

DEGENESIS

LEX TALIONIS



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NOW AS HOPE AND GLORY DIES
WE'LL SCREAM AT OUR DEMISE
ARE WE **LOST** FOREVER MORE
[PARADISE LOST]

MARKO DJURDJEVIC & LIAM FOLEY

FATAL CATCH

BREAKDOWN

The following adventure is broken down into two booklets. LEX TALIONIS features the events of the story as they unfold, introducing the Players to the plot, and driving them toward the climax in Act 3. The second booklet THE ROT-TEN FEW details the backstories of the main antagonist, Zeno Blackheart, and his elite entourage of lethal operatives, important information on their plans, and additional plotlines for the scenario.

LEX TALIONIS has purposefully been designed with a more open ending, allowing the GM to base the outcome of the adventure on the actions of the Players, cut it short or extend it to their own liking, and leaving enough room for follow up missions and further secrets to be revealed.

The latest gossip is spreading through Justitian, passed from drunk mouth to hungover ear and back again, concerning the events that took place in the Cross Quarter just a few days ago. It all started when a brawl of unprecedented proportions broke out on Banding Hill – that’s where all those fancy Anabaptists go to get drunk, they’re too good for us bums slumming it in the Outskirts – which ended up getting so bad that even the quarter’s guards got pulled into the fray.

From there, it didn’t take long for Judges to get dragged into the mix. They sent a full cavalry squad and then some down there to break it all up in the usual fashion, hammers and all. Blood, broken noses, shattered bones, you name it. Everything got all tangled up, lots of wounded, and the entire section of the Cross Quarter got locked off for a good few hours. There’s even some talk of Executioners getting off their high horses and wading in – that’s whatcha call a full on Judge raid, if I ever heard of one. Of course, no one is talking about it too openly, because the Protectors went around ordering people to stay quiet, passing out Drafts by the handful. I only caught the story because one Ascetic I know used the damn money on some of that quality Brenni beer down in the Stukov, although that’s getting off topic.

After that, the floppy hats dragged a whole bunch of serious offenders off to the Cleft, masked with hoods so no one could tell if they were Broken Cross or something else, and that’s that. I don’t know much else, and even if I did, I hear there’s been some Protectors goin’ about and listening in on conversations to make sure no one talks about the ruffle, and you can’t get me boozed up enough to risk another stint in the Cleft. So anyway, about that drink...

SUBSOCIAL RUMBLING

The aftermath of the Judicial intervention in the Cross Quarter is still playing out across the city. Despite their best efforts to stamp out the rumors and speculation, word travels quickly, and the gossip blitzes up as fast as it can be quelled. It was barely an hour after the incident came to a close that the Cluster had Streamers sniffing around in Judgement Hall to request information on the case, and it took a decree from High Judge Exelor to get them to halt their incessant screeching. Every Judge involved knows that won’t do a thing to stop the Chroniclers, but it at least saves them from the headache.

More puzzling to those keeping track of the situation is the order from the Office of Hygienics to pull the Spitalians from duty at the Knacker’s Office for the next three days, leaving the work to be entirely supervised by the Judges and Defilers stationed there. Later investigations will reveal a slew of official protests lodged by Elliot Heilkamp, head of the department, but authorities higher than his own made the call. The number of people in Justitian with an understanding of the events is limited to only a handful of Judges – and that’s just how they like it. After just under a week, the story has been replaced by more pressing discussions, like the new Architect appointed by Archot to handle his birthday celebrations, still months away. It’s time to execute the second stage of their plan.

SIFTING FOR TRUTH

In the days following the Cross Quarter raid, many injured and limping Anabaptists slowly trekked out of the Cleft, having slept off their hangover and agreed to pay the fine for their drunken and riotous behavior. However, one cell in particular has been

Prisoner Transfer

LEX TALIONIS places a group of characters at the center of an interwoven network of factions and parties of interest, in a high-tension, top-secret operation launched at the very heart of the Protectorate. They must navigate through uncontrolled hinterlands, following a plan passed down from above to the best of their abilities, and react to an array of unexpected situations. They must stay on course against the odds, while resisting an insidious threat trying to sabotage them from within.

The scenario is intended for a group of experienced characters who have already established themselves in the region. It can be used by Game Masters as an effective method to introduce their

Players to the deeper mysteries woven throughout the characters and factions in the story, with Zeno offering forbidden knowledge through words laced with poison. Throughout the adventure, the group will come to realise that the biggest threat facing them comes from their cargo. The Acheron is a volatile and cunning entity, who will not hesitate to lie, cheat, and deceive without a shred of morality in order to escape from captivity in one piece. The more his captors listen, the easier it will be to control them.

Additionally, LEX TALIONIS can seamlessly be tied back to the events of HARM'S WAY or LAST WATCH. By gaining an inroad with the Carrion Birds, the characters will

have positioned themselves against the operatives of the Cluster – while the two organizations aren't directly antagonistic towards each other, there is no love lost between the migratory birds and the tech-toads. This makes them suitable choices for the transfer mission.

More favorable, though, is if the characters rescued Murdoch from his perilous deployment in Watchtower 17N. He works from within the Judiciary, dropping the names of his saviors to push them towards suitable missions. Hakkal, meanwhile, continues his search for Senna all across the Protectorate, eventually finding himself directly in the path of the characters – willing to offer his aid once again.

occupied since the event, say some of the former convicts released over the last few days. Branded "High Security", and watched by guards at all times, only a single prisoner was spotted inside. The identity of this solitary man is close to unknown, leaving just a name whispered in the back streets of Downtown – "Zeno."

Meanwhile, the Judges have been digging into their supplies of horses and armored carriages, getting half a dozen full units together, sending them out on seemingly random journeys. Even some high-profile Protectors have been roped into the tasks, venturing out on what eventually is revealed to be mere busywork, something even a City Judge riding a donkey could handle, let alone a full sized transport. This all comes to a head when the fifth cart is spotted galloping out of the Cleft in the late hours of a clear night, with someone identified as Executioner Vexicall leading the transport. Destination: Ignatz. All of this is a massive cover up for the sixth carriage, still awaiting its crew and ready to head out along the exact same path...

HUMAN RESOURCES

The Judges must handle the transfer of Zeno to Ignatz in absolute secrecy, otherwise the Chroniclers will catch wind of the operation and the whole setup will explode into a political frenzy – the technophiles will never tolerate such a valuable prisoner being transferred without further investigation. They know the convict. What they don't know is that he's in the clutches of the Judiciary, and that they

want to use him for a trade. However, for the operation to be conducted swiftly and without catching the Cluster's attention, the Judges need to hire a group of people who have little connection to the Cluster, who can be trusted, and who won't ask too many questions.

RECOMMENDED: If the characters have previously worked with the Judges and performed well, demonstrating their loyalty and integrity, they will be contacted by a plainclothes operative during their travels in Justitian. In particular, if they rescued Murdoch during the events of LAST WATCH, the Judges will have their eyes on the group.

ENEMY OF MY ENEMY: In accordance with the old adage, the Judges start looking for the enemies of the Chroniclers. Those who lurk in the shadows, who spit in the face of the tech-toads, who hoard their artifacts, who pull down the megaphone poles; the ones who would never give the Chroniclers a secret that could be an advantage. It's a tenuous and uneasy relationship, but the Judges don't have too many options.

UNEXPECTED: The characters are new in town, haven't made too many waves yet, and the Chroniclers haven't had time to sink their mechanical teeth into them – not ideal, but they'll do. They'll be given only the barest of information about Zeno, only that he's a dangerous Anabaptist prisoner, with a commensurately greater reward to buy their silence. The threat of hard time in the Cleft or an ignoble end in one of Justitian's alleyways will also help keep their lips sealed.



LEX
TALIONIS

EYE FOR EYE

SCENE 1: CLANDESTINE CONVERSATIONS

In a more typical Judge operation at this level of secrecy, the instructions for the first meeting would have been passed to the characters through a pair of dead drops, one containing a code phrase which would be used to decipher the message in the other, ensuring that any one leak doesn't compromise the entire mission – but this is not a typical Judge operation. The rapid pace that must be maintained to ensure Zeno has no chance to escape and the Chroniclers don't find out about the captive requires that some corners are cut.

A Judge approaches the group while they're going about their business in Justitian, roughly barging into one of their number and pressing a note into their hand. "Tonight, 2:00 AM, make sure you aren't followed," the Protector commands, before slipping away into the crowd as just another figure masked by a leather coat and hat. Unfolding the message, the character finds a simple address, leading to a small warehouse in the Stukov Quarter. Once night falls over the city, and the glaring sun is replaced with the dim glow of oil or electric lamps, it's time for the party to meet their employers.

THE ORCHESTRATOR

The name Vexicall is a dogwhistle for the Cluster, but the Tech Cult isn't the only faction that will perk up at the mention of the legendary Executioner. He has taken part in operations all across the Protectorate, brought infamous criminals to justice, and exposed secret conspiracies by the truckload. An INT+Legends (2) roll from one of the characters, or a copy of a recent edition of the Righteous Hammer, is enough to remember one of his latest exploits: tracking down and destroying a Liqua-based smuggling operation working out of Fielding, in the process recovering several dozen kilograms of high explosive compound supposedly mixed by Brenni Toxicians. The intended use for the payloads remains unknown.

HIT THE GROUND RUNNING

From the street entrance, the characters are ushered through into a cleared out space in the center of the warehouse. Standing in a pool of light from an overhead lamp, a small group of brown-coated Judges are gathered around a map spread out on a table, engaged in heated conversation. As the newcomers approach, one of the lawmen breaks out of focus and takes notice of them. His face is covered in extensive pockmarks – remnants of a chemical attack, or just acne scars? With a scrutinizing gaze he pierces through the assembled characters, evaluating them. Regardless of his internal opinion, he lets out a grunt, "No turning back now. Kerrigan, Protector, and the one in charge of you lot. Welcome aboard. Don't bother introducing yourselves, I know who you are and it's best to not use names too liberally. Step up, I'll get you up to speed."

The Protector brings the characters around the table, revealing the map to be a detailed outline of the road to Ignatz, with various symbols, lines, and notes scrawled directly onto the paper. The focus of these notes is where the outline of the Rubble is marked, a series of crudely drawn barcodes obviously indicating Chronicler presence. "Right, here's the deal." Kerrigan points to a small wooden block, carved into the shape of a horse. "This is you. You'll be transporting a prisoner in an armored carriage from the Cleft to Ignatz. Don't ask too much about the package, he used to be in league with the Broken Cross and he's extremely valuable to them, that's all you need to know for now. I'll be sending a coachman to handle the horses, you're needed for protection and as a contingency." Next, he stabs his finger at a wooden hammer further along the road. "That's us. The Judge at the top of this operation, Executioner Vexicall, and a few of our best are riding ahead in an identical carriage to yours. They're already about eight hours ahead. They'll draw the attention of any techies up late to watch their cameras. Compared to them, you're less interesting than a bug on their screen – no offense."

The group's attention is drawn to a Chronicler symbol right at the edge of the Rubble. "This is the last cargo inspection station in the Rubble, and it's where we expect the most focus to be on you. The carriage is armored, enough that the normal scan-

ners used there won't be able to pick up anything inside, so all you have to do is keep a straight face and say you're transporting a convict to Ferropol to be exiled. Come up with a fake name for the guy if you get pressed on it, but it's a typical enough answer. After that, the journey should be a breeze." Kerrigan claps a character on the shoulder and cracks a twisted smirk, "Alright, ready to get going? No time to waste." He passes them a radio handset, "This is how you'll keep in touch with Vexicall," along with a small paper document marked with an Uptown seal, "and this is how you get to the Cleft. Special permits to move around at night. Keep them, part of your payment. Now, run along."

EMPTY STREETS

Time to move. The characters exit from the warehouse onto the street, armed with their night pass and a few whispered directions to the Cleft. "Head south, go through the Forecourt, then along the Niniver Stallion Street for about twenty minutes. The password is "Unbroken Cross." Got it?"

Justitian's central neighborhood at night is a very different place. Gone are the bustling crowds filling the streets, silent are the looming megaphones broadcasting the Cluster's decrees, and empty are the platforms of the Peace Walk passing overhead. The buildings of the Stukov Quarter rise up on either side of the winding streets, dark shadows only occasionally illuminated by lamplight. The city appears muted, with only occasional shouts from other streets or loud metallic clangs from unknown sources breaking through to elevate the tension. As the characters approach the edge of the Stukov Quarter, facing out onto the cleared expanse of the Forecourt – itself an unusual sight, the biggest market in Europe left unattended – they are stopped by a tired looking Protector. A single wave of the special permit is enough for them to be ushered on through, allowing them to weave their way through the emptied out stalls and deserted alleyways of the open plaza.

