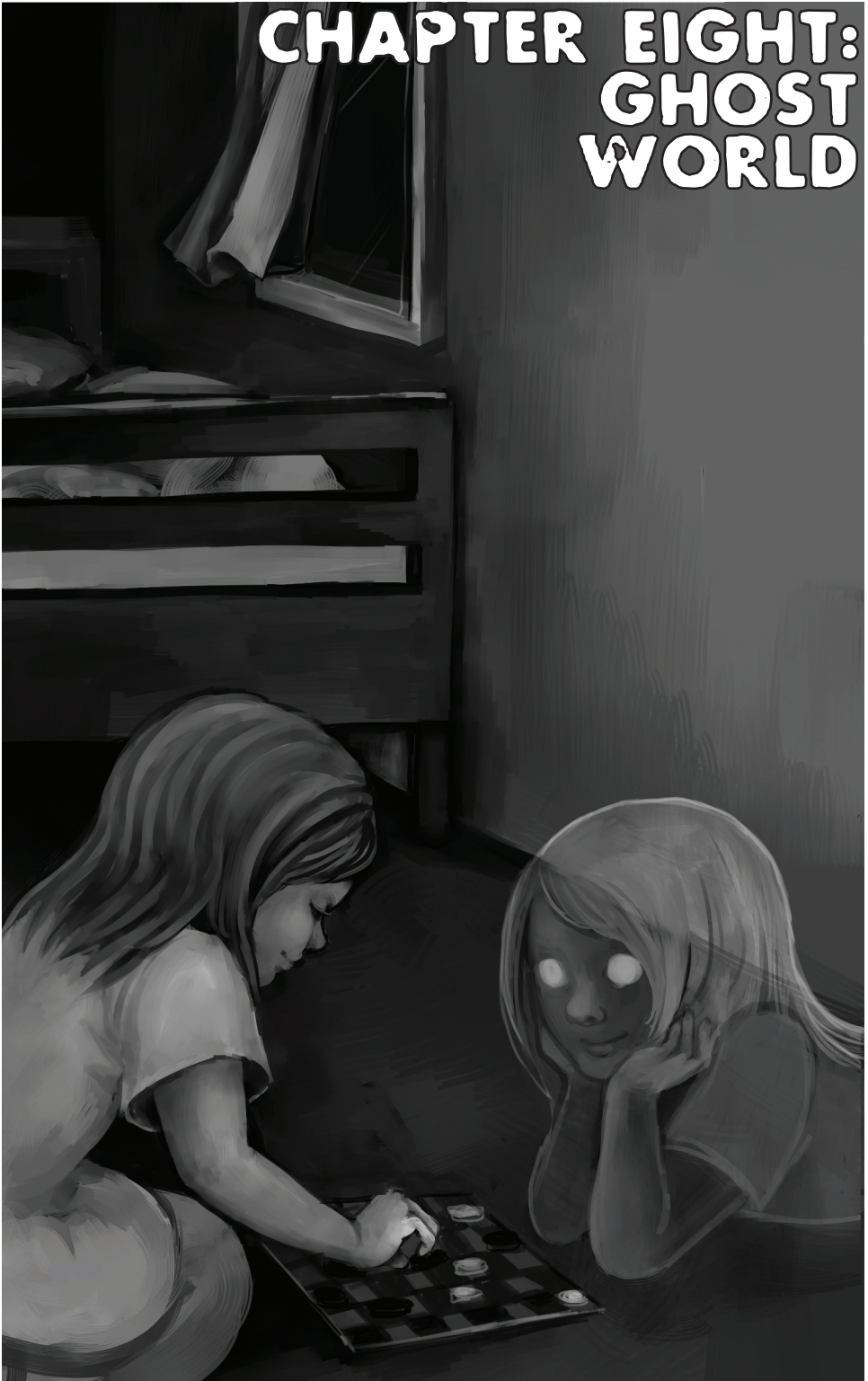


CHAPTER EIGHT: GHOST WORLD



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The blessed are a strange phenomenon. They don't play by the same rules as everyone else but, in turn, they pay a dear price. The blessed can often feel lost, alone, and terrified of what others think of them. Those who know of their capabilities have a choice to make: accept it or not. Often, the blessed aren't sure which decision a person has made about them until that person has to make a choice. That affects the blessed child. If a stranger witnesses what they can do, will they tell others? What about if a friend does? Would that friend tell? How deep does the bond between children really go when one of them is so much stranger than the other?

