

HIDEOUS CREATURES

GHOULS



TRAIL OF CTHULHU

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Pelgrane Press



GHOULS

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KEN WRITES ABOUT STUFF

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Hideous Creatures: Introduction

Lovecraft created his various “shadowy congeners” because the stories of vampires, werewolves, and even ghosts had become too familiar and too formulaic to evoke true horror. Almost a century after he wrote, his own monstrous races have likewise begun to seem like comfortable story furniture rather than unnerving signals that the world is horrible and wrong.

Our goal with this series is to present a comprehensive look at Lovecraft’s hideous creatures, from as many angles as we can. Our goal is contradiction, surprise, and most especially the uncanny: the recognition of something familiar as something weird. As in the “Gods and Titans” section of the *Trail of Cthulhu* core book, this series deliberately contradicts itself, blurring boundaries and erasing certainties in the name of the uncanny. In your campaign, these variant truths might be misunderstandings, legends, heresies, or deliberate lies spread by the creatures to lull their foes into a false sense of familiarity.

Change anything and everything in these pages, most especially the ability scores. If you need a terrifying assassin, a brief but survivable fright, or a sanity-shattering horror, just add or subtract points at will.

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“IT WAS A COLOSSAL AND NAMELESS BLASPHEMY WITH GLARING RED EYES, AND IT HELD IN BONY CLAWS A THING THAT HAD BEEN A MAN, GNAWING AT THE HEAD AS A CHILD NIBBLES AT A STICK OF CANDY. ITS POSITION WAS A KIND OF CROUCH ... NOT THAT, NOR THE DOG FACE WITH ITS POINTED EARS, BLOODSHOT EYES, FLAT NOSE, AND DROOLING LIPS. IT WASN'T THE SCALY CLAWS NOR THE MOULD-CAKED BODY NOR THE HALF-HOOVED FEET -- NONE OF THESE, THOUGH ANY ONE OF THEM MIGHT WELL HAVE DRIVEN AN EXCITABLE MAN TO MADNESS.” -

- “PICKMAN'S MODEL”

Rubbery, loathsome humanoids with semi-hooved feet, pointed ears, and claws, ghouls dwell in graveyard warrens, subway tunnels, and the like beneath many human cities. Their greenish or grayish skin is matted with grave earth or flecked with leprous lesions and leathery dead spots. They smell horrible, like open graves and rot and wet dogs. They move in a low, hunched posture, almost semi-bipedal; they climb, leap, and lope at prodigious speed. Their eyes are red or yellow, and glow in pitch blackness or when hungrily attentive on something or someone. Ghouls can see into both infrared and ultraviolet; in utter darkness, they can find a foe by smell or sound.

Ghouls are usually described as doglike or canine in appearance, a description that has as much to do with their pack behavior and habit of digging as it does their specific skull shape. For example, Lovecraft describes their noses as flat against a humanoid skull, not as pointed snouts. They might have muzzles and thin black, drooling lips like dogs, or high noses and flapping lips like apes.

To change up ghoulish imagery, try other graveyard scavengers. Ghouls in your campaign might also resemble or at least evoke:

- Rats (sharp incisors, beady eyes, unclean fur, tails)
- Baboons (howling, clambering and leaping, fangs, madly ferocious)
- Hyenas (spotted pelt, bone-crushing

jaws, horrible mocking laugh)

- Jackals (quarrelsome, long upright ears, curved canine teeth)
- Coyotes (furred long jawline, yipping howl, sawlike molars)
- Flies (bristles on arms, segmented eyes, green-blue sheen on flesh)
- Worms (pallid skin, ovoid head, visible “segments” along spine, thin)

Ghouls eat dead flesh, especially human corpses. Hungry ghouls are not above providing very fresh corpses from the homeless, lost, or curious, but ghouls in general know that too much predation on the living invites human investigation. They mostly stick to the anonymous dead, or to digging up into graves from below. Ghouls can digest almost anything; flesh soaked in formaldehyde and other embalming fluid goes down as easy as flesh left rotting in the sewer for a month (long enough for the fat to congeal into delicious spaetzle-like adipocere).

They speak their own language, one of gibberings and meepings, although some recall or have learned human tongues. These ties to humanity extend past diet and language: ghouls associate with human witches as go-betweens, with human dreamers as occasional allies against more fearsome foes like moon-beasts, and with human necrophiles, serial killers, and other unwholesomely death-obsessed sorts. Indeed, a human of particularly

thanatophilic tendencies can transform into a ghoulish over a prolonged period of time.