On the far side of the Forecourt, they finally enter the swept Stallion Street. However, a sudden electronic hiss interrupts their nightly march, as a pair of green lenses iris open above them. A mechanical arm juts out from a base mounted to a wall, with a pedestal at its tip allowing a figure to crouch there and look down at those passing below. The arm begins to descend, and the cloaked, masked Chronicler barks a command at the characters – "TRAVELING AFTER CURFEW! STATE NAME AND PURPOSE!" An Observer has them in his sights, and won't

let up until he has a satisfactory answer. The situation is delicate. The Observer will collect their identities, which in turn can compromise the outcome of their current affairs. That's not good. The characters have to act quick, and come up with a series of convincing arguments, or the Observer will be able to either sense a classified operation going on, or pinpoint them later on. While showing the Judiciary-branded pass will grant them the right to leave, suspicious behaviour will risk tipping the Cluster off to the mission being carried out under their mechanical noses, and potentially invite a follow-up investigation carried out at the end of a Shocker. In order to sufficiently excuse their presence, the characters must engage in a Complex Action of PSY+Cunning or Deception (15), with either Skill contributing to the total number of Successes. After the Observer is satisfied, the group can extricate themselves from the interview and continue on to the Cleft.

RENDEZVOUS

The time is 4:30 AM, "CARPE DIEM" reads the ponderous steel gate of the Cleft, as the characters arrive at the beginning of their journey. Ahead, the armored carriage that will carry them to Ignatz is ready for transport. Coming closer, their footsteps alert the silhouette hunched over at the driver's bench. A bob of red hair appears underneath the hat, followed by a square face, freckles, and a pair of round, hazel-colored eyes squinting through the murky darkness. "Hey, are y'all the hired guns I'm waiting for?" the figure asks, revealing herself with the voice of a young girl. "Or, hold on, I mean, what's the password?"

This is Dea, one of Kerrigan's Vagrants, assigned to steer the armored carriage. She's on the cusp of her promotion to City Judge, in her late teens, and is fully capable of handling the six tall horses harnessed at the front of the vehicle by herself, but she's inexperienced with most other matters. Fighting? Not her thing. "Would one of you mind sitting up and riding shotgun? Just in case something goes awry, right?" she asks with an innocent smirk across her cheeks. One character can saddle up next to her while the rest of the party must clamber into the main cab, looking out through the armored slats on the sides to spot incoming threats or dangers. Inside, their cargo is already waiting.

Against the far corner of the cabin, with shackles linking his wrists to the floor, sits the prisoner. His hulking frame is clad in faded convict's rags, ripped and torn, but the most prominent feature is the bizarre mask clutching his head:



a thick, iron helmet featuring only thin slits to allow the wearer to see. A pair of blue eyes suddenly open, locking on to the first character to enter. With a piercing and intense glare, accompanied by a faint rattle, he takes in every character head to toe. The prisoner remains silent, but slowly bobs his head to the side to point the characters towards something. Pinned to the wall next to him is a paper note, which contains additional instructions for the characters on their journey, stamped with Vexicall's seal.

WORD OF GOD

The paper sheet is handwritten in scratchy, hurried script, and begins with a recap of the information that Kerrigan passed down to the characters already – Vexicall and his elite squad are riding 8 hours ahead with a decoy to draw the attention of the Chroniclers away from the no-names transporting the true cargo. The radio the characters now possess is tuned to an encrypted channel that the Cluster is still unaware of, and will be used for check ins after the carriage is underway. However, it must be destroyed within 48 hours, or the Chroniclers will be able to detect the transmissions and triangulate their position within the Protectorate. Most critically, though, is the information on the prisoner. The characters are given the name of their charge; Zeno Blackheart. Just from the name alone, it's possible for characters with a rating in Secrets of at least (3) to identify him

via a roll of INT+Legends (3), with Jehammedans or Anabaptists adding +2D. Success brings the knowledge that he was a potent figure from the Adriatic Wars, although his exploits were far from public knowledge, while (2) or more Triggers will reveal that he was a renowned and brutal terrorist deployed far behind enemy lines. He will also be sharing the cramped cabin with the characters for at least the next day. Comforting.

Finally, the paper presents the protocol for the characters on their journey to Ignatz, along with a crude copy of their path.

- ◆ Don't draw attention to yourself, appear as normal as possible.
- ◆ Don't hurt, torture, or otherwise harm the prisoner. He must make it to Ignatz in one piece, or the deal will be off.
- ◆ Don't remove the prisoner's mask. Don't sniff around and try to interrogate him either. He's a dangerous man, and shouldn't be allowed to speak. If he needs anything, he has been instructed to tap his foot on the floor three times. Remove his mouth gag if he needs food or water – it's up to you whether you permit him to talk after that.

- ◇ Your horses won't last the entire way at full pace, so you'll be swapping them at Grifter's Rock, on the way and marked on your map. You must keep on schedule and travel through the night to reach Ignatz in the morning of the day after tomorrow, this is non-negotiable. Do everything in your power to move as quickly as possible, as your safety along the Fortified Road cannot be guaranteed.
- ◇ Memorize these points and destroy this paper at your earliest convenience.

SCENE 2: NIGHT TRANSIT

Inside the cab, doors closed, Dea urges the horses into motion, directing them back out onto the Stallion Street. The route out of the city is simple, but far from short; the carriage must travel directly through the Jehammedan Quarter in order to reach the southbound Fortified Road towards Cathedral City, which will be their home for the next 24 hours as they make their way to Ignatz. The wide boulevard is empty save for their carriage, so Dea can make good progress, slowly opening up to the character riding shotgun with idle chit-chat and probing gossip. "You know, Kerrigan calls me Pumpkin, and I mean I kinda get it because of the hair but it's not even the same kind of orange, and I keep it all bunched up in my hat anyway..." the young Vagrant rattles on. "How'd y'all sign up for this? Known each other before? Yeah, damn crazy times! This is my first transport, but I've been coaching since four years already. Love me some horses! Did y'all hear about what happened at that watchtower down by Siege a few months ago?"

Meanwhile, in the cabin, the ponderous presence of Zeno looms over the passengers like a thick blanket, the Anabaptist seemingly able to smother any conversation with nothing but the slight shuffling of his feet, or readjusting himself on the wooden bench. A sharp contrast.

Fifteen minutes later, and the cart passes through the Southern Gate, reaching the entry to the Jehammedan Quarter. It's only barely past 5 AM, but the district is already buzzing with life. Sounds of prayers travel through the air, people are rushing to attend their morning rituals. Pumpkin angles the horses into the narrowing path, yet navigates into even more traffic. The inhabitants don't keep to the sidewalks, instead spilling over into the open road, workers crossing the path of the carriage, Abami kneeling to pray where they shouldn't, and herds of animals being led across the streets. No compliance at all. The horses are shying, at risk of running into an ignorant Ismaeli darting in front of their hooves. Pumpkin tries to shoo the trespassers away with a half-baked "Pass aside, Judges coming through!" but the only thing she receives in return is mocking looks, along with one particularly aggressive Jehammedan spitting in her direction at the sound of her command. One can tell without much effort that the Jehammedans don't appreciate Judges, and female figures of authority even less so. They're stuck, and surrounded by the belligerent natives of the district. Not a great start. A character needs to stand up on the drivers bench and start asserting dominance, with a PSY+Domination or CHA+Expression (2) roll, yelling and commanding the ragtag Jehammedans to clear the Stallion Street. The situation remains heated, although the Street slowly begins to clear up.

Looking out into the streets, it's possible to start to notice a pattern. Moving through the crowds, hustling to-and-fro with urgency, young men are purposefully striding ahead with sword-shaped bundles hanging from their belts. An INS+Orientation (2) roll will let a character deduce their approximate destination: the House of War, in the west of the district. Something is off, but the characters were reassured that the only concern on their mission is the Chroniclers, so nothing to be worried about – for now.

LOCAL CONNECTION

If a Jehammedan is among the characters they can aid Pumpkin in bringing some calm into the atmosphere. The problem is simple, there is no respect for the Judiciary down here, nor can the entourage rely on heavy Protector backup this far south. Most of the district is under the watchful eye of its own neighborhood militia. Better to try and soothe tempers by acting friendly; aggressive or overbearing behaviour from a Judge could easily escalate the situation into a riot. In that case, Pumpkin would have to fire a flare gun to scramble squad support from the Southern Wall, something she'd only do as a last resort. She knows how important it is to stay on schedule, and remain incognito.

MUSINGS

If the chaotic and tumultuous scene outside the cart wasn't enough, the tense atmosphere within the cabin is suddenly broken by three firm taps on the floor – the signal that Zeno needs something. His eyes glint beneath the mask, focussing on whoever is sitting across from him. With the gag removed, he doesn't speak for a few moments, as if preparing his words. Anticipation hangs thick in the air. "Water, please."

The relief is subtle, but palpable, the request can be granted just by passing the metal water canteen stored under the opposite bench over to him. Although he's chained, he can move his hands and bring the water container to his mouth. Glug. Glug. Glug. As he passes the flask back, Zeno looks out at the Jehammedans. "Isn't it fitting how they are so close to their animals? They haven't developed much further, after all." He takes a deep, almost melancholic sigh. "What else could one use to describe a tribe that chains their women to their stables. Animals. Beasts. Do they really deserve to live amongst civilized humans?" he asks, as he swings back toward the characters. "I remember coming across one of their campsites once. I found sisters being married to their brothers, daughters to their fathers, sibling bedding sibling. Whether you believe in God or not, man was not created to commit to such sins."

Nodding up to the driver's seat, he follows up with another cynical remark. "Have you realised why they don't respect your driver? In their mind, she's nothing but breeding stock. If it wasn't for you, they'd pull her off the coach, drag her into a barn, and have their way with her. But they wouldn't kill her, instead they'd let her live, scarred, brutalized, so she can forever remember the moment when she was defenseless and in their clutches." With his message uttered, he trails off, staring out of the window. Under the mask, his expression is unreadable.

SCENE 3: LAST STOP – THE OBSERVATION STATION

As soon as the party enters the Rubble, the carriage starts to make headway, eating the distance in full gallop. The southern part of these farmlands belong almost exclusively to Jehammedan tribesmen, who arrived here during the second and third wave of settlement some thirty years ago. The plains are dotted with ranches and stables, barely lit by the faint morning sun. Campsites, tent cities, and large, fenced off masting farms fly by as Pumpkin steers the carriage through the deserted pathways ahead.

At the terminus of each Funnel Road, where the Rubble gives way to the greater Protectorate, the Chroniclers established inspection Alcoves intended to monitor the traffic to and from Justitian, feeding the information into the bottomless pits of their data stores to fuel the Static Stream's calculations. As with any point of interest, people began to gather, put down roots, clump up, and now each Alcove sprouts its own small town clinging to it like barnacles at the bottom of a ship. The Cluster doesn't care so long as they don't impede traffic – Obstruction Detected, Data Flow Altered, Disperse!

Such a settlement is directly ahead of the cart, a hamlet-sized cluster of buildings centered around and taking its name from Alcove S-3. From Kerrigan's talk, this is expected to be the most significant obstacle faced on the characters' journey. Closer in, the actual Alcove reveals itself, a black cube fortified with metal walls that stands out from the typical rusted scrap and flaxen structures like a sore thumb. Several cloaked Chroniclers stand outside at the side of the road, near a bench stacked high with technical equipment – a quick glance and a roll of INT+Artifact Lore (2) confirms it as a large scanning device. If Kerrigan was telling the truth, it should be ineffective on the carriage, but there's only one way to find out.

One of the Agents steps forth. He doesn't provide any identification as the carriage rolls to a stop in front of its station, simply barking orders through his overloaded Vocoder "State name, destination, and purpose!"

