance of glass to fool anyone standing above it but beneath that is the reinforced ceramic armour of the new roof, added soon after the fall of Salvation Tower, supported by the armoured pillars coming up through the floor.

The Rainbow Chapel

In the space between the newly constructed roof and the area above the fortress lies the Rainbow Chapel. When Salvation tower fell, the original Kaleidoscope Crossing was not shattered by the attack, but the images upon it were warped and twisted by a force not born of the world. The glass changed colours and formed new images, images which foretold of things to come and places that no one on Mort had ever seen or heard of. Recognising this as something which could not be shown to the world at large, SLA Industries quickly made a new roof over the old one, and a new Kaleidoscope Crossing, identical to the original appearance, was reinstated above it.

The Rainbow Chapel is the original dome of glass, now lit up by lights from all angles and from within, as the Firefi to try and discern what the images and patterns within signify. There are languages that cannot be spoken all the way up and down the glass, images of things that have never been seen, creatures that have never been encountered, and images of impossible landscapes, with two eyes, one red, one white, surveying all of it. The Rainbow chapel has been examined for over five hundred years, and the investigation teams are still far from uncovering all its secrets. On occasion, prisoners who have been converted to the side of SLA have been authorised to look upon it to see if there are any shards of the images that made sense to them. In each occasion, the prisoner was reduced to a gibbering wreck, their sanity shattered the second they gazed up into the myriad images.

Work is now underway to learn the languages and communications of the cults, in an attempt to understand the writings and see what is driving the prisoners insane. The results are transcribed into a huge book, held at the bottom of the chapel, so the transcribers can continue to work on it at all times without having to make separate notes.

The honour of transcribing and translating the Rainbow Chapel is left to those who have proven their worth in long service, usually those who have retired from the position of Lord or Master. Once assigned to the Rainbow Chapel, that person does not ever leave it, spending all of their remaining days on the project. It is their privilege to present new findings to the Lords and Masters of the Order.

Bethlehem Bastion

Four hundred feet in, separated from the outer walls by a biogenetic moat, lies the four gated walls of the true Bethlehem.

A fortress within a shell, Bethlehem was rebuilt from the remains of the original materials from within the structure, creating a massive fortress heavily armoured and reinforced with new materials and building techniques far in advance of those used to construct the original building.

The Moat has four drawbridges attached by heavy chains leading into it, which are retracted at all times unless ordered by the knights on watch. The Battlements are armed with a variety of weapons, from Soulburners to Horizon Flayers, and are manned at all times. The decision to lower the gates must come from a Knight or similar authority, if no Knight is present, one must be called to make the decision.

The perimeter defences are designed against large scale assaults, and can cause significant damage to the structure if misdirected, which is why there is a hundred foot killing ground (of which the thirty foot moat is a part) between the inner edges of the main building and the Perimeter of the fortress.

The Moat

The Vevaphon stormer is a marvel of modern engineering, but it's creation did not come about overnight, and the same project

minds that came up with the Vevaphon also constructed the moat. Given the nature of the enemy and their powers, it was impossible to use normal materials in the construction of the moat. Ordinary biomaterials had to be re-engineered to replicate living tissue whilst not having any of its weaknesses, the final creature lacked the elegance of the other biogenetics, but possessed nothing that could be controlled or influenced by any of the Xieye powers. Its rudimentary mind could only sustain a single imperative...

Feed...

Anything organic dropped in the moat will be immobilised and steadily consumed. The rate of consumption is around a single hit point a second, and the digestive acids work against almost anything. Against passive objects that fall in the moat, the creature only digests, but any movement within the moat will be subject to its full force. It forms knives, spikes, and powerful crushing muscles to pummel and peel the victim till their bodies are pulp and no longer resisting.

Once this process has begun, the victim will be dead within seconds, and digested into their component elements within minutes.

Any metal or equipment that the moat finds indigestible is deposited in the overflow at the edge of the moat, those working the wall spray their armour with a compound the wall recognises as inedible, if one of them falls into the moat, they remain still until the moat deposits them in the overflow.

Upon command of any of the lords or the master, the moat can solidify, or rise up to form a living shield around the outer walls of the fortress, capable of regenerating at the same speed as a vevaphon over the entire structure, this ability has never been fully tested and many are sceptical about its tactical use. The same commands can be modified to allow the moat to block any of the two entrances to the fortress, but there is insufficient mass within the moat to

effectively block more than two entrances.

The Pillars

On the four corners of the fortress are the Invictus Pillars, each over twenty foot thick and made from old stone reinforced and interlaced with steel and ceramics. These pillars extend from deep within the ground to the base of the Kaleidoscope Crossing, forming the basis for the suspension of the Kaleidoscope Crossing.

Taking out one or two of them would make no difference to the roof, but the removal of three or all of them would make the Kaleidoscope Crossing far more susceptible to attack. Each Pillar has a small series of explosive charges mounted directly at the connection between the Pillar and the Kaleidoscope Crossing. In the event that one of the pillars is damaged and severed at a level below the roof, the charges can be set off to prevent the pillars weight from causing a drag on the roof and adding to the risk of a collapse.

The Pillars have a series of stairs leading all the way up and down the height of them, allowing travel between the top and the bottom of the building and all the way up into the Kaleidoscope Crossing itself if required. These stairwells are blocked off at each level with ironbound doors, the keys for which are found with the Edges on duty within the Fortress.

The Pillars extend into the lower ground levels as far as the regular security cells, and the foundation part of the pillars extends yet further, but there is no access on foot below the regular security cells.

The Training grounds

In the west wing of the Fortress are the training grounds, containing the largest halls within Bethlehem. Originally the showering and washing facilities for the guards and inmates of the facility, it has since been converted into an open area for training in combat and the use of the Firefi abilities. The flooring in this area is hard wood, long polished and sanded to keep the area usable. Combat training is held on the lower four floors of the wing, with Firefi abilities on the two below, and training in knowledge and other skills on the upper floors. All the floors are soundproofed and vibration sealed so as not to interrupt the other lessons ongoing in the facility.

The Library

On the top floor of the south wing is the Library of the Firefi. It does not contain any of the operational knowledge of the order, but instead all the information, transcripts, books, and other items taken in the fight against the cults.

Several illuminated globes representing the central worlds of SLA are displayed here, Artery, New Paris, Mort, Dante, Charlies Point, and Cross. There is a final globe representing White Earth, but the globe is held under sealed container with access only upon permission of the master of the order. These globes have lights of Red, White, and Blue within them, the Red representing the Xieye Cults, the White representing the Crystal Cults, and the Blue showing the deposition of loyal SLA forces.

The Librarian is a woman whose name is not known to the rank and file. A long standing member of the Unbowed, she lost the taste for war more than a century ago and now tends the books and papers of the library, keeping order and peace in her sanctum. Any information required from the Library is classified by rank within the order, and is only allowed to be read, not

removed from the library. If the information is needed for a briefing, the member must gain permission from the Lords or the Master of the order to make a copy of the information to take with them. The walls of the library are the most armoured of the entire building, due to the fragility of the items held within, and access is only granted to Edges with several years' loyal service to their credit.

The Armoury

At the base of the North Wing is the Armoury, where all the weaponry for the Edges is held, together with the weapons of war for the more intensive campaigns waged against the Cults.

The Master of the Armoury is Jack Jenner, Once Unbowed, and one of the greatest soldiers to ever walk the Worlds of Progress. He knows each of the order by name and knows what they have taken and what they have yet to return, only making the adjustments to the inventory when the day is done and he returns to his quarters.

Weaponry over and above the general equipment given to Edges must be signed for by the Edges commanding officer and any damage or wear to the weapon must be accounted for by the Edge.

Jenner also holds the position of Master Weaponsmith and in the hours where he does not maintain the armoury, he works in the forges below the Armoury to further increase the stock of weapons available to his Order.

The Forge

Beneath the Armoury is the Forge of Order, where the weapons used in the crusade against the cults are crafted and imbued with the power they need to defeat the enemy.

Secondment to the Forge is a lengthy process and any candidate must show both interest and aptitude for the crafting of equipment, spending several years proving this by repairing the basic items within the forges.

If they still possess the interest and learn the craft to the required level, they are seconded to the teachings of Jack Jenner, who will discern if they have the necessary ability to proceed within the Forge. Those who take on the role of Smiths (and there have only been eight in the history of the order) work only within the forge and are removed from active duty.

The Barracks

The resting quarters of the Edges of the Order, the Barracks are located in the north wing above the Armoury, with several levels ranging from the newly recruited Edges at the highest levels to the more experienced of the Edges down towards the bottom levels, nearest the cells and Armoury.

The better you are, the closer you get to hell...

Each Edge has their own room, which contains a single bed, a chair, and a desk with space sufficient for them to store their clothes and personal equipment only. The weapons used on a daily basis are held within the armoury and are not brought back to this level.

The Edge is allowed within reason to decorate it as they wish, but may not modify the layout or design of the room in any way. The doors in this building are not security sealed, but are constructed from the same strong wood as the Training grounds. While

not the best precaution should the Barracks be breached, it is considered by the order that anything managing to breach the perimeter of Bethlehem and attack their most secluded location directly will be unaffected by a wooden door.

The Solitude

The Knights are given separate quarters to the Edges, housed beneath the Forge is the Solitude, built along the same lines as the Edges quarters, but with additional space to keep their paperwork and case tracking.

The Knights are permitted free egress to the Barracks, but the Edges are not permitted into the lower levels unless asked by a member of the higher ranks.

Knights each have a personal safe that only they know the code of, which is used to maintain their personal weapons and equipment. Knights have proven themselves in word and deed to be worthy of the trust granted to them.

The Lords quarters

Each Lord occupies one of eight points within Bethlehem, four of them residing within one of the Pillars supporting the roof, four more on the watchtowers spread across the ramparts.

Their personal residences are Spartan in nature, but spacious in design, allowing each Lord to hold audience with their Knights and if necessary, several others at the same time. The Lord may arrange and decorate his residence in the manner he chooses, but in keeping with the rules of the order, must set example by their choices.

As a result, the Lords quarters are very individual and reflect much of the personality of the Lord.

The Masters Retreat

Beneath the Knights Solitude is the Masters retreat. A single room with a bed, single chair, and desk are the only privileges accorded the Master, a fact that is well known and widely noted within the rest of the order. The Master must walk the furthest to the mornings muster, and his quarters are the least of all of the order, reflecting that even at the highest levels of power, the Master is still in the service of the Order. The Bed, chair, and desk have not changed since the origination of the order and it is the Masters privilege that they sit in the same rooms as their predecessors.

The Requiem

In the West side of the Bethlehem square is the Requiem, it is here that those injured in the line of duty may rest and seek to recover from their injuries. There are two parts to the Requiem, one of those that are wounded in body, one for those wounded in mind.

There are a number of medical specialists who work this particular area, most of them are Firefi personnel themselves, either injured in battle to the point that they are no longer fit for front line duties, or those that have grown weary of the endless struggle and choose to do good by healing those who still have the will to carry on.

The Firefi may from time to time requisition other personnel if they wish, including those with the powers of Ebb healing for the massive injuries that can be sustained in the line of duty. For those wounded in mind, the second part of the requiem has a number of Unbowed who have long studied the effects that prolonged experience to the cults can have.

These work with the patients in the hope of bringing back some semblance of normality to their lives. No-one is permitted here without the permission of one of the Lords or the Master of the order.

The Invictus Chapel

In the centre of Bethlehem lies the Invictus Chapel. Constructed from the original temple within the Asylum, the Chapel stands as a monument to all those lost in the war against the cults.

Each wall, each door, and all the windows are engraved with the names of those who have fallen. Within the Chapel are several obelisks of Black marble, each one bearing more names upon it.

When each Obelisk is filled, a new Obelisk is crafted and placed within the Chapel, so there is always a space for more to earn their place here. Added to all of this is the Altar itself, where the daily benedictions of the Master are made and the orders for war are given.

While every member of the order that dies is granted a place within the chapel, the Altar is reserved for those whose death made the greatest of differences. It is the most fervent hope of all Firefi that the manner in which they die is worthy of a place upon the altar and not just upon the Obelisks. When a new name is added to the Chapel, it is both the sorrow and the honour of the Master to engrave that name within the Chapel. The name is etched into the stone and inked in the Masters blood, sealed with the Masters personal power to ensure that the name never fades.

Containment

At the north side of the facility is the containment facility. This area contains several different levels, each one designed for a different category of prisoner.

Minimum Security

The first level of Cells is designed for the regular prisoners. Held above ground, these prisoners have little to no powers, and as such are watched over by Edges. The Cells are made from steel and stone, and are opened with keys. Prisoners are fed daily, with those that exhibit signs of hunger strike being taken for interrogation first.

At this level, the prisoners are no threat to their jailers, and as such, strong security is not maintained. The Edges on this level have their regular weapons at all times, and work eight hour shifts, with five edges at any one time on duty, and the main barracks within minutes of response time if something should go wrong.

There has never been a breakout from this level, and given the level and ability of the prisoners held within, it is unlikely that there ever will be.

General Population

Located beneath the light containment facility, the medium security cells are designed to hold prisoners with low level abilities. The construction of the cells is still in stone and steel, but the floor of each cell is implanted with a glyph of subdual, which draws on the life force and power of the prisoners to keep them at a lower threat level. The Glyph is engaged several times a day, in order to keep the occupant passive, but not kill them. Edges monitor this level, but patrol in pairs at all times.

At the entrance and exit to this level, two further pairs of edges monitor the security feeds to this level, and may increase or decrease the power being used in the glyphs within an instant. In the event of a large scale assault by any forces, the glyphs in the cells can be turned to maximum, which will kill the occupants within minutes of activation, but this has never been required thus far.

As with the previous level, there has never been a breakout from this level, and unless all the power and all reserve generators failed at the same time, it is very unlikely that there ever will be one here either.



High Security

Below the Medium security cells lie the glass pillars of the Secure Wing. Each pillar is calibrated for its occupant, and the name, designation, and threat classification of each prisoner is noted on the base of the pillar on the control panel. The beings in this level have each proven a threat to the ongoing safety of SLA, and as such are not allowed to retain any semblance of consciousness.

The Pillars construction was the result of collaborative work between Karma and Dark Lament, with advice and information from a number of the members of the Firefi. Each Pillar contains a solution of

Biogenetic tissue similar to the material used in the Moat. The primary difference between this fluid and that of the moat is the imperative given to it, which is to subdue, rather than to feed. This tissue can be heated, cooled, constricted, or relaxed at a touch of the controls to manipulate the occupant. To this is added a reservoir of fluid, which can have a variety of chemicals pumped into it in an instant to assist in the subdual of the occupant.

Most occupants are fitted with a breathing mask to ensure they remain alive whilst held here, and the chemicals that are pumped into the pillar also provide protein that is absorbed through the skin along with the

other chemicals working on the body. The protein keeps the prisoners alive whilst also using the bodies innate nutrition system to distribute the other chemicals.

The Glass pillars are all placed together in an open plan, which allows for clear observation of all the pillars, and there are at least five knights and one of the lords on duty in this place at all times, in the event of any sort of problem within the level. All the scientists on the level are Firefi trained and have been Edges for a number of years prior to secondment to the Secure Wing.

Access to this level to any but staff is prohibited to the Firefi observation teams, each one at the level of a Knight in ability or higher.

Only one prisoner at a time is ever roused from their imprisonment, and only for as long as is necessary. As before, if the worst should occur and the Secure wing ever comes under attack, the pillars can be set to kill their occupants with a combination of lethal chemicals and crushing from the pillar itself, but this has never been necessary thus far.

Genocide Vault

Far beneath the surface of Bethlehem asylum lie the Genocide vaults. There are several levels of security between the first door and the entry to the Vault, each with over a Dozen of the Unbowed in attendance. This wing is divided into five different cells, each one housing one of the most dangerous creatures ever to roam the world of progress. Each one of them a certified threat not only to individual inhabitants of the World of Progress, but to the World of Progress itself. As useful as the study of these five creatures is, their presence can never again be tolerated in the worlds of progress.

In the event of a cataclysmic failure of the Bethlehem defences, there is a failsafe device installed in the walls of the vault, a one way fold of space that will scatter the contents of the vault to places that no one knows the location of.



PI

PI was once known as Ulric Eisengren, a senior member of the Firefi and an operative of several decades' service. Ulric had served faithfully his entire life when he

went missing on a black BPN on the Cerres orbital habitat, clearing the area of Thresher Troops. The Thresher invasion had been stopped cold, but there was no sign of Ulric's body or that of his team, only thirty one dead thresher troops and most of the arm of the thirty second.

With no signs of anyone leaving the station and no indications of Ebb abilities in use, a report was filed, and the investigation into what happened to Ulric and his team reported them as missing, presumed dead.

More than ten years following his disappearance, Ulric was sighted on New Paris just before a terrorist incident claimed the lives of three hundred and fourteen people. Ulric left a warning to the SLA authorities on New Paris that he had seen the signs of the problem before it had occurred, and that if he could be brought back into the fold, he could prevent the next catastrophes from occurring.

By the time that the warning had got back to SLA and a response had been formulated, Ulric had moved on. His next warning was on the world of Artery, and by the time that the response had returned, Three thousand, one hundred and forty people were killed on Artery in an industrial incident that could have been easily avoided. Over the next ten years, Ulric's warnings continued coming, and with each one of them, an increasing number of people were killed, Thirty one thousand, four hundred on Sarvin when an entire city was caught in a thermite chain reaction, Three hundred and fourteen thousand on Kestern when an orbital weapons platforms stabilising thrusters went berserk and brought it down on the holiday resort of Silnos. The investigations into each of the incidents showed that a chain of events led to each incident, events that could have been linked, but the possibility of such events linking together was less than one in a million. A warrant was issued for Ulric's apprehension and operatives across the universe began the search. Ulric was finally brought down after 3.14 billion

deaths on the former foundry world of Argus. A chain reaction in the worlds power systems caused a series of explosions that tapped into the core of the world and destabilised the tectonic plates, causing a catastrophic shift which then went on to tear the planet apart. Ulric was found watching from the orbital watch station around the third planet in that system. He made no attempt to prevent SLA from bringing him in, merely indicating that the next incident was one that even he could not make any move to prevent, and that it would occur on Mort.

The name on his operative card had been changed to PI, and he co-operated with the SLA authorities without resistance in their investigations of the incidents which he had been informing them about. In each case, he had a clear knowledge of everything that had gone wrong, together with all the steps that could have been taken to prevent them. It was noted by the department of Ebb and by the Firefi that PI has some power over energy, very similar in nature to Ebb, but working on a different wavelength to that of Ebb and the cults. He was taken to the lowest levels of Jerusalem, where he is now held in a stone cell, surrounded by glyph pillars and senior Unbowed.

Each morning, PI moves through the forms of combat, Fire, Water, Air, Earth, and Void, moving from end to end of the cell, at the conclusion of each movement, he speaks three numbers as if trying to discern their meanings. When he finishes the numbers, he nods to himself and looks around the cell, taking a drink of water and looking to the door, saying "And I still have time..."

The meaning of the numbers has yet to be deciphered.



Pattern

In the second chamber, the walls are lined with Dark Lament power draining glyphs, beyond which there are a number of heavily shielded cables, leading to massive flux

batteries that are always available for the Necanthrope union that is on duty at the time. There are six unions that are bound to hold the occupant of this cell, each one of them watching over the cell for four hours at a time, allowing them time to recharge their personal reserves between duty shifts. These unions keep the occupant in stasis at all times, as if she were ever allowed to reach anything vaguely resembling consciousness, she could cause damage on a massive scale.

Within the cell is housed Pattern, first amongst equals in the ranks of the Shard Angels.

Towards the end of the Conflict wars, both the Xieye and Xinshen cults were causing a massive amount of disruption for SLA forces, both in terms of manpower taken from them and from conversions as the forces of SLA sought to be on the perceived winning side. The main reason for the conversions were the Shard Angels, separated into five prime Angels and countless others, far less in power than the primes but infinitely more than those they faced.

First amongst these was Pattern, who had sat at the right hand of Bitterness since before either of them could remember. She was the Angel trusted to bring others to become angels in the service of the Xinshen, she, and she alone, was trusted to bring the information of the war to Bitterness.

War is a thankless master, and over centuries of killing and enslaving, Pattern found herself weary beyond the understanding of any mortal. Though she possessed almost godlike power, it was only in the service of her master that she wielded it, and his requirements only ran to the slaughter and torture of his enemies. She sought an audience with the enemy, to discuss terms of her defection, on the understanding that she would not be brought over to serve them in war, but to better serve the aims of peace and forge some level of understanding between the

two sides.

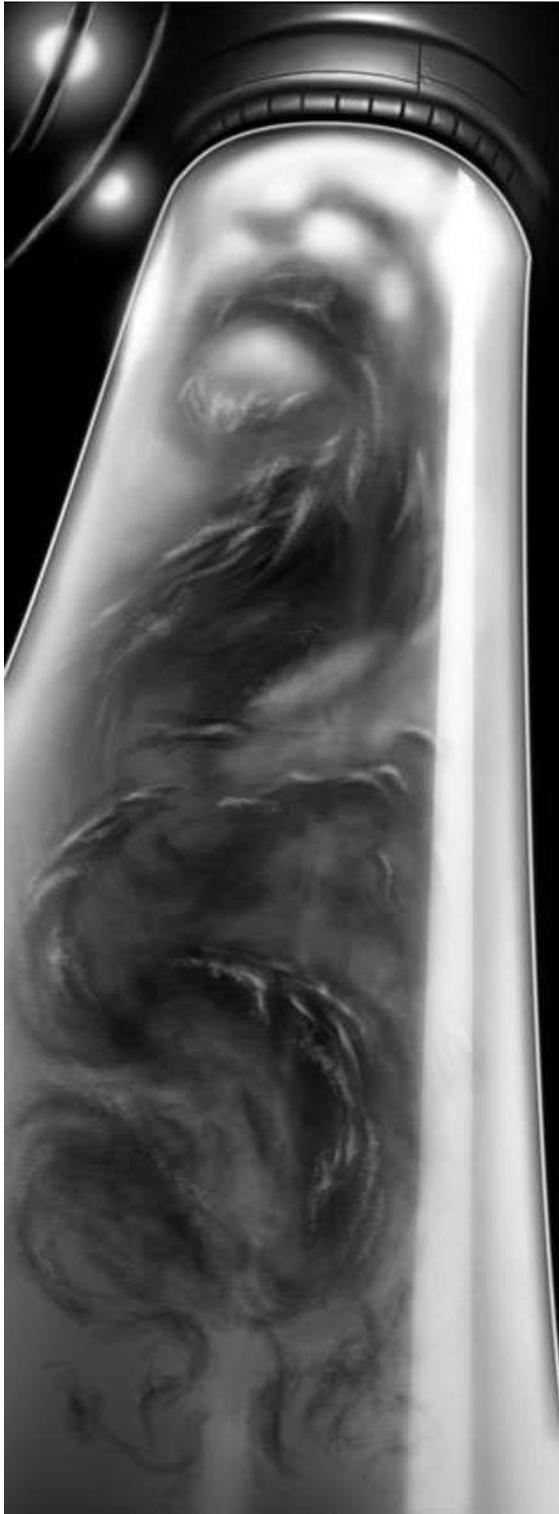
The negotiations were conducted by Intruder at the request of Mr Slayer, and they found a common foe in the shape of the Xieye cult. Intruder made an agreement with Pattern that in return for her help in entrapping Rot, Lord of the Blood, she would be granted asylum upon Mort, and a life free of war and misery. To one who so longed for peace, it was a dream come true and she knew that the word of Intruder was beyond forged steel. With a glad heart, she accepted, and together, she and Intruder laid the plans that would entrap Rot forever. When the time came, she fought for her new allies with all the fury her god had given her, and with the help of Intruder and many others, they subdued the Lord of Blood and chained him beneath Bethlehem. Intruder came to her after the battle and took her to her new home, high above mort, in the penthouse of a silver tower upon the side of head office, far from prying eyes, where she could live out forever without ever needing to raise a weapon again.

