



MISSION: THE BLACKEST FRIDAY EVER

In the United States, the Thanksgiving season brings two of America's favorite things into direct conflict, eating one's self into a stupor and shopping one's self into a frenzy. This Thanksgiving, however, is going to be unlike any other when the two merge into something far more sinister.

Ten days before Thanksgiving, Manger analysts come across a report from the U.S. city of Mendota Heights in Minnesota, about twelve miles south of Minneapolis. The article details an incident where several denizens of the city went on an unexplained rampage. The specifics are sketchy at best, but the gist of the report was that a dozen people at a church outing began assaulting other members of their congregation. No one died in the incident, but there were numerous injuries requiring hospitalization. There haven't been any follow-up stories since the original article in the *West/South Review*, the local Mendota Heights newspaper, that ran the initial report.

Manger analysts are concerned that this event could be a continuation of the brainwashing situation that happened Halloween night in Willimantic, Connecticut (See CROSS mission: **Vididiots**). Even worse, the location where the brawl occurred was St. Peter's Church which is also the CROSS safe house in the region. The type B safe house is located in the old priest's quarters in the back of the church. CROSS wants to make sure there are no additional injuries to the people of Mendota Heights and also to confirm that the safe house's existence is still viable after all the extra police attention at the church.

Getting to Mendota Heights requires a flight to Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport and finding a lift to the church. When the agents arrive, they can meet with Bernard Hoffman, the pastor of the church. In general, he is reluctant to talk about the incident downplaying the violence as a brief scuffle amongst good people (initial rating of Uncooperative on

the Reaction Table in *Savage Worlds*), so getting any information regarding the attack requires a successful Persuasion roll. Reminding him that he is the safe house contact and that he is there to help them on their mission will award the agents a +1 bonus to their Persuasion roll. If coerced to speak, he will tell the agents that the congregation was celebrating the engagement of a young couple that would be married the following summer. That was until the young man began brawling with his fiancé's father which then created a larger brawl with non-family members as well. The pastor could make no sense of the fight and didn't know of any animosity between the families or anyone else at the celebration. He repeatedly states that everyone involved was good people and there is no logic to why they did what they did. There were a total of thirty-nine people hurt in the scuffle with fifteen of the victims and all twelve attackers suffering injuries severe enough to need medical attention at the nearby hospital.

Speaking to the local police department will require police or lawyer credentials. The harried chief reports that the assault occurred at a church picnic. All witnesses state the event was going smoothly until shortly after lunch when each of the attackers started to become agitated. When the pastor attempted to calm them, they became violent as a group, attacking at random and anyone trying to stop them. Eventually, by sheer weight of numbers, the police and just about every able-bodied male at the party beat the attackers into submission. The chief could not question the attackers as each is still in a coma. Assuming, the agents got this information with a successful Persuasion roll, a Raise will get the chief to reluctantly mention the attackers were so aggressive that the police and citizens had to resort to a level of violence that would normally result in an investigation of police brutality.

If any of the agents search the party area, a successful Notice roll will reveal a mostly uneaten sandwich in one of the trash cans. A successful Smarts roll will cause one of the agents to realize that it may be wise to have the sandwich tested for any contamination. As Mendota Heights is too small to have a forensics department, the agents will have to take the sandwich to Min-

neapolis. Testing requires Knowledge (Science or Forensics) or Smarts -4 to find traces of the monomethylhydrazine toxin in various mushrooms which can cause erratic mood swings and anger in humans. More strangely, there are also traces of the rare ophiocordyceps unilateralis or zombie mushroom fungus. This fungus rewires the brains of ants to act as hosts, navigate to the most advantageous place, and spread its spores. A second roll of the above skills detects markers of genetic modification of both specimens. Essentially, this hybrid fungi can cause its human victim to become emotionally unstable and also take over the mind of the victim to cause it to release its spores to infect others just like it does to ants. Given the genetic markers, someone deliberately modified these mushrooms to create one of the most diabolical biological weapons ever created.

