

CTHULHU DARK ZERO

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Cthulhu Dark Zero is a game based on fiction.
Any resemblance to actual persons and creatures,
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LONDON 1851

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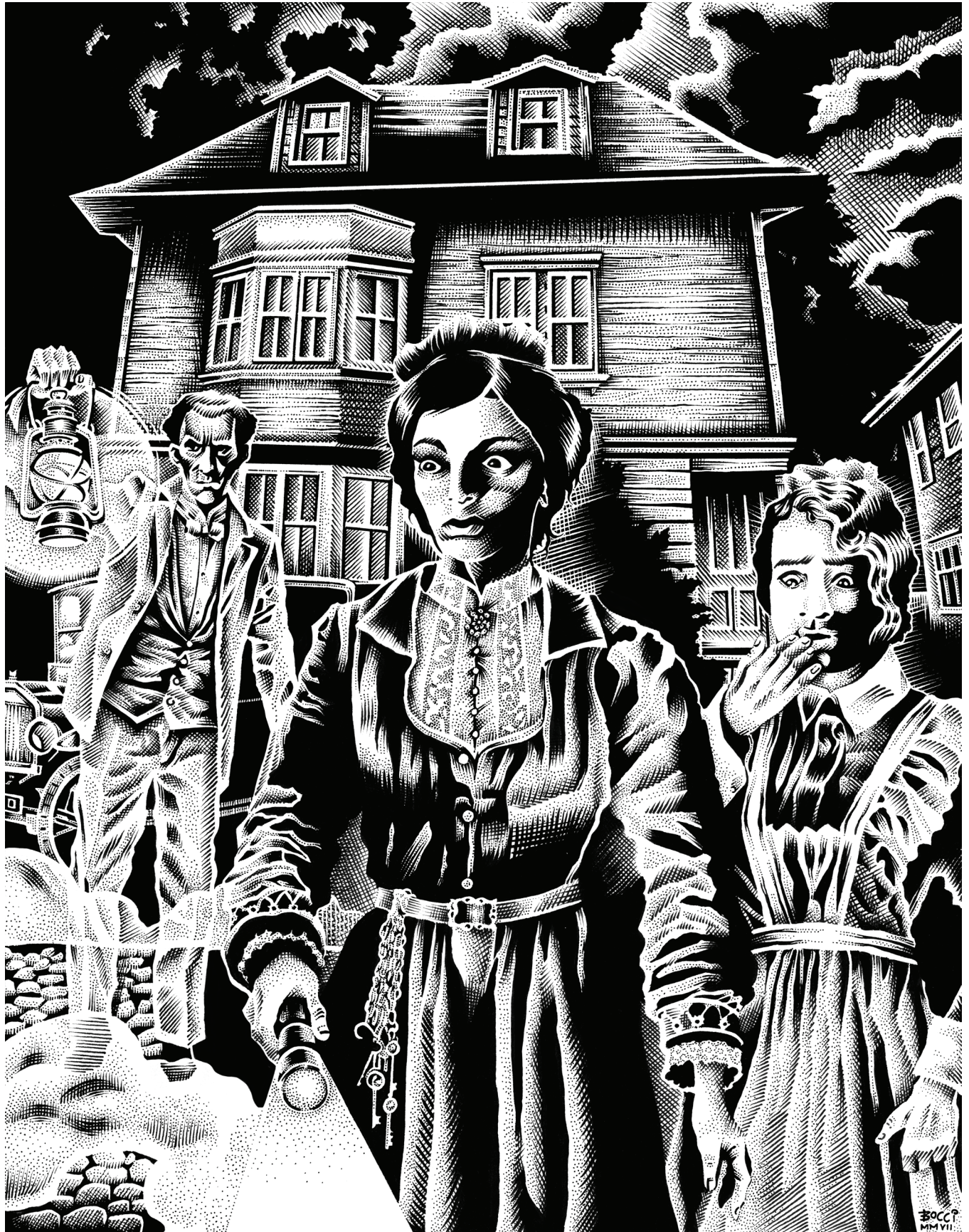
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PLAYER'S SECTION

Do you ever feel that you're losing control, even though you present a mask of calm to the world? That one push could make you snap, turning you into a screaming, desperate maniac?

Welcome to Cthulhu Dark.

This book begins with the Cthulhu Dark rules, which you can use to start playing immediately. You'll then find more detail about how the rules work and how to use them to best effect. There is then a guide to writing horrific mysteries, then a guide to playing them.

Following that, you'll find a guide on how to play Cthulhu Dark in London 1851 and a mystery, Screams of the Children, to play through.

Let's start our journey into horror.

THE RULES

YOUR INVESTIGATOR

Choose a name and occupation. Describe your Investigator. Take a green Insight Die.

INSIGHT

Your Insight shows how far you can see into the horror behind the universe. It starts at 1.

When you see something disturbing, roll your Insight Die. If you get higher than your Insight, add 1 to your Insight and roleplay your fear. (This is called an “Insight roll”.)

Is your Insight real? Can you really see a deeper truth? Or is it just insanity? Sometimes, it is hard to tell.

INVESTIGATING

When you investigate something, roll:

- ▶ One die if what you’re doing is within human capabilities (the “Human Die”).
- ▶ One die if it’s within your occupational expertise (the “Occupation Die”).
- ▶ Your Insight Die, if you will risk your mind to succeed.

If your Insight Die rolls higher than any other die, make an Insight roll, as above.

Then your highest die shows how much information you get. On a 1, you get the bare minimum: if you need information to proceed, you get it, but that’s all. On a 4, you get everything a competent investigator would discover.

On a 5, you discover everything a competent investigator would discover, plus something more. For example, you might also remember a related folktale, rumour or scientific experiment.

On a 6, you discover all of that, plus, in some way, you glimpse beyond human knowledge. This probably means you see something horrific and make an Insight Roll.

Here is an example. You’re investigating your great-uncle’s manuscripts. On a 1, you get only enough information to continue with the story: it is an address, “7 Thomas Street”. On a 4, you discover everything a competent investigator would discover: you find that your great-uncle was researching people plagued by dreams and visions, one of whom was Mr Wilcox of 7 Thomas Street.

On a 5, you discover all that, plus something more. So, you find that your great-uncle was researching people plagued by dreams and visions, one of whom was Mr Wilcox of 7 Thomas Street. Plus, when you read the descriptions of the dreams, they remind you of newspaper reports about a Californian theosophist colony, who recently donned robes for a “glorious fulfilment”.

On a 6, you discover all that, plus you glimpse beyond human knowledge. So, you find that your great-uncle was investigating people plagued by dreams and visions, one of whom was Mr Wilcox of 7 Thomas Street, and you recall newspaper reports about a Californian theosophist colony. And you experience one of the visions yourself.

DOING OTHER THINGS

When you do something other than investigating, roll dice as above. If you roll your Insight Die and it rolls higher than any other die, then, as before, make an Insight Roll.

Again, your highest die shows how well you do. On a 1, you barely succeed. On a 4, you succeed competently. On a 5, you succeed well and may get something extra. On a 6, you succeed brilliantly and get something extra, but maybe more than you wanted.

For example: you’re escaping from the window of a hotel in Innsmouth. On a 1, you crash on an adjoining roof and attract attention. On a 4, you land quietly on the roof. On a 5, you land quietly and get something extra: you escape your pursuers. On a 6, you land quietly, escape your pursuers and get something extra that is more than you wanted: you get a glimpse of your pursuers, who are twisted and inhuman.

FAILING

If someone thinks the story would more interesting if you failed, they describe how you might fail, then roll a die (called the “Failure Die”). They can’t do this if you’re investigating and you must succeed for the scenario to proceed.

If their Failure Die rolls higher than your highest die, you fail, just as they described. If not, you succeed as before, with your highest die showing how well you succeed.

Returning to the example above: you’re escaping from the hotel window. This time, someone thinks it would be more interesting if your pursuers caught you. You both roll. Their Failure Die rolls higher than your highest die. You are caught.

TRYING AGAIN

If you included your Insight Die in a roll and you’re not happy with the result, you may reroll (all the dice).

If you didn’t include your Insight Die, you may add it and reroll.

Afterwards, look at the new result. As before, the highest die shows how well you do. And, if your Insight Die is higher than any other die, make an Insight roll.

You may reroll as many times as you like.

COOPERATING AND COMPETING

To cooperate: everyone who is cooperating rolls their dice. Take the highest die, rolled by anyone, as the result.

To compete: everyone who is competing rolls their dice. The highest die wins. On a tie, anyone who wants to reroll may do so, providing they include their Insight Die in the roll. If that doesn’t resolve the tie, then whoever has the highest Insight wins, and if that doesn’t resolve it, everyone rerolls.

FIGHTING

If you try to defeat any supernatural creature by fighting it, you will die. Instead, roll to hide or escape.

If you fight something that is not supernatural, be clear about what you want out of the fight, then roll as described under “Doing other things”.

SUPPRESSING KNOWLEDGE

When your Insight reaches 5, you may now reduce it by suppressing knowledge of what you have discovered: for example, burning books, stopping rituals or destroying yourself.

Each time you do this, roll your Insight Die. If you get less than your current Insight, decrease your Insight by 1.

You may continue suppressing your insight into the Mythos when your Insight drops below 5.

UNDERSTANDING THE FULL HORROR

When your Insight reaches 6, you understand the full horror behind the Universe and leave everyday life behind. To the outside world, you appear insane. This is a special moment: everyone focusses on your character’s last moments of lucidity. Go out however you want: fight, scream, run, collapse or go eerily silent.

Afterwards, either make a new character or continue playing, but retire the character as soon as you can.

FINAL POINTS

Cthulhu Dark is a game about doomed Investigators. So don’t play to win. Instead, enjoy losing. Enjoy watching your Investigator’s mind slowly break.

The rules leave certain questions unanswered. Who decides when to roll Insight? Who decides when it’s interesting to know how well you do something? Who decides whether you might fail? Decide the answers to these questions with your group. Make reasonable assumptions.

THE RULES IN DETAIL

CHOOSE A NAME AND OCCUPATION. DESCRIBE YOUR INVESTIGATOR.

When you play *Cthulhu Dark*, most of the group play **Investigators**: ordinary people who investigate a horrific mystery.

One of the group does not play an Investigator, but takes the role of **Keeper**. They guide everyone else through the mystery, describing what the Investigators discover along the way and playing anyone who the Investigators meet. Before the game, the Keeper will often plan a mystery for the others to play through.

First, decide who the Investigators are. Do this as a group, talking as you do it. Choose names and occupations for your Investigators and decide any other interesting details.

If you're the Keeper, tell everyone the setting for your mystery: that is, the time and place where it is set (e.g. "London 1851"). This affects the occupations, names and other things that players will choose for their Investigators. If you have particular requirements for the Investigators, say these too: for example, if you want Investigators who are all soldiers, who all live in London or who all have strong opinions about children, say so now. We'll come back to this in "Who are the Investigators?" on page 24) and "Making Investigators" on page 36).

As you create Investigators together, ask each other questions. For example, if someone says their Investigator's name is "McDarryll", ask "Is she Scottish? How long has she lived in this country?" If someone gives their Investigator's occupation as a thief, ask "What do they steal? Where do they sell it?". If someone says their Investigator is shabbily dressed, ask: "What do they wear?".

Try asking leading questions: "What is your Investigator's greatest fear?", "What did your uncle tell your Investigator when they were young?" or "What did the letter from Andalusia say?". (For this last question, you just invented the letter from Andalusia, to make things interesting.)

As you do this, create relationships between the Investigators. For example, if there are two thieves in the group, then do they know each other? If there are a hobo and a policeman in the group, then how do they feel about each other? Try asking "What do you two think about each other?": you'll always get an interesting answer.

Think carefully about occupations. They depend heavily on the setting: occupations in London 1851 differ from those in Mumbai 2037. Often, narrowly-defined occupations are more interesting: "Quantum physicist" is more evocative than "Physicist" or "Academic".

For some mysteries, it won't seem right to give Investigators an occupation. For example, if the Investigators are all children, they might not have occupations. Or, if your Investigators are soldiers in World War I, it wouldn't be interesting to give them all "Soldier" as an occupation. When this happens, replace "Occupation" with something that makes each Investigator interesting and different from the others. For example, if the Investigators are soldiers, use their speciality (e.g. "radio operator", "sapper") instead of occupation. If they are children, try using "the thing they are best at" (e.g. "sports", "mathematics"). When you play, roll a die for these things, rather than your Investigator's occupation.

Finally, create Investigators who will be hit hard when the horror comes. Give them relationships with people they care about, especially family members or spouses. Give them strong convictions, which are likely to be undermined when they encounter the supernatural: for example, a deep belief in humanity, rationality or religion. The Keeper will bring these things into the game later (see "Tailor the mystery to the group" on page 42).

More generally, create Investigators who are vulnerable. Naive Investigators are better than all-knowing ones; weak Investigators are better than strong ones; uncertain Investigators are better than confident ones. Avoid Investigators who have experienced the supernatural before, since they are less likely to be surprised by it.

Finally, check that you all feel ready to play the Investigators. If not, talk more and ask more questions to each other.

TAKE A GREEN INSIGHT DIE.

Try using your Insight Die to keep track of your Insight, by keeping its highest face turned to your current level of Insight.

WHEN YOU SEE SOMETHING DISTURBING, ROLL YOUR INSIGHT DIE. IF YOU GET HIGHER THAN YOUR INSIGHT, ADD 1 TO YOUR INSIGHT.

When something happens in the game that you find disturbing, make an Insight roll. That means: when something happens that creeps you out or that would creep your Investigator out, make a roll.

Do this whether or not the thing you saw is supernatural. In Cthulhu Dark, anything that disturbs you can open your mind to the horror, supernatural or not.

If you're playing an Investigator, don't wait for the Keeper to tell you to make an Insight roll. Do it yourself, whenever something creepy happens.

If you're the Keeper, encourage players to roll their Insight Die when something horrific happens. Ask questions like "Would that creep your Investigator out?", "Do you want to roll Insight?" or simply push their Insight Die towards them.

If, when you make an Insight roll, you roll your Insight or lower, your Insight stays at its current level. When this happens, your Investigator is scared, but keeps it together. As you keep playing your Investigator, show them dealing with their fear.

If you roll higher than your Insight, your Insight increases. Choose how this affects your Investigator. Do they become edgy and nervous? Or quiet and withdrawn? Do they begin to believe the horror they see? Or do they steadfastly deny everything? Whatever you choose, show it in the way you play your Investigator.

WHEN YOU INVESTIGATE SOMETHING...

You are investigating whenever you are trying to discover something new.

So, if you are examining an object, talking to a witness or reading a book for clues, you are investigating. If you are breaking a safe, picking a lock or picking a pocket to get information, you are investigating. If you are following a map, sneaking past guards, clearing a path or dynamiting your way into an underground city, you might also be investigating, since you are trying to get somewhere new and discover what is there. For any of these things, roll dice to see what you discover.

You can also investigate in less obvious ways. For example, you might roll to remember a childhood memory, to work out what is wrong with a building or to follow an alien vibration to its source. In Cthulhu Dark, you can investigate in any way you can think of, without needing a specific skill.

If you are the Keeper, you might ask players to make investigation rolls, especially when you know there is something to discover. There are two particular times you might do this. One: when something is hidden, ask for a roll to see whether the Investigators notice it. Two: when the Investigators talk to someone who is lying, ask for a roll to see whether they spot the dishonesty.

ROLL ONE DIE IF WHAT YOU'RE DOING IS WITHIN HUMAN CAPABILITIES...

When you investigate in any normal way, you get the Human Die. Reading a book, understanding how someone feels, remembering your dreams, deciphering ancient symbols: all these things are within human capabilities.

When you investigate in a weird way, you might not get the Human Die. Casting a spell, controlling your dreams, trying to follow an alien vibration to its source, mystically sensing the pattern behind ancient symbols: all these things stretch beyond human capabilities.

As a rule of thumb: if you are getting close to dark forces, you are edging beyond human capabilities, and are unlikely to get the Human Die. You are also likely to roll your Insight Die shortly.

Don't argue too hard to get the Human Die or any other die! Remember that, in Cthulhu Dark, you shouldn't play to win. Failing a roll is often as interesting as succeeding, so don't fight to get every die you can.

ONE DIE IF IT'S WITHIN YOUR OCCUPATIONAL EXPERTISE...

When you investigate in a way related to your occupation, you get the Occupation Die.

You usually get the Occupation Die only for things directly connected to your occupation. For example, if you are a doctor, you get the Occupation Die when examining a patient, but not when trying to calm someone down (even if you are using your bedside manner).

There is one exception: Investigators with highly specific occupations (e.g. "quantum physicist" or "florist") may sometimes get the Occupation Die for things indirectly related to their occupation. For example, if a quantum physicist tries to sense mystical patterns, they might get the Occupation Die, on the grounds that quantum physics might help them with that. Similarly, if a florist tries to recognise a poisonous plant, they might get the Occupation Die, on the grounds that they might have seen that plant before. This rewards players for choosing specific and interesting Occupations, ensuring they are still useful.

AND YOUR INSIGHT DIE, IF YOU WILL RISK YOUR MIND TO SUCCEED.

You can add your Insight Die to any roll. By doing this, you are risking your mind, since if it rolls higher than other dice, you make an Insight Roll.

You can add this die even for tasks that do not obviously risk your mind: for example, reading a book, moving a slab or picking a lock. This represents pushing yourself hard, physically or mentally, which makes you more likely to snap.

Note that, when you try something beyond human capabilities, your Insight Die might be the only die you roll (since you won't get the Human Die and probably won't get the Occupation Die). For example, if you try to cast a spell, control your dreams or sense mystic patterns, you'll probably only roll the Insight Die. So, when you do weird things, you risk your mind breaking.

Finally, here is an alternative rule for quick play. When you add your Insight Die to a roll, it counts as an immediate Insight roll: that is, if it rolls higher than your current Insight, your Insight increases by 1. This is faster, but it makes Insight increase faster too.

THEN YOUR HIGHEST DIE SHOWS HOW MUCH INFORMATION YOU GET.

When you investigate and roll a low number, you succeed, but only just.

On a 1, you get the minimum amount of information that is still useful. This is probably just a few words. If you need information to continue with the mystery, you get that and nothing more: for example, if you're asking a shopkeeper where a missing child went, they might just say "The docks". Otherwise, you get what you want but no more: for example, if you are trying to find whether someone is telling the truth, you realise they are lying, but get nothing more.

On a 2, you get the information you want in brief, perhaps a sentence or two. If you need information to proceed, you get it: for example, if you're asking someone where a missing child went, they tell you briefly what they know ("I saw them walking towards the docks, late last night"). In any case, you basically get what you need: for example, if you try to work out whether someone is telling the truth, you realise they are lying because they are terrified.

On a 3, you get most, but not all, of what you want to know. This is probably two or three sentences. For example, if you're asking someone where a missing child went, they tell you most of what they know ("Last night at midnight, I looked out my window and saw her walking to the docks. She was in her nightdress."). If you try to work out

whether someone is lying, you realise they are and why (“She’s obviously lying. She looks terrified and keeps looking towards her children, as though she has seen a ghost and is afraid it will come back”).

Sometimes, on 1, 2 or 3, you get what you want, but not in the way you wanted. For example, if you are following someone, you discover where they are going but draw attention to yourself. If you are picking a lock, you force the lock, making it obvious that it is broken.

However, 1s, 2s and 3s are never failures. On a low roll, you barely succeed, but you basically get what you want. You never get so little information that it is not useful: for example, if you want to know where a missing child went, you will never just get “England”. Only the Failure Die (below) can make you fail.

ON A 4, YOU GET EVERYTHING A COMPETENT INVESTIGATOR WOULD DISCOVER.

On a 4, you find out everything you wanted to know.

So, if you’re asking someone where a missing child went, they tell you everything they saw (“Last night at midnight, I looked out my window and saw her walking to the docks. She was in her nightdress and looked like she was sleepwalking. There was someone ahead of her, a tall man who walked strangely.”). If you’re trying to discover whether someone is telling the truth, you discover that they are lying and why (“You don’t believe her. You realise she saw the creature and is terrified it will come for her children. She acts as though it might be listening now.”).

If you are the Keeper, don’t hold back on a 4. Tell the Investigators everything they wanted, everything that is there to discover. This makes 5s and 6s even more special: it means that the Investigators get even more.

ON A 5, YOU DISCOVER EVERYTHING A COMPETENT INVESTIGATOR WOULD DISCOVER, PLUS SOMETHING MORE.

On a 5, you find out everything you wanted, plus you get something extra.

For example, if you’re asking where a missing child went, you discover everything described above, plus you remember local legends of monsters who enticed children away. If you want to know whether someone is lying, you discover that they are and why, plus you recall obscure spiritualist writings, about a creature that haunted families for generations and returned when someone mentioned its name.

If you’re the Keeper, there are further tips for handling 5s on “On a 5” on page 38.

ON A 6, YOU DISCOVER ALL OF THAT, PLUS YOU GLIMPSE BEYOND HUMAN KNOWLEDGE.

On a 6, you get everything that’s there to discover, but you also find out too much. You glimpse the horror.

This means you discover something obscure, threatening and mystical. It often won’t make sense. For example, if you’re asking someone where a missing child went, they tell you everything, but you also mystically sense the presence of the creature. If you’re trying to tell whether someone is lying, you realise that they are and why, but you also sense a blankness in their eyes, as if their humanity is slowly draining away.

In Cthulhu Dark, rolling a 6 is dangerous. It often leads to an Insight Roll. When someone rolls a six, there should be a collective intake of breath. If you’re the Keeper, there are further tips for handling 6s “On a 6” on page 38.

Note that if you add your Insight Die to a roll and it is the only die that rolls a 6, you might make two Insight Rolls: one because your Insight Die rolled higher than the other dice, one for the thing you discover when you roll a 6.

Finally, note that however high you roll, you never discover something that lets you skip the investigation. For example, if you roll high while tracing a missing child, you don't immediately find the child. High successes give lots of information, but they don't end the game by revealing the whole mystery.

If you're the Keeper, a 6 is an excellent time to use a Creeping Horror (see "Creeping Horrors" on page 27).

WHEN YOU DO SOMETHING OTHER THAN INVESTIGATING, ROLL DICE AS ABOVE.

When you do something that isn't investigating, you roll in the same way. The Human Die, the Occupation Die and Insight Rolls work exactly as above.

This lets you attempt all kinds of tasks: for example, escaping, hiding, driving a car or detonating explosives to seal the entrance to an underground city. You can also roll for less obvious things: for example, you might roll to stay conscious, convince yourself that there is a rational explanation, resist being possessed by a creature or see whether you remembered to bring a piece of equipment. Again, Cthulhu Dark lets you roll for these things, without needing a specific skill.

Remember that, if you are rolling to discover something, you should roll to investigate instead. For example, if you are driving to get someone to hospital before they die, that's not an investigation roll, but if you are driving to follow another car to find where it is going, you are investigating. Similarly, if you are detonating explosives to destroy the entrance to an underground city, that isn't an investigation roll, but if you are detonating explosives to reveal the entrance to an underground city, you are investigating.

YOUR HIGHEST DIE SHOWS HOW WELL YOU DO.

As with investigating: on a 1, you barely do the thing you want to do. On a 2, you do it, although not well. On a 3, you do adequately.

On a 4, you do what you want to do and do it well. On a 5, you do it well and get something extra. On a 6, you do too well and may get a glimpse of the horror.

For example: if you are driving to get someone to hospital before they die, then on a 1, you get there, but you crash the car on the way, skidding to a halt by the hospital as the person's breath is fading. On a 2, you arrive with moments to spare, scraping the car on the way. On a 3, you narrowly avoid a crash, but arrive at the hospital safely. On a 4, you drive well and arrive with time to spare.

On a 5, you drive well and arrive with time to spare, plus your unconscious passenger mutters useful information about what they saw. On a 6, you drive well and arrive with time to spare, but your unconscious passenger mutters dark syllables, which lodge themselves in your brain.

As with investigating, 1s, 2s and 3s are never failures. For example: if you roll a 1 while driving to the hospital, you may crash the car on the way, but you get there in time. A 1 would never mean that you crash the car and the patient dies. Only the Failure Die can make you fail.

If you are the Keeper, there is further guidance on handling 5s and 6s "On a 5" on page 38.

IF SOMEONE THINKS THE STORY WOULD MORE INTERESTING IF YOU FAILED, THEY DESCRIBE HOW YOU MIGHT FAIL AND ROLL A DIE.

If you think of a specific way that someone could fail, which would make things more interesting, roll the Failure Die to see whether it happens. Anyone can roll the Failure Die.

For example: if someone is trying to destroy an occult manuscript by burning it, it might be interesting if they fail, because then the manuscript survives.

Failure won't always be interesting. For example, if you're trying to read an occult manuscript, it'll rarely be interesting if you fail. If you're trying to pick a lock, it won't necessarily be interesting if you get caught. When you aren't sure whether

failure is interesting, talk about it as a group. If you decide failure isn't interesting, don't roll the Failure Die.

If different people think of different ways to fail, they both roll Failure Dice. The highest die determines what happens.

If more than one Investigator is trying to do the same thing and it might be interesting if they failed, try rolling one Failure Die against all of them. Anyone who gets equal to or higher than the Failure Die succeeds. Anyone who gets lower than the Failure Die fails. This is especially useful when lots of Investigators are fighting (see below).

IF YOU INCLUDED YOUR INSIGHT DIE IN A ROLL, YOU MAY REROLL. IF YOU DIDN'T INCLUDE YOUR INSIGHT DIE, YOU MAY ADD IT AND REROLL.

You can reroll as many times as you like, providing you include your Insight Die.

This is dangerous. It tempts you to roll repeatedly, at the risk of your Insight increasing each time. There are two reasons your Insight might increase: because your Insight Die rolls high, forcing you to make an Insight Roll, or because you roll a 6 and glimpse something horrific.

If, when you roll again, you roll a lower result, that lower result stands. You can, of course, roll again.

If, on your original roll, someone rolled the Failure Die against you, they do not reroll the Failure Die when you reroll. Instead, you must match or exceed their original result to win.

Here is an optional rule: when you reroll, describe doing something that lets your Investigator try again. For example: when you roll to decipher an Indonesian folktale, you get a 3 as your highest die. You want to do better. You describe your Investigator spending the night in the library, painstakingly comparing the carvings to archaeological photographs. You roll again, adding your Insight Die to the roll. This time, you get a 6. You find out everything. Perhaps more than you wanted.

TO COOPERATE: EVERYONE WHO IS COOPERATING ROLLS THEIR DICE.

TO COMPETE: EVERYONE WHO IS COMPETING ROLLS THEIR DICE. THE HIGHEST DIE WINS.

When Investigators compete or cooperate, the highest die determines the result.

Anyone can reroll their dice, as many times as they like, providing they include their Insight Die in the roll. For competing rolls, this can lead to both sides rerolling repeatedly, until someone gives up.

After a competing roll, treat the matter as settled, at least for the time being. For example, if two Investigators both try to grab a book and one of them wins, the losing Investigator can't simply roll to grab the book again. That said, it might be interesting to roll again later in the game: for example, if the Investigator with the book begins casting a ritual, someone might try to grab the book again.

Here is an alternative rule: when there is a tie on a competing roll, describe the outcome as a tie. For example, if two Investigators try to grab a book, you might decide that they both end up holding the book, and must choose whether to share it or destroy it. Do this only if it adds to the story: it should be exciting, not frustrating.

IF YOU TRY TO DEFEAT ANY SUPERNATURAL CREATURE BY FIGHTING IT, YOU WILL DIE. INSTEAD, ROLL TO HIDE OR ESCAPE.

In Cthulhu Dark, alien creatures are vastly more intelligent and powerful than you. You cannot beat them in a fight.

This means that, rather than fighting, you'll often run or hide. When this happens, roll for Doing Other Things as above. Someone is likely to roll the Failure Die against you.

