

Spooks



It was sort of fitting that I joined up with the Spooks.

After what I had done, there weren't a lot of places I could go. It wasn't as if a lot of people were falling over themselves to associate with me or hide me from the authorities. I had committed a serious crime in the eyes of the Hierarchy; I had broken the *Dictum Mortuum*, the law laid down by Charon that expressly prohibits any and all contact with the Land of the Quick.

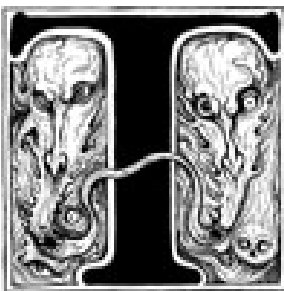
Big effing deal, you say. And I agree. Everybody does it. Even if it's just to stand on the shores of your favorite beach, or walk through the house you grew up in one more time, people find a way to get across when the Legions aren't looking. But I did a lot worse than that. I reached through the Shroud and killed a man. It was a man who deserved to die, but I nevertheless did the deed, and did it with such violence and force that his soul plummeted straight into Oblivion. And I hope it stuck in the gullet of a Malfean and made the bastard choke.

I didn't just break the *Dictum Mortuum*, I shot it to pieces.

I wasn't on the run long before the Spooks found me. It seems one of their number had been impressed by my actions, by what he called the "righteous anger" that I had exhibited in taking another person's life. He sympathized with me; with what I had gone through and what had driven me to commit the fatal act. He said he belonged to a group of wraith a lot like myself, wraiths that had, at one point or another, found themselves and those people and things they loved in mortal danger. He offered me sanctuary from the Hierarchy. He offered me support in safeguarding my Fetters. And he offered me the chance to make something relatively decent out of my time in this limbo, the changes to help my fellow wraiths that couldn't help themselves, who had nowhere else to turn.

It was an offer I couldn't refuse.

Spectrums



The best way I can think of to begin to explain who the Spooks are and what the Guild is all about is to compare it to a beam of white light as it hits a prism and separates into the spectrum of colors. What most wraiths see (or, more likely, what they want to see) is the in-your-face nature of the Guild: lashing out across the Shroud, knocking on the undersides of séance tables, driving people out of old house – hackneyed stuff like that.

Or they see what we do in the back alleys of Necropoli and side roads of the Shadowlands: starting riots and fires, tangling with Legionnaires, hijacking freshly, Reaped caravans of souls bound for Stygia and the Deathlords' coffers. One big uncontrolled (and uncontrollable) mega-gang – Death's Teamsters.

I won't argue with either interpretation. They're both right, in their own way. But they're both only one side of the spectrum. What I'm talking about is the other side, the more colorful side of the Spooks, so to speak. Just as the various bands of color combine to form the single color of white light, so do the various methods and purposes of our individual and collective members combine to form the Guild. And just as each individual band of color is an indispensable component of the Spectrum, so too is each facet of the Spooks an invaluable part of the greater Guild machine.

The Loyal Order

The Spooks are the most diverse Guild of the lot, at least as far as membership goes. The rank and file includes loners, fallen Heretics, disillusioned Renegades and discharged Legionnaires; even the higher levels of the Guild boast the odd Anacreon or Overlord who's been booted out of his or her post. Unlike stuffier Guilds such as the Artificers, we don't really care if you've been working for the Hierarchy or chanting on about Transcendence or playing freedom fighter. After all, everyone goes through their stupid and naïve phases, even in death.

What we do care about is how seriously you take this plane of existence. The survival of a wraith in the Shadowlands depends on facing up to a whole metric shitload of hard facts: the delicate cat-and-mouse games of your Shadow, the constant dangers of the Tempest and the Spectres and other beasts lurking in it, the unquenchable thirst of Oblivion for your soul – and the fact that the Hierarchy has no fucking clue how to handle any of it. We're all on our own trying to escape this place, and we can't count on the Deathlords. Stalin once said that one death is a tragedy, but a million deaths is a statistic. And frankly, that's all we are to the Deathlords. One big column of statistics.

Only when you truly grasp this fact do you have what it takes to become a Spook. It etches itself deep into your brain; it becomes the guiding principle for all of your actions as a Guild member. It gives you the willpower to travel the Tempest for days or weeks at a time to pierce the Shroud in a place you never heard of when you were alive, just to save a client's last hold on the Skinlands. It gives you determination to keep working at a site of great mortal sadness and death and sacrifice, just to ensure that someone will remember what happened there. It also gives you the mindset to smash someone's face in for trying to blow the whistle to the Legions.

Zealotry isn't what we're looking for. You can't reason with, control, threaten or give orders to zealots. What the Spooks want in a recruit is her comprehension of the totality of this half-world, of the essential psychological needs of all wraiths. When a recruit understands how much she needs the mutual assistance of individual wraiths, and *not* the Hierarchy or the Legions, loyalty to the Guild naturally follows. Of course, the Spooks aren't made up exclusively of former wiseguys or Sepmer Fi freaks, although representatives of both categories exist within the Guild. I was neither in life. But I made promises in life that were in danger of never being fulfilled. I had a *right* to keep those promises. All wraiths have those rights – the right to resolve their Fetters and Passions, the right to fight to keep Oblivion from swallowing them, the right to matter beyond what Quick existence offered. But not every wraith can do it on her own. That's where we come in.

The Spooks provide the type of goods and services that your ordinary wraith simply can't get anywhere else, because it's illegal, or too dangerous to do herself, or so important that she's afraid she'll screw it up. That's how the Guild commands the degree of loyalty and dedication it does from its members and clients, past and present. It's not about threats and kneecappings and dropping some stool pigeon into the nearest Nihil. It's about protecting a wraith's respect, allowing her memory to live on after her – 'cause let's face it, memory's the only thing a lot of us have left. It's about throwing a life preserver to a wraith who's flailing and splashing, trying to keep her head above the waves of Oblivion.

Don't get me wrong, though – we're not the Boy Scouts. We do a lot of ugly things, too. Everyone in the Guild's got one or two Obliviate notches on her belt. But that comes with the territory sometimes. Talking about Right and Wrong in capital letters and about how good you feel after you do a job really doesn't make a difference in this place. There's a war going on in the Shadowlands that the Hierarchy doesn't want to admit it's even fighting, a war for the future of both Quick and Dead alike. My fellow Spooks and I are the loyal soldiers in this war. And we're combating Oblivion with the only means we know how; raw, brutal, primal force.

Cause...

The older Guild members refer to what we do as The Cause – and do so in that tone of voice where the capital T and C land right in the pit of your gut and sit there. The Cause represents the singular nature of the Spooks' Guild. It's what sets the Spooks apart from both the Haunters, where we got our start and from the other Guilds who cross the Shroud. You know, the Puppeteers and the Proctors.

The Cause deals with the relationships between Life and Death, with the connections that each wraith keeps with the people, places and things he loved in the land of the Quick. The Cause is based on a single, simple premise: In order to function in the Shadowlands, in order to have any hope of achieving Transcendence, every wraith needs certain things that keep him viable, so to speak. Fetters, Haunts, the memories of the living – these are all examples of the energies that enable a wraith to move closer to Transcendence – or at least further from Oblivion.

The problem is, life, and Life, goes on. Fetters get lost or destroyed. Places of great emotion and sorrow, like battlefields or ancient burial grounds, crumble and fade away or get plowed over to put up highway off-ramps or one-stop oil change franchises. People forget, or never know, what happened in the old mansion up on the hill, whether the family it housed was big and loving or small and dysfunctional. And that's just on the individual level. Governments and peoples are notoriously eager to forget what happened. They edit the accounts so that the real stories of how continents were colonized or millions of innocents were slaughtered in wars and pogroms vanish into the mists of history.

And every time that happens, every time a Fetter is destroyed or a resting place gets plowed over, another wraith loses one more avenue to Transcendence. Every time a civilization forgets or ignores the blood spilled and bones broken by those who perished to make their corner of the world better, Oblivion grows more potent, seeping into the chasm of memory that such sociocultural self-absorption creates. And all too often, those wraiths that see their Fetters and Haunts being fed to the mangler of time can do nothing but watch and wait for a Harrowing.

