

# Hoard

In the year 2000, A Cell orders an investigation of multiple unexplained occurrences connected to the Marshall Morris building in the part of Pasadena known as Old Town.

Unbeknownst to A Cell, the incidents are caused by a single curious toy, hidden among 100 tons of crap by a pair of compulsive hoarders.

## Overview

The Marshall Morris building was finished in 1881. Originally a textile factory, it is now made up of four whole-floor apartments. Each of these is at 2400 square feet and worth millions, despite notable damage in the 1994 Northridge earthquake.

Residents and incidents by floor:

4: Patrick Sheehan and Sumner Kelsey, joined in civil union. Sheehan skyrocketed to success at an ad agency in 1996. His designs combine the styles of the Jazz Age with heroin chic. He became even more famous a month ago, when he disappeared without a trace.

3. The Batcher family. Nelson Batcher, CEO, divides his time between the Los Angeles and Madrid offices. His wife, Priscilla, is 16 years younger. Nelson's three children from a previous marriage, Harry (11), Selma (9) and Alma (6), all sprouted horns last week. The horns are between one and one half inches long. The skin appears stretched taut over them, but this is not painful.

2. Heiresses Miriam "Minnie" Rubenstein and Gertrude Capland-Silverman were both born in 1932. They have been best friends since the first week of finishing school. The clutter in their apartment is apparent even through the windows, from the street outside. No crime or preternatural incident here is known to A Cell.

1. On the market. Recently vacated by Rosa Hawkins, a pediatrician who divorced another MD in 1998. She was convicted for assaulting her psychoanalyst last year and is currently out of a job, serving a brief prison sentence. The building, she said, was the reason for her crime.

## Background

Sheehan's artistic success, the Batcher's physical transformation and Hawkins' first offense all have the same cause. The building is a Carcosan bridgehead, as a result of an item that Miriam Rubenstein purchased at a thrift store in 1995. The general phenomenon is described in *Delta Green: Countdown*.

The item is a hair-and-makeup doll, i.e. a doll's head and shoulders attached to a pink plastic base. It is surprisingly heavy, and looks remarkably old on inspection, but is obviously a mass-produced item. The only written identifier on it is the letters "Fabriqué en Transalgérie" on a torn paper sticker under the base. That base, and the accompanying hair brush, are made of Bakelite, while the hair is golden-yellow cuprammonium rayon with a piece of gum stuck in it.

The doll's head is a complex alloy, die-cast in two parts, soldered together along a ridge, and finally painted. The pigment in the whites of the eyes is arsenic, still bright in the fine cracks of its gloss varnish. No expert will ever recognize this thing, because it was not made in our world.

## Clues

Sheehan included a painted image of the doll in the background of one of his posters for a campaign against child abuse. Among his copious inspirational materials are some photographs of dolls, mainly Edwardian antiquities, and more photos of lighted mirrors from 1920s show business, usually with a dancer applying her makeup.

Sheehan's partner, Kelsey, is an out-of-work script supervisor with a drug problem. The night Sheehan disappeared, Kelsey dreamt the building opened up along the cracks from 1994, revealing interiors like those of a doll house. Sheehan was plucked from their bedroom by a ten-fingered hand. "You know," says Kelsey, "he didn't seem to mind."

Alma Batcher has a modern hair-and-makeup doll in a place of honor in the children's play room. Her sister Selma has done up its hair just like the real thing. Their brother Harry has stuck a piece of gum in it. They call it "the queen", but don't know why. While playing, Alma and her friends arrange other dolls and action figures around the queen, as if in a ballroom.

Like the others, Rosa Hawkins has never seen the doll in real life, and is unaware of its influence. She still managed to describe it to her psychoanalyst, Lola Franciscano: As the first and last acts of a recurring sexual fantasy, Hawkins and her 6-year-old niece bow before the doll. When Hawkins announced that she wanted to withdraw from therapy, Franciscano threatened to report her to the police as a possible child molester.

## The Second Floor

Gertrude Capland-Silverman has bouts of severe depression. The apartment on the second floor originally belonged to her husband, who died in 1994. Miriam moved in eight months later, with her general social phobia. In addition to their individual disorders, the pair share a compulsion to buy and hoard items in their home.

Both ladies think of themselves as collectors, with clear ownership of each item. Every item also has deep meaning and value to its owner. It is true that the heiresses maintain an encyclopedic knowledge in several domains of 20th-century industrial design, fashion and printing. Nonetheless, an outsider would perceive no pattern to their tottering piles of junk.

A few signed copies of iconic designs, worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, are mixed at random with everything else: dish rags, jig saws, Ziploc bags of sequins, cook books, boxes of pencils, car batteries, Betamax tapes, miniatures of the Eiffel Tower, plastic bags containing only other plastic bags, the complete set of notebooks from each woman's schooling, a clip book on the Kennedy assassination, unwashed coffee mugs, earrings, French vinyl LPs and so on.

There are barely navigable passages leading from the elevator to the kitchen and from there to each woman's bedroom and bathroom. Miriam's path branches out past her crowded aquariums. She has whole freezers devoted to storing dead pets. It takes the women two minutes to answer the door to the stairwell if the PCs come calling there, instead of using the intercom by the elevator, because they have to move two bicycles they haven't used since Gertrude's first knee operation in 1990.

## Investigation

After Delta Green arrives on the scene and does a first round of interviews, Miriam Rubenstein disappears. Like Patrick Sheehan, she has found her place in Carcosa. Not knowing where her friend has gone, Gertrude timidly asks the PCs for help. Trying vainly to search the apartment, whichever PC is most infected by Hastur hears an elderly woman, plaintively asking the agent to feed her pet fish.

Clearing the second-floor apartment for a thorough search would be at least a day's work, even without Gertrude's panicked interference and the pervasive influence of the King in Yellow. Beyond the first few layers of stacks, past the leaded glass harmonica, there are footpaths unconnected to those of everyday life. Rooms exist where the other apartments have no rooms. It's easy to lose one's orientation, to get distracted by the nostalgic knick-knacks and strange smells of the hoard.

The more lost one becomes, the easier it is to find a childish pleasure in the items, increasingly impossible and pointless as they are: a Dracula costume stained with semen, a dozen bioluminescent bonsai, a child's ivory face mask with a hundred elegant figures dancing around its edge, a broken Rube Goldberg device that promises to "reverse charcoal" into living plants, garishly painted fossils, and the first several hundred issues of the *Nova Belgica Tribune*, among other periodicals from alternate histories and alien worlds. The crossword puzzles are all done.

## Resolution

The PCs will see the hair-and-makeup doll, both before and after they get lost in the collections. Unless they have been thorough enough in their preliminary investigation to actually search for it, the only way to suspect its power is to be infected by Hastur, which happens to anyone staying long in the apartment.

While the hair-and-makeup doll is in one piece, the path to Carcosa is relatively stable. Seen from the far side, the collections are part of the archives in a sub-basement of a museum there. A dusty, spider-like employee of the museum guesses at the PCs' provenance and requests in writing that they "help organize the collection" by placing potent Yhtillian busts on Earth.

The link is the doll. Smashing its head releases blistering green smoke and a powerful herbal smell, like absinthe. Sickeningly drunk, any survivors of this event will stumble back to their own reality, or close.

Priscilla Batcher has her children's horns removed by the finest surgeons. Years later, the children find their own way to Carcosa.