

The Knife



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THE KNIFE

Sure, we've had some killings here. Every US city and town has them these days. They're also getting weirder. This latest guy, the one the media calls "the Knife", has been cutting people's hearts out and draining their blood. I'm looking forward to retiring, you bet.

CREDITS

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INTRODUCTION

This modern era adventure can be set in any city or town that has a university, such as Boston, Tallahassee, or even Orono, Maine. With some slight modifications it can be set in the 1920s or other eras.

This adventure was originally written in 1992 for an earlier edition of *Call of Cthulhu*. The current incarnation is a complete rewrite of the text and an update to the 7th edition of the rules. The original adventure and many others can be found at <http://www.eternallibrary.drmccl.com>.

KEEPER'S BACKGROUND

Prior to the beginning of the adventure, the United States and Mexico will conduct a joint police operation aimed at locating the hiding place of a drug cartel. Instead, they will stumble upon a previously undiscovered Aztec ruin.

An archeological expedition was soon sent to the site, along with a detachment of guards. The up and coming Assistant Professor John Wenton was among them. Eager to make an important discovery that would help ensure his promotion to associate professor, Dr. Wenton worked almost around the clock in the ruins. This effort paid off and he found what seemed to be the discovery of a lifetime: a unique knife with clear religious significance. Unfortunately for Dr. Wenton, this knife has far greater religious significance than he realized: it is a genuine mythos artifact with terrible powers. Dr. Wenton was initially confused by his inability to tell others of his find; then his altered mind rationalized that he had to keep it a secret to ensure that his competitors would not steal the credit. Regular contact with the knife sapped his health and this illness forced him to return home. The knife, or rather the nameless mythos being connected to it, continued to erode his sanity. Determined to acquire his promotion and tenure at all costs, the delusion Dr. Wenton killed his colleague, Dr. Ivan Tarski. Goaded on by the knife, he then grew suspicious that his wife was conspiring against him. He killed her, then hid her body in their basement freezers. Since then he has been killing one person a day. It falls to the investigators to try to stop him.

GETTING THE INVESTIGATORS INVOLVED

The bizarre nature of the killings might lure the investigators into the action, especially if they reside in the area. They may also be brought in by a past contact who suspects that occult activity may be afoot. This adventure is also suitable for running "in the background." The investigators could hear of the killings while the investigators are involved in another adventure and they could be gradually drawn in, perhaps because of a (real or perceived) connection with the main adventure.

PLAYERS' INFORMATION

The following information might become available to the players. Finding the information Library Use, although the difficulty of finding the information varies. In the modern setting, **Library Use** can be taken to cover searching for information via a variety of traditional and modern mediums ranging from library books to web sites to pod casts.

Learning about the killings will not require any roll; there is extensive web and TV coverage by the major networks. Checking on these reports will reveal the first victim was Professor Ivan Tarski, an expert in ancient languages. He was found in his office by a graduate student, Jesse West.

The other victims had different professions (ranging from hookers to accountants) and were killed in various places (at home, in an alley, etc.). The only two common threads in the killing are that each victim was missing their heart and all their blood was drained. This information was leaked to the press.

If the investigators wish to learn more about the killings, they may want to speak with the police or the coroner. The police on the case will talk about the killings if the investigators have some form of official standing (press, PIs, etc.) or if the investigators can earn their trust with **Persuasion** (or trick them with **Fast Talk**).

The police have no idea who the killer is, except that they are very good with the knife and seem to be insane. They suspect that it is probably a surgeon or coroner, due to the precision of the cuts. The police sources will confirm that all the victims were found heartless and bloodless.

If the investigators speak with the coroner, Angela Brown, she can be persuaded (expressing an interest in her work will help) into revealing information. She will also speak with them if the investigators have an official status. She will say that the hearts were removed with surgical precision with an implement that is as sharp as a scalpel. The rib cage of each victim was broken and removed; the markings suggest this was done by a human hand rather than a tool (the police haven't revealed this fact). The coroner will also say that the blood was removed almost completely from the bodies, but there is no indication of how this was done, but a likely explanation is that it was pumped out of the chest wound. There is, however, no clear indication that a pump was used (no marks, for example).

Investigators with **Occult** skill will, if they make a Regular difficulty skill roll, recognize that the victims have been killed in a manner similar to how some Aztecs sacrificed their victims. According to the Aztecs' metaphysics, the universe was created from the blood of the gods and human blood is needed to keep the universe's energy in the proper balance.

