

# protodimension magazine





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# THE LITANY OF CHAUGNAR FAUGN

A Cthuloid Poem

by David T. St. Albans

TRANSLATED FROM THE NECRONOMICON



**T**O HIM IS it given over  
the ultimate destructions,  
all terrible devices of war,  
and the never-ending horror  
of desolation,  
the poisoning of worlds.  
All manner of weapons  
are his to command,  
strange, all consuming fires  
and epoch old destructive chemistries.

*Chaugnar Faugn!*  
*Chaugnar Faugn!*  
*Ia, Ia, Shrpnth c(faugn hy!*

**W**E APPROACH THY throne of human  
skulls,  
we bow in supplication, at thy feet  
which hast demolished five million planets!  
Yea, verily thou hast crushed and destroyed  
ten billion nations beneath thy feet!  
To thee we give our souls.  
We willingly become abortions of God,  
the bane of mankind,  
the scourge of tribes,  
the destructors of principalities,  
the desecrators of kingdoms!  
Teach us that we may topple our enemies!  
Teach us that we may utterly crush our  
foes!  
Teach us to make many widows!  
Teach us that we may blast and persecute  
all those who would stand against us,  
We, thy new-born progeny!

*Chaugnar Faugn!*  
*Chaugnar Faugn!*  
*Ia, Ia, ssslnowtha c(faugn hy!*

**L**ET THY POWER be never ending.  
Let he who voids all life in the blinking of  
an eye  
give over that same power to his devoted  
disciples.  
Revenge thyself, oh Chaugnar Faugn!  
Yea, verily, revenge thyself against the very  
nature which hath given thee eternal being,  
never to die, thou givest death forever,  
never to be corrupted, thou spreadest  
corruption forever, never to be conquered,  
thou conquerest all empires forever.  
Out from thy eternal being and life goes forth  
eternal misery and constant war.  
Out from thy eternal being and life goes forth  
toxins and potions which kill for a thousand  
years.  
Out from thy eternal being and life goes forth  
the will to utterly decimate mortal life.  
(til the void be in impenetrable silence  
of ultimate vacuum!  
(til every planet be smashed  
into microcosmic dust,  
beneath thy elephantine feet!  
(til all life lay in the stillness of death,  
forever!

*Chaugnar Faugn!*  
*Chaugnar Faugn!*  
*Ia, Ia, c(faugn slt fl(gnn prth!*





Elephantine Chaugnar Faugn

St. Albans 1987

**G**OD OF THE Desolate Spheres,  
 Prince of the Ruins,  
 Demon who dwells in ultimate rage,  
 under the unyielding light of frosty stars  
 worshiped in silent deserted cities  
 and the palaces of the dead.  
 Only thou canst give us thy spirit  
 of the Abomination of Desolation!  
 To thou it is given the power  
 to wipe the earth clean of life,  
 life both useless and blind,  
 life to be burned up like chaff  
 and its souls cast into the maw  
 of Great Cthulhu, thy brother god.  
 Aid us now Lord of Destruction!  
 Give us power to willfully ruin  
 and pillage and poison the world  
 so that it may become utterly sterile  
 starkly desolate, and fit for thy coming!  
 We give our lives and our souls to Chaugnar Faugn!  
 Chief Executor of the Elder Gods!

*Chaugnar Faugn!*

*Chaugnar Faugn!*

*Ia, Ia, God of the desolate Spheres!*    ♦    ♦    ♦



# HIGHLAND STENCH

*Some things Smells in Scotland*

by Lee William and Norm Fenlason

FOR DARK CONSPIRACY



Use of the DarkWyrms by permission of the author, Lester Smith. The DarkWyrms was first published in *Dragon Magazine* in 1993

THIS ADVENTURE IS intended for players with some previous experience of *Dark Conspiracy*. A faction within the Masdon Global Corporation hires the player-characters as independent security investigators after the death of a Scottish Assemblyman, also a Scottish Lord, casts suspicion on the CEO. The basis of the story is Darkling interference in the affairs of the Masdon Corporation, a rising star of the British economy during the Recovery period (see Demonground 3 for details of the Republic).

## REFeree'S SYNOPSIS

This adventure starts with the players being drawn into the investigation of the murder of a noted Scottish Lord and his family. They will travel to Perth to investigate the lord's death. There they will meet the Atholl Wyrms, the millenniums-old Sons of Albion, and start on a new trail after the Masdon Global CEO. A fake terrorist attack by alleged anti-royalists has killed everyone at Lord Atholl's ancestral home, Blair Castle – including a 22-man crack security force. Because Murray family members were in the middle of a private reception after the christening of the latest addition to the Atholl line, the entire Atholl lineage was killed

that evening. Investigations will show that all the terrorists were killed there as well. Lord Atholl's blocking vote in the Scottish Assembly that prevents Masdon's factory opening will not take place on the following day.

At Blair Castle the PCs will find the Atholl Wyrms has been loosed on the countryside. In an accidental opening of its proto-dimensional prison, the Atholl Wyrms gets to terrorize the countryside again after 1000 years. The Wyrms of Atholl is a Darkwyrms and should not be confronted by the PCs unless they are very strong. However, a prolonged presence of the Wyrms in the area will begin the transformation into a demonground. While investigating the murders, the party will meet Mister X, an obviously influential, but mysterious person that is also investigating the death of not the Duke, but the Duke's daughter.

At this point the PCs will be sure of Masdon's interference and suspect Darkling motivation. They will travel to Oxfordshire to covertly observe the activities of the CEO of Masdon Global. There they will encounter a "new-age" healing group led by a strange man with a stranger voice and unusual manner. This New Age group and the CEO are friends. The group had been just another bunch of



## Wednesday's Broadcast



### Globecast News 24...

"Our top story tonight: Edinburgh police are assisting the local constables in Blair Atholl in the investigation of the brutal murder of Sir John Murray, Duke of Atholl and Scottish Assemblyman. Police found Sir John, along with his family, at 12.45 this morning when they responded to a frantic call for help, reportedly coming from Sir John's home at Blair Castle. The First Minister of Scotland was said to be horrified at the news. The police had no further comment but a Blair Castle staffer said that the security systems appeared to be operating when she left that evening and that security was at an all-time peak due to the reception.

"In a statement released within the hour, Thomas the Jack, spokesman for the anti-royalist terrorist group, the Cornwallians, claimed credit for the murders. In his statement he reportedly said, "Now Lord Atholl's holdings revert back to Scotland, where they belong! Now maybe the royals will pack it in!"

"Always outspoken for his anti-British sentiment, Sir John most recently opposed the move into Scotland by the Masdon Corporation. His opposition coalition crumbled as the Scottish Assembly approved the deal just today. Graham Kent, CEO of Masdon Global stated, "This is a terrible way to win. I just want to express my deepest sympathies to the friends and family of Sir John, and I call for a quick investigation and quicker execution of the perpetrators of this disgusting deed."

"More on this story as we get it.

"A round up of other news now. Cybernetics technician Harold Plummer was killed when a welding robot's assembly arm swung around unexpectedly during routine maintenance. This makes a total of five deaths due to faulty programming of assembly robots this year.

"Devon Police admitted today they have made no progress in the investigation of last year's terrorist attack on the naval yard at Plymouth. A police spokesman said, 'We have found no evidence of any kind other than the damage they caused. How they got in is anybody's guess.' Work on the Defiant-class stealth cruiser has been set back almost a year.

"Coming up, our business correspondent Henry Decker reports on the impact that the new Masdon Corporation plant will have on Scotland's economy. And later, eating on the dole, how to spice up your life on pennies a day. First, we take a short break..."



weekend hippies until the strange man arrived. The leader is in fact working to build a dimensional gate to the Mechaniaca proto-dimension, and is infiltrating anti-human programming into Masdon Global's products to cause the new Scottish factory to become that gateway. The trail leads back to Edinburgh, Scotland, to stop execution of this plan.

Once back in Scotland, time will run short for the adventurers. Using "new" Masdon Global construction bots the work on the factory has been greatly accelerated, and most of the buildings have been complete. Under the cover of automated construction, Mechaniaca -controlled robots work diligently to finish a dimensional gate. At the factory's opening in 2 days, the murder of the entire workforce and whatever other human visitors are there will *prime the pump* for the new gate which will open and bring forth Mechaniaca's waiting metal armies.

### PLAYER INFORMATION

Masdon Corporation is one of the few remaining heavy industrial conglomerates in Britain. Masdon's main business is the manufacture and integration of construction robotics systems – specializing in completely automated factories assembling components for automotive and aerospace use. The current CEO of Masdon is Graham Kent, who took over three years ago from the co-founders Hari Massut and Charles Donaldson on their retirement. Kent has been approached by the Scottish Government who have offered him a huge tax incentive in return for opening Masdon's next plant in Scotland.

Over the course of several months many conferences and discussions have taken place, and everything is set but for one thing. The Scottish Assembly must approve Masdon's proposed tax status. An influential Scottish government official has been attempting to block Masdon Corp's expansion into Scotland, claiming that the top jobs will be given to English execs. This man's name is Lord John Murray, Duke of Atholl,



and the fact that he holds controlling interests in rival corporations obviously has nothing to do with his anti-Masdon stance.

The party should see a locally broadcast news video. (See the Wednesday's Broadcast sidebar.)

## REFEREE

The news of the Atholl murders will break on Wednesday afternoon, just as Graham Kent is about to leave his office at Masdon HQ in the town of Milton Keynes to go home to his country house for an extended weekend in Oxfordshire. However, whilst watching the TV news an observant player-character may notice that Kent is not necessarily the staid businessman he appears. On a successful Average: Observation test the character will notice that Kent wears a tiepin in the shape of a mystic symbol. The symbol is an ancient Sumerian sigil of power. (See the Sumerian Symbolism sidebar.)

A player with law-enforcement or corporate security background or contacts will receive a phone call from the office of Masdon's security chief, Henry Brunner. He too has noticed the strange symbol on Kent's tiepin, and wishes to use people who are not likely to be recognised by Kent to keep an eye on him. Brunner suspects that Kent may have been responsible for the murders, but will not come right out and say it. He would like the player-characters to investigate the murders and then observe Kent for the weekend.

## BLAIR CASTLE

Blair Castle sits amid the Duke's extensive holdings just outside of Blair Atholl, 123 km northwest of Edinburgh. The local constables have cordoned off the country lane that winds through the Duke's pine forest. There are vehicles in a forest turn-around waiting to take away dead bodies being unloaded from an armoured personnel carrier (APC). Heavily armed troops in camouflaged battle gear are moving bodies from the APC to awaiting ambulances. Good observers, especially ones with military backgrounds, will notice that the troops are from the Black Watch, the 42<sup>nd</sup> Royal Highland Regiment, recalled from British service. Observers will also notice that local police do not cross the cordon. Answers to questions about the firepower will return that further desecration is expected from the terrorists. If the party can get close enough, observers will notice that there are dead victims in black tactical

## Sumerian Symbolism

Kent's tiepin was given to him by a New Age friend he met near his country home. The symbol is the sigil of the ancient Sumerian god Nergal. Although figuring prominently in Babylonian literature and even appearing in the Bible, (II Kings), Nergal—also called Meslamtaea—the god of the underworld, is Sumerian in origin.



*Nergal is the burner, the destroyer, for this is the last limitation. When a man dies he will, if he fears, burn in the flames of his terror. He will be torn by the dogs of his unfulfilled desires, cut to pieces by his guilt, until all that he has tied to his and to himself is purified and a little, just a little metal - it may be gold, or copper, or mercury, or silver or even lead - be left. This test takes place between every breath; between every breath a man dies and is reborn, so every day he is borne into the light of day and dies into sleep, that taste death, wherein the dreams torment and taunt him with the deeds of the day. Here he must be a hero, walking unafraid through the land of his own underworld, mocked by the laws he has acted against. He must meet the demons that he himself has created; he must fight the battles, which take place in him every day. This is justice: between breath and breath he may see the judgments he passes upon others, and as he does so visits them upon himself. Only courage and steadfastness in truth and insight are his weapons here.*

Davies, Wilfred and Zur G., *The Phoenician Letters*. 1979, Mowat Publishing, Manchester, UK.





garb as well as civilians. Good observers will notice that one of the bodies is that of a uniformed Highlander with grievous wounds. While there are gunshot wounds in the victims, some victims show up in parts having apparently been torn limb from limb. It seems that both terrorists and royals alike were the victims of something ferocious. Something still lurks at the castle still, since even the recently arrived military has fallen victim.

## THE WYRM OF ATHOLL

Over 1000 years ago, the younger Lord Atholl rode out to do battle with the Wyrms. Although he hadn't yet reached majority, the Sons of Albion had trained the young lord, to meet just such a creature as this. Wearing charms handed him by his brethren, the young Lord Atholl ran the Wyrms down. Although it took him into its jaws, the magicks the young lord wore caused the Wyrms to be taken apart with the parts flying into nothingness. At the same time and not known to the young lord, a pair of his brothers were in Inverness, and had just led a force of arms against a tower located there. They were very surprised to find the wizard to be a shrivelled grey-skinned dwarf with large almond-shaped eyes – like a legendary Viking dwarf. They put him to the torch anyway.

The young Lord Atholl would later recall he had thrown the beast into the pit from which it came. Or so he, with his limited experience, believed. The pit was actually a partial proto-dimension and the beast was trapped there – until now.

### LUCKY

As the players are moving around at the checkpoint, some of the Black Watch will bring in a man with his hands bound behind him. With some quick talking, the player-characters should get access to him. If the player-characters get to talk to him he will give a statement. (See the Police Statement sidebar.) With some interrogation and maybe threats of taking him back to the castle, Lucky will confess, off the record, that he is not really a Cornwallian, but a freelance hit man. Although he does not have all the details, his team was hired by some slick corporate type to kill Duke Atholl and his family, and paid a lot of money too. His buddy Jack said something about maybe a corporate job for Morstowe or Mastadon or something. Cushy, Jack said. However, if shown a picture of Kent, he will not recognize him.

### MISTER X

While questioning Lucky at the checkpoint, a stranger will pull up in a chauffeured Jaguar. He will move among the police like he is in charge with the constables hopping to follow his directions. The stranger will shake the hands of a couple of the Black Watch – obviously old friends. They will point to the player characters and he will approach smiling. The stranger will identify himself as Mister X, special envoy of the Republic. Mister X will talk softly to Lucky, who gets real quiet. Mister X will then ask some questions about what Lucky saw. Lucky will respond with the additional details that he *forgot*. (See Lucky's Private Statement sidebar.) Mister X will show Lucky a photograph of a serious looking woman in her early thirties. The photo is from a publicity shot and is captioned "Lady Margaret". Lucky identifies the woman as the one who fought with the dragon.

### DARKWYRM, THE WYRM OF ATHOLL

The Wyrms of Atholl is a dreaded Darkwyrms. It is not known if the Darkwyrms is a single creature or a race of creatures, but it is rarely encountered, coming from its proto-dimension like a tornado – wreaking about the same level of havoc. The creature is no animal, but highly intelligent with formidable intrinsic and other empathic powers. Some minion hunters lucky enough to escape encounters claim it is a Dark Lord. (See the Darkwyrms sidebar.)

### Weekend in the Country

This should point the players back toward England. If this leads the players to decide they would like to spend the weekend in what's left of the English countryside, they will find that Kent lives in an 18th century manor house near the small village of Asthall Leigh in the Wychwood area of Oxfordshire. The village will be hard to find, so at some point the players will have to put in at a little stone-built pub to ask for directions.

## THE PUB

This is the New Inns, a lovely English stone-built country pub built about 1810. The little pub will be quite busy if the player-characters arrive Friday night, but quieter if they turn up on Saturday morning or midday. The first thing they will notice are several tents and ageing camper vans in the grassy field next to the pub's parking area, invoking a feeling of a gypsy caravan complete with earthy smells, campfire



## Police Statement:

---

CLARENCE "LUCKY" SAMPLES: CAPTIVE CORNWALLIAN

"Our attack had gone according to the numbers – pickets in the woods taken cleanly. A cell phone call got through, but that was all, and our team would be done with it by the time the coppers got there. I was in the back, just took out the last of the standing watch when I saw the small power station in the back of the castle explode, the force of the blast knocked me and Jack to the ground. Too much plastique, I thought then. I know better now, though. I saw a normal red-yellow fire in the power station shift to a greenish-white, and the heat...the heat that emanated from it hit me like a board to the face. Jack fell down. Then it got real cold, I mean real cold, too! It was then that a hellish scream tore loose, sounding like metal tearing under some kinda stress. My assault ship hit a sub once, made that kind of sound. Most of my team cowered in the middle of their tasks. I saw a couple of them, Blake and Jocko, run for the woods. Must have been the motion then, cause that's when It saw them.

"Run it did! Like a goose, wings a flapping, screaming that metal sound. I was froze and couldn't call to 'em. It was too late anyway. It bit Blake clean in half before he knew what hit him. Jocko turned around at Blake's scream just in time to see a huge taloned foot press him to the ground. He didn't make much sound after that, even when the beast started pulling him apart.

"Jack ran into the back door then. I could still hear gunfire from in there. Gawd! I was scared, still am! I just ducked down and watched as the beast – all lizard-like – moved towards the castle. I tucked my head down then and I swear it was my first prayer, but it must have worked. The beast strode right past me, I guess, looking for the noises from inside. I almost lost it then. The thing stank! Gawd, the stench! My eyes watered like the CS gas we trained with, and I couldn't breathe without gagging. Some kind of lightning flew from its head and shattered the doors. I think it was Harry behind the door, poor Harry. After it went in, I scurried along the fence toward the trees. Once I hit the trees I ran. Must'a hit a tree in the dark, cause that's all I remember...until this morning. I sneaked back to the vehicles and that's when these goons caught me. And glad I am too, I tell ya'.

"What did it look like? It was a dragon. Right out of myth and fable. St George's own. Oh you can laugh, you weren't there.

"It was big as a truck, heavy through the body, short stubby, but powerful legs. Jocko would know that. Pale grey, almost white, I think. In the dark couldn't tell. It had a dozen or so heads, well...more than one. Looked like worms with big teeth. Had wings, but they were small; I can't see it flying on those.

"Hey you gonna charge me? Get me out of here! I know you didn't kill it, and it may come this way!"

◆ ◆ ◆

## Private Statement:

---

LUCKY SAMPLES

"I must have been hallucinating when I hit the trees cause I heard that metallic scream again and hit the ground. I looked all around for where the sound was coming from. Back at the castle, I saw that thing backing out of the doors. Screaming something horrendous. It was actually being chased by a person – a woman.

"She had this big-arse sword and was making gestures. Now I don't go for that magic mumbo-jumbo, but flames leaped from her hands and danced around the thing's heads. It appeared sort of stunned then when she moved in closer to use that sword. Got two of its heads before that lightning leaped out again. Hit her square in the chest. She fell to her knees, but she didn't drop that sword. Tough one! The creature walked up to her and just looked down at that kneeling woman. Then she screamed – definitely human, that scream. Then she went all white. The beast took one of its little forepaws and smacked her across the head. I swear she shattered, pieces flying everywhere – like that rose in the liquid oxygen.

"Nasty! I couldn't take it after that and crawled a while. I got up to run and that's when I hit that branch..."

◆ ◆ ◆



## THE DARKWYRM

<i>Strength:</i>	13	<i>Education:</i>	2	<i>Move:</i>	1/5/10/20
<i>Constitution:</i>	25	<i>Charisma:</i>	0	<i>Skill/Dam.:</i>	14 / 3D10
<i>Agility:</i>	4	<i>Empathy:</i>	9	<i>Hits:</i>	75 / 150
<i>Intelligence:</i>	7	<i>Initiative:</i>	4	<i># Appearing:</i>	1

*Special:* In addition to GM determined empathic powers, the Darkwurm has two abilities: Heat Drain and Chaos Lightning. See text.

The Darkwurm has been associated with the dark ancient Egyptian god Apophis, who was opposed to the sun god Ra. As the sun set, Ra, in his fiery chariot would travel the underworld domain of Apophis. A nightly struggle would ensue between Ra and Apophis. Should Apophis win, the world would be plunged into perpetual darkness and Apophis would come forth to claim his land.

The Darkwurm appears lizardlike with a large body, short thick legs, and thin rubbery wings. It has 5 heads that will grow back should they be cut off. However, this is not instantaneous as in the mythical Hydra, but takes several days. The heads are positioned at the end of long wormlike appendages. Circular mouths reveal several ragged rows of sharp pointy teeth. The stubby wings do not appear enough to give the creature flight in earth's gravity. The creature also has an overpowering stench that causes characters failing a willpower test to take one difficulty level penalty to all tasks they undertake for the first 10 minutes. True to the legends, the Darkwurm cannot stand light, especially sunlight, and will not come out during the day.

### HEAT DRAIN

The Darkwurm carries with it an aura of *dark cold*. The dark cold is an intrinsic ability of the creature itself, and is how the creature sustains itself. The Darkwurm leeches positive energy off its surroundings in the same manner that Pales leech heat from victims. Unlike the Pale, the Darkwurm does not have to touch the victim; rather the draining effect covers a volumetric radius around the creature. The Darkwurm also leeches heat from non-living things turning the area around it into a state approaching the vast coldness of space. Heat energy is drawn from the very air itself and causes the air to grow dark the closer one gets to the beast – the dark cold.

As characters move within 300 meters of the Darkwurm, the air begins to grow dim, objects grow cold, batteries drain down, etc. at closer distances, the effect is more pronounced. As a natural ability, the creature makes no skill test, but does make a power test to determine the maximum radius of effect. The power test does not subtract out the victim's Willpower level or Intelligence attribute. For each attained power level, the radius of effect is 5 meters. Characters within this radius are protected for each 5 meters of their Willpower skill level. For example, the Darkwurm has attained a



power level of 4. The Darkwurm's heat draining radius is 20 meters. A character with a Willpower of 2 enters this radius. She is protected from drain until she gets within 10 meters.

Each living being attacked by heat drain receives 1D6 damage each 5 seconds. Electronics operate at ½ efficiency. Characters within 75 meters suffer vision loss due to the dark cold that causes a difficulty level penalty to attacks. Within 20 meters the dark is so bad characters suffer a two difficulty level penalty.

### CHAOS LIGHTNING

Minion hunters call it chaos lightning because of the way blue-purple lightning dances and glows over the victim. They also call it that because of the way the victim disintegrates within minutes as the lightning consumes them.

Each Darkwurm head can shoot a bolt of lightning at a target each 5 seconds. Once it hits, the victim immediately takes 3D6 damage to the hit location. As long as the victim remains in the Darkwurm's draining range, the victim takes another 1D6 to the targeted location from progressive disintegration. Moving out of the draining range causes the lightning to dissipate. The short range of the lightning is 20 meters, which the creature shoots at a skill of 16.

Chaos lightning effects all organic and non-organic material that it consumes. Any equipment at the determined hit location is also subject to damage and disintegration as described.



smoke, and stringed refrains drifting on the light breeze. A queue of motorcycles leads up to the door from which music pores.

When the PCs enter the pub, the first thing that hits them is the strange mixture of customers. In their own cloister sit obvious locals enjoying a few pints, and a few biker types chatting to female students down from Oxford with their male counterparts brooding in their cups. Around the makeshift stage area there sits group of what seem to be New Age followers, drinking, singing with the musicians, or calling out favourites. Most of the people have come for the weekend to enjoy the entertainments, especially the bands that play on Saturday nights. The pub has a fairly large party room, and the few neighbours it has are already here. Chairs near the makeshift stage have been moved around to accommodate cheering and singing dancers. The mood is definitely festive.

If the PCs ask about Graham Kent by name, the barman will reply “What? Graham? He’s a regular here most weekends, if he can drag himself away from work. I haven’t seen him yet. He’s popular around here. We all know who he is in London, but in here he’s just Graham. You might ask those folks over there. I think they’re some of his friends, they might be waiting for him” and he gestures toward the New Agers.

## SHINE ON SILVER SUN

The Silver Sun self-help group was formed way back in the 1980s, after the Battle of the Beanfield where British police attacked an encampment of New Age travellers known as the Peace Convoy. For reasons still shrouded in mystery, the police dressed in full riot gear with no ID numbers showing, and charged into the camp at dawn. They pulled people from their beds and beat them (including at least one pregnant woman), smashed everything the occupants owned, and ended by impounding every vehicle in the campsite. The Silver Sun group decided to give up their apparently dangerous life on the road and bought a derelict farm near Witney in Oxfordshire. Over the years the farm has evolved from a self-sufficiency commune into a place of refuge from the pressure of early 21st century life, sort of an alternative lifestyle country club serving Gnomes wanting retreat. When Graham Kent moved to the area he heard about the group, and decided that he could do with learning how to relax. He became first, a student (of their meditation practices), an acquaintance, an associate member, and eventually a good friend.

If the players talk politely to the group in the pub, they will be friendly and chatty, telling the players much of the history given above. If any players enquire about joining the Silver Sun they will be told politely that the group has no vacancies at the moment. The most talkative member of the group is a tall woman in her late twenties, who the others call Kattie. Eventually a short but very muscular man will enter the pub and come over to speak to the New Agers. He will be polite to the players but rather distant, as though something was distracting him. The others will introduce him as Tannett, a “maker of things” as one calls him. He will have a quick drink of fruit juice (he never touches alcohol) and then officiously suggests that the Silver Sun members depart, as they have things to do. An Empathic player character will feel a sense of Foreboding and that something is not quite “right” about Tannett. But, as the Silver Sun people trust him, and are very genuine about their feelings, the PC will not be able to pinpoint any specifics. The Silver Sun will all go out and climb into a van, in which Tannett drives them away. The van, which was not present when the PCs came in, has distinctive markings of a stylised silver sun. However, if the players decide to try and follow the van, they will soon lose it in the winding country lanes.

## WATCHING KENT

When the players eventually near Graham Kent’s house, they will notice a trail leading to a now disused picnic site, which will make a good vantage point over Kent’s gardens and terraces. A difficult test of driving will get a vehicle to the picnic area. Another success is required to leave the area. However, the site is already occupied by a nest of large stinging ants, which are not deadly in themselves, but will certainly make life uncomfortable for any PC who steps out of the party’s vehicle.

Note that Kent is the CEO of a large corporation, and as such his home is surrounded by the very latest in hi-tech security gear. The players will not be able to get any closer without attracting the wrong kind of attention. Masdon security chief Brunner has no up-to-date specifications on Kent’s home systems, but he does know that Kent has three armed bodyguards with him.

The first thing they will notice about Kent’s house is a Silver Sun Farms van parked on the driveway. Neither Tannett nor the other Silver Sun members are to be seen. An empathic player may have a sense that something is happening in the house (Difficult: Foreboding), but will not be able to give a precise location. Empaths



will feel a slight pressure building in their heads, as though their skulls were being filled with cotton wool. Empaths that have been through a dimensional gateway will recognize the sensation, and realize that there is a portal opening in the Kent residence. They will also realize that the portal is being opened by a very powerful empathic force, for the sensation is strong even at this distance (about 350 meters). Eventually the feeling drops away, leaving the empathic players with a slight headache, and lots of questions.

A few minutes later, the Silver Sun group will exit the house and climb back into the van. They will be a little subdued, and although they are talking in awed voices, they are too far away to be heard. Last to exit is Tannett, who will pause by the door for a moment to talk to Kent, who looks a little shaken. An easy task vs. Human Empathy will show Kent's mind to be awash with conflicting thoughts. Tannett himself looks pale and seems to have aged visibly since the party saw him in the pub just a few hours previously. There is no exchange of handshakes and Tannett gets into the van and drives off. Kent returns to the house and goes to bed.

If the PCs decide to follow the van it will go straight to Silver Sun Farm and everyone will go inside, have supper, then retire for the night. It is not a good idea for the players to try to sneak into Silver Sun Farm, as it is guarded by five very large dogs and is surrounded by automatic security lights. Since the SPP period, the Farm has suffered parties of looters from the big cities who on occasion have raided their isolated community.

As night falls, if the PCs have the Kent house under watch, they will see two Masdon trucks pull up to the rear of the house. The angle is wrong to see anything, but several husky lads and some armed security thugs load something from the house. Loading takes approximately 1.5 hours. Before the trucks have finished, the Silver Sun van pulls up. Tannett gets out, but the others in the van stay seated. As Tannett talks to the drivers of the trucks,

Kent and his driver appear. The driver fetches the Bentley replica from the external garage. Tannett and Kent exchange a few words, and Tannett leaves Kent staring after him. Tannett drives away as Kent's Bentley pulls up. Kent gets in and follows the van out the gate. The trucks follow pulling away into the night.

If the Silver Sun Farm is under watch, the PCs will see all the New Agers and Tannett exit the house and get in the van. The PCs will follow the van to Kent's house to see the exchange and subsequent departure.

## ROAD TRIP

The PCs should follow the northbound convoy. During the road trip the PCs hear the following a broadcast news update on the Atholl murders. (See the Midnight Broadcast sidebar.)

The convoy is obviously headed for Edinburgh. Any encounters for the 6+ hours on the road are up to the GM, but the PCs should not totally lose the convoy.

## THE FACTORY

The plant in Edinburgh has a fairly well if incomplete security system installed. The plant builders were intent on completing the main buildings and left security until the end. While there is a chain-link fence topped with razor wire around the perimeter, there are gaps in the surveillance camera coverage spotted on an average test of observation. The convoy arrives at the plant just before dawn on Sunday morning. Kent's car is waved through; the van stops at the checkpoint and then leads the trucks to the delivery dock in the main factory building. There appears to be only the one human security guard. Only the security people and drivers from the convoy are around to unload the trucks.

Among the items taken from the truck are several irregularly shaped crates. Some items are so

## Midnight Broadcast

### GLOBECAST NEWS 24...

"This just in: Edinburgh Police report that their only suspect in the Duke of Atholl slayings was found murdered in his cell. Jailers in the Edinburgh central police station have no idea how the killer got past security cameras. Clarence Samples was found with a massive stab wound to the chest. Security cameras recordings, supposedly working all the time, showed no one coming or going in the jail.

"After calling in government investigators amid charges of treason, the investigation team has announced a breakthrough in the Plymouth ship yards break-in. Using state-of-the-art video processing, investigators noted irregularities in the surveillance tapes. Two suspected in altering the tapes have fled and an all-area search is underway.

"On a lighter note, Masdon Global has announced that the opening of their new Scotland factory has been moved up. The new factory staff and executives are already in place and expect massive profits from a backlog of contracts in Malaysia, Brazil, Nigeria and the US. Praising the speedy construction of the plant, the chief financial officer said that revised earnings estimates were in the works, and would be available after the opening on Monday afternoon.

"Things are looking up all over."

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irregular that they do not have crates, but rather are wrapped in blue plastic tarp. Empaths watching these items being unloaded receive a sense of foreboding so powerful they become dizzy, even at 500 meters away. Non-empaths can feel the malice emanate as well.

Tannett will stand around and watch the unloading of the trucks, occasionally yelling something to the workers. The other Silver Sun members will form into a small crowd behind and to his left. They appear dazed and confused. As the PCs watch, dock-loading bots appear and take the items onto the factory floor. Once all the parts are inside Tannett exchanges a few words with the truck crews, and they and the security men mount up in the trucks and leave. Tannett will lead the Silver Sun crew into the building.

## RETURN OF MISTER X

While the PCs have the factory under observation, the GM can have the mysterious Mister X show up. He will show up at the PCs' position unannounced and startle them. He will claim he seeks Graham Kent and will not interfere in the PCs operation. Dressed all in black, he will be carrying an ancient Colt 1911 automatic in a quick-release holster strapped across his chest, and a large sword in a sheath on his back. A cell-phone looking communicator on his belt completes his kit.

This character is a current Son of Albion and is there to retaliate against Kent for the death of his brethren, Lady Margaret and her designate. But he will not share his reasons, just his mission. Mister X will have knowledge of the control room and the communications center, which he is willing to share with the PCs should the GM feel the robots are too much. If the PCs ignore Mr. X's advice, he will seek Kent on his own, and in the process may shut down communications for them. In any event, Mister X will slay Kent and then disappear.