Intruder had barely departed when Preceptor Teeth and his personal union folded in, together with Durand and the fifty most senior Unbowed of the day. They had studied her information well on how to combat those of her kind, and put that knowledge to good use, engaging her on too many fronts for her to combat. She fought valiantly, but the fight with Rot had drained most of her energies and she had not had time to recover any of them. With minutes, she had been broken and brought to her knees, whereupon she was transported to the cell above Rot, there to be held in stasis, forever frozen in the broken state that she had been left in.

Intruder was furious that his word and bond had been used to gain Patterns trust, and threatened to go to Bethlehem to free her, but he was stopped by Mr Slayer, who spoke to him at length, showing him the dangers of such a creature to be permitted in their world. Intruder did go to Bethlehem

afterwards, and alone in the viewing bay of her cell, he wept tears of shame that this Angel who had fought for him should be brought to this state, but he knew well the power and range of his lord and master, and left her alone in her cell, his thoughts his own as he left.

Pattern was the first amongst the Shard Angels, a creature of surpassing power, able to direct or even cut off the powers of other creatures of the Xinshen and capable of reorganising reality on a molecular level. She has now been in stasis for more than a hundred years, and while the readings on her cell have not changed, there is a dark mood upon this level. Those necanthropes who guard this level speak of an almost palpable malevolence on this level, more so here than on any of the other levels, but with Pattern held within stasis, in the exact same state as she was when she was first brought down, it cannot be her, it must be something else.....



Rot

The third chamber is a shell of pure biogenetic flesh, impregnated with every toxin known to the world of progress, surrounded by an array of glyph towers, each one attached to colossal flux batteries

which constantly bathe the flesh shell with plasmatic fire. Behind these towers lies a glass shield which has not been opened in over a hundred and fifty years, not since the occupant of the cell was first brought there.

Rot, Lord of Blood, the most powerful of the chosen of the Blood cult, was brought her after a combined assault by Pattern, the Firefi, the Unbowed, Intruder, and several Necanthrope unions.

The Biogenetic shell is not there to protect him, but is renewed by him to protect from the heat being generated by the Glyph towers. It takes all his considerable power to keep himself within the flesh and continue to regenerate it to prevent his destruction. It has been hoped for many decades the one day he will tire and the scientists of Karma and Dark Lament will be able to find a way to find out how his powers work, but it has been more than a century, and his powers show no signs of abating.

At his full strength, Rot was all but invincible, a creature that could take control of anything that had blood running through it. No matter how powerful they were, what kept them alive was what Rot owned. For many decades, Rot was the deciding factor in the cult wars, only appearing when an overwhelming show of force was required, at all other times, remaining in lower downtown and strengthening his Bishops and Knights for the tasks ahead. As the primary servant of the Blood cult, he was in direct communion with his master at all times, and through him, the direction of the war and the nature of how things were to be progressed flowed freely.

When Rot was finally brought down, it showed to his master that even the greatest of his creations could be captured and imprisoned when they were not on his world, and he never made the same mistake twice, ensuring that all the power given to his chosen from that point onwards was far less, so if they were captured or killed, the

power he lost as a result would be equally less. This has led to a broadening of the cults forces, but far less problems for SLA in general. It is for this reason that Rot is so highly guarded, if he were to ever break free of his imprisonment, he would be pre-eminent amongst the blood cult, and through his leadership, the wave of cultists would be too much perhaps even for SLA to stop.



Legion

In the beginning of the Conflict wars, a warrior race with the potential to outstrip any other was found on the far edges of the galaxy. The S'San were a race of creature

bred for war, each capable of sustaining their existence within a single molecule of their DNA. It was only possible to kill a S'San by completely disintegrating all parts of their body, and even then, only if you had managed to disintegrate them before they had touched another living creature. The S'San also possessed the ability to transfer their consciousness into other living creatures, at first only occupying a single molecule of them, but quickly taking over the other cells and steadily transforming the victim into the mirror image of what they had at one point been. Mr Slayer saw the potential of this species to become the dominant killer in his new world, and approached their council with a view to offering them several planets and as much as they required in supplies and payment in return for their services in war.

Mr Slayer had researched his argument well, the S'San had already killed or converted all of the life in their part of the galaxy and while they were more than able to deal with life at close range, their abilities had meant that their development as a society had suffered. Why develop healing technology when you can simply move to another body? Why develop interstellar transport when you can take it from others? After many centuries of not needing to do anything to ensure the survival of their species, the S'San were now in a position of needing help, Mr Slayer offered it to them in return for their help.

The Council leaders debated at length about his offer, reasoning that even if they were double crossed after the wars had been won, there was no race more deadly than the S'San, and any that were sent against them could be easily taken over and used against their fellows. It was agreed, and plans were drawn up to have the S'San brought over into the conflict wars. Given the distance between the far edge of the galaxy and Mort at its centre, Mr Slayer pointed out that none of them would survive the journey if they were to travel in a normal ship (he had ensured that the S'San gained no knowledge

of the ways of the Ebb and reality folding), so a special ship had to be prepared, and the S'San would have to travel in hibernation to reach the warzones safely, whereupon they could be released upon any world and make it their own, then sally forth again in the service of Mr Slayer. He introduced Senti and Cadaver to the S'San, who had developed technologies that could transport them all safely within a generation ship, providing they could manage to fit their bodies into the ships holding unit.

Each member of the S'San undertook the ritual of Sh'nk, whereupon a single molecule of themselves was placed within the generation ship and prepared for the journey to Mort. Their old bodies left behind, the S'San travelled in the gigantic ship towards a new beginning.

That new beginning never came...

True to his word, Mr Slayer had engineered the ship to transport them to the world of Mort, but he had never specified how long it would take for them to get there. The ship was designed to work from solar power absorbed from the various suns and stars that it passed by, and never to exceed one quarter of the speed of light, just in case the batteries used up all their charge. By the time the ship had arrived, the conflict wars were long over, and just as Mr Slayer had planned, the S'San were still held within their stasis tube, waiting release onto a new world. Mr Slayer had known when he first approached them that this race possessed a power that could easily destabilise the galaxy, and this was ever more apparent now that the true wars had ended. Instead of letting them free upon a new world, Mr Slayer brought the stasis tube down to Bethlehem, installing it far beneath the facility. The tube is surrounded by Thermal projectors which vaporise anything within a metre of them, and the tube is suspended over a huge pool of Red Rain, for while the S'San are conscious, they are vulnerable to things which affect the mind. The stasis field was released and the race returned to

life, quickly realising that they had been double crossed, but not having the power to deal with their betrayal. Now interrogated by SLA scientists, particularly Karma, who have a strong interest in finding out how their race copies their essence into others, the S'San have formed themselves into a single entity, calling itself Legion. This creature is made up of all the single molecules of the S'San race, and moves as a single being, albeit one alien beyond the realms of imagination. If Legion were to ever find a way to escape the chamber, its arrival in the world of progress would be a catastrophe beyond the ability of any to predict. The S'San once laid waste to entire solar systems, it is certain that they could end the worlds of progress.



Lek Al Jahowne

The final chamber in the vault is a basic life support cell, a lone human, no security around him, no attendants, suspended in the

stasis fluid. Comatose, still wearing the threads of the suit he wore when they brought him in, still bearing the two bullet wounds on his chest where Intruder brought him down.

Lek was once a true friend to SLA Industries, and a man who counted both Intruder and Mr Slayer as personal friends, but his allegiance, first and foremost, was to the truth, and to the pursuit of it. This quest brought him to ruin and left Intruder a broken man when he had to bring him to the lower levels of Bethlehem. If this man were to ever recover consciousness and escape, the world as it is would end.

Jerusalem

Jerusalem is a small building with easy access to all other parts of Bethlehem and was once the central secured area, being reserved for inmates with the greatest capacity for violence and rage. The padded walls of Jerusalem have not changed since the opening of the building proper, and the cells within have not been altered either.

The Unbowed have long since eschewed the needs of normal people and use the quarters to rest before returning to duty. Of the Unbowed within, there are never more than five in the entire of Bethlehem, being Jack Jenner, the Librarian, and whoever has drawn fortress duty for the week, including monitoring and working in the Requiem. The insides of Jerusalem are covered in writing, records of what was seen there before and what has been seen since, nothing is ever deleted, and it is the right of every Unbowed to write upon the walls and make record of that which they have seen and experienced. There is still space upon the walls for more to be written, and although there is no guidance to what it is written here, those who live here know that it is only important that the knowledge be present, those who need it will find it.

Firefi

The Firefi are a highly secret organisation working out of downtown sectors 40 to 42. This chapter covers the organisational structure and the powers of the operatives who work within the organisation.

Invictus

The Code and Creed of the Firefi is that they are unconquered, through all the wars that they have fought and won, through all the battles they have fought and the lives they have lost and taken, they remain defiant above all others. When one is brought to join the order, they learn the litany of the order

Out of the blood that covers me,
Dark as the Pit from Red to White,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeoning of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shard,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll.
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

This is at the heart of what it is to be a member of the Firefi, they may not retreat nor withdraw, and even in death, they remain unbowed. Through their actions alone, the world of progress is not overrun by demons from other realms, and by their sacrifice, the people of this realm know some semblance of life and sanity.

Although the Firefi know that the only way to be released from their service is the long rest of Death, it is the wish of all them that they may earn a place in the Chapel of the Invictus, where the brave may live forever.

Organisation setup

The organisation has four different levels to it, Edges, Knights, Lords, and the Master of the organisation. Housed within Bethlehem but not under the jurisdiction of the Firefi are the Unbowed, veterans of long service, hardened to the nature of the battles that they will have to face. What follows is an overview of the different levels within the order and how each fits into the battle against the cults.

Edges

Edges form the rank and file of the order and will have been an operative or equivalent for at least five years prior to being called to the ranks of the order. In this time, they will have proven themselves time and again in stressful situations and will have at least one Black and several Silvers under their belt, thus proving that they have the ability to take on impossible odds and also that they know how to cover things up required, both of which are essential to the workings of the Firefi. While most organisations within SLA actively discourage those with emotional issues from engaging in dangerous work, the Firefi understand that only those who have faced their own issues and resolved them will prove strong enough to undertake the full range of training that they will need to fight the cults. Mental profiling is undertaken at any early stage, and most Edges have at least some level of psychosis, albeit usually not crippling.

Add to this the years of combat and operational training that they will have successfully completed, and it is understood why an Edge is one of the most dangerous warriors that SLA has to deploy.

When an Edge is first referred to the Firefi, they undertake training and mentoring under a squad senior Edges. This training will give them the basics of how to use the powers they will be taught in the future, and they will be put up against live opponents to show them the danger of what they are going to be up against. Each operative is evaluated throughout this time, tested for signs of deviancy or subversive thinking, and assessed towards any tendency for sympathy towards the enemy or pause in the execution of their duties.

If an operative shows a particular flair towards certain disciplines, they will be channelled in that direction, the order does not believe in trying to sculpt the operatives into uniform ranks, understanding that while square pegs can be made to fit into round holes, the square peg will be damaged in the fitting.

While there are some elements of training (the basic powers of an Edge and the operational understanding of the Order) are mandatory and required for life in the order, the rest of it very much depends on what the Edge is capable of and what they want to work towards.

If the operative survives the first year of the life in the Firefi, they are put with a squad that is below full strength and encouraged to prove their worth in live situations without any other support. If they survive a further year, they graduate to full Firefi privileges and gain access to the library and network of contacts that Bethlehem provides.

Knights

A Knight is a single operative in overall command of a group of five squads of

Edges, each numbering between three and five Edges, the group being known as a Claw. Each Knight has at least five years of experience as an Edge and will have taken charge of their own squad in the field a number of times. When an Edge starts to display the qualities required of a Knight, the Order will take an interest and give them the support they require. Unlike many of the departments in SLA, the Firefi have no time for Lone Wolves or Showboats. In the war being fought against the cults, one man is easy prey, and it is not worth the resources of the Order to encourage such behaviour, Initiative is to be praised, grandstanding not. By the consensus of the squads that the Edge has worked with, they may be elevated to the position of Knight and given control of a Claw.

Lords

Above the Knights are the Lords responsible for the planning and execution of missions against the cults. They have absolute control over the deployment and activation of units under their command. Each Lord has the complete faith of those beneath them, having worked their ways up the ranks in full view of those that they command. There are no direct promotions from Edge to Lord, and the politics of SLA have no place in this order. The Lords of the Order are drawn from the ranks of the Firefi and nowhere else, each of them has served for over ten years as a Knight before being promoted to Lord, again by the consensus of their peers.

There are Eight lords at any one time, each occupying one seat on the council of Eight, each making the decisions for their particular part of the order.

Master of the Order

Once a Lord of the Firefi, the operative has only two places to progress, the first being to the ranks of the Unbowed, to fight the enemies at the highest level they can, or to replace the present master of the

Organisation. Every generation a new Master of the order is chosen, and he reports directly to Head Office regarding all things to do with the Order. The Master is chosen from the ranks of the Lords, as always, by consensus of the collective.

The Master decides on the policy and direction of the order and makes all decisions regarding how training is to be organised and how wars are to be directed. He sits at the head of the table when the council meet and has a right of veto against any Lord that can only be prevented if all the Lords of the order are in agreement against the Master.

The Lords of the order have the right to challenge the decisions of the master at any time should they wish, but this challenge should be made in private and the order never gets to hear about any of them. When the matter is resolved, the judgement is passed through the lords and the council of eight.

Games played using Firefi operatives will rarely involve any level above that of Edge, as the other levels are busy in the planning of the war against the cults and the nature of the battles they have to fight. In large scale offensives the higher levels of the Firefi may be involved, but only to engage the greater threats of the cult and protect those that they command.

Divisions of the Order

The Order is divided into eight different departments, each one presided over by one of the Lords. While in their proving phase, each Edge will be evaluated as to which department their abilities would best be suited to. When they are accepted fully into the order, they are given the choice of several different departments to work within. This will not vary their day to day aspects and their patrol duties, but it will influence quite greatly what resources they can command and what their day after patrol consists of. Each department is

responsible for a different aspect of the fight against the cults.

War

The War department deals with the organisation and deployment of Firefi units to combat large scale incursions on Mort and other worlds. It takes its information from the Department of War and decides if Firefi presence is required to ensure the fight stays with SLA.

Whilst one of the smallest departments, the War department holds the greatest sway with regards to where the military might of the Order is placed, and what weapons or tactics are deployed there.

Street

The Largest of the departments and the one most reactionary in its role, Street is the watching arm of the order, from the monitoring station within Bethlehem to the various observation stations held throughout the city. Street maintains a steady presence within the City of Mort, ensuring that any attacks that had not been predicted by War or Intelligence are reacted to with speed and efficiency. Most Edges will belong to this department if they have not shown a particular aptitude for anything else.

The other, often more important, aspect of a Street Edges duties is the covering up and concealing of cult activities. It is the nature of mankind that those things forbidden to them cause the most interest, and those who have seen the cults at work are often drawn by the promises of easy power, regardless of the price they will pay in blood and tears for their service.

Street Edges are often called to the scene of incidents in downtown to cover all the traces that cults were involved and ensure that those who may harbour feelings of seeking out the cults are dissuaded from it.

Should words fail, they are authorised to ensure that the taint of the cults touch does not spread by more direct methods.

Undercity

The mazes of lower downtown are a constantly evolving mass, and it is known that many of the cults use this rolling landscape to mask their activities and remain hidden from the watchful eyes of the order.

The Undercity department trains operatives in the proper navigation and mapping of these areas, allowing them to maintain some semblance of control. Members of the order assigned to the undercity are knights at the very least due to the nature of the work and the dangers that it entails. They have usually been members of the Street department prior to taking on the undercity and it is seen as one of the greatest privileges that an edge can achieve to be trusted with travelling the cold dark alone.

Undercity operatives are given equipment with which to map and relay the tunnels and caverns that they have travelled through each day, and report back each day to download what they have encountered.

Research and Design

The War against the cults is never ending, and the nature of the changing war means that the Order too much forever be evolving to meet the changing threats. The Research Department works day and night to continue improving the weapons and equipment used by the order.

The primary focus is on things that can make a decisive difference in combat and tactical value, but the Research department is also given leeway to work on things which can improve other aspects of the order.

Those seconded to the research department do not often leave it, as the life of a laboratory worker is very different to that of

a front line soldier and instincts can be dulled by the lack of danger. If someone returns from the research department to the other departments, they must pass the rite of aptitude again to ensure that they still have the skills to survive out on the streets.

Intelligence

The information gathering nexus of the order, the intelligence department collates all the information from the other departments and provides analysis of overlaying patterns and developments.

Sharing its findings with the War and Street departments for the most part, Intelligence concerns itself with the bigger picture, allowing other departments to fight the fight while they plot the downfall of the enemy in more indirect methods.

Belief

The Abilities of the Firefi were not developed overnight, and the ongoing development of new abilities is a strong priority at all times. With new cult creatures and new abilities forever coming to light, it is required that the order have some method of combating these things as they emerge.

Those within the Belief department refine and experiment with the nature of the power base that the Order works from, developing new skills and modifying existing ones to ensure that the Order remains one step ahead, and if not that, at least on level footing with the cults.

Vision

The Order must advance both in nature and structure, the Order as it was created would not survive long in the environment that it finds itself within today.

It is the Vision department that co-ordinates the efforts of all the other departments to decide what shift in structure or amendment

in protocols must be made to keep the Order at the forefront of the fight.

The Vision department reports the shifts in the other departments to the Master, and from there, trends in what has been occurring can be seen, and the policy of the order can be amended to suit.

Discipline

At the heart of all things in the Order is the need for Discipline. Like Cloak Division for non-Order members, the Discipline department maintains a view on all those who operate within its jurisdiction.

When dealing with individuals who have the power of the Firefi, it is necessary to hold a code of conduct of those individuals and to carefully monitor any deviance from that code. While Discipline does not advocate an absolute adherence to these rules, any member of the order who constantly works outside of them will find themselves under ongoing scrutiny and occasional suspension from line duties.

The first step along the line to the cults is in rebelling from the natural order of things. A member of the order who might one day fall to the influence of the cults is a danger not just to themselves but to the entire of the Order, and the Discipline department exists to ensure that those setting themselves on this path are quickly turned back from it, or if necessary, removed from all paths.

Operational Procedures

Each day, the nights Station Analysis transcripts are carried through to the Lords of the Order, who check the patterns within the reports and see if there are any possible leads for them to follow up. The leads are then discussed with the Knights of the order and the best choices amongst the Edges for the situations are chosen. The order has a morning gathering where they meet in the great hall to be told by the Lords where

their efforts will be best directed for the day.

Each Claw is given a patrol, and some indication of what they might find in that area, those areas of particular interest are given additional forces to patrol, they are given the capability to monitor the transmissions of Station Analysis and are expected to bring their findings to the Lords for the next briefings.

In this way, the Edges get to increase their tactical ability as well as their combat prowess. The Nights briefings are handled in the same way, with the days reports from the Edges being scrutinised and assignments handed out.

Those assigned to Analysis also report when incidents are occurring and the level of intervention thought to be required. There is always a Knight or Lord present within the control room, and codes that need to be issued are done so within minutes.

Each Edge does not have a tracking beacon like many of the operative squads, but when a code is issued, the order are familiar with the Edges and Knights who are supposed to be in that area, if one of them does not respond, then they are contacted from the tactical station to confirm that they do not require assistance themselves.

Edges who encounter an ongoing situation whilst on patrol are given the opportunity to follow it up should they desire. As the first people on the scene, they have the ongoing knowledge of the situation and will be in possession of all the facts when it comes to debriefing. In this way, it is not uncommon for groups of Edges that work together to be given an assignment to resolve a particular matter.

Often the Edges within such groups worked as I&I operatives or scouts before their secondment to the Order and have long experience in the resolution of such matters.

Organisation Ratings

Each member of the Firefi has a competence rating that defines what situations they have been in and their ability in such situations as a result, this rating is used when assigning missions and investigations to the member in question.

The ratings are split into two different ratings. How well they fight, which covers how many kills they have made of cult targets whilst in the service. Kills made by using long range bombardments or support weaponry from vehicles and such do not count, the threat to the warrior had to be a real one, with the larger creatures and prominent figures being noted by the side of their rating in the file. How well they reason and think is a ratio measured by how many situations they have resolved without the use of violence or how much research and intelligence they have gathered for the Order.

How well they fight

Rank	Number of kills
Unproven	0-50
Tested	51-150
Trialled	151-500
Proven	501-1000
Unjudged	1001+

How well they think

Rank	Situations resolved using Intelligence
Head (As in Empty)	0-10
Debater	11-50
Reasoner	51-200
Negotiator	201 -500
Diplomat	501+

Although the order knows each of its members well and usually selects those best suited for the job, it reassures regular members of SLA industries when they know that the person being sent to them has tried and tested experience in the field.

Organisation Protocols

The Firefi work on strict protocols, allowing little deviation due to long experience in dealing with cult matters. The levels of incident are numbered one to five, and each dictates the level of response that the Firefi will send.

Code Six is a recognised watchword, but it can only be delivered from the master of the order and due to the nature of a Code Six, no protocols are in place for dealing with them. The call for the Firefi to attend must come from Bethlehem, Station Analysis monitors the airwaves to see if any squads are encountering any type of cult activity, and if they are, the monitoring stations pass the details through to Bethlehem, who decide if a code needs to be called in.

Code One – This is a basic incident, little more than regular cultists at very low levels of ability. Level one incidents are left for operatives to deal with, the danger levels from the cult at this point are sufficient for uninitiated people to resolve with bullets and blades. A code is issued so that the matter is recorded in the archives, no because attendance is required.

Code Two – This is classified as an incident with some aspect of cult activity, a smaller creature or two, something that would not usually warrant more than a squad of operatives, but would gain the attention of an Edge if one is in the vicinity

Code Three – Classified as an incident involving mainstream cult activity. Often a number of cultists sufficient to butcher the average operative squad or two, sometimes with creature backup, and either way, something that would necessitate the use of a squad of Edges or a single knight if one is available

Code Four – Classified as a Major cult incident, involving more than fifty cultists. Code Fours will have creature support and often the presence of one of the larger

creatures or a minor personality within the cults. Such incidents warrant the attention of a Knight and their attendant Claw.

Code Five – Emergency Protocol, this will be a co-ordinated offensive, involving a number of cult members at varying levels and heavy support, usually a Wurm or Devourer. Such activities warrant the attention of more than a single knight and their attendant Claw, sometimes even calling down the Lords of the order to assist with the action. In the event of the situation going beyond the Lords control, a single Unbowed may be requested. Non Firefi support is often called in at this level to help soak the casualties.

Whether or not the additional backup lives after the battle is decided after the fight is

over.

Code Six – Full Scale Invasion – There have only been five of these in the entire history of the order, Massive numbers of cult forces, backed up by super heavy hitters.

In the case of the previous incidents, Three involved Manifestations of the Red, One was a pitched battle under rainless sunlight with a Shard Angel, and the last and most recent, the whole Covenant of Xieye Bishops. Any and all forces that are required are granted without question, including the use of any number of the Unbowed, accounting can come later, the saving of the realm is at hand

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Firefi Campaigns

A Firefi campaign is far more high-powered than a regular operative campaign, all Firefi operatives were operatives at one time and survived to a level that few do.

Given the rigorous structure of the Firefi, it is extremely unlikely that more than one knight will be given to any situation unless a code four or above is auctioned, and these are very rare in the extreme.

It is recommended that characters playing a Firefi campaign generate Edges as their characters, although rules for creating Knights are given for the sake of completeness. The structure of a campaign is ordered in a similar nature to the operative campaigns, but rather than the Edges choosing what they want to be doing, they are assigned a patrol and have to follow it, which can lead for a more stifling arrangement than most SLA players are used to.

It is the nature of the organisation that a group of Edges being sent out will be to encounter something, and in many cases, follow it up until such time as the problem is resolved or until a higher authority is called in to resolve the matter. Edges that are following up incidents in an area report back on a daily basis and their lords and masters decide what to do with the information at hand.