Nevertheless, you might fight alien creatures, even though you cannot defeat them. You might fight your way past them. You might fight them back. You might temporarily subdue them, knowing that

they will rise again. You might defeat one of many creatures, knowing there are others to take their place. When this happens, roll for Doing Other Things, as described above.

IF YOU FIGHT SOMETHING THAT IS NOT SUPERNATURAL, BE CLEAR ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT OUT OF THE FIGHT, THEN ROLL.

When you fight another Investigator, use the rules for competing rolls above.

Before rolling, be clear what you both want out of the fight. For example, you might want to destroy an ancient statuette, but the other Investigator wants to keep it. Whoever wins gets what they want.

When you fight any other opponent that isn't supernatural, roll for Doing Other Things. Someone will probably roll the Failure Die against you.

Again, be clear about why you're fighting. What do you want out of this? Fighting is rarely just about hurting your opponent, so what is the fight really about? For example, if you're fighting a guard dog, you might be fighting to escape from it, to get past it or to silence it. If you're fighting a human, you might be fighting to stop what they are doing or to get information from them. Be clear about what you want, then if you succeed, you get it.

How do you tell whether the thing you are fighting is supernatural? For example, if someone is descended from alien creatures, are they supernatural? What about someone who is possessed or infected by a creature?

Use your judgement, but as a rule of thumb: if something is horrific, it is probably supernatural. The only exception is Investigators, who never count as supernatural, no matter what possesses, infects or obsesses them.

If more than one Investigator is fighting, roll one Failure Die against them, as described above. Anyone who rolls equal to or higher than that die succeeds. Anyone who rolls lower fails.

If the Investigators fight more than one opponent, you can handle this in one of two ways: you can treat the opponents as a single opponent, with a single die roll, or you can fight them one by one. If that seems simple, that's the point. Cthulhu Dark isn't about fighting. It's about investigation and horror. You can't fight your way out of the Mythos.

WHEN YOUR INSIGHT REACHES 5, YOU MAY NOW REDUCE IT BY SUPPRESSING KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT YOU HAVE DISCOVERED.

To reduce your Insight, you must suppress knowledge of what you have discovered.

This often creates conflict with other Investigators, who don't want you to burn books or shoot witnesses. It can provide a good ending to the game: everything descends into chaos, as some Investigators try to destroy everything, while other Investigators try to stop them.

When you suppress knowledge, do something that feels like a big step for your Investigator. Don't just hide a book. Burn it. Don't just ask a witness to be quiet. Shoot them.

You can't suppress knowledge in the same way twice. If you burn one library book, you can't just burn another book for another roll. Do something new. Try burning the library. Or the librarian.

WHEN YOUR INSIGHT REACHES 6, YOU UNDERSTAND THE FULL HORROR BEHIND THE UNIVERSE AND LEAVE EVERYDAY LIFE BEHIND.

Losing your mind is a glorious ending for your Investigator. Make your last scene a good one: your Investigator might run away screaming, destroy everything in sight or just stare in wonder at the horror of the universe.

Sometimes, it can work better if the affected Investigator remains with the others, especially near the end of the mystery. If this happens, the Investigator becomes a supporting character. They don't get to make rolls any more. They are part of the scenery.



KEEPER'S SECTION

Welcome, Keeper. Your job is to guide the Investigators through the horror and help everyone have fun.

You have two jobs. You are a performer: you present something to horrify and inspire the players. And you are a facilitator: you help the players to tell their stories, as their Investigators experience unimaginable horror.

Imagine yourself as an artist, who gives the players a half-finished canvas. You wash it with dark colours, with glowing patches of alien beauty. You give hints of lurking horrors. Then you let them complete the painting.

Most importantly, your job is to creep the players out. Aim, not for full-blown terror, but for a lingering uneasiness. And do this for real: try for a horror that makes everyone, you and them, genuinely uncomfortable.

It isn't about evil monsters with waving tentacles. It isn't about chanting cultists. It's about the things that creep us out, that drive us mad, that make us lose control.

COSMIC HORROR

Cthulhu Dark tells stories of **cosmic horror**: that is, tales of Investigators who discover that humans are insignificant, because they are powerless against greater forces in the Universe.

These greater forces are **the Mythos**, which consists of ancient aliens, artifacts and other horrors. Long before humanity existed, the aliens came to Earth, built great cities and left the artifacts behind.

Everything about these creatures is beyond our understanding. They are huge, ancient, hyperintelligent and powerful. Their geometry, mathematics, writing and technology are beyond us. Our science, technology and academic writing does not mention these creatures: they are only alluded to in ancient writings, whispered folktales and crank publications.

Yet the Mythos is not just a collection of aliens and other entities. On a deeper level, **the Mythos** is the terrifying truth, the underlying horror beneath the universe, which is beyond human comprehension.

Because of this, everything about the Mythos is repellent to us. When we encounter something from the Mythos, it appears evil, repulsive and inexplicably wrong.

These two meanings of the Mythos, “ancient, powerful alien entities” and “the terrifying reality underlying the Universe”, are connected. The more you understand the alien entities, the more you perceive the horror underlying the universe. The more you perceive the underlying horror, the more you see and understand the ancient, alien entities.

In Cthulhu Dark, this understanding is called **Insight**. When your Insight is low, you see and believe the mundane reality around you. When your Insight is high, you see beyond that reality and comprehend the horror of the universe.

Every time you see something disturbing, your Insight increases: your mind opens a little more and helps you see the universe as it truly is. Eventually, when your Insight reaches 6, you fully understand the horror behind reality and your mind breaks. Your job, as Keeper, is to help the Investigators along this journey.

MYSTERIES AND COSMIC HORROR

To do this, you guide the players through a **mystery**: a horror story, in which the Investigators glimpse the Mythos and begin to understand the true nature of reality.

In every mystery, Investigators discover dark and powerful Mythos forces, beyond their understanding or control. These Mythos forces might take the form of an ancient and terrifying creature, a mind-bending artifact, unearthly sorcery or something else. The Investigators realise these Mythos forces are vastly more powerful than them: that is, the Investigators experience cosmic horror.

To put this another way: every mystery is ultimately about **hubris**. It is about the Investigators’ overconfidence in their own importance, which is undermined when they encounter the horror, showing them they are insignificant. At the start of the mystery, the Investigators believe they are powerful, intelligent people who understand the universe. As the mystery unfolds, they realise they have been deceiving themselves.

THE THEMES AND THE THREAT

Mysteries are not just about cosmic horror, but about more human topics: pregnancy, hunger, abduction, fear of the sea, fear of the dark, fear of your body changing. These are the **themes** of the mystery.

To explore these themes, every mystery contains a specific **threat** from the Mythos, such as an alien, artifact or sorcerous spell. This threat is the source of the horror, which the Investigators will confront.

Under “Writing a Mystery”, we’ll explore themes and threats in more detail. Under “Threats of the Mythos”, you’ll find full descriptions of Mythos threats.

THE HOOK AND THE FINAL HORROR

Every mystery starts with a **hook**, a dramatic event to pull the Investigators into the mystery.

It ends with a **final horror**, which is the reason behind everything that the Investigators have discovered. You can write the final horror in a sentence or a few sentences: for example, “The Mi-Go have been kidnapping children”.

We’ll discuss these further under “What is the final horror?” on page 23 and “How does it start?” on page 24.

SETTING AND THE POWER

Every mystery has a **setting**, the time and place that provides the backdrop for the story. For example, a mystery might be set in New York at the height of the Great Depression, Spain during the Civil War or modern day Bangkok. You can use the example settings in this book or invent your own.

In every setting, someone has **power**. For example, in Victorian London, the gentlemen of the aristocracy have power, along with scientists, traders and the Church. In Mumbai 2037, those with money and those who were born into a high position in society hold the power. Power is often about money, government or social class.

In Cthulhu Dark, the Investigators are people with little power. They might be thieves, housewives or dockworkers. They might be skilled people, such as teachers, carpenters or nurses. But they won’t be aristocrats, tycoons or those in government.

By contrast, the horror is close to the power in some way. For example, in Victorian London, the Investigators might uncover a horror in a university, bank or church. In Mumbai 2037, the horror might be in a technology company or relic of the British Empire.

LOVECRAFT

Cthulhu Dark draws on the writings of H P Lovecraft, together with earlier authors that inspired him and later writers inspired by him.

Lovecraft wrote his stories in the 1920s and 1930s. His standard setting is New England in the United States, especially the fictional city of Arkham, although his stories sometimes venture elsewhere.

While Lovecraft was a superb crafter of horror, he had a blinkered view of humanity. Today, his work often comes across as racist. His protagonists were mostly dull, interchangeable middle-class men.

When you play, try to move beyond this. Tell stories about a wider range of people than Lovecraft did. If you do, you’ll discover you have more stories - and more interesting stories - to tell.

WRITING A MYSTERY

This chapter tells you how to write a Cthulhu Dark mystery.

You don't need to follow the sections of this chapter in order. Instead, skip back and forth, as you design your mystery. For example, if the first idea you have is for a setting, start at that section, then plan the rest of the mystery around it.

This chapter works in conjunction with "Playing the mystery" below. Use them together. As you write the mystery, think about how it will play. As you play the mystery, use the tips on writing to make it more fun.

WHAT IS THE MYSTERY ABOUT?

Choose something that inspires you, which you are excited to explore with your players.

Ask yourself: what scares you? What makes you uneasy? Is it a part of your body, a place you have visited, something that has happened in the news? If so, try writing a mystery about a horror that infects the body, lurks in the place you visited or lies behind the news event. Do you worry about your loved ones, your health, your family? Then write about horrors that turn your loved ones against you, leech your health or take children away.

Or ask yourself: is there a subject you are interested in? Are you fascinated by history: the Partition of India, the Reconquista, the Opium Wars? Or do you like childhood fairytales: fairies, unicorns, something hiding under the bed? Or are you drawn to an artistic movement: flamenco, minimalism or the early jazz scene in New Orleans? Whatever interests you, try writing a mystery about it.

Or is there a story you want to tell? Do you want tales of body horror, grand conspiracies or human temptation? Do you want a story about European travel, time travel or space travel? Then write a mystery about that.

WHEN AND WHERE IS IT SET?

If you haven't already, decide the setting for your mystery.

To do this, think of the story you want to tell. For example, if you want to write about a horror that infects the body, then try Victorian London as a setting, with its hospitals and public displays of surgery. If your mystery is about people betraying those they love, then why not set the story in modern suburbia? If your mystery is about flamenco, try Seville at the beginning of the 20th Century. For a story about human temptation, what about Las Vegas, in the glamorous 1950s?

Alternatively, you might use Lovecraft's favourite setting of New England, perhaps the city of Arkham or the remote countryside. This is a good setting, blending modern and ancient, familiar and strange, and many players are familiar with it. If you use it, make it your own. Draw inspiration from cities, towns and countryside that you know.

Whichever setting you choose, think of interesting places, people and things the Investigators might find there. For example, in Victorian London, they might find an imposing hospital, a wood-panelled gentleman's club and the twisting alleyways of the East End slums. You'll use these things later in the mystery (see "Locations" on page 25).

For the rest of this chapter, our default setting is London 1851, under the reign of Queen Victoria. This setting is detailed below (see "London 1851" on page 59), together with a full scenario. You'll also find a full scenario, Screams of the Children. Many examples in this chapter are similar to that scenario (although, to avoid spoiling surprises, not identical).

FINDING THE HORROR

From what you know about your mystery so far, what is the thing that unsettles you or scares you? That thing will become the horror. You'll represent it as an alien threat.

For example, let's say your mystery is set in London 1851. Ask yourself: what unsettles you about Victorian London? Is it hunger, the Church, the destruction of the slums? Whatever it is, make

it into a horrific threat. For example, if hunger is the thing that unsettles you, try writing about a creature stalking London, which starves people as it touches them.

Or let's say your mystery is about people betraying those they love. What unsettles you about that? Is it the idea that you can never fully know those you love? Then turn that into an alien horror. For example, try writing about the Investigators' loved ones being possessed by an alien creature.

As you do this, think about the power in the setting. Wherever the power lies, associate the horror with the power, rather than with people without power. For example, if you are writing a scenario about Victorian London, you might put the horror in the Church of England or the Houses of Parliament. But avoid associating the horror with the slums or the workhouse.

With that in mind, here is another way to think about the horror. Think where the power lies in your setting, ask what unsettles you about that power, then make your horror about that. For example, if your scenario is in Victorian London and you are unsettled by the power of the Church, make your horror about the Church. Perhaps there is a monstrous, charismatic priest or an ancient creature lying beneath a Cathedral.

THEMES

Now, think about the themes of your mystery: the topics you will explore, the types of fear you will play with, the things that your story is really about.

Write them down. You'll probably have between one and three themes. They should be human, emotional topics, which might scare, worry or obsess ordinary people: for example, fear of aging, fear of your body changing, fear of infection, fear of not knowing those you love, hunger, pregnancy, abduction, social class.

Try to avoid specific historical themes, such as "The British Navy", "Slavery" or "The Aristocracy". If you're tempted by a theme like this, ask yourself what deeper human themes you would like to explore. For example, if your theme

is "The British Navy", would you like to explore fear of the sea, fear of military power or fear of confinement on board ship?

There are two themes that appear "by default" in Cthulhu Dark mysteries. First, the fear of losing your mind. Second, hubris: the discovery that you are not powerful, but powerless (see "Mysteries and cosmic horror" on page 20). If you like, explore these themes in your mystery too.

Once you have decided your themes, keep returning to them as you write and play the mystery. Hit them again and again, pushing those buttons, playing on those fears.

THE THREAT

Once you know your themes, choose a Mythos threat - an alien creature, an ancient artifact or something else - that echoes those themes.

For example, if you want a story about loved ones betraying you, what about the Mi-Go (see "Mi-Go" on page 53), who impersonate people, or the Great Race (see page 51), who possess people? If you want a story about hunger, what about a Colour (see page 47), which destroys crops, or Ghouls (see page 50), who feast on humans?

To choose a threat, see the list under "Threats of the Mythos" on page 47, or invent your own.

WHAT IS THE FINAL HORROR?

At the heart of your mystery, something is very, very wrong. This is your final horror.

Write a first idea for your final horror, based on everything you've done so far, especially your setting, themes and threat. For example, you might write "a serial killer preys on rich gentlemen", "there are creatures in the sewers of Victorian London", "an alien infection makes people hate those they love".

Once you've written your first idea, rewrite it, until it is as terrifying as you can make it. Here are some ways to do that.

Firstly, ensure your final horror **harms people**. For example, "there are creatures in the sewers of Victorian London" doesn't necessarily harm

people, but “there are creatures in the sewers who kidnap children” does. Think of unusual ways to cause harm: for example, “there are creatures in the sewers who mesmerise children, making them leave their beds at night and walk to the sewers” is even better. So is “there are creatures in the sewers who kidnap children, then return them *changed*.”

Secondly, make your final horror **ancient** and **vast**. For example, let’s say your final horror is “There are creatures in the sewers”. Make it older: “There are ancient creatures in the sewers, who have swarmed beneath the soil since prehistory”. Then make it bigger: “There are ancient creatures in the sewers, who swarm beneath the soil everywhere in the world, and have done so since prehistory.”

Thirdly, whatever your final horror, **the Investigators can’t put it right**. After all, this is cosmic horror, in which the Investigators are powerless against greater forces.

For example, let’s say your final horror is “There are creatures in the sewers who kidnap children”. The Investigators could put that right by rescuing the children. But, if the horror is “There are

creatures in the sewers who kidnap children and alter their minds”, the Investigators cannot put that right.

Your final horror is the core of your mystery. You’ll build your mystery around it.

WHO ARE THE INVESTIGATORS?

Now think who the Investigators are.

Sometimes, you’ll be happy with any Investigators, providing they fit within the setting. For example, if your mystery is about abducted children in Victorian London, you might decide that anyone from Victorian London could investigate the mystery.

More often, you’ll want to specify things about the Investigators. So, in your mystery about abducted children, you might specify that the Investigators live in London’s East End. In a war mystery, you might decide that all Investigators must be soldiers. In a mystery about a family, you might specify that they should all be family members.

Try providing constraints that ensure Investigators are hit hard by the horror. For example, in your scenario about abducted children, you could specify that Investigators must have children or be children or have strong opinions about children. This ensures that, when they find out that children are disappearing, they care about it.

Finally, remember that Cthulhu Dark’s Investigators are people with little power. So, if you want a family of Investigators, choose a poor or middle-class family, rather than a rich one. If you want them to belong to a club, make it a working men’s club, rather than a gentlemen’s club.

You’ll use all this as the players make Investigators. For more details, see “Making Investigators” on page 36.

HOW DOES IT START?

Start your mystery with a hook: an event the Investigators can’t ignore, which grabs them and draws them into the mystery.

KEEPING UP THE FIGHT

For some mysteries, especially those with a political focus, there’s a danger in horrors that the Investigators can’t put right.

For example, let’s say your Investigators are Victorian housewives, who discover that alien-infected industrialists are exploiting factory workers. If they can’t do anything about this, you’re essentially suggesting that the might of Victorian industry can’t be challenged. That isn’t exactly an inspiring message.

If you think this is a problem, then write a mystery in which the Investigators score a victory against the horror, but then realise there is more horror to fight. For example, the housewives might close down one factory, but discover there are many more factories and alien-induced industrialists. They have won one battle, but the war will take a lifetime to win.

Make your hook **related to the final horror**: when the Investigators discover the final horror, it should explain the hook. For example, if a mystery starts with the hook “Your child has disappeared”, this will be explained when the Investigators discover the final horror “Creatures in the sewers are kidnapping children”. Similarly, if the mystery starts with the hook “You find a severely injured child on your doorstep”, this might also be explained by the final horror “Creatures in the sewers are kidnapping children”, if the Investigators discover that the child was injured when it resisted abduction.

Choose a hook that **makes the Investigators take action**. For example, the hook “Your child has disappeared” makes the Investigators take action: it’s almost impossible to ignore. The hook “You dream about children disappearing” is easier to ignore: the Investigator might simply shake off the bad dream and go to work. The hook “Local children are disappearing” is even easier to ignore. Pick something that forces Investigators to react.

To do this, make the hook **personal**. For example, if your hook is “You find a severely injured child”, give the Investigators a reason to care about the child: perhaps they know the child or have children themselves. You can do this by specifying things about the Investigators (see “Who are the Investigators?” on page 24).

Finally, make the hook **immediate**: a sudden event, rather than an ongoing situation. For example, if your hook is “You have disturbing dreams of children living under the ground”, the Investigators are unlikely to take immediate action. If your dream is “You dream that a child is being kidnapped at this moment”, the Investigators are more likely to react.

PROLOGUE

You can also start your mystery before the hook.

Try starting a mystery with a prologue, in which the Investigators are going about their everyday business. For example, if your hook is “Your child has disappeared”, try starting with the Investigators returning home after work, shortly before they find their child has gone.

This gives the players a chance to play their Investigators together and establish what they are like. Once they’ve done that, you’ll hit them with the hook.

One word of warning: don’t put weird events in the prologue. If you do, Investigators might think that they are the hook and start investigating. In particular, don’t do any Creeping Horrors (see below) during the Prologue: save them until after the Hook.

LOCATIONS

You now know how the mystery starts, with the hook, and ends, with the final horror. Now you must decide what happens in between.

Start by asking yourself: when the Investigators discover the hook, what will they do and where will they go? For example, if the hook is “you discover a body in an alleyway”, the Investigators might go to the police station or the buildings beside the alleyway. If the hook is “your child disappears”, the Investigators might go to the child’s school or a nearby playground.

Then plan these locations in detail. Decide where the police station is, what it looks like, who is there and what the Investigators will find if they visit. Make these locations interesting: for example, a school in a church is more interesting than an ordinary school. And think about the surrounding area: try putting a pub opposite the school, where Investigators can ask if anyone has seen their child.

Now think: after visiting those locations, where will the Investigators go next? For example, if, when the Investigators visit the school, they discover their child went towards the docks, they would go to the docks. And plan those locations in the same way.

As you do this, think whether there are any iconic or spectacular locations you’d like the Investigators to visit. For example, in Victorian London, you might want the Investigators to see Parliament Square, Covent Garden Market or Hyde Park. If so, put those locations in. For example, you might decide that the schoolteachers saw the child heading towards Hyde Park.

For the end of your mystery, choose a dramatic, climactic location. Try somewhere that is alien, dark or underground (see “The Descent” on page 33). For example, in Victorian London, the sewers, the cellars of the Houses of Parliament or the basement of a gentleman’s club would make good locations for the end of a mystery.

You now have a rough chain of locations for the Investigators to visit. When they play, the Investigators might not visit these places in order, but you’ve thought about where they’ll go and what they’ll do. (We’ll revisit this under “The Railroad” on page 33).

PEOPLE

Now fill your locations with interesting people.

When you want the Investigators to discover something, it is often best if they find it by talking to someone. For example, if you want them to find something in a library, let them find it by talking to a librarian.

This has three advantages. Firstly, it lets the players play their Investigators and interact with others. Secondly, it lets you reveal other rumours, tales and clues during the conversation. Thirdly, if the people the Investigators meet have been affected by the horror, they can talk about it.

Give each person a name and two or three character traits. For example, you might name a librarian “Sanjit Singh” and decide he is “overfriendly” and “protective of his books”. Avoid stereotypes: a overfriendly librarian is more interesting than a quiet librarian.

Finally, here is an exception: towards the end of the mystery, don’t fill your locations with people. Instead, let your Investigators wander through deserted places, for full horrific effect.

BROADENING THE HORROR

Now think: what else has your final horror done? You’ve defined the main thing it does, but how else does it affect the world?

SIX TIPS ABOUT LOCATIONS

1. Broad locations are often better than narrow ones, because they force Investigators to explore. For example, if the Investigators discover their child went to a specific ship, they will head directly to that ship. But if they discover their child went to the docks, they must explore the docks to find the ship. Try using also locations that contain lots of other locations: for example, if a body is found next to a market, this gives the Investigators many market stalls to visit and many people to talk to.

2. Spectacular locations are often better than mundane ones. If the Investigators need a rare book, try putting it in the British Library, rather than a local library.

3. Locations often form natural progressions. If your final horror is underground, it’s natural for the Investigators to descend through a series of locations: they might start in a house, descend to the basement, find a trapdoor into the sewers, descend further into caves, then head deeper to find an alien city. If the Investigators are following someone who has disappeared, it’s natural for them to replicate the last journey the person took before they disappeared.

4. To get the Investigators to a particular location, use a clue to point them there. For example, if you want the Investigators to go to Hyde Park, simply have the teachers at the school mention that the child was seen heading towards Hyde Park.

5. Use locations to ensure that the most horrific events happen late, rather than early, in the mystery. For example, in a mystery about a ghost town, don’t put dismembered bodies in the houses, because they’ll be discovered almost immediately. Instead, put them in a basement, which the Investigators are likely to enter later.

6. If the Investigators don’t know that a location exists, they can’t go there. Use this to ensure that the final horror isn’t discovered accidentally early in the mystery. If your mystery is set in a country house, don’t put the final horror in the basement, because the Investigators might simply go there. Instead, try putting the horror in an old well in the woods, then ensure the Investigators don’t find out about the well until late in the mystery.

Think whether your final horror has had any side-effects. For example, let's say your final horror is "Creatures are abducting children and taking them to the sewers". What else do the creatures do? Do they steal meat from butchers? Do street-children sing songs about them? Do they play a tune, which gives Londoners strange dreams?

Or ask yourself: what other harm does your final horror cause? We know it harms people, but does it affect them in lesser ways? Or does it do something to plants and animals? You might decide, for example, that a creature causes frostbite when it touches people or leaves half-consumed corpses of small animals behind.

Or ask: what traces does the final horror leave behind? For example, you might decide that the creature leaves a dark gelatinous trail, which dissolves bricks in alleyways. Or it might leave behind something less tangible: a thickness in the air, a feeling that time passes slowly, a deep sense of malice.

Or, to make your horror feel ancient, ask: has the horror happened before? How long has it been here? Perhaps the creature has lived in London for millennia, since it was woods and fields. Or perhaps it rises every two hundred years. If so, there may be folktales about the creature, medieval records of it or archaeological traces of its presence.

Use these ideas in your mystery. Use them during play, too, when Investigators roll 5s and 6s (see "On a 5" on page 38 and "On a 6" on page 38). They also make excellent Creeping Horrors, as described below.

CREEPING HORRORS

Creeping Horrors are unexplained, unsettling moments of weirdness, which repeat throughout the mystery.

For example, let's say, in your mystery about abducted children, "children singing" is a Creeping Horror. This means that, throughout the mystery, the idea of children singing will repeat again and again, in different and unexplained ways. So, at the start of the mystery, the Investigators might discover that, as the children were abducted, they sang a song. Later, at the docks, the Investigators

might hear children's singing over the sounds of the waves. At the end, when they find the children, the Investigators might observe them silently mouthing a song.

Or let's say that "triangles" is a Creeping Horror. This means that "triangles" will repeat throughout the mystery. So, at the start of the mystery, the Investigators might find drawings, in which the sea is depicted as a dense mass of triangles. Later, the Investigators might find triangles etched into the walls of the East End. Later still, the Investigators might perceive patterns of triangles when they look at the waves.

First, choose some Creeping Horrors for your mystery. Here are some tips for doing that.

Some Creeping Horrors can be connected to your **final horror** or your **Mythos threat**. For example, in your mystery about abducted children, try Creeping Horrors connected to the creatures that abduct them: an oily odour, half-dissolved bricks, wet-sounding footsteps. Under "Threats of the Mythos" on page 47, you'll find suggested Creeping Horrors for each Mythos threat.

Some Creeping Horrors might be connected to your **themes**. For example, if one of your themes is "the aristocracy", you might decide that aristocrats have a monstrous look (high foreheads, thin mouths, cold eyes), which you use a Creeping Horror. If "fear of the sea" is a theme, you might decide, as a Creeping Horror, that the Investigators hear the sea talking to them.

And some Creeping Horrors are **inexplicable**: a spiral pattern, an odour of rotten flowers, a set of unpronounceable syllables, a golden haze, a half-heard melody, a grey mould, a woman's laughter, a feeling of wrongness, a sense of lengthening time, a dream of flying through space, a taste of fat in the back of the mouth.

Make your Creeping Horrors specific. An odour of violets is better than an odour of flowers; an oily smell is better than a bad smell; wet-sounding footsteps are better than footsteps; children singing a particular nursery rhyme is better than children singing.

SIX TIPS ON HORROR

1. Horror is about things that shouldn't exist, that offend the natural order. So imagine things that are technically possible, but should never happen: you see your own face on a coin; the stars form words in the sky; a stream flows upwards.
2. Try weird juxtapositions: a man smiles as he is buried alive, a stone emits a low hum, an apple tastes like pork. Be specific: an apple that tastes like overcooked pork is even better.
3. Try impossible juxtapositions: a creature that is sleeping but awake, a darkness that glows, a triangle with four corners.
4. Horror is about unnatural life. So use signs of life that are obviously wrong: the corn oozes blood, a house seems to breathe, the birds laugh as they watch from the trees.
5. Horror is about disgust. Write about things that disgust as well as frighten you: a tunnel that runs with bile, ants running over your body, an eyeball melts and drips down someone's cheek.
6. Horror is about losing control. Try taking control of the Investigators in unexpected ways: describe an emotion that washes over them; narrate them speaking in guttural voices; tell them that their hand starts moving against their will. Do this only for short bursts and allow the Investigator some control: if you say "Your Investigator's hand starts moving", the player must be able to say "I grab it with my other hand".

Having chosen your Creeping Horrors, find ways to repeat them throughout the mystery. For example, if one of your Creeping Horrors is "half-dissolved bricks", the Investigators should keep finding half-dissolved bricks. If one of your Creeping Horrors is "a spiral pattern", the Investigators should see this pattern again and again, etched on walls, drawn in books, swirling in their coffee, forming in the clouds. Don't worry about why Creeping Horrors repeat, what they mean or whether they make sense: they are creepy because they are inexplicable.