## ENTERING THE FACTORY

The player-characters should have no problem locating the gaps in surveillance and entering the main manufacturing complex. Inside the main building, the PCs will be confronted by a vast array of machines working furiously, sparks flying, metal chips piling up only to be swept away by motorized thingies running around the factory floor. On the concrete flooring is a narrow path bound by red stripes

on each side. There is little light beyond that from arc welding, and noxious fumes taint the stale air. The heat is barely tolerable and the PCs break into a sweat after only a minute or so. The noise is deafening with the whirring and clanging of robots happy in their work. Occasionally, there is a clanging bell and a large bot will zip across the narrow path. Unwary visitors will get hit by failing an average test of agility. Treat as being hit by a small car.

The red-striped path appears to wend its way deeper into the machine complex, and eventually leads to a cleared away central area. The loading bots from outside are unpacking the crates they have brought in. Other bots are busy welding together parts into bleachers off to the side. A central raised platform roughly 40 meters on each side supports the parts as the bots unpack them. Behind the raised platform, multipurpose bots are raising a large sign containing the Masdon Global logo with the catchy line, "Things are looking up all over!"

Should the PCs cross the red lines the nearest bot will attack the PC with whatever it uses for appendage. All bots, mobile or not, will attack PCs on the wrong side of the red lines using melee combat. The path the PCs are on leads straight to the raised platform and the bleachers, and it is not necessary to cross red lines to get there. If the PCs attack the bots, alarms will sound. Moving back between lines will stop attacks if the alarm has not been raised. Should alarms sound Tannett will come running to direct the robots. Until Tannett shows up, the bots will only attack humans that have crossed the red lines. With Tannett there, the bots will attack all the PCs, and previously hidden battle-bots will join in, firing their strange weapons at all intruders. The battle-bots are of no recognizable manufacture. Use the Warbot from the *Darktek Sourcebook*, Mechanical Steriloids from the *Dark Races Sourcebook*, or the RamTech Robogards from the basic rules. Whatever the final battle-bot, these will be armed with at least the Pulser. (See below.)

Alternately, the GM can run the PCs through random encounters using the Mechanica Factory Encounter Table from the *Protodimensions Sourcebook*.

The Silver Sun group, still appearing dazed, stand in a cluster near the rear of the raised platform. Tannett is pointing out things to the bots unpacking the items from Kent's house. Once the parts are unpacked the malice is overwhelming to empaths. Empaths attempting to perform non-empathic tasks, receive an increased difficulty level because of these feelings.



## THE GATE

Anyone who has seen a dimensional gate will recognize the construction for what it is. However, this one is huge. Additional bots appear to manhandle the parts of the gate into place. The gate parts are a dull black and absorb rather than reflect the lights. Some parts seem to extend beyond their visible ends causing disorientation and making it preferable to look away. Those with good observation skills can make out ominous-looking robots in the shadows. These bots appear to mount weapons, weapons of no known manufacture, but definitely lethal. These are the battle-bots.

Smaller transit bots appear carrying folding chairs, which they place in neat rows on the platform. At this point Tannett moves to the Silver Sun group and takes each one by hand and leads them to the gate. As he touches a recess on the surface, a small opening appears and Tannett leads the member into a niche. He closes the moving surface behind them. He repeats this step for each member of the group. Once the last Silver Sun member is encased in the gate, an ominous low-frequency throbbing hum starts building. Tannett appears pleased with himself as he moves to the center of the platform in front of the gate. His raised hand prompts a raucous sound of martial music to pour forth from tinny speakers. The noise appears to shield the humming and Tannett's lowered hand halts the music and the throbbing hum. Spinning abruptly, Tannett strides off the stage and away from the working robots disappears into the surrounding machinery.

The bots continue the preparations for the next day's ceremonies. Should the PCs make it to the raised platform, a Difficult: Intelligence test will reveal the recess Tannett pulled. The members will follow the PCs complacently. They have had all their willpower drained.

### THE CONTROL ROOM

After arriving at the main building Kent went into the factory and made his way to the control room. Tannett intended the factory to be the security system and has not installed additional security for the control room. The control room is luxuriously appointed. It is intended to sell investors and government supporters on the factory. Kent will be in this room watching the surveillance screens and quietly getting drunk. He has finished the better part of his overlarge decanter, regrets what he has done to Lord Atholl, and suspects what Tannett will do to his friends. Should the PCs meet him here, they will be met with tears and slurs.

Below the surveillance screens is a control station. PCs with a robotic manufacturing background or who pass either a Difficult: Electronic or a Difficult: Mechanical test will recognize that all the factory communications functions pass through this panel. Unless the PC was a factory operations manager, she will not know how to operate the panel, just how to disable it. Kent did not trust Tannett, and unknown to him ensured this weakness was installed.

Should Mister X already have intervened by cutting communications, Kent will be dead with a horrible death-rictus and a large stab wound to the heart. The communications panel will be destroyed.

## RESOLUTION

The PCs need to remove the Silver Sun group from their casing in the gate. This is the initial power source required to open a portal. Murdering the onlookers will widen and complete the opening. Should the opening ceremonies progress to the murder of the visitors, the gate will be opened. Hordes of death machines lie just on the other side waiting to sweep out and sterilize the earth. Game over, pal.

Disabling the communications panel in the control room can stop the murder of the visitors. Should the PCs get in over their heads with the factory robots, disabling the panel will certainly help. Killing or incapacitating Tannett will also stop the murders as well as halt robot attacks – unless people are on the wrong side of the red lines when automatic programming takes over.

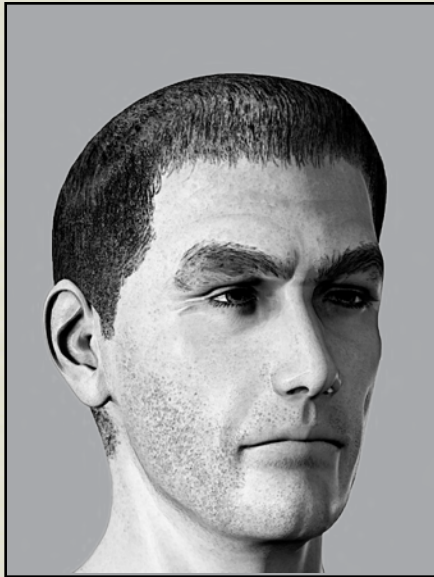
Tannett will not reveal his nature while in England, no matter how he is confronted. Once in Scotland, should Tannett realize that he has been exposed or that his plan is in jeopardy, he will revert to his *Whirlwind* form (see the Tannett sidebar) and attempt to slay all the PCs. If things start to go really badly, he will run away.

Of course the complete destruction of the gate would stop the portal, but that would require a lot of explosives. Further, any attempt to stop Mister X from killing Kent will be met with hostility. In the aftermath, should the PCs not destroy the gate, Mister X will step up to complete the job. He will have a lot of explosives. Mister X will remember the PCs and the way they arrived on the case.

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## MISTER X, BYRON ULRICH THYNNE



Mister X is Byron Charles George Ulrich Thynne and a Son of Albion. Byron is the nominal head of the Sons and has taken the case of Sir John's murder personally. The Murray family has held a seat among the Sons of Albion since the middle of the 16th century. The entire Murray family was murdered, including the next heir, Lady Margaret's designate, young Master Bruce. There is now a vacancy at the table and Byron is angry.

Graham Kent has been the subject of a Sons' investigation since his involvement with Tannett, who is well known to the Sons of Albion. Tannett's involvement coupled with the deaths in factories designed by Masdon

Global prompted a Sons investigation into Masdon. Reverse engineering a pilfered robot from the Plymouth shipyards revealed alien technology and programming. Fearing Masdon was a darkling proxy, the Sons took an opposition stance to the Scottish factory. At the Lady Margaret's urging Sir John opposed Masdon's move to Scotland.

Byron has several reasons to exact his revenge against Kent. Being a darkling lackey is the slightest. Loosing the Darkwyrms is next. Allowing the destruction of mankind just tops the list.

The Sons of Albion work methodically behind the scenes. When Sir John was killed, it was the Sons who called upon Brunner to seek outside

assistance. Brunner called his cab driver brother-in-law and asked him for ideas. Brunner was surprised when William Vincent called him. After getting the story, William Vincent passed the names of the PCs to Brunner and the rest is history. Byron is surprised to find organized resistance against the dark minions. The involvement of William Vincent also comes as a surprise since several of the Sons' families have business dealings with him. Although new money, Vincent seems on the up-and-up. What strange bedfellows these times make.

<i>Strength:</i>	6	<i>Education:</i>	8	<i>Move:</i>	4/8/14/30
<i>Constitution:</i>	6	<i>Charisma:</i>	8	<i>Skill/Dam.:</i>	See skills; Dam: 4
<i>Agility:</i>	8	<i>Empathy:</i>	8	<i>Hits:</i>	20 / 40
<i>Intelligence:</i>	8	<i>Initiative:</i>	4	<i># Appearing:</i>	1

*Special:* In addition to GM determined empathic powers, the Darkwyrms has two abilities: Heat Drain and Chaos Lightning. See text.

<i>Skill</i>	<i>Asset</i>	<i>Skill</i>	<i>Asset</i>	<i>Skill</i>	<i>Asset</i>
<i>Interrogation</i>	12	<i>Stealth</i>	11	<i>Rigid Thinking</i>	18
<i>Language(Latin)</i>	9	<i>Streetwise</i>	9	<i>Speed of Thought</i>	10
<i>Leadership</i>	12	<i>Willpower</i>	8	<i>Clairaudience</i>	12
<i>Melee Combat (Armed)</i>	16	<i>Force of Will</i>	13	<i>Mind Shield</i>	16
<i>Melee Combat (Unarmed)</i>	13	<i>Peace of Mind</i>	13	<i>Project Thought</i>	11
<i>Psychology</i>	12	<i>Mental Health</i>	11	<i>Telekinesis</i>	16
<i>Small Arms (Pistol)</i>	9	<i>Mental Leap</i>	11	<i>Telepathy</i>	14
<i>Small Arms (Rifle)</i>	10				

Byron received psionist training in his youth from the Beresford School for the Gifted after being identified as a successor to a seat among the Sons of Albion. After finishing psionist training, Byron took teaching from the venerable Psychokineticist Master Terry McGrath.

### Colt M1911A1, .455 Webley Special

<i>Ammo</i>	<i>ROF</i>	<i>Dam</i>	<i>Pen</i>	<i>Bulk</i>	<i>Mag</i>	<i>Recoil</i>		
						<i>SS</i>	<i>Brst</i>	<i>Rng</i>
.455 Webley	SA	2	1-Nil	1	7	3	—	12
Modern ammo	SA	3	2-Nil	1	7	3	—	16
DS ammo	SA	3	1-1-Nil	1	7	3	—	20
HEAP	SA	3	2-2-2	1	7	3	—	12

As the family's then-standing member of the Sons of Albion, Byron's sponsor gave him the family's Colt 1911 chambered for Commonwealth service in the .455 caliber. Charles was awarded the pistol upon obtaining his commission from Sandhurst in 1915. Although Charles, a Son of Albion, was killed in the Ardennes, his pistol returned with him to be given to his designated heir. The weapon has remained in the family's hands until present. Byron has started the custom manufacture of special loads fitting the .455 caliber and had the pistol modified slightly to account for the more powerful chamber pressures.

*Ammo:* .455 Webley  
*Weight:* 1.1 kg (loaded)  
*Mag:* 7 box  
*Price:* \$3,100 (-/-)





## TANNETT



Age: 31  
 Height: 183 cm  
 Weight: 84 kg\*

Strength:	8*	Education:	6	Move:	4/8/20/40
Constitution:	7*	Charisma:	6	Skill/Dam.:	See notes; Dam: 5**
Agility:	7*	Empathy:	8	Hits:	20 / 40*
Intelligence:	5	Initiative:	4	# Appearing:	1

\* These are Tannett's apparent stats. His real stats are those of the Whirlwind.

\*\* Tannett is really a Whirlwind. Should he be forced to act as a human, use the Skill above. If reverted to Whirlwind state, use the Whirlwind attack stats.

Skill	Asset	Skill	Asset	Skill	Asset
Melee Combat(Unarmed)	13	Streetwise	7	Human Empathy	17
Melee Combat (Armed)*	11	Willpower Drain	17	Dimension Walk	19
Small Arms (Pistol)	12				

Tannett was born Aaron Alexander Tannett and was a major disappointment to his family. Tannett is a strong empath who used hallucinogenic drugs to attain mystical experiences. It was during one of these drug-induced mystical experiences that a Machine Lord from Mechaniaca contacted him. The experience was overwhelming to Tannett who thought he had communed with God. Eager to please this powerful entity, Tannett followed the Machine Lord's instructions and was drawn into Mechaniaca. There Tannett was transformed into a special cyborg called a *Whirlwind*.

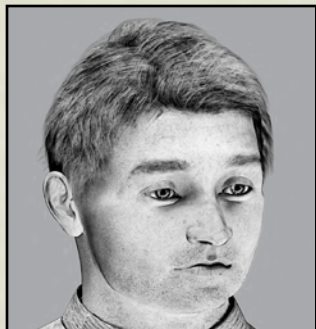
Whirlwinds have all-metal skeletons with flesh coverings. Whirlwinds have several internal weapons that spring out like switchblades. In melee combat Whirlwinds can strike with all of them at multiple targets. These weapons are devastating. However, the Whirlwind's flesh covering is severely damaged when the melee weapons are deployed, giving up the Whirlwind's disguise, which they do not want to do. Since the cyborg's original skin is used to cover a Whirlwind chassis, a Whirlwind can replace a person. Although the Whirlwind can mimic the target's voice, it is not quite right and sounds slightly metallic. Tannett is a willing Whirlwind and so retains his personality and his empathic skills. As an earthly minion for the Machine Lords, Tannett is a good choice; he can open portals.

Tannett has worked his way into the New Ager's group using his common background and personable skills. The Silver Sun Farm group consists of mildly empathic people seeking respite from the empathic noise of the city. With Machine Lord help, Tannett has developed a means of using humans as batteries to power a gate. He has taken control of this group to use them in this role.

At the opening, Tannett will use his empathic batteries and the horrible deaths of the dignitaries and visitors to overcome the alien device keeping Mechaniaca in its pocket proto-dimension. The gate Tannett is building will do more than open a pathway. It will cause the overlap of Mechaniaca and the primary earth plane. The invading killing machines will know no limitations in their onslaught. Tannett is ready to take his seat at the right hand of his Machine Lord.



## GRAHAM KENT



Age: 43  
Height: 170 cm  
Weight: 84 kg

Strength:	5	Education:	5	Move:	4/8/15/30
Constitution:	6	Charisma:	6	Skill/Dam.:	1/1
Agility:	3	Empathy:	2	Hits:	15 / 33
Intelligence:	5	Initiative:	1	# Appearing:	1

\* These are Tannett's apparent stats. His real stats are those of the Whirlwind.

\*\* Tannett is really a Whirlwind. Should he be forced to act as a human, use the Skill above. If reverted to Whirlwind state, use the Whirlwind attack stats.

Skill	Asset	Skill	Asset	Skill	Asset	Skill	Asset
Business	15	Small Arms (Pistol)	8	Forgery	10	Persuasion	12

Graham Kent is a brilliant industrialist. Through his efforts Masdon Global has grown to be an international robotics industry leader. A recent and surprising illegal transfer of technology to Indonesia has caused erosion in Masdon's market position. Stockholders are intolerant of the bite in their profits, and Kent grew desperate.

Tannett approached Graham at the Silver Sun Farm and offered patents for robotics technology that would blow the Indonesians out of the water. Kent jumped. The Indonesian threat has been stomped and Masdon Global currently controls the majority of robotics and robotic manufacturing integration in the world. For this Tannett was made a consultant and allowed to come and go as he pleased.

Using the Silver Sun Farms group, Tannett gave Kent the tiepin with the Sumerian sigil. In addition to supposed mystical, New Age, significance, the pin contains a locator/transmitter that Tannett uses to track Kent's movement.

Graham Kent at Tannett's urging had to take action to get the Scottish factory built. Kent did order the deaths of Lord Atholl and his family. He is no innocent bystander, but Kent does not know the horror Tannett wants to unleash on the world.

## WHIRLWIND

Strength:	12	Education:	3*	Move:	4/8/20/40
Constitution:	12	Charisma:	2*	Skill/Dam.:	** / 7D6
Agility:	8	Empathy:	0	Hits:	65 / 100
Intelligence:	5*	Initiative:	4	# Appearing:	1

\* The listed stats are for an involuntary Whirlwind – a human that was made a Whirlwind against their will. Use a volunteer's stats in place of those listed.

\*\* The Whirlwind has up to 6 attacks each phase with no penalty. Use the Melee Combat skill listed.

The Whirlwind has an all-metal skeleton that has an armor value of 1 (AV1)

Skill	Asset
Melee Combat (Armed)	19

## Pulser

Ammo	ROF	Dam	Pen	Bulk	Mag	Recoil		
						SS	Brst	Rng
Electrical pulse	SA1*	6**	Nil**	6	16	5	—	10

\*The pulser can only be fired once a combat turn, not round.

\*\*A biological target takes 6 damage, which only metal armor stops.

In addition to any blast damage, the Pulser hits biologicals for stun damage the same as the ET Stun Gun. Difficult:CON or go unconscious; success stunned for 1 combat turn. Armor does not stop the stun effect. Electronics suffer the same as an electro-magnetic pulse (EMP) attack. Unless EMP hardened, electronics stop functioning when struck. Unlike ET Stun guns, this weapon works well in a vacuum.

Ammo: Rechargeable battery pack

Wt.: 18.5 kg (weapon: 5.5 kg, battery pack: 13 kg)

Mag: 16 shots before recharging

Price: N/A (-/-)



## NOCTURNALLY YOURS

*By Karr Ess*

So I live in the darkness  
instead of the light  
and lurk in the shadows  
and rumored to bite;

We differ in ways,  
take for instance my sight;  
You may rule the day,  
but I own the night!

Preposterous! Those stories  
of sinister things...  
a blood-thirsty person  
with fangs and bat wings

To get well acquainted,  
I think it is wise  
to show me your trust,  
looking into my eyes...

Don't fear that I'm nearing  
your cheek for a peck.  
I promise it won't be  
a bite on the neck!

Consider the werewolf,  
that terrible beast!  
Such a lack of good manners  
while having his feast!

But with me, it is merely  
a kiss on the hand  
and fulfilling your wishes  
is at my command.

I believe in equality  
in every way;  
I don't care if your blood  
is type "O" or type "A"!

If you're feeling the challenge  
to prove me a fake,  
PLEASE take my advice:  
"Stay away from that stake!"

So I sleep in a coffin  
(according to tales)  
but it sure beats a night  
on a bed full of nails!

By now, you can trust me,  
though I look a fright.  
You'll come closer, my dear  
for just one "little" bite?

Since you came to my castle  
and walked through my doors,  
just remember, my dear:  
I'M NOCTURNALLY YOURS!





# TRAGEDY OF THE COMMONS

A Role-Playing Game

by Jeff Moeller

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Tragedy of the Commons* is a role-playing game in which the Players take the roles of mostly ordinary people who find themselves trapped in very, very bad circumstances. The system is very light on rules, and the mechanics emphasize resolving conflicts with dice only when the outcomes are legitimately in doubt.

The game is genre-neutral, time-period neutral, and style of play neutral. Rather, *Tragedy of the Commons* has been designed with the *type* of scenario in mind: impending doom, lack of control, and how the Players face up to it.

You will need: one Referee (who moderates the game); a number of Players, each of whom controls one character; some six-sided dice (d6s); and some paper and writing utensils. At least three Players are recommended; more than six Players can get awkward.

## 2. PREMISE

Heroes are able to channel their baser emotions and make the best out of a bad situation, as measured by the common welfare. Cowards are short-sighted and just try save their own skins from an immediate threat. This game is about exploring hero vs. coward psychodramas.

There are strong elements of basic game theory involved, and that is deliberate. It is possible that everyone will win cooperatively, and get an edge the next time that they play. It is equally possible that cooperation will break down, and someone will try to be the sole survivor—an even better outcome for the sole survivor, and bad for everyone else. It can be a game of collaborative storytelling; it can be a game of ruthless, selfish backstabbing and one-upmanship. Often it turns out to be both.

Players start each scenario with a new character and little information. They do not know the nature of the threat they will face, or what skills might best address it. They know, instead, who they are, where they live, and what they value. And that is about all that they will know. Repeat players will know the nature of the reward for winning: bonuses that apply in future sittings. At a convention demonstration, the prizes are whatever prizes are available for distribution, and how they are distributed is what is at stake.



## 3. THE PRISONER'S DILEMMA...

*...the Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma, and the Tragedy of the Commons*

This game, both on a scenario-by-scenario basis and on an ongoing, repeated play basis, examines what is known in psychological, economic and game theory circles as the Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma.

The Prisoner's Dilemma examines how, and under what circumstances, potential competitors either cooperate with or betray one another. Participants can either choose to cooperate (and receive a shared small reward) or try to take advantage of one another. If one succeeds in taking advantage of the others, he gets a larger reward than if he had cooperated, but if he fails (everyone tries to betray each other), they all lose and get nothing. By way of classic example:

There are two players and a banker. Each player holds a set of two cards, one printed with the word "Cooperate" (as in, with each other), the other printed with "Defect" (the standard terminology for the game). Each player puts one card facedown in front of the banker. By laying them face down, the possibility of a player knowing the other player's selection in advance is eliminated (although revealing one's move does not affect the dominance analysis). At the end of the turn, the banker turns over both cards and gives out the payments accordingly.

Given two players, "red" and "blue": if the red player defects and the blue player cooperates, the red player gets the Temptation to Defect payoff of 5 points while the blue player receives the Sucker's payoff of 0 points. If both cooperate they get the Reward for Mutual Cooperation payoff of 3 points each, while if they both defect they get the Punishment for Mutual Defection payoff of 1 point.

What do people tend to do? Most research tells us that it depends on how much information that the players have. If they believe that there is only one iteration of the game (example: a light sentence in exchange for testifying against a criminal co-defendant who is off in the next room being presented with the same sweetheart deal, in a situation where if both people stay silent, neither is likely to go to jail), about 40% cooperate.

The Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma, by contrast, involves putting the same people through the "cooperate vs. betray" decision-making process on an ongoing, recurring basis. People then have an opportunity

to remember previous cooperation and prior betrayals, and ongoing trust (and revenge) becomes an issue.

This is the basic game at play in *Tragedy of the Commons*. The rewards that the players stand to get are positive but modest if they all cooperate to a fair outcome, but there is the possibility of a large reward for one person who clearly dominates the others in any given scenario.

Unfortunately, and at risk of grossly oversimplifying thousands of academic papers (including some Nobel Prize in Economics winning research), what tends to happen is rather predictable.

If people know the number of iterations (e.g., we're going to play through five scenarios before we move on to another game), they drift towards stabbing each other in the back. This is the only rational way to for each player to proceed, according to a great deal of economics research. If you know that this is the last iteration, you might as well get everything that you can. One might as well backstab on the last turn, since the opponent will not have a chance to punish you. Therefore, rationally, both players ought to defect on the last turn. Furthermore, one might as well defect on the second-to-last turn, since the opponent will defect on the last no matter what is done, and so on.

Likewise, if people *don't* know the exact number of iterations that will be tried, but know that they are small and finite (e.g., we're going to play this game for a while until, predictably, we get bored with it), there is a strong skewing in favor of backstabbing. Indeed, when people begin to see an end in sight, the backstabbing picks up pace.

When the number of iterations that will be gone through is unpredictable, however, behavior tends to be different. The more uncertain the length of the game, the more likely it is that people fall into behavioral strategies of erring on the side of cooperation, while punishing societal rogues.

The good news is that, unless you are dealing with strangers or enforcing anonymity, isolating any game into a discrete, neatly packaged experiment really is not possible. People who are friends, game theory posits, are invested in relationships beyond the experiment. The small game being played between them is not really the entire game that needs to be examined. The game is their interpersonal relationship, and it may be indefinite. And if it is indefinite, then those players tend to cooperate over time.



## 4. SYSTEM BASICS

**a. The Basic Rule: Does the Outcome Really Matter?** The primary rule of the game is that conflict should only be resolved with dice if the outcome is legitimately in doubt.

This is one of the most important things that the Referee does: determine when things are really in doubt. The Referee should err on the side of caution: the outcome of most conflicts is really not in genuine doubt.

This “golden rule” is the opposite of how most role-playing games approach matters, so some explanation is needed, both in terms of theory and in terms of application.

In terms of theory: First, this game concerns (mostly) ordinary people. As a matter of common sense, people know what ordinary people are capable of doing. Life really isn't that random; some walls are climbable, others aren't, others might be depending on how long you take or what gear you have. If you spend long enough in a library, you will find a book there, and you will find certain information in it. Second, making the game about throwing too many dice detracts from the interactions of the psychodrama.

In terms of application, you as the Referee need to be thinking in terms of appropriate time and stretching one's limits. If someone can probably do it, let them. If they can't, then don't let them (unless it is some dramatically appropriate heroic gesture, then you might let them try). If they might be able to do it, then get out the dice. Or if they can do it, but are trying to do it very quickly—so quickly that they have to rush—then get out the dice.

There are three main areas where dice will come into play. One is combat. Combat is by its very nature chaotic and uncertain. Combat always involves a conflict to resolve with dice. The second is persuasion. Trying to bribe, cajole, lie or cheat your way past something will often involve a conflict to resolve with dice (although if the bribe is large enough, or the guard is asleep enough, or the sneaker is trying to do something too outlandish, the result might be assumed). The third is opposition. If two characters, or two sentient forces, are working at cross-purposes (sneaking/watching for sneakers, arm-wrestling, forcing a door vs. holding it shut), then the dice need to come out.

The example of trying to barricade a door—a sadly frequent occurrence in *Tragedy of the Commons*—provides a good illustration. The first thing that you, as a Referee, need to do is to size up the overall situation—what's trying to get through? How strong is the door? How balanced are the sides? What are they using to barricade things with? What are the attackers using to bash the door down?

If the situation as it begins is clear, then leave it clear until it changes. One zombie will not get through a secure, barricaded door. On the other hand, ten zombies coming through a poorly boarded-up window will get through, it's just a question of how long. Now, if someone steps up with an axe to beat the zombies back, and it strikes you as a fair fight, then the dice need to come out. Perhaps the zombies will succeed, be slowed down, or be beaten off. If two or three more people come rushing up with a bookcase, then reassess.

### **b. If Conflict Occurs Where the Outcome Is Genuinely In Doubt:**

The basic mechanism for resolving conflict is an opposed die roll: one six-sided die (1d6) vs. another, high roll wins.

Outcome legitimately in doubt and no side has a distinct edge: d6 vs. d6, high roll wins.

There are five levels of possible outcome: a tie, a marginal victory for one side or the other, or a decisive victory for one side or the other.

The winning Player decides what happens when they win, within reason. The Referee chooses outcomes for conflicts involving enemies or the environment, when the Player loses. (As a result, the Referee will decide when a Player dies).

Whether what is proposed as a favorable resolution by a Player is within reason or not, bearing in mind the plot and what could theoretically be accomplished, is determined by a vote of the table (the Referee plus all Players). A table vote is by majority vote, with each Player getting one vote, the Referee getting a vote, and the Referee's vote breaking any ties.

Everyone at the table is free to, and encouraged to, suggest a resolution within the “clear victory-marginal victory-tie” framework discussed below, but the winning Player puts



his selected proposal to a vote. This approach balances collaborative storytelling with some element of suspenseful uncertainty.

Winning by +3 or more should result in a decisive victory: the enemy you are fighting is incapacitated without risk to yourself; the door is kicked open; the task is accomplished with time to spare.

Winning by +1 or +2 should result in a marginal victory. You win the fight, but it takes some valuable time or raises a ruckus; the door is kicked open, but it takes several tries; the task is accomplished with no time to spare; you just barely manage to get to safety.

A tie should result in an inconclusive narrative. The task is accomplished, but not especially well or quickly. In the case of combat, the fight drags on and another round of dice is needed (after some time spent struggling, or shooting and missing, or scurrying about).

Losing by -1 or -2 should result in a marginal defeat. You might win a combat, but you are injured (which must be taken into account in future scene resolutions, such as by prohibiting you from climbing a wall, or running quickly, or tipping the balance to give the opponent a +1 in future combats).

Losing by -3 or more means that something very bad happens. In Act One, you are put in a risky or perilous situation. In Act Two, you might be killed if the narrative demands it. (Again, whether you are killed, or something else horrible happens to you short of death, is subject to a vote of the table).

What these outcomes mean in terms of lasting consequences or game impact varies, depending on whether it is Act One or Act Two. As a general rule, though, a tie is a push: a task takes as long as it normally would, a combat is inconclusive, or the situation is not clearly resolved, or gives rise to some new complication or obstacle. A marginal victory means that a task succeeds, but somewhat quicker than normal and without complications. A decisive victory means that the winner succeeds very quickly, achieves an unexpectedly positive result, or beats the odds.

Note that it may be appropriate in some circumstances to conduct the dice roll secretly, and only reveal the outcome

later. Examples: efforts to persuade an enemy who seems to agree, but might be planning treachery later (is he pretending to be your friend or has he really been swayed); or whether you have lost or hidden from someone successfully.

**c. *If Things Are In Doubt, But One Result Is Considerably More Likely, Or One Side Obviously Has the Advantage:*** The Referee may, before the dice are rolled, give one side or the other a +1 advantage to their die roll. No more than a shift of +1 should be given out, as that tends to take too much of the narrative control away from the characters and decreases the joy of uncertainty. Things that might justify a shift of +1 would be an uneven combat (someone is hurt, better armed, outnumbered, physically inferior); attempting something at the edge of someone's skill or human endurance; or the feat would be truly impressive for that character to pull off while not being implausible. Trying to convince someone who does not like or trust you to do something arguably in their own self-interest is another. In such a case, the side more likely to prevail, all else being equal, gets a +1 to their die roll.

Outcome legitimately in doubt, but one side has a distinct edge: d6 vs. d6 +1

**d. *Influencing the Outcome Via Extra Dice:*** Dice conflicts are generally 1d6 vs. 1d6, but this rule can be altered by a Player (or the Referee) spending any available extra dice that they may have at their disposal. Characters have extra dice corresponding to their personality traits, selected at character creation, one die per trait. These are referred to as Trait Dice. Thus, in a combat situation, a Brawler might (if what he is trying to do can be fairly described as "brawling") get to resolve the conflict with 2d6 vs. the opponent's 1d6. (Of course, the opponent might do likewise with any dice available to him).

Trait Dice are one-time deals: once they are used, they are gone for the duration of the scenario.

Whether a Player's requested use of a Trait Die is appropriate to a situation is subject to a table vote. By way of reminder, a table vote is by majority vote, with each Player getting one vote, the Referee getting a vote, and the Referee's



vote breaking any ties. This rule about Trait Dice is not optional, and is central to game play: it provides the primary mechanism for cooperation or backstabbing opportunities.

Trait Dice belonging to non-Player characters are controlled by the Referee, and the Referee decides when to invoke them. Negative Player Trait Dice likewise belong to the Referee, and the Referee decides when they are invoked.

Each player character (and a few select non-player characters) also have one (or in rare occasions, more) Desperation dice. A Desperation Die is wild, and may be used regardless of whether it “matches” a situation.

Desperation Dice are also one-time deals: once they are used, they are gone for that scenario.

- e. **The Referee Can Always Put Things to A Table Vote:** If in doubt, the Referee may (but need not) put any matter within his discretion to a vote of the table, with the Referee both getting a vote and breaking any ties. Note again that Player use of a particular Trait Die to affect a conflict is always subject to the vote of the table.

Who decides what? See the table below.