If a group of Edges has to stay away from Bethlehem for any reason, their Knight back at base must be informed and the group must check in every few hours to confirm that they have not been compromised or killed. If a group misses more than three filed reports, a Code 3 is called in on their last reported position.

Firefi are not known for going undercover, their very nature prevents them from directly infiltrating the cults, leaving such

activities to operatives who may fit in, and are expendable.

EDGES

The starting profile for an Edge of the Firefi is as follows

STR	5-12
DEX	5-12
DIA	5-12
CONC	5-12
CHA	5-12
PHYS	As per other attributes
KNOW	As per other attributes
COOL	10-15
BELIEF POINTS – Starting 15, raised in the same way as other statistics at Character creation.	

Player character Edges most often work within the Street Department, the other departments require a lot of time to be spent away from the foreground of the fights against the cults, and while their efforts are no less necessary than those of the street, a campaign based solely around the examining of materials or information will lack the front line action of a street campaign.

By all means it is recommended to let the players have some contact and dealings with the other departments, but if they are going out on missions daily, they should be a part of the street department.

All statistics start at the lower end listed above. The Edge receives the basic skills package listed below and All Core level Belief abilities are granted as free to the Edge, with any Edge level abilities being paid for out of their character points.

All Edges have at least one mental disadvantage at level 5 at character creation, this can be bought off with experience points.

Starting Skills package (Street Edge)

One Ranged Weapon skill – Level 5

One Close combat/Unarmed combat skill – Level 5

Detect – Level 5

SLA Info – Level 5

Specialist Knowledge –Cults – Level 5

This skill is a new one for this particular supplement and covers the tactics, creatures, powers, and processes of both of the Cults. Characters using this skill successfully should be given some hint towards what is going on at the time and what might be expected of the cultists if they follow normal actions for a cultist. This skill also allows the identification of personalities within the cult and identification of the different types of creatures that they may come up against, thus preventing the embarrassing mistake of calling in a Manifestation sighting when in

fact all that has been encountered is a large Blood beast.

Once a character has their basic skills, they have a further 1000 character points to spend to finalise their characters.

Starting weapons and equipment

All Edges start with 5000 credits worth of equipment, and have no restrictions in what they are allowed to purchase. Firefi armour and weapons are available to them, but they must meet the minimum skill requirements (the order do not give out specialist weaponry because the Edge wants to *look* impressive)

KNIGHTS

A Knight is generated in the same way as an Edge, but their starting character points are 2000, and they start with up to 20000 credits worth of equipment.

Firefi Powers

At the core of the Firefi training are the powers that each member of the order commands. These powers have been developed over many centuries of war with the cults, and while those not versed in the abilities consider them to be almost magical in nature, the Firefi know that at the core of their abilities is the Belief that what they are doing is the will of their God, just as the Cultists believe in theirs.

The Abilities of the Firefi are less spectacular in nature than those of the cults, but they are far more focussed. Many abilities call for a resistance roll to be made. Given the nature of the powers of the Firefi, this is a D10 roll added to the Characters CONC ability against a D10 roll added to the targets CONC ability, the highest result wins the roll.

Core Abilities

All Firefi operatives from Edge upwards are trained in the following disciplines.

Belief

The Firefi can use their Belief to counteract the effects of both the Xieye and Xinshen cult abilities. The resistance roll allowed for most of the cults abilities can be augmented by the Cultists, but the Firefi can use their own belief points to neutralise this ability.

Range – Personal or touch only for Edges, all targets of cult abilities within two metres for Knights, All targets of cult abilities within five metres for Lords, and all targets within ten metres for the Master of the Order.

Game use – Each belief point used by the Firefi operative adds one to the resistance

roll for all targets within their personal area of influence. These bonuses can be overlapped with one another, If a knight and an edge within two metres of the knight both raise their resistance roll by three, the knights resistance roll will increase by three, the edges by six (their own three plus the three of the knight). If an edge needs to protect another, they have to be in physical contact with them.

Burn

The Firefi have the ability to burn the power of the cult at its source. Upon making contact with a cultist or creature of the cult, the Firefi operative may pass their own power through the physical link to reduce the cultists personal stock of power.

Range – Touch only, or may be channelled through Firefi weaponry.

Game Use – For each point of Belief used in the ability, the Firefi operative burns one point of the cultists power.

Firefi operatives may make physical contact with each other in order to pass power along the chain to suppress the larger and more powerful members of the cults.

Bastion

All Firefi operatives regenerate Belief at the rate of one point per hour. A full night of natural sleep will recover all Belief lost. However, the sleep must be natural, without chemical intervention. Drug use to induce sleep does not help in the recovery of lost belief points, and the Firefi may not use drugs such as Drum to increase their recovery.

If resting within the hallowed walls of Bethlehem, Belief recovery is increased to one point every five minutes and it is for this reason that most Edges do not stay out of the fortress for too long.

Brainstorm

All Firefi Operatives learn to focus their mind to wash away useless thoughts and maintain a pure and absolute perspective on their situation. The operative spends five minutes in preparation and whilst in Brainstorm, they recover Belief at the rate of one point every five minutes. Brainstorm will not be broken by anything short of physical contact unless the operative breaks it themselves. Any physical contact will break the trance. This ability is used during long missions into downtown and lower downtown

Behold

The Firefi have long experience in dealing with cults and those associated with them. Behold allows the Edge to sense if there has been cult activity in the area and if so, the nature and extent of the activity. This ability does not allow the Edge to track cult members, but will allow them to sense if the activity in the area is decreasing or increasing. This ability manifests as a passive aura around the Edge, extending one metre per point of CONC the Edge has.

Edge level abilities

These abilities are available at the point in character creation when the Edges final skills are decided. Each abilities character point cost is noted just after the name of the ability. If an Edge wants that particular skill, they pay the required number of character points and the ability is noted on their sheet.

Seal (50 Points)

The Edge stops a wound from bleeding, this can be done at some range, allowing the

Edge to cut the influence of such abilities as puppet strings, and with others, to disrupt the flow of blood so the ability has to be reactivated.

Range – One metre, plus one metre per point of belief

Belief points required – One belief point per wound being sealed. The wound seals, leaving no trace that the injury was ever there, however, the damage already done will remain.

Game Use – This ability seals wounds, it is not healing, and no hit points are recovered as a result of this injury, but it interrupts the use of blood cult abilities that require open wounds, and in the case of cultists draining blood or using blood to power their rituals, it will disrupt the flow of blood long enough for the ability to have to be reactivated.

Freeze (100 Points)

The Edge passes their energy and causes an amount of blood to freeze. This ability can be used to directly injure a target if used creatively, but is mostly used to render blood armour and weapons brittle and unstable.

Range – One metre plus one metre per point of Belief used in activation

Belief Points Required – One point to activate ability, plus matching of Belief points against Power points used.

Game Use – The Edge matches the number of power points used in the cultists ability and the weapon or armour being used is rendered icy and brittle and will shatter when next striking or struck. Weapons will do one final strike before shattering on the opponent with no further effect. Armour will shatter causing damage to the wearer equal to the PV of the armour when it was created.

If using the ability to strike at the Cultist, the

Edge must pass two belief points for every point of damage they wish to inflict. Damage inflicted is taken from the total hit points and represents the blood freezing and clotting within the body, no wounds are generated by this ability.

For each point of Freezing taken to a limb, the victim is at -1 to any skills involving the use of that limb. If the target is reduced to 0 hit points, their body will start to freeze over. Any location reduced to minus its original hit points is lost forever and if the victim is reduced to minus their total hit points, their body freezes solid with the same effect as the Glacial chill ability. If a Frozen target is struck, they will explode doing damage equal to their total hit points to everything within one metre of their body.

Calm (50 Points)

The Edge radiates a calming influence outwards from themselves, causing a cessation of hostilities and making taking offensive actions for more difficult for those under the influence of the ability. The Edge uses this ability to crush the resistance from lower level cult members who would not be a threat through their powers, but whose weight of numbers may cause them some level of difficulty.

Range – Five metres, plus one metre per belief point used in activation

Belief Points Cost – Two points to activate, plus boosting of calming field at one Belief point per two additional points in the field modifier.

Game Use – All those working at cross purpose to the Edge and caught in the area of effect of the ability get a standard resistance roll against the effects. If they succeed in the resistance roll, there are no effects from this ability. If they fail the roll, any offensive actions incur a penalty equal to the Edges CONC bonus plus two for each additional point spent in the activation.

Offensive actions are defined as any action that will bring harm to anything. Those working with the Edge suffer no penalty to offensive actions, however, if their intentions change whilst still within the field, they will have to make a resistance roll as per all the other targets.

The field lasts for three rounds.

Tinker (100 Points)

This ability allows the Edge to make small adjustments in electrical equipment, causing momentary glitches and interruptions that appear normal, but will disrupt the use of that particular piece of equipment while the ability is trained upon it.

The equipment will not be damaged by this ability, but will malfunction for the length of time the Edge is concentrating on it.

Range – One metres, plus one metre per belief point used in activation

Belief Points Cost – Two points to activate, plus one point per minute the ability is sustained.

Game Use – This ability causes impulses within electrical equipment, allowing the Edge to confuse the machine and have it register what they want it to register.

The most common use of this ability confuses such things as motion scanners, bio scanners, and other methods of detection. The Cults very often rely on manpower to watch over things, but in some cases, the more organised cults have the use of machinery to assist in this.

It can also be used to fog instrumentation in armour and vehicles which can be of use when the Edge has to make a swift retreat from the forces that they are assisting.

Bind (150 Points)

The Edge uses this ability to restrict the

movement of living creatures within a short range, the ability works on the nerves of the creature rather than on its actual muscles, allowing the Edge to restrain far larger creatures than they would using the power of their own muscles. This ability is used by Edges in great numbers when faced with the larger creatures of the cult.

Range – Five metres, plus one metre per belief point used in activation.

Belief Points Cost – One point to activate, plus points equal to the targets PHYS bonus, duration of one round.

Game Use – When activating this ability, the Edge matches their mental patterns to those of the target. They can immobilise an amount of muscle equal to five times their own body mass with a single use of this ability and can maintain it as long as they have power to do so. Whilst maintaining this power, they are at -4 to any other action they undertake.

Targets under the effect of this ability cannot move at all and are unable to avoid attack or undertake any physical action of their own.

They may still use mental abilities and think clearly, any abilities that only require the mind to work will be unaffected. The target may undertake a resistance roll each turn to break the effects. Creatures with more than five times the body mass of the Edge are not restrained by this ability, and multiple Edges will have to use the ability on the same creature to achieve the same effect.

Deflect (150 Points)

The Edge creates a field of force around them that works to redirect anything being used to attack them.

This barrier manifests as a blurring in the air around the character that channels the attack away from them, bending the path of

attacks and altering the flow of energy so it flows around and not over the Edge.

Range – Personal only

Belief Points Cost – One point to activate, plus belief points to boost the armour's effectiveness, a single activation lasts three rounds, after which the Edge must engage the ability again as a single action.

Game Use – This ability forms a personal barrier for the Edge against incoming physical attacks. Only attacks with a physical presence can be affected by this ability. Abilities that cause damage by other means are unaffected by this ability.

For each point of belief put into the armour, physical attacks against them suffer a -1 to the attack roll. The attack will still take place and if it misses the Edge, may still injure/damage something else nearby. If the roll with the modifier is still enough to hit the Edge, then they will still take the hit, and this ability will not affect the damage done by the blow.

This ability is often used in close quarters with the enemy, when surrounded by others, it is very easy for this ability to deflect their attacks into each other while the Edge concentrates on the more dangerous opponents.

Maul (100 Points)

The Edge manifests a weapon into their hands, seemingly forged from solidified air, the weapon is visible in the normal Mort atmosphere by virtue of the rain bouncing off it, but is invisible if manifested in calm surroundings without other atmospheric conditions.

Range – Personal Only

Belief Points Cost – One point to activate, plus belief points to enhance the blades statistics as below. A single use of this ability will last a single round, so if the Edge manifests the blade in phase 3, it will last till

the end of phase 3 in the next round, with the Edge having to take a single action to renew the blade if required after this time.

Game Use – The Edge forms a weapon composed of their will, able to strike at any angle with equal force. The weapons statistics vary depending on the amount of power the Edge puts into it upon its creation. For Each belief point put into its creation, the weapon has one point of PEN, DMG, or AD, with an upper limit of the Edges CONC statistic.

Barrier (50 Points)

The Edge forms a hazy shield of coruscating energy either upon their arm or suspended in the air within a short distance of where they personally are. This shield will prevent all damage getting through it until its resistance is worn through, at which point the shield will flicker and disappear.

Often used as defence in close melees, the shield can also be used to safeguard others from attack or to cover assaults and movement to give the Edge the tactical advantage.

Range – A number of metres equal to the Edges CONC bonus within a fixed position or mounted upon the Edges arm and movable.

Belief Points Cost – One point to activate the ability, plus belief points to boost the shields size and potency

Game Use – The Shield created is one foot in diameter. This shield can be further increased at a rate of one belief point per additional foot of diameter the shield needs to cover.

The shield has no PV, all attacks damage it, but it will stop any attacks from passing through until the ID is worn through completely. The Shield will take the entirety of the hit from the last blow without letting any damage through, but any residual effects

from the hit (explosive damage and such) may carry through the dissipating shield to affect those close to the shield.

For each point of Belief the Edge puts into the shield, it gains 20ID, with the maximum number of points being used on the ability being the Edges CONC bonus.

Strength of Will (100 Points)

The Edge charges their muscles with the power of belief, allowing them to do things which would have been physically impossible. The Edge can pass this on to others if they are of a suitable mindset, but the effects do not last as long for others.

Range – Personal or Touch only

Belief Points Costs – One to activate, plus belief points to boost the power of the ability.

Game Use – The Edge focuses their power into their physical being or another who they are touching physically, channelling the power of their mind to enhance their physicality.

In game terms, for each belief point channelled into this ability, the Edge gains +1 to either STR or DEX, with any appropriate phase or damage bonuses that are appropriate to the new level of power.

The ability lasts for one round from the phase in which it was activated, so if activated on phase one of a round, it would last till the end of phase one of the next round, giving the user the bonus till the end of phase one. After this has ceased, the ability must be activated again as a single action. It is possible for several Edges to focus this ability upon a single recipient, but if the Strength or Dexterity of an individual is raised to more than twice what it was originally, the power being put into them starts to work against them, causing damage from within as the body struggles to contain the power coursing through it.

If this occurs, the boosted individual suffers one hit point of damage each phase while moving to all locations that moved in that turn. If they reach 0 hit points, they fall unconscious and may no longer damage themselves

Knight level abilities

As with Edge level abilities, these skills are not freely granted, their points cost in character points is noted next to their name.

Many of these abilities have prerequisites from the Edge level of abilities, which represent the Knight learning the basics of the higher level ability before progressing their expertise to this level.

Ignite (150 Points)

The knight uses this ability to infuse blood with raw power, one of the most devastating abilities of the Firefi, this ability ignites blood at the knights' command, causing devastating explosions of blood and removing the very substance the cults make weapons from.

A lesser known use of this ability causes the blood to become infused with power, when the cultist tries to use the blood for their infernal powers, the charge turns explosive and damages them, often disrupting their concentration for that ability.

Prerequisite – Freeze (to learn the basics of thermal manipulation)

Range – One metre per Belief point used on activations

Belief Points Cost – Two points to activate, plus matching of Belief to Blood points

Game use – The knight infuses the blood with too much power, causing spontaneous combustion of the blood in an explosion

centred on the location where the blood is, causing severe burns where the blood contacted the skin. The knight matches the blood points used in the ability they are burning on a one for one basis and the blood ignites, burning for one phase before evaporating. This does damage equal to the blood points used in the ability to the target using the blood. If used on a weapon, the ability causes the weapon to explode, doing damage to only the limbs using the weapon.

If used on a living target, the victim gets a standard resistance roll, and if this fails, each point of Belief that the knight puts into the ability does two damage to the targets total hit points.

If the Victim is reduced to 0 hit points, the explosion rips out of them and may damage those within a metre for a number of damage points equal to half the damage that they took in the blast that reduced them to 0.

If the Victim is reduced to minus their original hit point total, they explode spectacularly, doing damage equal to the blast that reduced them to minus the negative total to all targets within a radius in metres equal to half the damage done. Thus a target taking six damage, which lowers them to a double negative will explode for six points of damage to all targets within 3 metres of themselves.

The other ability of the Knight is to charge blood with power to make it useless to the cult. The Knight infuses the blood on a one Belief point per Blood point, which creates a charge within the Blood. If blood infused in this way is used in any cult abilities, it burns, doing one point of damage per charged blood point used.

Personal abilities (those with a range of touch or those generating an effect on the cultist such as armour or weapon) have a chance of being disrupted by the damage caused equal to the number of charged blood points used multiplied by 10%, so five

charged blood points used would have a fifty percent chance of being aborted with all power points and blood points used in the ability lost.

Abilities not being channelled through the cultist (summoning and such) do not suffer the problem of having the ability aborted.

Clearmind (100 Points)

The Knight extends their power of will, allowing all those within their area of influence to try and resist the pervasive abilities of the cults.

The aura of stillness radiates outwards from the Knight, allowing all those in the area to try and regain their mind against the insanities of the cults.

Prerequisite – Calm (to understand the nature of emotion and how to still it)

Range – Equal to the Knights CONC in metres, plus one metre per Belief point expended.

Belief points costs – Five points to activate, plus two points per additional +1 of resistance. The field will last for a number of rounds equal to the Knights CONC, plus two rounds per additional power point.

Game Use – The knight projects a calming aura, allowing all those within the range affected by Xinshen powers to make a second resistance roll with a bonus equal to the Knights CONC and any additional modifiers the knight has added power for.

Success on the roll will negate the ongoing effect of the Xinshen ability, requiring a new activation of the ability for the victim to be affected again.

Victims of abilities such as Conduit will still have the conduit active within them, but the cultist will need to reactivate the ability to continue passing power through it. Those

who have been already damaged or transformed in some way gain no benefit from this power.

A group of knights may combine the Clearmind ability to create far stronger protection against cult abilities. The effects of multiple clearmind abilities being used at the same time stack up on a direct basis, so two knights with a +3 bonus within their opposites field would gain a +6 against cult abilities.

Redirect (150 Points)

The Knight sees into the pattern of the power all around them, using their own power to subtly alter the direction and flow of the power flowing around them, changing the targets of the cults abilities and protecting those around them.

Prerequisite – Deflect (To learn how to begin to redirect things)

Range – Equal to the knights CONC in metres.

Power points costs – Five points to activate, plus power matching on belief to power points.

Game Use – This ability is a reflexive ability used by knights to prevent the more severe abilities of the cult from targeting their forces.

The Knight matches the amount of power being used by the cultist and redirects the ability to another target within the range of their influence. This target gets a standard resistance roll against the knight redirecting the ability. This resistance roll may be reduced by the knight spending further belief points.

If the resistance roll fails, the ability being redirected takes full effect on the new target.

If the resistance roll succeeds, the ability takes effect upon the intended target.

This power cannot be used on abilities that affect a wide area or are untargeted.

Still (150 Points)

The Knight extends their power into the air, uncharging all the blood within their sphere of influence. The blood affected this way drops inert to the floor and cannot be used again for the purpose of fuelling abilities.

Prerequisite - None (although the ability to Burn power points is a free ability gifted to all Firefi members and it is required to learn this ability).

Range – Equal to the knights CONC in metres, plus one metre per belief point used on activation

Power points cost – Five points to activate, plus power points to increase the amount of negation.

Game Use – The knight burns a number of their power points, which will not regenerate until they have had time to sleep

and recuperate naturally.

This sends out a shockwave of power from the knight, negating all abilities in the area, Ebb, Cult, or Firefi, and as such, is only used as a last resort.

For each power point used in the activation of this ability over and above the initial Belief points spent to activate, the shockwave has a power of five, so burning five power points in the activation of the ability will generate a power 25 shockwave.

The knights' shockwave cancels all abilities within the radius of the ability that are using an amount of power equal to or under the power total of the ability. No resistance roll is allowed to continue the ability.

The above power 25 shockwave would therefore drop all abilities in the region that cost less than 25 power points (Belief, Ebb, or Cult) to activate.

The Unbowed

Above and beyond the Firefi are the Unbowed, these long serving veterans have spent a long time in the field, dealing with the horrors that the cults can throw at them. Each Unbowed (The term applies equally to male and female agents of Jerusalem) is a phenomenally capable combatant with long years of experience in what they face.

Unbowed are inducted in generations, rather than as and when each of them comes to be ready for the job. Each generation is brought to Jerusalem as a new master of the Firefi is ordained from their ranks.

When the master is taken from their ranks, all those who were in the running for the position are brought to Jerusalem and tutored by the older and wiser warriors who serve there.

The nature of the power behind the world is shown to them and the ability to both mimic and duplicate the powers of the cults and the ebb using races is shown to them.

Sometimes these teachings can overwhelm even the strongest of minds, and only when the training is complete will it become clear which of the applicants have survived in mind as well as body.

Those whose sanity is shattered by the training are taken to the Requiem and tended with the best care that is available in the World of Progress in the hope that they will return to the fold one day. The nature of the training that Unbowed are given is such that many of them gain a degree of insanity, indeed, it is noted that one has to be insane to want to face the odds and creatures that these warriors do, but the use of a Unbowed means that all other options have been exhausted, as they are as likely to level the entire field as just the enemy, knowing that the taint of the cults extends everywhere, they often don't take the chance

that the corruption could have set in. Those that survive with their sanity in any way intact are inducted into the ranks of S1 and given the warrant to pass justice over the world, their actions only answerable to Mr Slayer himself.

The abilities of Unbowed are far beyond those of mortal creatures, they are able to move at speed enough to take a weapon from an enemy, unload the weapon, put it back in the hands of their enemy, and move back to the position where they were before the enemy has had chance to realise that they've moved.

Their strength and power is sufficient to throw small vehicles and punch through walls if they desire, and their understanding of the world is such that they can posit a solution to any problem within a second of seeing it.

The Unbowed do not wear uniforms of any sort, like all members of S1, they are present without ever being noticed, those who encounter them have a vague remembrance of a SLA operative assisting them, but will not remember anything else of what happened.

No rules are given for the generation of Jerusalem characters, such power is not allowed to roam on the streets of Mort, and no player should ever have such power available to them. The very nature of an Unbowed means that they work beyond the confines of SLA protocol and do not work as a team. If a single Unbowed cannot turn the tide, chances are the dock is already flooded.

They remain for the most part sequestered within the headquarters or are sent on missions off world, where the collateral damage they cause can be limited effectively.

Firefi Equipment

The Firefi have a variety of specialist equipment that they use to engage the cults, most of this equipment has not been made available to operatives on a general basis, but with the increase in recent cult activity, a lot of the minor items that are used in everyday Firefi activities are now available on special release for those operatives that might need them.

Ancilia

The Ancilia is an armour mounted seal that focuses the defensive abilities of those being assaulted by any supernatural power, be it Ebb, Xieye, or Xinshen. As long as the seal is intact and undamaged, any belief point spent to increase the users' defensive resistance rolls is counted as two when the roll is made. If the ID on the part of the armour that the Ancilia is placed upon is reduced to zero, the seal is broken and can no longer be used till it is fully repaired. Multiple Seals placed on the same armour to do stack effects.

Costs – 750c per seal.

Braid of Tanis

Tanis was one of the first of the Firefi, known for his fierce temper and uncompromising stance on dealing with the cults. It was he who led the charge at the Enra slaughter, and it was he who understood that defending against the cults would never be the way to victory. The Braid of Tanis focusses the offensive abilities of the Firefi, doubling the Belief points placed into it for any offensive ability used. Multiple Braids do not stack effects.

