



# anathema

a roleplaying game of death deferred

*By Devon Oratz*

## Credits

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## How to use this book

This entire RPG was written in under 24 hours for the February 2011 Ronnies, so it might not be the pinnacle of organization, and to make matters worse, the section headings are more poetical than functional. Hopefully, this introductory blurb will be helpful.

The first section, **Confessions Of A Shroud** explains the initial hook of the game: what you are playing as, why you should care. The second section **A World of Shrouds** finishes the short introduction with an explanation of the setting and the basic premise. The next chapter covers the **Basic Mechanics** of play in brief, a useful primer for the following chapter.

The next chapter **I Felt The Hand Of God (And That's The Last Thing That I Felt)** explains how to handle character creation and the first game session, which both incidentally are fused into one process. **Sudden Unexplained Death** lists the special powers possessed by all Shrouds, as well as their general characteristics, and lastly summarizes the Dominions that they can choose to invest in. The next chapter **A Murder Of Angels** provides a sketch of a system for turn based conflict resolution, namely, combat.

The final two chapters are ones that players who don't plan on GMing may wish to avoid if they prefer not to risk seeing hints as to the story's possible endings. The first of them, **God Called In Sick Today** explains what exactly Shrouds do and the challenges, opponents, and consequences they may face. The final section, **Even Death May Die** speculates on the possible endgames of any given Anathema campaign, which are meant to be somewhere between short and indefinite.

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# Confessions of a Shroud

In this roleplaying game, you play a **Shroud**. (Okay, but what's a Shroud?)

A Shroud is best defined by what it is not.

\* Shrouds are not demons or angels, although they are constantly mistaken for them on the rare occasions they are glimpsed by mortals who live to record the occurrence. The similarities to the angels and demons of Judeo-Christian folklore, and other mythical beings, are obvious. Shrouds are magnificent and horrifying winged beings with a supernatural aura that inspires awe or religious terror, beings for whom the laws of man and the laws of physics hold no sway, neither dead nor alive, bestriding life and death. But Shrouds are not creatures of heaven or of hell.

\* Shrouds are not human. Although they once were. A Shroud is repurposed from the memories and the body of a human being after their death; the human being that birthed a Shroud is called a **Husk**. Shrouds retain fractured memories of their Husks, are guided by their viewpoints and haunted by their sins, but Shrouds are not them. Eventually, their humanity is lost forever.

\* A Shroud is not a ghost. A Shroud *is* undead, and only takes up the mantle of corporeality when it chooses. Yet it has no emotional tie to any particular place or unfinished business, or at least, no interest in haunting anyone or any place, short of killing them.

\* A Shroud is not a Grim Reaper or an Angel of Death, although they serve a very similar function. The distinctions are important. As captured in folklore, the Grim Reaper is a mere personification of death. His actions are preordained, an ambivalent psychopomp claiming the souls of mortals when it is their time. The Grim Reaper is not a murderer. Shrouds are. Likewise, an Angel of Death is the wrathful arm of God, murdering on the command of a vengeful deity. A Shroud does not kill out of wrath, but out of necessity. The purpose of a Shroud is to decrease the surplus population.

\* Shrouds do not harvest souls for any God or devil. In fact, they do not see or interact with the soul any more than you and I, nor do they have any say over its ultimate fate. The work of a Shroud is to separate human beings from the moral coil, a necessary end in which all Shrouds serve **The Balance**, an impersonal power that makes no claims to either good (although it acts out of a benevolent motive) or evil (although it performs horrible acts). The Balance uses the Shrouds it has created as its agents to trim the excess biomass of Earth, an act necessary for the survival of the planet itself and all of the lives that it contains.

\* Shrouds are not immortal (though some try). The Balance does not think or hesitate, and acts immediately based on inherent knowledge that it does not question the origin of. It expects the same from its Shrouds, though they, once human, are frail, fractured, fallible souls. The ones that don't eventually deviate from or violate the tenets of their mission (necessitating their removal by other Shrouds) or fail on their assigned tasks and face their **Final Dissolution** are constantly plagued by their **Will To Die**. The existence of a Shroud is unnatural—paradoxical at best, considering that The Balance, if anything identifiable, *is* Nature itself—and even the most stubborn Shrouds eventually surrender and fall into the great unknown.

LOVE YOUR HATE, YOUR FAITH LOST  
YOU ARE NOW ONE OF US.

## a world of shrouds

**Anathema** is a roleplaying game for two to six (or more) players. Most players play as (i.e. portray and control) a Shroud, a harvester of human lives that was once human, but is no longer. One player is **The Balance**, responsible for portraying the mysterious force that animates and commands the Shrouds, as well as the Shrouds' various victims, adversaries, and anyone else they meet. The Balance is also responsible for creating and populating the world that the Shrouds have descended upon, and shares a bit of extra responsibility in shaping the story and acting as a referee for the rules. For sanity's sake, pleased as I am with the conflation of NPC and metagame role, in these rules I will use 'The Balance' to refer solely to the character, and refer to the player role as the '**GM**'.

This section will describe the basic concept and setting of the game.

Anathema is set "the day after tomorrow" in "a world not quite our own". This means it takes place in the near future of an alternate history or an alternate universe. This does not mean that Anathema particularly benefits from lasers, cybernetics, virtual reality, or a timeline in which the South won the Civil War...unless you think any of those elements would significantly enhance *your* game. By default, Anathema is set in the year 2013 in an alternate history identical to our own except for the fact that the world population is approximately *nine billion people* (now may be a good time to check the current world population; it may be more than you think). The world of Anathema is a shade darker and colder, bleaker and rainier, than our own; it is a world of frightened people, haunted by death and in the face of that, the futility of life.

The Balance thinks that this is too many people, although in fact The Balance does not think, opine, or contemplate anything; it simply knows. It has instituted an aggressive program to reduce the world population by *four billion* or more, creating Shrouds to work to ensure that the death rate far exceeds the birth rate. In truth, it has done this many times before. The great wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the great plagues of the 1980s and the middle ages, all of these were the work of Shrouds, at the behest of The Balance. All of these were attempts to keep the world population under the number that The Balance had in mind. Some would call this mass murder on an unthinkable scale. Others would contend that the culling was and is absolutely necessary to minimize humanoid suffering to acceptable levels and/or to prevent the collapse of the entire planetary biomass. The Balance is in all things about duality, and recognizes both sides of the coin: that what it is doing is both mass murder and completely necessary. In this, the Shrouds are its agents.

Anathema is a game in which you, as the player of a Shroud, are tasked to kill as many people in as short a time as possible—with various complications that will be discussed later notwithstanding, Shrouds are given no guidelines on who to kill, in what order, or how to do so. While interesting logistical questions come up, Anathema is not inherently about the *logistical* problem of doing your part in reaping four billion souls. Rather it is the psychological and spiritual consequences of these actions being performed by a being that was once a mortal human that is the crux of Anathema.

How can you kill thousands to serve The Balance while clinging to the tatters of your humanity?

A THOUSAND BONES PILED UP  
I NEVER THOUGHT WOULD BE ENOUGH  
TO SHOW YOU JUST WHAT I'VE BEEN THINKING

## basic mechanics

Besides a few friends and this book, what you need to play Anathema are some regular, garden variety six sided dice. You'll probably want to have about ten dice on hand for each person who is playing, including the GM.

