

Welcome to the Spire Quickstart! This book provides you with everything you need to get up and running with *Spire* – rules, background information, pregenerated characters, and a scenario to play through.

Let's get right into it.

WHAT IS THE SPIRE RPG ABOUT?

Spire is a very tall and very old city located towards the centre of the land of Desteria; two hundred years ago the aelfir, or high elves, invaded from the north and, with the help of gun-toting human mercenaries, took Spire from the native drow, or dark elves.

The masked aelfir now rule Spire from gilded ice-palaces within the upper areas of the city; they live lives of perverse luxury and senseless excess compared to the countless drow who work in their factories, houses and farms. Each drow is required to serve a Durance when they come of age – four years of unpaid labour in the service of an aelfir lord. Working conditions are poor, and injuries and deaths are common.

Traditional Desteran culture is under attack from the aelfir. Worship of two of the three main goddesses of old Spire has been forbidden, and cults devoted to them have been destroyed or radicalised and driven underground.

The player characters are members of one such cult – The Ministry of Our Hidden Mistress – and call themselves Ministers. They're paramilitary zealots living secret lives in service to their dark goddess of grace, subterfuge and misdirection. They have sworn to do anything necessary to remove the aelfir from power and return Spire to the drow.

CREDITS

The Spire Quickstart

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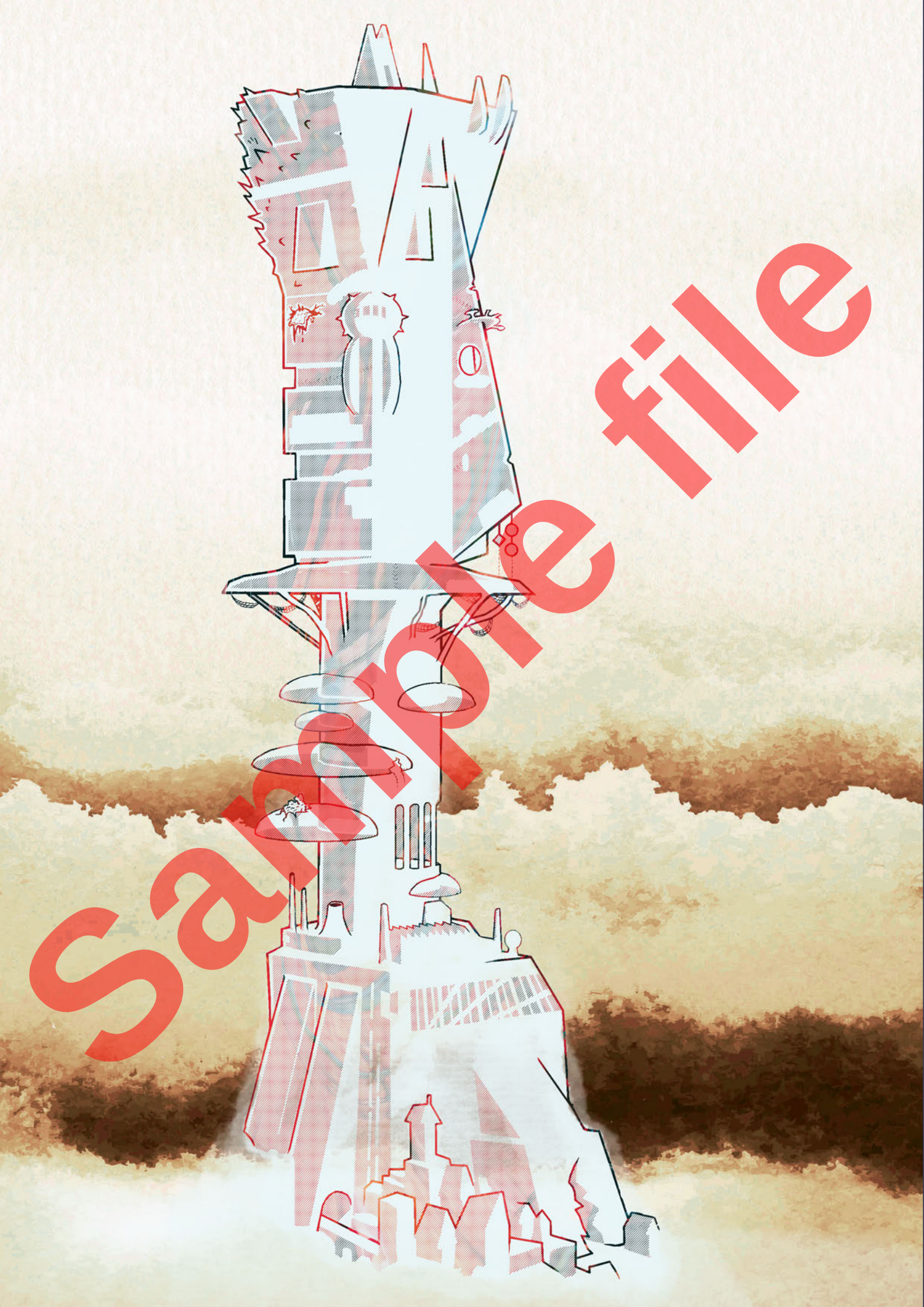
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SPIRE, IN BRIEF

