



Requires the use of the d20 Modern Roleplaying Game, published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc.



"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 Shadows Among Us

*"Evil enters like a needle and spreads like an oak tree."
- Ethiopian proverb*



Even the dullest heroes who see a big, hairy, monster with eyes of flame, scythe-like claws, and fangs the size of steak knives instinctively say, "Hey, that is probably something bad—where is my gun?" Whether it lurks in their closets, squats beneath their beds, or even chases them around the world, there is never a question that what they face is a monster. As soon as the heroes sense its presence, out come the silver-tipped bullets, holy water, and spell books.

However, the most dangerous monsters are those that masquerade as something innocuous. They know the weaknesses of our flesh, the frailty of our spirits, and take advantage of these failings to get up close and personal. These monsters slide into the character's lives, and possibly even their souls, to strike when the heroes are most vulnerable.

Following are three creatures that prey on human beings. Each uses a different form of disguise to infiltrate society and fulfill its need to feed itself and its young, propagate its species, or destroy those who oppose the Shadow.

Waspid

Adult waspid are hideous, insect-like monstrous humanoids that lay their eggs in human hosts. Because of their rapid reproductive capacity, they represent a real threat to human domination of the planet. Waspid have several stages of their life cycle, and below are stats for the most common stages.

Waspid begin life as a marble-sized egg implanted in a paralyzed host body. Each waspid is hermaphroditic—

self-fertilizing its own eggs—resulting in near-exact duplicates of the original. One week after being laid, inch-long yellow larvae hatch from the eggs, and the voracious creatures begin to consume their paralyzed host, often eating the host's entire body from the inside out.

Waspid, Larvae

CR 1; Fine vermin, HD 1/16 d8; hp 1; Mas 13; Init -2; Spd 1ft; Defense 6, touch 0, flat-footed 0; BAB+0; Grap -21; Atk -2 melee (bite 1/8 pt plus poison); Full Atk -2 melee (bite 1/8 pt); FS 5 in. by 5 in.; Reach 0; SQ Blindsight, Poison (Fort Save DC 12; 1d3 Str/1d3 Str); AL: none; AP 0; Rep 0; SV Fort 0, Ref 0, Will +2; Str 1, Dex 6, Con 8, Int -, Wis 4, Cha -

Skills: none

Feats: none

Blindsight: Using vibrations, the larvae is capable of maneuver and fighting. The range is the larvae's fighting space.

Poison: Fort Save DC 12, 1d3 Str/1d3 Str



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Waspid larvae growth is rapid, and after just a few days the larvae become juvenile waspid. Juvenile waspid are approximately seven inches long and consist of a shiny black head and abdomen, a yellow thorax with amber-colored wings. A stinger located on the creature's abdomen delivers a painful poison that is potentially deadly if the victim is stung multiple times. Juvenile waspid feed on small animals and insects and often swarm victims, using numbers to make up for their small size.

Waspid, Juvenile

CR 2; Diminutive vermin, HD 1/8 d8; hp 1; Mas 14; Init +3; Spd 15ft, Fly 45ft; Defense 9, touch 3, flat-footed 5; BAB+1; Grap -11; Atk +4 melee (bite 1 pt, sting 1 pt plus poison); Full Atk melee (bite 1 pt, sting 1 pt plus poison); FS 1ft by 1ft; Reach 1ft; SQ Flight, Poison (Fort Save, DC 15; 1d3 Str/1d3 Str); AL: none; AP 0; Rep 0; SV Fort 0, Ref +3, Will 0; Str 1, Dex 16, Con 9, Int -, Wis 7, Cha -

Skills: *Jump* +6, *Hide* +4, *Tumble* +8

Feats: Acrobatic

Flight: Juvenile waspid have wings and can fly at 3 times their speed.

Poison: Fort Save DC 12, 1d3 Str/1d3 Str

Juvenile waspid grow rapidly and molt their exoskeletons dozens of times until they reach adulthood, usually about two years after hatching.

With each molting, the waspid grows and changes its shape until it comes to resemble a cross between a human and an insect. Prior to final molting, a juvenile waspid stands on powerfully built hind legs at roughly 4 feet tall and weighs approximately fifty pounds. It no longer uses its wings, and its exoskeleton is covered with a thin veneer of colorless skin.

At the final molting of the juvenile waspid, it creates a cocoon out of local materials in which it remains for nearly a year. While in the cocoon, its body undergoes a metamorphosis. When it emerges, it appears as a very attractive human female. This is a façade created by a thin covering of flesh over the waspid's remaining exoskeleton. This façade is easily torn; any time the creature takes 2 hit points of damage, part of its façade is torn away. This façade grows back within a few days, and no evidence of prior damage is visible in the new skin.

