



Slipped Through the Cracks

Life is a constant struggle for the Lost, and it's the Judge's job to bring this across. Simple things most people take for granted, like sleeping, eating, and having shelter are never a guarantee for anyone on the street.

Sleeping

Rest is immeasurably important to survival and sanity, especially for the homeless. It's also near impossible to get. There are laws forbidding anyone to sleep in public, on subways or pretty much anywhere else that isn't a residence. For those without residences, the law doesn't make many suggestions. Caffeine and stimulants are an option, but take that route too long and psychosis starts to set in. There are shelters of course, but those will be discussed. Sometimes it's not the law that keeps the homeless awake, but the constant stress and paranoia of living in public around kids who think it's funny to screw with you or crack addicts trying to steal your possessions.

However, when everything is said and done, the homeless are left with the same choices we all have: Sleep or your body and mind will suffer.

After a while of being awake, the brain has to work harder to counteract the effects of sleep deprivation, which means it

doesn't react to anything else as quickly. Memory starts to go, tremors set in, and the sufferer becomes irritable or depressed. Lack of sleep also releases certain hormones and blocks the release of others, resulting in severe changes in body type. The sleepless feels hungrier than ever, but nothing they eat is satisfying. All the while they keep gaining weight. The immune system isn't able to function properly, making it more likely they will get sick, and getting sick on the street can be a death sentence.

After extended periods of time, hallucinations start to take hold, and one's perception of reality starts to break down (something already tenuous for most of the Lost)

Shelters

For the most part, there are two types of homeless shelters. One type is run by the government, the other by churches. Shelters seem like an obvious solution for food and a place to sleep to most people who've never seen one. In theory, they're a great idea. In practice, most people would rather sleep on the sidewalk than stay in a shelter.

To begin with, most cities' population of homeless far outweigh the amount of space they have available in shelters. Many are turned away if the shelter is at capacity. People who volunteer at shelters usually are there because they want to help, but shelters are run not by people who share this sense of charity. Those running government shelters are doing it because it's their job. They don't really care about the individuals, just the number of people they were able to cram into housing so they can show it to their bosses and meet their quota. Church shelters are often run as a misguided attempt to save the souls of those who they perceive to be sinners. Occupants are forced to sit through sermons if they want to have a place to sleep

and eat. After a short time, it's easy for even the volunteers to become jaded in an environment like this.

Arguably the most dangerous aspect of shelters however, are the other inhabitants. Many of the people staying in shelters are harboring some kind of drug problem, or are just psychotic. It's not hard to imagine what happens when you cram too many of these people together in one place. Belongings get stolen, people get hurt, and disease spreads rampantly.

If one of the Lost are desperate for a place to stay and choose a shelter as their best option, it's more difficult for them to get into one than it would be for a normal person. They have to get noticed by the staff, which is difficult to do without causing a scene which would get them thrown out anyway. Once they're in, they'll still have to deal with the other occupants. It's easier for the homeless to notice the lost, especially in cramped quarters. Though some may wish to help them out, others may wish to take advantage of them.

Health and Hygiene

The streets are a frighteningly harsh place to live. Constant exposure to the elements, overcrowded shelters and bad nutrition leave one open to a host of diseases and traumatic injuries for which there is no healthcare. The death rate for the homeless is about four times that of the general population. Tuberculosis, STD's and other communicable diseases are all too common.

Keeping up with hygiene also becomes monumentally more difficult. Everything in the city streets is, or eventually becomes, disgustingly filthy. It's next to impossible to keep anything clean for any extended period of time. When it's never a certainty whether or not you can eat today, it's not always possible to get a shower and a shave on a regular basis.

Those who have been on the streets for a while often have to find ways around these hurdles however. If a gym locker room is available, it's probably the best option. Nothing beats a hot shower after a few days or weeks of sleeping on cold concrete. When that's not available, fast food and gas station restrooms will do in a pinch. It just takes a few minutes to splash some water under one's armpits, brush one's teeth and get a quick shave before people start knocking on the door, but the relief that comes from this makeshift shower routine is well worth it.

