



The Kirkwood Farmhouse Massacre

A Call of Cthulhu scenario for 2-5 players

A modern-day scenario set in
an abandoned farmhouse in
America's haunted rural heartland

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CREDITS

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INTRODUCTION

KEEPER'S NOTE

This scenario provides a full session's worth of adventure for a team of two to five investigators and is ideal for groups eager to dive right in and explore a haunted house. This scenario picks up the story as the investigators approach the old Kirkwood farmhouse and doesn't spend much time providing history or context. Keepers interested in such content can download a free companion piece to this scenario titled *The Kirkwood Farmhouse Investigation*, which is also available through the Miskatonic Repository. *The Kirkwood Farmhouse Investigation* acts as a prelude to this scenario and allows investigators to gather clues and background details regarding the Kirkwood family and the nearby abandoned town of Wintry Creek, Iowa, before visiting the farmhouse.

SYNOPSIS

The Kirkwood Farmhouse Massacre, a modern-day scenario for *Call of Cthulhu 7th Edition*, charges a team of investigators with solving the decades-old mystery of what happened to the Kirkwoods, a family found brutally murdered on their farm outside the tiny town of Wintry Creek, Iowa. The official record reports that the Kirkwoods fell victim to a serial killer named Clarence Thackery, who had recently escaped a mental health facility and later was convicted of similar murders across three Midwestern states in the winter of 1924. However, the investigators will uncover clues hidden among the ruins of the old Kirkwood farmhouse indicating the family was murdered by its own patriarch, Boris Kirkwood, a prominent member of a small-town church devoted to the deity Cyaegha.

The investigators' pursuit of the truth will lead them into the farmhouse basement where they'll find a magical gateway to the Dreamlands, an alternate plane of existence where they can face the horrific supernatural manifestation of Boris Kirkwood. Defeating the remnants of Kirkwood's diseased essence will grant peace to the tormented specters of his murdered wife and children, though doing so may come at great cost to the investigators. Uncovering the truth of the Kirkwood Farmhouse Massacre will hint at other dark mysteries awaiting in the abandoned town of Wintry Creek.

BACKGROUND FOR THE KEEPER

The Kirkwood family bought several tracts of farmland southwest of the small village of Wintry Creek, Iowa, in the early 1900s. The family grew corn and other crops on the land, though the family's main motive for moving to the region centered on the First Church of Stoic Penitence, a hotbed of secret Mythos experimentation devoted to the imprisoned deity Cyaegha.

Boris Kirkwood rose to a position of prominence within the small church community, but his meditations on the Mythos drove him mad, leading him to ritualistically murder his wife, son and daughter in the cornfield near their home during the winter of 1924. Boris was convinced that the key to awakening Cyaegha from its long slumber required the mastery of travel through other planes of existence, including the Dreamlands. By murdering his family, he unleashed the sheer magical force required to open a permanent gate into the Dreamlands from the altar to Cyaegha hidden in the basement of his farmhouse. He has remained in the Dreamlands for years, growing ever more powerful in his quest for extra-planar knowledge. But his madness and the evil poisoning his heart have transformed him into something monstrous and inhuman.

Shortly after the murders, church officials discovered the slain Kirkwood family and immediately set out to cover up the crime as a means of diverting attention from their supernatural exploits. The church staged similar murders in several surrounding states and framed Clarence Thackery, an insane asylum escapee who was easily portrayed as a deranged serial killer. A short time later, the First Church of Stoic Penitence dissolved and Wintry Creek unincorporated, leaving a desolate ghost town to decay on the dreary Iowa landscape. Church officials intended to demolish the Kirkwood property, but law enforcement agencies stepped in to preserve the crime scene. Eventually, the Sunderland Area Historical Society had the farmhouse added to the state's registry of historic places and provided paid tours of the house. However, interest in the Kirkwoods waned in the early 1980s, and the farmhouse has stood abandoned and untouched since then.

But the spirits of the murdered Kirkwoods – Della Mae and her children Louise and Benjamin – haunt the farmhouse to the present day and cannot rest until someone uncovers the truth about their deaths. The spirits also wish to warn the world that even darker powers remain hidden in the nearby ghost town of Wintry Creek.