Attempting to speak to witnesses at the brawl, has the agents run into the same reluctance to talk displayed by the pastor and requires a successful Persuasion or Streetwise roll to learn the celebration was a potluck, a common type of party where members bring a dish to pass to celebrate events for the church. If the agents ask who brought the sandwiches, one of the people on kitchen duty remembers that Daphne, the youngest sister of the bride brought the sandwiches. Inquiring about her reveals that she was injured in the brawl, but released the same day. The only thing different about this event from the previous ones was the anonymous gift of some sandwiches that many attendees did not like. Researching Daphne will reveal a period of acting out and criminal behavior, an absence from social media followed by a more kind and mature online presence. Shots of her at the Mall of America food court are in her most recent posts. Follow up questions about the sandwiches discover that each of the attackers ate part or all of one of the gifted sandwiches and the brawl ensued shortly after.

A visit to the local hospital learns that four victims and all the attackers are still in the hospital. Getting any official information from the doctors will require police credentials or a Raise on a Persuasion roll to learn that three of the victims are still in critical condition, but expected to survive. The attackers are however all in comas that the doctors cannot explain, that they are still trying to diagnose. If the team fails at the above roll, they can resort to Streetwise and a \$50 bribe to learn the same information.

If the agents speak directly to any of the coma victims, the patient will begin convulsing, a large stalk will burst out of their forehead, and one of several types of spores will be ejected into the air in a Small Burst Template (See Special Abilities under **Fungi Zombie** and roll 1d4). Anyone that fails their Vigor roll will succumb to the details listed under each ability which can be cured with a healing miracle. However, these victims will be vulnerable to a mind control ability activated with the hyper-parasitic spores detailed below (see **Nikolai Petrov**).

Although the team now knows what happened and how; they are missing the critical who and why. As the team investigates further, anyone succeeding with a Notice -2 roll spots that the sandwich wrapping is a flyer from the Mall of America in nearby Bloomington and most importantly, the flyer explicitly mentions Black Friday sales events. This discovery gives the agents where and when; who and why they will have to figure out when they get to Bloomington.

Racing to the mall the team arrives only an hour before the mall opens and the line of shoppers already stretches out of sight. Entering the mall before opening will require the use of police credentials, a successful Persuasion -2 roll to bluff their way in, or a Stealth roll to slip in unseen via a loading dock.

Since the initial delivery of the fungus required ingestion, the food court and the various kiosks are the logical places to start looking. However, the Mall of America is one of the world's largest malls and even with their search area narrowed, the agents do not have time to conduct a thorough search. A Notice roll will reveal the presence of the Fun Guy Cafe. However, interviewing the workers and searching the restaurant doesn't turn up any evidence that they are involved with the plot. However, as they agents leave, Daphne will spot them and run. If they catch and interrogate her, they can discover that she had a new boyfriend that helped her make the sandwiches that caused the brawl and that he is outside in the parking lot giving away more sandwiches. Around this time, security heads to the doors to open the mall for another Black Friday.

A Notice roll will, however, spot an employee arriving for work at the absolute last minute and about to take a bite of a sandwich wrapped in the same flyer found in Mendota Heights. Knocking the sandwich out of his hand before he can take a bite requires an Agility roll and a Fighting roll against a Parry of 4. If the agents fail to stop him from eating the sandwich, the victim will need to make a successful Vigor -2 Roll to avoid turning into a Fungi Shopper. If they are successful, the team can ask him where he got the sandwich and the startled man can stammer, "Some guy is handing them out from a van in the parking lot to the people waiting in line."

