

# BOOK OF THE DEAD™



the  
World of Darkness

I'M GONNA ASSUME  
YOU'VE NEVER BEEN HERE BEFORE.

IT'S ALL RIGHT,  
THAT'S TO BE EXPECTED.

NOT MANY  
PEOPLE HAVE,  
YOU KNOW?

I MEAN... NOT MANY  
PEOPLE LIKE YOURSELF.  
PEOPLE WITH HEARTBEATS.

EVERYBODY ELSE, THOUGH  
— THEY ALL COME HERE.  
A LOT OF THEM  
ARE STILL AROUND.

YOU KNOW HOW  
SOME PEOPLE SAY  
THE BEST WAY  
TO DEAL WITH AN ENEMY  
IS TO OUTLIVE HIM?

This book includes:

- The mythology of the Underworld, and the ripples it casts through supernatural cultures
- A tour of the Underworld itself, from the Autochthonous Depths to the Dead Dominions
- Merits, Manifestations, Keys, and other tricks of the trade for dealing with the Underworld for Sin-Eaters and other supernaturals

*For use with the  
World of Darkness Rulebook*

THAT'S GOOD ADVICE  
MOST OF THE TIME.  
BUT RIGHT ABOUT NOW  
YOU SHOULD PROBABLY BE HOPING  
THAT ALL YOUR WORST ENEMIES  
ARE STILL ALIVE.

— RIO FLETCHER, SIN-EATER



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the World  
of Darkness®

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# BOOK OF THE DEAD™

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# ASCENT

By John Newman

"Josephine."

The whisper echoed in her mind.

"No one calls me Josephine," she muttered. "Only my mother."

"Josephine."

Jo slowly turned her head to the side, cocking it like a dog that hears its name. She smelled cinnamon and coffee for just a second before the stagnant air of the cavern overpowered it. She cocked her head to the other side and took a deliberate sniff. No coffee. No cinnamon. Only the smells of dust, dirt, and decay filled her nostrils.

"Josephine."

With a start, Jo realized she was standing in front of a hole in the cavern wall. She couldn't remember how long she'd been standing there. The hole was roughly circular and just large enough that she thought she might be able to crawl into it. The soft light of the cavern illuminated several feet of the darkness inside the hole, suggesting the aperture might continue on further. She was sure the voice calling her name was coming from the hole. She put her hands on either side of it to boost herself in, then stopped. Her hands were the pale white of a corpse. Her fingernails were translucent and the skin underneath was the unhealthy purple of a bruise.

"What happened to me?"

Pain exploded in her skull.

"Flashlight. Check. Canteen," Jo sloshed the water inside the canteen to make sure it was full. "Check. Blade," she reached out a hand and grasped a gleaming straight-razor from nowhere. The ivory of the handle was stained, here and there, with rusty spots the color of dried blood. "And check." A snap of her fingers and the straight-razor disappeared again.

**"NO NEED TO CHECK THAT.  
NO NEED TO BRING IT FORTH  
WITHOUT FLESH TO CARVE  
AND BLOOD TO SPILL"**

As always, when he ("*it, not he,*" her mind insisted) spoke, Jo visualized Mr. White as a short, dumpy man dressed in a white linen suit. A patrician nose jutted aggressively out of the face, above a bushy mustache. Blood-red eyes fixed her with a stern stare.

"Uh huh," she said. "Right." She shoved the flashlight into her backpack and hefted it onto her shoulders.

She took a minute to check out her reflection in the full-length mirror beside the door. Auburn hair was pulled back into a ponytail, secured by several rubber bands. She wore a battered leather jacket over a plain black T-shirt, blue jeans, and scuffed hiking boots. The green of her eyes was momentarily overlaid with shining red.

"I ASSUME THIS  
TEDIOUS APPRAISAL  
OF YOUR APPEARANCE  
INDICATES WERE NOT  
UNDERTAKING THIS  
ADVENTURE ALONE THEN?"