Most significantly of all, ghouls and humans interchange children and interbreed. Ghouls regularly exchange human and ghoulish infants, raising and nursing the kidnapped human child as a ghoulish and leaving the ghoulish changeling to ignorant human parents. Some human children interbreed with their ghoulish warrenmates to produce hybrids or mongrels; some human magi or degenerates mate with ghouls for their own purposes, likewise. And of course many ghouls brought up as humans never reconnect with their true species and marry humans. Like Deep One hybridism, ghoulish hybridism can turn recessive and pass through several human generations before reverting to type, usually upon exposure to some ghoulish stimulus or infection vector.

Why do ghouls bother with this practice, which both risks exposure and weakens the ghouls' immediate progeny?

- The ghouls do it to revitalize their long-term genetic pool. As immortals with very specialized diet, ghouls are an evolutionary dead end with a very low pure-blood birth rate. They seek to improve their stock with new germ plasm.
- The ghouls need servants, not just in the warrens to fetch and carry but also on the surface to run interference, acquire more bodies

Ghouls

when starvation becomes acute, and seek out artifacts and tomes for the ghoulish-liches' research. Such servants (and changeling ghoulish agents) anchor criminal networks fencing stolen grave goods and disposing of bodies for other criminals.

- Ghouls are just hateful, and stealing babies is a hateful thing to do.
- Ghouls are engaged in "ethnic cleansing" of the human population, on a millennial scale. Their goal is the same as a Balkan or Japanese warlord who orders his men to rape the conquered women – their seed will some day rule the surface, again.
- Ghouls are attempting to breed the Greater Ghouls that one day will build Zul-Bha-Sair and raise Mordiggian from the depths.
- Ghouls only kidnap children who show great promise as dreamers.

Only full-blooded ghouls and some "ghouled" human sorcerers are immortal. Others simply move into the Dreamlands and ignore the passage of time. For all that, ghouls are less inhuman than even Deep Ones. They laugh (at ironic, horribly dark jests), they know hunger and greed, they seek revenge and protect their warrens, they remember and harbor their past human grudges and concerns. And occasionally they will show loyalty or friendship to a human who has protected or amused them.

Ghoul

Abilities: Athletics 9, Health 7, Scuffling 9

Magic: 5-9 for pure-born ghoulish priests of Mordiggian; 10+ for once-human ghoulish-lich sorcerers. Call/Dismiss Mordiggian and Call/Dismiss Yog-Sothoth are common rituals for each, respectively. Liches may have Resurrection; both liches and priests may have Contact Ghoul for

negotiations in strange cemeteries.

Hit Threshold: 4 (5 underground)

Alertness Modifier: +2 (+0 in daylight)

Stealth Modifier: +1

Weapon: +1 (claw), +0 (bite); if two bite attacks in a row succeed against the same target, the ghoulish is worrying the poor devil with his mighty canine jaws, and the second attack thus does double damage. The ghoulish need not roll to hit that target thereafter, but will continue to do normal damage to it each round until killed or driven off. Ghouls can engage in two claw attacks and a bite against the same target in one round.

Armor: Firearms and projectiles do only half damage (round up) against the rubbery hide of ghouls.

Stability Loss: +0; +1 if the ghoulish was known to the witness when alive

Human-Ghoul Changelings

Humans raised by ghouls might metamorphose into ghouls or remain human to serve as interlocutors and ghoulish agents in the surface world. In addition to likely high scores in Scuffling and perhaps Conceal, they have +1 Alertness Modifier, and suffer no penalties for darkness.

Ghoulish changelings or hybrids raised as humans have the same adjustments to their statistics. Only on fully realizing and accepting their ghoulish heritage can they use the full suite of ghoulish abilities. Ghoulish changeling Investigators (usually with In the Blood as a Drive) take +1 Stability loss from seeing ghouls or their ilk, or from any trauma involving burial or cannibalism.

Becoming a Ghoul

If the campaign is the sort where Investigators might become ghouls, add 1 to the character's Ghoul ability rating for each instance of cannibalism, degenerate behavior in graveyards, exposure to ghoulish-virus, journey through the Vale of Pnath, or similar act. (Reading *Cultes des Goules* or other ghoulish books adds 2 or more

points to Ghoul.) Use the Ghoul pool as an Investigative ability for ghoulish lore, language, and so forth, and as a General ability for digging, tracking, seeing at night, etc. When the Ghoul pool exceeds the Investigator's Stability rating, he loses half his Stability immediately. Thereafter, each ghoulish act also lowers his Stability rating by 1 as it raises the Ghoul rating. When the Investigator reaches Stability 0, he becomes a ghoulish NPC permanently. Ghoulish changeling Investigators begin with a Ghoul rating equal to half their Athletics; they cannot use that pool until they realize their true heritage. A very cruel Keeper might keep such a pool secret until then, doling out bonuses to Sense Trouble or Athletics without saying why.