Actions in Anathema that are not trivially easy are resolved by rolling a **dice pool**, a number of dice equal to the relevant **Ability** (for humans) or the relevant Ability plus any relevant **Dominion** (for Shrouds). As a rule, each individual die that comes up as a 4, 5, or 6 is a **success**. The more successes you roll, the better. In general, you will either want to roll a set number of successes (called a **Threshold**) or, in an **Opposed Test**, roll more successes than your opponent rolled.

### Threshold Test Example

*A Shroud (with Perception 5) attempting to determine the location of a specific human within one hundred miles would make a Threshold 3 Perception Test, rolling five dice. If three or more dice came up with a four or higher, the test would be successful.*

### Opposed Test

*The same Shroud has Combat 4 and War Dominion 2 and is attempting to kill the same human. The Shroud rolls 6 Dice, the human resists with his Combat 3. The Shroud rolls 2, 5, 2, 1, 4, 6. The human rolls 1, 6, 3. The Shroud has three successes to the human's one, and has successfully hit, with two **Net Successes**. (For the particulars of damage, see **A Murder of Angels**.)*

One Ability (see next page) possessed by all Shrouds is **Will**. A Shroud can spend a point of Will *after* the dice for a test have been rolled to **reroll** all the dice that failed (in other words, to keep all of the 4s, 5s, and 6s and reroll all of the 1s, 2s, and 3s). However, doing so is not without its risks and drawbacks, and should not be done lightly. Will points are not easy to come by, can be damaged or lost, and if a character's Will is reduced to 0 the character is annihilated. However, spending Will remains a viable last resort to prevent unlucky rolls from ruining the best laid plans. Will can only be spent in this way once per roll.

The GM in Anathema can apply **Situational Modifiers** to dice rolls—both Threshold Tests and Opposed Tests—in two distinct ways.

**Dice Pool Modifiers** add to or subtract from the Dice Pool that a player rolls to attempt an action.

**Difficulty Adjustments**, less common than dice pool modifiers, increase or decrease the result needed on each individual die to count as a success. For instance, a Difficulty Adjustment (5), which could also be annotated as a Difficulty Adjustment (+1) would make it so that only the dice which rolled a result of 5 or higher would count as successes. Likewise, a Difficulty Adjustment (3) would do just the opposite. No matter the Difficulty Adjustment, a die result of two or lower is always a failure and a die result of six is always a success.

All characters in Anathema have six core **Abilities**, generally rated from one to five (although one is a hard minimum, five is not a hard maximum). The first five of these Abilities are the same for humans and for Shrouds; only humans have Life, and only shrouds have Anathema.

#### **-Combat-**

This is the capacity for physically harming others or defending yourself from physical harm, and is an abstract representation of everything from your skill in fisticuffs to your ability to find cover and place shots accurately in a firefight.

#### **-Perception -**

Perception governs intuition, cognition, and sensory acuity. It is used to determine whether or not a character is aware of something.

#### **-Manipulation-**

The ability for any kind of fine manipulation or brute force, physical, mental, or social. Manipulation encompasses manual dexterity, social maneuvering, and much more.

#### **-Resistance-**

Resistance determines a character's ability to resist physical, mental, or spiritual harm.

#### **-Will-**

Specifically, will to live, although willpower, courage, and force of personality are also implied. Will differs from other attributes in that in addition to determining dice pools, Will is measured in *points* which can be spent or lost. Reduction to zero Will is tantamount to obliteration.

#### **-Life-**

Like will, Life is measured in *points* and tracks the Physical Health of a human character. A human reduced to 0 Life is killed. Unlike Will, Life is never *rolled*. Shrouds have no Life score. Life's starting value is its maximum value (maximum 5), which it cannot be increased beyond. If it ever becomes important to the story, humans do slowly regain lost Life over time.

#### **-Anathema-**

Anathema is what Shrouds have instead of Life; like Life, Anathema is not rolled. Unlike humans and Life, Shrouds take no ill effects from having 0 Anathema. Shrouds spend Anathema to activate their supernatural powers. Shrouds gain Anathema—usually one point—for every human whose life they end. There is no upper limit to the amount of Anathema that any given Shroud can store.

## i felt the hand of god (and that's the last thing that i felt)

The first session of a game of Anathema and the character creation process are rolled up into one, an experience called a **Beautiful Death**. Before they construct their Shrouds, each player must decide upon the identity of their Husk. A Husk's identity is composed of numerous factors, including their name, profession, personality, history, age, appearance, family, and all the other little details that make someone human. None of these factors will have any mechanical impact on gameplay, but they should be recorded in as much detail as possible. It is important to have the whole record of a Husk's life, so that it can later be shattered to fragments and scrambled. During this period, the player may also want to begin thinking about *why* The Balance chose their Husk to become a Shroud (see next page). At some point during the above process—before, after, or during—each player should distribute 10 Ability Points however they see fit between the Husk's Combat, Perception, Manipulation, and Resistance. They must spend at least 1 point on each Ability; the maximum for each is 5.

The next thing that must be determined is if the Husks knew each other in life, and, more to the point, if they died together. If they died separately, then the Beautiful Death must be roleplayed by turns, with the GM switching the perspective at the appropriate times to keep everyone at the table engaged, ensuring that no one is hogging the spotlight or going long periods of time without roleplaying.

A Beautiful Death could perhaps best be described as the events of the Husk's life flashing before the eyes of the newborn Shroud. While certain important moments should be experienced vividly, the most important event to capture in scene is the death of the Husk. It is the last moments—peaceful, agonizing, heartbreaking, whatever they may be—of the life of the Husk that are most important into the birth of its resultant Shroud. For reasons to be explored later, the exact date at which a Husk passes must not be predetermined. A Shroud's Husk can have died in any way *except* by the hand of another Shroud. Anathema uses the conceit that there are (broadly speaking) six ways to die. They are:

- \* By Violence (Homicide by any means, savaged by animals, etc.)
- \* By Accident (Falling from a high place, being impaled, immolated, crushed, car crash, etc.)
- \* Old Age (Passing peacefully in your sleep from natural causes.)
- \* Illness (Cancer, AIDS, necrotizing fasciitis, pneumonia, heart disease, etc.)
- \* Deprivation (Starvation, dehydration, exposure to the elements, sleep deprivation, etc.)
- \* Suicide

The death that the Husk succumbed to will determine the primary Dominion of the Shroud.

- \* A Shroud whose Husk died by violence gains the primary Dominion of War.
- \* A Shroud whose Husk died by accident gains the primary Dominion of Misfortune.
- \* A Shroud whose Husk died of old age gains the primary Dominion of Atrophy.
- \* A Shroud whose Husk died from illness gains the primary Dominion of Pestilence.
- \* A Shroud whose Husk died of deprivation gains the primary Dominion of Famine.
- \* A Shroud whose Husk committed suicide gains the primary Dominion of Despair.

A Shroud starts with a score of 3 in their primary Dominion.

EVERY DAY IS THE SAME  
EVERY PLACE IS THE SAME  
VIOLENT



At the moment between the death of the Husk and the return of the Shroud to earth, the player can also spend 5 Dominion Points divided between the remaining (non-primary) Dominions however they like. Unlike Abilities, there is no minimum score for Dominions. Dominions other than the primary one have a maximum equal to the score of the primary Dominion minus one. (Hence a Shroud whose Husk died by violence cannot have a score of more than 2 in Misfortune.) The highest score that any Dominion can have, ever, is five.

