



THAT HELL-BOUND TRAIN

Keith Stetson Illustration by Chris Spence You can see its lantern in the will o' the wisp that leads folks away from the comforts of civilization.

You can hear its whistle in the lonesome howl of the last wolf left after humanity's massacre.

You can see its tracks laid out in the run of stars, seeming to converge right at the point on which you stand.

That hell-bound train is coming, and you're a-waiting on it.

PREPARATION FOR THE JOURNEY

Four souls gather to await the arrival of the train, each for their own inscrutable reasons.

- **The Youth** hunts for something they can't live without.
- **The Elder** seeks something they can't die without.
- **The Fool** looks for something they should flee.
- **The Wronged** searches to set things right.

One of these four will be the Facilitator, likely the one reading these words. The Facilitator has a few tasks in addition to those of the other players, but they will otherwise play the game in the same way as other players. The first of these tasks is to gather a deck of playing cards, scrap paper, and some writing implements for your group. Everyone chooses one of the four roles to play. Facilitator, whenever there is a choice, you choose last, always.

Each soul calls to mind a certain animal. **Which fits your soul best?**Bear, bison, bobcat, coyote, crow, eagle, jackrabbit, longhorn, mule deer, mustang, prairie dog, rattlesnake

Your animal may inspire you a little or a lot. You may find it a good choice at the start, but ill-fitting partway through the game. Use it only as long and insomuch as it is useful.

Create or choose a name for your character: Alonzo Marquez, Beulah Divine, Birdie Joe Hoaks, The Loop Garoo Kid, Molly-be-Damned, Nick Corey, Red Lucy Calkins, TT Longwater, Widow James

In addition to your role, animal, and name, three questions shape your past and present.

- What do you desire badly enough to board such a train and risk riding it to its final destination?
- Why do you believe you will find what you desire on the train?

Lastly, that hell-bound train takes no tickets.

• What do you bring for your admission?

You do not need solid answers to these questions now, but you should begin to think about them.

Let the answers come out in conversation during play. Your thoughts may be directed or changed by your fellow players' tales. Embrace that. Note how your tales echo each other. It is no accident that you are gathered together awaiting this particular train.

Consider some additional questions: Are you local to the station, or have you travelled some way? How well known are you to the other characters? What rumors have you heard of the train? Any or all of them could be true. The train and this game obey a folktale logic.

When everyone is ready the Facilitator will introduce their character by appearance, mannerisms, or with whatever method best invokes them. Everyone else will follow suit. Do not answer your three questions now; save them to come out in conversation during play.

WAITING

Play begins as the Facilitator describes where their character is waiting for the train. The train may arrive at any time and place, for it needs no tracks and heeds no timetable. Other players will have their characters arrive when suitable.

Play slow. Let scenes breathe. Ask leading questions. When asked such a question, accept the truth of it as long as it doesn't contradict something already established. Reveal your characters. Play generously. Give others the opportunity to answer their questions and develop their characters. Answer yours when and if you wish. Pair up different characters in conversation. What do they have to discuss? What do they learn about why they are both waiting for this train?

The first time you reveal the answer to one of your questions, turn over a card. The player always decides if something they have said is the answer to a question or not. Answers can be revealed in dialogue or by action, and may be revealed as late in the story as when the character hands their admission to the conductor. It is possible to answer two questions at once, in which case the player should draw two cards. When the train arrives, each player should have a number of cards equal to the number of questions they have revealed the answer to, anywhere from three to zero.

ARRIVAL

When everyone has had ample opportunity to answer their questions (or not as per their desire), the Facilitator will describe the first SIGN OF THE TRAIN according to their character's charge as listed below. Describe the sign and say what from your past it reminds you of.

Everyone else follows suit, describing signs and tying them into their past.

The Elder smells the smoke of the engine. What does it remind them of?

The Youth hears the call of the whistle. What does it remind them of?

The Fool notices the lantern of the train. What does it remind them of?

The Wronged feels the rumble of the locomotive. What does it remind them of?

When all signs have been revealed, the Facilitator will describe the train as it pulls to a stop before those assembled and the conductor emerges to collect their fares.

BOARDING

Whichever player wishes may step forward to board the train first. If none volunteer, the Facilitator should make the first move. All admissions to the train will be accepted. Show this scene in loving detail, letting each character have full attention as the conductor ushers them aboard.

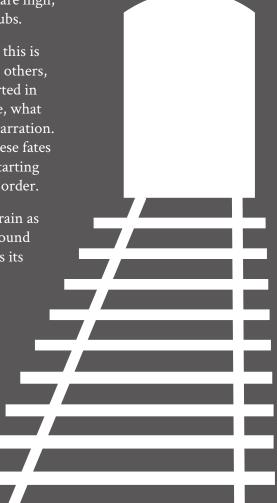
As each character presents their token of admission, their player narrates a detail about the conductor that ties back into their own story. With each detail, turn over a card and place it in the center of the table for the conductor's hand. This hand will determine each characters' fate. Note that the conductor will have cards equal to the number of characters who have boarded their train.

DEPARTURE

When all characters who wish to have boarded the train, compare each players' best card to the conductor's best. Aces are high, and if it comes to a tie, Spades beat Hearts, beat Diamonds, beat Clubs.

Each character whose card triumphs meets with an acceptable fate; this is the best that can be expected when boarding a train to hell. For the others, the worst imaginable. What does this fate look like? Are you thwarted in your desires, or do you get what you thought you wanted, or worse, what you deserve? Restrictions on time and space do not apply to your narration. Once you are on the train, you are part of its ecosystem. Narrate these fates in the same order that was followed for the first sign of the train, starting with the Facilitator, unless there is a pressing reason to change the order.

Once all fates have been resolved, the Facilitator will describe the train as it steams off towards its destination. How does it look, smell, and sound different now that the characters have boarded it? The train reflects its passengers, and that is a terrible, awful thing.



APPENDIX

This game is best played without a soundtrack in the background, so the silences may stretch out and breathe. However, if you're gathering to eat or socialize beforehand, you may wish to use this playlist to set the mood:

https://sptfy.com/8UxH

If you are playing online, there is a **That Hell-Bound Train** character keeper available through the Gauntlet's play aid collection:

https://tinyurl.com/GauntletPlayAid

Thirty-Six Treasures Beyond Our Sphere Strange items from another world. Hellish Surcery New rituals. The Pit An incursion where light don't shine and hate calls home. TROPH AARON BURKETT

Thirty-Six Treasures Beyond Our Sphere

When a treasure-hunter finds an otherworldly object, roll a dark and light die to describe their peculiar discovery.

-	
•	Fragmented sphere that exerts a constant pull. Heat increases the force.
	Jar of puce paste the texture of ground fish. Grows fingernails when you aren't looking.
•	Small, clear box holding sod and strange plantlife. It grows happily.
	Single high-heeled shoe carved from gemstone. Looking at it too long hurts.
	Key made from iridescent steel, an orgy runs down its length.
	Sheets of unbendable metal with astronomical figures etched into them.
	Lacquered, cross sectioned brain that holds thoughts like a message in a bottle.
	Rusty coin. You catch a cold. Your skin gets harder as your fever rises.
	Heavy metallic box with a spinning knob and locked lid. Something rattles inside.
	Round lens shows an alien landscape, red of tooth and claw.
	Incorruptible jaw and tongue belonging to one of the Sisters.
	Star-shaped blade that hurts when you look at it and sounds like meat tearing.
	Porcelain cube endlessly chiming strings of numbers.
	Aggressively territorial, bejewelled mud daubers that use flesh as nests.
	Bottle full of amber fluid. Smells like burning plastic. Highly hallucinogenic.
	Fully articulated steel hand with six fingers and coiled blades in the palm.
	Smooth metallic brooch that makes a chirping noise when you squeeze it.
	Helmet within a helm. Nests of wires suspend the inner helm while the outer helm

sports a six-spoked wheel sigil.



Hellish Sorrery

The following are new options for treasure-hunters for use with the Incursion *The Pit*, or any other session of Trophy.

RITUALS

Brimstone (grow scorching hot to the touch)

Carve (alter someone or something via sorcerous subtraction)

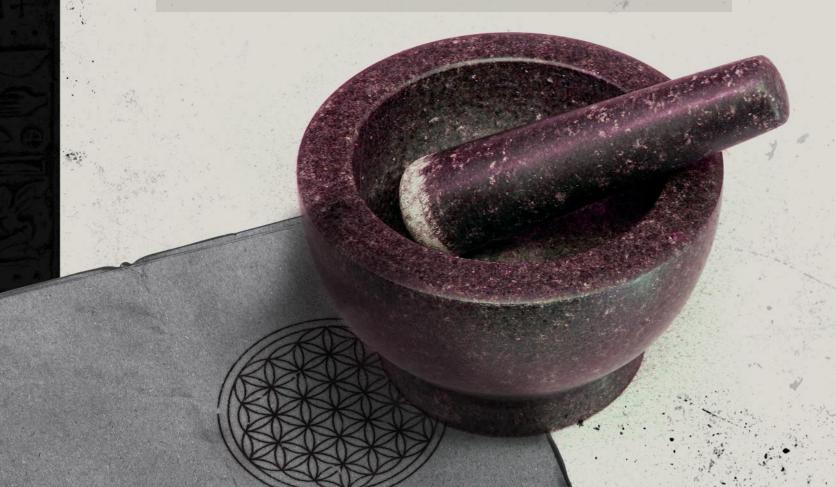
Challenge (force an opponent to make a choice: freeze, back off, or draw steel)

Crucible (heat a metallic object to melting)

Fault (strike the weakest point of a physical object with phantasmal force)

Feather (reduce the density of an object)

Inscribe (create or alter a written or carved message)



INCURSION

The Pit

Ten years ago, 'neath the bleak sky Ruby red stars fell from on high

Oh the sun was choked by smoky haze People thought it was the end of days

Howlin' for saving they've yet to earn You're my next witch to burn

- "The Inquisitor's Lament" Verse 1

Over Fort Duhrin's walls and beyond the awful woods lie the Barrens, unwatched by the Sisters. Once rolling grasslands are now shambling knolls; land, beasts, bodies, and minds twisted by the impact of a fallen star. Despite the inquisitors' best efforts, doomsday cults grew among the warped, led by prophets and doomsayers. They bought treasures from hunters for foul rites held in basements and back rooms before leaving the gossamer safety of civilization to mysteriously vanish into the trackless waste.

