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THE BOOK OF UNREMITTING HORROR

GUMSHOE VERSION



The Book of Unremitting Horror

Foreword

Players in horror campaigns are a little too accustomed to the nightmares their characters face; even the most eldritch of tentacular horrors is less intimidating when you know exactly what it is, because your PC has faced it before on some other evening. New times demand new nightmares. Our horrors are nightmarishly intimate, often created from human vice, or let loose by human greed. They show us the ugliness that underlies reality. They are the crawling things under the rock of the everyday, sane world.

This book follows on from the first two releases for the new GUMSHOE system, Fear Itself and The Esoterrorists. It requires one or both of these books. Most of the material can be used with either book. The book is based on creatures and material first published in The Book of Unremitting Horror, created by Dave Allsop and Adrian Bott, and Adrian has rewritten and updated the material for GUMSHOE. It includes a completely new adventure for Fear Itself and a whole chapter for the Esoterrorists background.

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12 July, 2003

Dear Mr Cosgrove,

I have some information I think might interest you. I hope you think that's a good opening line, because I've thought about it a lot. How to write a letter asking someone I've never met to read something they won't believe. That last bit's not so good, is it? I used to read a lot of fiction, horror and stuff like that, and in those books the protagonist often says "I can't remember when I first realized..." but this one won't. Because it's not fiction. I can remember. I often wish I couldn't, but I can. And now I need to tell someone else who can remember, or at least make sure that the information isn't lost. I suppose I'd better begin at the beginning, because it's a strange story. I'm almost certain you won't believe it - I wouldn't have, if I hadn't seen it - but if I tell you the way it started you might believe it enough to keep reading.

I'm an artist, you see. I really can't remember learning to draw, to see things with my eyes and to put them on paper so others could see them too. I never wondered what I would do for a living, just honed my skills in college, and walked straight into a job as a technical illustrator for a publisher producing academic textbooks. I spent my days in a small office drawing whatever was put in front of me: bones, fossils. Dissections, even, for medical texts. I suppose the students never think about where the drawings come from, and other people would be horrified if they thought about it, the nice, clean black and white as red and blue and purple, and the smell - but I liked it. I was comfortable in my office, or other people's labs, observing, translating color, texture, light and shadow into shades of black on white. Most people don't often see what's really there, you know, or rather they see it, but their brains edit the information, filling in any gaps with what experience has shown them in the past. I think that if they see something truly strange, completely beyond their experience, their brains edit that, too, substituting something that makes more sense in the world they know. I'm an artist, a trained illustrator. My brain doesn't do that. I see what's really there.

It started as a lovely day. I'd been working flat out all week to make a deadline, drawing fish, all staring eyes and spines and flabby grey flesh. I had to go in on Saturday to ink the last drawing. By the time I'd finished all I could smell was fish and formalin, so I decided to walk home the long way, through the park to get some fresh air, or I'd have to skip dinner. The sun was sinking into the lake and families were packing up their picnics to go home when I reached the park, parents closing the coolers and kids dragging their baseball bats back to the cars. It was wonderful. The grass was green, the poplars were every shade of yellow, gold and bronze in the low sun, and the sharp smell of their leaves flushed the formalin out of my sinuses. I slowed my pace as I came to the edge of the park, admiring the colors. A young couple was walking along the edge of the trees, holding hands. He said something, she turned and kissed him, laughing. As I watched, two dogs bounded up, looked like those black ones, labs? that seem to laugh at people. The dogs just stood, tails wagging, looking expectant, and after a moment the guy shrugged, picked up a stick and threw it. It flew through the air behind me and the dogs barked happily and took off after it. They ran past me, grinning mouths full of teeth. Lots of teeth, gleaming white against floppy pink tongues. The couple turned and walked off, her head on his shoulder. The dogs ran past the stick, around it and back towards the couple disappearing into the trees. One of them ran a little closer this time, its head swivelling up to look at me as it went past. I, too, walked away. My legs kept moving as my brain wrestled with what my eyes had seen, teeth, too many teeth? I carried on walking, listening to the high distant screams of the gulls over the

lake, watching memory rather than the cracks in the sidewalk. Their laughing mouths were too big, the sharply serrated teeth too big, and the claws on their hind feet had left gashes in the green turf. That couldn't be right, I didn't see them, I must have imagined it. Do you understand what I'm telling you? Do you? I didn't believe my eyes. I. Did. Not. Believe. My. Eyes. I kept walking, all the way home.

On the news that evening they reported a horrific murder. A young woman had been ripped to pieces by a frenzied attacker in the lakeside trees. There were shots of blue flashing lights and blood, red against gold leaves, but it was alright, they'd caught the murderer. Her boyfriend hadn't left the scene, was found semicomatose, drugged out of his mind. They showed him being bundled away and the reporters talked wisely about the effects of illegal substances. Except he - they'd - been fine when I saw them, about 15 minutes before she died, red and gold in the setting sun.

The police called for witnesses. I told them about the dogs, but they didn't believe me. They knew I'd been drinking, they could smell it on my breath.

I took Wednesday off, when the park opened again, walked there all day and saw nothing but trees and leaves and grass, and silent gulls. It was colder when I went the next Saturday. I sat on a bench, feeding the gulls and watching the shadows under the trees. I caught a glimpse of movement, something black, but it was only a jogger running the paths. Did something move under the trees? I couldn't be certain. I didn't trust my eyes, you see.

That night I went into town and tried to get drunk, but I drank too much and was sick, and spent the night walking instead. And while I was walking, trying not to think, I saw something else, and this time I believed my eyes, and that is how it started.

Did you see Blade? I often see him in my dreams, all black and silver, striding through the night, killing them. But I've never seen it. I've never seen one die. Do you believe me? Are you interested? I hope so. I'm tired. I'm afraid. And I'm so very tired of being afraid, of wondering when I'll make the mistake that kills me. They're cunning, they're very good at what they do, and I might have missed one, not seen it. Read the files I've sent. There are other copies, I've sent them to other people I thought, I hoped might be interested, but YOU might be the only person who sees reality instead of something your brain thinks makes more sense. There must be someone else who will believe their eyes.

Yours most sincerely

THOMAS PEPPER.

PS. It's interested me for years, the difference between the pen and ink on paper and the bone on the table, the words on the pages and the ideas the words convey. Reality and what we perceive it to be. There's a finely honed distinction between perception and madness; it's a razor's edge I've been walking for years, and I'm bleeding.

For a while I wondered if I was going mad, so I watched the mad and the drunks. They cringe and weep at things drawn from their past that exist only in their minds: Harvey left no piles of dung, no footprints in the grass. The things I see leave bloody corpses ripped limb from limb, the stench of dead meat seeping out beneath a locked door, fragments of lives like pieces of a jigsaw to be assembled from reports in the press. They are real, far more real now than the people they've destroyed. Please believe me.

introduction

How To Use This Book

The GUMSHOE edition of the *Book of Unremitting Horror* presents the creatures from the initial OGL edition, specially revised and detailed for use with *Fear Itself* and *The Esoterrorists*, along with completely new material in the form of five new entities Bleeder, Skitch, Empty One, Motherlode and Soliloquy.

We've also provided ten summarized Sinister Plots for the GM's use in an Esoterrorists game, along with information on how the creatures of Unremitting Horror are used in the Esoterrorist campaign for global reality breakdown. This section includes important distinctions between the World of Unremitting Horror and the Esoterrorists campaign setting.

Finally, we close with an expanded version of the scenario *The Final Case* and the new scenario *Crook's End*, both designed for use with *Fear Itself*.

New Abilities

The *Book of Unremitting Horror: GUMSHOE Edition* introduces two new abilities, one for PCs and one for their ghastly antagonists.

Aberrance (General, Creatures of Unremitting Horror only)

Some creatures in this book (typically the ones that hail from the Outer Black) have **Aberrance** pools. A creature's **Aberrance** ability represents the degree of intrinsic power it has to shred the Membrane protecting our world and impose subjectivity upon objectivity. **Aberrance** is similar to the human faculty of 'willpower', but is more alien and often malevolent.

Aberrance is a catch-all ability that each of the horrors uses in its own way. For example, a creature might draw upon **Aberrance** to create a supernatural effect, to alter a person's perceptions, or to travel between realities, depending upon what that creature's special abilities are.

The higher an entity's **Aberrance** rating, the more potential it has to disrupt conventional reality. A being such as the Mystery Man is a vortex of pure **Aberrance**.

It follows that the higher a creature's **Aberrance** rating is, the keener the Esoterrorists are to bring it into the world. Psychics can sense strong sources of **Aberrance**, which (in the case of Unremitting Horrors) appear as black clots of nightmare howling with a thousand voices.

Aberrance may be refreshed by the usual rules regarding creature pools (see below). Some creatures have other ways to refresh **Aberrance** during an encounter, which involve defiling or deforming the mundane world in some way. These methods are explained in the rules text for the creature.

A creature with an **Aberrance** rating is usually actively inimical to humanity; the Outsiders are the only known exception. Creatures with no **Aberrance** rating, such as Blood Corpses, simply follow their own limited agenda and only contribute to the Esoterrorists' grand campaign by increasing the level of chaos, unpredictability and fear in the world.

The Ordo Veritatis has not yet established exactly how **Aberrance** works, but its observations have led it to conclude that the supernatural horrors summoned by the Esoterrorists do have a limit to their power. This information has tactical value: it means that they can be exhausted. Bitter experience has shown that when one of the horrors retreats, it is not usually because it has suffered harm. These entities only withdraw so that they can return again, replenished.

Pathology (Investigative, Academic)

You are trained in carrying out medical examinations of living human subjects and forming diagnoses based on your findings. You can

- diagnose probable causes of sickness or injury
- identify the extent and cause of an unconscious person's trauma
- detect when a person is suffering from a physically debilitating condition such as drug addiction, pregnancy or malnutrition
- establish a person's general level of health

– identify
medical
abnormalities

If you have eight or more points in **Medic** you get **Pathology** 1 for free.

New GUMSHOE Rules

Ability Pool Refreshing (Creatures)

In accordance with GUMSHOE's narrative-based style, creatures refresh ability pool points according to how often they appear. A creature that is not encountered for 24 hours or more may replenish all of its ability pools, with the exception of **Health**, which is recovered at the rate of 1d6 points per day.

If the PCs encounter a creature later on in the same day, such as by tracking it to its lair, it can refresh all of its ability pools to a maximum of *half* their total Rating, again with the exception of **Health**, which it cannot refresh at all.

Creatures that have special rules for recovering **Health**, such as regenerating creatures, follow their own rules rather than those given above.

Alcohol, Drugs and Stability Loss

It is possible to achieve some measure of insulation against horrible events by getting drunk on alcohol or high on drugs. This isn't a sensible choice in the regular course of an investigation, but characters pushed to the very limit of endurance will frequently turn to 'Dutch courage' to help get them through.

Becoming moderately drunk (or high) increases the target Difficulty of all tests by +1, but grants the character four points of temporary **Stability**. These can be expended on **Stability** tests as usual, thus possibly allowing characters to make successful **Stability** tests when confronted with horror. However, any unused points are lost again when the character sobers up. Temporary **Stability** pool points gained through alcohol or drugs do *not* cancel the effects of being shaken or having a mental illness.

Becoming roaring drunk (or sky-high) increases the

target Difficulty of all tests by +2 and grants a character six points of temporary **Stability**, which function as above.

Note that only *depressant* narcotics have this effect. Stimulants and hallucinogens such as LSD are more likely to increase the Difficulty of **Stability** tests.

Alertness Modifier

Some creatures have keener senses than others. They may have heightened senses of smell, or psychic abilities that tell them who is nearby. Alternatively, they may be dense, brutish or even lacking in primary senses.

This variation is represented by the creature's Alertness Modifier. It is added to (or subtracted from) the target difficulty of **Infiltration** tests made when the creature's sensory awareness would be a factor, such as when the players are trying to sneak up on a creature, or are moving around near its lair.

Note that creatures do not have the **Sense Trouble** or **Surveillance** abilities. Players make rolls to evade creatures; creatures do not make rolls to detect players.

Bowel Rake

Some creatures can use their natural weaponry (or objects such as butchers' hooks) to rip their victims open. A creature with this ability can spend two points of **Scuffling** before an attack is made to deal two additional points of **Health** damage in the event of a successful hit.

Chill Grasp

Creatures with this ability can induce exhaustion with a touch, draining the body heat and vital energy from the target. The creature can spend three points of **Scuffling** to make a Chill Grasp attack as its attack for the round. (These points are *not* added to the attack roll.) If it hits, it drains an additional 1d6 points from the victim's **Athletics** pool, as well as dealing **Health** damage as usual. If the victim's **Athletics** pool is empty, any further points are taken from his **Scuffling** pool; if this

introduction

too is empty, then the additional points are taken from his **Health**.

Drowning

Characters plunged into water (or other unbreathable environments such as smoke or poisonous gas) are at risk of drowning.

If a character has advance warning before being immersed, he can hold his breath. A character holding his breath underwater may make an **Athletics** test each round to avoid inhaling water, in addition to anything else he may be doing (such as trying frantically to escape from a creature's grasp). The Difficulty of this test begins at 3 and increases by 1 with every passing round. As soon as the character fails the test, he has inhaled water and begins to drown.

Drowning characters automatically lose 1d6+1 points of **Health** per round, but these lost points can be restored if the victim is rescued and resuscitated before he or she dies.

Grappling

A creature within scuffling range may use its action to make an **Scuffling** contest (opposed by the victim's **Athletics**, **Fleeing** or **Scuffling**, target's choice) and grasp hold of its target. If the creature wins the contest, it deals no damage but has caught the victim and is holding him fast, and continues to do so for as long as its grip lasts. The effects of this grip vary depending on what is doing it. Typically, the effects of a grip (such as Strap Throat's strangulation) do not begin until the creature's next action, so the victim has a chance to break free.

If a character begins his action grappling a target, he may attack that target with **Scuffling**; the target's hit threshold is lowered by 1 in that event. However, the grappler's hit threshold is also lowered by 1 if the person he is grappling attempts to attack him.

The grappled victim may use his action to attempt to free himself from the assailant's grasp by beating the assailant in an **Athletics**, **Fleeing** or **Scuffling** contest (victim's choice).

Health Loss and Death for NPCs

Unlike PCs, monsters and other NPCs cannot continue to function when below zero Health. If their Health is reduced to zero or below, they simply die. Exceptions to this rule are given in the creature's game text.

The GM is, however, at liberty to use the rules for PC injury and death for certain important human NPCs, if this would add to the drama of a given scene.

Investigative Ability Ratings As Difficulty Modifiers

The GM will occasionally encounter situations in which a character needs to use a General Ability to accomplish a difficult task, in such a way that one of her Investigative Abilities is obviously relevant to it. The question to ask is 'Would this character's rating in the Investigative Ability give her an advantage in tackling this challenge that another person would not have?'

In these cases, the *rating* (not the current pool) of the Investigative Ability should be deducted from the target Difficulty of the test in question.

For example, a character who is trying desperately to crack the encrypted security code on a locked bulkhead door (so as to escape before the room floods) might roll **Infiltration** against a target Difficulty of 7 minus her **Cryptography** rating, because her knowledge of **Cryptography** is directly relevant to the dramatic attempt to crack the code. Similarly, a character who is racing against time to clear a jammed rifle before the blood corpses grab her might roll **Mechanics** against a target Difficulty of 6 minus her **Ballistics** rating.

Multiple Attacks

Some creatures have multiple attacks of the same type listed. For example, the Torture Dogs have Drill (+1) and Mandibles (+3), which are both **Scuffling** attacks.

A creature with multiple melee attacks may attack twice on its turn, but it may not expend more

Scuffling points on its second attack than half the amount it spent on its first attack. For example, a Torture Dog could spend 6 points of **Scuffling** on its mandible attack; it could then attack with its drill, but could not expend more than 3 **Scuffling** points on its drill attack.

Creatures sometimes have separate weapons listed for **Shooting** and **Scuffling**. Unless the text specifically states otherwise, they may only use their **Shooting** or their **Scuffling** weapons in a given round. Even having multiple attacks does not allow a monster to use its **Shooting** and **Scuffling** weapons on the same turn.

Rend Armor

A creature with this ability can destroy its target's armor. It does this after a hit is landed and damage rolled. It may sacrifice one point of damage dealt in order to remove one point of armor protection from the target. Armor with no protection left is destroyed.

Spirit Gouge

Some creatures, especially those of a ghostly or incorporeal sort, have the ability to assault the target's life force directly. They inflict no **Health** damage when they attack, but every hit shreds the target's psyche, dealing damage to **Stability** exactly as if it had been **Health**. Some creatures can also recover **Health** in a vampiric manner by these attacks, typically recovering one lost point of **Health** for every point of **Stability** damage dealt.

Stability lost to a Spirit Gouge attack cannot be recovered with the **Shrink** ability. It can, however, be regained naturally over time by recourse to sources of stability (see the **Stability** rules in *Esoterrorists* and *Fear Itself*), so long as the victim has access to his sources of stability.

Characters who drop below zero **Stability** from these attacks lapse into a deep and permanent coma, as described above. They cannot be roused from this coma by any normal means. In game terms, the character is as lost as if he had gone permanently insane.

Stealth Modifier

Creatures have varying levels of stealth. Some are especially quiet, some are small enough to sneak around unseen, some are huge and cumbersome, and some stink so powerfully that they cannot hope to evade detection.

To represent this, when a creature's proficiency with stealth is significantly different from that of a human, a stealth modifier is given. This modifier is added to (or subtracted from) the Difficulty number of any appropriate **Sense Trouble** or **Surveillance** tests made to notice the creature.

Note that creatures and other NPCs do not have the **Infiltration** ability. They never make rolls to avoid detection; players always make rolls to detect *them*.

BLEEDER



A lacerated undead shade, pale as death and tied all over with bandages to keep its wounds closed, the Bleeder is in fact benign in its own twisted way. It has a long face filled with melancholy and dark, watery eyes. It seeks to free humanity from sorrow by using an old-fashioned technique, that of bloodletting. Unfortunately, it often leaves its protégés well schooled in the techniques of self-harm, and unable to cope without this release.

Nobody knows where the Bleeders came from. Some hold that they are distantly related to the Practice, and form a more benevolent branch thereof. Others believe they have a religious rather than a medical background; one student has pointed out the similarities between the bleeders and the early mediaeval Calapechi Sect of Prague, who gave themselves voluntary stigmata (using sharp implements) in order to come closer to God, and considered the shed blood to be holy, sometimes using it to baptize new supplicants or to heal the sick.

Whatever their origin may be, those who have studied them agree on one thing: they attempt to cure the mental ills of humanity by slashing them with blades, so that the 'bad humours' (as they describe them) can leak out. In this, they resemble the doctors of the Middle Ages, who would draw blood with leeches or warm glass cups placed over little cuts. Bloodletting as a therapy has, in fact, gone out of fashion relatively recently; bleeding devices were manufactured up until the late 19th century. It is conceivable that the bleeders have only emerged from hiding as the tradition of remedial bloodletting went into a decline. Certainly, there do not seem to be any conclusive reports of their characteristic activities before 1901.

The bleeders' methods are surprisingly effective. Those who the blade cuts report feeling very little pain, only a mild burning sting like a kitten scratch, followed by waves of gorgeous relief as all the mental pressure that was piling up on top of them bleeds out of their body drop by drop. One analogy crops up again and again in the case notes: the bleeding is like weeping after you have been unable to cry for years. It gets all the pain and grief out of your system.

Ironically, this grisly form of relief from stress is itself addictive and causes more stress if it is not received regularly. Those who are calmed by the blade's cuts begin to crave them. If the bleeder has moved on to a different subject, they almost always start to cut themselves spontaneously in imitation of the healing wounds they received. The gashes of razors are a

poor substitute for the bleeder's gentle blades, but many young people choose the cuts as an alternative to suffering, heedless of the dangers of blood poisoning or excessive blood loss. The self-inflicted wounds still offer *some* relief, but it is never enough.

It is small surprise, then, that some of those who have been 'blessed' by the bleeders and then abandoned eventually choose to escape life itself, with all its attendant pains, by making one or two deep and final cuts. This tendency for the bleeder's visits to end in a suicide has motivated most of the more benign occult organizations (such as the Ordo Veritatis) to consider them a menace. Even if their vague intention is to relieve suffering, the victim is no less dead at the end of it.

The most suspicious of commentators have suggested that the eventual suicide is the *real object* of the bleeder's visitations, the philosophy being to end sorrow on Earth by goading one person after another into self-murder. This may be true, but it contrasts strongly with the bleeders' gentle demeanor and apparent empathy with the most vulnerable.

Police investigators frequently mistake the work of bleeders for slasher crimes, while more occult-minded persons will often jump to the completely erroneous conclusion that the Bleeder is some sort of vampire – probably not a genuine *nosferatu*, but some maniac who has convinced himself that he needs blood to survive, and gashes his victims with a razor to get it in the manner of Romero's *Martin*.

Social workers opt for the more prosaic and obvious conclusion, namely that the victim has inflicted the wounds herself and is one of the many self-harmers who use bloodletting as a coping mechanism. Those who have learnt to self-harm from the bleeders sometimes come into contact with support groups, often in the hope of finding their patron bleeder again, and are dismayed when the other members know nothing of the specters and ridicule them for talking such nonsense.

Some especially troubled souls may prove to be potential bleeders themselves. Those few who have the latent gift are reverently taken to a special sanctuary, where the current bleeders hang them by the ankles and cut them all over, so that they steadily seep out their life into the earth. They hang for 24 hours, after which their spirits arise as Bleeders themselves, while their bodies begin to decompose.

Forensic Pathology: A suicide victim who was previously a candidate for the bleeders' attention will always use razors or knife blades to do away with him or herself. The cause of death is obvious (blood loss) but the pathologist will also notice many smaller, older wounds on the body. Some of these are small and obviously self-inflicted, while the older wounds (those left by the bleeder) are longer and seem to have been incised deeper.

Most notable is the location and direction of the older wounds. They are placed in such a way that the victim could not easily have inflicted them upon himself. For example, a long, thin, pale scar might be found running across the back, or steadily traced across the right shoulder of a right-handed person.

Forensic Psychology: Those who the bleeders visit are never panicked or even scared by the experience. They remember it as a hazy, almost rapturous moment of relief.

A psychologist who speaks to someone before and after they are cut by a bleeder will note a definite improvement in their mental condition. They seem to be less stressed, more at ease in their own skin.

Psychologically speaking, there is practically no distinction between a self-harmer who was inculcated into the practice by the bleeders, and one who self-harms in the ordinary way. The only distinction is that the former exhibits much more of a craving for the blade and never seems to suffer from self-reproach afterwards; there is no consciousness that self-injury is anything but a good and necessary thing.

Pathology: The body of a bleeder subject is usually covered in little wounds, with older, larger ones left from the original bleeder visit, and from any other, more recent visits. See under Forensic Pathology above.

Game Statistics

Athletics 2, Health 14 (when manifest), Medic 8, Scuffling 8, Shrink 16

Hit Threshold: 3

Stealth Modifier: +2 (no contact with ground)

Weapon: +1 (bleeder blade)

Armor: +1 vs. Shooting, +1 vs. Scuffling

Bleeder visits are similar to those vampires are said to

BLEEDER

make. They are active only after dark, usually around the hour of midnight, when they hover outside the windows. They choose to visit those who are especially troubled in mind, such as adolescents who are being persecuted at school, battered wives or stressed, recently divorced men in the throes of a midlife crisis.

Only one in five bleeder protégés is male, though whether this is because the bleeders choose women out of preference or because women suffer in silence more than men do is not yet established.

Bleeders almost never fight. When they do, it is to protect their protégés or guard their physical remains from detection.

Hover: Being ghostly creatures, bleeders can hover in the air.

Scent Tribulation: Bleeders are drawn to psychic angst. A bleeder can tell the approximate **Stability** level of all creatures within half a mile of it, though it cannot sense their precise locations. It can home in on especially troubled people, like a shark scenting blood in the water.

Esoterrorists Note: There have been cases of Ordo Veritatis members (who are more exposed to sanity-shredding horror than most and thus stand out like beacons) forming a strange symbiotic relationship with bleeders, who seem to respect their willingness to suffer for others' peace of mind.

The bleeders will typically make contact after a major investigation that left the agent's sanity badly tattered and use their knives to relieve the agent's suffering psyche. From there on in, the bleeders keep the agent sane, while in return the agent is expected to ensure that the Ordo Veritatis keeps its attentions away from the bleeders and their work. This rapidly turns into a state of dependency for the agent, who begins to rely on the bleeders as a source of stability much as others turn to drink or drugs.

Naturally, such a situation is an absolute disaster for the Ordo Veritatis. An agent who cannot be trusted is a major liability; an agent who collaborates with a supernatural entity is effectively a Fifth Columnist. Those in the know are careful to keep an eye on their fellow agents, to see if any suspicious scratches ever appear.

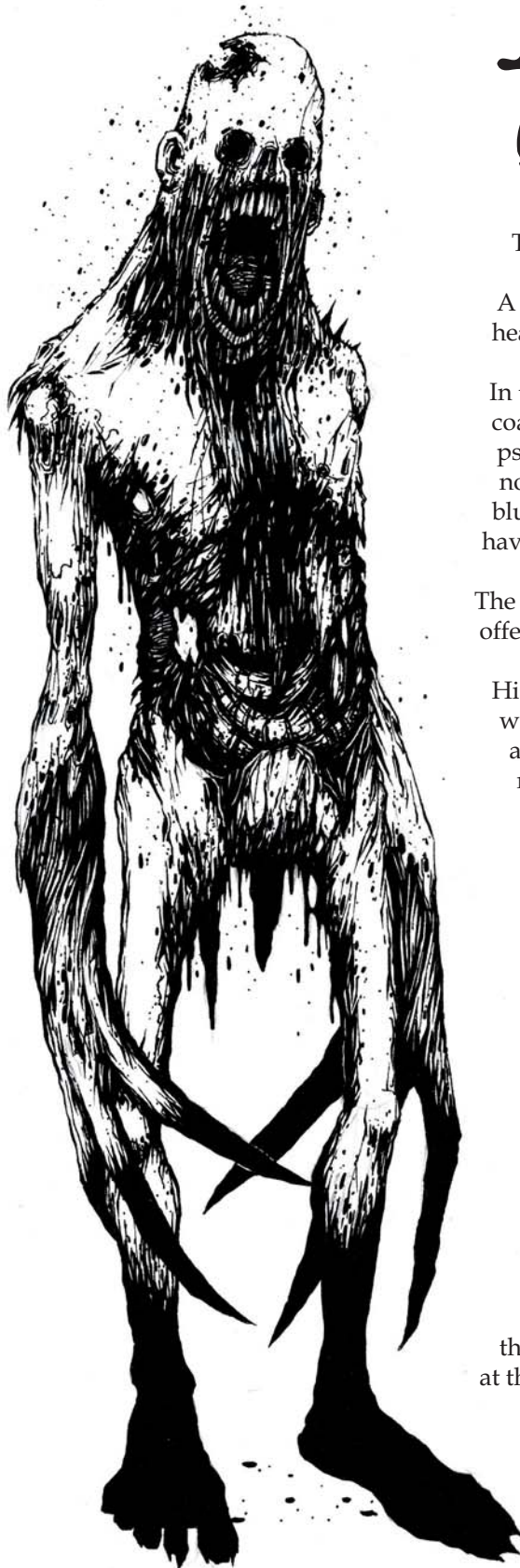
Calming Aura: Despite its startling appearance, the bleeder is not at all frightening. It emits an atmosphere of psychic calm (a sort of mental anesthesia) that puts those around it completely at ease. Unlike other supernatural creatures, seeing a bleeder does not result in **Stability** loss, *unless* it is viewed at a distance, out of the range of its Calming Aura.

It is very hard to force yourself to commit acts of violence when you are in a bleeder's presence. Even the thought of attacking another person or creature seems revolting. A character can force himself to carry out a violent act (such as attacking the bleeder) by willingly spending three points of **Stability**. This gives him freedom to act violently for the remainder of the scene, but not past that.

Incorporeal: The bleeder spends most of its time as a blurred, spectral shape, visible only out of the corner of the eye, or to those with psychic talents. While incorporeal, it ignores physical barriers such as doors and walls, and cannot be harmed. It can only interact with material things (including people) while manifest. It can only manifest between dusk and dawn, and the rays of the sun instantly revert it to incorporeal form.

The only way to destroy a bleeder is to dig up the physical remains and destroy them completely, by fire, acid or similar means. Physical wounds dealt to it while it is manifest just open bloodless gaps in its body. These do not heal, but the Bleeder can stitch them shut to avoid inconvenience. If the bleeder is reduced to zero **Health** while manifest, it immediately becomes incorporeal and cannot manifest again until the next night.

Let Blood: By using its blades to release blood from the target, the bleeder can help the target to cope with mental distress. The bleeder can spend points from its **Shrink** pool to restore lost **Stability** to the target on a one-for-one basis, but for every three points of **Stability** restored in this way, a point of **Health** is lost from the lacerations (to a minimum of one point).



BLOOD CORPSE

This is what I saw.

A back alley in a big city, empty but for wind-blown heaps of trash, food papers and dented cans.

In the shadow of a doorway, a pale figure in a tattered coat. The head is scabbed and flaking as if with psoriasis. A boy is before him, on his knees, probably no more than sixteen. The jacket he wears was once blue. Nights spent sleeping rough in other doorways have grimed it like a garage floor.

The figure rocks the boy back and forth. The boy, limp, offers no resistance.

His name is not important. None of his friends knew what his parents had called him anyway. This is an anonymous place; only the hot meat of the body matters, not the name. On the streets, everything feeds off everything else. You do what you have to, to survive.

Strong fingers dig into the boy's neck in rhythmic spasms of pleasure. There are no witnesses. Only a soft moaning rises and falls with the wind. There is a sound of suction, a grunt of satisfaction. Dribbling and dripping noises follow, a pattering of fluid falling on old newspaper.

Closer to them, a stew of stinks is strong in the air: rot and urine, vomit and cheap vodka, the smells of humanity gone to waste. Where the figure stands, the air is rich and rank with the smell of a butcher's shop window on a hot day. Then, you notice the decay, the sick, intimate, coughed-up lump of stink like a tooth gone rotten in the mouth. The man smells worse than food forgotten at the back of a fridge, sunk to brown liquid and pulp.

The boy is pale. His neck lolls loosely. His mouth hangs open, a thread of saliva trailing from it. Dead eyes look at nothing any more.

Scabbed paw-hands with pulsing veins

grip his shoulders tightly. Claws like two-foot catheters, gray as filthy glass, have speared through the padding of his jacket and into his body cavities. A red bubbling flow races through them, sucked up by the groaning thing. It rocks back and forth, back and forth in its pleasure.

The dead boy's face begins to tighten inwards from the suction. The eyes retreat into the skull. The lips draw back from the teeth in an involuntary grimace. He shrinks and crumples like a deflating rubber toy with bones in. The thing shakes him harder, trying to loosen more fluids from deeper within. It sucks harder and faster.

The boy's body convulses .

There is a rattling gurgle like a child finishing a milkshake.

Slowly, reluctantly, the slick claws withdraw. The body silently gives in to gravity, collapsing backwards into the alley without any fuss. It has nothing of the human about it any more. The limp white carcass is just a thing; cold veal.

The creature's car wreck of a face is happy. It closes the teabag-colored gobs that were eyes. Most of its jaw is hanging off and the lips are burst and ragged, but it smacks them anyway, as if it remembered how it felt to finish a bowl of hot soup on a winter's day.

The coat it wears is sopping with mucus and blood. But for that, it is a naked, rotten bulk of muscle, livid with wriggling veins. Hot blood vessels thread under the skin like fat cables, pulsing, bursting the surface. The little veins under its skin are livid and mobile as mealworms, itching. Those in its arms are swollen massively like sausage balloons, gross, taut and shiny, needing only a touch to burst them. The whole creature throbs. A little blood sprays from the head, like a leak in a garden hose, where there are shallow pink trenches ploughed in the skull. The boy tried to fight.

Later, no doubt, hardened forensic investigators will turn pale when they analyze the necrotic matter under the boy's nails. The skin and flesh belongs to a body that has been dead for months.

- From the diary of Thomas Pepper

This is how I will die.

The thing has me. I hear a popping, tearing sound and feel a searing pain. It only lasts for a second and then a watery giddiness washes over me. My vision mists over. I am floating, weightless. Dimly I recognize that part of my body still burns and there is something stuck, but it feels like someone else's pain. There is a spasm in my lungs and a tickle in my throat, as if I had inhaled water; I cough and an alarming blurt of blood fills your mouth. My limbs tingle, prickle and begin to feel strangely cold. Something is shaking me like a rag doll. I hear a pumping, rushing sound, like the beating of a huge unnatural heart. With every pulse, there is a sharp tug in your guts.

I am fading away, as if you were falling into dark water. The taste of blood is thick in my mouth and I should feel panic, or at least doing something, but I cannot make my arms and legs move. I try to speak but only a bloody gurgle comes out. My head sags. A wave of hot, choking wetness floods into my mouth. The last sight I see is a black dot with a red, shimmering halo, enlarging.

- A note found in the pocket of a dead vagrant

Game Statistics

Athletics 6, Health 8, Scuffling 12

Hit Threshold: 3

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: -1 (vile stench)

Weapon: +1 (Talons)

Armor: +2 vs. Shooting

Blood corpses are putrid blood junkies. They feel the urge for warm life fluids as a constant itch and craving in their puffy veins. All they want is to pump more and more of it in, sucking it up through their needle talons, moaning as they do.

Unlike the shambling zombies of Romero's movies, these creatures are crafty and cunning. They lurk in

places where the dregs of society go, like railway arches where the homeless sleep or dark back streets where sleeping drunks can be snatched up and drained. As they exist to feed, rather than to kill, they don't necessarily feel the need to take on all comers, or fight at a disadvantage. A blood corpse will never mount a last stand unless it is so hungry that it has to drink.

Physically, the blood corpse looks like a tall humanoid with long limbs. Its arms end in huge dagger-like talons, which are hollow and sharp as razors. Depending on its state of decomposition when it arose, its body is either scabbed with mould or has broad craters of leprous corrosion in its flesh, revealing yellow bone. The creature's veins always bulge out visibly and pulse. The vascular system decays much more slowly than the rest of the beast.

The blood corpse will literally drain its victim dry if given the opportunity. Once it enters this perverse euphoria the creature will not attack anyone else, unless in self-defense. It wishes to savor the warm sensation in its veins, undisturbed, for as long as possible.

The creature's ecstasy soon fades. The longer a blood corpse lives, the more often it needs to feed. It no longer gets the same rush as it used to for quite so long and has to hunt several times a night to slake its lust. Some of the more ancient, shriveled corpses keep living victims stored in their lairs, in much the same way that an alcoholic will cache liquor around the house. They then work through each victim in turn, taking up a whole night with an orgiastic binge of blood draining.

All That Remains

Evidence Collection: Tiny fragments of decomposed skin and flesh are sometimes found under the victim's nails, and shed in the immediate area. These prove to be human, though extensively decayed. The imprints of bare human feet can be found when the ground is soft.

Forensic Anthropology: The state of the body of a person killed by a blood corpse depends on whether the beast is able to take its full pleasure from the kill. When the corpse has been interrupted, the body is pallid and contorted. Deep puncture wounds are found at the shoulders or abdomen, the body's bones bent aside or splintered by the intrusion of some stake-like

foreign object. Massive blood loss is evident, with much more blood soaking the clothes than the wounds would ordinarily account for; it oozes liberally from even light scratches. This is because the blood corpse's talons have an anticoagulant effect, causing blood to thin so that it can be sucked up easily.

When the corpse has been able to feast to its full extent, the victim's body is shriveled and stark white. The same wounds are found, their edges ragged, but practically no blood is evident. The tremendous



suction means that some of the softer viscera and body fluids are drained along with the blood, emptying out part of the body cavity as if a gross straw had sucked out the liver and lights.

Forensic Entomology: Although this detail is not, strictly speaking, to do with the use of entomology to determine time of death, an entomologist is bound to pick it up: analysis of the victim's blood detects a similar anticoagulant to that used by blood-draining insects.

Where They Come From: When a person dies in the grip of an addiction or need so strong that it overwhelms their thoughts and blots out their personality, the craving can sometimes hold the diseased spirit bound to the body.

The first recorded blood corpses were dead Roman aristocrats, who perished weeping because they would never see the games, or watch slaves butcher an actor in a degenerate performance of *The Bacchae*. Blood corpses in the Middle Ages were often starving peasants, who died whining for a moldy crust of bread, or flagellant monks addicted to prayer and the pursuit of God. In later years, they arose when men and women addicted to drink or vice died in bedlam, their minds rotted by their insatiable desires. The blood corpses of the modern era (and there are many more than there used to be) are most likely to be the result of death through drug overdose, when an addict just could not cram enough sweet satisfaction into his veins.

A blood corpse can result from *any* fatally compulsive behavior. There is even one straggle-haired horror roaming abroad, stalking the streets after dark and preying on happy women. Her bulimia killed her, and she now binges on hot blood instead of on chocolate bars.

Intelligence Level: Blood corpses are cunning but not especially intelligent. They instinctively hide during the day and keep to the shadows at night. Some wear remnants of clothing, so they can be mistaken for derelicts at a distance.

Much as it was in life, their psychology is one of overpowering need. Blood is everything; they must get it. They are not able to think much beyond this, nor can they make complicated plans or anticipate the behavior of others.

Blood Drain: The blood corpse can drain blood from its victim, slurping it up through its feeding tubules. By spending additional **Scuffling** points prior to making an attack, it can inflict an additional point of **Health** damage on the victim, to a maximum of three points. These additional points are *not* added to the corpse's Scuffling roll, and if the attack misses, they are wasted. **Health** pool points lost from blood drain are added to the corpse's own **Health** pool.

Next round, the impaled victim must succeed in an opposed **Athletics** or **Scuffling** contest (victim's choice) against the blood corpse to pull the talons out. If the victim fails in doing this, the blood corpse may spend Scuffling pool points to drain **Health** points from the victim on a one for one basis, again to a maximum of three points per round.

A blood corpse that succeeds in draining blood goes into a state of rapture. This euphoric glory lasts for one hour, unless the corpse was unable to drain less than 3 points of **Health**, in which case it lasts for 15 minutes. The corpse will not attack during this phase, except to continue feeding from a target that it is latched on to.

Track Blood: Blood corpses can sniff out even tiny amounts of freshly spilled blood, such as from a wound, or even a nosebleed, within 30 feet by sense of smell. If the source of the scent is upwind, the range increases to 60 feet; if downwind, it drops to 15 feet. For the purposes of this ability, fresh blood is that has been shed no longer than one hour before.

When the blood corpse sniffs blood on the air, the exact location of the source is not revealed but only its presence somewhere within range. The corpse can always tell the direction of the scent. Whenever the corpse comes within arm's reach of the source, it can immediately tell the source's location, unless the source has successfully hidden. This is hard to do; a blood corpse gains a +2 Alertness Modifier when bleeding or bloodied characters are attempting **Infiltration** tests to hide from it.

Blood corpses can also track creatures that are bleeding or that have blood on them. The promise of fresh blood also gives it a surge of energy, allowing it to run faster. Evading a pursuing blood corpse is thus very difficult; when characters who are bleeding or bloodied are trying to flee from a blood corpse using **Fleeing** or **Athletics**, the corpse rolls against a Difficulty of 3 rather than 4.

BLOSSOMER

***Explanatory Note:** The following is an amateur transcript of an .mp3 file, **blossom.mp3**, which purports to be a genuine police interview. It was uploaded to the Web in September 2002 and makes its first appearance in a binaries newsgroup, [alt.sex.cthulhu](#).*

It has since become something of an urban legend. Most sources deem it to be a hoax, almost certainly the work of drama students. The supposed names of the persons involved and the context were derived from a very small .txt file uploaded along with the sound clip. These are the most telling evidence of a fake, since no research has yet turned up police officers with the given names; moreover, the interview does not appear to follow standard police procedure – there is, for example, no parent, guardian or responsible adult present, although “Sandy” is obviously of school age, and probably quite young, given her use of the word “tummy”. The voices have Scottish accents.

The furor surrounding the item has long since died down and only a few websites still keep it archived. There is one discussion group dedicated to the clip, on which self-appointed experts argue with one another at length about who was ultimately responsible for it.

From: Gareth Michaelis (kakraf00n@hotmail.com)

Subject: Blossomer mp3 transcript

Newsgroups: [alt.sex.cthulhu](#)

Date: 2002-09-22 00:14:56 PST

Interview 4.22.02 with Sandra P. Bickenstaff

Present: Det. Insp. Crockford, Sgt. Manfrey



Interview 4.22.02
with Sandra P.
Bickenstaff

CROCKFORD : Sandy, we know this is difficult, but we need to ask you some questions. We need to ask you about the school, about the group you and your friends started. The group Mr. Wabe made you start. We've got him now, Sandy. He's in custody. You're safe. You can tell us anything you want to, now.

(Silence)

Sandy, can you tell us what happened to Stephen?

BICKENSTAFF : No.

CROCKFORD : Why not?

BICKENSTAFF : I don't have the words. Nobody does.
(pause) It was too beautiful.

CROCKFORD : Beautiful?

BICKENSTAFF : What he did. For me. For all of us. It was his precious love. Sacrament. He gave himself.

CROCKFORD : Did they make you take drugs, Sandy?

(Silence)

Did Mr. Wabe make you do anything?

(Silence)

MANFREY (aside) : She's taking the piss, Jack. She's not telling us anything.

CROCKFORD : But she will. Just give us time. Sandy? Stephen was your boyfriend, wasn't he? We think he may be in trouble. We think you know something that can help us find him. Will you help us?

BICKENSTAFF : (laughs) You think he's dead, don't you?

CROCKFORD : Why don't you tell us, Sandy? Tell us what happened at the school.

BICKENSTAFF : You keep calling me that. Sandy is gone. I am Sister Sardonica now. (Muttering) It is right that you ask questions and that I answer them. I bear witness.

CROCKFORD : That's not a real name, is it, Sandy?

That's one of the role-playing characters you like to pretend to be, isn't it? In your game?

BICKENSTAFF : Stupid fat man. You don't understand anything. You will. When the babies come.

(Manfrey sighs audibly. Someone lights a cigarette.)

CROCKFORD : Sandy, do you remember Mr. and Mrs. Leverson? (Pause.) That's right. They're Stephen's parents. You have to understand that they're very worried about him. They desperately want him to come home. Can you help us find him?

BICKENSTAFF : You will never find him. He's in my tummy. He is in all our tummies.

CROCKFORD : (gently) It's Stephen's baby you're carrying, isn't it?

BICKENSTAFF : No. (laughs) Yes.

CROCKFORD : Sandy, what did Stephen do to you?

(Silence)

Yes, have a cigarette if it would help. Take your—

BICKENSTAFF : You corpulent, patronizing bag of pus. Stephen no longer exists. (She begins to speak in a flat monotone, as if reciting from memory.) Mr. Wabe held him down on the altar we made from one of the school filing cabinets. He did not scream as he was tied down. He did not scream as Jennifer Mackauley bit off his big toe with her buckteeth. He did not scream as little Gavin Prendle pulled out his tendons like gummy worms. He bit through his tongue but he never screamed once.

(sounds of sucking and exhalation)

We pinched his arteries shut and held them that way to keep the life within him. You cannot tie them off. Blasphemy, that is. Then Cathy and Penny and I did our part as it is written. We broke his thighbones tenderly and sucked the marrow and passed it back and forth between us in reverent mouthful kisses. Mr. Wabe did the readings. He is awfully good at that, you know. We picked Stephen's veins from our teeth and swallowed lumps of the

gristle from behind his knees, and though some of us gagged, we held to our duty, just as he held to his. Mr. Wabe had the honour to tear off his phallus with his teeth. I had the first bite of the glistening musculature where it had been. His face was the face of a man in rapture. Your dead boy nailed to a stick had no idea.

CROCKFORD : Jesus. Jesus Christ.

BICKENSTAFF : (*high-pitched giggles*) Wouldn't say that name if I were you. Baby doesn't like it. *Do you, now, sweetheart? Do you?*

CROCKFORD : Get... get her out of here. Interview concluded nineteen oh seven.

BICKENSTAFF : We did right. We kept him alive and it heard us. And then he got up on his arms. His eyes filled with holy (?) and his guts all spillin'. He got up and he did it to us. With his *face*. Over and over.

CROCKFORD : I said get her *out!* I don't want to look at that b—

(With an abrupt clunk, the recording ends. If the volume is turned up high enough, you can hear that while Crockford speaks, Bickenstaff is whispering the same words again and again. Distortion makes them hard to discern but the general consensus is that these words are either 'All of us' or 'A vassal'.)

Game Statistics

Athletics 10, Health 6, Scuffling 8

Hit Threshold: 5 (small and elusive)

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: +1

Weapon: +0 (Fists)

Armor: +2 vs. Shooting, +2 vs. Scuffling, but only when impregnating harem (see below)

Most demonic cults are nothing more than pleasure-seekers looking to break a few taboos and get kicks. They have no real magical power at their disposal

and do not succeed in anything more than shocking their parents, which is usually their intention. Trash like this is of no use to the legions of the damned. A few rare cults have genuine connections to the Outer Black. If these manage to prove their worth, both by making offerings and by using their cunning to go undetected (the demons have no use for the stupid or the careless) then they may be chosen for a rare and wonderful honor. This is the Blossomer Host ritual.

Qualifying for the Blossomer Host is not an easy task. Thirteen or more devotees must have been established an active, mixed-sex, demon-worshipping group, and have managed to perform bloody sacrificial rites for at least a year, without discovery. They need not have a single meeting place; what matters is they smear an image of their patron demon with innocent blood again and again, while howling praises to it. The blood of a family member is the most prized, but any blood will do. When the group has earned sufficient merit without making any stupid mistakes, then its patron will send a sign that it is ready to blossom inside the cult's female members.

For this, the demon needs a host, usually a high-ranking male member of the cult who is willing to die for the cause. The ritual can only succeed if volunteer expires from blood loss; so he needs to stay alive until he does so, thus he prepares himself thoroughly, whether by meditation, contemplation and privation, or with self-debasing excesses – drugs, drink, certain sex acts, and violence (traditions vary). Then, when his cult decides that it is time, he gives his life to his patron. The group places him on an altar and begins to eat his body, from the waist down, using only their teeth and fingernails. If the volunteer can stay conscious and willing, and survive the pain and the shock, his patron sends a demonic agent into the sacrifice's body at the moment he is exsanguinated. The cult continues its feast until they have gobbled up everything below the ribcage, at which point, the corpse comes to life as a blossomer.

The demon/host will then – apparently orally – impregnate all female members of the cult. These women will then give birth to daemonic servants – perfect hybrids of human flesh and demonic spirits (see the entry below for the daemonic servants). These children, once grown to maturity and gifted with the powers of their heritage, will then go out into the world and draw new followers to the cult.

Once the blossomer has impregnated all the available

women, the mothers-to-be eat the remainder of its body; as the unnatural fetuses need their father's demon-enriched flesh to develop properly.

Appearance and Behavior

The blossomer is little more than a human corpse that is terminated at the waist. Although it pads around on its hands, dragging shreds of intestine and skin around, it is surprisingly swift and assured; the creature can scuttle across a floor and scramble up a wall with ease.

The blossomer's only function is to create demon babies, and it will only fight in furtherance of this aim. If anything is impeding it from mating with a cult member, it will attack the obstacle, and if anyone attempts to interrupt it, it will fight back but, otherwise, it will ignore everything apart from the next available woman. When it has finished, it becomes inert, and waits for the cultists to eat it.

Resilience: The presence of the demonic spirit within the blossomer's dead tissues gives it unnatural resilience to physical injury. While it is impregnating its harem, it gains +2 armor versus **Shooting** and **Scuffling** alike.

Swiftness: The blossomer's staggering, ungainly motion gives no hint of its ability to launch itself through the air on its powerful arms. If it is chasing a potential victim or fleeing capture, it rolls **Athletics** against a difficulty number of 3 rather than 4.

Impregnation Madness: The victim of a blossomer's impregnation suffers a massive assault on her sanity. Immediately following impregnation, she must make a 15-point **Stability** test.

If the victim ends up with **Stability** 0 or less, descent into madness immediately follows. The victim can still attempt to converse rationally but lapses into babbling or monotonous chanting after a few sentences. It is possible to relieve this madness by using the **Shrink** ability, as usual. Use of **Forensic Psychology** detects that the victim is not suffering from conventional mental illness, but from some sort of exaggerated trauma to the psyche such as is found in those who have been drugged and tortured by professionals.

If the victim ends up with **Stability** -6 or less, then she withdraws into herself. She neither speaks nor notices her surroundings, but spends the rest of her life rocking back and forth. It is possible, though much more difficult, to heal this condition. **Shrink** tests to treat it are made against a difficulty of 5 rather than 4.

All That Remains

The blossomer ritual can provide an investigation team with hours of grisly work.

Evidence Collection: The most evidence-rich location is always the 'altar' on which the blossomer is initially partly devoured. Bone, muscle and skin are eaten, but some blood inevitably escapes, and is found spattering the ground beneath, mingled with saliva. If an uncontaminated saliva sample is found, it may be possible to identify the source's blood type if that person was a secretor (one of the roughly one-in-four people who secrete tiny amounts of blood into their saliva).

Forensic Anthropology: This ability establishes the cause of the blossomer's death as blood loss. If the ritual was interrupted and the uneaten carcass of the blossomer recovered, the tissues degenerate at roughly five times the usual rate, as if they were being digested from within. If the plot requires it, this ability can also reveal characteristic bite mark patterns where the tissues have been eaten away, which can help to confirm the identity of cult members.

In the event of an interrupted ritual, some of the traumatized cult members will vomit up undigested blossomer flesh, answering the question of what happened to the other half of the corpse's body. This flesh disintegrates rapidly, as does the rest of the corpse.

Pathology: Examination of the expectant mother reveals abnormally high white blood cell count and high temperature, as if the body were trying to fight off an infection. However, the mother appears to be in perfect physical health otherwise. If samples of uterine fluid are taken during the first trimester, they show frenzied activity by unidentifiable cells, which disappear completely later in the pregnancy.

Interrogation/Reassurance: If one of the members of a blossomer cult is confident that she has played her part to the full and that she will be rewarded, she may comply fully with an interrogation (or a more considerate interview, under the banner of **Reassurance**) purely to gloat and torment the listeners. She will, however, only persist in this if the listeners seem disgusted or horrified. If they receive the information passively, she will clam up again. This behavior naturally

leads some to believe that the whole account is a fabrication, intended to shock. See the police transcript above for an example of such an interrogation.

Demonic Servants

The offspring of a blossomer resemble ordinary human children at first but their rate of growth and development is staggeringly greater. They age at a rate of five years for every year that passes, gaining knowledge and insight whether they have been formally educated or not. Their subtle connections to the demonic realms grant them intelligence that human children have to earn.

In four years, when they are apparently twenty, they begin to age normally. They are usually black-haired and green-eyed, with a talent for sadism that puts that of normal children to shame; they will happily pull a beggar to pieces to find out how he works, or drown a playmate for fun. As the demonic children can attract unwelcome attention by growing up so quickly, they are usually kept in the cult's protection until they are of age.

Their hybrid origin gives them unusual robustness and sensory sensitivity. As a result, they tend to have abnormally high **Athletics**, **Health** and **Sense Trouble** ratings. They may also have aberrant physical characteristics, such as a forked tongue or small bumps on the brow where horns might one day break through. Only characters who specifically state that they are closely examining the demon-children's features may notice these deformities. If they represent an essential piece of information to the unfolding plot, then any character with **Natural History** or **Pathology** gains the clue automatically. If not, the character must spend 1 point of **Natural History** or **Pathology** to make this horrible discovery.

If a character recognizes the demon-child's true nature while he is in its presence (or encounters the demon-child at a later stage, once he is aware of its nature) he must make a four-point **Stability** test, as appropriate for meeting a supernatural creature.

Interrupting the Ritual

The blossomer ritual is horrific and protracted, and its results are by no means certain; the sacrifice might die prematurely, or the congregation might inadvertently touch his body with something other than their own naked bodies. Both of these circumstances terminate the ritual immediately, and win the cult their patron's disapproval; at the very least, they must work long and hard to earn another chance to host a blossomer.

Outside interference can be, if anything, even more catastrophic. The disruption of a ritual by the cult's enemies, whether rival co-religionists, demon-hunters, or mundane authorities like the police or the army, or even local vigilantes, threatens the failure of the patron's plans. The celebrants will stop at nothing to keep this from happening. Once they are alerted to an external threat, the female members of the cult will attempt to consume the sacrifice as quickly as they can, while taking all appropriate steps to repel the enemy. If the demon has possessed the corpse before the attackers break in, the men will fight to the death to give the demon time to impregnate the women, and for them to escape with – then eat – the blossomer. If the invaders get through the defensive perimeter and begin to interfere with the creature, the women will fight them while the monster carries on impregnating its worshippers. If the cult's opponents obstruct or attack the blossomer, it will fight them off (see *Appearance and Behavior*, above).

If the attack is successful, and the ritual fails, the cultists must make 15-point **Stability** tests to avoid intense psychological and psychic trauma; this has the same in-game effects as *Impregnation Madness* (above); they have failed their patron, who is royally displeased with them. The uneaten remains of the blossomer putrefy five times more quickly than they should, and show an obvious cause of death; blood loss.

Should a cultist miscarry (which can only happen following a disrupted ritual), the fetus looks strange and lumpy (see the *Demon Fetus in a Jar*, in the *artifacts* section).

Any children born to mothers who failed to eat part of the blossomer are human, but seem slightly odd. They have oddly charismatic personalities and tend to draw others to them. **Forensic Psychology** detects signs of megalomania formed from deep-rooted delusions of grandeur, as if the child had a profound sense of destiny.

CLOOTIE



The Clickety Man, by Rowan MacKenzie, aged 8

Where I used to live it was very old. All the houses were old. There was no school only a church. We used to have lessons in the church and Mrs. Wilson did the lessons. We used to play in the street but we were not allowed to when it was dark. When it was dark you had to go and say your prayers and close your eyes very very tight and then go straight off to sleep. You weren't allowed to look out into the village.

If you did look then the clickety man could get you. The clickety man is all gray and wet and he has hooks instead of hands. He has a proper name but I always call him the clickety man. He makes a clickety noise with the hooks. It is like when Dad carves the turkey at Christmas.

Nobody used to come and see us on the island. We weren't famous for anything. That meant we were poor. Some people wanted tourists to come but most of them didn't. In the end the people who wanted it to be different just moved away.

There was one person who came to see us. Sometimes this English man would come. He had glasses and no hair and smelled like pencils. He used to talk into a tape recorder and get us to sing songs or tell stories. Then he would look happy and go away. Granddad once sang a rude song that sailors used to sing and the man liked that very much. They didn't think I understood it but I did. We used to make up stories and tell them to the tape recorder man. We only ever told him made up things. We didn't tell them about the clickety men or other real things like the gulpies.

I used to have a little sister Becky but I don't any more. She stayed out too late and didn't come home and the clickety man got her and took her away. When we found her she was all white and her eyes were empty. They took her away to the mainland and put her in a hospital and now she has all machines around her. She can't do a wee on her own or even eat. That's why we came here and I went to the new school. My mummy wants to be near Becky. She cries a lot and has got very thin. Daddy sometimes gets cross and has to shake her to make her stop crying.

There aren't any clickety men here. You can't hear the sea. It's never dark because there are lights in the street. Perhaps if all the lights went out then

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the clickety men could come here too.

Comments:

This seems to be a version of the 'hooks for hands' archetype that I hadn't heard before. Anyone else know what the 'clickety man' could be? Is this just some Scots version of the Hook?

- from the Urban Legends website, friendofafriend.org

All That Remains

Evidence Collection: The clootie never leaves any physical evidence of itself behind; any detached part reverts to seawater. The deceased's clothes are always drenched in seawater, sometimes with particles of weed or sand grains, so it is common for an initial examination to give the impression that the body was washed up from the sea.

Forensic Anthropology: The clootie's hooks tear rents in the body, so victims die quickly from blood loss and shock. As there is no water in the lungs, the assumption is that the victim was killed on land, then dumped in the water.

Pathology: The victims of clootie attacks are often in profound shock and exhibit symptoms of exposure. If the clootie has used its spirit gouge attack, the victim is usually mute and withdrawn and will reflexively curl into the fetal position like a person undergoing a breakdown. Examination of the victim's body reveals strange red lesions on the torso, which behave like skin rashes.

Anyone who loses his soul altogether to a spirit gouge attack lapses into a coma. Examination of surviving victims reveals no apparent physical cause beyond the red lesions mentioned above, which remain livid and do not fade over time. The victim then proceeds, irreversibly, to waste away. Even when they are given nutrients, they still appear sallow and continue to starve. Brain activity is erratic and unpredictable.

I cannot sleep. I hide my face
From surf and swell and blow
Since I have seen the queer gray men
That nightly come and go.
The village squats in sodden dusk
With sea-mist draped, and drear.
And aye the waves, and aye the waves
Come rushing far and near.
When every door is locked and barred
And every curtain drawn
Tis then they come, unseen, but heard.
Forsook. Forgot. Forlorn.
The old know better than to look.
The young are fast abed.
But I, with lonely cynic's pride
And science in my head,
I looked. I shall not look again.
For yet I see them pass,
The hollow faces of the drowned
In mist beyond the glass.

- Fragment of verse by A. P. Morton-
Blunkett, 1921, discovered with his body.
The poet hanged himself in the room
he was renting with a family on the
Scottish island of Islay, where he had
gone to seek inspiration.

Game Statistics

Athletics 4,

Health 10, Scuffling 20

Hit Threshold: 4

Stealth Modifier: +1 (very quiet movement)

Weapon: +2 (Hooks)

Armor: +2 vs. Scuffling, +1 vs. Shooting

What They Are

Clooties, sometimes referred to as 'Auld Clootie', are ancient water spirits that exist on the islands off the west coast of Scotland. The locals believe them to be the wandering souls of dead sailors who have died centuries ago. The island villagers respect the clooties but fear them, so dissuade tourists from visiting their region.

During the daylight hours and all through the summertime, the clooties are not seen; there is always someone who will wonder whether they will stay away for good this time. Inevitably, in the dark months of the year, the clooties drag themselves out from the sea at night and wander into the village. The reason for these nocturnal visitations can only ever be guessed at. Perhaps they simply want to witness the ways of the living and remember what they have lost.

The clooties never physically interact with the environments they visit. Instead, they look, listen, remember and then go back into the sea. These visitations are, nonetheless, terrifying. According to legend, one must never look upon an approaching clootie or else it will steal away the soul and drag it down into the sea, forever.

These creatures have voices like those of old men, and make low drawn-out sorrowful moans wherever they go. Although they are wrongly believed to be the souls of dead men, these monsters are fey, not undead.

Despite the terrifying nature of clooties, the older members of the village community know that their visits are just part of the way things are and will resent any attempt to do away with them. Angering the creatures can bring grim retribution. The sea has

CLOOTIE

claimed more than one village overnight, with monstrous waves flooding inland and drowning the settlement forever. Legends tell that the church bells of sunken villages can still be heard ringing under the water.

Bowel Rake: Clooties can use their hooks to rip grisly trenches in victims' bodies. A clootie can spend two points of **Scuffling** before an attack is made to deal two additional points of **Health** damage in the event of a successful hit.

Rend Armor: A clootie can also use its hooks to shred armor. It does this after a hit is landed and damage rolled. It may sacrifice one point of damage dealt in order to remove one point of armor protection from the target. Armor with no protection left is destroyed.

Disincorporation: Physical damage cannot destroy a clootie. Reducing its **Health** to zero causes it to collapse into a gush of salt water, which then trickles away back to sea. The clootie can then manifest again on another night.

The only way to rid a region of clooties is to depopulate it: Some villages where they used to walk in years past have simply died out and turned into ghost towns, as the people have migrated away. The clooties no longer wander these streets, as there is nothing for them to look at and remember. Of course, should people move back, the creatures might very well return.

PCs might want to try to expel the monsters, using whatever passes for powerful magic or religious faith in the GM's campaign world. This might very well work, depending on the GM's whims although, there is, of course no way to know whether such an act has been effective.

Dreadful Gaze: The clootie's empty-eyed gaze fills any person who sees it with deep terror, as if freezing ocean currents were moving through his bones. The clootie may opt to stare at a character instead of attacking. Any person so stared at must immediately make a 4-point **Stability** test. This test must be made afresh on every occasion on which the clootie uses its gaze. Characters who acquire mental illnesses as a result of this **Stability** loss usually become hydrophobic, with a particular fear of the sea.

The clootie can tell when a person is averting his gaze. It will not molest anyone who does so, neither with its gaze nor with its hooks. There is no risk of an accidental gaze attack happening if a person is deliberately refusing to look. So long as a person does not look at the clootie, it will not do anything to harm him, even if it comes close enough to brush against him.

Fearful Howl: When the clooties raise their voices and howl, a thrill of pure fear goes through those who hear the sound. Their strength floods out of them like water. All those who hear the noise must make a 2-point **Stability** test. If they fail, they also lose a point of **Health** through uncanny physical exhaustion. Clooties usually only howl once per night, when they first come up out of the sea and trudge up the beach.

Spirit Gouge: The clootie can choose to rake the victim's spirit instead of his body if it wishes. In this case the hooks tear away shreds of the victim's very life force. They inflict no **Health** damage, but every hit shreds the target's psyche, dealing damage to **Stability** exactly as if it had been **Health**. The hook blows leave red weals when they gouge the spirit, which look fearsome but do no physical damage.

The clootie can recover one lost point of **Health** for every point of **Stability** it shreds.

Stability lost to the clootie's Spirit Gouge attack cannot be recovered with the **Shrink** ability. It can, however, be regained naturally over time by recourse to sources of stability (see the **Stability** rules in *Esoterrorists* and *Fear Itself*), so long as the victim has access to his sources of stability.

Characters who drop below zero **Stability** from these attacks lapse into a deep and permanent coma, as described above. They cannot be roused from this coma by any normal means. In game terms, the character is as lost as if he had gone permanently insane.



DEATH TAPPER



The prison cell was old, an adobe relic of past colonialism, although someone had painted the inside yellow earlier in the week. Several flies had become stuck in the tacky paint and died there; living ones buzzed at the barred window. Rush mats barely covered the excrement-streaked floor. An energy-efficient fluorescent bulb glowed behind a wire bound shade. The table, arguably of World War Two vintage, was stained, pitted and burnt; pale wood showed through where prisoners, pulling against their restraints, had cut into the veneer. The metal chair, once securely bolted down, now prone to shifting and rocking, was more recent, perhaps 1960s, perhaps a gift from the Soviets. The crocodile clips, cables, multi-socket extension lead, transformer, induction coil and soldering iron were new, recently ordered online, as was the bonded leather pilot's case that they traveled in.

There were three African men in the hot fug. Two, one in a cream linen suit and one in a sand uniform, stood over the third, the one in rags, the one stained with feces, urine, mucus, drool and blood, who had slithered off the chair and slumped to the floor..

The guard was nervous and wanted to leave. He cradled his machine pistol in sweaty hands. He'd always regarded himself as a hard man, but the smell of paint and filth was making him feel sick; the prisoner had been tortured earlier in the afternoon and had fouled himself.

The man in the suit was sleek, unfit and well fed. He was self-consciously, fussily stylish; even indoors, he affected a pair of mirrored aviator shades. He smoked *Gitanes* and carried a heavy cane. The man in front of him was sprawled crookedly, as if his arms and legs had been put in the wrong way.

'People in your village are making trouble for us. They say you have spoken to them of curses. They say that you have told them to kill the Government soldiers. Is this true?'

The skinny, wretch on the mat said nothing. The man in the suit began to remove his jacket and tie, folding them fastidiously. He held them out to the guard who, momentarily at a loss, slung his weapon, and took the clothes. They smelled of sweat and cologne.

'They want the land and they shall have the land,' said the man who, theatrically, drew a heavy vinyl apron from his case, and put it on. He rolled up his shirtsleeves. He picked up his cane, and patted his palm with the weighted handle. He addressed himself to his prisoner. 'You must give up your crops. Do you not care that your neighbors are starving? Are you that selfish?'

The shrunken figure on the floor did not move. Only his lips moved, soft and spittleless, mouthing silently. Then his white teeth began to click together, in a curious rhythm; *tick, tick-tick-tick-tick, tick.*

With a grunt, the man brought his cane down. There was a muffled crunch and a wet squelch. The stick came back bloody; the torturer's forearms his apron and the wall were covered with crimson spots. He hit twice more.

The guard at the door looked carefully away. There was a cracking, then a final wet sound, like rotten fruit being thrown against a wall. The guard thought of cold beers and of the wife who would be cooking for him by now. He felt guilty to think of her face in this place of blood and shit.

The noises of killing had stopped. There was only a sound of heavy panting. The guard looked again. Nothing was left but an impression of spindly limbs and mess. The guard thought of burst insects smeared across the windshield of a truck.

The man in the suit poked at the corpse with his foot. 'I am not afraid of you. You were nothing but an old man. There is no place for witch doctors in *my* Mabutu.' Sweat ran from him in fat drops. Dampness stained his shirt in wide underarm circles. He was shaking like a leaf. The guard knew that it was from exertion. The man was not scared. The guard bit his lip, because he was terrified. He believed that a very bad thing had happened, and that worse was to come.

The man in the suit dressed and left the room without a word. The guard went to follow him. Knowing that it was a bad idea, the guard looked back from the doorway. With his head split and lolling at an impossible angle, the old man was clearly dead. His jaws were still champing reflexively, the teeth clicking slowly like an clock work toy running down. The guard turned away, then something like a clot of blood groped from under the bloodied tongue, legs wavering. The guard ran.

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Later that night, the man who had worn the suit was drinking scotch, smoking a Cuban cigar and reading a pornographic magazine; whores were suddenly in short supply, so he had resigned himself to masturbating alone in a large bed, reclining on a mound of pillows. It was a hot night, and power did not buy air conditioning, so his window was open to the night and to the sound of dance music. He licked a finger and turned a page. He heard a faint ticking sound, like an old, electrocuted, beaten man's teeth chattering. He was not superstitious and blamed it on the plumbing, then something scalded his leg like a drop of molten solder and he threw away his magazine with a shriek.

There was a reddish-black thing stuck to his thigh, something the size of a groundnut; it looked like an inflamed growth. Repelled, he took it between finger and thumb and to his horror it wriggled under his fingers. He reached for his cigar, and thrust it at the creature. Unlike a grotesque tick, it did not fall off, but tore its mouth parts free, and jumped across the room. He sat up, reaching for a heavy glass ashtray; his blood ran freely from a new wound in his leg, staining the starched white sheets. An angry hissing came from the insect and tiny legs scabbled.

The man caught the bug between the ashtray and the carpet, scraped it off on the window frame. He was angry that it had made him cry out like a woman. (He had once had a botfly larva under his scalp; he was not squeamish.) In the bathroom, he found surgical alcohol and swabbed at the stinging wound. Yellowish ooze seeped from it, as if it had become infected in seconds. His head began to throb, the pulsing veins like a tight headband.

He had a glass of whiskey and lay back down.

Ten minutes later he was sliding down the wall of the shower, to collapse to his knees, like a pathetic supplicant, pleading for his life, his forehead pressed against the cool bathroom tile. The water, cold was running at full blast. He vomited. He had already vomited eight times; his stomach was in spasm, pumping like a second heart. This time, the substance ejected from his guts was thick and mucilaginous. The matter slowly washed towards the plughole. There seemed to be nothing left to throw up.

His nausea subsided. He was calm, blissfully calm. He breathed deeply, then there was a quaking in his stomach and he exploded in scarlet fury from the mouth as if he had been punched. His mouth could open no wider. The tendons cracked. The gush of fluid ebbed, then with a deeper gurgle, an amazing spray of gore and bile drenched the white ceramic walls.

The trucks did not leave the village laden with cassava. The village did not eat well, but its people had enough. No one asked any questions. The new governor was a superstitious man and knew when to leave well enough alone. He was afraid and the people respected him for it.

All That Remains

Evidence Collection: Discovering the corpse of a person who has died from Churning Rot is always a stomach-turning event. There is an overpowering stench of bile, fecal matter and blood. The victim usually purges his bowels several times in various places before finally collapsing. The expelled bodily substances contain a decreasing level of stomach contents and an increasing level of blood and deteriorated stomach lining as the victim staggers towards his final point of death.

Forensic Anthropology: Much of the viscera, in a disintegrated state, have usually been expelled from the mouth. They are in a semi-liquid state, with the tougher tissues softened and turned into a jelly-like substance. Without this liquefaction, it would be impossible for the internal organs to be propelled from the body, as they are too large to pass through the throat.

Several feet of prolapsed intestine typically protrude from the anus. The substance of the intestine is perished and eaten away as if by acid damage, not torn. In the near vicinity, having been expelled anally, are the majority of the large intestine and the small intestine. In some cases, when the victim has not been discovered for some time, the skin is also partly liquefied in the same manner that the viscera are. Organs that have been partially liquefied become semitransparent, including the skin.

Forensic Entomology: The point at which the Death Tapper latched on to the victim is always obvious. It is clearly a puncture mark of some kind; a raised, reddish crater an inch across, with a suppurating core. As it is inevitably found above a blood vessel, an entomologist will identify this at once as an insect bite rather than a wound from a blowpipe or dart gun. The tissues are inevitably too deteriorated to establish what sort of proboscis caused the wound.

Pathology: Medical examination of a person suffering from Churning Rot gives different results depending on how far advanced the disease is. In the initial vomiting stage, the victim exhibits symptoms indistinguishable from severe gastroenteritis. The later appearance of blood in the vomit and feces, along with skin lividity in the lower abdomen, indicates internal hemorrhaging;

this suggests either that a sharp object has worked its way into the bowel, or that the victim has swallowed a corrosive agent.

Game Statistics

Athletics 20, Health 2, Scuffling 8 (special)

Hit Threshold: 6 (tiny and agile)

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +2 (tiny)

Weapon: Special (Proboscis)

Armor: +3 vs. Scuffling

This minute creature resembles a bloated, repulsive flea. It is in fact a demon, capable of injecting a deadly agent that will kill its victim in a matter of hours. The death tapper is so called because of the knocking sound that comes from its abdomen. This noise indicates that the demon is making a dose of the fluid that acts as a vector for the disease attack. .

The death tapper lands on its victim and bites him, thus infecting him with a disease known as The Churning Rot. Churning Rot begins with violent diarrhea and vomiting. Once the victim sheds the contents of its stomach and bowels, the virus starts to liquefy his organs. The victims dies conscious and in horrendous pain as he vomits and excretes his own innards.

The death tapper is most commonly found in the developing world, where its greatest enemy, immediate surgical intervention, is unlikely. Fortunately, these demons are rare. Certain traffickers in dark magic know of them and respect them. It is sometimes possible for a death tapper to be sent on an errand, so that it can infect somebody who needs to be gotten rid of, although, in general, they spread their grisly plague indiscriminately, so that it seems to strike completely at random.

Agile: Death Tappers move with incredible swiftness on their many legs and are nigh impossible to hit. At the start of any round, before anyone has acted, the Death Tapper may burn up to four points from its Athletics pool. These are then added to its Hit Threshold for the duration of the round.

DEATH TAPPER

Elusive: Death Tappers are hard to see. If the plot requires the creature's discovery, then Evidence Collection (for *Esoterrorists*) or a declared search (for *Fear Itself*) reveal it. Otherwise, any character in the same area as one must make a **Sense Trouble** or **Surveillance** test to notice it moving about. A character who fails this test cannot see the Death Tapper unless it is pointed out to him. Detected Death Tappers remain detected unless and until they use their Jump To Cover ability, for which see below.

Cling: Death Tappers jump and cling to their victims before they bite. A Death Tapper that successfully hits (following its Scuffling test) is gripping on to its intended victim, and automatically bites on the next round unless removed. The victim may pull or brush the Tapper off by engaging in a successful attack against it.

Disease: The Tapper's bite does not deal damage in itself; it is too small. However, the impact of the disease on the victim's system is immediate and overwhelming. When bitten, the victim must immediately make a **Health** test with a difficulty of 10; this represents his body's attempt to fight off the initial infection. He is allowed to spend points of **Health** to do this, as if he were making a **Health** test to remain conscious. (A person bitten by a Death Tapper can thus become exhausted and unsteady, or even unconscious, but remain free from the disease.)

Victims who fail immediately become infected with Churning Rot. This disease is supernatural in origin and cannot be treated with antibiotics or serums.

A person suffering from Churning Rot must make a **Health** test against a difficulty of 6 every 30 minutes. (Again, he is allowed to expend **Health** points to stay alive, even to the point of pushing himself below zero **Health**.) Success simply means that no damage is suffered this time; failure deals 3 points of **Health** damage.

The only way to treat Churning Rot is to perform major surgery and remove any parts of the internal organs that have already become infected. This in itself can kill the sufferer. Treating Churning Rot with surgery requires three successful consecutive **Medic** tests against a difficulty of 5 made across a period of 45 minutes, as well as access to appropriate surgical equipment.



The removal of the internal organs inflicts 1-3 points of permanent damage to the victim's **Health** rating, even if the **Medic** tests are successful.

Once the death tapper has infected a victim, it has to secrete another dose of fluid before it can make another disease attack. The demon must pause to 'tap' before it can infect again. A **Sense Trouble** or **Surveillance** test (difficulty 4) allows a listener to hear the creature 'tapping' and work out its approximate location. While the creature is 'tapping', it does not benefit from its Stealth Modifier.

Jump to Cover: A death tapper can spring on its powerful legs, moving from one hiding place to another. If it has been detected, it can attempt to spring back under cover by making an **Athletics** contest, opposed by the **Sense Trouble** or **Surveillance** ability of the character closest to where it lands. If it opts to do this, it cannot attack that round.



DEMENTIA LARVA

The Transformation of Julia Browne

18th March

Today she got a postcard in the mail from Korensky, the private investigator. He had addressed it to 'Princess'. He was having a 'kickass time' in Kingston, sunning his scarred flesh, and hoped she was doing well. The message did not have any of his usual flirtatious banter in it.

She stuck it to the wall above the fridge. Korensky was a good man, probably the only truly decent one of the group. She wished he had been a better one. She swallowed her medication.

At least he wrote. The others did not. She only knew from newspaper reports that the Professor had exhibited the artifacts from Cairo and vindicated himself completely; nobody would call him a quack again. There was even talk of a Balzan Prize. Marco was back on the boats, and back on the booze by now. Connie - well, she would be married again by now, to some leathery magnate. Marrying was what Connie did. Her allowance had funded most of the Cairo expedition.

She hated them all. Yes, even Korensky.

She hated them for having run, for having left her there, for not having seen it.

20th March

She lay in the bath and wailed. The water was pink. It was not supposed to be pink.

28th March

Korensky's postcard lay among the muck behind the fridge.

Letters were piled on the mat. A few more had been stuffed into the letterbox and had wedged there.

It had all been a lie. They had never been a team. They were not 'investigators' or even 'heroes'. They were just greedy people bound together by common need. Connie wanted excitement, the Professor lusted after information, Korensky needed to find out what had happened to his friend, Marco had to be the big strong protector. As for her, she had wanted the story.

In her stories, she wrote about disasters and how they changed people. She wrote about the ocean liners that broke apart and the airship skeletons falling in a slow holocaust of fire. She was looking for something with suffering in it in Cairo, something with the human angle. Suffering sells papers.

It had all been so very romantic at first, so much like a pulp novel. True, Egypt had stunk and she could not bear to look at the lepers; but the hotel was modern, cool and plush. The expedition was going to be the climax of it all. The maps, the ancient talismans, the crumbling texts... it was supposed to be an *adventure*.

She ate raw eggs from the fridge, one by one. The cold shells burst in her mouth, a quag of slime. She crunched the grit and imagined that each one was the skull of one of her friends.

3rd April

In a spasm of remorse, she stuck Korensky's postcard back above the fridge, using a piece of her thumb that had come off as glue. It held there for a moment, then slowly began to slide and fell, fluttering.

Numb from too many punches to her mind, she cried. Hot salty snot flowed from the holes in her face.

7th April

It was not so bad now. Now she could see it again in her mind, it was not so bad.

It was calling to her, calling across the cold spaces. The heaving, goggling thing in Cairo was only *part* of it.

In Cairo, she had wet herself and curled up and clawed at her skin and screamed and screamed until the injections finally came and the strong straps held her tight to the bed. The Professor had tweaked

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his yellow moustache gravely and talked nonsense, while Marco held her hand and told her that she would be all right, that they were going home to New York.

Of course, she was never going to be all right. That had been the last of her, flaking away like a scab.