Cost – 1000c

Erqulan

The Erqulan is a bioengineered net that mounts to the users living skin. Thin enough to be worn as an undershirt to normal armour, it can be used to store Belief points within it. The Erqulan burns two points of power a day to sustain the other points it has within, if not given additional power, it will use the power stored within the shirt. While the shirt doesn't impede moving and fighting, it cannot be worn under a deathsuit without disrupting the ebb abilities of the wearer. It provides no armour in and of itself, and regenerates 10ID a day if it still has power within it. If reduced to 0 ID, it is shredded and will need to be replaced.

The Erqulan can store 20 Belief points within and when undamaged, can withstand up to 50 ID damage.

Cost – 750c

Ilotian Runes

Ilotian runes are used to nullify cult powers, the metal of the chain is etched with runes that drain power from those they are in contact with. The most frequent use of the Rune is to place it on ammunition being used against cult members, where a hit from the bullet will cause the cultists power to drain away as well. Runes can also be placed on melee weapons, and are often most used in restraint devices for when the cultists are subdued for safe transit.

Each small rune placed upon an object drains a single power point per turn the rune is in contact with the target. Each large run placed upon an object drains two power points per turn the run is in contact with the target.

In the case of bullets, this drain will apply every turn till the bullet is removed, but requires the bullet to be intact, so runes are never carved into HP, HEAP, or HESH rounds as the round deforms or explodes upon contact.

Melee weapons can have up to two large runes placed upon them in the case of a single handed weapon and up to four in the case of a two handed weapon. Restraints can have one small rune per six inches of restraint, which is why Illotian restraints tend to come in the form of chains that can sap large amounts of power each turn.

Cost – 1c per small rune inscribed, 20c per large rune inscribed.

Tikan

The Tikan is a larger battery for use in operations that have vehicular support. Weighing more than a hundred kilo's, it is portable, but unwieldy for use in field operations and is often mounted upon the support APC for any mission where its use is authorised. The Tikan contains up to 1000 belief points that can be drained from it by anyone in physical contact with it, the power point store goes down by ten each day and can be reloaded by anyone in physical contact with it. Most of these batteries are stored in the Bethlehem facility where they are recharged by the faithful on a daily basis.

Cost – Unavailable commercially, only available on assignment.

Personalities within the Order

Durand (Unjudged Diplomat)

Born more than four hundred years ago, Durand is a legend in the order. Since her initiation to the order so long ago, Durand has served faithfully on the front line for those many centuries. Standing just under six feet tall and appearing to be no older than a woman in her mid-thirties, broad in the shoulder and narrow in the hip, Durand carries herself as if she were Atlas, carrier of worlds, and those within the order believe that she could fulfil that role if she was called upon to do so.

The only one of the first Generation Unbowed remaining, she still patrols daily and splits her time between teaching the newer recruits to the order and the regular business of ensuring the cults stay in the dirt where they belong. Durand has never been elected to the post of master of the order, refusing several times before the protocol of recruiting from the current generation of warriors came into being. She remains an advisor to the Masters of the order but will not hesitate to remind them that her place in

on the street, where she can do the most good. She has no political aspirations, and

has little time for those that do, she sees the Unbowed as gifted with a responsibility to protect those that have neither their power nor their privilege, and she considers any person who seeks greater power through manipulation and not achievement to be unworthy of her attention.

Durand attends the morning briefing each day and chooses the area where she thinks she will be of most use. This breaches the normal protocol of Edges being given their assigned patrols, but no one thinks to take Durand to task over this. She is an Edge by Rank, but a Master by ability. Her records were long since erased from the orders records, and it is not known if she has any insanity that manifests itself beyond the need to continually test herself on the streets.

Rafe Peregrine (Unjudged Reasoner)

Rafe was one of the inmates within Bethlehem at the time of the first incursion against it. Originally a line soldier in the 22nd Orbital, Rafe served time in Dante, Charlies Point, Serros, and Calain before he was brought back to Mort. The wars that he had fought had given him purpose and meaning, and now that the war was over, it had left him hollow inside, his life no longer with meaning, no longer caring if he lived or died, and so he was placed within Bethlehem as an example that not all those that return from the wars are homicidal maniacs. For several years, Rafe sat in silence trying to make sense of the freedom that he was expected to enjoy within the walls, until the first cultists burst in through the walls of his world. In an instant, he was a man of purpose again, a man whose skills could be used again to make the difference against the enemies of SLA.

When the dust had settled from the battle, he returned to the damaged shell of Bethlehem, unable to use his skills on those he had so long fought to protect, and unwilling to remain a fugitive from the company that had given him all he had. The ministry of war found him sitting near the breach of the walls and made an offer to him, to make a contribution to the new department that would be directly responsible for turning back the efforts of the Cults. He was given a free hand in the crafting of the training that would come to shape the Firefi and after them, the Unbowed.

His experience of dealing with situations far worse than any that had ever been seen of the face of Mort proved invaluable, and his zeal for the task at hand was unmatched, he did not rest except when his eyes could no longer open, and his mind took in all the information he was given, taking vast cores

of data from the ministry of war and seeing the nature of war beyond the worlds he had fought upon, he learned everything. His techniques and training formed the basis from which all Firefi would learn, but when offered the position of Master of the Order, he declined, knowing that a position without the days fight in it would kill him more surely than any bullet.

Rafe still lives within Bethlehem as Lord Advisor of the Firefi, second only to the Master of the Chapter in rank and commander of all training and discipline within the halls of Bethlehem.

His even tone and manner belie a soul charged with the energy of a thousand men, and the respect for him is second only to that for Durand, in some cases, even more so.

Nathan Ehmann (Unjudged Head)

Nathan is the current master of the Order and the fiftieth holder of the office to date.

A veteran of Dante for over thirty years, Nathan was brought back to Bethlehem when he reached mandatory retirement, throwing himself with an intensity of purpose almost frightening into the training of the Firefi. He won acclaim at an early juncture when he stopped a Code Three whilst still on probation, and his prowess became spoken of throughout the order.

Not known for reasoning his way through things, Nathan does not believe in the benefits of diplomacy, and in these dark times, his no-prisoners approach is very popular with those of his generation and those beneath him know that he would not ask them to stand in a situation where he himself would have not stood.

Creatures of the Xieye

The creatures found serving the Xieye cult are vast and varied, what follows is a base description of the most common creatures found in the ranks of the cult within the World of Progress

All creatures' statistics are included as variables to reflect the differing levels of creature even within standard demographics, STR bonuses should be added to DMG on natural attacks where appropriate.

Splash

The Splash is the smallest creature found in the ranks, little more than a puddle of blood in its natural state, a Splash is a manifestation of the power of the Xieye god, it acts to assist cultists in the use of their power, focus their minds together, and in extreme cases, assist them in combat or in the healing of their wounds.

Splashes are summoned as a single Blood Beast (See Blood Beast), and then broken down into the individual pieces that will serve the cultists. A Splash is attuned to the cultist that it serves and remains with them by anchoring itself to their skin.

While attached, a Splash will add one to the cultists CONC and DIA, and take its nourishment from the excretions of their body. The splash is only good for a single action, chosen from the list below. This action will destroy the splash or use it up, requiring the cultist to summon another. A cultist may only have one Splash attuned to them at any particular time.

Splash Actions

Blind – The Splash is propelled from the cultists body to the eyes of the opponent, granting the cultist a free phase in which to act. The Splash propels itself to a target within two metres, and aims for the eyes

with an effective skill of 5 (no penalties applied to this strike for being a called shot).

If successful, the splash covers the eyes entirely and forces the creature to spend a single phase clearing its vision before it can continue. Creatures without sight or using another form of vision are not affected by this ability (although suit camera's and infrared will be obscured) but the splash will not be able to tell that it will be ineffective and if blinding the opponent would be of greatest benefit, will attempt it anyway.

Heal – The Splash absorbs itself into its masters' body, infusing their damaged body with new vitality. The cultist regains one hit point in all their body locations, with any undamaged location transferring their hit point to the nearest damaged location.

Harm – The Splash is propelled from the cultists body to the body of the opponent, where it attaches to the skin and tries to dissolve into them. The resultant burning and stinging sensation will cause the opponent to be at -2 on their actions for the next round only as they shake the Splash loose. This ability will not affect armoured opponents, but as with the blinding technique, if the splash considers it the most effective tactic, it will try it anyway.



Blood Puppet

The low level members of the Xieye cults are known as Blood Puppets, both for the fact that they're not enacting their own will in their service to the cult and that the only useful thing they provide is the blood within them. Blood Puppets are human, often without powers of their own, and mostly used as meat shields for the more important members of the cult. Those who survive long enough or show an aptitude for channelling energy may eventually find themselves in a position of power, but for most of them, the only promise the cult delivers on is that their blood will be used for something of great purpose.

STR - 2-7

DEX - 2-7

DIA - 2-7

CONC - 2-7

CHA - 2-7

PHYS (As per other attributes)

KNOW (As per other attributes)

COOL - 3-8

Power Points 10 to 20

Attacks - Most blood puppets have improvised weapons such as clubs or knives, very rarely they might have a holdout pistol with a few rounds.

Powers - All blood puppets will have the skill of Conversion, those who have been around more than a few months may have learned a single minor ability in addition to this. Senior Blood puppets may have several minor abilities, but they will not have been given access to anything above minor level.



Red Hand

Between the Puppets and the Bishops are the Hands, these are the few who have managed to survive beyond the days where all they could offer was their lives. Having been around for a while, they've learned enough of the cult to understand that truly serving the Xieye means giving of their mind as well as their body.

STR - 5-10

DEX - 5-10

DIA - 5-10

CONC - 5-10

CHA - 5-10

PHYS (As per other attributes)

KNOW (As per other attributes)

COOL - 5-10

Power Points 30-50

Attacks – Hands will have access to weapons, taking their choice from the weapons that their branch of the cult possesses. While they prefer to use the abilities they have learned in the service of the cult, they are not above using any armour or weapons that they have.

Powers – Red hands will have all the minor abilities mastered and are likely to have access to one or two of the major abilities depending on what they've managed to learn from the masters of the cult.

Bishop

The highest level of the human members of the cult, a Bishop is the Leader of all cult forces in a particular sector. They are never encountered by themselves and always have a strong retinue of Puppets and Hands with them as well as any summoned creatures that form part of their retinue. Each Bishop knows their territory well and communes with the Lords of the Xieye on a regular basis, bringing their will to the streets below. Bishops appear as humans who have no lower jaw with eyes of deepest crimson.

STR - 8-15

DEX - 8-15

DIA - 8-15

CONC - 8-15

CHA - 8-15

PHYS (As per other attributes)

KNOW (As per other attributes)

COOL – Immune to psychological effects, any tests called for are automatically passed. If a statistic is required, the range runs between 8-15

Power Points 100-300

Attacks and Powers – Bishops have access to the full range of Xieye powers, they never use equipment or weapons beyond the followers that support them. Each of them will know all the minor abilities and many of the major abilities of the cults.

Redtooth

The dogs of the Xieye cult once belonged to the world of progress, but through various rituals many centuries ago, they were infused with the madness of the blood and now there are sufficient of them to breed amongst themselves and propagate their own species.

A Redtooth appears very much like any other dog in the world of progress till it gets to close range, whereupon their paper thin skin can be seen underneath their matted and rotting fur, the internal organs pulsing just under the surface. A Redtooth lives only to feed, their own metabolism is far too

fast to allow them to survive for long without fresh infusion of blood, and they find this usually in their victims, or back at the point of summoning, where huge pools of blood are maintained, both for use as rituals, and as feeding pools for the Redteeth.

A Redtooth moves faster than almost any other living creature, and has a powerful bite as well as a corrosive spitting attack generated by its rotting insides. However, the worst aspect of the Redtooth is the disease that it carries within its saliva, a disease now known as the Red Madness that reduces anything afflicted by it to the state of the Redtooth itself, eventually causing mutation and transformation, and a new Redtooth to stalk the world of progress.

STR - 5-10

DEX - 13-15

DIA - 5-10

CONC - 1-5

CHA - 0

PHYS (As per other attributes)

KNOW (As per other attributes)

COOL – N/A, immune to all psychological effects

HIT POINTS - (As per other attributes)

ATTACKS –

Bite – Skill level 4, PEN 5, DMG 3, AD 2, any bite attack that succeeds in doing hit point damage also transfers the Red madness to the victim

Claw – Skill level 2, PEN 2, DMG 1

Corrosive Spit – Range 1 metre, Skill level 4, PEN 3, DMG 2 (No strength bonus), AD 2. Any target hit by this attack will be covered in corrosive spit that burns and chews through armour and skin alike. Unarmoured targets will take two damage per phase for three phases (after which the rain will have diluted it sufficiently), Armoured Targets will take two armour damage per phase for three phases. Targets

fighting the dogs in areas without rain to wash off the acid will continue to take burn damage till the spit is washed or scraped off them. The nature of the burns caused by the spit prevents the Red Madness from seeping into the skin.

SPECIAL

The Red Madness – the Disease that exists in the bite of the Redteeth is a progressively debilitating disease. Easily curable by drugs found in Bethlehem, or by swift ebb healing (Body Purification), if the disease is allowed to take hold, the victim starts to lose their mental grip on the world around them.

A victim will lose one point each of DIA and CONC each day till they are reduced to 0, at which point the victim becomes a feral beast, stalking and killing as the Redteeth do.

The disease also affects the muscles of the body, causing the fibres to contract and pull at each other, eventually shortening to the point where they snap, and the victim is reduced to crawling on deformed limbs.

It is not unknown for the victims to chew through their own limbs to allow them to move freely again, such is the madness that has them. If the victim finds their way to lower downtown, and into the presence of other Redteeth, they will bring the new Redtooth before their cult masters, who will either make a sacrifice of it to their masters, or send it back through the portal to the Xieye realm, where its transformation will be presided over by the lords of the cult.

If the victim is cured of the disease after losing points of DIA or CONC, they will suffer no further loss, but the loss already suffered will be permanent



Blood Beast

The Blood Beast is a larger Demon of the Xieye cult, ranging in size from a small car to a truck. Whatever its size, it resembles a huge mass of blood and viscera given form.

It is sometimes possible to see the eyes within the creature, but like the rest of it, it only extrudes limbs or organs when it needs to, remaining mutable at all times.

The Blood beast is the most common creature summoned to the world of progress, firstly because it is relatively small when first summoned, but more so because it rarely remains small once it has made its way here.

The Blood Beasts preferred method of attack is to envelope the attacker completely, whereupon the beast will first suffocate, then digest its victim at its leisure.

If the target is wearing armour or proves indigestible, the Blood beast can extrude

bones and the weapons of those that it has absorbed to strike at the enemy. The size and ability of the blood beast depends very greatly on what and who it has eaten and what they were carrying when it got them.

STR – 7-15
DEX – 7-15
DIA – 4-10
CONC – 5- 12
CHA - 0

PHYS (As per other attributes)
KNOW (As per other attributes)
COOL – N/A invulnerable to all psychological effects

HIT POINTS - (As per other attributes)
Takes one half damage from bladed weapons, one quarter damage from blunt weapons, and takes one half damage from projectile weapons of any sort.

POWER POINTS TO SUMMON –
Double total hit points when summoned

ATTACKS

Absorb – Skill level 8 – The Blood beast flows over and around the victim, which must be smaller than the Blood beast itself. Once inside the beast, the target takes one damage to all exposed locations each turn, if wearing armour, one armour damage each turn. The Beast will use its own strength to prevent the creature from moving within it, or at least to smother its useful actions while promoting its useless actions. This manifests as a penalty to all physical actions to the contained creature equal to the blood beasts strength bonus. The Blood beast can also extrude teeth and bones to attack limbs that are still carrying weapons (as indicated below).

Weapon attack – When the Blood beast has absorbed a creature fully, it can utilise to limited effect those weapons that the creature had on it when it was absorbed, the number of weapons a Blood beast may attack with at one time is equal to its CONC bonus. The skills with which it attacks with each weapon will depend on what knowledge it has absorbed in its life. See Drain ability.

Natural attack – The Blood beast can extrude bones, claws, and teeth to attack when it has no other method of assaulting a potential victim. It can also use these to attack creatures entrapped within its body. Skill level 5, PEN 2, DMG 2, AD 1. Against a creature trapped inside its body, it scores an automatic hit every phase (Even on phases when the blood beast itself does not have an action) against the creature.

Splash Generation – For every hit point in damage the Blood beast takes, a new Splash is generated where the injury fell. It is not uncommon for the Blood beast to be summoned and used to generate more Splashes, then healed and used again.

SPECIAL

Drain – The Bloodbeast absorbs creatures as a primary attack because it can gain knowledge from their bodies and brains. When a Bloodbeast absorbs the brain of a creature, it may choose one skill from the creatures list of skills and gain a single point in that skill. It cannot gain a point in a skill if it already has the skill at a higher level than the creature.

Using these skills, the Bloodbeast can use the weapons of the absorbed creature to attack others. In the event that the Bloodbeast absorbs a vevaphon, it gains five points from five individual skills due to the similar nature of the Vevaphons structure.

Multiple Attacks – The Bloodbeast is capable of fighting several opponents at the same time, but pays a price in concentration to do so. For each opponent above the first that it is fighting, it halves the attack skill being used against it. Thus against two opponents, a Blood beast with a skill of 6 in blade 1h and a skill of 4 in blunt 1h and both weapons in its possession could make a blade attack at level 6 and then a blunt attack at level 2, or a blunt attack at level 4 and then a blade attack at level 3 if it wished.

For each additional opponent over and above two, it halves the skill again, and again, so the third opponent would be at one quarter skill, the fourth at one eighth and so on. Only Blood beasts that have been around for a very long time can be effective at this particular tactic. Blood beasts may not use this ability to make multiple attacks on a single opponent.

Absorbing Penalty – The Bloodbeast also absorbs all the things that the creature had on it, which includes drugs of any sort. As a result, the Bloodbeast can be encountered on any number of SLA chemicals, but it can also be encountered whilst on recreational drugs. GM discretion.



Devourer

The Devourer is one of the largest of the creatures that the Xieye Cult can summon to the surface of mort, over twenty feet tall and weighing more than ten tons, the Devourer is a huge quadruped, composed of a body, legs, and a colossal mouth that takes up the entire of the front of its body.

Its skin is heavily armoured and it attacks with a prehensile tongue that snares its prey and drags them into its maw to be digested at its leisure as well as claws capable of shredding armour with a casual blow. Used as heavy attack support, the Devourer is usually summoned to cause maximum disruption to an area while the cult undertakes its actual mission.

STR – 30-40
DEX – 5-15
DIA – 1-5

CONC – 5-10
CHA – 0
PHYS (As per other attributes)

KNOW (As per other attributes)
COOL – N/A, Immune to psychological effects

HIT POINTS – 500

POWER POINTS TO SUMMON - 100

ATTACKS

Claws – Attack skill 5, PEN 12, DMG 15 (+ STR Bonus), AD 10

The Devourer may attack with any two of its claws at a time, and if it succeeds with an attack with both front claws, it pins its target and may strike every turn thereafter with one claw automatically hitting or it may press its weight onto the target to inflict a crush attack

Tongue – Attack skill 6, PEN 5, DMG 5, AD 2,

The tongue may be used to attack any target in front of it within twenty metres. On a successful hit, the tongue may wrap around the target and draw it back into its mouth. The target may make a single attack against the tongue or the devourer before being brought into the mouth where it will either be bitten till dead or swallowed to be digested.

Crush - Attack Skill 4, PEN 20, DMG 35, AD 15

The Devourer crushes down with all its weight on the target held beneath it. If a target is held prone by both claws, the attack hits immediately, if not, the creature must attack as normal. Against a prone creature, the devourer may crush as many times as it wishes until either the creature escapes or the devourer is killed. A direct hit to the mouth doing more than ten points of damage will cause the devourer to rear back briefly, allowing a prone victim to make good their escape.

Bite – Attack skill 6, PEN 15, DMG 10, AD 10

The Devourer strikes with its four jaws against the target. The Devourer cannot use the bite attack while it is holding something with its tongue, unless it is striking at the target held with its tongue, in which case the attack automatically hits. Any target that is bitten may be devoured on the devourers next attack unless they take more than ten points of damage in a single phase to their mouth, in which case the target being bitten has a fifty percent chance of being hit by the attacks being directed there.

Devour – Special, no attack skill required
The Devourer swallows using the powerful muscles of its jaws. Any target smaller than ten feet square may be eaten in a single mouthful, larger targets must be ground up before they can be devoured. Once inside the devourers stomach, the creature takes five hits of damage to all locations or five points of armour damage to all locations each phase of the round for a total of twenty-five points of damage per round to

all locations. Creatures within the stomach in sealed armour may still act as long as their armour is uncompromised, attacks from within the stomach automatically hit and do double damage to the Devourer. Any explosive attacks used within the devourer will also cause the same amount of damage to all the occupants of the stomach. If the Devourer is killed, the stomach acids will remain acidic for five rounds, after which the contents of the stomach will have been expelled by the Devourers death throes.

SPECIAL

The Devourer has heavily armoured skin that provides a PV of 20 against all attacks to the external areas of its body and stops 500 ID before the armour is ablated and the Devourer starts to take hit point damage.

The vulnerable point on a Devourer is its mouth, which has no armour, and presents an easy target for those trying to shoot in.

Any called shot against a Devourers mouth is at -2 to the attack roll. The Devourer will continue to attack with its bite and tongue until it has taken 150 points of damage in hits to the mouth or tongue, at which point it will withdraw its tongue and continue to attack using only its claws and crush attacks.

Regeneration – The Devourer regains hit points from those it digests on a one for one basis, so if the creature within the stomach takes fifteen total hits before it is killed, the Devourer will regain fifteen hit points itself.

If the Devourer finds itself triumphant in battle, it will often take the time to eat the bodies of all those around it to regain its vitality. However, if it is attacked again, it will immediately attack in return.

Manifestation

More powerful even than the Bishops of the cult, the Manifestation of the Lord of Blood is a massive humanoid (usually ten to fifteen metres tall) constructed of flayed skin and muscle, dripping blood from every part of it. With no bones to stabilise its structure, it relies on its enormous muscular power to propel it around, causing a very alien way of movement as the creature redirects blood to its muscles to move around, often appearing to be on the verge of falling over, then lurching rapidly to the next target. The Manifestation is able to use all the Xieye cult abilities and may alter the shape and structure of its body as it sees fit to suit the situation.

There have only been three recorded cases of a Manifestation in the history of SLA Industries, each one with a massive loss of lives and equipment, and SLA now knows that if a Manifestation has arrived on Mort, the cult is not using it for misdirection, and all their available forces are diverted into the area. The Manifestation is not a creature of thought and can be confused by providing it with too many targets, but it is also powerful enough to quickly level the number of targets in the area.

The Manifestation reacts purely on instinct, and this is perhaps its only weakness. The only saving grace of these creatures is that the amount of power and time required to summon one is colossal, and something that can only be done very rarely as the rituals required to prepare the victims and store the power take many days, even weeks to complete.

STR – 20 - 50
DEX – 20 - 50
DIA – 15 - 30
CONC – 20 - 50
CHA – 0
PHYS (As per other attributes)
KNOW (As per other attributes)
COOL – N/A immune to psychology

HIT POINTS – 1000
POWER POINTS (Personal) – 1000
POWER POINTS TO SUMMON - 10000

ATTACKS

Body Strike – The Manifestation forms a limb with which to strike at an opponent within four metres – Skill level 8, PEN 10, DMG 12, AD 5

Crush attack – The Manifestation launches its entire body at a target, slamming into it with tremendous force – Skill level 4, PEN 15, DMG 20, AD 10.

Grab – The Manifestation reaches out to a target (must be less than four metres in size) and picks it up, causing crushing damage in its powerful hand. Skill level 6, PEN 5, DMG 5, AD 7. Once gripped, the manifestation can continue to squeeze at the target until it is destroyed. The target may continue to fight back, scoring an automatic hit against the manifestation every turn with a weapon of their choice, but they are at -5 to any other actions other than physically striking at the manifestation.

