

GEIST IN THE SHELL

A *THE ESOTERRORISTS* CAMPAIGN KICKER

BY MARCUS D. BONE

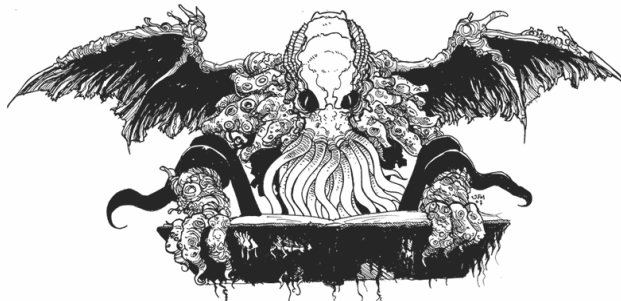
GEIST IN THE SHELL IS A THE ESOTERRORISTS SCENARIO WRITTEN BY
MARCUS D. BONE
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Author's Note

This scenario, with a few minor changes, was the kickstarter for my very first *The Esoterrorists* campaign. At the time I was keen on exposing my group to the GUMSHOE system and demonstrating how it brought a different - more focused? - style of investigative game to the table, but I was unsure of what type of plot they wanted to encounter. Hence the open and question forming style of **Geist in the Shell**.

I'm happy to say that the campaign I ran, which lasted a good 7 or 8 months, embraced this flexible approach, and it allowed me to integrate the published adventures 'Six Packed' and 'Profane Miracles' into its overall structure as well as generate my own content. I hope you have as much fun running this set-up adventure as my friends and I did, and more importantly I hope it leads to your own exciting *The Esoterrorists* campaign!



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INTRODUCTION

Geist in the Shell has been written as an introduction to a larger *The Esoterrorists* campaign; acting as a framework (or kicker) upon which Game Masters can build their scenarios. While it does offer some suggestions as to how such an ongoing campaign might be structured, nothing in this adventure should be seen as being set in stone.

As the first chapter in a potential ongoing story, **Geist in the Shell** focuses on bringing together a group of Ordo Veritatis operatives together to investigate a mysterious death. While operatives with any backgrounds are appropriate for this adventure, it is important - for this initial scenario and to maintain their cover - that at least one of the agents is skilled in the *Demolitions* Investigative Ability.

Structure & Design

Geist in the Shell is a linear story that has been designed to open up numerous leads that can be followed in later investigations. As such, it quickly throws the operatives from one scene to the next and should reveal that they are embarking upon the first steps of a much larger conspiracy.

Although a good-sized town or city is required to ensure that all of the sites mentioned are available, this story has no set location. It might, however, be of interest that during the playtest of this and subsequent investigations, the greater San Francisco area was used (despite the author having little actual knowledge of this region).

THE BACKSTORY

The characters are about to take their first steps into a world of conspiracy and horror, where the facts are hidden behind a wall of lies and no-one is what they seem. They are about to encounter the world of *The Esoterrorists*!

INVESTIGATION TRIGGER

Karl Giest is dead. Although you wouldn't have guessed it to look at him, Karl, a tall, lanky youth, barely out of his teens, knew more about the world of the Esoterrorist threat than even the most observant Ordo Veritatis operative could ever have imagined. And it was this knowledge that has seen him murdered.

It is up to the OV operatives to find out just why Geist was killed and his brain removed. Of course, this mystery will lead the characters to discover so much more...

A WATCHER IN THE DARK

Giest was a child protégé with electronics and computers. Even at an early age he had his future mapped out for him - a scholarship to MIT, a hand-picked role at any of the world's most prestigious multinational corporations, and then simply sitting back to watch the dollars roll in. However, that was before he developed his somewhat strange, and then downright disturbing theories on the state of the world. After a few years at MIT he felt that he no longer fit in within 'normal' society, and so elected to just 'drop out' of existence.

Becoming a recluse Geist began to use his exceptional programming and web skills (both legitimately and illegally) to keep himself in the lifestyle he quickly became accustomed to. Further, his fortune not only allowed him to maintain the most cutting edge levels technology, but also gave him access to advances in computer engineering that have yet to (and might never) see the light of day.

Meanwhile, as his reputation as a hacker and counter security expert grew, Geist began to use his seemingly unlimited access to the world most secure data to learn more about 'the truth'; the conspiracies and horrors that face humanity. Unsurprisingly, access to such information quickly made him extremely paranoid and even more cut-off from the rest of society, while also making him a living encyclopaedia of the supernatural and esoterror.

Yet, until late last night, Karl Giest, had done little more than watch his computer screens and track the invisible war been OV and the Esoterrorists. He had no interest in which side won out, but rather a morbid fascination with the conflict itself. And the fact is that neither the Ordos Vertatis, nor any of the various Esoterrorist cells had the slightest idea that Geist was following there every move. Sure, OV had made note of Karl's snooping, but with many more pressing matters and no direct evidence that he was part of the Esoterrorist threat, they had little interest in him... until today.