Possible Ghoul Abilities

Mix and match these abilities for ghouls in your campaign. The various lineages, human mongrels, or core breeds of ghouls might have any number of different abilities. Any given ghoulish might be a sorcerer, pack alpha, or avatar of Mordiggian.

Consume Likeness: A ghoulish that eats the heart and brain of a fresh kill can take the appearance of the devoured human. Depending on the campaign metaphysics, this ability may require 2 Magic points, not function in direct sunlight, or (in a Pulp game) "short-circuit" if the ghoulish is hit with silver. Consuming flesh from another human (including bite attacks) also dispels this effect.

Consume Memories: A ghoulish that eats the brain or sensoria of a fresh kill can "imbibe" the memories of the deceased. This works for all vertebrate flesh, not just for humans. This ability may require 2 Magic points; the memories last forever, or at least until the ghoulish would normally forget them.

Daze: If met, the gaze of the ghoulish can send a witness into a dream-state, or even replace short-term memories with hideous nightmares. The ghoulish spends Magic points (or from another pool if the Keeper wishes:

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Athletics for more powerful ghouls, Health for weaker ones) and rolls a die. The total becomes the Difficulty of the Stability test to resist the ghoul's daze.

On a failure, the witness loses 2 Stability and goes into a dreamlike, confabulatory state resembling sleep, drunkenness, or the like. If this ability is actually an infection spread by the ghoul's breath (or spores from its skin), the resistance roll is a Health roll but the effects are the same.

Diseased: Even if ghouls don't spread supernatural ghoul-virus, there is nothing more infectious than a human mouth full of teeth clogged with rotting human flesh. A few (2-8) days after a ghoul bite, the victim must make a Difficulty 8 Health test to avoid horrible infection. If the ghoul bite was immediately treated with First Aid, her Difficulty is 4; if medical treatment waited until after the battle or the next day, her Difficulty is 6. (Claw wounds are -1 to those Difficulties.) On a failure, the victim becomes Hurt and takes +3 damage to Health. She loses 3 Health and 3 Athletics thereafter each day until cured or dead.

Dream-Chase: For 3 Magic points, ghouls can enter the dreams of those they hunt. From there, they can discern their target's whereabouts, create nightmares (5-point Stability test), carry the sleeper into the Dreamlands, or even emerge into the dreamer's room if it abuts a basement, garden, or (of course) graveyard.

Enormous Ghoul: The ghoul in Pickman's final painting holds a human like a candy bar, implying gigantic size (perhaps 12' or so). Such ghouls add 6 points to Athletics, 5 each to Health and Scuffling, and do +2 claw damage.

Greater Ghoul: A leading ghoul of the Dreamlands or Zothique, used to being an equal or dominant species. Add 2 points to Athletics and 1 to Health. Such ghouls have a minimum Magic rating of 3, and may use maces or swords (+1 damage).

Head Shot: Only a deliberate head shot (+2 to Hit Threshold) can kill a ghoul;

ignore all damage to other body parts.

Monstrous Strength: Ghouls can rip apart caskets, subway cars, or anything else to get at the tasty corpse center. For 2 or 3 Athletics points, a ghoul can perform some feat of strength such as throwing an automobile or smashing open locked church doors. Ghouls can also hold their breath for up to an hour.

Pack Attack: Up to three ghouls may attack a single target in one round. The foe's Hit Threshold drops by 1 against the third ghoul.

Paralyzing Grasp: After scoring a Scuffling hit, a ghoul can spend (minimum 1) Magic points to force the target to make a Health test against a Difficulty total equal to the roll plus the Scuffling and Magic points spent. On a failure, the target is paralyzed; his Hit Threshold drops by 2 and he cannot move for the rest of the scene. (Kindly Keepers may allow an Athletics test against that Difficulty every round after the first to break the paralysis.)

Photosensitive: Ghouls must make a Difficulty 6 Health test to move into or use their abilities in bright, direct sunlight.

Resurrection: Unless killed outright by a single blow, a ghoul regenerates all lost Health at the end of a scene. It can only truly die by being burned to ash or dissolved in acid. An even tougher ghoul also regenerates 2 Health points per round.

Spider Climb: Ghouls can cling to walls and ceilings made of anything but sheer glass.

Track by Taste: Ghouls can track anyone they've bitten to anywhere on Earth or Dream, given long enough to smell the air. Ghouls can pass targeting information to their fellows: fleeing from Boston to Capetown works only until the local jakkal population gets the scent.

Tunneling: Ghouls can tunnel through soil, brick, concrete, or solid bedrock in

minutes, hours, or days.