Rend - If the Manifestation so chooses, once a victim has been grabbed, it may grab with the other hand and make a rend attack against the victim. Whilst doing this, it may not make any other attacks, but the target takes 20 minus their own STR statistic points of damage a phase until torn apart. Thus a human with STR 9 would take 11 points of damage a phase, but a Chagrin with STR 19 would only take 1 damage a phase.

This damage is first rendered against the torso of their armour and when that gives, against their torso hit points. Upon reaching zero hit points, the target is torn in half and discarded to the floor.

Meat Club – Once grabbed, the manifestation may also use the victim as a weapon, smashing them against other enemies like a makeshift club. Armoured

Victims will do PEN 10, DMG 8, AD 5 (Both to the victim they are striking and to themselves) and are at -8 to do anything else while being swung in this manner.

Unarmoured Victims will do PEN 5, DMG 4, AD 3 (Again, both to the victim they are striking and to themselves). The manifestation may choose to drop them at any time (usually when they break)

Cavity Crush – A grabbed victim may be placed inside the manifestations chest cavity, there to be crushed by the powerful muscles of the manifestation or to be held helpless until the manifestation desires. Once placed inside the chest cavity, the creature is held steady unless can pass a resistance test against STR to escape from the cavity.

Characters held in this way may not make melee attacks, but may still pull the trigger on ranged weapons they were carrying at the time they were imprisoned. Explosive rounds will do equal damage to them and the manifestation if used in this manner. If the manifestation chooses to crush the creature, it will take ten points of damage (to all armour locations and then to all body locations) per phase until they are mangled and ooze from the gaps in the manifestations body.

SPECIAL

Damage Resistance – While appearing to be a solid creature, the manifestation is in fact a liquid creature, blood bound together by infernal powers, as such, weapons and attacks have far less of an effect against it. The Manifestation suffers half damage from physical weapons, but double damage from heat or cold attacks (but not explosive,

where most of the damage done is concussive in nature).

Drain Blood – Any victim in skin to skin contact with the manifestation can be drained of blood within seconds, as hundreds of tiny probes extend from the manifestation to puncture them and drain them. Anything in skin to skin contact with the manifestation (including grabbed targets whose armour has been breached) lose five hit points a turn which go back into the Manifestations hit points total. In the Manifestation of 865, the creature was backed up by hundreds of cultists who willingly threw themselves into the incarnation of their god to feed its life force.

Summon – The manifestation has the ability to summon assistance from the Xieye Lord, but to do so, they must take another living creature and force it to become a conduit. Usually picked from the ranks of the cultists below it, the Manifestation reaches down and forces gallons of blood into the victim whilst simultaneously holding their body together with its power. The manifestation can force up to five hundred hit points per turn into a victim whilst keeping them alive, both from its own stock and from abilities going on around it (Blood harvest being a particularly useful one at this point). When the victim contains enough blood, the manifestation completes the ritual from its own power supply and the victim brings forth the new summoned creature. Creatures brought forth by a manifestation are under its control and will go berserk if the Manifestation is brought down with no way to recover the control of them.

POWERS OF THE XIEYE

There are three different levels of power within the Blood Cult, ranging from the minor abilities of everyday cultists to the devastating abilities of the Bishops and Knights of the cult.

Use of Abilities

All Xieye abilities do not require a roll to use, but the targets may get a resistance roll if they do not wish the ability to work on them, and in some cases, may resist the abilities physically. For Xieye Resistance Rolls, the character makes a roll of their hit points plus 1d10. The roll is made against hit points and not PHYS because a tired and wounded opponent is far more vulnerable to the abilities of the blood than someone who is uninjured and physically powerful.

The cultist can choose to further augment their ability to get around the more powerful targets and reduce the PHYS roll by a further -1 for each power or blood point they put into the ability when it is first initialised.

Whoever scores highest wins the roll.

Most abilities have two different costs, the first in power points, the second in blood.

The power points are used at the beginning of the activation, and must be present in the amount required for the cultist to initialise the ability. The blood must be present when the ability manifests, and unless alternative sources are being used, must be taken directly from the cultist themselves.

All blood point costs represent the number of hit points that must be used for the ability to work. If the cultist does not have sufficient blood present to complete the power, the ritual will use their blood until its needs have been satiated. If they do not have enough blood in themselves to complete the power, their god will be

displeased and leave them desiccated upon the floor, all their blood taken to pay for their failure.

Minor Abilities

These are the abilities that the players will usually come up against unless involved in Anti Cult operations at a medium to high level. Gifted to the minor members of the cult, these powers represent the least of the abilities that can be bestowed upon the cult, allowing them a minor advantage against the forces that they oppose but nothing more.

Conversion

This is an ability the cultist first learn when inducted into the cult. It allows them to freely convert blood points into power points and vice versa. The ability costs neither blood nor power points to use and converts either on a one for one basis. For each blood point sacrificed, one power point is gained and vice versa.

Blood Armour

The cultist cuts themselves with a prepared ritual knife whilst invoking the ability. The blood flows from the wound and over the clothing of the cultist, hardening into a very resilient coating within seconds. The more blood the cultist sacrifices when activating the ability, the stronger the protection. Once the ability lapses, the cultist must sacrifice more blood in order to reactivate it, although the length of protection can be increased by putting more power points into the blood armour while it is still activated.

Range – Personal only

Power point cost – One point per five minutes duration

Blood Cost – Each hit point raises the PV of the cultist by 2, the maximum blood that can be spent on this ability is five points at this level, ten points at Mid-level, and twenty at Major level.

Boost

The cultist channels their power into increasing their physical prowess. Cultists with this ability tend to work in concert with one another, forming the front line of any major assault by cult forces. At this level, cultists will only be able to boost one ability at a time, having to choose between greater STR or DEX. The ability can be used to boost the statistics of others.

Range – Touch only

Power point cost – One point per five rounds duration, which can be cancelled at any time or maintained, the power ceases to function when the cultist stops putting power points into it but does not cost them a further action to keep the ability running.

Blood Cost – One hit point will provide a two point boost to either STR or DEX, with a corresponding temporary boost to PHYS as a result. This boost does not affect the hit points of those being boosted, only their statistics. The maximum blood that can be channelled into this ability at this level at any one time is five points.

Blood Weapon

The cultist cuts themselves with a prepared ritual knife whilst invoking this ability. The blood flows out of the wound and into the cultists hand, where it hardens into a melee weapon of the cultists choice.

The more blood used in the ability, the more powerful the weapon will be. The cultist can throw a created weapon for a single attack, after which, the blood will revert back to its normal state. If the weapon is otherwise released by the cultist, it will splash to the floor, only a puddle to

show that any weapon was ever present. This allows the cultists to perform sneak attacks and assassinations without leaving any evidence of the crime. Forensics can be called in to trace blood contamination if a cult presence is suspected, but otherwise, normal means will not turn up any trace of it.

Range – Hand only

Power point cost – One point per five rounds duration, after which the weapon dissolves. The weapon also dissolves if the hand is opened, but can be transferred between hands. If maintaining the weapon, power can be spent without using an action.

Blood Cost – The weapons base statistics are PEN 0, DMG 2, AD 0, for each point of blood that is put into the weapon, the weapon gains +2 to either PEN, DMG, or AD. If the weapon is dropped or thrown, the blood must be sacrificed again to make a new weapon. The maximum amount of blood that can be put into the creation of a weapon at this level is five points, ten points at mid-range level, and fifteen points at Major level.

Game note – The weapon created does not give the cultist the ability to use it, a blood sword will still need a melee skill to wield it properly, and as the training of the cultists usually does not include weapons training, many of them choose to manifest the weapon as a gauntlet or claws.

Pulse

The cultist reads the pulse of the target, divining the next move of a single target within twenty metres. This is most used in combat, allowing the cultist to avoid the next shot or strike of the target. This ability is a reflexive action, not counting as an action within the round, allowing them to make their own strike against the target in addition to avoiding the strike that was directed against them. The power cost of this ability depends on the nature of the

target that the cultist is trying to divine the intention of. Some races are far more difficult to read due to the nature of their thought patterns.

Range – One metre, plus one metre for each power point used in the initiation of the ability

Power point cost – One point per human or frother action, two points for stormers of any variety, three points for Ebb using races, Shaktar, or Wraith Raiders.

Game usage – This ability will negate any one attack against the cultist for that phase, but will cost the cultist their next phase of action as they have to alter what they were doing to avoid the attack, and they can only use this ability as many times in any round as they have phases.

Thus a cultist with three actions per phase could avoid a character with four actions for three of them, but would be powerless to prevent the other attack from being resolved as normal.

If the cultist has a free action remaining in a round that they used this ability, they gain a +4 bonus to physically attacking any target that they used this ability on, but if the bonus is not used in the round that the ability was activated, it is lost.

Dissolve

The cultist concentrates for a second, breaking down the structure of their body and reducing themselves into a mass of blood that flows away under their direction.

This is not an instant ability, and even in liquid form, the cultist can be damaged by fire or cold based attacks and can be prevented from moving with either Telekinesis or by securing them within a water tight container.

When the ability is ceased, the cultist reforms, which can prove painful or even

fatal depending on the location that they are in at the time. If the cultist is seeping through something at the time the ability wears off, they will reform with their insides filled with whatever they were seeping through. The dissolved cultist can move at 3 metres per phase if moving on level ground, with appropriate penalties or bonuses for flowing upwards or downwards.

It is entirely possible for the cultist to flow through any gap that liquid could flow through, and with many bases held in lower downtown, the cracks in the buildings provide ample escape routes.

Range – Personal Only

Power point cost – One point per minute of liquidity, takes three rounds to full dissolve (one round at Mid-level, and one phase at major level), and one round to fully reform. If the cultist reforms either inside something or between something, they take damage equal to the amount of hit points/structural points that the object has and if this does not kill them, they may continue with the wounds they have sustained.

Cultists who are funnelled into a container take double damage as their bodies are compressed before they break the container. If the container has more hit points and is smaller than the cultist, their mangled body is compressed into the space however it can be. If a cultists body is somehow separated from itself (half within a container, half not), they reform with parts of their body missing, but otherwise whole. The body loses its arms and legs first before moving on to other parts and the parts that are missing should be resolved by the GM

Exsanguinate (Touch)

The cultist can drain blood from a target either into their own body or into a suitable vessel if one is at hand. The cultist must make a successful hand to hand attack with their bare hand to the skin of the target to be drained, making it a far less effective

ability when confronting armoured operatives. This ability can be channelled through blood weapons when they are manifested, but if the cultist is disarmed of the weapon, or they take their hand from the target, the ability will cease to function, requiring a re-expenditure of the power points to start the ability again.

Range – Touch only

Power points cost – The ability costs one power point per round of usage

Game Use - The cultist can drain one hit point per phase of action they have in a round, making it a far more dangerous ability for those who are faster on their feet.

The ability can be sustained for one power point per minute, and can be sustained as long as the cultist has power points with which to keep it going. The blood is transferred to the cultist, healing any injuries of their own first on a point for point basis. If there is a suitable container available for the cultists other hand, the cultist can transfer the blood directly to the container, but this cannot be done in a combat situation as the direction of the blood must be done with care. If the cultist absorbs more blood points than they have lost and does not use the blood points that round, either in injuries or abilities, then they suffer damage equal to the amount of hit points transferred at the end of the round as the excess blood erupts out of them. This damage will break the concentration of any cultist who is using this ability and require them to re-establish the ability again.

Major Abilities

This level of powers is manifested by cult leaders and those of some standing in the cult, they are rarely seen in the downtown cult headquarters and represent a far more dangerous level of the cult.

Burst

This ability causes blood to gather into a single location of the target, draining the blood from other areas of the body and forcing it into a single location. This has the effect of rendering the limb very difficult to use, and when a certain point has been reached, destroying the limb. This ability cannot be used on the main body of a target, but is often targeted on the head.

Range – One Metre plus one metre per power point used in the initialisation of the ability.

Power points cost – The ability costs Three points to activate and one power point per round to sustain.

Game Use – This ability causes blood points to drain from the adjacent location into the area targeted at a rate of one point per phase of action the target (not the cultist) has. Thus a target with five phases of action per round would gain five blood points in the area each round, making this ability dangerous against faster operatives.

The hit points are reduced in the adjacent location but do not cause any wounds. When the amount of blood points in the location exceeds double the maximum hit points that the location has normally, the location explodes, doing damage equal to double the maximum hit points of that location to both the limb and the targets total hit points.

If the location has suffered damage, the hit points that have already lost must first be replaced before the build-up has any further effect. While the ability is in effect, any wounds done to the location being targeted are healed by the blood point influx, and only when the wounds have been healed does the build-up begin.

Through the duration of the ability, any actions involving the targeted limb will be at a penalty equal to the number of blood points over the maximum that are being

held in it. Thus trying to use an arm that has four extra blood points in it will incur a -4 penalty to any actions involving it.

Puppet Strings

The cultist forms a link with the wounds of the target, forming strings of blood from their injuries and controlling their actions through this power. Those affected by this power often suffer psychological trauma as a result of the inability to stop what is happening to them.

Range – One metre plus one metre for every power point used in the initialisation of the ability.

Power points cost – Two points to initiate the ability, with a further point per turn thereafter. If the strings are cut, the ability must be started again. If the target recovers from their wounds, they must be wounded again for the cultist to be able to use the ability again.

Game Use - This ability can only be used on a target that has already taken damage that has caused a wound, or a target that is bleeding in some way. The blood from the wound becomes solid and forms into strands that reach up into the air and take control of the limbs movements. The cultist must mimic what they want the target to do, which usually entails the victim causing more damage to themselves so that the cultist can solidify their control of the victim, but it has also been known for cultists to turn the body of those controlled against their companions. If the wounds are closed and the blood flow stopped, then the cultists control will cease. All actions carried out under the influence of the cultist are resolved using the cultists skill level, not the victims, and incur a Penalty equal to the Victims PHYS bonus as the victim fights back. It is not unknown for cultists to use this ability to suicide their victim, especially the more physically gifted who cause problems for the control.

Bloodstorm

The cultist cuts themselves with a prepared ritual knife, the blood flows out and into the air, forming a close spray around them, making a powerful shield against attacks.

The storm also acts as a lacerating attack to those closest to the cultist, but is indiscriminate in its assault, causing damage to friend and foe alike. Targets using this ability appear as a figure of swirling blood, their faces an indistinct pattern of crimson.

Attacks are absorbed by the blood, with the shield becoming drained as more hits impact on it.

Range – Personal only

Power points cost – One power point for every half metre of radius of the storm, so a two metre radius storm would cost four power points to start, with an equal cost for each minute that the storm remains up.

Blood points cost – Each hit point sacrificed in the creation of the ability allows the storm to absorb five hit points of damage. The most blood that can be sacrificed to this ability in a single use is ten hit points to make a maximum storm of fifty hit points.

Game use – Only one storm can be raised at a time, but the storm can be cancelled at any time, losing all remaining hit points in it in order to raise the ability again. Anything caught within the storm takes either one hit point of damage or one point of armour damage per phase. Any hit point damage done by the storm adds to the hit points that the storm can absorb. The swirling nature of the storm means that anyone trying to strike with a ranged attack against the master of the storm will suffer a penalty equal to the one fifth of the storms remaining hit points, so a 30 hit point storm would give a -6 to any attack against the user. If the target is missed, the storm does not lose any hit points

This ability is used by the senior members of the cult when things are going against them. In a room full of cultists, it becomes very easy to keep the storm charged with blood whilst making a swift retreat, and equally, against unarmoured targets in great numbers, merely the effects of the storm are often enough to turn the tide.

Exsanguinate

Similar in nature to the lower level power, but this ability can be used at range. The cultist can drain blood directly from a target either into their own body or into a suitable vessel if one is at hand.

This ability requires line of sight in order to be effective. This ability can also be used in conjunction with other abilities, allowing the cultist to recharge their blood supplies whilst maintaining other abilities.

Range – Ten metres plus two metres per power point expended on initialisation

Power points cost – The ability costs one power point per round of usage, and the cultist drains one hit point per phase of action the victim has in a round, making it a far more dangerous ability for those who are faster on their feet. The blood flows through the air at the cultists direction, either coming to themselves or pouring directly into containers. The cultist can also direct the blood into his own forces, acting as a healing accelerant towards them should he so desire.

Game Use – The victim gets a standard Red resistance roll against this power, but if the roll is failed, their skin opens up (random location) and blood begin to flow at the rate of one hit point per phase they can act in. This blood is transported through the air at the cultists direction, any blood that the cultist takes themselves replaces their own lost hit points on a one for one basis, as does any blood that is directed into another living creature. Anyone apart from the cultist using the

ability who received blood in this manner will suffer a -1 to all their actions due to the distracting nature of how they are being healed. As always, if the cultist or anyone who is receiving blood from them absorbs more hit points than they have lost, then they suffer damage equal to the amount of hit points transferred at the end of the round as the excess blood erupts out of them.

Anyone not wishing to receive blood in this manner may make a Red resistance roll to prevent the blood from entering them.

This power does work against creatures in armour, but the blood will still flow. If the armour is not environmentally sealed, then the blood will penetrate the gaps, if it is sealed, the blood will pool up against it.

Once a number of blood points equal to the armours PV has been drained, the armour will be completely covered and the user will have to switch to an internal air supply or start to suffocate.

Boost

The cultist channels their power into increasing their physical prowess. At this level, the cultists with this ability work from the back of the assault, enhancing others as they need to, bolstering the line where it may be falling. At this level, cultists can boost as many statistics as they choose and by a far greater degree than the lower level cultists.

Range – One metres, plus one meter per additional power point put in on initialisation

Power point cost – One point per round duration, which must be set at the time the ability is used. Thus if the abilities were required for ten rounds, ten power points would have to be spent at the time of the powers activation.

Blood Cost – One Blood point will provide a two point boost to either STR or DEX,

with a corresponding temporary boost to PHYS but not hit points as a result.

The maximum blood that can be channelled into this ability at any one time is ten points to each statistic, providing a maximum boost of +20 DEX and + 20 STR, with a corresponding +20 to PHYS.

Rend

One of the more infamous powers of the cult, Rend is used to make impressive displays of sacrifice whilst removing an enemy from the field. The power establishes a physical link between the cultist and their target, giving the target a Red resistance roll against the ability. If the resistance roll is failed, the link is established, and any wound that either party receives will be mirrored on the other on a hit point for hit point basis. This ability is often used by senior cultists in conjunction with Alias, allowing them to inflict grievous wounds on those opposing them whilst only losing the most basic of their followers. It is for this reason that cult groups often take sacrifices into battle with them, to even the odds far more easily than combat or weight of numbers would do.

Range – Five metres, plus one metre per power point used on activation

Power point cost – The ability costs two points to manifest and then two points per round thereafter to maintain. The cultist can cancel this ability with a single action.

Game use - Whilst most operatives have far more hit points than the average cultist, Rend duplicates the injury, not the damage points done. A cultist stabbing themselves in the heart will die within seconds, but the target that they were linked with will also receive a stab in the heart, which, irrespective of hit point differences, will also be fatal. If the cultist head is cut off, the victim will also be decapitated and so on. As with the initial encounters with the cult, a target opened all the way down the middle

will likely not survive despite their increased hit points. Given the fanatical nature of cultists, this becomes one of the most dangerous abilities that they have. If the cultist linked with the victim loses other hit points as a result of manifestation of abilities or further wounds, these are also lost from the victim, but this does not cause any further wounds on them, just a lowering of their hit points. If the victim is healed (either ebb or chemicals), the cultist will also recover the same amount of hit points, but this works both ways, healing the cultists will also heal the victim.

Alias

The cultist opens a link with their target, allowing them to channel other abilities directly through the subject, rather than through themselves. In this way, the more destructive abilities can be used without personal risk to the cultist, but it carries its own risk in that both the cultist and their target can hear each other's thoughts, this does not give either side any information about where they are or what they are doing, beyond what they are thinking.

Range – Three metres plus one metre per power point expended on activation

Power points costs – If the victim is willing (another cultist usually), then it is a single power point to form the link. If the target is unwilling, the cultist must expend a number of power points equal to the targets KNOW attribute to form the link, and the victim receives a Red resistance roll against the effects. If the resistance roll is effective, they will be aware that something is going on, but not the nature of it. If the resistance roll fails, they will be aware that something is channelling power through them and the link will become two way, with both sides getting the information from the other. Once the link is established, each round the link is kept open, the cultist must expend a further power point.

Blood points cost – The cultist must also

expend one blood point for each round that they keep the ability active

Game use – If the cultist is knocked unconscious or killed whilst using this ability, the link is immediately severed, and both parties will no longer be linked in any way. While linked, any actions that the linked parties undertake against each other in direct combat will be at -4 due to their thoughts being linked.

If two cultists are linked in this way, the one who initiated the link will be in control, but the two of them can share power and blood points to use their powers. This link effect has led to several of the mid-level cultists often forming groups in order to pool their abilities against higher level SLA and Firefi personnel.

Merge (Touch)

This ability is the lesser version of the ability used to create the gigantic constructs that guard the cults innermost sanctums. Using this ability, the cultist can merge two living creatures into a single organism. Not often used in combat situations, the cultist must touch both organisms that they are trying to meld and succeed in overwhelming both their resistances. Once this is done, they sacrifice a portion of their own blood to create a link of flesh between the two targets. This conduit steadily draws together and causes both organisms to become part of each other. With external body parts such as arms and legs, this prevents effective use of the body part while it is attached to the other organism. If the cultist is in a combat situation, they must make a successful hand to hand combat roll against each target on successive phases, this hit will not cause any damage if successful, but will form part of the link. If the cultist does not have actions on successive phases, they cannot use this ability in combat.

Range – Touch only

Power points cost – Two points to activate the ability, plus one point per five hit points

(rounded up) of the two locations to be merged together.

Blood Cost – The cultist must sacrifice one blood point per hit point being merged (rounded up), so if trying to merge two arms, one with six hit points and one with seven, the cultist would have to sacrifice thirteen blood points to form the bond.

Game use – When the bond is created, the binding between the two limbs has a number of hit points equal to the total of the limbs being bound together (in the earlier example, the binding would have thirteen hit points), the binding retracts at a strength of 20 and merges the limbs completely within three phases. If both targets are strong enough to resist the binding, it will tear free of their limb, inflicting half their total hit points for that limb in damage as it does so. If one or both targets are not strong enough to break free, they will be drawn to each other and fuse together. At that point, they are considered one organism, even though they will have separate thoughts and aims. Any injury done to one will affect the other until their limbs are separated, something which Karma is still working on doing without complete replacement of the limb in question.

Voice

Those fighting against the cults have observed that occasionally, one of their number does something completely out of character that often changes the direction of the battle. Manifesting as a sudden urge, the victims of this ability find themselves acting according to the direction of the cultist.

Range – Ten metres, plus two metres for every power point used on activation.

Power points cost – Five points per action dictated, the victim gets a Red resistance roll, with a plus 5 to their roll if the action ordered will cause them harm.

Blood Cost – One blood point per invocation of the ability, regardless of

success.

Game Use - Unlike Puppet strings, if this ability succeeds, the victim uses their own skills to carry out the will of the cultist and will do so to the best of their ability. Each use of this ability allows the cultist to dictate the victims action in their next phase. The actions dictated can only draw on the victims' physical abilities, not their mental skills.

Blood Cannon

The cultist can hurl blood to form a powerful explosive ranged weapon. The damage caused by the blood varies depending on how much blood the cultist sacrifices, the range and radius of the blast depend on how many power points the cultist uses in the activation.

Range – Without expending any other blood points, cultists can throw the blood a number of metres equal to their strength x 2 and the blast will only affect that which is strikes

Power points cost – One point to activate the ability, one point for every ten metres beyond basic throwing range or part thereof that the blast needs to travel, and one point per metre of radius on the explosion.

Blood Cost – For each point of blood sacrificed at the activation, the blast increases by five in either PEN, DMG, AD, or Blast Radius

Game use – When throwing the blood, the cultist must make a roll against their Throw skill to hit the target. This ability is the mainstay of the cult for damaging armoured targets, vehicles, and buildings. It is possible to summon up vast quantities of blood and by linking the efforts of several cultists, create enormous damage in a short amount of time.