Beta Wave Controller

Beyond his knowledge of computers and their programming languages, Geist's only other real interest was electronics. With the help of a local inventor, Ron Speerage (a man who'd once worked for the military), Geist was able to build a devise he called The Controller.

This marvel of technology was developed to read the mind's Beta Waves, and was created to allow Geist to control his various computers and electronic devices by thought alone. Although very much a prototype, Karl successfully mapping his Beta Wave patterns to the device, and with some electronic wizardry had already networked many of his computers to respond directly to his thoughts.

Giest's Death

For all his interest and understanding in the occult, little did Geist know that his snooping would see him become a target of a much larger and dangerous organisation. A week or so ago, Karl was infected with an Outer Dark Entity, feed to him through images and data that he had discovered in his 'investigations' into the occult. This Entity, a Stalker, only became reality as he began to think more and more about it. From simple thoughts, to imagined shadows, the Stalker became real in the night just past and quickly claimed its prize - Geist's brain.

RUNNING THE SCENARIO

As noted above, this scenario is a brief, linear introduction to the Esoterrorist. Despite this, the story does follow the conventions laid out in previous supplements, which should give potential Game Masters the tools to make chances to the core plot, and any future investigations as they see fit.

A TRAIL OF CLUES

Geist in the Shell consists of only a hand full of core scenes that will see the operatives gain access to Geist's apartment, discover the hacker's body and follow the leads to learn more about his death. There are a few short optional scenes included, but as an introduction to a larger story, these are presented in a way that will hopefully generate more questions than answers.

ANTAGONIST REACTIONS

Just as the events in Geist's penthouse have alerted OV to his interest in the Outer Dark, so could it have triggered a response from any number of Esoterrorist cells.

During this scenario there are a few scenes where antagonists could attempt to intercept the operatives, to either stop them from learning more, or simply to discover for themselves what is going on. As has been previously mentioned, who and to what level of involvement such groups might have is left to the Game Master to decide.

As an additional issue, it is also possible to involve the city's police department in the investigation, especially when it becomes obvious that the Officers sent into to defuse the bomb on Geist's home where not the usual Bomb Disposal team. A curious or over enthusiastic detective adds both another hurdle to the characters' investigations, or even a potential a future OV recruit.

GEIST IN THE SHELL

THE BRIEFING (SCENE TYPE - INTRO)

Each of the operatives is contacted via mobile phone late one afternoon of what is otherwise a fairly typical day. When answered, A male non-descript voice provides the accepted OV identification and key words, and requests that the operative immediately reports to the top-level parking lot of the largest hotel in the city. There, they are told, they will be met by an OV handler who will brief them as to a situation and equip them with the appropriate cover.

Upon their arrival, the operatives will see a Bomb Disposal van (with attached Detonation Bin) as the only vehicle parked on this level of the parking lot. Within, waiting for them, is a young man (in his mid-20s) dressed in the hotel's valet uniform. His gold badge reads 'CHAD'.

Once introductions are completed, Chad will hand the operatives a folder with a report on Karl Geist. He will then brief the team on the following:

- About an hour ago, reports were received from residents of Harbour View - an upmarket apartment building - about gun-shots being fired in the penthouse.
- This is the last-known residence of Karl Geist, a suspected insider on Esoterrorist activities.
- Upon the arrival of regular police units, they reported a suspected bomb or explosive device having been mounted on the main door of Geist's penthouse apartment, and requested Bomb Disposal back-up.
- As the nature of Karl Geist's involvement with Esoterror is unknown, the team is to pose as the Bomb Disposal Unit and gain access to Geist's apartment. Once in, they are to determine whether the reported gunshots are Esoterror related. If so, they are to detain Geist and lock-down the site.
- Once the situation is in hand, OV friendly units will be available to remove Geist to a secure location, and complete the Veil Out.

To assist the characters with their insertion, the Bomb Disposal van is theirs to use and is fully equipped to handle most explosive and chemical situations i.e. includes bomb suits, analysis and testing equipment, a Remote Operating Vehicle (ROV), electronic counter measure units, etc.

Chad will provide the group with his contact number, and attempt to answer any other questions he can (which seeing he has little additional information, is very few). If the group delay's too long, or tries to gain more equipment or resources, he states that time is of the essence in this situation, and the van should have everything the need.

SCENE 1 - THE POLICE CORDON (SCENE TYPE - CORE)

Unsurprisingly, the block around Harbour View apartments has been cordoned off by the police. As they have awaited the arrival of the Bomb Disposal team, they have completed a sweep of the building and ensured that all civilians have been evacuated.

The operatives van is let into the cordon without delay and the team are met by Senior Sergeant **Tom While**. While gives them a run down of the situation as it currently stands.