In this same moment, the player can distribute 6 additional Ability Points between their Shroud's Combat, Perception, Manipulation, and Resistance, as the Shroud's Abilities are more formidable than those of its Husk. These points can increase any of these Abilities above 5, however each point of Ability score above the fifth costs *two* Ability Points.

Before, during, or after this time spent “in shadows growing wings”, the player of each Shroud must decide why, out of three broad categories, their Husk was chosen by The Balance. These decisions will determine how the Shroud is **Vindicated**, how it might reach **Satori**, and what might cause it to **Rebel** and face **Dissolution**.

#### **-THE VIOLENT-**

The Violent were chosen by The Balance because they were, in life, gifted killers (and most likely, very objectively bad people), which The Balance needs to fulfill its mission. Assassins, career criminals, serial killers, and special forces soldiers are common professions of The Violent while they were alive. The defining Pathos of the Violent is competition/ambition.

**Vindication:** A Violent Shroud is vindicated by doing its job so well that it outperforms its “competition”, which may be another player's Shroud, an NPC Shroud, or simply itself (beating its own record in say, kills per day). When a Violent Shroud beats its competition in this way, it gains a point of Will.

**Rebellion/Dissolution:** A Violent Shroud is most likely to rebel by perverting the purpose of the powers given to it by The Balance. For instance, a Violent Shroud may rebel by killing (only, mostly, or conspicuously) the enemies it remembers from life or by seeking worldly power, mistaking itself for a demigod rather than a civil servant. The consequences of either of these include, incidentally, a Violent Shroud that is voluntarily conspicuous. Whenever a Violent Shroud *abstains* from acquiring worldly power or revenge, it loses a point of Will. Worse, if a Violent Shroud *fails* to abstain and indulges in such behavior too often, it may be considered a rebel and earmarked for Dissolution by The Balance.

#### **-THE LOST-**

The lost have no idea why they were chosen, and remember less of their lives than other Shrouds. Choose any one hundred of them, and no two will have anything in common, except that they were not particularly good or bad people, and rather average. The defining Pathos of the Lost is curiosity. Their primary motivation is to comprehend their own existence.

**Vindication:** A Lost Shroud is vindicated by piecing together—in a way that its player can intelligently articulate—a part of the mystery of its past life in a way that contributes to its understanding of its current condition. When a Lost Shroud grows one step closer to understanding who it once was, and why it was chosen to be a Shroud, it gains a point of Will.

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**Rebellion/Dissolution:** A Lost Shroud is most likely to rebel through inaction; it is more interested in recovering its shattered memories and understanding its state of being than in doing its job. The Balance firmly believes that “ours is not to question why”: a Lost Shroud that becomes lost in pondering its own mystery is at the very least a waste, and perhaps even an affront (if The Balance can be said to be affronted). Whenever a Lost Shroud notably *abstains* from pursuing the mystery of its own existence(s), it loses a point of Will. Worse, if it repeatedly *fails* to abstain, it may be earmarked for Dissolution by The Balance.

### **-THE KINDLY-**

The Kindly were chosen by The Balance for their mercy, in order to balance the scales against the Violent. For every Violent Shroud created, a Kindly Shroud is chosen to counterbalance it. In life, most Kindly Shrouds were good people, aid workers, priests, nuns, individuals interested in helping others for genuinely altruistic reasons. For this reason, Kindly Shrouds view their existence as a terrible and undeserved punishment. The defining Pathos of a Kindly Shroud is reticence.

**Vindication:** Whenever a Kindly Shroud can rationalize that it has acted morally and/or mercifully—by only killing someone who “deserved to die” or someone who was killing others, by giving someone a gentle, merciful death, or by giving death to someone who *wishes* to die—they are Vindicated, and gain a point of Will.

**Rebellion/Dissolution:** A Kindly Shroud is most likely to rebel through outright refusal, depending on who and how many that the Balance wishes it to kill. Whenever a Kindly Shroud is forced by the Balance to kill someone who doesn’t deserve it and/or to kill someone in a way they don’t deserve in order to meet its quota, in other words, whenever a Kindly Shroud performs its function in a way it is unable to rationalize, it loses a point of Will. Worse, if a Kindly Shroud dares outright refusal too often, it may be earmarked for Dissolution by The Balance.

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Besides the way it died, the reason why it was chosen, and a few scattered memories (see below) each Shroud has a **Victim Preference** and a **Victim Avoidance**. A Victim Preference is described by two to three or more adjectives, or a high degree of specificity, for instance, “haughty blonde cheerleader” or “KKK Member”. A Victim Avoidance should have only one or two descriptors, like “small children” or “old women”. A Victim Preference that is too specific or a Victim Avoidance that is too general could both have a negative impact on the character’s longevity. Whenever a Shroud kills a preferred victim, they gain one point of Will (at the GM’s discretion) and twice the normal Anathema. Whenever a Shroud must kill a victim of the type they would rather avoid killing, they lose a point of Will. *Kindly Shrouds* are not allowed a Victim Preference (since they may already be Vindicated by a similar condition being met).

Every newborn Shroud returns to the world an entirely random amount of time after it died (see Table 1) remembering nothing of the time between life and undeath. Shrouds have an instinctive understanding of what they are, and only limited memories of what they once were. Specifically, Shrouds begin with 1d6 memory fragments (see below) from their Husk—Lost Shrouds receive only 1d6 -3 such fragments. The name of the Husk is not the name of the Shroud, and Shrouds more often choose their own name or go nameless rather than cling to the name of their Husk.

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VIOLENT

Whenever a Shroud (except a Lost Shroud) gains a point of Will, they must make a Threshold 2 Perception Test. If they succeed, they regain an additional random memory fragment—Lost Shrouds may be able to gain them through investigation. A Shroud that loses a point of Will must succeed a Threshold 1 Perception Test or *forget* one of the memory fragments that they already have.

**Table 1: Time Since Death of Husk**

1d6 Roll Result	Time Units Since Death
1	Minutes.
2	Hours.
3	Days.
4	Weeks.
5	Months.
6	Years.

*Note:* After you determine the unit type, roll  $2d6 + 1$  to determine the *number* of those units that have passed between the death of the Husk and the return of the Shroud to Earth. *Shrouds remember nothing of the time between their death and return.*

**Table 2: Random Memory Fragments**

2d6 Roll Result	Partial memory of...
2	A parent (or lack thereof.)
3	A sibling (or close friend.)
4-5	A (important) lover (or lack thereof.)
6	A happy occurrence.
7	A tragedy.
8	An enemy.
9	A job.
10	Your child (or your pet, or any child, or lack thereof).
11-12	Your death.

*Note:* Starting Shrouds roll 1d6 times on this table, ignoring redundant rolls; Lost Shrouds get only  $1d6 - 3$  rolls on this table.

In terms of their formidable supernatural powers, Shrouds that have newly returned are as weak as kittens. A “new” Shroud begins with Anathema 0, Will 10, and the Abilities and Dominions discussed above. *Shrouds who have Despair as their primary Dominion only start with Will 7.*

At this moment when the Shrouds return to Earth (in a location chosen by the GM) and begin to meet one another and struggle with (or result in) the fell purpose of their new lives, the Beautiful Death is complete and the campaign proper has begun. For thoughts on how that campaign may logically conclude, see **Even Death Must Die**.