Uncanny Reflexes: A ghoul can spend 1 point of Athletics to dodge any blow or missile, including bullets. For an even more terrifying ghoul, this dodge ability is free; only high-velocity (3,000+ fps) rifle bullets (.220 Swift, NATO 5.56mm, etc.) can hit ghouls, and only at Near range or closer.

VARIATIONS

As with the "Gods and Titans" section in the corebook, this compendium is intentionally self-contradictory. Its facts and theories come from Lovecraft, from later writers, and from the universe of possibilities opened up between them.

- Night-gaunts are the battle steeds and advance guards of the ghouls.
- The Paris ghoul cult of the 17th century was the largest and most influential ghoul cult in modern history. Its patron, Antoine-Marie Augustin Balfour de Montmorency-les-Roches, Comte d'Erlette, associated it with the black magic coven around Madame de Montespan. His grandson (also Comte), Francois-Honore Balfour, assembled and expanded his grandfather's notes on the European ghoul cult and the ritual liturgies of the ghouls, witches, and Satanists into the work *Cultes des Goules* (Paris, 1703).
- Ghouls can see a glow or aura around those who are soon to die: the terminally ill, the future murder victim, the unfortunate in the path of an accident . . . and, of course, people who will walk into a ghoul ambush.
- Ghouls can be detected in human disguise by a specific involuntary combination of gait and hand posture, somewhat like a card-player's tell.
- In moonlight, the skin, flesh, and organs of ghouls appears transparent:

Ghouls



they look like animated skeletons or rotting cadavers.

- Ghouls founded the corpse-eating cult of inaccessible Leng during an early, mostly forgotten, era of ghoulish empire before the rise of Atlantis. The ritual *rolang* necrophagy of the Thibetan Bonpa tradition descends from that cult.
- The men of Leng rebelled against the ghoulish empire and foolishly allied with the Moon-Beasts; this war continues throughout time and the Dreamlands.
- The ghoulish pack beneath Leng, led by Naggoob, the Father of Ghouls, worships Nyogtha.
- Certain ghoulish sorcerers or ghoulish-liches

can astrally project winged coursing hounds to harry those who disturb their chosen graves.

- Ghasts are Neanderthal ghouls.
- The hairy, cannibalistic Inutos who destroyed Lomar were ghouls.
- Ghoulish warrens extend not merely between Earth and the Dreamlands, but into the far future continent of Zothique, where ghouls perform all funerary duties and Mordiggian dwells in the city of Zul-Bha-Sair.
- Ghoulish warrens extend throughout time, to places and eras sacred to Mordiggian such as 7th-millennium B.C. Gozan, 3rd-millennium B.C.

Egypt, 2nd-century A.D. Rome, 8th-century A.D. Arabia, 19th-century Paris, 20th-century Guiana, 35th-century China, and Zothique.

- In many such eras, ghoulish priests move among mankind in funereal purple robes and silver skull masks.
- After millennia of intermingling, virtually all human communities have some number of unwitting or secret ghoulish hybrids among them. They often manifest as sociopaths, serial killers, or as aggressive death-seekers such as soldiers, funeral-home directors, or doctors.
- Humans can only become ghouls after death and burial.

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- Ghoul society is torn between two factions. The Old Breed are mostly immortal older ghouls who desire only secrecy and willingly wait for the Great Old Ones' return. The New Breed are packs of younger, more recently created or changed ghouls stirred up and filled with energy by the vast plenty of corpses from the Great War, the influenza, Stalin's massacres, and the Japanese invasion of China. They desire power and ever more food; these heretics wish to bring about the Great Old Ones' return and usher in the Greatest Feeding.
- The Old Breed remain true to Mordiggian; the New Breed worship Tsathoggua, Nyogtha, or Nyarlathotep.
- Ghouls worship Father Dagon and Mother Hydra, just as Deep Ones do; they originated in the sea as Lacedontes, the Deep One version of ghouls. The landbound ghouls bloodline only evolved into its current form as its human foodstock evolved from primates.
- A New Breed pack beneath Red Hook in Brooklyn even allied itself with a cult of Mormo (the ghouls' possible ancient enemy in Leng) in 1924 but was mostly thwarted by police raids and a sudden earthquake.
- Ghoul society is completely fragmented; each warren has its own agenda of secrecy and feeding, balanced as it sees fit. Evolutionary pressures and immortal conservatism keep ghouls in the shadows.
- Ghouls are a separate stream of primate evolution descending from baboons, or from the furry Voormis sub-humans of Hyperborea.
- Ghouls are the dream-selves of humans who died of starvation. They return to Earth from the Dreamlands always hungry and obsessed with death.

