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The Message

A Modern d20 System Horror Adventure for 12 to Midnight's Pinebox Setting

By Neal Hyde

History and Overview

In the millennia before the ascendancy of humanity, aliens visited the Earth. However, a shifting in climate forced them to cease their visits. They left behind a specifically designed fungus that would survive on the changing world and alert them when the conditions were right for them to return. That time is now.

As the fungus grows and prepares to send its message, Professor Jeffery Douglas of the East Texas University happened upon it. He was infected by it and the fungus destroys him and any evidence of the fungus' existence, but in doing so, it brings the intrepid heroes into the picture.

Professor Douglas was not the only one to discover the fungus and its unique nature. Agents of a secret government agency, identified only as the Rangers, have become aware of the fungus and hope to use it to contact alien civilizations, and attempt to avoid any public scrutiny.

The fungus is now in its final stage, preparing to send its message. It has consumed a large portion of a grove outside of Pinebox, Texas, and infected the occupants of a nearby town. It hopes to avoid detection long enough to send its message, and then its work is complete.

Scene 1, A Fiery Death

The campus of the East Texas University in Pinebox, Texas, is filled with hundreds of students on their lunch break as you navigate your way to the second floor of the Biology building. A display of comparative anatomy near the office of your friend, Professor Douglas, doesn't encourage your appetite, but the man had promised to buy you lunch.

It's to be a celebration, Professor Jeffery Douglas said yesterday over the phone. He has something big to show you, something that he says is "the discovery of the year, possibly the decade."

But as you approach the office at the end of the hall, you are suddenly assaulted with the overpowering reek of gasoline. A cold ball of ice forms in the pit of your stomach as you watch a pool of blood spread from beneath the door. You hear sobbing and a strange, repeated "shnikt" sound.

The pool of blood continues to grow until it forms a puddle that fills the width of the doorway and out to several feet. The heroes continue to hear the odd "shnikt" sound every few seconds.

The door of Professor Douglas' office is unlocked and open, but just barely.

When the door is opened, read the following:

The office is littered with papers and parts of a smashed laptop computer. On the floor lies the mangled body of a young woman. Blood flows from several large open wounds. An open gasoline can lies on its side on the desk, a trickle of gas still pouring from the open spout.

Professor Douglas sits in his chair in the center of the office. His clothes are soaked with blood and gasoline. Tears run down his gore-spattered face. He holds a lighter in his shaking right hand and strikes it, making the "shnikt" sound, but it fails to spark.

Observant heroes (Spot DC 10) may notice that patches of tiny, thin, white filaments are on Professor Douglas' skin and clothes. Attempts to reach the professor will be physically resisted by him.

Professor Douglas looks into your eyes and speaks, but still continues to strike the lighter.

"Stay back...I can't stop...<shnikt>... it won't...let me...<shnikt>...tell Jennifer's family...tell them I'm sorry...<shnikt>...I didn't want to hurt anyone...<shnikt>...so sorry...<shnikt>...its stronger than I am...<shnikt>...than any of us...<shnikt>...you've got to stop it...<shnikt>...the message has

to be stopped...<shnikt>...I'm so sorry...<shnikt>"

On the last strike, a small yellow flame appears at lighter's head and the gasoline fumes ignite in a fiery explosion.

The heroes must make Reflex Saving Throws vs. the explosion (DC 10). Failing the Savings Throw results in the hero taking 1d6 points damage.

If the team did not choose to open the door, they may hear (Listen DC 5) Professor Douglas sobbing and speaking to himself. He repeats over and over again that "the message must be stopped" and continues to strike the lighter. After the team has heard the man speak, the lighter ignites and the explosion occurs.

Moments after the explosion the building's sprinklers turn on, sending a cold shower of water onto the team and the office. However, the damage has already been done; Professor Douglas is dead and his office is a total loss.

After the explosion, students and professors rush into the hall and offer the heroes emergency assistance, but they will not enter the burning office. Within minutes, campus security, Pinebox police and the Pinebox Fire Department arrive. Anyone that has been burned is treated at the scene unless his or her burns are severe. Both campus security and a detective from the Pinebox police question the team to discover what happened.

Scene 2, A Visit from the Texas Rangers

While the team is being interviewed and treated by emergency personnel, several men in suits arrive and declare that the scene is under the jurisdiction of the Texas Rangers. The local cops angrily withdraw to the edge of the scene.

A muscular man who identifies himself as Ranger Albert Baker interviews

the heroes. He asks much the same questions as the local cops, except he is much more interested in what the Professor told them over the phone, particularly if there were any details about what the Professor had found. He also wants to know if they had any physical contact with the Professor or if they went into the office before the fire.



