

What Shall I Do To Shun The Snares of Death?

The Scythian Yog-Sothoth Cult for Cthulhu Invictus and Delta Green

Introduction

In 1998, one of my scenarios in Pagan Publishing's Mortal Coils scenario collection, Common Courtesy, pitted Classic-era investigators against a sect of Afghani tribesmen who adhered to ancient Scythian rites and practices. Their high priestess, a stunningly powerful and ancient Scythian sorceress named Nasra, the "Exalted Grandmother", was an adherent of Yog-Sothoth. Not outwardly malign as much as greatly concerned with maintaining the culture of the Paralatae, or Royal Scythian subgroup of the tribe, Nasra's obsessive/compulsive focus on doing Scythian rituals correctly was central to the optimal solution of that scenario.

Since that time, people have occasionally asked me, or wondered online, "what happened next?" With Soviet, and then U.S. military activity in Afghanistan—the very remote, tribal regions where the Paralatae now have their homeland—some have wondered what use could be made of them in a modern/Delta Green setting. And others have wondered how it is that a POW 35 sorceress born circa 310 B.C. both got her POW that high and managed to stay off the world stage, or what the Mythos connection was. This article and scenario addresses these issues, and provides a true thematic sequel to Common Courtesy in the Delta Green setting.

Origin & Early History

The Paralatae, or Royal Scythians, are an ancient (in truth, extinct), warlike tribe of early horse archers best known to modern scholars through the Histories of the Greek historian, Herodotus. They were one of several Black Sea area

empires that held sway in the several centuries B.C., before they were swept off the world stage by a series of conquerors, beginning with Philip of Macedon, then by Alexander the Great, and finally (during the waning days of the Roman empire) by the Goths. Although they were semi-nomadic, they did have a few larger towns and capital cities over the centuries, mostly centered around the Black Sea. Their royal funerary rites (involving ritual scarification of mourners, erection of enormous kurgans (tombs) and the human sacrifice of the king's concubines and retainers) are described by Herodotus in detail.

Common Courtesy posited that, for reasons that were not dwelt on in detail, a branch of the royal family (led by a very powerful Mythos-knowledgeable sorceress, Nasra, the "Exalted Grandmother") survived into the modern era. They had managed to cling to existence in Afghanistan (a hinterland of the Scythian Empire at its height), and were (for reasons not explored in detail) extremely concerned with maintaining their cultural integrity as it existed back in the days of Herodotus' accounts. Our first task is to explore why this is.

The story of the Scythian Yog-Sothoth cult begins circa the 7th Century B.C. The backstory is consistent with the concept of the "Olympians" in the Cthulhu Invictus setting, but alternatively, one can just posit that for whatever reason, the bloodline of a mythical sorceress, Medea, is somehow tainted and potentially targeted for severe punishment by the forces of the Mythos.

Medea is a figure in Greek mythology involved in several major stories, several of which have been adapted into operas and oratorios. She is a

powerful sorceress, and the niece of Circe (the sorceress in The Odyssey who turns Odysseus' crew into swine). Medea was wed to Jason (the hero of the Argonaut myth), although he eventually abandoned her. According to Herodotus, after her abandonment by Jason, Medea fled to the land of the Scythians along with her son Medus, wed the king of the Scythians, and established a dynasty, the kingdom of the Medes. (Some treatments of her aunt, Circe, have her retiring to Scythia and marrying their king as well, after the events of The Odyssey).

Medea is an angry, vengeful and spiteful figure in myth. She is also a descendant of the Olympian gods, specifically the granddaughter of the sun god, Helios. For our (fictional) purposes, the central point is that Medea was (fictionally) a real, historical figure. Not all of the myths about her are strictly accurate, but the parts about her being a sorceress, whose descent and blood are not strictly human, are accurate. She was a Mythos-influenced sorceress, with Mythos-tainted blood, and she fled into exile in the empire of the Scythians to avoid the wrath of her former sorcerous/Mythos patrons.

In the Cthulhu Invictus setting, the Olympian gods are a group of transcended humans (and their descendants) who dared to steal power from under the nose of Hypnos, god of dreams and lord of the Dreamlands. Hypnos had, by the time that Rome rises, caught up to almost all of them and condemned them to horrible fates in the Dreamlands, although a few, minor Olympians had managed to skirt his wrath by remaining off the world stage.

Of course, these assiduously avoid dreaming, either by avoiding sleep, or by dulling their minds to the temptations of the Dreamlands through the use of narcotics and/or sorcery, lest Hypnos find and cast them (and all of their

friends, relatives, kinsfolk, and anyone who ever supported them) into unending nightmare.

Medea was a descendant of one of these Olympians, Helios, and used her sorcery to hide as best she could from Hypnos' wrath. In her continuing efforts to avoid her final doom for the corruption of her blood, she delved into a wide variety of magical traditions, including the worship of Yog-Sothoth as Tawil-at-Um'r, the Keeper of the Gate. Her goal was to learn how to change and focus one's perceptions, in the hope of never dreaming. Avoiding dreaming, she thought, would keep Hypnos' wrath at bay.

It worked, for a long time. While Medea dared not sleep, and was forced to resort to numerous dark bargains to remain as awake as possible, her devotion to Yog-Sothoth served as a bulwark to Hypnos' wrath. When her power base in Greece was broken, she was forced to flee to Scythia, beyond the bounds of then-conventional civilization.

Medea lived on in comparative exile for several centuries, thanks both to her part-human heritage and to her sorcerous experiments aimed at life extension and soul preservation. She set herself up first as queen, and later as High Priestess of the Scythians, operating out of their great Crimean capital at Gelonus. Living for many centuries, and recreating herself every now and then to avoid gaining a reputation as immortal (and hence, perhaps attracting the notice of Hypnos), she married many times and gave birth to many, many children. It is possible, at least, that a good chunk of the Earth's population traces its descent back to her through at least one line of ancestry.

Most of the children were sons. One of her few daughters, and her first, by the then-current King of Scythia, was Nasra. Nasra displayed the potential for sorcery early on in life, and so was groomed by her mother to follow the family

business—including the part about avoiding the gaze of Hypnos.

The Decline of the Scythian Empire

At its 4th Century B.C. height, the Scythian empire stretched from the Black Sea, north into the Ukraine, east and south to the Indus and modern day Afghanistan. The Macedonian expansions of the late 4th Century B.C. saw the

beginning of the destruction of the Scythian empire. Philip of Macedon defeated the Scythian king, Ateas, at the battle of Dobruja in 339 B.C., sending the royal court (including Medea) scattering southeast toward the Dnieper. After being scattered again by Alexander the Great, their remnants settled for several centuries (~300 B.C. ~300 A.D.) in the Crimea, with a capital city known as Scythian Neapolis.



Scythian Empire at its height, circa 400 B.C.

Nasra, the Initiate: Nasra was born in what is now the Crimea in 310 B.C. Her mother was the (then High Priestess) Medea (by then using the name Hestia), and her father was then king Satraces. Her childhood was anything but normal; Medea told her the truth about her ancestry, the threat facing her people, and what her role in the world was to be when she was seven years old. She was (and is) not entirely human, but rather 1/8th “god.” She is her mother’s eldest daughter.

Her mother taught her that she had to be tough, because a time would come where she would have to do something horrible beyond imagining in order to save not just her people, but much of

the world. And she could not let the price break her mind. It would involve her bearing twins on behalf of a great being—a real god made flesh. Nasra was raised from infancy to not be bothered by the possibility. After all, she was 1/8th “god” herself.

As part of her magical education, Nasra had to travel the world, study from every sorcerer imaginable, join every cult she could find (no matter how misguided or despicable), and learn object lessons about how these cults ultimately failed. The purpose of her education would be to learn how to both face down and use horror and yet, not make enemies that would bring her

down. She would learn from the many, many mistakes of others.

In the *Cthulhu Invictus* setting, Nasra, the Initiate might be encountered in virtually any cult, temple, sorcery school, or other group engaged in arcane or Mythos shenanigans—regardless of their goals—from circa 295 B.C. until 153 A.D. She served stints as: a keeper of occult lore at the Library of Alexandria; a series of soothsayers for hire in Athens, Rome, among the Gauls, and elsewhere; an important figure in the corrupt Roman Daoloth cult of Apollo Delphinios; and court astrologer to several potentates. Often she pretends to be the daughter of her prior guise, as she ages very slowly.

Rumors persist of her involvement in a more orthodox Judean messianic cult active in the Levant circa 33 A.D., in which she posed as the wealthy patron of the head rabbi. She finds her eventual status as a saint amusing and has fond memories of that time.

If encountered, she is adverse to combat, not willing to die, and is the first one to become scarce if things get out of control. She is polite, obviously of refined birth, and perhaps even friendly in an aloof, aristocratic sort of way, but utterly ruthless if cornered.

Nasra, the High Priestess: And then, one day circa 153 A.D., a messenger arrived for her from home. She did not keep in any kind of sorcerous contact with her mother—such means of communication often involved dreams, and were to be avoided. But it had been years since she had heard from home, and she had been concerned.

Her mother had seemingly disappeared from her sleeping chamber, after giving birth to another (rare) daughter. There were no signs of a struggle, but her bed was sodden with blood and

foulness, as though a large animal had rotted in it over the course of weeks. The man who had been warming it, a Christian missionary from Greece named Autolus, simply stared and babbled. He had been refusing to take food or drink, and not even a hot poker had elicited any sense from him.

Her mother had found him interesting enough to sleep with, which Nasra suspected was a fatal mistake: taking an open interest in an ascendant foreign religion had doubtlessly angered the “real gods”. (At least, that was how Nasra thought of the matter at the time. Since then, she has realized that it is more a matter of one’s own force of will, since the mindless forces of the Mythos care little for people. It is more about avoiding the consequences of losing control over the stolen power that she and her mother had enjoyed).

Nightmares assailed her all throughout her journey back home.

The Bargain With Tawil-at-Um’r

When Nasra returned from her studies and cosmopolitan life in Greece, Rome and Egypt, she found her dynasty shattered and on the brink of collapse. Successive efforts to resist, and being crushed by, first Philip of Macedon and then Alexander the Great had ruined a once mighty, urbane dynasty and reduced them to nomads who lacked the confidence of the tribes they once lorded over.

Worse still, the Scythian empire seemed finished: its capital crumbling, its more civilized tribes becoming increasingly Hellenized, the old gods becoming forgotten in favor of the new, false gods of the Near East. This, she realized, risked death and worse than death.

*Nasra, the Initiate, Being Groomed to Become High Priestess of the Paralatae.***Nationality:** Scythian

STR: 12 DEX: 13 INT: 18 CON: 16 APP: 14 POW: 18
 SIZ: 11 EDU: 14 SAN: 00 Luck: 90 Hits: 14 Age: 22 (apparent)

(Use this set of statistics for all periods through late Antiquity, during which time she appears as a young adult).

Damage Bonus: +0.**Education:** Sorcerous training and tutors from many corners of the ancient world.

Skills: Accounting 10%; Anthropology 50%; Archaeology 45%; Art 80%; Astronomy 99%; Bargain 50%; Biology 50%; Botany 65%; Cartography 55%; Credit Rating 30% (99% to Scythians); Cthulhu Mythos 50%; Fast Talk 65%; First Aid 90%; History 95%; Law 50%; Natural History 95%; Navigation (Land) 99%; Occult 99%; Persuade 95%; Pharmacy 55%; Physics 25%; Psychology 95%; Ride 99%; Speak Scythian 100%; Speak/Read/Write Latin, Greek, Sumerian, Aramaic, Akkadian, Hittite 99%; Scythian Rituals 100%; Woodcraft 95%; Zoology 50%; Behave Imperiously 50%.

Spells: Augur, Bless Blade; Call Yog-Sothoth (as Tawil-at-Um'r); Call/Dismiss Yog-Sothoth; Chant of Thoth; Cloud Memory; Command Ghost; Conjure Glass of Mortlan; Create Mist of Releh; Death Spell; Deflect Harm; Enthrall Victim; Fist of Yog-Sothoth; Flesh Ward; Heal; Journey to the Other Side; Levitate; Mesmerize; Mindblast; Steal Life, Wrack; most types of ritual magic; other spells at Keeper's discretion.

Weapons: Nasra carries an enchanted, gnarled, gold-inlaid walking stick always kept fully charged with 18 magic points. Fist of Yog-Sothoth is her usual choice for self-defense. Persistent enemies get Wracked.

Nasra at this age has Javelin, Tulwar and Horseback Archery skills all at 70%, but typically does not carry weapons.

Notes: Nasra's purple and gold-ornamented sarong is enchanted and counts as 15 points of armor against non-magical attacks. If expecting trouble, Nasra augments this with Flesh Ward.

Indeed, the signs and portents were bad; her people had begun to be tormented by constant nightmares, and she herself feared to fall asleep. Hypnos' gaze was fixing on her and her people. Her mother had known that this would happen eventually.

The power of the Scythian sorcerers derived from the Olympians, through their descent from

Medea. It was stolen power, stolen from Hypnos and the Dreamlands. Nasra well knew that sorcery had its price, and it was a price that she had always been willing to pay. Faithfulness of the Scythian people to other gods, real gods—in particular, Tawil-at-Um'r, the Keeper of the Gate—had spared her and her bloodline from Hypnos' wrath. But those gods were fickle, and if their faith faltered too much, she was afraid

that Hypnos' revenge would not stop at her. It had not stopped at those most responsible before. The other Olympians, together with their entire bloodlines, had been reportedly blotted from the Earth by Hypnos' wrath. And now Nasra was the High Priestess, and preventing this fate from befalling her and her people (in a very broad sense) had become her problem.

And so Nasra did what sorcerers always do, as she had been prepared to do her whole life. She made a deal. She summoned her god, the Keeper of the Gate, and asked it what she could do to keep her people safe from being cast into eternal nightmare. She already suspected from her childhood indoctrination what its answer might be.

Tawil-at-Um'r was quite accommodating, or so it seemed at first. It proposed a simple arrangement. As long as Nasra remained High Priestess of the Scythians, and venerated it, Tawil-at-Um'r would protect her and her people from the wrath of Hypnos for her loyalty and devotion.

Only after the bargain was struck, and sealed by the bearing of twins, did Nasra begin to worry about matters of contract interpretation.

Nasra, the "Exalted Grandmother" (Or, It Ain't Easy Bein' Queen): Perhaps appropriately, there were twin prongs to the bargain. First, *Nasra* had to remain High Priestess. If she ever died, she realized, her end of the bargain would be broken, and her people's suffering would be beyond human imagining. And the implications of how many people might be caught up in Hypnos' wrath, given how long her mother had lived and how many children both she (and Nasra) had birthed and dispersed across the globe, weighed heavy on her mind.

Staying alive was the easy part. Nasra herself was not entirely human, so dying soon was not a

concern. She had no compunctions about using sorcery, and stealing power and continued life from an endless stream of enemies who sought to pillage her people.

With her twin guardians, people eventually, for the most part, wised up and quit bothering Nasra's Paralatae. Usually, her armies (led by her more human "Youngest Son") sufficed to deter attack. Occasionally, when someone got too daring (not often, given how militaristic the remaining Scythians were), they were taught a lesson in hyper-geometric principles and otherworldly monsters. This sometimes included subjecting them to the tender mercies of what Nasra refers to as her "Eldest Son"—the less human son of Yog-Sothoth born to her to seal the bargain.

At least, people quit seriously bothering the Paralatae for a century or two, until the Goths came calling.

Second, the Scythian culture had to remain intact, or she would not be High Priestess *of the Scythians*. And that realization was fraught with practical implications. Where was the line? When would the "Scythians" quit being "Scythians?" If they stopped worshipping Tawil-at-Um'r? If they changed the worship too much? If they stopped speaking Scythian? If the line of kingship was broken? How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?

These are all excellent questions. Nasra does not have a "unified field theory" or a perfect answer. There have been a few near misses over the centuries, where she began to feel Hypnos' gaze upon her and had to make a quick change in cultural practices or conduct a purge. But she is very, very conservative about maintaining Scythian culture. A lot of lives depend upon her getting things right, and her education has taught her to be extremely risk adverse when dealing with the Mythos.