"Nope. Reese is meeting us at the coffee shop. Like I'd really venture down below all by myself."

"HOW TIRESOME"

She could *feel* him (*it*) yawn.

"I THOUGHT WE HAD  
SEVERED OUR TIES WITH  
THAT IRRITATING BOY.  
YOU SHOULD HAVE  
LET ME DEAL WITH HIM."

The straight-razor reappeared in her hand. She shook it as though shooing a fly and the blade vanished.

"I think the Harridan might not have approved of that," she said. "We don't need to tangle with that nasty old hag. Reese knows it's over. He's just coming along to help."

"AS YOU THINK BEST."

He (*it*) sounded bored.

She walked out of her apartment, locking the door behind her.



The pain in her head subsided, and with it all memory of the pain. For a moment she stood dumbly in front of the hole, trying to remember what she was doing.

"Mr. White?"

Silence.

"Josephine."

The voice was calling her again.

"Yeah. Right. I'm coming," she said and started to climb into the hole.

She heard a skittering sound behind her and paused to throw a glance over one shoulder. The cavern was lit by iridescent blue fungus that grew in clumps on the ceiling, floor, and walls. The light reflected gently on the surface of a still pond, giving the black waters the appearance of a starry night sky. The cavern was quiet, peaceful, and even tranquil. With a shrug, she resumed climbing into the hole. The passage before her angled ever-so-slightly upwards and she inched her way forward, pulling herself along by her fingers. Soon she was swallowed by the darkness of the passage and the walls seemed to press in on her, reminding her of the weight of stone and earth surrounding her. She fought down her rising panic and continued to inch along. Time passed with agonizing slowness. The passage veered to the right and when she rounded the corner she could see light ahead of her. Excited by the prospect of leaving the tight passage behind, she attempted to increase her pace and the thin fabric of her shroud caught on a rock.

Swearing softly to herself, Jo tugged on the shroud. She had almost worked it free when she heard the sound again, the skittering, coming from the inky black of the passage behind her. *Tck-tck-tck-tck-tck*. It sounded like the noise she'd guess a spider would make if it were big enough to make a sound. *Tck-tck-tck-tck-tck*. She could picture each hairy leg being picked up and set back down again, each *tck* created when exoskeleton clicked against the stony bottom of the passage. She was mesmerized by the sound, even as a part of her screamed to get away. Seemingly of their own accord, her hands ripped the shroud free from its entanglement. *Tck-tck-tck-tck-tck*. It was right behind her now. She could feel its presence in the passage. Something cold and wet touched her foot. Something dry and horrible caressed her ankle. With a speed born of fear, she squirmed up the passage and out of the hole. The light...

Pain exploded in her skull.



Jo swirled the cinnamon stick through her coffee, inhaling the mixed smells with pleasure.

"My favorite. You remembered."

"Of course," said Reese, shrugging.

He had been waiting outside the coffee shop when she arrived, two cups of coffee and a cinnamon stick resting in a carrier by his boots. Reese was dressed in similar fashion as her. Leather jacket over an old, faded *My Chemical Romance* concert T-shirt, jeans, and a pair of steel-toed work boots. Brown hair fell down to cover one of his green eyes and he impatiently pushed it back. It was a gesture so familiar to her that her heart skipped a beat and she remembered why she'd loved him. Then she remembered all the reasons why she'd left. His possessiveness. His insane jealousies. His violent temper.

"So, where we headed, Josephine?"

"Only my mother calls me Josephine," she said, smiling at him. It was their old joke. "The South Ferry subway station below Battery Park. The good city of New York has been kind enough to leave the Gate in place."

"As if they had a choice," snorted Reese.

In 2005, a construction crew working on the subway station found a 200-year-old stone wall. Historians declared it was part of the original gun batteries from the 17th century that gave the park its name. Further excavations revealed four additional walls and an astonishing amount of historical artifacts. Not long after the discovery, news came along the Twilight Network that the last of the walls uncovered was an Avernian Gate. A low place.