INVESTIGATOR MOTIVATIONS

The keeper should begin play by giving the following background information to the players:

Tonight, you'll explore the old Kirkwood farmhouse, an abandoned home said to be the site of a grisly murder committed by a deranged serial killer nearly a century ago. Vast tracts of flat Iowa farmland, interrupted by occasional patches of timber, surround the property for miles in all directions. The journey to the property requires the navigation of several gravel roads that lead you deep into the countryside, dozens of miles from the nearest city. It takes some trial and error because each gravel road looks identical to the last, but you finally locate a narrow dirt lane that leads you onto the property.

KEEPER'S NOTE: This scenario makes use of text meant to be read aloud to the players to describe the situations in which their investigators find themselves. Any italicized text in a shaded box may be read aloud or paraphrased by the keeper without the risk of spoiling critical or hidden plot details.

With the setup established, the keeper should work with the players to establish a motivation for the investigators. Three potential investigator motivations are listed below. This scenario (and its free companion piece, *The Kirkwood Farmhouse Investigation*, also available at the Miskatonic Repository) assumes the players will choose the “Honest to Blog” hook. However, if the players prefer to use one of the other hooks given, the adventure works just as well. Additionally, the players may come up with an original motivation or keepers may introduce this adventure into an ongoing modern-day *Call of Cthulhu* campaign.

Example Motivations

Honest to Blog – Several bloggers working for the website NewsSpin plan to put together a multimedia project on Clarence Thackery, a convicted serial killer sentenced to death for a series of grisly murders across Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas in 1924 and early 1925. The Kirkwood farmhouse, located in Bleak County in rural Iowa, is one of the murder sites linked to Thackery’s rampage, and the bloggers want to collect photos, video and first-hand observations for their web series.

Halloween Night – It’s October 31, 2018, and night has fallen on the plains of Iowa. A team of fledgling investigators, bored with the usual trick-or-treat festivities, seeks the ultimate Halloween thrill by searching for the old Kirkwood farmhouse.

Paranormal Investigation – A team of present-day paranormal investigators conducts an inquiry at the old Kirkwood Farmhouse. The investigators plan to attempt communication with the slain Kirkwood family.

When the players have decided on their motivation, the investigators are free to begin **act 1** of the scenario.

ACT 1: THE KIRKWOOD PROPERTY

THE GROUNDS

After determining why the investigators are looking into the Kirkwood farmhouse, it’s time to start searching the property. The keeper should read or paraphrase the following:

You approach the farmhouse after passing through a dilapidated wooden fence covered in peeling white paint that breaks off in chunks as you swing open the gate. A frigid wind that tastes of dust whips through the bare branches of gnarled trees standing in the front yard. The two-story farmhouse features a wooden porch across most of its front side, and you can see part of the roof has buckled toward the rear of the home. The windows and doors appear to have been boarded shut long ago. An old barn has collapsed in on itself beyond the farmhouse. Along the northern edge of the property, rows of recently harvested cornstalks stretch toward the horizon.

All the windows and doors are boarded up, requiring a successful **Strength roll** to pry them open. If the investigators immediately find a point of entry to the farmhouse, skip to **act 2** below.

If, however, the investigators take a moment to circle the property, they find a back door toward the rear of the home, in addition to the front door on the porch. The keeper can call for **Spot Hidden** rolls from any investigator who takes a few minutes to search the exterior of the house. A successful roll turns up two items of note:

- A mossy mound of dirt along the western edge of the farmhouse indicates something may have been buried there long ago. The ground is cold and hard, and digging up whatever is under the mound would take hours or even days. The mound marks where a cellar door once led directly into the home’s basement. Members of the First Church of Stoic Penitence filled in the cellar door after the murder to hide the altar hidden in the basement.
- A rusty bronze plaque rests facedown in the weeds underneath the porch. The plaque reads:

Iowa Registry of Historic Places – 1977

In December of 1924, the Kirkwoods – Boris and Della Mae and children Louise and Benjamin – fell victim to the infamous serial killer Clarence Thackery. Thackery slipped onto the Kirkwood property in the middle of the night and bound each member of the family before dragging them into the cornfield behind the house and murdering them with an axe. Thackery committed similar murders in two other states in the following weeks before police in Salina, Kansas, apprehended him at a gas station. Thackery was convicted of the murders and hanged to death in a Kansas penitentiary.