One central Scythian magical belief is that one's soul is inextricably tied to, and indeed bound up in, the earth of one's homeland. As a result, the Paratae clung tenaciously to their real estate, adopting a very defensive posture. She bound the less human twin to remain near her palace at a horrible sacrificial cost, preventing it from attacking anyone who meant no threat to the Scythians. Over time, it began to follow her instructions, at least more often than not.

While most ancient empires thrived on continuously acquiring land, because of the Bargain Nasra was more worried about not losing land (and hence, seeing "Scythia" further erode). If she gained territory, she might lose it later, and she was not sure how that would play out in terms of the Bargain. Instead, she and her descendants, who came to form the royal line, became skilled diplomats, masterfully playing off enemies against one another always with the goal of simply being left alone. While the bulk of the population was kept insular and as "purely Scythian" as possible, the royal line was permitted to travel, interact with foreigners, study at academies, and generally act as royal families did.

Goths and the Flight to Afghanistan

There was a near disaster for the Paratae around 300 A.D. The relocated capital of the Scythians, in the vicinity of current Simferopol, was thoroughly sacked by the Goths. The Goths brought their own magic to bear, thwarting the efforts of even Nasra's "Eldest Son" to stop them. Her "Youngest Son" was killed by the Goths when they sacked her capital; a mention of this event can be found in the rare Gothic *Necronomicon* and other Gothic occult histories.

Nasra and a group of a few hundred exiles (plus the "Eldest Son") were forced to flee their capital, and Nasra (and perhaps a good chunk of

the world) suddenly had a serious potential problem. She began to be assailed by nightmares, and the signs and portents were unmistakable—Hypnos was drawing nigh. If she and her people were conquered and assimilated by the Goths, or whomever, that would be the end of not only her, but (perhaps) many, many people. A months-long onslaught of nightmares that affected a good portion of the world c. 300 A.D. might be mentioned in any contemporary occult work.

Nasra's solution was to flee to the farthest, most remote end of anywhere that might fairly have been called "Scythia" at any time, concentrate what remained of the Paratae there, and hold it at all costs. Uncertain as to whether this would be sufficient, or for that matter *what* would be sufficient, she decided that she needed to get even more, ruthlessly serious about keeping things under her umbrella as "Scythian" as possible: dress, customs, culture, language, down to food and casual customs.

New things like modern weapons and improved technology were only adopted over very long periods of time, and even then only used sparingly and after careful thought. They might learn to use rifles or drive cars, but they will avoid using them in favor of more "Scythian" things like bows and horses if possible. They view adopting new things as taking chances with fate. (The rank and file Scythians do not understand the real reasons for their ultraconservatism; rather, their culture simply requires that they do what Nasra says. Their diplomats know a bit more. Since they prosper under Nasra's system, it works for them).

Ultimately, Nasra and the remnants of the Paratae settled in what had once been the southeast corner of the empire at its heights, in what is today the Farah Province of Afghanistan. This was once the hinterlands of the Scythian empire, home to a minor branch of Indo-

Scythians and one of the least hospitable parts. They have picked up and moved around western Afghanistan a few times in the intervening centuries, always carefully calculating what would best maximize “Scythian survival” in the abstract.

The Importance of Being Earnest

Nasra’s formula for avoidance of a breach of the ancient Bargain with Tawil-at-Um’r worked well for millennia. She kept her populace small, several hundred to a few thousand in number, and off the beaten path, settling in remoter parts of Afghanistan. She leveraged her longevity and sorcerous knowledge into a sustainable situation. She uses millennia of diplomacy, contacts and education to avoid the worst of periodic invading armies. She sets up camp in places that nobody wants to conquer and hold. She uses millenia of wealth, know-how and discipline to eke out a comfortable living no matter where in western Afghanistan she has to set up camp at any time.

Occasionally, foreigners happen upon her village. Nasra would prefer not to deal with foreigners at all, but early efforts at complete isolation resulted in the familiar pattern of nightmares starting up. She realized that “being Scythian” did not mean much if the *zeitgeist* of the world did not comprehend “Scythians” still existing in some sense. Groups draw their distinctiveness by contrasting themselves to other groups. As a result, Nasra has had to juggle. She wants people to know that they are Paralatae, and true to the old ways, but not to have too much contact so as to tempt her people into different ways or risk conquest.

Over the centuries, she has developed a standard operating procedure for dealing with outsiders. People who want to learn about them are tolerated, but they must be sincere. People who want to try and inculcate them with their views

are barely tolerated, as long as they fail and then leave. If they seem at risk of succeeding (particularly persuasive or charismatic missionaries like Autolus), they have to be killed. That lesson has been learned. Traders entering the village are not welcome and tend to mysteriously disappear in inexplicable and/or hyper-dimensional ways—accompanied by the unearthly bellows and invisible steamrolling of her “Eldest Son”. The Paralatae go out of the village to trade, in that way controlling the extent of any interactions.

Those who would attempt to assert some kind of authority over them are laughed at and mocked at first—experience has taught her that ignoring them is the best policy. However, if they get violent—or worse, attempt to occupy the village—they must be dealt with immediately and decisively. If the Scythians are met with overwhelming and persistent force, they relocate the village, but they must keep their home base within the historical boundaries of Scythia.

The sorts of people that are tolerated, and the extent of their tolerance, shapes what kinds of records and research material might be available on the Paralatae. It takes a deliberate approach to the village to generate any sort of response stimulus. Scouts and surveyors, explorers, and missionaries might come across them and live to tell the tale, noting them as an unfriendly, highly closed society with a reputation for violence and trucking in the supernatural among neighboring tribes. Traders headed for the area often never return.

The area where their village is located has a reputation for being haunted and earthquake prone. The area around their village tends to be avoided by insurgents and military forces that know what is good for them. There is little there worth holding, and military probes turn up ambushed, with no survivors. The Afghani conflict of recent years has, unfortunately,

introduced both reckless Taliban insurgents and oblivious Western forces into the area, and there has been conflict with, as well as “lost patrols” on, both sides.

It would take a disaster for Nasra and any significant portion of the populace to leave the boundaries of the old Scythian Empire. The Paralatae had such a disaster c. 1925. It was nearly as bad, and nearly as apocalyptic, as the Gothic sacking of their capital c. 300 A.D. These are the events of the Common Courtesy scenario, the “canonical” events of which follow.

Consistent with prior practice, Nasra had allowed the current heir to the Scythian throne, Turib Nasfari, to go out and learn about the world in 1920. A National Geographic team, including bohemian photographer Ellen Black, had traveled to Afghanistan to do a feature on the area in 1920, had happened upon the Paralatae, and Turib left with them.

Unfortunately, Ellen ran with a fast crowd in the U.S. Turib contracted syphilis and died in California in 1925. This provoked a crisis, since Turib’s father had died unexpectedly while Turib was out learning the world, and as the apparent king, Turib *had* to be buried the “right” way. Nasra was extremely uncomfortable with the potential consequences of failing to do so: failing to bury a king properly would be a profound departure from societal norms, and a profound threat to the maintenance of their traditional Scythian identity.

Nasra’s journey to America, accompanied by 150 of her Scythian bravos, was fraught with nightmares as Hypnos’ will began to encroach on them. Fortunately, after some clashes with local law enforcement and some overly inquisitive occult investigators (Common Courtesy), a peaceful solution was brokered. Ellen Black and the investigators were

persuaded to participate in Turib’s proper funeral, and the matter was largely kept out of the media with the intervention of elements of U.S. Naval Intelligence. Hypnos’ gaze fortunately faded.

The Paralatae Homeland and General Notes on the “Cult” c. 2011.

Location: For the better part of the 20th and 21st centuries—including both the time of the various events giving rise to Common Courtesy and at present—the Paralatae Homeland is village located in the remote, mountainous, eastern part of Farah Province in Afghanistan, bordering on Iran.

Farah Province is large, remote, and sparsely populated. It is home to numerous ancient, ruined castles and Persian Empire era archaeology sites. It is predominantly Pashtun in terms of ethnic makeup, with a significant Persian, Farsi speaking minority.

The province was under Taliban control in the 1990s, but after the Northern Alliance entered Afghanistan in 2001, the Taliban fell back to the east and only sporadic conflict and incursions have occurred in the province since. The roads and strategic routes throughout the province are heavily mined, discouraging raids and casual incursions by any side in the conflict.

When clashes do occur, though, they tend to occur in the eastern border region, in the general vicinity of the Paralatae Homeland. Indeed, the notorious and still (as of the date of this article) under investigation May 2009 airstrike against insurgents in the eastern village of Granai, alleged to have killed over 100 civilians, occurred in the general area of the Paralatae Homeland. Northern Alliance forces monitor the area, especially via drone aircraft, but also with ground troops.



There are significant numbers of international aid and relief workers working in the area, particularly in the eastern mountain regions, and occasional, roving insurgent gangs have struck in the area and temporarily tried to seize control of transportation corridors. In short, the locale balances remoteness and difficulty of access (good for enclave survival and isolation) with occasional foreigners being in the area (good for scenario entrees).

Size/Daily Life: The Paralatae Homeland is, at present, a village of about 500 people. It is located about 150 km. due east of the city of Farah, along the Bakwa/Gulistan sub-regional border, about 10 km. east of the southern road along the border. It is situated in flat rangeland suitable for horses, at the base of some steep, rocky hills and cave structures.

For a highly detailed map of Farah Province at present and a socio-economic overview, see:

<http://foodsecurityatlas.org/afg/country/provincial-Profile/Farah>

The area is marked by Nazca line-style pictographs visible from the air or via satellite. The pictographs depict a bat-winged serpent

(*Critical Occult* roll or appropriate research into Scythian practices: this is a symbol of the Scythian godhead). Surrounding the village are hundreds of kurgan burial mounds, with (depending on their age) crumbling skeletons of riders atop horses set atop high poles around each.

Nasra's "Eldest Son," the less human, mostly invisible twin she bore to Yog-Sothoth, is still around, a doomsday weapon to be loosed against anyone who seriously threatens the tribe's survival. It haunts the hills and caves outside the village, generally lying quiescent and generally listening to its mother, who has told it only to harm those who seek to harm the Scythians. Since sons of Yog-Sothoth are not generally noted for minding their mothers, she further keeps it in line with magic and Elder Signs. Should Nasra die (or even meaningfully fall asleep), the Eldest Son would be much freer to ravine and slay.

The village is clean, busy, and well-organized—suspiciously so. They raise crops to sustain themselves, and breed horses, which they sell through intermediaries to buyers in the region. It has well-thought out irrigation, good defense and lookout emplacements, attractive stone

buildings, and excellent sanitation. It is all based on Late Antiquity technology—gravity wells, concrete and aqueducts are in evidence, but machines, automobiles and firearms are few. The Paralatae dress traditionally, use traditional weapons, and live traditional lives. While they have a stash of RPGs, AK-47s, and even the captured Soviet-era armored personnel carrier from the Taliban’s last raid, they do not use them except in those instances where one of their emissaries needs to blend in outside the village.

There is a no-fly zone in place (including for drones) directly over the village, per the SECNAV’s rules of engagement for the village (discussed below). Although foreign aid workers are tolerated, they rarely go there since the place is so clean and well-organized.

Reputation & Contact with Afghani and Foreign Forces: The Paralatae, up until the events of Standard Operating Procedure, play the role of a local Afghani warlord enclave that both sides have learned to leave alone, albeit for different reasons.

From the perspective of the Northern Alliance forces and government in Kabul, they are somewhat cryptic and poorly understood “friendlies,” who have to be handled with kid gloves when necessary, and left alone if at all possible. Early in the Afghan War, military scouts intent on reconnoitering eastern Farah province noticed the Paralatae village on satellite, but wisely chose to monitor the village and watch for insurgent patterns. The village is miles off of any significant road, and U.S. forces were able to secure the route and shove back a few Taliban insurgents without the village even stirring.

Eventually though, in 2005, a squad of soldiers, under the command of Marine 1st Lt. Jerome Taylor, was sent into the village to investigate it

and search for insurgents. Only Lt. Taylor returned. He was not a pretty sight when he did. Taylor’s squad had intruded on a royal funeral ceremony, and only Taylor had had the sense to play along. He was returned without a scalp, and had been subjected to ritual purification (scarified face, an arrow jammed through his left hand, and showing signs of having smoked a great deal of marijuana). His mind was also broken and he displayed classic signs of PTSD.

Taylor was accompanied back to his base by Talil Nasfari, the latest in the long line of royal relatives *cum* diplomatic negotiators. Nasfari laid it out for Lt. Taylor’s command and control structure as follows: Our village is a holy site. Many centuries of kings have their tombs in our village. We are an ancient people with no use for the Taliban. Taliban are not allowed there. Neither are your military forces. Leave us alone and do not set foot on our land, and we will not cause you any trouble. If you need to talk to us for some reason, send someone other than a soldier and ask for me. Next time, *no* soldiers shall return.

Lt. Taylor, for his part, spoke of participating in a royal funeral; the strange tongue they spoke among themselves; an old woman who interrogated him for a week without sleeping or allowing him to; and how his squad had lost an initial firefight to a bunch of mounted archers on horseback, like something out of an old Western. Taylor also spoke of odd earthquake like rumblings, like some enormous animal crashing and roaring through the hills. He did not see it himself, but some of his men saw signs of something huge, and it caused the panic that resulted in their massacre. And it talked.

Word of this odd encounter worked its way up the chain of command, and eventually came within eyeshot of certain read-in elements at Naval Intelligence. They ordered that, pending specific clearance from Naval Intelligence,

Nasfari's contact protocol was to be honored. This failure to seek retribution for the elimination of a squad of Marines and mutilation of a Marine officer does not sit well with several factions within the Marine Corps. Nonetheless, and up until the events of Standard Operating Procedure, they have reluctantly followed orders. They leave the village alone, and on the rare occasions when something is needed, they send in foreign aid workers to snoop around or carry messages.

The Taliban to the east of Farah Province leave them alone *now*, but only because they are tired of being slaughtered. It is strictly a strategic decision, and one that does not sit well with the Taliban mullahs. The mullahs know that the "ancient ones", as they call them, are not Muslim, that they laugh at Islam as a "new delusion," and even truck with "demons". They know the local legends that an invisible demon lives in the caves and hills next to the village, and feel like they really ought to do something about it. This helplessness infuriates them.

Beginning in the 1980s, the Taliban undertook periodic efforts to kill, capture, enslave or drive out the "ancient ones". These efforts at "defending the faith" have failed abysmally, at the cost of hundreds of Taliban lives. Early raids produced near total Taliban casualties, save one or two blinded, scalped survivors who came back to the mullahs with a simple message: leave us alone or die. Unlike the Americans, the Taliban leaders did not get the hint. They kept sending raiders. The raiders kept dying.

Once, they sent a very large force of several hundred men armed with RPGs, and even an old, captured Soviet era light armored vehicle. Nasra did not mess around with them this time; she simply had her warriors lure them into the hills via a feigned retreat, and loosed the "Eldest Son" on them. No one returned from that expedition, and their crushed bones and rusting

weapons litter the foot of the hills. That finally got the message across.

The result of the foregoing has been that eastern Farah province has become a sort of comparatively quiet, quasi- demilitarized zone. The Taliban gave up trying to control this area in the early 2000s, although occasional bandits and raiders still come through. International relief workers, pseudo-missionaries and other ideological do-gooders operate with relative impunity in the region, although they know that they are not exactly welcome in that one odd village at the edge of the grasslands. Conventional wisdom attributes this relatively calm state of affairs to well-organized, generally pro-Western local strongmen. While there is some truth to this, in addition the Taliban are scared to death of the Paralatae and whatever lurks in the hills near their village.

Foreign aid workers have divergent views and information about the village. Missionaries or religiously affiliated outreach workers receive decidedly hostile, and even violent, reactions. Food, education and medical workers are treated respectfully but asked to leave since their services are not needed. These are often used to convey requests from the military or advise about military operations that might be going on nearby. Journalists and photographers (although few have gone there) are tolerated, although they generally have to interact with Talil (who speaks good English).

Research Sources

An overview of what determined researchers looking into either Paralatae/Mythos connections, Paralatae survival after the Goths sacked their capital c. 300 A.D., or the history of the Paralatae village in Farah Province follows.