Alcohol

Though not as immediately dangerous as hard drugs, alcohol still contributes to the downfall of thousands. It's easy to get for those who are in a dark place and can't see any way out, namely because it's legal. In the short term it helps them deal with their problems...or at least they think it helps. Alcohol is a depressant. All it does it helps them forget momentarily, and once that moment is over, They're still stuck in the same place, looking for another way out. When you're constantly trying to find a way to escape, you're not dealing with the problems that got you there in the first place. You can't grow, you can't climb your way out.

Drugs

There are few things on earth that can tear an individual down like a drug habit, few things that can so neatly wrap salvation and damnation together. One can't go for very long living on the streets without feeling the destructive influence of drugs, whether they're using or not.

Some started as a way to escape the situation they found them-

selves stuck in. They didn't see any way out, save for brief excursions into senselessness. For others, drugs were the means to their current end. Once there, they couldn't find a way out. The streets of any given city are filled with users of some kind. Time begins to wear them down until there's nothing left in their brain but a couple of flickering synapses that drive them to fulfill the only desire they have left: to get high again. This makes them dangerous not only to themselves, but to the people around them. Plenty of people have turned up dead in the wake of grudges with addicts. Reasons range from a payment for the last deal to a bad look at the wrong time. Drugs is a pretty broad term covering a wide range of poisons, each with a different affect on its user, but all with a similar end result. Most street drugs are highly addictive, meaning that a user is going to spend what little money they have trying to get high.

Crack

Sometime around the 80's, dealers found that if they skipped a few of the filtration and extraction processes involved with creating Cocaine, they could create more of it for cheaper. Crack-Cocaine, or just "Crack," soon hit the streets, and suddenly getting high got a lot more affordable.

When a user takes a hit, massive levels of dopamine are released from the brain. This creates an intense euphoria, but only lasts for about 15 minutes. They get energized, nervous, and excited. They also stop eating for a while. After the dopamine wears off, an intense depression sinks in, pushing the user to take another hit. Dopamine levels take a long time to regenerate, so a Crack addict is often haunted by the pleasure of their first high, unable to get back to it, but damned to a life of trying.

Crack typically comes in the form of a rock, so it can't be snorted like Cocaine. It has to be lit and smoked through a pipe. It has a high melting point and evaporates quickly, so usually the pipe is pretty short. Putting a blistering hot pipe up to one's mouth usually causes dry, cracked, bleeding lips known as "crack lips." Less commonly, the drug is injected through a syringe. Because of the acidity of Crack prepared in this way, and the frequency a user needs to take a hit to sustain their high, their veins start to erode away.

Heroin

Heroin first showed up in Mesopotamia, around 3400 BC. In the early 1900's it was marketed as a cough medicine for children. After a little more research was done, it was found that Heroin was essentially a highly addictive, more dangerous form of morphine. It has some of the nastiest withdrawal symptoms of pretty much any drug out there. Kids don't use it as much anymore.

There are a number of ways one can take Heroin. Snorting or injecting it are probably the most popular, but it can also be smoked. This is called "Chasing the Dragon." Once taken, euphoria rushes throughout the users body. Their limbs get heavy and their mouth gets dry. Their mind starts to slow down and they enter a dreamy, half asleep state. Feeling gets dulled down to almost nothing.

Users who've been taking Heroin for a long time start to build up an immunity to it, so they need more and more to keep getting high. If they go as little as a few hours without getting high, withdrawal starts to kick in. Insomnia, diarrhea, muscle spasms and vomiting, just to name a few. The first 48 to 72 hours are when the symptoms are the worst. After about a week, they begin to subside.

Long term use has a lot of bad consequences. Over time, users develop infections in their heart and lungs, collapsed veins, liver disease and other health issues. A large enough dose will kill them on the spot.

Meth

Meth comes in a variety of forms; powder, tablets, a crystal that resembles ice, cherry or vanilla flavored...the list goes on. It's fairly easy to produce for those with a working knowledge of chemistry. It's components can be found in pharmacies and supermarkets. The main ingredient is ephedrine, an over the counter cold medicine, but other chemicals like Drano, gasoline additives and battery acid are commonly used in the process as well.