You'll also use Creeping Horrors when Investigators roll a 6 (see "On a 6" on page 38). Sometimes, after an Investigator senses a Creeping Horror (and especially if they roll a 6) they stay aware of it throughout the mystery.

Don't underestimate Creeping Horrors. They're the most important weapon in your horror armoury.

BUILDING THE HORROR

At the start of the mystery, keep the horror vague and distant. As the mystery proceeds, make it worse and worse. This is how you do that.

Firstly, as the mystery goes on, make the final horror **clearer and clearer**. This means that, at the start of the mystery, you should describe the final horror in broad, vague terms. As mystery goes on, refer to the final horror more and more directly, until it is completely clear what is happening.

For example, let's say your final horror is "Monsters are enticing children away into the sewers". At the start of the mystery, the Investigators might find a child's sketchbook, which shows the child playing with humanoid monsters. This hints at the final horror, revealing it in a vague, indirect and obfuscated way. Later, the Investigators might find an escaped child, who says she was enticed into the sewers by shadowy figures. This makes the final horror clearer, but not totally clear. Towards the end of the mystery, the Investigators might find children in the sewers, who say they were kidnapped by monsters. This makes it absolutely clear what the final horror is.

Secondly, as the mystery progresses, make things **weirder and weirder**. At the start, ensure that everything the Investigators see has a rational explanation. As the mystery progresses, bring in weird, alien things, until it's clear that the only explanation is a supernatural one.

For example, at the start of your mystery about abducted children, you might refer to the abductors as "tall gentlemen, with hidden faces". This makes them sound odd, but human. Later, describe them unnaturally tall, with twisted faces. This makes them sound weirder, but not totally monstrous. Later still, describe them as humanoid creatures with monstrous faces, emphasising how repellent they are. This makes it clear they are entirely supernatural. Do this with other descriptions too: at the start of the mystery, you might say that brickwork seems "worn away"; later, say that it is "half-dissolved".

Thirdly, as the mystery goes on, make the horror **more and more harmful**. Let the Investigators discover that more and more people have been harmed, in worse and worse ways, until the danger becomes unimaginably vast.

For example, at the start of the mystery, the Investigators might discover that one child has disappeared. This is worrying, but not too dangerous. Later, let the Investigators discover that several children have been abducted. This makes it clear that the horror is harmful. Towards the end of the mystery, show the Investigators that, over the course of centuries, thousands of children have been killed, imprisoned, infected or worse. This makes the horror vast.

Fourth, give the sense that the Investigators are getting **deeper and deeper** into an alien, dark world. Do this by making your locations stranger, darker and further away from everyday life. You might also make them literally deeper: that is, further and further below ground level.

For example, when the Investigators enter the docks, describe them as dark and threatening, with huge dark hulls of ships, which creak eerily. Later, when they enter the sewers, describe the passageways as black and unnavigable, twisting unnaturally. As they go onward, describe them descending deeper into sewers that become

unimaginably warped. Hence, as the mystery goes on, the locations become darker, weirder and deeper.

Finally, bring the horror **closer and closer**. Give the sense that the Investigators are getting closer to the horror. Imply also that the horror is getting closer to them.

For example, at the start of the mystery, the Investigators might find half-dissolved bricks, a faint oily smell and dried footprints. Towards the end, they might find bricks that are still dissolving, a strong odour and wet footprints, as though the creatures are nearby. This gives the sense of getting closer to the horror.

Do all this especially with Creeping Horrors. As they repeat throughout the mystery, make them clearer and clearer, weirder and weirder and more and more harmful, while bringing them closer and closer.

For example, if your Creeping Horror is an oily odour, then the first time you describe it, mention a faint, indistinct and distant smell of oil. Every time the Investigators smell it - and especially when they roll a 6 - make it stronger, weirder and more dangerous, until it becomes an overwhelming, unnatural and toxic stench.

TRAVEL, SLEEP AND FOOD

As you fill in the details of your mystery, use the practical constraints of time and space to get the Investigators to explore.

For example, try putting your hook in London, but the final horror in Edinburgh. This forces the Investigators to travel: they must go to a railway station, take the train through the countryside, arrive at the station in Edinburgh and make their way through the streets. They might stay at a lodging house, inn or cheap hotel. So, by thinking about the geography of your mystery, you've created new things to see and locations to visit.

Think, too, about the time of day. If you start your mystery in the afternoon or evening, then after some initial investigation, the Investigators must

find somewhere to sleep, either in their own bed or elsewhere. So, by thinking about timing, you've again created places to go and things to do.

Use food to bring Investigators together, especially when they are travelling. They might, for example, have an evening meal together, then assemble for breakfast before catching a train.

All these practicalities give the Investigators places to see, people to meet, opportunities to talk and chances to experience the horror. For example, if the Investigators travel from London to Edinburgh, they might hear rumours from fellow passengers, stay at an old inn, dream of curious horrors, then discuss what they have learned over breakfast. By planning these practicalities into your mystery, you make it richer.

You'll come back to this when you play the mystery (see "Practicalities" on page 44).

THE HORROR PUSHES BACK

As the Investigators follow the mystery, does anything happen to them? Does the horror affect them in any way? Does it push back?

Some horrors affect **minds**: the Investigators experience dreams, visions, hallucinations or obsessive thoughts. Some affect **bodies**: the Investigators find their face changing, a blankness in their eyes or things growing beneath their skin.

Some horrors **take direct action**. Be careful here: don't let your horror get too close too early. You don't necessarily want your alien creature to attack the Investigators as they explore. Save that confrontation until the end.

Instead, try letting the Investigators find signs they are being followed: footprints outside a window, severed telephone wires, belongings being moved, a feeling of being watched. These work especially well when Investigators eat or sleep (see Travel, Sleep and Food, above).

All the things above make excellent Creeping Horrors, as above.

SCENES OF HORROR

Instead of building tension slowly, try sometimes hitting the Investigators hard with the full horror.

To do this, use something connected to your final horror. For example, in your mystery about children being abducted, let the Investigators find a half-dissolved but living child. Or, for a psychological horror, let them meet a brainwashed child who refuses to stop walking to his death.

During these scenes of horror, let your Creeping Horrors intensify. So, when the Investigators find the half-dissolved victim, they should smell the oily odour strongly and hear wet footsteps pacing around them.

When you play, be ready to adapt your scenes of horror and use them in different locations. For example, you may expect the Investigators to find the half-dissolved child in the docks, but, in play, you might use him in the sewers instead.

REWRITING THE MYSTERY

You have the basics of your mystery. Now, take some time to think about it, tweaking and polishing until your mystery is as good as you can make it.

Here are ten different ways to look at a mystery. Think about your mystery from each perspective, going back and forth between them, and making changes as necessary.

THE KEEPER

First, imagine playing the mystery with your players. Think through what will happen, from start to finish.

Start by imagining yourself describing the Hook. Think what the players will say and what their Investigators will do (as you did under “Locations” on page 25). Imagine describing whatever comes next, then think how they will respond to that. Keep thinking through your mystery until you reach the final horror.

For example, if your hook is “You find a body in an alley”, imagine yourself describing the murder scene. Think how the players will respond. Will their Investigators search the body, look for witnesses or something else? And keep thinking through your mystery from there.

As you do this, you’ll invent extra details. For example, as you imagine describing the murder scene, you’ll naturally think about what the location is like, what is around and who is there. Add this detail into your mystery.

Think what happens if the Investigators do something unexpected. For example, at the murder scene, what happens if the Investigators try to follow the murderer or find the murder weapon? As you find problems like this, try to fix them. For example, you might decide that the murder happened hours ago, so that murderer cannot be found. (See “The Technician” on page 31 for more about fixing problems.)

Now switch to one of the other perspectives below. But this perspective is important, so keep returning to it.

THE TECHNICIAN

Now think of ways the Investigators could break your mystery. Are there any shortcuts, which could let them skip parts of the story? Is there anything that could throw them off track? Are there any distractions, which could stop the Investigators from investigatng?

When there is a **shortcut**, the Investigators find a quick route to the end of the mystery, which you didn’t plan. For example, let’s say you plan a mystery that starts with a murder scene and ends with the Investigators discovering the killer. If, when the Investigators find the murder scene, they discover the killer lurking nearby, they have found a shortcut. Shortcuts spoil a mystery, by making it too short and skipping interesting events.

When there is a **red herring**, the Investigators find something that looks like a clue, but isn’t, and waste time pursuing it. For example, imagine you put a street singer in your mystery, to add atmosphere by singing tales about murder. However, when the Investigators encounter the singer, they get suspicious and question him. Red herrings throw the mystery off track.

When there is a **distraction**, the Investigators discover something that makes them stop investigating. For example, let’s say that, in your mystery, a creature is killing an Investigator’s family. When that Investigator discovers this, she decides to stay with her family to protect them, which stops her pursuing the mystery. Distractions are disconcerting for players: they make them feel that, to continue with the game, they must ignore something important to their Investigator.

If you find shortcuts, red herrings or distractions, fix them in a realistic and satisfying way. So, to fix the three problems above, you could: put the killer far away from the murder scene; ensure the ballad-singer is not overly suspicious; and ensure someone is present to take care of the Investigator’s family members. See “Some Technical Issues” for more issues and suggestions of how to fix them.

SOME TECHNICAL ISSUES

Here are common **shortcuts**:

- ▶ The location of the hook is close to the location of the final horror. When the Investigators discover the hook, they immediately explore the surrounding area and find the final horror.
- ▶ Someone in the mystery knows the final horror. When the Investigators meet this person, they force them to reveal the truth (often by rolling dice) and discover the final horror.
- ▶ You've planned a sequence of locations, with the final horror at the end. For example, you've set your mystery in a tower, with the final horror at the top. The Investigators ignore everything else and go straight there.

You can fix these shortcuts as follows:

- ▶ Place the final horror far away from the hook.
- ▶ Only let the Investigators discover the location of the final horror near the end of the mystery.
- ▶ Only let the Investigators meet anyone who understands the final horror near the end of the mystery.
- ▶ Only use sequences of locations towards the end of the mystery.
- ▶ As these solutions suggest, shortcuts matter most at the start of the mystery. Later, they can actually be helpful.

Here are some common **red herrings**:

- ▶ You put something in the mystery, which isn't important, but looks as though it is. For example, the Investigators meet a carnival showman. They find him suspicious, so they go to the carnival to investigate.
- ▶ You put something before the hook, which isn't important, but looks as though it is, and Investigators investigate that instead. For example, at the start of the game, you describe the London fog so weirdly that the Investigators start investigating it.
- ▶ The Investigators investigate a Creeping Horror for so long that it distracts them from the mystery. For example, one of your Creeping Horrors is mysterious carvings on walls. The Investigators try to discover who carved them.

You can fix red herrings as follows:

- ▶ Assume the Investigators will investigate anything interesting and horrific.
- ▶ Avoid things that look important, but aren't.
- ▶ Avoid introducing weird or interesting things before the hook.

When the Investigators investigate red herrings, their investigation should end quickly and mysteriously. You might say that nobody saw who made the carvings or that they disappeared before they could be challenged.

Ensure your answers to red herrings are reasonable and satisfying. It's reasonable to say the Investigators cannot find who carved the symbols. It's unreasonable to say they cannot enter a carnival to ask questions.

Here are some common **distractions**:

- ▶ Your mystery includes a threat to the Investigators' loved ones. The Investigators stay with them to protect them.
- ▶ Your mystery includes a threat to a large area, where the Investigators' loved ones live. The Investigators leave with their loved ones.
- ▶ Your mystery includes a threat to a limited area: for example, a school or an area of London. When they find the horror, the Investigators try to evacuate the area.
- ▶ Your mystery includes someone injured or dying. The Investigators stay with them or take them to a doctor.

You can fix these as follows:

- ▶ When loved ones are threatened, ensure there is someone present to take care of them.
- ▶ When an area is threatened, ensure the Investigators' loved ones live outside it.
- ▶ When an area is threatened, ensure it is either impractical to evacuate (it's impractical to evacuate all of London) or easy to evacuate (it's easy for staff to evacuate a school, leaving the Investigators free to investigate).
- ▶ When someone is injured or dying, ensure there is medical attention nearby, leaving the Investigators free to investigate. Alternatively, ensure they cannot be moved or have minutes to live, so that there is no point getting them to a doctor.

THE FEARMONGER

Now, think through your horrific moments. Imagine describing them to the players. Do they still creep you out? Are you excited by the things you have to reveal?

If not, go back and make them creepier. Use the tips under “Broadening the horror” on page 26. Dig deep into what scares you.

It’s easy to write a mechanical, functional mystery, which technically works but isn’t scary. Check you’re still excited and horrified by what you have written.

THE RAILROAD

Imagine your mystery as a chain of scenes, leading mechanically from one to another. It starts with the hook and ends with the final horror.

Now imagine your players follow this chain of scenes exactly, focussing purely on solving the mystery. In every scene, all they do is search for clues, find out where to go next, move on to the next scene and repeat.

When you think about your mystery like this, does it still work? Is it always clear where the Investigators need to go next? For example, you may find that, after discovering a body in an alleyway or finding their child has disappeared, it simply isn’t clear where the Investigators should go or what they should do.

If this happens, add clearer links between scenes. For example, you might add an explicit clue on the body, such as a railway ticket, which directs the Investigators to the next location. Or you could add a witness, who saw the child going to the docks.

And, when you proceed mechanically from scene to scene, do you still show the Investigators horror? If not, rewrite the mystery, so the Investigators still encounter horrific things.

By adopting this perspective, you clarify the logic of your mystery and the path you expect the Investigators to take. It also ensures that, if your players focus only on solving the mystery, they still enjoy it.

THE DESCENT

Imagine your mystery as a descent into darkness. As the Investigators explore, they go deeper and deeper, until they reach the final horror.

Does your mystery have this sense of descending into a netherworld? If not, can you adapt it, so that the Investigators descend into chaos, darkness, madness and horror?

This is a classic story structure. It is easy to implement. Simply describe your locations as getting progressively more deep, dark, confusing or chaotic, especially towards the end of the mystery. For example, if your mystery ends in a cave system, describe it as a dark, disorienting maze of rocky caverns.

This is especially easy if your mystery ends underground. But, even it doesn’t, try to give the impression of descending into a dark, twisted underworld. For example, if your mystery ends in the alleyways of Victorian London, describe them getting darker, narrower and unnaturally twisted.

THE MONSTER

Now, imagine your scenario is just a story about a monster.

At the beginning, the Investigators find traces of the creature. As they dig deeper, the Investigators seem to get closer to it: the signs of the monster get more obvious, frequent and weird. At the end, they enter the monster’s lair and see it.

Does your mystery have this sense of drawing closer to a monster? If not, scatter signs of the creature throughout your mystery. Find ways to show the Investigators are getting closer and closer to it.

THE TEMPTER

Now, think about your mystery as a personal story. It is about the Investigators, as their heartstrings are pulled, their fears are realised and their hopes are raised then dashed.

Does your mystery affect the Investigators personally? Does it play on their personal ambitions, fears and feelings? Do your themes echo their personal themes? Does your final horror affect them individually?

You can do all this, even if you don't know who the Investigators are, because the players haven't created them yet. Simply set constraints on the types of Investigators you want (see "Who are the Investigators?" on page 24): for example, in your mystery about abducted children, ask for Investigators who have strong feelings about children.

All this ensures the Investigators cannot simply ignore the mystery. If you think they might, make it more personal until they cannot.

THE GUIDE

Imagine there isn't a mystery. Instead, you are simply giving the Investigators some things to see and places to explore.

Do you have interesting locations for the Investigators to see? Do they have choices of where to go? Do the locations contain beautiful and horrific things for them to see? For example, in your mystery about abducted children, you have the East End, the docks and the crumbling sewers, all of which are interesting to explore.

If not, make your locations better. You can do this by using iconic locations: for example, instead of the sewers, you could set the finale in the cellars of the Houses of Parliament. Or you can simply add detail to your existing locations: for example, you might flesh out the docks, adding crowds of porters, sailors' inns and customs officials.

THE HOST

Again, imagine there isn't a mystery. Instead, you are giving the players a chance to play their Investigators and talk to each other.

Have you given the Investigators enough chances to meet, discuss and reflect? If not, put more in. Give them more people to encounter, more meals to eat together and more chances to discuss where to go next.

When writing a mystery, it's easy to fall into the trap of planning things to do as Keeper: for example, clues for you to reveal, descriptions to read out, scenes of horror to describe. But this means you do all the work. Instead, plan times when you can set back and let the Investigators talk.

THE STORYTELLER

Finally, go back to your themes. Do they feature prominently in your mystery? If not, rewrite, so you hit them harder.

Go through all of the perspectives above, thinking about your mystery from each one. Switch back and forth between perspectives, returning especially to The Keeper, The Fearmonger and The Storyteller. Keep tweaking and improving your mystery.

When you think it's as good as it can get, you're ready to play.

PLAYING THE MYSTERY

It's time to play. This chapter guides you through being the Keeper for a Cthulhu Dark mystery.

Use it alongside "Writing a Mystery", bringing that chapter's tricks into your game. For example, as you play, use the ideas from "Building the horror" on page 28) to describe your horror getting weirder and weirder, deeper and deeper and closer and closer.

Remember your two jobs: give the players a horror that creeps them out and give them space to tell their own stories. You provide the framework. The players tell the story.

GETTING READY TO PLAY

Before you play, take time to think through your mystery.

Think through the mystery's locations. What do they look like? How do they smell? What will the Investigators see as they enter? Imagine yourself describing this to the players. For example, if your mystery contains a market, imagine the brightly-lit crowds, the yells of the stallholders, the watching gangs of ragged pickpockets and the mackerel shining on the fishmonger's stall. The more detailed the picture in your mind, the richer it will be when you describe it in play.

Think about the horror, especially your Creeping Horrors and any scenes of horror. Imagine yourself describing them. Make them as vivid as you can.

Think through the rules and how you'll use them in play. Think when each rule is likely to come up: for example, think when you expect the first investigation roll and the first Insight Roll. Imagine yourself describing key concepts, such as explaining which dice to roll or how a competing roll works.

All this ensures you know Cthulhu Dark and your mystery from back to front. Do whatever you need to get it in your head: take notes, sketch flowcharts, draw pictures.

Collect everything you need to run the game. Get dice, paper and something to write with. Print maps of the locations in your mystery or be ready to draw them. Print any letters, books and newspaper articles that the Investigators will encounter.

Just before play, remind yourself what's important about the mystery. What are your themes? What are you excited about? What are the main things you want to do?

You're ready to play.

HOSTING THE GAME

Whether the game takes place in your home or somewhere else, you act as the host. You set the tone from the moment the players arrive.

Welcome the players as they sit down. Take a moment to talk before starting play.

If you don't know the players, introduce yourself, ask their names and make small talk. Ask what they have played before: have they played roleplaying games, have they played Lovecraftian games, have they played Cthulhu Dark?

Ask whether anyone has disabilities, impairments, things they want to avoid in the game, or anything else you should know about. Give them the chance to tell you privately, if they prefer. This can make a big difference to some people: for example, if you know that someone has a hearing impairment, you can arrange the seating so they can understand you.

Explain that Cthulhu Dark is a game about horrors you cannot fight. They are doomed from the start and should enjoy slowly losing their minds. This isn't a game about winning, but about having fun with losing. That's the point.

Don't underestimate the importance of all this. By establishing a creative, friendly and welcoming atmosphere and by telling players what to expect, you help them contribute and have fun.

MAKING INVESTIGATORS

It is time to make Investigators. You'll guide the group through this, taking the lead in asking questions and bringing everyone into the discussion.

Start by telling everyone the setting for your mystery. Tell them that, in Cthulhu Dark, Investigators are people with little power and explain what that means within your setting. And tell them any constraints on the Investigators they should create: for example, if you want the Investigators to be soldiers, children or members of the same family, say that now (see SIDEBAR).

Ask whether anyone has an initial idea for an Investigator. If they seem unsure, suggest they start by picking an occupation: "You could be a pickpocket, an artist, a trader...".

When someone mentions an idea, ask questions to help them flesh it out. For example, if someone wants their Investigator to be a trader, ask "What do you trade in?", "Do you sell in a market or somewhere else?" or "How is business?". Invite other players to ask questions too.

Do this with all the players, until everyone has a starting point for their Investigator. Encourage players to get ideas from other Investigators: "If you're a housebreaker, I'll be your accomplice".

Keep asking questions: for example, if an Investigator is a teacher, you might ask "Where do you teach?", "What kind of school is that?" or "What are the children like?". Build on other people's ideas and encourage others to do so too: for example, someone might suggest "Could it be a charity school for very poor children?".

Ask questions about your mystery's themes too. For example, if your themes are "children" and "the aristocracy", ask questions related to those topics: "Does your Investigator have any children? Do they want any?", "Does your Investigator think of themselves as middle class? What did their parents do for a living? How do they feel about the upper classes?". This helps get the Investigators invested in the mystery from the start.

And ask questions to create relationships between Investigators. For example, try asking "How do you feel about living in the same house as a pickpocket?" or "Have you two ever met?".

When the Investigators are nearly finished, ask players to choose their names. They'll find this easier once they know something about who their Investigators are. Try having a list of example names ready, especially for less familiar settings.

If, while making Investigators, the players mention other characters, ask for their names too and note them down. For example, if someone mentions their Investigator is married, ask for the spouse's name.

THREE WAYS TO HANDLE CONSTRAINTS

If you have specific constraints for the Investigators, you can handle this in various ways.

Firstly, as mentioned above, you can state the requirements directly: "I'd like you all to have strong opinions about children".

Secondly, you can ask leading questions that guide the players towards your requirement: "What does your Investigator think about children?". This automatically creates Investigators with opinions about children. If necessary, challenge the players' replies: for example, if a player suggests their Investigator does not care about children, say "I'd really like them to feel something about children, even if it's negative. How can we do that?".

Thirdly, you can build on the players' ideas. For example, let's say one of your requirements is that someone has a family member, who will be abducted later in the mystery. Try waiting until someone mentions a family member, then decide (without telling the players) that that's the person who will be abducted. If nobody mentions a family member, ask explicitly for one.

EXPLAINING THE RULES

Before play, explain the basic rules.

First, give everyone an Insight Die and say something like:

- ▶ “This is your Insight Die.”
- ▶ “Your Insight shows how far you can see into the horror behind the universe. It starts at 1. When it gets to 6, you lose your mind.”
- ▶ “Whenever something creeps you out, roll that die. If you get higher than your current Insight, it goes up by 1.”

You might also explain how to investigate and do other things. If so, say something like the following, demonstrating with dice as you explain:

- ▶ “When you do something, roll one die if it’s within human capabilities and one die if it’s within your occupational expertise.”
- ▶ “You can also add your Insight Die, if you will risk your mind to succeed.”
- ▶ “Then the highest die says how well you do. On a 4, you succeed completely. On a 5, you get something extra. On a 6, you get more than you wanted and glimpse the horror.”
- ▶ “If your Insight Die rolls higher than the other dice, you make an Insight roll.”
- ▶ “If someone thinks you might fail, they can roll a die against you.”

After explaining these basics, answer any questions. But keep it short. You can explain anything further as you play.

STARTING PLAY

When planning your mystery, you’ll have decided how it starts and what the first location is.

To start play, describe that first location. Say where the Investigators are and what is around them. Then ask what they do.

You: “You’re in the lodging house. It’s early evening and you’re just returning from work. There is a fire in the grate and fish cooking above it. What are you all doing?”

When the players say what their Investigators are doing, respond naturally.

Player: “I’m sitting by the fire, trying to dry my boots.”

You: “Okay. As the mud dries on your boots, you smell the stink of the Thames, rotten and sweet. [You turn to another player] And what are you doing?”

Player: “I’m just coming in after a day at work.”

If the Investigators meet someone else, play that character:

You: “Your landlady comes in and turns the fish over the fire. She says: ‘Get those dirty boots away from my rug.’”

Encourage the Investigators to interact, by introducing them to each other and giving them chances to talk:

You: “As you come in, you see Violet sitting by the fire.”

And keep going like this. Describe what is around the Investigators, play any characters they meet, ask what they do and respond naturally.

ROLLING INSIGHT

When the Investigators discover something that creeps them out, it’s time for an Insight Roll.

Don’t always roll dice straight away. Lead up to the horror. For example, don’t just say: “There’s a child’s drawing with monsters in it”, then ask for an Insight roll. Instead, lead up to it: “In Danny’s bedroom, you find a sketch, which he must have drawn before he disappeared. It shows Danny meeting some kind of creature. It doesn’t look human. There’s something...twisted and... malevolent about it.”. Then ask whether they want to roll.

You may need to remind the players to roll Insight, especially at first. Try asking “Does that creep you out?” or “Do you want to roll Insight?”. Afterwards, remind them that it’s better if they roll without prompting.

After each Insight roll, ask the player to describe how their Investigator reacts. If the roll succeeded, they describe their Investigator keeping themselves together. If not, they describe their Investigator's fear.

Finally, remember that the player, not you, decides whether to roll Insight. If they aren't creeped out, they don't need to roll.

ROLLING TO INVESTIGATE

When the Investigators investigate something, roll dice to see what they find out.

Again, don't always roll immediately. Lead up to it, especially if the Investigator is doing something interesting or that needs further explanation.

For example, if a player says their Investigator searches a room, ask exactly what they are doing and where they search. Similarly, if an Investigator tries to get information by talking to someone, play out the conversation for a while. Bring it to a point where the person might or might not reveal the information, then roll dice.

Before a player rolls, ask about each of the dice they might roll. Is the Investigator doing something within human capabilities? Are they using their occupational expertise? Will they risk their mind to succeed? Then tell them to roll.

Look at the roll and explain what the highest die means.

Then tell the player they may reroll, if they add their Insight Die to the roll. However, if the Insight Die rolls higher than the other dice, they must make an Insight Roll. Try to tempt them to reroll. If they do reroll, remind them afterwards that they can reroll again.

When they've finished rerolling - or chosen not to - it's time to tell them what they discover.

ON A 1, 2, 3 OR 4

When the highest die is 1 to 4, the Investigator basically gets the information they need. For a full explanation, see the descriptions under "Investigating" on page 8.

ON A 5

On a 5, give the Investigator an extra piece of information, related to what they discover. This is easier than it sounds.

Often, you'll have some information from your mystery to give them. For example, let's say that the Investigators find a child's drawing, which depicts the child being abducted by a creature. Let's also say, when planning your mystery, you've decided that the creatures devour small animals. On a 5, say that the drawing shows a child being abducted, but mention the animals too: "In the corner of the drawing, you see a pile of small animals, as though they've been eaten by the creature".

If you don't have any information to give them, make something up. Try saying that, whatever the Investigator discovered, it reminds them of something else: for example, local folktales, a half-remembered rumour, a story whispered among older locals, the work of an obscure scientist, a book with a dark reputation.

For example, let's say the Investigators roll a 5 while examining the child's painting. You might say: "This reminds you of an obscure article in the Social Review, about children disappearing in the East End, apparently enticed away" or "This reminds you of sailors' stories, about sea-monsters enticing children away at night."

ON A 6

On a 6, give the Investigators a glimpse of the horror. This, too, is easier than it sounds.

Sometimes, you can introduce a Creeping Horror (see "Creeping Horrors" on page 27). For example, if one of your Creeping Horrors is "hearing children's laughter", then tell the Investigator that, as they examine the drawing, they mysteriously hear a child's laughter.

Sometimes, you'll think of new horrors. For example, as the Investigators look at the child's drawing, you might say: "As you look at the drawing, you get an inexplicable urge to follow the creature" or "As you look at the drawing, you get the feeling it is looking at you".