- The first units arrived in response to an emergency call regarding gunshots in the penthouse.
- Upon arrival they were given access to the penthouse level by the Day Manager, who escorted the two officers up the elevator.
- Approaching the main doors, both officers reported hearing an electronic voice stating that the doors have been booby-trapped, and any attempt to open them will result in their detonation. Hence the request for the disposal unit.
- Currently a cordon has been erected at a block's distance from building and all civilians have been removed.
- Three teams of officers are currently inside the cordon - one each at the main and service entrances of the Harbour View and one stationed in the Penthouse lobby. These will be removed on request.
- Both regular and SWAT units are in position to assist, if so requested by the disposal team.
- No contact - either by phone or by visual observation (from both the neighbouring buildings and a Police helicopter flyby) - has been made with anyone in the penthouse.

While will make it clear that the team is in charge of the situation (at least until the validity of the threat has been ascertained), and he will assist in any way he can.

Operatives taking the time to do so, have the opportunity to find at a little more about Karl Geist and his habits.

- *Cop Talk* - Geist didn't have any Police record. Although his educational transcript is available - it basically say that Karl was a protégée who consistently got top marks, gained a scholarship to MIT and then halfway through his undergrad degree just stopped coming to class.
- *Cop Talk/Bureaucracy* - The Manager of Harbour View, **Travis Polk**, is furious, not only at the mess that this incident is making, but more over whether he'll have a job by the end-of-the-day. It doesn't get much to get him to talk, saying that this isn't the first time Geist has caused trouble. Previously his contraptions have knocked the power out in the building and the Fire department was once called when a strange smell was detected coming from the penthouse. As for Geist himself, Polk says he's a recluse who hardly ever leaves the building. He has no friends he knows of, and has never let him in the apartment. Apart from that Geist is a good tenant who pays well and on time.

Once the operatives are ready to proceed, While and two other officers leads the team into the building and up the elevator. Once in the lobby their escort and the two officers stationed here will act in accordance to the team's wishes - which are most likely being asked to leave.

SCENE 2 - GEIST'S PENTHOUSE (SCENE TYPE - CORE)

The penthouse lobby is a small functional room, with no windows to the outside world. There are three exits from the lobby - the elevator, the door to the emergency stairwell and a pair of ornate double-doors leading to the penthouse itself. The only other objects in the room are a small side table and large, broken gold-framed mirror.

The Front Door

As soon as the operatives get with a few feet of the penthouse doors, an electronic voice, emanating from the two-way speaker on the wall can be heard saying:

This door is wired to explode. Any attempt to gain access to this Penthouse will result in a detonation.

- *Explosive Devices* - A quick examination of the door with reveals that it is indeed booby-trapped with a small explosive device.
 - A 1-point spend will confirm that no other devices or secondary explosives are present.
 - The bomb, a simple contact explosive, designed to detonate when the door is opened, and is attached directly to the door around handle height.
 - Any character with *Explosive Devices* can disarm the bomb. This is done by carefully drilling through the door, and removing the contact points on the far side.

Once the explosives on the door have been disarmed, or after about 20 minutes Sergeant While will contact the operatives to see how they are progressing. He wants his officers present when they enter the Penthouse, and it takes a 1-point spend of *Cop Talk* or *Bureaucracy* to keep him from sending them up as soon as possible.

The Penthouse

While the Harbour View's penthouse is not quite as large as other penthouse suites it nevertheless dwarfs any other of complex's apartments in size. From the lobby, the main doors open into a large rectangular open-plan room - with kitchen, dining area and large lounge within. The room is dark, with the large roof to floor curtains drawn and no lights on.

The first thing that strikes the operatives is the smell - decay, sweat and human detritus. A quick scan from the doorway reveals that there are four exits from this main room - two each to either end of the rectangle - and that the entire room is a complete mess - empty boxes, electronics, magazines and multitudes of cords can be seen lying haphazardly about.

- Unless a light is turned on or the curtain's opened (exposing the entire wall opposite the door as windows), an *Athletics* test (3) is required to make one's way safely around the lounge. Failure results in no Health loss, but a lot of noise as the operative gets tangled in wires, knocks down boxes or treads on some sort of electronics equipment.
- The Kitchen and the Dining area are completely disgusting, with food scattered around, and only a bottle of sour milk in the fridge. In fact they only eatable items in the house seem to be the scattered contents of two brown paper bags on the dining room table - crisps, noodles and the such.
- The lounge part of the room is dominated by huge TV screens (one broken by what seems to have been a dinner plate), and a connected set of three recliner-style theater chairs. There is also every type of gaming console available and too many games to count.
- One section of the lounge has been set up as some sort of work area. Here a large wooden bench (very much out of place with the rest of the room) has been set up, upon which are all the tools and components used in building home electronics.
 - *Explosive Devices* - The character will note that everything - barring any actual explosives - needed to build the device from the door is present on the table.

The other exits from the room lead to a bedroom and study at the north end of the room, and Geists' Server room and bathroom at the southern end.

The Master Bedroom

This room if anything is more disgusting than the main room, the large and otherwise luxurious bedroom, is covered with weeks' worth of dirty clothes and unclean bedding. Despite this mess, Geist's obsession with technology is in evidence; massive LED televisions fill the majority of the otherwise empty wall space (no room for art or photos it seems).

