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MACABRE Tales



A Translation of Evil

A TERRIFYING TALE BY JOHN ALMACK

The Lovecraftian Horror Role-Playing Game

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Table of Contents

Your Guide to this Tale

Introduction 3

Narrator Information 4

The Three Acts 5

Ending the Tale 118

Introduction

Things to Know Before You Delve Deeper

"Men of broader intellect know that there is no sharp distinction betwixt the real and the unreal..."

- H.P. Lovecraft, "The Tomb"

The setting for this tale is "witch-cursed, legend-haunted Arkham", sometime in the early 1930s. It is intended for a narrator and a single player using the pre-generated primary character provided below (Simon Maxwell). Another character with similar applicable aspects may be substituted, if preferred.

Narrators might also want to first read Lovecraft's short story "The Dreams in the Witch House", which shares a few of the same elements, as an aid in developing the tone and mood for this tale.

More Protagonists?

Like most *Macabre Tales* adventures, *A Translation of Evil* is designed to be played with one protagonist. In this case, that protagonist is Simon Maxwell. However, it can easily accommodate a couple more primary characters with little to no adjusting.

Perhaps the additional characters are Maxwell's assistants or even his partners. It could also be that Jacob Hobson has assembled several different individuals to work on the translation, figuring that several heads are better than one.

Or you could get even more creative with it by bringing the other characters in separately and for different reasons, such as disturbing dreams that guided them to Hobson's home.

Narrator Information

Knowledge Pertinent to the Running this Tale

What if it were possible for a book to actually be evil? What if the written words themselves had the ability to inflict harm upon the reader? If so, how do you fight something that is, in essence, only an idea on a page? This is the basic premise behind “A Translation of Evil”.

This tale concerns an attempt by the primary character to translate an ancient Grecian manuscript and the adverse effect this has both on his sanity and surroundings. As the tale progresses, the lines between reality and imagination become increasingly blurred, with each strange incident followed by an even more disturbing revelation. It ultimately leads to a final confrontation between the primary character and manifestations of the darkness residing inside himself.

Therein lies the subtle theme of this tale: your mind makes it real.

The Scarlet Palimpsest

The Scarlet Palimpsest

The unique volume that has become known as the *Scarlet Palimpsest* is a centuries-old, leather-bound folio. The pages of yellowing parchment contained within had been reused from an earlier work, which was banned by the Catholic Church as heretical. The original writing in Greek was carefully scraped off the parchment. The leaves were then split down the middle, rotated ninety degrees and refolded to make double sheets that are half the initial size. These were then later rebound and overwritten to create a Latin prayer book.

The newer Latin text is a hand-written copy

in dark, black ink of the Roman Breviary, also referred to as *Liturgia Horarum* or the Liturgy of the Hours. It is a Catholic liturgical book, divided into eight sections (each representing the start of a different three-hour interval, going from Midnight to 9:00 PM) and containing opening versicles, hymns, psalms, passages from scripture and assorted prayers that are meant to be recited by the faithful at the appropriate times of day. While valuable because of its age and craftsmanship, it is a relatively common work and similar books in printed form are in use today.

However, the underlying Greek lettering is still barely legible, appearing faintly red on the pages when held up to the light. The older manuscript, called the *Book of Outer Darkness* in English, is ostensibly an innocuous Gnostic text filled with apocryphal teachings and lore. In fact, this book contains much in the way of forbidden knowledge and possesses the dangerous ability to warp the minds of all those who read from it.



The Three Acts

A Breakdown of the Tale's Structure

The primary character, Simon Maxwell, answers a classified advertisement in the local newspaper for "an in-house translator, must be proficient in Greek, room and board provided, apply in person at 634 Sentinel Street." Arriving at the address listed, the primary character sees an old three-story, gambrel-roofed house that is not unusual in this section of town. It is a bright, sunlit morning during the first week of May, with only a hint in the air of the sweltering summer heat yet to come.

Simon Maxwell

Simon is a graduate student attending Miskatonic University with an undergraduate degree in foreign languages. He is a thoughtful young man in his mid-twenties, with interests in history, literature and philosophy in addition to his language studies. While on academic break, he seeks both gainful employment and lodgings until the fall semester begins. With few friends and no family in the area to stay with, he very much needs this job opportunity.

Body: Normal -- Athletics 2, Coordination 1, Fighting 1, Reflexes 1, Stealth 2, Strength 1

Mind: Good -- Ingenuity 2, Languages (English) 2, Languages (Greek) 2, Languages (Latin) 1, Knowledge (English Literature) 2, Knowledge (Classical History) 1, Knowledge (Western Philosophy) 2, Perception 2, Research 3

Soul: Good -- Persuasion 2, Resolve 3

Personal Factors: Educated at Miskatonic University, Humanist, Likes Old Books, Needs Summer Job, Wears Eyeglasses

Perfunctory Perception: 7

Act One: Preparation

Hobson narrowed his birdlike eyes and pursed his lips in a pondering expression as he slowly rubbed his chin, considering the younger man and perhaps doubting Simon's qualifications for the important task at hand. The said applicant before him shifted uncomfortably under his stern gaze as he sat in the dusty chair, wondering what more he could say or do to prove himself worthy to the strange old gentleman.

The white-haired man then stood up and ambled over to the massive bookcase that dominated one side of the gloomy parlor room. Reaching behind a marble bust of Pallas Athena, he gingerly retrieved a cloth-wrapped bundle that had been concealed there and carried it back to where Simon was sitting. Laying the bundle down on top of a nearby desk, Hobson untied the cloth and revealed a large leather-bound folio, gently opening the yellowing volume to the illuminated frontispiece and title page. He then repositioned the whole book sideways and gestured for the young man to come and take a closer look.

"It is called the Scarlet Palimpsest and is in remarkable condition considering its apparent age. I bought it at private auction over a year ago while traveling in Europe," he explained and paused for a moment as the student translator began to examine the fragile parchment. "Can you read any of the underlying writing?" Hobson asked, somewhat hopefully.