Sometimes, you can use a description connected with the Mythos (see “Cosmic horror” on page 20). Describe the thing they are remaining as repulsive, unnatural, ancient, vast or some other Mythos word. For example, when an Investigator examines the child’s drawing, say “You feel deeply repulsed from the drawing”, “Although the drawing is new, there is something unspeakably ancient about it”, “The angles in the drawing seem curiously wrong” or “You can’t explain why, but the drawing gives you a sense of malice and evil”.

Don’t worry if what you are saying makes sense. It is more horrifying if it doesn’t.

ROLLING FOR OTHER THINGS

When the Investigators roll for other things, explain how to roll in a similar way.

Ask about each die in turn: are they doing something within human capabilities (the Human Die)? Is it within their occupational expertise (the Occupation Die)? Will they risk their mind to succeed (their Insight Die)?

Then ask them to roll. Tempt them to reroll. And explain what the highest die means.

On 1 to 4, the Investigator basically gets what they want. On a 5, give them something extra: they might discover a new location, overhear a useful conversation or discover a new piece of information. On a 6, give them a glimpse of the horror, exactly as above.

ROLLING THE FAILURE DIE

When an Investigator tries something that might fail in an interesting way, explain how the Failure Die works.

Say something like: “I think it might be interesting if that failed, so I’ll roll this die against you. Anyone can do this, when they think that it might be interesting if someone failed.” And describe how they might fail: for example, “When you try to hide, I think it’d be interesting if the creatures found you”.

Then roll the Failure Die, at the same time as they roll their dice. If it rolls higher, tell them the consequences and ask whether they want to reroll. For example: “I’ve rolled higher, which means the creatures catch you. Do you want to add your Insight Die and reroll?”.

COOPERATIVE AND COMPETITIVE ROLLS

When the Investigators try to cooperate or compete, explain these rolls too.

For cooperative rolls, say something like: “When you cooperate, you both roll your dice. We take the highest die as the result.” For competitive rolls, say something like: “When you compete against each other, you both roll dice and the highest die wins.”

After a competitive roll, turn to whoever is losing and ask whether they want to reroll, by adding their Insight Die to the roll. Keep doing this until someone refuses to reroll. Again, tempt the players to reroll, pitting them against each other.

This might lead to a lot of rerolls and rapidly increasing Insight. That’s the idea.

ASKING FOR ROLLS

In Cthulhu Dark, you can roll for almost anything, using the rules for “Doing things”. Think of interesting ways to use this.

Ask for a roll **when there’s something to discover**, which you know about, but the Investigators don’t. Do this especially when something is hidden or someone is lying. When you do this, roll the Failure Die against them. If they win, they notice it. If not, they don’t.

This builds tension. When you ask for the roll, the players immediately know something is wrong. Whether the roll succeeds or fails, it is unsettling: if it succeeds, the Investigator finds something horrific; if it fails, they know something is wrong but don’t know what.

For example, let’s say the Investigators are in a child’s bedroom. You know there is an unnatural ichor beneath the child’s bed, so you ask for a roll to see whether they notice. If the roll succeeds,

the Investigators find the ichor. If they don't, they are left in suspense, knowing there is something they have not found. (If they keep searching, they might find it.)

Ask for rolls **when the Investigators try to resist something**. For example, if the Investigators hear an ancient song that lures humans, ask for a roll, rolling the Failure Die against them. If they succeed, they resist the lure of the song. If they fail, they are lured away.

Best of all, ask for rolls **to challenge things the players say**. This helps you create tension, by emphasising the Investigators aren't in control.

For example, let's say that, when the Investigators find the ichor in the child's bedroom, one player says "I avoid looking at it". Ask for a roll, rolling the Failure Die, to see whether the Investigator successfully avoids looking at the ichor. If they succeed, they avoid looking. If they fail, their eye is unavoidably drawn to it (and they may make an Insight Roll).

Similarly, if an Investigator tries to rationalise the horror ("I tell myself it's just the wind howling"), ask for a roll to see whether they convince themselves. If they succeed, they rationalise the horror ("Yes, it's just the wind"), although we know they are fooling themselves. If they fail, they cannot rationalise the horror ("That's not the wind blowing. It's something else.") and probably make an Insight roll.

Find other ways to use this trick. When someone says "I don't believe my child would do that", ask for a roll to see whether they do; when someone says "I fall asleep", ask for a roll to see whether they can; when they say "I hate the jewellery", ask for a roll to see whether, deep inside, they find it curiously beautiful.

Use these rolls to get inside the Investigators' heads and mess with them.

THEMES

As your mystery unfolds, keep returning to your themes (see "Themes" on page 23), hitting them as often as you can.

For example, let's say your mystery about abduction has the theme "Children". Keep finding ways to refer to this: mention folktales of disappearing children; describe children peering from doorways; describe the Investigators hearing distant childish laughter.

Or let's say your mystery has the theme "the aristocracy". As the Investigators explore London, keep mentioning social class. Describe gentlemen looking down at the poorly-dressed investigators. Make wealthy areas sound austere and unwelcoming.

HOW TO DESCRIBE HORROR

When you describe something horrific, focus intensely on what you are saying and communicating it to the players. Make eye contact. Don't allow them to look away. Keep still and speak slowly. Imagine you are saying something very, very important.

Don't try to sound scary or creepy. When you say something horrible ("You find a half-dissolved body"), you don't need to shout or growl or change your voice. Just say it, directly and clearly.

Use words and descriptions connected with the Mythos (see "Cosmic horror" on page 20), such as:

- ▶ Ancient, powerful and hyper-intelligent.
- ▶ Beyond our science, technology and academic understanding.
- ▶ Mentioned only in ancient writings, folktales and rumours.
- ▶ Associated with strange mathematics, writing and/or technology.
- ▶ Having strange angles, geometries or symmetries.
- ▶ Beyond our reality.
- ▶ Alien, unnatural and not of this earth.
- ▶ Evil, repulsive and wrong.

Fit these descriptions to whatever you are describing. For example, if the Investigators find a sculpture, describe it "made of an unknown material" and "fitting into no known archaeological period". If they find a painting, describe it as "twisted", "surreal" and "reminiscent of prehistoric paintings". And so on.

FIVE TIPS TO DESCRIBE HORROR

1. Try drip feeding: that is, revealing the horror piece by piece to build dramatic tension. For example, if creatures are about to converge on an Investigator, don't just say "Suddenly, creatures come towards you." Build up to it gradually.

You: You think you hear something behind you.

Player: I look around.

You: One of the doors is opening.

Player: Which one?

You: In fact, all the doors are opening, all at once. Behind every door is a dark shape.

Player: What kind of shapes?

You: They have top hats. Cravats. They're tall. Too tall to be human. They are all around you now.

2. Say things that don't make sense. Leave things half-explained or unexplained.

Player: I run down the stairs.

You: It feels like you're running underwater. Your feet feel lazy. One of the creatures reaches out for you. It's as though a wave of cruelty is coming towards you.

Player: I look at its face.

You: It's like staring into watery depths. As he reaches, you smell the stink of the river.

Here, it isn't clear why the Investigator's feet "feel lazy", what a "wave of cruelty" is or how the creature is linked with the river. This makes the scene creepier.

3. Describe things that happen only in the Investigators' minds. Try suggesting that the Investigators inexplicably know something ("Even before you enter the house, you know the wallpaper is yellow"), feel something ("The river feels welcoming, like coming home") or sense something ("This house is full of deep sorrow").

4. Take your time. Imagine a slow-motion camera, which reveals the horror gradually, in loving detail.

5. Alternatively, go fast. Imagine a hand-held camera held by an Investigator, which shows disjointed glimpses of the horror.

SCENES

Imagine yourself as a film director, taking the Investigators through the mystery scene by scene.

At the start of each scene, describe what the Investigators can see and what is happening. This is called **framing a scene**.

You: "As you approach the brothel, it looks like a respectable house, but all the blinds are closed. There are lights in every bedroom. As you watch, a cab pulls up to the front door and a gentleman gets out, hiding his face. What do you do?"

When it feels as though everything important has happened, end the scene and start a new one. This is called **cutting a scene**.

Player: So I sit with Lily, wiping her brow and trying to reassure her.

You: That's good. Shall we cut that scene there?

Player: Sure.

You: Okay. So, the next morning, you all come down to breakfast...

Be brave about cutting scenes. Cut when nothing new or interesting is happening, even if the Investigators are doing things. When a scene rambles on, it takes the life out of the game.

When there is no obvious chance to cut a scene, but nothing new is happening, try **fading the scene** instead:

Player: So I sit with Lily. "How are you?"

You: Lily looks doubtful. "I don't know. Getting better."

Player: "Is it good to be back?"

You: Lily smiles. "Yes, it is."

Player: "I'm so glad to see you."

You: Great. And let's slowly fade that scene there, as you talk with Lily and catch up with her.

If the Investigators decide to split up and do different things, you can **cut between scenes**. Play part of one scene, with some of the Investigators, then part of another scene, with the others. Keep

cutting between them until both scenes are finished. Try ending both scenes at the same time, especially at a dramatic moment.

You'll often play one scene per location: for example, there might be one scene in the church, then one scene in the docks, then one scene in the sewers. However, this isn't always the case: you might do two scenes in a hotel, one in the evening and one the next morning, or two scenes in different parts of the hotel.

USE THE PLAYERS' IDEAS

When a player asks for something, try to say yes:

Player: "Is there a large stone nearby, which I can throw through a window?"

You: "Sure!"

Player: "Can we say the pub is beside the church?"

You: "Okay!"

Alternatively, ask them to roll dice to find out.

Player: "Can I find something in the room to start a fire?"

You: "I don't know! Make a roll."

When a player's idea is vague, ask for more details:

Player: "Can I break into the church?"

You: "Maybe. How?"

Player: "Can I find out who owns the warehouse?"

You: "How would you do that?"

You might sometimes say no, for realism, horror or to keep the tone serious:

Player: "Can I jump off the church and slide down the roof?"

You: "No, you'll just fall."

Player: "Can I chase after the creature?"

You: "No, it's inhumanly fast."

Player: "Can I find the creatures just by following their smell, like a dog?"

You: "No, that sounds silly."

But don't take this too far: it's more important that the game be interesting than realistic. Try to work with the players ideas, even if it means adapting your mystery. For example, if the players really want to capture a monstrous creature, find a way to make that work.

ADAPT YOUR MYSTERY

As you play, adapt the mystery, so that whenever the Investigators go, they find horror.

Let's say you've planned a mystery about child abduction, expecting players to ask local families about their children. Instead, when you play, the Investigators go to the local orphanage. When this happens, change your mystery so that the Investigators find horror in the orphanage. For example, they might find children's drawings, which you had planned to be found in the homes of local families.

Or let's say that, when an Investigator discovers children are being abducted, they go home to check on their own children. Make sure they find horror there too. So, the Investigator may find their own children gone, with black ichor on the floor.

Look for unexpected chances to add horror. For example, if an Investigator goes to the docks and stares in the water, she might see dark shapes moving beneath the waves or hear the voice of a child.

Whatever the Investigators do and wherever they go, they get deeper into the horror. Make it inescapable.

TAILOR THE MYSTERY TO THE GROUP

Adapt your mystery to the Investigators. If an Investigator works on the railway, find a way to bring trains into the mystery. If an Investigator owns a pub, put a pub into the game.

Adapt your horror to the Investigators, too, so it hits them harder. If Investigator has a family, find ways to bring them into the game: for example, you might decide the Investigator's children have been abducted or simply hint the horror could happen to them (by saying things like "The child that's been abducted is the same age as your son.").

If an Investigator has strong beliefs, find ways to question those beliefs. If an Investigator believes passionately in Darwinian evolution, show them evidence of ancient aliens that disproves it. If they believe in their family, hint that their bloodline has been tainted by monsters. If they believe in the goodness of humanity, show them the dark side of human behaviour.

During the game itself, watch what the players do and respond. If they like breaking into buildings, give them chances to do that; if they prefer libraries, give them libraries; if they like conversation, give them people to talk with.

Use all this to bring players into the game, especially those who haven't participated much. For example, if a player hasn't contributed much and their Investigator is a flower-seller, bring plants and flowers into the game: perhaps the Investigators start finding twisted, dark flowers, as a new Creeping Horror.

Finally, give everyone a turn. If someone hasn't spoken for a while, bring them into the game: try asking "What is your Investigator doing?". If one Investigator takes the spotlight in a scene, give someone else the spotlight in the next.

SETTING THE TONE

Tell the players what kind of game you want. If your mystery is about psychological horror, but the Investigators are preparing for a fight, tell them "There isn't much fighting in this mystery". If they're playing overcautiously and avoiding the horror, say "Don't worry about dying. That's the point of the game."

Similarly, if a player wants their Investigator to do something that doesn't fit, tell them. For example, if one player wants their Investigator to start a fight in a pub, but the other Investigators are talking to the pubgoers, postpone the fight until the conversation has finished. If one player always wants to go off alone, explain that it works better if they stay with the others.

TAKE NOTES

While you play, write things down. Do this in whatever way you want: scribble, doodle, draw diagrams, sketch maps.

As the players create Investigators, write down their names and occupations, for later reference. Also note any beliefs, relationships or other things you might want to bring into the game.

Then, as the mystery plays, keep notes of anything you may need to remember. When you introduce a new character, name them and write the name down. When you describe a location, draw a map.

MONEY AND EQUIPMENT

Don't keep track of what Investigators are carrying. Assume Investigators have any equipment that seems reasonable: a nurse might have bandages, a photographer has a camera, anyone might have a cigarette lighter.

Assume too that Investigators have money to do anything that seems reasonable. Hence, most Investigators have enough money to get a bus, buy a newspaper or stay in a cheap lodging-house.

More widely, never let money or equipment be a barrier. If the Investigators must travel across the country, find a way to let them do that. If they must stay somewhere overnight, let them find somewhere. If they must go somewhere dark, let them find a light. It's more important to keep things moving than to be realistic.

Sometimes, it'll be interesting for Investigators to lack a piece of equipment. For example, if the Investigators want to force open a door as they are fleeing, it might be interesting if they lack the equipment. Ask for a roll to see whether they have anything - or can find anything - that might work. The higher the roll, the more suitable the thing they find.

It can sometimes add atmosphere to mention exact amounts of money. For example, in London 1851 (see "Money" on page 72), you might talk about giving a beggar a ha'penny for information.

or stealing a pound note. Nevertheless, don't keep track of money: just assume the Investigators have whatever they need.

PRACTICALITIES

As you play, remember the practicalities of time and space, as you did when writing the mystery (see "Travel, sleep and food" on page 29).

Keep reminding the players **what time it is**: for example, "When you arrive at the docks, it's late afternoon and the sun is low in the sky". This adds both atmosphere and time pressure.

This helps you describe **what the light is like**. If it is morning, describe the early sun through a shifting mist. If it is twilight, describe shadows and half-light. If it is night, describe pools of darkness beyond the streetlamps. In the dark, think about how the Investigators light their way: a cigarette lighter makes flickering shadows, a candle creates a dim half-light, while a flashlight creates a sharp bright circle, beyond which is darkness.

Think also about **how the Investigators travel**. If the Investigators are travelling across London, you might describe them paying a penny to take the bus, then sitting on the top in the stinking summer heat as they pass the Houses of Parliament and glimpse the Thames in the distance.

As with money and equipment, don't let time, travel or light become a barrier. Let the Investigators get where they want to go. Feel free to cheat timings: for example, if it's interesting for an Investigator to suddenly arrive in a scene, let them, without worrying how long it would take them to get there.

Finally, for most of the mystery, try to keep the Investigators together. It's easier and it makes things less fragmented. If Investigators want to split up, let them, but bring them back together as soon as you can. Be honest about this: say "I'd like to bring you back together". And, again, don't let travel times get in the way: just assume that everyone arrives when you want them to arrive.

WHEN AN INVESTIGATOR DIES

Dying is an important part of Cthulhu Dark. But, when an Investigator dies, it often means a player leaves the game. So don't kill Investigators lightly. Make it count.

It's best if the player, rather than you, decides that their Investigator will die. Encourage them to embrace this: after all, Investigators' stories are expected to end tragically. You'll find many players enjoy their Investigators meeting glorious - or even pointless - ends.

In particular, when one Investigator tries to kill another, always check to see whether the other player is happy for their Investigator to die. If not, find a way to let them survive.

When an Investigator attempts something that might kill them, warn them first. For example, if an Investigator tries to attack a supernatural creature, tell them "You might die if you try this". Give them a chance to back out. If they want to continue, roll as normal, rolling the Failure Die against them. If the Failure Die rolls high, the Investigator dies.

Similarly, always let players roll to avoid dying. For example, if an Investigator starts reading a book whose contents will kill them, suggest they roll to stop reading, rolling the Failure Die against them.

For the first two-thirds of the mystery, Investigators usually shouldn't die. Find a way to keep them playing: for example, if an Investigator is attacked, they might be scarred, traumatised or knocked unconscious, rather than killed.

In the final third of the mystery, when the horror intensifies, death becomes more likely. In particular, if the Investigators encounter supernatural creatures or descend into a horrific underworld, that's a cue that someone might die.

When an Investigator does die, provide a glorious ending for them. Give them a moment in the spotlight and - unless they try to kill another Investigator or otherwise disrupt things - let them go out however they want.

HOW A MYSTERY RUNS

At the start of a mystery, Investigators often explore gradually, as they slowly get to know the world and each other. You might find there is not much work for you to do. Just sit back and react to whatever the Investigators do, playing people they meet and describing the world. At this stage, the Investigators have low Insight, but it increases quickly, since most Insight rolls roll above the Investigator's Insight.

Towards the middle of the game, Investigators often focus on finding clues and solving the mystery. This stage can feel like a lot of work for you, as you answer questions, describe locations and ensure the players are on track. You may wonder whether the players are having fun: don't worry, they probably are. Now, Insight is likely to be 3 or 4, and it increases slower than before.

Later still, there is a sense of building to a climax. Now, there is again less work for you to do. Simply let things unfold and look for a good ending (see below). At this stage, some Investigators are likely to have Insight 5. These Investigators are on a knife-edge: every time they roll Insight, they will lose their minds if they roll a 6.

Try to give each Investigator about ten Insight rolls over the course of the mystery. This means that, on average, one or two Investigators lose their minds at the end.

FINDING AN ENDING

When it feels as though the mystery is approaching a climax, start looking for a place to end.

This won't always be where you expected. You might end before the Investigators discover the full horror or reach the final location you'd planned. When any of the following happen, start looking for a moment to end the mystery:

- ▶ Most Investigators have Insight of 4 or 5.
- ▶ An Investigator loses their mind.
- ▶ The Investigators discover the full horror.
- ▶ The Investigators discover something very horrific, even if it isn't the full horror.
- ▶ The Investigators see an alien creature.

- ▶ The Investigators descend into a dark or alien place.
- ▶ The Investigators turn on each other.
- ▶ An Investigator dies.

What makes a good ending? You might finish on a **moment of extreme terror**: for example, when creatures swarm around the Investigators, forcing them to run or die. You might end on a **moment of bleak realisation**: for example, as the Investigators discover tunnels filled with unconscious children and realise they can never stop the abductions. You could end on a **moment of violence**, especially if Investigators attack each other.

You'll often see the ending approaching: that is, you'll realise that, in a moment, the creatures will converge on the Investigators or the Investigators will find tunnels of children and it'll be a good moment to end.

When you see the ending coming, build towards it. Ensure all the Investigators are together: if one Investigator is somewhere else, bring them back if you can. Get everyone's attention. Dissuade Investigators from minor actions: this isn't the time for one Investigator to pick another's pocket.

Now focus on the horror. Bring it to a peak. Try drip-feeding the horror (see "Five tips to describe horror" on page 41): for example, you might describe the Investigators finding first one unconscious child, then a tunnel of children, then tunnel after tunnel of them. Emphasise anything that might hit particular Investigators hard: if an Investigator is a teacher, they might find some of their pupils, and if an Investigator believes in rationality, tell them this defies all known science.

Turn to each player in turn. Give everyone one last moment in the spotlight, asking what their Investigator does. One Investigator might look for a particular child; another might run aimlessly into the tunnels; a third might frantically begin rescuing children. Make any final rolls if you need to, but keep them short. Don't be afraid to leave things unresolved: for example, we don't necessarily need to know whether the Investigator succeeds in rescuing the children, just that they try desperately to do so.

Then end the story.

EPILOGUES

After the mystery is over, go around each player in turn. Ask them to narrate an epilogue for their Investigator, describing a short scene that happens after the mystery. So, one player might describe their Investigator in an obscure library trying to understand what they saw, while another might portray their Investigator having breakfast with their family, while watching nervously over their child's shoulder.

Don't let players influence the epilogues of other Investigators. In particular, don't allow an epilogue where one Investigator kills another (unless the players of those Investigators agree).

Include epilogues for Investigators who died or lost their minds. For example, a player might describe their Investigator's funeral or a scene with their loved ones.

Once the epilogues are complete, the game is over.

THREATS OF THE MYTHOS

Your mystery is a horror story, about fears, obsessions and other things that might occupy a human mind: fear of abduction, fear of the ocean, fear of your own body, aristocracy, isolation, hunger. These are your themes (see “Themes” on page 23).

The threats of the Mythos are your tools to explore these themes. They are horrific creatures, artifacts and other entities, that embody the fears you want to explore.

Choose a Mythos threat that works with your themes. For example, if “fear of abduction” is one of your themes, try the Great Race or the Mi-Go, who fit well with themes of abduction. If “the ocean” is a theme, try Cthulhu or the Deep Ones, who work well in stories about the sea. If your mystery is about “fear of your own body”, try the Deep Ones. And if your mystery is about “fear of science”, try Nyarlathotep or the Mi-Go.

In the rest of this chapter, you’ll find outlines of various Mythos threats. Each begins with a short description of what the threat is and what it does. There is then a list of themes that the threat represents well.

After that is a description of the Creeping Horrors commonly associated each thing: you can either use these or invent your own. You’ll then find the location where the threat is commonly found: you can either set your mystery here or somewhere else. Finally, there are suggestions of how to use the threat in two of Cthulhu Dark’s settings, London 1851 and Mumbai 2037.

Don’t feel constrained by this! All this detail is here to inspire you, not restrict you, so change whatever you like.

Try using different themes than those listed: for example, try using the Mi-Go to tell a story about fear of infection. Try swapping Creeping Horrors between creatures: so, if your Mythos threat is the Mi-Go, try using Creeping Horrors associated with

the Deep Ones, such as a repugnant smell. Try switching locations too: set a mystery about the Mi-Go by the sea, where the Deep Ones are more commonly found. Or use the information given for each creature, but give it a twist: for example, try giving the Mi-Go monotonous rather than buzzing voices or a glow rather than a vibration.

You’ll see that themes apply to several Mythos threats. For example, dreams are associated with both Cthulhu and Keziah Mason, art is associated with Cthulhu and Erich Zann and technology is associated with the Mi-Go and Nyarlathotep. But notice that each theme is used in different ways: Cthulhu does dreams-as-premonitions, but Keziah Mason does dreams-as-travel. Choose the creature that best embodies the theme in the way you want to use it.

In your mystery, always change the name of the creature. It is much better to say “Winged Ones” than “The Mi-Go”. If in doubt, pick a general and mysterious label, based on an evocative adjective and noun: the Ancient One, the Dark God, the Shining Things. Where you choose a specific person as your threat, such as Erich Zann or Keziah Mason, try replacing them with someone else, with a different name, who is essentially the same character.

COLOUR OUT OF SPACE

Colours are amorphous, intangible creatures, which fall from the stars, sink into the earth and drain life from everything around them. This makes living things in the area above them mutate unnaturally or crumble into dust. Everything about colours is inexplicable by known science. Years later falling to Earth, they launch back into space, in a blaze of colour.

THEMES

Life and death. Colours make living things grow monstrously, with unnatural speed and size. Use Colours to tell stories about life and death, in which creatures, plants and people grow and mutate, then have the life sucked out of them.

Food. Use Colours to tell stories about food

and those who produce it. For example, write a mystery about farmers, whose animals become mutated, and whose fruit and crops grow huge and glossy, but taste vile.

Science. Use Colours to tell stories about the failure of science, in which scientists try to analyse the Colour, but fail, before meeting a horrific end.

CREEPING HORRORS

- ▶ Living things, which are horribly mutated or crumble to dust.
- ▶ A colour, unlike any in the known spectrum, which infects the world around it.
- ▶ An unnatural feeling of lethargy and listlessness, which makes you unwilling or unable to leave.

Location: The rural countryside.

SETTINGS

London 1851: In Victorian London, science was at its height. Use Colours to show how little the scientists and scholars know, as they discover something that mystifies them. Try stories about archaeologists who find a coloured globule, engineers who find a glowing rock or astronomers who study a fallen meteorite.

Mumbai 2037: Use Colours to tell stories about unnatural life, such as artificial intelligence, food hacking, nanobots or cyborgs. Write a mystery about a form of life that seems too good to be true, which gradually kills everything around it.

CTHULHU

Cthulhu is an immense organic mass. It lies under the Pacific, sleeping, dreaming and half-dead, where it sends dreams to those who are psychically sensitive. Those that encounter Cthulhu see mostly flashes of vastness, flabbiness and blackness, with suggestions of something squid-like or crab-like. When, in the words of ancient texts, “the stars are right”, Cthulhu will rise, with the help of a sect that worships it, and rule the Earth.

THEMES

Dreams and the unconscious. Use Cthulhu to tell stories of hallucinations, visions and voices. Get the Investigators to fear their own minds, making them wonder what is real. Try using Cthulhu in stories about Surrealism, Freudian psychology or clairvoyants.

Art. Tell stories about art, in which something monstrous lurks beneath the surface. Put a monstrous work of art in your mystery, such as a book, symphony, sculpture or piece of architecture, whose artist is inspired by Cthulhu’s dreams.

The sea. When you want to tell a story set on the ocean, use Cthulhu as the threat beneath the waves. In this guise, Cthulhu becomes a sea monster, like the legendary Kraken or Leviathan.

The end of the world. If you want an apocalypse in your story, Cthulhu can provide it, by rising from the water and stalking the Earth. If you want to tell a postapocalyptic story, try a mystery in which Cthulhu has already risen.

CREEPING HORRORS

- ▶ Dreams of underground voices, chanting monotonously.
- ▶ Dreams of vast, alien stone architecture.
- ▶ Signs of Cthulhu’s sect getting closer to the Investigators (for some suggestions, see “The horror pushes back” on page 30), as they try to protect knowledge of the ancient gods.

Location: At sea.

SETTINGS

London 1851: In Victorian times, people who showed disturbed behaviour were detained in asylums. Use Cthulhu to tell stories about these places, as inmates (who might be Investigators) have visions of how the world ends. Or use Cthulhu to tell stories about the London floods (see “The river” on page 73).

Mumbai 2037: Mumbai is a city of dreams. Take this literally, as Mumbaikars dream of horrific architectural visions and the end of the world.

JOSEPH CURWEN

Joseph Curwen is a sorcerer, who lived centuries ago, but uses magic to force his descendants to resurrect him from his “essential salted”. Once resurrected, he murders the descendant who resurrected him, impersonates that descendant and continues his sorcerous projects, although his anachronistic language and habits betray his true identity.

THEMES

Naïveté. Use Joseph Curwen to tell stories about naive dabblers in the occult, who are represented by Curwen’s descendants. Searching for knowledge, power or excitement, they attempt sorcery they cannot control. It then destroys them. Write mysteries in which the Investigators deal with the aftermath.

Fighting fire with fire. The only way to destroy Joseph Curwen was by learning the dark sorcery he practiced. Try writing a mystery in which the Investigators can only fight the horror by becoming part of it: for example, by doing unspeakable deeds, infecting their bodies or learning dark secrets they can never forget. (Compare with Erich Zann’s vigil, below, which similarly requires Investigators to abandon their lives to combat the horror.)

CREEPING HORRORS

- ▶ Oddly archaic mannerisms and speech.
- ▶ Howling animals.

Location: Anywhere.