Pumpkin, unused to the harsh and direct question, struggles to stammer out a fumbled excuse. All that's needed is for the character riding shotgun to butt into the conversation with the story prepared previously by Kerrigan, "Low level exile transfer,

INTERFACE MATCH

While the Judiciary is extremely unlikely to trust a Chronicler with transporting Zeno to Ignatz, it's not impossible – whether through the use of extreme leverage like blackmail material, or by finding a technophile particularly disposed to acting to spite his own Cult. Regardless, if the carriage contains a Chronicler, or someone in the guise of one, the interrogation at Alcove S-3 will play out far differently. With little more than a show of their mask, and "Operation is Cluster-approved, expedite passage!" the inspecting Agent gives up his interrogation. However, this comes with its own dangers: when the Chronicler returns to a terminal and finds that no such action was sanctioned by the Cluster, alarm bells will begin to ring.

we're dumping him in Ferropol, and making sure he doesn't come back," or another suitable reason for a Judiciary carriage with an unknown prisoner inside, and wave an official looking document. But the Agent isn't satisfied. He circles the carriage, looking underneath, inspecting the spokes, the wheels, brushing along the outer cladding with his Streamer Glove.

"Order: State logic why the exile is so valuable that he must be escorted in an armored carriage." He initiates his investigation. The characters seem to have run into a very pedantic member of the cyberfrogs. Every answer he receives, he signs off with a reply of "Insufficient!" He keeps on pestering the characters, as more and more Agents surround the carriage, taking scans and samples.

"Order: State logic why the exile is guarded by so much auxiliary force." The Agent continues. The characters suddenly realize how hard pressed they are for answers.

"Query: Are the passengers registered Jurymen?" The barrage of questions doesn't ebb. "Query: Who is in charge of the vessel?", "Query: Which office ordered the transfer?", "Query: Is the prisoner marked, or branded?"

He pushes forward, attempting to open the side door of the carriage, while the other Agents frantically punch data into their portable interfaces. "Order: Step aside, I want to take a look at the cargo!" The situation is tense. The characters need to force his attention away from their transport, or he will continue with "Query: Why is the prisoner masked?"

ELECTRONIC INTERROGATION

Every word, action, and mannerism in this moment is critical. The Judges and the Chroniclers, despite their outward cooperation, each couldn't trust the other Cult less. The Agents manning this station must uncover some sort of answer for this operation and categorize the reasons for the inconsistencies in the story, or a dedicated team of Streamers in the Cluster will immediately be put on high alert. In order to bluff and connive their way through this inspection, the characters must come together to construct a suitable cover story that explains all the cracks – and Kerrigan's blithe, bullshit excuse of an exile isn't going to cut it. The problem? The Agent is keenly watching them, giving absolutely no time for planning. Pumpkin is of no help, paralysed by her first overtly hostile interaction with the technophiles. Time to get to work.

The characters must succeed in a Cooperative Complex Action of CHA+Negotiation, PSY+Cunning, and PSY+Deception, with a threshold of (35) Successes. Violence is completely out of the question, even if the characters somehow managed to overpower the Agents manning the Alcove, their faces would be plastered on every single screen in Justitian – Embargo! Adios, previous life. Not to mention the catastrophic political fallout of sanctioned Judicial operatives battering innocent Chroniclers in some backwater town.

If the characters are unable to reach the threshold within 6 rolls, or any character rolls more 1s than Successes, the Agent is tipped off that there's a game afoot, but is canny enough to know that simply arresting these mercenaries won't reveal the information the Cluster needs. With a coded burst of Vocoder static he calls off the other Chroniclers and bellows "Conclusion: Passage Permitted. Have a good day." However, as he makes one final inspection of the carriage, he drives the nail-shaped body of a transponder pin into a wooden beam on the frame. Unless a character succeeds a roll of INS+Perception (4) to spot the tiny, out-of-place fragment and then subsequently deduces the origin, they'll be broadcasting their location all the way out to Ignatz.

Just as the characters are preparing to get moving, the Agent turns back to them. "Query: Transport of Judiciary prisoner related to Cross Quarter raid, 6 days ago?"

Having recovered her wits, Pumpkin jumps in, "No, no, not related at all! Thank you!" Not allowing time for any further discussion, the Vagrant pushes the horses into motion, setting off into the greater Protectorate. As S-3 slips into the distance, along with the rest of the Rubble, Pumpkin lets out a sigh of relief. "Well, that was pretty easy. Smooth sailing from here, right?"

FOLLOW UP

The interaction between Pumpkin and the Agent is curious, especially to the characters who have only been recently inducted into the operation. If the young Vagrant is pressed on the matter, she fumbles while trying to avoid answering the question before finally sighing and acquiescing. "Last week, when the Protectors picked up our passenger," she nods to the cabin, "in the raid on the Cross Quarter, they were also going after a group associated with him. They all got away though, and the word from up top is that we're not to even mention there was a raid, so..." She shrugs. "It's not related. That clear it up? I don't know anything else myself, though, sorry!"



TOOTH FOR TOOTH

OUT FOR A DRIVE

With the armored cart supplied by the Judges, the 80km journey from Justitian to Ignatz will take place over the course of 24 hours. The margins on the schedule are tight, but not inflexible in order to accommodate emergencies and delays – if the characters drive the horses until they collapse at the midway point, then replace them and continue on in the same fashion, they'll arrive at Ignatz with four hours to spare. A more standard pace, allowing Pumpkin to handle the animals as she has been trained, will bring that margin down to just one hour. With the importance of the operation, along with the inter-Cult significance of the prisoner exchange, delays cannot be tolerated.

THE LEAK

Vexicall's initial warning given to the characters to avoid speaking to the prisoner is for more than just keeping secrets buried. The Acheron is dangerous, and from his years of training under the watch of the Broken Cross' most skillful operatives, along with indulging in the silver blood of the Arianoi, he has gained access to the memetic techniques practiced by only a chosen few. His first target was the Judge guarding his cell in the Cleft. Over the course of his hours in incarceration, he subtly broke down the walls in the Protector's mind and overrode his impulses. Now, without even knowing it, the Judge is working to sabotage the prisoner transfer. He has leaked the destination of the armored carriage to Zeno's pack, the Rotten Few, by writing it on a note and placing it in one of their pre-established dead-drops, but not even he is fully aware of which carriage truly holds the Acheron, leaving them to find out that on their own.

"Vexicall here. Transport team, report in. Did you make it through the inspection in one piece? Over." The radio Kerrigan handed to the characters buzzes, allowing whoever is holding the device to answer the call.

"Is the prisoner unharmed?" follows immediately after. The characters can give Vexicall a run down of the events. He remains strict. "Don't panic, you've made it through. The most important thing right now is that nothing happens to your cargo, understood?"

Then, after a short pause, he adds "You're transporting a war criminal. The Baptists want him back, in exchange for someone who's pretty high on our own Most Wanted list. They won't commit to the deal if you fail to get the bastard in your carriage to them unscathed." The Judge is terse, speaking in a clipped voice, demanding updates with no room for chatter. When sufficiently satisfied with the progress of the armored carriage, he signs off with "We're about to enter Grifter's Rock for a change of horses. The coast is clear on our end. Keep me posted on any developments."

The characters gradually continue to whip across the greater Protectorate, leaving the Rubble behind them. Settlements and hamlets become sparse, and the trademark dusty red plain of West Borca begins to replace any semblance of farmland. The Southern Road is fairly straight, and the landscape plain and featureless, allowing a clear view far off ahead of them. Every few hundred meters, the transport passes a pair of heavy stones functioning as markers, ensuring that travelers won't lose their way even if the beaten path is obscured by a dust storm – while also serving as a reminder to any over-eager highwaymen or enthusiastic bandits that the Judges operate on this road network. Not worth the trouble, find somewhere else to pillage!

The characters have overcome what they were told to expect as the greatest obstacle on their journey, but they still have a long way ahead before they reach their destination. Midday is approaching, and there's no time to waste. In order to make it to the rendezvous on time, in the morning of the next day, they must travel all the way through the night, only stopping for a brief rest at a designated halfway point where they will swap horses themselves – the sleepy, out of the way dwelling of Grifter's Rock, a location so irrelevant and meaningless that it's barely featured on larger Protectorate maps.

SCENE 1: BACKCHATTER

Uneventful silence in the cabin as the window slats reveal little more than a fleeting smear of the plains passing by. That changes as Zeno suddenly breaks the stoic calm. Tock. Tock. Tock. He bangs his iron mask against the cabin wall, implying that he wants to speak. If allowed, he begins with a low voice, reverberating with zeal and awe. "You expired, Rebus, but in your last moments you opened the path for ascension. Bless your servant as he smites down those who soil your path, infuse him with your Pneuma as he wracks the bodies and souls of the heretics, and grant forgiveness in death to those who trespass against him. As it was, ever it shall be. Amen." The prisoner exhales a long rattle.

If the characters attempt to involve him in a conversation, he nods courteously, clasping his hands until the knuckles turn white. Every question asked is answered with a religious salvo. If the characters attempt to find out who he is, he states "I'm a vessel of Rebus the Baptist, reborn and molded in his vision, a spirit of vengeance walking among mortals." If they try to find out what got him imprisoned in the first place, he'll let out a melancholic sigh. "Betrayal. The first sin. They taught me how

to sever the soul with a knife, and let oil seep into the wound. The blood of the fallen expanded my mind, and I realized the River of Death claims us all. Then they called me home, telling me the war is over," he says, letting out a sharp breath. "But war never ends," he whispers, as he leans back into the shadow, eyeing each character without a blink.

"When you kill an Isaaki, you must tear the heart from his chest to confirm it will beat no more, and when you fell a Hagari, open up the womb to make sure there are no more offspring of the Ram hiding within." Zeno's eyes flare up as he depicts the atrocities as if they're bedside stories, rambling on about how to survive in the wild feasting on Jehammedan entrails, how to set fire to their villages and bar everyone from escape, or how to drown their newborn for being born of heathen blood. It's pure, unhinged horror. Mental pressure is building up, forcing every listener to roll Mental Defense (2) for as long as Zeno remains ungagged. Failure causes the loss of Ego Points equal to the number of 1s rolled.

Naturally, the characters will attempt to replace the gag, pushing it back in past Zeno's teeth to keep him quiet. However, should any of them make the attempt, the prisoner will launch into another prayer, or adapt his current speech, and interweave it with the subliminal intonations of the Dictate protocol, commanding them to leave him ungagged. "You're escorting me to meet my death. What difference does it make if I speak, dear brother? Do plain words worry you so much? And what if I change them, what if I preach harmony and false truth?" In order to resist the protocol, the character must succeed a Mental Defense with a Difficulty of (3), otherwise they will simply abandon the action, developing an internally consistent excuse for their line of thought – it's really just him praying to himself, it would be unjust to block that, he's no doubt going to be executed in a few days, his ramblings can be tolerated, and so on.

SCENE 2: ROADBLOCK

There has been barely any traffic heading in the opposite direction for the past hour, only the occasional ramshackle settler wagon, or a lonely donkey rider in the distance. As the cart begins to enter a serpentine section of the road, slowly climbing into hilly territory, a towering megalith comes into sight.

"Semper's Limit," Pumpkin says. "Makin' headway. We can check off that box on the map." nodding to the character next to her. "Can you believe the Protectorate was once

this small?" she asks with glee. If the character riding shotgun doesn't understand, she'll elaborate. "Semper Salvano, Supreme Judge. That Judgement stone ahead was the borderline under his reign." The landmark doesn't look like much; compared to the current vast territory under Archot's control it seems almost pathetically constrained, but this territory was claimed over the bodies of thousands of warriors of the Great Old Clans. There isn't much time to reminisce, though. Pumpkin steers the transport along a drawn out curve, circumventing a jutting rock formation, before a lonely goat traverses the street in their direction. As the armored carriage passes the lonely animal, Zeno spots it from inside the cabin, fixating on it for a split second, then suddenly turning his head towards the characters, eyes wide, as if he just had an epiphany. If he's gagged, he begins tapping the floor with his foot. Tap. Tap. Tap. Once allowed to speak, he stammers out a frantic warning, "Ambush!"

Ambush? There is no one around as far as the eye can see – until the transport comes around the corner of the rocky slope, and abruptly halts in front of a massive goat herd occupying the entire road, a carpet of fluffy white creatures, blocking the way forward for a hundred meters or more. Zeno is on high alert. Meanwhile, Pumpkin looks out in confusion, trying to spot the shepherd who guides these animals. "This stinks," she says with squinted eyes, "the Jehammedan Grazelands are to the east, not west." Slowly she tries to steer the horses into the herd, to part the first animals in the front, scanning the slope to her left. "May the blessings of the Last Prophet be upon you!" An old, bald, and white-bearded Abrami with a staff climbs downhill, waving his arms.

