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"Howdy" from 12 to Midnight

In case you are not familiar with us, 12 to Midnight is a Texas-based RPG publisher specializing in modern horror. You might not normally think "Texas" and "horror" go together, but we are pretty sure you will change your mind after spending some time in Pinebox.

Pinebox, Texas, that is—a nice little rural community smack-dab in East Texas. There is a university nearby, a pine forest called the Big Thicket, and a mess of beautiful wildflowers every spring. Unfortunately, it is also the epicenter of a whole lot of bad mojo. We're talking dark magic, serial killers, haunted buildings—the whole ball of wax.

If you want to learn more about Pinebox, just visit our Web site at 12tomidnight.com. You can start using the free campaign setting on our site right now, then watch it continue to grow right here in the pages of *Modern Dispatch*. Of course, Pinebox is *our* setting, but all the material in these pages can just as easily be dropped into *yours*.

If you have any ideas for future issues, or if you want to comment on what you read here, please drop by the forums on our website.



Pinebox Places

Pinebox Pawn

111 Monument Street

This small shop is located in downtown Pinebox on Monument Street. The small door is green, with a tarnished brass doorknob and little panes of glass forming a half-sun motif at the top. Through a large window to the right of the doorway, you can see two mannequins, one male and one female, dressed in clothing from the 1920s or 30s. The window has a small sign hanging on the inside which reads, "We buy and sell everything your heart desires!"

Owned by Forester Harris, Pinebox Pawn has been on this street for nearly forty years. Like most of the shops on Monument Street, it seems deceptively small from the outside but is quite spacious within.

Inside, the lights are dim and the air is stale, reeking of age.

Upon entering, patrons are greeted by a chime and the sight of the front counter, where Forester Harris sits, reading a tattered old book. Almost always, Harris holds his rosary beads, idly moving them through his fingers. There is a small sign on the cash register, which reads "NO CREDIT." Just below it, another small sign reads, "BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU ASK FOR!"

All along the walls are pictures of many different people and places. Perhaps the most interesting is a picture of John F. Kennedy in his motorcade, driving down Dealy Plaza just before his assassination.

Every type of antique and collectable may be found within this shop; however, there are a few that are "special," and these all come with a story, a promise, or a curse.

Pinebox Personalities



Forester "Forest" Harris

Forester Harris is probably in his early seventies, though it is difficult to be certain based only on his looks. He is bald and wears small, wire-rimmed glasses. His nose is peculiarly pointed, and his ears are slightly too large for his head. He is trim and moves like a much younger man. The most startling aspect of his visage are his large, dark eyes. They are deep brown, almost black, with disconcertingly large corneas. He is dressed in a white shirt, a black tie, and suspenders.

A quiet man with a thin, raspy voice, Forester Harris has a perpetual smile that seems to say "I know something that you don't." He smiles at everyone who enters his store, and seems to know all the locals by name.

In conversation he sometimes gives the impression of being a conspiracy theorist, but anyone with the resources to investigate would find his "speculations" entirely truthful. Forester's uncanny knowledge of



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Forester “Forest” Harris, cont’d.

countless events—both historical and mundane—have given him a reputation as a walking encyclopedia, albeit a disquieting one.

If the day is slow, Harris spends most of his time in a small room at the back of the shop. The infrequent customers find him sitting by a radio, listening to the local news channel and fingering his prayer beads.

Beside the small office is a metal staircase leading to the second floor. This floor is dedicated to storage and a converted one-bedroom apartment. The apartment is simple, and one seemingly steps into the past when one enters this place. Harris lives alone and rarely invites anyone up to visit.

Secrets

Forester Harris is actually a Teifling, the product of Martha Lynn Harris’s infernal union with a demonic spirit she summoned one Halloween night in 1931.

Despite his tainted blood, Harris grew up to become a fine citizen of Golan County. He served in the Korean War and, upon returning to Pinebox, became a sheriff’s deputy and served admirably for the next twenty years. In 1977, he was elected sheriff of Golan County, and the crime rate dipped to an all-time low. He was reelected twice before retiring and opening Pinebox Pawn.

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His demonic ancestry provides him with several special abilities and talents. He has the gift of “reading” others, knowing what they want and even what they have done, or are willing to do, to attain it. Harris uses this ability to control others through gentle persuasion, intimidation, and even blackmail.

As he grows older, he becomes gruffer and less easy for others to get along with. He often closes his shop down at odd times, locks up, and tells people to go away. However, he still does a brisk business, and his gifts allow him to find and identify very special antiques and items.