10th April

When she had finally torn her itching skin off, it had made quite a mess.

The hands had been the worst. They had itched *abominably*, like athlete's foot. Cramming them into the waste disposal unit and pressing the switch with her chin had been absolutely the right thing to do. A few minutes of chunky, lacerating pain, then with a choked whirr and grind, they were off, and soon after, they were stuff like dog food.

Now, she felt quite chipper.

13th April

There had been a disturbance today. People had come, looking for a body. They had noticed the smell and the locked door and the mail, uncollected, wedged in the letterbox. Now they broke down the door and gasped to see all the furniture torn and the brown slime splattered up the walls.

She compressed herself into the dusty space beneath the floorboards and listened.

They thought she had been murdered. She understood.

Now, she stroked her skinless face with the tip of the slug-like object that had replaced her hand. A burning sensation like bile was heaving in her. The petty little people were in her apartment. One held a cloth to his face. The other made notes in a pocketbook. They reminded her of Marco and Korensky.

She oozed up through the floor. It made a noise. The humans turned round and began to jabber and squeak.

There were only two of them. Furless apes. Thick, fatty lumps of ignorance. Yes. Just like Marco and Korensky. They were infection, an irritation, like boils.

So, like boils, she took them and squeezed them.

They burst.

All That Remains

Evidence Collection: The victims of demonic larvae are slathered with a slimy residue, tinted brown. This residue is often found on other surfaces and smeared in slug-like trails across the floor. Sometimes, an investigation will find chewed-off hands and feet, badly deteriorated as if by gangrene. These are the larva's own body parts, shed in the process of transformation (see below under **Pathology**).

Forensic Anthropology: The victim's body typically shows signs of having been crushed to death by a muscular, coiling appendage, much like a constrictor snake.

Occasionally, bodies are discovered decapitated, the head – which is missing, and which never comes to light – having been sliced off by a set of shark-like incisors. There is much less blood than one would expect.

Larvae do not excrete anything more solid than slime. However, they regurgitate bones and similar indigestible remains (such as metal) much as owls regurgitate pellets. The remains of a victim that has been eaten by a larva are naked bones, covered with slime and showing signs of corrosion.

Chemistry: Chemical analysis of the slimy substance found on the victims shows it to be organic in origin and similar to human saliva. The brown color results from a huge quantity of dead blood cells.

Pathology: If a human who is beginning to transform into a dementia larva is encountered while still recognizably human, then some striking features can be noted. The skin is reddish and peeling, suggesting sunburn or possibly a nasty fungal infection. The flesh beneath is puffy, especially around the neck, the location of the swellings indicating inflammation of the lymph nodes.

The torso is typically covered with blood blisters between three and eight inches across, which are fragile and burst easily under gentle pressure. The exposed dermal layers are wet and pink, and ooze lymph but not blood.

The voice is usually hoarse at first, as in cases of laryngitis, but becomes a rattling gurgle later in the process, like the burr of a heavy smoker in the morning. Speech is hard to understand, as the victim's swollen tongue makes articulation increasingly difficult.

The hands and feet, which the victim will usually cover up (using heavy mittens for the hands, or even

boxing gloves in one case) deteriorate very suddenly.

The nails fall off, causing no pain to the victim. Thereafter, the flesh becomes spongy and pitted with tiny holes like enlarged pores, which steadily deepen and widen, accompanied by an unbearable itch. The victim will often remove these now-redundant extremities unprompted, typically by cutting them off (although it is hard to hack off the right hand if the left is already gone) or by gnawing if no cutting surface can be found.

Forensic Psychology: A human transforming into a larva radiates rage. Any forensic psychologist who has a chance to study one will notice the signs of repressed fury. If spoken to, then signs of psychotic breakdown are evident. Victims will also spontaneously babble in a 'word salad' strongly indicative of schizophrenia.

Game Statistics

Athletics 4, Health 10, Scuffling 10, Shooting 3 (spat heads only)

Hit Threshold: 3

Alertness Modifier: +1

Weapon: +1 (Sinuous limbs), +2 (bite) or +1 (spat-out head)

Armor: +1 vs. Shooting, +1 vs. Scuffling

Supernatural entities that dwell in realms unknown to science sometimes reveal themselves, or aspects of their existence, to certain luckless individuals. This can happen spontaneously, or because the person has been seeking after some form of spiritual or occult revelation, such as through drugs, meditation or obscure rituals. The human mind and spirit practically never survive; when a person is exposed to these monstrous visions or soul-rending vistas of nightmare, he dies internally and the shell of the person stumbles away from what he has seen, forever changed. Over time, his external appearance also changes to reveal the spiritual wreckage within. The most extreme result is a complete transformation into something inhuman, misshapen and savage; the dementia larva.

These creatures have been wrenched from their mortal lives and reborn as grotesque hybrids. The remnants of the people they used to be are steadily digested by

DEMENTIA LARVA

the horror to which they have been exposed. They are completely devoid of humanity and they will attack their former brethren on sight.

It takes some weeks for the final vestiges of mortal life to be broken down. Once the terrible transformation has taken place, these unfortunate creatures depart from our time and space and return to the source of their degradation. This is usually the entity that caused their initial breakdown, which will typically accept the larva as its thrall.

The dementia larvae attack humans with incredible ferocity. Perhaps some fragment of their former selves recalls what it has now lost and it can only react violently to what now confronts it. The extraplanar masters who govern the Larvae relish this misery.

Burning Envy: The larva has an insane loathing for human beings, as they remind it of what it used to be. A larva can go into frenzy when it encounters humans, especially if it knew them previously. While the larva is in a frenzied state, it immediately attacks the nearest target with no attempt at stealth. In this state, which lasts 5 rounds, its weapon bonuses increase by +1, but its Hit Threshold is reduced to 2.

A larva that wishes to remain hidden may be unable to do so if it is tempted to go into frenzy. If it is facing humans that it did not know in life, it may be able to contain its rage, but if it is facing former acquaintances it is almost impossible for it to resist frenzy. The GM should judge the larva's likely reaction, being alert for any actions or fragments of conversation that might tip the larva over the edge.

Constrict: Larvae twine their thick tentacles around their despised human victims and crush them to death. If the larva has successfully hit with a tentacle, it may make a **Scuffling** contest (opposed by the victim's **Athletics** or **Scuffling**, victim's choice) to twine a tentacle around the victim. If the larva wins the contest, it automatically hits and deals damage on its next action, continuing to do so for as long as its grip lasts.

The ensnared victim may use his action to attempt to free himself from the tentacle by beating the larva in an **Athletics** or **Scuffling** contest (victim's choice).

Decapitate: Larvae have horrendous knife-like teeth



that can shear off a victim's head with one snap. If the larva scores a 6 on its damage roll, then the target *may* have been decapitated. The target must make an immediate **Health** test against a target difficulty of 9. The target may spend **Health** points to attempt this test, and under ordinary circumstances will *have* to, as the difficulty number is higher than 6. This represents the trade-off between a wound that is merely horrendous and one which is instantly fatal. A target who fails the test is decapitated outright.

Depending on how much threat the larva faces, it will then do one of two things. If there are multiple

opponents facing it, it will spit the head at one of them. This is resolved as a **Shooting** attack, which the larva may make immediately (it need not wait until the next round).

Alternatively, if there is not much perceived danger in the area, it will swallow the head and tilt the cadaver up to drain the contents, as if it were drinking from an uncorked bottle. This keeps it occupied for 1d6 rounds.



The larva will always attempt to retrieve a severed head that it has spat at an opponent, once it has taken care of any obvious threats.

Monsters and Fatal Attacks

A few creatures have attacks that can possibly spell instant death for the victim, such as the Dementia Larva's ability to decapitate, or the Mortician's lethal use of his bone saw. While these attacks are part and parcel of horror games, they should always be used on NPCs first. We suggest that GM have the monster use its most fatal abilities on a NPC in such a way that a PC can see it. This makes for severe potential stability loss for the PC, and also serves the purpose of warning the players that the creature has the ability to cause instantaneous death.

Gelatinous Body: A dementia larva is mostly composed of tough, jelly-like matter that exudes awful slime. It can squeeze itself into places that would apparently be too small for it, though this takes it considerable time. As a guideline, a larva can squeeze under a door in 15 minutes, through a letterbox in 30 and between floorboards in an hour.

A larva's gelatinous body and slimy coating make it impossible to restrain with handcuffs, rope or similar devices.

Regeneration: The larva's body is hard to damage permanently. It recovers one **Health** level every minute, unless the damage was dealt by fire, acid, chemical or electrical sources. In addition, it does not die when reduced below zero Health unless the damage dealt to it is of one of the aforementioned types, though once reduced to -10 Health or lower, it appears very dead indeed.

It is easy to mistake a mangled heap of slimy mush for a dead larva and fail to notice the residual life therein. If it is necessary to the plot for the players to detect that a larva is still alive, then use of **Natural History** establishes that the protoplasm is still regenerating. If this information is not necessary to the plot, then a two-point **Natural History** spend uncovers it.

DREAM TEARER



As observers have been moved to comment throughout history, the dividing line between the genius and the lunatic is perilously thin. When a mighty idea's time has come, the fragile human being whose duty it is to bear the news to the world had best be of stout constitution, for he is treated by the Fates as if he were merely an instrument. The idea, *which is greater than him*, may obsess, consume and ultimately overwhelm him. What matters it if the great Author of the earth's destiny should break the nib of his pen, wherewith he writes? He can surely find another. Who can say, then, how many shattered wrecks in Bedlam-houses and suicides' graves would not have been souls as great as Galileo or Newton, had they been but strong enough to bear their burden?

Indeed, with some men, it is not their bodies that are weak but their very genius that blazes too brightly. They neglect to eat, to attend to the regular duty of their lives, even to bathe, because all these things take them away from pursuit of the one Goal that they *must* achieve, from the work that only they (so they see it) can do.

Few cases of this kind have been so celebrated of late as that of Paul Gregory. A young and singularly talented student, he had achieved much in the field of electrical

science, bearing the phosphorescent torch of Edison into realms that the good American could not have foreseen. Whether he would have gone on to introduce some invention comparable to Edison's bulb is not for us to know, for as the papers were keen to tell us at the time, he is dead...

It was Gregory's mania, rather than the merit of his work, which warranted attention from the Press, for Gregory evidenced a notable obsession in the weeks before his demise. He was frantic to avoid sleep. His notes (which were first believed to be written in cipher, such was their illegibility) reveal that he was convinced he was on the verge of a breakthrough. The mysterious 'electrovisual telegraph', which resembles nothing so much as the scrying apparatus of some mediaeval magician, would (so Gregory firmly believed) relay a constant and faithful image of events across many miles

to an illuminated screen, presumably by Marconi's methods or some further refinement thereof.

This would assuredly have been a great boon to mankind, were it possible! One envisions telegraph parties held in gentlemen's salons, where the activities of a single *demimondaine* in Paris are transmitted to an audience of thousands; but we digress. If the electrovisual telegraph is meant to be, then perhaps another shall discover it. In this age of science, shall we deem anything impossible?

One gleans from Gregory's writings the sense of 'a noble mind o'erthrown'. His scribblings are interspersed with imprecations to archangels for protection, hinting that a black and terrible thing was pursuing him *through his dreams*, and that only in his dreams could he see what he calls the 'trans-historic perfection' that informs his inventions. Sleep, it was clear, must be avoided at all costs, or the beast would claim him.

It is a sign of Gregory's rapidly decaying reason that he turns to superstition and occultism, while simultaneously pursuing his technical researches with ever-increasing zeal and (as has been confirmed) a startling level of mathematical competence. (It is surely a matter of note for our physicians that even as one part of the man's brain breaks down, another functions at levels of which it should not ordinarily be capable.) Gregory describes a visit to a spiritualist medium, who is discarded as 'useless'. Later visits to Theosophists and to traveling Hindoo mystics are dismissed equally succinctly. One sheet of paper is covered with notes on a 'caul ceremony', in which Gregory evidently invested some hope, though he despairs of being able to perform it; from the notes he left, it is the opinion of this writer that his poor soul is the better for not having done so. May he find his rest.

The devices that Gregory devised to remain awake are too horrible to describe. We shall note only that a man who began the last week of his life as a gaunt waif, haunting coffee-houses and consuming cup after cup of the strongest coffee available, ended it in a bath filled with ice, with a galvanic generator attached to a part of his anatomy. So desperate was the poor wretch to remain wakeful that he had devised for himself a hand-grip, which would deliver a tremendous jolt of electricity to his body if his hold upon it slackened. In this way, should sleep overtake him and his grip weaken, the electric shock would waken him again.

Evidently, this device was overly strong for Gregory's frame, weakened as it was by many days without sleep. The conclusion of the coroner is that the shocks that should have woken him instead stilled his heart,

so that when his rooms were opened and his sad corpse discovered he was quite dead. His face, twisted almost beyond recognition by the electric surge, was swiftly covered with a sheet...

- From *The Martyrs of Progress* by Jonathan P. Ashford (1902)

All That Remains

Forensic Anthropology: Those who die from dream tearer assaults usually have no physical injuries at all. Their hearts simply stop. It is common for their faces to be contorted in fear, though their eyes will always be closed, since they were asleep at the point of death.

When the victim has been pursued over the course of more than one night, he will typically have taken precautions against falling asleep. The blood will thus contain high levels of stimulants - caffeine, amphetamine sulfate, taurine (from energy drinks) and such like. Some especially desperate victims even wound themselves, sticking needles under their skin or hammering nails into their hands, just so that the pain will keep them awake.

In the very rare event of death at the hands of a *manifest* dream tearer, the victim is covered with bites. Death appears to have resulted from a combination of blood loss from these wounds and crushing pressure causing internal organ damage. When analyzed, the bites are found to be strikingly similar to those inflicted by *horses*, only far more savage.

Evidence Collection: If the victim died indoors, then it is also likely that he will have taken plenty of measures to remain conscious. The television will be on and the volume turned up, as will the radio and any other sources of noise.

Occult Studies: If the horse-like bites have been discovered on a dead victim, then a student of the occult may remember folklore tales of a creature that persecuted its victims in their dreams; a literal *night mare*, which eventually caused death through exhaustion, or incurable insanity.

Pathology: A person suffering from the persecution of a dream tearer shows all the signs of lost sleep:

a haggard expression, bloodshot eyes with dark hollows under them, slurred speech and lack of ability to focus.

Game Statistics

Aberance 6, Athletics 4, Health 8, Scuffling 8

Hit Threshold: 3

Alertness Modifier: +1 (psychic senses)

Stealth Modifier: +1 (silently levitates)

Weapon: +1 (multiple bite)

Armor: None

Dream tearers are malevolent creatures with the power to enter dreams and slay the dreamer. These horrors wander a strange plane of existence, where sleepers' subconscious minds bubble up, killing and feeding suitable prey. Although their abilities and powers are great, dream tearers have only an animal's intelligence and they always hunt instinctively. They prefer to feed on the souls of those whose dreams are rich and interesting, full of creative energy. When they have found a suitable meal in a sleeping mind, the monsters invade and tear it to shreds. The body dies a moment later.

One school of thought contends that, although unwelcome in their own right, these creatures are particularly dangerous because powerful, unseen hands guide them, and conjectures that dark, ancient gods use the dream tearers to keep humanity on its knees, stunting its spiritual and intellectual growth. This conspiracy theory holds that many great discoveries and advancements have never come to fruition because, mere hours before their invention, the dream tearers intrude on the sleeping mind that would have created them. But for this invasion – the argument runs – civilization would have developed twice as fast, so the masters of these terrible creatures must spy on great minds, watch them reach the verges of medical, social, and creative breakthroughs and then rip them to shreds, reveling in the tragedy they have wrought.

Dream Intrusion: From a dream tearer's perspective, a sleeper's dreams are hazy, colorful bubbles, distending the membrane that separates

the subconscious mind from the creature's gray, misty home; the larger and more intense the bubbles are, the more intense and appetizing the dream is. The dream tearer comes snuffling at an attractive intrusion, then tries to claw itself a way in, rending the barrier apart. Unless the victim succeeds on a **Stability** contest (victim's **Stability** versus the dream tearer's **Aberance**, with both sides being allowed to spend pool points), the dream tearer has entered the dream. If the dreamer keeps the tearer at bay, it cannot attempt to enter the dream again that night.

Once the attacker is inside the bubble, it begins to search for the dreamer, whose only chance of escape now is to be woken fortuitously by some outside agent. Failing that, the dreamer can always attempt to seek refuge in the fabrications of his own dream.

Once the tearer has found its prey, it attacks, using its Soul Shred ability. Sometimes, when the target offers some resistance, the hunter will attempt to change elements of the dream to suit itself. For example, if the dreamer has taken refuge in a white castle protected by an army of loyal knights, the dream tearer could dispel the latter and tear down the former.

To alter or destroy any dream element, it enters an **Aberance** contest, opposed by the victim's **Stability**. This then functions as lucid dreaming, for which see the feat below. As well as destroying dream elements, the tearer can also introduce its own elements, such as thickened air (which slows down those trying to run away, giving them a higher difficulty number for their **Athletics** or **Fleeing** tests and contests) and collapsing floors (which leave fleeing dreamers stranded).

At the GM's discretion, some charms and talismans can help the sleeper resist predation. For example, the hanging circular web called a dream-catcher (available in New Age stores) may lower the difficulty of the **Stability** test to keep the dream tearer away to 3. Note that such items can only help prevent the creature from entering the dream, and offer no defense once it is inside.

If the sleeper is woken, the bubble bursts and the tearer is forcibly ejected back into its own realm. It is, however, difficult to wake a person once an invader has entered his dream. Shouting, slapping and similar tactics only have a one in three chance of waking the dreamer on any given round. An injection of stimulants administered by a competent professional can wake the

dreamer instantly. This requires a successful **Medic** test (difficulty 5) and access to appropriate drugs.

A dream tearer can only attempt to enter a given dream once. If the attempt fails, it must wait for the its victim to wake, then enter REM sleep again, thus creating a new bubble.

Nonphysical: A dream tearer exists wholly in the Dreaming Realm, although it can be forced to manifest physically (see The Caul of Ninghizidda, below), and killed. The above statistics apply both to this involuntary material form, and to the creature's true - insubstantial - state, because the monster enters combat both in dreams, and in the real world. The difference is that only harm inflicted on its physical form can be fatal: within the Dreaming Realms, it can be hurt (such as with bullets from submachine guns 'dreamed' into being) but none of this damage is permanent, and is healed fully within 24 hours. If its health is reduced below zero from 'dream' injury, it cannot sustain dream intrusion and is ejected from the dream-bubble.

Soul Shred: A dream tearer that has successfully entered the dreams of a target with dream intrusion (see above) can attempt to shred the target's soul, although it might not do so in one invasion, maybe preferring, or perhaps being directed, to take its time. When the creature uses this ability, it attacks the target - use the prey's waking world statistics - with its teeth. It must successfully score a hit in order to shred the soul. If it hits, it deals damage to the victim's **Stability** as if it had been **Health**. (The physical body of the dreamer convulses when this damage is dealt, a sure sign that he is being assaulted.) If the dreamer's **Stability** drops to -12 or below during a dream as a result of dream tearer assault, then rather than going insane, his heart stops the instant he dies, his dream-body torn into fragments that do not stop screaming.. Should he survive, the lost **Stability** may be recovered naturally.

Shredding souls is a nutritious activity. Each point of **Stability** damage that the dream tearer deals grants it one bonus **Health** level, which dissipates within one hour if it is not used, or a recovered point of **Aberrance**, as the creature prefers.

The Dreaming Realm

The tearers live in the Dreaming Realm. This is, for the most part, a vague and insubstantial plane of existence that connects the dreams of individual people. Sleeping characters always enter these realms, whether they are aware of it or not, when they enter REM sleep. For game purposes, treat dreaming as if it were a form of

astral projection, with the limitation that every person has their own closed 'dream plane' that others cannot enter. This appears as a bubble blown in the matter of dreaming space. A person who has learned the art of lucid dreaming can alter the features of his or her own dream plane voluntarily.

A given dreamer's plane is populated with images drawn from his or her life, which appear as solid objects, both to the sleeper and to any other entity in the bubble.

The dream tearer is one of the only creatures that can cause actual harm from within a dream. Otherwise, characters who suffer damage from dream sources lose "dream" Health, and wake with a start when these drop to zero. Once woken they cannot enter REM sleep again for an hour; when they do, their dreaming bodies are at full Health once again.

Entering other people's dreams is dangerous and very difficult. Special scientific equipment or occult rituals are needed to achieve this, so the process varies according to the magical and scientific realities of the campaign world. Should entering dreams be possible, the intruders cannot alter the plane's features. Only the dreamer himself can do this.

The Caul of Ninghizidda

It is possible to force a dream tearer to manifest in the physical world. A ritual called the *Caul of Ninghizidda* draws the creature forth and forces tangible form upon it, wrapping it in a 'caul' or membrane of ectoplasmic matter. When the dream tearer is rendered solid, can be attacked and killed. Once dead in the real world, it is gone completely it does not reform in the Dreaming Realm.

The ritual requires certain objects: a portion of the amniotic sac of a stillborn child, a net woven from human hair, dragon's blood incense, and piece of snowflake obsidian. If the plot requires the characters to have access to this ritual, then **Occult Studies** grants it; otherwise, a two-point **Occult Studies** spend is needed to track it down.

To perform the ritual correctly, the practitioner must have access to the text and the proper implements. The practitioner must also have spent at least six hours purifying and preparing the room where the ritual is to

take place. The victim does not have to be present for these preliminaries, although the *Caul of Ninghizidda* must take place over his sleeping body, when the tell-tale convulsions show that the dream tearer is assaulting it.

The ritual proper takes ten minutes to complete. The character conducting the ritual must then engage in a Stability contest with the tearer, pitting his **Stability** against the tearer's **Aberrance**. If the character wins the contest, the dream tearer manifests in the physical world, with strands of ectoplasmic goo trailing from it. The creature is not visible in the material world except where this whitish-gray webbed matter clings to it, so a manifested dream tearer is like an incomplete, ghostly nightmare. Observers can see parts of its body but not the whole, which is probably just as well...

A manifested dream tearer cannot use its Soul Shred ability but it is both able and eager to tear the bodies of those present into pieces instead. Attempting to exorcise a person who is the victim of a dream tearer is a very dangerous business.

Lucid Dreaming

This ability is only likely to be useful in scenarios involving Dream Tearers or other dream-based antagonists. As it is only conditionally useful, it doesn't need to be bought with build points and should be something that the characters can either learn to do in the course of the scenario (such as by direct instruction from a mystical teacher) or are given the temporary power to do by means of some strange, experimental technology, such as a dream-amplification headset, or perhaps an exotic drug.

A character with this ability can attempt to alter details of a dream. This involves either introducing, changing or removing a dream element. For example, a lucid dreamer might introduce a huge oak tree, change a dragon into his grandmother or cause a high wall to dissolve away.

A **Stability** test is needed to work any of these alterations; naturally, the dreamer can expend **Stability** to increase the die roll. (Those who spend too much time in their own dream realms are usually mentally fragile for this very reason.) The difficulty of this test depends on the dream element's own ability to work changes in the environment or its use value as a tool. For example,

a flower has very little effect on its surroundings, so it is easy to create. A sword, chainsaw or motor vehicle can work significant changes, a club-wielding giant, medical scanner or ten-foot thick wall, even more so.

As a rule, any kind of technology works in the Dreaming Realm unless its object is information retrieval. Nothing you can voluntarily dream of can tell you something you did not know already: they can offer inspiration based on existing thoughts and concept. You cannot *deliberately* be inspired with new information by a dream.

What an object looks like is really immaterial; what it *does* is important. You could therefore dream up a gun, a locomotive, a matter transporter or even an atomic bomb but not a technical genius who told you how to build an atomic bomb in the real world or a magic crystal ball that told you where your enemies were hiding.

Dreamers can introduce wildly incongruous elements, if they choose. There is nothing to stop a dreamer who is floundering in the sea from being rescued by a World War I biplane, which then flies through a hyperspace portal and lands on the head of a gigantic robot made from children's building blocks. The GM has a free hand to introduce new dream elements or to think up new outcomes for failed attempts to alter dreams.

Typical Dreaming Check Target Difficulties

Item Significance	Difficulty
Insignificant element (bag of potato chips, lit cigarette)	2
Moderately significant element (fence, shield, shallow ditch)	4
Majorly significant element (rifle, burning fire, airplane)	6
Massively significant element (city, earthquake, missile)	7

THE DROWNER



Spirit of Dark Water

The mid-1970s were great days for the British public information film. These short broadcasts were intended to drive home the dangers of play in unsafe places: too near electricity pylons, inside abandoned fridges or on working farms. They were often deliberately terrifying, so that the young audience would remember the lesson. Children were shown being crushed by runaway tractors, suffocated inside refrigerators and electrocuted on power lines, with the final scene often depicting a funeral, weeping parents or an empty coat flapping in the breeze.

One such film achieved a notoriety all its own. It was called *The Spirit of Dark Water* and was supposed to scare children away from dangerous ponds. Shot like a horror film, it showed a dark shape that gloated over the children it had lured to death.

The piece did its work too well; while it certainly frightened the children away from standing water, but it gave them nightmares for days after they saw it. Parents complained, and the authorities quickly pulled the item from the broadcast schedule. It was replaced by a less disturbing film called simply *Lonely Water*, starring Donald Pleasence. Today, adults who watched the original film as children discuss it on Internet forums dedicated to TV nostalgia, and shudder. Clips of the broadcast are extremely rare.

Urban legend, for once correctly, has it that *The Spirit of Dark Water's* writer was a man by the name of Nick Rowley. Rowley is, of course, better known as the Windermere Drowner, the man tried in 1976 for drowning children near his lakeside home. .

Naturally, the urban legend is that Rowley's name on the film's credits was hastily changed following his arrest, so that associations with a child-killer would not mar the film. (Of course, public information films don't have credits, giving the story less credence.) Lurid speculation depicts Rowley identifying himself with the child-drowning spectre of *Spirit of Dark Water* and relishing the thought of children across the country going to bed terrified by this image of him.

Rowley, who is still alive, has always protested his innocence. He has privately claimed that the rumors are true and that he did indeed write the script for the film, but insists that he did so to warn children of the real dangers. At this point, the insanity begins, the insanity that had him transferred to a secure mental hospital some months after his conviction for murder; Rowley claims that 'they' drowned the children, not he.

Rowley described the events before a shocked courtroom. It would always be the same. The child would approach the water's edge slowly, curious, as if it were something fascinating. Sometimes, there would be two or three children together, approaching the lake on a dare.

From his window, Rowley watched, helpless, as 'pale dead things' swam up from the lake, like bodies bobbing to the surface.

Too frightened to scream out a warning, unable to turn away, he bit his knuckles and watched them hold out bony arms to the children, who would hesitate, as if unsure what to do next. Was it safe? Rowley prayed for them to turn away.

Rowley's silent prayers were never answered. Always, the children would begin to wade into the water, holding out their arms for balance, as if they were paddling in the sea. The white forms drew close. Then, in an instant, they and the child were gone, gulped down by the black water, with only ripples left behind.

Rowley rocked back and forth, wept and wailed. Sometimes, he would walk down to the lakeshore and look at the little footprints, then carefully

The Book of Unremitting Horror

smooth them over with his foot. That way, it was easier to pretend that it had never happened. If a visitor had not seen Rowley doing this, he would never have been caught and arrested. The immediate assumption was that he was destroying evidence of a struggle.

The lake was, of course, dredged for remains. What came up was incomplete. Enough was recovered for the missing children to be identified, though a good deal of the bodies remained missing.

Rowley was found responsible for the death by drowning of no less than five local children, whose partial remains were laid to rest in a ceremony of remembrance. Bones from five other bodies unexpectedly discovered when the lake was dredged, were never identified, nor was their death attributed to Rowley. It was assumed that they had drowned by misadventure. Although the discovery of a Roman brooch among these remains has caused speculation that some of the bones are many centuries old, no firm archaeological opinion has yet been expressed either way.

The myth of *Spirit of Dark Water* continues to grow. If we believe Rowley's claim to be the author, what were his intentions? Was the spectre in the film a glorified image of himself or a depiction of some water-horror in which he seriously believed?

All that is certain is that children are dead.

The writer is now in Park Lane mental hospital; the authorities transferred him there when the tabloids' got bored and stopped writing about his cushy life in solitary confinement; his house is a collapsed ruin.

Now, although Rowley is securely locked away, it appears that the nightmare is beginning again; little Michael Morris, who had often told his friends that he was going to go and see the 'nutter house' by the lake, has not been seen for two weeks. Two days ago, Mandy Cateshall, 14, never met the boyfriend she had arranged to see. The community is living in terror of a copycat killer. Its oldest members, who now suspect Rowley is innocent, fear something far worse.

-- from *friendofafriend.org*

All That Remains

Archaeology: As the passage above indicates, the muck fetched up from the bottom of a drowners' lake is sometimes found to contain interesting bits and pieces. The creatures have no use for human clutter, being interested only in the flesh, and so pieces of metal, glass and stone (such as coins, arrowheads or lanterns) that their victims were carrying sink to the bottom and are lost for centuries.

Ordinarily, an item dropped to the bottom of a pond will sink steadily further into the sediment, eventually becoming buried so deep down that it has to be dug out. However, the drowners seem to have a liquefying effect upon the earth below them, so that it remains in a constantly fluid state. This means that a sample of soil taken from the bottom of the lake may contain a flint arrowhead, a Victorian sixpence and a fragment of a Roman pottery lamp, *all in the same cubic foot of matter*.

Chemistry: Samples of water taken from drowner lakes show much more than the expected amount of turbidity. The high concentration of soil particles suggests that the bottom of the lake is being continually stirred up. This also accounts for the characteristic darkness of drowner lakes.

Forensic Anthropology: The body of a person who has died at the hands of the drowners is rarely recovered complete; dredging will yield a reasonably intact torso, perhaps a skull and a detached jaw, and a collection of limb bones. Astute pathologists might find the torso particularly interesting; ordinarily, and unless a killer has taken special precautions - weighting, slitting, both of which leave physical evidence - a drowned body returns to the surface for a few hours, made buoyant by the gases produced during decomposition; it sinks again when they dissipate. Not so with the drowners' victims; the creatures keep the remains as far down below the surface as they can, so that they can tear off whole limbs and carry them to their own lairs, where they feast, chewing the flesh away from the bones. It is thus extremely unlikely that the body will ever reach the surface, or that body of a person who has died at the hands of drowners will be recovered complete.

It is a minor incongruity, often overlooked when a specialist assembles the fragmentary, dismembered remains, but a particularly astute practitioner who is examining the dredged-up body of a victim might wonder why it is that a body with an intact torso that shows no signs of having been weighted down should never have risen to the surface.

History: Drowners' lakes are always *old*, and typically have names that recall water monsters (or

some forbidding phrase evocative of darkness or fear) in the language of whatever culture first met them. Some example British names would be Dunmere ('dark mere'), Lichwater ('corpse water'), Grindlesford ('Grendel's Ford') or even Senksmarsh ('sinker's or drowner's marsh').

Game Statistics

Athletics 10, Health 8, Scuffling 8

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +2

Weapon: Claws (+1) or special (Chill Grasp, Grapple)

Armor: None

The drowners are water spirits who prey on the living, transfixing their victims and then dragging them down into the depths to feast upon them. They indwell deep tarns and old marshes where children are warned not to go, and appear as the naked corpses of their most recent victims. Their skin is semi-transparent, pearlescent, with the pale bones and putrefying musculature visible beneath the cloudy surface.

Drowners can be found anywhere that the water is deep, dark, and cold. They may never leave while the waters are still there. If a marsh were drained or a pond dredged, then their existence might come to an end... but then again...

Captivating Gaze: A drowner's empty eyes, like some dragging vacuum, draw warm and living creatures into the cold, dark abyss of water. Once you meet the gaze of a drowner, it is next to impossible to overcome the urge to let go of the world and dive down to where it is eternally cool and peaceful.

Those who are subjected to a drowner's dread gaze must immediately make a **Stability** test (difficulty 5). The target may choose to expend **Stability** to increase the roll, as usual. If the test is failed, the victim loses no **Stability**, but is captivated. Captivated victims walk as directly toward the drowner as is possible, and can take no actions other than to defend themselves (thus,

THE DROWNER

a character cannot run away or attack but is not considered a sitting duck) and will enter the water without a thought. Once they are under the surface, they begin to drown. As they are not holding their breath, they begin to drown immediately.

A drowner can only captivate one creature at a time. Note that captivation can override Terrible Cramp; a victim who is paralyzed can be freed to move if the creature wishes to draw him in.

Chill Grasp: The touch of a drowner is icy cold and enervating. A drowner can spend three points of **Scuffling** to make a Chill Grasp attack as its attack for the round. (These points are *not* added to the attack roll.) If it hits, it drains an additional 1d6 points from the victim's **Athletics** pool, as well as dealing **Health** damage as usual. If the victim's **Athletics** pool is empty, any further points are taken from his **Scuffling** pool; if this too is empty, then the additional points are taken from his **Health**.

Grapple: A drowner within scuffling range may make an **Athletics** contest (opposed by the victim's **Athletics** or **Scuffling**, victim's choice) to grasp its target in its icy arms. If the drowner wins the contest, it has caught the victim and is holding him fast, and continues to do so for as long as its grip lasts. Usually, on the next round, the drowner will dive underwater and the target will begin to drown.

The ensnared victim may use his action to attempt to free himself from the drowner's grasp by beating the drowner in an **Athletics** or **Scuffling** contest (victim's choice).

Terrible Cramp: The very presence of a drowner is enough to cause the blood to run cold in a living body. A person exposed to this aura is stricken with paralysis, like the cramp that afflicts a person who has gone swimming in icy water. Any person coming within 30 feet of the drowner must make an **Athletics** test (difficulty 4) or be paralyzed. This happens automatically and requires no effort on the drowner's part.

If the person is in water when he is exposed to the drowner's terrible cramp ability, the difficulty of the **Athletics** test increases to 6.

Waterbound: A drowner cannot leave water. So long as some part of its body remains in contact with water, it can still manifest. If it is removed from water, it disintegrates into pale grey slush.

Water's Gravity: A drowner is the embodiment of treacherous currents that drag floundering swimmers down to their doom. When a target is in contact with water (such as when the target is immersed, swimming, or even standing ankle-deep) then the target suffers a -1 penalty on all **Athletics** or **Scuffling** rolls made to break out of a drowner's grapple. Drowners rarely grab their victims from the shore, preferring to entice them into the water.



THE EMPTY ONE



The Empty One does not yet exist.

In a world of Unremitting Horror, infested with cults, a serial killer is as likely to be a devoted cultist carrying out the cult's orders as he is to be a lone lunatic. There is more than one cult devoted to the act of the kill and to the elaborate processes of preparation and aftermath: research, selection of the victim, staking out, choosing the weapon and the moment, the arrangement of the dead, the collection of trophies, the burial (if there is one) and the escape all have their own proper form, which the cultist is expected to keep.

The Empty One is an engineered deity for these cultist serial killers, the monstrous perfection that they aspire to become or to merge with. The various cult strands have long known of the formula to create it, though none of them have yet put the formula into practice successfully.

In order to create the avatar of the Empty One upon Earth (so the prophecies run) you have to have two seasoned cultist serial killers of opposite sexes, and then have them copulate. The offspring of the killers must be twins (again one male, one female). When the children are of the correct age they are made to have sex with each other. The child born of this incestuous union will be the Empty One.

The mother is the first victim of The Empty One, when he bursts from the womb. He is a killer even before he is born.

As one might imagine, this is nigh on impossible to enact. Attempts have been made to bypass the absurdly restrictive requirements by employing genetic engineering to make it work, but all have failed; some have even brought down the wrath of whatever the Empty One is before it is manifest.

Serial killer cults in the world of Unremitting Horror have been trying for years to create the avatar, and common consensus is that it really all comes down to faith and a lot of sex and violence. If there is enough murder and enough frantic sex, then the Empty One will provide the appropriate vessels. Or so the cultists believe, and they are happy to continue murdering and fornicating on the basis of that belief.

Naturally, when the Empty One finally arrives, he/she becomes one of the most powerful entities in the Unremitting Horror setting. The Empty One

is suited to be the focus of a whole campaign, rather than an incidental monster or even a major antagonist for one scenario. He is an entity on the same level as the Mystery Man, if less powerful - a puller of strings, whose influence will be felt long before the PCs ever encounter him. Indeed, a whole campaign might revolve around an attempt to prevent his creation, the world's last chance at survival.

Although his physical appearance is that of a ten-foot, slough-faced baby, the Empty One is phenomenally intelligent, methodical and ambitious. Prophecy dictates what will happen when he finally manifests on Earth. He will take on the role of the world wide cult's leader, unify the disparate serial killer cults under his own headship, and start commanding his troops.

When the unified cult begins to flex its muscles, the world will know. The cult members are all serial killers but they are not bound to any one class or background. They can be doctors, garbage men, even heads of state. The newly risen meta-cult will be powerful but lack the immense wealth of some of the older cults. It is inevitable that its appearance on the world stage will cause massive power struggles among those who walk the paths of nightmare, with humanity forced into the role of trembling bystander.

FERAL DROWNER



Tell us a story, Mrs O'Connell!

You always want stories. I'm a tired old woman. Let me alone.

But it's time for a story! I'm boooored!

And why should you be bored, now, with all these lovely toys about you? People have spent a lot of money on those. You might be more grateful.

I don't care. I'm bored of them now. I want a story.

Don't care was made to care. I think you, young sir, and you, young madam, should be sent straight to bed.

If you don't tell me a good story I'll scream, and I'll tell Father you hit me.

Oh, will you now, Miss? That's a wicked thing to threaten your poor nanny with. Why, it's blackmail, so it is.

You'll be put out of the house and he won't give you a reference, and you'll have to go back to Ireland, and you'll be poor and have to eat grass.

And what would you know about what we eat in Ireland?

You only eat potatoes!

And I suppose you'd know all about it, would you? I'd sooner eat a nice, fat, wicked little girl than eat a mouldy old potato. I'd gobble you all up like a pooka would.

Like a what?

Never mind. Some things you're best not knowing.

Oh, pleeease tell us a story.

Very well. Since you are both wicked children, you shall have a wicked story.

Hurray!

The Book of Unremitting Horror

Now, let me see, how does it begin. Oh, yes. Once upon a time, there was a woman of Rosscommon, and this woman lived by a deep lake. At the bottom of the lake there was a pooka.

Oh, tell us what a pooka is! You have to! There's one in the story!

I was coming to that. A pooka has horns like a goat and smells like the oldest, rottenest bog in the world. This pooka was very old. He had been there since before Saint Patrick came and drove all the evil things away. He hid away at the bottom of the lake and Saint Patrick never found him.

Now, this woman was a wicked gossip and told many lies about people. She loved nothing more than the sound of wagging tongues, telling some filthy lie or other. So long as she had something bad to say about someone, her black heart was happy.

One day, she told lies about a young woman of the village. She said the young woman was working witchcraft, because she was so well loved by the young men. She called her many other bad names, too, that I won't repeat. Names you don't give a decent woman. It was jealousy, so it was, and she had no right to go calling anyone a whore.

Well then, said the young woman, if I am going to be called a witch, then I shall act the part.

And she went to the lake shore, where the woman lived, and she called three times, *pwca pwca wak thysel*, which is how you wake up a pooka. I oughtn't to be saying the words out loud, but if a pooka comes and carries you off tonight, it'll be no less than you deserve.

So, she said the words and then she waited. Then there was a horrible smell and the water boiled up and the witch-woman ran back to watch. Out of the water the pooka came.

I don't like this story!

Oh dear. Shall I stop, then?

... no... tell us what happened next...

Oh, I'll tell you what happened right enough.

It went into the house and it found Aisling Farrell, the lying bitch that she was, and it grabbed her in its arms and ripped her clothes to pieces with its big hands. Then it had her on the floor, and oh! didn't I laugh at it! oh, to hear her screaming!

FERAL DROWNER

And do you know what it did then, children? It took her by the hair, and it dragged her like a hunter dragging a hare, all the way to the edge of the water, and she bumped along the stones and her bones went crickety-crack! And still she was keepin' it up with the moaning! Still alive, she was, after all that!

Right by me it went, and didn't it smell awful? Like a bucket of muck pulled up from the marsh where the old wives chuck out the slops. Down went Aisling Farrell, down ye go and fare thee well, and all her screams went to bubbles, and that was the end of her, and they never ever knew what happened. Her tidy kitchen was black with mud.

They never found her, children. Nobody knows to this day. Nobody will care, neither, if I tell a couple of spoiled brats the truth.

There's a story for yeh, ye wee shites.

Why, look at the time. Lights out, now, and *no talking*.

Goodnight, Miss Amy. Goodnight, Master Russell.

Sleep tight.

-Secret taping by the parents of Amy and Russell Edwin. Mrs O'Connell was dismissed without notice, and the matter referred to the police.

All That Remains

Forensic Anthropology: Feral drowner victims rarely come to light. When they do, they are horribly mangled and usually decomposed from many days spent underwater. The water damage to the body obliterates a large amount of forensic evidence, though some can still be retrieved.

The body, whether male or female, shows signs of violent sexual assault. Combing through the pubic hair reveals coarse, wiry hairs tangled therein, which the **Natural History** ability identifies as a goat's. There is no sign of human bodily fluids, but the thick slime found in the ravaged orifices has goat DNA.

The cause of death is always drowning, rather than the physical battering that came before the victim's submersion.

The marks of the feral drowner's strong hands leave bruises that clearly show the victim has been physically assaulted. Most of the bruises the creature leaves are on the arms or legs, which, pathologists can infer, shows where the assailant's handholds were when it hauled its victim into the water.

Game Statistics

Athletics 26, Health 30, Scuffling 20

Hit Threshold: 2

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: -1 (huge) or -4 when it has begun to attack (foul stench)

Weapon: +2 (Talons)

Armor: +2 vs. Shooting, +3 vs. Scuffling

The feral drowners are long-lived, bestial creatures, apparently hybrids of men and goats. Their attack differs greatly from the more common drowner; they physically assault and often violate the victim during the drowning.

These creatures are incredibly strong. An ancient aura of power hangs over them. The feral drowners smell foul, yet this stench only becomes apparent upon the moment of their attack.

Note: These creatures are monstrosly powerful and can easily dispatch whole groups of investigators. They should be saved for the final encounter of an adventure, or even of a campaign.

Amphibious: A feral drowner can live in water as easily as air.

Ancient Musk: A feral drowner exudes a stink that words simply cannot describe. The only way to replicate it would be to bury an old, mouldy goatskin in reedy mud for a couple of weeks. Even this would not have the suffocating tang of sweat that the thing gives off.

Any character within scuffling range of the feral drowner must succeed on a **Health** test (difficulty 5) or be nauseated for as long as he or she remains

within the affected area. The character may, if he wishes, attempt to resist the stench with **Stability** instead, using pure force of will rather than physical resilience to keep his mind focused; the difficulty number is the same. In either case, points from the relevant pool can be expended to increase the roll.

Nauseated characters suffer from sporadic vomiting and cannot easily engage in strenuous activity; the difficulty of all tasks is increased by +1 for as long as the nausea lasts.

Characters who are wearing respiratory protection, such as gas masks, or who are holding their breath (see Drowner) are not affected by the feral drowner's ancient musk.

Derive Power: Feral drowners can actually increase their own power by feeding on the psychological horror they force their victim to endure. The more terrified their victims are, the more energy the monster can generate.

For every point of **Stability** that the feral drowner causes a target to lose (irrespective of how it does this; it could attack the target, disembowel one of the target's friends, or simply surface in its full horrible splendor in front of the target) the feral drowner may add a point to its **Athletics**, **Health** or **Scuffling** pool, as it chooses. It cannot, however, increase any of these pools to a level more than 5 points above its base Rating. Points that increase the feral drowner's pool above the maximum are lost after 24 hours if they are still unused.

Drown: A feral drowner who successfully grapples an opponent while they are both in at least three feet of water can hold the opponent under water, so that he begins to drown. If the opponent breaks the grapple, then he may be able to fill his lungs again.

Feral drowners are extremely good at diving down with victims in their grasp. A feral drowner who is grappling an opponent will dive under the surface as soon as it can. Even if the opponent then breaks the grapple, he is still underwater and will have to swim back up to the surface.

Oppressive Legend: The goatish hybrids terrify many of their opponents, because of their atavistic appearance. Something about them taps directly

into the reptile brain, recalling ancient terrors and memories of a time when man was a puny creature to be hunted. The difficulty of the **Stability** test made when they are first encountered (whether the creature is seen from afar or met up close) is 6 rather than 4. Note that this increased difficulty applies only to the *first* **Stability** test made when a given character encounters one.

Horrific Emergence: The sight of a surfacing drowner and the sound of its roar awaken primal terror in human minds. When a feral drowner rises from the waters and bellows, characters who are close enough to the event to see and hear it must immediately make 7-point **Stability** tests, as if the feral drowner had viciously attacked each of them individually. Those who hear the bellow but do not see the creature must make 2-point **Stability** tests.

Owing to the feral drowner's Oppressive Legend (see above), a feral drowner suddenly surfacing right next to a dinghy full of characters is one of the most sanity-wrangling events that can possibly happen...



KOOKS



They first appeared in the late 60s; the 'Summer of Love' was dying out and a new, darker season was beginning. It was time to play. It was the time of the kooks.

The kooks are small, malicious entities that resemble horribly disfigured children. Their eyes are pitch black, reduced to slit like cracks under swollen eyelids. Their mouths are contorted into hideous leering grins that stretch from ear to ear. If a kook is happy or excited it grinds and gnashes its sharp, miniscule fangs.

The kooks' prey on children. They always choose a lonely and ostracized victim; one who is bored, frustrated and in need of friendship. The child's cries for companionship are answered slowly, and quietly...

Kooks commence their hunt on the first day of summer. They listen intently for the cries of help echoing around and are drawn to ones they feel are the most profound. At first the kooks are little more than a whisper in the woods that reaches out to the child's bedroom window. If she hears their calling, the victim is drawn to them inexplicably. The first call of the kooks only comes during daylight hours; it is not the time to draw the attention of adults.

The child may spend her first days of summer vacation wandering the woods in search of the friendly, laughing voices. All through this time the kooks are stalking their victim, analyzing her, probing her, looking deep inside her for what they need.

Mere moments before the child gives up her search, the kooks will appear. To the innocent child the kooks appear as nothing less than beautiful fey children, bathed in sunlight. In that single instant the child yearns to be with them, to be just like them. It is what she has always wanted.

Naturally, the kooks will oblige.

Then, the fun begins; endless summer days playing in the fields and meadows; warm, bright hours packed with jokes, games and laughter. It all seems so wonderful and timeless.

Each day that the child spends in the company of the kooks draws out longer and longer. She returns home during late afternoon at first, then as the kooks' work begins in earnest, it gets later, and later. Eventually their prey arrives back in the darkening evening, pale, exhausted yet eerily content.

The Book of Unremitting Horror

By now, even the most neglectful parents are becoming concerned. At first they were happy that their little angel had found new friends, these... kooks, is that what she called them? It was strange; how come she had never brought them home with her?

Then, one day, their child doesn't come home at all and they panic. The unnaturally long, hot summer is ending. The skies cloud over slate gray. A chilling breeze picks up in an alarmed community where an innocent child has gone missing.

More often than not, the child is never seen again; she vanishes without trace. Only the most determined parent will discover the terrible truth of the kooks.

The father searches the woods frantically all night until dawn; and then he finds them, his daughter's two best friends, and he screams. His little angel has her back turned to him, he calls for her to come home, but she can't, not now.

She turns her grossly distorted head and looks at him with narrow black eyes. She doesn't want her daddy anymore. She's a kook.

All that will ever be found is her father's remains, a terrible, shredded mess. The police think rabid dogs did it; only animals could do that to a man.

The summer is over, and the kooks are little more than a name to chill those left behind.

All That Remains

Aura Reading: Psychic characters who study the aura of a child who is coming under the influence of Kooks can see that the auric field is shrunken and flickering feebly. If the plot requires it, then simple use of **Aura Reading** also reveals a sinister double image superimposed upon the child's own aura; the dark silhouette of a Kook, the Kook that the child is destined to become. If this is not information essential to the plot, then a 2-point **Aura Reading** spend is needed to discern it.

Evidence Collection: No part of the corpse appears to have been consumed and torn-off chunks of it can be found in the area around the body. Kooks rip out the flesh of their victims, but they do not swallow it; they subsist wholly on the vital energies of children.

Forensic Anthropology: The victims of kook attacks are ravaged by multiple bites, and some of the tooth marks could be mistaken for a dog's at first glance, though use

KOOKS

of the **Natural History** ability speedily rules that out. The flesh is viciously torn away from the bone and the throat is always bitten out. It is evident to a forensic pathologist that multiple assailants attacked the victim at once, since the deceased suffered many bites within a short space of time while still alive.

Forensic Psychology: Children under Kook influence behave in a markedly similar way to victims of abuse. They are withdrawn, pale, engage in repetitive activity, and their body language suggests that they are shielding themselves. The natural conclusion is that the child is flinching away from adults, who are no longer trusted. In actuality, the child is warding off the mundane world, which is threatening and loathsome compared to the endless summer that the Kooks offer.

Pathology: A child who has been preyed upon by Kooks exhibits symptoms that somewhat resemble those of anemia: pallor, dizziness, lethargy and unwillingness to communicate. A blood sample reveals that the blood sugar level is very low, as is the white blood cell count.

Reassurance: Children can sometimes be persuaded to talk about their strange playmates. They describe them as radiant, using garbled terms like 'shiny bright people' or 'glow in the dark children'. They attribute magical powers to them, like the ability to 'make anything appear that they want', or 'make cuts and bruises go away'.

Game Statistics

Athletics 8, Health 6, Scuffling 10

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +2 (small, quiet)

Hit Threshold: 5

Weapon: +1 (Bite)

Armor: +3 vs. Shooting

The kooks always arrive on the outskirts of a town upon the first day of summer. They always travel in groups of two to four, and only ever target one child, just enough to sustain them until next season when they start all over again. They may need to spend some time searching for a suitable candidate.

They need the child's essence in order to survive.

Once they have lulled her into playing with them, they begin to drain her. This process is conducted over a period of a month. It is a slow cycle during which the child and her hunters will play games, build hiding places and roam the woods (or other areas, such as deserted building sites or city streets) beyond the detection of her parents, or any other adults for that matter.

The child-victim spends a little more time with the kooks each day and grows paler and thinner the longer she is in their presence. At the end of the transformation, the child has become a fully-fledged kook, a ruthless monster that feeds on the essence of other children.

The kooks then disappear without trace.

People who have passed through puberty and thus are no longer children can see the kooks in their true form. The kooks cannot afford to have their feeding cycle ruined and they will attack and kill anyone who sees them for what they truly are.

Radiant Haze: This is an illusion the kooks use to deceive the child they are hunting. Radiant Haze creates an aura of beauty and enjoyment. The sky is bluer; the sun seems warmer and the smell of a soft breeze on the grass take on a euphoric quality. The kooks appear as stunning, angelic children, radiating love and friendship. The kooks do not have to concentrate to maintain this illusion.

A child caught under the spell is completely enthralled, and the effects of the glamour will not subside unless the kooks are banished or destroyed. If the child has some reason to fear the kook, such as the urgent warnings of an adult who can see it for what it really is, it is allowed to make a Sense Trouble or Surveillance check (difficulty 5) to break the illusion. A child is only considered to be under the enthralling influence of one particular kook, even if they are more in the group. Killing that kook destroys the illusion automatically.

Radiant Haze does not enable the kooks to control the enthralled children as if they were puppets, but the child does perceive the kook's words and actions in the most favorable way. The kook can try to give the child specific instructions to do something known to be wrong, such as 'go and steal your daddy's house key', but the child obviously struggles with this

instruction, to the extent that an adult can sense that something is amiss.

Use of the Social Sciences or Forensic Psychology abilities clues the character in to this inner struggle in the child's mind. If this is essential plot information, no spend is necessary; otherwise, a one-point spend is needed to notice the erratic behavior.

An enthralled child never obeys suicidal or obviously harmful instructions, but the kooks might convince it that something very dangerous is worth doing, such as walking on the edge of a high building. Again, if the child is put at risk to its own safety it struggles mentally with the kooks' control, and an adult may sense that something is not right; see above.

Any act taken by the kooks that threatens the child overtly breaks the radiant haze effect.

Radiant Haze can also be used on adults or on younger children who have lost their childlike innocence, but it is more likely to meet resistance. All non-child characters who meet a kook must make a Stability test (difficulty 5) or be enthralled. Enthralment in this case means perceiving the kook as a perfect, happy child – the embodiment of lost freedom and innocence, and an obviously apt playmate for any young person. So long as the kook keeps up the act, the illusion remains. However, if the kook acts in a sinister fashion or otherwise breaks out of character, the target may make a one-point Bullshit Detector spend to make a new Stability test, this time at a difficulty of 4. A further out-of-character action allows another Bullshit Detector spend and enables a new Stability test, at a difficulty of 3 (and so on). If at any time the Stability test is successful, the character sees the Kook as it truly is. Kooks who have enthralled adults are very careful to act the part of the angelic infant. If the Kook commits an act of violence or is killed, the illusion dissipates instantly.

Essence Drain: This vicious ability allows the kook to drain the living essence from his victim and sustain its own existence. The target is always a child.

Note that this mechanic is only necessary in cases where the PCs are trying to save a child from the kooks' predations, and it becomes a race against time. If the action is happening 'behind the scenes', then do not bother with die rolls and statistics. Just go with what is best for the narrative.

A kook must spend at least a week in the company of the child (daytime company is sufficient) before it can attempt to drain her essence. It does this simply by making an attack, which the victim usually does not resist. The touch of the kook drains one point of **Health** and one point of the victim's **Sense Trouble** or **Surveillance** pools (note that this is not an ordinary attack and does not leave a wound), neither of which pools can be refreshed unless the kook is destroyed or leaves at the end of summer without having drained the child completely. The kook gains one point of **Health** per point of **Health** drained.

Once the draining takes place, it cannot drain her again until it has spent another week in her company. Note that as the child's **Health** and **Sense Trouble** pools are drained steadily away, she becomes more susceptible to the kook's suggestions.

It usually takes a kook about a month and a half to drain the victim, meaning that she is totally drained by the end of summer. Once the last point of **Health** is drained the final transition occurs; the child undergoes transformation into a kook, who then joins its companions and then fades out until next summer.

The final transition of **Essence Drain** cannot be reversed. Once a child has become a kook, she is lost.

Lust For Life: If the kooks are discovered before they have finished converting their victim into another kook, they summon the lust for life to slaughter their opponents. Lust for life allows the kook to temporarily increase its physical abilities. While this lust lasts, the kook gains 10 pool points to allocate to its General Abilities. The gums peel back from its tiny fangs, which elongate; this increases the damage of its bite attack to +2. This effect lasts for 3 rounds, following which any unused pool points dissipate.

This is a powerful ability, which exhausts the kook when the effects ebb. The kook must kill its opponent while the ability is active, since it becomes quite vulnerable when Lust For Life wears off. Its entire **Athletics** pool is drained to zero, it loses 1d6 from its **Scuffling** pool, and its Hit Threshold drops to 4. It remains in this depleted state for 24 hours.

MAN IN THE BAR



Guys, it was three years ago. I can't remember which bar it was. Jesus, I can't even remember what the guy looked like. I just needed to talk to someone and he was there.

It was the kind of conversation when you don't even know how badly you needed to talk until you start. We were both sat at the bar, staring into our beers. You know how guys are when they're sat side by side and they don't know each other. You screen the other fellow out, like when you're taking a piss in the same urinal. Only, this time it was different. He glanced at me and I glanced back, and something clicked. A line from Billy Joel fell into my head and before I knew it, I'd spoken it aloud.

'And they're sharing a drink they call loneliness...'

'... but it's better than drinking alone,' he finished, and grinned. 'You know what most people never figure out about that song?' He waited for an answer, eyebrows arched.

When he saw that I didn't know, he ground out his cigarette carefully and turned around on the bar stool, facing me.

'Here's what it is. Everyone thinks it's all about compassion, like, he's the Piano Man and he makes these screw-ups feel better about their lives, right? But it ain't a compassionate song. It's all about self-pity. The guy who's singing

it, he's a bigger tragedy than *any* of them. You got to remember that it's not famous Billy Joel who's singing that song, it's just Bill the Piano Man. He's got talent; he knows he does. He can really *play*. But is he playing to a stadium? Is he cutting a record deal? No way. He's playing in some cruddy bar, to the same faces every week. It's killing him one day at a time, and he's really feeling it.

'That's why the microphone smells like a beer. You remember that line? It's *his own* beer he can smell on the mike. He's just another washed-up act who never made the most of his potential. That's what it's really about. That's the guy Billy Joel would have been, if he hadn't a been a success.'

It was mean, but it made sense. 'So that's why they say "man, what are *you* doing here?"'

'You got it. A guy who can play that good, he *oughta* be somewhere bigger. What's he doing in a shit hole like this? That's why the song works. It's all about shoulda, coulda, woulda. It all leads to the same conclusion.'

'What's that?'

'Have another beer and forget about it.' He winked.

I held out my hand. 'Michael. Michael Stewart.'

'John,' he said, shaking it. 'John Doe.'

I laughed. 'Whatever. Suit yourself. I won't pry.'

'Nobody believes me,' he said with a shrug. He sparked up another smoke. 'So what's your trade, Mike?'

This is the part where I usually lie. This time, I didn't. It was weighing on my mind. 'I'm in the adult movie business.'

'You make porno.' It wasn't a question.

I sighed. 'Yeah. I make soft porn.' I waited for the Comment. Every single guy who finds out what I do for a living makes the Comment, every single damn one. They all ask me how they can get into the industry, and they always do it in that I'm-just-goofing-around-but-maybe-I-ain't kind of a way. Some drop a few names - Monica Sweetheart, Jade Marcella - and ask if I 'get to' work with them.

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The guy didn't come up with the Comment. He frowned. 'Hell. A man does that for a living, it's going to eat away at his soul a bite at a time.'

It was like when you put your tongue on a sore tooth. You push right on the spot and there's pain, but you relish the pain because it's right on the spot, you know what I mean? Most guys would love to point a camera at naked chicks for eight, ten, twelve hours a day and watch them get busy. Most guys would *think* it would be the job from heaven. Let me tell you, it's not.

The novelty wears off *real* quick. After a while it's just bodies.

He put his hand on my shoulder. 'A man with that kind of a livelihood, well, he ain't going to have children. Not that can look him in the face, anyhow. How in hell are they going to go to school with the other kids all knowin' about how daddy makes titty flicks to put food on the table?

Right there it started to get hazy. I lost track of time, the way you do. All I could think about was what this guy was saying to me.

'If I was you, Michael, I'd be thankful that I don't have children. It's a mercy, that's what it is. A mercy.'

'Why, I reckon you don't have much of a relationship with that girlfriend of yours either, do you? Not your fault, man. I mean, how could you? You weren't lookin' for anything lasting.

'Men who date porn stars aren't after the conversation, now, are they? Just as well she's good at what she does. Hey, let me buy you another. Reckon you could use it.'

He kept on talking like that. He *knew* things. Everything he said cut me to the bone. Every time, more beer washed away the fresh blood in my brain. I could feel his hand heavy on my back.

'Yeah, sure you could have been a contender. Who couldn't? But you weren't a contender, Mike. You just went from one thing to another. Now look at you.

'You remember what you wanted to be when you were sixteen, don't you? Of course you do. We *never* forget. You just never made it. What would your sixteen-year-old self say to you now? I think I know. I think you know, too.'

You'll be wondering how it is that I let him say all that to me. It didn't make me mad, that's the thing. It all just



MAN IN THE BAR

went straight in, straight to the heart. All I could think was, thank God, thank God someone knows how much of a mess I've made of my life. He's not telling me to be strong or turn my life around or nothing. He was just telling me to give up. And you know, I did.

What he was saying was true. Carla was just a doll with silicon tits, a bed-warmer. I was a forty-five year old guy who earned a living by making movies of people fucking. There wasn't a whole lot to a life like that.

'Have another beer. It dulls the pain. *Have another beer.*
ANOTHER BEER.'

My head was on the bar in a puddle of my own tears. There wasn't anything more to say. I was dying and I didn't care.

I woke up to the smell of coffee, in Carla's apartment. She'd made breakfast.

I just grabbed a hold of her and hugged her like I'd never let her go. She was surprised but she held me and heard me out when I said I was going to change and make it all better and give up the business. When I was sane again, she told me she'd gotten worried that I was out so late and had come to find me. I was at the bar, alone, out cold, an empty stool next to me.

'Your face felt so cold, hon,' she said. 'I thought you were dead.'

So, you know the rest. You were all at the wedding, and the kids are growing up just fine. All's well that ends well, and all that.

Well, that's not quite the end of the story. I wish it was.

See, they found a guy dead in a bar that night. A different bar, in the same part of the city. The body was just sunk down across the bar top, his head in a pool of Bud, like he was sleeping off a bender. He was forty-five, same age as me. He was a cleaning product salesman, divorced. House repossessed the week before. Not much of a life. Not a mark on him, but for one little thing.

When they pulled his head up off the bar, they saw his eyes were gone. Nothing left but shriveled scraps of... stuff. It was like he'd cried his eyes right out.

I don't go drinking alone any more.

All That Remains

General Investigation: Frustratingly, none of the people present when the Man in the Bar was talking to his victim can remember exactly what he looked like. They agree that he was a Caucasian or possibly light-skinned mixed race; his hair was dark, he wore black clothes and his height and build were both 'average'. His age is agreed to be between thirty and forty. No facial features come to mind, however, and when asked to help a police artist or assemble an identikit picture, witnesses draw a blank.

Forensic Anthropology: There are two factors that link all victims of the Man in the Bar. They all have large quantities of alcohol in their bloodstream and they are all missing their eyes. On examination, the remnants of eyes are found to be present in the sockets, with the aqueous humor dried up completely and the eyeball collapsed. Some force must have desiccated the eyes while leaving the rest of the body's surface undamaged. The body also shows signs of massive dehydration from within. The liver, most commonly, is a flaking mass of dry papery stuff like a wasp's nest.

Fingerprinting: Forensic evidence cannot provide much more than the above, unless the victim was wearing a garment that could hold fingerprints, such as a leather jacket, or vinyl trousers. If he was, investigators will find a human handprint on it, where the Man in the Bar touched the deceased. The characteristic whorled fingerprints are, however, completely absent; there are marks from fingers, but these are blank ovals with no identity in them.

If, by some fortunate chance, the bar still has the glass from which the Man in the Bar drank and has not washed it, the same blank fingerprints can be retrieved from it. In either case, the information is free if it is essential to the plot, but requires a 1-point **Fingerprinting** spend otherwise.

Game Statistics

Athletics 8,
Driving 10,
Health 8, Scuffling 10

Shrink 20

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: +2

Hit Threshold: 4

Weapon: +1 (Knife) or +1 (handgun), if he is forced to fight

Armor: None

He is simply known as the 'Man in the Bar'. It is not clear what he is; this ambiguity is of his own creation and suits his purposes. He can be found in any city where there are bars. He is drawn to any place where alcohol is served and depressed people come to take advantage of it.

He appears to all onlookers to be a tall, otherwise nondescript man, standing alone at the bar. He is typically drinking a bottle of beer and smoking a cigarette with a contented expression on his face. When PCs first encounter the Man at the Bar, they should make a **Sense Trouble** or **Surveillance test** (difficulty 6). On a failure, the character simply sees the Man at the Bar as he wishes to be seen. Any investigators who succeed see him as he truly is; he has no eyes, just a blank expanse in the upper part of his face. Psychic characters with the **Aura Reading** ability may also discern his true nature with an **Aura Reading test** (difficulty 4).

If the Man at the Bar can see the observing character's reaction (it is up to the character to conceal his horror) then he may notice that someone has seen his true face. He does this by observing subtle clues, not by telepathy.

When encountered on a typical night out, the Man in the Bar is scanning the customers for the drinker with the weight of the world on his shoulders. He uses his empathic scan ability (see below) to find the person with the most bottled-up depression, the one who most needs a sympathetic shoulder to cry on. A moment later he will approach the drinker and strike up a conversation. This is, of course, a use of his captivating conversation ability; the target finds the discussion fascinating, though to an eavesdropper it sounds like any other

trivial exchange of views in a bar. The Man then offers to buy his target a drink.

What then follows is the Man's complete annihilation of his victim's character and nerves. The fiend exposes weaknesses, gives weight to the most insignificant worries, all the while telling the victim things about himself that he already knows, but casting them in the worst possible light. The sufferer cannot but agree and find himself slowly dying, minute by minute, as he listens to his life being taken apart.

To everyone else in the bar it simply looks like two good friends, one with his hand on the other's shoulder, plying him with drinks and gently consoling him. In reality, the Man is stripping his victim's soul, draining the poor drunk's essence, body and mind. This can take hours (see the Strip Soul ability, below), and by the time the creature abandons him, his target is a dried out husk.

The Man in the Bar only has to make the simplest physical contact, like a hand on the shoulder, to form a conduit, down which he sucks out his victim's power. This can be a real battle of wills (see Strip Soul, below), but not many have resilience to stand up to this attacker's verbal barrage, especially when alcohol has made them morose. While draining his victim, the Man prefers to whisper in his ear, slowly pressing him down till he is slouched dead on the counter, looking like nothing other than a passed out drunk. Then, the Man gets up and goes. On his way down the road, he hears a scream from the bar he just left, and smiles.

Note that: the Man in the Bar is not a fighter. All his attacks are mental and highly social. If PCs confront him, he will either talk his way out of the fight, or if he can, scare them off with talk of power he doesn't actually possess. He can also use his captivating conversation ability to delay a character or lead his inquiries off track.

Captivating Conversation: Once the Man in the Bar starts to talk to you, it is difficult to stop listening. He has a way of putting things that is just so precise, so adroit, so keenly observed, that it makes you wonder why nobody has said them before. You just want to sit there and listen to him talk. If he talked about you, you know that what he said would be true. Even if it hurt you to hear it, it would do you good; don't they say that truth hurts?

To use this ability, the Man in the Bar must be within 10 feet of his target and able to see him. If there is something excessively noisy or dangerous going on nearby then this

ability won't work. The Man can only target one person at a time with this ability.

To use the ability, the Man simply engages the target in conversation. The target must make a **Stability** test (difficulty 5) but does not lose any **Stability** points if the test is failed. On a failure, the target simply sits and converses with the Man, taking no other actions other than to drink when drinks are served, for as long as the Man continues to engage him in conversation.

While captivated, all the target's **Sense Trouble** and **Surveillance** tests are made against a difficulty of +3. Any potential threat to the target allows him to make a new **Stability** test (difficulty 5) to break free of the manipulation. Any obvious threat, such as someone aiming a weapon at the target, automatically breaks the effect, as does a successful **Stability** test to resist it. After the threat has passed, the Man may still attempt to re-engage his victim in a captivating conversation.

If a friend or ally tries to draw the affected target out of the conversation, then the target may make another **Stability** test for every round of interference. The target will not willingly leave the Man's presence until he has successfully made his **Stability** test, except in the case of an obvious threat as described above.

Empathic Scan: The Man has powerful empathic abilities, which allow him to 'read' the emotions of people in an area. He cannot detect thoughts, only emotions. This ability is always on and does not require concentration. The insights it offers him into others' moods make him much more competent at manipulating others and analyzing their behavior. In game terms, he has constant **Aura Reading** powers, that do not require him to spend any points.

Strip Soul: To use this ability, the Man must spend at least 10 minutes in conversation with the target. At some point in the conversation, he invests between one to five points from his **Shrink** pool and delivers a *piercing observation*. This is a key line that strikes to the core of the target's self-esteem. For example, in the story above, the Man's first piercing observation is 'A man does that for a living, it's going to eat away at his soul a bite at a time.' Naturally, the GM should roleplay this out with the player, cutting straight to the line in question if needed. It's not necessary to improvise ten actual minutes of small talk!

The target may then opt to spend points from any

applicable Investigative Ability pools to counter the observation and riposte with a line of dialogue of his own. Which abilities are applicable depends upon what the Man's piercing observation is and how inventive the player can be. For example, if the Man had pointed out that the target was unhealthily overweight and not likely to live past his 50s, the target could spend a point of **Humanities** to quote a merry Falstaff line from Shakespeare, thus blunting the sharpness of the observation. If the Man had pointed out that the target's wife was a squalid skank, not fit for his dogs to hump, the target could spend a point of **Intimidation** to recognize and kick back against the insulting nature of the observation, despite its accuracy. (It may be true, but that doesn't mean anyone can say it.) If the target has any points in the **Shrink** pool, he can use these as 'wild card' points to spend on any riposte. The GM shouldn't give the player *too* long to come up with a riposte, as that will dilute the intensity of the scene.

If the target doesn't come up with a riposte, he automatically loses the contest. If he does riposte, he is entitled to make a **Stability** test with a difficulty equal to 3 plus the number of **Shrink** points the Man invested in the piercing observation. He may add the number of pool points he spent in his riposte to his roll. For example, if the Man invested 3 **Shrink** points in his piercing observation and his target riposted with a 2-point **Bullshit Detector** spend, the target would make a **Stability** test with a +2 bonus against a target difficulty of 6.

If the Man wins the contest, the victim loses 1d6+3 points of **Health** and the Man gains a point of **Health**, which lasts for a maximum of 24 hours. (This **Health** loss represents enervation and dehydration, and as such does not show up as a wound, nor can it be restored while the Man is still present.) If he fails the contest, then the strip soul attempt fails. Once the Man has made a Strip Soul attempt, he cannot make another until the target has a fresh drink in hand, which takes a variable amount of time depending on the circumstances.

If the victim becomes unconscious through **Health** loss and the Man is still present, the victim dies after 1d6 rounds irrespective of his current level of **Health**, upon which the Man drifts away. The only way to save a character who has passed out in the Man's presence is to intervene physically, take the character somewhere safe and look after him; see Michael Stewart's account of his narrow escape above. Most victims are not so lucky.



MOTHERLODE

MOTHERLODE

In many major cities, little dead, deformed things can be found lying washed up against drain covers, their milky eyes staring at the sky, their pale bellies exposed. Some are like skinned puppies with the paunchy throats of bullfrogs; some are rats with too many teeth, their bodies stretched like chewing gum, limb bones poking through the scraggy fur; some are mere wads of little clawed paws, bulbous as berries.

Street cleaners and garbage men in major cities know about these tiny corpses, but do not talk about them, except to one another. The streets have many secrets, and some things are not for speaking about.

These are the abortive children of the Motherlode. This creature feasts on other creatures, then gives birth to horribly distorted versions of those creatures. Most of these are stillborn. The creature dumps them tidily in out-of-the-way places.

Not all of them die; this is where those bedraggled one-legged pigeons come from, which stare at visitors to London with rheumy eyes.

Motherlodes are urban vermin. They have no purpose beyond eating and reproducing, nor do they have sufficient intelligence to do anything else. Their origins are unknown, but they certainly do not hail from the Outer Black. Those few magical orders that have made a study of them conclude that they are probably the result of an especially inept attempt to create a demonic servitor through sexual alchemy.

They have a voracious appetite and will consume anything they can find. Tramps, street dogs and cats, and insects are all potential targets, but it also feasts on rotting organic matter. It incorporates this into its offspring, so many of the creatures it produces after a binge of this kind emerge with parts of their body dissolving into reeking muck, even more improperly formed than usual.

Motherlodes do not go out of their way to attack humans. They will eat sleeping tramps, biting the head off first to make the task quicker, and will sometimes leap upon children who stray into their territory, but if confronted by a large group of people (or a lot of light and noise) they will creep away and hide.

Very rarely, a motherlode will steal a baby and eat it. It then births a small monster, which is highly likely to survive and often proves to be more dangerous than the motherlode itself.

Motherlodes lurk in places where they can be assured a constant supply of food. City dumps are best, though many a careless motherlode has been burst by waste compressors. Abandoned slum housing and the alleys behind supermarkets or fast food restaurants are also choice hunting ground. Where there is rubbish, there are rats and pigeons to eat; and the trash is of course a meal in itself, if it is rancid enough.

Once a motherlode has settled into a region, it considers that region its territory. It is rumoured that when two meet, they attack, one usually winning and tearing the other to shreds, the winner dying in the process of giving birth to a bunch of even more distorted offspring, most of which are unviable.

Evidence Collection: An investigator looking over the area where a motherlode has entrenched itself is more likely to note the *absence* of evidence than the presence of anything significant. In the kinds of areas where motherlodes hunt, one would expect to find rats, pigeons and the like, but they seem strangely absent. Similarly, the only rubbish around is *non-comestible*. Plastic bags, crushed tins, soggy plasterboard and crumpled newspaper abound, but there is not so much as a rotten banana peel or discarded chicken bone anywhere to be found.

An investigator with the stomach for it can establish that something has eaten the refuse; empty cans that once held baked beans and cardboard cups that once held fast food milkshake seem to have been *licked clean*.

As motherlodes are secretive, they do not usually eat their victims *in situ* unless the victim is on their territory or they are unlikely to be disturbed, or is small enough to be devoured in a couple of gulps. They prefer to smother the sleeping victim and drag it off. The only part of the body that the motherlode cannot easily devour is the hair, which will also often catch on protuberances as the body is dragged to the motherlode's lair. As a result, stray strands tend to get caught near the site of the consumption.

Forensic Anthropology: Motherlodes need to absorb as much of a creature as possible in order to give their progeny the highest chance of survival, so they chew up their victims and leave very little for a forensics team to go on. Nothing larger or more solid than a bone chip or occasional tooth is likely to show up.

There will often be a large amount of blood spillage taking place while the victim is munched up, but the economical motherlode will take the time to lick this up if it can. When blood has fallen on absorbent or semi-absorbent surfaces, such as bare wooden floorboards or carpet, the stains are clearly visible. When it has leaked on to paving slabs or concrete, the only blood to be found will be a dried-up crust between the cracks, and will often escape initial examination.

Natural History: Study of the deformed dead creatures birthed by the motherlode (or of live specimens if they can be caught) reveals that they are not mutant strains of the original species, but something altogether different and alien. The tissues are shaped into the *form* of the imitated creature, replicating vital organs and the like, but very often the matter is incongruous with the apparent function. For example, a dead birthed pigeon might have a heart made from congealed bone, or a skull seemingly pressed from floppy, gelid tissue that would more properly belong in an intestine.

Game Statistics

Athletics 4, Filch 4, Health 20, Scuffling 6

Hit Threshold: 3

Stealth Modifier: +1

Weapon: -1 (teeth) and disease, see below

Armor: None

Motherlodes are never major antagonists in a story. They serve to heighten the flavor of surreal horror and disgust in a game by appearing in the background. A player might catch one going through the bins and have to beat it to death with a broom handle, or find one squatting in an empty house, giving birth to a feathery ball of half formed feral pigeons.

Disease: Motherlodes attack by springing on to the target from behind, then clawing and biting at them. The injuries they cause are no more severe than a nasty gash or scratch. They carry a dangerous wasting illness on their filthy teeth, however, which causes death in the majority of cases.

A target who suffers damage from a motherlode's **Scuffling** attack has a one in three chance (1 or 2 on a d6) to become infected with wasting disease. If his wounds are cleaned and disinfected immediately after they are sustained, which requires a **Medic** test (difficulty 4), then he is in no danger of disease.

A character who contracts wasting disease loses 1d3 **Health** every morning, and experiences constant nausea and giddiness. He makes all tests involving physical co-ordination at a target difficulty of +1. It takes three consecutive **Medic** tests (difficulty 5) and hospital-level treatment to cure him of this.

Vile Spawn: In the event of a motherlode devouring a human baby or young infant, it will birth a roughly humanoid creature shortly after. This creature is typically two feet tall, with rolls of pudgy flab hanging off it and a round mouth like that of a lamprey. Vile spawn do their best to serve their parent motherlode's needs, finding food and bringing it to the beast. When a squat figure is glimpsed wringing a pigeon's neck on a rooftop or trying to coax a dog off the street and down a back alley, it may well be a vile spawn trying to feed its eternally hungry parent.

Vile spawn will defend their parent motherlode to the death, and will try to lead investigators away from the motherlode's territory by steering them on a wild goose chase through city back streets and around crumbling slums. It is relatively common for an investigating team, on the trail of whatever mysterious entity has been eating urban tramps and possibly a child or two, to track down and kill a vile spawn and think that they have bagged the creature responsible, while the real perpetrator hides itself away, biding its time until the pesky investigators have left the area.