The brutal nature of the Kirkwood murders has horrified generations of Iowans. The site was added to the Iowa Registry of Historic Places in 1977, and the Sunderland Area Historical Society has restored the house to how it looked in the winter of 1924.

Group tours can be arranged by calling 319...

The rest of the plaque is too weathered and rusted to read.

If the investigators approach the collapsed barn north of the house, they find nothing of any value among the splintered planks and rubble. However, a stray **dog**, sheltering among the wreckage, scrambles out and barks fiercely at the investigators. The dog may attack if the investigators respond threateningly. If the investigators retreat back in the direction of the farmhouse, however, the dog will not follow them, preferring instead to keep its distance from the house. Keepers should use the statistics found in chapter 14 of the 7th edition *Call of Cthulhu Keepers Rulebook* for the dog.

ACT 2: INSIDE THE FARMHOUSE

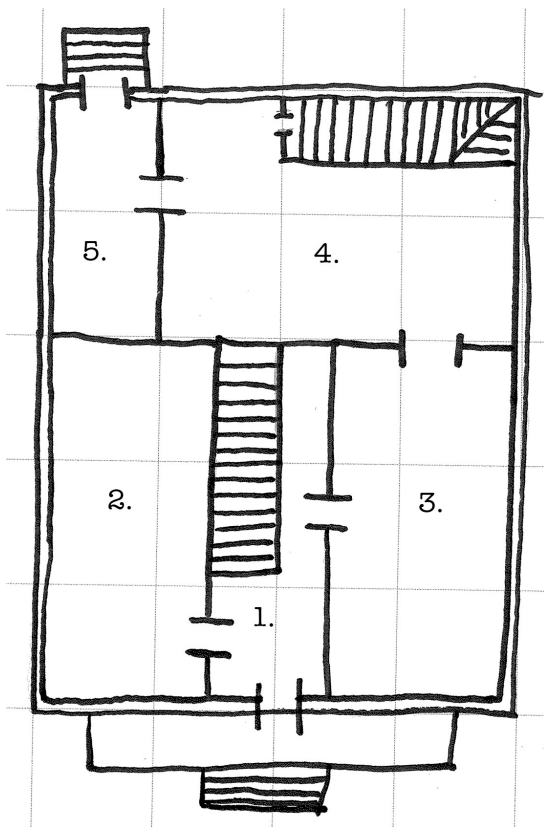


FIGURE 1: Kirkwood farmhouse, first floor

FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR

Room 1, Central Hallway

A hallway acts as a central hub for the rest of the ground floor. Open entryways lead to the right and left, and a rickety staircase leading upward to the second floor lines the hallway on one side.

Room 2, Parlor

Dusty antique furniture fills the parlor, and large windows would grant a view of the yard to the west if they weren't boarded shut. An old piano sits in one corner, and a portrait of the Kirkwood family stares out at you from atop a brick fireplace. A sign near the room's entrance reads, "PLEASE DON'T TOUCH." This room features a number of authentic artifacts once owned by the Kirkwoods and on loan from the Sunderland Area Historical Society."

A rack on top of the piano holds sheet music to a number of standard patriotic songs. Tucked among the yellowed pages is a handwritten composition titled "The One In Darkness." There's also a hymnal from the First Church of Stoic Penitence located in Wintry Creek, a defunct town in the nearby countryside.

A close examination of the family portrait shows all four members of the family in formal clothing standing in the yard with the farmhouse in the background. Boris and Della Mae appear gaunt and pale with stern looks on their faces. The children, 7-year-old Louise and 5-year-old Benjamin, stare expressionlessly outward, and their gaze seems to follow anyone in the room. The painting depicts a wooden cellar door affixed to the western side of the house. The location of the door matches that of the dirt mound the investigators may have noticed outside.

Room 3, Dining Room

A worn but sturdy oak table dominates the center of the room. An open entryway on the north side of the room leads into the kitchen.

It's time to kick the horror up a notch. As the investigators explore the dining room, they hear running footsteps travel through the room and into the kitchen, followed by the slamming of a door. Investigators standing near the kitchen entrance may even feel a rush of air as the footfalls pass by. But the investigators see nothing. This is an attempt by the ghosts of the Kirkwood family to lead the investigators to the basement of the house. Any investigator in the dining room must make a **Sanity roll** (0/1d4).