"Move your damn animals, will ya!" Pumpkin yells back. "Yer blockin' a Judge transfer!"

The Abrami draws large circles through the air with his hands, trying to deescalate the situation. "No worries, child, I am guiding the animals from their spring grazing fields to the summer patches, just keep moving slowly, the goats will part."

"Fuck you very much!" Pumpkin sneers under her breath, and pushes the carriage deeper into the furry obstacle. Inside, Zeno's breath is frantic and coming in sharp bursts. Is he trying to manipulate the characters? Or does he know something they don't?

WOLVES AMONG SHEEP

"Let me go!" Zeno yanks at the chains that hold him in place. "I can save us!" he roars, staring down the closest character. A successful roll on INS+Empathy (2) and any-



one inside the cabin will feel that the prisoner is certain of their impending doom. The armored carriage isn't even a third of the way through the herd, the bleating of the goats filling the air with overwhelming white noise. The character riding shotgun can't even hear Pumpkin's cussing. Anyone in the group not occupied with Zeno and spying through the window slats must roll INS+Perception (3) to notice a pearl-white, fist-sized orb hovering through the air at high velocity, catching up with the transport and then speeding away to the front. All of the sudden, a searing white flash erupts right in front of the carriage. The characters within the cabin are unharmed, but the orb's flashbang attack causes bedlam. From one heartbeat to the next the horses buckle and the goats panic, causing a chaotic stampede in all directions, animals getting caught under the wheels and being trampled under hooves. "I'm fucking blind!" Pumpkin screams in sheer panic. If the character next to her failed to shield his eyes in time, he will also be without eyesight for the next (5) Rounds.

"ARIANOI!" Zeno slams himself back into the cabin, tugging at his chains until blood runs from his wrists, his whole body shaking in a frenzy. Pumpkin has lost control over the cart, and the carriage slams violently ahead. A look outside reveals more than a dozen dark clad figures rising from their hiding places within the frantic herd, some of them armed with bows and slings, others with flaming bottles. Not a second later, a blazing explosive hits

the side of the cart, smoldering liquid blasting through the window slat, setting the carriage on fire.

ARIES' WRATH

The characters are under fire. The attackers want to ruin the cart and kill the target inside. They take no prisoners. This is a holy war. As Pumpkin and her companion struggle to regain vision and get the horses back under control, the Swords rush in to overwhelm their prey. One Jehammed-an jumps onto the side and tears open the door, attempting to stab at the first victim with his dagger. Meanwhile, bowmen take aim shooting directly at the horses, trying to wound the animals and stop the carriage dead in its tracks.

"What the hell is happening?" Pumpkin cries as she wrestles with the mounts. The character next to her can see a Sword diving out of cover just feet away from them, hurling his sling. A rock shoots through the air and hits Pumpkin at her throat, her head snaps backwards, before swinging back into position, face contorted in pain from the point blank hit. She's spitting blood. There's no choice for her but to hand the reins to her partner, while she focuses on wheezing for air. The character taking over must steer the carriage under enormous pressure; the horses are out of control and some of them are wounded. In order to break through the herd and escape into open terrain, where the trained mounts pulling the carriage can put their legs to full use, he must spend (4) Rounds fully fo-



cused on urging them forward, forcing them to push the goats aside and accelerate. The Swords aren't far away, and three will immediately start slinging stones at any exposed targets from range, while the rest take (2) Rounds to wade through the white ocean to reach and climb the carriage.

For the characters inside, the battle isn't easier. The tumbling carriage eliminates any concept of secure footing and tosses the combatants around wildly. Everyone, the Swords of Jehammed included, fights at (-3D) and must use at least one arm to hold onto a beam or frame of the cart or risk being flung out of the cabin at high speed if they fail a BOD+Athletics (2) roll, tumbling to the ground to take (4) Damage. However, from the movement of the vehicle, along with the elevated position over the Swords below, all characters riding on the driver's bench or fighting from the cabin will gain an extra (+1) Passive Defense and +2D to all Active Defenses.

To add to the frenetic drama, the roof has caught fire, and gleaming hot streaks of burning liquid are pouring through the wooden planks into the cabin. It takes (6) Rounds to escape the roadblock and break through the utterly manic goat herd – so long as the carriage doesn't flip over, and crash, whether through a Botch rolled by the character at the helm, or one of the mounts collapsing from its gashes. The Swords will deploy at least three assassins who will stop at nothing to enter the cart and kill Zeno on the spot, as well as anyone who stands in their

way, while the rest of the attackers will cast a flurry of projectiles from a safe distance in an attempt to knock the transport off road at all costs. They refuse to return without the head of the Acheron. This is their mission, and they're willing to sacrifice their lives for it. The characters are in mortal danger.

HOLY FIRE

The first rank horses break through the borders of the goat herd; escape is within reach. Some of the Swords have already fallen behind, struggling to keep up with the accelerating carriage. Unacceptable. But they had prepared for this. One of them anticipated their escape and bursts from a rocky hiding place, jumping up onto the side of the carriage and clinging on tight, pressing himself against the chassis. A moment passes, before the distinctive hiss of an explosive fuse cuts through the din of battle, and his cry of "ARIES, BE MY GUIDE!" draws all focus his way. The Ismaeli has a belt of explosives strapped around his waist, more than enough to eviscerate anyone in or on the cart!

There's only a single Round on the fuse before the explosives detonate; death is only a breath away. The characters must do anything within their power to toss the suicidal Jehammedan off the carriage and flee. The Sword can be attacked by anyone on the same side of the cart, and will lose his grip if he takes more than (12) Damage before the end of the Round – his only Action is to cling on tight,

BLINDING DEATH

The glinting orb spotted in the sky over the characters signals the arrival of Aries' Herald, Naraka. He can sense Zeno's presence through the Blood of Aries, pulsating through the Acheron's veins, and he is committed to punish him for his past atrocities. He sends his floating probe, Bhuta, to signal his warriors to initiate an attack. The only warning given of the oncoming flash is a glow emanating from within the polished sphere, a fraction of a second before it erupts – a PSY+Reaction (4) roll is just barely enough to spot it and move in time, looking away, throwing up an arm, screwing one's eyes shut. It'll still leave a hazy glare in the character's vision, but at least he can see. Otherwise, he receives a -4D Vision penalty until the flash wears off.

THE HOST

Naraka has assembled a group of fanatical Swords from among his inner echelon in the House of War. All of them have been told the story of the Acheron's blasphemous deeds, and all of them will happily give up their lives in order to deliver the Last Prophet's justice to such a heretic.

COMBAT STATS

INITIATIVE: 6D/12 Ego Points

ATTACK: Scimitar, Melee 6D,
Distance 1m, Damage 8;

◇ Sling, Projectiles 5D,
Distance 5/15m, Damage 4;

◇ Warbow, Projectiles 6D,
Distance 10/40m, Damage 9;

◇ Explosive Bottles, Projectiles 6D,
Distance 10/40, Damage 6,
Fire Hazardous, Explosive, Special

DEFENSE: Passive 1; Melee active (Parry), Melee 6D; Ranged Combat active, Mobility 7D, Mental 6D

SPECIAL: Fervor: +2D to Mental Defense when carrying out Naraka's mission

MOVEMENT: 5m

ARMOR: Reinforced cloth armor, Armor 2

CONDITION: 12 (Trauma: 5)

and he will not Actively Defend himself. Otherwise, a Cooperative Complex Action of BOD+Force (8) from multiple characters will allow them to pry him away from the carriage and send him toppling down into the mass of goats.

As the Sword is catapulted into the dust, his bombs ignite and erupt into a menacing fireball leaving black smog in the fleeing carriage's wake. The detonation sends a shockwave through the carriage, rocking it back and forth, while a cloud of red viscera erupts from the herd as dozens of goats meet their end. A glimpse at the terror disappearing behind the characters reveals the white orb, zapping out of the cloud, rushing after them, until it suddenly changes direction and disappears vertically into the sky. The characters are left with only the uncomfortable sensation of being watched by forces beyond their understanding.

AFTERMATH

"They have risen to take my head" Zeno yells, as the horses spur along to bring everyone into safe distance. "You won't even let me fight for my life, much less yours?" His voice is grim. "Can't you see why I warned you? Can't you understand what demons we're up against? This is the spawn you let live and breed among us, so it can befoul all life on Earth!" he snarls, wickedly rolling his eyes back and forth.

Up on the coach Pumpkin clears her throat, her view darting across the landscape to make sure there is no second attack waiting. "We made it?" she asks, riled up, rubbing the place where she got hit by the projectile. The horses keep galloping for another kilometer, before they slowly settle back into a more natural walking pace as the adrenaline rush begins to dissipate and the passengers can finally let out a breath to ease their tension. There's no time to be complacent, though; first, check up on Pumpkin and any other wounded, next inspect the damage to the cart and ensure it's still operational, finally tend to any horses that were caught up in the attack.

The young Vagrant quickly waves off any attempts to help her out, beyond a cursory inspection from anyone medically trained. "I, I think it's fine, just a nasty hit to the throat. I'll have a few-" she breaks off for a moment, coughing, "bruises, but it looks worse than it is I think. We gotta keep going, no time to delay more than we have." There isn't time to press the issue – Grifter's Rock awaits up ahead, and Pumpkin is right, the clock is ticking. The further they can get away from the attackers, the better. If any of the characters tries to inquire with Zeno about the ambush, he'll sullenly reply, "What did you expect? They understand that I am alive, and as such I am their worst nightmare. They want to kill what is holy, so it doesn't shine light on their own filth and burn it away."

Taking stock of the damage, the characters can confirm that the cart is mostly intact. The Jehammedans didn't have the heavy weaponry required to break through the heavy steel reinforcement, so while the carriage looks like it's been through hell itself, most of the damage is simply superficial charring from the fires, or some chipped wheel spokes from wayward scimitar strikes. It'll last long enough. The same is true of the horses, some of whom sustained slashes and cuts to their flanks, but are still trudging forward – well trained indeed. They'll make it to Grifter's Rock, and that's what matters.

RADIO CHECK

After escaping such an unexpected and targeted attack, sending a radio warning to Vexicall is the natural next step. However, when the characters report that they were ambushed by raging Swords, all they're met with is confusion. "Say again, transport team? Jehammedans? That's not possible." Only after repeated insistence, and a description of their garb and tattoos, does the Executioner accept the report. "That's difficult to believe, but it can only mean we have a mole on the inside. There is no other way for them to have gained intelligence of your cargo ahead of even the cyberfrogs. What worries me more, the Jehammedans haven't stepped out of line since the Colossus incident. You must keep your eyes peeled. Not good, not good at all. Well done on surviving. See you in Ignatz."

Vexicall's warning should be a clear indicator that there is more to this prisoner transfer than the characters are currently aware of. Yet another reason to stay suspicious and on edge.



SCENE 3: GRIFTER'S ROCK

The road forking off toward Ferropol lies behind them. Another three hours have passed since the ambush, and the sun has begun to set on the horizon. The horses are exhausted, having slowed to a boring trot. "We're close to the waypoint. Grifter's Rock is over there" Pumpkin wheezes hoarsely. Her face is pale, lips thin, the shock still sitting in her bones. She guides the carriage across a desolate and patchy piece of road to a fenced off area, to the right of the curb. In the near distance, shapes of buildings come into sight, faint glow spilling from windows and doors, like cut-outs against a darkening Borcan horizon. A few tents have been set up around the perimeter, evidence of a Scrapper infestation, and a small stable at the side of the building is stacked with six mounts – no doubt the replacements that had been promised for the party's carriage.

Pumpkin struggles to draw breath, just barely able to keep hold of the reins. Once she pulls the vehicle over at the side of the road, she turns to the character next to her and gasps out, "I'm gonna need a round of shuteye... For the next leg. Y'all sort this out." The kid looks exhausted. Better to let her rest in the cabin, so she can gather some strength for the rest of the way. But leaving her with Zeno doesn't sound like the best call. Better to take prisoner along, before he gets ideas.