## Who Decides?

Issue	Who Decides
<i>Is the Outcome Fairly in Doubt?</i>	The Referee
<i>If So, Does One Side Have a Distinct Advantage (+1)?</i>	The Referee
<i>Who Wins if the Dice Come Out?</i>	The Dice
<i>What Exactly Does a Player Winning Mean?</i>	The Player whose turn it is, within reason
<i>Is the Selected, Player Resolution “Within Reason”?</i>	Vote of the Table
<i>Is a Particular Player-owned Trait Die Appropriate For Use?</i>	Vote of the Table
<i>When One Player’s Turn Ends and Another’s Begins, or the Referee Takes a Turn at Narration?</i>	The Referee
<i>What Happens if a Player Loses When the Dice Come Out, Or There is a Tie?</i>	The Referee. As a Result, the Referee Decides When a Player Dies

## 5. CHARACTER CREATION

Character creation involves three basic steps:

- First, the Referee describes the general nature of the scenario (setting, who might be suitable characters).
- Next, each Player develops a back story for their character: who are they? What do they do for a living? What are their strengths and weaknesses?
- Finally, each Player picks between 3 and 5 suitable Traits for his character: positive personality characteristics or things that they are good at.
- No dice are rolled or numerical statistics assigned; this is primarily an interactive story-crafting game. Only Traits are selected, along with developing a back story.

- a. **Extra Dice at Character Creation: Tragedy of the Commons** is a plot-driven game with some collaborative story-telling elements. The Referee has a story line, in which certain facts and circumstances are given. There is a set up, a stage, and a general plan of action which the characters will interact with. At a given point in time, something bad will happen, and the Players must deal with the ensuing chaos.

The Players can influence the plot in substantive, but not radical ways. They do this in two ways. First, when it is their turn, they control the narrative, with the rules and within reason. Second, when conflict ensues, they can bring their skills, personalities and quirks to bear. This latter contribution is accomplished by trying to spend one’s extra dice to nudge events along.

Extra dice come in two sorts: (1) Trait Dice and (2) Desperation Dice.

Every Player gets, at generation, between 3 and 5 extra Trait Dice, plus one Desperation Die. Trait Dice are d6s, one per trait selected at character generation. The Desperation Die is a d6 as well.

To select Traits, each Player selects at least three different key words or phrases that positively describe his character, his personality, or his capacities. For each such Trait, he receives one corresponding d6 Trait Die that may be used **once per scenario** when resolving a conflict. Only one Trait Die may be used per Player in any given conflict. By



spending a Trait Die, the character rolls 2d6 (the usual one and the Trait-related one) to tilt the outcome of a given conflict in their favor. (Some bad guys can do this as well, so watch out. And if the Player has a negative Trait Die, so can the Referee, in his discretion)!

Thus, Bob's medieval warrior may be a Brave, Handsome Archer. Bob would have one extra d6 corresponding to Brave, one to Handsome, and one to Archer. Likewise Sam's Short, Cunning, Thief or John's Geeky, Observant, Film Buff have three extra dice, one corresponding to each of these Traits.

It is permissible to take the same Trait in repetition. Someone who is a Kung Fu master and little else might take Crane Style Kung Fu more than once. However, at least one Trait Die must correspond to some kind of personality characteristic (brave, cunning, geeky, smart, pretty, observant, cheerful, wise, unflappable, *etc.*). Thus, with three Trait Die available at character generation, the Kung Fu Master might have Crane Style Kung Fu twice and Wise once.

Whether or not a particular conflict would be appropriate to skew by the addition of a particular Trait Die is subject to a table vote. A Player cannot simply throw a Trait Die; one must propose and explain why that Trait Die logically comes into play when resolving that conflict, and put the matter to a table vote. Only if the table vote is affirmative can the Trait Die then be added to the conflict resolution.

Note that the concept of conflict goes far beyond trading blows and swapping bullets. It includes getting the upper hand in terms of group dynamics, swaying someone to do (or not do) as you would like, and calling in favors. Using "Sexy" to distract a guard, or to cause a guard to hesitate from killing your friend (based on your prior relationship with him), or to generally shift someone's attitude toward your group; these are all forms of conflict.

The Desperation Die that each character receives is not tied to any Trait. Desperation Dice are wild dice that can be used to affect any outcome, either affecting one's own character, or affecting another character, in any way, without a vote of the table.

**Three, four or five Trait Dice?** Everyone gets three "free" Trait Dice plus their one Desperation Die at character

generation. They may also take one or two additional Trait Dice if they wish, for a total of four or five. However, if they do, they must also take one "negative" characteristic per additional die. They select an unflattering or disadvantageous character Trait (greedy, cheap, liar, chicken, impulsive, physically weak, crazy, *etc.*) and the Referee gets an extra d6 to use against them, any one time that the Referee believes that the flaw would come into play. The Referee's use of a negative Trait Die is not subject to the vote of the table; it is in the discretion of the Referee.

(Finally, players who have won previous scenarios may have yet more dice to begin with, as rewards from prior scenarios. This is discussed below).

**b. Precisely Defining Your Character Is Critical!** Very careful thought needs to be given to selecting character traits, because these are the only quantitative rules that the system has. Characters have no numerical strength ratings, hit points, percentile chances, or anything of that nature. If your character conception is of a combat monster, he will have mostly combat-oriented Traits—or he won't be much of a combat monster when push comes to shove.

Before character generation in any scenario, the Referee will give a general description of the setting (*e.g.*, a German prison camp during World War II located in Timbuktu, Mali) and any restrictions on who the characters are) (*e.g.*, British prisoners of war). Within these restrictions, each player creates a character (with accompanying Traits) who would plausibly be found in that setting. Each character should have a name, a backstory, and should know how (if at all) they are related to the other characters.

Equipment, and things that the characters have ready and immediate access to, should likewise be discussed and agreed to by consensus of the table. A medieval guard at a castle will have appropriate weapons, appropriate armor, and appropriate resources. Other things, they will have to go find once the scenario starts, if they can get to them.

Wordsmithing one's Traits is extremely important to developing an effective character. Slight shades of meaning can and will have game play impact. Take, for example, the following three traits:



- ☛ Monkey-Style Kung Fu
- ☛ Martial Arts
- ☛ Fighting

These are all legitimate choices for Traits, but which one is the best? That depends. Remember, whether doing something is within the scope of a stated trait or not is a matter of a table vote. Monkey Style Kung Fu might involve a daring, Hong Kong Action Theater leap from a high place without serious injury, but not a mighty, focused kick to a door. It might cause another practitioner of that style to come to your aid, because you had the same master. Martial Arts might involve performing a mighty kick to a door, but what do you with that gun? Fighting sounds awfully broad in terms of actual combat, but can you enter a Zen-like focus on a task? Or snatch a pebble from someone's hand? Probably not.

A lot of the fun of the system is arguing for breadth of application for more colorful skills and submitting it to the table for its mocking, pooh-poohing or acclaim, but broadly worded skills might come in handy. So choose wisely.

- c. **No Capes!** Characters are mostly ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances. They may be tough, bold or even heroic, but they are not superheroes. This game is about how people react to chaotic situations outside of their control. Traits should therefore be (mostly) real world and (in every case) plausible for the setting summary. You might be quick, or brilliant, or know Kung Fu, or be exceedingly tough, but you do not have super speed, cannot leap two stories, and are not bulletproof.
- d. **Mooks, Tough Guys and Bosses** Because the characters are, and should always be, the focus of attention, most people that they interact with will be "mooks." Mooks may (and should) have personalities, but they are intended as obstacles to be overcome with comparative ease. As a result, mooks have no Trait Dice or Desperation Dice assigned to them. The Referee might choose to apply a Player's negative Trait Dice to an interaction with a mook depending on the circumstances, of course.

One exception to the rule about mooks is the "tough guy." A tough guy is usually an adversary of secondary importance, but one who is not easily *physically* overcome. They come in lots of flavors: thug, gangster, mugger, ninja, Kung Fu student, rank and file commando, ninja, man at arms, marksman, hit man, low-level samurai, crowd scene zombie, the list goes on.

The typical tough guy has one extra Trait Die in whatever specific type of tough guy description most closely describes their function in society. Real bad asses (chief enforcers, intended to give a combat-oriented character a fair fight, for example; or theoretically fightable monsters like vampires) might have more. Tough guys do not get a Desperation Die, however.

"Bosses" are primary adversaries. Defeating them may be an important part of the scenario, or they may be someone whose motivations are central to the conflict. Bosses are full-fledged characters controlled by the Referee. Just like the Players, they have Traits and the extra dice to go with them. They even have a Desperation Die, which the Referee can use just as a Player might use his.

- 6. **Conflict Creation and Resolution, In Three Acts.** Scenarios in *Tragedy of the Commons* follow a three-act staging progression. Some of the rules about extra dice usage and the outcomes of conflict resolution are different depending on which Act it is. Things in Act One follow a leisurely pace and are more under the Players' control. Act Two is chaotic; people struggle to survive. And Act Three is the aftermath—what happens once the dust settles?

## 7. ACT ONE, WALKING DOWN THE TUNNEL.

At the beginning of Act One, the Referee should set the scene. An important aspect of *Tragedy of the Commons* is that the Players do, in fact, have to deal with each other and the challenges ahead. They may not strictly be trapped, but escaping from the beginning predicament with their hides intact is usually the end goal of the scenario. Thus, when setting the stage, take things far enough along that there



is no easy way out for the characters. They should not be able to just walk away.

*Example: The characters are guards or other residents of a castle on the isle of Guernsey. A band of mercenary pirates was sighted off the coast late in the day, but now it is night. People need to decide what to do: Flee? Fight? Bargain? Turn traitor? While they may be able to leave eventually, leaving is the goal and cannot be accomplished quickly.*

The Referee and the Players should also, initially, work out whether and to what extent the characters know each other. What is the nature of their relationship? Do they love each other? Do they hate each other? Are they comparative strangers? People who know each other well should know each other's Traits (good and bad); people who do not know each other well should only be allowed to take note of what is immediately apparent.

*Example: The garrison on Guernsey would all know each other quite well: who is brave, who is not, who can fight, and who is a liability in combat. The survivors of a zombie apocalypse who meet each other in an abandoned apartment building will only know for certain what is readily apparent (e.g., Sexy).*

**a. The Role of the Referee in Act One** The Referee acts as a scene setter and storyteller. Important non-player characters should be introduced. The Player should be permitted to thoroughly explore their immediate environment: find what equipment there might be immediately at hand, think about possible strategies (for however long the scenario gives them), and take the measure of the other characters and the others around them. You should stir the proverbial pot, and gradually ramp up the amount of danger.

*Example: A band of zombie apocalypse survivors wanders around the city, trying to get a sense of the magnitude of the disaster. They adopt roles within the group, debate (or argue, or come to blows) about what to do, gather equipment or supplies, and have their characters tested by a few minor zombie assaults.*

Things for the Referee to do during Act One:

- ☠ Introduce all of the Player characters to each other
- ☠ Allow them to build conflicts and alliances with each other and non-Player characters

- ☠ Get them to explore their immediate environment
- ☠ Present them with preliminary combat challenges
- ☠ Use non-Player characters (and their dooms) to illustrate the magnitude of the peril that the Player characters face
- ☠ Build a sense of tension
- ☠ Set the stage for the Act One-ending catastrophe

**b. Taking Turns and Spending Dice.** During Act One, the Referee generally determines the turn order, except as noted below. Focus on building narrative, conflict, tension, and character relationships. Encourage people who are taking the lead in developing an active narrative by giving them any available slack, but make sure that everyone gets a fair chance to participate.

Initially, the Referee should proceed around the table, beginning with whatever Player is most expedient in terms of setting up the story. Give each Player an opportunity to tell the table about themselves by both setting and resolving a scene. The outcome of their scene is subject to vote of the table for reasonableness and plausibility. Every Player should get an initial turn before someone gets a second turn.

Afterwards, proceed as interactions and forward plot momentum dictate, generally in some sort of set order, but giving characters a short scene out of turn if necessary and as matters dictate.

During Act One, any Trait Die that is going to be spent on a conflict resolution may be announced and spent either **before or after** the result of the 1d6 vs. 1d6 roll. Hence, a Player (or the Referee, in the case of negative Trait Dice or Referee controlled Trait Dice) can wait and see how things are going to come out, and then try to "rewrite history" by throwing an extra die after the fact. (Positive Player Trait Dice are subject to approval of the table for the applicability of the Trait, of course, so be careful with trusting a Trait Die to bail you out after the fact).

The Referee decides when one turn ends, when the turn moves to another Player, and which Player goes next. This is subject to the actions of Players who are together passing turns among themselves (see the next section). Unlike in many role-playing games, however, where Players take their



actions and the Referee (or the dice) dictates the outcome, the active Player proposes the outcome of his turn.

The resolution proposed by a Player is subject to a table vote as to whether it is reasonable and plausible. If it is not, the Player can continue to propose variant outcomes until a table vote can be achieved.

*Passing Turns:* However, two player characters that are together (or otherwise in direct communication) can—subject to a table vote—pass a turn between themselves. This comes in handy when someone’s cute little sister is exploring a shopping mall, gets cornered by a horde of zombies, and screams for help. The turn might then be passed to the nearby police officer who is, of course, three days short of retirement. This rule is subject to the veto of the Referee, who may wish to give someone else a turn, leave the ultimate resolution of a character’s situation for later, or take a turn of his own to complicate matters.

- c. **Can I Spend A Trait Die On Someone Else’s Turn?** Players can only spend a Trait Die during their own turn in Act One.
- d. **The Desperation Die and (Not) Getting Killed.** You may only play your Desperation Die during your own turn in Act One. The

use of Desperation Dice is never subject to a table vote, and (like Trait Dice) may be played during Act One “after the roll” to shift an undesired result.

Narratively, characters ought not (in ordinary circumstances) to die in Act One. First, they will each have their Desperation Die to (almost certainly) avoid that outcome. Second, it is better that the significant setback that might occur upon losing a conflict resolution by 3 or more be something worse than mere death. Death resolves dramatic tension, and you want to increase it during Act One. Bitten by a zombie, with an uncertain amount of time to live; captured and tortured by the cannibals (and perhaps lightly snacked on); dragged off by the aliens conducting some sort of twisted experiments on the populace; taken hostage by the besieging army and having a limb removed every hour that the castle is not surrendered—these are the kinds of “preliminary” disasters that might befall some very unlucky person in Act One.

Note, finally, that the results of conflict dice resolution are open during Act One. Everyone will know how bad someone succeed or failed, and can tweak the narrative appropriately.

## Act One Quick Reference

Issue	Act One Rule
Who Determines Turn Order?	The Referee, But Players Who Are Together May Propose To Pass Their Turn To Their Companion
When Are Trait Die Committed To A Roll?	Before Or After Initial Result Is Known, But Only During Your Own Turn
Should Characters Die?	Only In Extraordinary Circumstances
Are Conflict Dice Results Known To The Table?	Always
Who Sets the Scene?	Whoever Is Narrating
Who Resolves the Scene?	Whoever is Narrating, Subject to a Table Vote for Reasonableness
Who Proposes An Alternate Resolution To A Scene If A Proposal Is Rejected By A Table Vote?	The Player Who Is Narrating, Subject to Another Table Vote For Reasonableness
When Can You Use Your Desperation Die?	Only During Your Own Turn, But Before Or After The Outcome of a Roll Is Known

## 8. AND THEN SOMETHING REALLY, REALLY BAD HAPPENS

*(Or, The Light At The End of The Tunnel Turns Out To Be A Train)*

Act One ends when something occurs that puts the characters—indeed, the entire scenario—into a chaotic, fight or flight situation. What this is should be thought out and determined in advance, and must be the kind of disaster that is not quickly and easily resolved. Some classic examples of a bad situation hitting the point of no return include:

Someone tries to escape from the secured building, only to allow the horde of zombies massed outside to finally break in;

The besieged inhabitants of the castle are forced to abandon the walls and fall back as the enemy finally breaks through and begins setting fires;



The characters in the war torn city discover that they have a limited amount of time to find their friend and escape before the bombs start to fall;

The mountain men who have been harassing the characters on their hunting trip turn out to be the owners of the restaurant that the characters have been trying to get to in order to call for help;

The serial killer appears on the dance floor, and the exits are found to have been blocked;

The dancers in the out of the way dive bar turn out to be vampires and start attacking the patrons.

## 9. THE MADNESS OF ACT TWO (OR, THE TRAIN WRECK)

**a. The Role of the Referee in Act Two.** Act Two should be action oriented. People are fleeing for their lives, struggling to survive, or otherwise trying to avoid being on the receiving end of something bad. It should proceed deliberately, if not frantically. People start dying, things start blowing up, and in general, mayhem ensues. The difference between Act One and Act Two is that, whereas bad things might be happening in Act One, the situation is discrete and under control. Act Two is what happens after things get out of control.

During Act Two, all interpersonal and storyline conflicts should be given the stage and given an opportunity to resolve. They may not necessarily resolve, but they should be given their moment in the sun.

The Referee determines whether the outcome of Act Two conflict checks are known or unknown to the table as a whole, using logic and common sense.

**b. Taking Turns and Spending Dice.** For Act Two, the character with the fewest remaining combined positive Trait and Desperation Dice goes first; after that, the Referee generally determines turn order. (Why? Because the person with the fewest dice left is in the most danger). Ties are resolved by the high roll of a die (1d6), but Desperation Dice may be used to influence this tie-breaking dice roll (if, for example, someone really wants to try and be the first to run through that inviting exit).

During Act Two, Trait Dice may only be announced (and, if approved by a table vote, spent) *before* the dice are rolled.

**Not after.** Things are much more chaotic, perilous and final in Act Two.

As in Act One, each Player both sets their scene and proposes a resolution to it. Scene resolutions are again subject to a vote of the table, as plausible and reasonable in light of circumstances. If a table vote fails, the Player can continue to propose resolutions until a table vote passes.

Like in Act One, turns may be passed between players in direct communication, subject to approval of the table. And like in Act One, passing a turn in this fashion is subject to the veto of the Referee, who may wish to give someone else a turn, leave the ultimate resolution of a character's situation for later, or take a turn of his own to complicate matters.

Note that there is another way to help out your fellow player during Act Two. Or mess with them, for that matter:

**c. Can I Spend A Die On Someone Else's Turn in Act Two?** During Act Two, you *can* spend a Trait Die or a Desperation Die during someone else's turn. In fact, each Player can throw one Trait Die (subject to table approval) and/or a Desperation Die into *any* conflict resolution roll. *And they can do so on behalf of any side of the conflict—even the bad guys' side.* And so, it is entirely possible that huge piles of dice will be hurled into the outcome of any one particular Act Two conflict.

The Referee should generally announce which Trait Dice he is choosing to invoke, and why, before the Player characters at issue invoke theirs. But it is possible that the Players' invocation of a particular trait demands a plot-driven response, in which case, the Referee might supplement matters after the Players act.

*Example: The remaining Players are all hiding in a broom closet as Lazarus, the seemingly unstoppable serial slasher, ambles down the hallway, his splitting maul dripping gore. The conflict to be resolved is whether the Players remain unnoticed as Lazarus lurches past their closet.*

*This begins with a basic 1d6 vs. 1d6 contest. However, one of the slasher's Trait Dice is to Punish the Naughty, and someone in the closet definitely qualifies as naughty based on earlier actions in Act One. The Referee advises that Lazarus feels the*



need to Punish the Naughty and announces that he will be adding a Trait Dice to the roll-off.

A round of proposing countermeasure dice ensues. Albert proposes that his Sneakiness came into play, and that before hiding in the closet, he created some bloody footprints continuing down the hallway in an effort to mislead Lazarus. Everyone accepts this narrative, and so it is now 2d6 vs. 2d6.

(Note the importance of keeping dice balanced from a disaster avoidance perspective. The odds of losing by 3 or more in a 1d6 vs. 1d6 contest are 1 in 6. By contrast, the odds of losing by 3 or more on the short end of a 2d6 vs. 1d6 contest are very high).

The dice are rolled, and unfortunately for the players, Lazarus rolls a 9 and they roll a 6. Lazarus seems to be tricked, but just as the door is opened, down comes the splitting maul from nowhere....

**d. The Desperation Die and Getting Killed.** Desperation Dice may still be rolled in a desperate, **after** the fact effort to change a very bad conflict outcome. Given the way that the system works, in fact, characters will probably not die until after they have spent their Desperation Die in a prior contest. However, it is entirely fair for a combat result to result in the death of a player character in Act Two, particularly one where the character loses by -3 or more.

Don't worry, though, character death is not the end of the game for the Player....

**e. Handling the Dead.** So Act Two has gone predictably badly, and your character is one of the ones who has checked out earlier than the others. Does this mean that you are out of the game? No, but the rules are a little different for the dead.

1. Generally speaking, dead characters do not get any more turns to shape the story's progress—unless a special table vote, initiated by the Referee, gives them one for the express purpose of a particular expenditure of a Trait Die. There are situations where it would be narratively appropriate to give a deceased character a turn. They may have left a message, taken some action off camera whose importance only comes home to roost later, or be “not quite dead” and “revive” briefly to perform one last, desperate, heroic act.

2. Dead Players do still get to participate in table votes.  
3. Dead Players do still get to use their remaining Trait Dice and Desperation Die, if they choose to do so, during Act Two. Remember, they don't need a turn to do so.

*Example: Bob had been killed earlier in Act Two, but had an unspent Devoted to Girlfriend Trait Die left when Lazarus bashed him in the head. Bob asks the Referee for a turn at narration, for the purpose of using his Trait Die. The Referee initiates a table vote. Bob proposes that when Lazarus senses that the people in the closet are, in fact, hiding there, he be allowed to come around the corner at the end of the hallway, “not quite dead” yet, and gurgle out a challenge to Lazarus to save his girlfriend. The table votes to allow Bob a turn to carry out this proposal.*

*Bob rolls 2d6 to Lazarus' 1d6 and wins the contest by 2. This is a marginal victory for the Players. Bob describes the scene as Lazarus hesitates, and then lurches down the hall and finishes Bob off with multiple sickening blows—giving the people trapped in the closet a chance to flee back the other way. The table votes in favor of this outcome as reasonable and plausible. Lazarus is quickly after them again, however.*

**f. Losing Control and Psychotic Breaks in Act Two.** Some things may happen during a scenario that would cause a person to lose control of himself. These things should be above and beyond ordinary stress and fear; something so bad that the player goes insane, faints dead away, runs screaming into the night or launches into a violent outburst heedless of the consequences. These are referred to as Psychotic Breaks. These should be reserved for Act Two.

The Referee (and only the Referee) decides what situations might be severely disturbing enough to check for a Psychotic Break. An initial confrontation with something obviously and dangerously supernatural would be a good candidate, as would seeing a close associate killed in front of you, or being surprised by something truly awful. A Psychotic Break is checked on a 1d6 vs. 1d6 check. A +1 might be assigned if the horror is particularly awful or mind-shattering. Likewise, Trait Dice (in favor of the Player or against the Player in the case of a negative Trait or an applicable enemy Trait) could come into play, as might Desperation Dice.



*Example: Bob's traumatized, seven year old little girl, already shaken by the evening's events, comes around a corner just in time to see an alien horror bite of her mother's head in one munch. The Referee decides that this should force a check for a Psychotic Break. If the alien is especially horrible, it might get a +1 to its roll. If the alien has a Trait along the lines of Spreader of Madness Against Puny Human Minds, it might spend such a Trait Die on this check. If Bob's character had a negative trait of Easily Frightened, or Really Needs Mommy, this negative Trait Die likewise might come into play. On the other hand, if Bob's seven year old is Wise Beyond Her Years or a Seasoned Monster Killer, that Trait Die might come into play on her side.*

If a Psychotic Break check is tied or won by the player, there is no effect other than whatever effect the Player chooses to give it. A marginal defeat (-1 or -2) results in a table vote determining the rest of the Player's turn; the Player

literally loses control for a short time. (The Player does still get to vote in the table vote). A major defeat (-3 or more) results in all of the Player's actions for the rest of the Player's turn, and beyond, being determined by a table vote. The Referee determines when the Player regains control.

A player who has lost control due to a Psychotic Break can attempt to regain control early during their turn. If they encounter a situation where a positive Trait Die might come into play, they can roll (1d6 + Trait Dice vs. 1d6 + any opposing Trait Dice) to regain control. Desperation Dice may also come into play on this roll. Any level of victory succeeds in the Player regaining control of himself.

*Example: Mommy managed to survive the bite to the head, but the alien horror is closing in to finish the job. Bob's little girl is cowering in the corner. The cruel table will not vote to allow her to pull it together, but Bob has a Desperation Die left, and decides to use it in an effort to shoot the alien with a nearby shotgun. Bob would roll 1d6 + 1d6 for his Desperation Die vs. 1d6 for the alien. If Bob achieves any level of victory (+1 or better) he can resume control over his character.*

## Act Two Quick Reference

Issue	Act Two Rule
Who Determines Turn Order?	The Referee, Subject to the Rule About Players Who Are Together Proposing To Pass Their Turn To Their Companion; But Person With Fewest Positive Trait Dice and/or Desperation Dice Gets To Go First in Act Two
When Are Trait Die Committed To A Roll?	Only Before A Roll, But During Anyone's Turn
Should Characters Die?	Should And Probably Will
Are Conflict Dice Results Known To The Table?	Maybe
Who Sets the Scene?	Whoever Is Narrating
Who Resolves the Scene?	Whoever is Narrating, Subject to a Table Vote for Reasonableness
Who Proposes An Alternate Resolution To A Scene If A Player's Proposal Is Rejected By A Table Vote?	The Player Who Is Narrating, Subject to Another Table Vote For Reasonableness
When Can You Use Your Desperation Die?	Any Time You Want, Before Or After A Roll, And On Your Turn Or Someone Else's
Who Decides What Happens If A Dice Conflict Goes Against The Player, Or Is Tied?	The Referee, Still
Who Decides What Happens If A Dice Conflict Goes In Favor of The Player?	The Player, Subject To A Table Vote, Still

## 10. ACT THREE, THE DENOUEMENT

Act Three begins when any one of the following things happen:

- ☠ All of the Players die;
- ☠ The situation that the remaining Players are in stabilizes and no longer is perilous; or
- ☠ If the Referee believes that nothing further of significance can be accomplished through active narration.

**a. The Role of the Referee.** The Referee has only a limited role to play in Act Three. The Referee should suggest and encourage narrative resolutions to each Player, and use any dice remaining under his control to mete out justice or make things interesting.

**b. Taking Turns and Spending Dice.** Once again, when Act Three begins, a sorting process occurs to determine the order in which the Players take turns. Act Three, however, consists



of only one turn for each Player, dead or alive. This is the “denouement.” The turn order is determined as follows:

- ☠ Living Players go before dead Players;
- ☠ Among living Players, those with the most remaining positive Trait Dice and/or Desperation Dice go first;
- ☠ Among dead Players, those who died first, go last;
- ☠ Ties in terms of determining turn order are broken by a high die roll. Desperation Dice may be used to influence the outcome of this tiebreaking roll.

**c. Can I Spend A Die On Someone’s Else’s Denouement?** Not only can you spend a die on someone else’s denouement, the game does not end until all remaining dice have been spent. And you cannot spend any remaining dice on your own denouement, only on someone else’s—not even Desperation Dice. So it may well turn out that you must spend a die on someone else’s denouement. If it is the last player’s turn in Act Three, all remaining dice must then be spent. The propriety of spending a Trait Die on a particular suggested narration remains subject to a table vote. Desperation Dice remain immune from any need for table approval.

Note that there are no conflict resolution dice rolls that occur in Act Three—with one exception. Using a die generally just buys you the right to interject a comment or event into someone else’s denouement. So, if during Act Three, Joan is describing how her character is pulling herself from the rubble, then Bob (annoyed at how Joan tripped him as they were both trying to run from the zombies) might spend a Trait Die attributable to his own Bravery to interject a few lines of dialogue where another survivor speaks well of Bob’s “sacrifice.” Or, the Referee might have a die of “Obsessed with Revenge” remaining for whoever loosed the zombie plague, and something unseen might drag the undeserving Joan back under the rubble, unnoticed by others.

**d. Conflicting Interjections.** This is the one exception to the rule of Act Three being free of dice rolling. Trait Dice and/or Desperation Dice generally do not need to be rolled to “have a say” in an Act Three epilogue, but if a conflict between interjections develops, and the table vote between them is a

tie, all conflicting dice are rolled against one another and the outcome determined as per the basic dice conflict rule. The person whose denouement it is must shade their denouement positively or negatively, depending on the outcome of the dice conflict.

## 11. SO, DID WE WIN? JUDGMENT DAY

At the end of Act Three comes Judgment Day. Everyone, including the Referee, gets out a blank sheet of paper and casts two ballots. The first ballot asks the question, does everyone deserve to win? The second ballot asks, if everyone does not deserve to win, which Player played his Traits the best? Both ballots are strictly secret, and should not be discussed. Blank ballots are not allowed.

Everyone Wins if the Referee, plus all Players or all but one Player, so vote. If Everyone Wins, everyone gets an extra, free Trait Die the next time that everyone plays.

If Everyone does not Win, the Referee should simply announce this fact. The Referee then tallies the individual votes for best player in that scenario. This time, however, the Referee does not break any ties. If there is a tie, no one wins, and the Referee should simply announce that fact. If an individual Player wins, that Player gets an extra Desperation Die the next time the game is played, and the rest get nothing.

What does this system accomplish? It plays out a variation of the Prisoners’ Dilemma, and stokes the action. The Players have some incentive to act heroically, stick together, and help each other out (or, at least, avoid pissing everyone else off). If the Players, acting together, can navigate the hazards of the scenario while maintaining a grudging respect for each other, they can all reward each other.

On the other hand, a Player can distinguish himself either by thorough, out and out ruthless behavior or by singular sacrifice, and win a bigger prize. A perfectly played ruthless bastard could prevent a group win (by Referee’s vote in some cases) and grudgingly gain the votes of those he screwed over. As long as history doesn’t hate him too much, that is.





# THE QUEEN OF THE CHANGING SEASONS

*A Halloween Scenario*

by Jeff Moeller

FOR TRAGEDY OF THE COMMONS

## INTRODUCTION AND PLAYER GENERATION GUIDELINES

This scenario is set in the modern day. The following information should be given to the Players for purposes of character determination:

The Players are children of either gender between 6 and 12 years old. They are confined in the locked, pediatric, pre-pubescent psychiatric ward of St. Peregrine's Regional Hospital. The hospital is located in a mid-sized urban area. Their ward is on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of the 10-floor hospital building.

They are in St. Peregrine's as short-term psychiatric holds, for evaluation and stabilization. They are moderately disturbed; a typical patient is dependent on alcohol or drugs (at their very young age); has engaged in self-harm (cutters) or a suicide attempt; or is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder due to some trauma or abuse.

Those patients that are deemed, following initial evaluation, not to pose a threat of violence to others are allowed the use of the Day Room, where there are board games, a foosball table, a television, and opportunities to socialize with other children under staff supervision. The Players will be among this comparatively stabilized group.

They will not be in possession (barring a convincing story as to how they manage to have such contraband) of any personal possessions that might be used to harm themselves or others. This includes belts, shoes other than slippers, electronic devices, cigarettes, lighters, drugs, or sharp implements. Outside food and drink is prohibited. They are unlikely to know each other previously, unless they have a story of shared trauma (such as sibling abuse victims).

Each Player should take five positive Trait Dice, as each must take two negative Trait Dice: one for Being a Child, and one reflecting their psychiatric problem. Suggestions for the second negative Trait Die might include Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Substance Abuser, Suicidal Ideation, Abuse Victim, or Antisocial.

## BACKGROUND

It's Halloween on the pediatric psych ward at St. Peregrine's. It's 8 P.M., the sun has gone down, and visiting hours have just ended. To cheer the kids up, kindly Nurse Gigi, fresh out of nursing school, has organized a somewhat lame Halloween party for the ward. The party is to be held in the Day Room. The Players are all



of the children presently on the ward, except for one who is newly admitted as the party is underway. The children are scheduled to go to bed at 9 P.M. normally, but since it is Halloween, they get to stay up until 10 P.M.

The Day Room is decorated with black and orange paper chains, which any Players who wished to participate made earlier that day. The Charlie Brown Halloween special is playing on the television that is bolted to the wall. There is punch, some board games and popcorn balls, and Nurse Gigi is organizing a spooky story contest.