Character Speak

“Welcome. What are you looking for? Perhaps I can help you.”

“I have about anything you could want, but some of it comes with a hefty price.”

“Are you certain you want that? Sometimes these things are not as they appear.”

“I’m closing now, so you had best make a decision and move on.”

“Everything and everyone has a price. Everything is negotiable.”

Plot Ideas

- Anything the heroes need to sell may be sold here at 25 percent of the total value, or they may take a loan on the item, for 75 percent of its value, by pawning it to Harris.
- An old diary that one of the heroes purchases at a yard sale turns out to be the diary of Forester Harris’s mother. It describes her rendezvous with the demon, how she summoned it, and her pregnancy with its child. If Harris is shown the book, or if the subject is discussed with him, he gets very angry and may attack the heroes with demonic force.
- Any psychic hero who enters the premises feels a great evil and sorrow within, and recognizes danger. Harris also senses the psychic, and the two may be headed for a showdown!
- Harris occasionally has dreams of the future and, if he is on friendly terms with a hero, may provide warning of impending trouble.
- Harris is a member of the Texas 13, a special force of warlocks and wizards being put together by Red McCoy, the mayor of Pinebox (see Modern Dispatch #26). While Harris does not harbor the racial hatred of McCoy’s Texas National Militia, old age has led him to crave power and immortality—two things promised by the Texas 13.

Pinebox Pawn

Special Items

Pinebox Pawn carries all the usual items typically found in a pawnshop. There are gun racks, antiques, stereos, old computers, video games, music, clothing, jewelry, and many other items for sale. A *Search* check (DC 12) allows the heroes to discover one or more of the following special items (at the GM's discretion):

Escalante's Crucifix

This golden crucifix is six inches long and heavy. It is set with a single red ruby behind the figure's head, where the crossbar meets the staff, and is a bit tarnished with age. A tag attached to it reads "Escalante's Crucifix, late 1790s."

The crucifix is made of iron, plated with a thin layer of gold. It is an exquisite piece of Spanish treasure that should be in a museum, rather than for sale in a pawnshop. It was brought to Texas by Father Joseph Escalante, the priest responsible for saving the nearby mission of La Bonita in the late 1790s.

Escalante converted many Native Americans to Christianity and protected the early Spanish settlers of East Texas against the forces of darkness. In truth, Father Escalante belonged to the secret Order of St. Tyrannio, whose practice was to seek out and face evil in faith. Father Escalante fought many evil spirits and demonic forces. This cross was given to him when he took his holy vows to the order.

This crucifix is an artifact of power, and anyone with the ability to sense such things feels the gravity of its presence. Anyone of true faith who holds the crucifix before him receives a bonus of +2 on Will saves and inspires those fighting evil within a 15' radius with a +1 on all attack and damage rolls and a +1 on all saving throws. Any evil spirit faced with this crucifix must make a Will save (DC 14) or flee.

Purchase DC: 19

Plot Ideas:

- A vampire has moved to Pinebox. The Escalante Crucifix would be invaluable in stopping him, but he has found out about it too and has sent his servant to obtain it.
- One of the heroes begins dreaming of this crucifix. One day, he finds it in the pawnshop. Harris says the hero is "destined" to use it, then lowers the purchase DC to 15.
- The spirit of a raven trickster has been awakened by a cult of Native American worshippers. The raven is truly evil and seeks power by controlling others. This particular spirit was defeated in 1796 by Father Escalante, and anyone wielding the crucifix can control him. He hires the heroes to purchase the crucifix and bring it to him, or he has his followers attempt to steal it.
- Anyone who purchases the crucifix and uses it against evil begins receiving dream visitations by Escalante's spirit. The benevolent padre attempts to help this living "warrior of faith" as best he can. His spirit is tied to the crucifix, and remains such, unless the crucifix is broken.
- Anyone who uses the crucifix against evil becomes known to the present-day Order of Tyrannio. Members of the order approach the character with questions about where he got the crucifix and how he has used it. If the character is of a holy bent, he may even join the order and gain from their long history of fighting the forces of darkness.

Johnson's 12-Gauge, Pump-Action Shotgun

One shotgun catches your eye. Its wooden stock is engraved with the image of an antlered deer, and the barrel is a beautiful gunmetal blue. It is obviously a pump-action 12 gauge and probably dates to the early 1960s. A tag on it simply reads, "Johnson's 12 Gauge. A Hunter's Weapon!"

