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CHAPTER I: DESOLATION OF THE DEAD

GM BRIEFING

The pale man shifted his corrupted flesh, shrugging off the disguising cloak needed when venturing uphive. Here, in his rusted bastion rising out of the sump waters, Ferrue Fayne was the master of the Blessed Flesh, and soon all of Desoleum. Nothing could stop his rise; it was as certain as decay itself. Not even his traitorous brother Darnis, who would dare steal a shard of the primordial relic, could forestall this.

Fayne looked deeply into the item from another world, from an age before men walked upright. There was ancient power here, enough to bring the fallen to shambling life, and summon the Grandfather's children onto this plane. Soon, he would lead dead and daemoniac wonders across the hive, and transform it to a temple fit for the Plague Lord.

Within the artefact, something smiled. Soon, indeed...

Hive Desoleum is riddled with a corruption and decay that reaches into its deepest roots. As the great structures of hive society grind on and its citizens live and die by their ancient oaths, the foundations of their existence is crumbling away. The persuasive nature of the Warp, the vile influence of xenos cultures, and the reckless hatred of fellow men all work to undermine the hive. There are few places where this is felt more keenly than the hive's lower levels, where the dregs of its society scratch out a living in any way they can. These poor, desperate masses are vital to the great industries of the hive, but go largely forgotten and unnoticed by its masters, making their homes and streets the perfect place for darkness to take root.

"Do not fear death, for should you fall, I shall raise you up again to continue our grand conquest."

—Ferrue Fayne, to a congregation of the Blessed Flesh

Desolation of the Dead is an investigation into the Carrion Guilds of Hive Desoleum, and one guild in particular that has become tainted by the influence of the Ruinous Powers. Following a trail of forbidden xenos artefacts and shadowy criminal rivalries, the Acolytes find an altogether more distressing foe far beyond normal humanity. At its heart, the adventure is the hunt for a single man: Ferrue Fayne. He is thought responsible for great havoc wrought upon his house and the inhabitants of the Gallowsyway, a decaying section of lower Desoleum City dedicated to dealing with the dead. Drawn into the plot by the discovery of a Warp-infused xenos artefact, the Acolytes are presented with their first clues as to the nature of Ferrue's plans: not just stealing corpses from the Carrion Guilds, but also reanimating dead flesh and consorting with the terrible power of the Warp. Eventually, the investigation leads the Acolytes into the depths of the Underhive; here, Ferrue is conducting dark experiments and foul rituals with a mind to summoning a powerful Daemon.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The adventure takes place in a rundown section of the lower hive known as the Gallowsway. It is home to a collection of Carrion Guilds, the families responsible for dealing with the dead of much of Desoleum's impoverished. Riddled with corruption, the Gallowsway has become a thoroughfare for those wishing to pass between the city's lower hive and the lawless Underhive relatively unnoticed. It is also the hub of the lower hive's body trade, where the Carrion Guilds dispose of the thousands of corpses sent from above, the remains of those lacking oath-credits for anything better than a one way trip to the Mortuarius Factorums.

The Gallowsway is more than just a warehouse for corpses and the citizens which tend to them: it is home to thousands of souls too poor to live anywhere else except among the dead. Even by the bleak standards of the lower hive, this is a tangled web of decay and ruin, with precious little power to light its worn streets and meagre rations to feed its populace.

From this rotten foundation, true heresy has begun to fester in the form of an ambitious and tainted Carrion Guilder: Ferrue Fayne. Second son of the Fayne Charnal House, Ferrue, along with his older brother Tormus and his younger brother Darnis, all share a latent psychic gift, rumoured among the Gallowsway residences to be the result of their late mother's illicit congress with unholy powers. Nurturing their gifts, the Fayne brothers were seduced by the Warp and its promise of power, becoming part of the Callers of Sorrow, a major heretical power overseeing many Nurgle cults within the hive.

While Tormus rose to power within the Callers, eclipsing the works of his brothers, Ferrue remained in the Gallowsway and schemed. His chance for power came in the form of a xenos artefact—a strange, asymmetrical device painful to look upon, which greatly enhanced his connection to the Warp and granted him the power to animate dead flesh. With promise in this newfound power, Ferrue formed his own splinter-cult, dubbing it the Blessed Flesh.