Reese stepped toward the street and hailed a taxi. Traffic was light and soon enough they stood in front of the stairs leading down to the subway. People passed them without a glance, part of the flow of humanity that pulsed in time to the city's heartbeat. She could hear the gleeful yells of children playing in the park over the constant drone of honking horns that gave New York its voice.

"You ready, Persephone?" Reese said.

"Ready as ever, Orpheus," she said and they began the descent.



The pain in her head subsided, and with it all memory of the pain. For a moment she stood dumbly in front of the hole, trying to remember what she was doing.

"Josephine."

She stumbled away from the hole and into a crowd. She bumped into a man who had decorated his shroud with a belt of glistening entrails. He glanced at her and smiled, eyes alight with insanity. His teeth were filed points. Backing away from the specter, she nearly tripped over a woman crawling along the floor, her legs broken and twisted.

"No no no no no no no!" the woman wailed. "Do you see? Do you fucking see what you've done!" The woman's shroud was tatters and she ripped a piece free, frantically scrubbing at the place where Jo was standing. "Now it's dirty! Filthy! I keep scrubbing and scrubbing and it won't come clean." She moaned. "What will Ronnie say? What will Ronnie do? Move, you dumb bitch!" and she shoved Jo with surprising strength.

The shove sent Jo staggering back against a wall and she took in the sight before her. The walls and floor were covered with raggedly shaped squares of granite, the gray of the stone further darkened by sooty ash. Nailed to the ceiling with yard-long iron spikes were a host of burning figures, the source of light in the hall. As she watched, the figures writhed in agony, sending showers of ash into the crowd like gently falling snow. The people (*ghosts*) seemed barely aware of each other, each individual moving with its own purpose, while avoiding the touch of the others. It was like watching a strange dance. The crowd made little noise beyond the occasional shriek of despair or the whisper of feet sliding across stone.

Some, like the crippled woman, repeated the same task over and over. One man repeatedly slashed the air with his hands, as though fighting some invisible enemy. The crowd ducked and swayed out of the reach of his flailings with an odd, unconscious grace. Another man beat his head against a stone wall, took a step, and repeated the motion, making a slow circuit of the hall. No blood flowed from his wounds. Others wound their way in and out of the multitude of exits from the hall, leaving from one archway only to reappear in the next. Jo moved cautiously along the wall, doing her best to avoid touching the people (*ghosts*) that came near her. Beyond one of the archway exits she saw the floor angle upward and she moved toward it.

*Tck-tck-tck-tck-tck.*

She heard the sound over the quiet din of the crowd and whirled round. Something was moving through the crowd, something low to the floor that took care to hide itself behind a screen of moving bodies. Peering through the crowd, she caught a glimpse of something gray and ungainly. She stared. She had forgotten the dance. She paid for her lapse in concentration when a woman walked directly into her as Jo stood, hesitating, in front of the archway.

"Ingrate! Wretch!" The woman slapped her and Jo's head snapped back with the force of the blow. "How dare you stand between me and my goal? After everything I've done for you!" She caught hold of Jo's hair and pulled. "You think you want it more than me? Have it then and be damned!" She turned and, using Jo's hair as a fulcrum, hurled her through the arch.

Pain exploded in her skull.



The overhead lights in the excavation were dim fluorescents, filling the air with a low humming. Inevitably, the bulb nearest the low place flickered, causing the shadows to jump and dance. The Avernian Gate looked no different than the other old stone

walls they had passed, but it exuded a kind of chill that had nothing to do with the ambient temperature of the subway.

"What did you bring?"

"Well," said Jo, setting down her backpack and unzipping it. "I brought red roses to tempt the dead, my first Valentine to open the way and this, of course." She flicked her wrist and the straight-razor appeared in her hand.