SETTINGS

London 1851: Write a mystery about Victorian spiritualists, who contact one of their ancestors in a seance. The ancestor then persuades the spiritualists to resurrect him.

Mumbai 2037: Use Joseph Curwen to explore the dangers of meddling with the past. Write a mystery about Mumbaikars who become obsessed with a figure from Mumbai’s colonial past, but who then takes over their bodies and minds.

DEEP ONES

The Deep Ones live under the sea, where they encounter humans who live on the coast, making deals and breeding with them. They are immortal.

Sometimes, people discover they are descended from these creatures. As these people age, they change, developing a distinctive look with staring eyes and flaking skin. They dream of returning to the sea and swimming there forever.

THEMES

Family. The Deep Ones let you tell stories about ancestry, heredity and children. Try tales of monstrous pregnancies, alien ancestors or the fear of your children turning out wrong.

The body. Use the Deep Ones to explore the fear of the body, especially your own body. Try a mystery in which Investigators feel their own bodies changing or see the faces of those they love mutate.

Immortality. Use the Deep Ones to tell stories about living forever. Try mysteries in which someone makes a deal to become immortal and discovers the horrific consequences of that choice.

Bargains. When you want to tell a story of a deal gone wrong, whether it is a lover’s pact, a fulfilled wish or a commercial contract, make it a pact with the Deep Ones or their descendants. Try a story about someone who must fulfil a pact made by their ancestors.

CREEPING HORRORS

- ▶ The stink of the sea, which lingers everywhere, getting stronger in areas where the creatures have been or when they are close.
- ▶ The Look, which descendants of the Deep Ones develop they age. This is often described as unblinking eyes, scabby skin and gill-like folds around the neck, but pick something that suits your mystery. Try making the Look more pronounced as your mystery goes on, in people the Investigators meet (or the Investigators themselves).

Location: By the sea.

SETTINGS

London 1851: Use the Deep Ones for mysteries about the British love of the sea. Try a story about horrors lurking in a seaside resort or monstrous deals made by the British Navy.

Mumbai 2037: Tell stories about monstrous ancestors and family members. Try a mystery about genehacking, in which the Investigators discover the imprint of something monstrous on their own DNA. Or write a mystery about new medical technology, which offers the promise of immortality.

ELDER THINGS

The Elder Things built vast underground cities in remote places. They are civilised and human-like, enjoying the pursuit of knowledge: indeed, like humans, they dissect other creatures (including humans) to learn about them. The Elder Things became extinct when one of their creations, the Shoggoths, turned on them.

Shoggoths themselves are black masses, covered in eyes, and natural imitators, mimicking both the carvings and voices of the Elder Things. They evolve over time.

THEMES

Doomed civilisation. Write a mystery that shows how the Elder Things destroyed themselves, through hubris and pursuit of knowledge, and imply the same will happen to the human race. Let the Investigators discover the story of how the Elder Things gathered knowledge, built cities and invented life, then show how this led to their extinction.

Imitation. Use the Shoggoths for horror of the “uncanny valley”: that is, something that is nearly, but not quite, life-like. Let the Investigators encounter badly-imitated writing, voices, documents or people. Try using Shoggoths that imitate so well they can replace human beings.

CREEPING HORRORS

- ▶ Signs of a detailed and complex prehistoric civilisation.
- ▶ Prehistoric carvings.
- ▶ The piping, whistling voices of the Elder Things, imitated by the Shoggoths.

Location: The Antarctic.

SETTINGS

London 1851: Show the hubris of Victorian civilisation and how it will lead to its own downfall, by drawing parallels with the Elder Things. For example, try taking aim at Victorian science, by showing how the Elder Things’ science led to unimaginable horrors. Or take aim at the British Empire, by showing that, when the Elder Things attempted to control other creatures, these creatures turned on them.

Mumbai 2037: Use the Shoggoths as a biotechnological, chemical or medical experiment. Write a mystery in which the Investigators are factory workers, investigating mysterious deaths in the experimental tanks. Tell a story in which the Shoggoths turn on the humans that created them. Or reveal that the Shoggoths have already taken control.

GHOULS

Ghouls are near-humans, who swarm beneath the earth. They lurk in underground places, waiting to overpower humans and gnaw their bones. Sometimes, while exploring dark places, you find curious covered shafts, which lead vertically down to where the creatures are.

THEMES

Underground. Use Ghouls to explore the horror of underground places, where demonic things lurk. Try cellars, sewers, caves and subway systems.

The dark. Similarly, use Ghouls to explore the horror of dark places, especially in the city. Try hidden alleyways, abandoned buildings and locked rooms in old houses.

Other civilisations. Ghouls are an intelligent, humanoid species. Write a mystery about an encounter between peoples, as Investigators discover they share the Earth with another civilisation.

CREEPING HORRORS

- ▶ Bones, scraps and other unidentifiable human remnants, found in corners.
- ▶ Scuffling sounds from behind the walls and beneath the floor, getting closer.

Location: The city.

SETTINGS

London 1851: Beneath the ground, Victorian workers build great feats of engineering. Tell tales about sewers, tunnels and the London Underground, as these projects disturb creatures who inhabit the soil.

Mumbai 2037: Try telling a story about encountering a new civilisation, living in the crumbling architecture of nineteenth and twentieth century Mumbai.

THE GREAT RACE OF YITH

To learn about the universe, the Great Race transfer their minds through time and space. When they transfer their minds into the bodies of humans, the human minds find themselves in the bodies of the Great Race, in a prehistoric library where they are forced to write about their lives. Years later, the minds swap back: the human finds itself back in its original body, with no memory of what happened during the missing years.

THEMES

Loss of control. Use the Great Race to explore the horror of losing control of mind and body. Tell stories about amnesia, abduction, sleepwalking, possession and more, with the Great Race as the cause. (Don't be strict about the way the Great Race operate: they could control minds and bodies in many different ways.)

Time travel. Use the Great Race to let your Investigators travel throughout time. Play tricks with time: for example, try a mystery in which Investigators find letters from the future, experience a time loop or discover when they will die.

CREEPING HORRORS:

- ▶ Dreams of aliens and architecture, as your memories, from the time your mind spent trapped in prehistory, start coming back.
- ▶ Memory loss, for moments, days, years or decades.
- ▶ Writing, sculptures and carvings, apparently and inexplicably made by humans in prehistoric times.

Location: Anywhere.

SETTINGS

London 1851: Use the Great Race to show the dark side of knowledge: for example, try a mystery about a librarian who archives memories by capturing people's minds. And, taking inspiration from H G Wells' *The Time Machine*, try a mystery about Investigators who travel to the future and see what humanity becomes.

Mumbai 2037: Try mysteries about technology that affects memory: it might wipe unpleasant memories, provide artificial experiences or give people a whole new identity. Or try a time-warping technology, which lets Investigators find relics or meet people from India's colonial past.

THE KING IN YELLOW

The King in Yellow is many things. It is a man, wearing tattered golden robes, seen in visions and hallucinations. It is a book, which spreads like a virus, appearing where it should not: once read, its madness infects you. And it is a looser collection of horrors: the Yellow Sign, a sigil that corrupts your mind; Carcosa, a mythical and beautiful land; Hastur, a thing that may be an alien creature or a god; a malevolent man that follows you in the street.

What is horrifying about the King In Yellow - or Hastur, or the Yellow Sign, or whatever name you choose - is that it is unexplained. It is not just an alien creature or monstrous race, but a series of horrific occurrences you cannot understand.

THEMES

Crazes. Use The King In Yellow (in book form) or the Yellow Sign to tell stories of crazes that sweep a city or nation: a new artwork, dance or show. Once the Investigators have witnessed it, they experience malevolent visions.

Doubting your sanity. Write mysteries about Investigators who fear their own minds, using the correction of inexplicable events above. Try stories about hallucinations, as Investigators see and hear things that are not real; delusions, as the Investigators believe they are immensely powerful; or paranoia, as Investigators find themselves inexplicably stalked by malevolent things.

CREEPING HORRORS

- ▶ Hallucinations.
- ▶ Someone following you.
- ▶ Visions of Carcosa, a beautiful city with twin moons rising over a lake.

Location: The city.

SETTINGS

London 1851: Tell stories about a malevolent man, stalking people through the dark alleys of Victorian London. Or write about The King In Yellow (in book form) in a gentleman's club, which infects the upper classes, leaving the Investigators to discover what is happening.

Mumbai 2037: In a city that dreams of impossible beauty, show the Mumbaikars the beautiful land of Carcosa. Tempt them with visions of power, wealth and decadence.

KEZIAH MASON

The witch Keziah Mason died centuries ago, along with Brown Jenkin, her companion, a scuttling rat-thing with a human face. Yet, by whatever means, their spirits linger. They haunt present-day occupants of the house where they lived, especially those who stumble on occult secrets.

These occupants are plagued with dreams of flying through an alternate cosmos, passing living things of impossible geometry. As the dreams continue, night after night, Mason and Brown Jenkin begin to appear in them, getting closer and closer.

Eventually, dreams and reality blur. Mason and Jenkin start following the dreamers in their waking hours. In the end, the victims are found partially consumed.

THEMES

Forbidden knowledge. Write mysteries where Investigators stumble on forbidden knowledge, then cannot escape what they have discovered. The Investigators realise they have unwittingly agreed to something horrific: to dedicate their lives to darkness, to transform their bodies, to fill their minds with dark knowledge or something worse. As the Investigators dig deeper, they find themselves pursued by monstrous things and cannot escape.

Dreams. Write mysteries in which the Investigators dream, alternating scenes during the day with dream-scenes during the night. During the day, the Investigators investigate mysterious occurrences. During the night, they dream of the horrors behind those occurrences. As the mystery continues, the Investigators perceive the horrors from their dreams in the real world.

Haunting. Use Mason and Brown Jenkin for stories about haunted buildings. When the Investigators move into a new home, they discover legends of previous occupants, then find the remains of these occupants. Each night, the Investigators dream. Gradually, the creatures in the dream begin to haunt the house.

CREEPING HORRORS

- ▶ Dreams, which gradually intrude into reality.
- ▶ Signs that Mason and Jenkin have entered the real world: for example, scratches, hairs and movements in the corner of the eye.

Location: The city.

SETTINGS

London 1851: Londoners were obsessed with ghosts and the supernatural. Bring Keziah Mason back as a ghost, then let her gradually become real and infect the Investigators' lives.

Mumbai 2037: Use Mason and Jenkin for stories about Mumbai's colonial past haunting its present. Try setting a mystery in an old British colonial building or a new construction built on its ruins. Let the Investigators discover its horrific past: for example, there might have been a disease, massacre or execution there. Gradually, bring that horror back into the present.

MI-GO

The Mi-Go flew through space to Earth, where they built mines in remote hills and high mountains. They appear insect-like or crab-like, but prefer to remain hidden, leaving only footprints or other traces. The Mi-Go are defensive, taking reprisals against those who discover their operations.

Sometimes, they use human agents or attempt to disguise themselves as human. They are also deceivers, spies and tempters, making offers and bargains at impossible prices. They offer humans the chance to see space, by taking their brains and placing them into cylinders.

THEMES

Science. The Mi-Go take humans to see other worlds, by removing their brains. Use them to tell stories of science pushed too far. Invent technology that promises immortality, happiness or power, but which destroys the Investigators in the process.

Bargains. Create Investigators who have dreams they want to fulfil: for example, saving a loved one, gaining political power or being young again.

Start the mystery with a rumour of something that fulfils those dreams. Let them investigate, then end the mystery with the Mi-Go offering a deal, which gives Investigators their dreams at a horrific price.

Impersonation. Write mysteries in which the Mi-Go impersonate humans, especially the Investigators' loved ones.

Space travel. If you want to take the Investigators into space, use the Mi-Go. Make this space travel dangerous: it comes with a price.

CREEPING HORRORS

- ▶ Signs of sabotage and surveillance: packages going missing, telephone wires being cut, footprints outside the door.
- ▶ People speaking in buzzing, cracked voices.
- ▶ An inexplicable, alien vibration, which lingers where the creatures have been.

Location: Rural hills and mountains.

SETTINGS

London 1851: Use the Mi-Go to explore the Victorian obsessions of technology, exploration and commerce. When Mi-Go agents come to London, they offer demonstrations of scientific marvels and the promise of space travel. Let the Investigators discover the price of this.

Mumbai 2037: Make the Mi-Go into powerful and malevolent traders, offering impossible deals and wild technology. Once a deal has been suggested, it cannot be refused. Tell stories of innocent Mumbakars, who have made promises they regret and who now face monstrous consequences.

NYARLATHOTEP

Nyarlathotep is a charismatic bringer of doom. He is a showman, arriving in cities to offer marvellous technological demonstrations. Yet those who see his show emerge changed, seeing signs of a destroyed, apocalyptic world everywhere.

THEMES

Charisma. Use Nyarlathotep if you want a central charismatic figure in your mystery. Try telling stories of the dangers of charisma: like the Pied Piper, who leads children away with his music, Nyarlathotep lures people with the promise of beauty and knowledge, but shows them only chaos. Try making Nyarlathotep into a preacher, demagogue or salesperson.

The apocalypse. To give premonitions of a destroyed world, use Nyarlathotep in your mystery. Make him an agent of chaos, showing the Investigators how things will be, then returning them to the present day. (Note the difference with Cthulhu's apocalypse: Nyarlathotep gives hazy visions of a disturbing future, while Cthulhu promises an imminent disaster.)

CREEPING HORRORS

- ▶ Unnatural weather.
- ▶ Dreams haunting the city.
- ▶ Sleepless nights.

Location: The city.

SETTINGS

London 1851: Victorian London was a place of fairgrounds, performers and shows. Use Nyarlathotep to give a demonstration of a scientific, supernatural or natural wonder, in a public lecture, a séance or a booth at the carnival. He might even show the future, demonstrating how Victorian dreams will lead to the inhumanity of the Great War.

Mumbai 2037: Make Nyarlathotep into a purveyor of riches, offering visions of impossible beauty and luxury. Perhaps the Investigators want to achieve their dreams or perhaps they know someone that has fallen under his spell. Show the underside of these dreams, as the beauty turns to dust and the rich become ever distant from the poor.

THE RATS IN THE WALLS

On returning to your ancestral roots, you hear rats swarming downwards through the walls. They are a hallucination, but they are also a sign of evil in your bloodline. On following the rats, you find traces of ancient occult rituals performed by your ancestors, involving cannibalism and human sacrifice. Eventually, instinct takes over and you find yourself performing the same acts.

THEMES

Family secrets. When you want to tell a story about discovering the evil that your family did, use the rats. Try writing a mystery about discovering a history of murder, abduction, torture or other acts in your family tree. (Note the difference with the the Deep Ones: use the Deep Ones to tell stories about being descended from monsters, but use the Rats to tell stories about evil human acts that run in the family.)

Architecture. Try writing a mystery about a malevolent building. In Lovecraft's original story *The Rats In The Walls*, the ancestral home dates from the 1600s, but is built on Saxon ruins, which rest on Roman foundations, which are themselves built on older buildings. This means that, as the Investigators go deeper beneath the house, they descend through layers of history, tracing the ancestry further and further back in time. Use this idea of descending through architecture and through history.

CREEPING HORRORS

- ▶ Hallucinations of rats, running through the walls and floor.
- ▶ Signs of ancient evil deeds, including carvings and ritual paraphernalia.
- ▶ Skeletons, who died in horrific poses, suggesting torture, murder and cannibalism.

Location: A house.

SETTINGS

London 1851: Use the rats to undermine the Victorian aristocracy. Write a mystery in which the Investigators descend beneath the ancestral home of a great aristocratic family, then discover the evil acts that made their fortune.

Mumbai 2037: Mumbai is a hotbed of new construction. Try writing a mystery about a new building, whose residents commit evil acts. As the Investigators investigate, they descend deeper and deeper beneath the building and into Mumbai's history.

REANIMATION SOLUTION

This chemical solution, when injected into a freshly-deceased corpse - or part of the corpse - brings it back to life. The owner of the solution is driven to use it again and again, even if this requires murder, subterfuge or graverobbing. Eventually, the owner may face bloody revenge from the things that the solution has reanimated.

THEMES

Life and Death. The solution lets you explore the boundary between life and death. Use it in a mystery to ask questions about life and humanity. Can a reassembled corpse be brought back to life? If so, is it truly human? Should the Investigators murder it or protect its unnatural life?

Medicine. The solution represents a great advance in medicine: it brings the dead to life. Try writing a mystery about a medical breakthrough with a horrific edge. Try writing about a medical technique that saves an Investigators' loved one from dying, but leaves them changed. Then let the Investigators investigate the horror behind the medical miracle. Again, use this to pose questions: would you keep someone you loved alive, if unnatural means were the only way to do it? Would you murder to save someone you love?

CREEPING HORRORS

- ▶ Corpses that flicker despairingly into life, then die again.

- ▶ A feeling of being followed, by the things that were brought back to life.
- ▶ Parts of corpses - disembodied heads, intestines, eyes - showing signs of life.

Location: Anywhere.

SETTINGS

London 1851: Use the solution to show the power of the medical establishment and the horrors of medicine. Make the Investigators or their loved ones into patients, under the care of well-meaning but firm doctors, who kill and reanimate patients.

Mumbai 2037: Try using the solution to reanimate corpses from Mumbai's colonial past. Perhaps corpses are revived as a cheap source of labour, yet retaining their memories of the horrors they have seen.

SHINING TRAPEZOHEDRON

The Shining Trapezohedron is an ancient, glassy prism, containing shifting visions of other times and places. Anyone who looks into it finds themselves with new knowledge, but hunted by an immense creature that is repelled by light. Once you have looked into the Shining Trapezohedron, your doom is inevitable.

Try asking Investigators to make a roll when they look into the Shining Trapezohedron. If they succeed, they gain its hidden knowledge and experience the Creeping Horror of being hunted. If they fail, they see nothing. Whether or not they remain safe is up to you.

THEMES

The dark. Use the Shining Trapezohedron to explore the fear of the dark. Since the creature hunts only when there is no light, the Investigators should fear any darkness, even if just for a moment. Sources of light, whether candles, streetlamps or cigarette lighters, can save your life. As the mystery progresses, use sudden darkness as a Creeping Horror: describe sputtering candles, power blackouts and flames that flicker and die.

Desire. The Shining Trapezohedron is an object of desire. It obsesses people, who seek it despite the danger. They find themselves fantasising about it and sleepwalking towards it. Afterwards, they must deal with the consequences of their desire. Eventually, their desire destroys them.

CREEPING HORRORS

- ▶ The sounds of something moving in the darkness.
- ▶ Traces of previous victims, with charred bones, dissolved at the ends.
- ▶ Unreliable light and sudden darkness.

Location: The city

SETTINGS

London 1851: At night, Victorian London divides into light and dark. The great streets blaze with gaslight, creating pools of impossible brightness, with threatening blackness beyond. Alleys and slums are darker, lit dimly by sputtering oil lights or candles. Tell stories about this light and dark city, where something hunts in the shadows.

Mumbai 2037: Tell tales of desire in hypermodern Mumbai. Use the Shining Trapezohedron as a glossy, modern object of desire, either in the real world or in cyberspace, which tempts the Investigators. When the Investigators look into it, they see shimmering visions of the future, but these visions later come to kill them.

ASENATH WAITE

Asenath Waite is a sorceress, with the power to place her mind in someone else's body, while they find themselves in hers. She gains power over those close to her: she can stop them speaking, prevent them travelling or swap bodies from a distance.

Her powers persist past death. If someone kills her, they may later find themselves in her decaying, buried corpse, while she takes their body. While Asenath appears young, she may herself be possessed by someone or something much older.

THEMES

Relationships. Explore trust and love in relationships. Can you ever truly know someone you love, even someone you are married to? Can you trust them not to harm you? How much power do your loved ones have over you? Try a mystery in which someone the Investigators know behaves strangely, under the influence of a Waite-like figure, perhaps their spouse, child or parent.

Gender. Asenath Waite is a woman in a man's body. Or perhaps she is something older and less describable, inhabiting both male and female bodies. Use her to tell stories about gender, as women gain power through men and people inhabit other bodies.

CREEPING HORRORS

- ▶ Objects with impossible curves, textured and colours, which come "from outside".
- ▶ A "tugging" at your mind, as Waite tries to gain control.
- ▶ Finding yourself in another body, which is doing something horrific.
- ▶ Finding yourself back in your own body, which is somewhere horrific.
- ▶ Being buried alive.
- ▶ Talking to someone, who suddenly changes their posture, voice and personality.

Location: Anywhere.

SETTINGS

London 1851: Victorians loved extraordinary people, including extraordinary women, but had strict ideas of gender roles. Try a mystery in which women Investigators discover a Waite-like figure transgressing these roles and achieving power, by possessing the bodies of men and the dead. Will they stop this figure, even though it is achieving things they have always wanted to achieve?

Mumbai 2037: Write a mystery about marriage, in which the Investigators are family members, welcoming a new member, such as a spouse or child. Gradually, the new addition takes control of people close to them.

YOG-SOTHOTH

Through ancient sorcery, certain families can summon the interdimensional god Yog-Sothoth to create an unnatural pregnancy. This creates a child of Yog-Sothoth, which, when it grows up, can take many forms: from a creature that appears superficially human, but with concealed tentacles, to a huge, invisible and ravenous monster.

THEMES

Small towns. Use a child of Yog-Sothoth to explore the secrets that small towns hide. One of the town's families has created the child, keeping it hidden as it grows up.

Family secrets. Similarly, use a child of Yog-Sothoth to explore family secrets. Try a mystery in which an Investigator discovers their family has access to ancient sorcery. Perhaps, somewhere in their family tree, there is a unnatural pregnancy or child.

CREEPING HORRORS

- ▶ Dogs barking uncontrollably.
- ▶ Birds surrounding those who are about to die, chirping in time with their dying breaths.
- ▶ Unnatural noises from a house where a child of Yog-Sothoth is imprisoned, together with regular deliveries of meat to feed it.

Location: Small town.

SETTINGS

London 1851: British aristocrats prize their ancestry. Use a child of Yog-Sothoth to explore the dark side of this, as Investigators discover that an aristocratic family has created a monster.

Mumbai 2037: Use children of Yog-Sothoth to tell stories about families. Try a story about Indians who move to Mumbai, dreaming of great things, then find they are unable to escape their village roots and family secrets.

ERICH ZANN

Erich Zann sits in an attic room, playing music to ward off the dark creatures outside his window. The tunes are eerie and unfamiliar, with notes that have never been heard. If he stopped, something unspeakable would happen, so he keeps playing.

THEMES

Vigils. Erich Zann keeps an endless vigil against the darkness. Tell stories about others who keep watch for Mythos threats, such as soldiers, sailors and sorcerers. Here is a possible ending: when the person keeping the vigil dies, the Investigators must take over their task to stop the evil coming.

Art. Use Erich Zann for mysteries about otherworldly art and the artists that make it. Try telling stories about a sculptor, writer or jazz musician whose creations keep evil at bay.

CREEPING HORRORS

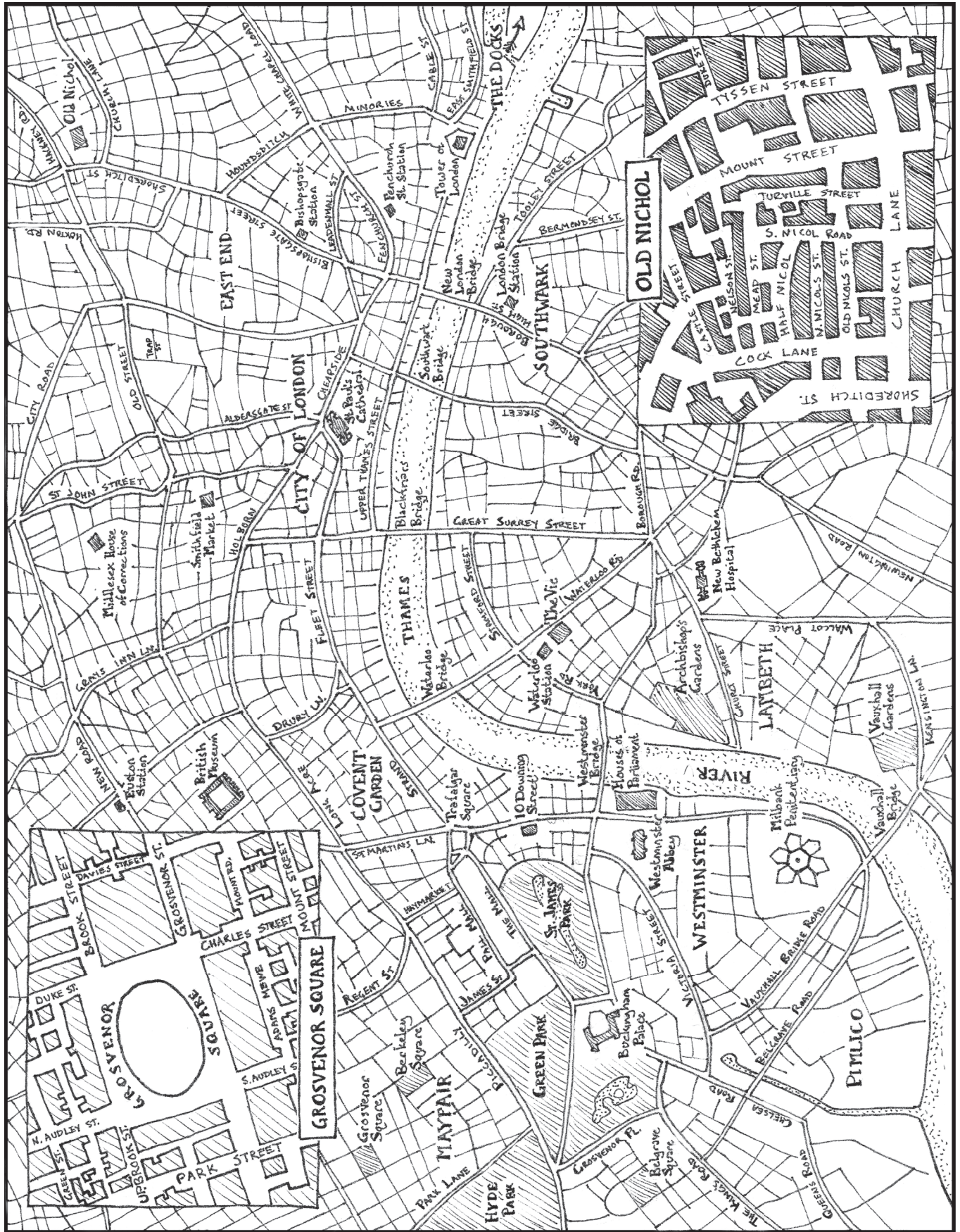
- ▶ Alien, atonal music, which gets louder and more frantic.
- ▶ Sounds from outside the window, as the darkness outside tries to get in.

Location: The city

SETTINGS

London 1851: Great artists were feted in Victorian London. Write a mystery about one of these heroes, whose art becomes twisted, leading them to become reclusive.

Mumbai 2037: What is the equivalent of a vigil in near-future Mumbai? Is it a programmer, typing through the night to fight against mutating code? Or an underground DJ, playing music nobody understands in underground caverns to ward off an evil under the city?



LONDON 1851

The city is twisted, dirty and threatening. And it evolves. Day by day, it grows, spreading further into the fields and rivers around. Each day, new factories appear, sucking in workers and breathing out smoke, hiding the city within a shifting, toxic fog.

The sewers clog, spilling foul water into the street. Candles and oil lamps sputter, casting pools of yellow light, with dancing shadows beyond. Gaslight, harsh and unnatural, floods the grand streets and bridges. Beyond those streets, London is a twilight city of narrow alleys and tiny courts. Through all this runs the Thames, London's great stinking river.

This city is the corrupt heart of the British Empire, whose tentacles slither across the globe. These tentacles seize one nation, even as another evades them: India falls into the Empire's clutches even

as America escapes. Further beyond, in Africa, Asia and Latin America, the Empire maintains a slippery grasp.