Waspid, Adult

CR 7; Medium Monstrous Humanoid, HD 7d8; hp 28; Mas 11; Init +1; Spd 30ft; Defense 4, touch 1, flat-footed 3; BAB +7/+2; Grap 7; Atk +7/+2 melee (1d3 slam, 1d4 bite, 1d6 sting plus poison); Full Atk +7/+2 melee (1d3 slam, 1d4 bite, 1d6 sting plus poison); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; SQ External Skin, Frightful Presence (when skin torn), Pheromones, Poison (Fort Save, DC 18; 1d6 Str/1d6 Str); AL: none; Rep 0; AP 1; SV Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +3; Str 11, Dex 13, Con 11, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 15

Skills: *Bluff* +8, *Diplomacy* +6, *Disguise* +4, *Hide* +5, *Listen* +4, *Move Silently* +3, *Spot* +4

Feats: Deceptive, Run

External Skin: The adult waspid appears as a beautiful woman, but this is only a thin skin, which can be torn when the creature suffers two hit points or more of damage.

Frightful Presence: When the waspid's skin is torn, it gains this feat.

Pheromones: Adult waspid create powerful pheromones capable of causing confusion and attraction in human beings (same as the Distraction and Attraction Psionic power in the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*, all humans within 20 ft.) It uses these pheromones to lower their victim's inhibitions and lure them to their lairs.

Poison: Fort Save DC 18; 1d6 Str/1d6 Str

After emerging from its cocoon, the adult waspid seek out human populations to begin the cycle over again. Although they emerge "naked," waspid seek out appropriate clothing, often killing a human female and taking her clothes. Waspid also have a quick ability to replicate language and can usually speak in short sentences.

Adult waspid have stingers that emerge from between their legs, and the venom is incredibly toxic, causing paralysis within seconds. Waspid can also inflict powerful bites with their mandibles, which are usually hidden beneath their façade.

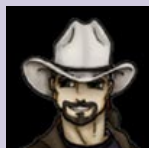
Quotes:

"Do you like me?"

"Let's go."

"I'm hungry."

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Adventure Outline for Waspid

Eddie lived alone in the unfashionable end of the Indian Summer Trailer Park when not on the road or stressing furniture in one of Golan County's many bars. At 49 years of age and 390 pounds, his life wasn't much to speak of, but he thought that had changed one night last week.

Eddie was bending his arm in the All or Nothing Roadhouse just outside of Pinebox, when She entered. Every man in the joint, and a few of the women, stopped what they were doing and stared at the blonde angel that walked through the door. Her clothes were old and dirty, but they were filled out in all the right places and she had a face to die for. She exuded sensuality, and her every move promised satisfaction to some lucky person.

Like the rest of them, Eddie couldn't pull his eyes from her. Like the rest of them, he couldn't believe it when she stopped in front of him. She put her arms around him and kissed him long and passionately. With a look of wonder and delight on his face, she led Eddie out the front door and into the night. A few folks laughed, and more than a few were jealous as hell, but nobody thought much more about it.

Edward "Eddie" Moffett (use the Mid-Level Taxi Driver from the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*) is an alcoholic, down-on-his-luck trucker from Pinebox, Texas. One night, he had the misfortune of being selected by an adult waspid to be the food for its

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brood. After Eddie left the All or Nothing with the waspid, it continued to use its pheromones to confuse and entice him beyond the point of rational thought. Guided by the waspid, Eddie drove his pickup truck to an abandoned logging camp in the Big Thicket National Forest, where the waspid impaled him with its stinger and implanted its eggs. Two days afterward, the larvae hatched and the creatures began to eat their way out of Eddie's paralyzed body.

The adventure starts three days after Eddie's disappearance and one day after the larvae have hatched.

Hook: Eddie's boss, Carol Winsor, asks the heroes to look for him. She has a soft spot for the big lug, and is willing to pay a small fee (less than \$2,000) for the heroes' assistance. She tells them that Eddie was last seen drinking at All or Nothing Roadhouse outside of Pinebox and that he left with an attractive, strange woman.

Alternate Hook: A bookie who is owed money by Eddie wants the heroes to locate him and offers them a "finder's fee" of about \$2,000.

Alternate Hook: A local deputy disagrees with the Sheriff that Moffett is on a drinking binge. He's heard that people have been seeing weird things around Pearl Road, and he asks the heroes to check it out, just in case.

The All or Nothing Roadhouse

At All or Nothing Roadhouse, the heroes meet the owner, David Barker (use the Mid-level Gang Leader from the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*). Barker is gruff and bad-tempered with people he likes and much more unpleasant to people he doesn't. All social tests with Barker start with the Unfriendly modifier (-2). Heroes who are obviously law enforcement or are "wimps" cannot eliminate the modifier.

Barker was working the night that Eddie disappeared with the woman and remembers it very clearly, although he can't understand why an attractive woman

like that would leave with a tub of lard like Moffett. Given the right inspiration, ideally through roleplaying but also such as a successful *Diplomacy* (DC 10) or *Intimidation* (DC 10) check, Barker gives the heroes several clues.

- Moffett drives a beat-up 1986 Chevy pickup truck. Moffett and the woman left in it together at around 12:20 a.m. They were going west on Pearl Road, toward the Big Thicket National Forest.
- The woman must have hitchhiked to the Roadhouse because there were no vehicles in the parking lot at closing time.
- The woman wasn't local and was a stranger to the place.
- Barker is not certain, but he thinks he may have seen her before. One night about three years ago, a similar-looking woman came into the saloon. She selected a big biker, and they drove off into the darkness on the guy's Harley-Davidson. Barker can't remember who the guy was, but he doesn't think he's seen him again (not unusual, considering he was a drifter). If it is the same woman, she has not appreciably aged.