The characters must use the break to replenish themselves, and change the horses. There is a small guesthouse that seems to offer food and supplies. This sleepy inn serves as little more than a waypoint for those regularly traveling around in the southern reaches of the Protectorate. Following the outbreak of the Clan Wars, and the various raids taking place along the nearby borders, this offbeat locale has seen a significant shortfall in clientele. As such, the proprietors – an elderly pair of Clanners from a tiny village a kilometer to the east – were all too happy to accept the Drafts of the Judiciary to house and feed six horses for some top secret operation. What would they be used for? Don't ask, can't tell. When the Executioner in his rumbling carriage showed up with yet more Drafts, demanding to swap the six horses in their stables with his own, and commanding them to prepare the incoming steeds for another transport coming in eight hours, it was just another simple task with a big reward. As the characters approach the entrance, the stableboy, actually just the grandson of the two owners, is already rushing out to unlatch the bridle and get the horses swapped.

He's not the only one investigating the newcomers, though, as several patches of dirt rise up from the ground next to the guesthouse and slowly begin to shamble across

FIXER-UPPER

For the most part, the “repairs” the Scrappers make to the carriage are merely cosmetic at best, buffing out dents in the metal exterior, polishing the wooden wheel spokes to remove any blemishes, and filing rust away from springs. However, if the characters previously came away from their encounter with the Chronicler Agent at Alcove S-3 with a transponder nail driven into their vehicle, one of the Scrappers – if paid to do so – will pull it out and toss it aside with a groan “Yer fuckers been bugged!” This leads to a Chronicler raid being staged on the guesthouse at a later date, the tech-toads assuming the prisoner was left there, but gives the characters respite from the Cluster tracking them.

RECKLESS

The stopover at Grifter’s Rock is crucial, and in many ways the actions of the characters will determine if the adventure continues on course. Should they act reckless and leave Zeno unattended together with the wounded Pumpkin inside the carriage, or should they rely on just a single character watching over the Acheron, the situation can wildly spin out of control.

Zeno will attempt to free himself, either by taking Pumpkin hostage, trying to memetically influence his guard to free him from his shackles, or both. Either way, if the character watching over the prisoner doesn’t pay utmost attention, Zeno will try to disarm and overpower the character while the rest of the group attends the guesthouse, entirely willing to use lethal force to free himself. Should the Acheron succeed, he will mount one of the available horses and break out south to catch up with the Rotten Few, leaving the remaining characters to chase after the fugitive. In this particular case, they won’t be seeing Zeno again until the finale, which will need to be adapted by the GM accordingly.

to the carriage. One steps forward into the diffuse light, revealing himself to be a grime-encrusted Scrapper. “Y’alright there, mate? What’s up with your friend? Why’s he wearin’ a metal face? Name’s Cleat, and we ‘ere’re the Grifters, bunch a’ Scavengers who kick about this spot for scrap ‘n tha’. “Want us t’ take a look at yer cart? Fix it up?” By the time Cleat has managed to enunciate his offer, the filthy dirt diggers are already swarming over the vehicle, poking around under the frame and loudly discussing the supposed damage.

“Ay, you’ve got some splintered spokes here, wheel’ll come apart if you run it much further.”

“Rusted nails on yer bottom axle, might drop the thing if you go over a bumpy patch.

“Got some sorta weird spiky thingy, doesn’t look like it’s supposed to be there, could be trouble.”

“Fuck me, these springs have been put together like it was a Mouse’s first damn day on the job, I’ll sort this out if you let me, you’ll be riding smooth all the way to fuckin’ Spania.”

Cleat simply flashes a wide grin as the loud complaints of the Scrappers filter their way into the ears of the characters, before holding out his hand. “Hundred Drafts, good as new.”

THE TRAVELER

Along with the eruption of activity outside of the guesthouse in the dead of night comes a few sleepy patrons emerging to investigate. The building only has room for a handful of inhabitants, so the crowd gathered at the window isn’t intrusive. As the characters march through to buy supplies, food, and water from the innkeepers, one of the figures steps forward; a Jehammedan, wearing a red scarf around his neck. Tensions quickly skyrocket, as Zeno lunges forward towards the newcomer, held back at the last moment by the heavy chains and a character straining to keep him under control. A snarl rips itself from the Acheron’s lips as the Jehammedan lifts his arm in defense, the other hand at the hilt of his knife, while stepping back, trying to calm the outburst. “Please, I mean no harm, I just wanted to introduce myself.”

If ungagged, Zeno launches into a tirade against the Jehammedan figure, “I ought to rip you to shreds you mangy cur, tear off your limbs and use them as kindling for the fire I’ll set in your damned stable!” Even with the memetic payload in place, from hours of traveling, this sudden eruption is more than enough motivation to allow a character to shove the gag back into the prisoner’s mouth, cutting him off. The target of the Acheron’s rage seems shaken by the ferocity of the speech, unable to grasp the motivation for the tantrum of hatred, but with Zeno silenced it’s possible to finally have a discussion with the traveler.

“I’m Hakkal, Sword of Jehammed, and I’ve seen your carriage outside. I’m looking for a quick way to travel south, and willing to pay for passage with my services.” If the characters aren’t familiar with the traveling Sword, his affiliation should concern them considering they were just ambushed by such fanatics a few hours ago. However, the newcomer appears utterly genuine in his request. If the characters inquire what he’s looking for, he’ll explain; “I’m searching for my niece Senna. She’s been gone for weeks, and I’ve been traversing the southern reaches of the Protectorate in hopes of finding her. She’s young, she’s lost, and I’m certain she’s in need of help.”

As introductions continue, Hakkal moves closer and back towards the carriage. If the group informs him that they have just survived an assault by Jehammedans on their way here, Hakkal will raise his eyebrows with bewilderment, following up with “The Iconide of Justitian would never condone such a heinous act, it would be a death sentence to our precarious standing.” His eyes pass over the group to the convict in chains, studying the blatantly Neognostic tattoos on the convict’s exposed arms. “Unless you’re transporting someone who is guilty of crimes against my tribe.”

Zeno chuckles, his shoulders heaving in amusement at Hakkal’s suspicion.

THE TRUTH

If the characters dare to reveal their prisoner's identity to Hakkal, his features freeze over with terror. Immediately, his hand drops to his belt, unlatching his dagger. "Zeno Blackheart?" he hisses, "Acheron of the Rotten Few?"

Hakkal is clearly distressed, his eyes have darkened, and his gaze rapidly darts back and forth between Zeno and the characters. "What in Jehammed's name are you doing, transporting a creature of such malice? This man is a murderer, a terrorist; carnage incarnate!" The characters can attempt to shed light on the situation and press Hakkal for his knowledge. After all, they were hired to do this job without much intel and have been kept in the dark on the identity of their cargo. Naturally, they will be curious as to what they've gotten themselves into.

Hakkal will step aside and lower his voice "This man is a criminal of war. He and his warband were deployed during the Adriatic Wars to slaughter my people behind the frontlines. Every Jehammedan worth their salt knows of the unspeakable atrocities Zeno and the Rotten Few have committed against us. He should be executed on the spot!"

Hakkal rambles on, exposing whatever detail he picked up on the prisoner throughout his years. "He shouldn't even be here. Rumors had it he went underground in Purgare, or that he had died already. Where on Earth are you taking him?" he asks accusingly.

The characters can try and explain their positions. This is what they've been hired for after all, and despite his tension and anger Hakkal readily acknowledges that they're not the ones who are to blame.

"Will they put him on trial in Ignatz?" he demands to know. "I'm offering Jehammed's help to escort this bastard to his due punishment."

BACK AT THE CARRIAGE

After some additional explanation allowing the newcomer to slowly begin to understand the scope of everything that has happened on their journey so far, Hakkal offers to inspect their coach. He grabs his gear, shoulders his bow and medicine pouch and follows the characters over to the cabin of the carriage. His addition to the team might give the characters some respite, but the nomad is hardly going to sell them out to the Chroniclers, and their strength has been reduced following the Vagrant's injury. Desperate times, desperate measures.

In the cabin, Pumpkin is struggling with her sleep, her voice faint and raspy as she clutches her neck. She coughs with a ragged breath before trying to make excuses, "I'm fine, just... think I caught something in my throat." The characters may as well examine her now, but it's obvious from simply looking at the girl that she's in a bad state, and it's not getting any better. She needs to get to a place with actual medical facilities, such as those in Ignatz. The mission just got a lot more urgent.

If the Vagrant is informed of her medical condition, a creeping panic makes its way onto her visage. "B-but, I'm gonna be okay right? We'll make it before anything gets too bad? Oh, dear..." No time to waste. Back on the road.

As soon as Zeno realizes that the tattooed Jehammedan making his way into the cabin is here to stay, his mood drastically shifts. Where he had previously spent the long journey calmly sitting in place, occasionally asking for some food or water or muttering prayers and epithets under his breath, he now remains visibly tense and on-edge. He doesn't vocalize his annoyance at being forced to travel with the Sword, for now, but it's clear in every facet of his body language.

Pumpkin, meanwhile, drops off into a dazed slumber, occasionally broken by coughs and choking breaths. Her throat has now acquired a large, blotchy purple bruise, and it's clear she's hurting. Any concern is waved off with a "Don't even, don't worry about it, alright?" Hakkal offers to take her place at the driver's seat, seeing that she is barely capable of keeping her eyes open.

SHARED DESTINY

If any character in the party previously endured the events of LAST WATCH, they will quickly recognize their former companion and fellow survivor, Hakkal. The wandering Sword, traveling across the Protectorate to track down his lost niece, was already planning to join a carriage on its southward journey, but following his reunion with his old friends he offers his help as a matter of honor, especially if he gets to see the terrible condition the Vagrant girl Pumpkin is in. Such a coincidence can only be the result of Jehammed's own will, and so it is his divine duty to share his destiny with those of the characters.

PUMPKIN'S CONDITION

To assess Pumpkin's condition and do a proper diagnosis, a successful roll of INT+Medicine (2) is required. The rough coughing is clearly not the symptom of an oncoming flu, but something far more serious. Depending on the amount of Triggers rolled, her status can be determined.

1 TRIGGER: A quick visual check reveals that her windpipe isn't fully blocked yet, but there is a bruise growing behind her larynx that is rapidly accumulating blood and water, simultaneously restricting her swallowing and breathing.

2 TRIGGERS: The rock that hit her neck caused internal hemorrhaging. Her situation is critical, and she requires immediate medical attention from a professional surgeon, who may be able to alleviate the constriction of her airway and stop the hematoma from growing.

3+ TRIGGERS: The kid is going to die a slow and terrible death. Within the next 8-12 hours the swelling will expand to seal off her windpipe entirely, until eventually no more oxygen can pass through. With the hematoma already the size of a walnut, not even intubation can rescue her. This is a terminal condition; denial will just prolong her suffering. Pumpkin's life will end through asphyxiation.

SCENE 4: THE STRIP

Nighttime. The road ahead is an empty artery. Hakkal calls this part “The Strip.” If asked what that means, he shakes his head in disgust answering “Whorelander territory.” Ahead of them, lights flare up in the dark. A campsite, with tents lit by the warm sheen of bonfires. There are obstacles placed on the street, ramparts, trash, and boarded up fences, forcing Hakkal to slow down the carriage to navigate the slalom. Scantly clad men and women appear on both sides of the road, closing in to bring the transport to a halt.

“Get out of the way, we have important business to conduct!” Hakkal yells out. From the driver’s seat it’s evident that there’s at least two dozen people belonging to this site now seeping onto the road. Not a blink of an eye later some barely dressed women jump to the side of the carriage, pressing their faces and bare naked tits against the window slats, peeking inside. “Come on, live a little, don’t be so trite! We have all the drinks you want, plus a lot more!” one of the Magpies whispers into the cabin. “Who’s the stranger with the mask? He must be awful’ pretty!” another one teases.

Zeno has worked out what’s going on, and a fiendish grin is almost discernible in his eyes. “Well? Aren’t you going to partake?” he asks the group. “You’re transporting the Demiurge back to hell, after all, and you’ve just been beset by savage Swords and technological terrors, why not take a break for a while? You never know when it’ll be your last chance. I’ll bet the birds even have someone who can take a look at your... friend.” He nods towards Pumpkin, wheezing and groaning. “Besides, if you keep running like this your horses are gonna collapse, I can hear it in their footsteps.” True enough, the horses are visibly exhausted – Hakkal has been driving them hard, desperate to get Pumpkin to safety. A short stop will do them good.