Note that not everyone should play a shroud with the same origins. In fact, *there should always be at least as many types of shrouds represented as there are players at the table*. A game of Anathema with all of the PCs being Violent Shrouds or all being Kindly Shrouds would most likely lose much of its nuance. Part of the focus of the game is on the difference between the backgrounds of the Shrouds and their Husks.

EVERY DAY IS THE SAME  
EVERY PLACE IS THE SAME  
VIOLENT

## Sudden unexplained death

This chapter covers the powers and abilities of Shrouds, both the traits that they all share alike and the Dominions that various Shrouds command varying levels of mastery over. It also discusses the appearance of Shrouds and their various (meta)physical traits.

### **-On Wings of Murder-**

Shrouds can fly, and have enormous, powerful wings. The appearance of their wings depends upon their Seeming (see below) but the capabilities of the wings do not vary. In “tactical” (micro-scale) terms, the wings and other traits of a Shroud allow it to be wherever it wishes to be when it acts each turn in Combat (see **A Murder of Angels** for more details). Closing distance on or escaping from a human—even a human in a fast moving vehicle—is trivial for a Shroud. In “strategic” (macro-scale) terms, a Shroud has an overland flight speed approximately equivalent to that of a commercial aircraft, and can cross, for instance, from the East Coast to the West Coast in approximately six hours under the power of their own wings. This limitation is all that keeps a Shroud from visiting every house on earth in one night, like Santa Claus.

### **-Darkle-**

It is trivial for a Shroud to choose between being visible or invisible. Their ability to become invisible isn’t limited to the visible spectrum, as they can also choose to be silent and give off no scent. Or, of course, a Shroud can choose to be highly visible, give off terrifying sounds, and emit the stench of the grave (see seeming below). If a Shroud wishes to be undetected, any mortals in its vicinity must succeed a Threshold 3 Perception Test with Difficulty Adjustment (5) to perceive it. Even then, all that they register is a bad feeling or a chill, as though a goose walked over their grave, although excess successes beyond the third (unlikely) may give them more information.

### **-Grave Wind-**

A Shroud can be as incorporeal or corporeal as it chooses at any given time. It is generally assumed that a Shroud using combat to physically harm a human becomes corporeal to do so, and that it is their partially incorporeal nature that makes Shrouds impervious to the attacks of mortals. This trait also means that purely physical barriers like doors cannot stop or slow Shrouds, which can simply flow underneath them, through the keyhole, etcetera. A Shroud can even enter or leave an air tight room.

### **-I’ll Sleep When You’re Dead-**

Shrouds cannot be killed or really harmed by mortals or their weaponry. Anything that would cause loss of Life to a human causes a Shroud to lose that many points of Anathema. Being reduced (back) to 0 Anathema by being stabbed, shot, or run over with a Mack truck does not kill a Shroud, and such “damage” cannot reduce a Shroud’s Anathema below zero. However, attacks by other Shrouds *can* reduce a Shroud’s Anathema below 0. If a Shroud’s Anathema is ever reduced below –Resistance in this way, they are permanently dissolved. (A Shroud with Resistance 4 whose Anathema is reduced to -5 or less is dissolved.)

I’M COMING BACK FROM THE DEAD AND I’ LL TAKE YOU HOME WITH ME

### **-Killer Competence-**

When rolling only an Ability and not a discipline and when performing any action *that a human could reasonably perform*, a Shroud can, before the roll, spend Anathema to receive bonus dice on the roll at a one-for-one basis, to a maximum dice pool of *twice* the relevant Ability. For instance if, in some odd turn of events, a Shroud (with Manipulation 3) was for some reason providing *first aid* to a human (which the GM, ad-hoc, declares a Manipulation Test), the Shroud could spend up to 3 Anathema before the roll to add up to three dice to the test.

### **-Seeming-**

By default, a Shroud is a wraith of tattered rags and shadows, “dressed” in a long, torn hooded cloak, which seems to flow and writhe unnaturally in a wind unfelt, the fabric making whispering and hissing sounds as it shifts. Beneath the hood of cloak there is only darkness, or perhaps the glimpse of a single, glowing eye. The entire figure is not seen clearly, obfuscated in a murky, twilight gloom. Rising from the figure’s back are enormous wings, which may be feathered like an angel’s, leathery like those of a bat or gargoyle, or anything else, but which most commonly look like ragged wisps of shadow. Of course, that can get boring. Your Shroud can look like whatever you please, but most often a Shroud is either terrifying, beautiful, or a little of both. The higher your current Anathema is, the more impressive your Shroud is, the more terrifying, beautiful, or both, with the aesthetic details up to you. One thing that Shrouds have difficulty accomplishing is appearing human, even temporarily. To take a humanoid form for the duration of a scene (or one hour, whichever is less) you must spend 1 Anathema. Additionally, you must win an Opposed Manipulation vs. Perception test against any mortals who interact with you during this time—you suffer Difficulty Adjustment (5) on this test. If you fail or tie, they are able to tell something is off about you; the more the degree of failure, the more they are able to perceive your true nature. While appearing in human form, you are unwinged, corporeal, and visible—hence you don’t benefit from On Wings Of Murder, Darkle, or Grave Wind. Even while in human form, Shrouds are incapable of normal human interactions, including displays of physical affection of any kind; a Shroud that touches a human instantly reveals its nature.

### **-Will To Die-**

(For humans, Will begins as a static value from 1 to 5 and functionally can only be reduced, usually by the actions of a Shroud attempting to force that human to commit suicide. A human with 0 Will is suicidal.) For Shrouds, Will is a continuum, beginning at 10 (usually) with no upper limit. Will is gained by preying on preferred victims and through Vindication, based on the Shroud’s origins. It can be lost by being forced to kill victims for which you have a Victim Avoidance, and by abstaining from the temptation to rebel—it can also be spent to reroll all failures on any die roll. Finally, it can be damaged by the Despair Dominion of other Shrouds.

When a Shroud reaches 0 Will, they dissolve forever, their will to live evaporated. For all of these reasons, there are more ways to lose Will than to gain it. The point of the game of Anathema is the struggle, but the existence of any Shroud is a downward spiral; eventually they will either lose the will to live or rebel and be hunted down. There are other possibilities, discussed in **Even Death May Die**.

I'M COMING BACK FROM THE DEAD AND I' LL TAKE YOU HOME WITH ME

### **-War Dominion-**

At no Anathema cost, Shrouds can roll Combat + War Dominion to attack their targets in physical combat. See **A Murder of Angels** for details. Shrouds who prefer the War Dominion have no *need* to use weapons, but often find comfort in using the weapons that they used in life.

Level 1: A Shroud can also spend one Anathema point before attacking to increase the *damage* done by an attack by a number of points equal to their War level, although if the attack does not succeed, no damage is done. This can only increase the damage by a maximum of *one* when attacking other Shrouds.

Level 2: A Shroud can spend one Anathema point to attack two targets at once in one turn in combat. This attack can't be used to attack one target twice. Resolve the attacks normally.