The drug triggers a release of norepinephrine, dopamine and serotonin. This causes a sudden increase of energy and attentiveness, and euphoria. The user become very talkative and easily agitated. The pleasure that comes out of Sex and listening to music is amped up, and they become easily invested in repetitive tasks.

The downsides are pretty intense however. Users stop eating, and commonly get tremors. Their teeth begin to rot away, partly because of a craving for sugar and partly because they're always grinding their teeth (commonly known as "meth mouth"). They can't sleep, they sweat all the time and usually have diarrhea and/or get nauseus.

Using Meth for a long time results in inflammations in the brain and spinal chord ultimately leading to serious brain damage, Formication (a condition where the afflicted believes their skin to be crawling with bugs) and possibly death by way of a stroke or heart failure.



Strange, Loathsome Monsters

THE NAMED ONES

There are some evils that saturate the lives of hundreds of Lost. Addiction, destruction, hopelessness...the list goes on. The despair that arose from the destruction of so many human beings from these evils soon coalesced into creatures so great and terrible that they could hardly be associated with even the most potent Cobwebs. They would appear in any city at any time, and wreak destruction upon any who came in contact with them. Tales spread of the them, and it wasn't long before they were given names by those who had survived encounters with them in fearful [not respect but something else]. Now, the mere mention of the Named Ones is enough to chill even the most stalwart of the Lost.

Mr. Piggy

There is little that the Lost have left to hold on to. A few precious sparks of memory, some places they loved at some point and a few material possessions; anchors that keep them tied to the hope that the future may hold something better for them as their past did. These souvenirs and places are the only things they have left, however, and they are precious to them. It is for this reason Mr. Piggy is so universally feared by all the Lost.

There is some debate among the Lost as to what truly

brought him into existence. Most people say he is born out of the greed of the rich, consuming everything for their own selfish benefit. Others who have been on the street longer, some who have survived an encounter with him, say it's not so simple as a bunch of mustache twirling villains spending their money to destroy the lives of the wretched street-dwelling scum. They say he may be the result of the city consuming itself, constantly mutating, cannibalizing itself in an effort to keep growing. The victims of this mutation are the old places, the historic buildings, the cheap housing, and anything else the city perceives to be useless. Perhaps it's a combination of the two, or maybe it's none. The cause, it seems, isn't as devastating as the effect for the Lost.

Piggy's reason for existence is to consume. He'll consume anything he can get his hands on, but he's not a mindless force of nature. He plays at being civilized and has sickly refined tastes. He vastly prefers to destroy things of value to an individual. Homes, objects, or anything else the Lost hold dear.

Like many of the Cobwebs, he can take several different forms based on what he needs to accomplish at the time. Most of the time he'll look like a fat, smelly scrounger dressed in a raggy tweed overcoat and a red hood. His voice has an air of superiority, and he tends to over pontificate, but he snorts when he laughs. He'll usually try to catch one of the lost in a conversation and try to pull information out of them as to what's most precious to them. He'll usually have things to trade, but they all provide immediate gratification. Drugs, food and water, porn, even money. Nothing to match the value of the object he's trying to attain however.

If he can get something from some poor sap, he'll immediately force it into his gullet no matter the size. If it's a place he's managed to get from them, it will simply not be

there if the Lost goes to see it later. Objects taken in this way are missed much more than if they were taken by anyone else. They'll dream about the object, and feel it's absence almost all the time. It takes weeks for the feeling to fade, and even then it'll never go away completely.

Legends tell of a few souls that sought out Mr. Piggy to reclaim that which he took from them. Most never returned, but a few who did described another shape he took when angered. The tweed coat and hood tore away as an impossibly large, obese, legless torso pulled itself out. It dragged itself around on long, spindly arms. It's hands were incredibly powerful and big enough to enclose an entire body within them. It's skin was so pale it was translucent, revealing the veins beneath. Where it's head should be, it had a hogs head with black, empty eye sockets, though somehow it was still able to see.