The Scythians and Mythos Worship In General: Anyone delving into an appropriate

occult or Mythos tome might, at the Keeper's discretion, learn a few interesting facts. The tome should have good coverage of Yog-Sothoth to divulge any of these facts.

- Worship of Yog-Sothoth as Tawil-at-Um'r is rumored to have occurred among certain Scythian tribes, particularly the Paralatae, or Royal Scythians.
- Strict and proper observance of ritual is extremely important to sorcerers devoted to the Tawil-at-Um'r aspect of Yog-Sothoth.
- The Paralatae were noted for their sorceresses, who were well known in ancient occult circles as teachers of magic and divination.
- Some commentators claim that Tawil-at-Um'r is one of the less malevolent aspects of Yog-Sothoth, in the sense that it would interact with humans without necessarily destroying them, though by no means friendly.
- Tawil-at-Um'r is concerned with opening the way to distant times and places, and known for making deals.
- The term "Exalted Grandmother" is an honorific for particularly important and powerful priestesses of Tawil-at-Um'r.

Archaeology Checks After Meeting the Paralatae or Seeing Their Pictures: A successful *Archaeology* roll identifies them as appearing to be dressed as ancient Paralatae. Alternatively, sufficient labor in a library or consultation with appropriate academics leads to the same conclusion. Anyone who identifies the Paralatae will know that Herodotus' Histories are the best source for information about ancient Scythians and their ways. The Keeper might wish to review Herodotus' descriptions of the Paralatae, their customs and mannerisms prior to using them.

The Scythian Recordings (1920 A.D.): Originally recorded by Ellen Black during the

National Geographic expedition c. 1920 A.D., these are recordings of Nasra lecturing and inculcating a group of young Scythians in matters of proper behavior and obeisance, made on a lacquer blank recorder.

The original recordings were seized by civilian occult investigators in California c. 1925. They were eventually acquired at auction by P Division (U.S. Navy Intelligence) in the 1930s and wound up in the Library of Congress' closed stacks. In a Delta Green campaign, they would be in the possession of "A Cell" and Dr. Everett Wu, who has been unable to make more than limited headway with them due to the challenges of understanding the Scythian language. He has, however, transferred them over to MP4 files and cleaned up the sound quality.

Anyone listening to the recordings will hear the voice of an old woman speaking in a totally incomprehensible tongue. An *Archaeology* roll enables the listener to identify the language as seemingly Indo-European in derivation, and to guess at a few words. The name Tawil-at-Um'r is mentioned frequently. A *Cthulhu Mythos* roll recognizes this name as one of the names of Yog-Sothoth.

The recordings comprise Nasra's lectures and lessons on proper adherence to Scythian ways and rituals of Scythian magic. Understanding them in any meaningful way requires either a *Speak Scythian* roll, or six uninterrupted months plus an *Archaeology* roll at -50%, or a successful roll in some ancient, similar Indo-Iranian language (e.g., Old Persian, Hittite) at -50%. Rewards for such a linguistic research endeavor: +5% to *Cthulhu Mythos*; -2d4 SAN; +5% to Occult; and the following spells potentially learnable: *Call Yog-Sothoth*, *Bless Blade*, *Cloud Memory*.

Accompanying these recordings are several more hours of separate, later recordings (c.

1926) in which an unnamed woman (Ellen Black-Nasfari) gives a Berlitz style course on Scythian to English. It is clear that she is not a

native speaker. Spending about 100 hours with these recordings grants two skill checks in *Speak Scythian* (10% maximum).

The Testimony of Autolus (Mythos tome, 155 A.D., translated 1850 A.D.):

This is a verbatim transcript, in formal Latin, of a purported interview between St. Pius I, an early Pope (d. 155 A.D.) and Autolus of Thessalonika, a Greek Christian missionary. Autolus was found, his eyes gouged out, covered in small burns, and nearly catatonic, wandering the shores of the Black Sea in late 153 A.D. As Autolus was known to be a personal friend of Pius I, he was taken in and conveyed to Rome for debriefing.

Autolus had spent that year at Scythia Neapolis (modern day Simferopol) on the Crimean peninsula, attempting to proselytize to the remnants of the Scythian empire with little success. He was apparently welcomed, nonetheless, by their queen and high priestess, “Hestia”. Autolus broke down into ravings and hysteria several times during his debriefing when discussing her “and her children—so many children” but insisted that she had been kind to him. She had taken a bemused, academic sort of interest in his proselytizing, but explained that her devotion was to the old Greek god Helios, and that to “turn her back on her grandfather, the sun” would cast the entire world into “nightmare”.

It was apparent that something had happened to “Hestia”, who Autolus described variously as queen, sorceress, witch, lover and “mother in law of all that is holy”, but was incoherent when probed for details. He insisted that her eldest daughter must be found and that “the holy bloodline must be maintained lest all mankind suffer damnation and fall under the sight of evil.” Autolus raves about certain schismatic beliefs that Mary Magdalene had escaped, pregnant, and given birth to the son of the Christ far from Judaea, but strangely maintained that she was still alive in 153 A.D. and working as a soothsayer with the forbidden splinter cult of Apollo Delphinios in Rome.

Autolus claimed to have put out his own eyes, and had adopted a disturbing habit of biting himself and burning the soles of his feet. His explanation was that if he slept too deeply, he “too” would be dragged down the “thousand stairs” to certain torment. By remaining in constant pain, he hoped not to sleep too deeply. Out of concern for his well-being, Pius I had doctors summoned to calm him with wine and opiates, but that same night, Autolus disappeared from his room, leaving behind a stinking pile of blood and corruption.

(The *Testimony* was kept in the Vatican Archives for many centuries without notice, but came to light c. 1850 when a doctoral student from London, Niles Berkeley, found and included it in his dissertation on Holy Grail legends and the myth of Merovingian descent from Christ. His dissertation appends a copy of the *Testimony* and translates it accurately into English).

The *Testimony* requires (depending on version) 20 hours to study and either a successful *Read Latin* or *Read English* roll to comprehend. It grants +1% to *Cthulhu Mythos*, a further +1% to *Dream Lore*, and one new spell is potentially available: *Evade Perdition*. (continued....)

The Testimony of Autolus (Mythos tome, 155 A.D., translated 1850 A.D.) (continued)

Evade Perdition (new spell): The reason for this ongoing set of rituals and practices is not fully explained in the *Testimony of Autolus*, but Autolus does describe a number of practices that he engaged in so as to “hide from” or “avoid the gaze of” some fearsome being that he does not name. It is clear that Autolus felt that the “dark force” held sway over men’s dreams and that to dream would be the end of him. Autolus was certain that if he fell well and truly asleep, or even let his concentration wander for long, he was vulnerable. ***Evade Perdition*** combines a variety of mystical chants and rituals, daily self-mutilation techniques, focus tricks and unusual and expensive pharmaceutical preparations that are intended to keep the caster from falling fully asleep or dreaming. Since human beings need to sleep and dream to function, it is largely a time-buying endeavor if one’s goal is to stop dreaming.

The rituals and self-mutilation involved, and the mental degradation that comes from a lack of true sleep, costs 1 SAN per day and 5 M.P. per day (which are regained). 1 CON per week is also lost for each week of continuous use. The caster sleeps fitfully and never enters REM sleep as long as the rituals are repeated every day. Instead, the caster only lightly “sleeps” for 4 hours a day, without statistic impairment (other than the SAN loss and weekly CON loss). Eventually, with constant use, the caster goes mad and/or his heart gives out from strain.

(On a ***Library Use*** roll when searching major British newspapers of the era, Dr. Berkeley was found murdered in 1852 in a London alley, shot with an arrow and with his scalp taken. No arrests were ever made).

The Golden Arrow Wand (Mythos Artifact): Shaped like a foot-long, three inch-wide thunderbolt with an arrow-shaped head and “fletching” carved into the tail end, this wand is remarkably heavy, weighing 15 pounds. It is golden in color but not made of gold, although it is metallic.

Scientific analysis would conclude that is made of a transuranic element in the same column as gold on the periodic table, but fortunately it is not (conventionally or detectably) radioactive. According to Nasra’s mother, this wand originally belonged to her aunt, who received it from her (Olympian) grandfather.

The wand serves to orient its holder to higher dimensions. This has two primary effects. First, with the expenditure of 2 M.P.s, it acts as an application of the ***Powder of Ibn-Ghazi***. Second, the wielder (and anything in contact

with him, like a hand-held weapon) can affect beings not ordinarily harmed by non-magical weapons.

California State Police Report (1925): This was a paper file which was in storage in (fictitious) Blaketon, CA from 1925 until the 1970s. It was reduced to microfiche in the 1970s, transferred to Sacramento, and the original paper file destroyed. As a result, it is difficult to find for most people.

The police report is sketchy. One Ellen Black-Nasfari, a photographer, was reported missing by her attorney, John Clancy. Clancy hired private investigators to locate her; he alleged that she had been abducted by associates of her mother-in-law, some kind of “Afghani royalty”.

A group of foreign “Afghani” horsemen attacked Blaketon a few days afterwards; there

were several injuries on the part of the police force, and a couple of the “Afghanis” were killed. Shortly thereafter, Ms. Black-Nasfari was located, and the investigation of the Afghani tribesmen was discontinued on the orders of “Naval Intelligence.” (This gives investigators an entrée into Naval Intelligence files, discussed below).

The National Geographic Article File (1921): The November 1921 edition of contains a lengthy article and photo essay about a 1920 expedition to Afghanistan, in which the expedition went both on and off the beaten track. There is no Mythos or occult knowledge to be gained from the magazine issue itself, but it does serve as a gateway to a larger file of more interesting material.

The article itself discusses traveling in the Farah Province of Afghanistan in general, and is one of the first things that will be turned up by a simple library search for mystical or unusual practices, or odd villages following anachronistic ways, in Farah Province. Two things are of interest.

One is a photograph, credited to “Ellen Black.” This depicts a group of men (dressed in Paratae warrior attire, on horseback) posing in front of a vaguely Grecian-looking marble portico. It is captioned “At a village in the east, inhabited by men claiming to be of ancient lineage.” Still, an *Archaeology* roll identifies the dress as Scythian inspired.

The second is a paragraph where article discusses the “odd village of the ‘Ancient Ones’ at the edge of the steppes.” They (unusually for the area) are known for horse-raising, and claim to be descendants of refugees from the Black Sea, driven there by the Goths over 1,000 years earlier. The author of the article also notes that their village has a reputation for being haunted.

The *story file* (buried in archives at headquarters in Washington, D.C.) occupies two banker’s

boxes. Someone with an interest in the occult could make a Ph.D. project out of these boxes, by contrast.

The banker’s boxes are full of two years’ of expedition notes, photos by Ellen Black, a few recordings taken on a recording phonograph, and a handful of archaeological samples, totems and other fetishes. The expedition notes reflect that it was a private one that sold a story idea to National Geographic to obtain some supplemental aid. Led by a Prof. Harold Dunfee from Yale, Dunfee’s expedition notes reference an obscure Vatican document called the *Testimony of Autolus* and Dr. Berkeley’s dissertation on it. Dunfee is noted for his research in early Christian myths and legends, including myths concerning the bloodline of Christ.

Dunfee was further pursuing and fact-checking Berkeley’s research, and thought he needed to go to Afghanistan to pursue a lead on the potential survival of the Scythians reportedly encountered by Autolus of Thessalonika.

The expedition notes are a *tour de force* of traditional Pashtun superstition, Islamic mysticism, speculation about the legendary family of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, and more than a smattering of Tawil-at-Um’r esoterica. The expedition spent time doing a standard travelogue, but a thorough review suggests that Dunfee structured the expedition’s route around a desire to consult certain libraries, examine archaeological sites and seek out a specific village of “ancient ones.”

Dunfee evidently found what he was looking for, although he was disappointed that he was not permitted to meet the “Exalted Grandmother”, head priestess of what Dunfee calls the “Paratae exile village.” Dunfee does not reach any conclusions or offer any explicit statements about what exactly he was looking

for in the village, or what conclusions he reached.

The archive file takes 6 weeks to thoroughly review, and a successful *Read English* check for non-native speakers. Success nets +4% to Cthulhu Mythos, -1d6 SAN, and grants skill checks in *Occult* and *Speak Scythian*. No spells are available, but a cursory review of the archive (skimming) gives the coordinates for the Scythian village as well as a photograph of the area pictograph (bat-winged serpent) taken from a high point not far away.

A handout summarizing the results of a skimming review of these files appears nearby as *Standard Operating Procedure, Investigator Handout #3*. Skimming the file costs 1 SAN and results in no Cthulhu Mythos gain.

Eastern Farah Province SATINT Summary and SECNAV Rules of Engagement For “Ancient Ones” Village, Southeastern Farah Province (2005): This military intelligence report and accompanying rules of engagement order originated in 2005 with the Secretary of the Navy following the unsuccessful Marine patrol into the village of the Paralatae.

A particularly sharp and restless Naval Intelligence officer, Lt. Andrea Littleton, decided to put in some extra hours to see if she could offer any historical or anthropological insight into what Lt. Taylor’s squad had run into. She was surprised when she found not only the National Geographic article from 1921, but an old Naval Intelligence report from 1925, where Naval Intelligence’s “P Division” had, for some unclear reason, gotten involved into some kind of unruly funeral celebration in rural Northern California.

Apparently, a sizeable group of the people matching the description of the “ancient ones” depicted in the National Geographic article had gotten into some sort of kidnapping dispute with the local police. Strangely, an old investigative arm of Naval Intelligence had been called in. They invoked secrecy on the proceedings, and all but a summary of the file were classified beyond even her very high security clearance.

Lt. Littleton dutifully wrote her report up and sent it up her chain of command. Lt. Littleton, “coincidentally”, disappeared the next day. She is listed as AWOL. (If you are using the Delta Green setting, her nosing around in “P Division” matters led her to be recruited and taken in by Delta Green, and assigned a new identity).

However, the Secretary of the Navy (“SECNAV”) (after “A Cell” called in a number of favors and pulled several strings to nudge things in that direction) shortly thereafter issued an unprecedented SATINT summary and rules of engagement for what was termed the “Ancient Ones” village.

This report is highly classified and “eyes only/need to know only”, for command level military officers operating in that area. “A Cell” nonetheless has a copy and takes a keen interest, through friendlies in Naval Intelligence, in anyone challenging the rules of engagement. “A Cell” gives a copy of it to the investigators at the outset of *Standard Operating Procedure*. A summary of the report appears nearby as *Standard Operating Procedure, Investigator Handout #2*.

Standard Operating Procedure, Investigator Handout #3—A Summary of the 1921 Afghanistan National Geographic Raw File Archive.

The boxes contain the field notes, raw photos, souvenirs, and receipts of an expedition to Afghanistan that occurred in 1920. It was led by Prof. Harold Dunfee of Yale University and was partially financed by the National Geographic Society.

The boxes contain a copy of the November 1921 edition of National Geographic magazine, featuring a lengthy article and photo essay about an expedition to Afghanistan which went both on and off the beaten track. The article itself includes a segment on the expedition's wanderings in Farah Province, Afghanistan in general, but is not focused on weird or occult practices.

All of the photographs are attributed to Ellen Black, a young photographer who accompanied the expedition.

The archive file demonstrates an ulterior motive for the expedition on Dunfee's part, however, and someone with an interest in the occult could make a Ph.D. project out of these boxes. Dunfee was interested in early Christian myths, including the rumor that Jesus and Mary Magdalene had been married and had one or more children who escaped after the Crucifixion.

Dunfee references a Victorian-era English Ph.D. dissertation by a Dr. Niles Berkeley of the University of London, which analyzed a Vatican document from the 2nd Century A.D. referred to as the ***Testimony of Autolus***. Unknown to the rest of the expedition, Dunfee was fact-checking the accuracy of Berkeley's research. Dunfee was looking to confirm rumors of a haunted village of "ancient lineage" in eastern Farah Province, inhabited by people reported to fancy themselves as direct descendants of the Paralatae, the royal sub-tribe of the Scythian Empire.