As Ferrue's power has grown, so too have the fortunes of the Blessed Flesh, and the cult is now well-established in the Gallowsway. The cult leader has created a lucrative body trade between the lower hive and the Underhive; he steals corpses from the Carrion Guilds for his own needs, then sells their wealth and remaining organs to the Red Walk, a gang located farther downhive. Ferrue's ultimate goal is to amass an army of the animated dead, and rise up from the Underhive in the name of the Plague God, spreading ruin and death in his wake. To this end, he has been preparing for a ritual to summon a powerful Herald of Nurgle to lead his corpse army.

Unfortunately for Ferrue, his brother Darnis has complicated matters by drawing the attention of the Sanctionaries. Much in the same way that Ferrue languished in the shadow of Tormus and the Callers of Sorrow, Darnis was jealous of his older brother's power. So much was his desire for attention and power that he stole a piece of the xenos artefact and tried to animate the dead himself. The horrific results are what has drawn the Acolytes to the Gallowsway, providing the first glimpse into the danger Ferrue and the Blessed Flesh pose to Desoleum.

USING THIS ADVENTURE WITH DARK PURSUITS

This adventure can be used as a sequel to *Dark Pursuits*, the scenario found in the *DARK HERESY* Core Rulebook. *Dark Pursuits* deals with the trafficking of xenos artefacts within Hive Desoleum, and can easily be connected to this adventure via the xenos artefact Ferrue has acquired to enhance his power. It is likely that Ferrue has had dealing with the Trade Sable, dealers in such items, and even some of the NPCs from *Dark Pursuits*, who in turn might have passed his name onto the Acolytes. *Desolation of the Dead* also takes place in close proximity to the events in *Dark Pursuits*, and the GM can use some of the same locations if he chooses, further linking the stories together.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

Desolation of the Dead is broken into three parts:

PART I: A TRIP TO THE GALLOWAYS

The adventure begins with the Acolytes arriving at Charnel House 17 within the Gallowsway. Their assignment is to investigate the discovery of a xenos artefact found amidst the remains of a brutal mass murder with rumours of dark powers at work. This takes them into the Carrion Guilds and the first threads of Ferrue's plots. Starting at the scene of the crime, the Acolytes discover the body of Darnis and a fragment of the xenos artefact. From this point, they have numerous clues and leads to investigate. Their immediate goals should be finding out who Darnis was, why many of the corpses at the scene of the recent murders seem to be already weeks dead, and more about the nature of the xenos artefact. The residents of the Gallowsway might be resistant at first, but there are some among them who know about the Fayne brothers and can shed light on what they might be up to. At the same time as the Acolyte's initiate their investigation, cultists sent by Ferrue begin shadowing them, trying to gauge their threat and, if possible, recover the xenos artefact. Once the Acolytes have investigated the murder, the clues should lead them to the Fayne Mortuarius, the huge factorum where the dead are processed for their useful meat, fluids, and bones. Here they meet the first true opposition from the Blessed Flesh, as well as damning evidence about Ferrue's plans.

PART II: THE RED WALK

The second part of the adventure moves the action into the Underhive and the Gantry—a rogue settlement ruled over by the Red Walk gang, and a key stop on the body trade. Having discovered evidence of the body trade in the Fayne Mortuarius, the Acolytes need to follow its trail downhive, passing through the Purity Gate. This massive structure acts as a barrier between Gantry and the Gallowsway, with Sanctionary patrols monitoring the scum who pass between the two. On the other side, they come to the town of Gantry, and the Red Walk. Vornas Crimson, leader

of the Red Walk, is ostensibly Ferrue's ally, but has little love for the cult leader; the Acolytes have a good chance here to turn him to their cause, or take him out of the struggle. The Acolyte's ultimate goal in Gantry is discovering the location of the cult's hideout, apparently somewhere in the sump-river below the town. While in Gantry, the Acolytes become targets for the Blessed Flesh cult again, as Ferrue has determined they pose a threat. This section concludes with the animated dead of the Blessed Flesh attacking the settlement, in part to eliminate the Acolytes, but also to test the capabilities of his risen forces.

PART III: A PESTILENT HEART

In the final part of the adventure, the Acolytes uncover the lair of Ferrue and the Blessed Flesh after voyaging down the dark river, and try to stop his ritual to summon a powerful Daemon. After the conflict in Gantry, and with any allies in tow, the Acolytes descend into the sump-swamp and the wild ruins of the Underhive. A perilous journey in its own right, the Acolytes must contend with rogue gangers, mutant families, and sightless horrors. The Blessed Flesh's lair is hidden in the remains of a massive archeotech construction platform, a veritable fortress rising from the toxic river. Through stealth, force, or guile, the Acolyte's must gain entrance and stop Ferrue before he can summon up a Herald of Nurgle to lead his army of animated dead.