Most are so terrified by the sight of this thing that they were devoured, mind and body, unable to find the strength to defend themselves. Some were able to escape alive, but would rather deal with the loss of their precious possession than face the monster again. A brave few met it in combat, slashing it's belly open and pulling out whatever it was that the beast ate, or decapitating it only to find that they were in the place Piggy took from them in the first place.

The Litterbug

The Lost are echoes of their former selves, brought into being by some despair so terrible their reality rearranged itself in order for them not to ever know just how terrible it was. Despite this, despair is an ever present, never welcome force in their lives. For some, things get worse and worse gradually until they become Dimmerstiffs. Every once in a blue moon,

one person has such a terrible immediate fate befall them that they become literal beacons of despair. It is to these people that the Litterbug is drawn.

The Litterbug is so frightening to it's victims partly because it has no real shape to speak of. It shows up at the precise moment when some unimaginable sorrow has befallen someone. Often if an individual has lost their entire Gathering, or someone else intimately important to them it's a sure sign that the Litterbug is just around the corner, though there are a myriad of other similarly dark circumstances that could draw it's attention.

The wind will pick up and a few pieces of trash will blow by. Some of these will get stuck on any of the bystanders. As the wind gets more and more intense, more trash begins blowing in. Soon there is a literal tornado of newspapers, fastfood containers, cans and other pieces of trash surrounding the source of the despair. It covers anyone in the immediate vicinity from head to toe. Some say that an ominous face is sometimes visible in the violent tornado of garbage. As the trash begins to blow away, only the victims it covered aren't there anymore.

One of the strangest aspects about the whole situation is that the individual whose despair brought about the Litterbug is unaffected. The whole time they're stuck in a trance-like state, unaware of anything that's going on around them. Afterwards, they can't be convinced that anything bad happened to them, or that anyone really disappeared. They just forget.

Inevitably the people who disappeared will show up later somewhere a few weeks later. No one knows what they go through in the brief time they've disappeared, only that they are deeply scarred by it and will never be the same again. Often they'll be found in an alley or dumpster, covered in garbage

and catatonic. Some are found washed up in a river having drowned, or dead on the street having starved themselves.

In some rare situations, the one who brought the Litterbug around in the first place can be found and convinced to face the thing that happened to them. It first has to be ascertained what it was exactly, because they themselves will never know. This is usually done using Ragpennys and Glimmerjoints. It's an extraordinarily dangerous task doing this however, as the feelings stirred up by this event will always bring the Litterbug back to claim those who are responsible for bringing the emotions back up. It is possible, in some rare situations, for the depression not to overtake the subject of the Litterbug's interest. If they are able to face and overcome the despair, the monster disperses and those who it took appear over the next few days with no memory of where they've been, but with terrible, indescribable nightmares.

The White Lady

They say we always hurt the ones we love. With any addiction, this is too true. Though the hell that the user's body and mind are put through are bad, it's worse for their loved ones to have to watch. This torment that comes out of loving an addict is what gave birth to the White Lady.

"Lady" is a term used loosely, because she'll take the form of a male or female based on what she wants to achieve, though she'll always dress in white. She preys on Lost who've recently found someone who they loved at one point. She's drawn to newfound sparks of hope.

The White Lady appears at first as an attractive philanthropist looking to help out someone in need. The fact that she can actually see the Lost doesn't even register with most of her victims, and if it's brought to their attention most

won't care. They're too excited that someone from the outside can interact with them.

She'll work on building up a relationship with her victims, being everything they could ever want in a companion. If they fall in love with her, she disappears immediately. After a week or so of misery and loneliness, she'll appear again, only now every time she spends time with her victim, their loved one begins to suffer. They become inexplicably ill with symptoms that don't seem to match any known malady. Their mind starts to slowly drift into madness. They begin to forget who the people are around them, and whenever they fall asleep they dream about a strange woman dressed in white tormenting them. This will continue until the afflicted person is dead, at which point the White Lady leaves the Lost forever.