Beyond the stench and dirt, it is obvious that the occupant had simple tastes, with the clothes and (most stained) linen found in the room being of a good quality while not being overly extravagant. Anyone willing to undertake a more through examination of the bedroom, can find a couple of interesting facts about their target.

- Neatly filed in the bed-side table are a number of credit card invoices dating back over the last few years.
 - *Forensic Accounting*¹ -Examining these, two purchases stand out, one for a regular weekly amount of \$200 from a Huang's Grocery, and second a series of irregular charges from a company called Spearage. The spending with the second company ranges from a few hundred to tens of thousands of dollars, but provide no details on what was purchased.
- Geist has a number of occult type books packed in an old banana box deep in his walk-in wardrobe.
 - *Occult Studies* - The operative will be able to tell that these books are nothing special and could have easily be purchased from any specialist book stores (i.e. while they wouldn't be found at the local book shop, they aren't esoterror related). Nevertheless, they do seem out of place amongst the electronics and technology that dominate the penthouse.

Bathroom

With a large walk-in shower, and a spa-bath taking up a good quarter of the room, the bathroom is typical of any high-end apartment. Like the rest of the penthouse the room is a mess, looking as if it hasn't been cleaned in weeks. Thankfully, nothing of interest can be found in this room.

The Server Room

If the power is on as the operatives approaching the room, they can clearly hear the sound of whirring computers and an overworked air conditioning unit from behind the door. The door itself is locked with a simple push-combination lock, which can easily be cracked with *Infiltration* (3) check, or just as conveniently knocked off its hinges.

Once opened, the room is revealed to be a server farm, made up half a dozen professional looking server racks. The various flashing lights, chirping computers and the incessant droning of the air con, makes the whole room seem somewhat surreal and out of place compared to the rest of the apartment.

In one of the corners of the room are number of large, empty boxes and assorted packaging. While of different sizes and shapes, all are labelled with the supplier - Spearage Electronic Supplies (SES).

Those with the appropriate Abilities will be able to gather the following leads:

¹ While anyone will be able to determine this information with a bit of time, those with this ability will be able to identify these interesting details almost immediately.

- *Data Retrieval* - The Servers can be accessed through a dedicated computer in the room. While the majority of the servers hold nothing too suspicious (Geist ran a private Cloud service for various online gamers, etc.), one of the devices is isolated from the rest. On closer examination it seems as if some advanced algorithms have been used to encrypt the data on this lone server.
- *Cryptography* - The data on the isolated server is too difficult to unencrypt without specialist tools and applications. Handing this server over to data security analysts seems likely to be the only way anyone could get anything from it.
- *Evidence Collection/Electronic Surveillance/Data Retrieval* - The room itself is very clean and tidy and obviously sees little use beyond its function as a server farm. However, to the trained eye something is amiss with the set up of a number of the devices in the rack; each seems to have attached a strange looking dongle/USB stick. On closer examination this is definitely a home made USB device.

SCENE 3 - KARL GEIST'S STUDY

Karl Geist currently sits dead in the study; a fitting place one might suppose for a man so focused on technology. Here also is where the operatives will find much of the evidence that will drive the rest of the investigation onward.

The first and most obvious thing the operatives will see is Karl's body. Slumped over the large computer desk (which faces the door), it takes little to notice that the top of his head has been removed. Witnessing this sight requires a *Stability (4)* roll. Once over this the operatives are able to see that the study is, like most of the penthouse, full of computers, and other items of technology.

The Body

Operatives examining Geist's body are able to discover the following.

- Dress in stained pyjamas and an unwashed dressing gown, Geist is slumped forward over the keyboard of the room's only computer. A 9mm pistol lies beside him on the desk.
- *Forensic Anthropology* - Geist is most definitely dead. The top of his skull has been removed with a very sharp, but imprecise weapon or blade. It is also immediately obvious that his brain has been removed (there is no sign of it here or elsewhere in the penthouse).
 - Further examination reveals large bruises around the neck and face, as if Geist had been held upright as his head was opened.
 - Karl's right hand is broken, with many of the bones shattered, as if crushed by an immense weight.
 - With a 1-point spend, some sort of grey filth can be found under his broken fingernails. This can not be identified against any OV or other database.

Clues in the Room

There is also evidence to be found in the room, pointing not only to the events surrounding Geist's death, but also what he might have been up to.

- *Evidence Collection* - An examination of the room reveals a number of interesting items.
 - In a hidden draw of the main desk is an open steel lock-box. With a moulded plush insert, this is obviously where Geist kept the 9mm pistol.

An opened box of 9mm ammunition is also in the lock-box, with 10 of the 50 rounds missing.

