

HIDEOUS CREATURES

HUNTING HORROR



BY
KENNETH HITE



Pelgrane Press



HUNTING HORROR

Publisher: Cathriona Tobin

Author: Kenneth Hite

Layout: Cathriona Tobin

Artwork: Ethan Black

KEN WRITES ABOUT STUFF

Hideous Creatures: Hunting Horror is part of the Ken Writes about Stuff subscription series, featuring new and original Hite goodness every month for twelve months. A subscription costs \$24.95 and as well as giving you a generous 30% discount on the individual article price of \$2.95, we'll be offering an exclusive extra later in the year to all subscribers.

Any time you order, you'll get all the issues of the current KWAS to date.

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.

Contents

Hideous Creatures: Introduction	3	Ophies Pteretoi (Ancient Greece, Arabia Felix)	7
Hunting Horror	4	Pihuechenji (Chile)	7
Possible Hunting Horror Abilities	5	Uktena (Southeastern U.S., Oklahoma)	7
Variations	5	Investigations	7
Mythic Echoes	6	Clues	7
Ala (Serbia, Macedonia)	6	Scenario Seeds	10
Azi Dahaka (Persia)	7	The Shadow From the Screen	10
Draco (Rome)	7	Out of the Vale of Pnath	10
Ifrit (Arabia)	7	Bibliography	10

Hunting Horror

“GREAT POLYPOUS HORRORS SLID DARKLY PAST, AND UNSEEN BAT-WINGS BEAT MULTITUDINOUS AROUND HIM ... AND HOARY NODENS RAISED A HOWL OF TRIUMPH WHEN NYARLATHOTEP, CLOSE ON HIS QUARRY, STOPPED BAFFLED BY A GLARE THAT SEARED HIS FORMLESS HUNTING-HORRORS TO GREY DUST.”

-- "THE DREAM-QUEST OF UNKNOWN KADATH"

Swift and implacable, hunting horrors harry their chosen prey, sometimes serving wizards seeking blood and lives. Native to a distant dark dimension, they emerge through a crystal focus such as the Shining Trapezohedron, or follow to Earth the summons or sendings of their eldritch masters.

Hunting horrors resemble enormous (40-foot) ropy black serpents or worms with one or two bat-like or sail-like wings. Their faces feature a three-lobed burning eye set over a mouth lined with serrated teeth. They often appear as clouds of thick, foetid smoke. Their twitching, writhing forms continually shift and change, painful to behold.

This of course sets you up to shift and change the hunting horror from its standard “bat-winged black viper” description:

- Change the wings to grubby or patchy crow wings, or thick and oily fly wings, or weirdly articulated skin-umbrella wings
- A viscous flow of black, iridescent oil suspended in other gravities
- An elongated, distorted tuatara or frill-necked lizard, using its ruff or frill to fly
- Change the three-lobed eye to a triple-insect eye, segmented and iridescent like the surface of the Trapezohedron
- A latticework of intertwined burnt-brown spines and ribs, extending out into thin bone wing spines and questing horns
- An elongated flying-fish with bony plated head, spine, and jaws

- A humped, polypous form trailing tentacles behind it as it flies

HPL signals the arrival of the Hunter of the Dark (generally considered a paradigmatic hunting horror) not just with a traditional Lovecraftian blast of foetor but with a rushing wind or even an approaching thunderstorm. Other ways to herald their approach might include:

- A sudden croaking as if a flock of invisible ravens rushes nearer
- A nightmarish buzzing, like metal tearing through cloth (listen to recordings of V-1 “buzz bombs” for the right note of alien terror)
- What light there is in the area shifts deep into the infrared, like the sea going out before the tsunami
- Unnatural sheet lightning that somehow never actually brightens the sky, only changing its color
- The taste of ashes and a powdery sensation on exposed skin
- A sense that surrounding tall buildings are folding or falling in on you

However you present the horror’s approach, give serious thought to evoking the Doppler effect: hunting horrors fly so fast that the signs of their coming pile up onto each other in a sensory overload.