Room 4, Kitchen

This room clearly has been staged to demonstrate what a typical farm kitchen from the 1920s might look like. Various kitchen appliances have been set out on display on the countertop, and a heavy iron stove rests in one corner. An archway leads into a small mudroom, and there's another closed door along the north wall.

The investigators should be able to surmise that the ghostly footsteps traveled to the basement staircase. The slamming sound they heard from the dining room was the door to the basement shutting.

Room 5, Mudroom

The home's back door opens into a bare entryway, and an open archway leads into the kitchen

SECOND FLOOR INTERIOR

KEEPER'S NOTE: Due to a collapsed section of roof, Rooms C and D on the second-floor map are inaccessible to the investigators until **act 3** of the scenario. For full descriptions of those rooms, see **act 3**.

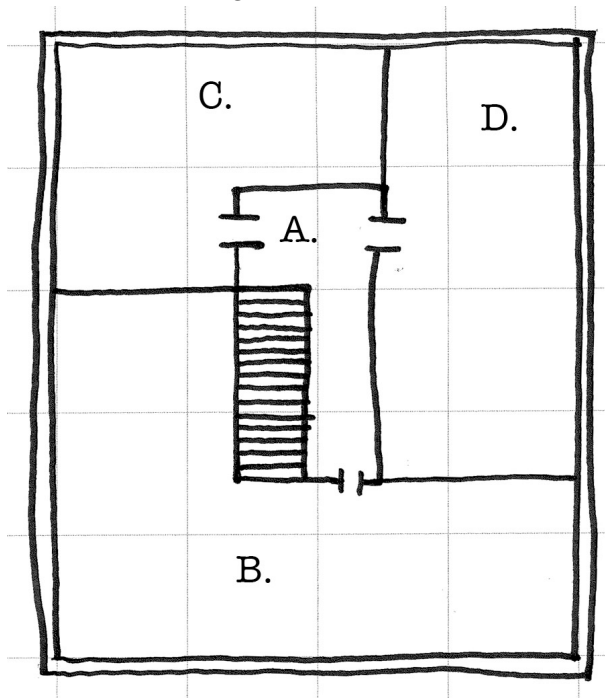


FIGURE 2: Kirkwood farmhouse, second floor

Room A, Upstairs Hallway

From the top of the stairway, you can see that the roof has collapsed and left much of the second floor inaccessible. Only one of the second-story doors appears intact.

Room B, Master Bedroom

This large bedroom features a canopied double bed in the northern-most section, along with a wardrobe and small desk. A rectangular mirror in a shimmering silver frame takes up nearly the entire eastern wall.

Any investigator who looks closely at the mirror notices a thin layer of ice coating much of the glass, and the temperature of the room will drop sharply. Anyone in the room who is reflected in the mirror will see his or her reflection has stopped moving and is instead staring blankly ahead. Deep gashes will appear on the throats of the investigator reflections, from which blood will begin to pour. Other than the bleeding wounds, the reflections will hold completely still and will remain so until the investigators exit the bedroom. Anyone who witnesses this must make a **Sanity check** (1/1D6).

The spirits of the murdered Kirkwoods are trying to communicate to the investigators that they were not killed with an axe, as the official story goes, but rather died after their throats were slashed. This may lead the investigators to begin to question the details of the murder.

BASEMENT

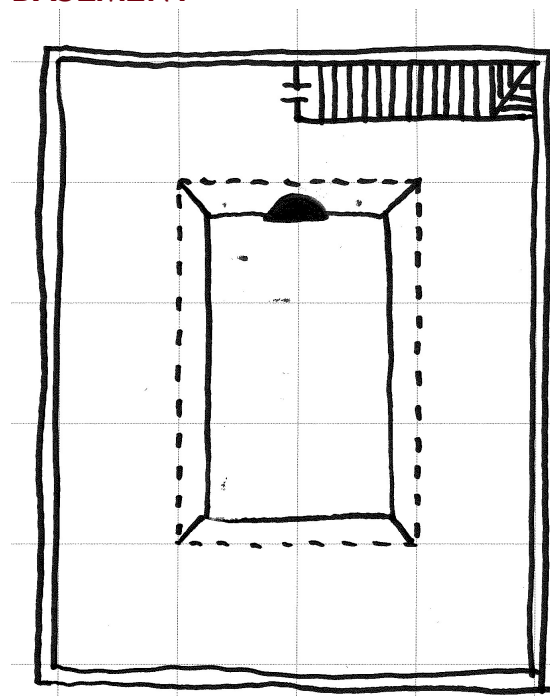


FIGURE 3: Kirkwood farmhouse, basement

You can see your breath as you descend the stairs into a dark room with bare brick walls. A thick layer of dust covers the rough wooden planks that form the floor. You can see the outline of a doorframe in the western wall, but it appears to have been filled in with cement. It doesn't look like anything has been in here for ages.