- On the floor near the desk lies a sweatband with a number of electronic patches attached. On closer examination any operative with the *Trivia* (or other appropriate ability) will be able to identify one of the attachments is a Bluetooth device.
- Two 9mm rounds can be found embedded in the door frame of the Study (obviously targeting something in the door way or perhaps in the main room). A third round is found mid-room, and has crumpled as if it had impacted on something very tough.
- The desktop computer at which Geist sits has the same homemade USB stick attached, as was found in the server room.
- *Forensic Anthropology* - The headband seems to be some sort of home made Electroencephalography (EEG) device, although what it is used for is difficult to decipher without further research.
- *Ballistics* - The weapon on the desk beside Geist is a subcompact Glock 26 9mm semi-automatic pistol. Examining it in detail reveals that it almost brand new. Three bullets are missing from the full magazine of 10 rounds.
 - Looking at the trajectory of the fired rounds, it is obvious to the trained eye that Geist fired quickly without thought, and was not a trained marksman.
 - The crushed bullet obviously hit something stronger than steel, as the damage done to it, given its energy at that range, should have resulted in the bullet splintering on contact rather than simply compressing.

Ghosts in the Machine

Getting access to Geist's personal computer allows the operatives to discover yet more about Geist. An operative with the *Cryptography* ability is able to crack Geist's password in about an hour, while a 1-point spend knocks this back to about 10 minutes.

- *Data Retrieval* - A quick look around Geist's system reveals that the system is currently running an auto-reformatting protocol that seems to be doing a very good job at destroying whatever evidence the computer might hold. Fortunately, a skilled user is able to quickly stop this routine and examine what remains.
 - The computer is connected to a local server labelled *Eso*. This is the isolated server mentioned earlier.
 - Only one contact remains on Geist's Skype client. This is from a **Tim 'Rascal' Pulling**. Details on Pulling can be found in Scene 4 below.
 - An unknown program label 'Controller' is running as a virtual server on the computer. This is the Beta Wave controller Geist was working on to remotely control his network, and is connected to the homemade headband device found on the floor. More details on how the controller works can be found Scene 7 below.
- *Electronic Surveillance* - Geist routed a number of the apartment's internal and external cameras through this desktop server, and although much of the data has been wiped spending points in *Electronic Surveillance* can recover some of the recordings.
 - *Zero-point spend* - From early the previous evening, a five minute recording of the front door camera (located up high and covering the entire entrance hall from the elevators to the door to penthouse). Thirty seconds into the recording, the elevator opens and an Asian man enters the entry hall carrying two brown paper bags. He leaves these on the

side table, and rings the door bell once before returning to the elevator doors. Although non-descript the man wears a distinct Grocer's apron and cap with the logo of 'Huang's Grocery' embroidered upon them. Immediately after he leaves from view, the front door of the penthouse opens and a dishevelled and unwashed looking Geist appears. He reaches to grab the bags, but seems to jump in shock as if seeing something in the mirror beside the table. Quickly turning around, he has a wild look in his eyes. Grabbing the bags, he retreats back into the penthouse. A few moments later, the mirror cracks as if hit but something, although no object is seen to hit it.

- *1 point spend* - Various scraps of video from within the penthouse, within which is seen Geist acting strangely. For example, in one he seems to be in the middle of some sort of ritual (which viewers with the *Occult* ability will recognize as an old Gypsy ritual to ward off evil). In another he is seen hiding under the dining room table, trying to cover himself in detritus.
- *2 point spend* - This recovers two additional scenes. The first is a brief flash of the entranceway camera, where a man in a dark suit can be seen standing near the penthouse door. With his back to the camera no details can be seen, and the image cuts out just as he begins to turn. The second is a recording of Geist sitting naked on the couch blankly watching the TVs. Although the TV screens can not be seen, it is obvious from the stark blue light that they display only the commonly used 'no signal' image. Nevertheless Geist seems entranced. This scene continues for almost 2 minutes and nothing changes, including Geist's expression. Just before the image cuts out, however, the viewers swear that a shadow of someone or something rises up from behind the couch; although even when the recording is paused no one can be certain as to if anything is actually there in the darkness.
- *Cryptography* - There is little else the operatives can extract from the now partially reformatted harddrives on the computer, although determined operatives can discover the following.
 - Despite the connection direct to the secure Eso server, it still seems impossible to access.
 - Amongst the left over code from the formatting protocols and the now corrupt files, some Esoterror trigger words can be found, with a number of references to secured Eso server.
 - *1 point spend* - A number of fragments of data from the 'application' that summoned the Stalker into Geist's reality still exists. What reconstructing this will do to a character is left to the GM to decide, although it is suggested that it isn't pleasant.

SCENE 4 - FOLLOWING UP LEADS (SCENE TYPE - CORE)

Once the operatives have made their initial discoveries, they will want to secure the penthouse. With a phone call to Chad, the OV friendly policing unit will be assigned to the case (replacing Tom While's men), and Geist's body and computers will be moved to a secure location for further examination.

Chad will arrange to meet in a quiet underground car park beneath an abandoned shopping mall, where he will take charge of the Bomb Disposal van and ensure it is 'cleaned'. Although the case seems like a bit of a dead-end, he will assign the group to investigate any leads they might have found in Geist's apartment. It is pretty obvious that Geist knew something about actions of the Esoterrorists, and unless some way of

cracking the encoding on his data files is found, OV might never discover how much he actually knew.