The archive file is a *tour de force* of traditional Pashtun superstition, Islamic mysticism, speculation about the family of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, and more than a smattering of Tawil at-Um'r esoterica. The expedition spent time doing a standard travelogue, but a thorough review suggests that Dunfee structured the expedition's stops around a desire to consult certain libraries, examine archaeological sites and seek out that particular village of "ancient ones."

Dunfee evidently found what he was looking for, although he was disappointed that he was not permitted to meet the "Exalted Grandmother", head priestess of what Dunfee calls the "Paralatae exile village." Dunfee does not reach or offer any concrete conclusions about what exactly he was looking for at the village. He does however note that the village is located near a pictograph (visible from elevation) of a bat-winged serpent, a classic symbol of the Scythian godhead.

Standard Operating Procedure, Investigator Handout #2—A synopsis of SECNAV’s SATINT and Rules of Engagement For The “Ancient Ones” village, Farah Province, Afghanistan

This is an extremely highly classified, “need to know” intelligence file on a certain village in eastern Farah Province, Afghanistan. It consists of three basic parts, and is intended for review by U.S. military units operating in that theater.

The first basic part consists of several hours of video footage and several dozen image files taken by spy satellites and reconnaissance drone aircraft. It depicts an unusual looking, off the beaten track village of approximately 500 people at the edge of a steppe transition in Farah province. The village is located in a well defensible, hilly zone and is of unusual construction, looking like a combination between a Greek movie set and a nomadic collection of yurts and horse pens. It is very clean, very well-organized, and there are few modern contrivances (like trucks) in evidence. Various labels and references on the images describe the village as belonging to the “Ancient Ones.” A bat-winged serpent pictogram is evident.

Several of the surveillance film segments focus on a hill overlooking the village to the northeast. These show several previously forested areas that have been smashed flat, as though by an enormous bulldozer. At the foot of the hill is a cave, of which several stills have been taken. Around the mouth of the cave appear to be *hundreds* of bleaching skeletons and abandoned military gear, including a flattened vehicle looking like a giant foot had stepped on it. SAN loss 0/1 for this portion.

The second basic part of the file consists of an incident report, related interview notes and psychiatric evaluations, and a research memorandum and synopsis of the foregoing by a Lt. Andrea Littleton of U.S. Navy Intelligence. *(Continued....)*



Standard Operating Procedure, Investigator Handout #2 (continued)

According to Lt. Littleton's summary and compilation, a U.S. Marine patrol performing a routine search for Taliban and basic area reconnaissance entered the village in question in 2005, disregarding warnings that the village was "sacred ground" and "haunted." The village is miles off of any significant road, and U.S. forces had been able to secure the nearest through road and shove back a few Taliban insurgents without the village even stirring. Still, someone had to go in eventually and have a look around. A squad of Marines, under the command of Marine 1st Lt. Jerome Taylor, was sent into the village. **Only** Lt. Taylor returned. He was not a pretty sight when he did. Taylor's squad had (he reported, after being sedated) intruded onto some kind of royal funeral ceremony, and only Taylor had had the sense to play along. He was returned without a scalp and having been subjected to "ritual purification" (his face scarified, an arrow jammed through his left hand, and showing signs of having smoked a great deal of marijuana). His mind was also broken and he displayed classic signs of PTSD. He was referred to the closed psychiatric ward at Walter Reed Hospital.

Taylor was accompanied back to his base by Talil Nasfari, an "envoy" from the village. Nasfari had a warning for Lt. Taylor's command and control structure: His village is a holy site. Many centuries of kings have their tombs in the village. His village was inhabited by an ancient people, some sort of ethnic isolate, with no use for the Taliban. Taliban are not allowed there. Neither are anyone else's military forces. Nasfari insisted that Alliance forces leave them alone and not set foot on their land. If they were left alone, he promised that his people would not cause Alliance forces any trouble. Any requests for "parley" (as he put it) would need to come from someone other than a soldier, and they should ask for him. Next time, no soldiers would return.

Lt. Taylor, for his part, spoke in his debriefing of participating in a royal funeral; the strange (non-Pashtun) tongue they spoke among themselves; an old woman who interrogated him for a week without sleeping; and how his squad had lost a firefight to a bunch of mounted archers on horseback, like something out of an old Western. He also spoke of odd earthquake like rumblings, like some enormous animal crashing through the hills. He did not see it himself, but some of his men saw signs of something huge, and it caused a panic that resulted in their massacre in their firefight.

Later field intelligence supplements mention repeated Taliban attacks against the village being crushed, ending in a massive Taliban raid that ended in unusual, loud, booming noises heard many miles away. The results of that assault are documented in the foregoing satellite images. The Taliban finally gave up with the village after that disaster, and now leave it alone. The result of the Taliban giving this village a wide berth has been that eastern Farah province has become a sort of comparatively quiet, quasi-demilitarized zone in the Afghanistan conflict, although occasional bandits and raiders still come through. International relief workers operate with relative impunity in the region, although they know that they are not exactly welcome in that one odd villages.

Lt. Littleton does not stop at synthesizing field intelligence, however. She also did some historical research. She attaches a Dept. of the Navy intelligence report from 1925, in which (for some reason) a Naval Intelligence element referred to as "P Division" was called in, apparently late in the proceedings, to suppress and hush up an incident in rural Northern California in the winter of 1925. Littleton openly speculates at a connection. *(Continued....)*

Standard Operating Procedure, Investigator Handout #2 (concluded)

The 1925 “P Division” report is fragmentary, but outlines a conflict between local police in Blaketon, CA and a group of “Afghani tribesmen” known as “Paralatae” over the course of that winter. About 150 “Paralatae”, led by a woman known as the “Exalted Grandmother”, showed up unexpectedly, stole a body from a Blaketon funeral home, and retreated to the countryside to conduct what is described as an “ancient funerary rite with occult overtones.” A local woman, Ellen Black-Nasfari, was taken against her will and reported missing by her attorney, who had been handling the estate of the deceased, her husband Turib Nasfari.

At least two violent encounters occurred between the “Paralatae” and law enforcement, resulting in several casualties. The “Paralatae” were described as ruthless, fanatical, “barbarian” throwbacks who mostly relied on ancient technologies (including “bronze swords”, bows, and horses). As things appeared headed for a final showdown, “civilian occult experts” managed to broker a peaceful solution. Ellen Black-Nasfari and the experts convinced law enforcement and Marine Corps elements to allow the funeral to proceed, and the matter was largely kept out of the media.

At the advice of the “civilian experts on occult matters”, the “Paralatae” were allowed to withdraw back to Afghanistan at the conclusion of their funerary rite, roughly one year later. Elements of “P Division” kept local officials and citizens away from the “Paralatae” camp, which required a lot of strings to be pulled. Lt. Littleton concludes from their dress, language and reported habits that these “Paralatae” were an ethnic isolate group descended from the Indo-Aryan branch of the Scythian people. There are references to “further investigations” being undertaken in connection with “civilian experts” into “certain recordings found in Mrs. Black-Nasfari’s apartment” and an “ongoing debriefing” of Mrs. Black-Nasfari, but Lt. Littleton’s report does not include these materials.

Lt. Littleton includes a one-page excerpt from, of all things, the November, 1921 edition of National Geographic. It appears to be part of an essay about an expedition to Afghanistan, with the portions pertaining to one particular village excerpted and highlighted. The excerpt includes a photograph credited to “Ellen Black” and a paragraph referencing the photograph. The photograph depicts a group of men (dressed in ancient warrior attire, on horseback) posing in front of a vaguely Grecian-looking marble portico. It is captioned “At a village in the east, inhabited by men claiming to be of ancient lineage.” There is also a paragraph where article discusses the “odd village of the ‘Ancient Ones’ at the edge of the steppes.” They (unusually for the area) are known for horse-raising, and claim to be descendants of refugees from the Black Sea, driven there by the Goths over 1,000 years earlier. The author of the article also notes that their village has a reputation for being haunted.

The third basic part to the file is a set of standing rules of engagement personally issued by the Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV), along with some commentary and written objections from certain Marine Corps field elements (all summarily overruled). SECNAV orders that the village of the “Ancient Ones” be completely avoided by all U.S. military forces, period. Any contacts needed to be had with the village must be approved by SECNAV personally, and then undertaken by civilian intermediaries. A no-fly zone is in effect over the village, including for recon drones. The written protests are divided in rationale between “slippery slope” arguments and revenge/loss of control arguments (i.e., those bastards wiped out a squad of Marines and we need to teach them a lesson).

Statistics

Typical Paralatae warrior

Nationality: Scythian

STR: 16 DEX: 16 INT: 11 CON: 16 APP: 08 POW: 14

SIZ: 13 EDU: 08 SAN: 00 Luck: 70 Hits: 15 Age: 21

Damage Bonus: +1d4

Education: Combat and ritual training by the "Exalted Grandmother"

Skills: Ancient Scythian Way of Life 70%, Art 20%, Climb 70%, Conceal 30%, Cthulhu Mythos 5%, Dodge 70%, Drive Auto 05%, First Aid 50%, History 30%, Horseback Archery 70%, Jump 50%, Listen 50%, Occult 20%, Speak Scythian 40%, Speak/Read/Write Pashtun 40%, Ride 80%, Sneak 50%, Swim 20%, Throw 70%, Track 70%.

Weapons: Bronze Tulwar, 1d8+1+db, 70%, can parry and impale, 10 HPs.

Javelins, Throw%, 1d8+1, 1/2 rounds, 25 yards, 5 carried in quiver, can impale.

Bow, 70%, d8+1+1/2 db, 1/round, 90 yards, can impale, 20 arrows carried in quiver.

Armor: Each Scythian will be dressed in hide trousers and heelless leather boots. They will also be wearing leather tunics under leather armor, and wearing a lot of gold: rings, torques and hair combs. They also carry a leather shield with metal scales. Armor and shield grant 4 HP of protection.

Notes: Scythian warriors are totally ruthless and fanatic. However, their primary goal is to keep Nasra alive. Their own lives are disposable, and they have been taught that being perceived as the aggressor in a fight, or resisting legitimate law enforcement, or annoying people who think they are legitimate law enforcement, only invites more attention. As a result, they are slow to be aggressors or to kill disabled enemies. Once attacked in their village, though, all bets are off.

The Scythians are fond of scalping defeated enemies, though. Scalping does 1d6 of damage, and costs the victim 1d4+1 points of APP and 0/1d3 SAN. The Scythians clean the scalps and use them as hand towels. There is nothing sanitary about a bronze tulwar, so checks for infection would be in order for a scalpee.

The Scythians are not totally averse to using modern technology, but they greatly prefer not to. This comes down from Nasra, who is uneasy about doing anything that might be seen as "not Scythian" and, as a result, insists on fastidiously erring on the side of caution. Only if very hard pressed would the Scythians break out the stash of RPGs, AK-47s and other captured military hardware stashed in their village. They should be assumed to only have base skills with firearms and other modern contrivances. Note in particular that the rank and file Scythians are not very good drivers.

*Nasra, the "Exalted Grandmother", High Priestess of the Paralatae***Nationality:** Scythian

STR: 03 DEX: 03 INT: 20 CON: 20 APP: 08 POW: 35
 SIZ: 09 EDU: 25 SAN: 00 Luck: 99 Hits: 15 Age: 2,320 (looks 95)

Damage Bonus: -1d6**Education:** 2200+ years in the school of hard knocks

Skills: Accounting 10%; Anthropology 50%; Archaeology 45%; Art 80%; Astronomy 99%; Bargain 50%; Biology 50%; Botany 65%; Cartography 55%; Credit Rating 30% (99% to Scythians); Cthulhu Mythos 50%; Drive Auto 5%; Fast Talk 65%; First Aid 90%; History 95%; Law 50%; Medicine 45%; Natural History 95%; Navigation (Land) 99%; Occult 99%; Persuade 95%; Pharmacy 55%; Physics 55%; Psychology 95%; Ride 99%; Speak Scythian 100%; Speak/Read/Write English, Latin, Greek, Arabic, French, Russian, Chinese, Sumerian, Aramaic, Akkadian, Hittite, Pashtun 99%; Scythian Rituals 100%; Woodcraft 95%; Zoology 50%; Behave Imperiously 99%.

Spells: All of the spells of the Greater Grimoire; Augur, Bless Blade; Chant of Thoth; Cloud Memory; Command Ghost; Conjure Glass of Mortlan; Create Mist of Releh; Death Spell; Deflect Harm; Enthrall Victim; Evade Perdition; Fist of Yog-Sothoth; Flesh Ward; Heal; Journey to the Other Side; Levitate; Mesmerize; Mindblast; Steal Life, Wrack; most types of ritual magic; other spells at Keeper's discretion.

Weapons: Does not need or carry any. Nasra does carry an enchanted, gnarled, gold-inlaid walking stick always kept fully charged with 35 magic points. Nasra has Javelin, Tulwar and Horseback Archery skills all at 99%, but due to her advanced age relies on spells.

Notes: Nasra's purple and gold-ornamented sarong is enchanted and counts as 15 points of armor against non-magical attacks. If expecting trouble, Nasra augments this with Flesh Ward.

Insanity: Debatable. Sincerely believes that if she allows her culture to die, the world will end. She would prefer not to guess wrong.



*Talil Nasfari, Semi-Westernized Scythian Go-Between (2011 edition)***Nationality:** Scythian

STR: 14 DEX: 13 INT: 12 CON: 14 APP: 12 POW: 12

SIZ: 13 EDU: 12 SAN: 30 Luck: 60 Hits: 14 Age: 31

Damage Bonus: +1d4.**Education:** Some College.**Skills:** Art 45%, Drive Auto 40%, Bargain 50%; Climb 70%, Conceal 30%, Dodge 70%, First Aid 50%, History 30%, Ancient Scythian Way of Life 70%, Jump 50%, Listen 50%, Occult 20%, Cthulhu Mythos 5%, Speak Scythian 60%, Speak/Read/Write English 40%, Speak/Read/Write Pashtun 60%, Ride 80%, Sneak 50%, Swim 70%, Throw 70%, Track 70%.**Spells:** None.**Weapons:** Bronze Tulwar, 1d8+1+db, 70%, can parry and impale, 10 HPs.

Javelins, Throw%, 1d8+1, 1/2 rounds, 25 yards, 5 carried in quiver, can impale.

Bow, 70%, d8+1+1/2 db, 90 yards, 1/round, can impale, 20 arrows carried in quiver.

Notes: The latest in a long line of diplomacy-trained Scythians.*The Eldest Son, The Price of Staving Off Oblivion*

STR: 35 DEX: 30 INT: 21 CON: 30 POW: 24 SIZ: 50

Luck: 99 Hits: 40

Damage Bonus: +2d6.**Spells:** Call Yog-Sothoth, Death Spell, Implant Fear, Stop Heart, Voorish Sign.**Languages:** (in huge booming voice that shakes the trees): Scythian 99%.**Attacks:** Bulldoze and Seize, 100%, damage 1d6 of crushing every round plus 1d10 of blood drain every round after the first.

Big Stomp, 100%, 1d6 + db.

Armor: Immune to most forms of physical damage. Enchanted weapons do minimum damage. Invisible except when feeding.**SAN Loss:** 1/1d8 when invisible (profound sub-basso twittering in Scythian and inexplicable terrain, tank and personnel smashing). When visible (feeding as the blood briefly illuminates its bulk, or with the *Powder of Ibn-Ghazi*), SAN loss is 1d8/3d10.



Standard Operating Procedure—A Scenario for Call of Cthulhu/Delta Green

1. Introduction

Standard Operating Procedure is a sequel, set in the modern day/Delta Green milieu, to Common Courtesy, published in Pagan Publishing's Mortal Coils collection (1998). The investigators, playing a Delta Green cell, will be called upon to intercede in a looming disaster.

Rogue vindictive elements within the U.S. military have “accidentally” caused a Predator drone to bomb the village of the “Ancient Ones”, the remaining homeland of the Scythians in Farah Province, Afghanistan. This has triggered a potential disaster on several fronts, and several different factions are mobilizing. These are: a pack of Taliban insurgents, determined to both avenge prior defeats as well as purge the world of the evil of the “Eldest Son”; Northern Alliance military forces, determined to investigate the strike and generally assume control over the situation; and MJ-12, which will infiltrate the Northern Alliance response with a reconnaissance team and try generally to figure out what is going on, before taking decisive action to co-opt and/or eliminate the Scythians.