This is **Spire**. The tallest city on the continent, and the oldest. Many have tried to measure its height, and none have returned with the same answer, but all agree that Spire is far too large to stand upright under any of the known laws of science. Built and rebuilt upon for generations and soaked in ancient curses and illegal magics, Spire defies standard cartography. But for those eager to explore, here is a rough guide as to what is where.

Amaranth, pride of the ruling aelfir, sits wreathed in magical frost near the top of Spire. Rich and powerful high elves live here and while away their days in the endless pursuit of beauty and status. The richest and most powerful high elves have the ear of **The Spiral Council**, an unelected cadre of clerics and plutocrats, whose dreams of empire propel the city-state into brutal wars of expansion. The **Silver Quarter** is riddled with casinos, luck-priests, canals and gangsters; it sits (leakily) atop **Ivory Row**, a tumbledown mess of faded grandeur, mad occultists and avant-garde art collectives.

Atop the city of Spire, Towers of Silence hold the bodies of the dead in **New Heaven** and the streets are fought over by rival death cults. On the side of the structure, the shanty-district **Perch** has been nailed and lashed to the wall over successive generations. **Pilgrim's Walk** is a red light district for religions, and is packed with cut-throat cult recruiters, nuns with come-to-prayer eyes and esoteric temples. Many drow prefer the **Cathedral of our Glorious Lady**, a house for the only dark elf religion allowed in the city, which is cobbled together from spare parts and hope.

The Solar Basilica is the seat of the state religion, and pilgrims from all over the land travel for years to tread upon its sacred flagstones. The four seasonal gods of the aelfir wax and wane in popularity throughout the year – the most mercurial is Brother Harvest, the autumn god of endings, the patron of **The Paladins** who enforce the will of the Council with blade and shot.

The Works is an ever-growing hive of industrial machinery, workshops and printing presses that use human retro-engineered technology from the east and forced drow labour to mass-produce goods on a scale undreamt of. Winding through it is **The Garden District**, filled with mushroom farms and vats of algae that grow lightless using traditional drow farming methods.

The Blue Port is a shifting maze of tents and stands ruled by priests of Azur, the god of gold. The **North Docks**, pulling in trade from the river, are fought over by dozens of Orders of platemail-armoured gangsters who call themselves Knights.

The Vermissian, a train network, was intended to connect all of Spire together and allow travel at lightning-fast speeds across the city. But due to poor budgeting decisions, a lack of clear communication and puncturing a hole to a parasitic hell dimension at the last minute, the entire network was condemned and abandoned fifty years ago.

Beneath the ground is **Red Row**, a lawless undercity of drugs and black magic and experimental theatre; beneath that is **Derelictus**, a lightless pit of destitution and want; beneath that is **The Heart**, the red-wet curdled core of the city, where reality has become unstuck and stitched itself back together in unsettling ways. But only the truly desperate would even think about going there.

THINGS TO KNOW

Before you start play, here are some things to know about your characters, the city, and its people.

SUBVERT, DON'T DESTROY.