The rest of this scene collates the various minor leads the operatives might want to follow up.

Huang's Grocery

Huang's Grocery is a large market-type store located on the outer-edge of the city. It offers a door-to-door delivery service for groceries and small-goods throughout the city, and processes hundreds of orders each day.

Run by a well-loved Malaysian family, operatives speaking Malay (*Language*) will find that they will be able to get the following information out of either the Dispatcher or Delivery Rider at the Grocery. If no-one speaks Malay, a 1-point spend of the *Negotiation*, *Reassurance* or even *Intimidation* can secure the same.

- Karl Geist is a regular customer of their delivery service, and has had an account with them for the last 12 months. The most recent delivery was at 5pm the previous night.
- He never ordered anything out of the ordinary, with most of his items being convenience or ready-to-cook foods. It seems Geist wasn't too keen on fresh fruit or vegetables.
- The delivery drivers never saw Geist, as he gave explicate instructions that all groceries were to be left on the side table in the penthouse lobby.

Harbour View Management

If the operatives have not already done so, they can approach either the management of the Harbour View (Travis Polk) or the owner **Janice Time**. Travis is only able to provide the information provided above.

Janice, on the other hand, can be tracked down using either *Streetwise* or *Research*. Based at her impressive mansion, she is an octogenarian recluse who will only talk to the operatives if they can get past her various employees. Once these troublesome hurdles are conquered however, Time is happy to discuss what she knows.

Consulting her files she has little to add to what Travis was able to give the operatives, however characters with the right abilities might be able to extract more.

- *Bullshit Detector* - While Time is telling the truth about her knowledge of Geist, it is obvious that something else about this situation is making her uncomfortable.
- *Flattery* (or *Flirting*) - She reveals that the group aren't the first to come to her to discuss Geist. A week ago she was approached by another man asking very similar questions. She says that she told the gentlemen - **Derek Cord** - exactly the same things as she now tells the operatives; she had never met Karl Geist, and leaves Polk to deal with the business of running Harbour View.
- *Reassurance* - Janice says that Cord providing FBI identification, but wasn't the sort of person you'd imagine working for the Bureau. She was very uncomfortable with his gruff attitude and line of questioning, and once he'd left, she used some of her influence to contact one of the senior staff at the Bureau. Suffice to say, they had no record of any agent named Derek Cord.

Tim 'Rascal' Pulling

While most of the data on Geist's computers has been either encrypted or wiped, one contact in his Skype contact list still remains - **Tim Pulling**.

Pulling rents server space off of Geist and plays various online games with him. He has never met Karl in person, (he lives on opposite sides of the continent,) although they

have spoken many times. In general, Tim has only good things to say about Karl, although will mention that he seemed to be a bit of a conspiracy theorist.

- *Bullshit Detector* - Pulling is covering something up, and seems nervous when the operatives discuss Geist's interest in the occult.
- *Intimidation* - Anyone taking an aggressive line of questioning will force Pulling to reveal that the last time he spoke to Karl, he was acting very weird. He spoke about strange things in his apartment and having 'acid' flashbacks, before cutting the call off. Tim simply thought he was high at the time, but on reflection there seemed something more to it.

SCENE 5 - SPEARAGE ELECTRONIC SUPPLIES (SCENE TYPE - CORE)

Spearage Electronic Supplies (SES) is easy to find. They are located in the same city as the adventure is set, and have an impressive website which details the showroom's location and hours.

Investigating SES reveals the following information.

- *Research* - SES is owned and run by Ron Spearage, a respected inventor. Of most note, Spearage has been involved in developing Brain-Computer interface devices for a number of public and private health organisations. These machines look to assist patients with physical limitations interact with others through thought control, and have been wildly successful over the past decade in allowing people trapped inside non-responsive bodies to communicate.
 - *One-point spend* - Digging a bit deeper into secure data, Ron Spearage's name comes up in connection to US military research projects 30 years ago. While details are scant, it seems he was involved in mind control experiments for the Army.
- *Trivia* - SES' is a general supplier of computer parts and electronics. They do, however, market their own property - a massage device that automatically walks up and down a user's back. It seems to be a popular purchase amongst older consumers, if the operative recalls the adver-commercial correctly.

Visiting SES

Situated in an otherwise quiet business park, Spearage Electronic Supplies is a hive of activity. As most of the staff in the show and stock rooms knows nothing of Karl Geist or his activities, the operatives are pointed towards Ron Spearage himself.

Although now in his early 60s, Ron is the sort of person who's enthusiasm belies his age. He is happy to talk to the characters and will quickly look to clear up any confusion around his or SES' involvement with Geist.