The filled-in doorframe once led up to the cellar door buried under the earthen mound outside. Members of the First Church of Stoic Penitence filled in the cellar door to discourage anyone from entering the basement and stumbling upon Kirkwood's gateway.

A Sudden Fall

When all of the investigators enter the basement, the floor planks collapse and drop the investigators into a secret room hidden below. The keeper can call for each investigator to attempt a **Dodge** roll. A successful roll allows the investigator to land without suffering any damage. A failed roll results in the investigator sustaining 1d6 damage. Whatever the result of the roll, all investigators in the basement at the time of the floor's collapse end up in a secret rectangular room about 10 feet below the basement floor.

Keepers should allow investigators to push the Dodge roll. On a second failure, the investigator loses a valuable piece of equipment in the fall. If you're using the "Honest to Blog" investigator motivation, then the equipment could be a camera or laptop containing notes or story drafts. Keepers may come up with other consequences for a failed push roll as well.

At this point, the keeper should read the following:

As you dig yourself free of the dusty boards and rubble, you feel the air nearly freeze in your lungs. You hear sharp cracking sounds as thick sheets of ice materialize on virtually every surface in the basement. You find yourself in a rectangular pit dug below the basement and then hidden under the floor planks. The ice prevents you from climbing out of the pit, but a tunnel dug into one of the pit's walls leads to the north. A glowing glyph composed of strange symbols you don't recognize surrounds the tunnel's entrance. It's too dark to see what awaits you on the other end of the tunnel.

Any investigators in the basement who experience the sharp drop in temperature and the appearance of the ice must make a **Sanity roll** (1/1D6).

Investigators who weren't in the basement at the time of the collapse likely will attempt to render aid to those who fell into the pit. However, the ice that has now built up throughout the basement will render such attempts futile. Any investigator attempting to pull another out of the pit may attempt a **Strength** roll. On a success, the investigator slips into the pit but avoids injury. On a failure, the investigator falls into the pit and suffers 1d6 damage.

The glyph surrounding the tunnel denotes a powerful gate spell that leads directly into the Dreamlands. Investigators may surmise the gate's purpose with a successful hard **Occult roll**.

KEEPER'S NOTE: Due to the slippery ice, the only way out of the pit is through the tunnel. Any investigators that don't enter the pit cannot proceed to the next act of the scenario.

ACT 3: A WORLD OF ICE

The keeper should read the following to the players once they decide to enter the tunnel:

The tunnel feels uncomfortably narrow, requiring you to hunch over and scuffle through single file. The walls feel like icy obsidian. You lose track of time as you slowly make your way. It might have been minutes, but just as easily could have been hours, before you emerge into a small room illuminated by a kerosene lamp set atop a small altar. A narrow ladder leads upward to a ceiling composed of wooden planks. You see no other exit from the room.

An investigator who passes through the tunnel loses 1 sanity point. Investigators who examine the altar find a handwritten text on a yellowed and fragile piece of parchment. The text is written in an archaic form of German and requires a hard **Language (German) roll** to translate. A successful roll allows the reader to determine the text appears to be a religious document debating various means of awakening a deity called Cyaegha. At least one suggested strategy to raise the deity involves human sacrifice.

Climbing the ladder and moving the planks overhead allows the investigators access to a room with the exact same dimensions as the Kirkwood farmhouse basement. But this version of the basement contains tools, canned food and supplies consistent with a Midwestern house in the 1920s. At this point, it should become clear to the investigators that they've traveled into an identical version of the farmhouse that exists in an alternate dimension. Investigators with a great deal of occult knowledge may even guess they've managed to travel into the Dreamlands.

Going through the equipment in the basement turns up a locked cabinet with a 20-gauge shotgun and a box containing 25 shotgun shells inside. Unlocking the cabinet requires a successful **Locksmith roll**.