It's said by many that the White Lady can easily be defeated. Unlike Mr. Piggy, who takes the form of a massive grotesque monster or the Litterbug, who takes no form that can be conceivably hurt, the White Lady has never been known to put up a fight. She'll ignore any requests to leave however, so the only way to rid oneself of her destructive presence is to kill her. It can't be done by anyone who doesn't love her with all their heart and soul. Those who say it's easy to kill her never had to strangle the life out of someone who meant the world to them. Like any addict kicking an addiction, they have to kill the one source of comfort they've had to rely on.

After the deed is done, the afflicted loved one makes a miraculous recovery. The tragic irony is that they can't see the Lost responsible for their sickness or recovery, and they won't know the terrible sacrifice they had to make in order to save them.

DIMMERSTIFFS

Eater of Sins

The Lost are a society within the larger society that's rejected them. In order for any society to function, it must have laws. In order to have laws, a society must have punishments. This is how the Eater of Sins got it's name.

This creature lurks in the bowels of the city, within the massive labyrinth of the sewer system. Like most Dimmerstiffs, it has a host of Dragranks at it's beck and call. Unlike most Dimmerstiffs, it never has to leave it's nest because the Lost send their own to feed it.

Any time one of the Lost commits a crime against another one of their own, a tribunal is called. A glyph is scrawled in white chalk on every street corner:



It dissappears after the first good rain, but it means that all the Gatherings in the immediate vacinity are expected to attend and judge the accused. The facts are presented by an impartial party, and the guilty is given a chance to plead their case. In the end, everyone present gets to vote whether the accused is innocent or guilty by show of a thumbs up or down.

If they are found guilty, they're taken to a Flickerport that brings them to some undisclosed location in the sewers, the domain of the Eater of Sins. All Flickerports are one-way only, so the guilty party has little chance of finding their own way out.

The Eater's Dragranks are hideously mutated. Some have extra limbs that hang lifelessly from their body, or mishapen heads. Others crawl around on all fours, feeding on sewage. Their eyes are large, pale white orbs that are extremely sensitive to light. They skitter around in the dark,

whispering and plotting, attempting to lead their victim into traps they've set up all throughout the tunnels. If they're able to capture the hapless wanderer, they'll usually spend some time torturing them and starving them before bringing them to their master.

The Eater of Sins is aptly named. It looks like it's done nothing but eat for decades. It's chamber is in the deepest part of the tunnels, a cylindrical room stretching up a few hundred feet, whose walls are perforated with large drainage pipes. The pipes spout raw sewage into a pool that the Eater resides in at the bottom. The creature itself is a slimey pink mass of amorphous flesh covered in an exposed network of thick red veins. Heads and limbs push their way out and sink back in as they are needed for feeding or talking.

Few have escaped the tunnels, but those who have are given pardon for their crime, whatever it was. Those who've heard the stories know that no one would dare risk being sent back to deal with the Eater of Sins.

The Vermin God

Cities are host to a thriving ecosystem of cockroaches, rats and other unpleasant pests. For most, all they'll see of that world is an occasional rat in the subway scrounging for food, or a few cockroaches feeding on some food that was left out overnight. For those living on the street, it's a little more serious.

Keeping food clean and safe from these unwanted intruders is almost impossible, made worse by the fact that often they carry disease with them. The Lost have more than just their food to worry about getting stolen by vermin, they have to worry about their own companions as well.

The Vermin God tends to go into long periods of

hibernation in abandoned places, forgotten or otherwise. Mostly it will tend to choose old industrial complexes. It will lie in wait with it's Dragranks, all hollid up in white hanging caccoons covered in a thick viscus ichor. It waits for some unfortunate Gathering to discover the building and tresspass into it's domain. It expells the interlopers with waves upon waves of rats that burst forth from the rotting walls.

It then proceeds to them down, using insects and rodents as it's eyes and ears. Once it finds them, it sends it's Dragranks to capture one of them and bring them back to the hive. It then sits back and waits for the rest of the party to come and retrieve their companion and walk into it's trap.

His Dragranks are rotting wraithlike creatures, swarming with flies and cockroaches. They bring with them teeming masses of rats that gnaw and bite anyone trying to get in the way of their intended prey. The Dragranks themselves bite as well, pumping a fast-acting poison into the blood of their quarry. Once they're incapacitated, the creatures drag them away and the rats follow soon after.