It seems they have returned, led by the mysterious *Sybil* and set on terrorizing the area. Waylaying caravans. Killing militia patrols. Looking for something. Now you have returned as well. You fought through Kaldhur but this cabal snatched your prize away.

Now the cabal flees across the Barrens, and the treasure-hunters follow.

THEME

Hell

MOMENTS

- ♦ A shrike spears a mouse onto thorns; the beast bleeds but the dust doesn't drink.
- ♦ When the hunters go to collect water, they find mirages and heatshimmers.
- ♦ Wounds don't bleed much. They trickle. There isn't enough fluid.
- ♦ Vultures are pulling apart a corpse piecemeal. Layer by layer; skin and fat and muscle and bones and offal. Intestines uncoil and glisten.
- ♦ If you look closely, the hills surrounding the Pit resemble blackened bodies clinging together.
- ♦ A Thing bleats with pain and panic at the bottom of a fall. Its back half is twisted 'round.
- ♦ A muddy light flickers from a fallen torch. It burns cool and dry, providing respite from the oppressive humidity.
- ♦ A stark black obelisk, scarred with the cabal's brand, glows with a faint white outline.
- ♦ Scorched skeletons tangled among weapons, insignia of the King's Rangers around their necks: explorers sent to investigate the fallen star out here in the Barrens.
- ♦ Leaning against a wall to catch their breath, cooked muscle and skin strips off the hunter.
- ♦ An initiate's corpse stapled to the wall is easily overlooked until a low, pulpy pop is heard. The skull bursts and well-done brains dribble to the floor.
- ♦ Cords slither, snakelike, from pitted holes in the walls, seeking to bury their exposed, blunt plugs in hunters' moist bodies.

CONDITIONS

- ♦ A row of scabby orifices pucker down your back. Pleasurable to touch.
- ♦ Three barbed claws burst from your wrist, ruining your hand. Useless fingers and palm meat slowly sweat away.
- ♦ Lights bright as fire burn you. Nothing else hurts anymore.
- ♦ Skin on your extremities peels, onion-like. The fat drips oily, and the muscle is now wound steel twine.
- ♦ A faint tearing noise as your eye blossoms, while mucus and tears trickle down your face. Rods and cones sway like fronds in the sweaty breeze.
- ♦ Hornlike growths rise from your temples and you can "see" through them.
- ♦ Your companions' steadily rising heartbeats stir your hunger.

- ♦ Cartilage and body fat melts away, leaving waxy build up in the corners of your equipment.
- ♦ The light of a furnace can be seen in the back of your throat. Teeth burn red hot and scorch your lips.
- ♦ You find new tastes in the air and take to flicking your tongue in and out. Greed is umami.
- ♦ A desire to punish and torment rises within you.

RING 1

TERRORS: The treasure-hunters are chasing the sorcerous cabal.

- What did the cabal run away with? It must be very precious for the treasure-hunters to give chase.
- How is the cabal outpacing the hunters?

The Forest's blood-flushed foliage thinned out awhile ago, ceding the landscape to fierce yaupon, fleshy yucca, and rugged hackberry trees. Soft loam parts before shale's hard edge. Cabal initiates lie in wait for the treasure-hunters with bow and ritual at the ready as the hunters skirt a sunbaked canyon.

- Ask the treasure-hunters about the companions left behind to die in the woods. Draw parallels between the initiates they're actively fighting and the abandoned they passively killed.
- What is the cabal's brand?

Though they aren't difficult to defeat, be sure to offer Devil's Bargains, and bloody the hunters' noses with cursed arrows, buffeting winds, or a swarm of ensorcelled snakes.

TEMPTATIONS: The initiates utter prayers and incantations with dying breaths, beseeching their patron for aid as the hunters liberate their spirits with steel. "Let me look upon your face!" and "Shine your face upon me!" are words the initiates might cry. Ask the hunters questions about who really initiated their drives.

- How does the stolen treasure intersect with their drive? Liberation? Revenge?
- What have they heard about the Sybil?

RING 2

TERRORS: The sun hides behind the horizon as the treasure-hunters arrive at the Pit. The opening yawns wide, a half-ring of uneven stone pillars akin to rotting teeth. Weather-worn curses and warnings mar their surfaces and the cabal's brand, freshly-carved, gazes out at them.

• What are signs this place is forsaken by the Sisters?

A hot breeze periodically rolls out from the entrance.

• Do the hunters press into the night below or huddle together for warmth? If they camp, no one finds rest, their dreams dominated by sweltering heat.

Pressing past the entrance, the hunters quickly begin tracking dirt through pitted and pebbled metallic passages. A maze of rust-sharpened fangs. A low jale light emanates from the seams. Not enough to see by, just enough to cast everything in feverish tinge.

• What are the signs the cabal leave behind as they flee?

The torchlight seems to shrink from the darkness. It's easy to get lost in the labyrinth; it's all canted at odd angles, and the floor could drop out suddenly.

TEMPTATIONS: A portion of flooring comes apart in a cloud beneath the hunters' weight, dropping some of them into a box bristling with tines and a freshly-mangled cabalist. Something wrong stirs the characters' memories.

- Where were you when the star fell?
- What awfulness stemmed from that dreadful night, and how does the corpse carry those marks?

Take notes, for the monstrosities of Ring 4 will also bear the taint.

RING 3

TERRORS: Cabling and cordage dangle from the ceiling and wall, poking up through corroded plating. Hunters heedless with their footing sink like quicksand. The light grows stronger from fully-exposed pinpricks and suffuses frothy mist rising from the black intestines, its moist warmth no succor from the heat. The mist strangles the hunters' torches, rots their waterskins, and pits exposed metal. Thickening, clotting, and cloying.

In the voluptuous hues, shadows and movement become deeper. Richer. Suggestive. Tempting the hunters with a whisper of unearthly delights, the mist shifts from promises of pleasure to mirrors of pain. The panorama of your shared shortcomings laid bare for all to see.

- What did you desire before you became a treasure-hunter?
- One of your companions has an inappropriate response. Who is it and what is their response? What are you going to do about it?

TEMPTATIONS: As curdled ambitions swirl around the hunters, they coalesce into the faces of people held responsible for the hunters' misfortunes—the architects of their circumstances.

• Who do you blame for your failures? Think about—but do not speak—the punishments and righteous torments you wish for them.

RING 4

TERRORS: Pursuing their quarry through the heat and the dark, the party finally catches the cabal as the Pit's defenses rouse against all interlopers. The cabal's defensive ring of spear, shield, and sorcery has created some space; the hunters can see the Sibyl in the center, haloed with witchfire. Mist so thick the hunters feel underwater; even breathing meets resistance. Muscles quickly burn with fatigue. Human carrion push from the braided undergrowth, connected via umbilicals to the larger structure. Every limb a spring-loaded skewer or scissors. The light shifts from surreal to painful.

• Incorporate the fallen star's taint from Ring 2 and don't use shorthand. Don't say mohrgs or skeletons. They're motorized bare bones skittering through the fog with uncanny grace. Clusters of eye hollows track prey mercilessly.

The monstrosities won't immediately attack if the treasure-hunters strike the cabalists first.

TEMPTATIONS: If the cabalists' defensive formation breaks, their leader, the Sybil, flees the scene, diving for a narrow opening. Clutching the treasure, she attempts to shut a grate behind her. A bright peal of youthful laughter—a disquieting contrast to the screams of the dying and the rasping hiss of their killers—rises up.

RING 5

TERRORS: The heat proves nearly unbearable as the hunters shoulder through the Sybil's feeble obstacle. The subject of the cabal's worship hangs here, enmeshed with the oily offal running through the Pit and a mandorla of etched obelisks. A poor excuse for a cosmic throne. Their appearance varies based on how much Ruin the treasure-hunters have:

- Ruin 1–2: A churning, soupy ball of guts, mangy wings, assorted skulls (ox and lion and eagle and man), and eyes of molten steel. Ask a hunter what's most inhuman.
- Ruin 3–4: A smooth torso with a beautiful face growing beneath the shoulders. Alternate asking the hunters for details horrible and attractive.
- Ruin 5: A devil most sublime with crown of flame and scalding eyes. Ask the hunters what's most beautiful.

Anyone with 3+ Rituals sees the cabal's brand among the other etchings on the structure's surface: *The Child Upon Whom We Dare Not Look. Prince of Traitors. Desire Flowing Downward.*

To gaze upon them is to fall for them. The Sybil is rapt and steps past the obelisks, under the oppressive fervor she stumbles with the treasure outstretched. Burnt hair and scorched pork smell fills the room. The Child Prince turns her around, her skin shrinking like paper from open flame and her flesh running waxy, grasping her throat. All the mouths move in unison and the hunters hear two voices, one sings while one speaks.