THE DREAMLANDS FARMHOUSE

Murdering his own family allowed Boris Kirkwood to tap into a deep well of evil, granting him powers he scarcely dreamed of previously. He used the power to establish a gate into the Dreamlands where he built an exact replica of his home from which to continue his dark occult explorations.

The Dreamlands version of the Kirkwood farmhouse appears virtually identical to its real-world equivalent with a few important exceptions. First, the Dreamlands farmhouse more closely resembles the house as it was when the Kirkwoods lived there in the 1920s, meaning all of the signage added to the home in the real world after the property was declared to be of historical importance does not exist in the Dreamlands. The windows in the Dreamlands have not been boarded up either, granting an unobstructed view of an ice-covered plain below an unchanging gray sky. Finally, the section of roof that had collapsed in the real world remains intact in the Dreamlands, allowing the investigators to search the rooms that had been blocked by rubble previously.

When the investigators climb the basement steps, the keeper should read the following:

You find yourself in the kitchen of the old Kirkwood farmhouse, but none of the signs and displays erected by the county historical society remain. Instead, the house now feels well-kept and lived in, as if the Kirkwoods might come home at any moment. The windows, which had been boarded up, now offer an unobstructed view of the yard to the north of the house. What once had been an overgrown lawn is now an icy plain stretching to the horizon. You see a shimmering green light glowing outside to the north where the cornfield should be.

If the investigators explore the second floor, they will find that the roof is no longer collapsed and a pair of previously inaccessible doors is now available. If the investigators go outside to examine the green light, proceed to “Meeting the Spirits” below.

Room C, Children’s Bedroom

This room holds two twin-sized beds, a wardrobe filled with children’s clothes and a bookshelf with a collection of early reading primers. A strange painting hangs on the wall depicting a large green eye surrounded by a mass of tentacles. The bedroom window offers a view of the eerie green light north of the house.

Any investigator who examines the painting must make a **Power roll**. If unsuccessful, a wave of nausea overcomes the investigator until he or she leaves the room. A hard **Occult roll** identifies the painting as a depiction of Cyaegha.

Room D, Study

A large wooden desk sits in the center of an otherwise bare room. Loose sheets of paper litter the desk’s surface

An investigator who goes through the papers finds most of them are covered in intricate hand-drawn diagrams that look like advanced geometric calculations. An extreme **Science roll** determines the diagrams hint at multiple planes of existence and various methods of traveling among them.

The investigators also locate a folded map of Bleak County from 1922 among the papers. The map shows the location of Wintry Creek roughly seven miles northeast of the Kirkwood property near the Bleak Rapids River. A successful **Navigation roll** allows the investigators to deduce that present-day maps of the area show that region as a flooded marshland.

MEETING THE SPIRITS

A vast and icy wasteland awaits the investigators once they leave the house. Traveling south, west or east leads nowhere, as the icy landscape stretches on endlessly. Traveling north from the house, however, leads the investigators toward the green light that can be seen from the farmhouse windows. The path to the green light takes the investigators near the barn, which stands intact in the Dreamlands.

The spirits of the slain Kirkwoods await the investigators near the barn. Della Mae stands in a stiff gown while her two children, Louise and Benjamin, peak shyly out from behind their mother. All three display sickly pale complexions and wear blank expressions on their faces.

“I’m sorry to have led you hear,” Della Mae says as they approach. “It seemed like the only way anyone could ever learn what happened.”

This encounter presents an opportunity for the investigators to uncover a first-hand account of how Boris Kirkwood slaughtered his own family in 1924. How much or how little Della Mae reveals falls to the keeper’s discretion, but good role playing on the part of the players should earn them a fuller picture of what happened. The “Background for the Keeper” section early in this text should provide most of the information to answer the investigators’ questions.

Della Mae asks the investigators to banish Boris from the Dreamlands and tell the world what really happened to them. She tells the investigators that murdering his wife and children in a dark ritual opened a permanent gateway into the Dreamlands. Boris passed through the gate and has remained in the Dreamlands since, constructing his own version of reality and searching for a means of awakening Cyaegha. Boris’s power also anchors the spirits of Della Mae, Louise and Benjamin to the farmhouse, both in the real world and in the Dreamlands. But granting her request and defeating Boris will allow her and her children to escape and find eternal peace.

