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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.



The Sundown Cineplex



Introduction

Every dusty Texas town has an old movie theater, and Pinebox is no different. The Crowley Cinema once did a thriving business throughout the 30s and 40s, but was unable to survive the hardships of WWII. The family that owned it finally had to board up the doors, and the marquee hung in disrepair until just a few months ago. That is when Alicia Crowley, distant relation to the prior owners, returned to open it up under its new name, the Sundown Cinema. With a healthy bankroll and adventurous spirit, she is determined to make a go of it. The theater is located on Travis Street, across the street from the Post Office.

Pinebox Personalities

Alicia Crowley

A slender, willowy lady, Alicia looks to be in her late twenties. Crowley typically wears her hair in a ponytail and dresses in Capri pants and t-shirts, and she appears to be an ETU co-ed.

Crowley is very enthusiastic, full of pep, and has a strong can-do attitude. Though not originally from Pinebox, she knows a good deal about the locals from idle conversations, and spends the bulk of her days in the shadowy recesses of the theater's lobby reading books and eating stale popcorn. While growing up in the San Fernando Valley, Crowley longed to be an actress, but her dreams were dashed when she was diagnosed with Xeroderma Pigmentosum. This rare condition makes her skin extremely sensitive to sunlight. The disease has affected her mind as well as her body. Her childish dreams of starring on the silver screen have taken a darker turn, and her love of cinema soon developed into an overriding obsession. While she is an expert on all movie types, horror movies invoke her deepest affections.

Crowley does not go outdoors unless absolutely necessary. When she must go out, day or night, she

wears a faded blue denim jacket that is always within reach, a big, floppy sun hat, and a large pair of Jackie Onassis-style sunglasses that easily cover half her face.

Her bedroom is downstairs from the theater in the spacious basement area that she had remodeled before she returned. It is very chic, clean, and comfortable, with custom track lighting around the ceiling that casts the room into a perpetual twilight. She has a surround sound system, a television, and a kitchen area complete with a gas stove, refrigerator, and an immense, commercial-grade walk-in freezer. Her fire-proof safe keeps important documents and at any one time anywhere from ten to twenty-thousand dollars



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in small denomination bills. Along one wall is an oak wine rack with a fine selection of reds and Shiraz.

Secrets

Alicia Crowley left California after both her parents died in a freak car accident. She collected a cool million dollars as the sole beneficiary. She did not know about the Crowley Cinema's existence until a past-due letter came from the County Tax Assessor of Pinebox, Martin Keys. A few phone calls later and local Pinebox attorney, Eliza Crane, reluctantly accepted to be her counsel and made arrangements with local contractors for renovations and remodeling of the Cinema. Crane failed to tell Crowley about the slaughter of '44 and what really caused the cinema to be closed down. However, she did suggest that it be renamed. Delighted with the idea, Crowley chose the apt name Sundown Cineplex, liquidated off the remnants of her inherited properties, and moved with her Siamese cat, Solomon, to Pinebox.

Crowley's skin condition "gifts" her with latent psychic potential that she is only beginning to realize. Already, she can sense moods and emotions beyond the pale. For now, she chalks these heightened senses up to neurological disorders caused by the progression of her XP. Actually, her delicate physical state makes her a beacon to the spirit world and is reawakening dormant spirits. As the veil between worlds is especially thin in the theater, she is exceptionally vulnerable.

The Slaughter of '44

Herman Crowley was a long-time movie buff and was especially fond of musicals, because they made his wife, Madeline, laugh and dance in the aisles. When she died giving birth to their son Allister in 1934, he never played a musical film again. Instead, he sought avant-garde films privately and cashed in on the lurid popularity of horror movies such as *The Wolf Man* and *Cat People*.

Crowley sought out something that would make him feel again. He heard of an underground movie by a German Director, Bruno Ludke, who filmed a movie entitled "*Leise Weinen*" ("*To Weep Silently*") that came out in the summer of 1942 in Munich. During the movie, open rioting and chaos ensued, the movie theater was burned down, and all copies were thought to be destroyed. Crowley discovered that one copy escaped destruction and still existed. Through much expense, he managed to get his hands on it.