I know. I felt the fear and the rage myself, boiling over inside me with no avenue to release the pressure. I've met a lot of others who feel that same pressure welling up within themselves. A lot of them find some way to release it, however messy the manifestations of this might be, but just as many don't know how to deal with their inner demons. They're law-abiding types who never pushed the envelope in life and can't seem to bring themselves to do it in death. They try to maintain whatever passes for normalcy in this world. As the parasites chew away at their Corpora daily, and one day they succumb to Harrowings, or become Spectres, or just plain walk into a Nihil.

But *we* act. We push, ourselves into the Skinlands and work to save the few things that wraiths can still call their own. We protect their Fetters. We protect their memory. And by doing so, we protect their hope. That is the Cause.

...and Effects

The war against Oblivion is fought on many fields, with many weapons and in many ways. And everywhere you go you'll find Spooks in the middle of the fray, in many different guises, performing whatever tasks are necessary for our clients. There are literally hundreds of Spook groups working in every major Necropolis and along every major Byway. You can find us patrolling Haunts and weak points all along the Shroud, ensuring that the wraiths who use them for gathering spots remain unmolested by others. You can find us reaching through, the Shroud to meddle with the march of modernization, driving new tenants out of old homes and making redevelopment efforts a nightmare for the construction crews. You know how it goes in the movies, right? Someone comes along and builds an office on the site of an ancient burial ground, and as soon as the joint opens up for business the tenants have more plumbing problems than they know what to do with? That's one of the Guilds specialties.

Of course, we also help wraiths to help themselves. Sometimes your average wraith needs a quick shot of Pathos in order to keep going or to fuel some of his own Arcanoi. We can provide that. Maybe someone loved a particular object in life and would like it for a useful relic. No problem, just get an Artificer who owes you a favor, and presto. A local Hierarchy Marshal's been leaning on a Circle unfairly. We've got connections who can encourage him to step back.

Spooks come in all shapes and sizes – as loaded a statement as I've ever made. No matter what a wraith needs, there's some of our number who can get it for you. And very reasonably. We only need to be asked.

The Lifeliners

The Lifeliners were the first Spooks to articulate The Cause for the Guild, which allowed them to stage a coup within the Hunters' Guild and break out on their own. Needless to say, Lifeliners command a lot of clout within the Guild because of this simple fact – so much so that one word from a Lifliner boss can redirect the entire course of Guild Policy.

Lifeliners are the Spooks whom most individual wraiths come to when they need help. These guys protect wraiths' Fetters, be they inanimate objects or living people. Such protection runs the gamut from such arcane endeavors as ensuring that an ancient Fetter gets unearthed and put in a safe place (like a museum), to smashing through the Shroud and stopping an assailant from killing the person who represents a wraiths last Fetter.

Lifeliners adhere to a strict code of conduct within their own Locals and Combinations. They rarely enlist the help of other Spooks outside their own spheres, partly because of the Lifeliners' reluctance to bring in inexperienced help, and partly to keep their own groups free of any possible taint from other, less-than-honorable divisions of the Guild. In addition, the austere existence and depth of focus on the Cause that the Lifeliners espouse gives a Lifeliner a better handle on her Shadow than any other Spook is likely to have' at least, that's what they say. Many other Spooks feel that the Lifeliners, despite being a crucial part of the Guild and the larger population of Restless, are drifting away from the large scope of Guild interest. A lot of Spooks fear that the Lifeliners may one day turn disgusted at the direction of the Guild and sell out any Spook who isn't one to their kind.

The Mementomorians

Groups of Mementomorians concentrate their efforts around sites of death and its remembrance. They are particularly active in and around national cemeteries, famous battlefield sites and national and international memorials where the Quick come to grieve, to learn and to find some semblance of closure. In additions, Mementomorians also watch for key times when such outpourings of Quick emotions are at their highest, such as Memorial Day, Good Friday, *Yom ha Shoah* and other such dates.

Mementomorians collect the mass emotions of the visiting Quick at such sites and during such times – sadness, honor, thanksgiving, introspection, love – and distill them into liquid Pathos, which then gets bottled and shipped. The Spooks provide this Pathos to any wraith or Circle of wraiths who can pay their price for such vital fuel in channeling their Arcanoi or running the machinery of the Shadowlands. Since the process of collecting this Pathos sometimes involves “encouraging” this sort of outpouring of emotion, and thus breaks the *Dictum Mortuum*, the Mementomorians are essentially engaged in an illegal practice, a form of “Pathos-running” in the Shadowlands.

In many respects, the Mementomorians are a throwback to the glory days of Prohibition rumrunners. And just as the police found themselves frustrated with the illegal liquor trade, Stygian authorities have had little success in fouling up the Mementomorians' networks of collection and distribution. Since the emotions of the Quick are not confined strictly to places like the memorials of atrocities or events like Veteran's Day, there are no real places for the Hierarchy to center their investigations. Since every wraith needs Pathos to functions,

there is little success in obtaining information from the general populace. (Plus, with the Mnemoides outlawed and systematically eliminated, there's a decided shortage of trained inquisitors.)

Despite the relative powerlessness of the authorities, the Mementomorian's activities are not without risks. Collecting and distilling Pathos into mass ingestible form requires the use of a special Pathos Flask. The Mementomorian's maintain that the only Pathos they collect is from "pure" sites, thereby ensuring that the Flasks are filled only with "good" Pathos. Whether it is true is still up in the air, especially since the market for the Mementomorian's goods has increased dramatically. This has given rise to rumors that some corner-cutting Mementomorian's have been peddling "inferior" Pathos, or even Flasks of Liquid Hate.

The Shroudbreakers

The Shroudbreakers have had a long history within the Guild. During the War of the Guilds, the Spooks who would later become Shroudbreakers worked closely with Hunters and other Guilds to "sanitize" certain houses and other sites in the Skinlands, either to facilitate the creation or destruction of haunts, or to thicken or weaken the Shroud as it served their overall purpose. In addition to these duties, Shroudbreakers also worked closely with Artificers in creating relics, a practice that still thrives in modern times.

Nowadays, the Shroudbreakers serve as sentinels for the Guilds and its clients. They still participate in sanitization and relic creation (there are always markets for their talents), but in recent centuries Shroudbreakers have had to contend with a new threat, namely groups of Quick who take it upon themselves to become ghost hunters.

Quick interaction with the Shadowlands, has peaked and valleyed alternately for thousands of years, spawning countless societies, organizations, cults, bands of researchers, curiosity seekers, death-wish types – and predators. Although many of these so-called "Ghostbusters" throughout the centuries have been nothing but charlatans, there exist some truly ominous organizations that, for whatever reason, have pledged themselves to spectral eradication. The sons of Tertullian and their subgroup, the Sect of St. James, are the largest groups of this kind.

Shroudbreaker Spooks act as commando units and first-strike teams against these Quick enemies. Methods vary depending upon the group targeted. In dealing with the Sect of St. James, Shroudbreakers monitor the actions and preparations of "crosses" of Sectarials, trying to determine when and where these bands of mortals plan to make their entry into the Shadowlands. More than one "cross" of St. James loonies has made the leap across the Shroud only to find a *very* large group of *very* angry Shroudbreaker Spooks lying in wait for them. What happens next is rarely a pretty sight.

The Sectarials, however, are relative pushovers. The sons of Tertullian remain far and away the most vicious of the sects with anti-wraith agendas. Dedicated to the destruction of wraiths through their own litanies of tortuous exorcisms, Sons' tend to target social groups who seem to have traffic with wraiths, namely psychics, Gypsies and the like. Few victims of the Sons' survive "exorcism," which often ventures into some of the most violating procedures on the body and mind. The Sons' targeting of innocents would be enough cause for the Shroudbreakers to act. But these mortals have also gone after living Fetters of wraiths when they could sense a connection. At moments like this, Shroudbreakers operate across the Shroud, to bloody and great effect.

Shroudbreakers are well-aware of the Sons' abilities to see into the Shadowlands. They are also aware of the Sons' ability to have some effect on the weaker class of wraith. Most Shroudbreakers, however, are definitely not your weaker class of wraith.

The Gray Gangs

The Gray Gangs consist mainly of the "younger" Spooks, wraiths of the modern industrial era. Most "Gray Gangsters" filled the rolls of labor unions and other such groups, as organizers, legmen and even strikebreakers – it is not uncommon for a single Gray Local to harbor fellow Spooks who were on opposite sides of the picket line in life.