Should the Gathering go after their comrade, they'll find that the once undisturbed hive is now alive and angry. At the center of the crawling chaos is the Vermin God itself.

From afar, it looks like a normal man, hairless and nude, covered in the same ooze that the caccoons were. It's eyes are jet black. It jumps impossible distances, crawls around on walls like a fly and when it's ready to feed, a massive pair of chitonous pincers emerge from it's mouth to rend it's vitcims flesh. It secretes the same paralyzing poison the Dragranks do, and spits a thick foam that hardens almost immediately as it touches the air.

If it's victims escape, it goes back into hibernation until the next visitors come into it's domain.

GATHERINGS

Portrayed here are a few of the larger gatherings that span over several cities. These are unusual, and most gatherings consist of a few people and are pretty tight knit. Humans are still social creatures however, and no matter what a few bug organizations are always going to pop up here and there. They're all painted in pretty broad strokes, and a Judge should feel free to modify them however they see fit.

FELIX CULPA

Sin's influence is felt on every street corner, in every back alley and slum. It's one of the only constants in a world of uncertainty and lies. The temptation of loving something one shouldn't and the blessed release of giving into that forbidden love is enough to keep some people going. For the Felix Culpa, this love is the essence of being. It is God.

Widely considered to be a cult by outsiders, the Felix Culpa rejoice in the fall from grace. They spread out in every major city like missionaries, seeking out those who've lost hope in their battle with their addictions. They teach that any desire has the power to destroy one's soul if it is fought. The harder one fights, the more power they give it to do harm. If that desire can be embraced, than the addictions and desires become pathways to inner-peace. When one is no longer using all their energy unnecessarily fighting themselves, they can put that energy into fighting the outside world. They point to the peyote-induced vision quests of the Native Americans and the Bacchean cults of ancient greece as enlightened men and women who demonstrate their ideal.

The head of this Gathering is a figure shrouded in mystery. Weir they call him. Few have actually seen him in person, though pretty much everyone says they have. Ask ten people what he

looks like, and you'll get ten different answers. A few things are generally agreed upon. He's old now, and very powerful. When he was young, soon after he became Lost, the White Lady descended upon him. Like all the others, all of Weir's family, all of his loved ones, perished or went completely mad. When the White Lady had taken all of the people he used to care about away from him though, she didn't leave like she's done every time before with everyone else whose lives she destroyed. She stayed because for the first time she was actually in love herself. She gave him a gift; a beautiful crystalline drug. It could easily be mistaken for a diamond, but when smoked for the first time it's said to be the most powerfully euphoric experience the human mind is capable of enduring. It's also immediately addictive and can kill the user if they're not strong enough to handle it's effects. It's called [Aepoth]. She taught him how to make it, but that's a secret he's not shared with anyone. He's cooked it in abundance and given it to anyone in the Felix Culpa, provided they never sell it to outsiders. This is the one unforgivable sin within the Gathering, and is punishable by death.

Anyone can join the Gathering, but those who do are rarely are seen or heard from again. Some outside the Gathering say that their leader is simply a Dimmerstiff who's found a way to trick people into willingly come to him. Others say that [Aepoth] requires some kind of human sacrifice to cook, and that this is where the new recruits go. Possibly the most frightening rumor of all is that the White Lady herself is pulling the strings, leading people who otherwise could have fought their addiction and overcome it. Whatever the truth is, anyone who's ever beaten an addiction can speak to the fact that giving in to ones vices never leads to happiness or enlightenment in the long run, only misery.

THE ODISTS

Before the world was civilized, unknown horror lay in

wait within shadows and under nightfall. Hungry beasts, strange peoples and other threats we wouldn't dare even think of. These were things we couldn't possibly comprehend, let alone fight back. So it was that the story was invented. Stories were able to explain what things were and where they came from. They gave us strength to venture out and push back the shadows. Time passed and the stories changed. We learned more and more about the shadows, and so truth was introduced into the tales. This only strengthened their power, and soon we had conquered all the darkness and the light of civilization touched every corner of this once mysterious world. Though some found solace in the old stories, we didn't rely on them as we once did.