Level 3: A Shroud can use a turn to Incite Rage, targeting up to three Humans and spending one Anathema point for each human targeted. The Shroud rolls Manipulation + War Dominion, the humans each roll Resistance. If the Shroud wins or ties against any given humans, those characters begin attacking each other or any other humans that the Shroud wills them to. The effect lasts for the duration of the scene or the combat.

Level 4: A Shroud can now spend two Anathema points to attack four targets at once in one turn in combat. Resolve the attacks normally.

Level 5: *Riot*: In this ultimate expression of the War Dominion, a Shroud can use a turn to start a riot. The Shroud must spend 10 Anathema points for every square mile effected (maximum ten square miles) and must succeed a Manipulation + War Dominion Test with a Threshold from one to ten set by the GM based on the population of the area.

### **-Misfortune Dominion-**

Level 1: *Accident Freak*: A Shroud can use a turn and spend one Anathema point to attempt to force any human within line of sight to suffer a tragic accident. The Shroud rolls Manipulation + Misfortune Dominion, opposed by the target's Resistance. The GM should apply Dice Pool Modifiers to each side depending on how likely an accident would be in the given situation. For instance, a human who is asleep in bed is very unlikely to suffer an accident, but a human operating heavy machinery is very likely to suffer one. In special circumstances, this power might even cause secondary casualties beyond the primary victim. If the Shroud wins, the human loses a number of points of Life equal to the net hits rolled by the Shroud.

Level 2: *Twist Fate*: Once per turn, as a Free Action a Shroud can spend one Anathema point to force anyone (player or GM) who just made a roll to reroll one of the dice that came up a success.

Level 3: A Shroud can now target a number of targets with *Accident Freak* each turn equal to the Shroud's Misfortune score. The Shroud must spend one Anathema point for each target. The Shroud rolls one Manipulation + Misfortune Dominion; compare the Resistance tests separately.

Level 4: *Improved Twist Fate*: Once per turn, as a Free Action, a Shroud can now spend five Anathema points to force anyone to reroll *all* of the dice that came up successes on a roll they just made.

Level 5: *Crash and Burn*: A Shroud can attempt to cause an accident that costs hundreds of lives (such as a plane crash). First, the Shroud must identify a potential target, and then spend between ten and fifty Anathema Points based on the potential casualties. Then the Shroud must spend a turn and succeed a Manipulation + Misfortune Dominion test with a Threshold set by the GM based on the probability of the accident, with less probable accidents being harder to cause. If the Shroud succeeds, the accident occurs, killing many, many humans.

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### **-Atrophy Dominion-**

To use Atrophy on a human, a Shroud spends a point of Anathema, spends a turn, and rolls Manipulation + Atrophy Dominion. The human opposes the test with Resistance, and with Difficulty Adjustment (5). For each net success that the Shroud has, the human gains one point of Age. For every two points of Age a human gains, they lose one point of Will. Human Age is scored from 1 (0-5 Yrs. Old) to 6 (80+). A human whose Age is reduced above 6 immediately dies. A human whose Will is reduced to 0 in this way eventually falls into a catatonic state of despair or commits suicide; they are treated as having died immediately. Atrophy has no effect on other Shrouds.

Level One: At this level, a Shroud must touch its victim to use Atrophy.

Level Two: No changes.

Level Three: At this level, a Shroud needs only line of sight on its victim.

Level Four: The Shroud can now target (Atrophy Dominion) victims with Atrophy at once. The Shroud rolls one Manipulation + Atrophy Dominion test, and the humans' resistance tests are rolled and compared separately.

Level Five: Each net hit now causes the victim to gain *two* points of Age.

### **-Pestilence Dominion-**

You can only use any given level of Pestilence once on a given human. Pestilence has no effect whatsoever on other Shrouds.

Level One: *Weaken Immune System*: A Shroud can spend a point of Anathema and one turn to weaken the immune system of one human within line of sight. This does nothing in and of itself, but humans are never perfectly healthy, and this can make even a common cold fatal, let alone an infection or a nascent tumor. Roll Manipulation + Pestilence Dominion, contested by the human's Resistance. Every net hit you score causes the human to lose one Life, but not *immediately*. The loss of life doesn't occur for a number of days equal to 6 – your net hits. If you have six or more net hits, the damage occurs immediately.

Level Two: Each net hit you score on a Weaken Immune System test now reduces the victim's Resistance by one; this effect is immediate.

Level Three: *Deadly Virulence*: You can spend two points of Anathema and one turn to infect a human within line of sight with a fast-acting and deadly bacteria or virus. Roll Manipulation + Pestilence Dominion, contested by the human's Resistance. Every net hit you score causes the human to lose two Life. The loss of life is delayed only by a number of hours equal to 4 – your net hits. If you have four or more net hits, the damage occurs immediately.

Level Four: *Typhoid Mary*: You can now spend one additional point of Anathema to *pull* any number of your net hits when using *Deadly Virulence*. Any human who comes into contact with your victim must succeed a Resistance test with a Threshold equal to the net hits you pulled or be infected with the same contagion. For example, if you rolled four net successes and chose to pull two, the initial victim would lose 4 Life in two hours. Any human the victim interacted with in that time would need to succeed a Threshold 2 Resistance Test or loses 4 Life in two hours *themselves*. Additionally, humans that survive your use of Pestilence lose a number of points of Will equal to half of the life that they lost.

Level Five: *Black Plague*: You can now use your *Deadly Virulence* on *all* humans within line of sight. You must spend two points of Anathema per target; roll Manipulation + Pestilence as normal. It may be expedient to just make one Resistance test for all of the targets.

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### **-Famine Dominion-**

Level One: You can spend one point of Anathema to turn any volume of food you can touch to dust and ashes, and to pollute any water source you touch.

Level Two: *Dehydrate*: You can induce the symptoms of dehydration in one human victim within line of sight. You can spend one turn and one point of Anathema and roll Manipulation + Famine Dominion, contested by a human victim's Resistance. Each net success you get causes the victim to lose one Life. When used against a Shroud, this ability cuts off their magical sustenance: they lose 1 Anathema for each net success you roll.

Level Three: You can now spend five points of Anathema to destroy *all food and water* within line of sight.

Level Four: *Desiccate*: Your *Dehydrate* power now causes the victim to lose *two* Life per net hit when used against human targets.

Level Five: *Drought*: Roll Manipulation + Famine before using your *Dehydrate* power. You can target a number of humans with your *Dehydrate* power this turn equal to the successes you roll. You must spend one Anathema point for each target. Make only one Manipulation + Famine roll, comparing their Resistance rolls to it separately.

### **-Despair Dominion-**

Level One: *Ennui*: You can cause minor misery in one human or Shroud within line of sight. Spend one turn and one point of Anathema. Roll Manipulation + Despair Dominion, opposed by the target's Will. If you win or tie the roll, the target loses one point of Will. This cannot reduce the victim's Will below 1.

Level Two: *Melancholia*: As *Ennui*, except if you succeed the target loses *two* points of Will.

Level Three: *Depression*: You can cause moderate misery in one human or Shroud within line of sight. Spend one turn and two points of Anathema. Roll Manipulation + Despair Dominion, opposed by the target's Will. The victim loses a number of points of Will equal to your net successes. If this reduces the victim's Will to 0, and they are human, they commit suicide in a number of days equal to six – your net successes (minimum one hour). If this reduces a Shroud's Will to zero, they are immediately dissolved.