The Gray Gangs are responsible for most of the smash-and-stab work of the Spooks within Necropoli. Riots, arson, destruction of property and hijacking of Reaper caravans bound for the Onyx Tower comprise most of the Gray Gangs' work. Gray Locals provide most of the Gray Gangs' work. Gray Locals provide muscle for any who hire their services, and they take clients from inside and outside the Hierarchy with equal ease. Gray Gangsters often attach themselves to another Spook group, providing added muscle for Mementorians distributors or reinforcements for Shroudbreaker shock troops.

Gray Gangsters often function as the "ward bosses" within Necropoli. Even in the cities of death, ethnic neighborhoods of Circles abound, places where wraiths don't go to the police (or in this case, the Legions) because the authorities couldn't be trusted in Life. Disputes and problems among these "marginal" populations of wraiths get settled in the same fashion as they were in breathing days, by the local politicians or mobsters, the ones who came from these neighborhoods, who knew how the system worked and how to get around it. That's where the Gray Gangs come in. In their semi-official capacities, Gray Gangsters exert a good deal of influence within their local Necropoli. And know what buttons to push and whose palms to grease to get things for their constituents. They're also not above breaking a few heads to get their way – but then again, who in the Spooks' Guild isn't?

The Harrowsmiths

The Harrowsmiths are a breed apart from other Spooks. In fact, one could argue that they're a breed apart from most wraiths. The Guild doesn't like to talk about them, or even dwell for too long on the fact that they exist. Mention the Harrowsmiths to a wraith, and you'll see him back away in fear, twice as fast if he's on their list.

Every Spook has destroyed a wraith's Fetters or Obliviated a soul. It comes with the territory. The Harrowsmiths, however, specialize in this sort of practice, and even enjoy it to a certain degree. Harrowsmiths are convinced The Cause is so sacred for the future of the Restless Dead, and that the Spooks are the only Guild capable of fulfilling its premise, that any opposition to the activities of the Guild emanates directly from Oblivion and must be destroyed. Translated into practice, Harrowsmiths believe that anyone who betrays the Guild or its clients deserves to suffer before being completely eradicated.

And they go about this making this prophetic vision manifest through everything from instant Obliviation to slow torture, breaking down a victim's Corpus until he falls into a Harrowing (hence their moniker). In the course of their work, Harrowsmiths will sometimes, after weakening a wraith to the point of delirium and hallucination, stage a *faux* Harrowing, beating psychologically at their victim until he gives up his fellow conspirators against the Guild, or coughs up the payment, or falls into a Destruction Harrowing and is sucked into Oblivion. The Harrowsmiths really don't seem to care what happens after they get their information, to be honest.

The Harrowsmiths are masters of pain, the closest thing to Spectres a wraith ever meets. Like a Joe Pesci character in a Scorsese film, they tend to be high-strung and nearly uncontrollable. The Commission of Five openly laments the unseemliness of the Harrowsmiths' existence, but has also said that keeping these Spooks within the Guild remains the best way to control their activities. It also gives the Commissioners easy access to their services, but that's just common sense.

One Big Happy Family: Guild Structure



he Guild's structure is sort of like a cross between a large labor union and organized crime cartel. Same difference, if you ask me. But it works. Everyone knows exactly where he fits in the system, whom he's responsible to, and what happens if he screws up. Most outsiders can't believe that the Guild's organized at all. Turf wars in the streets between rival gangs of Spooks seem to happen as often as skirmishes with Hierarchy troops. Most people are shocked that the Spooks' Guild can even stay together, let alone get anything accomplished. But screw them. They only see the outside, the rough edges. Inside, the machinery runs smoothly.

There is structure and organization to the Guild, believe me. What throws most people (and Hierarchy investigators) off is the apparent lack of communications among the different strata of Spooks. All the policy decisions come from the top make no mistake about that, but all information is transmitted one-on-one from one level of the Guild to the next. Spooks don't hold large conferences. The heads of Locals don't get together for summits or truces or even to compare notes with each other. The higher-ups don't want anyone eavesdropping on what they say or what they're told. That way, it's impossible to follow the course of information throughout the Guild if you're on the outside. The muckety-mucks say it's to keep the lines of communication fluid. I say it's to create an atmosphere of plausible deniability. Either way, it keeps prying eyes out.

Defender

The ground floor of the Guild consists of Spooks called Defenders, from the pledge we all take to defend the connections to the Skinlands of any and all wraiths who need our help. They're the grunts of the guild, the hired muscle, the shakedown people. Defenders are grouped into squads of 10 each, led by a captain known as an Armadar, a sort of Spook tutor. Defenders mostly do group work – starting riots, perpetrating mass Outrages across the Shroud, thing like that.

Occasionally, if you're a particularly promising Defender, you'll get solo work from your Armadar. Usually the assignment involves a single client who needs some help with her Fetters, but on rare occasions a Defender will be given an order to Obliviate another wraith. Landing this sort of solo work depends on your individual ability and affinity with Outrage – and a bit of sucking up doesn't hurt. It's a big deal when your Armadar singles you out for an individual assignment. Handling assignments like that stylishly is how you prove yourself competent enough to advance up the Guild ladder. If you're good – and your Armadar can tell if you are – you've got it made.

Defender squads are very tight-knit affairs from day one. When someone becomes a Defender, he gets the responsibility of guarding the Fetter of another member of his squad. He makes a solemn promise to guard that Fetter to the very end, and if that means sacrificing himself to oblivion, so be it. It's never come to that, as far as I know, but that's not the point. The point is that a Defender looks out for his mates, whenever and wherever. God help you if you screw up this assignment, because no one else will. I've seen Defenders who screwed the pooch on a comrade's Fetter get handed over to the nearest Legion, wind up as table lamps, or just get dumped down some remote Nihil.

Armadar

The title "Armadar" comes from an old Latin phrase, *armadare*, which means to knight someone. The Guild uses it to refer to a "made" Spook, a Defender who exhibits just the right mixture of efficiency and ruthlessness to get promoted to the next level.

Don't misunderstand me, though – it's not about chalking up an arbitrary number of kills, like it is with some Mafia families or street gangs in the Skinlands. Yeah, every one of us Armadars have Obliviated at least one soul or destroyed someone's last Fetter, but we've all saved far more wraiths than we've been forced to destroy. Becoming an Armadar is all about understanding and practicing The Cause every time you do a job. Fear and terror isn't the point. Doing the job is.

It's an uphill battle to get promoted to Armadar, but once you get there the view's great. Armadars can take on their own personal clients without previous Guild approval, as opposed to Defenders who have to wait to get solo assignments. Each Armadar also heads a squad of Defenders, and pretty much runs them like her own private army.

But you have a lot of obligations as an Armadar, too. Each Armadar has "turf," a section in a Necropolis or other area in the Shadowlands that she's expected to control and maintain, by keeping gangs of Renegades and Heretics, overcurious Legionnaires and other unwanted presences out. In addition, Armadars are entrusted with the education of the members of their Defender squads in the subtle (and not so subtle) natures of Outrage. The Guild considers this education of a Defender a significant part of being an Armadar. Any failure of a Defender on a job ultimately reflects on his Armadar teacher, and in severe cases it leads to official sanctions or ostracism by the Guild.

Controller

A Spook gang is called a Local, and a Controller is the head of a Local. Controllers are older, established Armadars, Spooks who've been around for centuries and managed to broaden their own sections of turf all around the Stygian Empire. Every Necropolis plays host to at least one, if not several Locals within its walls, and the Controllers coordinate the activities of their respective Locals, arbitrate disputes and turf wars between Armadars and act as the (un)official Spook representatives within the Necropolis.

Controllers, however, aren't confined just to Necropoli. In the outlying areas of the Shadowlands, roving Controllers, usually masquerading as Legionnaires, check in frequently with floating Armadars and their squads to make sure everything runs smoothly in the less traveled regions.

Boss

A Boss is the head of a Combination, a larger network of Locals. He or she is elected to the position by the Controllers of all Locals under the jurisdiction of a single Combination, and acts as a regional leader and representative to the other Combinations and the Guild's governing body, the Commission of Five.

Bosses have a lot on their plates. They implement the decisions of the Commission, and make sure that orders filter down to the lower ranks quickly and correctly. They also strike deals between their own and other Combinations, and between their own people and other Guilds, to do things like share resources and muscle – sort of like a Spook exchange program, if you will. And your Boss has the final say in anything you do or any request you ask. If a situation arises where you need help from another Guild, or have to destroy someone's last Fetter, your request goes to your Boss, who either accepts or rejects it. And the Boss' word is final with a capital F. There's no appeals, no going behind his or her back. Just suck it up, and find another way to get the job done.