Explode

The cultists have been known to employ the use of living bombs, this power causes an instability within the victim, making their blood charged with explosive power. When struck or when striking, the victim explodes, doing massive damage to those around them.

Range – Ten Metres plus one metre per power point

Power points cost – Ten points to activate, two points per round to maintain the effect, unwilling victims get a Red resistance roll to prevent the abilities.

Blood Cost – One point per (current) hit point of the victim

Game use - Those who have been affected by this ability become extremely volatile.

Any further hit on them causes the victim to explode, in game terms, any impact that would cause damage will set the victim off.

The victim will explode with Radius, PEN, DMG, and AD equal to the total hit points that the target had when they were detonated.

If the ability is ceased, or the cultist is killed, the victim will remain explosive for one round only, then return to normal.

Harvest

The cultist pulls the blood from all the living creatures in the area and collects it to themselves. The blood drains at the direction of the cultist and can be transferred to containers if they are available. Using this ability takes all the cultists attention, preventing them from using any other abilities while it is in effect.

Range – Ten metres radius, plus one metre per power point spent in the activation

Power points cost – This ability costs one power point to activate and a further power point for each metre of radius that the cultist wants to affect.

Blood Cost – There is no cost in blood to activate the ability, but the cultist gains all the blood points each turn which can easily result in overload if the blood is not properly channelled.

Game Use - All targets within the blast radius receive a normal resistance roll to prevent the ability working on them if they wish. All those affected by the ability lose one hit point each phase that they can act which is drawn through the air (See Exsanguinate) to the cultist using the ability. Standard rules apply for over absorption

Summon

The cultist opens a conduit to the blood realm within a living creature. The demon begins to manifest within the target, steadily absorbing the targets blood and forming the final creation. When the demon is fully manifested, the creature bursts out of the target under the cultists control. If the target does not have sufficient blood to create the creature, both target and demon are killed.

Range – Touch only

Power points required – Each demon requires a different number of power points to be expended when the conduit is first created, these are covered in the creatures section. The target gets a Red resistance roll to prevent the conduit from taking root inside them. It is for this reason that summoning is rarely done in combat, it is altogether too easy for the host to be injured enough for the summoning to be aborted.

Blood points – The blood comes from the victim directly

Game Use - To summon a demon, the creature being summoned through must

have more than twice the number of hit points that the demon has. Often, blood harvesting abilities are used to increase the amount of blood into a target in order to summon the larger creatures. It has often been the case that the mould and merge abilities are used to creature a larger mass in order for the demon to be summoned into.

The demon takes one hit point from the target each phase that the victim can act, and when the demon has more hit points than the target, it has overall control of the targets body and the target is rendered prone until the ritual is completed.

When the demon has absorbed a number of hit points equal to its own maximum hit points, it is fully manifested. At this point, the target takes a number of hits equal to the demons maximum hit points as it bursts out of their body. The target can take kickstart or be given healing while the demon is manifesting, but will still take the full damage when it arrives.

If the target is killed while the demon is manifesting, the conduit will be severed and the demon will be banished back to the blood plane. If the target runs out of hit points before the demon manifested, the conduit will remain active for one hour, and if the blood supply is resumed, so will the summoning, but if not, the body will no longer be able to sustain it and the demon will return to the blood plane. If several creatures are merged together, the demon will take one hit point from each of them in each phase, making its emergence that much faster. While the smaller cult groups have to make do with the smaller demons, it is easily within the power of the larger cult groups to gather together large groups of sacrifice to bring forth the greater demons.

Doppelganger

The cultist opens a link to their target, taking control of their blood and thoughts from within them. The victim's body opens and their blood pours forth to form a

duplicate of themselves which is controlled by the cultist.

Range – Five Metres

Power points costs – The cultist must expend a number of power points equal to half the targets maximum hit points at the activation of the ability, followed by one power point for each round that the cultist wants to keep the doppelganger active. Red resistance roll will negate the ability.

Blood points costs – All the blood from the ability is drawn from the target themselves, victims of this ability lose half their hit points when the ability is first activated.

Game use – When first manifested, the doppelganger possesses all the same physical skills and statistics as the creature it is copying, but none of the physical abilities (regeneration, natural armour) or Ebb abilities that the target possesses.

The Doppelganger acts at the direction of the cultist who created it and uses its own skills when making any physical action. The target of the ability recovers when the initial damage has been done, but takes half of all the damage done to the doppelganger in addition to any wounds of their own that are inflicted by the doppelganger.

The cultist has to remain concentrated on controlling the doppelganger or it will go berserk and attack whatever is nearest to it, whether that is a cult target or other. If the original target is killed, the doppelganger will collapse into a pool of blood that quickly evaporates. The victim will suffer no other side effects when the doppelganger is killed other than the damage that was done to it to kill it.

If the cultist who created the doppelganger is killed or rendered unconscious, then the doppelganger ceases to be and the victim is released from its influence but does not regain the hit points lost when the doppelganger was created.

Mould

The cultist shoots streams of blood from their hands to draw other living creatures together and merge them into a single heaving gestalt of flesh.

Range – Ten metres, plus one metre per power point used in the activation

Power points cost – One power point per strand of blood is used in the initial use of the ability. One point of power per round of control for each of the strand is needed until the merging is complete.

Blood points cost – One point of blood must be used for each strand of blood used in the initial use of the ability.

Game use – The cultist creates a series of blood whips from their hands which snare their targets, drawing them together where their flesh will warp and meld. Each strand of blood has a STR of 5, and the strands must have a greater strength than the targets being pulled together in order to meld them. The cultist can throw as many strands as they wish at the initial activation. If two targets each have strength enough to resist the strands that bind them, they can as a single action, pull apart and break the strands between them, cancelling the melding between them with no further ill effect. All targets that were affected by the ability and cannot break free will still be affected even if other targets manage to break free.

When used, the cultist uses their blood to form a living web of blood between the different targets. The blood then draws the targets together to form a single organism. The creatures are melded together and reshaped at the cultists whim, forming a single entity with a number of independent wills.

These creatures can do little else except pulsate on the floor as the individual minds within them all try to control the body in

different ways. Any cultist with the mould ability may use the ability to create a single strand which can act as a leash upon the gestalt and control its actions at a cost of one power point per round. Gestalts have a number of hit points equal to the total of all the hit points that the creatures merged into it had, and can have a number of limbs equal again to the total number of limbs that those merged to create it had. A Gestalt strikes with the combined strength of all those merged within it, but only with the cultists unarmed skill.

Heartfelt

The cultist makes a link with their target and proceeds to punch, seemingly at the air. The target is racked with a series of painful spasms as they are struck from the inside. When they finally succumb to the ability, a hand formed from their own blood bursts out of their chest, clutching their still beating heart within it. As they watch, they see the hand squeeze and their hearts drops to the floor, as lifeless as them.

Range – Three metres plus one metre for every power point used in the activation

Power points cost – One power point used in the activation of this ability, plus one power point for every phase that the ability is being used (Thus a cultist with five actions per round would use five power points, a cultist with three actions per round would use three power points)

Blood points – One point per five hit points that the victim has (rounded up) at the time of the abilities use.

Game use – The cultist forms a link with the victim (Red resistance roll every phase to sever the link for unwilling victims) and proceeds to strike from inside the victim, using their normal damage bonus. The damage is done every phase, always hits, and always does full damage.

When the torso is reduced to zero hit

points, the targets torso bursts open and the bloody hands formed within them pull their heart into the open air before crushing it and dropping it to the floor. Without immediate and effective medical care, they will die within seconds.

Pulp

The cultist forms a link with the victim, causing their own muscles to work against them, ripping and chewing at them from the inside till their bodies fall, outwardly unmarked, rent asunder within.

Range – Five metres plus one metre per power point expended on activation

Power points cost – One power point to activate the power, two points per phase to maintain

Blood points cost – The cultist must send a number of blood points equal to the targets strength bonus +1 to activate the ability.

Game use - The cultist forms a link with their victim and passes their own blood through the link into them.

Once the blood has been transferred, the blood begins to subvert the targets own muscles to cause damage within them. The amount of damage caused to the target depends on how strong the victim is; a stronger target will damage themselves more than a weaker one.

Once the ability is activated, the target takes damage to whichever location the cultists desires equal to their own strength bonus.

The cultist can keep up this ability indefinitely, but may not use any other abilities while using this one.

If a target is reduced to zero hits in any location, the location will need to be properly set by a trained medic as the bones will be pulped beyond the ability of kickstart

or Ebb healing to heal.

In the event of a body hit, the target will need to go on life support within 20 minutes divided by their strength bonus of being reduced to zero hit points or their own body will crush them under its weight. In the event of a head hit, once the ability has reduced them to zero, further hits will reduce all their mental statistics by the amount done in damage. Thus a target with

taking two damage each phase would lose two points of Know and Dia each phase. If a body part suffers more than twice its hit points in damage from this ability, it will have to be replaced as the damage caused will have been too severe. Victims of this ability often appear as if they have suffered massive crushing damage whilst not breaking the skin.

Creatures of the Xinshen

The creatures summoned of the Xinshen cult are typically creatures of free will themselves, coming freely in return for the power given to them, and acting of their own volition. There are some exceptions to this, and these are detailed below.

Sliver

The smallest of the creatures of the Xinshen to be summoned, the Sliver is a tiny (less than 5cm long) creature that has no independent motion of its own. It is typically used in rituals or by cultists to infect victims with the power of the Xinshen.

When a Sliver makes contact with living tissue, it burrows under the surface of the skin and seeks out the hearts blood of the creature that it is within. When it has reached the heart, it pierces it and begins to feed upon the life force of the creature, growing larger and larger as it does so.

When it has absorbed all the life from the creature, the sliver will have become a shard, and will fulfil its purpose from there.

Slivers are often left lying around the lairs of the Xinshen cult, so that any unwary soul might pick them up to examine them, at which time it is too late. A Sliver will burrow under the skin in less than a phase, but only activates when brought into contact with the skin of a living creature. It will burrow to the heart in a number of hours equal to the creatures maximum hit points (bigger creatures, further to go), whereupon it will penetrate the heart and begin to feed off the creatures life force at the rate of one hit point per round. This causes excruciating pain, and leaves the victim with a -10 penalty to do anything at all while this is ongoing. The hit points absorbed by the sliver cannot be cured unless the sliver is removed. When the creature has been

killed, the sliver will have grown to the point that it can pierce the chest cavity of the creature and wait to be removed as a Shard.

Removal of Slivers – A sliver can be removed quickly by operating on the victim with a full set of surgical tools and the Medicine (Surgery) skill. It is not hard to pinpoint where the sliver is, but it will cause a number of hit points damage to the victim equal to the number of hours that the sliver has been inside them to remove it. Once removed, the Sliver will go back to being inert until placed near skin again.

The alternative is to pinpoint the Sliver and cut it out with less medical methods

Pass me the blade, this will get messy.

This will be equally effective, but will inflict double the hit points of damage that the surgical method would, however, it is possible for the victim to receive ebb and chemical healing once the sliver has been removed. Healing the victim while the operation is still underway only causes the wounds to close again, needing to be opened again to get to the Sliver.

Shard

Shards are the remains of creatures and objects that have been completely overwhelmed by the power of the Xinshen. Varying in size and nature, most shards are inanimate and serve merely as Batteries for the cultists to store their power within.

However, if a Shard is given power over and above that which their bodies can hold, they gain some semblance of life again. Shards that achieve this level of sentience want to retain it, and become ravenous for the taste of more power. The only Xinshen power they possess is that of conversion, and as they do not regenerate power points

themselves, they seek blood to fuel the conversion process and maintain the semblance of life they have.

Sentient Shards reshape themselves from the creature or object that they were, becoming longer and more flexible, usually taking on the aspect of a large crystal snake, allowing them to attack with a bite from the head of them, but also shaping the end of the tail into a blade or mace like object to further attack other targets. A Shard senses creatures rather than seeing them directly, and is unaffected by lighting conditions or immersing in water or other substances. The noise made by shards as they move is a particularly recognisable rattling slither as it rolls over the ground.

STR – 5-15
DEX – 5-10
DIA - 0
CONC - 0
CHA - 0
PHYS – As per other attributes
KNOW - 0
COOL – N/A, but see Special rules below
HIT POINTS – 15
POWER POINTS - 10

ATTACKS

Bite Attack – The Shard lunges to bite its target, seeking to gain purchase to drain the targets blood from it. Attack skill 6, PEN 5, DMG 2, AD 2. Once the Shard has bitten the target, it will start to drain blood at the rate of one hit point per phase that it can attack. It may still use its other attack forms while biting. Victims that have not been constricted or those assisting the victim can pull the Shards fangs from the wound, but this will do another point of damage as the fangs are torn out.

Constrict – The Shard wraps itself around the victim to smother their actions and keep it immobile while it feeds on them. After a successful bite attack, the shard may wrap itself around its victim. This causes a penalty to the victims' physical actions equal

to the Shards strength bonus and gives them a -5 modifier to any attacks they make against it. Victims wishing to uncoil the Shard must have a larger strength modifier than the Shard, and may make a normal unarmed combat roll against it each phase they may act in, a successful hit meaning that they have managed to uncoil the Shard from them. If the target is unarmoured, the Shard may try to crush them to death using its coils. If it does this, the victim loses a number of hit points each phase equal to difference between the shards strength and their own (so a target with strength 6 against a strength 8 shard would take two points of damage a turn), but suffers no wounds as a result of this damage.

Blade Tail – The shard may attack with both bite and tail if it wishes, the tail cannot siphon blood from the target, but makes a more effective blow in the first instance. Attack Skill 6, PEN 4, DMG 4, AD 2. Victims that have been constricted cannot avoid this attack.

SPECIAL

Conversion – The Shard usually starts with a nominal supply of power points, but it must spend one power point per day to retain its sentience. Any blood points that it drains are immediately converted to power points, causing a series of lights within the shard as the power is generated from the blood. This is often a clear giveaway that a Shard is in the area and is certainly an indicator that the Shard has found blood.

Blood Frenzy – When the Shard has struck a target and started to draw blood, it becomes frenzied to the point of ignoring all else. The Shard will continue to feed until the victim has no more blood, regardless of what damage is being done to it. If the Shard is killed or pulled off, the frenzy ceases.

Shatter – When a Shard reaches 0 hit points, it shatters, inflicting a single hit to all the creatures within a metre equal to the

amount power points that it has left at the time. Thus a shard with four power points left would do four hit points of damage or four armour damage to anything within a metre.

Feed – If a shard drains all the hit points of a creature, it may then attempt to digest the creature in its entirety and increase its own size as a result. It takes the Shard one hour per ten kilos of mass of the target to digest, spitting out the pieces of armour around the meat as it does so. When the process is completed, the Shard will gain one permanent hit point and increase its strength permanently by one for each ten kilos it ate. Given the nature of Shards, most do not manage to get to any size of significance, but there are rumours of giant Shard Wurms in the darkness of lower downtown.

Revenant

One of the most common creatures encountered by operatives in the remains of downtown, the Revenant is a bipedal apparition that haunts the ruins of downtown. Once creatures born of the world of progress, the original being was drained of all their life by an Envoy or Shard Angel and now roams the world looking for another body to possess. No one knows how Revenants are created, or how they come to be, as most indications from the Firefi indicate that destruction by a Xinshen cult usually consumes both the body and soul, but still these ghostly shadows keep appearing.

Never appearing as any of the alien races, Revenants were always once human. Studies are ongoing into capturing one of these ethereal and finding out what has happened to create them. It has been noted that Revenants can be turned back by being forced to confront some aspect of their life from before they were taken by the Xinshen, and that the surest way of protecting something against a Revenant is to hide behind something it once cared about.

STR - 0
DEX - 0
DIA - 5-10 (Whatever was possessed in life).
CONC - 5-10 (Whatever was possessed in life)
CHA - 5-10
PHYS - 0
KNOW - As per other attributes
COOL - 5-10
HIT POINTS - 0
POWER POINTS Sum total of all other statistics

ATTACKS

Possession – The Revenant has the ability to possess another living body and use it as its permanent residence, but the Revenant

has been without a body for so long that it does not eat or drink and very soon, the body dies and the Revenant is loose in the world again.

power points at all, but regenerates them at the rate of one per hour, allowing it to continue to possess people.

To possess a Target, the Revenant matches their power points against the hit point total (all body parts added together) of the target and makes a single hand to hand attack (Skill 4) by moving into the same body space as the target. The Target gets a single White Resistance Roll which may be boosted by Belief or Ebb points, but if this roll is failed, they become possessed.

The process is painless and victims who have been freed from the control of the Revenant do not understand what has happened, very often refusing to believe that it has happened. To remove a revenant, they must be driven away from the body they inhabit, or forced out by the previous owner (White resistance roll every hour). While in possession of a body, the revenant may use it as they see fit. If the body dies of natural causes (starvation or dehydration), the Revenant is freed to drift the world again, but if the body is killed violently, the Revenant dies again, this time permanently.

SPECIAL

A Time before Death – A Revenant does not see that it no longer belongs in the world of the living, and when faced with evidence of its previous life, it flees, terrified to confront the reality of what has happened. The evidence of its former life must be something that the Revenant cared for, which makes a lot of the Revenants found in downtown and lower downtown especially difficult to deal with, as nothing meant much to them at all before their life ended.

If in possession of a body, presenting the evidence of its former life causes it to release control of the creature.

Regeneration of power points – While in Ethereal form, A revenant does not use



T'nabran Wanderer

The general soldiers of the Xinshen resemble humans at a distance, but at close range, it's obvious that their features are too sharp, too angular to be a true human. They move with arachnid like speed, remaining utterly still or moving with absolute purpose to what they must do. Their thought processes are without comparison, and often they are found doing things that defy comprehension, things which have a purpose, but only their lord knows what.

STR – 10-15

DEX – 15-20

DIA – 5-10

CONC – 5-10

CHA - 0

PHYS – As per other attributes

KNOW – As per other attributes

COOL – N/A Immune to Psychology

HIT POINTS – As per other attributes.

Power Points – 50-100

Attacks

Fistful of Razors – The Wanderer strikes with an open hand full of clear shards, if the hand comes into contact with bare skin, it drinks of the blood therein causing massive bleeding damage and reducing the power of any Xieye cultists they come across. The strike is made at skill level 7, PEN 10, DMG 5, AD 5, any wound against a living creature causes an open wound that bleeds at the rate of two points of damage a turn. If the target is using Xieye power, it loses that at a rate of two points a turn till this wound is stabilised.

A Wanderer will have several minor powers and the possibility of a single major power.



T'nabran Envoy

The most powerful of the Xinshen's mortal cult forces, the Envoys are those humans who have worked their way up the ranks, each of them has been to the place that others do not speak of and returned with new purpose and vigour within them. Unlike certain other races, the knowledge that a human gains does not twist them or shape them externally, but it does change how they think, it changes that forever. An Envoy understands this world in ways that no other does, being born of it and having learned that it is not what it seems. This gives them the understanding of what they need to do to make things right, and the will to carry it out. This insight sometimes causes them to seem distracted as they take in everything around them.

STR – 10-30

DEX – 10-30

DIA – 1-5

CONC – 10-20

CHA - 0

PHYS – As per other attributes

KNOW – As per other attributes

COOL – N/A Immune to Psychology

HIT POINTS – As per other attributes.

Power Points – 100-300

Attacks

All Envoys know all the minor abilities and several of the major ones, they attack using these abilities and nothing else, to resort to any other weapon would be to dishonour the gifts given them by the Xinshen lords.



Wurm

The Wurm is the primary heavy attack creature of the Xinshen cults, measuring over forty feet long and usually a quarter of that in diameter, the Wurms are huge slithering creatures that are summoned for the purpose of causing massive loss of life and property damage.

The problem with attacking a Wurm is that the skin of the creature is absorbent, so any weapon striking them is absorbed into the being of the Wurm, as is any creature that brushes up against it. This absorbent layer covers the entire Wurm except for the underside which is covered instead by a carpet of miniature legs that swarm and scuttle, conveying the Wurm where it wants to be. There have been several Wurm incursions, most of which have been stopped when the Wurm had consumed enough and became docile, at which point the Forces arrayed against it have managed to destroy it. There has never been a recorded instance where a Wurm was taken alive, although both Karma and Dark

Lament would pay enough money to retire to any squad who accomplished this feat.

Individual Wurms vary in size and strength, but all have chitinous plates of crystal that cover the skin, making lacerations of anything getting close and opening sometimes to allow the Wurm to feast on those closest to it, making it impossible for the presence of a Wurm to go unnoticed for long.

STR – 20-50

DEX – 5-10

DIA – 1-10

CONC – 1-5

CHA - 0

PHYS – As per other attributes

KNOW – As per other attributes

COOL – N/A Immune to Psychology

HIT POINTS - 500

ATTACKS

Bite – The Wurm entire front is made up of its mouth and row upon row of razor sharp teeth, used to tear and grind at the victims

caught within. The Wurm uses the bite attack against smaller creatures and more heavily armoured ones, softening it up before consuming it. Attack Skill 5, PEN 15, DMG 25, AD 10.

If a creature smaller than the diameter of the Wurms mouth (length/4) is bitten, it falls into the Wurms mouth, there to be bitten again or consumed. Any creature within the mouth of the Wurm is at -5 to all their physical actions and if the Wurm chooses to bite again, it does so at Attack skill 8 against that creature only.

Consume – The Wurm uses the massive muscles of its jaw to force the contents of its mouth into its stomach. The victim is propelled into the stomach of the Wurm where all the other victims and debris from its rampage are held. The Victim may try to resist the Wurm consuming it by holding on to the teeth within the Wurms mouth, but they will take another bite attack as they do so. Wurms faced with resilient food tend to spit it out after a few attempts, but this is rare as the victim is usually dead and mangled before then.

Creatures within the stomach take damage at the rate of two points to all locations simultaneously as a result of the debris and stomach acids smashing into them. They make attacks against the Wurms insides if they wish, but any explosive weapon used will do an equal amount of damage to them.

Crush – Rearing up, the Wurm smashes down with all its considerable mass on to the target. While not a fast attack, the sheer bulk of the Wurm makes it difficult to avoid. Attack Skill 4, PEN 10, DMG 30, AD 25. Targets hit by this attack will be pinned under the Wurm and will take additional damage when the Wurm moves, equal to 20 points of hit point or armour damage they are under the Wurm (done to all body locations simultaneously. If a target manages to fall between two objects capable of holding the Wurms weight above them (hiding near reinforced highway dividers for

example), they may remain underneath until the Wurm has passed by without incident.

SPECIAL

Absorb

Anything which makes contact with the Wurms skin is drawn into the body of the Wurm and deposited into its belly. The Absorption process does not cause any damage in and of itself, but the creature may be damaged by the armoured plates of crystal running the length of the creature. If a victim tries to resist, they match their strength against that of the Wurms side muscles (rated at STR 10) and make an opposed contest of STR, each side adding 1d10 to their STR with the highest score winning the roll. If the victim wins, they pull themselves away from the Wurm, if the Wurm wins, it absorbs them directly. Others may help the target being absorbed and add their own STR to the roll if they are assisting. If their combined roll fails, they are both drawn into the Wurm.

Process

Anything eaten and completely consumed by the Wurm is processed back into the Wurms body. In the case of living matter, the hit points they had when consumed are added again to the Wurms hit point total. In the case of inanimate objects, metal, stone and other such, the materials are ground up and fused by the Wurms ferocious digestion, eventually coming out as new plates of armour that sit above the natural crystal armour of the Wurm.

Natural Armour

The Wurm is naturally covered in heavy plates of Crystal which give it a PV of 15 against any attacks, each plate has 75 points of defense before they are cracked and rendered useless. Larger Wurms will often have processed vehicles, armour, and buildings to make additional armour that it put over the top of the Crystal armour.

Exact levels of protection vary and should be determined by the GM.