- Ron explains that he is proud of his inventions, and that the body massager is simply a way of 'paying the bills'. He's always happy to share his ideas, and when he met Geist in an online meet-up he discussed the research he'd done with Brain-Computer interfaces. He encouraged Geist to look into the technology when he showed an interest. This relationship also resulted in SES supplying Geist a number of server and computer parts.
- *Reassurance* - If the operatives promise not to go telling everyone, Ron will share some of the details of how the device works. See Scene 7 for details.
- *Negotiation* - The operatives can gain access to the blue-prints Ron provided to Karl. Any character with the *Electronic Surveillance* ability will readily identify that these match closely the USB devices and EEG headband from Geist's penthouse, although his prototype show some improvement. Spearage will be impressed at the changes if shown what Geist achieved.

SCENE 6 - THE TAIL SCENE (SCENE TYPE - OPTIONAL)

This scene can be run if the Game Master wants to include a bit more action into the scenario, or perhaps demonstrate to the players that there are definitely some human forces involved in the mystery. The events that follow can be played out any time the operatives are travelling in the city.

- With a successful *Surveillance* (4) roll, the driver or their passengers notice that a brown Ford has been following their car since it left their last appointment. Little can be made out about the vehicle or its three passengers, as it remains a discrete away.
- If the driver attempts to outrun the tail, a *Driving* (5) roll is required to lose the Ford in the traffic, although this sort of action might draw more attention than is wanted from the local police.
- Alternatively the group might attempt to confront their tails. This isn't easy, as the followers will do their best to avoid apprehension. If the characters do find a way in which to question the men in the Ford, they all produce FBI credentials, and will attempt to leave the scene as soon as possible.

SCENE 7 - USING THE BETA WAVE CONTROLLER (SCENE TYPE - CORE)

The Beta Wave controller built by Geist is attuned directly to his unique Beta Waves. While others might not be able to use the controller to manage Geist's computers, with a bit of jury rigging it can be repurposed, if linked into a big enough network, to pinpoint Geist's missing brain; after talking to Ron Speerage it seems easy enough (especially if the operatives have the original blueprints) to achieve. While it might seem futile to attempt to track Geist in this way (i.e. the ODE have consumed the brain and or may no longer be on this plane of reality), it is actually the best way to discover more about what is going on.

- Finding an appropriate Network - Operatives need to find a network wide enough and powerful enough to find Geist's unique Beta Wave signal. Anything as far reaching as a cell phone network will do the trick.
- Removing and Reinstalling the Controller - Using the *Data Retrieval* ability allows the operatives to successfully extract the Controller from the computer in Geist's study, while *Electronic Surveillance* is used to modify it enough to detect Geist's Beta Waves, and install it in a new location.
- Locating the Brain Waves - With a powerful enough network, the repurposed Controller will quickly locate Geist's Beta Waves, St Mary's church, situated in the old, industrial area of the city.

SCENE 8 - ST MARY'S CHURCH (SCENE TYPE - CORE)

St Mary's has been abandoned for just over twenty years. A small church, it consists of the main chapel, and a couple of adjoining rooms. The main area of interest for the operatives however is the basement, which houses not only Geist's brain, but many others.

Ground Work

Operatives taking the time to investigate St Mary's history and to stake out the neighbourhood, discover the following:

- The large overgrown section (there is no graveyard) around the church is surrounded by a high wire fence, while the building's windows and doors have been boarded up. There are a few signs of vandalism and graffiti on the exterior, but not as much as other nearby buildings.
- Any character making a *Surveillance* (4) roll notices that a number of state of the art security cameras have been put in place high on the church's walls.

Anyone with *Electronic Surveillance* will note that they have not been well placed, and provide numerous blinds spots in which could be used to get a closer look at the site.

- *Research/History* - Saint Mary's was once a vibrant and well attended Presbyterian church in a working class district of the city. However as the neighbourhood changed to become more industrial, the patronage dwindled until the church's Presbytery (local council) closed Saint Mary's and opened a new church closer to their congregation. The building has since been for sale many times, but a buyer hasn't been found.
- *Streetwise* - Asking the locals - a few warehouse workers, hobos, and even pushers can be found in the area at all hours - reveals that about month ago considerable work was done to the church, although strangely nothing was done to improve the exterior. Further more, a large refrigerated truck has been seen parked around the back a number of times since, although no one has noticed any workers arriving or leaving.

On the Church Grounds

Once within the security fencing the operatives need an *Infiltration (5)* - remember the Piggyback rules - to avoid detection. Even if the characters fail this roll, it takes a while for an appropriate response to be mustered by whoever is responsible for the setup. Hopefully this is more than enough time for the operatives to find out what is going on.

Once clear of the security, the team is able to discover the following.

- *Evidence Collection* - There are numerous tire tracks on the grounds, and an obvious point where the fence can be opened to allow vehicle access.
- Close to the church, the characters can hear a low rumbling sound emanating from under the church.
- At the external entrance to the basement two steel doors are in place where one would normally expect to find simple wooden doors. These are cold to the touch and are secured with a keypad entry lock.

Any operative exploring the church proper finds it much as one would expect from a building that has been abandoned for a long time. It is covered in dust, with plenty of debris, animal dropping and the occasional bird corpse to be found. Interestingly, there is no access from the church to the basement below.