Simon strained to make out the faint archaic lettering that seemed to bleed red from

beneath the newer Latin text overwriting it crosswise, much like dried stains from an ancient wound. He could now understand how the manuscript had received its unique moniker. Someone obviously went through a lot of effort to erase the older work. "Or to hide it," Simon suddenly thought.

The curious student carefully ran his finger tip across the larger letters at the top as he attempted to read the page. Λογιστική της εξωτερικής σκοτιάδι. "Definitely Hellenistic Greek," he said authoritatively, "probably early 5th century, which means that the book is most likely authentic." After a reassuring nod from the elder man to proceed, Simon adjusted his glasses and slowly translated. "It says Accounting...or Book...of External...or maybe Outer...Darkness," he hesitantly continued...

Simon is greeted at the front door by Jacob Hobson, the gentleman who advertised for the translator position. He quickly ushers the prospective applicant into his parlor and library. After a short interview, the primary character must make a successful opposed Soul [Persuasion] (Soul; Resolve = 6) check in order to convince Mr. Hobson to hire him for the job. The player may choose to spend a genre point at this time, to have in the character's possession a letter of reference from Professor Rice, which adds a +1 bonus to the result of the check. Optionally, the narrator can simply skip the check and assume that the player succeeds, since Hobson has no other potential candidates.

The task is expected to take several months and Hobson offers to pay a weekly stipend of \$50 for the translation work, which is a very generous salary in Depression-era dollars. In addition, the primary character is welcome to stay in a vacant upstairs bedroom for the entire summer. The primary character may also choose to dine with the old man (and sample his fine selection of imported wines) or eat at a local restaurant in Arkham.

Jacob Hobson

Hobson is in his late sixties, of rather stout build and with a shock of white hair. While generally friendly in demeanor, his dark, piercing eyes seem capable of peering eerily into a person's soul. A lifelong bachelor and somewhat of a recluse, he has a keen interest in ancient and obscure writings along with his various other pursuits.

Body 6: Athletics 1, Coordination 1, Reflexes 1, Stealth 1

Mind 6: Ingenuity 2, Knowledge (English Literature) 3, Knowledge (European History) 2, Knowledge (French Wines) 1, Languages (English) 2, Languages (French) 2, Languages (German) 1, Perception 1, Research 2

Soul 5: Art (Oil Painting) 2, Guile 3, Luck 1, Persuasion 3, Resolve 1

The House on Sentinel Street

Hobson's home is an older structure built sometime in the late 17th-century and has belonged to his family for several generations. The first floor contains the parlor and dining room as well as a small kitchen, pantry and access to his well-stocked wine cellar in the basement. The second floor has a few bedrooms, mostly unused, and a single indoor bathroom. A locked door at the top of the stairs leads to Hobson's private study in the attic.

Hobson's library in the parlor room contains an extensive collection of dusty, old books, some of them first edition works by famous authors, but nothing of any importance to the player.

Simon is told he may explore anywhere in the house except the attic. Hobson explains that behind the door is his *sanctum sanctorum* and asks not to be disturbed while the man has sequestered himself inside, unless it is an emergency.

Another odd thing with the house, which the player will eventually notice (Perfunctory Perception 7), is the complete lack of mirrors, even in the bathroom. If Hobson

is questioned about this fact, the gentleman replies that the last mirror was accidentally broken and he has not bothered to replace it. A successful opposed Mind [Perception] (Soul; Guile = 8) check reveals this answer to only be partially true, but does not give an apparent motive for his lying.

Researching at Miskatonic University

The player may decide to spend some time at the Miskatonic University Library, either before or during the attempted translation, searching for clues about the origin and history of the *Scarlet Palimpsest*. Research at the library requires an extended Mind [Research] (6) check, taking a number of hours equal to the low side of a random domino and with a blank indicating 30 minutes. With each successful check, the primary character learns one of the following pieces of information, a few of which are merely speculation on the part of the primary character. The narrator can assign numbers from 0 to 6 and randomly select what is learned according to the low side of a second domino, or else reveal the information in the order listed below.

- A 3rd-century theologian, Hippolytus, attributes the heretical manuscript known as the *Book of Outer Darkness* to Simon Magus, the Samaritan sorcerer mentioned in the Christian Bible.
- The text for the *Book of Outer Darkness* was probably copied onto parchment from an original papyrus scroll by scribes working at the Imperial Library of Constantinople in the 5th-century. It was then reused more than 700 years later to create the *Scarlet Palimpsest*, prior the destruction of the library by knights of the Fourth Crusade.
- The *Scarlet Palimpsest* could have been acquired by the Vatican and sent to the Lateran Palace in Rome, centuries before the establishment of the official *Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana*.
- During the Western Schism of 1378, the

Scarlet Palimpsest might have been carried to Avignon in France by a follower of the rival Pope Clement VII. It was apparently not part of the collection that returned when the Vatican Library moved back to Rome under Pope Nicholas V in 1448.

- The *Book of Outer Darkness* was placed on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* by Pope Paul IV in 1559. All known copies were believed to have been destroyed by the Church.
- John Dee, the court astrologer to Queen Elizabeth I, was rumored to have at one time possessed a “red palimpsest” in his personal library at Mortlake in England. It was likely stolen from there before 1589, during the time he spent traveling with fellow occultist Edward Kelly in Eastern Europe.
- The last mention of the *Scarlet Palimpsest*, in a recent newspaper article, is at an estate sale in Paris, France, in February of last year. The previous owner, a noted antiquarian by the name of Pierre Dafoe, was tragically killed after falling under a moving passenger train. The French police are still investigating whether or not it was an accident.

While at the university, the player could also look for something to aid with the actual translation. A successful Mind [Ingenuity] (5) check (or spending a genre point) allows the primary character to borrow a hand-held Wood's Lamp (a type of UV light) from the mineralogy department. Using this device gives a +1 bonus to the Mind [Languages (Greek)] check for reading the faint manuscript.