The blood draining part of the killings is not part of the standard Aztec ceremony, but a second **Occult** roll with a Hard difficulty level will indicate that the investigator is aware of a small Aztec cult which removed the hearts of their victims and drained their blood. This cult worshiped a god named "Azatcl" who was said to be served by a lesser god named "Thotaxtl."

According to this cult's mythology, the chief god lived at the center of the universe and fed upon blood. This blood was

brought to it in a variety of means, but blood from sacrifices was brought to it by a toad like being. Many modern scholars doubt that the cult existed and believe the story was fabricated by the Spanish to justify their wiping out the city this cult supposedly resided in and seizing the gold. No evidence has ever been found supporting the documents written by a Spanish priest detailing the cult and its practices.

In the 1990s, one ecofeminist scholar, Dr. Harriett Legges, contended that the city was a peaceful, matriarchal society which worshiped an earth goddess, and this is why the city was destroyed by the patriarchal Spaniards. This thesis fell out of favor when no supporting evidence was found for it. Most current scholars believe that the Spanish probably fabricated the details of the story about the cult, but their critics point to the fact that the Aztecs did engage in human sacrifice.

If the investigators learn about the Aztec cult, a successful **Cthulhu Mythos** skill check will reveal that the cult did exist and apparently worshiped Azathoth and Nyarlathotep by sacrificing people to them. There is also reference to an enchanted knife used in the sacrifices as well as some mention of a toad being that drank human blood. The knife is supposed to be inhabited by or linked to the toad thing and it is said that it can take control of anyone who possesses the knife.

The fact of the matter is that the inhabitants of the city did indirectly worship Azathoth and sacrificed humans to it. The heart and blood of the sacrifices was consumed by the nameless toad creature. When Spanish forces arrived in the city, they eventually learned of the cult. In response, they wiped the city out and had all record of it destroyed so that no one would return to the cursed site. This city is, of course, the one that was found by the police.

If the Aztec link is made, the investigators will no doubt start searching for local connections. A Regular difficulty level check of **Library Use** will reveal that previously undiscovered Aztec ruins were found by United States and Mexican police conducting joint operations against the drug cartels. This information can be found on various news sites and in major newspapers.

A Hard difficulty level check of **Library Use** will turn up a very brief entry in the university newspaper that Professor Wenton went on the expedition but was forced to return early because of illness. This information can easily be found if the investigators pursue information about the first person killed.

If the investigators check out the first murder, that of the professor, they will find out that he was killed in his office and that no one saw or heard anything. This is surprising, since the main office is next to the dead professor's old office and the walls are quite thin. If an investigator makes a luck role, one of the people will say "It's just terrible. First Professor Wenton took sick on the expedition and had to come early, and now Professor Tarksi is dead." If the person is asked about Wenton, they will say that he was on an expedition to an Aztec city and was forced to return due to an illness from which he hasn't recovered yet. If the investigators ask or check on the web, they can find his

address. If they check his Facebook page, they can find photos of him and learn that he is married. Checking Facebook will show that he was very active in his posting of photos at the start of the expedition, but then his posts dwindled and finally stopped.

ACTION

The professor, insane and dominated by the toad thing, will kill a person a day unless he is stopped. He hunts each night for a suitable victim, using his own keen intelligence and the abilities bestowed upon him by the toad thing to select the best victim and circumstances in which to kill them. If the investigators go out at random, they will have little chance of finding him, if any. If they search for him, they will also have little chance of finding him. Their best bet is to put the pieces together to find out who the killer is. If the investigators call Wenton (they can get his mobile number at the university), he will say that he is sick and doesn't feel up to visitors. If they stop by (with or without calling) during the day, he will answer the door and explain that he is ill and wishes to be left alone. While the knife enhances him, Wenton does look terrible and certainly appears to be ill.

A successful **Spot Hidden** skill check will reveal that his sneakers by the door are in small puddles, indicating he was out in the rain last night (an odd thing for a sick man to do). If the investigators ask about his wife, he will say that she is out of town (and odd thing for the wife of a very sick person to do). If he becomes suspicious of the investigators (they give no good reason for visiting him, they mention the killings, or ask too many questions) he will track them down and attempt to kill them. If the investigators simply attack him on the spot, he will fight back to the best of his ability.

If the investigators talk to his neighbors and can persuade them to talk (an easy task) they will reveal that they never see the professor leave during the day and haven't seen his wife in some time (they will give a date around the time he killed her).