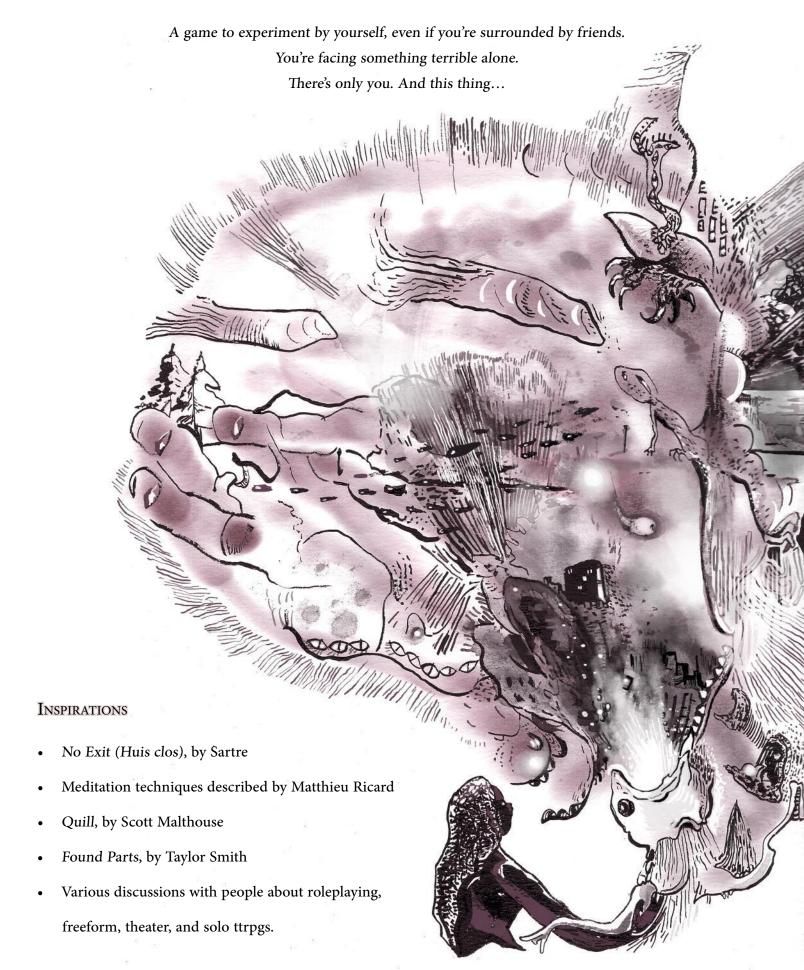
TEMPTATIONS: The Child Prince offers shattered baubles and broken toys if the hunter would just entertain them for awhile. The Sybil and Child motion wide in unison to treasures littering the tangled floor in states of disrepair and dissection. Each hunter feels like they are the only one addressed, and the others' faces become those of their tormentors from Ring 3. Bile and cutting remarks slay the listener.

The tools they need to inflict their justice materialize on hand from mist and heat shimmer. Cruel, barbed, alien, and organic.

• How do you punish the traitor?



...J...E...L...L...Y.....H...E...L...L...



...A...L...O...N...E...?...

It's a short solo game: the main experience is designed to be played alone. You'll be playing reflections of yourself, separated from space-time.

This game is divided into two scenes: first is the performance, second is a time when you're invited to leave your testimony. It's like a LARP ritual that includes writing and TTRPG elements. Playing alone, you'll write your story: you can then send it as a letter or put it on a public place. You can find a multiplayer option near the end which will allow you to play an "alone in a group" game.

...CONDITIONS...TO...PLAY...

Either in solo or in multiplayer mode, you have to play when it's really hot outside or completely dark indoors. You also need to be in the mood to play a game that drifts between meditation, LARP, and writing.

- Solo mode requires writing materials.
- Multiplayer mode requires tokens: any small object that fits in a pocket. You also need four flashlights if you play indoors at night.

...SAFETY...NOTE...

It's okay if you sometimes don't know what to think or lose your focus during the game. Keep playing. Even if your mind is flying away: keep playing. If you really feel uncomfortable because of the heat or because of the darkness, please stop playing and go to a place where you'll feel better.

Remember: it's a psychological experience and is not intended to make you feel physically ill. Stay hydrated. Take care.

Content warning: this game may contain elements of body horror

...I...N...T...R...O...

To prepare, print this game or put it on your phone. Take a notebook or a sheet of paper and something to write with. You can also bring headphones and a slow, gloomy song you have chosen beforehand.

Go on a walk. Outside by day, when it's so hot that your vision starts to blur. Or inside by night, when you're alone or when your loved ones are sleeping.

- If you play by day and don't have a health issue that would advise against it, you can take a hot shower before going outside.
- If you play at night, take a small flashlight with you for being able to read, or adjust the brightness of your phone to the lowest setting.

This game can seem weird if you're not familiar with experimental LARPs or theatre exercises. Try to "play seriously" if you want a complete experience. It's performance and gaming at the same time.

...PLAY... ...WHILE... ...YOU... ...READ...

Read slowly and loudly (or, at the very least, at a whisper). There will be questions: take each one into consideration but don't worry if you don't have an answer in mind each time. Note that you can answer by talking loudly or by talking in your head. But please, read the game text aloud even if you're answering questions in your mind.

How am I doing at this moment?

It's time to put on the song or listen to my environment. The environment is also a music source, through all the external noises—from the street, neighbours, trees, birds, wind, or even silence... What's the title of this music I'm listening to? What's my environment? Do I think we stay the same person throughout all our lives? I need to walk. It's better if I take my time. And take roads I have never taken, that I know little about, or a well-known path but with a slowness that is unusual for me. I'm now walking. Slowly.

I've got less than one minute to consider my environment. I do the countdown from sixty to one. Trying to count every second in time...

...60...1...

Was time slowing down or was it an impression?

Where is my mind with regard to the concept of time?

Now, I'll try to visualize each part of me touching my environment: my feet on the floor; maybe my hand on a piece of furniture; my shoulder grazing a wall... I feel the proximity with what I'm not touching: furniture, plants, and walls I'm passing by. How close are they?

Is it hot or cold? How do I feel the temperature? Does something happen if I focus on that feeling? I need to focus until I feel it. Focus. Maybe it tickles me, maybe it's like a cold small breeze, maybe it's like feeling heavy, maybe it's something else. Focus. I guess the important thing is that I can feel that something makes me feel different. I know I'm stuck in here—in this feeling: I can't escape from my body. What mirages am I seeing? How can I describe my feelings? I can try to hypnotize myself with these mirages. I can immerse myself in the examination of what surrounds me. Is it blurry? Is what I see real?

...PLAY... ...WHILE... ...YOU... ...READ...

Is it getting warmer or darker? Can I get my eyes accustomed to shadows and mirages?

I can feel something else coming with the temperature. It's inside of me. It looks like something I know, like the feeling of being hungry, but it's a new feeling. Maybe it's the same feeling as a few minutes ago, but it has grown. It invades me. Do I feel peaceful? Anxious? Bored? It's like my body is possessed by something... It's like I am melting.

Or perhaps am I freeing myself from what has possessed me so far?

Maybe I am truly becoming myself again?

Take off your disguise.

Let the sun fill you up with warmth, or let the obscurity fill you up with darkness. Let this feeling fill you, tell yourself it's inevitable. So it's true.

Take a moment

close your eyes

inhale

count backwards to three

at zero, exhale

swim on the sunbeams, or into the silence of the night

I know it's more a feeling than a knowing.

...join them...



...LEAVING... ...YOUR... ...TESTIMONY...

It's time to write. Take your notebook or sheet of paper. Write the first word you're thinking about, now.

The first thought is the right one: please don't change the word and don't overthink before writing. Then, whatever this word is, list 3 things:

- how do you feel when reading this word?
- which one of your organs do you consider to be associated with this word?
- where did you write this word on your page, and what does that mean for you?

Your feeling is still here.

You know it's in the organ you identified. Is it a vital organ?

Close your eyes and take long breaths until you feel quiet and feel being yourself, before reading the rest.

Does it seem the feeling is disappearing?

Does it seem the feeling is gone?

Why do you, or don't you, want to feel like this again?

Write it down. You can use one of the prompts suggested below that fits closest to your current mood, or create your own.

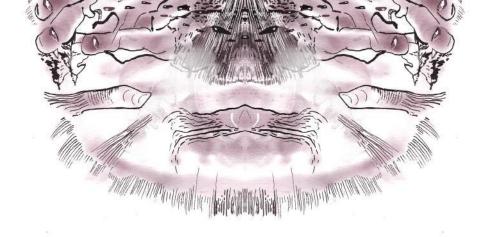
Luckily,	Sadly,	Secretly,
Slowly,	Honestly,	Dramatically,

Do you need words to describe how you felt? Pick 3 words on the table below, no more, and then read the next part.

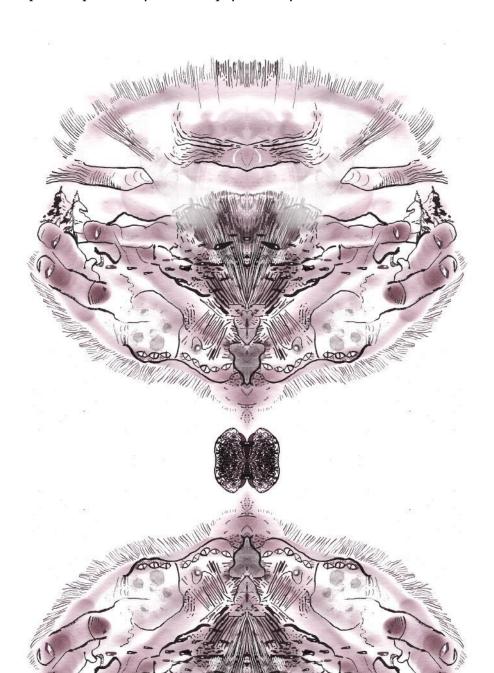
calm	pessimistic	defeated	helpless	clumsy	lazy
panicky	scared	uptight	emotional	worried	nervous
gentle	bored	curious	anxious	lonely	•••

Little by little, your eyes are closing: finish writing your sentence with your eyes semi or even completely closed. Then, when you feel the time comes, you will gently release your pen, sliding it along your thumb. You will feel the weight of your head trying to tilt your neck—let it bend—and then you will reopen your eyes when the urge to lift your neck is too strong.

Read the next part when you've done the above. Take your time...



When you reopen your eyes, take 3 long breaths and return to the place you call "home." Once in this place, change something (move an object, pick up a picture from the fridge, store a book differently...), wash your hands and take refuge in the place that is most familiar and reassuring to you. Sit or lie down. Get some rest and think about your body and its different parts in contact with your environment. Maybe you'll feel tired and fall asleep like this, and take a nap or sleep... when you wake up, you'll be yourself.