How does London control the Empire? By a web of shipping, commerce and military force, an explosive fist in a velvet glove that shakes your hand and smiles. And how does it power the Empire? By forced labour. Even though slavery has been abolished, the Empire has found subtler ways to make its subjects work.

This is London under Queen Victoria, Victorian London. In London 1851, the power lies in the monarchy, aristocracy and the British Empire. It lies in the Church, the corporations and in commercial enterprise. It lies in banks, country houses and the affluent West End of London. This is where the Mythos lurks. This is where the Investigators find the horror.

THE INVESTIGATORS

In London 1851, the Investigators are ordinary people in the heart of the metropolis. They might be workers, struggling to survive in an uncaring city, or thieves, prostitutes and others, feeding on the city's corruption.

NAMES

Choose old-fashioned names for the Investigators, especially nicknames: Spuddy, Curly, Foreigner, Taffy, Pineapple John, Dirty Sal, Dancing Sue, Lanky Bill, One-Eyed George, Short-Armed Jill.

OCCUPATIONS

Below are suggested occupations for an Investigator in London 1851. Use them or invent your own.

For each occupation, you'll find suggestions of when to roll the Occupation Die. These are just examples: you might roll the Occupation Die for other reasons, not just the ones listed. For example, if your Investigator is a burglar, you might roll the Occupation Die for climbing a drainpipe, even though that isn't mentioned below.

All occupations are open to both women and men. While there wasn't equality in Victorian London, Victorians accepted both women and men in most lines of work.

ARTISTS

Artists make their living through creativity. Some work in studios, where they paint portraits, write novels or compose ballads. Some work on the streets, cutting strangers' silhouettes in paper, taking photographs for sixpence or chalking wistful landscapes that fade in the rain.

Some street artists have a caravan or booth from which to ply their trade. These people are salespeople as well as artists, enticing the public to buy portraits, lithographs or caricatures. Others sell their art in travelling fairs or London's parks. Some are little more than beggars, scratching a living by selling trinkets in the East End streets.

As an artist's Insight increases, their art becomes more twisted, as they channel dark patterns beyond reality. Their warped creations may contain clues to the horrors they are investigating.

When one of the Investigators is an artist, include other artists in your mystery for them to talk to and horrific works of art for them to investigate. Try basing a mystery around a maddening artwork.

Artists might roll the Occupation Die for:

- ▶ Making an artwork.
- ▶ Studying art.
- ▶ Remembering something about the history of art.

BEGGARS

Beggars earn money through pity. Many are honest. Many are not. Most are somewhere in between: even if their story is true, they have learned the right clothes, words and expressions to provoke sympathy.

There are all kinds of beggars on London's streets. Some write their piteous tale on a sign, then sit beside it, giving anguished looks to passers by. Some have deformities, either genuine, exaggerated or fake: for example, a beggar might create blisters by rubbing soap and vinegar on their skin. Some wear costumes, especially a uniform to indicate their former profession: an apron for a ruined tradesman, a helmet for an injured miner, a naval costume for a wounded sailor.

Beggars must choose the right story. If a factory worker loses a limb and turns to begging, they might pretend to be a wounded soldier, posing by a picture of a great battle. If a family turns to begging, they may pose as a "clean family", wearing clean but ragged clothes to show their humility and godliness.

Most beggars frequent poorer and busier streets. Some carry something to sell, such as matches, buttons or bootlaces. Unscrupulous ones knock into passers-by, drop their wares, then ask to be paid for them.

If one of the Investigators is a beggar, fill your mystery with other beggars, from whom they can get information. Try starting a mystery with a beggar Investigator observing something amiss in the street or being given something curious by a stranger.

Beggars might get an Occupation Die for:

- ▶ Asking for money.
- ▶ Discerning whether someone is rich, from the way they are dressed.
- ▶ Knowing the layout of local streets.

BURGLARS

Burglars make their living by breaking into buildings and stealing. It is a skilled profession, involving charm, subterfuge and technical expertise.

Most burglars work in teams, targeting the houses of the middle and upper classes. Their work begins at midnight, when they start watching the house. They enter the property in the early hours and leave before dawn.

The police are the burglar's enemy. Yet, since policemen often walk the streets alone, they can often be overpowered or outrun, especially in London's twisting backstreets. An angry crowd is a greater danger: if a mob catches a housebreaker, they may parade them through the streets before beating them. For this reason, clever burglars target unpopular people.

Burglar are especially suited to mysteries that include buildings to break into, locks to pick or which otherwise reward a stealthy approach. To adapt a mystery to suit a burglar, provide opportunities for housebreaking, lockpicking and hiding. Try starting a mystery with a burglar stealing something horrific and strange. Burglars might roll their Occupation Die for:

- ▶ Guessing the layout of a house.
- ▶ Breaking into a house.
- ▶ Moving silently through a building.

For more on burglars and their methods, see "The thieves of london" on page 75.

CLEANERS

Cleaners keep London running by clearing the detritus of the living city. Without them, sewers would clog, chimneys would block and roads would be impassable, filling with animal manure, coal dust and discarded debris.

They are the invisible people of London, unnoticed by rich and poor alike. They clean the aristocracy's wide streets and grassy squares until they are white and beautiful. They clear the roads leading between the docks and markets, sweeping dust and shovelling dirt, but never quite making them clean.

There are many types of cleaners. Flushermen clean the sewers, clearing blockages and sometimes finding unimaginable half-living things. Waterers use a watering cart to hose the streets and damp the dust down. Chimney sweeps do exactly what their job title says: if they are adults, they use brushes for the sweeping; if they are children, they climb up from the fireplace, risking burial in soot.

Cleaners are never rich, but neither are they poor. Since few ordinary people want a dirty job, there is always work.

There are benefits too: cleaners often find interesting things as they work. Some are things they can use, such as tools, boxes or bottles. Some are things they can sell, such as glass, iron, tobacco or a lost silk handkerchief. And some things, especially in dark or hidden corners, are horrific.

When you have a cleaner in a mystery, expect them to find useful information from dust and debris. Fill your mystery with dirty rooms, detritus and discarded items.

Cleaners might get an Occupation Die for:

- ▶ Finding a useful object in the streets.
- ▶ Discovering clues in the dirt or grease of a room.

CLERKS

Clerks work in offices, either for public services such as the Post Office or for commercial interests such as railways, factories and shipping companies.

They are proficient in shorthand and typing, using the latest technology in their work: the typewriter, the filing cabinet and index cards.

They belong to the new middle classes. Clerks are literate and educated, although probably at a local school rather than the boarding schools attended by the aristocracy. Despite their low salaries, their jobs require them to wear respectable clothes. To save money, many live near work or commute on the cheap trains that run before 8 o'clock in the morning.

With any remaining money, clerks live a modern urban lifestyle. They might go to the theatre, sitting in one of the lower circles, or read popular literature. They might meet in tea houses or eat at supper clubs.

Clerks are especially suited for mysteries where the horror lies within a corporation or other large institution. When one of the Investigators is a clerk, put books and bureaucratic records into your mystery, in which they can find information.

Clerks might get an Occupation Die for:

- ▶ Searching files or bureaucratic records.
- ▶ Knowing something about popular places of entertainment.
- ▶ Passing among the middle or upper classes without attracting attention.

COSTERMONGERS

Costermongers sell their wares in London's markets and streets, specialising in one product, such as fish, tonics or cloth.

Many sell from a wooden barrow, which they wheel around the streets, following their "round": the regular route along they sell their goods. These costermongers know London's hidden places: the mews behind gentlemen's houses, where coachmen buy luxuries; the courts and alleys of the poorer neighbourhoods, where people buy bargains; the crowded and loud markets, where shoppers haggle over prices.

Other costermongers sell food and drink, ready to eat: the ham sandwich seller outside a theatre, the fried fish vendor near the docks, the coffee cart owner near the parks. Poorer costermongers,

especially the young and old, sell from baskets in markets. For some, there is a thin and hazy line between selling and begging: take the watercress girl, who buys watercress in bunches before dawn in Farringdon Market, then scrapes a living by selling them all day for four a penny.

All are experts at persuading people to buy. Some use charm, some use pity. Some illuminate their stalls brightly. Others shout loudly: many costermongers have hoarse voices from years of selling.

Not all costermongers are honest. Some mix sweet apples with sour ones or living fish with dead. Some boil their oranges to make them bigger: these fruit have little taste and go black within a day. Even an honest fishmonger knows that herrings look fresher when sprayed with water and lit by candlelight.

Costermongers might get an Occupation Die for:

- ▶ Selling something.
- ▶ Knowing about the thing they sell.
- ▶ Knowing about the locations on their round.

FACTORY WORKERS

London's factories are multiplying rapidly. They stand several storeys high, powered by steam, belching smoke. They make silk in Spitalfields, textiles in Kings Cross and matches in Bow.

For the employees, the work is always dangerous and often unhealthy: workers in textile factories, for example, are constantly wet, sprayed by the water that soaks the cotton. Hours are long and work is seasonal: in winter, workers often find themselves without jobs.

Women, in particular, fight constantly for work. When heavier machinery is introduced, requiring greater physical force, factory foremen often prefer male employees. Trade unions frequently close ranks to exclude women.

For many, though, factory work is modern and exciting. Workers receive good wages and enjoy the camaraderie of fellow workers. Many enjoy their independence, spending their earnings on trinkets and city life.

When an Investigator is a factory worker, put factories or machinery in your mystery. Try a mystery set in a factory, in which the workers investigate the factory owners and the horror at the heart of what they do.

Factory workers might roll their Occupation Die for:

- ▶ Understanding the workings of a factory.
- ▶ Understanding what machinery does.
- ▶ Working machinery.

FARM WORKERS

Farm workers learned their trade outside London. Some came to the city to sell their goods, others for a new life.

Most grew up on a family farm. If the farm grew vegetables, such as potatoes and turnips, they ploughed, planted and harvested. If the farm contained a dairy, they milked cows and made cheese and butter.

Farm workers understand nature, weather and the changing of seasons. Their honesty, strength and reputation for hard work makes them popular with employers in London: indeed, farm girls have a reputation of being the best domestic servants.

Farm workers are especially suited for mysteries set in the countryside, especially, of course, those that include a farm. When they take part in mysteries in London, it helps if they encounter things they might encounter in the countryside, such as crops, animals or bad weather.

Farm workers might roll their Occupation Die for:

- ▶ Understanding the weather.
- ▶ Knowing about the workings of a farm.
- ▶ Examining agricultural crops.

HOUSEWIVES

Housewives keep houses running, whether that house is a farmhouse, townhouse or slum dwelling.

Keeping house is hard work. Housewives shop, clean and launder. They lift heavy loads, cook food and budget so that the money lasts until the end of the week. They know their house and their

neighbourhood better than anyone: they know the smells, the sounds and the location of everything. They especially know if something is wrong.

Many housewives are mothers: they nurse babies, raise children and try to instill values into young people as they grow. These Investigators understand children better than anyone else.

On top of this, many housewives support themselves by working from home. Some take in laundry or mend clothes, while others make toys, pegs or trinkets.

Mysteries with housewives work especially well if they are located in the housewife's neighbourhood or even their house itself. If they have children, ensure they are threatened by the horror. You can also ensure your mystery contains houses, which are obviously lived in, with laundry, dirt and provisions from which housewives can deduce information about the occupants.

Housewives might roll their Occupation Die for:

- ▶ Understanding something about a house's occupants, by looking around the house.
- ▶ Knowing the layout of their local neighbourhood.
- ▶ Deducing whether their child is lying to them.

MUDLARKS

Mudlarks wade through the stinking mud of the Thames, searching for anything they can sell. They are young boys, old women and anything in between.

Their work begins when the tide goes out. As the Thames recedes, mudlarks venture into the silt, collecting whatever they find in hats or tin kettles. They wade waist- or chest-deep, risking death if the mud gives way into a sudden hole.

The greatest prize is copper, especially copper nails dropped by sailors repairing boats. Iron, brass and other metals are equally prized, as are rope, bones and cloth. Chips of wood or coal are valuable, too: a mudlark collects these until they have enough to sell. When the tide comes in, the mudlarks' work finishes, and they sell what have gathered to rag-and-bone collectors, shopkeepers, pawnbrokers or whoever else will buy.

Mudlarks are often drawn into mysteries when they find something peculiar in the mud. They are especially suited for mysteries involving the Thames: when there is a Mudlark in the game, put your locations near the river.

Mudlarks might roll their Occupation Die for:

- ▶ Finding something buried in the river mud.
- ▶ Finding a safe path through the river.
- ▶ Understanding something about the river.

NURSES

Nurses care for the sick, providing compassion, care and basic remedies. At a time when medicine had few answers, nursing is the best hope for the injured and sick.

Most nurses work in the great London hospitals, especially St Thomas's, Guys or the Royal Free. They dispense tea, sympathy and prescriptions of bedrest. Perhaps most importantly, in a world where medicine barely understands the benefits of sanitation, they cleaned.

Nurses often find their work rewarding, but find their lives constrained. They live within the hospital, where they are provided with meals and rooms. They have little freedom, being closely supervised at times.

If one of the Investigators is a nurse, put an injured or diseased person in your mystery. Nurses are particularly suited to mysteries involving diseases, deformities or other peculiarities of the human body.

Nurses might roll their Occupation Die when:

- ▶ Examining someone with a medical condition.
- ▶ Trying to keep a patient calm.
- ▶ Administering medical aid.

OUTWORKERS

Many Londoners take their work home. In the streets, you often pass people carrying stacks of hats to re-silk, bundles of umbrellas to re-cover or baskets to repair. These are London's outworkers.

Laundry is the most common kind of outwork. Women support themselves by taking in washing and doing simple repairs, such as mending tears or sewing on buttons. Needlework is also popular: clothesmakers often outsource tasks to women who work from home.

Some outworkers are makers and menders. They might make wooden spoons, toasting forks or clothes pegs, selling to whoever will buy. They might mend china, glass or kettles. Some are exceptionally skilled, such as printers, furniture-makers and toymakers.

Yet outwork is rarely lucrative. Most outworkers find another way to support themselves, whether legal (selling pies from their window) or less so (selling their body).

Since outworkers collect from all over London, they know London's geography better than most. They are skilled at communicating with the middle- and upper-classes without causing offense.

If you have an outworker in your mystery, give them the chance to travel about London, setting different scenes in disparate parts of the city. Try incorporating things connected to the Outworker's trade: for example, if an Investigator is an outworker who does needlework, let them get information from the state of someone's clothes.

Outworkers might roll their Occupation Die for:

- ▶ Finding their way about an area of London they have visited.
- ▶ Getting information related to their particular trade: for example, working out someone's social status from their hat.

PERFORMERS

Performers put on shows in London's streets and fairs, making money by drawing crowds. Some have a skill, some look unusual, while others have something to display.

Skilled performers are often musicians, playing an unusual instrument such as bagpipes, harp or dulcimer. Others sing, especially psalms or popular ballads. Still others dance. Then there are

performers with specific skills: those who eat fire, put on puppet shows or train a bear to perform tricks.

Performers with an unusual appearance include giants, albinos, dwarfs and people with tattoos. In a city which loves exceptional people, these performers could make an excellent living, even passing into high society as their fame grew.

Other performers might exhibit something to draw crowds, such as a peep show, wax work or flea circus. Victorians especially loved science, making telescopes, microscopes and other technological marvels especially popular.

When one of the Investigators is a performer, try putting something relevant to their act in the mystery. For example, if an Investigator is a glass-blower, put a piece of peculiar glassware in the story, which they can investigate to get information. If an Investigator owns a microscope, put a microscopic clue in the mystery. If they have a dog, ensure there are places that only a dog can go.

Performers might roll their Occupation Die for:

- ▶ Drawing the attention of a crowd.
- ▶ Using their particular skill, such as dancing, glass-blowing or operating their scientific instrument.

PICKPOCKET

Pickpockets steal wallets, handkerchiefs, watches and anything else they can get, before selling them onwards.

Pickpockets, like burglars, possess specialist skills. Some silently cut trouser pockets with a knife, then rifle its contents. Some cut watch chains or use hooks to steal bags. Pickpockets are adept at distractions: when pickpockets work in gangs, one may cause a disturbance, while the others steal.

After the crime, pickpockets sell their stolen goods, often to pawnbrokers or patrons of coffee houses. They may sell some items to shopkeepers: for example, silk handkerchiefs might sell to less scrupulous tailors.

As pickpockets gain experience, they graduate to more expensive items. A young pickpocket may begin by snatching from market stalls and grabbing handkerchiefs, progress to stealing watches and scarf pins, then finally take gentlemen's wallets.

Pickpockets often live together in a lodging house. They may be trained by an experienced thief, in extensive and technical lessons. They might learn to steal handkerchiefs from their trainer, who walks around with one in his pocket. Or a coat may be hung with a bell attached, from which boys must steal without making a sound.

When an Investigator is a pickpocket, provide opportunities for them to use their skills: that is, put interesting things in other people's pockets for them to retrieve.

Pickpockets might roll their Occupation Die for:

- ▶ Causing a distraction.
- ▶ Picking pockets.

For more on pickpockets and their methods, see "The thieves of London" on page 75.

PICKERS

Pickers make their living by finding things in London's streets. Some specialise in a particular item, while others take whatever they can find.

There is much to discover. Some collect cigar stubs, which they combine until they have enough tobacco to sell. Some collect dog excrement, called "pure", which they sell in buckets to leatherworkers. Others, known as "rag and bone men", explore backstreets with a bag and stick, poking through dust piles to find metal, bones and cloth.

Few pickers have a home. Instead, they roam London's streets endlessly, rising early to follow a known route. At the end of the day, they sort what they have found into piles, which they take to storekeepers, pawnbrokers and other buyers.

When you have a Picker in your game, let them find information by discovering things in the streets. If you can, set the mystery in streets they know well.

Pickers might roll the Occupation Die when:

- ▶ Searching London's back streets for something.
- ▶ Examining an item with which they are familiar.
- ▶ Exploring an area they know well.

PROSTITUTES

London is home to many prostitutes, young and old, high and low class, some men but lots of women. Some choose their profession, while others find it is the only work available.

Some prostitutes work in brothels, which range from respectable-looking houses to run-down shacks, giving a share of their earnings to the owner. These prostitutes benefit from the protection of the house, including thugs employed to keep order, but have little freedom.

Others ply their trade in parks, streets and coffee houses. The Haymarket is a notorious street for prostitution, while London's parks become lively centres of solicitation as night approaches. These ladies wear the finest dresses they can afford, although the dark makes this easier, making a shabby, lacy garment look rich.

Some prostitutes even make a good living, especially those who romance rich men or members of the aristocracy. These men may set the prostitute up as their mistress, with a house or apartment, and jewellery, carriages and other luxuries. These women have much freedom in their choice of men. One day, they may even marry.

Prostitutes are sometimes coerced into their work. Country girls tell tales of visiting London, often at the invitation of a man, then being seduced in a brothel under the influence of alcohol. Afterwards, they are given clothes and asked to sign papers of dubious legality. If these prostitutes try to leave the brothel, they are followed and even arrested, on the grounds they are stealing the clothes they were given.

When one of the Investigators is a prostitute, try putting a brothel or a fellow prostitute in the mystery.

Prostitutes might roll the Occupation Die when:

- ▶ Getting information from another prostitute.
- ▶ Knowing the workings of a brothel.

SERVANTS

Servants work in other people's homes, cleaning, cooking and running the household. They work hard, rising before dawn and retiring late at night.

Most work for middle-class families in small townhouses. Often, they are the only servant (a "maid of all work"), performing all household tasks: blacking grates, making fires, cleaning boots, making beds, washing windows, sweeping floors and cooking and serving meals. If a visitor calls, they change into a smarter uniform to answer the door. Such servants have a solitary life, rarely leaving the house.

Others work in country houses, as part of the staff that serves an aristocratic family. These servants work within a strict hierarchy: the scullery maid below the housemaid, the housemaid below the chambermaid and the housekeeper highest of all.

For their work, servants receive food and a small wage. They have little time off and are not allowed to marry: admittedly, this situation is welcome to some women, since it relieves them of the need to find a husband to support them. Especially in townhouses, servants are often in sight or sound of their employer. These servants are closely watched and their habits scrutinised: for example, spending money on luxuries is often met with disapproval.

To involve servants in a mystery, put middle- or upper-class houses into it, together with staff from whom the Investigators can get information. Try setting a mystery entirely in a country house, with servants as the Investigators.

Servants might roll the Occupation Die for:

- ▶ Getting information from other servants.
- ▶ Passing among servants without being noticed.
- ▶ Understanding something about how a house works: for example, who would serve dinner.

SHOPGIRLS

Shopgirls work in London's new and glamorous department stores. Most are educated young women, with genteel accents, good grammar and manners to please the customers they serve.

Like clerks, shopgirls must balance low income with the need to fit into high-class surroundings. Most shop girls live in the store, sleeping in dormitories. On their small wage, they must clothe and groom themselves to impress their customers.

For those that achieve this balance, the bright lights of London are there to enjoy. They may visit restaurants, cafes and the theatre. Some dream of meeting a husband, while others plan to make it on their own.

To tailor a mystery to a shopgirl, try putting clothes, perfume or other things the shopgirl can investigate in a mystery. Try setting a mystery within a department store.

Shopgirls might roll the Occupation Die for:

- ▶ Recognising a perfume, understanding something about clothes or otherwise using knowledge of the things they sell.
- ▶ Selling something to a middle or upper-class customer.
- ▶ Knowing how a department store works.

TEACHERS

Teachers educate children, working at an elementary school (for younger children) or grammar school (for older children).

Most have never left school. They come from the lower middle-classes: their parents might be clerks, salespeople or shopkeepers. When they attended school as pupils, they became an unofficial apprentice to their teacher, before attending a religious teacher training college.

Teachers' days are long, with the school day beginning at nine in the morning and ends at half-past four. Afterwards, they have paperwork and other duties to perform. Most live cheaply, perhaps in lodgings or with their parents.

Teachers are experts at understanding children, so when one of the Investigators is a teacher, it is best if the mystery features a child.

Teachers might roll the Occupation Die for:

- ▶ Questioning a child to get information.
- ▶ Controlling a group of children.
- ▶ Understanding the workings of a school.

TOSHERS

Toshers risk their lives in the crumbling netherworld of the sewers. Like Pickers (above), they make their living from the lost, discarded and dropped items of London.

Toshers enter the sewers at huge brick outlets, where the effluent discharges into the river. Once inside, the sewers are disorientating and twisting, constantly crossing each other. Many passageways are blocked.

The work is dangerous. Brickwork may crumble when disturbed, burying the tosher. A fall could kill, trap or disable them. A tide, flood or sudden discharge could drown the tosher.

The tool of the tosher's trade is a long pole. With this, they can rake through mud, break apart detritus and push aside barriers. It can even save the tosher's life: if a tosher suddenly sinks into an unexpected hole, their pole may be the only thing to stop their descent. Along with the pole, toshers carry small lamps, which they dim when passing beneath street grates, to avoid attracting attention.

For those that survive, the rewards are large. Copper and iron are plentiful, stuck in indentations and cracks in brickwork. Since detritus collects together, any find is likely to be large: toshers may find large and valuable collections of metal, bones and other valuables. Toshers tell tales of rusted masses of nails, built up over years, valuable beyond belief but stuck in place. To adapt a mystery for a tosher, put part of it in a sewer. This is especially easy if your mystery ends underground: simply ensure the final location is accessed via the sewers. Remember that sewers make excellent conduits, especially between inaccessible, forbidden and forgotten areas. Use the tosher's skills in navigating sewers to help the Investigators access new places.

Toshers might roll their Occupation Die for:

- ▶ Finding a way through London's sewers.
- ▶ Discovering something useful in the sewers.

A GUIDE TO LONDON

To understand the geography of London, you must understand what divides it. London is divided North to South by the river Thames, with the dense streets of North London holding most locations of importance. And it is divided West to East by money: the rich live to the West, the poor to the East.

Mysteries often start in London's East End, where many Investigators live. There, luckier Investigators might live in rented rooms, while poorer Investigators rent beds in lodging houses. Many live in twisting mazes of alleys and courts called rookeries (see below).

Here too are the docks, where the world's goods arrive for London to consume. They are surrounded by shops and workshops, including tanners, silkworkers and blacksmiths. There are also pubs, theatres and other places of entertainment (see below).

From there, most mysteries take the Investigators westwards. West of the docks and rookeries is the most ancient part of London, known as the City. Here are London's great banks, in monolithic stone buildings among winding streets.

Further west is Covent Garden, one of London's biggest and busiest markets (see below), selling fruit and vegetables. Then comes Leicester Square, a tawdry place full of cheap amusements, then Trafalgar Square, a newly-built monument to British victories.

Next comes the home of British government, Westminster, which in 1851 is curiously derelict. 10 Downing Street, the Prime Minister's official residence, is crumbling and rat-infested, while most other houses in Downing Street have been demolished. The Houses of Parliament are being rebuilt in Gothic splendour following a fire, although the old scorched buildings still stand.

Further west, London becomes richer. Here are the great squares, including Berkeley, Belgrave and Grosvenor Square. Each is surrounded by white mansions, where the aristocracy and others with money live. Behind the mansions are cobbled

alleys and courtyards, through which servants reach the backs of the houses. This area also holds many of London's great parks, including Green Park, St James Park and the huge Hyde Park, site of the Great Exhibition (see below).

Here, in the richest part of London, is where Investigators are likely to find the horror.

THE ROOKERIES

Rookeries are slums, inhabited by thieves, prostitutes and other poor Londoners. They are dirty, overcrowded and noisy, but to many, they are home.

Finding your way through a rookery takes skill. You must navigate a writhing mass of alleys and courtyards, along passageways that pass through basements, up stairways and across rooftops. To reach your destination, you may need to climb, duck or squeeze between buildings.

Shops line the streets. There are bakers' shops with illuminated fronts, selling fat loaves and buns. There are stores selling old clothes and shoes. Costermongers wheel barrows through the streets, while housewives sell pies, pasties and sandwiches from their windows.

And the streets are full of people. Some lean against walls and smoke pipes. Some sit outside houses, talking with neighbours. Crowds form around doorways and corners to meet and talk, while children play in dust heaps.

Although a rookery's residents are poor, they often take pride in their houses. On entering a well-kept house, you might find an airy living room, warmed by a coke fire, with crockery displayed on a dresser. Over the fire might hang a saucepan for cooking or a boiler for making tea, with candles or gas lamps providing light. Upstairs, there would be small rooms, each containing a flock bed, stuffed with scraps of wool or cotton. There are blinds at the window, clothes kept in baskets and jugs of water for washing.

In less well-kept houses, wallpaper peels from the wall, roofs bulge with water and windows are broken. Cracks in the wall are stuffed with rags. In these houses, chimneys are often blocked, so that heating the room fills it with smoke.

People are often neighbourly and compassionate. When someone is dying, neighbours visit them. When someone is in financial trouble, a purse is passed around friends, who each contribute a penny. People in rookeries take care of each other.

Rookeries are friendly neighbourhoods to those that live there. To those that do not, especially of the middle classes, rookeries are suspicious, confusing and dangerous, with the St Giles and Old Nichol rookeries being particularly notorious.

ENTERTAINMENT

London is filled with cheap entertainment, with pubs, theatres and other diversions competing for attention. These make excellent locations for a mystery.

For the price of a beer, the pub provides conversation, warmth and merriment. In the thick tobacco smoke, all types of person mingle, with thieves, prostitutes and thugs alongside ordinary working folk. Market traders are here, too, talking about the day's trade.

Pub games are popular. In "shove ha'penny", players throw halfpennies against a wall, winning if the coins fall all heads-up or all tails-up. In "skittles", players roll a ball and win if they knock the skittles down. Card games such as cribbage and whist are popular, often played with stained cards for a bet of money or beer. And all these games are popular with conmen. Card sharks fix the deck; regulars collude to fleece newcomers; and skilled ha'penny players throw coins so they land the right way up.