Horried, the agents turn toward the nearest door, only to see the main entrance open and eager shoppers flooding into the mall. Shortly after the initial wave swarms in, there are shouts as several patrons turn on other shoppers (See **Fungi Shoppers**). If the team rushes to stop the attackers, they find half a dozen men and women attacking other shoppers at random, but before they enter combat, the GM will have each agent roll Smarts. Anyone that succeeds realizes that their quarry has to be outside and that at least some of them should avoid combat and attempt to find the culprit and maybe a clue to how to stop the brawl.

The fight inside the mall is a whirling free-for-all requiring the rendering of the zombie shoppers unconscious to subdue them. Evading the flailing and rapidly spreading brawl requires an Agility roll to dodge between shoppers. If this mission is part of a campaign, have one of the bystanders video the fight and upload it to the Internet where it will promptly go viral making for a tense confessional debriefing with the archdeacons.

If any agent avoids the fight to go outside, there is a long line of shoppers pushing their way into the mall, blissfully unaware of what is going on inside. Most of the patrons ignore the agents' questions, but a successful Streetwise will find one that not only remembers the man handing out the sandwiches, but points to an old 60s era van in one of the prime front row parking stalls.

As soon as the team moves toward the man pulling another tray of sandwiches from the van, he seems to sense their presence and attempts to flee on foot, forcing the agents into a series of

opposed rolls of Agility. Three non-consecutive successes allow the agents to overtake him. When the man sees he cannot escape, he wheels about and begins stuffing one of the sandwiches into his mouth! As before, stopping him in time requires an Agility roll and a Fighting roll, but this time against a Parry of 6. If either roll fails, the man will need to fail a Vigor -2 Roll to turn into a **Fungi Shopper**. If he does fail, the man's eyes glaze over as he gains the abilities of the zombie creature. If the agents subdue the man and he hasn't turned into a zombie yet, he will state that he was just handing out sandwiches for the money and has nothing to do with his employer's plot. Obviously, this isn't completely true as he tried to use the sandwich's toxin to fight off his pursuers. However, it could be that he doesn't know about the full aspects of the genetically modified toxin.

Regardless, back at the van, the real mastermind of this terrorist act, Nikolai Petrov, crawls onto the top of the van and shouts, "They said that my research wasn't marketable. They said it wasn't something worth investing in. Black Friday in the United States is the purest form of its greedy, gluttonous, and capitalist world view. Well, I say...monetize this!"

With that Nikolai, rips open his plaid button-up shirt to reveal his open chest and beating lungs infected with rows and rows of fungi. In a weird action of exhaling air direct from his lungs, fungus erupts blasting multicolored spores into the air.

"Fly my pretties and infect the infected so I may control you all and destroy the decadent capitalists!"

The spores blanket the parking lot and cause all previously infected victims of either the sandwiches or the spores that erupted at the hospital to make Vigor rolls at -2 to avoid coming under the control of Nikolai's hyperparasitic spores. A master biochemist Nikolai has modified a parasitic fungus that only affects the ophiocordyceps fungi, giving him remote control of those under ophiocordyceps influence.

Fortunately for the team, the genetically modified fungus does not taste very good, and most of the sandwiches went into the trash or shoppers forgot about them once the mall opened. Only about twelve shoppers are affected by the hyperparasitic spores. Defeating them and Nikolai will stop the immediate danger to themselves and the other shoppers.

However, if there are other victims inside the mall they will also risk infection if they leave the mall. A successful Smarts roll will cause one of the agents to realize that an announcement over the mall's public address system warning shoppers that the unauthorized food vendor's sandwiches are unsafe to eat and to turn them into the security station in the mall and that anyone that has eaten one of them should also visit security. If the message is broadcast, it takes some time, but eventually, all the tainted food gets turned in, or discovered in trash receptacles and the potential victims contained by security.

Reversing the effects of the toxic fungus requires a Knowledge (Science or Forensics) or Smarts -4 roll to deduce that a prescription of a powerful anti-fungal medicine will kill the spores and bring the victims out of their various altered states.