Daylight dispels the Hunter and other hunting horrors; a strong enough burst of direct light (from a lightning bolt or an atomic blast, perhaps) could sear one to dust. How strong the light and how direct it must be are up to

the Keeper: can the dull yellow light of an approaching tornado dismiss the horror, or the red light of a sun choked by burning cities?

Hunting Horror

Abilities: Athletics 7 (ground)/11 (flying), Health 14, Scuffling 22

Magic: A hunting horror in service to a magus, or the alpha horror of a pack has Magic 10-18, along with Contact Nyarlathotep, Summon Hunting Horror, and likely attack spells such as Shrivelling or Steal Life.

Hit Threshold: 3 (large)

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: +2 (flying)

Weapon: +1 (bite), -1 (tail loop)

Armor: -5 vs. any (scales); all firearms do damage as if their modifier were -1

Stability Loss: +1

Held Back By Light: A hunting horror must make a successful Health test against a Difficulty of 8 to cross a lighted area (torches or street lamps count). It can spend Magic points on this test.

Tail Grasp: After a successful tail loop attack on a target, he must spend 3 Athletics to do anything but writhe uncomfortably. A grasped foe has his Hit Threshold lowered by 2. To free himself, he must defeat the horror in a contest of Athletics – but of course, the horror can carry its target into the sky or another dimension. While holding a foe, the horror can only make bite attacks, although it can automatically constrict its grasped target for -1 damage per round without attacking.

Hunting Horror

Possible Hunting Horror

Abilities

Bulletproof, fast, and implacable, you'd think that hunting horrors were bad enough. But really – is Nyarlathotep the kind of god who settles for “bad enough?”

Acid Spittle: The hunting horror's spittle is powerfully acidic. It can spit acid at Close or Near range (resolve as Scuffling, +1 to Hit Threshold) for +1 caustic damage each round for the next three rounds. After each successful bite attack, the victim continues to take +0 damage from the acidic saliva for two more rounds. Its saliva of course corrodes street lamps, auto engines, or anything else inconvenient.

Bull-Roar: The hunting horror utters a bass howl that seemingly penetrates bone and stone, plunging deep into the subsonic. It does +1 damage to both Health and Stability to all who hear it (Near range) as they bleed from the ears and nose, and know themselves utterly and completely alone in the cosmos. This howl costs it 2 Magic (or Health) and can only be uttered once per scene.

Damaged by Light: Focused light beams carve off portions of the horror's infra-flesh. Light sources include: flashlight (-1); car headlights (+0); floodlights (+1); arc lamps (+2); all damage drops by -1 at each range increment greater than Close. “Firing” a light resolves as a Firearms attack, at -1 to Hit Threshold. Shining a light at a horror is a great way to get attacked by it – and your Hit Threshold also drops by -1, being so well illuminated.

Darkvision: A hunting horror sees by the inverse of light; it never suffers penalties for darkness, fog, etc.

Foetor: “As a foulness shall ye know them.” All unprotected breathers

around a hunting horror must make a Difficulty 5 Health test or be Hurt until they return to clean air.

Gnaw: The hunting horror can gnaw and masticate the victim held in its tail loop (Scuffling attack at -2 to Hit Threshold), doing three instances of +1 damage.

Manifest Fog: The hunting horror can manifest a concealing fog in its presence by thickening the foulness it emits. For each 2 Magic (or Health) points spent, the fog increases any relevant test's Difficulty by 1; at 8 Magic points spent, the fog is completely opaque.

Smoke Form: The hunting horror can turn to smoke, making it completely immune to all material attacks (lightning still affects it) and allowing it to flow through cracks, small windows, etc. Its smoke form is also supernally fast, capable of flicking across a city in seconds. Changing forms costs 2 Magic (or Health).

Swallow Whole: With a successful Scuffling attack (at -2 to Hit Threshold) the hunting horror can unhinge its jaw like a viper and swallow the victim held in its tail loop, engulfing her in its abyssal hell-form. This triggers an immediate 7-point Stability test and begins the immediate suffocation of the victim (*ToC*, p. 68) by the horror's smoky foetor. Only the dissolution of the horror by bright light can free the victim.