Confrontation with Father Iwanicki

When Simon goes to move his things into the house, he is accosted on the sidewalk outside by Father Iwanicki, a local Catholic priest. The man is returning from the direction of the front door, having apparently just left it (although the primary character does not actually see the door close). The priest politely asks if he is working on translating an old book in Greek.

No matter what the player says to him, this exchange initiates an early tension scene (momentum threshold of 7). The priest begins to strongly urge the primary character “not to meddle with the blasphemous writings,” lest he endanger his “immortal soul.” Father Iwanicki will then physically impose his body between the primary character and the house, preventing Simon from entering as he continues his loud exhortations.

The player might use one or more different tactics to successfully resolve this scene. The primary character can attempt to get past the old cleric with crucial, opposed Body [Athletics] (Body; Athletics = 6) checks. Simon may also counter the priest’s (crucial, opposed Soul [Resolve] (Soul; Persuasion = 8) checks) fiery speech with his own (crucial, opposed Soul [Persuasion] (Soul; Resolve = 9) checks) reasoned arguments. If the player chooses to attack or otherwise threaten this man of the cloth, then Father Iwanicki will flee and the tension scene abruptly ends.

Regardless of exactly how the scene is handled, a successful conclusion means that Father Iwanicki departs relatively peaceably and offering to pray for the young man, while a non-successful ending indicates he leaves with a final warning for him. Since this is still Act One, an unsuccessful resolution does not require checking for a game-ending result.

Unknown to the primary character, the confrontation is being witnessed by the neighbors across the street. How it concludes will affect their friendliness toward Simon in the next act.

The scene’s main purpose is to provide an element of foreshadowing for the events in later acts. Alternately, the tension scene could be replaced with simple opposed checks, if the narrator wants to quickly move on to Act Two.

Father Iwanicki

The Polish priest in charge of the small St. Stanislaus’ Catholic Church in Arkham, Father Iwanicki is a grim-faced man in his mid-fifties. He is tall and gaunt, with a noticeably-receding hairline and dressed in the black suit and clerical collar typical for a member of the clergy. He is genuinely sincere, if overly stern, in his religious beliefs.

Body 5: Athletics 1, Fighting 1, Reflexes 1, Stealth 2, Strength 1

Mind 6: Ingenuity 1, Knowledge (Biblical History) 3, Knowledge (Catholic Religion) 3, Languages (English) 2, Languages (Latin) 2, Languages (Polish) 3, Perception 2

Soul 6: Performance (Choral Singing) 1, Performance (Oration) 2, Persuasion 2, Resolve 3

Act Two: Translation

Simon quickly devoted himself to the difficult task of translating the ancient and mysterious tome, eager to learn what forgotten wisdom might have lain hidden for millennia within its faded pages. It was very slow going at first, but soon his pace picked up as the centuries-old text became much easier for him to decipher. The book gradually began revealing its innermost secrets, almost as if it actually wanted to be read again by mortal eyes.

His generous host, Hobson, hovered around the young scholar like a great predatory bird, studying him and anxious to share in all of his newly-found discoveries. Which was his right, of course, since the man was paying Simon very well for the privilege.

However, as the days turned into weeks, the student translator noticed that he saw less of his employer, the gentleman wandering around his old house in solitary pursuits and leaving Simon alone with his work. He would

still chat with him at meal times, discussing the dark and often unsettling mythology Simon had unearthed, which was buried deep in the manuscript like some mummified cadaver in a moldy sepulchre. But on rare occasions, Hobson would not avail himself even then, spending more of his day upstairs in the attic, locked behind an oaken door and not to be disturbed.

As summer wore on and it became oppressively hot in the stuffy house, Simon did not really feel much like eating either...

Act Two of this tale starts once the primary character has finally moved into the house and begins working on the translation. The work of translating the Grecian text consists of a series of extended Mind [Languages (Greek)] (8) checks, one for each of the six chapters that make up the manuscript. The number of days it takes for each check is equal to the sum of both sides x2 of a random domino (minimum 2 days). A success results in another section translated, while a failure indicates no progress was made, with the time spent in finding a replacement light bulb, another trip to the library, some bed rest, etc.

In order to make the process interesting for the player, the narrator is encouraged to add more complexity to the actual task of translation, but always remember that the book wants to be read. Except for the malign influence of its contents, it is just an inanimate object. The only real power it has is to corrupt the psyche of the reader. Should the primary character suddenly realize this and try to destroy the book, proceed directly to Act Three.

Reading portions of the harmless Latin writing simply requires making a much easier Mind [Languages (Latin)] (5) check.

During the first few weeks of the translation, his host and employer is ever present,

curious and excited about the progress that Simon is making. As time goes on, however, Hobson's interest in the book seems to wane and he remains in his study upstairs. If the player ever decides to ignore the man's specific instructions and tries to gain access to the attic study, then move ahead to Act Three.

Beginning with Chapter 3 of the book, reading each new section entails a certain amount of personal risk to the primary character, as perusing the forbidden knowledge inscribed on these pages requires increasingly difficult Sanity checks be made. An unsuccessful Sanity check means that the player must flip over a random domino to determine the severity of the failure.

If a game-ending result occurs, then the primary character is found dead in his room, hanging with a belt tied around his neck in an apparent suicide. If the game does not end here, then the primary character suffers a mental break-down lasting both sides of another random domino in days, followed by a -1 to his Soul [Persuasion] aspect due to a sudden physical change (hair turned white, bloodshot eyes, etc.) for the rest of tale. This is in addition to the -1 to his Soul stat (or a mental glitch, such as "fear of the dark"), if the previous domino had a blank side.

Whether or not the Sanity check is successful, the player adds another +.5 bonus to Simon's Mind [Knowledge (Forbidden Truths)] aspect.