Vile Spawn Statistics

Athletics 8, Filch 4, Health 6, Scuffling 6

Hit Threshold: 4

Stealth Modifier: +1

Weapon: +1 (teeth)

Armor: +1 vs. Scuffling



MYSTERY MAN

I sat at the table opposite him.

The cup of coffee shook in my hands, spilling over. I had bought it to give myself something to hold on to, something nice and mundane and sensible, but it looked like muddy water and the thought of drinking it made me nauseous. I could not tell whether it was ceramic or plastic. It seemed part of an alien universe. I could not even remember if I had put sugar in it.

All around me people were talking loudly. It seemed exaggerated and therefore false. Were they doing that because they were pretending they could not see him? Their voices seemed so loud, the words so sharp. Was this all a façade? I was sick of it, sick of the unreality, of worlds peeling away like old damp wallpaper, faces dissolving while I was talking to them.

I was tired of overhearing police radios in my head, talking about me, making the fillings in my teeth hurt, filling my mouth with the taste of metal. I did not want to spend half an hour every morning finding the piece of furniture that had been moved half an inch overnight, just so that I could find it. Most of all, I did not want to feel the people watching me, only for them to turn back and pretend they were not looking before I could catch them at it.

For a while, I was tempted to tear out my eyes. I came close to obsessing over it. At least I would not have to see the faces, the graffiti spelling out my name amid obscenities, the recorded scenes on the walls of lavatories and subway tunnels played out over and over again, just for me.

It is a terrible thing to live in a relentless nightmare.

It is a far more terrible thing to become *used to it*.

I came so close to going mad, so many times. But I didn't let myself. I know, I just *know*, that nobody can ever make you insane against your will. You have to give in; then they've got you. Until you do that, you're not insane. You're a sane man fighting for his soul.

If you can keep that going for long enough, without *choosing* insanity – and believe me, it is more tempting than you might think – then maybe you will come to where I was then, sat opposite the puppet man, the puller of strings, the shadow behind the shadows. He's interested in the likes of me, you see. You know what children are like. They break something and then they lose interest. When something does not break, when it keeps surprising you, then you become interested. That was how I chose to play this, and now here he was. Finally. Face to face.

I looked up at him. He seemed ordinary.

Then his arms came up from under the table and I wanted to start screaming and not stop. Only some stubborn, dogged piece of me refused. I knew that part well. It was the fused lump of what used to be my heart, exposed to shock after shock, horror after horror. If I started screaming, then everyone else in the café would turn and look, and suddenly there would be nothing wrong. I would look like a lunatic. Frankly, I was unshaven and wild-haired enough to be taken for one already.

I could not look at his face, so I looked down. The fabric of his coat seemed to be made of spiders, an entangled mass of them, moving, struggling to pull themselves free. Little trapped legs waved feebly.

'Why are you doing this?' I said.

'Enough of Because,' he responded, quoting Crowley. 'Be he damned for a dog. Is it not enough that I choose you? Why are you not grateful?'

'Chose me?'

'When you were a little boy, living with your aunt in Brighton, you played a game one summer's afternoon. You probably do not remember. You called it the game of 'Blob'. It involved a piece of putty and some ants. You found it amusing to roll the ants into the putty, pretending that the Blob was engulfing

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them. They didn't matter. They were only ants.'

'So you're punishing me, is that it?' In defiance, I made myself drink some of the coffee.

It was stringy and tasted wrong. It wasn't coffee. I looked.

I spat it back out. It was mostly blood. But not just blood.

My stomach kicked up at my throat and I gagged. It was a reflex. I couldn't help myself. I could *hear* him smiling as I clutched at my abdomen.

'No,' he said. 'This isn't punishment. It's more of an entertaining game. Like the game of Blob.'

I looked up. The table was awash with my stomach contents and the chair opposite me was empty. People near me were gasping, muttering, making noises of disgust. I was the madman in the café, the filthy, revolting tramp. They had seen nothing. They knew nothing. I looked at them all, the wet still drooling from my mouth. It was too much.

'What!' I screamed. 'What are you bastards looking at? Eh?' I flailed my arms at them. 'Stop staring at me! Just leave me alone! Just go away! Go away!'

I held my head in my hands and bent over the table.

That was when I knew he'd won. It was over.

Only one more thing to do, really. My fingers closed on the metal of the coffee spoon.

I decided to do the left eye first.

--Last entry in the weblog of Iain Masterson

From a scrap of paper found in a park bin:

There are two ways to beat the Man. Play his game, the Ocean Game and win, or refuse to play his game, forever. Neither works.

Mystery Men and Railroading

The Mystery Man adversary places the players in a quintessential horror genre dilemma. What can they possibly do against a creature that is so horrendously powerful? If the Mystery Man is not handled properly, players may feel railroaded, or worse, end up having no fun at all because they feel their efforts are futile.

The Mystery Man is not there to be a tool for the GM to constantly thwart players' plans. Except for certain rare moments, he should remain in the background. His function, narratively speaking, is to establish *perspective*. Think of the G-Man from the Half-Life series of games, of the sardonic Nyarlathotep in the work of Lovecraft, even of the Old Testament God as He is depicted in the Book of Job.

The Mystery Man is there to remind players that the islands of security and comfort they create are fleeting, transient and ultimately illusory. The players will achieve victories, but those victories must be understood as momentary flint-strokes of sparking light in a universe of savage darkness. The Mystery Man personifies that darkness, and gives a voice to it.

The players' enjoyment of this situation thus comes from their freedom to buy into their own powerlessness and choose how they react to it. Fear and excitement are both rooted in the deeper sensation of being unable to predict what will happen, so if the players feel that the Mystery Man will *predictably* thwart anything they do, then there is no point in playing. The adventure's story questions have already been answered before the session has begun.

The Mystery Man will never limit their freedom to react; it may be that he enjoys watching the humans' reactions, as they are so entertaining and unpredictable. When used with subtlety, he should leave the players feeling haunted, paranoid and adrift. If they seem bored, frustrated or angry, then most likely they feel their freedom to react has been curbed by the Mystery Man's nigh-unlimited power, or story questions have been settled too early.

Game Statistics

The Mystery Man is simply a title best suited to this character for game book purposes. He will most commonly choose a title or central persona for his victim to know him by. Even this, though, is still just a mask resting on top of countless others. One can never know exactly what the truth of the creature's identity is. Nevertheless, this character is undoubtedly the most powerful creature in this book. He is not a 'monster' in the ordinary sense and game statistics are thus not given for him.

The Mystery Man is a godlike entity who targets one or all the PCs involved in an ongoing campaign. The characters will never know the Mystery Man's true intentions, other than that he wishes to destroy them utterly, body and soul, and not necessarily in that order. He never assaults any player character directly, working instead through catspaws, puppets and intermediaries.

The Mystery Man will take on a variety of forms and personas in order to achieve his ends. The PCs will be familiar with some of these. He will, for example, assume the form of a family member, but distort the character's perception of them, introducing dark and perverse elements that throw everything that seemed secure into doubt. The Mystery Man will do anything to confuse, disturb, mislead and utterly terrify the characters he has targeted. Indeed, once introduced into a game, the Mystery Man should be so pervasive that the characters will see and suspect him everywhere. He will either be leading or following them in some hellish cat and mouse game. Eventually, it will seem that every encounter, creature or situation is in some way connected to the Mystery Man.

One cannot destroy the Mystery Man. One can only thwart him, and even this is seldom permanent. You can only do this by disrupting his plans, which involves finding out who his agents are and confronting them.

One thing is certain about the Mystery Man; he thrives on terror. This is why he will never simply snuff out a person's life. He would rather have them descend into gibbering madness.

Sometimes the Mystery Man may even help the PCs, but if he does so, this is always connected to some complex and malicious scheme towards which he is guiding them

MYSTERY MAN

Statistics: The GM determines the Mystery Man's statistics for a given form and a given story. His statistics in one form may differ wildly from those in another.

God-Like Power: The Mystery Man can refresh any single pool at will. In combat, he can do it once per combat round. Otherwise, he can do so once per minute. He cannot be hurt or seriously wounded and need never make a Consciousness roll. If reduced to -12 or fewer Health points, the Mystery Man dematerializes. He returns to the Outer Black, where he must remain for at least twenty-four hours. For the next seven days, he is unable to come within three hundred feet of any persons who were present when he dematerialized.

Distort Reality: The Mystery Man can alter the physical environment around an individual for up to twenty-four consecutive hours. This is not an illusion, though he can turn off the effect at will when others approach, making it seem to the victim like a hallucination. Because the alterations to the surrounding area are objectively real, attempts by the victim to disbelieve what he beholds or wake up from the nightmare are doomed to fail.

The limits of this effect are roughly within the victim's line of sight. Use of binoculars or other sight-extending equipment by the victim merely increases the area the Mystery Man can alter. If the target moves, the Mystery Man can move the effect so that the environment continues to distort as he travels. He can place a victim back inside a traumatic memory from the past, make the walls of a house breathe and sweat, or turn a forest into a dark wood of reaching, hungry trees. If he wishes to insert other characters into the scenario, the Mystery Man must manifest in the desired form, or use other people enthralled with his Pull the Strings ability (below), altering their appearance as his twisted scenario demands.

Flawless Imitation: The Mystery Man can perfectly imitate any person he's observed for even a few fleeting moments. The imitation looks, sounds, even smells like the original, right down to body language. Characters can spot the fake by noticing out-of-character behavior. **Bullshit Detector** tells them that something is off about the imitation's statements, but does not outright reveal him as the Mystery Man. Only after the character (or player) voices the thought that this might be the Mystery Man does the illusion take on flaws.

Now the imitation looks mostly like the original, but with horrible, distorted qualities. Your "mother's" flesh suddenly becomes sallow and purulent. Your pig-tailed "niece" reveals a sharp set of fangs, and so on. This effect calls for a 4-point **Stability** test.

Pull the Strings: The Mystery Man may dominate the mind of any non-PC. He can force new behavior, including complex actions. He can extract memories, implant new ones, even change the victim's personality. This effect is permanent, if the Mystery Man wants it to be.



THE ORGAN GRINDER



Jormungandr lost genius or just crap? Jason Ardill tells all...

The Blair Witch Project of shock rock video is *Anus Dei* by the mercifully obscure Scandinavian black metal band JORMUNGANDR. The song is the usual shrill torrent of incomprehensible gibberish with a lot of umlauts in it, punctuated by guitar torture. But it's not the song that's memorable; it's the visuals.

The video has clearly been ineptly shot and edited. No attempt has been made to synchronize what's happening on the soundtrack with the action on the screen. Most of it is a languorous art-house rolling shot of subway tunnels, trash piled up against walls and sleeping tramps. This is interspersed with images from occult books, mostly woodcuts of Satan and his witches, as if someone had held a video camera directly above an open book. At various points, heavily made-up male faces leer into the camera from a few inches away.

After several viewing, the obvious conclusion is that the video is half JORMUNGANDR prattling about in their bedroom, and half someone else's film project footage, which JORMUNGANDR just happened to come across and edit into their video.

Although - perhaps that's what we're *meant* to think? Maybe this film looks so cheap because someone spent a lot of money to make it look that way? One thing is certain. By the time the monster appears, you know damn well you're looking at a sky-high special effects budget.

It's enough to give Aphex Twin nightmares. There's no face, just a peeled back skull and something like a huge set of dentures in the middle. Industrial limbs extrude from its shoulders, tipped with whirring claws - remember, this was made *before* Trent Reznor grossed us all out with *Happiness in Slavery* - which must have taken *months* to build.

When you first see it, the thing has its back to us and is tearing up dummies filled with offal, made to look like homeless people. This part looks a little fake, because of the over-the-top blood sprays and flying body parts, and it's hard not to laugh. Then it stops, like a dog sniffing the air, and turns round. It starts to stride towards the camera.

At that point, it's not funny any more. It moves

The Book of Unremitting Horror

with a horrible lurching gait, like Sadako from *Ringu*, as if it were broken on the inside. I've heard it said that they shot it running *backwards*, then played the tape forwards, to give it that disturbing stop-start lurch. Of course, from that point on it's all shaky-cam running, then there's the Blair Witch ending with the camera lying on the floor. Game over, man, game over.

As rock video monsters go, it's an unsung classic. If the camera would only hold still, we would get a better idea of how it was done. It's clearly not CGI, because that kind of technology wasn't available in 1992, when the video first surfaced. *Fangoria* did a special feature on the *Anus Dei* monster and came to the conclusion that one of the JORMUNGANDR members must be a *genius* with latex.

The film has been the source of rabid debate among those who have seen it, because it just does not make sense. Nobody has ever *heard* of JORMUNGANDR. Other than that one infamous track, they do not appear to have recorded any music. So, why spend tens of thousands on a video to promote a band that does not seem to exist any more?

There's more to tell. Contrary to popular belief, the video was never screened on MTV, nor was it sent to any other stations. The first person to broadcast it was Billy Two-Four (*sic*) an nineteen-year-old media student, who put it out on his public access show, *Billy's Horrorday*. He claims an anonymous donor sent it to him, which has, of course, led to speculation that he made the video himself, at college. Whatever the truth behind the *Anus Dei* monster, we know this much.

No one ever hired Billie Two-Four to make any more videos.

And the track *sucks*.

- From Cult Rockers, Tracks that shook the World

<http://www.dyingearth.com/horror/jorgamundr.htm>

THE ORGAN GRINDER

All That Remains

Evidence Collection: The victims of an organ grinder are rarely identifiable, even after consulting dental records, because the creature does not simply slaughter and move on. It obliterates its kills, pulling them to pieces like a glutton eating a lobster. Multiple portions of a single victim can be discovered spread over an area of several hundred square feet.

Occasionally, fragments of the organ grinder's flesh and metal components will be recovered. The former consists of stray hanks and gobbets of rancid human tissue, saturated with machine oil. Forensic Entomology reveals a strangely total absence of insect eggs or larvae.

The latter can, with considerable effort, be traced to their original sources, which prove to be deposits of scrap metal such as abandoned cars and old washing machines. For example, an investigator might find a shard of sharp metal with a speck of blue paint, trace that to a 1986 Volkswagen, scour the area for a car matching that description and finally turn it up – extensively cannibalized – in a local junkyard where the Organ Grinder armored itself.

Such investigative routes can often lead to the Organ Grinder's current hideaway, which is less fortunate than it seems, given the creature's ability to hide in junk piles.

Forensic Anthropology: The body is never recovered in one piece (although – unless the organ grinder has retained some ribs or a skull as a trophy – all of it is usually at the scene); it is always reduced to fragments, by a combination of slicing and tearing. Going by the blood splatters at the scene, it is obvious that this process has gone on long after the victim was killed; death is likely to have resulted from a single massive wound, after which the remains were torn up and scattered. It is very difficult to ascertain which wound was the first to be inflicted.

The wounds have traces of machine oil and metal slivers in them (see above under **Evidence Collection** for the forensic conclusions to be drawn from the latter), and mangling is consistent with what happens when someone falls into heavy equipment. As there is never a wood chipper or a sugar cane press nearby, pathologists would ordinarily decide that the victim died elsewhere and was deposited at the site *post mortem*.

Unfortunately, the blood dispersal argues to the contrary. Hence, investigators might conclude that persons unknown brought something big and industrial to do the deed, although the even distribution of bloodstains suggests that only the machine was present; people would have caught some of the spatters, producing shadows and footprints.

Forensic Psychology: A psychologist can draw some tentative conclusions about the killer's behavior from a study of the evidence.

Firstly, the killer is methodical, almost to the point of disinterest in the victims. The butchering and scattering does not suggest hatred, but rather thoroughness, as if the killer were *dismantling* the victims rather than slaughtering them.

Secondly, the killer appears obsessed with rending and separation; a severed finger, for example, will sometimes be found in multiple pieces, each joint carefully ripped from the next. It is as if the killer could not bear to leave any part of the body's operating structure intact. In fact, the act more resembles one of deliberate and extreme vandalism against a *machine* than one of atrocity visited upon a living human being.

A well-read character may note that the appearance of the disemboweled bodies, their contents strewn far and wide, is nigglingly familiar; they are reminding him of industrial equipment that has been opened and pulled to pieces.

Game Statistics

Athletics 12, Health 16, Mechanics 20,
Scuffling 10, Shooting 10

Hit Threshold: 3

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: -3 (but see Camouflage below)

Weapon: +2 Scuffling (pneumatic cleaver) or
+1 Shooting (swarf cluster)

Armor: +1 vs. Shooting, +1 vs. Scuffling

Note: These statistics depict a wholly 'new'

Organ Grinder that has only just arrived on the material plane and has not yet adapted itself in response to a combat encounter. A sample veteran Organ Grinder can be found below.

Veteran Organ Grinder:

Athletics 20, Health 25, Scuffling 20, Shooting 20

Hit Threshold: 2

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: -4 (but see Camouflage below)

Weapon: +3 Scuffling (steam-powered mallet) or +3 Shooting (compacted metal cannonball)

Armor: +3 vs. Shooting, +3 vs. Scuffling

The organ grinder is a ten-foot colossus, a horrendous amalgam of rotten flesh and metal. The creature has its origins in a distant, bleak plane of existence that occultists call the Outer Black, where it acts as some kind of sentry or ambush unit, as directed by its masters. A metal and organic construct, it has no volition of its own and follows a standard operating procedure: conceal yourself in a defensible position, and await instructions; if detected, eliminate or escape enemies (as appropriate) and find a new hideout; if defeated, adapt in response. Unless it receives orders the contrary, the organ grinder does no more than butcher anyone who sees it and fails to escape, then hides, slaughtering anyone who discovers it, then moves to a new location, taking care of all hostiles, and most of the witnesses along the way.

No occultist ever deliberately calls on one of these beasts. They are instead drawn to the material realm by botched rituals. When novices try their hand at summoning – perhaps using formulae downloaded from the Net – the result is most usually nothing at all. However, on occasion, magicians can get much more than they expected. The candles flicker and go out, then with a terrible din like an eighteen wheel truck crashing in slow motion, the organ grinder clambers

through into reality. The celebrants are the first to die, after which the creature runs to ground, eliminating witnesses and bystanders along the way.

Once it has disposed of its summoners, the organ grinder usually tries to hide in the subterranean depths of a city. Subway tunnels are too close to the surface; places such as deep, abandoned sewers and maintenance tunnels, disused metro stations or nuclear shelters.

An otherworldly, killing machine, the creature needs no food or fuel and can operate indefinitely – indeed *must* do so, because it cannot return to the Outer Black, under its own steam. Nevertheless, good soldier that it is, it prefers to sleep whenever possible, and can lurk unsuspected and undetected for years. Unfortunately, should someone uncover it, the organ grinder makes a fully committed attack, and fights tenaciously, unless overmatched (fighting for five consecutive rounds without killing an opponent), in which case it tries to run away. If defeated, it regenerates and rebuilds then improves itself, adapting so that the same method won't work on it again. Examples of how the organ grinder can modify itself through its different iterations are given below.

While a GM can use this creature as a repeating nightmare for the players and their characters, by getting worse every time it is encountered, the organ grinder is best employed sparingly; in the end, players get bored and frustrated when a campaign forces them to contend with a recurring, unstoppable killer. Nevertheless, with careful staging – research by other occultists pointing to some kind of unique identifier, accounts of botched “true name” rituals in blood-spattered work books, a lucky find while picking over an incinerated specimen – the adventurers might be able to work out how to get rid of the thing.

In case the players ever become confident that they know what to expect from an organ grinder, bear in mind that the adventurers are not the only hazards in the creature's world, so it may have upgraded itself several times since they last met it. It might have wandered across a freeway and been smashed down by a truck, leading it to invest in additional weapon damage, armor or even a more horrendous appearance.

Nevertheless, there should also be opportunities for the PCs to guess what will turn up next. Reports of bizarre traffic accidents or eccentric robberies from warehouses might give them some clues as to its new abilities, but

the machine should still have a few surprises; it might not even be humanoid the next time the characters meet it; an insect-like torso and multiple legs could have replaced the body below the shoulders. Alternatively, it could have equipped itself with spikes from which the mangled bodies of the players' allies now dangle.

Blood Lubricant: As a machine, the organ grinder takes a while to start; it grinds and groans into action and then builds up its pace as the blood starts to fly, until it is tearing through its victims like a like a food grinder.

As soon as the creature kills an opponent, the blood lubricates its parts, allowing the monster to move more quickly than usual. (Blood does not normally have this effect, but the creature's alien physiology causes a chemical reaction that produces it.) The machine runs at an ever higher setting, with accompanying grinding noises and mechanical whines. So long as it continues to slaughter living beings, it remains lubricated. If five rounds pass without the organ grinder having killed an opponent, then the increased speed and efficiency subside and cannot be recovered for 10 rounds, even if the creature goes on to kill again in that time.

The following apply while Blood Lubricant is in effect:

- The creature may make two attacks each round instead of one, but it may not spend more points from the appropriate pool (**Scuffling** or **Shooting**) in the second attack than half the amount it spent in the first. For example, if an Organ Grinder made its first attack and spent 4 **Scuffling** points, it could not spend more than 2 **Scuffling** or **Shooting** points on its second attack.
- A lubricated organ grinder gains a +1 bonus to its Hit Threshold, as it is able to move more swiftly and avoid incoming blows.
- The Organ Grinder gains a +1 bonus on all **Athletics** tests.

Camouflage: As a stationary organ grinder looks very much like a pile of random junk, it is very well suited to concealing itself among trash, rubble and construction material. If the organ grinder is lying prone among this sort of detritus, it does *not* receive its usual negative Stealth Modifier, and an investigator in the area must succeed on a **Sense Trouble** or **Surveillance** test (difficulty 5) to notice it. This camouflage is negated as soon as it moves or stands up.

Horrific: The organ grinder's monstrous appearance, the mechanical whines, the rotting trophies, and the

stench of fresh and stale blood, between them increase all potential lost **Stability** by +1, when lost as a result of tests that it provokes. For example, an investigator needs to make a 5-point **Stability** test on first seeing it up close, rather than a 4-point **Stability** test. Similarly, if the organ grinder tears your friend apart in front of you, you have to make a 9-point **Stability** test instead of an 8-point test.

Least Action: The organ grinder will only do as little as it must to comply with its orders. Thus, if it gets encased in something through which its enemies cannot harm it, the beast will decide that it has successfully evaded detection and found a safe hideout. This also means that an organ grinder on the receiving end of a severe beating might choose to jump into a tar pit, or deep, newly poured concrete. Of course, should this covering ever get chipped away, the creature's standing orders will reassert themselves.

Least Action also limits the organ grinder's upgrade ability (below). It will do the minimum possible to improve itself and thus would not work through a whole slaughterhouse, increasing its muscle mass with bits of cow. It would stop as soon as it had increased its **Scuffling** rating by the minimum of two.

Mechanical: As a demonic machine, the organ grinder is impossible to tire out. It can sustain hard activity, such as running, continually. In game terms, it refreshes one point from its **Athletics** pool every round, to a maximum of its basic **Athletics** rating.

Regeneration: Damage dealt to the organ grinder is speedily recovered. It regenerates one **Health** point of damage per round. Only one *specific* kind of damage, such as fire, freezing, electricity, acid, crushing, vacuum or radiation, can deal damage to the organ grinder that it can *not* regenerate. The GM chooses which type applies before the creature is first encountered. If the Organ Grinder is rendered 'unconscious' then further damage of the specific sort to which it is vulnerable can kill it; further damage from any other source merely makes it even uglier.

Serial Number: Each organ grinder has a unique serial number, etched somewhere inside its chassis. Competent summoners of supernatural creatures such as senior Esoterrorists can use this identifier as a true name in a dismissal ritual, and send the creature back

to the Outer Black if necessary.

Finding the number involves careful scrutiny of an inactive machine. **Evidence Collection** or a declared manual search will find it eventually. However, investigators looking for the number can see the monster regenerating while they look, and may even have to pare back re-grown flesh.

Guessing the number's significance is possible by use of **Occult Studies**. If this is vital information to the plot, then no spend is necessary. Otherwise, a two-point spend is required.

Note that knowledge that its the serial number does not allow a mortal practitioner to give the Organ Grinder orders other than 'go away', although it's fun to allow PCs to find that out the hard way...

Standing Orders: The Organ Grinder is a machine; a learning machine, granted, but it has strict operational parameters. Unless its master tells it to attack a specific target, all it will do is kill people who discover it, or who are a present threat to it (i.e. are attacking it), then hide and await new orders. If it is defeated, it must improve itself; if it is losing badly, it may attempt to escape, again disposing of threats and obstacles in its way.

Thorough: This creature reduces its victims to strips of shredded meat. This is behavior straight from the battlefields of the Outer Black. Like the organ grinder itself, most of its adversaries regenerate damage, so, when it has vanquished an opponent, the machine immediately rips it limb from limb to make sure it stays dead.

Once the organ grinder has killed a victim (see Blood Lubricant, above), it will spend 1d6 rounds tearing the body into pieces, and it suffers from an Alertness Modifier of -1. While it is absorbed in this grisly task, bystanders have a chance to escape. The monster will not pay any attention to other opponents unless they cause direct harm to it, in which case it will roar and go after them.

Trophies: The organ grinder sometimes mounts pieces of its kills on its body, partly to show its masters that it is an accomplished killer, partly to scare new opponents. Players who recognize former acquaintances, such as friends, family or colleagues, must make 5-point **Stability** tests for having this horrible realization, in

THE ORGAN GRINDER



addition to any other **Stability** tests they have to make. This test includes the +1 potential **Stability** loss from the Organ Grinder's Horrific ability.

Upgrade Construction: The organ grinder can, and does upgrade itself, learning from each defeat and improving systems, so that it becomes stronger and tougher. It is almost impossible to actually destroy one of these horrors, unless the PCs have reduced it to unconsciousness and dealt damage to it of the sort that it cannot heal. Of course, the characters may wrongly believe that they have successfully done so; see the description of the Regenerate ability above.

In game terms, the creature improves a given rating or gains a new ability. It takes the organ grinder 1d6 days to upgrade itself. It also needs access to raw materials, such as metal and machine components, so it will raid nearby sources; perhaps stripping gear from trains in sidings, cannibalizing parts from electrical ducts or pumping stations, or even raiding scrap yards and car-crushing plants to get the pieces it needs. It may even break into factories if it requires specialized items, although, the beast commonly draws upon the objects in the near vicinity to fortify itself; for example, if the adventurers smashed a truck into it, it might reappear with pieces of the truck embedded in its body and blazing headlights for eyes.

The type of upgrade the creature gains depends on how it was defeated last time. The primary purpose of the improvement is to do the minimum possible (see Least Action, above) to prevent the same thing from happening again. The GM should therefore choose something appropriate from the list below. For example, if it was blasted with small arms fire until it fell over, it would fit itself with armour plating, while if it was torched with multiple flamethrowers and

reduced to a blackened, peeling skeleton, it would use chemicals and replacement organs to proof itself against fire. There is no limit to the number of times an organ grinder can upgrade itself, though it can only do so after it has been defeated.

Upgrades

Additional Health: The organ grinder gains two points of **Health** rating.

Additional Terror: The creature uses protrusions from its body (such as barbaric spikes and tumors) and ornamentation made from the remnants of the dead to increase its fearsomeness. The increased potential Stability loss from its Horrific ability increases by a further +1. The organ grinder will use this upgrade if it is not creating a suitably terrified reaction, or if it believes that its opponents are getting used to its appearance and can recognize it too easily.

Rating Increase: This upgrade is only applied when the creature fails in a specific type of task. It increases one of its General abilities by two points, or its Alertness modifier by one 'plus', to a maximum of +3. For example, if it was rammed by a bulldozer and forced over the edge of a cliff (failed **Scuffling** contest) it would increase **Scuffling**; if it was pinned by fallen debris that it was not strong enough to move (failed **Athletics** test) it would increase **Athletics**; if it failed to spot a strike team sneaking up on it, it would increase its Alertness modifier.

Improved Weapon: If it was not slaughtering the fleshy ones swiftly enough, the Organ Grinder can upgrade its melee or ranged weapon, increasing its bonus damage by +1.

Change Vulnerability: The organ grinder must always have an Achilles' heel, but may change the type of energy that deals lethal damage to it, from electricity to fire, for example.

Special Damage Resistance: The GM might apply this upgrade when overwhelming damage of a given type (such as acid, electricity or fire) was what defeated the organ grinder last time. The creature gains a point of 'armor' that is only effective against damage of this kind. It cannot armor itself against the one type of damage to which it is vulnerable.

Improved Armor Plating: If the organ grinder did not last long enough in combat, it will opt to fortify itself with bulky metal plates sewn into its skin, or by developing thick clumps of tough callus. Each time the GM assigns this upgrade to the creature, its **Armor** vs. **Scuffling** or **Shooting** increases by +1.

Size Increase: The organ grinder can simply grow larger. Each five-foot height increase boosts its **Health** by 5 points, its **Athletics** by 5 points and its **Scuffling** by 5 points. Weapon damage from scuffling also increases by +1. However, the creature's Hit Threshold drops by 1 point, and its Stealth modifier is reduced by an additional -1. It cannot reduce its Hit Threshold to below 1.

THE OUTSIDERS



These enigmatic creatures have sometimes been called the Men in Black or the Strangers. Alone of all the beings in this volume, they are not necessarily malign – just very alien indeed. They are drawn to extreme emotions, such as panic, terror and rage, and the emotional radiation given off by a collapsing mind that cannot take any more torment is fascinating to them. When PCs confront terrors beyond those faced by ordinary people, they may attract the attention of the Outsiders.

According to the case histories available, the Outsiders are drawn to certain people when their anxiety reaches a certain peak and a complete nervous breakdown is imminent. These creatures do not do anything to increase or diminish the anxiety. Beyond simply *being there*, they have no major interaction with their victim; for the most part, they simply stand in the background of the person's life, and watch. These silent, subtle ghosts are constantly in the background, noticeable but not intrusive, which can make their breakdown come all the quicker. The paranoid mental patients who rave that 'they' are watching and controlling them, may be

referring to the Outsiders.

It is not known whether or not these strange, shadowy creatures mean any harm but recorded encounters with them are disturbing. Their behavior is noticeably *wrong* – they do not seem familiar with human interaction, their speech is stilted and they make elementary mistakes, like forgetting to tie shoelaces or walking out of a shop without paying. The most common theory regarding the Outsiders is that they are aliens who are researching the stress factors in human life.

Typically, Outsiders appear as blurred, indistinct people who lurk in the corner of one's vision. At other times, when they decide to approach closer, their appearance is more like that of business-suited men and women in dark glasses. Their skin seems a little too smooth, as if it were made of plastic. Their lips are very red and their expressions never seem to change. Terrifying sounds and flashing images typical of a UFO encounter can sometimes accompany their arrival; see the Psychic Interference ability.

All That Remains

Evidence Collection: Depending on how the victim contextualized the Outsiders' influence on his life, investigators may find various attempts to cope with it or to negate it. For example, a mystically minded person might have tried to keep them at bay with magical rituals, drawing mystic symbols around his house and sleeping in a ritual circle. By contrast, a more conventional human being would have a medicine cabinet full of antipsychotic drugs, or perhaps commercially available tranquilizers (heavily used) if he had not seen a psychiatrist.

Forensic Anthropology: The Outsiders do not kill their victims, as a rule. However, a person can die as a result of an Outsider's interference: when an Outsider has heightened a person's emotions, he is more vulnerable to shock and can literally be scared to death.

The bodies of such victims show all the signs of having suffered coronary arrest. Adrenaline levels prove them to have been highly agitated and the expression on the face is one of stark terror.

Forensic Psychology/Textual Analysis: Studying the dead person's recent activities results in an image of a person who had recently been suffering from extreme stress. Handwriting becomes jagged and uneven, while the voice is tremulous and suggests unspoken burdens.

If the victim described his encounters with the Outsiders in a journal, or some other medium such as letters or emails to a friend, a psychologist may well conclude that he was suffering from paranoid schizophrenia. The references to mental control at a distance, and to a shadowy conspiracy behind the surface appearance of normality, are all too familiar.

Game Statistics

Aberance 10, Athletics 6, Driving 8, Health 8, Scuffling 6, Shooting 6

Hit Threshold: 3

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +2

Weapon: Electrical Grasp (see below)

Armor: None

In the context of a game, the Outsiders represent two things: the worsening of terror that already exists and the presence of an unknown, enigmatic, potent force.

While these creatures could intimidate PCs, they are not necessarily hostile. They might even provide a bizarre kind of assistance, as they view other alien entities' meddling with humans as a corruption of their experiments. Consequently, when entities from the Outer Black (such as the organ grinder or the torture dogs) are persecuting the adventurers, the Outsiders may be able to keep them at bay. This is entirely in the interests of science. The Outsiders are wholly neutral and alien, not allies of the players.

Electrical Grasp: The Outsiders are not combatants. If menaced, they will retreat. They do, however, have means to defend themselves. The Outsider can prepare for an attack by burning up to five points from its **Aberance** pool. It then makes a **Scuffling** attack. If the attack is successful, it deals damage as normal, plus one point of **Health** for every point of **Aberance** that the Outsider expended.

The target must also make a **Health** test, the difficulty being the number of points of **Aberance** the Outsider spent plus one. (The target may choose to expend **Health** voluntarily to get a better result.) If the test fails, the target is immediately knocked unconscious by the force of the electric shock and remains that way for 1d6x10 minutes or until revived.

Heighten Emotion: Outsiders find human emotions fascinating. In order to understand them better, they magnify them, much as a scientist uses a microscope to increase the image of the tiny creatures he is studying. Human beings who are being monitored by Outsiders often find that their own feelings of panic, hope and rage are much harder to bear. They fear they are going mad, which just adds to the stress and causes more intense emotion.

An Outsider can heighten the emotions of up to three people at once. The range of this ability is line of sight. This ability costs the Outsider a minimum of two points of **Aberance** per target affected; it may expend more. The target may make a **Stability** test to resist the effect. On a failure, no **Stability** is actually lost, but the target's emotions are heightened and he is more sensitive to future **Stability** losses.

A person suffering from heightened emotions makes all **Stability** checks against a Difficulty of +1 (usually 5). For example, if a person with heightened emotions was attacked violently by a human opponent, he would make a 2-point **Stability** test against a Difficulty of 5.

(The amount of **Stability** lost does not change, only the difficulty number of the **Stability** test.) Subjectively, as a roleplaying element, they perceive other people as much more frightening, or charming, or depressing than they actually are.

The state of heightened emotions lasts for 12 hours per point of **Aberrance** that the Outsider used when it imposed the condition.

Medical treatment with appropriate psychiatric drugs can remove the condition. **Forensic Psychology** or **Pathology** can discern that there is something specific wrong with the victim (they are not just highly strung). As usual, this information is free (requiring only the stated use of the relevant ability) if it is essential to the plot, and requires a 1-point spend otherwise.

Diagnosing a PCs condition is *never* counted as essential to the plot, and the **Shrink** ability may be used to diagnose and treat it. Treating this condition once it has been diagnosed requires two successful **Shrink** tests across a period of 48 hours (Difficulty 4) and access to psychiatric medication.

There is, however, a positive side. Affected characters make all **Sense Trouble** or **Surveillance** tests at -1 difficulty, as they are more sensitive to emotional stimuli and can detect other people's emotions more easily. The GM may also rule that certain Investigative Abilities (such as **Reassurance**) are more effective, costing one fewer point than usual to use, or refreshing in the middle of a scenario rather than after it has finished.

Partial Reality: Until they decide to become solid, the Outsiders are not fully 'real'. They can occasionally be seen, as blurred figures out of the corner of the eye. Those who they are stalking see the Outsiders reflected behind them in shop windows, watching from across the street, or even standing outside the house looking in through the window. As soon as they are looked at directly, they cannot be seen at all.

While in this state of partial reality, the Outsiders can only observe. They cannot interact with the material world, nor can they be interacted with. When they choose to enter this world fully, then they become solid and tangible and can be seen clearly.

This ability hinges on whether the Outsider can be seen or not. An Outsider can shift from full reality to partial

reality at will, but only if nobody can see it. It cannot use this ability to teleport or become insubstantial. It could, however, disappear while someone's back was turned. Keeping your vision fixed on a manifested Outsider prevents it from becoming partially real again.

Psychic Interference: The arrival of Outsiders into an area is accompanied by a night of bizarre manifestations. Ghostly lights are seen in the sky, behind the clouds, too vague to make out properly. Strange grinding noises and echoing metallic twangs are heard in the distance, again impossible to place. Television pictures and radio shows dissolve into bursts of static. During phone conversations, indistinct, buzzing voices are heard in the background, like a crossed line but far more sinister.

Most distressingly, electrical and mechanical appliances malfunction. It is as if power were surging through them one minute and being drained the next, without any logic to the process; cars stall without warning, their engines simply dying and their headlights fading, and will not restart. Electric food mixers go into overdrive, smoke pouring from them and do not stop even when they are unplugged.

All of this is essentially atmospheric. The GM can improvise any effect that the scene requires; the more uncanny effects will require a 2-point **Stability** test if the happening could be blamed on mere coincidence, an electrical defect or the like, or a 3-point **Stability** test if the happening is apparently supernatural or sinister. The key points are that power surges into items or is drained from them and that some other signal is interfering with the ordinary channels of communication. The morning after these disturbing phenomena take place, the Outsiders begin to appear, silent and observant...

Repel: Outsiders can telekinetically shove objects or people away from them. They will often do this to avoid combat. Instead of attacking, an outsider can expend **Aberrance** to project a cone of invisible force. This projects all unanchored items in the area of effect in a straight line away from the Outsider. PCs in the area of effect must make **Athletics** tests (difficulty 3 plus the total **Aberrance** expended) to stay on their feet. Characters with something solid to hold on to should roll against the set Difficulty -2. On a failed test, the character is forced back as far as the Outsider wishes, to a maximum distance of 60 feet.

OVVASHI



Jimbo

Howyeh. Heh, pal, I'm talking to yeh. Gie us two's up on yer fag, aye? Whassat? All of 'em? Ey, tha's generous of yeh. Very generous. Gentleman.

Cam oan, cam oan, thessa fire goin' here. Move round, youse lot. This is a pal o' mine. His name's er... yeh. I dinnae recall, but he's me mate. He's crashin' the ash. Decent cigs an' all. Bensons. Doesnae talk much but he's sound, eh?

So, where ye from, pal? Don' tell me. Yeh a foreigner, in't yeh? From the thing. Asylum seeker. Well yeh very welcome, you are. Welcome tae the land o' plenty. Nae

predjudice here, is it? All one big family, eh? Here... would that Netto bag have a wee bottle in it by any chance? Aye, let's have a bevy then. Guid man.

Tha's Mary there, then tha's Nick Fingers, so called 'cos he'll nick anything that's nae tied doon. Yon big bastard's Baz, he's got the horrors again, he hasnae got his pills tae take, not since they closed the centre doon and chucked him on the street. Care in the community, issa wonderful thing, eh? Tha's Welsh Dave pissin' his troosers, says it keeps him warm, eh Dave? Who, him? Eh, dinna pay nae attention to yon gobshite, that's Mickey Bastard, he's all mooth...

Mary

I'm cold. What I was going to tell you? Yes. Don't tell anyone. I had a child. A little girl. She died. She found my methodone. It was when we were living in the ca ca caravan. She drank it all and she duh duh died. I miss her so much. I just want to see her again, to hold her again. She's gone. Look, the pigeons are eating the chips. I don't believe in God, do you? It doesn't make sense to believe in anything that cuh cuh could do that to me. I just want another chance. I'm so sorry, Melissa. I'd do anything to hold you again. Anything. Even if it was just for a moment. Anything.

Nick Fingers

Cheers, fella. Sorry, I can never remember your name. Weird that. Where was I? Oh, right. Yeah, ten years inside for something I never even done. Dying a bit more every day. When I came out, when I saw the sky and the streets again, *that* wasn't real. It still don't feel real now. I get angry all the time. I wouldn't *be* here if that judge hadn't taken one look at me and decided I deserved to go to prison. That's where 'my sort' go, y'know.

He yawned. Just before he pronounced sentence, he yawned, like he was saying he wanted it over with. Then ten years of my life go by in pure hell. You think you know what hell is. You don't. Do I want justice? Well, I'm a criminal *now*, inn' I? Wasn't before. Learned a few things while I was inside, though. Wonderful thing, the British penal system. And to think they say the kids don't get a decent education these days...

Look, mate, there is no justice. Not for you, not for me. It's all bollocks. It's just a pile of bullshit and

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enough scapegoats behind bars to keep the Mail readers happy.

I'll tell you something. Not joking this time. I'll tell you what justice would be. If I had a gun in one hand and the address of that judge in the other, I'd sort a bit of justice of me own out. That's all I really want. That's all that keeps me going. The rest of my life's just shit, really. No point lying about it. It's all shit. I don't suppose...

Mickey Bastard

Don't you try and mess me about. I'm not afraid of you. I want what's mine. I kept up my side of it. I done him. Just like you said. Shanked him between the ribs. What, didn't you think I had it in me? It's a piece of piss, offing a bloke is. He wasn't any bloody use to anyone, was Jimbo. Nobody'll miss the old bugger. Quick flick of the wrist and it's done. By the time they fish him out the Thames, he'll be too manky for anyone to tell what happened. I know places no one ever goes. See, I done what you said. Hand it over. Jesus, I'm losin' my rag here, hand it over!

Ahh. Now that's more like it. None of your brown rubbish, this stuff's the business. Pure as virgin's piss. Got a bit of foil in there too? Magic. Hey, we work well together, you and I do. You ought to get me connected with your dealer. Stuff this good, you oughtn't to be givin' it away... well, except to me, know what I mean? This is class stuff, this is. We should go into business...

Welsh Dave

Thought I might find you here. I need them. Yes, again. You don't understand, do you, what it's like to lose everything? You've never been more than shit, have you? I was up there, I was. See that silvery tower? Canary Wharf? I worked in there, I did. Earned more than *you* can imagine. Don't you bloody smirk at me. You can't imagine me in Versace, can you? Well, I bloody owned a wardrobe full of it. Parties on the riverboats, we used to have.

The City, they call it. Don't need to say which city, do they? There's only one. Babylon was a city, and a whore. Same thing.

If you can't handle the heat, then you end up here. Too much coke did it. And Vanessa. She's a killer, she is. Cold bitch. Set me up for a tumble. It only takes one bad call, one afternoon of disasters. She got her arse out, oh yes. She had her back covered. Muggins here was the

one who made the papers. City trader loses a fortune. What, you think I should go on the streets and sell the Big Issue after that?

Look, I'm sorry I called you shit. It makes me angry. I've come down so far. I don't know how you got them, but I need them.

I need the keys. I need to get into the XJS and drive to the apartment and let myself in. It was so good to do that last time. It was like none of this never happened. Like this place, the drinking, the stink, like that was all the dream. Please. You don't know how much it means to me. Please give me the keys. I'll do what you ask. Of course I will. They're not like me. They belong here, they'll die here, they're just scum. I was never meant to be here with them.

You're going to make me kill another one, aren't you? Oh God... oh God.

All right. Give me the screwdriver. I'll be right back. Don't move.

Baz

please just make it stop make the voices go away make the faces stop staring at me make it quiet again give me the lovely silence the sweet silence no more mad people screaming no more whispers in the dark please mister please just make it all go away again make it quiet again let me sleep please god let me sleep whatever it takes just give me peace yes I will bring you the heads yes I will bring you all the heads you want yes all of them yes I will yes.

All That Remains

Forensic Anthropology: When the ovvashi kill, the victim looks like a shark tore and ate him, although the body shows no signs of having been in the water. Even more awkwardly, a thorough post mortem examination will often reveal that the cause of death was an overdose of high-quality, high-purity narcotics, and that the lacerations were inflicted on the still-twitching corpse.

Happily, pathologists seldom have to present evidence on shark-eaten, drug-saturated bodies to coroners, because ovvashi seldom do their own butchery. Instead, they delegate, duping their victims to into slaughtering

each other, then rewarding the survivor with presents from its bags.

The dead thus show the signs of brutal, desperate murder. Stabbings are common, as are other violent causes of death such as strangulation or braining with a blunt instrument.

Evidence Collection: The ovvashi's stooges want to get the job done as quickly as they can, so that they can get their hands on their heart's desire. Similarly, they do not usually take a great deal of care over disposal of the bodies. Thus, victims tend to be dumped on rubbish tips, thrown into canals, abandoned in telephone boxes or (at most) buried in very shallow graves.

When investigating the aftermath of an ovvashi's predation, investigators are more baffled by what they do *not* find than what they do find. The corpses show clear signs of intoxication – one has alcohol in his system, another heroin, another crack cocaine – and yet there is not so much as a bottle cap to be found that can be linked decisively to the substance that killed the victim. This is because the items produced from the ovvashi's bag cease to exist after 24 hours, or sooner if the ovvashi wills it.

Frustrating false leads are very common in these cases. An investigator may find a needle apparently used to inject heroin, only to find that the blood crusting its tip does not match that of the victim. The fingerprints on the crack pipe found by the stiffening cadaver are not those of the dead person. It is as if something has not so much cleaned up the evidence as willed it into nonexistence, which of course is exactly what *has* happened.

Fortunately, the murder weapons are not always provided by the ovvashi. These usually prove to be the core clues in an investigation of this kind. A is killed by B with a rusty screwdriver; B is decapitated by C with a spade; C gets his head bashed in by D, who in turn has his arteries slit open by the glass shards from E's broken bottle; and so on.

Forensic Entomology: The time of death, as determined by insect activity (the bodies almost always being discovered outdoors) shows that the ovvashi's victims died in sequence, separated by periods of 24 to 48 hours.

Game Statistics

Athletics 12,
Driving 3, Filch 8,
Health 20, Medic 8, Preparedness
(special), Scuffling 15, Shooting 8,
Shrink 8

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +1

Weapon: Bite (+0)

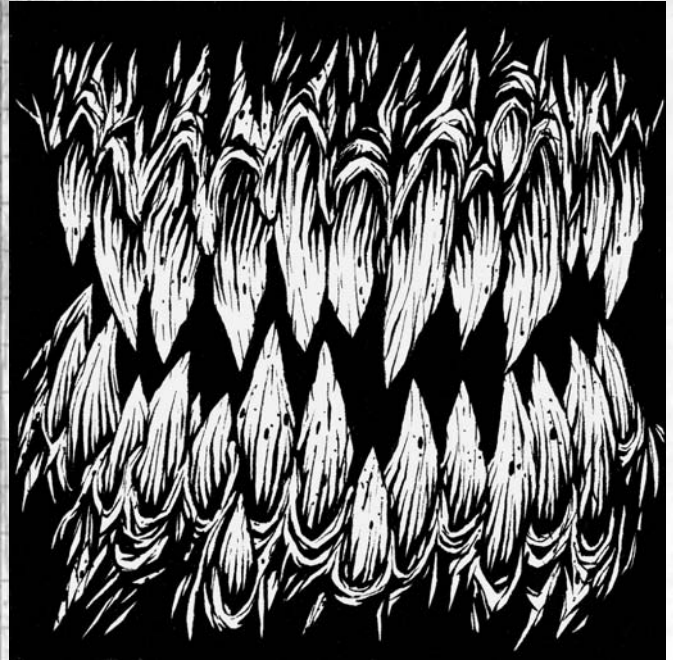
The ovvashi is a demonic entity, resident on the material plane. It seeks out the little knots of homeless derelicts scavenging on society's margins and steadily corrupts them, manipulating and feeding their need until they are utterly lost. It targets them because they are ideal for exploitation. The homeless have nothing; they are hungry, desperate and alone and they understand need like no other.

Physically, ovvashi look like nondescript vagrants. They can be male or female, filthy and wearing many different garments at once, laden down with plastic bags containing their worldly belongings. They do have one eccentricity, though; they smoke little pipes (see Bone Pipe, below). As it prays on the homeless, it makes itself at home in the places where they congregate, such as soup kitchens, railway arches, burnt-out buildings and bridge pilings; sheltered places away from the wind, the rain, or the sun's glare. It never finds it hard to integrate itself into the homeless community; as soon as the cheap vodka and cigarettes come out of its bags, the ovvashi's popularity is assured.

Once it has settled into the homeless people's world, it goes about listening to their woeful histories. Whenever it can, it will pull from a plastic bag an object its chosen victim feels he most needs. This could be drugs, money, photographs from the victim's past, a cherished doll or teddy bear not seen since childhood, or even just food. What really matters is that the victim needs it badly, to the point where he would kill for it. In time, he will have to.

The ovvashi intends to exploit these needs, which it first feeds to the point of obsession. It loves to destroy the fragile community of vulnerable people from within, tempting and tormenting its victims with material gain

OVVASHI



or satisfaction of a more personal kind. To an ovvashi, any human being is worth corrupting and can always fall a little further. It is not just the business magnates and crime lords who draw the attention of the Outer Black. One can always find souls to destroy, even when it means going right down to people who have already reached rock bottom in their lives.

The ovvashi's first gift is always free. After that, they begin to have price tags attached. The demon will demand that the victim carry out little favors, such as robbing a fellow vagrant or telling lies about him. The ovvashi knows how to do this properly; it always starts small and works up. By the time it has been in the community for a few weeks, it has the members at each other's throats. The first killing is always a happy time for the Ovvashi. It especially likes its dupes to kill off the old and vulnerable members first, since they contribute so little. The easiest way is to set them on fire while they sleep, as if they had been smoking huddled up in their filthy sleeping bag and had caught themselves alight accidentally. It happens – who is going to know any different?

Of course, the first death is only the beginning. After that, more and more killings will be demanded. The victim is now imprisoned not only by his overpowering need for the gifts of the ovvashi but by the knowledge the ovvashi holds – he could have the victim arrested for murder, or killed by his fellows. The only way forward

is to descend into further degradation. Push this person in front of a bus, slit that one's throat, slip rat poison into another's bottle of cheap whiskey...

The ovvashi will only move on to a new disadvantaged community once all the people it has been in contact with have killed each other off. It is usually left with one victim standing, who has disposed of all the others. This one, of course, the ovvashi must kill itself. It usually arranges for the death to happen with an overdose or surfeit of the very thing that the victim craved. The last victim is thus given his due reward, in such a quantity that it kills him. With that final futile horror accomplished, the ovvashi's work in the area is done.

Appear Innocuous: The ovvashi looks like an ordinary derelict except for its multiple rows of triangular, shark-like teeth. It is, however, able to psychically influence those around it to ignore this glaring sign of its inhuman origin. Only characters who specifically state that they're closely examining the ovvashi's features may notice the teeth. If this is an essential piece of information to the plot, any character with **Natural History** gains the clue automatically. If not, the character must spend 2 points of **Natural History** to learn the horrible truth. Any characters seeing the teeth must then make a **Stability** test for seeing a supernatural creature, the potential loss depending on the distance from which they observe it.

Derive Power: Whenever a victim is killed by its machinations, the ovvashi consumes its soul. It does this by taking a small portion of the remains, like a fingernail or hank of hair, and smoking it in its pipe, which itself is carved from a bone of a previous victim. After smoking its victim's soul, the ovvashi gains an additional 12 points to spread amongst its general ability pool. Unlike ordinary pool points, these cannot be refreshed. The ovvashi retains them until they are spent, or until its bone pipe is destroyed. The demon is extremely attached to the pipe and will negotiate for its return if stolen.

No psychic residue remains of a soul smoked by an ovvashi. No ghost, no spirit, not even an emotional vibration, is left behind for sensitives to detect.

Extract Secrets: By sitting and patiently listening to a person who regards it sympathetically, the ovvashi can encourage the subject to reveal his deepest, darkest secrets. In most cases, the demon uses ordinary psychology. Where the subject holds tightly to his secrets, the ovvashi can use supernatural means to

impel him to spill the beans, forcing the player to make a **Shrink** test against a Difficulty of 4 (or a **Stability** test against a Difficulty of 6 if he has no **Shrink** ability) to avoid pouring his heart out. Each use of this ability costs the ovvashi 1 point from its **Shrink** pool. Unlike an ordinary use of the **Shrink** ability, this can force the subject to unwillingly reveal his most shameful, closely-held secrets.

Uncanny Preparedness: The ovvashi can withdraw from its pile of plastic bags any object desired by a potential victim.

Consumable items, including food, cigarettes, and drugs, work just like the real thing.

Size of the items is limited to objects that could credibly fit in an ordinary shopping bag. Items remain in existence for twenty-four hours only. The ovvashi can wish them away before that time.

When it wants to pull out all the stops in manipulating a victim, it uses its Extract Secrets ability to work out exactly what item will arouse the most desperate need. When presented with their heart's desire, characters must do what they can to satisfy the ovvashi and gain the item, or suffer the same **Stability** loss as if they ignored a Risk Factor. As they become crazier, the horrible acts proposed by the ovvashi seem progressively more sensible.

THE PRACTICE

You are hovering near the ceiling, looking down at your own body.

Your face is mostly covered by the oxygen mask. Surgeons bend over you, their attention fixed on a crimson spread of tissue, exposed by a hole in the center of a white sheet. Glinting forceps have peeled your skin back. Clamps protrude from the red mass.

The thought that you might be dead occurs to you, but brings no panic. There is only an oceanic calm, as if you were floating in the womb again. Perhaps there will be a tunnel soon, with a white light at the end. You have heard of this. You are having an out of body experience.

The billows of the respirator rise and fall. Your pulse traces a glowing trail across a screen. The lights in the room are bright; everything is moving in slow motion. It is like being drunk, or drugged. It is real and yet it is not. No tunnels have appeared, nor any white light. Everything is surprisingly ordinary.

You feel yourself rising. The ceiling offers no resistance. The dusty hollows of the void behind it are a secret space, where only ghosts like yourself linger. There are cables and ventilation ducts, and pipes that nobody bothered to paint, because nobody would ever see them.

You emerge from the floor. The room you are entering is much darker. It is a space like your own room. The bed stands silent in the center. It is not empty.

They are bending over him. You cannot see their faces, only skin like tree bark, knotted with stitches like clots of blood. Their uniforms are ragged and anachronistic.



One of them wears a once-white Florence Nightingale gown that has a Rorschach butterfly of blood across the back. You catch the gleam of a raised scalpel.

The only sound is a steady stream of blood spattering wet on the floor, as if a man were urinating there. It flows from the foot of the bed.

You cannot make yourself look away.

They move slowly, patiently. They nod to one another. They do not speak. Dripping things are lifted out and laid aside. You recognize the dark purple bulk of the liver.

One of them moves aside and for a second you see the face of the man on the bed. Tubes lead from his nostrils. His mouth is closed with a succession of Xs in tight black thread. A single mad eyeball rolls around, then fixes itself on you. He is still alive.

As he notices your presence, they notice it too. Or perhaps they already knew and were in no hurry.

As one, they turn to look at you. Their grins are fixed.

THE PRACTICE

Their eyes are dry sockets. Heads tilt to one side and then the other, examining you.

Silently, gliding, they approach.

The body they move away from is no more than an excavated crater with arms and legs. All the ribs have been snipped off and discarded. Intestines lie in curious designs. Lungs inflate and deflate. The head still jerks spasmodically. The mouth tries to speak and cannot, because of the stitches.

They crowd around you. Eyeless faces peer down at yours.

When the morning comes and you wake, with the drip in your arm and the stitches from your own operation crisp on your chest, you try to dismiss it as a dream, even when you learn of the death in the room above yours. There were no traces of foul play. He simply died in the night. It happens all the time in a hospital.

They claim that you are making an excellent recovery. You think otherwise.

You lie awake that night, too afraid to sleep, listening for the sounds of feet treading light as shadows in the sterile corridors. You know about them. They know that you know.

It is only a matter of time.

All That Remains

Electronic Surveillance: Members of the Practice do not show up on security cameras or similar forms of surveillance. Careful study of the videotapes from the time of their visit reveals bursts of apparent static, lasting a fraction of a second. These bursts can be frozen during playback and examined more closely. They prove to be images of human blood cells, bacteria, antibodies and similar microscopic entities, seething in relentless activity, as if the Practice had somehow blinded the camera with a glimpse into the carnal chaos of the human body.

Evidence Collection: The victims of the Practice are found in varying states, depending on how thoroughly the surgical team has been able to clean up after itself.

The great majority of Practice teams will be meticulous in tidying up the scene. The mortician in attendance will close the ravaged body up again, sealing it shut and smoothing over the wounds. Bloody surfaces will be wiped clean, so that only microscopic traces remain. Forensic analysis reveals that hospital grade disinfecting cleanser has been used to do this.

Forensic Anthropology: A body that has been violated by the Practice is only revealed to be such once the body is opened. Then, it is immediately obvious that some horrible surgical butchery has taken place. Organs have been snipped free, grotesque stitches connect parts that do not belong together, and some of the viscera even appear to have been fused by an unknown means, so that the organs are merged, as if they had grown like that. There is no sign of an entrance wound.

The Practice do not make a habit of leaving their victims like this, as it would lead to their detection, but occasionally a given surgeon will be more obsessed with the operation than with the clean-up procedure, or some outside force will interrupt the operation.

If the Practice have been interrupted, the sight is altogether more terrible. The body is sliced open with long, deft cuts, the skin peeled back and the innards scattered around with careless abandon, as if the carcass had exploded from within.

Forensic evidence (in particular the blood flow, the adrenaline levels and the absence of anesthetic chemical residue in the bloodstream) leads to the conclusion that this surgery was performed while the victim was both alive and conscious. Moreover, the procedure went on for some time without killing the victim, which seems miraculous given the extent of the injury.

Pathology: In a very tiny number of cases, a victim will be found still alive. Such unfortunate wretches can live for several hours before dying from blood loss and system breakdown caused by absent internal organs. They are opened up and disemboweled as above, but their eyes are open and moving and their lungs still inflate and deflate. If the left lung has been removed, then the heart can be seen clearly, pulsing among the ribs. Some form of muscular paralysis is preventing them from moving, though they are obviously in agony.

History: The careful evisceration of the victim, performed as it is with evident surgical skill, is reminiscent of the infamous 'Ripper' murders in Whitechapel, the victims of which were also missing certain internal organs.

Who Are They?

The Practice is an ancient organization of monstrous entities that were once medical practitioners and scholars that dabbled in things they should not have. They appear as vaguely human, yet horribly mutilated and disfigured. Their faces are covered in scars and stitches, where they have replaced parts of themselves or practiced surgical techniques on their own bodies. The Practice has been around for a very long time. Its members stood by Galen's side as he made his pioneering incisions into cadavers. They sniffed the wounds in the bellies of disemboweled Vikings, and chuckled over illuminated tracts on the four humors; they tore leeches from diseased peasants and eagerly unwrapped the latest delivery from the 'resurrection men' in Victorian times.

The intentions of the Practice are ambiguous at best and their habits are only vaguely documented. They creep into hospitals at night, like silent ghosts, always passing through their doors at the stroke of three, when the body is closest to death. Somehow, security cameras and human senses are blind to their passage so, undetected, they go about their grim business, torturing and mutilating patients in the interests of science. If someone comes across the Practice at work, they will see bizarre, gruesome men and women dressed like nurses, surgeons and morticians. Often, the clothes are very dated, and occasionally they span centuries of style. Some practitioners even wear medieval, Hellenistic or Ancient Egyptian costume. These are to be feared greatly for their advanced age and the power they have accumulated. When discovered, the Practice will, depending on the circumstances, flee or fight.

If the operation has gone successfully, hospital staff will find a dead patient the next morning. The body will show no obvious sign of mutilation. As far as any of the staff will be concerned, the deceased passed away overnight, quietly in her sleep. Sometimes a 'salmonella outbreak' will be blamed, sometimes an epidemic in the ward, sometimes malfunctioning equipment. Usually, no member of the hospital staff who

examines the corpse will notice anything unusual. An outside investigator, on the other hand...

There are those who have made it their business to study the Practice over the years. Many believe the Practice come for organs and other body parts from healthy patients, to replace their own rancid innards, and cheat death for another century. There is some truth in this. Others suspect an even sicker purpose, that this organ stealing and swapping is in the interest of research, that the Practice studies us, looking for new ways to weaken and conquer our civilization. Whatever they once were, they are now servants for a far greater and more sinister entity; perhaps even a god.

Common Abilities

All members of the Practice, whatever their function, have the following special abilities.

Dimensional Walk: A member of the Practice can phase out of this reality and into the spirit realm (and back again) as easily as stepping from one room to another. The Membrane is only a mild hindrance to them. A member of the Practice can pass from the spirit realm to the mundane world by expending a point of **Aberrance**. It costs the Practice member no **Aberrance** to re-enter the spirit realm.

Eyeless Vision: Although they do not have eyes any more, the Practice can see perfectly well. They can see in the dark as clearly as if it were daylight. The lamps their surgeons wear are not merely for illumination; see below.

Heal Injury: Any member of the Practice can stitch itself or a wounded associate back up again. It does this by expending points from its **Medic** pool, just as characters do. One point from the **Medic** pool heals two levels of **Health**.

However, the Practice are not subject to the restriction that affects PCs, by which use of the **Medic** ability can heal only the most recent injury. They can restore any amount of **Health** by expending **Medic** pool points, and take half the time a human medic would to do the job.

This crude surgery is only effective on members of the Practice (or upon similar monstrosities such as a residue daemon) and leaves hideous scars behind.

mortician



Mortician

The morticians of the Practice have the duty of cleaning up once the surgeons have done their work. They are putrescent artists, with a supernatural understanding of dead flesh and an appreciation of its beauty. If necessary, they can dismember a dead body in seconds and incinerate the remains. The Practice will always do this if it is not possible to reshape a corpse so that it appears to have died a natural death.

Game Statistics

Aberance 10, Athletics 6, Driving 3, Filch 4, Health 12, Medic 14, Preparedness 8, Scuffling 12, Shooting 8

Hit Threshold: 3

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +2

Weapon: Claw (+0) or scalpel (+1)

Armor: +1 vs. Scuffling

Animate Carcass: An operating theatre can be a busy place, with instruments to hold, machines to work and, sometimes, doors to barricade. Occasionally, an unwilling patient will attempt to escape, or resist the paralyzing grasp of the nurse. To prevent the surgeon from becoming distracted, it is often helpful to have a few silent, reliable assistants standing by.

The mortician can create *ad hoc* assistants from dead bodies by using this ability. Each animated corpse costs it 2 points of **Aberance** to create. A typical zombie assistant has the following statistics:

Health 12, Scuffling 4

Hit Threshold: 3

Alertness Modifier: -2

Stealth Modifier: -2

Damage Modifier: Fists (-2) or scalpel if it has been given one (+1)

Armor: +1 vs. Scuffling, +2 vs. Shooting

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The animated corpses are not intelligent and are not capable of independent action. They follow their most recent command from the mortician that created them or any other member of the Practice that addresses them directly.

Incinerate: The touch of a mortician can cause bodies to burst into strange colorless flames. They burn flesh, hair and bone, while leaving the surrounding environment untouched. Once set on fire, the body is quickly consumed, leaving only a gray ash that can be swept up. This ability works with complete reliability on dead bodies. The mortician can also use it on living beings, but the fire is not quite so controlled, nor does it necessarily consume the body altogether. It leaves a greasy, lumpy residue with parts of limbs still recognizable. Many cases of 'spontaneous human combustion' can be attributed to morticians trying to burn up someone who saw too much.

To use incinerate on a living victim, the mortician must first expend 4 points of **Aberance**. As it does this, its fingers glow and char like cigarette ends. It must then succeed at a **Scuffling** attack against the target. A successful attack not only deals damage as normal, but sets the victim on fire. Burning victims take 1d6 damage per round until they die or the flames are extinguished. This requires a whole round of uninterrupted help from another person, along with suitable equipment such as a fire blanket. A burning victim can attempt to 'stop, drop and roll' to put the flames out, which requires an **Athletics** test (difficulty 5).

Many victims, of course, die screaming.

Mould Dead Flesh: A mortician can shape dead flesh as if it were clay, but cannot create new dead flesh. By expending a **Medic** point it can perform simple changes, such as smoothing over the rent in the belly of a disemboweled cadaver. More thoroughly mangled corpses, such as the victims of serious car crashes, can be restored to a normal appearance with a two or three-point **Medic** spend. Incomplete bodies can be made to appear healthy at the point of death, but the missing parts cannot be recreated. Ordinarily, this is enough for the Practice, since they usually remove internal organs and seal up the incisions.

If an observer casually examines a corpse that has been treated with the mould dead flesh ability, the **Forensic Anthropology** ability may detect the tampering. (This happens automatically if the information is necessary to the plot, and requires a 1-point spend otherwise.) A full post-mortem will automatically reveal the absence of internal organs.

Sever Limb: The mortician's bone saw can zip through bone as if it were soft cheese. So long as the mortician can get a good grip on his victim, he can easily sever a limb in seconds. (The head is treated as a limb for the purposes of this ability.)

A mortician within scuffling range may use its action to make an **Scuffling** contest (opposed by the victim's **Athletics** or **Scuffling**, target's choice) and grasp hold of its target. If the mortician wins the contest, it deals no damage but has caught the victim and is holding him fast, and continues to do so for as long as its grip lasts.

If the mortician begins its action grappling a target, it may attempt to sever one of the target's limbs with its bone saw. To do this, it engages the target in a **Scuffling** contest (the target may oppose the contest with **Scuffling** or **Athletics** as he pleases) but must also expend 2 points from its **Medic** pool if it intends to sever a limb, and 4 points if it intends to sever the head.

If the mortician wins the contest, the limb of the mortician's choice has been sawn clean off. This automatically deals 1d6+8 **Health** damage as well as the obvious game effects of missing a limb, such as not being able to hold an item in a severed arm, or flee at speed with only one leg. The victim also loses one **Health** per round from bleeding until he receives medical treatment.

The grappled victim may use his action to attempt to free himself from the assailant's grasp by beating the assailant in an **Athletics** or **Scuffling** contest (victim's choice).

Reattaching a severed arm or leg is extremely difficult but possible. It requires three consecutive **Medic** tests across 8 hours (difficulty 5), a **Pathology** rating of at least 1, and access to hospital facilities.

GMs should always have Morticians use this ability on non-PCs first, in preference to PCs. Severed limbs and heads flying about are very true to the horror genre, but a missing arm or leg can easily spell the end of a character's useful life. The recuperation process can take months, and the other characters in the group will need to get on with their cases.

Nurse

The nurses of the Practice are eyeless, shriveled horrors that reek of antiseptic. They wear the tattered remnants

of uniforms. Their main function is to prepare the patients for surgery by immobilizing them. This ensures that the suffering is heightened as much as possible but the victim's thrashing about will not spoil the surgeon's work. The nurses also insert catheters and intravenous drips whether necessary or not (usually not) and assist the surgeons during the operation. If the mutilation from surgery risks killing the patient too quickly, the nurse can provide a surge of life energy to keep the patient alive.

Game Statistics

Aberrance 8, Athletics 6, Driving 1, Filch 7, Health 12, Medic 10, Preparedness 10, Scuffling 10, Shooting 8

Weapon: Hook-nailed claws (+0)

Hit Threshold: 3

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +2

Armor: +1 vs. Scuffling

Immobilize: When the nurse lays her twisted hand upon a human body, spurting needles emerge from under her fingernails and dig into the victim's veins. Paralyzing liquors, burning like stinging ants, flood from the wound and into the circulation. In seconds, the victim is unable to move or speak and can only stare as the surgeon's gleaming blades descend.

The nurse must expend up to three points of **Aberrance** and then hit with a **Scuffling** attack in order to immobilize. If the attack is successful, the target must make a **Health** test (difficulty 2 plus the number of points of **Aberrance** expended) or be paralyzed by the injected toxins. A paralyzed character is completely helpless and can take no action at all. Paralysis lasts for 1d6+1 hours, though most victims are long dead by the time the toxins would wear off.

Life Surge: A nurse can pump energies into living creatures in order to keep them alive, (and worse, conscious) even when their innards are lying all around them.. This can either restore a creature to consciousness when it has passed out, or heal it for 1 point of **Health**. The nurse may choose which. The nurse can use this ability at will, but each use costs it

THE
PRACTICE

nurse



surgeon

one point of **Aberrance**. Unlike the use of **Medic** to heal damage, this ability works instantly.

A nurse will only ever use *life surge* when a patient is in danger of dying too soon, or in similarly dire circumstances. The ability does not work on members of the Practice.

Vital Sign Awareness: Part of the nurse's job is to monitor the patient's condition and make sure that he does not perish too quickly. They can hear the blood rushing round the circulatory system and sense the flickers of consciousness in the brain as if they were precise medical instruments; the Practice does not need mere human technology, and never has.

Nurses are automatically aware of the state of health of any being within 30 feet of them. They do not have to concentrate; the awareness is constant. In game terms, they can tell how much **Health** a creature has, what sort of state its General Ability pools are in and what its current condition is, such as nauseated, scared or crippled.

They must be aware of the creature first in order to use this ability; it does not reveal any creatures that the Nurse does not already know are there. Nurses use this knowledge to their advantage in combat. It is impossible to fool avoid notice by pretending to be asleep, unconscious or dead. Nurses know better.

This ability does not help the Nurse to find a target that she cannot see, though she will notice if the target moves out of her sensory range.

Surgeon

The surgeons are the senior members of the Practice. Many of them are over four hundred years old. Only rarely do new members qualify for acceptance into their distinguished society. Like the rest of the Practice, they are corpse-like manikins of contorted and scar-laden flesh, with pathetic scraps of uniform over the top. The surgeons are even more scarified than the rest of the Practice, because of the surgical work that they perform on each other.

The oldest surgeons look like unwrapped Egyptian mummies, which is exactly what some of them are; the combination of dark magic with the removal and replacement of preserved internal organs was

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what first caused the Practice to come into being, many thousands of years ago.

Game Statistics

Aberrance 12, Athletics 8, Filch 8, Health 18, Medic 20, Preparedness 8, Scuffling 14, Shooting 8

Weapon: Scalpel (+1)

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +3

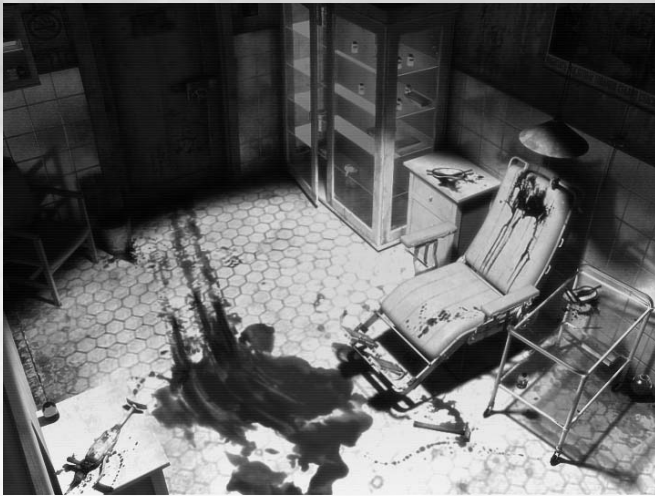
Armor: +3 vs. Scuffling, +1 vs. Shooting

The statistics given above are for a typical surgeon. It is not unusual for a given surgeon to have General Abilities even higher than this, due to repeated necrotic transplants (see below). Many surgeons stuff their skulls with additional brain matter until they begin to split like over-boiled eggs and need sutures to hold the brains in, while others graft muscle tissue on to their arms and legs until they resemble bloated and partially burst sausages.

Deep Gash: Surgeons can draw upon their anatomical knowledge to disembowel a target with a stroke. They can rip their scalpel blades through the spinal cord, paralyzing the victim, or slice through important organs, often killing the victim immediately.

A surgeon may forego action for one round to study a target within **Scuffling** range, working out the best place to strike and spending a point from its **Medic** pool. If it makes a successful **Scuffling** attack against that target in the next round, the surgeon deals +10 damage (if it meant to kill) or severs the spinal cord and causes permanent paralysis. The surgeon must attack on the round immediately following its round of observation for this special attack to be effective.

Necrotic Transplant: The rumors that the Practice steals organs so that its members can replenish their own putrefying organs are true. This is not their only purpose in butchering human beings, but it is a handy side effect. If this were not bad enough, there is a dark metaphysical aspect to their work. An organ is only useful to the Practice if it is charged with negative energies, such as those that result from fear, panic and agony. They cannot use organs taken from sleeping or anaesthetized patients, as these are just so much bland



flesh to them. Only an organ extracted from a living, conscious human will do. This is the reason why the Practice dissect their victims while they are still alive.

A surgeon can remove one or more organs from a living victim and place them in the body of a member of the Practice. This requires a successful **Medic** test (difficulty 4) and ten minutes of work. Depending on the organ removed, the patient is either killed outright (if the organ is essential) or loses 3 points of **Health rating** (if the organ is non-essential). The effect upon the member of the Practice is to grant him or her three rating points to allocate to General Abilities. The ability increased will depend upon the organ taken; hearts increase **Athletics** or **Health**, sections of the brain increase **Medic** or Alertness Modifier, nerve tissues (or, indeed, hands) increase Scuffling and so on. The GM will no doubt be able to improvise on this theme if necessary...

While the transplant is taking place, the member of the Practice receiving the organ is helpless, though he can revive himself (and abort the surgery) by using his action for the round. A surgeon can attempt to

transplant organs into his own body, but he makes his **Medic** test against a difficulty of 6 if he does this.

Pliant Flesh: The lamp affixed to a surgeon's skull is not just for illumination. Its radiation renders flesh even more malleable than usual, so that it almost begs for the touch of the blade. Wounds inflicted by the light of the lamp are deep, deliberate and sure.

Within the cone of lamplight (directed by the surgeon at the start of his turn as a free action), all weapons have their damage modifiers increased by +1 when they are wielded against living flesh, and all uses of the **Medic** ability to perform surgery receive a +1 bonus to the roll. The surgeon will usually employ this ability to assist him in his surgical work, though it is also useful when slicing the faces off those who are stupid enough to disturb him.

Suture: The surgeon can use a needle and thread to stitch an opponent's flesh with blinding speed. Gnarled hands move in a blur, and an ugly row of black stitches knots across the skin. This can be used offensively – and the results are disgusting.

To use the suture ability, the surgeon must succeed at a **Scuffling** attack against an opponent he is already grappling (see the **Grapple** rules on page XX). If this attack is successful, it deals only one **Health** point of damage, but the victim has his flesh stitched either to another part of the body or to a soft object nearby, such as the victim's clothes or a mattress. The surgeon might, for example, stitch an opponent's lips together, or his legs, or stitch him down on a bed. Ripping the sutures apart deals 1d6 damage to the unfortunate (and agonized) victim.

RESIDUE DAEMON



When I was only a sapling, this was a peaceful place. The wind was gentle in my branches and the frosts of winter never bit too deep. The other trees around me kept their own quiet counsel, brooding with the deep wooden wisdom that humanity once respected but has long since lost.

Finding nothing amiss in my little world, I sent my roots down into the clean earth and spread my branches wide. Little deaths, little births, all happened around and in me. Rabbits mated; foxes stalked. Eggs hatched; stoats killed. Birth and death, day and night, warmth and cold, back and forth, a balance.

Then the man came, and the girl, and I thought they were only lovers. There was talk of money, of what was allowed and what was not. Next there was a fumbling, and then a struggle. She lay still at the base of my trunk, unconscious. He was breathing hard. He had a pair of scissors.

She was not beautiful, but she was female and that made him mad. I could feel his madness hot inside him, his blood like boiling water.

He stuffed her mouth with earth and held it in place with a stocking. He used his scissors and he made her unrecognizable. He cut off the soft parts of her first. Then, when her face was no longer a face and white bone showed through the holes in her body, he went to work on the other places.

There should have been screams. The screams were choked by earth.

Agony spurted into me. Bitter blood drenched my roots and I was forced to drink.

She did not die for many hours. He went away and left the remains there. She looked up at the moon. A fox came and sniffed at her, then fled.

When he came back, he had a spade. He buried her without a sound, just as he had killed her without a sound. He left her bones down among my roots, to sink into the black earth of time.

Blood and rags and a rusty pair of scissors hung in absolute darkness among my many agonized roots. Her lower jaw slowly moved down, over the months; her spine arched; her skull was screaming, too slowly to be seen. Something still lived in the rot of her. It craved to scream.

The angry, eager, pious man brought others to share her grave; a pale factory girl from Rochdale, on her first

night on the job, and an aged syphilitic insensible on cheap spirits. It was always a fresh pair of scissors.

Then they caught him and hanged him, for something he had done in a different place. He liked to do this very much. Some pieces he had taken with him, and he had left an ear in a coat that he mistakenly took to the dry-cleaners. So he was caught, and so he ended, and nobody ever knew about my three, though many questions were asked.

Down into the dark they fell, between the spread fingers of my roots. Women's bones jumbled together, broken things holding silent conversations in the silent ground. Remnants undecayed. A scrap of silk stocking, a stained, once ivory denture-plate. (And three sets of scissors, red-brown with rust.)