Pearl Road is a paved road that runs west into the Big Thicket until it reaches a campground. From the campground, it becomes a dirt road that rapidly degenerates in quality as it continues west. The dirt road terminates at the abandoned Pearl logging camp, roughly six miles past the campground and deep inside the Big Thicket.

The Campground

If the heroes wish to investigate the campground, they can talk to the few people staying there with a successful *Gather Information* (DC 12) check.

- No one remembers seeing anyone resembling Moffett or the woman enter the camp.
- Some campers report seeing someone lurking around the edge of the campsites at night. No one has been harmed, but some articles of clothing and several pets are missing.

If the heroes *Search* (DC 17) the area immediately around the campsite, they find the mostly eaten corpses of two dogs. If the players find this, they must make a *Will* save (DC 10), or be Panicked for 1 round. Alternately, if you are using the *Fear Effects* horror rules (see sidebar), this is a *minor spook*.

Driving on Pearl Road beyond the campground is difficult, requiring a *Drive* (DC 15) check. Failure indicates that the vehicle becomes stuck and the heroes must free it. This requires either another successful *Drive* (DC 20) check, or a *Strength* (DC 20) check and is the GM's option. A second failure means that the vehicle cannot be moved without assistance from of a four-wheel-drive vehicle.

The Logging Camp

The area around the abandoned logging camp is thick with pine trees and smaller bushes, and travel off the trail is difficult. Visibility in the forest is restricted to about 40 feet. The adult waspid hides in the dense foliage and requires a *Spot* (DC 20) check to be seen by the team. The waspid observes the heroes. See *Conclusions* below for its actions.

The logging camp is about 60 years old and was abandoned 30 years ago. It consists of several dorms, a kitchen/dining facility, and a vehicle and equipment workshop. All of the buildings are falling apart and some have collapsed entirely. The space between the buildings is filled with knee-high grasses and a scattering of trees and bushes.

If the heroes successfully *Search* (DC 17) the area, they find a rusting Harley Davidson motorcycle on its side in the grass near the kitchen. It has obviously been there for some time.

If the heroes *Search* (DC 5) the kitchen, they find a human skeleton in the corner of the dining room, and they must make a *Will* save (DC 10), or be Panicked for 1 round. Alternately, if using *Fear Effects*, this is a *minor spook*. This is the waspid's last victim, the drifter that Barker remembers from years before. Examination of the skeleton with a successful *Investigate* (DC 12), or *Knowledge (Earth and Life Sciences)* (DC 20) check reveals that the bones have been picked clean of all muscle, tendon, and fibers. A *Search* (DC 10) of the immediate area reveals several credit cards, a driver's license, two boot soles, and a belt buckle. There is also a loaded, rusting, .38 pistol (2d6 damage, 20 critical, 10% chance per shot of misfire).

The Hatching

If the heroes *Search* (DC 15) beyond the kitchen, they find Moffett's truck. They can clearly see him sitting in the cab on the driver's side. Looking through the dirty windows, the heroes may *Spot* (DC 7) that Moffett's eyes are open, his skin is dry and flaky, he has several days' growth of beard on his face, and his shirt is bloody around his abdomen. Moffett is paralyzed but can move his eyes, blink slowly, and make moaning sounds. He is in intense pain and nearly insane with fear as the waspid's brood consumes him from the inside out.

If the heroes attempt to move Moffett, the juvenile waspids emerge from his body, causing him to go into violent convulsions and die. Seeing this, the heroes must make a *Will* save (DC 15), or be Panicked for 1d4 rounds. Alternately, if using *Fear Effects*, this is a *great fright*. Once free of Moffett's corpse, the juvenile waspids (20+1d6 individuals) attack the heroes.

The heroes have several ways they can deal with the swarm. If Moffett's body is still inside the truck, they can shut the vehicle's doors, which contain the swarm for 1d4+2 rounds; after that they find ways out through the undercarriage, etc. The heroes can attack the swarm with bludgeoning weapons as they emerge, but this is unlikely to stop the entire swarm. If the heroes contain the swarm inside the cab of the truck, they can attempt to set the vehicle on fire.

If the heroes attempt to flee, they must make it to their vehicle before the swarm exits the truck and pursues the heroes. Because of the juvenile waspid's speed, it is unlikely that heroes on foot will escape unscathed. If the heroes attempt to flee in their vehicles, they must make the same *Drive* (DC 15) checks or get stuck and then a check (DC 20) to continue to leave the area.

Conclusion

It is left to the GM's discretion to decide when the heroes have a confrontation with the adult waspid. Suggested conclusions include:

- The adult waspid waits for the heroes beneath their vehicle and attacks them when they attempt to leave. It uses its pheromones to confuse the heroes before attacking.
- The adult waspid attacks the heroes while they are driving out, trying to make them crash. It then tries to pick them off one at a time.
- The adult waspid follows the heroes home and seduces one of their relatives or friends, who then disappears. It takes the victim back to the logging camp where it waits for the heroes to return so it can take its revenge.