Tail Whip: After grasping a victim, the horror can hurl him up to 100 yards away by whipping its tail and paying 1 Scuffling. This does +5 damage and forces an immediate Consciousness roll.

Thousand Forms: Like their master Nyarlathotep, hunting horrors can take on any of a thousand forms. All their forms are vulnerable to bright light.

In all forms, they retain the three-lobed burning eye, although the “Man in Black” hunting horror conceals its three-lobed eyes behind dark glasses. Shifting forms costs a hunting horror 2 Health or Magic.

Tracking: The myriad alien senses of the hunting horror can always identify its chosen target at any distance out to the interstellar.

VARIATIONS

“AND IN THE AIR ABOUT HIM WERE GREAT VIPERINE CREATURES, WHICH HAD CURIOUSLY DISTORTED HEADS, AND GROTESQUELY GREAT CLAWED APPENDAGES, SUPPORTING THEMSELVES WITH EASE BY THE AID OF BLACK RUBBERY WINGS OF SINGULARLY MONSTROUS DIMENSIONS.”

– AUGUST DERLETH, *THE LURKER AT THE THRESHOLD*

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.

- Hunting horrors serve Nyarlathotep, and he has incarnated as the greatest of them, the Haunter of the Dark, as one of his Thousand Forms.
- Hunting horrors are made of ultraterrene matter, and fly by exerting pressure into other dimensions.
- Hunting horrors do not fly in a straight line, but proceed along a non-Euclidean great curve more directly to their target; they seem to flicker or stutter in and out of existence, or to be imperfectly resolved in local space, causing the “cloud” effect.
- Hunting horrors are native to an utterly dark dimension, and even

Hideous Creatures



starlight causes them infinitesimal wounds, accounting for their rage and hunger in our cosmos.

- Hunting horrors “cannot cross the universe of light,” so they do not fly through space but through dream or hyperspace.
- Hunting horrors come from an anti-radiant dimension; they see darkness as light, and vice versa.
- “They from the air cannot help without human blood. They take body from it.”
- Hunting horrors are the mature form of star vampires, extruded from that pupal stage once they have obtained enough blood.

- The folk of Yaddith have defeated the hunting horrors and know a certain Sign to thwart them; Sicilian peasants learned of a similar (if slightly less effective) sign from the Sibyl in Roman times.
- Hunting horrors are given shape by the one who gazes into their prism to call them – if she fears dragons or snakes, she calls the winged viper form. In other forms, they might be abstract ghouls, elongated rat-things, or hundred-mouthed toads.
- The mi-go built the hunting horrors from Yuggothian fungus-flesh as an offering-vehicle for their lord Nyarlathotep.

- Summoning a hunting horror requires a bleeding victim, bound in darkness. Or just making contact with a proper prism, of course.

Mythic Echoes

“NOTHING DEFINITE COULD BE SEEN ... THOUGH SOME UPWARD-LOOKING SPECTATORS THOUGHT THEY GLIMPSED A GREAT SPREADING BLUR OF DENSER BLACKNESS AGAINST THE INKY SKY—SOMETHING LIKE A FORMLESS CLOUD OF SMOKE THAT SHOT WITH METEORLIKE SPEED TOWARDS THE EAST.”

-- “THE HAUNTER OF THE DARK”

In addition to the various dragons, sky-demons, and dark horrors listed below, the Haunter of the Dark seems to embody a specific failure and corruption of the land – one perhaps more familiar from Grail myth. The Trapezohedron is a sort of anti-Grail, offering visions of gods and communion with Nyarlathotep, discovered in a Perilous Chapel that Blake finds mysteriously difficult to approach. When Blake finds the “Grail” the Haunter-king is feeble, but gains power from Blake’s curiosity (reversing Perceval’s unasked Question) and eventually emerges into Lovecraft’s sacred Providence. The parallels may be strained, but they can be used to add depth to a hunting horror story. As with the variations and possible powers above, the hunting horrors might more closely match their various mythic depictions than Lovecraft’s fiction.