This is very much of a “sandbox” style of scenario, as the outcome is extremely variable depending on the investigators' actions. Rather than script an investigation, Standard Operating Procedure will lay out the available sources of investigation, describe the various factions and what will happen absent investigator action, and discuss how the Paratae will react to different stimuli. Ultimately, the most successful outcome is to restore the status quo as much as possible, and keep the Scythians from being

killed or dispersed, but this is an extremely difficult outcome to achieve.

2. Getting Started

This scenario is intended for an experienced cell with a reputation for being able to operate quietly. Cells believed to be under active scrutiny by MJ-12, or those with a reputation for “cowboy” antics, will never even hear of the operation. “A Cell” needs someone extremely discrete and capable of creative thought for this mess.

Sometime prior to the beginning of the scenario, the Keeper should introduce The Light of Day website. The Light of Day is a Wikileaks like, hacker operated website that delights in embarrassing the United States government in particular. Unlike Wikileaks, it has no public face and has so far managed to have whoever is operating it avoid identification. (In fact, The Light of Day is operated, under several layers of cover, by a mainstream news agency to trial balloon sensitive news stories and thereby, in effect, generate its own news).

Two days before the Delta Green cell is contacted, all major news outlets include in their news cycle a story about another “accidental” drone bombing of an Afghan village. The village is referred to as an “ancient holy site belonging to an ethnic minority group in a remote part of Farah Province, which had remained neutral in the ongoing efforts against the Taliban.” Public relations flaks from the Dept. of Defense address the “accident” at press briefings, terming it “regrettable” and (falsely) suggesting that “insurgent activity” had been detected in the vicinity.

One day before the investigators' cell is contacted, in reaction to the news coverage, The Light of Day website somehow obtains (via hacking) and posts a few seconds of the Predator drone footage leading up to the bombing run on the village. This limited footage likewise makes the news cycle with all major news outlets. Pentagon flacks deny the authenticity of the footage.

The investigators' cell is instructed that the "highest levels" are extremely concerned about the Predator drone incident currently making the rounds of the news cycle. Delta Green has acquired a longer clip, and the investigators are advised that the incident appears potentially related to an old (1920s era) Naval Intelligence file. The players are asked to discretely look into the situation and take "whatever steps may be necessary" in light of what they uncover. This is an admittedly open ended assignment, but the players are warned that military intelligence may well be mobilizing on a parallel investigation, and that discretion is a must. Up cell contact should be very limited due to concerns about exposure, given the likely involvement of other organization's operatives. Anticipating the possible need for travel, a supply cache has already been established for the investigators.

The players are given:

--*A thumb drive*. The thumb drive contains a longer (minute long) clip of the Predator drone footage, including operator voice-over chatter (**Standard Operating Procedure, Investigator Handout #1**).

--*A paper copy of SECNAV's intelligence file on the village of the "Ancient Ones"*, summarized above as **Standard Operating Procedure, Investigator Handout #2**. This is to be a hastily made copy of a paper document. It is festooned with a variety of heavy-duty

security classifications, some of which the players may never have seen or heard of before. Scrawled in red marker is a note from the players' cell contact: "Burn after reading or you'll be burned. You *never* saw this, and it doesn't exist. Don't even ask."

--*Directions to a "Green Box"/supply cache located in a storage locker near Logan Airport in Boston*. Inside the Green Box are: passable fake passports, one for each cell member; open, round-trip plane tickets for each cell member to Kabul, Afghanistan; a contact name and number in Kabul for a "friendly" with the International Red Cross, Genevieve Jansen (and a warning that Ms. Jansen is not "read in" but thinks that the players are legitimate undercover government agents, attempting to find out what happened at the village); and a pre-paid Visa card with \$10,000.

One of the passports will be in the name of "Thomas Leon". This identity comes with a Red Cross employee credential badge; each of them comes with limited background support (fake social security numbers and a few years of fake credit histories). If someone calls the Red Cross, they will have a Thomas Leon in their payroll system. He will be an aid worker assigned to work under Ms. Jansen's supervision in Afghanistan. But it is far from a bulletproof cover, as no Thomas Leon actually exists, and the identities will not withstand serious digging by law enforcement.

There is also contact information for a grey market military supplier in Kabul who (with the aid of the Visa card) will be able to set up the players with basic gear: street-available weapons like AK-47s, basic body armor, etc.

Finally, *a warning*: "Watch your backs. Somebody broke protocol. Expect cleaners and parallel investigations."

Standard Operating Procedure, Investigator Handout #1—A synopsis of leaked Predator drone footage of bombing run on the village of the “Ancient Ones.”

This grainy footage runs about one minute in length, and appears to be taken by a low-light enhanced, digital video camera from above, perhaps through a bomb sight. It is consistent with footage taken at night from a Predator drone aircraft. Visible in the footage is the bat-winged serpent petroglyph marking the location of the village, which appears nestled at the foot of a range of hills.

The camera circles the village for a while, which is distinctly odd looking. There is a lot of audio static in the background, which cuts in and out. The village does not look like your typical collection of Afghani huts. Rather, it looks like someone has pitched about 100 felt tents around a square block out of a Roman-era movie set, complete with Classical-style architecture and a small aqueduct.

The drone circles for a minute and drops its ordinance right on the central square, in the midst of the anachronistic architecture. A lot of static erupts when the bomb hits. The footage continues for a few seconds, at which point there is a loud roar, (almost like a trumpeting elephant) and a crash. The camera flips over and the footage abruptly ends.

(The village being bombed is clearly the same, odd looking village depicted in the SATINT reports in **Standard Operating Procedure, Investigator Handout #2**. On an *Idea* roll if necessary, it strains credulity to believe that any drone operator in his right mind could have “accidentally confused” this village for some other one—it is far too distinctive).

3. Research & Stateside Events

a. MJ-12’s Parallel Investigation: The players will probably want to do some additional digging before taking advantage of the offer to go to Afghanistan. Logical research and interview pursuits follow. Note that while MJ-12 is also mobilizing to investigate, they have no particular sense of urgency.

Rather, someone at MJ-12 will have seen the same leaked videotape that the players have seen (as they are covertly monitoring The Light of Day Website), but will not have had the pleasure of reading the SECNAV file on the “Ancient Ones.” They will have seen and digitally enhanced the videotape, and been a little weirded out by the booming sounds that accompanied the downing of the Predator drone. They will not have thought to try to filter the last ten seconds of the archived version initially, but

will catch on and do this if they get a sense that Delta Green is looking into this event.

So MJ-12 will be a step slow and on a slightly different trajectory. They will have seen something weird, but not be highly alarmed about it. Rather, at first, they will stick a couple of low-level guys on it to do some routine due diligence.

The two MJ-12 agents initially assigned (Mr. Black and Mr. White, if they must have names) are not rocket scientists. Rather, they are ex-Special Forces with some rudimentary counterintelligence training—relative noobs to the spy game. They will be digging into conventional military intelligence sources initially. This will lead them to the general background information about the village, and most of the information in the SECNAV file (except for the SECNAV’s standing rules of engagement and Lt. Littleton’s historical

research. They could get at that, but not without risking undue attention). In other words, they will also have (eventually) the historical SATINT footage, and the story, psych files, etc. behind Lt. Taylor's encounter with the village, but not have much of a clue as to what sort of supernatural threat they might be dealing with.

Indeed, MJ-12's view of the situation, initially, will be that a rogue government actor or actor(s) probably sanctioned the village for some reason—possibly Delta Green. Early on, they will be questioning Taylor, then perhaps doing a little research, then perhaps looking into the National Geographic archive. They will be looking for anything that smells like Delta Green covering its tracks. But it will initially be consistent with a low level of concern—a pair of lightly-armed MIBs flashing Dept. of Defense identification and conducting general inquiries.

The players may get a sense that a parallel investigation has been ongoing—people arriving shortly before them asking similar questions, but also looking for people who have been there previously. Lt. Taylor, depending on how the investigators are with him, may tell the MIBs that they were there before and give their descriptions, or may call the MIBs when the investigators show up later. Or, maybe not. The investigators may, if they get noticed, find themselves tailed or poked into by the MIBs. This will all be in a low key sort of way, however, until several days after the players get involved.

Eventually, the two MJ-12 agents will think to ask to dig through the National Geographic archive, and depending on what the investigators are up to at that point, things might get hairy. That archive, once reviewed, puts MJ-12 on its guard. If the investigators have already looked through it, MJ-12 might seriously try to identify them and/or escalate their involvement level.

MJ-12 MIBs x2, Think They're Defending the U.S. of A. Against An Illegal Government Conspiracy.

STR: 15 DEX: 15 INT: 13
 CON: 15 APP: 12 POW: 12
 SIZ: 15 EDU: 14 SAN: 60
 Luck: 60 Hits: 15 Age: 30ish

Damage Bonus: +1d4.

Education: Military Special Ops Training and Spook School.

Skills: Climb 70%, Computer Use 40%, Dodge 70%, Drive Auto 40%, Fast Talk 50%, Hide 77%, Listen 50%, Library Use 50%, Martial Arts 50%, Occult 20%, Speak/Read/Write English 70%, Speak/Read/Write Spanish 40%, Sneak 50%, Spot Hidden 59%, Tradecraft 40%.

Spells: None.

Weapons: Ruger P91 semi-automatic handgun, 2/round, 15 shots, 15 yards base range, malfunction 98-00, d10 damage, 50%, with laser sight (+10%) and silencer.

Fist/Punch 54%, 1d3+db.

Grapple 57%, special.

Kick 54%, 1d6+db.

Gear: Bullet resistant/Kevlar weave executive protection suits, 4 points of armor (torso, 50% chance of protection); secure cell phones; sunglasses; parabolic microphone; wiretapping equipment; phony search warrant; other dirty tricks Keeper thinks might be appropriate to a non-urgent inquiry.

Notes: Overly non-descript.

**M.I.B. #1 (Black)****M.I.B. #2 (White)**

If the investigators are looking through it at that point in National Geographic's basement, the MIBs (with or without backup, depending) might try to sanction them, or follow them and then arrange for an abduction and interrogation.

If the archive has been "borrowed", legitimately or otherwise, the MIBs will scramble, seek instruction from their chain of command, and matters will escalate. The investigators might

feel some heat as they make their way to Afghanistan from MJ-12 hit squads if things escalate.

In any case, at the point that MJ-12 reads the National Geographic archive (or it goes missing), MJ-12 will conclude that it is not sure what is going on, but that it might be Mythos related and significant, and that it needs to send someone into the village in Afghanistan to investigate.

b. The Light of Day Website: The Light of Day website (*Know* roll or simple research) is a Wikileaks-like organization, devoted to airing unedited versions of whatever top-secret documents and video it can get its hands on. Unlike Wikileaks, no one quite knows who runs it; it is layered behind several levels of misdirection. Submissions to the site can be made by e-mail, which is routed and re-routed, hidden behind zombie servers, and generally so thoroughly obscured that no one has yet been able to find it. Like Wikileaks, it has found a place where it can store and disseminate its infodumps, in this case a server in Iceland. The Icelandic authorities have stubbornly refused to do anything about it, citing protection of journalist laws. Unlike Wikileaks, whoever is behind The Light of Day is smart enough not to annoy their host government, and there is no public face to get embarrassed or discredited in a sex scandal.

If the investigators have and can access any well-placed journalists with confidential government sources, or well-placed intelligence analysts, they might get some speculative insight as to the operation. Well-placed sources believe that The Light of Day site is a test balloon scam, run covertly by a U.S. oriented news agency. They point to the rapidity with which the U.S. news outlets report on the stories (suggesting that they know in advance when a juicy story is coming out on the site) and the website's focus

on U.S. activities. (This is a correct supposition).

Finally, there is vital information to be had just by giving the public website a thorough snooping through. With a *Computer Use* roll, the investigator can check through the site map and scripting of the site and find an archived but accessible, longer version of the video clip. This version of the clip runs about 10 more seconds in length and has important extra footage at the end (although without enhancement, the extra footage simply appears to be visual snow and audio static).

c. Video Analysis: Running the video clip through sophisticated analysis (e.g., digitally filtering sounds, enhancing the light) is instructive and an important clue. How much the players get through these efforts depends on whether they are looking at the one minute (handout) version or the slightly longer version (archived on The Light of Day) version.

The one minute (handout) version benefits from further digital cleanup of the sound track. There is audio feed of the remote drone operator offering running commentary on what he is picking up on the drone's cameras. It is plain that the bombing of the village was no accident, with phrases like "target acquired" and "ordinance away" being heard.

But perhaps most startling is a comment at the very end, under his breath and only audible with enhancement: "gotcha you scalping sumbitches. Orders be damned. Oo-rah." ("Oo-rah" is a Marine Corps chant). This is then almost immediately cut off by a roar and a smashing, to which the operator shouts "what the hell..." as something impacts the drone and sends it careening.

The extra 10 seconds on the archived website version are chaos. This needs to be digitally filtered or it appears as just snow and noise. As

the drone spins around, the operator is generally freaking out, and then the drone stops, as though something caught it. And at the very end, when it is rather low to the ground, *something* looks in the cockpit. It appears as a semi-human warm spot, perhaps 20 feet tall, but not exactly human shaped, more like an enormous human head and arms atop a blob of a body. Only the heat signature outline is detected by the drone's night vision gear. SAN loss 0/1.

d. Scouring the Public and Not-so-Public Record: There are numerous additional sources of information available, depending on the extent to which the investigators are willing to dig. There are at least two potential interviews suggested by the SECNAV file: Lt. Taylor and Lt. Littleton. These are discussed below.

The one page of the National Geographic article might send them to approach the Society for any archive files, which are likewise discussed below. Reading through the archive file will lead the investigators to the existence of the *Testimony of Autolus* and Niles Berkeley's dissertation on it. It also underscores the Mythos nature of the things ongoing at the Scythian village. The *Testimony* (apart from opening up several new cans of worms) provides another, critical indication that the Scythians are trying to maintain their particular identity for a reason, and hints at the consequences of their failure.

The 1925 Blaketon, CA police report (above) is not copied in the SECNAV file, but likewise hints that the relationship with the Scythians has been "managed" by Naval Intelligence since the 1920s. All of this is helpful for putting the investigators in an informed frame of mind upon arrival in Afghanistan.

Generally speaking, requests sent up to "A Cell" are ignored. The first one might get a response along the lines of "DO NOT RISK

COMMUNICATION EXCEPT IN DIRE CIRCUMSTANCES. USE EXTREME CAUTION. EVALUATE SITUATION AND MAKE FULL REPORT ONCE SITUATION IS ASCERTAINED VIA ENCRYPTED E-MAIL.” Subsequent ones not reflecting a full evaluation and report do not receive a response. Emphasize to the investigators that there are both legitimate and clandestine parallel investigations ongoing, and that it is obvious that A Cell is concerned about exposure as a result.

e. Interview, Lt. Jerome Taylor, U.S.M.C. (Ret’d): Lt. Taylor’s military career effectively ended after his forced participation in a funerary rite in the Scythians’ village. While he might have been able to tough that out, the evidence of the “Eldest Son” that he witnessed on top of it was too much. He presented as a case of post-traumatic stress disorder (“PTSD”) with delusional aspects, and only certain very well placed people in Naval Intelligence had any idea that something worse might be involved. Unwilling to lend any credence to that view, the Marine Corps simply treated Lt. Taylor as though he were crazy and had been badly mistreated by the Scythian village.

Lt. Taylor was routed through the Navy’s PTSD treatment regime (focusing on medication) and mustered out honorably. His pals from the Naval Academy do not begrudge Marine Corps in this regard; they do begrudge the fact that the Scythian village has not been blotted from the map.

Lt. Taylor is a very fit, 30-year old man who looks like he is still in the Marine Corps. He is presently working at a Best Buy as a “loss prevention specialist” for slightly above the minimum wage in Toledo, OH. Locally, he is known as “that military looking dude who lost half his ear in the war.” Plastic surgery has done a nice job of repairing the facial scars he endured, but he still has a few.