A few minutes later, men and women in full-body biohazard suits arrive with a large, sealed, clear plastic container. Team members with Knowledge Earth and Life Sciences (DC 10) recognize these suits as self-contained biohazard suits and the container as an emergency containment vessel. The Professor's body is placed in the containment vessel and then removed to a waiting vehicle. The people in biohazard suits then seal the office in sheets of plastic.

If the team admits to having had physical contact with the Professor or going into the office before the fire, a woman in a biohazard suit passes an ultraviolet light over them, seemingly searching for something. If the heroes ask her what she is looking for,

she ignores them. After several passes with the light, she says "Your clean," and leaves.

Some heroes may resist the questioning or attempt to escape from the area after the "Rangers" arrives. A "Ranger" is at every exit and those who resist are forcibly sedated.

After several hours, the heroes are allowed to go. Read the following:

Finally, after several hours under the scrutiny of the FBI agents and the biohazard team, you're allowed to go. Special Agent Baker apologizes for the treatment you received at the hands of the team.

"I'm afraid it was necessary for your own safety," Baker says. "We have reason to believe the Professor Douglas stumbled upon a lost container of nerve gas while conducting research in the field, near an old testing range. The residual effects of the gas drove him into a homicidal rage and culminated in his own suicide. I'd tell you more, but I'm afraid it's a matter of national security."

If the team questions his explanation, Ranger Baker suggests that paranoia and aggression are symptoms of the nerve agent and that perhaps the team should be re-examined. If the heroes become physically aggressive, they are arrested and spend the night in the Pinebox jail.

Note: The heroes phones are tapped and their homes are bugged. If the team communicates over the phone they may hear strange clicking noises. Also, they are under surveillance (Listen DC 15 to notice).

Scene 3, Information gathering

The team may wish to find out why Professor Douglas became so deranged and what he meant when he said, "the message had to be stopped." However, conducting an investigation is difficult as the Rangers are in the process of removing any evidence pointing to Cavalas, Texas.

If the heroes begin asking around the ETU campus (a Gather Information test, DC 10), they find that Professor Douglas was well liked by the Biology department staff and his students. All are at a loss to explain his actions, but no one seems to know what he was researching. Most of his previous work had been centered around the ecology of the Pinebox area, with an emphasis on fungus. Some of Douglas' colleagues remember him saying he was going to be doing some field research, but don't recall where or what he was looking for. Speaking to the Dean of Biology, Dr. Bethany Moore, is impossible as she attending a conference in New York City and won't be back for several days.

Attempts to get information from the ETU computer network are hampered by a sudden viral infection that is causing corruption within several databases, including the Biology department (Computer Use, DC 20).

The administrative head of the Biology department, Suneet Sindu, is the only person that can provide much of a clue for the team. If the heroes attempt to speak to the Dean, or ask for assistance in the Biology department, they are directed to him. Sindu, an immigrant from India, is a short, wiry man who speaks with a heavy accent. If asked about Professor Douglas, he expresses his sorrow and surprise at

what happened, but he doesn't know what the Professor was doing. With the computers down, he can't even pull the Professor's personnel file. However, he does have something of value; Douglas submitted an expense report that he has not had time to enter into the system yet. In the report is a receipt for gasoline from a station in Cavalas, Texas from two days ago.

Research on Cavalas, Texas (Research DC 10) finds that it is not located on most maps but is located in the Texas state registry. It is a small town, population 74, located approximately 23 miles to the northwest of Pinebox. According to the map, the only access to Cavalas is via a one-lane road that branches off of Highway 96.

Scene 4, Cavalas

Cavalas is a small town of 7 houses, a general store and post office, and a gas station and garage. There are another 10 houses scattered around the area. There is no school, and the few children are home taught or taken to Pinebox high. Most of the families that live in Cavalas are farmers or ranchers with land outside the town.

Arriving in Cavalas

Read the following:

After riding on a lonely one-lane road for nearly half an hour, you pull into what you assume is Cavalas. There is no

sign announcing the name of the half-dozen houses scattered around the dirt road junction. A dingy general store sits opposite a greasy gas station and mechanic shop, and neither appears to be occupied, despite the "Open" signs.

A warm wind blows from the west, sending dust and grit across the road in small waves. An unseen radio quietly plays country-western tunes, but otherwise there is no sound besides a squeaky screen door blowing in the wind.

As described above, there are really only two locations where the heroes can inquire about Douglas: the store and the gas station. If the team attempts to knock on the doors of any of the houses in town, they appear to be unoccupied. In reality, the fungus has infected every person in the town and put them in a kind of hibernation. If the heroes look through windows (Spot DC 15) or enter a house, they discover family members unconscious and coated in the white filaments. The family members will awaken and attack the team.

The General Store

If the heroes enter the General Store, read the following:

A bell rings overhead as you enter the General Store. The place is exactly as it bills itself- hardware, farming supplies, tack and harness, clothing, and groceries all sit side-by-side in the narrow aisles. A chalkboard sign at the front advertises the daily special as "10% off seed, shirts, and olives."