Ala (Serbia, Macedonia)

This sky demon takes many forms in addition to the black and horrible wind: thundercloud, dragon, three-headed snake, and a winged horse-headed serpentine creature with a sword for a tail. It brings or embodies storms and madness; associated with summer hailstorms, it devours

Hunting Horror

the fertility of the land. It possesses chosen victims called aloviti, and eats children.

Ale (the plural) dwell in lakes or mountain caves, avoiding sunlight and only emerging during sky-darkening storms or eclipses. In later myths, ale fear eagles (possibly symbolizing the lightning that defeats the hunting horror) and avoid magical “ala’s herbs” found growing at the ends of plowed furrows.

Azi Dahaka (Persia)

In Zoroastrian myth, Azi Dahaka (“snake that burns”) is the three-headed winged serpent whose wings blot out the heavens. Like the Haunter, it is imprisoned in a stone (in this case, Mount Demavand in Iran) until its release, which will herald the apocalypse. Persian mythic influence – or Nyarlathotep cultism – stretched as far as the Buriats of Siberia, whose sky demon Alkhla clearly echoes Azi Dahaka, and adds lordship over eclipses to his portfolio. Like the Haunter, Alkhla is also damaged by sunlight, which burns him in half.

Draco (Rome)

The specifically Roman version of the more familiar dragon is a fierce winged serpent that glows strangely and crushes its foes. (Heraldically this beast is called the wyvern or amphiptere, although the wyvern grew legs by the 16th century.) Aelian said the draco lived in caves in India and Ethiopia; later authors added fiery breath. Medievals called the hypnotically glowing draco – a conflation with the Shining Trapezohedron? – the scitalis. In the 2nd century A.D., the Romans adopted the draco as a standard from either the Sarmatians or the Dacians, both of whom carried draco “banners” into battle. The Roman commanders of late antiquity – including King Arthur – thus rode to war under the sign of the hunting horror.

Ifrit (Arabia)

The “dusty ones” are a winged race of djinn, made of coils of smoke and dwelling underground or in ruins. Though immune to weapons, the ifrit fears lightning, and burns up if destroyed. It serves Shaitan, can be bound with magic by a sorcerer such as Solomon, and is restrained by his Seal or Sign. Early tales of the ifrits said they formed around the blood of a murder victim, and took the shape of sandstorms or dust devils. In later stories, ifrits have kings and family lines, part of the usual folkloric “domestication” pattern of the unknown and terrifying.

Ophies Pteretoi (Ancient Greece, Arabia Felix)

According to Herodotus, these varicolored winged snakes guarded the frankincense trees of southern Arabia. They were deadly poisonous, and attacked at night; Aelian reports that their urine caused “festering wounds.” They attempted to invade Egypt each year, but were driven back to Arabia by flocks of ibises – a tangled reference to the 3rd dynasty replacement of Nyarlathotep by his “friendlier” avatar Thoth? Even in Herodotus’ time, mounds of their spines could be seen in the Mitla Pass in the Sinai. They can be driven off only by the smoke of burning storax (the resin of the sweetgum tree).

Pihuechenyi (Chile)

The Araucanian tribes feared these winged snakes that attacked travellers and those asleep in the forests by night. The pihuechenyi drank the blood of its victims, or carried them off to its unknown lair. Some sources describe Pihuechenyi as a god, possibly a reference to Nyarlathotep as the Haunter. Another Chilean lake monster has a human face, bat wings, and a serpent body with two tails:

one for stabbing, and one for grasping victims. Dwelling in Lake Tagua Tagua, one was supposedly captured in 1784 and brought to the authorities in Peru.

Uktena (Southeastern U.S., Oklahoma)

The “Horned Serpent” and “Winged Serpent” are common motifs in many Indian legends, often overlapping in space or time. The Cherokee describe the uktena (“keen-eyed”) as a great horned snake with glowing scales, although since it dwells both in rivers and high mountain passes (“where Uktena stays”) it likely has the power of flight or teleportation. The uktena emits a poisonous foulness such that the hunter who sees one dooms not just himself but his family. Most interestingly, the uktena bears a great gem, the Ullunsu’ti, in its forehead – coveted by sorcerers, it can only be powered by blood. Hunters become so captivated by the gem they run toward the uktena to their doom.