Additional Research

As the primary character is delving into these bizarre passages of lore, the player might want to return to the library to do further research. While the primary character finds nothing on the bookshelves covering this material, asking any of the university staff about this strange subject matter eventually brings him into contact with the head librarian, Dr. Henry Armitage.

After being escorted into Dr. Armitage's cramped and cluttered office, the primary character is asked to explain what his purpose is dealing in such outré topics. If the senior librarian is satisfied by Simon's explanation (an opposed Soul [Persuasion] (Soul; Resolve = 8) check), then he can provide short, guarded answers to some of the player's questions (treat as an assisting supporting character, adding a +1 bonus to the primary character's Mind [Knowledge (Forbidden Truths)] aspect). The exact challenge rating for each check is up to the narrator to decide, depending on the specific question, but should average at least a 7 for even common Lovecraftian concepts. In particular, Dr. Armitage knows nothing more about the *Book of Outer Darkness* than the primary character has already discovered.

Before leaving his office, the elder librarian gives the primary character one final cryptic piece of advice, telling him to be careful and that "there are some things man was not meant to know."

Dr. Henry Armitage

The venerable scholar, Dr. Armitage, has been head of the library at Miskatonic University for many years. Even with thick glasses, thinning hair and a "salt and pepper" beard, the man commands respect from those who meet him. Along with two other university members, Professor Warren Rice and Dr. Francis Morgan, he faced and defeated the terrible Dunwich Horror back in the late 1920s. There is probably no more knowledgeable a person in Arkham to consult with on matters of forbidden truths.

Body 5: Reflexes 1, Vehicles (Automobiles) 2

Mind 7: Ingenuity 3, Knowledge (Forbidden Truths) 2, Knowledge (MU Library) 4, Languages (English) 2, Languages (French) 1, Languages (Latin) 1, Perception 3, Research 3

Soul 5: Persuasion 3, Resolve 3

The Book of Outer Darkness

The six chapters of the *Book of Outer Darkness* are listed as follows. They may technically be read in any order, but the construction of the tome makes it hard to skim due to the half-sized, sideways pages.

Chapter 1 contains an esoteric essay concerning the duality of man, the nature of the demiurge and other Gnostic concepts. While a fascinating subject, the information is nothing special and does not require a Sanity check.

Chapter 2 provides a fairly complete story of the Philistines, their culture and history, and one that is notably at odds with the unflattering depiction of them in the Bible. Reading this account also does not need a Sanity check from the player.

Chapter 3 initially discusses the various Sea Peoples of the eastern Mediterranean area. However, it goes on to talk about "those of the depths" and their vaguely disturbing relationship to the other bronze-age cultures that were living on the coastlines. This is a veiled reference to the Deep Ones, requiring an easy Sanity check (4) to learn about. They can be properly identified by name with a harder Mind [Knowledge (Forbidden Truths)] (6) check, but only by someone with at least a full point in that aspect.

Chapter 4 continues on the previous theme, but also covers the bizarre and often disgusting rites that the Deep Ones have for worshipping a pair of mysterious beings called Father Dagon and Mother Hydra. Successfully translating this section requires making a Sanity check (5).

Chapter 5 reveals that the previous two entities are actually part of a larger pantheon of “Great Old Ones”, most having obscure and unpronounceable names and with Cthulhu as their titular ruler and “high priest”. Have the player make a Sanity check (6) after reading this chapter.

Chapter 6 further expands on this forbidden knowledge in long, rambling passages about the “Outer Gods”. It is very hard to decipher and understand the exact meanings of the author in some of this largely allegorical information. A Sanity check (7) is required while translating it.

The final page appears, at first glance, to be meaningless gibberish. It is really an invocation to Yog-sothoth in the R’lyehian tongue rendered phonetically into Greek lettering. The player may make a difficult Mind [Knowledge (Forbidden Truths)] (8) check to identify the original language, but not what the words actually mean. If the primary character succeeds in translating this last page directly from the Greek, even without knowing what it is, then immediately begin Act Three.

Events at the House

In between making the extended checks for each chapter, several unusual incidents happen at the house during the time that the primary character spends working on the translation. Listed below is the suggested order in which these events will occur, however narrators are free to switch them around, skip some or add new ones of their own design, as desired to make the tale unique.

Event 1: Meeting the Neighbors

Shortly after Simon arrives at the house, he hears a knock on the front door. Answering it for Hobson, who is busy painting a still life in the parlor, he meets one of the neighbors, Nathan Greene. The middle-aged man is bringing a home-baked apple pie as a welcoming gift from his wife, Eleanor. On the lawn next to him stands his loyal

Bloodhound, Shep.

Unless the earlier confrontation with Father Iwanicki ended with the primary character using physical force against the priest, Nathan also invites the primary character to dinner over at his house across the street.

If the player accepts the invitation, the primary character is greeted warmly at the married couple’s more modern home and served a meal of roasted chicken with assorted vegetables, a nice change from the sausage and potatoes that are his usual fare. During dinner, they will engage the primary character in small talk, asking questions about himself and the purpose of his stay at Hobson’s house, but neither of them expresses any special interest in ancient writings. The primary character can use this opportunity to learn a few important facts about his mysterious employer from the pair.

The husband says that he is personally on good terms with the gentleman, even if Nathan’s stereotypical Yankee demeanor and Hobson’s own hermetic tendencies make actual contact between them minimal. He has not seen Mr. Hobson venture outside since just after the man returned from his trip to Europe this last spring.

Eleanor knows that Hobson inherited his modest wealth (enough to support his dilettante lifestyle) and has some relatives (a nephew and his family) living somewhere in Florida. A later search of genealogy records at the Arkham Courthouse can confirm this information.