- Ghoulism is caused by a parasitic infection acquired by ingesting a certain sub-species of grave worm. The worm is a creation of Nyarlathotep, or of Mordiggian, or of some ancient Hyperborean acolyte of Tsathoggua.
- Ghoulism is a degenerative mental illness caused by eating decaying human brains. It leads to weird hallucinatory beliefs, paranoid schizophrenia, ataxic movement, constant hunger for rotting meat, and heightened senses including photosensitivity. People suffering from such a condition seldom bother to bathe or wash their hair, leading to horrid skin infections.
- Ghoulism is a mutated form of rabies with the above symptoms.
- Ghoulism is a symbiotic condition caused by an extraterrestrial species (similar to a quasi-transparent cuttlefish) that fell to Earth in North Africa around 5,000 B.C. The species first parasitized jackals, then humans who handled corpses; the final ghouls stage blends all three species in a doglike, humanoid, rubbery whole.
- Ghoulism is bodily possession by a mistlike alien or disease or psychic emanation, to the extent that those are three different things. Those possessed become cannibals, and eventually present the whole gamut of ghouls symptoms.
- Such bodily possession is called *wendigo* by the Cree Indians; the great mist-disease-psyche that is the ghouls spirit is Ithaqua.
- The ghouls spirit can be exorcised with the correct rituals, although those were lost to humanity with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Other methods include pouring boiling pitch or fat down the wendigo sufferer's throat.

- Mummification in Egypt began as a means of thwarting ghouls; eventually some of the more long-lived pharaohs struck a bargain with the ghouls lords Anubis and Wepwawet (An-pu and Up-uat), later depicted as gods with the head of a jackal and a wolf, respectively.

MYTHIC ECHOES

"THESE FIGURES WERE SELDOM COMPLETELY HUMAN, BUT OFTEN APPROACHED HUMANITY IN VARYING DEGREE. MOST OF THE BODIES, WHILE ROUGHLY BIPEDAL, HAD A FORWARD SLUMPING, AND A VAGUELY CANINE CAST. THE TEXTURE OF THE MAJORITY WAS A KIND OF UNPLEASANT RUBBERINESS."

- "PICKMAN'S MODEL"

As with the variations and possible powers above, the ghouls might more closely match their various mythic depictions than Lovecraft's fiction. Lovecraft introduced the changeling motif from faerie lore into the ghouls legend: reverse-engineering fairy stories into ghouls stories makes an excellent change-up. As canine-looking flesh-eaters, ghouls have much in common with werewolves, especially the traditional loup-garou that repeatedly stalked France between 1520 and 1630. Both loup-garou and ghouls seemingly move between the human and monstrous worlds at will.

Gallu (Babylonia)

Primordial demons and servants of the goddess Ereshkigal, the gallu travel between the surface world and the underworld, often carrying unfortunates (such as the god Tammuz) with them. They hate children, move in packs like reeds, and have large axe-like claws. Gallu resemble crouching bulls and ghosts, but can shape-shift or hide in shadows, especially in graveyards. Humans cannot bribe them.

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Ghul (Arabia)

The ghilan (plural of ghul) were created when Allah battered the rebel djinn with meteors and they fell to Earth as corporeal beings. They can shape-shift (save for their hooved feet) and in human form lure travelers off the road to be killed and eaten. The ghul must be killed with one blow; a second blow restores it to life and invulnerability.

Lubin (France)

This spirit or fairy haunts graveyards. It appears in the shape of a wolf or large gray dog, and preys on the bodies and souls of the dead. This is a more aggressive and overtly evil version of the kergrim or church grim of Scandinavian and English lore, which sometimes appears as a death-fetch. In Yorkshire, the kergrim takes the form of a black hound, similar to the Black Shuck or other devil-dogs.

Pishacha (India)

Demons of the crematory and cemetery, the pishacha eat corpses and children. Their dark, leprous skin is mottled with bulging veins; their red protruding eyes glow. Some pishacha can shape-shift, turn invisible, or implant maddening thoughts or panic into victims. Sacred mantras and the smell of neem-tree leaves keep them at bay.

Psoglav (Serbia)

This dog-headed monster has the body of a man, the lower legs of a horse or goat, iron teeth, and a single eye. Psoglavci live in caves or other dark places of the Earth. Their dark, unknown homeland is rich in gems. They eat humans, both alive and dead, digging up corpses when hunting is poor.

INVESTIGATIONS

Keepers should treat this section, and use these elements, even more idiosyncratically.

Clues

Perforce, the clues in this section mostly point to “conventional” ghouls as painted in Lovecraft’s stories “Pickman’s Model” and *Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*. Feel free to adjust them at will.

Accounting: Although he’s tried to hide it in the books, Peck has a lot of gold coming in that he doesn’t pay remotely enough for. Cross-referencing with the pawn tickets, a lot of it is wedding rings and lump gold alloy – most likely, dental gold. But very few watches, which is unusual.