INVESTIGATIONS

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

Clues

Perforce, the clues in this section mostly point to “standard” hunting horrors, assumed to be servitors similar to the avatar of Nyarlathotep in “The Haunter of the Dark.” Feel free to adjust them at will.

Accounting: That mildewed bag looks like it holds all the donations ever made to the church for its last two decades. The Reverend didn’t do good works, or expand their building, or even embezzle it. Just collected it, like a forgotten, meaningless ritual action.

Anthropology: Among the Indians of the Mississippi valley, the winged serpent represents a dangerous

Hideous Creatures

compromise between the powers of the Below World and the powers of the Upper World, one that only the most powerful of medicine men could command.

Archaeology: Nephren-Ka, last pharaoh of the 3rd dynasty, took the Black Winged Uraeus as a throne-symbol, blasphemously unifying the cobra and vulture symbols of Lower and Upper Egypt. Later priests erased his name from all records, making his tomb impossible to find – although there’s a rumor that the Reverend Enoch Bowen discovered it by accident in 1843.

Architecture: This steeple is taller than the staircase inside it. There’s a hidden gallery concealed above the bell chamber.

Art History: This haunting, or whatever it is, reminds me of the sensationalistic rumors about the death of painter and author Robert Harrison Blake in Providence during the great storm of August 9, 1935. The inquest demonstrated he had been struck by lightning, but there were certain details not admitted into the record at the time ...

Assess Honesty: “Again he asked a merchant about the massive church of stone, and this time he could have sworn that the plea of ignorance was feigned. The dark man’s face had a look of fear which he tried to hide, and Blake saw him make a curious sign with his right hand.”

Astronomy: Most of the disappearances happened at night, but we haven’t been able to explain Osgood’s death at 4:30 in the afternoon. Except he vanished on August 31, 1932 – during a total eclipse in Gloucester!

Biology: “The birds of spring were returning, and as he watched their sunset flights he fancied they avoided the gaunt, lone spire as never before.

When a flock of them approached it, he thought, they would wheel and scatter in panic confusion.” (Outdoorsman)

Bureaucracy: Both the county and the city claim it’s the other jurisdiction’s responsibility to tear down the derelict church. You can’t tell why they’re so adamant on the topic, but the local bureaucrats are barely capable of reasoned discussion of it even with you.

Chemistry: “The possible causes of such an event are many. No one can speak with certainty of the obscure chemical processes arising in a vast, ancient, ill-aired, and long-deserted building of heterogeneous contents. Mephitic vapours—spontaneous combustion—pressure of gases born of long decay—any one of numberless phenomena might be responsible.”

Cop Talk: “The police sent an officer to verify the reports. Three men in succession found ways of evading the assignment, and the fourth went very reluctantly and returned very soon without adding to the account given by the reporters.”

Credit Rating (4+): Infiltrating the parishioners requires a professional demeanor, with enough potential social clout to open the outer doors, at least.

Cryptography: “The devices of the sun, moon, planets, aspects, and zodiacal signs — here massed in solid pages of text, with divisions and paragraphings suggesting that each symbol answered to some alphabetical letter.”

Evidence Collection: Somebody smashed the streetlight that ordinarily shines on this courtyard. These bullets hit something, though, something that flattened them out.

Forensics: The corpse was mauled and mutilated, showing severe blunt trauma as well as ligation marks on the limbs

(indicating thick, looped cable was used to suspend the body and possibly slam it into a wall) and wounds made by at least five different shapes of blades, mostly hatchet-like. The left foot, heart, and at least three inches of the trachea have not been recovered from the crime scene.