A few moments after you enter the store, an obese woman comes out of a storeroom with a case of canned creamed corn in her arms.

"Hello folks," she says, smiling. "Sorry, I didn't hear you come in. What can I do for you?"

The woman is Gretta Ashe and she is the owner of the General Store. Like the other residents of Cavalas, she is a fungi zombie, although the filaments have retracted into her body



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and she appears normal. However, like all zombies, her reaction time is slow and she appears somewhat groggy. She acts friendly, and answers general questions, but denies ever seeing Professor Douglas or that anything unusual is happening in the area. If the team persists, she asks them to leave. If they continue, she pretends to call the "county sheriff" and report them for harassing her.

If the heroes look around the store, they may notice (Spot DC 10):

- The shelves and their contents are dusty.
- The few magazines in the racks are weeks old.
- The expiration dates on the milk products are several days overdue.

If they get into the storeroom from which Gretta emerged, they find it coated with filaments. Gretta will attack them at that time.

The Gas Station/Auto Shop

If the team enters the Gas Station read the following:

The gas station is visibly empty. Once inside, you see the auto shop is empty as well, although a pickup truck has been raised up on the lift and tools are scattered around it. A cheap AM radio on the shelf plays the country-western tunes you heard outside.

Moments after you enter the gas station, you hear a flushing of a toilet and a skinny man in a dirty undershirt emerges from the bathroom on the side of the building. He is just zipping up his pants when he sees you.

"Oh, hey, um, howdy!" he says. "I'm Zeek. You need some gas?"

The man is Ezekiel 'Zeek' Funk and he is the gas station owner and the only mechanic in town. Like the other residents of Cavalas, he is a fungi zombie, although the filaments have retracted into his body and he appears normal. However, like all zombies, his reaction time is slow and he appears somewhat groggy. He acts friendly, and answers general questions, but

denies ever seeing Professor Douglas or that anything unusual is happening in the area. If the team persists, he asks them to leave. If they continue, he attempts to force them to leave, pushing them out of the store. Zeek also refuses to sell gasoline to the heroes, which can be a real problem, as the gas station is the only one within 30 miles.

There are fewer signs that something is wrong at the gas station, but there is one tale-tell clue; the gas meter outside is set to \$20.18 (Spot DC 15), the exact same as on Professor Douglas' receipt. No one has purchased gas since Professor Douglas passed through.

There are three directions the team can explore from Cavalas; west, north, and east. Each direction is accessible from Cavalas' only crossroad.

To the east is a road that meanders between ranches and farms. The area is rolling hills with dry grass and occasional scrub bushes. The road terminates after approximately 16 miles. The fungus has infected none of the people living on the farms or ranches and none have seen Professor Douglas. However, some of them have heard helicopters to the west in the night.

To the north, the road goes approximately 3 miles and ends at a defunct gravel pit. Aside from empty beer bottles (the local teens come here to drink), nothing of interest is here.

To the west, the road goes for approximately 5 miles through rolling hills before it meets a large grove of pine trees.

After a mile through the grove, the team comes upon a tree that has been felled across the road. Examination of the tree reveals that it has been cut with a chainsaw and intentionally dropped to block the road. They can attempt to move the tree, a difficult task, or, if they possess an axe, saw, or chainsaw, they can attempt to cut the tree apart. The most likely course put them on foot beyond the tree,

but if they drive, it won't impact the adventure.

The road cuts back and forth through the grove for another $\frac{3}{4}$ miles and ends in an extremely lush and thick stand of grass five feet tall. This is the edge of the fungal circle.

Under Observation

The town of Cavalas, the grove of trees, and the fungal circle are all under intense covert Ranger surveillance. Two-man camouflaged surveillance teams are scattered around the area, reporting to a command center located deep in the heart of the grove, not far from the fungal circle. The team has been under observation since they came within 5 miles of Cavalas and their progress has been monitored throughout their journey. The surveillance teams are under orders to leave the heroes alone, so long as they don't come within sight of the command post or make some other discovery that reveals the Ranger presence.

The heroes may feel like they are being watched, but spotting the surveillance teams is very difficult (Spot DC 25).

The Rangers know of the fungus' extraterrestrial origins but do not consider it a threat, despite its tendency to infect people and drive them homicidally insane. The Rangers are under orders to observe and report for now, but they hope to use the fungus to contact extraterrestrials. They are aware that the residents of Cavalas are infected and consider them casualties, albeit acceptable ones. They do not interfere if the heroes are infected, but observe them and attempt to bring them into custody for study once signs of infection are apparent.

Scene 5, The Fungal Circle.....

Note: This scene works best at twilight or just after dark.

When the heroes reach the end of the trail, read the following:

The dirt road becomes more and more rough and eventually turns into a trail passable only on foot. Ahead of you, there appears to be an open field in the midst of the grove, but a wall of unnaturally lush grass five feet tall obscures what you can see.