USING INQUISITORIAL POWERS

The Acolytes might desire to take on covers to help lower their Subtlety. This can work to prevent alerting any possible suspects (such as Ferrue) of their investigations and origins. Should the Acolytes reveal themselves as Acolytes of the Inquisition, they are, to a certain extent, able to throw their weight around with the Sanctionaries and other hive authorities. However, they probably are better served by discretion; any advantage they might gain from revealing themselves is likely outweighed by the attention it draws. The adventure assumes that the Acolytes are investigating undercover and, as part of their briefing, the GM can issue them with false identities that could work within the Gallowsway; the PCs could be Special Concern Officers for the Desoleum Hive Carrion Combine, City Desoleum Sanctionaries on secondment, or agents of a ration bar producer looking to test the purity of the Fayne ingredients. If they choose to maintain fake identities, they likely have an easier time talking to locals, and their enemies, such as Ferrue, should remain unaware of the true threat they pose. In the event they are unmasked or purposefully reveal themselves, the GM should impose a -20 penalty on all social tests with locals (as well as Underhivers), though they gain a +20 bonus on social tests when dealing with the Sanctionaries. In addition, if Ferrue learns they are members of the Inquisition, he quickly dispatches Blessed Flesh killers to deal with them (see page 23).

PART I: A TRIP TO THE GALLOWSWAY

"Filth runs downhive in Desoleum, and you don't get much more downhive than the Gallowsway."

—Vuris Keth, Usher of Charnel House 9

The adventure beings with the warband investigating the discovery of a xenos artefact amidst the scene of a mass murder in the Gallowsway. It was discovered by the Sanctionaries in the tangle of corpses, and their Inquisitor's many eyes and ears within Desoleum made sure this information quickly reached the Acolytes. The case could be linked to the events in *Dark Pursuits* (the adventure in Chapter XIII of the *DARK HERESY* Core Rulebook) and the Acolytes might be pursuing it on their own initiative. They could even have been summoned at the behest of the local Sanctuaries if they have contacts with hive law enforcement, perhaps as part of that adventure.

If the group is not led by an Inquisitor personally, a directive passed down from on high from their master could begin their investigation. If the GM wishes to start the adventure in this manner, read or paraphrase the following aloud:

Word has reached me of disturbing activities in Hive Desoleum's bottom reaches, where it appears the foul taint of the xenos has penetrated even to these remote levels. The Sanctioned Bondsmen enforcing hive law in this wretched area report of an unnatural item found at an unusually grisly mass killing, and I have decided to make the matter my own. You are to descend into the darkness of the Gallowsway to investigate the situation, and take whatever steps are necessary to prevent further contamination of humanity, even in these desolate depths. In the name of the Emperor, go forth to do my bidding and carry out His Will.

THE GALLOWSWAY

The Gallowsway is a dank and forgotten place perched on the under-edges of Desoleum City. Very little in the way of wealth from the hive trickles down here, nor do power, light, or food. It is home to thousands of unclaimed corpses. Sent each day from the poorer sections of the city above for disposal, they fester in monumental warehouses before being processed in the level's numerous Mortuarius Factorums. These range from executed criminals, unknown dead, and, worst of all, those that have broken their oaths. It is a foul place to live, but one that must exist lest the city become choked with its own dead. There are several locations here that the Acolytes might explore in their quest for the origins of the xenos artefact.

CHARNEL HOUSE 17

Each of the major Carrion Guild families of the Gallowsway maintains a house to store the dead before processing. They are given numerical designations rather than names, the faded numbers on their doors the only way to distinguish one rusted, corpse-filled building from another. The Fayne family maintains Charnel House 17, and it is likely the Acolytes' first stop in the Gallowsway. It bears a crumbling façade of huge faces from old

signs and tarnished reliefs arranged in a failed attempt to resemble an Ecclesiarchy temple. Within the House is a single large entry chamber, designed as a place where the House can prepare or “welcome” the bodies that choke the threshold. Beyond this are a few cluttered offices, and deep halls lined with shelves for the dead. The bodies are painted in a preservative paste to retard decay, though this only replaces the stench of rotting flesh with a deeper and more vile chemical odour.