Underground

The steel doors to the basement can either be broken open (with the appropriate tools) or have the keypad lock cracked (with a 1 point spend in *Electronic Surveillance*). With the entrance breached, the operators are greeted with great gouts of cold air escaping from the open doors and the sounds of the equipment that is obviously needed to keep the chamber below at a low temperature.

- Although it is pitch black, automatic lighting flickers on as soon as anyone descends the short flight of stairs down into basement. With this illumination reveals a short corridor leading into a large chamber.
- The basement has been totally renovated, with state of the art insulation and special grip floors (to stop slipping). Half a dozen cameras can also be seen in the corridor, which seem to cover most angles in the hallway.
- The corridor contains a dozen of identical grey ceramic boxes. Two feet in all dimensions, they are empty except for a layer of insulation. There are no identifying marks on any of the boxes.

Stark Confrontation

Moving into the main chamber of the basement, the temperature is even colder than the corridor and the sound of the refrigeration equipment borders of the distracting.

- The first thing that the operatives see entering this room is that it full of about a hundred boxes of exactly the same size and shape as those found in corridor.
- Opening any requires the character to make a *Stability* (4) test, when they realize that it (and the others) each contains a brain. These brains are cold to the touch and seem to come from both adults and children, and sit snugly against the insulation.

The Guardian

After a few moments in the room, the ODE summoned to guard the church appears, obviously looking for a sign or code from the team to identify themselves.

- The creature coalesces from a dark grate in the floor, in a smoky and shady form. This arrival requires a *Stability* (6) test, made even more terrifying when they realize that it watches them expectantly. If there are a large number of operatives, the GM should feel free to add additional Guardians.
- As the team have no way of placating it, it attacks after about 20 seconds, using its shadow abilities to confuse the group and get them to attack each other.
- The Guardian statistics are - Athletics 10, Health 7, Scuffling 10
 - Hit Threshold: 6
 - Weapon: +1 - The Guardian's icy tendrils
 - Armor: Nil
 - Fast: Can attack twice in once round.
 - Shadows: When attacking the Guardian makes the surrounding area dark (vision is as if a thick grey mist had settled). Each turn, any operative wanting to attack much make a *Surveillance* (5) roll to get a clear view of the Guardian. Anyone failing this will not be sure of the target they see and if they attack anyway have an even chance of hitting all combatants (i.e. with 5 operatives and the Guardian, there is only a 1 in 6 chance this attack will hit the ODE).

Aftermath

When the Guardians defeated, the scenario is at an end. The group are now in possession of a number of human brains in cold storage, but are unsure why they have been gathered here, or which one might be Geist's...

THE VEIL-OUT

As this is the starting adventure on what could be a larger campaign, the Veil-out undertaken by the operatives only has to be detailed as they see fit (or where they have exposed themselves too much during their enquiries). Beyond this OV friendly teams will cover most of the mop-up, allowing the characters to continue the investigation.

- As noted earlier, Geist's penthouse is cordoned off, and cleaned of all occult evidence; the recluse's body is shipped off to a secure site for further examination.

- The encrypted data of Geist's investigations into Esoterror is sent to specialist analysts, and has the potential to be the source of many leads and adventures in the future.
- Unless the operatives were too forthcoming in their interviews the people they interviewed, most of these individuals will never know they've been involved in an Esoterror threat.
- With the site comprised, the organisation who set up Saint Mary's church abandons it. OV will quickly secure the church and transport its contents into storage. Once this is done, the church will be purchased and demolished in the following week.

FURTHER MISSIONS

Upon completing this assignment the operatives are likely to have many questions as to just what is going on. This is a good thing, as a kicker to larger story line, the events in **Geist in the Shell** is about setting in motion a larger, and dare I say, grander, conspiracy. For those GMs looking to expand this story themselves, I suggest that you explore the following questions.

Who killed Geist?

So who actually killed Geist? And why did they do so? It seems most likely to have been an Esoterrorist group who had caught wind of his snooping, but why not just kill him out right rather than stealing his brain? Maybe it was a government organisation, or perhaps an OV sanctioned hit (by then why involve the operatives?). These questions form the basis of any on going threat the team can investigate.

Who set up the storage in the church and what was its purpose?

This is obviously a large and expensive operation, but one that whoever built it was unable to devote too much security to. Why an old church in the middle of a run down neighbourhood? Where were the guards? And what was the purpose with the brains? Were they destined for some sort of experiment, to be used as a sacrifice, or even returned from where they came?

Where are all the missing people?

Surely someone must have noticed a hundred plus corpses with missing brains? Even as an isolated case, a strange death like that would have made the media. Maybe they didn't come from humans? Perhaps they were farmed somewhere that people can't complain about there plight?

What else exists within Geist's encrypted data?

It is obvious that Geist knew a lot about the Esoterrorism and perhaps even the actions of Esoterrorists themselves. What information can be extracted from his secure server (or maybe even his brain, if it can be found)? Will it lead to more direct operations against the various cells in the country or across the world? Or will it reveal facts that will not only embarrass OV, but threaten their very existence?