The heroes have reached the outer edge of the fungal circle. This edge is approximately 40 yards wide before it ends abruptly at the edge of the circle. If the team makes their way through the outer edge to the actual fungal circle, read the following.

After sloggng your way through the dense grass and weeds, you are shocked when the blades suddenly stop and you find yourself at the edge of a large, circular open space approximately 300 yards across. All the grass and trees in the bowl-shaped depression are a withered brown and gray, completely dead. In the center, a patch of ivory-colored tufts sprout from the ground like bizarre cotton candy.

As you look at the dark and unpleasant sight, something moves in the grass behind you.

If the heroes reach into the circle, they find the grass is completely desiccated and turns to powder in their hands. This powder covers the ground and obscures the earth beneath. If they push aside the powder and examine the ground beneath, they discover that the white filaments are enmeshed in a tight weave just below the surface.

The powder is unnaturally warm, as is the whole circle. The heat they feel is the action of the fungus' acid eating away at everything. After half an hour, if they do not wash their hands, they discover an uncomfortable rash. After an hour, the rash blisters and the heroes take 1 HP damage (GMs discretion). Note that this does not indicate infection, merely contact with the fungus' powerful acids. Also, if they stick anything in the ground,

such as a shovel or knife, they find it corroded after an hour.

If they venture into the circle, the heroes soon feel the heat through their shoes. After half an hour, the bottoms of their shoes become corroded to the point that they fall apart. The heroes then suffer 1 HP of damage to their feet per 10 minutes in the circle.

If the heroes examine a topographical map of the area (Search CD 5), they find no bowl-shaped depression. The fungus is eating away at the ground, creating a parabolic dish shape to better send its message.

If it is dark, the heroes notice that the fungal circle has a slight phosphorescent glow to it. Some parts are stronger than others, including the growth of filaments in the circle, and vein-like tendrils extending outward from the center.

The sound the team hears behind them is not a Ranger surveillance team. It is a trio of completely infected fungi zombies, now perfectly camouflaged in a covering of green fungus. Attempts to see (Spot 20) the zombies in the dense growth are difficult.

The fungi does not want to actually hurt the heroes, merely herd them toward a spore trap, located about 50 feet away, where it can infect them as it did Professor Douglas. Consequently, the zombies attempt to scare them, making noises and threatening sounds, but attempt to avoid actual contact.

The Spore Trap

The spore trap is a large (4" x 4") fleshy green ball containing billions of fungal spores and pressurized with a noxious gas. When the heroes are within 10 feet of the ball, it "pops," sending a cloud of the noxious gas (similar to tear gas) and spores everywhere within 15 feet of the ball. Once the team comes in contact with the spores, unless they are wearing a biohazard suit or other biological protection, they are infected. There is no Savings Throw to resist.

Black Helicopters

The Rangers decide that its time for the heroes to leave. A pair of black helicopters is dispatched from a disguised heliport nearby. Within minutes of the teams encounter with the spore trap, the pair of helicopters emerge over the treetops of the grove and swoop down low over the heroes. They are not attempting to hurt them, merely force them to leave the area. The helicopters chase the team away from the area and follow them until they reach the felled tree, then they vanish as quickly as they arrived.

Scene 6. Infection.....

The team likely wants to leave the area now. If they attempt to get help in Cavalas, no one comes to their aid. If they need gas, they can fill up at the gas station, but Zeek won't come out to collect any payment.

Unless a member of the team stayed behind to watch the vehicle(s), the Rangers have placed bugs and tracking devices on it.

If the team attempts to get any assistance from local authorities, such as the sheriff or police in Pinebox, they find themselves in trouble. Their names have been given to the police by the "FBI" as being "Persons of Interest" in the death of Professor Douglas, meaning that the police have the right to hold them, but they are not charged with anything.

The fungal infection is relatively rapid, and the onset of symptoms is sudden.

At infection + 1 hour, the heroes begin to experience headaches and dizziness. These cause a +3 modifier to all tests. This likely occurs while the team is driving or escaping the fungal circle.

At infection + 3 hours, the effected members feel nauseous and a rash breaks out on patches of their bodies. The team also feels a powerful lethargy, causing drowsiness and an

addition +1 to all tests. If a team member falls asleep at this point, they do not awaken until after full infection. However, the sleeper may be awakened by external stimuli (slapping, water, etc.)

At infection + 4 hours, the effected members notice patches of white hairs erupting from their skin. They begin to feel as if ants are moving beneath their skin (the fungal filaments are moving through their bodies).