Right now the guild network consists of 99 Combinations, so there are 99 Bosses. In addition, five of the 99 Bosses sit on the Commission of Five, making policy for the Guild as well as running their own combinations. A few of the younger and lower-ranking spooks think that's sort of a conflict of interest. They don't think it too loudly, though. Your Boss has more power than God, Rockefeller and a 20-gigaton bomb rolled into one. He or she is your parent, your confessor, your best friend and your worst enemy, and sometimes all of those things at once.

The Commission of Five

At the apex of the Guild sits the Commission of five, usually just called the Commission, or sometimes “C5.” C5 is made up of five Commissioners, the most powerful and trusted Bosses in the Guild as elected by the entire population of Bosses themselves. All major policies and activities of the Guild originate with the Commissioners. C5 also mediates disputes between Combinations, as well as acting as the judicial arm of the Guild. One Commissioner acts as the “Guildmaster” delegate of the Spooks at all Conclaves. Niccolo Cianfrocco, the head of the Chicago Combination, is the current “Guildmaster” of the Spooks, and tends to be the *de facto* leader of the Commission by virtue of the information he gets as Guildmaster delegate (not to mention sheer bloody-mindedness).

The Commission started out with four members originally, until the newer generation of Spooks began to make their mark on the Shadowlands. Defenders and Armadars who had been mobsters in life simply picked up where they had left off in the classic pursuits: intimidation, extortion, racketeering and Obliviating. With bands of these modern-day Spooks getting back at old enemies and making new ones, the higher-ups had to do something to control these punks. The Bosses decided that, instead of a mass purge of these “Gray Gangsters,” as they were known, a fifth Commissioner would be added to represent this younger generation of Spooks. So, C4 became C5.

I won’t pretend that’s the end of the troubles. The Commission still runs the show with an iron fist, but the tension between Cianfrocco and the fifth Commissioner, Artemus Vanderwal, isn’t a secret within the Guild. A lot of Bosses, old and young guard alike, think that the current Commissioners have outlived their usefulness, and that the Guild needs new blood. But just as many bosses like things the way they are, and don’t see a reason to clean house upstairs.

Friends and Enemies



Nobody admits to consorting with the Spooks. We’re a Guild, which makes us illegal. We specialize in transgressing the *Dictum Mortuum*, also illegal. And as far as what we’re into in the Shadowlands – rioting, extortion, hijacking, trafficking in illegal relics and Pathos, the occasional Oblivate – well, as the old saying goes, with friends like these...

But we’ve got our friends and enemies, in high places and low, tucked away in the bowels of the hierarchy bureaucracy or playing lookout on the Byways of the Tempest. Forget what people say in public about us. This isn’t a black-and-white world. It’s one big gray wash, and it’s in that grayness that the Spooks live and thrive. What a Legionnaire sees as the breach of the *Dictum Mortuum*, a client sees as her last Fetter’s salvation. What some Anacreon laments as an underground economy of Mementorian Pathos, our customers see as an easy way to get the energy they need to operate. The same thing is perceived in multiple ways by multiple people. And from that multiplicity, we know who our friends are, as well as our enemies.

The Hierarchy

On balance, the Hierarchy doesn’t get it. They think the answer lies in the simple accumulation of souls to stop Oblivion. The Deathlords enact idiotic decrees like the *Dictum Mortuum* to keep wraiths out of the Skinlands, like they’re the eternal flight attendants trying to keep us wraiths in Coach and out of Business Class. As if that’s going to keep Oblivion from rolling over everything.

Oblivion erupts whenever it bloody well feels like. What do you think a Maelstrom is? Hell, we've had five of them already in the Shadowlands, and each one unleashed more violence and pain than the last. And if past experience counts for anything, let me be the first to come right out and say that ol' Number Six'll make the first five seem like slight drizzles.

The point isn't to corral a wraith's actions in this world, or to put up these artificial barriers to a soul's completion of her tasks. The more the Hierarchy tries to stop souls from dealing with the people and things they left behind, the more harm it does to the Shadowlands. The more the Deathlords worry about their soul-ledgers than they do about the souls themselves, the more desperate the situation gets for the souls involved. And the more difficult Stygia tries to make it for a wraith just to let go, the more Angst grows, the closer a Harrowing comes, and soon there's one more soul down the maw of Oblivion.

I'll admit, things have changed a lot since the *Dictum Mortuum* got announced. Charon's gone, the Deathlords are acting like a bunch of anklebiters in a day care center who just got denied their milk and cookies, and the whole bureaucracy of Stygia's so redundant and confusing that half the idiots cancel out the other half. Still, the Guilds are taboo, we Spooks doubly so. The Hierarchy is by no means irrelevant, and its power still hits the Restless like a falling I-beam. It becomes very tricky for us to maneuver sometimes, particularly when the local Overlords are freaking out because of reports of Spectres or Renegades in the area. They can clamp down a Necropolis like lightning and sit on the entire population like the proverbial 800-pound gorilla.

However, it's not impossible to get what you want. Politicians – not all, but lots of them – need help every now and then. Spook Locals aren't above hiring themselves out to The Man for some fair consideration on our end, or even doing a job *gratis* if it helps our interests. You've got to be careful with greasing palms, though. There's a very fine line between a bunch of Hierarchy pencil-pushers waiting for you to offer them a bribe and a bunch of Hierarchy Pencil-Pushers waiting for you to offer them a bribe so they can throw you in the forges. They're all looking to cover their asses, and that's what it comes down to.

The places where Spooks have the best rapport with the representatives of the Isle of Sorrows is in the smaller Necropoli and on the outskirts of Stygian rule. Often the Anacreons and officials who rule these places can barely keep things from falling to pieces without help. They're constantly under attack from Spectres and Renegades, or there aren't enough Reapers for all the souls that come across the Shroud, or their Legionnaires want to be transferred to cushier assignment is a godsend. Dealing with the Hierarchy is no different than dealing with anyone else. If you can provide them with a service they want, you'll be left alone. And if you can turn that want into a necessity, and make yourself an indispensable cog in the machine of order, then you're all set. They won't shut you down. They can't afford to.

Renegades

Frankly, the Renegades are one big inconvenience for the Spooks – hell, for any Guild. They have no structure, no network, no sense of what they want, except they don't want the Hierarchy telling them what to do. Hey, pal, *nobody* wants anybody telling them what to do. But most of the Renegades I've run across would flush the whole system down the Veinous Stair just to prove a point. The problem is, they don't have anything to put in its place.

For all the crap the hierarchy doles out, for all their stupid regulations and self-absorbed policies, they keep Oblivion at bay. They could do better, a lot better, but right now they're what we've got to work with. Besides, the Guilds got a lot invested in the Hierarchy. We've spent an incredibly long time fine-tuning our network of people and positions. Speaking for the Spooks, I'll be damned if I let a bunch of wild-eyed bomb-throwing ex-Bolshies chuck the whole system. We'd all be Spectres in under a week.

The Renegades do serve one important purpose, though. When you need a scapegoat, they're always available. It's easier to convince some Legionnaire you've got in your pocket to go after the Black Fist Brigade or Danforth's Flying Irregulars or whatever damn fool name most of these groups call themselves than you. It looks good to their superiors, and keeps Big Brother off our back. Besides, who in hell are the Renegades going to complain to about "persecution?"

Heretics

In general, the Spooks' Guild doesn't have much quarrel with Heretic cults. The Cause centers around helping a wraith to achieve Transcendence free of unwanted obstacles, and if a wraith feels the need to do so under the auspices of one Heretic Circle or another, that's his business.

Besides, Many of our Locals' steadiest customers have been Heretics, who depend upon the specific services we provide. Mementomorian supply Pathos to those quasi-drug-oriented Heretic Circles, while Shroudbreaker Locals make a killing (literally and figuratively) in safeguarding established Heretic haunts from intruders. Some of the Circles have been receptive to our requests to hide certain Guild members until the heat from the Hierarchy dies down. I've availed myself of that option a few times. It works, as long as you take all of the chanting and the attempts at conversion with a few grains of salt.