THE DRAINS

Even though the Gallowsway contains far more dead than living, the workers too need a place to sleep and rest in their fleeting moments of downtime. The main hab block is known as the Drains, because of the constant stream of vile water that passes through it from above. Located at the end of the primary conveyor hub, it stretches towards the hive wall in a series of prefabricated containers stacked one on top of the other. Originally, these containers were used for transporting goods from the lower city in more prosperous times, but since have become ad-hoc housing. Walking the Drains at any time can be dangerous, not just because of the local thieves and thugs, but also due to of its unstable construction which constantly moves or shakes as people travel across it. Flash floods can also catch travellers unawares, as torrents from above can push a container off balance and cause an entire section to come crashing down.

SCRAP MARKET

Where there are people, there is some semblance of trade and markets, even in the Gallowsway where most goods are discards from above. A thriving market in scrap and trash exists in the

shadow of the Drains, and there are avenues devoted to buying, selling, and trading rubbish of all kinds. Most of the items which make it to the scrap market are taken off the dead, the few possessions not already pilfered before they were sent down for disposal. As a result, the market deals mostly in small trinkets and tattered clothes, and these can perhaps be of use if the Acolytes wish to disguise themselves to a lesser state.

BONEYARD

There is usually little left of a body after treatment at the Mortuarius except a scant bone shards and teeth, but sometimes the workers are too lazy (or too busy) to take care of these few remains, and they are dumped into the Gallowsway. Over centuries this human refuse has built up, and by some unspoken arrangement is swept away to a far corner of the level known as the Boneyard. Filled with mounds of bone dust and splinters, the Boneyard is a mournful and eerie place, shunned by most of the locals. Some adventurous scavengers are drawn to it, though tales of terrible creatures lured from the Underhive by the stench of death are usually enough to keep most away.

PURITY GATE

It is an impossible task for the Sanctionaries to stop traffic between the lower hive and the Underhive, given the nature of lower Desoleum City and the countless ducts, vents, shafts, and lifts that link the two regions together. Within the Gallowsway, attempts have been made to keep the local gangs in check (especially the Red Walk) by creating a Purity Gate between hive and Underhive. A large imposing blockhouse, the gate straddles the main route down; all other passages are sealed off for kilometres in all directions. This is also the headquarters of the local Sanctionary forces, and where Oath-Captain Nils is based. It is only due to the presence of the Purity Gate, a relatively recent addition to this region, that the Gallowsway has any Sanctionary presence at all.

FAYNE MORTUARIUS

The Mortuarius are the factories where the dead are dealt with. Connected to the Charnel Houses (usually via long conveyor tunnels) they process the corpses, breaking them down into useful components. They are large, noisy places filled with an acrid stench and dangerous clanking, grinding machines with plenty of hazardous locations. The Fayne Mortuarius, connected to Charnel House 17 by a long, open shaft, is no different, though in recent times it has become the scene of Ferrue's crimes, and the place from which he thieves his bodies. It has also become infected with the taint of Blessed Flesh cult; in hidden and shadowed corners, the signs of the Plague God can be found, smeared onto the walls in crusted blood, pus, and filth.

INHABITANTS OF THE GALLOWSWAY

While in the Gallowsway, the Acolytes deal with a number of its residents, in addition to Oath-Captain Nils and the Blessed Flesh cultists sent to deal with them. The role that these minor NPCs play is up to the GM, and they are presented here to allow him to fill out the region as the Acolytes explore and gather clues. Most have little concrete information, and some are out-and-out false trails, but they should help the GM bring the Gallowsway to life.

LIFE AMONG THE DEAD

The Gallowsway is a miserable and vile place to visit. The Acolytes must contend not just with surly locals, but also with its inconstant lighting, failing machinery, and maze of rusted streets. The GM can reinforce the oppressive nature of the Gallowsway by working the low ceilings and refuse piles into descriptions. Illumination is also a major issue here; the feeble local lighting often fails, plunging an area into a shadowy twilight. Added to the sluggish fog which rises up from below in most places, visibility is restricted to little more than a few dozen metres. It is up to the GM to decide the lighting conditions at any particular time, but as a general rule, all Perception tests relying on vision and all ranged attacks should suffer a -10 penalty while in the Gallowsway. The GM can also use the lighting to add to the drama, such as during the confrontation with the Blessed Flesh cultists, by extinguishing the lights for a moment and allowing the cultists to launch a surprise attack.