Anthropology: “Reid, you know, had just taken up comparative pathology, and was full of pompous “inside stuff” about the biological or evolutionary significance of this or that mental or physical symptom. He said Pickman repelled him more and more every day, and almost frightened him towards the last -- that the fellow’s features and expression were slowly developing in a way he didn’t like; in a way that wasn’t human. He had a lot of talk about diet, and said Pickman must be abnormal and eccentric to the last degree.”

Archaeology: These tunnels were not carved out by metal tools – the cuts and chips on the walls are too uneven. Bone tools might have had the variance and give evidenced here, but bone can’t cut rock. (Geology)

Architecture: “Look here, do you know the whole North End once had a set of tunnels that kept certain people in touch with each other’s houses, and the burying ground, and the sea? ... Why, man, out of ten surviving houses built before 1700 and not moved since I’ll wager that in eight I can show you something queer in the cellar. There’s hardly a month that you don’t read of workmen finding bricked-up arches and wells leading nowhere in this or that old place as it comes down -- you could see one near Henchman Street from the elevated last year.”

Art History: Richard Upton Pickman (1884-1926?) of Salem, Mass. was perhaps the finest American Realist painter of the early 20th century, although his work hung only in small galleries due to its outré and hideous subject matter. After the Boston Art Club and Fine Arts Museum both rejected his masterpiece “Ghoul Feeding” in 1925, he dropped out of artistic circles and most likely died in poverty. Some unattested “Pickmans” continue to appear at anonymous auction; although their visual and color technique is close to his, most authorities call them forgeries, as the brushwork is less controlled.

Assess Honesty: “He had been listening with peculiar intensity ever since my shocked scream had waked unaccustomed echoes in the dark cellar, and now he seemed struck with a fright which, though not comparable to my own, had in it more of the physical than of the spiritual.”

Astronomy: The cemetery vandalism is at its worst not on full moons, but on waning moons when Saturn is in the sky.

Biology: The flies in the Wensdon house have the characteristic hunched thorax and scuttling movement of *Megaselia scalaris*, the coffin-fly. There’s a dead body hidden somewhere in there – from the number of flies, possibly a good many bodies.

Bureaucracy: According to hospital records, Nurse Upton was the maternity ward relief night nurse during all those outbreaks of “childbed fever.” Her normal position? Morgue attendant.

Chemistry: The bottles in Silas Snow’s icebox hold propylene glycol, a humectant used to remoisturize dried or leathery tissue, especially in funeral parlors. All the food in his cupboard -- beef tallow and vinegar, honey, even the quillaia in that home-made root beer -- has that same effect.

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Cop Talk: Nobody ever found those missing kids. Searched the whole house and a square mile around. All they found was a doll, dropped and hidden under a stone in St. Lazarus' Churchyard, but there wasn't any way to say whether it belonged to one of the kidnapped girls.

Credit Rating (6+): It's not talked about openly you understand, but unmarried girls in our set are warned off the Kavanaughs. If you can withstand her scrutiny, my Aunt Phyllis will tell you about "Laughing Jack" Kavanaugh, and why he had to be sent away after that disgraceful episode at his father's funeral.

Cryptography: It's a book code, but it uses the Pere Lachaise Cemetery as

the "book!" Whoever receives these messages from Paris must have the layout of all 300,000 graves there memorized!

Evidence Collection: The "newly dug grave" over in the next plot has a marker on it labeled 1919.

Flattery: "My hero-worship, coupled with the fact that people generally were commencing to have less and less to do with him, made him get very confidential with me; and one evening he hinted that if I were fairly close-mouthed and none too squeamish, he might show me something rather unusual -- something a bit stronger than anything he had in the house." (Reassurance)

Forensics: The entire body is covered

in bite marks. Oddly, although the marks are clearly canine, the jaws are unusually short and wide. From the marks, we estimate three or four of the animals. The eyes were plucked from their sockets, and are missing, as are the kidneys, spleen, liver, thymus gland, pancreas, and intestines. The large wound in the belly was a tearing wound. The skull, on the other hand, was smashed open postmortem on the gravestone, and the gray matter scooped out with some kind of clawed utensil and taken. Also postmortem, the long bones of the limbs were cracked and pried open with a four-pronged, sharpened tool, and the marrow removed. Extensive saliva traces were found in and around the bone cavities.

Ghoul

Geology: The dirt found in your wounds matches dirt from the Copp's Hill Burying Ground, not from the place where you were attacked.