Wrest weapons from the hands of your enemies and turn them against them. Recruit cells from other organisations, even ones that work against you, and use them as tools. If you kill someone in authority, someone will replace them and they'll probably be worse; turn them, instead, through blackmail or threats or bribery, and use them. You can't rule over ashes; you want the city to be standing when you're done. (Still: when it comes to it, don't be afraid to resort to bloodshed, especially when your cover is on the line.)

THIS IS NOT A KIND WORLD.

There are soft and gentle parts of it; there are easy lives, but you don't have one. You were born into an underclass within an underclass. You have struggled for everything you have, and even then someone probably tried to take it away from you. You have been handed such a bad lot in life, in fact, that you have joined a radicalised cell who worship a forbidden goddess and murder people in order to get revenge.

YOU ARE BRAVE.

People don't know what they want or, moreso, what they need. The drow need freedom, and you're the one to give it to them, even if that means hiding your actions. You are most likely lying to your loved ones, sneaking out while they sleep, and stockpiling illegal weapons under your bed. You are living one wrong step away from death every second of your life.

YOU ARE GOING TO HURT PEOPLE.

That's unavoidable. It's a crime for you to spill blood, but it's "justice" when they do it. The city guard are drow, just like you – desperate, and hungry, and tired, but they're duty-bound to stop you. Who are you going to hurt to get what you want? Who won't you hurt? What will you do to preserve the secrecy of The Ministry and your mission?

THIS IS GOING TO KILL YOU.

One way or another, you are going to die doing this. Maybe you've made your peace with it, and maybe you're lying to yourself and saying that you're smarter than everyone else, but if you stay active in the Ministry, you're going to wind up dead or mad or destitute or all three. The best hope you've got is offloading the danger onto someone else, earning the promotion to Magister, or retiring. But no-one really retires. So you burn bright, as best you can, and try to make a difference.

THERE'S ALWAYS ANOTHER LEVEL.

You can't win this. Listen: you can take a street back, sure. Maybe even a district. But if you make too much noise, take too much territory, someone much bigger and more dangerous than you will notice, and they'll turn up and destroy you. So it's slow work, and you have to subvert rather than destroy, and that leaves you with risky assets all over the map, and when you finally secure a victory, one of two things happens: either it gets taken off you by your enemies or your superiors, or it causes you untold problems, and suddenly you're the bastards in charge, oppressing people. But that's how it goes, and better you than them. Right?

YOUR OWN FAMILY WOULD SELL YOU OUT.

You know what ministers do? Ministers get people killed. Ministers used to meet in the cellar of the bar down the road, and then the Solar Guard showed up and burned it to the ground with everyone inside. Ministers abduct and kill people for reasons that no-one can fathom. Ministers draw the attention of the city guard, and the aelfir, on the poorest, most downtrodden districts of Spire. Far better, then, to report a cell to the authorities, and gain whatever rewards are offered for doing so – better job prospects, a pocketful of sten, maybe even a nicer flat further up-Spire.

THE MINISTRY WOULD SELL YOU OUT.

The Ministry are not your friends. They can't afford to allow you to mess up, or to let information slip – they've invested so much in getting as far as they have today, and their work has barely started. If you get something wrong and it causes problems, the Ministry will quite gladly give you false information and send you into a trap to confuse their enemies.

TERMS USED IN SPIRE

D3, D6, D8, D10. D stands for Dice and the numerical value refers to the total number of sides. D10s are the only dice used to resolve actions; the other dice are used to determine a random amount of stress.

DICE POOL. 1 or more ten-sided dice rolled at once; take only the highest result rolled.

REFRESH. Remove D3, D6 or D8 stress from any resistance or combination of resistances. The amount rolled is determined by your actions, and by the GM.

RESISTANCE. A place to allocate and codify abstract stress suffered by your character. The more stress you have marked to your resistances, the closer you are to serious consequences.

FALLOUT. Temporary or permanent problems suffered by your character as a result of marking stress to their resistances. The GM determines what fallout you take in any given circumstance.

ROLL WITH MASTERY. Add 1D10 to your dice pool.

PROP. An element or unimportant character present in a scene which can be exploited or interacted with by the player characters. That's not to say that they can only interact with props, but that props are useful methods for giving them opportunities to roleplay.