If the investigators try to break in during the day, he will try to kill them. If he succeeds, he will stash their bodies in the freezer after slicing them up into conveniently sized. If the investigators go to the house at night, they will see him go out the back door around 1:00 am. If they search the house they will find that kitchen refrigerator contains spoiled food (he lives off blood now) and if they go into the basement they will find his wife's body in the freezer. If the police are called, they will put out an APB on him and will try to arrest him. If the toad thing is convinced that the professor will not be able to escape, it will make him turn the knife over to another person who will take up the task of gathering hearts and blood. Wenton will then be found wandering in the streets, totally insane and without tenure.

The professor's killings will also inspire a copycat killer. This killer will murder people and hack them open to remove their heart. Due to the difference in the killing styles, the police will know that they are now dealing with two killers.

This killer might cause the investigators some problems and they might even run into him, since he is not as smart or cautious as Wenton and lacks the toad's help. Of course, if the investigators take to running around at night they may be picked up by the police for questioning.

RESOLUTION

The killings will continue at the rate of one per night (or more if the copycat stays active) until the investigators deal with Wenton. If the investigators defeat him directly, each involved investigator should receive 1D4 Sanity Points as a reward. If the investigators indirectly defeat him (they find the body of his wife and call the police, for example) they get 1 Sanity Point (or none, if the Keeper judges they did not do enough to merit a reward). If the knife is captured by the investigators and taken care of (perhaps by burying it under a newly poured concrete foundation) and they are aware of its nature they should each receive an additional 1D4 Sanity Points as a reward. If the knife is not recovered or is lost, then the investigators should each lose 1D4 Sanity Points if they are aware of the nature of the knife. If the investigators give up, somebody will eventually take care of Wenton. But, the knife might end up in the hand of someone else and the murders could start again.

THE KNIFE

The knife is composed of an extremely hard metallic alloy not native to the earth. It has unusual markings on it that seem vaguely Egyptian in character. Used in combat, the knife inflicts 1D6+3 damage due to its enchanted nature.

The knife is linked to a horrible mythos being. It manifests as a bloated toad whose warty skin drips blood. Its mouth is full of bloody, writhing tentacles. The toad thing has no material body, except the knife, and has only intelligence and power stats. Its Intelligence is 80 and its Power is 105. The toad can manifest itself at the cost of one Magic Point per minute. Seeing this manifestation of the toad costs the viewer 1D6 SAN on a failed roll, 1 on a successful role. The toad cannot physically attack people and cannot be physically attacked when manifesting but may attack and be attacked mentally or magically.

Attacking in this manner costs the toad thing 1 Magic Point. The toad thing and its victim match Power as per the rules for opposed rolls. If the victim fails his/her roll, the victim loses 1D6 Magic Points. If the toad fails its roll, it loses 1D6 Magic Points. A being (the toad or victim) who reaches 0 Magic Points in this battle starts taking physical damage, as per the usual rules. While it will gleefully devour weaker foes, the toad is no fool and will break off attacks against more powerful beings as soon as it is aware of its disadvantage.

The toad thing can also be harmed by attacks that affect the target's Power. Reducing its Power to 0 will destroy it.

If a person touches the knife when it is not linked to another, the toad thing will attempt to link to the person. The process begins with a mental attack on the person touching the knife with bare skin. This attack is resolved by the usual process using

the Powers of those involved. If the victim resists, they will be aware of the nature of the knife and will probably avoid it. The person is thereafter immune to contact with the knife and can employ it as a weapon.

If the toad thing wins, it has made a link to the victim. The victim will immediately lose 4D6 CON and STR, which will be regained at the rate of one point a day each. If the loss reduces CON to 0 or below, the victim dies. If the victim survives, the toad thing will send them horrible visions and manifest itself. This torment will cost the victim 1D4/1D10 Sanity Points each day. The victim cannot willingly get rid of the knife once the link is made (but it could be taken by another). The victim is likely to go insane before reaching 0 Sanity, and while insane the person will be completely under the toad thing's control. The toad thing will direct the victim to kill, whispering plausible reasons to the target. These killings are likely to cost the victim further Sanity, especially since the toad thing delights in making them kill their friends and loved ones first. Once the victim's Sanity reaches 0, they are permanently lost.

When the wielder is under the toad thing's control, they will be directed to kill one person a day for the toad to feed upon. The toad will manifest and feed upon the blood, heart and POW of the individual. The blood and heart are not actually eaten by the toad (it lacks the requisite body), but it does consume them by transforming them into energy. The wielder will be forced to drink some of the blood and eat some of the heart. This will sustain them and they will stop consuming normal food. The toad gains a number of Magic Points equal to one fifth of the victim's POW after the kill and has 24 hours to use them.