Meanwhile at the front, a voluptuous lady with streaks of white in her red mane has caught up with Hakkal and the character riding shotgun “You’re one handsome lad. I’m pretty sure they don’t give you what you deserve at home.” The Jehammedan is reluctant, and along with the dangerous prisoner and the wounded Vagrant girl, it’s not an enticing prospect to stop. However, when one of the eager Magpies lets out a groan of exasperation and sassily adds, “Don’t be so prudish, the Anabaptists who came through before also had ‘big important business’, but they still joined us for some fun. Damn squares...” the mood shifts. The Anabaptist delegation should be arriving from the south, from Cathedral City, so what other group of the Broken Cross could be roaming this empty road ahead of them? Time to piece two and two together.

SMELLING THE RAT

Selanis plays up her friendly, seductive persona, accommodating her guests’ every desire, pointing out men and women that might suit their tastes, offering up what she claims to be her best distillate – and she does it well, with hardly a hint of an ulterior motive. With an INS+Empathy (3) roll, however, a character is able to piece together the situation and realise that the Magpie is stalling for time. But why? A further successful roll of INS+ Cunning (3) allows them to analyse the surroundings and the locations of the Apocalyptics in the campsite, and realise that there’s someone missing. Looking around, they’ll spot the Owl positioning herself within reach of the armored carriage, prowling ever closer. With the crisis detected, they can subtly alert their squadmates and extricate themselves from the situation, the story continuing at regular pace from here onwards with the characters back on the road and their cargo secured.

ROADSIDE SIRENS

“Yes, they came through here before nightfall. Left a mighty tip. Boasted about going for a wild ride,” the redhead explains if pressed for facts. “But you gotta give me something in exchange for more.” She opens her palm, nudging the characters to pass over some Drafts. “Clearly Furors, three men, three women, heavily armed, vets like you don’t see come around often, all scarred and rugged,” she continues after collecting some cash.

As the characters try to establish a conversation with the leading Magpie, who just calls herself Selanis, the group is hounded by her Flock of eager prostitutes, male and female alike, who attempt to drag their attention towards the tents with a flurry of hugs and kisses. “Don’t worry so much! You’ll get to your destination in time...” they moan, tugging and pulling at the collars and backpacks of the characters, like sirens calling a band of shipwrecked pirates to mate. A few of them appear hauntingly beautiful in the dark, as they playfully attempt to seduce the group. All of this becomes increasingly dangerous, as Zeno must be watched at all times.

If the characters can keep their focus, they can continue to press Selanis for information, but further knowledge requires them to convince her beyond plain bribery. A successful Combination of PSY+Cunning (3) and CHA+Expression (3) is necessary to warm the heart of the Magpie enough for her to willingly spill more. “Yes, they were going after some Judges that came through before. They were keen on what we knew about them. The entourage had an armored carriage just like yours. The typical Squad, as you see em’ patrol the countryside, eight Protectors and some. All uptight of course, not like you easy fellas,” she says with a warm smile, as she tries to brush the hair of the character closest to her. However, as open of a game as Selanis plays with the characters, she’s dragging out the acquisition of hard facts for as long as she



can. She doesn't care that the group is under pressure. Hakkal has no choice but to cut everyone's attention back to the task at hand. "We have a half dead girl and a mass murderer in tow. We must get back on the road."

BLINDSIDED

Selanis isn't as genuine as she appears. She's been paid off by the Rotten Few to keep her eyes peeled for their leader, and do whatever she can to free him if another carriage should pass through her camp. As soon as the characters appear in the dead of night, she correctly calculates that the first convoy to pass through was nothing but a decoy to put the Anabaptists on the wrong track. This is the right one. Now, all she has to do is distract this ragtag group of half-baked prison guards long enough for one of her Owls to sneak past them and attempt to break Zeno free. The two most likely outcomes are:

◆ If someone is keeping an eye on the cargo, the only way for the Owl to operate is to slip a tool through the window slat unseen. The character guarding Zeno must succeed at a roll of $INS+Perception$ (4) to notice the tiny splint dropped into the cabin. If the roll fails, Zeno will have a chance of clasp- ing the metal piece in his hands and begin to dismantle the handcuffs. This is a Complex Action of $AGI+Dexterity$ which will take him (16) Rounds to complete. Spotting the lockpick- ing attempt in the dark of the cabin is tough, and a character must succeed at a Conflict of $INS+Perception$ against Zeno's

$AGI+Stealth$ which can be attempted once every (4) Rounds in order to notice it. If the Acheron manages to free himself, he will immediately hurl his massive frame at the guarding character to overpower him and try to choke him to death with his chains. The violence unfolding in the cabin will shock Pump- kin out of her slumber who'll screech for help, yet her voice has fully disappeared at this point, leaving her at Zeno's mercy. In order to secure the raging Anabaptist in time, the group must notice the commotion and recapture him.

◆ Selanis has drawn the characters in with wine, women, wiles, or any other method in her playbook – they're totally enamored with her and her Flock, and have left their charge unattended. By the time the Owl manages to sneak around the carriage and silently enter from the unobserved side, ensuring she doesn't wake Pumpkin, Zeno has already begun working at the handcuffs, straining his wrists to try and slip through the tight cuffs. If he was left alone, he would likely manage to dislocate his thumbs and escape, but the arrival of the Owl ne- gates that necessity. The assassin works quickly, taking stock of the situation and hurrying over to the prisoner's cuffs. Just a few moments later and the mechanism is free, leaving the Acheron unbound. Courteously, he gives the Apocalyptic a few moments to move away and slink back to cover, before he bursts from the cabin and clambers onto one of the horses linked to the carriage, rapidly detaching it from the harness and galloping off into the night, towards Ignatz.

WANTED

Should Zeno manage to escape, whether due to his own cunning, aid from the Magpies at the Strip, or any other method, his objective remains the same. Using the Judge assigned to guard his prison cell, he sent a message to the Rot-ten Few that he would be transported to Ignatz. Therefore, the Acheron must travel to the town in order to regroup with his pack and free himself from the mask latched around his head. However, with several high-up figures in the Judiciary and Broken Cross gathering in one place, his old instincts for causing maximum disruption kick in. Zeno's new motivation, having already broken free, is to irrevocably disrupt the relationship between the upper echelons of the Anabaptists and Judiciary by slaughtering the delegation from Cathedral City.

SCENE 5: RUN FOR IT!

As soon as Zeno has broken free of his chains, courtesy of the Owl, chaos erupts. Selanis was keeping an eye on the carriage the whole time, and once she spots the Acheron clambering out to grab a horse, she gives off a piercing whistle. Instantly, her Magpies switch from gentle, teasing flirtation to aggressively pushy passes at all of the characters – grabbing hold of their arms while talking about how strong or supple their muscles are, how well toned, and so on. It doesn't take a genius to work out that this is a ruse, especially once the horse Zeno has chosen whinnies and prepares to gallop away. The Apocalypitics aren't looking for a fight, but they'll happily delay the party to let the Acheron escape. The characters must succeed a BOD+Force (2) roll to push their adoring 'friends' away and rush towards the cart, setting off into the moonlight after the escaping Anabaptist.

Zeno's mount is a well trained horse dedicated to pulling carts for the Judiciary, but it's not used to being directly ridden, especially not without a saddle. The Acheron grabs the animal's mane tight, holding on for dear life as he sloppily maneuvers it in the darkness. It's not moving nearly close to full speed, dissuaded by the darkness and the strange nature of its rider, but it's fast enough to give the carriage a run for its money. In order to catch up with Zeno, the character at the reins must enter a Conflict of AGI+Navigation with him, accumulating Successes with each roll. When the difference in the total Successes reaches (5), one party has either successfully caught up with the other, or escaped.

When the carriage comes close to the galloping horse, the characters must somehow get Zeno off it and back on the ground. If they target the horse, they must either deal (10) Damage to it in order to cause it to stumble and fall, or successfully land an Aimed Attack with a Difficulty of (+4) against its legs. Otherwise, should they instead try and knock Zeno off, a BOD+Force (6) roll can be made to kick or push him onto the ground, right into the path of the wheels, causing him to take (10) Damage and the Shellshock Complication, and allowing him to be quickly recaptured and dragged back into the cabin. – he's a veteran of the Adriatic Wars, he can handle it.

SCENE 6: EYE IN THE SKY

Whether the characters managed to successfully see through Selanis' deception, run Zeno down and topple him from his horse, or notice the turmoil breaking out inside the carriage before it was too late, they have successfully kept their prisoner and returned to their normal path on the road. Just as it seems the situation can't get any worse, though, the characters begin to hear an odd sound, a strange buzz, distinct from the usual noises of the cabin. Is it the damn orb again? After noticing it, an INT+Engineering (3) roll is needed to guess at the origin – the tone is high pitched, like some sort of fast moving electrical component. But where is the device? Looking around the cab, even popping the doors and scanning along the exterior surface of the carriage reveals nothing.

Only someone smart enough to look outside and directly up at the moon will be able to spot something unnatural. A strange distortion in the glowing disk, as if it had been bent out of shape somehow, tips them off to look closer. By succeeding an INS+Perception (3) roll, they will be able to begin to make out the faint, angular outline of some sort of flying object, refracting the moonlight through its plastic casing to make it almost invisible. The source of the object is obvious, especially to anyone who has spent time in Uptown; a Chronicler spy drone, watching from above, its beady lenses recording their movements. They've been picked up by the damn tech-toads after all. Have they been following them around, all this time? Is the whole operation compromised?

Either way, the drone would normally fly far overhead, at a great enough distance

to make even spotting it nigh-impossible, but the darkness has forced the operators to reduce its altitude to ensure its night-vision optics can properly focus on the individuals below. Even with it flying this close, it's no easy feat to lob a projectile up to take it down. A Combination roll of BOD+Force (3) and AGI+Projectiles (3) will allow a character to hurl a stone picked up from the ground with sufficient force and accuracy to knock the buzzing metal insect out of the sky, otherwise a gunshot or arrow can be fired with AGI+Projectiles (3) to accomplish the same effect. If the drone is hit with a stone or takes less than (5) Damage, it veers off course and pulls back, presumably returning to the operator for repairs. Any more Damage causes it to fall from the sky, softly clattering to the ground. Whatever. At least they got rid of their pursuers. Hopefully the Chroniclers didn't get to surveil them throughout the entire journey. That would be fatal for the group's anonymity in the eyes of the Cluster.

SCENE 7: RADIO SILENCE

The sun begins to crest over the horizon after a long night of traveling. After his failed escape attempt, Zeno has returned to his impassive silence, his cold demeanor serving as a sharp contrast to Pumpkin. Her condition has significantly worsened, with a large, black discoloration bulging on her neck, and a hoarse rattle accompanying every strained breath. She doesn't have long left before her throat closes up completely and she runs out of air. Thankfully, there's only about 20km left to take to make it to the town of Ignatz. The horses are already on their last legs, heads low – reason enough to look forward to the end of this damn journey, if only to get rid of this fucking Acheron with his stupid mask.

All that's left is to radio in with Vexicall and report on their position, informing the waiting Executioner on their progress, along with the trials and tribulations they have endured since their last conversation. When they spark up the communication device, though, and make their report, they are greeted with indifferent static. Concern quickly fills the air; try again. Nothing. One more time. Nada. The Judge has never failed to respond to a call before, and with a mission as urgent as this he would surely have at least delegated someone to answer in his place if he needed to sleep. Something is wrong. Very wrong. Onwards!

RESOLUTION

As the end of Act 2 approaches, the characters can potentially be in very different circumstances depending on their actions up to this point. Some groups will have managed to keep the Acheron completely under their control, the powerful figure remaining locked in his chains despite attempts from without and within to change that fact. Others will have a glaring omission in their cabin due to Zeno managing to escape, vanishing into the night or galloping out of reach ahead of the carriage. Regardless, though, the objective of the characters remains similar. Ignatz.

Each situation will present different motivations to reach the offsite Judge town, a variety of strings which can be tugged by the Game Master to ensure the pace remains high and the Players remain motivated. One constant of most groups will be Pumpkin's rapidly deteriorating condition, choking and wheezing with every breath, while Vexicall's silence presents yet another foreboding mystery.

Finally, the delivery or recovery of Zeno is perhaps the strongest impulse – the characters will have observed the Anabaptist attempting to head south in his escape attempts, towards their destination. Why would he travel towards his own reckoning with such drive? Only by staying on target will they be able to know. Regardless, it allows the chance for him to be recaptured by the characters, setting things right.