OPTION: MULTIPLAYER MODE

MULTIPLE PLAYERS?

You're alone together

...I...N...T...R...O...

To prepare, you need to distribute the game to each player: print as many copies of the game as there are players or put it on each phone. Tell them you're not a Game Master, you're just the person reading the presentation of the game.

Players who wish to do so can bring headphones plus their phone or MP3 player to listen to a slow and gloomy song chosen by them beforehand. If you decide to use headphones, keep the song at a low volume so you can hear the other players during the « leaving your testimonies » scene. You can also play music on a speaker if you all agree about the songs to play, and if you're playing in a space that permits it.

Each player takes as many tokens as there are players, minus one. Each player goes on a walk—outside by day, when it's so hot your vision blurs; or inside by night, when silence and darkness is full. If you play at night, put four small flashlights on the floor at the corners of the room, and adjust the brightness of your phone to the lowest setting if you're playing by reading on your phone. This game can seem weird if you're not familiar with experimental LARPs or theatre exercises. If you want a complete experience, please tell everyone to try to "play like it is an immersive experience."

...NOT ALONE... ...ALL ALONE...

In multiplayer mode, you need to be an even group of people, between 2 and as many as you can gather in the place you choose to play. You start by placing yourselves in the centre of the space, forming a square group: four lines, so each player has someone in front of them.

You begin by looking the person in front of you in the eyes. Exchange one token with the other player and then look eye-to-eye as long as you need until you are serious and not laughing anymore, if it was the case. Players with a theater background will be faster at this, but don't worry if it takes a little time for you or your group: take your time.

Then, when no laughing can be heard and everyone is "playing seriously:" everyone reads aloud the below safety note, and each player then has to read the solo game part except you play the "Leaving your testimonies" section below instead of the "Leaving your testimony" section above.

MULTIPLAYER SAFETY NOTE

Safety comes first. Entertainment follows.

It's okay if you sometimes don't know what to think or lose your focus during the game. Keep playing. Even if your mind is flying away: keep playing. If you really feel uncomfortable, because of the heat or darkness, please knock against a wall to make noise and signal to others that you feel bad and stop playing. Go to a place where you'll feel good. Remember it's a psychological experience, and not intended to make you feel physically ill.

If you are too affected, you can choose to talk about it. According to The Luxton Technique everyone will listen to you: you are given complete power over how the scene plays out. For example, you decide how the scene has to end or how your character will step away from the game after talking about what affected you.

Before playing, make sure everyone knows where to find another place or room if they need to escape from the game for their health and safety, and where they can find some drinkable water.

Stay hydrated. Take care of everyone, including yourself.

Content warning: this game may contain body horror elements

ACCESSIBILITY NOTE

If some players can't do some actions, please adapt the game. For example if someone can't read, they'll be in pair with someone else so they can hear what their partner is reading; if someone can read but have difficulties to read on a screen, print it with a larger scaled text; if someone have mobility restrictions, play in a large space and tell them to immobilise themself instead of sitting... Adapt according to their needs.

PLAY WHILE YOU READ

After everyone does the "eye-to-eye" exercise and notes the safety text, each player can read the following paragraph and begin to walk while reading/whispering the solo game portion.

Play in the same place, where you currently are. Circulate through this space, without touching anyone. Play as if you were alone. Because you are, even when other people are around you. Don't seek them out with your eyes. And when you look at one of them, look at them as if they were a reflection of yourself, of your mind. Don't make any judgments about what this person is doing. You do the same thing.

Without saying which one, everyone chooses to focus on a part of their body and starts to wonder what their current movement is, during the walk. Is it a motor limb activating the body during this walk, or does it move only by reaction, or does it not move at all? Continue walking as you read the rest of the text. Each time your mind seems to be slipping away, focus again on that part of the body. Specify if it's right or left for the leg, arm, or ear, for example.

Now walk, while reading the solo play text. Take your time. After that, you'll read the next part when you see someone who stops walking or when you judge you're ready to read it.

Little by little, your walk slows down and your eyes are closing: finish the walk with your eyes semi-closed. Then, sit or lie down. Arrange to stop in a comfortable position: you will not have to move after that. You can't move anymore. You're stuck here and you can feel the distance that divides you from the other players: it rejects you, but it attracts you at the same time, it prevents you from running away from them as much as from going to them. You're immobile now.

...LEAVING... ...YOUR... ...TESTIMONIES...

It's a speaking moment. You will talk about what you felt, and you will listen to others. You'll confront yourself as in solo mode except the questions that were to be answered by writing are now to be asked to someone else.

Don't feel the need to go too long or into too much detail.

Testimonies begin when no one is moving, when players are all sitting or lying in a stopped position.

You'll talk about your own experience in the game and then give your token to another player. When a token is given, it's placed somewhere on the ground, and then the chosen person speaks. This continues until no one has a token in their hand.

The person who sat first goes first in answering the input question: how would you describe the body part you focused on without naming it?

After speaking, the player has to give one of their tokens and ask another player a question picked from the list below. The other player needs to answer; the first word they say at the beginning of their answer will become the ritual-word that starts everyone's answer.

Tokens allow you to ask questions about the game experience, about your feelings during the game, and about what the player said when it was up to them to talk: giving a token offers you the right to ask a question that the other player can't avoid. Remember you're playing reflections of yourself and can therefore imagine an alternative reality, but it must remain close to your experience.

for example you can say « As a dragon, I would answer that... », if your daily nickname or pseudonym is linked to dragons or if you get common memories in an another game

... EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS ...

What's the thing you didn't expect?	Why do you have such a rigid posture?
What are your thoughts about what [player] said?	Why do you, or don't you, want to feel like this again?
Did you feel like you were disappearing?	Did you observe the others from the corner of your eye?
What was your main thought during your walk?	What do you think is troubling [player]?
What's a mundane detail you noticed?	What has had the biggest impact on you?
Is your main feeling gone?	What did you notice in your environment?
What was lost?	Why do you think you were the first player to stop walking?

The one with the last token in hand will decide who will close the game, and can only ask this question: which testimony described by another player was in fact the testimony that best attests to what you experienced?

The chosen player has to end the game by saying "Now, I thank each of my reflections but I want to go. I want to be really alone. I invoke space and time and I beg them to bring me back."

To end the game, drink some water or something you appreciate, then do something you like to do in a group: casual conversation, playing a boardgame, watching a show... even if Hell is Them, if Hell is the people surrounding you, you can now feel comfortable to share moments with Them. Even if you're Alone in a group.

by

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Thanks

lives.

Thanks to Laurent and our temporary gang of clowns-activists with whom I had fun and learned a lot in terms of improvisation. Thanks to the second Laurent, a performer met more recently and with whom I discussed theatre. Thanks to the French community of "experimental" role-players, who are told that they play everything but role-playing games. Thanks to my close friends who formed my first game group, but also thanks to all ttrpg players with whom I have already had moments of laughter and great memories. Our characters will always remain alive in our minds. We are ourselves our own characters, built through our many



Hesper's Mill

An incursion to a long-abandoned village with a terrible secret.



TROPHY

JASON CORDOVA

HESTER'S MILL

INTRODUCTION

The tiny village of Hester's Mill, located somewhere in the lands known as Toren's Bend, has two histories: the history the treasure-hunters know at the start of the incursion, and the secret history they may come to learn.

The history they know: Over a century ago, Toren's Bend was ruled by a usurper lord called Gahldren. Lord Gahldren was a heretic, and routinely defied the teachings of the Sisters, going so far as to mock Hester, Saint of the Harvest and the most-revered figure in Toren's Bend. The people of Hester's Mill, said to be extreme religious fanatics in the histories, rose up against Lord Gahldren and overthrew him, burning down his keep and murdering his soldiers. The Sisters, and St. Hester in particular, were so appalled by the brutality of the people of Hester's Mill, they laid a curse upon all of Toren's Bend, which caused the land to go fallow and the village of Hester's Mill to wither away. Toren's Bend eventually recovered, but the lands remain uninhabited (people are too superstitious to repopulate them), and are now completely overgrown.

The treasure-hunters believe Hester's Mill and its surrounds contain abandoned valuables that can be sold to merchants and antiquarians.

The secret history: The rough contours of the known history are true, but it leaves out some important details. For a start, Lord Gahldren was more than a mere heretic; he was, in fact, a brutal tyrant who had no love for the people of his newly-conquered lands, and inflicted a regime of violence and forced labor on them. The people of Hester's Mill, dedicated as they were to their saint, were given special attention by the cruel, heretical lord.

Another detail the known history misses is that the people of Hester's Mill were unable to fight back against Lord Gahldren by

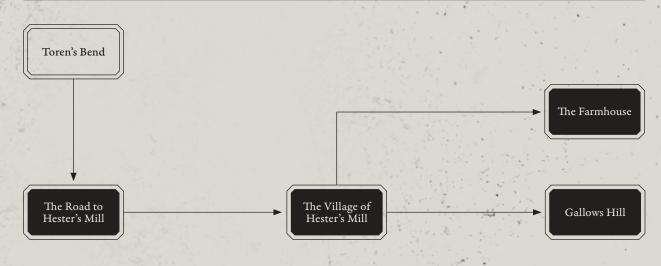
normal means. They were so desperate to be free of Gahldren's yoke, they sought the help of a famous show-woman and diabolist known as Beatrice Mandrake. Mandrake used her talents to contact a greater demon called Malphast, who showed her how to create an army that could fight back against Gahldren's soldiers. Following Malphast's instructions, the people of Hester's Mill captured a soldier and sacrificed him beneath a specially-prepared millstone, and then drank the slurry of blood and bone produced from it. This caused them each—man and woman alike—to become pregnant with, and later birth, crow-like monstrosities that would be unleashed on Lord Gahldren. His soldiers and, over time, commonfolk in other parts of Toren's Bend, were captured and dragged to Hester's Mill, where they were fed to Malphast or sacrificed beneath the millstone. The people of Hester's Mill even began to sacrifice each other when there were no more people in Toren's Bend to satisfy their lord's hunger.