The toad thing can aid its host in a variety of ways. First, for each Magic Point it expends it can heal one point of damage the host has sustained. Second, for each Magic Point expended, the toad thing can increase the host's STR by 5 points for 5 minutes (hence the ability to rip open rib cages). This can increase the host's Damage Bonus. Third, for each Magic Point expended, the toad thing can increase the host's CON by 5 points for 5 minutes. This will increase the host's hit points. When the time runs out, the added points are removed. For example, a host with 13 hit points is given 30 points of CON, increasing his hit point total to 16. He takes 14 points of damage. He will die when the magic CON runs out unless he is healed. In both the STR and CON additions, the toad can use its magic points to increase the points or the duration. Each point expended to increase duration increases it 5 minutes. For example, 6 magic points could increase the host's STR by 30 for 5 minutes, or by 5 for 30 minutes. The toad thing also confers a +20% to the knife skill of the host.

The knife is very hard to destroy. It is immune to most terrestrial acids and can withstand heat that would easily melt titanium. It has 30 hit points. Destroying the knife does not destroy the toad thing but does cut off its connection to this world. The destruction of the knife will free the wielder from the control of the toad thing. If the host still has Sanity left, they can be treated and returned to some degree of normalcy. The host

will also be freed if the toad thing is defeated in the mental combat described earlier. The knife will rapidly corrode and turn to dust if the toad thing is defeated in this manner. Of course, the host will be forced to prevent the knife and toad thing from coming to harm.

NPCS

Professor John Wenton, age 30, archeologist

STR 70 CON 65 SIZ 70 DEX 75 INT 80
APP 60 POW 60 EDU 95 SAN 0 HP 14
DB: +1D4 Build: 1 Move: 8 MP: 12 Luck: N/A

Attacks per round: 1

Brawl 60% (30/12), damage 1D3+1D4
9mm Auto 35% (17/7), damage 1D10
The Knife 65% (32/13), damage 1D6+3+1D4

Armor: none.

Skills: Anthropology 15%, Archeology 85%, Computer Use 15%, Drive Auto 55%, Library Use 75%, Martial Arts 25%, Natural History 15%, English 95%, German 25%, Latin 25%, Photography 25%

Description: Prior to his encounter with the knife, Wenton was a kind and loving person, happily married to his wife and pleased with his job as an associate professor of archeology. Now he is an insane puppet of the toad thing. Though his mind has been shattered, his intelligence remains—albeit twisted to the toad thing's evil purposes. Wenton will make full use of his abilities when stalking victims and dealing with any threats. Unfortunately for the investigators, Wenton is in good physical condition, has received martial arts training (karate), and is good with a handgun. He is incapable of surrendering and will fight to the death as long as he has the knife.

David Fetter, age 28, copy-cat killer

STR 90 CON 70 SIZ 70 DEX 60 INT 50
APP 55 POW 45 EDU 55 SAN 38 HP 15
DB: +1D4 Build: 1 Move: 8 MP: 9 Luck: N/A

Attacks per round: 1

Brawl 65% (32/13), damage 1D3+1D4
Knife 65% (32/13) damage 1D6+1D4

Armor: none.

Skills: Dodge 45%, Hide 55%, Sneak 25%,

Description: This is a disturbed individual who hopes to gain fame for being a killer. He was inspired partially by the psychic emissions of the toad thing, but mostly by his own evil character. Like Wenton, he will kill one person per day and remove the heart and as much blood as he can. Since he lacks the assistance of the toad thing, he will crudely hack open his victims and try to bleed them as much as possible. He will not attack media crews or reporters if he recognizes them, since he is doing the killings for the notoriety.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Michael LaBossiere is a gamer/runner from Maine who went to school in Ohio and ended up a philosophy professor in Florida.

While acquiring his doctorate in philosophy at Ohio State University, he earned his ramen noodle money by writing for Chaosium, GDW, R. Talsorian Games, and TSR. After graduate school, he became a philosophy professor at Florida A&M University. His first philosophy book, *What Don't You Know?*, was published in 2008. He continues to write philosophy and gaming material. He is also a blogger, but these days who isn't?

When not writing, he enjoys running, gaming and the martial arts. Thanks to a quadriceps tendon tear in 2009, he was out of running for a while, but returned to the trails and wrote a book about it, [Of Tendon & Trail](#). He can be contacted at ontologist@aol.com.

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