TRACKED

The Chronicler who inspected the characters on their mission at Alcove S-3 was suspicious throughout. After some initial deliberation, regardless of the carriage being bugged or not, he deploys a surveillance drone to track the carriage from about a mile away. The tiny spy in the sky has recorded their entire journey to this point, its data feed accumulating in the Cluster, waiting to be read out by a Streamer with the permission to access the files.

Whatever comes next, the characters are busted. They will be marked in the Static Stream as Judicial collaborators, if their identities can be traced through the Office of Locality. If they've been no-names and unregistered guests up until now, the Chroniclers will attempt to dig up some dirt that can potentially be used against them. As yet, it's uncertain if they need to be interrogated or disposed of: More data required. If the characters manage to crash the tiny surveillance drone that's stalking them, the Chroniclers will miss out on the final destination of their journey. However, the tech-toads are more than capable of putting the puzzle together on their own. This unratified operation should have never been conducted without their approval.



POUND FOR POUND

SCENE 1: DEATH BY THE LAKESIDE

Morning dawns. Hakkal is pushing the horses to the limit as they enter the final stretch. “This area had Enemoi sightings. Watch out for raiders!” He calls out from the front. Inside the cabin, Pumpkin’s condition is riveting. The girl is gasping, her face next to the window slat trying to catch the draft with an open mouth, slowly panicking. She has ceased to speak.

A few hundred meters ahead, a lake sparkles in the early morning sun, surrounded by lonely shrubs and oversized rubble. A rare sight in dusty Borca. “We need to water the horses quickly, or they’ll break.” Hakkal points toward the lake, and motions to the character riding shotgun to keep an eye on the surroundings, so as to not run into another ambush. As the carriage leaves the road and clatters toward the shore, any character can roll INS+Survival (2) to spot fresh wheel furrows and hoof trails in the muck. A quick examination reveals that there were at least four, probably six horses, followed by the slim tracks left behind by something with four wheels, just like their own armored carriage... Something isn’t right here.

The cart rumbles down towards the lake, pulling up at the shore. The water is slightly murky and brackish, but more than drinkable – an opportunity to refill any flasks or canteens, along with allowing the horses to refresh themselves. Hakkal handles the mounts, giving the characters time to follow the tracks spotted earlier; a faint glint of metal peeks out from behind a large boulder along the path. Learning from past experiences, Hakkal notes “Take the Acheron with you, don’t leave him alone in the carriage again, just in case.”

Rounding the boulder, a grave sight immediately becomes apparent. The sandy lakeshore has been torn up, horse hooves and footprints mixed with chaotic tracks from a heavy carriage going awry. Naked, brutalized corpses of what must have been the occupants are haphazardly scattered around, in a sorry state. The bodies are mutilated, limbs carved off by some cruel bladed weapons, or torn to shreds by high-caliber gunfire. This is what became of the group traveling ahead, they were ambushed and executed to the last man. While the characters have never seen Vexicall in person, they can guess which corpse belongs to him – one which was callously ripped limb from limb with savage ferocity, leaving only a bloodied torso shrouded in viscera. All of the bodies have had their belongings removed, including the hats and leather coats and other insignia of the Judiciary, and there’s no trace of their carriage either.

Zeno, if ungagged, simply lets out a cold, heartless chuckle as he comes to understand the situation, looking out through the narrow eye slits of his expressionless helmet. “A rotten end for rotten people, how appropriate. The Demiurge will devour their Pneuma and spit them back out. Good riddance.” Any character who has been interacting with the Acheron over the past day can roll INS+Empathy (2) to guess that Zeno was expecting exactly this turn of events. The Acheron is in on all of this, and the ones responsible for this massacre are acting according to a plan that the characters are not fully aware of.

However, should he remain gagged, all that will be heard from inside his mask is a rumbling, muffled laughter. As the characters continue to inspect the murder site for clues, a sudden movement from a nearby boulder draws their attention and ratchets up the tension. The outline of a figure clad in a camouflaged cloak and masked against the backdrop of shrubbery, aiming at them with the laser sight of a high-tech sniper rifle.

MISINFORMATION

Back at the Strip, the Magpie Selanis informed the characters that the Judges were well ahead of the pursuing Anabaptists, but the incident by the lakeside reveals the truth. She was lying through her teeth about the timeline, and the Rotten Few were far closer to their prey than she let on. What else has she kept hidden?

CONTACT POISON

When the Rotten Few took out the carriage, slaughtered the inhabitants, and found no trace of their leader, they knew that another transport would be arriving soon, and that they would likely find the corpses. In order to disrupt any investigation, the bodies have been smeared with a contact poison developed by the pack’s Elysian, Hera. Based on the sting of a Stukov Scorpion, anyone who touches the bodies will lose (1) point of BOD per Round. When it falls to (0), they will be paralysed for a day. The toxin is Potency (3), and can be resisted with BOD+Toughness.

SCENE 2: THE HIGHWAYMAN

The surprise appearance of the strange highwayman doesn't help diffuse the morbid atmosphere of the massacre site, far from it, especially as the laser bead of his rifle travels across the chest of one of the characters, "Names! Purpose!" Is he in league with the Rotten Few? Could he be one of them, left behind to clean up after the main group has gone? Zeno is hardly going to answer, leaving the characters to defuse the situation alone.

A CHA+Expression or Negotiation (3) roll is needed for the party to ease the stranger into talking. "Don't touch the dead. They're laced with poison," he calls out as a warning, his laser now travelling across the pile of corpses.

A roll of INS+Empathy (2) is enough for a character to realise that the highwayman is a witness, rather than a perpetrator. He doesn't act hostile, merely cautious – a sensible attitude considering the blood-soaked surroundings. If the characters escalate the situation, or Botch their explanations bad enough to devolve into combat, the stranger will rapidly retreat to a nearby boulder field, putting his camo cloak, high powered rifle, and other technological weaponry to good use to create distance. He's not in for a fight and has no stake in this game.

Should they manage to explain their presence and ease the tension, the highwayman lowers his weapon and approaches the group carefully, drawing back his hood to reveal a pair of piercing green eyes. "I am Turin. I watched over this stretch of road for any interlopers and spotted a carriage like yours approaching. They ran straight into a set up, about eight hours ago. Five attackers, all with Neognostic markings, although I suspect there may have been a sixth. Too many to intervene." He points towards one of the torsos split open by a bullet hole, "This one was mowed down by a large musket ball, from a long distance. I didn't spot the shooter, however."

Then he points up to the hills rising in the distance. "They took the carriage and left the Fortified Road, maybe three, four hours before now. I saw them race towards the Muktar stone totems before they went out of sight. Shortcut to the Judge town behind the hill line. Rough terrain, but it will cut their travel time down by thirty minutes." He checks a small watch on the underside of his wrist, and pulls his hood back up. "I must get back to my post. You're all heading down from Ferropol. Anything for me to be prepared for up there?" He asks for a return of favor. The characters can decide to fill him in on anything they might consider relevant. In any case, he wishes them luck before he trudges away, quickly lost in the distance due to his camouflage. He has given the characters a pointer, but their next move is clear. They have to follow that trail into the hills. Back to the carriage, quick!

SCENE 3: ANCIENT STONES

The characters must drive as fast as they can; with the horses freshly watered they can afford to keep the pace high towards the end of their journey. Going offroad, the carriage is bumped and jolted from the rough, rocky surface, but luckily it's easy to follow the tracks of the hijacked cart as they cut through the stubby tundra grass. Left and right, looming rock formations begin to rise up, at first seemingly natural outcroppings, but soon revealed to be man-made stone totems. Many feature abstract markings, faded runes and primitive drawings painted on the walls that fly by too quick to parse. As the carriage approaches the summit of the hill line, the horses are forced to stop.

Jutting from the ground, and taller than a building, towers a colossal blackened rock monolith, its four flat sides all coated with paintings and inscriptions easily recognisable as naive depictions of the people who once ruled over this land, showcasing their fight for survival. Each face, from top to bottom, tells the story of one of the Great Old Clans, from their first origins, and a few hundred years of their history, in-

THE SILENCER

Turin is one of the Enemoi operatives sent on behalf of the Raven Chagall to probe the settlement of Everlast, nestled within Ferropol. He, along with several other Custodians and Silencers, has been casing out the surrounding area for several weeks now, determining the right moment to strike. Turin is one of the external guards, tasked with ensuring that the surrounding countryside remains clear, hence his investigation into the attack of the Rotten Few. Throughout the conversation with the characters, he will subtly try to have them confirm their destination – so long as it's not Ferropol, it's not his problem.

If the characters have never met an Enemoi before, they might first be inclined to identify Turin as some sort of high-tech Scrapper, or perhaps a Hellvetic operative going incognito. A few hints will tip them off to his identity, however; unlike a dirt-digger, he keeps himself and his gear impeccably clean, and the Alpine soldiers would never be caught dead without a Trailblazer or some other obvious mark of their origin. He's clearly something different, but it takes an INT+Legends (3) roll to fully identify his origins as a member of the ostracized and nomadic bandit Clan, branded traitors and public enemies of the Protectorate by the Chroniclers.

COMBAT STATS

INITIATIVE: 4D/16 Ego Points

ATTACK: Whisper Rifle, Projectiles 12D, Distance 100/400m, Mag. 1, Damage 14, Sensitive, Piercing (4), Armor Piercing;
◇ Combat Knife, Melee 5D, Distance 1m, Damage 5, Smooth Running (3T)

DEFENSE: Passive 1; Melee active (Dodge), Mobility 6D; Ranged Combat active, Mobility 6D, Mental 10D

SPECIAL: AGI+Stealth 9D, IN S+Perception 9D, Hawkeye 2, Quick Eye 1

MOVEMENT: 3m

ARMOR: Ghillie suit, Armor 1, Camo (4C)

CONDITION: 8 (Trauma: 5)

fluenced by the gods controlling the stars and heavens to the mystical prophets risen from the Earth to guide them into the future. The number 100 repeats itself across one face, in intervals, and always in connection to another more obscure symbol, reaching toward the top, until it suddenly turns into a 1000 after exactly ten glyph cycles. A mesmerising sight, but there's simply no time to waste gawking at ancient megaliths. "Jehammed be with us, we must move swiftly!" Hakkal spurs the horses back into motion, rapidly navigating along the bizarre plateau and through the forest of totems ahead.

The ruin field grows more dense and hard to traverse at high speed, weaving in and out of rocky passageways, but there is an ancient path crossing through that's relatively easy to follow. The Sword is deeply focused on spurring the horses, leaving only the character riding shotgun to spot the approaching threat. With a Combination of PSY+Reaction (2) and INS+Perception (4) roll, they see the glint of metal stretched between two stone totems, suspended just at the height of a horse's legs. A thin wire, too small to trip up the mounts, but just enough to cause the trap to spring. There's just enough time to yell a warning and brace for impact, but it's too late to change course before the lead row barges through. A sudden snarl of metal wire snapping whips through the air- followed by a sharp, biological hiss.

THE TRAP SPRUNG

The Rotten Few, aware of the risk of being followed, planted various traps throughout the stone field, consisting of flasks and canisters filled with Pheromancer ichor mixed in with other toxins and catalysts, linked up to a tripwire network rapidly strung up by their explosives expert. When the wires are snapped, a hormonal reaction inside the bomb casings causes each of the containers to erupt in a sudden and violent burst of acidic spray. Now, the characters have stumbled right into the middle of them. It's impossible to notice the trap at high speed, and unless the characters have abandoned their carriage along the way and march the shortcut by foot, they won't be able to see it in time to avoid it from going off.

VILE PITFALLS

A series of flasks and canisters hidden along the path and between the totem formations detonate in a cascading explosion, ejecting choking smog and iridescent ichor towards the carriage. The horses are hit dead on by burning hot acid as they race through the narrow trap. The animals panic instantaneously as the acrid grease tears through their flesh; losing their footing in full gallop, the mounts at the helm topple over, crashing into the ones in the back. The speeding carriage slams into the collapsing pile of bodies and flips over, catapulting Hakkal and the character next to him off the coaches' bench. The group inside the cabin is violently tossed around as their transport sails through the air and shatters onto its side. Everyone involved in the wreckage must succeed a roll of BOD+Athletics (4), or take (8) Damage in the impact – a Botch, in this case, indicates extreme trauma or death from a shattered neck.