The Other Guilds

Of course, the Spooks aren't the only game in town. There are 15 other Guilds, and depending upon whom you talk to, the Spooks are anything from misunderstood knights errant to near-animals and everything in between, depending upon how badly someone needs the services of one of our number. It used to be, a long time ago, that hardly any of the other Guilds would associate with us. When we broke off from the Haunters, that Guild tried everything to discredit us publicly. They called us Renegades, said we'd all end up as torches for the Legions within a month, and spread bullshit rumors about how we were going to drag the other Guilds down to Oblivion. It was hard, so the Bosses tell me.

But, the Artificers still kept in contact with us. They enlisted our services in Outrage to create relics and perform similar tasks for them. They even asked some of the old Shroudbreakers to go after key Fetters of Important enemies during the War of the Guilds. They gave us what we wanted, what we needed – respect. Say what you will about the Artificers, I've heard it all. They're arrogant. They're megalomaniacs. They're old as sin and not nearly as attractive. Doesn't matter. They saw us as a Guild when we needed to be seen that way. I think that gave the Spooks the first foothold in the family of guilds. And as far as the Spooks' Guild is concerned, whatever the Artificers' crazy notions about taking over might be, they've got the right of first refusal of our services simply for the respect they showed the Spooks long ago.

Relations between the Spooks and the remaining 14 Guilds tends to filter down on a case-by-case basis. Some Locals, in fact some whole Combinations, work closely with certain Guilds when they've got our kind of work. A lot of Gray Gangsters provide muscle for Oracle Gamblers in their gaming halls and that Guilds' great relic riverboat casino, the *Belle La Fayette*. Harbingers tend to employ Lifeliners a lot to look after their Fetters while they take extended trips into the Tempest, and as far as the Pardoners go, everyone needs them. And even they have Fetters and haunts they like to visit.

Allies: The Haunters

Ah, yes. The Haunters.

Hmmm...

What can I say? They're family to us, in many ways. The entire Spooks' Guild *did*, after all, grow out of the Haunters. They provided a sort of structure to encourage the growth of the oldest Spooks' talents. We can't forget that.

But even in the best of families, you get a lot of tension. Rivalries, heated discussions, screaming matches at the proverbial dinner table – it all came out in the Haunters' Guild, which is why we pretty much cut our losses and got out of the house. I won't bore you with the details. Call it creative differences, if you want, that made us choose Outrage over Pandemonium.

What really made the Spooks break off from the larger Haunters' Guild was a fundamental philosophical difference between our crew and theirs, with that big plan they have to take over the Skinlands. The Haunters have always said that they want to bring down the Shroud and recapture the world of the Quick, like they had held so long ago. The Haunters wanted, and still want, to bring the Skinlands and Shadowlands together, to make the Quick recognize the existence of ghosts. Then they plan to take their places on the throne of this unified kingdom. It's an interesting theory. So is time travel.

The thing that makes a Spook a Spook, and not a Haunter, is that we don't dwell on theory. There's no way the Haunters, or all of the Guilds for that matter, are going to bring down the Shroud. The Shroud isn't just a physical object. It's the collective force of thousands of years of the Quick saying, in effect, "There's no such thing as ghosts." That's hard in a lot of ways, but it's the way things are. Life sucks. So does Death. Wear a cup. The shroud is much too powerful to collapse like a house of cards just because the Haunters can make cockroaches crawl out of your ass. But the Haunters still waste their time with this crackpot idea, as if they could get billions of people to wake up one day and believe in us. Makes you wonder why we hang around with them as much as we do.

The Mandelbrots are an OK group. They still believe in the power of Outrage, and out of all the subchapters in the Haunters' Guild, they're the ones a Spook is most likely to fraternize with. But as far as the rest of the Haunters go, the two-peas-in-a-pod speech they give about us being their well-meaning but simplistic younger siblings is the biggest crock I've ever heard. The Gray Gangs, I know, could take 'em or leave 'em, and they'd prefer the latter.

Enemies: The Monitors

I honestly can't believe, with everything the Monitors do, that they're not being hunted down like the Mnemoi. Even the quickest glance at their Guild's history and current practices reads like the chronicle of a parasite attacking its host. They used to train themselves as full-fledged Reapers, you know. They'd corral new Enfants for their own purposes, and the souls they considered to be "runts" they'd ship straight off to Stygia.

The Monitors don't Reap anymore, but what they do engage in is just as bad. To the man, the guild holds the Lifeweb ability over wraiths like the proverbial carrot on a stick. They won't permit a wraith to learn how to keep track of his own Fetters, unless he can serve the Monitors' purpose. And you wonder why wraiths come to us? We have our price, like anything else, but at least we're not running around pushing innocent souls into a corner. If a wraith needs help, we'll help him. The Monitors would rather watch a wraith get torn apart by Spectres than let someone "not of their kind" into the Guild. The whole lot's a worse band of criminals than people say we are.

The Monitors are invasive, callous extortionists. They don't provide a single service that one of our Locals couldn't provide, and what they do provide costs you a lot more than a sack or two of oboli. Because once a Monitor gets his hooks into you, he's got you for the duration. And he can snap your lifeline like that, for any reason at all, or no reason whatsoever.

The Other Side of the Shroud

Vampires

Admittedly, you've got to watch out for some of them. A few of their lot can put a spell on you that ranks right up there with being enthralled. Probably worse. But it's basically just a matter of common sense and smarts. If you watch your back with the ones who can grab you, you've got nothing to fear from the rest of them. Besides, what the hell can a vampire do to you when he's only got a certain number of hours in the day to operate? And what can he do to you that Death hasn't done already?

Werewolves

They do like to fight, don't they? More power to 'em. I say. And when a pack of these overgrown Lassies pops its collective gasket and takes out a whole building, it's a sight to behold. The more they destroy, the more things surface in the Shadowlands. The more they worry and fret and fight like living hell to save the Skinlands, the more the Pathos rolls in. Encourage them, I say. Make 'em crazy. Direct 'em to do your work for you. It's a veritable cash cow when they Rage.

Mages

This crop tends to be more concerned with fighting it's own little wars. Having said that, though, there are definitely a couple of groups to keep an eye on. The Euthanatos are ones for sending the Quick to their more untimely demises, and when a new wraith crosses over with a lot of things undone, he can make a good client, or even a possible Defender. The Nephandi, however, are the real enemies. They lie down with some pretty awful bedfellows – I wouldn't be surprised if a lot of their more powerful members have a direct line to Oblivion. We've got Shroudbreakers and Gray Gangsters watching a lot of their activities, but it's a tough battle from this side of the Shroud.

Changelings

The walking snakes in their crowd are helpful if you need a Fetter or two toyed with, because you can usually get them to help you out. And when the redcaps go ballistic on one of their razing sprees, they'll do just about the same in the relic department as some of those woofs I mentioned earlier. The Gray Gangs tend to watch the redcaps to see what they're going to break next. The Harrowsmiths watch to pick up pointers. I don't know which one's worse sometimes.

Inquiries (A History)

TO: The Deathlords

From: Julins Overbrook, Chief Inquisitor, Magisterium Veritatis 3rd District Stygia

RE: The Spooks' Guild – Deposition of Ivan (Jackie Blades) Bladmiroff, Armadar, Silver Maple Combination

My Dear and Most August Lords,

I am pleased to report that our attempts to turn Bladmiroff have proven very fruitful. In exchange for immunity from the forge and the guarantee of a new identity, Bladmiroff has agreed to furnish the Magisterium with information about the history and recent activities of the Spooks' Guild.

I have enclosed the first part of my report based on Bladmiroff's testimony. I have taken the liberty of summarizing much of the information he has provided us in several instances. Those places where I have left the testimony unaltered I have done so in order to capture the true flavor of his mindset in relation to the Spooks' Guild and his position within their structure. I believe that such direct quotation may prove useful to get an accurate "feel" for the typical Guild member's mindset.

This first section of my enclosed report details the understood history of the Spooks as an official Guild, while chronicling the course of their actions throughout the ages. More reports on specific objectives of the modern-day Guild members will be forthcoming in future dispatches.

B.C.O.
Overbrook

I. The Era of the Independents

First and foremost, it is clear from my conversations with Baldmirooff that the earliest history of the Spooks' guild borders on the stuff of legends. The "official" history stretches back in time to presumably before the Sundering, when the Shroud was nonexistent. Individuals like Odysseus, Orpheus, Gilgamesh and others who freely passed to and from the Underworld are considered to be the forefathers of the Spooks, for their simple physical methods used in effecting the journey between Life and Death:

Baldmiroff: "When I was initiated, the ceremony talked a lot about our Guild stretching back to people like Aeneas and Orpheus and that crowd. It makes sense, if you think about it. Aeneas and his contemporaries were able to reach back into the living world through plain efforts. They didn't take over someone else's body like Puppeteers do; they didn't make the walls bleed like Hunters. If you consider their actions as a straightforward use of strength, you have to consider it to be a form of primitive Outrage, which we do. So if they used this type of Outrage, then they're the first Spooks."