Geology: The pictograms are all in red ocher (iron oxide), and the crystal in the box appears to be hematite, or iron oxide. Hematite has very strange magnetic properties, and this crystal has been subjected to immense magnetic stress and fractured. Could we use a shard of it as a compass, to find the thing before it emerges tonight? (*1-point spend if hematite acts as a locator or tracker; 0-point spend if it merely provides early warning of an attack by moving of its own accord*) (Physics)

History: On May 19, 1780, a mysterious darkness settled over New England between Portland, Maine and northern New Jersey for several hours. Accompanied by a foul sulphurous smell and a blood-red moon, the Dark Day may represent some major action by the thing’s worshippers – and the moon is turning red again, and the west wind smells of fetid sulphur ...

Languages: “The cipher, he soon saw, was no simple one; and after a long period of endeavour he felt sure that its language could not be English, Latin, Greek, French, Spanish, Italian, or German. ... The text was, he found, in the dark Aklo language used by certain cults of evil antiquity.” (Cryptography)

Law: The actions of Mayor Thomas Doyle and his “secret committee” to close the Church of the Starry Wisdom in 1877 were completely extra-legal. This Elizabeth Bowen absolutely has a case, if she cares to bring it, and if she can prove her descent from the Reverend Enoch Bowen. This might explain why Mayor Dunne is turning a blind eye to these disappearances.

Hunting Horror

Library Use: The first description of the lucifuge, or “fly-the-light” demon, appears in Johann Weyer’s *De Praestigiis Daemonum* (Basel, 1563). We need the most complete version, perhaps one annotated by the witch-hunter Remigius – check archives in Paris, Lyons, and Nancy.

Medicine: “Blake stooped over the gleaming bones and noted their peculiar state. Some of them were badly scattered, and a few seemed oddly dissolved at the ends. Others were strangely yellowed, with vague suggestions of charring. This charring extended to some of the fragments of clothing. The skull was in a very peculiar state—stained yellow, and with a charred aperture in the top as if some powerful acid had eaten through the solid bone.” (Forensics)

Occult: The symbol is the goetic emblem for Focalor, a demon governing storms. But “Focalor” is also a rough anagram for “Rofocale,” the name of the great Lucifuge according to the *Grand Grimoire*. This could be a summoning ... or a warning?

Oral History: “All of the few observers, however, agree as to the violent gust from the west and the flood of intolerable stench which preceded the belated stroke, whilst evidence concerning the momentary burned odour after the stroke is equally general.”

Outdoorsman: “It was odd that the green of spring had not touched the brown, withered growths in the raised, iron-fenced yard.” (Biology)

Pharmacy: The material in the bowl is shredded kava root, used in Polynesian cultures to inspire visions. It also causes dreamless sleep – was Audrey trying to commune with the thing, or prevent it from communing with her?



Photography: For some reason, the shadow of the church seems longer than those of the other buildings, given the time of afternoon. Darker, too.

Physics: This machinery seems designed solely to channel the electrical system of this building – possibly this whole block – into a single discharge of bright light. Or that’s what it was designed to do, before it got smashed to pieces. (2-point spend to rebuild the Lux Capacitor)

Sense Trouble: “There was a bad odour everywhere, and here and there were bits of yellow stain and patches

of what looked like charring. Opening the door to the tower, and pausing a moment at the suspicion of a scraping sound above, they found the narrow spiral stairs wiped roughly clean.”

Streetwise: Old Paddy remembers, aye! One o’ the Federal Hill Bhoys I was, back when we ran those Starry Wisdom heathens out o’ Providence. I seen more than most back then, I did. ‘S why I’m blind now, yuss, but I c’n tell ye what I saw, if’n you have the price of a dram on ye.

Theology: “The designs were largely conventional, and his knowledge of

Hideous Creatures

obscure symbolism told him much concerning some of the ancient patterns. The few saints depicted bore expressions distinctly open to criticism ... the cobwebbed cross above the altar was not of the ordinary kind, but resembled the primordial ankh or crux ansata of shadowy Egypt.” (Occult)

Scenario Seeds

The usual role of the hunting horror in Mythos adventures is either as horrible monstrosity haunting a ruin/artifact/both, or as the level boss summoned by the Nyarlathotep cultists at the big finale. While it serves both functions admirably, these scenario seeds offer two different takes on the Haunter and the horror.