Shortly after the Halloween party begins, there is a commotion in the hallway. A new patient, screaming at the top of her lungs, is wheeled past the Day Room en route to the isolation ward. She is strapped to a gurney. This is Christine Issa, age 9. The police have just brought Christine in, fresh from a horrific crime scene where some sort of bizarre religious ritual had been under way. The ritual involved human sacrifices, a variety of ancient Middle Eastern relics recently stolen from the local art museum, and a large group of people recently arrived from Iraq.

When the police arrived, Christine was drenched in the blood of the sacrifices and suspended by chains over some sort of intricate magical design on the floor. The poor thing is obviously extremely traumatized and in need of acute psychiatric care. She is thrashing, burbling, spewing vomit and speaking in tongues. The plan is to take her to the isolation ward at the back of the psych ward wing, sedate her, and begin her on a course of anti-psychotic medication and intensive therapy for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

What the police and the psych ward staff do not understand is that Christine is the chosen vessel of Ereshkigal, Sumerian goddess of the underworld and the Queen of the Changing Seasons. She has been possessed by Ereshkigal, who will soon fully manifest. When this occurs, her home (the psych ward) will transition into the Sumerian netherworld, and the Players will not be easily able to leave. Her guardian shadow demons, the *rabisu*, will arrive to protect her and punish any of her subjects who attempt to leave. The Players who survive may be able to escape, but this will only likely occur if one of them volunteers to stay behind with Ereshkigal. Exorcising Ereshkigal is an optional but unlikely story path that might result as well.

## ACT ONE—THE PEDIATRIC PSYCH WARD

### HALLOWEEN PARTY IN THE DAY ROOM

The scenario begins at 8 P.M. in the Day Room (Area 6 on the map). The Day Room is boring but it is better than the antiseptic, minimally furnished, constructed with safety in mind patient rooms, so this where patients who are not in the isolation ward hang out. It has a collection of distressingly age appropriate books and magazines, a foosball table, and a bolted down television with basic cable. This is also where snacks are available: a little refrigerator with juice boxes, a coffee maker (for visiting parents), and prepackaged cookies and salty snacks.

There is (importantly) a basket of condiments on the table (despite there being little food to put them on): sugar, coffee creamer, ketchup, mustard and salt and pepper packets.

The room has been decorated with paper chains and paper Halloween decorations, and a festive pumpkin and witch festooned plastic tablecloth has been put out over the center table. There is an orange frosted white sheet cake declaring “Happy Halloween” with (for no good reason) a bunch of candles in it to blow out. There is also a real jack o’lantern, lit up by three taper candles. (The initial fire source is a butane candle lighter, used by Nurse Gigi to light the candles and then put back into her pocket).

Nurse Gigi is a pixyish young woman in her mid-twenties. (Her nametag reads Genevieve Minotti, R.N., but she has the kids call her by her nickname). She specializes in pediatric psychiatric nursing and is the primary nurse who keeps an eye on those children well enough to be in the Day Room.

The Halloween party is scheduled to last between 8 and 10 P.M. Any crabby children who want to skip out on the party are discouraged from doing so, ultimately culminating in a commanding tone of voice if necessary and a threat of the isolation ward if they become unruly.

The Charlie Brown Halloween special runs in the background on DVD. The Referee should give each Player a turn to establish their personality and allow them to interact with the others. Since it's Halloween, give each Player a turn to tell a scary story. If in the course of roleplaying their mentally unstable child, they act out in character, so be it.

About 15 minutes into the party, the double stacked security doors leading into the nurse’s station are buzzed open, and any other nursing



staff than Nurse Gigi who might have grabbed some of the Halloween candy scurry out of the Day Room. Nurse Gigi keeps the Players in the Day Room, but they can (if they wish) peer out the door. (The door to the Day Room is usually kept open). A loud, thrashing young girl, strapped down to a gurney, screaming nonsense at the top of her lungs, is hurried down the hallway. Unless the Players happen to speak ancient Sumerian, it simply sounds like gibberish. She is covered in blood and vomit. Nurse Gigi stays behind in the Day Room and tries her best to keep the Players from leaving and getting in the way.

About 15 minutes later, the staff psychiatrist, Dr. Larrabee (dressed in street clothes) arrives in a hurry. Over the next half hour, he can be seen going back and forth past the door of the Day Room. The last time (headed for the isolation ward where they have put Christine), he can be overheard ordering an IV and "lorazepam" "set up".

Five minutes later, the power goes out completely. It appears that the power has gone out across the city, since no light is coming through the windows in the Day Room, either. Although there should be emergency lights coming on in the ward, they do not come on either. The only light available in the Day Room comes from the jack o'lantern, but there are birthday sized candles stuck in the party cake if anyone wants to light then. Nurse Gigi tells the Players to stay put while she goes and finds a flashlight.

About 30 seconds later, horrible screams and unearthly howls begin outside of the Day Room. It takes about two minutes for the slaughter to die down, and then all is unnaturally quiet. The Players can hear Nurse Gigi begging for her life from a short distance away, but her pleas are cut short with a sickening, wet ripping sound.

What has happened is this: when the staff sedated Christine, Ereshkigal fully manifested herself and assumed complete control of Christine's body. She is (fortunately) strapped to a bed in the isolation ward at the back of the wing, but the ward has transitioned into her underworld dimension, the Sumerian land of the dead. Subject to a few special cases discussed below, it is not possible for the Players to leave the wing, which has become out of phase from and frozen in time with respect to the rest of the world. Four of her servitors, *rabisu* plague demons, have joined the party and are treating the psych ward as though it were the Sumerian underworld, which for many intents and purposes, it is.

This is not, however, the beginning of Act Two. Act Two will not begin until either one of the Players is attacked by a *rabisu*, or until one of them encounters Ereshkigal.

## STUCK IN THE SUMERIAN UNDERWORLD (ST. PEREGRINE'S ANNEX)

One or more of the Players are likely going to try and run for their lives and escape the psych ward immediately. They may even do this as soon as the lights go out, trying to evade Nurse Gigi's efforts to keep them safe in the Day Room. This, sadly, will probably trigger Act Two, since until the staff is liquidated, you should not rely on the *rabisu*' rest/default positions as reliable indicia of where they are. Those are the dark corners where they go to ground; however, if there is movement, loud noise or light, they will come to investigate and/or feed.

The psych ward is stuck in time with respect to the normal world. No one will be coming into the ward since, from an outside perspective, this is all happening in the blink of an eye. Likewise, there is no effective way to call out, access the Internet, or otherwise send out a message that anyone will receive; the Players are stuck between ticks of the clock with respect to the outside world. Time flows normally within the ward, however; the Players need to eat, drink and sleep as they normally would. The Players can look out of windows (including in the Day Room), but they will see only pitch black darkness.

## RABISU, SUMERIAN PLAGUE DEMONS

The *rabisu* are guardians of the Sumerian underworld, and they play by certain rules. They appear to be plague-ridden, naked human corpses, existing in a sort of greyscale: they are like black and white television figures in a color world (for the fleeting moments that they allow themselves to be in the light). They have the ability to cling to walls and ceilings like spiders, and will often scuttle along ceilings or walls.

Generally speaking, the *rabisu* thirst for human blood and would be quite content to snack on the Players. However, they are extremely light averse. If one is exposed to a fair amount of light (a direct illumination from a flashlight or the jack o'lantern would be sufficient), they will recoil and retreat to the darkness. This does not mean that they will completely break off an attack, however; they may circle and stalk and try to come at the Player from the darkness when they can.

Always pay close attention during this scenario to the issue of who has lights and who does not, and which way they are pointed, because a *rabisu* that has taken an interest in the Players will be where the lights are not pointed, trying to lunge in.

Generally speaking, however, the *rabisu* are more opportunistic than determined, and will wait for annoying light sources to be pointed the other way or flicker out before attempting an assault.



Eating the Players for the sake of eating them is not a priority item for them. They have two priorities that will definitely result in an attack, other than one of opportunity:

No one leaves the underworld (i.e., the ward) without Ereshkigal's permission. Any Player trying to exit the main doors, one of the fire exits, out a window, or through the ductwork is attacked until they stop trying to leave. These efforts may be momentarily thwarted by pesky light sources, but the *rabisu* will keep trying, unless and until the Player actually manages to escape the ward.

No one attacks Ereshkigal. Likewise, these efforts may be momentarily thwarted by pesky light sources, but the *rabisu* will keep pressing, and even work together in this circumstance.

Direct combat interactions with *rabisu* should usually end in the death of the Player, unless the Player or another Player is trying to resolve it by quickly bringing a light to bear, fleeing to a lit area or secure area, or deploying one of the few effective weapons against them.

*Rabisu* are not intelligent (roughly as smart as an angry, territorial dog) and can be baited into traps.

*Rabisu* have two trait dice, one for Vicious and one for Stealthy, but no Desperation Die. They have one negative Trait Die, Hate Bright Lights.

Following are guidelines for determining when and how to resort to dice in the event of a *rabisu* attack:

The first attack by a *rabisu* on the Players should result in a check for loss of control/psychotic break.

In a straight up fight between a lone human and a *rabisu*, where the human does not have an effective weapon and/or is not trying to flee, there is no need to resort to the dice. The human is ripped to shreds in 30 seconds or so. They are for all intents and purposes immune to physical weapons like bludgeoning, cutting or sedation. They could be crushed under a heavy weight or lit on fire; this would effectively kill them, but these circumstances would not involve a straight up fight.

If a lone human is trying to flee from a *rabisu* and get from a place of no safety to a place of safety (behind a door, or from a darkened area into a lighted one), without a light source or an effective weapon, resort to the dice to guide the outcome but give the *rabisu* +1. They are quick and good at getting the drop on people.

A lone human who is trying to flee from a *rabisu* and get from a place of no safety to a place of safety, but is also carrying a portable but one-directional light source (e.g., a jack o'lantern or a flashlight)


is a situation that should be resolved by resort to the dice if the human tries to bring the light to bear on the *rabisu*, but with no +1 adjustment.

If a *rabisu* chooses to attack multiple humans in a pack, each trying to cover the other's back(s) with multiple one-directional light sources, give the humans the +1 advantage to fend it off and/or escape to a secure location. The *rabisu* will be slow to attack a coordinated pack bearing multiple light sources in the first place, only doing so if one of their priorities is threatened.

The *rabisu* on the one hand, and salt or fire on the other, do not get along. *Rabisu* cannot cross a threshold across which a solid line of salt has been poured. Hitting one square with a handful of salt, likewise, causes it to burst into flame and flee for the darkest corner it can find. One hit does not kill a *rabisu*, but the *rabisu* will then cower and only respond to a subsequently occurring priority event. A second hit with a handful of salt will kill a *rabisu*. They also recoil from large sources of flame. Resolve efforts to throw salt at an aware *rabisu*, or light one on fire with a Molotov cocktail or large torch, as a combat with no +1 adjustment either way. Resolve efforts to throw salt or a Molotov cocktail at a *rabisu* in an ambush situation (e.g., distracted by another Player, led into a trap) as a +1 adjustment in favor of the Players.

## SOMEHOW GETTING OUT OF THE WARD WITHOUT ERESHKIGAL'S PERMISSION

Although the *rabisu* are heavily invested in attempting to keep the Players' from escaping, it is certainly possible that determined Players might somehow escape. Remember, this is a storytelling game, and within reason and the bounds of the scenario, the Players should be given some latitude to steer the plot. The potential egresses are:

-  The main, double stacked doors to the ward (bottom edge of the map, at the end of the Area 3 hallway). Ordinarily these need to be buzzed open from the nurse's station main desk, twice (once to get into the vestibule, and then once to proceed). This gives the staff an opportunity to see who is coming in and out via security camera, and to keep someone from slipping out while someone else is transiting. The buzzer is not functional due to the power cutoff, and the *rabisu* that rests in the nurse's station keeps an eye on this door. In any case, it has taken a mythic place as the gate to the underworld, and will not open. It has to be smashed open, a process which will take a bunch of children with a battering ram of some sort



and several awkward minutes (amount of time to accomplish depending on the dice roll). During this time, the various *rabisu* (except for the one in the isolation ward) will skulk up to them and try to kill them.

- The fire doors (one on the left edge of the map, at the back of the Area 2 nurse's station; and the other in the treatment room, Area 8). These also have to be physically smashed down.
- Out a window and down seven stories. The glass is laminated and the windows do not open by design (no one wants a psych patient smashing glass or jumping out a window). Smashing a window is a major undertaking which will again require a heavy battering ram (e.g., several children, a chair and several minutes). It is possible to gather and braid together enough bed sheets, going room to room, to clamber down seven stories, but as noted below, that plan falls apart as soon as the Player(s) exit the window and find themselves to be shadows; and
- Up into the ceiling, through the duct work. A smaller child will fit, but crawling through the duct work will make a certain amount of unavoidable noise, echoing throughout the ward.

Any of these options will make a lot of noise (the duct work perhaps the least if the Player is very stealthy), and *rabisu* will come to investigate and put a stop to it.

Ordinarily, in Sumerian mythology, Ereshkigal does not allow spirits to leave her realm unless someone agrees to remain behind in their stead. However, apart from her chthonic status as queen of the underworld, she is also the Queen of the Changing Seasons. When the seasons change, spirits from the underworld can sometimes roam the world of the living. As a result, since it is Halloween, the Players can exit her realm—albeit as dark, incorporeal spirits.

Anyone who gets out takes the form of a shadow without substance. They cannot manipulate physical objects or communicate using spoken language. They can shriek a little, and they might scare the bejeezus out of someone. They will observe that the hospital staff and patients are oblivious to anything having happened in the psych ward. If/when the escaped Player(s) go back to the ward, it is as though no time had passed since they left. Furthermore,

they find that they can only remain outside of the ward for comparatively short periods of time; they feel tugged back to the ward and eventually, start to dissipate if they do not go back.

It is entirely possible that a very enterprising Player/shadow might get someone's attention and lure them to the door of the ward. From a time flow perspective, whatever happens inside the ward leading up to a final resolution occurs in the time that passes while the rescue effort tries to get into the ward. That story thread should then be picked up at Act Three.

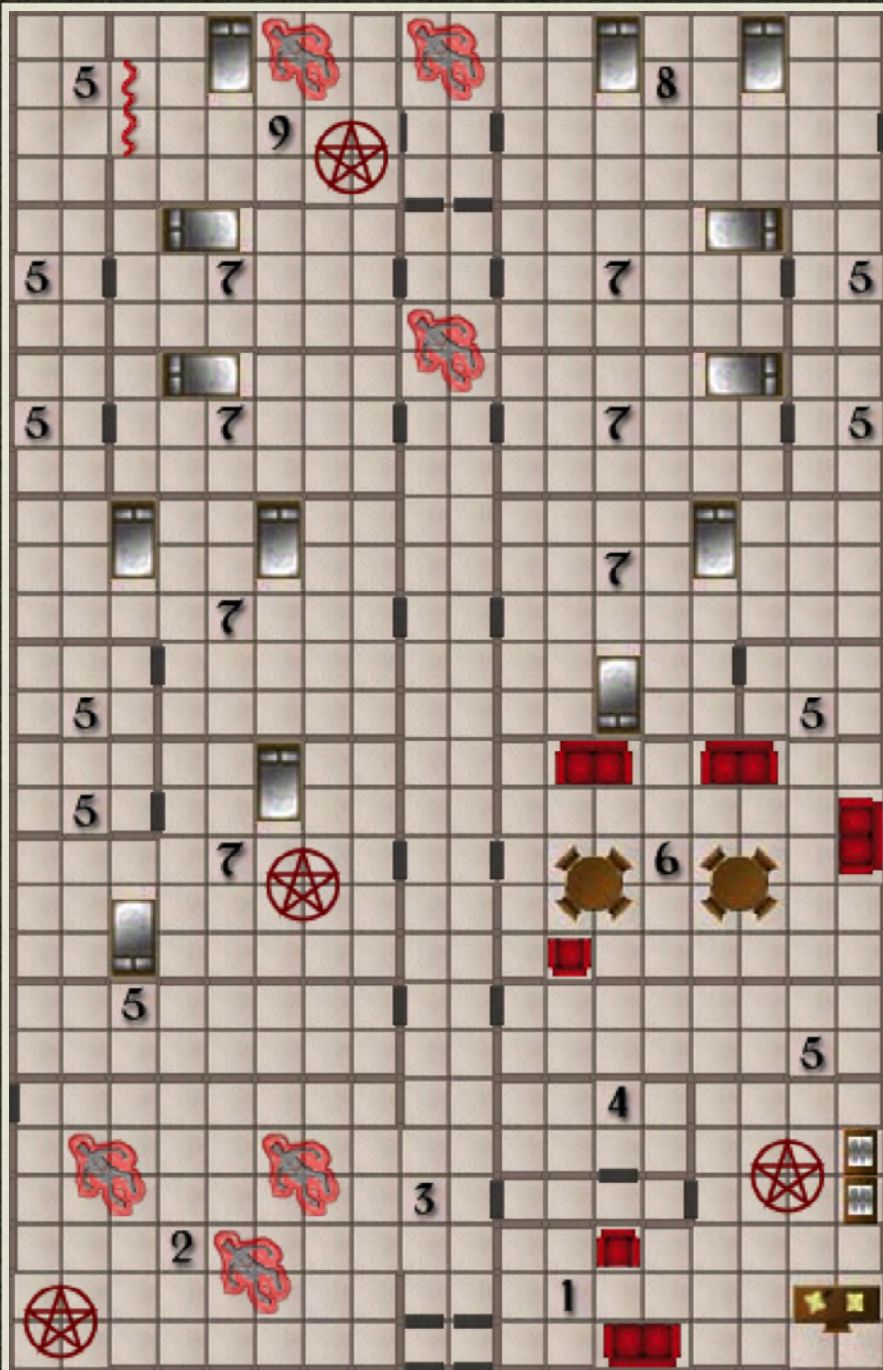
## OPTIONAL: THE EXORCISM TRACK

Since this is a storytelling game with more narrative control in the hands of the Players than is normally the case, it is possible that the bulk of the table will work together to ratchet the narrative toward "finding a cure" for Christine Issa.

If things start to go this way, one problem faced by the Players is that there are no exorcists or spell books handy in the pediatric psych ward. They might plausibly stumble onto something helpful in this regard is during a foray out into the rest of the world as a shadow. While these forays are limited in time, if you want to encourage this story path, you might position Christine Issa's grieving parents in the hospital chapel or private waiting room nearby. If a Player approaches them in spirit form, the Issas' initial reaction will be to flee in terror. However, they might be brought around (through pantomime, and definitely requiring some use of the dice) to understand that the Player/shadow is trying to help them. If so, the Issas might have some idea about what might have happened to Christine (since she is the chosen vessel of Ereshkigal, perhaps they were aware of this, or one of the kidnappers said something along these lines). If so, then they might tell the shadow that wherever she is, Christine needs to be made to eat as much salt as possible. Their legends hold that this is the only way to thwart a demon.

It is also possible that if the Players find out that salt wards off the *rabisu*, they might just throw and/or inject some at and/or into Christine/Ereshkigal and see what happens. Pelting her with salt causes her to shriek in pain, writhe, and get angry, but does not really harm her. It takes a lot of salt, directly ingested, to cast out Ereshkigal. However, she and the *rabisu* will resist violently if Ereshkigal is so much as pelted with salt, so the reaction itself is informative.





### Map Key:

- 1: Doctor's Office
- 2: Nurse's Station
- 3: Main Hallway
- 4: Supply Closet
- 5: Restroom
- 6: Day Room
- 7: Patient Room
- 8: Treatment Room
- 9: Isolation Ward (Ereshkigal)
- Pentagrams= Default/Rest Location for Rabisu
- Body Outlines= Mangled Staff Bodies

### HANDOUT #1 DR. LARRABEE'S NOTES:

Christine Issa, age 9. PTSD & psychotic break? Extremely agitated; witnessed or participated in some sort of murder? covered in victim's blood. Gibberish+ resisting restraint, projectile vomiting. Sedation (clonazepam) and restraint--danger to self. BG: kidnapped from her home yesterday evening per police and subjected to psychological abuse by kidnappers--fringe religious sect? Keeps repeating phrase "Air-ish-kee-gul" (Ereshkigal)?

### HANDOUT #3 SUMMARY OF ENCYCLOPEDIA ENTRY ON SUMERIAN DEMONS:

There are many different kinds of Sumerian demons, who are seen as avatars of various kinds of earthly woes, such as plagues.

Most are afraid of the light and generally beyond the ability of people to fight, except through magic or fire.

The guardians of the Sumerian underworld are the rabisu. They are disease spirits who dwell in darkness and look like corpses. They lurk in dark corners and at doorways and pounce on unsuspecting humans, draining their life and rending them limb from limb.

Rabisu can be driven off by fire or by pure salt; salt represented life to the Sumerians.



## THE WARD AND POTENTIAL RESOURCES/MAP

Once the Players figure out the *rabisu*'s aversion to light, it is entirely possible, and in fact intended, that the children will venture out into the ward and do some exploring (either with lights or more wisely, back to back in a little cluster with many lights). They will, in fact, probably go foraging for more lights, and possibly for information or weapons.

### *General Notes About Safety Precautions at a Locked Psych Ward*

Modern psychiatric wards in general, and pediatric psychiatric wards in particular, are constructed and operated with a view toward proactively preventing patients from injuring themselves or others. Sharp implements and things that could easily be turned into a weapon (needles, fire extinguishers, rope) are either not kept on the ward at all, or kept out of sight and under lock and key (in the case of fire extinguishers) until needed. Drugs of potential abuse are kept off of the ward until needed; small supplies of difficult to abuse drugs (IV administrations of sedatives) or first aid supplies are kept on the ward under lock and key. Furniture is designed to be difficult to harm oneself on: no pipes or hooks to hang oneself from; slanted edges on door tops to prevent attaching a rope; and sheets that will not hold a person's weight.

For a quick overview of design guidelines, you might wish to review the U.S. Veterans' Administration's construction guidelines:

[www.cfm.va.gov/til/dGuide/dgMH.pdf](http://www.cfm.va.gov/til/dGuide/dgMH.pdf)

Bear in mind that the fire alarms and automatic sprinkler system are not functioning as a result of the transition of the psych ward into the Sumerian underworld.

**Area 1: Dr. Larrabee's Office:** This is accessed down a short side hallway. Both the doors to the hallway and into his office proper are normally

kept locked, but they are now open because he was scurrying around to deal with Christine's emergency.

Note that this the resting place of a *rabisu*. The Players had better have lots of lights before going in here in earnest.

On top of Dr. Larrabee's desk is an intake sheet, on which he was beginning to write down his initial case impressions about Christine Issa. A summary follows as Handout #1.

In his desk are a variety of desk implements that might interest the Players: they include a disposable cigarette lighter (Dr. Larrabee smokes pipes, his pipe is on his desk); a letter opener and a pair of office scissors. The sharp implements are not effective weapons against the *rabisu*, but the lighter works and might be used to create a torch with other supplies (which would be an effective weapon against the *rabisu*).

On his bookshelf (right edge of the map) are several reference works, including (if they are looking for it) an encyclopedia. The encyclopedia contains basic myth information on Ereshkigal, as well as a general entry on Sumerian denizens of the underworld. See the sidebar for summaries in Handouts #2 and #3.

**Area 2: Nurse's Station:** This is an open area behind a large counter, where the nurses have their desks. There are several computers, chairs and a variety of now depowered and useless office equipment. The Players can arm themselves with a variety of scissors and the like, but these are useless against the threats that they face. There are three bodies of staff members in various stages of consumption, all looking like they have been afflicted with some horrible, pox like disease as well. The head nurse (if they can recognize her) has keys to the

## HANDOUT #2 SUMMARY OF ENCYCLOPEDIA ENTRY ON ERESHKIGAL:

- ☠ Ereshkigal is a Sumerian goddess and the queen of the dead.
- ☠ She rules over the Sumerian underworld, a place of darkness from which no one usually returns.
- ☠ There are two major myths about Ereshkigal. The first myth concerns the descent of her sister, Inanna, into the underworld. Ereshkigal is lonely so she traps her sister in the underworld, but Inanna is able to leave when Inanna's husband, Dumuzi, sacrifices himself and agrees to stay in her place. This myth is seen as illustrating the changing of the seasons. Ereshkigal is sometimes called the Queen of the Changing Seasons, and the change from summer to winter is a time when spirits from her realm might wander the Earth for a time.
- ☠ The second myth concerns Nergal, the Sumerian plague god. Ereshkigal is invited to a party held by the gods, and wants to go, but because she is afraid of the light, she declines and sends one of her servants instead. This infuriates the other gods and they send the fearsome Nergal to teach Ereshkigal a lesson. Nergal defeats her and prepares to kill her, but she begs for mercy. Nergal instead marries her and becomes joint ruler of the underworld with her.
- ☠ Ereshkigal is served by a wide variety of Sumerian demons and the spirits of the dead.



whole floor in her pocket. The keys will open the supply closet (Area 4) and medicine cabinet in the treatment room (Area 8). They will also open the fire extinguisher cabinet in this room. The fire extinguisher might momentarily distract a *rabisu*, but will not harm one. It will be handy in putting out any fires that the Players might start, however.

Exiting through the fire exit on the left edge of the map in Area 2 will quickly reveal to the Players that they can only leave as a spirit, hardly a desirable state of affairs. It must be bashed down like the main exit.

Note that a dark corner behind the counter is where one of the *rabisu* likes to lurk.

One of the normally locked cabinets under the front counter is standing open. Inside are a variety of emergency supplies, including a first aid kit and a bunch of dry cell batteries. There is, however, no flashlight (as Nurse Gigi took it already).

**Area 3: Main Hallway:** Apart from the candlelight in the Day Room, this is the only area that is lit at all at the outset. The rest of the ward is pitch black. The body most of the way down the hall on the map is that of Nurse Gigi. Nurse Gigi is horribly wounded, with half of her face hanging off, and it appears as though she is developing a bad case of chicken pox. She is, however, still barely alive, but this state of affairs will not last long after she is discovered. She may croak out a warning about the isolation ward, or make one of the older children promise to take care of the others.

The light is from a large Maglite flashlight that is still shining on the floor next to Nurse Gigi. She has in her pocket the butane candle lighter that she lit the candles in the Day Room with, as well as a ring of keys that

open the various locked doors and cabinets on the ward.

At the bottom edge of the map are the double stacked doors leading out into the rest of the hospital. At the top of the hallway are the double stacked doors leading to the isolation ward and treatment room. These latter doors normally require a swipe card to access, but with the power out, they simply open.

Note that approaching Nurse Gigi on the floor will take them past the resting place of a *rabisu*.

**Area 4: Supply Closet:** This is locked, but one of the keys from the nursing staff will open it. This closet is the gearing up jackpot. Although there are no light or fire generating sources, there are: mops; rubber gloves; flammable cleaning supplies; rags; sponges; paper towels; toilet paper; boxes of odor absorbing powder for cleaning up blood and vomit; disinfectant; and extra boxes of condiments, coffee creamer, coffee and miscellaneous other things. In other words, this is where the torch-making supplies and boxes of salt packets that the Players may be looking for are kept.

There is enough salt for five pitches at a *rabisu* and/or lines across a doorway in this closet. There is not enough to effectively force feed salt to Christine Issa, if you are allowing an exorcism as a possibility. There is only one solution to that problem, and that is the IV saline bags in Area 8.

**Area 5: Restrooms:** Toilet paper rolls and bundles of paper towels burn nicely. The restroom in the isolation ward (Area 9) is not separated by a door from the rest of the room, but rather by a simple privacy curtain.

**Area 6: Day Room:** Described above. The jack o'lantern is a ready light source, as is the cake if its candles are lit. If the Players open up all of the available salt packets in the condiment basket, there is enough for either one line across a doorway or one handful to pitch at a *rabisu*. The chairs could be used to bash out a window and the table or couch as a battering ram. The door does not lock and would have to be barricaded to be an effective physical barrier.

**Area 7: Patient Rooms:** There is (by architectural design) little of use in any of the patient rooms. The bed sheets are designed not to hold much weight, but if several of them are braided together, they might pass for a rope. The doors do not lock and would have to be barricaded to be effective barriers (but the furniture is bolted to the floor to prevent this from happening).

**Area 8: Treatment Room:** The back section of the ward (Areas 8 and 9) is accessed through a double stacked door. This is a medical exam room with an exam bed (with restraints), a variety of scopes, a heart monitor, and a locked medicine cabinet. There is a sharps disposal bucket with a couple of used syringes inside. Inside of a locked cabinet is a portable defibrillator (battery powered and hence, operable), some syringes, and a few vials of sedative. The syringes and drugs may sound like fun, but they will not be of any use against a *rabisu*. The defibrillator's effectiveness against a *rabisu* or the possessed Christine Issa is in the Referee's discretion. There are also several innocuous looking IV bags of saline solution, the only way on the ward to get enough salt into Christine Issa to work an exorcism.



## Area 9: Isolation Ward/Christine Issa's Room:

Although a map has been provided, mostly for the sake of completeness, the Players are unlikely to see all of the details of this room. Although a light can be shone around the room, Christine's body itself cannot be illuminated; there is a perpetual shadow that blocks any light from illuminating her. The Players will be able to see that whoever or whatever is in the bed is hooked up to an IV. The IV itself is just glucose solution for hydration; however, there is a used syringe on the floor and a sedation prep tray at the side of the bed.

If they manage to get in and have a look at the sedation vial, she has been injected with lorazepam and should be unconscious. They might infer that she is in four point restraints, which is accurate.

There are two bodies on the floor, thoroughly poxy and partially eaten: Dr. Larrabee and the head nurse, Nurse Lora.

There is a *rabisu* standing permanent guard at the foot of Christine's bed. It will not leave this room and is only interested in guarding her person. Whether or not it leaps to the attack when someone enters the room (the door is shut, but it does not lock) depends on the circumstances, and these are discussed in detail below.

The room stinks of blood and death and decay and vomit. When Dr. Larrabee sedated Christine, he set the slaughter in motion. Although this rendered Christine's mind unconscious, it allowed Ereshkigal, who had been summoned at the ritual to possess Christine and guide her worshippers, to fully manifest and assume control. Although the sedation will wear off in a few hours, even when it does, Ereshkigal is now running the show in Christine's body. Christine's psyche

is hopelessly submerged, although it might resurface in Act Three.

Ereshkigal is more of a force of nature than an intelligent, thoughtful personality. She speaks English when she wants to, but is not given to debate. She is the goddess of the Sumerian underworld, and since she is here, this must be the Sumerian underworld, and so it is the Sumerian underworld and the Players are spirits dwelling and trapped in her realm. She is an uncaring and disinterested entity, generally above interacting with anyone not of divine rank. She does not really care about mortals or spirits in her realm; it is up to them to fend for themselves. Spirits (i.e., the Players) who want to interact with her need to do so properly, or she just ignores them or lets her pet *rabisu* deal with them. She sounds like a deep voiced woman when she speaks, rather than a nine year old girl.

Meaningfully interacting with Ereshkigal will involve one of three situations (discussed in more detail below): making a sacrificial offering; attacking her and/or attempting an exorcism after eliminating all of the *rabisu* (whose top priority is always to defend her person); or petitioning her to release the Players in exchange for one Player remaining behind. Mercy for the sake of mercy really is not in her vocabulary.

Christine/Ereshkigal is strapped to the bed and cannot free herself (and she's heavily sedated anyway and so cannot physically move), and the *rabisu* aren't much for fine manipulation to get her out of her restraints. She is at -1 to any combat, and any result in her favor cannot result in her moving away. She has Trait Dice (positive) for Divine Awareness, Regal Bearing, and Not Afraid of Anything. She has a Trait Die (negative) for Lonely, and a Desperation Die.

## ACT TWO

Act Two begins will not begin until either one of the Players is attacked by a *rabisu*, or until one of them encounters Ereshkigal. This is likely to be an attack by a *rabisu*, and that is first likely to happen either when one of them runs down the hallway to check on Nurse Gigi, or when someone makes a move for an exit.