Taylor is kept on anti-depressant medications, although he comes across as normal under normal conditions. He suffers from occasional nightmares and flashbacks (tolerable on medication), and lives alone in a cheap apartment near his work. He participates in talk therapy and volunteers at the local V.A., trying to help fellow vets. He owns a gun, legally, and has an Ohio license for it if anyone bothers to check before going to talk to him.

If left alone for a few more years, Taylor might pull it together. Unfortunately, the investigators and/or MJ-12 are about to come calling and stir up bad memories.

How Taylor reacts depends on whether the investigators are first or (as is more probably the case) the second gang on the scene, and how they approach him. If they are first, he will be aloof but reluctantly cooperate with questions asked for plausible reasons. (He will, for example, tell what he remembers about his incident in Afghanistan, sanitized of any occult overtones, if approached by a government investigator looking into the “accidental” drone strike on the village). He might likewise volunteer that he has gotten anonymous letters—he presumes from sympathetic fellow Marines—vowing that the village would be dealt with.

He will not (without torture or other effective coercion, or having his apartment thoroughly searched) reveal that he has gotten an anonymous e-mail since the attack reading “WE GOT EM”, or that he has a pretty good idea that a former classmate, Capt. James Conway, U.S.M.C., currently in theater in Afghanistan, probably coordinated the attack. The MIBs will not be that intrusive on their first visit.

People coming right out with probing questions hinting at Mythos knowledge can (*Psychology* roll) detect that he is uneasy, and he quickly orders them out.

After the initial visit by whichever faction, Taylor quickly has a nervous breakdown. He goes on a multi-day bender at a variety of local bars and strip clubs, fails to show up for work, catches a cab home when the clubs close, loses his job, and does it all over again.

He is both more and less pliable at this point. He will not want to answer standard investigation questions through his drunken stupor, insisting he told those other officers all this just a while ago. However, after his breakdown, *Persuade*, *Fast Talk* or *Psychoanalysis* might get him to tell the whole story, including the parts about the horrific bellowing of the “Eldest Son”, something no one but his mother, “the Exalted Grandmother” could see but everyone could hear.

Taylor will not give up his friend Conway or the e-mail in either case (although he will pass out easily and the investigators can toss the place, and his computer is unprotected). The IP address can be traced back to Conway with appropriate warrants or hacking.

f. Failed Interview, Lt. Andrea Littleton, U.S.N.: Lt. Andrea Littleton, U.S.N., vanished several years ago, shortly after completing her intelligence report on the Paralatae. She is the subject of a missing person report, which investigators with law enforcement credentials or who otherwise manage to get a hold of an open investigation file can read. The Navy likewise has an open investigations file, but it is officially considered a cold case.

As far as the official records are concerned, she just vanished. She left work on a Friday evening (after turning in her report) and did not report for work the next Monday. Her car was found parked and locked at her apartment in Reston, Virginia. Her purse, cellular phone and all of her personal belongings were found inside. There was no sign of obvious foul play. That

was the end of the trail: no letters, no calls, no sightings, no credit card activity. No one saw anything. Nothing incriminating was found on her computer. Her boyfriend, a civilian attorney named Scott Bell, was questioned, but was out of town that weekend at a convention and had an airtight alibi. Things potentially useful in locating her (like her computer) are in police storage.

Things are almost too clean, and an *Idea* roll might suggest some sort of covert assistance or witness protection program being involved. A few things are odd because they are so clean: nothing on her laptop computer at all work-related? Despite the fact that she was ranging far and wide and reviewing outside sources to compile a historical review of a small tribe of forgotten people? Disappearing when her boyfriend just happened to have a good alibi?

Getting Mr. Bell to talk should be difficult, but in fact, Lt. Littleton did break protection protocol to let him know that she was still alive and (as she put it) “gone undercover.” He even hooked up with her once in Las Vegas a few years ago. He believes that she now works for a highly covert arm of Naval Intelligence and had to disappear for reasons of national security. Which is not entirely untrue. But, as actually contacting and interviewing her would involve “A Cell” putting the investigators in contact with her Delta Green cell, it is not going to happen.

4. *Travel to the Village of the “Ancient Ones”*

Getting to Afghanistan can be as eventful or uneventful as you wish. There are no direct flights from the U.S., and the investigators are routed through Boston, to Dubai, and from there on to Kabul. Americans headed for Kabul are subjected to a great deal of security checks and baggage screening at every leg of their air journey.

It is then approximately a 14 hour drive from Kabul to Farah city, the capital of the province, although you can also fly commercially. Since the players will probably want to take advantage of their connection in Kabul to obtain non-airport friendly supplies, however, they will probably be driving.

The investigators should be allowed their selection of a reasonable amount of street-level gear (AK-47s, common handguns, basic military surplus body armor and other gear). Standard military armor available consists of a Kevlar vest, military boots, Kevlar gloves and military helmet, amounting 6 points of armor (with a 66% chance of protection).

They can also hire a truck to take them as far as Farah city, which can again be as eventful or non-eventful as you wish. They will pass through a few military checkpoints, but lightly armed “Red Cross employees” will not attract much attention.

Should the investigators secure heavier weaponry somehow (they might be able to afford an RPG or two on their prepaid Visa card, or a brick of plastic explosive), they had better do a good job of hiding it or they will be detained and have successfully compromised their entire mission (*Idea* roll if they insist on arming themselves to the teeth—it simply is not consistent with their cover). Of course, they might approach the matter quite differently, such as by bribing a private plane operator and/or bribing local officials, and avoid the military checkpoints entirely. Note, of course, that since this is Call of Cthulhu, the benefit to any weaponry-oriented solutions should be short-term at best and illusory at worst.

In Farah city, they are welcomed by Genevieve Jansen, the “friendly” local International Red Cross supervisor. Ms. Jansen, remember, thinks that the investigators are undercover but

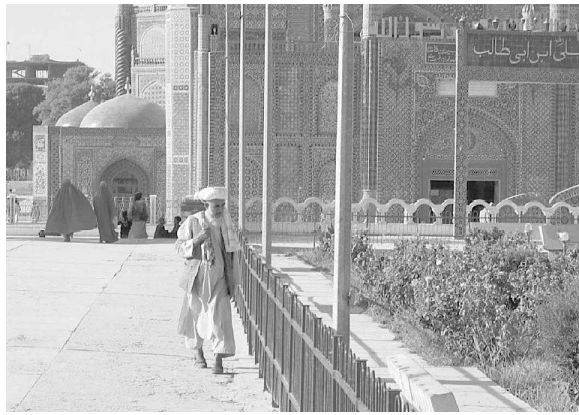
legitimate spooks (C.I.A., D.I.A., Navy investigators, or some combination thereof). Under normal circumstances she would not be favorably inclined to help such people, but “A Cell” has led her to believe that a rogue military element is responsible (true) and that the investigators are here to conduct an undercover criminal investigation (not exactly).

Jansen’s attitude will basically be that of a snotty, over-privileged, somewhat immature, bohemian former art student (exactly what she is) who feels like she’s somehow betraying her principles by “helping the Man.” She will be much friendlier if she decides that any of the investigators are into such things as promoting diversity or helping this “ethnic isolate” survive. Then she acts like a college-aged, bohemian party aficionado. She is flippant and generally a pain in the butt, until someone is bleeding. Then she flips a switch and gets very serious and competent.



Genevieve Jansen

Genevieve has had some contact with the village of the “Ancient Ones” in the two years she has been in Farah Province, although she has not actually set foot in its boundaries and has not been out that way since the drone strike. She exemplifies what knowledgeable outsiders know about the village, and has some insights of her own (see *Standard Operating Procedure, Investigator Handout #4*). Her art history degree, ironically, is of some actual use to the investigators as well.



5. Status of the Village

A tactical overview map of the Scythian village proper is nearby. A map key follows. The description represents the Scythian village when the investigators arrive in the area (post drone strike).

General Comments: The village is unusually quiet for its size. The temple center building which dominates the village has been partially destroyed by a bomb blast, but is mostly still standing. The Scythians are at a very high state of alert, and generally spoiling for a fight. Sentry groups of Paralatae warriors, using signaling mirrors and animal calls to communicate over distances, are scattered around the region, watching for both further drones and for approaching convoys.

Genevieve Jansen, International Red Cross Supervisor--Thinking Globally, Acting Globally

Nationality: American

STR: 12 DEX: 13 INT: 14

CON: 14 APP: 15 POW: 15

SIZ: 12 EDU: 14 SAN: 72

Luck: 75 Hits: 13 Age: 28.

Damage Bonus: +0.

Education: B.A., Art History, Bowdoin College; Red Cross Field Medic Training.

Skills: Art 40%, Computer Use 40%, Credit Rating 40%, Dodge 40%, Drive Auto 40%, Fast Talk 50%, First Aid 88%, Hide 47%, History 38%, Listen 50%, Library Use 50%, Persuade 50%, Pharmacology 44%, Photography 33%, Psychology 33%, Speak/Read/Write English 70%, Speak/Read/Write Pashtun 40%, Speak Scythian 01%, Sneak 50%, Spot Hidden 39%.

Spells: None.

Attacks: No weapons and no combat skills above base. *Thinks* she knows how to defend herself, though. Fortunately for the investigators, she is pretty skilled at administrating painkillers and stabilizing gunshot and shrapnel wounds for transport.

Gear: Kevlar vest, military boots, Kevlar gloves and military helmet, 6 points of armor (66% chance of protection); satellite phone; GPS; sunglasses; binoculars; field medical kit (with wound stanching bandages and painkillers).

Standard Operating Procedure, Investigator Handout #4—What Genevieve Jansen Can Tell You.

- The village has been there a very long time, at least several centuries. They are some kind of ethnic isolate with their own culture and language (which is nothing like Pashtun or anything else she has ever heard).
- They refer to themselves as “Paralatae”, which she remembered from an art history class. That refers to the royal house of the ancient Scythian empire. They certainly act the part: dress, artwork, habits. Going near the village is like overlooking an old movie set: everyone in period costume, few anachronisms to that era out in the open. Although there is one old Soviet-era armored personnel carrier parked in the downtown square, and they do have a couple of flatbed trucks that they only use when they are traveling somewhere. They do not even use guns, instead relying on horseback archery and big, heavy bronze machete-like blades they call “tulwars.”
- There is a temple structure in the middle of the village that looks Greek in influence. The place is green and well watered, with cisterns and a stone aqueduct collecting and bringing water down from the nearby hills.
- There are a lot of kurgans (old burial mounds) surrounding the village, and some of them are not so old. Rumor has it that this is how they bury all of their important people, and they do it like Herodotus says the Paralatae did: slaughtering horses and attendants and impaling them on poles.
- The locals have an odd relationship with them. The Paralatae do not bother anyone as long as they are left alone. The locals will tell you they hate them if you ask, but the whys are a little obscure. The Paralatae are not Muslim and deflect questions about their religion. Rumor among the local Pashtun is that the village is haunted by demons and that the Paralatae worship some kind of demon that lives in the hills outside of the village. There is a cave at the base of the hills, just northeast of the village, that everyone is particularly afraid of.
- The Taliban used to try to raid the village, but the last time that they tried, a few years ago, there was a massacre and the Taliban by far got the worst of things. Hundreds of Taliban were killed and there is a killing field around the mouth of that cave that so concerns the locals.
- She is aware of the basic story about Lt. Taylor’s effort at forcing a reconnoiter of the village. There are a lot of military people in theater that would like to level the place, but they have been ordered to stay away from it. She thinks that someone disobeyed those orders out of a desire for revenge on behalf of Lt. Taylor and his men.
- She has been to the outskirts of the village a few times. If one goes to the edge of the village and make oneself seen, eventually, they send out a spokesman. The locals say that the spokesman is usually a relative of the “Exalted Grandmother”, who is their queen and head religious figure. The current one’s name is Talil, and he is fairly polite and reasonable, as long as you do not want to come into the village. He’s taught her a few words of their language (which he calls “Scythian”) and gave her a present, a gold-inlaid hair comb. She had a professor of hers back at Bowdoin look at a picture of it and it looks like it is Scythian-influenced art.
- They were interested in her wound-stanching alginate bandages, especially after they learned that they were just algae-based and “the kind of thing that could have existed in Biblical days”.
- The Paralatae make their living on subsistence agriculture and on raising and selling horses. Occasionally they will take a load of horses to market and sell them for hard currency or luxury goods, and it is known that some of the members of the ruling family travel abroad, but they are completely self-sufficient.

There are both 2-3 mounted patrols of 5-6 warriors out at any time, as well as men concealed in the hills. Work to repair the temple is underway, and people are tending to the horses and crops (generally to the east of the map). People fetch water from the cistern, but apart from that and other strictly necessary work, people stay indoors.

Nasra, the “Exalted Grandmother”, was badly injured in the bomb blast and is comatose. She is at 1 H.P. and has suffered both shrapnel wounds as well as a concussive head wound. Not even 15 points of enchanted sarong is much help against a bomb.

Although Nasra has been training an acolyte priestess (a granddaughter of some far removed tier), the acolyte is presently in Western Europe learning about the outside world and studying sorcery. The acolyte (Ismala) is a week away from returning. Magical healing assistance is, as a result, not immediately available. Query if Nasra will live that long. The traditional healers are doing their best.

There is an unusual stench in the area of the village. It is faint in most places, but strong in the area of the cavern (Map Area 2). There it is overpowering: ozone mixed with decay. Every so often, but occasionally at night, loud booming groans emanate from that direction.

This would be due to the “Eldest Son”, and he (?) is angry. While he (?) is bound not to attack the Scythians, or generally run amok, while Nasra is alive, she is hovering on the brink of death. Strangers going anywhere near the cave, or being vulnerable at night in the general area, are at risk if they are not with the Scythians.

The Paralatae have a supply of LAW rockets which they are reluctant to use unless hard pressed to survive, 20 in all. 10 are at the temple, the rest have been distributed to sentries in high lookouts and around the perimeter.

LAW rocket launcher, base 15% chance, damage 8d6/5 yards; 1/round; range 150; malfunction 98-00.

Map of the Village

1. Central Temple: This enormous building (300' x 100' x 30' high) is built mostly of local stone, but white and pink marble have been hauled in from somewhere to dress it up. It strongly resembles a Classical Greek temple, complete with partly open floor plan, a roof supported by dozens of Corinthian columns and statuary and colorful plasterwork. Sun imagery (Helios, chariots, mosaics depicting the rising and setting sun, gold leaf strategically placed to reflect light) feature prominently, as does a winged serpent.

The southeastern end of the temple has taken significant bomb damage.

Nasra's apartments are below ground. All entrances to the below ground level but the one in the center of the temple have been heavily barricaded. The Scythians—men, women and children—fight to the death to prevent anyone from entering the temple uninvited. There are about 200 men (it is a society with segregated gender roles) who would count as Paralatae warriors, but the women and older children (another 200 or so) are not shy about picking up a bow, nor ignorant in its use.

Attacking the temple hits the Paralatae where they are most vulnerable—they must defend it. It is possible to concentrate them there with a heavy feint, and then bomb the complex.

Nasra, along with an honor guard of about 10 warriors and some overmatched traditional healers, are in her apartments beneath the temple.

2. Cavern: This is the lair of the “Eldest Son”, to the extent his existence intrudes onto this

plane of existence. There is a stench of ozone and death permeating the area. The “Eldest Son” is invisible to normal sight, but can be detected with infrared or night vision scopes (as a heat source with an inhuman outline) and of course by sound (as it crashes through the underbrush or speaks in a booming sub-basso).

The interior of the cavern is not something anyone should ever report back on. The “Eldest Son” sticks close by it.