Beatrice Mandrake, horrified by what she brought upon Hester's Mill, used powerful magicks to secure a nearby farmhouse from the monstrosities. She then created a powerful magical construct, a scarecrow filled with a burning hatred for Malphast and the ability to contain the demon in a dreaming stasis. She then left Toren's Bend, telling anyone who would listen that the land was cursed by the Sisters and that they should stay far, far away.

THEME

Harvest. This incursion includes imagery and motifs associated with literal harvests, such as farms, fields, a grain mill, the act of eating, crows, and so forth. It also uses harvest as a metaphor for birth. When running this incursion, emphasize the pastoral landscape (now overgrown); dwell on details bathed in traditional harvest colors (golds, oranges, deep purples); and make sure the tools of harvest are always at-hand (sickles, scythes, burlap sacks).

FLOWCHART



SET NAME	Toren's Bend			
SET GOAL	Find the road to Hester's Mill.			
OVERVIEW		MOMENTS		
The region known as Toren's Bend, so-named because its northern border is a semi-circular bend in the titanic Toren River, is almost entirely uninhabited, despite the fact it is some of the most arable land on the continent. Its formerly bustling roads are long-overgrown, and the area hasn't been reliably mapped in decades.		The sun hanging high in the sky, golden and hot. A wild patch of fat, round pumpkins: gold, orange, green, and purple. A gust of wind causes a pile of dead leaves to cyclone around the treasure-hunters.		
PROPS		TRAPS	TREASURES	
crossroads. T to how St. I crossed over in the other (ed Gahldren ord Gahldren stands at an overgrown he statue is posed in a manner similar Hester is traditionally depicted: arms the chest, a sickle in one hand, a sword except statues of St. Hester hold a corad of a sword).		The plinth Lord Gahldren's statue stands on is hollow. A secret panel on the back of it gives access to the hollow space, inside of which is a sack of coins, likely put there by someone needing to make a quick escape. The sack's contents are worth 2 Gold.	
River-Rock F ladies of Toro piles of rubbl shelter in it, b	River-Rock Keep Keep was once the seat of the lords and en's Bend, but is now little more than e. Enough of the keep is intact to find out even the structures that are still exposed to the elements in some way.	Ghouls are rummaging through the ruins.	Lord Gahldren's signet ring can be found in the rubble.	
ADDITIONAL	TRAPS Falling rubble; snakes	in the overgrown grass	77.47	
ADDITIONAL	TREASURES Documents and ledger	s; high-quality arms and armor (now	rusted and beat); moldy tapestries	

$oxed{8}$ $oxed{ ext{GHOUL}}$ $-$ Emaciated humanoids with razor-sharp teeth, claw-like hands and feet, and yellow	, feral eyes; grave stench
 Slavering over rotten flesh Clinging to a wall, silent Hanging from a ceiling, eyes shining Cracking a bone between its teeth Reared	
Sever limb — The ghoul's teeth can quickly cleave away any extremity that gets caught in its mouth	WEAKNESS Holy symbols

SET NAME THE ROAD TO HESTER'S MILL		
SET GOAL Learn the secret history of Hester's M	ill.	
OVERVIEW	MOMENTS	
The road is overgrown, but easy to follow once it's found. When the treasure-hunters first set out, they're in an elevated position and can see all the important areas in the incursion: the vagrant's campsite; St. Hester's shrine; the village of Hester's Mill; the intact farmhouse, north of the village; and Gallows Hill, south of the village.	Stalks of corn, tall and rotting. A cow carcass, picked clean by bugs The deep, rich smell of soil mingled blood. A dog tearing the afterbirth sac from	with the smell of feathers, fur, and
PROPS	TRAPS	TREASURES
The vagrant's campsite Tent, bedroll, the remains of a campfire, and some basic equipment. The vagrant can be found here during the day, cleaning his equipment and humming songs that are too old for anyone to remember. He's a lean, rangy man, with a hard look and a gamey odor. His sword and chainmail seem much nicer than a man in his position should have. He's reasonably friendly, though he will warn the treasure-hunters to stay away from the village. If pressed about why he's in Toren's Bend, he will simply say, ominously, "I'm on a hunt," and change the subject. Secretly, the vagrant is an immortal beastbitten and, even more secretly, is Lord Gahldren. When the followers of Malphast slaughtered his men and destroyed River-Rock Keep those many decades ago, he sought refuge with a beastbitten clan. Eventually, he became one of them, receiving the beastbitten blessing under the light of a holy moon, granting him immortality. He has returned to Toren's Bend to take revenge on Malphast. At night, the campsite is unattended.	At night, the vagrant transforms into a powerful wolf-beast and roams the area in and around Hester's Mill. In this form, he has no memory of the treasure-hunters and will attack them on sight. Treat as a werewolf. He will continue to have no memory of the treasure-hunters if and when he returns to his human form (his short-term memory "resets" every morning).	If the treasure-hunters raid the campsite, let them each select a piece of Backpack Equipment to add to their Found Equipment list.
Shrine to St. Hester A small shrine a few dozen paces off the road. The exterior is decorated with carved symbols sacred to St. Hester: a cornucopia, a sickle, sheaths of wheat, and gourds.		
Statue of St. Hester Inside the shrine are a half-dozen prayer plinths before a statue of St. Hester. The statue is positioned in the traditional manner: arms crossed, a sickle in one hand, a cornucopia in the other.		A few pieces of polished amber are set in the offering bowl at the base of the statue.
The secret shrine A secret ladder beneath the statue of St. Hester descends into a basement area. The walls of this area are painted with scenes depicting the secret history of Hester's Mill. At one end of the room is a small statue of a crow wearing a crown and wielding a scepter. There are half-burnt candles all around and profane symbols scrawled on the floor in charcoal.		The crow statue is a valuable piece to those who collect profane objects (can be sold for 4 Gold). Whoever takes possession of the statue must increase their Ruin by 1 and take the Condition "Servant of Malphast."

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SET NAME	THE ROAD	TO HESTER'S MILL (CONTINUED)
ADDITIONAL	TRAPS	A bear trap lying in wait
ADDITIONAL TREASURES		A hymnal sacred to St. Hester; a holy symbol made from twigs and cornhusks

10 WEREWOLF – 8-foot tall wolf-beas	st standing on two legs, dark fur matted wi	th blood from	a fresh kill
• Stalking from the darkness • Howling at the moonless sky	Wildly sniffing the night air Eyes glowing yellow in the dark		g its tender joints ng on a fresh kill
Supernatural endurance — If not destroy by 1.	yed after the first Combat Roll, increase its	Endurance	WEAKNESSES Silver weapons Weapons consecrated in baleful moonlight

SET NAME	THE VILLAGE OF HESTER'S MILL			
SET GOAL	GOAL Gain the ability to see and hear the demon Malphast (this counts as knowing its Weakness).			
OVERVIEW		MOMENTS		
There is very little of Hester's Mill left standing: an odd cottage or two, a half-crumbled well, a decaying stable. The only feature left fully intact from the village's heyday is the mill itself.		A scythe, leaning against a wall, its blade red with rust. A message in faded red paint declares "Malphast is king!" Buckets of wet, orange-hued soil. Stacks of brown and gold burlap sacks, stuck together by caked blood. A fat, orange tabby cat keeps a terrified mouse on the edge of death. Paths strewn with cornhusks and rotten wheat stalks.		
PROPS	1 4 7	TRAPS	TREASURES	
large double purple and r from the outs roughly carve Mandrake's l Inside the floor are stain bone are scat here and the massive mills of profane sy	stone building with a crimson roof. The doors that lead inside are painted deep nidnight green, and are chained shut side and secured with a lock. A message ed into the doors reads: "Do not believe ies!" mill is a horrifying scene: the walls and ned red with blood, and bits of cracked tered all over. Burnt candles are nestled re, and in the center of the room is the stone, delicately etched with hundreds mbols. The bedstone has been stained a has flecks of dried blood and bone in it.	The greater demon <i>Malphast</i> sits atop the mill, invisible and silent, engaging in its endless, grotesque pantomime. It is trapped in a permanent dream-stasis by the scarecrow near the farmhouse, and will leave the treasure-hunters alone unless they enter the mill, at which point it becomes aware of them and will use its magic to destroy them.	A satchel hidden in the mill contains the following: • A roll of diabolist tools • Beatrice Mandrake's journal, containing notes on Malphast and the crow-things • 2 healing potions (each lowers Ruin by 1 when consumed) • A key (opens the front door and trap door of the farmhouse)	
	artially crumbled, but the mechanism ne bucket is still functional.		A fat sack of copper coins at the bottom of the well (worth 1 Gold)	

SET NAME	THE VILLAGE OF HESTER'S MILL	. (CONTINUED)	
thick beds of the ladder lea moaning, and	early collapsed, but the stalls still have hay in them. The hayloft is intact, but ading up to it is in splinters. Hissing, I retching can be heard coming from		A fine set of chainmail marked with Lord Gahldren's crossed sickle and sword is buried under (and preserved in) a bed of hay in one of the stable stalls.
the hayloft.			A dying <i>crow-thing</i> can be found in the stable's hayloft. It's no danger to the treasure-hunters, but they can still kill it and sell its parts (roll 4 gold dice).
or two rooms bols sacred to of wheat, mos made profane A question t St. Hester's sym Each cottag	to pose to the players: In what ways have abols been altered to make them profane? ge is one or two rooms, simply furling beds with straw mattresses infest-		A fine copper washing basin. Correspondence from a villager to his lady love in Ambaret (possibly of value to historians or antiquarians).
ADDITIONAL	TRAPS The <i>crow-things</i> stalk to of the scarecrow).	the village and Gallows Hill (but won't	go near the farmhouse on account
ADDITIONAL	TREASURES None		

8 CROW-THING — A lesser demon, 5-fe	eet tall. Upper body of a toothy, pitch-black	corvid. Lower boo	dy of thick, black tentacles.
Clinging to a ceiling Slithering up a surface	Feasting on rotten flesh Cawing balefully toward Malphast	_	fat bugs and rotten corn y trying to take flight
The Crows Have Eyes — Crow-things can you fail to destroy a crow-thing after the so	,	ins the fray. I	WEAKNESSES Distracted by rotten or partially-masticated meat

12 MALPHAST – A greater demon.

Roughly 15-feet tall. It appears as a large, revolting crow surrounded by six smaller crows in a nest of oily, black tentacles. The large, central crow occasionally regurgitates a screaming, partially-digested soldier loyal to Lord Gahldren, who is promptly torn apart by the smaller crows. Malphast endlessly repeats this scene, even in combat.