She heard a quiet hiss from behind her and ignored it. The Harridan — Reese's own version of Mr. White — never had approved of the memento. Standing before the Gate, Jo sliced the razor across the heel of her palm, wincing at the pain. She smeared her blood on the Valentine ("Will you be Mine?" signed Tommy in blocky crayon lettering), obscuring the grinning armed cherub on the front. She set the Valentine at the base of the Gate and smeared her blood on the wall as well. She felt Mr. White add his (*its*) own offering as a trail of plasm mixed with her blood. Blood, plasm, and card were pulled into the wall, like the fingers of a twitching hand vanishing into quicksand. Cracks formed in the wall in zigzag patterns and the entire thing collapsed with something almost like a sigh. Beyond the hole was darkness that defied the light of the fluorescents. The Gate beckoned.

"Shall we?" she said.

"Ladies first," said Reese.

Stooping to collect a pair of roses, canteen, and flashlight from her backpack, Jo entered through the low place and was almost immediately swallowed by the gloom. She heard Reese step through the Gate behind her and they set off. The tunnel angled ever-so-slightly downward and for the first few minutes nothing could be seen as darkness pressed all around them. Then, abruptly, light appeared at the end of the tunnel. They hurried toward the light and just as she stepped out of the tunnel and into the light, pain exploded in her skull and she heard the sharp report of a fired pistol. The black that followed was darker still.



The pain in her head subsided, and with it all memory of the pain. For a moment she stood dumbly in front of the hole, trying to remember what she was doing. She looked through the hole and saw the familiar setting of the South Ferry subway excavation site.

"Josephine."

The voice was coming from a figure standing next to her, just inside the Gate. What looked like a gallon of coffee was spilled on the floor, next to a dozen or so crushed cinnamon sticks. Strange symbols traced in blood surrounded the offerings.

"My love," it (*he*) said.

Pain exploded in her head. The pain in her head subsided, and with it all memory... *no!* She forced herself to remember.

"You shot me," she whispered.

Reese turned his head and in the fluorescent light of the dig she saw *he* was wearing a deathmask. A patrician nose jutted out of the deathmask, grotesquely overstated, over a bushy mustache made of bristling steel wool. Long streaks of crimson ran down from the eyeholes and over the paunchy cheeks.

"Mr. White."

"He kept you from me," Reese said. The Harridan cackled under his words. "Don't you see it? This was the *only* way, the only way we could be together."

"You *killed* me, you bastard!"

"I know it's hard," he said. The Harridan squealed with glee. "I didn't want to do it, but now we can be together." He raised his right hand and in it she saw a wooden statue carved to represent her.

*A nude of course. The prick.* Jo thought to herself. "It's *hard*? Hard!" She fought the numbness that threatened to overcome her thoughts. "You arrogant motherfucker! Did you really think I left you because of Mr. White? I left you because you were a possessive, violent shit!"

"You're confused," he said in what he meant to be a soothing tone of voice. "That's only to be expected. Don't worry. As soon as I bind you to an anchor we can get you out of here and find you a new body. Then we can be together." He held the statue out in front of him and began to chant in what sounded like Latin.

*Tck-tck-tck-tck-tck.*

The sound echoed along the tunnel, coming from the darkness behind her. Jo backed against the rough stone of the tunnel wall, staring into the black.

*Tck-tck-tck-tck-tck.*

It was closer now. Reese continued to chant and she was certain he hadn't heard the noise.

She felt herself being drawn toward the statue, her essence being absorbed into it.

*Tck-tck-tck.*

It stopped. The thing was very near. A giant chitinous claw emerged from the darkness on the end of a ghastly gray limb. The claw snapped around Reese's throat, cutting off the chant. Ichor dripped from claw and limb onto him. Reese's faced grew tight and he dropped the statue to pull ineffectually at the claw.

"Thou shalt not kill."

Jo could hear the Harridan screaming.

"Thou shalt not wake the dead."

Another claw snaked its way out of the gloom and reached *inside* Reese, passing through his flesh like a stick through water.

"Thou shalt not free those that wander these benighted halls."

The claw reemerged holding the squirming form of Reese's soul: a pale ghost clad in

a dingy, white shroud. His body stilled as his soul was extracted, leaving only the shrewd gaze of the Harridan staring out from behind Reese's eyes.