The suspect proves to be Nikolai Petrov, an unemployed biochemistry science last employed at Northstar Genetics. HR records state he quit after they would not fund his mushroom toxin research. Questioning him reveals he is a devout communist and deplores the entire capitalist orgy that is Black Friday. Both brilliant and deranged at the same time, Petrov modified the fungi as a means to bring the vile buying for buying's sake tradition to an end. Clearly a threat to himself and others, authorities whisk the man away for an extended stay at the state mental ward.

NPCs

NIKOLAI PETROV

Nikolai is a brilliant biochemist and geneticist that has perfected both ingestible and airborne toxins to generate various effects. His most recent deranged effort was to inject himself with a genetically modified concoction to allow him to eject spores from his own lungs. His failures to secure funding for his various projects have fanned the flames of his negative views on capitalism from his birth nation of Russia.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d12, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Driving d4, Fighting d6, Investigation d12, Knowledge (Genetics) d12, Knowledge (Biochemistry) d12, Notice d6, Persuasion d6, Stealth d6, Streetwise d6

Charisma: -; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Delusional (Major, Stop Capitalism), Vengeful (Major)

Edges: Jack of Trades, Scholar

Special Abilities

Ophiocordyceps Spores: Nikolai can eject these spores in a Medium Burst Template. Exposure to these spores will cause a victim to turn into a Fungi Shopper in 1d4 rounds after a failed Vigor roll. A successful Vigor roll will mean that the person is immune to the spores. After 1d8 hours, the Fungi Shopper will become a Fungi Zombie complete with a mushroom stalk pregnant with spores protruding out of its head.

hyperparasitic Spores: Nikolai can eject these spores in a Large Burst Template. Exposure to these spores forces a Fungi Zombie to succeed with a vigor roll or come under the mental control of Petrov for 1d10 rounds.

Tags: Earthly

FUNGI SHOPPERS

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d10

Skills: Driving d4, Fighting d8, Intimidation d6 Notice d6, Stealth d6, Streetwise d6

Charisma: -; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7

Hindrances: Bloodthirsty, Mean

Tags: Earthly

FUNGI ZOMBIE

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d4

Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7(2)

Hindrances: Ugly

Special Abilities (Select one type of spore for each zombie)

Armor +2: Mushroom covering

Bolesatine Ophiocordyceps Spores: The Fungi Zombie can eject these spores in a Small Burst Template causing vomiting and nausea. If the victim fails their Vigor roll they are vomiting

and nauseous for 1d4 rounds and unable to act, but after that period of time can attempt another Vigor roll. If they are successful, they suffer one level of Fatigue but can act.

Monomethylhydrazine Ophiocordyceps Spores: The Fungi Zombie can eject these spores in a Small Burst Template causing uncontrollable anger unless the victim successfully rolls a Vigor roll. Failure increases the victim's Strength and Vigor one die step and causes them to attack anyone that confronts or speaks to them.

Muscarine Ophiocordyceps Spores: The Fungi Zombie can eject these spores in a Small Burst Template causing a form of flaccid paralysis. See **Paralysis Poison** in *Savage Worlds*.

Psilocybin Ophiocordyceps Spores: The Fungi Zombie can eject these spores in a Small Burst Template causing hallucinations. Roll on the chart below to determine how to describe the scene for the victim of this spore. Consult the chart below to help create a hallucinogenic effect for the victim of this spore.

DB	HALLUCINOGENIC EFFECT
1	Victim believes an object is a different object.
2	Victim believes a target is someone or something else.
3	Victim misinterprets something happening in the current situation.
4	Victim sees something or someone that isn't there.
5	Victim hears something no one else can hear.
6	Victim believes a personal item is suddenly lost.
7	Victim feels as if he is injured or sick.
8	Delayed result. Roll again on following Round.

Note: All of these Spores have a secondary effect of the **Ophiocordyceps Spores** described under **Nikolai Petrov** but this doesn't manifest until 1d8 hours.

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