All of them had thought this kind of thing happened to other people. None of them had ever thought that they would come to this. They would never be found. Nobody ever came here. The earth had choked the only screams they could ever have made.

Only I knew. There was a scream in my branches, far too loud for anyone to hear it. It never ceased. I was continually thrilled through with the pain and the rage and the denial. My leaves trembled with it. I bore it for years upon years, like black rot through the very heart of me. Their fury raged and swelled against the crust of the earth as an abscess rages and swells beneath the skin, unable to burst and find relief.

It was on a summer's morning, a hundred years or so after the man was hanged, when the boy struck the other boy. It was not even meant in anger. They were playing at superheroes and became overexcited. A sharp crack; three drops of blood from an eight year old's nose fell on the mossy earth. One fled in howling misery, the other followed in howling fear.

A bubble of blood lay below me. It was a bridge, at last; a chance of release. I groaned and let the decades of putrid evil, back into the world.

It was slow for a moment. The little scarlet spots only sweated more blood, a feeble trickle. The awakening seemed impossible after so long.

Then it was like when the puffball grows in the forest floor. There was a swelling, a blooming, a detonation. It burst and bubbled and burst again. Something spurted

from the pool. It spurted again, then again; a pulse, or a purging. My whole trunk, my branches too, shook with the relief of it.

Something was being born. It was born piecemeal, as its mothers had gone piecemeal into the ground. A spine without limbs lashed like a severed tail in the puddle. A tiny skull squealed in shrill madness. A claw like a mouse's flexed. It grew. They knotted and writhed together, wriggling with mad life. It grew. I felt sweet green peace return as I finally emptied my bowels of their nauseous hate. It grew.

The moon rose over my highest branches.

Horror unfolded itself and stood.

A giant shadow turned this way and that. It bayed, and its voice was many voices in a harmony of shrieks. Long jaws closed and opened, closed and opened.

They made a sound.

A sound of rusty scissors.

All That Remains

Evidence Collection: The residue daemon's victims are always found buried underground. The earth shows signs of disturbance directly above the point where they vanished, but there are no spade marks. Instead, the earth itself seems to have been churned up from within.

Chemistry: Chemical analysis of the soil around the buried remains detects copious quantities of blood, as if the victim had bled out into the surrounding loam. Testing corroded metal items reveals that oxidization was steady and gradual, as one would expect if the item had had years to corrode rather than days.

Forensic Anthropology / Forensic Etymology: More than any other creature in this book, the residue demon has the ability to baffle forensic pathologists. It drains every drop of blood from the creatures it kills, but it does not do this through its mouthparts. Instead, the fallen bodies are sucked into the earth within its zone of influence. Once under the soil, they rapidly begin to decompose until they reach the state of the other bodies buried (or concealed, or bricked up) within the same area.

Within three days, a fresh corpse is in the same state as a murder victim buried in the same place three decades ago. All the applicable factors – insect activity, staining and so on – point to the victim having been killed and buried around the time of the original murders.

Most bizarrely, the items the victim was carrying are also aged accordingly. Metal items rust, papers decay and clothes rot away to almost nothing. Dental records (if applicable) confirm that the victim is indeed the missing person, but the forensic evidence makes for an impossible time of death, many years in the past.

Given the accelerated decay of the remains and the absence of bloodstains from the bones, it can be hard to ascertain the cause of death. Marks upon the bone, read together with shattered vertebrae, suggest biting or mauling as the cause.

Natural History: The state of the skeleton, which usually has several crushed vertebrae, suggests that the victim was bitten or seized around the neck and then shaken, much as some predators kill their prey. The body may even have been carried some distance, or dragged, in the same way that a lioness will drag the carcass of a gazelle to a safe place to devour it.

However, the bones have not been gnawed, nor have they been pulled apart; apart from the marks of death, the skeleton is relatively intact. This is completely unlike the behavior of a predator, which will at least attempt to eat its kill, only abandoning the body if disturbed.

Sometimes the bones of the forearm will have deep gouges, easily interpreted as the marks of claws. The natural conclusion is that the victim threw up his hands to protect himself from the raking claws of some huge assailant.

Game Statistics

Athletics 16, Health 18, Scuffling 20

Hit Threshold: 2

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: -2

Weapon: +3 (Bite) or +1 (Talons)

Armor: +4 vs. Shooting, +2 vs. Scuffling

Murder, especially horrifically brutal murder, leaves scars behind. The minds of those involved are never the same again. The town where the murder happened must live with the memory forever after. Even an entire country can feel stained and disgraced by such events.

Wish you were here.



The pain and sorrow may fade, but there is always something that remains.

The worst murders of all leave a spiritual blemish behind, a running sore on reality. Invisible, it deepens and suppurates, creating an atmosphere of sickness, apprehension and despair that effects anyone who happens across it. Communities take what action they can; houses where murders have happened are torn down; outdoor places are shunned and tales of hauntings are told. This makes little difference: this psychic wound festers over the years to the point where if so much as one drop of blood is spilled on its grounds, something terrible will occur.

The worst possible occurrence is a residue demon. (Which, to the more pedantic savants, is actually a construct.) The accumulated energies seize upon the spilt blood and pour themselves into it, finally given form after decades of stifling silence, finally birthed into the world. The spot becomes a bubbling patch of scum, then a mewling fetal skeleton, then a skinless thing the size of a greyhound. It grows with obscene speed, nurtured by the putrid memory of horrors past but not forgotten. In less than 24 hours, the creature is complete.

A residue demon is truly a daunting adversary. It is composed of dried blood and pure rage. It stands approximately twelve feet tall, rippling with muscles and taut sinew, giving off a stink of excavated flesh. Its only purpose is to embody the terrible acts that led to its creation, and will torture and slaughter anyone or anything that comes with close proximity of its location. It will do this in a manner that fits the original event, which often leads to frantic speculation in the local press about 'copycat killings' or the return of a serial killer. Some may even wonder if the right man was caught the first time around...

Blind rage, terror and agony of past events govern the residue demon. In games where religion and magic have palpable effects, the horror will not rest or dissolve until it is destroyed, and its grounds exorcised. The GM might like to specify that this will require discovering and burying the victims with appropriate rites.

Blood Healing: Those who try to face down a residue demon often find they cannot prevail against it. The more party members are torn asunder, the more robust the creature seems to get. This is because it

Residue Daemon

thrives on the shedding of blood within its zone of influence (see the zone of influence quality below). Whenever blood is shed on to the earth within the residue demon's zone, and the creature is itself in contact with the ground, it is healed of 1 to 3 points of **Health** damage, depending on the quantity. The GM must decide, based on the nature of wounds inflicted and damage dealt, whether blood was shed or not but as a guideline, it can only regain its strength when other people suffer and bleed.

The players may realize what is happening. Whenever the blood healing ability is used, any person in a position to see the shed blood can make a **Sense Trouble** or **Surveillance** check (difficulty 5) to notice that the blood is disappearing as soon as it lands on the earth. Any person who does nothing but observe the demon for one round during which Blood Healing takes place may use **Natural History**, **Occult Studies** or **Pathology** to figure out the connection between the creature's self-repairing ability and the shedding of blood on to the earth. This information is free if vital to the plot and requires a 1-point spend otherwise. Of course, the players may figure the connection out on their own, without needing to use Investigative Abilities.

Note that the blood has to land on the earth in order for this ability to work. If any barrier (bandages, Wellington boots, a groundsheet, quick-drying cement) prevents its – the blood's *or* the demon's – contact with the earth then the residue demon cannot benefit. Similarly, if the adventurers somehow manage to lift the residue demon into the air, it cannot regenerate until it touches the ground again, and fresh blood falls there.

Frightful Presence: The residue demon can express the full horror of the events that caused its creation, sending out a psychic shock wave that floods the minds of witnesses with primal terror. It may do this only once per day. The shock wave is discharged in a 30-foot radius; as it is telepathic in nature, there is no way to avoid it by hiding behind walls and the like. However, anyone who is not within three feet of the ground (such as by being on the upper floor of a building, or up a ladder) is unaffected.

Any person struck by the psychic shock wave has his mind flooded with random images from the time of the murders. These are intense and horribly graphic; the victim feels he is simultaneously forced to watch

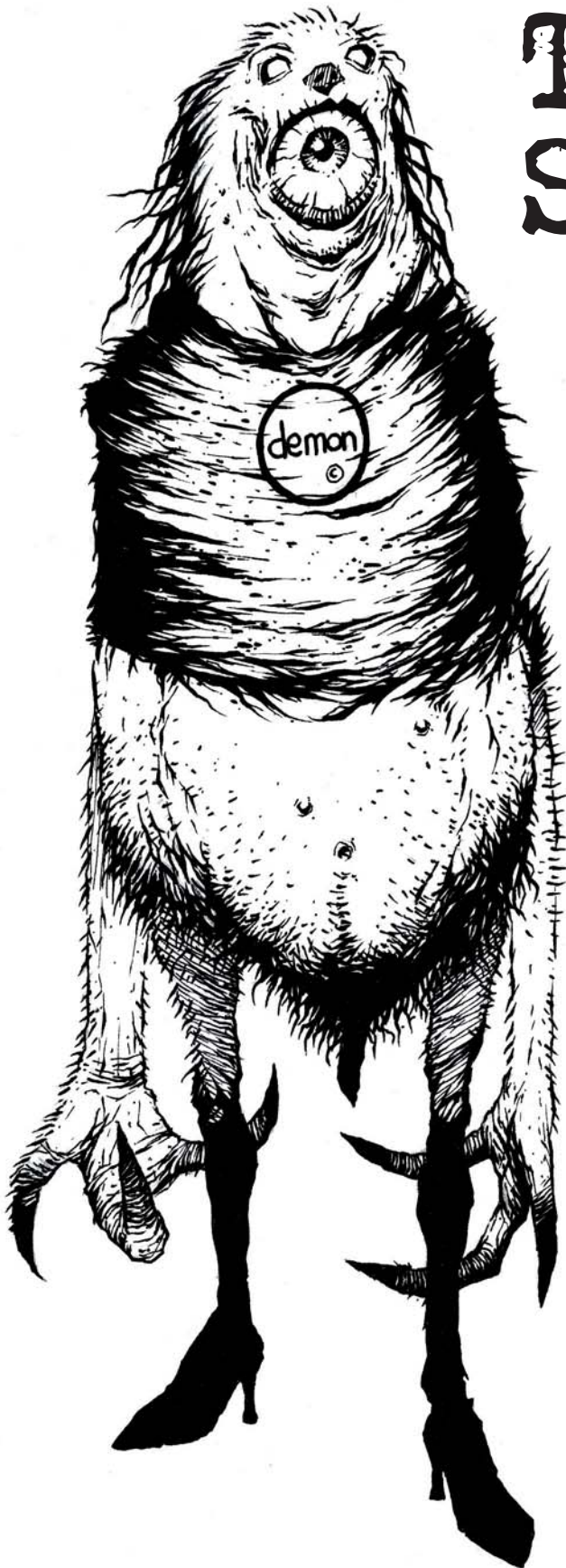
the events unfold, and forced into the role of the victim. Rather than a cinematic rendition of the killings, the victim is subjected to glimpses and sensations, such as a screaming face, the feeling of a knife slicing through a throat and grating on the vertebrae, the welling of blood inside the lungs and so on. These sensations force a 5-point **Stability** test.

The GM may, if appropriate, include useful clues in this barrage of imagery. For example, the face glimpsed may help to identify one of the victims, or a sensation of being struck from behind could confirm how a victim died. It is even possible that the original killer could be identified.

Zone of Influence: The residue demon is entirely the product of the violent events that created it. It has no existence outside of that context. As such, it is limited to a very narrow area, six hundred feet across. This zone is circular and centered on the remains of the original victim. If there are multiple victims, then it is centered upon the first one.

The demon cannot leave its zone of influence. If by some means it is forcibly removed from the zone (such as by resourceful characters trapping it in a truck and driving it over the boundary) then it disintegrates into a grisly slush of blood and bone fragments. However, it will regenerate in the centre of the zone at midnight the next night. This therefore does not destroy the creature but does give the party some vital time to investigate the demon's home ground. Artful players might think of removing the creature, then covering its zone of influence with concrete or tarmac. While this will not work as a permanent solution, as the demon will eventually claw through the obstruction, it can certainly slow it down or even trap it below the earth for a while.

THE SCOURGER



From his Lexus, pulled up near to the Greyhound station, Russell checked that Clovis was in position, and watched the cars grind slowly past. Going by the plates, Virginia, and Maryland, mostly, commuters outnumbered the locals, who had a snide, whiney slogan «Taxation without Representation.» If you really thought that senators actually represented you, then yes, living in a big city with none of them on your side might just piss you off. Russell didn't mind though; he'd met quite a few politicians, and none that he could ever have respected. He wasn't alone in that opinion; he'd once read that more teenage boys wanted to be pimps than be politicians, and whore-mongering was a fine way to make a living.

As the cars trucks and buses crawled by, Russell mused on his career highs, particularly one little bitch - Marie? - he'd thrown into the Potomac, while he scanned a set of prospects who'd just arrived and were wandering around outside the exit. He wanted kids poor looking, clean, and alone. When a prospect came out, some hick from West Virginia, probably, he sent a text to Clovis's cell "redhead, jeans, crop top," and his partner was off. Clovis's job was to rob her and run away, so that Russell could come to the rescue. It worked quite often, and was going fine, until he caught a finger-lickin' good eyeful. The pimp always looked for merchandise that would fill the occasional special orders that he got from high-paying clients. One of them was a superior court judge who had a thing for what he called "mambo chickens;" short strong-looking Latino kids, and Russell had just seen some prime meat. A little guy, broad-shouldered and muscular in a baseball shirt, sneakers and baggy jeans, was wandering aimlessly between the rundown houses across from the station.

He quickly called Clovis off, got out of his Lexus and followed his target. After a couple of blocks, the kid stopped nest to a vacant lot and turned round. Big, liquid black eyes, glistening like crude oil, cinnamon skin and a huge mouth. Russell grinned; chicken just didn't get any better. "Hey, kid," he began.

The Latino smiled. His lips pulled back to reveal a huge eyeball. The pimp stopped, mid sentence, and the *thing* disappeared.

Next morning, Russell got a package in the mail. In it were a contact sheet and a series of photographs of a client of his with Marie, then of him taking her body, weighting it, and dumping it in

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the river. The panderer scanned the images with mounting panic - he'd been so careful. Then, his cell rang. "Russell Baliol?" said a chipper, preppy voice he didn't recognize. "We'll be in touch."

All That Remains

Evidence Collection: Scourgers hardly ever kill their victims. When they do, it is to avoid being discovered. If the scourger's true identity is found out, it will usually flee but if the person who discovers it is alone and weak, the scourger will try to finish them off quickly and hide the body.

Scourgers have a tendency to shed hair. As they often lurk on rooftops and beside windows, they catch their long reddish-brown hair on protrusions, where investigators can later discover it.

Forensic Anthropology: Victims eventually have their throats torn out, although it is apparent that they were first brought to their knees; the pattern of wounds on a typical adult victim shows a strong concentration of claw slashes around the thighs and lower abdomen. This is because the scourger is about the size of an eight-year-old child and cannot reach any higher. When the body is fresh, these claw marks are puffy around the edges, suggesting that some form of irritant toxin was introduced into the wounds. Analysis of the blood reveals strong levels of remarkably fast acting, unidentifiable toxins, implying that the initial wounds caused the victim to drop to the ground, following which the assailant tore the throat out as a coup de grace.

Game Statistics

Aberrance 8, Athletics 14, Health 8,
Scuffling 6

Hit Threshold: 6

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: +2

Weapon: -1 (Talons)

Armor: +1 vs. Melee (thick fur)

This is a particularly loathsome little demon, one of

the class that is generally called the servitors. It is little more than an ambulatory spying device and research tool. Periodically, dark masters will dispatch a scourger, perhaps to study a city, organization, building, cult or similar institution, or even an interesting person. This may simply be a surveillance or reconnaissance mission for general information purposes, or it may involve trying to find weaknesses in an organization, a way into a building or even a suitable candidate to become a blossomer (see above). Then the creatures will descend upon the location, sect or institution and make it their own, either taking direct control, infiltrating and subvert it.

The scourger is not a particularly dangerous adversary, no matter how freakish it may appear. The reports that it sends back are what really matter. A group of PCs may find that the enemy is consistently one jump ahead of them and able to set horribly efficient traps, simply because the enemy has a scourger observing them so that its superiors can analyze their weaknesses.

Scourgers don't establish lairs, scrounge for food or even eat (they can't) and are always on the clock, concealed near to their target.

Campaign Note: Scourgers can be very useful at the beginning of a horror campaign since their arrival can represent the start of something terrible. The best thing the PCs can do is to locate the scourger and slay it as quickly as possible, to prevent their enemies learning even more about them. (Obviously, they must have had experiences with scourgers or creatures like them before in order to know that this needs doing.) This will not guarantee the demonic masters will move to different opportunities, but it does mean it will buy the party time to prepare for whatever the masters send next..

Poisonous Claws: Scourgers have tiny venom sacs under their fingernails. The wounds they leave cause a maddening itch that makes it impossible to coordinate one's actions properly.

The scourger can attempt to envenom an opponent by spending two extra points of **Scuffling** prior to an attack. These two points are not added to its roll but

if it hits and does damage, the opponent has his Hit Threshold lowered by 1 and the difficulty of all **Athletics**, **Scuffling**, **Shooting** and **Fleeing** tests increased by 2. The venom lasts for twenty minutes or until salves are administered, which requires a **Medic** test (difficulty 4) and proper equipment, i.e. at least a first-aid kit.

Spider Motion: Scourgers often need to manoeuvre themselves into out-of-the-way places, such as gloomy upper corners in rooms or the spaces behind walls, in order to observe without being noticed. To aid them in this, they have the unpleasant ability to climb up any surface as effortlessly as a spider does. They can climb up even the smoothest of walls, though they cannot ascend a surface made slippery with grease. They can even hang upside down; indeed, they often do so, as high ceilings are excellent vantage points.

Conceal Identity: The scourger can use a magical trick to make itself look different. It can seem one foot shorter or taller, thin, fat, or in between. Every shift in form costs it one point of **Aberrance**.

It cannot change its body type; for example, it could not seem to be a dog instead of a humanoid. Otherwise, the extent of the apparent change is up to the scourger. It could add or obscure a minor feature or look like an entirely different person. It will typically use this ability to take on the appearance of a nondescript human being. As it is a small demon, the form of a child is especially useful to it.

The spell does not provide the abilities or mannerisms of the chosen form, nor does it alter the perceived tactile (touch) or audible (sound) properties of the scourger or anything it might be carrying. The scourger cannot speak (there is an eye affixed where its mouth should be!) so this means that any person it pretends to be cannot speak either.

The scourger can use this ability to disguise itself as someone else. A player who interacts with the illusory body may make a **Sense Trouble** or **Surveillance** test (difficulty 6) to recognize that it is somehow fake. Alternatively, a one-point **Natural History** or **Forensic Anthropology** spend alerts the character to the odd artificiality of the scourger's manner and movements. (If this information is essential to the plot, then these abilities pick it up automatically.)

THE SCOURGER

Transfer Knowledge:

The scourger can show its master what it is seeing through the huge eye located in its mouth. This ability is continuously active. The master peers into a dish full of dark fluid to receive the scourger's transmissions. .

The scourger does not need to sleep, so 24-hour surveillance is a possibility. The master cannot, however, contact the scourger other than by means of a third party messenger, or some mundane means such as a mobile phone. Once the scourger has been given his instructions, he obeys them until told to do otherwise.

If a sheet of lead (even a thin sheet) comes between the scourger and his master, then the transmission is interrupted. Running water, such as heavy rain or a shower inside a cubicle, distorts the signal but does not block it; the scourger's masters suffer a -2 Alertness Modifier when trying to find characters who are evading them. Note also that the scourger only sends visual information, not sound.

Final Gaze: When a scourger dies, its remains are automatically recalled to the summoning circle from whence it was originally dispatched. This means that those who summoned it can examine it and find out how its life ended. Moreover, a scourger's great glistening eye is potent even in death. The last thing it saw is imprinted upon its cornea. If great care is taken, the creature's eyeball can be removed and the cornea peeled off in a square section. This is then fitted into a device similar to a projection slide. Light is shone through it to reveal the last image.

Extracting the scourger's cornea requires surgical tools and use of the **Medic** ability (difficulty 6). If the check is failed by 2 or less, then a blurred but still possibly useful image is recovered. If it is failed by more than 4, the cornea is useless.

Refresh Aberrance: The scourger can only refresh **Aberrance** when 'off duty', that is, not being used as a scrying conduit. It does this by invading privacy, watching the most private, personal acts it can find, preferably degraded or embarrassing ones. If you have ever had to use a filthy, ill-maintained public lavatory and felt that someone was watching under the door, it was probably a scourger. Young men masturbating in their bedrooms, who know they are



alone and yet cannot shake the feeling that they are being watched... well, they are.

SHATTERER



Dear Stevie,

I'm writing this letter because the counselor told me it would help me process what happened. I think that's bullshit. You're dead, you're not going to read it. Nobody who does read it would ever believe me, either, so what's the point? But they're making me, so I have to.

Today is the day you died. Happy Deathday. I should make you a big black cake. I could do that. It would only need food coloring. Then I'd put eighteen candles on the top. You would have liked that, I think. You and your gothier-than-thou attitude. I wonder if they'd let me.

They wouldn't, of course. I don't get on with the people here. When I say that you weren't ripped to pieces by a murderer, they think I'm in denial. When I say it was my fault, they call that bereavement guilt. I mustn't blame myself, everyone goes through the stages of grieving, blah, blah, blah.

It *was* my fault, though. You know that.

It was because of you and your obsession. You just never seemed to be there for me any more. There was no time for anything but the Great Work. Your magic.

You remember when we first met? When I told you I was into Wicca, you laughed and spent the night explaining how it was all made up. Goddess, I was so humiliated. You knew so much, but it only ever made me feel stupid. I still craved you, though. Everyone was in awe of you. You were everything I wanted to be. There was a darkness around you I could taste.

That first night was amazing. I would have believed anything you'd told me, then. You said we were going to be like Aleister Crowley and Leila Waddell, remember? Hot beast-on-whore action, with black robes, and candles burning.

I was jealous, that's all. I thought you wanted me for me. I didn't just want to be your vessel.

I was into the whole sex magic thing when it was kinky and weird, but you just wanted to keep taking it further and further. I wasn't ready for the things you wanted to do. It was all slipping out of control.

The problem, Stevie dear, was that you were too good at it. Everything you tried, worked. You never had a ritual fail. You weren't one of those spotty

The Book of Unremitting Horror

jerk who wears a trench coat too big for him and has a wall full of fantasy swords. When you said the words, things *happened*. Jesus, people actually were afraid of you. That's how it's supposed to be when you're into the occult. I saw you make that drunk guy crap his pants, literally. The way you laughed scared me.

That's why I did it. I got into your files and changed some of the words.

I'm sorry.

I wanted to make one of your rituals fail. That's all I wanted. I needed you to stop being the great magician and just be my boyfriend for a change, like we used to be. I didn't know what would happen. I feel like I cut your brake cables or something.

I'm crying now. This is just a stupid shitty letter to a dead guy and I'm crying.

I was in the next room with the door closed. I knew you were going to do the ritual without me. I knew it was the one I'd messed around with. I honestly thought nothing was going to happen. Then you'd say 'oh well' and come to bed and we'd just have regular, ordinary you-and-me sex.

I heard it happen, Stevie. All of it.

I heard you screaming and trying to send it back. Then there were the other noises, and then you screeched. That's the only word for it. Like that time when you got burning incense in your hair.

I ran away then, because I was too scared to stay. Out the door, down the stairs, into the street, down the hill, like the Bernstein Bears. All the way to the police station.

I saw what it did to you. I wasn't supposed to, but someone downloaded the pictures from rotten.com and sent them to me. I think it was your mother. She thinks I killed you myself. I guess she believes that my satanic powers give me inhuman strength or something.

I used to like running my fingers over your ribs. I can't think of that anymore. I think 'ribs' and my brain keeps flashing up those pictures.

Now I'm here, in the hospital, writing you this. It's been a year. I still think of you.

Your mother's right. I murdered you, Stevie.

All my love,

Toni

SHATTERER

All That Remains

Evidence Collection: Shatterers are not subtle. When they go into a feeding frenzy, they rip their enemies limb from limb, taking greedy bites and swallowing bitten-off extremities whole. The carnage that is left in the wake of a shatterer can send veteran police officers back out into the street to vomit up their last meal.

At first sight, it is quite difficult to tell how many bodies there actually are, because the residue is a carpet of gore. None of the bodies will be recovered with all of the parts will never be accounted for. All the corpses will have bits missing, typically those that protrude most from the body. For example, heads and hands will be bitten off, but hips, shoulders and internal organs will usually be present.

Forensic Anthropology: Although it is far from obvious *what* killed the shatterer's victims, the cause of death is not in any doubt. The victims have simply been torn apart by something with a huge pair of jaws. It is possible to take partial casts of the wounds, which produce a model of something halfway between a squid's beak and the ripping teeth of a piranha. The bite radius is between one and a half to two feet.

Game Statistics

Aberance 30, Athletics 10, Health 22,
Scuffling 20

Hit Threshold: 6 (when invisible), 4 (when
partially visible) or 2 (when fully visible)

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +2 (when invisible), 0
(when partially visible) or -2 (when fully
visible)

Weapon: +2 (Bite) and +1 (Talons)

Armor: +2 vs. Shooting, +2 vs. Scuffling

Occultists who have heard of it speak of the shatterer with horror. Though it is a lesser entity in rank than the likes of the sisterite (see page XX), and is not especially intelligent, it is no less deadly. The shatterer's name derives from its curious innate ability to break practically any enchantment, including magical protections and bindings placed upon demons.

Its favorite meal is would-be demon-summoners, who have the spark of potential in them that makes for magical ability but lack discipline. There are stories of magicians who died, dismembered, while attempting to call up and control something that they believed to be well within their competence. Some of them reflect how easy it is to make nitroglycerin with an alchemist's tools; others are just horror stories, while a few relate to the shatterer.

Shatterers have the ability to sense attempted summonings and are drawn to them like a shark to a thrashing swimmer. (See the vortex sense ability below.) The shatterer enters the physical world through a breach in the Membrane, by hijacking the summoning vortex that was meant for some other, lesser creature. Unless the magician performing the ritual is extremely careful, he may find himself with a ravening shatterer in - say - his Triangle of Art instead of a weak, easily controllable spirit.

Upon entry into the physical realm, the shatterer goes into a feeding frenzy, devouring everything in sight. Once its appetite is finally sated, the demon shifts back to its previous realm; it can leave whenever it pleases, and does not care to stay on the material plane any longer than necessary. A shatterer simply gorges itself and goes home.

The shatterer's deadly powers make it a favored pet of greater demons. These will sometimes punish importunate or disrespectful covens by sending the shatterer in response to a petition for aid. Some groups of diabolists have been literally torn apart when their demonic patron dispatched a shatterer into their circle instead of a servitor.

In form, shatterers resemble something between a spider and a plucked turkey with a neck full of teeth. They are quick and agile despite their heft.

Countermagic: A shatterer can simply override any magic that is attempted against it. (In the Esoterrorists setting, banishing and binding magic is not effective anyway, given that magic itself barely exists; this rule applies to other settings.) By making an **Aberance** test (difficulty 4), the shatterer can negate exorcism attempts, shrug off attempted bindings and abnegate any other magic taking place in the vicinity.

Feeding Frenzy: Shatterers turn into berserk killing

machines as soon as they taste blood. Once a shatterer has slain a creature, it will attempt to devour the body. This will keep it occupied for 1d3 rounds, during which it will not attack except to defend itself. Its Hit Threshold drops to 2, but the damage from its bite attack increases to +4, and it may refresh 1d6+1 points of **Scuffling** pool. This heightened state lasts for 3 rounds.

If the shatterer manages to kill and begin to eat a second victim before the feeding frenzy has worn off, then a

new feeding frenzy commences at that point. A shatterer can keep up a feeding frenzy for several minutes if there are enough victims to devour. It may refresh 3 points of **Aberrance** for each victim devoured.

Invisibility: A shatterer can choose to be invisible when it first manifests. It does this to fool its prey into thinking that their summoning ritual has been unsuccessful. The shatterer remains invisible even when it attacks a foe.

This invisibility continues indefinitely until an event occurs that cancels it. Other than such tricks as paint sprays or throwing a sheet over the thing, there are only

Shatterers in the world of The Esoterrorists

It is remarkable that an attempt to summon demons should have any result *at all*, let alone such a catastrophic one, since the usual effect of an attempt to summon demons is nothing more than charcoal burns on the furniture, boredom, and angry parents. It is doubly remarkable that the Esoterrorists, who crave magical manifestations, should be just as wary of shatterers as their more benign adversaries.

According to Ordo Veritatis history files, these creatures were the result of a very early attempt to pierce the Membrane by a cell of proto-Esoterrorists called the Tannhauser Bruderschaft, who were active in Austria from 1712 to 1788. Having striven for years to summon demonic entities with no success, and blaming this on the aftermath of the Enlightenment, they abandoned their well-thumbed copies of the Legemeton and the Ars Notoria, and tried to ascertain what common factor linked the demonic apparitions of which they had heard.

They found, to their surprise, that almost every single recorded incident of *actual* manifestation (and bloody massacre) was of the 'foolhardy young magician attempting to summon something beyond his ability to control' variety. Though it seemed an affront to reason, they had to conclude that those poor fools who were doing magic *wrong* were getting results, albeit disastrous ones, while they in all their Hermetic wisdom were getting no results at all.

Could it be, they reasoned, that magic that was done *wrong* was more likely to produce a result than magic that followed all the instructions? Attempts to do magic wrong on purpose were dismally unsuccessful, and so it was agreed that ignorance on the summoner's part was a crucial element of the process.

The Tannhauser Bruderschaft thus embarked upon a conspiracy. They deliberately sought out and groomed an arrogant young aristocrat called Peter Muller, flattered his ego while teaching him the basics of magic, and made sure that the arcane library was left unlocked. Muller naturally sneaked in night after night, read all the forbidden tomes he could get his hands on, and prepared to summon himself a demonic patron. He had not been taught the protocols of binding, nor did he have access to the instruments of exorcism.

Confident that they could bind and control any entity that Muller conjured up, the magicians retreated to a private room to watch through spyholes, clutching their consecrated talismans of protection.

To this day, no plants will grow on the spot where the Profess-House of the Tannhauser Bruderschaft once stood, and the locals do not let their children play there.

two events that can render the creature visible. When it attempts to break a ward (see the shatter circle ability below) it becomes temporarily visible as a transparent version of itself surrounded by sparks of energy, so characters who are observing this can see roughly what it looks like and where it is. Secondly, when it enters feeding frenzy, it becomes fully visible.

A shatterer can become invisible again by expending 4 points of **Aberrance**.

Shatter Circle: Shatterers have a strange innate ability to struggle through protective spells and boundaries that would hold other entities. In GUMSHOE settings that use magic, a shatterer may expend a point of **Aberrance** to attack a protective circle or ward as if it were a physical object, dealing damage each round with its claws without having to make a **Scuffling** test in order to hit. The default **Health** of a protective circle or ward is 15, though the GM may choose to make some stronger or weaker than others, depending on the competence (or lack thereof) of the creator. Each attack requires the expenditure of an **Aberrance** point.

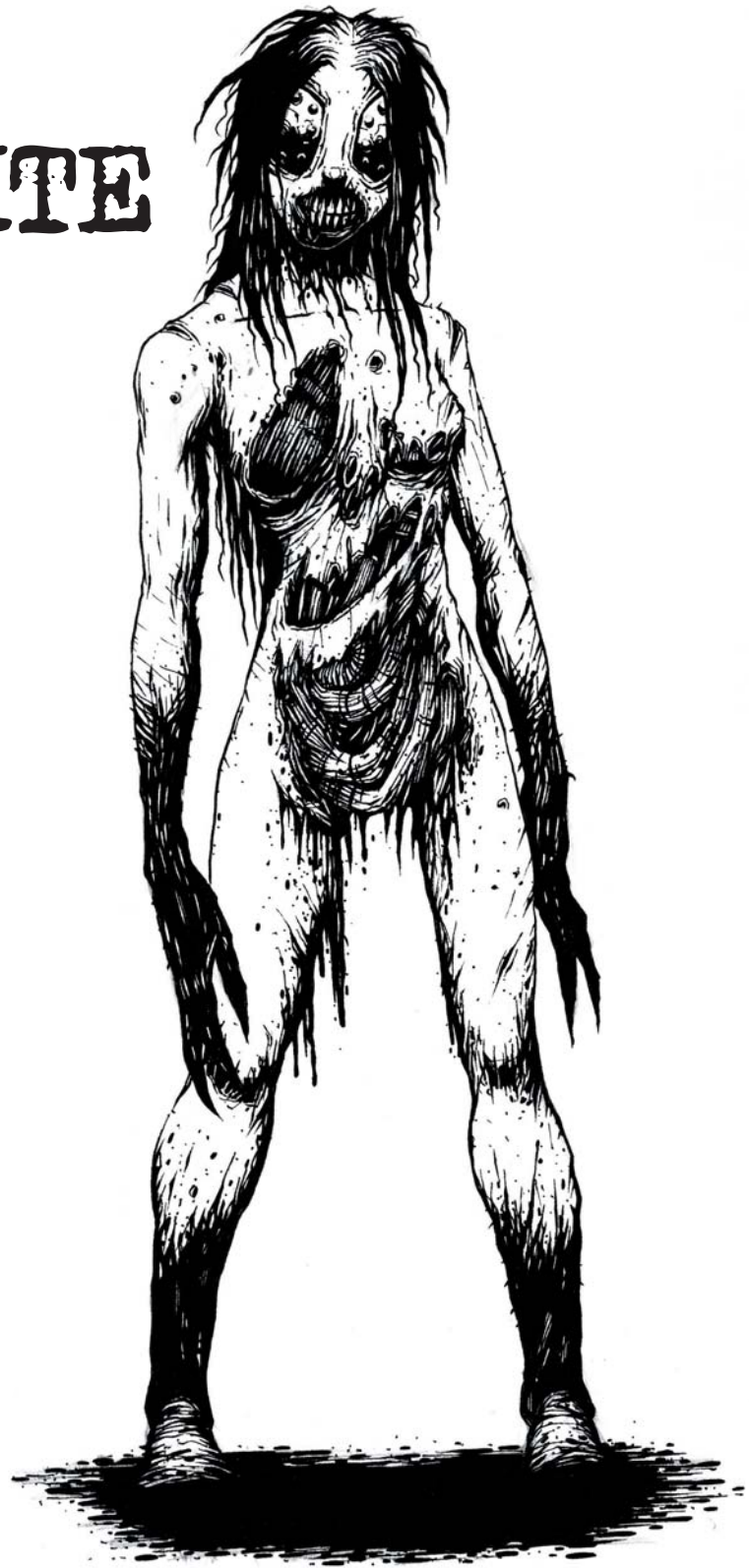
Vortex Sense: On the rare occasions when a summoning ritual is competently performed, a temporary conduit is opened in the Membrane, linking this world with the realms beyond. A shatterer can feel the interplanar conduit opening and can hijack it, so that it appears instead of the summoned creature. This ability will have a slightly different application according to the rules the GM is using for demonology and summoning. Depending on the system, a shatterer may be attracted to a summoning under the following circumstances:

- The caster is calling for help from supernatural allies (such as the Messenger psychic ability) and the GM rules that these are unable to assist him or her directly, such as if the attempt were to be made in a thoroughly desecrated temple, or some external force were interfering.
- The caster is attempting a summoning ritual along classic Solomonic lines and does not have the proper items, shirks the ritual preparations or has some incorrect information. By far the most likely condition for a shatterer to appear is the absence of the correct name for the entity being summoned. If the summoner uses a name that belongs to a different entity from the one he thinks he

is calling, then he is likely to get the creature whose name he uses, if the setting is such that magic works at all.

- However, if he uses a name that does not actually belong to any entity *at all*, then he effectively creates an open channel into which any being can jump. The shatterer's ability to sense a summoning vortex makes it the most likely creature to respond to such a botched summoning.

SISTERITE



Hunt for missing computer technician goes on

Fears are growing for the safety of a computer technician who has been missing for more than three weeks. Robert Dobbins, 21, of West Addison, Chicago has not been seen since 7pm on July 9 when he told his roommates he was going to meet a woman he had befriended over the Internet. His green Volvo 244 was found parked at a vacant lot the following day.

Searching Mr. Dobbins' computer for leads, police discovered several gigabytes of hard pornography. Encrypted chat logs show that he believed he was to meet a woman, who gave her name as Michelle Schwester, and provided a nonexistent address. Though the logs mention them, no images of his companion have been located. Police are anxious to trace Ms. Schwester, whose name does not appear in any public records.

Featured Profile: Michelle

hey, bear with me because computers make me nervous lol... what I need most of all is a guy who can show me how to use this god damn box! :) any programmers out there? hello? but seriously that would rock my world as I am just so sick of jocks like u would not believe. I have dated my last piece of beefcake for REAL. Now I really want to meet some one who has a brain and knows how to use it... no more super heroes, I want the mild mannered reporter for a change. and to be honest your looks really do not matter much because its only skin deep as they say. ok, so I am a night club dancer (gots to make a livin) and I guess I look good but there must be a guy out there for me who can see THRU the surface... some one who knows what is there UNDER the skin... am I making any sense? any how I may not be a genius or nothing but I know how to make a guy feel like the king of the world, so come on and mail me, don't be shy, I promise not to bite ;) NO HUNKS NEED APPLY lol

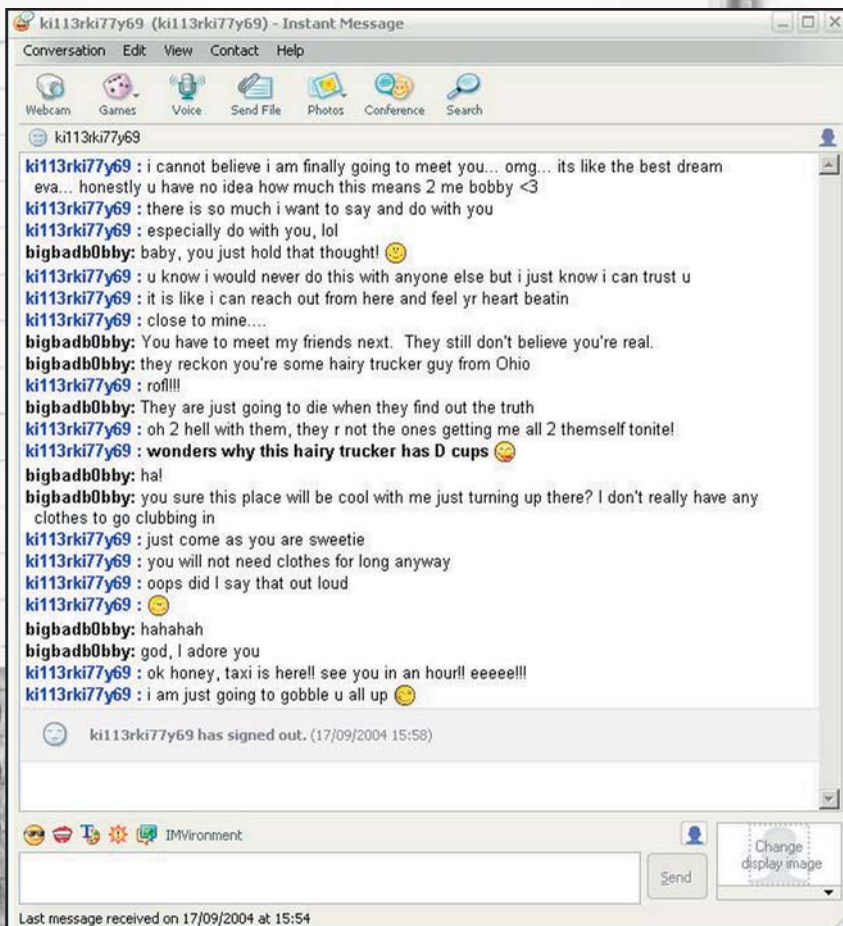
Killerkitty69 is michelle@op6u6s6.sisterite.com *
whateva u want

Killerkitty69 is connecting from *@nexushub.sisterserver.net

Killerkitty69 using irc5.p2pchat.net P2PChat West Coast

Killerkitty69 has been idle 1secs, signed on Fri Jul 09 19:38:50

Killerkitty69 End of /WHOIS list.



SISTERITE

All That Remains

Bureaucracy: Sisterite victims often have low-key jobs in corporations, which will co-operate with investigators if they are properly persuaded. The pattern that emerges when discussing a sisterite victim is one of personal transformation coupled with deteriorating work attendance. The victim appeared to be happier than ever, and yet he began to take frequent sick days, sometimes not showing up for work for days on end without explanation. The manager would have fired him, but for the fact that nobody else knew how to fix the network if something went wrong with it.

Data Retrieval: Study of the victim's computer will typically reveal extensive conversations over messenger programs, lovingly logged for rereading. It is not common for sisterite victims to protect these files on a domestic computer, but as use of chat software is not usually permitted at work, they will have securely hidden the chat logs on any PCs used in the workplace. Use of **Data Retrieval** will also locate the sisterite's bewitching sigil (see below).

Evidence Collection: When sisterites feed, they do so thoroughly, and their stomachs distend as they fill with meat, gristle, bone and fabric. Their powerful jaws grind up every morsel of the victim, clothes included; even teeth and bones are crunched and swallowed. Unless a sisterite is interrupted at her grisly feast, the only sign that the slaughter has taken place is the riot of bloodstains. It is next to impossible to find any other trace of the unfortunate victim, however, even so much as a fragment of bone or a scrap of skin.

The quantity and distribution of blood suggest that the victim bled out in one location over time, and was dismembered in the process. In ordinary murder cases, it is typical for dismemberment to take place in a bathtub, as it is easier to clean up the mess. Here, however, the butchery seems to have happened with no regard for concealment of the evidence.

Sisterites will often begin their meal by biting deep into the thigh and tearing open the femoral artery while the victim is still alive. They do this by offering to fellate the stupefied victim, kneeling while he

removes his pants and briefs, then sinking their teeth into the flesh. A careful study of blood splatter patterns can reconstruct this tender scene. The blood shadow of the victim's feet, sprayed over by an artery suddenly gushing like a hosepipe, is the giveaway.

Anyone making a cursory check for physical remnants is unlikely to find anything at all other than blood. With a more thorough search, the investigator will discover shards of keys, coins, jewelry, spectacle lenses or plastic cards, all showing tooth marks. Only the very tiniest organic remnants can be found; perhaps a hair, an eyelash, or a sliver from a fingernail.

Even sisterites cannot digest plastic and metal, nor can their systems handle the larger chunks of bone. They thus regurgitate a ghastly bundle of matter several days after devouring their prey, before settling down to hibernate. This object varies in size between a fist and a football. It is a stiff, stinking wad of hair, teeth, bone fragments and indigestible material, like nothing so much as a huge owl pellet. It is full of giveaway evidence that can identify the victim or victims. Researchers have taken to calling this the 'beozar', because of its hair content.

Sisterites will never heave up the beozar in the same place as they made the kill. Knowing that it could lead to their discovery, they take care to deposit it somewhere where they hope it will never be found. A sisterite in a hurry will, however, dump hers in a litter bin or even attempt to flush it down the lavatory if she has no other choice.

Forensic Anthropology: There is not usually enough of a body left at the murder scene to identify cause of death. If the sisterite is interrupted, then the half-eaten cadaver can be examined; the victim obviously died from blood loss, following deep bites.

Forensic Psychology /Text Analysis: If an investigator talks to someone who is under the influence of a sisterite, or studies their writings (such as a chat log), it is immediately apparent that he is a man obsessed. His physical appearance is unkempt and pallid, as if he had been neglecting to take care of himself and spending many hours indoors.

SISTERITE

Game Statistics

Aberrance 14, Athletics 8, Driving 8, Filch 8, Health 12, Medic 4, Preparedness 6, Scuffling 10, Shooting 10, Shrink 18

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: +2

Weapon: Bite (+0) and talons (+0)

Armor: +2 vs. Scuffling, +1 vs. Shooting

The sisterites are demonic entities that dwell on the material plane. They make their homes in secluded and easily defensible places where they are not likely to be found, such as the attics of abandoned houses, underground railway tunnels, deep caverns such as those of disused mines and unvisited archive rooms in the basements of universities.

From their lairs, the sisterites use their bizarre powers to access the Internet, using the Web to lure in lonely and unwitting prey. They make use of dating websites and other less salubrious 'adult connection' agencies to cultivate potential victims, targeting lonely and gullible men – for preference unhealthy and overweight specimens – who reside within easy distance of a lair. All sisterites appear to use the same ISP; whatever name she uses, her email address will always end with *@sisterite.com*.

Those who are familiar with the sisterites' insidious ways will delete any message that comes from a *sisterite.com* source, unless they are putting together some kind of rash plan to track down and kill the creatures. This is a very dangerous undertaking, as sisterites take great pains to avoid detection and will often booby-trap their lairs.

Sisterites typically seduce their prey over an extended period; often weeks or months; complimenting and soothing them until they have established trust or, preferably, incited a degree of lust that clouds the victim's judgement. Once the prey has been thoroughly gulled, with the help of the sisterite's bewitching sigil (see below), he is invited to a suitable location for a meeting 'in the flesh'. The sisterite warps the victim's perceptions, so that he sees a nightclub or bar instead of an empty barn or derelict house. He hopes for sex,

and, hopefully, a lot of sex. What he gets is a night of being dismembered, disemboweled and devoured.

Addictive Presence: The sisterites know what sad, lonely men want. The creatures are experts at giving their victims enough attention to feel good about themselves, while holding back enough to make them want more. When a sisterite first makes contact with her prey and spends at least one minute talking to him online, he becomes fascinated.

While fascinated, he does not want to do anything other than sit at his computer and converse with her, though he will react to life-threatening circumstances. The sisterite will always end the session after several hours have passed, giving a time and date for the next online rendezvous. This ends the conversation, but not the fascination.

Once the victim has been fascinated once and has the opportunity to spend more online time with his new friend, he finds it increasingly difficult to do anything else. For example, if the target knew that his sisterite was going to be online on a given night, he would make excuses to avoid attending a party he had previously promised to go to. At most, he would spend five minutes there before rushing back to his computer and log on.

The sisterite's predatory methods depend on wearing away the victim's skepticism and inability to believe his luck. Through simple online conversation, sharing of intimacies and clever flattery of the victim's ego, the huntress steadily lowers her prey's defenses.

The reassuring effect of the sisterite's cossetting thus makes the victim more and more vulnerable to manipulation. According to the *Ordo Veritatis* operations manual, the best way to help a potential victim of the sisterites is to drag him physically away from his computer and take him for a camping trip out in the wild, far away from bluetooth connections, cyber cafes and the like.

Bewitching Sigil: A bewitching sigil is a form of magical attack delivered over the Internet. When she eventually agrees to send a photo of herself, a sisterite will always send an image file, usually in .gif or .jpg format. Once this file is opened and the image looked at, any person looking at it must make a **Sense Trouble** test (Difficulty 5).

Those who succeed at the test see the sigil as it truly is, a tangled white symbol on a black background. Those who fail, however, see instead a gorgeous and enticing female. Any person who has ever seen a sisterite's true form, or has previously seen through a different bewitching sigil, rolls against a difficulty of 3 rather than 5. You only need to make a **Sense Trouble / Surveillance** test against any given sigil once.

Psychic characters with the **Aura Reading** ability see the true sigil automatically, but are forced to make a 2-point **Stability** test as its malign psychic influence corrodes their minds.

All those who fail their **Sense Trouble / Surveillance** tests when looking at one particular sigil see the same beautiful woman, but do not suffer any other negative effect. However, whenever the sisterite sends out her bewitching sigil, she always has one specific – *primary* – victim in mind, whom she must select in advance. This unfortunate is plunged into far greater danger if he fails his **Sense Trouble** test.

Firstly, a sisterite always knows the exact location of her primary victim, even if he is out of range of her blindsight (see below).

Secondly, the creature can twist her primary victim's perceptions at will, provided that he is within range (ten miles plus one additional mile per point of the sisterite's **Aberrance** rating.) The predator can mentally convince her prey that a ruined shack is actually a nightclub, that a glass of brackish water is champagne and that she is not a ghastly apparition but a luscious blonde dream girl. The sisterite typically uses this power to create a suitable hallucinatory venue her meeting with her victim, when she decides to summon him to his doom.

The victim is allowed no further **Sense Trouble / Surveillance** tests until the sisterite is killed (at which point he is freed from the effect) except under the following circumstances:

- Deleting the image file allows the victim to make a second **Sense Trouble / Surveillance** test (Difficulty 4) to break the bewitchment effect. However, this is not as easy as it sounds. The image is a magical effect that actively resists deletion. On the mundane plane, the file uses unpleasant

programming tricks to evade removal and is thus difficult to delete, requiring several hours of programming time to eradicate completely.

- The GM should determine privately whether any attempt to delete the file has been successful (the higher a character's **Data Retrieval** rating, the more likely it is that she will have deleted the file) and then allow the character a **Sense Trouble / Surveillance** test (Difficulty 6 minus the character's **Data Retrieval** rating) to notice whether she has been successful or not. If the **Sense Trouble / Surveillance** test is failed, then the programmer believes that she has deleted the file successfully, when in reality it still resides on the potential victim's hard drive.
- Spiritually, the sigil's magic subverts the will of anyone attempting to remove it. A person trying to confront the sigil (whether by deleting it, reformatting the hard disk, or even, as a last resort, destroying the computer) must first succeed at a **Stability** test (Difficulty 5) to summon up the necessary inner courage. Although the subject can expend **Stability** to increase his roll, this test does not result in lost **Stability** if it is failed. In the event of a failed test, the subject cannot attempt another such test for one hour.
- Giving the victim a dose of an anti-hallucinogen can cause him to see the world as it truly is for 1d6x10 minutes, suspending but not removing the effects of the sisterite's bewitchment. Administering the correct drug effectively requires a successful **Shrink** test (Difficulty 4) and access to psychiatric medicines.
- If the sisterite goes into hibernation, she can no longer actively control the victim's perceptions, though he is still under her spell. The dupe still perceives the sigil as the photo of a beautiful woman. When the sisterite awakens from hibernation, she can resume her control of the victim's perceptions, provided that the sigil has not been deleted in the interim.

SISTERITE

A sisterite can only control the victim's perceptions of the environment and of herself. She cannot make other people seem to be different or to do things that they are not doing. She may, however, create and sustain hallucinatory creatures, such as bartenders, additional club attendees and the like, in order to make her unreal environment seem less empty. Each such hallucinatory creature costs her a point of **Aberrance**; she does not recover these points until she has fed.

Supernatural Senses: A sisterite has a metal plate nailed over each eye socket. This apparent blindness does not impede her, as these horrors do not have a sense of sight. Instead, they use psychic imaging to perceive their environment, modeling it in virtual form inside their unspeakably twisted minds. As a result, conditions that hamper vision for ordinary people, such as darkness and obscuring smoke, do not interfere with the sisterites' ability to perceive their environments at all. They automatically sense the presence of any creature within 60 feet.

Their supernatural senses are continuously active and does not need to be 'switched on', though it functions to a lesser degree while the sisterite is in dormancy (see below).

Dormancy: Approximately three days after a sisterite has fed, she goes into a trance-like dormancy for about six months, so that she can digest her victim. Before doing this, she will retch up her beozar and dispose of it (see Evidence Collection section above). Next, she will barricade herself away behind as much movable junk as she can find, so that anyone trying to reach her will create noise and wake her up. During this critical and dangerous time, her hideously distended form slowly contracts back to its usual proportions. A dormant sisterite is helpless and cannot defend herself.

In their dormant state, these horrors do not enjoy the full benefits of their supernatural senses; their Alertness Modifier drops to 0. While in a digestive trance, they find it much harder to detect a creature moving around in their immediate vicinity. It is possible to sneak up on one by making a successful **Infiltration** check (Difficulty 4), so long as your scent does not give you away.

A dormant sisterite's primary defense is her sense of smell, which is so acute that it can waken her if she detects an unexpected scent in the area. The **Infiltration** test difficulty given above assumes a normal human scent, without exertion. A person who had recently

been running or engaging in hard manual work would roll against a difficulty of 5, while someone wearing aftershave would face a difficulty of 6. More powerful scents, such as strong chemicals, cigarette smoke or an overweight male who has not showered in over a month, totally override any attempt at using **Infiltration** and instantly alert the Sisterite as soon as the source of the smell comes within 60 feet.

Sisterites try to arrange their lairs so that they will have plenty of time to waken before they have to confront any intruder, because a dormant sisterite needs to take a whole round to rouse herself before she is no longer considered helpless and can take actions. For the next 1d6 rounds, she is sluggish and makes all tests against a +1 difficulty, including rolling against opponents' Hit Thresholds.

Horrific: Sisterites are pallid, gruesome figures of nightmare. Even those who think they are inured to the worst a mortuary room or battlefield can offer can be driven shrieking mad when they see a sisterite looming over them. The potential **Stability** loss for any **Stability** test provoked by a sisterite is increased by 1.

Natural Interface: A sisterite can access the Internet without the need for a computer, modem or any external paraphernalia whatsoever. A sisterite can 'log on' at will, taking a round to do so. Once connected, they can compose and send emails, model or remodel websites and even hold conversations through Internet Relay Chat (IRC) or messenger programs.

While a sisterite is using her natural interface ability, she must concentrate. If she suffers distraction, such as from taking physical damage, she must make an **Aberrance** test (Difficulty 4) or be abruptly 'disconnected'. Attempts to track the sisterite's IP address through conventional means are always fruitless. The domain *sisterite.com* does not appear to be registered to a user, though name servers clearly recognize it.

The secondary application of the sisterite's natural interface ability is remote usage of computers. A sisterite can control any powered-up computer within 60 feet of her as if she was sat at the keyboard. Her supernatural senses tell her that it is there.

Sisterites can attempt to operate a computer secretly while another person is also using it. If she does

so, the person using the computer may make a **Sense Trouble / Surveillance** test (difficulty 6 minus their **Data Retrieval** rating) before the sisterite attempts whatever operation she is undertaking. If she is successful, she goes undetected. If not, the other operator realizes that someone else is manipulating the computer at the same time, though he is not automatically unable to counter what the sisterite is doing, nor does he automatically recognize what she is trying to do. A sisterite's remote computer use requires concentration exactly as if she were sat at the machine.

Render: Whether they are fighting or ripping the flesh from the bones of their screaming prey, sisterites like to close their jaws on a soft part of the victim's body and rend out whole masses of tissue. A sisterite that hits and deals damage with her bite attack may immediately make an opposed **Athletics** test with her target. If the sisterite wins, she deals an additional die of damage; if the target wins, for the next round he treats the sisterite as if her Hit Threshold were one point lower than it is.

Description

When they appear in their true forms, the sisterites stand about seven feet tall. They are usually naked and have deathly pale skin. They might once have been human but now show the evidence of horrible butchery, as if a serial killer's victim had somehow been restored to a semblance of life. The skin on their abdomens is always shredded, exposing muscle tissue and glistening viscera. Their arms end in talons; they are usually slathered up to the elbow with the fat and juices of the men whose bodies they have eagerly ripped open to get at the offal.

The face is perhaps the worst of all: sisterites have carbuncular metal plates nailed over their eyes, making them look almost insect-like and their lipless mouths are almost always thickly crusted with the blood of their last unfortunate meal. They prefer obese males as their food, since they contain substantial fatty deposits and plentiful meat.

Sisterite Hunting

Although the sisterites are usually content to look for potential victims on the Web by simple searching and registering on dating websites, this is

not always practical. The vast number of lonely human beings using the same facilities can easily drown out even a sisterite's compelling presence.

The sisterites use two methods to increase their number of potential victims. One is to send out hundreds of thousands of unsolicited emails, purporting to be from lonely women craving male attention—all from *sisterite.com*, of course. The sisterite has no supernatural ability to make the reader of such an email pay attention to it. His own natural curiosity must lead him to visit the indicated website.

The other method is the free promotional CD. This is sent to all the men in a given region that match a particular profile, namely the single, love-seeking variety. Once the CD is inserted into a given computer, it installs software that automatically logs the individual on to the sisterites' web site. It is extremely difficult to uninstall, requiring several hours of work, a minimum **Data Retrieval** rating of 2, and three consecutive **Sense Trouble / Surveillance** tests (Difficulty 7 minus the character's **Data Retrieval** rating). Like the sigil above, the CD carries a magical charge, and those who see it have to make a **Stability** test (exactly as for the Bewitching Sigil above) to force themselves to get rid of it.



and anchovy filling. Some hosts, particularly those in isolated areas, find themselves craving human meat. Odd cravings are usually dismissed as the result of 'pregnancy hormones' in the case of women.

SKITCH

The skitch is a revolting parasite with a life cycle of several stages. Like the Death Tapper, it seems to have had its origin in third world countries, and has recently migrated to the urbanized West.

The host typically consumes the tiny skitch egg without being aware of it, owing to bad domestic hygiene. The egg grafts itself to the wall of the stomach, and begins to form itself a body. It draws on the host's DNA, clothing itself in layers of borrowed flesh, effectively becoming a parasitic twin. Like a hideous cross between a fetus and a tapeworm, it feeds from the host, who becomes irritable, listless and bloated.

As the skitch swells in the host's entrails, it begins to show as a distinct bulge in the abdomen. In the case of women, this is almost always taken as evidence of pregnancy, especially since the skitch's hormonal secretions block the menstrual cycle; pregnancy tests, however, register as negative. Male hosts are more likely to be dismissed as beer drinkers whose habit is catching up with them. Oddly, men who are hosts to skitches begin to lactate from the nipples, a symptom they are almost always too embarrassed to describe to their doctors.

The skitch's craving for nutrition transmits itself to the host, who begins to suffer pangs of hunger, ordering stacks of pizzas and eating them all in one binge, or sometimes heaping tin after tin of cat or dog food on a plate and eating it all. The skitch has strange nutritional needs, and the host may find himself craving pint glasses full of vinegar or sandwiches with a toothpaste

When the skitch grows large enough (which takes approximately one month) it splits the host's body, eats it, and scuttles off. While it is bursting free, it fills the host with massive amounts of biochemicals that induce

hysterical laughter and euphoria, so that the host ends up screaming with laughter while the skitch gnaws its way out.

The emergent skitch is a lumpy, heaped mass of tissue, with tiny mimicked parts of the host's body protruding from its own - a few tiny fingers here, an eye there, a malformed set of genitalia beneath. (It greatly resembles the parasitic twins that are sometimes extracted from adults, with the exception that it is alive and conscious.) It has no recognizable human shape and scrabbles with ungainly speed on little babylike limbs. It remains in this form for up to three weeks, eating whatever it can find to sustain itself.

The next stage in its life cycle is to disintegrate, falling to bits a piece at a time. This takes place as it moves across an area (usually scrabbling across rooftops). It crumbles into chunks of especially pungent rotten meat, each one saturated with eggs, which are eaten by carnivorous domestic animals. Cats in particular seem madly attracted to the stuff, craving it in a manner not unlike the human host's craving for strange foods.

These animals then pass on skitch eggs to their human owners through their feces. Strangely, the hatched skitch always leaves the pets alone, perhaps recognizing their contribution to its life cycle.

Skitches originated in Africa, where they are responsible for some of the distended bellies and shrunken bodies of children and adults there. A skitch host just prior to the hatching often comes to resemble a famine victim; his limbs are emaciated, his belly a balloon, the navel a knot.

Evidence Collection: Unless the skitch is interrupted, which is unusual, the bulk of the host's body will have been gnawed to the bone. Its mouthparts are

tiny, so it cannot consume much at once. It works like a caterpillar chewing a leaf, munching away steadily until all the soft parts are eaten.

There are clear tracks left by the departing skitch, such as blood smears in an obvious direction, but it is difficult to establish what made them, as the body is heavy and drags across the floor. Sometimes a tiny handprint or footprint can be found.

Forensic Anthropology: The body has been chewed to the bone by a single creature working steadily over time. The parts are not scattered. As the creature exits through the lower abdomen, below the ribcage, there is not usually any bone damage to mark its grisly exit.

Pathology: When a person who is incubating a skitch is brought in for medical attention, it is a relatively simple matter to diagnose parasitic infestation. X-rays reveal the mass of the thing curled up among the host's viscera. A nascent skitch has some basic awareness of the world outside and will keep still while the host is examined, hoping to be mistaken for an ordinary parasitic twin.

On some very rare occasions (only two are known), a victim has had a skitch removed and survived; on one of these, the skitch was nicked by a scalpel and scabbled squealing out of the operating theatre, no longer pretending to be dead flesh. The ultimate fate of the medical team who carried out the operation is not known, but the surgeon is believed to have been deeply traumatized by the experience and gone on to become one of Eastern Europe's most notorious serial killers.

Game Statistics

Athletics 4, Health 8, Scuffling 8, Shooting 20
(see below)

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +1

Weapon: +0 (teeth)

Armor: +3 vs. Shooting, +1 vs. Scuffling

Climb: Skitches can cling to sheer surfaces, as gastropods do. A skitch that needs to avoid detection will crawl patiently up a wall in a dark

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room and lurk in an upper corner or cling to a ceiling. A slight silver trail is visible for an hour after the skitch has crossed a surface.

Infest: A person who has become host to a skitch makes all tests of physical competence (such as **Athletics**, **Scuffling** and **Health** tests) against target difficulties of +1.

A competent surgeon can remove the skitch before it grows to maturity. This requires two consecutive **Medic** tests (difficulty 4). However, the damage to the victim's system even if he survives is such that his **Health** rating is reduced by two points thereafter if the skitch had been growing for more than two weeks, and one point if it was more than one week old.

Removal of a younger skitch carries no penalty, but the little larva is harder to detach and requires three consecutive **Medic** tests (difficulty 4) rather than two.

Spurt: If a dying skitch is in a hurry to reproduce, it can try to spit fragments of itself into a nearby creature's mouth. The fragments are, of course, riddled with eggs.

It makes a **Shooting** test to do this, and the target receives a +3 increase to its usual Hit Threshold, as the mouth is a tiny target to hit. The skitch can only spit bits of itself into the mouth of a creature whose mouth is open, so a player character who is talking is fair game, as is a barking dog or a yawning cat. Those who know the habits of dying skitches make sure their mouths are covered up before they enter a room where one may be lurking.

The flesh gobbets are so egg-laden that any creature or person who gets skitch tissue in his or her mouth will inevitably become the host to a new skitch, unless immediate medical attention is received. Field medical attention requires a **Medic** test (difficulty 4) and involves sluicing the mouth with an appropriate wash; this must take place within three rounds, or the skitch becomes implanted. Hospital treatment and the use of a stomach pump are much more reliable and require no tests. This must take place within the hour.

Pliable: As skitches are mostly boneless tissue, they can squeeze and deform themselves to press through gaps. Given enough time, a skitch can pass through a gap as small as half an inch across. They can ooze under many doors and through letterbox slots, but cannot (thankfully) pass through keyholes

SLEEP HAG



I told them again and again but they did not listen.

The first time it happened was about two years ago, I think. I was seven then. I woke up in the middle of the night. I could see it was twelve eighteen because the clock was glowing. It was the only light in the room and then something moved in front of it. There was a strong breeze and it was warm. The curtains were blowing in. I was really frightened. I could not move and could not scream though I wanted to. It lasted for about thirty seconds and then it was gone. I didn't see anything that time apart from the thing that moved in front of the clock for a moment. I could not get back to sleep and did not want to get out of bed and turn the light on in case something happened.

Then a few months later it happened again. I was lying in bed and again I woke up all of a sudden. I felt something holding me down. It was really strong and I could not sit up. I tried to scream for my mummy and daddy and could not make any noise come out. I tried to bang on the wall so they would hear me but I could not move my arms at all. I was more scared than I have ever been in my life.

I told a couple of people at school. Tommy Pryce said it was the old witch that comes in the night. We all laughed at him and he cried but secretly I thought he was telling the truth. Nobody ever talked to Tommy much. He didn't have any friends. His mum died in the night and her face was all screwed up and scary. She had a heart attack. Tommy believed in the old witch and the more I listened to him the more I believed in her too. He said she climbs in the window and sits on your chest and steals your breath.

Whatever you do you must never ever look. You have to lie still and wait for her to go away. If you turn on the light and look, you will see her, and she will see YOU, then it's all over. That was what Tommy said. It's all over.

I told mum and dad about it in the evening and they just cuddled me and told me not to be afraid. Tommy was having emotional problems and I must be sympathetic, they said. He had had a lot of tragic things happen in his life.

They said it was not a ghost. My dad made me go and sit with him while we looked it up on the Internet. We found a place that said it was a thing called sleep paralysis and lots of people got it. It is what

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happens when your brain is still full of dreams but your body wakes up, so you are stuck in the bad dream.

When I went to bed I was not quite so scared as before because I knew it was all in my head. I went to sleep. There was a bright moon shining.

I woke up again. The curtains were blowing and I had a heavy thing on me. I was scared all through my body. I wanted to turn on the light but I couldn't. I wanted to open my eyes so I could see there was nothing there. I was scared too, though. What if I did see something? I thought about the website and the sleep paralysis and I knew I was being a big baby. I opened my eyes.

The old lady was looking right into my face.

Her mouth was all open wide, like this: Oooooo.

Now I'm really frightened. I can't move at all. I haven't been able to move for ages. My mummy and daddy are crying. Some men came and took me out of bed and took me away to the hospital. That was days ago.

A man cut me with knives and took things out of me. Then they painted my face to look healthy because it was all twisted up and didn't look like me any more. They put me in a little suit.

I can't move. I'm scared.

I don't want to be in the coffin.

I don't want to go in the oven and be all burned up.

All That Remains

Evidence Collection: Sleep hags leave very little evidence behind. Long, semitransparent gray hairs are sometimes recovered from a death scene, but these dissolve into dust 48 hours after being detached from the hag. (The dust cannot be conclusively identified, but seems to be a fine ash.) Sleep hags will often lurk under a bed if they think someone is about to come into the room, so an investigation team that thinks to look there will find toys, books, boxes, clothes and so on shoved aside, and the impression of a body that has lain there.

Forensic Anthropology: When a sleep hag drains all the life from a victim, they die without any wounds being left on the body. Death appears to be from asphyxiation (there are burst blood vessels) but the

airways are not blocked, nor is there any sign of fluid in the lungs. Occasionally, crease marks left on the chest and abdomen from rumpled bedclothes indicate that a heavy weight has pressed down on the victim from above.

The most bizarre feature of a sleep hag death is the expression of the corpse. The victim's face is twisted in an alarming way, as if it was frozen in an exaggerated grimace of terror, or someone had molded it like clay after the victim's death.

Pathology: If a doctor consults with a living victim of a sleep hag's predations, then the obvious diagnosis of the symptoms is sleep paralysis. However, there may be warning signs that this simple explanation is not entirely sufficient. The victim is sometimes wheezy, as if suffering from asthma or an allergy. Occasional nosebleeds are sometimes reported (a consequence of the sleep hag's life-draining attacks weakening the blood vessels in the face). There may also be bruising on the chest, if the hag has jumped clumsily on to the victim, or on the wrists, if the hag has chosen to pin the victim down, fearing that he is not entirely subdued.

Game Statistics

Aberance 10, Athletics 8, Filch 6, Health 8, Scuffling 6

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: +2

Weapon: Taloned swipe (+0)

Armor: +1 vs. Scuffling, +1 vs. Shooting

The scientific explanation – sleep paralysis – makes sense and probably does account for many cases. Nevertheless, occult scholars who note that this creature – or phenomenon – occurs in many peoples' folklore, ranging at least from China to the Fertile Crescent, feel that there is an old and terrible truth behind the legend of the sleep hag. It is a genuine entity that feeds off living creatures, by squatting on their chests and inhaling their breath. This is not usually fatal, as the hag will take a little breath each night, coming back for more and keeping the victim alive. This can continue indefinitely, so long as the hag does not believe that it has been discovered. Should the creature believe that

its victim or a third party has seen it at work, it will attempt to suck away victim's remaining breath in one inhalation, killing the sleeper.

Drain Life: The sleep hag may drain an opponent by making a **Scuffling** attack. This is usually performed against a helpless victim whom the monster has first paralyzed, and automatically wakes a sleeping target.

This attack reduces the target's **Health** rating by 1d6+1 (that is, a permanent drain) and each point confers 1 temporary point of **Health** upon the hag, lasting for 24 hours. It will not usually drain the victim to the point of death unless it believes that the victim has seen it. Note that the hag does not have any supernatural means of telling whether it has been detected or not. Usually, the monster must notice a person looking at it, before it tries to use the drain life ability to kill.

Heavy: The sleep hag is a strangely heavy creature, with mass than one might expect from its shriveled appearance. It is very difficult to dislodge one of these monsters once it has a hold. When a Sleep Hag has successfully caught its target with a grapple (see page XX), it gains a +1 bonus to any **Athletics** rolls it makes to maintain the hold.

Paralyzing Touch: The touch of a sleep hag causes the famous paralysis described above. Unless the victim is asleep when the creature touches him, it must grapple him first (see page XX). The hag then makes an **Aberance** contest against the opponent's **Health**. If the hag wins, the victim cannot move for 5 rounds, though he can open his eyes. He wakes up and is aware of his surroundings but cannot move a muscle, nor can he speak. If the hag loses, the victim is not paralyzed and cannot be affected by the same hag's paralysis ability for the next 24 hours. Unlike the drain life attack, the paralyzing touch does not automatically wake the target.

Silent: A sleep hag makes no noise at all, which accounts for her high Stealth Modifier. Her feet do not touch the ground when she walks. The only time when this monster's actions result in sound is when it moves objects about, such as opening a door or window, or when items that it has interacted with encounter other physical things. A vase that a hag knocks over will make noise on impact with a floor, for example. Any person near enough to hear may make a Sense Trouble / Surveillance test (difficulty 5) to hear any noises that the hag makes while moving things around.



SNUFF GOLEM

**Dictaphone record
of Special Agent
Gail Moncrieff**

Click.

Janet, I'm standing in the house where the bodies were found. Seven days have passed since they took them out of here. Nobody has been inside but the investigating officers and the forensics team.

The house is a beachfront property. It belonged to Jefferson Thomas, alias Candy Apple Joe, alias Monsignor. Thomas' body was found in the center of the room, hanging from the chandelier. The bodies of the Manez brothers, Pepito and Esteban, were in the upstairs bathroom and the kitchen respectively.

Thomas had been strung up by his arms. He was naked and had his mouth bound with tape. It would have been easy to kill him then, but he did not die at that stage. Ergo, the killer, or killers, wanted him kept alive. Thomas bled to death from multiple wounds in the thigh, one of which opened the femoral artery. I am looking at the splash patterns on the carpet. Thomas was swinging from side to side while he bled.

The pathologist found that the penis and testicles had been smashed repeatedly between two wooden surfaces, and were crushed to a pulp. The blows were so forceful that the penis was almost entirely severed. Splinters of wood were recovered, suggesting that a ruler or wooden pole was used. The impression the report gives is of a repeated slamming between two wooden surfaces. I had thought that they did this with a drawer or a cupboard door, but I now believe the injuries happened after Thomas was hung up. I will look at the crime scene photos tonight and see if anything clicks.

Click.

I'm standing in the upstairs bathroom. Pepito Manez was found dead in the bathtub. Death was apparently from electrocution. He was fully clothed. It is thus safe to assume that he did not enter the bath voluntarily. There is no sign of any electrical appliance nearby.

Click.

I am making a circuit of the kitchen. The toaster does not appear to have been moved. The George Foreman

grill is similarly undisturbed. I cannot find any evidence that an electrical appliance from this house was thrown into the bathtub.

Esteban Manez was found on the kitchen table. The contents of the cutlery drawer are missing, and seem to have been thrust through his body. The table is marked in several places, where the knives penetrated it. Death did not result from a single blow but from blood loss, following a series of wounds sustained over time. I can only conclude that this was deliberate. Manez was supposed to suffer.

Click.

Janet, I am looking at the home entertainment system. It's a Bang & Olafson, top of the range, and it stands away from the wall at an angle of about forty-five degrees. It is undamaged, and it's been unplugged. Were they attempting to steal it when Thomas interrupted them? The DVD and music collection seems to have been left undisturbed. The report says that no valuables were taken. Why did the killers move the entertainment system?

An armchair has also been moved away from the wall. Why was the armchair moved? Janet, there is a double wall socket behind the armchair, just like the one behind the entertainment system.

So, they moved the entertainment system and the armchair to get to the electrical sockets. The entertainment system was plugged in, so they unplugged it. That means they needed as many sockets as they could free up. They had some equipment, then, that they needed to power with electricity. What was it?

Click.

Thomas is the central figure here. Thomas was a pimp and drug dealer, with God only knows how many sources of income. Whoever did this was saving Thomas until last. He was supposed to die slowly. So was Esteban.

Why not Pepito? Why was Pepito taken out so quickly? Why such a bizarre death? Electrocuting a fully clothed man in the bath isn't practical. It isn't quick to arrange. Why would anyone want to do it? Just to see the look on his face?

SNUFF GOLEM

The damage to Thomas's genitals doesn't make sense. If you're going to cut someone, you cut him. His thighs were hamburger, for Christ's sake. Wait. Stop. Getting frustrated here.

Click.

Janet, I'm standing just beside where Thomas bled to death. I need to know what caused that genital bruising. None of the other wounds appear to have been made with a wooden object. I can't think of any wooden object that would crush flesh like that, as if it had been slammed in a door.

If I were the killer, then to make those wounds, I'd have had to reach across Thomas' naked body, like *this*, and hold the item with both hands, and slam it like a -

A clapperboard.

Janet, it was a clapperboard. They mashed his genitals with each *take*. Someone was making a movie. That's why they needed the power outlets. It was for the film equipment. Someone was filming all of this.

Each time they shot the scene, they slammed his genitals in the clapperboard and they gashed him in the thighs again.

Jesus.

I need to know if Thomas was ever involved in movie making. See what we can dredge up. I've got a hunch here, and it's an ugly one.

All That Remains

Evidence Collection/Forensic Anthropology: The condition of a snuff golem's victim is entirely dependent upon the amount of time that the golem had to 'shoot the scene'. If the creature was simply defending itself, then the victims are only bashed and slashed; they died from the impacts of large metal objects. Some will have sharpened metal spikes driven through them with sufficient force to pin them to the wall. These spikes prove to be pieces of film-making equipment, such as boom mike stands and slivers of film canister.

If the golem had time to get 'creative' then the scene is far more horrifying. The bodies of its victims show signs of protracted torture. Their deaths are also bizarre and ritualistic, having a strong element of *display* about them. For example, a victim might be found crushed between two pieces of strong glass, or hanging from a meat hook with her limbs removed, or bloated with water from tubes inserted into the body's orifices.

Forensic Psychology: A sharp-witted investigator studying the scene could conclude that there was a cinematic sensibility at work. Whoever did this was even more interested in creating a gruesome spectacle that could be savored by an audience than in finishing the victim off.

Photography: A photography expert immediately notices the elements of *composition* involved in a Snuff Golem murder scene. The bodies have not simply been slaughtered, they have been arranged for a display. Even the colors of the unraveled viscera and the slivers of drying tissue seem to complement one another. Given time, a character with **Photography** can make a good estimate of where the camera would have been, how long the scene lasted and what aspect of the slaughter was most important to the perpetrator (e.g. the death itself, the disfigurement of the body, the use of some particular device, or the prominence of a given body part.)

Game Statistics

Aberrance 18, Athletics 8, Driving 2, Health 20, Mechanics 16, Preparedness 8, Scuffling 12, Shooting 12

Hit Threshold: 3

SNUFF GOLEM

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: -1

Weapon: Bashing and slashing limbs (+2 Scuffling) or high-velocity fragments of film equipment (+2 Shooting)

A armor: +2 vs. Scuffling, +2 vs. Shooting

The Romans reputedly had snuff theater, and public executions remain crowd-pullers but, to tabloid journalists, snuff movies are entirely new, unique, the darkest product of the information age. They're mostly urban myths, of course, tales of hard-faced sadists and perverts working in Rio's slums, exclusive Party-only clubs in China, and remote barns in the Midwest, making black market films that change hands for hundreds – no, *thousands* – of dollars. These stories, of poor-quality videotapes that show the rape and torture of hapless victims, always end in murder; the stars get snuffed. .

In the 21st century, the rumors seem less incredible, as the anonymity and global penetration of the Internet might actually have turned snuff movies into a practical proposition. The theory goes that these films require only the most basic ingredients: a camera, a secure location and one or more victims. Immediate revenue is assured and the market is constantly growing.