After the Sundering occurred and the Shroud materialized between this world and the world of the Quick, it obviously became more difficult for Spooks to affect the Skinlands. As a result many of the first gangs of proto-Spooks began to turn their activities toward one of the Guild's oldest, and if my sources are correct most lucrative practices on this side of the Shroud - namely, the collection and distribution of Pathos among the Restless Dead:

Bladmiroff: "The cults of the dead in Greece and Rome provided an unusual windfall for our forefathers. Both civilizations strongly believed in the existence of an underworld, which bore a lot of similarity to the world they knew. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Anyway, people became very concerned with the status of their deceased friends and loved ones in Hades or wherever, and they took great pains insofar as sacrifices and other things to make the afterlife more comfortable. In Greece, a whole Cult of the Heroes sprang up, fueled a lot by Homer's works, which got people involved in respecting the deeds of their past military giants. It carried over into Rome, too, since most of their mythology was lifted wholesale from Greece.

"So when people began to engage in these sorts of rites, it resulted in a lot of Pathos oozing through the Shroud into the Shadowlands, just ripe for the taking. So the Spook gangs took it, used what they needed, bottled the rest and gave other wraiths access to it. Things were a lot simpler back then, so there wasn't any real problem in this kind of practice. It certainly wasn't illegal by any standard. It was sort of like payment for earlier services rendered. We used to return to the Skinlands to talk with mortals when the Shroud was thin, and we helped the ones we liked as best we could. After the Sundering, we just took the Pathos from the Quick's sacrifices as our due and reasonable payment."

These harvesters were known as Nepentheans, and their practice of harvesting Pathos, according to Bladmiroff, has been a mainstay of the

Spooks' Guild since these earliest times. Public festivals, Coliseum games, temple sacrifices, plays, the Olympics - everything provided some form of raw Pathos for the first Spooks. When Rome fell, Christianity and its rites of worship provided a suitably new resource of Pathos for the Spooks. Pathos, in short, was to had anywhere a Nepenthean could tap into it.

II. The Haunting Time

Along with their newfound trade in Pathos, many Spooks turned toward other activities. When Rome fell and the First Great maelstrom appeared, sending waves of Spectres to attack Stygia and the Isle of Sorrows. Spooks offered their services to Charon and the Legions as mercenaries-for-hire to combat the demons. These wraiths were known collectively as Dolabra - The Axe. None of the names of individual Dolabra mercenaries have come down through the ages, however. Bladomiroff states that this is because of the highly secretive nature of their operations against Spectre hordes. Apparently Charon and the Hierarchy did not want to acknowledge that they had utilized outsiders.

Regardless of the level of Spook involvement in the Maelstrom wars. Bladomiroff is adamant that after the Spectre wars ended and the Second Empire was established, both the Nepentheans and Dolabra found themselves on the outside looking in. Both groups had little in the way of real services to offer wraiths except for selling Pathos. As a result of this lack of direction, a rift developed between the two main camps of Spooks: those who collected Pathos and those who were the supposed veterans of the Spectre wars:

Bladomiroff: *"It was a full-scale turf war. Nepentheans would be waylaid by mercenary Dolabra and vice versa. The infighting got very ugly. The old veterans of the Maelstrom wars used to call in favors from their old Equitae and Legionnaire buddies, and they'd mount an attack on a Nepenthean gang's stronghold. So the Nepentheans'd get Renegades to help them. Since they had no real reason to be together, the Nepentheans would pay the Renegades in distilled Pathos, and create their own mercenaries.*

"Anyone could see that any thought of truce was ridiculous. What the Spooks needed was some sort of organization. When the gangs received the invitation to attend the first Haunters' Conclave, they all jumped at the chance. Neither side wanted to rack up any more casualties. And that's pretty much how the Spooks got their first taste of any overall Guild organization, through the Haunters."

Apparently the Spook gangs were never satisfied with being attached to the Haunters. Whatever semblance of organization and control the Haunters' Guild offered was outweighed by the gap between the Guildmasters and those members who preferred to deal in Outrage as opposed to Pandemonium. The Spook gangs were a vocal minority within the Conclave on this point, but they remained irreducibly a minority. Eventually, certain Spook representatives came before the leaders of the Haunters to announce they wished to leave the Guild to set off on their own:

Bladmiroff: *"The general attitudes of the Quick actually had a lot to do with our decision to leave the haunters' Guild. While still part*

of the Haunters, a few Spooks had begun to take on individual clients in a new field: that of protecting Fetters. This all happened during the Dark Ages, when the Church controlled practically every facet of Peoples' lives. Mortals were obsessed with the afterlife, worrying about whether they'd wind up in Heaven, and were constantly making preparations for the next world, by praying and donating to the Church and making pilgrimages.

"Well, what happened was that wraiths who wanted to keep watch over their families and their lands began to approach the Spooks asking for help in this sort of thing. A lot of them wanted to make sure that their families were all right, but just as many wanted to get back at their enemies from beyond the grave. Spooks began to take on these wraiths as clients, and soon after they started to perform these tasks, the Quick fooled themselves into believing that it was the intercession of saints or guardian angels watching over them. These Spooks even referred to themselves as the Dulians, from an ecclesiastical term for the veneration of saints.

"It wasn't long after this that a group of Dulians, acting as representatives of all Spooks, went to the Haunters and voiced their differences with the direction the Guild was taking. The leader of the delegation was Dulian named Ned Riddle; he's considered to be the man who first articulated The Cause. Anyway, he and some choice Spooks came before the assembled Conclave and stated their terms, and said that they felt overlooked and unwelcome within the Haunters' Guild. They felt that the use of Outrage was still a mostly untapped Arcanos, and they felt that they could do better in trying to expand its uses and continue their work under their own organization.

"So Riddle and the entire company left the Haunters' guild. They took with them a name that a lot of Haunters had been calling them under their breath - Spooks. It was supposed to be a term of derision; I'm told, referring to our unrefined art of Outrage. The formation of the new Guild marked the division of labor among the Spooks according to their particular talents: Dulians were the guardians of The Cause, Nepentheans were Pathos traders, and the Dolabra were a sort of Private Spook Army. In Spook history, they're known as the Three Leagues. Now their descendants are only three of many specialized groups within the Guild, but this trio is considered the original, the oldest set of demarcations within the Guild."

The separation, however, was not amicable. The newly formed Spooks' Guild bore the brunt of a vicious smear campaign orchestrated by the Haunters. One episode in particular illustrates the extremes to which the Haunters went in order to discredit the new Guild:

Bladomiroff: "In Spook history it's called the Village Incident, or just the Incident. You have to understand that the Haunters were livid about Riddle leaving the Guild and taking the rest of the Spooks with him. They went on and on about how we couldn't survive without the Haunters. No Guild would take us seriously, they said without their support we'd be routed by the Hierarchy. I won't say that those first years weren't rough, but on a strictly practical level I think we were doing pretty well on our own.

"Anyway, there was this Circle on the outskirts of Stygia that made its haunt at the intersection of two major Byways. The Restless living

there were all from the same village in life, and had banded together for solidarity and familiarity. There was nothing special about the Circle. The location wasn't what you'd call strategically important in any way. It was just an ordinary community of Restless. If you ask me, that makes what happened all the more senseless.

"The local Hierarchy patrols in the region were alerted that there was a group of Spooks hiding out at this crossroads, which was called the Village. Now, the Hierarchy knew nothing about the new Guild, but they naturally assumed that it was just another type of Spectre or some such. It was the easier answer available.

"The orders came down to root out the Spooks that were hiding out there. So a couple of Hierarchy patrols showed up and ransacked the Village. They destroyed the place, and what wraiths survived they sold to the Reapers in Stygia. The Legions never found any Spooks, though. That's because there weren't any Spooks to be found.