Level Four: *Despair*: You can cause severe misery in your victims. This functions as *Depression* except that it costs three points of Anathema and the victim loses *two* points of Will for each net success, and human victims commit suicide in just (4 – Net Successes) hours (minimum one hour).

Level Five: *Miseria Cantare*: You can now target up to five humans at once with your *Despair* or *Depression* as long as they are all within Line of Sight. Make one Manipulation + Despair roll and compare the humans Will roll results to your roll separately. This ability can still only target *one* Shroud **or** (not and) up to five humans.

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## a murder of angels

This chapter briefly details the rules for conflict resolution in Anathema. Anathema is not a very combat heavy game, so nearly everything (movement, initiative, weapons, damage) is abstracted. However, the concept of “turn based” concept is kept as an orderly way to resolve conflicts.

### Turn Order

Shrouds act first, in clockwise order around the table. Humans (controlled by the GM) act last, regardless of table position. If the GM is controlling any Shrouds and it is important who goes first, have every Shroud (PC or NPC) that wants to go first roll 3d6. The one with the highest roll goes first, and the next highest, and so-on. Humans still go last. If it is important, a turn in actual physical combat can be assumed to be about ten seconds long. Once everyone has gone once, the turn reverts to the character that acted first. Rinse and repeat until combat is over.

### Movement

Shrouds can move as far as they want to within the space of a turn, within reason. Certainly they can run circles around humans, and keep up with each other easily. Due to their wings, they are also not restricted to moving in two dimensions. Humans can only move a small distance each turn, trivial and limited compared to Shrouds.

### Actions

Everyone gets one normal action per turn, plus one free action. For Shrouds, a normal action most likely means attacking or using one of their Dominions. For humans actions are probably just restricted to attacking, and most likely in vain at that. Actions can also accomplish any other tasks that could reasonably be accomplished in ten seconds (opening and shutting a door, turning on a car, and other things that won't help humans escape alive).

*Table 3: Typical Action List*

Normal Actions (1/Turn)	Free Actions (1/Turn)	Non-Actions
Attack (Physical Combat)	Toggle Invisibility/Visibility	Spend Will to reroll failures.
Attack Two/Four Targets (War Dominion)	Toggle Incorporeality/Corporeality	Roleplay/speak dialogue.
Use War Dominion	Spend Anathema to boost an Ability for next test.	***
Cause Accident (Misfortune Dominion)	Spend Anathema to increase damage. (War Dominion)	***
Use Atrophy Domain	Twist Fate (Misfortune Dominion)	***
Use Pestilence Dominion	***	***
Use Famine Dominion	***	***
Use Despair Dominion	***	***
Change Seeming	***	***
Fight Defensively*	***	***

*\*When fighting defensively, you can add your Resistance to all Combat rolls you make until your next turn. A Shroud who fights defensively can also add their War Dominion.*

DANKING IN THE RAIN OF DESCENDING ASH  
DANKING IN YOUR DUST, I'LL SEE YOU ALL FALLING

### The Attack Test

When one character attacks another character, both characters roll Combat. If the *attacker* is a Shroud with the War Dominion, they roll Combat + War Dominion instead. If the attacker rolls a number of successes equal to or less than the number rolled by the defender, the defender is unharmed. If the attacker rolls *more* successes than the defender, the defender loses a number of points of Life (or Anathema) equal to the **Net Successes** of the attacker.

*A Violent Shroud (Combat 5, War Dominion 3) is going on an unrepentant rampage in a Mafia run strip club, tearing apart some of his Husk's old enemies. Not bothering to use any of his special powers or waste Anathema, he reaches towards the nearest mobster to tear his head off. The Shroud's player rolls 8 Dice and gets four successes. The GM rolls three dice for the victim, getting two successes. The mobster loses two life; which the GM would then, of course, describe as colorfully as possible.*

A human with 0 Life has been killed. A Shroud with 0 Anathema is fine, and Shrouds can't be reduced below 0 Anathema by mortal attacks. However, attacks from other Shrouds can reduce Shrouds below 0 Anathema. A Shrouds reduced to –Resistance Anathema dissolves.

### Equipment Bonuses

As Shrouds are not human, they are largely unaffected by visibility, weather conditions, wound penalties, and the like. Humans may receive Dice Pool Penalties or even Difficulty Adjustment penalties from any or all of these things. Shrouds don't really *need* to use weapons or equipment either, although some of them like to, especially Violent Shrouds with War as their Primary Dominion. Weapons provide a Dice Pool Bonus depending on how deadly they are. A handgun might add +1 Die, a bastard sword might add +2 Dice, and a light machinegun might add +3 Dice, at the GM's discretion. Likewise, armor or cover might add a Dice Pool Bonus to the *defender*. Equipment bonuses might even apply to *other* Ability tests, although those are even less likely than combat to be within the spotlight of the game.

### Flexibility

If combat is an aspect of the game you enjoy, feel free to expand on these rules accordingly! In the meantime, this basic foundation should be enough to get you started.

DANKING IN THE RAIN OF DESCENDING ASH  
DANKING IN YOUR DUST, I'LL SEE YOU ALL FALLING

## God called in sick today.

This chapter will discuss what Shrouds *do*, what is expected of them, their unique relationship with The Balance, their victims, and the challenges they may face. Their *ultimate fate* is discussed in the next and final chapter, **Even Death May Die**. As much as this book can be said to have one, this is the “behind the scenes” chapter which provides advice specifically for the GM.

Shrouds are expected to kill vast numbers of people—innocent, guilty, doesn’t matter, they’re not supposed to be judging, just killing—and are equipped with the power to do it. For the most part, The Balance does not care who they kill as long as they meet their daily quota. What is their daily quota? That is up to The Balance (GM) and the players. A group that wants to focus more on the killing itself than the time in between may want a high daily quota, and vice versa. What would constitute a high quota? I can’t say. In the beginning, Shrouds will literally be ripping people out of their cars and beds and tearing the life out of them *one at a time*. By the time that they’ve advanced, powerful Shrouds can create riots, plane crashes, epidemics, famines, and droughts, and that’s just by rolling dice. By getting truly creative, they could probably kill more people than that (and how many is too many? I’ll get to that) by starting wars, finding, stealing, and detonating nuclear weapons, and so forth. Ultimately what is or is not a high quota will be determined by the GM and the players through play. A wise GM may wish to have The Balance give its new Shrouds a few days to find their own pace before assigning a quota. The start of the game is designed to be a wonderfully open ended question:

If you had to kill a LOT of people, where would you *start*?

Above, I said that The Balance doesn’t care *for the most part* who its Shrouds kill. However, The Balance does occasionally have groups of people that it specifically wants dead. For this reason, it transmits “lists” to its Shrouds from time to time. These lists are a perfect opportunity to force a Kindly Shroud to face the choice between losing Will and risking rebellion and dissolution by ordering them to kill a person whose death they can’t rationalize, a perfect opportunity to force *any* Shroud to come face to face with its Victim Avoidance. Alternatively, of course, they could point the Shrouds toward a target that is a *logistical* challenge to defeat, as opposed to a moral quandary (see below).

Speaking in terms of technical details, the names on a List may or may not count towards the quota. That as well as the length of Lists and how frequently they are assigned depends on the group and its playing style.