Nathan Greene

Nathan is a rugged individual in his late forties and a US Army veteran of the Great War. Wounded in his left leg during battle, he met his future wife while she was working as a nurse at the field hospital. Upon returning to Arkham with her after the war, they were married and he took up woodworking to supplement his small pension. An avid

hunter and outdoorsman, he is often seen leaving his house for the nearby woods, armed with a shotgun and his dog.

Body 6: Athletics 2, Coordination 1, Fighting 2, Marksmanship 3, Reflexes 2, Stealth 2, Strength 2, Vehicles (Automobiles) 1

Mind 5: Ingenuity 3, Knowledge (Natural History) 2, Languages (English) 2, Perception 3

Soul 6: Art (Wood Carving) 2, Intimidation 1, Resolve 2

Shep the Bloodhound

Narrators should consider Shep as an item instead of a supporting character. While with Nathan, the dog adds a +2 bonus to his Mind [Perception] and a +1 bonus to his Soul [Intimidation] aspects.

Eleanor Greene

Eleanor is a typical New England housewife and is a few years younger than her husband. A former nurse by training, she enjoys cooking in the kitchen and gardening in the backyard. Unlike Mr. Greene, she loves to gossip and is also a respectable member of Father Iwanicki's congregation. Although Eleanor comes from a big family herself, the couple does not have any children of their own.

Body 5: Athletics 1, Coordination 2, Reflexes 2

Mind 5: Ingenuity 2, Knowledge (Gardening) 3, Knowledge (Local Gossip) 2, Knowledge (Medicine) 2, Knowledge (Recipes) 3, Languages (English) 2, Perception 2

Soul 7: Art (Cooking) 3, Luck 2, Persuasion 2, Resolve 2

Event 2: The Moving Shadow

At some point early in the translation work, the primary character is startled by a moving shadow in the hallway outside his door, the motion caught out of the corner of his eye. When he goes to see who it is, the primary character finds nobody there, right before Hobson enters the hall, coming in from the opposite direction. A thorough search of the house reveals no evidence of an intruder.

Event 3: The First Dream

The primary character is sitting in the dark for some reason, but can still clearly view the room by the moonlight streaming in through the windows. Over on a table rests the open tome next to his unfinished translation. As he quietly watches in the darkness, the ink pen that he had been using suddenly levitates and starts writing more of the translated words down, as the pages of the book slowly begin to turn by themselves.

The primary character then awakens to realize that he had been dreaming. A quick check of the book and his translation papers finds them exactly as he had left. It was only a weird dream.

Event 4: The Barking Dog

On another night, the primary character is awoken again, this time by the sound of the neighbor's dog barking. By looking out the nearest window and making a successful Mind [Perception] (8) check, a shadowy figure can be dimly seen standing beneath a street light, evidently watching the house. If the primary character goes downstairs to investigate further, the suspicious person will already be gone before he arrives.

The figure was Father Iwanicki, acting under orders from his superiors in Rome, although the player has no way to know that.

Event 5: The Second Dream

The second dream occurs sometime after over half of the manuscript has been successfully translated. It should not feel like a dream, but as if it were a typical work session.

The days are becoming hot and the primary character has taken to working late at night when the air is cooler. Have the player make a standard Mind [Languages (Greek)] (8) check, then while describing the newly translated contents, mention that the primary character notices bright red stains on his hands. Glancing back at the book, the Greek letters seem to waver and dance around under the light of the electric lamp.

They then actually start to flow off of the parchment pages and onto the worktable... and then down to the floor, gradually becoming a torrent of blood-like ink flooding the room.

At this point the primary character wakes up, covered in sweat. It was still just a dream, but the primary character's sanity is beginning to suffer adverse effects from reading the book.

Event 6: An Optional Dream

This dream is optional. It can occur at any time, but should only be used by the narrator if the player ever tries to view Hobson with a mirror. Since it was the player's choice to initiate this specific action, the dream should appear absolutely real. Its purpose is to mislead and shock the primary character, casting doubt on everything that happens later.

The primary character may easily acquire a small hand mirror, such as one found in a common shaving kit, and attempt to secretly catch Hobson's reflection in it. Make an opposed Body [Stealth] (Mind; Perception = 7) check in order to do so without the man noticing. If successful, Simon's host is seen to be completely normal. However, as the primary character is putting away the mirror, he casually turns it on himself.

Instead of his own face, the primary character sees a grinning skull smiling back at him. He then bolts upright in his bed, wide awake and shaken by the nightmare.

If the player retries this experiment in reality, Hobson is again shown to be a normal human...as is Simon.

Event 7: The Missing Book

Sometime in the morning, prior to completing the translation, the primary character finds that the ancient tome he has been diligently translating for weeks is missing. An initial search of the house reveals no signs of it or who might have taken it. When Hobson is

consulted about it, he seems nonplussed, but says that Simon has been working very hard lately and should probably take a break. The man suggests that the book has just been misplaced somewhere and assures him that it will turn up eventually.

During that night, the primary character experiences the next dream below.

Event 8: The Third Dream

The primary character finds himself standing outside St. Stanislaus' Catholic Church at night with no conscious memory of how he got there. He somehow knows that the *Scarlet Palimpsest* is within the church and that he must go inside to retrieve it. Many details betray that this is obviously a dream, such as the primary character being unable to speak or seeing only blurry images reflected by any shiny surfaces. What is less apparent is that it is also a tension scene, with a momentum threshold of 10.

Entering the church, the primary character can hear Father Iwanicki openly praying alone, reading aloud some of the Latin text out of the stolen book that has been placed upon the altar. The man of faith stops for a moment, having sensed the presence of someone nearby, and calls out to whomever it is before moving through the empty pews to investigate.

The narrator should now have to player draw a random domino, setting the starting momentum for the scene based on the value of the high side (minimum 1). Unable to verbally negotiate for the return of the book, the player has to resort to more physical methods to successfully conclude this scene.