Forester Harris purchased this shotgun from Old Man Aries Johnson, who was a local legend in Golan County. He is still considered by many to be the greatest hunter and tracker in the history of East Texas. Aries used this shotgun on many hunts, from 1961 until 1991, when his age and health began to take a toll on his body so that he was no longer able to hunt the woods as he had once done.

Aries, an African American, fought for civil rights in East Texas and had several vigilante run-ins with the local Ku Klux Klan in the mid 1960s, conflicts in which this gun played a pivotal role. Aries now lives in the Pinebox Hospice, his body withered and frail.

The shotgun was built by a local gunsmith named Toombs, and it has taken on certain qualities that may be beneficial to anyone who wields it. When fired in combat, the damage increases from 2d8 to 2d10.

Damage 2d8/2d10, Critical 19-20, Damage Type Ballistic, Range Increment 30 ft., Rate of Fire S, Magazine 5 box, Size Large, Weight 12 lb.

Purchase DC: 16.

Plot Ideas

- Aries Johnson dies and his spirit enters the weapon. He speaks with the new owner in dreams and visions, attempting to create a new vigilante hero against oppression and racism.
- A successful *Research* check (DC 12) reveals that Toombs was a dabbler in the occult and often called upon various earth spirits when creating his weapons. If the heroes seek out Toombs' descendents in Pinebox, they happily sell them a copy of his self-published book, *Native Rites and Modern Weapons*. The book describes several arcane marks. These marks bind the wielder to the weapon, if both bear the same mark. A successful *Search* check (DC 10) reveals a mark on the butt of the weapon. The mark is that of the "Hunter." While carrying the gun in the woods, the owner who gets a matching tattoo gains the *Tracking* feat for free and the following bonuses: *Hide* +2, *Move Silently* +2, and *Survival* +2.
- The mayor of Pinebox, Red McCoy, hears that the shotgun has been found and he approaches the heroes about purchasing it. He is angry that Harris has kept the gun secret from him. He wants the gun enough to send several members of the Texas National Militia against the heroes to get it, if they refuse to sell. (See *Modern Dispatches* #26, #30, and #34.)
- Anyone holding the gun must make a Will save (DC 12) or see an image of himself hunting in the woods, shooting a great buck. For hunters, it is a nice dream.

Talking Toaster

This metallic toaster is a vintage antique of the 1950s. A small tag on it reads, "Antique Toaster: Dupree's Rampage, Collector's Item!"

Outwardly, this appears to be an ordinary toaster from the 1950s, in excellent condition. But there is an evil spirit that posses this vintage toaster—a spirit bent on wreaking havoc and chaos. The spirit is that of an ancient, unspeakable evil or bizarre alien entity, and it causes the toaster to talk and attempt to manipulate its owner into going on a killing spree.

The first known appearance of this toaster is in 1952, in Roswell, New Mexico. At a small farm, an entire seven-member family died in what was then labeled a bizarre, cult-related suicide pact. The truth is that, although the McGills led a relatively ordinary life against the backdrop of the New Mexico desert, "Pops" McGill murdered six members of his own family before taking his own life.

Then, in 1984, Mark Dupree, an ex-policeman, walked into Pinebox State Bank and Trust. That November day would be very long indeed, as Dupree, with a fully loaded shotgun, C4 strapped to his body, and a toaster clutched to his chest, held the entire bank and its patrons hostage.

After sixty-three hours, the state SWAT team was able to disarm Dupree, taking his weapons, his explosives, and his kitchen appliance. During the trial that followed, Dupree's lawyer argued that his client suffered from temporary insanity.

In his official statement, Dupree claimed he was under the influence of the kitchen appliance. After the trial, there was no evidence indicating anything unusual about the toaster. It was simply auctioned off and bought by Forester Harris.

This toaster, when in close proximity to its owner, bestows a temporary +2 bonus to Constitution and inflicts a permanent -2 penalty to Wisdom. The

character falls under the control of the evil spirit if he fails a Will save (DC 15). The check is made every 12 hours and increases in difficulty by an increment of 2 each time—so after 12 hours the check will be made at a DC of 17; after 24 hours, at a DC of 19; and so on. The possession may be broken by keeping the toaster at least 10 feet away from the target for at least 24 hours. Anyone eating bread from the toaster must make a Will save (DC 12) or feel compelled to hold the toaster, cradling it like a baby! Clutching the toaster in this way inflicts a penalty of -2 to Dexterity.