Death

When a Wurm is finally killed, the contents of its stomach are expelled in its death throes, spewing bodies, rubble, and the acid within over a fifty foot cone in front of it. The contents will do damage per the GMs discretion. The body of the Wurm will also writhe and lash out for a few minutes after its death as the creature finally slows to a halt, against causing damage at the GMs discretion.



Shard Angel

The most powerful creature that the Xinshen cultists can hope to summon is a Shard Angel. Summoning one of the primes would be well beyond the range of any

mortal cult and such creatures only appear at the whim of the Xinshen Lord himself, but in times of need, one of the lesser angels may grant the cult their favour in return for significant sacrifices and power.

To call such creatures lesser is a vast underestimation of their abilities. Shard Angels are always female, appearing as tall, slender girls dressed in pure white robes, they speak without sound and wield immense power within their fragile looking frames.

An Angel has the power to alter the very fabric of the universe to their whim and bring greater glory to their masters. It was noted at the beginning of this chapter that the creatures within are not creatures with their own free will, and so it is with the Shard Angels. They are summoned to the world of Mort to carry out the will of their master, and it is the sacrifice and power that their master gives to them that binds the Angel to the masters will.

When the sacrifices and power have stopped flowing, the Angel again controls her own destiny and may act as she sees fit. Rarely will her own plans match those of her Master.

When Shard Angels have been summoned to mort, the best chance that the forces of SLA have is to mount a massive assault while the Angel is still gathering her power from her transport to the world. Once she has had the time to build up her power reserves, she will be all but invincible.

STR – 8-15
DEX – 8-15
DIA – 15-30
CONC – 20-30
CHA – 12-20

PHYS (As per other attributes)
KNOW (As per other attributes)
COOL – N/A while under the influence of a master, 15-30 otherwise.
HIT POINTS – As per other attributes

POWER POINTS – 250 upon summoning, can hold infinite amounts

ATTACKS

The Shard Angel has access to all the powers of the Xinshen cult, and can enhance or terminate powers of the Xinshen being used around her at her whim, allowing her to massively improve the odds of a cult victory by increasing the power level of all the combatants on the Xinshen side. The increases in power are done as a reflexive action for the angel and she can spend up to her CONC statistic multiplied by ten in power points each turn (So a CONC score of 15 would allow her to use 150 power points a turn).

Ethereal blow

The Angel strikes with her fist, punching through the victim without making any damage to their outsides. From within the victim, she grasps the internal organs and pulps them, causing death by massive internal damage. This attack requires an expenditure of power points equal to the targets armour rating to bypass the armour.

All damage is done directly to hit points and cannot be healed by chemicals. Ebb healing can be used to heal the damage, but at twice the normal cost due to the nature of the damage, and Regeneration works, but at half speed. The attack is carried out at Skill level 10, PEN N/A, DMG 5 + strength bonus, AD 0

Spirit Strike

The Angel reaches out and places their hand upon the victim, drawing the life force out from the victim's body into their own.

Armour does not affect this ability.

The Angel spends an amount power equal to five times the number of hit points that the victim loses from the blow and the damage is sealed as permanent. Any hit

points lost from one of these strikes are permanently lost from the location, but this damage does not affect the total hit points of the victim. The Shard Angel gains these hit points as a bonus to their own, even if this takes them temporarily above their maximum. The Attack is carried out at Skill level 10, PEN 0, DMG 3 (+ STR bonus), AD 0.

This skill cannot be used in conjunction with any other skill

Flux Detonation

If engaged in direct conflict with an Ebb using race, the Angel can form a physical link with them and pass her own power down the link to explode the flux of the Ebb user. A riskier tactic than most due to the amount of damage and force generated by the blast, but one of the only sure ways to ensure that the Ebb user is out of the fight. The Angel makes a normal hand to hand attack at Skill level 10, and if the attack connects, puts an amount of power equal to the amount of Flux the Ebb user has remaining in them and releases it all at once.

The resultant influx of power overloads the Ebb user and causes an explosion of power centred upon their deathsuit doing damage equal to one half of the total flux points burned to both the Ebb user and the Angel. If the deathsuit is reduced to 0 ID in this blast, it is torn open by the force of the blast and both combatants are propelled away from each other as the flux explodes between them. The blast is confined to the Ebb user and the Angel, but the noise generated from the blast will deafen anything within a hundred metres for the next few minutes, making this a favoured tactic for causing confusion in the ranks. If the Ebb user still lives, they will recover Ebb as normal in the time following, but will have to deal with the trauma from having all their flux ripped from them and possibly the emotional loss of their deathsuit.

SPECIAL

Power Field

All Angels have a personal field of resistance around them that prevents them from being attacked or harmed while in this realm. This field works directly off their personal store of power and works by stopping damage on a one for one basis with power points. Thus if an Angel was struck for four points of damage, they would lose four power points instead, if struck for 64, then they would lose 64 power points. If the Angel takes damage over and above the amount of power points that she has remaining, the rest go directly to her hit points.

Reverse

The Angel has the ability to alter things within the world of progress, including the inbuilt abilities of the other races that live there. The Angel reaches out with their mind and alters the physical structure of the creature at a molecular level. Stormers find that their regeneration now harms them, Ebb users now lose Flux instead of regenerating it, Frothers find that Drugs now damage them instead of healing, and those shooting up UV suddenly find that instead of being psychologically immune to everything, they find that the world is suddenly infinitely terrifying and end up curling into a ball and crying. The Angel matches four times the number of hit points in the victim's body and if the victim fails their White resistance roll, the change is made.

The change is permanent and must either be removed by the Firefi or will continue to plague the victim for the rest of their lives.

Great Wurm of T'nabra

Everything dies... Everything...

Powers of the Xinshen Cults

The Xinshen cults powers work in a very different way to that of the Xieye. Where the Xieye cults (by their very nature) operate to control the blood of the targets and adapt things in such ways, the Xinshen cults operate within the realms of the mind. The blood to them is Anathema, and their powers have evolved to be the antithesis of all that the Xieye cult stands for.

When the Xinshen cultists engage a power, any unwilling target may make a resistance roll against the power taking effect. This roll is made against the targets current CONC score, with a success being any result lower than that number on 2d10.

This roll is reduced by the Cultists KNOW bonus and may be further reduced by the cultists spending extra power points on a one for one basis. For each power point the cultist spends, the victim must add one to their resistance roll. If the roll succeeds, the ability does not work on them for that activation and that activation only.

Permanent Damage

The other note about the powers of the Xinshen is that they very often reduce the amount of blood a target has within it, leaving behind a sandy residue that is no longer blood in any sense of the word.

Damage done by the Xinshen cults in this way does not heal in the normal sense, and cannot be healed with either drugs or Ebb. Instead, blood transfusions are required to heal this damage, meaning that protracted encounters with the Xinshen cult can very often lead to operative groups being reduced significantly in strength with no way to recover the damage without aborting the operation. It is for this reason that most of the encounters with the Xinshen cults have been primarily with the Firefi and the

Unbowed, who know of the perils of combating the Xinshen cults.

As with the Xieye cults, the powers have been separated into Minor and Major powers.

Minor Powers

These powers are the ones most likely to be encountered by regular operatives, they are gifted to the lowest levels of the Xinshen cultists, more details of which can be found in the Xinshen Cult character creation section.

Focus

All Xinshen cultists are gifted with this ability, used as a free action at any time, they draw on the power of their master to raise their mental prowess. Unlike the Xieye cultists, the Xinshen focus have no need to increase their physical abilities, and so raise their intellect and reasoning, aiding both in the effectiveness of their abilities and in their tactical prowess.

Range – Personal only

Power point cost – One point of power will raise the cultists DIA or CONC by one point, with any corresponding increase in KNOW due to the raising.

The increase takes effect for the following round, after which the ability has to be renewed again. The most that can be spent on this ability at Minor Level is five points, at Major, Ten points.

Battery

The Xinshen often need more power than they can hold, and it is for this reason that they learn to store their power within crystal shards, to be used when they see fit. This

ability allows the cultist both to store energy within crystals and to take it out when it is required. Cultists without this ability cannot make use of crystal shards.

Range – Touch, plus one power point per two metres of range needed to reach the battery

Power point cost – No cost, but if using the power at range, one point per round to continue using the battery either to draw or place energy

Game use – This ability allows the cultists to store or remove power at a rate of their CONC per phase. This ability does not require any concentration and can be used in conjunction with other abilities.

A crystal shard contains power according to its size. For each kilo of weight in the crystal, a shard can hold five power points.

Cult bases often have the crystallised statues of their victims at several points through the base to allow them to store more and more power in the event they are attacked.

Blood Crystals (see Merge, Major powers) can be used to store energy, but can only be withdrawn or stored at half the speed, and can only carry half as much power as pure crystal.

If a crystal shard with power in it is shattered, the shard explodes, doing damage equal to the remaining power points within it to everything within a number of metres equal to its mass. Thus a shard with ten power points in it weighing two kilos will detonate doing ten points of damage within a two metre radius, whereas a shard with five power points weighing a hundred kilos will do five points of damage to everything within a hundred metres, friend and foe alike.

Shard Armour

The Cultists draws on the inanimate objects in the area, crushing them into powder and forming a mobile suit of armour which moves with the cultist. This armour can be used to resist damage and also provides a damage bonus when striking whilst wearing the armour. To use this ability, there must be some unhardened stone or metal in the area, otherwise the ability will fail. Plastics and flesh cannot be used as they do not provide significant protection against attacks. However, downtown is littered with buildings in a significant state of disrepair, each of which can be used to fuel this ability.

Range – Personal only

Power Point costs – One point to activate the ability, one point per two points of PV that the armour has, and one point of power per 10 ID that the armour has. One point for five rounds of use, all points to be expended in advance.

Game Use – If the armour PV is breached, the ablative part of the armour will absorb the damage done by the attack, till the ID level has been depleted. When the ID is depleted, it will absorb as much of the damage as there are ID points left, allowing the rest to go through to strike the cultist.

When the ability runs out or is stopped by the cultist, the materials used to make the armour fall to the floor in a pile. If the armour runs out of damage points, it will also fall to the floor in a pile.

For each three points of PV the armour has (rounded down), the wearer gets a +1 to all damage done while striking unarmed.

Ghost

The cultist forms an image of themselves from dust and water in the vicinity, controlling it as if it were their own body. The image will not fool anybody within five metres in regular daylight, but it can be used as a distraction for anything not at that sort of range. This ability is often used by cultists to confuse the enemy as to the true number of cultists in the area. At the higher levels of ability, this ability can be used to imitate larger creatures and at greater ranges. The image will make noise as it moves around, but that noise will not be the same as a creature of flesh and blood (which makes this ability all the more effective against those who have encountered Xinshen creatures before, knowing that they don't always make the noise that would be expected of a Flesh and blood creature).

Range – Twenty metres plus ten metres per power point expended at the activation.

Power points cost – One point to form image, one point per round to maintain image.

Game use – At Minor level, this ability can only be used to make a duplicate of the cultist using the ability. At mid-range, the image can include larger creatures and smaller daemons, and at major level, the image can be almost anything within the thoughts of the cultist.

Hand of Fate

Similar in nature to the power of the Xieye cult, the Xinshen cultist cannot control the actions of their enemy at this point, but they can aid or resist the actions of another through this ability.

Range – Ten metres plus five metres for every power point used in the activation of the ability

Power point costs – One point to activate the ability, plus points required to power the ability.

Game Use – This ability affects a single action within range and either makes a bonus or a penalty to the action depending on what the cultist is trying to achieve.

For every power point that the cultist expends when the ability is activated, the Action being affected either gains +2 or -2 to a single dice roll. If attempting to assist, the action being attempted must be a skill that the cultist themselves possesses, so if attempting to help one of their fellows strike with a sword, they themselves must be able to strike using a sword and so forth.

Hindering has no such penalty, anyone can get in the way of something.

The most that the cultist can raise or lower the action by is the limit of their own skill, making this somewhat limited for the lower level cultists, but lethal for those at higher levels. It has often the case that cultists operate in groups that have similar skills, enabling them to be far more efficient in general.

Sandstorm

The cultist draws up the dust and debris from around them and focuses it into a swirling storm of razor sharp particles. This cloud does not provide any armour for them, but will cause minor amounts of damage and injury to those caught within it.

Range – one metre, plus one metre per power point used on activation

Power Points Cost – One point to activate the ability, plus one point per metre of radius that the storm covers. This power lasts for one round per activation, and can be maintained by paying the activation cost each minute. The size of the storm can also be varied by putting in more or less power when renewing the ability between rounds.

Game use – The storm does one point of armour/structural damage to any inanimate object caught in it and two hit points of damage to any unarmoured living matter within the field. This damage is done automatically to any creature within the field on each of the phases that the cultist could normally act in.

Impulse

The cultist reads the intended actions from the victims' thoughts, predicting what they are doing in the immediate future. Unlike the Xieye cult ability, impulse reads the possibilities of what the victim could be doing, and gives the Xinshen cultist a general idea of what is happening, rather than the exact action before it happens. This means that while it is not as effective as the Xieye ability against single actions, it provides the cultist with more ability to make actions without taking all their own efforts up.

Range – Ten metres, plus two metres per power point expended on activations

Power point costs – One point to activate the ability, plus other power points to specify how much assistance this power provides. This ability lasts for two rounds seconds and may not be renewed as with normal durational abilities. To continue using this ability, the ability must be used again, with all power point costs paid again.

Game use – For each point that the cultist puts into this ability, they gain a +1 on any roll against the victim, and the victim gains a -1 on any action against them for the duration of the ability. This ability does not give any bonus or penalty other than the modifier, although the cultist can warn others about the intentions of the victim.

Major Powers

Sand Cyclone

Similar in nature to the lower level ability, the Sand Cyclone ability does not have to be focussed on the cultist themselves, but can be targeted onto others. This can be used for both defence and offence.

Range – Twenty metres, plus five metres per power point expended on activation

Power Points costs – Three points to activate the ability, plus two points per metre of radius the cyclone is to cover.

Game use – The cyclone can be used in the same manner as the sandstorm, doing two points of structural/armour damage or four points of Laceration damage to living tissue per phase the cultist can act in. However, it can also be manifested around another living creature, usually causing the comrades of that target to move away from them and isolating them. It can also be projected inside buildings and vehicles, drawing up materials from inside to form the cyclone and preventing the occupants from making any sort of coherent movement within the contained storm. The storm will continue to do damage if there are any solid objects within the building/vehicle, but if there is only such things as paperwork, it will only generate confusion within.

Dessicate

The cultist reaches out with the power of their god and removes the moisture from a living creature cells. This ability manifests itself as body parts being turned from flesh into a dry white powder. This is one of the most feared abilities of the Xinshen cult, because the damage done in this way cannot be healed by normal means.

Range – Five Metres, plus one metre per power point expended on activation.

Power Points cost – One point to activate the ability, plus points to cause damage itself.

Game use – For every three points of power put into this ability, the cultist permanently removes one hit point from the body location of their choice and also the victims total hit points. These hit points cannot be healed using drugs, Ebb, or regeneration of any sort and require the victim to be rebuilt and repaired at a Karma facility. Damage manifests itself as the affected area steadily being turned into a white sandy powder, falling to the ground where it lays. Areas affected by this power also incur a -1 penalty to any actions they have to take for each point of damage that they take. Thus if an Arm were to take three points of damage, all actions involving that arm would be at -3 until a proper rebuild could be done. If a body part is reduced to zero hit points, the limb is removed, falling to the ground in a pile of white powder. If the body or head is affected in this manner, death is instantaneous and irrevocable beyond even the ability of LAD

White Resistance rolls prevent this ability from taking hold in a turn, but the points for the ability are still spent.

Looking Glass

The Cultist can use any pane of glass as a spying lens, looking into one pane of glass and seeing through another piece of glass somewhere else. The Xinshen cults often litter their territory with large pieces and fragments of glass to allow them to keep an eye on the whole territory without having to ever leave the main base.

Range – One mile, plus five hundred metres per additional power point spent on activation.

Power points usage – Four power points to activate the ability, each activation lasts for Five rounds.

Game Use – When the cultist uses this ability, they look into a pane of glass near

them and will see the visage facing any other piece of glass within the area of the ability. They can switch the view to other glass as often as they like, allowing them to quickly take in the view from all around without moving themselves at all. If a pane of glass is shattered whilst the cultist is looking through it, the image will splinter and crack within their field of vision, but will remain as each pane sees individually (and will alert the cultist that someone has smashed the glass they were watching through).

Power Burn

The Xinshen cult knows more than anyone that power wins the war, this ability was the deciding factor in many of the early battles with the Xieye cults and Necanthrope unions.

The Xinshen cultist focuses their will on their victims' store of power, burning their own power to destroy that of their victim. As time has gone by, the Xinshen have refined their abilities to target flux over the other sorts of energy, as the Ebb using races often present the greatest threats to their control over the field.

Range – Ten metres plus two metres per power point expended on activation

Power points cost – One point on activation, then however many points are used to burn the opponents power.

Game use – When activated, this ability makes a link from the cultist to their target, a normal white resistance roll can be made to prevent this link, but as soon as a link is made, the power burning begins.

For each point of power that the Xinshen cultist uses, one point of power from any other cultist (Xieye or Xinshen), one point of belief from Firefi or Unbowed, or Two points of Flux from any Ebb using race are burned away.

This burning of power does not prevent the Xinshen cultist or their victim from calling on their other reserves of power to use other abilities and the link will maintain itself for a number of rounds equal to the cultists CONC. If either the cultist or the victim runs out of power, the link severs itself. In the case of Ebb users, only their personal supply of Flux can be used up, not anything held within Flux batteries such as deathsuits or medikits. The most power that the Xinshen cultist can opt to burn in each phase is equivalent to their CONC. The victim of this ability may make a White resistance roll each round to sever the connection if they wish.

Incorporeal

The Xinshen cultist turns transparent and insubstantial, becoming no more than a ghost. While in this form, they are invulnerable to physical damage and can move through any corporeal barrier with no impediment. Any abilities that work on the psyche or inflict damage through non-physical methods still have full effect, and ebb abilities that move or stop things can be used to prevent them from moving past.

Range – Personal only

Power points – Two points on activation, one further point for each round spent in this state.

Game Use – The cultist turns incorporeal and may move through any physical obstruction with impunity. Whilst in this state, they may not interact with the physical world and will not change the height at which they are moving, allowing them to walk through the air if they so desire.

Barriers created by Ebb, cult, or Belief powers will still prove effective against them, but they will be able to sense where the barrier comes to an end and move around it if they so desire. If they materialise within a solid object, they will take an amount of damage equal to the

structure/damage points of the item, if they survive this, their body will reject the foreign object and if they still live, they may proceed with what they were doing. Those Xinshen cultists who have rejected the flesh for a higher level of existence will suffer no damage, but will amalgamate the object into them until the next time they turn incorporeal. It has been known for Xinshen cultists to use this ability to materialise inside the bodies of those they are trying to kill. If an Incorporeal cultist manifests within the body of a living creature, both take damage equal to the hit points of the cultist. If the victim loses all their hit points, their body is torn asunder, if the cultist fails to kill them, they themselves are destroyed.

In the case of cultists who have transcended the flesh, this becomes a very efficient assassination tool.

Unravel

This ability is used by the Xinshen cultists to damage inanimate objects. They reach out with their abilities to unravel the cohesive threads within an object, causing it to fall apart or crumble to dust. The residue is often used as the building blocks for the abilities that use material from the world such as Sand Storm and Sand Cyclone. Combined with knowledge of the workings of equipment, armour and vehicles or of Architecture, the cultist can cause catastrophic damage to most things without leaving any traces of their actions.

Range – Ten metres plus five metres for each power point expended on activation

Power Points – Two points on activation, plus one per round of use, plus the number of power points used in unravelling the target

Game Use – When the ability is activated, the cultist makes a link to the target and each phase, at a cost of one power point per five points of damage, they may unravel a number of armour points, or structural damage points up to their CONC skill. If the cultist has a skill relating to the object

that they are damaging (Architecture in the case of buildings and so on), they may unravel an extra amount of damage equal to their skill level in each phase. Several of the higher level cultists have strong knowledge of munitions and armour to aid them in the use of this ability. If a ranged weapon has their ammunition unravelled, it often causes a misfire which can destroy the weapon (particularly if explosive ammunition is loaded in the weapon).

Soul Drain

The cultist forms a link with their victim and begins to use their ability to burn the targets intellect and reasoning away. This ability takes time to use and is unsuitable for battlefield applications. Instead it is used as coercion towards prisoners of the cult, removing their natural barriers and training in order to gain their complicity and assistance. It is often used when the cult wishes to ensure that the prisoner will never again make a move against them.

Range – touch only

Power points – Five points to activate the ability, then the power points required to make the changes the cultist desires.

Game Use – For each ten points of power, the cultist can permanently remove one point of either DIA or CONC from the victim.

Victims get a White resistance roll, if successful, the power points are lost, but the victim is unaffected.

Each point of DIA or CONC removed from the victim takes a number of minutes equal to ten minus the Cultists CONC bonus. If this process is interrupted at any point prior to the completion of the process, the victim retains the statistic and the process must be started again from scratch.

If a victim reaches 0 in DIA, then their ability to reason and debate is lost and they can no longer resist interrogation in any way, allowing the cult to strip their brain of

all its secrets in short order. If a victim reaches 0 in CONC, they may no longer hold a coherent thought in their head for longer than a half second and spend most of their time in a vegetative state. They can still be fed, but will be of no use in an operational capacity.

This ability only blocks the victims' ability to use their abilities or make conscious decisions, resulting in a reduced mental state. Any cultist with this ability may also replace what was taken in the event they are captured and forced to comply, so all hope is not lost for a character who suffers this fate, but it will take a lot of time and effort from others to return them to the field

Shard

The cultist throws a piece of glass filled with Xinshen energies at the target, which upon impact shatters and covers the target with small pieces of the glass, which work their way into their armour and flesh, then begin to change the cells around them, eventually resulting in the complete crystallisation of their target. In the case of targets with completely enclosed armour, successful use of this ability will trap them within a crystalline prison, able to see out of it, but trapped within for all to see.

Range – Thrown, plus one metre per power point expended in the activation

Power points– One point to prepare the glass, plus however many points the cultist puts into increasing the damage done by the projectile

Game Use – The glass is merely the conduit through which the power travels, once the glass has impacted something, the cultist may begin to pass energies through it, increasing the rate at which the glass spreads and multiplies upon the target. For each point of power the cultist puts into the glass, it does two points of damage or five points of armour damage, and the most power they can put through it each phase is equal to

their CONC skill. If an armour location or part of the body is reduced to 0 hit points or damage points, it is turned into crystal, which for the purposes of shattering, has the same hit points or damage points that the original limb/armour had, but is immobile.

The glass will then spread to the next limb (if hit in the torso, it spreads to all limbs, and the cultist can put power where they like. Regular chemical or ebb healing works against this damage and reflects the body trying to push out the shards. If the body part is completely healed, it is possible to brush the glass from the affected limb to prevent any further power from being passed into it, but this is not usually possible in combat situations. Stormer regeneration does work against this damage, but cannot help when crystallisation has fully occurred. If an entire suit of armour is turned to crystal, the occupant can be broken out of it, but if the armour is shattered and not carefully opened, they will take damage equal to the suits original PV in the shattering. If a victims' entire body is turned into crystal, they become a shard in the service of the Xinshen cult and their original personality is lost forever.

Glass Walking

The cultist forms a link between a large pane of glass near them and another pane of glass within the range of the ability. This ability forms a link to both pieces, so they can move objects, people, and anything else they like through the portal at will, stepping from one pane of glass and emerging from another. The link is not a permanent link (although some stronger rituals can create permanent links), and will cease the second the cultist is not powering it. The only limit on what and where the cultist can go is that they must have seen with their own eyes the glass which they are to emerge from. It is for this reason that a lot of the glass-forging companies have been infiltrated at some level by the Xinshen Cult in order to ensure an effortless transition to where they need to be. It is also possible for the cultist to

use this ability to step through glass as if it were not there, making it an especially useful ability for getting into sealed vaults.