Some available crucial, opposed checks to use are Body [Athletics] (Body; Athletics = 6), Body [Coordination] (Body; Reflexes = 6), Body [Fighting] (Body; Reflexes = 6), Body [Reflexes] (Body; Fighting = 6), Body [Stealth] (Mind; Perception = 8) or Body [Strength] (Body; Strength = 6) in order to run after/

away, grab the book, fight, dodge, sneak past or wrestle with the priest over the book.

If the tension scene is concluded successfully by the player, the book is returned to his possession, with Father Iwanicki either totally unaware or presumably recovering from any injuries sustained during the struggle, depending on how the scene played out. The primary character wakes up in his bed the following morning, appearing to have slept in his clothes from the previous night. The primary character soon finds the *Scarlet Palimpsest* concealed under a stack of paper on his writing desk, uncertain whether or not he had checked there yesterday. Was this really a dream?

Because this is Act Two, an unsuccessful conclusion has potential consequences for the primary character. In this case, the player must draw another random domino to determine Simon's fate.

If this results in the game ending, the robbery attempt at the church has failed and the primary character is immediately taken into police custody. What happens to him while in jail is left up to the narrator, but the tale is effectively over.

On a non-game ending result, the book is still recovered as if the conclusion of the scene had been successful, exactly as described above. However, Father Iwanicki is found murdered, slain in his church by an unknown assailant. This sad fact can be learned by the primary character later, either by reading the newspaper or talking with the neighbors. In addition, if the domino had a blank side, apply a -1 penalty to all stats for future checks made by the player, representing how badly shaken the primary character is by the news.

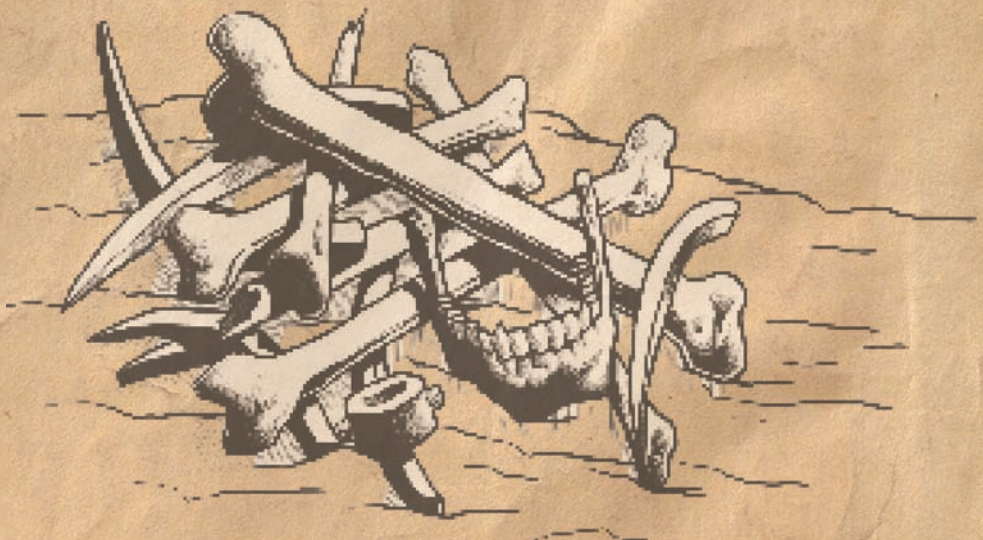
Act Three: Conclusion

"Father Iwanicki might have been right," worried Simon as he sweated over his work, consumed by the desire to finish the arduous task of translating the final, loathsome chapter. He could feel the awful toll that this job had already taken on his health... and his sanity. Completing it had become an obsession.

"How long has it been since I had slept?" the young man wondered. His last few nights were a terrible, disjointed blur and his dreams, in the times he still found precious sleep, were filled with nightmares spawned from reading the noxious volume. But Simon knew that he could not rest, not yet, when so nearly within grasp of attaining his goal.

As he continued to make his way through the remaining contents, Simon stumbled across more words and phrases in Greek that he did not comprehend. Evidently, they were proper names, no doubt borrowed from some older, likely now extinct language and long forgotten by history. The student tried his best to transcribe them, without much regard as to their exact meaning or pronunciation.

Suddenly, on the very last page, he came



to an abrupt halt. Simon could no longer understand a single word. "What madness is this?" he said aloud. The puzzled translator then silently pondered, "Could it be in some form of cipher?"

Unable to make sense of the seemingly meaningless passage, he nonetheless decided to press onward. He painstakingly copied down each letter one at a time into its nearest English equivalent and hoped that would suffice to satisfy his absentee employer. While busily engaged in this endeavor, Simon felt the air in the room drop in temperature, as a chill breeze began wafting through his open window.

"I should have listened to Father Iwanicki," he thought...

The third act of this tale begins whenever the player chooses to perform one of the following three actions: complete the translation, open the attic door or destroy the book. Each of them will initiate a tension scene with a momentum threshold of 12. Note that they are not mutually exclusive, but part of the same scene.

For instance, the primary character could complete the translation of the last page (summoning the Outer Darkness), retreat into the attic (confronting the Doppelganger) and then decide to destroy the book.

A final resolution (ending the tension scene) of any of them will also simultaneously conclude the others. They are all just different representations of the real inner conflict, the book attempting to wrest control of the primary character's mind. Exactly how much of the scene actually occurs in reality and what is only an illusion should be unknown to the player.

1. Completing the Translation

If the primary character translates the entire book, then this act will unintentionally create a psychic gateway for the Outer Darkness to manifest itself in the world. Doing so puts the player at a distinct disadvantage, since the Overwhelming special rule means that the tension scene's starting momentum point total is set by the low side instead of the high side of a random domino, unless the scene is already in progress. However, the narrator should award a genre point for having completed the assigned task, which may be spent immediately.

Called down from the icy void of space, the Outer Darkness will quickly descend on the house and search for a way inside. It can flow through cracks under doors or into an open window, but will not travel up the stairs onto the second floor for some reason. The nightmarish thing will remain downstairs, preventing Simon from escaping.