"The Village Incident soon became one of the Hunters' main weapons in their campaign against the Spooks. Rumors spread to all the other Guilds. They said everything from the Spooks were using the Village as a base camp to the Spooks themselves destroyed the Village for no reason. Ned Riddle was furious. He kept insisting that the accusations were not true. The Spooks weren't like that. It didn't matter. A lot of anti-Spook violence came our way in the aftermath of the Incident. There was no reason for it. All the Spooks wanted was their own chance to form a Guild, without any harassment from the Hunters or anyone else.

"It got so bad that we had to fight back. Spooks tangled with anyone who crossed them: other Guilds, Hierarchy, anyone at all. It wasn't a matter of proving ourselves. It was just to stay intact and viable as a separate Guild. Pretty soon Riddle decided that the Spooks had to reach out to the other Guilds to tell their side of the story.

"Riddle went to the Artificers, since they were the oldest guild and had a lot of clout among the others. (They also had a lot of big guys with big hammers, which was a bonus in this situation.) He explained the whole situation to the three Guild masters, including The Cause and the reasons for the breakaway from the Hunters'. The Artificers were very receptive to Riddle's address. They made Riddle a deal: If the Spooks would agree to help the Artificers in their work, the Artificers would officially recognize the Spooks as a Guild and give them whatever help they needed. It was the jackpot, and Riddle quickly accepted it on behalf of the Three Leagues."

The agreement with the Artificers changed the inter-guild political landscape drastically. Now possessing official recognition by the Artificers, the Spooks turned their energies toward clearing their name of the Village Incident stigma:

Bladomiroff: "We still had some friends among the Nihilists, who were never happy with the treatment the Spooks got under the auspices of the Hunters' Guild. Ned Riddle soon discovered the real story - that a Pandora Skia calling himself Despair had fed false information to the Hierarchy about the presence of Spooks in the Village Circle. In other words, this son-of-a-bitch had set us up!

"The heads of the Three Leagues agreed that Despair had to be dealt with. I won't bore you with the details of how we got a hold of him,

except to say that a couple of Nihilists helped point us in the right direction. Riddle gave Despair over to the Dolabra to teach him a lesson about crossing the Spooks. They beat on him and cut him until his corpus was nearly vapor. Then they took a bolt of Stygian silk that the Artificers had treated in soulfire and wound it tightly around his face. It took six-days for the treated cloth to eat out his eyes. And at that point, Despair fell into a Harrowing. He never returned.

"Even Riddle was unnerved about how the Dolabra had dealt with the Haunter, but there was little he could do about it. It was business. The Spooks couldn't let the Haunters continue doing what they were doing to the Guild. After what the Haunters heard happened to Despair, they got religion real fast. The Council quickly called a truce with the Spooks and agreed to make a public apology in front of all of the other Guilds, admitting what they had done and officially recognizing the Spooks as a legitimate entity. Of course, the presence of a bunch of soulforgers in our corner had a lot to do with how quickly they capitulated, but the loss of Despair had been a real blow to the Haunters' Guild. There was no way they could afford something like that again.

"Ned Riddle always said that the look on the head Haunters' faces was priceless. He could barely keep himself from laughing out loud as they stood there and owned up to their actions. With all of the other Guilds as witnesses, a truce was signed between our Guild and theirs, and the Spooks were allowed to get on with the business of expanding the Guild.

"Oh, and those Dolabra? Once they realized what they could do to another wraith to get him to confess, they decided to specialize in it. So they called themselves Harrowsmiths.

"But you probably figured that out already."

III. War Games

No sooner were the Haunters and Spooks officially reconciled to one another than the first stirrings that would later blossom into the War of the Guilds manifested themselves. While the Spooks' Guild existed ostensibly as a single unit, the different factions within the Guild often followed their own agendas, sometimes coming into conflict with one another in the process:

Bladomiroff: *"The Guild still underwent a lot of growing pains at this point, and the War of the Guilds didn't exactly help matters. Spooks fought on both sides, each to his own ends. Shroudbreaker squads fought for whomever paid them, no matter what Guild it was. The Mementomorians played practically every side against the middle and ran a huge black market in Pathos, weapons from Artificer forges and the odd relic or two.*

"Even the Dulians got into the act. Ned Riddle had made a public plea to all Spooks to stand united with the Haunters based on the terms of the truce. He was still talking to the Nihilists, and made his Haunter contacts aware of the Artificers' plans to make themselves the lead Guild in Stygia. But Riddle was just covering his own ass, if you ask me. He and his Dulians were working with Artificers to create instant relics from across the Shroud. They'd destroy Inhabited targets and take a percentage off the top, which Riddle would forward to the Nepentheans to put on the

black market. Hey, there are always more than two sides to a war. And we were on every single damned one of them."

The cessation of hostilities in A.D. 1354 left the Artificers in control of much of freewraith politics and activity. While the Compact of Guilds granted equal status to the 13 major freewraith Guilds on paper, it was evident from the postbellum atmosphere that the Artificers held firmly onto the reign of the large community. While many former members of Guilds have openly lamented the machinations of the Artificers in this regard, Bladomiroff offers a different perspective on the Spooks' reaction:

Bladomiroff: *"Things didn't exactly change with the Compact of 1354. Sure, the Artificers pretty much pulled the strings, but they'd been doing that for centuries. The Spooks settled into the niche that fit them on the Council and went about their usual business. We still had a pretty good relationship with the Hammerboys from back when they gave us a break during the Village Incident. A lot of their forge boys still threw work our way, and the Leagues gladly took it. Besides, after what happened to the Masquers' rep who started yelling about how the Artificers were railroading everyone else into the Compact, the Spooks decided it wasn't worth the effort to make waves. It would have been bad or The Cause, and bad for business in general. Unlike the Haunters, we're not that crazy."*

After the ratification of the Compact, the Spooks' Guild turned inward, streamlining its organization. Ned Riddle and his opposite numbers, Francesco di Toscano of the Nepentheans and Hermann Reinhardt of the Dolabra, formed the Commission, the governing body of the Spooks' Guild. Bladomiroff has mentioned that the Commission soon expanded from three to four members, eventually including the leader of the Harrowsmiths, one Aristide Plumet, known more familiarly as Plummet (pronounced like the verb).

Bladomiroff: *"They had to let the Harrowsmiths in. It wasn't like the new Commissioners could deny that these psychos existed. After all, the revenge they'd exacted on Despair was still legend among all the Guilds. And to cut them loose from the Guild was too dangerous. A bunch of loose cannons like that running around was an accident waiting to happen. Popular wisdom is that the other Commissioners figured they could control Plummet and his crowd better if the Harrowsmiths were merged into the structure of the Guild. I think they did it so they could have their own bunch of hitters to select from. Either way."*

IV. The Breaking

At first the *Dictum Mortuum* had little real effect on the Spooks, or any other Guild that specialized in dealing with the mortal world. After all, it's not like the Legions wanted to enforce it, any more than a policeman who likes a cold beer enjoyed enforcing Prohibition. The Law did, however, serve to make enemies of the Spooks and the Monitors' Guild. After the passage of the *Dictum*, the Monitors began to comport themselves as its strict constructionists. Either through a fear of Hierarchy reprisal or for other, unknown reasons, the Monitors withdrew their services of Lifeweb from the general population of the Restless Dead. Wraiths seeking status reports on their Fetters who were ignored and rebuffed by the Monitors (who were not above leading the odd Legionnaire

or two toward any refused clients), took matters into their own hands. Spooks, particularly the Dulians, openly criticized this change of attitude, while they simultaneously moved into the vacuum the Monitors created. Bladomiroff confirms that this state of affaires explains the virulent animosity between the two Guilds.

Regardless, the *Dictum Mortuum* threw the Council of Guilds into a tizzy over the status of those few Guilds who made interaction with the Quick their livelihood. Debates raged among the Guildmasters about whether the Guilds as a community should proceed more cautiously around the Hierarchy. The Spooks were remarkably silent during these debates; however, they had already found other avenues to pursue:

Bladomiroff: *"The council debates were going on in Stygia under a siege mentality. The Renegades had begun their assault on the Onyx Tower during the early 1500s, and Riddle foresaw a way to use the situation to ensure that Charon and the Deathlords would owe the Spooks a lot of favors. My guess is that he figured that putting Charon in his debt would get the Dictum revoked. So he came up with a way to make sure that Charon owed him one.*

"The job fell to Hermann Reinhardt. He sent Dolabra members to infiltrate the Renegade ranks and track their movements. These Dolabra reported to Reinhardt and Riddle, bringing back the Renegades' movements, supply status and other vital information. Riddle and Reinhardt then sold the information to the Equitae and Charon. They were instrumental in pinpointing key weaknesses in the invaders' assault plans. In essence, the Dolabra practically handed the Renegades over to the Hierarchy on a silver platter."