At infection +5 hours, the effected members experience what feel like hallucinations. The hallucinations are in fact their brains being rewired to link to the fungus' mind and the memories of the fungus and everyone it has ever infected. Read the following:

A sudden falling feeling overcomes you and your senses twist and blur. Strange sights, sounds and sensations come at you rapid fire – an ageless blackness waiting for the world to change to fit your gray master's needs; ice flows covering the world around you; meat cooking over a campfire while wearing the skins of animals; living in a sod house and worried about Indian attacks; sitting up in bed and turning on the light to find the patches of white, moving hairs on your arms and chest; the world changing over the millennia and now its time to send the message in a ball of light, that its time for them to come back – and then you're back in your own mind, but you feel different, you hear a constant buzzing in the background that you realize are voices.

However, the fungal telepathy has a real advantage; the team can now communicate mind-to-mind and don't need to speak verbally. But the fungus is very strong and threatens to take over their bodies and minds.

At infection +6 hours, the investigators must make Willpower save DC 15 or be taken over by the fungus. Failure turns them into a fungal zombie. The Game Master should take the player aside and tell them that they

are now infected and must follow the fungus' commands. The fungus keeps the infected members as close to the rest of the team as possible to learn more of their plans, but makes them homicidal like Professor Douglas if it feels threatened.

Despite the power of the fungal infection, it is not unbeatable. It is just a fungus, and its creators had no idea that when it would be called forth, it would face beings capable of creating antibiotics and fungicides. If the team members are currently taking antibiotics then they receive a +3 to their Willpower save to resist the infection.

The Rangers Return

If the team members are in their homes or in their cars, and speak out loud about the changes or exhibit strange behavior, they will be assaulted by Rangers, who want to take them captive and learn more about their new-found telepathy. A group of three Rangers in biohazard suits will appear near each team member and attempt to knock them unconscious with stun guns. If successful, the team is loaded into a clear isolation chamber, as was the body of Professor Douglas, and they disappear, never to be seen again. (This is GMs discretion; they may also be cured and made to repay the Rangers with their service.)

The Team Gets Better

The only way they can successfully fight off the infection is with the help of lots of antibiotics. However, if they attempt to go to a doctor or the Emergency Room, they may be caught by the Rangers. Instead, they must find an alternative source of medicines such as a doctor friend, or breaking into a pharmacy. Obviously, these actions have inherent dangers all their own.

Once the team members have ingested massive amounts of antibiotics, the fungus dies in their systems, causing incapacitating pain for about 10 minutes and the loss of 2 Hit Points (temporary).

If a team member has been cured of the fungal infection, they are immune to future infection.

Scene 7, Stopping The Message.....

The team should be sufficiently aware that the fungus is preparing to send a message to its alien creators that the Earth is now ready for them to return. While some folks may look forward to this, most will detect a downside, such as the extermination of the human race. If they are sufficiently heroic, they should want to do something about this.

Allow them to consider how to stop the fungus- possibilities include



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injecting the fungus with antibiotics (very difficult to get the amounts necessary), burning it, blowing it up, etc. The fungus is actually quite fragile and can be stopped by destroying parts of it, or destroying the center, which the team will see when they approach the fungal circle.

Regardless of the plans, if just one of the team is infected at the time the plans are made, the fungus reacts by preparing the entire population of Cavalas to stop them.

Getting to the Fungus

If the team has not already alerted the fungus to their intentions, they can make their way to Cavalas unimpeded (although observed by the Rangers). They still need to drive through Cavalas to reach the fungal circle and the fungus sends all the residents of the town to stop them. 1d6 fungal zombies appear per round the team members are in the town up to a total of 70.

If the team has alerted the fungus to their intentions, they reach Cavalas, but find the road blocked by several pickup trucks and cars. 3d6 fungal zombies attack from the rear, attempting to kill the team, with 1d6 additional fungal zombies approaching per round until the entire population of the town has come out.

Into the Grove

Once the heroes get out of Cavalas and go west toward the grove, they find it infested by the weird white filaments, which seem to be growing on every surface. The filaments have a yellow-green phosphorescence that makes the area a bizarre twilight. Read the following:

As you approach the grove, you realize that it seems to be glowing. Weird white filaments seem to be growing on every surface and form a cottony web between the trees. This web glows with a yellow-green phosphorescence that slowly brightens and dims like a heartbeat.

The filaments themselves pose no danger to the team, and walking through them can easily tear them apart. Driving a vehicle through them is easy, but the growth is so thick finding the road can be difficult (Drive DC 18).

The fungus is putting out a powerful electrostatic charge as it prepares to send the message. If the team members have radio or are attempting to use an electronic device, they find that is being disrupted and a loud waves of static comes from the speakers. The static rises in volume to match the fluctuations of the glowing. Eventually, this begins to interfere with the workings of any vehicle the team are riding in causing the engine fail.

As the filaments began to fill up the grove and surrounding area, the Rangers have pulled out of the grove and are just waiting to see what happens. They continue to watch the situation by real-time satellite and have their black helicopters on standby. The surveillance teams around Cavalas are still active and will pass on information that the Rangers are driving through and the resulting events, but won't intervene.