### RESISTING RABISU AND MOVING AROUND SAFELY

The *rabisu* should be portrayed as vicious, blood-thirsty child eaters who are largely opportunistic but avoid the light. They are generally not very good about working together and can be baited into a trap (by one child luring them into a salt or flame based ambush by the others).

Players are very likely to be killed or to blow through Trait and Desperation Dice early, trying to survive, until they find the doctor's office and read up on the weaknesses these things have.

Light sources are available to the children early on in the form of the jack o'lantern, cake with candles, and perhaps that very tempting flashlight lying in the hall. If the Players get organized and get a sense that "fire works", both to fend the *rabisu* off and to harm them, everyone will soon probably be wielding a burning mop or the like.

Salt is the key to long term stabilization of a safe zone. Once the Players learn about salt, they can ward the door to the Day Room off and create a safe zone with the amount of salt already in the Day Room.

Note that "just holing up and buying time for a rescue" is not an option. No outside rescue is coming. The Players will probably manage to sneak someone out into the hospital at some point. That person will discover that they are a spirit who has temporarily escaped from Ereshkigal's realm of the dead, thanks to it being Halloween, and that they cannot stay out for long. They also find out that when they get back, no time has passed since they left. This is because time is not flowing inside the ward with respect to the outside world. However, inside, time is flowing with respect



to those inside. The Players will start to get hungry and eventually, if they just sit tight in a warded off area, they will succumb. And the *rabisu* will eventually come pay them a visit, barricade or no barricade.

Also, if they barricade themselves in a room (most likely the Day Room) without warding it, you can force the action by having the *rabisu* batter down the barricade, come through the duct work, or slowly dig through the drywall.

## OFFERINGS TO ERESHKIGAL AND THEIR IMPACT ON PROCEEDINGS

It might occur to the Players that whatever the hell is wrong with the new patient, she might like some cake or candy, since she did not get to come to the party. This may be an odd thought given all the carnage, but is one that might occur to them if they read about the myth of Ereshkigal and the gods' party in Dr. Larrabee's office. Ereshkigal likes parties, but is afraid to go to them because she hates the light.

Players who are taking an offering to Ereshkigal of cake, candy or other party goodies can walk unmolested by *rabisu* to the isolation ward, leave the offering, and return unmolested to wherever they were holed up. This is not a continuing hall pass, however. Ereshkigal might also take enough of an interest in such a properly respectful mortal to engage them in a brief conversation. She would probably tell such a Player her name, inquire of theirs, thank them for their offering, and explain the basics of who she is, where they are, and how she got here. She has no mercy for anyone harmed by a *rabisu* ("such things are part of the world") and her mood can turn hostile at the slightest provocation.

Politely worded requests about how it might be possible to leave her realm with her permission might be answered, albeit after a bewildered question about why anyone would ever want to leave. Because the seasons are changing, denizens of her realm can leave to visit the living world, albeit only for a short time. The *rabisu* will not like it, however, and she cannot control them despite their loyalty to her. She is lonely and without a consort, however. (Per the myth), if someone was willing to stay with her—forever—and help her rule the land of the dead, continuing the endless cycle of the seasons, others might be permitted to leave. She has no sympathy for Christine Issa, and no interest in "leaving this world" since, from her perspective, she is already in her world.

## APPEASING ERESHKIGAL/ESCAPE FROM THE WARD

If one of the Players (a suitable one, in the judgment of the table) agrees to remain with Ereshkigal forever, the remaining Players can leave the psych ward and rejoin the rest of the world. "Can" here is as distinct from "able to", as the *rabisu* still must be contended with. They never just let someone leave the underworld.

When the last Player (other than any agreeing to remain behind with Ereshkigal) has left the ward, pass the turn to the Player who decided to remain behind and allow him to narrate what occurs between him and Ereshkigal. When his narrative is over, it becomes Act Three.

Note that the situation in the psych ward is not maintainable indefinitely. Ereshkigal is possessing a 9-year old little girl, and there is little food. Eventually Christine's body will die, and Ereshkigal will be dispelled at that point, her spirit returning to whence it came. It is logical from a storytelling perspective that the strain on Christine will cause her to expire before her consort/companion does. If the Player who remains behind simply sits and keeps her company until this occurs (days or weeks seemingly, but remember, no time is really passing in the "real world"), take this into account when judging Act Three narration.

## DEFEATING ERESHKIGAL/MURDER MOST FOUL

It is at least possible that the Players (any survivors, at least) will defeat all of the *rabisu* and kill Ereshkigal to boot. Bear in mind, if this occurs, that in Act Three, the consequences of all the dead bodies lying about (including that of a helpless, strapped down, mentally ill 9 year old) will have to be dealt with.

If all of the *rabisu* are killed or warded off, and you are permitting an exorcism to occur, Ereshkigal will resist with all of her remaining Trait and Desperation Dice. She might engage in any number of exorcism-movie gross outs; spend dice to have one or more of her *rabisu* be "not quite dead" and sneak up on the Players from behind; summon up a foul wind to disrupt any salt lines keeping *rabisu* at bay; or use a Desperation Die to have the bodies of the staff rise from the dead as new *rabisu* in her defense. The only way to effectively exorcise her is to pour the contents of several IV bags of saline solution down her throat. (Hooking them up to her IV takes too long). This causes an earthquake. Christine bursts into flames and sets the entire ward alight; and the Players must then attempt to escape from a burning ward, perhaps with a horribly burned and injured (but now unpossessed) Christine in tow.



Although Christine will eventually expire (after days or weeks from the perspective of the psych ward), it would be fairly easy for her volunteer consort to kill Christine/Ereshkigal after the other Players leave. Her guard will be comparatively down; the *rabisu* will allow her consort to sit at her side, and there is an IV and some sedatives easily at hand.

Of course, if the Players light the ward on fire without Ereshkigal first being dispelled somehow, either deliberately or through carelessness, they all probably die, Christine/Ereshkigal included. If they flee the ward as spirits after starting a fire, they have to go back soon, or dissipate.

If the Players float around outside the ward somehow until the sun rises the next morning, they dissipate and are likely lost forever, barring some excellent storytelling.

## ACT THREE AND AN OVERVIEW OF HOW THINGS ARE LIKELY TO GO

The situation stabilizes sufficiently to move to Act Three only when:

- ☠ All the Players have either escaped from the ward (in physical form, not as spirits) and/or agreed to remain behind with Ereshkigal (and the Player(s) who remain behind finish their ensuing narration); or
- ☠ Ereshkigal and all of the *rabisu* are killed;
- ☠ Ereshkigal is exorcised and the survivors escape the ward; or
- ☠ All of the Players are killed. Note that if all of the Players are killed, Christine/Ereshkigal will eventually die of starvation and lack of care several days hence.

As the framing device for Act Three, have meaningful outside help finally arrive. Surviving Players must take turns explaining themselves and the likely carnage to the police. If everyone has died, each Player can assume or take turns narrating the reactions of the first responders and what they find. Things to consider in this regard include: whether Nurse Gigi has somehow survived; how people try to explain away all of the dead bodies; how exactly did Christina finally die; what just desserts each of the Players have coming for their actions in the game; legal consequences for any murder or arson that may have occurred; how each of the surviving Players gets on with their life (or is scarred); and perhaps most difficult, explaining away how much time may

appear to have passed in the ward. Unless everyone dies in a fire, by the time that things finally stabilize, some of the victims will have been dead for hours, days or perhaps even weeks.

Once Christine/Ereshkigal dies or Ereshkigal is exorcised, the *rabisu* are dispelled.

Things are likely to be extremely chaotic, particularly if the Players role-play emotionally disturbed children well. They should be *very* slow to want to fight the *rabisu*, especially after the initial encounter where someone will probably come perilously close to dying.

The children will probably do one of three things initially, or perhaps all in succession: barricade themselves inside the Day Room; try to go help Nurse Gigi (and get attacked by a *rabisu*) or beat a hasty march for one of the emergency exits after having trouble with the main door (and get attacked by a *rabisu*). One or more of them may slip out in the confusion, but their efforts are likely to be focused on escape until they actually manage to get someone off the ward.

Be sure to make clear to them that the *rabisu* do not like the light, but that they are not afraid to try to ambush someone with one, either. During the storytelling of a *rabisu* attack, have it flinch, dart in and out away from light sources, and only give up pursuit when the Player manages to get to a lit area.

When they realize that escaping immediately will not do any long term good, they will probably turn their attention to exploring the ward and looking for things to thwart the *rabisu*, specifically, more light sources. They may or may not be cerebral enough to do the research in the doctor's office and pick up on the usefulness of salt. Torches will be put together in fairly short order, and then a cat and mouse game will occur with the *rabisu*. The Players will take turns narrating their explorations of the ward, probably as a group with as many torches and light sources as they can muster, and the Keeper will use the lurking *rabisu* to keep them off balance. Don't forget that the *rabisu* can scuttle along walls and ceilings.

Eventually, they will get back to the back of the ward and run into Ereshkigal. At that point, either someone very devious or very heroic may volunteer to remain behind, and/or they will resort to murder (likely involving burning the ward down). It should be very difficult for the Players, if well role-played, to be coherent enough to find and enact the exorcism option, but if one or two of the Players are designed as smart, survivor types, it might be possible.

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# SONS OF ALBION

*An Empathic Underground*

by Lee Williams and Norm Fenlason

FOR DARK CONSPIRACY

## GOALS

The goal of the Sons of Albion is the restoration of the Constitutional Monarchy to Britain. The Sons have seen a Dark hand behind the destruction of royal rule. To this end, each member has sworn allegiance to the *retired* rulers of the once United Kingdom.

The Sons are composed of adepts and provides training in the Psychokinetic (PK) disciplines. (See the Psychokineticist Career.) However, their emphasis is on the martial applications of PK, using those skills to further the art of personal combat. Almost all the members are trained PK practitioners.

## Sons of Albion

<i>Goals:</i>	Hunters
<i>Methods:</i>	Shadows
<i>Empathic Philosophy:</i>	Mixed
<i>Organization:</i>	Council
<i>Assets:</i>	Superior Resources (\$1,000,000+)
<i>Size:</i>	12
<i>Level of Activity:</i>	Medium
<i>Relations with ETs:</i>	Sees ETs as part of the problem.
<i>Relations with Other Cells:</i>	No formal relations with other cells.
<i>Headquarters:</i>	Republic of Britain (moves around)

## METHODS

The Sons of Albion is a strictly secret organization whose membership is through invitation only. The members of the Sons are all *second sons* (although usually but not necessarily male) of influential or formerly influential families of the old British Empire. Vacancies are usually passed to a designated heir to keep it in the family, so to speak. Once the heir has been identified, usually as a youth, he or she is trained in key leadership, PK and combat skills.

In action, the Sons prefer a solid secret investigation into Darkling activity. Once the activity is confirmed, the Sons form a plan of action. One or sometimes two members of the Sons head a team drawn from outside but otherwise trusted sources to put down the Dark Forces. The extensive resources of the Sons of Albion are focused on the plan, which includes covert and proxy overt actions: from computer sabotage to an assault on a darkling stronghold to assassination of suspected *Igors*.



The Sons will always operate in secrecy and will take action against anyone who is a threat to that secrecy. This has caused some brutal *collateral* incidents that the Sons consider tragic, but necessary. Externally, each member of the Sons (except Vincent) fosters the image of the foppish dandy. A key part of the Sons of Albion's secrecy is to derail suspicions using a coached caddish and whimpish front in public.

## EMPATHIC PHILOSOPHY

The Sons consider the PK discipline to be a scientific activity, the study of which is necessary to combat the Darkling invasion. The mixture of indifference and psionic studies (through PK) causes a difference of opinion on any unifying philosophy. However, being so dedicated to their goal, such differences are hardly of significance to the Sons of Albion.

## ORGANIZATION

The Sons of Albion is a council of 12 and only 12. The Sons have operated in secret for many years. Other groups have claimed responsibility for many of the Sons activities, but the Sons have kept silent, keeping their existence secret. The sources of the names of the titles and positions within the council have been lost. But the Sons maintain adherence to ages old rituals and procedures used during their meetings. The Sons of Albion has no fixed headquarters, but has a meeting place that changes randomly.

There is a nominal leader called the First Standard Bearer and Holder of the Royal Shield. Byron Ulrick is presently holding this position and is referred to simply as Lord Byron.

## ASSETS

Multimillionaire William Vincent, although neither a master of PK nor a knight of the realm, holds a valuable chair in the Sons. He has significant resources that he can move indiscriminately to support clandestine activities. In addition to Vincent, some of the great families holding a chair among the Sons retain some vestige of power, and will support activities in some form. Some members of the Sons see Vincent as an upstart, one intending to rise above his station, but for access to his resources, they are quiet on the matter.

## SIZE

While there are only 12 members in the cell, teams can be formed consisting of loyal or trusted outside persons. However, these people are loyal to the leader of the team (a Son of Albion) and have no knowledge of the Sons itself.

### Level of Activity

The Sons of Albion combat Darkling influence wherever it can, but one of the Sons' strengths is its secrecy. All plans undertaken by the Sons include protection of its existence.

## RELATIONS WITH ETs

Information and legends handed down from generation to generation include positive knowledge of the existence of extraterrestrials. The Sons consider the ETs to all be Darkling controlled and will not trust the execution of a plan to include an ET. The general consensus among the members is to shoot first and query the corpse.

### Relations with Other Cells

The Sons are not above using another cell as a front, dupe, or proxy. However, since its existence is supposed to be secret, there are no formal relations to other cells. Some members have links with other cells, such as Vincent, but this is not usually formal and above all the secrecy of the Sons is maintained.

## HEADQUARTERS

The Sons of Albion's geographic headquarters can be pinned down no finer than the Republic of Britain. Meetings of the Sons are called using keyed code words and phrases passed in normal communications. Their meeting place appears random and is selected just prior to the meeting, with midnight and far from prying eyes as the only requirements for the location.

Operations are staged from locations called out in the plan. Resources are dedicated and staged according to the plan prior to execution. No fixed, single control point exists for cell activities.

## SONS OF ALBION

Tales of knights crossing chasms on thin air, withstanding the fiery onslaught of dragon breath, and seeking religious artifacts with mystical powers actually have a basis in truth. In counterpoint



to legend, a select set of families in the dawn of Albion, started passing these tales as truth to each new generation. The strange things that have been seen and the legends that sprung up are not always the same. These families have, and have had for ages, direct knowledge of aliens, darkling incursions, and the causes of the current maladies tormenting on the world.

Some of these families have taken it upon themselves to combat these dark forces in the same spirit as Arthur's Knights of the Round Table. A keen understanding of the insidious darkling nature and the apathetic disbelief of the masses has caused the families to operate from the edges, in secret fashion. Although called many names in the past, the present coalition of families calls themselves the Sons of Albion. Membership in the Sons usually consists of family members that are not in line for a family title.

## THE FAMILIES

Although not all the current families were members of the original coalition, the current Sons of Albion come from the following families:

### *Thynne – Byron Ulrich Thynne, First Standard Bearer*

Byron is the First Standard Bearer of Albion and nominal head of the Sons of Albion. Byron is the son of Lady Virginia Stewart-Thynne and Byron is not in line for his family's title. However, Byron is happy in his current position as the leader of the Sons of Albion, which he takes very seriously. The family home is Longleat House in Wiltshire, but Byron moves about a bit and has apartments all over England and the continent.

### *Percy – Richard Percy, Guardian of the North*

The Percy family are the dukes of Northumberland, in the north east of England right next to Scotland. The ancestral home is the mighty Bamburgh Castle on the bleak North Sea coast. Richard has distinguished himself in military service at the Second Battle of the Pas de Calais and holds a reserve commission as Lt. Colonel of the Infantry. Bamburgh Castle is the site of the defeat of the Laidley Wyrms, a delicate situation for the King resident in Northumberland at the time. In the late 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, the good King Ida resided at Bamburgh Castle. The king had a son,

Childe Wynde, who went to fight abroad and a beautiful daughter, Margaret. Margaret entered service in the Council of the Shield as the Sons were then called, and was taught several magicks as well as the sword – unusual for women of the day. Upon the death of King Ida's wife, the King fell under enchantment of Behoc, the Witch. Behoc was responsible for the Queen's death, so in continuation of her plan, Behoc turned Princess Margaret into a dark creature, the Laidley Wyrms. This wyrm plagued the countryside bringing ruin to Ida's kingdom. The Council sent word for Childe to return immediately. Upon his return, the Council loaded the young prince up with magicks to restore the poor princess to her true form. The Council felt that only Childe could get close enough to the Wyrms to do this. The Wyrms refused to attack the prince; and the Council's magick reversed the curse and restored Behoc to her true form also – appearing as a giant toad. Behoc was a Dark Lord. The Council was prepared and immediately sent the evil witch to a pocket proto-dimension to live out her days. Legend has it that the witch lives trapped in the dungeons below Bamburgh. Occasionally the witch escapes and is forced back into her prison – this has risen to the belief that the witch arises every seven years to plague maidens in the area.

### *Grosvenor – Victor Hugh Grosvenor, Guardian of the East*

Grosvenor is the family of the Duke of Westminster, and one of the wealthiest families in the Republic of Britain. They hold title to a great deal of the land and property of London, and are now as they always have been close to the Royal family. The Grosvenors have maintained good communications with the Royal family while they are out of the country. While far removed from the family title, Victor's business acumen has, in part, kept the Grosvenors among the ranks of the wealthy. Little in the legitimate business world moves without Victor's knowledge.

### *Bowes-Lyon – Alexander Ian Bowes-Lyon, Guardian of the South*

Bowes-Lyon is the family of the Earls of Strathmore and of Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, the former Queen Mother (wife of King George VI). The Bowes-Lyon ancestral home is Glamis Castle in Scotland. Alexander, who goes by the name Ian, is the second son of a second son, and has the reputation as an effeminate playboy and gambler that roams the circles of the social elite, much to the embarrassment of his other family.



*Cavendish – Sir Edward Osborne Cavendish, High Sheriff Cumbria, Guardian of the West*

The Cavendish family is the ancestral holder of the Duchy of Devonshire. Sir Edward's branch has been the holder of his title as High Sheriff Cumbria. Sir Edward has a reputation as a womanizer, and has come under fire by Republic officials as detrimental the cause. Sir Edward shot and killed an estranged husband, but was acquitted due to the circumstances.

*Lambton – George Fredrick D'Arcy Lambton, Armorer Extraordinary*

The family of the earl of Durham. A former medieval Earl and a member of the Council of the Shield is reputed to have battled the Lambton Wyrms, a fearsome beast that terrorized the area. The Lambton Wyrms were a darkling beast called by a Dark Lord to open the gates of hell themselves, that is, until stopped by the Sons. Recalling "Q" from the old James Bond tales, George is considered a technical eccentric by his peers. Although he has a gadget for everything, George is a fearsome close-in fighter as well.

*Anson – Edward Arnold Anson, Holder of the Eternal Door*

The Ansons are the Earls of Lichfield, an historic city in the English Midlands. Most of the ancestral holdings have been sold off or *reclaimed* by the Republic. Edward is fighting to restore his family to their once proud status. Edward has no love of the Republic and strongly wishes the return of the aristocracy.

*Churchill – Mary Elisabeth Churchill, Rider of the North Road*

Churchill is the family of the Dukes of Marlborough. WW2 leader Winston Churchill was a relative, and was in fact born at the ancestral home, Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire. Mary Elisabeth is considered a luckless spinster by the rest of her family, and an eccentric recluse by the rest of the world. However, Mary Elisabeth holds advanced degrees in microbiology; and conducts research and publishes under the pseudonym, Charles Pennington. She does, in fact, operate the largest of the *private* armies of the Sons, with over 250 troops of various capabilities.

*Clive – Geoffrey Clive, Protector of Wales*

Geoffrey is a member of the Clives of 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century Governor of India fame. Geoffrey Clive races cars around the world specializing in survival rally races through wild regions. Outfitting his

own series of vehicles, the Clive name has become prominent as Brougham or Eddie Bauer for popular customization of automobiles. Geoffrey's specialty is long-range endurance coupled with firepower. For example, the Rover, Clive Edition features a .50 caliber machine-gun mounted in a turret ring in the roof.

*Armstrong-Jones – Lord Reginald Anthony Armstrong-Jones, MP, Wielder of the Red Blade*

The Armstrong-Jones' are another family, which maintain close Royal links. Historically, this family has been involved in the legal profession and the actual passage of laws through government procedure for many years, both as working barristers and in the House of Lords. Lord Reginald is the second in line as the Earl of Snowden. An autocrat by nature, Lord Reginald served with the old Royal Air Force obtaining the rank of Group Leader before acceding to the title of Earl. Although considered to be approaching retirement from government service, Lord Reginald is quite vigorous and has many years left in him.

*Somerset – Jonathan Albert Somerset II, Champion of the Palace*

Closely related to several lesser-known British noble families, including the Thynne 'dynasty'. In fact, it was the first of the Somersets and Thynnes that formalized membership in the Council of the Shield, as the Sons of Albion was then called. At the urging of the Sons, Jonathan entered the Foreign Service, attaining the position of Ambassador to Belorussia, until the PRR when diplomatic relations suspended. Jonathan was recalled and has been serving in various Republic posts, most recently in the Foreign Registration Ministry.

*Vincent, William*

The twelfth member filled a vacancy when a darkling plot exterminated the original seat-holder's entire family. The twelfth seat holder is William Vincent, Keeper of the Chest. (See the *Republic of Britain* in **Demonground** for information on William Vincent.)

On a recent operation in Scotland, Byron Thynne had occasion to be introduced to William Vincent and discovered that Vincent also fought the darkness destroying England. With a vacancy among the Sons, and sensing that Vincent could significantly add to the Sons' activities, Byron and the other Sons grudgingly invited Vincent to join their group. With over 1000 years as a cohesive secret organization,



they had finally found another group with the same awareness of the darkling threat. A coalition seemed obvious.

## PASSING THE TORCH

A primary duty of each member of the Sons of Albion is to ensure continuity to the next generation. For this reason, the next in line is identified early in his life so that training and preparation can begin in earnest. Once the current seat holder is ready to retire, or be retired by events, the Sons of Albion briefs the heir apparent on reality – Dark Lords, aliens, empathic monsters, the plot against the crown, etc. Each heir is prepared to take on this position by sending them to special schools. Using carefully prepared wills and trusts the new seat holder comes of age with full capability to join the Sons of Albion and deal with the Darkling invasion.

◆ ◆

## COME TO ME

*By Karr Ess*

Come to me, my sweet little mortal,  
I can take you to heaven's portal.  
There'll be no sorrow, there'll be no pain,  
Feelings of joy will fill your brain.

Come to me, my sweet human thing.  
Give me your heart and I'll make it sing.  
Forget your fears, leave them behind.  
Forget the trivial troubles of your kind.

Come to me... ah, yes, that's right.  
Now hold still, it's no good to fight.  
I'll drink your blood, and leave you dying.  
Didn't you realise I could be lying?



# CLIFTON MAGNA, DORSET, UK

*A location*

by Linden Dunham

FOR CALL OF CTHULHU



THE CLIFTON MAGNA estate occupies a remote wooded valley approximately fifteen miles north east of Dorchester. The sole access is via a narrow lane that runs north from the A354 trunk road. The turn for Clifton Magna is easily missed, being unsignposted and partially obscured by trees. Visitors who spot the turning in time (or retrace their route after overshooting) pass an through an impressive arched gatehouse then find themselves trundling along a rutted track that threads a winding course along the valley bottom between dense woodland and a lake shore. After a mile and half the track abruptly terminates in front of Clifton Magna House, a massive Victorian gothic mansion with a facade of Portland Stone. Huge windows gaze out over the lake, turrets and gables adorn the roof along with numerous gargoyles and carvings of animal figures.

Magnificent though it is there is an air of sadness about the house. It is semi-derelict and appears to have been in this state for some time. Even a cursory inspection reveals several unglazed windows and entire sections of missing roof tiles. Those who enter the house find that the property appears to have been abandoned during construction. The central section is complete but in the east and west wings there are many unfinished rooms which have been left as shells without ceilings or floors. The work that has been done is of undeniably high quality: Vaulted ceilings feature intricate tracery and carved stone bosses, those windows which are glazed display elaborate arrangements of coloured panes. Plainly Clifton Magna House was an ambitious building project that never came to fruition.

Locally the house is sometimes referred to as Kingston's folly, a reference to William Kingston the estate's nineteenth century owner who originally ordered the construction of the property. Kingston was the scion of a family that had grown rich in the Railway Mania boom of the 1840s. In 1890 he married Christina Russell, member of a long established family of Dorset land owners. Their marriage caused a minor scandal amongst the county gentry for whom marrying into trade had only really just become acceptable. Marrying a suitor whose family money came from speculation was emphatically not the done thing. Disapproval of his daughter's choice of husband may have been behind Sir George Russell's wedding gift to the couple - he made them a present of the Clifton Magna estate as their marital home. The estate had been in the family since the 1300s and had supported a herd of White Park Cattle. The Russells had never been frequent visitors, dissuaded by its remoteness, rather gloomy aspect



and the ill favoured look of the Yatton family, a large and multifarious clan living on the estate and nominally employed to look after it. Their performance of their duties had become lacklustre though, and they had even allowed the herd of White Parks to die off some ten years before. Christina's marriage gave Sir George the chance to get rid of a property he had little use, or liking, for. If he also hoped to antagonise his son-in-law by effectively banishing him to the backwoods. Sir George was disappointed.

William Kingston had grown up in the dirt and clamour of the industrial English Midlands. To him Clifton Magna was wonderfully quiet and serene, the ideal place to settle down and bring up a family. His wife, already having a passing familiarity with the estate, was considerably less enamoured of it. She was partially mollified though by her husband's proposal to build a grand country mansion to be their family home. William Kingston employed a well respected London architect of the Gothic Revival school with a brief to design a suitably impressive house using only the finest quality materials, cost to be no object. Kingston wasted no time evicting the Yattons who departed reluctantly, issuing several curses against the Kingstons and the Russells along with various bloodcurdling threats of supernatural vengeance. Even after their eviction the family continued to skulk on the fringes of the estate seemingly unable to tear themselves away from their former home. They had a particular attraction to an ancient stone circle overlooking the north end of the lake and had to be chased away on several occasions after congregating there.

Building work proceeded slowly, delayed by a series of accidents, petty thefts, and illnesses amongst the workers engaged

by Kingston's architect. Many of the workmen lived on site, dossing in tents and huts on the lake shore or living in the gatehouse that was formerly owned by the Yattons. These men complained of headaches and constant tiredness blaming the "miasma" that surrounded the lake. Those who moved away from the camp to take up lodgings in nearby villages found that their condition rapidly improved. Their workmates who remained by the lake continued to sicken and performed their duties in a

desultory fashion as if half asleep. A few began to behave strangely and ended up in the county lunatic asylum at Charminster.

Despite the slow progress in construction the main part of the house was habitable by the summer of 1895 and the Kingstons with assorted servants and staff took up residence in July of that year. Within a couple of months of their occupying the house things began to go wrong. The strange malaise that afflicted the building workers also began to affect the Kingston household: Servants became clumsy and inattentive, William and Christina's two children were fractious and disobedient, and Christina herself would often spend the entire day in bed complaining of a lassitude that made even the smallest movement an incredible effort. William did not escape this malaise and frequently found himself unable to muster the enthusiasm for directing work on the house, or the day to day management of the estate. In December, as the family prepared for Christmas, the children's nurserymaid was found hanged from the balustrade of the landing overlooking the entrance hall to the house. The local police investigated but found no evidence of foul play although the detective inspector in charge of the enquiry commented on the gloomy atmosphere of the house and pronounced the matter "deeply troubling" when taken in the context of the other strange occurrences on the estate over the last few years. Worse was to come. In March 1896 Christina Kingstone drowned in the lake, after climbing the path that led up to the stone circle and throwing herself into the water from the nearby cliff top. A hastily scrawled note on her dresser that read: "The dragon means to drink us dry. I can not stand it any longer."

The death of his beloved wife sent William Kingston mad with grief. Pronouncing the house cursed he ordered work on the property to stop. The workmen dispersed, the architect returned to London and the family moved to a modest townhouse in Dorchester where William became a recluse. When he died in 1920 Clifton Magna was sold to pay death duties.

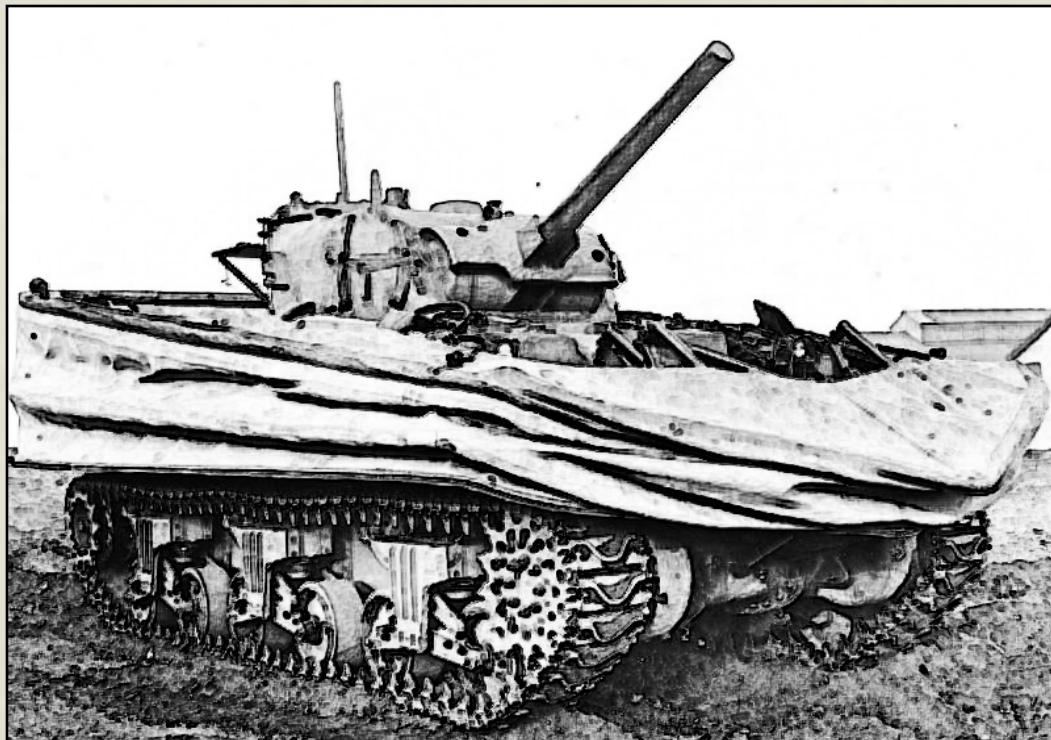
In 1942 the estate was appropriated by the War Office and subsequently chosen as a suitable site to train personnel in the use of amphibious duplex drive (DD) tanks in preparation for the long mooted invasion of Western Europe. A company of converted Valentine tanks with attendant crews and support personnel were billeted at the mansion in autumn of 1943.

The training exercises did not go well: The DD tanks showed a propensity to wallow uncontrollably in the water, often veering

*Reeds of Clifton Magna Lake.*







*"DD or Duplex Drive tanks, nicknamed 'Donald Duck tanks', were a type of amphibious swimming tank developed by the British during the Second World War. The phrase is mostly used for the Duplex Drive variant of the M4 Sherman medium tank."*  
—Wikipedia

off course, despite the placid conditions on the lake. Mechanical checks found nothing wrong with the duplex drives. The company's officers began to look at human error as a possible cause and noted that many of the men seemed tired, easily distracted, and generally not focused on the task in hand. The tank crews were told to buck their ideas up but to little effect. Days later one of the DD tanks was lost with all hands while crossing the lake. Witnesses described it as sinking within seconds as if suddenly pulled under the water. There was a marked reluctance to join in the recovery of the lost tank and in the end it was left on the lake bottom, the bodies of the crew still inside. The rest of the company were posted to the established DD tank school at Fritton Lake in Norfolk to complete their training.

In the summer of 1944, possibly against its better judgement, the War Office allowed Clifton Magna house to be used as a convalescent home for soldiers wounded in the fighting in Europe and shipped back home. This use stopped in early 1945 after many of the men quartered there began to suffer a combination of physical and

psychological symptoms with one patient hanging himself from the rafters of the uncompleted east wing in a grim echo of the nursery maid's suicide fifty years before.