History: "You call the Salem witchcraft a delusion, but I'll wager my four-times-great-grandmother could have told you things. They hanged her on Gallows Hill, with Cotton Mather looking sanctimoniously on. ... I can show you a house he lived in, and I can show you another one he was afraid to enter in spite of all his fine bold talk." (Occult, Oral History)

Languages: That gravedigger we talked to used vocabulary and sentence construction more common 200 years ago. (History)

Law: The adoption papers for these children are so vague as to be irregular. Someone who works here is doing their level best to keep this orphanage's records in a hopeless tangle. (Bureaucracy)

Library Use: The authoritative source on psychopathic necrophagy is Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), which discusses the case of one Francois Bertrand (1824-?), a soldier court-martialled in 1849 in Paris for grave-robbing and post-mortem cannibalism. Fuller details of the case (which resembles demonic possession or medieval werewolf trials) can be found in the *Annales Medico-Physiques* for 1849. (Psychoanalysis)

Medicine: The spongy, perforated condition of the brains indicates the dead men suffered from something akin to the disease first recognized by Creutzfeldt and Jakob in 1921, but how every member of the cannibal cult could have simultaneously contracted such a rare condition is unknown. Also unknown: how they could have survived such advanced cases of the disease at all.

Occult: It's probably just a coincidence, but the Greenyear and Detiller families

we've been investigating could be descendants – perhaps refugees who changed their names in the New World – of Jean Grenier and Pierre de la Tilhaire, accused werewolves in Bordeaux in 1603.

Oral History: Church custodians, even more than vergers or curates, love to talk about things that happen at night in churchyards – and they're much less likely to suppress the "good bits" of a story for sensitivity's sake.

Outdoorsman: Whatever pulled this branch down was very strong: a circus strong man could perhaps have done it. Those tracks, meanwhile, call to mind a sort of hooped baboon. It could be a deformed or crippled circus chimpanzee, perhaps – but November in Vermont is hardly circus season.

Pharmacy: This seems excessive: shortly before hanging herself, Dr. Glyn injected herself with tetrodotoxin, a deadly poison. Her flesh is impregnated with the stuff; her blood is probably 100 times more toxic than cyanide. It will stay that way for up to a year – you'd think she worried someone would eat her! (Forensics)

Physics: Under the Raman spectrograph, this orange pigment shows up as arsenic sulfide, or realgar. It's very poisonous, and hasn't been used in paintings since the last century – so what is it doing on a canvas stretched last year? (Art History, Chemistry)

Photography: It's uncanny – the shadows on the wall behind the horrible monster in that painting look exactly as they would if cast by an instantaneous photographic flash, rather than by natural light.

Sense Trouble: That barking doesn't sound like the dog we heard earlier.

Streetwise: "What do maps and records and guide-books really tell of the North

End? Bah! At a guess I'll guarantee to lead you to thirty or forty alleys and networks of alleys north of Prince Street that aren't suspected by ten living beings outside of the foreigners that swarm them."

Theology: The Arabic painted on the walls of the apartment in Red Hook is the Ayat al-Kursi, or "Throne Verse" of the *Koran*. According to certain hadith (sayings attributed to Mohammed), that verse has the power to drive away demons, ghuls, and djinni.

SCENARIO SEEDS

With their close connection to human society, ghouls can lie beneath almost any tale of crime, death, or magic. Here are a few ghoulish gobbets to start you digging.

Pour Another Ghoul One

With the shooting death of fixer Matt Kolb the week before Halloween 1931, all Hell is breaking loose on the West Side of Chicago. Literally, perhaps. Along with the connected ex-Cook County sheriff Al Winge, Kolb and Martin Guilfoyle ran a million-dollar bootlegging business on the Northwest Side. Even after Capone cut himself in in 1926, everyone was doing nicely. With Prohibition ending soon and Capone in prison, there's no market for the Guilfoyles' terrible beer, brewed in secret sewers deep beneath Chicago Avenue. Mile after mile of tunnels connect huge vats dug out under dilapidated factory buildings or rundown tenements. The custodians and renters in such places speak no English, only stare suspiciously at strangers or gabble in dawning senility. Pipes and exhaust run to the sewers, and strange ingredients find their way into the beer the Guilfoyles brew.

Hideous Creatures

Kolb was more than a fixer; he was a necromancer, fascinated by the possibility of creating a slave spirit that would obey him and force others to do so as well. He dealt with a colony of ghouls beneath Chicago, feeding them Capone victims and lone foreigners for secret lore and unsavory alchemies to spike the Guilfoyle suds. His plan was to harness the dreaming minds of all who drank the beer into one mass-spirit – to be bound on Halloween. Now, it bubbles away, creating dramas of abjection and cruelty while the ghouls encourage both the Touhy and Nitti mobs into tasty war over Guilfoyle turf and Kolb’s “blackmail notebook.” Not just his record of bought cops and judges, it also holds his sorcerous calculations ... true power in Chicago seeps into those pages and into Guilfoyle’s beer.