What is Fear Effects?



Fear Effects is 12 to Midnight's own set of add-on horror rules. These rules do not require the use of a sanity score. Instead, they rely on a saving throw called a Horror check. You will see references to three different kinds of Horror checks mentioned in this adventure: *minor spooks*, *medium shocks*, and *great frights*.

If you aren't using *Fear Effects*, be sure to check it out. It makes any mediocre game great, and any great game (such as those by 12 to Midnight) even better. However, if you still are not convinced to run this adventure using the *Fear Effects* rules, then just ignore comments in the adventure about *minor spooks*, *medium shocks*, or *great frights*.

Beautiful People

Beautiful People are creatures that were once human beings, but have become mutated into shadow-kind. These shape shifters have lost all of their humanity and now follow a twisted instinct to prey on their former species. They travel in packs and their nightly hunting grounds are the fashionable nightclubs, hot spots, and party zones of the urban world. The creatures have an uncanny ability to select victims who crave being part of the popular crowd, and use this weakness to lure them to their deaths, or worse.

Packs of beautiful people establish a lair, usually a rented hotel room or a short-term lease apartment paid for with cash from their victims. During the day beautiful people are dormant and revert to their true form; hairless humanoids with pale, translucent skin, no eyelids, and stark white eyes. At dark, they shape shift and engage in dancing and partying and drink and eat to sustain the ruse, but their preferred food is human flesh. The group befriends a victim, usually someone who craves companionship, and lures them back to the lair with the promise of more fun times. When the victim is in the lair, the pack overwhelms him or her and consumes them. To eat, beautiful people regurgitate a powerful acid that liquefies flesh and bone, then they slurp up the mess.

To reproduce, the pack selects a candidate at random. This victim is not killed and consumed, but instead is infected with a virus that changes their DNA, causing them to become one of them. Transmission of the virus is done skin-to-skin and usually when the victim is being intimate with a shapeshifter.

The virus quickly goes to work, altering the victim's DNA. Initial symptoms are flu-like, with headaches, nausea, and fever. As the virus works, the victim becomes disoriented and develops an overwhelming urge to join with the pack. In later stages, usually about two weeks after infection, the victim's skin becomes

transparent and the iris loses pigmentation and turns white. At the last stage, the victim's skin becomes pale and translucent, and is capable of changing color and shape. Simple antiviral medications administered in all but the last stage can reverse the process.

Beautiful People

CR 4; Medium Aberration; HD 4d8; hp 20; Mas 13; Init +2; Spd 30ft; Defense 15, touch 15, flatfooted 10; BAB: +3; Grap +3; Atk +3 melee (1d3 slam); Full Atk +3 (1d3 slam), Atk +5 ranged (acid spit 1d6); FS 5ft by 5ft; Reach 5ft; SQ Acid Resistance 10, Acid Regurgitation/Spit, Darkvision, Fast Healing, Light Sensitivity, Psionics, Shapeshift, Weakness (antiviral drugs); AL: Beautiful People pack; Rep 0; AP 1; SV Fort +1, Ref +4, Will +3, Str 11, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 18

Skills: Bluff +11, Diplomacy +11, Disguise +11, Escape Artist +4, Knowledge (Popular Culture) +4, Knowledge (Streetwise) +4, Listen +2, Perform (Dance) +8.

Feats: Deceptive

Acid Resistance: Beautiful people ignore the first 10 pts of damage from acid.

Acid Regurgitation/Spit: Beautiful people regurgitate an amount of acid (1d6 damage) and can spit the acid 10 ft.

Darkvision: Beautiful people can see to 60 ft in total darkness.

Fast Healing: Beautiful people regain 1 hit point per round.

Psionics: Beautiful people have the following natural psionic abilities: Distract, Charm Person, Detect Thoughts (see *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*).

Shapeshift: Beautiful people can change gender, height, weight, and even the appearance of their "clothes," which are really parts of their bodies. They can also create small objects from their bodies, such as cash or drugs, which later, 4 hours, turns into a dried, flaky powder. In shifted form, the creatures always have a Charisma of 18 or greater. A hero who sees a Beautiful Person shapeshift must make a Will save (DC 12), or be Panicked for 1d2 rounds. Or, if using *Fear Effects*, this is a *medium shock*.

Light Sensitivity: Beautiful People take a -1 penalty on attack rolls in sunlight or in brightly lit areas.

Weakness: Antiviral drugs do 3d6 damage to beautiful people per dose.

Quotes

"Buy a girl a drink?"

"If I told you that you had a beautiful body, would you hold it against me?"

"Wanna come back to our place for dinner?"

Beautiful People Adventure Outline

Amanda didn't like crowds. It took her sorority sisters 'pushing to convince her to go with them to Ft. Lauderdale for spring break. For a whole week she did her best to blend into the background. But when the most attractive group of people she'd ever seen invited her to join them at the club, she couldn't resist. The fact that they had ignored her friends made it all the sweeter.