The opening night was one to remember in Pinebox. Upon hearing what was to be played, local parents vocally proclaimed Crowley to be a Nazi-sympathizer and that he was trying to abuse the minds of their youth. He listened to their complaints and invited them to an advance screening to ease their fears. When everyone was seated and the movie was playing, all moviegoers broke out into a riot. During the chaos, three men and two women died at the hands of Herman

"Bloodstump" Crowley before the police gunned him down on the street in front of the theater.

In the aftermath of the chaos, young Allister was shipped off to live with his uncle's family in Sacramento and everyone tried their best to forget about the awful event. The movie itself was never found. When the theater was shuttered for good, the official story was that it was due to "economic hardships" caused by the war overseas. To this day, people in and around the theater have reported weird sounds and lights, but these encounters are rationalized away as reflections of passing headlights or too much alcohol.

Leise Weinen ("To Weep Silently")

This harrowing film is infamous in movie circles as Bruno Ludke's last work before going over the brink of sanity. Ludke was born in Germany in 1909 and began a promising career in cinematography at the age of twenty-six. A favorite of Hitler's, he was swept up to make many propaganda films, but managed to secretly work his personal project, "*Leise Weinen*", into his schedule.

Ludke spent seven years making the film, during which time many of his indiscretions were buried by the Gestapo. However, he crossed the line when he confessed to killing the wife of an SS officer with whom he was having an affair. Rather than being

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summarily executed, he was ruled mentally unfit and shipped to Vienna to be used as a human test subject. While undergoing therapy, he admitted to killing more than eighty-five German citizens in the process of making the film.

At that time Hitler, a fervent believer in the occult, was notified of Ludke's secret project. Intrigued by the potential of this evil film, he arranged for copies of it to be put into limited distribution abroad to pollute the minds of his enemies. No one knows exactly how many copies are in existence at present.

The exact effects of watching the movie are up to the Gamemaster and can range from the typical violent, psychotic breaks of most viewers, to self-mutilation, to permanent derangement. The images on the screen have been alluded to as "stark black and white still pictures that shift one into another; a slow blur that jars and bleeds black as the nails of humanity peel away to the hidden truth—a truth too horrible to comprehend." Have everyone watching the film make *Medium Shock Fear* checks if using 12 to *Midnight's Fear Effects* system. Otherwise, allow a Wisdom check DC 20. Failure results in some insanity of the GMs choosing.

About the Author

Sean Preston is the President and Founder of Reality Blurs based in Memphis, Tennessee. He enjoys juggling multiple projects and is currently wrapping up work on *RunePunk: Steam and Shadow*, getting into the meat of *Agents of Oblivion*, and looking at *Iron Dynasty: Sins of the Samurai* waiting in the wings. Look for *Iron Dynasty: Journey to Red Temple* and *Agents of Oblivion: Starfall Jungle* available at the Edge section on RPGNow and check out his website for (mostly) weekly ramblings at www.realityblurs.com. He looks forward to making more contributions to the horror genre of roleplaying and adding more citizens to Pinebox.

Adventure Hooks

Opening Night

The old folks of Pinebox have largely ignored the theater's reopening until Ms. Crowley's article in the local paper announcing she's found the lost copy of "Leise Weinen" and intends to show it at her grand opening. Someone who remembers the Slaughter of '44 contacts the heroes to either convince Ms. Crowley not to show the film or procure the movie at any cost.

A Victim of Gossip

People fear strange Ms. Crowley, and it is rumored that she is a vampire. She is never seen outside of her musty, old theater and some people who have gone into her theater never come back out. The truth is that Crowley has the rare skin condition XP, as previously mentioned, and stays indoors as much as possible. However, XP can cause neurological disorders. In Crowley, this takes the form of being sensitive to the traumas of the theater's past, picking up fleeting waves of emotion. Has she developed her grandfather's thirst for blood and begun cannibalizing the occasional coded, or is she just having innocent, one-night stands? Her walk-in freezer and her king sized bed have room for both.