The sudden crash whips up dust and smoke, and the haunting howls of the dying horses fill the air. Everyone is lying on top of each other inside the carriage. Zeno is alive, trying to drag himself out of the side door that's been flung open. Hakkal rises from the low grass, his left arm hanging limp at his side. Broken. The Acheron is using the confusion to gain distance, and attempts to run. He must be stopped.

Where is Pumpkin?

EXITUS

A faint moan escapes from the dark of the cabin. Pumpkin lies at the bottom, her body twisted, lips blue, eyes red. A faint rattle is the only sign of life left in her. The characters must lift her from the wreckage; she's no longer capable of moving on her own. As she's pulled outside, her breath quickens. It's clear her time is up. She motions to the characters that she wants to speak, but she can't form a tone. One must move their ear close to hear her last words. "Just... Finish... The job..." she whispers in a final struggle before her face suddenly freezes over, and her eyes go blank. She doesn't blink.

The situation is over the edge. Zeno, witnessing the girl's death, mocks the characters with a cruel snicker. Hakkal can't take it any longer. With his functional hand he draws his knife and steps toward the Acheron to gut him. The characters must intervene and stop Hakkal from murdering their cargo – Ignatz is just over the hill, damnit! The Jehammedan is furious. "He must die!" he roars. It requires quick action and the right words to smother Hakkal's outburst, with a combination of PSY+Reaction (2) and INS+Empathy (4), otherwise Zeno will find a dagger thrust into his stomach.

The Jehammedan pauses, weighing up the arguments in his head. "You're right. He's not worth it," Hakkal says as he sheathes the knife and begins to put together a makeshift splint for his broken arm. "We must bury the girl. We owe her that at least," he adds. Then he looks southeast. "We have about an hour left to travel by foot, but we must hurry."

If the characters are familiar with the customs of the Judges, they will know that



Pumpkin's corpse must be brought with them to Ignatz in order to permit her to be interned in the Cemetery of the Judges in Justitian. Leaving a Judge's remains behind is a grave cruelty, but then again, Vexicall's entire entourage is rotting out there in the tundra and they can hardly turn themselves into corpse collectors this close to the end of their journey. If they decide to carry Pumpkin's dead body along, they must wrap her up and strap her to a harness somehow; the character carrying her will not be able to do anything but shoulder her for the rest of the way.

SCENE 4: APPROACHING IGNATZ

The first ramshackle buildings come into sight. A small, deserted settlement sprouts at the top of a hill, looking like an abandoned campsite rather than a small town. "That's not it. The new town is at the foot of the hill," Hakkal remarks. As the group chases along, the valley opens up to them. They can see Ignatz' layout from up here, as well as the Fortified Road inbound to the city. Their vantage point is crucial, as they can already spot the Anabaptist delegation approaching from the east; a massive cart more reminiscent of a chapel on wheels which is drawn by eight towering stallions. Red banners hang from its side, emblazoned with

spiritual iconography, and a colossal broken cross is mounted on the roof. A handful of Furors trot alongside on their own mounts, holding Spitfires at the ready, and an ornately dressed Emissary sits at the helm – joined by a younger Ascetic, guiding the horses. Their prisoner must be in the cart.

Where are Zeno's helpers? If the characters have field glasses, or sights mounted to their rifles, they can try and zoom in on the hub of Ignatz, across the main road towards what appears to be a big market square in front of a massive public building. The courthouse, maybe? Drove of people clutter the plaza. There are prison workers and patrolling Jurymen, as well as merchants and citizens going about their business. A successful roll of INS+Perception (2) reveals a mounted carriage, similar to their own, as it pulls into the main road and rolls toward the open square. That must be Vexicall's cart. A single coach driver, clad in a Protector's garb, steers the vehicle.

Reaching a rocky outcrop, just a few hundred meters from the town, Hakkal calls a stop. "We should at least try to get some use out of this heathen scum, see if he can tell us the strength of his pack, who's who. Pull the gag." It's at least worth a shot, but as soon as the segment of the mask is removed, the Acheron launches into a last, desperate attempt to escape. Zeno has been studying his captors throughout the journey, learning their movements – and

Ignatz

Once a silver mining town infested by outcasts and miscreants, Ignatz has been remodelled to become the purest, most distilled example of the Judiciary's ideology and ethical practices, beaten into shape by the Iron Fist. Now, it's a town kept under strict control, in full accordance with the Codex. High Judge Orvex was given full purview over this domain, as long as he kept his eye clear of any covert operations happening in his territory, and he exerts his

control from the large courthouse at the heart of the town.

Expanding out, the main body of the town has been rebuilt on the backs of the convict laborers stationed here, bringing high quality stone all the way from Cavernis at times to create facades reminiscent of Uptown. The prisoners are stashed out of sight from the paved main road, behind the main rank of homes, to ensure any visiting dignitaries are met with only the pristine

pinnacle of the Judges and their power. Meanwhile, just a little further beyond the central areas of the town lie a number of ruins and shacks, now just empty husks for the wind to gently whistle through. They'll be knocked down in time for additional settlements, as the Judiciary converts Ignatz into a true muster town at the frontier for future campaigns into the southern expanse beyond the Protectorate.

VIGILANCE

The characters are in a tough spot. They do not know what the Rotten Few are up to, but it can't be any good. To make the right decision, they need intel. Piecing the information together that they currently have, everything looks like the prisoner exchange will commence in front of the courthouse. Keeping their eyes on the big market place allows for some visual data, but how are they supposed to spot any of Zeno's men if they are dressed up in Judge regalia? A Combination of INS+Perception (3) and PSY+Cunning (3) allows them to observe and interpret the scene.

1 TRIGGER: The cart has pulled to a stop in a position where anyone standing in the open doorway of the cabin would see a killing field stretch out in front of them – perhaps one of the Rotten Few is hidden inside.

2 TRIGGERS: One of the convicts laying out cobblestones along the road is a muscle strapped giant, totally out of place in the poorly-fed and scruffy lot. He's out of position from the rest of the labor cohort, perhaps one of the Rotten Few in disguise?

3+ TRIGGERS: A glint of reflected light draws the eye away from the main square and up towards the courthouse. It's all-but impossible to make out any detail, but the flashing is coming from a small window on the domed roof – a sniper nest!

their Concepts. Every character must succeed a Mental Defense (4) against the Dictate protocol. The command: "Release me!" Should they succeed, they can ram the gag back in, silencing the Anabaptist. If they fail, he'll make a break for the town, spurring the Rotten Few into action.

SCENE 5: HIGH NOON

Whatever the characters do next, every action counts. Whether they stay at a safe distance or rush into the town center will determine how the events unfold. They must understand that something big is about to go down, and they are the only ones who can warn the Judges and innocent bystanders in time. It should be clear as day that Zeno's henchmen are potentially trying to sabotage the prisoner transfer and will attempt to free their leader. What the characters don't know however, is how far the Rotten Few are willing to go to reach their goal.

- ◇ As the Anabaptists flood into the square, a High Judge can be seen exiting the courthouse to cross the market square and greet the approaching delegation. Orvex waves his arm to guide them toward Vexicall's carriage which is now parked at the center. Suddenly, a nearby convict drops his tools and races toward Orvex, grappling him in a chokehold, he places a gun at his temple, and whirls him around like a human shield. Hostage taken.
- ◇ The side door of Vexicall's carriage swings open toward the south side of the plaza where the Judges and Jurymen are located who oversee the convicts. Before they can even respond to what's happening to Orvex, they're mowed down by fire from a captured Judge Rotary Gun mounted inside the carriage. Riddled with bullet holes a dozen men go down in a spray of assault fire.
- ◇ At the same time, a Judgelike figure cuts the leg chains of an entire convict train. Forty marked criminals are let go in the middle of the market square as the chaos ensues. Some of them bolt off into safety, while others immediately grab shovels and heavy tools, and start a riot, attacking bystanders, or collecting muskets off of fallen Judges.
- ◇ A shot cracks from the dome of the courthouse, its leaden bullet racing across the distance and striking the Emissary in the head. The dignitary of the Anabaptist drops off his mount dead. The Furors break out in haste, trying to retrieve the body and retreat behind their cart to find cover.

- ◇ All out bedlam erupts across the entire square, citizens and merchants fleeing in all directions, as the attackers suddenly call out their demand. “Bring us Zeno, and the killing will stop!” Soon after, several figures retreat with their hostages toward the courthouse, to entrench themselves. During their retreat, they drop a pair of Black Marbles on the ground to cover their movements, leaving bubbles of pitch-black space in their wake until they reach the courthouse entryway.
- ◇ If Zeno is still with the characters, then they will quickly find themselves in the crosshairs of the Rotten Few, as their highest priority objective is rescuing their leader. The sniper up in the tower will notice them first and try to eliminate the group, while radioing their position to other members of her team on the ground. In the turmoil the characters will have a hard time telling friend from foe, and Zeno will do anything in his might to fight his way out of captivity, even engaging in melee if he can find the opportunity to get hold of a weapon.
- ◇ If Zeno has been freed and his pack are retreating, the Anabaptist Furors will try to step in – the Acheron is too critical an asset to simply give up, even with the Emissary dead. In that case, the Rotten Few stage a counterattack. Zeno charges towards the Anabaptist delegation, banking on the confusion of the Spitfire plumes beginning to arc towards each other to make it through. As soon as he gets within 10 meters of the ornate carriage, he detonates a Black Marble and swallows the entire congregation of Furors and the transport in a pitch-black Rift. Zeno is no stranger to the unnatural environment within, and forges ahead to seize the cart of the Anabaptists. The carriage breaks out of the Rift and speeds out of town. The Rotten Few are now in possession of the Anabaptists’ most valuable asset: Kargonogh. More leverage for use against the Judges.
- ◇ Rutgar, who hasn’t heard back from Vexicall in the past few hours, has issued a distress call to the Black Judges stationed in Ignatz. A team of five specialists dispatches from their secret headquarters, armed with sufficient firepower to retaliate against the terrorists.
- ◇ Should Zeno fall during the showdown, the Rotten Few will abandon their mission and bail out of Ignatz, using their equipment and skill to put distance between themselves and any pursuers.

BRANCHING POINT

There are countless ways for the final, climactic encounter at the gates of Ignatz to play out, depending on the journey up to this point and how the characters handle themselves during the chaotic turmoil. Game Masters who wish to extend the storyline can find further information on Zeno’s pack and their immediate plans in the booklet *THE ROTTEN FEW*. When approaching the final scene, there are several key variables which must be kept in mind when planning out the events taking place in Ignatz, or beyond in other scenarios.

Most critical among these is Zeno’s status. If the characters, in concert with the Judges and Anabaptists, were able to repel the Rotten Few and keep the prisoner under control, then the operation continues as planned; Kargonogh is swapped for the Acheron, and the two Cults go their separate ways. However, if he survives and escapes with his pack, or even worse manages to snatch Kargonogh, an operation is immediately scrambled by all involved parties to get him back. The characters may be pulled into this as penance for their failure, or in recognition of their valiant efforts.

The second variable is Kargonogh, and his fate. Rutgar, and by extension the Judges, are desperate to get their hands on the prisoner, and will happily resort to underhanded tactics. If the Acheron gets away, but leaves the cart behind, the prisoner will simply be taken without the normal transfer taking place. This will cause a polit-

ical storm between the two Cults, but it’s better than the Reformist going free. If he has been taken, however, the Judges rapidly agree to aid the Anabaptists in their efforts to recapture Zeno.

Finally, the Cluster’s investigation into the unfolding events is a key point to consider. If the characters were able to remove the bug on the carriage and destroy the drone watching them, the Chroniclers will be aware of the operation but unsure of the exact circumstances and identities of the prisoner or his captors. If they were to discover Zeno was an Acheron, though, they will be fully aware that the Judges snatched a critical source of information right from under their noses. The Fragments will be alerted, and the repercussions will be dire.

THE DUST SETTLES

Whether their mission was a total success or a complete failure, the characters have found themselves thrust into a high-stakes political game between the Judges, Anabaptists, and Chroniclers. There’s a lot on the line, and their faces are about to become very well known to the upper echelons of each Cult. With Vexicall dead, one of Rutgar’s own deputies is assigned to handling the party and their reward – cash, favors, or equipment equal in value to 2500 Drafts each. Each character gains 15 XP for completing the adventure, and the group adds (10) Scars to their group’s pool if they are following an Alignment.

EYE FOR EYE