There are consequences of course; consequences unexpected by the criminals who just want to make quick money off other people's suffering. When something is recorded, it can generate an occult charge; horrific events very often do. Indeed, a snuff movie that preserves a victim's last agonized hours on a black ribbon of tape can sometimes result in the creation of something even more nightmarish than the film itself; the right kind of movie, with a budget and serious equipment, a movie that's big enough and depraved enough will create a snuff golem.

This monster is one of the most repulsive constructs to walk the earth. It begins to coalesce when the damage to the movie's star becomes irreversible. Then, when death comes, the movie's dark energy pulls together materials from the shoot; body parts, recording equipment, knives, power drills and saws; and builds itself a body from them. The result is a sickening mass of human (and sometimes animal) matter, butcher's tools and electrical equipment.

Once the creature arises, it goes to work. First, the it destroys everyone associated with the production, such as the director and any of the surviving cast, slaughtering them in mordantly appropriate ways. Some of those few scholars who study these creatures, think that it is a strange avenging angel, tracking down the star's killers, but they are wrong; the snuff demon is simply cruel, and it knows its makers well. Although they only contributed subconsciously, the movie director, his crew, his supporting cast and financial backers, all readily gave the monster their thoughts and lusts. Their unconscious urges, their greed, hunger, and excitement, as much as the star's agony, terror and desperate need to escape, all flowed into the construct, and the golem feels, embodies and savors the filmmakers' sick desires, as well as the pain, panic and resignation of those that died during the shoot.

So, the golem kills its creators. Then, when the blood has settled, it sets about making its own movies, strange, intensely intimate first person perspective movies. It circulates these on the Internet and deposits them anonymously with the contacts the producers used to have, thus keeping the demand for new material going. It carries on shooting films until someone or something stops it, and and never makes arrangements to collect any fees or royalties – some thing that the distributors occasionally wonder about.

Another, slightly more alarming trend is the steady disappearance of other snuff movie moguls; whom the fences and middlemen suspect their new producer is eliminating. They are correct; in its career, the snuff golem frequently hijacks other shoots, killing the cast and crew in the process of shooting its own movie, and crafting new assistants out of the dismembered bodies and damaged equipment.

Craft Homunculus: The golem can build its own stunted servitors from the remains of its victims and any handy electrical equipment it can find. One victim in relatively intact condition yields one homunculus. A more mangled body yields 50% of the organic material necessary to make a homunculus. Multiple bodies can be combined to create a single homunculus, which is often necessary if the golem has been especially eager with its butcheries.

It takes around two hours to make a homunculus.

Electrical Recharge:

Snuff golems thrive on electrical power. Electrical damage restores their health, rather than sapping it. A snuff golem can plug itself into an electrical outlet and heal an automatic 1 point of **Health** per round, though obviously it cannot move far from the outlet. Unplugging itself (or being unplugged), removes this benefit.

Given sufficient time and the assistance of a few homunculi, a snuff golem can rig itself an extension cable; this can be of any length, but more than 30 feet is impractical. If the cable is cut, the golem is not harmed but it does lose the benefit of continual **Health** recovery.

Cutting through an electrical cable without adequate protection is a bad idea, for obvious reasons.

Electrocute: The golem can divert some of the energy powering its own systems and use it to fry its victims. To use its electrocute ability, the golem must expend up to 5 points of **Aberance**. This 'charging up' does not take time to achieve.

Once charged, the golem must then strike its victim with a **Scuffling** attack. If the attack is successful, then one additional level of **Health** damage is dealt per point of **Aberance** invested. If the golem misses, the charge is lost.

The golem can 'hold the charge' once it has charged up the attack, instead of discharging the electrical energy immediately. It can hold the charge indefinitely. When charging up, a snuff golem crackles with electrical power; the lights on its body whirl, and a disgusting stench of molten plastic emanates from it.

Driller Killer: This gruesome act involves the golem holding the victim immobile and extruding whirling drill bits to pierce the target's skull. If the golem starts its turn with a victim held in a grapple, it attempts to drill right through the center of the opponent's forehead and out the other side. This horrendous attack deals +10 damage. If it results in death for the victim (as it often does), those watching make their **Stability** tests at +1 difficulty.

Studio Lights: The golem does not have the ability to see in the dark but it can project strong light from its body, drawing upon the studio lights left over

from the movie shoot. It uses these to light its way and to blind opponents. When used to light an area, the studio lights ability projects light in a 120-foot cone or a 60-foot circle. The golem can turn its lights on or off at will.

It can also use the lights to dazzle its opponents. A victim wearing sunglasses, welding goggles or similar protective equipment is immune to this, as is anyone who has prior warning that the golem is going to turn its lights up to full. A dazzled opponent rolls against a target difficulty of +1 on any test involving vision (such as **Shooting** or **Driving**). The dazzled condition lasts for 1d6 rounds.

Tape Vision: A snuff golem can videotape anything that it sees, transferring the feed to a videocassette in its abdomen. It uses this ability to make its own snuff movies, torturing and killing the victims and filming itself doing so.

Water Vulnerability: Nothing can ruin a film shoot quicker than rain. Water on a camera lens blurs the image and makes it useless to continue. As snuff golems have so many electrical parts, even a small amount of water in the mechanism can cause malfunctions.

A snuff golem that is drenched in water (such as from a bucketful being thrown at it or from heavy rain) can only move at a crawl. All **Athletics** and **Scuffling** tests are made at a +2 target difficulty. It is obvious that the water is affecting it adversely. Sparks fly from it and a high-pitched whine (like a jammed video recorder) comes from its internal workings.

A snuff golem that is completely immersed in water (such as a handy swimming pool) is immobilized. It cannot move and can take no actions, nor can it heal damage. To a casual observer, the golem seems to be dead. However, it is still very much alive. It can still move itself, albeit at a very slow rate, drawing upon the residual hate and anger left in its system. The golem moves at a rate of one inch per round, which is enough for it to crawl out of most bodies of water in which it might be immersed.

Zoom In: The snuff golem can use its action to zoom in on a single opponent with its camera eye. On its next action, it can then treat that opponent as if he had a Hit Threshold of 1 for the purposes of a single **Shooting** attack, so long as the attack is made on the golem's next turn and the golem has continuous line of sight contact

with the target. If the target ducks out of sight or is obscured by an intervening object or character, then the insight bonus is wasted.

Snuff Homunculus

Aberance 4, Athletics 4, Driving 2, Filch 2, Health 8, Mechanics 8, Preparedness 2, Scuffling 6, Shooting 4

Hit Threshold: 4

Stealth Modifier: +1

Weapon: Bashing and slashing limbs (+1 Scuffling)

Armor: +1 vs. Scuffling, +2 vs. Shooting

Some snuff golems build dwarf-like homunculi from the remains of their victims. These stubby creatures then help the golem to create more and more ambitious film projects. They kidnap future victims, track down rival producers, arrange sets and see to such complicated matters as lighting and electrical rigging.

As the snuff golem usually does not have a full set of body parts to work with, the homunculi it produces tend to have a squashed-up appearance. They have random pieces of technical equipment poking from their bodies, which the snuff golem has substituted for the missing parts. For example, a homunculus might have a camera tripod for a leg, an articulated mike stand for an arm, or bulbous light bulbs in place of eyes.

The golem is often surprisingly creative and is not limited by anything as sane as human biology; its creations live, no matter how absurd they are. Many golems create at least one homunculus which has a camera jammed into its neck instead of a head, so that it can act as 'second cameraman'.

Bind: Snuff homunculi can extrude cables, tapes and loops of adhesive gunk from their bodies, and ship it into useful lengths. They usually use this ability to tie or stick things together. Binding an item in place requires a whole round's worth of action. Bound items can be cut apart in a whole round, or can be ripped free with an **Athletics** test (difficulty 6). If the homunculus uses its bind attack to tie up a foe, then the foe cannot escape without succeeding at three successive **Athletics** tests (difficulty 6).

A homunculus can wrestle an opponent to the ground and bind him up with sticky lengths of tape. To do this, the homunculus must begin its action grappling the target. Unless the target succeeds at an **Athletics** check (difficulty 5) he is swaddled, mummy-like, in electrical tape and flex.

Repairable: Snuff homunculi cannot heal damage on their own, nor do they have the electrical recharge ability that the snuff golem has. However, a snuff golem can restore a homunculus to its full original **Health** pool with a **Mechanics** test (difficulty 4) and half an hour of work. Failure means that the homunculus is impossible to repair.

If the homunculus has been destroyed, it cannot be rebuilt, but the mangled remnants do count as 50% of the raw materials needed to build a new homunculus. The snuff golem will frequently destroy an irreparable homunculus and use the parts towards building a new one.



SOLILOQUY

Some creatures, like the Organ Grinder, exist to cause random slaughter. Others, like the Practice, follow their own insidious agenda. And a very few exist to persecute their victims, and make their lives sheer hell. The Soliloquy is one of these.

The origin of these creatures is unknown. They may be a highly evolved variety of skitch, or possibly a bioweapon from the Outer Black. Their modus operandi, however, is clear enough.

A soliloquy starts off its life very small, like a thumb-sized nub of flesh within a fuzzy bundle of lint. Two tiny, bulging, oddly human eyes can be seen under the

SOLILOQUY

hair. It latches on to one designated victim and follows him around, eating his discarded hair, skin and body fluids with its tiny puncture of a mouth. By doing this, it absorbs the victim's DNA into itself.

As the soliloquy grows, it becomes bolder. A victim might wake up to find the soliloquy licking his toes, or even lapping at his tear ducts. By this stage, it is a tiny homunculus around eight inches high, obviously resembling the target victim, though the eyes are still buggy, the limbs end in blobs of skin and there is usually a vestigial tail.

It is slowly forming itself into a duplicate of its victim. When it can speak and has fingers it will start making phone calls, speaking with the victim's voice and leaving listeners upset, angry or bewildered at what it says to them. It finds out about the victim, talks to exes and looks for the victim's trail on the internet. Friends and colleagues will begin to distrust him, perhaps even thinking that he is mad.

When it is almost completely grown it will commit crimes, steadily escalating from burglary to assault to murder, and of course the DNA evidence will lead to the impersonated character. The soliloquy is always careful to leave plenty of evidence that can be linked back, such as saliva smears (all soliloquies are secretors), blood droplets, and possibly even sexual fluids. When the victim's friends start giving a rock solid alibi, they'll be under suspicion, too.

If the victim is accused and imprisoned too early, the Soliloquy is annoyed. The whole point is to spin out the nightmare for as long as possible. It is therefore careful to include *some* ambiguity in what it does, making it appear that other people were involved, or even committing 'copycat' crimes while the victim is imprisoned, suggesting that the real perpetrator is still at large.

It is practically impossible to outwit one. Soliloquies are crafty and inventive, and have a strange ability to pre-empt what the victim does, as if they could borrow the victim's thoughts along with his appearance. For example, if the victim tries to flee to a friend's house in the mountains, the soliloquy will get there before he does, slaughter everyone inside, and sit back to watch the fun.

Eventually, once the victim has been completely

shattered in mind and body, the soliloquy will come for him. It will only do this when the victim is alone and unable to reach help; a prisoner on Death Row is perfect. It says a single word to the victim, and then rips out his heart and eats it. Nobody is quite sure what this single word is, as the creature and its victim are always alone, but the legend has arisen that the word is 'Soliloquy', and thus the thing has acquired its name.

Evidence Collection: As one might expect, the soliloquy leaves lots of evidence for an investigative team to pick up: shed hairs, saliva and bodily fluids. If it can establish a further connection to the unfortunate human it is replicating, such as tufts of borrowed clothing or a distinctive kitchen knife, then so much the better. It will always make a *token* attempt to conceal murder weapons, so that its subterfuge is not blatant.

Fingerprinting: The first crimes the soliloquy commits are notable for a complete absence of fingerprints. This is because the subtle whorls on the tips of the fingers are among the *last* of the bodily details it can successfully replicate. Until it is fully grown, it can leave only a smudgy blur that is clearly similar to the persecuted victim's own prints, but also obviously different – sufficiently so for a fingerprint specialist to suggest that these fingerprints might belong to someone who has tried to burn his prints off with acid, or slice them off with a razor.

Once it has grown a full set of fingerprints, it will start to commit the most brutal and perverse of its crimes. The ability to leave incriminating prints makes this conclusion all the more satisfactory.

Forensic Psychology: When it turns murderous, the soliloquy targets those people against whom its victim has a grudge – or against whom people will *believe* he had a grudge. These will be bitter ex-partners, business rivals, work colleagues, and (very often) former schoolteachers. It is thus easy to make a surface connection between the murder victim and the supposed perpetrator.

However, a forensic psychologist will often feel that there is something amiss. The supposed perpetrator's increasingly hysterical denials of guilt are absolutely convincing, despite all the evidence being against them. Unfortunately for the victims of soliloquies, there is now a recognized syndrome that accounts for such cases. Rowland's Syndrome, named for Doctor Amelia Rowland, is the name given to a particular rare form of multiple personality disorder in which the subject *genuinely believes* that he did not commit the crimes of which he is accused, even to the extent of manufacturing fake memories to cover the times on which he was committing them.

Since Doctor Rowland's paper was published back in 1998, there have been some tragic individuals (now awaiting execution) who have now become convinced that they are sufferers from Rowland's Syndrome and consequently have 'accepted' that they committed the brutal murders of which they were accused.

Game Statistics

Tiny Homunculus

Athletics 8, Filch 8, Health 2

Hit Threshold: 5 (for size)

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: +2

Weapon: -2 (teeth)

Armor: +1 vs. Shooting, +1 vs. Scuffling

When in this form, the creature will avoid combat at all costs, using its Evasive and Vanish abilities to stay out of harm's way.

Fully Grown Replica

Athletics 8, Driving 4, Filch 4, Health 18,
Preparedness 3, Scuffling 8, Shooting 8

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: +2

Weapon: Whatever it can lay its hands on, usually something belonging to its victim...

Armor: +1 vs. Shooting, +1 vs. Scuffling

Evasive: The soliloquy is very hard to hit, and ducks and weaves around incoming blows. Before any given round starts, it can spend up to five points from its **Athletics** pool to increase its Hit Threshold by an equivalent amount for that round only.

Regeneration: A creature that can build itself a body does not have much to fear from wounds. If it is wounded but not killed, a soliloquy heals back one point of **Health** every hour.

A badly injured soliloquy will sometimes opt to shed a body part, much like a lizard sheds its tail. For example, if its arm was badly hacked (or it was handcuffed to a railing and needed to escape) it could simply pull it off and grow a new one. It can even discard its head if it needs to. Losing limbs or a head costs it 6 points of **Health**.

Vanish: Soliloquies have one failsafe means of escape. They can duck away into the Drift, a dusty sub-dimension known to, and accessible to, them alone. To do this, the soliloquy must be completely out of sight of any other creature. If even so much as a cat or squirrel is watching it, it cannot vanish.

It can reappear at will, but it can only do so if the spot where it wishes to re-emerge is not being observed by any creature. It must also reappear within 300 feet of the point where it vanished into the Drift.



STRAP THROAT

for all of the broken daughters
cheaper than porcelain, with eyes
glass could too easily replace
for those whose fingers
were brushwood to a father's
blows
for every plum pudding of
bruises and every cherry tart of
sweat in cotton silence
force-fed and fattened on fists
brewing their own bitter blood
stewing apple jack poison
under ice
for all of the broken daughters
for all of the stump-split green ones
gingham cribs for bastards
finding tongues too thick to speak
and minds too slow to argue
dumb bitches, bitch-dumb:
for all of the broken daughters
turned stubborn as stones
but easier to bleed
for them i clasp my hands
bow my head
and scream.

Alyson Starkey, *Strap Throat*

from *Not So Fresh: Poems by Women
Anarchists*

Puberty is a time of rituals and ordeals. It is attended by more monsters, real and imaginary, than any other time of life. The urges of the body are answered by cautionary tales as old as the campfire itself, which warn of the fate of those who yield to them unwisely. Superstition and taboo are unavoidable.

Couples making out on deserted lanes encounter a hook-handed maniac. Young girls looking into the water in a toilet bowl see Bloody Mary looking back at them. The stories vary from state to state. Every teenage girl in the Upper Peninsula, and upstate Wisconsin has heard of Strap Throat. The story has been passed down from mother to daughter, from classmate to classmate, for more than a hundred years. Her name is spoken with the same respectful dread reserved for the likes of Lizzie Borden, Sadako Yamamura, Brenda Spencer and Samara Morgan.

As with many legends, the truth behind Strap Throat is mundane. She was a tragic, pathetic figure. Her real name was Mary Beth Spaulding, and she was the daughter of Ernest Y. Spaulding, a widower who ran a general store in Black River Falls, Wisconsin. Until the death of his wife Nancy in childbirth on 14th January 1872 – something he never forgave his daughter for – Mr Spaulding had been a moderately successful shopkeeper. Subsequently, he lost interest and business slowly deserted him for competitors and mail order catalogs. In time, the loneliness, the pressure and the poverty finally became intolerable to the store owner, now a hopeless drunk, and he killed his only child.

It is likely that Mary Beth contributed to her father's decline; she was commonly regarded to be mad, perhaps even possessed, and her ways were well known in the town. She would have terrible fits in which she would soil herself and black out for hours at a time. The little girl frequently ran away from home, hiding out in the woods for days, and coming back – or being forcibly returned – to her father, starving and dirty. Then, one morning, Spaulding caught

her spitting on the holy cross and cursing God's name, and decided to keep her locked in her room. Mary Beth spent her waking hours throwing herself against the walls and beating her head on the floorboards. She raised Cain with banging and yelling and occasionally a shrill, piercing shriek that made the skin crawl. It sounded more like a little girl trapped inside a devil than the other way around. The older Mary Beth got, the worse Spaulding coped – it certainly did not help that she was the image of her mother – and the more he drank. Then, on Mary Beth's thirteenth birthday, and the worse for entire bottle of Scotch, the shopkeeper decided that it was time for Satan to get the hell out of his little girl, thrashed her senseless with his belt and tied her to a chair.

Mary Beth began to choke and froth. Foul-smelling foam sprayed from her mouth and nose, followed by a stream of bile. Spaulding reasoned, with drunken logic, that this was it; the devil was emerging.

This terrified him. What would he do if the devil squeezed out of his daughter's mouth and stood there staring at him? Suddenly, it was not such a fine idea as it had seemed. The more the yellow bile frothed up and dripped, the more scared he got. He was so afraid that Satan would leap out of her throat and kill him that he gagged her with his belt. That would keep the son of a bitch in there. He staggered off to his bed and fell asleep.

Twelve hours later, when he finally came to, Mary Beth Spaulding was dead. She had choked on her own tongue.

Spaulding was tried for murder. In mitigation, he told the court that Mary Beth had 'gotten the devil living in her throat.' She had been damn fool enough to drink spunk-water from a tree stump and the devil had lodged in her throat like a leech. Spaulding calmly explained that he didn't have any choice; that he only did what any God-fearing man and father would have done. This plea did not help his case; the jury found against him after cursory deliberations, and the judge condemned the shopkeeper to death.

The sentence was never executed upon him, though; somehow – a common belief is that Mary Beth's ghost obliged – Spaulding's leather belt found its way to him inside his cell and he hanged himself with it. Following his death, the belt was lost. From time to time, an item that the seller claims is Spaulding's belt will show

up on Ebay or at a private auction, accompanied by suitable faked provenance.

Today, the specter of Mary Beth still haunts the backwoods of Wisconsin. The locals call this mysterious ghost 'Strap Throat'. They warn tourists not to camp in their woods in case Strap Throat should appear before them, screaming like a banshee. Teenagers dare one another to call her name in remote clearings.

According to folklore, Strap Throat's piercing cry can petrify the human soul. It sounds like nothing human and is more like a wolf's howl than the scream of a young girl. Over the last fifty years, Strap Throat has supposedly killed 34 people with her terrible baying. The official record attributes these deaths to more mundane causes, such as pneumonia and cardiac arrest.

Researchers into this case have all reached the same conclusion. It is unlikely that anything was spiritually wrong with Mary Beth. The most likely explanation is that she was suffering from epilepsy and a mild mental illness. Ironically, she was not a monster in life, but folklore and superstition have turned her into one after her death.

-from *Wolves at the Door - Myths of Adolescence*

by Renee Carter

All That Remains

Evidence Collection / Simple Search: When the victim has tried to call on Strap Throat deliberately, there will always be one type of item found in the vicinity: a reflective surface. This is almost always a mirror, but as the description below explains, other types of surface have been used.

There is also usually a single light source in the room, arranged so that it is behind and to the left of the victim's body.

Victims discovered in the pine woods near her home are often hikers or people on camping trips. More than once, couples have been found shrunk and partly decayed in sleeping bags under canvas. Unusually, their camping supplies (including food) have not been ransacked by wild animals. Even strips of beef jerky are left uneaten, as if even the creatures of the wood were uneasy about approaching the bodies of these dead.

Forensic Anthropology:

The majority of Strap Throat's victims die of heart seizures. They hear her shrill shrieks echoing through the gloomy pines then shooting pains travel up their left arms, their vision blurs and their world turns dark forever. Autopsies reveal no blood clots or signs of aneurysm. The heart simply stops dead. The time of death is inevitably midnight.

Those that she has visited personally sometimes have black finger marks on their necks, the signs of strangulation.

Fingerprinting: Attempting to lift prints from the victim's body, or from other locations nearby (such as the frame of the mirror) is a relatively easy matter. Strap Throat's fingerprints are consistent despite her ghostly form, but as might be expected, they do not belong to any living human being. There is a secret case file on the 'mirror strangler', who appears in locations up and down the country and has done for decades, which might be made available to an Ordo Veritatis member.

Game Statistics

When Manifest:

Aberrance 20, Health 8, Scuffling 14,
Shrink 16

Hit Threshold: 3

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +2

Strap Throat is a malignant ghost, wracked by insanity and the violence of her life and death. She does, however, have limitations and does not prey wantonly on anyone who happens to be nearby. She reserves her assaults for only three classes of people: those who enter the woods where she walks, those who she feels should die, and some of those who perform the simple, and well-known ritual that calls her forth. Occult Sciences can easily recall this ritual.

Those who camp in the woods and hear her fatal howling are most usually killed outright. These are accidental deaths. She does not deliberately set out to cause them; they just happen. Strap Throat wanders

STRAP THROAT

randomly in the woods, manifesting as and when she chooses and screaming without provocation.

The majority of those who call her up, however, she kills deliberately. Several adolescents have been found strangled to death, sat in front of a mirror, sometimes with a burned-out candle beside them. Nobody says so out loud, but everyone thinks that they know the truth; someone summoned Strap Throat and sent her to kill the unfortunate teenager. Everyone knows how to do it, and why: Mary Beth, who spent her last years locked in a room, sympathizes with the lonely, the awkward and the isolated, and hates bullies so much that she came back from the grave to kill her own father. Consequently, she will intercede on behalf of kindred spirits, and reach out of a convenient reflective surface to throttle the summoner's most persistent persecutor. As to the question of why the deceased was sitting in front of a mirror with a candle, well, everybody's heard that occultism and witchcraft – which are nothing to mess with – are on the rise among high school students.

The common belief that Strap Throat will kill your enemies for you is only true of the special cases, those very few people who have survived summoning Mary Beth, and is based on rumor more than it is on actual accounts. Very few people talk about it – after relief of being free from the teasing and bullying fades, guilt and denial set in – but those who do report that the operation went without a hitch. Hence, desperate people will attempt to call on this avenging angel.

The ritual to summon Strap Throat is simple, involving a reflective surface of some kind, such as a pool, a mirror, or, on one occasion, a cake slice and a birthday candle. The hour has to be midnight and the celebrant has to be alone. The only light comes from a candle behind and to the summoner's left. The petitioner looks into the mirror, without blinking, and counts slowly to ten, then the summoner says the creature's name five times (opinions differ as to whether the correct appellation is "Mary Beth" or "Strap Throat"), closes her eyes and opens them again, to see Strap Throat looking back at her, instead of her own reflection.

The first problem with this ritual is that it does not guarantee Strap Throat's response. She may not choose to appear at all (and often does not, fortunately for the foolish) and she cannot be controlled should she



show up. A further difficulty is Mary Beth Spaulding's stringent criteria for qualifying as a true victim of bullying, and her tendency to kill summoners who don't meet her high standards of personal suffering. Hence, the majority of Strap Throat's victims are those who have called on her themselves, usually frivolously or, sometimes, out of bravado.

In game terms, calling on Mary Beth requires only the proper preparation. However, Strap Throat will only appear if she the GM feels it is appropriate. On manifestation, she will usually scream (and kill the summoner) or thrust her pale hands out of the mirror and grab the petitioner by the throat. See the strangulation ability above. If the summoner is a victim like herself, however, she may well choose to listen to their story and go after the person Mary Beth believes to be their worst enemy, strangling the victim the next time he or she is alone and looking into a mirror. If the petitioner has a series of tormenters, then Strap Throat will kill one per summoning.

Indestructible: Strap Throat is a ghostly entity and cannot be destroyed. Although it is possible to dispel a given manifestation by reducing her to zero **Health**, she can never be wholly eradicated while people still remember her and tell stories of her. If a given manifestation is dispelled, she is prevented from appearing again until some other hapless adolescent goes through the summoning procedure.

Manifestation: Strap Throat cannot be harmed at all while she is only an image seen in a mirror, nor can she harm anyone. To strangle her victims or scream, she must manifest partially or fully.

Strap Throat typically manifests through a mirror. The arms that emerge and encircle the victim's throat are completely solid. Assailants facing the mirror can attack her through it, but they cannot do so from its back. Once she has emerged completely, the mirror is just a mirror again. Sometimes, rather than thrusting her arms through, she will push her head through and scream.

Shriek: Strap Throat's terrible cries can stop a person's heart dead. Those who survive are usually rendered half-mad with fear. She can only utter a shriek when she is manifest. The shrieks come when the GM deems it dramatically appropriate.

The shriek counts as her action for the turn and affects

all creatures within earshot. Animals that hear the shriek are panicked and will try to flee the area: dogs strain against their chains and howl, horses throw off their riders and bolt, cats in carrying cases hiss and scrabble against the plastic.

Humans who hear the shriek are in even more danger. All who hear it must make Stability checks (difficulty 4). On a failure, the victim takes 1d6+10 Health damage from a sudden shock to the heart and brain; if he survives, he also loses 1d6+4 points of Stability. Those who successfully make their Stability tests are unharmed.

Strangulation: At close quarters, Strap Throat dispatches her victims by locking her chilly hands around their necks and squeezing.

In order to strangle, Strap Throat must begin her action grappling her victim (see page XX). She automatically begins to strangle them. A target she is strangling is unable to breathe, speak or cry out and remains so for as long as the ghost maintains her grip. The victim can free himself from the stranglehold by breaking the grapple in the usual way.

Victim Empathy: The ghost's dull eyes see all the secrets of those who call her. Strap Throat can almost always tell whether a person has truly been persecuted through no fault of his or her own. She is extremely unlikely to be fooled when a person calls her out of curiosity or because of a dare and then protests that they did it because they needed help.



**TORTURE
DOG**

Torture Dog

SUB ROSA

In the keeping of the Priory

Access: Inner Order, Adeptus Primus and higher
ONLY

File under: Subtle Planes, Outer Black

Doc. 8b

Transcript of surveillance of the Caulksmere flat (see
the case notes)

I have just swallowed an enormous mouthful of
poison.

That was what Rimbaud said. I have followed his
example. Our poison is, of course, not of the fatal kind,
unless it be fatal to the mortal ego, to the undeveloped
self; the death is thus the serpent's kiss, the initiatory
death, the shedding of one of the veils of the Absolute.
Through the toxic, we become intoxicated. The root
word, *toxos*, means an arrow. Poison and drunkenness
are the same thing. The Pythoness of Apollo inhaled
the poison gases of her home, and was gifted with
prophecy.

I am calm, most terribly calm.

I have barricaded the door. I have moved the chest of
drawers, uh, the second altar in front of it. The idiots
are downstairs watching a video, but I do not wish to be
disturbed. The working is too important.

I pause before I begin. It is pleasant to reflect on their
state, so like that of cattle. I do not bear them any
animosity. It is not their fault that they are not chosen.
The servants of the Light are few and secret. Many
greater than I have suffered for the benefit of others,
without any acknowledgement being given. The world
is bound in secret knots; it is my burden, that I keep the
world safe for the likes of them. It is not given to them to
know what strange things people the universe.

The temple is that of Saturn. Three black lamps burn
about me. The shew-stone is my obsidian mirror, after
the fashion of Dr. Dee. Tonight I will scry into realms
that the Doctor never guessed at.

The invocations must be spoken. I shall pause the record
so that the words be not profaned. Think not too hardly

(?) of me, O posterity, that
I share not my secrets. Let
those who would come after me research,
even as I have researched.

It is the hour. It is the time.

(Sound of tape being paused and restarted)

It is done. A great silence falls. I turn to the shew-stone.
It is dark. Alas!

I cry aloud: Show yourselves! Open the mysteries of
your creation! May I be made a strong seer-of-things!

I wait; yea, I wait.

(pause)

With the patience of the pyramids, I wait, giving a
certain Sign known unto me, that I may -

Oh my God. Oh my God.

Something's actually happening.

It's a ripple. It's definitely there. It's like light, like
moonlight on a pond, or something like that. It's not just
a visual effect from the drugs, I put my hand in front of
it and it blocked it out. Visuals don't do that. Dear God
in heaven.

This is really disturbing. I'm not imagining it. It's getting
bigger. This has never happened before. It's worked. It's
bloody worked. *(laugh)*

Right. Focus. I must maintain my resolve. Very well.
There is a rippling light in the mirror. In the stone, I
mean. How would Crowley have put it? Yes. The seer
beholdeth a great light in the shew-stone, portending...
portending he knows not what. He stands in the Sign of
Silence and awaits the appearance of the Guardian.

In the name of the Great Order, I petition for admittance
to the Mysteries!

Nothing is happening. It is just... shiny and empty.
I keep checking and it is still definitely there. The
rippling light, that is. It's *in* the glass. It is cloudy and
transparent and sort of swirling, like... like milk...
or... holograms? The drugs are beginning to cloud
my perception. I cannot lose this vision, not now that

something's coming
through.

? All's enough very Sarge! ? *(words unclear)*

Something else here, something new. There's a shape in there. No... one, two, three... three shapes. Turning and twisting.

They are coming close, coming out of the rippling light. I cannot see them clearly. They look rather like tadpoles, or little foetuses. Getting bigger, getting bigger. Ahh. I don't like... they look a bit like sea-monkeys, really big ones, but...

Now... oh God, oh shit, oh Jesus God no they're coming OUT.

(sound of furniture being moved and repeated screams)

Oh fuh oh god this isn't happening aaa

(sound of growling, heavily distorted, as if through a synthesizer)

mummy Jesus pleeeeeeese

(sound of tearing fabric)

(clattering sound of many heavy objects falling or running down stairs)

(faint sound of multiple voices screaming and shouting)

All That Remains

Evidence Collection: The single most puzzling aspect of a Torture Dog murder scene is the point of entry. There isn't one. Owing to the Torture Dogs' ability to glide through dimensions, there is never a break-in point. They simply manifest inside the room where their potential victims are.

It is, however, quite common for initial investigation to mistake the victim's hasty *exit* route for a point of entry. Victims try to flee the scene by opening windows and leaping out of them, jumping right through them glass and all, or even by smashing down doors. In the messy chaos of the crime scene, it takes a sharp eye to discern that the damage was done from the inside to the outside, and not the other way around.

Forensic Anthropology: The victims of torture dog assault are thoroughly savaged, as if wild animals had attacked them. Deep gashes from claws and teeth are left in the flesh. Some victims are pulled limb from limb, as the dogs fight over the remains as over chew toys. Not all of the wounds are this straightforward, though; among the tears and bite marks, there are occasional, deep puncture wounds that are frayed on the inside. These appear to have been caused by a sharp metal item rotating at high speed, the most obvious culprit being a conventional electric drill. Since no wild animal could possibly have a drill in its mouth, the usual conclusion is that the massacre was the work of a demented human and a pack of savage dogs, trained to rip humans apart. The size of the lacerations suggests that the dogs were one of the Great breeds, or possibly even wolves, though these would be less easy to explain in an urban setting.

Pathology: As noted below, the dogs leave one victim alive. If he is hospitalized within three hours of the attack, the blood samples reveal high concentrations of some hallucinogenic chemical in his body.

A typical attempt to reconstruct the events of one of these incidents would involve a human maniac injecting one victim with hallucinogens, killing the other victims with an electric drill and setting his dog pack on the corpses, possibly in the hope that they would devour the evidence. The drugged state of the victim neatly accounts for his babbling about bizarre biomechanical creatures from the Outer Black.

Forensic Psychology: The one human left alive after the torture dogs have faded through gaps in reality is barely recognizable as human, and babbles incessantly about the Outer Black. This is mostly demented raving but occasionally a sentence slips out that gives a clue to what the dogs are and what they want. Naturally, few can glean more than a few coherent sentences from them; the more forthcoming survivors babble about the torture dogs themselves, that they are from the 'Great Razor Plains' and that they 'glide along the agony breezes'.

A listener with no experience of the Outer Black would probably conclude that the victim was left alive as some sort of a cruel joke, or possibly as a warning to others. To a listener with some awareness of the creatures of Unremitting Horror, the inference is very clearly that the dogs leave a tortured victim as a warning, to give those who would interfere with the operations of the Outer Black an idea of the fate that awaits them.

Game Statistics

Aberrance 10, Athletics 8, Health 7,
Scuffling 9

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +1

Weapon: +1 (Drill), +3 (Mandibles); or fired
spines (+0 Shooting and venom, see below)

Armor: +2 vs. Shooting, +1 vs. Scuffling

The torture dogs originate from the Outer Black (see the organ grinder above) and we are fortunate that only a few have slipped into our world. As with all of the denizens of this dark, remote dimension, very little is known about them. They are believed to be a trained hunter-killer creature, dispatched in packs to bring down foes of particular status or significance, but this may be mere supposition. Other theories believe them to be information-gatherers, whose savage methods ensure that the victims can keep no secrets locked away.

Their minds are not human and they operate according to an alien logic. For reasons of their own, they always spare one of their victims, although "spare" is perhaps a misleading choice of words. The dogs first inject their victim with a hallucinogenic drug, secreted from their own glands. This has the effect of making the victim ultra-sensitive to physical stimuli (so much so that he even experiences some agonizing sensations as almost pleasurable) and links him telepathically with his torturers, so that he is forced to become an accessory to his own mutilation. Then, he watches through their eyes and feels what they feel, as they peel back his skin and drill down to his bone marrow. This horrible fusion is what leaves the victim with such bizarre, intimate knowledge of the creatures, even if he is too insane to articulate it. The telepathic link exposes him to the torture dogs' own memories and experiences. After five hours, the beasts depart.

Dimensional Leap: Torture dogs can glide along strange planes unknown to conventional science. By expending a point of Aberrance, they can leap from one place to another along a line that appears straight to them but leaves the dog facing in the opposite direction, or on the other side of a solid wall.

To an observer, the dog appears to have jumped through some sort of wormhole or impossible angle in space. It is impossible to tell where the dog will appear from watching it jump. Torture dogs always teleport flawlessly and do not have to see the place they are jumping to, though they do not have any precognitive

awareness of what awaits them there. A torture dog can spring upon an opponent by using a dimensional leap but must be able to see that opponent first.

If it chooses, instead of moving within the material plane, it may take a dimensional leap to return to the Outer Black. The dog will not usually do this unless it has done what it came to the material plane to do, or it is severely wounded.

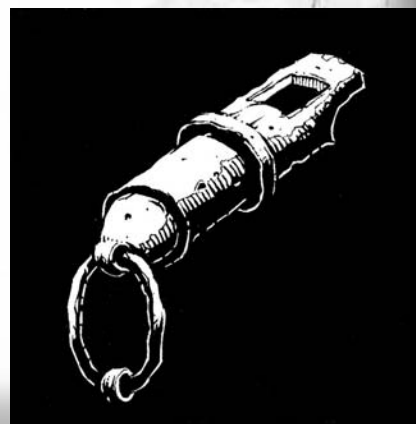
Horrific: Torture dogs are steeped in the mind-wracking essence of human agony and the fear that ordinary humans have for suffering. All Stability loss incurred from encountering them is at +1.

Toxin: The spines that a torture dog fires from its back transmit a potent toxin. Victims who are struck by the Torture Dog's spines risk having this poison sent coursing through their veins, as well as suffering **Health** damage. They must make immediate **Health** tests (difficulty 5); on a failure, they are reduced to shivering, cowering wrecks, overcome by agony. The toxin heightens all sensations to unbearable intensity, increasing the difficulty of **Stability** tests by +2, and making it impossible for the victim to take any action at all.

The toxin also mentally fuses the recipient with the torture dog that delivered it. While the venom is seething in his blood, the victim can see, hear and feel everything that the dog does. He not only gets to watch himself being devoured (or tortured), he gets to experience himself doing it, too. For the torture dog, this may give some kind of voyeuristic satisfaction; for the victim, it is a living hell, and calls for a fresh **Stability** test every time the creature attacks.

After 1d6 hours, the toxin wears off but leaves the victim with permanent nerve damage, increasing the difficulty of all **Stability** tests by +1. Immediate medical attention *may* help the victim and prevent this outcome, but three consecutive successful **Medic** checks (difficulty 4) are needed to achieve this, along with a supply of antitoxins.

Telepathy: A torture dog may communicate telepathically with others of its kind, with its masters or with a creature that it has poisoned with its toxin.



ARTIFACTS

These are items that have a connection of some kind with the creatures described in the first part of the book. Be aware that the artifacts are not necessarily intended to give the players power over the horrors, or to protect them. They are part of the creatures' mythos. Possession of an artifact can sometimes give a character a greater insight into the beings he is facing but is often likely to place him in greater danger than he would otherwise have been.

These artifacts can be used as the basis of a story or even a campaign. For some of the artifacts, a selection of possible histories is given. The GM can either use these alternate histories as blind alleys for the players to investigate, using them as rumors that increase the mystery of the item, or simply pick one history as true and omit the others.



Artifacts

The First Altar

This is a ring of gray-black rock, measuring three and a half feet across, and one foot thick, with a two-foot hole in its middle. Once, it stood by a lake, and on it – and for some time – priests used to tie living human victims to it, for the feral drowners to take.

The practice of leaving sacrifices at the First Altar continued for centuries, although, after the monsters stopped coming to claim the victims. None can tell why. It may be that they slept, or that they moved away, or even that the majority of them died out. Discovering the altar still laden with its sacrifice, instead of empty and bloodstained, made the priests uneasy. Perhaps the monsters had become invisible. Perhaps they wished to be fed, instead of taking the food themselves. Obviously, the sacrifice would not work if the victim was not killed, so the priests would just have to carry out the sacrifice themselves. Thus began perhaps the practice of ritual slaughter of humans by humans, to emulate the feral drowners' claiming of mortal victims. The priests were a little perturbed at having to make the sacrifices themselves, but they were far more afraid of what would happen if the sacrifice were not made. In time, this cultic practice died out, and the altar was forgotten.

The fate of the First Altar is unknown, but any of the following rumors might prove to be true.

- The Altar was floated out into the center of a lake on a raft, which was then set on fire. The Altar now lies at the lake bottom, waiting for the day when changes in the local environment will drain the lake away and reveal it once more.
- The Altar is a major museum, in open public view in the foyer, passed by hundreds of people every day. It remains there thanks to the efforts of a secret society dedicated to protecting mankind from supernatural evil. While it is in such a public place, it cannot be used for occult purposes again.
- The Altar was captured by a secret sect, who posed as Christian clergy but were in fact pagans, carrying out bloody. They arranged to have the First Altar made into part of a well-known British cathedral, where it stands to this day. It lies underneath the main altar, as if to say that beneath all the trappings of Christianity, there is still an abiding darkness. The sect is, of course, still active.

- The Altar is in the possession of the Freemasons, who still use it in some of their more obscure rituals. Their interest in the item is purely historical and they are unaware of its original use.

- The Altar was tipped into a local rubbish dump. Several centuries later, it was taken to the local manor house by laborers and used as the base of a table. The Altar, along with the rest of the house, was shipped over to America when a visiting tycoon decided to buy the whole historic property and have it sent home brick by brick. It can now be found in Salem. Ironically, the reconstructed house where it now lies does not have any known connection with witchcraft.

Function: The purpose of the Altar is to facilitate the only kind of interaction between humans and feral drowners that the drowners themselves will permit. When a sacrifice is placed upon it, a feral drowner will come to collect it if there is one within 10 miles. It will recognize the person who makes the sacrifice as 'special' and will not attack them unless they first attack it.

The altar does have the supernatural ability to call out to the feral drowners. The mere presence of a victim on its cold stone surface sends out a psychic message reinforced by countless centuries of ritual observance.

The feral drowner who comes for the sacrifice is not in any sense bound by the person who makes it, nor is the drowner obliged to offer any kind of service in return. The drowner may also judge that the offering is inadequate, in which case it will take the celebrant as well.

The First Altar is supernaturally hard and resilient. Even dynamite will barely scratch it. The stone of which it is made seems to be an igneous rock similar to flint but darker in color. It cannot be reliably identified.

Doctor Moxon's Apparatus

This device is only useful in games where the GM allows mediumship, ectoplasm and all the accoutrements of the Victorian spiritualist to be something other than an elaborate con.

Doctor Peregrine Moxon went one step further than

those peers of his who attempted to photograph the soul as it left the body, or weighed the body at the point of death to see if anything escaped. He developed techniques of recovering ethereal information by means of mechanical devices. Sensing that there was something of the truth in spiritualism but aware of the gullibility of human beings and the deceptive (not to say emotionally unstable) nature of many mediums, he sought to replace the human medium with a mechanical interface.

Moxon reasoned that the ability of some people to channel the forces of the spirit world could be emulated by a machine, so long as that machine was equipped with similar faculties to a human being. In much the same way that the vibratory disc within an early telephone emulated the human eardrum, so too would the bell jars and networks of wiring within Moxon's device emulate the human brain and nervous system.

Moxon never finished his work. Moxon's intention was to pave the way for a revolution in telecommunications that would have made the telephone and television (and even the eventual Internet) seem insignificant by comparison. It would have been possible for living people to access the world of the dead simply by activating a Moxon machine. A new era would have dawned in which the living and the dead were in everyday contact. The stranglehold of tyrants upon their subjects would have been broken, for nobody would fear death any more. Murder would diminish massively once the victim was able to testify at the trial. The wisdom of long-dead minds, of Socrates and da Vinci, would have been at humanity's fingertips.

Small wonder, then, that the dream tearers intervened. Geniuses like Moxon are stifled by the dark powers that wish to hold humanity back. His mind was torn to pieces as he slept, by strange floating shapes that grinned with many toothed mouths, and the nascent Eidolon Device was never built.

All that survives is an early, flawed version of the machine. Moxon's prototype Apparatus is a grotesque object that resembles a brass samovar, clustered with wires and dials. A thick cable trails from it like a tail. In the heart of the thing is a green glass chamber, in which floats the pulpy mass of a human brain, previously resident within the skull of the clairvoyant Maxine Sosatrice. Although he had hoped to have sensitive

electrical fields do the same work as a medium's brain, Moxon was unable to substitute for the real thing; the design simply could not be refined sufficiently in its early stages. Beneath the glass chamber is an odd brass trumpet, protruding some six inches and shaped rather like a flower.

In order to function, the device needs a powerful electric current. When active, the brain vat glows from beneath, the dials flicker and the whole device vibrates in an alarming way. The device cannot function for more than 30 minutes without overheating and blowing a valve.

Repairing the machine if it suffers minor damage (such as overheating) can be achieved with a **Mechanics** test (difficulty 4). A similar test is needed to activate the device if it has spent several years in storage. The outer electrical components are not especially arcane. Only the heart of the thing was crafted according to Moxon's own invention. For safety, the central core of the device is kept shielded behind a thick metal plate. A section of this plate can be slid down over the brain jar to protect it.

Should the inner core become damaged, the machine is almost guaranteed to be irreparable. Three consecutive **Mechanics** tests (difficulty 5) and the advice of a consultant with a rating of at least 2 in **Occult Studies** are needed. Damage to the brain within the glass jar renders the machine inoperable unless the brain of a second psychically gifted individual can be found. Even in that event, the machine must still be repaired as if its inner core had become damaged.

The current whereabouts of Moxon's apparatus is unknown. Any of the following might prove to be true.

- The device is kept in one of the cellars of the Institute for Psychical Research building in Brighton, England. It has the status of a morbid relic rather than a functioning scientific instrument, as it contains part of a deceased human's body.
- The apparatus is part of the décor in a tattooist's studio in New York. The current owner, Mickey Blaze, is unaware of the object's provenance and does not think that the brain is actually real. As far as he is concerned, it is a gorgeous piece of sculpture. He bought the item on Ebay from a seller in Europe. He recently loaned it out to a local theatre group for their production of the Rocky

Artifacts

Horror Show.

- The machine is an exhibit in a travelling Museum of Curiosities, alongside two-headed babies in the obligatory dusty jars, model classrooms populated by stuffed kittens in little costumes, waxwork figures of notorious murderers, implements used in torture, composite 'mermaid' creatures created from monkeys and fish stitched together, and all the usual grotesquerie associated with such endeavors. The owner, Mr. MacHenry, is a stout, red-faced alcoholic who could be persuaded to part with the apparatus for a suitable sum. It is not an especially popular exhibit. People are usually more interested in the pickled brain than in the device's supposed purpose.

Function: The machine's function is twofold. It gathers data and assists manifestation. A character must first make a one-point **Occult Studies** spend in order to work out what the machine's various controls and readouts mean (unless this information is vital to the plot, in which case it is granted for free). If the character has access to Moxon's design notes, or has the machine explained to him by someone already familiar with it, then this spend is not necessary.

In its function as a gatherer of information from the spirit world, the machine simulates a human psychic medium. It is sensitive to 'vibrations' in an area, exactly as a psychically gifted human would be (if such people exist in the game). When an especially violent, malicious or tragic event has taken place (such as the events that give rise to a residue demon) the psychic 'memory' clings to the area, causing the phenomena that manifest as hauntings, poltergeist activity, nightmares and so forth. The machine detects these memories and can, to some extent, articulate them.

A large dial, with glowing numerals, shows the level of psychic activity in the machine's surrounding region. Areas that are rich in psychic vibrations, such as the sites of murders, cause the needle to rise. This indicator will also fluctuate up or down according to whether there are supernatural creatures present in the vicinity. Creatures that are undead or hail from other realms of existence that come within 80 feet will cause the machine's dial to twitch upwards. The higher the reading, the closer the creature is.

Once it has settled in to its surroundings and processed the regional vibrations, a task that requires at least 30

minutes of undisturbed operation, the apparatus can produce a psychic disruption graph. This is a spool of paper marked in increments of ten years, going back up to eight hundred years; Moxon's later designs would have allowed for even longer time periods, but he never had the chance to build them.

The psychic disruption graph is a series of peaks and troughs showing which years have been the most psychically active for the region. If, for example, the region is a muddy field and there was a battle there in 1829, then that year will show an abrupt spike on the chart, with almost completely flat lines on each side. By contrast, a stretch of motorway that was a 'black spot' for car crashes would show a consistently high level of psychic activity in recent years (from the accumulated pain, grief and fear) with next to nothing in the years before the motorway was built.

The machine can also be made to record residual psychic vibrations as sound, tapping into the memory of the region. It can effectively record and play back segments of the past, as they happened. A skilled user can correlate this function with the psychic disruption graph (see above) in order to build up a picture of what may have happened in previous centuries.

When this function is activated, the apparatus automatically 'homes in' on the strongest source of psychic vibrations in the region's history. It then records sixty seconds of sound from the events that caused those vibrations. Only the sounds can be heard, and these come without any kind of explanation or context. For example, if the event in question was the torture and eventual murder of a young man, one could hear the last sixty seconds of screams and sobs - even the grunts of the person carrying out the deeds - but not necessarily learn anything at all useful.

The machine does not in any sense probe into the past; it is actually picking up on the psychic echoes of terrible moments in the past that are still vibrating in the present. The sound is recorded on to a scratchy wax cylinder, which must then be played back through a gramophone in order to be heard.

The machine's function as an assister of manifestation is somewhat more bizarre. Moxon noted the ability of genuine mediums to produce ectoplasm from the mouth and nose. Spirits could then use this ectoplasm

to give themselves physical bodies, molding forms for themselves as if the ectoplasm were temporary flesh. A discharge valve at the rear of the apparatus produces a spurt of ectoplasm from the brass trumpet beneath the brain. This fills a 10-foot sphere with faintly glowing, clammy mist that smells of sour milk. Ectoplasm allows non-physical beings to manifest much more easily, without spending any **Aberrance** (if applicable). Ghosts within the ectoplasm can remain manifested indefinitely.

The Crying Stones

These loose stones seem unremarkable; a collection of rounded pieces of semi-precious minerals such as obsidian and rose quartz, such as one might buy in any new age store. They are typically found tied up in a simple black bag. This bag is held shut by a few stitches, which while they are easily cut or snapped, are evidently there for a purpose.

Their appearance completely belies their power. Each stone is a matrix of occult force, concealed beneath a humble exterior. To create a full set, the stones have to be individually blessed by "men of high degree" from several different Aboriginal tribes according to rituals given to them by entities called the 'guardians of man'.

As it takes several tribes working together to create a complete bag of eight stones, co-operation between the tribes is essential and peace is thereby assured if all the tribes are to benefit. A new set of stones is created every twenty years. It is traditional for each shaman to receive a complete bag, made up of contributions from all the others. The old sets are sent out into the world, slightly weakened in their power but still usable, so that they can assist others.

It may be that other secret organizations also know how to prepare a set of the crying stones, but so far no source for them has been found. Talismans in mediaeval grimoires could also serve a similar purpose. Certainly, talismans against sleep hags are well known.

Function: The purpose of the crying stones is to protect a sleeping person from attack by malignant entities. (They fulfill a purpose similar to the ostensible 'dream catcher' seen in so many occult shops.) The bag of stones must be placed beneath the sleeper's

head and be kept there until morning. Should any creature with malignant intent approach within 30 feet of the sleeper, the stones will wake him. They do this by sending a telepathic cry into his mind, which is where they get their name from; they are called crying stones (in English) because they cry out a warning, not because they weep.

After every successful warning, one of the stones has a 1 in 6 chance of burning out. A burned-out stone becomes black and dull. When all the stones are burned out, the set is useless. If the stones are ever exposed to daylight, they are useless for 24 hours. They depend upon immersion in shadow in order to work.

The Book of Jabassallab

All cults have their prescribed rituals. Some must be transcribed laboriously by the new initiate, while others are privately printed and issued. The Book of Jabassalab is the ritual guide for those who want to earn the favor of certain dark entities, those who will, if duly petitioned and faithfully served, grant permission to perform the Blossomer Ritual.

Like other ritual texts, it is cloaked in secrecy. However, it is not kept secret by being locked away. It can be downloaded from the Internet easily and in fact often is by those who do not understand what they have. The Book looks like a block of sheer gibberish. Alphanumeric characters fill the page in a solid mass of nonsensical text. It is usually taken to be a corrupted document of some kind, or a file that is being read by the wrong kind of program. It is in fact supposed to look like this. Printed-out copies of the Book of Jabassalab are just as incomprehensible to the untrained eye as the electronic version.

To decipher the text of the book, the reader's mind must be in a specific trance state. Ritual syllables must be chanted and a meditative state achieved, which requires ten minutes of solitary contemplation. Once the mental state has been attained, the Book of Jabassalab is as comprehensible as if it had been written in reader's own language; however, no other written text makes any sense and the reader until this state ends. This state lasts for 1d6x10 minutes. The reader cannot transcribe the book into a standard written language.

Of course, the cult itself teaches the appropriate chants and meditative techniques. A person cannot use them



unless a fellow cult member has instructed him. This simple measure ensures that the entirety of the Book of Jabassalab can be distributed over the Internet to the faithful but will never be read by anyone who is not trained in the proper deciphering meditations.

For additional security, it is customary for only one person – the cult leader – to carry out the preliminary meditations before a given ritual begins. They will do this in complete privacy, to minimize the risk of eavesdroppers learning the secret of the Book. That person will then lead the ritual and perform any necessary recitals from the Book. Cult copies are not usually bound, as it is much easier (if less reverent) to keep them in loose-leaf printout form. The cult has little to fear if the Book itself is stolen or seized, as it is anyone who looks at it will mistake it for mere scrap paper unless they make a one-point **Document Analysis** or **Occult Studies** spend (if this is a core clue, then no spend is necessary).

Function: The Book of Jabassalab contains all the rituals appropriate to the blossomer cult, including the proper way to prepare a bloosomer host and what to expect when the resultant demon is allowed to carry out its work of impregnation. Any person who was able to comprehend the seeming gibberish of the Book would become aware of exactly what the cult's intentions were.

Demon Fetus In A Jar

This jar of cloudy liquid contains something that seems at first to be a wax model. Surely nothing like this could actually have been born from a human being? The jar's occupant is superficially similar to a human infant, with a body and limbs no different to those of an unborn child of about eight months' development, complete with a frayed tassel of umbilical cord. The infant is extraordinarily thin, with the ribs clearly discernible and the elbows and knees bony, but is otherwise human below the neck. Only two incongruous bulges where the shoulder blades are strike the observer as unusual. These are hard swellings, like tumors.

When the face and head float into view, most observers gasp in shock. The ears are disproportionately large, with an obvious point. The face is slit-eyed and piggish, not human at all, with a squashed-up snout like the face of a boxer dog or a vampire bat. The thing is clearly dead but has an expression of sleeping malice that is

disturbing even to the most objective medical specialist. An embryologist would doubtless account for the child's deformities by attributing them to a congenital disorder.

The thing is in fact the product of a blossomer cult that arose in the 1920s. It is the result of a typical blossomer impregnation that did not carry to term, because the mother and the rest of the cultists were gunned down in a raid. The child was removed from the mother's corpse during the autopsy procedure and was kept as a medical curiosity, pickled in formaldehyde.

The child was to be one of those favored ones, who represents the interests of the dark gods on Earth. Now it is nothing but a fairground attraction. It might be found in any of the following locations:

- The fetus is owned by an artist resident in New Orleans, who keeps a collection of macabre and grisly items. She is less than entirely sane and believes the fetus speaks to her in dreams, giving her inspiration. She does not like to receive visitors and spends the whole day indoors with the curtains drawn. Popular local belief is that she is either a vampire, or has convinced herself that she is.
- The jar is kept in the biology lab of a public school in France. It is not supposed to be part of the laboratory's inventory and sits among the other jars on a high shelf. Only the assistant knows that it is there. He likes to take it down when he is alone in the laboratory, examine it and make sketches of it.
- The fetus is buried along with the other loot stolen from a country house. It had previously been the property of a well-to-do eccentric. (The doctor who removed it became addicted to drugs and sold the preserved infant for ready money.) A burglar who was robbing the house was so troubled by its sinister expression that he bundled it into his sack along with the silverware, thinking that he would rather have it there than sitting on the shelves in the dark, watching him. Besides, someone might be willing to pay for it. The burglar died before he could go back to the buried stash, but someone else might come across it.

- The fetus is still among the medical detritus of

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the hospital, which was closed in 1935 and became derelict. The hospital had to be abandoned after it was found to be structurally unsafe; it was built on the cheap and began to crumble away. Whole levels have never been opened up since they were barricaded and the building declared unsafe. The jar with its unwholesome occupant sits on a shelf in a dusty storeroom, among other pickled organs.

Function: The demonic fetus does not have any particular powers or uses but it is an example of what the blossomer cult can do. As such, it is a potential lead to their activities. The relic was preserved, so there is still a small amount of demonic essence still bound up in the flesh and fluid in the jar. The cult will be concerned to recover it. They will do this by the disgusting means of tearing the remains apart and devouring the fragments, and gulping down the fluid.

The Scalpel of Mynarthitep

This unremarkable-seeming bronze knife, pitted with age and yet razor-sharp, is a relic of great significance to the Practice. It was supposedly wielded by one of their most senior members, who was an embalmer and priest of Anubis in the days of the Old Kingdom of Egypt. Unwilling to be subject to the judgment of mighty Osiris in the afterlife, Mynarthitep sought instead an immortality in which the body was preserved while living and the soul was able to indwell it forever. Judgement would therefore be escaped.

It was with this knife that Mynarthitep opened his own cranium and made certain surgical modifications, ensuring that his own life would be extended far beyond its natural limit. He stitched his scalp back together afterwards, knowing that the operation had been a success. Had it not been for the supernatural properties of the knife, which Mynarthitep was careful to prepare in accordance with appropriate rites, the operation would have been both messy and fatal.

The scalpel is thus the founding instrument of the organization, and has both symbolic and practical value to them. If they ever learn of its location, they will be eager to reclaim it.

The current whereabouts of the scalpel are unknown. Any of the following might prove to be true:

- The scalpel is in use by a cannibal cult in Mexico. The cult is ostensibly Satanic, but does not have a particularly coherent doctrine. Victims are taken to remote locations, slaughtered and eaten in ritual

feasts. The leaders of the cult venerate the scalpel as a sacred item but do not know anything of its history. They instinctively sense its importance and always use the scalpel to make the first incision in the victim. Were the Practice to manifest before the cult, they would be greeted with awe as ambassadors of the satanic powers, although this is an inaccurate perception of them.

- The scalpel is currently being exhibited in the Chicago Museum as part of a display on embalming techniques in Ancient Egypt. Since it arrived, there have been numerous strange events after closing time. Other exhibits have mysteriously moved around, the contents of locked cases have been disturbed without any sign of forced entry and old Egyptian ritual equipment has been found laid out in formal arrangements, as if someone had been using them for their original purpose. None of the security cameras have registered these events. They simply show a grayish blank screen during the time when the rearrangements must have been taking place.
- The scalpel is in the possession of an elderly taxidermist in Austria. He does not remember how he came by it, but views it as his most prized tool. Under its malign influence, he has been expanding his repertoire to larger and larger animals. There are now several missing students in his basement, expertly stuffed.

Function: The scalpel is usable as a weapon or as a surgical tool. Its unnatural sharpness give it a +1 bonus on damage rolls, and it lowers the target difficulty of all **Medic** checks by 1. Anyone who uses it is slowly subject to its malign influence, as determined by the GM.

Gummy Rubber Ball

The Summer of Love produced many strange and silly toys, which fascinated adolescent hippies and young children alike. It was an age of Silly Putty and Raggedy Ann, of glow-in-the-dark dancing plastic skeletons and X-Ray-Spex, Pong and bubble blowers. These toys, brightly colored and easily broken, provided plenty of amusement for those with short attention spans, whether they were young children or stoned adults.

The kooks, too, had uses for these new playthings. Anything that helped them to attract the attention of lonely children would be useful. As well as the plastic toys of the sixties, they brought a few gimmicks of their own. From whatever strange place the kooks come from, they took the gummy rubber ball.

This is a fist-sized sphere of transparent rubbery matter that is full of rainbow-colored glitter. It smells strongly chemical and is squishy to the touch. When thrown, the ball bounces back almost as strongly as it was hurled, as if it were made from some miracle substance.

A kook, or a child who has begun to have her essence absorbed by the kooks, can control the ball. A simple mental instruction makes it float in the air as lightly as a bubble. This is endlessly fascinating to children, who see the ball as something miraculous. The colorful twinkles it emits from its center are soothing to watch. Children play with it for hours.

The ball is less appealing to adults. The kooks use it as a way of getting rid of interfering people (or animals, such as loyal dogs). When an adult handles the ball, it is likely to attack them, bouncing into their face and pressing their nostrils and mouth shut with its gluey mass.

The ball has an effective **Athletics** pool of 10 and a **Scuffling** pool of 8. If it hits, it latches on to the target, dealing 1d6-1 **Health** damage per round. The victim, or someone near enough to help, may make a **Scuffling** test (difficulty 5) to wrench it off. If another creature, such as a kook, throws the ball at a target, then use the Kook's **Scuffling** pool instead of the ball's own.

If the ball is pulled off before it can choke the target to death, it becomes cloudy and inert and cannot attack again. However, if it manages to cause a death, it is even more bouncy and vital than it previously was - its **Scuffling** and **Athletics** pools are immediately refreshed. The secret of the ball's magic bouncing is not any kind of chemical process, but the extraction of life essence. Like the kooks themselves, it feeds off living human beings.

Tincture of Woe

This fluid looks exactly like water. It is usually found in small ceramic flasks. Alchemists in the Middle Ages distilled it as part of the process of creating the Philosopher's Stone. The chief ingredient is human tears, which must come from young women.

Production is almost completely nonexistent in the modern era. Most of the flasks of the tincture in the

world come from the laboratory of Yamamura Ataru, a Japanese alchemist who combines industrial chemical technology with older techniques in order to produce large quantities of the stuff. It is said that Ataru has a production facility in Osaka, in which he keeps a collection of young women who no longer have arms or legs. This ensures that there will be an ample supply of tears and prevents the source of the tears from escaping.

There is high demand for quality tincture among the cunning men, demonologists and other professionals who work with malignant spirits. The tincture makes it much easier to converse with, negotiate with or even imprison the entities whose worlds border our own.

Function: When the Tincture of Woe is sprinkled on an area during the hours of darkness, all spiritual, monstrous or otherworldly creatures within the immediate area are irresistibly drawn to the spilled fluid. All that this substance does is to call the beings to the spot. It does not confer any control upon them, nor does it make them favorably inclined towards the user. They are compelled to remain within the area until dawn.

The Tincture has many occult uses. Magicians will use it to draw forth a ghost that has been haunting a house, so that they can converse with the spirit and find out what it wants. Hunters of the undead pour out the Tincture to draw zombies and their ilk out of their lairs. The Tincture has even been used to cause the deaths of other people. There is a case on record of a necromancer who poured the Tincture out over a lake filled with drowners while a rival was boating on it. He then watched while the ghostly creatures all swam up to the surface at once and dragged their screaming victim down into the depths.

The Shankskin

This ancient, rotten skin is has been eaten away by mould in several places. It is designed to be worn; a wooden toggle holds it fastened around the wearer's neck. It is yellow, stained and looks like a piece of odorous rubbish. In fact, it has been handed down from father to son for generations, with as much reverence as the family bible would have had to Victorian Christians.



The smelly object is a ritual cape, which was used in ceremonies involving the First Altar (see above) in which men would leave sacrifices for the feral drowners. It is made from the hide of one of the feral drowners that washed up, dead, on the shores of the sacred lake. For centuries it was the property of a single family that has followed a secret religion for centuries. Then it went missing.

The family that held the Shankskin, the Beans, are odd-looking. Many generations of interbreeding have made them lumpen and slow-witted, with eyes that sit too close together. The family practices incest to keep the blood line pure for religious reasons and secondly to prevent its members from having to come into contact with outsiders. They prefer to live in isolation and take what they need by stealing it.

The Beans are the most degenerate, filthy, foul-mouthed gang that ever stole a welfare check. They spend their days loitering, having fights and shouting at passers-by. The older males usually drink themselves into a stupor by mid-afternoon, while the females roam the streets and make trouble, while their children bawl in nests of their own filth. Social workers have long since realized that the Beans are a hopeless case and there is nothing they can do.

In more primitive times, the Bean family lived in caves or shacks, but in the present era they colonize housing projects. There are entire residential buildings that only have the Bean family living in them. The family's squalor and aggressiveness scares away all others who might otherwise have kept on living there. It takes a very short time for the Beans to turn a neighborhood into a stinking slum. Those stubborn enough to stay are abused on a daily basis and pelted with rubbish; the truly unlucky ones are 'made part of the family' by being abducted and forcibly impregnated, then kept hidden and prevented from ever leaving.

One member, the infamous Sawney Bean, gained notoriety when his family's habit of capturing and eating travelers became public. The clan was discovered living in a pit, surrounded by the remains of dozens of human beings. That branch was wiped out, but the Bean family had other members elsewhere who could carry on the tradition. Cannibalism is not quite as easy to practice nowadays as it once was, so it tends to be saved for special occasions.

Should the Shankskin ever reappear, the entire Bean clan would be mobilized to get it back. Though they are indolent drunkards, they take their pagan religion very seriously and will happily murder any number of people to secure their sacred object once again. This

has only happened once to date, when a group of police officers broke up a ritual and confiscated everything.

Function: The wearer of the Shankskin is immune to the feral drowners' ancient musk ability. He can stand in the presence of one of the noisome beasts and breathe freely. The feral drowner will recognize the wearer of the skin as an important priest and will not attack him unless he attacks first. Feral drowners do not have any especial regard for humans except as food or sexual playthings, but they do find the Beans more appealing than most. There are even times when an especially corpulent and perverse Bean female will present herself as a voluntary candidate for the sexual attentions of a feral drowner. It is traditional for such women to wear the Shankskin as a form of bridal train.

Torumbolo s Rod

This is a gnarled, black walking stick, with a hard-wearing white metal knob. The metal knob is hollow and rattles if shaken; there is something loose in there. (If it is shaken vigorously, an angry buzzing comes from inside for a couple of seconds.) The stick is also shod in the same white metal. If anyone removes the shoe, the stick proves to be a wooden tube.

There are pictographic symbols on the head of the cane, which require a 1-point **Anthropology** spend to decipher (or a free use of **Anthropology** if this is a core clue). They identify the rod as sacred to Torumbulo. Sufficient anthropological research identifies this being as an obscure demon of plague, who is depicted as a crawling insect, spider or scorpion. Although the practice of propitiating Torumbolo is long dead, he is still remembered and dreaded in some parts of West Africa.

The Rod is used by certain witch doctors. The populace fears them and fears the rod above all, saying that it brings quick death to those who speak against the wise man. They are, of course, right. Much like the 'pointing bone', the rod of Torumbulo is an instrument of death. The sound of the stick rattling will send people fleeing for safety, for fear that they should be the one who has aroused the sorcerer's rage.

Function: The rod does not actually have any magical properties in itself. The rattling knob holds a single death tapper, in a dormant state. To use the rod, the shaman shakes it until the death tapper is woken and

becomes angry. He then takes the metal tip from the rod's foot, so that the death tapper can travel down the hollow interior of the cane. An expert flick of the wrist, and the death tapper is flung down the cane towards the person the shaman wishes to destroy.

In game terms, the shaman may make a **Scuffling** attack against his target to fling the death tapper on to him. If the shaman's **Scuffling** attack hits, the tapper may make an immediate **Scuffling** attack against the target. Even if the shaman misses his mark, the death tapper will latch on to the nearest available victim. The death tapper does not return to the cane once the shaman has dispatched it. He must summon a new one.

Black Metallic Liquid

Only a few human beings will ever be exposed to the horrors of the Outer Black, where the torture dogs glide down breezes of pure agony in pursuit of things that used to be men, and the organ grinders roar over battlefields strewn with the remains of machines over a thousand years old. It is not a place where people voluntarily go.

Nonetheless, in their quest for new experience and more and more extreme sensations, some decadent souls who learn of the place make up their minds to find their way to it. These are usually the kind of person who sees everyday life as sterile and dull, who has tried every drug imaginable and gotten bored of depravity and who desperately wants a new thrill to replace the old ones. They imagine that the Outer Black is some kind of sadomasochistic paradise, where a soul that dreams of extremes can experience a hell sweeter than any heaven.

They are, of course, completely wrong.

Accessing the Outer Black physically is not possible, but a mind can be exposed to it by means of a peculiar drug. This is always found in liquid form. It is black and has a curious metallic sheen, as if it were a form of dark mercury. The source of the drug is unknown, but it is always found in glass ampoules that have shredded electrical wires at one end, as if the ampoule had been ripped out of some complicated device. If subjected to chemical analysis, it proves to be a substance unknown to science.

Function: Whatever its original purpose may have

been, the liquid is used a narcotic. It is peddled on the black market as 'the ultimate high' and is taken in that capacity by the ultra-rich, as well as by criminals with easier access to it, such as high-ranking gangsters and smugglers. Those in the know consider it to be the caviar of illegal substances.

When taken in tiny doses, a deep inertia settles on the drug taker, shot through with strange cybernetic hallucinations. There is never any sense of panic or disorientation. Some users feel that their mental abilities are enhanced massively by use of the drug. They become able to visualize complicated mathematical concepts, such as a rotating hypercube, as easily as they would be able to visualize simple polygons.

If the whole ampoule is drunk, the full effect manifests. The initial effects appear after five minutes. The drinker's pupils dilate to an alarming degree, so that the iris is almost completely invisible. He begins to suffer hot and cold flushes. Other people's voices sound metallic and alien. This is an upsetting experience and he must now make a 2-point **Stability** test.

Fifteen minutes into the experience, the chemical takes over his brain. As he begins to 'peak', he becomes intermittently telepathic and can 'overhear' the surface thoughts of people within 20 feet. This is completely random and the character has no way to control it. He must now make a 4-point **Stability** test as the voices in his head begin to shake his sanity. A character who begins to panic will attempt to flee away from other people, as he believes that this will make the voices stop.

Approximately ten minutes later, the drinker can suddenly see into the Outer Black. His vision is shifted, as if he were now physically standing in that dimension, although he remains on earth. Since he can see only the Outer Black all around him, he may believe that he has somehow been transported there. If he looks down at himself, he sees an insectile, vaguely crustacean body instead of his human shape.

This experience is massively jarring to the brain; the character must make an 10-point **Stability** test.

The portion of the Outer Black that the character can see resembles a painting by H R Giger. Enormous biomechanical demons, with wings like ragged plastic, tear smaller demons to shreds. Titans made from mangled metal and rancid green flesh fire weapons that spew corrosive acid, or rip away at their armored opponents with claws the size of bulldozers. The experience is utterly terrifying and completely alien. There is no reason or purpose to the destruction. It just seems to go on and on.

After two hours of this, the experience begins to fade.

The character returns to normal in 15 minutes. He carries the memory of the experience with him for the rest of his life. Exposure to the bizarre geometries and mind-rewiring energies of the Outer Black subtly alters his brain, granting him a permanent increase of one point of **Occult Studies** rating, and two Rating points to spend on investigative skills as he sees fit. However, if he lost more than five points of **Stability** during the experience, he is left with a permanent nervous condition. He makes all future **Stability** tests against a target difficulty of 5 rather than 4.

This is not the only hazard of the black metallic drug. While the character is exposed to the Outer Black, there is an additional danger: there is a 50% chance that a denizen of the Outer Black will notice the presence of the character's mind. (This will either be an organ grinder or a torture dog. Future supplements will detail additional creatures from this dismal plane.) It will approach him on the Outer Black, coming closer and closer, but fading steadily from view, becoming transparent. What the creature is actually doing is tracking the character's mind back to its actual location on Earth. It senses prey and is keen to get to it. The creature arrives on the material plane 1d3 hours after the drug experience ends.

A character who has been seen is marked as prey from that point onwards. The denizen always knows whereabouts on Earth he is. It will take its time, allowing the prey to become properly paranoid before finally making its appearance. Sometimes, a creature will come straight for its intended victim but it is more usual for it to spin the hunt out.

Spaulding's Belt

This is a simple brown leather belt, fastened with a buckle. There seems to be nothing remarkable about it at all. There is some damage to part of it, as if strong jaws had bitten down on the leather. Close examination reveals a row of tooth marks imprinted into it.

This is the genuine belt that gagged Mary Beth Spaulding, who died from choking on her own tongue and became Strap Throat. There are dozens of imitation belts out there in the hands of morbidly minded relic collectors, but only one is real. Those who are so eager to own the genuine article would be much less eager if they knew the truth.

Function: The belt is a death sentence. Whenever anyone comes into ownership of it, they are absolutely doomed to meet their death at the hands of Strap Throat – literally. The victim has until the next full moon to live. When the moon becomes full, Strap Throat will manifest through the closest available reflective surface and strangle the belt's owner to death.

This fate will already have been foreshadowed. Those who are marked to die can no longer see their own reflection when they look in the mirror. Other people who look at the reflection see it as normal, but the eventual victim sees Strap Throat herself, staring and staring, where the reflection should be. She never says anything, nor does she react. She only stares. When it is time for her to claim her victim, she simply lunges out of the reflective surface.

The only possible solace in these visions is that the victim can see that the very same belt that he now owns is that which is gagging Strap Throat, so he can at least work out the connection.

Ownership of the belt is conferred in two ways. The owner either paid money for it (or traded an item for it) or he was the first person to touch it after the former owner died. It does not matter whether or not the character considers himself the owner. As far as Strap Throat is concerned, he is cursed and she will come for him.

There is only one way to escape the fate that awaits. The owner of the belt must sell it on to someone else. He must do so in legitimate trade, by exchanging it either for money or for an item. Simply slipping the belt into someone else's pocket is not enough. It must be sold. Strap Throat will then claim the person who owns the belt when the full moon comes. A potential victim can always check whether he is still cursed or not by looking at a mirror. If he sees his own reflection once again, he is safe.

The belt cannot be destroyed. If the character attempts to throw it away, he finds it among his possessions.

The Voynich Tape

This is an old-fashioned spool of recording tape, of the kind that comes in reels rather than cassettes. It cannot be played unless one has access to the proper equipment. From its faded appearance, it probably

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dates from the late sixties or early seventies. There is no label.

When played, a voice can be heard speaking in Oxford English. The sound quality is extremely sharp. It announces that what is about to be done is being done of the speaker's own free will, and that the speaker takes responsibility for anything that may happen as a result. It states that what follows is 'Experiment Fifteen' in a series of twenty experiments, which altogether form Project Voynich. After this come various ominous incantations in Latin and in apparent gibberish. A one-point **Occult Studies** spend identifies these as calls from the Goetia, or Lesser Key of Solomon, with additional random-seeming material worked in.

The tape is from the archives of an occult research organisation. The name 'Project Voynich' refers to the enigmatic Voynich Manuscript, a lengthy piece of illustrated text dating from the time of Doctor Dee and Edward Kelley, the Elizabethan magicians.

Project Voynich was an attempt to combine the evocation techniques found in grimoires of known efficiency, such as the Key of Solomon, with the names derived from the Voynich Manuscript. The logic behind this was that if the Voynich Manuscript was (as it appeared to be) a manual of alchemical magic, then the logical thing to do was to call up the entities associated with it and ask them to translate it. If successful, this could have opened up secrets of alchemy hidden for over four hundred years.

The person responsible for Project Voynich was Barry Dryburgh, a dilettante magician who had his coven in the swinging Soho of 1967. He vanished amid scandal involving the son of a member of the House of Lords and never resurfaced into public life.

The truth of Dryburgh's disappearance has nothing to do with sordid tabloid headlines. It was Project Voynich that removed Dryburgh from the world of the living. Whether he mistranslated the manuscript or made some other fundamental error in the summoning ritual is unknown. What is certain is that he did not succeed in calling up the alchemical angels of the Voynich manuscript. Something altogether more malevolent and less intelligent answered his call. He was visited by a shatterer.

The occult organization, to which Dryburgh belonged, the Circle of Nine, noticed the massive psychic

turbulence in the region and were thus able to reach his flat before the police did. The demon had already departed, taking most of Dryburgh with it. The Circle were forced to clean up as best they could, in the hope that Dryburgh would simply be thought to have gone missing. (If his grisly death became public, it would expose their own activities, and they did not want that.) While they were mopping up, they discovered Dryburgh's tape recorder. It was still running.

The Circle of Nine is now defunct. The order's ritual equipment has been sold off, lost or stolen. Some of the previous members, those who were active in London in the 1960s, will remember the tape, though they will be understandably reluctant to discuss it or Dryburgh.

As for the whereabouts of the tape itself, there are several possibilities:

- A famous American 'shock rocker', who had heard of the Circle of Nine from one of his associates in the music industry, bought the tape for his private collection. He is intending to have a party for Halloween, at which the tape will be played to an audience of hundreds. This person is very high profile and will not be willing to receive visitors, nor to part with the tape. If the players have learned of the tape's significance, they will have to act quickly to prevent a massacre.
- The tape found its way into an archive of BBC radio broadcasts, where it lies to this day. The filing clerk who listened to a short section of it mistakenly believed it to be an episode of a supernatural drama series from the mid-seventies, called the Armchair Horrors. It currently sits in a box, gathering dust. This would be the end of the story, if the BBC were not planning to rebroadcast some of the classic 'cult' serials from that time. Should the tape be broadcast on live radio, the results could be carnage on an unprecedented scale. Not all the listeners would be visited by shatterers - there simply are not that many of them - but at least eighty homes in the country would suddenly have a huge invisible presence in them...
- The tape is still in the keeping of an occult society. Unlike the Circle of Nine, it is not a group of decadent sensation-seeking diabolists. It goes by the name of the Astrum Occidentis, or the Star in the West, and is dedicated to protecting humanity from supernatural threats. Young and upcoming

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covens with something to prove would very much like to get their hands on the tape, since it is one of the only recordings in history that has a track record of actually having successfully summoned a demon, something that 'wannabe' magicians would desperately like to do - or so they think.