Leise Weinen

While cleaning up one evening, Crowley discovers her grandfather's journal in the projection room. From the journal, she learns of the film *Leise Weinen*. Immediately, she arranges to have flyers distributed about Pinebox offering a substantial reward for the recovery of this lost, cinematic relic. Does this open old wounds in the community, put the current owner of the film in a dangerous panic, or even awaken restless spirits best left undisturbed?

Bloodstump

People say that someone disturbed the resting place of Alicia Crowley's grandfather, Herman Crowley, in the Old Pinebox Cemetery the day after her visit. Most suspect the vandalism was the result of college kids pulling pranks, but darker rumors suggest that Ms. Crowley dug him her grandfather's coffin in the middle of the night. Upon learning of the rumor, Ms. Crowley became upset because she would never do such a gruesome thing. She believes locals must be trying to run her out of town, and asks the heroes to learn the truth behind her grandfather's missing corpse. Actually, Ms. Crowley's own latent psychic abilities have combined with the powers of the movie *Leise Weinen* to reanimate an old, hibernating evil. Now Bloodstump wanders the night streets of Pinebox, an animated corpse of evil cunning.

Adventure Outline

While the Adventure Hooks are just that, below is bare-bones outline that you can flesh out into a full-blown story arc for your campaign.

- Foreshadowing in two parts: People have noticed and are talking about the new renovations being made to the old abandoned Crowley Cinema. Word has it that the last Crowley is coming back home from California. The theater is undergoing a name change too. The gossip is soon confirmed. The theater is renamed the Sundown and Alicia Crowley returns to Pinebox. This can be mentioned in the local newspaper or just noticed in passing while the characters are driving to another adventure. If this isn't part of an ongoing campaign, you can still mention this and then telescope time to the next major point.
- Soon after moving in, Crowley begins having bad dreams. She may mention this to the characters if they come in to see a show. If not that, she mentions this to someone the characters know (perhaps

someone at the Comics store or on the campus of ETU) who then relates it to the characters with uncharacteristic concern. “That new girl is looking rough. Like she never sleeps. I’ve gone in to see a flick a few times and she shows a lot of horror and told me she’s having bad dreams. I think she’s one of those California psychos you hear about.” Somehow her XP has made her psychically sensitive. Living a sheltered life, she was unaware of this until moving to Pinebox. She is picking up on the bloodshed that occurred during the slaughter of ’44.

- However she chances to finally meet the characters in her theater, her story is the same. “Ever since moving in, something has been going on in my theater. I see phantom lights. I can’t sleep. Maybe I should pack it all in.” She is a kind, sensitive girl and is generally trusting. She agrees to having the characters stay overnight and observe the strange happenings for themselves, or to most anything else barring her leaving the Sundown.

What direction the characters take from here is up to them. The following steps are listed in a logical progression, but remember players are mercurial!

- If the characters investigate the theater, they find old blood stains on the seats and carpet. This is easily seen if the lights are brought up to full intensity, something that Crowley never does. The projection room is filled with reels of vintage horror movies from the ‘30’s and ‘40’s. The walls are decorated with movie posters of Lon Chaney, Jr. as the Werewolf and Bela Lugosi as Dracula, among other B-grade titles. Of special note is a black and white poster for a movie that depicts a man sitting on a step with his head cupped forward in his hands and blood running down his arms and dripping onto his shoes. The caption is in German and reads “Leise Weinen” (“To Weep Silently”) and the text below translates to “a film by Bruno Ludke”. Unless the characters make a *Knowledge (occult)* check, DC 20, they have never heard of this film. The canisters are in good

shape, and it is easy to tell that they are originals. If inspected closely, the characters can discover a journal belonging to the late Herman Crowley detailing his lifelong obsession with movies. The last entry details his acquisition of “Leise Weinen” and his plans to have a pre-screening that evening. The date on the journal entry is July 18, 1944.