In addition to the cramped shadowy streets, the other constant of the Gallowsway is the dripping rain. Nothing so natural as real rain (something of which few hivers would have any concept), it is the filthy liquid that constantly drizzles down from the hundreds of hive-levels above. It never ceases, and there are few places where one can take shelter from it. Everything is covered in an oily sheen, which comes to include the Acolytes after they have been there a while. There is no short term ill-effect of the rain, but the GM should feel free to bring it into play if appropriate, such as making a climb up slick rubble harder or causing open flames to sputter and die.

The Gallowsway is also defined by its people, and on first inspection they are much like the dead they deal with, slump-shouldered and stumbling about their daily lives. Most are pale and listless, and the Acolytes likely will stand out among them as they push through the crowds. The GM can illustrate this by having the minor NPCs and locals speak in weary tones, and show indifference to brutal scenes of murder and violence. Those who dwell here know the

Gallowsway is the end of the world, and most are resigned to ending their days here in dank despair.

CARRION GUILD FAMILIES

The Fayne Brothers are one of many Carrion Guild families that operate in the Gallowsway. Others close to Charnel House 17 include the Keth (Charnel House 9), Vlador (Charnel House 38), and Gysis (Charnel House 5). Vuris Keth runs House 9, an ancient man more than a little mad, and whose greatest enjoyment comes in imbibing from his personal stock of distilled embalming fluid. Eris Vlador is the middle-aged ruler of House 38, covered in gaudy jewels (she has first pick from the corpses at her House) and thick make-up, always ready to welcome guests. Finally, there is Jayir Gysis, a whip-thin man who runs House Five. Though he has little personal wealth, he does maintain a stake in the body trade with the Red Walk gangers.

SANCTIONARIES

Apart from the help they get from Oath-Captain Nils, the Acolytes can deal with other Sanctionaries and ask them questions. Hob Claymet and Ryrat Telin are amongst the handful who leave the relative safety of the Purity Gate to patrol the Gallowsway; they were the ones who discovered the corpses that night. Poor specimens of humanity, driven down to the Gallowsway because they were not fit to work in the Main Hive, they are dismal at their job, spending much of their time drinking in the scrap market or intimidating the locals. Claymet, especially, has a mean streak and enjoys using his shock maul on anyone who gets in his way.

BONE-MEN AND SCRAP CARRION

Those that do not work for the Carrion Guild families survive by dealing in the junk sent from above or the pitiful possessions taken from the dead. While the scrap market is filled with these wretches, there is one man that the Acolytes might have dealings with: Cog Lostok. A fallen Apex surgeon who found his way down into the Gallowsway after a scandalous disgrace, Lostok has prolonged his life through scavenging broken and damaged cybernetics. After years of operating on his failing flesh, he has become a nightmarish mix of meat and machinery, only able to move about with the aid of his worshipful underlings. There are few things that Lostok does not know about the Gallowsway, and fewer things he cannot procure—for a price, of course.

THE DEADMAN'S KNOT

It is possible that the Acolytes do not know much about the Gallowsway and its place within the hive, beyond the fact that this is where much of the lower hive's dead are processed. They can infer that it is probably a poor and decaying place, resting as it does on the lower edge of the hive. Once the GM has set the reason for the arrival of the Acolytes, he should start the action. As they arrive in the Gallowsway, he should make a point of how far down the warband must travel to get there, and the oppressive nature of the hive at this depth. As they disembark, the Sanctionaries meet their lower hive conveyor and lead them to the scene of the crime. For more guidance on how to evoke the mood of the Gallowsway see the Life Among the Dead sidebar.

To set the scene, the GM can say or paraphrase the following:

Shortly after receiving your orders to investigate a tip detailing the discovery of some kind of xenos artefact discovered downhive, your warband has made the journey down from the relative civilisation of Desoleum City. Clutching your forged oath-cogs and the false identities they grant, you have watched as the one decaying level after another has slid by, each subtly worse than the one before it. As the rusting hive-lift platform shudders to a halt, the huge corroded metal doors painfully grind open to reveal your stop: the Gallowsway.

The Acolytes are met by Oath-Captain Kaytlan Nils (see Roleplaying Oath-Captain Nils on page 8 for more details), the officer in charge of the investigation. She clutches an oily extendible tarp, which she offers to the Acolytes to keep off the waters streaming down from the decrepit ceilings high above. While she is happy to take the Acolytes directly to the crime scene, this is a good point for the GM to use her to answer any questions about