Due to the otherworldly nature of the beast, have the player make a non-crucial, non-perilous Sanity check (9) the first time that he views it.

Outer Darkness

This large, amorphous entity resembles a shadowy cloud, with fleeting glimpses of tentacles and less identifiable appendages flailing menacingly within its inky depths. Despite its great size, it ominously glides across the ground in total silence. It reacts to the surrounding environment more like an implacable force of nature than a living, conscious thing and it is almost impervious to threat or persuasion. Whether the Outer Darkness is some form of lesser avatar of a Great Old One, a servitor creature attached to the book or something else entirely is left up to the narrator.

Body 6: Athletics 3, Stealth 4

Mind 6: Perception 2

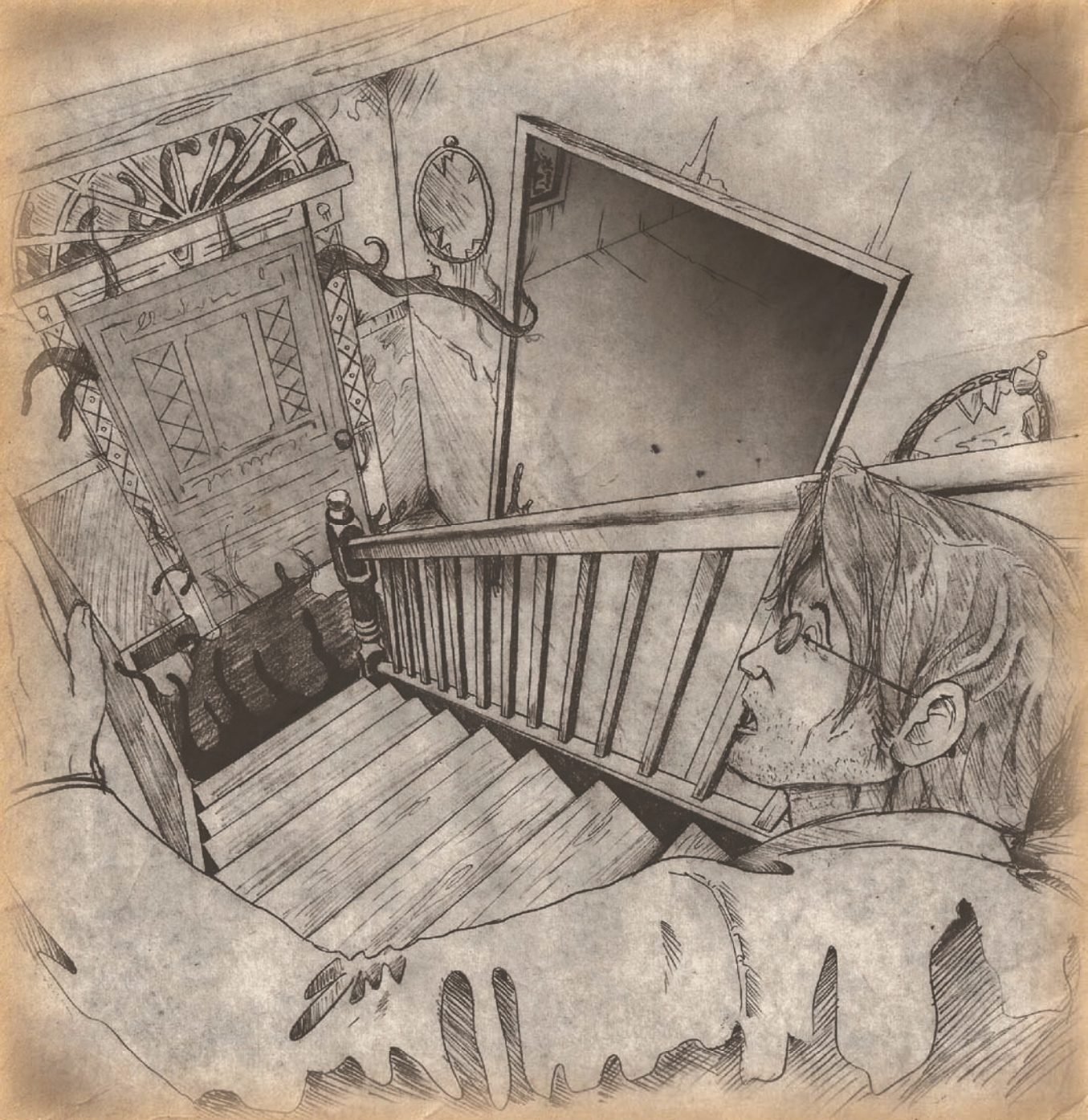
Soul 6: Intimidation 4, Resolve 3

Special Rules: Dark Vision, Immunity to Physical Damage, Malleable, Mental Protection 4 (mindless), Overwhelming, Unspeakable Visage 9, Weakness (bright light)

Unable to fight it physically, the primary character may attempt to run from or sneak past the approaching Outer Darkness by making crucial, opposed Body [Athletics]

(Body; Athletics = 9) or Body [Stealth] (Mind; Perception = 8) checks. However, because it moves so quietly, the Outer Darkness can easily ambush an unsuspecting primary character, requiring a crucial, opposed Mind [Perception] (Body; Stealth = 10) check to avoid. Resisting the bone-chilling effects from its ice-cold touch requires making a crucial, opposed Soul [Resolve] (Soul; Intimidation = 10) check.

Players who witness the Outer Darkness in action may make a non-crucial Knowledge



(Forbidden Truths) (9) check to recognize its weakness to bright light. Warding it off using a flashlight or other strong source of illumination requires a crucial, opposed Mind [Ingenuity] (Soul; Resolve = 9) check, with a success resulting in a momentum point increase equal to the high side of a random domino instead of the low side.