- Heroes spending the night in the theater is more than the restless spirits can take. While being somewhat awakened by the presence of Alicia and her occasional late night visitor, a party of four or more causes the five victims of the Slaughter of ’44 to fully manifest. Three grisly, butchered men and two butchered women appear demanding justice. Consider using the Revenant template from *Modern Dispatch #61: Revenants*.
- To put the spirits to rest, the party must locate the cursed film and destroy it. Wherever it may be is up to the GM, but consider keeping it in the Pinebox area. Could it be buried somewhere in the morass of junk and treasures at Pinebox Pawn (*Modern Dispatch #45*)? Or, perhaps it is in the private collection of Thomas Shelby, Associate Director of Fine Arts at ETU and head of the burgeoning cinematography department?

Animated Corpse

Creature Statistics

Medium Construct (CR 3); HD 6d10+10

Initiative	+0	BAB	+3	STR	20 (+5)
Defense	14; touch 10; flat-footed 14	Melee	+8	DEX	11 (+0)
Hit Points	46	Ranged	-	CON	- (+0)
Save Fort	+4	Grapple	+8	INT	7 (-2)
Save Ref	+2	MAS Dmg Threshold	-	WIS	5 (-3)
Save Will	+0	Action Points	-	CHA	10 (+0)

Attacks *unarmed attack*: Punch +8 Melee (1d6+5)

Attack Options None.

Spells None

Speed 30 ft.

Skills None

Feats/Talents None

Special Qualities Damage Reduction 5/- (Su), Fast Healing 1 (Ex)

- Damage Reduction 5/- (Su): He ignores 5 points of damage from weapons and natural attacks. However magic items or blessed weapons are not affected.
- Fast Healing 1 (Ex): He regains hit points at an exceptionally fast rate. He gains 1 hit point per round. Fast Healing ends when he is reduced to -10 or more hit points.

Weaknesses Vulnerability: Exceedingly Bright Lights (10)

Wealth +0

Reputation & Allegiances 0; To evil

FX Items None

Possessions None

Description

The body of the Blood has not only reanimated, but has begun to regenerate. The man looks alive, though his skin is pasty white, and he walks with a stiffened gait. He is truly evil and sets about killing anyone he can get into a one-on-one situation. He literally rips the person apart with his bare hands. This animated corpse has been constructed by the magic of the movie and by the latent psychic abilities of his granddaughter. Hence this is not a typical undead, nor a typical construct.

PINEBOX NEWS

December 19, 2005**Volume V, Issue 69**

Theater to Reopen after Sixty Years

The old Crowley Cinema, so popular in the Pinebox of the 1930s and 1940s is being renovated and will reopen for the first time since 1944. The Crowley Cinema was the jewel of Pinebox in the first half of the 20th century. Its gilded marquee and seating arrangements rivaled the great theatres of Dallas and Houston, making it a major attraction for much of east Texas and as far away as Louisiana.

The theater originally opened in 1931 during the worst years of the Great Depression. The owner and manager of the business was Herman Crowley, and now his granddaughter, Alicia has returned from California to reopen the refurbished, upgraded, and renamed Sundown Cineplex of downtown Pinebox.

"I've added stadium seating, a state-of-the-art sound system, and period uniforms for the employees. Watching modern movies should be an experience and I'm hoping the people of Pinebox will enjoy it."

Ms. Crowley has also invested in a pizzeria to be located next door to the theater. She and her partners hope to capture the University student's attention

as a great dating venue. "Dinner and a movie. What could be more American?"

The theater closed in 1944 after facing economic hardships caused by World War II, and the abandoned building stood vacant for many years—home only to vagrants and the occasional drug pusher and user. The building had also developed a reputation for hauntings and was the object of many teenaged adventures around Halloween.

"Ms. Crowley has done a tremendous job of redecorating and upgrading the theatre, and I think we're in for a real

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Community Calendar

January 16

City Council Open Forum—The main agenda item is a safety discussion about the 37 foot deep sinkhole on Carter Avenue. 6 pm.