She left the club with the group and spent the rest of the night partying hard. The most exclusive

night spots opened their doors for her and her new friends, and Amanda felt like Cinderella at the ball. When she woke up in a taxi the next morning, she had a killer hangover and the night was a blur.

After spring break, Amanda returned to East Texas University but discovered she couldn't concentrate. The music of the dance floor kept running through her head. Her hangover never fully went away and within a week she was sick in bed with flu-like symptoms. As badly as she ached physically, she yearned to return to the club and be with her new friends.

And then her new friends found her. They didn't look the same at all, but they were still stunning and she knew it was them. They wanted her to come with them, and she wanted to go. It was only when her stupid sorority sisters said she was too sick to do anything and called the police that they left. But she knew she'd see them again. After all, she was one of them now.

Amanda Grace, a college sophomore at East Texas University, traveled to Ft. Lauderdale and met up with a pack of beautiful people. Instead of killing and eating her, they infected her with their virus. When the heroes begin the adventure, Amanda has begun the transformation into one of them. She is currently in the Intensive Care Unit of the Golan County Medical Center, being treated for influenza and nervous exhaustion. She has roughly four days before the transformation is complete and irreversible.

Hook: Amanda's father, frightened by his daughter's illness and even more frightened by the weird strangers who have shown up looking for her, hires or asks the heroes to keep an eye on her. He also asks the heroes to investigate the good-looking strangers and find out their true motives.

Alternate Hook 1: A heroes' relative or friend vanished the previous year after he visited Ft. Lauderdale on Spring break. He also suffered from

the strange, flu-like illness before he disappeared. The heroes investigate Amanda's case to determine if it is just coincidence or if there is a more insidious pattern.

Alternate Hook 2: One of the heroes was also infected and is starting the transformation. He or she wants to find out what is happening and how it can be stopped. The heroes have only a short time before the transformation makes him or her unable to resist the lure of the night.

The Hospital

If the heroes visit the hospital, they may meet with Amanda's doctor. However, the doctor resists attempts by the heroes to discuss her condition, citing patient confidentiality. If the heroes persist, have them make a *Diplomacy* (DC 25) check. Alternately, they may attempt to sneak a peak at Amanda's medical records perhaps using *Slight of Hand* (DC 15) and *Treat Injury* (DC 15) to understand it. If successful, they learn the following:

- Amanda's condition is worsening and her skin has taken on a disturbing pale translucence.
- She is in restraints because she is delirious and has tried to leave.
- Several people not related to the family have tried to visit her and have been turned away.
- Amanda is unable to communicate with the heroes and cannot provide any insight for them.

If the heroes enter Amanda's hospital room and see her condition, particularly her pale and transparent skin, they must make a Will save (DC 10) or be Panicked for 1 round. Or, if using *Fear Effects*, this is a *minor spook*).

The Sorority House

If the heroes go to Amanda's sorority house on the ETU campus, they meet the "house mom," Bonnie Conrad (use the Mid-level Politician from the *d20*

Modern Roleplaying Game). Conrad is a large woman and very protective of "her" girls, and the heroes must demonstrate that they have the best of intentions through *Diplomacy* or *Bluff* (DC 15) or she won't hesitate to tell them to get lost.

If the heroes ask around about the men and women who visited Amanda that night, have the heroes make a *Gather Information* (DC 10) check. Upon a successful check, they learn the following:

- Amanda's sorority sisters didn't like the looks of the strangers; although they were attractive and stylishly dressed, they thought they were pushy and rude.
- Conrad called the police when the group told Amanda they had come to get her. Amanda was willing to go, but her friends prevented her from leaving.
- When the police arrived, the group left without incident other than Amanda becoming very angry. She later collapsed and was taken to the hospital.
- None of the girls can remember any of the group's names or even give a positive description, except that they were attractive and stylishly dressed.
- One of the group told Amanda they would be back for her, but they haven't been seen at the sorority house since then.

If the heroes ask about Amanda and are successful at a *Gather Information* (DC 10) check, they learn the following:

- Amanda is friendly but somewhat shy. She gets good grades and doesn't have a boyfriend.
- Amanda and her friends went to Ft. Lauderdale for spring break and returned a week ago.
- On the last night of spring break, Amanda hooked up with a group of six attractive people and spent the night partying with them. She returned with a hangover and a hazy memory of the night. No one can accurately describe the six people, except that they were not the same people who came to get Amanda at ETU. However, they were good-looking and the girls were jealous of Amanda's wild night.

- Amanda has been ill ever since returning to ETU and has only gotten worse.

If the heroes search Amanda's room, they find nothing of interest. However, if they investigate her ETU computer account with a successful *Computer Use* (DC 10) check, they learn that she has a blog. Her last entry, dated the night before going to the hospital, states that she has been ill, unable to concentrate because of dance music in her head, and has had recurring dreams of going back to Ft. Lauderdale and becoming someone else.