2. Opening the Door

Opening the heavy attic door requires a successful non-crucial Body [Strength/Coordination] (9) check, using either brute Strength to break in or careful Coordination to pick the lock. Primary characters who manage to open the locked door will then be able to enter Hobson's study.

Upon entry, Simon finds a large attic room, expensively furnished, but initially nothing unusual...except a stale stench of decay. Looking around, he will eventually discover the motionless form of Jacob Hobson sitting in an overstuffed chair, a vial of arsenic power and a half-empty bottle of Pinot noir resting on the small table beside him. It is clear that the corpse has been dead for some amount of time, maybe for over a month. Whether the gentleman that the primary character knew as Hobson during the last few weeks was only a figment of his own imagination, or else the body is not truly what it seems, is an open question.

The primary character's attention is soon drawn to an upright, full-length mirror across the room from Hobson's chair. As he curiously stares at a reflection of himself, his image in the mirror impossibly springs to life, stepping right through the glass into the room and leaving no reflection behind. This Doppelganger will then start verbally assaulting the primary character, claiming that he is pitifully weak and will soon be devoured with the rest of humanity when the Great Old Ones return to reclaim the Earth.

Doppelganger

The Doppelganger is a "mirrored" duplicate of the primary character, but with a crazed expression on his face and undisguised hatred in his eyes. Unlike the mute Outer Darkness, this evil simulacrum is quite vocal. While capable of feats of physical prowess, it prefers to use a cunning combination of conversational Guile and verbal Intimidation in an effort to weaken Simon. The narrator can also spend a double (on a failed crucial check by the player) to activate the Drain special rule in order to lower the primary character's Soul stat by 1, using merely the sound of his voice and cumulative with any previous penalties.

Body 7: Athletics 2, Fighting 2, Reflexes 2, Strength 2, Toughness 2

Mind 5: Knowledge (Forbidden Truths) 4, Languages (English) 2, Languages (R'lyehian) 2, Perception 2

Soul 5: Guile 3, Intimidation 3, Resolve 2

Special Rules: Drain (voice; Soul)

Players may use various tactics to oppose the Doppelganger:

Crucial checks using Body. The primary character might decide to fight, dodge, flee or hide from him with opposed Body [Fighting] (Body; Reflexes/Toughness = 9), Body [Reflexes] (Body; Fighting = 9), Body [Athletics] (Body; Athletics = 9) or Body [Stealth] (Mind; Perception = 7) checks, respectively. Note that the Doppelganger will pursue the primary character throughout the house and could potentially join forces with the Outer Darkness on the first floor.

Crucial checks using Mind. The player can logically argue for man's inherent nobility (an opposed Mind [Knowledge (Western Philosophy)] (Soul; Resolve = 7) check) or passionately quote Shakespeare or another author on the subject (an opposed Mind [Knowledge (English Literature)] (Soul; Resolve = 7) check) to counter the Doppelganger's view of an uncaring universe and mankind's utter insignificance in it. In

this way, the primary character might be able to successfully defeat the Doppelganger...by debating with him.

Crucial checks using Soul. The primary character may attempt to bargain or plead for his life with the Doppelganger by making an opposed Soul [Persuasion] (Soul; Resolve = 7) check. The primary character can also choose to ignore his words with an opposed Soul [Resolve] (Soul; Guile/Intimidation = 8) check. This very last option could be made easier, if the player also makes a non-crucial Mind [Ingenuity] (7) check to remember the Latin text. Reading the Latin portion of the book out loud adds a +2 bonus to ignore the Doppelganger's nihilistic rhetoric.

3. Destroying the Book

If the player wants to destroy the book, then the challenge rating for each of the crucial checks depends on how many chapters the primary character has already translated. The more that have been successfully read, the greater influence the book has over Simon and the harder the difficulty will be to get rid of it. To determine the overall challenge rating, total the number of translated sections and add 4 (giving a value from 4 to 10).

Additionally, each check that is failed also necessitates a non-crucial Soul [Resolve] (8) check from the player, with a further failure meaning that the primary character is mentally compelled to no longer attempt that particular action. This is the only way in which the book will directly defend itself.

The book can be destroyed by any of the following methods:

Defacing the writing. The primary character may overwrite or otherwise obscure the Greek words. This requires a crucial Body [Coordination] check against the challenge rating. With each successful check, a portion of the book will be ruined. If unsuccessful, the scarlet lettering will seem to darken and bleed straight through whatever the character has written.

Tearing up the pages. The primary character can try to physically rip apart the book. A

crucial Body [Strength] check is required to shred a few pages. Failure means that new pages will inexplicably appear replacing ones that have been torn out.

Burning the book. The player might choose to simply burn the parchment pages. This calls for a crucial Mind [Ingenuity] check to incinerate part of the book. If failed, the fire will be extinguished with a loud hiss, as if by a sudden wind.

Other possible options may also exist, as decided by the narrator. Once destroyed, the dark power of the book is gone forever. Note that the English translation has no such abilities and could be disposed of without effort.

Ending the Tale

With the resolution of the tension scene in Act Three, the tale is done. Which actions the player chose to perform, and if they were successful, will determine how the tale ends.

If the scene ended with the player's success, then the primary character remains alive, his mind free at last from the powerful influence of the *Book of Outer Darkness*. The hideous Outer Darkness evaporates like a fog at the break of dawn, while the Doppelganger simply vanishes without a trace, as if he were a bad dream.

The *Scarlet Palimpsest*, if it still exists, and any translation papers can be turned over to Dr. Armitage for safe keeping. After listening to the primary character's unbelievable story, the elder scholar tucks the book away under lock and key in the vault of the library's Restricted Section.

If unsuccessful, the player must flip over a final random domino. On a game-ending result, Simon is found dead in the house by the neighbors, his wrists slashed by the glass from a broken mirror. With a non-game ending one, he is committed to Arkham Sanitarium, driven permanently insane by his terrifying experience. What becomes of the book then is never learned.