Function: Dryburgh recorded the whole flawed summoning ritual. If it is played back, it has exactly the same effect as it would have if spoken aloud. A shatterer has a flat 50% chance of arriving in the space where the tape is being played.

The Ugly Sofa

There is plenty of hideous furniture in the world. Some of the travesties of the 1970s and 1980s are especially memorable. One hardly needs to mention the orange butterfly chair, the pine faux-settle or the chrome yuppie suite.

The ugly sofa is more than just tasteless. It has a sinister look to it.

It seems to be a large, lumpy, green leather sofa that has clearly seen better days. Strange stains besmirch it, the arms are pockmarked with cigarette burns and it has a faint smell of cat urine. When sat upon, it tends to engulf the sitter. This makes it hard to stand up again. The leather upholstery clings unpleasantly to the skin, as if it were coated with some lightly tacky substance.

The sofa is most likely to be found in a run-down slum, squat, crack house or similar place. It is not the kind of furniture that anyone would want if they could afford better. At best, it might be found in a house shared by a group of students. Nobody who has more than a rudimentary standard of hygiene would want to have it in his house.

The sofa has a sinister past. Beneath the cushions, there is an open wooden framework, with a surprisingly large amount of space beneath, which smells appalling. One does not notice the smell unless the cushions are removed. There is a crusty, flyblown layer of some kind of brown matter at the bottom of the open space, in a roughly humanoid shape. Darker stains spread out around one end, where the head would be.

The obvious explanation of this is that a dead body has lain here for several weeks without being discovered.

Perhaps one of the sofa's former owners shot a neighbor in the head during an argument and hid the body in the sofa before fleeing. Those who found the corpse evidently just disposed of it, for whatever reason, without notifying the police...

This is not as far-fetched as it may seem. It is quite common for the spaces below beds or larger items of furniture, such as the sofa, to be used to stash bodies. There are even stories of hotel staff who have discovered corpses hidden in the bed base long after the last person to use the room has left. These corpses are not always found in time, and other guests sleep on mattresses mere feet away from the rotting remains of a stranger.

Function: The ugly sofa is now the resting place of a blood corpse. It returns to it in the same way that a vampire would return to its coffin, pulling the cushions over its head and curling up inside. It is possible that the people who live in the house where the sofa is have no idea at all that this is going on, but it is much more likely that the blood corpse killed them first, then went off to hunt night after night, returning to the sofa to rest.

Lyssa Martin's Face

Nobody remembers Lyssa Martin. She was only one minor actress from the early 70s, lost in a vast sea of other similar actresses who all started out with big dreams and ended up nowhere. In the early days of her career, she managed to secure a few minor parts in soap operas and one washing powder commercial. That was as far as it ever went. Without decent work and with bills mounting, she did what many unsuccessful actresses do, when they have the looks for it; she went into porn.

This was supposed to be an emergency move. She would do a couple of movies, make some money and tide herself over until the next job came along. She looked good enough and performed well, and the adult movie producers were interested in her. Unfortunately, when she tried to return to mainstream acting, none of the TV companies were willing to hire a porn star - bad for the station's image, they all said. The emergency option became her only option.

Still, it was not so bad. The money was all right and she had a talent for the job. Now that she was involved,

she may as well take it all the way and make a living out of it. There were always ways to earn more money in the porn industry. The more extreme acts you were willing to perform, the more you could earn for it. Lyssa's movies became more degraded, more bizarre. Numbd by a cocaine habit, disillusioned and apathetic, she barely cared any more.

When she was invited to take the starring role in a secret video project, described as 'a number for the true connoisseurs', she was slightly nervous but went along with it anyway. There were some warning signals that she should have paid attention to. She did not know the producers and soon discovered that she did not know any of the film crew, either. The money was good, though. It was the break she needed. One last big job and she would retire, move away from LA and get a waitressing job in some quiet burg where nobody knew her.

The chloroform-soaked rag came out of nowhere. She was dimly aware of a bumpy car journey, of raised voices laughing, the smell of Jack Daniel's and marijuana. When she came to, she was in an empty garage. There was a ball gag in her mouth and her hands and feet were bound. When she saw the cameras, she groggily thought that this must be some kind of BDSM trip. Even then, she did not think herself in too much danger. She had done this kind of thing before. When the man rolled out the fabric with the medical instruments in its pockets, she began to panic. She struggled and tried to scream. The camera was already rolling.

Lyssa was the unwilling star in an especially graphic and horrible snuff movie, one that has come to be known as 'Flayboy' on the circuit. She was meticulously flayed, the skin peeled from her body with medical knives. Mercifully, she died from shock shortly into the film. As far as anyone knows, the people responsible for her death have never been brought to justice, nor has her body ever been recovered. The detectives who investigated the case believe that the corpse was probably dumped into a concrete pillar that now holds up a motorway bridge. There is, of course, no way to investigate this.

There are two important facts that the law enforcement agencies do not know. One is that the man who carried out the on-camera flaying, a Greek called Sotiris Vandis, kept a souvenir of his work. He

retained the carefully removed pieces of Lyssa's face and stitched them back together, making a mask of the reassembled fragments. Vandis was obsessed with rearranging the features of women and is wanted for practicing plastic surgery in America without any medical qualifications at all, causing horrific injuries and permanent scarring.

This disgusting object is barely recognizable as a human face and looks more like a tanned leather mask. It has no eyes or lips, and the nose is a mere dab of skin without anything to support it. Only close examination reveals it to be an actual face, preserved and reconstructed. There is a giveaway beauty spot just above the right eyebrow.

The other unknown fact is the creation of a living nightmare, a walking jumble of blood and electrical equipment, forced into being by the recording of *Flayboy*. This monstrosity, a snuff golem, immediately set about doing what these creatures always do - it began to hunt down and slaughter the men who had made the film. So far, it has disemboweled the cameraman and stuffed him like a piñata with videotape, left the director's head rotating in his microwave oven and run over the financier with a hover mower. Only Vandis is left to find. The *Flayboy* snuff golem is saving him for last.

Lyssa Martin's face is currently in Vandis' possession. He is obsessed with it, seeing it as a souvenir of his most inspired work. He will sometimes wear it himself, when alone in the house. He will also hire call girls and make them wear the thing, which he tells them is just a 'gimp mask'. They are in no position to tell any different.

Function: The face is psychically bound to the *Flayboy* snuff golem. It desperately wants to possess it and bind it to its own face. However, when another person wears it, it confuses the creature. It identifies that person as part of itself and will not attack them. As soon as the mask is removed, it will instantly try to rip that person apart and claim the mask for itself.

Esoterrorism and the World of Unremitting Horror

The world of *The Esoterrorists* and the world of *Unremitting Horror* are two distinct game settings, though the creatures in this book can be used equally well in either one. There are, however, several key differences in how the mechanics of the supernatural work in each.

The Esoterrorists

In this game world, the Membrane that divides subjectivity from objectivity is a major impediment to magic. It is next to impossible for those who seek to work magic to impose their wills upon the world in any ways but the most mundane. This is not good enough. Esoterrorists seek power: supernatural power, magical power, the kind of power that beckons lightning from the clouds and sets spectral armies marching across desolate heaths. But in this world, the famous saying is true: *the problem with magic is that it doesn't work.*

The exact nature of the Membrane is difficult to determine, but the Esoterrorists know that it is a secretion of human thought and action. Humans impose their expectations of normality upon the world, and the world responds. As the vast majority of human beings want reality to be dependable, it is dependable.

This does not just refer to humanity's ready belief in the power of science or technology. Any human routine in which assumption of underlying normality and security plays a part reinforces the Membrane. The cornflakes at breakfast, so predictably tasty; the morning commute, with its humdrum annoyances; the daily round; the evening television, saturated with re-runs, and the exhausted nightly snooze: all these shore up the Membrane like so many steel girders. *Predictability* is the Membrane's weft and weave.

Humanity has changed since its days in the caves, hiding from the growling thunder and the hunger of wild beasts. There is no longer any place either for the shaman or the demons he used to hold at bay. Any residual angst about the uncertainty of the universe can be sopped up with the sponge of religion. For many, the world has become brightly lit, automated, and safe.

Supernatural horror in this environment becomes literally 'unthinkable'. With the exception of the children, who see more clearly than adults, the majority

do not think about what may be lurking in the closet or under the bed. They *cannot think* about the horrors that may befall them. If tragedy strikes their lives, such as in a car crash, a house fire or a cerebral hemorrhage, they are always surprised. They never thought it could happen to them. Their caveman ancestors lived side by side with fear, but modern civilized man no longer knows what it is to live in constant dread.

That anodyne predictability has to be shattered. So runs the edict of the Esoterrorists.

Humanity must once again feel that sense of universal dread, of being on the brink of a precipice, that it used to feel back in the dark times when magic was strong. To do that, the Esoterrorists must bring the demons back.

The rise in global terrorism has helped them immeasurably. For the first time in decades, people are beginning to dread again; not the dim, persistent specter of nuclear holocaust, but the threat of sudden, unavoidable personal extinction. They could go out of their houses, get into the car, go to work and be blown up. They could be shot by a sniper, or contract bird flu, or open a package crawling with anthrax. The Membrane has begun to fray around the edges.

But mundane terrorism alone is not enough. People must lose faith not only in their own safety and in the power of governments to protect them, but in the solidity of reality itself. They must believe in the supernatural and their own powerlessness in the face of it. To this end, the Esoterrorists strive day and night to saturate the western world with grass-roots level anecdotal evidence of the supernatural, disseminating myths and starting rumors, and attempt to bring actual manifest horrors into existence where they can. That is where the creatures in this book come in.

For *Esoterrorists* purposes, the creatures are divided into two groups: Folkloric and Engineered.

Folkloric Creatures: Cloutie, Dream Tearer, Drowner, Feral Drowner, Man in the Bar, The Practice, Residue Daemon, Shatterer, Sleep Hag, Strap Throat

Folkloric creatures already exist, if only in legend form. That is, while the creature itself may not be real (yet), its legend is, even if only a few people

know it. People believe in Clooties, for example, even if there are no actual Clooties walking the earth. The legends surrounding these creatures are so potent that they can be induced to *become* real if there is sufficient belief in them, and fear of them. They can also become real spontaneously, if the Membrane is rendered thin enough. Esoterrorists see this as a major triumph when it occurs. It is their work, bearing fruit.

All other creatures are Engineered. They have been designed and brought into being by the Esoterrorists, mostly over the last fifty years, and the lore that surrounds them was similarly created, as a form of twisted propaganda exercise. The GM should bear this in mind when consulting each section.

For example, the Blood Corpse entry describes how Blood Corpses have been formed in the different eras of history. In the world of Unremitting Horror, this is exactly how it happened, and there really were blood corpses lurching through dark mediaeval alleys.

However, in the world of *The Esoterrorists*, the blood corpse concept came into being in the mid 1970s, and was inspired by the 'video nasty' uproar. All the lore that has arisen about them since then is fabricated, but it is slowly becoming incorporated into how the world's population thinks.

The World of Unremitting Horror

In this campaign setting, the Membrane is still present, but ragged. Magic does not work predictably, and only a handful of people know its secrets, but it does work.

All the descriptions of creatures are accurate. The world itself is haunted. There are Drowners in lakes, Clooties under the sea, and the Man in the Bar is out every night, leaving eyeless victims in his wake. A variety of powerful cults vie for control of the unseen worlds, ranging from the antique, wealthy Sallow to the degenerate serial killer cults mentioned in the entry on the Empty One. Behind everything else, the Mystery Man pulls invisible strings, playing the Ocean Game, and never letting you know what the real rules are.

The Outer Black plays a much larger part in this setting. This is a demonic plane of existence, not graspable by the sane mind, where biomechanical creatures and immense, primeval entities exist in a state of constant warfare. Entities such as Organ Grinders and Torture Dogs occasionally cross over

between the Outer Black and our world, usually when accidentally summoned by the unwise.

The World of Unremitting Horror is what the world of the Esoterrorists will become, when the Esoterrorists start to win and the Membrane at last gives way.

The Esoterror Process

Why do we work with fear and not with wonder? Why nightmares and not miracles? It is simple. Wonders merely serve to make men pious or sentimental, but supernatural horror engenders a superstitious response. The common man, faced with a vampiric apparition, does not reach for his copy of *The Origin of Species*. He clutches for his crucifix, or a clove of garlic, or some similar charm in which folklore rather than science has been his tutor from the dim days of childhood.

Man faces down the unknown *with* the unknown, and has always done. Confronted with the fearsome and irrational, almost every man will abandon his reason and become, in that moment, a shaman. His electric light, his telephone, his motor car - how can they avail him now? He is no longer a child of science, for he begins, after many years of forgetfulness, to recall that power which wise tradition deems may lie in herbs, symbols, words, recipes and enchantments. In his stark desperation, finding no comfort in the rational, he becomes brother to the savage; the savage who stares out into the blackness of primordial night, who wards off the terrors he imagines must walk therein with talismans and totems, not with weapons. And thus we win back what was lost.

The more man fears the supernatural, the more he will turn to the supernatural for protection. Every muttered imprecation, every horseshoe nailed above the door, every phylactery and every philter, all warding gestures and all whispered gibberish are reflexive acts of magic. And it is with these ignorant drippings that we shall eventually fill the vast reservoirs of our craft.

Our enemies, then, are not those who try to keep our creations at bay with magic. They aid us. Our enemies are those who seek to unravel what we weave, plucking continually away at our tapestry with the tools of science.

Past Grand Master Gerhard von Hutt, Esoterrorist Conference, Vienna, 1907

SCENARIO OUTLINES

The following section presents ten skeletal scenarios for use with the Esoterrorists game system. Each one provides a sinister conspiracy, a trail of clues and a dramatic instigating incident to get the players involved. This information should be all the GM needs to flesh out the basic structures into fully-fledged adventures.

The following format is used for each outline:

Sinister Conspiracy: This section gives the behind-the-scenes information on what the Esoterrorists are planning and what they hope to gain from their exploits. Bear in mind that the goals of the conspiracy are what is most important for the story, not adherence to a rigid narrative structure.

The GM can refer to the conspiracy goals to determine when the antagonists should intervene in response to the players' actions, and how they should alter their plans on the fly. That way, the antagonists become dynamic, intelligent opponents, rather than static bad guys waiting to be discovered.

Instigating Scene: This is the scene that opens the action, and to an extent determines the flavor for the whole story. Think of it as the sequence from the crime show just after the credits roll, as the investigators arrive at the crime scene and begin to make their initial observations, complete with wisecracks and sidelong comments.

The instigating scene is always given in detail, to help the GM get the story rolling. The more dramatic impact the first scene has, the easier it is to improvise along with the story; players form emotional connections to the victims, use their imagination to try to reconstruct what may have happened, and froth over with questions that need answering.

Core Information: This is the information associated with the clues that link the instigating scene to the later scenes in the story, and in turn link those scenes to even later ones. The players *will* find these clues, as this is a GUMSHOE game. However, in these summarized stories, we deal with core *information* rather than core clues, as the players may come up with other ways to

find the information they are after.

Core information found later on in a story can, and often does, alter the relevance of core information found earlier on. For example, lipstick traces found on a cigarette stub lying next to a dead dock worker take on a different meaning if it is later discovered that the victim was a transvestite.

Supplementary Information: This is information that can be gathered at or after each scene. It is not essential, but fleshes out the story and can provide for alternative routes between scenes. For example, if the players go to the trouble of finding out the ground plans for an abandoned factory complex that they plan to visit, they can discover an abandoned sewer tunnel that leads straight into the place, past any guards that might be waiting on the outer walls.

Antagonist Reactions: This section contains suggested means in which the antagonists can retaliate, once the players have become enough of an annoyance to warrant it. Retaliation is not always a matter of snipers on the roof or bombs taped under the car, though these crude methods are sometimes used. The Esoterrorists like to suit their ripostes to the conspiracy in which they are engaged, and so the warnings and outright attacks often have a supernatural element to them.

Climax: This is the scene in which the investigators confront the Esoterrorists, or their agents, head-on. By this point, the investigators will have found the conspiracy's point of greatest vulnerability, and will be preparing to expose or destroy it.

Aftermath/Veil-Out: This section deals with the fallout from the events of the conspiracy. Almost all Esoterrorist conspiracies leave terrible scars upon the people and the places concerned. Moreover, there is always the veil-out to consider. The ultimate goal of the Esoterrorists is to increase the levels of dread, panic and superstitious terror in the world. Without a solid veil-out, the battle may be won, but the war is lost a day at a time, as rumors of the events begin to spread, and people sleep a little less easily at night...

I. The Maiden In The Marsh

Sinister Conspiracy: This scenario can be set anywhere there is plenty of boggy land, such as the bayou of New Orleans, or the peat bogs of Ireland.

In the lonely backwater town of Bronson's Creek, a cabal of Esoterrorists is trying to bring a Feral Drowner into being. Legends of these creatures already exist, but the Esoterrorists have never yet managed to bring one to life. So, in order to give the nightmare the best possible chance of becoming real, they are trying to engineer events so that the locals already begin to believe in it. All the ingredients are there: a marsh, an ancient Irish abbey with a sinister window, a history of disappearances. It only remains to add brutal murder, as if by an enormous goatlike beast, and babbling tongues will do the rest.

The Esoterrorist group has abducted Karen Miller, a local girl with learning difficulties, choked her to death and left her body in the marsh. To make the death seem like the work of a feral drowner, they have left plenty of bizarre clues on and around the body.

Instigating Scene: Karen's naked body lies on the borders of the marsh. The gases of decomposition have brought her corpse to the surface, just as the Esoterrorists planned it. She has clearly been strangled, and the marks of huge claws are dragged down her back and thighs.

Villagers from the nearby settlement of Bronson's Creek stand nearby with grim and solemn faces, and the police try in vain to keep them from trampling all over the area. Everyone has seen the huge cloven hoof prints that lead to and from the body. There are mutterings of diabolism; some say it's the curse of Crowhurst Abbey come back to haunt the town again.

Core Information: The goat-like elements of the murder scene turn out to be fake. There are goat hairs on the body, but the roots prove that the hairs were pulled out rather than shed. The goat footprints were made by *the same hoof*, pressed into the mud to the left and right; the only way that could happen is if it were one goat's hoof on a stick. Karen has ordinary human skin under her fingernails (from her Esoterrorist

assailants). Whoever set the murder up is clearly trying to make it seem as if some half-goat horror committed the deed. These clues lead to the Swarbrick goat farm, forty miles away.

Supplementary Information: The local abbey of Crowhurst was either shipped over from Ireland stone by stone (if the adventure is set in America) or dates from Norman times. A single stained-glass window depicts a horned, goggling horror rising up out of the waters, held at bay by Saint Michael who hovers serenely above. The horned creature is strangely unsettling to look at and carries a limp female figure in one arm. The scroll beneath reads 'From the pestilence that walketh in darkness, good Lord deliver us.'

Legend has it that the Abbey was once used as a refuge by a young woman who was walking alone by the marsh, heard heavy footsteps and harsh breath behind her and fled behind the Abbey's stout oak doors for protection. There are still deep trenches gouged into the wood where something (so it is said) clawed at the doors and tried to reach her, but could not enter the sacred ground.

All this is so much hokum, of course; the investigators can find out (and prove) that the Abbey's doors were damaged as recently as 1921, but that does not stop people from believing in the stories.

Later Scenes: At the goat farm, run by Swarbrick and Sons, the investigators discover that a goat has indeed been stolen (and lab reports prove it was used to fake up the crime scene.)

Investigating the goat farm allows the investigators to pick up the Esoterrorists' trail, and pursue them to their base of operations, a trailer parked up on the far side of the marsh. They are pretending to be botanists, studying the effects of pollution on the local newt population.

Antagonist Reactions: Once the story of the half-goat killer has begun to ferment, the Esoterrorists plan another killing. They still have plenty of goat hair and the hoof on a stick. They also collected some goat

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semen from the unfortunate animal. Perhaps it is time for the manufactured 'feral drowner' to do more than just kill its victim.

Climax: Now that everyone believes in it, the Esoterrorists try to summon the Feral Drowner into being. They take a skiff out into the marsh, focus their will, and use their foul rite to bring the creature bubbling up from under the surface. Unfortunately for them, they have done their work too well; it is raging wild, and rapes and kills all of them before turning towards the town.

2. ... And I Shiver The Whole Night Through

Sinister Conspiracy: The principal of Hobsgate High School, Mr. Carslake, is an Esoterrorist with extensive knowledge of the occult. His shadowy superiors have given him the task of tapping the enormous reservoirs of psychic energy latent in high school students, especially female ones. The more they can be encouraged to believe in spooks, monsters and witchcraft, the thinner the local Membrane will become.

Over the last three years, Principal Carslake has steadily been dropping very precise references to the practice of hoodoo and folk magic into his classes (under the guise of educating the students in American folklore) all the while expressing the strongest possible disapproval of these dabblings. He believes that if he tells them *not* to do these things, they will want to. This attempt at reverse psychology has gone extremely well, and a cabal of young girls led by the dumpy, bespectacled Miranda Jeffries have now managed to summon up Strap Throat, who has not yet claimed any lives but will do so soon. The cabal's intended target was Clarissa Lang, a beautiful and vicious girl who has been making younger students' lives miserable.

Unfortunately, Carslake's hints have also resulted in the formation of a would-be band of white witches, led by the 15 year old Jessica Crane. Jessica has learned of the summoning of Strap Throat and has promised to do something about it. Unfortunately, the most reliable protection spell she has discovered involves mummy

Aftermath: Legends are not easy to kill, and that stained glass window really is centuries old. Maybe there already *is* a Feral Drowner in Bronson's Creek, buried beneath the stones of the abbey...

As for the veil-out, the obviousness of the hoax (once the dead goat's foot on a stick is discovered) helps with the official story that it was all a sick joke that went too far, perpetrated by a gang of weekend Satanists.

dust, and the only mummy is located in the town museum.

Instigating Scene: Someone has broken into the town museum, broken open the glass case that held an Egyptian mummy, and unwrapped it. The Ordo Veritatis is concerned that Esoterrorists may be trying to bring a new manifestation of the Practice into being. There are several bizarre elements to the robbery. Nothing precious seems to have been taken, and a jar of supermarket honey has been left inside the case.

Core Information: The honey is Jessica Crane's attempt to give something in return for the mummy dust she took, in accordance with occult laws of equilibrium. She left a partial fingerprint on it, enough for a match if the investigators suspect her. An imprint of a sneaker sole reveals that whoever broke in was likely to be a teenager, which points the investigators towards the High School. Fabric tufts can also be used to identify the perpetrator as a high school student.

At the school, the investigators can pick up on rumors of something sinister going on with the seniors. Carslake offers his help, presenting himself as a staunch Christian who knows a lot about the ways of Satanists, as he has studied them for years - 'know your enemy', he says.

Jessica Crane's protective spells will not work, of course, and Strap Throat will claim her first victim

while the investigators are at the school. This will encourage the girls to talk.

Supplementary Information: The school has a severe bullying problem. Jessica Crane is well known as the school weirdo. Her coven meets in the local woods, though nobody who isn't sworn to secrecy is allowed to know where.

Later Scenes: The investigators may follow Jessica's trail and end up in the little-known cave where she and her coven practice amateurish magic. If they are interrupted, they protest that they are trying to help, and hold the investigators responsible if Strap Throat kills anyone. Strap Throat's screams can be heard in the woods after dark.

Strap Throat's first victim is Clarissa Lang, a self-appointed princess who is loved by the popular and hated by the lesser students for being an acidic bitch. It transpires that Clarissa had been making begging phone calls to Jessica Crane, of all people, shortly before her death. Clarissa was begging for Jessica's *help* (which Jessica agreed to give) but an investigator may mistakenly think that she was begging for her life.

Antagonist Reactions: Principal Carslake is livid that these meddlers have arrived on his doorstep, just as things were going so well. While maintaining his cover

as a God-fearing expert on folklore, he will give the players a ride into the woods to visit the site where a local witch-woman is believed to have lived, ensure that they get lost and abandon them, hoping that the screams of Strap Throat will finish them in the night.

Climax: Carslake will, by now, have requested backup, and a beat-up Ford filled with muscular cultists will follow the players around. The climax comes when Principal Carslake is unmasked as an Esoterrorist. If the players survive their night in the woods, they will want to investigate him, and can easily find plenty of incriminating evidence in Carslake's home and on his computer.

Aftermath/Veil-Out: Jessica Crane, if she survives, admits to vandalizing the mummy case and unwrapping the mummy. Unfortunately, her parents insist on institutionalizing her, deeming that her occult fantasies have gone too far. As for Carslake, who almost certainly ends the story dead, the official story is that he turned out to be the serial murderer who strangled Clarissa Lang and any other high school seniors who Strap Throat did away with. The pressures of his position, and his obsessions with folklore, drove him over the edge.

No matter what the investigators manage to achieve, the legend of Strap Throat grows a little stronger after the horrors of Hobsgate.

3. The Secret Mysteries Club

Sinister Conspiracy: In a major city where they have a strong foothold, the Esoterrorists want to create something *big*. An Organ Grinder would be just fine. They have the designs worked out and have made a model - the 'physical analogue' as they call it - but their attempts to conjure the real thing in their sanitized labs have failed. Somebody comes up with the idea of moving the evocation to an abandoned tenement block, the scene of many episodes of gang-related violence, scheduled to be demolished in the near future. Surely all of that lingering psychic sickness will empower the nascent Organ Grinder and enable its creation?

At the same time as the Esoterrorists were assembling their equipment in an empty apartment at the top of the block, a group of three teenaged kids was climbing through a gap in the fence, ignoring the DANGER signs and carrying a video camera. They called themselves the Secret Mysteries Club, and had hoped to make a comic video about urban pirates looking for treasure in the abandoned tower, which they would then post on YouTube to international acclaim.

The Esoterrorists' attempt to summon the Grinder was not successful, though the psychic turbulence did almost reach breakthrough level. This resonated

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through the whole building, causing doors to open and slam shut and piles of trash to animate for brief instants (events that the kids caught on tape). As the ritual reached its peak, parts of the building itself took on nightmarish life.

One of the kids, Robbie Nervin, was killed outright when the stairs crunched him up, as if they had been huge jaws. (The video swings away, and shows only the 'before' and 'after' scenes of this horrible moment.) Off camera, the Esoterrorists seized Billy Pawney, who saw too much; Alistair MacGovern, the cameraman, ran for his life and is now catatonic in a mental institution.

Billy Pawney, held in an Esoterrorist facility for observation, is beginning to change. It seems he has absorbed the psychic charge from the ritual, and is mutating into some non-human travesty – possibly the very Organ Grinder that the Esoterrorists tried to create.

Instigating Scene: The team watch the MacGovern video, a shaky sequence that begins with the kids breaking in and fooling around, then hearing weird metallic noises from above and going to investigate.

Core Information: The team can retrace the kids' path through the building. Police have searched the place from top to bottom, but have found nothing besides a strange lump of putty-like flesh fused with fragments of scrap metal. The stairs where Robbie Nervin died still bear the dark stains his crushed body left. The lump of flesh is available for analysis, and proves to have been purposefully manufactured. The embedded metal fragments can be traced to a car now in a local scrap yard. The dead flesh component is human, but proves to have come from hospital refuse (amputated limbs that should have been incinerated, extracted tumors, and the like).

Supplementary Information: Alistair MacGovern can supply a little information if the players calm him down enough. He claims that 'they' took Billy, and that 'the building came alive'.

Later Scenes: From making inquiries at the scrapyard, the team can discover that a local punk artist, Clarine Goodwood, can often be found picking through the metal remains and taking photographs. Clarine admits that she was commissioned to make the dummy Organ Grinder, and was assured by her client that the tissue was recycled hospital waste. The client paid tens of

thousands for the project, so she didn't ask too many questions. The contact number she was given is traceable to the Honeywell Institute, a beauty clinic owned by the Esoterrorists and used as a front by them. The contact was a Mr. Masters.

At the hospital, an orderly who is also an Esoterrorist has been quietly passing on containers filled with surplus human flesh to the Honeywell Institute.

Antagonist Reactions: There are several Esoterrorist doctors in the local hospital, who will be all too eager to get the PCs in for examination on the slightest excuse. Once they are inside, knockout gas and a quiet (and gruesomely unnecessary) surgical procedure will ensure that they never wake up. Alternatively, characters can be given lobotomies, or suffer tragic 'aneurysms'. Injured characters who are taken to the hospital for treatment will be separated from their colleagues and disposed of. Their flesh will be put to good use; bodies are sawn up and sent to the Honeywell Institute, for use in making monsters.

Climax: The team need to break into the Honeywell Institute and get Billy Pawney out of there before he mutates into something no longer recognizable as human. The Institute may have other monsters locked away in its cells, who are already viable.

Aftermath/Veil-Out: The official story is that the medics at the Honeywell Institute were organ traders, and wanted Billy Pawney's healthy body parts to sell to surgeons in Brazil. There is plenty of evidence to back this up. The MacGovern video, however, is harder to explain away, and probably ends up on YouTube no matter what the investigators do...

4. And The Valley Folk Below

Sinister Conspiracy: The inhabitants of a village in a valley near a chemical works begin to panic when anonymous letters are sent, apparently threatening the town with 'a nightmare they had tried to forget'. This refers to a sequence of hushed-up murders 30 years ago, which *may* result in the creation of a residue daemon if sufficient energy and blood are infused into the area. The letters use rambling apocalyptic language, and describe 'the bloody souls of the slaughtered rising from their graves, to cast a giant shadow over the whited sepulchres of man'. No member of the Ordo Veritatis with even the vaguest knowledge of residue daemons could possibly miss *that* allusion, which is why the letters have been deemed significant enough to investigate.

The Esoterrorists are sponsoring (and goading) a lone eccentric to find and raise the daemon, as they think there is sufficient residual horror there for one to be created.

Eugene Crae, the aforesaid maniac, is the anonymous letter-writer. His wife and daughter were two of the murder victims, and he has never forgiven the small town for what he always believed was a conspiracy of silence. The women were well-known local drunkards, not missed by most of the townsfolk, while the suspected murderer was Jonny Powell, the mentally retarded son of the chemical works owner, Anthony B Powell. As the chemical works kept almost all of the menfolk in employment, it would have been a disaster if the owner had been implicated in scandal or (worse) imprisoned. The murders were eventually pinned on a vagrant, Mo Buckley, who had wandered into the town and vanished on the night the murders happened.

The Esoterrorists' representative in the village is Lucille Varley, the woman who runs the chemical works canteen. She's been meeting with Eugene on a regular basis. The townsfolk mistakenly think this is a touching case of senior romance.

Instigating Scene: The scenario begins in a large town, not the village itself. The players are allowed to study the letters, which were sent to the offices of a local newspaper covering a much wider region. There are three letters in total, obviously the work of an

unhinged mind, promising that 'the past will soon come to light' and 'the valley will overflow with blood'. From there, the players need to head out to the village and try to piece the story together.

Core Information: Analysis of the documents allows the players to build up a partial profile of the letter-writer, who has tried to cover his tracks but hasn't allowed for modern forensics. The letters were composed on a vintage typewriter, and a dirty smudge on one of the envelopes (from where it was dropped into a puddle) provides enough soil information to prove that it came from inside the village itself. The murders of Annabelle and Victoria Crae thirty years ago were a local sensation that the team can read up on, and they were never solved.

Supplementary Information: The owner of the chemical works is Troy Powell, the grandson of Anthony, and he's not happy about outsiders poking around, uncovering what was best kept buried. Troy knows a dreadful secret; it *was* his cousin Jonny who murdered the two women, one night when he'd been given strong liquor to drink by a couple of chemical workers who thought it was funny. Jonny also killed Mo Buckley, who Anthony B Powell had buried in the dumping grounds near the chemical works.

Later Scenes: It's not hard to track the letters back to Eugene, who can easily be arrested and incarcerated, but the adventure doesn't end there. Investigation of Eugene's house reveals pints and pints of blood stored in his fridge, which proves to be his own, extracted patiently over months. It won't be easy to get him to talk, but Eugene was planning to drench the area of the murders in his own blood, so that 'the red spectre' would arise. He won't explain who gave him this idea, but the team can establish that Lucille has been in the house very frequently by studying ashtrays and finding her hairs in the carpet (as well as by more mundane means like asking the neighbors).

Antagonist Reactions: If Eugene's in prison, he is no longer useful, and the Esoterrorists will have him killed. Meanwhile, there's a perfectly good murder scene just needing to be drenched in gore, and a nosy team of investigators stirring up trouble. It would kill two birds

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with one stone if the investigators were abducted, taken to the murder site and had their throats slit.

Climax: One way or another, Lucille means to raise the residue daemon, and for that she needs blood. The team can track her down to the chemical works, where she either has her victims ready, or is planning something much less obvious – a terrible industrial ‘accident’ that will shower the workers with burning chemicals, and leave the bodies of dozens of the dead soaking the ground with their body fluids.

Aftermath/Veil-Out:

Eugene can be dismissed as a maniac easily enough once he is identified as the letter-writer, and if the players are clever, they can solve a thirty-year-old mystery while they are at it. Jonny Powell died long ago, but if the players can prove he killed the Crae women and Buckley, they can give the case some much-needed closure and thus prevent a residue daemon from ever arising again.

5. The Blog of Crispin Clarke

Sinister Conspiracy: The Esoterrorists are taking a subtle new approach to the problem of the Ordo Veritatis. They have created a deliberate trap to lure a team of investigators in, which will ultimately lead them into the jaws of a ravenous Sisterite.

They have created an online journal in the name of Crispin Clarke. This journal, which has a real ring of authenticity to it, documents Clarke’s daily life as a drug-using psychic; he has visions and dreams of terrible things. It is filled with references to supernatural creatures that the team may recognize, and hints at some terrible catastrophe that nobody will be able to prevent. There is also a mounting sense of fatalism, as if Clarke expected his unseen enemies to eliminate him at any moment.

Frustratingly, there is no hard information as to who exactly Clarke is, where he lives, or who the real people about whom he writes are. The journal makes it plain that the author is using pseudonyms, both because of his drug use and out of fear of being detected and eliminated by ‘them’.

The Esoterrorists’ intent is to draw out the Ordo Veritatis and sucker the team into following false leads, so that they eventually end up cut off from help in a Sisterite lair. As the scenario proceeds, the Clarke journal will be updated with new entries, giving the team fresh information to act on. Eventually, Clarke will ‘disappear’ while investigating what appears to be Sisterite activity in a nearby town – a town that Clarke

does not name, but enough clues are dropped for it to be identifiable.

Instigating Scene: The team can read Crispin Clarke’s blog from any secure point of Internet access. It is a haunting, terrifying read, including references to cases that the team members themselves have been involved in, which Clarke describes in detail in ‘visions’. Clarke also provides photographs of the area near his home where he saw these visions or encountered shadowy supernatural creatures, which are frustratingly lacking in detail.

Core Information: The only information that can be gleaned from the blog at first is by extracting the images and analyzing them. By doing this, the players can home in on the place where the pictures were taken. (It is not possible to tell the blog writer’s physical location by analyzing his data trail.)

Supplementary Information: Once they are safely in the town that Clarke describes, and thus in the strands of the web, the Clarke blog begins to include references to creatures seen in various buildings and locations. The team can find these much more quickly, and should begin to suspect that they are on to something big. The Esoterrorists make sure to leave some leftover bits of creatures behind – a claw here, a shed scale there – so that the investigators will genuinely believe that there are monsters afoot.

Later Scenes: For the conspiracy to work, the

investigators have to believe that Clarke is real. They can leave him comments on his blog or try to contact him through email. 'Clarke' will respond, leaving suggestions of places to meet up. He will never be there, of course, but will sometimes leave a note behind the bar or a hastily scribbled message on the lavatory wall.

Antagonist Reactions: To liven things up, and prove to the team that they are hot on the trail, the Esoterrorists may leave a Blood Corpse or two lurking in the places mentioned on the blog, or have a scourger follow the team around, making sure they notice it.

Climax: In his last blog entry, Clarke mentions going to visit a mysterious woman, 'Candi', who has left many encouraging comments on his blog and seems to know the truth behind his experiences. The team can discover that Candi's comments are coming from a sisterite.com address, which should set off alarm bells. The 'Candi'

6. Andrea's baby

Sinister Conspiracy: The Esoterrorists want media coverage of supernatural happenings and an increase in global uncertainty, not exposes on their own organization. So, when Andrea Leigh went public three years ago about her forced involvement in an Esoterrorist breeder cell, appearing on home cable shows and talking about Satanic plans to use baby tissue in making horrible monsters, something drastic had to be done. With her neat appearance and calm demeanor, not to mention her atheism, Andrea just didn't sound like the usual 'satanic abuse' crank. People began to sit up and pay attention. She stopped short of naming names, obviously for legal reasons, but tongues began to wag in her home town.

If she wasn't silenced fast, the cell could have been exposed. Killing her wouldn't have worked, as it would just have attracted even more attention. Instead, the Esoterrorists used their fetish sorcery, the only magic apart from summoning entities that they can rely on, to give Andrea a classic case of paranoid schizophrenia. The genuine trauma of her experiences mingled with the supernaturally imposed living nightmare

comment mentions a specific location to meet up: the abandoned railway station just outside town.

If the team hurry, they may make it in time to save Crispin Clarke - or so they think. All they find is a hungry Sisterite and a team of Esoterrorists with automatic weapons hiding in the bushes around the building.

A truly tech-savvy team will be able to track down the real source of the Crispin Clarke journal, which is an Esoterrorist van filled with electronic comms equipment, disguised as a TV repairman's vehicle. The Esoterrorists have been using a satellite connection to upload the blog.

Aftermath/Veil-Out: If the Crispin Clarke blog is allowed to stay up, it will generate buzz and belief in supernatural entities. The Ordo Veritatis attempts to have it 'exposed' as a hoax, allowing a young horror buff in a totally different city to claim the credit.

of mental illness, and she began to make claims that were increasingly bizarre and obviously untrue, such as having been raped by the Devil in broad daylight outside her local church, or having vomited up gallons of gold enamel paint. Andrea became a nine-day wonder, her planned book was cancelled, and those cable shows that had featured her ravings quietly moved on to other, more credible guests.

Andrea herself descended into insanity and was eventually picked up off the street and forcibly institutionalized, where she has been ever since. Psychiatric medicine has kept her quiet, if not calm. However, the effects of the fetish have long since worn off, and Andrea is ready to talk again - so long as she can talk to the right people. The Esoterrorists who tried to use her as a breeder have gotten away scot free, and she wants them dealt with.

Instigating Scene: The team members are asked to pose as medical specialists investigating cases of alleged Satanic 'baby breeding' cult practices. They are given access to Andrea Leigh and allowed to talk to her

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about her famous (and largely fabricated, in the public opinion) past. In the serene daylight of her hospital room, Andrea patiently describes night-on-unimaginable horrors, involving forced insemination, the removal of fetal tissue and (on one occasion) an attempt to breed her to a Billy goat, for some ghastly purpose having to do with 'psychic imprinting'. Andrea's voice trembles and she is clearly unwell. No human psyche could come through Esoterrorist abuse, magically induced mental illness and massive amounts of psychoactive drugs without being badly fragmented. Some of the elements of her story may well be figments – it is simply impossible to tell without investigating.

Core Information: The investigators come away from their interview with a long list of names and places back in Andrea's home town, a settled little community of picket fences and rigorous Church attendance. Andrea was unable to tell exactly who the cult members were, as they all wore surgical masks, but she is certain the ringleader was the local dentist, Buddy Lawrence, and the financier was a wealthy eccentric called James Wetherington, who paid for many of the town's buildings. Andrea also remembers kneeling beside a particular tree, screaming and screaming, but cannot now remember why. She does remember hearing chains rattle behind her, and then feeling a sudden blow to the back of the head.

Supplementary Information: Wetherington lives in a large estate overlooking the town, and rumor has it (truthfully) that he lives only in one room. The cell carried out its experiments and breeding programs in an old decommissioned naval vessel, moored up the coast; this is Wetherington's property.

Andrea also insists that there is a network of catacombs under the church, where the Esoterrorists used to conjure creatures into being. This is not actually true (her imagination has supplied this detail) but the investigators can try to break in, dig under the flagstones and get arrested if they choose.

Later Scenes: The power of the story depends on the seesawing between belief in what Andrea says and the apparent lack of evidence. The players should feel that they are possibly being led on the wildest of wild goose chases, with one lead after another turning out to be a dud, despite an undeniable sinister ambience. They can explore the rooms under Buddy Lawrence's dental surgery and find bags full of bloody cotton wads which should have been incinerated, or crash an exclusive

party at the Wetherington Mansion and find naked guests engaged in full-on BDSM antics, though no suggestion of Esoterrorist activity. The decommissioned ship has rusty marks where hospital beds *could* have been belted down, and bloodstains that match Andrea's DNA, but nothing conclusive enough to condemn anyone.

Antagonist Reactions: The townsfolk themselves are not likely to be happy about outsiders messing around in their affairs, and it will be an easy matter for Wetherington to pay a few thugs to beat the investigators up. If they try to investigate the moored

Climax: Just as they are growing frustrated with the lack of any solid confirmation of Andrea's stories, there should be overwhelming, terrible proof of the breeder experiments. The tree that Andrea mentioned is in the Wetherington grounds, and the players should track it down at a suitably dramatic point. It has an old wooden swing hanging from its branches by rusty chains; the blow Andrea felt was from someone slamming the swing into the back of her head. The tree is where the skeletons of a dozen babies now lie, cast-offs from the breeder program.

Aftermath/Veil-Out: As far as the world at large is concerned, the Andrea Leigh story is already dead and done with. Additional publicity would only stir up belief in strange cults and half-demon babies, and the Ordo Veritatis needs to keep that from happening at all costs. It only remains to help Andrea herself adapt to life outside the hospital, which she can at last leave, now that the roots of her sanity are once more restored.

7. When The Cannibals Came To Skunkwater

Sinister Conspiracy: Not every Esoterrorist campaign involves an attempt to summon supernatural creatures. Some are more to do with increasing the levels of paranoia, horror and alienation in the world. In the world that the Esoterrorists create, monsters are not just things lurking in the shadows; your friends and neighbors could turn into monsters at any moment. The idea of common humanity underpinned by a very ordinary kind of sanity is anathema to the Esoterrorist vision and must be destroyed.

In the mountains near Skunkwater, a survivalist group is preparing for the Rapture that they think is coming. They have already had one false alarm at the turn of the millennium, but this time they are *really* sure. A closed community is prime fodder for the Esoterrorists. A special agent sneaked into the compound, planted fetishes intended to create cannibalistic madness among the survivalists, and set a bomb in the main food storage bunker.

This worked better than the Esoterrorists could have dreamed. Almost all of the food reserves were destroyed, and then the fetishes went to work. In the enclosed environment, the already paranoid survivalists went into a frenzy of cannibalism, tribal violence, forced copulation and territoriality. Like mad primates, they tore up their environment, hacking at one another with improvised weapons and blasting each other's brains out with shotguns. Tribes formed, giving themselves biblical names and looking to their alpha males as prophetic figures. One spontaneously formed 'tribe', Washed in the Blood of the Lamb, held the few remaining food stores; another (Bearers of the Sacred Wounds) took over the weapons lockers, and a third much smaller group (Covenant of the Holy Flesh) fled the compound and camped out in the woods near the town of Skunkwater. They have now begun to capture and eat people.

Instigating Scene: It has now been two weeks since the Esoterrorists introduced their mind-twisting fetishes into the compound. The team is given reports of apparent cannibal activity near Skunkwater. Soon,

the team is standing around the partially eaten bodies of two cannibal victims. Their blood-spattered camping gear is still by the lakeshore in the woods, behind a barrier of incident tape. Thunder begins to rumble and the locals huddle fearfully in their houses. Rainfall will no doubt wash away evidence, so the team will have to move fast.

Core Information: The victims can readily be identified as Jack Barnes and Wilbur Connelly, two college students who had gone on a camping trip (the Skunkwater lake being a famous beauty spot) and had been smoking marijuana outside their tent, watching the sun set. From the bodies, the team can establish that the two had their heads bashed in with blunt objects and were then eaten raw by human jaws. Five, possibly six different people were involved in the devouring, and they seem to have worried at the flesh like dogs. They were dragged several hundred feet away from the murder site and into the woods, presumably to avoid being seen.

Supplementary Information: There is enough forensic information for the team to track the Covenant of the Holy Flesh down to the rocky cave where they are holed up. They are dressed in bloody rags and have marked themselves all over with religious symbols and Bible quotations. The team is in for a hard fight.

The alpha male of the Holy Flesh still bears the fetish that sent him and his kin insane, though he doesn't know it. It is a talisman on vellum, slipped into the back pocket of his jeans. It still has some residual magic left in it, and unless it is found and destroyed, its influence will slowly begin to work on the residents of Skunkwater. Depending on where the clothes are left, the first to feel the cannibalistic urges may be cops, mortuary attendants or even PCs.

Later Scenes: In the event that one of the cannibals is captured alive and interrogated, he exhibits profound and raging mania. Whatever has happened to him, he is clearly not responsible for what he is doing. He shows

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no sign of having been drugged, so Esoterrorist magic may be a factor in this. The local police can verify the cannibals' identity and prove that they came from the survivalist compound twenty miles away.

Antagonist Reactions: The Esoterrorists will send a squad over to check on the compound's progress, monitoring it from afar with electronic equipment. If they discover the player team, they will do their best to guide the cannibals to them rather than intervening directly.

Climax: The scenario ends with a raid on the compound. If the tribes up at the compound have enough warning of the players' approach, they take precautions. There

are plenty of stockpiled weapons there, ready for the second coming of Jesus, and few of them have ever been used. Tripwires, mines, caltrops to burst tires, bodies staked out as a warning, and even snipers in the rocky hills are all potential hazards waiting for the investigators.

Aftermath/Veil-Out: Rumors of cannibalism are suppressed, and the mess at the compound is blamed on a Jonestown-esque disaster in which the devotees all took hallucinogenic drugs and lost their minds. Thinking that the apocalypse had come, they slaughtered each other so that they would 'ascend' all the quicker and not be 'left behind'.

8. Red in Tooth and Claw

Sinister Conspiracy: Sometimes, the Esoterrorists' patient attempts to wear the Membrane thin succeed, and supernatural manifestations take place that they neither engineered nor anticipated. This is all to the good, as more manifestations mean more mortal terror, less trust in concrete reality, and an exponential further weakening of the Membrane.

Just such a shattering has taken place in an isolated rural community. A quiet place where nothing ever seems to happen bar the occasional stolen sheep or station wagon full of drunken kids running off the road, Thornwick has become a slaughterhouse thanks to the ravages of a Shatterer, drawn through the tattered Membrane in a spontaneous interdimensional accident. The ill-advised drunken rituals of a group of would-be black magicians fifteen years earlier had made the Membrane weak at that point, and the psychic resonance of a heavy thunderstorm blew it wide open. The Shatterer sensed the faint residue of the summoning vortex, and entered the material realm.

Its first act was to rip the cattle to pieces in the field where it appeared, after which it strode towards the village in search of any foolish humans who were attempting to summon things they could not control, as Shatterers love to devour such fools. The only thing resembling a psychic vortex that it found was a group of teenagers playing with a Ouija board. Sensing that

the psychic vibrations of those who had weakened the Membrane all those years ago were still present in the world, it set off to destroy them.

Instigating Scene: The team is called to Thornwick, where a whole house has been roped off as a crime scene. Upstairs, one of the bedrooms is awash with blood and viscera. What is left of four teenagers, Sandra Grist, Mike Bosley, Samantha Dawson and Jimmy Summers, lies draped around the room like scarlet bunting. Shaken local police, far out of their depth, tell the players about the cattle mutilations and the strange lights in the sky the night before.

Core Information: Among the gory mess, the team find letters of the alphabet written on torn scraps of paper, along with the words 'hello' and 'goodbye' and a shattered whisky glass. This is clearly an attempt to create a budget Ouija board. The bite radius of the wounds on the victims shows clearly that some shark-like maw did the biting, and comparison proves that the same thing tore the cattle apart. There appears to be no point of entry at all. A local rumor has it that 'witches' used to congregate in the field at the full moon, and somehow brought this horror down on the community; this is about the only lead the team has to go on.

Supplementary Information: Researching old news stories about the Thornwick fields brings up a report

about a self-styled cult leader, Greg Blenk, now in prison for murder. Blenk was the head of the 'Thornwick Coven' fifteen years ago, a sex-and-drugs outfit that attempted to practice black magic, though getting Blenk laid was always the primary motive. Several local girls were involved, and one became pregnant in the course of the coven's sex-magical antics. The girls, Deborah Carney, Michaela Jones and Mary Sue Elmore, are the next to receive a visit from the Shatterer. They all moved away from Thornwick after the scandal. One is a truckstop waitress, one a pole dancer and one a librarian, and they all live in small towns between fifty and seventy miles away. If the players do not work out the connection, then they will have many fresh crime scenes to investigate.

The child is not named, but the team can use their investigative skills to find out that she is Janey Ellison, still resident in Thornwick. Once the Shatterer is done with the other coven members and Blenk, it will come for her.

Later Scenes: The Shatterer senses a group of people praying in a roadside church, and considers this a summoning vortex for the purposes of its mission. It smashes through the walls and devours everyone present. The team can trace its rough trajectory - it is heading for the city where Blenk is held prisoner.

The team will have to interview Blenk sooner or later. He is a haggard, sardonic man who has used his acting

ability and his vast occult knowledge to cow others into submission and get lots of free sex. He knows what a Shatterer is, and may actually know more than the players do. If he thinks one is coming for him, he will insist that the team should protect him. If they do, he will tell them all they need to know about such creatures.

Antagonist Reactions: The Shatterer is singleminded and does not react. It will pursue its victims one by one and rip them to shreds. However, the Esoterrorists may take an interest, visiting the areas where the murders take place in a black van and making sure the story receives as much coverage as possible in the news. The more terror the event generates, the better it suits them!

Climax: The adventure reaches its peak either when the Shatterer comes for Blenk in the prison, or when it attempts to devour Janey Ellison. If the team manages to protect one of these unfortunates, it will attempt to finish off the other.

Aftermath/Veil-Out: The team is going to have a rough time coming up with possible mundane explanations for this incident. The Ordo Veritatis comes up with an invented serial killer, The Crusader, a demented Christian fundamentalist who preys on those he thinks to be the 'agents of Satan', namely neopagans, occultists and modern day magicians. Ironically, this urban myth is more effective against the Esoterrorists than expected, as fear of The Crusader deters many young people from becoming involved with the occult at all.

9. Tuned To A Dead Channel

Sinister Conspiracy: Late at night, some televisions in the region of a big city have been receiving strange signals. First the picture breaks into static, as if the signal had been lost; then faces seem to form out of the static and howl silently, surging towards the screen and vanishing away again. These images have been becoming more and more distinct, and now an amateur researcher called Jonas Gubevitch has captured a whole sequence of them on tape. He also claims to have recorded faint, barely audible voices.

These are genuine psychic phenomena. An old reservoir outside of town has become infested

with drowners, who moved there (during a rainstorm, thus remaining in contact with water) when the deep swamp in which they formerly lived was drained to make room for a new housing project back in the 1950s. Over time, the drowners have claimed victims; stray vagrants, children, roving drunkards. The reservoir lies in between the local broadcast tower and the city.

The ghosts of four of the drowners' victims are screaming out to anyone who will listen, begging for their bones to be found. These are Luke Payne, a six-year-old who was dragged under in 1952, Jerome MacArthur, an octogenarian soak who met his end in

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1988, and Martha Wilbury, a former prostitute who was snatched from the reservoir's edge along with her baby in 2003.

Meanwhile, rumors of haunted television sets are growing like wildfire, video rentals and downloads of *Poltergeist* and *The Ring* go through the roof, and the Membrane begins to wear thin as the accumulated night-fears of a whole city winnow away at it. Worse still, the Esoterrorists are in on the act, and have arranged for a chat show host, Mikey T, to show the Gubevitch Tape one week from now on his evening special. If that tape reaches a wider audience, belief in the paranormal will surge, and the Esoterrorists will be one step closer to their goal.

Instigating Scene: The team are allowed to watch and study the video. Gubevitch doesn't allow them to keep it, as he needs it for Mikey T's broadcast next week, but he is content for them to analyze it in his presence.

There are at least three distinct faces swimming in and out of the hazy snowfield, and they do not look like the faces of living people. The eyes are empty, the mouths yawning and black. One seems to be a woman, with copious flowing hair that hovers as if weightless. The others are a young boy, possibly wearing a baseball cap, and an old man mouthing words. Right at the end of the tape, something rushes at the screen, like a demented bawling balloon-head waving tiny limbs. (This is Martha Wilbury's infant child, whose anguish is primal, hideous and inarticulate.) The atmosphere in the room afterwards is damp and chilly, as if something dead had walked through trailing miasmal air behind.

Core Information: Careful study of the tape reveals that the old man's words are 'I can't swim', the last thoughts that went through Jerome MacArthur's mind. Martha Wilbury's flowing hair also looks like it is hanging in water. If the sound on the video is amplified, the gurgling sound of a crying child can be heard, which together with the final image suggests a baby was involved. Checking Missing Persons and other records reveals about twenty missing mothers with children from the past hundred years or so. Martha is named among them, and her identity can be confirmed by checking the fuzzy video image against her photo.

Supplementary Information: Research into local deaths by drowning points the characters towards Purdey's Marsh, which had a history of drowning more than its fair share of travelers, and for being haunted

to boot. The marsh is now gone, and a housing project has been built on the reclaimed land. The housing project is rough, violent and supposedly haunted, though the team will not find any concrete evidence of ghosts. A study of the swamp drainage records reveals that there was a cover-up; the investors who built the projects were not told the whole story about the land. By talking to old residents, the team can find out that a massive amount of ancient human remains was dredged up and quietly reburied in a landfill site to avoid causing alarm. One resident in particular, Martin Coalbrook, was dead set against the draining of the marsh, insisting that it would upset 'them', and cause 'them' to look for 'better lodgin's elsewhere.' One man was dragged under and drowned while working on the draining machinery. Those few who are willing to talk about it say that pale hands came up from the water and grabbed him by the ankle.

Later Scenes: The players can dig through the landfill site and discover the remains, which prove to be hundreds of years old, and to have bits of antique pottery mixed in amongst them. The landfill site is quite mundane, psychologically speaking. They may also have to fight to avoid the tape getting broadcast on the chat show, which may even involve stealing it from Gubevitch.

Antagonist Reactions: The drowners will not leave their reservoir, but the Esoterrorists want that tape broadcast. If they get wind from Gubevitch of something that sounds like an Ordo Veritatis team in the area, they will send a hit-man to take them out at range.

Climax: By piecing together Martha's last known location, the proximity of the reservoir to the now-drained Purdey's Marsh, the watery feel to the video and the direction of the transmissions mast, the team can establish that the reservoir is at the core of all this. It needs to be dredged for remains, but doing so brings the drowners up from their oozing black beds...

Aftermath/Veil-Out: There's always some mischievous student out there with a good grasp of electronics who can be blamed for this sort of thing. The faces in the static are 'explained' as computer animation, and the stray signals as the result of an unlicensed broadcast.

10. Coming Live To Your Living Room

Sinister Conspiracy: The Radiant Circle is a cult. Not a shadowy cult of black robes and heavy incense, but a shiny, Hollywood cult to which the less stable celebrities belong; they may not wear red thread or use E-Meters, but they are in the same ball park. Their charismatic leader, Edwin Bright, teaches them to actualize their potential via 'breathing the Light Within', a much-trumpeted technique which consists mainly of stolen Hatha Yoga exercises and a lot of psychobabble. The Radiant Circle is not well known about, but those who do know about it consider it to be harmless, as such things go. Its adherents rave about it, donate tens of thousands of dollars to the cause, and obviously derive some spiritual fulfillment from it that compensates for the resounding hollowness of their lives.

The Radiant Circle is an Esoterrorist front. In this, compared to their other campaigns, they are playing a very long game indeed. The cult exists in order to pick out the most weak-willed, spiritually derelict celebrities and fill them full of mystic nonsense, priming them for the time when they will become walking proof of supernatural horror, and thus expose the world to it. Their plan is to instill in the members the belief that the world is filled with demons, which only the Radiant Circle can stand against. (This teaching is, of course, kept to a higher level, the Inner Circle, accessible only to the long-term members who have given most.) Those who find themselves too weak for the battle, so the teachings go, will become prey to these demons, and only a new incarnation will free them. Naturally, the Esoterrorists intend to use their fetishes to convince a few well-positioned celebrities that they have indeed become prey to the horrors, and public suicide is the only way out.

Murphy Cullen, news anchor and instantly recognizable media face, is the first sacrificial lamb. For weeks now, the Esoterrorists have been persecuting him with visions of madness, while at the same time the Radiant Circle gives that madness a context, explaining that the demons are trying to drag him down, and insisting that he use more and more esoteric, occult

techniques to keep them at bay. In his agony, Murphy already knows from his trusted teachings that there is only one way out.

And so it is that Murphy Cullen recites a long, well-prepared speech on live television about the invisible demons populating the world, emanating from the true horror that underlies reality – and blows his brains out. All across America, screaming children and shocked adults watch his smoking, headless corpse slump to the floor. This is a waking nightmare, happening right in front of their eyes. And the Membrane shudders and begins to split.

Instigating Scene: The team all see the Cullen suicide as it happens. Moments later, there is a phone call. Soon, they are at the scene, urgently trying to gather all the clues they can. Weeping colleagues and profoundly shocked policemen try to keep other journalists at bay. (Meanwhile, video footage of the incident is circulated all over the Internet.)

Core Information: There is not much to be learned from the TV studio. Cullen's colleagues believe he was under stress, but didn't expect anything like *this* to happen. Only Cullen's apartment yields any real clues: the fetish itself, glued underneath his workstation; various crystals situated around the place, which occult students can tell are supposed to soak up malign vibrations; encrypted emails from 'Brother Indigo' urging him to keep up his mystic exercises, and not to give in to the darkness; and a tiny scrap of holographic plastic that investigation reveals to be from a Radiant Circle membership card.

Supplementary Information: Cullen's recently ex-girlfriend, Mandy Tate, is a strong-willed reporter who is convinced there is more to his suicide than there seems. She knew of his membership in the Radiant Circle, but will not give this information up unless the team prove that they already know it. She will hound the investigators, demanding access to their

information, and getting herself in trouble with the Esoterrorists. Later in the scenario, the Esoterrorists capture and execute her in the most graphic, extreme way they can, to send the team a strong warning to stay away. This is a major operation for them, and they will not be broken.

Later Scenes: The team will have to investigate the Radiant Circle. Its headquarters are in an office block, and prove glitzy as any New Age cult could ever hope to be, with rotating crystals and water sculptures in all available corners, and beaming faces behind every desk. Naturally, the team is not given access, and must break in. They can find evidence of the Esoterrorist connection here, and the crucial Inner Circle doctrines.

They can also track down the Esoterrorist hub, which is based in a beach-front house on private land. It won't be easy to get in past the roving guards, the dogs and the razorwire-topped walls, but if they make it inside, they can find the full details of the plan, as well as the next nigh-unimaginable step. A certain well-known teen idol, a pop star with millions of fans, is a member of the Inner Circle. Her recent stresses, which have been explained away in the media as drug-related, are in fact due to Esoterrorist persecution of exactly the same kind as Cullen suffered. Now, she plans to do exactly what he did. At the climax of her concert, she will recite a speech of dire warning before gutting herself with a switchblade in front of a packed stadium. Whether or not the team was successful in shutting down the Esoterrorist hub, this unfortunate girl is already lost, and will carry out her plan if she is not prevented.

Antagonist Reactions: The grisly death of Mandy Tate; see above. The Radiant Circle will also use the very mundane muscle of law enforcement, and legal action if necessary, to keep the investigators out of its business. It is a legitimate organization and the team has no right to interfere.

Climax: The team has to prevent the pop idol from committing ritual suicide in front of thousands of fans, and a live satellite feed. Security at the stadium is tight, and the clock is ticking...

Aftermath/Veil-Out: So long as there are no other deaths, then Cullen's is eventually explained away as the consequence of mental illness resulting partly from severe religious indoctrination in childhood and partly from addiction to pharmaceutical drugs.

CROOK'S END

This adventure is for three to six players. It can be set in most rural areas. The back story only requires that the main villain, Jack Duffy, was formerly a criminal in a large city.

Premise

Young Michaela Duffy is a friend of the players. She invited them all to stay at her large country house (Crook's End) earlier in the year, where they spent a week of the summer swimming in the pool, raiding the wine cellar and generally larking about.

Michaela's father is a former criminal and recent lottery winner who is rarely home (he's off yachting in the Caribbean); he bought the impractically large house, called it Crook's End for a joke, moved some of his possessions in, lost interest half way through and didn't bother looking after it. Michaela thus has the run of the place and is allowed to bring friends back.

Even at the time, she seemed a little reckless and unhinged. Far too much of the money her father gave her was being blown on drink and drugs. The last the players heard of her, she'd been admitted to rehab following some sort of breakdown, the details of which were never revealed.

Now, Michaela is calling for the players to come back to Crook's End. She claims she needs protection, because 'the ghosts are in her head' and she needs to be around people she can trust.

When the players arrive, they find the door gaping



wide open, a smashed window in the downstairs dining room, and Michaela all alone in the vast, empty property. She is barricaded in an upstairs bedroom, curled up in bed, shaking all over and unable to speak.

She absolutely refuses to leave the house, screaming if anyone tries to take her off the property. If the players try to manhandle her out, perhaps to take

her straight to the nearest hospital, she howls that 'the blood' will not let her leave.

She's more right than she knows. Ghosts now walk the rooms and corridors, and anyone trying to flee the grounds is in serious trouble. A residue daemon is prowling out there unseen...

The Massacre

Jack Duffy, Michaela's father, has a sinister secret. When he struck it big with his lottery win, he decided it was time to set the past to rights. He had plenty of old enemies from his time as a crime boss, and now he could pay them back with interest.

He had a well-chosen agent contact every single person against whom he'd had a grudge, from ex-girlfriends to former partners, and invited them to a secret wild party at Crook's End to celebrate his new-found fortune. He encouraged them to keep this party secret by confiding in them about his lucky millions, and hinting that if they let the secret slip, they'd be out of a share. With that clever little move, he made sure that every single person who came to the party would lie to their family and friends about where they would be that night.

When the guests were all gathered together watching their host greet them on a video, a group of four black-clad men from the Czech Republic silently entered the building through the patio doors. (Duffy himself was in the Bahamas, making quite sure of his alibi.) The doors were locked, and one by one the screaming guests were killed in a variety of ways. One of the assassins was also killed, unexpectedly shot through the head by one of the guests who had the presence of mind to bring a pistol. His body has been interred under the house.

Naturally, Duffy wanted to savour his revenge by proxy. There was no way he would arrange all this just to be *told* about it later. So, one of the men played no part in the killing. He recorded the whole thing for Duffy to watch later, at his leisure. That tape is now in Duffy's safe. He is looking forward to taking it out and watching it.

Later, while one of the surviving assassins scrubbed the blood off the woodwork and did his best to clean up all trace of what they had done, the other two heaved body after body on to the dug-up cellar floor and tipped cement over them, including the corpse of their former comrade-in-arms.

Not all of the bodies ended up there, however. Mr. and Mrs. Grant made it as far as their car, which was

riddled with sidearm fire and burst into flames. The smouldering wreck and the two charred skeletons inside it went into the pond. The assassins deemed it too much trouble to recover them.

One last body went into the garden incinerator – that of Mary Mumford, Duffy's adulterous first wife who cheated on him with his best friend. Duffy had left instructions that the ashes should be raked over his roses. 'Roses do like a bit of ash,' Duffy would often say to his unsuspecting daughter, chuckling as he rubbed his hands in anticipation.

The Residue Daemon

All that spilled blood, and the despairing panic of the murdered guests, soaked into the grounds of the house. It coagulated over the days that followed, forming into a residue daemon. This has only just begun to claw its way out of the earth, and as there have been no people nearby, it has not yet done much besides watching the house lights from the edge of the garden and croaking balefully into the night air.

It did catch the boy who came to clean the swimming pool, though. His van now lies smashed on its side among the trees beside the driveway, where the players will notice it on the way in. He himself has sunk to the bottom of the now-murky pool in shreds and fragments, like soggy croutons sinking to the bottom of a bowl of soup.

The Ghosts

The ghosts of the six murdered guests, along with that of the dead assassin, now haunt Crook End. Michaela's cracked sanity allows her to see them, and they have been harassing her since her return, trying to prevent her from leaving the house. They want the truth about their deaths to be known. However, Michaela is too close to insanity to put the facts together.

At first, the ghosts are invisible to everyone except Michaela herself, so the players may believe she is hallucinating them. However, as the adventure progresses, the players begin to see them: reflected in a mirror or window, standing in a doorway, mouthing silently from the screen of a switched-off TV set.

Deciphering the Horrors

Each of the ghosts has a story to tell. This is where the

clue-finding aspect of GUMSHOE comes into play. By cross-referencing the appearance of each of the ghosts with the clues found in the rooms where the ghosts appear, the players can establish what happened to each of them, and gradually assemble a picture of what went on that night. They will also have to break open locked rooms, go digging in the garden, and eventually find and watch the video.

The Big Twist

Jack Duffy is on his way home. Just as the adventure is starting to become intensely scary, with the players knowing they are trapped in the house with some horrendous monster outside, the phone rings. Duffy is coming home to see his 'little princess'. The moment he gets any inkling that someone may have found out about the massacre, he decides to shut them up for good.

Duffy fetches his shotgun and his axe, and drives pell-mell up to the house. The players now have a homicidal maniac to contend with. Duffy doesn't *want* to decapitate his own daughter, but he hasn't stayed out of prison for this long by being soft-hearted.

The Resolution

Michaela is just a means to an end. It's Jack Duffy that the ghosts really want. One way or another, the players have to ensure that Duffy is either killed within the grounds of the house, or brought to justice in the outside world (and Duffy can be sure that he will get a little visit in his prison cell).

They can do this in a variety of ways: by bargaining with the ghosts to be allowed to leave with the videotape, by killing Duffy themselves when he invades the house, or even by tricking Duffy into following them out into the grounds, where the residue daemon can catch and devour him.

Genre

This is the very familiar 'trapped in the house of horrors' scenario, as seen in *The Haunting*, *13 Ghosts*, and umpteen other films. The players have two main objectives, one being to find out what happened, and the other being to escape alive. These objectives are inseparable, as they will swiftly find out.

Timeline

- **Early Summer:** Duffy wins the lottery jackpot and buys Crook End.
- **Mid Summer:** Michaela has players over to stay; they briefly meet Duffy, who seems pleasant and friendly.
- **Four weeks ago:** Duffy has the invites sent out.
- **Three weeks ago:** Duffy leaves for the Bahamas.
- **Two weeks ago:** The massacre and subsequent cleanup.
- **One week ago:** Michaela turns up at the house unexpectedly, having fled from a miserable holiday in Crete, during which her boyfriend ran off with another girl. (Duffy hadn't expected this. She's supposed to be out of the country.) Michaela hits the wine cellar in a major way, and begins to see the ghosts. The ghosts, realising that she can see them, do everything in their power to keep her in the house.
- **Five days ago:** The residue daemon manifests.
- **Two days ago:** The pool boy comes to clean the pool. The residue daemon smashes his van off the road and tears him apart.
- **Present Day:** Michaela calls for help. The players arrive.

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Necessity-Driven Exploration

As the characters are not exploring a dungeon, they won't need to romp from one end of the house to the other, kicking in doors on the way. They will visit rooms as needed, and Michaela can tell them how to find their way to any room they might want to use.

As this scenario is very open-ended in its first stage, the GM should use the ordinary necessities of life as a way to steer characters towards key rooms and the encounters (and clues) that lie in wait there. All of the instances below are bound to come up sooner or later, so long as the characters stay in the house. They can all be used as a way to drive the story forward if it begins to lag. If nothing else is happening, then the Games Master can simply declare that the characters are getting really hungry, cold or tired, and let them take it from there.

- All characters need to use the bathroom once in a while. This doesn't usually come up in roleplaying games. When it does, you know you're in trouble. Following a scary event, or about an hour of playing time, let the players know that nature is calling. (There's no need to be graphic. This is just one of those horror movie moments - the kind of thing that happens just when it would be least convenient.)
- If the characters get covered in blood or mud, then they'll want to shower and change their clothes, especially if they're jock or beauty queen characters.
- All characters need to eat, and the kitchen has a working stove, along with large reserves of tinned food. Unless they have high levels of **Preparedness**, they won't have brought any food along; they didn't need it on their last visit. While cooking in the kitchen, they can hear strange rattling noises from the cellar: Maczka's ghost, shaking the wine bottles in their racks, and possibly even flinging them across the room.
- All characters need to stay warm, and it's freezing cold outside. The central heating doesn't work, but the living room has a fireplace and a stack of firewood. Once that runs out, there's a woodpile outside.

- All characters need to sleep. The bedrooms are obviously ideal for this, and can be bolted from within. Michaela can point them to either of the guest bedrooms, warning them that one of them 'still has Dad's stuff all over it'. This 'stuff' holds important clues for the players to stumble over.

Risk Factors

As always, player Risk Factors are the best answer to the prevailing question of 'why don't they just run away?' Some guidelines are given below.

Curious PCs have a mystery to solve. Something's not right in this house. The more clues they find, the more they will want to learn, even if it means digging up the cellar floor.

Dismissive PCs won't want to pass up the opportunity to enjoy their stay at the house. This was the perfect opportunity to get away from parents, school principals and cops, and run wild. The cat's away, so the mice should be playing in his expensive palace. Who hasn't wanted to party in a place like this?

Drug Fiend characters know that Michaela always has the best gear, and the money to get more. Her wealth gives her access to a whole world of contacts with a cornucopia of illegal substances. That's not the kind of girl you meet twice in your life.

Greedy characters see one thing: money. This place belongs to a *lottery winner*, for God's sake. Help his daughter out, and he's bound to shower you with cash. She's not short of a few herself!

Gung Ho characters have an unknown horror out there to fight. Never mind running and hiding; if it bleeds, they can kill it. There has to be something in the outbuilding or the cellar that they can use. Is that a chainsaw? Groovy...

Horny characters welcome the chance to have sex in a variety of swish rooms. There are four-poster beds (to tie each other to) and fireplaces with rugs in front of them (to get naked on top of). Michaela herself is not a bad looker, despite being a bit strung out right now...

Oblivious characters just don't see what all the fuss is about. Everything will be all right. Waiting is the obvious thing to do. All they have to do is wait for Mr. Duffy to come home, wait for the phones to start working again, wait for Michaela to feel better. There's plenty to do in the meantime: videos to watch, billiard games to play, wine to drink!

Protective types have a sick, frightened friend to look after. That's priority one. As events proceed, there will be more people in need of protection. Someone has to take charge, making sure food is cooked and fires are lit. It's going to have to be you.

Skeptical characters roll their eyes at the whole situation – haunted houses indeed! There's always a rational explanation, and they're going to find it. Someone's obviously covering something up, but what?

Thrill-seekers have plenty to do. Exploring the many rooms of the house (on their own, naturally) is likely to be their first option. After that, there are the outbuildings, and then those spooky woods... maybe they should grab some guns, eh?

Vengeful characters have the most situational motivation. The GM can work with a Vengeful character by making one of the ghosts into a friend or even a relative of the PC, which gives a personal dimension to the story. Billie Walker is the most readily adaptable ghost to use for this.

Story-Driven Exploration

The characters will also have other reasons to explore the rooms of the house, based on their reaction to the horrible situation they've landed themselves in.

- Gung-ho, thrill-seeking or protective characters may want to arm themselves. Michaela can tell them where to find her dad's gun cabinet. It's downstairs in the Games Room, among the trophies. They can also prise swords, axes and a mace off the wall, if they want to get mediaeval.
- The characters may need tools, to break doors open or saw up wood. These are kept in the outbuilding.

- They may need medical supplies, to bind wounds or treat shock. There's a first-aid kit in the utility room, just off the cellar. Drug fiends may go hunting for codeine, too.
- They may want alcohol to drink, to stave off the effects of **Stability** loss, or just to party in the face of terror. The place to find that is the cellar.

Event-Driven Exploration

The Games Master always has the option to throw in an event that obliges the characters to react. This kind of thing happens *all the time* in horror films, usually while something bad is already happening. The classic example is the power failure. Some poor sap needs to go out there and get the power back on. Naturally, that event happens in this scenario.

- Without warning, as the characters are in the middle of something tense, all the lights go out. The wall sockets still work, so it's obviously a blown fuse in the lighting circuit. The characters now have to choose between fixing the fuse and stumbling around the house in the dark. The fuse box is, of course, in the cellar, and the cellar is now pitch black.

Unfortunately, the house's electrics are ancient, the fuses are antique wire instead of modern circuit breakers, and there are no replacement fuses or any fuse wire to hand. Unless the players can improvise, they're going to be in the dark for a long time...

- Sooner or later, the firewood in the living room is going to run out, and it'll be perishing cold. Someone will have to go out to the woodpile. Of course, they could try smashing up the furniture and burning that, but the furniture all seems to be classy and expensive, and that nice Mr. Duffy wouldn't approve.
- At one point, the front door or a window will be smashed open (see **The Thing on the Threshold**) and will need to be barricaded. Characters will have to go and find suitable bits of timber, a hammer, nails and such like. The same applies to any other breaches, such as broken windows. If these are not fixed,

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then the residue daemon pacing around the outer gardens will be able to widen the breach and eventually cram itself into the house.

Flashbacks

As this scenario is heavily location-based rather than tied to a set sequence of events, the GM should tie flashbacks to the various key locations.

When the characters first enter a memorable area, such as the region by the swimming pool or the driveway leading up to the house, run a brief flashback to their visit in the summer. Use that flashback to indicate the salient features of the area, and especially to contrast how it was then with how it is now. Think of it as a cinematic sequence, and cut abruptly back to the present.

For example, last time the character was here the swimming pool was placid, sunny and bright, with laughing young people splashing around in it. Now, it's a murky brown morass of dead insects and fallen leaves, with the dismembered pool boy's body parts lying under the scum.

The character must, of course, be given an objective for the scene. Suitable objectives include:

- trying to chat up possible romantic partners
- attempting to get a job with one of Duffy's straight companies

About the Ghosts

In this adventure, the ghosts themselves are clues, which is why each of their manifestations is marked with the (C) for a core clue. Their appearance says something about how they died, and where the players should look to find them.

For example, Mary Mumford's ashen appearance (and the powdery deposit she leaves in her wake) relates to her ending up in the incinerator and being spread over the roses as ash, while Max and Cynthia Grant's burned, skeletal forms and wet footprints recall their deaths in a burning car and subsequent immersion in the lake.

– approaching Duffy for a loan

– persuading Michaela to let you borrow her Porsche to go for a drive

– sneaking off with Michaela to do a couple of lines of coke somewhere away from the rest of the group

Remembering Duffy

The other point of the flashbacks is to familiarize the characters with Jack Duffy, who should come across as a friendly, avuncular figure, happy to let the young people enjoy themselves around him.

The players are supposed to think that Duffy is dead, a victim of the same sinister events that took place at his house, so his later reappearance as the villain comes as a shock.

Tram Lines

The only memorable feature Duffy has is a strange scar on his cheek, like two parallel lines. It can only be seen from up close. A character with **Streetwise** can tell that this 'tram line' scarring is characteristic of injuries inflicted with a certain kind of makeshift prison weapon, the toothbrush with razors melted in the handle, a motif which crops up several times in the course of this adventure. However, in the interests of dramatic pacing, the GM should have the character who notices this scar *not* be a character with any rating in the **Streetwise** ability, if possible; let the players discover Duffy's prison background by sharing information later in the game.

If the players don't understand why the razors would be set close together and in parallel, a character with **Streetwise** or points in the **Medic** ability can answer them. It's because the gashes such a weapon leaves are impossible to stitch.

Key Events

Michaela Calls

The adventure begins with a phone call from Michaela Duffy. It's obviously a bad line, as there is a hissing, crackling sound that almost drowns out her words. She sobs hysterically down the phone, begging the

characters to come and get her:

'I don't know what I've done. I don't know what they want. The ghosts are in my head.' (A sound of glugging and swallowing.)
'They're everywhere. They won't let me leave! *I don't know what they want!*'

The players can find out easily enough that she's at Crook's End. If any of the characters are hesitant about helping, they can be reminded (in and out of character) that as the daughter of a lottery winner, Michaela is loaded. Besides, she treated all of them to a week-long holiday last year, for free. She's a nice, slightly scatty girl who wouldn't hurt a fly, she's in trouble and they're in her debt. If for some reason that doesn't motivate the players to help, then the Games Master will have to invoke the players' Risk Factors; see the examples above for guidelines.