Bloodier games are even more popular. For a penny, drinkers can rent boxing gloves from behind the bar: fighters play to a bloody nose, with the loser buying the winner beer. Pubs may have dog pits in the back yard, at which drinkers bet on fights between dogs and rats.

When not in the pub, Londoners love to dance. For two pence, Londoners can attend a "tuppenny hop", dancing the hornpipe, jig or polka to a fiddle or harp, late into the night. Novelty dances are especially popular: for example, in a "pipe dance", tobacco pipes are laid along the floor, between which dancers tiptoe, trying not to break them.

And then there is the theatre. For three pence, Londoners can join the crowd at the Royal Victorian Theatre ("The Vic"). Watching from an upstairs gallery, the crowd participates noisily, shouting at actors, joining in songs and throwing nuts and orange peel. Dances and comic songs are popular, with audience favourites often being repeated. For those hungry after the show, traders sell ham sandwiches, pigs trotters and porter outside the theatre.

Those who cannot afford the Vic might pay a penny to see theatre in a pub. These homespun productions consist of several short entertainments, which often include patriotic songs and tales of murder and tragedy.

Parks are even more popular. Being free, they fill quickly with those who cannot afford to go elsewhere. By day, they are places to sit, relax and watch. By night, they are prime locations for romantic - and less romantic - liaisons.

For those who can spare a few pennies, the spectacular pleasure gardens of Vauxhall and Cremorne contain many diversions: ponds with imitation Greek statues, lit by gas; aerial spectacles, such as fireworks and balloon ascents; and the chance to meet a partner or prostitute while promenading among the trees.

Finally, Londoners often make their own entertainment. Rat killing is a common pastime: rats are turned out of a stable or yard, then chased by dogs. Discussion groups and political assemblies meet in back rooms of pubs.

But the most popular free pastime is fighting. It often starts with an argument, around which forms a ring of spectators, who chant for a fight. For the young, beating policemen is common sport: they wait in a dark alley for a policeman to pass, throw a stone, then, when he comes to investigate, leap on him.

MARKETS

On entering one of London's markets, the noise and light hits you. Market sellers shout their wares, trying to be heard above each other: some traders hire extra men to shout for them. Housewives bargain for meat and vegetables. The market stalls are brightly lit, especially in the evening: grease lamps hang above them; fires glow from stoves; candles burn inside huge turnips and swedes.

The market stalls themselves are varied and colourful. On one, you might see a shining pile of tin saucepans. On another, red handkerchiefs clash with blue shirts. On the greengrocer's stall, there are red apples, yellow onions and purple cabbages. On the butcher's stall, meat glistens in bloody piles. At the cutler's stall, knives glint in the sun. All this is accompanied by a barrage of smells: oranges, walnuts, onions, the bitter odour of herbal remedies.

All kinds of traders come here. Farmers' boys bring carts, heaped with greens. Old women squat beside baskets of potatoes. Young flower girls thread through the crowds, selling posies of violets. If any Investigators make their living by selling, they probably come to a market to do so.

There are markets throughout London, each focussing on particular goods. Covent Garden specialises in fruit and vegetables. Smithfield specialises in meat. Then there are smaller local markets, and beyond those, a myriad of roadside stalls and street sellers. Wherever you go in London, someone is buying and someone is selling.

WESTMINSTER

Further west is Westminster, a tiny block of grand buildings, from which Britain and its Empire is governed.

Here is how the government of Victorian Britain works. Parliament consists of two legislative chambers: the House of Lords, comprised of aristocrats, bishops and judges; and the House of Commons, comprised of representatives from across Britain, elected by men who own land in each region. These representatives of the two

Houses, known as Members of Parliament, fall mostly into two parties, the conservative Tories and the slightly-less-conservative Whigs.

From this collection of men - and they are all men, even if they are not gentlemen - the monarch, Queen Victoria, chooses a Prime Minister. She cannot, in practice, choose whoever she wants: she requires someone with enough allies to pass legislation, for which only a few candidates fit the bill. As such, Victorian Prime Ministers are largely undistinguished. In 1851, the Prime Minister is Lord Russell: if you are wondering why you haven't heard of him, it is because, like other Victorian Prime Ministers, he is forgettable.

Whoever the Prime Minister is, he leads the Government and appoints Ministers, each with a particular area of responsibility. These Ministers are supported by the Civil Service, an unelected, apolitical institution which remains unchanged between Prime Ministers and governments.

All this happens around Parliament Square, a maddening tangle of traffic and pedestrians. On the west side is the imposing Westminster Abbey. On the south side, the new Houses of Parliament are being constructed, with a Gothic clock tower overlooking the Thames. The old, burned-out building also remains: in the less-damaged parts, the Members of Parliament continue their business.

Heading east from Parliament Square is Whitehall. Here are the grand buildings of the Civil Service: the Treasury, which administers finances; the Colonial Office, which deals with the Empire; the Foreign Office, which deals with the rest of the world. On the left is Downing Street, a narrow, dark road containing the Prime Minister's official home and office, currently rat-infested and crumbling. At the end of Whitehall is Trafalgar Square, a newly-built memorial where the war hero Admiral Nelson stands atop a column.

Yet, in an important sense, all this grandeur is an illusion. For, in reality, the business of government is not done here, but in the houses, clubs and other haunts of the aristocracy.

THE SQUARES

Towards the west of London, the crowd subsides and an eerie hush pervades. This is where the richest, most powerful Londoners live.

Here, there are wide streets, walled gardens and white mansions. There are few signs of life: an elderly lady climbing into a waiting carriage, a powdered butler on a doorstep, horses riding through the streets. Mostly, however, the rich live their lives behind the closed doors.

What are those lives like? There are great balls, with attendees in silks and diamonds. There are opulent dinners, served on silver and gold plate. The guests are aristocrats and perhaps royalty, although not the unsociable Queen Victoria, nor her unpopular husband Prince Albert (although his popularity soared after the Great Exhibition, see below). But a minor royal, a cousin or niece of the Queen, might come.

And then there is business. For the aristocracy, this is conducted in gentlemen's clubs around London's parks, such as The Reform, the Travellers and the Athenaeum. On the outside, these clubs are discreet, only a brass plaque announcing their presence. Inside, they are luxurious, with statues, portraits and extensive libraries. While Parliament is under repair, much government business is conducted here.

This, then, is where London's power lies. Here are the rich, here is the aristocracy, here is where Britain and the Empire are governed.

TRAVEL AND LIGHT

If the Investigators started walking from the East End in the morning, they might arrive at Hyde Park by evening. This is because the streets are crammed, with pedestrians, coaches, horses, bicycles, omnibuses, carts pulled by donkeys, farmers driving cattle to market and many more, sharing the road in a chaotic swarm.

Similarly, the buildings of central London are chaotically jammed together. Walking down a single street, the Investigators might pass a dairy, an abbatoir, a church and several pubs, in close proximity. This means that milkmaids with

pails of milk, animals driven to slaughter, pious churchgoers and raucous drinkers all jostle past each other in the street.

By evening, the city is mostly dark. Flickering, sooty oil lamps light the streets, with major bridges and thoroughfares lit with astonishing brightness by modern gas lamps. Beyond these streets are unlit alleys and courtyards, black and threatening. Blazing in the darkness are the lights of commercial premises, especially pubs, to welcome customers.

Other than walking, how might the Investigators travel? For a penny, they might take the omnibus: a horse-drawn carriage, with passengers crammed both inside and on the roof. It is a favourite haunt of pickpockets.

Or they might travel along the river. Investigators could hire a waterman in his rowboat or join middle-class commuters on the steamers. These steamers were not always safe. Sometimes, they pulled away from the bank suddenly, dropping boarding passengers to their deaths in the filthy water. Sometimes, as the pilot tried to wring extra speed from the ship, the boiler would explode, destroying the ship and killing many passengers.

Richer Investigators might take a coach. In London and beyond, roads are lined with services for coaches, including coach houses, where travellers can stop for the night, and pubs, where owner and driver can drink in separate bars. Most bridges have a pub beside them, where the coach owner waits while his driver weaves through the crowd. Roads are lined with turnpikes and toll-booths to extract money from road-users.

If Investigators travel outside London, they might take the train. In 1851, railway mania is at its height, with new stations constantly being built. Fenchurch Street and Waterloo stations have just opened, for those travelling east and south respectively. For those travelling north, Euston and Kings Cross are under construction.

Train passengers can relax in the cushioned carriages of First Class, sit on the hard benches of Second Class or stand like cattle in the box-like carts of Third Class, open to wind and rain. Wherever you sit or stand, train travel is dirty

and sooty, with steam, grease and coal smoke everywhere. Yet it is also affordable. Indeed, by Parliamentary decree, cheap trains ferry workers into London first thing in the morning, at a cost of a penny per passenger.

COMMUNICATIONS

In Victorian London, letters were the best way to communicate. There were several postal deliveries a day, each for the price of a penny stamp. For many, letter-writing was not just a convenience, but a hobby.

Newspapers were also popular, ranging from the upmarket Times to the popular Weekly Dispatch, with a range of specialist and humorous magazines in between. Those who could not afford their own copy could read one - or have it read to them - in a coffee house, for the price of a drink.

Books, too, were popular, with booksellers on major streets and at railway stations. Ballad-sellers were also a familiar sight, selling popular songs on flimsy sheets for a penny.

Finally, there was the telegraph. This technological marvel, although not yet in common use, sent electric messages instantly over long distances. It was one of many wonders at the Great Exhibition (see "The Great Exhibition" on page 74).

POLICE, FIRE AND HEALTH

In 1851, London has a new, small police force. It is well-regarded, but not always in control. Police-baiting is popular sport for children and adults alike. When criminals are caught by a policeman, they often fight back and win.

There is also a fire brigade, which employs watchmen to stand on rooftops. If they spot a fire, a fire engine is despatched through the crowded streets. When it arrives at the burning building, bystanders are engaged for a few pennies to work the engine. All this activity stops fires spreading, but does not stop them destroying property and killing people.

For the sick, there are doctors, hospitals and nurses. Victorian medicine focusses on relief and recovery, rather than cure. For any malady, doctors and nurses commonly prescribe bedrest and nourishing food.

Nevertheless, there are medical innovations. The most important is sanitation: nurses and doctors are beginning to recognise the importance of cleanliness, especially washing hands regularly. There is also pain relief, especially from laudanum, a milky-white opium drink often given to pacify children.

Diseases flourish, especially pneumonia, diphtheria, smallpox, cholera and consumption (tuberculosis), and epidemics are common. They are often blamed on "miasma theory", a widely-believed idea that "bad air" causes disease. In a city where the Thames stank of sewage, it was an understandable assumption. Once contracted, diseases are often fatal.

The poor lead short lives, with many children not surviving to adulthood. This is partly because of lack of medicines, but also because of poor public health. Water is often polluted, whether it comes from pumps, wells or (in better homes) is piped directly into homes. Nutrition is poor, with many Londoners starving or filling themselves with poor-quality bread.

One practical effect of this is that the poor are physically shorter than the upper and middle classes. In mysteries, Investigators will discover that the aristocracy literally looks down on them.

MONEY

Three coins matter in Victorian London: the penny, the shilling and the pound. They are made of copper, silver and gold respectively. Twelve pennies make a shilling, twenty shillings make a pound.

Alongside those three coins, there is a bewildering array of others. The smallest is a farthing (a quarter of a penny), followed by a half-penny (pronounced "hay-penny"). Then comes the penny, followed by a silver three-penny (a "thrupenny bit") and a sixpence. After that is the shilling, the florin (two shillings), the half-crown (2s 6d) and the

crown (5s). The gold pound coin is a “sovereign” and, although it isn’t a coin, a guinea is one pound and one shilling, with higher prices often being quoted in guineas. For higher denominations, starting with £5, there were large banknotes from the Bank of England.

Pounds, shillings and pence were denoted ‘£’, ‘s’ and ‘d’. Hence, prices were written “£1 2s”, “1s 1d” and “½d”. Alternatively, a slash might separate shillings and pence: “1/1”.

Yet, in practice, Investigators deal mostly in pennies. When you play, assume that one penny buys a cheap version of anything essential: a meal (either from a street stall or to cook), a cold bath in the public baths, a piece of string, a stamp for a letter. Two or three pennies buys most other basics: a night’s lodging, a night’s entertainment, a ride on an omnibus or steamer, a loaf of bread.

Poor Investigators, such as mudlarks and outworkers, make about sixpence a day. Most Investigators, such as costermongers and nurses, make one or two shillings a day. Any Investigators who are heading towards the middle classes, such as clerks and shopgirls, might make nearly a pound a week. Additionally, poorer Investigators might receive money from the parish or a charity, amounting to 1-3 shillings per week.

With all that said, don’t worry about exact amounts of money and don’t keep track of how much money Investigators have. Assume that Investigators have a few pennies, enough to pay for basic things. Skilled investigators, such as nurses and clerks, may have the occasional sixpence or shilling to spare. Anything higher is beyond their reach.

THE RIVER

Old Father Thames, as the river is affectionately called, is loved and feared. It is, after all, beautiful and deadly.

Every imaginable waste pours into the river: soot from factories, animal remains from abattoirs, faeces from sewers, ooze from graveyards. All this makes the water dark, stinking and slimy. When the surface is disturbed, foul gases bubble up. As the river flows, it leaves black deposits on its banks, sometimes several feet deep.

SOME PRICES

- 1/2d: Slice of pineapple.
- 1d: A penny gaff (an evening of cheap theatre) in the back room of a pub.
- 1d: Send a letter.
- 1d: Ride on a steamer.
- 1d: A sparrow to play with, a string tied to its leg.
- 1d: Two oranges, half pint of nuts, a plate of sprats or a pint of plums
- 1d: Hire boxing gloves at a pub.
- 1d: A pair of soles (fish).
- 1d: A public bath (cold).
- 2d: Attend a tuppenny hop.
- 2d: A pound of ripe cherries.
- 2d: A public bath (warm)
- 2d: A night in a bed in a cheap lodging house.
- 2d: Mackerel, six for a shilling.
- 2d: A pound of cod.
- 3d: Attend a performance at the Threepenny Gallery of the Vic.
- 3d: A threepenny newspaper.
- 3d: Tobacco.
- 3-6d: A ride on the omnibus.
- 4d: Clean bedding in a lodging house per night.
- 6d: A pound of salmon.
- 6d: Fuel, per week.
- 6d: A loaf of best wheaten bread.
- 6d: A night at the music-hall.
- 1s: Three pounds of live eels.
- 1s: Entrance into the pleasure gardens at Vauxhall or Cremorne.
- 1-3s: A week’s supply of meat, coffee, vegetables.
- 4s: A week’s supply of bread.
- 1-3s per week: A standard grant for a poor person “on the parish”.
- 4s: Rent rooms per week.
- 5s: Entry into the Great Exhibition.
- 3d an hour: Work at the docks.
- 7s/week: Crossing-sweepers salary, seasonal.
- 6-8s/week: A trader’s earnings.
- 9s/ week: A milkmaid’s earnings.
- £1/ week: A food seller’s earnings.
- £1 10s/week: A carpenter’s earnings.
- £2/week: A tosher’s earnings.
- £1: A singing nightingale.
- £1-2: A labourer’s weekly salary.
- £1-3: A donkey.
- 3 guineas: A season ticket to the Great Exhibition.

There are many stories about the Thames. Huge animals are rumoured to live in its depths. Sailors take casks of Thames water to sea: it is foul for the first weeks, but, after the sediment settles, it never goes bad. Animal corpses sometimes bob in the river: they return every day with the tide, growing larger, until they sink.

People have tried to clean the Thames. They have poured buckets of lime into it, leaving the river banks seething with dying red worms. For the poor, for whom the river is their only source of water, the Thames is poisonous.

Floods are especially deadly. When the Thames bursts its banks, a torrent of water races into London's low-lying, poorer areas. The water's weight destroys doors, windows and even buildings, whose debris becomes part of the onrush. In winter, ice floats on the water.

There is little warning. Sometimes, if they think the Thames will flood, a family member keeps watch: if the river rises, they run home, shouting "The tide, the tide!". Yet, even if they get back in time, there is little to do other than grab the children and hope.

Floods leave streets chest-deep in water, houses flooded to within inches of the ceiling. When the water recedes, clothing and bedding is foul, slimy and unusable. Fireplaces are sodden, so that victims cannot heat or dry their homes. In the weeks following a flood, furniture warps, wallpaper peels, mould grows and disease, especially bronchitis, spreads.

Sometimes, residents try to fight back. They barricade streets with planks and seal windows with mud and paper. As the water rises, they hope they have done enough: will the defenses hold or suddenly burst?

There is, in fact, a reason why floods afflict Victorian London. It is profit. Mill owners like to keep the water high, since it keeps their mills running longer, so they built locks and weirs to do so. Because the water is high, low-lying areas flood regularly.

THE DOCKS

Looking east from the Tower of London, the docks seem endless. Ships are packed together, bow to stern. Smaller boats weave between them.

The docks are new. Only fifty years ago, ships unloaded their cargo on to barges, one crate at a time, which then took the goods ashore. Unloading a ship could take a month, with much lost to thieves and corrupt officials. In these new docks, unloading takes only a day, as steam-powered and hydraulic cranes hoist cargo upwards from the ships, then swing it ashore.

Like the markets, the docks are a riot of colour: white flour, black coal, brown tobacco, red wine, the deep blue of indigo dye. The goods come from all over the Empire: feathers, mahogany, spices, tea, corn, timber, marble, wool, with each dock specialising in particular items. There is also a crowd of people: sailors, labourers, porters with carts, clerks with pens and books, Customs officials and newly-arrived emigrants, all jostling with each other, carrying barrels, bushels and baskets.

Once the crates are ashore, vans take them to warehouses. There, they are unpacked and checked for damage, under the gaze of Customs officers. The goods then await the inspection of brokers, who sell the goods onwards.

Around the warehouses are other buildings. There are Customs offices and storage sheds. There are shopfronts with carpenters, wheelwrights, chain-sellers, painters and blacksmiths. And, of course, there are taverns.

THE GREAT EXHIBITION

One event dominated London in 1851: the Great Exhibition. It is a perfect setting for many mysteries.

Organised by Prince Albert, the Queen's husband, the Great Exhibition was designed as an international exhibition of art, technology and other marvels, in which Britain's exhibits would lead the way. It was intended to showcase Britain's greatness. Nobody expected it to work.

London's Hyde Park was chosen as the venue. Since the park's trees could not be disturbed, a great glass palace was built to enclose them and host the Exhibition.

When the Investigators visit, the Great Exhibition is extraordinary. The glass structure is draped in red, white and blue, the colours of Britain's flag. Stalls sell tea and lemonade to crowds. At the centre, a 27-foot fountain made of pink crystal shoots water into the air. Statues line the halls, including - as a commentary on American affairs - an intricately carved Greek slave girl, her face's contours perfectly visible under a veil.

The exhibits are more extraordinary still. There is cutting-edge technology: the telegraph, the railway, photography and a working model of Liverpool's new docks. The United States pavilion displays a Colt revolver, agricultural equipment and an artificial leg. France displays textiles, china and tapestry, while the Indian pavilion shows a golden throne, a stuffed elephant and the astonishing Koh-i-Noor diamond, suspended above the exhibition floor.

By the time it ends, there is no doubt that the Great Exhibition has been a success. It has drawn tourists from all around the country, paying 5s to travel on "Exhibition trains". Over 6 million people visit the Great Exhibition.

THE THIEVES OF LONDON

Theft is at the heart of Victorian London. Sooner or later, Investigators will meet thieves or use their methods: that is, if they are not already thieves themselves.

There are **sneak thieves**, who simply snatch goods and run. Shops and markets are a favourite target, especially those with items displayed in open windows or old women selling fruit from baskets.

Sneak thieves often work together: one causes a distraction, while another snatches the item. Others watch for policemen or trip anyone who tries to pursue the thief. After stealing, the thief passes the stolen goods to an accomplice, and, if caught, will protest their innocence.

Sneak thieves have many tricks. One may throw a cap into a shop, then create chaos as they retrieve it, while an accomplice steals cash from the till. A subtler technique is "star-glazing", in which the thief forces the point of a knife into the edge of a window pane, then twists until cracks spread through the glass. Beforehand, the thief has placed sticking paper over the pane, which they then peel it away, taking the glass with it. They then steal the goods inside, with sweets and tobacco especially popular.

Children make excellent sneak thieves, being fast and hard to catch. So do women, who often escape suspicion. Women often steal rolls of cotton or carpet, which they carry away with accomplices. Butchers are another target: a woman may ask a butcher to prepare meat, then, as their back is turned, steal another piece, which they later sell in a poorer part of town.

Pickpockets flourish whenever people are close together, especially at markets, on omnibuses and in crowds. They steal wallets, watches and silk handkerchiefs, which they remove unnoticed.

Pickpockets use sophisticated techniques: on an omnibus, a pickpocket may wear a false arm, to suggest they have their hands on their lap, while their real hand picks their neighbour's pocket. They often carry knives, to slash through trouser pockets.

Burglars make their living by robbing buildings. There are many ways in. To get in through a window, a burglar might slide a leather strip through a gap to open the catch. Alternatively, they might simply stand on the shoulders of a comrade to reach an unlocked higher window.

To enter through a door, the burglar might use brute force or cut through a padlock. They might even replace the cut padlock with their own padlock, to avoid suspicion from passers-by. Burglars know which doors are likely to be less secure, with back doors and cellar flaps especially vulnerable.

Or they may access the roof, by climbing a waterspout or along the roofs of neighbouring buildings. From there, the burglar might break open an attic window or remove roof tiles to create a hole.

There are subtler ways in. One way is to gain the confidence of a servant. Some burglars pretend to fall in love, then ask where the valuables are. Others conspire with the servant, who, for a cut of the profits, provides impressions of keys in wax blocks.

When robbing a warehouse, the burglar might enter during the day and hide. After dark, they emerge and let accomplices in, with a cart waiting to remove heavy goods. Warehouse porters are notoriously open to bribes.

Once inside a building, the burglar searches silently for valuables. Gold, silver and jewellery are favourites, but clothing is also valuable. The burglar listens at doors, to find whether occupants are asleep. They climb staircases by treading on the outside of the steps, which are less likely to creak.

Burglars often use equipment. To muffle footsteps, they may wear India rubber on their feet. To pick locks, they carry skeleton keys. Carpentry equipment is especially useful: a chisel can force a locked drawer, a crowbar can wrench a door open and a hacksaw can cut through doors, partitions or floorboards.

This equipment can be used in ingenious ways. Using a jack, a burglar can force iron bars apart. Using an auger, the burglar can displace a brick in a wall, then use a crowbar to remove the mortar until a hole appears. Using a specially-made cutter, with two knives revolving around a centre bit, a burglar can cut a hole in a wooden shutter or door.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

For more details on London in 1851, I recommend the following sources, which I used while writing everything above:

- ▶ Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, a readable and contemporary account. There are several editions available and I recommend reading more than one.
- ▶ Lee Jackson's Victorian London website, <http://www.victorianlondon.org/>, an excellent source that points you towards other texts.
- ▶ Matthew Sweet's *Inventing the Victorians*, a history that suggests taking a positive look at Victorians.
- ▶ Lisa Picard's *Victorian London*, which gives detail on what everyday life in London might have been like.
- ▶ Susie Steinbach's *Women in England 1760 - 1914: A Social History*, a scholarly and comprehensive guide, which is especially useful in finding out about women's work.
- ▶ Roy Porter's *Blood and Guts: A Short History of Medicine*, an eye-opening and concise history.



SCREAMS OF THE CHILDREN

A CTHULHU DARK MYSTERY IN LONDON 1851

In Victorian London, a woman's baby is taken by faceless gentlemen. When the Investigators search for the child, their journey takes them from the crowds of the East End to the homes of the aristocracy. What they find is not just a child, but thousands of children, snatched at birth and carefully stored away.

Screams Of The Children is a Cthulhu Dark mystery about pregnancy, childbirth and monstrous offspring. It is set in London 1851, where ancient evil hides in the dark and the stink.

THE HOOK

One night, in an East End lodging house, a former resident returns. She has just given birth, but her baby was forcibly taken by the father. She wants it back.

THE FINAL HORROR

For centuries, ancient creatures have bred with humans, then taken the children away. Those children are stored beneath the Thames river, silently screaming and waiting to rise.

THE STORY

At the end of their working day, the Investigators return to the East End lodging house where they all live. There, they find Lily, a well-liked former resident who had left to get married, asleep in her old room.

Lily is weak and bleeding. She has recently given birth, but the husband took the child and turned Lily on to the streets. She wants the child back.

The Investigators head to Pimlico. There, they may visit The Duck and Feathers, a middle-class pub full of rumours about the house nearby where Lily stayed. This house is a brothel and, after talking to the prostitutes who work there, the Investigators find the room where Lily's gentleman kept her as a mistress. The Investigators hear strange tales about Lily's pregnancy, during which the child grew with unnatural speed, and rumours of baby snatching throughout London. (The gentlemen in this mystery are based on the "Deep Ones" on page 49.)

Eventually, the Investigators track Lily's gentleman to the moneyed district of Grosvenor Square. Here, they may visit The Church Of St John the Baptist, where a broken Father Little presides over a twisted religion. The Investigators may read The Book of Life, a book with the power to enforce oaths on the Investigators, and visit Ebba Abendroth, a mother whose baby cannot die.

Finally, they enter The Richard House, the family home of Lily's gentleman. The house itself is empty, but there is a cellar beneath. There, they find stacked cradles and a network of tunnels leading under London. Eventually, the tunnels lead to the Thames, where, from a silt bank, the Investigators see the faces of babies gleaming under the water.

THE INVESTIGATORS

The Investigators live in a lodging house in London's East End. They are thieves, prostitutes, street-sellers and others of the working or criminal classes. The Investigators should mostly be women, although one or two men might fit into the mystery too.

As the players make their Investigators, make sure they have:

- ▶ A relationship to Lily, who used to live in the lodging house until she left to be with her gentleman friend.
- ▶ A connection to children. For example, they may have children, they may want to have children or perhaps they cannot have children.

Do this by asking the players questions like "What is your relationship to Lily?", reminding them to keep the answers positive, and "How does your character feel about children?". You can also simply say "I'd like to give your Investigator some kind of relationship to children. What should that be?".

Alternatively, here are some example Investigators. Some of the occupations are based on those listed under "Occupations" above, while others are new.

MAGS

Occupation: Pickpocket

Mags learned her trade from an early age, wandering through the parks, colliding with gentlemen and relieving them of their handkerchiefs. When the market for silk deteriorated, she moved on to wallets. Sometimes, she stares at the white buildings surrounding the parks and wonders who lives there. They must, she thinks, be great people to have earned so much.

Men have proposed to Mags, but she has never felt any attraction in that direction. The idea of having children fills her with a fear that is not quite rational. Indeed, she has always enjoyed female companionship more, especially Lily. When Lily left the lodging house, Mags felt she was throwing her life away for a man.

ROSE

Occupation: Costermonger / Flower girl

Rose sells flowers in the streets surrounding the markets. Early every morning, she goes to Covent Garden Market to buy her flowers. Because she is pretty and girlish, she gets a good deal from the stallholders, but is clever enough not to let them overcharge her. After making the flowers into posies, she sells them to passers-by in the surrounding streets. She looks younger than her fourteen years, which often attracts a sympathetic coin.

In the evenings, she goes back to the lodging house, where she used to enjoy talking to Lily. She thought of Lily as her best friend, respecting her and looking up to her. One day, Rose always thought, she would be like Lily: she would marry a nice gentleman and have children. She wonders where Lily is now.

FLO

Occupation: Barmaid

Flo has worked in the East End all her life, first selling fruit from a barrow, then moving to a market stall. Now, she is a barmaid, minding a tiny pub that serves beer through a hatch to drinkers in the street. She hopes to save enough to buy a coffee stall.