These Dolabra, known within the Guild as Reinhardt's Raiders, became a key factor in shoring up Stygian defenses during the First Abomination. The Spooks' good reputation within the Hierarchy however, was to be short-lived.

Guild unrest increased throughout the next few decades, and this turmoil touched even the Spooks. Despite the Guild's clandestine involvement with the Equitae, Riddle involved himself and the Dulians more and more in Council politics, throwing his weight and that of the Guild behind the simmering rebellion the Artificers had been half-planning for centuries. It again split the Spooks' Guild into two sides, with Riddle and his Dulians supporting the coup and Toscano, Reinhardt and Plummet against the idea:

Bladomiroff: *"Reinhardt and Toscano went to the Artificers and let them know about a deal Riddle had made with the Hunters and some remnants of the Fishers to usurp the Artificers from their place of primacy in the Council. It may just have saved the Spooks' Guild. Without the support of the Entire Spooks' Guild, the Hunters' revolt never materialized. I'm sure that we'd have been subsumed right back into the Hunters, the way Riddle was acting.*

"Most Spooks who survived the coup attempt and subsequent Breaking will tell you that they never thought it was a wise idea. It was better to let the Artificers have their fun and inflate their egos, though, than to refuse to go along. So we did, and we paid the predictable price. The aftermath of the Decree of the Breaking practically decimated the Dulians. No one'll admit to it, but I think Reinhardt and Toscano handed Riddle and

most of his crew over to the Hierarchy after the failed coup. And I know a lot of old Spooks who would agree with me.

"The future of the Dulians was a thorny issue. A lot of Spooks wanted to disband the Dulian League altogether. It's a good thing they didn't, though. If the Dulian League went, The Cause went with them, and so did our rationale for existing as a Guild. So the Commission began the painstaking process of reforming the Dulian League under the strictest interpretation of The Cause. The other Spooks combed through the ranks of former Dulians and plucked those who had refused to go along with Ned Riddle. There weren't a lot of them. I'll tell you, but there were enough to rebuild the new group of Dulians. These former Dulians chose new leaders and stuck to protecting Fetters - and stayed out of politics. They even gave themselves a new name, to symbolize the break with the past. They became the Lifeliners."

V. The Modern Spooks

After the Breaking was officially declared, some Spooks began to look toward other areas of influence. With Stygia growing at an exponential rate, the ability of the Legions to keep order throughout the Empire got weaker and weaker. Eventually it was decided by Charon that the first Necropolis should be founded, in the city of London. According to Bladomiroff, the plans for a second city of the Dead were just what many Spooks were looking for:

Bladomiroff: "To put it kindly, the treatment of the first Necropolis in the *Historia Popularis Stygiae* is bullshit. Hell, what'd you expect when you've got a 700 something year old sexually ambivalent Italian writing it? The process was not as simple as sending in a brace of Stygian civil servants and the odd detachment of Legionnaires. It took a lot of work to found Necropolis London, and a lot of muscle, and I don't mean the nice wholesome sweat-of-your-brow kind. Squatters had to be relocated. People had to be, erm, 'persuaded' to accept the new order of things.

"The Legions couldn't do it alone, especially when there was a massive network of Spooks running around London, led by an odd highwayman named William Castor. He was the head of a gang that called itself the Charing Crosses, after the neighborhood where they were headquartered. When the Legions tried to clear out this and other sections of London, Castor sent men to block them. When the Smiling Lord tried to set up central sites for collecting recently arrived souls, Castor hijacked the caravans. The Centurion's could barely flinch without Castor knowing and countering it. Finally they gave up, went to Castor and offered to lay off him and his Spooks if he helped do a bit of urban renewal.

"Castor agreed, and the legions were able to get the London Necropolis underway. After things got settled, he transformed the organization of his Spooks into the first of the Gray Gangs. Castor appointed himself its leader, or Controller. And once Castor proved successful, other Spooks all over the Shadowlands in the sites of future Necropoli followed his lead. Individual Armadars who organized the Spooks within other Necropoli became Controllers too, and these wraiths became the building blocks of the Gray Gangs.

"The Gray Gangs ushered the Spooks' Guild into the modern era. Within a couple of centuries, Necropoli sprang up on practically every major city in the Western world, all under the jurisdiction of the Stygian Empire. Souls flooded the streets, and Defenders pored into the Guild. The old system of the Three Leagues, especially in these new Necropoli, had to be reformed again.

"The Commission took its cue from two fast-growing entities among the Quick: labor unions and organized crime. They abolished the Three Leagues and set up a system of Locals and Combinations. The theory was that Locals would coordinate the activities of all Spooks under a specific vocation. All Lifeliners in a Necropolis or region in the Shadowlands would belong to a dedicated Local, headed by a single Controller. All Dolabra would be under their own Controller, all Gray Gangs, and so on. The combination system placed all the Locals in one or more Necropoli under the overall leadership of a Boss, who would then direct and coordinate the activities of the different Locals under his aegis in accordance with the Commission. The two oldest groups of Spooks even updated their names. The Nepentheans, with a nod to their classical roots, renamed themselves the Mementomorians. With the rise of the spiritualist movement in Europe and America, the Dolabra changed their name to reflect their change in focus. They became the Shroudbreakers. Stygia was moving into the modern world, and the Spooks made sure they followed suit."

The arrival of the so-called "Gray Gangs" on the larger Guild scene marks the turning point in the overall direction of the Spooks' Guild. Of all of the Locals and Combinations within the Guild, those affiliated with the Gray Gangs have grown the fastest in the modern industrial era. The Gray Gangs have become the Locals of choice for a significant percentage of the younger Guild members, who see unlimited opportunities in burrowing deep into the Imperial bureaucracy and attempting to control the output of the Hierarchy machine. It is this development that has preoccupied the entire Spooks' Guild since these Gangs began their rise to power, and its resolution will apparently shape the course of all future Spook endeavors:

Bladomiroff: "The new breed of Spooks has the old guard shaking their heads. The old-timers keep reiterating that The Cause centers around the dedication to assist individual wraiths, not the urge to grab hold of the government. The Gray Gangsters reply by saying that The cause is supposed to be fulfilled by any means necessary, and that keeping the authorities off one's back is the best way to go about one's business unmolested.

"It's not going to go away soon, and it's not going to go away quietly, that's for sure. The new breed of Spooks is even starting to make its presence felt in the older Locals. Mementomorians are getting pushed by Spooks who are selling inferior Pathos just for the quick buck. Shroudbreakers are starting to bully wraiths around instead of watching the line between the Quick and the Dead. Even the Lifeliners aren't immune to the effects of the new generation. Some Defenders are starting to demand better compensation for their work, or are even taking on their own clients illegally. The Commission of Five still keeps a tight hold on the Guild's operations, but I don't know how long the status quo is going to last. I'm afraid the Guild might split permanently; there's precedence, after all. If it does, then The Cause is done for, and Oblivions' one step closer to winning."

END PART ONE OF REPORT

Memorandum

TO: The Deathlords

FROM: Overbrook

RE: Following on Deposition of Ivan (Jackie Blades) Bladomiroff

My Dear and Most August Lords:

I am sorry to report that further testimony from Bladomiroff will not be forthcoming. It appears that the Masquers whom we had contracted to give Bladomiroff a new identity were in fact a group of Moliated Harrowsmiths, who then proceeded to infiltrate the holding center where Bladomiroff was being kept and destroy him.

I am unable to discover at this time how the Harrowsmiths gained access to the cell where Bladomiroff was being held. I can only speculate that they either somehow coerced the guards who patrolled the cell blocks and or duped them into believing that they were sent by the Magisterium to begin work on the transformation of Bladomiroff into a different individual.

I cannot but extend my most forthright apologies to you Lords at the unfortunate developments that have transpired. I have initiated a through investigation into the breakdown of security in our holding center, and hope to have the culprits in my hands forthwith. Yet I fear that any further information about the present maneuvers of the Spooks' Guild will be impossible to obtain, as the ostentatious hit on Bladomiroff tells us that the Spooks have definitively learned of our fact-finding endeavors, and possibly how to circumvent them as well

B.C.O

Overbrook