Hospital Encounter

This scene works best if the heroes are acting as a kind of protective guard for Amanda, but it can also be used if they are making a late-night visit to report to Amanda's father, who is staying by his daughter's bedside.

During the night, the beautiful people shapeshift into nurses, nurses' aids, and doctors (complete with scrubs, stethoscopes, etc.) and infiltrate the hospital and attempt to kidnap Amanda. If the heroes or anyone else attempts to stop them from putting her in a wheelchair and taking her from the hospital, the shapeshifters attack with their acid. If the heroes are not present, actual doctors, nurses, and security staff stop the shapeshifters.

After the encounter, a successful *Spot* (DC 12) check lets the heroes identify a matchbook with the logo of the Pizza Barn (see *Modern Dispatch* #30) that one of the shapeshifters dropped. The Pizza Barn is a local pizzeria and bar frequented by college students.

The Pizza Barn

If the heroes investigate the Pizza Barn, they find a large barn that has been converted into a pizzeria. The night after the attack at the hospital, the beautiful people appear as college students, go to the Pizza Barn to hunt. They engage in dancing and drinking, keeping to themselves until they select a young local man (use

low-level Dilettante from the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*) to join them. The heroes can try to identify the beautiful people by observing the people in the bar with a successful *Spot* (DC 15) check. Sometime after midnight, the beautiful people leave the Pizza Barn with their victim and travel to their motel.

The Motel

If the heroes successfully identify the beautiful people and their intended victim, they are able to follow them to their motel room. Once inside, the beautiful people overwhelm the young man, force him onto the bed, and regurgitate acid onto him to kill him. If the heroes intervene in time, he can be saved; otherwise he dies of his injuries. Witnessing the pack feeding is frightening and requires a Will save (DC 15) or be Panicked for 1d4 rounds. Alternately, if using *Fear Effects*, this is a *medium shock*.

When fighting, the beautiful people revert to their natural state and attempt to use their acid to harm the heroes. They also use improvised weapons, although they are unskilled in their use. If the battle turns against them, the beautiful people attempt to escape. If they cannot escape, they fight to the death.

Conclusion

If the heroes manage to kill all the beautiful people in the motel, the adventure concludes. By examining the creature's bodies, doctors at the hospital can determine that they are infected with a powerful virus and treat Amanda with anti-viral medications. She slowly recovers.

If the heroes are unable to kill all the beautiful people in the motel, suggested conclusions include:

- The remaining beautiful people now hunt the heroes, disguising themselves to get close to them and strike when the heroes least suspect.
- The remaining beautiful people attempt to abduct Amanda from the hospital again, but this time they appear as the heroes (albeit, better-looking versions).

The heroes may be able to stop them, resulting in a bizarre who's—who game, or they fail and the heroes are blamed for the kidnapping.

About the Author

Neal Hyde is no stranger to Modern Dispatch, having also written *Modern Dispatch* #61: *Revenant* and an issue for RPG Objects. Neal is also responsible for the excellent adventure *The Message* found in issue 3 of our *Journal of American Paranormal Research*. The *Journal* is a free download from 12 to Midnight website.

The Daeva: Corruptor of Heroes

The daeva is a dangerous fiend that feeds on the energies of other shadow creatures, but its preferred meal is the corrupted souls of shadow slayers (or anyone who investigates or confronts paranormal creatures). This fiend appears human and takes the guise of a talented, traveling shadowlayer or paranormal investigator. It seeks out those who have had contact with or are tainted by the shadow/paranormal and befriends them.

At first, the daeva uses this friendship to assist the heroes in their work (and feeding on the energies of slain shadowkind), but it also encourages the heroes to “do what has to be done” and go to extreme measures in the name of protecting humanity. It creates circumstances to induce the heroes to commit crimes and atrocities against innocents. Once the heroes have committed an evil act, the daeva reveals its true nature and consumes them.

In their natural form, daeva appear as six-foot-tall humanoids with stony skin bearing runes of law carved into it. Curved horns rise from the sides of its head and its feet and hands are clawed. When in combat, the daeva’s eyes and runes glow a fiery red.

The Daeva often appear to the heroes as drifters or lone shadowlayers. They prefer leather clothes and often have archaic armor, such as a chainmail shirt. Daeva always have a magical weapon in their possession, such as an enchanted sword or spear.

Daeva, Outsider 2

CR 2: Medium Outsider; HD 3d8; hp 15; Mas 13, Init +4; Spd 30 ft; Defense 19, Touch 10, Flat 10, BAB +2; Grap +2; Atk +4 melee (1d8 +4, 20, longsword); Full Atk +4 melee (1d8 +4, 20, longsword); FS 5ft by 5ft; Reach 5ft; ; SQ Automatic Change Self, Darkvision, Immunity—Ballistic, Resistance—Sonic/Concussion 10 pt, Spells, Telepathy; AL Evil, Law; Rep 0; AP 1;

SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +4; Str 14, Dex 11, Con 13, Int 13, Wis 11, Cha 15

Feat: Archaic Weapons, Improved Initiative

Skills: Bluff +3, Diplomacy +3, Hide +2, Sense Motive +2, Spellcraft +5

Spells: Cause Fear, Daze, Detect, Magical Aura, Message, Resistance, Sleep

Automatic Change Self: The daeva can automatically change its appearance. See the Change Self spell in *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*.