The Shadow From the Screen

The movie *Stairs in the Crypt* plays in whatever exists below the B-movie circuit, at desperate theaters without air-conditioning, or in Elks Lodges in one-horse towns. A black-and-white horror film about a hidden monster lurking in a crypt, it exists to fill space until the new Laurel & Hardy or Roy Rogers comes out. And every so often when it plays in a town, someone watching dies, or spontaneously combusts, or just never comes back out of the darkened theater.

Investigating the film, nobody associated with it has ever accomplished much; the set designer worked for United Artists until his alcoholism got him fired, and Franz Ritter (who plays the elderly mystic) was a silent star 20 years ago. The alleged leads are clearly summer-stock players from Wisconsin, where Horngate Films was incorporated before going bankrupt and burning down in an insurance scam. But digging deeper uncovers a few tendrils in a larger web: the score was composed by the son of an organist in Providence, R.I., and the female

lead is named Clare Bowen. And of course the script is based on the story “The Stairs in the Crypt,” published in *Whispers* magazine after the death of its author, Robert Harrison Blake, in Providence in 1935.

Each tiny fragment of creativity put into the film was drawn into the nimbus of the Shining Trapezohedron. The creature in the crypt, never clearly seen in the film, is a hunting horror, assembled from the shards of interest its makers briefly expressed before falling back into mediocrity. This emergent monstrosity, the dark shadow of wasted talent, dwells in between frames of the film, in the ultimate dark. It enters the theater and takes those who respond most strongly to the movie, drawn by their interest. And nobody is more interested in *Stairs in the Crypt* than the Investigators.

This seed combines the good old “Haunter in the Dark” with the electrical-showman version of the titular deity in “Nyarlathotep.” See “The Final Reel” in *Shadows Over Filmland* for more cinematic Cthulhianity, as a sequel to this adventure perhaps.

Out of the Vale of Pnath

Walter Ennis, an archaeologist connected to a small religious college in the Midwest, has been excavating a pre-Roman mound outside Gordion in Turkey since the end of the War, uncovering a temple to the Galatian god Noadatos, better known as Nodens. His work, and the publication of his initial researches, has reawakened the Chosen of Sathariel, a Gnostic cult that believes this world is the Vale of Pnath, where the charnel demiurges hurl their bones. The Chosen easily took over the mound and site from Dr. Ennis, whom they keep prisoner there to interpret the carvings and carry out the rites of Noadatos, placating the night-gaunts who infest the ruins.

Every nine years, however, the true God Nyarlathotep sends His Dark Angel – a hunting horror – to draw a favored worshiper up to Sharnoth, the true Heaven. And the Chosen compete to be that favored worshiper. Their competition consists of committing ever more horrible, nihilist evil outrages, and bringing their trophies to Gordion every nine years on Walpurgisnacht. The Investigators likely stumble over one or more of the Chosen engaging in seemingly insane and pointless monstrosity, and track them to Turkey ... because this is, of course, the ninth year, and the Dark Angel will come again.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Like many of the familiar monsters of Cthulhoid gaming, the hunting horror looms larger in RPG scenarios than in Mythos fiction.

Lovecraft introduced the hunting horrors of Nyarlathotep in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, although he left their appearance and nature unsaid. General consensus casts the titular “Haunter of the Dark” as an avatar of Nyarlathotep in the form of a gigantic hunting horror. (The interested Keeper should also read Robert Bloch’s wonderful, if hunting-horror free, sequel to that story, “The Shadow From the Steeple.”) But as so often turns out to be the case, it was August Derleth who provided us with a description of the beasts, in his novel *The Lurker at the Threshold*.

It’s possible that a hunting horror or the like is also the titular “Horror From the Middle Span” (an August Derleth tale that name-checks the Haunter) in that it comes “from the air,” then snatches and exsanguinates human victims – but if so, its shapes include that of a beautiful, albeit scaled, woman. A thousand forms, indeed.