*"Three sins to repay"*

Reese's ghost burst into flames. His screams were silenced by a twist of the claw. Jo felt the thing's attention turn to her.

*"You have been wronged,  
yet I may not free you.  
Only flesh may depart this realm."*

The Harridan turned the corners of Reese's mouth up into a wicked smile. Uncertainly, Jo took a step toward the corpse. She reached out a hand to touch the vacant face and her fingers slid through flesh like

the thing's claw had. Another step and she was staring out of Reese's eyes.

*"HELLO DEARIE,"*

cackled the Harridan. A quick flash of a piebald, withered crone with clumps of greasy white hair.

*"The flesh may depart.  
Go as my messenger.  
Tell those who would enter  
this realm of the wages of sin."*

Jo stepped out of the Gate into the flickering fluorescent light, still accustoming herself (*himself?*) to the feel of Reese's stride. The low place closed behind her with a groan.



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BOOK OF THE <sup>TM</sup>  
DEAD

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# Introduction: Descent

Well now!  
The clock of life stopped  
a few minutes ago.

I'm not in the  
world any more.  
Theology's a serious  
thing, hell is  
certainly way down —  
and heaven's above.  
Ecstasy, nightmare,  
sleep in a nest of flames.

—Arthur Rimbaud,  
“Hellish Night”

The walls yield to you. Granite moves with naught but a whisper. You're in the deep, dark. A coffin handle hangs out of the stone wall. An ancient pillar lays collapsed before you. Somewhere in the distance, the murmur of a river sluggish with pus and infection. All around you, *movement* — the pale bodies of ghosts ducking in and out of shadow. You stumble. You wander. You tumble. Hours turn to days, but no sun shines down here — some tunnels are lit by old paper lanterns lambent with pale red flame, others lay lined with odd configurations of glowing fungus. Someone weeps. A whisper is carried on the charnel winds, carrying promises of unimaginable sins.

Why are you here? A loved one slip off this mortal coil? An old business partner took a ride on the Heart Attack Express and ended up down here with a head full of secrets? Maybe you're a necromancer looking for power, a Sin-Eater in search of the blade that murdered Caesar, or a vampire driven to sup at the syrupy blood oozing from cracks in the ceiling. Maybe you don't even want to be here. Maybe you're lost. Will you ever find the way back? How many unnatural rivers must you cross? With how many ghosts must you barter? You seek potent reward, but the greater the reward, the greater the risk...

This is the Underworld. Welcome to the Great Below.

## Beyond the Bound

This book isn't just for those who possess **Geist: The Sin-Eaters** — yes, that book has a robust appendix on the Underworld, and certainly some portions of this book (the Stygian Key, the Manifestation of the Pit) are useful only to those playing Bound characters.

Still, the Underworld is not restricted to the Bound, and the dark depths possess a great deal of crossover potential. So, in an effort to make this book more useful to those who do not possess **Geist: The Sin-Eaters**, we've transcribed some of the more critical rules and ideas regarding the Underworld right here, right now. (Note, however, that you'll find rules specific to multiple types of “monster” in Chapter Two.)

If you already possess **Geist: The Sin-Eaters**, then you're already good to go!

## The Map

The map of the Underworld is, in a nutshell, as follows:

- The world of the living is home to “low places,” sometimes called “cenotes,” and more precisely known as “Avernian Gates.” These subterranean locations may not look like a gate, though they're often marked. Here, the wall is thin between the world of the living and the land of the dead. Opening a gate takes one to...

- ... the Autochthonous Depths, sometimes known as the “Upper Reaches.” All ghosts are subject to a kind of gravity: the longer they're here, the deeper they are pulled into the depths. The Upper Reaches are home to ghosts who've been here roughly a century or less. The tunnels here are tighter, maze-like, and often reflect more human cultures (anything from the New York Subway System to the tombs of New Orleans, depending on where one made an ingress). Wander long enough and one will find...