Have Your Quake And Eat It Too

One dependable scenario for ghouls is the post-disaster adventure. Have something in a city that brings the Investigators there: an artifact, a cult ritual, a weird premonition of Tsothoggua, a villain’s flight. Once they settle into the straightforward trail of clues, upend it with an earthquake. Which brings out the ghouls in a feeding frenzy, lets the Keeper palm the MacGuffin, and sets up a Romero-style post-apocalyptic shootout *avant le lettre*. Some prime disasters of the decade include:

Managua, Nicaragua (Mar 31, 1931): 2,000 dead, preceding a fire leaving 45,000 homeless. Possible MacGuffin: A Mayan bas-relief on exhibit in the museum, depicting Dagon as Chac-Mool.

Ierissos, Greece (Sep 26, 1932): 500 dead in the quake and subsequent tsunami. Ierissos’ necropolis goes back to the 7th century B.C.; the ghouls may carry ancient swords and wear verdigris’d breastplates. Possible MacGuffin: Consulting the library at Mount Athos Monastery.

Long Beach, California (Mar 10, 1933): 120 dead, many school buildings demolished. Possible MacGuffin: A Theosophist cult trying to raise R’lyeh and getting their math wrong.

Bihar, India (Jan 15, 1934): 10,000 or more dead, buildings collapsed as far away as Kathmandu, while sand jets and fissures eradicated villages in India. Possible MacGuffins: Tcho-Tcho cults, Mi-Go coming down from the Himalayas, or a Nazi mission to the area.

Concepcion, Chile (Jan 28, 1939): 20,000 dead, 95% of the houses destroyed. Possible MacGuffin: Following a shipload of suspected Cthulhu cultists; research at the Jesuit library in the University (est. 1727); research into ghoulish activity in Concepcion during the great earthquake of 1751 in which the University’s Library vanished.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ghouls most unambiguously appear in Lovecraft’s story “Pickman’s Model” and his novel *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*. “The Hound,” “The Statement of Randolph Carter,” and “The Outsider” are all colorably ghoulish: “The Lurking Fear” and “The Rats in the Walls” both also hit HPL’s ghoulish tropes of degeneration, cannibalism, and underground warrens. Clark Ashton Smith’s “The Charnel God” introduces Mordiggian, but “The Ghoul” and “The Nameless Offspring” also offer something. “Dwellers Under the Tomb” by Robert E. Howard, “The Graveyard Rats” by Henry Kuttner, and “The Grinning Ghoul” by Robert Bloch all look at the ghoulish in shadow and from the surface. Two later sequels to “Pickman’s Model” are worth noting: “The Truth About Pickman” by Brian Stableford and “Pickman’s Other Model (1929)” by Caitlin R. Kiernan, both in *BlackWings of Cthulhu*.

The insufficiently anthologized 1939 story “Far Below” by Robert Barbour Johnson riffs wildly on Lovecraft’s Pickman painting “Subway Accident” to create a gonzo secret war of man and ghoulish beneath Manhattan. Also excellent are “Lord of the Land” by Gene Wolfe and “The Tehama” by Bob Leman, although the ghouls are farther from center stage in both. “And I Feel Fine” by Robin Laws in *Shotguns v. Cthulhu* and “Identity Crisis” by Bob Kruger in *Alien Intelligence* both present the human-ghoulish boundary as unsettlingly permeable.

Three “sympathy for the ghouls” short stories are worth especial note: “The Tenderness of Jackals” by Amanda Downum in *Lovecraft Unbound*, “The Patriot” by John Goodrich in *Cthulhu Unbound*, and “Some Buried Memory” by W.H. Pugmire in *The Book of Cthulhu*. At greater length, sometimes sympathetic (though still horrible) ghouls appear in *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman, Brian McNaughton’s dark-fantasy *Throne of Bones* collection, and the “Silvey series” by Caitlin R. Kiernan, most notably *Daughter of Hounds*, which focuses on the ghoulish-human criminal underworld alongside wainscot fantasy.

Slightly off the Lovecraftian beam, *Famished: The Farm* by Ivan Ewert deals with a secret conspiracy of cannibals, and *Ghouls* by Edward Lee introduces the ghoulish as a predator species in Maryland. *Ghoul* by Brian Keene features a graveyard killer and human evil, *Ghoul* by Mark Ronson brings a Middle Eastern monstrosity into a 1980s thriller, and *Ghoul* by Michael Slade presents a Lovecraft-obsessed serial killer and rock musician.

Finally, on a lighter note, *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers* by Mary Roach is recommended as a spark to corpse-centric game ideas.