Della Mae also reveals that the Church of Stoic Penitence framed someone else for the murders and hints at other dark secrets awaiting discovery among the abandoned buildings still standing in the defunct town of Wintry Creek.

Whichever plane they inhabit, Della Mae and her children can choose whether or not they can be seen by the living. If the investigators take a hostile stance toward the slain Kirkwoods, or if they attack for whatever reason, the spirits simply vanish.

FINAL DECISION

Refusing Della Mae's Request

The investigators must now choose to either go back the way they came through the gateway or grant Della Mae's request by confronting Boris Kirkwood, who awaits them where the green light shimmers north of the farmhouse. Retreating back to the real world will prompt Della Mae to plead with the investigators once more to help her. She won't attack the investigators, but she will approach them with a forlorn look on her face saying, "Please. Help us. All these years. So lonely."

If the investigators insist on returning to the real world, Della Mae reluctantly accepts their decision and promises to dispel the ice in the real-world farmhouse basement, which will allow the investigators to leave the Kirkwood property.

Confronting Boris Kirkwood

Approaching the green light will leave the investigators face to face with Boris Kirkwood. The keeper should read the following to start the encounter:

Boris Kirkwood bends over an old telescope, squinting into its eyepiece. The shimmering green light emanates from the lens of the telescope, which is pointed skyward. "You've come to banish me, have you?" he says without looking up from the telescope. "You'll find I've grown quite powerful. Sacrificing my family was a small price to pay to illuminate the One In Darkness."

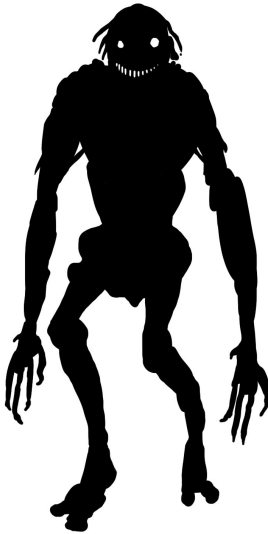


FIGURE 4: Dimensional Shambler

Kirkwood is convinced the easiest way to awaken Cyaegha hinges on opening a path to the deity's prison through a different plane of existence. To that end, he's fashioned the telescope, which allows him to peer into Cyaegha's resting place. If the investigators look into the eye piece, they catch a glimpse of Cyaegha, an enormous green eye surrounded by twitching tentacles, awaiting in his subterranean prison. Any investigator who does so must make a **sanity roll** (1/1d8).

Kirkwood doesn't consider the investigators a serious threat, and he jumps at the opportunity to show off the power he's amassed through years of study and experimentation in the Dreamlands. He'll answer investigator questions in an arrogant, though fairly honest, fashion, and he won't attack the investigators immediately. Instead, he'll offer them a chance to return to the real world through the gateway he created.

If, however, the investigators insist on an altercation, Kirkwood will escalate the situation by revealing his new form. His flesh stretches and his bones snap, reshaping themselves into the form of a **Dimensional Shambler**, a monster detailed in chapter 14 of the 7th edition *Call of Cthulhu Keeper Rulebook*. The Dimensional Shambler, a being known for its trans-dimensional travel abilities, will fight the investigators. If it is reduced to half its HP, it will begin to fade and flicker as it prepares to escape to another dimension. During this round, it cannot make an attack, but it can attempt to grab one of the investigators. If successful, it disappears into another plane of existence, dragging the investigator with it to who knows where.

If the investigators defeat Kirkwood or drive him from the Dreamlands, Della Mae's spirit approaches the investigators and thanks them for granting her the peace she has sought since her murder and promises to dispel the ice in the real-world basement preventing the investigators from leaving the Kirkwood farmhouse. A serene smile spreads across her features shortly before her spirit fades into nothingness.

CONCLUSIONS

If the investigators destroyed Boris Kirkwood's spirit or banished him from the Dreamlands, the spirits of his wife and children will haunt the old Kirkwood farmhouse no longer. They may also return from the Dreamlands with Boris Kirkwood's telescope, a valuable tool for anyone with enough knowledge of the occult to recognize what it depicts. Investigators that explore the farmhouse and its Dreamlands facsimile most likely discover several clues leading to further mysteries in the abandoned town of Wintry Creek.