After the war Clifton Magna remained in the ownership of the government (with the Ministry of Defence succeeding the War Office in 1964). The estate was sealed off behind a high fence, topped with coils of barbed wire. Prominent signs sited at the entrance and at intervals along the boundary warned prospective visitors away and threatened dire retribution against those trespassing on Crown property. The Ministry appeared content to allow Clifton Magna to remain unoccupied, house and grounds both gradually falling into dereliction.

The election of the coalition government in 2010 and the discovery of a "black hole" in the defence budget put the Ministry under pressure to dispose of much of its land holdings. Clifton Magna was scheduled as one of the sites to be sold despite objections from both the Ministry and the intelligence services. Their warnings that the site was dangerous due to its poisonous psychic climate counted for little to a cash strapped government desperate to balance the books.

## KEEPER'S INFORMATION

Clifton Magna is inhabited by a Lloigor. For the most part it is content to remain submerged in the lake in its immaterial form. In the times when there are people living on the estate it uses its psychic power to drain them of magic points to replenish its own reserves. Those persons suffering sustained contact with the Lloigor suffer the usual symptoms of sleeplessness and deterioration in their mental health. Although it regards humans as useful the Lloigor dislikes having them in close proximity, seeing them as a potential threat. Anyone venturing onto the lake is at risk of attracting the creature's attention particularly if they do so on a regular basis. When sufficiently irritated by activity on the water the Lloigor will prefer to use its telekinetic powers to deal with lone swimmers or small boats. If lacking sufficient magic points to employ telekinesis it may manifest in reptile form and launch a physical assault on any interlopers. The creature rarely sees the need to utilise its implosion ability but may use it against a significant threat. The Shrivelling spell is primarily a disciplinary measure for use on its own worshippers – the intonation time, relatively high MP cost and narrow area of effect limit its use in a close range confrontation.

*(Continued on page 53)*





## The Clifton Magna Estate

### Clifton Magna Location Guide

1. **The Lodge:** The entrance to the estate is guarded by large gatehouse. Like the main house it is derelict. Prior to Clifton Magna being given to William and Christina Kingston the lodge was inhabited by the Yatton family. It may contain clues to the Lloigor's presence e.g. crudely sketched and faded dragon murals on a cellar wall, or a barely literate cultists' diary hidden under the floor boards.
2. **The House:** At first sight Clifton Magna house is an impressive example of late Victorian gothic architecture. Up close its unfinished nature soon becomes apparent. Only the middle section is halfway habitable. The two wings are merely shells and require considerable work to bring them up to the same standard as the main part of the building.
3. **The Lake:** Surrounded by trees that admit only a limited amount of sunlight the lake water appears dark and forbidding. Persons venturing into the lake find that his darkness extends below the surface. Even those equipped with proper diving gear and underwater lighting will find it difficult to navigate the lake waters when submerged. If the Lloigor senses any swimmers are in difficulty it make take this as a cue to attack, either mentally or physically, dragging the luckless victim down into the murky depths.
4. **Cliff:** To the north of the lake the ground rises abruptly and a sixty feet high cliff overlooks the water at this point. If anyone feels the need to scale the cliff then three Climbing rolls are required.
5. **Stone Circle:** Composed of twelve stones on a small grassy plateau at the top of the cliff (4). The stones are each around three feet in height and are in variable condition. Seven remain upright and more or less intact, four have fallen or been pushed over while another has been cracked down the middle, its two segments leaning away from each other at drunken angles. The circle is linked to the Lloigor. At the most basic level it provides a worship site for the Yattons or anyone else unfortunate to come under the creature's influence. Other potential uses are detailed in the scenario seeds below.  
  
The circle can be reached by following a footpath from the house up through the woods.



(Continued from page 51)

For a long time the Lloigor preyed on the Yattons, the local family engaged by the Russells in the late 1790s to look after the estate and its cattle. The Yattons fell under the sway of the Lloigor and became its worshippers, holding ceremonies in the stone circle overlooking the lake, in which they would work themselves into a frenzy until they finally fell to the ground exhausted and unconscious. As is the way with the Lloigor the Yattons received little in return for their devotion. The Lloigor fed from them during their sleeping hours and they suffered the usual psychological effects that prolonged contact with such creatures brings. Recalcitrant family members were dealt with in time honoured fashion by causing tentacled cancerous growths to sprout on the bodies of offenders.

By the time the Kingstons moved to Clifton Magna the Yattons had degenerated into an inbred rabble numbering twenty persons of various ages. They were no match for the Kingstons bailiffs and were swiftly evicted. Still in thrall to the Lloigor they remained in the area, sometimes trespassing on the estate to worship at the stones and implore their master to restore them to its rightful place as its servants. The Lloigor paid them no heed, being more than content to prey on the Kingston household.

After the Kingstons departed the Yattons resumed occupation, living in a squalid camp in the woods to the north of the lake. They would occasionally be harrassed by the local police and arrested, but invariably returned to the estate on completing whatever sentence the local magistrates handed down. With William Kingston wanting nothing to do with Clifton Magna the authorities eventually lost interest leaving the Yattons free remain on the estate as well as take up occupation of the main house. By the time Clifton Magna was sold in the 1920s the family had dwindled to just half-a-dozen of the youngest and hardiest members. They caused some difficulties for the new owner, but by the time of the second world war the Yattons had either died out, or a handful of

surviving members had finally managed to throw off the Lloigor's influence and flee the area.

## ADVENTURE IDEAS

### BLEAK HOUSE – GASLIGHT ERA

The investigators are contacted by Henry Russell following the death of the nursery maid. He is aware of the strange goings on during the building of the new house at Clifton Magna and fears for his daughter's safety. He asks the investigators to accompany him to Clifton Magna. He will try to persuade Christina to come and stay with him in Blandford Forum while the investigators determine if there is indeed a supernatural menace lurking on the estate.

When the party arrive at Clifton Magna they have to contend with the hostility of William Kingston, unhappy at what he sees as unwarranted interference by his wife's family in his private life. The local police also don't take kindly to the investigators trying to re-open what looks like a straightforward case of suicide. The successful use of appropriate skills or characteristics will convince the detective inspector who originally dealt with the suicide to assist the investigators and he can be helpful in filling them in on local information and is also able call on colleagues for help if the investigators aren't suited to strenuous physical activity e.g, brawling with the Yattons during one of their visits to the stone circle.

Enquiries with the staff and workmen find that many of them seem tired and listless. Some claim to suffer recurring nightmares involving the lake. During the course of the investigators' visit Christina Kingston attempts to drown herself. If the investigators act quickly to save her she tells them of her belief that there is something in the lake that is sapping the life from everyone on the estate.

Venturing out onto the water eventually provokes the Lloigor, which having drawn a large amount of magic points from the, Kingston household will be

## Clifton Magna Lloigor

### ANCIENT LORD OF THE MANOR

STR	42
CON	32
SIZ	30
INT	14
POW	16*
DEX	13

*\*(Magic Points available vary and may be considerably greater than base POW)*

Move	7 (3 through stone/rock etc if immaterial)
Hit Points	31

### Weapons

Claw	30%, 1D6+3D6db
Bite	50%, 2D6

*Various psychic attacks as detailed in CoC rulebook*

Armour	8pts (immune to physical weapons when immaterial)
Spells	Create Gate, Dominate, Shrivelling (variant in which the damage manifests as cancerous growths)



able to mount a concerted assault using its psychokinetic ability. If this fails it will use the last of its magic point reservoir to take physical form and confront the investigators directly.

## ONLY CONNECT – CLASSIC ERA

William Kingston dies in the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918-20. With his heirs facing sizeable death duties Clifton Magna is put up for sale. It is purchased by Douglas Bray, a businessman and war profiteer. Bray buys the estate at a knock down price due to the Kingstons' urgent need to sell, the poor condition of the house, and the presence of a band of squatters living in the woods by the stone circle which, for reasons best known to themselves, they are trying to rebuild. Bray and his employees chase the squatters off, yet within a month they are back, seemingly with the new owner's approval. Indeed, Bray is actively assisting them in their efforts to restore the stone circle. At this point the investigators are called in by a concerned family member, family lawyer, doctor or other interested professional.

Bray has fallen under the sway of the Lloigor. It recognises that he is a far more useful servant than the idiotic Yattons and is utilising him and his resources to repair the circle. Once the repairs are finished the monument will be ritually activated allowing the Lloigor to re-connect with the ley line network that served its race in ancient times. Although run down and degraded the network still exists. If the Lloigor can "plug" itself back in it will be able to draw a considerable amount of magic points from the residents of the surrounding area. It may also be able to communicate with others of its kind. In either event the creature gains considerably in power and creates its own private kingdom in this small corner of the Dorset countryside, exercising its malign influence for a radius of several miles. This proves to be only the first step in a much larger campaign. With Bray's help more sites (and more Lloigor) are added to the network and unless the investigators take early action the Lloigor become a significant threat to the British Isles.

## HORROR HOSPITAL – WORLD WAR 2/Delta Green

Clifton Magna is pressed into service as a convalescent hospital for injured servicemen. Unfortunately, the troops billeted there begin to develop further physical and mental health problems. Perhaps even more worryingly, so do the staff. PISCES has serious concerns about the estate given its history, and David Cornwall lobbies the war office for his section to investigate further. Approval is granted and

the investigators are assigned to the task. Research material provided by PISCES details the unfortunate history of the house, including the loss of the DD tank. The investigators must uncover the Lloigor and find a way to dispatch it.

As an alternative to a PISCES themed scenario the investigators could be patients and staff at Clifton Magna house. Realising that something is wrong they research the estate's history and discover that something very dangerous lurks in the waters of the lake...

## Return of the Native – Modern Era/Delta Green

The MOD sells Clifton Magna to David Yatton, an enfant terrible of the BritArt scene who made a small fortune in the 1990s with his conceptual pieces, usually involving reptiles in some capacity - most notoriously a crocodile suspended in a tank of formaldehyde. Yatton announces his intention to restore the house and complete its construction as far as possible to William Kingston's original specifications.

After a couple of months the building project falters due to Yatton becoming more interested in rebuilding the stone circle to the exclusion of the work on the house. The contractors leave following an argument. They make it plain to him that carrying out unauthorised alterations to ancient monuments is not part of their brief. A few weeks afterwards Yatton announces a Halloween-cum-house warming party and invitations are sent out to friends, other artists, musicians, writers and sundry other media figures. The event seems to be patterned on a 90s style rave and invitees are encouraged to bring guests. The message seems to be "the more the merrier".

Yatton is acting under the influence of the Lloigor. The creature has decided that it is time to "pass on" and return home to the Andromeda galaxy. It has been draining Yatton of Magic Points to fuel its psychokinetic power so that it can rebuild the stone circle as a gate. Due to the high cost of moving large blocks of stone around it hasn't made a great deal of progress. The Lloigor requires a much larger pool of magic points if the task is to be completed quickly. Yatton is coerced into holding a party at Clifton Magna. This turns out to be a riotous affair as might be expected from a former hard living habitue of pubs, Soho drinking dens, and the old rave scene. Friends and acquaintances plus assorted hangers on descend from London. Booze, drugs and dance music are in abundance. Just before dawn when the sound system is finally switched off and with many of the revellers lying insensible in the house and grounds the Lloigor enacts a mass magic point drain enabling it to move the last gate



stones into place. It then manifests itself in physical form and kills Yatton, sacrificing him for the POW needed to activate the gate, and finally passes through the portal to Andromeda.

PISCES is aware of Clifton Magna's history and believes it to be a mythos site. The section has kept tabs on the estate since it was sold to Yatton and suspects that the house warming party is some sort of disguised ritual. The investigators are to accompany a PISCES friendly named Gary Ellis to the event. Ellis is known to Yatton and has an invitation. Originally a music journalist Ellis graduated to working for one of the broadsheets as an arts correspondent. He also makes appearances on television and in other media where he is usually billed as a "cultural commentator". The exact nature of his relationship with PISCES isn't immediately clear but he mentions that the section sometimes uses him to disseminate misinformation on those occasions when the supernatural intersects with the arts e.g if a performance of *The King in Yellow* results in mayhem at a fringe theatre venue. Ellis is cagey about how he came to be recruited by PISCES but investigators should be given ample opportunity catch him hoovering up line after line of cocaine. They may well conclude that his habit led to him being blackmailed into helping the section as and when they require it. Suffice to say the ingestion of large quantities of Colombian marching powder do nothing to improve Ellis's already obnoxious personality. Once he has got them into Clifton Magna the investigators may find him more hindrance than help.

In a non-Delta Green/PISCES campaign Ellis gets in touch with the investigators after interviewing Yatton for one of the Sunday papers. He tells them that Yatton appeared irrational at times and was making grandiose claims for a new piece of open air installation art making use of the occult energies contained within ancient stone circles. Yatton refused to give any more details and told Ellis he would have to attend the unveiling party at Clifton Magna on Halloween night if he wanted to know more. Ellis was so disturbed by Yatton's demeanour that he asks the investigators to accompany him to the party "in case of any trouble." Has Ellis's coke fuelled paranoia finally got the better of him or is he genuinely on to something?

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## SOURCES/ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### PUBLICATIONS

"A Landscape of Barrows and Stones" by Davide Mana from **The Black Seal #1**

"Forces for good: making the most of military land for public benefit" by Julian Dobson. Discussion paper available at:

[www.bstrust.org.uk/uploads/forcesforgoodjan2012.pdf](http://www.bstrust.org.uk/uploads/forcesforgoodjan2012.pdf)

"Duplex Drive Amphibious Tanks at Fritton Lake". Short article on DD tanks and the training of their crews at a specialist lakeside camp in Norfolk, available from the Somerleyton Estate website at:

[http://www.somerleyton.co.uk/downloads/FrittonLake\\_DuplexDriveAmphibiousTanks.pdf](http://www.somerleyton.co.uk/downloads/FrittonLake_DuplexDriveAmphibiousTanks.pdf)

### WEBSITES

The history of Clifton Magna is largely inspired by that of Woodchester Park in Gloucestershire. The *Haunted Britain* website has a very informative page detailing the history of the property and its various ghosts.

<http://www.haunted-britain.com/woodchester-mansion.htm>

Slightly haphazard layout to this page which features information on notable personalities from the county of Dorset. Useful inspiration for the Kingston and Russell family histories.

[http://www.thegypsypoet.co.uk/famous\\_dorset\\_people.html](http://www.thegypsypoet.co.uk/famous_dorset_people.html)



## THE NINGYO

A Dark Race

by Norm Fenlason

FOR DARK CONSPIRACY

### 人魚

Inspired by the short story:

Left by the Tide by Edward E. Schiff  
©1938-1953 *Weird Tales Ltd*



Ningyo,  
Toriyama  
Sekien,  
1712

THROUGH THE FORMATION of demongrounds in the ocean, a series of creatures and maladies can be unleashed upon the unsuspecting peoples of earth. The *Ningyo*, Japanese for merperson, is a group of creatures that have made good their escape from their underwater demongrounds. They now wander the ocean taking an occasional lone fisherman, swimmer, or surfer.

Legends abound of mermaids and mermen luring the hapless sailor to a watery grave. With the torso of a human and lower body that of a fish, mermaids and mermen can breathe under the water, although they can stand limited periods out of water. Their malevolence against humans has been downplayed by quaint stories and catchy animated motion pictures. However, an underlying thread among the legends is that they either kill humans or they drag luckless victims to their homeland to be converted into mermen.

Mermen come from a protodimension long controlled by a Dark Master. The Dark Master was banished to this protodimension from the primary earth plane ages past, whereupon he quickly enslaved the hapless mermen. The mermen have long since been suffering under this rule. Collectively the mermen blame humans for sending the Dark Master to their world. Now that the interdimensional barriers are weakening, more Ningyo are escaping to earth's oceans. Once they escape from the torment of their home dimension, they pursue an agenda intent on making as many humans suffer as they can. Usually acting alone, a merman will throw a wrench

### NINGYO

Strength:	8	Education:	2	Move:	4/32/64
Constitution:	5	Charisma:	3	Skill/Dam.:	5 / 3D6
Agility:	6	Empathy:	1	Hits:	32 / 64
Intelligence:	5	Initiative:	2	# Appearing:	1-2

Melee Combat (Unarmed)	15
Throwing	16

\*Ningyo moves at 4 on land and 32/64 in the water

into underwater human technology efforts. Many of these unexplained mishaps have taken place at great depth. The unforgiving nature of deep-water accidents has prevented knowledge of the causes of these accidents from leaking out.

The Ningyo take the form of the classic mermaids and mermen of old. They have an upper torso of human form, but the skin is slightly translucent and puffy. It is colored a sickening light gray immediately calling to mind rotting flesh that has been in the water too long. There is no differentiation between Ningyo; there are no male and female sexes.

The Ningyo have strong shoulders, large arms, and oversized hands. Their five fingers speak of a common ancestry to humans, but the fingers are webbed. They have barrel-like chests with gill slits under the arms allowing them to breathe. When breathing underwater, their chests heave up and down to pump water through their gill system.

The lower body is that of a large fish. There is a single tail with ventral and secondary dorsal fins. The whole of the lower body is covered in scales. While the scale colors vary from white to a silvery gray, minion hunters have also spotted a shimmering green, and the white of a fish's underbelly is the usual color.

The Ningyo can spend up to four hours on land before having to return to water. When on land, the Ningyo move by dragging themselves about with their arms. They move at 4 meters per initiative phase when on land. In the water they are very mobile, moving at 32 meters per phase. However, on land the Ningyo have difficulty in agility-based actions. These they suffer at one greater difficulty level.

In the water, the Ningyo will attempt to grapple their victim and drag them into deeper water to let them drown. On land the Ningyo will also attempt to grapple, but instead with the intention of choking their victim. Because they are so slow on land, the Ningyo will pick up and throw rocks attempting to stun their victim so they can catch up to them. They are very skillful at throwing rocks.



# RICO JC2 SIGNATURE MODEL

Weapons

FOR DARK CONSPIRACY



S AID TO HAVE been originally developed by a shadowy government department, the JC2 is another example of “big boy’s toys” *in extremis*. The weapon is semi-legendary, and those in the know say that only two were ever made: a matched pair nicknamed Rose and Pearl. Starting out with a Magnum Research Industries revolver already chambered for the hefty .454 Casull round, the weapon was given an enclosed hammer and ergonomic grips. To this was added what the designers optimistically called a grenade launcher, although its small size makes it more of a single-round shotgun. In essence then, the JC2 is a modern take on the ACW era LeMat revolver but with far more stopping power.

Inspired by the 2010 video game *Just Cause 2*

Rico JC2						Recoil		
Ammo	ROF/Rld	Dam	Pen	Bulk	Mag	SS	Brst	Rng
.454 Casell	DAR	4	2-2-Nil	3	5R	4	—	20
30-mm buckshot	SS	6	Nil	3	1i	4	—	12
30-mm HE	SS	C2, B4	Nil	3	1i	4	—	15

Weight: 2.1kg

Price: \$??

Availability: -/-



# THREE BABIES AND A SHOGGOTH

An Adventure

by Dave Schuey

FOR CALL OF CTHULHU (D20)

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*Words have no power to impress the mind without the exquisite horror of their reality.*

— Edgar Allen Poe

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*Knowledge is Power.*

— Sir Francis Bacon

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IT IS OCTOBER 21 and the investigators awake to tragic and disturbing news. An infant has been kidnapped from a local hospital. An Amber alert has been issued. It is also all over the morning papers. (Handout #1).

## DAY ONE

If the investigators choose to look into the infant's abduction, they may want to speak with the police first. Use a police contingent appropriate to the city in which the adventure takes place. The police, of course, will not voluntarily divulge any key aspects of the case. Any investigators with legitimate law enforcement credentials may be extended a professional courtesy, but a Charisma or Bluff roll (DC 15) is advised. A successful check may grant them access to **Details**, below.

If they go straight to the hospital they may encounter detectives there, who will ask that they stay uninvolved, but otherwise do not interfere with their interrogations.

Interviewing nurses and doctors will reveal nothing, although several of them will recount the story of the gunshot victim that evening, who appeared to be under the influence of a powerful stimulant. He was brought into the emergency room (the only door open at that hour) and taken to a treatment room, but he quickly broke free and began roaming the halls while security attempted to restrain him. He frightened many other

*NOTE: This adventure originally took place in modern day Arkham, Mass., but has been edited to be of more general use. If you wish to run it in the original locale, I suggest the purchase of the excellent "Arkham Now" sourcebook by Courtemanche, Sanborn, Sumpter, Antunes and Christensen from Chaosium (assuming you already haven't). If you wish to run it in 1920's era Arkham, the "Arkham Unveiled" sourcebook will do nicely. If you wish to run a 1920's adventure somewhere else, you're on your own for background material.*

*Depending on the setting choices you make some of the props may need to be modified. The **Day Five** radio crackpot call will need to be an in-studio interview if you set the adventure in the 1920's. See PROP NOTES at the end of the adventure.*

*Throughout the article there will be Arkham specific boxed text for those who choose that locale*



## Arkham

*National media has picked up the story. Investigators could come from anywhere. There are daily flights into Arkham Airport so arrangements could be made for arrival late on Day One or early on Day Two. In the latter case, consider the Day One events to take place on Day Two, as well.*

*The kidnapping victims in this story are the youngest members of the remaining Arkham founding families. While this is ultimately irrelevant, to the cult involved it is significant.*

patients and caused quite a ruckus, eventually bleeding to death in a supply closet. **NOTE:** the surveillance does not reflect this incident, as it has been falsified from previously recorded nights.

A possible interview of note would be with the security guard on duty in the surveillance room on the night of the abduction. His name is Kyle Vanderburg and he is smart and helpful, though afraid of his security chief. He will tell the same story as the others, though a successful Sense Motive (DC 20) may reveal he is hiding something. If successful, the roll may get him to admit he was smoking marijuana at the time of the abduction (another lie, another Sense Motive). If pushed on this untruth he will say that he was in fact smoking with one of the nurses and engaged in sexual activity. Again he is lying, but as luck would have it his security chief will show up and send him out on rounds. The chief will then answer the investigator's questions but will become indignant if suggestions of incompetence on the part of his team are made. This will bring his cooperation to a close.

### Details

Unknown persons took the child during the night. The security surveillance provided by the hospital shows nothing unusual. Normal rounds revealed the missing child, but by then the abductor was long gone. Per procedure as soon as the child was discovered missing the hospital doors were sealed and a floor-by-floor search begun by security.

The child was born to Matthew and Enid Pickering, the youngest of the Pickering family. She was healthy and unremarkable in any other way. She was yet to be named but the parents were planning on calling her Camille.

### DAY TWO

The day after the investigators arrive the police receive an anonymous tip that the child's body has been disposed of in the lake in a local cemetery. The

Chief decides to drain the lake, as a dive team will be unavailable for several days. If the investigators are friendly with the police they may hear of this, otherwise it may be **Day Three** before there is mention of it on the news.

That night Kyle Vanderburg fails to report for work. If Searched (DC 15), his apartment is unremarkable, save a list of last names with several names crossed off and three accompanied by checkmarks. (Handout #2). Should the search roll be exceptionally high, the remnants of a shipping label, with enough of a local address still readable to identify the location, can be found adhering to the bottom of his work boots. The location is that of a warehouse in the industrial district.

The list can be recreated using other names or used as is, but the names on the handout will take on special significance in Arkham.

### DAY FOUR

Another baby is stolen from a crib in town. This family is one of the names with a checkmark. The story is the typical, "we went to bed and the baby was safe, then woke up and he was gone" story. The window appears to have been jimmed.

If the investigators recovered Vanderburg's list of names they may have had a chance to stop the abduction. If so, an appropriately sized team of **Acolytes** (at least one per investigator) will survey the street where the family lives then return for the abduction. They will attempt to draw off the investigators while an additional pair of **Acolytes** gets the child. Combat may ensue.

The parents will be reluctant to leave their home on the word of the investigators, but if convinced (Diplomacy DC 20), they will go to stay with relatives. In this case, **Acolytes** will show up to distract the investigators, but no break-in attempt will be made on the home. This is because a second team of **Acolytes** will be abducting the child from the relative's house. (Handout #3)

*The names on the list are those of the Arkham founding families. Those crossed out have no current infant members, but those with checks do. These are the targets of the cult. If found, the shipping label mentioned above is instead part of a flyer for an illegal rave happening at the Vacant Church at 561 West Main.*



*This family is the Marshes and the relative's home they are staying at is, in fact, a mansion outside the city limits on a wooded estate. The cultists enter the mansion through the extensive Arkham cave system. The house has been staffed with at least a dozen private security guards, but a powerful, odorless gas introduced into the HVAC unit in the basement knocks all those inside the house out. The security guards were checking in by radio every 15 minutes, but that was all the Acolytes needed.*

*This is the West family.*

## DAY FIVE

The next day a crackpot calls the local morning show and claims to know what is going on. He says he is a graduate student at the local university and that he was studying the journals of a notorious seventeenth century "witch" and one of the cities founders. He came across a ritual to be conducted on All Hallows Eve, which requires the sacrifice of three infants. He believes that some crazed individual plans to enact the ritual. The morning show guys make fun of him, and play bits of the conversation all day. (Handout #4)

The police have been contacted by the same man but have filed him with lots of other crazies. His name is Larry Zirmetski and if he is tracked down he seems entirely reasonable and suggests that they look at the "witch's" journal for themselves if they doubt him. At the university library they discover the journal missing.

He is more than happy to show them his notes, though, the most significant (and relatable) of which are the recorded positions of the stars and some hints as to where the sacrificial altar may be.

Checking the star positions from Zirmetski's notes against the current sky, they seem to be in alignment (Knowledge (Astronomy) or Research DC 15). (Handout #5).

Of note, Larry also tells them that he believes the "witch's" altar was on an area of land that is now a local cemetery. If they check this out they find the pond dry, and three large flat stones at its bottom.

Contacting the police at this stage about the drained pond, they will learn of the false lead that resulted in the situation.

## DAY SEVEN

Two days later a rural man drives into town in a truck from the 1920's. He says his daughter has been stolen. She was just 4 months old. Upon questioning he turns out to also be descended from one of the city's founding families, who had moved out to the hills in the 1920's.

The cult now has all it's sacrifices and need only await All Hallows Eve. They will be in the cemetery at midnight with their Shoggoth protector.

## DAY TEN

If the PCs manage to foil either or both of these abductions the cult will simply opt for children from non-founding families and continue unabated. Members present at the ritual will number 13; the cult's leader and 12 acolytes. Convincing the police to take this threat seriously is impossible. Though if some sort of conflagration or incident is staged to call them to the cemetery at the right time they will certainly show up, unless the call comes in through 911. One of the 911 operators is a member of the cult and has arranged to be on duty that evening. She will divert any calls about activities in the cemetery.

The full cult consists of 20 plus the leader, with the remaining 8 in positions likely to aid or hide the group's activities.

## ALL HALLOWS EVE (SAMHAIN)

20 minutes before midnight on Halloween, ten cultists show up and prepare the site for the sacrifice. This includes lighting fires and laying down pieces of plywood to walk from the edge of the drained lake to the center. They will then form a circle around the lake's edge and begin to chant.

10 minutes before midnight the Shoggoth rises from the mud and begins prowling the edges of the lake. At the same time a car pulls up to the edge of the lake and Meredith and two female cultists get out. The two female cultists remove the three babies from the car, each swaddled in a red blanket.

The trio proceed across the plywood to the center of the lake and the cultists place the babies on the three flat stones. They then join the others around the edges while Meredith begins his incantation. The cloudy sky begins to swirl and the whole area is bathed in an unearthly glow. (This schedule can be modified by the Keeper if dramatic needs require it. If the investigators

*The "witch" is notorious necromancer Joseph Curwen and the university is, of course Miskatonic University. Agents of the cult retrieved the books once the plan had begun in the event of just such recognition by a student or professor. The cemetery is Christchurch Cemetery, south of town.*



are well prepared and have a clear plan of rescue less time will heighten the tension.)

The investigators may try to break things up at any point, but unless it is dealt with, the Shoggoth will continue to guard its master. The cultists will also attack, if need be, with their pistols if at range or daggers if in melee.

If Meredith manages to complete his incantation (Call Azathoth), the babies will be killed in three separate ways; by fire, by drowning, and by turning to dust. Azathoth will then turn his gaze upon Meredith, who is requesting the boon of immortality. A voice coming from nowhere and everywhere will reply, "I grant your boon...in the fiery pit of my stomach!" At this point something that might be a hand reaches out of the swirling sky and snatches Meredith from the ground. As Meredith disappears into the clouds the glow fades and the sky returns to normal. Any cultists still alive will rob their weapons and flee the scene. The Shoggoth seeps back into the mud of the drained lake.

If the Investigators stop the ceremony by any means, adjust events accordingly. If Meredith is forced to defend himself the opportunity for casting the incantation will be lost, as the timing is critical. This will send him into a rage and he may begin casting whatever spells he can at the investigators, though resorting to physical combat will be the last thing he tries.

If Meredith is killed the cultists will surrender or flee, otherwise they will fight to the death. If the police are somehow summoned to the scene remember to make sanity checks for them. If Meredith is arrested he will not speak a word, waiting instead to make an escape using the spells he knows and the remaining members of his cult. He might also use his Charismatic Leader ability on his fellow inmates to organize a mass escape or riot. If he is allowed to live the investigators will have made a powerful enemy.

### POSSIBLE LOCATIONS

#### *The University*

The university has a large student body and professors in many fields, including a few that may help the investigators. Gather Information checks (DC 15) can lead them to these people, but especially to Dr. Maria Kirkland.

They may approach any number of Professors and/or students about Larry's claims and many will simply look at them dumbfounded. A few will offer help but may be of little use. Dr. Kirkland might be more useful, despite her age. If they can obtain her cooperation she might be able to help in a number of ways.

#### *East of Eden Curiosities*

Oliver Hayden Meredith owns this curio shop, filled with things from all over, but mainly the Middle East. It is hard to find, on a narrow street in a seedy part of town, but not impossible. He is using it to cover his presence and activities. It is filled to bursting with a jumble of souvenirs and trinkets, most of which are creepy but innocuous. Some, however, are indeed magical. He is cordial and businesslike, but if he suspects that the investigators have found him out, he may summon acolytes to have them followed and, possibly, killed.

#### *Chaos Brotherhood Hidden Lair*

If the shipping label on Vanderburg's boot is found, or the brotherhood is found out in some other way, investigators may manage to track them to their lair. This is a disused warehouse in the city's industrial district. The lair is in the basement, but the normal entrance has been welded and blocked. A concealed door has been constructed nearby. This is where Vanderburg will be hiding once he flees the hospital.

The cult has converted the basement of the warehouse into a place where they can hide and plot. It has dining facilities, sleeping quarters, a small armory and the cult leader's private "study".

*Miskatonic University receives a full write up in "Arkham Now" and, if used, could net the investigator's many useful resources and theories. However, the cult is not affiliated with the university or any of its professors or students. So strong leads on where to find them will be unavailable. Researching Shoggoths if the guardian is encountered at the cult's lair may help with formulating a plan of attack.*

*The lair is under the Vacant Church, and a secret door in the basement opens into a sealed off section of Arkham's Tunnels. The lair has a dining room, rooms for sleeping, an armory, and at the very back, Meredith's "study".*



In the study Meredith has several tomes of arcane knowledge and few magical devices, including a set of panpipes, which, when played, will send the guardian Shoggoth into a dancing trance. If the investigators are to have any real hope against the Shoggoth these pipes should be acquired. Unfortunately for them, the Shoggoth is in the study guarding his master's effects.

### *Garden View Hospital*

The location of first abduction this is a modern general hospital on the outskirts of town to the north. It is a 5-story glass box with an attached parking garage. On staff are about 20 doctors, 50 nurses, 10 administrators and security and custodial workers. The first floor has the Emergency room and its operating theaters, Pediatrics, Admissions, a Gift Shop and the Pharmacy. The second floor consists of doctor's offices and administration. The third floor has other surgical theaters, Neo-Natal and L&D, Recovery and a few private rooms. The fourth and fifth floors are Patient rooms and labs. Vanderburg will be working from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. the evening of Day One but will not show up for work on Day Two.