It's possible to use **Reassurance** over the phone to some degree of success. Michaela is still sobbing, but calms down slightly. She's been drinking, she is seeing horrible things, she's sure that something very bad has happened in her house, and she's worried about her dad.

If asked where her father is, Michaela insists that he is 'on holiday', but she does so in such a wavering, sing-song way that the players should *think* she is in massive denial, and her father may well be dead. Use of **Bullshit Detector** conveys her lack of conviction to the player.

Ghostly Voice (C): Once the players have enough information, Michaela suddenly shrieks, there is a burst of static, and then a whispering, hoarse, strangely accented voice says: '*We got it all. That'll do. We got it all. Fu-*' Then there is a click, and the line goes dead.

The players won't know it yet, but this is a psychic echo of the final words on the videotape of the killings. A character with the **Aura Reading** or **Messenger** psychic ability can recognise this as a psychic imprint, rather than a recording of something that was actually happening at the time.

Phoning For Help

What a surprise - the phones aren't working properly. While the characters are within the house and its environs, they won't be able to get a signal

GUMSHOE and Non-Linear Adventures

GUMSHOE is a flexible system that can be used to simulate many different investigative stories. In the example GUMSHOE adventures in *The Esoterrorists* and *Fear Itself*, clues are used to advance the storyline, moving players from scene to scene. Like a detective story, the clues are laid out in a trail, and if you put the clues together, you end up at the end of the trail.

However, this adventure has only one location, albeit a large, labyrinthine one. The clues thus do not propel the players to new places. Instead, they allow the players to build up a solution to the mystery that confronts them.

Crook's End is much more akin to a murder mystery than a linear detective tale. The players are trapped in a closed environment, and solving the riddle of the house is their only hope of escape. They may not realize this at first, which is why the message on the ballroom mirror (see below) is so critically important.

on a cellphone. The psychic turbulence created by the ghosts and the residue daemon is interfering with all telecommunications. (Any character with psychic abilities intuitively senses this, and **Aura Reading** perceives a seething, murky background all over the house.) The phone still gives a dial tone and the sound of ringing, but upon connection, the character can hear only a static hiss, with occasional snatches of metallic-sounding dialogue.

Whispers in the Dark: If the characters take the time to listen hard to the voices, they can make out some coherent phrases. Again, these are echoes of the videotape, which has effectively become a charged talisman, sealing the terror of eight people's deaths into a recording medium.

The phrases, all delivered in a Czech accent (as a one-point **Social Sciences** spend reveals) are:

'Do it again, she's still alive.'
'How did he want this one done?'
'Shit, it's stuck.'

Trying To Escape

The characters may just try to make a break for it. Aside from the PCs' Risk Factors, there are two major obstacles to this.

The first is Michaela, who won't leave willingly. She wants to, but she is totally convinced she will die if she leaves the house. She's seen the vague form of the residue daemon out there, and she has an inkling of what it wants. If the players are determined to get her out, they'll have to take drastic measures such as knocking her unconscious.

Secondly, the residue daemon isn't about to let them leave. Whether they try to flee on foot or in a vehicle, it pursues them and catches them easily. (Try not to reveal the creature in full if you can possibly help it. A quick flash of something huge in the headlights, or even just a noise followed by a tremendous impact, is much more effective.) Player-owned vehicles will be smashed from the road and rendered impossible to drive, while characters silly enough to try to flee on foot will simply be snatched up and devoured. The Games Master should give characters a chance to make it back to the house, however. There's nothing like an *Evil Dead* style shaky-cam sprint through trees to put the wind up a character.

Bear in mind that the residue daemon can manifest anywhere in its designated territory. Even if the players have encountered it in the woods to the south a moment before, it can surface in the lake to the northwest immediately afterwards.

The First Night

Once the players have found Michaela and absorbed the basic facts of the situation, a lull will probably set in – the proverbial calm before the storm. Before it is fully dark, there won't be any supernatural manifestations, and the scariest thing to have happened so far will have been Michaela's ravings and possibly the voices on the phone.

After dark, the ghosts should begin to appear in earnest. Whenever a player is in a suitable area for one of the ghosts to appear (and ideally when alone), they should begin to see them. At first, the ghosts will appear only for an instant, though this is still enough to cause **Stability** loss. As soon as the character can no longer see the ghost, it vanishes. Once the characters have seen all of the different ghosts at least once, they should become more tenacious, staying for longer periods before moving out of sight. (The characters are becoming attuned to the psychic dimension of events at the house.)

The following are suitable shock moments for the first glimpse of each ghost.

Mary Mumford – reflected in the bathroom mirror, standing behind the character.

Marty Isaacsohn – sitting in the swivel chair in the living room, facing away from the character, as if he were a living person. He swivels around to face them, and the character sees his gaping grin and empty eye sockets.

Billie Walker – crawling outside the large windows on the ground floor, scraping at the glass with her broken fingers, or crawling crab-like down the stairs.

Cynthia and Maxwell Grant – standing in the distance by the lake shore, unmoving, or sitting on the back seat of a vehicle, reflected in the rear view mirror.

Charlie Masters – pacing back and forth across the cellar floor, in the flickering light of a failing tube.

The Thing on the Threshold

The group's first encounter with the residue daemon should come in the middle of the first night. They will only encounter it during the day if they attempt to flee within a few hours of arrival, which shouldn't happen.

They first become aware of the daemon as it paces around the house. There is a sound of heavy footfalls, as if something gigantic were approaching, then a great rasp of breath. The daemon passes by upper windows, too huge to be seen clearly. If it comes close to where one or more of the players are, it pauses, as if it can sense them hiding inside.

The further inside the house they are, the safer they are. If a player is anywhere close to the outside wall, the residue daemon will smash through a window or outside door with one of its vast claws, and grope around inside trying to catch its prey. It is too large (just) to fit through the gap, but the players won't know that. If the daemon doesn't manage to snatch up a character, it will stomp back out into the woods.

Trying To Escape Again

The players may well make further attempts to leave. To encourage them to do this, there are two potential

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escape routes worked into the adventure. (This is just to give them false hope – it's a horror scenario, after all, and attempts to flee in horror films before the final act are always disastrous!) They can either opt to row across the lake and reach the far shore, or get the jeep in the old stables working and just drive like hell.

The escape by boat scenario is covered in **Area 4, The Lake and Boat House**. They have an outside chance of escape here if they are lucky, but the boat cannot take more than three, so some of the group will still be left behind when Duffy comes home.

To attempt escape by jeep, they first have to get the old rattletrap working at all; see **Area 9, The Old Stables**. Then they have to hope that their repairs last long enough for them to drive all the way out of the woods. As soon as the jeep shudders to a halt (assuming they don't manage to keep it running), everyone will hear the sound of the residue daemon clawing its way up through the bracken very close by. If Duffy has been dealt with, then the players should be allowed to escape, but if he hasn't yet made his appearance or is still at large, then they should have to flee back to the house.

Jack Duffy's Return

No matter what order the players uncover the clues in, they should eventually discover the video; see **Area 22, The Study**. At that point, as if by some psychic cue, Duffy calls his daughter to tell her the good news: he's coming home, and what's more, he's nearly there. This has to happen before the players watch the video, so they have plenty of time to dread his arrival.

Duffy's plan is simple. As soon as he realizes the player characters are here, he tries to find out what they know. He isn't stupid, and will immediately pick up on any residual tension (not to mention noticing giveaway details like smashed windows or broken furniture). From there on in, it's the player characters or him. They know too much. They have to die.

Duffy has a shotgun in his car, but if he can't easily reach that, he will go round to the woodpile and get the hatchet. Then he comes for the players one by one.

If the players can successfully draw Duffy out into the

woods or the lake, then the residue daemon will come for *him*, leaving the players free to escape.

The Seven Ghosts

There are seven ghosts haunting the house. Psychic characters can sense when they are near, and characters with the **Aura Reading** ability can see them (as vague, vaporous forms with no bodily detail) even when they are not visible to others. These forms do *not* prompt a **Stability** test, as they are too vague, and psychics are used to seeing (or imagining) such figures.

However, a character with **Aura Reading** can choose to spend a point from her **Aura Reading** pool to concentrate and see the ghost clearly. This can cause problems with rapid **Stability** loss...

Six of the ghosts are relatively benign, and only want the truth about their deaths to be known so they can rest. They will terrify the characters, but when this is deliberate it is only done to keep them active and intent on finding out what happened. The last is the spirit of a ruthless assassin, who was killed unexpectedly when the massacre began. He is actively hostile and will use poltergeist-like abilities to kill the characters off one by one as best he can.

Ghosts and Clues: Each ghost presents the person as they were at the moment of their death, or shortly after. This means that the ghost itself *is* a clue. To solve the mystery of what happened at Crook End, the players must work backwards from the mutilations of the ghosts and the other clues that they may find about the house. They may also have the opportunity to use their Investigative Abilities in reference to a ghostly manifestation, including some Interpersonal Abilities.

A Note On Communication: In accordance with horror film tradition, the ghosts are unable to communicate verbally with the characters beyond the occasional one or two syllable word, always spelled out via some convenient medium rather than spoken aloud. (The one exception is Marty Isaacsohn, for which see below.) If they were able to communicate, they'd simply tell the characters what happened and where the bodies now are.

If the players are especially daring, they may try a séance, Ouija board or some similar means of contacting the dead. This is another horror film staple, after all. A psychic character could also use the **Messenger** ability



to attempt contact. In this case, the ghosts should spell out some of their first names, along with key words like 'murder', 'blood', 'burning', 'cement' and 'guns'. Just as the séance, seems to be going somewhere, the room will turn freezing cold. The spirit of Steffan Maczka will then take over, blocking any further communication, and start to fling the furniture around.

Mary Mumford

Ghostly Image: Mary is a sunken-eyed figure in a white dress, with wet, straggly black hair, now about fifty-five. One of the teeth in her lower jaw is clearly gold. She appears behind you in mirrors, but is not there in the room when you turn around to look.

Clue To Death: Her hair is wet, but her body is dry. She keeps making retching motions, as if she were croaking like a frog, or about to be sick. This alludes to the manner of her death; she was drowned in the lavatory bowl and still haunts that area. Anyone coming within five feet of her notices that the teeth in her upper jaw are

missing; **Pathology** or **Streetwise** notices that they are broken, leaving jagged stumps behind. This was from where her head smashed against the lavatory bowl.

If she manifests, she leaves faint ashy footprints behind, a reference to her ultimate destruction in the incinerator. Psychic characters also smell smoke and a faint smell of roses when she is nearby.

Backstory: Mary was Jack Duffy's first wife. She cheated on him with Charlie Masters, Duffy's former best friend and partner, and humiliated him into the bargain; the two of them took multiple pictures of their bedroom romps, which circulated the London underworld for two weeks before Duffy found out what was going on. He came home with an armful of red roses expecting to find his wife there with his dinner ready, and found an empty house, with nothing left but a dozen sordid pictures pinned on the kitchen notice board. His pride was shattered, and he swore Mary and Charlie would one day pay for what they'd done.

Fate: Mary's body was put into the chipper and then the mess was incinerated. Her ashes were spread all over the rose bed, a deliberate irony. The only identifiable part left of her is the gold tooth, now a deformed little nub glinting up from the ashes in the incinerator.

Relevant Clues: Straggly Black Hair (16), Framed Wedding Picture (9), Chipped Lavatory Bowl (16), Ashes to Ashes (7), Gold Tooth (6), Sordid Pictures (22), Nostalgic Photographs (22), Dead Roses (22)

Applicable Abilities: A player who is brave enough to talk to her can try to use **Negotiation** to find out what Mary wants. (This must, of course, be appropriately roleplayed.) Her response is to ululate a low, terrifying 'aaaa, aaaa' while making retching motions, and then suddenly to hold her hand up to the character, gripping and twisting at her ring finger as if she were trying to pull it off. She's trying to communicate Duffy's identity, but all her shattered mind can do is remember pulling off her wedding ring. She then fades away into dust.

Charlie Masters

Ghostly Image: Charlie is a short, tubby man, who died wearing full evening dress.

Clue to Death: All there is left of him above the neck is a lower jaw, where his tongue flops among stray teeth like a red eel. He took automatic sidearm fire in the face,

removing almost all of his head.

Background: Charlie and Jack Duffy were like brothers, sharing money, booze and women freely. They ran racket after racket in their home city in the 1970s, intimidating whole streets full of shopkeepers into paying protection money. Jack was the bookkeeper, the polite one; Charlie was the hatchet man, standing behind Jack and idly tapping half a pool cue in his palm.

Eventually, one woman came between them: Jack's wife, Mary. Charlie couldn't keep his hands off her. The friendship ended very messily, as did the marriage. When Charlie received a letter from Jack, offering a share in his good fortune and a chance to be friends again after all this time, Charlie was pleased but suspicious. He brought his revolver along just in case.

Fate: When the gunmen broke in, Charlie shot their leader, Steffan Maczka, in the face. He was promptly shot himself, and his body now lies embedded in cement in the cellar.

Relevant Clues: Framed Wedding Picture (9), Sordid Pictures (22), Bullet Holes (14), Pine Stench (14), No Carpet (14), Carpet Shreds (6), Broken Window (3, 14)

Applicable Abilities: Charlie can't communicate much, what with his head mostly being gone. He stumbles around waving his hands in front of him, trying to grab hold of things. He can, however, hear what is being said. He responds especially violently to **Intimidation** attempts, blundering after whoever is threatening him. If anyone thinks to use **Impersonation** to do an impression of Jack Duffy's voice, he seems to fly into a psychotic rage, making hacking, stabbing motions, the wet red tongue lashing in rage.

Cynthia and Maxwell Grant

Ghostly Image: These two are little more than charred skeletons, one a little taller than the other, with a few tenacious scraps of blackened meat clinging to the bone.

Clue To Death: A fetid steam rises from them, the result of their quenching in the lake, and the bones of their lower legs are bedraggled with weeds.

Background: The Grants were neighbours of Duffy's shortly after Michaela was born. They had an aging whippet dog which they insisted on

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walking past Duffy's gate, where it would predictably evacuate its bowels. Duffy hated it, and when one day it began to bark through his pounding hangover, he decided enough was enough. He fetched his shotgun and shot the dog, but botched the job and didn't manage to kill it outright. As the dog howled in agony, Duffy bludgeoned it to death with a spade. Despite Duffy's claims that the dog had menaced his daughter, the Grants successfully prosecuted Grant and had him imprisoned (again) for animal cruelty.

Fate: The Grants fled as far as their BMW, but it was riddled with automatic gunfire and burst into flames. The assassins dumped it in the lake, burned bodies and all.

Relevant Clues: Burnt Patch (3), Dragging Trail (3), Sunken Car (4), Bullet Casings (3), Newspaper Clipping (9), Michaela's Schoolbook (9)

Applicable Abilities: **Natural History** or **Investigative Procedure** identify the animated, ghostly remains as having spent time underwater.

Marty Isaacsohn

Ghostly Image: Marty was dressed in a tweed suit when he died. His thin silvery hair has been combed over the top of his head. He grins in a horse-like rictus of yellow teeth.

Clue To Death: His shirtfront has been ripped open, and shows multiple red burn marks among the tattoos, left by the hot poker. His lower body is crisscrossed with parallel double cuts, about a quarter of an inch apart. When he raises his head or turns around to look at you, you see he has no eyes, only seared, empty sockets. Ropes dangle from his wrists, from where he was tied to the chair.

Background: Marty was the Mr. Big in the prison where Jack spent ten years of his life. Now an old man, he still has muscles under his sagging skin, smudged all over with faded blue tattoos. Marty was the man to deal with if you wanted anything. He was exact, formal, and never once gave Jack an ounce of compassion or an inch of manoeuvring room. If Jack was late with his payments, he got gashed. Jack's body still has multiple 'tram line' scars, the marks left by that famous prison weapon consisting of two razor blades melted into a toothbrush; the players will have noticed one such scar on his face when they visited last.

Crook's End

Fate: Marty was tied to a chair and tortured with a red-hot poker, in retribution for the treatment Jack Duffy got in prison all those years ago. When the assassins became overzealous and burned Marty's eyes out, he died of a heart attack.

Relevant Clues: Tram Lines (Remembering Duffy), Scuffed Chair (13), Burned Rope (13), Old Poker (13), Melted Toothbrushes (10)

Applicable Abilities: Anyone who encounters Marty's ghost or examines his body and calls upon the **Streetwise** ability can identify his tattoos as having been done in prison, indicating a long time spent behind bars. They have the distinctive look that only tattoos done with rudimentary equipment, such as a needle and burnt thread, can have. The parallel double cuts are also prison-related, of course. Jack Duffy, following his exacting revenge, made himself a toothbrush-and-razors prison shiv in the outbuilding and had the assassins use it on Marty.

Marty, being an ex-con, also responds to **Cop Talk** and **Interrogation**. As he has no eyes, he can't properly see who is speaking to him, so the undead remnants of his mind go into 'defensive prisoner' mode. He will converse with the players, speaking in a hoarse, hollow voice, but will be convinced that he is somehow in a police cell somewhere, being quizzed about one of his many crimes. If the players bring up the subject of Jack Duffy, Marty laughs hoarsely and calls him 'that little shit', claiming he was nothing but a petty criminal and all-round prison bitch to boot.

Billie Walker

Ghostly Image: Billie is a lanky woman of about nineteen dressed in a cream-coloured ballgown, her dark hair coming loose from where it was pinned up earlier in the evening. Her feet are bare.

Clue To Death: Her body has been broken by the wheels of the assassin's vehicle. She can only crawl across the floor. As she moves, dragging herself like a half-crushed spider, her splintered bones grate and grind together. The jagged end of a femur pokes out from the ruined flesh of her leg. There are tyre marks on her face.

Billie cannot easily raise her head. When she does, it becomes horribly obvious that her jaw is smashed out of alignment.

Background: Jack Duffy became obsessed with Billie three years ago after giving her a lift to a gig. She saw him as a provider figure and experienced older man, while he saw her as a chance to reaffirm his manhood as he grew older. When she fell pregnant, he demanded she keep the child, and became violently possessive. She turned her back on him, successfully obtaining an abortion and, later, a restraining order.

Billie is the only one of the guests that Michaela has met while they were alive. They didn't get on well. Michaela only knows that Billie was her father's girlfriend for a while, before they had a major falling out. It's highly likely that Michaela will see Billie crawling brokenly about outside the windows. If Michaela sees Billie's face, she will screech in horrified recognition and then faint dead away.

Fate: Billie slipped her bonds and made a run for it while the assassins were busy with Marty Isaacsohn. She tossed her impractical shoes to one side (they now lie, sodden, under a hedge) and fled down the driveway. She might have made it to safety if one of the assassins hadn't seen her through the living room window. He drove after her and simply rammed the car into her, then reversed back over her to ensure she was dead.

Clues: Blood on the Tracks (3), Billie's Letter (19), Restraining Order (19), Faded Valentine (19), Discarded Shoes (3)

Applicable Abilities: Normally, Billie's scuttling form will keep its distance, moaning at the players from outside the windows. However, Billie responds to **Reassurance**, and (dreadful though the prospect is) to **Flirting**. In life, she had an insatiable hunger for affection. If she is shown kindness with either of these abilities, she latches on to the character responsible and begins to follow them around. Most of the time she will not be manifest, but when the character is asleep or resting, she will crawl up his or her body and try to cling with cold arms. Any character who allows him/herself to be embraced by Billie (and doesn't recoil) brings a measure of peace to her troubled spirit. The character regains 1d6 **Stability** and thenceforth makes **Stability** tests at -1 difficulty when the threat to **Stability** is a ghost of any kind. Billie doesn't manifest again until Jack Duffy is back in the house.

Sequence of the Massacre

The sequence of events on the night of the murders, as depicted in the video, is as follows:

One of the assassins, dressed in smart evening wear, admits the guests and has them assemble in the grand dining room. He provides them with champagne and explains that their host will be with them in a moment; in the meantime, here's a videotape to watch on the TV that has been wheeled in for the purpose. He then leaves, quietly locking the door behind him.

The tape begins to play. On the screen, a smiling Jack Duffy raises a glass to the guests, welcoming each of them by name and apologising for not being able to make it tonight. He says he has a little surprise planned for them, for old time's sake, and he looks forward to watching their reaction. He then starts to laugh.

The three other assassins, led by the grinning Steffan Maczka, enter the room through the patio doors, and there is pandemonium. People scream and Billie Walker immediately tries to hide under the table.

Steffan Maczka looses a round of bullets from his Skorpion machine pistol into the ceiling, bringing down plaster dust, and shouts for everyone to get on the floor. Mary Mumford and Marty Isaacsohn join Billie Walker on the floor, but Charlie Masters takes out his revolver and shoots Steffan through the head. In a reflexive spasm, another of the assassins shoots Charlie in the face, blowing his head to pieces. His body slumps across the table. There are shouts, screams and cursing. One of the assassins yells that's it, it's fucked up, the whole thing is fucked up.

Maxwell Grant makes a run for it through the side door, dragging Cynthia after him. One of the assassins remains in the ballroom to keep watch on Marty, Mary and Billie, who are huddling under the table, while the other two assassins (including the cameraman) chase after the Grant couple. Maxwell and Cynthia make it as far as their car and start the ignition, just as a gunman unloads his clip into the back of it. The car bursts into flames on the spot, and the screaming Grants are rapidly burned alive.

The cameraman is now saying 'fuck' repeatedly. They leave the car to burn itself out, as there is nothing else they can do.

Back in the ballroom, the survivors are bound hand and foot. They are taken out and killed one by one, with the cameraman documenting it all. Furious at the death of Steffan, the assassins make sure the deaths are appropriate and agonizing. Mary is hauled upstairs and drowned in the lavatory, screaming and begging for mercy as she gurgles and spits. Next, Marty is taken up to the living room, tied to a chair and tortured with a hot poker. The assassins also give him a few gashes with the toothbrush-and-razor, as instructed.

While this is going on, Billie (off camera) has slipped her rope bonds and has sneaked out of the house. One of the assassins looks out of the window and notices her running away, swears and runs down to their four-by-four. He catches up with her and runs her over with a horribly final crunching noise, then backs over her for good measure.

All the guests are now dead, along with one assassin. The cameraman takes some footage of Billie's inert, broken corpse, then says 'We got it all. That'll do. We got it all. Fuckers.'

Before driving off, the assassins make a dispirited attempt to clean up. They keep to their instructions as best they can. Mary's body is fed into the chipper and then incinerated. The burned-out shell of the Grants' car, still sizzling, is shoved into the lake along with their burned bodies. The corpses of Billie Walker, Charlie Masters, Marty Isaacsohn and Steffan Maczka are laid alongside one another in the cellar and covered with a foot of hastily mixed cement, which (unknown to the assassins) will not dry properly and will be easy to smash...

Steffan Maczka

Ghostly Image: He doesn't manifest visibly, and his presence can only be detected by psychic senses or when he begins to throw things around. Owing to his massive strength of will, Steffan's ghost is now a furious presence, hindering the efforts of the other ghosts and capable of moving physical objects. He uses this telekinetic power to throw objects, such as kitchen knives or statues, and to cause accidents, such as by knocking the loft ladder out from under a person climbing up it.

For game purposes, Steffan can manifest a **Scuffling** pool of 10 once every hour. He cannot be hurt, only avoided. If his body is found, he can no longer attack the players. Steffan's ghost is thus the main adversary and physical threat for the first phase of the adventure.

Background: Maczka (pronounced *moonch-ka*) was a Czech assassin, a horrible piece of work who relished the misery he caused to others. Greed was his primary motivation. When Duffy's agent contacted him about the job, he immediately recognised how much money could be made from it, and haggled for more than twice the original sum. He was planning to retire on the proceeds.

Fate: Maczka was shot through the head within seconds of the massacre's beginning by Charlie Masters, who had suspected something might go down and brought his revolver with him. The other assassins dumped his body in the cellar rather than bring it with them.

Outdoor Locations

1. The Woods

Crook's End is a long way from the nearest village. The driveway leading up to the house is half a mile long. It threads through woods that were green and luscious last time the characters were here. Now they look like a thick tangle of shadows.

Unless the PCs specifically set out to arrive at a different time, it's late afternoon when they arrive. As it's winter, the sky is already darkening. There is an almost palpable sense of menace in the air. Any psychic characters feel their skin begin to crawl, as if they were being warned to turn around and run.

2. The Wrecked Van

Off to the left side of the road, something white shows through the trees – an abandoned car, perhaps? If the players stop to investigate, they find it is a transit van turned on its side and leaning against a tree, apparently dragged off the road, judging by the deep rut it has left behind it. There are tools of the pool cleaner's trade in the back, but no sign of any occupant.

The side of the van has been staved in as if from a massive blow, but this isn't readily apparent unless the players push it back down to a horizontal position again. Where the blow landed, there are smears of blood, oozings from the residue daemon (though they look like a human being has been crushed there.)

3. The Driveway and Outer Courtyard

The gravel-lined driveway eventually reaches an iron gate between two brick pedestals, each one topped with a cement lion. The gate stands ajar, as Michaela pulled it mostly to when she passed. Someone will have to get out and open it the rest of the way.

Blood on the Tracks (C): Just past the gate, the gravel path is churned up, as if a heavy vehicle came to a sudden stop. There are gory stains still on the gravel, despite the rain. It looks as if a lot of blood was shed on to the ground here. This is the place where Billie Walker was crushed to death.

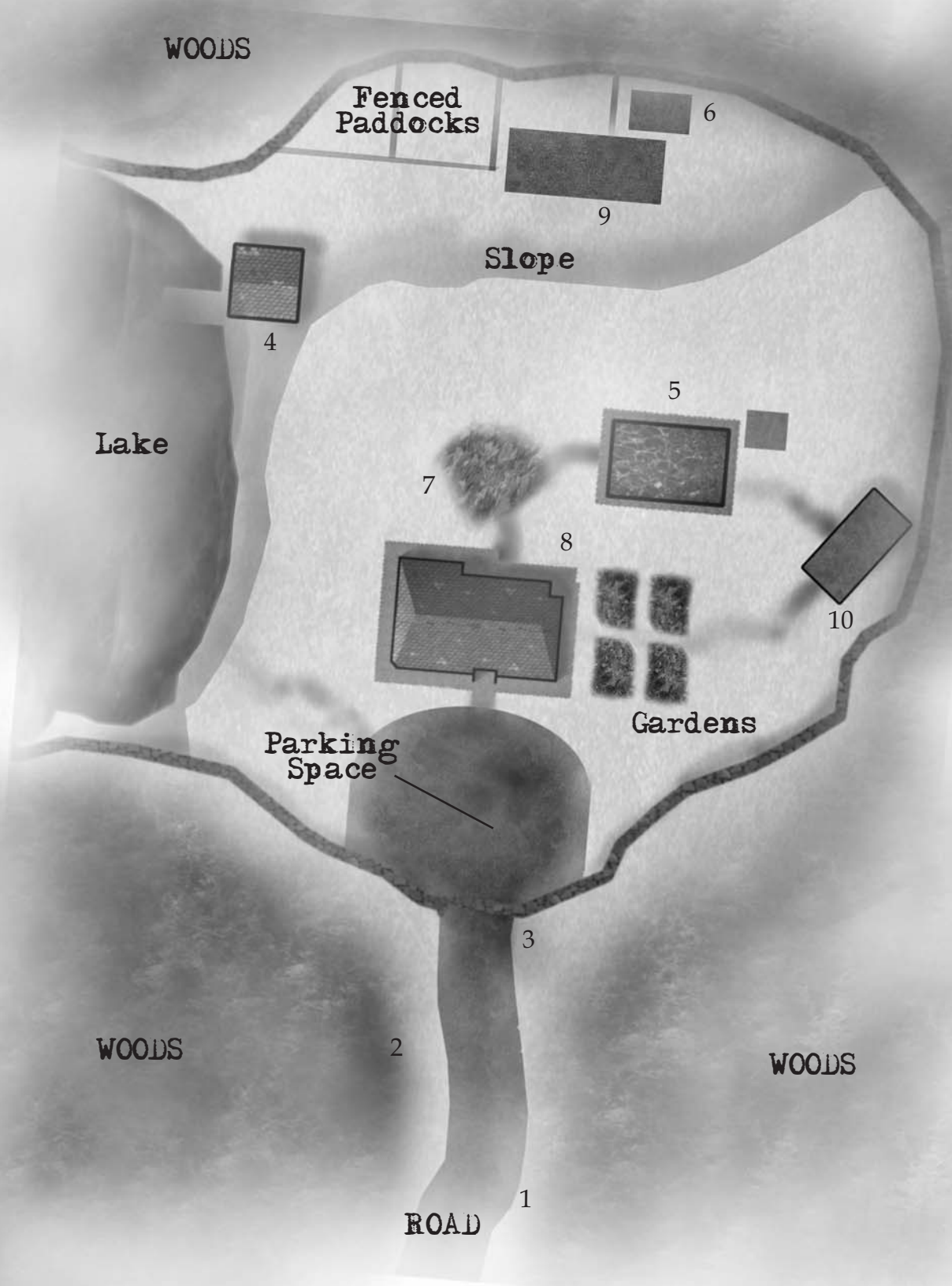
Beyond the gate is a broad area in front of the house, where cars would be parked. It's currently empty; Michaela took a taxi here. The house looms over the approaching players, all of the windows dark.

Burnt Patch (C): Roughly half way between the house and the gate is a blackened patch of gravel, where the Grants' car burned with them in it. The assassins have tried to cover this up by raking the gravel back and forth over it, but haven't been very successful.

Streetwise or **Chemistry**, or any relevant experience with cars, identify this as the kind of patch a burning car would leave behind.

Dragging Trail: The assassins dragged the car to the lake and pushed it in. It was a lot easier to conceal the drag marks than the burning, but they still haven't managed to hide the trail completely. A character who makes a thorough, careful examination of the burned area *with plenty of light to see by* can discern a trail leading in the direction of the lake.

Crook's End



Bullet Casings: A character who takes the trouble to examine the region between the burned patch and the front of the house finds two spent casings lying at the foot of the steps. (The assassins removed most of their dropped casings, but missed clearing these up in their haste.)

Investigative Procedure identifies these as nine-millimeter casings of the sort that would be expelled from a submachine gun such as an Uzi or Skorpion vz-61.

Broken Window: If the characters approach the house from the garden side, they notice that there is a smashed window by the patio doors (see area 14). Examination of the broken glass residue reveals fragments of bone and hair and gobbets of blood amongst the shards. This is from Steffan Maczka's skull, when Charlie Masters shot him.

Investigative Procedure identifies this as spatter from a gunshot wound at close range. The hair still clinging to the fragments of scalp is black and curly.

Discarded Shoes: A pair of cream-colored fashionable shoes with fairly high heels has been flung into the bushes. Examination reveals there is nothing wrong with them. They've been lying here for at least a few days, judging by how sodden they are. These were Billie Walker's shoes, taken off so she could run up the driveway and escape.

4. The Lake and Boat House

The lake waters are black as a pint of stout, and the lopsided boat house that stands next to them has seen better days. Out in the lake's center is a reedy island, with a tiny hut-like structure visible through the reeds. (This is a long-abandoned duck house, with nothing unusual about it.) There is an old rowboat halfway up the bank, turned turtle. It's impossible to tell whether it's seaworthy from a quick inspection.

The players may try to use the boat as an escape route. It will hold no more than three, and will begin to fill with water seconds after being pushed off. If it is constantly bailed out, it *may* make it to the far shore, which is outside the residue daemon's territory. If the adventure is in its closing stages, the GM may choose to let some characters escape and fetch help.

However, if it is still early days, there are two supernatural menaces that should get the players

rowing back to shore as fast as they can. Each should be heralded by a few sinister bubbles bursting on the lake surface, followed by a few more, followed by a flurry. The skeletons of Cynthia and Maxwell can come surging up from beneath, clutching at the players' faces with bony fingers dripping with black mud; or if something still more terrifying is needed, the residue daemon itself can burst up from the lake, probably overturning the boat.

Dragging Trail: The drag marks from the Masters' burnt-out BMW end here.

Sunken Car: It isn't easy to see below the water's surface, but any character who makes a deliberate inspection can just make out the metal framework of the car. To drag it out of the lake, the characters will need to use a sturdy vehicle such as the jeep in the old stables (see 9). If it is dragged out, the characters can find numerous bullet holes in the back and several over the gas tank. (Bullets don't make cars explode all that often, but this is a cinematic genre!)

The remains of Cynthia and Maxwell Grant lie sprawled in the front seats. It's obvious how they died. If the characters have the stomach for a search, they can find the remains of Cynthia's jewellery and Maxwell's gold watch, by which they can be identified. Maxwell's watch has his initials stamped on the inside.

5. The Pool

The swimming pool has a plastic cover over it for the winter, but this has been torn aside by the residue daemon, which dragged the pool boy's corpse here for reasons best known to itself, but probably having to do with some vestigial grasp of irony. His remains now lie under the scummy water, which is also filled with leaves, insects and debris.

The daemon hasn't left much to identify him with. Anything that can be ripped off and chewed, has been. Any players wanting to go to the trouble of investigating can dredge up some vile, recognizably human body parts.

6. The Incinerator Shed (and hosed-down chipping machine)

The door to this long shed has a padlock and clasp. The padlock shows no sign of having been forced, which

smart characters will realize means that it was either left unlocked by accident, or the house's owner *meant* for people to come in while he was away.

Inside, the place is gloomy and smells of engine oil and burnt timber. Dusty, spiderwebbed windows let in a feeble light during daylight, and after dark a single bulb screwed into an overhead beam does duty. At one end of the shed is an incinerator, its chimney poking through the shed roof, and at the other is a chipping machine. They have obviously been used recently, as the hopper on the chipping machine and the door on the incinerator have both been left open.

Carpet Shreds: When the assassins realized how much of Charlie Masters' blood had spilled on to the dining room carpet, they knew it would have to be destroyed. They rolled it up and dragged it down here. Something so huge wouldn't burn all at once, so they fed it into the chipping machine. Some shreds of carpet, still recognizable as such, lie against the sides of the room, where any character who searches will find them. **Natural History**, **Chemistry** or **Investigative Procedure** identify the dark stains on the shredded carpet as blood.

Gold Tooth (C): A character who looks around inside the incinerator finds a small amount of fine, greasy gray ash, with bits of solid clinker in it. Someone has obviously raked it out recently. However, in the darkness something gleams yellow. It's a seared human tooth, with globules of molten gold clinging to it. This, of course, belonged to Mary Mumford.

A one-point **Chemistry**, **Science** or **Investigative Procedure** spend reveals that whoever incinerated human remains here did not take enough time to ensure that all of the cadaver had been reduced to ash. Teeth take longer than other body parts to burn.

Straggly Black Hair: There are a few long, straggly black hairs caught in the door clasp. When Mary's body was carried through, these hairs snagged on the clasp and were pulled out.

7. The Rose Garden

The roses in this part of the garden seem to be flourishing despite the cold weather. The garden seems to have been dug over quite recently.

Ashes to Ashes (C): Examination of the rose bed

reveals that ash has been shoveled over them. This isn't at all uncommon, as many gardeners will use ash to encourage rose growth. However, tiny fragments of hard stuff can be found among the ashes, which **Natural History** or **Investigative Procedure** identify as chips of scorched bone, possibly animal, possibly human. The **Chemistry** ability can confirm that the bone was seared in an incinerator, but not for quite long enough to reduce it completely to ash.

8. The Woodpile

This is a small area in the corner of two walls, shielded from the rain by an extended section of roof. There is a small stack of chopped wood here, enough to keep a fire going for around eight hours. Propped against a trestle are a saw and a hatchet. If the players don't pick the hatchet up themselves, then Jack Duffy goes to get it when he arrives at the house, so he can hack his way through any locked doors that stand in his path. It's good and sharp, and gives a +1 **Scuffling** damage modifier.

9. The Old Stables

This broad barn-like building is made from brick, with a corrugated iron roof. It was obviously used to stable horses once, but now seems to be a dumping ground for all manner of junk. There are several cardboard boxes here, filled with what seem to be the contents of a house, not yet moved in. Black marker pen scrawls on their sides read BEDROOM, KITCHEN and so on. These boxes contain many of Duffy's old effects, which he hasn't moved into the main house yet.

At the southern end of the stables is a jeep, left behind by the former owner and clearly not driven in years. Miraculously, the keys are still in the ignition. Unfortunately, the jeep doesn't start if the ignition is turned. There's no battery, and many of the parts are corroded. It takes three successive **Mechanics** tests (difficulty 4) over a period of 3 hours to get the jeep roadworthy again. The players will also have to salvage a battery from some other vehicle, such as the pool boy's smashed-up van.

Once the jeep has started, it will stay working for about fifteen minutes before beginning to lose power and make unhealthy noises. A **Mechanics** test (difficulty 5) is needed to fix it, after which it will stay working for another fifteen minutes before the same thing happens, this time requiring a **Mechanics** test (difficulty 6), and so on.

Anyone rooting through the boxes of junk finds the following:

Framed Wedding Picture: This is a blotchy, discolored photo of a much younger Jack Duffy, Charlie Masters and Mary Mumford, evidently taken at Jack and Mary's wedding. Charlie is evidently best man, judging by his lapel flower and smirk. Although Michaela has never met Mary and doesn't recognize her ghost, she remembers this picture, and can identify it as 'Dad and his first wife.'

Michaela's Schoolbook: This exercise book dates from when Michaela was seven years old, and contains a lengthy account of how the neighbors' dog scared her and made her cry. A **Social Sciences** or **Bullshit Detector** spend reveals that there is something strangely false about this, as if the child were making it up. (She was, in fact, writing it at her father's prompting, not because she was especially upset.)

If the players think to ask Michaela about this incident, she doesn't remember it at all. It takes **Reassurance** to get her to talk about it. She only remembers a time when Daddy had to go away for a while because of something bad the neighbors did, and it made her sad. He never explained to her what it was.

Newspaper Clipping (C): Tucked in with this book is a clipping from a local newspaper, describing Duffy's prosecution for animal cruelty; the headline reads DOG KILLER JAILED. The article explains how Duffy shot the dog, failed to kill it, then bludgeoned it to death with a shovel before tossing it over the Grants' fence. There is a picture of Cynthia and Maxwell Grant looking stony-faced alongside a picture of the whippet, 'Basil', while it was alive. Someone has underlined their names in red pen wherever they appear in the article.

A one-point **Law** spend recalls the case. Duffy served three years for cruelty to an animal. The case was significant, because the defense lawyer tried to argue that Duffy had been acting under diminished responsibility because of perceived danger to his daughter. The prosecutor, however, successfully convinced the jury that Duffy was completely lacking in human compassion, and went out of his way to cause the dog suffering as an act of revenge. (The character's memory is jogged by the article; they may have met Duffy before, but didn't remember the incident.)

10. The Outbuilding

This is another shed-like structure, clearly older than the stables and in worse condition. The former occupant of Crook's End used it as a dumping ground for garden

tools and miscellaneous equipment. If the players root around in here, they can find the following potentially useful items:

- woodworking tools including hammer, nails and screws
- a full canister of gasoline
- a blowtorch
- a working chainsaw
- a lawnmower of the kind that can be sat on and driven about
- an old Ford van buried under piles of detritus, which looks on first glance as if it ought to be fixable, but is practically impossible to get running; a **Mechanics** test (difficulty 9) restores it to functionality, but anything less has no effect

Melted Toothbrushes: On a workbench in the far corner are several plastic toothbrushes, their ends melted to brown bubbly ruin, obviously by a blowtorch or something similar. They are all completely wrecked, so it's not at all clear why anyone would have been doing this.

However, a character with a **Streetwise** rating can surmise that someone might have been trying to make a prison shiv out of twin razorblades melted into a toothbrush handle, and sure enough, there is an opened box of razorblades among the clutter beneath the desk.

Indoor Locations

11. Main Hall

The hallway has a tiled floor, oak-paneled walls and a variety of historical prints hung upon them. To the right, a broad staircase gives access to the upper floor. An explosion of china fragments litters the tiles.

Beside the front door is a black lacquer table on which sit a reproduction antique telephone and a pile of unopened envelopes (see below). Two more envelopes lie on the mat just below the letter slot. These are **Joyce Pulley's Letter** and **Envelope With Keys**.

Shards of China (D):

The tiled floor is covered with a mess of blue china potshards, and the toppled plant stand nearby suggests that someone has tipped a vase over. This was Michaela, throwing the vase at one of the ghostly forms.

Stench (C): There is a smell of pine disinfectant in the air, which grows stronger as you approach the dining room. Everyone smells it as soon as they enter the room. This was left behind by the assassins, who used much more cleanser than necessary to clean up their mess.

Pile of Bills (D): Most of the envelopes are bills, addressed to Mr. J Duffy. They cover the electrical, water and gas amenities.

Burning Need Letter: There is also a letter from a company called *Burning Need*, thanking Mr. Duffy for his custom and providing a number to call in case of any problems with his purchase. There is no indication of who Burning Need are. A one-point **Bureaucracy** or **Science** spend, however, identifies them as a company that provides incinerator solutions to the medical, veterinary and forestry markets.

Letter from Joyce Pulley: This letter is handwritten and has not been opened. If the players decide to open and read it at any point:

Dear Mr. Duffy,

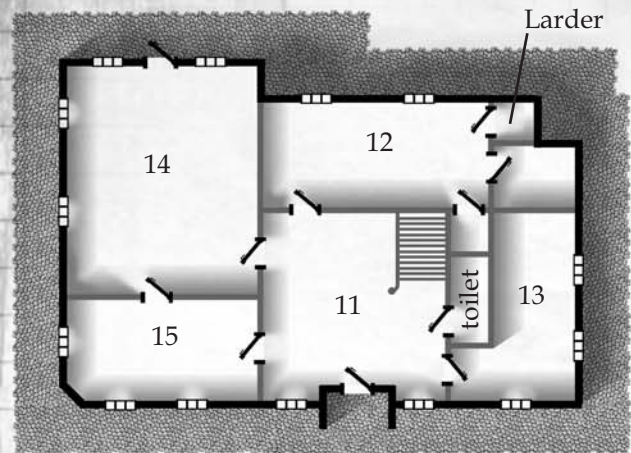
I congratulate you on your recent accidental wealth, and thank you for your invitation. However, I will not be attending your proposed soiree in celebration thereof.

I cannot imagine why you believed that after fifty years, I would have anything to say to you. Some bridges cannot, and should not, be mended. As for the suggestion that it might be 'to my advantage' to attend, I am not remotely interested in your money.

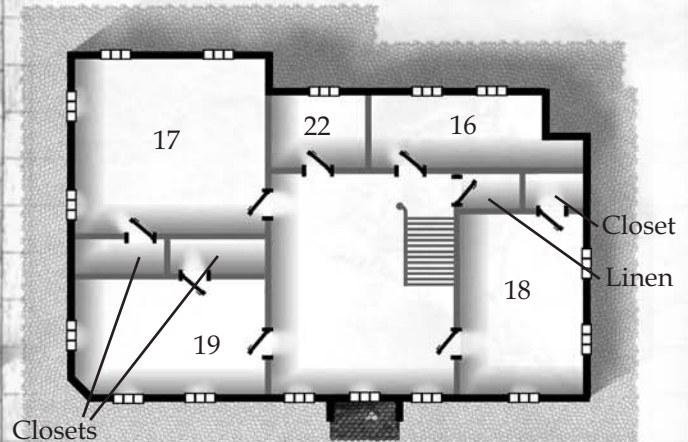
Your sad letter only serves to remind me how much I failed to teach you anything of life's true values.

Sincerely,
J. Pulley (Mrs).

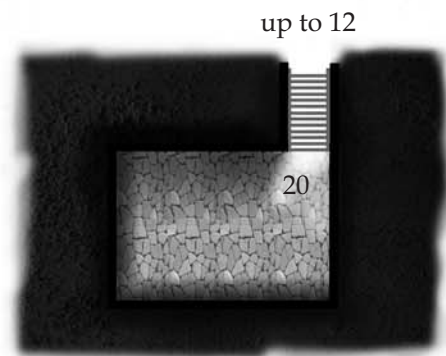
Crook's End



Ground Floor



First Floor



Cellar

Crook's End

Envelope with Keys (C): This envelope is lumpy, obviously containing a bunch of keys. Someone has written TO MR DUFFEY (sic) on the front. The back of the envelope has the following message written on it:

Mr Duffey I am sorry but I can no longer continue as your cleaning lady. I am therefore returning your keys and wish you all the best. Lorna

PS Not for nothing I say this 2 you as a Christian but truley this is a bad house and it has a bad vibe and if you knew what I had seen here you would not be coming back neither

The keys inside the envelope allow the players to unlock (and lock) any door in the house, with the exception of the door to Duffy's study.

12. Kitchen

The kitchen is well stocked with tinned foods and a large fridge hums in the corner. However, someone has been living like a slob here. Dirty dishes are piled in the sink and judging by the empty jars, someone has been living off peanut butter sandwiches and instant coffee. (Michaela, of course.)

13. Living Room

This cozy room has a large stone fireplace, bookshelves lining the walls, and a desk with a round 'captain's chair' behind it. The floors are covered with throw rugs. The fireplace contains only gray ash now, but has been recently used. Enough firewood for a couple of hours' warmth is stacked up beside it.

A huge plasma-screen TV, complete with VCR, DVD player and assorted video games, occupies one corner. There is a shelf full of videotapes and DVDs above the TV.

Old Poker: The players find an old iron poker beside the fireplace. Not unusual in itself, but examination reveals a strange crusting around the tip. A one-point **Science, Investigative Procedure** or **Natural History** spend identifies it as a scorched mixture of blood and tissue.

Scuffed Chair: The captain's chair has some fresh scuff marks where the wood has splintered just under the arms. There are also gouges in the leather.

Investigative Procedure

interprets the former as the marks of ropes, and the latter as the marks of fingernails, digging into the chair leather as someone convulsed in agony.

Burned Rope: Some partially burned rope lies among the ashes of the fire. One piece still has a hefty knot tied in it. This is the rope that was used to bind Charlie Masters.

Duffy's Welcoming Video: Having found the empty VCR in the dining room (see below) the players may wonder what happened to the video that was in it. The assassins hadn't been given any clear instructions, so they shoved it among the assorted videos, thinking that Duffy would probably want to keep it as a souvenir and it was as good a place to hide it as any. The players can find it after a sustained search.

The video is short, and just shows a smirking Duffy raising a glass of champagne to his guests. He welcomes them all and apologizes to them for not being able to be here in person. They all, he says, have one thing in common, that being unfinished business:

'I'm glad you all could make it. I promised you that you'd get something to your advantage from joining me tonight, but I'm going to confess something now. I wasn't talking about money. And to be quite honest, what you'll be getting is more to *my* advantage.

'Mistakes were made in the past, as you all know, and things were said and done that gave cause for regret. However, I'm a rich man now, and that means I'm able to settle accounts that are long overdue. So, without further ado, here are some special surprise entertainers.

'Put on a good show for me, would you? This has been a long time coming.'

With that, the screen fades into darkness.

14. Dining Room

A grand table occupies the room, at a slightly skewed angle. There are seven places laid, with multiple knives, spoons and forks as if for a banquet of many courses, but there is no sign of any food. The place

settings are jostled, as if someone had moved the table. A sideboard runs along the wall, with a long mirror above it.

Standing on the sideboard is an open bottle of champagne; the glasses the guests used are set on various items of furniture around the room. At the end of the table is a TV and VCR combo unit on a wheeled stand. It is still plugged into the wall.

Empty VCR (C): The VCR doesn't have a cassette in it. Any character passing by notices this seemingly trivial little detail.

The Message On The Mirror (C): The first character to look at the great mirror in the dining room has a shocking surprise. Just for a second, he can see six figures thronged around him, smoky and vague, with empty eyes and something trailing from their hands. Next moment, they are gone, and the words FIND US appear on the mirror, smeared in some sort of stinking trail that looks like soot mixed with bacon fat. Then the mirror cracks with a sound like a gunshot. This little event prompts a 2-point **Stability** test.

This is, of course, the ghosts' message to the characters. They want to be found; that is, they want their bodies to be located, or as much of them as possible. This lets the players know that they have a chance to escape after all. Their course should now be clear, if they are brave enough to run it.

Pine Stench: The air in this room is eye-wateringly astringent. It is as if someone had doused the room and all the furniture in pine disinfectant. A quick sniff of the floor confirms that it has been soaked with the stuff. **Investigative Procedure** (in case it wasn't obvious) reveals that someone has been scrubbing hard here.

No Carpet: **Investigative Procedure** reveals that there was a carpet on the floor until recently, because of the dust patterns and scuff marks. There is now no carpet on the floor. Someone moved the table aside to take the carpet up and remove it.

Plaster Dust: There is a sprinkling of plaster dust on the table and the place settings. Checking the ceiling to find the source reveals a scatter of pockmarks high above, which prove on closer examination to be bullet holes.

Broken Window: See Area 3.

15. Games Room

This room is decorated with horrendous pseudo-mediaeval features: a shield, two crossed swords, and a long halberd. The paneling is so dark as to be almost black. A billiards table, dusty from disuse, is the room's main feature.

The heads of stuffed animals look glassily down from one wall, against which is a glass gun cabinet containing three hunting rifles and a shotgun. The key to the gun cabinet is on the bundle (see **Envelope with Keys**, Area 11). Ammunition for all of these can be found in a wooden drawer under the cabinet, also locked.

16. Bathroom

This spacious bathroom, tiled in ugly magnolia with floral stencils, is where Mary Mumford was drowned. It features an old-fashioned claw-foot bath and a large arched mirror above the sink. In the manner of British bathrooms, there is a lavatory in the same room.

Straggly Black Hair: The first time any character uses the sink or the bath to wash in (whichever is first to be used) they find a quantity of long black hair clogging up the plughole. If they pull it out, more comes with it, and more, and more... This is nothing but a side-effect of the haunting, but can be disturbing to find.

Chipped Lavatory Bowl: The edge of the lavatory basin is visibly chipped, as if something hard had been slammed into it. **Investigative Procedure** can suggest a possible explanation: that is where someone's teeth would strike if their head were shoved hard into the lavatory bowl.

17. Master Bedroom

This room reeks of mildew, cigarette smoke and stale wine. The ceiling is coming down in one of the corners, and ragged flaps of paper hang limp. The roof joists can be seen, and the dark space of the cellar beyond.

The room's main feature is a vast four-poster bed, the posts bare, the canopy long since removed. When the players first arrive, this is where Michaela is, huddled in a fetal position in the bed and clutching her mobile phone. Beside her in the bed is an overturned ashtray, the cigarette ends spilled into the covers. Numerous empty wine bottles litter the floor.

The players can hear Michaela whimpering inside. The door is initially locked, with the key in the keyhole on Michaela's side, so the players will either have to batter it down or push the key through and use one of the cleaner's keys from the entrance hall.

Michaela is a complete wreck, mentally and physically. Her eyes are hollow and have black bags beneath them. She hasn't had a bath in a week and has been living off red wine, toast and cigarettes. Use of the **Pathology** ability reveals that she's badly malnourished and probably hasn't eaten right for at least a week; use of **Social Sciences** reveals that she's suffering from a temporary breakdown, probably as the result of extreme trauma and consequent loss of sleep; use of **Streetwise** discerns that there are no track marks or other suggestions of drug use, and her symptoms fortunately *aren't* those of a drug casualty, but merely someone who's been drinking a lot of alcohol without enough food.

The players need to get her back on her feet before she'll be any use at all. This calls for **Reassurance**, the use of the **Shrink** ability if anyone has it, and enough practical compassion to make her a decent meal and run her a bath.

Michaela has now seen each of the ghosts at least once. She's now not sure of her own sanity – for all she knows, her brain is giving way. At first, she speaks in monosyllables, moans and whimpers. As the players start to see the ghosts too, her grip on reality reasserts itself and she becomes more coherent. Whatever is wrong with the house, it's not *her* who is to blame.

Some of Michaela's initial mumblings are effectively clues:

'Daddy's gone on holiday..' She repeats this twice over and starts to cry, as if it were horrible news. If the players use **Reassurance** to settle her down, she explains that when she found the house empty, she had a premonition that something terrible had happened and phoned him, but discovered that he was in the Bahamas. If the players check Michaela's phone, they discover that a call to a number listed as 'Dad' did indeed go out around seven days ago.

'I don't want to go out of the room!' To induce Michaela to leave the room at all, let alone come into the bathroom or eat something, the players must use **Negotiation**, or **Intimidation** if they are so inclined,

though the latter won't help her mental state. She won't say what she is so afraid of. If the players successfully persuade her to leave the room and cross the hallway, she eventually admits her fear that the 'man without a head' was waiting in the hallway to grab her. (This is a reference to Charlie Masters' ghost.)

'I've been having such horrible dreams... I can't remember them very clearly, but they were horrible, full of blood and screaming.' The players can try to help Michaela work through her dreams and recover key details. The Games Master can use a certain amount of poetic license here regarding which ability is most suitable for this. Use of **Occult Studies**, **Social Science** or the **Shrink** ability could all qualify as dream analysis, from the mystical, the psychological and the psychiatric perspectives respectively. Even **Flirting** could be used to put her at her ease, if the GM feels it appropriate.

In Michaela's first dream, she unlocks the front door to the house, and a great wave of blood washes over her. It has bones and skulls floating in it. She knows she has to find her father. As she tries to walk up the stairs, calling his name all the time, the bones and skulls knit together behind her into a red giant. She can't see it, but she knows it's there. She feels it grab her hair from behind. It drags her back down the stairs and into the deep pool of blood, where she begins to choke and drown.

In the second dream, it's her birthday and her father is trying to give her a big box with a ribbon on it. She doesn't want to open it, because she knows it's got a dead dog inside it. Her father killed the dog himself, and he's angry that she's so ungrateful. As she tries to push the box back to him yet again, her father slowly fades away and turns into dust. She's filled with an overpowering sense of guilt and loss.

In the third dream, she's sat with all of the player characters in this very house, watching the television. The room is completely dark apart from the glowing screen. Everyone stares at it. Expectation builds. There's nothing on the picture but static. She knows that something awful is about to appear on the screen, but she can't look away. She tries to make herself look away, and yet she can't. Suddenly the screen flickers and a clear image appears, and she wakes up screaming.

18. Guest Bedroom

This comfortable room is a peaceful sanctuary compared to the other rooms of the house. The door is locked and nobody has been in here for weeks. The bed linen is a little musty, but that's about all that's wrong with the place. It is an ideal place for the player characters to establish a safe space and thus refresh some of their ability pools (see *Fear Itself*, page XX).

19. Guest Bedroom

Unlike the other guest bedroom above, this one is a dingy, damp-smelling place. The light bulb doesn't work, and because of an electrical fault, any new light bulb put in the socket will blow as soon as it is switched on.

Much like the stables outside, Duffy has used the place as a dumping room for boxes of clutter, yet to be unpacked. There are several of these in the room, mostly containing old clothes of his or copies of car enthusiast magazines. One of the boxes is open. Duffy partially unpacked it, before giving up in disgust.

Faded Valentine: The partially emptied box's contents have an old Valentine's card on top of them. It looks as if whoever opened the box and began unpacking it got as far as this card and then stopped. It has a cutesy teddy-bear cover; the message inside reads

With all my love to my bad, bad boy! xxxxx

The handwriting looks like it is probably that of a younger woman. The I is dotted with a heart, which rather gives it away.

Restraining Order: Immediately below the valentine is a torn scrap from an official legal notice, made out to J. Duffy. Although the bulk of the text is gone, use of the **Law** or **Social Sciences** abilities immediately recognises it as a restraining order, issued by a court to forbid one person from approaching within a set distance of another. It is dated April 26th 2004.

Billie's Letter: This is a short note on folded lavender paper, dated March 18th 2004, in the same handwriting as the valentine's card. It reads

Jack,

It's over between us hon. I'm not keeping the baby and you have to respect that or there'll be trouble. You can forget about your 'deal' because I don't need your protection and I don't want your help so you can quit it with the rough tough Jack the lad stuff. It's not cute any more it's just sad.

Anyway I finally asked my uncle Eric about you and you know what? he says nobody over there even remembers a Jack Duffy running things. I really wanted to believe you but I guess you weren't the gangster you made yourself out to be eh.

I was so stupid but I'm so clear on everything now. I'm so sorry it's come to this but you didn't leave me any choice. If you don't stop calling I'll get the police involved and you don't want that do you.

I'll never forget what we had

B

20. Cellar

The steep, narrow steps down from the kitchen give onto an underfloor area divided into two sections, with brick pillars punctuating the space between. The western section is the wine cellar, with rack upon rack of bottles gathering dust. It seems Duffy must have purchased the cellar contents along with the house, as they obviously predate his occupation of it.

The eastern section contains the main fuse box and has a tang of fresh cement in the air. It seems the space is being refurbished somehow, as building materials lie across the floor: bricks, cement bags, sacks of plaster, even boxes of tiles. There are shovels and trowels to hand, too, along with a large green tarpaulin. The area has definitely changed since the players were here last.

Something's Not Right (C): Use of the **Architecture** or **History** abilities reveals that the cellar area is being competently rebuilt, presumably to modernize the house and add a 'den' type of room. Judging by the marks on the walls, the cellar floor looks like it has been lowered. However, while the job was *started* competently, it doesn't look like it has been finished



competently. The cement on the floor is unevenly laid, and hasn't been put down to the correct depth.

A one-point **Architecture** spend also reveals that the cement has been ineptly mixed, and will crack over time. This also means that it will be very easy to break, if the players are so inclined.

Dead Bodies: The corpses of Billie Walker, Charlie Masters, Marty Isaacsohn and Steffan Maczka lie under the cement. They have not even been stripped, though Maczka's sidearm has been taken. **Investigative Procedure** can conclude how each one died, as well as placing the time of death at approximately two weeks ago.

Maczka's Phone (C): Maczka's mobile phone is still in his jacket pocket. His most recent text message is

from a caller recorded as 'albatross'. The number is Jack Duffy's, as the players can find out if they compare it with the 'Dad' number on Michaela's phone. The text message consists only of a number, which looks like a phone number but has too few digits. It is the combination to Duffy's safe.

21. Utility Room

This small room holds a sarcophagus-like freezer, a washing machine and a dryer. A first aid kit is mounted on the wall, along with a fire extinguisher.

22. Study

The study in this adventure is a sealed room full of secrets, analogous to Bluebeard's room in the fairy tale; it is the one place where the players cannot easily go, as there's no key. At first, this should just be a mild annoyance, but as the story unfolds, they should begin to realise that whatever is behind that door is crucial to their escape. All the clues they will find will ultimately lead them there.

Some players will become frantic to get into a locked room as soon as they discover it is locked. This is perfectly allowable. The door is thick and strong, but they can bash their way through it if they really want to; the one thing *not* to do is make them think, in a metagaming sense, that they 'aren't allowed in there yet'. Even if they do break into the study, the adventure is far from over. They need the safe combination to get the video, and that's on Steffan Maczka's mobile phone (see **Area 20**). The animated sex-doll (see below) may also scare them off!

To get into the study, they will simply have to smash the door down or climb up the outside of the house, break the window and get in that way. Neither path is easy. Smashing the door requires appropriate tools, such as the hatchet from the woodpile. Climbing up the house's walls is a very tricky task, requiring three consecutive **Athletics** tests, each one difficulty 5 (and not forgetting that there's a residue daemon out there!)

Once the players are inside the study, they are confronted with a vision of absolute chaos. It is piled high with the kind of expensive items that a man with millions to spend (and a fundamentally vicious and immature mindset) would be likely to buy: lava lamps, radio-control cars, crates of beer, boxes of chocolates, computers, boys' adventure books Duffy remembered

from childhood, and even an incredibly realistic sex doll. It looks as if Duffy has barricaded himself in here and ordered hundreds of items from the Internet.

In the midst of this maelstrom of consumerism run wild is a writing desk. On the walls are large portrait-size photos of Michaela and Duffy; Michaela is only 8 years old in the photograph. Behind the picture of Michaela is a wall safe.

Key: A key to the study door has been shoved underneath it. Obviously, someone has had access to the room and put the key through when they were done.

Realistic Flesh: The sex doll, who has Japanese features and is dressed in a French maid's outfit, is splayed out on the desk. A player character who looks into the room from outside, or who hacks enough of a hole in the door to see into the room, can see the immobile figure and may well mistake it for a dead body. Only when the character comes up close are its empty eyes obviously plastic.

If the Games Master feels like adding a little extra physical horror, have the telekinetic spirit of Steffan Maczka animate the doll and send it after the players. The sight of the thing lurching jerkily to life prompts a 4-point **Stability** test. It has the following statistics:

Athletics 10, Health 12, Scuffling 12

Armor: +1 vs. Scuffling

Weapon: Rubbery limb bash (-1)

If the players reduce it to zero **Health**, it falls into two pieces, breaking in half at the waist. These lie still for a few seconds, and then come scuttling after the players again. Use the following statistics for each half:

Athletics 2, Health 5, Scuffling 8

Armor: +1 vs. Scuffling

Weapon: Rubbery limb bash (-1)

Getting His Own Way: Use of **Social Sciences** interprets the room's contents as the result of a very frustrated man indulging in wish-fulfilment. This is what someone does when he can finally (so he thinks) *get his own way*, because of the money he now has.

The Book of Unremitting Horror

It's the behavior of someone who is determined to get everything he's ever dreamed of having.

Video Camera Packaging (C): Anyone entering the room stumbles over some shaped polystyrene packaging. It's not easy to tell what it is, but use of **Photography** identifies it. This is the packaging from a brand new video camera. The assassins found it where they were told to look for it, unpacked it and went to work. However, the camera itself is nowhere to be seen.

The Desk

The drawers of Duffy's desk contain some important clues

Sordid Pictures: These old polaroids are clumsily shot images of Mary Mumford and Charlie Masters engaging in sexual intercourse in a variety of positions. They are sprawled across a bed covered with roses. In one picture, Masters is winking at the camera; in another, he is holding both his thumbs up. The pictures have thumbtack holes, suggesting they have been pinned up, and they look well handled. Use of **Photography** establishes that the pictures were taken with a remote shutter control rather than a timer, and there was not necessarily anyone else present.

A one-point **Photography** spend dates the pictures to round about the mid 1970s, based on the peel-and-rip style of the print, popular before instamatics were widely available.

Nostalgic Photographs: These are black-and-white pictures of Mary Mumford, mostly smiling and doing her best to look beautiful. She is sat on a beach, in a restaurant, and then outside a house in the bright sunshine, with a much younger Jack Duffy standing beside her and looking pleased with himself.

Although Michaela has never met Mary and doesn't recognise her ghost, she remembers these pictures, and can identify them as 'Dad with his first wife.'

Dead Roses: One drawer has nothing but long dead, desiccated roses in it. Use of **Natural History** identifies them as at least ten years old, quite possibly more.

The Safe

The wall safe is old, but made of thick steel. Unless they try some complicated plan to blow it open, the players will need the safe combination number (from Steffan Maczka's mobile phone) to get inside.

The Camera: The safe contains only one item, the video camera with which the assassins taped the massacre. The cassette is still inside.

Once the characters know what is recorded on it, use of **Occult Studies** reveals that the cassette is effectively acting as a binding talisman. Because it has *recorded* the terror and brutality of the massacre, it has anchored the suffering souls to earth. The characters may, therefore, think that destroying the videotape will free the ghosts and end the nightmare. It won't, because nothing will placate the ghosts except Jack Duffy's death (or exposure), but the GM can certainly give the characters the *impression* that destroying the tape has saved them. This makes for a good false ending, before the real resolution of Duffy's appearance.

The Endgame

By finding the video camera, the players move the adventure into its final stages. Between the discovery of the cassette and the players having a chance to watch it, Duffy telephones the house. He'll be there in about half an hour, he says, and he doesn't want anyone to panic. The players' **Bullshit Detectors** go off instantly. The man means to kill someone.

While the players watch the video, learn the final truth about what happened and make whatever plans they can, Duffy is burning towards the house on his (brand new, very expensive) motorbike. This is fast and manoeuvrable enough to race down the driveway, outrunning the residue daemon that lurches from the woods to give chase; Duffy doesn't even notice it, he's that fixated on his goal.

The final confrontation with Duffy should remind the players of *The Shining*; a wild-eyed axe-wielding maniac pursues them through the house and will stop at nothing to reach them. The ghosts will slow him down, but not stop him. He cackles wildly at them, gloating that he had the last laugh.

The best way to deal with him is to trick him into going outside, at which point the residue demon will bear down on him and snatch him up. Once Duffy is dead,

the demon disintegrates, the psychic tension finally relieved.

Jack Duffy

Athletics 10, Fleeing 8, Health 16, Preparedness 4, Scuffling 10, Shooting 8, Stability 3

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +1

Weapon: Shotgun (+1) or axe (+1) or chainsaw (+2)

THE FINAL CASE

An adventure for 3-5 starting characters.

In this adventure, the players come to the aid of an old mystery-loving friend who has gotten himself into deeper water than ever before. They find themselves on the trail of an undead horror, unleashed on to the world for the most unlikely of reasons: desperate and devoted love.

This adventure is set in London, but can easily be adapted to most western cosmopolitan cities. Use the urban location with which you're most familiar. Substitute underground trains for Greyhound buses, or a player's van.

Genre

As a story, *The Final Case* is evocative of occult comics, in which the everyday world conceals the machinations of feuding magicians and the perverse rituals of would-be sorcerers clutching for power. Brandon Miles already lives amid the strange, sordid world of urban magic (and it may yet devour him) but the PCs are new to it and are drawn into it over the course of the adventure. They are ordinary people, pitted against forces of supernatural dread.

Finding Clues

Frequently in this adventure, the players will have the chance to use their abilities to find clues. For the GM's convenience, clues are itemised as follows:

- **Clue Title:** Longer description of clue, along with its implications.

The short title of each clue in **Bold Type** helps the GM to keep track of which clues have been discovered. It is useful to make a brief note of each clue as the players uncover them.

The Final Case

When clues are referred to in other sections, they appear in bold type, with the scene number in parenthesis, e.g. **Occult Book Receipts (2)**. This allows the GM to check back through the storyline more easily and find which clues lead to which scenes. A clue that can come from multiple scenes has all those scenes numbered.

To increase immersion and reduce the risk of players forgetting important information, we strongly recommend providing player handouts for appropriate clues, such as **Brandon's Email (1)**.

Core Clues: Core clues are marked with a **C**. These are the *essential* clues that the players need to find to move the story forward, such as **Pryce-Hamilton Case.doc (C)**. The GM must give the players every chance to find the Core Clues in each scene, whether by use of the abilities described or by other ingenious or dramatically apt methods.

Flavor Clues: Please note that a 'clue' is not necessarily useful information. Many of the clues that players will find simply add flavor, rather than leading to later scenes. These clues are marked with a **F** for flavor, such as: **Slow Business (F)**. The GM can embellish dead-end clues as much as she likes, as there is no danger of short-circuiting the plot with them.

Dead-end clues provide the necessary 'noise' to the 'signal' of true clues, and help to keep the game free from the sense of railroading, especially if the GM runs with them. Do beware, however, of making dead-end clues so interesting that the players become convinced they are on to something.

About Brandon Miles

Brandon Miles is a private investigator, who uses unorthodox methods (such as scrying and ritual magic) to find out information that others cannot get hold of. His reputation is that of a crank who has a few fluke successes. Nonetheless, he is approached when other avenues fail, by people who are desperate enough to try anything.

Brandon is easy to spot in a crowd. He is a tousle-haired, permanently unshaven man of thirty, though his lifestyle has left him looking older. He habitually dresses in a grubby trench coat and smokes constantly, in imitation of an occult comics character he is obsessed with. His demeanour is preoccupied and sharp. He does not often smile, but when he does, he suddenly

looks warm and friendly.

A wealthy patron has hired him to find a missing person. Now Brandon himself has gone missing. The PCs are drawn into the investigation by a frantic email.

The Investigation

One week ago, the wealthy Alexander Pryce-Hamilton hired Brandon to investigate the disappearance of his son, Rupert. The police are also looking into the case but Pryce-Hamilton has his own reasons for wanting an investigator of his own on the job.

Brandon has spent the week looking into Rupert's social life and has come up with some disturbing conclusions. The young man was making many contacts in the seedy world of London nightclub life, including a notorious social circle who mixed magical rites in with their drug-fuelled parties. He left his Kensington flat to meet friends at the Torture Palace nightclub, where that social group meets, spent several hours there, left at one in the morning and has not been seen since.

The Truth

What Brandon does not know is that Rupert Pryce-Hamilton was becoming obsessed with someone, even beyond the point of death, and the occult circle was only a means to an end. Rupert had a secret love, a boyfriend called Eric Chalker, who was his 'bit of rough' – an East End skinhead. Eric had a heroin habit, which Rupert's allowance helped to fund.

When Eric died of an overdose, Rupert was utterly distraught. He kept the body in the squalid flat where Eric had fled after his sister kicked him out, unwilling to have the boy taken away from him. That flat was squatted and there was nobody living in the flats on either side, so nobody would notice the smell for many weeks. Perhaps there was someone in London's occult network who could help.

Rupert spoke to his Goth friends at the Devonshire Arms and to Sebastian Bale at the New Era Bookshop. Bale told him about Nicolas Montano, a young ritual magician, pervert and *bon vivant* who kept a private room at the Torture Palace.

Rupert begged Montano to bring his beloved Eric back from the dead. Montano refused, but in the

interests of having yet another person owe him a favour, agreed to supply

Rupert with the necessary ritual to do it himself. This was a translation of a text called the Kalshinak Ritual, of which Montano owned a photocopy, as originals are almost impossible to find. Montano had never dared to use this ritual himself and was curious to see what it would do. He ran off a photocopy of his photocopy, inadvertently blurring the text even further in the process, and passed it on to Rupert.

Rupert went back to Eric's flat with the third-generation copy of the ritual. He performed it as best he could over the decomposing body of his former lover.

Eric arose as a blood corpse.

The embrace that followed was not a sensual one. Rupert's shrunken remains are now scattered across the floor of the squat. There are a few more desiccated husks there now. Eric has begun to feed, preying on the tramps and homeless people in the area. He is starting to run out of victims and will have to broaden his hunting scope in the next few days. Fortunately, there is a flophouse hotel nearby...

Shortly after Rupert's disappearance, his father enlisted the help of Brandon Miles to track him down. Miles followed up on the most obvious leads, including a visit to Nicolas Montano, who was intensely displeased by his nosing about. Montano was already aware of Brandon, the self-styled 'psychic investigator' and was expecting to have to deal with him one day. Concerned that Brandon might find out about Rupert's connection to his circle, Montano conjured a scourger to keep an eye on Brandon and report back.

To be on the safe side, Montano also arranged for some magical intimidation to be sent Brandon's way. After his car nearly crashed itself and strange waves of freezing cold struck his little flat, Brandon understood he was in deep trouble. This was confirmed when an anonymous message on his answerphone warned him to stay away.

We thus come to the present day. Brandon sends an email asking for help, which brings the PCs into the picture. He arranges to meet them at the tube station nearest to his house, but Montano (forewarned by the scourger) is one step ahead. Montano's thugs

grab Brandon and bundle him into their black van. If the PCs act quickly, they can save his life when the blood corpse is finally confronted.

The Theme

The themes of this story are obsession and degradation. Rupert's tragedy is the result of love that could not let go, tolerated the degradation of addiction instead of fighting it, and ultimately became blind even to the horror of a rotting body. Brandon's own fixation on solving the mystery may be the death of him; Montano's circle, obsessed with sensation and pushing the boundaries, sink into further and further depravity and encourage others in theirs. The ghastly creature that waits for the players at the story's end, the Blood Corpse, is a very avatar of obsession in a degraded form.

The players, too, will be tempted by their own private obsessions with revenge, hedonism or even disproving the supernatural, and risk being drawn into sordid realms from which they can never escape. The seamy underbelly of London offers plenty of quick and easy ways to get what you want, whether that is revenge on an enemy, emotion and consequence-free sex, the thrill of violence or the rush from illicit drugs; faced with these shortcuts, will the players have the strength to resist? Whenever possible, weave these themes into improvised sequences, taking special care to reference them in directed scenes.

Spine

The Spine of this scenario is as follows:

1. The Underground. The characters, travelling together on the London Underground, have a chance to converse and introduce themselves. Flashbacks reveal the role that Brandon Miles has played in their lives to date. They arrive at King's Cross, only to find Brandon is not there to meet them.

2. Brandon's Flat. The characters begin to search for leads, while a creature of Unremitting Horror observes them. They find the first evidence of sinister forces at work.

3. Pryce-Hamilton. Rupert's father, a

The Final Case

wealthy Sussex landowner, is clearly hiding something, but what? The players may uncover the truth: Rupert had a boyfriend, and a disreputable one at that.

4. Rupert's Flat. The characters begin to learn who Rupert's mysterious boyfriend was, and the dangerous habits in which he indulged.

5. Dirty Needles. Characters with the nerve for it may follow the trail into a heroin dealer's den.

6. The Devonshire Arms. The Goths are friendlier than one might think, but one of them is stranger than the rest.

7. The Torture Palace Nightclub. All trails lead to Nicholas Montano, a decadent magician with his fingers in many pies. Crossing Montano can get your kneecaps shot off if you are lucky, or your soul torn out if you really offend him. When Rupert's boyfriend died from a heroin overdose, Montano provided the ritual to bring him back to life, but it did not work out in quite the way Rupert expected.

8. New Era Books. In which the players learn just what Rupert needed his books of magic for.

9. Coldharbour Lane. In the working-class neighbourhood of Brixton, the homeless are beginning to disappear. The animated corpse of Rupert's junkie lover has begun to feed.

10. The Squat. What was once Eric Chalker is waiting in the darkness... and he's hungry.

Player Introduction

All of the players know Brandon Miles. Whether as a friend, lover, colleague or rival, he has played a part in each of their lives, to the extent that they want to help him when he is in trouble. They may want to help out of nothing more than friendship, or perhaps they owe him a favour; they may even want to disprove that silly supernatural nonsense he believes in.

Brandon's Party: They also know each other, if only to

talk to, from having met at Brandon's birthday party at his flat earlier in the year. London punks, several bookish occultists, at least one D-list celebrity and a bevy of hangers-on attended.

The party, which involved sex, alcohol, drugs and an attempt to do an impromptu magical ritual, will form the basis of several flashbacks. The GM has free rein to improvise along with the players, but the general plan of the evening is that during the course of the party, a fight broke out between the punks and the occultists, ending with a visit from the police.

It is best if the party turned out to be a complete personal disaster for some of the characters. Maybe it ended in a fight, or with one character overdosing and needing to be taken to hospital, or even with a character being tricked into thinking something scary and supernatural was happening when it wasn't, and thus being openly humiliated.

The players all receive the following email (or a hard copy, in the case of characters with no Internet access). A CC note at the top of the page gives the names of each of the characters who have been mailed.

– *Brandon's Email: It's Brandon. Sorry to land this on you all, but I'm badly in need of help. I would have phoned but there's something listening in. For all I know, it's reading this, too. Yes, it's one of those cases. I wish I could explain more but there isn't time. Get yourself to King's Cross tube station at eight tonight and I'll come and meet you, if I've still got my kneecaps.*

– *If I miss the meet-up, then the worst has probably already happened. From there on in it's down to you. Head straight to my place and let yourselves in, and do your best to pick up where I left off. There's a spare key stuck just inside the letterbox. You should be able to reach in and get it.*

– *I wouldn't be asking this of you if my own life wasn't on the line. I reckon I've got about three days left to live, at most. God, I hope I'm wrong.*

The character concerned already knows Brandon's address. Reaching the flat should be straightforward enough. The GM can decide how much time the characters have to get there, but they should not have more than a few hours at most.

I. The Underground

Before you begin, compile master lists of the characters' personal goals, enmities and affinities, sources of stability, and the worst things they ever did.

Rattling Through the Dark

Start your series by asking the players to describe their characters and their relationship with Brandon.

Next, let them describe their affinities and enmities with one another,

Tell them they're seated together in a carriage on the London Underground. The windows are absolutely dark, the lighting blinks off sporadically, and the rattling of the train going over the tracks has a soporific monotony. The only people in their section of the train other than themselves are three strangers: a young Pakistani man with a large backpack, an old black man reading a Bible audibly but unintelligibly, and a pregnant (or possibly just fat) girl in a baseball cap, with a gold clown pendant and terrible acne, eating chips with her mouth open.

