

... Casts a Shadow



Seventeen hundred and thirty nine days.

That's how long we kept the lights burning in and around the armory — day and night, rain or shine. After the first few days, we learned to fall asleep with the ruddy glow coming through our eyelids. After a couple of weeks, we got comfortable with it. By a year in, we couldn't imagine being without it. We slept in hammocks with lights strung along the walls, so that no shadows gathered under us. We kept the place warm so there was no need for blankets that They might have crawled out from under. Hell, even our back-ups had back-ups: we plastered the inside of one of the smaller rooms with those glow-in-the-dark stars you put on a little kid's bedroom ceiling, just in case the lights in there ever went out. The bigger rooms got even more elaborate treatments. Our Openers went beyond the "light border" and brought fresh food from far and wide to supplement what we grew in the nearby park, what we sowed and harvested only under the noonday sun, and what we fished out of the river.

David was a mathematician from MIT and Mia was an architect. They figured out the plans for how to do it. They mapped out every line and angle of that building and told us how to make all of the shadows disappear. Hell, we even installed lights in the toilets, if you'd believe that. Between Feng, Jennifer, Hector, and Russ, we had the generators running 24/7 on pretty much anything that could conceivably be used for fuel. We didn't even care during that month or so that the entire place stank like stale French fries. We had light.

The Removal Challenge proceeds as normal and José's player winds up with the following suit spread:



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The GM builds the Resolution Deck and José's player takes a spade from Manuel's Active Cards to contribute (he'd rather fail than die!). As fate would have it, José's player then draws a spade from the Resolution Deck. José stumbles, but Manuel appears as a bloodied, horrific apparition between José and the shadow-creatures. The creatures hesitate, staring at the ghost. José isn't out of danger yet, but his brother has saved him for the moment. (Note that José has failed at his action – to run away from Them – but has not left play.)

Dead Souls in the Between

In the Between, ghosts are solid and cannot use ghost-powers. *Spirits* are functionally human, though if they leave the Between they become ephemeral again. **Ghosts** are solid, but wander drunkenly after their fixated items/people, unable to form much in the way of coherent thought.

Whether in the Between or out, They can see dead souls for what they are. However, creatures from the shadows can only interact with phantoms when in the Between, meaning that on our side of the shadows ghosts actually have some advantage over Them. In the Between, however, it's a different story: neither *spirits* nor **ghosts** can use their otherworldly powers there and They are capable of touching, and therefore attacking, dead souls. A phantom torn to pieces or otherwise "killed" in the Between is gone forever.

Dead souls cannot undergo Removal Challenges, but they can assist (or hinder) PCs during the process. See "Dead Souls & Removal Challenges" p. 19.

Laying the Dead to Rest

A **ghost** can be put to rest by either destroying its fixated item/person/location or by generating enough Memory Points with that person's memory to allow the dead character to *light a candle*, and then dedicating those Points to the character (that is, not spending them for any other purpose).



Closers can *Close shadows*, and so they often work in tandem with Openers. They can also cut Them off from the Between; since They can't Open by Themselves, a Closer can often keep a bad situation from getting worse. Closing is a Stamina Challenge — most Closers describe the sensation as physically forcing the edges of the shadow to rejoin. The difficulty is determined by the size of the shadow (the Closer doesn't necessarily have to be able to reach both edges of the shadow, but if she can't, this raises the difficulty). Injury or a large Between Point pool also increases the difficulty. Closer characters must take a card-cap in Focus.

Binders

It's not going to hurt us. It doesn't want to.

Binders want to *control*. The world is total chaos; for many Binders (none of whom realized their ability until recently), the ability to impose any

sort of order is all that keeps them sane. Binders are well-practiced social creatures, understanding how to speak to people, how to listen to them, and how to get what they want. Some negotiate, some intimidate, some lie, and some simply lead, but Binders deal well with people. Binding takes a toll on the Binder's body, however. Closing is strenuous, but Binding is actively painful. Every act of Binding causes scarring on the character's body, and no one is yet sure what the long-term effects might be.

Binders can *control Them*. This control doesn't last very long and can't be used to force a shadow-creature to take complicated actions ("lead me to Him" has been attempted many times and it always ends badly — maybe this time, though!). Binding is a Humanity Challenge. Binders often refer to commanding Them as a purified, raw form of social communication; imparting meaning by pure intent, without the trappings of conversation, body language, or facial expression. They also agree that it hurts. All Binders must take a Stamina card-cap.

- **What is the goal?** When you know the goal, you can work backwards to get to the “now” suggested by the questions. Remember that getting to the goal isn’t just a matter of reaching the location, rescuing a target, or finding the Macguffin. It’s more a matter of all of the players making the essential choice, which means that once you know the answers to the questions and the particulars of the characters, you can start to think of a potential path to that goal, and ways to incorporate the Challenges that will enable that choice.



Let’s take a concrete example.

- **Where are you?** In Buffalo, in the Central Terminal. Since the end of the world, it’s been used as a hub for a growing community and the land around it has been used to grow food. The hydroelectric dam at Niagara Falls still works, providing power to the community and the surrounding area.
- **What just happened?** The power went out. Something’s wrong at the dam.
- **How are you following the rules?** The community takes care of its own and it has power, which means it’s a popular destination for people. The community has a working system of farming and other services.
- **How are you breaking the rules?** As groups function, hierarchy is inevitable and one has started to form here. Vicki, one of the players’ characters, is becoming recognized as the leader of the community.
- **What is the goal?** Get to the dam and, if possible, fix the problem.

I ran this scenario at UBCon in Buffalo, NY, in April 2012. I had three players, one of whom had played **curse the darkness** a few times and had a better idea of what to expect, and the other two were new to the game.

With that scenario in mind, what did I have to work with? I knew that the group had a community and that it was pretty well off; it had power, agriculture and probably enough population to have doctors and other skilled folks. I knew that the group regarded having a leader as a clear violation of the rules and that one of the characters was taking on the role of leader, so that gave me a target in case He noticed them. I knew, too, that I needed to get cards into their Banks quickly, because realizing the goal wasn’t going to be especially difficult within the story – all they had to do was go through the Between. That meant that getting into the dam and solving the problem was going to be the difficult bit.

Working backwards from the solution (get to the dam), I didn’t want to make the problem with the dam too technical, since I wouldn’t be able to sell that (I’m not an engineer). There was no particular reason why He would stop the dam working, so it had to be either a natural occurrence or a man-made issue. I decided there was a lot more drama inherent in peo-