We spread out too thin however, too greedily. We were so concerned about pushing ahead, our center became weak. The places we had first brought light into started to become rotten and obscured. Shadows crept back into the forgotten corners of the city, seeking to reclaim a world that had once been rightfully theirs. Once again, the storytellers were needed to help fight back the shadows. A Gathering was formed after this tradition. They called themselves the Odists.

There's no real defining visual characteristic of any given Odist, save for a small glyph tattooed on their left hand resembling a lyre. They're pretty jovial folk for the most part. When they begin a tale, one can always notice a passionate glint in their eye. Their voice takes on an entirely different quality from that of their normal speaking tone, as if they're body is present but their soul is in another time and place, reliving the events in vivid detail.

They won't stay in any one place for too long. When they're in town, they'll make their way around trading stories for a place to sleep and a little food. They'll never say outright that they belong to the Gathering, but if it comes out, most of the time the surrounding Lost show them a great deal of respect and admiration. Some con artists have taken to tattooing the glyph

on their hand in order to receive the fringe benefits of being a member without taking on their responsibilities. The Odists have some unexplained way of knowing when someone's a faker. If they catch one, they'll promptly walk up to them and whisper something into their ear. Before the next day's out, the faker will have lost their left hand in some freakish accident. No one knows what exactly they whisper. No one wants to ask and hear it themselves.

Some say that this is pretty harsh punishment for such a small crime, but the Gathering takes their work very seriously. Few enjoy laying curses upon those already down on their luck, but it's too important that the stories remain unmolested by amateurs. Much of what the Lost know about the shadows that threaten them come from the tales told by wandering Odists. They speak of Dimmerstiffs and Dragranks, of Cobwebs and Named Ones. Sometimes their stories are about addiction or despair. The tales always revolve around one or more of the Lost, and their attempts to vanquish the foul demons that inhabit the Nothing, mundane or not. Sometimes the heroes win, and sometimes they lose, but always the audience learns something that will inevitably keep them alive and fighting for a little longer, be it anything from a weakness they can exploit in a Cobweb to the simple lesson that despite all the bleakness around them, there is still hope for the Lost. One just needs to keep looking.

An Odist will always tell a story about hope before they skip town.

ST. JUDE'S DISCIPLES

Faith is one of the greatest wellsprings of hope in the human spirit. The belief that the world of the flesh is fleeting and something greater waits for those who persevere often leads to a close kinship with others who share the same creed.

There are many Gatherings brought together by religion.

Arguably the largest is the St. Jude's Disciples, derisively known as the Mission Stiffs by outsiders. Their evangelical, almost medieval outlook on religion is a bit frightening to most Lost.

They believe that every person living on the street is being punished for some wrong they've perpetrated some time in their lives, and they will inevitably be stuck there until they earn God's forgiveness. This drives followers to preach barefoot on the street for hours in the winter wearing nothing but a monk's robe, screaming to pedestrians who aren't able to hear them. Self-inflicted flagellation is fairly commonplace among other forms of torture to strengthen the body and spirit.

The Disciples will often hole up in Galway Towns, healing those who've pushed themselves too far just enough to keep them alive. They will almost never let outsiders in, no matter how badly injured they are. Anyone not part of the Gathering is considered unholy, and will defile the place in the eyes of the Lord. They will however accept the needy if they pledge their life to the Disciples. Desertion is out of the question however. Any deserters are hunted down by the Inquisitors and brought back. The escapee is locked up without food, water or light for days or sometimes even weeks on end. The first time it's done in a cell. The second time it's a coffin or waterproof box that's sunk to the bottom of a river. The third time they don't retrieve them.

Where they can, the Disciples will muscle out any Gathering holding on to a Galway Town, letting just anyone enter and be healed. They're not above killing the inhabitants, claiming that any who they vanquish will be judged by God.

The Gathering is obsessed with the Final Judgment. Most are Apocalypse scholars, and can quote by heart texts in their entirety dealing with the subject. Members are taught to look forward to the End Times, when their time of suffering will be at an end and will seem like a distant memory in the eternity of everlasting happiness to come for the truly faithful.