The Fungal Circle

The fungus has grown since the team last saw it. It is no longer creating acid to eat at the ground below, meaning the heroes can walk on it without burning themselves.

The fungus has grown since you last saw it. The filaments you saw in the middle of the circle have coalesced into a rubbery mass and grown nearly 40 feet tall, resembling the receiver on a satellite dish. Fungus tendrils one foot thick radiate out from this mass all around the dish. The entire fungal mass glows a bright blue-green color, with the mass in the center glowing the most of all. You can see colors swirling within the carpet of filaments between the tendrils and they are getting faster and faster.

When the team reaches the edge of the fungal circle, they can decide how best to destroy it. Destroying the rubbery mass in the center is sufficient to stop the message, as is destroying 25% of the dish itself. As stated, this can be done through injection of antibiotics, explosives, fire, etc.

The Rangers won't do anything to the team unless it becomes obvious that they intend to harm the fungal circle. At that time, a team of 3+1d6 Rangers in biohazard suits are dispatched to stop the team by helicopter. They will not use lethal means to subdue the team members unless they shoot at them or its obvious they intend to damage or destroy the fungal circle. After 1d6 minutes, the black helicopters reappear over the team and the biohazard-suited Rangers fast-rope to the ground. They attempt to stop the team and undo whatever damage the team has done.

The Message

At a time of the GMs discretion, preferably in the middle of the most intense moment, the fungus begins to send its message. Unless stopped by the team, the fungus' glow increases to the point of nearly blinding everyone around it and the electrostatic charge is drawn up through the tendrils and collected in the central mass. This charge is then released in a powerful explosion that hurls a sparkling mass of energy into the sky. Looking like a comet, this energy escapes into space and slowly fades from view.

If the heroes have successfully destroyed 25% of the fungal circle, or the central mass, the charge is still collected, but the attempt to send goes horribly awry. As the fungus begins to collect the electrostatic charge, the tendrils burst into flame and parts explode (1d6 damage, subject to Reflex Savings Throw). After 4+1d6 rounds of this, the entire mass begins to burn, causing 1d6 damage per round, no Savings Throw, to all still within the circle.

End Game

Regardless of whether the message was sent or if the heroes stopped it, the filaments in the grove and elsewhere immediately die and dissolve away. Any remaining fungal zombies collapse and die, and any traces of fungal infection dissolve away as well. If a team member is still fighting a fungal infection, the fungus dies, and the hero takes 2 HP damage, but they can survive if they have any remaining Hit Points.

After the final events, the Rangers withdraw, but the team remains under surveillance, with disturbing clicks noticed when speaking on the phone, and being followed every now and then, just to keep them paranoid.

Cavalas is wiped off the map in a mysterious fire that breaks out shortly after the team leaves. No bodies are ever recovered from the area and attempts to find out what happened are stonewalled by the Rangers. It is assumed that the residents simply moved away after the fire, but no one knows where they moved to.

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Regardless of whether the team stopped the fungus or not, a day after the conclusion of the attempt to send, the surviving heroes read the following buried on page 12 of the Texas Tattler, Pinebox's local newspaper:

*Unexplained Lights Seen
In several divers locations around the globe, people are claiming to have seen strange lights rise into the sky. Observers in Bolivia, Eastern Europe, South Africa, Siberia, and Australia*

are all reporting similar sightings of large balls of light erupting from the ground. In each case, the lights rose up and were eventually lost from view. No natural explanation for what has been described has been put forward but some scientists suggest that it may be an elaborate hoax, possibly coordinated via the Internet.

Appendix

Fungi Zombie:

CR 1/2; Medium-size undead; HD 2d12 plus 3 (Toughness feat); hp 16; Init -1; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 11, touch 9, flat-footed 11 (-1 Dex, +2 natural); BAB +0; Grap +1; Atk +1 melee (1d6+1, slam); Full Atk +1 melee (1d6+1, slam); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ undead, move or attack action only; AL none or creator; SV Fort +0, Ref -1, Will +3; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 13, Dex 8, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10.

Skills: Varies

Feats: Toughness.

Possessions: Last clothes they were wearing when infected.

Fungi Zombies are normal people that have been infected with fungal spores. They retain all their regular skills and memories, but are telepathically controlled by the fungus. When fighting, they can pick up simple items as weapons but cannot use firearms or complex devices.