Darkvision: The daeva can see in total darkness to 60 ft.

Immunity—Ballistic: The daeva is immune to ballistic damage.

Resistance—Sonic/Concussion: The daeva ignores the first 10 points of damage from sonic/concussion weapons.

Telepathy: The daeva can communicate with any creature within 100 ft.

Daeva, Outsider 2/Charismatic Hero 5

CR 7: Medium Outsider; HD 3d8+5d6+6; hp 77; Mas 13, Init +4; Spd 30 ft; Defense 21, Touch 13, Flat 19, BAB +4; Grap +4; Atk +6 melee (1d8 +4, 20, longsword); Full Atk +6 melee (1d8 +4, 20, longsword); FS 5ft by 5ft; Reach 5ft; ; SQ Automatic Change Self, Darkvision, Immunity—Ballistic, Resistance—Sonic/Concussion 10, Spells, Telepathy; AL Evil, Law; Rep 0; AP 1; SV Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +3; Str 14, Dex 11, Con 13, Int 13, Wis 11, Cha 15

Feat: Archaic Weapons, Improved Initiative

Skills: Bluff +7, Concentration +5, Decipher Script +2, Diplomacy +7, Disguise +5, Drive +3, Gather Information +4, Hide +3, Intimidate +5, Jump +3,

Knowledge (Arcane Lore) +5, Move Silently +4, Search +3, Sense Motive +4, Spellcraft +5, Spot +4

Talents: Fast-talk, Dazzle, Taunt

Spells: Blur, Cause Fear, Daze, Detect, Fireball, Magical Aura, Message, Resistance, Sleep, Shield, Spider Climb

Automatic Change Self: The daeva can automatically change its appearance. See the Change Self spell in *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*.

Darkvision: The daeva can see in total darkness to 60 ft.

Immunity—Ballistic: The daeva is immune to ballistic damage.

Resistance—Sonic/Concussion: The daeva ignores the first 10 points of damage from sonic/concussion weapons.

Telepathy: The daeva can communicate with any creature within 100 ft.

Quotes

“You guys look like you could use a hand.”

“I’m prepared do what has to be done. Are you?”

“Looks can be deceiving.”

Daeva Campaign Subplot Outline

Jesse crouched low beneath the gardenia bush and pressed his rifle to his chest. Behind him, Dave unsheathed his sword. The scruffy guy had given them the tip about the lycanthropes in the

suburban home, and he'd asked for their help in taking them out.

Jesse's earpiece hissed. "Dude, are you sure about this?" Wilcox asked. "They look like a normal family to me."

"Don't let them fool you," Dave whispered. "Lets do what we came here to do."

For the first time in a long time, Jesse wasn't sure. He looked at the family having dinner and his eyes refused to focus. A sudden wave of dizziness swept over him.

Jesse felt Dave's hand on his shoulder, steadying him. "Don't be afraid," the drifter said. "You can do this."

Doubt left Jesse's mind. He raised his rifle and sighted in the lead male.

"On my mark," he said.

The daeva works best when integrated as a subplot into an existing campaign where the heroes are shadowslayers or are people who investigate the strange and paranormal. If the players have a tendency to shoot first and ask questions later, so much the better. The daeva's intention is to get close to the heroes and become trusted, then twist that trust into corruption. Building the heroes' trust doesn't happen quickly (especially in GM characters), and so a campaign subplot is required.

Introduction

The heroes are pitted against a creature or creatures that outstrip their capabilities. When the heroes are desperate and get in over their heads, the daeva appears and tips the odds in their favor.

Variations:

- The daeva lurks around the heroes during the course of the adventure, and the heroes initially believe that it is an enemy.

- After appearing and tipping the odds, the daeva leaves before it can be fully introduced, giving the heroes the impression of a lone Shadow Slayer. Future encounters reveal more, but never the whole story.

Gaining Trust

Over the course of the next few adventures, the daeva offers assistance to the heroes as a source of information, or as an aid in their fight against the shadow. The daeva allows the heroes to believe that it is a lone drifter, traveling from fight to fight with the shadow.

Variations:

- The daeva continues to follow the heroes and be there when they get in over their heads.
- The daeva provides a weapon or spell essential to stopping a particular shadow creature.
- The daeva allows itself to be captured by a shadow creature that the heroes are hunting. When they "rescue" it, it thanks them and uses this bond to gain their trust.

Springing the Trap

When the daeva believes that it has gained the heroes' trust, it creates a trap for them. It uses its powers of illusion to make an innocent family appear to be a family of shadowkind, such as vampires or werewolves. It approaches the heroes and asks for their help in eradicating the enemy. It attempts to trick the heroes into believing the family is what it described. If the heroes are fooled and they attack the family, the daeva encourages them to "do what has to be done" and annihilate them. Only after the heroes have done its bidding does the daeva reveal itself and attack them. The revelation of the daeva's true nature is very frightening, and heroes who witness it must make a Will save (DC 15) or be Panicked for 1d4 rounds. If using *Fear Effects*, this is a *great fright*.