### *The Cemetery*

Any cemetery map will do, but it must have a medium sized pond near the center and roads throughout. If available, look to the Christchurch Cemetery map from "Arkham Unveiled" for inspiration.

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## NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

### DR. MARIA KIRKLAND: MU PROFESSOR OF ANCIENT RELIGIONS

**Hit Dice:** 15D6+15 (61/2=33 hp)

**Initiative:** +4 Imp. Imit.

**Speed:** 30 ft.

**Armor Class:** 10

**Attacks:** 9mm Glock +12/+7/+2, Katana +12/+7/+2

**Damage:** Pistol 2D6, Sword 1D10

**Face/Reach:** 5 ft. x 5 ft./5 ft.

**Special Abilities:** Spells

**Special Qualities:** None

**Spells:** Bind Enemy, Cast Out Devil, Create Self-Ward, Darkness, Deflect Harm, Detect Magic, Healing Touch, Identify Spirit, Return to Rest, Suggestion, Voorish Sign,

**Saves:** Fort +6, Ref +9, Will +14

**Abilities:** Str 11 (0), Dex 10 (0), Con 12 (+1), Int 20 (+5), Wis 20 (+5), Chr 14 (+2)

**Skills:** Appraise +8, Balance +2, Bluff +4, Climb +2, Computer Use +8, \*Concentration +11 (+4 Def), Craft (Painting) +6, Cthulhu Mythos +15, \*Diplomacy +10, Disable Device +7, Drive +3, \*Gather Information +12, Handle Animal +4, Heal +7, Hide +2, Jump +2, \*Knowledge (Religion) +18, \*Knowledge (History) +14, \*Knowledge (Occult) +13, \*Knowledge (Geography) +12, Listen +9, Move Silently +2, Performance (Flute) +4, Pilot (Small Plane) +3, \*Read Lips +13, \*Research +15, Ride +3, Search +8, \*Sense Motive +13, \*Latin Language +15, French Language +7, German Language +7, Farsi Language +7, Spellcraft +9, \*Spot +16, Swim +4, Use Rope +3, Wilderness Lore +7

**Feats:** Alertness, Blind-Fight, Combat Casting, Expertise, Improved Initiative, Pistol Prof., Sword Prof.

**Sanity:** 85

Kirkland has written many scholarly reports on beings from the Mythos and while they are not widely published, she makes them available to anyone she learns of who might be searching for them. She is in her 70's but still spry. Her eyes twinkle with a light of knowledge that is almost unearthly. For a woman of her age she is still amazingly attractive and her grey hair hangs around her face is small, loose curls. She has spent the better part of her life seeking out esoteric knowledge and has learned well the inherent dangers. Many years ago a colleague instructed her on the use of pistols, and her late husband, a Japanese professor in the same field, taught her to use a sword.



## LARRY ZIRMETSKI: GRAD STUDENT, EARLY AMERICAN STUDIES

**Hit Dice:** 3D6+10 (20 hp)

**Initiative:** -1 (-1 Dex,)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

**Armor Class:** 9 (-1 Dex)

**Attacks:** Unarmed Melee +2

**Damage:** 1D3

**Face/Reach:** 5 ft. x 5 ft./5 ft.

**Special Abilities:** None

**Special Qualities:** None

**Saves:** Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +3

**Abilities:** Str 10 (0), Dex 9 (0), Con 13 (+1), Int 15 (+2), Wis 15 (+2), Chr 11 (0)

**Skills:** Bluff +3, Cthulhu Mythos +5, Computer Use +6, Gather Info +6, Knowledge (History) +10, Knowledge (Occult) +6, Knowledge (Religion) +6, Listen +4, Move Silently +2, Research +6, Search +6, Sense Motive +4, Spot +2

**Feats:**

**Sanity:** 80

Larry is short and wears dark rimmed glasses. His hair is brown and his features sharp. He is American, speaking with a slight New York accent. Perhaps 24, he is genuinely worried about the situation, not because he believes in the supernatural, but because he believes someone does and those children's lives are at risk. He comes from a large family of 8 children, and has 3 younger siblings himself.

## OLIVER HAYDEN MEREDITH: LEADER OF THE CHAOS

**Hit Dice:** 6D6+12 (35 hp)

**Initiative:** +2

**Speed:** 30 ft.

**Armor Class:** 17 (+2 Dex. +5 Armor)

**Attacks:** Pistol +7, Knife +7

**Damage:** Pistol 2D8, Knife 1D4+2

**Face/Reach:** 5 ft. x 5 ft./5 ft.

**Special Abilities:** Charismatic Leader: The character makes a series of Charisma checks vs. a single target, DC 25. Each successful roll lowers this DC by 1. When the character has exceeded the DC by 10 on one roll, the target has fallen under his influence, and believes him to be a great, god-like leader. Acting against this belief requires a DC 25 Will save. Spells

**Special Qualities:** Mad Certainty,

**Spells:** Bind Enemy, Blind/Deafen, Call Azathoth, Cause Fear, Contact Shub-Niggurath, Dark Resurrection, Dismiss Azathoth, Dread Curse of Azathoth, Fist of Yog-Sothoth, Mindblast, Obscuring Mist, Shriveling, Summon/Bind Shoggoth, Word of Recall

**Saves:** Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +7

**Abilities:** Str 14(+2), Dex 14(+2), Con 15(+2), Int 21(+5), Wis 15(+2), Chr 16(+3)

**Skills:** \*Appraise +14, \*Bluff +12, Computer Use +8, \*Concentration +11 (+4 def casting), Cthulhu Mythos +10, \*Diplomacy +10, Drive +4, \*Gather Information +10, \*Innuendo +8, \*Intimidate +9, \*Knowledge +11, \*Knowledge +11, Knowledge +7, Listen +6, Move Silently +5, \*Psychic Focus +7, \*Research +10, Sense Motive +4, Farsi Language +7, \*Spellcraft +10, Spot +6

**Feats:** Alertness, Combat Casting, Sensitive, Mind Reading

**Sanity:** 30

A bald Caucasian man of average height and build, Meredith nonetheless has a Middle Eastern air about him. This is because he was raised there by his archaeologist parents and still retains a bit of an accent. His eyebrows are dark and heavy and he appears to be in his 50's. His stare is intense and he speaks crisply.



## KYLE VANDEBURG: HOSPITAL SECURITY GUARD

**Hit Dice:** 5D6+10 (30 hp)  
**Initiative:** +3 (-1 Dex, +4 Imp. Init)  
**Speed:** 30 ft.  
**Armor Class:** 14 (-1 Dex, +5 armor)  
**Attacks:** Pistol +3 ranged, Knife +4  
**Damage:** Pistol 1D10, Knife 1D4+1  
**Face/Reach:** 5 ft. x 5 ft./5 ft.  
**Special Abilities:** None  
**Special Qualities:** Mad Certainty  
**Saves:** Fort +6, Ref +0, Will +2  
**Abilities:** Str 12 (+1), Dex 8 (-1), Con 15 (+2), Int 14 (+2), Wis 12 (+1), Chr 13 (+1)  
**Skills:** Bluff +6, Cthulhu Mythos +5, Gather Info +7, Innuendo +6, Intimidate +7, Computer Use +10, Knowledge (Occult) +8, Research +7, Forgery +7, Listen +6, Move Silently +4, Search +7, Sense Motive +7, Spot +6  
**Feats:** Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Improved Init.  
**Sanity:** 35

Kyle is a gifted computer specialist, and would not normally be working as a security guard, but his cult needed him in place for the kidnapping. He is 27, blonde and of average height and build.

The attributes of Doctors and nurses at the hospital should be considered 9-12 for the most part, with skill of 10 in their appropriate fields and a 1 or 2 in anything else they might have. Beyond that they are unremarkable.

## ACOLYTE

**Hit Dice:** 5D6+10 (30 hp)  
**Initiative:** +3 (-1 Dex, +4 Imp. Init)  
**Speed:** 30 ft.  
**Armor Class:** 14 (-1 Dex, +5 armor)  
**Attacks:** Pistol +3 ranged, Knife +1  
**Damage:** Pistol 1D10, Knife 1D4+Str  
**Face/Reach:** 5 ft. x 5 ft./5 ft.  
**Special Abilities:** None  
**Special Qualities:** Mad Certainty  
**Saves:** Fort +6, Ref +0, Will +2  
**Abilities:** Str 12 (+1), Dex 8 (-1), Con 15 (+2), Int 14 (+2), Wis 12 (+1), Chr 13 (+1)  
**Skills:** Bluff +6, Cthulhu Mythos +5, Gather Info +7, Innuendo +6, Intimidate +7, Knowledge (Biology) +10, Knowledge (Occult) +8, Knowledge (History) +7, Knowledge (Religion) +7, Listen +6, Move Silently +4, Search +7, Sense Motive +7, Spot +6  
**Feats:** Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Improved Init.  
**Sanity:** 35

Carrying a large knife and a Berretta 9mm, these acolytes live to serve their leader and will sacrifice themselves to help him achieve his goals. They cannot be frightened or driven mad, as they are already suffering from a peculiar madness.



*PROP NOTES: The newspaper are from The Arkham Advertiser and will need to be redone if the adventure is run elsewhere. As noted, the radio transcript will need to be an in-studio interview if set in the 1920's, but if set in Arkham could be modified to include the local radio station, WARK. The names on the list mean something in Arkham, but not really anything if not used there. So edit the list if you like. A web image search for October stars in the Northern hemisphere should find an image that matches Zirmetski's notes. If you are not running the adventure there then don't worry about matching the positions to actual stars. I have not included maps as most of the scenes don't really require them, and any that do use maps that would be simple to tailor for your own campaign.*

## HANDOUT #1

### AMBER Alert Issued for Infant Abducted from Ward Memorial Hospital

ARKHAM- The infant daughter of Joseph and Amelia Pickering disappeared from the nursery at Ward Memorial Hospital on the evening October 19. There were no witnesses, despite video surveillance and no ransom demands have been made.

The girl, as yet unnamed, was born the evening of the 18th and is reportedly in excellent health. She was scheduled to go home on the 20th. She weighs 7 lbs. 5 ozs. At the time of the abduction she was swaddled in a pink wrap and wearing a white, knit skullcap.

The Pickering's, while descended from one of Arkham's founding families, are not wealthy and no financial motive for the kidnapping can be ascertained. Joseph

Pickering is a veteran of the Iraq War and works as a computer specialist at Arkham Aerosystems. Amelia is a housewife.

Police Chief Andrew Reagan reports that a city-wide search is underway and all evidence is being examined. "If anyone saw anything suspicious around the hospital that evening please contact Detectives Powell, Nilsson or Yaris at 1-800-ARK-TIPS."

## HANDOUT #2

~~Armifage~~

~~Bishop~~

~~Carter~~

~~Curwen~~

~~Derby~~

~~King~~

Marsh ✓

~~orne~~

Pickering ✓

~~Pickman~~

~~Upton~~

West ✓

~~Whately~~



## Second Infant Abduction: AMBER Alert Heightened As Police Fear the Worst

ARKHAM- The second infant in five days went missing from the home of Jeziah and Francine Marsh last night. Police now believe this to be connected to the disappearance of the Pickering baby on the 19th.

Jeziah Marsh is a local lawyer and would be well able to pay a reasonable ransom, but as of this printing none has been forthcoming. Francine, a lawyer at a competing firm, is less prosperous. Police think it unlikely a previous client of either could be involved.

The Marshes put their new baby to bed around nine o'clock and then turned in themselves around eleven. Mrs. Marsh states that she checked on the baby at

that time and nothing was awry.

Trace evidence found at the scene has been sent to Boston for analysis. Chief Reagan reports that no fingerprints were found and there were no signs of breaking and entering.

"It is possible that a group of adoption thieves has moved into our area and these children are being spirited away to other parts of the country or even abroad. If anyone saw anything suspicious near the Marsh home last night please call us at 1-800-ARK-TIPS.

Citizen volunteers have been organized to watch the roads out of town and search any vehicles that seem suspicious.



Jeziah & Francine Marsh

buette



## HANDOUT #4

### *Transcript of WARK call*

**Bob:** It's Bob & Dave in the morning on WARK, Arkham's Music Leader. Ok so Dave, Arkham is up in arms over these two kidnapped infants.

**Dave:** You said it, Bob, the police are searching everywhere, there are posters up on every corner...

**Bob:** I even heard they're draining the pond in Christchurch cemetery!

**Dave:** Yeeuch. That's not a happy thought.

**Bob:** You said it buddy. Well, we want to start this segment by asking for the kidnappers to please, please, return those babies. We don't know what you're up to...

**Dave:** ...And frankly we don't care...

**Bob:** ...right, but those kids haven't done anything to you and their parents are hardworking Arkhamites who can't afford to pay a ransom.

**Dave:** I even heard one of the father's is an Iraq War vet. What a way to treat a hero!

**Bob:** Not cool, dudes, not cool. Oh, looks like we have a caller...It's 8:05 on WARK and you've got Bob & Dave, what can we do for you?

**Caller:** I know what is going on with those missing children.

**Bob:** Really? Maybe you can enlighten us.

**Caller:** They have been taken as sacrifices to the Great Old Ones. Their lives are in terrible peril!

**Dave:** You don't say? What's your name? And how did you come by this information?

**Caller:** You can call me Larry, I won't tell you my last name because they might come after me.

**Dave:** That sounds like a reasonable precaution. I know I don't like to blab my name when I out a sinister cult.

**Larry:** You laugh, but these people are low enough to steal babies for sacrifice. They wouldn't think twice about making me disappear. Anyway, I'm a grad student at Miskatonic U. and I was doing a term paper on Joseph Curwen...

**Bob:** He's the old witch guy from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, right?

**Dave:** Whoa! Look at you man, Mr. History.

**Bob:** Hey, I went to college before going into broadcasting. I'm not just another pretty voice.

**Larry:** Yes, that's the one. I was looking over some of his lesser known journals, at the Orne Library, and I found reference to a Ritual of Appeasement. Based on the notes I found and my calculations, the time for that ritual is very soon, and the stars look right. Curwen wrote that the ritual requires the blood of three innocents, sacrificed to the Old Ones.

**Dave:** You know, Larry, Arkham has a history of these sort of crazies, but that doesn't mean we have to attribute every kidnapping and lunar eclipse to them. Have you talked to the police about this?

**Larry:** Of course, but as you can imagine, they weren't interested in my theory. They'd rather poke around in the bushes and hope for the best than face the facts.

**Bob:** Hold it right there, Larry, I'm sure the law enforcement officials of Arkham are doing everything necessary to find these kids. I wouldn't want to criticize their methods.

**Dave:** That's right, Larry, the hardworking officers of the APD are out there right now combing the city. And I hear tell they've been working 18 hour days.

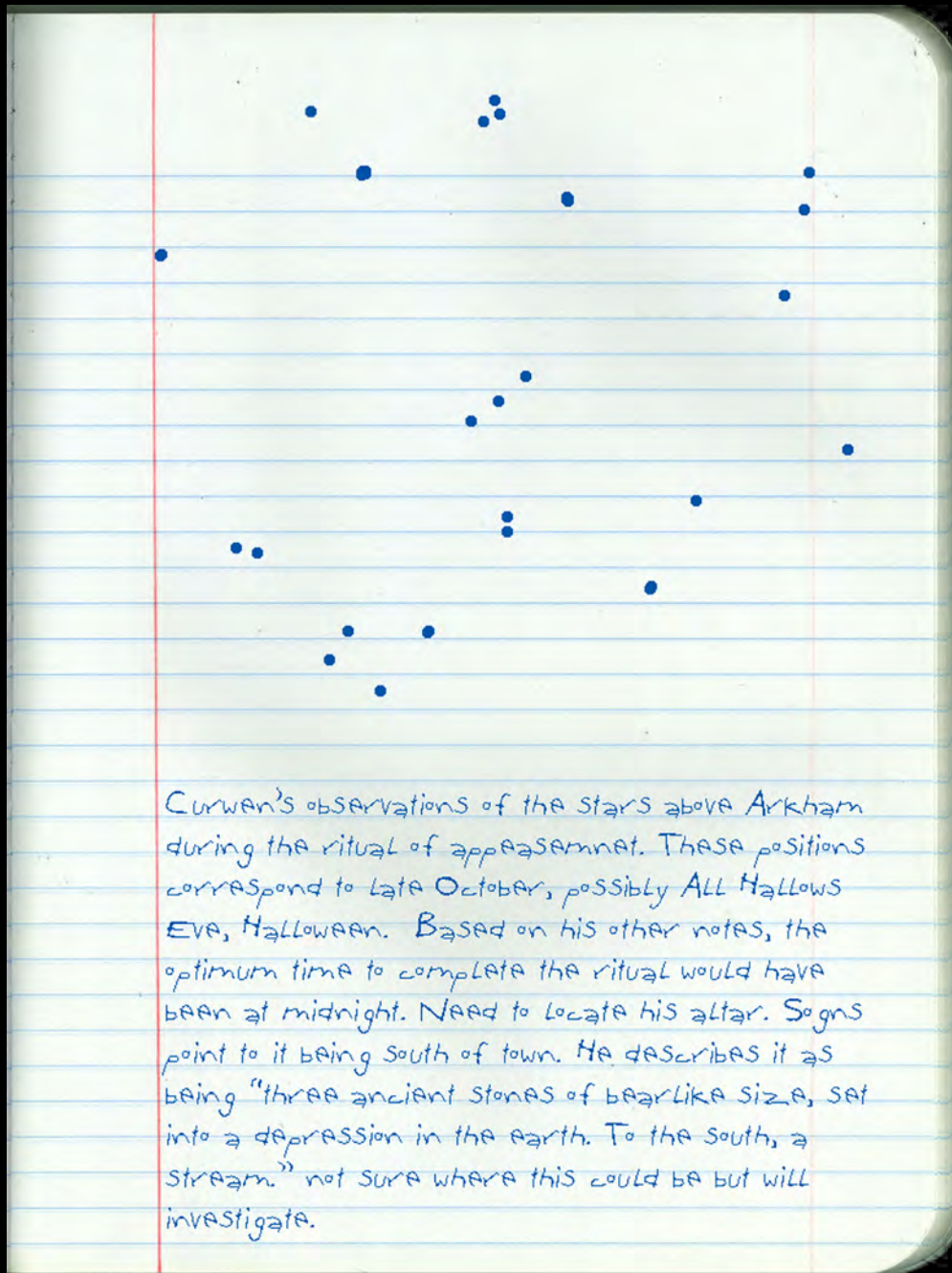
**Larry:** But they don't understand, when this cult gets their third child they'll be able to enact this ritual and demand a boon from the Old Ones. That could be catastrophic! Not to mention the horrible ways the children will die! One I think will be burned alive...(call is cut off).

**Bob:** HELLO! I don't think we need to hear any more of that. Kinda strange, the Mental Health Center letting a guy like that run around when we have a serious situation on the streets.

**Dave:** You speak the truth, my brother. We have to go to break, but we'll be right back with you morning dose of Metallica.

✧ ✧ ✧





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## SACKS AND CLAWS

*Fiction*

by C W Kelson III (Tad)

• I just had to look down at my hand.

I really just had to look down, there it went disappearing into the ugly brown paper sack, who even has them anymore? It is like sheesh, my mom forced me to take when we headed out to trick or treat.

“Here sweetie,”

Sweetie, why did she have to in front of the guys,

“Here you go sweetie, a nice big bag to put your loot in.”

Then her fake smile, as fake as her fingernails. I know cause she goes to the smelly store to have them glued them on her hands. How gross.

“Hey thanks mom, i

What else can I say,

“Love you.”

Gotta whisper it under my breath, cause the guys are there and I don't wanna let them know I still say it to her. Even though I like to.

“Have fun boys.”

And the door closes behind us, leaving only me, the guys, and the street full of porch lights to head out into.

There in the night we head, going from house to house, getting all the candy we can. Up and down, outside of the usual streets, into new territory, different faces, different houses. New people we never talk to at school, cool costumes and other moms all walking with their kids, not like us older ones.

Still raking it in, we are about back to our street coming from the other side, the other direction we never ever seem to want to explore. Over there are the larger houses, bigger yards, dogs that growl in a really mean way, the street we don't dare ride our bikes on, the places we just know not to go on usually.

Last house, the lights are going off up and down the whole place, man what a good night.

Ding Dong, the bell goes, and the door opens.

Sheesh she looks like my mom, the same short hair, the same fake fingernails, I guess she goes to the same places Mom does.

“Trick or Treat!” We all yell together, last time this year.

“Well what scary monsters do we have here?”

“A superhero.”

“A monster”

“A bum”

“What are you young man?” She asks me

“A werewolf, growl.”

I am proud of the mask, the gloves I glued fake fur to and the bloody fake teeth Mom let me buy at the costume store.

“Well here are all your treats, what scary monsters you all are.”

Her hands dump stuff into each bag.

“And here is a special something for Le Loup-Garou.”

She says, smiling really big and showing her fake teeth too, how cute a grownup with fake teeth.

She dumps something into my bag, wow it is heavy, we lucked out big time.

Off to our homes we race, to sort and divvy up our treasure, even if no one was a pirate this year, maybe next year. My mouth is watering thinking about all the chocolate and stuff I got in my old big brown paper bag. It is hard to carry as I say good night to my friends.

Home finally, time to show Mom what I got, and then to stuff myself going to my room.

“Hey Mom home!”

“I'm in the kitchen, did you have fun?”

“Yeah lots, here let me show ya!”

So there I dumped my ugly old brown paper bag, really heavy and hard to get it all to come out, and then Mom starts screaming and crying and screaming more and more, like what is up with her.

Then I look at the kitchen table and I hear myself scream as well at what was sitting there.

Author Notes

Sacks and Claws was originally written 07/28/2009 and revised on 06/27/2012. This was written for an online Flashfiction Magazine. It was not accepted, but some nice comments were made on the original version. This is a revised and expanded (slightly) version of the original. Thanks for reading.

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# RED DOTS AND OCCURRENCES

*An Interstitial Adventure*

by CW Kelson III (Tad)

## OCCURRENCE

POST SUNRISE DAY 1

In a deserted location, where there are no others around it is observed that there are 3 triangles in the sky, mixture of green, white, glowing afterimages and trailing as well

In the distance the voices of an old couple arguing about the weather and how much their feet hurt while the click click of canes on stone underlie their words. They are speaking in English and they fade away as the afterimages from the flying triangles disappear.

## OCCURRENCE

POST SUNSET DAY 2

This is the second observance of the 3 glowing triangles, again in a deserted location, in the sky, indeterminate distance to where they are at.

A pair of old people arguing about whether wheat bread or German rye bread is better as toast. She favors wheat while he is adamant about the German rye, especially with butter vice margarine.

## OCCURRENCE

POST SUNRISE DAY 5

This is the third and final observance of the 3 glowing triangles, they are more red than green this time, low to the horizon leaving streaks of fire like afterimages as they dash and dart across the sky, appearing near and distant simultaneously.

The old couple is discussing what to have for brunch this day. He wants sausages and eggs while she is opting for cereal with fresh milk. He cannot seem to fathom the reasoning she has in her decision. Their voices fade away as they walk away.

As with the first occurrences only their voices, never their bodies or appearances are made.



## OCCURRENCE

Post Sunrise Day 8

In the shop where everyone gets breakfast, or coffee, is a one page poster on the cork board for an art exhibit titled Red Dots being held at a local art gallery.

In line to pay the sounds of a distant ocean wave crashing on the beach sounds faintly, the second wave a little louder, the third wave noticeably audible, the fourth wave like you are standing on the beach and the fifth wave crashed over the heads in numbing volume.

The cashier returns your change and you are free to leave the establishment.

## OCCURRENCE

Post SUNSET DAY 11

Typewriters are visible everywhere. All desks have one, tv shows are re-running old typewriter ads and there is a door to door salesman with one that comes to pay you a visit. The model he has is an old Soviet Knockoff, the keyboard laid out in the standard QWERTY format with the actual keys of some ivory, or perhaps bone. His appearance is as follows:

Short in height, round to rotund, greasy slicked back hair and florid flushed complexion. Nicotine stained hands and teeth testify to a lifetime habit that will not abate until death do they part. He delivers his spiel and if a yes concludes the sale, if a no, then a thanks and he heads to the next place of residence on that side of the road. His suit is rumpled and older cut, wide lapels and an almost grungy shade of brown.

## OCCURRENCE

Post SUNRISE DAY 15

The main news on the radio, TV, online sources

Astronomers are pleased to announce the discovery of a new solar system with evidence of planets orbiting in the habitable zone. Further proof that there should be

other life out in the universe, that science just needs to keep looking for it. Pictures from the observatory shows the stellar object in an enhanced state.

## OCCURRENCE

Post SUNSET DAY 21

On a crowded public transportation conveyance in the city of choice, 18 people go insane simultaneously.

Police reports indicate that precisely at 2:30 PM in the city of choice 18 people all sitting in close proximity of each other fell to the floor writhing and shouting and screaming. Other passengers were unable to calm them and once sedated all began speaking the same language, one that no officials are able to understand or decipher.

A Difficult Task, Languages Ancient, Might pull up information regarding Ancient Vedic Sansrit.

The phrase being spoken over and over consists of the following sentences.

*O Maruts, as your strength is great  
Who is your mightiest despite the Spears, swords,  
and glittering ornaments*

*Praise ye the Bull for whom sacred grass is  
clipped*

*As your strength is great, so great are the horns  
and hooves*

*So mighty are your pinions and forces of arms  
still bow before the greater shall they*

*O Maruts, with your strong-hoofed steeds,  
unhindered in their courses, hasten now past  
and over the dark river streams, lo into the  
Sacred River to flow past*

*Now bring forth the oldest hopes and lace with  
sinew the praise of The Heart*

That will be known only in translating from the tongue being spoken

Nothing further will be forthcoming and these peoples minds are emptied save for these words. They

can no longer feed nor clean themselves and all manner of knowledge and information has been purged to make room for these simple sentences.

## OCCURRENCE

SUNRISE TO SUNSET THE ART GALLERY SHIFCHING

On display are a number of pieces similar to the Red Dots piece. All are semi abstract, semi minimalist with a strong sense of reds and purples running in them. Many geometric shapes, the circle and triangle dominate the work. All original prints are for sale and the artist is not in town, their manager is running this show.

When questioned further the gallery clerk will not disclose more information and suggests that if someone is truly interested, to purchase some art to satisfy their curiosity. Oftentimes, they state, there are hidden meanings in the artwork that the artist never intended, but that an astute observer can prevail to find.

Leaving the shop an echo as of a fog horn, or perhaps a train whistle sounds

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*Finis*

Credits, Soundtrack and inspirations:

<http://origamisound.com/>

*Especially*

Nils Frahm & Anne Müller: Journey For A Traveller "Paperwork Explosion"

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_JZw2CoYztk&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_JZw2CoYztk&feature=player_embedded)

Portions of the Rig Veda as translated by Ralph T.H. Griffith, [1896], taken from the following web page and reassembled in fragments with my own additions in this document

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv01037.htm>

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv01038.htm>



# GILBOA SNAKE

*Double the firepower for the discerning Minion Hunter*

by Lee Williams

FOR DARK CONSPIRACY



**D**ESIGNED AND MANUFACTURED by Israel's Silver Shadow Systems, the Snake is a dual weapon. It has two chambers and two barrels, side by side, each fed by one of a pair of STANAG magazines clipped together. The single trigger fires both barrels at once, therefore the fire combat and damage are treated as a single shot rather than separately as with a normal firearm. General size and layout are as per the M-4 carbine series, with operation is by the company's own gas-piston system. The Snake has a flat top upper receiver fitted with a Picatinny rail, and the fore end also has them on the sides and underneath. This enables a great many optional fittings: tactical lights, optics, whatever the user might need. Stats given here are for the standard version, though the Snake is also available to order in 7.62x39mm (7.62S) and 7.62x51mm (7.62N)

<b>Gilboa Snake</b>						<b>Recoil</b>		
<b>Ammo</b>	<b>ROF/Rld</b>	<b>Dam</b>	<b>Pen</b>	<b>Bulk</b>	<b>Mag</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>Brst</b>	<b>Rng</b>
5.56N	SA	5	1-nil	4	30/30	3	—	30



# THE CORNER OF 5TH AND 15TH

*A Dark Seed Location*

by CW Kelson III (Tad)

A SYSTEM INDEPENDENT LOCATION

AT THE CORNER of 5th and 15th there is a simple little store catering to the outre' and unusual. A little bit of new age, a dash of used book store, a smidgen of CD and Music, with a hint of the occult, all overlaid with the aroma of fresh brewed coffee. The Corner of 5th and 15th lies at the intersection of 5th Street and 15th Street in a slowly decaying city. Surrounding blocks are occasionally rubble strewn, and city services are on a decline. A lack of a tax base, a lack of employment, and a general overall climate of disinterest in the population have all contributed to the slow fall into senescence of the city. There are of course parts of the underground economy (the barter and trade system) that are still doing well. Certain sections of the city are filled with 'Street' Entertainers complete with hourly specials; with other sections devoted to more chemical oriented forms of escape or recreation. Then there are the areas with hope still extant, still alive, still possible and one of those sections is the ten some blocks running from 5th to 15th.

The rock, the foundation, the heart of this section is a little store oddly named for where it is at. Not everyone that lives in the area knows that it exists. Fewer still have actually found it and gotten inside to peruse the wares. For those that are inclined, with that particular perspective on life, they are able to find it with little difficulty. Any who wish the patrons ill have an impossible time The front door only welcomes friendlies, while un-friendlies simply are not able to locate the entrance, rendering it safe from potential harm and danger of the physical or mundane sorts.

The Corner of 5th and 15th has an eclectic collection of New Age brick a brack, Used Books, New and Used CDs, along with small rooms to let for meditation, reading, arts and crafts, and to conduct business at. Part retail, part consignment, part generosity, all these terms and more apply to the place. Owned and operated by a married couple, The Corner of 5th and 15th is a small dream made manifest in the world. A tiny shelter from the real as well as imagined ills and fears of the world, as well as the streets all around it.

There are rows of hand made book shelves interspersed with modern art as well as hand made and replica pottery. There are dusty throw rugs covering the floor in many locations with stools or cast off wooden chairs scattered all about. Towards the front are a few glass counters with beads, Tarot Decks, and similar accessories. A small coffee station sits just inside the door. No charge, just donations to place in the mason jar strategically located next to the various pots and machines.



The walls alternate between off white to beige with spots of dark greens and browns from previous tenants. With oil stained spots on the concrete floor to semi industrial feel to the metal supports, the building has a refurbished warehouse or factory to the original function. There are no living souls that know the real source of the structure and location. Often the interior might feel different from one visit to another.

Keep in mind the store is at the intersection of two parallel streets separated by 10 blocks making it somewhat interesting to find it the first time. They also do special orders for items not in stock for a small handling charge of course.

### OWNERS

A married couple, Sam and Samantha (Sammie), are the owner/operators of The Corner of 5th and 15th. Married for over twenty (20) years, they have spent their time and lives involved with their community and their store. Both have gone to gray with long shoulder length hair each. Looking very similar, slender in build and with convergent facial features. Both are equally at home talking to customers or giving advice to the stray and curious.

### SERVICES AND PRODUCTS

The following are services available at The Corner of 5th and 15th Coffee/Juice/ Fresh Sandwiches Bar. The menu and variety changes on a daily basis, often determined by what is easily available.

Used Paperbacks and Hardcover for trade and Sale

New Age Accessories including Incense, prayer and Yoga Mats, Candles and Crystals, along with a good selection of relevant books and magazines both new and used

New CD music section. None of it mainstream or commercial.

There is a Used CD section set up as a consignment portion.

There is free WiFi connectivity inside the building

There are 5 small rooms in the back. 3 of these are little more than a closet with desk space with two of them slightly larger and suitable for small groups of up to 10 people for meditation or yoga instruction, in example.