PC or PLAYER CHARACTER. A person in the story who is controlled by a player. Only player characters roll dice to resolve actions; the GM determines what happens when the non-player characters act.

NPC or NON-PLAYER CHARACTER. Any person in the story who's not controlled by a player, and thus controlled by the GM.

SITUATION. A variable length of time or section of gameplay equivalent to a scene in a film or an encounter in a video game where something exciting, dangerous or interesting happens. If the location or timeframe changes drastically during a situation, it's over and a new situation has begun. If whatever's going on isn't exciting, dangerous or interesting you don't need to worry about keeping track.

For example: an arms deal that goes wrong and devolves into a running battle is a single situation. If the city guard arrive to break up the deal and chase one party into a nearby market, the chase becomes a second situation. If you're hiding in the rafters above the arms deal after sneaking into the building that morning, the infiltration is one situation and the deal another.

MASKS

Aelfir wear masks in public; to show their faces to the world is considered barbaric or obscene. The wealthier an aelfir is, the more masks they own and the more precisely they'll dress themselves for any given occasion – poorer aelfir might only have their everyday mask and a fancy one worn on special occasions.

Aelfir expect their servants and those around them to follow the same rules, so the more aelfir there are in a district, the more you'll see drow wearing masks out of politeness, obsequiousness or obligation.



CORE MECHANIC

When your character performs an action and the gamesmaster asks you to roll, roll a D10 then consult this chart:

- 1: Critical Failure (take double stress)
- 2–5: Failure (take stress)
- 6–7: Success at a cost (take stress)
- 8–9: Success (take no stress)
- 10: Critical success (inflict +1 stress for each 10 you roll)

If you have the skill you need, roll another D10.

If you have the domain you need, roll another D10.

If you have mastery over the action, skill or domain, roll another D10.

Mastery doesn't stack – you can only use it once per action, no matter how many sources you get it from. You don't need a skill to benefit from mastery when using it, although usually you'll have both.

You'll use the highest dice result you roll to resolve the action; the other dice don't matter, unless they show 10 and you're inflicting stress on someone else (each ten rolled increases the stress you inflict by 1).

Don't roll if there's nothing at stake; if the character could do it, it works, and if they couldn't, they don't. Only roll if the character has something to lose, which is represented by marking stress.

Example: Chris is playing Justine, a supernaturally-beautiful occultist/artist known as an **Idol**. He describes his character walking into a seedy bar down Spire, trying to attract the attention of everyone inside. The GM, Alex, reckons this is entirely possible and can't think of anything fun that would happen if she failed, so they describe the crowd turning as one to face Justine as she walks in. A few people stop drinking their beer and nudge their mates.

Chris goes on to say that he wants to track down the informant he's been told hangs out in the bar, and Alex sees that there's something at stake here, so they ask him to roll. He rolls a D10 and gets a 6 – Success at a cost. Alex says that Justine finds the informant, but that their entrance drew some attention from the authorities.

PARTIAL STRESS

Sometimes you're just rolling to avoid taking harm and not trying to achieve anything else in particular – you test to see if you can hang onto your mind after seeing something horrific, to avoid damage from someone taking a swing at you, or to escape from a burning building. On a 6–7 result on such an action, you still take stress, but it's one dice type lower than usual. The same rules apply when you're trying to buy something for cheap.

DIFFICULTY

If the action is difficult, the GM subtracts dice from your pool. If your dice pool would be 0 or fewer, roll one die and downgrade the final result by 1 step. Difficulty ranges from 0 (standard) to 2 (very challenging).

HELPING AND GROUP ACTIONS

For each character that assists you, if they have a relevant skill or domain, add 1 to your dice pool – but they take stress the same way you would. (There is a limit to how many characters can aid you on any given action, determined by the GM.)

For group skill actions (such as sneaking in somewhere), choose one player to lead the group – if they succeed, every other player rolls with mastery even if they don't have the skill.

ADVANCEMENT

There aren't any rules for gaining more abilities in this Quickstart; if you want to expand your characters' range of spells and powers there are many more in the *Spire: the City Must Fall* RPG corebook, and details on how to acquire them.