Variations:

- The heroes may discover the daeva's trick. If so, the creature feigns innocence, claiming that it was tricked by a Shadow creature, too. If this ruse fails, it attacks the heroes.
- The daeva may allow the heroes to suspect the family is innocent but let their bloodlust take them over the edge into corruption.
- The daeva may delay revealing its true nature until long after the heroes have attacked the family. It lets the heroes be pursued by law enforcement and tormented by their own consciences before finally destroying them.

PINEBOX NEWS

February 20, 2006

Volume V, Issue 77

Rash of Armed Robberies Worry Police

By Daren Smith

The past two weeks have seen four armed robberies of convenience stores and gas stations. The assailants are described as being two African-American males, a Caucasian male, and an Hispanic female.

The robbers enter the stores just before closing time armed with pistols and a shotgun, wearing Halloween masks of various types. They rush any customers and clerks they see, ordering them onto the floor and often beating them violently with the butts of their weapons or by kicking them. They open the cash registers, take all the money, and take expensive-looking personal items from their victims. In each case the robbers have also taken several packs of beer.

"These robbers are believed to be extremely dangerous and anyone confronting them needs to be very cautious and non-threatening," advised Pinebox Police Chief Jacob Miner.

"The worst thing you can do is fight or resist them. Nothing you have is worth risking your life for. The best approach is to simply do whatever they ask, and

contact the police as soon as possible," Miner added.

The authorities believe the perpetrators may be the same gang who robbed several convenience stores in Lufkin, Nacogdoches and Louisiana. The clerk in Nacogdoches was shot after resisting the assailants, but has since recovered from his injuries. Two of the four instances in Pinebox took place at Speedy Pete's Gas and Convenience store off Highway 96.

Community Calendar

February 22

17th Bull Riding Contest—

The Pizza Barn continues its mechanical bull riding contest.

First Aid & Basic Life Saving

Techniques—Because the first two classes filled up so quickly, the hospital has scheduled a third class. Call the front desk to be put on the class roster.

Bingo—The Pinebox Masonic Lodge is holding a bingo night beginning at 6 p.m. The public is welcome.

Pete Longley, the owner of Speedy Pete's issued the following statement: "This sort of lawless violence cannot be stood for, and I ask all of the good citizens of Golan County to contact the police or crimestoppers if you have any information on these guys. Something must be done."

Adventure Ideas

- The heroes are contacted by Pete Longley. He wants to hire someone to investigate the robberies and to protect his store.
- The characters happen to be in a local store when the robbers strike again. What do they do? Are they heroes? These folks are drug addicts and they mean business.
- The heroes hear a rumor that the gang lives in the Blackburn community just south of Lake Greystone. Crimestoppers is offering a sizable reward for anyone who can bring evidence that leads to a conviction of the suspects.

Big Thicket Search for Bigfoot Continues

By Jackson Green

"It's out there somewhere, and I'm going to find it," says Leroy Jenkins, a Veteranarian and part-time xenobiologist. Jenkins is referring to the mysterious Bigfoot. The Bigfoot legend grows every year, with over 2,000 sightings around the world, yet no one has been able to show irrefutable evidence of the existence of such a creature.

Finding that evidence has become Jenkin's life goal. "I saw one when I was about fourteen years old, just south of the Six-Mile bridge in Scrappin' Valley. Ever since, I have taken every opportunity to study and search for the great ape."

Jenkins believes that the Bigfoot creature is actually a very rare ape, possibly an ancestor of early man. Jenkins is a founding member of the Texas Bigfoot Studies Center, which includes men and women from all walks of life and coming from across Texas, Louisiana and Arkansas.

This past January and February the group has been camping out deep in the Thicket of East Texas, hoping to gather evidence of this elusive creature.

continued on page 2

Bigfoot *(continued from page 1)*

One method for drawing out the creature is by playing the “Ohio” growl. They play the sound through great speakers they have brought with them in the middle of the night deep in the woodlands of East Texas, hoping to get a similar response. This sound is purported to be an authentic howl of a Bigfoot captured in the woodlands of Ohio. The sound itself is reported to sound part animal howl, part pained crying, and wholly strange.

“If we can only find evidence of the creature. Hair, droppings, or a skeleton, we could have irrefutable proof of its existence.” Jenkins explained.

The search goes on...

Adventure Ideas

- The heroes are invited on a Bigfoot hunt by Jenkins or Jackson Green. What do they find in the woods?
- While hunting for Bigfoot, the heroes stumble across a hidden marijuana field. The drug dealers are camped nearby and go to any lengths to stop the heroes from returning to civilization and reporting them.
- While in the woods, perhaps on a campout, the heroes meet a young lady who is part of the Texas Bigfoot Studies center. She speaks with them a while, before leaving to rejoin her group. She never makes it back and soon the heroes, other Bigfoot studies hunters, and the police are all searching for her. Did Bigfoot take her?

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