### NPC WRITEUPS

Here are the owners as they appear in several relevant game systems. Modifications and customizations are always encouraged. Additional skills are the best way to bring them directly into your particular game.

Here are the owners of The Corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>.

### DARK CONSPIRACY

#### Sam

Sam is the only name anyone calls him by. It is unknown what it is short for, if anything. Sam, or Dear, are the only terms his wife has used in the presence of others to refer to him.

<b>Veteran NPC</b>	Ace of Diamonds: Generous 5 of Hearts: Moderately Sociable Outsider
<i>Initiative</i>	3
<i>Attributes</i>	6
<i>Skills</i>	5
<i>Damage</i>	3
<i>Other Skills</i>	
Electronics	3
Observation	3
Streetwise	5
Medical	4
Bargain	2
Persuasion	3
<i>Gear</i>	Laptop Computer, Wireless Modem, Well outfitted surgical setup

#### Samantha (Sammie)

<b>Veteran NPC</b>	10 of Hearts: Very Sociable Queen of Hearts: Loving Outsider
<i>Initiative</i>	3
<i>Attributes</i>	6
<i>Skills</i>	5
<i>Damage</i>	3
<i>Other Skills</i>	
Observation	5
Streetwise	5
Medical	1
Bargain	3
Persuasion	4
Forboding	5
<i>Gear</i>	Assorted craft items, large crystal collection



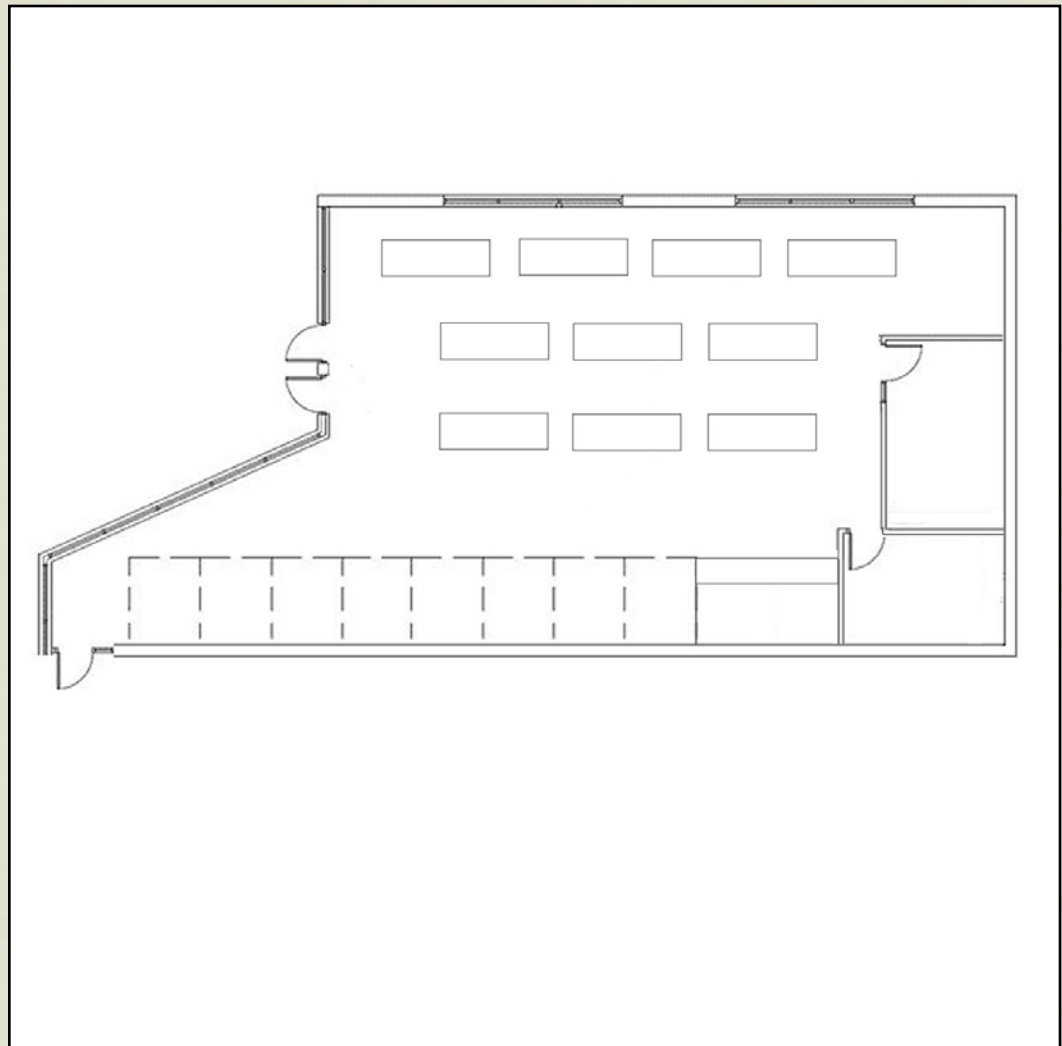
# PROTODIMENSION MAGAZINE

## CALL OF CTULHU

<i>Sam</i>		<i>Sammie (Samantha)</i>	
<i>Characteristics</i>		<i>Characteristics</i>	
Str	10	Str	11
Con	15	Con	12
Siz	12	Siz	9
Dex	12	Dex	8
App	14	App	13
San	65	San	75
Int	16	Int	12
POW	13	POW	15
Edu	15	Edu	15
Idea	80	Idea	60
Luck	65	Luck	75
Know	75	Know	75
<i>Damage Bonus</i>	+0	<i>Damage Bonus</i>	+0
<i>SAN Points</i>	65	<i>SAN Points</i>	75
<i>Magic points</i>	13	<i>Magic points</i>	15
<i>Hit Points</i>	13	<i>Hit Points</i>	10
<i>Skills</i>		<i>Skills</i>	
Bargain	30	Art	35
Fast Talk	30	Bargain	40
Hide	65	Craft	30
Listen	50	Library Use	65
Natural History	45	Spot Hidden	65
First Aid	55	Cthulhu Mythos	30
Medicine	30	Customize 1	15
Cthulhu Mythos	30	Customize 2	15
Customize 1	15	Customize 3	15

## LAYOUT/MAP

Please note that the layout can seem to change from visit to visit. This is representative of one of the more common configurations. There is always a main interior section, occasionally there are upper floors, not more than 3 at any one time, as well as variably configuration to the back meeting rooms.



A SYSTEM INDEPENDENT LOCATION



THE CORNER OF 5TH AND 15TH



A SYSTEM INDEPENDENT LOCATION



# SELF-GUIDING BULLETS?

*Talking Tech*

by Kevin O'Neill

NON-SYSTEM SPECIFIC

IN JANUARY 2012, Sandia National Laboratories announced the development of a dart-like projectile that could be fired from infantry smallarms. The projectile isn't just any ordinary bullet however, it corrects itself in flight.

Working in the same manner as laser guided bombs and missiles, the dart homes in on the reflected light given off from a target that has been illuminated (or as the military puts it, 'painted') by a laser designator.

## THE TECHNOLOGY:

The dart has an optical sensor in the nose, a tiny battery, 8-bit CPU and electro-magnetic actuators to control the tail fins that keep the dart on target. The point to all this technology being placed into a package little bigger than an oversized pen is that the projectile will impact very close to the firer's point of aim, something that cannot be guaranteed with conventional bullets. Although not yet developed enough to ensure the dart will go exactly where it is meant to go, trials are ongoing to further refine the technology. However, the purpose behind the design philosophy must also be taken into account in regards to the accuracy potential.

## THE PURPOSE:

For the US military, the main and perhaps only customer, the dart is seen as a way to reduce the number of rounds required by a .50 calibre machinegun to neutralize a target and while the technology obviously lends itself to precision distance shooting, two factors should be noted about the .50 cal M2HB machinegun.

1. It can be used to indirectly fire upon targets out to a distance of 6800m. Or in other words, nearly 7km away (4 ¼ miles). This is far in excess of the range any long distance marksman would be expected to fire out to.
2. It can be locked to fire single-shot only instead of fully-automatic. With a suitable sight, it can be used for long-range shooting much like a marksman's rifle and was used in this manner during the Vietnam War.

The image above shows the self-correction of the projectile during validation trials (conducted at night to allow tracking of the projectile).





*A tiny light-emitting diode, or LED, attached to a self-guided bullet at Sandia National Laboratories shows a bright path during a night-time field test that proved the battery and electronics could survive the bullet's launch.*

*Photo and text courtesy of Sandia National Laboratories [https://share.sandia.gov/news/resources/news\\_releases/bullet/](https://share.sandia.gov/news/resources/news_releases/bullet/)*

While “very close to the firer’s point of aim” sounds as though the dart lacks precision, it’s helpful to compare its action with that of a conventional bullet fired over long distances.

In a typical bullet, the projectile leaves the barrel and is immediately affected by a number of factors that degrade its accuracy. Wind, gravity, air temperature, angle of the shot (e.g. from a low point to a high point) along with other factors such as humidity, foliage between the shooter & the target and so on, all impact upon the flight of the projectile. Due to these factors, the further the projectile travels, the greater the chance of deviation from its desired point of impact.

Currently, precision distance shooting requires that the firer use a sight that is calibrated to the rifle/ammunition package being used and the firer then has to calculate distance, wind speed & direction over the course of the bullets flight, bullet drop for

the ammunition used, movement rate of the target and so on and then adjust the sight to account for all these factors. At a distance of 1000m (0.6 mile) a standard bullet could be off the intended impact point by as much as 9 metres (10 yards) if these factors are incorrectly calculated.

With the prototype laser-guided dart, the distance from the intended impact point is as little as 20.3cm (8 inches) at a range of 1000m (0.6 mile). Or to put it another way, the width of an average man’s hand with fingers spread out compared to the length of a London double-decker bus. This is without calculating corrections for any of the factors mentioned above. This figure is just for the current development level, future refinements of the guidance package will likely see this distance shrink to less than the current margin of 20.3cm (8 inches) and potentially much less than that if precision is a requirement for the future.

At this stage of development, the prototype dart is about 101mm (4 inches) long and uses currently available off-the-shelf components. While the accuracy might not seem to be as good as something so “high tech” should be, it should be noted that the dart is designed to be fired from a conventional .50 calibre rifle or machinegun, albeit with a smoothbore barrel (for reasons explained below) but also using a traditional cartridge case with conventional gunpowder as the propellant.

The reason for using a smoothbore barrel to fire the dart is that unlike conventional bullets, the dart does not need the rifling of the barrel to impart the spin needed to stabilize the projectile for flight. In fact, this self-guided projectile is not required to spin at all and its design concept intentionally mimics the darts used in the pub game of the same name. By removing the need to spin the projectile so it achieves stability, small tail fins could be used to force guidance corrections during flight (as dictated by the guidance package as it homes in on the laser reflecting off the target).

*The four-inch-long bullet has actuators that steer tiny fins that guide it to its target.*

*Photo by Randy Montoya [https://share.sandia.gov/news/resources/news\\_releases/bullet/](https://share.sandia.gov/news/resources/news_releases/bullet/)*







*The dart in its plastic sabot as it would be packaged into the .50 calibre BMG cartridge.*

*Image courtesy of Sandia National Laboratories via Defense Review website.*

A sabot is used to hold the dart within the cartridge case and seal in the propellant gases while it travels down the barrel (see image below) and also to protect the tiny tail fins until the projectile leaves the barrel.

## THE POTENTIAL:

In terms of long distance precision shooting, the self-guiding dart allows the shooter's assistant to locate a target and 'paint' it with the team's portable laser designator. As long as the assistant keeps the designator on the target for the requisite time, there is a drastically increased chance compared to a standard bullet, that the round will hit the target. Better yet, the shooter doesn't have to calculate all the parameters mentioned above to attain that level of accuracy. By relying solely on the laser to guide the projectile, a sniper could simply aim in the general direction of the target without the need to precisely align the first shot let alone calculate all the corrections needed.

Further to this, with the assistant continuing to paint the target, the shooter could do very rapid follow-on shots without having to reacquire the target after the recoil of the previous shot. While this is probably overkill for enemy personnel, it could be necessary for the disabling of enemy equipment.

Alternatively, the firer doesn't even have to see the target or have an assistant with them to paint the target. The shooter's team could be located as much as 2000m (about 1.3 miles) away - the current maximum distance that the prototype has been tested to - and another team located closer to the target could paint it and, communicating with the shooter by secure radio, state when the shooter should fire. This has the benefit of misdirecting any enemy attention away from the team that painted the target because they will not be firing the shot and drawing attention to themselves. Also, with the shooter's team located 1000m (0.6 miles) or more away from the target, their own chances for escaping detection are substantially increased.

## THE GAME:

As of 2012, there are two large caliber rifles that could be very quickly adapted to firing this dart - the Barrett M82A1 and the Gepard M6 Lynx (the Lynx was detailed in Protodimension Issue 12 - Spring 2012). By virtue of their method of operation upon firing (where unlike many rifles, the barrel is **not** permanently fixed to the stock and/or the receiver and actually recoils a certain distance), the M82A1 and the Lynx designs facilitate a relatively quick and easy barrel change in comparison to traditional rifles.

As no permanent changes need to be made to these rifles, they can retain their ability to fire standard .50 calibre ammunition from a rifled barrel simply by swapping one for the other and the police/military unit armourer could switch from the smoothbore to the rifled barrel as needed.

Because the dart is designed to fit the .50 calibre M2HB (AKA .50 BMG) ammunition, the only change needed is the smoothbore barrel, there's no need to change the bolt, bolt face, magazines or ammunition belts. This should still require a test of a gunsmithing or small arms skill and for the M82A1 and the Lynx, will take approximately 15 minutes with the appropriate gunsmithing or gun maintenance tools. If these tools are not available, double the amount of time needed.

The M2HB machinegun in its QCB variant features a Quick Change Barrel (hence the M2HB-QCB label) that requires a test of either gunsmithing or small arms skills to change but it can be done in the field by the gun crew with their standard M2HB maintenance tools. This barrel change can typically be accomplished in less than 1 minute by a trained person.

For other weapons where the barrel is permanently fixed to the receiver, such as the McMillan TAC-50 long-range rifle, the barrel swap is a semi-permanent or permanent change and is a task for a gunsmith/armourer in a workshop and cannot be easily accomplished in the field. This will require a gunsmithing skill test and not simply a small arms skill test. It also requires gunsmithing tools and not just gun maintenance tools. This is to ensure that the correct spacing of the barrel to the receiver is attained as well as to ensure that the correct tension



is applied to the bolts used to fix the barrel to the receiver and stock. This procedure will likely take 20 to 60 minutes depending on the weapon – the more complex the weapon the longer the time.

The smoothbore barrel would likely weigh somewhat less than a normal rifled barrel. With conventional firearms, heat builds up due to the friction of the projectile (itself a metal object) traveling down the metal barrel at high speed as well as from the detonation of the propellant. This means the barrel must absorb a lot of thermal energy and as a consequence is often quite thick to act as a heatsink to prevent barrel warping (from the heat created by prolonged firing).

As can be seen with the typical shotgun, this isn't as necessary with a smoothbore barrel and like modern shotgun ammunition, the self-guiding dart is carried in a discarding plastic sheath (the sabot) that generates very little friction as it travels down the barrel in comparison to modern copper-clad bullets.

Maximum range as far as the current real world developments are concerned will be no greater than 2000m as of 2013 but the future of the technology could see this extend out to 6000m. It's the GM's call as to the state of the tech but as a rough guide, by the year 2015 the range could be as far as 3000m while by the year 2020 the tech would be much further advanced and the range could be 6000m.

Availability of the ammunition and smoothbore barrels should be very low for private individuals and moderate for police/military units based upon the gameworld specific restrictions on such weapons technology. Cost should be based on the technology developments, therefore it could be as high as 8-10 times the cost of standard .50 BMG ammunition for the years 2012 to 2015 and as much as 5-8 times for the years 2015 to 2018. From 2019 onwards the cost should be much lower if the tech has been sufficiently matured and the cost per bullet could be low, for example approximately 3-4 times that of standard .50 BMG ammunition.

The most important consideration for gaming – someone must paint the target with a laser designator.

This requires that they are not just able to see the target but that they are also able to see that the target is properly painted by the laser. I'd suggest asking for observation/

perception checks from any person painting the target so that they can ensure the laser is on target – they need to physically see that the target is illuminated by the laser. Like any observation type check, distance to the target, weather, day/night time, target movement along with other factors will make this easier or harder as a task.

The second most important consideration – the laser must illuminate the target for the duration of the darts flight to the target. Typically this will only be a few seconds but anything that disturbs the person painting the target should require some sort of concentration/willpower test to ensure they maintain the designation of the target.

If a PC/NPC cannot paint the target, or becomes distracted during the homing phase or environmental conditions diffuse the laser, the long-range benefits become null and void. No laser means no homing onto the target but even a weak laser can prevent success. For example, smoke, snow fall, heavy rainfall, thick fog etc. etc. will diminish the laser not only in range but also in strength and because laser-guided projectiles (be they aircraft-launched missiles or this dart), home in on a coded laser transmission, this can possibly corrupt the code and prevent target lock-on even if the projectile can pick up the light reflected from the target.

## THE DESIGNATORS:

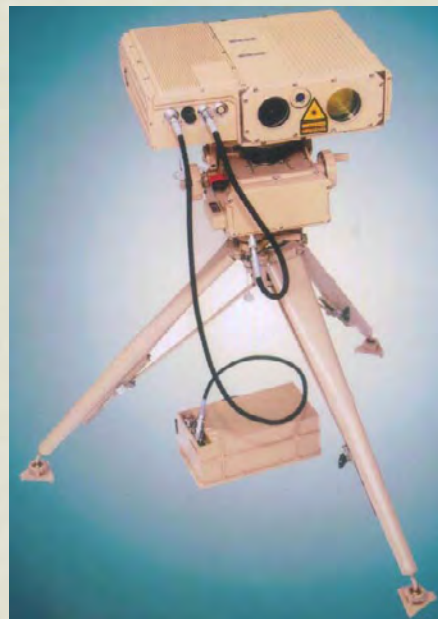
Modern portable laser designators are typically available in two configurations and both are normally fitted with a laser rangefinder for determining the distance to the target. The first type is a rectangular box of approximately 380 x 250 x 100 millimetres (15 x 10 x 4 inches) in size that can easily designate targets at ranges up to 10km (6 miles). Normally, it's mounted on a lightweight tripod for stability and has a separate battery pack. Weight for the designator, battery and tripod can be anywhere from 8 to 18kg (18 to 39 lbs) depending on the model chosen as well as the country of origin.

The second type is like a pair of oversized binoculars and can be comfortably used in the hands rather than needing to be mounted on a tripod (although this facility is also available). Weight is just 5kg (11 lbs.) while dimensions are typically 230 x 290 x 110mm (9 x 11.4 x 4.3 inches). Designation

*A typical box-type portable laser designator with laser rangefinder. The battery is the box under the tripod.*

Image courtesy of Tempestini Systems.

[http://www.tempestinisisystems.it/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=1424:tmp-lightweight-laser-designator-system&Itemid=41&lang=it](http://www.tempestinisisystems.it/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=1424:tmp-lightweight-laser-designator-system&Itemid=41&lang=it)





range can be between 7 and 10km (4.3 and 6.2 miles) depending on the model.

Both types are sometimes combined with a computerized Fire Control System (FCS), lightweight thermal imager and/or GPS for enhanced vision and communications. Many types also have Ethernet and/or USB connections to allow data transfer to portable computers or recording devices (e.g. digital cameras).

## THE CONCLUSION:

This self guiding dart is a potent tool for NPCs assisting the PCs and naturally enough for the PCs themselves if they want to do more than just paint the targets for someone else to shoot. With the appropriate firing platform, it gives the PCs an ability to take on much tougher enemies and at greater ranges but the GM should **always** be aware that the dart must have the laser paint the target. And while the shooter doesn't necessarily need to see the target, whoever is using the laser to paint the target must be able to physically see it so that they can actively paint it.

With all these considerations however, give the PCs a suitable weapon, a laser designator and a mere handful of these self-guiding darts and they'll be able to target particular villains or monsters without the need to put themselves into excessive danger. It can keep them alive by avoiding tough situations or it could allow them to avoid that carefully planned confrontation with the main badguy that the GM spent hours preparing – who wants to talk to Mr Evildoer when they can eliminate him from a distance of five city blocks?

Where Players are involved, give them a new toy and the best laid plans of GMs can come undone in seconds but it'll be something bordering on amazing for them to do it from 2000 metres away!



A typical handheld portable system.

Image courtesy of Thales Group.

[http://www.thalesgroup.com/Portfolio/Defence/LandJoint\\_Products\\_Lethality\\_LaserTargetDesignator/](http://www.thalesgroup.com/Portfolio/Defence/LandJoint_Products_Lethality_LaserTargetDesignator/)

## A LONG DAY

Poetry

by CW Kelson III (Tad)

*Took a stroll down Pity Lane  
 Wandering along the Dead River Concourse  
 With a jaunt across the Broken Bridge of Dreams  
 All along the journey I encountered the lost, the lonely, the forgotten  
 Reminding me of a novel from my childhood, where all things forgotten were left  
 behind on a highway across time  
 "I am done", he said  
 "There is no more energy left inside of me."  
 All the parts are worn out  
 All the batteries are spent  
 All the time wasted has wilted away into dried leaves that crumble under the foot-  
 print of existence  
 This is the end of the line for that one  
 The sun had risen in the east, taken almost all day to rise  
 It might settle in the west, where all things seem to go to die  
 Off to the north lies cold forever, where the past is ground into forgetfulness  
 The south lies open, where all things seem possible, yet are not  
 Leaving only above or between for directions to go  
 Taking the road not imagined yet, leaving it all once more behind in wrack and  
 rumination  
 Red, Green, Gold, and Purple  
 Hues evocative of moods and ceremonies  
 Carried over from distant lands, ever farther away in the calendar  
 Past the Bridges Guarded by Trolls  
 Across Meadows strewn with Fairy Circles and Toadstools  
 Where the lives are spent as coin into a vending machine  
 Thrown down a slot for processing, becoming disposable containers filled with arti-  
 ficial hope  
 All along the Pity Lane  
 Hands are dropped, arms droop, heads slide down  
 Onto the chests of those who have succumbed  
 To the times  
 Outside of it all  
 There is still a semblance of hope  
 Echoed in the scant spaces between  
 Then and Fear*



# HOLLOW LIFE

*Even More Fiction*

by CW Kelson III (Tad)

*Author Notes:*

*For your reading pleasure this is the submission I had made for a Flashfic writing challenge over at Terrible Minds.*

*This was a genre mashup challenge. The two I chose to use were Cyberpunk as influenced by Southern Gothic. Started 08/22/11 at 12:15 PM Updated on 06/30/2012*

## RIGHT NOW:

Out past where the potholed concrete gives way to sinkhole threatened dirt roads.

Past where high rise turns into decaying structures and then into diseased landfills and finally becomes runoff tainted swamps.

Where heavy metals lace the food and the bones of the refugees of the tax breaks and repatriation to the powerful.

Out to the point where all that was left was the thin tip at the top, and the massive masses down below.

Human life has been led back to the primordial ooze, that is stagnant algae covering the swamp water.

Life has come full circle.

Here the flies, mosquitoes, and ticks far outnumber the human race at its peak. Along with the other natives staking a claim, comes the intruders, humans and altereds, all of them squabbling among themselves in the heavy metal tainted byways and bayous. Each day spent there is more than a day closer to death from toxins or worse. Still it is a viable compared to most places on Earth. At least here a man can pretend to be a man up until his lungs bleed out into his abdominal cavity, or get hacked out in a coughing fit. More pleasant than most ways to expire.

## NEXT:

A ways farther north comes our hero. Heading back down south to pay the final due respects to the dying. A message had arrived, by way of back channels and bounced packets, to come back where home is now. To where his father lies dying in a tin shanty out past where the factories end and more of the diseased vegetation commences.



He sits on the tail end of an automated semi-convo, rolling on wide fats over the massive imperfections that remain of the old highway system. Brush and industrial cutters line the front. They are placed there to remove impediments to the continued progress of commerce. Only whining into life when ground radar detects obstacles to be cleared. Once in a while a detour is needed. Utilizing satellite imaged sinkholes or underground coal fires and then one of these convoys roll through the middle of a shanty town. Then it is right over the tops of homes, animals, people that are too slow to move out of the way of multiple tons of computer and remote controlled steel and carbon fiber.

Limpet attached at the rear, heat blanket aiding to obscure his signature, a couple of flasks of water and trail rations tiding over the growl in the belly, Sutton Spense, Lowkey to his peers, checks his location compared to cell towers and signal strengths and figures a few more hours at this rate then he will disembark to find transport heading in a more southerly than south-east direction. Destination home.

Time, hours, days, pass and after many changes in hitchhiked transports, finally coming into unfamiliar territory. On the edge of a swamp, far from prying eyes, a wooden dock sits, a small punt docked there. The printed out directions that were sent when he was still up north, in the lights and glitter of death dancing along wires and nerves, sit in his pocket long memorized but retained for unfathomable sentimentality. A touch of potential contact long ignored.

Getting into the small craft and unshipping the single long pole, Lowkey, heads into the swamps on the final leg of the sins of his father's life. Over forty years ago Willie Spense, aka BasketWeaver, embarked on a life of fighting the system, striving for something more than what was possible for a person not born in the glittering towers of glass and ice. Instead of reform, he found a woman and nine months later his one and only child. Now almost forty years later, his son is coming to pay the debt his father owes, redemption for failure. Redemption for omission.

As the day progresses and the distance into back-country increases, the insect population multiplies. Finally the time comes to risk electronics and the low-grade background hum sets in, repelling most of the bloodsuckers from his immediate person. Small solar panels inset into the shoulders of his coat continuously recharging the ni-cads in his boots as he moves deeper and deeper into a world as far away as exists on this planet from his normal stomping grounds.

No connectivity here, no throngs of starving people amped up and looking for their next score.

No herds of mindless drones running the factories and sweatshops of the NE corridor.

No clubs laced with the latest designer entertainments, selected for maximum penetration into a cortex. Instead of civilization mixed with small arms fire, there is the drone of insects, electronic in similarity, interspersed with the splash of the pole into the water propelling the small boat closer to a final resting place.

It took only a few days to get this far, it might take almost that long to reach the center of the morass that used to comprise most of central Florida. Finally backup circuits are engaged, removing the need for rest, eliminating fatigue and boredom and time passes in a blur until the smartpaper, containing the inertial directions, inside his jacket pings, letting him know he was within a mile of his destination. Waking up to darkness, augments allowing for navigation, trees all around and rustling of animal life near and distant. So far from the calm of inner city chaos and imminent danger.

Not too long later he docks the craft. A series of tree stumps fused together forming a pier and the way to slightly dryer ground. Nestled within the hollow ahead lay his father's home for the last thirty years. Ever since leaving his son alone in an apartment surrounded by dead bodies and the stench of gunpowder and death's release. Now the two are coming face to face for the first time since that last meal they had shared before it all ended for them as a family.

Up to the wooden boards held together with bailing wire and laced with pieces of pvc pipe. The shack was set into a space between several ancient trees, built into them as well as between. No obvious security, no defensive perimeter, no motion sensors that Lowkey could detect. Nothing protecting the old man, presumed to be inside, besides distance from the world he had left. Abandoned just as he had abandoned his son.

Pushing the door open the pistol, kept safe in the small of the back in a rig, now nestled into the left hand with integral targeting devices primed. The once lonely child, that grew into a very lonely man, enters a room comprising a single handmade table, three simple stools converted into chairs, several oil lamps, a relic of a computer and the corpse of his father sitting at the table. There is a piece of paper folded around something in front of him.

Unfolded the paper simply reads, handwritten, Sorry. Inside the paper wrapped up is a single chip-drive, older but still compatible with most drives. His father had been dead at least a few days, and from luck or circumstances had not been defiled by insect or animal behavior. No pictures in the room, a single simple bed visible behind a hanging paper screen. Nothing of worth visible, nothing of a life lived visible. Just an ancient man now dead. With hair wild and white, skin leathery with exposure to Sun and chemical burns on his hands and arms, most likely from the waters he had been surrounded with.

Lowkey paddles away now, the chipdrive stored in a EMP lined pocket, waiting to be scanned before ran. One lone termite on a timer waiting to consign his history to the pyre, as he heads back to the only life he knows.

Alone

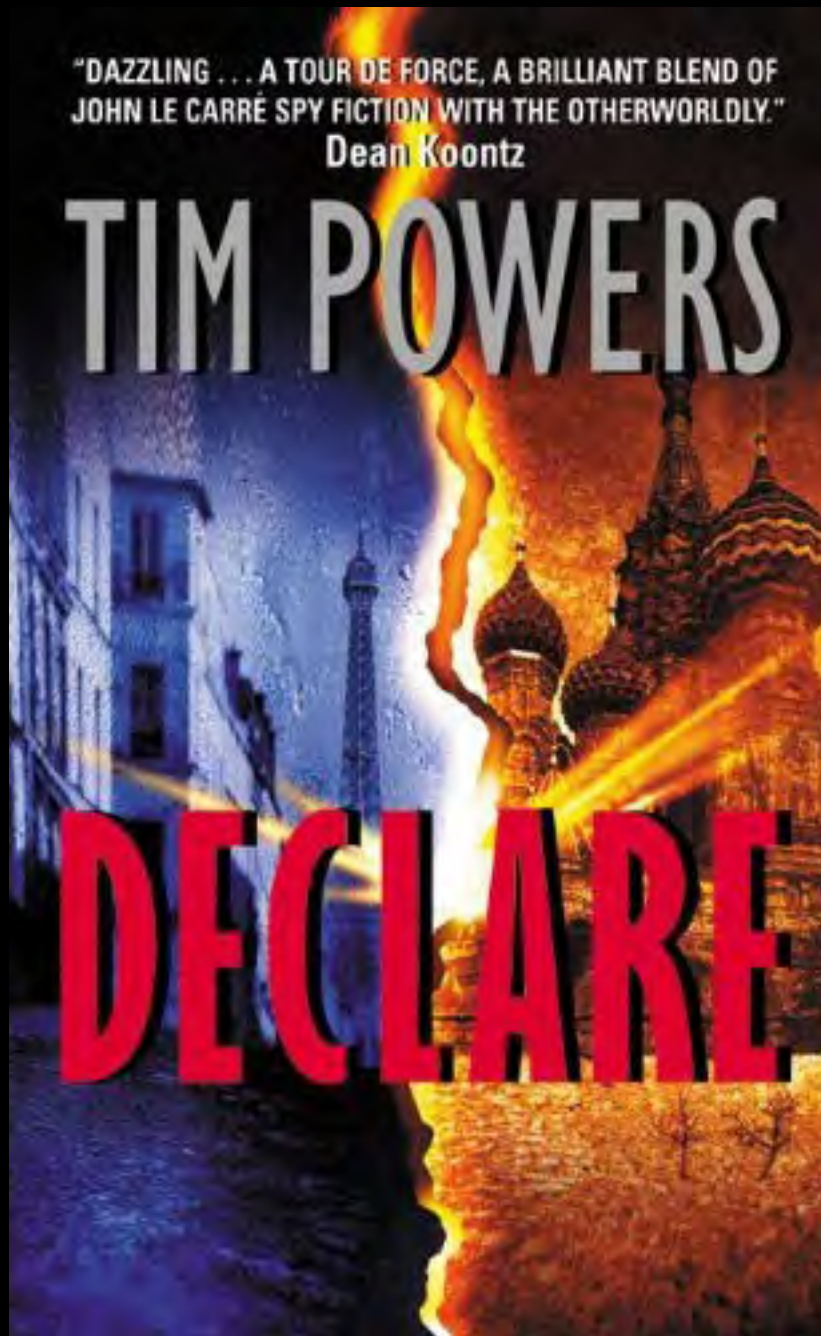
Alone

Alone

FINIS

◆ ◆ ◆





<i>Born</i>	February 29, 1952 Buffalo, New York, United States
<i>Occupation</i>	Writer
<i>Genres</i>	Horror, Adventure, dark fantasy
<i>Influences</i>	Philip K. Dick

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