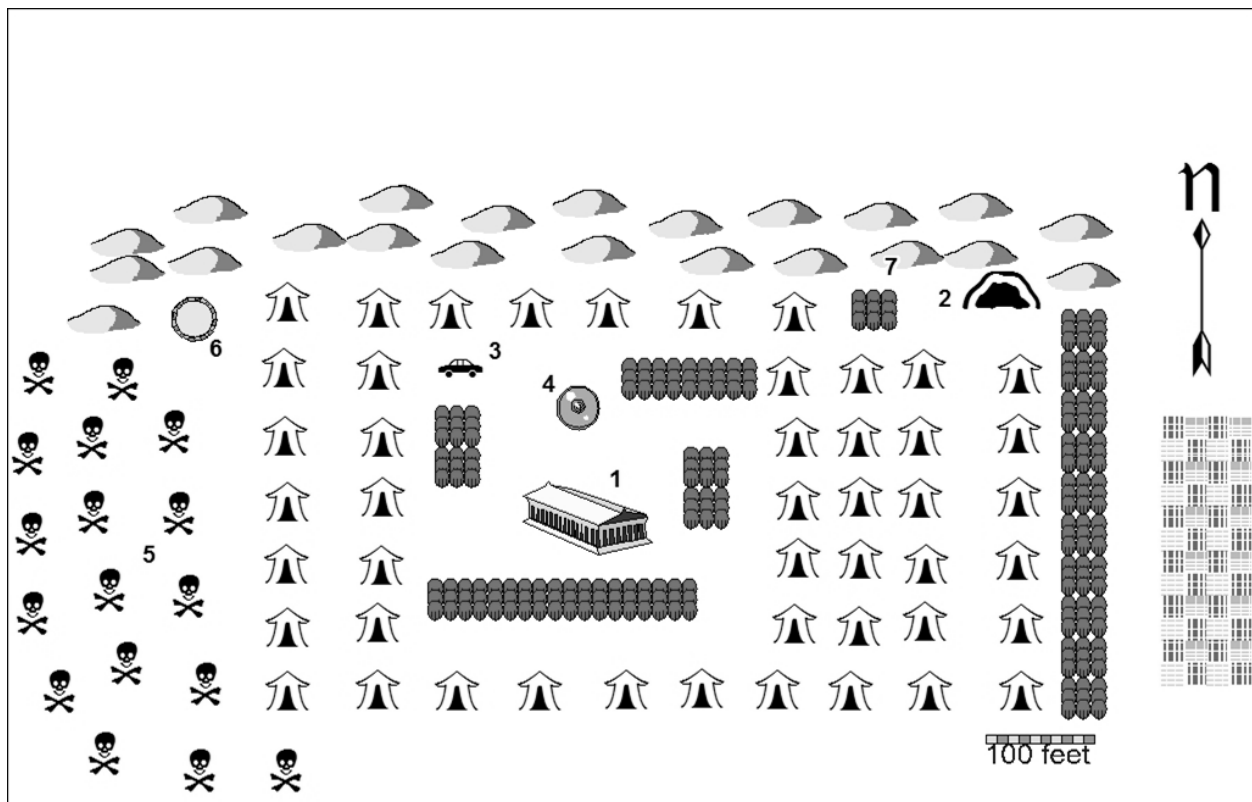
3. Soviet era APV: This APV is in good operating condition, intact, and ready to roll, having been repaired by the Scythians for use in an emergency. They are loathe to use it, but they will. It is a standard BTR-80. See:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BTR-80>

BTR-80: *Rated Speed: 12 (see BRP chase system rules); Handling: 8; Acceleration: +/- 4; Move: 134”; SIZ: 70; Armor: 18; HP: 100; Passengers: 8 +3 crew; Cargo: 36. Uses Drive skill (essentially a large, Humvee-style eight-wheeled vehicle, with armor and 2x turret guns).*

Machine Gun Turrets (x2): *(uses Artillery skill): Base 05%, 4d6+4 damage (burst capable), Range 200; Ammo: 1,000; Malfunction 98-00.*

4. Water Cistern: This is the terminus of a cunning, partially underground aquifer system drawing down water from the hills. It is 10’ high, 10’ in diameter, and made of stone and cement. It is both a source of cover for Scythian archers (and possible LAW rocket shooters) as well as a strategic target—bombing it imperils the water supply for the village and things quickly escalate from there.



Map of the Scythian Village Center

5. **Kurgans:** Several dozen kurgans (burial mounds) for Scythian royalty stretch out for hundreds of yards to the west of the village. Each is about 20' high.

Most just simply appear to be earthen mounds due to their age. One, still only a few years old, however, still has a circle of impalement stakes (20' high) surrounding it, on top of which are the decaying skeletons of a dozen horses and riders in full Scythian dressage (SAN loss 0/1). Without Nasra to rein them in, defiling the kurgans sends the Scythians into a reckless, attacking fury.

6. **Stone Tower:** The proverbial 30' high, round stone tower, suitable for **Calling Yog-Sothoth** (**Cthulhu Mythos** roll or familiarity with the spell identifies). Covered with runes and sigils, and prone to sap 1 M.P. from anyone who touches it.

7. **Foothills Around the Cave:** Imagine a couple hundred Taliban bodies steamrolled and smashed flat by a spawn of Yog-Sothoth and

then left for the crows, complete with gear, for a few years. They are not just smashed and dismembered, but affirmatively flattened. Several skulls seem to have been bitten in half by some enormous maw. A vehicle abandoned there shows signs of having been stomped by a gigantic, vaguely humanoid foot. Many also show arrow penetrations and scalping nick wounds, suggesting some sort of bizarre collaboration. SAN loss for the killing field is 1/1d3.

6. *Stimuli and Responses*

a. **Arrival at the Village/Investigators:** For narration purposes, the author suggests allowing the investigators to be the second interested party to arrive in the area. They will be preceded by a recon squad of Northern Alliance troops, who will have encamped a mile from the village on the road, set up a checkpoint, and be trying to enforce the Standard Operating Procedure of non-molestation. This would ideally be followed by the investigators, MJ-12 recon team, and finally the Taliban.



The Northern Alliance troops (12 in total, commanded by a U.S. Army Captain, Christopher Kluznarski), have no idea what they are messing with. They are simply doing their best to keep military forces away from the village, and to keep an eye out for the Taliban.

They are encamped behind temporary barriers, and have basically strategically positioned two APVs (similar for all material purposes to the Soviet era one parked in the village), put up some screens and camouflage nets, and are using them to control the road. They also have a flatbed supply truck parked off the road, and satellite phones to call for backup if needed.

Use the following statistics for the typical Western soldier, including MJ-12's mercs.

Capt. Kluznarski is expecting relief workers, and they are not flatly contrary to the Standard Operating Procedure. He is not surprised by a Red Cross relief team, and is slightly acquainted with Genevieve Jansen, so the investigators strike him as kosher. He will stop them, inspect their credentials, make a few calls, and let them through, assuming no out and out suspicious behavior. "Hang on to your scalps" will be his parting warning.

Anyone going into the village itself uninvited is attacked with little warning, and no quarter is given. Anyone going up to the edge of sight of the village and waiting, waving a white flag, or taking a similar non-threatening stance to make themselves known, is approached after a while by Talil Nasfari. Talil has two broken arms in slings.

Typical Western Soldier (Including Forte's Mercs and the Checkpoint Crew)

Nationality: American

STR: 15 DEX: 15 INT: 11 CON: 15 APP: 12 POW: 12
 SIZ: 15 EDU: 12 SAN: 60 Luck: 60 Hits: 15 Age: 25ish

Damage Bonus: +1d4.

Education: High School and Military Training.

Skills: Computer Use 25%, Dodge 50%, Drive Auto 40%, Hide 57%, Listen 50%, Martial Arts 50%, Speak/Read/Write English 60%, Speak Pashtun 10%, Sneak 50%, Spot Hidden 57%.

Weapons: M4 selective fire NATO 5.56 mm combat rifle, 1 or 3/round, 30 shots, 90 yards base range, malfunction 98-00, 2d6 damage, 60%, with laser sight (+10%).

Fist/Punch 54%, 1d3+db.

Grapple 57%, special.

Kick 54%, 1d6+db.

Gear: Kevlar vest, military boots, Kevlar gloves and military helmet, 6 points of armor (66% chance of protection); satellite phone; GPS; sunglasses; night vision goggles; binoculars; survival knife, rations and watering system.

Talil exemplifies what the most knowledgeable Scythians, outside of the absent acolyte, Ismala, know about their situation. A *Psychology* roll reveals that he is frightened and trying very hard to put on a brave front, but the subject of his concern is Nasra, not physical threats. An outline of what Talil (or other very knowledgeable Scythians) knows pertinent to the history of the Scythians and the threat posed is given below.

Note that some serious roleplaying when interacting with Talil is anticipated; he is not going to info-dump a fantastic story on a bunch of strangers, or give out tactical information for free (such as Nasra being incapacitated). Bonuses to any *Persuade* checks you decide to impose might be given to: people who seem sympathetic to the Scythians' need to maintain their cultural identity (+10%); to those who seem to know about the incident in California circa 1925 and suggest that a deal can be worked out like before (+20%); or those who seem to have a genuine belief (backed by details of the research tree) that something hellish might happen if the Scythians either disintegrate or, in particular, if Nasra dies (+50%).

- Talil is currently the recognized King of the Scythians, thanks to Taliban raids over the past decades and the recent drone bombing.
- There is a scroll in the temple detailing the genealogy of his people (Scythian is not written, so Nasra keeps it in Classical Greek. The founding queen of the royal family, a woman named "Hestia", was Greek). Nasra, their "Exalted Grandmother" and High Priestess, is said to be the daughter of "Hestia". According to legend, "Hestia" lived for many centuries and had hundreds of children, mostly sons, as did Nasra in her younger days.
- If things get into exactly how old Nasra is and when the royal line was founded, the Scythians are not sure, but Nasra

occasionally speaks of things in Rome when "Rome ruled the world" and finds Christians amusing for some reason.

- Their legends inform why the Scythians act as ultra-conservatively as they do. Talil describes it as a "creation myth that the Scythians sincerely believe in." It is said that there is a war between the gods, with the Scythians being faithful to the god of the sun, and the enemy being the god of darkness and nightmares. They simply refer to the god as the "sun god" and have no other name for him.
- Nasra is said to have struck a bargain with a demon, Tawil-at-Um'r, where the demon would protect her people from the darkness and nightmares as long as she remained alive and kept the Scythian culture pure. She has taught her people that what this means is not completely knowable, but that changing from the way that things have always been is dangerous.
- The danger is particularly great in matters of faith. Displaying interest in other faiths, allowing those of other faiths to dwell among them, and failing to properly perform religious rituals (such as the funerary rites for a dead king) are serious matters which threaten to "break the bargain."
- If the bargain is broken, all descended from "Hestia" (or Nasra) will descend into nightmare. Legend has it that those who descend into nightmare will have their bodies melt the next time that they truly sleep. There was a near miss in 1925, when the burial of a king who was living in California was temporarily disrupted. Many Scythians felt the gaze of the dark god upon them for their delay, and Nasra is still unnerved by the event.
- As a reward for faithful service to their god (which is how the rank and file see the matter), they are protected by a demon known as the "Eldest Son." They believe

that the “Eldest Son”, like Nasra, is thousands of years old and is, literally, her son. Apparently at one time there were two sons like it, but one was killed centuries ago when the Goths drove them east to where they dwell now.

- The “Eldest Son” is a huge beast which men cannot see. It dwells in a cave to the northeast of town, at the foot of the hills. It comes on a foul wind, with the crashing of trees and a booming voice, crushes its enemies and drinks their blood. The mouth of its cave is littered with the bodies of the last group of Taliban that attacked the village. That was a sizable attack, so Nasra loosed the “Eldest Son” on them. She is reluctant to do this, since her control over the beast is not perfect.
- Nasra speaks to the “Eldest Son” as though it were her son, and it answers her (in a booming, inhuman voice) and calls her “mother.”
- Nasra is a sorceress. She leads and informs their culture and teaches them how to be Scythians, and some of that includes ritual. But she also works magic; he himself has seen her fly, summon demons, and foretell the future. She also controls the “Eldest Son.”
- (Remember, the rank and file Scythians, or even the more cosmopolitan ones like Talil, are not sorcerers. They have some Mythos knowledge, as they would have to, given that they live in close proximity to the “Eldest Son”. But their knowledge is matter-of-fact rather than read in).
- If the investigators manage to have a look at the genealogy scroll (*Read Greek*, 4 hours to study), they can pin down the dates and some more details about what may be going on. This would mean either that the investigators somehow get themselves invited into the village and into the temple, or have the scroll brought to them. If they

do manage to read it, though, it is concerned only with royal lines of descent (so any misadventures that Nasra may have had while away from home are not discussed). It goes back to no figure called “Hestia”, but begins with a woman called Medea. Medea’s heritage goes back thence to “Helios, God of the Sun.” Nasra is shown as being born to Medea (not “Hestia”) in 310 B.C. If the investigators are the studious sort, they may enjoy finding a reference to an unnamed daughter being born to Medea in 153 A.D., who is noted as “died in childbirth.” The father is referenced as “Autolus of Thessalonika, a Christian missionary.” The “Eldest Son” and the “Youngest Son” were to Nasra born in 136 A.D. and their father is matter-of-factly named as Tawil-at-Um’r.

- The tactical situation at present is not something that Talil will readily discuss without serious roleplaying and trust building, but it is dire. Nasra is down, in a coma, and near death from a near-direct hit from the drone bomb. They lack the medical skills to revive her; sorcery or advanced medicine (requiring surgery and likely, a medevac) might be of assistance. Nasra has an acolyte, his sister, Ismala. She is learning sorcery from Nasra, and has been sent for. She was last known to be in Sweden, and is not expected for a week at least. Without her, they have no other sorcerers at present, and they believe (without evidence, but correctly) that the “Eldest Son” will go berserk and kill everything in sight if Nasra dies. (Even if Nasra does not die, if the “Eldest Son” senses that Scythian survival is imperiled, it will burst forth and start ravening and slaying).
- The Scythians were not totally surprised by the strike. They think that the American soldiers are not of one mind about how to

interact with them. They have been told by some soldiers that they will be left alone, on orders from Washington. For the most part, that has held up. But there were threats made after they forced a patrol that entered their village to participate in a royal funeral, and killed most of them when they refused. They expected some rogue group to seek revenge at some point, and assume that this is what happened. (Even though from their perspective, the Scythians did nothing wrong). They mean to kill any soldiers who dare set foot in their village without mercy.

Whether, and to what extent, the investigators are permitted into the village is a matter of effective role-playing; do not have it turn on a dice throw. The Scythians do not immediately, or even promptly, consent to letting anyone see Nasra, let alone evacuate the camp—they need to come to trust the investigators before something like that is even considered. A more likely (very positive) preliminary outcome is to allow the investigators into camp to assist with some other wounded.

b. “Northern Alliance/U.S.M.C. Squad” & Their “Civilian Advisor”: Roughly one day after the investigators arrive (but before they should have a clear opportunity, if things go just swimmingly, to attempt to move/medevac Nasra), the MJ-12 probe team arrives on the scene. This consists of one Humvee worth of disposable mooks pretending to be U.S.M.C. recon troopers, accompanied by Robert Forte, a fairly senior MJ-12 spook with occult and Mythos experience. MJ-12 is operating here in a fashion unambiguously without Dept. of Defense sanction, and indeed, in violation of the Scythian village Standard Operating Procedure.

The MJ-12 “team” (except for Forte) has been assembled with a view toward both expendability and plausible deniability. There are eight private contractor/former military

mercenaries, who have never heard of MJ-12 and believe they are on an “honest” black op for the C.I.A, and Forte, a (fully read in) MJ-12 spook. They are dressed (except for Forte) as U.S.M.C. recon troopers, and appropriately equipped. Forte is dressed like a spook on a mission in the desert: desert camouflage and body armor, sidearm, and an array of video and audio equipment. The mercs think they are coming back from this mission; Forte rather doubts this (with the sole exception of himself).

Forte’s “team’s” cover is fairly good: they have a man on the inside at regional command who is prepared to field a call about their credentials and purpose, and they do not have any heavy firepower that they should not have. Unless one carefully examines their own Humvee, that is. Their Humvee is rigged to blow up with an impressive amount of C-4 plastic explosive, cunningly hidden throughout the frame and packed into empty spaces (12d6 explosion/3 yards). Only Forte knows that the C-4 is there, and he has the remote detonator in his pocket.