The Flashbacks

The players should be familiar with directed scenes from the *Fear Itself* rulebook. In this scenario, we get right into them from the start. Tell the players that they're each going to dramatize their relationship with Brandon, and establish their motives for wanting to help him out. Telling the players outright what to achieve with a scene may seem like an odd way to approach roleplaying, but don't worry. It works brilliantly in practice!

Go through the players one by one, looking at their risk factors, and run a brief flashback to Brandon's disastrous party. Work the risk factor into the drama of the scene, allowing the player to use it as their motivation for getting into some sort of conflict. This works especially well if the conflict is with other players.

The two main groups at the party, apart from scattered friends of Brandon's from other walks of life, are a group of London punks and a clique of intellectual occultists. These two factions start the evening

antagonistic towards one another and may eventually develop into outright violence.

In between the flashbacks, cut back to the Underground, the automated voice announcing the stations, and the three strange passengers. Build up the players' paranoia and disgust. The Pakistani boy seems nervous – he's even sweating a little – and that backpack is a bit on the bulky side. (It contains camping gear, and he's nervous because he knows he'll be stared at, but the players don't know this.) The old man reading his Bible is nodding rhythmically, as if he was incanting something. Is that even a Bible he's peering into? As for the fat girl, why doesn't she shut her mouth? You can see right inside to the awful mush of potato and grease she's chewing. Does she have some sort of mental condition? Why is she staring?

When running the flashbacks to the party, bear in mind the adventure's themes of obsession and degradation. The chaotic party represents an opportunity to get what you want – sex, drugs, thrills, revenge – if you are willing to compromise your integrity to get it. Some suggestions follow.

Curious PCs may be tempted to nose around Brandon's collections of occult books, risking discovery of something distasteful; they may wander into a closed room and interrupt an illicit romp, or ask too many leading questions of another player character, digging a bit too close to finding out the worst thing that character ever did. The appetite to satisfy curiosity overrides concern for other people's privacy.

Dismissive characters will relish the opportunity to misbehave at a riotous party. A couple of the more inebriated punks are probably going to go out on a spree of smashing expensive cars later, which might be fun to join in with. So that gang of occult nerds doesn't want you to mess with the book collection or interrupt whatever it is they're doing? All the more reason to do it. The downstairs neighbour called the police, and now Brandon wants everyone to co-operate? Why should you?

Drug Fiend characters will find plenty to tempt them at the party. Those London punks have some wicked ketamine. Better still, this Brandon geezer has a box full of shamanic hallucinogens, for when he goes on his vision quests... is that Yage root? What about these Amanita mushrooms? Who cares if they find you curled up naked in the bath, covered in your own

vomit? Degradation don't matter, it's the *experience* that counts, matey...

Greedy characters will quickly realise how much money there is to be made from the people here, whether by selling them drugs or selling the story to the papers. That D-list celebrity has a book coming out soon, doesn't he? He wouldn't want the News of the World finding out what he was up to tonight. Maybe you could tap him for a bit of cash? Yes, it's sordid, but you've got to make a living...

Gung Ho characters will be in the front line when the party gets gatecrashed, or raided by the police. If it's a fight they want, they can bloody well have one. Spending a night in the cells is a small price to pay. When the shit hits the fan, you need to be right in the middle. So what if it's brutal and stupid, and could get you killed? It makes you feel alive.

Horny characters will have plenty of chances to indulge at the party as the drink and narcotics flow. Brandon's extensive book collection includes several rare manuals of Tantric sex, which might encourage characters to experiment on top of the pile of coats in the spare room. Maybe one of the occultists, or even Brandon himself, feels inspired to try something a bit more extreme than usual. And if it crosses the line from kinky into downright perverse, well, that's what separates the weekenders from the serious players, isn't it?

Oblivious characters tend to think the best of everyone, going along with things innocently. When someone asks you to hold something for a moment, you'll probably oblige, whether that thing is a fuming joint or a piece of ritual equipment. You might be able to help prevent that occultist getting his nose broken, or that drugged-up girl from choking on her own vomit in the bathtub, if you had the faintest idea what was going on around you. Admitting how bad things are would hurt you. It's so much easier not to grow up.

Protective types may try to intervene when the fighting breaks out and butt in to settle private disputes when they are not wanted. It's quite likely that they will fixate on one particular person to protect. It's strange how protectiveness can slide so easily into possessiveness and jealousy, isn't it?

Skeptical characters may relish the opportunity to put down a gang of credulous occultists. The party is full of underachievers and asinine exotics who are clearly seeking refuge in fantasy. So what if they depend on their worldview for comfort in the face of a nasty, brutal world? The satisfaction of being right is much more important than respect for other people's beliefs.

Bonding with brandon

During the flashbacks, it's important for the GM to establish Brandon as a friend to the players rather than just a contact. This makes his disappearance an emotional hook as well as a compelling mystery. In order to make this easy for the players to work into their flashbacks, have Brandon take the characters' side in conflicts. He can help calm those who are suffering from bad drug experiences, step in and negotiate when a character is about to be beaten up, drive wounded characters to the hospital, check on characters who seem lonely and help them have a good time, and so on.

Play Brandon as a pro-active, compassionate, slightly distracted guy who likes the PCs and is willing to put himself in danger for them. This doesn't mean that he steps in and solves their problems, just that he stands by them when there is trouble; and thanks to the stupidity of the guests, there *will* be trouble at the party.

Thrill-seekers will find just about any of the party's stages offer opportunities for reckless fun, whether it be slam dancing in a room full of inebriated punks or fleeing from police cars.

Vengeful characters will have most to do in the latter half of the evening, when opportunities arise to get revenge on those who have insulted them, stolen their boyfriends or scoffed at their beliefs earlier on in the party. Of course, the trouble with grudges is it's hard to truly satisfy them, and if you ever do, it's always an anticlimax; pursuit of vengeance can consume you altogether, so that there's nothing left at the end of it. Revenge is sweet, and like all sweet things, it rots you away.

Once all the flashbacks are played out, the train arrives at King's Cross.

King s Cross

When the players arrive at King's Cross, there is nobody there waiting for them. Hundreds of people are coming and going, but none of them is Brandon Miles. Asking around yields no useful results. The only people who have been here continually are the station staff and they cannot recall seeing anyone matching Brandon's description.

Outside the station, it is raining. A single desultory

homeless person, Steve Clemens, is selling the Big Issue (a magazine that the homeless sell in Britain).

Steve wears an orange waterproof and hasn't shaved for a week. Nobody wants to stop and buy his magazines. He has given up the cheery demeanour of an hour ago, and now chants 'Big Issue!' tonelessly while striding back and forth.

Steve isn't in the mood to chat; he still has ten magazines left to sell. Players can attempt to make him more tractable with gifts of money, but though he appreciates these, they put him on the defensive. People who are too generous usually want something. Use of NEGOTIATION, STREETWISE or REASSURANCE puts him at ease enough to talk. A two-point STREETWISE spend means that Steve remembers the character favourably from a previous occasion, and can be called upon later as a contact. This is a good opportunity to include a flashback.

None of Steve's comments trigger the characters' Bullshit Detectors.

- **Slow Business (F):** Steve's been working this patch for the last three hours. Business is bad.
- **Fast Moving Black Subaru:** Steve has not seen Brandon, but he does remember hearing an argument and seeing a black Subaru with tinted windows drive past the front of the station at high speed. He refers to the vehicle as a 'Chelsea tractor', a common dismissive term for expensive gas-guzzlers. He thinks this was probably someone engaged in criminal activity of some sort. 'Someone who drives that fast in the City 'as to be on a job of some sort, don't they? Maybe it's got somefink to do with your mate, maybe not.'

Walking to Brandon's flat from the station takes twenty minutes. There are taxicabs available if the characters feel too paranoid to walk.

2. Brandon's Flat

Brandon lives in a second floor flat in a dingy apartment block. The key is taped just inside the letterbox, just as Brandon said it would be.

The lights are off, so the players will have to illuminate the rooms one by one as they go. Play up the tension as the players flick each light switch.

The flat is untidy, smelly and has clearly not been cleaned in many months. Ashtrays are overflowing on to the floor and other objects, such as cups and plates, have been used as impromptu ashtrays as well. Brandon is living the life of a single man who is throwing himself into his work. The place is decorated with modern art posters and ethnic knick-knacks. The book collection is a mixture of technical works on forensics and investigation, science fiction and fantasy, and works on magic by the likes of Crowley and Spare.

The 'ritual room' is painted black and is empty but for a small black Japanese table. On this are a set of Thoth tarot cards, a bundle of yarrow sticks (used to cast the I Ching) and a bag of Viking runes, handmade in wood. There is also a case that contains a brass pendulum on a cord. Brandon uses this equipment to perform his divinations.

Brandon's living room doubles as his office. The most important object in the room is clearly the computer. It sits at one end of the room, surrounded by piles of printed-out sheets, half-drunk mugs of coffee and loose 3.5 floppy disks. The computer's screen saver is running, showing a starfield whooshing past.

- **What Was That?** Once the light goes on in the living room, something dodges away from the window, like a cockroach skittering away when the lights go on. It moves too fast for the players to see what it is, but it is approximately the size of a small child. This is, of course, the scourger that Montano has summoned.
- The players may want to rush out and check what was standing out there but it is soon obvious that there is no fire escape, nor ledge, nor anything else that the thing could have been standing on. The scourger, taken by surprise, has scrambled away to find a safer perch.

Hunting For Clues

The flat is teeming with clues for the players to find and numerous different abilities will be useful here. Brandon's computer is the mother lode of information.

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The Computer

Accessing the computer is the obvious first step. **Computer Science** gains the characters access to Brandon's files.

The salient folders are 'Current Cases' and 'Journal'. There is only one document in the Current Cases folder, entitled *Pryce-Hamilton*. The Journal folder similarly contains a single document.

– Pryce-Hamilton Case.doc (C)

Case Notes – Rupert Pryce-Hamilton. Missing.

Son of Alexander Pryce-Hamilton, currently footing the bill for this job. University educated. Looks a bit of a Hooray Henry. No job as yet. Continues to draw

allowance of £3,400 per month from father. Lives at 28 Canal Walk, over the road from the Devonshire Arms, Camden Town.

Known to drink in the Devonshire Arms. That's odd, seeing as it's goths only. They've got Giger art on the walls, for God's sake. Doesn't seem like his sort of scene. Maybe they've got some sort of a coven going?

Old man hiding something. That's to be expected. Had they quarrelled? What about? Probably political differences – sons of rich daddies kick back hard sometimes.

Father does not know of any girlfriend. Rupert was involved with someone at University but nothing came of it.

Missing since 3rd December. Had a look at events in London for that night, but there are just too many. Maybe he went to the Devonshire and then back home with someone? Will ask for his father's permission to look around the flat.

Have checked flat. Absurdly expensive place. All brushed chrome and Ikea furniture. Very sterile. Many occult books on table, mostly 'simple spells' nonsense, spines not cracked, ergo not read yet. Cannot see Rupert being involved in occult, so who are these for?

What was Rupert spending his allowance on?

– Journal.doc (C)

Monday: Going to write this down. Not felt this rough in a long time, not since the Liverpool case. There's something in the air. Ever since I started looking into the Pryce-Hamilton case, I've been feeling like I was straying from the path. It's that feeling you get when someone's trying to send you a message. So, somebody's jerking the strings. Who? Who have I offended this time? Bleh. Could just be plain old paranoia. That or the flu.

Tuesday: I should trust my own instincts more. Yesterday's spider-senses were leading me right. Pryce-Hamilton was definitely in with a bad crowd, some of whom were more than capable of stirring up the bad vibes. Worried about where this is leading. If I'm not careful, I'll piss off some very nasty people.

Wednesday: Not only am I getting poltergeists, I've got someone human on my tail, too. I'm definitely being followed. (Could be that Pryce-Hamilton senior has a guy watching me? He seems the sort.) I saw the guy briefly when I stopped and looked in a shop window. He was short. Chinese, I think. Long coat.

Thursday: And now they're stepping it up some more. They've put the chills on me. My breath was clouding today. I had all the heating on and it was making no difference. This is how it begins. There's always a temperature drop first. Well, if nothing else, it shows they're feeling threatened. I'm not about to break this off just because a bunch of tuppenny-ha'penny sorcerers

tries to scare me off. What are they trying to hide?

Friday: Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck.

I know what they've put on my trail. Saw it clearly today. The eye.

Tuppenny-ha'penny sorcerers? I underestimated them, that's for sure.

Shit. It's freezing. Losing feeling in my fingers. Need to send that email.

It *wanted* to be seen. To send a message. That's it. Prove they can do what they say they can do. Maybe they're scared enough to break cover?

Bollocks. It's me who's terrified. I should call P.H, tell him the deal's off. Bugger the money.

But I *can't let Rupert down*. That's the trouble. Never met the little sod and yet I like him. He's out there in the dark and he's crying out for help and if I don't answer, no other fucker will.

(And if I *do* answer, it might be me out there in the dark next, crying for help, praying for someone to come and find me.)

No. No backing out of this now. Come on, Brandon, play the hero.

Once more unto the frigging breach, dear friends.

The Desk

As well as the computer, Brandon's desk has a mass of loose papers on it, along with a half-buried answerphone, the red LED light blinking madly.

– **Answerphone Message:** There are three messages on Brandon's answerphone. The voice speaks in a blank monotone, with slight electrical distortion, as if there was interference on the line:

– Message 1: *We know all about you. We know what you have been doing. There is more happening than you understand. You have been warned. Back off now and stay away, and you will be safe. If you continue to interfere, we will remove you.*

– Message 2: *Mr. Miles, we do not play games. It seems you doubt my sincerity. Perhaps you need a more practical demonstration of our abilities. Maybe when you have had some time to cool off, you will rethink the wisdom of your current course of action.*

– Message 3: *Na hag na gabrali, vel astarun i kobrech... (crackle) ... baraka na cavlach na regestemon. Bastocha'ael. Venite, venite, venite.*

– A one-point **Trivia** spend reveals that the speaker is using a Cyber Warrior voice changer toy, produced en masse after the sudden success of a relaunched children's science fiction series on TV, to disguise his voice.

– **Occult Studies** tentatively identifies the garbled words in the third message as some sort of command, probably a summoning, though they cannot be pinned down to any definite text.

– **Loose Papers (F):** These prove to be printed PDF copies of out-of-print occult books. **Occult Studies** reveals them to be fairly musty stuff from the early 20th century, such as Mathers' *Kabbalah Unveiled* and A.E. Waite's *Masonic Cyclopaedia*.

– **Set of Shiny Keys:** Alexander Pryce-Hamilton gave Brandon a spare set of keys to his son's flat. (He kept a set of keys so that

he could check up on his son's lifestyle at any time, without warning.) These are currently sitting on the desk, beneath a layer of papers. Any player searching the desk will find them. If the players find these, they can let themselves into Brandon's flat without attracting untoward attention.

- **Money Roll:** The drawer of the desk has a jam jar with a wad of money in it, bound up with an elastic band. There is a total of £540 here, in £20 notes. This is Brandon's advance from Pryce-Hamilton.
- **Business Card:** Alexander Pryce-Hamilton also gave Brandon a business card, which has his address and contact number on it. The players can use this to contact him directly. Pryce-Hamilton's estate is in Sussex, a train ride away.

The players might expect to find a photograph of Rupert somewhere, since Brandon was investigating his disappearance. Pryce-Hamilton did indeed give Brandon a photo, but Brandon has been carrying it around with him and asking people if they have seen Rupert. He still has it in his coat. If the players want to find a photograph, they must either ask Pryce-Hamilton for one or get one from Rupert's flat.

The Living Room Window

The players may want to hunt around the window where they saw the fleeting shape.

- **Claw Marks:** There are claw marks left on the outside edge of the wooden frame around the living room window, as if something had been trying to prise it open from the outside. The scourger made these. **Natural History** reveals that the marks are not obviously those that would be left by any human-sized biped.

The Psychic Atmosphere

Psychic characters can easily pick up on the atmosphere of unnatural menace in Brandon's flat.

- **Icy Hostility:** A psychic character who is **SENSITIVE** instantly notices a dim, pervasive atmosphere of cold, threatening energy. This does not seem to be associated

with Brandon himself. It is as if someone had broadcast the emotion into the place deliberately.

- **Sadistic Edge:** A one-point **SENSITIVE** spend detects an additional dimension to the icy hostility. Whoever is feeling these emotions so strongly is enjoying the idea that the recipient is scared and in pain. There is a powerful element of deliberate sadism involved. This may help the characters to identify Nicolas Montano as the villain of the piece.

Talking to The Neighbours

The players may want to talk to Brandon's neighbours to find out if they have seen anything. Downstairs is Mrs. Clegg, while upstairs are Julius and Martin, the Rastafarians.

Mrs. Clegg

Beryl Clegg is an old woman with horn-rimmed glasses and a deep distrust of cold callers. The players will need to fabricate a good reason to ask her questions, or she will simply shut the door in their face. If they persist in harassing her, she will call the police.

To get Mrs. Clegg to talk, a player character must show some proof of authority. She is a product of an older kind of England and has no respect for anyone who is scruffy, disreputable or other than white. In her imagination, all 'darkies' are thieves and layabouts, and young people are all troublemakers. Policemen, on the other hand, are charming and trustworthy. **IMPERSONATE** will work, if the character can plausibly impersonate a policeman and is willing to do so.

Players can also use **NEGOTIATE**, but will have to express sympathy with Mrs. Clegg's distastefully nationalist views, or they will be thrown out. This kind of self-degradation in pursuit of a goal is what the adventure is all about.

- **'Darkies' (F):** Mrs. Clegg did not approve of Brandon, who she believed was 'meddlin' with the hoccult', but she thought him better than 'them two darkies upstairs'.
- **Scallywag In The Dustbins:** She has not

seen Brandon for a day or two, but does remember seeing some young hooligan in a big brown coat going through the bins for the last two nights. This is the scourger, who took the form of a youth in order to conceal its identity. It has been searching through the refuse from Brandon's flat, looking for useful information.

The Rastafarians

Brandon's upstairs neighbours are Julius and Martin, a pair of Rastafarians. They will be wary of answering the door to strangers, because there are large amounts of cannabis on the premises. Their reaction to the players will depend greatly on the character concepts that have been chosen and the approach that the players take. Any hostility or implication of police involvement will lead to slammed doors and possibly even the use of a pool cue or an ornamental sword.

A one-point **History** or **Social Sciences** spend gives a character intimate knowledge of Rastafarianism, enough to approach Julius and Martin with respect and understand their Jamaican patois; possibly even to speak it.

Martin is susceptible to **Flattery** or **Flirting**, so long as it is a woman who is doing it, while the edgier Julius is more concerned with security; **Streetwise** convinces him that the player character is sufficiently savvy to be trusted, at least to the point of inviting them in for tea.

Finally, a large poster visible just inside the door displays a relatively obscure superheroine from a small comics publisher. With **Trivia**, a character can identify this as Lady Marsha Warlock, and get Martin talking on the subject of 1970s superhero comics, a subject dear to his heart. He and Brandon would sometimes read comics together while stoned.

- **Brandon Is Missing? (F):** Brandon got on very well with Julius and Martin, who respected him for his interest in spiritual wisdom and knowledge of comics esoterica, even though he did not share their religion. He, in turn, was sometimes able to tap them for grapevine information from their contacts. The Rastas will be concerned to hear of Brandon's disappearance but will not wish to become involved in any search for him. They have troubles

ANTAGONIST REACTION: The Scourger

This vile little creature is in service to Nicolas Montano. It has standing instructions to keep up surveillance on Brandon's flat and on anyone who seems to be pursuing the same lines of inquiry that he was. Although Brandon is now in Montano's hands, the scourger is still being kept on the job. Montano is intelligent enough to know that Brandon had friends and that someone will come looking for him.

The scourger will hound the players for the duration of the adventure. It will keep relaying information back to Montano, which will put the players at a definite disadvantage. At the early stages of the adventure, Montano does not know how much of a threat the players represent. Later on, he will be able to arrange ambushes (see Montano's Thugs) and magical harassment (see Psychic Attacks) because he will know exactly where the players are. If the players are smart, they will realise that their adversary had to have some way to know where they would be, in order to mastermind these attacks.

The scourger will stay in constant pursuit of the PCs. If they split up, it will tail the one who it believes to be the greatest threat. It intends to find out where at least one of the players is staying. Once it knows this, it will try to find out where the other PCs live on other nights. This information is especially useful to Montano; if the PCs sleep in separate places, they are that much easier to neutralise.

The players should keep spotting the scourger out of the corner of their eye. Draw heavily on the **SENSE TROUBLE** ability; any psychic characters will have their **PREMONITIONS** and **SYNCHRONICITY** triggered. (For suitable synchronicities, have the character followed by a big brown friendly dog, or gawped at by a small child in a brown coat.) The scourger will either be leaping from roof to roof in its natural form, or watching them in a suitable alternate form, using its ability to disguise itself.

Defeating the scourger will be extremely difficult but not impossible. It is not especially strong but it is difficult to pin it down, as it is cautious, alert and agile and will stay well clear of anything it believes to be a trap. The PCs will have to come up with some way to lead it into a suitable place where it can be cornered and overcome.

If they do manage to destroy it, remember its Final Image ability. Montano will be furious at the destruction of a creature that he invested valuable time and energy to summon (not to mention the costly material components) and will go after the characters with redoubled energy. He will not be able to summon another scourger for the duration of the adventure.

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enough of their own.

- **Something On The Roof:** If they are asked about the events of the past week, they will say that they have heard someone moving about on the roof, who they thought was 'the Babylon' (the police) until they went up to look and saw nothing.
- **Fire Escape:** A fire escape leads from the back of the Rastas' flat to the building's flat roof, so the players can go up and have a look around if they choose to.

The Rooftop

The building has a flat roof. The scourger is often found here, with its ear pressed to the air ducts. If the GM wishes, the players can see a brownish shape leaping off the roof down into the alley.

- **A Tuft of Hair:** Use of **Investigative Procedure** or a simple search finds a tuft of coarse brown hair caught in the sharp corner of one of the ventilation outlets. This is from the scourger, which snagged itself. **Natural History** use suggests that it most resembles the fur of a long-haired dog, though it seems oddly rough and thick for that.
- The hair has a faintly musky, smoky smell: **Occult Studies** identifies this as incense used in ritual activity, while a one-point **Occult Studies** spend identifies this as a Solomonic blend used in summoning.

3. Alexander Pryce-Hamilton

The players may wish to call upon Pryce-Hamilton senior, whether to question him, keep him appraised of events, or even to ask to take over the case. If they try to contact him by phone, he will insist on a face-to-face meeting. He flatly refuses to discuss his son over the telephone. His manner is carefully neutral until he has decided for himself whether the PCs are worth his time or not.

Researching Pryce-Hamilton

The players may wish to check up on Pryce-Hamilton before visiting him.

- **A Man Of Means: Research** identifies Pryce-Hamilton as a wealthy, retired member of the Civil Service, widowed in 1994 when his wife Andrea died of cancer. His family is 'old money'. He attended a prestigious public school and served briefly in the Army before being honourably discharged for reasons of health. He is distantly related to the Royal Family, is politically right-wing and is a personal friend of Margaret Thatcher. He is a major shareholder in (and member of the Board of Directors of) Brideshead Glass, a highly successful company that specialises in lead crystal ornaments.
- **Goodbye England's Rose:** A one-point **Research** spend tracks down a photograph of Pryce-Hamilton in attendance at the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales.
- **Quatuor Coronati:** A two-point **Research** spend tracks down details of Pryce-Hamilton's involvement with Freemasonry. Pryce-Hamilton is involved with Quatuor Coronati, the Masonic body devoted to the history of the Craft.
- **Brideshead Glass (F):** Investigating Brideshead Glass with **Bureaucracy** reveals only that the company was established in 1966, has steadily expanded since then, and is internationally successful. The head offices are in Oxfordshire.

Pryce-Hamilton's Estate

The estate is in lush Sussex countryside. A long drive leads up to the house, which resembles something out of a Jane Austen novel.

- **House With A History:** A one-point **History** spend gives a character the exact period of the house, and knowledge of a quaint local legend; it is said that the infamous Sussex rebel Jack Cade hid himself in an

oak tree in the garden to evade pursuit by the King's troops.

– **Lesbians On British Television:**

A one-point **TRIVIA** spend reveals the front of the house has frequently been used in BBC historical dramas, most recently an adaptation of a controversial bestseller about lesbians in Victorian London.

A youthful butler answers the door, takes the PCs' coats and shows them through to Pryce-Hamilton's study.

The study is designed to make the person on the other side of the desk feel small. The desk is huge and made from tropical hardwood. A large portrait, in oils, of Margaret Thatcher hangs on the wall behind it. The walls are lined with books.

Pryce-Hamilton has grey hair in a widow's peak and is dressed in tweeds. He greets the PCs cordially, but with reserve.

Before settling into conversation, Pryce-Hamilton will insist on proof that the PCs know Brandon Miles and are on friendly terms with him. A printout of the email will suffice, but the more proof the characters can supply, the better. The issues are extremely sensitive and Pryce-Hamilton is nobody's fool. He suspects that any caller at this point will either be an undercover journalist or a blackmailer.

First Impressions

Players who have done their homework may be able to put Pryce-Hamilton into a more relaxed frame of mind. He responds favourably to any informed conversation about the house, its history or Conservative politics (so long as the speaker is sympathetic to the latter). The players can use the **House with a History** or **Goodbye England's Rose** clues to their advantage here.

However, if they bring up the events of **Lesbians on British Television**, Pryce-Hamilton becomes noticeably frosty. He explains, curtly, that the BBC did not tell him what the precise subject matter of that particular drama was to be, and said only that it was 'historical'.

The following clues can emerge from the players' initial conversation with Pryce-Hamilton:

– **He's Hiding Something (C):** Use of **Bullshit detector** reveals that Pryce-Hamilton is definitely hiding something, as Brandon intuited. With a one-point **Bullshit detector** spend, the player character senses that Pryce-Hamilton is deeply scared of having something sensitive exposed.

– **Masonic Regalia: Investigative Procedure** or a deliberate examination reveals a gold Masonic ring on Pryce-Hamilton's finger. **Occult Studies, History** or **Law** all detect the Masonic paperweight on the desk. Characters who have these abilities immediately recognise the square-and-compasses symbol Freemasons use.

– **Craft Secrets:** If any of the PCs is a Freemason (or happens to know the Craft secrets) and gives Pryce-Hamilton the appropriate handshake, then he becomes far more open and trusting, though he will insist on speaking to the Mason in private if the other characters are not also members of the Brotherhood. Pryce-Hamilton has been drawing upon his Masonic resources to keep the matter of his son's disappearance quiet and keep the media away.

– With a two-point **Occult Studies** or **Impersonate** spend, a character can fake the Masonic handshake and etiquette convincingly. Bear in mind that a character who is scruffy, long-haired, tattooed, pierced or otherwise unconventional in his appearance is never going to pass for a Freemason, at least in England.

Talking to Pryce-Hamilton

Pryce-Hamilton will pretend to be less than happy if the characters try to take the case over. **Bullshit Detector** reveals that this is a false front; a one-point spend reveals that he is actually quite relieved to have the PCs' assistance, now that Brandon has also disappeared.

If he does not think very highly of their abilities, then he will only agree to stay out of the way and consider himself forewarned that the PCs are now on the job. However, if they show definite competence, explain what they intend to do and seem genuinely concerned for Brandon's welfare, then he will offer to help.

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Allow the players to use their interpersonal abilities here. For example, use of the **Negotiation** ability persuades Pryce-Hamilton that the PCs are competent and have a professional attitude, while use of **Reassurance** helps set his mind at rest concerning his son's fate. Use of **Streetwise** gives him confidence that the character will be able to handle the seamy underworld, with the side effect of making him want the character out of the house as soon as possible.

Pryce-Hamilton can supply a spare set of keys to Rupert's flat (if they do not already have one) and pay travel expenses, as well as providing a recent photo of Rupert.

Pryce-Hamilton will forward a maximum of £500 to cover the PCs' immediate needs, with a promise of £10,000 for Rupert's safe return. He has plenty of money, but like most rich people, he will not spend it unless he absolutely has to. He will ask for regular updates from the players. They will be expected to show progress if they are going to earn anything.

If he suspects the PCs of being money-grubbing con artists, which he will if anyone tries to **Intimidate** him, then he will have them shown out. Given his recent circumstances, he expects blackmailers to come out of the woodwork, but is determined not to yield to them.

The following clues can be unearthed by talking to Pryce-Hamilton:

– **Rupert And The Scruffy Counterculture:**

Pryce-Hamilton cannot tell the characters much that they do not already know about Rupert. The boy graduated from University last year and has been living off his father's money ever since. They have had disagreements over politics, but nothing serious. Pryce-Hamilton will say that Rupert seemed to be embracing the 'scruffy counterculture', keeping company with hedonists and hippies, but will not go into any greater detail than this. Pryce-Hamilton's use of the word 'hippies' shows that he is not really in touch with the contemporary countercultures of London.

- **Rupert's Secret Lover:** What Pryce-Hamilton *does* know and is not willing to say is that Rupert was obsessed with someone. He knows this because Rupert said so in

their last conversation:

- 'I've found someone, Dad. I'm completely in love for the first time in my life. You're just going to have to accept it.'
- Pryce-Hamilton refused to listen any more. He did not want to hear what he knew he would hear – that Rupert was in love with a man. He will not volunteer this information unless the players completely run out of leads and come back to him, demanding that he come clean.
- **Pryce-Hamilton's Trauma:** A large part of Pryce-Hamilton's homophobia regarding his son comes from his own past. While at public school, he had a humiliating homosexual experience at the hands of an older boy and has never been able to confront it. The PCs have almost no chance of finding out this information through anything other than psychic means. It is not intrinsic to the story, but adds additional depth and conflict.
- A two-point **Investigative Procedure** spend notes that Pryce-Hamilton's body language changes if the subject of homosexuality is brought up; he unconsciously moves into a defensive stance, as if to protect himself.
- A two-point **Sensitive** spend gives the psychic character a brief mental flash of intense emotions: agonising pain, shame and fear, along with cold nakedness and the feeling of water on the body. (Pryce-Hamilton's trauma occurred in the showers and he was whipped with wet towels afterwards.) The character cannot shower or stand under falling water for the next week without a two-point Stability test, so intense are the emotions.

The GM must bear the following in mind: Pryce-Hamilton is desperate to have his son back under his watchful eye. He is in complete denial about Rupert's homosexuality and is hoping that he will not have to mention this possibility. In Pryce-Hamilton's mind, Rupert is the son and heir, the one who will take over after Pryce-Hamilton's death. He needs to be kept

under strict supervision.

Pryce-Hamilton is deadly afraid that Rupert is mixed up in some kind of sordid scandal. That is why he hired Brandon in the first place. He is using all the influence he can muster to keep the case out of the papers and hopes fervently that his son will be brought back before the story breaks.

4. Rupert's Flat

Rupert lived in the Camden area of London, in a plush and expensive ground floor flat overlooking the Grand Union canal. The flats are opposite a pub called the Devonshire Arms.

Accessing Rupert's flat legally will not be possible without permission from his father, who has a spare set of keys. (See Scene 3, Alexander Pryce-Hamilton.) This does not, of course, prevent the players from investigating the flat anyway. Smart players will take the cue from Brandon's journal and approach Rupert's father first, or use the set of keys that were given to Brandon.

Expensive flats in London tend to be well protected and this one is no exception. The front door is extremely sturdy and is kept monitored by a security camera. The camera feeds to an office inside the building, where a single security guard is on duty at all times. If the PCs attempt to break in, they are likely to find themselves surrounded by the police. An ornate steel grille covers the windows on the back of the flat. It should be obvious that a forced entry is a very bad idea indeed, unless the PCs have an exceptionally talented lawyer. Entering the flat without keys requires a Difficulty 8 **Infiltration** check; on a failure, the security guard notices and calls for the police.

Inside The Flat

Once the PCs are inside, they can do some exploring. The flat is very clean and smells of detergent and pinewood furniture. The wardrobes are full of smart, tasteful clothing in dark hues. The book collection consists mostly of political science textbooks, with several works of contemporary fiction by authors such as Will Self and Chuck Pahlaniuk. On the table in the living room is the pile of occult books mentioned by Brandon.

The flat holds the following clues:

- **Cigarette Ends: Investigative Procedure** or a simple manual search outside the flat reveals numerous cigarette ends scattered by the front door. The natural conclusion from this is that someone was going outside to smoke. Since Rupert could have smoked in his own flat if he had wanted to, this points to the presence of a visitor.
- A one-point **Investigative Procedure** or **Streetwise** spend, or a declared close examination, detects the significant detail that the filters were broken off the cigarettes before they were smoked. A further one-point **Streetwise** or **social sciences** spend reveals this as a characteristic habit of some drug users. Heroin users will sometimes use clean cigarette filters as part of the process of injecting, breaking them off the cigarette to do so.
- **Taxicab Card (C):** Pinned up on the cork board by the phone in the entrance hall is a brightly coloured card for Salmon Cabs, who are based just up the road in Camden. On the back of the card is a handwritten address:
 - Jacky the Smacky
 - Flat 21
 - 10-12 The Elms
 - Brixton
- The handwriting is large and untidy, not what one would expect of a boy like Rupert. If the players give Salmon Cabs a call or drop by in person, then with a little **Negotiation**, they can discover how Rupert and 'his friend' used to take cabs from Camden to Brixton regularly.
- **Stack Of Occult Books:** These are a pile of fairly trashy modern occult handbooks, as described in Brandon's document, **Pryce-Hamiltoncase.doc (1)**. They have clearly not been opened, much less read.
- **Occult Book Receipt (C):** The receipt for the

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books that Brandon found has been tucked inside one of them. Any player leafing through the books finds this automatically. Players can use the receipt to find out the address of the New Era bookshop, if they do not know it already.

- **Gay Porn Magazines:** Stashed under the mattress (**Investigative procedure** or a declared manual search to find) is a collection of gay pornographic magazines. These are not especially extreme and are the kind that could be bought from the top shelf of any newsagent. There is no fetish or leather element to them.
- **Rupert's Photograph:** Rupert's graduation photograph is on display in the bedroom. This could be useful to the players if they do not already have any idea what Rupert looks like.
- **Crushed Cans Of Lager:** A player who looks through the rubbish bin in the kitchen (**Investigative procedure** or a declared manual search) finds several empty, crushed cans of Carlsberg Special Brew lager, along with empty wine boxes. **Social Sciences** or **Streetwise** reveal that it is highly unusual for a rich highborn boy to drink Special Brew. It is a very strong type of lager that is much more likely to be drunk by 'lager louts', football fans and homeless people – in London, anyway. Crushing the cans is also considered a 'macho' thing to do. The cans are, of course, Eric's.
- **Stained Tinfoil:** Stuffed down the back of the toilet cistern are several pieces of stained aluminium foil, with burn marks on them. **Investigative procedure** or a declared manual search locate these. They are marks of Eric's heroin habit. He has been 'chasing the dragon' in the bathroom, unbeknownst to Rupert. **Social Sciences** or **Streetwise** recognise this sign of heroin use instantly.

5. The Devonshire Arms

This pub is just opposite the exclusive flats where Rupert lives. Unless the players are familiar with the Camden district, they are in for a surprise.

The 'Dev', as its patrons call it, is a pub for Goths only. There is even a dress code on the door. Unless you are wearing black (or at the very least, alternative clothing) you will not be served. The barman will politely refer people who do not fit the dress code to a different pub down the road, which is more conventional.

If the players are not dressed correctly, they will find the spooky occupants of the pub staring gravely at them as they open the door. Paranoid players may think that they have walked into a nest of vampires, though in truth members of the clientele are extremely polite and friendly when approached.

There are many ways to glean the following information, but players who are not themselves Goths will get the best results with **Flattery**. **Streetwise** will also serve as a good conversation-opener, as it establishes the speaker's credibility. Use of **Flirting** is not likely to succeed unless the character is openly part of the Gothic subculture, or uses a one-point **Impersonate** spend to pass him or herself off as such; Goth women and men already have to put up with tiresome amounts of unwanted attention from people who find them 'sexy'.

Asking around yields the following information:

- **An Occasional Visitor:** Rupert did indeed drink here. He was not exactly a Goth, but he did have plenty of tasteful black clothing. He was well liked and occasionally brought people back to stay the night at his flat when they were too drunk to travel.
- **Rupert's Friend:** The only tension that ever broke out was when Rupert brought a friend with him. This person was shaven-headed and did not look comfortable in his black clothing. He and Rupert seemed to be fond of one another. He tried to buy drugs, which did not go down at all well with the pub's manager and resulted in his being thrown out. Rupert was furious and did not bring him back. This happened about two weeks ago. This was, of course, Eric.
- **Rumours of Black Magic:** Rupert had not been himself recently. He looked stressed and preoccupied. The last time he was in, he was enthusiastically discussing

black magic
with anyone who
would talk to him about it. He
was particularly emphatic on the
subject of the soul and survival of
death. He wanted to know where he could
find a genuine coven.

- **The Torture Palace (C):** Quite a few of the regulars at the Devonshire Arms also go to the Torture Palace nightclub. They can confirm that Rupert was planning to go there on the night of his disappearance, but will not readily admit to knowing who he was going to visit. The players will have to work for that information; see **His Name is Nicolas Montano** below.
- **Dress For Success:** If any of the players express an interest in going to the Torture Palace, the Goths at the Devonshire will advise them to get suitable clothing first. They can buy fetish gear from Camden Market, an alternative shopping experience just up the road. This is expensive - a character can expect to spend between £70 and £600 on a decent set of clubbing clothes for this scene.
- **The Dolls of Darkness (F):** Players may notice that one or two of the female Goths are carrying large, slender dolls with them, which resemble elfin-featured adults that are themselves dressed up in Gothic attire. These are Korean imports, very expensive and highly regarded.
- As the players pass by a table where the doll-owners are, they overhear a conversation about 'preparing for the naming ritual'. This is nothing more than a ceremony (originating in Korea) that some doll-owners like to perform for their dolls to name them formally, but the players may think it is something far more sinister.
- **His Name is Nicolas Montano (C):** As mentioned above, although several people know it was Nicolas Montano who Rupert was going to see, nobody likes to talk about him because of his habit of

surrounding himself by well-paid thugs.

- However, by judicious use of the right interpersonal abilities, the players can weasel the name of Nicolas Montano out of the Goths at the Devonshire Arms. **Flattery** will win over some of the more narcissistic Goths, while a **Occult Studies** spend reassures the listener that the speaker has probably heard of Montano before anyway.
- Finally, if a player uses **Intimidation** not to threaten the Goths but to give the impression that she can handle herself in a fight, then the Goths explain all about Montano and his heavies, adding that they sometimes drive about in a black Subaru with tinted windows.

Raven Bane

There is one Goth girl who drinks in the Dev who the clientele view as something of a crank, though she is wholly unaware of this. She calls herself Raven Bane, though her real name is Sally Hayward. She claims to have psychic abilities, a claim that is unfortunately true.

The longer the PCs spend in the pub, the more intently she stares at them and the more distressed she seems to be. She is clearly waiting for a chance to get a word in edgeways. As soon as an opportunity presents itself (even if this means dashing out of the pub to catch the characters as they leave) she will blurt out a warning to them.

Sally will come out with a torrent of words that make little sense, with a few phrases that can be discerned: 'you are in terrible danger', 'it's watching you with its eye' and 'he's hungrier than ever now.' In game terms, she is using her **Precognition** ability.

This episode is intended only to distress and intimidate the players, and provide foreshadowing of some of the creatures they are going to encounter in the adventure. Once she has babbled for a while, she will clap her hands to her mouth as if she has said too much and run away.

Sally 'Raven Bane' Hayward

Athletics 3, Health 8, Stability 4

Psychic Powers: Messenger 5, Remote Viewing 5, Sensitive 5

Hit Threshold: 3

Risk Factor: Oblivious

Worst Thing She Ever Did: Slashed her older sister's face with a piece of broken mirror, scarring her for life.

Source of Stability: The Devonshire Arms, her home away from home.

- **Chasing Sally:** When Sally leaves the scene, the players can attempt to follow her. She takes a cab to the Brixton area, where she wanders around aimlessly for hours. Occasionally, she scribbles wildly on a notepad. If asked what she is doing, she claims she is 'trying to get the signal'. Sally is attempting, without success, to use her **Messenger** ability (Automatic Art) to get a picture of the house where the Bad Things are happening.
- The Brixton district is far too large for the players to track down Eric at this stage, though Sally may prove useful in locating him later on in the adventure. For now, the episode only suggests that strange things are afoot in Brixton.
- **Sally's Phone Number:** The players may try to cultivate Sally as a contact. A one-point **Reassurance** spend is needed to calm her down enough for this. As an NPC, Sally is very useful at the end of the adventure, as she can become an imperilled hostage (having rushed off alone to confront Eric), a valuable source of psychic information, or both.
- **Sketch on a Cigarette Packet:** If the players are stuck later in the adventure, Sally's Automatic Art ability finally pays off. She produces a sketch, decorated with Gigeresque staring eyes and dripping mouths, of the squat where Eric is lurking.

By putting this together with the knowledge that Coldharbour Lane in Brixton is where the Bad Things are going on, the players will be able to track Eric down.

If the GM finds that the adventure needs some fighting to liven it up at this stage (which will depend more upon the players' tastes than anything else) then the following encounter can be inserted.

A group of three to five football fans in sports gear come swaggering into the bar, clearly already drunk, and demand service. When this is refused, they turn violent. If the PCs help to remove them from the premises, they will be regarded with a kindlier eye than they might have been otherwise. Use of **Intimidation** is the best way to do this. Depending on the Game Master's desire for violence, a one to three-point spend is necessary to scare the louts into leaving. (A high spend should give the player a distinct dramatic advantage; perhaps he knows the right crime boss's name to drop, or recognises one of the louts from the year below in school.)

Rowdy Lads

Athletics 2, Driving 2, Health 6, Scuffling 4, Sense Trouble 3

Hit Threshold: 3

Weapon: -2 (Fists) or -1 (Broken Bottle/Pint Glass)

If the GM decides that the Rowdy Lads are already drunk, then their Hit Threshold should be lowered to 2.

6. Dirty Needles

The players may decide to investigate 'Jacky the Smacky' following their discovery of the address on the back of the taxi company card back at Rupert's flat (see **Taxicab Card (3)**).

The Elms is a cul-de-sac, where stand several imposing red-brick tenements. From the graffiti and burned-out cars, it is clear that this isn't a very nice place to live.

A lobby, its door propped open with a half-brick, gives access to the tenement the players want. There

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is a buzzer system, but it is broken and smeared with something that might be Chinese curry sauce. The lifts work but stink of urine. So do the stairs, but at least the lights are working.

The door to Flat 21 has a spy-hole. An old bicycle has been abandoned outside. If the players knock, a cracked female voice from inside yells 'Hold on a fucking moment, I'm having a dump!'. Two minutes later, the door opens part way and a suspicious face peers out.

Jacky the Smacky: Jacqueline Greave, formerly Eric's dealer, is a pinch-faced woman on the down side of 40, with bleach-blonde hair that needs its roots redying. She is an unsentimental, necessarily vicious person who has learned to survive the hard way. Deciding that dealing heroin was preferable to prostitution, she's carved out a small market for herself after a lot of hard work. It hasn't been easy: several times she's faced down the gangs who have tried to intimidate her out of doing business, and last year a stab wound to her stomach put her in hospital for two weeks.

Dealing with Jacky isn't going to be at all easy. When you have survived as much as she has, you can laugh off most intimidation attempts. She carries a large kitchen knife if she thinks there's going to be trouble. When answering the door to the players, she holds it out of sight. A **Sense Trouble** check (difficulty 4) detects the subtle body language of someone hiding a weapon.

Jacky, like any sensible dealer, keeps her clients' details confidential. However, she's concerned about Rupert, who she hasn't seen lately. He was a good customer, always paying in cash and buying larger amounts each week. She fears she's lost his custom to some other dealer.

The first challenge is to get inside the flat. If the players pretend that they're here to score drugs, they must make at least a one-point **Streetwise** or **Impersonate** spend to convince her and even then she will allow only one person into the flat at once. As soon as the character starts asking questions, she will try to throw him back out.

The players may try outright violence. If they rush the door, the neighbours don't interfere. They assume it's a police raid, and about time too. Jacky will stand her ground and fight. Given a chance, she will barricade herself into her bedroom and call some friends on her

mobile phone for back-up. These local heavies (three louts armed with knives) will arrive in five minutes on mountain bikes.

If the players pretend to *be* the police, they must show some convincing ID and make a three-point **Cop Talk** or **Impersonate** spend. Jacky is a shrewd woman, so if the players act out of character (such as by talking about occult matters) she becomes suspicious; the players must make a further one-point spend to prevent her seeing through the deception.

Alternatively, they can be completely upfront and ask Jacky for help in the matter of Rupert's disappearance. Once Jacky senses that they need her, she'll exploit that need and ask for money. She wants at least a hundred pounds - 'a pony' as she puts it - and only a one-point **Negotiation** spend whittles that down to fifty.

The players can work the following clues out of Jacky with **Interrogation** (if a hostile approach is used) or **Negotiation** if they try to buy information.

- **The Rich Boy Did The Buying:** Rupert bought a lot of heroin for his mate Eric. They used to come round here regularly. Eric's habit was getting heavier. It took more and more smack for him to get a buzz.
- **Eric Lived On Coldharbour Lane (C):** Rupert and Eric used to take taxis from Jacky's place to Coldharbour Lane. Jacky doesn't remember a flat number.

Jacky the Smacky

Driving 4, Filch 8, Health 6, Infiltration 6, Preparedness 4, Scuffling 8, Shooting 4, Stability 8

Hit Threshold: 3

Weapon: +1 (large kitchen knife)

Worst Thing She Ever Did: Sold a mixture of rat poison and baking soda to a known local thief, claiming it was smack. The victim died in agony.

Sources of Stability: Heroin use; her daughter, currently living with the father in Hackney; watching daytime television.

7. The Torture Palace

This two-storey nightclub is a converted warehouse. It is completely given over to a regular fetish party that happens every Saturday night. The dedicated fetishists of London pack the place out regularly; it is somewhere to be seen.

PCs will be flatly refused admission if they are not wearing suitable clothing. There is plenty of variety allowed within the category of 'fetish', but one must at least make the effort.

At the door, they are charged the outrageous price of £25 for admission and frisked. If any of the PCs has secreted anything larger than a matchbox on his person, he must make an **Infiltration** or **Filch** test (whichever is best) against a difficulty number of 4 to smuggle it past the bouncers.

PCs who are wearing very little, as some of them may be if they hope to get into a fetish club, must roll their **Infiltration** or **Filch** against a difficulty number of 6.

Anyone who is found to have any drugs will have them confiscated and will be denied entrance. Anyone who is carrying weapons will not only have them confiscated, they will be taken around the back and beaten up. The management want to make an example of people who bring trouble to the club. (See Montano's Thugs.)

- **It's That Van Again:** If the players think to look behind the building, they find Montano's black Subaru parked on a back street.

Freaking at the Freakers Ball

Once inside the Palace, the PCs are exposed to the astounding variety of London fetishism. The creativity of human beings in this dark carnival is every bit as unnerving as the supernatural beasts that the players may have seen on previous adventures in other games. There are men and women with metal spikes through their flesh, trussed up in straitjackets, wearing PVC and leather sculpted into decadently beautiful forms, clad in medical outfits made of rubber, dressed in Nazi uniforms, or even wearing nothing at all but spatters of their own blood.

In many cases, this exotic exterior is only skin deep. If the players try to talk to the clientele, they can quickly discover that they are mostly just ordinary people who have dressed up for a night out. They are involved in the BDSM lifestyle, but this is just a matter of personal taste. Except for that, they are just like anyone else and

will be perfectly friendly, so long as they believe the characters to be fetishists like themselves.

If the characters turn out to be 'posers' or tourists, then their reception will be much more hostile. The fetish community does not appreciate people coming in from outside to gawk at their strange ways.

The following clues are freely available, simply from talking to the clientele and looking around.

- Not Quite The Dungeon Crawl We

Expected: The club has two levels. One is for dancing and drinking; the other is a 'dungeon' area, which is equipped with furniture for those who want to play. This includes a rack, several poles, a spiderweb-like contrivance suspended between girders and similar objects. PCs who feel inclined to get involved will be treated extremely harshly if they do not know what they are doing. In the fetish scene, it is considered polite to ask first. Moreover, safety is essential, so for someone to simply dive in without having a clue what he is up to is dangerous for everyone.

- **Nicolas Has Rooms Upstairs:** Nicolas Montano does not own the Torture Palace. A man called Bruno Coldwell is the owner, but he is rarely on the premises. Nicolas has intimidated him into allowing him to keep rooms on the upper floor. These form Nicolas' own private retreat, where he can meet with his coven members and bring anyone he particularly fancies from the club.

- **The Bouncers:** The bouncers here are large men in black suits. They communicate with walkie-talkies and look completely humourless. They have seen it all before and are not especially impressed with the club.

- **Rupert Who?:** Almost nobody except the bar staff remembers Rupert visiting last week.

- **Oh, I Know Who You Mean:** One girl, Manda Crossley (a black girl with leather bat wings and a badge that reads *Dip Me In Honey And Throw Me To The Lesbians*) remembers Rupert talking to Nicolas, 'the bloke who has the private rooms'. He was

only in the club for five minutes before the two of them went off upstairs.

- **Montano's Over There (C):** Any of the bar staff or the regulars can direct the players to the dungeon area, where Montano is holding court (see below).

Antagonist Reaction: A Touch Of Unreality

The scourger, if it is still alive, will have informed Montano that the characters are on their way. He sends a message down to the bar staff: *make sure that a little something extra is slipped into these people's drinks.* If the characters order anything from the bar, a dose of hallucinogen is added to what they drink. A **Sense Trouble** check (difficulty 6) notices one of the bar staff, a woman with blonde hair scraped into a ponytail and a tight corset, surreptitiously dropping something into the drinks.

Each character who imbibes the drugged drink now needs to make a **Sense Trouble**, **Shrink** or **Medic** check, whichever has the lowest difficulty (difficulties of 6, 4 and 4 respectively) to recognise what is happening to him. Success means that the character still experiences the effects of the drug, but this is mitigated by the knowledge that it is only a narcotic which someone must have slipped him. The world seems blurred and distant and sounds echo in his mind but he is not seriously debilitated. He is aware that he is under the influence of some sort of chemical.

Failure on the ability check means that the character is feeling overwhelmed. He must immediately make a two-point **Stability** check. The difficulty numbers of any ability checks he now makes are increased by 1, because of the fuddling effects of the drug. In addition, he begins to perceive some of the people around him as genuine demons. The drugged condition lasts for up to two hours.

The GM must play this carefully. Even if he figures out that he is under the influence of a drug, the player should not be able to tell whether he is seeing something that is real (which the drug has given him the temporary power to see) or something that is hallucinatory.

- **Your Pupils are Huge:** With a successful **Medic** or **Shrink** ability check (difficulty 4) a character can identify drugged characters'

Wracked With Guilt

While one or more of the characters is reeling around under the influence of the hallucinogenic drug, the GM can take the opportunity to dredge up bad memories. Bad trips have a way of doing exactly that.

Before the drugged drink scene, make sure you have all the players' personality traits to hand. Decide which of these is the most shocking, then when the character is hallucinating, take the Worst Thing The Character Ever Did and improvise hallucinations around it. Be subtle with this, avoiding direct references. For example, if a character tortured an animal to death, let him think his hands are covered with blood, or that everyone around him is staring at him with animal-like eyes in human faces.

If more than one character is hallucinating, then the GM can really mess with their heads. The cocktail of drugs has the effect of causing mild to moderate psychic flashes. The characters should thus hallucinate horrible scenes that recall each other's Worst Things They Ever Did. Again, these should not be explicit references, but should cut close enough to the bone to make the characters paranoid that their deepest secrets are being exposed to others.

Depending on the character's personality type, they may feel an urge to be punished (there are plenty of people with whips nearby, if they want the bad memories beaten out of them) or even begin to believe that they are dead and in Hell, surrounded by horrors that are tormenting them for the Bad Thing they did.

symptoms as typical of LSD, and let them know they have been spiked. The drug is actually a cocktail of LSD and some shamanic psychoactives that awaken latent psychic abilities.

- **Scalpel, Forceps, Swab (F):** One of the drugged characters should suddenly realise that he can see through a wall. Beyond that wall, there is someone tied up to a frame, evidently part of the fetish equipment that has been taken to a private area.
- As the character watches, three mummy-like, hideously scarred creatures wearing Victorian surgeon's smocks and carrying scalpels drift lazily up through the floor and begin to operate. Try as he might, the character can find no way in to the space beyond the wall – if indeed it even exists. The mummified surgeons take no notice of

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him unless he tries to attract their attention, in which case they look up as one, nod, then go back to their work.

- **The Man With The Flayed Face (F):** There is one customer walking around who seems to have the most astounding make-up job imaginable. His face has been peeled back in quarters and pinned to his skull. On first meeting him, a drugged character must immediately make a two-point **Stability** check.
- The flayed man is quite friendly and approachable, gives his name as Andy and will attempt to assist any character who is having trouble with a drug experience. This will involve taking the character to the toilets and talking him gently down from the bad trip. In game terms, Andy has a five-point **Shrink** pool, for the purpose of talking shaken characters down.
- Odd though it may seem, this person is not at all malevolent. He simply has very good makeup, though a character under the influence of the hallucinogen will be utterly convinced that he has been genuinely flayed.

Nicolas Montano

When the characters encounter him, Nicolas is wearing a huntsman's costume, as if he were about to ride off on a fox hunt. He is wearing jodhpurs, riding boots and a smart scarlet jacket with a whip. He has an earnest, open expression and a warm smile. He is holding court in the dungeon area, with several languid ladies and gentlemen lolling nearby and listening to his pronouncements. Most of these are members of Montano's coven. He has two of his thugs with him, as bodyguards. These two have pistols under their jackets, making obvious bulges.

Montano listens to the PCs with interest. He has only learned of them so far through the scourger and is curious to find out exactly how much they know. He will become very grave on hearing that Rupert has gone missing and will suggest that the characters adjourn to his private rooms. The two bodyguards follow him up.

- **That's a Nasty Bruise:** Observant PCs notice

that Montano has a bruise on the side of his head, which he has attempted to cover up with makeup. He received this from Brandon the previous night, when he was abducted.

- **Wallop:** One of the bodyguards has a very obvious black eye, also from Brandon.

The Private Suite

Nicolas' suite can be reached via a spiral staircase in the corner of the club. The rooms consist of a lounge, a bathroom, a large bedroom and a private ritual room, which Nicolas will obviously not show to the characters.

- **Cyber Warrior:** On the bookshelf in Nicolas's lounge, along with other toys and trinkets, is a Cyber Warrior voice changer mask – the same one used to change his voice when he left the message on Brandon's answerphone.

Nicolas will sit the players down on the sumptuous sofas and armchairs in his lounge and explain the situation to them:

'Rupert was going slowly out of his mind. He was obsessed, you see. Obsessed with his bit of rough, a skinhead by the name of Eric, from Brixton. Not to my taste, but who are we to judge? Anyway, he came to me and asked for my help. He'd got it into his head that I was the Great Panjandrum of Magic or some such nonsense. He was desperately afraid that Eric was going to leave him, and he wanted a love charm. I mean, can you imagine it? A bloody love charm, in the twenty-first century ?

At this point, the PCs' **Bullshit Detectors** go off.

At the same moment, there is a loud thump from the temple room. This is either the Scourger moving about, or its dead, deliquescing body falling off the altar on to the floor, depending on whether or not the players have killed it. Either way, Montano glances to one of his bodyguards, who goes to take care of it.

'As I was saying... yes. Rupert was spending hundreds of pounds on Eric, but he was still convinced that the boy was going to take off. Well, I

told him I wasn't in the love charm business. Tried to talk him down gently, you know. Didn't do very well. He became awfully distraught. Said something about going and killing himself. I'm very much afraid that that's what he will have done.'

- **Why Does He Keep Going On About Love Charms?:** A one-point **Bullshit Detector** spend reveals that Montano is specifically lying about what sort of magic Rupert wanted, the 'love charm', but not about the nature of the visit.
- **Suicide My Arse:** A further two-point **Bullshit Detector** spend reveals that Montano's final words, describing Rupert's planned suicide, are total fabrication.

Once he has said his piece, Montano apologises that the characters have had a wasted journey, offers them a drink and shows them back down to the club. As he makes his apology, one of the bouncers quietly leaves the room and heads to the bathroom. He is checking on Brandon: see **The Toilet's Out of Order, Mate** below.

The following clues also apply to this encounter:

- **Sorry, Never Heard of Him:** If the PCs ask Montano if he ever met Brandon Miles, Montano will deny ever having met him. This, of course, trips their **Bullshit Detector**.
- **Toilet's Out of Order, Mate:** Any player character that asks to use the bathroom will be sent downstairs to use the one in the club.
- This is because Brandon Miles is in the bathroom, lying in the bath, with his arms and legs bound and a strip of tape across his mouth. He was beaten up badly last night. He is conscious and can hear the PCs talking. Halfway through the discussion, a bouncer comes in to keep him quiet. The bouncer points a pistol at his head and warns him silently that any further noise will get him killed, then returns to the lounge.
- **Inside The Temple:** If the PCs somehow manage to force access to the temple room, they see a ritual circle marked out

Montano's Temptation

Before running this scene, make sure you are familiar with the players' personal traits, especially What They Want.

Through his occult practices, Montano has gained a very mild divinatory ability, which he uses along with a knowledge of psychology (and neuro-linguistic programming) to 'read' people. While the players are talking to him, he will focus on one of them - the one who seems to him to be easiest to manipulate. He closes his eyes for a moment, and then smiles, suggesting that it would be best if the players went away and forgot all about this silly business. After all, he says, he makes a very good friend. He can help you get all sorts of things.

At this point, he makes a veiled reference to what the target character wants, while looking right at him and smiling serenely. The idea is to drop a hint that will be intelligible only to the target character and to Montano. The message is clear: if you keep me on your side, I'll help you achieve your dream; if you don't, you're worse than screwed.

If Montano has a chance, he will work on the character some more, trying to draw him away from the others and find out more about what desires drive him. He cannot find out any more through psychic means, so he will use the simple information he's already gleaned as a foot in the door, and try to find out more just by private conversation.

on the floor and an altar in the centre that resembles two black cubes, one on top of the other. Sitting on top of this is a dish full of black fluid. Montano uses this to scry through the scourger's eyeball.

Getting Additional Titbits From Montano: During the time in which Montano is willing to talk to the players, they can use their Interpersonal Abilities to glean a few more pieces of information from him.

Flattery or Flirting encourage Montano to talk about himself and his club. This place is a phase he's moving

through, a diversion he's toying with until he gets bored of it and goes on to do something else. He made his money by playing the stock market, and has an uncanny eye for which way a commodity is likely to go. 'It's not what you know, it's who you know... and I have friends in low places,' he says with a wink.

Bureaucracy or Cop Talk can both be used to pinpoint the dubious legality of some aspects of the club. There are far more people present than the official fire regulations allow; besides which, the emergency exits are not well signposted and in one case are blocked by a gigantic bondage cradle. Montano is noticeably uncomfortable if these subjects are brought up; the players can use them as leverage later on.

Intimidation doesn't work very well while Montano is surrounded by heavies and the players are unarmed, nor can it be used after a fight has already broken out. However, if a player uses this ability during the tense run-up to a potential conflict in which the players could conceivably dish out damage as well as taking it (such as if the players have smuggled weapons in) then Montano sees that the players mean business. His immediate response is to placate them with an offer of money. Would, say, five hundred pounds smooth any ruffled feathers, and persuade the players to leave? If that doesn't win them over, then Montano ups the offer to a thousand; failing that, he sends word downstairs to have the club shut early tonight, and has one of the heavies call the police. The situation is now officially out of control, and he has to come down hard, even if it means losing a night's business.

If A Fight Breaks Out: If the PCs turn violent and try to get their way by force, Montano will not pull any punches. His thugs have firearms. The players will have had any weapons they had confiscated at the door (or should have). He will take out as many of the troublemakers as he can and have the bodies driven out of the city and dumped. Montano is powerful enough to have all of this covered up, though he will owe a lot of people a lot of favours if he has to go that far.

Should the fight go against him, Montano will do whatever is necessary to save his own skin. This will certainly include telling the players where Brandon is and telling them the truth about the Kalshinak Ritual, which Montano sold to Rupert. Montano knows where Rupert went (Coldharbour Lane) because the

scourger was sent to follow him.

Freeing Brandon

If the players are able to free Brandon, he will tell them everything he knows. Rupert came to Montano looking for some kind of magic ritual and was given a copy of it, then went off to see this Eric person. Brandon only knows that Eric lived in the Brixton area, but does not yet know where.

Brandon's 'Escape'

Should the PCs fail to free Brandon, Montano releases him anyway after another day. By now the magician has seen the reports of drained homeless people on the television, and thinks there might be a bigger problem than he had bargained for.

However, Brandon seems to think he can deal with it, so Montano sends him off to Brixton; it's no skin off Montano's nose, and it saves him from having to get his hands dirty. (He already knows where Eric is lurking, because of the handy little scourger.) Then Brandon, who knows that there is terrible danger loose in the city, sets off for Coldharbour Lane, where Montano told him to look. Not long thereafter, Eric catches him...

If the adventurers later rescue Brandon and ask him how he got away, he will say that Montano had him beaten up again and thrown into the street, then told him to head to Coldharbour Lane, adding 'If you want to play the great white warlock, now's your chance.'

Brandon Miles (slightly battered)

Ac: Law 2, History 5, Occult Studies 10, Research 6

Int: Bullshit Detector 3, Flirting 2, Reassurance 2, Streetwise 4

Tech: Investigative Procedure 3

Gen: Fleeing 4, Health -2, Infiltration 5, Scuffling 4, Sense Trouble 3, Stability 6

Psy: Messenger 3, Premonitions 3, Sensitive 3

Hit Threshold: 3

Risk Factor: Curious

Worst Thing He Ever Did: Stole an irreplaceable Crowley manuscript from the Warburg Institute

Sources of Stability: His elderly mother in Kent; playing massively multiplayer online games.

This represents Brandon after the beating Montano's thugs have given him. If the players do not catch up with Brandon before Eric attacks him and stuffs him in the wardrobe, then he has a Stability of only 2.

Nicolas Montano

Athletics 6, Health 4, Scuffling 2, Sense Trouble 4, Stability 4

Hit Threshold: 3

Risk Factor: Thrill-Seeking

Worst Thing He Ever Did: Participated in the death by torture of a prostitute in Berlin (and enjoyed it) following which her flesh was eaten.

Sources of Stability: Causing pain to the helpless; receiving the adoration of his cult circle; Biffo the teddy bear.

Montano is thirty-six. He has grey eyes, thinning hair tied backwards into a smug little ponytail, and pitted skin from terrible acne when he was a teenager. He plays the part of the corrupt public school boy, but isn't one.

When indoors, he has a habit of carrying his old teddy bear around, passed on to him by his father, who died when he was very young. The bear's head is threadbare where Montano has rubbed it, to calm his nerves. It is called 'Biffo' after an old British comics character. Montano never takes Biffo outside, for fear he will lose him.

Summon Scourger: Montano has access to a ritual to summon a Scourger, a demonic minion that can spy on people for its master and relay images to a scrying bowl. Summoning a Scourger requires Montano to burn two points of Stability and perform a three-

The Book of Unremitting Horror

hour ritual. If it is killed, Montano must immediately make a four-point Stability test; psychic repercussion is vicious.

Sending of Spectral Chill: If Montano has access to a magical link to a person (such as a lock of their hair, a good-quality photograph or an article of their clothing) he can call up a *Sending of Spectral Chill*. Magicians typically use this ritual to intimidate the curious and scare them away. Montano has been using it on Brandon (see **Answerphone Message (2)** and **Oppressive Psychic Atmosphere (2)**) but no longer needs to, as he has him imprisoned.

By spending an hour each day in ritual activity and sacrificing a point of Health on each such occasion, Montano can infuse the target with supernatural cold and a feeling of dread. As well as the discomfort this causes, it forces the target to make a two-point Stability check every day when the ritual is begun. If the players are causing problems, he may use the ritual against them; he will pick the target who looks like they will cope the worst, make a magical link by sketching them, place the image in a prepared pentacle and start the ritual. The players can break this effect by finding their magical links and destroying them.

Montano's Thugs

Athletics 4, Driving 3, Health 8, Scuffling 8, Sense Trouble 3

Hit Threshold: 3

Weapon: -1 (Brass Knuckles) or 0 (Baseball Bat)

These are a group of fairly generic, bald-headed bruisers. (Depending on player group size, there are between three and seven thugs available to Montano at any time. Assume one more thug than there are players.) They work for Montano and beat up whoever he wants beaten up. They do not talk very much and are good at taking orders.

If the players are *really* getting on Montano's nerves, he will send the thugs round in the trademark black Subaru to beat the players up in a back alley somewhere.

8. New Era Books

This occult bookshop is small and untidy. It can be found in Soho, among the sex shops and massage parlours. The proprietor, Sebastian Bale, drinks wine

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behind the counter and scratches himself a lot. He seems to be running the shop in a rather haphazard way. If the players turn up too early in the morning, the shop will not be open yet.

Bale is initially refractory and uncooperative. If the players aren't there to buy, then he resents their presence. There are already enough timewasters and penniless browsers mauling over his stock. The players will have to thaw out his frosty exterior before they can get any useful information from him.

They can convincingly feign interest in the books with **Impersonate** or **Occult Studies**, though unless they follow this up with an actual purchase, Bale remains unwilling to engage in chit-chat.

Cop Talk of a threatening kind puts him on the defensive immediately, and he will immediately become loquacious and co-operative; he knows that some of his erotica is verging a little close to the obscene, and he doesn't want to be raided. The same applies to **Intimidation**.

Finally, **Flirting** wins Bale round almost instantly, though the character using it will find that they cannot easily shake Bale off now that they have shown an interest. He will pester them with phone calls, requests for dates, and even suggest that he close the shop for ten minutes so they can get 'down to it' in the back room.

- **Raising The Dead (C):** Bale remembers selling the books to Rupert.
- 'Intense kind of a bloke. Absolutely obsessed with magic that could bring dead people back to life. Bought a whole pile of stuff off me. Well, I did tell him that there was nothing much that could restore life to the dead short of the Kalshinak Ritual, but *that* was as rare as rocking horse shit. Probably didn't even work, anyway. Still, he was insistent, so I told him where I sold the one and only copy I ever got hold of. Sold it to Nicolas Montano about a year ago. It was only a photocopy, but he still paid a ton for it. Bit of a dodgy one, he is, Montano. Into all that sadomasochism. Not my cup of tea, really. Here, got a fag?'
- **The Kalshinak Ritual:** Now that they have heard of it, the players may try to research

the Kalshinak Ritual. **Research**

alone does not bring up many details. It seems the ritual is in fact fictional, invented in the 1920s by Marie-France DuPont, an obscure French writer of 'weird fiction' and imitator of the likes of Guy de Maupassant.

- A one-point **Research** or **Occult Studies** spend digs up some more details. The ritual appears in a short story called *The Bells of Saint-Quay Portrieux*, so badly written and abominably dated that it is never anthologised. The 'plot', related in the second person, deals with a young man who is devoted to a dead girl who he keeps pickled in a vast bell jar. It mentions the Kalshinak Ritual as the means whereby he shall bring her to life. The protagonist intends to learn of the Kalshinak Ritual from 'the Anchorite of the Moon', but the identity of this character is not revealed; shortly thereafter the protagonist strips naked in a field full of lilies, recites a fifteen-page monologue and shoots himself.
- A further one-point **Occult Studies** spend reveals that the Kalshinak Ritual is supposed to have existed in real life, allegedly written down by DuPont herself. Third-party sources relate her claim that it was dictated to her during a wild Parisian orgy by an 'intelligence discarnate' that called itself *Zim-Brabbali, the Voice of the Black Lamp*. How she wrote down the ritual during the orgy is not explained. These claims are oddly similar to those of certain occultists who believe that the *Necronomicon* exists on the 'astral plane' and can be written down in chunks by those with the necessary psychic talents.

9. Coldharbour Lane

This bleak London street of apartment buildings, bus shelters and ragged billboards is clearly not an upmarket part of town. A cold wind blows down the street, picking up chip papers and white plastic

bags. In laundrettes and red-brick pubs, people gather to gossip or drink away their dole. Under a bridge halfway down the road lie the recently abandoned remains of a homeless camp.

Unless the players have a specific reason to be here, there is not much to do other than hang around on the street corners and wait for something to happen, which seems to be the local pastime of choice. The only sign that anything is amiss is a single police car, parked on a corner.

- **There's Been Some Murders (C):** The players can glean a few details from talking to the locals or approaching the police. Two homeless people, Ned Moulton and Bernie Rubenstein, were found under the bridge yesterday. The police say they'd been stabbed.
- **Vanishing Tramp:** Old Fogerty, who used to drink Buckfast outside the library, hasn't been seen in days.
- **We're Not Going Out After Dark:** The streets round here are almost empty after dark now. Nobody wants to go out of his house. You don't know what's out there, do you?
- **Sucked Right Out Of Them:** This additional information requires a one-point spend. If the players are talking to the locals in the pub or a similar location, the spend should come from **Streetwise** or **Reassurance**. If talking to the police, it should come from **Cop Talk**.
- The corpses were completely drained of blood. There were ragged holes in the bodies, as if stakes had been driven into them.
- **Something On The Rooftops:** There's been something funny going on overhead. A few people on the street have seen a kid running about on the fire escapes and lurking on the rooftops. Satellite dishes have been knocked out of alignment; it's a real pain in the arse to get them put back right.

- If a player manages to get up on one of the rooftops and check, he finds a tuft of brown hair snagged in a TV aerial, identical to **A Tuft Of Hair (2)**. This is from the scourger, which has been keeping its eye on Eric and the squat.

Sally: This is a good place to reintroduce Sally, the Goth from the Devonshire Arms. She's wandering around the area, trying to pick up on the 'dark vibrations'. She insists that she's needed here and that the players should back off and leave her alone. However, if the players don't take her somewhere safe, she'll end up in the squat, unconscious, destined to be Eric's next meal.

If the players are already hot on Eric's trail, then Sally can produce her automatic drawing of the squat (see **Sketch On A Cigarette Packet (5)**) which will be enough information to track it down, especially if the players think to ask the locals or the police.

The Lane After Dark: The players may think to stake the lane out after dark, when the locals aren't venturing outdoors. If the players haven't found many other clues yet, then nothing happens. If they're near the climax of the adventure, they should catch a glimpse of the Scourger hopping from roof to roof, or of Eric's hulking form making its way back to the squat at the far end of the street.

10. The Squat

This location is the climax of the adventure. There are several ways that the players can find their way here.

- They can use psychic abilities such as **Messenger** or **Precognition** to get a flash of the building's exterior.
- They can get the address from Montano, if they manage to intimidate him into providing it.
- They can follow the Scourger or Eric here.
- They can use Sally's automatic drawing (**Sketch On A Cigarette Packet (5)**) to identify the building.

The squat on Coldharbour Lane used to be a pleasant enough council house, but it is now a squalid pit.



Evidence of Eric's heroin habit is scattered everywhere, along with old clothes, used condoms and similar trash. The whole place stinks. Cockroaches crawl over the kitchen work surfaces. The electricity does not work.

There is half of a drained human body sticking out of the oven. The rest is on the table in the living room, its arms raised up like claws, dry as a dead spider. There is another corpse on the stairs. The players must either move it or step on it to get up to the next door. Finding these cadavers warrants a 4-point **Stability** check.

Rupert's shriveled body is upstairs on the bedroom door, next to the crusty bed where Eric's dead body lay for several days before being raised. This, too, warrants a 4-point **Stability** check. Scattered around the room are loose leaf photocopied pages. This is the copy of the

Kalshinak Ritual that Rupert received from Montano. Several of the pages are now illegible from bloodstains, which is probably just as well for the players. Use of **Photography** detects that this is in fact a copy of a copy, and is badly blurred in places. Someone trying to read this could easily mispronounce a syllable or draw a sign in the air slightly amiss.

The only other thing in the room is an old closet. If the players have not already rescued Brandon from Montano's flat, then he is slumped in the closet, which Eric is using as a larder. Eric beat Brandon unconscious and set him aside to eat later. The detective wakes up when he hears the investigators

break into the building and calls for help.

If Brandon is with the PCs, then Sally (or Raven Bane, to use her *nom-de-Goth*) is the one screaming. She is trapped in the closet, about to become Eric's lunch.

Eric himself is lying under the bed. Once several of the PCs are in the room, he will hurl the bed upwards, sending it crashing across the doorway and blocking it. He then turns on the trapped characters and attempts to slay them. Like any attack from a supernatural creature, this demands a seven-point **Stability** check.

Eric Chalker, the Blood Corpse

Gen: Athletics 6, Health 8, Scuffling 12

Hit Threshold: 3

Weapon: +2 (Talons)

Armor: +2 vs. Shooting

Eric is wearing the ragged remains of an Arsenal football top, but nothing else. His body has begun to deteriorate already; his jaw hangs slackly open, and his thick tongue is chewed ragged. Fat veins pulse in his temples. At the end of his hands are long, needle-like extrusions that click and rattle together, like a handful of dirty glass syringes.

Eric may not provide a suitable challenge for the party if they have avoided violence. He is supposed to be very fearsome. Adjust his Health, Athletics and Scuffling as appropriate, and describe him continuing to fight after

terrible wounds. The party may choose to flee rather than face him.

If the players can destroy the blood corpse that used to be Eric, then they have saved the residents of London from a ghastly threat. This warrants a six-point **Stability** recovery.

Pryce-Hamilton will be distraught on learning of his son's death, but will be comforted that it seems to have been the work of a maniac rather than some 'gay suicide pact.'

Free Floating Scenes

The following two scenes can be introduced at any time during the scenario.

The Music of Hammers

Adventures that are based around detection can sometimes lag, and it's always a good idea to introduce some action to keep the players on their toes. This is especially true around the beginning of this adventure; if the players miss the fun of chasing the Scourger, the next few scenes can seem a little pedestrian. So, send Nicky Swift after them.

Nicky Swift is a contact of Montano's, not part of his regular heavy mob but a reliable odd job man. He is six foot five inches tall, around fifty years old, lean, mostly bald, and has a brown blood spot in his left eye. He wears smart black suits and always carries his favourite tool: a large Black and Decker workman's hammer. One might expect him to ride a motorbike, but he opts to ride around London on a bicycle, his suit trousers bound up with clips, the bike bell sounding its cheery *ching-ching* as he rides to his next appointment.

Nicky is very good at two things: causing people exceptionally painful physical harm with his hammer, and singing in a splendid tenor voice. When he can, he likes to combine these two activities. He's not got so much as a drop of Italian blood (he's Hackney born and bred) but he has a particular love for Puccini. When interrogating or beating up a victim, he can't resist asking them what their favourite operas are. They're in big trouble (well, even bigger trouble) if they give the wrong answer. He can't stand Mozart, who he thinks is horribly overrated. Besides, the boy was a filthy-minded little fuck. Never seen *Amadeus*?

Nicky will pay the players a little visit at a suitable stage in the adventure. Don't worry about how he could have found them – it's as simple as the Scourger seeing them, Montano making a quick phone call, and Nicky arriving on scene minutes later. It's best if one of the players goes off alone and Nicky corners them.

Nicky's brief is simple: scare the hell out of these interfering bastards. Break their kneecaps if you have to, but don't kill them, as it'll only lead to questions being asked. Nicky will also break in and smash up Brandon's computer if the players leave the place unoccupied.

Nicky Swift:

Athletics 8, Driving 4, Filch 8, Health 12, Infiltration 6, Preparedness 8, Scuffling 12, Sense Trouble 10, Shooting 4, Stability 10

Hit Threshold: 3

Weapon: Claw hammer (+1)

Supernatural Graffiti

This scene can happen at any time after the players have entered Brandon's flat. Montano has learned a simple little magical trick, which can be employed to send a warning and to scare the hell out of people who are poking their noses where they shouldn't.

While scrying through the Scourger's eye, Montano can write messages on a board. These then appear, much larger, on a nearby surface, scrawled in real time as he writes them. The medium matches whatever Montano is using to write with, so if he writes the original in drippy white paint, that's what the graffiti appears in.

Montano finds that the most effective way to use this technique is to wait until the Scourger is peering in through a window at a character, then make words appear on the wall inside so that the character can see them. The messages are best kept short and poignant, such as:

I CAN SEE YOU

or

YOU'RE NEXT

Watching a supernatural graffiti message appear prompts a 4-point **Stability** test. Finding the graffiti *after* it has appeared doesn't risk Stability loss at all. It looks like ordinary graffiti.