Purchase DC: 4

Plot Ideas

- In the middle of another adventure, a well-dressed business person launches a random attack upon the heroes by swinging the toaster by its cord.
- The heroes investigate a murder/suicide involving a newlywed couple who had been opening their wedding gifts before suddenly turning violent.
- A woman wearing a tinfoil hat and carrying a toaster accosts the heroes on the street, pleading with them for help. She weeps, "What's the frequency? Can't stop the signal." (Extra points for those who get the pair of pop-culture references—one old, one new—in her plea. Post the answers on our forums at 12tomidnight.com/forum)
- The heroes are drawn into tracking a serial killer whose victims are all chefs or caterers. The killer is herself a caterer, slowly working her way through her competition for catering a black-tie charity event at the state capital in Austin. She and her toaster have *big* plans for that evening.
- The possessing spirit wants to be free and manipulates its owner into stealing magical tomes and ingredients necessary for performing the ritual. Rare occult volumes are disappearing from the city, foreshadowing dark things to come.

A Pair of Tickets to the Big Thicket Flyer

These tickets are found in an old cigar box, among indian-head nickels, matchsticks, buttons, and other odds and ends. The tickets, yellowed with age but otherwise in remarkable shape, both read, “Big Thicket Flyer, Stanley Spur to Baton Rouge, Admit One, Coach, August 3, 1939.” Neither appeared to have been used.

In 1939, the Big Thicket Flyer was the only passenger train to serve Pinebox. It traveled the Stanley Spur, off the Gulf Coast Line, connecting several East Texas and western Louisiana towns along the express line. That summer, the Flyer derailed at Sandy Fork Bridge, killing every person on board. However, at least four ticketed passengers never boarded the train. (See *Last Call for the Big Thicket Flyer* in 12 to Midnight’s *Green’s Guide to Ghosts* for the whole story behind the Flyer).

Purchase DC: 5

Plot Ideas

- Following the night of the accident, these tickets became cursed. Whoever owns them dies in a transportation-related accident and is doomed to haunt the next owner. To release all the trapped spirits, the tickets must be torn by one of the missing passengers.
- A series of numbers are printed in pencil on the back of one of the tickets. Are the numbers a safe combination, latitude and longitude, or a coded message? Whatever the case, powerful people want those tickets and will do almost anything to get them.
- Tearing the tickets instantly summons a ghost train to the user. The train can take two passengers on a one-way trip to any known location in the world, bypassing even the most airtight security.

12” Black & White Television, circa 1982

This old television set is marred with numerous scratches in its plastic frame, yet surprisingly, it still works—more or less. Only five channels work, the rest come in solid black. The channels are 13, 26, 39, 52, 65.

This innocuous old television set is a window to other dimensions, times, and places. Even if connected to cable, the set only picks up the channels listed in the paragraph above, nor can it be repaired. Channels 13, 26, and 39 are normal channels. The other two are anything but normal.

Channel 52 appears as an infomercial, personalized for whoever is watching. The handsome huckster sells anything the viewer may desire—from his missing car keys to the old girlfriend or boyfriend who got away. Anything and everything is for sale—for a price. The TV personality is a demon, and the price is the character’s soul, although usually not in so many words. Often, the price is a “favor,” to be paid at a later date. Those who default on their payments face terrible consequences.

Channel 65 is a window to our own world and time, as well as countless alternate worlds and times. Sometimes it is easy to discern that the “program” is an alternate reality—such as the one in which Pig-Latin-speaking reptillians rule in the place of humans—but sometimes the differences are much more subtle. Sometimes there is no real difference at all.

The viewer has no control over what is to be found on channel 65. Those who have owned the television in the past have often avoided watching the channel altogether, since the subject matter often reveals

things mankind was not meant to know. Too much exposure to such mysteries can lead to madness.

Purchase DC: 4

Plot Ideas

- In the midst of an adventure, the Channel 52 announcer offers the heroes the physical clue or item the need to resolve their problem. Can they resist the temptation to take the easy way out? Can they pay the ultimate cost?
- Shortly after the heroes become accustomed to the silver-tongued devil on Channel 52, he disappears. The camera points to an empty desk. The next day, “The Network” asks the heroes to investigate. If the heroes have purchased something from the station, The Network offers to erase the debt.
- Channel 65 shows a future in which the heroes are murdered in just two days’ time. Is it an alternate reality or their own? Is the future written in stone or sand?
- The television ends up in the rec room of a mental hospital. Some patients completely snap when exposed to Channel 65, while others grow strangely calm and even draw strength from the visions. Yet others unite in a quiet, mysterious purpose.

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