### The Rewards of Doing Terrible Things

When Shrouds kill a human, they gain a single point of Anathema (which they can then use to kill more people in more creative ways). Unless specified otherwise, they gain this Anathema at the moment when their victim *actually dies*, which, in the case of indirect uses of Famine and War and in the case of most uses of Pestilence and Despair, may be hours or days after they use the skill that kills them. It may be easier for book keeping purposes to grant this Anathema immediately, or you may prefer the verisimilitude of holding off on the point award until the actual moment of death.

SEULIM OF A WILL DESTROYED.  
THE SEASONS CHANGE WITHOUT ME.  
I REMAIN IN SHADOWS GROWING WINGS.

If the players accumulate a significant amount of Anathema, they can use it to advance, like in experience points in other roleplaying games. *A Shroud can increase Combat, Perception, Manipulation, Resistance or any Dominion by paying a number of Anathema points equal to the new score multiplied by 50.* (This factor should be modified by the GM to be reasonable relative to the amount of people the PCs are killing.) A new Dominion can be purchased for a flat cost of 100 Anathema. While Dominions have a maximum score of five, there is no Maximum Score for the four Abilities listed and hence no theoretical limit on how far the Shrouds can advance, except the limits presented in the next chapter.

**Table 4: Using Perception (Finding People To Kill)**

Looking For...	Perception Test Threshold
Any human within one mile.	No test needed.
Locate specific (known) human within one mile.	1
Catalogue locations of all humans within one mile.	2
Locate specific (known) human within ten miles.	2
Catalogue locations of all humans within ten miles.	3
Locate specific (known) human within 100 miles.	3
Catalogue locations of all humans within one mile.	4
Locate specific (known) human anywhere on earth.	5

#### The Necessity Of Doing Terrible Things

The most important relationships that the PCs have is with The Balance, an entity with no personality, no emotions, and no weaknesses or flaws that can be used to sway it. The Balance also has no body or appearance, communicating with its Shrouds only as a disembodied voice in what passes for their heads, although in what passes for their hearts they do not doubt its power. The Balance is neither good nor evil and considers itself neither good nor evil. It does what it does because it is necessary; it does not explain its motives. If the proscribed number of people are not removed from the face of the earth, the entire planet will die and it will not allow that. It is unshakable in its resolve. It cannot be bargained with. It cannot be stopped. Because it knows beyond any doubt that what it is doing is necessary for the greater good.

#### Your Victims

##### **Child (Elderly Person)**

Combat: 0 (1)

Perception: 2 (1)

Manipulation: 1

Resistance: 1

Will: 2

Life: 1

Age: 1(6)

These poor souls can barely defend themselves at all.

SKELIN OF A WILL DESTROYED.  
THE SEASONS CHANGE WITHOUT ME.  
I REMAIN IN SHADOWS GROWING WINGS.

**Average Civilian**

Combat: 2  
 Perception: 2  
 Manipulation: 2  
 Resistance: 2  
 Will: 2  
 Life: 2  
 Age: 3

When in doubt about any given victim, this stat block is the exact middle of the road.

**Cop (Criminal)**

Combat: 3 [Most Likely Augmented By Equipment]  
 Perception: 3 (2)  
 Manipulation: 2 (3)  
 Resistance: 3  
 Will: 3  
 Life: 3  
 Age: 4 (3)

Some individuals at least try to fight back. Here are two good examples.

**Generic Elite Mortal**

Combat: 4  
 Perception: 4  
 Manipulation: 3  
 Resistance: 4  
 Will: 4  
 Life: 4  
 Age: 2d2 (2-4)

Why is this human so competent? That is up to the GM.

**True Believer/Priest**

Combat: 2  
 Perception: 5  
 Manipulation: 3  
 Resistance: 4  
 Will: 5  
 Life: 3  
 Age: 5

These individuals have iron will and have spent a lifetime doing good works. They have seen much of the worst of what life has to offer and their spirit has survived. These individuals may very well be Kindly Shrouds in training.

SERUM OF A WILL DESTROYED.  
 THE SEASONS CHANGE WITHOUT ME.  
 I REMAIN IN SHADOWS GROWING WINGS.

### Special Forces Badass

Combat: 5 [Most Likely Augmented By Equipment]

Perception: 4

Manipulation: 3

Resistance: 5

Will: 4

Life: 5

Age: 4

This soldier is the veteran of a dozen hellish foreign wars, and has the scars and the knowhow to prove it. This mortal is certainly on the fast track to becoming a Violent Shroud.

#### How many is too many?

It is hard to imagine it being within the scope of the game, but there is such a thing as a Shroud taking too many lives (namely reducing the world population below 5 Million). If the event that The Balance were to say *enough*—a fascinating endgame not otherwise considered here—then a Shroud who continued their work would be in open rebellion. If you want this to be a factor in your game, but not have the PCs killing millions, you could have The Balance restrict the Shroud's culling to a certain rate, adding a new element to the dynamic.

#### Your Enemies

Anathema is more concerned with the moral, psychological, and spiritual consequences of murder than its logistical complications, but few RPGs are hurt by a small injection of “raid the dungeon and fight the monsters”. Admittedly, in Anathema you *are* the monsters, but you are not the *only* monsters. The Balance has earmarked at least two types of targets more challenging than the most stubborn mortal.

### Lich

Combat: 4

Perception: 6

Manipulation: 6

Resistance: 5

Will: 10

Anathema: 25

Anathema Reward: 100

#### Spells

Equivalent to any 15 Points Worth of Dominions. Every Lich is different. Give them a good mix of abilities that can harm Shrouds and humans.

A lich, once mortal, is using sorcery to prolong its own life by consuming the lives of other mortals. This upsets The Balance, and The Balance may send you to rectify it. Skeletal undead monstrosities that can appear human when needed, liches have not lived this long by being stupid. Be prepared for a fight. Liches are immune to age, disease, famine, and mortal weapons, and can turn invisible (Manipulation vs. Perception), but not fly or turn incorporeal. Although a Lich prefers to use its spells, its physical attacks can harm a Shroud just like those of another Shroud.

SEALIN OF A WILL DESTROYED.  
THE SEASONS CHANGE WITHOUT ME.  
I REMAIN IN SHADOWS GROWING WINGS.

**Animated Corpse**

Combat: 4

Perception: 1

Manipulation: 1

Resistance: 3

Will: NA

(Un)Life: 5

Age: 6

These undead mooks are used as foot soldiers, bodyguards, and all around goons by liches. While immune to Pestilence, Famine, and Despair, they are still not a serious threat.

**Rogue Shroud (Devourer)**

Combat: 6 [+3 For Weaponry]

Perception: 4

Manipulation: 5

Resistance: 4

Will: 10

Anathema: 50

Anathema Reward: 200

Dominions

War: 3

Pestilence: 3

Famine: 2

The greatest enemy any Shroud can face is another Shroud. This particular Shroud is a Violent Shroud which rebelled against The Balance, and has been going on a rampage, killing humans not *to meet its quota* but to horde their life force for itself. The Balance refuses to abide by this, and will send the rebel Shroud's replacements to dissolve it, although they will be in for a hell of a fight. Naturally this enemy has all standard Shroud traits.

SEULIM OF A WILL DESTROYED.  
THE SEASONS CHANGE WITHOUT ME.  
I REMAIN IN SHADOWS GROWING WINGS.