Standard "Ranger"

Strong 3 / Fast 3 / Soldier 4 (CR 10)

Attacks: Melee +10; Ranged +10

M16A2: Atk 11 / 6; Dmg 2d8+2;
Crit 20; Rng 80; Ballistic; RoF

STR	14 (+2)	Hit Points	58	Defense	27
DEX	15 (+2)	Initiative	+2	Save Fort	+6
CON	13 (+1)	BAB	+8	Save Ref	+7
INT	12 (+1)	Wealth	+18	Save Will	+3
WIS	10 (0)	Reputation	+1	Damage Threshold	13
CHA	10 (0)	Action Points	5		

SA; 30 box; 3 Round Burst; +1 damage if within 30' (5.56mm assault rifle)

Glock 17: Atk 11 / 6; Dmg 2d6;
Crit 20; Rng 30; Ballistic; RoF S;
17 box; +1 damage if within 30' (9mm autoloader)

Stun gun: Atk 10 / 5; Dmg 1d3+2;
Crit 20; Electricity

Armor: Tactical vest (Bonus +7; MDB 2; ACP -5; Notes Mastercraft: +1; Magical +1)

Skills: Hide +-1; Knowledge: Arcane Lore +6; Knowledge: Tactics +3; Listen +9; Move Silently +1; Pilot +4; Search +5; Spot +7; Survival +4; Treat Injury +4; Tumble +1

Talents & Feats: Evasion (Ref Save: full damage, no damage); Improved Ignore Hardness (Ignore 4 hardness in melee); Tactical Aid (duration 2 rounds); Weapon Specialisation (+2 damage with M16A2); Uncanny Dodge (DEX to Defense); Advanced Firearms Proficiency; Armor Proficiency (light); Armor Proficiency (medium); Combat Martial Arts; Combat Reflexes: max 3 AoOs; Personal Firearms Proficiency; Point Blank Shot; Precise Shot; Simple Weapons Proficiency; Weapon Focus (M16A2)