The blessed go to great lengths to hide who they really are and what they can really do, even from the children who should accept them. The blessed are aces up the sleeves of those fighting back against the monsters of Closetland but their unusual powers and the odd side effects that sometimes follow make them very self-conscious and slow to make friends.

For the blessed, it is especially important for them to know who they can and cannot trust. They need to know which places are safe and which are not. Any blessed would do well to familiarize themselves with the following.

PART ONE: THE WORLD OF SOULS

Blessed children glimpse another world that's not the real one, not Closetland, and not the In-Between. It is, in fact, the world of the dead. Unlike Closetland, which is a dimension adjacent to our real world, or the In-Between World that exists in the gap between our world and Closetland, the World of Souls exists solely in our world. It appears as another layer, a second skin draped over our reality. People on the brink of death report glimpsing this world as their life fades from them but the blessed see it everyday.

When They See It

Most blessed types see the World of Souls at different times for different reasons.

When a gifted's other soul asserts itself and tries to take over the body it shares, the kid sees this world. As the faithful find their center and draw power from the source of their faith, they see this world. The innocent see this world almost as often as the cursed for they see it as a double-image, a blur that sometimes overtakes the real world. The changeling see it when they are on the cusp of changing. And the cursed, well, they see it all day every day as this is the world they live in. The soulless see it the least which we'll cover next.

All blessed glimpse this world in times of severe stress, when they use either Belief or their blessed powers, and when their Spirit dips to four points or below. These are, in fact, the only times the soulless see this world.

What They See

Imagine our world with a strong blue tint to it. Outlines around living creatures jitter and shake like two images overlapping each other. Wispy threads flit off the edges of buildings and cars. Artifacts of death sprout from the soil: the spirits of deceased cats, dogs, squirrels flicker in your peripheral vision. The outlines of the dead become visible.

This world is always a hair slower than the real world, which is what causes the ghost images you see. When you see the dead, they do not act as living creatures but as beings

stuck in a loop, forever repeating the same action over and over again. Interacting with the dead draws them out of their routine briefly, enough to speak a warning or answer a question but whatever it is controlling them has a very strong pull.

It's easy for a blessed child to confuse what's happening in the World of Souls with our own reality. A gifted girl may see a truck slam into a car at an intersection, sending glass and bend metal into the air. As she screams, she looks around and notices nobody else is reacting. Then she see the accident happen again and again. It is an accident that first happened twelve years ago but has continued to happened every ten second since then. It's an artifact of the World of Souls.

The same goes for the old man at the crosswalk. He spends a minute anxiously pressing the walk button but, frustrated, gives up and wanders right into traffic. A changeling boy gasps as cars drive right through him. That man has been crossing this crosswalk for over sixty years. He took that route every weekday for thirty years; it's how he got to work. Though he didn't die there, it's what his soul knows to do so it does it.

Who Lives There

Not everyone who ever lived is now in the World of Souls. There doesn't seem to be a hard and fast rule that determines whether someone "moves on" or stays behind. Folks often talk about ghosts with unfinished business being the ones left behind but many of the spooks who wander have no emotional baggage, no need for vengeance or understanding. They're simply living, in their way, and nothing else.

Perhaps someone does know the reason why each spirit has stayed behind. If so, that person is mostly likely the King of Souls.

Spirits and Specters

The majority of those seen in the World of Souls are the spirits of deceased humans and animals still tied to the earth. These spirits look mostly as they did in life, usually wearing some ghastly version of whatever outfit they were wearing at the time of their death. Glimpsing someone who died in the shower or in some gruesome Halloween costume is particularly jarring.

Like the ghosts in most tales, most spirits are tied to locations or routines that were familiar to them in life. They will often be seen doing whatever they did most during their breathing days. Most ghosts are blissfully unaware of their true state, which is what makes the guardians of the dead necessary.

(We'll talk about these types of ghosts in much more detail later on this chapter.)

Guardians of the Dead

The guardians of the dead or, simply, guardians are spirits of exceptional power. The World of Souls is theirs to police and protect—and it's a job they take very seriously. When a ghost threatens—or is threatened by—another, punishing those responsible falls upon the guardians.

Unlike their charges, the guardians of the dead look only nominally human-like. They have the same basic form and proportions but often wear large helmets adorned with bones and strange symbols. They also carry weapons straight out of the Medieval Faire: pole arms, long axes, large stone hammers. And that medieval look goes beyond their arsenal; the guardians of the dead look like knights. Which is fitting since they all answer to a king.