Deafen — The crows unleash a baleful cacophony that deafens all who hear it.

Swallow — The central crow swallows a victim whole and then regurgitates them.

Dark Nest — Tentacles from the "nest" materialize in place and attempt to choke/crush Malphast's enemies (a Risk Roll is required to escape them).

WEAKNESSES
As in the Set Goal, but
also: Malphast will leave
this plane of existence entirely if the vagrant (Lord
Gahldren) is sacrificed to
the millstone.

SET NAME THE FARMHOUSE			
SET GOAL Learn the Scarecrow Ritual.			
OVERVIEW	MOMENTS	A-1037	
A half-mile north of Hester's Mill is a lone farm-house. It should attract the treasure-hunters' attention because, unlike nearly every other building in Toren's Bend, it's still standing and in largely-pristine condition. A scarecrow is hanging, sentry-like, in the cornfield that abuts the farmhouse.	A mural depicting a sunny, pastoral scene. A large, wide basket filled with ceramic gourds in shades of white, green, yellow, and orange. The mewling of newborn kittens coming from a safe, enclosed place; their mother strutting proudly. A warm breeze blows in from an open window.		
PROPS	TRAPS	TREASURES	
The porch A rocking chair rocks back and forth in the breeze, and the tinkling of reed windchimes can be heard all over. The door leading inside the farmhouse is locked.		On the porch is a jack-o-lantern, perfectly preserved in wax. The jack-o-lantern is a magic item (undead creatures cannot come within 10 feet when a candle is burning in it).	
Interior The farmhouse is four rooms in total: a kitchen and family room downstairs, and two bedrooms upstairs. It's dusty and unused, but comfortable. The treasure-hunters should be aware that this is a safe, comfortable place to spend the night.	The farmhouse is largely safe, unless a treasure-hunter sleeps there, at which point they are affected by the <i>scarecrow</i> 's magic and must make the <i>Nightmare Roll</i> . Additionally, if the scarecrow has any reason to believe a treasure-hunter is loyal to Malphast (even if this is a mistaken belief) it will hunt that treasure-hunter forever, until one of them is destroyed.	A set of fine copper pots and pans, only slightly tarnished.	
Secret cellar A locked trap door beneath a russet-colored rug leads to a cellar that has been converted into some kind of workshop. Straw and burlap are piled-up in the corner, and a partially constructed scarecrow is laying on a table at one end of the space.		Beatrice Mandrake's notes for how to create a scarecrow man ikin. Studying these notes allow a treasure-hunter to learn the Ritual called Scarecrow (create construct of straw and burlap that will endlessly hunt a named tanget). If a treasure-hunter has Enliven or Mandrake's journal from the mill, they can take this Ritual without increasing their Burder	
The cornfield Unlike the corn along the road to Hester's Mill, this crop is fresh and edible. A slight thumping, like a heartbeat, can be heard. This rhythmic thumping gets louder the closer one gets to the scarecrow.		A tiny heart beats in the scare crow's straw-stuffed chest. This heart will continue to beat, eve if removed from the scarecrow.	
ADDITIONAL TRAPS None			
ADDITIONAL TREASURES Farm tools		STEP OF THE BUILDING	

7 SCARECROW – A man made	of straw and sackcloth, with button eyo	es and a zig-zag thread mouth.					
• Facing north • Facing south	Facing east Facing west	Limping silently Looming over a victim in the dark					
Nightmare — Inflict debilitating nigh	WEAKNESS Fire						
Choke — The scarecrow prefers to throttle its victims to death while they sleep, usually after they							
have been rendered harmless by a nigh	itmare.						

THE NIGHTMARE ROLL (THE BIRTHING DREAM)

 \vdots

Roll a dark die. If it's **equal to or lower** than your current Ruin, your Ruin goes up OR you take the Condition "*The birthing dream*" (your choice). If you take the Condition, continue to the next step.

Your treasure-hunter has a dream where they are laying on a bed of sunflowers, their belly fat with child, surrounded by beaming loved ones and onlookers. Tell everyone at the table what your treasure-hunter fears the most. Every other player and the GM then offers one detail about what it looks like when you give birth to your fear in the dream.

	SET NAME	GALLOWS H	SALLOWS HILL				
	SET GOAL	Find the trea	treasures of Hester's Mill.				
	OVERVIEW			MOMENTS			
	Lord Gahldren's gallows were built high on a hill, so the people of Hester's Mill would have a good view of their friends and family swinging in the sun.			A skeleton desperately clinging to an oubliette's cage door. A ribcage displayed as a grisly cornucopia, stuffed with skulls, dried corn, and rotting gourds. A piece of frayed rope, stained red.			
	PROPS			TRAPS	TREASURES		
	The gallows A raised, enclosed platform with three trap doors situated beneath hanging ropes. Oubliettes A trio of pit-like cages in the ground, each 20-feet deep, masoned, and locked tight.			Both <i>ghouls</i> and <i>crow-things</i> can be encountered here.	Lord Gahldren's soldiers had a makeshift campsite set-up in the enclosed portion of the gallows, beneath the trap doors. There isn't much of value to be found, but if the trap doors are sealed, it's a safe place to rest.		
				Both <i>ghouls</i> and <i>crow-things</i> can be encountered here.	Prisoners from the village hid a number of valuables inside the oubliettes' stonework: • A note of deposit from a bank in Ambaret (worth 4 Gold if redeemed). • A pair of silver cufflinks • A sack of coins and gems (2 Gold total) • Gold holy symbol of St. Hester (stylized sickle and wheat stalk)		
	ADDITIONAL	TRAPS	Cave scorpions (vermin	ave scorpions (vermin, Risk Roll to avoid poisoning)			
	ADDITIONAL TREASURES Love letters to and from Lord Gahldren's soldiers (of value to historians and antiquarians)				o historians and antiquarians)		



HEY ENDED

1 🖪

The War of Three Rivers, a conflict between a trio of noble families that dragged on for multiple generations. The three families gave the war its name: House Bernden had the image of a river on its coat of arms; the ancestral home of House Torenden was located in the bend of the great Toren river; and House Reverden, well, that one's a bit less clear, but it's most likely the fact that 'rever' sounds kind of like 'river' (it's best not to think too hard on these things). The war ended when members of the fourth generation of each family to be involved in the conflict got together and, after some discussion, realized they could no longer agree on what originally started the war in the first place, and figured it was best to just set the whole thing aside.

1 .

The Great Port of Emberdam is unique in that it's built on the Demar river delta, which splits two fiefdoms: Mev'rem and Beradynne. For generations, the lords of each would build embankments into the river, extending their fiefdom just a few feet, causing a subtle shift in the river's path such that it would overtake the neighboring fiefdom by some inches. Ultimately, this conflict was forgotten when an upriver dam burst, and the Great White Flood washed away all such embankments, and much of Emberdam as well. The Mev'rem and Beradynne fiefdoms came together to rebuild, and are now staunch allies.

1 🖪

No one could remember why The War Of The Grim started, but it had raged for a generation and a half, and had taken such a toll on both the Hlalil and Gurovar empires that they had both resorted to conscripting children. That meant forging weapons and armor for soldiers who were barely 12 hands tall. The war continued until a pair of 10-yearolds, whose names have been forgotten, met on the field of battle. They were both dirty, covered in blood, and almost too exhausted to raise their swords again. They fell against each other in a grapple, swaying almost like lovers dancing, trying to gain any advantage, until one broke wind and it echoed in their armor, reverberating off the metal. The other tried to stifle a giggle, which resulted in a snort. Before long, they had both fallen to the ground, howling with laughter at the absurdity of it all. Their comrades joined in the mirth and, no matter how the generals yelled, their power was broken forever and peace inevitably followed.

1 ...

The Glasya, fiend lord and commander of 36 legions of Hell, had invaded other dark and strange realms, in order to gather more conscripts for the ultimate goal. Unfortunately, the strange realms had taken their toll on Glasya's troops, each denizen losing a limb or one of their senses with each new incursion. After the 6th Realm was invaded, so few of Glasya's minions were battle ready, the invasions stopped, and Glasya was demoted to imp form with a furious gaze from Lucifer.

Aunt Jen's "WAR OF THE BLUEBERRY COMPOTE PIE" raged for 17 years. Convinced that the local diner had stolen her secret, award-winning recipe after the '82 town fair, she waged a war on multiple fronts. Early on she would eat there and speak loudly about how the pie was so similar to her own, often to a confused waitstaff. After ownership had her forced out over one particularly vocal tantrum, she bought all the blueberries from nearby food suppliers, causing a menu change for a whole week (she was so proud). The final battle, and her Waterloo, was when the diner submitted their pie for the '99 town fair. It was only after a niece explained to her what the "vegan" tag on the diner pie meant that she relented. "Well, I make my crust with lard!" Aunt Jen said. She never mentions that the diner pie went on to win the blue ribbon at the state fair.

1 III

The Cubist Missile Crisis was a secret war fought in the shadows of Europe between supernatural intelligence operatives working for the Great Powers after World War II. Red Warlocks of the Soviet Union discovered how to weaponize abstract art, and CIA and MI6 assets raced to shut down their clandestine art-and-artillery foundries. The Crisis came to a head in Vienna, where a shootout in a hidden studio left 13 humans dead, a golem disintegrated, and a young woman permanently rendered abstracted and fragmented like a Picasso painting.