**Rogue Shroud (Sin Eater)**

Combat: 3

Perception: 6

Manipulation: 5

Resistance: 4

Will: 7

Anathema: 50

Anathema Reward: 200

Dominions

Atrophy: 3

Despair: 5

This is a Kindly Shroud that has gone rogue. It has set itself up as a messiah, genuinely believing that it is, performing “miracles” for and enjoying the worship of a cult of humans who serve it. It actively intends to oppose The Balance, believing that the deaths of millions is wholly unnecessary. It will attempt to reason with the Shrouds sent to destroy it before using its Despair Dominion to erode their will to exist. Naturally this enemy has all standard Shroud traits.

SEULIM OF A WILL DESTROYED.  
THE SEASONS CHANGE WITHOUT ME.  
I REMAIN IN SHADOWS GROWING WINGS.



## Even death may die

This chapter explains the potential endgame situation of any given game of Anathema.

Anathema is not designed to have the entire arc of a group of characters play out in one or two sessions, nor is it designed for their adventures to play out endlessly. Every Shroud essentially faces a dilemma that will eventually lead to their permanent death. When they act according to their nature, they are rebelling against The Balance. When they forsake their nature and obey The Balance, they sacrifice their Will (to live) and hence draw closer to dissolution. Clever players should be able to put off the Final Death of their Shrouds for a long time by preying on their Victim Preference and ensuring that they Vindicate according to their natures. But *ultimately* they should not be able to put off the choice between Rebellion and loss of Will *indefinitely*.

The GM is the ultimate arbiter of how much Will players can gain and lose in a given session. As a guideline, players should not be able to gain or lose more than one point of Will from one source per in-game day, and should not be able to gain or lose more than a few points of Will total in one game session. The overall rate of Will change should be a loss of approximately one point of Will per session. No cap has been specified for how often characters can gain will from Vindication, lose Will from obeying The Balance against their natures, gain Will from Victim Preference or lose Will from Victim Avoidance. This was done for a reason, to allow the GM to set these caps on the fly. If the players seem to be burning through a lot of their Will to reroll unlucky dice, a GM should set the caps for Vindication and Victim Preference high. If on the other hand, the PCs have been sitting at well above 10 Will for a long time, the GM should start thinking about forcing them into choices where they either lose Will or risk rebellion.

Anathema by design has three possible endings for each character—the PCs need not share the same ultimate fate. Because Anathema is not a video game, there are no ‘good’ or ‘bad’ endings. The best ending is one that a character’s actions have earned for them. In the same vein, these three endings aren’t *really* the only outcomes, as discussed below.

The first possible Fate of a Shroud is to reach 0 Will over time and dissolve. This is, in fact, the fate of most Shrouds.

The second possible Fate of a Shroud is to disobey The Balance enough times—and it is up to the playing group how much disobedience is *enough*—to be labeled a rebel. If one PC is labeled a rebel and the others choose to remain obedient, The Balance will ask those PCs to destroy the newly labeled rebel. If they refuse or dally too long they too will be labeled Rebels. And The Furies will be sent for them.

The Furies are Shrouds that The Balance keeps on hand specifically for the purpose of eliminating other Shrouds. The Furies are very powerful and unless the campaign has been particularly lengthy and the PCs have harvested a great deal of Anathema, the rebel PCs will be unlikely to survive.

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The Furies

Unusually, the Furies operate in *twos* rather than the expected *threes*. A pair is generally sent for each Rebel, ensuring two-to-one odds in the favor of The Balance. Both of them will make liberal use of their *Improved Twist Fate* to cheat the odds.

**Wrathful Fury**

Combat: 7

Perception: 5

Manipulation: 3

Resistance: 5

Will: 10

Anathema: 25

Anathema Reward: 100

Dominions

War: 4

Misfortune: 4

This Fury is a literal combat monster, and can and will engage the entire rebel party in physical combat as soon as possible, and continue until they are dead.

**Merciful Fury**

Combat: 3

Perception: 5

Manipulation: 6

Resistance: 4

Will: 7

Anathema: 25

Anathema Reward: 100

Dominions

Despair: 4

Misfortune: 4

This kindly one will try to use its Despair Dominion to put the rebels out of their misery as quickly and painlessly as possible.

Beyond The Furies

By default, if the PCs rebel and are victorious against the Furies, there is a brief respite. And then the replacement killers keep coming and coming until the rebels are dead. However, an Anathema campaign need not end one of the ways prescribed here. In fact, it really *need* not end at all. If an ongoing rebellion against The Balance in which the PCs actually have a chance of winning is the kind of thing that interests you thematically, *especially* if the PCs were able to defeat the Furies “fair and square”, then you should pursue that. The PCs can certainly choose a fourth path, entering hiding and trying to nurture what is left of their humanity, seeking sorcery to regain their mortal lives, or even taking the fight to The Balance—somehow—and trying to end its “reign of terror”.

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Finally, the least likely and most hopeful outcome for a Shroud is **Satori**, a state of enlightenment. If the death of Will results from denying a Shroud's human nature, and Rebellion, being hunted by the Furies, and eventual dissolution rewards a Shroud *embracing* its human origins, then how can Satori be achieved? The answer is: Transcendence.

This is as good a time as any to back up to a note on fudging. A GM should never give a point of Will to a PC for Vindication unless the entire gaming group—including the GM, but he is not the final authority on this—seems to feel that that character genuinely Vindicated their nature. This should not be something that players are fudging just to get more points: it is an important part of the game. Likewise, the GM should not be constantly forcing decision points to grief players out of Will points or to force an early confrontation with The Furies. Moments where a Shroud Vindicates or redeems its nature or is forced to give up some of its humanity are the dramatic crux of the game, and should not be glossed over as a point where points change hands, but reflected on and analyzed as much as possible. You can determine if a Violent Shroud Vindicated his nature quantitatively, and with a Kindly Shroud it is a matter of pure rationalization. Really, the Lost Shroud is the one most susceptible to the fudging problem, and that is the origin type that should receive special attention, in terms of adjudication, from the GM and the rest of the gaming group.

Anyway, if Vindication should not be fudged, Satori absolutely must not be fudged, although there is no mechanical apparatus for measuring when it is reached. If at the end of a campaign, through genuine character growth, the entire group can agree that a Violent Shroud has transcended his violent nature, that a Kindly Shroud has transcended its mercy and humanity, that a Lost Shroud has embraced its new existence and given up its questions about a long dead Husk, then that Shroud has achieved Satori and dissolves—becoming a part of whatever phase of The Balance's plan is next. The difference between Will Death and Satori is a subtle one, and could perhaps best be described as the difference between a bang and a whimper.

In any case, very, very few Shrouds reach Satori and such a journey should be long, arduous, and fraught with peril and difficult choices.

Once everyone has dissolved—through Will Death or Satori—or been destroyed by the Furies, then relax and take a deep breath, the campaign is over (again, it doesn't have to be: see the sidebar on the previous page). This moment might come in two to four sessions, or it might take a year or more of real time. It depends on how much you are enjoying the game, and the pace your group likes to set. After you finish a story arc of Anathema, set this game aside for a while.

Hopefully if you enjoyed it, you will come back to it.

I think I will.

Devon Oratz  
Tarrytown, New York  
February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011

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