Despite having two husbands, both of whom died, she has never had children. This, if she is honest, is a hole in her life: she has always wanted a daughter. For a long while, she thought of Lily as her daughter and was lonely when she moved on. Nevertheless, she is happy for Lily finding a husband. One day, she thinks, Lily will make a great mother.

MAEVE

Occupation: Abortionist

When Maeve was young, she was a prostitute, but lost that job when she became pregnant. Although she didn't want the baby, she didn't trust anyone to get rid of it. She had the child and tried to bring

it up herself, but it died within a year. Following that, she decided to become someone that young women could turn to with their trouble.

By talking to doctors and learning folk remedies, Maeve learned everything she could about abortion. She earned the trust of prostitutes, gaining a reputation for sympathy and safety. Today, her clients are not just prostitutes, but ordinary young women of the East End.

Once, Maeve helped Lily, when a young officer got her pregnant. Maeve had felt almost maternal towards Lily. She hopes she has found someone better than that young officer.

ANNE

Occupation: Prostitute

Anne grew up on a farm, where she always wanted to see the city lights. One day, a young gentleman offered to take her to London. Once there, she stayed in rented rooms as his mistress. She learned manners, grace and beauty, which, when that relationship ended, ensured a succession of others.

Although Anne currently has no gentleman to take care of her, she expects to find one soon and eventually marry. She envied Lily, who found such a gentleman. In the meantime, Anne spends evenings in the cafes of the West End, plying her trade and hoping to meet someone more permanent.

ROLLING FOR INFORMATION

Throughout this mystery, when information appears in italics, it's a clue that Investigators might need to roll to discover it. For example, when you read about the Duck and Feathers pub below, you'll read this:

The house is a brothel: gentlemen arrive at all hours of the day and night, hiding their faces. No-one in the bar has heard of Lily, but if told her story, they are sympathetic.

This suggests that, when the Investigators ask the pubgoers for information, they might need to roll to discover that the house is a brothel. When the Investigators get the information in italics, they also get anything that follows (which, for ease of reading, is not in italics): so, when they discover that the house is a brothel, they also find that gentleman arrive there hiding their faces.

These italics are only a guide. You can reveal information in italics without a roll, if it seems right: for example, while the Investigators are talking to people in the pub, you might simply reveal that the house is a brothel. You might also ask for a roll for information that isn't in italics.

ON A 5, ON A 6

When a player rolls a 5 when investigating, the Investigator gets everything they wanted, plus something extra.

Here are some things that might happen on a 5. Use these or invent your own.

- ▶ The Investigators remember stories of unnatural pregnancies in the East End, with babies that grew with unnatural speed.
- ▶ They remember rumours of baby-snatching, in which mothers left their babies outside to breathe the morning air, but found them gone when they returned.

- ▶ They remember the folktale of Gentleman Jack, who takes babies and keeps them in his cellar.
- ▶ They remember newspaper reports of deformed babies being thrown in the river.

When a player rolls a 6 when investigating, their Investigator may glimpse beyond human knowledge. Here are some things that might happen on a 6. Again, use them or invent your own.

- ▶ You see the terror in someone's eyes, as though they have seen something unearthly.
- ▶ You glimpse a monster's face, twisted and alien.
- ▶ You are physically repulsed.
- ▶ You discover a horrific detail of a pregnancy: for example, that it lasted only for mouths or that the baby came out wrong.

Alternatively, a 6 might make an Investigator aware of one of the Creeping Horrors (see below).

Later in the mystery, a 6 might give a sudden realisation of the final horror:

- ▶ Suddenly, it all makes sense. You can't explain it, but you just know that children are being taken and stored in the river.

Throughout the mystery, you'll find specific suggestions of what might happen when someone rolls a 5 or 6. These are just suggestions: use them, use the ideas above or, as always, invent your own ways to glimpse beyond human knowledge.

CREEPING HORRORS

There are three Creeping Horrors in this mystery.

- ▶ **The stink of the Thames**, ancient, rotting and repulsive, especially in places where the horror is greatest or something bad has happened.
- ▶ **The way the monsters look**, high-browed and twisted, pale and aquiline. As the Investigators travel west during the mystery, they notice this look in people more and more, until eventually they see traces of it in everyone.
- ▶ **Monstrous children**. When the Investigators meet Lily, they are aware of something repulsive inside her. Later, when they meet other women with unnatural pregnancies, they are repelled too.

Try to introduce these Creeping Horrors subtly near the start of the mystery. Then, as the mystery goes on, build them gradually, until they become unreal and terrifying. Invent your own Creeping Horrors too: for example, you might decide that Investigators hear faint church-like singing whenever the creatures are near.

When an Investigator rolls a 6, they may notice one of these Creeping Horrors, then remain aware of it throughout the mystery. For example, they may suddenly smell the stink of the Thames, then keep noticing it. Or they may notice the way the monsters look, then see that look in more and more people (including other Investigators).

When a Creeping Horror appears in the text below, it is preceded by an *asterisk. These asterisks are only a guide: you can, and should, introduce Creeping Horrors even when they are not mentioned in the text.

THEMES

There are four main themes in this mystery. Refer to them when you can.

- ▶ **The river**. Refer frequently to the River Thames. When you describe things, use water-related descriptions whenever you can: for example, you might describe something "flowing" within Lilly's belly.
- ▶ **Children**. Keep mentioning children in the streets of London. Keep referring to the Investigators' individual relationships to children.
- ▶ **The aristocracy**. Throughout the mystery, be clear about the social class of anyone the Investigators meet: are they working class, middle class or upper class? Describe upper-class people ignoring the Investigators and middle-class people looking down on them.
- ▶ **Immortality**. Refer to the idea of living forever, especially in a religious context and especially when the Investigators are in the Church of St John the Baptist (below).

PROLOGUE

It is summer and London stinks. As the sun shines down, the river Thames gets warmer, and its mix of mud, sewage and rotting fish spreads its odour throughout the city. Every street has a layer of filth, which coats boots and clothing. *It is as if the Thames has infected London, spreading its stink everywhere.

Nevertheless, this is a working day and the Investigators must earn their living. Ask each Investigator how they spend their day. Where do they go? What do they do? For example, a flower-seller might head to Covent Garden before dawn, buy flowers, then spend the day wandering around London's streets. A prostitute might ply her trade in London's coffee shops. An abortionist might ply her trade in a crumbling East End backroom.

Take a moment to play out each Investigator's day. As you do, mention the hot sun, the mud on the streets and the *smell of the Thames. Describe the people that each Investigator sees. If the opportunity arises, play a short scene: for example, try playing a rich customer buying flowers or a young woman visiting the abortionist.

If two Investigators might meet during the day, bring them together and let them play a scene: for example, play a scene where the pickpocket sees the prostitute in the park or steals from her clients. Don't get them into trouble, though: this isn't the time for anyone to get caught by the police. If they try something illegal, simply let them escape.

This is a chance to introduce the Investigators to 1850s London. If you have a map, then point out where each Investigator works. Explain the geography of London, especially the difference between East and West. Say that, in the East, people are friendly and the streets are crowded. In the West, people are cold and the streets vast and unwelcoming.

If you like, introduce the Creeping Horrors of the mystery, but don't make them seem too strange. Describe the *stink of the Thames as vile, rotting and everywhere. Say that, in the West End of London, the *people look different.

Mention the sellers of scandal-sheets, standing on street corners, shouting about *rumours of baby-snatching. But keep this low-key. Don't make anything sound unnatural or out of place. It isn't time to investigate yet.

When the working day is over, it's time to return home. That is where the story - and the horror - starts.

THE LODGING HOUSE

The Investigators' home is the Old Nichol Rookery, a winding mass of streets and passageways. As they return after work, the Investigators pass bars that open on to the street and hear craftsmen working in the surrounding houses. The crowd buzzes around them.

Their lodging house is crumbling but welcoming. In the downstairs room, a fire is coming to life, with fish hanging over it to cook. Rush matting covers the floor and long wooden benches surround a long table. The light comes from tallow candles, sputtering and fatty.

Let the Investigators greet each other and prepare for dinner. Ensure that, in addition to the Investigators, there is one more person in the lodging house, who might be the landlady or another lodger. (This ensures that, when the Investigators leave to investigate later, there is someone to take care of Lily.)

Then ask an Investigator to roll to notice something wrong, without rolling the Failure Die. Tell them that, for some reason, *they feel they have gone back in time*. The house feels like it did a year ago. (Depending on how high they roll, give them more or less of this information.)

Something moves upstairs. As the Investigators follow the noise, they find it is coming from the attic. When they get closer, they realise something is moving in Lily's old room. If they look inside, the room is dark.

When they enter, they find Lily there, in her old bed. That is why the house feels as it did a year ago. It is because Lily is home.

Yet, even in candlelight, the Investigators realise something is wrong. Lily is huddled, as close to the wall as she can get. If touched, she shrinks away. If the Investigators get close or examine the bed, *they find blood on the sheets.*

If one of the Investigators has medical knowledge, they surmise *she is recovering from a traumatic childbirth.* Alternatively, an Investigator might ask Lily what has happened: if so, she tells them that *she gave birth and the father took the baby away.* If, while discovering this information, anyone rolls a 5, they remember the folktales of snatched babies. If they roll a 6, they inexplicably smell the river's stink in Lily's room.

As the evening goes on, Lily tells the Investigators the full story. When she moved out of the lodging house, she went to live with Jack, her husband: as she says this, an Investigator might notice that Lily hesitates on the word "husband", since *they were not really married.* Thereafter, *she lived in a house in Gloucester Street, Pimlico.* Depending on how much the Investigators ask, Lily might or might not reveal that, in fact, *Jack did not live there, but kept her as a mistress.*

Shortly afterwards, Lily became pregnant and gave birth. Lily explains that the baby was premature, then hesitates as though something is wrong. In fact, *Lily's pregnancy lasted four months,* after which the baby emerged fully grown. Immediately after the birth, Jack took the baby. A few hours afterwards, Lily was evicted from the flat and returned here.

Lily tells the Investigators she wants the baby back. She asks repeatedly where the baby is. She asks the Investigators to find it.

Remember that it is late at night. Unless the Investigators must go immediately to the house where Lily lived in Pimlico, they must retire for the night. The next morning, a breakfast of bread and dripping is waiting for them. As they eat, they must decide how to proceed.

Note that Lily does not need an Investigator to stay with her. She will not be alone in the house (because someone else is there, as described above). She asks to be left to rest, while the Investigators to find her baby. The first place to look is Pimlico.

PIMLICO

As the Investigators head westwards to Pimlico, the city changes. They leave behind the welcoming crowds of the East End for the braying gentlemen of the west. Buildings become monolithic, pale and austere. People are tall and unwelcoming, with *high brows, aquiline looks and cold glances.

On arriving in Pimlico, the Investigators find a shabby genteel neighbourhood for the aspiring middle classes. There is no welcome for the Investigators here. The people of Pimlico want to rise in society, not mix with those at the bottom. They also want to keep their secrets hidden.

In Gloucester Street, the Investigators find Number 24, the house where Lily stayed. They may also visit the pub opposite, The Duck And Feathers.

PASSING

Unless you have good reason to think otherwise, assume the Investigators stand out whenever they leave the East End. Even if they cut their hair, wash their faces and mend their clothes, something gives away their true origins: their voices, their vocabulary, their lack of knowledge of how to behave.

If the Investigators want to fit in with the middle or upper classes, ask them what exactly they do, then ask them to roll, rolling the Failure Die against them. If they succeed, they are accepted by people, at least for long enough to ask their questions or do whatever they want to do. Be sensible about this: a prostitute might fit in with polite society, if she wears her best dress, but a beggar with matted beard would need to shave first. A match-seller might pretend to be a maid or milliner, but not the Lady of the Manor.

Finally, don't take too much pleasure in this. Remind the players of the class system, but don't glorify it. Remember that the Investigators are the heroes: the people putting them down are the villains of the mystery.

THE DUCK AND FEATHERS

When the Investigators enter The Duck and Feathers, they find themselves facing a wall, with doors to the left and right.

Through the right door is the saloon bar, with engraved glass and leather chairs. It is home to clerks, doctors and other professionals, who look at the Investigators, draw in their breath, then pointedly look away. If the Investigators want to stay, they must pass as middle class (see Passing, above). Otherwise, the barman eventually jerks his thumb, indicating they should go through the other door.

Through the left door is the public bar, where traders, labourers and other working people cluster around a sparse wooden room. Even here, the Investigators are not entirely welcome, since the customers consider themselves a class above them. The drink of choice is beer, although brandy and gin are also common.

In either bar, the Investigators can ask about 24 Gloucester Street. At first, people seem reluctant to talk: the most likely reply is “The less said about that place the better”.

It emerges that *the house is a brothel*: gentlemen arrive at all hours of the day and night, hiding their faces. No-one in the bar has heard of Lily, but if told her story, they are sympathetic. If pressed, the drinkers may admit to hearing *peculiar chanting, like a twisted hymn*, from the house, although they seem unsure of their own senses.

If, while investigating, anyone rolls a 5, they remember urban tales of a secret aristocratic society, who venture forth at night to brothels before diving in the Thames.

If anyone rolls a 6, they see a deep terror in the speaker’s eyes when they talk about the gentlemen’s masked faces, as if they caught a glimpse of something horrific, but have blotted it from their minds.

24 GLOUCESTER STREET

Like other houses on Gloucester Street, Number 24 is made of off-white stone, with classical dimensions that make it look like a small, polite Roman temple. Candles flicker in the windows, flaring occasionally to reveal neat interior rooms.

How do the Investigators get in? Unless they can think of a better way, there are three entrances: the front door, the back door and illicitly through a window. If they try the window - which they can reach by climbing the drainpipes of the neighbouring house, then balancing across the roof - it opens easily and they find themselves on the upper floor (see below).

If the Investigators try the front door, a thick-set man with a boxer’s broken face answers. His first reaction to the Investigators is embarrassment, telling them either to “Go round the back” (if they look respectable enough to be delivering something) or “Clear off” (if they don’t). After that, he will shut the door in their faces, unless they make a roll to stop him. On a successful “Passing” roll (see above), the Investigators may stop him long enough to ask questions, although it’s unlikely they’ll convince him to let them in.

At the back entrance, a girlish woman of about twenty opens the door. Whatever the time of day, she wears evening dress and make-up. This is Victoria, whose inexperience with the world makes her more likely to believe the Investigators stories. If asked about Lily, she freezes: her first answer is “I can’t tell you here”, before retreating into the kitchen and waiting for the Investigators to follow.

As Victoria explains, *Lily stayed here, in an upstairs room, as the mistress of a man called Jack*. Like the other gentlemen visitors, Jack arrived at odd hours, his face covered, and rarely stayed the night. Lily became pregnant. *After she gave birth, a few days ago, Jack left the house with the baby*, driving off in a carriage. Victoria is not sure where he went or where he came from.

If pressed - or if someone rolls a 6 while investigating - Victoria might reveal that the *pregnancy lasted only four months*, the baby growing with unnatural speed. She also caught a glimpse of the baby as Jack took him away.

Although she cannot explain why, there was **something unnatural about it, which filled her with horror.*

As the Investigators explore, they realise, if they haven't already, that *the house is a "meeting house": the polite term for a brothel.* Indeed, for a brothel, this is an exceptionally polite and middle class one. The ground floor is comfortably furnished, like a family home. There is a hallway, with nondescript portraits lining the wall, and a drawing room lit by candles. Both are excessively tidy, as though nobody lived in them.

In the living room is Mrs Bowerby, a matriarchal redhead who owns and runs the brothel. If she meets a lone Investigator, she asks whether they are looking for work. If so, she offers them a drink, and explains delicately that she employs women to keep men company.

When the Investigators go upstairs, they find the bedroom doors closed. Beyond them, the Investigators can hear murmuring voices and an indistinct shuffling. At the end of the landing is Lily's room.

At first sight, Lily's room has the studied middle-class look of the rest of the house. The bed is made precisely, with starched white sheets tucked at every corner. On the window, beside thick red curtains, there is a wilted tulip in a tiny vase.

On investigation, though, something is badly wrong. *The mattress is apparently soaked in blood:* this is, in fact, Lily's afterbirth. *The door panel is cracked,* as if someone had beaten against it to get out: this was Lily, who was locked into the room by the gentleman who took her baby. To anyone who has smelt the **stink of the river* (see above), this room reeks of that same smell. If anyone rolls a 6 while investigating here, they smell the stink now.

There is a curious gold ring beneath the bed: it is intricately woven of threads of gold, in a way that seems impossible to manufacture. If the Investigators look closer, then deep within the threads, there appear to be miniature sculptures of humanoid couples, in inexplicable poses. The ring is both captivating and repellent.

It is now clear that, to find the baby, the Investigators must find Lily's gentleman. He is, in fact, in Grosvenor Square, a fact which the Investigators can discover in various ways. If they search the room, they may find *a gentleman's silk cravat tucked under the pillow:* the label identifies a tailor in Grosvenor Square. If they ask Mrs Bowerby or another worker, they may remember *the gentleman ordering a cab to Grosvenor Square.* Alternatively, the cab drivers who arrive at the brothel may say that *the gentleman lives in Grosvenor Square.* Follow the Investigators' lead. Reward any method of investigation with the right location. But don't tell them exactly where to go. Just tell them to go to Grosvenor Square.

Now, it is time for the Investigators to leave. If their investigations have been quiet, then the occupants of the house may let them leave quietly.

If there has been a disturbance, then as the Investigators are leaving, the doors to the bedrooms open. A gentleman stands in each doorway, his face half-hidden by a top hat and cravat. The gentlemen step forward. Time and space seem to distort, as if the Investigators are underwater. The gentlemen seem impossibly tall. If anyone has smelled the **stink of the river*, they smell it again now, more threatening and oppressive than ever. The men approach slowly. Or perhaps time is running slowly. It is hard to tell.

What do the Investigators do? If they try to run, they find themselves running impossibly slowly, as if in a nightmare: ask them to roll to escape, rolling the Failure Die. If they fail, one of the gentlemen grabs them. If they hesitate, they also get grabbed. For any Investigator who falls into the gentlemen's grasp, allow one roll to escape, warning that the Investigator will die if they fail. Remind the players that they can reroll by adding their Insight Die. (See "When an Investigator dies" on page 44.)

If, during this, anyone rolls a 5, they remember news reports of men, including a Member of Parliament, disappearing from brothels, one of whom was a Member of Parliament. If anyone rolls a 6, they may catch a glimpse of a gentleman's face, alien and twisted and incomprehensible, and make an Insight Roll.

GROSVENOR SQUARE

The journey to Grosvenor Square feels like a descent into evil. Buildings become bleached white monoliths. Faces are *high-browed and unwelcoming. And, for those that can smell it, the *stink of the river is everywhere, filling the Investigators' mouths and lungs.

Grosvenor Square itself is dominated by the Church of St John the Baptist, a twisted Gothic monstrosity that fills the west side of the Square. The remainder is dominated by the houses of the rich. These houses can also be reached from the back, where stable yards lead on to the servant quarters.

From here, the Investigators can head in a few directions. They might gravitate towards the Church of St John the Baptist. They might, perhaps by asking around, find their way to the Richard House, where the baby was taken. Wherever they head, they might encounter the Book of Life or Ebba Abendroth, both of which are described below.

THE CHURCH OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

As the Investigators approach the Church of St John the Baptist, they get a strong sense that *this is the heart of the evil*. The Church is brown, damp and glistening, as if the *river has seeped up into the bricks. A sodden wooden door leads inwards.

Inside, the Church is dark, lit by a mouldy brown light through the windows. These windows contain twisted stained-glass images which, on prolonged inspection, show *armies of children rising from the water*, although *the children look strangely lengthened.

Although there is no one singing in the church, there is a sense of echoing hymns, as though the bricks are resonating with centuries of music. If the Investigators listen carefully, they *understand the songs are about finding new life in the water*, but the words are not English. If they touch the church's walls, they *hear the screams of children in their heads*, hundreds and thousands of

children from throughout history. It is as though the children have been carefully preserved, like butterflies in vinegar.

In fact, the Church isn't empty. As the Investigators' eyes become used to the darkness, they see the short figure of Father Little, drifting around the altar. Little is a crushed, broken figure, with a songlike Liverpool accent and a look of haunting in his eyes. He does not have the high-browed aquiline look of the monstrous gentlemen.

Little is a font of information on Grosvenor Square. If asked about rumours of baby-snatching, he reluctantly suggests *the Investigators ask at the Richard House*. If pressed, he may suggest that *the babies are baptised in the river*, but he cannot explain what this means or even how he knows. He may also tell the Investigators about *Ebba Abendroth, a former maid at the Richard House who left when pregnant*, and who now stays in a nearby workhouse.

Yet, as the Investigators question Little, it is clear something is wrong. If they roll a 6, they see an unearthly terror in his eyes: it reminds the Investigators of a man in quicksand, who knows both that he will drown and that fighting will make his death sooner.

If pressed, Little explained that *he wants to leave, but is forced to stay in the Church* by the Grosvenor Square residents. There is something wrong with them, but he cannot explain what. The residents have even forced a change to the Church services, with atonal hymns and readings from unfamiliar books.

Little shows the Book of Life (see below) to any Investigators that are curious. Alternatively, they might find it resting on a pew. Finally, he seems exhausted of information and repeats that they should ask at the Richard House.

THE BOOK OF LIFE

The Book of Life is a soft, battered leather book with gold-edged pages. Investigators might find it anywhere in the mystery, but especially in the Church of St John the Baptist or the Richard House. It might also be dropped by one of the

gentlemen at 24 Gloucester Street. The book appears suddenly, often in drawers or on shelves, nudging against an Investigator's hand.

To anyone who looks inside, the lettering is unfamiliar and appears to move in the corner of the eye. Nevertheless, the viewer feels they understand it. They know instinctively that this is an ancient language of power and compulsion (even if they are not sure what a language of power and compulsion might be).

If an Investigator begins reading the book, tell them that they realise that the book is describing an oath. Ask again whether they want to continue reading.

The first oath in the book is **to live forever**. Any Investigator who reads this oath realises that, by reading, they have already taken the oath: they have promised to live forever. Moreover, they feel they have the power to live forever. What all this means is not clear, but at least, the Investigators should be starting to understand what a language of power and compulsion might be.

Next in the book is another oath. Ask the Investigator whether they want to read it.

The second oath in the book is **to rise when called**. Again, by reading this oath, it is clear that the Investigators have promised to rise when called. They also feel they have the power to do so. It is not clear what this means, although the Investigator may experience a taste of blood and dirty water.

There is one final oath in the book. Even before reading it, it feels immense, final and apocalyptic. Ask the Investigator whether they want to read it.

The third oath in the book is **grinding and flowing and screeching**. It is inexpressible in words. Yet it is clear that, like the other two oaths, the Investigator has promised to keep it.

What these oaths actually mean is up to you. For example, you may decide whether an Investigator who takes the first oath can, in fact, be killed. But make sure the oaths are horrific. Certainly, they are not a quick and easy way to become immortal. If an Investigator drowns in the river, only bring them back to life if it seems very, very bad to do so.

EBBA ABENDROTH

Ebba Abendroth is golden-haired, painfully thin and looks older than her twenty-five years. The Investigators might meet her in the Church of St John the Baptist, the Richard House or anywhere else appropriate. They might also be told about her by Father Little or others.

When Ebba was a kitchen maid at the Richard House, *she had a child with Lord Richard*. She then heard that the child would be stolen, so she fled and had the child nearby, in St George's Union Workhouse. That is where she lives now.

From time to time, *she was visited in the workhouse by gentlemen strangers*. When they asked about the baby, she told them it had died. This was true. What she did not tell them was that *every time the baby died, *it came back to life within minutes*.

To see the baby, the Investigators must visit the workhouse where Ebba lives. It is a huge institutional building, crammed with the poor and elderly, who huddle in corners for warmth and talk with merriment.

The baby lives in the chapel, which is cold and damp, even in the height of summer. The child breathes irregularly, gasping for air. As the Investigators watch, it breathes a final breath and lies immobile. It is dead: if the Investigators check, it has no pulse. If Ebba is there, she motions to wait. Minutes later, the baby gasps for breath and begins its ragged breathing again.

As Ebba explains, this happens several times a day. Once the Investigators have seen this, she asks them to leave. After all, there is nothing they can do. Even if they killed the baby, it would come back to life.

THE RICHARD HOUSE

If the Investigators knock at the Richard House, nobody answers. The front door is locked. The back door, which opens on to a stable yard, is open.

Inside, the house looks white and empty. The Investigators' footsteps echo through the hallways and rooms. Curtains are half-drawn. On the

window sills are vases, picture-frames and candles, which curiously are lit. It seems that *someone wants to pretend the house is occupied*. At your discretion, the Investigators might find the Book of Life (see above) as they explore.

As the Investigators explore, they sometimes hear shuffling, as though someone is moving on the other side of a wall or beneath the floor, but they can never locate the source of the movements. There are trails of mud, as though *visitors have walked through the house after wading through the river*. These trails lead to a cellar door.

The stair downwards is dark: the Investigators need a source of light to get down. When they reach the cellar floor, it is caked in mud, like the banks of the Thames. Everyone can now smell *the stink of the river*. It is so strong that it seems to follow the Investigators around, like an alien spirit.

As they explore the cellar, the Investigators find *stacks of what appear to be baskets*. On closer inspection, they are cradles of all different shapes and sizes. Deeper into the cellar, they find more and more cradles, some modern, some old and rotting.

It becomes clear that the cellar has no wall separating it from the neighbour's cellar. Indeed, all the cellars are connected in a long, continuous tunnel, packed with cradles. As the Investigators venture deeper, they occasionally find an opening to another underground tunnel. This is an underground network, connecting the aristocratic districts of London.

Eventually, the tunnel ends at a door. It opens on to a silt bank of the Thames. Above them, the Investigators can hear the buzz of horses and pedestrians, but on the bank, they are unseen and alone. *The stinking Thames washes against the bank, lapping at the Investigators feet*.

The Investigators realise that *this is where the babies were taken. They must be deep under the water*. If the Investigators look carefully, they may see a submerged baby, although there must be many more beyond. They could rescue one, but they cannot rescue them all. They will never find Lily's baby. *If they listen carefully, they can hear the children screaming*.

EPILOGUE

If it seems right, you can end the mystery there, with the Investigators staring bleakly into the Thames.

If you want something more dramatic, then reintroduce the faceless gentlemen, who rise from the water or the darkness, then converge on the Investigators. If the Investigators want to fight their way past or run, they must roll. If they fail, then they themselves are dragged into the Thames.

If any of the Investigators are alive, ask for a short epilogue from their player, then end the game.

ENDNOTES

Thanks to my fellow indie game designers for their inspiration and support over the years. I won't attempt to name you, because I'll inevitably leave someone out.

Thanks especially to everyone I met on The Forge, a website that encouraged people to develop and publish their own roleplaying games. I must particularly thank the people who made that website happen, Ron Edwards, Vincent Baker and Clinton N Dreisbach.

Brennen Reece did the layout for the original Cthulhu Dark, on which this layout is based. Anna Kreider did an early editing pass on the text. Thanks to both.

Thanks to the designers of the games that influenced Cthulhu Dark. The die mechanics, along with subtler things such as the description of Hooks, draw on Sorcerer by Ron Edwards. Other tricks have their roots in Robin Laws' *GUMSHOE*, especially the Lovecraftian version, Ken Hite's *Trail of Cthulhu*. The bleak style of Cthulhu Dark was developed in the scenarios I wrote for Pelgane Press. I must also mention the granddaddy of Cthulhu games, Sandy Petersen's *Call of Cthulhu*, published by Chaosium Inc.

If you'd like to use Cthulhu Dark for publishing your own mysteries or if you'd like to release a game based on Cthulhu Dark, I'd like to help you. Contact me at graham@thievesoftime.com.