Robert Forte, M.I.B. & Grail Scholar

The MJ-12 “team” will roll up to Capt. Kluznarski’s checkpoint, park their Humvee, and (in all likelihood) bluff their way past. After all, there are only nine men, without heavy weaponry; and they swear they have strict orders just to observe the village from a distance

Part of Forte’s plan is to park his Humvee at the checkpoint, further avoiding suspicion, and proceed on foot up into the hills to the north of the village to conduct visual recon. There is a

squad level sniper rifle and a few LAW weapons in the Humvee so that things look kosher, but they leave those in the Humvee.

Mr. Forte is calm, polite, affably evil, and utterly ruthless. Apart from being a spook, he is an academic, an expert on Early Christianity in general and schismatic Christian cults in particular, and knows that several early Christian cults were actually slaves of the Mythos in sheep’s clothing.

Robert Forte, MJ-12 Senior M.I.B., Ruthless and Wily.

Nationality: American

STR: 14 DEX: 15 INT: 17 CON: 15 APP: 12 POW: 17
 SIZ: 15 EDU: 18 SAN: 49 Luck: 85 Hits: 15 Age: 40ish

Damage Bonus: +1d4.

Education: M.A., Religious Studies, Harvard Divinity School; Military Special Ops Training and Spook School.

Skills: Climb 70%, Computer Use 40%, Cthulhu Mythos 10%, Dodge 70%, Drive Auto 40%, Fast Talk 50%, Hide 77%, History 68%, Listen 50%, Library Use 60%, Martial Arts 50%, Occult 40%, Speak/Read/Write English 90%, Speak/Read/Write Aramaic 60%, Speak/Read/Write Greek 60%, Speak/Read/Write Latin 60%, Speak Pashtun 10%, Sneak 50%, Spot Hidden 59%, Tradecraft 40%.

Spells: Cloud Memory; Command Ghost; Elder Sign.

Weapons: Ruger P91 semi-automatic handgun, 2/round, 15 shots, 15 yards base range, malfunction 98-00, d10 damage, 50%, with laser sight (+10%) and silencer.

Fist/Punch 54%, 1d3+db.

Grapple 57%, special.

Kick 54%, 1d6+db.

Gear: Kevlar vest, military boots, Kevlar gloves and military helmet, 6 points of armor (66% chance of protection); satellite phone; GPS; sunglasses; night vision goggles; binoculars; survival knife, rations and watering system; 2x syringes of Outlook Group Orange memory wiping serum (causes 12 hours of “lost time”, during which subject remains conscious but afterwards, cannot recall what occurred); 2x applications of topical Outlook Group Yellow paralyzing agent (complete paralysis for CON x40 hours +1 point of SAN loss if a CON x1 roll, halved, is failed); 2x throws worth of the

Powder of Ibn-Ghazi.

Forte has worked for MJ-12 in disrupting several other pseudo-Christian messianic cults that were suspected to be (and turned out to be) Mythos-influenced, including elements of the Skoptsi and a branch of the Icelandic Third Cloister. He has been assigned to this mission by virtue of a Stateside review of the *Testimony of Autolus*.

Forte's actions, if left unmolested, are detailed below. He knows what Delta Green is and, if the investigators butted heads with MJ-12 stateside, may have their descriptions. They are of secondary concern to him, though, and he will not approach them or worry about them unless they disrupt his mission (see *Endgames*, below).

If the investigators approach him either as he arrives or heads to his stakeout in the hills above the village, or while he is there, he will try to maintain his cover as a mainstream civilian intelligence advisor and feign ignorance as to their identity as long as possible. If things get violent, he will try to escape, leaving the mooks to deal with the investigators. If he is killed or captured, things proceed as described in the *Endgames* section, below.

c. Taliban Attack: Eventually, things will be brought to a violent denouement with the arrival of a gang of about 200 Taliban, armed with AK-47s, pistols and other light, inexpensive weaponry, a smattering of heavier weapons such as LAWs, all riding in about 20 makeshift pickup trucks (a few with light machine guns mounted on the back). Use the basic physical and combat stats as for Northern Alliance soldiers, only these guys have no body armor. They arrive from the East when summoned by Forte (see below).

AK-47: 7.62 mm assault rifle, selective fire, 1 or 20/round, 30 shots, 100 yards base range, malfunction 99-00, 2d6 damage, 60%.

Even before the Taliban is invited in by Forte, there will be a series of probes. None of these

probes will be armed with anything more than personal small arms or come with more than two adult men. Often they will have women and children with them. These, rather, will be pickup truck driving Taliban friendlies with a variety of semi-plausible excuses for being in the area: driving down the road to visit the next village over; wanting to buy horses; taking a wrong turn; etc.

(If the investigators have been paying attention, and you might arrange for them to overhear that exchange, the “buying horses” is a sad excuse for a lie. Strangers are not allowed in the village, not even to buy horses. The Scythians take their horses to market. This should pique the investigators suspicions that the locals are probing the situation).

Once they raid in earnest, they will throw their lives away in an effort to kill as many Scythians as possible, trusting (to a certain degree) that their informant is speaking the truth when he says that he will handle the demon in the hills for them.

d. When Talil Begins to Feel Hard Pressed: If, at any point, Talil feels that the situation is irretrievable and that the Scythian village is at serious risk of being totally eliminated, he has his own Standard Operating Procedure. The Scythians—man, woman and child—have been indoctrinated since birth that they are better off dead than to have their village subdued.

And they are right about this: if things get bad enough that “Scythian culture” is at an end, the wrath of Hypnos (may) rain down on them and (maybe) all their descendants. Nasra must die for this state of events to be achieved. Their bodies (may) dissolve into corrupt, putrescent puddles the next time they enter R.E.M. sleep, and their souls (may) go to eternal torment in the Dreamlands. And the same (may) go for anyone else that Hypnos can sort out as partaking of

Medea's bloodline, which could be a huge chunk of the global population.

In any case, at that point, Talil and the Scythians have instructions to stage a feint attack in an apparent effort to evacuate the village, with Nasra (or her body) in the Soviet-era personnel

carrier in the village. This is only a showy, suicidal feint; someone will be headed for the "Eldest Son's" cave and deliver a memorized message in a tongue even older than Scythian. The "Eldest Son" bursts forth and kills everyone and everything it can find, playing no favorites (not even with the Scythians).



7. *Endgames*

While the temptation may certainly be there to organize a miniatures battle, this is *not* how the author thinks things should go. This is a horror investigation game, and confusion and chaos should be the order of the day.

The consequences of investigator action should be described cinematically, not resolved with a plethora of dice rolling. Only discrete challenges (trying to sneak past a given guard, or shoot a particular person you have spotted) should be for the dice.

Absent investigator action, things proceed as follows. The "U.S.M.C. squad" shows up first thing in the morning, on the day after the investigators do (Day +1). This gives the

investigators some time to role-play, poke around and get themselves into some trouble. The "civilian advisor" (Forte) manages to talk his way past the Northern Alliance checkpoint with his story about being dispatched to do military recon. They park their Humvee at the Northern Alliance checkpoint and proceed on foot to a campsite high up in the hills to the northwest of the village.

Forte's cover story is called in and, by pre-arrangement, the checkpoint's primary point of contact vouches for them. Something does not seem quite right to Capt. Kluznarski, though, and he sends an e-mail higher up the chain of command questioning the "civilian advisor's" credentials.

The “U.S.M.C. squad” camps out and observes the village over the rest of the day, giving the investigators more time to interact with the Scythians and perhaps report back to “A Cell”.

Late in the evening of Day +1, Kluznarski gets a response to his e-mail, denying any knowledge about any authorized U.S.M.C. recon mission and reminding him that access to the village has been restricted to military personnel. Kluznarski starts to scramble his checkpoint. He is under observation by the “U.S.M.C. squad”, however. When Forte sees them react, he gives the order to the mercs to proceed on a recon of the village; only he remains. Their specific mission is to recon the cave of the “Eldest Son”; he tells them that it is a suspected weapons cache.

The “U.S.M.C. squad” moves down the hillside; they take fire from Scythian archers but manage to reach the cave. While this is going on, Forte uses the remote detonator to blow up his Humvee (left at Kluznarski’s camp). This results in a LOUD explosion echoing through the hills, and kills most or all of Kluznarski’s team as well as anyone else camped there without adequate cover. (12d6/3 yards (per spot rules, less 1d6 damage for each yard farther away)).

The explosion gets the attention of the “Eldest Son”, and a confused, noisy, bellowing slaughter of the “U.S.M.C. squad” ensues. They are not expecting an invisible, extra-dimensional thing to join the fight, and things get ugly fast. Forte takes careful notes and records video on a night vision camera of the slaughter from his safe vantage point.

Having learned what he wanted to learn--that there is a Mythos presence in the village—Forte puts his contingency plan into action. He calls his handlers on a satellite phone and reports what he has observed. He then calls a contact that his handlers have in the Taliban, drops a

password on him, and manages to persuade them that elements of the U.S. intelligence community have determined that the village of the Ancient Ones needs to be destroyed, and that they will handle the monster they have uncovered in the hills. Perhaps they have already heard the first strike earlier this evening? Forte has seen their probe teams, and hopes that they would like to make common cause.

Ordinarily, the Taliban would not fall for an apparent trap such as this, but they hate the demon-worshipping Scythians so much that they readily agree. Just before dawn of Day +2, about 200 Taliban in a variety of vehicles assault the Scythian village, laying down automatic weapons fire and LAW rockets and going house to house (or yurt to yurt). There are many casualties on both sides. The Scythian defense effort centers on the temple complex. It is dark, loud and chaotic above all else.

Forte, still watching from hiding a distance away, waits until the Taliban raid is fully involved and the “Eldest Son” is out in the open, and then calls in an airstrike via a handful of MJ-12 controlled, Accord-tech augmented Predator drones with conventional bombs. The village, Taliban raiders, “Eldest Son” and anyone else who happens to be in the village are carpet bombed and (depending on where they are) likely killed. Except for the “Eldest Son”, of course, which goes berserk and starts killing everything that moves. The *Golden Arrow Wand* (in the temple) may come into play if the “Eldest Son” starts going after Scythians.

This is by design; Forte calls for the airstrike just as soon as the Taliban attack is fully committed. He is trying to leave no or very few witnesses, and needs a “failed Taliban attack” to be the explanation for why the village got blown up.

The airstrike will target the cave area, the temple, and other large structures. Good places

to take cover include the hills away from the cave, in the temple's sub-levels (where Nasra is) and inside the cistern. The temple is collapsed in the attack and the investigators (if they were in there) are buried alive, although perhaps not hopelessly.

If he thinks that he can do so safely, Forte will creep down into the village, plunder whatever valuable Mythos lore or artifacts that he can quickly find, and then call for an extraction at a pre-arranged rendezvous point five miles away. Otherwise, he just skedaddles to the extraction point.

Whether or not MJ-12 "burns" Forte at the pickup site is up to you. If there are survivors at the village, or someone gets away, Forte gets betrayed and "burned." If the mission goes cleanly, maybe he does not. If it goes obviously badly, and he becomes concerned that too many survivors know of his team's clandestine activities, Forte may rabbit or even try to team up with the investigators to save his own hide.

Assuming that the investigators attempt a report to "A Cell" and seek further instructions at a late stage in the proceeding, put yourself in the shoes of "A Cell." What would you do? As a general proposition, you want the Mythos purged. However, there is evidence in this case that purging the Scythians is contraindicated and might result in severe fallout of some kind. Obviously, the response will depend to some degree on what the investigators report. However, "A Cell's" predisposition will be to maintain the Standard Operating Procedure, which means either getting Nasra out of there, or deflecting attacks pending her acolyte's arrival, and sanitizing any suspected MJ-12 operatives.

Of course, Delta Green being Delta Green, the investigators do not have a black helicopter waiting to airlift them out. On the other hand, "A Cell" will not be too happy with the Son of

Yog-Sothoth in the area (or whatever that invisible "Eldest Son" thing in the cave is. Remember, labeling your monsters beyond how they are known on the proverbial street is not sound Keeping practice).

Investigator interference: might plausibly take several forms. And the point of this scenario (as it is a sequel to Common Courtesy) is to present the investigators with a *drame cornelian*: give them an awkward situation with no clear best solution, require them to struggle internally between their fear and hatred of outré cults and watching a few hundred people get slaughtered, and see what they do.

They might get the Soviet-era personnel carrier running, load Nasra and some clutch cultural artifacts (the genealogical record) into it, and try to escape during the chaos of the Taliban attack. Of course, the Scythians will have to think their situation is dire—or be too busy fighting the Taliban and watching the "Eldest Son" rend them—to allow the extraction.

The investigators might interfere with Forte's crew taking up their position overlooking the village in the hills, or disrupt their silencing of the Northern Alliance checkpoint. They are probably outnumbered, but if they do something that successfully disrupts the early stages of Forte's plan, more power to them. If Forte escapes after a fight with the investigators and can get to cover, he will proceed with the remaining stages of his plan, bypassing confirmation of the Mythos activity in the cave in favor of confirmation of apparent Delta Green involvement.

Forte is not a fighter, and will surrender if his crew is losing a firefight. He is a potential treasure trove of information if he decides not to commit suicide, or is not somehow eliminated by MJ-12 before he can be interrogated.

Disrupting the bomb-in-the-Humvee plot would be a positive development, except that it is, of course, booby trapped. (*Demolitions* at ½ to defuse). If it goes off under circumstances where nearby personnel have been evacuated and there are survivors at the checkpoint, however, this may or may not be a mission scrub for Forte. This will depend on whether he thinks that he can still eliminate the witnesses and stage a cover up.

Should the investigators somehow kill Forte before he calls in the air strike and Taliban, they will disrupt the situation sufficiently that MJ-12 will not bomb the village. They need a set of intelligent eyes on the scene to confirm that the bombing run will actually stand a good chance of eliminating both the village and witnesses, and they need it to occur when the Taliban is attacking for the sake of plausible deniability. If Forte never calls in the Taliban attack, there is too much of a chance that, without a patsy, the air strike will be noted as such and traced back.

Likewise, somehow disrupting the Taliban attack after they are summoned (good luck, there are 200 of them in a fleet of vehicles) prevents the air strike; if the Taliban do not show up for whatever reason, Forte scrubs the air strike to avoid detection. If the Taliban raid and ensuing bomb strike do not occur, this buys enough time for Ismala the Acolyte to arrive from Sweden. She is able to magically heal Nasra and this stabilizes the situation in the village; the window to wipe out the Scythians will have closed.

8. Reward, Repercussions and Follow Up

1 SAN should be awarded to anyone who tries to help Lt. Taylor get an increased level of mental health services. If Genevieve Jansen survives, award 1 SAN. If Kluznarski's road block team is saved from death, at least in part, award 1d3 SAN to the investigators.

If the investigators escape with their miserable lives from Afghanistan after they are put in jeopardy, award each survivor 1d3 SAN.

No SAN should be gained or lost for however it is that the plight of the Scythians resolves. Honestly, is it a good thing, that will let them sleep better at night, if the Scythians continue on? Is it a bad thing? How about if they manage to kill the "Eldest Son"—and thereby remove the Scythians' best source of protection (and expose some uncertain part of the world to the wrath of Hypnos)?

If the Scythians are blotted out and Hypnos takes his revenge on their bloodline, consider carefully what, *if anything*, happens. How many people will it affect? Anyone? Is the world decimated? Or do a few people just commit suicide and/or dissolve in their sleep? That's purely up to you as the Keeper. Nasra and the Scythians have been making sorcerous, tainted deals for millennia to avoid this feared fate, but apart from the Scythians themselves, how far Hypnos' wrath will reach is a question that is very deliberately left unanswered.

Sure, Autolus and Medea faced an awful fate a couple of millennia ago, and Nasra has felt eyes upon her a few times since, but does she know for a fact what will happen if she falters? No—she's following a standard operating procedure, too, one designed not to take chances. A few people might dissolve into puddles, or the world might end. The best ending to this scenario would be an ambiguous one, where the Scythians survive to some limited extent, and everyone worries about what will happen to the world as a consequence.

Author's Notes: Written as a lark during the spring of 2011. Please like my publishing imprint at Facebook, search "Swefna Cyst Publishing". Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back.