2.

For years, the Duchess of Seradynne was unrivaled in her ability to spread malicious gossip. With a few choice words, spoken to a few choice people, she could ruin reputations, turn the meek into the mighty, and bring whole kingdoms to their knees. But then the Duchess met her match in a minor royal, Prince Theo of Thaynne. For months, the Duchess and Prince circled one another, positioning themselves to glean the best bits of scandalous information at the expense of the other. Their rivalry was officially commenced when they tried to see which of them could more quickly ruin the reputation of the old Countess of Bernden, a woman neither of them had met. After months of effort on both sides, the contest ended when they realized the Countess was a shameless drinker and fornicator, and didn't give a fig for their ridiculous parlor games.

2.

Everyone assumed that the Armageddon Swarm would eventually overtake all sentient life in the universe. The superhumanoids of 30 galactic civilizations hurled themselves futilely against the insectoid horde only to be consumed and employed as hosts for ultralarvae. It turned out only Terrans were stupid enough to have stockpiled the colossally lethal chemical agents capable of felling the bugs. Entire sectors of space are now uninhabitable, but Earth is the richest planet in the galaxy thanks to ongoing contracts to eradicate the remaining pests.

2 🖸

In the 1980s, the "Cola Wars" between the Coca-Cola Corporation and PepsiCo were really just competing advertising campaigns. But for a few months in 1986, they could have gotten "hot," as PepsiCo briefly owned the sixth-largest navy in the world! How? Citizens of the Soviet Union had acquired a strong taste for Pepsi in the 1960s. At the time, the Soviet government had signed an in-kind payment agreement, trading Russian vodka for American soda pop. However, by 1986, there were enough competitors in the American vodka market that the Soviets weren't able to offer enough vodka to slake their thirst for Pepsi. So the Soviets traded a fleet of mothballed WWII-vintage naval vessels for \$3B worth of Pepsi products. Until PepsiCo arranged for the ships to be sold for scrap, they briefly commanded a fleet of 17 submarines, a cruiser, a frigate, and a destroyer!

2 :

In 2083, NASA detected 7 asteroids of nearly identical mass approaching the inner solar system. All 7 followed the same hyperbolic trajectory at a speed significantly faster than solar escape velocity: they were clearly of extra-solar origin. The asteroids were also equally spaced, at 13,419 km apart. Projections indicated that all would impact the Earth, any one of which would be an extinction-level event. Fortunately, the UN had passed the International Asteroid Defense Treaty nearly 20 years earlier, and a coalition of spacefaring nations was able to destroy or deflect all 7: none hit the Earth. Scientists could not come up with any natural phenomenon that would cause this event. Which raised the question: was this an act of war? And if so... from whom?

3.

The Second Franco-Prussian War (1881-89), or the "Dino War" as it is more popularly called, was fought between the French Republic and the German Empire. Following Professor Otto Lindenbrock's discovery of the Lost World in 1866, German Chancellor Bismarck sent a successful delegation to the "Amazons" of Mizoria, the subterranean land that exists miles below the Alps. This new alliance gave Bismarck access to trained Mizorian dinosaur cavalry, and when fitted with modern weapons, became the infamous German "Dragon Dragoons." The Mizorian alliance also provided Germany with vast supplies of "lifting gas" (helium), which allowed construction of a fleet of war zeppelins. With both land and air superiority, the German Empire conquered the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and, ultimately, all of France. German expansion into Iberia was kept in check by the Spanish subterranean allies, the Giants of Avatabar, who held the Pyrenees.

2 H

The Whiskey Wars waged for a mere 5 months, but to those involved it felt like decades. It started at the debut of Lady Weanne, which was so grand that the partying lasted 17 days, and consumed 17 casks of good rye. Not to be outdone, Lady Ifera's mother threw a party lasting 18 days and consuming 18 casks of infused bourbon for her daughter's debut the next summer. After that, the battle was on, with Weanne and Ifera each trying to outdo the other with elaborate celebrations, sometimes overlapping. It came to a head one day, when Weanne issued an invitation for a grand brunch the morning after a stargazing party at Ifera's. Their shared guests, too hungover to join them, mostly stayed home, and Ifera arrived alone, in a snit. She demanded to know why Weanne kept throwing these parties, and Weanne, still drunk on scotch from the night before, said something along the lines of "because of you." The guests who showed up more than an hour later found the two of them cuddling on a divan, and the ridiculous invitations stopped immediately. Everyone was quite relieved, except for a handful of charlatans selling hangover cures.

3 🖪

Few now remember the Great Emu War. Following Allied victory in Europe in 1917, the government of Australia compensated its former soldiers with grants of land in Western Australia. Much of that land turned out to be marginal at best, and ill-suited for a wheat crop. While it should have been clear that farming this region was folly, the government kept promising subsidies (which never arrived), and most kept at it. When the Great Depression hit, wheat prices were already at record lows... and that's when the emus started their periodic migration across the desert. The large flightless birds found cultivated lands far better pickings than natural areas, and nearly 20,000 emus feasted upon the grain of the meager farmland. Farmers asked the government for aid, and in 1932 it arrived in the form of the Australian Army, bearing machine guns to fight off the avian menace. But the birds were too crafty to line up neatly for slaughter. After nearly 2 weeks of fighting and thousands of rounds of ammunition spent, the army slew just over 50 birds. Parliament then called off the attack. In the Great Emu War, the emus won.

"Pizzageddon" was the colorful nickname assigned to the 14-month knock-down, drag-out bare knuckle fight for dominance in the children's party theater eatery arena between Pizza 4 Kidz and Calamity Raccoon's Good Time Pizza Farm. The two franchises battled each other with competing specials, coupons, special events (like the short-lived Beer 4 Dadz promotion) and even rumored industrial espionage. The battle ended abruptly in March of 1983 when Ward Browerly, CFO for P4K was found dead in a limo parked outside a high-end Bangkok casino, having lost somewhere north of a million dollars betting on college basketball. P4K liquidated to their hated rival a few weeks later.



3 🖪

There are none who live long enough spans to notice, but Lithmagmar, Dread Plate of the Subducted South, Rumbler of Worlds, Stone Heart, Dagger At The Throat of Mountains has been at war with Qertzgeld, Eternal Plate of the Obducted North-East, Sky Toucher, Crystal Heart, Hammer at the Anvil of Time since the planet's crust first cooled. These two tectonic plates are locked together in a war that spans eons, with gains measured only in the slow growth of a shared mountain range and the regularity with which deep tremors from their struggles reduce surface-dwelling civilizations to ruin.

The Magisterium's fleet had assembled in orbit around Archon IV, ready to defend a vital resupply point against an attack that spies watching The Children of Invictus had predicted was imminent. While the spies were correct, none of them had anticipated the shocking nature of the attack. A single drone ship appeared and used a modified matter driver to launch a projectile of nearly infinite mass into Terrico, the star that Archon IV orbited, causing the star to implode and suck every object in the system into the resulting singularity. The remnants of The Magisterium's fleet were scattered across the galaxy, unable to mount any meaningful form of counterattack, and The Magisterium quickly surrendered.

3 🖽

Tarragon Brewster waited patiently by the hole in the wall she had seen Squeaker enter two hours before. She had chased off or killed all of the other members of The Rats, the worst gang she had ever had to hunt down, so she had plenty of time, but Squeaker's hours were numbered. The sun was starting to set, casting long shadows. Squeaker should be coming out any time now. Tarragon's tail twitched, almost as if it had a mind of its own. She didn't need people to set traps. She was a hunter, and by the end of the night, her house would be free of rodents, one way or another.

3 H

History Search: Algorithm Rivalry of 2052

Top Result: GoozlePlex Lycanos Search Engine War

In the early months of 2052, GoozlePlex LLC and Lycanos Corp. began competing with each other for search engine supremacy on the World Net, utilizing their influence to begin shifting views onto more and more disparate content services. In a bold move by Lycanos, they entered a joint media distribution sharing agreement with Fennic Futures distribution, shutting GoozlePlex out of the multimedia market. In retaliation, GoozlePlex utilized their connections to the US Government to create and funnel financial transactions through their systems, thus causing any attempts to purchase media to be tarrifed unless it also was stored on GoozlePlex servers. This continuing escalation resulted in a rise of piracy and encryption systems, and lead to the current black hat culture taught in most magnet schools and other private institutions, as any capable youth needs to learn to navigate the BlackNet in order to receive both a paycheck for the continuing corporate espionage jobs each company sponsors on the other as "bug bounty" hunts, and devour the up-to-date pop culture necessary to keep up with their age bracket.

4 🖸

The first territory to declare its independence from the United States did so more than 30 years before the American Civil War. Due to ambiguity in the wording of the 1783 Treaty of Paris, a small, rural region between New Hampshire and British Canada was claimed by both sides. In 1832, the region's 300 residents were sick of paying double taxes, and voted for independence, forming the "Indian Stream Republic." The new microstate ratified its own Constitution, and its tiny militia chased off tax collectors from both sides of the border. Things came to a head in October 1835, when an unpaid hardware store bill nearly escalated to war. British authorities went into the ISR to serve an arrest warrant on the debtor. The resulting gunfight sent an injured British official back to a doctor in Sherbrooke. Shortly thereafter, the New Hampshire state militia marched in and annexed the territory, preventing British authorities from re-entering. A month later, the citizens of the ISR voted to dissolve their nation and join New Hampshire. The British ambassador protested the annexation to President Andrew Jackson. Neither country wanted war, and an uneasy peace lasted until the signing of the Webster-Ashburton Treaty in 1845, which set the current border between the US and Canada.