Range – Five miles, plus one mile per power point used in activation

Power points – Ten points to form the link, plus one point per round to maintain the link. When the link is allowed to cease, a new link must be forged to make the return journey.

Game use – The link between the two panes can carry anything at all, but the objects must be able to fit into both the entry pane and the exit pane, so a huge glass window cannot be crafted at the cultists base and used to transport vehicles into a small door window. The link will remain open as long as the cultist keeps feeding it power, and they can abort the portal at will. If there is anything that is on both sides of the portal when it closes, it is bisected and the respective parts will fall to their side of the portal. Armour and ebb abilities cannot assist in protecting against this damage, and penalties for losing limbs or being cut in half are at the GMs discretion.

Brittle

The cultist can remove the strength of the cohesive bonds of an inanimate object, rendering it as brittle as glass to impact and making it easily breakable. This ability is used to end resistance from heavily armed and armoured targets.

Range – 100 metres, plus ten metres per power point expended on activation

Power points– Ten points on activation, plus five points per additional ten kilos of material rendered brittle

Game use – This ability renders up to thirty kilos of material extremely susceptible to impact damage, any strong impact against it will shatter it into thousands of pieces. Only

one object at a time can be affected, and the whole object must be affected or none of it.

Melee weapons that are affected by this ability will shatter, doing only one point of damage the next time they are used to strike something and being destroyed in that impact. Armour affected by this ability will explode, causing one point of damage to the occupant per point of PV the armour originally had. Ranged weapons affected by this ability will shatter when next fired, dropping the entire clip of ammunition on the floor. If the ammunition was explosive in any way, it is possible that the rounds may be set off by the impact (GM discretion).

Merge

The cultist reaches out to crystallised victims and objects and merges them into a single lump of crystal, to be reshaped at their whim.

This ability is often used in conjunction with Glass walking to move an amount of crystal to an area, then create a larger portal from which to launch the attack proper. It can also be used as a conduit to summon creatures through (see Summon)

Range – Five metres, plus five metres per power point used on activation

Power points – Five points on activation, plus five points per object being drawn together

Game use – This ability creates a glowing beam of light from the cultists hand, which when directed into a crystallised victim or object, sets the crystal aflame with colour, emerging in another colour to strike the next victim and so on. When all the targets to be merged are linked by the light, the cultist closes their hand and the crystal is drawn together and merged as one. If there are any living creatures trapped inside the crystal (trapped within armour for example), they take damage equal to the total damage points of the items being merged. If this

results in their death, their blood soaks into the surface of the crystal and turns it into blood crystal, a corruption of the true ability, and not without penalties of its own.

When the crystal has been merged, it may be shaped as the cultist sees fit, every ten kilos of crystal will make a pane of pure crystal one metre square, with each part of it having twenty damage points per square metre. It is possible to make ten kilos of crystal into a pane three metres by three metres, but it will only have two damage points per square metre, making it very fragile and vulnerable.

Blood Crystal will be able to be used in the same way as pure crystal, but the blood taint within the crystal will double the summoning cost of any creatures brought through. It is also highly prized by the Xieye cults as their own summoning rituals can be done through this crystal. In all other ways, the Blood crystal functions in the same way as normal crystal.

Summoning

The cultist forms a link with the realm of their god and offers power to him in return for his favour in the form of a creature of the Xinshen. The type of creature summoned depends very much on the level of the cultist and how much power they can send back to please their god. This ability requires a crystal portal or a conduit to summon the creature through.

Range – Ten metres between cultist and portal/conduit

Power points – Ten points to activate the ability, plus the power points dependent on what is being summoned.

Game use. – The cultist activates the ability and then must pass power through the portal equal to twice the combined hit points and power points of the creature being summoned through. The portal must also be of a size that can allow the summoned creature to pass through whole.

Any cultist within ten metres of the portal may pass power into the conduit, making the normal scene of a summoning the entire group of cultists passing by the conduit in a swift procession, then retiring to a safe distance to try and recover the power points given to the conduit. The conduit must have at least one power point per round or the link is severed and the summoning is aborted, and for this reason, the cultists will only try to summon things when they have more than ample power in the vicinity. Once the power needed has been given, the portal warps and bends, bulging outwards as the creature makes its entrance through the portal, then shatters as the creature emerges fully. This ability grants the cultist no control over the creature that was summoned, only making the conduit to allow it to enter this world.

Conduit

The Cultist opens a conduit with the victim, allowing Xinshen creatures to be summoned through the link, and in time, allowing the victim to be drawn back into the realm of the Xinshen. The ability is passed on through touch, and the victim may not be fully aware of what has happened till it is too late, although it is possible that users with some sensitivity or awareness of cult powers may be able to sense what has happened and seek assistance before it is too late.

Range – Touch, plus one point per metre of additional range

Power points costs – A number of points equal to the victims CONC must be used to initiate the link between the cultist and the victim, it is then down to the cultist as to how fast the conduit is fully established.

Game use – Once the cultist has initiated the link within the victim, they may then pass power down into the link to make the link more permanent. The amount of power that must be passed into the link to fully establish the conduit is equal to the

victims KNOW x 5, and a maximum of five points per phase may be passed into the link. The Victim is allowed a KNOW roll for each five points of power passed into them, with a successful roll causing them to realise that something is going on inside them. At this point, only the Firefi and the Unbowed have the knowledge to confirm what is happening, which is why the cults often choose victims that have no connections and no understanding of the things that go on in the world. When the link is fully active, the Victim still retains control over their body, but they are very aware that something terribly wrong is going on within them.

At the point the link becomes fully active, the cultist may choose to turn the victim into a portal to the world of the Xinshen, or to suck the victim back through the conduit into the Xinshen realm. If choosing to turn the victim into a portal, they must pass more power into the victim, equivalent to the hit points of the creature being summoned into the world. Once this power has been passed through, the victim unfolds from the inside out to form a glass portal through which the summoned creature steps.

When the creature has emerged, the portal shatters, killing the victim. If the cultists chooses to take the victim back to their world, they pass a further amount of power equal to the total hit points of the victim and the conduit activates within them, drawing them from the inside out back into the realm of the Xinshen, where they arrive as a broken mass of flesh and bone, alone and isolated, to be used as the lords of that realm see fit.

Targets that have an active conduit within them are more susceptible to other Xinshen powers, and the costs to use any other powers on them (by any cultist) is halved.

Possess

The cultist forms a mental link with their victim and moves their entire consciousness

into the new body, leaving their old body comatose behind them. This ability is a permanent transfer and as such is only used in rare circumstance, as the cultist will then have to convince the others of its cult as to its identity. Destruction of the body left behind makes no difference to the spirit that has moved on. This ability is occasionally used to infiltrate SLA positions, but never occupied by Ebb using or Stormer positions, as the body loses any special abilities it had prior to the possession when the new owner comes in.

Range – Five Metres, plus one metre per power point used in activation

Power point – Twenty points to activate

Game Use – This ability is not dissimilar to the Ebon ability of Possession, however, in the case of the cult ability, the cultist must also actively transfer back to their own body if they wish to reinhabit it.

While within another body, the cultist gains access to most of the memories of the possessed creature, but none of the abilities of that body. In particular, if possessing an Ebb using race, they lose all flux and ability to channel Ebb, and if in a Stormer body of any sort, they lose regeneration abilities.

Furthermore, if the cultist inhabits a vevaphon body, they will quickly lose all coherence and remain a shapeless mass on the floor until such time as they uninhabit the body. This will most likely be long enough for the cultists forces to imprison the vevaphon, but will prove an unsettling experience for the cultist themselves. While in the possessed body, the cultists skills will be limited to what that body can physically do (if the possessed body has a physical statistic lower than the cultists skill ability in a physical skill, it is reduced to the same level while they are in that body), but their ability to channel power points and regenerate them is unchanged. If the cultist leaves the possessee, their mind will return instantly, but they will be unaware of what

has been done with their body while they were not in control. Unless they are mind scanned and checked, it is very likely they will be held accountable for the things their body did while they were not in control.

Siphon thought

The cultist reaches out to the victims mind and removes one or more memories or skills from them, leaving them with no knowledge of what has been removed. This ability is often used to cover up the presence of cult activities as the use of the ability takes a strong ebb user or Firefi/Unbowed to detect. Low level ebb scans will reveal nothing, and the victim themselves will be unable to provide any sort of help with the probing.

Range – one metre, plus one metre per three points used in activation

Power points cost – Five points, plus any resistance the victim may have

Game use – The cultist reaches into the mind of the victim and removes the memory that they desire. The removal is subtle, allowing the victim to still remember what they were doing around the time of the memory, but not the particular part that the cultist has taken from them. The cultist may expand the use of this ability to remove skills from a victim. This takes considerably more time and patience as all traces of the skill must be removed, without leaving obvious gaps in the victims' memory. The victim will remember what was going on, but not the particular part that the cultist chooses to remove from them. Thus, if they had seen a cult activity while in downtown, they would still remember going into downtown, just not that they had seen cult activities. In the event of a skill being removed, they will remember that they learned it, but just that they haven't used the skill in a long time and thus its use has atrophied to the point that it's just a thought in their head. In the event of physical skills, this ability also goes some way into deleting

the muscle memory of the skill, so that even if the victim tries to use the skill, their muscles will feel as sluggish and unconnected as a beginner to that skill would. In the case of a skill that has been used all the time, the cultist must go deep into the psyche of the victim and draw all the instances of their skill being used from their memory. This process can take hours and is only reserved for the worst cases, where the victim needs to be returned unharmed, but without the memories. The power point cost for the ability is done in the amount of time that the cultist needs to remove from the victims memories. See the following table for base totals

Amount of Memory taken	Power Point Cost	Time Taken
Minutes	1	One minute
Hours	2	Five minutes
Days	3/day	Ten minutes
Weeks (Skill level 1-2)	5 per week removed	Half an hour per Week
Months (Skill level 3-4)	8 per month removed	One hour per Month
Years (Skill level 5+)	15 per year removed	Twelve hours per Year

This presumes that the cultist is sending back the victim with their other memories mostly intact and no obvious gaping holes for anyone probing to find. If the cultist is merely after removing the memory without any thought for the holes in the mind that will be left behind (that may lead other people to come looking), then the time taken to remove the memory is quartered, but the victim may suspect something has happened to them and anyone doing a detailed scan of their mind/memory will notice obvious signs of tampering.

If the rush job is performed, any Ebon with Mind read 2 or above will be able to tell that

there has been tampering, as will any Firefi or Unbowed who examines the victim. If the job is done properly, taking the proper time to ensure everything is still clear in the mind, then it will take Mind Read 4 or a trained Firefi/Unbowed to locate the tampering.

Warp

The cultist reaches out and infuses the victim's body with the power of the Xinshen realm. The victim's body start to warp and stretch at the direction of the cultist, culminating in whatever the cultist can imagine being made manifest in their flesh. The Cultist can also incorporate inanimate objects into the victim, making gruesome sculptures, half flesh, half metal, stone, or anything else that is nearby as a tribute to their god. This particular power also leaves lasting mental scars on the victim should they survive it.

Range – Five metres, plus one metre for every power point used on activation

Power points– Five to activate, plus power points dependent on the creature being warped

Game Use – The cultist forms a link with the victim and begins to put power through. A normal white resistance roll can be made each turn to resist the effect. When the amount of power put into the victim reaches the same level as their maximum hit points, the victim is bound by the cultist to remain motionless until released or until the cultist runs out of power. The cultist must spend one power point per round in addition to any other points that are spent in the use of the ability or the link collapses. Each phase, the cultist may use as many power points as their CONC modifier, putting them into the victim's body to alter parts of them. The number of points required to modify the body is equal to the hit points of each body part, so if a victim had 3 hit points in the arm, the cultist would need to put three power points in to modify the arm. The cultist may reshape the body part as they see fit, whether splitting the muscles so they

work in such a way that breaks bones whenever they're flexed, or swapping muscle and bone so the bone is a thin layer on top of the muscle. Whatever is within their imagination can become real should they wish it. The modification takes one minute per hit point and is permanent when complete. When the link stops, the victim will remain as they are. The key point of this power is that it cannot be used to kill something. All victims remain alive throughout the process, and will remain alive when released from the power, forever infused with the power of the Xinshen coursing through them.

They can be killed by normal methods once the shaping is completed, but will not die as a result of the modifications to them. This ability is used primarily as an indication of the cult's power, all instances of the power and the victims that result from it are suppressed under a D notice, but there is a vault in Jerusalem where those that did not have to be euthanized when found are held. Cubes of flesh are placed next to canvases that draw patterns in themselves as their fingernails and hair grow beneath the paper thin covering of skin upon them, and the faint moan of those still aware of their existence can be heard keening through the corridors. Chemical, Ebb healing and stormal regeneration cannot help with this ability, the body is rewritten at a genetic level, and now believes the abomination of its new form to be how it was supposed to be. All regeneration and healing will only go towards bringing it back to its new form. If the cultist wishes to incorporate weapons, armour, or technology into the victim, they can do so, and it is not unknown for the cultist to seal bombs within their victims that go off when the medical teams arrive to try and undo what has been done.

Invert

A powerful modification of the warp power, the cultist reaches out with the power of the Xinshen and causes the victim to turn inside out, their insides folding over and over until

their skin, armour and equipment is held within the pulsing, bleeding mass of their entrails. The pulsing mass usually does not last long, and those that have been saved by quick intervention are not thankful that they were.

Range – Five metres, plus one metre per five power points used on activation

Power points – Ten points to activate, plus power points as detailed below

Game Use – The cultist must use an amount of power equal to the victim's total hit points (all locations added together) to initiate this ability, which can be forced into the victim in a single phase.

The victim will start to open immediately, as will their armour and their clothing, folding towards their back as their entrails spill out, forming ropes to hold them steady.

The inversion takes as long as the cultist desires, during which time, the victim will be under such intense pain and stress that it will be almost impossible (-20 on all actions) to do anything but stand and scream. If the cultist is killed before the inversion is complete, the victim will fall to the floor in the state they are in, suffering at least a total loss of hit points in the torso and anything else the GM chooses to be appropriate.

Those who are inverted suffer an amount of damage equal to their total hit points (all locations added together) to their torso. If there is an LAD wagon in the vicinity or a specialist medical team, it is sometimes possible (there are two inverted victims in the Jerusalem facility) to save the life of the victim, but in these cases, a full body rebuild from Karma is the only option to putting them back on the streets ever again. The sight of their colleague being killed in this way is usually enough to dissuade the opposition from pressing the point further and usually leaves lasting mental scars for those who have witnessed it.

BPN Suggestions

The following are examples of the type and level of encounters involving cult activity found in different BPN types.

BPN - Red Sky in the Morning

BPN Colour - Blue

Remuneration - 200c/Squad

Details- The squad are sent to investigate possible cult sightings in the ruins of Evenside Station. While there have been no confirmed sightings, glyphs bearing the name and legend of the cult have been seen throughout various streets in the sector, all of them indicating a single location for the majority of the cults power base. The only building still standing with sufficient space to hold the cult is the no longer used station of Evenside. The cult does not have a large presence in the sector, several blood puppets with a single power each at most, but if the squad let any of them escape, they will return with larger forces within a short while, which will have another BPN issued in the area, but if the squad return, the enemy will be ready for them.

BPN - Red Sky at Night

BPN Colour - White

Remuneration - 200c/Operative

Details - The squad are asked to follow up a Blue BPN that was not completed fully around the area of Evenside station, several of the low level cultists escaped further into downtown and it is thought that they might have managed to alert other cult forces in the area. The squads' directive is to investigate and report back, not to engage the cult at any point, only provide sufficient intel for the proper support to be organised for a strike against them. It is likely that in addition to the Blood Puppets present, there will be at a few Red Hands, and if left too long, additional forces over and above those.

BPN - The Sleeper awakens

BPN Colour - Yellow

Remuneration - 200c/Operative

Details - The squad are requested to go to sector 23, where shiver sleeper team 426's position was last reported. The squad had been returning with information and camera footage of cult activities within sector 23 and it is thought they may have been ambushed before they could return safely. Upon arrival at the APC, the entire sleeper team is missing, and the black box from the APC has been removed, something which could only have been done with the proper codes from Station Analysis. The box is showing as not far from the APC, but unbeknownst to the operatives, the Sleeper team 426 has been corrupted by the cults and lies in wait for them. Knowing normal operative tactics, they have laid an ambush for the squad. The sergeant is equivalent to a Red Hand, with the rest of the squad equivalent to Blood Puppets, but they will have standard armour and equipment as well as their abilities.

BPN - Fantasia in White

BPN Colour - Green

Remuneration - 150c/Operative

Details - The squad are called to the vicinity of Bethlehem, where sporadic movement signals have been detected out in the Boneyard, but no evidence of life has been found, even though several of the movement based mines have been triggered. The Firefi on overwatch can deactivate separate parts of the minefield to allow the operatives to walk there, but there are no signs of anything other than recently dead creatures. The perimeter alarm goes off again and another civilian walks into the field above. If left to their own devices, they will trigger one of the mines and be killed, revealing nothing about them remarkable in any way. If allowed to come to the operatives, it is revealed that the creature continuing to try and get back to Bethlehem is a former Firefi Edge by the name of Jane Vaughn, killed and turned into a Revenant more than a year ago. If she is presented with the evidence of her inhabiting another body, that will be sufficient to release her from her torment. If the body she inhabits is destroyed without her realising what she has become, she will return later with another body.

BPN - Blood type O very negative

BPN Colour - Red

Remuneration - 300c/Operative

Details - The squad are called on rapid response to the blood bank in Downtown 6 where a large group of cultists have broken into the main vault and are trying to steal the entire supply of blood for sector 6, what amounts to several thousand litres of blood. What makes this vault special is that it also contains the special supply for several necanthrope unions, and it is this blood they are intent on taking. If they are interrupted in the taking of the blood, they will use the blood to summon as many creatures as they can to assist them in getting out. There are at least Six Red Hands working the hit, each one with the ability to summon.

BPN - By the people, For the People

BPN Colour - Grey

Remuneration - 500c/Operative

Details - Jarinna Verlain was a councillor for the peoples advice bureau who recently stood for election to the central council and won by a landslide. While such things do occasionally happen, the fact that several thousand civilians moved from their original sector so they could pledge their vote for her and that all her primary opponents have been found butchered has raised a concern within Cloak. The squad is to investigate Councillor Verlain and confirm whether or not her sudden popularity was down to her winning way, or if something else has been instructing her in the proper way of winning...

BPN - A calculated risk.

BPN Colour - Jade

Remuneration - 500c/Operative

Details - A group of ten Feral ebons in one of the outreach groups operating in sector 12 have gone missing from their habitat and SLA wants them brought back alive. Sector 13 has a larger than normal concentration of Xinshen activity and the concern is that the Ferals may find some common ground within the cults members. Upon arrival, it is apparent that several of the Ferals have more than learned from the cult, they now embrace the nature of the other power and have begun to spread the word to others with all the fervour of true believers. Any fatalities within the group of Ferals will incur a penalty of 100c to the fees upon completion.

BPN - Mass at the Basilica of Saint Genevieve

BPN Colour - Silver

Remuneration - 750c/Operative

Details - A major incursion has been mounted by a combined force of Xinshen and Xieye for the first time in countless decades, both are united to try and retrieve the artefacts held within the Basilica of Saint Genevieve. For reasons unknown, SLA has decided that the protection and recovery of these artefacts is more important than their denial to the cults. 3rd eye have placed a bounty on every death that they witness on the BPN, whether cultists or operative, as long as the death is suitably spectacular. If the artefacts are lost or destroyed in the fracas, the BPN will be viewed as a failure and no bounties or fees will be paid. The cult forces include a single Bishop and a single Envoy, both of which will turn upon each other when the artefacts are located and secured.

BPN - An arrival to cleanse the world

BPN Colour - Black

Remuneration - 1000c/Operative

Details - The Squad is called to the wastelands of CS 4 where the Xinshen are engaged in the summoning of a worm of far greater size than those that have been encountered before. There is a shield of power above the summoning site that prevents the direct targeting of it with artillery, and a large group of followers, both mortal and summoned in the area. It is not known how long the ritual has been running or how long it has left to run, but if the worm summoning cannot be prevented, leading it away from the city till it returns whence it came will be sufficient. The BPN comes with the free issue of several thumpers as a contingency in case the primary objective is failed.

BPN - Here lies a toppled god

BPN Colour - Platinum

Remuneration - 5000c/Operative

Details - It is the end of 913 and the construction of the new progress tower, to replace the travesty that Salvation tower became, is almost complete. Mort has enjoyed several years of reasonable peace, the enemies of the worlds of progress are all but vanquished, and it looks as the promise of the brighter tomorrow may finally come to pass.

Worlds away, the forces of the Xieye and the Xinshen realise that they have but one hope to break the tyranny that the universe is held under, and that hope lies deep within Bethlehem. A combined assault of both cults comes to the perimeter of Bethlehem and assaults the walls without mercy, the squad is amongst those sent to defend the walls against impossible odds. The only aim of the cults is to free the two lords of their orders, for with them released from their captivity, it would take nothing less than the intervention of the gods to make things right.

A pitched battle ensues, ending only when the cults forces have been completely dissipated, or when they finally make it through to maximum containment. The first of the Maximum security prisoners to escape will be the beginning of the end, for there is nothing that will stop them once they gain their freedom.

Red Sky at Night

“It hasn’t changed, you know...” Intruder sat on the chair opposite the tank, “The Stars, the World, it never changes...”

Within the tank, the body didn’t move, the chest still rising and falling despite the bullet wounds.

“No, you’re right, I don’t think it ever will...” Intruder leaned back in the chair, the wood creaking, “I wonder if it ever could have...”

Within the tank, the body didn’t move, the chest still rising and falling despite the bullet wounds.

“Yes, I know that you could have made some difference,” Intruder stood, feeling the weight of his many years, “But truly, do you think it would have mattered to most...?”

Within the tank, the body didn’t move, the chest still rising and falling despite the bullet wounds.

“Well, what does it matter,” Intruder shrugged, “*He* knew, and so I knew, and he, *we* couldn’t let that knowledge reach the outside world.”

Within the tank, the body didn’t move, the chest still rising and falling despite the bullet wounds.

“That’s not true...” Intruder leaned on the rail surrounding the tank, supporting himself on his fists, “I never wanted this, this *half-life* for you, for any of us...”

Within the tank, the body didn’t move, the chest still rising and falling despite the bullet wounds.

“You think I didn’t do anything to save you?” Intruder turned to look at the bodies face, his voice rising to a shout as emotion clouded his face, “I WHO ALONE AM YOUR FRIEND? YOU THINK I DID NOTHING...?”

Within the tank, the body didn’t move, the chest still rising and falling despite the bullet wounds.

“I...” Intruder sagged against the rail, looking away in shame, “You’re wrong, you have no idea what I had to do to keep this world alive...”

Within the tank, the body didn’t move, the chest still rising and falling despite the bullet wounds.

“No, no that can’t be the way...” Intruder turned towards the door, his fists clenching, “Who would keep the world safe, who but us can keep...”

Within the tank, the body didn’t move, the chest still rising and falling despite the bullet wounds.

“Never...” Intruder turned with a snarl, “You never understood what we have to do, what *I* have had to do to keep this place safe, you only cared about the truth, *your* truth.”

Within the tank, the body didn’t move, the chest still rising and falling despite the bullet wounds.

“And look where *that* got us...” Intruder sighed, “I don’t know why I come here, there was a chance for all this to be right once, a chance and I...”

Within the tank, the body didn’t move, the chest still rising and falling despite the bullet wounds.

“You know I wouldn’t, I never could, I...” Intruder turned, taking his coat from the stand and swirling it around his shoulders, he turned back with a smile, “That’s not what I’m for, that’s what *you’re* for...”

Within the tank, the body didn’t move, the chest still rising and falling despite the bullet wounds.

“It’s what you *were* for...” Intruder looked down with a sigh, walking from the room without another word.

Within the tank, the body didn’t move, the chest still rising and falling despite the bullet wounds, as the lights in the corridor went out, the corner of its mouth turned upwards...