Occupation: classified

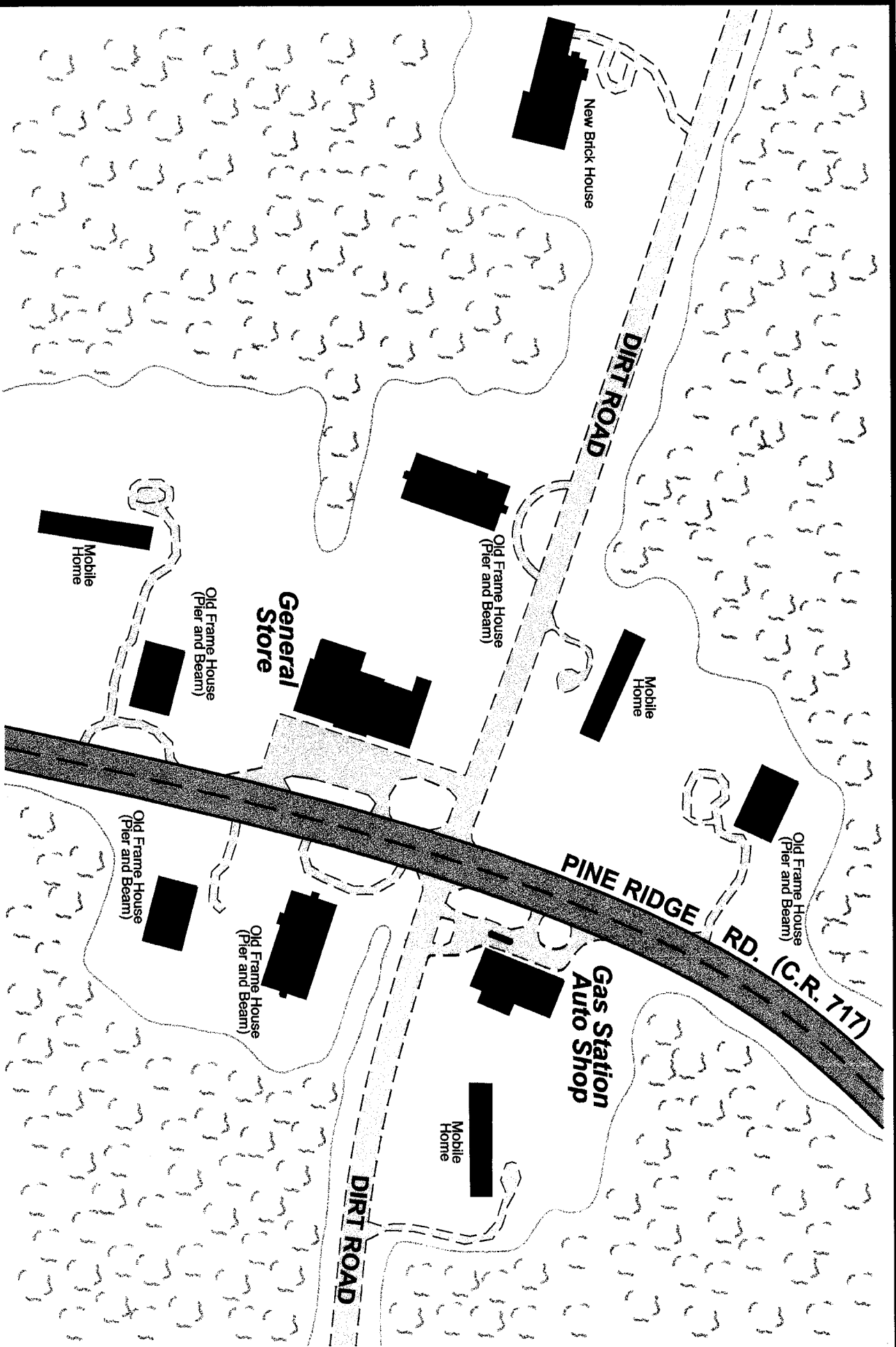


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**MAP OF THE CAVALAS COMMUNITY
GOLAN COUNTY, TEXAS**



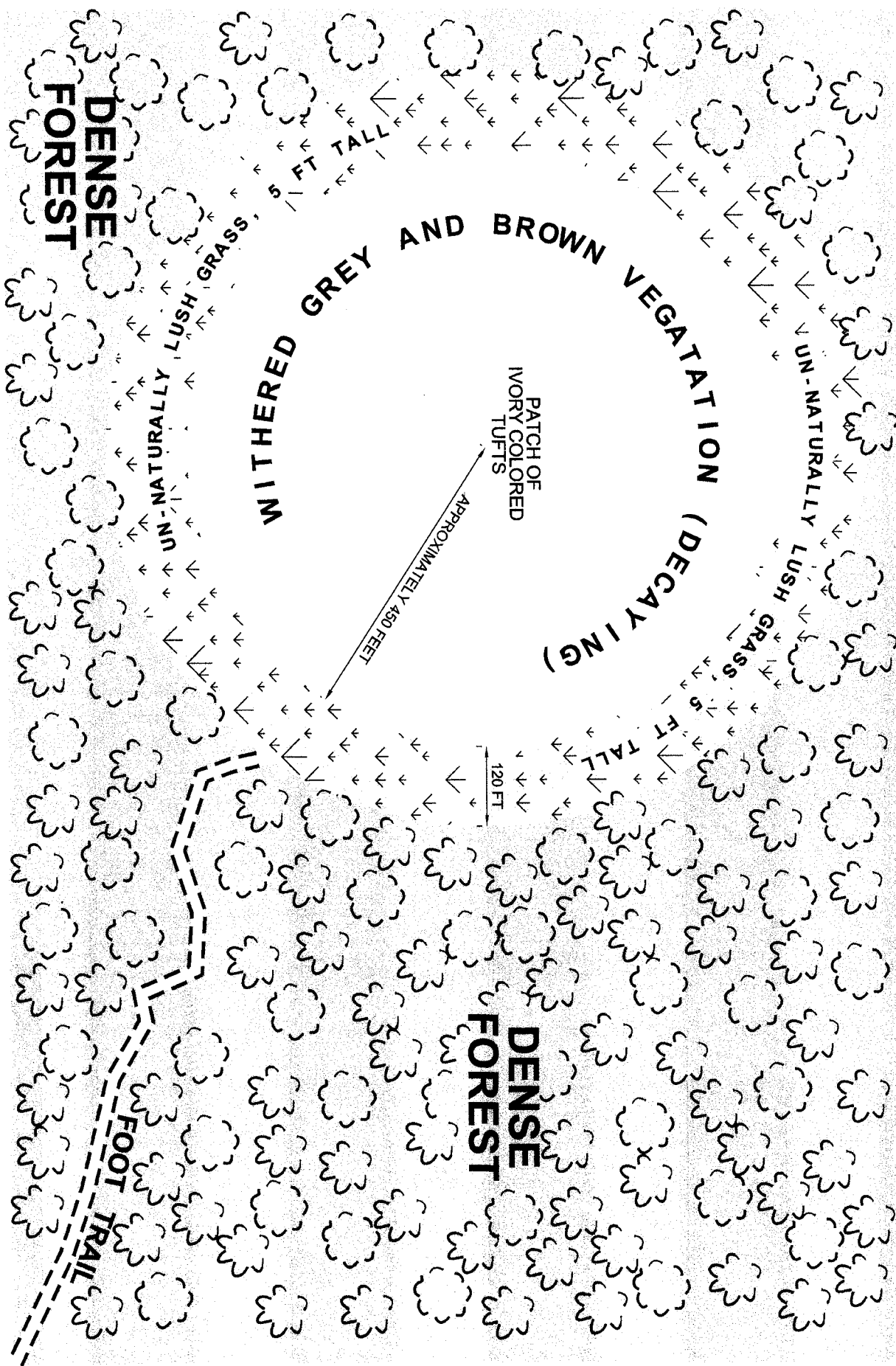


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THE FUNGAL CIRCLE



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