Friends of the Library

Booksale—The Friends of the Library is holding a book-fair fundraiser. In addition to new books, part of the library's unique and colorful Reserve Desk collection will be auctioned off. 3 pm.

continued

Fewer ETU Students Begin Spring Semester

As anyone driving can tell you, the coeds—and accompanying traffic—are back in Pinebox. Classes at East Texas University began on Monday for the Spring Semester. Despite record enrollments every year for the past ten years, Dr. Monica Sears, Dean of Admissions and Recruitment, has a problem.

"We have more students enrolled than ever before, but fewer than 73% of our freshmen return for their second freshman term. Another 12% do not return for their sophomore year," Sears said.

Why do these students not choose to return to Pinebox? Dr. Sears has been studying the lack of returnees in an attempt to discover what is driving them away. "These sorts of rates are common with two-year junior colleges, but it is disturbing at a four-year university."

According to Dr. Sears, many of the non-returning students had scholarships and most passed their Fall classes. Of those non-returning Freshmen who

responded to the ETU survey, almost half reported that they were transferring to other schools and forfeited their scholarships. Less than half the missing students responded to the survey. Sears says students typically begin dropping out and disappearing from campus even before the Fall semester ends, and many never leave forwarding addresses.

"I don't understand why this is happening. Our school is a fine institution of learning, we have great professors, and we live in a garden spot of the world," said Dena Wolke, a senior Biology student at ETU.

Jena Voss, a junior English major disagreed. "I think it's because so many weird things always seem to happen here. They're scared. Too many evil happenings and bizarre events. Personally, I like it. I think it gives us character. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger, right?"

Other students claim that the city of Pinebox has not been very welcoming to ETU students. In 1986, the City Council

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Crowley Theater (continued from pg 1)

treat,” stated Mayor Flowers. “The more economic development we can get in the downtown area the better.”

GM Ideas

- One of the heroes gets a part-time job at the theater for the opening night. He experiences some of the haunting episodes and has a premonition of worse things to come. Before the night is over, the distinction between reality and movie blurs and creatures from the ‘40’s horror movies prowl the theater’s shadows.
- If heroes *Research* (DC 20) the history of the theater, they discover the truth about a shootout in 1944 and a Nazi propaganda movie. Their research sparks the attention of others who also seek the film, and the heroes are shadowed by a group with their own agenda for the film.

ETU Student Enrollment Decline (continued from page 1)

passed a curfew ordinance requiring that everyone under 21 years of age be indoors by midnight. The ordinance faced great protests by many student organizations and was eventually revoked, though it did divide the town from the university.

Whatever the reason, Mayor Flowers has joined with Dr. Sears and agreed to hold a series of town-hall meetings in the County Courthouse starting this Thursday evening at 7:00 pm.

“Everyone interested in our town and the university is invited to speak. Our city and the university are truly one entity and we need to support each other every way we can,” Flowers said. “Pinebox is a great place to live, and ETU is a great university. We need to find a way to keep these students happy and continuing their educations.”

GM Ideas

- If the heroes are students at ETU or long time citizens of Pinebox, they are asked to speak at the town-hall meeting. This is a great opportunity to meet many important contacts in the city government and university bureaucracy.
- The heroes are contacted by Dr. Sears and offered temporary positions as Recruitment Officers for the university. She wants them to investigate why students are choosing to leave ETU. Of course, the main reason is that students typically come face to face with some form of the paranormal during their stay at ETU. Some die, some run away and never look back. In either case, the ETU administration itself does what it can to cover up the incidents. This

hook may lead to some interesting adventures such as traveling to an ex-student’s home and discovering he is now a vampire, werewolf, or belongs to a coven dedicated to the Dark Arts of magic.

- The heroes discover that an average of six students per semester simply disappear. After further investigation, the heroes learn that the immediate family members of the missing students also sometimes vanish. The common thread is that each of the students had been science majors and worked in the university labs. Who is behind these strange disappearances? Is it a government conspiracy, terrorists, or something even more sinister?

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