4

The Battle of the Elizabeths: For about a decade, Duke Serafend was the most eligible bachelor in the land, as he was rich, handsome, kind, and not smart enough to notice someone else taking over the managing of his household. Two powerful Elizabeths set their sights on him: Lady Elizabeth Dupree, and Sir Elizabeth of Antegonne. For years they held lavish parties and exotic hunting retreats, throwing famous snits when the duke would visit one and not the other. Duke Serafend, for his part, appeared not to notice the rivalry. The war ended when both Elizabeths met their tragic end in the same year: Lady Elizabeth Dupree died of indigestion, and Sir Elizabeth of Antegonne was run through by a boar on a hunt. For his part, Duke Serafend made a love match with a third, title-less Elizabeth, and everyone reports that they're very happy together.

Lord Namar, who ascended to his throne when he was but 12, got it into his head that a town in the fiefdom of Leval was his, simply because it shared his name. He gathered up all of his armies, and lead them, on a pony he was scarcely tall enough to ride, into a long crusade across the country, out to claim the town of Namar, and a 10-foot wide strip of land connecting his fiefdom to the town, intending to bisect several interstitial fiefdoms. As the young lord was an ineffective strategist, his men-at-arms did most of the commanding, and so the crusade was relatively bloodless—aside from a few bulls who resented the encroachment onto their pastures, but that could be made right with the exchange of a few coins. Ultimately, the neighboring lord viewed the encroachment mostly with amusement, and built a small folly titled "the triumph of Namar" in the army's path, which amused Namar so much he forgot about his intended target. Ultimately, Namar married that neighboring lord's daughter, and blushes every time his childhood military campaign is brought up at family reunions.

4 ...

Logan Chase, the Sheriff of Andersen County, stared down the dusty street as Johnny "The Two-Gun Kid" Calico sauntered out of Mad Jack's Saloon. "You're the last one, Calico!" Chase yelled. "You're the last of Branford's roughnecks! Everyone else laid their guns down or died slapping leather! Which is it gonna be for you?" Johnny was lightning quick, but Logan had put a round through each eye... before The Two-Gun Kid could finish unbuckling his belt to call it quits.

4 🖽

The Felwith Sewer War began when the Lord-Mayor of Felwith Town became fed up with the "infestation" of goblins in the sewers, and declared a bounty of five gold sovereigns per goblin head delivered to Town Hall. The Thieves' Guild saw an opportunity, and allied with the Mudeater Gang of sewer goblins, assisting them with their ongoing aggression against the larger Pigsticker Tribe. The Guild collected the heads of the fallen goblins on both sides, turning a tidy profit... until they discovered that the corrupt City Watch had made a similar arrangement with the Pigstickers. This caused months of underground skirmishes between the Thieves Guild and the City Watch—and their goblin proxies until the goblins allied with each other and turned on their erstwhile human benefactors. After the goblins slew both the Captain of the Watch and the Guildmistress, the Lord-Mayor called off the bounty and sued for peace.

4 H

"The Komil blood feud lasted 12,000 years from it's beginning at the Centek Pass."

::Slide Change:: Are you going to Kee'ga's party?!?

"Only when the last remnants of the Nomil rebels were purged from the outer planets did the feud subside and lasting peace reign in our system."

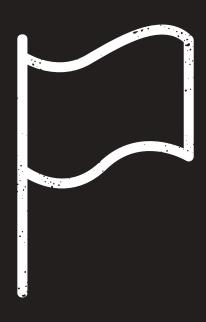
::Slide Change:: Nah, Kee'ga's a total nom, I don't want to be seen with them

"Our eternal vigilance against transgression has brought our species peace."

::Slide Change:: You're the nom! You haven't been to any parties this year!

"Is there something you would like to share with the class, Selk?"

No teacher, sorry.



Codex Keepers

A Thousand Faces of Adventure, Keeper of the Drunken Pirate's Forgotten Wish

Aaron, Keeper of the Child Upon Whom We Dare Not Look Jesse Abelman, Keeper of the Moon's First Memory Rob Abrazado, Keeper of the Purple Falsehood Stras Acimovic, Keeper of the Man Who Dies Every Third Day

Quentin Acord, Keeper of the Word that Binds and Blinds ActualPerson084, Keeper of the Yellow Tree's Oozing Heart John Adamus, Keeper of the Endless Page

Benjamin Adelman, Keeper of the Brotherhood of the Black Dragon's Great Saga

Javitt Adili, Keeper of the Arms of Torg the Blasphemer Joaquin Aguirrezabalaga, Keeper of the Blood of Lursiss Jesse Aldrich, Keeper of Azurix, the Blue Dust Planet John Alexander, Keeper of the Child Whose Face is a Mirror Zach Alexander, Keeper of the Weeping Cells Jack Alexander, Keeper of the Lies of the Child Kingdom Brendan Allison, Keeper of the Child Who Creeps and Crawls Kristin Allison, Keeper of the Bright One's Shroud of Mourning

Brian Allred, Keeper of the Spear Eldfuglinn, Which Burns with the Terrifying Light of the Sun

Bryen Alperin, Keeper of the Sibylline Grimoire Joe Amon, Keeper of the Astral Blades

Erik Amundsen, Keeper of Pages Touched but Unread Ancusohm, Keeper of the Stone Queen's Egg

Dustin Andrews, Keeper of the Egg of Existential Dreaming Robert Angus, Keeper of the Keystone of the Many Worlds Calvin Anthropos, Keeper of the Tomb of the Winter Khan anna anthropy, Keeper of the Revenant Chord

Apollo, Keeper of the Vein-Seeking Tongue

Vincent Arebalo, Keeper of the Dolm Sarcophagus

Mark Argent, Keeper of the Child Who Has No Shadow

Natalie Ash, Keeper of the Fungoid Blessing

Michael Atlin, Keeper of the Beetle's Teeth

John Atwood, Keeper of the Diary of Sanguine is the Eye

AU, Keeper of the Screaming Statuary

Archmage Aulin, Keeper of the Turtle-plate Greaves of Old King Marwen

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Rye Baerg, Keeper of the Mark of False Direction
Eric Bahr, Keeper of the Burrow From Which It Comes
Andrew Bailey, Keeper of the World Teeth
Vincent Baker, Keeper of the Sign of the Tree of Life
Josie Baker, Keeper of the Mutinous Younglings
Chad Bale, Keeper of the Chimes of Misery
Noah Ban, Keeper of the Maze of Unending Pleasure
BansheeGames, Keeper of the Lost Child's Breadcrumbs
Félix Barbaret, Keeper of the Nightmare Diadems
Michael Barford, Keeper of the Eternal Chime
Mike Barnes, Keeper of the Hymnal of St. Thibold the
Merciless

Marty Barnett, Keeper of the REDACTED TITLE Marco Barreto Bittner, Keeper of the Leonine Child That Wails and Stings

James Barta, Keeper of the Dreary Island of St. Lomax the Unseen

Michael Bartman, Keeper of the Sad Tale of Alvin Horoux Nick Bate, Keeper of the Most Delectable Wyrm Viscera Jacob Bates, Keeper of the Fleeting Blooms Bearosaurus, Keeper of the Traveling Notebook of Faina th

Bearosaurus, Keeper of the Traveling Notebook of Faina the False

Joe Beason, Keeper of the True Name of Ashmedai Scott Beattie, Keeper of the Worm Bone Frescoes David Beaudoin, Keeper of the Clock's Fourth Hand Michael Beck Esperum, Keeper of the Recorded Grievances of the Thousand Heretics

Becky, Keeper of the Record of Where We Have Been Mathias Belger, Keeper of the Spectral Hounds David Bell, Keeper of the Sensual Sword of St. Ortho the Languid

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Simon Brake, Keeper of the Blight Goat and Its Five Ever-Hungry, Ever-Gnashing Mouths

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Mike Carlson, Keeper of the Obsidian Forests of Yend
Andi Carrison, Keeper of the Unknowable Words
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Alice W. Castle, Keeper of the Diary of the Emerald
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Jeremy Christian, Keeper of the Spiral Nemesis
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Pier's Twin

Glenn Condron, Keeper of the Golden Barge of Ambatoharanana

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Tom Davies, Keeper of the Glossary of Blades

Will Davies, Keeper of the Holy Seals Carved from Valoña's Bones

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Steven desJardins, Keeper of the Black Between the Stars Mark DesLauriers, Keeper of the Goblet of the Maudlin Priest

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Vincent Eaton-Valencia, Keeper of the Orc King's Quivering
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Richard Evans, Keeper of the Milk Caves
Mitchell Evans, Keeper of the Blackbird's Brides
Amanda F., Keeper of the Cloud Baron's Ghost Zeppelin
Lebrun Fabien, Keeper of the Dying Grottoes
Katherine Fackrell, Keeper of the Invisible Candle
Fada Joe, Keeper of the Memory Circus
Per Falk, Keeper of the Unlit Effigy
Luis Farebrother, Keeper of the Songs of Satyrn's Sounding

FeITK, Keeper of the Urn that Holds the Ashes of the Red Poet's Heart

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Mike Fedinando, Keeper of the Gaze, Adoring and Wanton Finn, Keeper of the Spider Tombs

James Firkins, Keeper of the Seclusium of Loshe the Living

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Marcus Flores, Keeper of the Chromatic Gates

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Shut Forever

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Michael Heiligenstein, Keeper of the Child Who Repeats the **Numbers**

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William Hobson, Keeper of the Phantom Penitents Joshua Hockaday, Keeper of the Tome of Forgotten Fae Remedies

Kyle Hodnett, Keeper of the Secret of Clovis Stout-Hearted Arnie Holder, Keeper of the Mortician's Tesseract Heart Elias Helfer, Keeper of the Milk-White Putrescence Nick Hollingsworth, Keeper of Tarnat's Prayer for Peace Danny Hood, Keeper of the Fabulous Fish Parade Nicholas Hopkins, Keeper of the Space-Borne Memory that Creeps into Our Dreams

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indistinctdistrict, Keeper of the Mistletoe Arrows of St. Aryndion

Edward Ingold, Keeper of the Cannibal King's Ancillary Carnassials

Antonio Ingravallo, Keeper of the Atlas of Vanished

Countries

Insanodog, Keeper of the Porcelain Lantern Which Shall Never Be Lit

insert quest here, Keeper of the Silver Light of St. Lannen the Pure

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